

EPIISODE 033

HARRODS CHOCOLATE

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Debrah Smith, Richard Village, Smith&+Village

AND

Chris Dee, Harrods (former)

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

This week we are following up on Harrods' own chocolate brand and magnificent new Chocolate Hall. After a nine-month, pandemic-caused delay, the new Chocolate Hall opened in May of 2021, completing a multi-million pound, seven-year renovation of all four Food Halls at Harrods, the iconic luxury department store in London, UK, that has been making its own chocolate, on site, since 1897.

The project, designed by London-based Smith&+Village was posted on Brand New on June 24, 2021. You can pull it up on your browser at bit.ly/bnpodcast033 that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast033, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Debrah Smith, Creative Director and Smith&+Village; Richard Village, Strategy Director at Smith&+Village; and Chris Dee, Former Director of Food and Home at Harrods who oversaw the project at the time but stepped away from the position in August of 2020.

If I have one weakness in my life it is chocolate. From cheap chocolate in the shape of a rabbit to luxurious gold-foiled truffles. So the idea of a luxury chocolate hall in one of the most iconic stores in the

world brings me down to my knees. And as we hear in this episode, no expense was spared, no strategic thought was disregarded, and no design detail was overlooked as Smith&+Village brought an unexpected degree of modernity to a historic environment through a vibrant color palette that made the best use of Harrods' iconic brand assets and decadent interiors. The conversation warms up with a great breakdown of the role Harrods plays as a super brand through its own products and as a retailer. From there we go through the strategic thinking, asset and color selection, and luxurious production approach that resulted in a stunning suite of packaging that preys on my weakness. Hard.

Now, let's listen in as Bryony follows up with Debrah, Richard, and Chris.

BRYONYGOMEZ-PALACIO Today is an exciting day for The Follow-Up. I am confident in generalizing that many of you will join me in my love for good design, great typography, beautiful colors, and excellent chocolate. Chocolate that is as carefully designed and crafted, as this brand has been executed. So let's not sugar coat this one and welcome Chris, Richard, and Debrah to The Follow-Up.

RICHARD VILLAGE Hi, Bryony, lovely to be here.

BRYONY Welcome everybody, just for our audience if you can take just a minute to give us your name and title that way, they start to identify the voice behind the words.

CHRIS DEE My name's Chris Dee, I'm the Food and Home Director of Harrods, or rather I was.

RICHARD I'm Richard Village, I'm one of the founders and obviously the Village part of, Smith&+Village, and I'm responsible for the strategic direction we take with our clients.

DEBRAH SMITH Hello, I'm Debrah Smith, I'm the Smith part of Smith&+Village, and I'm the Creative Director.

BRYONY Thank you so much for that. I like to start by establishing a little bit of a context of where this project comes from. So Chris, before we get into the package design and all of the details behind it, let's talk about the overall package for the packaging itself. The Chocolate Hall. It is my understanding that it is a development that took about four years, and judging by the pictures, it was definitely worth the wait. Can you expand on the vision of the Chocolate Hall? And how it falls within the overall Harrods strategy?

CHRIS First of all, it's worth saying that Harrods history and sort of DNA is in food retail. So it goes back a very long time. So back to 1849, when Henry Harris started as a grocer and team merchant. So, there's that sort of thread of food halls throughout the history of the business and that specific building, the store in Knightsbridge. And the food halls were put into the ground floor of the store. And there are four major food halls, and then some sort of slightly smaller ones off to the sides. For as long as I can find, that room is generally devoted to chocolate or sort of luxury confectioneries in some form. Harrods itself was going through a major refurbishment of the store, so spending about 250 million pounds on refurbishing the store as a whole, including restoring the historic food halls to their sort of former glories. And out of all the food halls, the Chocolate Hall was actually the last one to be done.

