RETHINKING THE HAPPY MEAL: EDUCATING CHILDREN ON SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH DESIGN

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of Texas State University-San Marcos in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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by

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RETHINKING THE HAPPY MEAL: EDUCATING CHILDREN ON SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH DESIGN

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Rachel Martinez, who is no longer here but is always with me in spirit; to Silvia, without whose love and support this would not be possible; to my father, Ruben Martinez, who has encouraged happiness in my career from the start; and, finally, to my nephew Roman, who has just arrived---- I hope my work will help change the world you'll grow up in for the better.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Finally, I would like to thank the MFA program, William Meek and Christine Haney--- without them I would not have had the opportunity to question, challenge, and experiment with ideas in the study of Communication Design, my passion.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

McDonald's

Recently, a letter signed by over 500 health professionals and organizations called for the retirement of McDonald's (MD) beloved spokesperson, Ronald McDonald (Jargon, 2011, para. 1). The reason? The belief that Ronald is responsible for getting kids hooked on unhealthy food, spurring an epidemic of diet-related diseases (Woodard, 2010, para. 2).

Since the first time he tied on his big red shoes in 1963, Ronald has become, through one of the most successful marketing campaigns in history, an instantly recognizable and beloved character worldwide (Retire Ronald, n.d., para. 9). Needless to say, the influence this hamburger-loving clown has on children is immense.

Not surprisingly, the Happy Meal (HM) has also come under attack. For example, a San Francisco ordinance, passed last year, requires children's meals that include a toy to meet certain nutritional standards before they can be sold (Chong, 2011, paras. 1-2). In response to the heat, MD has taken steps towards offering a better meal. They have introduced healthier alternatives to fries and soda, and offered items such as a pedometer instead of the usual toy (MSNBC, Associated Press, para. 1). Has it worked? Perhaps.

But the real question is, why is there so much hatred and backlash towards a cartoon clown and a little red box with a toy? The answer lies in the numbers. 2.5 million HM are sold a year (Karst, 2010, para. 13). This enormous figure underscores its popularity. Over 40 years of ingenious, child-targeted marketing have served to make the HM an iconic brand. The inclusion of a surprise toy only adds to the allure.

Statement of the Problem

While MD has taken some steps to address the above stated concerns, like redesigning their restaurants to evoke more of a "community-center"-like feel (Freshhome, n.d., para. 1), or applying the idea of "farm-to-fork" to their food, their attempts have been mostly cosmetic (Bellotti, 2012, para. 2). They have not reached the heart of the problem, which is to analyze their values, recognize the impact those values have on their customers, and use this influence for good, rather than just for profit. This project is not seeking to solve the problem in its entirety, but rather focuses on the HM, a product whose immense popularity has the potential to reach an audience whose principles and actions will shape the future.

Design for Change

The evidence is clear. The HM has power. Why, then, not use that power in a more positive or constructive manner? That question, coupled with the belief that design can play a vital role in advocating social change leads to a new question: Can design activism revitalize MD's tarnished reputation by educating and inspiring children to embrace sustainable practices? This project's central idea is that it can. Graphic designers can help clients promote practices that help educate the public, and spur them to take action about social and environmental problems (Dougherty, 2008). So, how can design

solve MD's problem? Design Thinking (DT), a holistic view to the design of products, services, and systems, will lead to a solution.

Design Thinking

Dziersk (2008) defines DT as "a protocol for solving problems and discovering new opportunities" (para. 2). It involves asking many questions. Sort of like a curious child relentlessly asking, why? Until finally, "simple answers are behind you and the true issues are revealed" (Dziersk, 2008, para. 6). When problem solving, an open mind and multiple perspectives can stimulate thought. The DT process consists of three stages: Inspiration, Ideation, and Implementation (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). When defining these three stages, Brown & Wyatt (2010) explain, "Think of *inspiration* as the problem or opportunity that motivates the search for solutions; *ideation* as the process of generating, developing, and testing ideas; and *implementation* as the path that leads from the project stage into people's lives" (para. 20). This project specifically utilizes the first two stages of the DT process. Only the prototyping aspect of implementation was undertaken.

Sally Madsen, designer and project leader at IDEO, states: "Design thinking is a process for innovation" (Sand, 2010, para. 2). This thought process could be applied not only in design, but in many other business situations as well. Madsen goes on to state, "It's about finding inspiration in the world, and using that to drive the generation of new ideas, and then coming up with a huge number of ideas in order to get to the one or two good ones" (Sand, 2010, para. 3). In this project, DT led to the following central idea: What if the happy meal could be reinvented in order to teach children about sustainable practices? This could be achieved by repackaging the HM as a sustainable product, thus creating an atmosphere of learning through play and discovery.

Sustainability

In simple terms, sustainability is "ensuring that people and the earth have the basic needs to thrive both now and in the indefinite future" (Persad, 2011, para. 2). Another way to think about it, is to visualize sustainability as a cycle, meaning, that resources that are used, are replenished. For example, a farmer plants a tomato, he eats it, and then he uses the scraps to make compost for his new crop of tomatoes. This research addresses two specific aspects of sustainability: Waste Hierarchy and Sustainable Food.

