

# EPIISODE 049

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## BAWI

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Jolene Delisle and Diego Barragan, The Working Assembly

AND

Jordan Hicks and Victor Guardiola, Bawi

### **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 49 of The Follow-up.

This week we are following up on Bawi, a new brand of sparkling water inspired by the “Agua Frescas” of Mexico. The product was created by two students — Victor Guardiola (originally from Monterrey, Mexico) and Jordan Hicks (an Austin, TX, native) — who met at The University of Texas at Austin and started forming the product idea during a Food & Beverage Entrepreneurship Practicum program: to create a low-sugar, carbonated water with the full flavor of Agua Frescas, traditional fruit-based drinks found throughout Mexico but generally loaded with sugar. Using a very low-volume Soda Stream sparkling-water-maker from a liquidation sale at Bed Bath and Beyond, the two founders honed in on their recipe and now have launched their ready-to-drink, direct-to-consumer range of three flavors that include lime, pineapple, and passion fruit.

The project, designed by New York, NY-based The Working Assembly was posted on Brand New on April 5, 2022. You can pull it up on your browser at [bit.ly/bnpodcast049](https://bit.ly/bnpodcast049) that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast049, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Jolene Delisle, Founder and Head of Brand Creative at The Working Assembly; Diego Barragan, Design Director at The Working Assembly; Jordan Hicks, Co-founder and COO of Bawi; and Victor Guardiola, Co-founder and CEO of Bawi.

In this conversation we get to hear an authentic origin story and how Jordan and Victor started with nothing more than an idea and, for better or worse, a complete lack of experience in the industry and no network that would make their trajectory any smoother. Spoiler: they succeeded. Part of that success, we learn, came courtesy of The Working Assembly's TWA Labs that works with founders — especially minority founders — at early stages in order to help them establish a brand and bring their product or service to market as was the case with Bawi. We also get a glimpse at one of the many benefits of hiring a diverse team as Diego's Latin background — he hails from Bogota, Colombia — helped connect the vision of Bawi's founders to create a drink that represented Mexico with authenticity, leading them to draw inspiration from a classic game, La Lotería, and playing all their cards right.

Now let's listen in as Bryony follows up with Jolene, Diego, Jordan, and Victor.

**BRYONY** A couple weeks ago, a package arrived in the office from Bawi. Nestled inside three latas of what later would reveal was pure heartfelt nostalgia. With graphics reminiscent of the games and signs that shaped our childhood in Mexico, and flavors that quickly transported us to town squares with friends or siblings, sipping limonada, or cooling down with an helado, I can't recall a product ever that has managed to transport me so clearly in time. Victor, Jordan, Jolene, and Diego, welcome to The Follow-Up.

**JORDAN** Thank you so much. Thanks for having us.

**BRYONY** Let's go ahead and hear name and title and kind of where you're coming from from everybody so that our audience can familiarize themselves with your voices.

**VICTOR** Sweet I'm Victor Guardiola, I'm Co-founder and CEO, and I am based out of Austin, Texas.

**JORDAN** I'm Jordan Hicks, Co-founder and COO. And I am also based down here in Austin, Texas.

**JOLENE** I'm Jolene Delisle, I'm the founder and Head of Creative at The Working Assembly based in New York.

**DIEGO** I'm Diego Barragan, I'm the Design Director at The Working Assembly, also based in New York.

**BRYONY** Wonderful to have you all here today. I am sure that there is more to be shared about the origins of Bawi than what has been posted online, which is very interesting. I know that there was a food and beverage class at UT, and an old Soda Stream from Bed Bath and Beyond involved. Can you share us how you met, how this idea first emerged, and what your initial experimentation entailed?

**VICTOR** Yeah, absolutely. I guess it emerged right around Jordan and I met way back in the day. So Jordan and I had always been kind of entrepreneurial, and we ended up creating this little marketing firm more or less where we built websites for food truck owners. That didn't really get off the ground, but we always knew we had this entrepreneurial connection—for years. So fast forward a couple years, and Jordan had just landed a role at a CPG company called Kate's Real Food, while I was trying to get a caffeinated mint startup off the ground at the same time. We had pretty much connected over being 20-something years old, trying to get our feet in the ground in the CPG industry. Jordan and I started tinkering with the idea of an RTD Agua Fresca that summer, in 2019. And it was the same time that the practicum started. So we took Bawi through the food and beverage entrepreneurship practicum, and kind of landed by the end of it on

what it is today, this mid-cal, organic sparkling Agua Fresca, that's aiming to bring Mexican representation to the beverage space.

