

# EPIISODE 022

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## CRANE

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Nick Ace, COLLINS

AND

Laura Seele, Crane

Chris Harrold, Mohawk

### **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**

Hi, this is Armin Vit and welcome to episode 22 of The Follow-up.

This week we are following up on Crane, an American paper manufacturer known for its 100% cotton papers and stationery that dates back to 1770. I mean, Paul Revere was their client. A part of the Mohawk Fine Paper family since 2018, Crane has continued to develop beautiful products and stationery for social use, serving as the stationery or notecard of choice for everyone from Jackie Kennedy to Franklin D. Roosevelt to Jimmy Fallon.

The project, designed by the New York, NY office of COLLINS was posted on Brand New on December 9, 2020. You can pull it up on your browser at [bit.ly/bnpodcast022](https://bit.ly/bnpodcast022) that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast022, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Nick Ace, Partner and Creative Director at COLLINS; Laura Seele, Director of Marketing at Crane; and Chris Harrold, Senior VP of Marketing and Creative at Mohawk.

In this conversation we get to hear about the challenges of a product with so much legacy and so loved by its customers that some of them don't even use it because they want to safeguard it. We also get scintillating descriptions of visits to the mills and romantic descriptions of engraving plates and we are here for it. And in between everything else we dive deep into the process of creating one of the most popular wordmarks on Brand New to date and the art nouveau inspiration behind it.

Now, let's listen in as Bryony follows up with Nick, Laura, and Chris.

**BRYONY** Welcome everyone to another episode of The Follow-Up. I am someone who was taught to bite paper in order to assess its qualities and its characteristics. So I'm really looking forward to this conversation—I know that's fairly old school. Nick, Laura, and Chris are here to help us cover the rebrand of Crane and hopefully get the scoop on the archives that they also got to explore. Before we get started it would be great if you could each introduce yourselves by sharing your name and title for our captive audience.

**LAURA** Hi, I'm Laura Seele, I'm the Senior Director of Marketing for Crane Stationery.

**CHRIS** My name is Chris Harold and I lead the marketing and creative team at Mohawk.

**NICK** My name is Nick Ace and I'm a Partner and Creative Director, COLLINS in New York City.

**BRYONY** Let's start with Laura. Laura, these days, aside from Dunder Mifflin, most people probably don't know the world of paper. So it would be great if you can tell us a little bit more about what your position is, and the market and the audience that Crane is after, not just in the paper industry, but as a consumer product within the marketplace.

**LAURA** Sure. Crane has very deep roots within not only the paper industry, but within the broader cultural and historic context of this country. It's

one of the oldest brands I think that's still alive and well today having been founded in 1801. So it comes with tremendous heritage, which is a fantastic gift in and of itself. Paul Revere was one of Crain's earliest customers. Crane was originally set on the path that it's on today because of its—at the time—incredibly innovative approach to anti-counterfeiting for currency, with their engraving skills.

And engraving has gone on, even though it's no longer playing a role in the world of currency technology to be a real mainstay of Crane and Crane's identity and what we do so beautifully within the stationery world. That legacy of craft lives on in sort of the multi-generations of craftspeople that join Crane. We have fathers, sons, family members so much so that for quite a long time, the company has used a first and middle initial in email because there were too many people with the same names to just use a single initial and the last name. You know, I think that it's truly known for setting the bar for exquisite print capabilities and for exquisite masterful printing, especially engraving. Within the industry, it certainly sets the bar from a craftsmanship perspective. As a consumer product, the reverence for beauty that we have as a company philosophy translates to being beloved in, in a way that's I think especially unique from a consumer product perspective in the sense that 99 times out of a 100 when I tell people that I work for Crane, they say, Oh, I love Crane.

And then they have a family story to share about it, about how it had some role in their family, how it's something that they treasure and that overwhelmingly positive affinity and feeling about the brand is, I think, is a rare thing in this day and age as a marketer.

**BRYONY** Do you get a sense that both internally and externally from the consumer standpoint, that level of pride that seems to be coming in from the inside, is that getting translated into the brand itself and perceived to your audience? Or is that something that's being kept more internal?

**LAURA** I do think that for the people who know and love the brand, there are certainly a multi-generational affinity for it. That's both within the craft

and within the family of Crane and then the people who know and love and use it. There's so many times where we hear a grandmother, and a mother, and a daughter all carried on this tradition of using Crane for their wedding or wanting to come back in because it was something that was special to other members of their families. I think that for people who are not already part of that Crane ecosphere of people who know and love and use it, maybe there's not that same understanding yet, but that's something that continues to be our mission to show.

