







"Cooler Than They Already Are"

Margo Chase knows what she wants. And what she wants is more. More arenas in which to express her firm's idiosyncratic style. She is happiest when every aspect of a client's look rests squarely in her hands. Sitting on the balcony of her room at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas, the 38-year-old Chase describes the process of putting her imprimatur on this pop-fueled enterprise.

"In music, design adds to the cachet and value of the product, but people buy CDs because of the way they sound, not because the packaging is really cool. My job isn't to say 'Buy us!' It's about making the bands look cooler than they already are."

Together with Hard Rock's creative director, Warwick Stone, the Los Angeles-based Chase has created a flashy, edgy image for the Vegas hotel and casino. As one of the music industry's designers of choice, she was a natural for the job of streamlining and organizing the graphics for the recently opened venue.

Trimly built, looking cool, speaking in a machine-gun vocal delivery and possessing an appreciation for the ironic (graphic and otherwise), Chase has just led me on a quick tour of the casino. We passed the craps and blackjack felts that she created to evoke rock 'n' roll imagery (never mind that the designer's cheeky "bet or die" warning has been excised from the tables), then strolled beyond her signage and slot machine fronts. Despite the fact that the Hard Rock offers Chase an enviable degree of freedom, she bluntly allows, "This client is simultaneously one of my favorites but also one of my most frustrating."

But she is getting restless. With an eye to the future, the designer is parlaying her reputation as a cutting-edge aesthete into the kinds of assignments that transcend the simple designing of compact disc covers and rock star logos.

Checking out trippy, baroquely swirly, seductive yet difficult-to-read pieces for Keith Richards and the X-Pensive Winos, Prince, and rap star Yo Yo, I wonder how Chase so frequently manages to do such uncompromising work, even when it seems to be anything but commercially viable. "I actually think that a lot of our work is compromised," she softly responds, smiling. "So it's good to hear you say it doesn't look that way. But the reason I have freedom in the music business is that music packaging really doesn't necessarily drive sales. In music, design adds to the cachet and value of the product, but people buy CDs because of the way they sound, not because the packaging is really cool. My job isn't to say 'We're Crowded House.



(PAGE 37) NIKE'S DENNIS RODMAN LOGO BY MARGO CHASE DESIGN. (ABOVE) LIBRARY AND ADMINISTRATIVE DEPARTMENT IN MARGO CHASE DESIGN STUDIO.

She elaborates: "When we were brought in, we thought we would be able to do everything—the print, the signage, the image for the hotel. But that's not how it works; they don't give us that much control. But I would like to see the consistency of the design get even better than it has become." Then Chase brightens as she adds, "But the interesting thing about working for the Hard Rock is that Peter Morton is really the heart and soul of it. So, as long as Peter likes what we do"—and so far he has—"we get a lot of what we want."

Chase's design style is at once sophisticated and trendy, anchored by highly angled typefaces that are as complex as illustrations. She gamely works in three dimensional media (the vampire symbol for Francis Ford Coppola's *Dracula* was done that way) and can create the kind of imagery that's guaranteed to drive 14-year-old boys wild (check out the collection of pop-art inspired snowboards created for Kemper and Yonex Gatta). Aggressive and elegant—a little bit like Chase herself—the work straddles alluring, if opposing, aesthetics.

Buy us!' It's more about making the bands look even cooler than they already are."

Two years ago Chase hired former designer Terry Stone as a business manager, and now the two of them are working symbiotically to broaden the studio's parameters. Most immediately, that growth can be seen in the launching of Gravy Fonts (a side enterprise that introduces nine of Chase's idiosyncratic fonts for sale) and a foray into motion titles. "The hardest thing for me, in terms of growth, has had nothing to do with design issues," says Chase. "It's been about managing the business and learning to delegate. Over the last two years, Terry has served as a bridge between me and our business-oriented clients. She's much more organized than I am and she can come closer to speaking the business people's language. Our situation is great right now because I have the time to go out and solve creative problems and do the design I love without fearing that everything around me will fall apart. I

"They asked why I should get that part of the assignment," she recalls. "I told them that they should let me do it because I passionately care about everything I do. I promise that I will do it over and over again until everybody is pleased."

used to feel like those guys who spin a bunch of plates on sticks and try to keep them all in the air. You become so maxed out that you can never move forward."

Involvement in motion titles represents a big step forward for Chase. It's an area that first began to seem viable when her firm was asked to pitch to modernize ESPN's corporate image. Up against firms like Landor and Pentagram, she entered the competition cognizant of her dark-horse status and could hardly have been surprised when the job went elsewhere. Nevertheless, Margo Chase Design must have made a positive impression, as she soon received a call to work on another project for the sports channel. "We were

After Effects and Media 100 software with which she had no prior experience. "And ESPN wound up with much more than what they had anticipated getting."

