EPISODE 034

PINTEREST

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Simon Blockley, Pinterest
James Hurst, Pinterest

AND

Alistair Webb, Made Thought
Noël Leu, Grilli Type

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.

BRYONY GOMEZ-PALACIO Hi, this is Bryony Gomez-Palacio and welcome to episode 34 of The Follow-up.

This week we are following up on Pinterest, which probably needs no introduction but, for the record, it is, in their words, a "visual discovery engine". In less branded terms, it is an image-sharing and social media service that enables the saving and discovery of ideas across every imaginable subject. Publicly traded since 2019 and headquartered in San Francisco, CA, the company has over 2,200 employees in offices across the globe. More than 400 million people visit the platform every month to explore and experience the over 240 billion images and videos that have been saved since its introduction in 2010.

The project, designed in collaboration by Pinterest's in-house team with London, UK-based Made Thought as well as with Grilli Type on the design of a custom type family, was posted on Brand New on May 12, 2021. You can pull it up on your browser at bit.ly/bnpodcast034 that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast034, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Simon Blockley, Core Brand Lead at Pinterest; James Hurst, Global Creative Director at Pinterest; Alistair Webb, Creative Director at Made Thought; and Noël Leu, Partner at Grilli Type.

At 44 minutes, this conversation runs a little longer than usual but as you will hear, we cover a lot of ground. Starting with the need to convey Pinterest's evolution over ten years and reflect the refined company's mission to "bring everyone the inspiration to create a life they love". As we learn, giving visual shape to quote-unquote inspiration is no easy task, but Made Thought's self-acknowledged messy — yet thoughtful to the rest of us — approach paved the way for a flexible, expandable, and… well… inspiring visual platform. To add to the complexity, Grilli Type was charged with designing a geometric sans serif that felt new, fresh, and unique. No easy task given that over 87,500 retail and custom geometric sans serifs have already been designed. Grilli's ability to deliver on both the technical and emotional requirements of the typeface was the result of close collaboration with the brand and product teams that yielded a surprisingly fresh geometric sans serif with killer italics. Finally we get to hear about when, how, and where we will eventually see this work, which was a question that remained lingering in the air after the post on Brand New.

To find out the answer and hear all about this project, let's listen in as Armin follows up with Simon, James, Alistair, and Noel.

ARMIN VIT   Hello, everyone today we are here to get our moodboard on, as we talk about Pinterest and we have an international panel from exciting cities worldwide. San Francisco, London, New York, and of course me from the exciting metropolis of Bloomington, Indiana. James, Simon, Alistair, Noël, thank you for joining me on The Follow-Up today.

SIMON BLOCKLEY   Thank you for having us.

JAMES HURST   So excited to be here. Thanks for asking us Armin.

ALISTAIR WEBB Yeah, absolutely. Excited to talk about Pinterest again.

NOËL LEU Thanks for having me here.

ARMIN We have four gentlemen on the call. So if you could each introduce yourselves so that our audience can know who's who.

SIMON I'm Simon and I lead the core brand team at Pinterest.

JAMES I'm James, I'm the Global Creative Director at Pinterest.

ALISTAIR I'm Alistair, I'm one of the Creative Directors at Made Thought in London.

NOËL This is Noël, I'm Partner with the type foundry Grilli Type, and actually I'm calling in from Lucerne, Switzerland.

ARMIN Oh, even better. That sounds more exotic than Bloomington, Indiana. Bloomington sounds more exotic, but Lucerne is a pretty nice location too. Simon and James, unlike most projects we talk about on the podcast there's no logo before and after here, which usually helps draw a line in the sand in a company's evolution. This project was about building an identity around the existing logo. So, what led Pinterest to want to take on this challenge now, and also by now, when did this project start?

SIMON This project started loosely in 2019. What led up to it was an extensive research and strategy process that led to the reforming of Pinterest's company mission: to bring everyone the inspiration to create a life they love. So with that new mission… that sparked the need to rethink how the brand presents itself to the world. To be that of a company that inspires, encourages exploration, action, and really a central focus on each individual self. Actually one caveat before we get too deep into the conversation is we must say that this project was led by a guy named Andreas Helin, who was the former Design Director at Pinterest. He's actually now starting his own creative practice in Sweden called Strand & Form alongside Sara Strand, who was also another key player in this project. Just an advanced warning that you will likely hear this group name Andreas a lot. And we just want to

make sure that we're not taking credit for someone else's extremely talented, hard work.

JAMES I think we all miss Andreas and Sarah enormously. But why did Pinterest move ahead and start to really think about it's brand? And I think we're in a really interesting position because Pinterest is a decade old. 10 years of building this brand, and it's really started to crystallize and define its role and its purpose in the world. I mentioned "bringing everyone the inspiration to create a life they love" comes with some massive changes that have happened over 10 years of stuff going on on the internet. So it's such an exciting time for us as a brand to really think about what is it that do? How do we show up? And how do we make sure we add value to the ways that people might be using tools on the internet today, in a way that has changed over 10 years. That was sort of the challenge to get going, and get really meaningful, and be really conscious of what it is that we do as a brand to make sure that we step up to that challenge.

