DIELINE

ANNUAL 2026 — PACKAGE DESIGN AWARDS · TRENDS · PROJECTS · HEADLINES

BEST OF SHOW 2026

Varus 775 by OlssønBarbieri, the first spirit to take Best of Show since 2019.



The Shape of 2026


Strangers
DISORDER
ROJA
Coca-Cola
PEPSI
WATER
WILDHAWK
MAG
DOUBLE DOWN
NACHOS
GOURMET DURIAN
Gala
BUFFS
YALA
2
3



FROM THE EDITOR

The year in full color.

The numerals are built from packaging in the pages that follow, from DIELINE Awards winners to the Trend Report and the Top Projects of 2026, arranged by color.

Listen: the entire DIELINE team could use a nap, because, small and mighty as we are, we put out roughly 1,200 stories in 2026.

And we deserve it, too.

If there was one thing 2026 was, it was relentless. Granted, most of the team's parents are still very confused about what we do ("Billy writes about boxes and cans!"), but don't ever let anyone tell you that packaging isn't newsworthy. We witnessed several massive global redesigns, a complete supply chain disruption that impacted the cheapest packaging material (and made one company opt to remove all color from their packaging), and the implementation of EPR laws in several states (followed by a few pesky lawsuits from manufacturers).

What you hold in your hands (er, digital hands?) is the best of the best from the year that was in packaging. Not only can you see all 155 winners, 76 merits and 14 top honors from the 2026 DIELINE Awards, but you get to see the best of Chloe Cordover's newsletter Shelf Life, our 2027 trend report, the biggest sustainability stories of the year, but also our most viewed projects and top headlines, with a few controversial redesigns thrown in to keep it interesting.

Oh, and what packaging looks like in North Korea...

Oh, and don't forget about the Coca-Cola redesign...

Or, how wellness products have gone all-in on infantilization...

OK, I'm done. Even that is just a small sample of what our team brought to life this past year, and we're looking forward to doing it all again next year.

2027 won't disappoint.

Bill McCool
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Con-tents

5 From the editor



282 **Sustainability**
Refill, plastic-free, Trash Talk

Jury 10 · **Top honors** 12 · **Winners** 30



8 **DIELINE Awards 2026**
155 winners, 76 merits, 14 top honors



70 **Trend Report 2027**
20 trends, 110 pages

Merit 50 · **Concept & Student** 61 · **The Celebration** 66

Cut — Fold — Every section of the year, flat-packed.

The year, unfolded.

231 Awards honorees
20 Trends for 2027
12 Top projects
10 Headlines

12 projects, ranked by readers



182 **Top Projects of 2026**
The stories readers opened most

From Coca-Cola to Sprite



234 **Headlines**
News, opinion and critiques



312 **Shelf Life**
Six columns from the newsletter

68 Enter DIELINE Awards 2027

DIELINE Awards 2026

The Winners

The year's best packaging design, as judged by the DIELINE Awards jury.

The Jury 10

Best of Show: Varus 775 12

Top honors 14

Category winners 30

Merit 50

Concept & Student 61



BLACK



SILVER



BRONZE



CLEAR

Enter the DIELINE Awards 2027 →

SAVE $30 PER ENTRY WITH CODE ANNUAL26 · FINAL DEADLINE FEB 26, 2027

THE 2026 TROPHY, SHOWN IN GOLD AND FOUR MORE FINISHES

The Jury

All entries were judged by a panel of jurors who are experts in their fields, led by five jury chairs. Every entry went through two rounds of critique and appraisal.

1,500+	~40	41	14
ENTRIES	COUNTRIES	CATEGORIES	TOP HONORS

JUDGED ON FIVE CRITERIA

01 **Creativity**

02 **Marketability**

03 **Innovation**

04 **Execution**

05 **On-pack branding**

SD

Sarah Di Domenico

CO-FOUNDER AND CCO, WEDGE

SO

Sam O'Donahue

CO-FOUNDER, ESTABLISHED

KL

Katie Levy

CO-FOUNDER, GANDER

ZZ

Zipeng Zhu

DAZZLED STUDIO

VF

Veronica Fuerte

FOUNDER, HEY STUDIO



BEST OF SHOW The highest honor, voted by the Jury Chairs

Varus 775

STUDIO	LOCATION	TIER
OlssønBarbieri	Oslo, Norway	Independent

Every publication will tell you that we're all drinking less, but it looks as if that memo didn't make its way to our judges, as OlssønBarbieri's Varus 775 nabbed top honors at DIELINE Awards. It's also the first spirit brand to win Best of Show since 2019, which, coincidentally, was also a gin. Courtesy of a German family-owned distillery, the drink was inspired by a battle in 9 AD that took place in the Teutoburg Forest, just a stone's throw away from the gin maker's front door.

Comprised of a 3-part system, Varus 775 consists of a glass bottle and an aluminum refill, a lightweight circular option that helps reduce transport costs and CO2 emissions. But the third part is the actual star of the show: a porcelain container that's not only refillable, but inspired by Roman vessels of a bygone era. When unboxed from its crate, it elevates the drink to near-ritual status.



Plaster molds for the porcelain refill vessel, the third part of the system.

Studio of the Year

Wedge

3 **years in a row.**
The three-peat.

Yes, that rarest of feats is emblematic of not just grit, determination, and more Gladwellian hours than any of us care to commit to, but a body of work that speaks for itself.

For the third year in a row, the Montreal and LA-based studio has taken home Studio of the Year.

WEDGE ON THE 2026 WINNERS LIST	
Rebrand of the Year	**Cocolab**
Best of Health, Beauty & Personal Care	**Cocolab**
2nd, Health Care	**Equip**
2nd, Health, Body & Beauty identity	**Cocolab**
3rd, Health, Body & Beauty identity	**Equip**
Merit, Beauty & Cosmetics	**Clearstem**
Merit, Ready to Serve Cocktails	**Snapple Spiked**









Editor's Choice
Best of Sustainability

Fussy

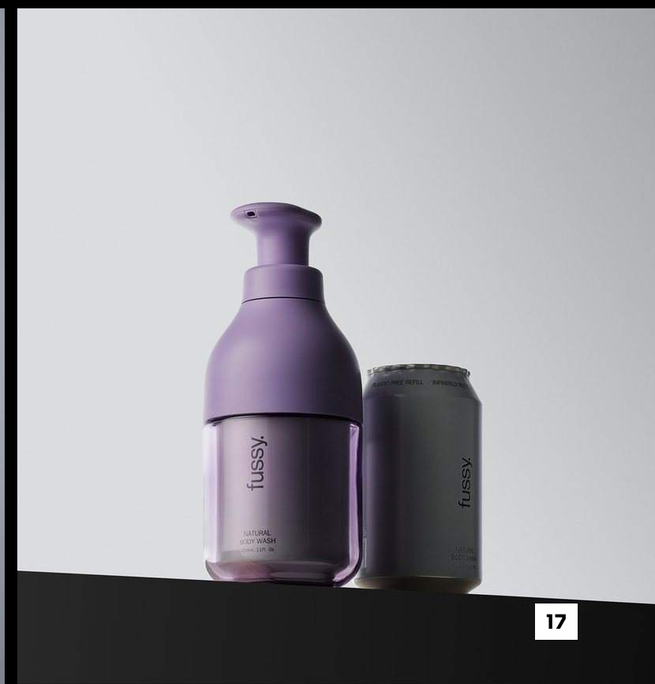
by Beta Design Office

With a mission to kick all single-use plastic waste from our bathrooms to the curb, Fussy's latest body wash uses a refillable system with a forever container and refills packaged in endlessly recyclable aluminum cans.

The outer container uses tinted PET that lets consumers see the goods inside, while a much-needed matte texture wraps the bottle so it doesn't slip out of sudsy hands.







Rebrand of the Year
Best of Health, Beauty & Personal Care

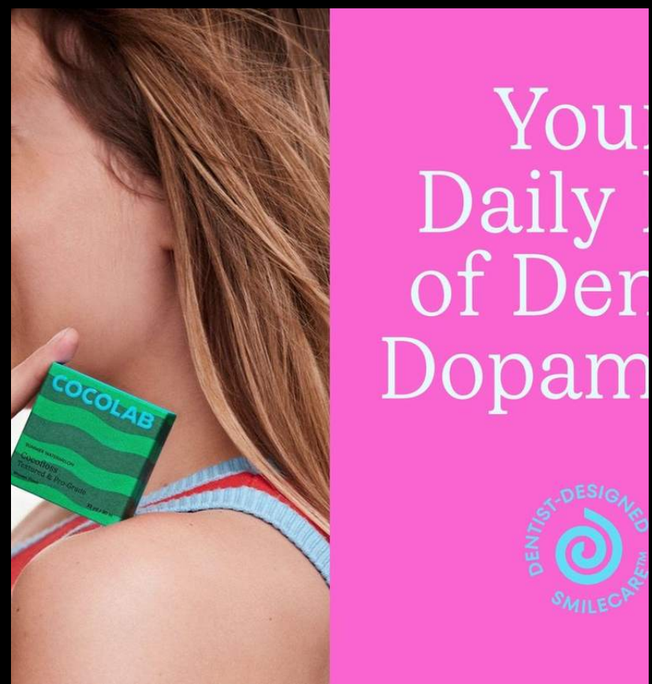
Cocolab

by Wedge

Seeking out the help of brand and design agency Wedge, the company rebranded to Cocolab with an expanded portfolio, strengthening its positioning in the oral care space.

At the core of the brand's transformation and expansion was a new kind of strategic approach, "Your Daily Hit of Dental Dopamine." It reframes oral care as beauty care with what Wedge calls a "system worthy of the MoMA store."







Plastic Free Innovation of the Year

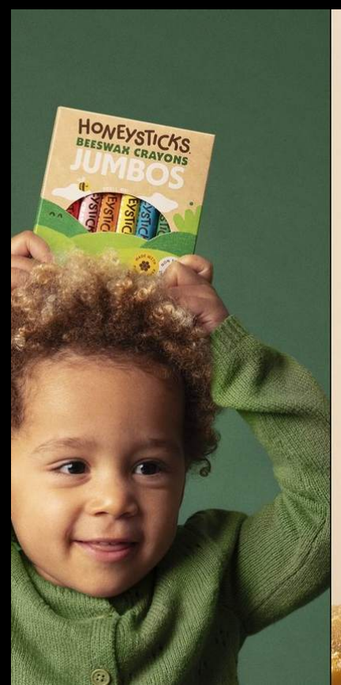
Honeysticks

by MILK

Using 100% natural beeswax, as opposed to Crayola's petroleum-based coloring implements, the brand had expanded to nearly 30 SKUs and turned to Milk to unify the range.

You'll now find no-glue, 100% recyclable cartons, in addition to bath products sold in reusable tins, which also can be used as bath toys. Your move, Crayola.











Design for Good Award

Godawan 173

by Butterfly Cannon

If you’re going to name your whisky after a critically endangered bird, it’s a pretty good idea to bring its plight into the public consciousness.

Releasing just 173 handcrafted bottles, forged from quartz and salts, each one-of-a-kind edition represents one of the surviving Godawan.

96 → 173

Great Indian Bustard population the brand has helped grow

173

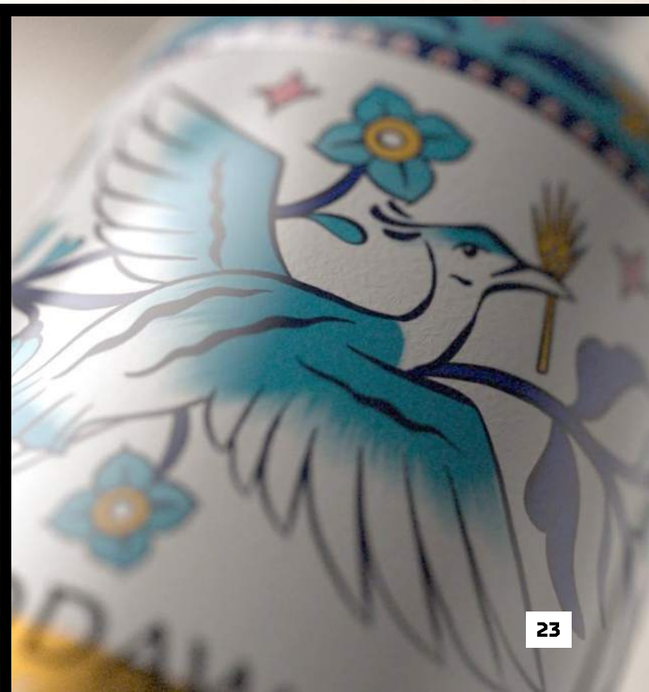
Handcrafted bottles, one for each surviving Godawan

$1M+

Raised for conservation groups







Designalytics Design Effectiveness Award

Catalina Crunch

by Catalina Crunch In-House

66%

of consumers preferred the new packaging to the previous version.

Winner selection was entirely data-driven, based on sales performance in the marketplace and rigorous quantitative consumer testing.

"Design can feel like a gamble, until you bring the consumer into the process early and often."

Steve Lamoureux, founder and CEO, Designalytics





Best of Food

HEYDOH

by Herefor Studio

Heydoh, an Anglicized version of the Mandarin Chinese word for black soybeans, enlisted design studio Herefor to dream up the packaging.

The tall, slender bottles are made from thick glass, adding a premium, quality touch.





Best of Beverage

PAZ®

by HardCuore

In Portuguese, “paz” translates to “peace,” but with the new-to-market energy drink Paz, there’s nothing calming or serene about the brand.

It draws inspiration from 80s running aesthetics and old-school Olympic vibes.





Best of Home, Shopping & Other Markets

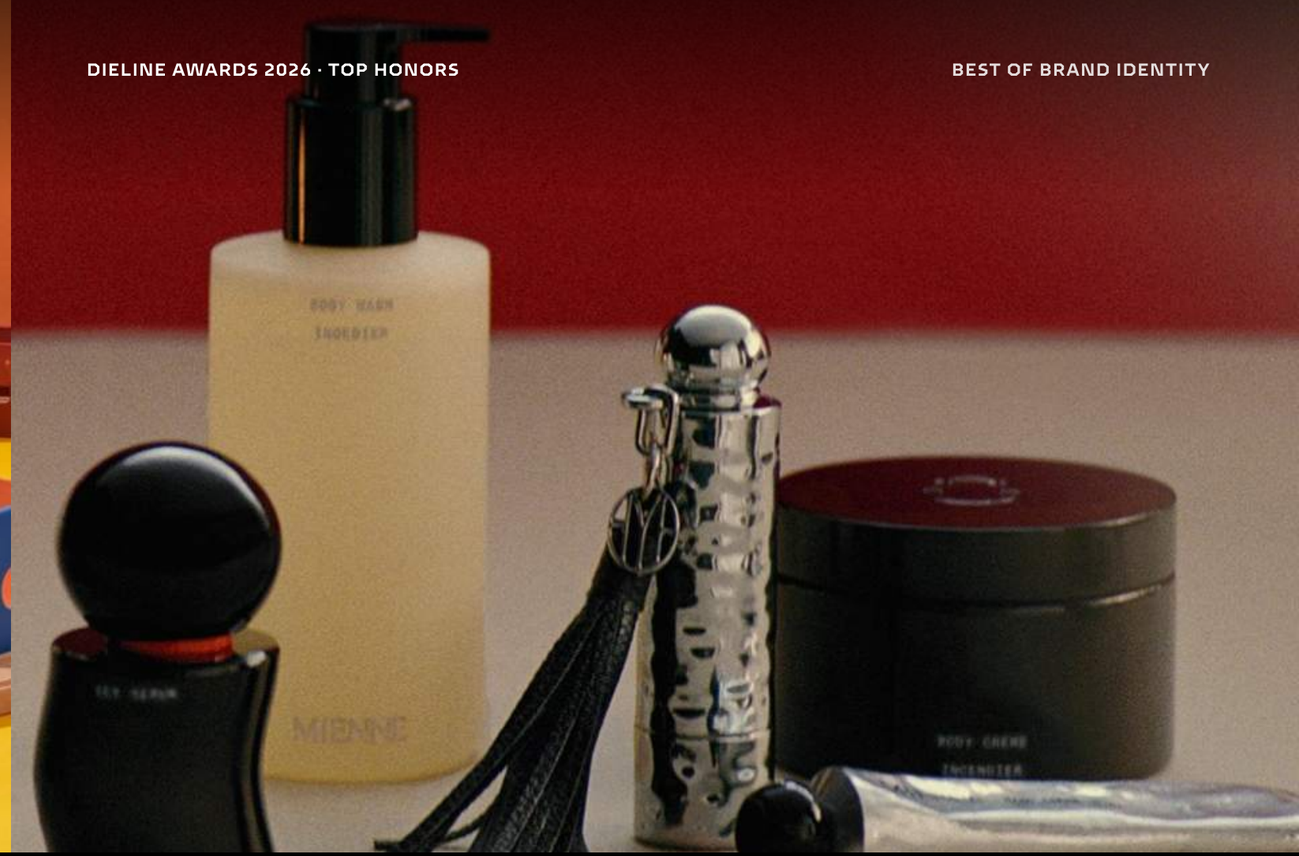
b is for ball®

by biggest little® × Sundae Kids

Inspired by whack-a-mole, the packaging invites interaction with a drawer on the other side that has three pre-cut holes.

100% plastic-free, made from FSC-certified paperboard and printed with soy-based inks.





Best of Brand Identity

Mienne

by Aruliden

Intimate body care brand Mienne attempts to answer a fairly complex question: What does everyday eroticism look like?

The packaging mirrors the contours of our own bodies, inviting tension and innuendo.



FOOD

CATEGORY 01 OF 41

Breads, Cereal Pasta



1 **Man Cereal**
Day Job



2 **Northern Pasta Co.**
Roleplay



3 **Longping Oil Noodles**
Wow Creative Design (Shenzhen) Co., LTD

FOOD

CATEGORY 02 OF 41

Dairy or Dairy Alternative Products



1 **Cacao Disidente Hot Chocolate**
S&Co



2 **Mitica — Parmigiano Reggiano**
Design Womb



3 **BONEARTH FOOD MARKET**
3AND

FOOD

CATEGORY 03 OF 41

Sauces, Oils, & Spices



1 **yiayia and friends Single-serve Sticks**
Beetroot



2 **One Trick Pony Peanut Butter**
Polygraph



3 **MAG**
LG2

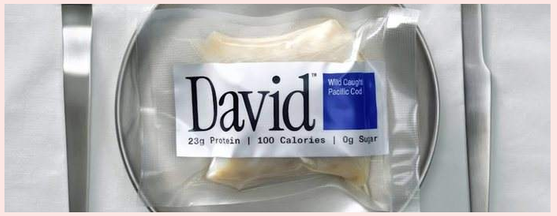
FOOD

CATEGORY 04 OF 41

Fruits, Veggies, Fish, Meat, and Meat Alternatives



1 **Yes! Apples**
Blurr Bureau



2 **David Cod**
Day Job



3 **Portuguese Gold**
Fábrica de Conservas da Murtosa, Lda & Sonoco

FOOD

CATEGORY 05 OF 41

Ready to Eat, Fast Food, Meal Kits



1 **Korean Bros**
TRUFFL



2 **Pizzeta**
BroHouse



3 **Norteno**
Design Happy

FOOD

CATEGORY 06 OF 41

Confectionary Desserts and Sweet Snacks



1 **Strangers Candies**
Auge Design



2 **Maeve Celebrations Chocolate Collection**
Maeve & Young Jerks



3 **Maeve Spring Chocolate Collection**
Maeve & Young Jerks

FOOD

CATEGORY 07 OF 41

Savory Snacks



1 **Buffs**
Herefor Studio



2 **Cob Foods**
Saint-Urbain



3 **Tozi Azteca Superfoods**
Sofia Llaguno x IfOnly Creative

BEVERAGE

CATEGORY 08 OF 41

Water



1 **DongJiangYuan-60th Anniversary Commemoration**
ShenZhen Lingyun creative packaging design Co.,Ltd.



2 **Aqua Libra**
Magpie Studio



3 **Madison Blue**
Makers & Allies

BEVERAGE

CATEGORY 09 OF 41

Soft Drinks



1 **Schweppes**
Jones Knowles Ritchie Schweppes / The Coca-Cola Company



2 **Coffee Counter Culture**
Turner Duckworth



3 **POJU Organic Pomegranate Juice**
Toolbox Design

BEVERAGE

CATEGORY 10 OF 41

Tea & Coffee



1 **Module**
Standard Format



2 **Songchuan Mountain Tea**
Linshaobin Design



3 **Chaozhou Oolong Tea**
TUSHI design

BEVERAGE

CATEGORY 11 OF 41

Functional Beverage



1 **PAZ®**
HardCuore



2 **JIN JIN**
Roleplay



3 **Purdey's**
Magpie Studio

BEVERAGE

CATEGORY 12 OF 41

Beers, Ciders, & Malt



1 **Pedavena**
Auge Design



2 **Birra Castello**
Auge Design



3 **1664**
Epoch

BEVERAGE

CATEGORY 13 OF 41

Low-Alcohol and No-Alcohol



1 **Famiglia Santoni**
Agency: Stranger & Stranger , Client: Gabriello Santoni S.R.L.



2 **Tessas Eplegård Cider**
OlssønBarbieri



3 **MURI**
Opposite House

BEVERAGE

CATEGORY 14 OF 41

Wine & Champagne



1 **BODEGAS LAN**
GRAVITA



2 **Bidai Berri**
Moruba



3 **Carnada**
Mirona Estudio

BEVERAGE

CATEGORY 15 OF 41

Clear Spirits



1 **Øl'søn Green Gin**
Van Heertum Design VHD



2 **A'peel**
Studio Guild



3 **Perro Verde Mezcal**
S&Co Design (Colombia)

BEVERAGE

CATEGORY 16 OF 41

Dark Spirits



1 **Treblasé**
OlssønBarbieri



2 **Old Grand-Dad**
Tavern Agency



3 **Banff Whisky**
Glasfurd & Walker

BEVERAGE

CATEGORY 17 OF 41

Ready To Serve Cocktails



1 **Roro**
Swear Words



2 **Yoshi**
Saint-Urbain



3 **Waterbird**
Tavern Agency

HEALTH, BEAUTY, & PERSONAL CARE

CATEGORY 18 OF 41

Clothing, Fashion, And Fragrance



1 **Monica Rich Kosann**
Here Design



2 **adidas x Tron : Ares Movie, Shoe Box / Chest**
L&E International Ltd. and adidas



3 **Wildhawk**
Red Antler

HEALTH, BEAUTY, & PERSONAL CARE

CATEGORY 19 OF 41

Health Care



1 **Persephone Biosciences**
Creech



2 **Equip**
Wedge



3 **Biologica**
Mythology

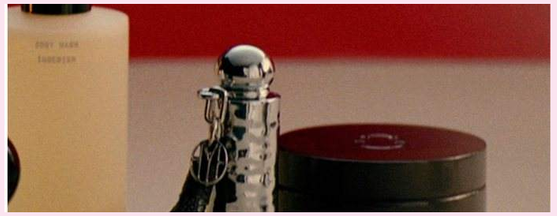
HEALTH, BEAUTY, & PERSONAL CARE

CATEGORY 20 OF 41

Body Care



1 **Isima**
Established



2 **Mienne**
Aruliden



3 **Ghilli Beauty Bars**
allink

HEALTH, BEAUTY, & PERSONAL CARE

CATEGORY 21 OF 41

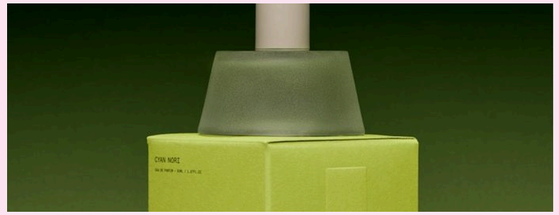
Beauty & Cosmetics



1 **DAISE**
ZURU Edge



2 **Mienne**
Aruliden



3 **Abel**
Base Design Melbourne

HOME, SHOPPING, & OTHER MARKETS

CATEGORY 22 OF 41

Household Maintenance & Home Improvement



1 **Moctezuma: Cement Reimagined In Mexico**
Brands&People



2 **Spumos**
BroHouse



3 **Brite by Scotch-Brite™ Cleaning Tools**
3M Design

HOME, SHOPPING, & OTHER MARKETS

CATEGORY 23 OF 41

E-Comm Packaging



1 **Adidas OPTIME PR Mailer**
PPRKIT, Burson, Adidas



2 **Haven**
Studio Marina Veziko



3 **Boston Marathon Mailer**
PPRKIT, Burson, Adidas

CATEGORY 24 OF 41

Electronics, Office, E-Commerce, Entertainment



1 **Mohawk Packaging Promotion**
Hybrid Design



2 **Heimført**
Tank Design Tromsø AS



3 **Faccia Brutto x Tavern 30 Month Aged Fernet**
Tavern Agency

HOME, SHOPPING, & OTHER MARKETS

CATEGORY 25 OF 41

Baby, Kids, & Pets



1 **FIDOVET**
REWOT s.r.l.



2 **Klarina Sunscreen & Blender Duo**
Klarina Inc / Tomorrow Lab LLC



3 **Willow & I**
The Brand Crafters / Willow&I

HOME, SHOPPING, & OTHER MARKETS

CATEGORY 26 OF 41

Tobacco & Cannabis



1 **ELF Nicotine Pouches Tracker Kit**
Star Latitude (BVI) Limited



2 **Tokin' Jew Presents: Tokin' Jays**
Mitch Wiesen



3 **Twisted Hemp**
Dinger Creative

SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

CATEGORY 27 OF 41

Food



1 **KIND Snacks Paper Wrapper Pilot**
KIND Snacks



2 **Dino Bars x Veritiv**
Dino Bars and Veritiv



3 **The Fiber Box — Circular Seafood Transport So...**
PAPACKS

SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

CATEGORY 28 OF 41

Beverage



1 **milkadamia Milk Slices**
milkadamia



2 **REDESIGN COGNAC A DE FUSSIGNY RANGE**
Maison Linea



3 **GRO Spirits**
GRO Spirits / Philippe Bordonado

SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

CATEGORY 29 OF 41

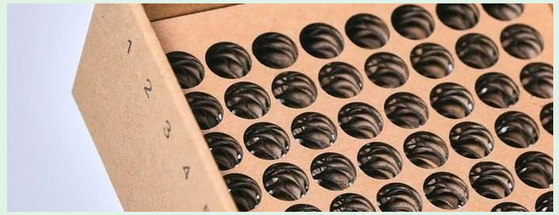
Health, Body, and Beauty



1 **Clarins Total Eye Lift**
Aptar Beauty



2 **Dig Deep Endurance Fuel**
Public House Studio



3 **PulpFixin Paper-Based Labware**
Zenpack / Scilutions Labware

VISUAL BRAND IDENTITY SYSTEMS

CATEGORY 31 OF 41

Food Brand Identity Systems



1 **Korean Bros**
TRUFFL



2 **HEYDOH**
Herefor Studio



3 **Breadcetera**
Blurr Bureau

CATEGORY 30 OF 41

Home, Shopping, & Other Markets



1 **Clement Packaging x Lil Luv Dog**
Clement Packaging x Lil Luv Dog



2 **TIPA x Pawniolo Pets**
Miki and Nick Vericella, Mario Patino, WildKind Packaging



3 **Honeysticks**
MILK

CATEGORY 32 OF 41

Beverage Brand Identity Systems



1 **Birra Castello**
Auge Design



2 **Coffee Counter Culture**
Turner Duckworth



3 **Tial's New Identity**
HardCuore

VISUAL BRAND IDENTITY SYSTEMS

CATEGORY 33 OF 41

Health, Body, & Beauty



1 **Beam Butt Health**
Saint-Urbain



2 **Cocolab**
Wedge



3 **Equip**
Wedge

SPECIAL CATEGORIES

CATEGORY 35 OF 41

In-House



1 **Burn Rate**
Runway, In-House Creative Team



2 **IHOP Catering For All!**
IHOP Brand Creative Team



3 **etleé Perfume Brand Identity and Packaging ...**
KISS Products, Inc.

VISUAL BRAND IDENTITY SYSTEMS

CATEGORY 34 OF 41

Home, Shopping & Other Markets



1 **Naked Paper**
Otherway



2 **Govino**
Redscout



3 **Dixon Rye Candles**
Russell Shaw Design

SPECIAL CATEGORIES

CATEGORY 36 OF 41

Limited Editions



1 **Hendrick's Whimsical Watering Can**
Boundless Brand Design / Hunter Luxury



2 **Maeve Holiday Cocolate Collection**
Maeve & Young Jerks



3 **Godawan 173**
Butterfly Cannon

SPECIAL CATEGORIES

CATEGORY 37 OF 41

Private Label



1 **72H flour line**
Boo Republic



2 **Good Mood**
Mamastudio



3 **CVS Rebrand**
Pearlfisher

SPECIAL CATEGORIES

CATEGORY 38 OF 41

Luxury



1 **The Glenrothes 51**
STUDIO FORM



2 **Darphin Paris Stimulskin Cream Jar**
Estée Lauder Companies, Darphin Paris
Design: Servaire & Co
Outer cage manufactured by TNT Group



3 **Leon K. Studio & s778 Gin**
Leon K. Studio

SPECIAL CATEGORIES

CATEGORY 39 OF 41

Design for Good



1 **Godawan 173**
Brand — Diageo India / Agency — Butterfly Cannon



2 **Oh! for OzHarvest**
Weave



3 **Wild Oats**
Sukle

SPECIAL CATEGORIES

CATEGORY 40 OF 41

Brand Partnerships & Collaborations



1 **adidas x Tron : Ares Movie — Two Icons Collide**
L&E International Ltd. and adidas



2 **Fortnum & Mason x Chelsea Physic Garden**
Design Bridge and Partners London



3 **SPRITE HOOPS**
Analogue Creative / The Coca-Cola company / NBA

SPECIAL CATEGORIES

CATEGORY 41 OF 41

Startup Brands



1 **HEYDOH**
Herefor Studio



2 **Gap Tooth**
Saint-Urbain



3 **Korean Bros**
TRUFFL

MERIT

76 more to know.

Beyond first, second and third, the jury named Merit winners in nearly every category: 76 projects in all, from 41 categories.



MERIT · BREADS, CEREAL PASTA
Pasta Fortuna
nju:design



MERIT · BREADS, CEREAL PASTA
Nuda
Blurr Bureau



MERIT · DAIRY OR DAIRY ALTERNATIVE PRODUCTS
SKY BARN: EARTH'S FIRST CLEAN-LABEL, BARIS...
SKY BARN (Brand) / EO SPACE (Agency)



MERIT · DAIRY OR DAIRY ALTERNATIVE PRODUCTS
Edenesque
Perpendicular



MERIT · SAUCES, OILS, & SPICES
Attianese Conserve
nju:design



MERIT · SAUCES, OILS, & SPICES
Mezzodì
Marimo



MERIT · FRUITS, VEGGIES, FISH, MEAT, AND MEAT ALTERNATIVES
Hendersons Bacon
Onfire Design



MERIT · FRUITS, VEGGIES, FISH, MEAT, AND MEAT ALTERNATIVES
Epik Eats
Pigeon



MERIT · READY TO EAT, FAST FOOD, MEAL KITS

Pizza Hut Evergreen Boxes

*Trace Element



MERIT · READY TO EAT, FAST FOOD, MEAL KITS

Otoki Brand Redesign

Chase Design Group, Otoki



MERIT · CONFECTIONARY DESSERTS AND SWEET SNACKS

Pâte and Puff

Ark Visual



MERIT · CONFECTIONARY DESSERTS AND SWEET SNACKS

Yala Greek

Herefor Studio



MERIT · SAVORY SNACKS

Manomasa Corn Chips

Derek&Eric



MERIT · SAVORY SNACKS

WEIRDO SNACKS

MABA



MERIT · WATER

DongJiangYuan-ShanShuiXinWu

ShenZhen Lingyun creative packaging design Co., Ltd.



MERIT · WATER

Loonen Still Water

Colony



MERIT · SOFT DRINKS

Tial

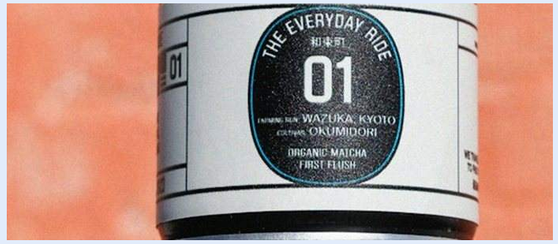
HardCuore



MERIT · TEA & COFFEE

ɣiayia and friends Organic Mountain Teas

Beetroot



MERIT · TEA & COFFEE

MOTORCYCLE MATCHA

Saint-Urbain



MERIT · FUNCTIONAL BEVERAGE

Hy.Q

Hart Brands & Kody Goodson



MERIT · FUNCTIONAL BEVERAGE

Halfday

Earthling Studio



MERIT · BEERS, CIDERS, & MALT

Big Rock Brewery

Helms Workshop



MERIT · BEERS, CIDERS, & MALT

THE BEAR

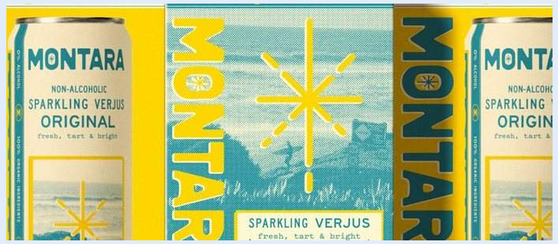
Pond Design



MERIT · LOW-ALCOHOL AND NO-ALCOHOL

Ghia Blood Orange Le Spritz

Ghia



MERIT · LOW-ALCOHOL AND NO-ALCOHOL

Montara

What Else Studio



MERIT · WINE & CHAMPAGNE

Bento

Denomination



MERIT · WINE & CHAMPAGNE

Developed Through Time

Zulu Alpha Kilo



MERIT · CLEAR SPIRITS

Tolmanns Gin

Van Heertum Design VHD



MERIT · CLEAR SPIRITS

L16 Far North Dry Gin

Clay Andrews



MERIT · DARK SPIRITS

Paranubes Café de Olla

Work by Lule



MERIT · DARK SPIRITS

Terrativo Aperitivo

Chad Michael Studio



MERIT · READY TO SERVE COCKTAILS

Snapple Spiked

Wedge



MERIT · READY TO SERVE COCKTAILS

Coca-Cola x Bacardi

Studio — TheSUPERULTRARARE LTD Brand — The Coca-Cola ...



MERIT · CLOTHING, FASHION, AND FRAGRANCE

Earth Love Life EDP

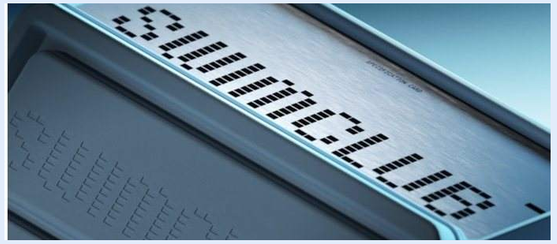
KYUB Studio



MERIT · CLOTHING, FASHION, AND FRAGRANCE

Kahf EDP Oracle Series

KYUB Studio



MERIT · HEALTH CARE

Swim Club

CENTER



MERIT · HEALTH CARE

Gentlee

WeWantMore



MERIT · BODY CARE

Little Six Good Botanical Spray

Tiger Pan



MERIT · BODY CARE

Estrid Refillable Antiperspirant

Sample Studio



MERIT · BEAUTY & COSMETICS

Clearstem

Wedge



MERIT · BEAUTY & COSMETICS

Teddy Glow

Sweety & Co.



MERIT · HOUSEHOLD MAINTENANCE & HOME IMPROVEMENT

Alter:Bio

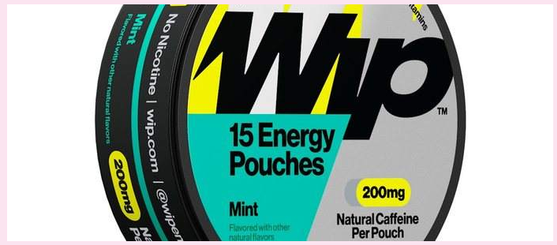
Brand Design by Trackmeet and Industrial Design by Lauren G...



MERIT · HOUSEHOLD MAINTENANCE & HOME IMPROVEMENT

Govino

Redscout



MERIT · E-COMM PACKAGING

Wip

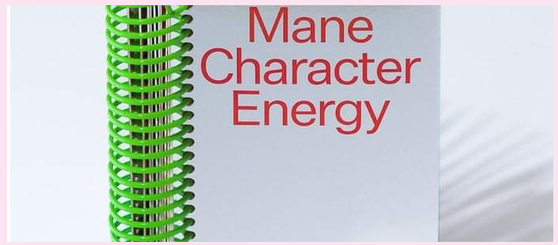
George



MERIT · E-COMM PACKAGING

Vital Farms Pasture Parcels

Vital Farms



MERIT · ELECTRONICS, OFFICE, E-COMMERCE, ENTERTAINMENT

Mane Character Energy

Fictionist Studio



MERIT · ELECTRONICS, OFFICE, E-COMMERCE, ENTERTAINMENT

Acer PureForm Mouse Packaging

Acer Gadget Inc.



MERIT · BABY, KIDS, & PETS

Ryoken Instinct

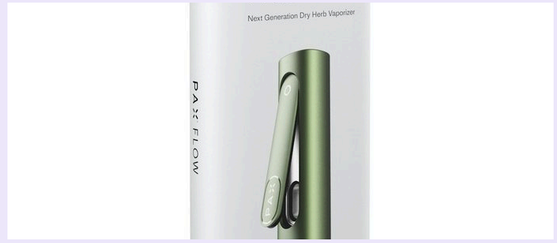
Planet People Studio



MERIT · TOBACCO & CANNABIS

Botanist Jungle Rebrand

Botanist



MERIT · TOBACCO & CANNABIS

PAX Flow Packaging

PAX & Rival



MERIT · FOOD

Drizzle & Sizzle Glass

Gander



MERIT · BEVERAGE

Mijenta Tequila

Mijenta Tequila, Sophia Castellanos, Mike Garland



MERIT · BEVERAGE

WhistlePig Boss Hog XII

WhistlePig & GPA Global



MERIT · HEALTH, BODY, AND BEAUTY

Abel

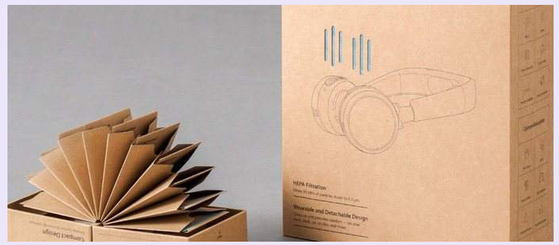
Base Design Melbourne



MERIT · HEALTH, BODY, AND BEAUTY

Everamid

Arithmetic



MERIT · HOME, SHOPPING, & OTHER MARKETS

EHT Headset Air Purifier

Zenpack



MERIT · HOME, SHOPPING, & OTHER MARKETS

PAX TRIP All-in-One

PAX



MERIT · FOOD BRAND IDENTITY SYSTEMS

Wild Oats

Sukle



MERIT · FOOD BRAND IDENTITY SYSTEMS

Yala Greek

Herefor Studio



MERIT · BEVERAGE BRAND IDENTITY SYSTEMS

Yoshi

Saint-Urbain



MERIT · BEVERAGE BRAND IDENTITY SYSTEMS

Juno Soda

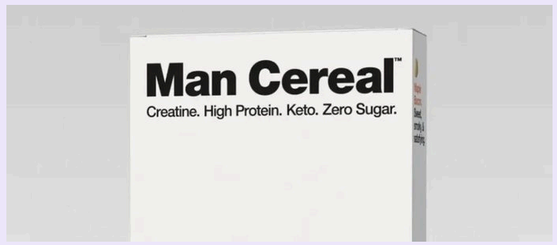
Saint-Urbain



MERIT · HEALTH, BODY, & BEAUTY

Wip

George



MERIT · HEALTH, BODY, & BEAUTY

Woodwork

Day Job



MERIT · IN-HOUSE

Burt's Bees Holiday at Target

Electro Creative Workshop



MERIT · IN-HOUSE

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Suntory Design



MERIT · LIMITED EDITIONS

Don Julio 1942 Year of the Horse Lunar New Year L...

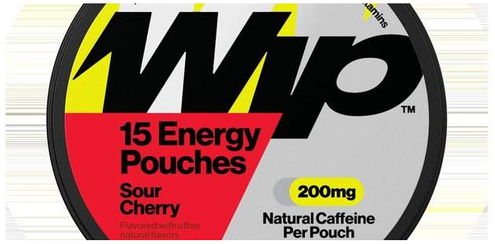
Design Bridge and Partners, Singapore



MERIT · LIMITED EDITIONS

Maeve Summer Chocolate Collection

Maeve & Young Jerks



MERIT · PRIVATE LABEL

Wip

George



MERIT · LUXURY

Burn Rate

Runway, In-House Creative Team



MERIT · LUXURY

Fortnum & Mason: Bars of Chocolate

Otherway



MERIT · DESIGN FOR GOOD

Re:Label

House of Adjaycent



MERIT · DESIGN FOR GOOD

Coffee Foundation: Call Us Crazy

Damien O'Brien / Coffee Foundation



MERIT · BRAND PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATIONS

IQOS x SELETTI

PMI Design Team



MERIT · BRAND PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATIONS

Absolut Haring



MERIT · STARTUP BRANDS

Strangers Candies

Auge Design



MERIT · STARTUP BRANDS

Yoshi

Saint-Urbain



Concept Best of Show

MUUPI

by Sweety & Co.

With a rich, character-driven identity, a smiling, joyful wordmark, and saturated, contrasting color combos, this concept brand successfully balances play with parental trust.



1

BEST OF CONCEPT · 1ST PLACE

Priceless

Co-Partnership



2

BEST OF CONCEPT · 2ND PLACE

Pomelo Mooncake

K Laser Design Lab.



3

BEST OF CONCEPT · 3RD PLACE

Tiger Balm

The University of Melbourne / Jacqueline Widodo



BREAD, CEREALS, PASTA

D'Italia Pasta Lab

National Taiwan University of Science & Technology / Wu Hoi Lam, R...



DAIRY OR DAIRY ALTERNATIVE PRODUCTS

Blue Bell

ArtCenter College of Design (MFA) Graphic Design / Hailey Caress



SPICES, OILS, SAUCES

Sting Hot Honey

Manas Trivedi



FRUITS AND VEGETABLES, FISH, MEAT, POULTRY & ALTERNATIVES

Gourmet Durian

Nguyen Huynh Gia Han / Tran Hoang Long



READY TO EAT, FAST FOOD, MEAL KITS

Jooks on You

Fictorium



CONFECTIONARY, DESSERTS, AND SWEET SNACKS

Day&Night

Zukerman Studio



SAVORY SNACKS

CRAKKY

VANESA GARCÍA ESTUDIO



WATER

Zigi Su

Dauren Serikbayev Branding studio



SOFT DRINKS, JUICES

Lemonade nude mood

Shura Kashentseva and Pavel Gubin



TEA AND COFFEE

Canyon Gold Coffee Roasters

So Na Ho



FUNCTIONAL BEVERAGES
Life Lab
Good Spark Creative Design



BEERS, CIDERS, & MALT
NOISE BEER
Kate Minsk



LOW-ALCOHOL AND NO-ALCOHOL DRINKS
SAF Qymyz
JAS.BRANDS



WINE & CHAMPAGNE
OENO
Good Spark Creative Design



CLEAR SPIRITS
Spirit Animal: The Akita Reserve
KJS CRAFT



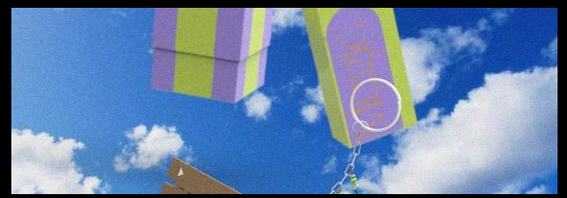
DARK SPIRITS
Nikka Redesign Concept
Studio Garcés



READY TO SERVE COCKTAILS + SELTZERS
NFU2D
Jose Manuel Vega Rocha



CLOTHING, FASHION, FRAGRANCE
HƯƠNG — VIETNAMESE INCENSE PACKAGING
Huy Nguyen, Thanh Nguyen, An Do, Linh Bui, Mai Phuong Le, Thien ...



