

EPIISODE 080

H&H BAGELS

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Danny Miller and Matthew Smith, High Tide

AND

Jesse Stein, H&H Bagels

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 number 80 of The Follow-up.

This week we are following up on H&H Bagels that, for over 50 years, has been using their original recipe and the same artisanal water bagel method to make their product along with the highest quality, all-natural ingredients sourced from around the world. Founded in New York City in 1972, their legendary bagels and iconic brand have established its own legacy in popular culture, showing up in major hits like Seinfeld and Sex and the City. In addition to bagels, they are known for their high-quality sandwich offerings including house-made spread and salad sandwiches, fresh griddled egg sandwiches, and smoked salmon sandwiches. H&H Bagels operates five retail locations in New York City, with plans to franchise its business and open 25 more stores across the United States in the coming years.

The project, designed by Brooklyn, NY-based High Tide was posted on Brand New on March 6, 2024. You can pull it up on your browser at bit.ly/bnpodcast080 that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast080, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Danny Miller, Co-founder and Creative Director of High Tide; Matthew Smith, Senior Designer at High Tide; and Jesse Stein, Director of Marketing at H&H Bagels.

In this conversation we hear about the lightning-fast design development that managed to evolve a clichéd logo into an upscale but approachable and timeless new mark in the span of three months. We get a glimpse into the challenge of selecting the right brand color as not just one to fulfill a creative desire but one that can be realistically reproduced on budget across signage, uniforms, paper goods, and digital applications. We also learn about a key consideration for this New York-based brand, which is to convey New York quality NOT New York style, so no Empire States, no Statues of Liberty, no yellow taxicabs, and certainly none of that “Hey, I’m walking here” attitude. Instead they had to figure out how could H&H do for bagels what Sweetgreen and Shake Shack did for salads and burgers respectively: make people equate one with the other.

Now, let’s listen in as Bryony follows up with Danny, Matthew, and Jesse.

BRYONY GOMEZ-PALACIO Few things are as New York to the local and the visitor alike as a bagel—from the shape, to the spreads, the fillings and the overall experience—this is something that many can envision and salivate over. Today we’re chatting all things H&H Bagels, who now in its second half century in business has a few ideas about what comes next. Aside from a rebrand.

Jesse, Danny, and Matthew, welcome to The Follow-Up.

JESSE STEIN Thank you.

MATTHEW SMITH Thanks for having us.

BRYONY Let’s go ahead and do a round of introductions so that our audience can get a sense of who’s who, and who you’re representing.

JESSE My name's Jesse Stein. I'm the Director of Marketing at H&H Bagels.

DANNY MILLER I'm Danny Miller and I'm the Co-Founder and Creative Director at Hide Tide.

MATTHEW And I'm Matthew Smith, Senior Designer at Hide Tide.

BRYONY Wonderful. Jesse, if it's not too big of an ask to summarize about 50 years of H&H Bagels, let's go ahead and do that. Especially I want to cover how it got started and what are some key milestones or happenings between when it started to today, that led to the rebrand.

JESSE Yeah, absolutely. Obviously, it's a very long history. Books have been actually written about it, but I will condense it as best I can here. H&H Bagels opened in 1972 in New York City, a little over 50 years ago, and we became wildly popular in the eighties and nineties. Known for our hot, fresh, ready to order bagels. Back then, it was no sandwiches. It was just, you come in, you get a paper bag. There were lines around the corner. All hot bagels all coming out. That earned us cameos in shows like Seinfeld, Sex in the City, The Office, and a bunch more. So really explosive awareness during that period.

In 2014, our CEO Jay Rushin bought H&H out of bankruptcy. What he did when he came in was he was really, really insistent to keep everything that was working, the recipe, the processes, and especially the people. A lot of our staff has actually been here at H&H for over 25 years, and then he made major improvements to other areas that sort of led to that bankruptcy. So he put in really great financial systems and accounting systems. He streamlined the menu and really prioritized the customer experience.

During that time, we started exploration on how to grow H&H outside of New York City without sacrificing on quality. So they developed what we call internally, the H&H 3.0 store model. So this has an updated, really, really sleek contemporary interior. It's got a really, really nice customer flow. At the same time, they started putting together our franchise program. We have our first franchises opening

this year. The first one's going to be in Boca Raton, Florida, this spring; and then we have 50 more agreements for franchises to follow. Very, very quick growth, very fast moving across the country. Obviously we're not opening all 50 this year, but you're going to see us popping up in places like Santa Monica, Chicago, Boston, DC, Texas, and a lot more.

