

HIGH FUTURE UNBOXED

2024 TREND REPORT

DATA
AI
BLOCKCHAIN

THE FUTURE UNBOXED

TikTok ruined trend forecasting—we'll happily die on this hill.

It's not that "trends" didn't exist before, or they were solely limited to end-of-the-year wrap-ups, it's just that, well, they're everywhere now, and we're constantly inundated with the new flavor of the week or even the next five minutes. A dragonfly, gorgeously hypnotizing wings and all, can live anywhere from one week to two months. Butterboards died a much faster death.

That's how ephemeral they ostensibly are these days. We're all just so hungry to name a moment and plant our flag, right or wrong.

But there is something nice and tidy about a report—it's how we mark time or recognize a genuine true-blue moment of innovation or serendipity. And, yeah, we try our darndest to make our very own trend report feel just a bit different. We'll spread out the tarot cards and tell you what we foresee with packaging trends. But we also like to talk about some of the bigger ideas taking shape in the design and branding world, whether that's packaging refill systems using old-fashioned aluminum cans or how brands are failing the LGBTQ+ community. Sometimes, it even comes in the guise of commentary, but we think that's perfectly OK and that these things can coexist peacefully.

And the year ahead promises to be a doozy for creatives everywhere. If you thought 2020 had it in for us, well, gird your loins for 2024. While it's true that it has never been a more exciting time to be a designer, it's also an industry—not unlike many others—going through a significant moment of great upheaval and change. And, as always, we're here to cover it and hopefully make sense of it, good and bad.

So, let's cut the preamble short and dig in. **Here's Dieline's 2024 Trend Report.**

THE BIOPLASTICS SHUFFLE



"BIOPLASTIC IS PLASTIC. THE 'BIO' PART DOESN'T MAGICALLY SOLVE THE VERY COMPLEX POLLUTION PROBLEMS IN THE PACKAGING INDUSTRY."

- SANDRO KVERNMO, CO-FOUNDER AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR AT [GOODS](#)

THE BIOPLASTIC SHUFFLE

We're talking billions of plastic bottles, most of which would otherwise end up in a landfill, incinerated, or making its way to the great plastic patch of garbage in the ocean. But you already knew that.

Instead, what many of the biggest brands around are opting to do isn't give you more infinitely recyclable packaging. They want you to have bioplastics.

In 2021, Coca-Cola announced that they had developed another bioplastic [bottle prototype](#), one made from plant-based paraxylene (bPX) that uses corn sugar—however, the technology the beverage maker uses is flexible feedstock-wise, meaning they could instead use agricultural byproducts or forestry waste. Sadly, brands aren't interested in reducing their plastic footprint. They want to give you another polymer entirely, one that might be even more harmful to the environment. It's not that bioplastics can't be part of a circular design system—they can. They just haven't yet proven they can be a viable part of a circular ecosystem, and that comes down to the material's end-of-life scenario.

Yes, they could be made with a lower carbon footprint or using renewable energy sources, i.e., non-fossil fuels. However, it requires land to grow these feedstocks, lots of it, and that's immensely resource-intensive. And, well, there goes your better-for-the-Earth-carbon footprint (not to mention [783 million people worldwide](#) going to bed every night on an empty stomach).

And what about disposing of the stuff? [Bioplastics carry a resin code of 7](#)—or “other”—and are often rejected from recycling facilities. That's not to say they can't be recycled or repurposed, but it really comes down to the chemical structure of the material in question or what kinds of additives might get mixed into the plastic slop.



THE BIOPLASTIC SHUFFLE

Oh, and they also use plenty of toxic chemicals.

"Bioplastic is the plastic industry's marketing dream," says Sandro Kvernmo, co-founder and creative director of [Goods](#). "It sounds like a product that's sustainable and low cost and has all the properties we know from 'regular plastic.' In reality, it has nearly all of the downsides non-bioplastic has, spreading microplastics being just one of them."

"Bioplastic is plastic," he adds. "The 'bio' part doesn't magically solve the very complex pollution problems in the packaging industry."

It makes for a challenging set of materials with plenty of question marks, and designers and brands alike need to pump the brakes. Ultimately, we're still talking about substrates that no one recycles, and they lack the infrastructure necessary for wide-scale adoption (we're looking at you, industrial compostables).

We want these to work just as badly as anyone else. But until brands assume responsibility for not only the trash they put into the world but the actual full life cycle assessment of these materials, we'll be talking about this ad nauseam because replacing one resin for another won't fix anything.





YES
CHIPS

"YOU HAD A LOT OF PEOPLE WHO HAD NEVER COOKED A DAY IN THEIR LIFE THAT WERE LEARNING HOW TO DO IT FOR THE FIRST TIME, AND SO THAT INCLUDED EVERYTHING FROM BUYING OLIVE OIL IN A SQUEEZE BOTTLE, OR MAYBE EVEN WORKING ON EASY-TO-MAKE DISHES LIKE RAMEN NOODLES THAT ARE SLIGHTLY ELEVATED OR EVEN TRYING HOMEMADE COCKTAILS FOR THE FIRST TIME."

- MIKE MCVICAR, PARTNER AND CO-FOUNDER AT GANDER



YES, CHEF

The packaging world isn't exactly rife with controversy, but it typically comes in the form of accusations about copying a design. Case in point? [Graza Olive Oil and its practical plastic squeeze bottle](#). The beloved brand's founder went on a LinkedIn tirade—now deleted with the requisite apologies—over how one of their competitors stole its immensely chef-y packaging.

So, color us crazy when we thought the biggest packaging scandal of the year would be over who owns chef vibes.

But then, you look around, and that back-of-house look is absolutely infiltrating food and beverage, from [Momofuku's](#) masking tape soy sauce to [Cheely Cocktail's](#) mad scientist mixologist look that sits comfortably behind any bar. Hell, even [Eggo's Brunch in a Jar](#) booze taps into our inner-pickler with its Ball-aping look.

We're a chef-obsessed people. Yes, there's Julia and Jaques and Emmeril and Guy, not to mention Anthony Bourdain's globe-trotting adventures. But in recent memory, we have David Chang first appearing on Mind of a Chef in 2012 or the FX hit show The Bear. Americans don't agree on much, but we can at least break bread and say "FOOD GOOD." As of this writing, over [73.2 billion folks have checked out the hashtag FoodTok](#), and there's no end to our incessant need to watch food porn. What's more, it's right at your fingertips, and something—literally anything—is [trending](#), even tinned fish and cottage cheese.





YES, CHEF

Likely, we have COVID to thank for all of it. And there are two reasons for that. Firstly, we were all at home. We were all at home a lot. "During the lockdown, people were cooking a lot more," says Mike McVicar, partner and co-founder at Gander, the same agency that brought you Graza. "You had a lot of people who had never cooked a day in their life that were learning how to do it for the first time, and so that included everything from buying olive oil in a squeeze bottle, or maybe even working on easy-to-make dishes like ramen noodles that are slightly elevated or even trying homemade cocktails for the first time." Secondly, the restaurant industry took a sizable hit, and the Momofukus of the world needed a new revenue stream. Hence, sauces and noodles for the masses.

But that chef-driven aesthetic also plays well with many of these products. When you buy instant noodles from Momofuku, it's not your standard ramen fare. "The hand-drawn labels that look back of house reinforce this idea that it's not just instant noodles—it's instant noodles plus a few interesting ingredients, and maybe you can take it a step further," says McVicar.

So, will more brands lean into chef and food culture? We're pretty bullish on the topic, but we're also firmly convinced that Food Network's Molly Yeh could launch a "hot dish" line in the freezer aisle at Target that revels in home cooking tropes and would be an instant hit (but seriously, call us, Molly). After all, there are certainly worse things than [slapping on an apron](#).



Barbie World



**“WHENEVER WE GET NEW
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HAVING WOMEN, STARTING THESE
BUSINESSES OR HAVING THESE
BRAND IDEAS.”**

- LIA MCMILLAN, SENIOR DESIGNER AT BEST STUDIO



BARBIEWORLD

Being a woman in today's society means wine nights with girlfriends that feed your soul, salon trips that make you feel reborn (*Fleabag* was right—[hair is everything](#)), and badass role models like Beyoncé. It also means getting passed up for a promotion because of your gender, leered at on the street like you're a steak dinner thrown to a pack of hungry wolves, and you walk to your car with keys poking out between your knuckles, just in case. [How I love being a woman!](#)

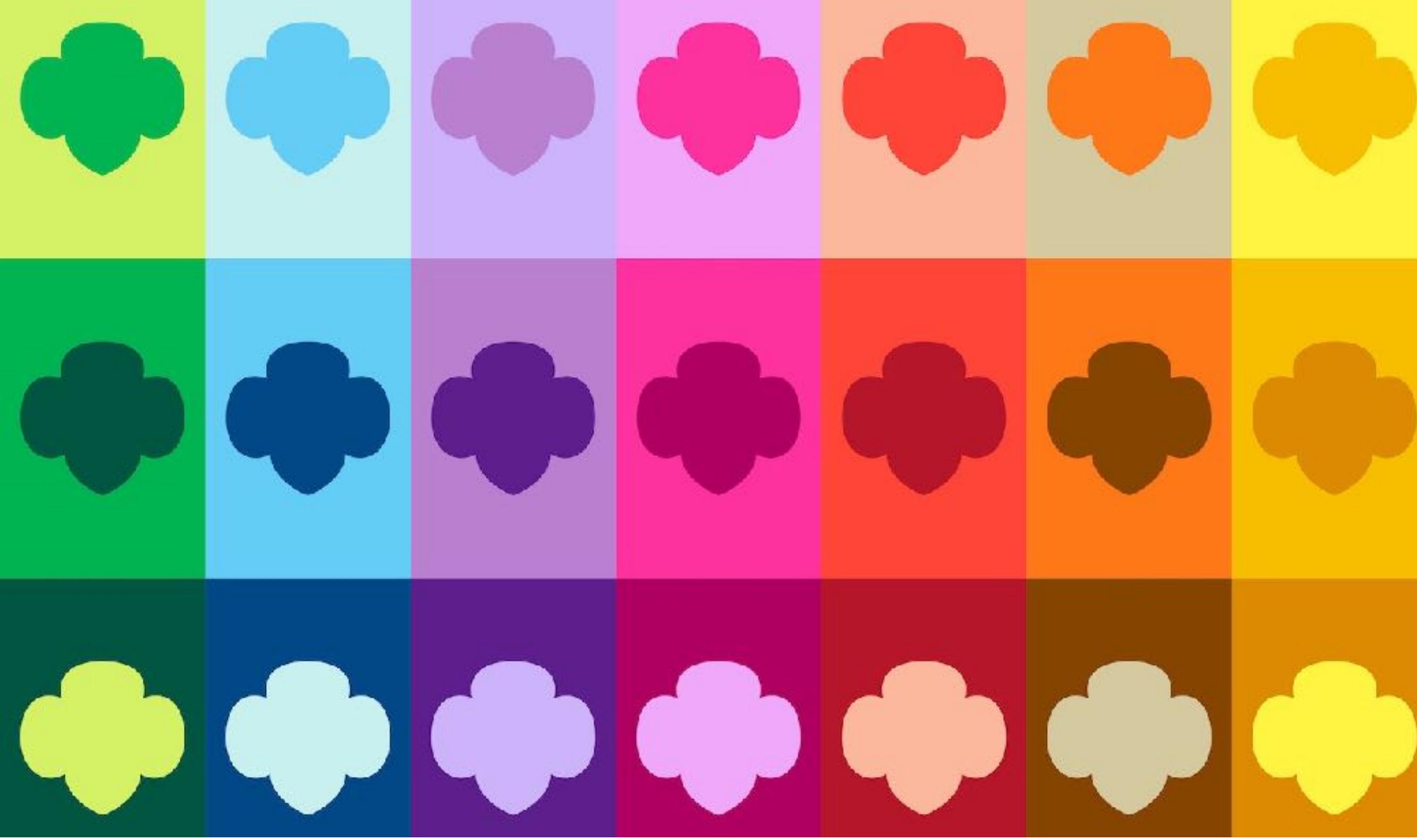
Michelle Goldberg wrote [in The New York Times](#), “An obvious lesson from the gargantuan success of both Barbie and the Eras Tour is that there is a huge, underserved market for entertainment that takes the feelings of girls and women seriously.” Greta Gerwig’s film and Taylor Swift’s tour were two year-defining pop culture phenomena that have unequivocally influenced branding and packaging, and they’ve encouraged people to embrace designs centering the female experience in an enthusiastic way we’ve not really seen before.

“It’s cool to be girly right now,” said Sami Christianson, co-founder and creative director at [Best Studio](#), the studio behind [Girls Trip](#) cannabis. “People are not ashamed of being too girly, and it’s the first time it’s really trendy.”

We’ve seen [Barbie collabs galore](#) and pink everything, like Widarto Impact’s design for [Pinklab. Co’s skincare](#). But this trend is about more than everyone’s favorite color.







