

EPISODE 054

HAZEL

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Travis Ladue, Studio Mast

AND

Aubrey Hubbell, Hazel

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 number 54 of The Follow-up.

This week we are following up on Hazel, which is aiming to redefine the incontinence category for women by offering a range of thoughtful and ground-breaking products like disposable, leak-proof briefs; mess-free roll on sticks that prevent rubbing and soothe rashes and irritation caused by leaks and sweat; and discreet and flushable wipes that make it easy to, as they say “hit refresh anytime, anywhere – down there”. Founded by Aubrey Hubbell and Steven Cruz, the two felt the category often made women feel ashamed and alienated and that they deserved products to boost their confidence and make them feel excellent at every age. They sum up the company quite nicely in their one-sentence description, “Luxe, down-there femme care for the ever-evolving woman”.

The project, designed by Denver, CO-based Mast was posted on Brand New on March 8, 2022. You can pull it up on your browser at bit.ly/bnpodcast054 that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast054, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Travis Ladue, Principal at Studio Mast; and Aubrey Hubbell, Co-Founder & Chief Design Officer of Hazel.

In this conversation we get to hear about how the two founders noticed a big hole in the incontinence category for women and how the lack of quality in these products resulted in a feeling of embarrassment to buy them, use them, and even store them in their own house. With a laser focus on creating an elevated product to meet the sophistication — and spending power — of the audience, Aubrey and Steve focused on the design, branding, and overall experience of the product BEFORE they even had a product. That's how much a design ethos is built into this brand. Reeling off of the co-founders excitement, Travis and his team at Mast had no shortage of inspiration, motivation, and drive to help them redefine a stagnant category. One without a clear leader, which led them to use top-tier brands in other categories used by the audience, like Chanel or Chloé, to shape Hazel into their equivalent and setting the standard for their category — which, we think, they achieved successfully and elegantly.

Now let's listen in as Armin follows up with Travis and Aubrey.

ARMIN VIT Hello everyone today, we're here to talk about Hazel and explore its wonderful visual world, which is a way I never imagined myself describing incontinence products as, because this category is visually bleak and clichéd. So here to tell us how they buckled that trend I am delighted to have Aubrey and Travis. Welcome to The Follow-Up.

TRAVIS LADUE Thank you.

AUBREY HUBBELL Thanks for having us.

ARMIN Aubrey, we're gonna start with you and it's a relatively long complicated question, so hopefully we can all get through it together. Very few new products coming to the market with an identity and tone of voice as well defined, and well designed as Hazel—as sometimes design can be an afterthought for many founders. I am assuming it has to do with

your design background, which I would also love to hear about before you answer the question, which is: how early in the process did you start thinking about the branding for your new venture? And how did that align with the development of the products themselves? So take your time and I can repeat any questions as needed because I know it's a lot.

AUBREY <laugh> Yeah, so it definitely was informed by my design background. I studied at the University of Colorado in Denver. So I happened to meet Travis in that program. I was in their digital design program and I studied in Copenhagen as well. And that really made me focus on that human-centered approach to design, and user research, and really informed everything I did after in terms of working for different companies and then eventually building Hazel. So I started out my career post university in New York, working for startups, primarily focused on women in specific life stages. Coming into it, that's really where my passion was just building brands for women. And the addition of a specific stage just makes it interesting. So I started out with a company called Cricket Circle, a baby registry with an editorial component and I was a digital designer there. And I followed the founder of that company, Rachel Blumenthal to her next venture, which was Rockets of Awesome, a kid's fashion and tech company—got to be a part of the founding team there. I bridged both the brand team and the product team. So, did everything you could see, touch, or feel from photo shoots to helping with the branding, even designing graphics on the kids' t-shirts, helping out the fashion design team. And then on the product side was doing user research and developing their digital product. A little bit of everything. But then I really wanted to lean more into the user research side of design and I moved on to Zola, a wedding tech company, and I got to join as their first product design hire. And I worked under the designer at the time, which was one of the co-founders Nobu Nakaguchi, and worked with him for a good year before we built out the team... and all those seeds had been planted.

