



Chad Lavigne

A few minutes with packaging designer Chad Lavigne of Chad Lavigne Studios

Chad Lavigne's invisible design signature is etched across some of the beauty industry's most innovative fragrance bottles, as well as on full collections for leading retail brands. Here, he discusses with *Beauty Packaging* what his key clients are looking for, which project gave him gray hair and why he loves ridiculous ideas.

BP: Do you design mostly fragrance bottles? What other responsibilities do you handle on a project?

CL: The studio actually has a very diverse project list right now, including skin care/hair care/cosmetics/home/web and fine fragrance brands. There has been a big move over the past two years with our clients looking for more all-encompassing branding. Diversity is what I thrive on so there is always a very big range of aesthetics under our roof. In fact we just moved into a new space where we created an amazing 90ft chalk wall made up of five moving panels. We have a rotation of artists come in creating fantastic new works of art every month—super fun watching the creation as well as working in a changing environment.

Every project carries its own responsibilities. In many cases the physical amount of time spent on design can be only a fraction of the brand development. The studio often spends far more time on the production end of a project, monitoring all of the details that often make the difference. China has certainly been a frequent stop for us over the past year.

BP: Can you list a few of the bottles (or other PC containers) you have designed?

CL: We have designed collections in quite a few categories. The designer realm includes Michael Kors, Donna Karan, Guess, and Marc Jacobs. We have also developed collections for vertical retail brands such as American Eagle, Bath and Body Works and Aerie. The celebrity category certainly has zero intention of slowing down regardless of what has been said. I can safely say that 30–40% of our projects within the studio are based around a tal-

ent or celebrity. Mary J. Blige, Sarah Jessica Parker, Celine Dion, Kimora Lee and Kate Walsh are some examples.

Another example is Kiehl's—such an amazing brand that is doing such a great job holding the codes of its heritage while pushing into new fresh creative.

BP: When are you typically brought in on a project?

CL: Lately we have been brought into projects in the very early stage of ideation. We are offering turnkey solutions to many of our clients as so many are looking for new ways to bring brands into the marketplace. We are creating concepts or in some cases lifting what the client has tried to articulate into a stronger positioning. Typically the project will move very quickly into package design once the concept is thoroughly explored.

There still is a percentage of our clients that will contact the studio for very linear solutions, such as an established brand that is looking for a seasonal theme or expansion into new categories. Codes exist, but the client is almost always looking for us to break out of the box to explore fresh ideas. These capsules are great because the client is often too close to their brand and it brings a new perspective.

BP: Do you have a signature or key element that defines your packaging designs? Any particular strength or aesthetic?

CL: I would say that the studio's strength is launching collections or capsules that fit the brief spot-on. From a whimsical Halloween theme for Bath and Body Works to a super sexy Guess fine fragrance—they all need to project exactly what the brand stands for and connect with their core consumer.

BP: *What is the most rewarding packaging project you've worked on?*

CL: Oddly enough, the restage of the Bath and Body Works Signature collection was one of my most rewarding projects. The studio works primarily in the prestige arena so it was an amazing experience to bring these cues to such a masstige brand and see it launch with such success. It was especially intense for me as I felt strongly that a brand with this kind of loyal customer could not lose its soul. It is very easy to push the evolution of a brand too far and have a serious backlash.

BP: *What about your most challenging packaging project?*

CL: Still to this day, the perfume bottle for the original Michael Kors fragrance collection stands as one of the most challenging bottles we have created. There were endless rounds of sampling for this bottle—to the point of it not being solved in time for the launch. It was a huge hero shot in an extensive print campaign to make things all the more intense. Eventually we turned to pressed glass for both the base and the cap, fusing the pieces together and hand polishing every edge to create the graphic lines. It still remains one of my favorite bottles in our fragrance portfolio—even after all of the gray hair.

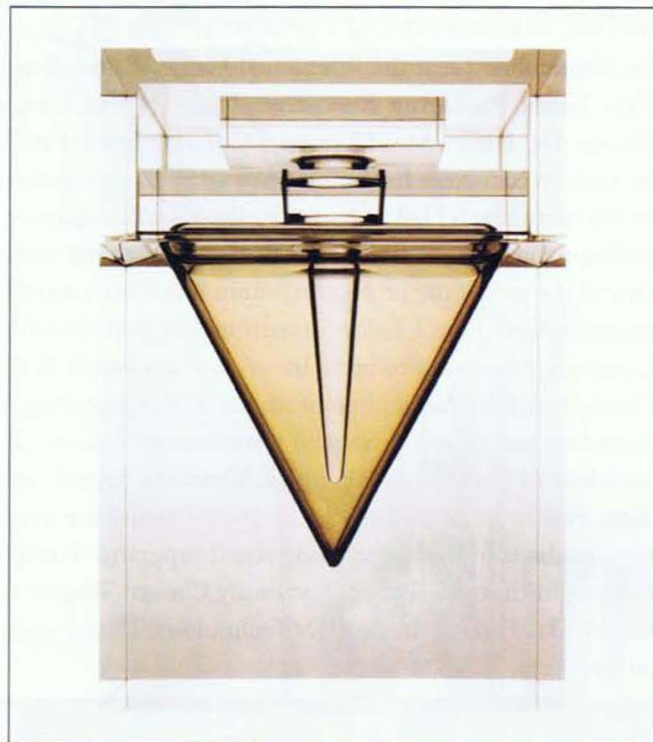
BP: *What was your inspiration for the packaging for Celine Dion's new fragrance?*

CL: The studio does quite a bit with Coty, and Celine was an interesting brief as we all know she has years and years of branding under her belt. The brief was to create the most iconic signature fragrance in the portfolio—timed with her comeback to Vegas. To me, she certainly seemed to be on top of her game, and the solve was how to best communicate the iconic power of this talent.

The gestural figure of Celine with her arms raised on the “stage” for me communicated this moment in her life: love of the performance, love of her accomplishments, love of her family. It all seemed to land in this symbolic gesture.

BP: *How do you envision the future of packaging for health and beauty products?*

CL: Innovation is still the single-most important code. Playing it safe simply does not attract the ever so spoiled consumer, even in these lean times.



The perfume bottle for the original Michael Kors fragrance collection.

I am also a big believer in brands that have substance behind them—solid stories or concepts that the consumer can clearly see and understand and most important, believe in. Brands that can engage a consumer at every level simply work. The days of shipping in product without the story being told in all of the available channels are over. Online storytelling vehicles are the future of brand building. I personally find it incredibly exciting, as there simply are no rules to the game any more. I often tell my team that I want to see the most ridiculous ideas because more often than not I love them and we nurture them into a concept.

BP: *What are you working on now?*

CL: Most of our more innovative projects in the studio are actually new startups—concepts that break the rules and stand out against many of the more traditional beauty pillars. I love having this range of creative. I could do with just a few less 15-hour flights though! In the next 12 months, we will bring to market the best creative to date out of the studio, but the hardest part of doing what I do is keeping it all behind-the-scenes until the gates open! •