Waste Hierarchy

Waste hierarchy refers to the 3Rs, which "classify waste management strategies according to their desirability" (eNotes, para. 1). The 3R's have become society's environmental slogan, reminding us of the order as well as their meaning. The 3Rs are as follows: 1. Reduce - Buy less and use less. 2. Reuse – Use discarded elements again. 3. Recycle – Incorporate discarded material into new products.

Sustainable Food

Sustainable food is "food that is healthy for consumers and produced in an humane, ecologically benign, socially responsible and economically fair way" (Planet Matters and More, n.d, para. 1). The following section will address the design decisions taken into account to follow these sustainable principles.

CHAPTER II

THE HAPPY MEAL

Project Overview

This research resulted in a system that encourages new ways of disposing and reusing packaging in the fast food industry. Consequently, this new system led to the creation of a more sustainable HM; by promoting a change in the way food is packaged and sold. A reduction in the amount of packaging leads to savings in manufacturing costs, meaning more available funds can be spent on foods of better quality, for example, locally sourced produce. Thus, the result is not only a better HM, but also a happier community, more satisfied with the product and more willing to visit the restaurant. In addition, there are several unrelated benefits of this new system. For example, the new HM could create the opportunity for quality time spent between parent and child as they plant their seeds and enjoy the results together. Overall, this project will add value to the HM and create an educational costumer experience.

Target Audience

The target audience for this thesis project is the HM's target consumer: children. Children are the future. They are the future advocates and farmers, the future leaders and decision makers. Children find their identity, learn values, and more than anything discover their passion, at an early age (Ottman, 2011). Therefore, they should be taught early. Kids learn by doing; through hands-on learning. Gradually, Ottman (2011) explains, children "become empowered to act on environmental issues through their own purchasing and consumption habits" (p. 161), meaning childhood offers a great opportunity to introduce sustainability-related values.

Methods

Observation

Observation is a key phase of DT. During the early stage of the process, a visit to the Austin Children's Museum was conducted. This visit was an important factor to understanding how children play and learn through discovery.

Another key observational opportunity for the designer was playing the role of an urban farmer. Dziersk (2008) emphasizes the fundamental importance of "Getting out of the cube and involving oneself in the process, product, shopping experience or operating theater" (para. 5). Creating and maintaining an urban garden, from seed to crop, allowed for hands-on research. Digging, dirt under the nails, composting; All of this gave the designer an appreciation for earth and all that it has to give, as well as a revealing perspective on sustainability's big picture.

Sustainable Design Principles

Two sustainable principles were taken into account in the packaging design for

this research: Minimizing Waste, and Designing for Re-use.

Rightsizing

The HM's entree and sides were combined into a single container. This practice, known as rightsizing, removes excess material, thus minimizing waste (Re-nourish, n.d., para. 1).

Material Reuse

In addition to rightsizing, the new HM bag was made of 100% post-consumer material, with graphics to be printed in soy-based ink. The container for the entrée and sides is made of molded pulp, which is reusable and biodegradable. All of these modifications will aid in reducing the HM's ecological footprint.

Ideation

Ideation is the process of creating and developing new ideas. It involves drawing out ideas anywhere, on stickies, on paper, the whiteboard...., following an intuitive strategy: Think. Draw. Map. Challenge. Repeat. As Linus Pauling, scientist and two-time Nobel Prize winner, put it, "To have a good idea you must first have lots of ideas" (Brown & Wyatt, 2010, para. 30). Good ideas stand out. They're "creatively disruptive", because they "provide a wholly new solution to a problem many people didn't know they had" (Brown & Wyatt, 2010, para. 30).

The Toy as a Teaching Tool

In addition to packaging, this research focused on the motivational aspect of the HM. Specifically, how the HM can be used as tool to educate children on how to grow their own food, and consequently, on the importance of locally grown produce and eating healthy. Keeping in mind the importance of the toy as an element of surprise, the new

HM includes a seed packet. In this way, the element of surprise is amplified as a customer waits for his seeds to grow.

Play and Discovery

The importance of understanding and utilizing the concept of discovery and learning through play was key in the design objective. A play aspect was introduced into the restaurant environment, to teach about another sustainable practice, recycling. A paper and plastic recycling campaign was introduced, revealing new characters, recycle monsters called "The Northborns". These characters help communicate the message on a level children understand and respond to. The playground is key to this experience, as it is the location of a Recycle Monster (RM) game created to promote recycling.

Strategy

Storytelling

An imaginative approach was used in developing the narrative for this project; just as children introduce their imagination into everything they do. A narrative was important because stories put ideas into context and give them meaning. As Brown & Katz (2009) state, "Human capacity for storytelling plays an important role in the intrinsically human-centered approach to problem solving, *design thinking*" (p.132). It was story telling that allowed the idea to navigate through from the first phase of the project and into the final stages of the experience. "When we create multiple touch points along a journey, we are structuring a sequence of events that build upon one another, in sequential order, across time" (Brown & Katz, 2008, p.132).

As far-fetched as the origin of the story is, knowing the motivation behind the idea made it all the more thrilling and challenging. Following, is the narrative behind the origins of the experience, Victory Earth (VE), and the new characters, The Northborns:

Victory Earth

The story begins with McDonald's being hit by lightning, bringing Ronald McDonald to the realization that global warming, pollution, and waste have placed the planet in grave danger. Trading his clown makeup and red shoes for a farmer's hat and overalls, Ronald vows to save Earth by enlisting the help of the world's children. He forms the Victory Earth Hero Team, handing out Team Hero badges to all those who are ready to join the fight.

