

EPISODE 007

KING ARTHUR BAKING COMPANY

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Mike Schacherer, Little

AND

Ruth Perkins, King Arthur Baking Company

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to The Follow-up, a weekly podcast that goes in depth into projects recently reviewed on Brand New featuring conversations with the designers, and sometimes their clients, uncovering the context, background and design decisions behind the work.

ARMIN VIT

Hi, this is Armin Vit — surprise! — and welcome to episode 7 of The Follow-up. If you are wondering where Bryony is, she will be conducting the interview in this episode.

This week we are following up on the new identity for King Arthur Baking Company, the oldest flour brand in the United States — established in 1790 — and one of the most used today.

The project, designed by Minneapolis, MN-based Little, was posted on Brand New on July 21. You can pull it up on your browser at bit.ly/bnpodcast007 that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast007, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Mike Schacherer, VP and Creative Director at Little, and Ruth Perkins, Senior Creative Director at King Arthur Baking Company.

In this conversation we uncover the process and thinking that led to the retirement of the King Arthur visuals and how that opened up the

possibilities to create a new logo that is more representative of who the company is today instead of who it was when it was founded 200 years ago. We also learn about the open and collaborative process between Little and King Arthur Baking Company and how that set them on the right path to discover the new, and very satisfying, wheat crown.

Before we begin, I want to quickly thank Pierre Dogbo who has helped us equalize the audio across hosts and guests on these last two podcasts.

Now, let's listen in as Bryony follows up with Mike and Ruth.

BRYONY GOMEZ-PALACIO First of all, welcome to The Follow-Up. We're very excited to have you. And before we really get started with the questions, if you can state your name and your title, please, that will help our audience identify you.

RUTH PERKINS I'm Ruth Perkins, Senior Creative Director at King Arthur Baking Company.

MIKE SCHACHERER And I'm Mike Schacherer. I'm a VP and Creative Director from Little & Company, a design and branding firm in Minneapolis.

BRYONY Let's start with the basics. What led King Arthur to rename and undergo a redesign at this moment in its history Ruth?

RUTH It's something we've been talking about for a long time. I've been at King Arthur for over 12 years. And I think probably for a decade, I've been talking to Karen, our co-CEO about it. And about two years ago, when we've really started emphasizing innovation and trying to attract a new audience, it probably felt like it was time. And we wanted, we just wanted a mark that better represented who we were, as a company of bakers for bakers, and our old mark didn't feel like it really did that. And then the name change really came naturally during the creative process with Little—it was something we talked about doing ahead of time and it just never really felt like the right time to make that change. And then when we were had some initial branding workshops with Little, it came up and then as part of our process of sharing the, um,

some initial logo concepts internally, it kept coming up in department meetings. So it just felt like a natural progression and Little was more than happy to help us with the added characters in our mark.

BRYONY So Mike, in, in making this recommendation, how did you land into the need?

MIKE I think it was just, I mean, it's one of those things like that I think is really cool about our job. Like you come into a company and you just you're able to say things that maybe like, like Ruth has said, like she'd been there for all these years and sort of knew these things, but then like suddenly, you know, you come into a situation, you're able to say things and then people are like, oh, you know what I mean? And so I think it was, it was something they already had on the tracks, but it was something that we were really excited about and it just felt so natural. The more, the more stakeholders we talked to and the more you learned, like this is a company that is so much more than flour, you know, that does so many amazing things for people, all the components of who they are, that it just felt like a, a huge win to be able to have a name that represented more of the totality of all the things they do.

BRYONY All right. So Ruth, I know you're an employee-owned company and so this kind of idea started to float around. And I'm wondering what was the input from the employees besides your team in making these changes?