HEALTH CARE
Influencer Kit Concept for a Condom Product
PPRKIT



BODY CARE
Re:Label
House of Adjaycent



BEAUTY & COSMETICS
Shy
Anastasia Alekseevskaya, Gorbacheva Valeria



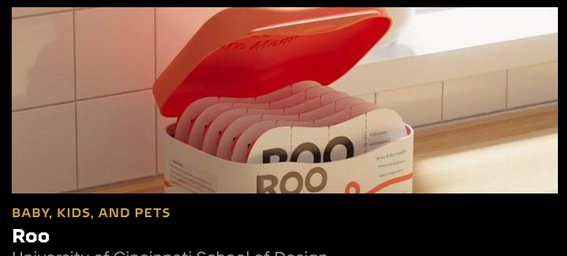
HOUSEHOLD MAINTENANCE & HOME IMPROVEMENT
Marlow
BrandForma Agency



E-COMMERCE PACKAGING
PR box for Feline Dental Products
PPRKIT



ELECTRONICS, OFFICE, E-COMMERCE, ENTERTAINMENT, & SELF-PROMOTI...
Amiten Lighting Co
Alexander Long



BABY, KIDS, AND PETS
Roo
University of Cincinnati School of Design



TOBACCO & CANNABIS
IridescentMed Trichomes
Prompt Design



SUSTAINABLE
SŌMA
Louis A. Yau



LUXURY
Oro premium herbal liquer
ABC DESIGN COMMUNICATION



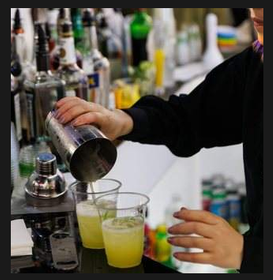
The Celebration

Inside the DIELINE Awards 2026 celebration.

WINNERS PARTY · SHIFT MIDTOWN, NEW YORK · MAY 6, 2026



01A



02A



03A



04A

CONTACT SHEET: SCENES FROM THE CELEBRATION

THE EXHIBIT





THE WINNERS





THE PARTY







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Trend Report 2027

Twenty calls for **2027** from four DIELINE editors, across 110 pages.

By Charlotte Beach, Chloe Cordover, Bill McCool and Rudy Sanchez

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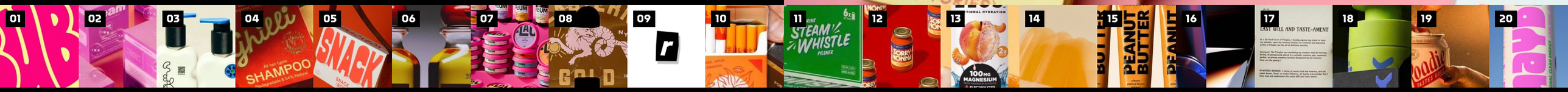
Mathilda Mutant Snackbox · 05 Whimsy, p. 92



The 2027 Trends

It used to be that the only three constants in this world were death, taxes, and a handful of media professionals coming together annually to write year-end caps and trend reports. But billionaires kinda-sorta don't pay taxes, bots are increasingly writing for other bots, and Iris DeMent has made a pretty good argument for letting the mystery be.

The only real inevitabilities, it turns out, are uncertainty and change. The river outside your window might not look all that different from year to year, but you'll never see the same water flowing through its banks. Whether we like it or not, time marches on, undefeated, and the river keeps flowing.

Which is all to say that Heraclitus would likely be all about a trend report.

We talk an awful lot about trends. That's kind of our thing, and if the past few years have taught us anything, they sure do come at you fast. So fast and furious that it can make the task of even compiling a trend report feel dated before you've even hit publish. Still, as per usual, we put our heads together, all five of them, and did our darndest to play both explainer and fortune teller, and we even brought along some of our design super pals for the ride.

We looked at all things design, packaging, branding, sustainability, and the CPG landscape, and we found 20 hills to die on (jk jk, it's just a painstakingly curated trend report, guys, right?).

Anywho, here's grade-A watercooler trend fodder. Think of it as a handy guide of directions and predictions for the coming year. Read 'em, argue over 'em, do what you will. Just remember, this is supposed to be fun.

Because we're all having fun, right?



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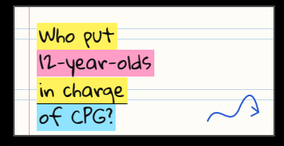
Charlotte Beach



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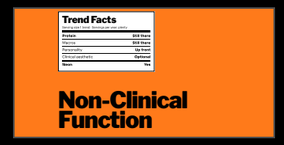

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Live, Laugh,

Luscious Logotype

BY CHARLOTTE BEACH

A bold and brazen logotype might be one of those timeless mainstay styles we see year after year, but it's a 2027 trend nonetheless! Chunky, luscious, and otherwise voluminous wordmarks that stand out on a crowded shelf are an enduring fad for a reason. Bold type choices like this are, on a base level, eye-catching; they get that brand name out there loudly and proudly in a style that is hard to overlook. Further, letterforms with heft are comforting and cozy, clear, unmistakable, unapologetic, and, simply put, fun. All of which are the sorts of adjectives CPG brands so often aspire to.

Designer, art director, and writer Elizabeth Goodspeed describes this sort of logotype as "un-selfconsciously voluptuous," with her favorite version feeling "like a script that has been left sitting out on a hot day." She explains that part of the appeal is how much work a logo can do on its own, especially on packaging.

"Increasingly, the packaging is the brand," she says.

"These big, rounded letterforms feel soft, generous, almost squeezable."

Marisa Sanchez-Dunning, If Only Creative



“Someone is simply going to hold up a chocolate bar they like on social media for two seconds in a video; ergo, the package needs to communicate the full identity in that one moment. Because these logos are so bold and idiosyncratic, they can carry a lot of that weight themselves, without needing a huge secondary graphic language around it.”

And the beauty part is that this sort of type can achieve all of that while still retaining clarity. “Unlike a lot of expressive script lettering (i.e. what came before blanding), chunky logos can be very weird without sacrificing much legibility,” Goodspeed adds. “You get something that feels distinctive and ownable, but can still be read instantly and easily.”



Bubs



Danchos



Piiper



Maybe



Sidepiece



Plato



Bubs



Shroom Works



Bubs



Shroom Works



Shroom Works



Sidepiece

Live, Laugh, Luscious Logotype

BY CHARLOTTE BEACH · CONTINUED

These bulbous letterforms also have a retro swagger, whether harkening to a curvaceous 70s script, thick brutalist block letters, or the kitschy bubble letters from the early aughts we all wiled away school hours scribbling in our composition notebooks. The girthy weight of this sort of type can also capture the texture of the food items it's marketing, like the gelatinous feel of the gummies the Shroom Works and Bubs logotypes invoke, or the ooey-gooeyness of the Sidepiece dipping sauces that's directly applied to the brand's woodmark treatment.

"I love typography that makes food feel like something you want to eat," says Marisa Sanchez-Dunning, founder and creative director of If Only Creative. "These big, rounded letterforms feel soft, generous, almost squeezable. There's an immediate connection to texture and indulgence, which makes sense for a category built around flavor and enjoyment.

For a while, emerging food brands followed a very recognizable formula: clean typography, restrained colors, lots of white space. Now, we're getting more personality.

Goodspeed agrees this trend is nothing new, noting it first burst into the CPG space a few years ago "as a reaction to the buttoned-up branding (i.e. modernism, peak teak, branding, etc.) that dominated the previous decade." She says, "Years of geometric sans serifs and fairly austere DTC branding meant that these more exaggerated and loose forms felt friendly, expressive, unserious—and most importantly—new!"

But a handful of years of something new inevitably makes it old, right? "I think it's interesting that something that began as a reaction to a dominant style is now simply a fairly established CPG vocabulary in its own right," she says. "The 'opposite of blanding' can eventually become its own kind of blanding—I do think the bulbous lettering has started to feel a bit expected. I have clients asking me to make their logo 'look like Graza' (goopy) even though the whole reason Graza's logo was so genius was that it looked like olive oil."

A micro-trend we've noticed within this wider trend is the uptick in logotypes with rounded letters and circular counters. This type fad defies category, as thick, chunky letters with tiny circular counters seem to be everywhere across the CPG space these days. From energy drinks like Maybe, pet treat brands like Plato, the new baking brand Piiper, and even legacy snack brands like Danchos, this light-hearted, bold wordmark aesthetic is omnipresent.

> **"Increasingly, the packaging is the brand."**
>
> ELIZABETH GOODSPEED



Graza



Danchos

Piiper



Who put 12-year-olds in charge of CPG?

BY RUDY SANCHEZ

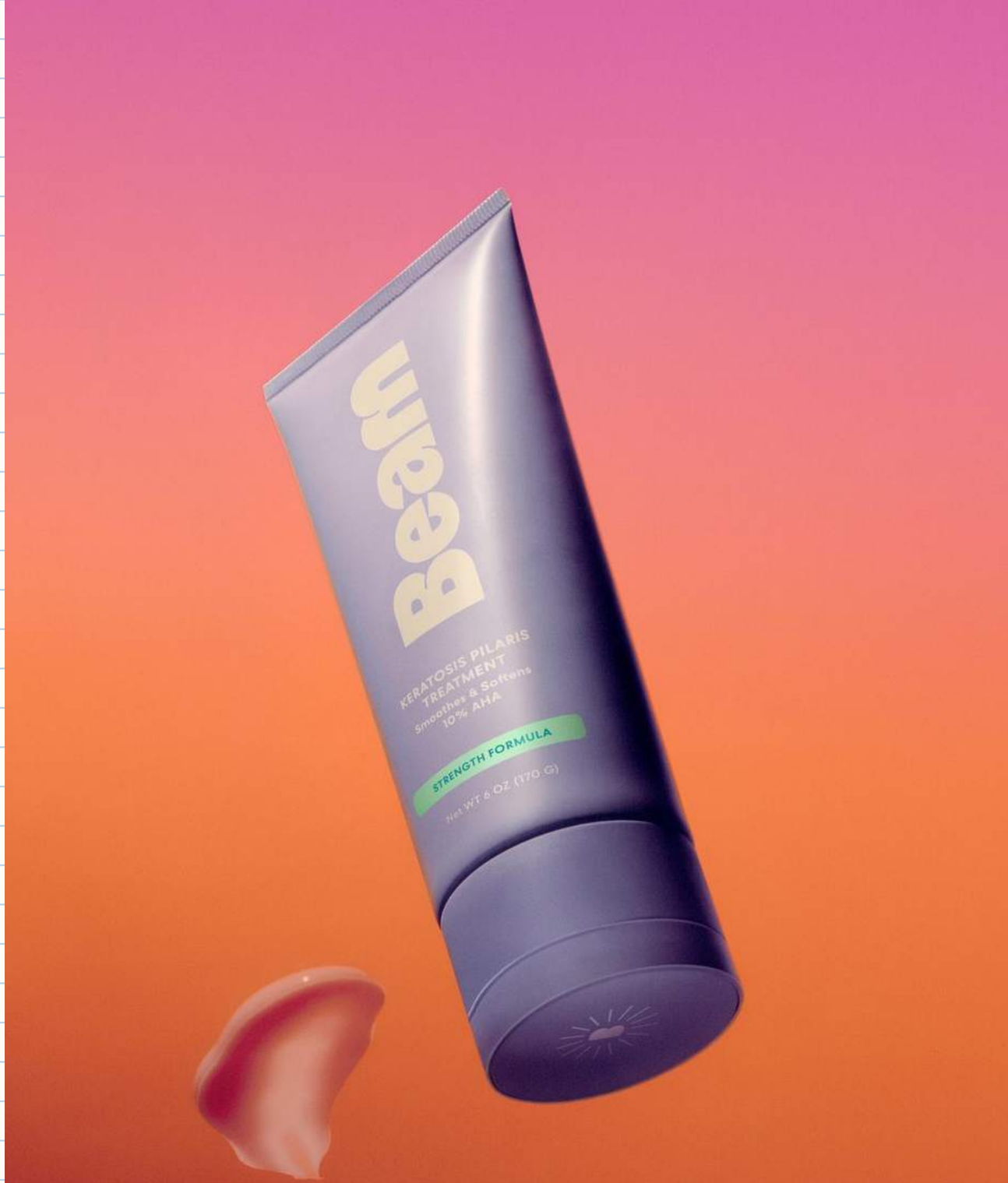
With the popularity of Liquid Death, Dude Wipes, Beam, and Good Nut, branding seems to be running toward the sensibilities of 12-year-old boys. The puerile voice and visual identity of brands like these shed any notion of corporate stuffiness, keeping things fun, often with potty humor and plenty of innuendo.

Given the general malaise surrounding us these days, it's easy to see why the ol' dick-and-fart joke mentality in branding is gaining traction.

You won't find anything subtle about brands like Beam or Good Nut. The letterforms in Beam have round mounds with inkwells that turn into butt cheeks. Good Nut isn't shying away from the double entendre, either. In a video, founder Tom Brady is on the phone talking about the coconut water brand, but doesn't want to say "Good Nut" to the woman on the other end of the call. The logo is a coconut with a straw in it, but with a suggestive drop coming off the end. In both cases, the brands are leaning into the humor rather than shying away from it.

"Sophomoric humor doesn't necessarily have to mean unsophisticated."

Cally Burgett, Wonderkind



Beam by Saint Urbain

Who Put 12-Year-Olds in Charge of CPG?

BY RUDY SANCHEZ · CONTINUED

"I actually think it's a part of a much larger shift of brands falling away from traditional, beautiful, perfect, polished branding," says Cally Burgett, co-founder and creative director at Wonderkind. "We're just inundated with these brands that are throwing out wellness jargon and are so polished and clean, and people are hungry for something a bit more relatable. I think humor is a way to break down that wall sometimes."

"Sophomoric humor doesn't necessarily have to mean unsophisticated," she adds. "With Beam, they have a very cheeky subject matter, but the design is very clean and cool. So I think there's a way to do both."

Although it feels like teen-boy humor, when executed well, it can appeal to adults of all genders. "Women can definitely be crude and absurd and juvenile," Burgett explains. "We can be all those things, but it just looks a little bit different than men's humor, and it can be really funny, if not maybe more funny, because it's so hidden," Cally says. "It's the kind of humor that happens privately among women about things that, historically, have been poo-pooed as topics to talk about, like oversharing or motherhood, or saying negative things about your family or your children." Burgett points out that brands like Billie and Poo-Pourri, which target primarily women, also tap into the same kind of sophomoric humor. So the same branding isn't limited to men by any means, though when targeting women, some unique avenues can be explored.

Even non-profit organizations are using this kind of humor to get their message across. Plastic Change recently ran a campaign featuring close-up shots of hairy testicles to raise awareness of the connection between microplastics and infertility.

Of course, not every brand can pull off humor, but especially this kind of juvenalia. But if a brand is authentic and funny, the public seems more receptive now than ever. So let your inner Beavis-and-Butthead flag fly.

"Even non-profit organizations are using this kind of humor to get their message across."

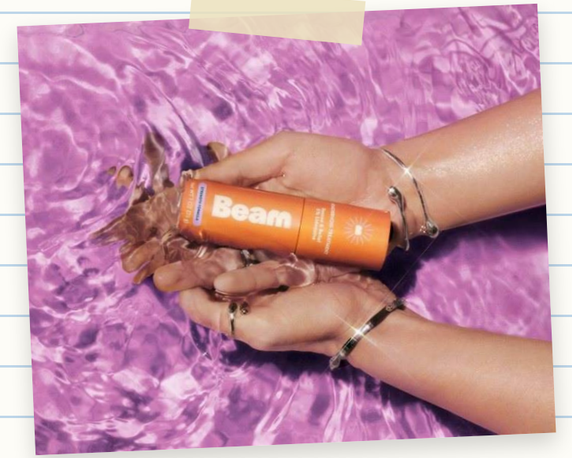
"So let your inner Beavis-and-Butthead flag fly."

“I think humor is a way to break down that wall sometimes.”

Cally Burgett, Wonderkind

“Women can definitely be crude and absurd and juvenile.”

Cally Burgett, Wonderkind



Beam by Saint Urbain



Poo-Pourri



Dude Wipes



Good Nut



Liquid Death x Goodwipes



Poo-Pourri



Good Nut



Dude Wipes



Beam by Saint Urbain

03

Scalloped Edges

BY CHLOE CORDOVER

Last year, we saw the Soft Edges trend loosening packaging by rounding corners to feel a little more approachable. But in 2027, those curves are going to get a bit more decorative with the Scalloped Edges trend, taking that softness and giving it a sense of rhythm with repeating waves and borders that can bring a sense of play into an otherwise simple design.

There's something beautifully ordinary about a scallop; it reminds me of old-school bakery boxes, embroidered linens, and vintage stationery. On packaging in particular, those associations can make an otherwise mundane object feel more special and precious.

M/M Paris's work for Funner is a great example of this in packaging. The haircare identity combines primary colors, loose linework, and rounded typography with scalloped details across the range. The decorative edge helps turn a functional bathroom product into something with a bit more personality and flair.

What interests me here is how much expression can happen at the perimeter. A label can keep its information clear and its typography relatively restrained, while the border does the flirting.

When worked into a physical format like this, the scallop motif provides a unique silhouette that's recognizable and ownable for a brand. Applied graphically, a scalloped edge can be used as a handy framing device. Saxon Campbell's work for House Guests, for example, wraps the fruit juice bottle with scalloped paper labels that are delicate and considered, yet still approachable with a touch of crafty charm.

Of course, a scalloped edge slapped onto the wrong sort of product or brand can quickly skew childish, but when the shape connects thoughtfully to the product or brand tone, it indicates that someone cared deeply about the design, right down to the edges.





Funner by M/M Paris



House Guests by Saxon Campbell

Funner by M/M Paris

“When the shape connects thoughtfully to the product or brand tone, it indicates that someone cared deeply about the design, right down to the edges.”

Chloe Cordover

House Guests by Saxon Campbell



Funner by M/M Paris



Funner by M/M Paris



House Guests by Saxon Campbell



House Guests by Saxon Campbell



Funner by M/M Paris



House Guests by Saxon Campbell



Funner by M/M Paris



Funner by M/M Paris



Funner by M/M Paris



Funner by M/M Paris

Nonchalant Sustainability

BY BILL MCCOOL

The idea of “quiet sustainability” is, admittedly, a little gross, and sounds like the kind of trend-friendly copy that gets gobbled up by folks with a CPG-themed Substack (hi!), but these brands aren’t working overtime to sell you on a behavior. They’re not educating you on the benefits of refill or anything like that, they just simply are.

Body wash, for instance, has always rankled me, because, honestly, what did bar soap ever do to deserve this blatant disrespect? Plastic bottles of the stuff continue to outsell the humble soapy puck, which is absurd given that a bar of soap lasts longer than your run-of-the-mill body wash. Not only is that bar of Irish Spring or Dove cheaper, but body wash is 80-90% water, so you’re really just shipping around something heavy and keeping CO2 emissions high.

That’s why a bunch of us were so impressed by the bodycare brand Ghilli when it first came across our collective DIELINE desk. Here you had a brand that was perfectly executed, with body and shampoo bars that came in a sturdy box that slides out. No disrespect to Ivory or any of the other giants in the soap game, but Ghilli was elevated and even a little upscale. Not to mention there’s a small call-out that they’re plastic-free, but it’s done in a way that doesn’t overwhelm the brand world. It’s fun and flashy…but it’s also soap.

RTD brand Kocktail, meanwhile, comes packaged in a reusable cocktail glass without the aggressive sustainability messaging either. It almost feels like a play from French-style yogurt brand Oui’s playbook: they’re giving you a tasty treat (er, drink) with a second use that can live far beyond its initial purpose.

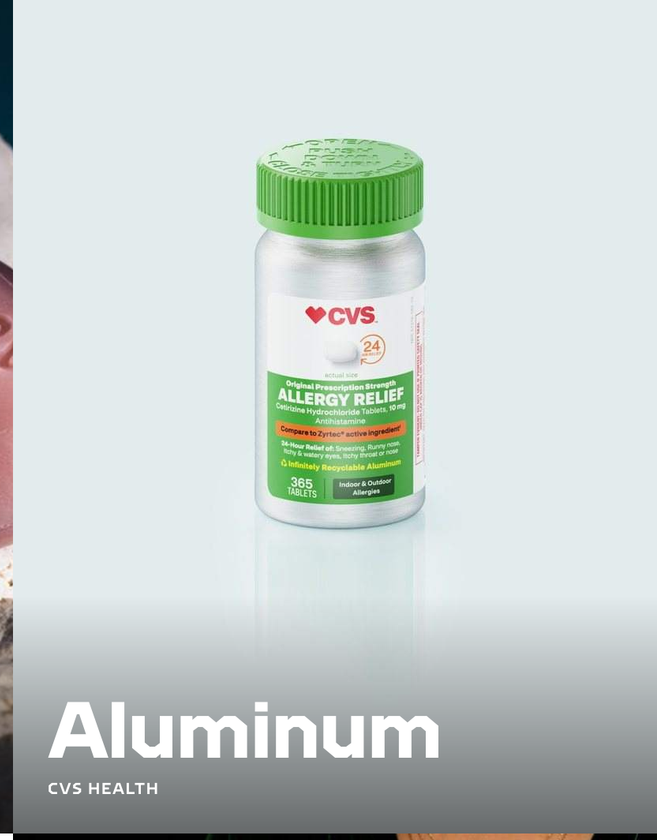
Likely, this has to do with the substrates used. Capture rates for aluminum and paperboard are mostly strong, and I think that’s because there’s no fingies-crossed invocation of wish-cycling. Consumers mostly recognize that these materials can be used again and again. This ain’t throwing a flexible plastic bag into the recycling bin with your fingers crossed (please don’t do that). Sure, CVS is telling you that this is an infinitely recyclable aluminum bottle on the label, but it’s not the story. It’s just a regular ol’ bottle of private-label Tylenol, and we can all just move on.

Sustainability doesn’t have to be about grandstanding for a press release, or involve QR codes and shouting from the rooftops. Sometimes it’s just going with the materials we already know work. And if it’s a protein bar packaged in a sardine can, well, so be it.



Paperboard

GHILLI



Aluminum

CVS HEALTH



Steel

JACKED GRANNY



Glass

KOCKTAIL

Whimsy

BY CHLOE CORDOVER

“Whimsy introduces surprise. It has an element of irrationality, humor, or unexpectedness that you don’t necessarily see coming. And that feels very human.”

Chaittali V Patel, Affogato Design

Whimsy has been everywhere this year, from fashion to TikTok DIY trends, and packaging is certainly getting in on the fun, allowing for a bit more chaos and quirk. Think an oddly proportioned character, or a serious typeface delivering an unserious message. The thrill is in that small moment of surprise when a product interrupts your daily routine.

One strange detail can be enough to make an entire identity feel like there’s a real person behind it, someone with a sense of humor and a slightly unusual collection of references. “Whimsy introduces surprise. It has an element of irrationality, humor, or unexpectedness that you don’t necessarily see coming. And that feels very human,” says Chaittali V Patel, Founder and Creative Director of Affogato Design.

Her studio’s conceptual design for Cake Social puts that idea into practice, with each collectible tin designed to look like a decorated celebration cake seen from above. Piped frosting swirls, dot borders, and ornamental flourishes are flattened into a graphic system that’s maximalist but entirely in control.

Designstudio Mathilda Mutant’s Icon Papers Snackbox 2.0, created for the CXI Brand Identity Konferenz, plays a similar game with conference swag. An oversized SNACK wordmark in rounded bubble lettering bleeds off the edges of the pack, nodding to 70s food packaging and diner signage.

A dose of whimsy can also rescue a category that’s stuck. Bandages, for instance, have long meant cartoon prints for kids, and clinical beige for everyone else.

A little chaotic on purpose



Cake Social by Affogato Design



Snackbox 2.0 by Mathilda Mutant





Benjie bandages



BRIEFLY CONFUSED, IN A GOOD WAY

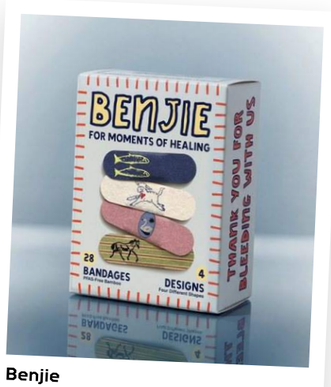
But Benjie offers bandages for adults that have personality and idiosyncratic charm; a dash of unexpected whimsy.

Patel's point explains why this feels relevant now. When polished imagery is increasingly easy to generate, an offbeat decision becomes the moment worth paying attention to. But whimsy can't exist just for the sake of standing out. "The danger is when designers try to manufacture whimsy by simply adding a few 'quirky' elements. Then it becomes a style rather than a feeling," Patel explains.

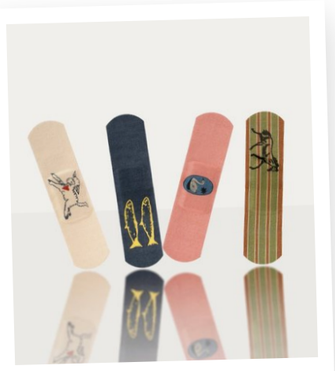
The strongest examples of whimsical design have a thoughtful internal logic behind them, even when that logic is delightfully strange. For 2027, I see whimsy depending less on any one recognizable look and more on how packaging makes us feel curious, amused, and maybe even briefly confused—but always in a good way.



Benjie



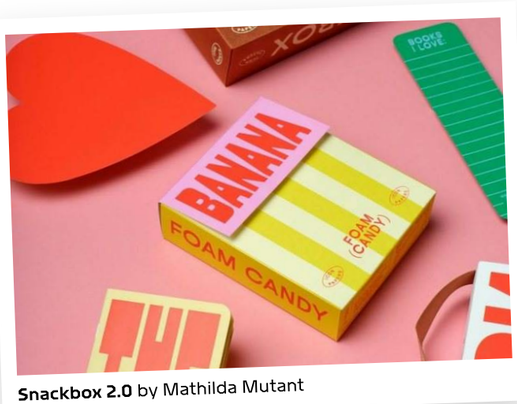
Benjie



Benjie



Benjie



Snackbox 2.0 by Mathilda Mutant



Snackbox 2.0 by Mathilda Mutant



Cake Social by Affogato Design



Cake Social by Affogato Design



Cake Social by Affogato Design



Benjie



Cake Social by Affogato Design



Cake Social by Affogato Design



Snackbox 2.0 by Mathilda Mutant

Doff Your Cap







BY CHARLOTTE BEACH

To make a splash in CPG categories that are ballooning by the day, brands are keen to find new ways and unexpected moments to make bold choices in their packaging forms. A unique silhouette or striking materiality offers a rich opportunity for ownability, and the bottle cap has emerged as a site ripe for this kind of signature brand statement. “I love seeing brands consider the whole object. A distinctive cap can make a bottle recognizable before you’ve read the label, and there’s something satisfying about packaging you want to leave out on your counter,” says Sanchez-Dunning. She adds that her experience as a partner at Guacamole Airplane, a design studio focused on sustainable packaging and materials, has also shaped how she looks at caps. “I’m thinking about how it’s manufactured, how it feels to open, and more specifically, what happens when the product is finished. Does the shape improve the grip or the pour? Can the components be separated? If we’re making something people want to keep, can it be refilled?

“A unique silhouette or striking materiality offers a rich opportunity for ownability.”

Charlotte Beach



Binaurale Perfume



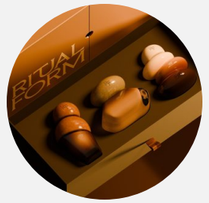
Giona
Gin-based liqueur



Mayah
Body care



Ya Albi
Olive oil



Ritual Form
Skin care



Ilém
Olive oil

Doff Your Cap

BY CHARLOTTE BEACH · CONTINUED

There's so much creative opportunity here."

Goodspeed is a bottle cap enthusiast herself. "I like caps because they take the brand identity away from surface into form," she says. "When so much stuff is drop-shipped or made from pre-existing components and just skinned by a brand, having something be this custom feels like a flex of quality and investment. It's a way to show that you have the budget, and a belief in your own longevity."

Perfume brands aren't new to experimenting with avant-garde caps on their bottles, as the luxuriousness of that industry lends itself to bottles that fall into the realm of fine and ornate objects. "Perfume makes sense as an early spot for this kind of formal packaging experimentation because fragrance acts more like an object or sculpture than a classic package," explains Goodspeed. "Perfume is a tchotchke you keep on your bedside table! The package is part of the fun of owning it."

And 2027 certainly won't be any different, with perfume companies like Binaurale and Arielle Shoshana proudly representing the power of the funky perfume cap. Meanwhile, in the neighboring skin and body care category, brands like Ritual Form, Mayah, and 39BC are making similar moves with curvaceous and architectural tops that similarly radiate sensuality and preciousness.

What's more noteworthy, though, is that food and beverage categories are also getting in on the cap action. Goodspeed similarly sees the trend here as being less about the shapely bottle cap in general, and more about the new types of products we're seeing feature them. "I see this trend not as a brand-new idea (especially since this is also something you see on a lot of historic perfume bottles) but as an idea that is expanding into more non-perfume categories," she says. "It feels like another example of ordinary consumer products adopting the visual and material codes of fragrance, beauty, and luxury (I have always felt that almost every trend is seen in fashion first)."

The gin-based liqueur Giona recently stepped into the limelight with a striking squat bottle shape topped off with a red orb cap, making the packaging experience special, and the product something you want on your bar cart even more than you might want it in your cocktail. Caps are making a splash in other unexpected categories as well, like the blossoming world of olive oil. Artisanal olive oil brands Ya Albi and Ilém represent how the kitchen staple is making a play at more luxury bottles, with caps a central aspect of that endeavor. And even more historically humble products are looking to their caps to stand out, as seen via the ketchup concept Roja.

While Sanchez-Dunning enjoys the wider trend toward more keepsake packaging with the sort of shelf, desk, bar cart, and coffee table appeal that makes you want to hold onto these bottles as decor, factors beyond looks and aesthetics also must be considered. "I'd love to see the same ambition applied to how packaging works and how long it can be useful," she says. "The experience of using it should live up to the way it looks."

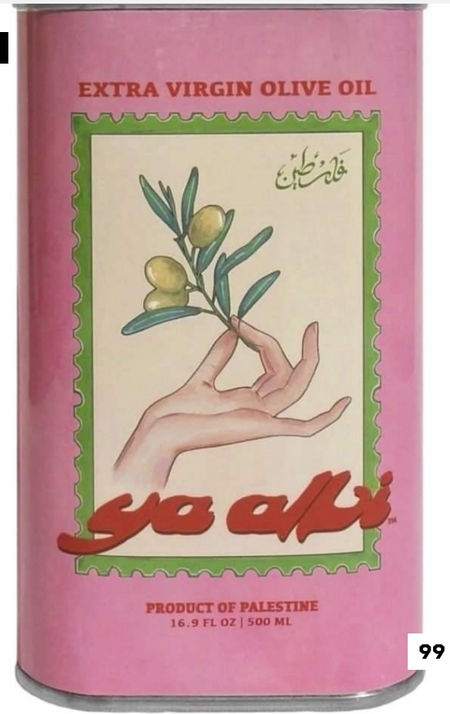
> **"Perfume is a tchotchke you keep on your bedside table!"**
>
> ELIZABETH GOODSPEED



Giona



Roja



Ya Albi

“Perfume brands aren’t new to experimenting with avant-garde caps on their bottles.”

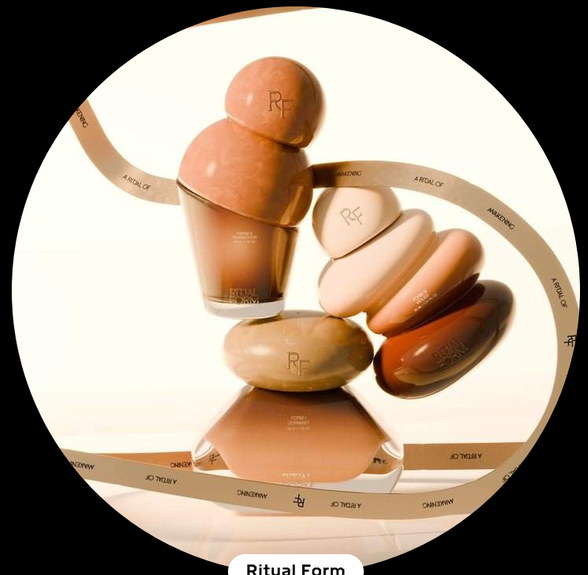
Charlotte Beach



39BC



Binaurale



Ritual Form



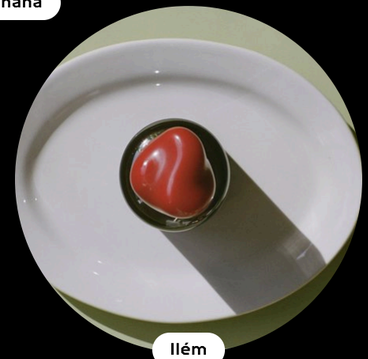
Ya Albi



Arielle Shoshana



Giona



Ilém



Arielle Shoshana



Ritual Form



Giona



Roja



Roja

~~Heritage~~ Schmeritage

BY RUDY SANCHEZ



Pirate's Booty, before and after



Flaum by M/OTG, before and after

The general rule when updating a brand with years of strong heritage is to take a light touch.

Makes sense, right? A brand has built up significant equity and recognition, so the risk of getting it wrong is too much to gamble on. The downside is that it may not appeal to younger generations and could eventually become irrelevant, cede ground to competitors, and, worse, go out of business entirely. But we're starting to see a few brands take big swings, ditching conventionality and saying, heritage-schmeritage, and nearly throwing out long-standing assets.

The reception isn't always positive (see: the debacle that was the 2025 Cracker Barrel redesign).

"People enjoy these small moments of nostalgia; it takes them back to certain places, and I feel like it's a really delicate exercise."

Max Hofert, Powerbomb



"The logo was redone, but it's in the same lettering style as the original; it's just been cleaned up and modernized."

Max Hofert, Powerbomb, on Bob's Red Mill by Turner Duckworth

Heritage Schmeritage

BY RUDY SANCHEZ · CONTINUED

But sometimes the update elevates the brand, solving presentation problems like muddied packaging systems and modernizing the identity to stay relevant.

"If we look at the Bob's Red Mill example, it was done with a lot of craft. Looking at the system, there's a lot of strategy that went into this," says Max Hofert, founder of Powerbomb. "It seems much easier to see on shelf. The logo was redone, but it's in the same lettering style as the original; it's just been cleaned up and modernized. They're leaning further into that red as the wayfinding mechanism on shelf, then using it to delineate different product lines."

That said, it's understandable why some might get upset when a brand undertakes such a stunning facelift. "The world is changing so rapidly, and everything is on a screen now, so they cling to things that are just nostalgic; when you come in and change something physical and associated with someone's past, they feel like it's yet another thing being erased," Hofert says. "People enjoy these small moments of nostalgia; it takes them back to certain places, and I feel like it's a really delicate exercise."

There are no hard-and-fast rules for heritage in brand updates. What's most important is the reasoning behind the update, as well as the goals. Hofert cites Pirate's Booty and the infamous Cracker Barrel refreshes as examples. Pirate's Booty, in particular, seemed to be trying to cater to a younger audience (and not just their parents). "I think that's when people get upset; the familiarity is erased and replaced with something very screen-centric and digital-centric," Hofert says.

Depending on what your threshold for design-leader hot takes is, LinkedIn can be a fun place to park when a major refresh is announced.

Many commented that the Pirate's Booty refresh was the byproduct of AI (it wasn't). However, some still felt the new illustration style was an outright rejection of the brand's signature lo-fi, antiquated look, highlighting how hard it is to thread an about-face update. Still, that drastic change might have had a strong business reason propelling it forward. Perhaps the new visual identity resonates more with younger consumers who will soon become the brand's biggest customers. But, as in Cracker Barrel's case, maybe it was just too much too soon, like Jaguar.

Often, Hofert believes, a brand tries to solve a business problem with design when it should focus on strategy first, then work backward to the refresh itself (or, in the case of Bob's Red Mill's, opt for a happy medium).

Regardless, while it defies all conventional wisdom when it comes to updating a beloved CPG mainstay or company, some brands are swinging for the fences. At the very least, it can challenge our notions of what's possible and how far you can push things.

"There are no hard-and-fast rules for heritage in brand updates."

"Some brands are swinging for the fences."

“I think that’s when people get upset; the familiarity is erased and replaced with something very screen-centric and digital-centric.”

Max Hofert, Powerbomb



Flaum by M/OTG



Bob’s Red Mill by Turner Duckworth



Flaum by M/OTG



Cracker Barrel



Jaguar, before



Jaguar, after



Pirate’s Booty



Bob’s Red Mill by Turner Duckworth



DIVE BAR MYSTICISM

BY CHLOE CORDOVER

"Imperfect type and illustration, balanced so it feels equal parts esoteric and cozy."

Dan Cassaro, Young Jerks

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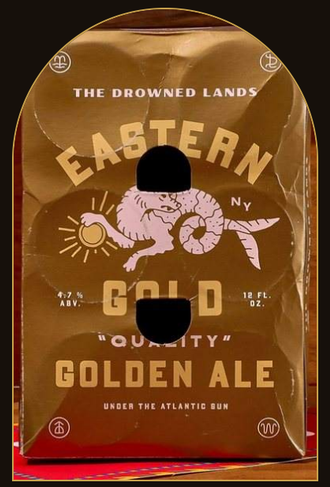


THE PACK

II



THE CAN

III



THE ALTAR



Eastern Gold
Young Jerks for The Drowned Lands, Warwick, New York

Dive Bar Mysticism looks like the label on a bottle you found behind the counter of your favorite local watering hole whose owner brews their own beer and might also give you a tattoo. This trend, in packaging specifically, has imperfect lettering, strange little creatures, and intentionally rough illustrations. It's moody, a little scrappy, but oddly welcoming.

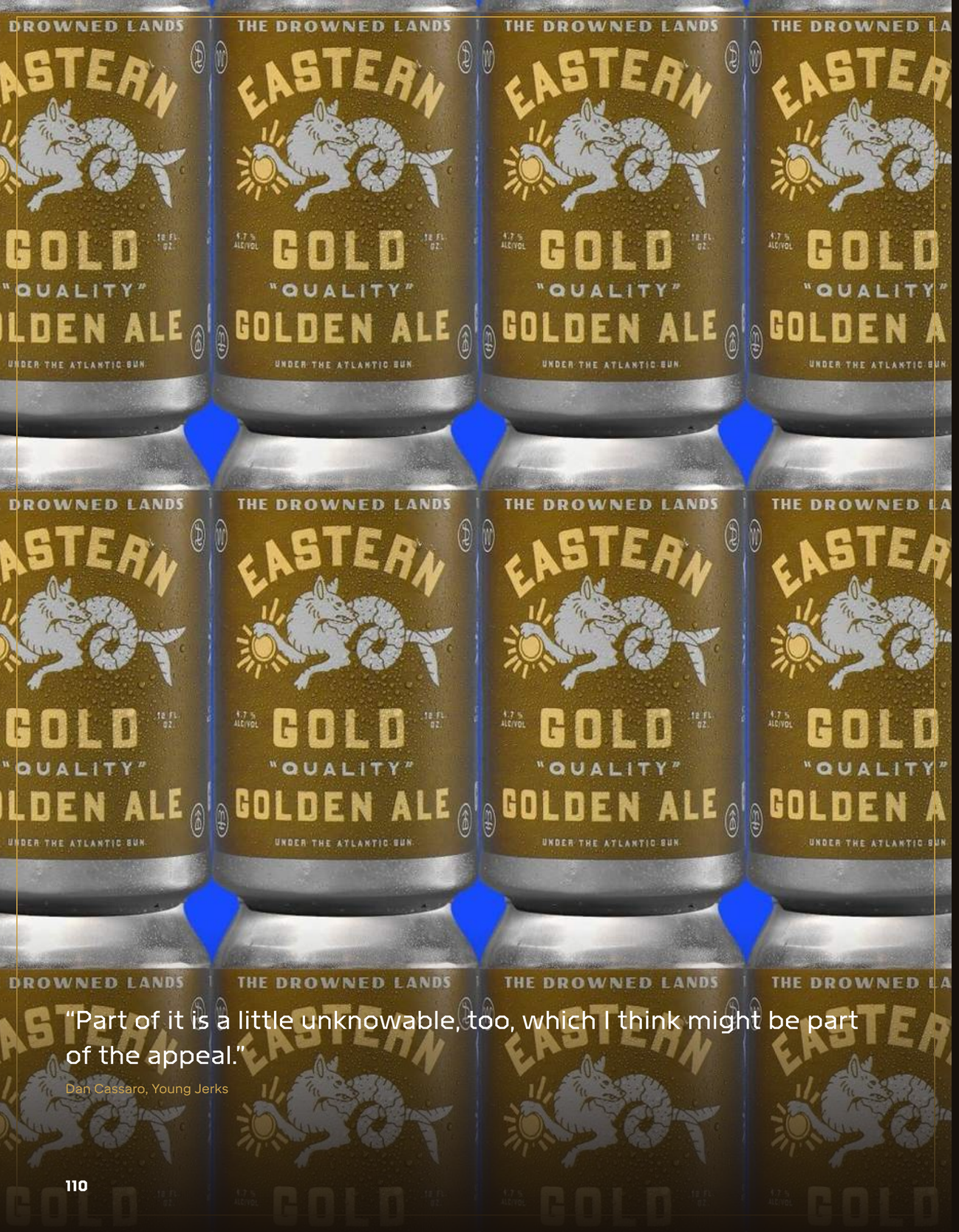
"It's kind of an audit on the underbelly of commercial art," says Dan Cassaro, partner at independent studio Young Jerks. "It takes beautiful, less-celebrated ephemera from our collective past, and brings it to the forefront instead of letting it collect dust. Imperfect type and illustration, balanced so it feels equal parts esoteric and cozy. It's that in-between area that is so intriguing. It makes something feel familiar and foreign at the same time. Part of it is a little unknowable, too, which I think might be part of the appeal."

Unplaceable feels like the right word.

The references might suggest an old matchbook, a hand-painted tavern sign, or some local legend you've never heard of, and all together they create the feeling that a product belongs to a world with its own rituals and questionable characters.

Young Jerks' work for Eastern Gold is my favorite example of this trend right now. As Cassaro explains, the beer's Mer-Wolf mascot connects American hybrid-creature folklore with the history of the Drowned Lands in Warwick, New York. The strange animal has an actual mythology tied to it, which grounds its overarching weirdness.

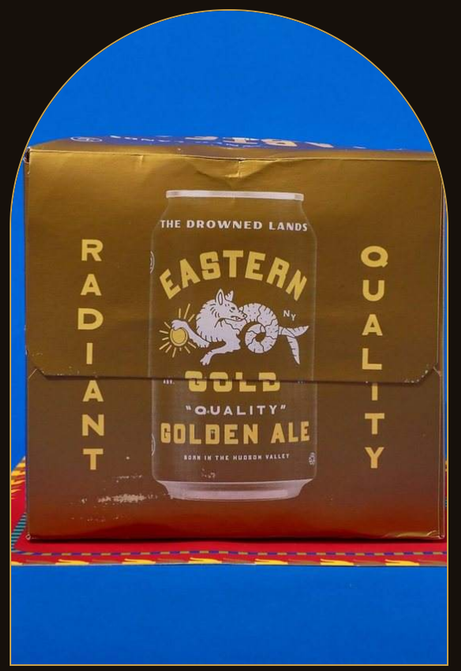
The charm of this trend comes from leaving room for interpretation. Packaging typically works very hard to explain exactly what a product is and how you should feel about it. But Dive Bar Mysticism lets some things remain unresolved, and while you can understand what you're buying, there are still some things you're left wondering about.



"Part of it is a little unknowable, too, which I think might be part of the appeal."

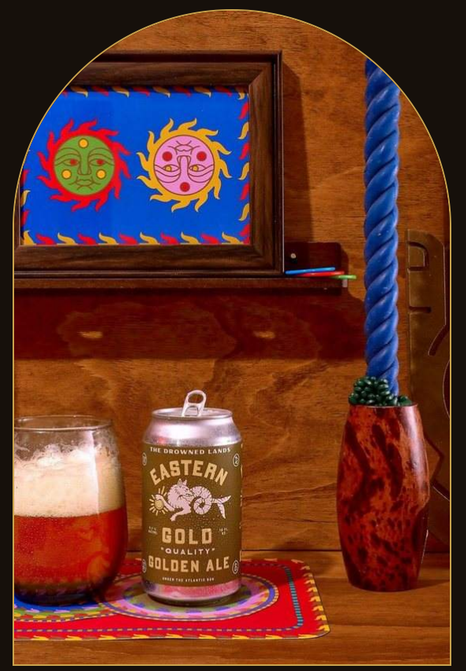
Dan Cassaro, Young Jerks

IV



THE RADIANT

V



THE POUR

The challenge here will be preserving that intrigue as the aesthetic spreads. Too much polish and that sense of atmosphere disappears, but not enough intention and you're left with sloppy, bad design. The strongest examples make the peculiar feel specific, as though you've stumbled upon somebody else's favorite local dive bar.