ARMIN It is amazing how much has changed in what is relatively, such little time. 10 years is not really that long, but in internet years… so much has changed. I have been using Pinterest for forever. Seeing the evolution of the platform over those years. You know, it goes on par with what everybody else is experiencing, but with a tool that is so relevant and used by designers around the world. I think it is interesting to hear about that realization that yes, a lot has changed in that time.

JAMES In a weird way that's kind of the dream place to work. We've got this big legacy of building a tool that is really, really, functionally really useful, especially if you're a designer. I think we're probably all guilty of building one-too many Pinterest boards, myself very much included— thinking about what the future of inspiration is, and then how you make that into something that's meaningful for people to actually go away and do something, and improve their lives in some way. There isn't a playbook for that. You know, we've got to ask a bunch of really

dumb questions to get to some really smart answers. And I think this rebrand is the start of that journey for us.

ARMIN Got it. Alistair. Since your involvement in the project proceeded Simon and James, what can you tell us about the early stages of this project and how did Made Thought get involved?

ALISTAIR We got approached by Pinterest as part of a wider process. Some of the early sort of interactions were conversations with our founders Ben and Paul, and Evan and Andreas more specifically—part of the pitch process to win the job, the guys obviously asked us for provocations and the thoughts around the platform, around the brand. So we covered kind of everything from actually how the brand should feel different, and feel like the product, and like the experience more, right all the way down to things that will get onto lights around typographic choices, color, sort of the fundamentals of any brand system. And then true Pinterest style, part of that ask was to create a board that really captured this idea of inspiration that's inclusive for all. We went in true Made Thought fashion slightly above and beyond the three boards that were themed around exploring, dreaming, and discovering, and went pretty deep on how big those boards got to really kind of try and represent the super diverse cross section of people that use the platform and interact on a daily basis. As far as pitches and RFPs go, it was actually quite a fun one to just dive back into the platform you use every day, and actually just really think about your view on the world, how you create, and start the ideation process of really how you can transform a brand to speak to more people in more meaningful ways.

ARMIN So meta to use a Pinterest board to work on a Pinterest project for Pinterest. It's kinda like the perfect storm of Pinterest-ness, and the result shows that. I think there's something very unique about the result that reflects how Pinterest is used, but we'll get to that in a little bit. This may be a hard question to answer, but do you know Alistair, why Pinterest ended up working with a firm in London? With Pinterest

being based in San Francisco. It's not to put anyone on the spot, I'm always curious about how businesses choose design firms.

ALISTAIR I can't shed much light on the actual decision being made. I know Evan and our founders got on really well, and I think had a shared sort of vision of the humanity behind the platform, which I think really struck a chord between them collectively. There's also Byron who used to work at Pinterest who was part of that brand team process. He's an ex-pat like James, so I think had an affinity with the Made Thought legacy in our portfolio. So I think that's partly where some of the connection and recommendations came from.

JAMES I mean, as someone that's sort of looking at this with the benefit of hindsight, you know, one of the reasons why I suspect many people listening to this really admire, Made Thought is that Made Thought is one of the few agencies that understand how to convey an idea with a real lightness of touch, and with a real sort of breath of fresh air. And when we're talking about inspiration, and at its core something that isn't solid, there isn't like a physical thing at the end of it, it's just an idea. We needed to have a group of people that knew how to play with that sort of flexible… it's like trying to sculpt with gas, or something like that. I think the result kind of shows why Made Thought in this instance, I think really stepped up to the challenge to show how you actually take something really abstract, like how do you build a brand around inspiration, and make that meaningful for people to understand their role in it. But give it in a way that sort of helps us build comprehension and coherence over time.

ARMIN That's a good endorsement for Made Thought. Nöel, we're going to talk more in depth about the type family later on, but just to start setting up a timeline of events here, for me and for our listeners, when and how did Grilli Type get involved?

NOËL I think I met James once in London and we really bonded together over a shared memory of spending parts of our childhood in Switzerland. And apparently we had the same cowhide rucksack in primary school.

We drank a few pints of beers, and I think one or two years later he got in touch with me, and asked me if I would like to propose working with Pinterest. And then Pinterest decided on going with Grilli Type as a foundry. And we kicked off the project, I think beginning of 2020. At the beginning I was mainly working with Andreas on the typeface. And I'm happy to talk more about the progress later on.

JAMES Just to go a bit further on that cowhide bag… because yeah, that was a really meaningful moment in my life. If there's anyone else out here who grew up in Switzerland, I'm sure you probably remember these cowhide satchels. They were kind of the thing that every child wore to school. My parents moved me back to England when I was eight years old. And if you've ever walked into an English school wearing a cowhide bag, I think I went from a school that had 30 kids in it to a school that had about 2,000 kids in it—and that cowhide bag was one way to make yourself very much the focus of a lot of taunts. It's been something that Nöel has had to counsel me for.