BRYONY With all of this growth and all of this happening, what led you to choose a redesign right now versus three years ago? Where in this process does the rebrand fall, and why?

JESSE This actually started as a brand extension exercise. I came over from Apple about a year ago, and we only had a logo, a font, and a color. Everything we were using was off the shelf, so we had Gotham Rounded Bold for our logo and for our font. It was a very, very standard circular logo that you see on pretty much every bagel shop across the entire United States. As I started to develop more elevated concepts for the brand, I very quickly realized that we did not have all the ingredients we needed to push this out and make it a nationwide company. I put together a few case studies, and Jay and I aligned on before making any extensions of the brand, we first needed to build a really, really solid foundation. And it was also really important to set expectations for our customers because we're entering new markets and historically we were contemporaries with New York City bagel shops, but as we grow nationwide, we're entering a phase where we're actually contemporaries with premium QSR restaurants like Sweetgreen and Shake Shack, and we wanted to make sure that we were standing out in that specific category.

As far as timing is concerned, it absolutely had to be now because it's much better to refresh with three locations rather than 10, or 20, or 50 locations, that's going to take a lot of the financial burden off of our franchisees. We didn't want to be in a position where franchisees were opening with one brand and then six months later or a year later needing to pay to redo all of their signage, and menus, and potentially interiors, packaging... It's a pretty big financial lift and we would not

want to give that experience to any of our franchisees. And it also allows us to enter these new markets with just the strongest presence possible.

BRYONY Danny, two questions: How did Hide Tide get involved in this particular project? and I'm guessing the timeline was pretty tight, so it'd be great to hear what that timeline was.

DANNY Jesse reached out via email and the email was something like rebrand for H&H Bagels. Immediately massively exciting for me. I was born and raised in New York City, so there was a personal attachment to the brand having grown up, and it was always regarded as one of the best bagels in the city. Getting that email brought back memories, and I have a very clear memory of what H&H was like in the nineties, giving more color to what Jesse was mentioning. If you step in, it was really just this very bare bones experience, but you could tell it was all about the bagels, and I remember there was sawdust on the floor when I first came in and I was very perplexed, why is there sawdust on the floor? And it wasn't until I asked my friend Will, who also grew up in the city about it, and at the time H&H was open 24/7, 365 days of a year, they never shut. They were just constantly cranking out these bagels. And then people would come in with muddy boots and snow when it was raining. They would use the sawdust to sort of so that stuff up and then they would sweep it out at the end of the day. You could tell that they were just hyper-focused on the bagels and just creating, there were no bells and whistles. To me, it resonated and was proof of just the quality, and intentionality, and the craft. To me, it was sort of on the same level as a Katz's or Joe's Pizza, this iconic New York institution. So to be able to be a part of that and helping preserve and extend the legacy was just a very exciting opportunity for me and Hide Tide.

MATTHEW Building off of Jesse and Danny here. As we started to sit down and talk with Jesse and Jay and learning more about this expansion of H&H, it became very clear that these things were happening fairly quickly and we wanted to do this with a lot of care and intentionality. To speak more directly on the timelines, we were trying to operate fairly quickly

with it. We focused primarily on the visual identity upfront, but then we quickly were able to roll into more art direction aspects to fill out the brand, to compliment it with photography and then even straight into the web portion of the project where it actually started to go live. We developed a pretty good cadence in the beginning of the project so that we weren't overly rushed and we could really put in the time, and care, and research to make this a memorable project.

BRYONY So how long did it take from that initial email to handing over the assets and launching?

DANNY That's a good question.

BRYONY Give or take.

DANNY Maybe like three months for the visual identity portion.

JESSE Yeah, it was very quick. We reached out over the summer, I think by October we had finished up the visual ID and then we moved into production on photography, paper goods, the website. I mean this team is absolutely legendary. Just so you know, they put the entire website design and dev together in a six-week period, so they did three weeks of web design, three weeks of web dev, and it looks stunning.

BRYONY Danny, just to have an understanding of the Hide Tide team, if you don't mind sharing who was involved and what roles you were including within that team.

DANNY On the strategy side, we had Mariah Wright as the Principal Lead Strategist on the project with Anna Hughes supporting her throughout, and on the design team front, we had Matthew Smith as the Principal Lead Designer, and Emma Kane supporting on the design front and also playing a really pivotal part in the art direction and photography execution.

BRYONY Sounds like a solid team. Jesse, who was involved on your end in terms of making decisions and handling the day-to-day?

JESSE We're actually a very nimble team over it, H&H, so for this exercise it was just myself and Jay Rushin our CEO.

