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THE GREEN BEAN

A specialty coffee and cacao supplier that supports the organic and fair trade efforts in
Central and South America.

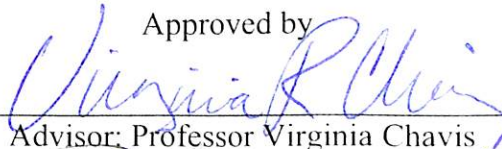
By

Allison Nicole Johnson

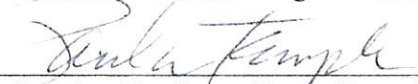
A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford
May 2008

Approved by



Advisor: Professor Virginia Chavis



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ABSTRACT
Allison Johnson

During my study in graphic design, I have noticed the different ways certain product identity motifs influence potential consumers. My thesis explores this idea by addressing the importance of organic and fair trade products and materials.

I have created a coffee company that specializes in coffees, chocolates, and spices from specific countries in Central and South America. The company's identity is designed around the culture of these countries and the increasingly popular idea of "going green". Environmentally safe, fair trade, organic, and recyclable are characteristics and the unifying themes of the company. Not only am I trying to persuade potential consumers to buy the products, but to do so because of the "green" benefits.

The other goal I had was to design the product identity so it was artfully distinguished from the competition. Today, most organic and fair trade product packaging is very cluttered with information and images. I designed my packaging so only the most important information was given in text. The materials and colors used let the consumer gather other information without having to read a lot. For example, the natural brown coffee bags with grass ties and a sewn label let the consumer assume that this is a type of organic coffee. (The USDA Organic and Fair Trade logos are printed small on the back to reassure the consumer.) My packaging has clean

designs, a couple of colors, and clear labels that stand out from today's packaging that has many complicated colors, images, and text.

A majority of my research is based off information provided by Transfair, the Fair Trade Organization, and a brief study on location. The programs that I used in creating the designs were Adobe Illustrator CS2 and Adobe Photoshop CS2.

Upon the completion of my thesis, I believe I have successfully created a company and its identity with a particular motif that would catch the attention of many, and influence potential consumers to purchase because of its green benefits.

SECTION 1: COFFEE AND CHOCOLATE

Coffee and chocolate are not only tasty edibles, but also part of a lifestyle that has touched all levels of society all over the world for many generations. From cowboys crouched by campfires cradling tin cups of range brew to Humphrey Bogart's droopy eyes peering over a steaming cup of java in *Casablanca*¹, coffee has been a common comfort in America.

For me, it was the smell of my mother's kitchen perfumed with bacon and coffee on a Saturday morning that instantly put me in a good mood. Chocolate is also one of the world's most famous and beloved treats that has taken on many forms and has been a key ingredient in many recipes for hundreds of years. From puddings to pies and bars to beverages, chocolate is enjoyed by almost everyone.

Central and South America contain the top coffee and cacao producing countries in the world and the United States is one of the world's largest consumer of coffee, cacao, and other crops from the global South. However, few Americans realize that agriculture workers in these industries often toil in what can be described as "sweatshops in the fields." Under the law of free trade, many small-scale farmers receive prices for their coffee and cacao that are less than the costs of production, forcing them into a cycle of poverty and debt. These conditions stem from severe injustices in the global economy. World coffee prices have plummeted to all-time lows in recent years, causing

¹ Putumayo Music CD - J. Poet

malnutrition, starvation, and loss of farms. Some have even turned to drug cultivation just to survive. Cacao farmers are so poor they have been forced to use child labor and, in the worst cases, child slavery.

The environment in Central and South America is also suffering. Some farmers are cutting down trees to sell for extra money. While shade-grown coffee is known for being superior, coffee and cacao grown in direct sunlight has a faster production rate. Thus, trees are cut away to make room for these crops. Rain forests are being sacrificed for coffee fields so small farms can make a larger profit. An increase of fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides are also being used for faster and higher production numbers. Studies also show that approximately 150 bird species live on farms of shade grown coffee, whereas non-shaded coffee supports as few as twenty to fifty species.

As profit needs have increased, more forests are cut down, soil fertility has become less sustainable, and the songbird populations have steadily decreased.² Small-scale farmers are still not making enough to support their families.