One day, while working in his farm, Ronald discovers a volunteer plant in the compost. [A volunteer plant is one that grows on its own, from a seed carried by the wind or a bird, rather than from one deliberately planted by a farmer (Wikipedia, 2011).]
Ronald removes the volunteer from his compost pile, plants it, and nourishes it as it grows. To Ronald's surprise, from that little seedling emerge a race of helpful monsters, The Northborns.

The Northborns

The Northborns are born from the earth. They have come to help the Victory

Earth Hero Team. [The name Northborn comes from Lord Northbourne, author of the
book Look to the Land, who is known as the "Father of Organic Agriculture" due to his
having coined the phrase "organic farming" (Northbourne, 1940).] The Northborns are
friendly creatures, farmers, protectors of Earth, and recycle monsters. There are three of
them: Mac, the leader, whose favorite food is paper; NomNom, who consumes everything

plastic; And Posty, who craves all that is compostable. Each of the Northborns wears a different colored pin, which identifies their food of choice. Mac wears an orange square, NomNom a blue triangle, and Posty a green circle. These three smiling creatures are used throughout the Victory Earth experience as advocates for the sustainable principles of recycling and urban farming.

Mind Mapping

Mind mapping is an ideation strategy for visualizing connections between several ideas (Mind Mapping, para. 1). It was utilized to map out the process for this thesis project. It enabled the designer to visually create a road in order to solve each problem, maneuver each obstacle, and tell the VE story from concept to final deliverables.

Visual Diary

Following the ideation phase, visual exploration for this project began with a pen and paper, sketching quickly to explore multiple concepts. After the narrative was written, ideas flowed as if there were a brain located in the hand, drawing intuitively, very similar to how designer and illustrator Seymour Chwast describes his design approach, "After my mind has done it's job, Mr. Hand takes over" (Millman, 2007, p. 157). Every visual itch lurking in the mind was caught on paper. Even those that came in the middle of the night were sketched. After a period of intensive sketching, all the illustrations were collected and sorted into a visual diary.

Ink, Color and Type

A Sharpie ultra fine point pen was used for sketching and final illustration work.

The color palette (blue, orange, brown, and green) was inspired by the colors of nature (water, sun, soil, vegetation). The color palette also includes MD's signature colors, red

and yellow. The font used was Knockout, and this font also inspired the hand-drawn type.

Deliverables

The applications for this thesis project cover Packaging Design, Environmental Design, and Interactive Design. The deliverables function as bridges, engaging the costumer by leading from one component of the VE experience to the next.

Exterior Signage

The experience begins with the outdoor signage. As the happy little customers arrive at MD, they get the first glimpses into the VE world. From the ride up to the parking lot, to the walk-up purchase counter, visuals are used to string along the narrative experience. A banner hangs on the outside of the playground fence, visible to passing cars. Window graphics are placed by the restaurant's entrance.

Tray Liner

The first interior touch point a customer comes in contact with is the tray liner.

The liner, like all of MD's liners, is used as a promotional component. It either advertises a new item on the menu or a new promo launch. In this case, the liner is used to promote the launch of the VE experience.

Packaging

The packaging design is hand drawn. The idea is to visually narrate a brief chapter of the VE story in an imaginative way, in order to catch a child's eye. Pen and ink images were scanned, saved as bitmaps and then applied to the bag. Three final comprehensive designs were developed.

Included in the HM bag are a milk box and a single container partitioned to hold both chicken nuggets and carrots. The milk box is made of 100% post-consumer material.

The food container is made of molded pulp, which is biodegradable.

The packaging design encompasses the elements of a green initiative, which in this case is growing your own food. The inclusion of a seed packet in place of a toy allows children to be hands-on, letting them not just read about sustainability, but also practice it. Because the food container is biodegradable, it can be reused as a planter for the seed. Along with the seed packet, the HM also includes stickers, which will be applied to residential recycle bins. These stickers will allow children to create their own RM, extending the Northborn recycling experience from the restaurant and into their homes. The HM bag includes copy that prompts the costumer to ask for a Hero Card (HC).

The Hero Card

The HC is given to each customer when requested. It is the VE Hero Team membership card. The card contains a unique 8-digit ID number. This number is used to log on and create an account in the VE website. The card is also used to activate the RM bins found at the restaurants.

The Hero Station

The Hero Station is a computer kiosk located in the restaurant, where a customer can log in to the VE website and activate his HC. The station will be mounted on a wall, out of the way of passing customers. Once a customer receives his HC at the register, he can activate it at the Hero Station. In addition, having a Hero Station located in the restaurant allows those without a home computer to get online and keep track of their RM and points.

Recycle Monsters

The Monster bins are located in the MD playground area. The aim of the bins is to introduce children to a 3-step recycling system. The bins are modeled after the three Northborns. There is a bin to recycle plastic (NomNom, with a blue triangle), a bin to recycle paper (Mac, with an orange square), and one for compost (Posty, with a green circle). The RM game goes beyond the playground by operating interactively, allowing the customer to access and track his recycling points. Before each costumer makes a deposit, he will use the HC to activate the RM bin. Lights will be activated and the customer will be free to deposit the correct material in the respective RM's mouth. A customer receives points for each recycling deposit. These points determine their RM's energy level. Customers can choose their RM at the VE Website.