RUTH Yeah, it was really important for us to bring everyone along in the process. So there was three of us that were the leads on the project—myself, our co-CEO, Karen, and our VP of marketing Bill Tine. And we were the ones who were in constant contact with Little, but then as we went through the process, we had department meetings with every department throughout the company to bring that along in the process and make sure they knew how seriously we were taking it. We never wanted them to feel like this was something we were just going to come upon a logo and we would just, you know, kind of share it

out. We wanted them to understand that all the steps that went into making the decision. So, from the early research, we went to, through some initial concepts, to testing of the concepts, and then to some of the early identity elements by bringing them through and sharing them in every part of sharing with them, every part of the process, they understood how, what a big deal it was and that we weren't, we weren't just rushing into anything that we were really considering all aspects of it and that they were, um, they and our company was in good hands and this would be a really successful rebranding. And we had so many people share, you know, all the horror stories of rebranding, but that's where we we're well, we're well aware, but we're going into this with our eyes wide open and we will be guardians of this company and make sure we're ready for the next century and not taking it lightly.

BRYONY So you have buy-in from your employees, you're starting to move forward, but if we take a step back real quick and Mike, how did you actually get involved in this project?

MIKE Ruth and team reached out for a few different branding firms. And we had recently done a rebrand for Vermont Creamery another cool, you know, Vermont company. And I think there was some, some crossover there. And so that's how we got invited to the party. And I think, you know, we, we came and did our Little presentation and went to Norwich and we're sort of fell in love with the place instantly. Uh, we're all from Minneapolis. And it's just the, you know, I, I've got to say that I had not heard of King Arthur. I had not, I'm not a Baker and, you know, sort of from the land of Pillsbury and Gold Medal Flour here in Minneapolis. And so it was like a new thing to go out, out to the Northeast and learn about this company and see what a huge deal they were. And so I think we instantly fell in love with them. And it's one of those, one of those times where you have that first meeting and you're, you're hoping, oh my God, I hope we win this just because after meeting the people and seeing the place, you just wanted to be involved with it.

BRYONY And Ruth , why Little?

RUTH Um, so we, we looked at a few, you know, we'd sent out an RFP and we brought in three, we had selected three to bring in and Little was actually the last, uh, agency to come in and present. And we were feeling pretty good about another agency, but we're like, we're going to go into this presentation, you know, open-minded and they just blew us away. And the biggest part with their design process, because they included us in all the steps of it. So one of our hesitations with some of the other firms was they would present three-to-five logos and you'd select one. And, you know, you finish up the project, Little includes you in the weeding out of the ideas. So, uh, you know, after our initial branding workshops, we went out to their offices and sat in a room and the walls were wallpapered in logo concepts. And we were able to pull the ones off the wall that we didn't think worked and say why they didn't work, but we were never left with that uneasy feeling of, yeah, we love this logo, but what about the things we didn't explore? Or we didn't see? We felt like we really saw everything. And then we could feel really confident about the choice that we did make.

BRYONY So it almost sounds like your internal process was very similar to that external process. Your relationship with Little is what you were doing with your employees by sharing the entire process step-by-step.

RUTH Absolutely. And I mean, this sounds so, you know, trite, but we really felt like they were an extension of our company or of our internal creative team. That was a real great partnership. It didn't have that client/agency feel at all.

BRYONY And Mike, can you talk a little bit about your team, who was involved, and then what were the directives that you first got from Ruth that got you started.

MIKE With any project like this really getting smart, you know, we did a lot of stakeholder interviews of people inside and outside the company. We did a brand workshop with the team at King Arthur. And then we did a focus group of like 250 people online who both knew King

Arthur and didn't know, and really talking about the logo itself. So within the team we had, you know, strategic folks, we had our whole design team involved, you know, when it comes to big initiatives like this, we just love to have a lot of people at the table and a lot of different voices to talk about. And so, like the process, like Ruth said, just really gets wide and shallow. If you will, you know, we sort of put together mood boards and talked about, you know, what are the, what are the right territories for this logo, but then really wanted to explore it to the fullest ranges. I think in the past, like Ruth said, sometimes you, you bring in three designs and as an agency, you sort of beat yourself up for weeks, culling down those ideas with the assumption that, you know what's right. And I think sometimes we're better served by bringing the client along earlier, and sort of letting them, you know, inside the sausage-making, letting them see all these different territories that are happening. And so we're not making the assumption that we knew exactly what was right. And we're wasting so many hours, you know, refining the type on some logo that they look at it in two seconds and they're like, oh, no, that was never right. Some of the territories that we had on the wall, and it was everything from, you know, new illustrations of King Arthur or the Knight, you know, we had a lot of stuff that went that way.

