

LES MASON

SOLO

Artwork labels

Please return to the ticket desk
or information desk after use

LES MASON

SOLO

Artwork labels

***Epicurean* magazine**

In 1966 Alan Holdsworth of Lawrence Publishing commissioned Les Mason to design a prestigious bi-monthly food and wine magazine for the Wine and Food Society of Australia. The magazine's tiny budget meant colour could only be used on its cover.

Mason's vast knowledge and love of many art movements – Arte Povera, Surrealism, Pop Art, geometric abstraction, colour field painting and Op Art – informed his portrayal of food and wine in the publication. Fitting this low-fee project into a busy studio practice, Mason would arrive early to work to sketch concepts for cover and internal pages prior to handing them onto the studio team. Often collaborating with artists, craftspeople and models, he devised unique designs for each new cover and often photographed these at home.

From 1966 until 1979, seventy-seven issues of *Epicurean* were produced by Mason and his design team that included Casabi Banki, Stefan Bohacz, Rosemary Cato, Sandi Clark, John Cotter, Gail Devine, Andrew Fowler-Brown, Pat Grainger, Belinda Hayball, David Hornblow, Simon Josephson, Bill Kwan, Sandra Leveson, Margaret Lord, Vicki Mackay, Lyn Nicholson, Malcolm Smith and Alan Stubenrauch.

Les Mason: designer

Born in California in 1924, Les Mason worked as a seaman and ran a bar and dance hall before opting to study art at the age of twenty-seven. He studied painting and interior design at the Chouinard Art Institute, Los Angeles, before moving to Melbourne in 1961 with his then wife, Pat Grainger, on a one-year contract as Art Director for advertising agency USP Benson (now DDB). When his contract was up Mason opened his own graphic design studio, Les Mason Graphic Design, in 1962. Over the next thirty years he remained a formidable advocate for establishing the professional practice of graphic design. Mason was outspoken and fought hard and unceasingly for designers to recognise and understand the importance of a rigorous conceptual and formal design process to achieve better outcomes for clients at the same time as elevating society aesthetically.

Throughout his career, Mason produced an array of award-winning designs instrumental in cementing the role of graphic design as a profession in Australia. He was a member of Alliance Graphique Internationale (AGI) from 1975 onwards and was widely acclaimed for his art direction of seventy-seven issues of *Epicurean* food and wine magazine, produced over a thirteen-year period. Mason died in Istanbul on 17 October 2009 while attending the annual AGI Conference.

Packaging and psychology

Les Mason was fascinated by the psychology of design, in particular the psychology of colour and gender in relation to consumer decision-making. He drew upon these areas when designing hundreds of diverse retail packages. As part of his design process, Mason visited more than 500 supermarkets in the United States photographing food packaging to compile a packaging research library.

In 1971 he said: 'The package stands between the product and the consumer, as did the grocery clerk of earlier days. He is no longer around to offer advice, information, and recommendation. The consumer is alone with your package. It must tell them what and why, how, and how much indicating quantity, quality and methods of use. Then it must convince that what he or she is holding is the best they can buy'.

Thank God for the Salvos

Mason said the Salvation Army was the ideal client. Despite the fact that sometimes the Salvos did not fully understand the concept of a particular campaign, nothing was ever questioned or changed. Salvationists Captain John Smith and Captain John Dalziel (Account Director at Hayes during this period) were always enthusiastic supporters of Mason's work.

The campaigns used emotional prompts to enable fundraising, switching between hope and despair and utilising confronting imagery, iconography and language to depict the harsh realities of exclusion and social disadvantage in Australia. All campaigns carried the tagline 'Thank God for the Salvos', created by Eric McCarrow, then a copywriter with Hayes Advertising. Many of Melbourne's top creative talent from other outside companies worked pro-bono on the campaigns under Mason's direction, including the late Wes Walters, illustrator Barry Tucker, filmmaker Fred Schepsi, Ian Baker, Trevor Ling, the late Ole Olsen, John Pollard, Dieter Muller, Phil Webster, David Webster and Gail Devine, among others.

Design practice

When Les Mason moved to Melbourne in 1961, advertising agencies offering commercial art as a sub-service to advertising were primarily responsible for the creation of corporate identities, packaging, advertising and branding. Drawing on his education and international experience, Mason pioneered a new approach focused on the idea and practice of graphic design as a professional discipline in its own right, with a rigorous conceptual and formal process on par with that of architecture.

