

EPIISODE 081

NEW YORK

BOTANICAL GARDEN

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Jane Boynton, Wolff Olins

AND

Michael Crowley, New York Botanical Garden

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 81 of The Follow-up.

This week we are following up on the New York Botanical Garden. Established in 1891, NYBG, for short, is a living museum, educational institution, and cultural attraction located in the Bronx in New York, NY. Spanning 250 acres, it has a plant collection presenting over 12,000 species from almost every part of the world, many of them housed in the iconic Enid A. Haupt Conservatory — a nearly 1 acre greenhouse. Additional outdoor exhibits include a 40-acre woodland, a rock garden, a garden of native plants, as well as special collections of conifers, lilacs, and magnolias. Additionally, it operates one of the world's largest plant research and conservation programs, state-of-the-art molecular labs, hands-on curriculum-based educational programming, and has one of the largest botanical libraries in the country and an herbarium of 5,700,000 dried reference specimens.

The project, designed by the New York, NY, office of Wolff Olins was posted on Brand New on January 31, 2024. You can pull it up

on your browser at bit.ly/bnpodcast081 that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast081, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Jane Boynton, Senior Creative Director at Wolff Olins and Michael Crowley, Chief Marketing Officer at NYBG.

In this conversation we hear about yet another fast turnaround project — like last episode’s H&H Bagels — with NYBG and Wolff Olins sprinting from June to December to make it happen, which is a pretty impressive feat for an organization of this size. Unlike the last episode with H&H Bagels where the client didn’t want to be heavy-handed in its New York-ness, this was the complete opposite, with the client having a strong desire — which was discovered in the very early strategy and exploratory phase — to play up their New York provenance as they aimed to, possibly, create another visual icon for the city. The main challenge, though, as we learn, was developing a brand voice that could help convey all the wonderful and important things NYBG does beyond being home to one of the most beautiful places in the city.

Now, let’s listen in as Bryony follows up with Jane and Michael.

BRYONY GOMEZ-PALACIO

Back when we were living in New York, I remember strolling the gardens of the New York Botanical Garden and hiding from the rain in the greenhouse with our then toddler and their stroller. A space embedded into the fabric of the city in a way that you almost take it for granted, especially when it’s blended with every other cultural resource. That has now changed with a bold and quirky rebrand hat calls me back to take a stroll while admiring all the new cool signage. Jane and Michael, welcome to The Follow-Up.

JANE BOYNTON

Thank you for having us.

MICHAEL CROWLEY

Thank you so much for having us.

- BRYONY** Let's have a little round of introductions telling us your full name and where you're coming from.
- MICHAEL** Michael Crowley, pleasure to be with you. I'm currently in New York City in my office here at the New York Botanical Garden where I serve as our Chief Marketing Officer.
- JANE** I'm Jane Boynton, I'm a Senior Creative Director here at Wolff Olins and I'm based here in New York City.
- BRYONY** Michael, given that the New York Botanical Garden has been around since about 1891, what led you and those around you to embark on a brand redesign in this particular moment of its history?
- MICHAEL** We are 133-year-old institution and on the heels of new leadership here at NYBG, it was really important for us to not only create more relevance with our community, but really tell more of our holistic story here at NYBG, especially in regards to the impact we have around the world. We did a host of research about two years ago that led us to believe that many folks, especially those in New York have heard of NYBG, but they had no idea what we do beyond the beauty of the grounds, as you suggested and our amazing horticultural exhibitions. But there was a real need and opportunity to tell our story around our education work and our scientific work in addition to the beauty of the garden. It was really mission critical for us to find a brand that both let people in on the secret of how amazing this garden is, but also something that set the course for our future trajectory in terms of a strategic plan that we were also developing on a parallel path.
- BRYONY** And Jane, how did Wolff Olins get involved?
- JANE** Well, it was that dream phone call, which I don't think we do phone calls anymore, do we? Let's pretend like we do, it sounds better than the email, [laughter] but it's the one that all branding agencies want. It's what we designers live and dream for, right? It's a cultural institution and one in New York City, no less. There was the ask to meet and present some credentials and cases and just as Michael

had mentioned, we were aware that there was change afoot, right? We had new leadership, there's a new strategic plan. They wanted to tell that broader story and we understood that they wanted to assess the identity against all of this. And we decided, look, Wolff Olins, we're already known as a creative agency, right? We're creative first. So I think one of the things that we wanted to do is we wanted to surface to Mike and the team beyond this notion of creative was the importance of strategy and how intrinsic it is to our creative work.