BARBIEWORLD

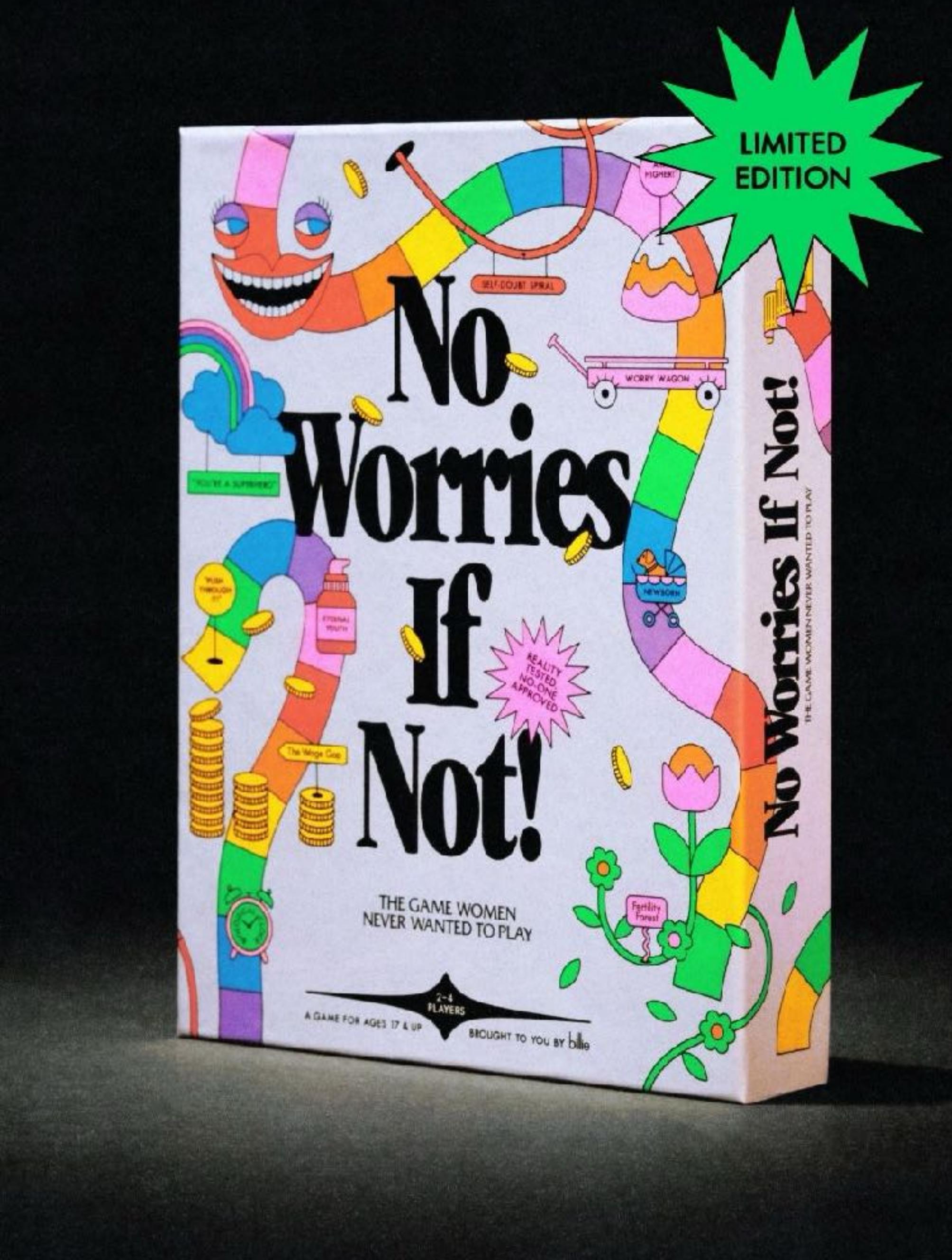
It's about the favorites from our younger years, like [peak girlhood icon Lisa Frank teaming up with Pillsbury](#) for ready-to-bake unicorn cookies, the chapstick of our childhood, [Lip Smacker, releasing a 50th Anniversary Vault Collection](#) or [Girl Scouts getting a snappy new brand identity](#) thanks to [COLLINS](#). It's about women's health, like battling the Black maternal mortality rate with [Spora Health's Momma's Kit](#), designed by [Leadoff Studio](#), and also emphasizing self-care, like in [TNKR Design's Wavy](#) bath soaks or [Commersart Agency's BioSelf](#) skincare lineup. It's about amplifying women's voices like [Folk Estudio's](#) design for [Lickabite ice cream](#) did, and about women embracing their sexuality, like [Clita](#), designed by [Auge Design](#), and [Tabu](#) from [SMAKK Studios](#). And it's about laughing through the tears with self-care brand Billie turning womanhood into the unwinnable game that it is with [a literal board game called No Worries If Not](#) or [Fortnight Collective](#) encouraging people to go to the polls with their [parody Votex campaign](#).

Barbie World is about the power of girls and women. Sami even admitted that advertising Best Studio as female-led is one of their biggest selling points to potential clients, and they love working with female-run brands and businesses. Lia McMillan, senior designer at Best Studio, added, "Whenever we get new projects that are female-led, it's exciting for us. It's not something you see as often, having women, starting these businesses or having these brand ideas."

But this trend doesn't look any one way. The female experience is simultaneously universal but also unique to girls and women. Whereas men at the forefront often exclude others, women-focused products and experiences create a safe space for anyone of any gender or background who's down to join. Best Studio's work on Girls Trip—founded by a mother-daughter duo—is a prime example.

"It's called Girls Trip," Lia said, "but everyone's invited."





NEW WAVE QUIRKS



"THERE WAS AN OPPORTUNITY TO DO SOMETHING FOR RADFORD THAT WASN'T POLISHED. IT GOES WITH THE BRAND'S FOCUS ON HAVING THE HIGHEST QUALITY PRODUCT, SHOWCASING THAT THE BRAND IS SO OBSESSED WITH THE PRODUCT THAT THEY SEEMINGLY DON'T EVEN CARE ABOUT WHAT THE PACKAGING LOOKS LIKE."

-RION HARMON, CO-FOUNDER AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR AT DAY JOB



NEW WAVE QUIRK

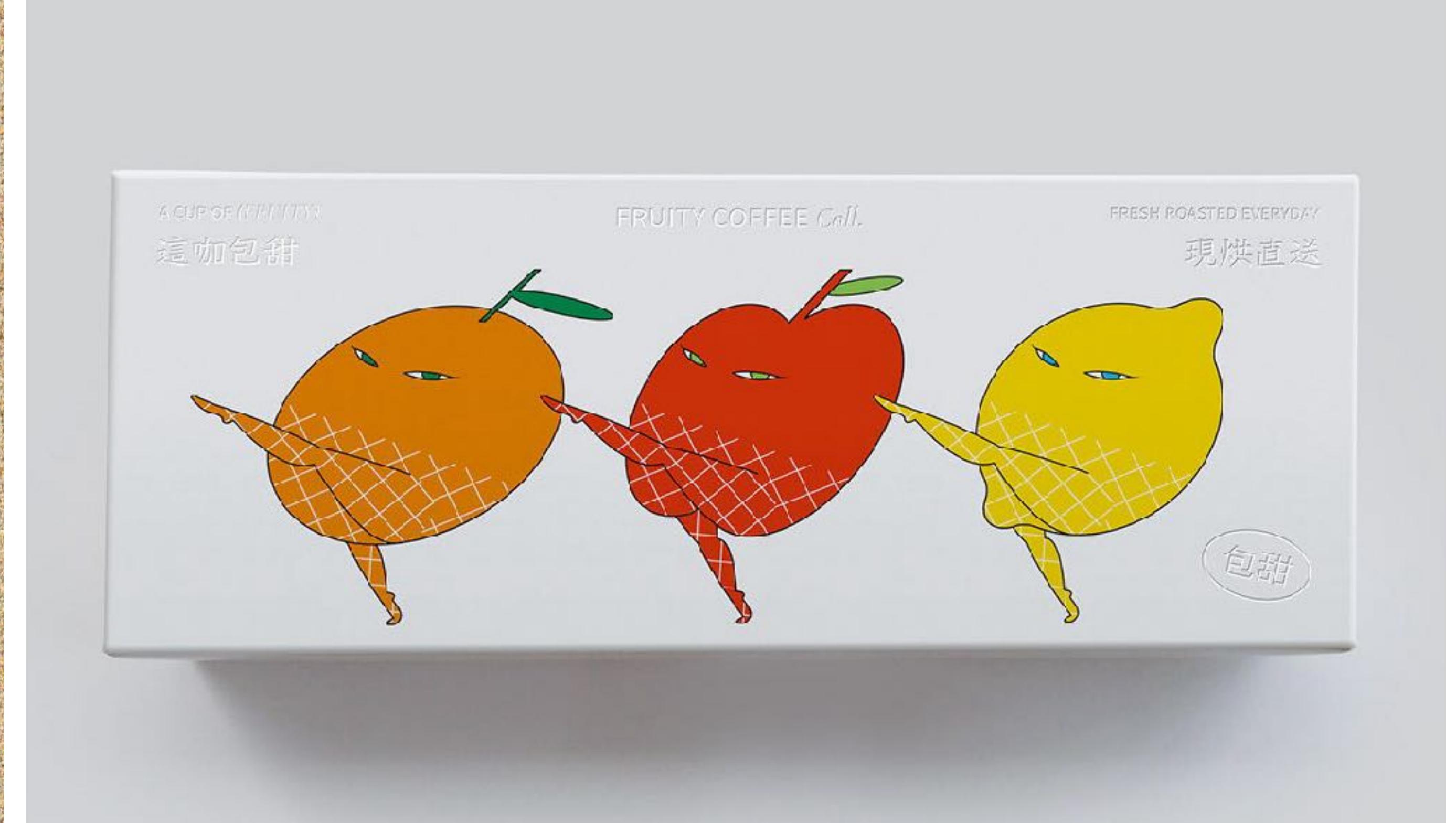
If TikTok has taught us anything, users love coining terms with the hope that it will go viral or describe a genuine moment. Who amongst us can forget Coastal Grandma, Girl Dinner, and Everything-Coded?

Now, you can also find "Hipness Purgatory," a visual aesthetic that popped up in the early 2000s, a response to digital technology distinguished by its nonchalant drawings, ironic undertone, and a quaint, retro vibe, much like the visuals seen in movies like Juno or Napoleon Dynamite.

And thanks to AI, you're likely going to see it again.

[Day Job](#), an agency known for its forward-thinking branding, released a design earlier this year for a beauty brand called [Radford](#) featuring hand-drawn elements and a twee aesthetic, a welcomed juxtaposition against the refined frosted bottles, neon colors, and immense use of white space choking the life out of the beauty world. "We explored ideas of boredom and routine because the beauty space is loud right now, and everything is screaming at you," shares Rion Harmon, co-founder and creative director at Day Job. "There was an opportunity to do something for Radford that wasn't polished. It goes with the brand's focus on having the highest quality product, showcasing that the brand is so obsessed with the product that they seemingly don't even care about what the packaging looks like."







NEW WAVE QUIRK

We're accustomed to brands taking themselves too seriously, more so in the beauty industry. [Radford](#), however, goes against the grain and demands a second look from consumers. By peeling back the layers, the packaging system creates a casual, unexplored philosophy that consumers have been missing, aligning with the Hipness Purgatory movement. It's the unrefined illustrations and imperfect, handwritten text that give the brand its cooler-than-thou credentials.

We also saw this aesthetic take hold with [Geist Wine](#), designed by [Supercult](#), in which the nonalcoholic brand implemented irreverent illustrations and 70s-inspired hues to emphasize its commitment to breaking free from the norm. The images have a rebellious nature but one that proves that the juxtaposition of playfulness and sophistication can work together. Designed by Lung-Hao Chiang, the [Fruity Coffee Collection](#) found inspiration from cheeky fruit stand graphics. While in typical Asian gifting culture, high-end, luxury fruit gift boxes have always been the traditional choice for presenting gifts—this new presentation evokes a sense of quaint charm.