And when I was at Zola, I was also working with an over 50 audience. Our wedding registry product was primarily used by women over 50. So they were the ones buying all the gifts for the couples. And so I started working with that audience a lot and optimizing those digital experiences for them and really loved it. So it was while I was at Zola that I got connected to my now co-founder, and he came to me with this initial proposition. He saw this white space in the personal care phase for people over 50, specifically women. And that's where we really jumped in. So when it came to design, that was immediately my thought was, anyone I know over 50, especially women, they're some of the coolest, most stylish women I know <laugh>. When you look at the products that are designed for them, they're outdated, they don't resonate with this audience, and a lot of times they fit into a cliché or a stereotype of who this woman is. From the beginning, design was at the forefront. We actually jumped in with testing different brand concepts before we even officially knew what the name would be. It was just so early, we didn't even know exactly how the product format would take form. We just started looking at what would resonate with this audience. And we knew after so much time of her being overlooked and underserved, we wanted to include her in the process, every step of the way. We tested into overly medical feeling, brand language, and visuals. And then we looked into more of a millennial, trendy feeling brand all the way through to what tested the best and what resonated the most was more of a beauty-inspired or fashion-forward look that was much more elevated. And ultimately that's what we moved forward with. Long answer to your long question <laugh>, that was the story of how the brand began.

ARMIN Well, that was a very satisfyingly chronological trajectory of working with the different stages of humans, and how you ended up with product ideas. Thank you for the really long answer. It paid all the points perfectly. So that brings us into Travis. When did you get involved?

TRAVIS We got involved pretty early, as Aubrey mentioned, we've known each other for better part of a decade, now. When Aubrey lived in Denver

and after her move, we continued to stay in touch. And when she and Steven had this idea, it was a great opportunity to work together. You know, we remained friends and we remained cheerleaders for each other in our various career stages. And I think at that point they approached us and said, Hey, we really wanna work with you on this. Here's the idea. And it was something that for us, we were really excited about. It was a big challenge, and it was something that was exciting to us. It was something that we could feel the excitement that Aubrey and Steven had for this product, and this company, and we said, we're in. Again, not as long of an answer, but I tend to be quite verbose myself, so I'll try to edit myself. We jumped in pretty early on before there was a name. And I think that that's a testament to Aubrey's background, knowing that having designers at those early meetings is incredibly important. And I think that through that, it built a, you know, not that we didn't already have a great relationship, but a really strong working relationship, from the get-go with Steven and Aubrey, both. We built that trust early on, and it's something that we compounded on through the project. We started this project December, 2019. So right before everything hit the fan. We held up in our rented apartment in Tribeca for a couple days and hammered out a ton of research on our end. We worked through a ton of things together. We spent the better part of those days there, which was great, cuz it was terrible weather and raining and we all just held up and worked. And that was really wonderful to do. Being that we started right before the pandemic we had an incredibly long runway to work together and test things. So not ideal, but I think in this scenario we definitely used the challenges, the pandemic, to our advantage. To say, okay, let's make sure everything is tested. I think we did more user testing than we normally would've because we had that time. And that's something that we had at our disposal from the get-go. Long answer.

ARMIN You just couldn't help yourself Travis, could you?

TRAVIS <laugh> I couldn't, I really couldn't. And I've only had one coffee today too, so this is impressive.

ARMIN <laugh> What's interesting to your point about having time to test during the pandemic, that's something that we've heard throughout the many episodes that we've recorded of the Follow-Up because it started because of the pandemic as well. The silver lining in this horrible thing was the gift of time, that all of a sudden things halted to a stop and that gave ample room to do things that normally would have been rushed or not on at all. Just to marry the two answers together, Aubrey did Travis come in during the testing of those different territories and brand approaches? Or after you had selected sort of the beauty approach?

AUBREY He came in after that, but we were in a state where we were still figuring out the product format. And I know you had asked about how that all came together in terms of how did the brand align with the product. And I think that's really where once we figured out, we knew that this was the direction in terms of it needed to be an elevated brand, it needed to be fashion-forward. Then we had to figure out how do we make a product that actually fits that too? Because we knew this category needed a better brand. That was obvious <laugh> the bar was really low, but what was exciting when we were working together, because we started so early is the brand and the product evolved together. So if you're curious and want a little bit of insight into the product side, that was really interesting because we knew we wanted this beautiful brand that was really elevated and sophisticated.