A lot of stuff that was very in, you know, monograms and pulling up King Arthur's name in different ways. And how quickly over the course of a day, Ruth and team, you know, we really go through that process and make them, like she said, making them pull stuff off the wall and showing them that yeah, we're designers and yeah, we take it personally, but we're not going to be a puddle tears when you pull one off the wall, it's like, we're all here to get to this end result. You know, over the course of a day, we went from probably 50 or 60 logos on the wall to maybe five or six that were left standing. And that was really where you started the concepting process from there then. You know, taking those and almost starting like we were starting from scratch.

BRYONY So this is a perfect segue to kind of like burning question that I find in the brand new comments. And that is why not keep King Arthur? And I would love to hear from both of you as to that moment, you made that decision.

RUTH He didn't go into the project, assuming we were going to walk away from the Knight on the horse. And I had actually, you know, been thought about this for so many years and watched other people rebrand. I had always sort of thought we would go like the mega mark, like a Starbucks route, you know, like part pick apart of a, of the horse and the Knight and just really zoom in on that. And through the process of pulling off the, um, all the logos off the wall, he had a really pivotal conversation. Little—they—I think they probably were witnesses and were part of it, but they definitely forced us to have it where we're starting to eliminate most of the logos, and we were... kept saying, well, we have to keep one knight and horse, right? We need one that's close-in. And we had this great conversation about, if this is the logo we end up with at the end of this project, are we going to be excited about this? And we all wouldn't like, it just didn't feel like it would really represent who we are as a company and set us up for the future growth that we want from this rebranding. It was an important conversation. It was difficult to make that decision. But once we did, it was so freeing, like all of a sudden we're like, wow, we can now really focus on everything else on this side of the wall and explore what will work best for the company that we want the logo to reflect.

MIKE Yeah. I th-I think when we first started it, it was, you know, a lot of times you, you hear about a project and your head immediately goes, oh, I know what the answer is going to be. And so, you know, we got this job and you saw the old logo. And I immediately started thinking of illustrators who I think of off Instagram, who would just like kill a new illustration of a knight and a horse and modernize it. But I think it was through all that process of talking to people. And in that online survey, you know, people said that it was King Arthur was high quality and trusted and all these things, but they also said it was old fashioned,

which is not a great place to be. And a lot of this is all based on, you know, how do we turn this baking company that's known by the best of the best? How do we open it to more people? How do we get more people invited to this world of King Arthur? And so it was really about how do we modernize this thing. And, and really when you looked at King Arthur and you looked at the voice that they went to market with, one of my favorite things was, you know, we're reading through Instagram's and somebody on Instagram is talking about, you know, making a cake. And the person from King Arthur said, oh, if you're in the sprinkles, you're one of us. And so it was really this tone of voice that they had, and it was so joyful. And it's all about the joy of baking. And it really got to the point where you realized that that logo people fell in love with King Arthur, not because of the logo, but despite the logo, you know? That logo had, if there was a Venn diagram between like the joy of baking and that logo, there was no overlap at all.

People loved that brand, but the guy on the horse, it's almost like people made excuses or, you know, we heard people say like, oh, I don't even see it anymore. And so how could we turn that into something? And I know a lot of people questioned on the blog said that, you know, it's like, I can't believe you went away from the quirky type and all these things, you know, that represented King Arthur... but it was like, we really got to a place where we felt like, we wanted to be an ax and chop off a lot of those tendrils between that sort of old English branding that had nothing to do with who they were today and really, you know, stop that and really take them to a new place. Yes. We wanted to have the heritage of their story and quality and all those things, but we didn't want it rooted in something that brings up more questions than it, than it answers. Like, why does, why King Arthur is this an English company? You know, all those things. And so I think like Ruth said, that meeting we had, when we decided that it wasn't going to be this dude on a horse that really was freeing and it let us think big picture about who we wanted it to be.

BRYONY That is really interesting that you kind of went into this project thinking you're evolving a brand and really you're reinventing a brand. It's a revolutionary process in a way by having all of these conversations.