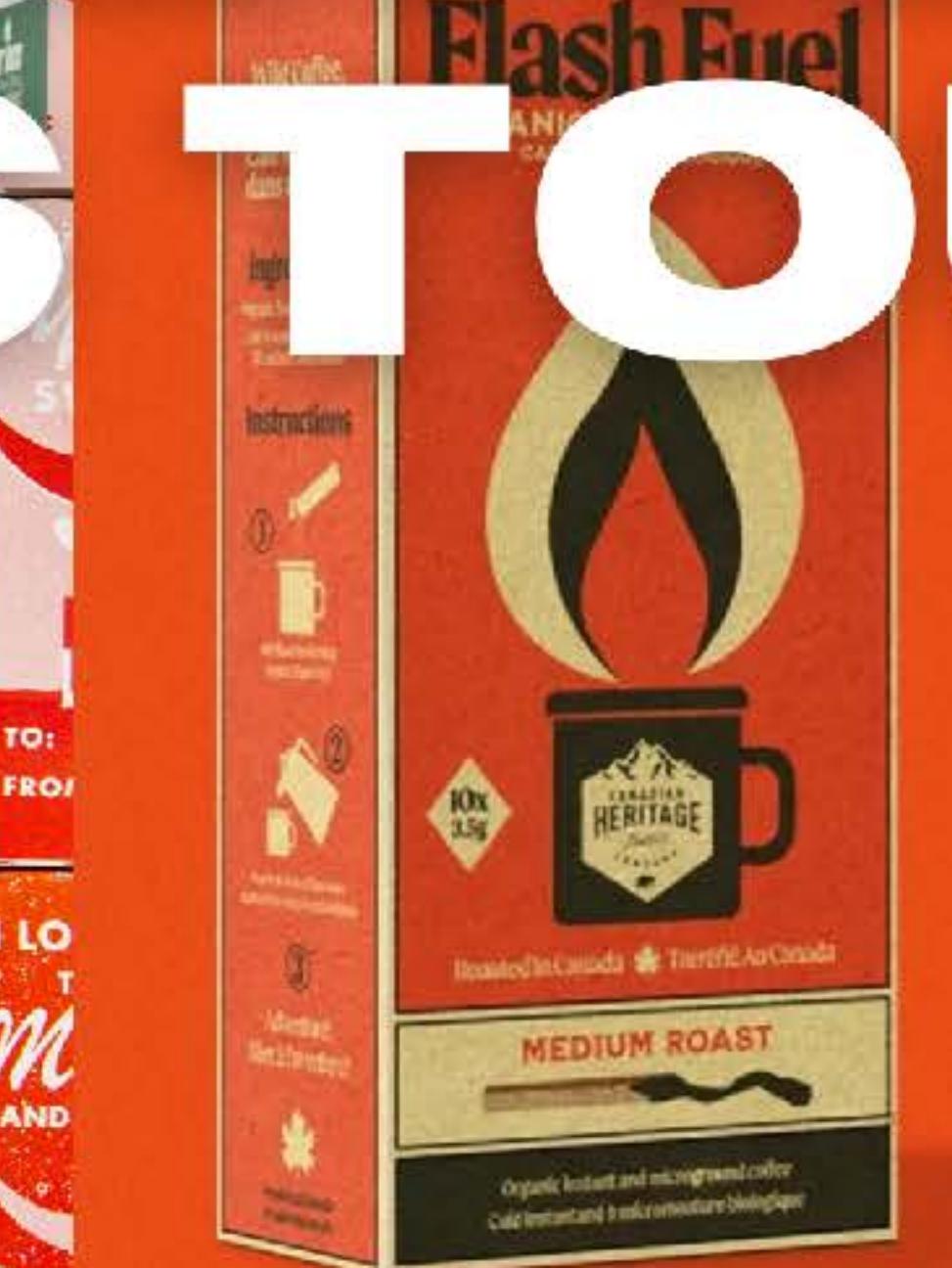
Beyond retro, ironic drawings, this laissez-faire movement also brings in more handmade elements like stickers, paperclips, cardboard, and chalk typography. But it's also different from indie craft in that it's a direct reaction to all things digital, with a longing to return to something touched by the human hand; in the end, it's about peeling back the layers of design to reveal what's beyond the surface.







THE NEVER ENDING TOUR



**'NOSTALGIA WAS OF MOST VALUE AND
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-MADISON UTENDHAL, FOUNDER OF [UTENDAHL CREATIVE](#)



THE NEVERENDING ERAS TOUR

In our [2022 Trend Report](#), we called out some definite—but very obvious—90s love happening in design.

It made perfect sense! All the kids were pinching their folks' forgotten clothing from some dusty boxes in the attic. But it also felt like an extreme about-face from blanded brands and pastel-everything for something more dynamic and fun that traded on pure, messy maximalism.

But something else started happening, too. The nostalgia machine could no longer make up its mind. Was it [80s preppy making a comeback](#), or was [Gen Z fiending over early 00s nu-metal](#) and [Y2K aesthetics](#)? Or were we feeling the [90s, but really the 70s](#)? Maybe it's [60s Tiki bar culture](#)? And wait, if [Wes Anderson is doing the 50s](#), is that what's next? It's enough to make your head spin, and TikTok and its finely-tuned algorithms certainly aren't helping. Instead, it feels more like you're getting served a heaping portion of every era and micro trend all the time. And it's a lot of distracting noise that's mostly fleeting.

And listen, we do this too. As people in the trend prediction and reporting business—but even more so in design—you're looking for emergent themes and aesthetics that tell a story about where culture is and why something is happening. Social media has helped accelerate all that. In the past, it felt like a trend had some juice. Now, you're lucky if it lasts a week. That feeling of cultural dizziness has also permeated design, and creatives are pulling influence from a vast array of sources and creating their own remixed pastiche of everything everywhere all at once.





THE NEVERENDING ERAS TOUR

A lot of this has to do with brands and their over-reliance on [nostalgia marketing](#). Consumers have come out of a tough few years because of COVID and increased polarization in the US. Comfort has been in dire need for many. But it's also left many brands spinning their wheels. "Nostalgia was of most value and interesting and fun when it had relevance to the brands themselves or the product," says Madison Utendhal, founder of design agency [Utendahl Creative](#). "I think we've reached a place where brands are adopting this trend because of the cultural zeitgeist. The consumer is getting oversaturated with nostalgia. But they're also not understanding what the throughline and story is."

Those sentimental feels and good times *deja vu* often aren't rooted in anything genuine, and brands have stalled while they exploit it again and again.

"Some of the biggest trends of the last 60 years connect so deeply to culture," Utendhal adds. "The '90s was about innovation, but also angst; the 60s and 70s had this cultural response to the overall turmoil in the world. The early 00s had this new millennia energy of what we thought would be the future. But I find that the 2010s, and the decade we're in now, I feel like—because there seem to be so few central throughlines or almost too many because of the exposure of social media—it's given us too many options. So what are the common threads we're all connected to that lead to these new trends?"





THE NEVERENDING ERAS TOUR

"The only trend that seems persistent is The Kardashians," she jokes.

Design and branding can't make up their minds. Everything is momentary, and nothing cements itself or becomes sticky to modern culture. And we're all scrambling to name a moment that falls away as quickly as we recognize it.

It's also worth mentioning that nostalgic retro design isn't bad design. There's a lot that's pretty great, especially when we look at recent redesigns like Canada Dry, which relied heavily on brand archives but still felt modern through and through. Designers should cast their proverbial moodboard net as far and wide as possible.

But it's also fair to wonder if the 2020s doesn't know what it wants to be, as every new decade seems to feel a little less distinct and, well, uninspired.





PRIDE & PREJUDICED



"THE UNFORTUNATE REALITY IS THAT PEOPLE WHO ARE PART OF THE LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY HAVE BEEN DEALING WITH VIOLENCE AND VIOLENT THREATS SINCE THE BEGINNING OF TIME. THAT'S WHY IT WAS A BIG SETBACK FOR THE COMMUNITY TO SEE HOW THESE BUSINESSES WERE PRESENTED WITH THE REALITY OF WHAT THE COMMUNITY FACES DAILY."

- JONATHAN OCHART, FOUNDER AND CEO OF [THE POSTCARD AGENCY](#)



PRIDE & PREJUDICED

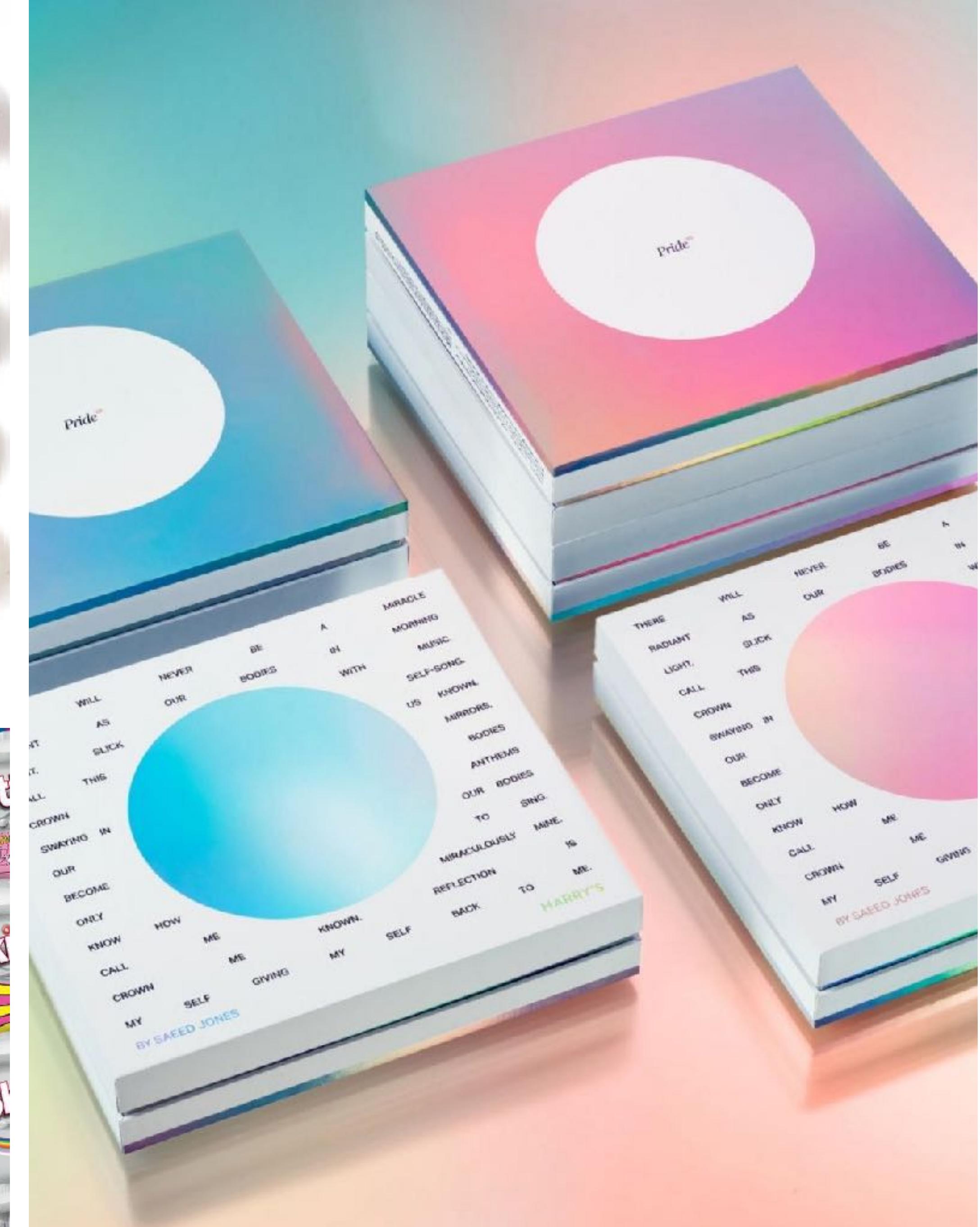
With June's annual Pride celebrations come [brands with Pride packaging and campaigns](#)—some great, like [Harry's](#) or [Skittles](#), and some misguided, like [Burger King's Pride Whopper](#). [Absolut vodka was one of the first brands to advertise to LGBTQIA+ individuals](#) in 1981. The AIDS epidemic had just started, and at the time, that was a risky stance to take.

While the monetizing of marginalized people during a month designed to honor them is something to question, brands can approach Pride in an informed way that supports the community.

Those who oppose gay rights always push back on Pride campaigns, but responses this year felt different. Trans influencer Dylan Mulvaney partnered with Bud Light; in turn, [she faced stalking and personal attacks](#), and Bud Light never reached out to her in the aftermath. Target has featured Pride merch for a decade, [but backlash caused concerns for employee safety](#) and prompted some stores to move or minimize Pride displays.

"Once violence enters the mix, that sends a strong signal to businesses and organizations to figure out how they can navigate that challenge," said Jonathan Ochart, founder and CEO of [The Postcard Agency](#), a marketing agency [that's done extensive work with LGBTQIA+ clients](#). "The unfortunate reality is that people who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community have been dealing with violence and violent threats since the beginning of time. That's why it was a big setback for the community to see how these businesses were presented with the reality of what the community faces daily."







PRIDE & PREJUDICED

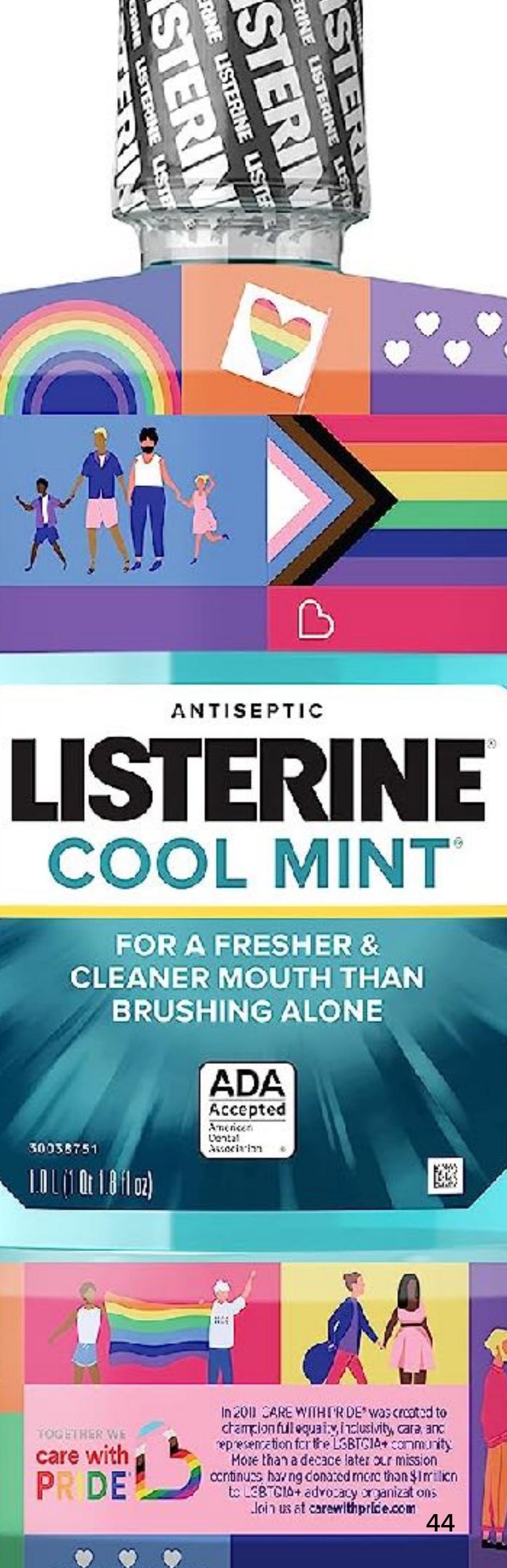
"These corporations who have stated that they stand by the LGBTQIA+ community washed their hands and left when the community needed them most," Ochart added.