But when we looked at what was available in terms of products, they looked like baby diapers. When we talked to manufacturers, we had talked to all these women, we got this wish list of what could be better about the product. We went to these manufacturers and they showed us this giant white diaper. It was worse than the two premium legacy brands that are out there today. It was terrible. We knew we have this beautiful brand. You can't just put a beautiful brand on this product. It doesn't work. That's really what kick started our work on

the product. We figured out that the reason why they look like baby diapers is because the existing brands, they are leveraging their baby diaper categories. And that's why they look like baby diapers. So the supply chain manufacturing is all based on those products. We ended up having to develop our own materials. We found this material scientist that had led R&D at J&J for over 20 years, and he explained to us that the material science had developed and had really... they'd come out with incredible materials, but no matter what they did, if they put them into those machines, it would always come out like a baby diaper. So we were able to leverage the material science, and then develop our own manufacturing process to create a product that matched the brand. That was really exciting for us.

ARMIN And did you work with a industrial designer, fashion designer to do that?

AUBREY Yeah.

ARMIN Or how did that come about?

AUBREY Yeah, so we ended up marrying both the material science expertise with fashion designers. I had worked with a team of fashion designers in my past and brought them in. And so we really were able to marry the science with the design to develop products.

ARMIN Fascinating on many aspects. Some great about how you marry the two things together, some sad about how one category sort of drives the other, being so different and so far apart in generations and years that... yeah. Kind of baffling.

AUBREY Yeah.

ARMIN So, having established the product and the direction... first I should ask, and I should probably know the answer to this, Travis, did you also work on the name? Or was that a separate entity that named the product?

TRAVIS That came from Aubrey and Steven. We definitely had thoughts around that. They had really deep and wonderful user research that came into the naming of the product, something where we had a lot of

conversations we were privy to that. But with that research being done, it was something that—the ball was rolling when we got on board, but it’s something that we definitely were part of. Gave feedback, gave insight, gave thoughts about how different letter forms can come together in a wordmark, things like that. And really just went along with Aubrey’s incredible research. I think that as we got into the process, as you can probably tell Aubrey’s incredible conduit for all these folks coming together, whether it be fashion designers, or whether it be copywriters, or whether it be anybody. Aubrey, is the conduit here and brought in a ton of incredible people into the fold.

One of our key ethos at MAsT here is that, you know, “we stick to what we’re good at and we let really good people do what they do best”. When it came to naming, you know, that’s something we do internally a lot, but Aubrey already had that rolling and we said, Hey, let’s go, and let’s be part of the team in that sense. Allowing folks to do what they’re really great at is an ethos, but it’s also a testament to the work being done for Hazel. And I think Aubrey was the mastermind behind this. The minority report, I guess, of bringing everyone together to create an incredible brand from start to finish, from concept to even, you know, as she was mentioning the product itself. Getting into the weeds. There’s a lot of other people who would just be like, yeah, let’s just put a good brand on an off-the-shelf product. They were really dedicated towards creating a better product, creating a better quality of life. That’s a testament to Aubrey and Steven. You know, we were happy to be part of it and happy to be a part of the team.

ARMIN Now that I have clarity on the name, which is good because I was gonna frame my question if the direction that you had given Mast, Aubrey involved the naming. But now that I know that the name was in place, that the product was in place, that the direction was in place, but what kind of direction, what kind of inspiration, what kind of goals did you state for Mast for them to get started?

AUBREY We definitely shared that initial finding that a more elevated fashion-forward, beauty-inspired brand was something that resonated. But something I really wanted to make sure, and as Travis has said, was that they were up for user testing and research. That was something that was really important in terms of a goal in our partners, as well as through the design process. They were definitely up for that, and that stood out. None of us on the team are our customer, the demographic, and so we wanted to make sure that we validated the choices that we were making. And as designers weren't completely biasing the process, but really using our expertise. Those are some of the goals that we put forward. In terms of the look and feel, it was something that resonated that really made her feel like there wasn't something wrong with her, that she was just buying a great pair of underwear. That as a brand, we don't take ourselves too seriously, and that was something that we learned resonated with her. So we incorporated not only a beautiful design, but moments of surprise and delight—that was a mix of both design and copy. And really seeing that come together was one of my favorite parts of the brand. Yeah, those are some of the goals.

ARMIN And Travis from all of this, what stood out to you as something that you could build from to start developing this identity?