RanSOm NOTE tYPOGRaPhY

BY RUDY SANCHEZ

One way to make wordmarks more interesting and expressive is to spice up the letterforms. Sure, a big, heavy wordmark with straight letters projects strength and stability, and it also stands out across the grocery aisle or in a beverage cooler.

But…what's the fun in that?

Which is exactly why we think typography and wordmarks might take on the character of a ransom note. Sure, it probably won't be as drastic as the Jamie Reid Sex Pistols logo, but it could be a letter or two in a different font, a mix of weights, heights, or colors, perhaps an italic here, a totally different font there.

It's not necessarily because brands want to hold you hostage, but because they're looking to grab your attention, especially as we've become inured to soft, minimal visual identity. What better way to get you to take notice than by holding your eyes for ransom? If it works for kidnappers, it just might do the trick for some brands, too.

Some designers will use a mix of letterforms to evoke a punk rock, DIY, lo-fi, human-made attitude; others bring a little edge to the brand identity. The more distinct the letterforms, the more attention they could potentially draw.

This approach also lets you be creative and express different ideas within the same logo. Each letterform can convey a different emotion or feeling, or new ones when combined. M—N Associates' logo design for Lôcô Art Market is an example of using different heights and widths for letterforms against a background that achieves this effect. The letters even point in different directions, and the result is energetic and dynamic. Pepper brand Milly, meanwhile, fully commits to the bit, with script, blocky, and skinny letterforms; ditto coffee brand Bold Bean and its Sweet Spot.

Meta's recent refresh of Instagram's wordmark also uses different fonts. The wordmark includes some cursive (who says script is dead), specifically the "s" and "r," but it's a subtle example of ransom noting.

dUSTOff ThOSe SCISSORS

In a recent blog post, Instagram's Jasmine Probst, director of product design for the social media site, argued that script fonts represent individuality.

So dust off those scissors, find letters in magazines you like, and start cutting and collaging. Show some originality that showcases the human touch with a side of punk rock attitude by defying "boring" typography and standing out. Just don't kidnap anyone.





Lôcô Art Market by M—N Associates







Milly



Milly



Bold Bean, Sweet Spot

NIHILISTIC INDULGENCE

BY BILL MCCOOL

DESIGNER'S WARNING:

Not everything needs to look good for you. Not everything needs to make you feel good about yourself.

Alex Center, Center

You can't necessarily blame anyone for indulging that little, pesky nihilist we all have deep down, or maybe even not so deep.

While GLP-1 use continues to transform consumer behaviors and brands keep pumping protein into things that clearly don't need it (hello, Buffalo Wild Wings Espresso "Protini"), I would like to point you in the complete opposite direction. The CPG world would have you believe we need every dang macro stuffed into every inch of our RFK-pilled food supply, and that we're all drinking NA beverages (new data says NO, incidentally). That said, a new kind of hedonistic, devil-may-care ethos has emerged. After all, smoking is back.

Look at it this way. You can't afford anything, but especially a home.

AI has very credibly threatened your livelihood and turned us all into data center NIMBYs. Techno-fascist oligarchs (sorry, billionaires) are a genuine threat to our very existence, with many of them controlling what news you consume, all while keeping you angry at everyone but, you know, them. Needless to say, it's not great out there! I don't want to say that over-the-top indulgence like Old El Paso-stuffed nachos or the pink drink industrial complex are meeting the YOLO moment, but also, yes? Indulgence and sin are the name of the game now because, of course, you want those crazy mozzarella sticks and the heart-attacks-worth of food porn cheese pull from Chillis. Brands are ostensibly giving you permission to not only treat yourself, but treat yourself like complete shit.



Nihilistic Indulgence

BY BILL MCCOOL · CONTINUED

“In a world where everything feels like it's falling apart, AI is either going to take our jobs or kill us (probably both) and the government is busy making memes, there's something appealing about the classic attitude of ‘let's fuck some shit up,’” says Alex Center, founder of design studio Center. “We've spent the last decade optimizing every aspect of our lives. Every meal needs protein. Every hobby needs to be productive. Every workout needs to be tracked (love you Strava). Every sleep needs a score. Maybe we are just fucking exhausted by it all.”

The best brands reflect culture, and revolt and dissent are in the air.

“It's not necessarily anti-wellness,” Center adds, “it's anti-being told how to live. Hopefully we can finally move past the era of bright, cheery, colorful, gloopy identity systems where every brand looks like it's trying to be your fun best friend. Less manufactured happiness, more edge, attitude, imperfection and, dare I say it, a little danger. Not everything needs to look good for you. Not everything needs to make you feel good about yourself.”

There’s clearly an underlying existential crisis at the heart of whatever’s left of the American Dream, and you can bet more consumers are just going to do whatever makes them feel good, regardless of the outcome of the Midterms. At some point, little-treat culture becomes a near-constant dopamine hit of delight all the damn time, and if there’s one thing we’re good at here in America, that’s excess. It’s only a matter of time until many of us start praying for the resurrection of KFC’s notorious Double-Down. The pendulum always swings back.

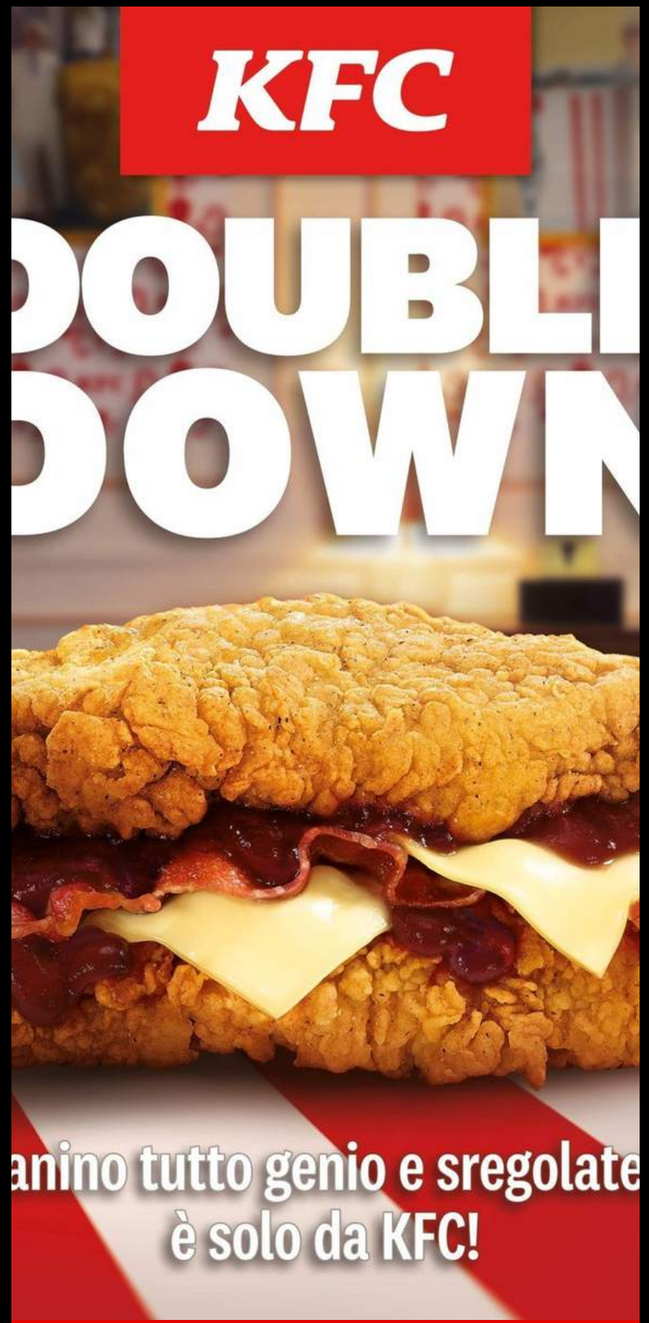
“The pendulum always swings back.”



Old El Paso

“It’s not necessarily anti-wellness, it’s anti-being told how to live.”

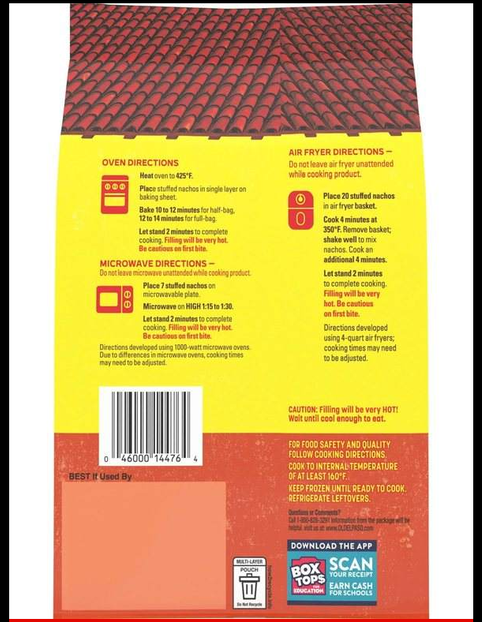
ALEX CENTER, CENTER



KFC Double Down

"We've spent the last decade optimizing every aspect of our lives. Every meal needs protein. Every hobby needs to be productive."

Alex Center, Center



Old El Paso



Smoking is back



Buffalo Wild Wings Protini



Smoking is back



Chili's



Smoking is back

Hand-Painted Signs

Don't Call it a Comeback!

BY CHARLOTTE BEACH

Call it the Mamdani Aesthetic Effect, call it the AI rebellion, or simply call it good old timeless design, but the style of traditional old-school sign painting is back, baby!

In all honesty, did it ever really go anywhere?) We're seeing the hand-painted look of classic brush lettering and rótulos popping up on packaging left and right, and I, for one, am thrilled every time.

Gheelish popcorn has deployed a packaging design that's unmistakably inspired by sign painting typography and layouts. Frozen fruit pop brand Hundy! has similarly incorporated the casual hand-brushed lettering of sign painting into its identity, along with a drop-shadow effect that's another signature component of the trade.

"For many communities, these visual languages never disappeared. They weren't waiting to become trendy again."

Marisa Sanchez-Dunning, If Only Creative



La Reina by If Only Creative



Hundy!

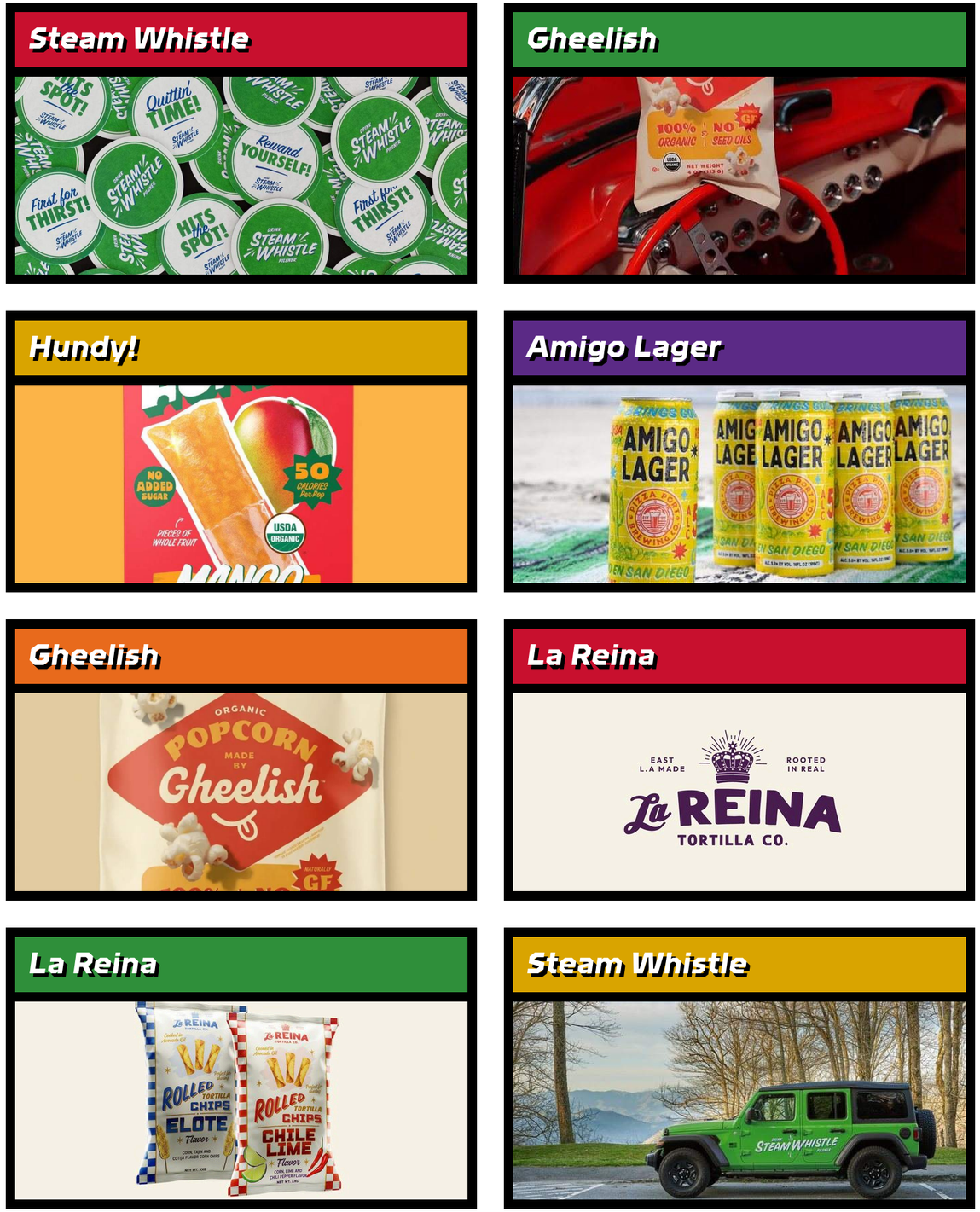
“In all honesty, did it ever really go anywhere?”

Charlotte Beach

Beer brands Steam Whistle, Honey Shot from Alvarium Beer Co., and the Amigo Lager from Pizza Port Brewing Co. in San Diego have also turned to sign painting type in their identities, which makes sense for a category that leans industrial and blue-collar in tone.

I recently covered the stellar branding work Sanchez-Dunning and her team at If Only Creative did for the family-owned LA tortilla brand La Reina, which directly applied the look of hand-painted signage that’s so authentic to East LA to its new tortilla rolls packaging.





Hand-Painted Signs

BY CHARLOTTE BEACH · CONTINUED

"As a Chicana from California, hand-painted signage and expressive lettering are part of the visual culture I grew up around. They make me think of neighborhood restaurants, markets, and family businesses. There's a person and a place behind that work," reflects Sanchez-Dunning. She prickles at the idea that this style is having a "resurgence," considering that, for so many people, it's been here, unflinchingly, for generations.

"For many communities, these visual languages never disappeared. They weren't waiting to become trendy again," she says. While she loves seeing increased appreciation for this sort of work and style, she cautions that the more it's used in a trendy manner, the more it will feel watered-down and disconnected from sign painting's roots. "My concern is how easily it can be stripped of context and used as shorthand for authenticity," she says. "The people, places, and craftsmanship behind the lettering deserve as much attention as the aesthetic."

In her writing for It's Nice That, Elizabeth Goodspeed has dissected similar ideas regarding analog design. "A lot of what we're calling an analog revival is kind of more semiotic than real: 'handcrafted' increasingly describes how something wants to be read, rather than how it was actually produced. I think sign-painter aesthetics fit perfectly into that conversation," she says.

"Hand-painted lettering carries a ton of associations: human labor, skill, locality, history, idiosyncrasy, etc. Those associations remain legible even when the lettering has been drawn digitally and reproduced hundreds of thousands of times on a package," she goes on. "A bit cliché and sort of a recurring phrase these days, but this is all especially relevant as AI and other digital tools make polished image-making increasingly fast and accessible."

Like Sanchez-Dunning, Goodspeed also highlights how, in CPG, the sign painting look is used as a shorthand for locality. "Historically, a hand-painted sign belonged to a particular shop—it's one of one. It also required working with a real local artisan. A contemporary brand borrows that visual vocabulary to suggest that same kind of specificity, even if the product is distributed nationally," she says.

But she doesn't think borrowing from sign painting or vernacular design is inherently a problem, as long as "a designer understands what produced those forms in the first place, and does something new with that knowledge, versus simply reproducing a handful of recognizable aesthetic tells. Ultimately, I'm much more excited about a resurgence of actual sign painting than a resurgence of sign-painterly branding or a bunch of people trying to do sign-painting aesthetics in Figma."

"The people, places, and craftsmanship behind the lettering deserve as much attention as the aesthetic."

MARISA SANCHEZ-DUNNING, IF ONLY CREATIVE



Honey Shot by Alvarium Beer Co.



Amigo Lager by Pizza Port Brewing Co.



Gheelish

Luxury

Nonna-Core

BY CHLOE CORDOVER

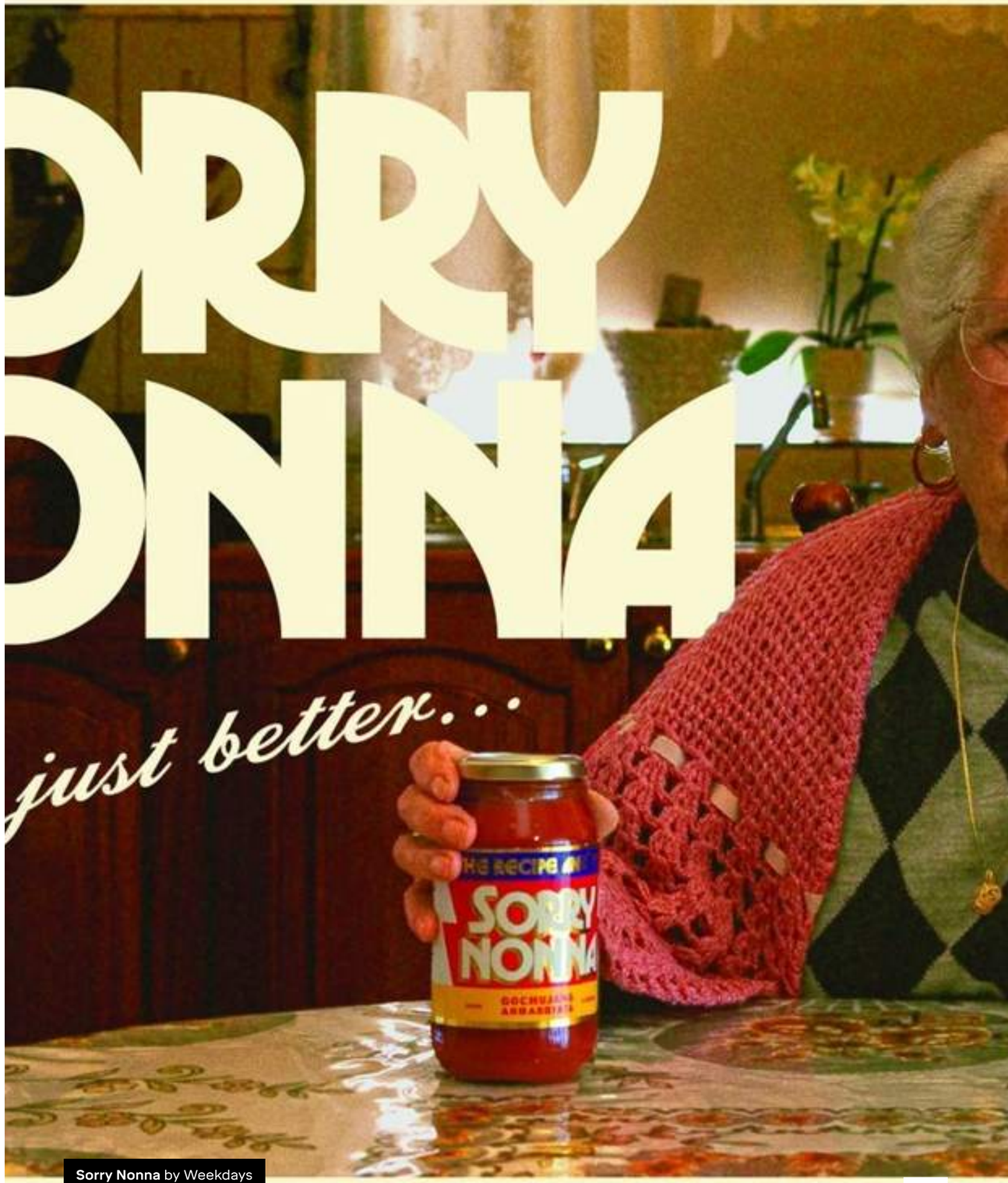
Luxury Nonna-Core takes the emotional appeal of getting fed a home-cooked meal by your grandma who thinks you look hungry, and packages it into a premium brand experience. Think pantry staples with the presence of a hostess gift; pure indulgence expressed through generosity.

The visual territory includes recipe-card typography, ornamental borders, and table-linen patterns. These are design cues that make you feel warm and fuzzy inside. Sentimental, homey, nostalgic—just like grandma used to make.

But there's room for attitude here, too. Weekdays' work for Sorry Nonna approaches the grandmother reference with a wink. The studio conjured a cheeky, self-aware brand world, centered around the joke that the sauce received a unanimous one-star rating from Nonnas. It's a useful example of how tradition can be remixed with a modern-day edge.

"The nonna in an Italian family can carry so much matriarchal power. She represents more than food: there's authority, care, and a whole family culture around her."

Todd Vanneste, Weekdays Design Studio



Sorry Nonna by Weekdays

Luxury Nonna-Core

BY CHLOE CORDOVER · CONTINUED

"Part of the appeal is that not everyone grew up in a family with such strong cultural traditions. The nonna in an Italian family can carry so much matriarchal power. She represents more than food: there's authority, care, and a whole family culture around her," shares Todd Vanneste, founder and design director at Weekdays Design Studio. "Packaging that draws on that can offer a connection to those traditions, even if they weren't part of your own upbringing. It suggests food made by someone who knows what they're doing and cares about feeding people well. That's where the trust and appetite can come from."

What makes this territory interesting to me is the kind of "luxury" it proposes. The aspiration is a well-stocked pantry, a lovingly set table, and enough food for whoever shows up. Premium packaging can support that feeling through considered materials, tactile details, and a vessel you want to keep around, like an heirloom.

The danger is flattening an entire cuisine into a checkered tablecloth that revolves around cultural stereotypes. Specificity gives the design trend depth: an actual recipe, a regional reference, a personal connection, or a clearly expressed point of view.

Vanneste also notes, "Fundamentally, it's the familiar and the expected that does the work. People recognize those cues and bring their own associations. The packaging doesn't have to explain everything from scratch. For an everyday product, that familiarity can suggest the care and tradition that makes it feel special. For a more aspirational product, it gives people something they already understand and feel comfortable with. It's drawing on a connection that's already there."

For 2027, I see Luxury Nonna-Core as a move toward indulgence with a hint of familial intimacy. It's special enough to bring as a dinner party offering, and familiar enough to open immediately.

> "Specificity gives the design trend depth."



Sorry Nonna by Weekdays



Sorry Nonna by Weekdays





> “It suggests food made by someone who knows what they’re doing and cares about feeding people well. That’s where the trust and appetite can come from.”
>
> Todd Vanneste

Sorry Nonna by Weekdays



Plezi *Conza* **Proda** POPELO

HUNDY! *Esspo* **Trevi** Ollin

Pecana Meltö ***S'noods***

Elos **Klēn** Oca Drizz

Bizarro Brand Names

BY CHARLOTTE BEACH

As we stumble into 2027, we just might have finally, officially run out of brand names—and it shows. At least judging by the trend of bizarre naming conventions running rampant around CPG right now. We know you're clocking it too: Plezi, Conza, Proda, Popelo, Hundy!, Esspo, Trevi, Ollin, Pecana, Meltö, S'noods, Elos, Klēn, Oca, Drizz... And the list goes on and on and on.

Noticing a pattern? The answer is no, no, you're not, because the only common denominator here is nonsense.

"Have we simply used up all of the brand names that use actual real words, so now we have to resort to a grab bag of letters?"

Charlotte Beach



Bizarro Brand Names

BY CHARLOTTE BEACH · CONTINUED

Even if their founders and brand strategists have some sort of elaborate backstory behind these types of brand names, they still read as meaningless gibberish, feeding into this ever-expanding CPG vernacular of random sounds and letter combinations we're expected to somehow make sense of.

Are we trying too hard here? Are we not trying hard enough? Have we simply used up all of the brand names that use actual real words, so now we have to resort to a grab bag of letters?

The argument for this type of naming strategy is ownability. If a brand makes up a word or sound out of thin air, it won't have any other associations or previous uses; it's entirely the brand's. But that only works if the brand name resonates with the masses and cuts through this avalanche of other brands trying to do the exact same thing. It also takes a significant amount of funding. Sanchez-Dunning explains how being able to go with a funky name is a privilege not all brands can afford.

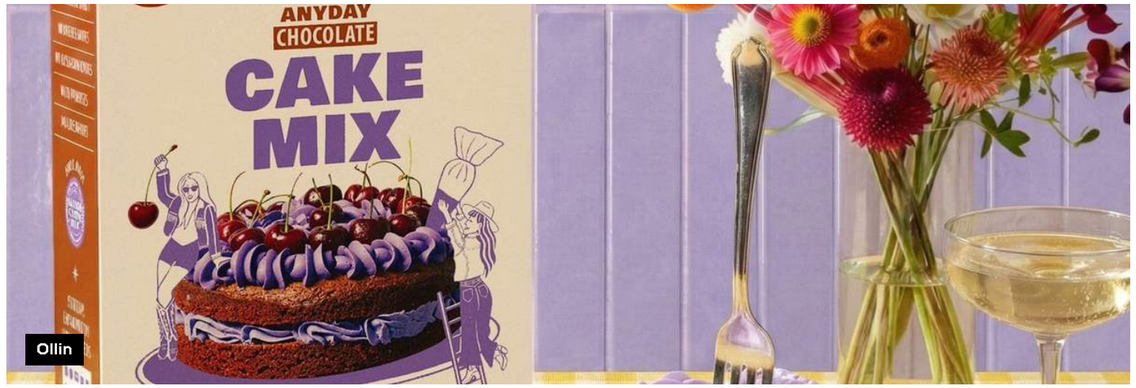
"I like a strange name. It can be fun and memorable without needing an elaborate origin story. But being quirky isn't a strategy on its own," she says. "There's also a difference between launching with substantial funding, retail relationships, and a marketing budget versus building a brand with your own savings. Those resources give you more room to be cryptic because you can afford to explain yourself, repeatedly."

For a founder without that support, the packaging has to do more of the selling. "If the name gives someone no clue what's inside, everything around it needs to make that clear.

It's easier to take a big creative risk when you can fund the follow-through. That doesn't mean smaller brands should play it safe, but boldness has to work hard for the business."

"But being quirky isn't a strategy on its own."

MARISA SANCHEZ-DUNNING, IF ONLY CREATIVE



Ollin



Oca



Meltö

A GLOSSARY OF 2027

Say it out loud.

And the list goes on and on and on.

“Are we trying too hard here? Are we not trying hard enough?”

Charlotte Beach



Plezi n. ?



Conza n. ?



Proda n. ?



Popelo n. ?



Trevi n. ?



Ollin n. ?



Pecana n. ?



Meltö n. ?



S'noods n. ?



Elos n. ?



Klēn n. ?



Oca n. ?



Drizz n. ?



Esspo n. ?



Klēn n. ?



Esspo n. ?



Ollin n. ?



Drizz n. ?



Proda n. ?

Trend Facts

Serving size 1 trend · Servings per year: plenty

Protein	**Still there**
Macros	**Still there**
Personality	**Up front**
Clinical aesthetic	**Optional**
Neon	**Yes**

Non-Clinical Function

BY CHLOE CORDOVER

For a long time, functional food packaging desperately tried to prove to consumers how healthy, organic, or nutrient-rich it was. Protein counts were front and center, typography leaned utilitarian, and enjoying the taste of your snack took a backseat to optimizing yourself. In 2027, while the macros will still be there, the packaging is veering in a more playful direction.

"Historically, functional food products had to look a certain way to get noticed by the right consumer. You either leaned into a clinical wellness aesthetic, or a more crunchy-granola look," says Megan Forbes, co-founder of Benita Studios and the packaging designer of the better-for-you gelatin brand Wobble. Now that shoppers know what they want, those cues have lost their monopoly.

"Looking clinical is no longer the only way to communicate credibility, and it also isn't the only way to catch someone's attention."

Megan Forbes, Benita Studios



Wobble by Benita Studios

“Gelatin dessert is inherently playful with its color, texture, and jiggly movement, so it didn’t make sense to dress it up in serious, clinical packaging to communicate its benefits.”

Megan Forbes, Benita Studios

“Looking clinical is no longer the only way to communicate credibility, and it also isn’t the only way to catch someone’s attention.”

Forbes’ work for Wobble shows how that freedom can take shape.

“The personality is what draws people in; the product has to deliver on the promise.”

Megan Forbes, Benita Studios

“CPG is entering a whole new era, which we call beautifying: brands transforming the once-boring food aisle into something people actually want to look at, explore, and bring home.”

Lily Wohlner, Benita Studios



Wobble by Benita Studios



Wobble by Benita Studios



Wobble by Benita Studios



Wobble by Benita Studios



Wobble by Benita Studios



David



Wobble by Benita Studios



Wobble by Benita Studios



Wobble by Benita Studios



Wobble by Benita Studios



Wobble by Benita Studios

Non-Clinical Function

BY CHLOE CORDOVER · CONTINUED

Bright, child-like colors and a juicy product shot sit right alongside prominent, grouped value props. As Forbes puts it, “Gelatin dessert is inherently playful with its color, texture, and jiggly movement, so it didn’t make sense to dress it up in serious, clinical packaging to communicate its benefits.”

David’s protein bars offer another reference point, representing the ongoing “beautiful” protein wars that are playing out. Metallic wrappers and a decadent serif wordmark completely subvert the traditional protein bar aesthetic of the past, instead using design codes associated with luxury accessories. Benita Studios co-founder Lily Wohlner sees a bigger shift underway: “CPG is entering a whole new era, which we call beautifying: brands transforming the once-boring food aisle into something people actually want to look at, explore, and bring home.”

This trend builds on last year’s Clinical With Soul, which softened the visual language of science. Here, function becomes part of a fuller identity, with the challenge being keeping the substance legible as the personality grows. “The goal isn’t to choose between design and function. It’s to make the functional benefits clear while giving people a reason to stop, look a little longer, and connect with the brand,” says Wohlner. As Forbes puts it, “The personality is what draws people in; the product has to deliver on the promise.”

“The goal isn’t to choose between design and function.”

LILY WOHLNER, BENITA STUDIOS



Wobble by Benita Studios



David

Squeeze Play

BY CHLOE CORDOVER

1841 American painter John Goffe Rand patents a collapsible metal paint tube.

1929 Swedish brand Kavli begins selling cheese in tubes.

1954 Kalles cod-roe spread becomes a Swedish staple.

2027 Honey, peanut butter and chili paste move from the medicine cabinet into the pantry.

The aluminum tube is moving from the medicine cabinet straight into the pantry. Honey Department has put thickened honey in aluminum, Smeared has done the same for peanut butter and strawberry spread, while Spicy Boys packs its chili paste into one too. Before you've read a word on the label, the format has already given the brand an unmistakable identity.

The tube itself isn't new. American painter John Goffe Rand patented a collapsible metal paint tube in 1841. And in Scandinavia, food tubes are completely ordinary.

"The tube takes it out of the cupboard, onto the table and into your bag."

Noah Phillips, Honey Department



Honey Department

The Swedish brand Kavli, best known for spreadable tube cheeses, mustards, sauces, and dressings, began selling cheese in tubes in 1929, and Sweden's Kalles cod-roe spread has been a staple since 1954.

What's changed is how we're cooking. In America, condiments have become the shortcut to flavor, whether that's a smear of chili paste or a squeeze of honey to finish a dish, and the tube is built for small doses. It dispenses only what you need, keeps the rest sealed, and travels well.

"The tube takes it out of the cupboard, onto the table and into your bag," says Noah Phillips of Honey Department.



Smeared



Smeared



Kalles



Spicy Boys, Smeared and more



Kavli



Honey Department

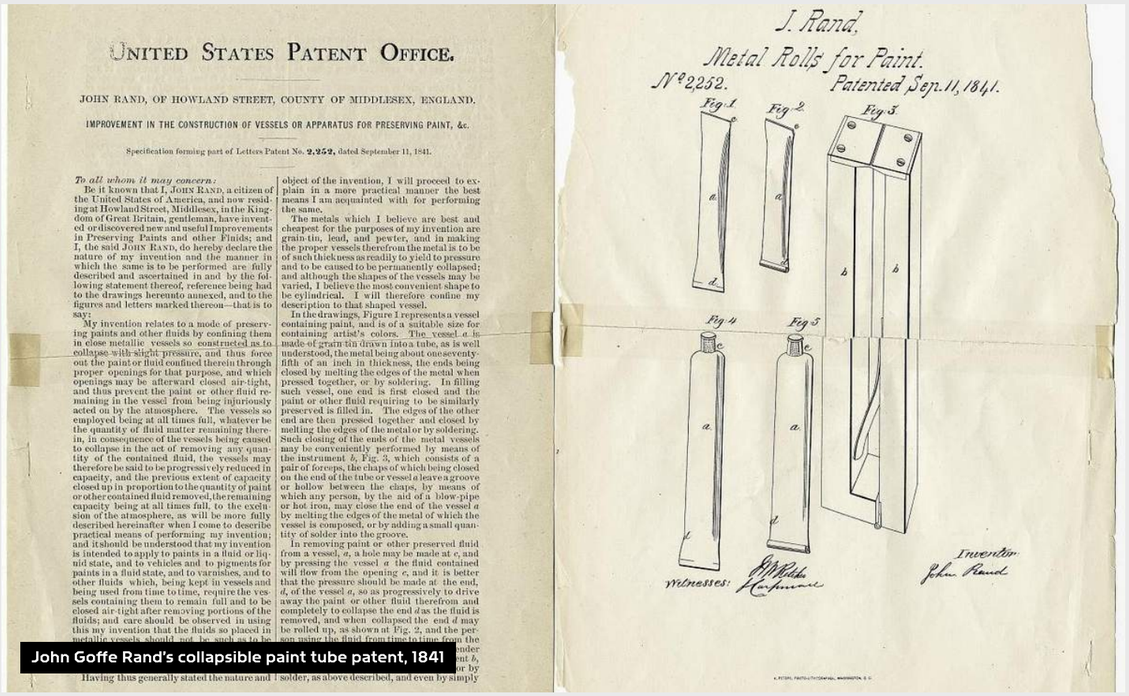
Squeeze Play

BY CHLOE CORDOVER · CONTINUED

In fact, Smeared sells a stand that holds its tubes upright, so you can leave it out on your countertop. Much like Graza's squeeze bottle that took the world by storm, the tube form makes a pantry staple feel like something worth showing off. Aluminum also has a better material story than plastic squeeze bottles, since it can be recycled again and again without losing quality (even if plastic caps and interior coatings complicate things).

Of course, the tube format comes with trade-offs. Phillips notes that aluminum costs more than plastic, it dents in production and shipping, and limits fill sizes, nozzles, and caps. The tube makes the most sense for something used often and in small amounts, not as a novelty. For 2027, I expect more brands to give it a squeeze. A tubed mayo from Graza, a sardine spread from Fishwife, or a ketchup tube from Heinz for the perfectly dressed hot dog would all be a CPG dream come true.

"Of course, the tube format comes with trade-offs."



UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.

JOHN RAND, OF HOWLAND STREET, COUNTY OF MIDDLESEX, ENGLAND.

IMPROVEMENT IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF VESSELS OR APPARATUS FOR PRESERVING PAINT, &c.

Specification forming part of Letters Patent No. 2,252, dated September 11, 1841.

To all whom it may concern:

Be it known that I, JOHN RAND, a citizen of the United States of America, and now residing at Howland Street, Middlesex, in the Kingdom of Great Britain, gentleman, have invented or discovered new and useful Improvements in Preserving Paints and other Fluids; and I, the said JOHN RAND, do hereby declare the nature of my invention and the manner in which the same is to be performed are fully described and ascertained in and by the following statement thereof, reference being had to the drawings hereunto annexed, and to the figures and letters marked thereon—that is to say:

My invention relates to a mode of preserving paints and other fluids by confining them in close metallic vessels so constructed as to collapse with slight pressure, and thus force out the paint or fluid confined therein through proper openings for that purpose, and which openings may be afterward closed air-tight, and thus prevent the paint or other fluid remaining in the vessel from being injuriously acted on by the atmosphere. The vessels so employed being at all times full, whatever be the quantity of fluid matter remaining therein, in consequence of the vessels being caused to collapse in the act of removing any quantity of the contained fluid, the vessels may therefore be said to be progressively reduced in capacity, and the previous extent of capacity closed up in proportion to the quantity of paint or other contained fluid removed, the remaining capacity being at all times full, to the exclusion of the atmosphere, as will be more fully described hereinafter when I come to describe practical means of performing my invention; and it should be understood that my invention is intended to apply to paints in a fluid or liquid state, and to vehicles and to pigments for paints in a fluid state, and to varnishes, and to other fluids which, being kept in vessels and being used from time to time, require the vessels containing them to remain full and to be closed air-tight after removing portions of the fluids; and care should be observed in using this my invention that the fluids so placed in metallic vessels should not be such as to be

Having thus generally stated the nature and object of the invention, I will proceed to explain in a more practical manner the best means I am acquainted with for performing the same.

The metals which I believe are best and cheapest for the purposes of my invention are grain-tin, lead, and pewter, and in making the proper vessels therefrom the metal is to be of such thickness as readily to yield to pressure and to be caused to be permanently collapsed; and although the shapes of the vessels may be varied, I believe the most convenient shape to be cylindrical. I will therefore confine my description to that shaped vessel.

In the drawings, Figure 1 represents a vessel containing paint, and is of a suitable size for containing artist's colors. The vessel *a* is made of grain-tin drawn into a tube, as is well understood, the metal being about one seventy-fifth of an inch in thickness, the ends being closed by melting the edges of the metal when pressed together, or by soldering. In filling such vessel, one end is first closed and the paint or other fluid requiring to be similarly preserved is filled in. The edges of the other end are then pressed together and closed by melting the edges of the metal or by soldering. Such closing of the ends of the metal vessels may be conveniently performed by means of the instrument *b*, Fig. 3, which consists of a pair of forceps, the chaps of which being closed on the end of the tube or vessel *a* leave a groove or hollow between the chaps, by means of which any person, by the aid of a blow-pipe or hot iron, may close the end of the vessel *a* by melting the edges of the metal of which the vessel is composed, or by adding a small quantity of solder into the groove.

In removing paint or other preserved fluid from a vessel, *a*, a hole may be made at *c*, and by pressing the vessel *a* the fluid contained will flow from the opening *c*, and it is better that the pressure should be made at the end, *d*, of the vessel *a*, so as progressively to drive away the paint or other fluid therefrom and completely to collapse the end *d* as the fluid is removed, and when collapsed the end *d* may be rolled up, as shown at Fig. 2, and the person using the fluid from time to time from the

J. Rand,

Metal Rolls for Paint.

No 2,252. Patented Sep. 11, 1841.

Fig. 1 Fig. 2 Fig. 3

Fig. 4 Fig. 5

Witnesses: Inventor John Rand

John Goffe Rand's collapsible paint tube patent, 1841



Smeared



Spicy Boys

Kavli



A Touch of Glass

BY CHARLOTTE BEACH

180 g

Johnnie Walker Blue Label Ultra (2024), weighed without the closure. A limited edition of 888 bottles.

17%

Carbon reduction per bottle AB InBev reported for its lighter longneck, 180 g down to 150 g (2021).

Forecasting a packaging trend toward lighter-weight glass bottles might be wishful thinking on our part. But hey, someone's got to manifest these sorts of industry disruptions to help save the planet. If you build the trend, it will come!

We're not pulling this out of thin air either—we've already seen certain brands in the beverage space exploring lightweight glass. Martell, for example, partnered with Vitalink Technology in early 2026 to develop a prototype bottle made from ultra-thin (0.7mm), scratch-resistant glass that's typically used in smartphones.

"A bottle that uses 10% less glass but results in more breakage and wasted product is not a sustainability win."

Valerie Hawks, Interact Brands



Cognac A. de Fussigny

A Touch of Glass

BY CHARLOTTE BEACH · CONTINUED

Cognac A De Fussigny similarly rethought their bottle this year, in the name of “less material consumed, less energy required, less impact on the planet.”

Valerie Hawks, the Head of Production and Sustainability at Interact Brands and the author of our newest DIELINE column Trash Talk, shares another important case study to consider on the topic of lightweighting glass bottles. The Johnnie Walker Blue Label Ultra bottle released in 2024 by Diageo weighed just 180 grams without the closure. But it took five years of development and resulted in a limited release of just 888 bottles; it wasn’t a structure that was immediately ready for permanent, large-scale commercial production. “Diageo has acknowledged that the technology isn't yet available to produce bottles of this weight at scale,” says Hawks. “If something can’t scale, how big of a win is it?”

Hawks also mentions how AB InBev developed a lighter longneck beer bottle in 2021, reducing its weight from 180 grams to 150 grams, which resulted in a 17% reduction in carbon emissions per bottle. “This is a particularly interesting example because it was developed for commercial production and scale, and demonstrates how relatively modest weight reductions, when implemented at very large production volumes, can have a bigger and more meaningful impact.”

With these examples in mind, it’s clear the lightweight glass trend is nuanced, complex, and will certainly be gradual. That said, we do expect to see more lightweighting moves in 2027, as conversations around sustainability and microplastics amplify.

Hawks dives into the specifics, explaining that Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) laws only impose taxes on various packaging materials in certain states, but not all. “While EPR is pushing brands to reconsider packaging choices, it doesn't necessarily make switching from plastic to glass, or vice versa, a beneficial financial decision. While I think this could be affecting a trend in lightweighting glass, I think the effects are marginal.”

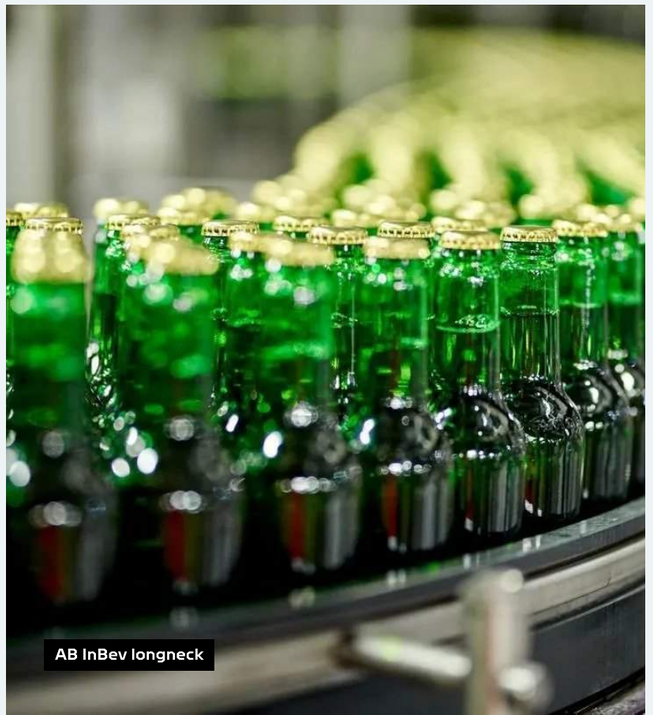
She also says that as the general public becomes increasingly informed about the packaging materials of what they’re consuming, brands will need to follow suit. “Where consumers play a role in driving this trend comes down to the latest data showing that consumers are more conscious of the containers their food and beverages come in, and the potential for that material to leach into what they are eating and drinking. Hello microplastics!” Where brands might have previously gotten away with using plastic to cut costs, now they’ll have to look to better substrates, and potentially, lightweighted glass.

This trend will certainly be incremental, but we’re manifesting more and more examples of brands reconsidering their bottle production.

“I think lightweighting will continue to be an important sustainability driver, particularly as brands face increasing pressure to manage material costs, transportation expenses, and environmental impact,” concludes Hawks. “However, I don't think we'll see every brand moving toward the lightest possible glass structure. There's a point at which reducing material creates more problems than it solves. Breakage, product loss, manufacturing limitations, and the consumer experience all have to factor into the equation. A bottle that uses 10% less glass but results in more breakage and wasted product is not a sustainability win. We have to look at the entire lifecycle, not just the amount of material going into the package.”



Johnnie Walker Blue Label Ultra



AB InBev longneck



Cognac A de Fussigny



Johnnie Walker Blue Label Ultra



AB InBev longneck



A. de Fussigny, before and after.



Martell

"If something can't scale, how big of a win is it?"

