

EPISODE 048

MINECRAFT

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Michael Laning, Bold Scandinavia

AND

Martin Johansson and Harry Elonen, Mojang

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 48 of The Follow-up.

This week we are following up on Minecraft, a sandbox video game developed by Stockholm, Sweden-based Mojang Studios. Minecraft probably needs no introduction as it is literally the best-selling video game of all time, with more than 238 million copies sold and an infinite number of worlds created by the simple act of collecting resources and building freely. Minecraft now encompasses a wide universe of multiple editions, major updates, and spin-off games that attract over 132 million players each month.

The project, designed in collaboration by Mojang's in-house team and Scandinavian agency Bold was posted on Brand New on March 24, 2022. You can pull it up on your browser at bit.ly/bnpodcast048 that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast048, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Michael Laning, Creative Director at Bold Scandinavia; Martin Johansson, Senior Art Director at Mojang; and Harry Elonen, Senior Brand Manager at Mojang.

In this conversation we learn about the working relationship between Mojang Studios and Bold where the typical agency and client model was successfully blurred so that the two teams could work together seamlessly. No big presentations, no big reveals, just a lot of working side by side... or, well, as side-by-side as the pandemic allowed. We also hear about how big an influence the pixel-based world of Minecraft informed the design approach, which should come as no surprise but it was still interesting to get the inside scoop and rationalization about how the blocky world manifests in the brand. It's hard to imagine Minecraft becoming bigger than it already is and this conversation sheds light on how it plans to grow and expand as it straddles the line between gaming franchise and entertainment franchise.

Now let's listen in as Armin follows up with Michael, Martin, and Harry.

ARMIN VIT Hello everyone. Today, we are immersing ourselves in the pixelated 3D-universe of Minecraft to mine for some deeper insight about this great evolution. Harry, Martin, Michael, welcome to The Follow-Up.

HARRY ELONEN Thanks so much.

MICHAEL LANING Thanks.

MARTIN JOHANSSON Thank you.

MICHAEL Nice to be here.

ARMIN So that our readers can know who's who, if you can introduce yourself with your name and title.

HARRY I'm Harry, I'm a Senior Brand Manager for the Minecraft brand.

MARTIN I'm Martin Johansson. I'm the Senior Art Director of the brand direction team at Mojang.

MICHAEL I'm Michael Laning, Creative Director at Bold Scandinavia.

ARMIN Wonderful. Let's get started with you, Harry, so that we can get sense for what prompted Minecraft to undergo this project. Given the success of Minecraft, I get the feeling that you could have left things untouched, and the success would have continued uninterrupted for many more years. So what led Mojang to want to redesign Minecraft at this point in its history?

HARRY Well, there's the strategic part and there's the more technical design part to that answer. So I'll start off with the strategic part and then I think, Martin, you can go on with the more technical design part even. First of all, the whole rebranding... and I really love that you say that we could have kept things as they are [laughter], because I assume that we are quite distinct and everything looks good. But a big driver for all the brand work is actually the strategic shift we are seeing as a franchise.

Our franchise is really growing and we are growing beyond the gaming category or even the original gaming category, if you follow my thought. So we are really going into multiple categories. Somebody might even say that we are almost like a big franchise now, like an entertainment franchise. So that was the one key aspect of this whole rebrand task, and really to succeed in this task we had to take a holistic take on the branding. The whole intent of this work was really to create a strategic foundation for the Minecraft brand strategy, future architecture, and the visual identity system. The intent was really to support the growth plans and our future prospects.

ARMIN When you mentioned categories, can you give us a couple of examples of what those categories that you're extending in are?

HARRY We are extending already within gaming. As you probably know, we have Minecraft Dungeons, which is a totally different game. We are reaching into, or we have already, services. We have broadcasting, Minecraft Live. As you see, this franchise is growing, we have our consumer products offering is huge and we are seeing collaborations. For

instance, just now in the Lacoste collaboration that just came out. So those are just examples of new categories we are touching upon.

ARMIN Do you know what year, or how many years it's been since this expansion took off? Or has it been gradual, where little by little, you have needed to expand into these different categories?

HARRY I think Martin is best to answer this one.