We already knew that there was a strategy being done in-house at that moment in time at NYBG, but we knew that if we were going to eventually partner with them, we'd want to sharpen that thinking right into a really crisp brand for the creative. So even though this wasn't a "strategy ask" with a capital "S", we decided to go into the meeting with strategy regardless and lean a bit more harder into this point of view. The other thing that made it really fun is that one of our strategy directors, Anna, who raised her hand for this, studied botany at university. And then I think the other thing that we consciously did is that we just decided to lean in and really have fun with the meeting. One of our core beliefs at Wolff Olins is around this idea of "Enjoy the ride", and that's this idea of making the process joyful and engaging, not just for ourselves but also with our clients. That's our little wiggle squiggle in the "W"; and we knew that this meeting was going to be the potential beginning of relationships, so we wanted to make sure that they could get a good sense of us, kind of our wonky spirit and what it would feel like to work with us. I mean, we were so giddy at this point to get this assignment. We wanted them to feel that energy.

BRYONY Michael, coming from all of this strategy, as you were embarking in your search for a creative partner, what were you looking for? And what sinched the deal?

MICHAEL First of all, we were looking for somebody who shared our passion and love for not just NYBG but for nature. And as Jane mentioned, there were folks on the pitch team from Wolff Olins who not only

clearly demonstrated their love for this institution, but their own excitement and curiosity about nature. So that was really manifested in their pitch. And for us it was also really important to partner with a leading design firm with some experience with other major cultural institutions. We were watching from afar during Wolff Olins's work on the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which was a very successful piece of rebranding work that they did, as well as their work in the corporate sector. We knew that this brand needed to speak again, not just to lovers of NYBG, lovers of nature, but to a broader cross section of consumers at large. So we were really enthused by their portfolio of work and then the people and their enthusiasm was like the cherry on top. Having been on the agency side a long time for myself, I could feel the genuine enthusiasm from the team at Wolff Olins for this project work. One of those rare instances where the pitch meeting ends and you hang up the Zoom call and you say, "we got to hire these people!" Because they just got it. They understood the assignment, and as Jane said, they layered on strategic thinking that really felt simpatico with a lot of the work we had done here in house. It was a perfect marriage.

BRYONY I always find that an outside look is refreshing, even though you've been so introspective and gathered so much information, there's value to that.

MICHAEL Yeah, exactly. Hearing things that we have been holding true or the stories we've be telling ourselves reinterpreted through a creative lens was just really fortifying and I think really helped us solidify our decision to partner with Wolff Olins.

BRYONY And then just very briefly, what was the overall timeline of the project from that first phone call we're going to call it to the final deliverables?

MICHAEL It was pretty quick. We started speaking to Wolff Olins June or July of last summer, and we finished this project up the end of the calendar year around November, December. So they're amazing. Sprinters really kept us on our toes. Then on our end, we were very clear quick in decision-making because we did go in with such a strong strategy and a strong WHY behind this work. We were very clear about the need to

do this work, so we were able to hold hands and really sprint together as we work towards unveiling this new brand this past January.

BRYONY Before we get into the strategy work and the creative details, what would you say are the main challenges for an institution like NYBG in rebranding when you're taking into account your locals, your visitors, all of your tourists, and then you also have this other component that you talked about, the education and the research.

MICHAEL One of the biggest challenges for us was the very rich and strong relationships people already had with the institution. So it was really important to us that we honor prior iterations of this brand work. We know there's real meaning in iconography and brands, so whether it's our trustees, whether it's people who came up through education program are now adults who are visiting the garden, there's such a rich emotional connection to NYBG and it's 133-year history. So for us, it was about honoring and building upon, and then there were some real sustainability considerations. While we launched this brand in the end of January and have rushed to update some of our materials, there are also other assets that are going to take us months and even years to update. The sides of trucks, some of our signage out in the community. We want to make sure that we're making responsible decisions in terms of sustainability. So it was another important piece to us that we think about the new logo as almost a distant cousin to make sure that the new iconography, the new brand architecture really works alongside where we've been in the past. So for us it was really about honoring that legacy, but developing something that felt much more future focused for folks who've either been along for the ride or are going to be joining us between now and the next decade or two.

BRYONY That is a keen awareness of how deep the rebrand can go.

