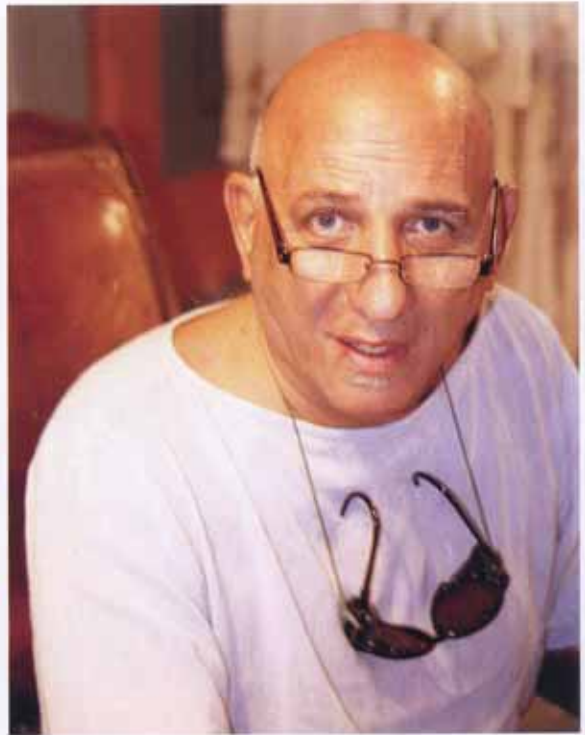


Those colors and textures that leap from the shelves in Paul Ropp shops are the inspiration of one man. Here is a glimpse of the man behind the shops and those gorgeous creations.

Over the Top with Paul Ropp

Text by Salvador Bali Photos by Jill Gocher



Paul's little shop in the tropics unexpectedly went bananas and buyers couldn't get enough of that funky stuff. Next he moved to Kerobokan -mind blowing at that time, then off to the big apple -New York City and the ENK trade show- the biggie. In order to do that Paul had to juggle to find the finance to cover the show. The first day of the show, early morning, there was a line of buyers at one of the booths, nowhere else.

Bloomingdale's buyer, Saks Fifth Avenue, Macys and many more waited impatiently for the booth to open. This was an extremely unusual sight at this hour of the morning. Now whose booth were they waiting for so eagerly? Bingo, the Paul Ropp stop. Timing is our most important product, *Vogue* magazine had a ten page centerfold layout with the Asian-Indian look. Paul's unique designs were right on target.

Now these conglomerates strictly base their buying options on thirty to sixty day credit. Paul, breaking all the so called rules, went right for the jugular and laid it on the line - my terms: C.O.D or no deal! He had them coming in and out all week long - not even letting them behind the counter to get close to the product. But they went for it and not in a small way! There were other smaller booths with Indian designs but, no one came

close to Paul's designs or construction. But why did most of the business come towards Paul? The answer was simple. Although the others could take orders with promises of delivery, it was a known fact that delivery from India could be difficult. Paul's reputation preceded him and he was known as the man who could make it happen. And he did. This is not a Paul Ropp story, it is true. I was there, and anybody who knows me, knows I shoot straight from the hip. With more orders than expected, Paul came through with flying colors. Here's the real deal of the man inside as we romp from the Kerobokan factory to his new flagship store in Jimbaran.

As long as I know you have never followed a trend. Even your production manager thinks that you create too much - can't keep up with you. I, on the other hand, being an artist myself, feel that you can't create enough. You never know when inspiration hits. What are your thoughts on that?

We are constantly upgrading our quality, learning from our mistakes, applying what we learn. We play with new textures, colors and applications, styles - it is all new, new, new. But you have to apply yourself.

What separates you from the boys, so to speak?

Engineering, the concept of knowing what you want is the first step. What we do is work very hard to make something attractive. We design a method to engineer the fabric in the village, so the embroidery is where it's supposed to be, so that when we lay it down to cut it, the embroidery comes out exactly right. There are no short cuts there because we need multiples of arty styles. What we do is artsy fartsy. In the old days they would take a piece of stone and put some ink on it, then roller it and we have serigraph. Today what we do is similar. We take an original and we do multiples of that. But they're not serigraphs, they're works of art.