BRYONY Direct access to everybody. [Yeah] That sounds like a good plan. Matthew, you mentioned there were some conversations happening in the beginning. What was the understanding out of those initial conversations as things that needed to remain, things that needed to change, things that were untouchable... what were those parameters that eventually led to developing the visual identity?

MATTHEW I'll touch on these, but Jesse and Danny feel free to jump in and add more clarity too because in the very beginning of this project, one, another benefit of all of this, of course we're both operating out of New York, but just to make this even easier, H&H's office was just a couple blocks up the road, so our very first meeting we got to just walk on up, meet Jesse and Jay in the office and really sit down and just talk big picture, what are our ways in on this project and get a lay of the land in terms of exactly as you were asking, what are the untouchables, what are the wants and needs? We did a little bit of our own research upfront to understand what is the current equity of the brand, or what is the landscape of the industry at large?

We really spent that initial meeting running through a couple of their initial decks that Jesse had put together, laying out what is H&H and where is it going. As well as in some documents that our own team put together, in particular our strategist Anna, and then another previous employee of ours, Mariah, who did a little bit of initial strategy work upfront too, to figure out, yeah, what are some of these territories that H&H might want to lean into. We got a good understanding of they're moving into this premium QSR space. They're operating these higher end retail spaces. And so what is a brand that needs to exist in those areas? And in that first conversation, I think we got a pretty good foundation in terms of the brand elements.

They had one font, that one font was used in the logo. They kind of had this other secondary font that wasn't really used, but sometimes used, and there's a lot of inconsistencies with the logo and how it was used in general. So some of the key takeaways from it were: they needed a logo that was very flexible—they're doing a lot of collaborations, it's showing up in a lot of different spaces. I think it's sometimes easy to overlook how a logo is used for an actual restaurant. Signage has its own requirements versus native digital brand, so we need to be very flexible, kind of establish that upfront. And the other big part of this project was the color. We got get a sense of how do we feel about the current H&H navy that they had, and from our understanding, they weren't overly married to it, they knew that there was room for improvement. I know Jay also had some reservations against how it printed and showed up differently across different vendors, and so we definitely saw that as an opportunity of something that we can improve upon as we went forward.

DANNY To touch on some of that earlier brand immersion phase, one thing that was really helpful early on was to actually visit the locations. So Jesse was nice enough to host us at both the Upper West side and the Upper East side locations, and what was great about seeing both of those was one had more of the older historical branding and the newer one was really more in line with the future of what H&H is meant to look like. So it had the more current refreshed layout and look and feel that we were then going to design into. It was really just a great experience. We came in super early and got to experience and see the process of the bagels being made in the back of the house, which was just really exciting and talking to some of the workers that have worked there for decades, seeing how they boiled the bagels in these huge cauldrons, pull 'em out, throw 'em onto these wooden slats, seeing that whole process was really helpful for the whole team.

And then also looking around the space, allowing us to think and see how the branding shows up currently in terms of signage and the menu board. Really also just allow us to audit it and see where their

areas for improvement, how signage and graphics can play a better role in a more considered way as we dive into this rebrand. And then to touch on... strategy is really important part of our process, I think “great strategy leads to great design” is like a philosophy that we hold. So Mariah and Anna who Matthew mentioned, they were the principal strategists on the project. They really did their research to understand the business as well as its commercial ambitions and goals. They did stakeholder interviews with Jesse and Jay and that really helped us clarify the audience, like getting an understanding of who we’re communicating and speaking to, as well as the competitor landscape.

Two really great insights that came out of those conversations with Jesse and Jay that really helped inform the creative brief for the design team. It was one quote, and I believe it was Jay Jesse, correct me if I’m wrong, he mentioned “you go to Sweetgreen to get a salad, you go to Shake Shack to get a burger, we want you to go to H&H to get a New York City bagel”. And that was really great insight and really allowed us to sort of frame their business ambitions and their goal to allow anyone across the nation to experience a bagel, and for H&H to be that go-to New York City bagel. The other insight that was really helpful was another quote around “we’re about New York quality, not New York style”. That was really important for the team to understand that the thing about H&H that makes it so special is the tried and true recipe that was used to create these bagels that hasn’t changed for the past 50 years, and the strength in that and the equity in that, but not playing into the New York tropes, the Statue of Liberty or anything that’s too on the nose New York and really avoiding that and how can we not get caught up in that and really create something that visually is faithful to the essence of what makes H&H so special.