If brands want to be allies and accomplices, Jonathan said accountability is critical. Large corporations donating to political candidates must know if those reps advance LGBTQIA+ rights or diminish them. "The expression 'put your money where your mouth is' should be a guiding principle for these corporations," he said. Additionally, raising awareness and forging partnerships to highlight the community can happen year-round, as can monetary support.

Backlash may tempt brands into stepping back from Pride—but in 2024, they need to be louder and prouder than ever. Take notes from brands like [Adidas, with its gender-inclusive swimsuit model](#), or The North Face and its drag queen-led [Summer of Pride](#) campaign. There's also Fenty Beauty and Savage x Fenty by Rihanna with their gender-diverse models ([and the latter with a GLAAD partnership](#)). Brands can get creative, too—[Havaianas has a permanent Pride campaign](#), while Scarlett Johansson's beauty line The Outset [used its platform to shine a spotlight on LGBTQIA+ nonprofits](#) and spark donations.

Perhaps most interesting from this past year, though, is Cracker Barrel. The Southern comfort food chain [previously discriminated against gay employees](#), but 2023 marked [their first year participating in Nashville Pride](#). Despite the hate they received for this, they didn't bow down.

"That goes to show that some corporations and businesses who may have not shown up in the past and may have been detrimental to the LGBTQIA+ community always have the opportunity to make things right," said Jonathan. "They can learn and grow and make a difference."







I LIKE MY FONTS REAL
THICK AND JUICY

"WE LIKE THIS STUFF BECAUSE IT IS NOSTALGIC, BUT, IN REALITY, IT'S MORE ABOUT DRAMA. THE FONTS CREATE THIS KIND OF FORMAL DRAMA IN THE LETTER SHAPES THAT TAKE YOU TO A POINT WHERE IT FEELS EDGY BUT NOT TOO EDGY. IT'S STILL MASS MARKET."

- PHIL GARNHAM, EXECUTIVE CREATIVE DIRECTOR AT [MONOTYPE](#)



I LIKE MY FONTS REAL THICK AND JUICY

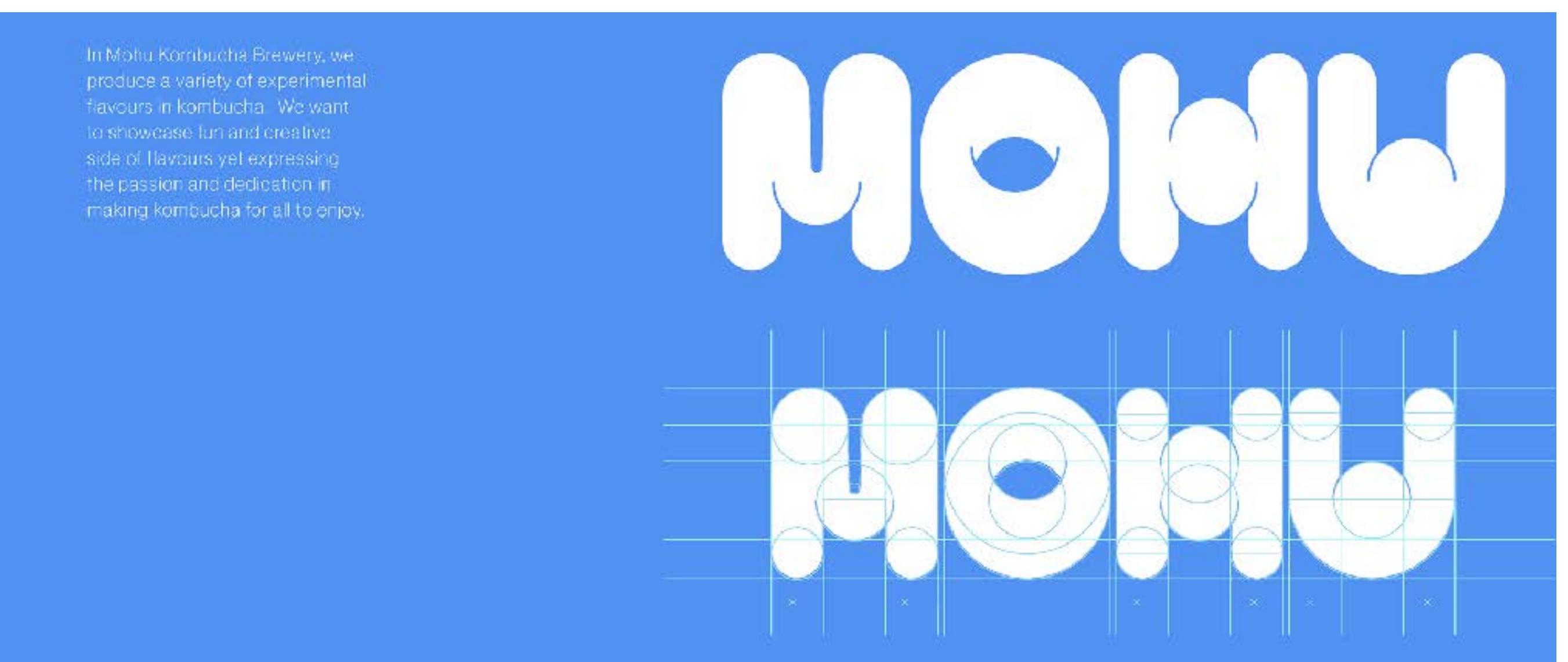
Recently, it seems like we can sum up our feelings towards fonts using the poetic prowess of Sir Mix-a-Lot: we like 'em round and big.

And let's be real. Anything—anything—is better than yet another brand playing it safe with a plain, inoffensive background and simple line of serif text. This trend could have been born from how traumatized we are by [blanding](#), and we will giddily welcome more personality in the packaging and branding around us. Or maybe this is [the Unconventional Type trend we mentioned in 2021](#), now taking a step back and becoming a teensy bit more legible.

"It feels quite nostalgic, and I kind of hate saying that because everything's nostalgic nowadays," said Phil Garnham, executive creative director at [Monotype](#). "But there's these nuances inside the letter shapes. There are a lot of contrasting elements and forms, which makes me think it's not really about nostalgia at all. We like this stuff because it is nostalgic, but, in reality, it's more about drama. The fonts create this kind of formal drama in the letter shapes that take you to a point where it feels edgy but not too edgy. It's still mass market."

We've seen many chunky fonts lately—think [Jell-O's juicy new look and logo](#), thanks to [BrandOpus](#) designing the brand's first refresh in a decade. [Safari Sundays](#) created a bespoke typeface called SWERVE for [the Slurpee brand refresh](#), and it's as fat and fun and funky as it sounds.





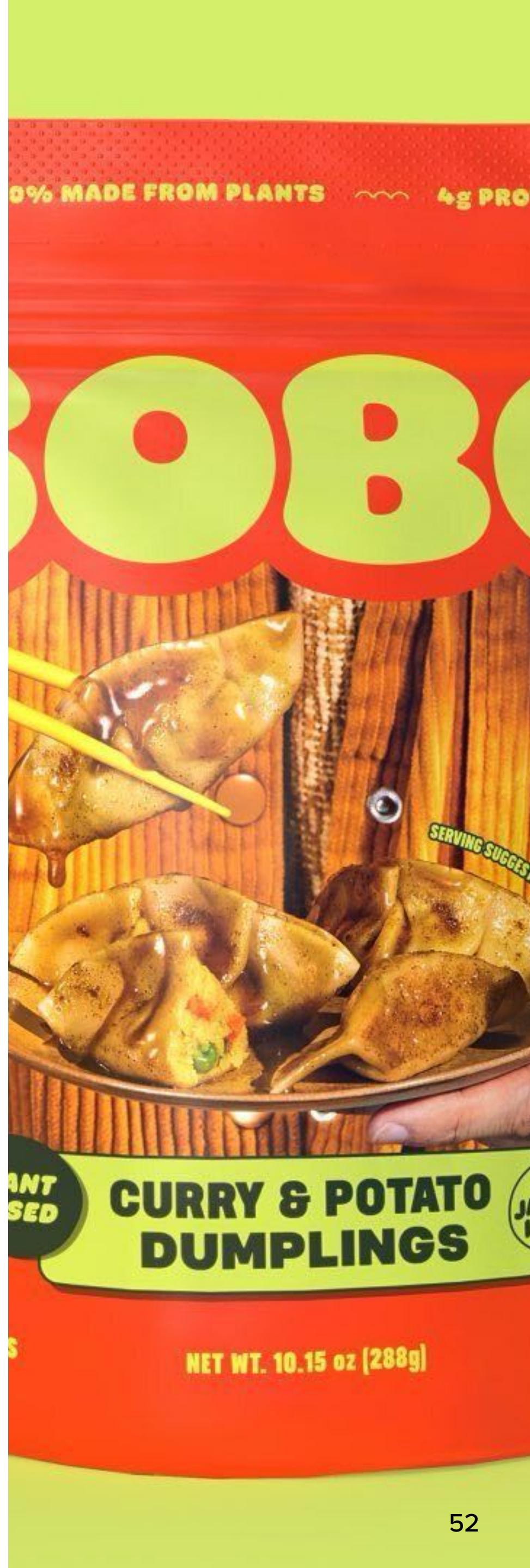


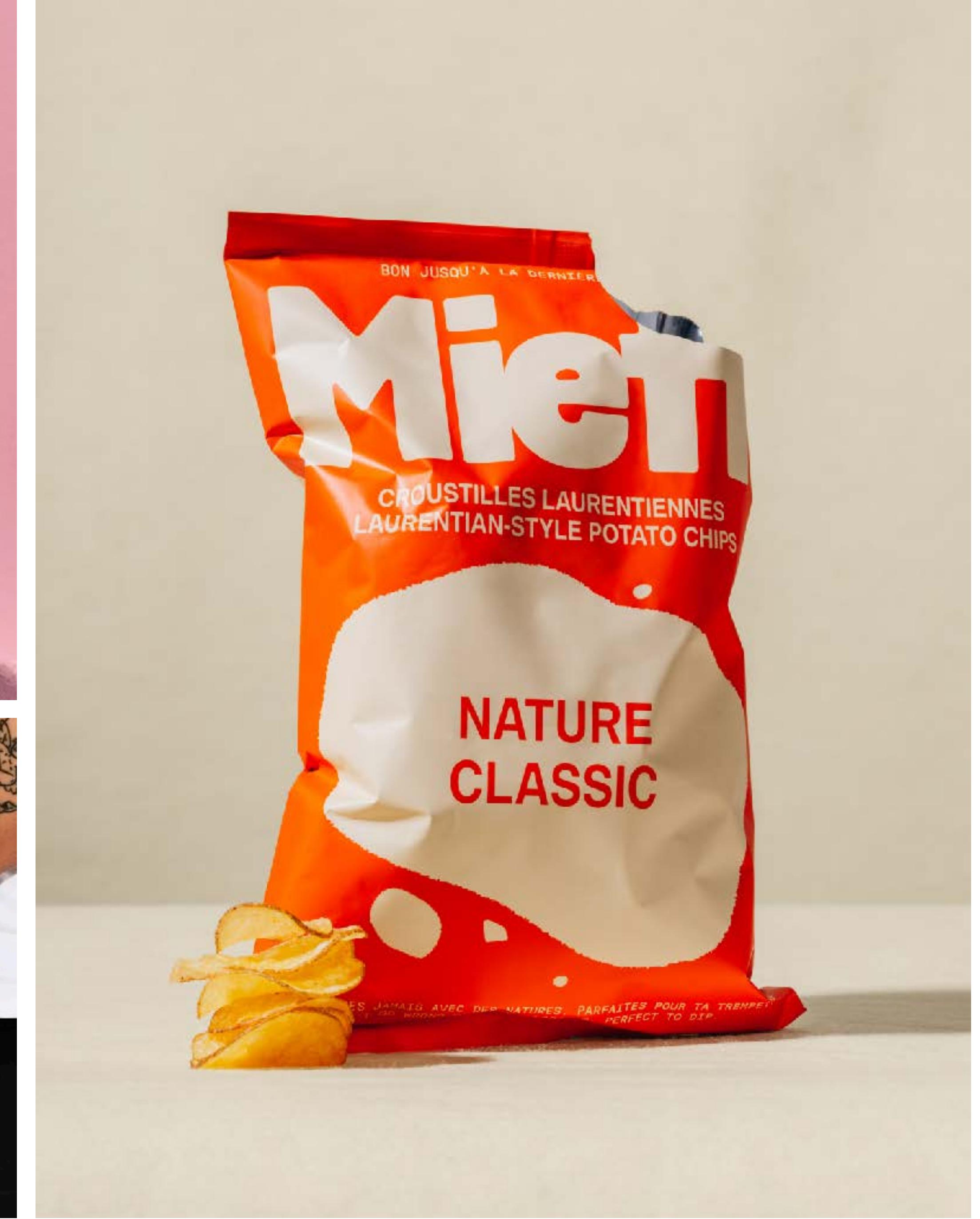
I LIKE MY FONTS REAL THICK AND JUICY

The lettering from Student Enqi Lim's [conceptual design for Mohu Brewery](#) could be mistaken for balloon animal art. Because it creates an enticing look you almost want to take a bite out of, we've seen this style of font show up a lot in food and beverage, like [Alani Nutrition's Kimade](#), [Studio Peel's](#) work on plant-based food [Sobo Foods](#), or [The Chicago Blend's specialty roasted coffee](#), designed by [Span](#) studio. But it's shown up in other products, too, like the beauty brand [BioSelf](#) from [Commersart Agency](#), [HiRaw!](#), a pet food brand redesigned in collaboration with [M — N Associates](#), and even in the logo for [Useful School, a pay-what-you-can design school for people of color](#).

