

EPISODE 045

MANDAI

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Hanyi Lee, Kit Chua, Jeremy Tan, Anak

INTRODUCTION

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

ARMIN VIT

Hi, this is Armin Vit and welcome to episode 45 of The Follow-up.

Before I get into this week's details, a quick heads up that the upcoming episode, number 46, will be delayed by one or two weeks as me and Bryony will be taking a rare vacation during Spring Break. With that out of the way...

This week we are following up on Mandai Wildlife Group, the steward of Mandai Wildlife Reserve, a 300-acre reserve in Singapore that encompasses five wildlife parks, an eco-resort, a nature foundation, and much more. Its flagship destination is the Singapore Zoo, opened in 1973, that is home to 4,200 animals that represent over 300 species. The other parks are Jurong Bird Park, Night Safari, River Wonders, and Rainforest Wild. Unifying all parks is Mandai Wildlife Group's mission to "Provide meaningful and memorable wildlife experiences with a focus on protecting biodiversity in Singapore and the region."

The project, designed by Singapore-based Anak, was posted on Brand New on October 27, 2021. You can pull it up on your browser at bit.ly/bnpodcast045 that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast045, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by three members of the Anak team: Hanyi Lee, Creative Partner; Kit Chua, Associate Creative Director; and Jeremy Tan, Senior Designer.

In this conversation we learn about the complexity of this project, which started more than four years ago and involved multiple entities, from the existing parks, to the non-existing parks, to the government, to... the animals. It may seem obvious to not forget about animals but with so many people involved it was an early realization that this project wasn't necessarily about park staff or visitors but about the animals. It was so much about the animals that even the exact orange hue of an illustration of an orangutan was the subject of heavy scrutiny. We also get all of the details about the multiple collaborators Anak worked with to bring this to life, from Colophon on the customization of the primary brand typeface, to Always With Honor on the development of individual park logo illustrations, to Stevie Anderson on the creation of an insanely detailed and modular tapestry system. All while keeping their cool for four years as the project's ambitions and expectations grew.

Now let's listen in as Bryony follows up with Hanyi, Kit, and Jeremy.

BRYONY GOMEZ-PALACIO The last two years have given us the opportunity to experience the world from a different perspective. That of seeing the world go by while we kind of, sort of patiently go about our simplified daily routines. Mandai Wildlife Group out of Singapore strives for the opposite experience. One that is experiential and equal in its footing between humans, and the rest of the animal kingdom. And the recent rebrand brings that to life in every possible way. And the team from Anak is here to share how. Hanji, Kit and Jeremy, welcome to The Follow-Up.

KIT CHUA Hi, really nice to be here.

BRYONY So let's take a few minutes, and Kit maybe you can answer this for us, to establish who Mandai Wildlife Group is. It was previously named

Wildlife Reserve Singapore, and what preceded them in terms of their organization prior to the rebrand is a question our audience might have. What role do they play within the nature landscape of Singapore?

KIT Really? It starts with Singapore's four wildlife parks and WRS, or Wildlife Reserve Singapore, is the operator of these four parks. Starting with our first park, which was the bird park in 1971. The thing about Singapore that's a little bit different, I think from other countries is that we are very lucky to have some of the world's best zoos in Singapore. And because of that, the zoos and the wildlife parks in Singapore are incredibly well loved institutions. They're very embedded in the national landscape. They do a lot in terms of educating people about nature in Singapore, especially because Singapore is such an urban context. People often really don't get to kind of experience animals, wildlife, and nature so firsthand. So the zoos really did that from the very beginning. Wildlife Reserve Singapore was never designed to be a public-facing brand. Wildlife Reserve Singapore was always the operator of the zoos, in the background, and over the years they've become really, really respected in the global zoological circle. The veterinary services, the research, and the breeding, and all that—that's all incredibly top of the line and they're really, really very integrated in that community. But nobody really knows about that on a consumer level. Not in Singapore, and not outside Singapore as well. In terms of where they were sitting, I think they were doing a lot, they were also doing a lot in terms of local and regional conservation. For example, they were really instrumental in repopulating a native species of bird in Singapore that had been in decline for the past few decades. So they do a lot of this work, but people only really knew the zoos. And that was it. Even though the zoos were very well loved, there was a lot going on on behind the scenes as well that wasn't really being brought out by the brand Wildlife Reserve Singapore.