TRAVIS A lot of things, first and foremost, the excitement that Aubrey and Steven had from that very first call, it was palpable. You know, we've all been on those client phone calls where there's so many things that are between that phone call and starting work. You can feel your heart racing, and getting really excited, and you start designing things in your head. It was very much that situation. They had a very clear goal for the brand, and how they can make an immediate impact in the market. The excitement that they both had around it was something that was palpable. We could really latch on, and feed off of. Creating something that seemed like a no brainer. It seemed like something that should be there. It seemed like something that should be in the market. They just brought it to light, and what was missing in

the market. And we said, wow, this is an incredible idea. And I think just the positioning of it was completely unique. We've all seen that aisle. It's bleak. We spent a lot of time walking through those aisles at different stores, and looking at shelf placement, and looking at how we could create a moment of surprise and delight. And something that felt empowering for someone to pull off the shelf. Something that could go next to Chanel No.5 on that counter. Something that they wouldn't feel ashamed putting on the counter. And I think with that, it's something that they came to us with this idea and they said, look, we're gonna build this and we need a great brand that can follow it. And we said, yeah, let's go. We were about ready to start immediately after the phone call. It was one of those perfect scenarios where, I mean, I was biased cuz I've known Aubrey forever now, but even if I didn't, it would be a scenario where I would be that excited about it. Getting off of that call.

ARMIN Now it's clear that you both acknowledge and realize how much this category needed help. But was there any hesitation of creating something that could be so good that people would be like, no, this is not right. Like I'm used to the bleakness. I'm used to buying these crappy diapers, that that's what it is. I'm guessing that may have surfaced in research as you were testing both the brand and the product, but was there any point where you're like, maybe this is too nice of an approach for this category?

AUBREY From a user research side, that's what she was wanting. That's what she was telling us she wanted. Was a better experience, a more sophisticated experience, something that didn't scream incontinence brand <laugh>. That was really a femcare brand that was empowering that was elevated, was really a brand that she deserves. So on my side, no hesitation. I mean she told us, and that's why we asked <laugh>.

ARMIN That's why sometimes user research is so good. You know, you have an intuition, sometimes it's right, sometimes it's wrong, sometimes that's the only thing that you listen to if you are stubborn like me, on some

aspects. But I think it is great that you had that answer, that you knew that you could go full steam ahead, full in, on creating something that stood out. Did you feel like you were out the deep end of the pool, not that you didn't know what to do, but just like there was nothing to compare against or nothing to go towards?

TRAVIS Honestly, it was far better. As we all have alluded to the market is not impressive. We knew what the market looked like. We were looking past that, we were looking at the Chanel No.5, the Chloé, the things like this, these brands that a lot of these users were accustomed to. One thing that came up in the research is that the core demographic has more spending power than any other demo. When it came to something like this, why were these products making them feel ashamed? Why were these products not feeling high-end? Why were these products not feeling adequate? It's something where it was easy to say, look, we're gonna make something that is gonna stand out on the shelf because all of these products are pretty terrible. And then we said, okay, we'll set our sights on creating something that felt high-end and elegant, and made them feel empowered instead of making them feel ashamed.

You know, as Aubrey said, a lot of the user research she did was one-on-one conversations with core users. A lot of these women would take these products, immediately unwrap 'em and throw 'em under the sink. There's a shame around it. So we said, okay, how do we take that away? From a design standpoint? Aubrey and Steven were doing the hard work with actually redeveloping the product that could feel empowering. And we had to create a brand that felt like it. With a product that one-to-one against these other products in the the market visually, and from a performance standpoint, blew 'em out of the water. We said, we're gonna set our sights on a brand that's gonna stand out and blow these other brands out of the water.

ARMIN Aubrey, a question that may be hard to answer, but we were talking about hindsight before the podcast. So in hindsight, do you think a

brand like this could have existed 10 years ago? Five years ago? Or is there something about this specific moment in time and culture that makes it possible for this brand to exist?

AUBREY I think it's a really interesting question because these conversations that we started with with these women, even before we had those conversations, it was looking at social media and how in the last five to 10 years women have more publicly started talking about periods and sexual wellness, infertility, pregnancy, and postpartum. Those conversations weren't happening before, not in a public way. So that was something we looked at, but then all of a sudden call it postpartum, no one was talking about what women were experiencing over 40, over 50 in their sixties, in their seventies. As a woman that's something like you wanna know what's to come. If knowing it is so much better than being surprised. I mean, how many women have gone through postpartum and been like, why didn't my friends, doctor, why didn't you tell me about this? I should have known how terrible or challenging this was going to be! At least what to expect.