Valerie Hawks, Interact Brands



PERMANENCE

NOTHING LASTS FOREVER, RIGHT?

BY BILL MCCOOL

"The faster technology gets, the more we crave permanence. Permanence is physical proof of an idea, a moment, a memory."

Dora Drimalas, Hybrid Design

Nothing lasts forever, right?

Well, that's what we've all been told, at least. But there's an argument to be made that consumers are looking for tactile, tangible items, things that they can hold and treasure for a lifetime. And those feelings are more than justified, given the fleeting, ephemeral nature of most life experiences, branded or otherwise. Sure, you can watch the latest Hollywood movie on Netflix from your own personal home, but who's to say how long it will even be available on that streamer?

And while it sounds like I'm very much making an argument for hoarding media, that short-lived, vanishing content (and, boy howdy, does that empty word perfectly encapsulate this) points to a deep need to capture something that feels meaningful.

What's more, fast fashion, algorithmic slop, AI sameness, and the overall disposability of most things have led to an increased appreciation for craftsmanship and artistry.

Kocktail is an RTD brand that packages its drinks in a reusable cocktail glass. Remove the metal pull tab, sip, and enjoy…and then you have a whole new addition to your bar cart.



Pringles urn

Permanence

BY BILL MCCOOL · CONTINUED

Yes, you now have a new dish to wash, but you also have a memory of the drink itself and how you acquired that glass. It's an infinitely sticky brand experience. Ditto Zenpack's Boomi balm case with its refillable packaging system. The compact, made from PCR aluminum, resembles a highly polished stone and feels like the kind of intentional design object people will constantly ask you about when they spot it in your bag. It's certainly sustainable and speaks to a real consumer desire to have "forever" objects, but, more importantly, it moves away from disposability into something that is kept, and even cherished.

Not to get dark, but Pringles recently ran a promotion tied to the inventor of the brand's beloved tube, as he was cremated and his ashes were put in the very thing he brought to life. In a morbidly hilarious tribute, Pringles gave away a specially designed Pringles urn featuring some wonderful copy in "once you drop." What's more permanent than an actual urn?

"The faster technology gets, the more we crave permanence," says Dora Drimalas, co-founder of Hybrid Design. "Permanence is physical proof of an idea, a moment, a memory. Technology is great, don't get me wrong, but it's a commodity, a utility. Experiencing something in real life is a luxury. It's personal. It's engaging. It's definitely more memorable."

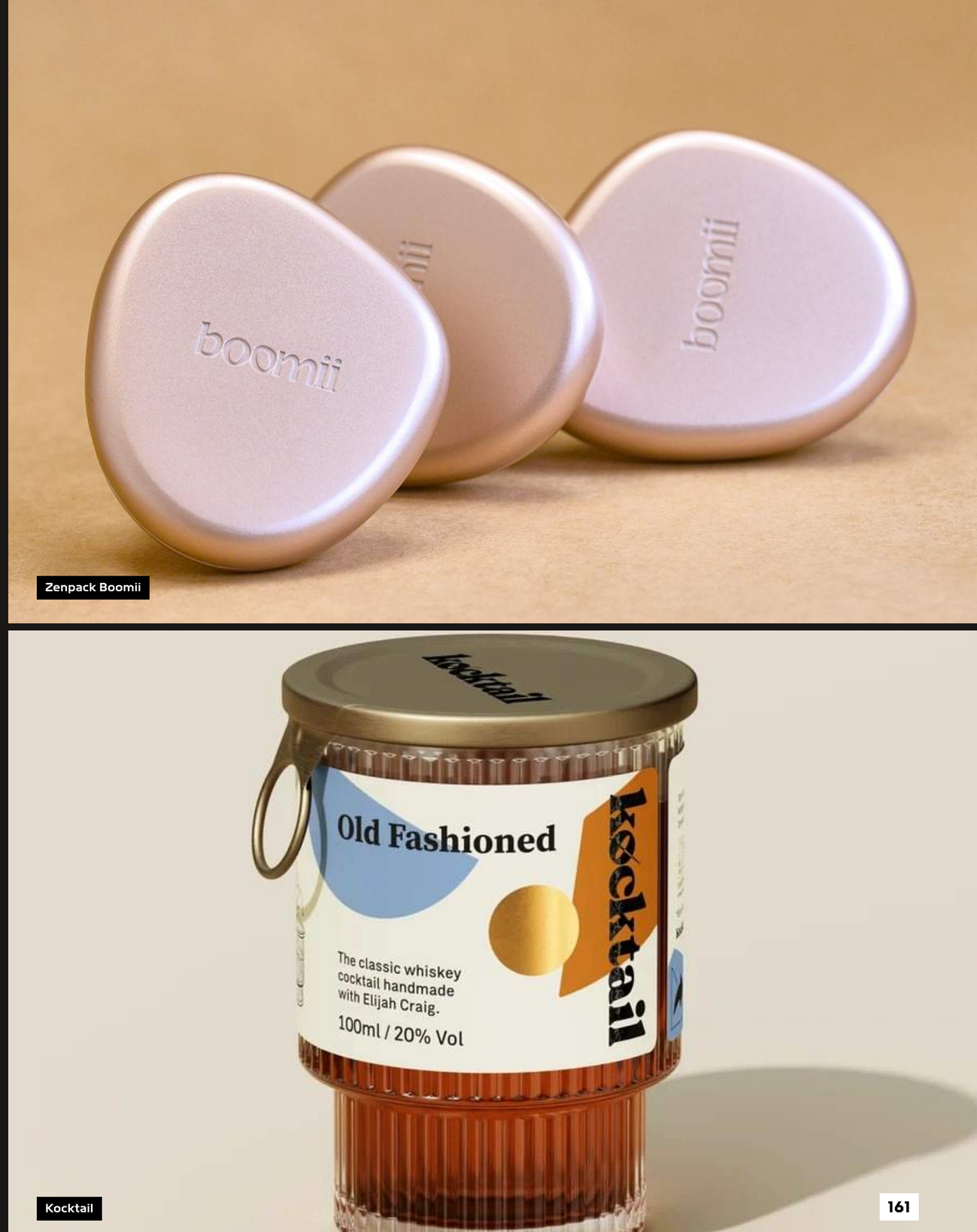
Ultimately, we all want stuff that's built to last, and brands should remember that people aren't looking for something they can gobble up quickly and then toss away just as carelessly.

"Experiencing something in real life is a luxury."

DORA DRIMALAS, HYBRID DESIGN



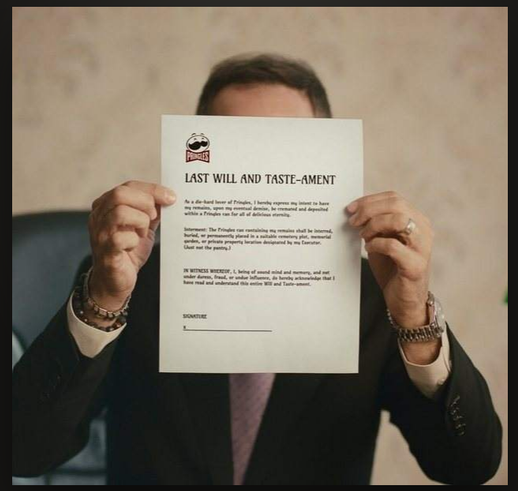
Pringles urn



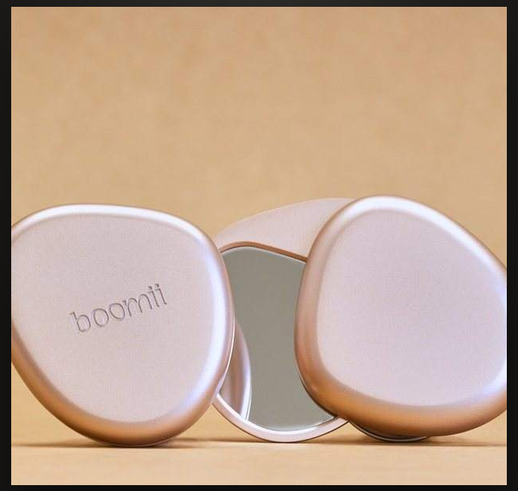
Zenpack Boomii

Kocktail





NO. 01 Pringles Urn



NO. 02 Zenpack Boomii



NO. 03 Pringles Urn

RETRO FUTURISM

(But Make It 90s)

BY RUDY SANCHEZ

> **“What if the future took a different, more positive path at some point in the past?”**
>
> Rudy Sanchez

As if the future didn’t seem bleak enough with global warming reaching a point of no return, and the amount of plastic continues to pile up and accumulate inside our bodies to the point of affecting our fertility, now there’s the new existential threat of AI coming for our jobs, or worse, finishing off the planet and maybe our species quicker than the first two combined.

That likely isn’t the future anyone imagined for themselves. Plenty of films, literature, and other media are set in a world destroyed by our own consumption and inaction, but what if the future took a different, more positive path at some point in the past?

Wouldn’t it be more fun to imagine the world where we didn’t become dependent on fossil fuels or where the robots (or, more accurately, their trillionaire owners) didn’t turn us into modern serfs?

Instead of watching The Matrix and quietly bemoaning that it feels less fictional than it did at the turn of the 20th century, we can look back at rosier depictions of the future from the past. As we look to escape modern existential dread, we’ll start to embrace retrofuturism.

In the mid-century, at the start of the atomic age, we saw technology still beautifully designed and ornate, not drab slabs of aluminum and glass.



Think flying cars with 50s-style fender fins, The Jetsons, Tomorrowland (the film and the Disney parks area), and the recent Fantastic Four.

Packaging and branding design often take cues from trends and cultural shifts, and as fads wear out, they inspire new ones. We're at peak retro and vintage looks, though this constant mining of the past is unlikely to disappear from brand playbooks. Nonetheless, designers might shift away from purely retro decade-pulling from the 70s and 90s toward an approach that taps into adjacent retrofuturism.

The fluid typography, set against a bright color palette, in sunscreen brand Runblock's work evokes a 2000s vision of the future. S-STATUS' shiny metallic silver, paired with orange and vertically aligned Japanese and English text, also captures that same aughts vision of the future.



Matchalita by imaginaryfriend



Matchalita by imaginaryfriend



Matchalita by imaginaryfriend



Matchalita by imaginaryfriend



S-STATUS



Runblock



Runblock



Matchalita by imaginaryfriend



Matchalita by imaginaryfriend



Matchalita by imaginaryfriend



Matchalita by imaginaryfriend



Matchalita by imaginaryfriend



Matchalita by imaginaryfriend



Matchalita by imaginaryfriend



Matchalita by imaginaryfriend

Retrofuturism (But Make It 90s)

BY RUDY SANCHEZ · CONTINUED

Finally, Matchalita's similar approach, using metallic sheen, vertically aligned text, and East-meets-West copy, is also a great example of what we might have thought futuristic RTD cans would look like decades later.

A common thread in the examples above is how much the packaging designs resemble turn-of-the-century album covers from groups like Autechre, Stereolab, and Massive Attack. Electronica, in particular, fits the bill here. It's not surprising, considering genres like trance often strove for a technical, futuristic look. Now, they can inspire retrofuturistic design. In fact, it's not all that surprising that the vision of the past-future now looks to the 90s-00s, a popular well for design inspo.

Beyond generational timing, the 90s and 00s were a transitional time of optimism, but with touches of apprehension and uncertainty. The world was experiencing a telecommunications revolution that would completely change our lives; even a couple of decades in, it's still unclear whether it was for the better or worse. But for many, it felt like we could stretch our arms out and touch the future, and that was exciting.

"Electronica, in particular, fits the bill here."





Runblock





Matchalita by imaginaryfriend

★ EST. ★
Yesterday
TREND 19 OF 20

Heritage COSPLAY

BY CHLOE CORDOVER

Heritage Cosplay is what happens when a brand launches yesterday but looks like it's been sponsoring the town baseball team since 1963. We're talking script logos, badge marks, old-fashioned color combinations, and supporting graphics that look like they're from a business that's survived a few stock market crashes.

This trend isn't about LARP-ing the past or nostalgia for nostalgia's sake. It's about thoughtfully building a brand world that feels worn-in and a little gritty.

The interesting part is how that sense of history gets created. A convincing heritage identity rarely feels like one vintage logo slapped across every surface. It has variations, little inconsistencies, and marks that seem to have arrived at different moments. Ryan Rhodes at Land describes his process of achieving this look.

"I make 20 'things,' and then see how they all work together. This method builds a world around the brand. It gives the illusion of a history."

Ryan Rhodes, Land



Roadie by Land

Heritage Cosplay

BY CHLOE CORDOVER · CONTINUED

"I'm unable to create one 'thing.' I make 20 'things,' and then see how they all work together. This method builds a world around the brand. It gives the illusion of a history."

Land's work for Roadie shows how convincing that illusion can be. The non-alcoholic beer features a logotype that borrows from 60s car culture and sign painting, plus a roadrunner mascot that looks like it's been hiding in gas station coolers for decades. Where much of the NA category reaches for clean, wellness-adjacent minimalism, Roadie leans into the vernacular of classic American domestic beer. It's a modern-day brand, yet it looks like your uncle has been drinking it at the lake since before you were born.

Why might this be resonating right now? Familiar commercial graphics make a new product easier to place. You might never have bought it before, but its visual language suggests something established, local, or dependable.

"We're comfortable with things we know. Life is busy, new, and chaotic, and familiar things give us something to connect with without having to learn a whole new story every time. Heritage brands have a lot of established narrative," notes Todd Vanneste, founder and design director at Weekdays Design Studio. "We know them and, to some degree, love them. New brands are drawing on that familiarity and using ways of attracting people that have already worked."

Vanneste continues, "From a customer's point of view, there's comfort in feeling connected to something that seems bigger and longer-lasting than the moment you're in. The heritage might be simulated, but that doesn't mean it can't work. As long as the business does things properly and delivers on what the branding suggests, it can still build a genuine connection with people."

For 2027, the most convincing Heritage Cosplay will have a sound reason for its references and relate to the brand's overall story. Otherwise, it's easy to end up with an inauthentic costume consumers will see straight through to the clown inside.

"It gives the illusion of a history."

RYAN RHODES, LAND

"The heritage might be simulated, but that doesn't mean it can't work."

TODD VANNESTE, WEEKDAYS DESIGN STUDIO

“Heritage brands have a lot of established narrative. We know them and, to some degree, love them. New brands are drawing on that familiarity and using ways of attracting people that have already worked.”

Todd Vanneste, Weekdays Design Studio





Roadie by Land

Clean Energy

BY RUDY SANCHEZ

According to a Grand View Research report, the energy drink market size is estimated at $92 billion.

You don’t have to squint to see why they remain so popular. Flavors are more varied and similar to those of other beverages, like sodas and sparkling water. Many, though not all, have far fewer calories than a glowing, too-sweet coffeehouse drink full of syrups and powders. They’re usually more charged than a typical coffee-based drink, with some brands, like Reign, containing 300mg of caffeine.

But the category is evolving as it expands, and many brands target consumers drawn to qualities like “all natural.” Brands like Gorgie, Kim Kardashian’s Update, Freedom Fluid, and Yerbaé use ingredients such as green bean coffee extract, green tea extract, yerba mate, or yaupon, a caffeinated plant native to the Southeastern United States.

With different caffeine sources and target consumers, it stands to reason the branding and packaging will differ from category stalwarts like Red Bull, Monster, and Rockstar.

$92 billion

Estimated size of the energy drink market, according to a Grand View Research report.

“Lots of tea-leaf imagery, ancient textiles, and symbology that feels more like a return to something, rather than these lifestyle energy-drink brands.”

Fred Hart, Hart Design



Maybe by Young Jerks

Clean Energy

BY RUDY SANCHEZ · CONTINUED

"When I think of natural energy, I think of yerba mate and brands like Yerba Madre (Guayaki), Machu Picchu, Mateína, and PepsiCo's Yachak," says Fred Hart, of Hart Design. "Those tend to feel more rooted in primal design languages that feel more honest and earth-oriented. Lots of tea-leaf imagery, ancient textiles, and symbology that feels more like a return to something, rather than these lifestyle energy-drink brands."

An overarching trend among "natural" or "clean" energy drink brands is a shift away from extreme sports and aggressive branding toward something that, ironically, feels more calming and serene, like Maybe, designed by Young Jerks. That makes sense, since those brands are more likely to be found in retailers like Sprouts or Whole Foods, which target wellness-focused consumers who want to avoid artificial ingredients.

Most brands voluntarily list the amount of caffeine in their drinks, though that's not currently a requirement. If caffeine is added to a beverage, it does have to be listed under the list of ingredients; however, if the caffeine comes from another ingredient, like yerba mate or green tea extract, then only that ingredient has to be listed, and there's currently no rule requiring brands to point out that said ingredient itself contains caffeine.

That gives "natural" or "clean" energy drinks a lot of leeway in labeling, though that may soon change. Earlier this year, the FDA signaled it will consider changes to caffeine labeling, though it is still unclear what exactly will change. Unlike alcoholic or cannabis beverages, energy drinks are not age-gated, and there have been deaths linked to overconsumption of highly caffeinated drinks.

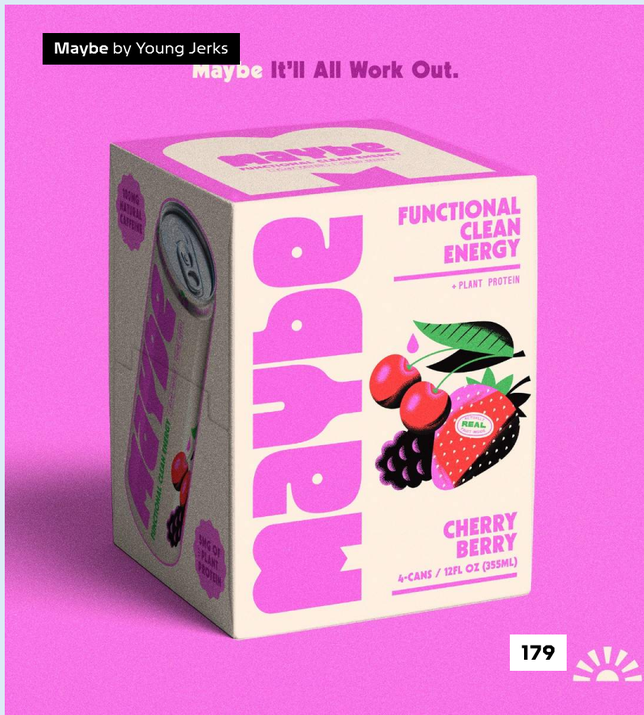
"You don't have to squint to see why they remain so popular."



Yerba Madre



Machu Picchu by Firma



Maybe by Young Jerks

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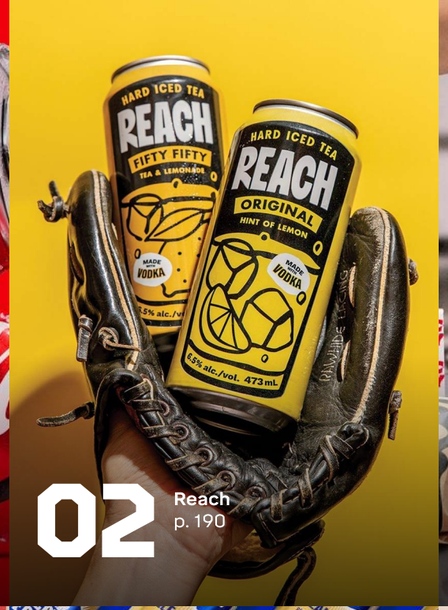

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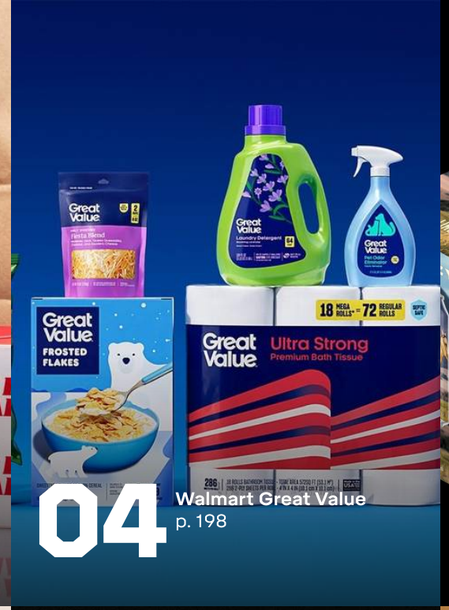

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Top Projects
of 2026

The 12 project stories DIELINE readers opened most this year, from Coca-Cola to Sprite. Every article runs here in full.

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Coca-Cola

01

Coca-Cola Unveils Newly Refreshed Global Visual Identity System

By **Bill McCool** · Published on thedieline.com, July 20, 2026

IN BRIEF

- Coca-Cola is rolling out a unified global visual identity system that features vertical wordmarks on cans, horizontal can imagery on multipacks, and a redesigned Coke Zero Sugar look utilizing white logos and serif typography.
- Developed in collaboration with JKR, Superultrarare, and Brody Associates, the refresh leverages Adobe-powered “Design Intelligence” tools (Project Fizzion) trained on the brand’s archives to scale capabilities and ensure consistent global design governance.

For over 100 years, Coca-Cola has set the standard in how soft drinks—hell, every drink—are branded and marketed. As the legend goes, in 1915, the Coca-Cola Bottle Association issued a challenge to glass bottling companies across the US, seeking a vessel “so distinctive that it could be recognized by touch alone and so unique it could be identified when shattered on the ground.” Go even further back, and Frank M. Robinson, bookkeeper and partner of Coca-Cola inventor John S. Pemberton, thought the brand name sounded nifty, and that two “Cs” would look pretty swell. He wrote out the name in a Spencerian script, and they had a trademark.

The rest, of course, is history. Plenty of brands will try to tell you that they’re iconic, and rest assured—they’re absolutely not. Coca-Cola? That’s actually iconic. And you can thank a glass manufacturer and the guy in payroll (who was a marketing genius).

Fast forward 140 years, and the world’s biggest beverage company is still playing in the sandbox using those genuinely iconic assets. And today, the brand has announced a new global visual identity system—one that seeks not only to further amplify those design elements that pretty much everyone in the world knows, but also to usher in what they call “a new era of brand consistency” across the 200+ markets where the soft drink is sold.







Coca-Cola by it's very nature doesn't have to reinvent the brand or do something drastic (that's why Pepsi exists), they need only elevate what's already there, whether it's the aforementioned Spencerian script, the ribbon, the Arden Square, or their red and white palette, and the brand intended to make them even more prominent across retail and packaging, and, well anywhere Coca-Cola lives.



"This evolution celebrates our legacy while looking to the future, delivering a single, bold brand experience that reinforces Coca-Cola's heritage and confident global presence," said Rapha Abreu, Global Vice President of Design at The Coca-Cola Company, in a press release. "For over a century, Coca-Cola has been more than a drink; it's been a global symbol of optimism and authenticity. Now, with one seamless visual identity, we can deliver one recognizable brand experience to consumers."



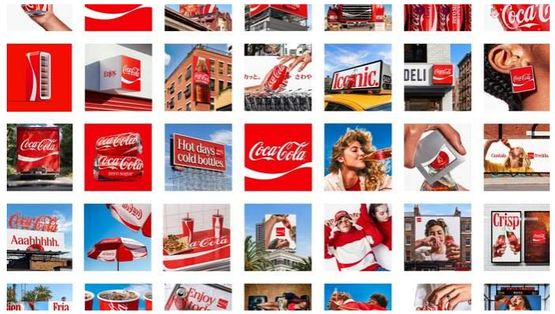
As the old adage goes, it takes a village to refresh a global giant, and Coca-Cola is no exception: it was a collaborative effort across the board. The global packaging system was courtesy of The Superultrarare, while the global brand identity was developed alongside JKR. Brody Associates handled typography, and new photography standards were set by Guy Aroch, Anna Palma, and Martin Wonnacott.

"The original brief was to create a platform identity for a new campaign," said Dave Balsamello, creative director at JKR. "Pretty quickly, we all realized there was something bigger to solve. It had been nearly a decade since Coca-Cola had set standards for its brand. Most guidance had been centered around individual campaigns or platforms, and because of that, there was a need for more consistency."



The central idea behind the updated global identity system rests on the idea to "make Coca-Cola more Coca-Cola," and the change is immediately noticeable—not because they've tweaked the wordmark or anything like that. Instead, they've just moved things around in a pleasing enough fashion.

The most notable change can be found on the cans: the wordmark no longer sits horizontally and has reverted to vertical, which tends to happen every 5-10 years, it seems (vertical is best—facts). Multipacks, meanwhile, have removed the wordmark that stretched out across the body and replaced it with a can lying on its side. Flip it over, and the ribbon gets the whole panel of the box with the square in the upper left corner.



Coke Zero, incidentally, has ditched most of the black (save for the cap on bottles and the black ribbon). Now, the logo appears in white, as does an enlarged "Zero Sugar," which is now set with a serif type. Will it give my elderly Coke Zero-loving father pause? Perhaps.



Coca-Cola has also brought back the Arden Square. Designed in 1969 by Lippincott & Margulies (now Lippincott), the mark was introduced during an era when the beverage brand was also rapidly expanding.



"When people think about Coca-Cola, a handful of memorable brand assets immediately come to mind: the iconic red, the Spencerian Script, the Dynamic Ribbon, the Contour Bottle, even the product itself. Those are the symbols people recognize, trust, and love. Our ambition was to double down on those distinctive assets and make them even more iconic," Abreu told DIELINE. "Making Coca-Cola more Coca-Cola became our guiding principle from day one. It reflects the belief that iconic brands don't need to reinvent themselves; they need to reinforce what makes them unmistakable."





“That philosophy shaped every design decision,” he added.” We simplified where needed, amplified our distinctive assets, and built a system that creates a more consistent Coca-Cola experience, whether you’re looking at a can, a digital experience, retail, equipment, or a campaign. The result isn’t a new Coca-Cola. It’s a more iconic Coca-Cola, designed for the future while staying true to everything people already love.”



The larger question here, of course, is how that new identity will perform in the market and be used in the coming years. The brand has invested heavily in what they call “Design Intelligence” tools (i.e., Project Fizzion), and has worked closely with Adobe to ensure brand governance and scale its design capabilities with AI models trained on the brand’s vast archives.





The beverage maker has also introduced its immersive Brand Center to support the global rollout and considers it the brand’s digital home. Anyone who works on Coca-Cola, whether it’s marketers and designers or agency partners, can dive into every aspect of the brand and learn how to bring it to life consistently. In essence, it’s a playground where all of the core design assets and visual principles to packaging, equipment, retail experiences, and fleet standards live. Ideally, anyone who designs for the brand will no longer have to navigate a disconnected ecosystem or brand guidelines.

Coca-Cola’s updated identity is rolling out starting today in select markets across Europe, the Middle East, and India, with Latin America and Asia to follow. The rest of the world, including North America, won’t see it until 2027. It’s doubtful that any of this will cause confusion. After all, it’s Coca-Cola.





Reach

Public House Studio

02

Good Times are Within Reach, the New Hard Iced Tea Brand that Celebrates Easy Living

By **Charlotte Beach** · Published on thedieline.com, March 31, 2026

STUDIO Public House Studio

IN BRIEF

- Reach is a new brand of hard iced tea from Ontario that's all about location and occasion
- Public House Studios and Cool Brewing teamed up to create a brand system and packaging that felt distinctly from Ontario while still having mass market appeal

The only beverage that encapsulates relaxation better than an iced tea is a hard iced tea, and that's just the facts.

Name a better companion for hanging out on the porch on a hot summer's night, or putting your feet up at the campfire with friends—you can't! But for too long, the hard iced tea category has been dominated by Twisted Tea, which has a bit of an overly-sweet, your-first-sip-of-alcohol-at-a-party-in-college connotation.

Hard iced tea deserves better. The beverage has desperately needed a rebrand for years, and finally, Reach has answered the call.

From Public House Studios and Cool Brewing in Ontario, Canada, Reach is a new hard iced tea brand that launched with three distinct flavors, all made from locally sourced black tea and vodka: Original (black tea, lemon, and vodka), Peachy (white peach, black tea, and vodka), and Fifty Fifty (black tea, lemonade, and vodka). What's more, the Reach brand ethos is built around a distinct Ontario vibe, all about easy living and laid-back hangs.





"The whole brand is built around location and occasion, with that occasion being specific to Ontario," Public House Studios creative director, designer, and an Ontario native in her own right,

Dahlia Ishak, told me. “It’s a region in the middle of Canada that’s super outdoorsy with deep winters and beautiful summers. People are always looking for a reason to be outside. It’s really relaxed and laid back, with lots of casual hangouts at the rink, at the park, at the lake, or going on hikes.”

Cool Brewing identified a void in the market for a beverage designed for these quintessential Ontario moments and moods, and built out the Reach brand in direct response. “They wanted this drink to fill the gap for those relaxed hangouts,” said Ishak. “Right now, there’s really only the main hard iced teas in the market, like Twisted Tea, and that’s from the United States. We wanted something that felt more like us and for us and for what we do in Ontario.”



To achieve that, Ishak and company stripped the design concept down to a classic glass of iced tea. “There’s something about just a big glass of iced tea that’s really refreshing, really honest, and really at the root of its ease and tastiness. So we used the shape of the can to build this iced tea vessel and lock-up. Once we had the ‘aha moment’ of the glass fitting the can and then filling it with the flavor, it just had to be the way to go.”





The thick black-line cartoon style is direct and adds to that sense of light-hearted fun. “It’s like a comic book that’s easy to digest,” said Ishak. “It had to read as iced tea, and the black against the flavor color became a system that made it identifiable and gave it that active edge and mass appeal.”

The illustration language also opened the door for more nods to Canada. “We added little vignettes that are specific to Toronto and Ontario to the spine of the can and in the whole brand,” said Ishak. “There are scenes of little characters doing things from the region, like ice hockey and fishing. The idea is that those vignettes can change and evolve over seasons, over time, and over regions. So if Reach expanded to other areas, we could change up the illustrations. They’ve become a big part of the website and the merchandising and overall story.”

The Reach name is also partly an allusion to insider Ontario jargon. “It’s slang in Toronto. ‘Reach’ means you’re going somewhere fun,” explained Ishak. “And then the sentiment of ‘reach for a good time’ and ‘good times are in reach’ is at the core.”



While remaining authentic and true to their hometown is the foundation of the brand, they have aspirations to reach (pun certainly intended) a broader market outside of just Ontarians. “It had to have cues for mass appeal, so we didn’t want it to feel overly boutique or fussy. It was challenging to try to make something that felt like it could connect to a broad audience but still be unique,” said Ishak. “Because it’s not a high price point, it’s not meant to be a special occasion drink; it’s meant to be that every moment, at every occasion, it’s in the cooler. The drink for when you’re doing nothing but having a good time. That was probably like the hardest part of the balance.”

And though there’s so much Ontario specificity at the heart of Reach, having a good time with pals and enjoying a low-key hang transcends location.

“The core story is that we’re from Ontario, in terms of where the brand started, but celebrating the in-between moments, laid back memories, being with friends, and making a party in the moment of wherever you’re at and whoever you’re with, is so universal,” Ishak says, “We’re celebrating Ontario and putting that as our first foot forward, but the broader sentiment is in the spirit of ‘good times are in reach.’”



KFC

03

Yes, There's a Drumstick Hidden In KFC's Global Rebrand

By **Chloe Cordover** · Published on thedieline.com, June 15, 2026

IN BRIEF

- KFC's global rebrand with JKR brings the brand's six iconic assets into harmony, including a hidden chicken drumstick tucked into the logo and stripes that now form the bucket shape.
- Beyond the visual identity, KFC is expanding its menu with new boneless chicken formats, a boba inspired beverage line, and new restaurant concepts rolling out globally.

There are a few classifications of brand refreshes, but the best ones are crafted with careful attention to detail without completely disregarding the brand's past.

Today, KFC announced a global overhaul, developed with global branding agency JKR, spanning menu innovation, restaurant redesign, and a visual identity evolution, rolling out first across the UK and Ireland.

The finger-lickin ' good chicken brand is expanding its boneless chicken offerings under two banners: "Dipped," a customizable tender-and-sauce format drawing from a library of 20-plus globally inspired sauces, and "Dunked," a sauce-drenched format already performing in South Africa and India. There's also KWENCH by KFC, a beverage platform featuring boba refreshers and krunch shakes, moving from pilot to permanent menu in Australia and Canada. New restaurant formats, including an open-concept location in McKinney, Texas, and a two-story flagship in Dubai, are on deck for later this year.



The real design challenge, Sean Thomas, Global Executive Creative Director at JKR, explains, was one of abundance rather than scarcity. "Very few brands are lucky enough to have even one asset in the top quartile of distinctiveness, and KFC has six: the Colonel, the bucket, the stripes, the lettermark, finger-lickin ' good, and the chicken itself." The problem was how to simplify.

The Colonel stays, because of course, he does. Thomas notes, "The conversation was never about whether to remove the Colonel but how best to use him to retain the recognition and love of existing KFC fans, while increasing relevance with the next generation."

The solution, according to Thomas, was about hierarchy and harmony. "The previous visual identity

system at times felt like multiple distinctive elements competing with one another,” he says. The refresh uses KFC’s signature stripes to actually form the bucket shape, a small piece of visual problem-solving with outsized long-term impact, particularly in digital environments.

There’s also a hidden chicken drumstick tucked into the curve of the “C” in the logo. “We didn’t want to make too much of it, so it’s more something you discover and enjoy over time,” Thomas says, “but it rules.”



What’s notable about JKR’s process is how deliberately it was designed to avoid the classic pitfall of global brand uniformity. “Markets weren’t presented a direction to sign off on,” Thomas says. “They were co-collaborators, shaping the work from strategy through concept to final execution.” KFC operates across 150-plus countries, so it’s the difference between a successful brand refresh and forcing something to work.

KFC didn’t want to and didn’t need to reinvent itself here. Instead, the brand is doubling down on the Colonel, the bucket, and the same assets that have defined it for decades.

Now, I ned a bucket.



























Walmart Great Value

04

Walmart Streamlines Private Label Brand Great Value With a Sleek Redesign Across 10,000 Products

By **Charlotte Beach** · Published on thedieline.com, April 17, 2026

The bigger the brand, the bigger the redesign—and it doesn't get much bigger than Walmart.

The behemoth retailer has just unveiled a massive overhaul of its flagship private label brand, Great Value, including the redesign of nearly 10,000 food and household items. That's a lot of .ai files.

"Great Value is already in 9 out of 10 U.S. homes, so with that kind of legacy, the team needed to ensure we were thoughtfully evolving the brand with this redesign," says Maya McDonald, Senior Director of Always-On Consumer & Campaigns at Walmart. "Maintaining the consumer trust and credibility we've already built was critical throughout the process, while ensuring that the new design felt like a meaningful upgrade."

And a meaningful upgrade they've made, scrubbing Great Value's sea of dated, disjointed designs and upgrading to a clear and cohesive visual language suited for the modern day shopper.

The impetus for such a massive undertaking was closing the gap between the way Walmart customers perceive and regard the Great Value brand and how it showed up on the shelf. "Customers already trusted and embraced the products, but the packaging expression hadn't kept up," says McDonald. "The reality is that it had been 10 years since Great Value was last redesigned, and over time, the brand became fragmented as it evolved category by category, which made it less consistent and harder to shop. The redesign was about creating a more unified system that improves recognition and aligns the brand with our customers' evolving expectations."





The refreshed Great Value look, envisioned by Walmart's in-house design team and JKR, was designed to meet the needs of the brand's many, many customers in terms of form and function. The existing Great Value brand needed a cleaner, more modern visual appeal while increasing accessibility and shopability across both in-store and digital shopping experiences.

"At this scale, our focus was on building a system that could balance consistency with flexibility," says

McDonald. “The design prioritizes a clear hierarchy and consistent placement of information. It also takes a purposeful approach to communication—highlighting what’s useful and making it easy to find—while maintaining a cohesive brand that can still adapt across such a broad range of different categories.”



Achieving an elevated look also meant stripping away tired design elements like the drop shadow and oval lockup on the wordmark, and developing a sleeker graphic style to depict each product. To enhance Great Value’s brand equity and name recognition, each product now prominently features the refreshed Great Value logo, displayed in a large navy box across many items in the range.

Other improvements to the packaging include consistent placement of nutrition information and benefit claims across all Great Value food items. Visual cues are now more direct and streamlined for enhanced visibility and an easier shopping experience in identifying items in person and digitally.

To ensure a smooth transition across so many products, the new look will be rolled out in phases over the next two years, starting with salty snacks and then expanding incrementally to other categories.

This redesign marks the most extensive private brand update in Walmart’s history. The quality of what they’ve created proves that budget-friendly brands don’t need to look like they’ve been designed on a budget. As Walmart’s Vice President of Creative, David Hartman, puts it, “We believe great design should be accessible to everyone.” At a time in the US when prices are skyrocketing, and purse strings are tightening, it’s especially important for brands like Great Value to up their design game as more and more people turn to their products and rely on savvy, thoughtful packaging. Walmart is setting a new bar for budget-conscious brands everywhere, and the caliber of design they can and should achieve.





Crazy Mountain NA

05

Is That the Marlboro Man? George Clooney's Crazy Mountain NA Beer Launches

By **Rudy Sanchez** · Published on thedieline.com, March 9, 2026

IN BRIEF

- Casamigos founders Rande Gerber, Mike Meldman, and George Clooney launched a non-alcoholic beer called Crazy Mountain.
- Branding and packaging for Crazy Mountain play on a cowboy theme, very reminiscent of the highly successful Marlboro Man campaign, which ran from 1954 to 1999.

Just because cigarette smoking is down, and the Marlboro Man was officially retired by the brand in 1999, it doesn't mean that the mystique and allure of cowboys has gone away.

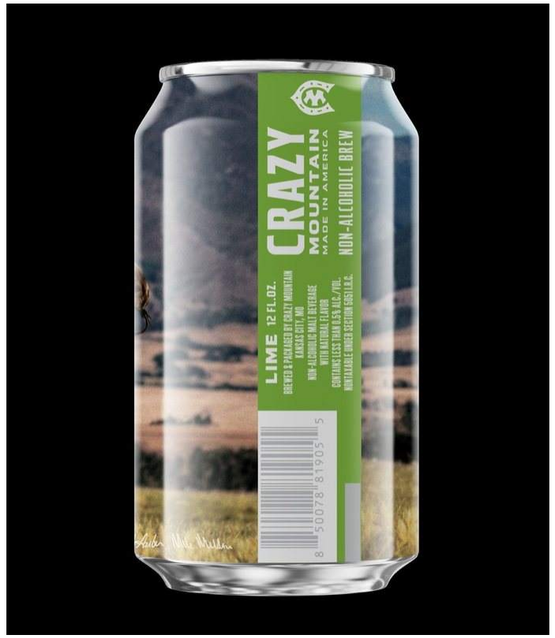
Crazy Mountain, a non-alcoholic beer brand founded by the Casamigos tequila team of Rande Gerber, Mike Meldman, and actor George Clooney, taps into the free-spirited mythos of cowboys. The brand has positioned itself as a premium NA option for health-conscious consumers who don't want to sacrifice taste or the ritual of cracking open a cold one. To start, Crazy Mountain has released two NA beers: a classic take on lager and another brew naturally flavored with lime.

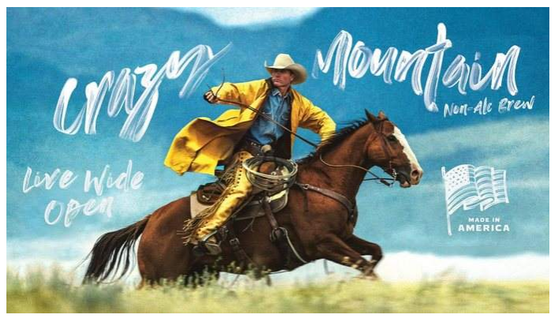
It might not be the most beer-sounding name, but in a fact sheet produced by the NA beermaker, the meaning behind the brand name is, "everyone has their version of Crazy Mountain, whether it's riding the biggest wave, climbing the highest mountain, the fight they show up for, or the dream they refuse to let go of."

According to the brand, the branding and packaging were designed by co-founder Gerber.

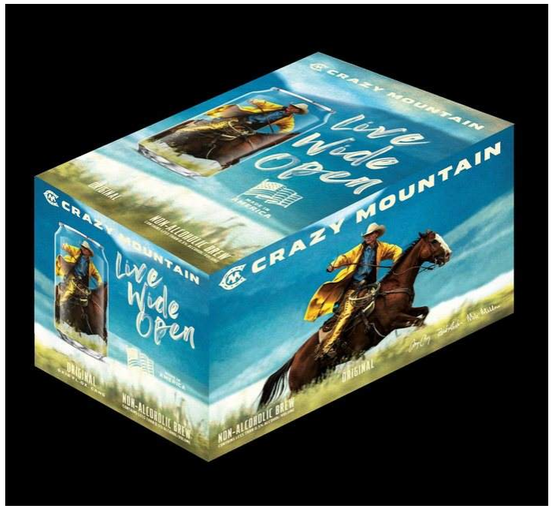
The Crazy Mountain wordmark's typography is reminiscent of ranch resort signs, which the Casamigos-adjacent are likely very familiar with. The letterforms of "Crazy" stand tall while the terminals and kerning add to the cowboy-esque quiet projection of strength and durability. Crazy Mountain's logo cleverly uses a horseshoe to envelop an "M," creating a lettermark highly evocative of the Western United States and cowboys.

The wordmark appears on a vertical stripe that runs down the back of the can; a curious choice for a new-to-the-world NA beer, but the brand is likely betting it can seduce curious drinkers with the photography that graces the packaging.





The beer cans lean hard on the romanticism of the Wild West, featuring photographs of horse-riding cowboys against a natural backdrop. No one would blame you if you thought it was a Marlboro magazine ad from the 70s or 80s. Lime's can and case featuring a black hat cowboy wielding a lasso in front of a mountain range. Original's packaging depicts a white-hatted cowboy wearing a thick raincoat. There's a vintage feel to the photography, including the slogan, "Live Wide Open," which looks like it was handwritten on a film negative. Crazy Mountain is brewed in the United States, and an American flag with "Made in America" text also appears on one of the panels of the outer packaging.



"We wanted to create a beer that lets you enjoy the moment, as well as the morning after," Rande Gerber said via a press release. "Something real, refreshing, and crafted for the way we actually live today."

Crazy Mountain is available now on the brand's website and rolling out to stores this year.





Nuda

06

Blurr Bureau Helps Pasta Brand Nuda Leans Into Quiet Luxury

By **Chloe Cordover** · Published on thedieline.com, March 26, 2026

I don’t think I’ve ever looked at a pasta box and given it a “quiet luxury” label, but for Nuda, Blurr Bureau strips everything back to create a design that feels refined. The typography leads with a flowing script for the brand name, contrasted by sans-serif details.

The color palette moves through deep charcoals, warm neutrals, and muted tones, while a small window reveals the pasta inside, acting as the only “illustration” and reinforcing the idea of transparency. This approach avoids the usual cues of health food packaging and instead leans into contemporary luxury trends seen across beauty and fashion. Its confidence in doing less feels genuinely new.

Nuda (naked, in Italian) is a premium almond pasta brand that sits at the center of flavor and function. Made with only three ingredients, it merges almond’s superfood benefits with culinary craftsmanship to evolve a once-restricted comfort-food into an elevated, everyday source of nutrition.

With three months until fundraising, Blurr worked to define their biggest strategic opportunity and build out a premium, production-ready brand that captured the appetites of investors and pasta lovers alike.



The Blurr/Challenge:

Consumers are demanding more from their food - and even more from the pasta aisle. Functional pasta has gained momentum, but the category stays split between avoiding what’s bad and overdoing what’s good. With shelves crowded with better-for-you options, our challenge was carving out a clear niche in both audience and design.

Who would reach for pasta as a carrier of nutrition over focused supplements or other healthy meals? Could we elevate almond pasta beyond another buzzy, high-protein promiser? More importantly — could we win over the pasta purists, the ones who judge on al dente bite alone, by proving an alt. flour could match wheat on texture and surpass it on macros?



The Clarity/Solution:

Today, truly health-conscious pasta lovers restrict consumption due to its perceived heaviness and lack of nutrition. To reach for pasta, they required an end-to-end experience in complete balance — crave-able flavor and texture, trustworthy nutrition, a lighter bite, and design that looks as good as it tastes.

Partnering with a master chef gave us the credibility to deliver on all of it at once. Nuda invites you inside their personal kitchen — the intimate space where they refine everyday recipes nutritious enough for pro athletes and elevated enough for discerning palates. Stainless steel counters. Ingredients treated like they matter. Minimalist, but rich with the textures of craft.