NOËL In Switzerland it's the other way around. If you don't show up with a cowhide bag you're really an outsider, it is unacceptable [laughter].

ARMIN There's so much fascinating material here for a full episode about cowhide satchels. We'll have to abandon that topic, and maybe leave it for another time… Alistair you started by doing those Pinterest boards and taking that challenge. How did you proceed from there? What was the actual ask, for you, in terms of the deliverables? Since it's such an abstract project or such an abstract product to sell.

ALISTAIR The deliverable is actually and all credit to Andreas and team really, were incredibly well-structured. But what could be, you know, to James's point sort of sculpting with gas, a very abstract sort of idea and offering, to interpret and communicate. I think the fundamental thing in my mind was really actually the shift from being about product, to being about purpose. And crystallizing that purpose. So, improving the comprehension of it, you know, to James and Simon's point, and really reconnect with the idea of inspiration. That was I think the sort

of genesis of the idea and the ask. And then, we obviously sort of went through relatively kind of structured process of going from concept to visual personality, and look and feel, into then actually how that translates into the ecosystem, that then becomes the toolkit for the brand team to work with going forward. We'd had quite an extensive amount of deliverables in regard to focus all the activities that Pinterest do, all the content needs they have… so actually really fun and exciting sort of canvas to get stuck into and play with, really.

ARMIN This is a good segue to talk about the brand team. But I also just want to mention, in thinking about… now you have to brand the purpose of Pinterest as opposed to the product, because the product sort of has branded itself and has proven its usefulness and what purpose it serves. But now, sort of elevating how the audience interprets and associates with Pinterest. That is an exciting challenge. So, going back to the brand team, using that as a segue to Simon and James. I know that Pinterest has a robust brand team, and I'm sure that played a role in how this project was framed originally. And maybe that's something that you will have to channel your coworkers from the past. Was there a pre-established definition of the roles and responsibilities that Made Thought, and the Pinterest team would have in relationship to the project?

SIMON I think above all, the defined roles were that we wanted Made Thought to not really think too much in terms of restrictions, and really have them focus on a real true North Star vision for the brand and how we can encapsulate that feeling of inspiration, without leaning too heavily on product UI and whatnot. But something that can really capture that feeling with the knowledge that we do have a very capable brand team on our end, that could execute and scale the vision. Because I think there's definitely a tendency with large brand systems like a company at the scale of Pinterest to try to be overly rigid, and make sure that everything falls under a certain level of consistency—which we obviously want—but we also wanted to ensure… it's that balance of how do we also make sure that this is very loose and inspiring, and

how can we do that in a way that is scalable, but also very interesting. So primarily just make sure that they didn't feel like they were handcuffed in any way to many restrictions, and that we could help find ways to scale, develop tools, resources, to make sure that we can bring these ideas to life.

ALISTAIR Being given the commission to really truly think freely, was really exciting for us. And we often talk about… which sounds like sort of the counter-intuitive term, but our intentional naivete as a business, and not knowing, is sometimes our greatest power. You know, we're not shackled or influenced by day-to-day needs, and concerns, and sort of anxieties around using a brand, which I think particularly in the concept phase actually gives you the right mindset to actually approach it with the greatest degree of creativity. There's no restrictions imposed—you just actually really play and explore, and then go through the process of rationalizing that to a workable system.

JAMES Yeah, I think that's the biggest benefit of any agency coming into the orbit of any company. The agency not being shackled by the internal mechanics of what that company is going through, and being able to shine a light on problems that people within a company have probably looked at a lot of times and be able to shine a light on it in a way that throws some surprise and bows some serendipity, on how we could resolve something. One of the things that I think is really pertinent to Pinterest is, unlike a lot of brands, the thing that we're delivering, the thing that we provide to the world is really unique to each individual. My inspiration will be different to yours Armin, will be different to your Simon, it will be different to your Alistair, and I think that as a brand, we've got to know how to flex to make it not an imposing statement of, hey, this is Pinterest talking, but actually be really generous and give people a pallet of ways of engaging with this brand, that's unique and as interesting as each of them. And I think that's the exciting journey that we've all been on. Is trying to define, where does that work? How do we hold that together? And when does that make sense? And when do we need to be a little bit more controlled with how we operate as a brand?

ARMIN   That's definitely quite a challenge.

ALISTAIR   There was one thing actually that came to mind from kind of that early relationship. It was how well actually the Pinterest team really changed that perception of the platform. As users, you know, we use on the daily basis—interact with all the time, really helps to shape and form our creativity. But there was an analogy that Andreas used around Pinterest and the home. This idea that obviously Pinterest can often be perceived as social media. This idea that almost other social media platforms, imagine a journey from the curb into the house and Simon said this one before I think, this idea that actually other social media platforms sort of advertising and promoting in quite a shallow surface way, but Pinterest exists within the home. It's curated objects that are very special to people, they have an intimate connection with, and they really go on to actually inform what they do with their lives. Even those small conversations, and that sort of set outside predefined roles. But I think that education process, or reeducation process, about what Pinterest is and should mean to people, was certainly really interesting beginning to the project.