**JORDAN** Specifically about the Soda Stream. Victor and I kind of both had this idea for some sort of beverage. Victor really led with this Aqua Fresca concept. Originally it was, you know, a little bit more of a traditional Agua Fresca, but sparkling was a very, very big trend at the time—still is. And we kind of wanted to just tinker around with it. We both had zero experience in any, I guess, food science or operational background as far as how to go about getting anything sparkling. First thing that came to mind was a Soda Stream. As Victor said, we're both 20-something year olds at the time. I think we were both just 21, so it's not like we had insane amount of cash to blow on, you know, an inline carbonation system or anything like that. We jumped into a liquidation sale at a Bed Bath and Beyond, and just picked up the Soda Stream and started kind of tinkering around with the recipe. Soda stream is not very good at carbonating, anything other than water, and then adding flavoring to it. So very quickly destroyed the Soda Stream, unfortunately had to retire it pretty quickly, but luckily my uncle is pretty big in the home brew scene over in San Antonio. So I hit him up and enlisted him to kind of run me through how they've been carbonating their beers and ciders for the past few years. And he hooked us up with some entry level equipment, just a keg, a CO2 tank, a regulator, and some tubeage. And that was about it, kind of walked us through the technique. And we, like I said, tinkered around with it for a little bit, but eventually landed on this delicious sparkling pineapple Agua Fresca that we were pretty impressed with, and kind of just hit the ground running with.

**BRYONY** And I bet that hardware was a little bit more durable than the Soda Stream.

**JORDAN** Yes. The Soda Stream did not hold up. Well, we were both living on West Campus down here in Austin at the time, 'cuz we're both students and very quickly got sparkling Agua Fresca all over our West Campus

apartments—to the ceilings, behind the refrigerators, it was a mess to say the least.

**BRYONY** As you worked to get this idea launched, and finessing the recipe and all of that, you also developed a logo and other items. What can you share about that initial branding? And those efforts? And how that informed where you are today without getting into all of the branding just yet.

**VICTOR** It was certainly a scrappy effort, some of the earlier designs... and Jordan and I were familiar with Fiver, that contractor service, where you could hire anyone inexpensively to create any piece of content for you. Our initial design definitely wanted to lean Retro-Mexican, and that was the center of our inspiration. And I guess our budget, it ended up costing us like \$56 bucks to get the first Bawi logo off the ground, which we took to the farmer's market. And to describe the logo a little bit... I was born in Monterey, one of the most visual elements of Monterey is the Sierra de la Silla, the mountain in the background. So that's the center of the Bawi logo with some cursive typography over it. But it was pretty instructional because we realized that we did want Bawi to have some Mexican elements within, I think it was just a lot more overt back then using such a strong icon instead of the subtle and bold typography we have now. It's a lot more refined now, I'll say.

**BRYONY** And what were some of the initial challenges from a business perspective that you identified entering the sparkling trend, sort of saturated market, as a small business?

**JORDAN** I think you mentioned it, obviously differentiation is kind of a trigger word in this space, honestly. So obviously we wanted to try and figure out how we could set ourselves apart from every other sparkling beverage brand on the shelf right now. But consumer education was something that we were definitely keened in on pretty quickly. You know, I think down here in Austin, we have a really awesome TexMex and Hispanic food scene down here. So specifically to consumers, Agua Fresca is relatively well known, but in the retail space, there's a

pretty massive hole, as far as RTD Agua Frescas go. As far as figuring out where we place ourselves on the shelf, that was something that we definitely keyed into, like I said, early on. But until recently, you know, we had our first month in market as of yesterday and that's something that's become even more apparent is, you know, we're not necessarily a sparkling water with a little bit of fruit juice or fruit flavoring to it, but we're also not a soda, or a Fanta, or anything like that.

**VICTOR** So something as simple as placement is something that we very quickly were like, okay, we need to figure out how we can almost carve out this new category of Agua Frescas 'cuz there's just not a whole lot out there in the market right now. And definitely trying to, you know, butt our way into the shelves and still communicate what exactly we are. 'Cuz like I said, not a sparkling water, we're not a soda. And then on top of that with no marketing budget and bootstrapping it with whatever money us 21-year-olds had saved over the past two years working, you know, our odd jobs here and there.

