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Quadpack interviews Antoni Arola about design

With Armand Basi's Wild Forest for Men continuing to scoop up packaging awards, it is clear that wood is a material that is positively trending. Does this mean we will see more of this kind of packaging in future? What inspires designers to integrate it into a pack? And where does such a design begin?

Antoni Arola, head of the design studio responsible for Wild Forest, grants an exclusive insight into what makes a good perfume bottle design.
What do you need to consider when you design a perfume bottle?
Antoni Arola: When you design a perfume pack, there are certain ingredients that have to be included. It has to be up-to-date, but it also has to last. When you look back 10 years later, you want to be able to say that it still looks good.

Next, you add the brand values and, in some cases, the characteristics of the fragrance itself. And then you make a cocktail, applying the unique creativity that the designer brings to the mix.

Of course, the pack itself needs to be desirable. I always ask myself: "What would I like to see in my own bathroom, that I would feel bad about throwing away when it's finished?"
What about the actual design process?
Antoni Arola: Well, a perfume bottle has fixed components, rather like a body. The bottle is the torso, the pump is the head. The body can take a variety of forms and then we play around with the dress, adding the cap as the hat, as it were. Each of the components has its set materials. The bottle will be glass and the pump will be metallic. Everything else is open to creativity.

The process to create a pack can take around 18 months, but it all begins with a drawing – or, rather, several drawings. These initial concepts are consolidated into one or two designs. The shape and the materials are chosen and then we move on to mock-ups. These show what does and doesn't work, so the design can be refined, until it takes its final form.
Is that how it went with Armand Basi's Wild Forest for Men?

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Antoni Arola: Yes, more or less. With this particular pack, the client (perfumer IDESA) specified the use of wood. Rather than just a cap, they wanted to make the whole pack out of wood and we loved the idea. The project began with a visit to the factory of Technotraf Wood Packaging, to discover the possibilities. And that's where we got really excited. We saw examples of packs they had produced for brands like Issey Miyake, we noted the production capabilities of the factory and then we got down to work.

Our studio has worked for Armand Basi for around 15 years now, so we knew the brand very well. We came up with some initial designs and tried out various ideas for a 'box' made of a single block of wood. We also wanted to incorporate a window that looked like a carpenter's level. The cap was another block of wood; a smaller version of the body. It worked out very well. You can see the grain of the wood, it's honest, real and, as all good packaging ought to, it breaks the mould.

How has perfume packaging design changed over the years?

Antoni Arola: Before, products had a longer lifetime and designs lasted for a while. Now, brands are subjected to the 'madness' of fashion. Fashion trends are very fickle and cause confusion among beauty brands. I don't feel comfortable with it. There is no fixed formula for what makes a good design. What is clear is that it needs to be durable and withstand the changeable waves of fashion. Whatever the design, it needs a strong, powerful concept and, in some cases, the courage to make it happen.

Wood is appearing in design in all areas these days, from bicycles to sunglasses. Why do you think this is happening?

Antoni Arola: In general, we're seeing a return to natural materials. Wood, glass, granite, leather, textiles. In today's high-tech world, everything around us – cars, TVs, computers – it's all smooth and perfect, but artificial. Human beings need normal, natural things.

The new generation of 'Hipsters' are rebelling against this environment. That's their job, to contradict their parents. They cycle to work, buy fair-trade goods and put houseplants inside their homes like their grandmothers did – but always with an iPhone in their pocket. That's the reality. Despite their ecological mindset, they are always connected to the internet, so I guess these practices help compensate for their technological consumption.

So is wood just a short-lived trend in design?

Antoni Arola: All trends are cyclical, even in wood. Before, oak was old-fashioned and now it's back in. Wenge used to be sophisticated and now it's used in melamine. Yes, the wooden design trend will change, but whether the cycle will be a short or a long one I couldn't say. What is for sure is that wood as a material will always be good. It's a 'noble' material. It has dignity. It is suitable for everyone at every level, from mass market to luxury. It also makes a product personal. Each piece of wood is unique, so a wooden perfume pack will be uniquely yours, the only one in the world. Plus, of course, it is natural and can be sustainable.

We hear a lot about sustainability these days. Is environmental awareness a trend or are we going

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through a fundamental change?
Antoni Arola: I hope it lasts. The issue is too important to be just a trend. Today's generation is showing real environmental consciousness, so maybe they can bring about true change.

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About Quadpack Industries SA

Quadpack Industries is an international manufacturer and a provider of enhanced packaging solutions for beauty brand owners and contract fillers. With offices and production facilities in Europe, North America, and the Asia Pacific region and a strategic network of manufacturing partners, Quadpack develops bespoke and customised packs for prestige, masstige and mass market customers. For more information, please visit www.quadpack.com.

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