**BRYONY** Maybe the rebrand will help bridge that gap.

**LAURA** Exactly.

**BRYONY** Chris, turning on to you, how does Crane fit into the world and the offerings that Mohawk has?

**CHRIS** Well, you know, as hard as this may be to believe I've been at Mohawk for 30 years, which feels like another man's lifetime. But before that, I had a short stint in the paper industry after grad school. Probably about '88, 1988, '89, I visited the Crane Mill all by myself to learn about how cotton paper is made. It was the most amazing, memorable experience to this day, including Mohawk. It was one of the most captivating mill tours I've ever had. I arrived in this little town in Western Massachusetts, knowing the history that it dates back to the 18th Century. And here I walk into this facility where there's rags, cotton rags, and underwear cut into tiny pieces going into these small manufacturing devices. It felt like art meets industrial production. It felt more like a paper-making studio. It was like walking through the looking glass, this whole world of this carefully kind of small batch made paper.

And then there's these people sitting around border, edge bordering, painting, lining envelopes. It was crazy and really left a deep impression on me. So, fast forward almost three decades when we made the acquisition of Crane Stationery, what came along with it

is that legacy. And it feels like we are either strategically or by sort of happenstance, Mohawk ends up being sort of the stewards of American paper-making. You know, we bought Strathmore back in 2005 or so, we're like extending our legacy. And now it's, we're reaching all the way back to Stephen Crane and his origins in American paper-making, and cotton paper-making specifically. So what does it do for Mohawk? It extends our reach. It expands sort of our nerdy paper-making knowledge, deeper into cotton paper making, it sort of positions us again, happenstance or otherwise, as... I suppose I could say the unlikely stories of American paper-making. If that doesn't sound too hyperbolic and bullshit.

**BRYONY** No, it's beautiful.

**CHRIS** Okay.

**BRYONY** And I am incredibly jealous of that tour.

**CHRIS** Amazing.

**BRYONY** I would love something like that. I mean, my closest experience with making paper was in a tiny village in the mountains of Mexico, where they were using stone to pound the paper—that is not as soft as any Crane paper ever. Paper is extraordinary, I think it has beautiful, beautiful qualities. We do find ourselves in a point of history right now in the world where it's all about the new, the slick, everything technology, and everything needs to be connected through our phones or through Zoom. So, in essence, what made Mohawk want to invest in this branding and have the acquisition of Crane?

**CHRIS** Is Mohawk per se? You know, we were started by a family, still the same family O'Connor family in 1931. So 90-years of ownership under one family, four generations later and over... probably from the '60s on '50-60s on, our focus was exclusively fine paper. Color, texture, Mohawk Super Fine which actually reaches back into the late '40s, early '50s. And I think we have been and continue to be convinced that we occupy a space where we want to build on that legacy and

continue to make materials for designers and the printers who serve designers needs that would make print more beautiful, more effective, and really kind of more memorable because at the end of the day, it's like, you know, beauty is something that, whether it's a printed piece or a cotton paper in a swatch book. The comment across gender, age groups, in disciplines, is how beautiful the paper is.

I get people don't always have the nerdy language we use, but they recognize how beautiful... Bryony, it's the reflection of tasting paper and touching paper. And again, I think it's the counterpoint to screens, and Zoom, and phones, and email. It feels it's in higher relief every year, in my opinion, to have something memorialized in paper. By the way a friend of mine just produced a book series as a Kickstarter program using cotton paper and letterpress printing an Edgar Allen Poe series with quarter-bound leather books; all the illustrations were done by a tattoo artist. So it's this beautiful sort of like mashup of current tattoo technology or art, sorry. And in very traditional analog print and they are just the most possessive things you've ever seen.

**BRYONY** That sounds like a great project. So we've kind of established some foundation here, turning it over to Nick. How did COLLINS get involved with this project?

**NICK** Chris, I think I met you first. We were in the library at 88 University and I was walking by—I want to say I was going to get lunch, or maybe leaving for the day. And Brian kind of, he was like Nick Ace, you're an upstate boy. He was like, you gotta meet these guys and you and I immediately bonded over the fact that I grew up, I mean, maybe two miles away from the Mohawk factory. I grew up going to tours, I think in elementary school and high school.

**CHRIS** Yeah. That's pretty much it.

**NICK** And I knew about Crane because it was just always this elevated type of stationery. So as you study design as a young designer, it's seen to be the pinnacle. It's the one. If you're going to print on anything,

you strive to do it on Crane. So having been exposed to Mohawk and Crane, I think we immediately got into that conversation and maybe I've dropped that term upstate boy....