Mason's work and that of his contemporaries demonstrated that, when understood and used as a professional methodology, contemporary typography, editorial grids, colour and space could function to aesthetically unify the many different aspects of a project. Today we recognise the benefits of good graphic design and the field is broad and diverse; from simple produce brochures to publications, corporate identities, campaigns and environmental graphics.

The design studio

'Almost everyone who worked for me went on to their own business, because I showed them my books. They knew how much I was charging, I brought them right into the business, which was the way I felt. I taught them everything I knew. I cared about design. I wanted design to improve. So I used to teach everyone who worked for me everything I knew. If I could improve him or her ... great! But that was my belief ... that was the feeling that I had, that's why you enjoy yourself, if you care about the level, if you don't care about the level well, you're pretty stupid! We always had an open bar and music going, if you wanted a drink you could help yourself, but when the job was due, it had to be good and it had to be on time.'

LES MASON

Design process

'I had the biggest library in Melbourne, I had every book that came out [about] what the Japanese were doing, I knew all the names, and went around and visited them in Japan and talked to them. That's not to copy them, it's like an art, it's to extend yourself. To extend your mind, to understand, it's the only way. This is the danger of the computer. Young designers get on the computer before they start thinking; I mean the computer comes way after the composition. When I used to layout an annual report, when I first started in Los Angeles, to get it right, say a double-page spread, it might take you four or five hours. But as you build information over the years, you speed that process up. Then you get to the stage where you speed the process up in terms of seeing the whole thing at one time working backwards. So it's quite different. Of course the early work was all by hand, the whole layout.'

LES MASON

Design influences

'Trying to do breakthrough design was difficult. Mainly I admired the Europeans as designers ... some of the top Europeans ... the Swiss guys. When I left Los Angeles in 1961 we were starting to see some pretty good American designers happening, but they had come from Europe and had been grounded in the Bauhaus philosophy. I quite admired those ... there weren't that many. The only one who was influential in the beginning in LA was Saul Bass. I went to lectures of his. Out of that developed a few others. Anyway a couple of them went to Europe, especially to Milano. The Milano designers had also studied in Switzerland but they went back to Milano and they added the "Italian flavour" to their work. I was quite taken by that, plus the Polish guys were doing very good work, their posters. The effects of the Bauhaus were very strong on design in the United States and in Europe, knowing how to break the rules.'

LES MASON

Design and photography

'In the 1970s I decided we were going to set up our own photographic department. So I went up to RMIT and said I wanted to study photography and they said, "We don't want designers doing photography!" Yeah! Would you believe it? They wanted a closed field! I said, "You're crazy, (designers) should know everything!" So I just went ahead on my own. We hired a photographer and I shot a lot of the stuff myself. It should have been an open field ... to do better work.'

LES MASON

Spicers Wizz Wrap packaging

1967 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

At the time Les Mason began to design packaging, Australia was exporting raw materials and semi-finished products overseas but packaging was almost exclusively imported. As the economy restructured in the 1960s a closer study of marketing developed, and manufacturers began to realise the necessity of good product and package design. For Mason, the inexperience of many Australian companies with graphic design was a benefit. He found that packaging was not yet subject to the rigorous research-based marketing policy in place in the United States, giving the designer more latitude to execute a design concept without restrictions.

Anchor Food Honey Pot packaging

1986 Perth

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Glo-Weave visual merchandising materials

1963–67 Melbourne
digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

In 1963 Les Mason Graphic Design was retained by Australia shirt maker Glo-Weave as their permanent design consultant. This role, while common enough in the United States at the time, was new to Australian companies.

‘Glo-Weave shirt cartons have added display value. The product name is printed on the top of the box, with letters extending down the sides. When the boxes are stacked, the cover of the top box can be removed to reveal the brand name, which combines with the design on the outer lid to provide an effective display.’

PACKAGING DESIGN, 1971

Les Mason graphic designer

United States 1924 – Turkey 2009, Australia from 1961

Hayes Advertising advertising agency

Melbourne est. c. 1950

Preservene Sno Soap Powder

packaging

1966 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

This minimalist white design for Sno detergent was conceived by Mason to stand out from the clutter of colours and competing brands on a supermarket shelf. The packaging design also articulates the benefit of the product to the consumer. The white box alludes to the capability of the product to make your laundry white and bright.

