

Shut Skateboards

In the beginning, Shut was a group of friends from New York, Brooklyn, and New Jersey who met through skating and were trying to make a board to better reflect the way we skated. At the time, in 1987, board designs weren't changing quickly enough, and the evolution of tricks in the streets of New York was demanding different shapes. The bulk of what was being sold was pro vert boards marketed with a California vibe and aesthetic that did not speak to us.

Rodney Smith, Alyasha Owerka Moore, and I would hand-cut, sand, and drill concave blanks on Ali's roof in Brooklyn, and give each board a custom spray paint/stencil graphic—some of those first boards were works of art, I can't believe I never saved one. We gave them to our extended crew up and down the East Coast, refining the shapes and graphics. Then shops started calling. Unknowingly, we had started a business when we were just trying to make the best boards with the hottest graphics. We never tried to be different from the established West Coast companies. It just happened that way naturally.

Aly drove our graphic direction, and Rodney and I worked on design and team. Our graphics and identity came from influences in and around New York City: hip-hop, comic book art, tattoo art, hardcore/punk music, the '80s Soho art scene, and the energy of the city. When you're skating down the street and you see a boxing poster with Warhol and Basquiat next to a full-color graffiti piece, it has an effect on you whether you know it or not. We were a product of our environment, and our scene was something we never saw in the magazines, videos, and products at the time.

We met most of our artists skating in the city. Everyone we skated with was in a band, wrote graffiti, took pictures, made art, or spun records. Someone would tell me their friend could write, and he'd come by and bring his "black book" to show what he could do. If he had skills, we would tell him that we needed a sticker or T-shirt graphic, give him some direction and see what he came back with. Often someone would bring us a drawing, lettering, or character, and we would say to apply it to a theme or adapt it to a model. A few rounds later we had a graphic. People were always stopping by, showing us what they had.

The Shark graphic was done almost entirely by Wylie Singer, who I met skating in Washington Square Park. He could be considered our in-house graphic designer. Coming from artist parents, Wylie went to music and art high school—the Fame school—and was incredibly talented and creative. He was responsible for a lot of our artwork.

The first Street Posse was drawn by Hugh Gran. It was a drawing he gave us, and we made into a sticker. When we were ready to release a new shape, we'd ask him to do it as a full graphic. Hugh was very active in the NY hardcore scene, and we had mutual friends. His early illustrations definitely reflect that style.

The first Zoo York model was a way to pay respect to the crews that represented New York before us—we asked some of the older skaters, Puppet Head, Papo, Andy Kessler, and others if it would be okay to use the Zoo name—and it was a collaboration between Wylie Singer and Ducky Alex Talavera. We let them run with the Zoo and graffiti themes. Ducky focused more on the character and the cage, and Wylie on the overall graphic. Ducky introduced me to his friend Phil Frost and told me we should use him for some graphics. Phil gave me a sticker, but I never got around to calling him.

Alyasha Owerka Moore went on to play an integral role in the conception and design of several clothing lines including Phat Farm, Monkey Wrench, Mecca, Dub, Droors, Alphanumeric and Fiberops. Rodney Smith founded Zoo York and has continued representing the East. **Bruno Musso**



SHUT / SHARK 1 by Wylie Singer / 1989