² Coffee Research Institute

SECTION 2: THE FAIR TRADE FEDERATION

One solution to create a just and sustainable economic system is fair trade. The Fair Trade Federation (FTF) is an association of businesses and organizations who are fully committed to fair trade.³ Under this organization, it is guaranteed that every step, from the farmer to the consumer, has followed the fair trade standards and criteria. These standards promise that farmers receive a sufficient living wage price under direct long-term contracts, eliminating exploitative middlemen. It also guarantees that the farms are either small-scale producers in democratic cooperatives or workers on larger farms who receive a living wage and can bargain collectively. Fair trade strictly prohibits abusive child labor or forced labor and allows them to remain in school. The Federation ensures ecologically sustainable methods are used by teaching these techniques to the farmers. Funds are set aside for community projects like schools, clinics, and training in quality improvement and sustainable production. Even though Fair Trade products are not always organic, profits from Fair Trade are often used for training farmers in organic techniques like composting and integrating recycled materials. Because Fair Trade allows farmers to practice traditional methods of coffee and cacao cultivation, most are shade grown and organic. Approximately 80-85% of these farms do not use pesticides.⁴

Many companies, such as Starbucks, are now advertising fair trade products, but only 1% of their coffee is fair trade and isn't offered at all stores. Interestingly enough, in

³ The Fair Trade Federation

⁴ Fair Trade Certified

2003, Starbucks net revenues were \$4.1 billion. This number rises every year. The same year, M&M/Mars, the world's largest chocolate company, had annual revenues of \$16 billion. However, they don't invest in any kind of fair trade chocolates. The United States State Department and the International Labor Organization have reported child slavery and child labor on these cacao farms, yet the M&M/Mars Company has refused to pay more for the fair trade guaranteed cacao.⁵ Therefore, for people insistent for fair trade products it is important not only to demand fair trade products, but also to make sure the producer sells fair trade, makes it constantly, and consistently available to everyone.

⁵ www.globalexchange.org

SECTION 3: ORGANIC COFFEE AND CACAO COMPANY

During my study in graphic design, I have observed the different ways certain food packaging motifs influence potential consumers. There are two good examples that I have observed during my everyday routine of work and grocery shopping.

For instance, I work at a kitchen store that sells the Mississippi Cheese Straw Factory cheese straws. They have recently created a new flavor: Fire-Roasted Tomato. The flavor resembles the taste of grilled, sun-dried tomatoes that were roasted over a fire. However, the packaging has orange and red colors with flames along the bottom and many customers assume it's spicy. They often ask, "How spicy are these?" instead of, "Are they spicy?" The packaging is misleading and either steers potential consumers away or disappoints those that were looking for a spicy treat.

Another example can be found on many shelves in the Kroger grocery store. Almost every aisle has very popular food brands that sit next to the cheaper Kroger brand of the same food in almost identical packaging. The idea is to either visually advertise to the consumer that the product quality and taste is exactly like the expensive, popular brands or that an inattentive customer will grab the imitation without notice.

Observations like these have aided my thesis research while I studied particular behaviors of potential consumers. Most of my study was in the area of food and beverage packaging, so naturally I narrowed the rest of my research down to this field and started creating my thesis accordingly.

In light of the current popular idea of “going green”, I have used my thesis to explore these observations by creating a company identity that addresses the importance of consuming environmentally safe, organic, and fair trade products and materials.

The company is a supply business that specializes in Central and South American coffees, chocolates, and spices and its identity is designed around the increasingly popular idea of “going green.” The concepts and unifying theme of the company’s foods and designs are environmentally safe, fair trade, organic, and recyclable. I chose for my company to specialize in products from Central and South America because they are some of the largest producers of coffee and cacao. I also designed the production with influences from their culture and environment. Even though the Fair Trade Federation doesn’t include spices yet, I added these as other organic items that could be sold under the organic supply company and can also be used along with the coffees and chocolates.

Two other objectives I had were to design the product identity so it is artfully distinguished from the competition and to maintain a consistent visual voice among all the various pieces. Not only am I trying to persuade potential consumers to buy the products, but to do so because of its “green” benefits.

SECTION 4: MATERIALS AND DESIGNS

When I started sketching designs and identity ideas, I wanted to come up with a unique name that was simple yet creative and distinct enough that upon hearing the name, the consumer would immediately know the product. I came up with “The Green Bean.” Obviously, the name refers to organic coffee and cacao beans. Yet, the design of the logo also represents fair trade products, recycled materials, and environmentally safe techniques used in their production.