MIKE Or it's almost like we're bringing the, the visual up to a company that's already reinvented itself. You know, it's like a company that started in flour. And I always think of like, it's Little house on the Prairie where they're scooping flour out of a huge barrel. And it's this company that's come along for 230 years and the visuals have never caught up with it. The visuals are still trying to sell somebody that old English means quality. And instead it's like, the company has moved so far away. How do we get the visuals at least in sync with that? So people don't have to fight the definitions.

BRYONY Mike, if you can give me a little bit about the trajectory of that Wheat Crown, was that in the mix from the very beginning and kept being pulled, or was that introduced later? Where does it fall in the process?

MIKE That was in the first round of concepting that we did. Um, it looked a lot different and it almost looked Middle Eastern or something. And that was, uh, like anything is like, like the idea of it, people sort of fell in love with, but then how do we make it look more like a crown and look more like wheat and look friendlier and all those things. And so that, I feel like we landed on that Wheat Crown really early in the process. Before this podcast, I was looking through some of the old presentations, and I was like, wow, that Wheat Crown went a long way, you know, a scary long way. And so I was really happy with where it got to. That idea that instead of the user looking at this character and being outside the story suddenly that Wheat Crown invites them to be the hero of the story. You know, sounds a little cheesy maybe, but, but that idea that I'm part of it, I'm royalty when I'm using this product, or I'm the King, you know, I don't have to wonder who the King is. It's me.

BRYONY I can tell you my daughter has probably baked with a crown on her head from time to time. So, well, we can all relate a little bit. Ruth from your perspective, from that first view of the, of the Crown and all the way

to the end, how did you perceive that evolution and how did you feel about it?

RUTH One of the ones that drew my eye right away, and I, I've always loved marks that have that, you know, those two things going on. So it is the crown and the wheat and I had many late night conversations with Karen about, is it wheaty enough? Is it crown-y enough? Is it like, you know, things like that, but over time we really, you know, refined it. And we, uh, we really got there and in the, our initial, uh, internal meetings where we were looking at five concepts, including, you know, still included a face or a King, and then a knight, everyone really gravitated to the inclusiveness of the crown. Like, it really felt like we're moving away from this character, this thing that represents—it's supposed to represent us as a company and doesn't. And it felt more it felt a little more feminine, you know, a lot of our audience is female and it just, it just, it felt so right so quickly, and then allowed us to then refine it to... First it was tall and skinny, then it was a little squat, and then we found the, found the right size. We made sure we added the bottom, or half circle. So it had some weight to it, uh, played with the line width, all those things. But once we knew it was the right mark and the right direction, I found the re- the refinement of it to be, um, probably the most fun of the project.

BRYONY And was it always intentional to keep it inside the circle so that you could swap it out in packaging and things like that?

RUTH No, that would—having a circle to replace our current mark, um, was always one of the requirements that our, we have so much brand presence and shelf awareness of our flour bag on the shelf that we needed a circle to replace that circle. But there are versions of the logo that, that are outside the circle. We've on some of our hard goods where you're using just the crown as a seal of approval, um, that, you know, that, you know, this is a top quality product because you see the crown on it. And I'm hoping that, you know, over the

time, a decade or more, that the crown can come to represent us as a company, it doesn't even need the words around it.

BRYONY So, and speaking about the packaging, is there a plan to eventually update the packaging in any way, or is that going to stay for a while and just with a logo update?

RUTH No, we are, we are right in the thick of a package redesign with Little right now. So our flour bags will remain as is. Those, we feel those are iconic and we have the, the shelf presence and the findability that we feel good with and we don't to mess with, but for our newer products, our innovation items, our mixes, um, we have a lot of alternative flours like almond and coconut and paleo and keto and all these other flours. We have little single serve microwave mixes. Those are all getting redesigned and you'll start seeing them next year.

BRYONY Okay. Going back to you, Mike, for a minute, you made a quick reference earlier about the typography and moving away from the quirkiness of it. Can you expand on that a little bit more? 'Cause that is a contested item on Brand New...