**CHRIS** That may, or may not be true.

**NICK** —maybe too much as I am, you know, damn near 40-years old. [laughter] And you guys, you and Brian were in conversation through, I think all of our Laura, Chris, myself, all of our great mutual friend, Elizabeth Talerman, who I believe has been on the board at Mohawk for quite some time and was working with you guys on some new initiatives that would carry you forward into the future. And she had recommended COLLINS be brought into this project. Did I get that right?

**CHRIS** You got that right? You nailed it.

**NICK** All right.

**CHRIS** Including upstate point. Yeah. [laughter]

**NICK** I think where it all became very real—and I'm sure we're going to touch on this—was... Elizabeth hosted a workshop for everybody at the MFA Branding School for SVA, up on 23rd street. And I was invited to attend, I think Lauren, Chris, I think I was out the Crane factory in North Adams, maybe two, three weeks later.

**LAURA** Yes, yes.

**CHRIS** Mhm, mhm.

**NICK** And then we just kind of hit the ground running.

**BRYONY** And what was the purpose of that workshop, what were you after?

**NICK** Oh my goodness. So, we were each tasked with bringing in different stimuli, different ephemera, things that we were excited about in tackling the assignment. Elizabeth took us through deep immersion

into some customer personas that she did—sorry, Bryony—I’m going to speak about Brand Strategy now, I’m going to try not using jargon.

**BRYONY** That is a challenge. It sounds like when the workshop took place, it had been decided that a rebrand was needed. Is that correct?

**NICK** Mhm, mhm.

**BRYONY** Okay. So go ahead.

**NICK** I want to say it was like one day, maybe two day. And it was inviting folks from Mohawk, from Crane, obviously from COLLINS and from Elisabeth’s own nucleus group. And they had walked us through some of the initial research they did. Elisabeth did this great exercise where she had been actually collecting vintage cards, paper, and postcards. I don’t think anybody can top her when it comes to handwritten correspondence, she’s kind of the God at it. And she took us through some of the items from her archive that she pulled some of the conversations she had with customers. And obviously Lauren, Chris can speak on this, we define customers not just as people who want boxed stationery, but it’s people who want custom stationery people who are actively engaged with Crane.com. And then of course thinking about events like weddings and graduations. So, really like rolling through all the different personas for customer and Elisabeth teaching us every step of the way, what they were after, what they were missing, and what they loved about Crane.

**BRYONY** Laura, can you elaborate a little bit on what were those goals? What were they missing? What were the challenges that you set forth for COLLINS to work with?

**LAURA** As Nick said, Elisabeth helped lay some phenomenal groundwork in terms of really identifying where we had opportunities. I think the legacy can be a real double-edged sword in some ways, because there can often be a tendency to get stuck in more of a backward looking, relying on that legacy to keep you where you are as opposed to being a forward looking and continuing what the actual legacy of

the company was, which was as an innovator to bring cotton paper to the market in the way that it did to really be at the forefront of refining and perfecting these print processes and holding that as the standard to which everyone should aspire. And then I had this phenomenal professor in business school whose favorite expression was nothing fails like success.

And I think that so many legacy and history brands can fall into that trap of stasis as they sort of stay where they are because something worked and they forget to keep looking forward, and to finding new ways to build new relationships with customers. And then I think the other thing that we struggle with a little bit, or have struggled with in the past is that along with this real brand adoration that I mentioned before can go a little too far. It can go to that point of deification, putting the brand on a pedestal. People say, Oh, I love my Crane. I hoard my Crane. It's precious. I only use it on special occasions, which totally defeats the purpose, which is to use it, and to enjoy it, and to love it, and to use it part of what you're expressing out into the world.

How do we reframe that love into a way that keeps us elevated, but takes us off the pedestal. So how do we get people to use it? Cause, you know, I think what we're really about at our core is that everything can be beautiful, but a message doesn't have to be momentous to be worthy of that beauty. It can be the simplest thing so long as it's a genuine sentiment delivered beautifully. That's what elevates something to being a treasured thing. So that was sort of the Genesis I think, of what we presented to COLLINS. You know, along with that idea of being super premium, it can have this sense of having a little bit of a perimeter around it, about who's... should use it, who can use it, and finding our voice that resonated amongst a broader group of people was really important to us.

And Brian had this fantastic nugget of history. I think, as we started these conversations with COLLINS about the word etiquette. Which is something that a lot of people look to Crane to help provide guidance

around. But it's a word that has developed a sort of stodgy stigma to it, I guess in some ways it's about conformity more than anything else, but he had this fantastic point about the root of the word. Etiquette goes back to the old French and it translates essentially to a ticket, which is an invitation to join something. It should be about inclusion and ways to help more people feel comfortable and inviting people into being part of something instead of parameters to keep something in a specific structure was a beautiful sentiment. And I think really hit it, what we were trying to get at for the brand to go forward.

