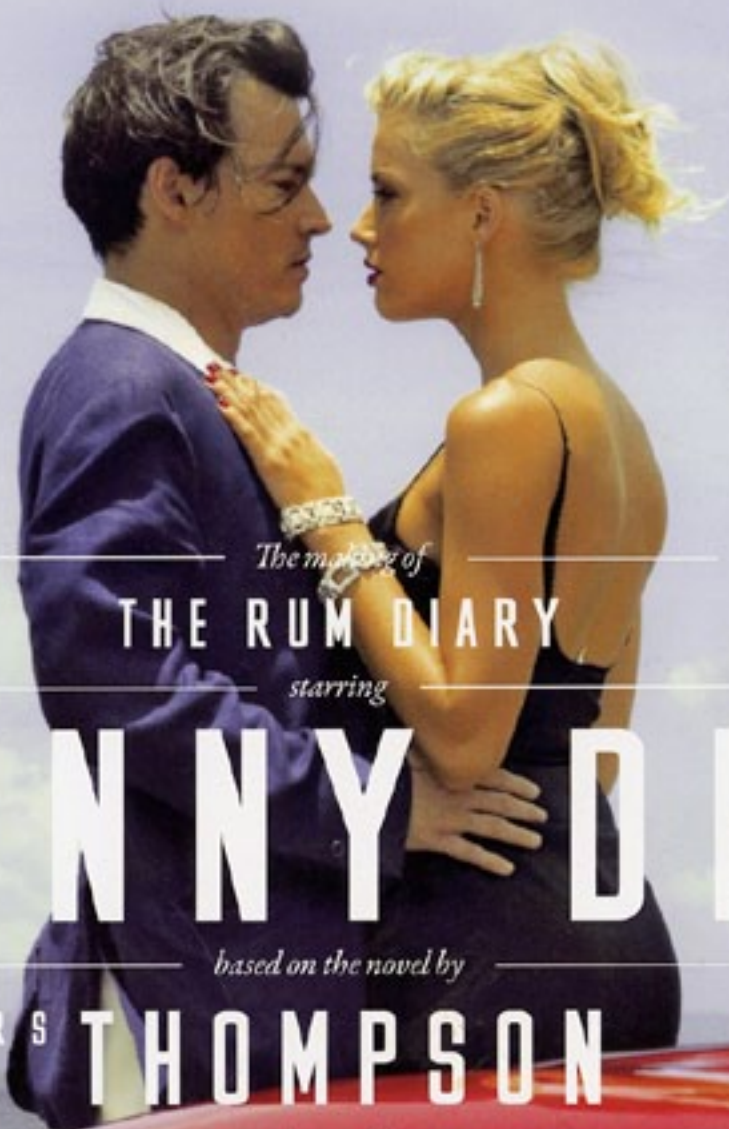


# PORT

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*The making of*

THE RUM DIARY

*starring*

JOHNNY DEPP

*based on the novel by*

HUNTER S THOMPSON

*directed by*

BRUCE ROBINSON

DANNY BOYLE MELVYN BRAGG SAMANTHA MORTON  
STEVEN BERKOFF DIETER RAMS





Left: On the first floor, *Riga e squadra* (ruler and square) desk designed by Barnaba. It is surrounded by a collection of inspirational pieces.  
 Right: In another room on the first floor, a red piano is illuminated by a pair of adjustable swing-arm Fornasetti wall lights. A mid 19th century Italian walnut armoire, one of Piero's antique furniture pieces, originally made for the *Carabinieri a cavallo* – the horse-mounted branch of the Italian armed forces, to hang their long capes.



*Cambiano i suonatori ma la musica è sempre quella...*  
 (The melody's changed but the song remains the same...)

Words Huw Griffith and Tessa Nicholson  
 Photography Tobias Harvey

A bottle green wall on the ground floor living room exhibits an eclectic collection of assorted mirrors. The window alcove in the far corner displays Piero's Bohemian glassware collection.

In the kitchen, a painting by Piero titled *La venditrice di farfalle* (the butterfly seller). Painted in Tempera (1938).





Left: A corner of the kitchen and a three-tiered stand supports a vase featuring the iconic face of Lina Cavalleri. Lampshades and ceramic floor tiles are adorned with butterflies and newspaper decoration and the glass doors and windows invite the lush greenery of the courtyard garden inside.



Right: Stacked plan chests contain archived material in the atelier and office.

Below: The original Architettura circa 1955: the Fornasetti Bureau-Bookcase in collaboration with Gio Ponti. On brass legs, its inside decoration continues through depicting internal rooms and spaces of its neo-classical 'palladin'.