The visual identity embraces our name — naked, stripped of Italian clichés to showcase almond's ability to anchor multicultural cuisines, from sesame noodles to cacio e pepe. Focusing on its experience over its star ingredient allows the system to scale across chef-crafted superfoods -pasta today, sauces tomorrow.

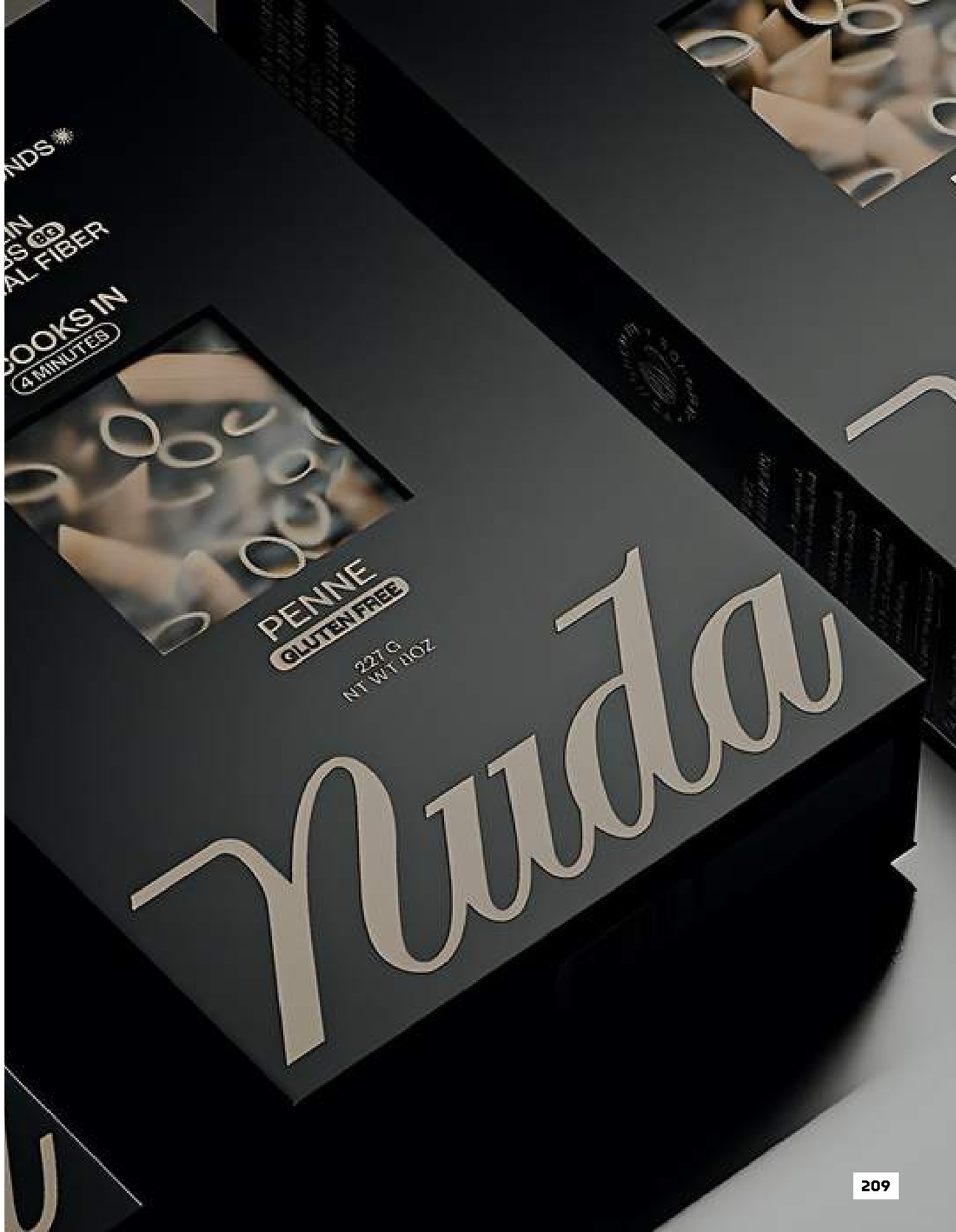


The Details:

Bold black packaging cuts through category noise on shelf, drawing eyes with contrast and negative space. Full-bleed imagery on back doubles down on appetite appeal.

Infographic-inspired typography showcases almond's nutritional x-factor, balanced by an organic wordmark inspired by linguini itself.

"Pasta Senza Cazzate" (pasta without BS) keeps one foot in the category with colloquial Italian, signaling our commitment to both flavor and minimalism.



Olipop

07

Olipop Launches ‘The Feel Good Soda’ Platform, Complete With a Refreshed Identity and Sonic Signature

By **Charlotte Beach** · Published on thedieline.com, May 19, 2026

IN BRIEF

- Olipop gets a refined new look courtesy of Collins as part of its new creative platform launch
- “The feel good soda” platform also includes a new ad campaign and the brand’s first-ever sonic signature

Sometimes a brand comes along that carves out an entirely new category. Olipop did just that with its launch back in 2018, essentially kickstarting the functional soda craze along with Poppi. As pioneers in this space, Olipop is keen on remaining at the top, setting the industry standard for quality and innovation as a feel-good soda.

Not content to rest on their laurels, Olipop has just released a new creative platform called “The feel good soda,” featuring a new visual identity, refreshed packaging, a sonic signature, and a national ad campaign.

“We wanted the new visual identity to do three things more clearly than before: create better clarity across our portfolio, make our functional benefits easier to understand at a glance, and more fully express who we are as a brand and why we exist,” says Olipop SVP Tara Piper. “At its core, OLIPOP was created to reimagine soda—bringing together the nostalgic experience people love with ingredients and functional benefits that help them feel good. That mission is what drives everything we do, and we wanted the design system to communicate that more intuitively and emotionally from the first moment someone sees it.”

Olipop already had a defined aesthetic from its initial brand rollout, which Piper describes as living at the intersection of nostalgia and nutrition.

“It feels bold, joyful, and unmistakably like soda, while still signaling the science-backed benefits behind the formulation. That balance is central to who we are as a brand,” she adds. While this original look hit the mark, there was room for enhancements as Olipop grew.





For the first time since its initial release, Olipop has redesigned its packaging across its 6g Fiber Line, including 12 oz cans, Multi-Packs, Sleek Cans, MINIs, and Variety Packs, in partnership with Collins. The new look isn't a complete overhaul, but more of an elevated version of its original design. "This wasn't about reinventing the brand. It was about expressing it more clearly and confidently," says Piper, "so as more people discover Olipop, they immediately understand not just what it is, but what makes it feel different."

With subtle tweaks like adding a white outline around flavor icons to make them pop, a richer color palette, and removing visual noise, the redesign thoughtfully amplifies the brand's existing elements. The new visual style features hand-drawn illustrations inspired by the late '60s and early '70s to bring a human touch to the packaging. "Beyond the can itself, this was a broader visual identity evolution," says Piper. "We wanted the system to feel bolder, more joyful, and more expressive of the Olipop spirit. The refreshed design introduces a more human, playful visual language that carries across every format, from single cans to Multi-Packs and Variety Packs."

"That aesthetic is important because it helps instantly communicate what makes Olipop different," she continues. "As more brands enter the functional space, our design reinforces our role in defining the category: Delivering a soda experience that feels both nostalgic and modern, delicious and functional, familiar and feel good."



These design refinements also drive distinct visual separation between product formats across the wider Olipop range and more clearly highlight each flavor, ingredient benefits, and other key product information for a more intuitive consumer experience.

"One of the biggest changes is a bold new color palette that creates clearer separation between product formats, making it easier for shoppers to quickly distinguish our 6g Fiber Line from our original 9g Fiber Line," Piper elaborates. "We also streamlined the can architecture to bring key nutritional benefits—especially high fiber—more prominently to the front."

"What makes Olipop different is easier to understand at a glance," she adds.





The wider "The feel good soda" creative platform kicks off with a national advertisement entitled, "A Good Start," using animation and vibrant imagery to depict the "ripple of goodness" a single sip of Olipop can inspire. The ad also features Olipop's first-ever sonic signature: A modern reimagining of the beloved "Lollipop" song (originally sung by the Chordettes), interpreted by Zinadelphia with playfully updated lyrics for the brand.



The updated Olipop design is proof that reinvention isn't necessary if the original look is plenty strong. With a solid foundation, subtle visual refinement coupled with strategic expansions to the brand universe is all that's needed to stay at the top.

"This wasn't about becoming something new," concludes Piper. "It was about expressing what we've already been building in a clearer, more cohesive, and more human way." Ultimately, being a "feel good soda" has always been in the brand's DNA, and the updated visual identity reflects that purpose in a more comprehensive fashion, bringing taste, function, nostalgia, and feeling in a way that's not only instantly recognizable, but utterly Olipop.





Bar Keepers Friend

08

JKR's Refresh For Bar Keeper's Friend Adds Some Much-Needed Shimmer and Shine

By **Rudy Sanchez** · Published on thedieline.com, April 9, 2026

IN BRIEF

- Bar Keeper's Friend partnered with design agency JKR to execute a thoughtful brand refresh that elevates the 144-year-old heritage brand and shifts the product's positioning from a "tough-job" specialty cleaner to an everyday household staple, utilizing a refined visual identity that balances its utilitarian roots with a contemporary, premium look.
- The redesign retains the signature gold metallic can while introducing sophisticated "before-and-after" illustrations and a modernized logo. Key design details include smoothed-out typography and a new "sparkle apostrophe" star, reinforcing the brand's efficacy and "countertop jewelry" appeal.

It may be called Bar Keeper's Friend, but since its launch in 1882, consumers have found uses for the scouring powder beyond bars and kitchens. The cleaning brand's many products are useful throughout the home, as they can safely clean nearly any surface. It's one of those utilitarian household staples that has proven so effective that it's built a loyal customer base.

Recently, Bar Keeper's Friend enlisted the talented folks at JKR to polish up its branding. Rather than upending its visual identity, the cleaning company opted for a thoughtful revision that repositions the cult favorite as an everyday cleanser rather than one reserved for tough jobs.

"Bar Keeper's Friend came to us with a focused and thoughtful ask: modernize the brand without disrupting the trust and familiarity people already associate with it," says Apirat Infahsaeng, creative director at JKR. "With a product that carries deep credibility and a long heritage, this wasn't about reinvention. It was about elevating what already existed and bringing greater relevance on shelf and in culture, while honoring the brand's history."



For the most part, the logo wasn't drastically altered. The saloon-door-inspired shape is refined, with smoothed-out curves, and the white border removed. The slab serif typography feels familiar, though a four-pointed star is added between the "R" and "S" in "Keepers" to serve as an apostrophe. The addition of that star is almost like a nod to Bar Keeper's ability to make stuff shiny and cleaned within an inch of its life. "The sparkle apostrophe is one of our favorite moments. It's a bit of a wink, something you might not notice right away. It works so naturally with the type, and it feels like it was always meant to be there," Infahsaeng says. "It captures both the spirit of the brand and the satisfaction of the product experience in a single,

thoughtful gesture.”



“We introduced a few new elements that speak more to the product experience,” Infahsaeng adds. “Specifically, the satisfying before-and-after moment when a surface has been freshly cleaned. This is expressed through the wordmark’s new sparkle-shaped apostrophe, and the use of high-shine surface renders that help visualize the end result of using Bar Keeper’s Friend’s products.”



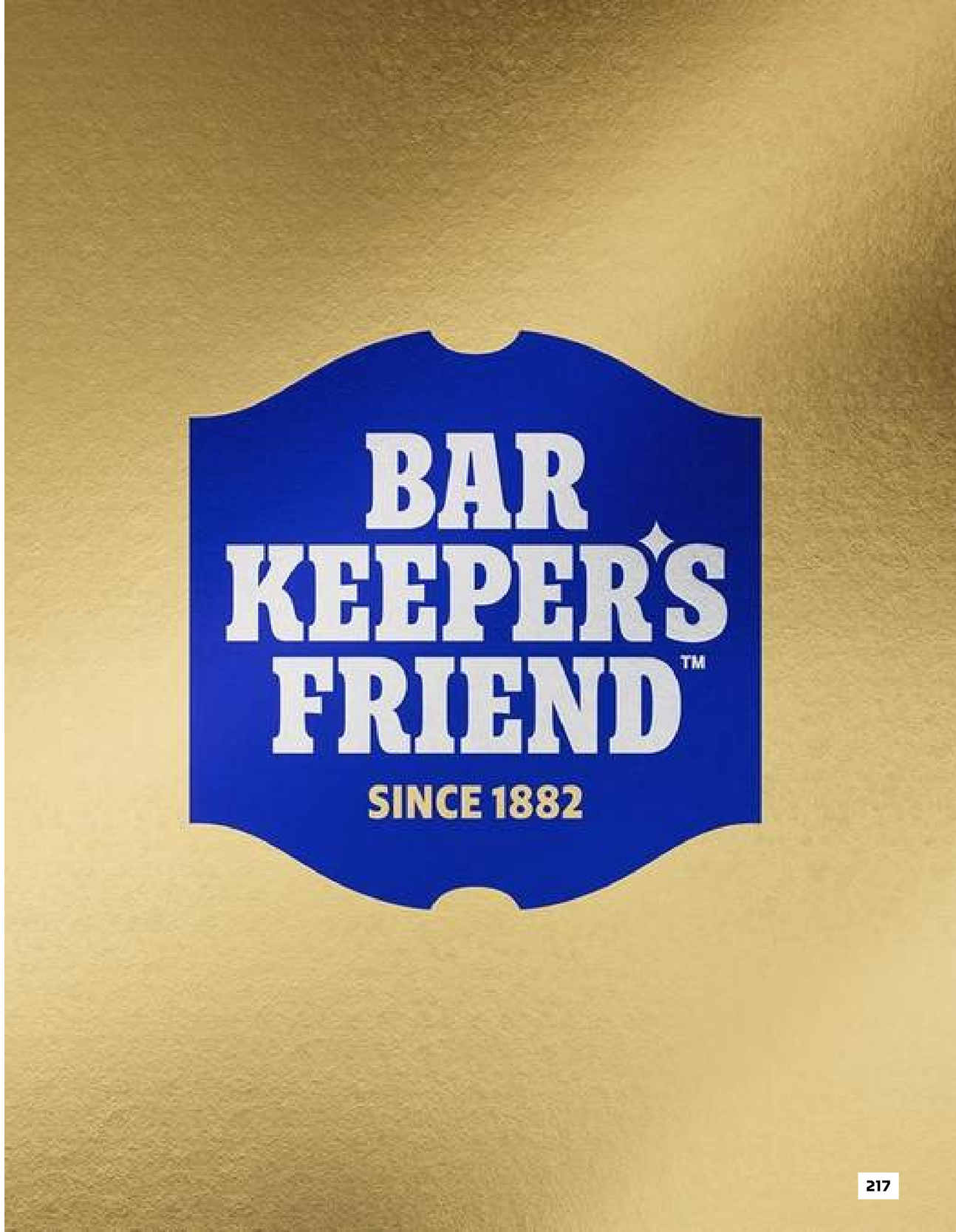
As with the logo, JKR kept many of the packaging’s recognizable elements in place, with a few modifications. The color is now a deeper gold with a metal flake finish. Aspirational before-and-after illustrations dominate the bottom of the products, with items like sinks showing the left side dirty and the right side clean, giving Bar Keeper’s packaging a less infomercial feel. Some might be saddened by the loss of the 2 am Billy Mays-style kitsch of the previous packaging, but overall, the update pleasantly contemporizes the presentation.

Still, this was no fixer-upper teardown. “The gold can was a non-negotiable. It’s one of the brand’s most iconic and distinctive assets, especially in a category where metallic finishes are often avoided for cost reasons. We saw an opportunity to lean into this, extending metallic cues across the system to reinforce its ‘countertop jewelry’ positioning,” Apirat says.



New copy along the top reads, “Once Tried, Always Trusted,” highlighting Bar Keeper’s Friend’s long-standing, positive reputation among consumers. The evolved packaging looks good enough to proudly keep out on countertops, letting customers show off how serious they are about cleaning. “One of the central tensions was balancing beauty with efficacy, making something that feels beautiful and elevated while still reading as hard-working and effective,” Infahsaeng says. “In this category, many of the conventional cues that signal performance, like big violators, oversized type, and bright color, aren’t necessarily beautiful, and they didn’t feel authentic to Bar Keeper’s Friend.”

Bar Keeper’s Friend is the kind of brand that can hold onto dated branding longer than most, thanks to the product’s reputation and 144 years of history. Still, JKR elevates the packaging to something of a countertop crown jewel that’s not only trustworthy but a deep-cleaning workhorse.



Paulie's

09

Vocabulary Gives New Cider Brand Paulie's Old School Cool

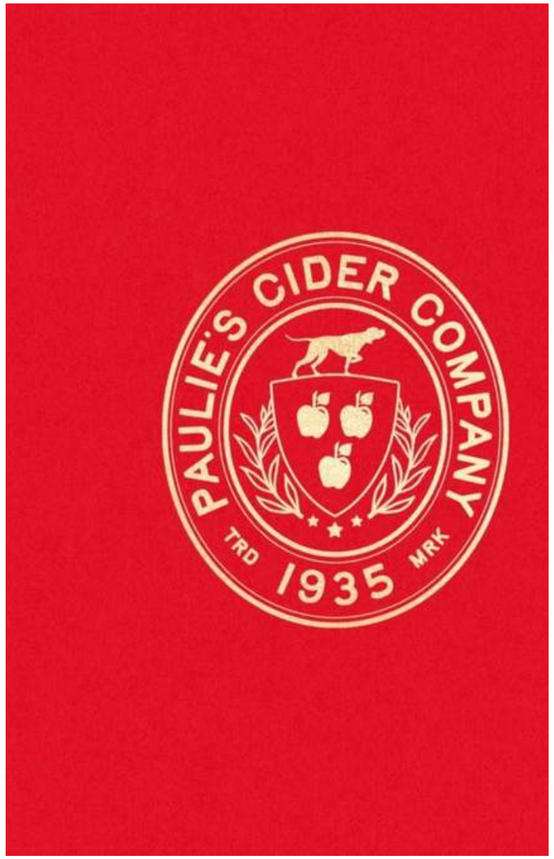
By **Rudy Sanchez** · Published on thedieline.com, January 5, 2026

Brand heritage is, of course, something which takes time, often decades, to earn. Because there needs to be some element of history that's racked up on the ol' brand odometer.

But visually, it can be much easier to emulate, and regardless of how nascent a brand is, when executed well, it can create some intrigue and interest, and tie into the brand's history before launch.

One such brand is Paulie's Cider. The branding and packaging, by design studio Vocabulary, manages to feel classic and timeless, even though it's fresh to market. That retro-styled identity is accomplished through a smart color palette of cream white paired with either black or blue. Also adding to that old-school charm is the red wordmark in a classy script that looks right at home at a local watering hole, along with a similar treatment of the "America's Original Gold" copy at the top of the cans, in a golden hue.





The same gold is used for the classic logo, consisting of a hunting dog sitting atop a shield adorned with three whole apples surrounded by wreaths. The emblem also reads "1935" along the bottom, which is obviously not the founding year of the Paulie's brand; instead, it's a nod to the birth year of Cooper Allen's grandfather, the founder's namesake.



"The brand traces its roots back to Cooper's grandfather, who began crafting cider in Virginia decades ago as a passion project rooted in family, land, and tradition," says Peter Baston, founder and executive creative director at Vocabulary. "What started as a small batch recipe made for friends and family slowly became a ritual that brought generations together. That original cider was passed down to Cooper's father and eventually to Cooper himself, evolving over time but always staying true to its core. After his grandfather passed away, Cooper felt a responsibility to keep that legacy alive. Reviving the cider was not just about creating a product, but about honoring a family story and ensuring that something deeply personal could continue to be shared."

Vocabulary's branding and packaging design imbues Paulie's with a classic charm that's uncommon in a freshly minted brand. There's a coziness and familiarity to the visual identity that's not found in the larger hard cider brands, nor often encountered in microbrewed ciders. Paulie's branding sits in a sweet spot among hard ciders, allowing it to stand out.

"From the beginning, it was imperative that the design carried the weight of that tradition forward. We wanted the can to feel like a time capsule, evoking a specific era while still feeling relevant and contemporary," Baston says. "The goal was to strike a balance between nostalgia and modernity through thoughtful use of color, typography, and layout. Every element was considered to create a sense of heritage without feeling dated, allowing the brand to honor its past while confidently stepping into the present."

Paulie's Cider is set to launch in 2026.



Strangers Candies

Auge Design

10

Strangers Candies is a Sweet Treat for People Who Like a Little Mystery

By **Chloe Cordover** · Published on thedieline.com, March 24, 2026

STUDIO Auge Design

I don't know if I've ever come across a candy brand that so elegantly dares you to take the risk. Sure, sour candies do it in their own right, but with Strangers Candies, the team at Auge Design builds a visual identity around curiosity and unpredictability. The typography is sharp with a slightly condensed structure, giving the name a confident presence.

The use of blurred and grainy patterns that sweep across each pack, almost like distorted digital textures or abstract heat maps, hints at the unexpected flavor combinations within. These visuals feel inspired by experimental print processes and glitch aesthetics. There's a real sense of mystery, suggesting that each variety holds something worth discovering.

I love how the design moves away from sweetness as a visual cue and instead leans into complexity and exploration. It reflects a growing trend toward more mature, flavor-driven confectionery, where design becomes part of the discovery experience.

Do you dare to take candy from Strangers®? A spiced candy that challenges what "candy" really means. It's pure flavor. Never boring. A grown-up, wholesome pleasure. It's all about unknown combinations and never-tasted-before pairings to tickle your tastebuds.



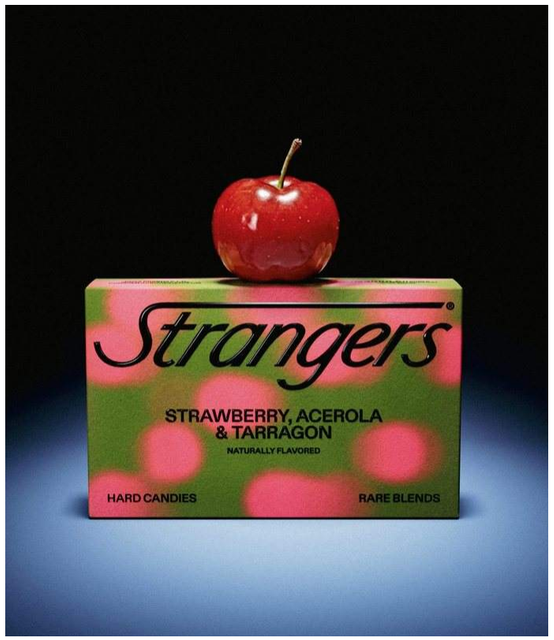
Each pack is literally coded with its unique blends. Blurred patterns and grainy finishes create friction and texture, giving the brand a distinctly tactile presence. The patterns are a physical hint of the rare blends inside.

The tone of voice is bold and unexpected. The pleasure is all yours.

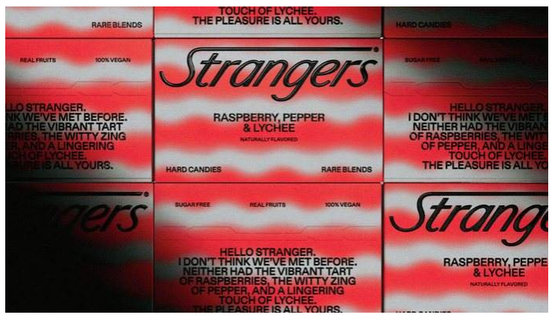

Strangers
RASPBERRY, PEPPER
& LYCHEE
HARD CANDIES
RARE BLENDS


Strangers
MANGO, COFFEE
& GUARANA
MINT, MELON
& MELISSA


HELLO STRANGER.
I DON'T THINK WE'VE MET BEFORE.
I'VE GOT UNKNOWN COMBINATIONS
TO ENTICE YOU WITH AND
NEVER-BEFORE-TASTED PAIRINGS
TO TICKLE YOUR TASTEBUDS.
THE PLEASURE IS ALL YOURS.
Strangers
DARE TO TAKE CANDY
FROM STRANGERS.
HARD CANDIES
RARE BLENDS


Strangers
STRAWBERRY, ACEROLA
& TARRAGON
NATURALLY FLAVORED
HARD CANDIES
RARE BLENDS


Strangers
MANGO, COFFEE
& GUARANA
HARD CANDIES
RARE BLENDS


RARE BLENDS
TOUCH OF LYCHEE.
THE PLEASURE IS ALL YOURS.
Strangers
RASPBERRY, PEPPER
& LYCHEE
NATURALLY FLAVORED
HARD CANDIES
RARE BLENDS
HELLO STRANGER.
I DON'T THINK WE'VE MET BEFORE.
NEITHER HAD THE VIBRANT TART
OF RASPBERRIES, THE WITTY ZING
OF PEPPER, AND A LINGERING
TOUCH OF LYCHEE.
THE PLEASURE IS ALL YOURS.


DARE TO TAKE CANDY FROM STRANGERS.
HELLO STRANGER.
I DON'T THINK WE'VE MET BEFORE.
NEITHER HAD THE VIBRANT TART
OF RASPBERRIES, THE WITTY ZING
OF PEPPER, AND A LINGERING
TOUCH OF LYCHEE.
THE PLEASURE IS ALL YOURS.

Honey Department

Foreign National

11

Honey Department's Brand Identity Lays It On Thick (and From an Aluminum Tube)

By **Rudy Sanchez** · Published on thedieline.com, March 9, 2026

PHOTOGRAPHER Graham Pollack BRANDING Foreign National

IN BRIEF

- Honey Department is a new honey brand that, unlike conventional liquid honey, is thick and can be packaged in an aluminum tube.
- The brand identity, courtesy Honey Department's founder Noah Phillips' creative studio Foreign National, is an irreverent lampoon of the corporate world.

When we think of honey packaging, bear-shaped bottles come to mind. Unless you're like me, and you get a Costco-sized container, which takes months to go through. In the meantime, it crystallizes and runs down the sides.

Obviously, not all honey comes in cute grizzly jars, and a new entrant into the category, Honey Department's sweet stuff, doesn't either. In fact, Honey Department sells "thick honey" and packages it in a squeezable aluminum tube.

"Thick Honey begins as conventional liquid honey, then is slowly and intentionally crystallized to form micro-crystals that create a smooth, stable, and luxuriously thick texture," explains Noah Phillips, founder of Honey Department. "The result is often referred to as 'creamed honey.' Once thickened, it won't harden or get crusty in the cupboard. Conventional liquid honey, by contrast, is often processed at high temperatures or blended. This shortcut compromises texture, dulls flavor, and destroys the natural enzymes and beneficial properties."

Thanks to think honey's consistent texture, it can go into a tube, squeezed out, and onto everything from toast to yogurt, or into beverages like hot tea, without creating a sticky mess. Additionally, Honey Department's liquid gold is 100% raw, so its natural enzymes and nutrients are preserved, and single-sourced from a Central Mexican co-op and processed at a family-owned apiary in Texas.

Packaging and branding design is by founder Phillips' creative studio, Foreign National.











Honey Department could have gone with a plastic tube, but the brand has opted for an aluminum one instead. Honey Department says the plastic cap is also recyclable, but whether you can toss it in your curbside bin will depend on where you live.

“The aluminum tube was always the goal. Honey needed a format that was easier and more inviting to use every day. Glass jars require utensils. Plastic squeeze bottles drip and get sticky,” Phillips says. “The tube offered precision, portability, control, and real differentiation in a confusing aisle of monotony. We chose unfinished aluminum specifically because it feels utilitarian and unprecious. It has the look of a material that’s there to do a job. And there’s an honesty to it: raw honey in raw aluminum.”



Phillips adds that the tube isn’t a new idea, as it has a decades-long history across categories such as pharmaceuticals, industrial uses, and food pastes and spreads. Honey Department isn’t inventing a new behavior, Phillips says, it’s simply borrowing a proven one and applying it to honey.

Branding for the Honey Department is a bit surreal. There’s a play on absurdity that’s defiant and attention-grabbing. Like using old footage of a calf, a dog, and a chicken eating waffles to point out that the brand’s honey goes great on waffles, or portraits of older men wearing beekeeping hoods.

The packaging has the same sort of attitude. The raw aluminum is a nod to raw honey, but there’s a deeper level of defiant corporate inspiration as well. A type-forward approach was chosen because, like the pure honey, there was a desire to omit anything unnecessary.



“The logo uses Exposure, a variable typeface that’s thickened and adapted to reflect the Thick Honey,” Phillips says. “There’s also a reference to departmental stamping: the kind of bold, no-nonsense type you’d find on official documents, field guides, or government-issue materials. We were drawn to typefaces with presence but not too much personality. SPAM and Cooper Black, nostalgic and completely familiar. Legible from across a grocery aisle, but with enough warmth to not feel cold.”

Supporting typefaces such as Alternate Gothic and IBM Plex were chosen along the same lines. These are typefaces found in things like corporate manuals, field documentation, and institutional print. Honey Department picked these typefaces because they aren’t trying to look interesting, and the brand was looking for that sort of restraint.

The one graphical flourish is the series of dots that appear on the packaging and throughout Honey Department’s visual identity. “We call the yellow dots our Baldessari Bees,” Phillips says. “They gather, swarm, and randomly land, attracted to the honey. In a design system built on simplicity and structure, but they’re the organic element that loosens everything up.”

The overall execution is a kind of business world parody that’s as sweet and thick as the brand’s honey. “It’s all rooted in corporate irreverence. Taking the visual language of official use seriously, and putting it somewhere nobody expected it. The right kind of wrong,” Phillips says.

Honey Department finds a way to innovate in the category by processing the ingredient, turning it into a solution to many common problems with conventional honey, and then packaging it in functional packaging. What’s more, the branding direction lampoons corporate culture and, by mocking it, draws attention to the purity of its product in a playful way.

Honey Department is available for order on its website.



Sprite

12

Sprite Seeks to Reclaim its Edge With a Global Redesign Rooted in Culture

By **Abbey Bamford** · Published on thedieline.com, March 20, 2026

IN BRIEF

- The 2026 Sprite redesign, a collaboration between forpeopleand Coca-Cola's global design team, marks the return of the historic lemon-lime "Lymon" symbol.
- Modernizing the "It's That Fresh" platform, the new visual identity system utilizes high-contrast green-and-white palettes, angled italic typography, and layered compositions.
- Sprite's global refresh includes a new sonic identity developed with producer Mustard.

On a cobbled London street in the trendy borough of Hackney, a green glow spilled out from beneath the doors of The Combustion Chamber—a former Victorian power station turned industrial venue. It wasn't a rave, as you might expect, but the site where Sprite unveiled its latest redesign.

Few projects in brand and packaging attract as much attention as those tied to the world's biggest soft drink companies, so the large-scale event felt fitting. It turns out the venue choice was very intentional too, as it links to energy, which is something the brand is now doubling down on.

Inside, the experience unfolded around a central basketball court and a stage hosting live DJs and performances. Around the edges was a truck handing out McDonald's spicy nuggets, a grocery-style stall stacked with lemons, limes, and heat-heavy snacks like Takis and Tabasco, a live customization station personalising basketball jerseys, and a bar serving Sprite cocktails and mocktails.

It can only be described as a living brand world that spans music, food, fashion, and sport. Everywhere you looked, you could see applications of Sprite's new identity, born from a collaboration between the creative studio forpeople and Coca-Cola's global design team.

This wasn't actually the first "Sprite FreshFest." It debuted in New York in 1985, proving the brand's longstanding connection with music, sport, and street culture. Sprite even claims to be one of the first brands to associate itself with hip-hop. Today, that legacy continues through renewed global partnerships with the NBA and EuroLeague, as well as ongoing collaborations with athletes like Anthony Edwards.

"Fresh doesn't just refer to the product," says Santiago Iturralde, President of Global Category, Sparkling Flavors. "It's about people who have a fresh take on their craft, whether that's music, sports, or fashion."



There was even a new sonic identity developed with producer Mustard, along with performances by hip-hop artists using Sprite sounds, making it a truly sensory experience.

As for the redesign, Coca-Cola Company and forpeople's approach doesn't drastically reinvent anything, though it seeks to reintroduce a bit of Sprite's edge that's softened in recent years.

In 2022, the brand unveiled a global refresh led by Turner Duckworth that streamlined the system, removing elements such as the starburst and Lymon symbol, and standardizing packaging globally. It prioritized clarity, consistency, and scalability, which seems like a no-brainer for a brand operating at Sprite's scale, but in doing so, it's possible that it stripped back some of the distinctiveness that had historically given Sprite a bit of bite.



"I think the previous agency did an amazing job of creating something simple and pure that really helped to elevate the brand, but that depiction of flavor and refreshment needed to come through stronger," says Archie Colvin, Creative Director at forpeople. "A key part of this redesign was building on what they did and adding more."

Central to that approach is a renewed focus on Sprite's most iconic assets. The wordmark has been repositioned as the dominant feature, set vertically to create a stronger front-of-pack presence. Alongside it, the historic lemon-lime "Lymon" symbol makes its triumphant return, with some subtle refinements.

"One of the key things for the main markets was that flavor wasn't coming through strong enough, so the Lymon was a good way to bring that back," Colvin explains.



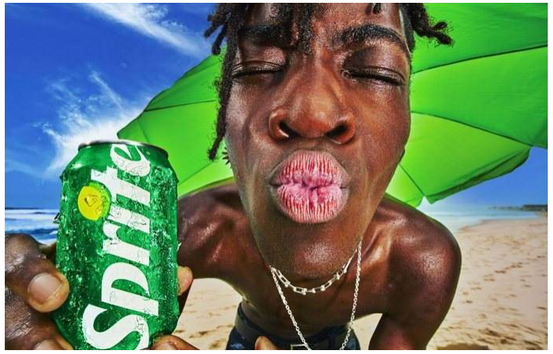
Sprite's familiar green-and-white palette has also been amplified through higher contrast and saturation to increase visibility both on shelf and across digital touchpoints. The new brand certainly isn't minimal, but it does favor reduction and emphasis over complexity. Layouts have been simplified, removing secondary elements so the core brand cues can "pop" and do more of the work.

Joshua Schwarber, Senior Global Director of Design at The Coca-Cola Company, adds: "Sprite is the number one lemon-lime beverage in the world—it's everywhere. This is about sharpening our most distinctive assets to show up consistently and reclaiming iconicity, boldness, and intensity. We're reframing refreshment and the brand's edge."



Of course, packaging is part of the revamp, but we can also expect to see a much broader rollout of the new global platform, "It's That Fresh."

The visual language draws heavily on the cultural spaces Sprite has long inhabited, such as music, basketball, and streetwear. "It's about making sure authenticity comes through," says Tim Blackburn, Associate Director at forpeople. "You can see with the photography that we have real people with attitude, and it's fashion forward."



Typography and layout also suggest a sense of movement with angled italic forms and layered compositions.

Overall, the system just feels a little less static. It's been designed to move across formats, from cans and bottles to social content and live events, which we saw firsthand at last night's launch.

While Sprite's 2022 redesign was about creating a consistent global system, this 2026 update is about making that system work harder.



Coca-Cola's design team and forpeople carried out a somewhat subtle but necessary recalibration, sharpening the wordmark, restoring the Lymon, amplifying color, and stripping back clutter. The brand certainly feels more self-assured as a result.

In the fight for attention and recognition, it's actually easier for brands to hit the reinvention button, but standing out for the sake of it will only ever result in short-term gain. For a brand of Sprite's scale, sold in more than 180 markets and embedded in decades of cultural history, even small changes done really well carry significant weight.

In other words, if it ain't broke, don't fix it—unless you can perfect it.



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OPINION WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2026 No. 01

Jessica Hische, Meta's Muse, and the Ethical Landmines of Design

This past Wednesday, lettering artist, designer, and author Jessica Hische took to Threads to announce that she had worked alongside Meta's team to create the icon and logotype for their agentic AI, Muse.

By **Bill McCool** Published on thedieline.com 5,078 READS IN 2026



The following article originally appeared in one of our newsletters, Side Salad. To read more, subscribe on Substack or sign up for a free DIELINE account to receive it in your inbox every week.

***

A few days ago, I got a message from an old college friend asking about a classmate that I had overlapped with who founded an AI company. He was interviewing for a gig. He's a writer, too, and he wanted to know what I thought of this guy. And while I didn't really know him and he seemed like a mostly nice guy in college, there were still plenty of red flags, not least of which was founding a company that could potentially upend an industry and put lots of people out of work.

Of course, my friend understands all of this. It's not something that really even needs to be said. But he also has a family and debt. Which is to say, I get it. To be honest, I don't know many people who aren't struggling right now. There are ethical landmines everywhere, and each of us must decide who is worth working for, despite them perhaps being a very bad actor.

And for some of us, those are some mighty big compromises that we have to make.

This past Wednesday, lettering artist, designer, and author Jessica Hische took to Threads to announce that she had worked alongside Meta's team to create the icon and logotype for their agentic AI, Muse. Acknowledging that people would be "mad because it's AI and Meta," Hische sought to explain at least why she had taken the gig in the first place. Obviously, she took some flak for working with Meta. While plenty of comments voiced support, just as many chastised her for even considering the project, which I can mostly sum up as a general narrative thread of "How could you?"

FWIW, it's pretty rich to criticize someone for working with Meta while you're very much using a Meta product to issue said criticism. But I digress.

What's curious here is that I can't recall a time when I've seen a designer simultaneously announce a project while also seemingly apologizing for taking the gig in the first place (her newsletter about Muse had a subject line of "Don't Be Mad at Me"). Transparency is good, but perhaps she knew that if she had stayed quiet about working with Meta, it would have gotten out eventually. Who can say?

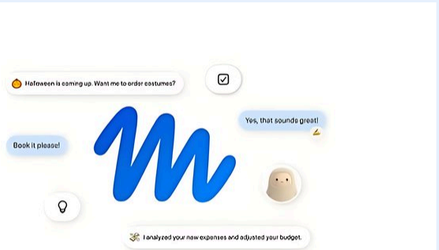
In her Threads post, she talks about her own complicated feelings on AI, in addition to why she chose to work on the project in the first place. She also mentions having worked with other people at Meta before and having a good experience, but also the need to pay her own employees (and help a pregnant employee with a health plan) and keep her various projects going, not to mention that she hadn't taken on a big brand as a client in some time.

What's most striking about the series of posts is how defensive it is from the jump. Certainly, by announcing the work you're going to garner some attention (whether that's good attention is debatable), but her need to defend it is unmistakable. We can certainly comb through the many justifications here and critique each decision point (like, I dunno, find a better, bigger client to work with?), but I can also say what I told my friend the other day. I get it.

And while most people were keen to point out that Hische is supporting an AI product, I can point to a few recent headlines that are equally troublesome and genuinely merit turning down the work.

For folks who have followed this newsletter, you likely have a sense of where I land on a lot of these things. We cover design and branding, but in our own way, we also cover the brands themselves, and I have always been of the belief that, on some level,

most brands are problematic. That Tolstoy line about how each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way? You can say the same for brands—they can be uniquely terrible and evil in their own miserable, shitty ways, too. Ultimately, there's no ethical consumption under capitalism. It's nearly impossible to keep our values intact, and the road to a career in art or writing or design is littered with a fuck-ton of compromises.



But I think about these things a lot, and I would wager Hische does, too.

The thing I always tell people is that I'm very pro-designer and anti-brand. Which, I'm sure, a lot of people will think is complete horseshit. I wouldn't blame them, but I write about brand design for a living. It's absolutely complicated and compromising. I've also published an immense amount of shit in these pages about Bezos, Musk, and ol' Zuck because, frankly, they are genuinely awful people, and they certainly don't care about you.

That said, I reckon most of us have a few clients with checkered pasts on our resume.

I've written about this before, but Jeff Bezos has a little bit to do with me being able to afford college, because in addition to some scholarships I got through my mother's employer, I worked at Amazon's first non-Seattle warehouse in 1998, where, upon being hired, I received Amazon stock as an employee benefit—stock that I sold so that I could pay tuition. Now, this was 1998. This wasn't the Lex Luthor Bezos eventually channeled, but it was still the same man putting mom-and-pop bookstores out of business.

It was also incredibly hard, soul-crushing warehouse work that was often physically taxing, and your level of productivity was constantly monitored. Overtime wasn't mandatory, but, you know, it was strongly encouraged. It wasn't fun, rest assured. Millions of people have walked through those warehouse doors, and I can guarantee you that most of them considered it a toxic environment.

If you look close enough, there is rot everywhere. And boy howdy do we have a lot of bad systems and reprehensible people that all of us must engage with daily. Ethical landmines and moral quandaries abound. And for every designer who shits on working with someone like Meta or Amazon, I can guarantee that your portfolio contains a few doozies as well.

Oh, and before I forget, let me remind you that I am writing to you from Substack.

Regardless, each of us must tangle with the moral complexities of who we choose to work with. And while the bills need paying, we also have to deal with the consequences of our decisions. But you certainly can't take umbrage with anyone for finding fault with you for having done the work in the first place. Whether you decide to work with ExxonMobil, big tobacco, Starbucks, or, yes, a Mark Zuckerberg-owned company, it's on you to decide if it's worth the potential fallout.

My guess is that most of us would do it.

I don't have a good note to end on here. There's no tidy conclusion that I can reach that will explain any of this away or put any of this in a good light. I can only tell you that these are things I wrestle with, too. I don't have an answer, nor can I toss off an easy joke to make any of this better.

But do I get it? Absolutely.



-30- **No. 01** Jessica Hische and Meta's Muse

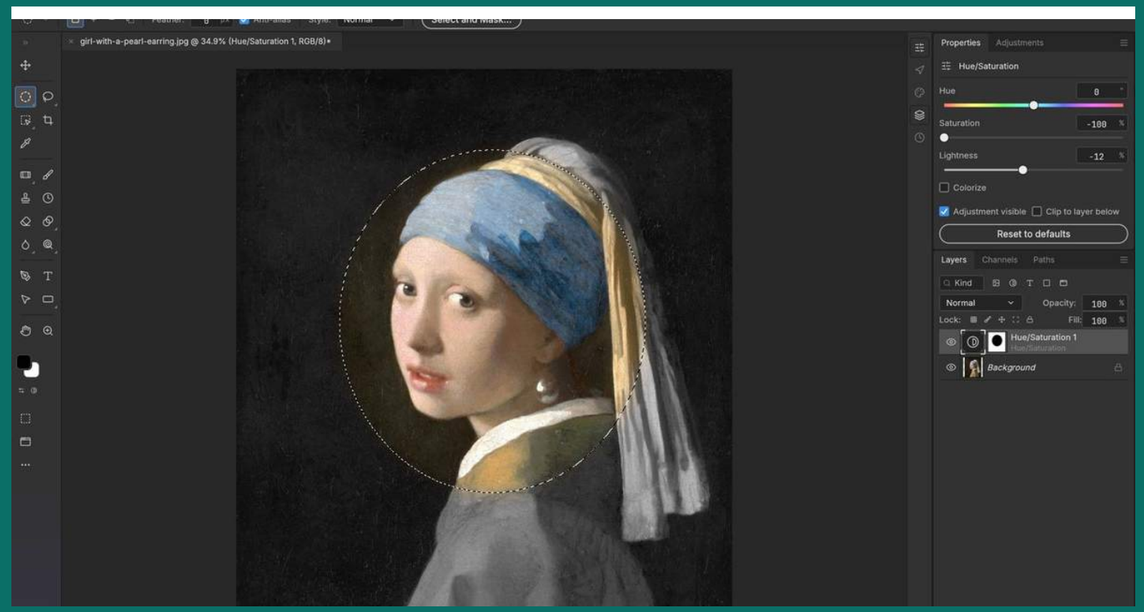
NEWS THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2026 No. 02

ArtCraft Launches an Open-Source, AI-Powered Alternative to Adobe's Creative Cloud

A new open-source project called ArtCraft recently launched, promising to replace Adobe's popular Photoshop, Illustrator, Premiere, Lightroom, Acrobat, After Effects, and InDesign.

By **Rudy Sanchez** Published on thedieline.com

3,634 READS IN 2026



IN BRIEF

- Frustrated by Adobe's subscription model, ArtCraft is a new vibe-coded and open-source project that aims to replace the software maker's Creative Cloud.
- While Adobe has promoted AI tools across its suite of programs for the last few years, ArtCraft's developers are now using artificial intelligence in an attempt to erode its market share.

A new open-source project called ArtCraft recently launched, promising to replace Adobe's popular Photoshop, Illustrator, Premiere, Lightroom, Acrobat, After Effects, and InDesign. The ArtCraft suite is available as native applications on Windows, Mac, and Linux, plus browser versions of PhotoCraft, VectorCraft, LightCraft, PdfCraft, EffectCraft, and DesignCraft.