ARMIN   Yeah. That's an interesting way of approaching such a difficult challenge. And speaking of having no… having those shackles removed, let's talk about what comes across as Made Thought's, biggest contribution to the project, which is the tableaus. And I don't mean that you didn't contribute anything else—clearly you did—but just that this is the most visible, and visual manifestation of your involvement. So how did those come about? And yeah, I can get a sense of how this came about based on what we've heard so far, but let's hear from you.

ALISTAIR   I would say the honest answer is they are very reflective of our exceptionally messy process when we get into creativity in the studio. I mean, we obviously, like a lot of studios, go on a journey whenever we're engaging friends, staff in the creative process. And we felt that those tableaus really represented what it was to engage with the product. Things like the imperfection, the journey that people go on in

their life, and the inspiration they take on board, and try and respond to, and develop from, is almost never perfect. The whole thing around Pinterest fails, that was part of the big conversation. So actually, really revealing the imperfection in, and beauty and inspiration, was part of the catalyst for that concept. And then obviously in terms of sort of trying to rationalize that into a brand system, we then looked at actually different ways to interpret the idea of the tableaus. Inspiration coming together, and a more immersive world, that really challenged actually the two dimensional perception of tech. The sort of confluence of those ideas was really actually where we found the most fertile territory to play around with. And hopefully the most flexibility for the brand going into the future.

ARMIN   It must have been rewarding that finally your messy process paid off in something useful. I'm not saying that it hasn't in the past, but you know, there's a direct result from that messy process that translated into these tableaus. Simon and James, on your end, how did you receive those tableaus? Did you receive the idea as brand assets to carry forward for years to come?

JAMES   We are all so lucky and blessed, I think at the moment, because there is so much amazing art direction. And I think the standard of visual communication is so high, everyday I walk down the road and I see bits of work and I feel so excited at the amazing talent, the quality of the work that exists. And I think the expectations to do great work, get higher and higher, which I find really exciting. And I think the thing that the tableaus do is it gives us an ability to take ownership of a really complicated idea without having to be really sort of direct about it. Always by saying less, right? By showing sort of an expansive collection of images and inviting other people to interpret it. It's almost like the ability to give people a tool to understand what "world of inspiration" means to them. It doesn't matter where they are, what they're doing, I think it gives people a little moment to marinade in that. And I think that's a real gift for us to be able to use. And it's a real pleasure to put

stuff out in the world. So when you start to see lots of it together, it feels like it's a brand communicating comprehensively.

SIMON I think there is a tendency for us to use the visual language of the actual Pinterest experience of the board collections, and your pin grids, which are very clean and organized process, which is very intentional, but if you look behind of what James and Alistair are speaking to, of what's happening inside of your head. It's such a perfect way of having a flexible language to speak to what is not just Made Thought in the mess, it's all of us in that mess. And that's what's really happening inside of our heads. And so it's such a fun way to bring that to life in various ways for different people. It enables us to do more than the story we could otherwise tell through things like standard boards and pins, but actually, you know, dip into rabbit holes and alternate self portraits in a way of people. But there's just so much we can do with it that got us really excited. That there's a lot of different routes we can go down and tell different narratives—has been really fun for us to experiment with.

ARMIN The tableaus turned out really great. And I think it's a nice respite as you said, from that gridded approach. It's more loose, it's more free, it allow us to make more interesting connections whether they have a real purpose or not, but just have that sense of discovery, and exploration, and inspiration. Those are a great asset for this project, now let's turn our attention to the typeface. Noël, it's your time to shine. I know you've been quiet for awhile, but it's time for you to take center stage. What direction did you get from Pinterest and Made Thought? And from that direction, what stood out to you as having the most potential to create something unique?

NOËL The briefing at the beginning, as you can imagine, it's a little bit difficult because the typeface should be used for both branding and product. It was clear from the beginning that the genre of the typeface should be a sans serif, and namely a geometric sans serif and that's genre, or that is quite full of already existing typefaces. And the objective of the

project was to have both very functional typeface, but also typeface that would be recognizable as Pinterest typeface. Before we actually kicked-off the project, we also discussed this. We decided to do two slightly different versions of the same typeface, one typeface being called UI, so user interface specific typeface, and the other typeface is the branding typeface that should sort of carry more of personality of the typeface. We liked the challenge about this specific project, because there's really a little wiggle room within that genre to do things that are too crazy, which is a tough restriction to do something that's recognizable.