**BRYONY** So I do have to share a tiny story that I think you'll find funny.

**LAURA** Great.

**BRYONY** I went to school in the late '90s at Portfolio Center. You know, strapped for cash, I remember going to Paper Source and places like that, and at some point I did end up getting something special from Crane. We've lived in six states, and when we moved here three and a half years ago, I still found envelopes that I bought back then because they were so precious. [laughter] And I used them right away. I was like, I'm not moving these things again. This has got to go, this is a lesson for me. I cannot hold onto things for 20 years! As you were speaking, I was like, Oh, that is hitting a sore spot. Question for Chris and Laura, as you were embarking on this, did you have any expectations or concrete ideas of what you wanted the overall design, or the rebrand to look or achieve?

**CHRIS** You know, with me with this, you know, veneration and I'm part of that nerdy group of followers from the '80s and that visit to the mill and the history and the paper industry. I think that, for my part, it was important to acknowledge this incredible legacy to Laura's point. Innovative paper-making, historical sort of part of American history, but look forward and be much more inclusive and try to dust it off a bit. It doesn't have to be just for people on the Upper East Side anymore.

**LAURA** Right.

**CHRIS** That was certainly an expectation of mine as I was invited into discussions with the team at COLLINS.

**LAURA** I think Chris really nailed it. How do you find that balance of honoring legacy, but clearly communicating that you're forward-looking from a visual perspective, from a product perspective, coming up with something that feels like it resonates with a lot more people than it did before. I think those were sort of the core pieces. By not letting go of what we're so well known for, which is this beauty in craft.

**BRYONY** It's always a challenging point when you find yourself in opposite—

**LAURA** Right.

**BRYONY** —ends of a spectrum and you have to make it all cohesive and beautiful. But I think that is the beauty of design. The fact that it can actually achieve that. Turning over to Nick and starting to get more into the design itself. What did the first round of exploration look like? Did you dial in, into the whole Art Nouveau aesthetic very quickly? Did it take several rounds? Did you present just the one idea, multiple ideas? How did that go?

**NICK** I'm not going to lie... Gang, I came up with the Art Nouveau thing, probably like two and a half months before I showed it to you. It was more, you know, Bryony... It comes from a very authentic place. I'll talk about the other directions, and I'll talk about directions in general outside of Crane, but it comes from an authentic place. When Bart ,and Dean, and Paul, and Laura, and Jill, walked us through the factory in North Adams, we saw people hand painting edges of the stationery. I met a gentleman who, I mean, Laura and Chris keep me honest, this fellow and his parents and his grandparents worked at Crane. And this guy nailed a 12-plate engraving. I believe it was for a Hanukkah card, but it was 12 plates, beautifully registered, beautifully engraved. And I was like, why don't we see more of that stuff?

It almost felt like they had thrown every amazing print capability into this card. And I think as designers, we get so hung up on the identity that we often forget about the ephemera. Getting to work with Crane was a dream project. We got to throw every single thing at it. We knew that we had the best printing, the best engraving, the best bordering, everything at our disposal. Sorry guys, I'm getting ahead of myself and way too excited. So walking the factory first was... we had seen glimpses of this ephemera all over the floor. We saw commitment to nailing it on press every single time. And then we stepped into the archives and Bart Robinson gave me a Crane book and I think he said—Chris and Laura, I can't recall—he was like, there's like two copies of this left Nick. So you have to get one of these back to me.

And I left Massachusetts and I went home and read it. There I learned about Paul Revere. I learned that engraving was actually an innovative security technology. It came from a function first. In my own research, I learned about Alexander Hamilton creating his challenging note on Crane. And we kind of took all this stuff into account. Uh, one person we have to shout out is Jump Jirakaweekul. Jump is a Senior Designer at COLLINS. The guy is a God-damn icon. When you think about all the projects that he's touched at COLLINS, and I said to Jump in our very first meeting, this is way before we showed anything with Crane—I swear Bryony, I will get to the Art Nouveau piece.