Website

The VE website is where a customer, once he receives and activates his HC, can create a profile, choose a monster, and keep track of his garden's progress. The website consists of 6 pages. The home page is where the customer can log in using the 8-digit Hero Code found on his HC. The next page is the Northborns page. There, the customer can learn about the Northborns' origins and preferred diets, choose his own RM, and learn more about recycling. On the My Monster page, the customer can keep track of his RM's health and power levels, as well as the number of items he has recycled, and the number of points earned. An RM's health and power levels increase the more a customer recycles, resulting in points being awarded. The customer can then choose to redeem his points for prizes or powers for his RM. On the My Garden page, the customer can upload photos of the vegetables planted from the HM seed packet. The Gallery page is where the

customer can view garden photos uploaded by other children from all over the world. The contents of the gallery can be searched by vegetable type and location. Finally, the Store page is where a child can go to redeem his points for prizes such as T-shirts, stickers, and little farmer tools.

Exhibit

The exhibit served as the visual representation of the thesis as a complete process. It offered an opportunity for the viewer to experience VE from concept, to process map, to final deliverables. Each component is showcased in the order it would be presented to the customer at MD. In this way, a visitor to the exhibit can have the same experience a costumer would.

Conclusion

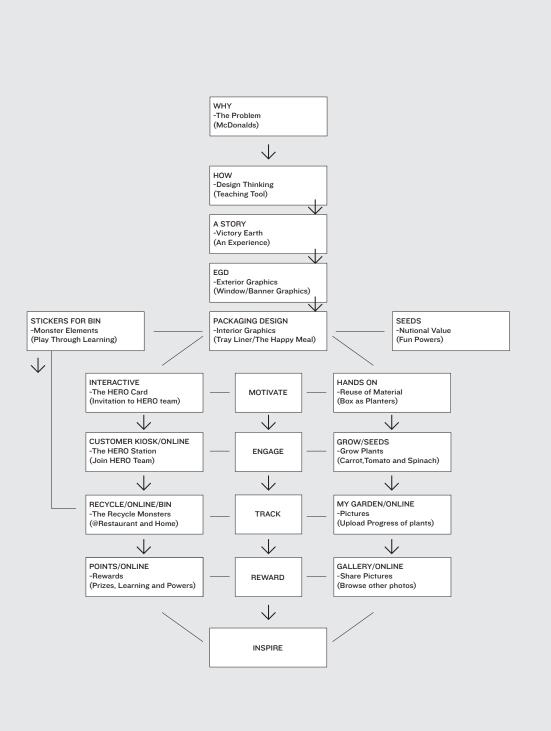
This thesis questions whether activism (i.e. design for change, the methodologies of DT) can help address MD's negative perceptions. The project poses a solution through the use of a redesigned HM to teach children about sustainable principles, and in this way effect change for a greener future. As the worldwide fast food industry leader, MD's decision to adopt the proposed solution, would effect change within the fast food industry, and become more aware of their product and the impact they have on their customers. Perhaps other fast food restaurants could also utilize this influence for good rather than merely for profit. Additionally, these changes might act as a way for MD to reflect on other aspects of their business; from the impact their food system (i.e. growing, transporting, processing) has on the environment to the impact their food has on their customer's health.

CHAPTER III

ILLUSTRATIONS

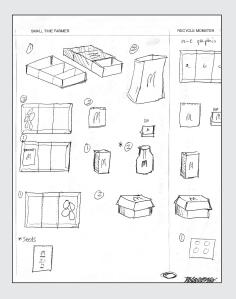
CONCEPT MAP

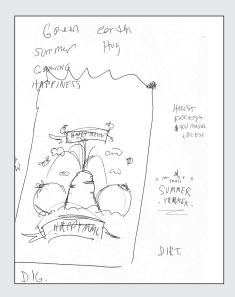
Concept Map

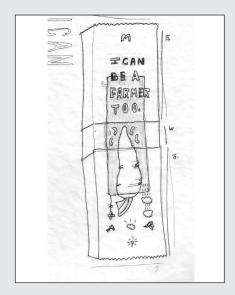


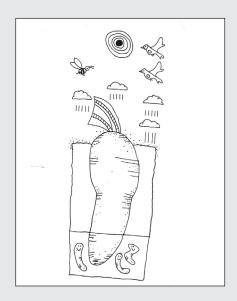
Visual Diary

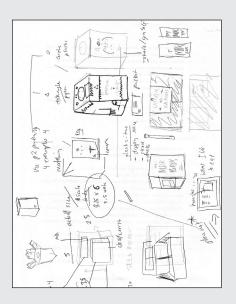
Sketches collected in the process.