BRYONY That is really fascinating. That's a lot of information that I didn't expect, especially not knowing what they're doing, but they're doing so much,

not only for Singapore, but really for the world and their impact goes way beyond anything that I had expected. So Hanji, how did Anak get involved with this project?

HANJI LEE It was one of those, you know, crazy multi-agency pitches that required a pitch consultant and everyone kinda on board. It was a pretty long process from start to finish, I'd say about three months or so. They found us because, I guess, we're a balance of an ad agency, but also a branding arm. So I think they wanted a little bit of both to be able to create something very usable, but also something that had like a really big picture in mind.

BRYONY So you mentioned that the pitch process took about three months. Can you put it in context for us as to when this started? What year, what month? And then how long did the design process actually take.

HANJI I think the pitch was about four years ago, end of the year. And I think within that period, none of the new parks were being built yet. At that point in time, they kept telling us, okay, the next park is gonna be built in new 2023, 2024. So it was a long runway for us to really think about. But even though, you know, when you tell someone, oh, it took four years to create a brand, it wasn't a typical brand project per se. There was a lot of soul searching, the company itself had to do. There was a lot of dealing with the government, dealing with different parts of, you know, Singapore, because it's such a national baby that they were trying to create. All of this went up to ministerial levels for approval... because, you know, I mean they grew up with the zoo, they loved it. So everyone had their say about the kind of colors that they wanted, or the animals that they wanted. It was a project that was very close to heart for a lot of people, but also, you know, a lot of opinions within that at the end of it.

BRYONY This is gonna be like a two-part question. But when a project about this size comes into your studio, I'm curious to know how you structure your internal team, and kind of the first steps taken. But hearing that it took four years I'd be curious to know if that internal team was

the same throughout the four years, or if it's something that went evolving? And what percentage of the studio was dedicated to this project for those four years?

HANJI Other than three of us, there was two others that's, you know, been there from the very start seeing it all the way to fruition. As a studio, we have a really big strategy and research arm. A lot of that was kinda discovery, you know, talking to people, a lot of the insight gathering at the start. And that took a while. We were really building out every part of the Mandai experience, from spatial and wayfinding, to the motion design to the material bots of the retail stores. I really tapped on every single part of the agency, and of course, partners that we are bringing on along the way. For example, wanting to create a sonic design for the piece. So bringing on those things are kinda running every part of the brand.

BRYONY So you have a core group and then a lot of partnerships and collaborations within the firm and outside of the firm, it sounds like. Kit, were you involved in the renaming of the company itself? Not sure if it, part of that soul searching process that Hanji alluded to.

KIT It was part of the original brief to us to come up with the name. But the original brief was to come up with a name actually for a district that would serve as a destination brand that would house all these four wildlife parks. So that was sort of the initial step into this branding exercise. But I think what eventually ended up happening was, our discussions with the client led us further to positioning Mandai as more than just a destination brand. So it sort of evolved into not just a place to go, but a brand that would stand for something, i.e., biodiversity. Some of the names ended up not being in our hands, but basically we were part of that strategic discussion to position Mandai, in that particular way, where it's not just the destination, but more than that as well.

BRYONY Well, and I think that speaks to all of the other things that they do that are not part of the destination. That's a smart thing to highlight.

So Hanji, what groundwork, or directions, or parameters, were you given by the client to get the project off the ground to launch that soul searching, and figuring out what they were going to do?

HANJI They were basically a brand, well a zoo for the past 50 years. So I think the start of this project was really to balance “doing well, with doing good”. The doing good part was basically to create a brand that stood for biodiversity. And I guess it was a very different start from most clients that we have because it wasn’t just the marketing team that was the clients, it was the horticulturalists, it was the zoologists, it was the vet within the room as we were kind of presenting this. Extremely eye-opening for us, because we always looked at everything from a human point of view and to have the questions come back at us and say, you’re not considering the animal. You can’t make an animal talk, you can’t anamorphize a living being. And I think all of these things kind of really took us by shock because we just had all these assumptions that we didn’t even know, that we were just made aware of, to really consider not just human, but animals and plants, and the whole world of biodiversity, was something that was the groundwork for everything that stemmed from here and on.

BRYONY And do you find that that kind of thinking has influenced how you’re approaching other projects?