**BRYONY** I trust you. No worries.

**NICK** Oh yeah. Okay. So I said, instead of us just making this a history play or just making this a sort of A+ let's dust it off. I said, let's look at a time first in history where mechanization and technology had become overpowering in regards to what role did a human being play in it. And we said, Mucha, Clara Driscoll, Louis Majorelle, all these great books that were in the COLLINS library. And we said art Nouveau was a very clear point of inspiration where the industrial revolution was happening, cities were changing, people were becoming less present, nature was becoming less present. And really the icons of art Nouveau

found ways of harnessing that technology and bringing some of those more natural and ornate forms back into the world. So Bryony, that's where the art Nouveau stuff came from. Can we talk about directions? 'Cause this is like a kind of a spicy subject.

**BRYONY** Yes, please. I'm always curious, and our audience is always curious as to the firms that show up with one idea, the ones that show up with 25, you know, there's a big spectrum of how you can present all of your concepts.

**NICK** While Art Nouveau was the first thing that Jump and I put together and, uh, Camille Soft who was a designer at our company for many years. We had two other directions. All of them leaned into really showcasing the best of Crane's technology, their printing capabilities, everything. One was way more, Chris, I think when you saw one of the directions, you were like, well, I hate that. Maybe you didn't use the H-word. [laughter]

**CHRIS** Well, I may or may not have been dismissive of the other two. [laughter] I'll sit here and listen to that. I'll listen to what you're saying.

**NICK** There were three directions. One leveraged a symbol that we found all throughout the history where you guys were quite literally using a Crane. One was purely about like looking at Crane a hundred years in the future, stripping everything back... Chris and Laura, maybe we never spoke about this, but I said to Brian and Jump—I was like, look, I'm coming in with three directions, but I'm going to sell the shit out of this Nouveau thing because... [laughter].

**CHRIS** Yahtzee. You did it.

**NICK** Just because it was right. It felt right for you guys. And it felt like the story was straight. It felt like it was a rich territory that we could build from. And I think Chris, you said to me, you said, congratulations, you've debougiefied Art Nouveau.

**CHRIS** Yes. Not a word, but it could be a word, right?

**NICK** Yes.

**CHRIS** On- or de-bouging.

**LAURA** You got to flush out the de-bouging. [laughter].

**BRYONY** Chris and Laura, can you expand on your reaction when you saw this idea?

**CHRIS** A reference back to Mohawk. We inherited when we bought Strathmore in 2005, the Strathmore Archive, which was this vast, insane collection of design ephemera for designers from Will Bradley of note in the 1890s, who was sort of the point of origin using graphic design and print to demonstrate fine paper, to sell to printers and illustrators. And these individuals who ultimately would be called graphic designers. And he was a champion of Art Nouveau. You know, I had this predisposed love of Art Nouveau and a little bit of ornamentation. The whole world doesn't have to look like the Bauhaus, right? All respect to the Bauhaus. To use Brian's phrase, an unguarded gate. As a creative class we haven't been looking at that. I would submit carefully enough. I'm like the accidental curator of the Strathmore Archive having sort of accidentally immersed myself in the 1890s and the early 20th Century. There was some really spectacular illustration and lettering work done. I was predisposed when I saw that first version of this new brand, I was sold. That's why I—all joking aside—I did kind of say, okay, go onto the second and third. If I'm nothing else I'm polite, but you nailed it with this. That's sort of my version of how that all happened. It just felt like the wordmark looked calligraphic, it referenced Art Nouveau, the whiplash patterns felt like they could be as comfortable in psychedelic posters from the '60s that were looking at Art Nouveau again, as much as they were in the 19th century. It felt weirdly kind of from an Epic, but timeless.

**LAURA** Totally. I think that there was a lot of consensus after we saw option one. It was going to be a difficult one to top from so many perspectives. It felt right for everything that Chris just said, it had that great balance of grace and that timelessness that people look to Crane for with something that felt way more vibrant, way more interesting, than

anything that we had been in recent past. That was beautiful. What we're about so much at our core is this sort of like hand craftsmanship, that the whole look of it, harks back to this sort of organic and a much more natural inspired feel that felt like it made a nice nod to back that we're so much about the humans that are essential for creating what we do.

**BRYONY** Sometimes as designers, we just know when something is perfectly, right. Even if you have other ideas, yes, you sketch a bunch of ideas and you feel like you need to come in with more than one concept, but sometimes you just know which one is the golden ticket.

**NICK** Can I follow up on that?

**BRYONY** Yeah.

**NICK** We usually, usually we say, we're going to come at it from three very different ways in, and we build from there. And Bryony, I'm sure you're familiar with this. Is like, let's just see what three different worlds look like, and then let's build from it. I think you have to love or see potential in all three. But to your point, you sort of know as a designer who's been in the game, you know what you want it to be, and you want to guide your partners on what you want it to be, but you don't want to oversell and be a jerk about it. So I just wanted to put a pin on that one.