In the same way the experiences women are having, you know, call it 10, 15 years postpartum through perimenopause, menopause and post. That was something that started those initial conversations. Understanding what is she going through at this stage of life? And what are the brands that are supporting her? What do those look like? And that's really where, the kind of the conversation started. To Travis' point we found that they had the shelf on the wall with all the products they love, their Chanel, their Chloé, but then they were hiding all of these other products behind the cleaning supplies. Just like that. That's how the conversations are happening. We looked at that as an opportunity. If younger women are talking about their experiences, we should continue the conversation. And even in the last two years, three years, as we've been building Hazel, we've started to see women in their fifties, sixties, seventies, starting to talk about their experiences. But it was very little when we first started, and it's only started to build. And Hazel has become that catalyst to encourage

conversations, especially around the experiences that no one was talking about. Maybe they were talking about hot flashes, but they were definitely not talking about leaks.

ARMIN Yeah. So one thing is to be part of the conversation, the other one is to start the conversation—

AUBREY Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

ARMIN —as you’ve been able to do, so that’s pretty great. Now, Travis, with a world sort of ready for a brand like this, what was the first phase of engagement between Mast and Hazel? Passed the research part, which you talked about, past the getting held up in the Tribeca apartments. Once we have all the necessary information, all the ammunition that you could get, what did you start to do on your end with your team?

TRAVIS That was really the first step, that strategy, working with them. They had a lot that we dove into. And I think that a lot of times the strategy behind founding a company, creating a product is a little bit different than exact design strategy. So what we did first was really dive into that as a team. And then by the time we were meeting with Aubrey and Steven, we had gotten through a lot of that. You know, proverbial dropped the binder of research on us before we even met.

AUBREY It was basically a giant binder <laugh>.

TRAVIS And it was wonderful. Yeah, just a Dropbox link, everything incredibly organized—I will admit. That led further emotional research, and emotional conversations about what this brand needed to feel like. I think as most designers do, we are firm believers that if you miss that emotion behind the brand, you’ll miss the visuals. It needs to have that strong emotional resonance. That’s where we started. You know, after that, we held up in that Tribeca apartment and presented that first round of emotional and visual positioning. Knowing that it was going to be, you know, we were gonna rip it apart and put it back together. And that was the idea. Is saying, we took all of the research that you gave us, here’s our interpretation of that. Knowing that

Aubrey is a designer herself with the track record to prove it. We said, look, let's have a session. Let's work together to get this to a place that really works. And after that trip, we went head first in the pandemic with a really solid, emotional and visual positioning for Hazel. That was clarified through a lot of the work that we began to do on the identity side.

ARMIN Sorry to interrupt, so far this is all verbal. You haven't shown any visual approaches, not even mood boards, nothing?

TRAVIS Part of that was looking at mood board imagery.

ARMIN Okay.

TRAVIS Part of that emotional positioning was taking that and saying, here's how this emotion is gonna translate visually. We were extremely granular in that process to figure out what would be resonating, color, type, how certain things can really resonate with that user. So by the time we got outta that, we had a clear understanding of that identity from a visual standpoint, but also most importantly, that emotional standpoint. So there was mood board in the sense that yeah, we were looking at images to help clarify that vision.

ARMIN And were there options? Or was it just, this is how we interpret this, and this is how we would like to move forward? Obviously with back and forth, but did you provide different variations of themes and approaches?

TRAVIS We looked at different variations and we got granular by looking at the symbol directions, wordmarks, figuring out how we could take all this specific pieces and start to speak into those from an emotional standpoint. And then look at those in more of the context of the brand, looked at packaging, looked at digital, looked at a bunch of different imagery to start to clarify that vision.

ARMIN And Aubrey, at this point, did you feel like you were in good hands?

AUBREY I knew I was in good hands to start, but yeah, I continued to feel that way. I remember seeing all of those different variations and immediately gravitating toward one. Took some convincing and internally, and we tested into them as well. In that first round I remember seeing a version of what we ended up with, it completely hit the mark. That's what I felt, at the very beginning.

ARMIN And what were some of the key words, or the key idea at that point that got your attention?