As for how these thick, fat fonts will eventually evolve, only time will tell. One thing's for sure, though—this trend is a type designer's dream. "I love super bold, daring typefaces like this," Phil said. "I love doing wild things and being super expressive through type. I think that's super important." Even fonts that don't lean too heavily into this trend (like Lina Aragon and María Alejandra Maya-Fresa's work on [Blum Skincare](#) or [Studio Miles'](#) packaging design for [Canton Brasse Microbrewery](#)) still have a perfect plumpness to them and exude the drama Phil was talking about.

So go ahead, designers—bring on the drama and feed those fonts well.





January is a language
we don't understand.

A fantasy, delivered to
your door in a pastel
colored box.

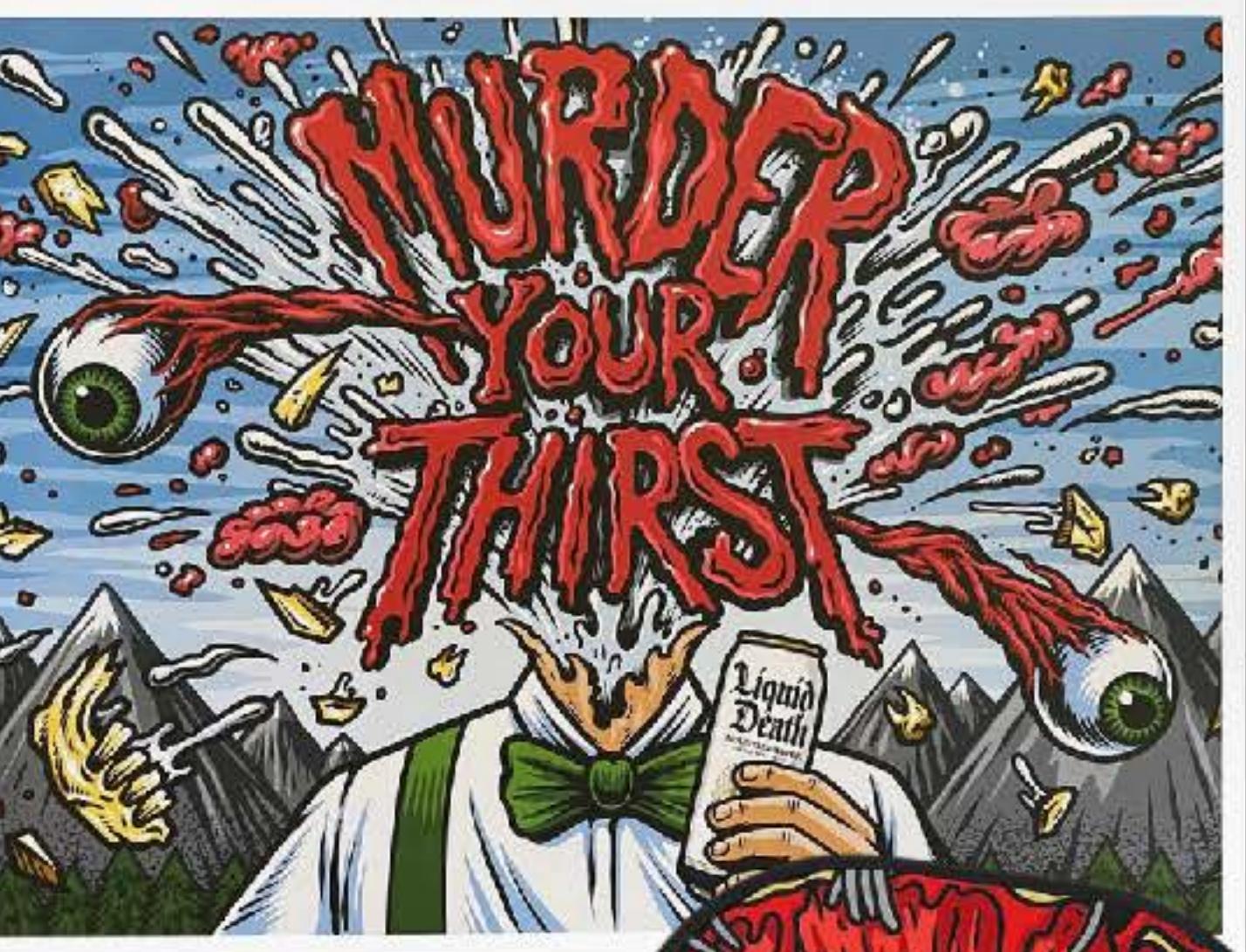
It talks about change.

It wants you to start
something when you should
be in the middle of it.

It thinks time is on its side.

It needs a new outfit
before it can begin.

Stalling, short-cutting,
giving up.



POSTURE BOARD DILIGENCE



"THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS THAT YOU CAN'T FAKE IT, WHEN BRANDS DO, IT'S OBVIOUS. THE BRAND HAS TO ORGANICALLY COME OUT OF THE PEOPLE BUILDING IT."

- ANDY PEARSON, VP OF CREATIVE AT [LIQUID DEATH](#)

HOSTILE BRANDING

It's a sensible method; why risk alienating future customers or potentially catching fire from the public? But for the right company, being indifferent or outright hostile as a brand can work to dazzling effect. It's a way to stand out in a competitive space and garner plenty of attention, especially on social media.

Sometimes called "hostile branding," or "anti-branding," it's an approach that's existed for some time. Perhaps the most memorable historical example is Volkswagen USA's branding of the 1960s, which included a series of legendary print ads. VW leaned into all the criticisms of its vehicles; Beetles are small, and all look the same year-over-year. Oh, and they're ugly, too. The "Think Small" campaign from [Doyle Dane Bernbach \(DDB\)](#) took the car's flaws to highlight the tradeoffs, like fuel economy and affordability, over fancy new grilles and tail lights.

But that was the 60s. Six decades later, there are a combined 140 million Gen Zers and Millennials conditioned on conventional branding and messaging, thanks to spending most of their lives inundated with online advertising.

And that means authenticity from a brand is in high demand.

By now, you know Liquid Death. Their brash identity is not only genuine but unapologetic. What's more, they're not afraid to get raunchy or controversial, and they continually hammer home their core mission of ridding the world of single-use plastic water bottles by providing an aluminum can alternative.

"The key is just to build the brand that's the most you," says Andy Pearson, VP of creative, [Liquid Death](#). "I wince a little—OK, a lot—when marketing or brands are referred to as 'punk.' I don't think Liquid Death is punk. Liquid Death is just an amalgamation of the things we find interesting—heavy music, satire, art, absurdist humor, health and environmental issues, sketch comedy—all thrown in a bag and shaken up. What makes it feel punk is that this approach feels very contrarian to the traditional way brands are built. Also, we're doing it ourselves; it feels handmade. DIY was really what the whole punk ethos was originally built on."





HOSTILE BRANDING

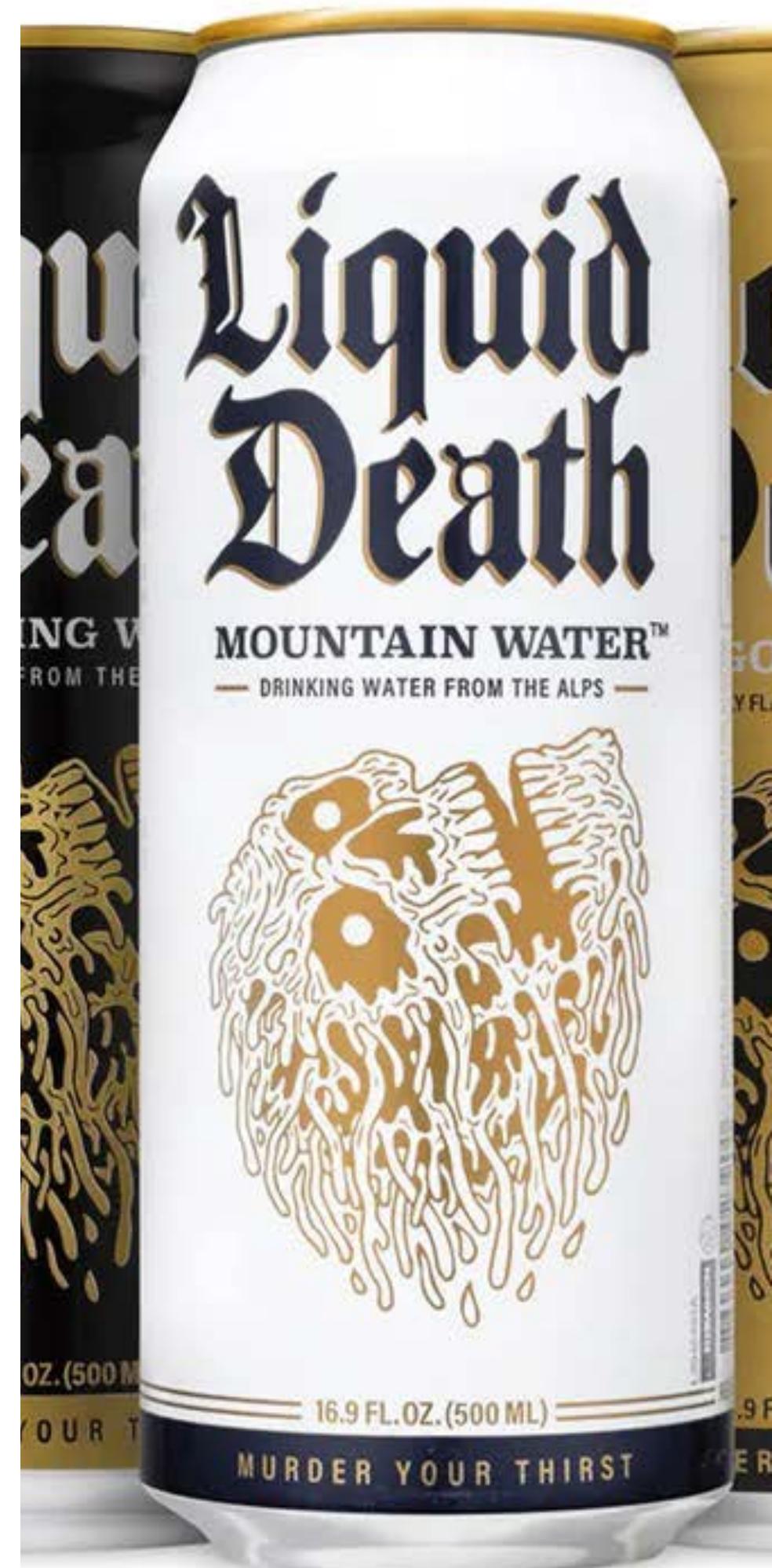
"The most important thing is that you can't fake it," he adds. "When brands do, it's obvious. The brand has to organically come out of the people building it." Some companies don't have the culture or—sometimes—the cojones to let things like heavy metal and dark comedy define their brand.

A typical New Year's resolution is to get healthier and more fit. For gyms, the new year brings in loads of new members enthusiastic about sticking to their resolutions. But that resolve evaporates, and folks stop hitting the gym over the following weeks.

On January 1, 2023, Equinox unveiled a new campaign by [Collins](#), declaring, "[We don't speak January](#)," which also included not selling new memberships on New Year's Day. The language and tone around the campaign directly called out the people who signed up in January and weren't seen at the club come February or March. Critics of "We don't speak January" accused Equinox of being elitist and exclusionary. But the brand has always been about elitism and exclusion, as memberships cost about \$380 a month with a brand identity that doesn't appeal to the casual Crunch elliptical user. Regardless, Equinox's campaign proved [successful](#) despite [online vitriol](#); website traffic rose 52%, and sales increased by 30% compared to the previous January.

There's no secret to hostile branding, but that doesn't mean every brand can pull it off. Besides Equinox and Liquid Death, companies stick to branding that doesn't offend potential customers. But breaking through the noise is only getting tougher, with conventional branding becoming less effective on younger consumers bombarded with more of the same.

Not every brand can be so aggressive and turn controversy into revenue. But when it works, the payoff is handsome. More than likely, a few more Liquid Deaths are waiting in the wings.





BIG BEER NOSTALGIA



"CONSUMERS ARE BOMBARDED BY THE CACOPHONY OF BAD DESIGN AND CHOICES IN THE BEER AISLES, BRANDS ARE TRULY SCREAMING OVER EACH OTHER TO GET YOUR ATTENTION, AND THERE'S NOT MUCH TO CONNECT WITH. THE NOSTALGIC, SIMPLE DESIGNS THAT HAVE COME OUT FROM THE LAST TEN OR SO YEARS ARE THE ONES THAT SEEM TO BOLDLY BUT QUIETLY CATCH THE EYE OF THE CONSUMER."