**BRYONY** That makes total sense.

**NICK** Yeah.

**BRYONY** In the end you do believe in all three ideas, otherwise you wouldn't be presenting the other options. Let's get a little nerdier here with a wordmark. It is very rare that a wordmark gets such high scoring on Brand New as the Crane one did. In a way, congratulations for that. How did that come about? And what was that process in finding that wordmark?

**NICK** I think we looked at a lot of different typography when we were forming the original direction and Jump brought in a typeface that a gentleman named Jacob Wise had designed called Monarch, MT. And that was the precursor to what Jacob's done now, which is Monarch Nouveau. That's the typeface that's available. And Bryony, this is perhaps just a glimpse into our process at COLLINS. It would be incredibly rare,—if ever—that we would just pick a typeface and put, you know, their name on it and say, here you go. Here's a font... buddy boy. I think before we even show our clients, we always take a few passes at it to see if we can strengthen the relationships between the characters. See if we can invent ligatures, look at it on all scales, you know, something like Crane has to exist so small, could be like a blind emboss or a blind deboss. It has to exist digitally. It has to exist in things like the national stationery show at the Javits Center. Huge. So we're always pressure testing. Now in the best cases, because we have love for all the artists that informed the work, Jacob designed that typeface, and we just loved it. So jump and I wrote to him and we said, hey, will you take a pass with your eye? Refining some of these elements. If I recall, we were pretty close and Jump actually came up with that R-A-ligature, which is bananas by the way....

**BRYONY** It's bananas. But it's amazing.

**NICK** I mean, guys look him up Jump Jirakaweekul, fellas from Thailand, he's been with us about five years, he's a superstar. So he came up with the R-A ligature and we briefed Jacob looking at different counters for the "A", looking at other variations of the R-A ligature, looking at perhaps the "N" and the "E" could have a stronger relationship. Perhaps we could tip the "E". And I want to say, we looked on it by sort of throwing everything at it. And like, what is the most we can do on this wordmark? I think it was just two rounds we did with Jacob, really lovely fellow to work with. We got to the final wordmark, but at this point we had already moved forward with that direction with Crane and it was just Jump and Jacob agonizing over the details. So I guess a teaching moment for any designers out there listening, or any

agencies, is if you have access to the typographer who designed the typeface more often than not they're willing to collaborate with you because they want their work to look just as spectacular in the world as you do. And you know, they're never really more than an email away. So yeah, Bryony, that's sort of the evolution of the wordmark.

**BRYONY** Fantastic. Would you mind elaborating on the other side, which is the ornaments—an integral part of the rebrand? How did that come about?

**NICK** I'm showing this guy a lot of love today, but Jump drew all those by hand. And again, the considerations that went into it were first looking at the work of Majorelle, looking at the work of Driscoll, looking at Alphonse Mucha. You know, there was a certain, I think Chris, you referenced it earlier. The whiplash curves. It felt both natural, but also able to be replicated by machines, right? When you think of plates and you think of the way these things were designed. They weren't just designed because they were beautiful, they had to take into account the technology at the time and what was achievable, how it could be engraved, how it could be printed, how it could be consistently done. But at the same time, Jump didn't want to make anything that was purely derivative and neither did Brian or myself. So we went through, I want to say Jump spent two and a half, three weeks just drawing those whiplash curves.

And I think we gave you guys a kit of about a dozen to start with. And we said, if nothing else appeared on the page, if it was a blind emboss or it was a single hit of ink, will these things hold up on their own? You know, when you referenced some of the architecture from Art Nouveau or some of the work of Louis Majorelle, it's interacting with other things. So we kind of had to make it its own thing, both like suited for printing and digital, but also if you were to strip everything away, does it still hold up as a visually arresting piece of design?

**BRYONY** Now you touched upon this a tiny bit, but did you provide the kit of parts and guidance on how to use all of these motifs moving forward? Or is it more of a, we've got a dozen go wild?

**NICK** What you're seeing is really just scratching the surface. I want to say we created about a dozen for different use case, and we have not just different illustrations, but different orientations of how they're used. So in the brand guidelines, we gave you some examples in use, but we also scratched out what it could be in the future. So Bryony, I think it would be a miss for us as a company like COLLINS to say, hey, here's your stuff, good luck. This the best way it's going to look. But we were actually in conversation with you guys and Paul Thurgood throughout the process about applications, about how you guys were working with the materials. We even poked out how it could evolve in the future. The point was is it never had to be one thing. If you guys wanted to start experimenting with different artists, different collaborators, and reinterpreting it. Let's nail it consistently first with a small kit of parts, but let's always build from it instead of just making it look the same. Bryony, to answer your question, it started with a toolkit and a guideline, but you guys have even done some things that we didn't come up with yet that we're quite excited about when we see appear online.