JESSE Essentially, bagel stores, historically, they do a little too much. You can almost get anything at a bagel store, a lot of places in the city. You could go there for bagels, you could get salads there, you can get smoothies there, some of them do burgers, some of them do pancakes and waffle s. The menus get kind of out of control. Some of them even

go so far as to sell things you would find at CVS like paper towel, toilet paper and dish soap, that kind of stuff. What Jay really focused on with the evolution of the brand is streamlining all of that and laser-focusing onto what we are the best at. And so the way that a customer thinks when I want a salad, I'm going to go to the best salad spot. I'm going to go to Sweetgreen. When I want a burger, I'm going to go to Shake Shack. When I want a great bagel, I'm going to go to H&H and not thinking I'm going to go to be and h just for anything. So really just focusing on what you're best at and not trying to fill in everything else that's involved. Sorry, Danny, what was the second piece that you were talking about there?

DANNY We're about "New York quality, not New York style".

JESSE Really what we want to bring from New York to the rest of the country and eventually the world is the New York bagel, but we do want to be a part of these local communities around the United States. It's not like you're going to walk in and you're going to feel like you stepped into New York and there's going to be subway imagery and Empire State Building—Danny mentioned the Statue of Liberty. We want it to feel like it's a part of the environment, so if we were to go to someplace like Miami and end up in Wynwood, we would kind of play into the street art culture there and maybe there'd be a mural involved. When we go to Fulton Market that's in Chicago, we really want to feel organically a part of that ecosystem and not just feel like you've taken a space out of New York and imposed it into any of these other communities.

BRYONY As you gathered all of this information and you started working in the office, let's talk about that first round presentation, and we don't need to go into all of the details. I want to focus more on what actually came out of that meeting, but I'm curious to know, given the constraints and the ambition, if you presented multiple territories or just the single evolution, what was that presentation like? And how did you put it together?

MATTHEW In this first presentation for the H&H visual identity, we went in with three distinct concepts. We want it to be very cognizant of the current brand. It's a scary step to do a rebrand for like anyone, you have a lot of equity, and so we wanted to tread carefully, but we also want to make something that's long lasting, and so we went in with three concepts and we treated them as a bit of a spectrum. We wanted to show them what's a direction that's maybe a natural evolution of where you're currently at. How can you push that a little bit further? Another direction that goes a step further, removes a little bit of the baggage, pushes the concept a little bit. And then something that almost goes a little bit to an extreme, gets them out of their comfort zone, and also... one, shows them what that world could be, that was us kind of leaning more into this premium proposition and also gives a sounding board for the other concepts that we were working on.

BRYONY Jesse, what was the take on these three concepts, and what feedback did you provide?

JESSE We actually loved everything right out of the gate, which I know rarely happens. Like Matt was saying, Hide Tide showed us three directions. One was this timeless luxe version. The other was a bit more playful, and then the one that we eventually chose was the perfect balance of everything we were looking for. Each of them had really, really special elements and we were able to incorporate a lot of what we loved from the directions that we didn't move forward with into the actual final direction itself, which is always really nice. You don't feel like you have to leave something great behind because you can take it with you, and then the feedback was really minimal. I mean, we increased the weight of the word mark, just a hair like we spoke about a bit earlier. It did take us a few rounds to nail down the final color.

We were balancing what looks best objectively versus what is achievable in physical spaces, knowing that the navy color of our uniforms is going to have to match our awnings and our menu boards and our cups and everything, and we're not making bespoke dyed

T-shirts at this phase. We are going to have only access to Next Level navy cotton shirts and Richardson's navy hats, and we want to make sure that everything was as close as possible. So that definitely took some nuance and balancing.

But the Hide Tide briefing process was so thorough and we would do a working session in between rounds. There were actually never really any surprises during their presentations. We kind of knew what we were going to get before it came in, and so all of our expectations were met. There were a few fun surprises, though. I don't know if it was Emma or Matt, but someone on their team tracked down some really exceptional vintage photography of H&H from the eighties, and we were able to reach out to the photographer and get the rights to those photographs and now we have that incorporated into the website into some franchising brochures and a few other touch points as well. So that was really great.

DANNY That reminded me of Jesse. That was also a helpful part of the process too and not the usual part of our process, but having those check-ins with Jesse in between rounds was really helpful because what was great about our partnership with him was he understands and can speak the creative language, really a great buffer and soundboard when we were going through a lot of those rounds before presenting to Jay and the larger H&H team. Another challenge that was just really tricky within that initial first round was towing that line and that balance around creating something that meets to have a certain mass universal appeal, but not sacrificing the fact that this is a legacy brand and accommodating for both. When you do try to go mass, it can start to feel middle of the road, devoid of any personality so that it does appeal to everyone, and I think it was really important for the design team to retain that texture and warmth and how do we inject that personality and retain that while appealing to a wide demographic.