MIKE And we were the same way. It's like you look at some of that funky old type, and there were probably, you know, you start going through the archives and I don't think there was like, it was ever the same twice, but just those little swoops and flourishes from that King Arthur type. Like I said, it's like, we just were trying to get away so much from that, from anything that connected to that "knights and castles" and Medieval England, and all of that, you know, and that was almost as we were putting stuff up on the wall and the other, you know, it was something we just kept pulling back from. And there was this great shot that King Arthur at their headquarters, they have on the wall of this van. And it's probably like circa 1963 or something, an old delivery truck in front of a factory. And it has just these channel letters above the factory that says King Arthur Flour. And we were, you know, when we were thinking of heritage, we weren't thinking of old England, we're thinking of like, what would a mark look like that was made in like,

you know, that time in the fifties or sixties. Something, a company that's been around, but something that could have been like stamped into a manhole cover in the factory or something. And so trying to be timeless in that sense, you know, where it just felt like just a good, solid sans serif font that feels like it's not from today. It's not from yesterday. It might be from 40 years ago, but trying to make something more like that when it comes to heritage and also a little bit, maybe industrial from that standpoint. We really wanted something, we talked a lot about joyful. Um, and we really wanted something that was almost neutral from the sense that you could add it and take it away. And based on the way it was used.

BRYONY And as the identity kind of begins to roll out. And Ruth mentioned that some things are being actually rebranded as well, except the flour bags. What are you most excited about moving forward?

MIKE You know, what some of it is just the scale. Some of it is like, like any design project you're just excited. You know, when you walk into Costco and you start seeing flat after flat of flour bags that have this new logo on it. So I think it's been the feedback of people. You know, when we started launching this, you know, it's a loyal crowd and the more we learned about King Arthur, it's like the Harley Davidson of baking, where there are people who, if they couldn't find that flour, they would probably just not bake because, you know, they are so invested in it and they so believe in it. And so I think anytime you're rolling out something, a change like this, we can see it on the team, you know, Ruth and Ruth and Karen and Bill, you know, they took it very seriously. And the more we talked to stakeholders, the more, the more we were taking it, like, oh my God, there's a, you know, there's a lot at stake here. You know, mostly just because people love this brand so much. So I think that when you think about rolling it out, that to me, more than any given tactic that we're doing is just about knowing that—that young person is just getting into baking., maybe they're just started baking through the pandemic is sort of learning about this brand, but it's also their grandma's grandma who's been using this

stuff forever and swears by it that she's not feeling abandoned. You know, it doesn't feel like her brand went away. And so hopefully if both those audiences can see something they like about it, that to me is the exciting part.

BRYONY I think you hit a fine point there with the amount of bakers that have now joined on this endeavor, thanks to COVID—it has been quite interesting to observe. Ruth, your press release describes, you know, the company as a “company of bakers who believe in the power of baking to forge community and bring joy”. So how do you see and foresee the brand reinforcing this message with your employees internally, and your customers?

RUTH Well, for us, you know, the crown symbolizes the best in baking, right? It's supposed to be the seal of approval, best products, best instruction, and a community of bakers. So I think the mark finally lives up to who we've been for a long time as a company. And, it also is the flexibility that it fully allows us to, to have with our mark. Our old logos is so detailed... in our initial branding workshop with Little, we had our head bread baker there and he's like, “I just want a logo I can stencil on a loaf of bread”. He's like, I've tried it. I tried it with the other one. I can't, I can't do it. So every, I feel like this is a mark that everyone in d— no matter their department, they can use it and they can embrace it. So we can have it on our loaves and our loaves of bread from our bakery. But it also works just as well as a tiny little bug on our social channels. So that, you know, from an external standpoint, it's going to work really well for us. And then internally people are really excited about the rebranding because it has brought us all together, especially at a time when most of us were working from home. Uh, I was in the, we have a flagship store and bakery, and I was there last week, putting up, you know, new signage and logos on the windows and things like that. And the, the, um, the staff that work in the store in our cafe, we're so excited to be wearing their new t-shirts. And, you know, we have pins for everybody, and these shirts that say we are bakers, and it's just really, it's really brought us together in a time where we're not seeing each other as much as we are used to.

