

100% MAMBO

THE MARKET

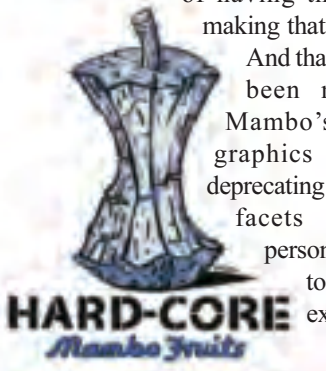
Mambo was launched in 1984 into an industry that was entirely focused on the production of a surf-specific product. It was an industry that had grown rich selling a “dream” and as a result had become very exclusive. It was also an industry that in Mambo’s opinion “took itself far too seriously”. Mambo decided that in addition to producing clothing it would share with the market its passion for art, humour, music and politics. In so doing, it became one of the first brands to move out of the surf-specific market and into the more eclectic, surf and streetwear market where it continues to operate today.

While Mambo is situated mainly in the youth clothing and textile area, their development of several related product categories has enabled them to build very active and successful relationships with the skiwear, footwear, optical, sunglasses, watch and surf hardware markets.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Over the past 23 years, Mambo has become one of Australia’s best known brands. In 2006, Principle (an Australian research company) named Mambo as ‘Australia’s sixth most authentic brand’, in a list that included brands such as Bonds, Speedo, RM Williams and Billabong.

Because Mambo evolved out of a large and successful screenprinting business (Phantom Textile Printers) there was no financial pressure on the company to conform to the usual demands of the surf and streetwear industry. As a result, Mambo could afford to ignore market convention and offer a product that was in no way typical of that being produced at the time. This made it easier for the consumer to decide what they liked instead of having the retail industry making that decision for them.



a catalyst to expand the parameters of what was once a very one dimensional industry.

HISTORY

Mambo was launched by Dare Jennings in 1984, “in a nice pair of boardshorts and a fashionably oversized t-shirt”. Their classic ‘Farting Dog’ t-shirt

was released in 1987 and is possibly one of the most recognisable t-shirt graphics on the planet.

While Mambo produces a wide range of surf and street related products they remain first and foremost, a surfwear label. But Mambo is not like other surf labels. Their passion for surfing represents just one aspect of a much richer life. Unlike the major brands, selling surfing as a religion, Mambo lives in a much bigger world. That world is defined by their passion for “surf & art & music & love & life & death & football & just about the whole damned thing”. By their own admission, Mambo is a

fiercely independent company and has never pandered to the whims of the surf and streetwear market.

Art has played a pivotal part in the company’s development. Over the past 23 years Mambo has worked with many well-known Australian and overseas artists including Reg Mombassa (guitarist and original member of Australian rock band, Mental



As Anything), Richard Allan, Robert Moore, Josh Petherick, Paul McNeil, Ben Frost, Beci Orpin, Maria Kozic, and David McKay plus, Mark Falls and Robert Williams (US), Trevor Jackson (UK) and



Rockin’ Jelly Bean and Tomoo Gokita (Japan).

In 1993 Mambo was invited by the Art Gallery of NSW to share wall space along side an international exhibition of Surrealist art. The following year they released, ‘Art Irritates Life’, the first of three books. The release coincided with the launch of an exhibition of original Mambo artwork at the Northern Territory Museum and Art Gallery in Darwin. The show, which included paintings, original t-shirt graphics, posters, surfboards, ceramics, rugs and pinball machines, drew record crowds. As a result of that success the exhibition travelled to several other state and regional galleries. Mambo has also had exhibitions in London, Bologna (Italy) and in Sydney, at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) and Ray Hughes Gallery.

The first Mambo ‘Loud Shirt’, a not too distant cousin of the famous ‘Hawaiian’ shirt, was released in 1994. ‘Blue Hawaii’ by Martin Plaza (another member of Mental As Anything), became an instant hit and led to the creation of a style that has since become a “classic” (and also very collectible) not only in Australia but also throughout Europe and the UK.

To cope with a steadily increasing demand for

product, Mambo opened its first store in 1995. Located in the Sydney suburb of Paddington, the 'Mambo Friendship Store' became a showcase for the label's unique personality. Its windows in particular became well known for their humorous and often provocative themes. The success of the Paddington shop quickly led to stores being opened in other Australian cities and then eventually in the UK, Europe, Asia and NZ.