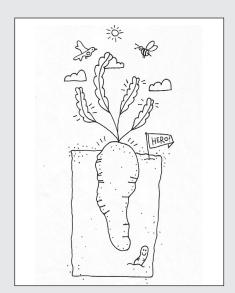


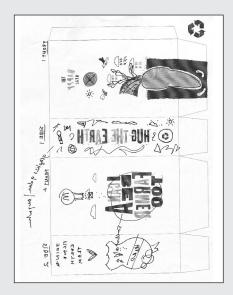


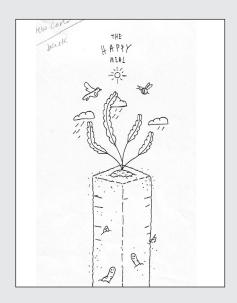


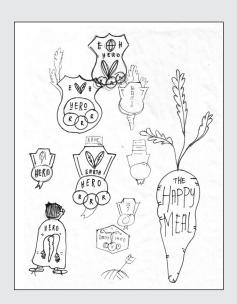


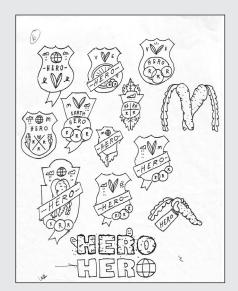


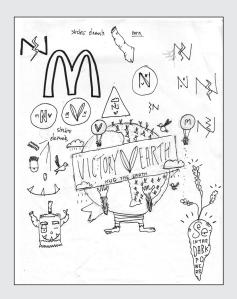


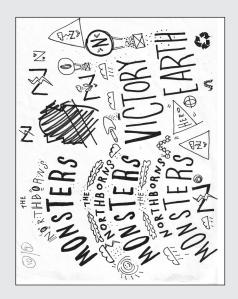


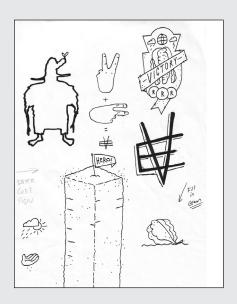


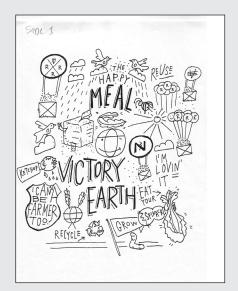


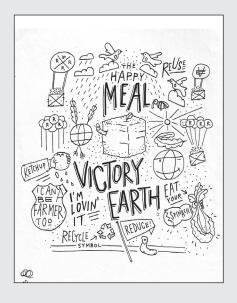


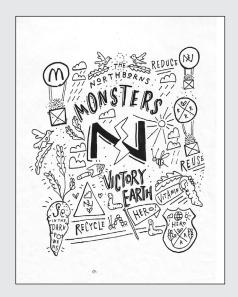


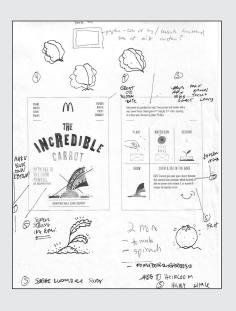








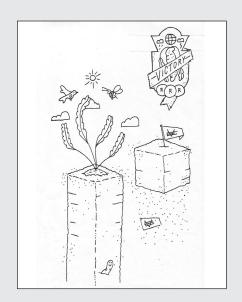




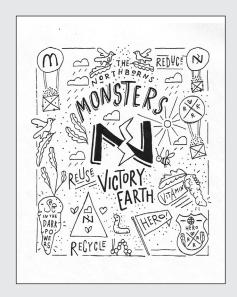


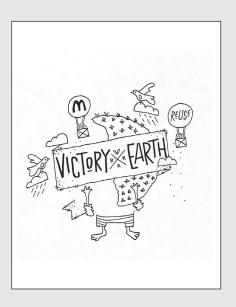












COLOR PALETTE

Color Palette

The color palette (blue, orange, brown, and green) was inspired by the colors of nature (water, sun, soil, vegetation). The color palette also includes McDonald's signature colors, red and yellow.



Pantone I44 cyan: 0 magenta: 48 yellow: I00 black: 0



Pantone I44 cyan: 50 magenta: 58 yellow: I00 black: 45



Pantone I44 cyan: 49 magenta: I yellow: 0 black: 0



Pantone I44 cyan: 50 magenta: 0 yellow: I00 black: 0



Pantone I44 cyan: 0 magenta: 48 yellow: I00 black: 0



Pantone I23 cyan: 0 magenta: 24 yellow: 49 black: 0



Pantone 485 cyan: 0 magenta: 95 yellow: IOO black: 0

TYPE PALETTE

Type Palette

The font used was Knockout, and the hand-drawn type was also inspired by this font.

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz 1234567890 HTF27 JuniorBantamWeight

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz 1234567890

HTF28 JuniorFeatherWeight

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz 1234567890

HTF29 JuniorLiteWeight

ABCDEFGHIJKLM NOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklm nopqrstuvz 234567890

HTF32 JuniorCruiserWeight

TYPE PALETTE

Hand-rederend type done in black Sharpie.

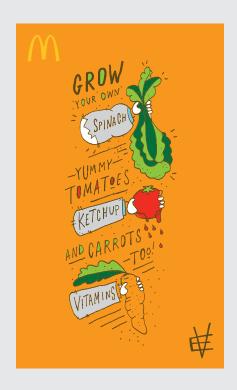


DELIVERABLES / EXTERIOR GRAPHICS

Deliverables

Exterior Signage: Banner and window graphics.







DELIVERABLES / EXTERIOR GRAPHICS





DELIVERABLES / TRAY LINER

Interior Restaurant Application: Design for the tray liner.



DELIVERABLES / TRAY LINER



DELIVERABLES / PACKAGING

Packaging:

See infographic for each item's size.