MARTIN To give it a little bit of context, I joined Mojang in 2015, and at the time we were some 30 people in the Stockholm studio. A lot of good brand work was already made by Lydia Winters, I do believe, but especially my boss, Markus Toivonen, also known as Junkboy, who set a lot of brand foundations such as the logotype, ideas about the grid, and how we can visually translate from the product into something more visual. But as we scale, today Mojang is about 250 people, so we scaled quite a lot during the last years.

ARMIN Wow.

MARTIN The knowledge was within people's heads needed to be translated into some sort of documentation. I mean, a lot of things that's been done is really solid work, quite rewarding. To do that it's a foundation. But as we scale, and also after acquisition by Microsoft, we saw the need for creating guidelines for the brand. That's how we thought about it, initially. We also knew that it would be a quite huge undertaking, just to translate all these good ideas into something more visual. We set out early 2019 to plan. We started to execute early 2020, just a little bit of context there. But from our side, is that we wanted to democratize the whole brand really into different teams in the company. We are so huge now that the knowledge needed to be shared. There wasn't any sort of logic or system in place really. We knew that we needed to create that.

That's where we started to have the conversation with Bold, especially Michael and also Harry, who at the time worked at Bold. Also Oliver, who's the CD at Bold, who helped immensely. That's sort of where we

started with it. So it is basically a lot of growing pains. As Harry says, we're expanding into multiple new arenas for us. There are some things we can't talk about at this stage, but we're really going out to be something else than just a game. We could be perceived as an entertainment brand or a lifestyle brand. I mean, I don't really like to use those categories, but that is as close as I can get to define where we are at our current state.

HARRY Also, I have to echo Martin here. I always remember digging in, to those first massive presentations and first massive conversations we had. I remember thinking that, wow, there was like great branding work done before Bold Scandinavia, and Michael, and Oliver came in. The system of it all was not necessarily that clear, and we needed that system to be able to scale.

ARMIN That makes sense. Now, Michael, your name has been invoked already. How did Bold get involved? And I understand that there was previous work that Bold had done for Mojang Studios, creating that identity. But how did that work translate into conversations about taking on this massive project?

MICHAEL I can speak on this a little bit, but I think actually Harry's probably the best one to answer. Because at the time he was the Client Director for us. So maybe, Harry, if you want to take this one.

HARRY When we finished off the work with Mojang Studios, we definitely had a happy customer at the time. But we also knew, as soon as we were diving into Minecraft and having those initial discussions, we all understood we had a much harder task ahead. I'm not saying the Mojang Studios identity wasn't difficult to crack, not at all. But what I wanted to say is really that the system needed probably a little bit more thinking. Because suddenly we had this big brand in our hands that was situated in a multitude of categories with big growth plans and a universe that was everything but getting smaller. So that was really a challenge for us.

ARMIN And then at what point in this whole process, did you go from Bold to Minecraft / Mojang? Not necessarily year and date.

HARRY That was basically when we packaged up the work you see today... around that time. So I jumped ship, as you say.

ARMIN The change for you from Bold to Mojang/Minecraft is very recent.

HARRY It's quite recent, yeah. But we've also—

ARMIN Okay.

HARRY —done a lot of work after that first batch of work, which we can't reveal yet.

ARMIN Which is always sad [laughter]. I always hate when people tease me with things that are great, but we cannot reveal yet. So thank you. Martin, maybe this is a question for you. What was the initial directional challenge or brief you gave Bold, Michael and Harry in this case, just to get things started?

MARTIN We did an extensive audit on everything we've done visually so far. Every sort of documentation, any sort of guides that were there, and there are many. There are guides about animation, how we approach a hero art, or as we call it, key art. We also have game design documents and everything we've done by visual design, really. So we just dumped shitloads on top of Harry's, and then Michael's, and also Oliver's heads. And then we started to have a conversation. But I think our initial point was that, and I think it was Oliver, the CD at Bold who said this first was, "simplify and amplify" really. So we wanted to take what was currently there, but we wanted to put it in a structure, more of a modular structure. And that is also quite rewarding because Minecraft is a very elegant product in itself, it's pure math. Everything 16x16-pixel grids and all of that. That sort of logic was very easy to take and bring into the design work, I would say. Design is also fundamental logic applied and we just took that part and brought it in.