HANJI <Laughter> Yeah, absolutely. Like every other project that has come in, even though it’s got nothing to do with animals, you still view it from a collective circular point of view. And I think that’s the best learnings that kinda left us with. And it’s just been a really, really nice feeling.

BRYONY Perhaps that’s what your studio’s gonna be known for in the future. The full, we look at the whole world for your project. Kit, can you walk us through the first round of creative? I’m always very curious to know if you presented a single direction, or if you come in with various options, and how in depth are your examples of how the brand can be applied? What was that like for you?

KIT Our first round of creative was back in 2018, pre-COVID—we did this in-person presentation. I think because of the incredible scope of the brand, you know, it was one master brand with eventually like 20 sub-brands, and tailing off into all these other sub sub subs things. We went in with one system to begin with. And I think in the beginning, what we were focusing on was that challenge of creating one system that would bring all these different parks, different subbrands and different experiences together under one cohesive master brand, but still give them the breadth and the flexibility that the clients were looking for. But what ended up emerging as a different challenge was the question of how to balance all the different sides of Mandai. From the high level conservation and biodiversity, and saving the world kind of stuff, to the natural, fun, and attractiveness of a zoo. That emerged from our first round. And after that, obviously there were many, many rounds, but it was sort of like that question that we always went back to, which was, how do we unlock that question of balancing those two different sides of doing well and doing good rather than the question of like, okay, there's just many parks, one brand.

BRYONY What was the overall feedback from the client when they saw this? From more the visual aspect of it?

KIT I think one of the comments I distinctly remember was that we couldn't be too Nat-Geo [National Geographic]. I think some of the things we showed them, they were like, that's too Nat-Geo for us. And that really struck us as well because we were like animals, nature, beauty, and majesty, and all these kinds of things. But at the same time, I think what was really interesting and different about Mandai is that there is an immediacy and closeness that is specific to, to zoos and we needed to be reminded of that by the clients. And so that comment really helped sharpen the approach. Our job is to do more than just observe. We were asking people to come into the world of Mandai and experience it in a different way from just being a distant observer. So I think that was some of the feedback that we received that really helped us get there.

BRYONY Jeremy you're hearing don't go National Geographic. What were other key guiding factors in creating that cohesiveness, while maintaining the individuality of each park as they came along?

JEREMY TAN What helped was that, I think three of the five parts already existed, each with their own unique features and characteristics and established attributes. The zoo had its own mascot animal, that's the parrot one. There were these themes and offerings that were unique to each part that were already in place. So these were good in-markers to guide the rest of the work, I would say. But I think the bigger thing with our project was we had to first take a step back, and create the master brand, which also didn't exist yet. I think after establishing that umbrella brand and its ambitions, and what it must encompass, and the feelings, and the beliefs that it should be imbued by, we were then better able to structure the parks within that, and inform the concept of the two new ones that were to come. Yeah, I think most of it was really creating Mondai, the umbrella brand and everything fell into place after, I'd say quite organically.

BRYONY That's wonderful to hear. So if we're focusing on the umbrella brand for a moment, and how it informed the parks, I would love to get your perspective on the selection, customization, evolution, and pairing of all of the aspects of the typography. From the typography that informed the logomark, all the way down to the smallest supporting type, I wanna know everything about typography in this project.

JEREMY Yeah, I think we can start with the Mondai wordmark and that customized typeface. I think like Hanyi and Kim were already saying, on this project really, was all about foregrounding the standing of the organization as a strong zoological entity in Asia and the region. And also whilst having it be, still very much commercially viable, giving to a mass audience. So I think what Mondai really needed was a voice for the entire brand that could speak well for it at both zoological conference with vets of the world, as well as a kid visiting the park.

So I think we really wanted to find a typeface that was formal with esteem, but at the same time was quite warm, organic, and friendly.

We identified Value Serif really early on as one of the most suitable options for the typeface, for the brand. Yeah, I think we were really happy when we got the chance to customize it a little bit to be uniquely Mandai's with some very slight adjustments because I think as it was, the clients also fell in love with how it looked. Stress testing it with them as well. I think pinching the serif just helped to break even more straight lines to help it feel a little bit more organic. I guess we slightly thickened the stroke as well. Just have it a bit more, I guess, of a commanding presence on the printed page, especially. would be the master brand and the master voice that is used across all the parks, and across all of its backend entities and [inaudible], as well, as the master ones.