AUBREY I'll focus on the wordmark specifically. The one that we ended up going with, and that was initially proposed. As a designer, typography is one of my favorite things—I can completely nerd on typography all day. That was something I really focused on. And that first iteration, it was completely custom. It was so nuanced, and the movement was so unique, it was unlike any wordmark I'd ever seen. There was a hint of nostalgia, which I really appreciated for kind of the way we could take the brand. You really felt that warmth that we wanted Hazel to have. We wanted Hazel to be her best friend in the know. We wanted her to be friendly, sophisticated, but the person you could ask anything and has that level of humor. And I feel like our wordmark specifically encompassed all of that. And that was really, really exciting from the beginning. And then it only got better from there. And I know Travis is the best sport! Working with a designer has got to be challenging <laugh> as a client. But we worked together so closely to develop that initial symbol, that final symbol. And I was so, so, so happy with where that ended up too. And we get compliments on it all the time.

ARMIN Yeah. And with good reason. So with that said, Travis, how did you arrive there? What was the first round of design explorations like? What did you leave on the cutting room floor? You know, how many options did you present? All that good stuff.

TRAVIS We originally presented three concepts. Those were tweaked, ideated. I think there was one specifically that Aubrey and Steven were like, this is not it. And that made the decision easier. But I think with that, we

presented three original concepts. We tweaked and ideated until we had a winner. Knowing that we were going into this with the lens of this is gonna be a collaboration, that's how we look at all of our brand presentations. We don't say, Hey, this is a hundred percent it. It's always that conversation, and that collaboration to get better work at the end. Being a designer herself, Aubrey was a great partner along the process. She brought in a ton of insight, which was fantastic on our end. And we kept ideating. I think we probably looked at 25 versions of the wordmark until we got there. It was natural knowing that all that research and all that emotion we had going forward, it was really exciting.

The symbol itself being that it is that abstracted "H", the idea is that people wanna feel comfortable in their own skin. Showing a mark that feels more human in nature, showcases that individual power and spreads that idea of self-love, and power, and beauty, and strength throughout. It was a natural fit with the wordmark. At first, you're like, it's a natural fit? But it worked really well. You know, we have those cuts that match the unique serifs in the wordmark itself. We had the symbol first, and then we led that into the wordmark, knowing that they were carrying two very different emotionalities, visually. We wanted to pair them in a way that really made sense. So the curves in the symbol and the cuts, you know, the serifs and then the curves, the letter forms. Aubrey alluded to, it feels like there's a little bit of a nostalgia to it, but it's through the lens of, you know, more modern type design. So we have the best of both worlds there. That's a testament to our lead designer here Jake, he created a extremely wonderful wordmark to be that face of Hazel. And with that, it has a little bit of something for everybody. It has modernity, it has nostalgia. And it does kind of play into that emotionality that every woman is unique. You know, it's something that is exciting to us. Every time I look, you know, I get excited and I think of the conversations we had and the collaboration get to that point. Again, we imbued the ethos in every aspect of the brand, and it all comes from that strategy. And it comes from that first phone call of Aubrey and Steven saying, here's what we wanna do. Here's how we're gonna do it. Here's what we're

gonna change in the market. And that emotionality comes through in almost every aspect of the brand.

ARMIN With 25 iterations, Aubrey you were not kidding <laugh> that Travis was a saint to work with, but no, that's the game we're in. Since you tested so much, do you test the logo as well?

AUBREY Definitely <laugh>.

ARMIN And how did it perform? Given that it is so unexpected? It is s... not just for that category, just in general as a logo, it really is unique. Like it could be for so many things yet, no one has done it.

AUBREY Mm-hmm <affirmative>. So whenever we do testing, if it's very generic terms, we will show it, we would send it to women one-on-one and then talk to them about it after. You know, send it to them directly and then talk to them. We also would run surveys with thousands of women, or hundreds of women to validate what we were hearing in those one-on-ones. So we did both, we tested it solo, we tested it against competitor brands to see how that ended up. It ended up performing well, so that's what we moved forward with. I think it's come together very, very well. And most importantly, it stands out, especially with competitor brands. You know, we keep saying that this aisle, we call it the sea of pink, and purple, and green <laugh>. it's just, all the jewel tones are kind of, I don't even know how to describe their colors <laugh> but I think we wanted to just do something that was completely different from them.

ARMIN So with a symbol and a workmark in place, Travis, how did you start developing the rest of the identity? Color palette? The rest of the typefaces? Illustrations, photography? Was that done while the logo was getting refined? After? How did that work?

