

CLASSIC DRIVER

Visiting Cool & Vintage, ground zero for custom Land Rover culture

Lead

Over the last seven years, Cool & Vintage has created an aesthetic for its tastefully modified classic Land Rovers that is instantly recognisable among its cult following around the world. We thought it was high time to pay a visit to its Lisbon hipster haven...

Sun-drenched beachscapes, beautiful surfing girls and the most immaculate old Land Rovers you've ever seen – it must be Cool & Vintage. This vision of fantasy has garnered the Lisbon-based restoration company, which has been putting its unique twist of Defenders and Series models since 2012, something of a cult following Land Rover buffs and hipsters alike.



While the imagery is of course fanciful, it's underlined by what Cool & Vintage's founder and creative director Ricardo Pessoa – a marketing expert and dyed-in-the-wool classic car obsessive, who was taught to drive a Land Rover by his father at the age of seven – believes a Land Rover embodies: freedom. "The Land Rover is the shape of freedom and a symbol of limitless possibility," he explains. "We want to appeal to people who are willing to have fun and make memories with these cars, which is why we create the films and the photos – so we can inspire owners about how they can be enjoyed."

Incidentally, Ricardo's decision to focus solely on Land Rover was down to the cars' no-nonsense nature. See, what began as a simple case of buying and mildly refurbishing a range of classic cars, predominantly for his friends, has morphed into a business that carries out 10 world-class Land Rover restorations a year for clients across the world.



"We always worked with Land Rovers, but we also used to deal with a lot of Alfas, Minis and the occasional Porsche," Ricardo recalls. "But at one point I started to get anxious about their values and whether they were increasing or decreasing." Land Rovers never gave Ricardo such anxiety. In fact, he suggests that despite the overwhelming demand, restoration delays and impatient customers, he takes no greater joy than being the first to open the workshop in the morning and seeing the 30-odd cars in various states of disrepair. "If I like one enough, you could offer me double its value and I still wouldn't sell."

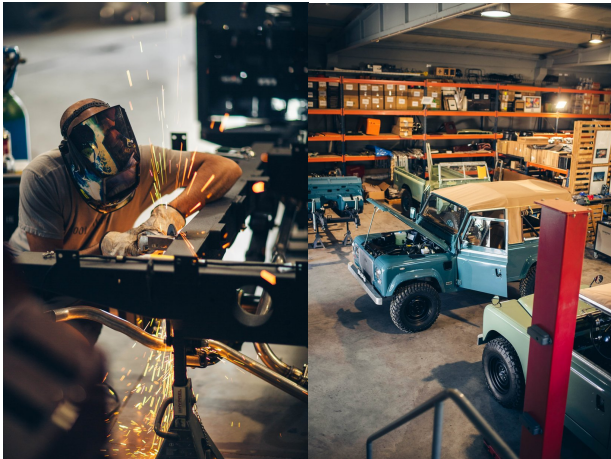


Of course, Cool & Vintage is one of hundreds of companies building Land Rover ‘restomods’, but it’s forged its premier reputation for two reasons: the unparalleled quality of its work and its aesthetic positioning. “I’ve always thought that the Land Rover is among the greatest pieces of industrial design, so it was never my intention to mess around with it too much. We try to stay true to its shape and its history while adding our own creative twist, which could be anything from a bright colour to a more aggressive stance.” Ricardo initially wanted to fuse his vision of the quintessential beach car with a southern European summer vibe.

Interestingly, it was Ricardo’s desire for the cars to be used that prompted the bolder colours and less original specifications that we’ve come to know and love. If you cast your mind back to Cool & Vintage’s early days, you’ll remember that its Land Rovers were largely in original colours and period-correct spec. But they were attracting bargain-hunting collectors who Ricardo knew had no intention of really using them. “I discovered that if I painted the cars in bold colours and fitted big wheels, the collectors were no longer interested.”



Next year Ricardo and his talented team will commence their 100th build and it’s fair to say Cool & Vintage has cemented itself at the heart of custom Land Rover culture. Just last month, it sold a staggering 20,000 stickers and, as you can imagine, they will end up on Land Rovers far and wide. People now instinctively know which cars are the real deal, however, which is something Ricardo is particularly proud of. “We’ve developed this aesthetic around the car that people love and recognise. Funnily enough, even when we build a car today that’s in an original colour and specification, people still know it’s by Cool & Vintage.”



Cool & Vintage will restore 10 Land Rovers a year, one of which it will retain for special projects such as [the art car it created with the Portuguese street artist Vasco Costa](#) in 2018. Around 50 percent go to the United States, and while Ricardo suggests this figure could be greater, he likes European customers as they typically grant him more creative liberty.

Depending on the specification, the restoration process takes 6–10 months and costs anywhere from 70,000 euros to, well, the sky’s the limit. There’s currently a waiting list of around a year, though it’s not difficult to see why. Each restoration takes in excess of 1,000 hours and includes 1,000km of road testing to iron out any issues and, of course, take some dreamy photographs. As Ricardo stated, he’s not reinvented the wheel. It’s more a case of many small features combining to create a unique, enhanced and instantly recognisable overall aesthetic.



You certainly won't find a Corvette V8 under the bonnet, either. "If you want a fast SUV, buy a Mercedes G63 AMG. A Land Rover is supposed to be slow, but then it makes you slow down – you can't take a call because it's too loud and bumpy and windy. You need to take care of whatever you need to before you jump in – even a short drive is like going on a mini vacation."



The quality of Cool & Vintage's work is such that its restorations have been chosen to take centre stage at various events including the Parking Lot d'Elegance in California, one of the foremost Land Rover events across the pond. But which of the 90-odd cars he's built is closest to Ricardo's heart? "It's usually the latest one, but there are three that really stand out: the dark red Series III we built for Stig Edvardsen in Oslo is the classiest Land Rover I've ever seen, the art chassis painted by my good friend Vasco Costa was divisive and broke the barriers of ordinary, and Steve's tangerine orange car realised an idea I held onto for over a year."



Ricardo is promising Cool & Vintage 2.0 in the not-too-distant future, though for now, finding a special project for build number 100 is his biggest goal. In its relatively short existence, Cool & Vintage has defied and actually won over the hardcore Land Rover contingent and created a space for many others to follow. Ultimately, though, it's provided means to write years more memorable stories with these rugged, go-anywhere cars. Please, stop waiting for Friday!

Photos: Tom Shaxson for *Classic Driver* © 2019

Gallery