Happy Meal Bag: 6x10.25

Entree Box: 3.657x6.5

Milk Box: 2.15x4

Design: Happy Meal Bag Option I / Side A



Design: Happy Meal Bag Option I / Side B



Design: Happy Meal Bag Option 2 / Side A



Design: Happy Meal Bag Option 2 / Side B



Design: Happy Meal Bag Option 3 / Side A



Design: Happy Meal Bag Option 3 / Side B







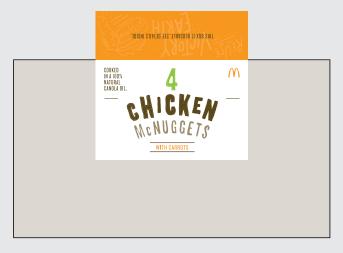


Design:

Label for entree box (McNuggets and carrots).

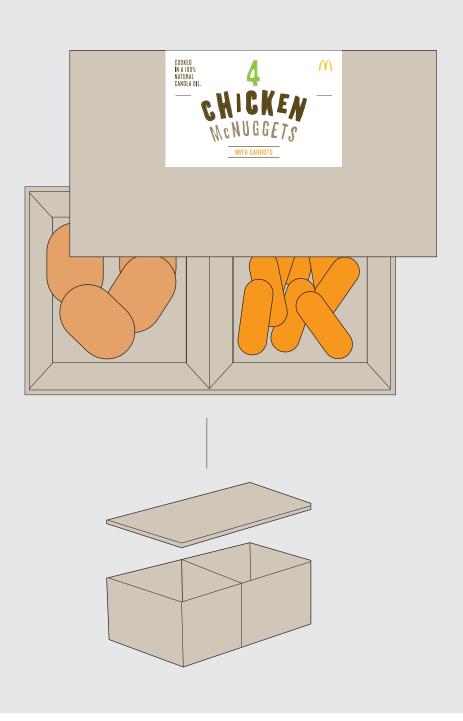


Label on box.



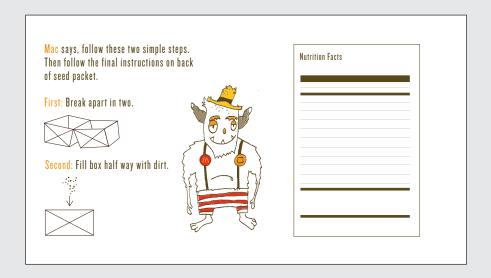


Functionality of entree box.



Functionality:

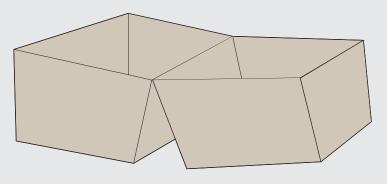
List of instructions given by Northborn Monster Mac, prompting the customer to separate entree box.



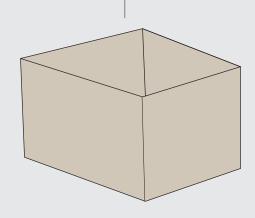
Instructions are located below lid.

Functionality:

The box is separated into two parts.



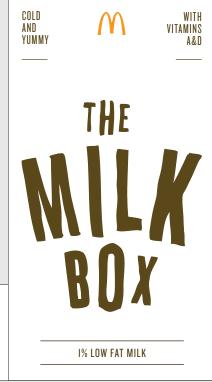
Once separated they can be used individually as planters.



DELIVERABLES / MILK BOX

Design:

Label for the milk box.



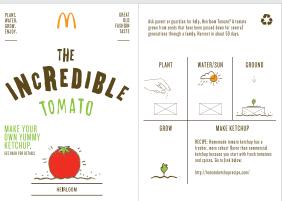


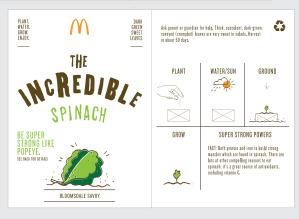
DELIVERABLES / MILK BOX



Design for the seed packets (Front and back).







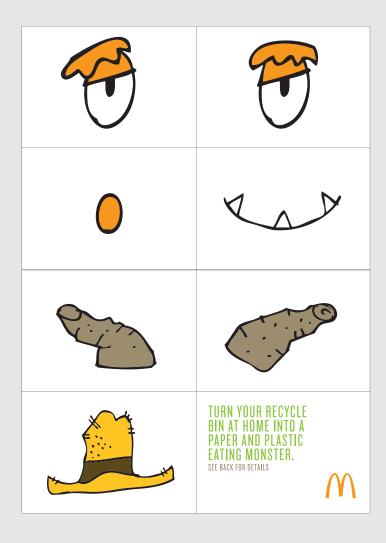






DELIVERABLES / STICKERS

Design of stickers.



DELIVERABLES / STCKERS



DELIVERABLES / HERO CARD

Design of Hero Card.



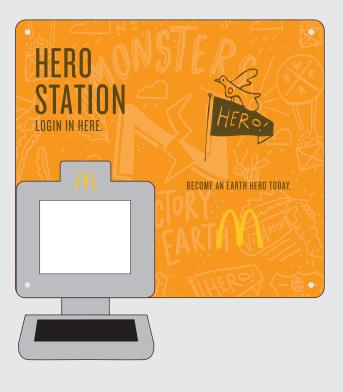


DELIVERABLES / HERO CARD



DELIVERABLES / HERO STATION

Rendering of Hero Station.