Software engineer Brandon Thomas seeks to match Adobe's software by year's end. He is motivated by a common concern among the San Jose behemoth's customers: expensive forever subscriptions for the applications they rely on to make a living. Thomas shares Adobe's passion for AI and vibe-coded ArtCraft, using Anthropic's Claude. Unsurprisingly, AI features are baked into ArtCraft, just like Adobe's AI is integrated into Creative Cloud.

"We're making everything Adobe makes OPEN SOURCE. Please repost this to spread awareness. Goal by EO2026: Adobe Fully Open Source. No more subscription cancellation fees. Software you OWN," Thomas posted on LinkedIn.

ArtCraft is free, though users can buy subscriptions that include AI credits, starting at $8 a month. The subscriptions also fund further development of ArtCraft.

Thomas' ArtCraft isn't the first to come after Adobe. Most notably, Canva made Affinity free last year, while designer Stuart Semple announced a Kickstarter for a software toolbox creatives would own, Abode, in 2023. Semple's project blew past its target launch and was canceled, but it was ultimately rebranded as NIVA. It's still in development and currently in beta.

So far, though, none of these contenders for the creative software crown has dethroned Adobe. For as much as creatives grouse over Creative Cloud subscriptions, not enough of them have jumped ship to change course in the creative software space. Sometimes, it seems safer to stick with the devil you know, and taking the effort to learn or make a living with new vibe-coded software is a difficult proposition for many.

Still, the promise of no subscriptions or cancellation fees is certainly a tantalizing one. While it remains to be seen whether ArtCraft can seize the Adobe crown, some folks may be ready to give it a go.



OPINION TUESDAY, JUNE 9, 2026

Did Pirate's Booty Just Walk the Plank With Its Latest Refresh?

Pirate's Booty just got its biggest rebrand since 1987, courtesy of Pearlfisher. We're weighing in on whether the CGI-polished new look honors the brand's scrappy origins, or walks the plank on everything that made it iconic.

By **Chloe Cordover** Published on thedieline.com

3,472 READS IN 2026

When a brand you've known since childhood decides to suddenly rebrand after decades of a consistent look, there's only one way to describe it.

Emotional whiplash.

Pirate's Booty, the white cheddar puff that's been tucked into lunch boxes since 1987, just got its most significant rebrand since founder Robert Ehrlich first dreamed it up as a healthier alternative to the junk food of the time.

The new packaging, designed by Pearlfisher (the same agency that recently rebranded SkinnyPop), swapped the hand-drawn scrappiness of the original for a much more modern look.

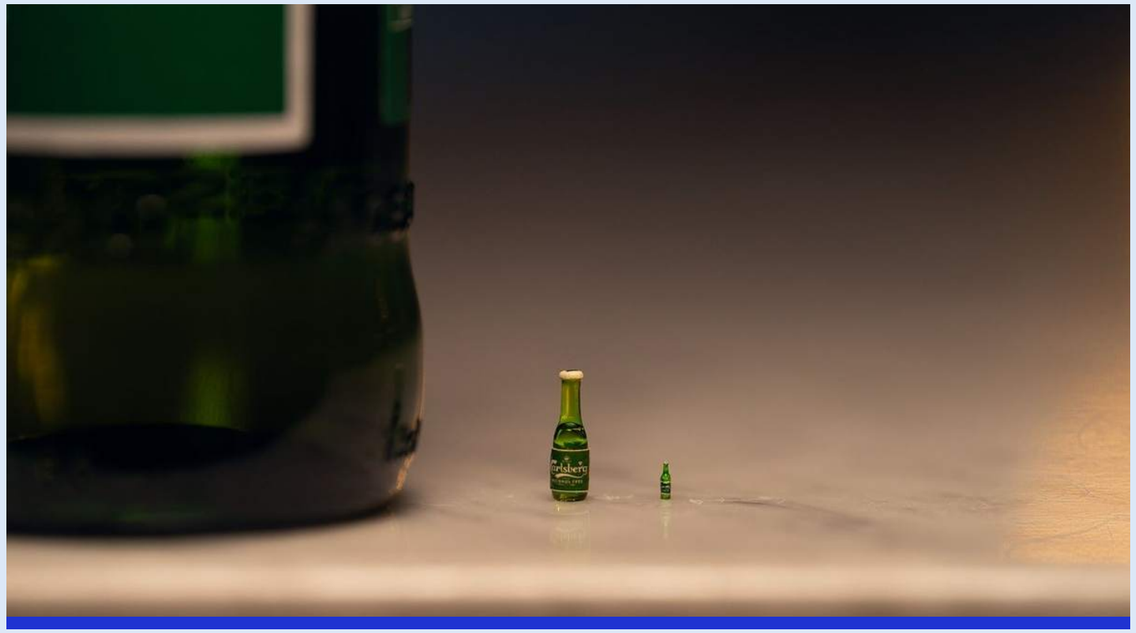
The intuition behind Pirate's Booty rebrand isn't wrong, I'll give it that. Captain Bob and his parrot sidekick, Crunch, look like they could pop off the bag and fit right into an animated movie running at your friendly neighborhood AMC. The logo now feels bolder and chunkier, described by Pearlfisher's executive creative director, Matt Sia, in Fast Company as "carved from wood." The matte bag finish and soft blue-and-tan palette differentiate the brand on the shelf. At first glance, the bag feels entirely more appropriate for today's kids, but is it so new and different that the brand's most loyal customers might not even recognize it as the same Pirate's Booty they grew up with?

As a child of the 90s, the execution here lands in complex territory for me. The new Captain Bob looks like a composite of every other CGI character currently fighting for kids' attention. It's somewhere between the recent Bit-O-Honey and Danimals rebrands, both of which leaned hard into the same rendered, hyper-expressive character style. Both, by the way, received waves of negative feedback.



I had the chance to meet Robert Ehrlich at Expo West a few years back, and he is genuinely one of the quirkiest founders I've ever encountered. Despite selling the brand to Hershey in 2018, there's a detectable contempt in how he talks about where Pirate's Booty has landed since. He intentionally built something odd and rough around the edges. I'd be willing to bet the new packaging might even make him wince.

As brands catapult into modern times, I understand the importance of relating to today's children, but I think there's a lesson in respecting a brand's heritage without losing its soul. I'd be curious to hear which bag, the before or after, a five-year-old would gravitate towards and why, in their own words. That hand-drawn original had personality because it wasn't fine-tuned. The new version is very, very perfected. Whether that's progress or just overly polished depends entirely on what you think a snack brand owes its audience. Is it the kids who are eating it now, or the adults who still remember when it felt like discovering snack treasure, i.e., the same ones who are now likely purchasing it for their kids?



NEWS THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 2026

Swedish Students Break Months-Old World's Smallest Beer Bottle Record

Who knew the race for the world's smallest beer bottle could be so exciting?

By **Rudy Sanchez** Published on thedieline.com

3,448 READS IN 2026

NO. 04 · THE WORLD'S SMALLEST BEER BOTTLE · NEWS

IN BRIEF

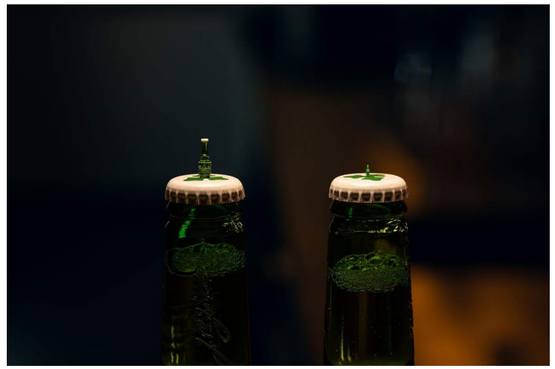
- A student team from the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, Sweden, has broken the record for the world's smallest beer bottle, completing a challenge from brewer Carlsberg.
- The new record-holding bottle is one-third smaller than the previous smallest bottle, and holds only 0.00001057 centiliters of fluid.

Who knew the race for the world's smallest beer bottle could be so exciting?

Last October, miniature artist Åsa Strand, Research Institutes of Sweden (RISE), glassblower Glaskomponent, and Carlsberg collaborated to make the world's smallest beer bottle, about the size of a rice grain. The fully functional bottle was filled with non-alcoholic liquid and was meant to inspire responsible drinking.

Building on last year's breakthrough, Carlsberg challenged teams to go even smaller, aiming to spotlight moderation and innovation.

That record lasted only a few months, as a team of students from the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, Sweden (KTH), broke it with a bottle one-third the size of its predecessor.



The students behind the new bottle are Joel Bovin, Annie Nordström, Lucas Bergman, Linnea Isaksson, and Karin Hallgren. The KTH team started a 3D model of the original 33cl Carsberg bottle and used high-precision 3D printing to determine just how small they could go, which turned out to be 4 millimeters. The newly printed bottle was then cleaned with a microcannula and cured under UV light.

Strand assisted the KTH team with cap and label creation, coloring, and filling the bottle with non-alcoholic beer.

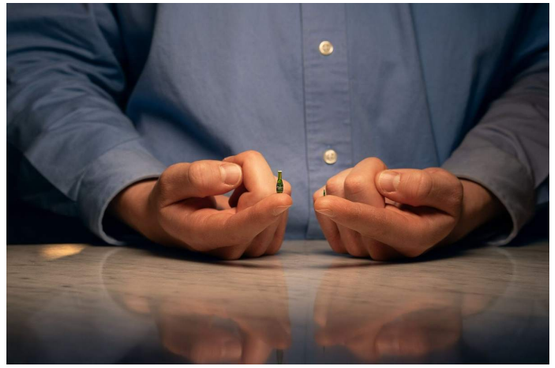


The new bottle holds just 0.00001057 centiliters, so it would take 5.37 million to fill a regular pint.

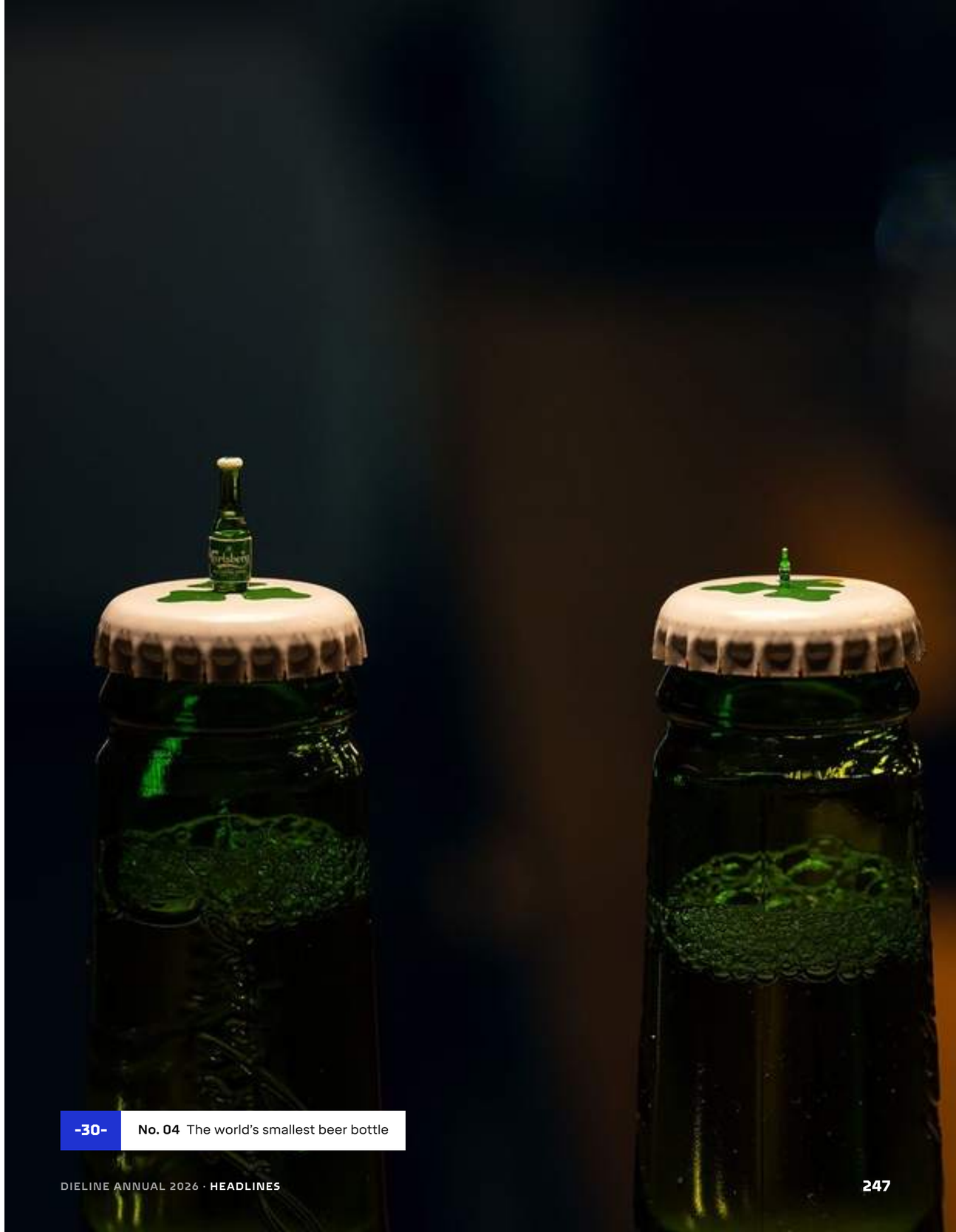
"I'm not surprised that KTH students succeeded in this. Pushing boundaries is part of our culture. We are incredibly proud that the group, through curiosity and determination, broke the record by a wide margin," Lydia Boij, president of the KTH student

union, said via press release.

The winning team will receive prize money, a trip to Copenhagen, and a tour of Carlsberg's research laboratory. Additionally, the new record-holding smallest beer will be publicly exhibited at the Home of Carlsberg museum.







-30- **No. 04** The world's smallest beer bottle



OPINION WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29, 2026

Smoking is Back (and, Yes, It's Still Deadly)

Smoking is back, and it's back in a big way.

By **Charlotte Beach** Published on thedieline.com

2,830 READS IN 2026

Smoking is back, and it's back in a big way.

While it might have seemed like we'd wriggled free from the chokehold cigarettes had on society up through the '90s, just as mid-century modern furniture and vinyl have made a roaring comeback, so too has the cigarette. But unlike Eames chairs and turntables, cigarettes can kill us.

We have seen some of the most enviable, trend-setting young stars in Hollywood, like breakout Heated Rivalry hottie Hudson Williams (who's only 25), smoke so openly and consistently that you would think it's clearly a concerted personal brand choice for their image. Admittedly, Williams does make smoking look very sexy and pretty damn cool, despite our better judgment and what we all know those cigs are actively doing to his hot boy lungs. He's smoking in campaigns for Giorgio Armani, he's smoking on his own time while gallivanting around NYC, LA, and Milan, and he's even smoking throughout his keenly curated Instagram grid, with one post from this January accompanied by the tongue-in-cheek caption, "happy new year. quit smoking ☑️" To which we say, PLEASE!!!

Sadly, Williams is not an isolated case; he is far from the only Millennial or Gen-Z starlet bringing the cigarette-accessory aesthetic back into mainstream "cool" culture. Charli xcx has been puffing on cigs as part of her "fuck it" pop persona for years, which catapulted into the mainstream in 2024 with her Brat Summer campaign. The entire ethos of Brat Summer was built upon the sort of anarchist energy that's embodied by smoking. "She is now the nihilistic, burn-the-world exemplar of a post-modern 'live fast, die young' culture," writes Alexander Larman of Charli for the Telegraph. "Charli and her ilk choose to smoke not because it makes them feel alert—or even because it's stylish and cool—but because it's a deliberate middle-finger-up to received ideas of 'wellness' and 'self-care.'" I'd push back on the idea that Charli isn't smoking because it's cool—that's always part of the smoking calculus, especially as someone so prominently in the public eye. But I agree that the look of smoking invokes an inherent rebelliousness, a subversiveness at the heart of being (read: looking) "cool." And while this has long been the case with cigarettes, this sentiment has only been heightened in the modern era, now that it's common knowledge how dangerous they are. Taboo is precisely what makes something cool.

The cigarette resurrection also feels like a direct response to a vaping culture that's plummeted into cringe territory. Where vaping feels shiny, soulless, and synthetic, smoking cigarettes feels classic, timeless, and raw. Youth culture thirsts for the novelty and mystique of vintage vibes and seeks out nostalgia escapism, so it stands to reason cigarettes would also fall into this category and become enticing to a new generation.

I've also noticed an uptick in young designers I've admired getting in on cigarette culture through their work. Take Nik Bentel Studio's The Loosie Purse, for example, which is described on their site as "a purse that holds exactly one cigarette." The product is clever and fun and objectively adorable, but once again fuels this new version of cigarette obsession. Similarly, cool girl designer and upcycler Gab Bois has shown an affinity for cigarettes in her work, including envisioning AirPods in the likeness of cigs, and creating miniskirts made entirely of cigarettes. At first, these products and concepts feel harmless enough, chalked up to silliness, but they still contribute to this wider culture of valorizing cigarettes and softening the lens through which we view something that's deadly.

Instagram post embedded in the original article: instagram.com/p/DSDxaAEDt77/

Instagram post embedded in the original article:
instagram.com/p/DWZRjc3EQzB/

Individual celebrities and small-time designers leaning too far into peddling unhealthy smoking habits is one thing, but powerful, zeitgeist-defining brands and publications feeding into smoking culture, and thus profiting off of it, is a whole other. Let's look at public enemy number one in this category: Interview Magazine. The well-known fashion and culture publication has made cigarettes the go-to ingredient of their cover photoshoots over the last few years, wedged between the fingers of Hailey Bieber, Jeremy Allen White, Sabrina Carpenter (in which she's wearing a bikini literally made out of Marlboros and Marlboro boxes), Dylan O'Brien, and Adam Friedland, to name a few (or shall I say, to name a lot). Other taste-makers with nicotine on their hands are Vanity Fair, which featured Kylie Jenner lighting up on the cover of their spring 2026 issue, and W Magazine, which photographed Odessa A'zion in a similar fashion.

The ridiculous Instagram account @ciginfluencers, run by content creator Jared Oviatt (who has called himself the "unofficial leader of the 'smoking is cool' movement" on his Substack) has done its own part in glamorizing smoking and restoring its ubiquity. With 100K followers, the account simply shares photos of celebrities smoking in a way that might feel harmless, but certainly is not. Disseminating these photos not only normalizes smoking but also celebrates cigarette culture and puts it on a pedestal. Recently interviewed by The NY Post on the resurgence of smoking, Oviatt said, "It's almost a rejection of wellness culture. Or an acknowledgment of, 'If I smoke and look a little different ten years from now than I would have if I hadn't smoked, I can just reverse it with a facelift or anti-aging serums. It's this idea that the world is coming to an end anyway, and even if it is, I can change my face in the process."

Now that's a take. Unsurprisingly, Oviatt appears to be pals with Interview Magazine's editor in chief, Mel Ottenberg, having been interviewed by the outlet in 2023, and recently resharing the Hailey Bieber cover on the @ciginfluencers page with a caption that tags Ottenberg and thanks him for his service.

These creative choices restoring smoking into the mainstream aren't innocuous. We all know the almighty power of the media and the fashion industry in influencing culture—that's literally their whole point. So when these outlets continue to irresponsibly portray our culture's most coveted and idolized figures smoking cigarettes and styled to look incredibly beautiful and hip while doing it, obviously, that's going to have an impact on how we view smoking as a society. And where there is intrigue and influence, there is money, and pretty soon brands flock to the scene like vultures.

Enter Hestia.



Hestia is a tobacco company that glosses over the cancer sticks they're selling under the guise of earthy wellness branding. With a warm, soothing color palette centered around terracotta orange and natural, leafy, feminine motifs, illustrated in an organic, hand-drawn style you might associate with candles or incense, Hestia is a blatant, despicable attempt to reposition cigarettes in the market. This

calculated brand feel is designed to distinctly differentiate Hestia from those of big tobacco companies. Skewing artisanal and using "support small business" rhetoric to manipulate consumers is nasty stuff, while not surprising in the slightest. They also rely heavily on influencer marketing to circumvent tobacco advertising laws, working with none other than Oviatt, who gave them a shoutout in his Interview Magazine interview. Hestia might be a smaller tobacco brand, but they're a tobacco brand nonetheless, willing to sell their souls to get people to buy a product that kills them.



Of course, we can't talk about the smoke-aissance without also touching on nicotine pouches, the latest self-soothing craze with murky medical implications. The nicotine pouch global market is valued at $5 billion and is rapidly expanding, with brands positioning the product as a safer alternative to smoking and vaping because it doesn't contain tobacco. Since nicotine pouches are relatively new, their precise health consequences remain unknown. But what we do know is that nicotine is bad, bad, bad, especially for the kids, and highly addictive. Suffice to say, it's a solid bet that nicotine pouches are bad news; when Tucker Carlson is making a cash grab in the market, you can be sure I'm running in the opposite direction.



Even though the pendulum might be swinging back on the public perception of smoking, one thing sure hasn't changed: how deadly it is. Interview Magazine, Oviatt, and Hestia can make smoking look as hip and cool and earthy and timeless as they like, but smoking remains as lethal as it ever was. According to 2025 data from the World Health Organization, tobacco kills more than seven million people worldwide each year, including an estimated 1.6 million non-smokers who are exposed to second-hand smoke, and it kills up to half of its users who don't quit.

So, while you might feel invincible right now, Hudson Williams, perhaps you should earnestly "quit smoking ☑️". Cigarettes won't hold back because you're hot.



OPINION MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2026

TRUFF Loses its Design ‘Edge’ With Retail-Ready Refresh

Look at what they did to our boy, TRUFF. The brand that defined premium hot sauce for the Instagram era just unveiled a major in-house packaging redesign that signals a strategic push to dominate retail shelves, trading something design-forward for appetite appeal.

By **Bill McCool** Published on thedieline.com

2,634 READS IN 2026

NO. 06 · TRUFF LOSES ITS EDGE · OPINION

IN BRIEF

- **TRUFF Hot Sauce Redesign:** TRUFF unveils its 2026 in-house packaging refresh, transitioning from a digitally-native Instagram disruptor to a mainstream retail competitor by trading minimalist brand equity for appetite appeal.
- **Premium Bland:** Why the new visual architecture signals a shift toward corporate aesthetics, potentially diluting TRUFF’s high-end positioning in exchange for better shelf-navigability and intuitive shopping in big-box retailers.

When Truff first landed on the hot sauce scene in 2017, the digitally-native DTC brand was a fiery, truffle-soaked breath of fresh air and a certified Instagram smash. Designed by Colony, it eschewed all of the usual hot sauce cues we had long grown accustomed to. With its truffle-inspired cap and luxuriously decadent bottle, it seemingly promised an elevated experience, a genuinely premium hot sauce that lived up to its disruptive design.

So, let’s just get this out of the way: today, the brand unveiled its redesigned packaging. It’s not great.

However, I can acknowledge why they did it, and I can even understand it from a strategic POV (more on that in a bit).

Here’s the breakdown from the in-house-led design. For starters, they made the logo smaller, and instead of running down the length of the label, it’s now confined to the top half. The wordmark still appears in white, but a black rectangular border now encloses it. Below, you’ll find the hot sauce flavor, and underneath that are now images of the ingredients you’ll find in that particular bottle. Flavor notes make up the bottom portion of the label, along with the sauce’s heat and truffle levels (as indicated by the red chili peppers and the brand’s truffle logo, respectively). The brand’s color palette appears unchanged as well and still somewhat indicates flavor (I say “somewhat” because “Mild” is blue and the OG hot sauce is black).

Overall, their packaging, which once felt very design-forward and high-end, now has a more generic sheen. Frankly, it’s not the best look, and I would even go so far as to say that the packaging architecture feels off.

But just because it’s not the best look (in this writer’s opinion) doesn’t mean it’s not the right look. When you’re a tiny upstart DTC, you can absolutely use design to your advantage. But in retail? Often, that’s another story entirely, and it’s why many of those once-Instagram darling brands have to refresh their packaging. What works on your screen might not necessarily work in Walmart or your local Acme.

“From our early days as a DTC disruptor to becoming a true cultural favorite, we’ve always been driven by creating best-in-class, culinary-level flavor and making products that elevate the everyday,” said Nick Ajluni, co-founder of TRUFF, in a press release. “The new packaging is not just a visual update—it’s a reflection of how we’re showing up for shoppers in retail across the country, making our products easier to find, use, and love.”

The idea behind the refresh was to create a “more intuitive shopping experience,” one in which they differentiate flavors “while reinforcing the brand’s culinary-forward positioning.” Essentially, they clearly want to make more inroads into retail. While the brand says it’s already available in over 17,000 retail locations, they want to greatly expand on that and have an outsized footprint. This is a brand that wants to be the more premium version of Tabasco or

Cholula.

Using images of the sauce's ingredients does signal the brand's culinary ambitions. If the goal is to truly make it more approachable, the new packaging could help in this regard and potentially attract new customers who aren't as familiar with the brand. Also, consumers tend to want some indication of taste, and appetite appeal is critical. It will never not be fascinating to me that Hershey's added product photography to their packaging, completely upending one of the most iconic pieces of candy packaging around, seemingly destroying the brand's heritage in one fell swoop...and it worked. Within a year, sales rose nearly 10%.

That said, we all know what this is, and it will live very much in the hot sauce section of the condiment aisle. If this were any other category, strategically, I'd be inclined to agree with them—but it's hot sauce, guys. Does the brand still have its own signature look that sets it apart from the rest of the hot sauce world? Absolutely.

But does it feel diluted or that it's been acquired by the likes of PepsiCo or Kraft? Yes, it really does.



"So, let's just get this out of the way: today, the brand unveiled its redesigned packaging. It's not great."

BILL MCCOOL



-30- **No. 06** TRUFF loses its edge

OPINION WEDNESDAY, JULY 22, 2026 No. 07

Has Redesign Hate Gone Too Far?

In 2026, everyone has an opinion.

By **Charlotte Beach** Published on thedieline.com 2,177 READS IN 2026



IN BRIEF

- The growing trend of tearing down redesigns reveals a sad, toxic culture in the design industry
- We chat with folks from agencies with first-hand experience of this trend that's hurting the industry far more than it's helping it

In 2026, everyone has an opinion. And not only do we all have opinions, but we all have the means to share those hot takes with the masses, whenever we want, on ever-multiplying online platforms with global reach.

So it's really no wonder this power has insidiously created a culture of snap judgments and big opinions shouted from the proverbial rooftops of the internet about literally every topic under the sun. Of course, there are those insipid perennial favorites, like the debate over whether pineapple belongs on pizza (we can give that one a rest, right?), but then there are the far more dangerous and damning ideas poisoning our minds, like rhetoric from the "manosphere." As we know all too well, the design industry is far from immune to the phenomenon of big, bold declarations with a toxic impact. In fact, it's proven to be a realm where this type of behavior thrives.

If a high-profile brand unveils a redesign in the morning, you better believe everyone and their mother will have posted a takedown of it on LinkedIn by lunchtime. All the design media outlets (DIELINE included, to be fair) will have quickly weighed in on the design to get in on the conversation, Threads and Reddit channels will be buzzing with hot takes, and full-on dissertations will have been written back and forth between users in the comments section of social media posts. Perhaps this is partly a residual behavior baked into the industry as a result of critiques in design school, but I think it says more about the general state of society and the internet than anything else.

We've recently done some self-reflection and wondered, why does our industry do this? Is it healthy? Is it productive? Is it holding the industry back? To think through this rampant compulsion to make snap judgments and to dogpile on redesigns, we've spoken to a handful of folks who work at heavy-hitter agencies and have firsthand experience bearing the brunt of these inflammatory moments. A few main ideas rose to the top from these conversations, illuminating where this trend stems from and how it's potentially hurting the design world.



Pearlfisher's recent redesign of Pirate's Booty

The design industry is but a reflection of society at large, and this redesign takedown trend is a microcosm of how social media has so indelibly impacted how we all communicate, engage with each other, and seek value in what we do and who we are. Social media has become an ever-present megaphone for our thoughts that only gets louder the more we use it and the more inflammatory the things we say through it are.

Looking through some of the more notable redesigns of the 21st century that have received the biggest pans, the 2009 Tropicana redesign naturally tops the list. Widely held as the worst rebrand in history, Tropicana's then-owners, PepsiCo and the designers they worked with at the Arnell Group, are lucky social media hardly existed back then—can you imagine the LinkedIn wrath? But even without the social media presence that modern-era bullying would have, Tropicana ultimately rolled back the new look and returned to the original. Cautionary tale Sierra Mist in 2008 is another from the annals of redesign disaster, as their new look made the brand name virtually illegible. Kraft met a similar fate in 2009 and reverted a few years later, and so did Pepsi in 2008 with an infamously terrible new logo that was leaked via a PDF. We'd be remiss to not mention a few of the most infamous non-CPG redesigns as well, like the Gap in 2010, Jaguar in 2024, and of course, one of the most incendiary rebrands of the modern era, Cracker Barrel in 2025.

"Social media has given everyone the ability to comment with a degree of anonymity, so people are more vocal than ever," says Sean Thomas, global executive creative director at JKR. "The LinkedIn algorithm rewards people who post constantly, and I see more people getting speaking gigs at festivals and in the press for their views rather than their work. Times are tough in this industry, too, so I guess some of this noise is an attempt to draw attention and get noticed."

Mike Perry, CCO and founder of Tavern, says this takedown trend is more a reflection of the internet than of design. "The algorithms reward speed, certainty, and negativity," he says. "A thoughtful take rarely travels as far as a harsh one. As a result, we've created a culture where having an opinion is often valued more than having expertise."

Perry goes on to unpack the grip this culture has on branding, specifically. "Branding is one of the few professions where this has become completely normalized. Everyone feels qualified to critique the solution without understanding the problem it was designed to solve. We don't do that with most other professions. Most people wouldn't tell their doctor what medication to prescribe or tell an architect how to engineer a skyscraper. Yet somehow, when it comes to branding, we've convinced ourselves that seeing the final logo means we have all the information we need," he says. "To me, that's less about design and more about the way we consume information today. We react before we understand. We reward confidence over curiosity. And in the process, we lose the nuance that's required to have meaningful conversations in the first place."







WorkInProgress' redesign for Domino's

Another aspect of this urge, so many feel, to tear down another's work is primal, rooted in humans' innate sense of jealousy and designers' inherent need to iterate. The design industry is an increasingly cutthroat world where agencies are pitching against many others (not to mention going up against AI), putting in hours of unpaid work to do so. This system naturally creates a competitive and ruthless sentiment that breeds envy and disdain towards others' work. "Whenever we see a rebrand or campaign, there's often a knee-jerk reaction to dismiss it or pick it apart because, deep down, we're jealous that person got the opportunity to do it, and we didn't," explains Thomas. "We all have things we'd change or don't like. But that's who designers are: problem solvers, tinkerers, perfectionists. So the reality is, we're never pleased with our own work or anyone else's. That's the brilliant thing about our industry, and also the biggest issue with it."

The aspect of critique has always been part of the design world, but now it's being done in public forums outside of the industry, with damaging consequences. "Our conversations are now taking place in front of our clients, potential clients, and the broader public. That visibility means designers need to be more conscious of how we talk about one another's work," says Leigh Chandler, founder and executive creative director at Sister Mary. "Publicly denigrating another designer or agency doesn't make the critic look more intelligent or talented. What it does is create anxiety for the designers who made it, and for the clients being asked to approve the next ambitious redesign. And anxiety is the killer of creativity. Anxiety makes people freeze. It makes them second-guess their instincts and retreat towards whatever feels least likely to be attacked. The result is safer designers, more nervous clients, and increasingly generic work. It also makes an industry that should be joyful, provocative, and imaginative far less enjoyable to be part of."





Sister Mary's redesign for Genesee

Another piece of this puzzle is the nature of critiquing redesigns, specifically, which by definition take widely known visuals, logos, and lettering people have grown accustomed to and often feel sentimental toward, and tweak or replace them. This very act can feel like a betrayal or elicit an emotional response due to nostalgia and our fear of change.

"Change is hard. The bigger the brand, the harder

the change," says Sarah Williams, co-CEO and co-owner of Beardwood. "The brands we choose say who we are, designer or not: what we value, what we belong to. Public critique of a brand is really a commentary on us and our relationship to it. For some, it's an opportunity to voice skepticism and frustration with larger cultural forces. For others, it's a feeling that the brand has abandoned them when they ditch the familiar and push in a way that's disconnected."

WorkInProgress design director, Jimmy Rosen, adds, "People develop emotional connections to the brands they've known for years, so change can feel like a loss, even if the previous design wasn't objectively better. Nostalgia plays a role, but so does the simple comfort of the familiar, and that emotional response can outweigh an objective assessment of the redesign."







Tavern's redesign for Sizzler

Those in design engaging in this behavior are only hurting the industry in a fundamental manner. More than hurting the feelings and egos of our peers (which, in itself, is bad, of course), it's creating an environment of fear, one where brands are reluctant to take big swings with redesigns. "The rush to deliver the most cutting verdict without any thoughtful critique doesn't raise the standard of design. It breeds anxiety, rewards conservatism, and makes brave work harder to approve," says Chandler.

"I felt the effects of this personally while we were finalizing our redesign of Genesee, and then again with Labatt. Throughout the process, I kept thinking, 'What if people tear this apart the way they did Cracker Barrel? Could this damage my career?' I've worked in the design industry for 25 years, and I've never felt nervous about issuing a press release or sharing new work on LinkedIn. This is a horrible state of affairs. The fact that an experienced designer can feel so fearful about sharing such carefully considered work shows how unhealthy the culture around redesigns has become."

Rosen elaborates further: "Rebranding is already a difficult investment to justify because its value isn't immediate or easy to quantify, even when it's strategically the right decision. The added risk of spending money to become the laughingstock of the week online could discourage brands from pursuing changes that would genuinely benefit them. Over time, that creates an environment where

safe, incremental design is favored over bold, meaningful evolution."

"The biggest casualty of this culture isn't designers' feelings, it's originality," adds Chandler. "Every time public ridicule makes a client choose the safer option, we all end up living in a world with slightly more forgettable brands. If we want more iconic work, we need to create an environment where bravery is rewarded rather than punished."





Soulsight's recent redesign for Smuckers

Knowing an avalanche of criticism is likely headed their way after a redesign goes live, agencies have to develop thick skin and other mechanisms to navigate the noise. The key is being so confident in the job you did for the brand's specific needs that you can return to that truth whenever haters try to tell you the work is horrible. Those folks don't know the brief you nailed, or the client's needs you proudly delivered on. That context is critical to a redesign, and the wider public simply won't ever fully have that knowledge.

A redesign is simply the visible, itty-bitty tip of the iceberg, with the majority of the brand overhaul expanding below the surface, out of the public eye or understanding. A new logo or wordmark is merely an indication of a much larger systemic change the brand is undergoing for a litany of complex reasons that online trolls will never know. So while the public response might make a redesign feel like a failure, the new design might do precisely what the brand needs. Take the 2021 KIA redesign, for example. The logo refresh was met with skepticism from outsiders, but the strategic changes this new logo represented led to successfully repositioning KIA as a more premium car. Which was the whole damn point!

"We put a lot of time into making sure people understood why there was a real need for change. And that is always aimed at the public rather than our own industry; sure, we hope our peers like our work. But really, it doesn't matter if they do or don't. It's the public who will ultimately judge us," says Thomas. "To be clear, debate is healthy, and critique is useful. That's different from trolling, which isn't. This isn't about wanting everyone to say your work is great, because that's not real, and it would be bland if they did. Reading differing opinions is often a good thing. We're human, we don't all have the same tastes, and you can't be all things to all people. You just need to do what's right for the brand."

So when the next big redesign hits your feed, we implore you to consider all of this. Take a breath. Close your eyes. Is sharing your gut reaction to a new wordmark for a legacy brand making the world a better place? Chances are, it's not. Instead, pick up a notebook and sketch something. Call a friend you haven't spoken to in a while. Go outside and touch grass.

The design industry will be better for it.

FEATURE MONDAY, MARCH 16, 2026 No. 08

Want To Know What Packaging Looks Like In North Korea?

Given the level of obfuscation maintained by North Korea, it's difficult to know what branding and packaging look like there, or how they're designed and produced.

By **Rudy Sanchez** Published on thedieline.com 1,856 READS IN 2026

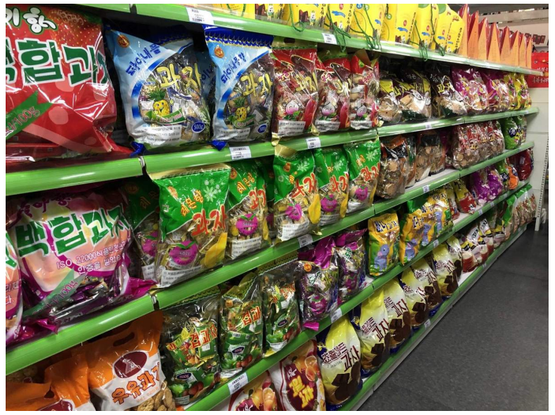


North Korea, officially known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), is a country of over 26 million people. Despite its population and geographic proximity to countries like China, Russia, Japan, and South Korea, little is known about the DPRK in the US. America and North Korea have no diplomatic relations, are not trading partners, and travel to North Korea by Americans is practically impossible, save for a few exceptions. The DPRK's emphasis on military buildup, claims to the entire Korean peninsula, nuclear and ballistic weapon build-up, communism, and horrific human rights record have all factored into its isolation from the rest of the world. Even when Americans and other Westerners visit the DPRK, the trips are heavily manicured by the North Korean government. State chaperons always accompany tourists and are only shown what the government wants them to see.

Given the level of obfuscation maintained by North Korea, it's difficult to know what branding and packaging look like there, or how they're designed and produced. What does marketing Consumer Packaged Goods (CPG) entail?

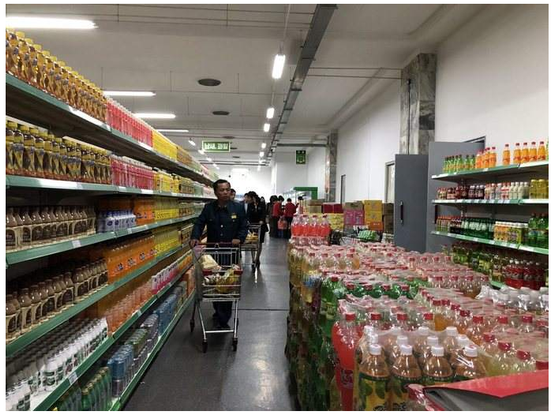
Even the sorts of CPG products available in the DPRK are somewhat mysterious. And yet, there surely are some CPG products; even in North Korea, there is certainly a demand and need for everything from home cleaning products to snacks, especially given its large population.

Despite the country's best efforts to hide products made for its people from the rest of the world, there have been some inroads into understanding North Korea's CPG world. Researchers can gain some insight by traveling to Chinese towns bordering the hermit nation. Thanks to proximity, North Korean goods are more readily available, and researchers can talk to folks, including defectors, with firsthand experience of the country's CPG products.



The government might go to great lengths to launder its reputation, but even North Korea can't hide all its trash. Professor Kang Dong Wan of South Korea's Dong-A University started collecting and studying the DPRK's trash that washes ashore on border islands in 2022, after China severely restricted travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to Kang, his research is motivated by a desire to better understand the North Korean people and learn how to bridge the gap between them and South Koreans if and when the two nations reunify.



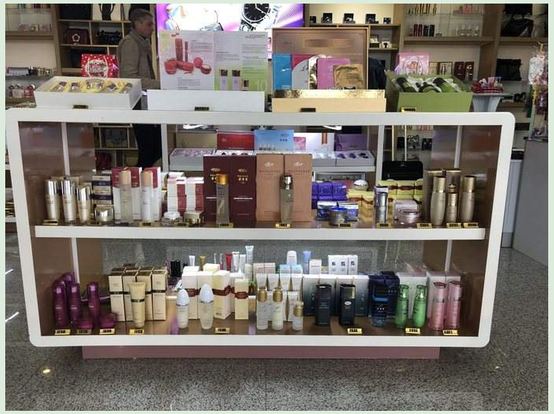
In Kang Dong Wan's book, Picking up North Korean

Trash on the Five West Sea Islands, he provides a window into the country's CPG landscape, noting that the Communist nation is beginning to offer a range of products tailored to personal preferences. Having different options has become increasingly important as North Koreans have become more aware of consumerism abroad. Kang has also found that packaging has begun to take cues from neighboring countries like Japan and South Korea, using cartoon characters similar to Hello Kitty, also possibly in response to North Koreans being exposed to outside culture and media.

There are even better-for-you claims on North Korean packaging, like collagen-containing snacks that claim they will help children grow taller and improve skin elasticity.



Nicholas Bonner is the co-founder of Koyro Studio (and Koryo Tours). The studio is one of the first Western galleries of North Korean art, has a sizable collection, and offers commissions from the DPRK, while Koyro Tours guides trips in the country. Bonner has been visiting North Korea and taking folks there since the 1990s. He's also produced several documentaries about North Korea and is the author of Made in North Korea: Graphics From Everyday Life in the DPRK. As one of the few Westerners with firsthand experience and knowledge about the country, he's had a glimpse into North Korea's CPG world and how it's evolved since the 1990s.



According to Bonner, in Pyongyang, the DPRK's capital, over 70% of goods appear to be locally produced, with the rest mostly from China. He says the approximation is based on observations of supermarket shelves, and there's no way to get exact figures. "In Pyongyang, it is mainly Chinese brands and ad hoc deliveries of Western brands according to what the various North Korean traders abroad can get into the country," Nicholas says. "This varies; one week it might be shelves full of Nivea hand creams, the next week it could be Russian shampoo. Various Western brands of cigarettes and spirits are available, but not all are genuine products. Many food items recently seen on supermarket and shop shelves in Pyongyang are very similar to foreign brands, almost copying them."



Even when imported products are available, local products often imitate the branding and packaging of well-known global brands like Coca-Cola.

"Perhaps somewhat incongruously, the harbinger of this shift was the packaging for Korean-made cola, which imitated the universally recognizable red label and tapered-waist bottle people are so familiar with worldwide," he says. "Even South Korean products are copied; an example is the Galaxy Candy with Strawberry (made in the Pyongyang Wheat Flour Factory), brightly colored with a cartoon cat strikingly similar to Sanrio's Hello Kitty."



While Adobe's Photoshop transformed graphic design from a mostly hand-drawn endeavor to a digital one in the 1990s, that shift, understandably, came later in North Korea. "The era of hand-drawn North Korean graphics came to a close in the early 2000s with the arrival of digital design and new printing methods. Product competition arrived, and with it, local companies sought shiny designs and bright, homogeneous color palettes," Bonner adds. Before economic reforms in 2002, North Korean packaging was "rather naive" and "simplistic," he claims; packaging design was pragmatic, existing mostly to inform consumers what the product is and what it does. But the slight liberalization of the North Korean economy in 2002, along with the availability of digital design tools, gave graphic designers in the Asian country new inspiration.



North Korea lost its largest benefactor with the fall of the Soviet Union, and many trading partners with other Eastern European countries abandoned communism. The DPRK saw huge famines in the 1990s and relied on the UN to feed a significant portion of its population. A shadow, informal economy began to form among North Koreans as a result, and by 2002, the government introduced reforms, such as allowing farmers to have gardens and sell their harvests at markets, and dropped the Stalinist-inspired food rationing system.







"Products now have a much more assured Korean style, particularly the use of natural elements in the graphic identity of all manner of products. For example, to present a well-known Korean landmark, such as a mountain, a building, or a sculpture, on a packet of cigarettes, or a box of matches, is to imbue them with instantly recognizable 'Korean-ness', thereby making them, in their eyes, 'the best,' even in the absence of any competition," Bonner says.



North Korea certainly isn't the first nation to see patriotic symbols used to market products. Even in the US, patriotic symbols like the bald eagle, the Stars and Stripes, the Statue of Liberty, and natural landmarks like the Moab desert, redwood forest, and Niagara Falls have been used by brands such as Coca-Cola, Jeep, and Budweiser. "Places of revolutionary importance, ancient or mythical, and areas of natural beauty, all appear on different products, lending each item an aura of special significance," Bonner continues. "Graphically, this means that a simple line drawing can convey a level of importance far exceeding aesthetic decoration.









“As more foreign products entered the market, advertising designs have also shifted toward a more Western style to trigger emotional rather than rational responses. It became important to many North Korean companies to stay on a perceived level with foreign brands, so nowadays products have similar shiny designs, deploy (and overuse) computer-aided elements, bright color palettes, and other styles similar to Western designs.”

This modernization is evident in candy and snack packages, which feature bright colors and even mascots. The Chinese and Western influences on locally produced and packaged treats are evident, and were it not for the copy, they could be hard to distinguish from imported counterparts.