What made me super happy, and maybe you want to talk to this too, Michael, was that Bold got it really fast. They understood the logic and what was necessary. We also had an extreme inflation in different visual assets. Too many logotype, not really systemized, a lot basically. People were just running and doing their own thing really. There weren't any structure. I think Michael brought that sort of sense, or logic. So we laid a really, really solid foundation to build upon. And that is actually, just to wrap this up, that is also the foundation that we're sitting on right now. So we are actually very much scalable into the future.

ARMIN So Michael, from that shitload of stuff that you were given, what stood out as either the most challenging aspect of it, or the thing that help you kickstart the creative process on your end?

MICHAEL I mean, yes, it's a bit daunting when you see that amount of stuff come in. Like you mentioned, I mean, there's a huge amount of things, and maybe we can touch on that a bit more later. But initially, the biggest challenge from our point of view was going to be the internal alignment. There were a lot of big questions on the table, and a lot of stakeholders invested in the outcome of a project like this. And things like, "is Minecraft a gaming franchise? or an entertainment franchise?", we were still discussing at that point.

Whenever you start fiddling with something as big and successful as Minecraft, there's going to be a lot of people that have a strong opinion. Immediately for me and the team, that's one of the things that really jumped out at us. And then of course, that also leads me into another challenging aspect was, how do you refresh a brand as iconic as Minecraft without losing what made it what it is today. I guess that's a fairly common challenge in our industry, but this happened to be at a very large scale. So we needed to create structure without limiting creativity, and make things function without stripping away the fun, essentially. On both sides it was really important to all of us that the brand kept its quirky charm, that it still felt like Minecraft when we were

done with it. Initially, I would say those were probably the two biggest things that stood out to me.

ARMIN Both of which sound impossible. [Laughter] The idea of aligning and steering such a giant ship that is Minecraft, that has such an impact on such an insane amount of people, and then making sure that internally everybody's aligned with what's going to happen. Because whatever you do, the ripple effect is insane. I'm always fascinated and also scared at the same time to hear when projects like this take shape, and how much of it is not so much about the design, but about the internal conviction that this needs to happen. You mentioned that it would be nice to talk about the assets, or the stuff that you saw, can you expand a little bit on that?

MICHAEL The first phase of the design development for us was really centered around creating this new master brand for the entire franchise, as Martin had mentioned, and Harry also. The game had gone from just being a game to being a full entertainment franchise. We needed to create something that felt familiar and closely connected to the game, but also capable of standing on its own and meeting the needs of new categories outside of gaming. Given what Martin said, it was really a process of simplification. Minecraft is a game where you can build anything. And in many ways it felt like that's basically what had happened with the brand. It had grown quite organically and they'd produced truly an enormous amount of assets over the years. I don't think I've ever seen anything like that come across my desk. I don't know the exact number, but it feels like thousands of logos, and there's colors, and there's guidelines on guidelines—I mean, everything was built to suit a particular need at the time.

But I think what stood out for them, and what also stood out for us, is this creates this really fun and spontaneous look that feels Minecraft. It doesn't feel wrong when you see it, but it also lacks a stable core and becomes more and more difficult to manage over time. When it comes to specific assets, it was both intimidating to see everything, but also

fun to see everything because it really felt creative, and kind of not the typical brand assets that you see.

ARMIN When you mention the idea of different guidelines in different times that you almost forget about... it reminded me of sometimes when my kids show me their worlds that they're building in Minecraft, and they're walking me through it, and then they run into something like, "Oh, I completely forgot I had built this." It's amazing. It's those things that you build, and then you forget to use, but then they're still there, like lingering. In the case of Minecraft where things mutate and things grow, you're like, "Oh crap. I should have tended to this a little bit more carefully." Martin, what was that process like? And you sort of hinted at it...

MARTIN You're mentioning like persistency, right?

ARMIN Yeah.