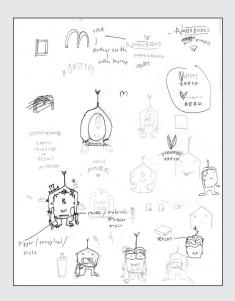
4 ft.

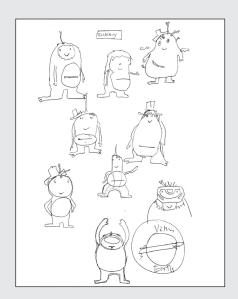
3 ft.

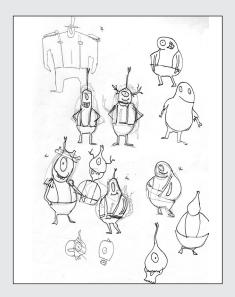
2 ft.

Recycle Monsters

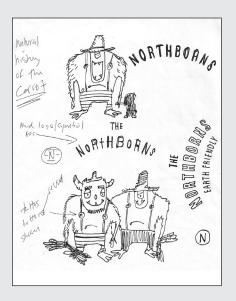
The creation of the Northborn Monster.

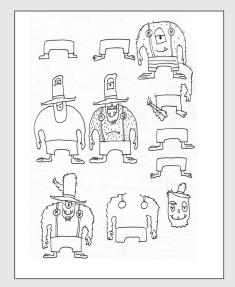


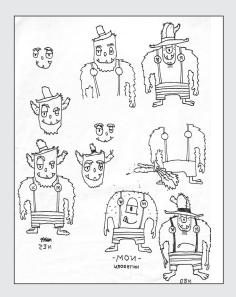


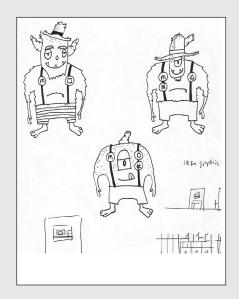




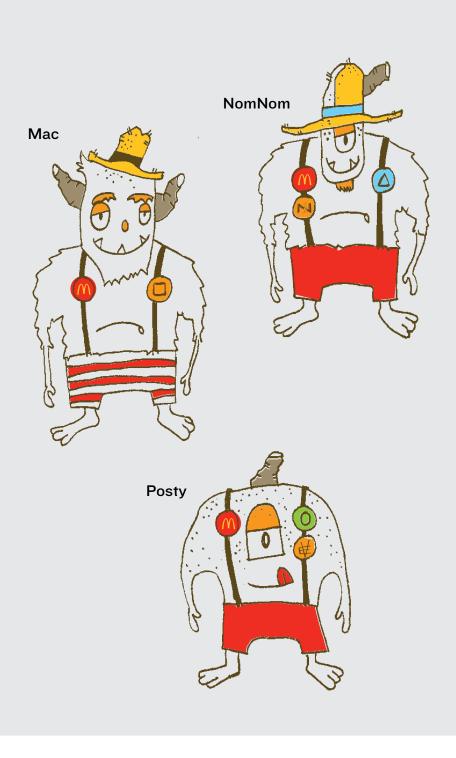






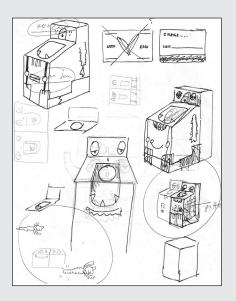


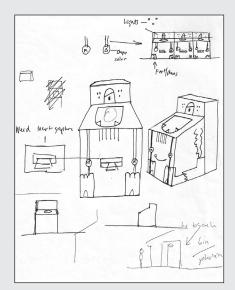
The Northborn Monsters

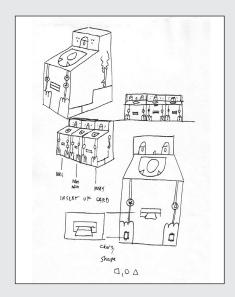


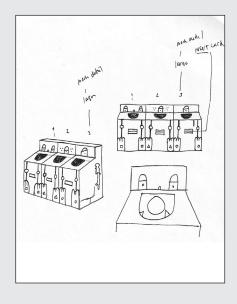
Recycle Monsters

Transformation from charater to recycle bin.

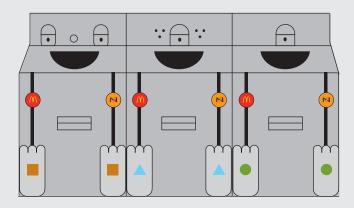


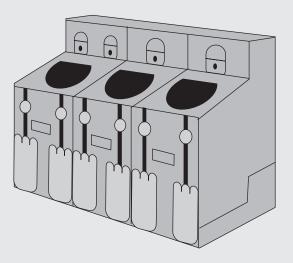






Renderings of recycle bins.