And on top of that, it wasn't only the branding team that got involved in the project, but also the product team with Pinterest. And they have of course, different kinds of requirements for making sure that the typeface is very legible and so on. And I think all the ends of social media platforms are particularly picky when they get confronted with a new typeface, you have to kind of swap one typeface for the other, without people getting too hung up on the details of the typeface. And we did a kind of creative brief at the beginning where we listed all the functional aspects of the typeface, like geometric sans serif, and so on. And then the other thing which is actually the more complex and interesting part for us, is all the personality traits the typeface should have. We like to imagine a typeface like a person. It has its unique personality, and the personal aspects of Pinterest Sans or the typeface that would later become Pinterest Sans was it should be approachable, simple, personal, and modern. For us, it was really a challenge within the very simple and modern look, how can we infuse all this personality to make the typeface not bland, or boring, or too much like something that already exists. We really like that. And usually the project begins with also educating a bit, the client in how we translate all those personality aspects in a typeface. It's a really niche kind of profession within design. You basically have to take very emotional and complex feelings that the client wants, and you have to put that in into a bunch of sequential, two dimensional sculptures. We had a very, very close collaboration with Pinterest. I would usually say

if Andrea's wouldn't have been so nice, and knowledgeable, and good designer, it would have been a horrible project, probably, because he got very much involved into the details. So is Simon by the way, but in a good way, because I could tell that he really paid attention to the details, and it was really important for him that the typeface is ownable for Pinterest, and also he did a good job in bringing the entire team on board. Meaning like the whole product team, and also management, and so on, so they would be happy with the result.

ARMIN   Whenever a company or corporation introduces a proprietary geometric sans, or humanist sans serif, If I always roll my eyes because it looks like something that you could buy off the rack, and you know, you get that sense of like, oh, they're just trying to sidestep the licensing fees. When I first read Pinterest Sans, I again rolled my eyes because that's sort of my gut reaction. But after I saw it, you're like, there's something really unique, and different, and special that separates this from others. So, I do think that you were able to channel all of those personal attributes in a unique way that is extremely hard with so many sans serifs in the market at the moment. You mentioned working with the brand team, and the product team. How did that process work in terms of sending proofs? Testing it? You alluded that it was a little bit hard and Andreas being really nice about it, but how did that process go about in terms of the back and forth, and more or less how long it took?

NOËL   First thing I started with this, I started a back channel with Andreas. So I would talk with him before presentation went into bigger groups. So he would already a little bit know, what's coming to him. He really expressed that it's important for him that it's an open collaboration. We started the project with opening it up as much as we could. We basically designed a design space with two extremes, one being like very constructed, very Bauhaus-y geometric, kind of static looking idea of a geometric sans serif, towards more like kind of grotesque geometric sans serif. Took a lot of ideas from Adrian Frutiger, Swiss type designer that liked to bring together geometry and also human

intervention to a very caligraphically inspired geometric sans serif. This basically covered the entire range of what you could do. And then we said, you have basically from zero to 10, that's the space we can open up for you, where do you think we should land?

And then we gradually narrowed it down, more and more and more, until we really shaped the character of the typeface that we wanted in the end for the brand typeface. That was the first stage, mainly working together with the branding team. And then the second stage was getting involved in the product team, which made it even more interesting because then they came and said, yeah, but we have issues with this, this, and that. And we basically adjusted the brand typeface to fit their requirements. And then the product team realized that actually those presentations are kind of fun, and they could also put their own individual stamp on the project. One member from the product team Sergio, he got very emotional about the leather "S" for some reason. So we have maybe six different iterations of the "S" and he always said, "yeah, I feel like I should be…" It felt like at some point also like a self-help group of designers, where we shared our feelings about typographic characters. It got really nerdy, but still in a respectable way. It wasn't tedious. I actually appreciated the involvement of the entire team, because it meant that ,as you said, Pinterest didn't just wanna like save licensing fees, they actually wanted to build something right.

JAMES Well there's something that Nöel has just said. I don't think Nöel knows this. I'll lift the lid a little about some stuff that happened in Pinterest Towers. It's funny that you pulled up the "S" as well, because one of the things that I love about working at Pinterest has been open book, but like everyone is often, you know, that board mentality of just building boards, we do that in the way that we work. And we have a room in Brandon Street just before we all had to unfortunately get locked down and start working from home, but just became sort of the place where the time started to develop. And there was an amazing day where I walked into this room and it's a huge, huge meeting room.

And Andreas had pasted up every single possible variation of an "S". And we went [laughter] really thinking about, at what point does it lose its calligraphic quirkiness, and sort of the charm, you know, the personality that's sort of embedded in it.

And I really have really loved—I hope that we've been a good client to the Grilli Type team—I've really loved how much food there has been to marinade in and how many tools you've given us to have really, really, you're right, they are quite nerdy conversations, but I'm really proud of how everyone's sort of piled in and really shared. You start talking about type, very quickly it becomes a self-help group. It was a really, really important process I think, for us as a team, to get to know each other. So yeah, this typeface into a place where we felt like it represented the ambition for the brand.