As for the park wordmarks, right now what they are is that Bauhaus-y one that we locked down. Initially in the process, we definitely covered all ground. We even explored different type treatments and different typefaces per park. In terms of consistency and tidiness, it eventually led to just the one type treatment for all wildlife parks, and other attractions that we'll be opening in Mandai's soon. In terms of that particular type style, that was actually an homage to the original Singapore Zoo logos. Not what it was before, but the original logo that this was started out with. Yeah. I think many Singaporeans have sentimental attachments to that logo. Everyone that's grown up in Singapore, when they remember the Zoo, they remember that logo. Along with the mark, which was this really old—one of the mother elephant and its baby. So we thought that was really a very positive design legacy there we wanted to bring along.

BRYONY That's one spot where I think there's a cultural disconnect between, for example, the audience on Brand New, who didn't all love the Bauhaus-y solution, but it speaks to a local community versus the online community. From what you're saying in Singapore, there is an

immediate recognition that makes sense. This typeface makes sense for me as a local, versus all of our folks on Brand New. Would you say that that's the case?

JEREMY Yeah. I mean, I think understandably it's stylistically, not the easiest typeface to pair with anything, let alone Value Serif. It's quite strong on its own. And I think the Bauhaus movement on its... I mean it's really its own class of aesthetic, almost. It really was about a national sentimentality that was eventually chosen for.

BRYONY I mean, it speaks to the animal kingdom, you know, they clash among themselves too. If the typefaces clash a little bit like the animal kingdom, I think it's okay. Anything else in the typography?

JEREMY I think those were really the two main typefaces you see upfront. I guess the workhorse one definitely is Mandai Value. It really needed to work everywhere. Print, web, at your most official zoologic conference, to an interpretive, and a little coloring book for a kid that Mandai might produce for merchandise. We have the sans serif pairing that we have for Value Serif in other instances, eventually went with Poppins. I think simply because there was a democratic value to that, I think, spoke to universality of biodiversity, and conservation, and the whole liberal effort behind that, trying to keep that healthy. And there was a really stick [inaudible].

BRYONY Let's step away from the typography for a minute, and move on to the illustrative icons that you created for each of the parks. You did these with Portland, Oregon-based studio Always With Honor. So walk us through the selection of the partnership, and the evolution of the illustrations themselves.

JEREMY What the parks were currently on, they were mostly wordmarks with some embellishment. But I think in terms of coming together as a larger brand, with an umbrella brand that had such a strong wordmark originally, I think in terms of giving it some hierarchy or some level of sub-branding after that, the parks definitely needed a distinct

web mark and emblem. The emblems, I think naturally everybody gravitated to the option of having it printed by animals per park. One mascot animal per park was identified as something to be logoed. I think we did look all over the place for illustrators, and logo designers that really might be able to get the job done right. We found Always With Honor, I think what they did for the Audubon Society somewhere in America, but I think what we really thought worked with their portfolio was that they really showed their ability to really capture these beautiful, organic, energized animal forms. This really graphic vector format. It was scalable and really for use as a functioning logo from the get-go. Everything from the first sketches they showed us was pure magic. And mostly in the local creation process with them. It really was a matter of crafting the right brief to them, and also crafting a deck the right way for presentation to a multitude of stakeholders, and making sure every option we put on the table was something we would be happy on ending up with, in being end product, say it was something we art directed.

KIT I think I just wanna add like, every step of the process also involved a lot of the different stakeholders of Mandai as well. So just the conversation around picking the species to represent each park was incredibly laden, incredibly weighty for them. And you know, it was like one point, it was like, should we do a river otter, a river crocodile, or a river manatee, you know? And these things were just iterations and iterations of different animals, and different motions, and different positions and, you know, postures and everything like that. It was really tough. Everything had to be shepherded through, and aligned—not just with the horticulture team, and the zoology team, and the board members, and everything like that—but at the same time, us as well, making sure that they all worked as a set. There was so many discussions around all of that. A big part of the process was just doing that.

JEREMY I think it even got as authentic as the vine, the final orangutan logo you see in the zoo lockup now. It got as authentic as making sure that vine

did not look distinctly something that could not be tropical or local. Even the orangutan actually is swinging now because there were seated ones. There were these really cute options with mother and baby, but they were all kind of seated. And I think they were comments from the client where, it was orangutans do not naturally rest on the ground. You need to have them up in the treetops, out there. But yeah, yeah.