Tarax Black Label collection

Children's Games Ideas packaging

Adult Cocktail Recipes packaging

Orange Drink packaging

1971–74 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Tarax's many marketing innovations included sponsorship of the long-running *Tarax Show* on television from 1957, and the development of new packaging technology, such as the steel can. Mason produced a range of soft-drink labels for the company, which was one of the top-selling soft drink brands in Victoria in the 1970s.

Les Mason graphic designer

United States 1924 – Turkey 2009, Australia from 1961

Les Mason Graphic Design design studio

Melbourne est. 1962

Massius Wynne-Williams advertising

agency

Melbourne est. 1925

Tarax Solo lemon drink can packaging

1975 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Les Mason was commissioned by Noel Delbridge, Creative Director of Masius Wynne Williams, to design the can label for a new soft-drink 'Lemon Solo' for client Tarax (now Cadbury Schweppes Australia). The product was marketed as THE new non-alcoholic soft drink for 'hard-working, hard-living Aussie males', and the iconic television commercial featured a thirsty, rugged man drinking a can of Lemon Solo, its contents running down the corners of his mouth. The product was an overnight success and the design persists as an iconic work of Australian branding.

Preservene

Pure Soap packaging
Twin Soap packaging
Soap packaging

1967–71 Melbourne
digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Cyclax Straight Eight Aftershave packaging

1970 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

KMM

Buster dog food packaging

Trusty dog food packaging

1967–75 Melbourne
digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Peter Beattie's Witchetty Grub Soup packaging

1971 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

'Les Mason used type like artists use pots of colour, mixing them up to create something fresh. He had an instinctual feel for what worked and what didn't. He mixed classic serif faces with clean, roman, gothic or ornamental faces or a finely kerned script. He would spend hours perfecting a piece of type trying to create "new space".'

GAIL DEVINE, *LES MASON: DESIGN ART RULE BREAKER* 2015

Spalding Dot golf balls multipak

1967 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

‘Mason designed a colourful “multipak” for Spalding’s Dot golf balls. Each ball is *individually* packaged in a small square carton then placed together in boxes of twelve. The individual boxes can be turned to any one of their individually designed sides; in configurations of twelve – when placed inside the larger carton – an endless variety of packaging looks can be achieved.’

PACKAGING DESIGN, 1971

Woods Relaxa-tabs packaging

1969 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Glaxo Scorbies Vitamin C packaging

1965 Melbourne
digital reproduction

Estate of the designer

Cyclax Frenzy Perfume packaging

1970 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

‘The package is an advertising medium, which gives the manufacturer more exposure at a lower cost than any other medium, it has the advantage over other media of presenting its sales message at the very point at which the buying decision is made. That message relies for effectiveness upon the creative skill of the packaging designer and on his knowledge of marketing and consumer psychology.’

LES MASON QUOTED IN *PACKAGING DESIGN*, 1971

Telegene Care germicide cleanser packaging

1967 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Lord Henry's Menswear shopping bag

1963 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Les Mason graphic designer

United States 1924 – Turkey 2009, Australia from 1961

USP Benson advertising agency

Melbourne est. 1945

**USP Benson 25th Anniversary Port
packaging**

1970 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Claytons Tonic packaging

1975 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Les Mason graphic designer

United States 1924 – Turkey 2009, Australia from 1961

Hayes Advertising advertising agency

Melbourne est. c. 1950

**Australia Post Priority Paid packaging
elements**

1970 Melbourne, Victoria

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Les Mason graphic designer

United States 1924 – Turkey 2009, Australia from 1961

Fred Schepsi director

Australia born 1939

Ian Baker cinematographer

Australia born 1947

Gail Devine copywriter

New Zealand born 1951

Hayes Advertising advertising agency

Melbourne est. c. 1950

**State Bank of Victoria identity and
campaign elements**

1974 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

A memorable television campaign by Les Mason and Gail Devine for the State Bank of Victoria involved a 'feel-good' campaign with theme line 'Helping you live is our life'. The production involved filming 187 babies crawling around a blackened set. 187 represented the number of babies being born each day in Victoria at that time.

Les Mason graphic designer

United States 1924 – Turkey 2009, Australia from 1961

Hayes Advertising advertising agency

Melbourne est. c. 1950

Salvation Army campaign elements

1969–77 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

In 1969 the Salvation Army aimed to dramatically escalate the public profile of their annual Red Shield Appeal fundraiser. At the time Les Mason was Creative Consultant to Hayes, advertising agency for the Salvation Army. Over the following years, Hayes Creative Director Ian Caithness and Mason set about creating iconic and powerful campaigns for the Salvos. The dynamic campaigns employed television, press, radio, and billboards to launch the annual appeals.