TRAVIS So when we presented, we presented a look of proof of concept. A lot of that has changed, but it gave us an idea of where we wanted to go with things. With that we had a lot of insight in packaging. We had a lot of insight to make those correct decisions. We wanted everything to

feel flexible throughout the brand, and make sure that every element had its purpose and wasn't superfluous. With that, we had the idea of packaging, but we knew that we wanted to balance this idea of something that was really refined was something that was expressive. So we started by building out an expressive pattern. We had an idea from a expressive pattern from one of the other directions that we presented. We started using the thought process and the ethos of the symbols construction to build a visual language that connected to it, and created that pattern. With the packaging itself, we started with those really extremely emotive concepts to ensure we could really grasp what we were after. After dialing in that emotion, we worked Aubrey and the team to ensure that we included all the pertinent information, iconography, illustrations, to help tell that story. We got to sneak a lot of things in there—there's even an icon of Aubrey's dog Gatsby hidden in our custom set of icons—things like that, that, you know, we knew there was going to be a lot more added on. So we started very loose with those concepts for packaging, knowing that things would change. I'll be the first to say that this was a team effort. We could not have done this alone. Lisa Tegtmeier created an incredible set of illustrations to further that feeling of the brand. We had Abby Muir do an incredible website to put a digital face to the brand itself, and take apart the brand and put it back together in a way that felt really fitting for the website.

We had Tracy and and Chloe take amazing photos as well. We had a ton of photographers, and Aubrey had a great list, and we worked with a lot of people to bring things together. That's a testament to the true team effort. You know, with our team, with Jake and Amanda here, and then with Aubrey and Steven and the rest of the Hazel team, it was a true team effort. I'm sure as a lot of designers would wish for, we were like, Hey, let's include almost nothing on the packaging, but we knew that wasn't going to be feasible. So we said, okay, how can we create a balance of a really high-end product, high-end feel with a lot of this pertinent information. Or some information that we absolutely have to have on there from a legal standpoint. That's why we started

really loose. We didn't wanna get locked into a design that we were gonna have to mourn the loss of once we added all these things onto it. Utilizing Aubrey and team to make sure that we could have that flexibility within the brand and create fun things like that icon set that I think has 70 icons in it now, and build upon that with icons, and patterns, and illustrations from Lisa. Everything kind of came together.

ARMIN Now I know that I have to go look for Gatsby somewhere in the website or in the case study <laugh>. Aubrey with all of this great stuff to work with, and with the idea that you wanted to create a high-end brand, were there any challenges in the actual implementation, once you had to actually produce packaging, produce advertising, social media, all that stuff, what was it like to go from zero to a hundred using this new identity?

AUBREY It's interesting because it started with such an amazing base that whenever we would bring on new partners, social media, whatever it might be, everyone was just so excited to jump in <laugh>. This is so robust, you have so much to work with. I would say in terms of a challenge, there hasn't really been much to date. With my design background, I just see unlimited possibilities with what we created. We have an incredible color palette, primary and secondary icons, you know, so many icons! And a pattern that is so flexible, a color palette that's so flexible, brand language that is amazing to just use across so many different platforms. So, in terms of challenges, we're still a new brand, I'm sure there will be more. The only one that comes to mind—and Travis you touched on—it was like the legal side, you know, with our product specifically, it's a Class 1 Medical Device, so you're required to have specific things on the packaging, in a specific type size. Which as a designer, it was really just annoying <laugh> to work with. That was, I don't know if we could, it was challenging. It was definitely challenging, but probably more annoying than challenging <laugh>.

TRAVIS There were so many conversations about the legality and looking at, okay, what percentage of the base is used for information and the type size based on that percentage; everyone was a good sport. We knew

that we weren't gonna have something that was a completely sparse package. So we said, okay, how do we make it work? Throughout the entire process, the idea of collaboration has been there. No one has been dogmatic in how we've gone about things. We just wanted to create something that was right for Aubrey and Steven, and right for the product, and right for the market. We have a little saying internally that, you know, "nothings sacred till it's paid for". It makes you realize that at the end of the day, once the client is happy, once you're happy, you get sign-off, and then it can become something that is sacred. But all of those iterations let us here. And I think with that, it was that testament to the collaboration. It was wonderful to work on. I would work on a hundred projects with Aubrey and Steven.

ARMIN Mm-hmm. That is a wonderful endorsement from designer to client, which doesn't always happen. Aubrey, you mentioned about how partners and vendors were excited to work on this and help develop it. What has the reaction been like in the market from consumers, from distributors, social media, now that it's out in the world?