Presenting clients with unexpected directions and strategies is Margo Chase's strong suit. When EMI Latin called her studio to design the cover of a posthumous collection for Selena, the firm came up with a truly inspired idea (commissioning a painter to do a Kahlo-esque portrait of the murdered Tejano star for the CD cover) and wound up settling for something only mildly inspired (an eye-catching logo and treated photos of Selena). But when another label rejected a cover she had done and requested that she scrap



STUDIO VIEW WITH ASSOCIATE AD BRIAN HUNT IN FOREGROUND, CHASE AND ASSOCIATE AD WENDY FERRIS IN BACKGROUND. PHOTOS BY ETHAN HILL.

asked to design logos for boxing and billiards, and the idea was that somebody else would animate it," she recalls. "I said, 'I want to animate it.' They asked why I should get that part of the assignment. I didn't even have a reel. I told them that they should let me do it because I passionately care about everything I do. I promise that I will do it over and over again until everybody's pleased."

With little to lose, ESPN agreed to the arrangement. Chase brought on a production company that specializes in alternative rock videos, and she allowed herself to get ambitious with this new medium. "Basically we filmed fight footage to produce the effect of animated boxing posters," she says, adding that creating the piece required her learning Adobe

her idea to work on the updating of an existing one, Chase had the gumption to say no. "Some things are so lame that you can't possibly make them cool and you have to turn them down," Chase says, adding that she'd rather concentrate on limitless possibilities than waste time on projects where she doesn't see much potential.

"Who knows where [the new technology] will lead. Right now we're getting involved in doing lots of new media projects. It's changing the focus of my firm. We are moving from being designers of CDs to doing other things that are exciting." She hesitates for a beat, then briefly resembles some graphics world It girl as she gushily concludes, "I can't tell you how addictive it is!" ■



(OPPOSITE, TOP) PACKAGING FOR A CD-ROM GAME. CLIENT: VIRGIN INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT, INC. CREATIVE DIRECTORS: LAUREN RIFKIN, KATHY GUILD. ART DIRECTOR/DESIGNER: MARGO CHASE. PHOTOGRAPHY: SIDNEY COOPER. (BOTTOM) CD PACKAGING FOR "LARRY & LEE," LEE RITENOUR AND LARRY CARLTON. CREATIVE DIRECTORS: MARGO CHASE, DEBORAH KERN. ART DIRECTORS: MARGO CHASE, WENDY FERRIS EMERY. DESIGN: WENDY FERRIS EMERY. PHOTOGRAPHY: JAMES MINCHIN. ■ (THIS PAGE) PACKAGING FOR A LINE OF PERSONAL CARE AND BODY PRODUCTS. CLIENT: KARMA SUTRA COMPANY. CREATIVE DIRECTORS: MARGO CHASE, JOE BOLSTAD. DESIGN: WENDY FERRIS EMERY, MARGO CHASE, ANNE BURDICK. ILLUSTRATION: JACQUELYN TOUGH. ■ (FOLLOWING SPREAD, TOP) LOGO FOR GATTA SILVERWARE SNOWBOARDS. LOGO DESIGN: MARGO CHASE. LOGO ILLUSTRATION: WENDY FERRIS EMERY. (SECOND ROW, LEFT) PTERRA AIR SNOWBOARD. CLIENT: KEMPER SNOWBOARDS. CREATIVE DIRECTOR: MARGO CHASE. DESIGN: BRIAN HUNT. (SECOND ROW, CENTER) GATTA SILVERWARE SNOWBOARDS. CLIENT: YONEX CO., LTD. CREATIVE DIRECTOR: MARGO CHASE. BOARD DESIGN AND ILLUSTRATION: WENDY



FERRIS EMERY. (SECOND ROW, RIGHT) GRAPHICS FOR SIGNATURE BOARD FOR PRO RIDER MARTIN GALLANT. CREATIVE DIRECTOR/DESIGNER: MARGO CHASE. (THIRD AND BOTTOM ROWS) KEMPER SNOWBOARDS LOGO. CREATIVE DIRECTOR/DESIGNER: MARGO CHASE. ■ (FOLLOWING SPREAD, TOP RIGHT) TATTOO TEARDROP LOGO FOR INDEPENDENT FILM ABOUT GANGS. CLIENT: MAD PICTURES. CREATIVE DIRECTOR/ DESIGNER: MARGO CHASE. (RIGHT PAGE, SECOND) PROPOSED CORPORATE IDENTITY FOR TURNER PICTURES. CREATIVE DIRECTORS: CHUCK BROCK, MARGO CHASE. DESIGNERS: MARGO CHASE, BRIAN HUNT. (THIRD) HALLOWEEN MASQUERADE PARTY LOGO. DESIGN: MARGO CHASE. (FOURTH) CORPORATE IDENTITY FOR ENTERTAINMENT PUBLICIST. CLIENT: MITCH SCHNEIDER ORGANIZATION CREATIVE DIRECTION: MARGO CHASE. DESIGN: WENDY FERRIS EMERY. (FIFTH) RECORD PACKAGING AND LOGO FOR SELENA'S "DREAMING OF YOU" CD PACKAGE. CLIENT: EMI LATIN, EMI RECORDS. CREATIVE DIRECTION: MARGO CHASE, JOSÉ BEHAR, BARBIE INSUA. DESIGN: BRIAN HUNT. (BOTTOM) PTERRA AIR LOGO FOR KEMPER SNOWBOARDS. DESIGN: BRIAN HUNT.