Festival of Perth campaign collateral

1987 Perth

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Poster AGI Conference, Italy

1995 Perth

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Anti-Violence posters

1995 Perth

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Les Mason graphic designer

United States 1924 – Turkey 2009, Australia from 1961

Gail Devine copywriter

New Zealand born 1951

Bill Kwan artist

active in Australia 1970s

Hayes Advertising advertising agency

Melbourne est. c. 1950

History of the Christmas Tree gift poster

1973 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Unplugged Faces AGI Conference Istanbul poster

2009 Istanbul, Turkey
digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

This is the last work of art designed by Les Mason. He died attending the Alliance Graphique Internationale (AGI) Conference in Istanbul on 17 October 2009.

National Mutual Development architectural graphics

1988 Perth

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Knox Shopping Centre architectural graphics

1977 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

National Gallery of Victoria architectural graphics

1972 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

In 1972 Les Mason designed a ninety-one-metre sinuous zigzag hoarding along the exterior of the National Gallery of Victoria on St Kilda Road, Melbourne. The painted hoarding drew from his knowledge and interest in art using geometric abstraction and optical art to create a lenticular effect – when a 3D graphic pattern is achieved on a 2D surface. From one direction Melburnians read the pattern in black and white; from the other they read it in colour. This project opened new opportunities for graphic designers in large-scale temporary graphics, public advertising and architectural wayfinding.

Metech promotional materials

1985 Perth

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Les Mason graphic designer

United States 1924 – Turkey 2009, Australia from 1961

USP Benson advertising agency

Melbourne est. 1945

Shell Australia print advertising

1961 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Les Mason graphic designer

United States 1924 – Turkey 2009, Australia from 1961

USP Benson advertising agency

Melbourne est. 1945

Canon Electrical print advertising

1961 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Comalco packaging, advertising and trade promotions

1965–1972 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Macquarie Network 2GB Radio corporate identity

1969–70 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

National Bank of Australia travel advertising

1966 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Les Mason graphic designer

United States 1924 – Turkey 2009, Australia from 1961

Hayes Advertising advertising agency

Melbourne est. c. 1950

**Tomasetti Paper Company promotional
campaign**

1970 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Les Mason graphic designer

United States 1924 – Turkey 2009, Australia from 1961

Hayes Advertising advertising agency

Melbourne est. c. 1950

**State Bank of Victoria advertising and
corporate identity**

1970–75 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Les Mason graphic designer

United States 1924 – Turkey 2009, Australia from 1961

Fred Schepsi director

Australia born 1939

Ian Baker cinematographer

Australia born 1947

Gail Devine copywriter

New Zealand born 1951

Hayes Advertising advertising agency

Melbourne est. c. 1950

**Salvation Army Red Shield Appeal TV
commercial**

1970 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Art Directors Club of Melbourne identity

1966 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Total Electronics corporate identity

1970 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

‘Corporate design is not just a “symbol”. It’s going in and blowing up the inside of the building, putting in new furniture and the whole lot. When you know that, you can say you dislike it, because “a corporate” is “the people”. It’s the “personality” of the company. The Japanese know that better than anyone. They’ve done that marvellous integration. But to [simply] stick a symbol [on everything] ... I went through the symbol period, it’s not totally bad – but it’s pretty close. Dangerously bad.’

LES MASON QUOTED IN GAIL DEVINE, *LES MASON: DESIGN ART RULE BREAKER* 2015

Impac Packaging corporate identity

1970 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Les Mason graphic designer

United States 1924 – Turkey 2009, Australia from 1961

Gail Devine copywriter

New Zealand born 1951

Les Mason Graphic Design design studio

Perth est. 1983

Shafto's Tavern Perth interior and identity

1986 Perth

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

After relocating from Melbourne to Perth, Mason and his wife Gail Devine were commissioned to create an interior concept for Shafto's Tavern. The project started with illustrations by Mason and copywriting by Devine for newspaper advertising. One headline read 'Our waitresses wear clothes', as it was not uncommon in Perth to be served by topless waitresses. The proprietor of Shafto's then tasked the couple with designing a new visual identity anchored around 'ribs'. Their striking yellow interior concept was accompanied by table settings, bibs and banners designed by Mason and texts for the walls by Devine.