Ironically, it was the first one to be designed. After having done the others, we then changed the design and that's when we started talking to Richard and Debrah. We'd spent quite a lot of time on the other rooms in a very particular way, according to the nature of the food that was in there, but chocolate required a much lighter, brighter sort of space. We wanted to devote half the room to Harrods as a brand, as a product brand, a chocolate brand, and the other half to a whole raft of other concession sort of luxury chocolate brands, each of which has obviously its own look and feel. So it was trying to make all that work together. I always had it in my head that it was kind of almost more like a Beauty Hall, than it was a food hall. So it was trying to think about the brightness that you get in, you know, in a

department store beauty environment and try and take that forward. I wanted it to be less engineered than the other rooms. So much of the sort of lighter touch in terms of what we did with shelving and what we did with the whole approach. We definitely wanted to put products as hero, and very much sort of front and center and make the product fill the space, rather than sort of almost, you know, be the afterthought. The big challenges were around how we dealt with the sort of historic elements. So Harrods is a Grade 2 Listed Building in London and therefore every element of change that we make has to sort of get approval effectively from the government. There were some extraordinary, wonderful features of the food halls, which is predominantly tiling done back in back in 1902.

And those tiles had to remain intact. And some of the elements on the walls particularly had to stay as floors. We could sort of build within them. So there's lots of attention paid to that. Because it was chocolate, and because we care deeply about getting the product quality right we also had the temperature and humidity challenges. So certain chocolates are in the counters, certain things could be out of counters, but we were managing and controlling all those elements. So there's quite a lot of practical retail stuff going on as well as, you know, visual aesthetic design.

BRYONY That is incredibly fascinating. The depth of thinking that had to go into all of the different elements. And I can imagine that getting approval on every little change must have been a nightmare in itself, but you know, something that definitely informs every step of the way. As you were working on all of this, you said you started talking with the design team. What did you hope to find in the design team that would actually develop the brand?

CHRIS For me, it was quite interesting. I was working both with the architect team and obviously the design team for the product brand. I'd worked with Richard and Debrah previously with another brand and another business. I was very aware of their work in food and drink.

And particularly in, the brand we'd worked on was a premium brand, but they'd also worked on another luxury department store brand in London, Harvey Nichols. And I think what I was looking for was someone who could come and clearly give some form of modern interpretation to a very historic, long-standing brand. And Harrods had been making chocolate for a very long time. I think the whole different approach to luxury branding that doesn't necessarily—so it's not, you know, it's beyond super premium, this is luxury and needs to be treated like luxury.

It's about creating desirability rather than demand. It's allowing them the freedom to be quite playful, but to take that sort of thread of Harrods DNA and not abuse it, but also not make it cliched. Just felt always that we have to do it in a very, very intelligent and very subtle way. I knew them both, I knew the attention to detail, particularly from Debrah and I'm sure we'll come to that as we go through this. There's just a level of expertise and ability, I think you just don't get from most designers. So for me, it was actually quite comfortable to work with them because we'd worked together for a long time, before. Also I think it was always going to be a stretch to take this iconic British brand and make it really, really work.

BRYONY So Debrah and Richard, you have a long-standing relationship. What are the benefits, or cons if you may as well, of having a long-standing relationship with a client and working on an entirely new project with them?

DEBRAH Certainly for me, I know that Chris wants the best. He'll push me to be more creative and challenge myself more. So, that's great. That's why I love working with him. I don't know about you, Richard.

RICHARD No, I think it's the same from my side as well. I mean, you know, Chris and I spent, have spent over the past 10 years, an awful lot of time talking about retail brand strategy with each other. He is very keen to push and obviously having the opportunity to work with somebody,

with whom one already has a very strong relationship, but on a brand as iconic as Harrods is kind of a dream job. Isn't it?

BRYONY I can imagine that. Chris, you've spoken to some of your challenges and some of the things that you wanted, or that guided where you wanted this brand to go. Specifically, in summary, what was kind of the groundwork or directions, and parameters that you gave Smith&+Village to get them really started on what would be the strategy and the design?