Hoping that it wouldn't be confused with the vegetable, I changed the 'e' in 'Bean' to a coffee bean that resembled the letter. This also added a nice design element to the logo that could also be used in place of the whole logo and still be identified as The Green Bean label.

When I started designing the packaging, I wanted something that would stand out from the current organic and fair trade competition. Today's packaging has many complicated images and is overloaded with text. I decided to design my products with clean labels and a couple of strategic colors. I will provide only the most important information in text and the rest will be visually provided through materials and designs.

First, I wanted to create a distinct pattern that would stand out from the competition, yet still clearly represented a special coffee and cocoa supply company. While sketching, I made a cup of coffee in hoping that it would help inspire my creative thought process. Sure enough, after my third cup I noticed several ring stains on my

discarded sketches. Realizing that the unifying identity of true coffee and chocolate lovers was staring me in the face, I began using this organic pattern through out my packaging and other identity pieces.

Every coffee and chocolate lover is familiar with these infamous rings and drips that have inevitably stained almost everything. Yet, while an “every now and then” drinker is familiar with the occasional ring or two, a true coffee and chocolate lover will have numerous stains on almost everything. Also, while the drinker might appreciate the organic benefits of the company’s products, only a true lover will invest in something that insures the quality of life of the people and environment that provide these tasty treats and thus promises superior tasting coffee and chocolate. Therefore, I settled on the pattern of several coffee and hot chocolate rings and stains that are familiar to coffee lovers and, now, represent the identity of the company’s products.

The colors that resulted from this idea of rings and stains were different shades of earthy brown. However, these bland colors are a far cry from the rich colors and bold patterns of Central and South American culture.

Accordingly, I needed another design element that would reflect these cultures yet, not clash with the pattern I chose for my company’s identity. It was very difficult to come up with something simple, yet representative of the entire Southern West Hemisphere of culture and history. Consequently, I focused my attention on four specific countries deeply involved with Fair Trade coffee and cacao: Brazil; Colombia; Mexico; and Peru. These countries also have distinct flavors in their coffee and chocolates so I decided to divide the different kinds of coffee and chocolate by their origin. This gives the consumer a choice between four distinct flavors of beans.

A unifying design to represent these four countries was still challenging. I researched many cooperatives in these specific countries to observe the different crafts created in each. I tried to connect any common themes, ideas, or subjects that could embody all four of these countries. What I found were beautiful bold earth tone fabrics that were being sewn into many kinds of clothing, quilts, rugs, and other textiles. I then decided to chose four of the commonly used colors and create a small pattern of squares similar to these textiles. I made the pattern smaller and used it in moderation so the coffee stains and the squares wouldn't fight for attention, yet would add a bit of Central and South American flair.

I strictly use this pattern on the inside of the packaging for an artistic touch. However, the more I built the boxes with the quilt pattern on the inside, the more I noticed that the two patterns were fighting for attention. When I asked for opinions on the two patterns, many viewers said they liked the idea of a pattern on the inside, but they were confused as to which pattern was the main identity pattern for the company. Therefore, I removed the color pattern from the packaging. Since the pattern on the inside was so popular I varied the placement of the coffee stain pattern. The coffee packaging has the stain pattern on the outside, and textured chocolate-colored paper on the inside. The chocolate packaging has the textured paper on the outside, and the stain pattern on the inside. I also used this idea throughout the gift box sets as well.

Even though I got rid of the pattern I still wanted some color on the pieces. I then saw an opportunity to use each color as a specific country identifier on the packaging. For example, I used a cool red on certain packaging to represent products grown in Brazil. From a distance, a consumer would be able to easily see which packaging contained the

Brazilian type of bean without having to constantly read the information on the box to distinguish them apart. This visual identification through color instead of text sets the packaging apart from today's packaging. It easily distinguishes each type of bean without overloading the packaging with text. Also, this flexibility with colors also might inspire the company expand out to other fair trade cooperatives in other countries or even other continents.

However, I couldn't completely get rid of the pattern. The spices that I've incorporated are not fair trade, but organic items that come from all four countries. The origin of a spice does not significantly differ in taste or quality either so the idea of incorporating one color for four different sugars seems monotonous. Therefore, I saw this as an opportunity to represent all four countries on the spices with the color pattern I had previously discarded. Except this time, I didn't repeat the colors as a square pattern on a quilt, but as a band of repeating colors that would wrap around the spice bottles.