NOËL And what you're mentioning about like where… you mentioned just like a tipping point with the "S" and I think building a geometric sans serif typeface has kind of a little bit this tipping point. If you make it too geometric, it will look too static, and too bleak, and not warm enough. And if you make it too funky and dynamic, it will look not serious enough. So you have to kind of find the sweet spot between the two. And you can only do that by really getting intense details, which as a Swiss graphic designer, is basically what I do all day long. I think it's also nice for me to have seen that other designers that are not maybe that much into type, they could all of a sudden see emotions coming to life just by looking at simple shapes. And then it gets even more complex, you put those shapes in sequence and look at them after one another. And of course constantly looking at how would Pinterest the word Pinterest, look in the typeface itself.

SIMON To add one other elements of what made this such an interesting process was… we would go through these very detailed, like microscopic interpretations of each letter and investigations, and then arrive at something we felt worked. And then there was the next step of, well, how does this work within our current brand? Or the brand

that we're trying to utilize this for? And I think that that was the other key challenge for us to overcome was, we would have these subjective kind of feelings of, you know, what is the best version of the"S". I think the "A" was another key one, and after going through this and saying, okay, well, how does this work within the tableaus? And all of these other items that we're working with? I think what we gravitate towards might have too much personality, and it competes with the larger brand vision, trying to then balance the two back, like I said, a little bit closer to the geometric side? And yeah, it was definitely quite a puzzle to figure out what is the best balance of it all. And I think Armin, what you were saying that was another key item we all had in mind was, we're not doing this to just create something that we can call Pinterest Sans, but actually something that can really nail each item of what we wanted to accomplish, and feel like something that's truly unique to us, and can perform not just for our current brand ecosystem, but also for any other future interpretations of it too. 'Cause that was another big part was seeing, well, how could this work for other exercises that are completely outside of where our brand is currently going? Could this still live, could this still be successful if we did something completely different with it? And that was another exciting challenge for us to get our hands dirty into.

ARMIN   Well Nöel, I think you have a spinoff business on your hands sort of self-help through type design for large corporations. I think there's something there that could be a nice niche for Grilli Type to expand in. And Alistair, did Made Thought have any involvement in the design of Pinterest Sans? or were you just more to the sidelines in this part of the process?

ALISTAIR   The original sort of conceptual starting point… So, one of the big things for us was we'd called it, and turned in our original concept a "Forward Weight". So this idea of taking the italic to represent actually the progressive nature of the platform, to sort of complicate Nöel's job, a true italic that actually had real character, but equally, as Nöel said, felt approachable, simple, and had a humanity to it. That was our

involvement really. Coming up with that concept. And that, that would sort of be the, I guess, the hero typographic styling within the Pinterest identity. But then yeah, all credit to the Pinterest team and Nöel to get it over the line really.

ARMIN   Which as subtle as that suggestion was, it makes a huge difference in how different the project feels. I think a lot of identity projects shy away from italic sans serif. And I think the fact that you had such a nice one, with real true italics, not just the slant [laughter], I think it really added to the whole aesthetic of the identity and how well it played off of the tableaus.

JAMES   To build on… I think what Made Thought did a great job of doing, is helping frame the entire brand system around potential, about what's to come, about what people are planning. And I think when you take the simplicity of that, the idea that the typeface is actually an italic, and sort of playing to the idea of anticipation of what you're going to do, and sort of playing with that forward momentum—if we can stay true to that, then it becomes a really simple system to imagine, okay, this is how it needs to grow when we start to think of these new things. And I think that's one of the things that we've already enjoyed getting into the details, on trying to be really honest with ourselves. Like, are we deviating from the truest way of representing them, bringing them into the world.

ARMIN   Switching to another element of the identity that I thought was pretty interesting, or Pinteresting… sorry, I won't do that again [laughter]. It was the use of the flat red pins. Where did those come from? I mean, I know where they came from, but what was the decision to elevate them into a more formal brand asset?

ALISTAIR   So they were really, I guess the product of two trains of thought. There was obviously a lot of conversations at the beginning around the significance of that, and almost the ubiquity of the pin as an icon. Finding that balance with how much you could affect it, how much you could reinterpret it without it losing its meaning, was quite an

important part of the process. Playing back to really the idea of Pinterest being about immersive worlds that have a dimensionality to them, even though you're interacting with them through a flat two-dimensional interface. Taking the pin and giving it a three-dimensional form, but then viewing it in a two-dimensional lens actually creates this interesting tension between almost the interaction with the user with the product ,and the worlds that they create and immerse themselves in and surround themselves within their own boards. The initial thinking behind how we can transform the icon with subtlety and respect for it, but still be able to present in an exciting way that felt fresh for the brand.