CHRIS There were two things. One was whatever we were going to do, we were going to have to do across all the products in the range, not just chocolate. So chocolate was the start of something rather than a sort of pure discrete project on its own. The idea was that we developed some packaging, and obviously a sort of brand coat that was going to work across all of Harrod's products. Having said that, that inevitably there are some constraints around the actual chocolate category. You know, it's a lot of cardboard boxes if I'm honest... and there are a few other packaging types. But one of the things was, we needed to have packaging for everything that we sold. Like with other existing ranges. How are we going to do this? There's a lot of focus as well as some new products. And to be honest, one of the things I've always done with Rich and Debrah is encourage them to talk back from a product perspective, and not just see themselves as designing packaging, but if there are clearly things that they think we ought to be selling. Is to encourage them to actually see those opportunities because sometimes the packaging can suggest products, as much as product suggest packaging. So for me, it's working with designers who get food and drink enough to realize that they can influence range and help with the whole process. So, they get very sort of embedded into the team and how that works. There's always some new products coming along. Also the big advantage, I suppose, to this piece of work was that we were designing a room, and a space, and environment, at the same time as designing packaging. And I think bringing the architect and packaging

designers together, fairly early on in the process to talk about what would work in the space was crucial. And I think, you know, when you see some elements as they've been executed in the room, you can see that that wasn't just by accident—that was very much sought through from the outset. Really, I think that was it. I'm not one for massive constraints, but I do think having the right sorts of constraints does drive the right sort of creativity. From my point of view, you know, you've got a degree of freedom, whatever we do, it has to then work elsewhere as well. But clearly the chocolate category has its own dynamics. And one of the big elements of that, by the way, is gifting. So it was always that everything had to be giftable. Most people who are shopping in Harrods, more than 80% of their missions, certainly within the Chocolate Hall, is that's for somebody else, not for them. That was crucial, and that definitely played a very strong part in the design process for these products.

BRYONY That is definitely a unique customer. You know, if 80% of them are not buying for themselves, but for somebody else, that's a beautiful customer. I would love to be in a room with a bunch of people thinking of others instead of ourselves. Debrah and Richard, let's talk about what phase one of the work looks like for you. What are the first steps taken towards defining a brand, the strategy... long before you present that first round of creative concepts?

RICHARD I think that I'm just going to add to Chris, because I think there was one other—this is not a constraint or a parameter—but there was one other element of the brief that was unbelievably clear. Which was the need for a graphic icon for Harrods.

BRYONY Okay.

RICHARD I mean, we can come back to and talk about later, but actually it was a very, very interesting thing to be tasked with. Because if you think about the competitive set in London, you have two big competitors, Selfridges and Fortnum & Mason, who both have incredibly iconic colors. Fortnum & Mason has an aqua, an odeneal color that's very

similar to Tiffany's, and Selfridges has that very, very neon yellow. So wherever you are in London, you see those carrier bags and you understand that that packaging, that gifting, comes from Selfridges... and Harrods didn't have anything like that. So actually, one of the parameters of the project, and one of the first things that we had to think about, was really how do we elevate all of this to the level of an icon? And how do we create something that sits with a 155 years of history, but also works in a really iconic way for 2020? That was one thing. What was the question? Where did we start?

BRYONY Where do you start? Obviously you're starting with some conversations because of your long-standing relationship, but there's a process to your magic and I would like to hear more about it—.

CHRIS [Laughter] Bryony, you hope there's a process to the magic. There might just be magic...

BRYONY It's a creative process.

CHRIS There is.

BRYONY It's messy sometimes.

CHRIS We spent a lot of time in the food halls. A lot of observational time talking both to staff, understanding what their interaction with customers, well, what customers wanted, needed, got excited by, in the Harrods experience. Because those halls are really impressive, and going there, it's an event. And so trying to understand how this is something considerably more than just picking up a box of chocolates was actually really crucial. Everybody at Harrods was really wonderful in their ability to share that, and their ability to articulate what it was about Harrods that made customers feel wonderful, and feel part of this experience. There was a lot of tasting during that, which was also good. There was a lot of reviewing other areas of the store, I mean, what Chris said that was very interesting was his relationship with the Beauty Hall—a new Beauty Hall had just opened in Harrods—so actually understanding the architectural spaces and the architectural

codes of other departments in the store was super important, to get both a sense of continuity with the Harrods retail brand, but also, and I think this is really important and something that food and drink often slightly misses, is to try and understand how you can create a food and drink experience that is also super luxury, and a super brand. That was really, really important for us to be able to take influence from not just food and drink, and not just what was happening in the food halls, but from elsewhere in the store. Lots of talking, lots of looking...

