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A legend is born



The 1950s and 1960s will always be remembered for new beginnings. From the introduction of the first colour TV and rise of Elvis Presley to a cultural revolution, the Rolling Stones and a man walking on the moon, it was a time for firsts. It was also a time when Olympus would change the face of photography forever by pursuing one simple idea: create a camera as easy to use and carry as a pen. This is how, in 1959, an elegantly designed camera started to bring photography to the people.

Yoshihisa Maitani: father of legendary design

The story of the Pen series is deeply rooted in that of its lead designer. Yoshihisa Maitani never expected that his hobby would one day make him a photography legend. After two years of practical training in the Olympus factory, he began designing. His career would see him involved in the development of many revolutionary cameras as he set milestones in photographic history.



Yoshihisa Maitani

1959: the first milestone

In a year when the first Barbie and Mini were introduced and Marilyn Monroe made history on the silver screen with "Some like it hot", Olympus launched its first generation Pen camera. For Maitani, the design process had begun with the idea of creating a camera that could be bought for 6,000 yen, the equivalent of a month's salary. The half-frame model featured the D-Zuiko lens' superb photographic performance and excellent portability.



1960s and beyond: the half-frame camera boom

Parallel to the rise of Pop Art, the Pen took the world by storm. This half-frame camera uses standard 35mm film at half the intended exposure format. Its compact size triggered a camera boom that would last through the 1960s and 1970s. Until 1961, however, 98% of cameras were purchased by men. That year, the introduction of the Olympus Pen EE saw the percentage of female buyers jump to 33%. The touch of a button camera became the driving force behind Pen popularity.

After this first explosion into the market, the Pen continued to evolve. Sharing the limelight with the likes of the Beatles, the miniskirt, and Andy Warhol, the Pen EES was followed by the Pen D and then the Pen F in 1963. Introduced as the world's first half-frame SLR, it could be used with a range of 20 exchangeable lenses.

Another popular Pen series camera, the Pen FT, was launched at the same time as Star Trek and the first artificial heart transplant in 1966. Selling over an incredible 17 million units, the Pen is one of the most popular and successful camera series ever. Today, the much sought after collector items are traded for incredible prices.