SIMON   I don't know how many people know about it, but what we're talking about is a particular pushpin icon, that's kind of been a secondary mark for the brand over the years that was designed by Susan Kare. It's a pin that just stands at an upright flat angle, and we thought, well, this could be a great foundation for us to play with. And since this brand, I mean, we haven't really talked so much about the color aspect of it too, but between the tableaus and this kind of infinite contextual approach to color, the pushpins provided a nice way to ground everything and tie it all back together, and really reinforce that top level brand ownership when we needed to. In the end, it ended up being something that like Alistair was talking to, it wasn't just a way of putting a corporate stamp on it, but actually adding this other layer that was really fun, and adds this element of personality to it. Just in the way these pins can move, and have their own little life to them really adds this other element so we can play with the levers of the brand as well. And maybe we don't always need the tableaus, and don't always need to play with color, and sometimes those pins on their own can add this other elements of life.

ALISTAIR   There's a really interesting, almost ephemerality to those pins as well. The idea of transitioning from a two-dimensional icon to a three-dimensional form, almost gave them the quality of being able to pick

them up and start pinning. A little bit of a catalyst to actually start pinning, creating boards, and engaging with the product.

ARMIN   So you have the tableaus, you have the pushpins, you have the color palette, which we didn't talk about, but it's a wonderful color palette, it's expansive, it's happy, it's optimistic… but there's one nagging question that I had, and that some of the commenters on Brand New echoed, which is: where do we see this? Who sees this? And with what purpose do they see it? Is it for promotion purposes? For marketing purposes? For driving traffic? What, when, how?

SIMON   This has actually been one of the more common questions and reactions we ourselves hear when we onboard new team members and creative partners, and we walk them through our kind of comprehensive brand onboarding of all of this. They say, wow, this is so great, why haven't I seen this out in the world? What's the deal? And I think the primary answer is our first priority over the past year, since we finished this project with Made Thought, was to make sure that we could create the proper tools, guidelines, and resources, and whatnot, to really scale this vision before making this kind of splash of introducing it to the world. Now that we've done all of this, and we've got our foundations in order, and we've developed tools to help scale all this, we're starting to bring it to life with somewhat of our larger brand pillars like campaigns, events—we had an event in March of this year called Pinterest Presents, which I think the majority of the work that you've seen that was featured on Brand New was actually made for this event, and used in this event. So that was one of the primary touch points right now that our team did an amazing job to bring that all together and bring it to life. It's a really fun project. So I think right now, for the most part, it's within the brand world. The next big thing that we want to do, and similarly, I saw a lot of people were curious about this as well, how does this live in Pinterest itself as a product? Where am I going to see that? And I think the big thing that we wanted to keep in mind is that, you know, this is our way of interpreting the products through a different lens, a more human lens.

And so it's tricky subject of, well then how do you take an interpretation of Pinterest, bring it through a brand lens, and then bring it back into Pinterest itself, the product. And that's something that's been a fun challenge that we're currently working very closely with the product team to do. And there's a lot of interesting things that we've found of how that can come to life, that I'm hoping the world will see very soon. But I would say the primary, at least foundation will be the typeface, the UI typeface to really bridge those two worlds. James and I talked a lot about this, that our primary goal for this project is to create a singular Pinterest experience. Like we don't want it to be that there's an experience in the product, and then a different experience through brand. That really, it should be one cohesive thing. And so that's absolutely where we want this to land, very soon.

JAMES We've talked a lot publicly about how we're starting to create tools to enable creators, to come to the platform and create content that's native to the platform, and the way that that content works, and is unique to Pinterest, and the role that it plays in people's lives. And then there's a bunch of practical tools, you can now do stuff on Pinterest that you couldn't do before. The whole Pinterest experience is kind of changing, and kind of evolving and getting really rich and exciting. All of this brand work is the start of that journey, for how we introduce that to the world. And it's really difficult to have like a definite answer about how much of this will be Pinterest, because I don't think it is. And that was never it's intention. It's intention was to try to sum up and encapsulate the experience of Pinterest, rather than become like the experience of using Pinterest. As Simon said, you know, we've started to introduce it at key pillar points that feel right. And in the background, in-building, all manner of tools to make sure that we can really scale this, and we can launch this around the world. Because this has got to resonate as clearly. In whatever country it exists in, they all have fantastic teams that have got to manipulate this, and use it, and convey very specific messages where they might be working.

ARMIN   I am satisfied with the answer and I hope our listeners are too. So starting to sum up our conversation with some final thoughts, let's start with you Nöel, what was the most exciting aspect of designing Pinterest Sans?

NOËL   For me, the most exciting aspect of it was to translate all these personality traits that the typeface should have into typographic language. Which is also my job to do that, I mean, not only designing it, but also educating the client, and explaining how we actually accomplished that. And then doing that with such a big team on my side, and on side of Pinterest. And just to be clear that the project is also actually not quite finished. We are just finishing first round of the language extensions together with Simon, and my team, and Tanya Avilova who is doing the cyrillic for us, and is helping us with the Greek. And also with Minako and her team in Tokyo, from Thai Project who are doing the Japanese extension for Pinterest Sans. It's not only interesting to do the first batch, which is the Latin part, but also now expanding it on a global scale, and to continue the collaboration with Pinterest, and also getting to see how all those aspects can be included in other scripts, and how those experts are doing that then with us.