DEBRAH [Laughter] Also, just visiting other parts of the store and realizing—absorbing what Harrods means to people, absorbing that it's this kind of temple of luxury. So, as well as doing all the food halls and seeing what goes on there, we spent quite a lot of time in the Interiors Department. Kind of just getting what people are into and kind of what an incredible store it is. Trying to figure out how we can get a sense of that into the Chocolate Hall. Because if you think about it, and like Chris said, most people are coming in to buy something for somebody else. And actually, you know, not everyone can go into Harrods and buy a Gucci handbag, or a Fendi cushion, but they can go and spend six, seven quid on a chocolate bar. Having to think about how we could get that kind of amazing luxury Harrods special-ness, and it's really, really a very unique store. This is another kind of thing to think about actually, I think in a way a lot of Brits had kind of forgotten about what Harrods meant. I think Harrods kind of was seen almost a tourist destination. So it was really wonderful revisiting again, and learning that magic and just absorbing... one of the reasons Village and I work very well together is because I'm kind of quite emotionally-based, and he's quite logically-based. So, I'm all about absorbing feelings and he rationalizes it all [laughter].

RICHARD In terms of process, there was a lot of that. Then there becomes a lot of scribbling, and writing, and shouting at each other. And then there's talking in through the first time around with Chris.

DEBRAH And crying in my case 'cause I haven't got it right yet [laughter].

BRYONY So, you went through your time of listening, observing, absorbing, feeling, and you've identified these things. What is, in a way, the elevator pitch foundational strategy that then drives the creative?

RICHARD This actually is quite straightforward. It's one of those sorts of super simple, but relatively hidden things. So what we have to solve, the big issue in my head was, we have this brand called Harrods that is a retail brand that is known throughout the world by almost everybody as being kind of the ultimate template of super brands. Within its walls, within its hallowed halls you get every single super brand going in the world, from Louis Vuitton to, you know, much more adventurous things, they're all there. And they're all talking with each other, and they're hosted as it were by the Harrods brand, which when it acts as a retailer acts as a super brand.

The flip side of that is that Harrods also must work in the food department as a product brand. This is essentially an own-label branding project. You know, when it comes down to kind of pure brand strategy about it. It's like this is a no label branding project. And how do we reconcile the product brand and the retail brand? Which is always the question that one has to ask when one's doing an own-label branding project. Let's say the question was, how do we create a brand that will sit with super brands? And that is representative of this super brand retail brand in products that are as different as you know, caviar to very, very ordinary tea bags. How does one do this? Sorry, not ord—beautiful, beautiful tea bags handpicked on the slopes of Mount I'm Not Quite Sure Where—but I return... the elevator pitch became, this is a very long elevator pitch, we hope that we're going in the slow car to the top of the Empire State Building. Forgive me. The elevator pitch is that we have to create the first super brand of food and drink. Simple as that. And that was what became the holy grail, and that was what actually directed the creative because super brands work in a certain way, which I should have let my colleague talk about. And what we had to do was find a way to make these food products work in that way. And in way that was relevant to the Harrods brands.

BRYONY So Debrah tall order there, how did you approach this?

DEBRAH Yeah, no pressure at all. Hence, you know, head in hands, crying.

RICHARD I just said, thank you. Good night.

DEBRAH Basically, you know, you've been given this incredible opportunity, the job that you've always wanted, you spend time in the store, you know the client, you've got a great brief, you've got the strategy worked out, and then you've got to go kind of figure out what you're going to do and how you're going to do it. You've got to consider this incredible room—you've always got to think about the environment that your products are going to end up in initially. In this case, because it was so special, that led my first thoughts. So you've got to decide whether you're going to compete with that, or whether you're going to just settle in alongside it. The way I thought to solve it was, would be to think about how real sort of contemporary artists would solve that dilemma, or would think about that. If you think about Anish Kapoor, Chatsworth House, or one of those sort of an exhibition where you take an incredibly contemporary artists and they exhibit in an incredibly historical situation.