Paul, what's the deal with so much accessory work being done here in the factory?

We sweep up the scraps off our production floor, and separate it into different colors and product lines - whether it is the shoes or some of the accessories. Belts, bags, and dolls are all put into a program where we can lavish a little love and care on them.

This is using your head.

You got that right.

I love it, a new line called scraps.

The Balinese people are the most creative race that I've ever experienced and had the pleasure to work with.

So it looks to me like you created an arts and crafts school.

Yeah, all from scraps and cut offs. We teach them, we give them the labor so they can go to the village.

Do you tell them what to do or do you let them do their own thing?

I have a very enthusiastic young woman from Holland, who after contacting me for months was given a job. She is proving to be very creative. I started a division I call waste management (laugh) and she is coming up with great ideas that we teach the villagers to make. All the work is labor intensive and is farmed out to people to work in their homes. It's our own attempt at decentralization helping to stop the flow of people to the city and helping to retain the culture. In fact my company is very cosmopolitan as we employ Hindus, Muslims, Catholics, and Buddhists, every type of denomination that one can imagine. We export to fourteen countries. Now is that not a positive sign to what is happening in Asia?

I have to admit this store is quite an impressive departure from all your other stores, but why in the Jimbaran area where nothing is happening besides the fish market?

This was a broken down restaurant in the days when I came here to be alone. There

were no boutiques here, not much at all, but now we are close to a dozen big hotels and villas - the Ritz-Carlton, the Four Seasons, Bulgari, the Intercontinental and all the Japanese hotels that are going up. I counted them; there are approximately six thousand five hundred rooms and nobody here.

It looks to me like you created an intensive business in this mini mall of yours.

We do our best. Let me show you around. You see over there is the second phase. There will be an espresso bar going in and over here an air conditioned glass enclosure for reflexology. There is a brand new children's area, and a women's division with fabulous accessories and such. We now have a men's division as well. Two years ago we weren't selling any men's clothing, now it's fifty percent of our business.

You have obviously created your own world here, going in so many different directions, but where do you find the time to do the trade shows?

If you are going to work in Tokyo or New York, finding yourself in a city, working every day where you don't really like to live, in order to learn what you do, life can be tough. But choose where you want to be and create the business you want to make and have the industry come to you, as we have been lucky enough to do in Bali. I don't do the New York trade shows anymore. I don't do

runways anymore. What I do is to make the best of a beautiful comfortable place. Uncle Sam, beware! People can come to Bali on vacation, buy our collection or any collection they can find and Uncle Sam will have it as a total write-off.

Personally I think it's inspirational (and of course with a lot of perspiration) how you got from there to here. Share with us my dear friend and ego maniac (laugh) what the meaning of positive thinking and desire is in your estimation.

Basically I left school in the eighth grade when I was brought to a court in the city of New York. My family gave up my custody with the state of New York as my guardian. I was instructed to go off with a man I had never seen before to my new home - an institution in upstate New York for mostly disturbed delinquent children.

You're still disturbed. (Laugh)

But I learned. Survival is the greatest motivator. I was lucky enough to have advisors in the institution. I didn't want to learn how to read or write or do math, so I was allowed to be in a working class, art and music classes. I was allowed to work on the farm, watch animals being born, chickens hatching and basically, I was given the opportunity to use my time there in a most constructive way. Without a formal education I had very little opportunity to work. The first job I had was a dish washer and I realized in half a day this wasn't for me.

The next job was doing window displays at Sax Fifth Avenue, pushing pins through mannequins, arranging clothes etc. I enjoyed the colors, textures and composition so the basics were there, to further my work experience. I was lucky I had a couple of good teachers. I was told do not be concerned going off the canvases. Let your stroke follow through. Feel good about how you approach your project and do not be concerned with the opinions of others. Coming to India blew my mind and it was the colors and textures that the people wore which inspired me. So learning out of the classroom, how to make fashion, having the realization that fashion was dead, my frame of reference expanded. I focused on doing what I want and came up with the beginning of my future.

Give me a Paul Ropp philosophy.

I can, it's done, what's next.