Bottom left: The 'Red Room' complete with slippers.



Bottom right: The wallpaper in the ground floor corridor called Gerusalemme, was designed by Piero to decorate the house. After the wearing effects of time, reprints were made in the Fornasetti Atelier.

Above: A bathroom upstairs with Fornasetti wall tiles and ceramic cat.



Wading in amongst the hollyhocks and low ferns, Barnaba Fornasetti teases away a handful of wild raspberries and hands me a couple; a kindly gesture by a kindly man. We are sitting in his quiet courtyard garden under the sultry Milanese sun. An almost perfect city peace pervades; birds talk, interrupted only occasionally by the devilish development going up close by and the distant whine of two-stroke engines making haste up the via Bazzini.

The family villa that surrounds us was built by his grandparents in the late 19th century; now completely covered in creeping ivy, its rendered walls of dark terracotta are totally cloaked by bottle green. Within these walls and behind those windows, a six-decade-strong story of incalculable importance has played out in the world of decorative design. This house is the very place where innovation and imagination collided under the commanding eye of Barnaba's father, the late Piero Fornasetti. Artist, engraver, designer and, above all else, craftsman, Piero Fornasetti was a master lithographer who propelled his groundbreaking designs into many thousands of homes.

Much has been written on Piero's life and work already: his 11,000 strong inventory of pieces, his all-consuming persona, and his rebellious heart. His handmade work typified the exuberant spirit of postwar Italian design in the '50s and '60s – it was boldly traditional yet boldly iconoclastic. But as his softly-spoken son, Barnaba, confides, it was not only in his work that he cut a line in controversy.

From bourgeois beginnings, Piero trusted his instincts enough to know that the Le Brera School of Art was not for him. Unmotivated and uninspired, he was expelled for "bad discipline". His explanation was simple but damning: "They didn't teach me how to draw people." He enrolled instead at the Milan School for Industrial Arts.

Piero could draw. There is no doubt that his vivid imagination only found expression when he was pencil-in-hand. From the beginning, he took inspiration from the Italian surrealists of his day. Early on in his career, he printed art lithographs for a number of exceptional artists, the likes of De Chirico, Giacomo Manzù and Lucio Fontana came to his studio to have their paintings, etchings and books printed. A chance meeting with Gio Ponti, designer and editor of the influential magazine *Domus*, ensured that it

was not long before Piero himself was one among those artists he admired so much. Ponti was a *tour-de-force*, an artistic giant in his own right, and his patronage was to play a critical role in the early years of Piero's career. Ponti had taken note of Piero's expert technical knowledge of stencil lithography and engraving methods and also his unfettered imagination and freedom of spirit. Recognising his potential, Ponti asked him to experiment with techniques for applying decoration to furniture that he wanted to produce industrially. Experimentation came readily to Piero; it suited his curious, radical nature and he quickly adopted it as his *modus operandi*.

It was not long before Piero discovered a decorative formula that had not been seen in the same way before. He devised a technique whereby he could transfer his own designs onto the surface of literally anything that took his fancy. Nothing was spared – from the most everyday functional objects, such as plates and teapots, to bespoke decorative objects and furniture, he embellished them all with his inimitable, often subversive, designs. Images of neoclassical architecture predominated, but also animals, playing cards and butterflies.

Piero stumbled across his most iconic image when leafing through a 19th century periodical – it was a black and white portrait of Lina Cavalieri, a silent film actress and opera singer of note whose features are now more famous for being Piero's "Face that launched a thousand plates", as one journalist aptly put it. He toyed with her graceful beauty over and over in his "Themes and Variations" collection in 1961. On one of these 400 designs, Piero, the unstoppable mischief-maker, went so far as to give her a Hitler moustache – and it worked. He was having fun and the public liked it.

So universally accessible were his designs that for over two decades, the Fornasetti brand was in almost constant demand all over the world – an exciting and absorbing time for him and his apprentices. Piero was prolific but his obsessive nature and devotion to his brand and namesake took its toll on family life. His wife, who died last year, was an artist in her own right. It cannot have been easy, overshadowed as she was by her husband's success, but this was something she was evidently willing to accept as she stayed by his side, supporting him and his work throughout his entire rollercoaster

career. Barnaba admits the dynamics in the house were difficult: "My mother had a hard time being next to my father, she had to put up with his strong personality. She also had an artistic education which was immediately suppressed by my father's machismo that he would show off through his vast knowledge and culture. As a child I remember their fights ending up in flying objects and plates." When tensions ran high Barnaba's mother had few places to go given that a good part of their house was dedicated to the Atelier.