MICHAEL Absolutely.

BRYONY All of the steps that you need to take, especially when you're considering things that you don't need every time. Jane, walk us through getting

all of their strategic work and immersing yourselves into that and developing your own take on the strategy that led to, I imagine the first meeting where all of this was shared before going into creative. [Yeah.] What was the process and what were the key outcomes of it?

JANE The first step and probably actually the most important was the immersion. This was so essential for the work and for us as a team to really understand that this place, NYBG is simply not just a place of beauty. Michael and his team gave us full on access not only to the place to the garden, but to all the employees who are all really open, incredibly inviting and giving of their time. We are given a tour of the herbarium where over 8 million plant specimens are being recorded, and I actually got to hold a plant sample that Charles Darwin himself had pulled. We walked through the greenhouses and saw how plants are cared for to bloom at the exact same time for an upcoming exhibit, and again, we don't think about this right when you go to those big exhibits, but all of those plants have to bloom at the same time.

We viewed microscopic samples in the Pfizer plant research lab, and then we as a company did a volunteer day harvesting and prepping vegetables at the Edible Academy that we donated then to the food bank across the street from the garden. We got a real hands-on sense of this amazing yet really complex universe that New York Botanical Gardens is, and then from there, just like you said, we were given the initial strategy work, so a strategic phase happened. The strategy team went and worked their magic and they decided to come in with three different articulations of the strategy. What we decided as the creative team behind each strategy territory, we would do a creative territory. It wasn't directions yet more like loose gestures that we could start to put down to start to see and test the waters with the client to see what would resonate and what wouldn't.

I'm sure people listening, you've done this before where you give your clients, here's your eight red dots, here's your six or your eight dream dots, and then you can go and heat map what you like and what you

don't like. And the other thing I wanted to mention is not only were we doing visual gestures, but we were doing verbal ones as well. And I don't think we talk enough about the voice, that was part of the ask was to address the voice. We're showing verbal gestures as well. And I bring this all up within the strategy because I think this is where we had one of our big aha moments for the creative. One of the strategy directions was this idea of being the world's garden and we were feeling like, Hey, you've got New York and the name and a lot of similar institutions don't have that, and that's an honor.

Can we dial that up if we think about New York, New York is like the world stage, it's the center of the universe. It's the biggest and best of everything just like this garden is. So you can imagine then what the visual swipe was, things like the mastheads for the New York Times and New York magazine, Milton's I ♥ New York symbol, it's Chermayeff's number 9 sculpture on 57th Street, it's the MoMA logo. And what was interesting is strategically the client was like, "no, this isn't quite right". It wasn't the one and they walked away from that as a strategy idea, but what was interesting is it was all the images in this bucket that the client green dotted to the point where I think they hoarded all their green dots and they put them in all these images. Same with the voice as well, while strategically not right, it told us between the lines that the clients wanted their identity to feel like a New York icon.

MICHAEL Here, here! We love those green dots by the way. I need another stack of them to put on things [laughter]. It was really interesting because at the outset we knew we were a part of the rich cultural fabric of New York City and we also have a couple of very historic buildings on site, so the notion of some New York iconography, it was always sort of in the back of our minds, but as Jane suggested, the real lift here for us was brand voice. A really important piece of this work as we might've been drawn to some of the New York iconography in terms of where this might lead us in terms of the actual logo, the real focus of the leadership that was engaged on this was the brand voice. Who are we

in the world and more importantly, how do we activate our staff of 500 to 700 people depending on the season to collaborate with us telling that story among our visitors and our learners.

As we started leaning towards this notion of “do right by nature and plant people”, once we got to the heart of the strategic underpinnings of the brand voice and the brand architecture, then I think we kind of let our shoulders down and we’re able to see how these guys were pulling in some of that iconography. All those green dots were really drawn back in when they went to make crater that really supported this scaffolding we built around this idea of “do right by nature”. We’re all plant people, anyone who is a living, breathing human, whether they know it or not, we’re all plant people. Really putting our stake in the ground around that brand idea, then allowed us to pull back in some of that New York iconography that we all loved.

BRYONY Judging by the green dots, it seems that that was the main thing.

MICHAEL Exactly [laughter]. Yeah.

BRYONY After that meeting, what was the next step? What were the conversations that led to the next round, which I’m going to assume—but correct me if I’m wrong—was a round of fleshed out creative?