Even though I decided not to use the textile pattern on the packaging, I still wanted the labels to seem cloth-like. I chose to use a textured paper with rough, torn edges to create a softer and less industrialized look.

With the inspiration of fabric on my mind, I started to think of ways I could incorporate actual fabrics and other materials into the production to further develop the idea that the product is truly an organic Central and South American product, undisturbed by industrialization. There were many materials that I decided to use in the packaging because of three reasons: They were recycled materials, they were native to Central and South America, and they helped unify my theme and maintain a consistent look among the various pieces.

One way I thought to advocate this idea that the products were directly from the cooperatives was for me to create as much of the packaging as I could by hand and with native materials. This method mimics the fair trade crafts that are hand made and sold with fair trade coffee and chocolate.

During the development, I wanted to use a type of casing that was unique, yet easy on the environment and easy to acquire in the global South. Balsa wood, a very common, fast-growing, and weed-like native tree in Central and South America, is sometimes used in packaging design samples. I thought recycled balsa wood would be a unique, creative, and easy material to make boxes from. It would also help reflect the idea of recycled and native materials.

I then chose two types of recycled paper for my chocolate-colored and stained paper. One type I used is called “coffee paper.” Coffee paper is more than just another type of recycled paper. It is comprised of leftover coffee waste from plantations that, not only reduces the amount of circulation of recycled paper, but it also helps farmers get rid of the problematic coffee waste build up safely and effectively.

The other type of paper I chose wasn’t coffee paper because the chocolate color and texture I desired wasn’t available in coffee paper. However, it was recycled and the dark brown color and rough texture related to the organic theme.

I also incorporated polyurethane coffee bags into the production line. The polyurethane inside the bag keeps the beans fresher longer. To keep the bag consistent with the theme of natural and recycled materials, I used a natural brown color craft bags. I also used raffia to tie the bags shut.

Recently, when I visited a Fair Trade coffee seller in the Caribbean, I noticed that the coffee being brought in from the cooperatives were in large burlap bags. They then sold it to consumers in smaller burlap bags. So, in order for my product to seem as if it was genuinely from Central and South America I also made small burlap bags to contain the coffee and chocolate inside the boxes. Since roasted coffee doesn't stay fresh in a breathable bag, I was forced to place those beans in resealable plastic bags inside of the burlap.

After making the burlap bags, I wanted to utilize the material one other way so it was artfully distinguished from the competition. Since my packaging obviously needed the logo somewhere, I began to think of how I could use my logo and a piece of burlap to come together and create a distinctively creative face and further push the idea of an organic and handmade product. While I was studying the other Fair Trade packaging I noticed that the labels were sewn shut instead of glued or stamped. I then realized that I could sew the label onto the burlap and then to the coffee paper to give it a handmade look. Because I wanted to reduce the use of machinery, I tore the labels from the original paper and hand sewed the pieces together. This eliminated the need for scissors and sewing machines and also helped support the idea of fabric-like paper.

This idea of using burlap for aesthetic reasons encouraged me to use it among all the other pieces of identity to maintain a consistent visual voice. The spice bottles have burlap tied down to the top, the product catalog cover is bound with it, and the gift boxes are creatively wrapped with it. The burlap bags used to transport coffee from the farms doesn't last and are usually given away as a complimentary gift with the purchase of some coffee products. That doesn't guarantee that it won't get thrown away once it's

sent, but it helps the cooperatives and suppliers to get rid of the unusable burlap.

Utilizing the unusable burlap as a design element in the product packaging provides a creative, attractive, and profitable solution for the company.

The last material I used was glass bottles for the spices. The glass is a recycled borosilicate glass that contains no lead. I chose to use glass jars because I wanted to add another form of packaging to the product line and because it is a practical solution to keep spices fresh while in storage. This type of glass is economical to produce because of its superior durability and chemical and heat resistance.⁶ Also, because I couldn't sew on the logo like the other packaging, I had to find a way to incorporate another element on these bottles to give it a natural, handmade look. I had previously mentioned that I had decided to tie burlap on top of these bottles, which helped the handmade look of the bottle design. However, in the end I needed one more item to push the look even further. After researching more fair trade crafts, I came across hand carved beads from animal bone. I decided that they would be a perfect touch to the bottles to help them tie into the Central and South American and handmade theme. I also used these beads in gift box designs as well to create a connection between the various pieces.