**BRYONY** So it sounds like it's an actual toolkit. Like here are your tools. Here are your parts. Now go make stuff versus just put these two together, send it to print and be done. Chris, as the work kind of keeps evolving and during design, and as you start to implement the process, how involved is the rest of the Mohawk team? And is it isolated within the design team or do you do focus groups, market research? Any of that?

**CHRIS** I would say our involvement is kind of nominal at this point as the makers of Crane Paper products, right? So Crane's letter of note, I may or may not insert myself occasionally with opinions and participate. For instance, we adopted the wordmark when we republished the Crane Papers Collection kind of right at the beginning of 2020 semi lost in COVID nonsense. But that was actually bizarre fashion. That was

one of the first sort of public expressions of the wordmark used in a paper swatch book. Appropriately, right? Yeah. Harkening back to the origins of Crane in the 18th Century, and the early 19th Century. Mind you, yeah, we did a design as sort of a Google design sprint with some designers around other products in probing design minds around colored paper and so on using the Crane names. So we're kind of like part of the family, that tool kit, those building blocks all day, every day.

**BRYONY** Laura, can you talk to your experience?

**LAURA** To Chris's point, the first presentation of some of the new brand was within the swatch book that Mohawk put out. We have sort of had a space rollout for sort of introducing this new look to the world. The first big one was at last year's national stationery show almost a year ago to the day, at this point, but it was trade. So it was an unveiling to the sort of the retail industry, the sort of paperworld to say, here's the new Crane. And in more immediate previous years, Crane had taken a fairly modest presence at the show, but last year we put a real stake in it to say like, no, this is a real celebration and unveiling. So we had a huge space, to Nick's point about how big does this have to be? A six-foot execution of this logo, backlit along, you know, an enormous wall of our exhibition space, you know, and really immersed in all of the components of what that was. We brought in crafts people from North Adams and machines, and we were live hand-stamping, live lining envelopes, and together with Mohawk, this was actually a beautiful collaboration, Chris... for the product integration that we had at the show, we developed, very much inspired by a lot of the work that COLLINS did, a bespoke stationery piece that duplexed Crane Lettra Paper and set Mohawk Key Color papers together with the beautiful Crane wordmark on the back and let people choose their own, and then select a stamp color and had this little design foil stamped on it and explain sort of how we saw people being able to use it and how it was a step away from the past.

And then on the other side of the booth, we had all of this iconic best loved Classic Crane engraved stationery motifs, and personalized collections. It was just a beautiful marriage of all of the things together. There was this phenomenal momentum of all the different ways that it was going to move into the market. We chose to hold the real consumer launch to the brand until we relaunched our website, which was going to come with some significant backend technological updates, which for one reason or another, [laughter] you know, the world happened over the past few months that actually came online in September of this past year. And so we're really only, you know, holidays are sort of a whirlwind time period for us in general because of holiday cards and the importance of that piece of the business, I would say we're really at this exciting place right now, where we're finally getting to really test drive the new brand and get out outside of the confines of commercial requirements of holiday promotions, getting to sort of really put it out there and celebrate what it can do. And I think there's so much, I'm excited to keep unfolding with it.

**BRYONY** As a paper company and given your high standards of quality, you know, the 12-plate engraving registration, that kind of stuff... in terms of the implementation of the identity and the print production across all of the new products, I am assuming that has been fun and nerve wrecking, but the expectations are high. Can you share from your perspective and your point of view, how you went from all the approved designs to the actual product implementation and starting to take everything in store?

**LAURA** Fortunately, because of the exposure at the National Stationery Show, from the sort of coming in store perspective, you know, the retail partner has got a little preview of what was going to come. So it wasn't specifically a shock to them about what they were about to see. And I think it's still very much a work in progress to be able to execute all of these things in the way that we want them to. One example, the beautiful whiplash designs were always intended to be something that gave dimension to products. So, we have a rule that outside of existing

on a screen and digitally that those are not allowed to be flat printed. It has to be engraved. It has to be embossed. It has to add dimension because it's an elevating element, as opposed to just a decorative one. There are things like that that we will continue to be sticklers about as we roll it out.

A lot of what we've envisioned with COLLINS has helped the sort of the presentation of the packaging. We are adventures yet to come. We're sort of in this phase of, we know we want to do that, right. And when we fully bring that into being that has to be something that really nails the living up to everything that inspired it. I think we're halfway down the road, but there's a lot more to come.