**BRYONY** That's really interesting. I have to say the lemon flavor, it's kind of like a melted ice cream flavor to me. It is really intense, but at the same time, watered down. Does not fall into the soda category flavoring, or the Hint, or gentle flavors that some of the sparkling waters have. It does have umpfh to it. Now, Jolene, how did The Working Assembly get involved with this project? Because I'm guessing your estimate was a little bit higher than \$56. And I hope so.

**JOLENE** Yeah. I mean started Working Assembly in 2017 and you know, we've been very fortunate in our past five plus years of working to work with some really amazing brands at various life stages, both kind of at the early stage, to storied enterprise Fortune 100 companies. I think at the heart of our company, and why we started was really this idea of working with founders. And I think as much as we all love to do that, oftentimes it's hard to work with those very early stage companies because to your point, there's financial viability that we have to balance with also our business and our employee costs, and

all of that. I started an arm within Working Assembly called TWA Labs, which is where we incubated brands like Sanso and Axiology out of. And really the idea was to work with BIPOC founders, female founders, because ultimately they're really underrepresented and underfunded. And they often lack access to early stage support that can help them scale their business. Especially at a critical stage as when you're launching a brand. We always knew that we wanted to dedicate some of our time as a team to being able to work with brands like that.

We get a flood of emails, often, that come in where people will share, you know, what they're trying to do and create. Sometimes we get a little backlogged and I remember getting Victor's email, I think it was in June of 2021, so about a year ago or so. And he had mentioned that him and Jordan, they were in college, they had this idea and were at the very earliest stage probably of any brand that we've yet to work with. But what I really found intriguing about them, and their story was, it was very clear that they were very passionate and that they had something that felt very genuine and authentic, and was coming from a real deep-rooted place. I hopped on a call with them to talk through their vision for their brand. It was also really clear that they were exceptional entrepreneurs... like very early, but had the resilience, the passion, the work ethic, to really see this through. And when I tell you that we've been working on branding projects for the past year with companies and founders who have yet to get their product into the market, and the amount of work that Jordan and Victor have been able to produce and make happen in the past year is phenomenal. It's really unheard of.

**BRYONY** So I'm gonna ask you one more question about the TWA Labs in just a second, but first Victor, how did you find this very unique opportunity?

**VICTOR** I'd gotten really, really used to cold-emailing people. Just quite generally super used to cold-emailing people, no matter who they were, I knew I wanted to connect and start a conversation. And I saw the TWA Lab arm and was basically hopeful that they could potentially work with

minority-owned company, or at least give us some guidance, right? 'Cause she's had experience working with companies at various stages. So, I sent her over the cold email with my fingers crossed, and luckily she ended up responding to us. It was great timing too, 'cuz at the time we were sourcing for a ton of different agencies and we had probably talked to about a dozen or so with TWA kind of being our North Star the whole time. And whenever we found out they were interested in working with us, we were really excited, and we hopped on it immediately.

**BRYONY** Jolene, I'm gonna ask you from more of a general perspective for a second, independent of the Bawi project, just as a point of inspiration, if you may, for other design firms. What are key considerations that you have in taking on these clients in terms of team allocation? What are things that other people can think of, and say actually maybe as a studio we could pull off something like, this and help others just like they are doing.

**JOLENE** For sure. I think one thing we wanted to really think about was we love the idea of working with values-led companies. It's really amazing when we are able to do that, you know, with companies that are larger, have bigger budgets, it's quite serendipitous when that can happen. And I think we just wanted to make a concerted effort that we were gonna treat these Labs projects as real clients, as they are, as real projects and dedicate a certain amount of resources to them each quarter. So we can only take on one of these brands per quarter, but it's something that we internally, as a team, all talk about and we say, there's gonna be a project that we're all gonna take that might be the project that will pay us, to then help support this project that we're all super passionate, excited about. That is not gonna pay us as well, and at the rates that we typically charge, but that's the kind of concession and balance that we as a team are gonna make to do it.