KIT All our orangutans have to be represented as arboreal creatures living in the trees, which is what they are naturally. So, I mean, it's this level of detail, and precision, and care for animals actually in the accuracy in representing them that Mandai really, really wants to get across. I mean, it's something that an average person wouldn't even know, or care about. I remember they had this really long discussion about the right shade of orange for the orangutan as well. 'Cause it could just be any orange, it had to be a specific orange; they wanted it also to specifically represent the Sumatran, and not the Bornean orangutan, and they are different shade of orange. So it had to be reflective of one species and not the other. I mean, yeah, I was just like constant and infinite.

BRYONY Does this mean you got to go into their enclosure and find a loose hair on the ground so that you can match the Pantone to it?

KIT Yeah. We wish we didn't get that close <laughter>.

BRYONY Designers often dialogue among themselves about the stakeholder input. You never know what a logo went through in order to get to where it is. And it sounds like these individual parks went through the ringer in order to get to where they are today. It required a lot of patience, hand holding, and shepherding of the process for you. within the four year to timeline., about how much time did you devote just to the development of these illustrations?

JEREMY Three to four months for this specific group.

KIT Yeah. But we had pursued other things before that. So to lock down from the illustrator, to proposing the illustrator, getting the illustrator,

and then developing this particular set, it was about four months. But before that, there were other possibilities, other directions that we considered that hadn't come to fruition, in the end.

BRYONY That just helps us put a little bit of context around the development of these illustrations. You also collaborated with an illustrator, Stevie Anderson, who is based out in Bali on developing all these customizable collage assets that really bring the whole brand to life in a way that it feels more experiential, like being in one of the parks. How did you go about landing on this particular concept or approach, and what were some of the main challenges in creating it?

JEREMY I think like the park wordmarks, there was this really old illustrated tapestry, I think initially drawn by Sally Heinrich that used to wallpaper the gift shop and the ticketing cons at the zoo forever. Up until now only, actually, that it's been updated with ours... of this quite 2D-tapestry with lush forests, with little animals peeking in and out. That was one of the first graphic assets we locked onto as something quite historic with the Singapore Zoo. Along with the logo that we thought would be nice to retain, but modernize, or update. That's where the general idea of the tapestry came from. To modernize it, I think Hanji was looking at the stuff Stevie was already doing at the time for Potato Head. He did posters for music festivals, he did merchandise for them. I think we all thought it was quite a good fit and his rendering of tropical flora was more contemporary than what it currently was, and the idea to have it be quite modular, the main tapestry to be composed of these modular elements that would be able to be easily broken down and recomposed into smaller formats and smaller, different habitats... That definitely would help its application across various platforms and media.

HANJI It was really hard to find an ownable illustration style because we really wanted something that was both modern, but really own the tropicality of the reserve. The beauty with Stevie's stuff is that it keeps making you look again, and again, and again. And there's something

about it that you feel like you are missing—like I never saw that little creature there before, or that leaf there before, and the sudden mystique to it. And that was exactly tied to the bigger idea that we had of coming to life, leaning in, you know, come closer, come to the zoo, come to the parks. So I think it had that alluring feel to it that we just felt in love with. Personally, we have this really stupid ambitious idea of wanting to create a full on tapestry that you could also use with individual pieces. That was a really ambitious thing that, I guess, we did pull off in the end, but at the start was like, why did we even go down this route? You know, he created the five parks as a full painting that can hang on a wall. But when you look at all those pieces, it breaks down to every single leaf, and petal, and animal that can be separated and used individually. So each piece had minimally, I think it was like 800 pieces within that, times five. Across, you know, five different habitats, from day to night. Being able to create the whole universe of this tropical Mandai, hopefully something that can, you know, last the brand for another 50 years.

BRYONY What really resonated with the audience on Brand New was the fact that in this era of simplification, of really stripping brands to their bare essence, and saying, well, our audience will only focus on our brand for two seconds before moving on., so keep it simple. This was a breath of fresh air, literally on everybody's screens and realizing there is so much depth, and so much story behind it that you just wanna sit there and look at it for a long time. My question now is on the practical side, is it a Photoshop file? How do you build this? And how do you implement it?

