

**MIMMO COZZOLINO: PAPA, WHEN I GROW UP I'MA GOING TO BE AN AUSTRALIANO!
THE LIE OF THE LAND, SHIELL, A, STEPHEN, A, ED., NATIONAL CENTRE FOR AUSTRALIAN
STUDIES, MELBOURNE 1992**

Even before I was born I knew I was going to be an Ozzie. If your name has an OZ in it, your future has been written. Anyway I was born in Italy and came to Melbourne in 1961 at the impressionable age of 12.

I remember the sense of adventure which surrounded our trip. Before we left Italy, my father started talking about how different Australia was from Italy. He had read about Australia and was preparing us kids for the trip ahead. He told us about the native Australians and their magical boomerangs. The trees had flat leaves which grew pointing down. The seasons were all back to front and there would be no snow at Christmas! Above all I remember him talking about the deserts of Australia. The only desert I knew then was the Sahara and this is what I imagined Australia was like: kangaroos hopping about sand dunes and over the horizon Aborigines instead of Legionnaires.

The reality was very different once we arrived at Port Melbourne. We were loaded straight onto a "red rattler" and chuffed off to the Bonegilla migrant camp near Albury where two weeks earlier over 1000 unemployed migrants had rioted. The landscape didn't seem like anything I had imagined. Definitely no sand dunes, but we did see a few kangaroos and plenty of sheep.

It wasn't until much later that I experienced some of that romantic Australian landscape that had seemed so exciting to a twelve year old kid in Naples. I travelled to Perth across the Nullarbor and when I saw the desert for the first time and I wasn't disappointed. Then, in Ceduna, after 11 years in Australia, I met and talked to an Aborigine for the first time.

INFLUENCES

When I was studying graphic design in the late 60s there was no discussion about the relevance of Australian imagery as a design source. Nor was there anything about the history of Australian design. I would have loved to have known about the commercial art of the Lindsays, Ure Smith, Harry Weston, Douglas Annand or James Northfield.

Instead, I knew more about what was going on in New York and Los Angeles (by subscribing to the American magazine *Communication Arts*) than I knew about what was happening in Australia. At college there was no tradition of any other kind to be passed on. We were asked to interview established local designers but in 1970 they were mostly into Swiss or American West Coast design. It was not the sort of work that tended to inspire students.

A much more interesting influence at college was a fellow student, Con Aslanis, a Greek, and a migrant like me. We talked a lot about the future and the possibility of working together in our own studio. The fact that we were both migrants really bound us together.

Con had (and still has) a great eye for the quintessential Australian suburban landscape and its inhabitants: the fluffy slippers, the "Crappy Nappy" van, dad washing the Holden on the nature strip. This rubbed off on me. Con also was more politically aware than I was. We talked a lot about the changes on the federal political scene. It seemed that after 23 years the ALP, led by Gough Whitlam, was going to govern and bring some fresh ideas to politics: a new deal for migrants, buying back "the farm", pulling out of Vietnam and making Australia more independent.

AUSTRALIANNESSE Vs. AUSTRALIANA

These were all factors that influenced Con and I to explore an Australianness in our work which we realized was missing in the design of the early 70s. (I say Australianness and not Australiana because Australiana had a different meaning at that time and the word was not used the way we use it now).

It was a time to be proud to be an Australian, especially if you were a "New Australian". And as we were about to start a new design studio, we would be able to capitalize on a fresh marketing edge which no one else had: Australian graphics. After all these years I still don't quite know what this term means. Perhaps it was enough to acknowledge that if you worked in Australia, it was alright to call what you were doing "Australian graphics". At the time I didn't know that artists like the Lindsays, Walter Jardine, Hal Missingham and others had done it all before.

ALL AUSTRALIAN GRAPHICS

Within this electric cultural milieu, I set up studio with Con Aslanis in 1972 and we called it "All Australian Graphics". The name was *our* joke: two wogs running a studio called "All Australian Graphics". Our trademark was a character Con created called "Kevin Pappas" – top half a Greek in traditional costume, bottom half a kangaroo.

Con and I had talked about doing postcards to promote the studio and in 1975 we produced our first cards. They were a hit and some people even wanted to buy them from us. Lamella Distribution took them on and wanted us to produce more. But, we needed to sell a lot more to break even. We looked at other distributors but no one was interested in our brand of Australianness. Eventually we got the idea to put the cards in a book so we could utilize standard book distribution. Penguin excitedly printed 32,000 copies. After *The Kevin Pappas Tear Out Postcard Book*, Australian cards of the modern era would never be the same again!

All Australian Graffiti, as our studio was later called, disbanded in mid 1978 before we had a chance to further develop the Australianness theme. We nipped ourselves in the bud before we could offer our ideas to a broader audience. By the late 70s Australianness was an idea which was ready to be commercially exploited. But we quietly bowed out and let others carry on. Our motivation had been primarily a journey of self discovery and of wanting to absorb our new cultural landscape. To exploit Australianness required a different kind of motivation which we just did not possess.

MEDITERRANEAN CONVERTS

In retrospect, Con and I were into Australianness also in an unconscious desire to be more Australian than the Aussies. I realized this when, in 1980, I published *Symbols of Australia*. The book received a lot of media attention and the most often asked question was: "Why has the task of publishing a book on our national symbols been taken on by an Italian? What would a *wog* know about Vegemite or Minties anyway?" My answer was that, as an outsider, I could see interesting things which had become invisible to the locals. *Symbols of Australia* is still selling and has now become a reference book. I believe it was one of the ripples that helped create the tidal wave of nationalism which characterized the 80s.

But I have had a love/hate relationship with this book. I embarked on its research and production not really caring if I would get a return on the months of work I had put into it.

The love comes from the thrill of discovering, in trademarks, a culturally rich aspect of Australian commercial art which had never been explored by anyone else before. The hate comes in being stereotyped as a designer who does only "Australiana" type design. Yet, over the years my approach to the use of Australian imagery in my work has not changed – I use it when and where it is appropriate and relevant to the communication.

During my 31 years here I have noticed that Australia has become more Australian than it was when I first arrived. I have also discovered that the harder I try to become an Australian the less I succeed. Aroovederci!