- BRYONY** That makes total sense. From both perspectives, the client and as the designer, what did the initial conversations and explorations entail so that you could get started with the strategic and creative side?
- JOLENE** Because this project was at such an early stage, it's hard to brief it in the way that you would typically, projects that already exist. It was difficult for us to kind of express the team: they don't have an actual product yet that you can taste, they don't have a real can or product that you can actually look and hold and feel. We have to often lean on Victor and Jordan and founders to be able to illustrate and bring us along their vision. I knew when I met Victor and Jordan, that they had the capacity and ability to do that. They inspired me just from our brief interaction and call. And I knew in taking them on as a project that they would be able to then translate that same excitement and vision that they had for the brand to the team, 'cuz that was gonna be really critical for us.
- JOLENE** And I think part of that also led to the foundation work we had to do within the discovery, which was really unearthing from them, what the opportunities were. Not just from a cultural perspective, but also within the competitors. I mean, as you know, sparkling water is booming in the space right now. And you know, when I brought to the team, we're gonna do this sparkling water beverage, I think there was a lot of skepticism. Another brand, another sparkling water, how can we make this different? How can we make this not look like anything else that's already out there? But I think ultimately because the story, and where the product was coming from was so homegrown, and also was so authentic, it really provided a lot of fodder for our team to really get started. The other aspect is that we are lucky and fortunate to have really talented Latinx people on our team who also immediately understood this product and had a shorthand with Victor, where they understood the nostalgia that he was trying to bring into the market, and what he was trying to do. And we're really excited to work on it.
- VICTOR** To add onto that, just a little bit. What Jolene mentioned right there at the end was super important to us, and those initial conversations

inspired a whole lot of confidence because we were talking to, you know, this one great agency out of a dozen who had Latinx representation on their team. And I wanted Latino consumers to be able to see Bawi, and feel a sense of comfort and familiarity. And I think the only way that translates is if you have the actual representation on the design side, with the understanding of what Mexican cultural motifs and iconography actually look like. And that's why I think they knocked it out of the park, because they had the context that other agencies didn't really.

**BRYONY** And in order to get started, after all of those initial conversations and starting to figure out the details, what were the fundamental directives, parameters, or requirements that you set for the creative team? Or Diego, what did you hear? What were the things that came to your desk first?

**DIEGO** I think the brief was pretty open. It was one of the great things about working with Victor and Jordan, very receptive. As Victor was saying, we identified this nostalgia that we had for Latin American culture and how we can bring that over into cohesive directions for the can design, the typography, the logos—each of those decisions meticulously studied for each of those aspects of the design.

**JOLENE** What Victor and Jordan briefed us on was this idea of being authentic and not stereotypical, and really trying to infuse brightness and warmth into the brand, that wasn't expected or contrived, but really felt classic. And they kept on mentioning the word nostalgia and retro elements as well. That was something that we knew that we were gonna be challenged with. We wanted to show directions that felt like it balanced both this nostalgia that they were seeking, but also this modernity. And then balancing this idea of them, both being from Austin, Texas, which of course has a lot of Mexican influence and culture within the city, but also is decidedly its own flavor. You know? That has its own cultural aspects. We want to really combine those two together.

**BRYONY** And as you started to look into the creative, when you went back to Victor and Jordan, did you present one idea? Did you present 10 ideas? What was that first round of creative? What did it involve?

**DIEGO** Well, of course there's like 10, 20 ideas that are backstage. We presented them with four directions, all rooted in the Mexican heritage. We did a lot of sort of research into what Mexican street typography, and hand-painted signage looks like, fruit stands, folklore attires... all these cultural references that could enrich and inform our design decisions. And ultimately I think we were pretty excited about the direction that we landed on, which not only included a nod to the vernacular typography found in Mexican street typography, but also a homage to a classic game that all Latin Americans are sort of very fond of, or remember very fondly, which is the Loteria cards. As we were doing the research and just going through this Loteria card, I had a feeling of, it brought me back and it just felt right. Felt very [unintelligible]. <laugh>

