



## ***The story of how Bang & Olufsen's Form 2 headphones were born.***

***By Steve McGugan***

*In the world of consumer electronics, products come and go as the wind blows. Some last six months on the market, others can last a few years, but in general it is very seldom that a Hi-Fi accessory can stand the test of time and still be on the market after 25 years.*

Bang & Olufsen's Form 2 headphones had their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2010. Here is the story of how a pair of simple headphones, have lived a long and quite life.

From 1978 to 1981 I attended Art Center College of Design in Pasadena California, USA to study industrial design. During this period I had learned about a company in Denmark that was producing some of the most fantastically designed Hi-Fi equipment on the market. At first sight I had fallen in love with their products and the company. The first stereo I ever bought, was of course a Bang & Olufsen Beomaster 1900.

Near the end of my education at Art Center, I decided that I wanted to work as industrial designer some where in Europe. Therefore I thought what better place to start my design career than to work for Bang & Olufsen. So I wrote to them and said, "hey I would like to work for you as a in-house designer". After a couple of interviews and talks back and forth, I got the job.

In 1982 I was getting ready to travel to Denmark to start my career as product designer for Bang & Olufsen. In preparing for my trip, I decided to purchase a Sony Walkman to take with me as I always enjoyed listing to music and found this new product idea, which Sony had launched in 1979, to be a fantastic way to enjoy music whenever and wherever. This little product would turn out to have a big influence on some of my future ideas for Hi-Fi design.

The first year at Bang & Olufsen was full of new learning experiences as well as exploring some of the ideas that I had floating around in my head. Some time in 1983, I had the idea that B&O needed a more compact and lightweight headphone in their product range. I thought that this type of headphone would be ideal to use together with B&O's existing Hi-Fi products as well as together with a Sony Walkman. At the time the headphones that came with the Walkman where not at a high standard of design. With a Bang & Olufsen designed headphone the Walkman consumers could enjoy good sound together with a nicer looking design. I started to sketch some ideas and created some 3D cardboard models. After a while I chose a design and presented it to my boss, Jens Bang. He looked at the model and said, "this looks really nice, but we have Form 1 headphones which is our top of the line model. We don't need a cheaper headphone in our product line". I though "well OK, it was just an idea" and I put the model up on a shelf in my office. One year later Jens Bang comes into my office and says, "I remember that you had made a design proposal for a lightweight headphone some time ago, do you still have the model". I looked around on my shelf and found it still lying there. I dusted it off and handed it to him. Jens looked at it and said, "it still looks good, we'll make it".

The next step was to get the designed engineered and ready for tooling. A mechanical engineer working at B&O at the time by the name of Bent Gørbel was assigned to create the final mechanical construction.

In 1985 Form 2 headphones hit the market. In 1992 the headphones where accepted to the Museum of Modern Art's permanent design collection. At one point a Chinese company had copied the headphones and were selling them under another brand. B&O's legal department quickly put a stop to this. In the late 90's B&O was considering phasing out Form 2, but Apple suggested that they continue producing them because they were ideal for their iPod, which had become a huge success.

When seeing all the newfangled electronic products and accessories that have come and gone over the past 25 years, it has shown me that having the right idea and keeping things simple is a good formula when designing a new product. I find it amazing that these little headphones have continued to appeal to consumers thru all these years, delivering good sound quality with a stylish and classic design, first for the Sony Walkman generation and now for the iPod generation. I am very grateful that Jens Bang and Bang & Olufsen had changed their minds and saw the potential of introducing a new headphone into their product assortment.

This is absolutely one of my all times best designs, which I am very proud of, and I'm thankful to all the consumers that still find the design desirable.

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