Jesse was saying earlier it's like H&H isn't a New York bagel shop and they're expanding and they're going to be from luxury malls

and neighborhoods to airports to urban areas, so we really had to create something that could accommodate and flex for all those wide audiences and demographics, but we still wanted it to retain the essence of this amazing heritage brand. We did do a lot of research in looking at a lot of the old spaces. How can we use that to inspire us?

Matthew, I definitely want you to talk about the script more 'cause that was something that we incorporated. It really was inspired initially by a photograph we saw of one of the old H&H spaces and they had a script handwritten sign. That was a way to connote premium in a very easy way in shops back then, whether it's like butcher shops or delis. That became the inspiration for bringing in a script into the identity.

MATTHEW The direction that was chosen. We really positioned it as “elevating the every day”, and that’s really where the whole seal/logo/tag motif was born out of, all these things overlap in a lot of ways. The typography both for the logo type as well as the script element that Danny’s mentioning, both really derived from and were inspired by early iconic New York signage and that gave us a way to have an anchor in New York without it being on the nose too overt. And so we were able to instill a little bit of that New York energy by pulling inspiration from these iconic New York old deli signage scenarios, and then we found a couple of great pieces of H&H history. I will give that shout out to Emma, our other designer who was supporting on this whole project, who found some of that early photography that Jesse was mentioning in the interior space.

We had seen just a couple of instances where it’s “order here” and it has some information about ordering bagels, but it was all done in this beautiful hand painted script. Within this very first round—again, we’re always trying to find ways to push the client a little bit—we included a little bit of this calligraphic script within the identity, and to be honest, sometimes things like this can be very divisive.

BRYONY Oh yeah!

MATTHEW It can feel like it has a little too much personality, and it was honestly super reassuring that once we started to show that one, I think Jesse even got an early preview of it. He understood it. He got it right away and saw the potential for it. And I think it has just made the brand so much better for it being able to incorporate that into the identity while still maintaining some of the more paired back moments. You just kind of get that balance.

BRYONY So in regards to the typography, you ended up using Workhorse Script and GT Walsheim?

MATTHEW Yeah.

BRYONY Were those the initial typefaces that you included in the concept? Or did you end up with those two further down the line with more exploration?

MATTHEW They pretty much were incorporated kind of from the beginning within this direction. It all was built off of the custom logo type, which we drew internally. Logo type is completely custom when we were able to lean into this beautiful custom ampersand that becomes a little ownable for H&H. The rest of the typography, GT Walsheim and then Workhorse Script were introduced in the early stages. It was later in the project where we actually also introduced Commercial Type's, Caslon Ionic. Adds like a serif to this family. Another nice delicate touch to compliment the rest of the typography.

BRYONY Aside from the typography, if we take a step back for a second and focus on that logo, starting with the holding shape, how you found that shape and what were the defining things as you developed the typography and that ampersand that everybody on Brand New seems to be loving beyond what's reasonable [laughter], but I understand it because it is a beautiful ampersand. Wouldn't be surprised if we find tattoos down the line with that ampersands somewhere. So let's talk about the development of the logo itself and the many variations that you had to create for the brand to flex online and in store.

MATTHEW Just to give intro to the shape, that initial inspiration. Just as a callback to this concept of “elevating the every day”, and you kind of touched on it in the very intro too, everyone knows the bagel, right? A bagel is such a simple but kind of profound food in a way, especially in New York. Bagels are everywhere. We wanted to find a way to elevate it as we were looking back at some of these iconic institutions of New York, and what was the visual vernacular, and what laid the foundation for what bagel shops and delis and bodegas are nowadays. We were looking at various things that you see within the physical space, and one of them was the infamous regular price tag. This price tag was also reminiscent of a couple of other elements that we had noticed popping up in some of the H&H inspiration.

They had done some previous explorations of illustrations utilizing old street signs and they’ve had this shape very rectangular and like a half circle on top. There was a lot of through lines happening and we took this price tag shape and turned it on its side and it became this super modular system. This really ties back to the wants and needs that Jesse and Jay explained to us in the beginning of this project. They wanted a logo that could accommodate a seal because they felt they had a lot of equity in their current seal, but they also know it needed to work horizontally because that’s going to show up on physical spaces. It might need to be stacked at times because some people that they collaborate with have stacked logos and they want to blend into these worlds. They’re not trying to take control in all these environments. And so, by utilizing the shape we’ve ended up in a scenario where we could flex the H&H system. From the very beginning they were like, we are H&H Bagels. That is the name. Very much understood that, but as we got into this concept that they chose, we were able to tease out the idea that there’s a possibility that you guys are just “H&H” because even conversationally, as anyone talks about it, especially in New York, they are just H&H. They’re known for their bagels.