Bowater Scott brand and identity

1964–76 Melbourne
digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

For a number of years Mason worked as Design Consultant for Bowater Scott. At the time it was rare to be hired as an ongoing consultant. Mason was retained to design the company's industrial range of products, along with dozens of toilet roll packages and tissue boxes, and Bowater Scott was a steady ongoing client during the period. By the mid 1970s, however, Mason started to feel that the integrity of the graphic design process was compromised by the increasing practice of consumer research-defined marketing strategy.

Plaster head with glasses

used as a photography prop for various *Epicurean* magazine cover sets

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Mixed correspondence, work in progress, job book, vellum layout pad, black pencil holder, HB pencil, Staedtler pencils, pencil sharpener and box cutter

from studio desk of Les Mason

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Black pencil holder, HB pencil, Staedtler pencils, pencil sharpener and box cutter

used by Les Mason

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Charles and Ray Eames Soft Pad chair

1969 used by Les Mason in his studio

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Hasselblad camera

c. 1960 bought and used by Les Mason for *Epicurean* magazine photography

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Samsonite briefcase

c. 1960 used by Les Mason

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Les Mason graphic designer

United States 1924 – Turkey 2009, Australia from 1961

Wes Walters artist

Australia born 1928

Salvation Army campaign painting

1969 Melbourne

Courtesy of the Gail Devine (Mason)

Les Mason graphic designer

United States 1924 – Turkey 2009, Australia from 1961

Bill Kwan artist

active in Australia 1970s

Face in egg

painting for *Epicurean* magazine

1969–77 Melbourne

oil on canvas

Courtesy of the Gail Devine (Mason)

Les Mason graphic designer

United States 1924 – Turkey 2009, Australia from 1961

Legs out of table

painting for *Epicurean* magazine

1966–79 Melbourne

oil on canvas

Courtesy of the Gail Devine (Mason)

Les Mason graphic designer

United States 1924 – Turkey 2009, Australia from 1961

Eyes turned to bird on wheel

painting for *Epicurean* magazine

1966–79 Melbourne

oil on canvas

Courtesy of the Gail Devine (Mason)

Les Mason graphic designer

United States 1924 – Turkey 2009, Australia from 1961

Bill Kwan artist

active in Australia 1970s

Arm as tap in head

painting for *Epicurean* magazine

1966–79 Melbourne

oil on canvas

Courtesy of the Gail Devine (Mason)

Les Mason graphic designer

United States 1924 – Turkey 2009, Australia from 1961

Festival of Perth program

1987 Perth

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Les Mason graphic designer

United States 1924 – Turkey 2009, Australia from 1961

Cover design for *Graphis Magazine* no.

174

1975 Melbourne

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Les Mason graphic designer

United States 1924 – Turkey 2009, Australia from 1961

Philip Morris annual report

1972 Melbourne

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Camalco Aluminium Foil packaging

1972 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

National Cash Register Co. advertising

c. 1955 Los Angeles, USA

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Forest Humus advertising

c. 1955 Los Angeles, USA

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Art director **Bill De Meo** at **West Coast Studios**

c. 1955 Los Angeles, USA
digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Les Mason at West Coast Studios

c. 1955 Los Angeles, California

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

A.R.C Industries branding and communications design

1967–73 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Johnson Regency tile catalogue design

1967 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Canberra TV Colour Club communications design

1968 Melbourne

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

PA Management Consultants **communications design**

1969 Melbourne
digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Transperth Sightseers brochure and ticket design

1984 Perth

digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Dalton Spectrum cheese and wine chart design

1974 Melbourne
digital reproduction

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

Epicurean magazine internal layouts, commissioned artworks, props and promotional materials

1966–79 Melbourne

Courtesy of the Estate of the designer

There was little money to be made from *Epicurean* and the deadlines were tight. While full colour was available for the cover, pictorial content inside the magazine had to be in black and white and limited typefaces were available. Budget prevented the use of freelance photographers, so Mason did most of the work himself. He bought a range of photographic equipment, including a Hasselblad 5x4 camera, and taught himself photography.

From its first issue in 1966, and continuing until the death of publisher Alan Holdsworth in 1979, every two months Les Mason and his studio team turned out an innovatively designed food magazine that established itself firmly in the Australian marketplace. *Epicurean* wasn't a food magazine for everyone, however: nor was it intended to be. This was a publication for serious food and wine lovers and Mason's work gave it a distinctive edge and prestige.