⁶ www.bodumusa.com

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Figure 1: Bag Design - Color labels identify each country.



Figure 2: Gift Bag and Box Designs



Figure 3: Spice Bottle Designs



Figure 4: Coffee and Cacao Box Designs (Brazil)



Figure 5: Product Catalog Cover



Figure 6: Opening Page Layout Example

Each country has an opening page giving information on the country's farmers, products, and cooperatives.



Figure 7: Product Page Layout Example

Every layout varies for each country and product.

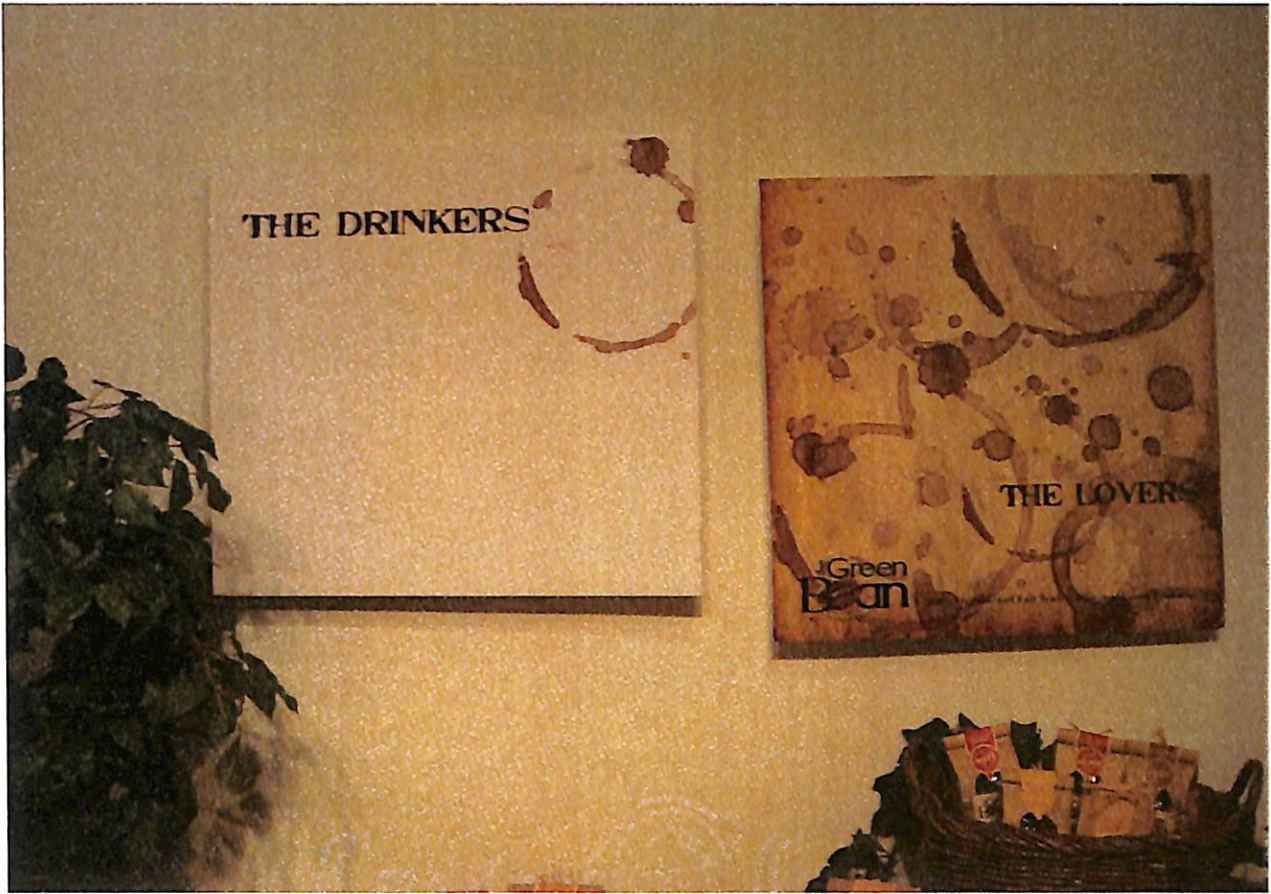


Figure 8: Advertising