**BRYONY** Jordan and Victor, what was your reaction in your first impression of these four directions?

**JORDAN** We were absolutely floored, obviously super tough to decide. We were kind of given four different directions that were all really, really cool, but you know, I guess from just an emotional standpoint, we had been working on this thing for quite a few years at that point, almost to no avail is what it felt like. Jolene briefly mentioned this, but we didn't have an RTD version that we could necessarily hold in our hands yet. We were just selling this on tap and you know, farmer's markets around Austin, which is great and that's definitely somewhat tangible, but obviously the end goal was that RTD version. And to really see the brand be put together in a way that communicates what we couldn't do creatively between Victor and I, was a pretty like surreal moment for both of us. And a lot easier to start explaining to people as well, 'cuz it's pretty tough to tell your parents that you're working on this juice business on the side. It's pretty tough to tell your friends, this is what you're draining all of your weekend hours in. So I mean, it

was really emotional for both of us, just kind of right from the start, 'cuz it definitely was our first indication that this was something that definitely has some legs to stand on, and is something that is gonna be really, really cool and communicated perfectly from these visions we've had over the past few years.

**VICTOR** It was super impactful to go from the Soda Stream to now seeing illustrations of the Bawi cans for the first time. TWA gave us four really, really solid options. We were actually deciding between two of them at the time, and polling all of our friends and family, and everyone on our Instagram too, to kind of be the communicative tie-breaker. But no, ultimately we ended up with the design direction we currently have, and it's been received well, and is certainly the best vehicle possible to communicate what we want in the market.

**BRYONY** Now, Diego, we need to get a little bit geeky here. Let's start with a logo for a second. You have flared serifs, you have a curved bottom, there's angled horizontal strokes, there's a shadow, there's so many things. And usually when they're all together, you say that is too much. They work beautifully all together here. Give me all the juicy bits of how you ended up where you ended up.

**DIEGO** Thank you. You know, I said before, like massive research... pulling references, what Mexican traditional, you know, street typography looks like. It's really rich. So many expressions from black letters, serifes, brush-like typography. And we really love where we landed, which is this all-caps Bawi logo with custom, slightly pointed serifs. And we wanted to bring some of that depth that a lot of this typography has, through the shadows. So we finished with our flat version and then we also devised another version, which has a little bit of depth and shadow. I know Armin had made this comment about the shadows on the first two characters having one sort of perspective, and then the second two characters having another perspective... which those are decisions that we made in order to have, if you have the shadow going in one direction or another direction, which makes

it more keen to what real life is, but makes the whole design less symmetric. So we did have those shadows going in each direction. We really love those details that added to that DIY/imperfect look and construction that we loved about the Mexican street signage and typography. So that's kind of like where we landed. The whole curve of the logo also was kind of as constructing the logo, bringing it into the packaging and see how it behaves, that really made the logo have a good boldness and strength.

**BRYONY** Definitely made me think of all those signs for the bands that you see painted on the walls along the highway, or even the truck names. Now you also have a lot of supporting typographic elements that go along with the logo. Can you share a little bit of that process and how you ended up making those selections, especially that awkwardly stretched Steradian... It all works nicely, but it is a stretch. I'm really curious as how you ended up where you ended up.

**DIEGO** Absolutely. We wanted a typeface with serifs that had some personality, to kind of not at the serifs on the Bawi logo. Shackleton had those striking flared serifs that we were looking for, and love, and had a little bit more width to the characters. That has like a certain personality as opposed to like a more sort of standard weight serif. And Steradian has a good geometric clean look that makes it really legible, when we did the special sort of stretch treatment for the flavors. So we really loved those moments in Mexican street typography and we wanted to bring them through the typography, but also pair them well in order to have legibility when you stretch the type, but also like a little bit of the serifs, not only on the logo, but also throughout the voice of Bawi.

**BRYONY** I'm pretty sure you probably read all of the comments on Brand New. Any typographic responses you wanna put on air for those skeptics out there?

**DIEGO** <laugh> I think the main one was the decision on the stretch Steradian. And I think—

**BRYONY** Correct.

**DIEGO** Yeah. When we looked at typography, Mexican-centric, traditional Mexican street signage there's times where there's columns, there's little spaces, there's so many like, and I'm pretty sure you've seen these images, they take typography and just fit it into any space. So that aesthetic of the imperfection, the almost ugliness of it, the roughness, was one of the decisions, the stretching of Steradian which I guess there were some comments of controversy there <laugh>.