That was kind of the driving inspiration for me. This has got to be really, really super contemporary. You know, I can't compete with those beautiful hand inked tiles from 1860, or whatever. The way to sort of take it forward would be to just go super contemporary, super clean, and super modern, and blow everyone's mind because I think everyone expects Harrods to be very staid and very traditional. I think that's where the whole idea of the contemporary-ness came from. What isn't anyone expecting to see? And then I set to work.

BRYONY And did you come in with Chris with one general concept? More than one idea? What was that like?

DEBRAH The working method is to figure out what the strategy is. Get everyone sort of agreed in with what the strategy is, and then obviously, you know, you have your first bash. And there's always something, and

Chris is incredibly good at spotting these things, it's always something which is like, wow! that's not what I expected to see, but I love it. There are iterations then. Part of the design process is, of course, honing and getting things exactly right. But I think the first stuff that we showed was just like, okay, we're going to take this and we're going to make this into an icon, and we're going to take that icon and make that into patterns and repeats, and use the idea of this kind of tiling and patterns to create our iconography. He was just on board straight away with that kind of idea.

RICHARD Just to add a little bit to what Deb says what we like to do. When she says pin down the strategy, we mean pinning down the visual strategy as well. A first presentation is a demonstration of what the codes and the working practices of super brands are. And you can break it down to things like, they have a monogram that they play with an awful lot. If you think about Chanel "C's" or if you think about Louis Vuitton "LV's", et cetera. They use pattern either from the, again Louis Vuitton or, somebody like Hermès which uses wonderful, wonderful, wonderful sense of patterns that can be super contemporary and super traditional. That playfulness of going from 1834 to 2050 in a visual look, and sort of mixing it all up. What we came with first time was a sort of overview that shows how this potentially could work across a whole range of products. And then we tend to like to make it real and go, yeah, these bits work, these bits work, these bits work, let's do it.

BRYONY Chris, can you add to that perspective being on the receiving end?

CHRIS I think they nailed it very early on as Debra said. And I think in a way that, that was helpful. The debates we had were originally around this dilemma we had around whether we were going to be driven by the color, Harrods has a very strong color palette, that's very, very well established, which is a dark green and gold. It didn't lend itself to doing this work. And it was almost like, are we going to break with dark green and gold? Are we going to break with tradition and the

heritage of the color? And if we are going to, what are we going to replace it with? So this idea of using the Harrods “H”, the initial letter of the logo, that, which, again, wasn’t new to Harrods, it had been done before and you see the “H” on its own as a monogram elsewhere in the store and within its visual identity.

But I think being really ultra bold with it was the thing that was really stunning. Literally making it as big as it is. Also then the color combinations, which were radical and clearly breaking with the past. As Debrah said, playing a very, very contemporary sort of approach with color, which I think was stunning and made all the difference. I could see it very quickly that that could be used. One of the things about developing a range across category and across hundreds and hundreds of products, is you just have to have enough in your armory to be able to make it interesting because otherwise it just becomes this sort of bland, you know, especially when they’re all merchandised together. People already know they’re in Harrods. There’s elements that you have to create points of interest in, and difference through the whole thing. Far more like designing a range of fashion than it is designing a range of packaging, I think. Which I think is really helpful.

The one thing that was definitely pushed back on, was when Debra did a whole series of different patterns and we sort of looked at different interpretations of pattern, the more abstract it became, the more it lost some of its Harrods identity almost. So we ended up with this sort of simple task, which is, you know, if I saw it at a hundred yards down the road and you held up the product, could I tell it’s from Harrods? And that’s where the big “H” really came out. I think there was this sort of like, you know, we can push this so far, but we probably can’t go much further. We have to be really clear. And actually it’s interesting, there a times when we put the word Harrods on the pack and there were times when it would just be a “H”, and it was kind of trying to find the times for when we needed to, when we didn’t need to. And as I say, the patterns themselves, we probably reeled back from some of the more abstract versions of those.

BRYONY Debrah, what was the process for you in this like? You're going back and forth on the daily, or are these presentations every few weeks? What does that look like as you evolve the details?