That’s a major evolution from the simpler candy design for items like blueberry jellies, which are simpler in execution and feature less sophisticated illustrations of fruit and a mountain range along the top. Or “sweet-smelling drops” with a pair of birds perched on a branch on the front of the box, accompanied by product illustrations next to it.







One product category with some branding diversity is cigarettes. Although smoking by women is frowned upon in North Korea, over 40% of men light up; Kim Jong Un has often been seen with a cigarette in his hand, and has tried quitting, and imposed restrictions or bans, but like most smokers, has struggled to kick the habit himself and get his countrymen to do the same. “Kim Jong Il (leader of North Korea before his death and succeeded by Kim Jong Un) famously denounced smokers as one of the ‘three great fools of the twenty-first century,’ despite himself being a smoker,” Nicholas says. “This criticism from the very top of society did lead to some men quitting, as well as a ban on smoking in universities, but the habit remains popular for the majority of North Korean men. The other two great fools, according to Kim Jong Il, are those who aren’t interested in computers and those who don’t like music. The denouncement can be interpreted as a directive to focus on health, technology, and culture.”

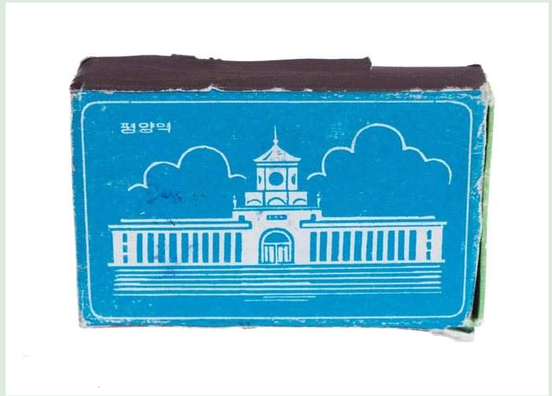






Cigarette packaging and branding are often stratified by social and economic status.

“There are several brands of cigarettes sought after by specific sections of society,” Bonner says. “Kunsol (Construction) filter cigarettes—one of the earliest brands—are clearly pitched at the working classes both in terms of cost and branding.”



Another brand of smokes, Chollima Cigarettes, plays into national pride by using imagery evocative of industry. “North Koreans are totally conversant with this kind of iconography,” Bonner says. “For example, they will know that an image of the Kangson Steelworks symbolizes the great industrial capacity of their country; that the statue of a winged horse with worker and peasant known as the Chollima Statue represents the speed and resolve with which they rebuilt the country after the devastation of the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War (the local name for the Korean War).”



Is the move to more Western-style packaging and branding design a sign of communist failure, at a fundamental level? Perhaps individuality and personalization are inherent human desires, and a utilitarian design void of flourish and distinctiveness is simply unsustainable. For those looking to topple communism, maybe the right tool isn’t firepower, but the power of marketing and branding.

As in the West, graphic designers learn the discipline in school. In North Korea, students train in industrial design at the University of Fine Arts for degree courses or at one of the other colleges that provide training. Not much is known about the curriculum of North Korean design schools, but one can imagine that an emphasis on extolling Juche (the name of North Korean ideology) is a possibility in a student’s design education.

As you would expect, Adobe and other Western software firms don’t sell digital design tools to North Korea. In fact, export restrictions expressly prohibit American, UK, and Australian companies from selling software like Creative Cloud, Figma, Canva, and Affinity to the DPRK. The internet as we know it doesn’t exist in North Korea either. There is an internal, tightly controlled intranet that designers and other professionals can use for work. Still, the lockdown means that any cloud tools or websites that graphic designers take for granted in the rest of the world are mostly unavailable to their North Korean counterparts.

“Photoshop and various programs are used, but there is no internet in North Korea, just a form of intranet, and North Koreans will make use of various copies of design programs that can be copied and brought into the country,” Bonner says. “According to Hee Sun Choi, Adjunct Professor in the Department of Design at Chung-Ang University Graduate School of Arts, in South Korea, North Korea has recently opened and is operating a website called ‘Chokhudae,’ which allows for the search of information on industrial designs and award-winning works through an intranet.”

Package manufacturing followed a similar trajectory to design. And like the companies in the West, North Korean CPG firms import packaging from China.



“Before the early 2000’s, low-grade paper and packaging were produced internally. New packaging and bottling plants have been imported (many from China), and much is now locally produced, including Tetra-Pak-style cartons, plastic water bottling plants, etc. Sophisticated packaging for sophisticated products is reportedly produced in China’s Liaoning province and imported into North Korea,” Bonner says.



What about recycling? As expected, sustainability is not a priority for the bellicose DPRK, and recycling wasn’t a serious consideration until the COVID-19 pandemic significantly curtailed Chinese exports, forcing North Korea to rely on plastic recycling to make up for some of the trade loss.

Any recycling effort in North Korea is more about subsistence than it is about being good stewards of the environment.

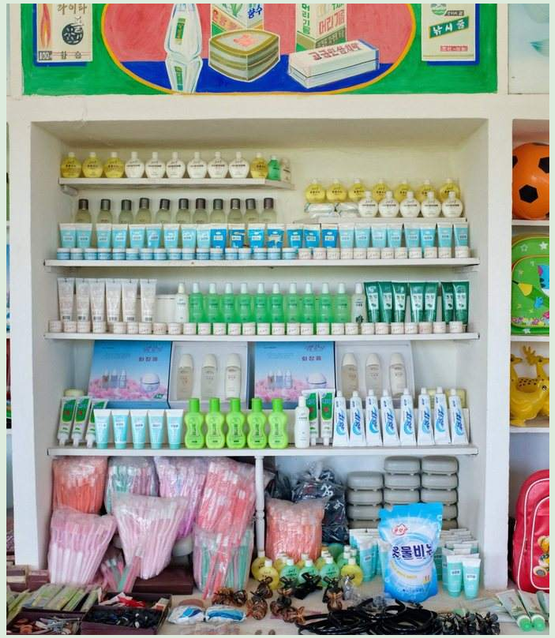
“Recycling has not yet entered the North Korean vocabulary, and paper is recycled purely as a means to reuse it due to scarcity, not to save the planet,” Nicholas notes.

In most of the world, we can expect to see many of the same CPG brands and products. Pepsi, Coca-Cola, Doritos, Oreos, and other brands can be found from Sheboygan to Shanghai; the CPG world is very different in North Korea.



One brand that has managed to gain a foothold in even the isolated DPRK is Hello Kitty. Sanrio’s flagship character manages to drive product sales even in North Korea, even if that version is a simulacra.

Despite differences in the DPRK market, graphic design shares some similarities with the rest of the world. Design is done digitally, albeit with illicitly acquired copies of Photoshop. While the state’s overall values and goals undergird CPG design in a country like North Korea, ultimately, consumer preferences are also a consideration.





There are very few opportunities to gain insight into the life and culture of North Korea, but one window to the hermit nation is its CPG world. Despite the DPRK's best efforts to portray self-reliance, a core tenet of Juche, we learn from packaged goods that North Korea has adopted some Western branding and packaging techniques. The regime can only push back against its people's desire for Western-style goods only so far, and as a result, we see some evolution in its local CPG offerings.

Which makes for a curious thought experiment. We often speak of design as a way to solve existential problems like plastic pollution and food waste, but what if branding and packaging design is actually the solution to toppling Kim and improving the lives of millions of North Koreans?

Images courtesy of Nicholas Bonner.



-30- **No. 08** Packaging in North Korea



OPINION FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2026

Why Isn't The Laughing Cow Laughing?

Bel Brands' beloved Laughing Cow has suddenly stopped smiling in new promotional packaging released this week. And no one knows why.

By **Charlotte Beach** Published on thedieline.com

1,656 READS IN 2026

NO. 09 · WHY ISN'T THE LAUGHING COW LAUGHING? · OPINION

IN BRIEF

- The titular Laughing Cow on Bel Brands' The Laughing Cow cheese is suddenly not laughing on newly released packaging. But why not?
- In a cryptic campaign meant to intrigue customers by withholding details, all we can do is speculate and wait to see why the once smiley cow is now sorrowful

You know things are bad when even The Laughing Cow has gone somber.

That's right, folks, everyone's favorite (and the only) Laughing Cow, who has radiantly beamed in open-mouthed glee on the beloved packaging of Bel Brands' The Laughing Cow cheese for 100 years, has stopped laughing. Hold your loved ones close.

The brand has just sneakily rolled out a campaign with promotional packaging featuring The Laughing Cow doing just the opposite: looking woefully distraught, staring vacantly out into the middle distance, and decidedly not laughing. A hand-scrawled "NOT" has been crudely wedged into the wordmark so that it now says "The Not Laughing Cow," with additional text below reading, "We need to talk" in front of a QR code. What does it all mean, (Not) Laughing Cow?! What are you trying to tell us?!

"The Laughing Cow has spent more than 100 years reminding us not to take life too seriously, so when she suddenly gets serious, you pay attention," Bel Brands chief marketing officer Jamee Pearlstein said in a press release. "Whatever finally got to her must be worth talking about. We'll let her explain when she's ready."



The investigative journalist in me took me down an admittedly very shallow rabbit hole to The Laughing Cow website. I was greeted by a cryptic dialog box featuring The Not Laughing Cow, that prompted me to "Learn More." Alas, learn more I did not, as the only new information provided on the ensuing landing page were two odd campaign videos—one featuring a Not Laughing Cow mascot sitting alone at a diner, and the other showing the same mascot pushing herself sadly on a swing. "We need to talk," appears as the tag at the end of each segment.

Bel Brands is clearly aiming to stoke confusion amongst customers with this campaign, and, well, mission accomplished, you guys! Because, I'm sorry, but what the hell is going on? Why am I even writing about a Not Laughing Cow on promotional cheese packaging right now?

Though I must admit, I'm at the edge of my seat waiting to find out! That is, only when the Not Laughing Cow is ready, of course. Until then, we

simply must give her and her ridiculous earrings all the space and time they need.





-30- **No. 09** Why isn't the Laughing Cow laughing?

NEWS TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2026 No. 10

Colgate Made a Better Toothpaste Tube. Now They're Getting Sued for It

Should we put a giant asterisk next to "recyclable"? As a lawsuit against Colgate moves forward, the packaging industry faces a potentially uncomfortable truth: there is a world of difference between a package that is technically recyclable and one that the system actually accepts.

By **Valerie Hawks** Published on thedieline.com 1,529 READS IN 2026

"Does the recycling system actually accept it?"

"404 Page Not Found."

That's what I'm seeing as I go back into the archives to 2022 to confirm my memory of how Colgate announced the rollout of its new, widely recyclable toothpaste tube. And let me remind you, this was a massive deal for a piece of packaging that goes straight to landfill or the incinerator, something on par with getting bacon out of that pesky plastic sleeve.

Whenever a new "recyclable" format replaces one that previously wasn't recyclable, my skeptical antennae go up. But Colgate's announcement also felt different. I think I first heard about it during an Economist webinar with Ann Tracy from Colgate, but that link has disappeared into the internet abyss.

What stuck with me was that Colgate didn't just talk about changing the material back in 2019. They talked about working with MRFs (Material Recovery Facilities, aka recycling centers) as part of the R&D process. They considered what would happen to the tube once it entered the recycling stream.

Traditionally, toothpaste tubes are made from multiple materials and aren't accepted for recycling. However, Colgate approached the problem differently, and they developed a tube primarily from HDPE, the same No. 2 plastic used for recyclable bottles, using different thicknesses of a single material to make it compatible with existing recycling infrastructure.

And Colgate (sorry, Colgate-Palmolive) is a Fortune 500 company with a very solid legal department. Surely they weren't going to announce a "recyclable" tube without having the data to back it up.

Right?

Fast forward to 2024, when Colgate shared the technology and approach with other brands and tube suppliers. They believed in the tube's success, and making the technology available mattered more than keeping it proprietary, which was amazing because I don't believe in hoarding critical IP either. If we have good materials, they should be open-source.

Now, in 2026, a lawsuit alleging that the tubes are misleadingly labeled as "recyclable" is moving forward. The lawsuit claims that Colgate and Tom's of Maine's "Recyclable Tube" labeling is deceptive because many recycling programs and MRFs don't actually accept the tubes. Plaintiffs argue that facilities can't reliably distinguish them from their conventional (and unrecyclable) counterparts, while leftover toothpaste creates contamination concerns. Colgate has maintained that the tubes are compatible with the HDPE #2 stream and meet relevant recyclability standards. Ultimately, the court declined to dismiss the case.

The question isn't simply "Can this tube technically be recycled?" It's "Does the recycling system actually accept it?"Those are not necessarily the same thing.

This is what I'm most interested in as the case moves forward. Working with MRFs during R&D is excellent. But follow-up is necessary to deliver on claims. If the package enters the real world and the infrastructure doesn't accept it, what was promised isn't being delivered. And this is where I'm frustrated with Colgate's defense. The whole reason this tube was impressive was that Colgate seemed to have gone beyond "technically recyclable." They had done the work to make a toothpaste tube compatible with an existing recycling system.

At least, that's how I remember the story.

I'm pretty sure the goal wasn't to create a tube that could theoretically be recycled somewhere. The goal was to create one that could actually enter the recycling stream, no questions asked.

So, did Colgate deceive all of us?

NO. 10 · COLGATE'S RECYCLABLE TUBE GOES TO COURT · NEWS

I'd hate to think they did. If Colgate loses, I hope the result is more honest sustainability messaging.

Brands should absolutely be accountable for claims that don't reflect what happens to packaging at end of life. But I worry about the unintended consequence. If the standard becomes "prove your package will be perfectly handled by a recycling system that itself is anything but perfect before you're allowed to call it recyclable", we risk scaring smaller brands away from trying anything ground-breaking or helpful at all.

We tell brands there is no perfect package. We ask them to innovate within fragmented, underfunded, and constantly changing systems. Then we put a giant asterisk next to "recyclable" and demand proof of exactly what happens to it everywhere. I want better claims. I want better infrastructure. I want brands to do their homework and follow their packaging through the system, not just through the press check.

But I also want room for progress.

Because if we require a perfect package and a perfect recycling system before we're willing to call something progress, we're going to be waiting a very, very long time.

We tell brands there is no perfect package.

VALERIE HAWKS



-30- **No. 10** Colgate's recyclable tube goes to court

Sustain-ability

Six stories from 2026 on refills, plastic-free formats, and the price of plastic, run here in full.

Material Facts

Servings per section: 6 stories · every word, every image · pages 282–311

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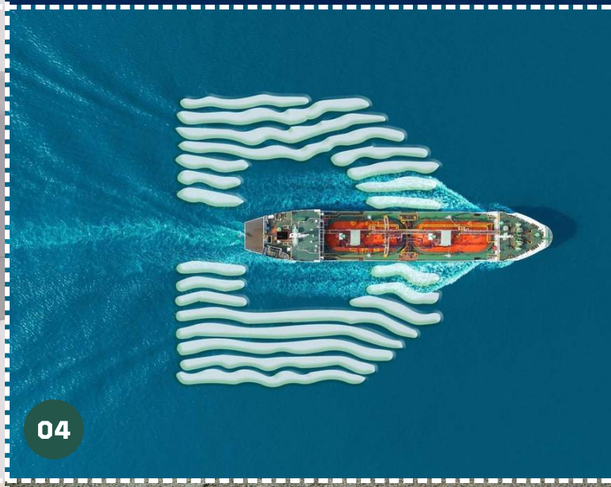
Trash Talk 308
Trash Talk: We Used To Talk About Replacing Plastic. Now, Not So Much

Contains: refill systems, glass, soap, paper, plastic prices, and a new column on why the industry stopped talking about replacing plastic.















01

SUSTAINABILITY · 01 OF 06

Track&Field

By Chloe Cordover · January 8, 2026

01

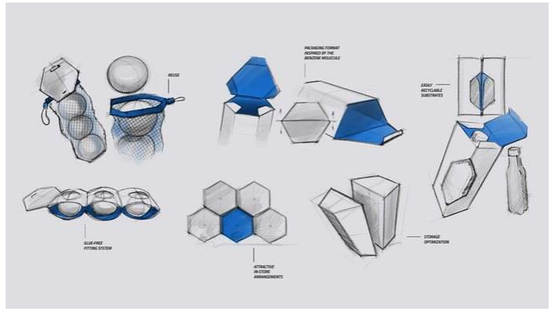
FutureBrand Goes For Sustainable Gold with Track&Field Packaging

By **Chloe Cordover** · Published on thedieline.com, January 8, 2026

FutureBrand's Track&Field packaging treats sports gear as a modular system rather than retail clutter, not to mention the prevalence of plastic clamshells and other PET-heavy containers that are harder to break into than the sport itself.

And for something so stripped down, they also managed to make it look pretty cool. Hexagonal boxes reference track geometry and training grids, creating stackable logic across categories. The typography is clean and functional, borrowing from performance labeling. Kraft brown paired with electric blue signals material honesty sharpened by motion. This system prioritizes structure, reuse, and disciplined visual rhythm.

Amanda Oliveira, Head of Design at FutureBrand, shares more about the design below.



What was the client's brief for this project?

The brief was optimize Track&Field's packaging portfolio (to female, male, and children's clothing and also for accessories that require packaging of specific shapes) and give a proprietary and more attractive visual to it.

The brief had over 50 packagings of similar dimensions and shapes, which generated a lot of waste and caused a high environmental impact. With the rise of important topics such as wellness, mental health, and the environment, the brand had to reinvent itself and connect with the needs of new audiences.

How did you execute the brief and what were some of the strategic design elements that you built into the brand?

The portfolio was renewed to more sustainable solutions by eliminating the use of plastic in its products and replacing them with easily recyclable paper materials. They possess reduced printing areas on their surfaces and don't have any glue points — only smart fittings that endow the packages with a solid structure to each box shape and guarantee less use of material during manufacturing.

Varnishes and other graphic finishes that could make recycling harder were eliminated. The blue color inside the boxes reveals the brand essence, generating high recognition and emotional appeal from the audience. The line graphics were created to translate sensations generated by good hormones (serotonin, oxytocin, endorphin, and dopamine) that appear because of physical activity and originate from benzene, which has a hexagonal shape in organic chemistry and is present in the shape of the packaging and clippings that allow for visualization

of the products inside the boxes.

The quantities, shapes, and dimensions were rethought to reduce the portfolio in a more efficient and conscientious manner to the maximum.

What was the most challenging part of the design process?

The biggest challenge was using Kraft paper with a weight of 300g, which offers numerous benefits for packaging, particularly its recyclability, and ensuring the perceived quality of the products, the robustness and efficiency of the packaging, as well as guaranteeing easy storage in physical stores and simplified logistics for purchases made through e-commerce.

What is your favorite part of the final result?

The way the visual concept is maintained, from the largest packaging to the smallest.



CASE STUDY

Track&Field sustainable packaging re-signifies the relationship between people, sport, and the environment. It is a sportswear brand with over 300 stores spread throughout approximately 100 cities in Brazil. With the rise and advancement of important topics, such as well-being, harmony, wellness, mental health, and the environment, the brand had to reinvent itself: to expand the vision beyond performance and product technology, and connect with the needs of new audiences, changing their mindset with wellbeing and environmental impact.

Considering the massive sales via e-commerce, the entire packaging portfolio has been renewed to more sustainable solutions that connect directly to the brand current scenario — eliminating the use of plastic in its products and replacing them with easily recyclable paper materials. In addition, a proprietary visual image that was more attractive to the audience was necessary. The old portfolio had over 50 packagings of similar dimensions and shapes, which generated a lot of waste and caused a high environmental impact, from production to disposal. The quantities, shapes, and dimensions were rethought to reduce the portfolio in a more efficient and conscientious manner to the maximum. The packaging is tailored to female, male, and children's clothing (such as t-shirts, tops, shorts, and underwear), and also for accessories that require packaging of specific shapes (for example rackets and tennis balls, fanny packs, bottles, and shoes). From the guiding concept "breathe and go", which represents a commitment to incentivize balance, possible approaches were sketched — both in terms of graphic inspiration and materials utilized.



Kraft paper with a weight of 300 grams offers numerous benefits for packaging, particularly due to its strength and sustainability. One of its main advantages is its recyclability. This type of paper is made from natural fibers, making it biodegradable and recyclable, which helps reduce waste and environmental impact. Additionally, the high grammage provides durability and protection for products, making it ideal for packaging heavy or fragile items. 300g Kraft paper is also highly versatile, suitable for various applications such as boxes, bags, and wraps, ensuring product integrity during transport. Another benefit is the rustic and natural aesthetic of the paper, which gives an appealing visual touch and can be easily customized with prints or labels, adding value to the brand. Lastly, using Kraft paper in packaging reflects a commitment to sustainability, aligning with the growing consumer demand for eco-friendly and responsible products.



They possess reduced printing areas on their surfaces and don't have any glue points — only smart fittings that endow the packages a solid structure to each box shape and guarantee less use of material during manufacturing. Varnishes and other graphic finishes that could make recycling harder were eliminated, as was plastic. The blue color on the inside of the boxes reveals the brand essence, generating high recognition and emotional appeal from the audience. The line graphics were created to translate sensations generated by good hormones (serotonin, oxytocin, endorphin, and dopamine) that appear because of physical activity and originate from benzene — which has a hexagonal shape in organic chemistry and is present in the shape of the packaging and clippings that allow for visualization of the products inside the boxes.

Thanks to the versatile concept, these packages stop being just for e-commerce and gain space in physical stores. The concise and geometric shapes optimize product stocking in different environments thanks to the ease of stacking — both in store stock and distribution centers. In addition, the dynamic visual integrates them with store environments as decorative items, especially in spaces near the register where the consumer can impulse shop — leveraging sales of brand accessories. They also allow the consumer to reutilize these boxes in other ways — especially the ecobag and the mesh with elastic band. They provide solutions that align quality with sustainability, meeting the needs of consumers who seek eco-friendly options without sacrificing functionality or aesthetics. In this way, the packaging not only protects the products but also contributes to a more sustainable future.

After 1 year of implementing the packaging together with the Track&Field rebranding, there was a 580% increase in searches for the brand in the digital environment, a 315% increase in gross revenue (which means 567.4 million), a 22.4% increase in EBITDA and +34.3% in sales in stores.



02

SUSTAINABILITY · 02 OF 06

Loonen

By Rudy Sanchez · January 12, 2026

02

Colony Helps Loonen Set the Standard For Plastic-Free Bottled Water

By **Rudy Sanchez** · Published on thedieline.com, January 12, 2026

There's a certain irony in water brands touting purity while bottling their products in plastic. While taking great pains to produce clean, crisp water to drink, these same companies contribute to the pollution of waterways, oceans, and the sources of their products.

Loonen is a new bottled brand that eschews plastic for glass. The brand says it chooses glass because it's chemically inert, infinitely recyclable, and plastic-free; what's more, it elevates the brand's presentation and lends a premium quality, as it's often the material of choice for higher-end brands.





The brand worked with design agency Colony on packaging and branding. The colorful labels use a pleasant color palette of yellow, blue, and green, befitting a spring (and sparkling!) water brand. The bottom third of the oval-shaped label is blue while the top 2/3rd is yellow, evocative of a sunny sky. A waterfowl sits in the middle, facing backward, creating an accent point that reinforces the brand identity's nature theme.







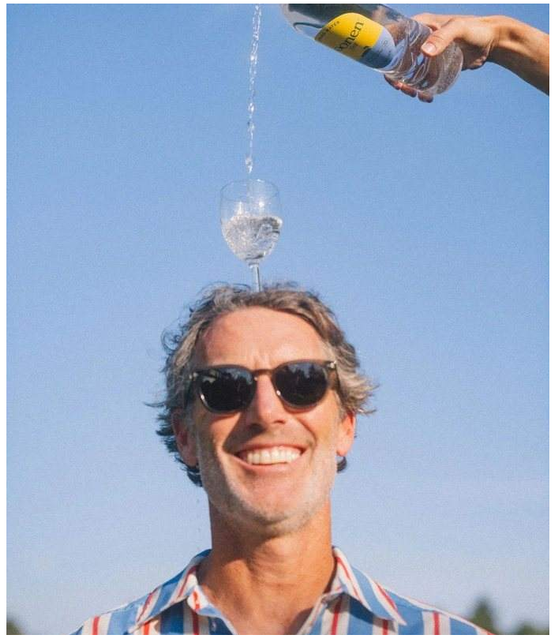
Typography is exquisite, as evidenced by the wordmark. The letterforms add a graceful elegance to the brand identity, and there's a water-like flow and movement to much of the copy on the label. The type choice for "Spring Sourced" at the top of the label is more assertive and matter-of-fact, and it strikes a good balance with the fanciful nature of the primary fonts.





Meanwhile, boxes offer a much larger canvas for the logo to shine. Again, we're treated to an image of a loon placidly floating on the water, but additional copy promises "a sip above." Green and brown colors are added to the overall mix, a refreshing step away from the blues that continue to dominate the category.





Loonen's choice of glass has several advantages, chief among them that it's classier than plastic and infinitely recyclable. While other brands have launched plastic-free water packaging in recent years, they often use aluminum cans, which are arguably better than plastic (and lighter than glass, of course) and also infinitely recyclable. But glass bottles, at least in Loonen's case, better signal purity, not least because there's transparency unachievable with aluminum packaging.

SUSTAINABILITY
02 · LOONEN

A waterfowl sits in the middle, facing backward, creating an accent point that reinforces the brand identity's nature theme.

FROM "COLONY HELPS LOONEN SET THE STANDARD FOR PLASTIC-FREE BOTTLED WATER" · RUDY SANCHEZ

Estrid's Refillable Antiperspirant Deodorant Rethinks What Sustainability Should Look Like

By **Chloe Cordover** · Published on thedieline.com, February 6, 2026

CONTENTS OF THIS STORY

- Estrid’s refillable antiperspirant redefines sustainable rollerball deodorant by separating reusable parts from disposable ones
- The design uses a durable polycarbonate roller ball and a recyclable twist-in refill cartridge.
- Designed by Sample Studio, the project spans full industrial design execution, from early concept and functional 3D-printed prototypes to high-fidelity 3D renders created for product marketing.

This refillable rollerball deodorant system feels like such a smart, satisfying leap forward. It’s sleek, minimal, and genuinely beautiful without trying too hard. The brand is called Estrid, and Sample Studio is the design agency behind the packaging.

It’s refillable in a way that doesn’t feel over-engineered. The roller ball stays, while the recyclable cartridge twists in cleanly, separating what should be reused from what shouldn’t.



Visually, the simple cylindrical form and glossy finish make it feel more like something unearthed from the world of skincare rather than a utilitarian bathroom product (almost exactly what I mentioned in my recent Shelf Life about how the skincare market is coming for your armpits). The result is a system

03

SUSTAINABILITY · 03 OF 06

Estrid

By Chloe Cordover · February 6, 2026

that's sustainable but chic enough to leave out on the counter, a rare combo. You can see the industrial design thinking in every detail.

Tyler Anderson, Designer and Partner at Sample Studio, dives into the design process below.



What was the client's brief for this project?

The brief was to design a refillable rollerball deodorant system, which, to our knowledge, had not been done before. Most rollerball deodorants combine the ball mechanism and the deodorant into a single disposable unit that gets thrown away once it's empty.

The goal was to separate those components by creating a compact refill cartridge that could be efficiently shipped, while housing it in a premium, reusable outer shell. Deodorant was a new category for the brand, so the challenge was to rethink a very familiar product format through a more considered, refill-driven system.

Visually, the client wanted the product to feel at home in the beauty space rather than reading as a conventional or athletic deodorant. That drove a softer, cylindrical form with restrained detailing, allowing it to blend naturally alongside skincare and cosmetic products.

How did you execute the brief and what were some of the strategic design elements that you built into the brand?

Because the brand already existed, our focus was entirely on the product and system design. One of the first things we explored was the refill architecture itself. Early on, we assumed the refill would be serviced from the bottom, but through prototyping, we quickly realized that approach created a messy and frustrating user experience. That led us to prioritize the refill interaction before finalizing the form. A clean, intuitive refill experience became the foundation for the rest of the design.

One key design element that emerged from the exploration is how the product is stored. The deodorant is intentionally designed to rest on its lid and not easily stand on the refill end. Similar to storing a marker or pen tip down, this keeps the roller-ball in constant contact with the liquid formula, resulting in a more consistent application over time.



What was the most challenging part of the design process?

The most challenging part of the design process was developing a system that felt reliable without feeling over-engineered. Because the product uses a liquid formula and a refillable rollerball, everything needed to work together with very little margin for error.

The system had to perform consistently across everyday use, refilling, and situations like air travel, all while feeling seamless and intuitive. Balancing those requirements without adding unnecessary complexity was the core challenge, and one that required a lot of iteration to get right.



What is your favorite part of the final result?

My favorite part of the final result is how intuitive the overall product experience feels. From the beginning, the goal was for the system to make sense immediately and for the refill process to feel straightforward rather than cumbersome. There's a clear separation between the interactions for everyday use and actions for refilling, which helps the product feel effortless in daily life.

More broadly, the hands-on nature of the process was a highlight. The mechanical requirements and form factor allowed us to quickly prototype, define the system hierarchy early, and dial things in without excessive back-and-forth.

We were also able to return to the project after completing the industrial and product design to execute the editorial 3D imagery. Having designed and prototyped the product ourselves meant we knew exactly which details and interactions to highlight, and that familiarity helped us create a

more compelling image set. We're really proud of how everything came together.

CASE STUDY

Estrid's first refillable antiperspirant roll-on rethinks what sustainability can look like in the roller ball deodorant space. Instead of replacing the entire ball mechanism, the design separates the reusable components from the disposable ones — a durable polycarbonate roller ball pairs with a recyclable refill cartridge that twists into place. The result is a cleaner, more intentional approach to refillability.



A simple cylindrical body is finished with mirrored endcaps, encouraging the deodorant to stand upright with the ball facing down so that the tip is always ready to go, already primed with product. The threaded cap creates a sealed, leak-proof system that travels well, while the refill cartridge snaps in vertically, reinforcing the difference between opening and reloading.



Our team at Sample Studio led the industrial design, taking the product from early concept through final execution. This included functional 3D-printed prototypes and high-fidelity 3D visuals for marketing use.

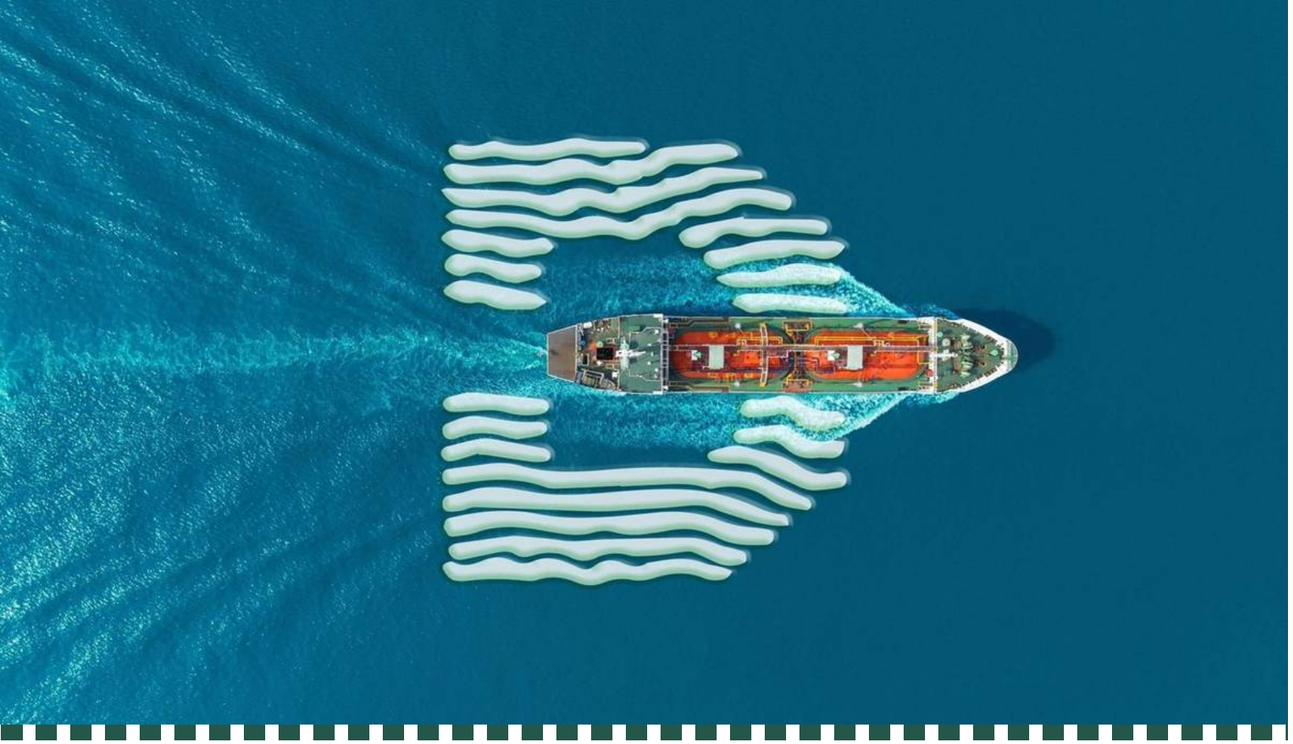








Credits:Industrial Design and 3D — Sample StudioLifestyle Photos — Estrid



04

SUSTAINABILITY · 04 OF 06

Plastic prices

By Bill McCool · April 22, 2026

Plastic Prices Are Over a Barrel: It's Time Brands Rethink Their Packaging

By **Bill McCool** · Published on thedieline.com, April 22, 2026

In the run-up to President Donald Trump taking office for his second term, it sure did seem like a good time to be in the business of plastics.

With his arrival, his "Liberation Day" special saw his administration enact reciprocal tariffs aimed at boosting US manufacturing jobs. Steel and aluminum imports, in particular, were especially painful, with duties rising to 50%. Granted, most of the tariffs were struck down by the Supreme Court last February, but the steel and aluminum tariffs have remained in place.

Coca-Cola CEO James Quincey, seeing the writing on the wall, admitted that the beverage maker would need to sell more beverages in plastic containers. Further, it gave the brand cover to push their sustainability goals to 2035 while also admitting they would rely less on recycled materials for their packaging. Many other brands followed suit, citing supply chain issues. Those added manufacturing costs were then passed on to consumers across the US, who were already tightening their belts because of ongoing inflation since the COVID pandemic.

In other words, consumers were going to get more plastic packaging, whether they liked it or not, because, frankly, it's cheaper. In a way, tariff-inflicted damage, our general deregulatory era, and an overall sense of fatigue for organizations that just can't get sustainability right, were the perfect toxic stew for brands to lean into plastic.

Ain't it funny how an unwanted excursion in the Middle East, i.e., a war, can change things in an instant?

The Iran War has put a chokehold on the world's petrochemical supply. As a result, the price of plastic has skyrocketed. There is not an inch of the global economy that hasn't been touched by the US's latest debacle in the Middle East, whether it's gasoline prices, fertilizers, semiconductors, and, yes, even plastic. Estimates show that nearly $25 billion in petrochemicals pass through the Strait of Hormuz each year, and last year the Middle East accounted for 40% of polyethylene exports. PE and PP resin prices have risen dramatically, and even with a temporary ceasefire in place, the outlook for relief is murky at best.

This actually makes this an ideal and opportune environment for brands and organizations to revisit those dusty, slept-on sustainability goals they pushed out for another decade.

Even if peace in Iran comes about after the ceasefire, Iranian attacks across the region have also threatened production capabilities. Qatar's liquified natural gas (LNG) has been damaged and may take 3-5 years to make necessary repairs. In other words, it will take time for prices to normalize.

What's more, currently, seven states— California, Colorado, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, Oregon, and Washington—have active or enacted Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) laws on the books, aka environmental policy that says producers are responsible for the entire life cycle of their goods, with more likely on the horizon. It follows then that if the cost of disposal and recycling shifts away from local governments and taxpayers, brands will want to keep their material costs as low as possible,

sustainability be damned. If rising plastic costs persist, they could turn to materials like paper and glass, substrates that can be recycled again and again. And, if tariffs ease or polymer prices become even more exorbitant, aluminum might be in the cards.

“With this intense pressure, perhaps short-term, and the longer-term pressure of EPR laws getting on the books, we’re bound to see some needles move. I think the new movement in sustainability will be scale,” says Brandi Parker, founder of sustainability consultancy Parker Brands. “Switching out of plastic will now make sense because it presents a strong opportunity to benefit the bottom line.”

But that doesn’t just mean relying on materials that are already in circulation and use. Brands and packaging manufacturers must continue to innovate and find new solutions for problems that have persisted in the packaging space.

“Huge gaps remain in barrier science that will require significant effort to move us away from plastic,” Parker notes. “Maybe this will be the push we need.”

Of course, there is room for skepticism. It’s not as if brands haven’t pushed out sustainability targets over the last decade. ”Rising petroleum prices will cause brands to rethink plastic, but not in the values-driven way we’d like to see,” says Interact Brands director of sustainability and production Valerie Hawks. “The driver will always be cost stability and supply chain risk. And then maybe some sustainability thrown in for funsies.”

“Plastic prices being tied to fuel prices can become just as unpredictable, which makes it hard for brands to forecast or maintain margins,” she says. “While we’d like to see this lead to a wider adoption of post-consumer recycled (PCR) content, an overall demand increase will also lead to a price increase in that as well. And it’s already overpriced for a lot of brands.”

Swapping materials, of course, is no easy fix and could take years to implement. Given the shaky nature of the US’s economic policy and the upending of the world order, we could be facing even more supply chain disruptions, and it’s likely that no one would have made a doom-happy bet on Kalshi over the cost of rising plastic nurdles.

However, according to Hawks, maybe we can look to recent history for a fix. “Brands need to look at what worked in 2020-2022 when supply chains were thrown out of whack and incorporate it now. Can they light-weight and reduce material use? Can they utilize more local supply chains, and can they design for multiple end-of-life scenarios? This last part is such a win for sustainability.”

Regardless, it’s time for the C-suite to travel down a few floors at company headquarters and dust off the cobwebs of the sustainability manager’s office and pay them a well-overdue visit. An uncertain global economy that still heavily relies on oil and gas is presenting both short- and long-term issues for consumers, and, from the looks of it, affordability remains a persistent pain, regardless of political affiliation.

Much has been made over the last decade of the circular economy to come, but barring some kind of revolutionary change or an earnest attempt to tip the scales for greener substitutes, we might be looking at more of the same for the indefinite future. Perhaps a federal EPR law could drive more eco-friendly packaging, but reading the tea leaves, there doesn’t seem to be much political will or demand coming from Capitol Hill. Ultimately, brands have a well-documented history of placing profits and an insatiable desire for growth over all things, even corporate sustainability targets. And just like the majority of American consumers, they’re going to seek out the most affordable option on the shelf.

“The majority will switch to whatever is cheapest right now,” Hawks says, “even if it’s less sustainable.”

SUSTAINABILITY 04 · PLASTIC PRICES

Regardless, it’s time for the C-suite to travel down a few floors at company headquarters and dust off the cobwebs of the sustainability manager’s office and pay them a well-overdue visit.

FROM “PLASTIC PRICES ARE OVER A BARREL: IT’S TIME BRANDS RETHINK THEIR PACKAGING” · BILL MCCOOL



05

SUSTAINABILITY · 05 OF 06

Sapone

By Bill McCool · August 4, 2026

05

Sapone Is a Plastic-Free Shampoo That's Bottled In Soap

By **Bill McCool** · Published on thedieline.com, August 4, 2026

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- Sapone is a plastic-free, zero-waste 2-in-1 shampoo housed inside a functional, melt-away soap bottle made with argan oil, aloe vera, and panthenol B5.
- Founded by Paulius Buivydas as a school project, the Shark Tank-approved brand features eco-friendly marbled soap packaging and launches officially on August 11th.

Will Sapone Be the First Commercially-Viable Plastic-Free Shampoo Inside a Bottle Made of Soap?

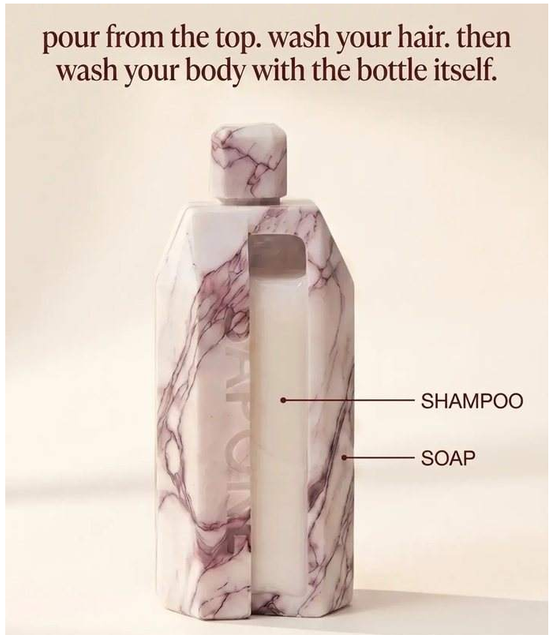
Here’s a no-brainer: your bathroom is packed to the gills with plastic. Sitting inside your shower right now are a handful of shampoo, conditioner, and bodywash bottles, most of which are bound to spend the next 500 or so years in a landfill, unless they’re incinerated, which is also not ideal. So it stands to reason that if you built a bottle out of soap and filled it with shampoo or conditioner, you’d really be on to something because packaging that completely disappears would be a genuinely massive piece of bath-time fun-time innovation.





This happened back in 2019, when designer Jonna Breitenhuber created Soapbottle, a zero-waste soap-encased shampoo that completely eliminated those pesky polymers from the mix. However, after a successful Kickstarter campaign, the brand faced production hurdles and fulfillment delays and is still in product development.

Now, you can add another player that's even Shark Tank-approved with Sapone. The plastic-free brand is a 2-in-1 shampoo packaged in a soap bottle. Founded by Paulius Buivydas when he was a 17-year-old student, the brand started as a school project inspired by the fact that 91% of plastic bottles aren't recycled. Three hundred dollars and 23 prototypes later, they finally created what they believe is a salon-grade shampoo made with argan oil, aloe vera, amino acids, and panthenol B5 (not to mention it's also sulfate- and paraben-free).



The bottle itself is actually quite striking. With an embossed wordmark and a marbled surface, the bottle looks as high-end as any other sustainable personal care product on the market. With mostly minimal branding, it's a beautiful object to place in the shower. What's more, it appears to come with a corked cap (maybe start from the bottom of that bottle for the "soap" portion).





I shouldn't have to tell you how this works, but simply open it up, pour some shampoo out, and lather up. Once you're done, close it up, work up some suds from the soapy bottle, and voila—you're clean.

That said, some fairly practical questions arise. For starters, there's the slip factor, what with all those suds and a soapy bottle. According to the brand, the bar is compact and has a suitable enough grip to get your hands around. There's also the matter of what happens when the shampoo runs out. The obvious answer is that, well, you now are the proud owner of a strange-looking bar of soap, but Sapone's founders say that they have designed "the perfect ratio." Both concerns have been consumer and lab-tested by the brand, but I certainly wouldn't mind getting one in my hands for a test run.

Sapone currently has a waitlist for anyone interested in trying the plastic-free brand, and it will officially launch on August 11th.



06

SUSTAINABILITY · 06 OF 06

Trash Talk

By Valerie Hawks · September 29, 2026

06

Trash Talk: We Used To Talk About Replacing Plastic. Now, Not So Much

By **Valerie Hawks** · Published on thedieline.com, September 29, 2026

TRASH TALK

VALERIE HAWKS

Why are we talking trash? Why this column now? Packaging has entered a new era. Sustainability is no longer a priority because it's competing with inflation, tariffs, retailer requirements, legislation, supply chain instability, and consumer skepticism. The industry needs conversations that acknowledge those realities without losing sight of long-term progress.

Our new column, Trash Talk, from Interact Sustainability Manager Valerie Hawks, explores that tension and maybe even offers some hope for the future.

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Remember when every sustainable packaging conference featured a revolutionary new packaging material to replace plastic? Mycelium was everywhere! We were covered in seaweed. Helloooo algae. And how about agricultural waste, like those pesky corn husks or wheat straw? Duh, that was going to solve it all! Every booth promised to replace plastic, while panels packed with material experts and entrepreneur wizards predicted a material revolution, but somewhere along the way the conversation got quiet. Like, real quiet.

So what changed?

Brands are asking "is this better" a lot less and "can we afford this" a lot more. And honestly, I don't blame them. While innovation hasn't stopped—take the seaweed-based packaging company Sway, for example—priorities have shifted. The bright, shiny future we were promised actually entailed Inflation, high interest rates, tariffs, tight or non-existent venture funding, retail pressure, and brands trying to survive in a crowded, constantly changing landscape.