HANJI Being Singaporeans were extremely practical. So actuality, it's actually quite an easy brand to use. Where right now in the midst of building an online hub for them. So it's really easy to be able to download all of the different files, the assets that you need. The way that it's built, it's that you can basically take each piece as an individual piece, or you can have it as a scene that have been pre-created. So the kinda different ways in, into the actual illustration itself. Yeah. They basically

exist as Photoshop files. They also exist as a motion file because we have a lot of them that know, a little bit of a leaf kind rattling, or like a little bit of a buzz moving. It's a mix of illustrated habitat, but photographic animals, 'cuz we wanted to really pay respect to the animals, and keep them in their perfect godlike-form.

HANJI There was no way we were gonna touch any of that. All of these things, downloadable from the online hub eventually, is something that we are very excited by. To your earlier point about how to make this practical, I think the way we approach brands these days that is, not to create a 2000 page PDF, or deck, or guide, 'cause it's just impractical and just not very friendly to the planet. What we do is that we create a brand world at the start. So it really gives you the feeling... there's a video that goes within that to really put across what this brand stands for, in the quickest of ways. So someone that has no interaction with the brand before. The second part is general rules and tools that the typical, you know, logos assets and all that they're downloadable. But then what we have is like a really big, best practice section that we're just gonna keep adding to as they built new parks, as they built new formats and signages that we—just gonna keep adding to overtime.

BRYONY As you speak about the over-time, it sounds like you transferring all of the materials to ,I'm guessing an in-house department or group that will manage the application of the brand moving forward. What role will you play as they develop new parks or other things? Is this moving all entirely in-house or will you be brought back in to create new icons, and new brands for them? Do you know?

HANJI We're still engaged the next few years to carry on with the project, which we're very excited by. So it's not just building out the brand that we've already created, but they're gonna be adding on three more indoor attractions. There's a whole resort that's gonna be created. It's being able to create these other sub-brands that have a looser link to the parent brand, but still fit within the same bigger feeling of biodiversity.

So we'll kinda carry on doing that in tandem with the in-house team, on a day to day basis.

BRYONY And as you put things out into the world, I'm curious to know what the feedback has been locally, you know, ticket holders, park employees, and even within the Mandai corporate leaders, now that they see it live and coming up everywhere?

KIT The audience that we were really, really worried about was Singaporeans. Because Singaporeans can be really critical, and we know that this is a well loved brand. So the stakes are really high. We're really worried about letting them down most of all. So I think the fact that it's been received really well within Singapore has been a huge sigh of relief for us. There's been some really lovely feedback from people saying, you know, it's really beautiful and... the feeling is that it lives up to what they want the zoo to be. They can see it standing the test of time. And I think that to us is the best thing. And that meant more to us than anything. I think internally, within Mandai more than just positive feedback from within the company, what really kind of gratifies us is to see people actually excited to work with the pieces that we created and to see them running with it. To see what they've done with it, to see them owning it, and translating it across the different applications, and kind of really breeding life into the brand and living it out in what they do. That says a lot more to us, and it makes us really happy that, you know, they're able to take it on and really own it.

HANJI My personal gauge is always a zookeeper, the guy who is with the orangutan, or like the jaguar, day-in and day-out. And whether they feel that, you know, it makes sense to them. This is their job. This is what they live for. The other day, my four-year-old daughter, she came up behind me on the computer and she was like, "mama, I love your work." And I think just being able for her to, you know, immediately understand or get a certain feeling for this, yeah, it's a best feeling.

BRYONY So you might have touched upon it a little bit, but this is a good segue to ask from each of you individually, what was the most satisfying aspect of working on this project, as you look back?

JEREMY I think it's rare when you meet clients, you meet the organization, and you go on these, I guess, excursions or I don't know, field trips. Yeah. Immersions to get to know what you're branding better. And everybody on the ground is incredibly invested in what they do. I think, yeah, from what Hanji is saying, the zookeepers, everyone from back-of-house to front-of-house is incredibly passionate about what they go to work for. And I think that makes it more enjoyable to be designing for. I think really helps you build a connect, like what you're creating. Eventually, you don't want to let people down, and you don't want to let the work they're doing down. Visually present that the best you can.

