

## INTERVIEW WITH SIR KEN ADAM ABOUT HIS WORK ON DR. NO, THE FIRST JAMES BOND FILM

*By Sascha Braun, contributor of From Sweden with Love.*

**Dr. No defined in a lot of aspects the typical characteristics of the following Bond films. One aspect are your sets. How did you prepare for *Dr. No*? Was every idea already in your mind before shooting or did you develop some while making the film, maybe even improvise?**

Well, you know *Dr No* was a very small budget film. We really didn't take it very seriously because we started shooting in Jamaica in 1962. **Terence Young** was a friend of mine; I had also worked for the two producers **Cubby Broccoli** and **Harry Saltzman**. I was no stranger to them. I suddenly decided that I had to get back to England to design the settings so I had a meeting with Terence which took exactly five minutes. He said: "Ken, I leave the concepts of the settings to you to provide it. But how you design them is your Business." So I went back to England and to Pinewood. The ideas came then really. The first thing that happened, I called in all the Heads of Construction at Pinewood and said, please let me have any new material that is on the market. Because I wanted to get away from the old fashioned type of film-set-building and materials we used, and use new materials. Because we are living in an age in which that is possible and we should reflect that age. And so they were fantastic. They came up with stainless steel and copper finishes and so on which then inspired me to go way out in my design. Because at that time we're talking at the beginning of the Sixties I hadn't seen any contemporary film which reflected the electronic age, the age of computers we were living in. You had to go back thirty years to Fritz Lang, to *Metropolis*, things like that or things to come up. But a film reflecting the Sixties and the age of computers I hadn't seen. So that gave me an opportunity to do that and at the same time keep the whole thing not completely realistic - what we call in English tongue-in-cheek. Bigger than life, you know.

**How did you get the job of production designer for *Dr. No*?**

I had worked for Cubby, I had done three films for him including one with Oscar Wilde. Saltzman was a friend of mine, I knew him literally and Terence Young - I had never worked for him before, but I admired him as a director, he admired me as a designer, so it came out of the relationship that I was approached to do the design for *Dr No*.

**Did you have ideas that couldn't be realized for the film for the comparatively small budget when looking at later Bond films? Which ones?**

No, I think, everything that I wanted was on the screen, amazingly though. I had enormous help in one way. You remember there was that water reactor because I knew nothing about atomic power. So Harry Saltzman introduced me to two young scientists and they came to advise me. I did a rough design and said, would that be possible? And as I always found in future, in much more complicated films, that scientists are very elastic. They said, you change a little bit here and that could work. So that's how that nuclear reactor was conceived and rather in little terms. Fortunately my whole fat budget which was increased because it started at 14 000 Pounds and eventually I spent 21 000 Pounds on the set with *Dr No*. I had no real problem. The only problem was that we all had forgotten, because at the end of the film that we needed another set. For when Professor Dent goes to meet *Dr No* and you hear *Dr No's* voice. So I came up with that set which consisted of a circular ceiling piece with a drill inside it. My boys built that set in 24 Hours and it was a minimalist, maybe the first minimalist set that I ever designed which depended on the simplicity, the dramatic effect of the shadow of the grill, the foreground table with the tarantula, one chair and the voice of *Dr No*. I did it all on a platform so you can really get a low angle shot of the ceiling. And I remember when I showed the set to Terence Young before lunch, he said, Ken if you want to see that whole circular ceiling you have to give me an extension of another ten feet on the ceiling peace. So my carpenters over lunch extended the ceiling by ten feet and so you get the whole circle in the frame. Critics and then over the years they said this set and *Dr No* set the style for all the Bond pictures.

**Which rating does Dr No have in your career?**

Well I think it's a very important film in my career. Because it was the first time I made a film in which I expressed our period and a little bigger than life. And also it influenced Stanley Kubrick in giving me Dr Strangelove to do. So it was a very, very important progression in my career as a designer. Even though when you look at it today, they seem - oh my God, it was made 45 years ago - old-fashioned, but it was the first one. And on that level and with all the consequences of other offers I had it was a very important film for me.