MARTIN Some of this logic comes from Jens, who is the Lead Creator for Minecraft. There's a lot of logic that we also used. We made a little book, we call it "Jens' Little Green Book", but it's about game design logic, basically. We also shared that with Bold. It also gives you a lot of insights into the game mechanics, but also the game design, and what Minecraft is and isn't. I think that also gave us a good idea how to extend that into branding. And as a side note, maybe this is putting Harry and Michael on the spot, but we are not like a conventional client either. We are a creative studio, we have loads of creatives, and we also have a long legacy with a game that is the best selling game of all times. Obviously that put a kind of pressure on Bold, and they handled that very elegant through the whole process. I can see also that we as a company, or as a studio, has been quite challenging to work with, as well. Because there are a couple of truths in there, and there's also that sensibility towards our users that really need to take into consideration. We can't just do anything too crazy [laughter] with this, even though that we really pushed the boundaries here, I'd say a lot.

ARMIN Harry, can you confirm or deny how easy or hard it was to work with the Mojang team? [Laughter]

HARRY I think—

ARMIN Putting you in the spot.

HARRY —yeah... I'm a former athlete and I always love a good game. I have to say that the work we did for Minecraft and Mojang Studios was one of my career absolute favorite games. And it's always like that. There is a clear trend nowadays that companies build in-house teams. In this case we had a very, very good in-house team with us. After a couple of months, it really started feeling like this group of people having a great time together. There were obviously challenges. Like every client relationship there's always bad days and there's good days. We're human, you know?

ARMIN Yeah.

HARRY But we solved them quite elegantly. At the end of the day, everybody had a good time.

ARMIN And you're all here with a smile on your faces, so things turned out well.

HARRY [Laughter] Yeah.

ARMIN Now Michael and Harry, what was the first big presentation that you gave to Mojang/Minecraft? You know, was it just pure logos? Let's move on to the next thing? Or was it more of a big picture presentation?

MICHAEL One of the nice things about this whole project is that when it came to sharing the work, we didn't take the typical design presentation approach. Very early on in the project we established that we wanted to operate more as a single collaborative team. I mean, there's so many talented people on both sides. It's like Martin said, that can be intimidating you know, designing for designers. But in this case, it felt natural that we worked together and I think it just improved the work. There were so many insights coming from the Mojang team. I mean,

having, as you mentioned, Junkboy designing the original logo, to the team that eats and breathes Minecraft. We didn't go in with polished presentations or final recommendations. It was rather an ongoing conversation within this shared group where we could discuss ideas, and iterate on key design developments. I think that made a huge difference from the way that you often end up working when it's an agency/client relationship.

ARMIN Pretty interesting insight into how this worked out. I imagine it became more difficult to do it this way with the pandemic. Can you speak a little bit about how that dynamic worked out remotely, to get this done in that way?

HARRY I mean, we started working in the worst phase of the pandemic. I think we worked through like the first, second and third wave of the pandemic and everybody sat at home. But on the flip side there, I always felt we had a bubble almost. We met every morning at 9:00 or 9:30, and then we closed the day, just seeing where we are. The team spirit that we created during the first batch of work was quite significant. Obviously, I'll also never forget the really big and long meetings in the beginning of summer, 30 degrees outside in Stockholm and you sit very late in the evening towards the U.S., to London, and present these things. It was a very peculiar time.

ARMIN We launched this podcast as a result of the pandemic. So most of our 46, 47 episodes now have some sort of story tied to the pandemic. I'm hoping that we can stop asking that question soon enough. But it's still interesting, especially a project like this, where it's so much about the interaction between two separate teams that now are each completely separated. So, let's move on from the pandemic into the logo. Again, like I'm not a Minecraft player, but my kids are, and I help them troubleshoot things, and set up their servers, and buy things. So I'm very familiar with the logo. It loads up, you see it, and everybody sees it. Was there any concern about touching it, in any way whatsoever, given how recognizable and how iconic it is for so many gamers?

MARTIN Yes, it was. It was quite a challenge and it took some time. I mean the baseline was created by Markus Toivonen and Junkboy. And that came out of... I think Notch made the original logotype, but Markus Toivonen had made the one that we worked upon. It's very, very classical. But I think beginning conversations, we already established the core brand logotype, which is the logotype without cracks. What Michael did, and also a designer called Viktor [inaudible], who works with us, a really good designer who also made the Mojang Studios. We settled up on to find a perspective grid that really worked out well for us. Then we added fidelity to it, and then we broke it down into pixels, then we looked at the details. The Minecraft logotype, or the Minecraft Vanilla logotype had a couple of cracks that was quite organic. Those were hand drawn by Junkboy, but then vectorized for resolution.