JANE Absolutely. You’re absolutely right. We went back, we did three creative directions and then just as Michael touched on, I want to take a step back because this is the foundation for everything. Strategy had done their magic and the strategic idea that we landed on was this idea of “do right by nature”, and that’s that idea of always striving to have the right relationship with nature. It’s like treating it with respect, it’s preserving it, it’s studying it, it’s learning from it, it’s enjoying it. And because we believe if we have the right relationship with nature and it leads to a healthier planet and population that’s more connected and more vibrant. So that was the big idea, “do right by nature”.

With that big idea we had three personality attributes and those were this idea of empathy, and empathy was really the nature dial. If we're doing right by nature and we're listening to it, we're showing empathy as an organization. Another attribute was this idea of being deliberate, and deliberate is now going to dial up that whole idea of education and scientific rigor. The third one was optimism, and so this is that whole idea of plant advocacy. We decided everything would be based on "do right by nature", but what we were going to do is we're going to take each of those personality attributes and we're going to dial one slightly up over the other. One will not forego the other, they're all true. And then lead into that and that's what then drove the three directions.

The first direction was going to be the empathy one, so this is going to be the nature one. This is the one that came out of the gate really strong and really quickly. This was based on an idea called: interbeing. Hopefully I'm teaching you a new word today. I had never heard of it. It's a concept from a Buddhist monk and it's a philosophy that man and nature are intertwined, so you can imagine now we're going to do those letter forms. So we took the "NY" and the "BG" and we actually stacked them on top of each other, and that was kind of a little slight nod to the footprint of I ♥ New York, and then we made them feel a little bit more plant-like, and then we worked it to make those letter intertwined with each other—man in nature and that coexistence. We were feeling pretty good about this one. We're like, well, this is it. I was on the phone with Thomas, who's one of our global principals, and his wife had walked by the screen. I guess when he got off the call, she was like, I don't know what that was, but I want that on a baseball cap. So we are feeling pretty good.

While that was being developed, we had another direction. It's the second direction, we call it the Gardener and the Scholar, and just as I had mentioned earlier, we were given access to NYBG and part of that access allowed us to go into all the archives. This is like being in

a candy store looking at all that typography, all those symbols... we were really looking for, is there something in the past, especially the storied institution from the late 1800s that we could bring... you know the trick, can you take something from the past and bring it into the future? The only thing that we could find that was a consistent thread was a seal, very old, had never been vectorized. Within it was a portrait of a gardener and he was holding a flower and a scholar and he was holding a book. We thought that this was a really nice metaphor, so we simplified it, wanted to make something a little bit more modern, so we just focused on the flower in the book and we created a modern seal for them. That became the second direction. So if they want to feel more scientific and educational now, we had that close they could try.

The the third direction is the one that then dialed up that theme of optimism and plant advocacy. In a way, it's dialing up that "do right and do right by nature". We know the ending to the story that this will eventually become the one. To be honest with you, this is absolutely the most difficult one. It was very stubborn, very hard to land. We knew we wanted it to be bold. This was the one that we wanted to embody that New York spirit that I mentioned earlier and kind of that attitude. Because of that, we are pulling a lot from the International Typeface Corporation early on and often in our research and reference pools and more specifically, we kept circling around Herb Lubalin and his work, specifically that gorgeous ampersand in the organic gesture in the iconic U&lc magazine masthead as well as the typeface Serif Gothic. So we're taking those all in. We're in the Figma board, we're crafting these letter forms and it started to feel like something... Once we were getting something we brought in Ryan Bugden, typographer, partners with us, love Ryan. Ryan is very generous with us, allows us to play with his forms, and we just started to do a back and forth with these forms. At a certain point we were like, it just needs one more thing. What could it be? And we looked at that stem of the "Y" and we're like, what if we just give a little bit more nod to nature? Ryan adjusted the form and it clicked. I'm not kidding you. It was a late

night in the studio and we all fell quiet and we're like, "oh, that's it". We felt it. And we were like, oh, screw direction one. We got so excited about this. Everyone in the office was excited about it, so we went to Michael and the team with the creative directions, one that was more about nature, very handsome, one that was a seal and talked about that science and that rigor. And then the third one that celebrated that plant advocacy.

BRYONY Michael, on the receiving end, what was the take of the team? And what was the process in actually making a choice?