**BRYONY** There always is, but that usually means they're paying attention, right?

**DIEGO** Yeah.

**BRYONY** They're focusing on all of the details as much as you have, and that's rewarding in its own way. Now Jordan and Victor, the illustrations are reminiscent of La Loteria, the game, but in the end, they're not exactly Loteria illustrations. So from your perspective, if you can share the evolution from the idea, through your feedback, through the conversations and the iterations of illustrations that you saw, and how you ended up in this spot that is inspired by, but not a replica of La Loteria illustrations.

**VICTOR** We thought that the Loteria motif was a wonderful branding vehicle that encapsulated Mexican illustration really well. And the Loteria motif was also something that was core to some of our initial conversations, because we did want something retro-Latino, but modern. And to me Loteria cards are the most retro it gets. I grew up seeing them in my grandma's house all the time. So it's super emblematic of classic Mexican design, and for the Latinos who are familiar with Loteria, at least from some of my DMS, I see people that are recognizing it and resonating it, immediately. But no, we think it's an awesome little classic object that has a lot of potential for us to play with, because this Loteria-style illustration is something that touches every aspect of the brand. And whenever we're developing new skews for example, it's really nice to be able to have a solid branding basis on how we

illustrate new skews whenever we launch, like Horchata, for example, later on it's <laugh> sorry, that's a sneak peek.

**BRYONY** That's very exciting.

**VICTOR** We'll see. We'll see.

**BRYONY** My kids will be ordering cases, and cases, and cases, I'm sure.

**VICTOR** Me too. The Loteria motif is just so awesome to be able to take those visual elements and expand them to all different sectors of the brand. It's just a really nice vehicle for Bawi, I would say.

**JOLENE** I also wanna touch on the illustrations, which we designed in-house. We have an amazing illustrator Zoe Larson, who worked with Diego to refine these through multiple iterations, as you alluded to. And I think it was really trying to strike that balance of realism and reference to the Loteria cards without being as flat, as traditional illustration style of those cards. Part of that was also knowing that we weren't gonna just be a D-to-C product. This is actually gonna be in restaurants, it's gonna be in stores, on shelf. And we wanted to have that appetite appeal and also something that was really representative of the fruit. Especially if it's a fruit people are not as familiar with. We wanted to make sure that we were able to represent in a way that wasn't too gestural, and it didn't give a clear indication of what it was.

**BRYONY** Diego. Anything else you wanna add to the illustrations?

**VICTOR** <laugh> Jolene pretty much compiled it very well. I think the realism and that yummy factor of the fruits, which is very opposite to like the actual Loteria cards. If you look at them, there's a little bit more hand quality, but a little roughness, almost like way more imperfections. And I think through the flavors of this, we do want flavor cue it, you know, like the limón, the piña, the maracuyá—something very appealing for the consumer or whoever is picking up this can.

**BRYONY** I greatly appreciate the better quality and the printing of the cans versus the Loterias which are always misprinted and registration is terrible.

Let's move on to the website for a second because you know, all products, all services at this point, just about anybody has a website, and anything has a website, but you did something fairly unique, which is to have the website be in English, or Spanish, or Spanglish. And I think this is a brilliant marketing detail, and I wanna know how it came about, and if you have any specific standout moments in the copywriting room, as you were developing the language and that voice of Bawi.

**VICTOR** The initial idea came from Anthony Fernandez, who is not here, but he's the Brand Manager, if I'm not mistaken at TWA, and he was in the forefront of this entire project. So whenever he first came to us showing us the earliest iteration of the website, and started explaining that he wanted to have a Spanglish, Spanish, and English version, I was super, super excited because it's something I grew up on in South Texas. We're filled with second, third, fourth, first-generation Mexican immigrants. So it just becomes a part of your vernacular. We were really excited about it and definitely saw that it had a set of challenges. So thanks to Diego and Anthony, they were able to kick out some awesome copywriting. And we were also able to enlist my brother, shoutout Jose Guardiola, at University of Iowa, master student, in the Master of Fine Arts writing program. He's a Chicano author and is really affiliated with a lot of Latino writers. They did a final pass to him and one of his friends, Laura Rubia, she is a Spanish author as well, and they were able to help us with some of the copy. We think it's a super unique marketing element that definitely made us feel a lot more differentiated.

**BRYONY** Now you've got your logo, you've got your packaging, you've got your website in place. You are working on the product itself. Let's focus a little bit on the photography, which also has a very unique voice and a style. It's extremely Instagramable, it's colorful, it has a personality that I can't quite pinpoint. What was the inspiration and the end goal in developing all of this imagery?