The barriers to adopting sustainable materials at scale haven't gone away. If anything, they've gotten harder to overcome. Materials once too expensive for widespread adoption are still too costly, and substrates that work well at a smaller scale are also struggling to meet the cost, performance, and supply demands of a larger brand. Even when we talked about this more often, the latest materials rarely had the potential to scale. Now? Novel materials are fewer and farther between, and the path from promising innovation to something a brand can actually afford and get up and running remains a long, winding road.

Sustainability hasn't disappeared, but reality is definitely louder.

In my day-to-day life as Director of Sustainability and Production at a CPG branding and packaging design agency, I don't spend much time talking about replacing PET with mycelium anymore. I spend my days helping brands figure out how to reduce

color stations, simplify structures, consolidate SKUs, source materials that are actually available, and make packaging work within shrinking budgets. None of those conversations make conference keynotes. But collectively, they may be doing more to move the industry forward than the flashiest and most quotable material announcement ever did.

Innovation hasn't failed, but business is changing, and those two things are very, very different. More brands are using some amount of post-consumer recycled (PCR) plastic than they did before. Maybe we have EPR regulations to thank for that, but progress is progress. And a conversation about removing material from a carton (lightweighting) that used to be about sustainability has now evolved into a dialogue about removing overall cost out of the material. Two things can be true at the same time. More PCR is being adopted, and less material is being used, and if it's being done to save money, does it matter if it's also offsetting a negative impact?

Admittedly, it feels harder to be inspired right now. Every day brings another crisis demanding our attention. THIS economy, political turmoil, supply chain disruption, rising costs. Hope doesn't trend nearly as well as outrage. Or maybe that's just my algorithm, but I suspect I'm not the only one.

I don't miss being told by a guy in a suit that his startup's latest "biodegradable" or compostable material is the next big thing while I'm checking out of the convo and thinking there's no way it can meaningfully scale to make it accessible to brands and businesses. But these far less noticeable improvements, happening on a much larger scale, might surprise us in future data.

Coca-Cola Consolidated has used data to optimize stretch wrapping, cutting film use by 30%. Wild (the deodorant brand) created lip balm packaging that uses a reusable case with a paper-based refill (that 100% removes single-use plastic) with PCR plastic and recycled aluminum. The product reportedly sold out within a week of launch. Across the industry, even incremental increases in recycled content and recyclable packaging become meaningful when multiplied across millions of packages. None of these are particularly sexy. They aren't going to headline a sustainability conference as the next big material breakthrough. But they are measurable, scalable, and happening now.

While AI has a whole host of reasons to be loathed, we are also seeing it help us more accurately track, predict, and optimize the things that can actually demonstrate a reduction in impact. Will packaging even matter when we have no water because of data centers? Who knows. The real test, though, will come in combining this practicality with ambition and innovation. This isn't the end of material innovation, but it may be the pause before the next wave. Eventually every cost conversation circles back to value, and every packaging conversation circles back to materials.

The question isn't whether that conversation returns. We're in the same loop, and we're just hanging out on the value side a bit more. But I keep getting stuck on whose value and whose cost we're actually talking about. We're increasingly told that better materials, better systems, and even EPR will ultimately cost the consumer more. And yes, that might be true. These things come with real costs, and not every brand can absorb them. Consumers are already stretched thin.

Meanwhile, brands are reporting record profits. So when we say "the consumer won't pay more," I think we need to be honest about what we mean. Is that actually a limitation of the consumer? Or is it a decision about where we believe the cost should land? Because the environmental cost is being paid regardless.

So what will it take to push us back around to the other side? It has to be something yelling louder than cost. Or maybe we need to stop treating cost and value as the same thing.

Remember when every sustainable packaging conference featured a revolutionary new packaging material to replace plastic?

FROM "TRASH TALK: WE USED TO TALK ABOUT REPLACING PLASTIC. NOW, NOT SO MUCH" · VALERIE HAWKS

SHELF LIFE

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THE WEEKLY TREND COLUMN | JANUARY 5, 2026

The Projects Designers Want To Work On in 2026



By **Chloe Cordover**

SHELF LIFE | NO. 093

The Projects Designers Want To Work On in 2026

By **Chloe Cordover** · Published on thedieline.com, January 5, 2026

Designers are often told they have total freedom; they can say no, choose their clients, or follow their passions wherever they lead.

And while all of that is technically true, the reality is a little less romantic. Most design work doesn't begin with a blank slate or a dream brief; it arrives via an inbox through inbound requests with existing brands, fixed scopes, and definite constraints.

Which made me wonder what designers would choose to design if they had 100% freedom to pick their next client? And not in some vague, aspirational sense, but what brands feel unfinished to them? What systems feel outdated? What objects, institutions, or experiences are begging for sharper thinking, better design, or a little more ambition and creativity?

The answers that follow come from designers reflecting on that exact question. Some are looking closely at the everyday. Some want to fix what's broken; others want to elevate what's already loved. But they each offer a snapshot of what excites designers heading into 2026, not necessarily as a trend forecast, but as a collection of very specific, very personal desires.

Jessie McGuire | Managing Partner of ThoughtMatter

In 2026, I want to redesign how private money shows up in public life.

Through an ongoing speculative series at Thought Matter, we've been exploring what it could look like if private investment supported civic institutions and public infrastructure in service of long-term thinking and trust. One example has been libraries: historically funded by private philanthropy, now asked to defend access, knowledge, and free expression with shrinking support.

Philanthropy shouldn't be invisible or abstract. I'm interested in designing it as a public-facing system, with clear values, accountability, and community benefit built in. For me, this work is about creating enduring models that help private capital serve the public good.

If we can design brands to build loyalty, we can design institutions to defend freedom.

Verònica Fuerte | Founder & Creative Directress of Hey

In 2026, I would love to design a truly international brand, one that is visible, public, and shared. Not because of scale itself, but because of what it represents.

Over the years, I've worked with large companies and global brands, but many of those projects remain confidential. They exist, they function, and they carry real responsibility, but they can't be shown. And I think there is something powerful about being able to point to a project and say that a small, independent studio did this.

I would love to design a global brand that proves that small studios have the same strategic and creative capabilities as large agencies. That size doesn't define ambition, rigor, or impact. That a compact team can think systemically, long-term, and at scale, without losing personality, authorship, or care.

Ideally, this would be a brand that lives across many contexts: packaging, digital platforms, physical spaces, and everyday touchpoints. A brand that requires consistency but allows flexibility, and that understands design as a living system rather than a fixed outcome.

More than a specific sector, what excites me is the opportunity to show that independent studios can lead big conversations, not just execute them.

Dorothy Ogé | Founder of Oge

If I had the opportunity to redesign anything this year, it would be Dick's Sporting Goods' branding and in-store retail environment. As a loyal customer and a mom of two young athletes who shop at Dick's for seasonal gear to team essentials, I want a more fun and inspiring experience.

The current logo's collegiate typography, with dingbats of a soccer ball, baseball, and basketball forming an apostrophe, feels dated and in need of modernization. I'd love to see their strong green equity expressed more boldly and consistently throughout the store, paired with clearer, more organized zones that distinctly separate apparel from accessories and equipment. Ultimately, it's about bringing the brand up to par with the design and performance-driven labels they proudly carry: Nike, YETI, and The North Face.

Dan Cassaro | Partner at Young Jerks

More tiny things!

Looking back on our projects from this year and into 2026, there seems to be an inverse relationship between the size of a box and the delight it brings. The smaller the box, the bigger the joy. I'm not sure if it's forced distillation of information, pushing back on packaging waste, or just that we love tiny little guys. Whatever it is, the payoff feels bigger when the box is smaller. We did the brand and packaging for skate bearings (led by Senior Art Director Brett Stenson) this year, and the box was barely bigger than a matchbook. I can't tell you what a treat it was to hold these things. So yeah, bring us your candy bars, your decks of cards, your tuna cans. We're going tiny-guy mode in '26.

Phoebe Glasfurd | Co-Founder and Creative Director of Glasfurd & Walker

I have so many things I would love to design. I'm really enjoying working on projects that elevate everyday objects, both from a product design perspective and through their packaging and brand world. Creating packaging that people want to keep, and brand worlds that feel rich and entertaining for things that live in the home every day.

I would love the opportunity to work on a beautiful hair care brand. That could be an evolution of an iconic brand like Mason Pearson, or a brand looking to create something new from the ground up.

And as always, our love of hospitality runs deep. I'm always excited about the next hotel or restaurant project, especially those with in-house packaged food and beverage products. Any opportunity to bring a physical space to life through all of the brand touchpoints, from packaging to menus to the overall atmosphere of an iconic hotel, is always a dream.

Kristian Shepherd | Senior Designer at Pearlfisher NYC

I love martial arts; it's made me who I am. I've trained in Muay Thai and Jiu-Jitsu for the past 8 years. With that said, I would love a crack at rebranding the UFC I think it's so dusty and dated. As the leading brand within combat sports, I feel it should look like it. There's so much fluff!

I've always been a fan of the Premier League rebrand by DesignStudio (Further). That same graphic confidence could carry the UFC—unmistakable blood-red, electric pops of color, and immersive motion, with communications that have cultural flex. I don't even watch football, but I tune in just to see that brand in action. It's inspiring.

Rebranding the UFC would be a dream fight; I would love to get my hands on it. With the right team and a sharper perspective, the brand could visually match the energy, discipline, and global influence of the sport itself.

"It's Tiiiiiiime" for a rebrand. Dana, hit me up.

If we can design brands to build loyalty, we can design institutions to defend freedom.

JESSIE MCGUIRE, THOUGHTMATTER

SHELF LIFE NO. 093 THE PROJECTS DESIGNERS WANT TO WORK ON IN 2026

"Which made me wonder what designers would choose to design if they had 100% freedom to pick their next client?

SHELF LIFE NO. 093 CHLOE CORDOVER

THE WEEKLY TREND COLUMN · FEBRUARY 16, 2026

Does an AI Divide Exist Between Corporations and Creatives?



By **Chloe Cordover**

SHELF LIFE · NO. 099

Does an AI Divide Exist Between Corporations and Creatives?

By **Chloe Cordover** · Published on thedieline.com, February 16, 2026

AI has become a cultural phenomenon that we all have feelings about.

Not mild feelings, either.

The kind of feelings that can turn a comments section into a war zone of emotion. And of course, there are my own personal opinions. I'm a writer and a creative, and I don't think anything can replace the creativity that comes from an IRL human who laughs, breathes, knows how to ride a bike, has a preference for aisle versus window seat, enjoys baked brie, or has actual lived experiences.

But do I use it? Yes, again, I'm human.

I often use it to help me with outlines for articles. I'm horrible at titles, so I use AI to help brainstorm. I'm a terrible speller with a tinge of dyslexia, and for that, I love Grammarly. Do I ever understand what my accountant is telling me? No, thus I turn to AI to help translate.

Disregarding its detrimental economic and environmental effects (which are far too numerous to detail here), I do believe it has its place. But I also believe it's imperfect, incapable of creating original work, and always robotic in its delivery. It exists. I use it for smaller tasks, but I still rely on my own brain and cognitive processes.

I'm also curious about the tension between how the emotion shifts when a brand releases a concept using AI versus when a designer creates something with AI. There's an unmistakable flip-flop of emotion, and I'm curious why.

When Coca-Cola released its AI Christmas campaigns in both 2024 and 2025, the backlash was immediate. There were accusations of greed, laziness, and job theft. The internet responded like Coca-Cola had tried to pass off a frozen entrée as a home-cooked Christmas feast.



Also, in August 2025, J.Crew posted a series of images on Instagram, but shortly after, its followers flagged the visuals as AI-generated rather than real photographs, noting odd visual glitches such as unnatural shadows, distorted stripes, and other imperfections.

As backlash grew, J.Crew updated the Instagram posts to credit the digital artist @samfinn.studio for creating the images, though they didn't explicitly label the visuals as AI-generated at first. The company described the collaboration as part of experimenting with new forms of creative expression.

Meanwhile, I'm seeing designers post fictional AI concepts on Instagram, and are met with something close to idolization. Studio Miso, for example, recently posted a conceptual collaboration with Bottega Veneta and Apple. The comments were overwhelmingly positive. "I'm mad. I want these," followed by "I need these to be real immediately," and fire emojis galore.



It's tempting to chalk this up to a simple moral: corporations are bad, artists are good.

But is it more nuanced than that?

Perhaps the tension isn't really about whether AI is ethical. It's more about power and who gets to wield it, who gets displaced by it, what audiences think is being taken, and what kinds of cultural meaning AI has begun to accumulate.

In the past two years, a new category of creative has quietly emerged: the AI concept designer. Their work sits somewhere between concept design, art direction, and advertising, without any of the constraints of those fields. They can invent campaigns for brands that haven't asked for them, build collaborations between companies that would never agree to share a mood board, and produce hyper-realistic product visuals. On Instagram, this work is sometimes labeled "concept," which is part of its charm; it almost seduces you with possibility.

Now, of course, it's not all well-designed or even intentional; there is certainly a fair share of "slop."

But the well-executed concepts offer the thrill of plausibility, something that isn't real, but could be, and maybe should be. The Loewe x Stanley Cup concept collaboration, which generated a wave of positive buzz, did exactly that. The concept project fuses the classic Stanley silhouette with a more sculpted take, wrapped in a leathery material and an unexpected color palette that screams luxe.



It wasn't celebrated because it was made with AI. It was celebrated because it looked good and it was smart, the kind of creative thinking that makes people briefly forget they're scrolling in bed, and instead imagine the product on their kitchen counter. The comments weren't about whether AI is destroying creativity. They were about taste. About desire. About the old-fashioned pleasure of seeing something innovative and wanting it.

And was I fooled? Was I ready to purchase one, no matter the cost? Admittedly, yes.

SHELF LIFE NO. 099 DOES AN AI DIVIDE EXIST BETWEEN CORPORATIONS AND CRE...

This is where the brand problem begins. When a corporation uses AI, audiences don't see imagination. They see cost-cutting and everything that word implies. Laziness, lost jobs, and cultural cheapening. The visual language of AI has become shorthand not just for a new tool, but for a familiar corporate sin, which is doing less while charging more. It signals a company choosing efficiency over craft, scale over care, and convenience over the human labor that once sat behind the work.

When viewers clock AI in an ad, many immediately assume the brand chose it because it was cheaper than hiring real people. The logic is emotional rather than technical, but it's not irrational. Coca-Cola is not a scrappy startup. It is a multinational corporate behemoth with the resources to pay for practically any kind of production. So if it uses AI, audiences interpret that decision as a statement. They could have hired humans, illustrators, photographers, set designers, actors, but they didn't. And in a moment when creative industries already feel saturated and unstable, AI reads as one more way to flood the world with content while shrinking the number of people paid to make it.

But Coca-Cola isn't adopting AI because it's strapped for cash. The company has poured serious money into AI infrastructure, partnering with major platforms like Adobe, training systems on its own brand assets, and even creating executive roles dedicated to AI strategy. It's a massive corporate bet on where creative production is headed, even if no one yet knows what that shift will mean for the humans who used to get paid to do that work.

There's also a conundrum here, especially with a brand like Coca-Cola. AI is constantly marketed as a shortcut. It's said to be faster, cheaper, frictionless, and a way to save time, reduce labor, and streamline creativity. But the kind of AI advertising Coke is making isn't actually effortless. It's painstaking. It does require taste, iteration, human direction, and enormous amounts of polishing to get something usable, let alone good. Which means the promise embedded in AI's own sales pitch doesn't quite ring true. AI changes what the work is, and who gets credit for it. And that conversation certainly isn't being had.

What complicates this, and what rarely makes it into the outrage cycle, is that AI design is not actually a one-click wonder. "I think a lot of the backlash comes from misunderstanding, especially from people who aren't familiar with how production actually works," shares Nana Shatsky, Creative Director, AI-Enhanced Creative Production. "When audiences see something that looks obviously AI, the immediate assumption is often: 'This brand is greedy. They pressed a button instead of hiring real creatives.' For large, multi-million or billion-dollar companies, that perception triggers an emotional response."

She continues, "What most people don't realize is that AI campaigns are still created by teams (AI artists, directors, editors, and creatives) and they're very much paid work. They're not free, and they're not effortless. AI simply allows ideas to be executed faster and with more flexibility than traditional CGI pipelines, which require long render times, massive budgets, and huge teams."

But in a way, the misunderstanding isn't the point. The backlash isn't really about how AI is made. It's about what people believe it represents. AI, in the context of a brand campaign, reads like an extraction. Not just the extraction of jobs, but the extraction of meaning. When a brand uses AI, audiences aren't just asking "Is this good?" They're wondering who didn't get paid. And what harm was done in the process.



It's also a reaction that feels evergreen. We're drowning in a glut of branded slop content, and there's a constant stream of loud, disposable attempts at relevance. The 2026 Super Bowl felt like the peak of that feeling. Thirty-second spectacles engineered to go viral, most of them forgotten before the fourth quarter. Svedka's ad, for example, was the first fully AI-generated ad to air as a Super Bowl commercial, and it caught a lot of backlash around how the brand could afford an eight-million-dollar ad spot but not "real" animators.

Independent designers, by contrast, are often granted the benefit of the doubt. Instead of a powerful institution replacing workers, it becomes one person finally able to make what they've always imagined. That difference in power dynamic is enormous, and audiences respond to it instinctively.

Shatsky described her relationship to AI less as a sudden pivot and more as a continuation. She had spent years building a creative foundation across illustration, graphic design, video editing, product visuals, art direction, and social media. AI didn't replace those skills. It gave her a new way to express them, and, crucially, to execute concepts that previously would have required an entire team.

"I've been creative my entire life: illustration, graphic design, videography, product videos, editing, art direction, and even managing social media for brands. AI didn't replace that experience; it finally allowed it to be seen, shares Shatsky. "Before AI, ideas like mine required a full production team. Today, I can execute them alone. That shift didn't make my work easier. It made it possible. AI gave my ideas wings, not shortcuts."

Their process, notably, begins far away from the technology. Shatsky notes, "I begin with the brief, then immerse myself in the brand's world — its language, values, and visual codes. From there, ideas form very intuitively. I sketch by hand, write notes, draw in my phone, sometimes even at night, right before sleep. The raw thinking happens offline.

"Only after that do I bring AI into the process. I use it to translate abstract ideas into visual directions, not as a generator of concepts, but as a way to shape and communicate them clearly. What clients receive isn't a rough idea, but a strong visual narrative that already feels intentional and considered," she continues.

AI can generate images, but it cannot generate judgment. It cannot generate the particular kind of restraint that makes something feel expensive, or the emotional intelligence that makes a concept land. Those qualities still come from a human mind with a point of view. And audiences, even if they can't articulate it, can feel the difference between something that was prompted and something that was directed.

AI does not replace creativity, but it does demand that every creative decide how they will relate to it or use it. There's no denying that AI does create based on stolen IP and blatantly references artists' and creators' work.

I asked Shatsky how she felt about it. "Personally, I don't experience that sense of guilt in my own practice, because of how I approach AI. Everything I create starts from scratch — from my own concepts, sketches, and visual thinking. I rarely use references directly, and I don't build work by asking AI to replicate a specific living artist's style. My work leans toward realism — lighting, angles, product textures — and those visual principles don't belong to any one person. They're part of shared visual language, much like photography itself."

She continues, "I also think it's important to zoom out: all creatives, historically, learn by absorbing, referencing, remixing, and evolving what came before them. Designers study other designers. Filmmakers reference cinematography. Painters study masters. AI accelerates that ecosystem, but it doesn't invent the idea of influence. To me, the responsibility sits with the human using the tool. AI can be used lazily — copying aesthetics without depth. Or it can be used as a visualization engine for original ideas. In my case, it's closer to the latter. It's not about pulling fragments of someone else's identity, it's about bringing something that already exists in my head into visible form."

The temptation, in moments like this, is to start policing tools. To declare that "real artists" don't use AI, the way people once declared that "real photographers" don't edit their images, or "real designers" don't use templates. But telling artists what they're allowed to use has never been a particularly good way to protect culture. It usually just protects hierarchy. The more interesting question is not whether AI should be used in creative work, but how it is being used and by whom. AI can be used lazily, cynically, and carelessly. It can also be used as a way to accelerate workflows and allow a single designer to do what previously required a small studio.

In the end, the difference between backlash and applause comes down to trust.

When an independent designer uses AI, audiences tend to see someone making something out of curiosity and ambition. When a brand uses AI, audiences tend to see someone making something out of efficiency and profit. Those assumptions may not always be fair, but they are culturally consistent.

DIELINE ANNUAL 2026 · SHELF LIFE

SHELF LIFE NO. 105 · MARCH 30, 2026

The Rise of Founder-Designed Packaging

By **Chloe Cordover**

DIELINE ANNUAL 2026 · SHELF LIFE

The Rise of Founder-Designed Packaging

Founder-designed packaging is emerging as a response to overly polished, interchangeable branding, trading perfection for personality, authenticity, and a closer connection to the founder's vision. While designing in-house allows for speed, cost savings, and stronger brand alignment, it also carries risks like lack of objectivity and weaker execution without design expertise or external feedback.

By **Chloe Cordover** · Published on thedieline.com, March 30, 2026

Take a stroll through the grocery store, and most packaging looks good. But, if we're being honest, most of it is also completely interchangeable. There's no lack of clean typography, muted palettes, and safe branding architecture and hierarchy. It's the result of many, many rounds of refinement that almost sand down anything too weird or too personal in favor of something that has mass appeal.

For a long time, looking "professional" was the goal, and hiring a design agency was the fastest way to get there. But now, as more brands compete for attention, especially online, packaging has to work just as hard on a screen as it does on a shelf. Blending in can feel like a liability.

At the same time, a different approach is emerging, with more and more founders designing their own packaging. I keep noticing it with products that feel a little rougher around the edges, more opinionated, and sometimes even a bit… off.

But that's exactly why I'm taking notice. They don't look like they've been filtered through the same set of references, and they feel closer to the person behind the brand.

In many cases, yes, it starts as a practical decision. Most early-stage brands don't have the luxury of spending heavily on design when the product itself isn't proven yet. But founders are realizing that doing it themselves can create something more aligned with how they actually see their product.

Jacky Ibarra, VP of Product Management at nopales-tortilla snack brand Cactus Foods, shared, "We were bootstrapping the business and being very intentional about where we invested early on. As a founder, my primary focus at the beginning was the product itself. We were introducing something novel, tortilla chips made with cactus. While cactus is very familiar across much of Latin America, it's not as widely recognized in the broader U.S. market. Because of that, I prioritized investing our limited resources into developing a product that tasted exceptional and could stand on its own. For me, the thinking was: if the product wasn't delivered, no amount of design could save it, but if it did, the brand had to rise to meet it."



That logic exposes something founders are often unwilling to admit. Beautiful packaging can't manufacture meaning; it can only amplify what's already there. Founders who understand that tend to build brands that feel more honest from the start.

At the same time, some of the most beautiful packaging in the world is doing its best to distract from a product or brand that lacks the quality to back it up. In those cases, design becomes more of a cover-up.

In other cases, founders aren't outsourcing because they don't need to. They already know how to design, and, more importantly, what they want to say.

"We had two brand designers as founders from the start, so that was never really a decision we had to make. Being able to build a brand-first company was just a built-in advantage we brought to FABRIC, and it was intentional. Anyone can formulate a beverage, but we saw brand as the moat from day one," noted Haylee Jordan, Co-Founder of Fabric, a non alcoholic, TCH beverage brand. "Having a strong, distinct identity that we can evolve in-house means we can pivot quickly, which is a must in a beverage startup. Anthony [Bradley] and I both come from brand design and strategy backgrounds, so we had the core capabilities covered without needing to go outside. That saved us real time and money in the early stages, and it means the brand can move fast without being reliant on an external service provider."



This is where the shift becomes visible. When founders design their own packaging, they're deciding everything, down to the kerning of the product description. And they work to build from a point of view rather than trying to align on one. Which shows up in the design.

Founder-designed packaging often starts with the same fundamentals as agency-designed packaging. Hierarchy, readability, and shelf presence are all considered, but it doesn't stop there. It pulls in niche visual languages, cultural cues, and sparks of inspiration that these founders feel deeply connected to and inspired by.

Jane Kate Wong, for example, the founder and designer behind Noon, worked hard to create packaging that drew on the stainless-steel aesthetic of a lab. Honey Dept's founder, Noah Phillips, also designed his own packaging, opting to put his brand's honey in an aluminum tube with an aura of what he calls "corporate irreverence," something he has brought to every decision and detail of the packaging and branding.



When founders design, the work tends to feel more specific and occasionally a little off. But that's what makes it memorable. Mohave Mallows, the first organic marshmallow, with packaging designed by its founders, is a brand so rooted in their story of being a Girl Scout now living in Joshua Tree, fused with the small batch mission; it's almost like this packaging couldn't have developed without the founders' vision being so involved.



It feels like someone made a decision, and not a compromise.

That said, there is a structural advantage here: speed. Designing in-house removes the lag of briefs and feedback loops. Brands can iterate in real time, responding to what's working and what isn't without waiting. In early-stage consumer businesses, that kind of agility is critical.

But there's also a very obvious downside. Without external input, there's no objective filter. No one to challenge assumptions or call out blind spots. The standard becomes whatever the founder is willing to accept, or, worse, what they think is good quality design when they don't have a background in design at all.

Anthony Bradley noted, "There's a unique kind of pressure that comes with designing your own brand, a little voice whispering, this has to be the best work you've ever done. It's hard to check yourself when you're working in a vacuum, and at times we had to remind ourselves to trust the process we'd each built over nearly 15 years of branding work."

But even that fear contributes to the outcome. The work carries weight because it's personal. That's why these brands often feel more engaging. Product and packaging are developed together, and positioning becomes the design. Founder of Madley Hadley, Madelyn Hadley's experience captures this shift clearly. After working with an agency, she realized something was missing.



"The real turning point came when I was meeting one of my mentors, Tom Rinks, co-founder of Sun Bum and a longtime brand builder," noted Hadley. "He was scrolling through sketches on my iPad, doodles I had been making just for fun, and told me, 'This is what your brand has to feel like.' They were playful, slightly weird drawings, my cat, Goose, in red high-heeled boots and a mustache, my husband in cheesy sunglasses with messy bubble-letter captions, full of personality and a little bit of madness. From there, I started figuring out how to bring those two worlds together: the structure and clarity needed for shelf communication, and the expressive, hand-drawn energy that made the brand feel personal. That's when it really began to feel like something that was truly my own."

The result isn't always polished, but polish has become a default, and personality hasn't. Because what's happening here is a shift in what we value in the design. For years, "good" packaging meant clean, clear, and category-aligned. But sometimes it can also be something specific and hard to replicate. Founder-designed brands don't always look perfect, and they might not follow traditional design "rules," but that's what makes me love them more.

Of course, while I've highlighted some brands with great packaging designed by their founders, I don't think every founder should design their own packaging, and not every brand benefits from it. A strong point of view doesn't automatically translate into strong execution. If you don't have a background in design, or at least a deep sensitivity to it, there's a risk in working entirely in a vacuum. The brands that make this work are applying a level of craft, restraint, and awareness that often comes from experience. For founders considering this path, bringing in external feedback, even if it's not a full agency engagement, can be the difference between something that feels distinct and something that simply feels underdeveloped. Because at the end of the day, people do judge brands by their packaging.

As Bradley puts it, "If you're going to take the shot and build your own brand, remember to have fun with it. Perfection is impossible. A brand is a living, evolving organism, and early on, you're constantly balancing priorities. Sometimes, perfecting a design just isn't the most important thing."

Perfection isn't what stands out, but a strong point of view certainly does, and I hope to discover more founder-led packaging designs.

THE WEEKLY TREND COLUMN | APRIL 27, 2026

The Peter Pan-ification of Wellness



By **Chloe Cordover**

SHELF LIFE | NO. 109

The Peter Pan-ification of Wellness

By **Chloe Cordover** · Published on thedieline.com, April 27, 2026

Spend five minutes in the supplement aisle at Whole Foods, and you'll find pastel bears, tropical flavors, gummies for sleep, for bloat, and for focus. It seems like the wellness industry has suddenly decided that adults need their supplements and vitamins to taste and look like candy. And business is booming. The gummy supplement market is valued at roughly $10 billion, and is on track to nearly triple by the early 2030s. Grüns, a gummy bear greens supplement, was acquired on April 9th, 2026 by Unilever for $1.2 billion. You might assume the fastest-growing customer segment would be children who can't swallow pills, but it's not. It's adults who, apparently, prefer not to.



The standard industry explanation is that gummies "remove friction." Founders keep telling me the same thing: people quit their wellness habits because the product made them work harder to fit it into their routines. But make the vitamin taste like a peach ring, and suddenly they take it every day.

When this consistency piece is unlocked, so too are the sales.

Hudson Davis-Ross, co-founder and CEO of the wellness gummy company Plant People, shares that, "Most people don't fail at wellness because they don't care. They fail because the products don't fit into their lives. Gummies worked because they removed that friction. They turned something you should do into something you actually want to do. So it's less about making self-care 'fun,' and more about making it repeatable. And repeatability is what drives real outcomes."





Mashiat, the co-founder of another gummy company, Atlantic, shares a similar sentiment: “Most supplements today still feel like a chore: scoops, shakers, textures you have to tolerate. Gummies remove that friction entirely; the ‘fun’ is almost a byproduct of that simplicity, and the taste, of course. For us, it wasn’t about making something playful for the sake of it—it was about designing a format people would actually stick to daily. Consistency is where results come from, and fun definitely makes the consistency easier.”

But there’s a difference between responding to a consumer problem and engineering one. Gummy brands have induced the idea that wanting something easy and delightful within the wellness space is perfectly fine. It also happens to be an extraordinary marketing tactic, because it reframes any product that asks something of you into a design failure. Why take a horsepill-sized vitamin when you can chew a fruity flavored gummy that you’re told does three things for your body at once? But whether these gummies actually serve consumers is a different question entirely.

There’s the regulatory layer, which the branding conveniently obscures. Supplements in the US are not approved by the FDA for safety or effectiveness before they go to market. Unlike a prescription drug, which requires years of clinical testing before it reaches a shelf, a supplement company can simply formulate a product and start selling it. The FDA can intervene after the fact if something goes wrong, but, out of the gate, it’s on the brand to ensure the product is safe. The same brand that’s also spending millions on pastel packaging and influencer campaigns to make you feel like you’re just treating yourself. That’s a lot of trust to extend without much structural accountability to back it up.



“A well-made gummy can absolutely meet quality standards,” Pinto shares. “I encourage clients to look past the format and focus on transparency, third-party testing, no fillers or dyes, transparent labels, and clinically meaningful dosages. It’s also helpful to check sugar content and look for brands like Plant People that prioritize stability and bioavailability in their formulations.

The wellness industry has always sold aspiration.

What’s new, though, is that it’s now selling the concept of aspiring to effortlessness. For a long time, the aesthetic of serious wellness was stark and medicinal to a fault, with plain white bottles, horse-pill capsules, and chalky powders that tasted like a mineral deposit. That period made wellness feel punishing, and it demanded to be disrupted. But I think the correction has gone a bit too far in the opposite direction. Today’s supplement branding is often more interested in making you feel like you’re treating yourself, than in making you feel like you’re doing something with physiological stakes.

The real question is, what happens when we make healthy choices feel so effortless that they stop registering as health-related at all? Maybe there’s something useful about a supplement that tastes like medicine. Is it not a small, daily reminder that you’re doing something deliberate? Remove that, and the line between self-care and snacking disappears. And when something is easy, it’s also hard to regulate.



Alexis Pinto, a registered dietitian, notes, “Clear education is so important for consumers to understand the purpose and limitations of supplementation, but when done well, this overlap can be a good entry point for healthier habits, especially for individuals who feel overwhelmed by wellness routines. It creates a more positive, less restrictive relationship with health behaviors.”

None of this is an argument for going back to horse pills, because no thank you. But it is an argument for some honesty about what’s actually happening. Because, if nothing else, it’s a major, profitable restructuring of wellness around the psychology of indulgence, justified by the language of behavioral design.

Brands get a $10 billion market and a rhetorically bulletproof position, and anyone asking harder questions is just bringing back the punishing wellness culture everyone hated. Consumers get a gummy that might work, in a format optimized for their enjoyment, with no one checking the label before it ships. Whether that’s a fair trade probably depends on how much you trust the brand. And the brand will do anything to make you.

THE WEEKLY TREND COLUMN · MAY 11, 2026

Does Everything Now Come In A Single-Serve Pack?



By **Chloe Cordover**

SHELF LIFE · NO. 111

Does Everything Now Come In A Single-Serve Pack?

By **Chloe Cordover** · Published on thedieline.com, May 11, 2026

A few years ago, it felt like every brand was releasing sustainability goals they promised to address within 5 to 10 years. Well, now we've arrived at those promised dates, and it seems as though sustainability practices are moving in the opposite direction.

Brands that have built their identities around large-format, pantry-staple products are launching on-the-go versions of their hero products, and consumers are buying them enthusiastically, with sustainability concerns left behind.

The most recent example is Bragg, the 112-year-old company behind the apple cider vinegar bottle that's been a fixture in health-conscious kitchens for generations, just launched On-The-Go ACV Pouches. Also known as single-serve flexible pouches available in a 6-pack at Walmart for $7.99.



Bragg is far from alone. According to Fortune Business Insights, the global single-serve packaging market size was valued at $11.2 billion in 2025. The market is projected to grow from $11.93 billion in 2026 to $19.68 billion by 2034.

The thought process driving this is extremely straightforward. Portability is baked into the user experience. Single-serve sachets designed for gym bags and car cupholders are increasingly driving purchase decisions as packaging that moves with the consumer, and are becoming the norm.

Look across categories, and the pattern repeats. AG1, the $79-a-month greens powder that has built a cult following, has long offered travel packs precisely because its customer base expects their

wellness rituals to be portable enough for a work trip. Kylie Jenner's Sprinter brand just launched k2o, on-the-go drink sticks that blend electrolytes, hyaluronic acid, and collagen peptides, translating a beauty-from-within trend into a format designed for a what's-in-my-bag-style haul.



Even the olive oil space is taking note. YiaYia, an olive oil brand, has just won a Dieline Award for its single-serve oil sachets. According to the brand, "The single-serve range was created in response to customer needs. For one, single-serve portions are a perfect way to ensure you use the right amount each time, perfectly seasoning your salad or dish. And for another, proponents of the Mediterranean Diet drink "shots" of extra-virgin olive oil neat to take full advantage of its plentiful health benefits. Single-serve packages are easy to store, to transport, and to use, quickly, cleanly, and requiring no kitchen implements."



Several cultural movements are converging, making this moment particularly ripe for the single-serve spin-off. Wellness culture has become a daily ritual, and the rise of the "wellness stack," the morning routine of supplements, functional beverages, adaptogens, and ACV shots, has created a consumer who is highly motivated to maintain their health practices even when they're traveling, commuting, or eating at a desk. When your wellness ritual lives in a large bottle on your kitchen counter, that habit breaks the moment you leave home.

The single-serve packaging immediately solves that.

What's more, household sizes are shrinking. The rise of single-person households has reshaped demand across CPG, making the single-serve trend particularly relevant. While a full-size bottle of Bragg ACV might go bad before a single person can finish it, a 6-pack of single-serve pouches means no waste, a much longer shelf life, and a natural trial-and-variety mechanism for brands.

This may be the most uncomfortable truth embedded in this trend. A 2025 McKinsey survey on sustainable packaging found that consumers consistently rank price, quality, and convenience as more important than environmental impact. In other words, sustainability messaging moved the needle for a while, but with inflation and shifting consumer priorities, it has lost ground to practicality.

Here is where the trend gets genuinely complicated. Most single-serve flexible pouches, the kind Bragg is using, and the kind that dominate this category, are made from multi-layer laminate films. These materials combine plastic, foil, and other substrates to deliver barrier properties and shelf stability. And they are notoriously difficult to recycle.

Multi-layer flexible packaging accounts for a huge share of single-use plastic waste, and infrastructure to recycle it at scale barely exists. While the industry is moving toward mono-material recyclable films and bio-based alternatives, those transitions are slow.

Compare that to what these brands are spinning off, like a glass bottle of Bragg ACV and a resealable aluminum can of AG1; these formats are measurably more sustainable per unit of product delivered.

These launches are happening at exactly the moment when brands spent the better part of a decade building green credentials. The 2010s and early 2020s were marked by an arms race in sustainability claims like organic certifications, compostable packaging, refillable systems, and carbon-neutral shipping pledges. Bragg is a certified organic brand. Yiayia is building its premium positioning partly on quality and transparency. AG1 talks extensively about clean sourcing. Yet each of these brands is now entering or expanding into a format category that represents a meaningful step backward in packaging sustainability.

There are nuances worth acknowledging. Flexible packaging, even multi-layer laminates, is significantly lighter than glass or rigid plastic, reducing transportation emissions. Brands like AWSM Sauce have made it their whole mission to create single-serve sauce packet sachets in the name of sustainability. As mentioned on the brand's website, "You no longer have to worry about how you can make the world a better place. By purchasing our sauce powder packets and replacing single-use plastics in your fridge, you reduce the plastic used per sauce bottle by 95%. Help preserve our planet." And they go on to mention, "Companies spend millions of dollars to transport water from place to place so they can make their sauces and condiments. The trucks and ships used to do this pollute the environment. Our powder packets cut out this step. Use the water you have at home."



For brands, there's pressure from both sides. On one end, consumers want more convenience, and on the other, regulators want less waste. New state packaging laws took effect in 2026 across California, Virginia, Washington, and New York, targeting single-use plastics, polystyrene, and hotel amenity bottles. Extended Producer Responsibility schemes are expanding. The EU's Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation is setting ambitious recyclability targets for 2030.

The brands that navigate this best will be the ones who find formats that deliver on both promises: the travel-ready stick pack in a recyclable mono-material film, the pouch that earns compostable qualities. Until then, convenience is winning decisively, sustainability is being compromised, and heritage brands are betting that getting into your travel bag is worth everything.

SHELF LIFE NO. 123 · AUGUST 17, 2026

Nostalgia As a Band-Aid

By **Chloe Cordover**

Nostalgia As a Band-Aid

By **Chloe Cordover** · Published on thedieline.com, August 17, 2026

If one more person tells me Gen Z is obsessed with nostalgia, I'm hurling my laptop out the window.

Not because they're wrong, but because it's become the only marketing trick most brands seem interested in deploying. In reality, it feels a lot like a creative Band-Aid. Risk tolerance has taken over, and nostalgia is what brands reach for when they can't afford to fail, but it's nothing strategic or clever.

But I do get it.

The last few years have handed people an unrelenting stream of things to be anxious about. Inflation is making what used to be an average grocery run a checking-account thief of joy; the housing market has affected future generations' ability to purchase homes; and a constant, always-on news cycle makes people's jaws tense, and their shoulders stay up high. When the present feels unstable, and the future feels scary, the past sure does become safe.

Not to mention, the data backs brands up. A peer-reviewed, six-experiment study found that inducing nostalgia made consumers willing to pay more for products because those warm, sentimental feelings satisfy a need for social connection. Nostalgia sells, and it makes sense that people would want to buy their way back into a moment that felt simpler, even if it's half-remembered. So no, I don't blame consumers for wanting comfort. What I blame brands for is recognizing that hunger and deciding that the easiest way to feed it is to keep serving the same ideas on repeat, instead of asking what comfort could look like, if that's the problem trying to be solved.

"To us, the popularity of nostalgia came from the reaction to everything looking way too clean, 2D, boring, the same. Minimalism got boring. Techy, cold design all looks the same eventually. Also, the fact that people want to escape the world we live in these days factors into it, too. Nostalgia is an incredibly efficient visual shorthand. You can borrow a typeface, a color palette, a tone for language, a packaging convention from another era and immediately create familiarity and feeling," Ashley Jones, Creative Director at Creech, shares with me.

"There are categories where familiarity is just really useful. We recently branded Smash Kitchen, and when you're designing ketchup and mustard, you're competing with products and brands people have known their entire lives. There are certain things that feel familiar or appropriate to the category because they've been proven to work. We don't think the goal should always be to throw those things out just for the sake of being new. The opportunity is to understand what deserves to stay, and then figure out where you can push," continues Jones. "For us that's the distinction. Looking backward can be incredibly generative when you're extracting an idea, an attitude, or a truth, or even recognizing a convention that has earned its place. It gets less interesting when you're just extracting an aesthetic"



Something that converts or wins with consumers this consistently stops being a creative decision and quickly becomes impulsive and without thought. It becomes the packaging equivalent of a social media trend. How many times have you seen the butter yellow text over an Instagram reel lately? How many people can share what they think is chic? Algorithmically, it works, sure, and the "creative" might convert. Still, when an entire industry of talented people stops pushing the limits because it's an easy way to hit numeric goals, we find ourselves in an interesting conundrum.

It is also intriguing that brands have started calling out the nostalgia of it all in press releases. KFC's U.S. CMO announced the return of popcorn chicken this summer and put it on the record that the comeback was about "nodding to nostalgia" while modernizing the brand, as if those two things obviously go hand in hand. Last summer, the return of Diet Cherry Coke was a nostalgic fever dream come true. Even smaller brands like Batta are betting on the nostalgic take.

Christina Fischer at Studio MPLS recently shared with me that she hoped "to balance both a modern aesthetic and a sense of nostalgia" for consumers. But increasingly, "nostalgia" is just a word being slapped onto a press release with no meaning behind it at all.



They're all the same idea, repeated and repeated once again for good measure.

"Brands follow culture, and culture is on a nostalgia loop: we're mining the (increasingly recent) past and repackaging it for the present. In 2014, the late theorist Mark Fisher used the term 'the slow cancellation of the future' to describe a sense that no genuinely new styles or movements are emerging, only recycled ones," Senior Strategist, Claren Walker. at Porto Rocha, notes. "We see it everywhere in brand: from newcomers like Vacation borrowing '80s decadence to sell sunscreen, to Burger King recreating ads straight out of the '90s, to heritage fashion houses reissuing more bags than they design."

She goes on, “Some of this is a reaction to a decade of blanding and the sans-serif identities that made everything look the same. But it’s also become a convenient shortcut and turned into its own kind of boring. Nostalgia lends a brand emotion, familiarity, and recognition it would otherwise have to earn, which helps if you don’t have a history of your own to draw on. It’s nearly impossible to design something with no reference to the past, but the brands that do it well start from something they own and then build on it to get somewhere new.”

But it’s not about creatives just being lazy. Last year, when Cracker Barrel dropped its identity to aim at a younger customer—a standard modernization routine straight out of the usual playbook—the backlash cost it nearly $100 million in market value in a week, and the company reversed course before the news cycle even finished processing it, publicly recommitting to the folksy original.



Pirate’s Booty took a similar beating online. In June, the Hershey-owned brand rolled out its most significant rebrand since 1987, working with agency Pearlfisher on a new wordmark, color palette, and a redesigned mascot with a modern, clipart-style overhaul that stripped away the parrot-shouldered pirate’s original personality. The backlash was immediate, with design fans calling it the latest casualty of a broader “blandification” trend. Some critics even speculated that the new logo had been generated by AI (it’s not). If anything, it’s matching current illustration styles that children, the brand’s target demographic, gravitate towards… like Paw Patrol.



The launch suggested that Pirate’s Booty redesigned its mascot for a Gen Alpha customer it didn’t yet have, and, in doing so, alienated the adult fans it already had. Consumers were almost as upset as they’d been with Cracker Barrel, but if you’re an adult who’s going to stop eating Pirate Booty because you don’t like the look of the new pirate, I’d suggest maybe taking a step back and taking a breath.

I’ll admit these two examples complicate my own argument more than they support it. If stepping away from nostalgia keeps failing this publicly and this fast, the market is actively punishing the alternative. When a brand’s entire equity is stability, ditching nostalgia isn’t a smart move. But these two examples shouldn’t be enough to convince an entire industry that forward motion is impossible.

Kapono Chung, partner at Combo, states, “Forward-thinking design must be grounded in consumer and cultural insight; it can’t exist in a vacuum. Humans and taste are constantly evolving, and design needs to evolve right alongside them. Nostalgic design feels so easy and safe because it lets us stay comfortable in what we already know. Real forward-thinking design means resisting that comfort and paying attention to where culture is actually headed, not ignoring it.”

The interesting brands over the next few years will be the ones willing to figure out what “forward thinking” actually looks like, and it will absolutely have nothing to do with a brand’s archive.

“We feel the work that ends up feeling most forward-thinking often comes from paying closer attention to the company than to the category,” notes Griffin Creech, Founder and Creative Director at Creech. “Culture is obviously in the room. We all absorb it constantly. But we don’t think our job is to predict the next aesthetic. It’s to make something specific enough that it doesn’t need to follow one.”

The choco taco might be nostalgic now, but at one point, it was the pinnacle of innovation.



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