But we looked at that quite a lot, like we didn't really know how to change it. And then I think probably Michael and Viktor, they brought that idea that actually put the cracks within the grid. That was quite a big change I'd say, but it is not really recognizable—it is quite a big shift. So I think that was also, from idea to execution, was a long conversation because we were quite hesitant to begin with just touching it, it's so iconic. But I think we innovated, but we stayed true to the system we set up. I think also Michael has a lot of points to that, but it was quite an endeavor, I'd say. Even though it doesn't look like it, but it was truly.

MICHAEL From Bold's side, it's both exciting and daunting at the same time. It's a dream project to work on something like this, with a brand that touches so many people. You really don't want to disappoint the huge fan base. In the end you want to create something that people will love, and the brand will genuinely benefit from. So there's the excitement of getting to touch this iconic thing. But also, of course, there's always in the back of your mind that you really want to make sure you do, not only a good job, but do a good job for the right reasons.

ARMIN So the actual execution of the final logo was that on Mojang's end or Bold's end, or somewhere in between?

MARTIN We actually did it in-house, I think. It was Viktor, together with I, and Markus Karlsson Frost, who fiddled around internally with support from Junkboy, because he made the original logotype. So that was the conversation, but then we worked very, very close with Michael. But we actually made it in-house because we felt like that needs to be done by us. I don't know, some artistic pride or keep it close. But obviously, also Michael helped out finishing the finishing touches of final art, and that part was made by Bold.

ARMIN Got it. How difficult, or how easy was it to get it approved for change internally? Was there a lot of resistance? Was it more embraced? Like, "Yes, let's modify it just enough to take it into the next century or the next 100 years."

MARTIN To be super honest, it was a mixed bag. We had to run it with different teams. But I think ultimately, Jens really liked it and he understood the evolution and the logic. He's a very, very logical-based person. People saw the elegance of the setup and they accepted it, although it was a bit different. I'd say the most difference actually exists on the lower part, not so much on the upper part of it. It took some time, and a little bit of an explanation. And then we had to go all the way back to grid systems to explain why we ended up here. In the end, people were quite supportive. Some people didn't like it, but that's fine. I mean, people are different. Aesthetics are—there's as many opinions as there are human beings on the planet, basically, regarding aesthetic.

HARRY I have to say that I tend to get scared if everybody loves something. [Laughter] Like you almost want that there is a group of people that say, "Oh, I really don't know."

ARMIN Yeah, it's usually that friction that yields better work. There's just like, it's not an easy sale, it's not a hard sell. But just somewhere in between that forces you to make better decisions along the way. Speaking of grids, and this is a question for all three of you. There is a lot of grids. There's a lot of pixels. There's a pixel-based logo, a pixel-based grid system, pixel-based graphics. Did at any point you think, "This is too many pixels"?

And was there any exploration at any point to introduce different visual elements or visual styles? I know that some of it comes through the key art as you mentioned, Martin. But was there any point where it's just like, "Maybe we've gone overboard with the pixel-based stuff"?

MARTIN Michael did shitloads of exploration. But we do have a consistency, as I mentioned. Like our textured surfaces on the block is 16x16. So that's something to go on, for instance. So Minecraft has sort of a chunky sort of resolution attached to it. So I think for us, from a logical standpoint was to keep it sort of chunky, I think that was the idea. So not as granular as some people would say. We kept it chunky, that was the goal.

MICHAEL Coming from an outside point of view, Minecraft has such a strong visual language and it was really clear to us from the start that we should fully embrace this pixelated look. I mean, that is, and always has been part of the brand's charm, this sort of low-fidelity. Everything is so consistent, nothing breaks the grid. The brand all started with a block and we wanted it to end with a block too. We didn't want to force a new aesthetic in there, or try to make it into something that it's not. Yes, there's many pixel-based things, but I think in a way it always felt right.

ARMIN I was going to preempt my question with saying that I think I know the answer, and that answer makes sense because yes, you can't deny what's there. And what makes Minecraft unique is that pixel-based universe. I just want to say that if you made posters that said, "Keep it chunky and nothing breaks the grid," I'll be the first in line to buy those. Those are great mini-design manifestos, that sound great.