DEBRAH We quite quickly sat up every two weeks. We had a bi-monthly meeting, which was like a board presentation meeting to the top buyers, and Chris, and all his team that he wanted involved. We also had a bi-monthly meeting, which was just like a production meeting when it got down to me. So we kind of keep flowing things through. So once something was approved at the board meeting, we would then take that to the production meeting the following week and get back into it. So there's a lot of meetings. This was pre-COVID, just about pre-COVID, we were meeting in person up until... when was it? Like March or something? And then after that, everything was obviously done online.

BRYONY So conundrum of the meetings that is often the case, allow me to geek out a little bit. We've talked about the monogram, the patterns a little bit, the reasoning behind them and kind of what the parameters were, like a hundred feet away. I want to talk color. You were looking for an iconic color palette. Talk to me about that process, and how you ended up with this delicious, scrumptious, amazing color palette that really stands out from everything else.

DEBRAH Well, I love color. I think color is my superpower. I love to put colors together and try things out. My happy place is with my Pantone book. There was also the underlying issue—it's not an issue—there was the underlying thing of what to do with green, how to make that work because Harrods is kind of green and gold. Gold is fine. You can kind of tweak that up or down. You can play with it. You can make it more blingy or less blingy depending on what you want to do. The way to get the green to look modern, is to really go for it with those contemporary colors. Certain colors with that green, if you put it up against it, it's just like, oh, that's really sucked all the life out of that. That's kind of, you know, it's really taken it into old. But if you have that very dark green, and then you put bright pink up against it, that kind of really makes everything come alive.

It's really good to try and avoid those kinds of cliches because everyone's like, well, if it's strawberry, it's gotta be red, right? And I think sometimes it's really nice to kind of break those and just sort of think, not necessarily, or, you know, it can be red, but I'm gonna use that with powder pink, or I'm going to use that with a kind of really bright, bright blue. One of the things with packaging is it's going to be around, you know, five years, if it's lucky. There are trends that come and go, and color, and some things kind of just automatically make something look quite cool just from those sort of combinations. 'Cause you've seen them on catwalks, you've seen them on people on the street. Just kind of grab hold of all that excitement that color can bring, because we all live in the world online, color brings something magical to packaging online. Whereas, you know, I guess even five, 10 years ago, everything was about kind of tiny details. When you stood in front of something and looked at it, you could kind of think, oh, that's, you know, some nice little yellow stitches there... but because everything's online now, you can be more punchy. I just think the reason that the color is kind of a bit crazy, is because we were allowed to be a bit crazy. It's not all crazy. You know, some of it is kind of quite subtle, but it's that mix again, it's that balance. It's a mix of allowing something to be quite low key and subtle, like we did with the Turkish Delight, which is all very pale, and pink, and beautiful kind of off-white with the gold, to doing something like the truffle boxes, where it was all about color—I want to do truffle boxes like nobody's seen before, and it's just all about this kind of crazy color combos.

BRYONY Yeah. It made me think a little bit of fusion cuisine where there's unexpected flavor pairings, and how flavor can be subtle, but it can be bold, when I first started to see the packaging. That's what came to mind. Now, I'm not sure who was behind all of the production of all of this packaging. And I would love to hear a little bit more since you did not shy away from any specialty printing or expensive techniques... was this a hard sell? Was this something that required a lot of approval, or a lot of oversight? Is somebody there at the printers half the time?

DEBRAH There was a team in place at Harrods for getting stuff done, which were fantastic. Was it a hard sell? No, not really. Because if you want to play in the world of luxury, you have to go for it. There's no point in cutting corners, because really good packaging just sells product. I know that Chris thinks that for sure. There was never a no, you can't do that. I think it was just really important to get the playing with the contemporary and the traditional. So that went through to all, our kind of, print techniques. And also if you think about a Louis Vuitton handbag, you know it's a Louis Vuitton handbag because when you turn it over, and you look at the base, the patterns are matched up. Everything is perfect. If you want to be a super brand of anything, you have to pay attention to those sort of little details. You have to make sure everything lines up and you have to make sure everything's looking perfect.