KEMPER
SNOWBOARDS

tattoo teardrop

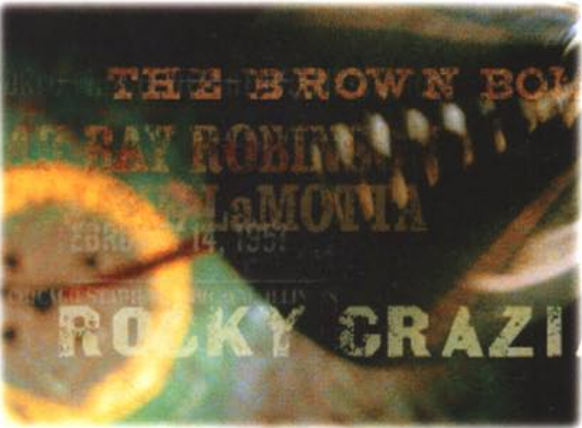
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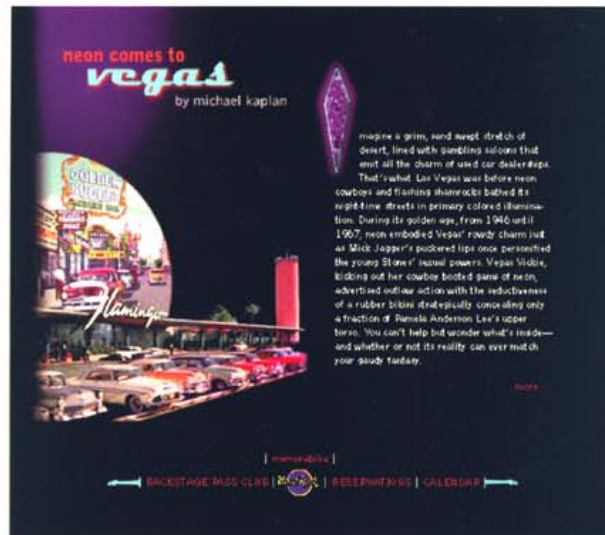
ESQ
((O))

Selena

PIERCE



(PREVIOUS SPREAD, LEFT) CATALOG PAGES FOR MARGO CHASE DESIGN'S TYPE FOUNDRY. TOP LEFT TO BOTTOM RIGHT: BOX GOTHIC, KRUELLA, PORTCULLIS, PIERRA, TRIBE, VITRIOL. CREATIVE DIRECTOR: MARGO CHASE. DESIGNERS: MARGO CHASE (BOX GOTHIC, KRUELLA, PIERRA, VITRIOL); BRIAN HUNT (PORTCULLIS); WENDY



FERRIS EMERY (TRIBE). PRODUCTION: HOLLY GOLDSMITH. (RIGHT PAGE) TITLE OPENS FOR ESPN. CREATIVE DIRECTION: NOUBAR STONE. DESIGN: MARGO CHASE, DAVE McCLAIN. PROD. CO.: MORBIDO/BIZZARRIO. DIRECTORS: SEAN ALATORRE, LAURA PIZZARELLI. PRODUCER: LAURA PIZZARELLI. DIR. OF

PHOTOGRAPHY: RICHARD HENKLES. EDITOR: PAUL MORZELLA. ■ (OPPOSITE) ORIGINAL DESIGN OF HARD ROCK HOTEL & CASINO WEB PAGES AT WWW.HARDROCK.COM. (BELOW, TOP ROW) NEW DESIGN OF HARD ROCK WEB PAGES. CREATIVE DIRECTION: WARRICK STONE. ART DIRECTION: MARGO CHASE.



DESIGN: BRIAN HUNT, DAVE McCLAIN. HTML/PROD.: YEEHAWH! DIGITAL CARTOONS. COPY: MICHAEL KAPLAN. PHOTOGRAPHY: PETER DOKUS. (BOTTOM TWO ROWS) SIGNAGE AND GAMING TABLE FELTS FOR HARD ROCK CASINO. CREATIVE DIRECTION: WARRICK STONE, MARGO CHASE. DESIGN: MARGO CHASE, BRIAN HUNT.