**How did you work generally for the movie? Were there meetings with the producer and the director or did they let you do all your things alone?**

Not on that one. When I look back, I was a little mad, you know. They were filming in Jamaica and I had to fill three stages at Pinewood with sets and they arrived back on a Thursday or Friday, I don't remember. And they started shooting on the following Monday. So if they hadn't liked my work I would have been in serious trouble. But as it was Terence was the first one who said, it was quite brilliant. And then the producers sort of reluctantly agreed. They possibly saw I am going to ask them for more money. It really started a very free sort of debate by every member from the propman to the cameraman of the film unit. Everybody came up with ideas. It was like I think I am quoted a saying, a democratic debate beside it. Everybody came up with ideas, some good, some not so good. That was really which eventually turned out the success of the Bond film, part of it.

**Did you read the Dr. No novel before filming and developed ideas for the sets from the book?**

No, in fact I haven't read it. I've been abroad I came back and they just sent me 100 pages of the screenplay. It was pretty awful at the time and then eventually of course it developed and became a more interesting film.

**Did you meet Ian Fleming when Dr. No was made? Did you talk with him about your set ideas and what did he think about that?**

He liked them (laughing), he did like them. He first had problems with Sean because Bond was sort of in Ian's idea sort of supposedly upper-class. But then he was delighted as Sean turned out. Thanks to the help many of Terence Young who imagined himself as James Bond, he had been in the Second World War he thought of himself as a minor James Bond. He told Sean a lot of things which Sean was very grateful for. And Ian Fleming was delighted with the final result.

**As you met Sean Connery for the first time, did you have an idea he would become such a big film star later?**

He was fabulous looking; he had a great body and a lot of charm. He was very modest and simple. So I immediately was attracted to him obviously one didn't realize that he would eventually become such a mega star. But that is to his credit. I don't think any I really firmly believe that no Bond since then has ever had that charisma of Sean.

**The room with the spider and Professor Dent is one of the sets where one can say that is a typical stylish Ken Adam set, just brilliant: Light, shadows and circles. But there is also the set e.g. the casino which looks rather normal. Did you design that too? How did you prepare? Did it look like a real casino of that time or did you design something which is only in a film a casino, not in real life?**

Yes, there was a famous sort of gambling club in London at that time; it was in Wellington House I remember. So I based my design a little bit on that gambling club.

**Before Dr No was made, was there any discussion about making a big series with lots of films if Dr No was a success?**

Not really, no. I mean nobody expected the success it had. Once it became that successful United Artists and the producers obviously said we had to make more films.

### **Which of all your Bond sets are your favourites and why?**

Oh, my God [laughing]. I loved the volcano in *You Only Live Twice*, because you know who had ever been inside a volcano? Nobody could say that. It was pure invention and imagination. And as people later said, why didn't you build it as partly as a model, but the exiting thing of those early Bonds was that they were real. You had 200 stuntmen rappelling from the top of the roof. You had a real helicopter fly inside that enormous space so it was possibly one of the most original and certainly biggest sets I had ever done. That if you ask me I liked a lot. I liked Fort Knox in *Goldfinger*, because again you see, I didn't like imitating reality, I always liked to create whenever possible my form of reality. Which I thought the cinema audience would accept as reality and they did. Fort Knox is the biggest Gold deposit in the world; I designed it as a cathedral of gold which is completely unpractical. I felt that reality was more acceptable to the cinema-going audience just a low-bald with gold setup. You have got to invent it's not such a new concept. But if you saw some of the early Hollywood movies by **Cedric Gibbons** designed and so on. They were beautiful art deco interiors with women in most fashionable dresses. It was not reality it was complete escapism because the cinema-going audience loved it because they didn't see it every day. So in a different way many of my designs where that type of idea to give the audience a reality which had nothing to do with reality but which they would accept as being real, you understand?

### **You saw the last Bond film [Casino Royale] as well, what do you think of it?**

The scene with the crane was very well done, the technology has advanced. **Daniel Craig** I think was good too in a masculine way. He was quite different to the concept of Ian Fleming because he invented an upper-class-character, but he was very good at it. Some things in the film were missing, a lot of people like Moneypenny were lost and the slight cheeky humour.

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