BRYONY Chris, what has been the overall feedback that you have received in terms of the packaging, from printing technique, to the design itself? And how it stands out?

CHRIS So I'm no longer at Harrods and the products actually launched, and the room was finally re-launched. Because of COVID it took a year longer than we previously first hoped. If I'm honest, I haven't had that direct feedback from customers as I would normally have had. I know it's been very well received within the business and clearly looks stunning, and has had incredible press since it was launched. Just going back a little bit on some of what Debrah said, I think there's an interesting element in a role that I always feel I have to play in these situations around pushing the boundaries of packaging design in order to get it right. Which is that inevitably, there's a strong commercial dynamic in the room with any retailer who are, you know, pretty obsessed around cost and making sure that things make sense commercially. There's often a temptation to play down some of the more luxury elements and try and sort of cost engineer out of product to ensure that it hits a particular price point, or whatever. With a luxury brand and with a super brand, I think you have to step over into an emotional

dimension that isn't there for the decision someone takes in that whole about buying a product is an emotional one, not a rational one. And so to a certain extent, what they want is for you to live up to your global luxury reputation. They don't want you to cut corners to make it a couple of pounds cheaper. And so actually supporting Rich and Debrah, and their fastidious approach to making sure it was absolutely perfect, is my job as client. And there were other people in the room whose jobs are to try and stop me.

BRYONY That makes sense.

CHRIS And they tried! The same level of detail goes into the cost of the product, by the way. So the actual chocolate that's in the boxes or in the bars is also looked at in exactly the same way. There is no room for compromise and Harrods reputation is built entirely on that. You know you're going to get the very, very best product and it's going to be packaged beautifully. That relationship between retailer and designer in this case, can so easily be clouded by an overly commercial approach. Hopefully we got the balance right. As I said, I don't know how well they've sold, ultimately how well it's worked, but I'm pretty sure it will prove itself to be mostly successful as well.

BRYONY Richard, in looking back at the strategy, you know you gave that elevator pitch, that was beautiful and succinct. As you see the final product, and you were involved in the entire process, is this anywhere near or did it go far beyond your expectations of meeting that one strategic goal from the very beginning?

RICHARD I think it's nailed it, actually. That's a terribly un-British thing to say, but what I feel very strongly that it's managed to solve that issue of how you bring the worlds of food and drink, and how you bring the worlds of international super fashion brands, together. It's done that miraculously well. We wanted to create an icon and blessedly the reactions that we're having to it, looks like it might be something that is on its way to becoming iconic. In about another 150 years, you understand, not next week or anything like that.

I think it is working terribly well. Just another thing that's interesting is, and I think one of the things where in the success of the project lies, is the incredibly holistic nature of it. And this is super important post-COVID. And I think this is going to become a massive debate post-COVID. Understanding the online environment because online retail environments are just going to become something totally different. And therefore how you package for that, is fundamentally important. And actually having the opportunity for this to be a holistic project with architects, right from the start, where we were sharing each other's designs... Right through the project, and conceiving of things like shelving and lighting together was both very interesting and very informative. And I think a really important thing to think about going forward. Environment in packaging, is super important and often overlooked.

BRYONY Richard, I get the sense that I know the answer to this, but what was the most satisfying aspect of this project, for you, personally?

RICHARD You do know. It's the solving of that conundrum. It's making that Venn Diagram of food and international luxury fashion brands come together. And actually conceiving of that, and going, how is that going to manifest itself creatively? Which also I don't actually necessarily do [laughter]. I am very encouraging to my colleague, and very helpful in walking through this process. For me, that, and then when I went in—after we were allowed to go to shops for the first time and it was opened—and I saw the amazing, amazing rainbow wall of the Coco Dusted Nuts. That's really cool!

BRYONY Way beyond the rendering—.

RICHARD Way beyond the rendering! It's like, boy, that's cool!

BRYONY Did you get to taste again?

RICHARD Yeah, well, no... I had to buy this time...

BRYONY But you got to taste even if you had to pay for it.