- RYAN RHODES, PARTNER AT DESIGN STUDIO LAND



BIG BEER NOSTALGIA

Nostalgia is a powerful force. It has a way of transporting us to happier times or, for those who weren't there, a retro-fueled break from modern life. Most recently, there seem to be more beers turning yesterday's lookbook, even non-alcoholic varieties.

It's not hard to see why. Beer is often consumed among friends in times of revelry, so naturally, connecting to those memories through branding makes plenty of sense.

In 2022, we saw Molson Coors give both its flagship [Coors Banquet](#) and [Hamm's](#) cool, retro-throwback look with a new-old visual identity that mines both beer brands' 20th-century heyday. This past summer, [Natural Light](#) returned to its packaging from 1979, a bygone look from before Natty's college-aged demo was even born. That might seem counterintuitive, but the move reacquainted older beer drinkers with the heritage brand while being "retro" cool with the younger crowd.

It isn't just heritage. Macro beer brands tapping into the visual stylings of the mid-century stand out—and in a good way. Given the popularity of non-alcoholic alternatives, even no-ABV beer brands are getting into the retro spirit. [Doublenaught](#)-designed [Stay Classy](#) is a non-alcoholic IPA with branding inspired by mid-century brews. [Al's](#), meanwhile, is an easy-going NA brew that captures a night out at the dive bar with neon signage playing the lead role of logo.





BIG BEER NOSTALGIA

"The appeal for consumers might be the idea of drinking something that was 'cool' from another era," says Ray Ricky Rivera, founder of Southern California's [Norwalk Brew House](#). "The resurgence of PBR had a lot of that. People like discovering under-the-radar stuff, whether it's truly retro or just feels like it."

Perhaps new brands without a deep, decades-old archive are drawn to retro-beer styling for a different reason. "I'd argue brands are mostly utilizing retro and nostalgic designs to signal 'legacy' when there isn't much brand history there," Rivera says.

Ryan Rhodes, partner at design studio [LAND](#), believes the highly competitive beer space offers an opportunity for brands to distinguish themselves using retro label designs.

"Consumers are bombarded by the cacophony of bad design and choices in the beer aisles," Ryan says. "Brands are truly screaming over each other to get your attention, and there's not much to connect with."

"The nostalgic, simple designs that have come out from the last ten or so years are the ones that seem to boldly but quietly catch the eye of the consumer," Rhodes says. "People freaking love it, we love it," he adds. "[Fat Tire](#) and [Big Country](#) allowed us to tap into those nostalgic emotions, that bygone era when beer cans and bottles were beautiful, well-crafted, and human. When a beer, or any product, feels timeless and looks good in your hand and delivers quality ingredients to boot, it seems like a simple recipe for success in connecting with folks."

There seems little doubt that beer drinkers love that retro look. New brewers can tap into that nostalgic vibe successfully, even if they don't have the heritage of decades-old brew. Regardless, it's clear that what's old is new again.

Well, at least in the beer aisle.





RUBBED FOR OUR PLEASURE

THE QUEENDOM
100% AGAVE TEQUILA
MEXICO
100 PROOF
NUMBER: 3400

"OBJECTS WITH THE 60S AND 70S AESTHETIC HAVE AN EXPRESSIVE NATURE FIGHTING AGAINST ALL THINGS THAT ARE 'PERFECT.'"

- BRIAN ROETTINGER, PARTNER AT PERRON-ROETTINGER

RIBBED FOR OUR PLEASURE

There's nothing more quietly luxurious than ribbed glass.

Ribbed glass bottles have been slowly making the rounds. Earlier this year, [Campari](#) refreshed its bottle with the help of the branding agency [Robilant](#) by adding ribbed detailing. The new design features elegant embossed detailing, but more importantly, it marked the brand's first update in a decade. Similarly, [Perrier](#) recently worked with French designer Phillippe Starck to add an embossed twist to the brand's classic packaging for a limited-edition release.

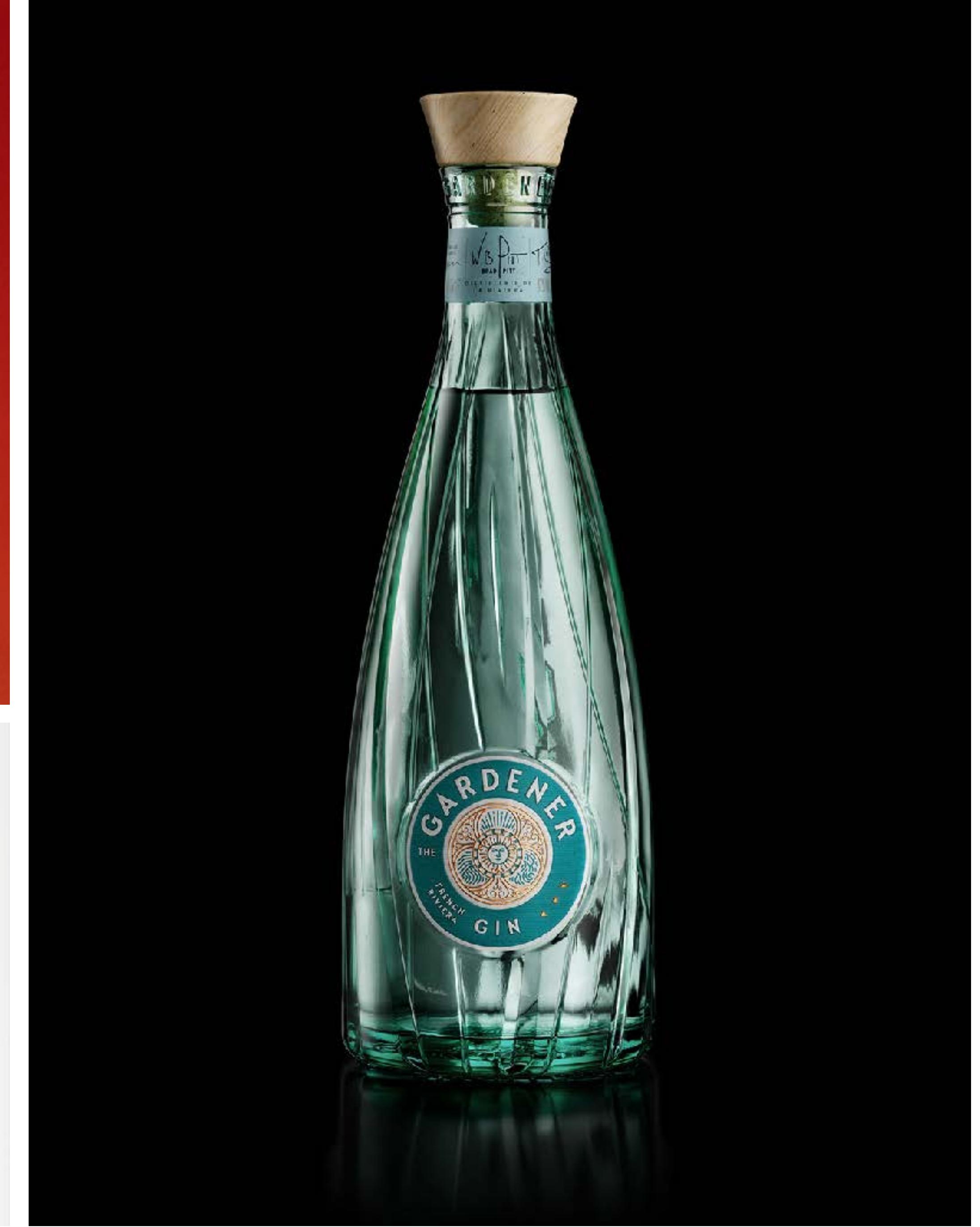
More than just making shelf impact, the ribbed detailing often turns these vessels into a keepsake. In turn, this means no longer tossing packaging after a single use but repurposing it—heck, go ahead and put some flowers in em'.

[Ghia](#), everyone's favorite no-booze aperitif, also updated its bottle with ridges. [Perron-Roettinger](#) designed the brand's updated bespoke container with the intention that the new packaging system could act as a memento once you've gobbled up every last drop. "It feels like a unique experience, and it makes you just want to keep it indefinitely because it feels too nice to want just to discard it," shares Brian Roettinger.

By Chloe Gordon







RIBBED FOR OUR PLEASURE

The intricate ridges also provide a tactile experience that engages consumers' senses before they try the product. Beyond simply elevating the design, the textured or embossed glass becomes a memorable receptacle that lives rent-free in their heads. "The idea was that Ghia's bottle silhouette would become iconography and that, over time, you wouldn't even need to see the logo; you just knew the shape of the bottle," Roettinger notes. "It feels a bit retro, and it's coming back into play in the aesthetic sense, even graphically. Objects with the 60s and 70s aesthetic have an expressive nature fighting against all things that are 'perfect.'"

[Perron-Roettinger](#) also designed Doladira's packaging with similar ribbed detailing and is maybe even trying to corner the market on ridge-y embossed glass. "The entire ethos is that this brand is an elevated aperitivo, and the Alpine and the Dolomites are very much an influence," notes Brian Roettinger. "So we wanted the bottle to feel like it. The lines are meant to mimic an Alpine route. So it feels like a mountain and a ski route, with this elevated approach to it. It's less about aesthetic and texture and more about thinking of it as a ski run."

Facts—ribbed elements add that extra note of classiness. But it needn't limit itself to beverages and spirits. Imagine its application in spreads and sauces or beauty and baked goods. So give the people what they want, a luxuriously tactile experience of packaging that's too good to pass up.





An aerial photograph of a dense green forest. A winding blue river or stream cuts through the center of the forest. Overlaid on the image is a large, semi-transparent recycling symbol (three chasing arrows forming a triangle). Superimposed on this recycling symbol is the text "ARECYCLINGRECKONING" in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

ARECYCLINGRECKONING

**'IF BRANDS ARE PAYING ATTENTION,
THEY'RE AWARE THAT THEY HAVE
PRESSURE TO MAKE SUSTAINABLE
CHANGE FROM SEVERAL SIDES;" BRANDI
SAID. "FROM GOVERNMENT POLICY, FROM
RETAIL, FROM CONSUMERS, AND FROM
THEIR OWN CORPORATE GOALS. THERE'S
JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING AT STAKE."**

- BRANDI PARKER, SUSTINABILITY CONSULTANT

A RECYCLING RECKONING

“Since the 1970s, Americans have been told to recycle,” [John Hayes wrote for CNBC](#). “Dutifully, millions of us do just that, with the promise that when we put our waste into a recycling bin, we’ve done our part to save the planet.”

Or so we thought.

Because we now know this promise is not being honored. It’s not a secret that, [according to the EPA](#), less than 10% of plastic in the United States actually gets recycled. And today, consumers are more conscious than ever about sustainability—in part due to Covid-19.

“The pandemic defines the era we’re now in, which I call the ‘post-awareness era,’” said [Brandi Parker](#), a brand-level sustainability consultant. “It was during the most intense part of the pandemic that many people realized how much impact we collectively have as humans on this planet. Since then, technology, conversations, and change have increased exponentially.”

[Some companies may be more than happy to hide behind the recycling symbol](#) and fool well-meaning consumers into thinking they’re doing all they can for Mother Earth, but people these days have less patience for [wishcycling](#). For big brands, this puts a lot on the line.

“If brands are paying attention, they’re aware that they have pressure to make sustainable change from several sides,” Brandi said. “From government policy, from retail, from consumers, and from their own corporate goals. There’s just about everything at stake.”





A RECYCLING RECKONING

We're seeing states with proposed bans on the recycling symbol ([like in California](#)), and we may even one day see [plastic taxation laws as they have in Europe](#). Brandi mentioned that retailers are prioritizing sustainable goods, [such as REI](#) intending to only sell products with a "preferred attribute" within their Product Impact Standards by 2030, Ulta Beauty's [Conscious Beauty](#) for the eco-minded, or even the [GreenWise](#) line at Publix—and this leaves less and less room on the shelves for brands that don't meet those standards. Brands have also made environmental promises, and you can bet [we're closely watching their progress](#). People are willing to prioritize the welfare of the world in their spending habits ([especially Gen Z and Millennials](#))—and brands that don't follow suit may eventually feel it in their pockets.

Until then, what will make the most impact is brands putting in a genuine effort with sustainable choices—because the shift from single-use plastic-everything won't be instantaneous. We might expect to see more sustainable packaging options on the horizon, too, like [Morrama's work on Maya](#), a refillable beauty and makeup brand [in an industry notorious for plastic waste](#). Or there's [Paper Blister](#), a sustainable solution for push-through pill packs in pharmaceuticals, which are typically plastic. [We're happy to report that canned refills are having a moment](#). And hey, maybe we'll take a step back in time [with more classic materials like glass getting used for milk](#) once again.

"The reality is that sustainability isn't a singular end goal," Brandi said of what she looks forward to in the realm of sustainability for packaging and branding in the coming year. "It's a concept meant to be ever-evolving, and it encourages possibilities instead of limitations. I hope to see and feel more optimism. The doomsday-speak might have been effective in sparking awareness, but it is not inspiring action. Only hope does that."