BRYONY It’s understood.

MATTHEW Yeah, it's understood. It's like a household name, especially here in the city. We weren't going to drop bagels from the beginning and I don't think they have plans to do that anytime soon, but it was nice that we could develop a system that could flex across different sizes and shapes and work in a whole range of environments. That's where we ended up with this really flexible modular system that allowed the seal typography then to use the same structure and typography for the horizontal word mark as well.

DANNY It was just super important for us to create a system that will really endure and will really hold up ideally for the next 50 years and won't break, and we'll give them as much sort of flexibility and just thinking holistically to what Matt was speaking around, pressure testing and making sure that it will work in physical areas on signage, on a-frames, in the menu board, and then in the digital space. So really creating this highly functional system for the H&H team that they could utilize.

BRYONY And Jesse, as the brand starts to be implemented, are you finding that you have everything that you need for your own stores and then as the first franchises are getting put together and the materials that they need?

JESSE I would say that we have everything we need and then some! We've already found uses for the word mark, the seal, and the monogram to kind of play off of each other, and that helps us not be repetitive. You're not seeing the full seal on the shirt of the employee uniforms and on the hat. The hat we use the monogram, the shirt we use the seal and that prevents it from being very repetitive. It's also about context, so if you're already in the store, you don't need to have H&H Bagels everywhere. You know that you're at H&H Bagels, so we can start to play with just using H&H. Even on the masthead of our website, we use the H&H monogram seal rather than the full seal because you're already at h&hbagels.com, you know where you are and we can lean into a bit more of that familiarity and not just repeating the same mark over and over and over again. So it's really, really nice to have that versatility.

DANNY And that even reminds me the “Like no other bagel in the world” tagline, that was a really important one for us to revive. That was the tagline since probably the seventies, right, Jesse?

JESSE Forever, yeah.

DANNY Creating this custom hand-drawn script as another element in the toolkit was really exciting and giving them that flexibility where there are moments maybe where we don’t need to— like when you’re in store or on the site or wearing some merch where you don’t have to rely on just using the logo. That was just another element that we really enjoyed bringing into the identity system, just to give them this really robust toolkit so they don’t end up just rubber stamping the logo everywhere.

BRYONY I have to admit that whenever we post a case study on Brand New, these usually get put together and organized very early in the morning, long before breakfast. And I want to touch on the photography the day we posted it. It made me very, very hungry. It is so scrumptious and delicious and magnifying in a way. What was the thinking behind the photography and how is that system being used in a way that’s sustainable long-term?

DANNY In our mind, I think the current photography for the H&H brand wasn’t really cutting it. It wasn’t really doing justice of making the food seem appetizing, and I think that was obviously something that was important for a food brand, right? That was first order of prioritization. At the same time we were building this really exciting, updated, evolved brand identity and we wanted to make sure that whatever photography was the same quality and consideration level, so we really wanted to make sure that the photography was considered.

When we were rounding out the visual identity phase was when we talked with Jesse about having a photo shoot, working out the art direction for that. We sort of divided it into a few buckets. The macro photography, really focusing on making the food look as appetizing as possible and really communicating what delicious sandwich should

taste like, and then also having a more kitchen tabletop dining table setting environment, knowing that H&H has a catering program and they ship their bagels nationally—catering to that. And then we also had some moments that were more, we called it “sculptural”, heroing the bagel as this monumental sculptural piece trying to cover all those bases. We brought in Dylan Nelson, who’s an amazing photographer, and Matthew, I’d love you to just give more color to sort of how that experience was.

MATTHEW Dylan Nelson who we worked with as a photographer really knocked it out of the park too. Our other designer Emma also played a really pivotal role helping establish a lot of this art direction. This was admittedly a new experience for me too in terms of going through this full art direction, especially in the food space. It was nice because we could have a lot of conversations around styling and we had to talk about these things pretty early on. This is always a sort of nebulous problem across branding as you’re mocking up and showcasing stuff to a client, what are you using? How are you showcasing the brand? And if a brand has preexisting stuff, you’re either stuck with that, or is there an opportunity to build on it? In H&H’s case, their previous photography was very stylized. There wasn’t really much opportunity to reuse it in the same capacity just because it was going to clash with where the new art direction was heading.