AUBREY From everyone it's been very positive. You know, after years of working on this in a silo, just showing it to people we knew, or testing it with women online, or whatever... to actually have it in the real world has been amazing. And we just launched in January, so it still feels very new. It's been incredible! A week after launch, we were published in Vogue and that was a highlight I know, for all of us. Anyone who was a part of it, just having them be at the forefront of the conversation that we're starting. What's been the most exciting has been about 35% of our customers have never purchased incontinence products before. They were completely avoiding the aisle. That's a huge testament to everything coming together. We knew we would be serving women that used existing product today, but what's been really, really exciting is hearing from women that had stopped working out. They had stopped running. They couldn't jump on the trampoline with their kids. They were constantly crossing their legs when they were giggling with their girlfriends. And now they're willing to wear a product to

support their needs because it's not completely requiring them to change their lifestyle. That's been one of the most incredible responses that we've received. Huge support from our investors and from community as well. But that, that's definitely one of the highlights.

ARMIN That's an amazing data insight that... well done product with good design can have such an impact, on such a big part of the market that many other companies and products are missing on just because they wanna save money on production and design. So that is score one for design, and branding, and good thinking about how to challenge a category. Now, Travis, you've talked a lot about how great it's been to work with Aubrey and all that stuff, but is there anything else—which is great <laugh>—was there something else about this project that was exciting, or satisfying, beyond the great group of people?

TRAVIS I thought you were gonna say now, what was the bad stuff?

ARMIN We can get into that too, if there's any!

TRAVIS <laugh> There was not. I think the most exciting thing... there's a duality to it, right? As designers, we always wanna see tangible products. We always wanna feel it. We always wanna see something we've made. We always wanna show it to our mom, no matter how old I get, my mom is always gonna be my biggest cheerleader, and how I got into design—she's always gassing me up in that sense. Seeing the product live, and seeing it out in the world, and seeing the impact it's having is the most exciting part of it. Seeing these products empower people in a way that they've felt forgotten about, as Aubrey mentioned, you know, jumping on a trampoline with your kids, something that most people take for granted. I think that empowering component of it, and seeing the reviews, there's a whole Slack channel we have of the reviews. And I think with that, it's something that's really wonderful. And it's why we do these things. Seeing that impact we can make through design on someone's life for the better, is truly exciting and wonderful.

ARMIN Well said. Aubrey, last question. Looking forward for the next three-five-years, what is the most exciting aspect of having this identity in place, moving forward?

AUBREY This identity connected to the product is making women feel better about themselves. We were kind of repeating the same thing and that's the impact we're making. So it's starting a conversation around women's health that was rarely discussed before. One of our brand phrases is "By embracing everything that comes with being a woman we're making aging aspirational". And that's something that I have completely seen. I mean, that's across generations, and between men and women, but just having these conversations has allowed us to see that aging isn't something to look down on, or to not look forward to, but it's actually something to aspire, to do, to be. That's the power of the identity that we've created. It's so much more than a product or a service. It's really creating this conversation and empowering women.

ARMIN This has been wonderful to hear. And it's amazing again, how much design as a practice of choosing type and choosing colors, but as well as they sign thinking and going through the motions of how do we break through, how do we create something that people want and embrace? So it's been great to hear about how you went through all that, how you were able to break into a category that just seemed unbreakable, and that if you haven't, it would have been fine for the next 20 years. No one would have complained, but you've made a positive impact, that for this category, there's a line in the sand from before Hazel and after Hael, I like to throw a lot of praise on our guests because we always invite the projects that really turned out good. I do think there's something really nice about this project, everything from the name, to the wordmark, to the icon, that don't belong together at all, by the way, Travis, but you somehow managed to make them work and they couldn't work without each other. They are a fantastic one-two punch, and I'm gonna stop rambling and just say, thank you for joining me on The Follow-Up today to talk about Hazel.

TRAVIS Thank you so much for having us.

AUBREY Thank you. This was great.

BRYONY From the conversation it was clear this was a team effort and Studio Mast's ethos to, quote, "Stick to what we are good at and we let really good people do what they do best", end quote, is a great one to live and work by but, despite Travis' modesty, it should be noted that Mast is very good at what they do. Not just design-wise and based on the final identity but also as a partner who listened to the research, understood the assignment, and worked hand in hand with the founders and their other experts to build a great brand where non existed. A brand that is now forging an emotional connection with its audience as it empowers women to age with grace through a product that improves on anything previously available in a category that simply didn't care about them.

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