In 2000 Mambo received an invitation from the Australian Wool Board to design the Australian athletes' uniforms for the opening ceremony of the Sydney Olympic Games. The uniforms proved hugely popular with both the athletes and the Australian public.

THE PRODUCT

As Mambo grew so too did the demand for more products. In 1986 Mambo added to its three main clothing ranges a small collection of accessories: 3



backpacks, 6 wallets and 8 baseball style caps. Over the next four years that collection grew from a small but flamboyant range of accessories into a huge catalogue of products that included sunglasses, optics, watches, caps, luggage, backpacks, wallets, footwear, posters, postcards, ceramics, books and CD's... "all available in the usual sizes and fashionable colours".

Mambo also produce a range of snowboarding and skiwear and have recently entered into a joint venture with another Australian company to produce a range of footwear.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

2006 saw Mambo joining with David Jones to market the brand throughout Australia. Such a relationship, while common throughout the US and Europe is unique in Australia where brands have traditionally battled for space in independent retail stores. In addition to increased sales, the move to DJs has provided Mambo with an opportunity to promote itself in a



typically unique fashion via 'mini gallery' concept areas in several of DJ's premium stores.

While Mambo continues to work with many of its original artists, including Reg Mombassa, Robert Moore and David McKay, the company is continually expanding its creative base to include new generations of artists such as recent signings, Campbell Milligan and Melbourne based painter, Josh Petherick.

PROMOTION

Like everything else that Mambo does, it refuses to follow conventional wisdom when it comes to advertising. Unlike many of its rivals, Mambo only occasionally uses images of surfers when advertising preferring instead to use graphics and story-based text. Nor do they advertise on television as this would require handing over a part of the creative process to people not directly involved with the company and therefore not familiar with



their unique and often contrary sense of humour. When Mambo does advertise it is always on its own terms. An early magazine ad (and subsequent poster) contained a by-line that typically poked fun at the very idea of their core business: 'More a pair of shorts than a way of life'.

When it comes to advertising, Mambo prefers to let its retail stores, clothing and even its swingtags tell the story. One particularly controversial swingttag encouraged absentee parents to "buy your children's love with a gift from Mambo".

Art exhibitions and music, surf and political events have also become a preferred method of boosting brand profile as have 'special' projects such as Mambo's 2000 collaboration with Holden to reprise and re-style Holden's iconic Sandman panel van for the Sydney and Detroit motor shows.

BRAND VALUES

"Surf, art and humour" are the principal cornerstones on which Mambo is built, with "music, love, life, death and football" propping up the other end of the studio.

While styles and aesthetics have inevitably changed, the Mambo culture has not. Mambo remains passionate, irreverent, extrovert and ironic in a market that does not usually think in those terms. Nor is Mambo shy when it comes to voicing an opinion about matters outside its fashion charter, particularly matters relating to politics and social justice. Most importantly Mambo continues to provide the market with a truly unique and individual product, which is why the brand was created in the first place.

THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT MAMBO

- The name Mambo is an abbreviation of a Latin phrase that appeared on the back of a medal that was presented to Elvis Presley by former US President, Richard Nixon.
- Mambo's first t-shirt print, 'Invasion of The Chain Store Surfers', was adapted from a crudely printed t-shirt found stretched over the passenger seat of an abandoned panel van in the Sydney suburb of Redfern.
- An early Mambo poster, Live Fast, Die Young In A Nice Pair Of Shorts, featured a teenager, wearing 'a nice pair of Mambo shorts', lying splattered in front of a truck after having been knocked off his bike. At the same time as this poster was being condemned by the Californian Traffic Authority for its use of "violent and inappropriate themes to sell an unrelated product", it was also being used by the Victorian Department of Main Roads to encourage kids to wear bicycle helmets.
- Paul Keating chose the Mambo studio to release Labor's Youth Policy during the 1996 Federal election campaign.
- The 1988 Mambo/Hardcore Easter Skateboard Festival poster, featuring an illustration of a skater nailed Christ-like to a cross, generated over 1,000 phone calls and letters of complaint. This remains a record for any Australian poster.
- In 1998 Mambo donated \$100,000 to the National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA). The money came from profits made from the sale of Mambo's infamous PAULINEHANSON/REDNECKS t-shirt.
- Total profits from the sale of Mambo's iconic 'Farting Dog' t-shirt has, for the past two years (2005 and 2006), eclipsed the gross domestic product (GDP) of former Russian state, Azerbaijan.