MICHAEL First of all, the work across the board was so strong and the level of rigor and detail that was brought to each of the three ideas was just really impressive. They saved the best for last as they say, and I think that there was a real quiet confidence among our group as they were going through idea number three. What struck all of us was this notion that our mission and activities have always been centered around plants, fungi in the natural world as well as science horticultural and education, but we have done that with a backdrop of a very black and white brand architecture. The world of technicolor, seeing that on screen along with the brilliant nods to nature and New York iconography in the logo where this perfect marriage of who we want to be in the world, but again honoring this institution's rich history. There was really quiet solitude almost that came over. Those of us kind of on the other side of the table, and then I believe Jane, we went one by one and all had to say our number and we all said number three. Caveat, there were little things we wanted to explore and can the "Y" do this? and the "G" do this? But it was across the board alignment on both the voice, the direction, the colors, and again the overall architecture of this exciting brand.

BRYONY Seems like you nailed it on that one, even though you found it fairly challenging [laughter] to land in the beginning. How close was that presentation to the outcome? To what has been produced?

JANE Honestly, it was pretty, I would say 90%. There was two things that shifted. One was the one that was presented was much fatter, [laughter] it was much more chunky, had a little bit more personality. The client was like, could we look at that a little thinner? And I of course was like, I love that he's chunky, could really feel him. But we looked at it, it was funny, and as we started to slim it down, it started to give it a hair more gravitas and we agreed. And then the other thing was just kind of fine tuning the serif tips. We had them pointing in different ways. We were being maybe a little bit organic with it. We just dialed it all in and made it just a hair more formal—but for the most part it was pretty much as it was presented.

MICHAEL There are things that were presented in situ, in that meeting that we're already selling at our retail shop that are online. So exciting to see things that were presented in situ that have come to life because the work was that strong at that first meeting. As Jane suggests, we were able to really thread the needle to launch on many of the assets and ideas.

BRYONY And do you have an in-house team [affirmative] or support staff that is doing this? How big is your team?

MICHAEL We have a larger marketing communications team of about 30 folks, but we have three designers, creative folks, and we also have a photographer and a videographer. Jane and her team were more than generous with their time. Once we landed on the idea of both sitting and laying on the ground and looking up at the sky with these designers to really help them get under the hood of this new brand idea, and this notion of really shifting people's perspectives in terms of how they think about nature. Our team was both involved in some of those tweaks, but really involved along the way with the team at Wolff Olins so that they were ready to hit the ground running with implementation. So it wasn't just here's a delivery of a brand style guide or toolkit. It was let's talk about the why behind some of these decisions and let's help you guys think about new ways into covering some of these stories that we're telling around the garden. It was just

a really exciting moment I think of energy for the team, especially folks who've been here for a while who love the garden, but again needed a bit of outsider perspective to help them really fine tune how they're documenting the garden for our visitors around the world.

BRYONY I'm seeing that collaboration happen more and more as more companies and institutions have an in-house team. They get involved early on, which makes it easier to iron out some of the challenges they know very well while the designers are sort of guessing. It also brings up the energy and the involvement and the ownership over the work, and it makes it a lot more exciting [affirmative]—it's a trend that I'm all for.

MICHAEL I think that's a really important point. It was really a collaboration. There was not a day that went by where we didn't have an email from Jan or somebody asking us for a thing. Sometimes we scratched our head about the thing they were asking for, but we always gave it, and without question. What was wonderful is that as they started delivering more and more assets, we saw them pull in things that we could have never imagined, but there was that trust sort of this collaboration and it goes both ways. I mean, the team of Wolff has been more than generous with their help in the rollout of this brand because it has been such a tight-knit collaboration. You bring up a really important point, which is that the trend is starting to pivot less away from client/agency to let's really partner together for success, and that was very much I think the tone and tenor of this collaboration.

BRYONY Jane, on your end, as you developed all of these assets, was there any surprises on some kind of deliverable that you wouldn't have landed without the input of the in-house team?

JANE Just as Michael had said such great partners, and Chris is the Creative Director... We got Chris in very early, and I think it's really important when you have an in-house team that they feel that they're part of authoring it. It's going to be theirs at the end of the day, so we made sure that we brought Chris in very, very early and even while we were codifying we're starting to test things out, we gave them to Chris. Chris,

can you run with this? And then report back to it? How is it working? What's not working? Would you use this? Would you use these many colors? Do you like these colors?