BRYONY Well who knew this rebrand was going to fall so timely, right? Can you both, um, as we kind of wrap up share kind of your personal highlights in this process that led to the success of the project. You've mentioned some of those pivotal touch points or moments, but is there anything else that kind of determined the outcome that we haven't covered?

MIKE I think I would be remiss if I didn't talk about the team here, you know, Tyler who came up with that first idea of a wheat crown, the very first sketch, and then Leah, our designer here who went through round and round and round of tireless revisions of it, and never sort of never relaxing on it and kept pushing it and just the angles and all these things. I just feel like so much of it lies on her talents and her hard work. She just killed it the entire way through. So I couldn't be grateful enough, but my highlight honestly, was like getting to know this team at King Arthur. And when all COVID happened, you saw different companies who were suddenly winners or losers based on the craziness that's happening in society... and the fact that we'd already met King Arthur, and then seeing them become this sort of surprise winner, um, not by doing something that was sort of capitalizing on the marketplace, but just by being who they were already at a time when people really needed to bake and where people came to them, I thought that was really exciting to be involved with a company in the way we were at exactly the time where they were peaking in society and people were flocking to what they had to offer and flocking what to what they've offered for 200 years. I thought that was really cool. And suddenly, like I was saying, I'm working for King Arthur and people are like, oh my God, you know? How, how awesome is that? So it, it was something that we're really proud of, even more so than the work we're just proud of the association.

BRYONY Fantastic. Ruth?

RUTH For me, I think because we are an employee-owned company, the, the excitement and acceptance of the logo internally was really important to me. And in February when we were finalizing, the mark, Mike came

out and presented to, um, to the whole company and one of our all company meetings. And you could just feel the excitement in the room at his presentation. And the way he was referring to King Arthur as “us”, and “we” just, it made everyone understand how, how seriously he was taking the project and how much he felt like one of us and therefore was going to give us his absolute best work. I got so many emails after that presentation about like, you guys nailed it. It’s so great. And just to feel the excitement throughout the whole company that the mark was right, and was going to be successful was a huge relief and just a huge honor that, okay, we’re going to, we’re going to be able to get through this and it’s, it’s going to be right. And then, and then last week, seeing all the comments online of everybody being so excited about it was, was definitely a highlight as well.

BRYONY It seems like the relationship is not going to end anytime soon—there’s a lot of work still being put out. And you have mentioned Ruth, a couple of times, some innovative products. Is there anything you can drop for us and for our audiences to what might be coming?

RUTH Yes. So we are, our new products for this year are coming out next week. So we have a, um, a double Oak pizza flour, which is Mike is a huge pizza Baker. So just, it’s just for Mike.

MIKE I have become a hug pizza baker.

RUTH And then, um, an organic rye flour, which, uh, I must say makes an excellent chocolate chip cookie. It’s one of my, it’s my new go-to flour for chocolate chip cookies because it balances the sweetness with a bit of nuttiness. And then we have some, a bunch of items in the new aisle, you know, the alternative line. So we have a Keto flour coming out, has a zero net carbs, a, an alternative baking sugar. That is, yeah. So sugar-free, no calories for people looking to reduce their sugar for either dietary reasons or for lifestyle reasons. And then two new flavors of our single serve mixes. So we already have chocolate chip cookie and a brownie, and we’re coming out with a salted caramel brownie, salted caramel chip brownie, and a confetti cake.

BRYONY Oh my.

RUTH And we have two new gluten-free pancake mixes as well, which are available from Amazon, a Keto pancake and a protein pancake.

BRYONY Well, I think I'm going to go shopping very soon. [laughter] I'll just have to wait until next week. Well, I want to thank you both for your time today. It has been an absolute pleasure and so much insight as to your process and what it was like to go through this rebrand. So thank you so much.

MIKE Thank you for your interest.

RUTH Thank you so much for having us—it was a lot of fun.

ARMIN I would have never expected a flour company to be referred to as The Harley-Davidson of baking but it's a sentiment that captures the loyalty and passion that both its consumers and employees have for it. The knight on a horse waving Saint George's Cross on his flag is gone, which may seem radical, but by replacing him with the new wheat crown logo, we ALL get to be baking royalty now.

Today, thanks for listening. Until next time, we'll be here, we hope you'll be there.