MARTIN I just want to share a little bit of our internal logic when we're dealing with branding basically, from Minecraft as well. It's also take my boss, Markus Junkboy and that is, that there's a thing that happened... the Minecraft game is quite granular, right? The textures have a much higher resolution, but when we look at the key art, it has lesser resolution. So the in-game graphics and the hero art doesn't translate really. It's more of a simplified version and re-interpretation

of Minecraft. The hero art should look like the game feels, it shouldn't be an exact representation of the game. That's also because if you have so much information in each block, it's going to be hard to read what the scene actually is, right? So that is one thing that we thought about when we did the branding, talking about resolutions and the chunkiness and all that.

There's also a second layer on top of that. Junkboy always says, key art should look like it's edible. That's why we have very high saturation in colors and we work with really bright colors. So there is also a logic that we took from the older branding that translated eventually to this great work with Bold. I just wanted to have that said, so the listeners perhaps have a little better idea about the logic and how we approached this as well.

ARMIN So speaking of stuff that you got from Bold, and maybe this goes in line with the fact that it wasn't a typical designer/client relationship. But Michael, what deliverables did you end up giving the Mojang team, if any?

MICHAEL The full toolbox. Working with them to create the logic behind what's needed and what's not. We spent huge amounts of time on the logos. Also, looking into the color systems, grid systems, patterns, consulting on things like photography. A lot of the art styles, like the key art that Martin was mentioning is completely developed in-house. But when it came to more of core toolbox assets, that's really what we delivered.

ARMIN Got it. Now, Martin and Harry, with this sets of toolboxes, one thing I'm really curious about is, what do you do with this now? Meaning, how many Minecraft communications are you generating on a daily or weekly basis? And like, what are some channels where these things typically appear? And who makes it happen? Clearly, both of you have a hand in it, but speaking a little bit of the internal team, would be good to hear.

HARRY First of all, I think all the work is great. The guidelines, the assets currently, I feel that we have so much work to do now. It feels like somehow that we've just begun this journey because now we are seeing these assets being used in very different ways. Like we have collaborations, we have tactical campaigns, we have big, top tier campaigns going out. There is a lot to process internally, across channels. Important channels are like social media, for instance, that they need to work in that space. We do a lot of different advertising. We do different advertising formats, most are digital advertising currently. So yeah, that's really quite a lot.

I used to have this old colleague of mine, Andreas Russelev, who always walked on saying that your strategy is only as good as your execution. Sometimes it feels like doing a positioning, or an identity sketch, or a logo, it feels almost like the easy part. The real trick comes when it's supposed to go live, where you're actually with those assets, with your templates, and actualizing the position you want to take on your mark. I think there we have quite a lot of work to do, as these kind of rebrandings tend to have.

MARTIN Part of this work is also going into our franchise expansion. So we're working with a lot of new partners and old partners as well. So a lot of this work could translate into box design, it could be new partnerships, it could be new ventures that you haven't seen Minecraft in. There's no secret that we're making a movie in Hollywood, part of this work would translate into that as well. There are multiple arenas where this brand work will go into. But the brand compliance is going to take time because of the scale and scope of the whole franchise is huge, so we have to upgrade partially. We're facing our old design, and applying the new one as we go along, and it's super hard to just do it in one batch, if you will. So it's going to be a staged introduction over time.

ARMIN Of the 200+ people you mentioned working at Mojang, how many are dedicated to the design and implementation of the brand?

MARTIN We in the Brand Direction team, we're about nine people in total and that comprises of art directors, designers, producers, strategists, and the managers, basically. So that's us. And then we have a larger part of a team called the Brand Team basically, comprised of brand experience, it's partly social media, or the written word, like coms. And then we have consumer products and then media, who is doing all our live broadcasts or bigger things. So that's that. And then we have the game side as well that's also partially integrated with us as well. Then of course, we also have a team in Redmond you would say that is totally dedicated to this as well. We have five studios in the world [laughter] so partially, there's stuff that we're doing that's going to have impact on our Tokyo office, or Shanghai office, or London office, as well.

ARMIN A lot of people involved for sure.

MARTIN Right.