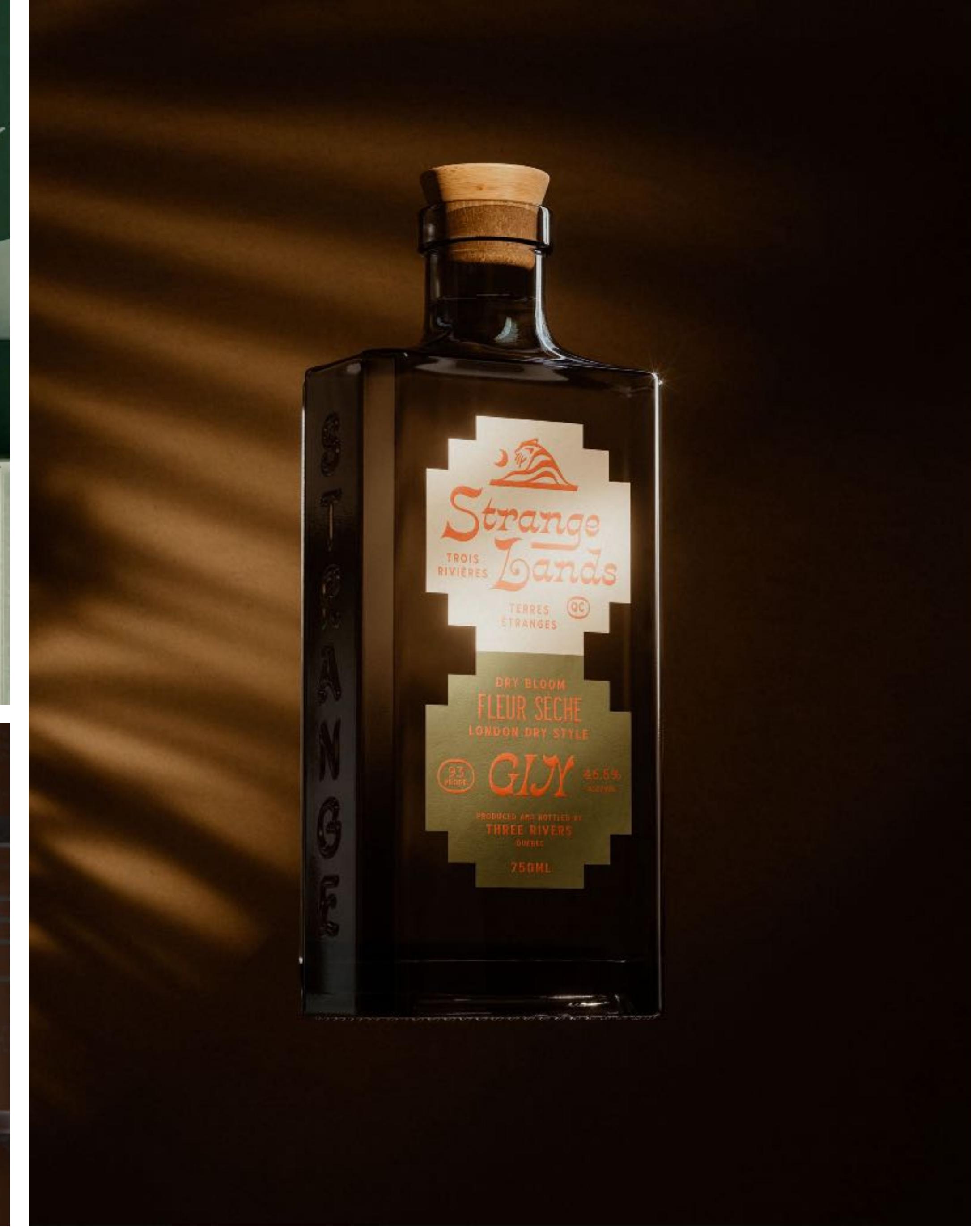
YOU BETTER SHAPE UP



**"GEOMETRICAL, SIMPLE SHAPES
ARE FOR EVERYBODY; IT'S A
DEMOCRATIC STYLE. IT'S VERY
APPROACHABLE, AND THEY ALSO
HAVE AN EDGE BECAUSE THEY
CAN BE FUNKY."**

- VERÒNICA FUERTE, FOUNDER AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR AT HEY STUDIO





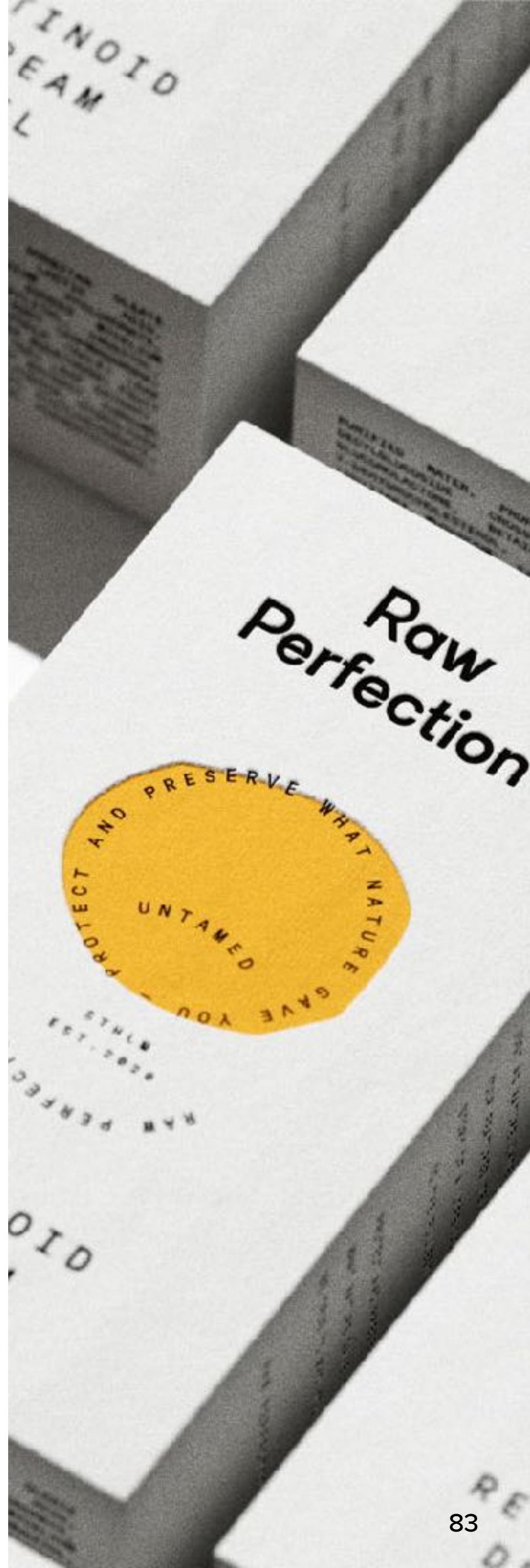
YOU BETTER SHAPE UP

At some point midway through the year, I realized that the packaging I was writing about was home to more than just complementary color palettes and compelling typography.

In place of intricate illustrations and drool-worthy food photography, I found shapes. From wonky geometrical, no-name figures and three simple solid squares with typography subtly gracing the bottom to a label of half moons layered with squiggly configurations, the forms became too widespread to ignore.

The geometrical shapes we're seeing are striking—these aren't your run-of-the-mill polka dots or outdated chevron patterns, and these bold, geometrical forms are no longer confined to the background. Instead, they've emerged as the indisputable stars of the show.

Window cutouts are certainly driving interest. Instead of just serving a practical purpose by allowing consumers to see the product, these windows transform into dynamic design elements that make the goods inside an integral part of the brand aesthetic. Seachange's packaging for [Bennetts Chocolatiers](#) has an element of luxury and leans into the power of color while allowing the geometric cutouts to create a stunning frame. The boxes now serve as exquisite visual representations of the dessert, boasting a rich, elegant, and utterly delicious look.







YOU BETTER SHAPE UP

In some packaging designs, shapes are the primary decorative element. Using minimalist, geometric patterns can make a product stand out in a crowded marketplace. [Heartbeat Hot's](#) aesthetics are simple, sure, but they're also utterly captivating. "You see geometrics in the liquor world, but wine is a type-heavy category. The type IS the design. Going against that, I wanted something you could see from 20 feet away and instantly know it was HEARTBEAT," mentions Kristen Knapp, Founder of HEARTBEAT.

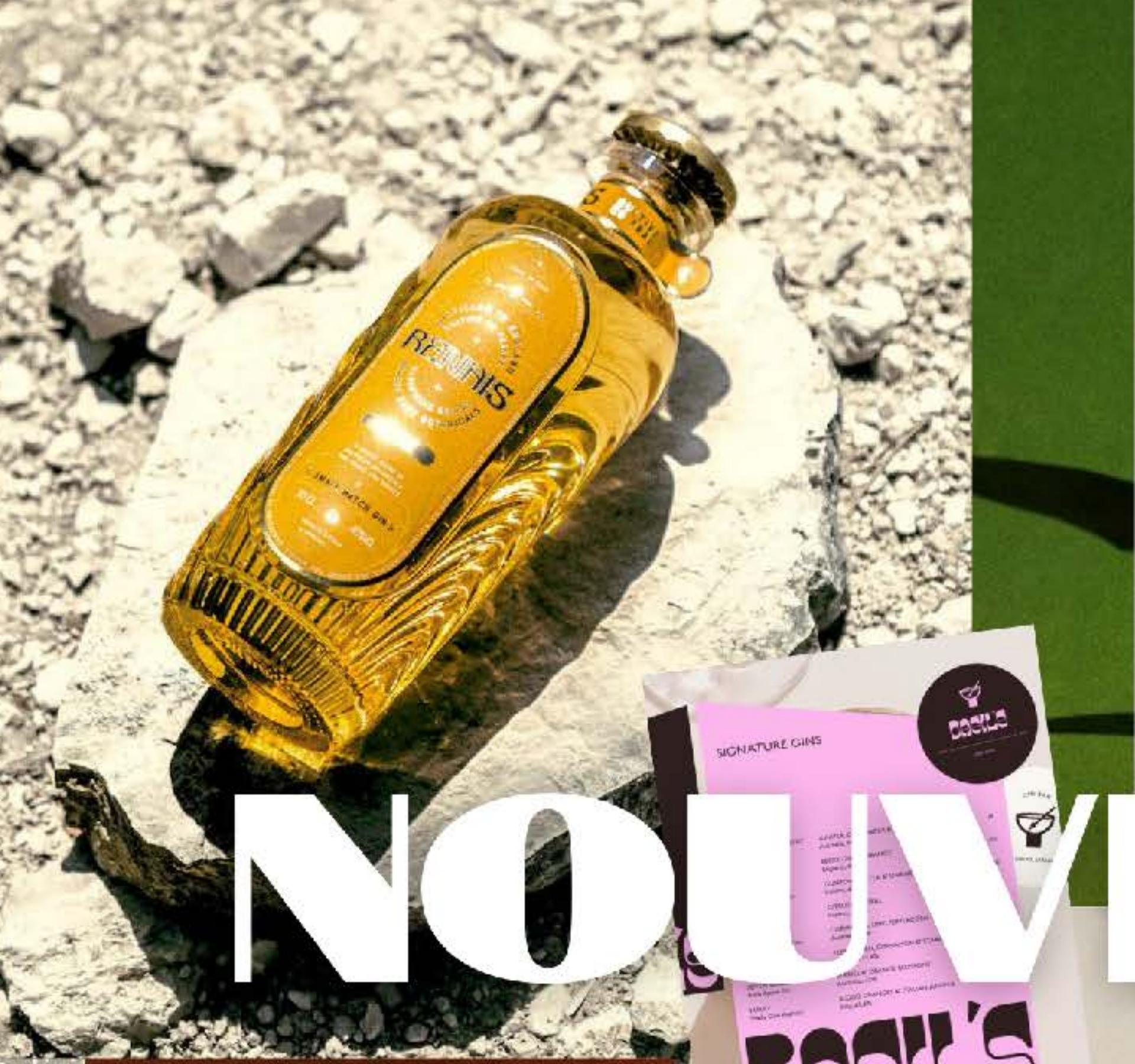
[Buddy Buddy](#), a gender-neutral deodorant for teens, and [Metaklinika's](#), a specialty paper brand, have also implemented shapes as the main design element within the packaging system. The appeal lies in geometry's ability to convey meaning, evoke emotions, and create a lasting visual impact that's less cluttered and anything but dull. "Geometrical, simple shapes are for everybody; it's a democratic style. It's very approachable, and they also have an edge because they can be funky," shares Verònica Fuerte, founder and creative director of [Hey Studio](#). Fuerte led the design of [Neeo](#), a new line of supplements with packaging that features geometric tile patterns throughout the packaging and brand identity. "We used these geometrical patterns to evoke the ceramics you see in Mediterranean architecture."

Sure, intricate, elaborate patterns are dainty and elegant, but using bold, funky shapes in a packaging system without overwhelming typography is an instant disruptor. It tells consumers the brand is confident and approachable, something more brands should strive for. There's nothing standoffish about jazzy shapes. And for that, they're flawless.





NOUVEAU DECO



**MERGING 20'S AND 30'S STYLES WITH
CONTEMPORARY ELEMENTS CREATES
FRESH, COMPELLING PACKAGING SYSTEMS.
COMBINING BOLD GEOMETRIC SHAPES AND
RICH COLORS WITH MODERN DESIGN
ELEMENTS GIVES CONSUMERS THEIR
CRAVINGS FOR THE PAST WHILE BALANCING
THE VISUALS OF MODERN TIMES.**



NOUVEAU DECO

Art Deco-inspired design, which first flourished in the 1920s and 1930s, is reinjecting a sense of cultivated glamor and luxury into packaging designs of the modern era.