ARMIN   That's insane to think that what you already did is only barely scratching the surface of the work needed to be done. Because it's such a comprehensive type family to start with, just in the Latin alphabet. So, it's interesting to hear how much work is still needed. Alistair on your end, what was the most exciting aspect of working on this project?

ALISTAIR   Stating the obvious, working with a brand that you use on a daily basis is always really exciting and rewarding, particularly when it's one that touches so many people's lives in a positive way. Without wanting to sound very philosophical, the opportunity to represent a platform that allows people to dream, plan, and create, is almost the perfect creative opportunity. For us, it was the perfect project really.

ARMIN   That was just the right amount of philosophical. Thank you for keeping it within that right amount. Simon and James, what is the most exciting aspect for you, about this identity, moving forward?

JAMES   I think the most exciting part of a project for me personally… is I love going into the chrysalis. I've always loved it when you take a bunch of stuff into the chrysalis, and you start to work out what it is,that needs to change before you sort of reemerge as a butterfly. And you just hope the butterfly is something that is going to work in the world, in some instances. And I think the most exciting part about this thing— we've all gone into this big chrysalis and we've had a ton of amazing insight, and input, and collaboration with so many amazing people around the world, to try and make sure that what we emerge as, is going to be something that helps frame something that people feel real ownership of, and feel real sort of control over. And it's a real representation of who they are. I'm really excited to keep shepherding that, and keep stewarding that, making sure that we give it the oxygen that it needs to make sure that people get a benefit that they should be getting out of Pinterest.

ARMIN   That was pushing the envelope philosophically, by the way, with a chrysalis, but we'll allow it because you made a really good point. And it's a nice way of thinking about a rebrand, really embracing, and going into that process, and then coming out on the other end. Well done. Interesting metaphor. Simon?

SIMON   No metaphors for me but I will say that, what's been most exciting for me has been just to see the various interpretations of this identity within our team, and our partners that we've been working with, that it's not like we hand this off and everyone says, all right, I got to follow the exact guidelines and do, you know, beat-for-beat what was done in the case study and everything. But actually, how we've been riffing off this, and been surprised by things people have made, and experiments that have been done. It's been really refreshing to see that, oh great, this is working, that we're not kind of shackled to a certain set of standards

that the brand must live by going forward. But this is really taking on a life of its own, which has been very fun to bring the life.

JAMES The last thing to just sort of add to that is, I think that there are many people that will be listening to this will be asking, or thinking about the guidelines and the rules that set up to try and control this, and maintain it, and ensure that it's consistent. One of the things we're already wrestling with is, how do we make this less about asking permission, and more about empowering people, and equipping people with the optimism, the energy, the inspiration to go out and represent the brand, but take ownership a bit and how much flexibility can we introduce to get people to push this further, and away from things that we might expect or design right now. Which is really interesting way to think about how do you build this and continue to manage this moving forward.

ALISTAIR To add to James's point that, something that we haven't really talked about, but we've touched on is the color principles behind the brand. And I think that's really representative actually what James is talking about. In that it's one of those rare occasions where we always present something that could be in the conventions of a traditional brand book, or playbook, and absolute had a color super subjective. But then the guys at Pinterest actually came back within about the space of a week, off the back of similar concepts, with a new tool. A piece of technology that actually empowered the user to almost not have to make the decision, but still generate a beautiful combination of colors. A really interesting use of technology, to actually create something that is almost infinitely expandable, and puts the power in the hands of the people that are actually using it on a day-to-day basis.

ARMIN I think that's a good segue into my closing. This was a great conversation that you all shared how complex this process was, how it reflected the complexity of the challenge at hand, and how it was solved through what comes across a simple design solutions. But there's nothing simple about them. There's just like really good thinking behind them.

It empowers the team to, as you mentioned James, to explore and be empowered to take it in new directions with their own personality. And I hope that we do see this brand come alive in product, in marketing, on the other social media platforms, whatever it is. I do want to see more of those tableaus, more of that italic typeface, and move those color palettes out into the real world. Thank you, Simon James, Alistair, Noël, for joining me on The Follow-Up today.

NOËL Thank you Armin.

SIMON Absolutely. Thank you for having us. This has been a fun chat.

ALISTAIR Thanks guys.

JAMES Thanks Armin, and thanks everyone else. This has been fun.

BRYONY One thing we didn't expect to learn today was the popularity of cowhide satchels in Switzerland and you are correct in thinking that we Googled that the minute this recording was over and expect you to do the same. Beyond that, this was a great conversation that, among many things, highlighted how beneficial it is when an in-house team brings in an outside agency that isn't mired in the day-to-day needs and operations and can offer a fresh perspective. Paired with the involvement and know-how of the in-house team, the results can be quite powerful as was the case here. To take a cue from the metaphor offered by James… for 44 minutes we went into a Pinterest chrysalis and have all emerged as beautiful butterflies ready to spread our wings and… start yet ANOTHER Pinterest board.

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