



Girl Crazy

BACK FROM THE '40S TO SPICE UP THE NAUGHTIES, THE SEXY, CHEEKY CHEESECAKE GIRL LIVES AGAIN THANKS TO 'PINUP' PHOTOGRAPHER CARLO PIERONI.

INTERVIEW NICK DENT



FUN people tend to have fun jobs, and Carlo Pieroni is no exception. A cheerful 49-year-old fashion and beauty photographer – his clients include *Vogue*, *Interview*, Christian Dior, Renault, Chupa Chups and M&M/Mars – he photographs and retouches women in a 1950s pinup style. Vibrant and shamelessly silly, his work is a throwback to the 'girlie' magazine art practised by illustrators such as Alberto Vargas and Gil Elvgren. Pieroni divides his time between Paris, New York, Tuscany and Holden Beach, North Carolina, which is where Black+White caught up with him.

BLACK+WHITE Carlo, are you on holiday? CARLO PIERONI It's part work and part vacation. I have a house here in North Carolina and we stay for two

months of the year. Right now I'm retouching some work I shot in New York about a month ago. You can never stop in this business.

How did your pinup style develop? The Hawaiian girl you see here is one of my very first pinup girls made in 1992. That was for a calendar for the model agency Riccardo Gay in Italy. I wanted to do something different, and from that moment I got stuck with this style [laughs]. Clients have often requested this pinup style, it became a kind of signature. I'm not complaining at all, it's so much fun and the girls enjoy it. The girls tell me, you're the first photographer who's asked me to smile! It's important to smile, not to take life too seriously.

Your more modern images also have the same playful sense of the '50s pinup. There are two





things that bring back my images to the Vargas style: one is to use very few colours, and the other is the clothes, the makeup, the hairstyle. Yes, it's a style that began in the '40s, but the pinup style can be timeless if you just change clothes and locate the situation into a more modern time. The [modern] pictures are all about elegance, harmony, love, happiness, joy of life, seduction, and they are values that recall the '50s.

What equipment do you use? For many years I used to work with a Mamiya 67, but this year

I have been an art director for an advertising agency, I've done lots of things, and finally I decided to switch to fashion and beauty. In 1986 I met my muse, my wife Carol Wilson, who was a model at that time, and with her I got a lot of inspiration. And now we have three children – that's where the inspiration went! [Laughs]

“I MAKE A FOOL OF MYSELF ALL THE TIME WITH MY MODELS AND SHOW THEM HOW THEY SHOULD POSE. AND THEY LAUGH.”

I started to only work in digital, with a Phase One Digital Back. I used to print my pictures big and then work with an airbrush on the pictures. Then when the first PowerMac came out they were affordable and fast enough [so] I started working with the computer the same way I used to with a paint brush.

You mostly work in the studio but what about the outdoor images – the girl on the bus, et cetera? These were fashion images for *Spoon* magazine. I shot the backgrounds separately because it's easier to have a girl naked in the studio than in the middle of a square. **Images like the French maid and the rollerskater seem to be from the same series.** They were for the lingerie section of French *Cosmopolitan*. Every month I show lingerie in a funny way. The girl unzipping the red Chinese dress is for that too.

How did you get your start? I was born in Florence and grew up there. Photography was just my hobby in high school and as soon as I finished high school I opened a small commercial studio. I'm self-taught, I never assisted anybody.

You've shot campaigns for Chupa Chups and Mars – do you have a sweet tooth? My sweet tooth is for women! So Chupa Chups was perfect in a way. It was all about lollipops and '50s humour... Men would like to think that women are candy but actually, we are candy for women.

Do women tend to like your work? At my exhibition in Paris last year, more women than men told me they liked the pictures. It's probably obvious that men like these pictures. But most women who see these pictures say, oh, I love the happiness, the elegance. They're not pictures that make women feel smaller. I have so much respect for women that I would never portray women as a body, an object. My women are always subjects.

What have you learned after nearly 30 years in this business? In this profession, getting older, I get younger, because I see more the importance of having fun and seeing the funny side of every situation. [When I was younger] I was afraid to look stupid. Today, I make a fool of myself all the time with my models and I show them how they should pose. And they laugh. I'm a six-foot-four guy, I'm not a little guy, and I look like a bear when I do those poses! That's the way to break the ice. ◻