It's the re-roaring 20s with Gatsby levels of glamour. Except, we're all broke, which tracks if we consider the Great Depression also happened at the tail end of the 20s.

But we digress.

It's bold geometric pattern season with rich colors and a distinct sense of opulence. Those are the things that immediately come to mind when we think of that ground-breaking period in art history, especially considering it's a movement that fuses elegance with an eye for the avant-garde, resulting in a style that exudes sophistication and captures the pure essence of the jazz age.

Consumers have shown a continued interest in all things vintage and classic, often seeking nostalgia in products and experiences. The allure of Art Deco lies in its ability to transport consumers to a time known for its glamor and extravagance. Plus, it offers consumers a bit of escapism, something we all need when the world feels full of endless doom and gloom.

We're seeing this come to life through brands like [Ami Ami](#), [Etota](#), [Renais Gin](#), and [Le Ruse](#) Wine. Etota's packaging, for example, was designed by the [The Company You Keep](#) (TCYK) and exudes refinement. The curvature of the glass bottle's shoulders, the sleek silver cap, and the transparent glass all contribute to the Art Deco aesthetic.





NOUVEAU DECO

By emphasizing the vessel's shape, designers can tap into the consumer's subconscious even further. When the physical container of a packaging system leans into the same visuals as the label, even if it's something as subtly lavish as the silhouette of a bottle, it adds a lasting impact.

Merging 20s and 30s styles with contemporary elements creates fresh, compelling packaging systems. Combining bold geometric shapes and rich colors with modern design elements (think holographic foils and updated type systems) gives consumers their cravings for the past while balancing the visuals of modern times. So, while the aesthetic can be upbeat and playful, there's a feeling of approachability to the highly glamorous undertones.



CRAFTSTORE IN THE AGE OF AI



**THERE'S LITTLE DOUBT THAT
GENERATIVE AI WILL BE INTEGRAL TO
MOST DESIGNERS' TOOLKITS. BUT
WHILE YOU TINKER AND ADJUST TO
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THAT A HAND-CROCHETED BABY
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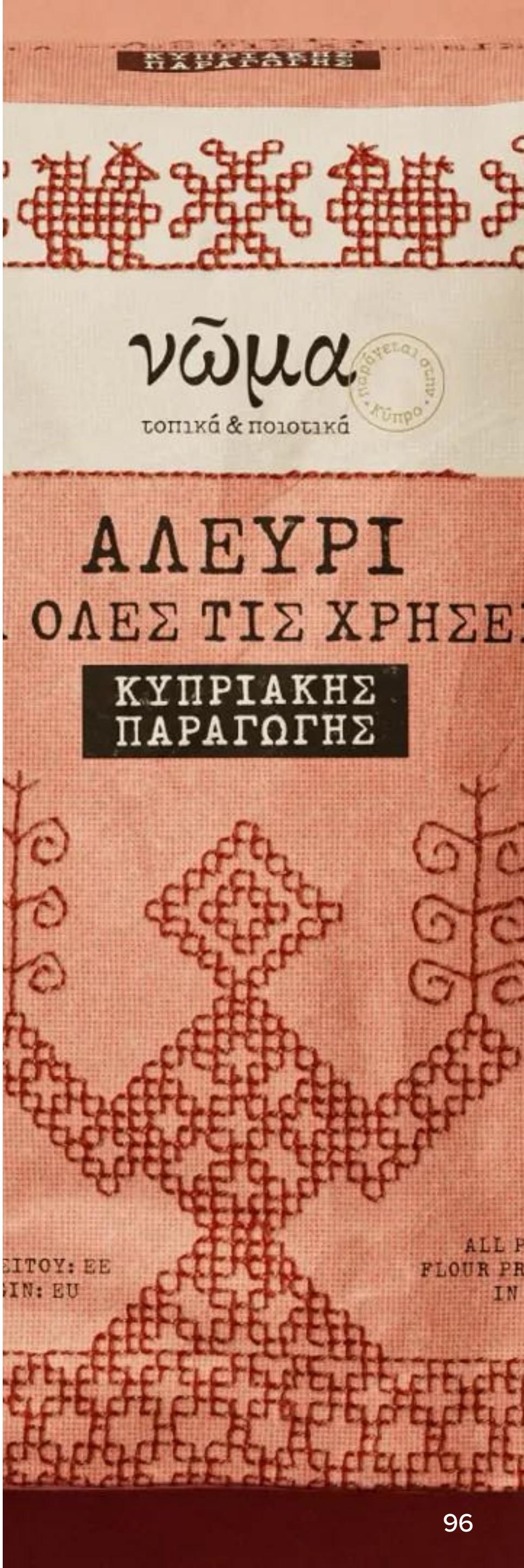
CRAFTCORE IN THE AGE OF AI

My mother loves to crochet, as do a lot of other grandmas. Despite her arthritis, my ama works those hooks with a kind of fervor and precision that I've only seen in elite gamers smashing keys and guiding mice in an intense match of Unreal Tournament. For my dear mother, crocheting is a pastime and a way to give the ones she loves unique and bespoke things.

There's something special about a handcrafted, unique physical object, and it has an intangible value when someone devotes time and energy to conceptualizing, designing, and executing versus something ideated and mass-produced by machines in a factory.

While companies like design software developer Adobe [position](#) AI tools like Firefly as an "assistant," a quick perusal on social media shows that many non-creatives are letting the bots do all the work, save for a text prompt. At least for now, that low-effort AI-generated "art" is still apparent to even the untrained eye. However, AI will, as most technologies do, improve over time. As we see more and more of AI's fingerprint in design, from completely machine-generated to simply an "assist," the value placed on expertly handcrafted designs by humans will rise.

What does this mean for brands? Simply put, you can't fake the human funk using AI. At least not yet.





CRAFTCORE IN THE AGE OF AI

Coca-Cola recently released its AI co-developed “Creations” flavor, “[Y3000](#).” The Atlanta-based firm says it asked consumers what they thought the future tastes like, then shared those responses with the bots to help design the packaging and create the recipe. Visually, the final design possesses an AI vibe, but it’s unclear how much of a human touch was involved. The bulbous shapes, distortion effects, and overall shininess feel like a highly evolved, perhaps overly optimistic, outlook of the future.

Ultimately, the drink feels like it was created via committee with an AI chairperson. What it doesn’t feel or taste like is a soda crafted by folks devoted to visual design or soft drinks.

As designers incorporate generative AI into digital design, it will become more evident who’s leaning on the robots and who’s taking the time to handcraft things like letterforms. Some of the most exciting packaging we’ve seen lately incorporate beautiful typography design that AI can’t replicate just yet, like the labels for Matchbook’s [Amaro](#) line, branding and packaging for [Date Better](#), and plant-based artisanal NOT-cheese [SriMu](#).

Even some brand collaborations are taking up the craftcore mantle. To promote Cheetos Mac n’ Cheese, the brand recently teamed up with fashion designer Coral Castillo to create a limited edition collection of macrame shoes and bags called “[MAC’rame](#).” The project harkens back to personally designed and handcrafted work, like the crocheted pieces my mom spends hours making.

There’s little doubt that generative AI will be integral to most designers’ toolkits. But while you tinker and adjust to having AI “assistants,” remember that a hand-crocheted baby blanket from Tia Carmen beats anything in stock at Target. When it comes to “[boilerplate](#)” design projects, like a social media post that has the lifespan of a fruit fly, you can probably give AI the wheel and just course correct and advise. But for the assets that matter, a personal touch remains essential and will be the most noticed and appreciated by consumers.

At least for now.





WHAT'S YOUR TYPE?

flow
awake
respect

WHEN PACKAGING COMES SPLASHED SOLELY IN TYPOGRAPHY, IT OFFERS A STRIKING WAY TO COMMUNICATE A BRAND'S IDENTITY, SIMPLIFY PRODUCT RECOGNITION, AND ENGAGE CONSUMERS EMOTIONALLY. THESE DESIGNS OFFER SIMPLICITY, VERSATILITY, AND TIMELESS APPEAL.



WHAT'S YOUR TYPE?

Yes, we love our fonts thick and juicy. But, they're also stealing the whole show—er, package.

As of late, more and more brands are leaning into removing food photography and buzzy graphics. Now, the letters are doing all the talking. Just look at [Go Human](#), [Eau de Yellow Pages](#), [Ordinary Soda](#), [Roast Umber](#), [Bits](#), [Blum](#), [Cervezas Salvajes](#), [Bruichladdich](#), [WHINE](#), and [Ghost Town Oats](#).

When packaging comes splashed solely in typography, it offers a striking way to communicate a brand's identity, simplify product recognition, and engage consumers emotionally. These designs offer simplicity, versatility, and timeless appeal.

Dog food brand [Wildpack](#), designed by [Studio Drama](#), leaves behind the cliched pet food tropes. Think macro images of dog food, rustic illustrations of ingredients, and a two-toned color palette for each product that portrays a mighty shelf presence. Scraping away everything but the letters also lends itself to a design system focused on the critical elements of the product, which, coincidentally, is perfect for a brand that's all about stripping back unnecessary ingredients and giving dogs the raw food they crave.

Designed by Goods, [Tekla](#) relies on refined minimalism to create a memorable experience that visually showcases the brand's dedication to sustainability. Tekla's updated packaging design removed 88% of the CO₂e per packaging, and by just featuring the brand's logo, the highly minimal presentation means more than it visually appears, creating a sizable impact.







WHAT'S YOUR TYPE?

MATRAFOX studio's packaging design for [Hyper Six Skincare](#) is an innovative approach to scientific wellness. Drenched in a vibrant orange shell, the packaging gets balanced by a type-centered design. Pairing simplistic letterforms with a bold color can make a design feel outsized and demand attention on the shelf. Also, with Hyper Six, scarping away extraneous elements highlights the gender-neutral aspects of the design. [Amble Sheep](#)'s boxes, courtesy of [Lowkey Design](#), also use dazzling colors paired with relaxed, lowercase sans-serif typography. It radiates a playful charm that coordinates beautifully with the coffee brand, setting Amble Sheep apart by presenting a rarely-seen casual aesthetic in the coffee world.

Meanwhile, Wedge's [Aupale](#) comes packaged in a bottle that represents the brand's value of balancing practicality and aesthetics, and the typography exudes smooth refinement and sharpness, visually representing the glacier water at the company's core.

Trendy visuals and graphics can lose relevance quickly, but well-executed type can maintain its appeal for decades, especially for brands looking to establish a lasting presence in the market.







REFILL SYSTEMS GET SMART

WE'RE STARTING TO SEE NEW BRANDS TWEAK THE REFILL PLAYBOOK AND ADDRESS CONVENIENCE WHILE AVOIDING PLASTIC PACKAGING, MANY OPTING FOR ALUMINUM INSTEAD.





REFILL SYSTEMS GET SMART

Refillable systems are everywhere, whether it's home cleansers, toiletries, or coffee.

There's an abundantly clear value proposition—using less packaging and refilling the same one creates less trash that can end up in the environment. Since the refill product gets sold for multiple fills in bulk, consumers often save a little coin in the process.

Still, many of these refill systems come packaged in plastic. Sure, they might utilize less plastic with a refill pouch, but it also defeats the purpose. Don't we want to use less single-use plastic?

We're starting to see new brands tweak the refill playbook and address convenience while avoiding plastic packaging.

Cleaning brand Puracy introduced the CANcel refill system, which includes dish soap, hand soap, and stain remover. The dispenser is still plastic but designed to work for years. [Puracy](#)'s refills, however, get packaged in aluminum cans, similar to soft drinks and beer. The refill process takes seconds; the consumer pops the can open, snaps it to the bottom of the pump, and twists the second piece of the dispenser to the pump. What's more, the refills are easy to store, stock, and use. And, of course, you can easily recycle the aluminum.

Unlike aluminum beverage cans, [KANKAN's](#) refills resemble tinned food with a thin lid that pulls off with a tab. The dispenser goes over the can, and the two pieces are held together by tightening a knob on the side of the pump. Critically, brands are creating innovative and attractive dispensers, ditching those unwieldy refill pouches for aluminum and metal.



REFILL SYSTEMS GET SMART

Besides home and beauty, coffee beans seem like a natural product for a refill system (and ridding ourselves of wasteful coffee bags). Given the prevalence of cafe outlets, it would be easy to offer an airtight metal can that keeps air, light, and moisture away from roasted beans, keeping them fresher. [Peak State Coffee](#) saw promise in compostable coffee bags until founder Danny Walsh discovered that his local service didn't accept these bags as compostable. Most composters in the country didn't either.

"I think metal, refillable cans will become more common," Walsh said. "Illy was the first to use metal successfully. The ecological benefit over single-use plastic vs recyclable and refillable aluminum is apparent, but consumers will be warming up to the concept for a while."

"There have been successes in recyclable packaging," Walsh adds. "I think it's more that a coffee business hasn't justified the ecological benefit over the economic cost of aluminum up until now."

It's encouraging to see brands rethink and improve refillable packaging systems, particularly concerning eliminating plastic pouches that provide a more flawed user experience. It remains to be seen if enough consumers will switch to refill, but with sustainability mission critical among the public, the outlook is at least optimistic.