I think back in the day, we did guidelines, we'd hand them off and be kind of like, see you. But now I see guidelines more and more almost becoming like a Beta phase where we start to do original codification and we let the team to start to run with it. And then they start to give us inputs and then as we start to dial it in making sure it's relevant for them, it works for them. And the other thing that that does is it also empowers the team. They feel more ownership of it, they're more protective over it, and they're excited about it because it's theirs as well. So it's really important to make it about both of us. We didn't really necessarily have anything there was a surprise, and I think it was because of that daily partnership, and just that daily communication, and just taking the work and passing it back and forth as we dialed it in.

BRYONY Now you have a very extensive color palette that is [affirmative] beautifully labeled with fun and very relevant names [laughter]. Curious how that was developed and how is it being applied through the patterns and all of the different things. Is there a system that has been developed? [Affirmative] How do we get to see all of those colors?

JANE Think about it. The garden is such a visual sensory experience and color is a main contribution to that. It's everywhere in the garden and it takes different forms throughout the season. So the palette, as you mentioned, it's big. It's 23 colors, is inspired by this abundance and that idea of change. We really wanted the brand to feel alive like nature through the color and having this breath allows it to constantly change and adapt throughout the year. Materials that are created are always in harmony and reflect the physical experience. I also think a large palette evokes emotion. All this color brings a sense of drama and joy. It's very immersive and we really wanted to capture that. It's also really functional just as you were starting to nod to. It allows that creative team and agencies to modulate the tone for the expression.

When we want to be really bold and colorful, or celebratory, times of advocacy, we can use those brighter colors and then we can use those darker, more sophisticated tones when we're doing maybe something more formal like the gala or maybe a research paper. One of the things that we worked with Chris was we like when the pairings are a little odd and not perfect—Mother Nature doesn't color coordinate and neither should we [laughter]. So we also think that that keeps it really interesting and engaging.

Lastly, just as you mentioned, I'm going to touch on it back again actually for a reason. We did name each color based on the specimen that was inspired by be it plants, fungi, Bronx River, algae. But the idea was that the names not only would create that little moment of joy when you read it, it also presented an educational moment, which is inspired by the mission of the organization. We were very purposeful. You could take a green and go It's moss, but instead we're like, no, no, it's Broom Fork Moss [*Dicranum scoparium*], and you may not know what a Broom Fork Moss is, but then you would google it and look it up and boom. Now you know!

MICHAEL We're very fortunate to have the Bronx River running through our 250 acres, so one of our blue hues is named Bronx River, and I was walking across grounds yesterday and a colleague saw my new ID tag, which happens to be blue with the new branding and stopped me and said, "I love your tag". And I said, "yeah, you should get the blue one". And he said, "Michael, it's not blue, it's Bronx River Blue". And at that very moment some visitors walked by and we engaged in the story about the fact that yes, you can go walk back there and hang out by the river. I mean, it truly is a game changer for us in terms of telling the story about not just our grounds, but the work that we do with plants and fungi, both beautiful but also educational.

BRYONY That's wonderful. Before we get into the outside perspective, I want to hear from both of you. If there was a moment in this rather rapid process, fairly condensed—I'm surprised at how condensed—was

there a moment or an element or something that you were like, yes, we're here. Whatever comes next is all good?

JANE I think I already mentioned it, but I'll just reiterate it. One was that aha moment when the logo came together, that was a huge breakthrough for us, and when we saw it, we felt really like, this is it. And when we sat in the room after we presented those creative directions, this is the moment as creatives, you all take a deep breath. You have to sit back and it's like, all right, do they see what we see? And as one by one they started, it's number three. It's number three. It was that third direction. That's when we knew. We knew that from here on in, we had nailed it.

MICHAEL The team at Wolff Olins went above and beyond in terms of comping up images and putting things in situ, which I think is a great lesson. They comped up the full letter forms, the 24 letters, New York Botanical Garden on one of our fences, and these are things that have been there for decades and decades. Weather war on these old green fences and seeing that new logo on that piece of actual physical infrastructure was a light bulb for us! Because we immediately knew that it was going to do both things for us, help us gain relevance, be seen as a modern institution, but honor who we are and honor our physical place, which was of a big goal of this work as well. It sounds simple, but sometimes being very smart and strategic with what you're comping up can speak volumes. And I think it's also worth noting that Jane and her team made several visits to photograph things across the garden, the tree signage, the fences I mentioned, so many different pieces of our brand architecture, so many different touch points that we hadn't even considered that they then put in front of us with this new branding. These collective ahas, but it truly was seeing the execution of the 24 letters on that fence that's been there forever and going, this is the winner.

