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BRANDING & PACKAGING

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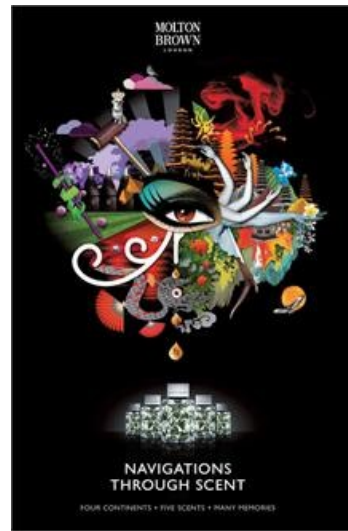
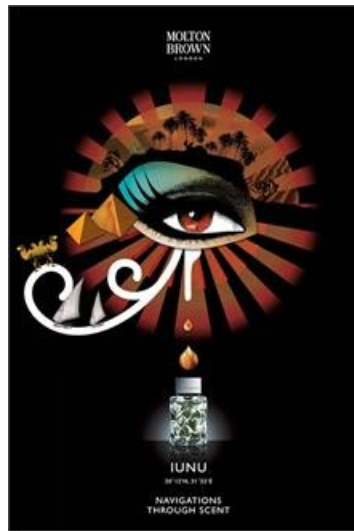
Radical Graphic Moves Signals an Overhaul on the Horizon

When Molton Brown's new campaign launches this month (going above line this week on the London Underground with an extensive billboard campaign), it will signal the start of a subtler overhaul of the entire brand, early next year.

Working with London-based branding specialists Fitch, the new Fine Fragrance campaign is made up of a series of five larger than life, exuberant illustrations – one per fragrance – featuring stylised elements reflecting each fragrance's ingredients. From a dog in a crown and a Robin in a bowler hat to a Siamese camel in Lunu, the new visual language couldn't be more different to the luxuriously understated, Zen-like attitude with which the brand has become synonymous.

"We've worked for the beauty and cosmetics sector for many years at Fitch, and each brand has its own story to tell," explains Stuart Wood, executive creative director at Fitch. "Historically, the narrative was based on the functional aspects of skin care, while fragrance and beauty [cosmetics] was all emotion, with little depth. As brands struggle for a point of difference in the marketplace, the story of ingredients, provenance and aspiration will collide to create a new vernacular in that industry."

Apuldre – the fragrance inspired by England, for example, takes its title directly from the Anglo-Saxon word for apple tree, while its signature visual tic in terms of the campaign imagery is the distinctly English dog in a bowler hat. The lead ingredients include juniper berry, violet and cedarwood – all of which are indigenous to the UK. According to the brand, irreverent, eccentric, youthful, mischievous and alluring are the traits with which the perfume should be associated.



Own Brand's Personal Stories Trigger a Shift in the Beauty Formula

So could this be a sign of things to come? Will there be a significant shift in the way that product categories such as skincare and fragrance are dealt with by the brands themselves, perceived by the public, and subsequently promoted? "As own-label brands take an increasingly larger share of the market, I believe we'll see beauty brands working harder to tell their unique story," suggests Wood.

The unique story is something that Rachael Swindlehurst, head of global marketing for Molton Brown is keen to further. But she's also aware that the new fragrance range – perfume being a completely new category for the brand – is somewhat of a departure, and therefore it may not all be plain sailing. "As with every brand, we are always looking at ways of refining our offer both in terms of the products themselves and our brand communications," says Swindlehurst. "Fine fragrance is a new category launch for us, and this gave us the opportunity to provide a unique identity."

Swindlehurst is keen to promote a new shift in creative direction, but plays down the extraordinary addition of a veritable cacophony of colour. It's a move that will take the brand a long way from its regular refined (bordering on conservative) palette, and is perhaps the most obvious shift in visual identity. "As a luxury brand known for our use of colour, it was important for us to utilise a colour palette that complimented both the packaging and the personality of each fragrance."

While Molton Brown may have been known for colour in its cosmetics products/packaging, it certainly never stepped beyond the subtle approach – further intimating that the new launch symbolises a chance to explore a significantly more adventurous attitude.



Illustrations that Tell Stories (for Inquisitive Minds)

According to Wood, illustration was a critical factor within a brand campaign anchored in the idea of storytelling. “We were looking for a style that could create a visual narrative that could, at first sight, be impactful and different from other fragrance campaigns and, on closer inspection, reveal layers of storytelling,” says Wood. “Illustration best suited the message.”

Was there a conscious decision by the brand to try and extend its appeal to a younger market through the use of illustration? “I don’t believe it’s a move to become a more youth-based market,” muses Wood. “Molton Brown is looking to create a stronger relationship with consumers of all ages that have a similar mindset: discerning, inquisitive, with a desire for more unique experiences. The work certainly is a departure for a fragrance brand, but how much this will affect the conventions of the beauty category, only time will tell.”



Packaging First, Followed by In-Store

Time will also tell on the logo, identity and in-store redesign for Molton Brown that London-based design studio Farrow Design has recently completed. Though full implementation is due for full launch in Spring 2012, elements of the rebrand are already in place at Molton Brown's newest destination store in London's Covent Garden.

Does it follow the playful scheme adopted by the fine fragrance campaign? Or is that perhaps a step too far, too soon? "After exploring a range of options, we all agreed that it would be foolish to disregard the equity in [Molton Brown's] current logo," explains Farrow's founder, designer Mark Farrow.

"The marque, the lotus flower (along with the typography), had been relatively unchanged since the company's foundation in 1973. They needed to replace this with something that spoke more clearly about the brand's core contemporary values. As a result, we created the Compass, which provides a cleaner, more modern marque. It takes inspiration from the botanical components they use, and the fact that they are gathered from the four corners of the globe."



Creative Agencies Synchronise to Navigate the Brand to Success

With such a radical shift in creative brand syntax, the need not to appear schizophrenic is imperative – evident in the very clear synchronisation between the independently created work of Fitch and Farrow. Both even talk of a desire to navigate the brand through identifying key assets – not least heritage. "I think our approach to the Molton Brown redesign is a good example of how to treat a heritage brand: creating something new and modern while not losing the equity they already have" explains Farrow.

Molton Brown, therefore, appears to be playing a shrewd game of cat and mouse – toying with the possibilities of creative license afforded to them by launching the fine fragrance range, while also fine-tuning their heavyweight brand image. Swindlehurst comments: “You don’t have to be earnest in your execution, and we also don’t take ourselves too seriously.”

Digging further with Wood, regarding where he sees the intention of the branding exercise going, he surmises: “There is certainly a momentum behind the brand and a desire to be more contemporary and relevant.”



Stylus Summary

Molton Brown’s work on redefining its brand identity proves that the launch of a new product or product category can be invaluable in terms of experimentation and reassessment. In this instance, the brand is revisiting and re-stabilising its core heritage values, while simultaneously toying with forging ahead into much newer, contemporary territory.

Illustration can be hugely beneficial in terms of defining brand personality – especially in the context of storytelling. Its looser boundaries (in comparison to photo-based imagery) offer more fantastical, lyrical design opportunities.

As the own-brand launches rise, many experts predict that personal brand stories, playing on heritage and as yet untold narratives, will play a far larger role in the conception and marketing of successful beauty products.