- RICHARD** I did get to taste. On the bus, on the way home, underneath my mask, slipping in a Coco Dusted Almond....
- BRYONY** That's fabulous. Debra, what part of the process, or the outcome, is the most exciting for you?
- DEBRAH** As a designer you have a vision in your head. You're convinced it's going to work. You're convinced that everything's going to be great. And then seeing the final coming together of packaging and environment is just... it really did exceed my expectations. I mean, how often do you get that chance to do a whole room full of packaging, with some of the world's best interior designers fitting out? Just the combination of everything come together, it worked much better than I thought. It was a struggle, some of it was hard, and just seeing it all together... was just fantastic. It was really mind blowing. And reading the comments that your readers put under that, it was so heartening to see that people were responding to it in the way that they are. I mean, I think I was really surprised how people have responded to it, so positive. That's really gratifying, and fantastic, and kind of really super made my day. I have to say.
- BRYONY** It was a very good slew of comments. Sometimes the audience can be a little brutal, there is definitely an honesty that comes from our audience. You had a good day, a day that you earned by going through the struggle, by being daunted at the very beginning with what seemed like a huge task. All three of you, you really stepped up to the plate and delivered in a way that is going to be memorable. Chris, looking back, focusing on the present now that you're outside of Harrods on the customer side, if you may, what excites you most in terms of the brand that you have unleashed onto the world?
- CHRIS** I'm just a simple grocer. So for me, it is about how customers respond. And it's a shame that I'm not there to see that. But I think one of the things that really appeals to me about retailing in general is just getting that very... when people meet product in an environment, it's visceral. And food and drink is particularly visceral. The responses,

and the oohs and aahs, almost that you get from doing it really, really well. And I think Harrods is an exceptional retailer in terms of the levels of execution, and you've seen how the products are displayed. That's how they're always displayed. It's true of every department in the whole store. There's an obsessive level of detail that goes into it. And I think for me, having put these products into that space and having had the pleasure and challenges of designing both, and being involved in this big team effort, as Debrah said, has been a joy really.

And I think, I can't think of anything I've done in my retail career that's brought me as much satisfaction as doing that. It's a chance to leave a legacy, and it's a chance to engage customers in a brand new way with a brand which has this enormous history, and sort of global recognition and fame. It's an incredible brand to work with. And, you know, you've taken it on you've acted as steward because, no doubt, someone at some point will come along and change it all over again, to meet a new modern audiences need. You know, you have that chance for a short period of time where you're this custodian and very special, very, very important, I feel very privileged, if I'm honest.

BRYONY No, that's wonderful, having an awareness of opportunities such as those and being able to acknowledge them and again, step up to the plate, but also take a step back and realize what it means moving forward, is a wonderful trait. One final question from our audience. We need to know if somebody is tasked on the daily with making sure all of those monograms on the wall are aligned, and standing up straight after people have been touching those packages.

CHRIS As I said, retail is detail. It's not just one person, it's everybody's job. I would have walked that floor, and in front of that fixture every single day, as well others, and it would be my job as much as anybody's job, to make sure that they're absolutely aligned. And that is true of every fixture in the million square feet of Harrods everyday. Definitely.

BRYONY I want to thank you all for joining me today, and for creating what is going to be an iconic brand without a doubt, once we're all allowed

to shop freely again, and you can see those bags and those packages down the street, as people come and go. It's a beautiful thing to observe from afar, and with any luck I'll be in London next summer, I will be stepping into Harrods into the Chocolate Hall, for sure. Thank you so much.

CHRIS Thank you.

ARMIN We first want to salute Chris as his statement about one of his many roles in this project — and other similar projects — was so wonderful to hear: helping the designers he works with push the boundaries of packaging design in order to get it right when there is constantly an equal push to lower its production costs. We also want to acknowledge Debrah's comment about her happy place being alongside her Pantone book. We feel seen. And not to be left out, we also acknowledge Richard's appreciation for the teas handpicked from the slopes of Mount I'm Not Quite Sure Where. Kidding aside, Richard's thoughtful strategic direction and clear understanding of how luxury brands and super brands work is a huge reason this project turned out so good — perfectly demonstrating Chris' sentiment that retail is detail.

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