**BRYONY** I have one more question for each of you. Chris, what has been the most positive impact of having this kind of revitalized Crane brand for Mohawk?

**CHRIS** Not to be cute about it, from what I said earlier, I think it allowed us to bring sort of our Mohawk sensibility to the table as the Crane team help navigate this amazing brand to a new audience.

**BRYONY** That makes sense. That sounds like a good partnership.

**CHRIS** It is, it is.

**BRYONY** Where you're both bringing something to the table and leaving with something at the same time. Laura, what is the most exciting aspect of this new identity as you begin to work with it?

**LAURA** Oh man... I've thought for so long that, you know, as long as I have been with Crane, which is just over four years now that it's an exceptional brand that has this, I think largely untapped potential for really interesting storytelling that we haven't been able to fully do justice to up until now with visuals that really tell a story, that draw you into a space, and a world that really illuminates what we do so well and that role that we can play in that broader sense of meaningfully connecting people and being a part of that story that people have. And that ability

to celebrate how words on paper can become a treasured connection that create legacy on their own.

You know, I think that we just—we haven't been able to really do justice to that until now. And I'm excited that I think we can.

**BRYONY** Yeah. And it'd be interesting to see given the circumstances in the world, how much people start to gravitate back towards—.

**LAURA** Yeah.

**BRYONY** —sending notes in the mail and just having that tactile experience, because we're all so digitized at this point.

**LAURA** Right. Starved for that more tangible connection.

**BRYONY** I'm very curious to see what's going to happen over the next few years as we evolve from this. Nick for you, what has been the most rewarding aspect of having worked on this brand and what the final outcome was through COLLINS?

**NICK** Look, I'm going to echo a lot of my friends, Chris and Laura just said. Personally, I've never gotten to work on anything that was tied to my hometown. I never got to work on it, you grow up in upstate New York, there's only so many industries you can connect to. So, you know, having that connection to Mohawk was really exciting. Being aware of Crane and purchasing their products, or earning the right to purchase their products, as I used to think it was... I think you had a great product that I was excited to sort of revitalize. It would be a lot different as Jump and Brian and I shopped all the stationaries and the Paper Sources and everything in New York. There wasn't a lot of great product. And Crane really stands the test of time as a great product and Bryony, as you know, if your product isn't great it's really hard to build a brand out of. It's actually a fool's errand, but maybe don't quote me on that. We'll see if I get fired for that one. And I'm kidding. Nobody's firing me. So Bryony then there's the personal thing, which I think it's like personally and professional. I am so sick to death of

these nothing brand projects, the sort of like, we reduced everything to a square... or we reduced everything to a circle... and we use the 2021 version of Helvetica. It's all well and good. And it has a use case where I'm really proud of not just Jump and Camille and everybody on the team, but feel so blessed to have gotten to work with Chris, and Laura, and Paul, and Bart, and Dean, and Jill, did I get everybody? You guys had the patience and imagination to let us help take you there.

I'm constantly saying to our design team, I mean, whatever, this is a whole podcast in itself, talking about how the word minimalism gets thrown around is like, if everything looks like nothing, then why are we here? What is the purpose in us being here? If everything looks like nothing, can I just pay somebody on Fiverr to do that? Can I just have an AI design that for me? It is really rewarding to get to work with clients like Chris and Laura that have patience and imagination and really want to make something the most of what it is, and allow us the space to do it. So Bryony, just in short, the fact that we all worked together and made something that didn't look like, nothing is such a huge deal. And I think something we strive for in all the work we do at COLLINS.

**BRYONY** On our end, I can say it's rewarding to see something in our inbox when it comes to Brand New, that actually makes us pause and be like, Oh, that is beautiful. That is awesome. But look, and then we start to geek about it versus all the nothings that come our way, that we are just like, eh, well, okay, let's move on. What's next? Kind of thing. This one really was a showstopper and we really appreciate, and you can see the amount of work that has gone into it and the collaboration. Something like this does not happen on its own. It really requires a group of people to come together. Congratulations on that beautiful, beautiful brand. And I really appreciate your time with me today and look forward to catching you all at a conference, at an event, or at Javits Center sometime soon.

**LAURA** Thank you so much.

**CHRIS** Thank you. Thanks Bryony.

**NICK** Thank you Bryony.

**ARMIN** We all worked together and made something that didn't look like nothing". As much as most of us love, or appreciate, minimalism, that closing sentiment from Nick was a perfect call to action to help both our industry and our clients move beyond the overbearing simplicity that permeates most designs these days and the Crane identity is a perfect, positive example of what can be achieved when we strive to make something that doesn't look like nothing.

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