As we got going, I think Jesse, he early buy-in of, yes, this is an opportunity for us to really explore and we tried to be really conscious of how do we really tackle this early on in project. A couple of things that we wanted to make prevalent in this photography, admittedly, if we look across the landscape, whether it’s fast food or some of these QSR premium things, there’s certain trends that exist within this space. There’s tried and true photography techniques and the truth is we just were bored of them and they didn’t feel on brand for H&H. We’re trying to create this very homey, almost intimate experience now and something that feels premium and high quality and that didn’t really align with high flash photography, something that was overly

bright and vivid and instead we're like, let's focus on natural lighting, embrace having shadows, keep it kind of warm and natural. And the other part too is it's very subtle, but we're very conscious of the angle in which we shot food. [Okay] If we have a bagel on a table, we want it to be as if you're sitting at that table. We didn't want it to be this hero shot to where you're like, the point of view is underneath the bagel and it's almost like wide angle view because it just wasn't on brand.

BRYONY Jesse, in terms of the photography, do you see that you will need to expand that library anytime soon, especially considering social media, or are you set for a while?

JESSE Absolutely we'll be needing to continue our photography efforts going forward. Hide Tide set us up with a beautiful foundation, but one thing that I learned from that experience is that we need to be shooting more often so that we can keep our content exceptionally fresh. We also have a lot going on, so we have some really, really fun partnerships coming up in May and we want to make sure that the photography for that is up to the standard that we laid in this last round. I had to go to Jay and say, listen, we're doing something a little different with the photography now. Prepare yourself that we're going to have to do this probably three times a year. I would think at least just to keep up with everything that we're doing and making sure that we have all the assets we need. Hide Tide was really, really flexible with us and was able to work with our budget, which was for this specific portion of the project a bit limited, so we only were able to leave that stylized photo shoot with something like 12 or 15 photos. After a year, those are going to be used up. But if we can expand on that library, not only will we have these new images to push in, but by getting that variation we'll be able to make the original photos last longer if they're not being used over and over and over again.

BRYONY That makes total sense. And what kind of feedback are you receiving on the rebrand from your employees and your internal team to distributors, retailers, new franchisees... What's the word?

JESSE It's been really, really special for me and rewarding to watch all the feedback come in. First of all, our customers absolutely love it. We meet with our General Managers most weeks and so they've been coming to us and saying, when is merch going to be available? Because customers are coming in and asking where they can buy the shirts and hats that they're wearing, but those are just our team uniforms. That's not even our merch. This is just what the store team is wearing. We're setting up our merch store right now and the level of soft goods is going to be even higher elevated. The design on that merch is going to be elevated from what you're seeing on the store team, and so we're really, really excited to be able to share that with the customers who are already generating a demand for that.

We have a few partnerships coming up that I mentioned. They've responded incredibly well to the rebrand as they're aligning their own brands next to ours. It's really nice for them to have this premium look and feel. It's kind of like a rising tide lifts all ships kind of situation. The website's gotten some really, really great feedback from our franchisees. It's night and day from what we had before, so we're still in very early stages of this rollout. We just got our coffee cups today, printed materials take months to print [affirmative]. Coffee cups went into the store today. Our wax paper is coming next week. Our paper bags are coming the week after that, so we're still very much in that rollout phase, but the initial reaction's been overwhelmingly positive.

BRYONY Matthew, for you personally, what was the most satisfying aspect of working on this project?

MATTHEW There's definitely a lot of highs. I think one part in the early stages of the branding process is Jesse and Jay set us up with bagel deliveries every Tuesday.

BRYONY Ooh, dangerous!

MATTHEW So what's not to love there? Definitely something to look forward to each week as we're working on this being in the constant H&H headspace

beyond that within the project. I think what I was mentioning earlier, and this is really just a testament to Jesse, I felt like we got a lot of early buy-in on some design elements and you're just never sure if they're going to quite land. The scripts, the "like no other" calligraphic lockup. Sometimes you take those swings and you just don't know if it's going to land and it did and I think there's a lot of opportunity within that. It's just so easy to end up in the middle of the road and I just am really appreciative of the whole H&H team and everyone involved to be able to always be pragmatic about this, but also be willing to push the boundaries and make sure that we're not sacrificing everything for the sake of efficiency or sameness.

BRYONY Danny, was there anything in this particular project that was either totally different, or inspiring, or challenging, that will inform how you approach some of your future projects as a design firm?

DANNY I think there were a number of really interesting moments. One of the big pivotal moments that really helped unlock and inform a lot of the work thereafter was moving them away from the current seal that they had because when we did have those initial conversations, the existing H&H seal, I know Jay had a little bit of an attachment to it, right Jesse? Given that he played a part in creating it. It was a little bit on our side making a case for moving away from it. We quickly found out that it was something that was very, very common in the space, this sort of circular bagel shaped seal.