**JORDAN** Kind of a good place that Victor and I kind of started on was wanting to be a little bit more of an authentic Austin brand as well, no shame to California or anything, but I think California has a very specific beachy vibe to it. And I think Austin, to some degree, has some of that, but it's a little bit different. And I think that's something that we really wanted to highlight in our brand. We're not just another California sparkling water brand that's popped up or something like that. We are true Austinites that have been here for a while now, and really wanted to highlight that and communicate that in the photography as well. And we actually enlisted the help of one of our really, really close friends at the same stage as us, Fresh Take Studios. They're a really, really cool POC photography studio that's just popped up down here in Austin, that we quickly jumped on to enlist the help of knocking out some of these photography assets.

And they've just very quickly blew it out of the park with some of these scopes that we were chatting with them. And like we said, we're really close friends with them. So it was a very easy, free flowing communication as far as communicating our vision. Also helps that they're down here in Austin, so lots of coffee and beer meetups and everything like that. They did a really good job of taking some of these obviously Mexican elements that we wanna hone in on, but also some of this more Austin vibe that's very bright, and colorful, and fresh, and has lots of fruit, but you know, Mexican elements as well. So I'd say Fresh Take was definitely someone that was super helpful in leading the photography side of this, 'cuz they've just done a really awesome job of communicating the packaging, and then the elements outside of just the cans themselves. We were really stoked to obviously be working with someone that we've been friends with for a super long time, and then also be able to get some really, really awesome assets that again are communicating exactly what our dream and vision has been for a few years now.

**BRYONY** It all comes together. All of this great support in terms of the branding, and you've got the photography, you're in a really sweet spot. You

said you're at one month kind of anniversary of actually being live and out in the market. But I wanna know for each of you, from the entrepreneurial side and even the designer side, at what point in the process of developing this whole project and the assets that go with it, did you know deep in your gut, this is it. We are actually going to make it. This is going to be amazing. And there is no turning back. This little nugget is feeding me for the next hurdle.

**JORDAN** I think, you know, for me personally, the moment that I really started to get super excited was right around the second iteration of designs. We had a few different directions that we could go in and we had kind of boiled down a few different elements from each different direction that we really, really liked. And we were slightly worried that it might have been a little too busy, but TWA sent us some of these can renderings where they blew it out of the park. I mean, it was like super, super cool to be able to encapsulate some of these illustrations on the front panel of the can, but some of these really cool sticker assets on the back that communicate different things as well. For me, the moment we saw these can renderings a little further down in the iteration process, I immediately was like, oh, these have some really, really cool potential to be something that's very unique in a very crowded cold case these days. And it was a cool moment for us, for lack of a better words, they looked very sexy. We were super excited <laugh>.

**VICTOR** They certainly did look very sexy, and it also felt authentic enough. And I'm always careful using the word authentic 'cause we don't like saying Bawi is like an authentic Mexican beverage. It's a modern take on a Mexican stapled drink. For me, it was great because it felt really communicatively strong. I had my background in direct consumer before. So I was used to seeing how fickle consumers are whenever they're clicking through a website. But to me, whenever we started seeing some of the later renders of Bawi, it was like, damn, I think consumer can get that really quickly and understand exactly what we're trying to do. It just delivered on all the communication elements, and all of the branding elements.

**DIEGO** Kinda like to jump on Jordan's <laugh> sort of like moment of this is coming along. It was one of the days that we went into the office and... when we present to clients, we usually for round one, you know, we have rough ideas and once that takes shape for round two, we kind of really got into the weeds of the typography, of the illustrations, and how can we really push this. But I showed up that day, laid out with a bunch of can explores, it was not until the last one where I kind of really wanted to like push that freshness, that typography, that I looked at it and I said, this is it. We nested this very nicely. And we were super excited about it. We knew Victor and Jordan were gonna love it. That was one of my moments where I really got super excited about where Bawi was going. It felt right, with the right aesthetic. It had the right attitude that I envisioned Bawi having.

**JOLENE** For me, I think it was when the website came together, that I really felt it was a perfect manifestation of all the elements that we were really excited about making this very joyful, fun, playful, nostalgic, celebratory brand. It felt like the website really accomplished all of those things together. Having those little playful moments like the jug filling up as you add to your cart, or the Spanglish element, it really felt like their website was our canvas to be able to really showcase this brand in a way that was very unique and different than the other websites we've been working on where, you know, really was a big permission to play that Victor and Jordan gave us.