ARMIN Michael, is Bold still involved in this facet of the implementation? Or are you like, "It's not my problem now and you guys figure it out"?

MICHAEL No, no. We're still working on a number of things together now. Even though we've done a huge amount of work up until this point, it feels like we've just scratched the surface. I think the project initially was about stripping things down, getting to the core of what makes Minecraft Minecraft, and then building it back up as a scalable system. Whether it's the way the identities work, or the way that we approach logos, everything needs to be both functioned for today, and exist for whatever may come tomorrow. It feels like now we've laid a solid groundwork, but we're also kind of at this starting line in many ways. There's quite a lot, I think, left to be done and a lot of exciting new projects that we're working on.

ARMIN Speaking of excitement, what was the most exciting aspect of working on this for each of you?

HARRY I was thinking about this earlier today. I remember Michael Jordan said that the best thing of the '92 Olympics was the camaraderie and the matches they had between the official games. Somehow, I feel a little bit like that when it comes to this work. We had such a great team spirit on both sides. We had so good sessions talking about everything from brand strategy to architecture, to hierarchies, to logo grids, and lock-ups [laughter]. I think that time is super special to me, and that was really one of the big things. And then of course, the outcome and the great response we've had—for instance, on your website. And people writing really nice messages when we launched the work. That was really special to me.

ARMIN In your analogy of the Dream Team, who are you in regards to the process? [Laughter] Like a Magic Johnson, maybe?

HARRY No. I'm the dude that brought the water bottles.

ARMIN Christian Laettner, the college guy?

HARRY Yeah. [Laughter].

ARMIN Martin, how about you?

MARTIN Working with talents, I think Harry is very humble here in his statement. Working with great talent, I'd say, and also expanding your mind. Usually when I approach creative work, I like to innovate at some point, and I really think we did, but kept it true to what we are. And also, this is not a three-man show, this is a lot of people have been engaged, from Stockholm, to U.S., to Japan, everywhere, basically. I'm super grateful for all the support, and the talent, and peoples' wholeheartedly support to transform this brand into something new, so we can bring this into the future and also be able to scale as we go. That's been quite an amazing thing really, and very rewarding, to say the least. It may be a bit of a life changer, I think. And I'm not saying this lightly, it's been a truly rewarding experience.

ARMIN Yeah, I can imagine, that being... it's your job, but it also becomes so much a part of you that you become emotionally attached beyond just trying to get results in the market. Michael, how about for you?

MICHAEL There's a few things that stand out for me. I mean, one is what Harry mentioned, and I think also Martin. That it was a really nice experience getting to work collaboratively like this, and really get integrated into the team and into the company, instead of being sort of the agency standing on the sidelines looking in. That was an exciting and fun experience to see things from both sides of the fence, in a way. Also, as someone who does play the game, of course, it's always nice to see your work out in the wild. Especially when you go home, turn on the computer, it pops up, that's always a nice moment. I think just the designer in me was really excited about how systematic everything can be in a project like this. Working on the system behind the logos and how do you create something scalable at this magnitude. In a very nerdy way, something that's exciting for me.

ARMIN This has been wonderful to hear. I think the reasons why you are all excited about how this project turned out, it's evident in the final product. I think there's something really amazing about how Minecraft this feels, like it doesn't feel like it's trying to... like it's not the most popular shooter game, it's not Fortnite, it's not Super Mario, it's Minecraft. It has stayed Minecraft. And it has that quirky, chunky, charm. That is what has made it exciting for more than 200 million people. It is now poised to attract, hopefully for you, another 200 million people down the road. I can't wait to watch the movie with my kids, which I'm sure they will want to see. Thank you, Harry, Martin, and Michael for joining me on The Follow-up today.

HARRY Thanks so much.

MICHAEL Thank you so much.

MARTIN Thank you so much.

BRYONY One of the key takeaways from this conversation and something that summed up the design approach nicely came from Michael, who shared how this was an exercise in “Creating structure without limiting creativity” and “making things function without stripping away the fun”. Structure and function may stand as opposites to creativity and fun but Mojang Studios and Bold somehow found a way to bring those traits together into a structurally creative and functionally fun identity. This, at a time when, as Martin said, Minecraft is setting out to be more than just a game, which is true because ultimately Minecraft is almost literally a state of being.

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