BRYONY There is something to be said for photography that is not downloaded [yeah!] from the internet with a perfect sign and exactly [exactly!] the perfect lighting. It's not as relatable [right]. It's that sense that you walk

past every single morning on your way to work. That's the one that becomes relevant, that touches your heart. And what is some of the feedback that you're starting to receive on the rebrand, both internally from, I think you said about 500 employees, and then the board members, and the visitors? From day-to-day?

MICHAEL It's been really overwhelmingly positive. I mean, we're so grateful that we had such strong partnership in Wolff Olins in terms of the storytelling around this brand. And I think that's a really important piece too, is that because we had such a strong strategy behind this brand, that we were able to really preview this out in advance with our board and with our full staff community. So we did a lot of work talking about the why behind the brand before we even rolled it out, and that even extended to our fans and followers on social media and everyone on our email list. So we were really diligent about explaining the why before the big reveal so that when we went live with this at the end of January, people were primed for it. They were primed for the color, they were primed for the joy, they were primed for the optimism. That really helped because then when we went live, folks were amped up for it.

Our visitors are really enthused by products. Things are flying off the shelves in the shop. But again, I think it speaks to the color, it speaks to the experience people have here and the world of nature. And then I think many of our board members who have been along for the ride for several iterations of branding here at NYBG have been also just as enthused. I think Jane hit the nail on the head that it so is not just thinking about our garden grounds, but it's our special events and our fundraisers. And what's so beautiful about this brand is that it really does flex across all of those different usage points. We were hypervigilant with Wolff Olins about who our key audiences were for this project and really mapped our storytelling to each of those. I think we had eight audiences so that when it came time for rollout, they understood their piece of the story, and there was a real collective buy-in. When we went to roll it out.

JANE Even I'm feeling it from the employees, it was a lovely encounter a couple of weeks ago... My younger sister was in town visiting from the Midwest, she brought her teenage daughter. They were here for a long weekend and they asked, can we see this New York Botanical Garden that you worked on? I brought them. We went to the Organ show... Afterwards they're like, "can we go to the shop? And I'm like, absolutely". So I'm like, let me load you up. I'm going to buy you a bunch of stuff to send home to the other family members who couldn't make it. We're checking out and the employee is ringing me up, and she's like, "don't you work here? And I'm like, no, no, no, no. I'm just a visitor". So she keeps ringing me up and then she stops. She goes, "no, no, I know you work here". And my sister leaned in and she's like, "no, she worked for the company that did your logo". She just fell silent. She grabbed the employee next to her and she's like, you're not going to believe this. This is the woman who did our brand, and they just got so giddy and they're like, "oh, we love it so much. Thank you, thank you, thank you. We love everything that it's doing. It makes us so happy. Thank you so much for working on it". And it was just such a lovely moment.

BRYONY Had do you heard that one, Michael?

MICHAEL I hadn't. That's amazing. That's great. The other thing that strikes me is that there are people across both our garden ground who work here, but also in the community who have embraced this in their own ways. We have Bronx Greenup Community Farm sites throughout the Bronx, and I was making a visit to one recently, and they had already taken the new branding and utilized it for signage on their farm site. And we're seeing people across the garden in their own departments and their scientific division especially who are taking the new branding and using it in ways that really serve their needs. I think that's such a ringing endorsement. And I think also a good lesson that for us, this brand work was about really empowering people.

So often I think rebrands are about creating very regimented structure and especially at a big institution, ensuring people follow the rules. There's an element to that. Of course, in our work, there's a really detailed style guide, but it was all under the auspices of empowering folks, not just folks who work here, but people who are engaged with the garden and work around the world to take this brand and run with it. So every time I see something that my creative team hasn't made, my gut reaction is still to, "oh, what is this? What are they doing with it?" But then I let my shoulders down, and the vast majority of the time, it is the ultimate compliment that folks are out there using this brand in ways that are furthering our mission, that are engaging folks in the environmental action fight that we all need to engage in. It's just been really thrilling to see it all used across the city already.

BRYONY Well, that comes from that very strong strategy that you started with, which included a very keen awareness of who your audience is and how you need to communicate with them. I'm curious to know, what were the eight audiences that you created?