What we did to sort of get ahead of that was before presenting any of the work, we presented the current H&H seal within a wall of twenty different logos that were very, very similar. That really helped them open up to moving away from that and that really unlocked the new system that Matthew talked about around this flexible system of logos, sort of like modern updated seal, but really just moved them farther away from that. So I thought that was a really great turning point.

One other challenging area, but also great learning experience was the hero color, the navy. They've had this navy, but we were really excited initially to sort of push them away from the navy and inject new energy into the brand with a more vibrant blue. And that was something that we were just genuinely excited about. We also felt like the navy wasn't really ownable and was pretty common in the space, so we really fought hard for that. Having those conversations with Jesse and Jay and them informing us that, Hey, we agree, this is great, but from a commercial and functional standpoint, it's very difficult for us to all of a sudden move and get this very custom vibrant blue replace all the tiles in our current storefronts with this very particular blue. So it's much easier from a commercial standpoint to order navy tiles to have the uniforms be navy. That was just a really great learning for us to not let our creative aspirations get too in the way and really just understand that we're building a brand for them that needs to function for them as they scale in a massive way. That's why we ended up going to a very slightly tweaked navy, but what was also a nice cherry on top was that we were still able to add this secondary palette, which had both the poppy accent blue that I mentioned, and then on top of that some more poppy accent colors, like a tomato, a scallion... there was an egg yolk, all kind of ingredient inspired colors that allowed them a little bit more flexibility for social, for digital, and so it was sort of best of both worlds at the end. I think we all came out with a better understanding.

BRYONY It's an awareness we can definitely take forward to future projects. One more question for all of you, what part of the overall outcome and that which lies ahead is the most exciting?

JESSE I would say for us at H&H for me specifically, the most exciting piece for me is going to be bringing this nationwide and eventually global. I've been trusted to steward this brand that I've loved since childhood and it's been an incredibly rewarding experience to be a part of this expansion. In the short term, like I mentioned before, we've got some really fun partnerships coming up this summer, and so having the

new brand makes each of these partnerships even stronger, and really elevates what we had already been planning before the rebrand. Every project that we're working on now is even better than what our initial concept was. Lastly, and very, very importantly, we're excited by the opportunity to continue working with Hide Tide. Right now, we're in conversations about bringing them in on retainer as a creative partner, so excited by that opportunity to continue working together.

MATTHEW One, always exciting to work with the H&H team; Jesse's been greater along this whole process. Just excited to see things come to life in the physical world. It's always great to seeing Jesse wearing the H&H hat, [laughter] so seeing more of the merch actually roll out, and one thing in particular that I can't wait to see is the kind of deli paper bagel wrap. We've got a beautiful H&H repeating pattern that's going to exist in that space. It'll be very cool to see out in the world.

DANNY Similarly, super excited to see it out in the real world across different markets, different spaces around the country. I think that's going to be really exciting to see. And then we did a bunch of collateral right after the rebrand, the sandwich wraps, the signage, the to-go bags, so I'm excited to see that out in the real world as well. It's just been such an honor to contribute to the legacy of this historic brand. With everything and especially with this project, we really strive to create something that will endure and stand the test of time, really create something timeless, and I hope that's the case.

BRYONY You have embraced what was a legacy shop for each of you individually from your childhood and whatnot, and created what is to be a future legacy for lots of people all over the world as the franchises start to expand and actually open across the US—and eventually I hear the world—and you're a long ways from having the one logo, the one font, and the one color that we're all off the shelf, and you have definitely a toolkit that will have you stand out but also blend in within all of these environments and markets and demographics that you have your sights on. I cannot wait to see how it will all grow up in the next five to

10 years. Thank you so much for joining me on The Follow-up today.

MATTHEW Thank you so much for having us.

JESSE Amazing. Thank you for having us.

DANNY Thank you so much Bryony.

ARMIN Jesse and Jay sound like ideal clients: ambitious, hands-on, and located just a few blocks away. Kidding aside, it was great to hear how involved they were in the process and how they established clear expectations of what was up for grabs and what wasn't while being open to things that made sense like a new logo but convinced on things that didn't, like a highly customized blue. It was also nice to spend some additional time on the photography and understand how important that element was in developing a complete and more elevated package to expand across markets. One good bit of advice that can be pulled from this conversation was something Danny acknowledged on the subject of choosing the right blue and that is that it is important to not always let our creative aspirations get too much in the way of commercial restrictions or smart business decisions. Key words: NOT ALWAYS. Otherwise H&H would have stayed with its old logo and we would all be devoid of enjoying the magnificent ampersand they ended up with.

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