KIT As brand / ad agency, it's not often that you get to work with a client who is actually doing work that is so meaningful, so powerful, and so positive. Even when we got lost in the weeds of the colors of the orangutan, or whatever, it was always, you know, helpful to remember that Mandai as an institution and an organization, it stands for something that's way bigger than all of us. And that definitely kept giving us the motivation to do it for the, how many years we've been working on it, and how many years to come. Personally also I think, I do derive some not minor level of satisfaction from the fact that there is one thing that lasted all these years, from the pitch, which was the line "come to life." And the fact that it stood there from day one, almost when we pitched this to the clients to now—I think that was something that feels really rare, and special to me as a writer. And I'm just like, this is my lightning bolt moment. I'm never gonna get struck by lightning again in my life. So this is very precious. I'm gonna take this away to my grave.

HANJI I think, especially in this COVID-times, it's so easy for a branding studio to get so myopic, and so stuck in our four walls, you know? Where we're and what we do. What was more satisfying about this was feeling so

small. We felt so small, and so meaningless, and so pointless, in this bigger endeavor of the creatures and what they're trying to do and the future of all of this. Yeah. This was just a really nice reminder of that.

BRYONY You have a sense of what's coming in the years ahead. I don't know what you can reveal, and what you can't, that's totally fine, I'll leave that up to you. But I wanna know, what are you most looking forward to as you further this project, and as you see people interacting with its various parts?

HANJI As you can tell, we've had so much learnings over the past few years that we're in the midst of creating an actual playbook for biodiversity. An actual design playbook for biodiversity. Really putting in, you know, the tenets of what we've learned. One being, you treat plants, human, and animals equally. There's a certain vibrancy and tone that the natural world lives in that we should all imbue. 'Cause I think a lot of talk about climate change and sustainability has always taken a bit of a nagging, painful, serious tone. It's a happy thing. It's a happy, positive, optimistic, fun, vibrant thing just like nature is. And being able to use that tone to create this playbook and hopefully really get the message out in an infectious way.

KIT I mean, I'm very excited for the opportunity that Mandai has to be sort of taking the lead in a very strong way from Asia. I think that that's not really what we're known for right now, you know, Asia's very tech-forward, or finance, and startups, and all those kinds of like very techy things. But I think raising up the whole idea of being connected to nature and biodiversity from this region, that's something that we are unfortunately not doing so well at right now, in terms of Southeast Asia and all that. But I'm really excited for Mandai to do that, and step up in a bigger way, and lead that charge. This region is so biodiverse that we really do need to do that as well. More brands coming out of Asia within this space, hopefully is something that I'm excited for.

JEREMY What's exciting is most of our learnings have been about how conservation, and conservation efforts on a personal level, don't have

to be these difficult life changing efforts. They can be quite, I guess, conscious small decisions in day-to-day things, and have some impact in helping things along. I'm just quite excited to see how that might affect the work on a graphic design level, purely because most of the time when you think about things like that, immediately, you just think about print production concerns. But I think I'm interested to see how it just informs the work on every level, from a design point of view anyway. I think we have developed quite a nice visual language, or brand world, where global feel from a Southeast Asian perspective. I am quite interested to push the design language of that perspective a little bit more in terms of the work we ourselves are pushing out, or the work from the region in general.

BRYONY You know, I think you have done a fabulous job, or I should say "you did well, and you did good" in creating this brand that, I mean, it was a huge challenge in the very beginning. Part by its size and how massive the project itself is, but also by how many unanswered questions the client themselves had when they approached you. There was still a lot that needed to be resolved, that was worked on by your team through strategy, through design, through just overall hand holding conversations, and thinking through all of these unanswered questions that further developed the answers, towards the actual brand itself and brought everything to life. I commend your patience in taking this client through a four-year process that most likely has another four years ahead with your team or more, but that also gives you the opportunity to go into a project with a depth that usually we don't get to experience. Having that trickle effect on your own personal development, in how you approach design. I'm very curious, on my end, to see where your work individually and as a firm goes, as you further this thinking. I can't wait to see what other brands you come up with in the next few years.

KIT Thank you so much.

HANJI Thank you so much, it's been a real pleasure.

ARMIN After listening to the Anak team it's now easy to understand how this identity reached such visual depth and richness. What stands out isn't so much the strategy and design decisions along the way — all of which were great — but the commitment and investment from everyone involved, from board members to veterinarians to horticulturists to zoologists, to create something that would make the people, AND the animals, of Singapore proud.

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