MICHAEL Pop quiz time, our visitors, our members, folks who take classes,—both in-site and online— our trustees, our donors, our local Bronx residents, elected officials, and then members of our leadership team who are engaged in the work. So we're really thinking holistically about everyone who intersects with the garden, and again, not just folks who work here, but people who have a vested interest in the long-term health of this institution.

BRYONY It's rare to find the polarizing point where you have somebody who's there 365 days a year and then somebody who's there once a decade.

MICHAEL Yeah, exactly.

BRYONY And how do you share that story with both of them in a emotional way?

MICHAEL I'm really grateful to the leadership here who really rolled up their sleeves on this project and understood the need for it, and were honest about representing their individual areas, whether it was

science or horticulture, education, retail, and licensing. Really thinking strategically about how this brand can serve our long-term goals here. I was grateful for the partnership of the leadership of NYBG, who was ready, willing, and able to roll up their sleeves and dive in.

BRYONY I have one last brief question for both of you. What is it of the future that excites you the most beyond seeing the brand applied everywhere and really five years down the line, 10 years down the line, what is the most exciting aspect of this event for each?

JANE For me, it's pretty simple. I'm just hoping the excitement and the positivity... that traction continues, that engagement so that more and more people will just continue to be inspired, curious, and engaged; and therefore for them to care. I mean, that's the ultimate goal of this is to get people to care, and if you care you'll take action to keep our planet healthy.

MICHAEL For us, it's really about increasing the amount of people who engage with not just NYBG, but all the things NYBG stands for. As I mentioned at the top of this, we have a really exciting strategic plan that takes us to the year 2030, and this brand was really meant to be the visual representation of that plan, to be the container of all of that strategic thinking that will chart the future for this institution. So I'm really excited to see this brand manifest itself in some of the many initiatives, some of the master site planning projects, and really see it physically manifest as attached to many of those initiatives that we've charted in our planning process here.

For a lot of institutions, they tend to think of some of these projects on different tracks. I'm really glad and grateful that we did it on a parallel path because I think that the brand has already led us to some really exciting wins in terms of new programs we're bringing online to meet our strategic goals.

So for me, five years from now, I have full confidence that I'm going to be seeing more of this new branding. Again, not just in the new things we're developing on site, but different experiences that will come our way, not just here in New York, but around the world for collaborative experiences, for learning experiences, for co-product development. It's a really exciting opportunity to expand NYBG beyond our 250 acres into people's everyday lives. And again, back to those audiences, there were so many other sub-audiences, but thinking about people in their homes, making sure that not only our staff was fully invested as a key audience, but also people who love the garden middle of America or in the UK. I'm just really excited to see this walking down the street. I keep saying every time I see an NYBG hat with a new logo, it's like a major, major win.

BRYONY Nice. Well, I have to say, when we first saw the brand, we got kind of giddy because it's so unusual, but yet so right for what it stands for... for the time. I don't know if this would've worked in the 80s, but it definitely works now, and I see it working for a long time. As the brand evolves and the collateral might change a little bit and how you apply it and all of those things, but the essence of it, you can carve that in stone and have it there for a long time. Paint all your fences because you'll be safe with that for a while.

MICHAEL Here, here.

BRYONY And it really has managed to capture that really complex universe of nature and also the very complex workings of the garden. There are so many aspects to it that one doesn't think about in the day-to-day. There's many facets. There's many groups. I had no idea the employee count was so large. But it makes sense when you're talking about research, and grounds, and merch store, and all of these things. So I think you're well on your way to be the next New York icon in a few years. Definitely on track for that.

MICHAEL We're primed and ready.

BRYONY Perfect. Thank you so much for being on The Follow-Up today with me and for sharing all your insight.

JANE Thank you so much for having us. We're so happy to be here.

MICHAEL Thank you. What a fun conversation.

BRYONY I'm glad you enjoyed it.

ARMIN It was interesting to hear the early design process where Wolff Olins fell in love with their first idea, then struggled to develop their third idea, which eventually became not just their favorite but the eventual selected design direction. A nice reminder that our process as designers is rarely linear and often... painful. At least emotionally. One other great sentiment came courtesy of Michael who observed that most often, rebranding exercises are about creating regimented structures and ensuring people follow the rules but that we shouldn't forget that it's also about empowering people, inside, outside, and everywhere in between. In this case in particular it was about empowering plant people but, to their credit, I am not plant people and even I feel empowered by this new, soon-to-be-iconic identity for NYBG.

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