But this was not the case for his son. Barnaba left home aged 19 with aspirations of his own. He embraced the hippy '60s, grew his hair long and set up an underground magazine. He recalls how his father "could not bear my long hair, because that was fashionable, and he'd always been against fashion" – frustrating to be a rebellious teenager who, to his father, was just not rebellious enough.

Barnaba cut his teeth designing fabrics alongside the American textile designer Ken Scott. Some years later, with a business of his own restoring farms in the Tuscan hills, his father rang. That telephone call changed everything. It was a crisis call – Piero Fornasetti was 65 and he was tired. He had poured his entire being into his work but, without business partners or collaborators he could trust, he had to carry the company through too many largely economic disappointments. In the mid to late '60s, a new sensibility had taken hold – modernism. It brought an end to decoration for decoration's sake and caused a crisis in Fornasetti's career.

Fornasetti needed his son's business acumen. Up to this point, Barnaba's working relationship with his father had been "complicated". From here on, they joined forces more on an equal footing. It wasn't an easy transition, "I had to sweet talk him. He may have been hard, but he really loved me. He would never have listened to anyone else" Barnaba remembers. The family business was at breaking point. Barnaba talks in restoration terms when he describes how he dealt with the crisis: "When I got there, I started putting down markers to save the structure, and especially the archives." For the next eight years they worked side by side. When Piero died suddenly in 1988, his son was left with a great feeling of emptiness, but also a lot of debt. Now, with 23 years at the helm, Barnaba has revived the fortunes of the family business without having recourse to





Above: At the far end of the house, the guest bedroom with Cole and Son wallpaper by Fornasetti. Blue paint has been incorporated into the paper for further effect. A Fornasetti chest of drawers stands between a pair of antique chairs.

Below: Upstairs in Bernaba's quarters, his immense record collection complete with DJ decks.



Above: In the front room, a desk with matching chair called *Biglietti da visita* (business cards) designed by Piero Fornasetti. The business cards are taken from antique books and redesigned by Piero.

Below: The main living room downstairs complete with matching Chesterfield-like sofas. An 18th century hexagonal Italian mirror hangs above an ornate fireplace.



Hand-bound files containing archived reference material jostle for space on the shelves. One of a pair of dogs titled *Canis seduti* (seated dogs) designed in the '60s by Piero Fornasetti and inspired by the French glass artist Emile Gallé, sits upon a Fornasetti round table with neoclassical motifs.

advertise – the Fornasetti empire has never once paid for publicity, relying instead on the power of the products themselves to attract attention at exhibitions and trade fairs.

Barnaba has implemented some major changes: he has opened new production lines, introduced new prototypes and reissued archived designs, choosing carefully whom to collaborate with. He has also transformed the house that is such an integral part of his father's legacy into a living showroom. It attracts collectors from all over the world.

The house that stands today is decorated with Fornasetti pieces from the past and present. Things clash here and there, but with an off-kilter elegance. It is unashamedly exhibitionist with everything out on show and a far cry from the generic minimalism of interiors we have become so accustomed to these days. On the ground floor, rooms are traditionally arranged: a miniature pair of Chesterfield sofas oppose each other in symmetry. Any notion of the conventional, however, is disrupted by the details – proportions and perspectives are all askew: a Palladian building is scaled down to become a chest of drawers whilst a gold-leafed row of sardines leap atop a large coffee table residing upstairs in Barnaba's quarters. It is here, on the first floor, that the house feels comfortably lived in. Barnaba has created a more informal – but nonetheless exuberant – surrounding for himself. Stacked bookshelves buckle under the weight of carefully catalogued files, stuffed with preserved visual references, each one string-tied and numbered. An invaluable archive. Through to the sitting room and an archive of a different kind: a colossal record collection complete with DJ decks that tell of Barnaba's great love of music.

Ambling through these rooms and narrow corridors stirs up memories of houses I knew as a child in the '70s – timeworn family homes with their dramas and stories hanging heavily in the air. The interior of this house holds a timeless quality marked by the Fornasetti family trait that still lives on: the refusal to toe the line. Barnaba embodies this trait. He is a man of integrity and flair.

We say goodbye to Barnaba. In the entrance hall above him hangs a chandelier assembled out of hundreds of cowrie shells. Demanding little attention, it is one of his mother's creations. Here it presides, in pride of place.

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