**BRYONY** Diego and Jolene, what from this entire process with Bawi was a key thing that you are taking as a lesson, or inspiration, or best practice to implement into further projects within the Lab?

**DIEGO** I think a key takeaway touching a little bit on my previous answer is, if you see round one and round two from what we presented Jordan and Victor, they're slightly and bigger differences. And I think one key takeaway is push it and trust. You know, just having trust in the work. When we presented it to Victor and Jordan, they were super excited

about where round two was. So I think one key takeaway for everyone, and for myself, to take that idea, push it even more... past where it actually is.

**JOLENE** You know, I think this whole project, and process, and the reception that it's received has just further reiterated for us how important the work that we're doing with Labs is, because the brand foundation support, the kind of creative infusion advisement that our team's able to give these emerging brands, it immediately elevates their credibility and enhances their ability to get that immediate amplification that they wouldn't have gotten before. And so for us, Bawi is just kind of proving to us how critical brand is for fundraising, which Victor and Jordan have been able to get a lot more of because of this product being out. And again, just having that access, and that early stage support to be able to scale, I think is really vital.

**BRYONY** Vital, and crucial. Victor and Jordan final question. What part of the outcome and that which lies ahead, besides Horchata, is the most exciting aspect for each of you?

**JORDAN** First realizing obviously how difficult it is to get something like this off the ground was something that we've been mulling over for three and a half years that we've been working on this now. And honestly, we got pretty lucky. You know, we got queued up with a really awesome team like TWA. We obviously grinded, but it was still pretty damn tough to get off the ground. Something that's super exciting for me, and Victor also obviously, is having the opportunity to be a little bit more of a proponent for change, to increase these opportunities for grants and education, or even just like networking for young minority or women founded companies is gonna be something that's really cool and something that we've wanted to lay the groundwork for other people, 'cuz coming from the farmer's markets days, there's some really, really cool brands out there that just, either don't have the capital to get it off the ground or they're even being held up with something as simple as being able to print a lot code on their package. Being able

to identify some of these issues that we've encountered over the past few years is something that we're both very, very excited for to change the landscape hopefully later on, once we have some bigger elbow to throw around <laugh>.

**VICTOR** We saw how difficult it is to get stuff started and without a network and without access to resources, it's almost impossible. We're starting to get emails now about people asking us how to start their CPG company. It's really nice to have insight and be able to tell them exactly what they need to do, more or less, in order to get out of this cold start. On top of that, one thing that really excites me, my parents, my family members is just having more ready-to-drink representation within the retail space. One of the earliest things we saw was that within Mexican RTD beverage, you essentially have a polarized category. You have these authentic staple Mexican drinks, Jarritos on one end or you have mineral waters on the other, and pretty much nothing in between. So it's nice as a Latino consumer, who's looking for better-for-you options to be able to pick up something that reminds me of home, on the shelf, while still keeping my health in mind.

**BRYONY** It's been great to hear all of the details from the business side, the branding side, the decisions that have led you to set the groundwork for what is to come. In both instances, both Bawi and TWA Labs are authentic, but yet not stereotypical. You live that by doing the work that you're doing, by taking the approach that you are taking as business owners, and practicing what you preach. I am fascinated by the future that you both have ahead and what the next few years will bring for all of you. So I can't wait. And I wanna thank you all for being on The follow-Up today.

**JOLENE** Thank you.

**VICTOR** Thank you. It was a pleasure.

**JORDAN** Thank you so much for having us. It was really awesome talking with everybody.

**ARMIN** One interesting takeaway from this conversation was the founders' lack of a network in the CPG industry that would give them a leg up but they DID have a network that helped them get to the finish line. From Jordan's uncle who lent them some carbonating equipment, to Victor's brother who helped with the Spanglish copywriting, to the founders' friends at Fresh Take Studios that created an excellent lifestyle image library, they relied on their close acquaintances and it's these kind of collaborations that often lead to more authentic results than knowing the right people or having the right connections. Lastly, as an unpaid endorsement, we got a sampler pack in the mail and I have to say that these drinks are legit delicious. I can't wait for their take on horchata.

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