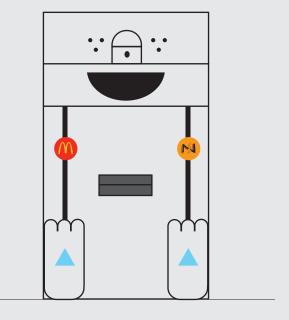


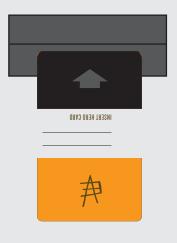






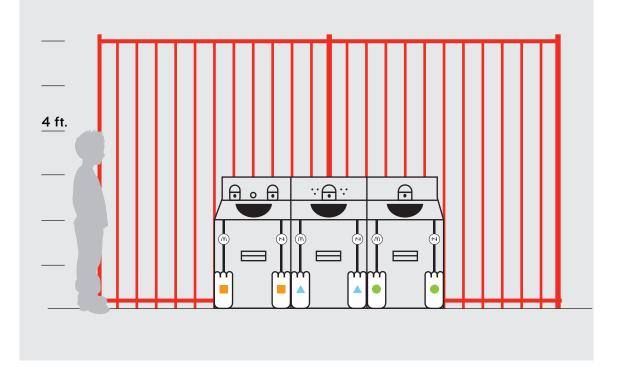
Functionallty of recycle bin and Hero Card.





Rendering of recycle bins in the playground.



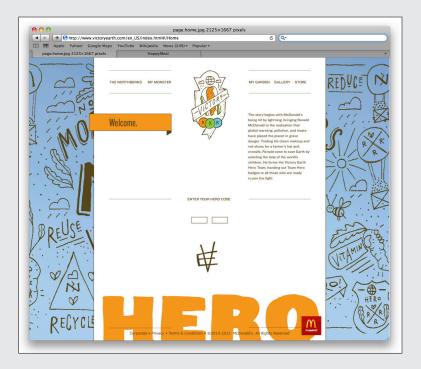


DELIVERABLES / WEBSITE

Website

Screen Shots:

Home, The Northborns, and My Monster page.

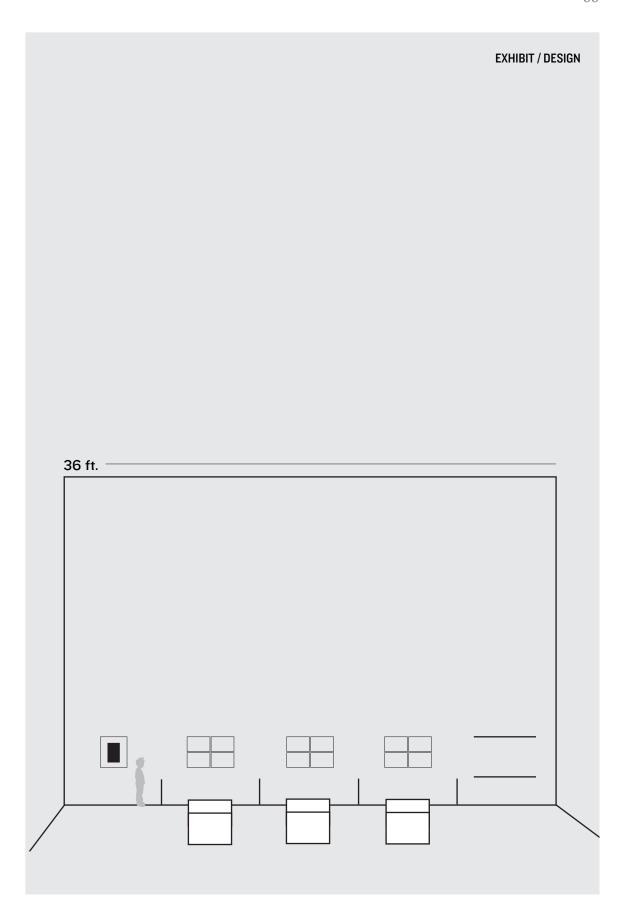


DELIVERABLES / WEBSITE





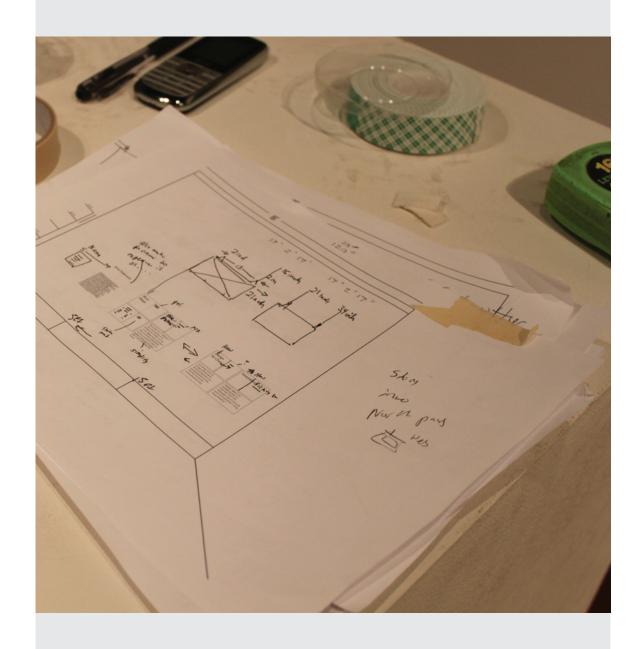
EXHIBIT / DESIGN **Exhibit** Design Renderings: Wall space design layout for Gallery 2. 18 ft.



Exhibit

Photo Documentation:



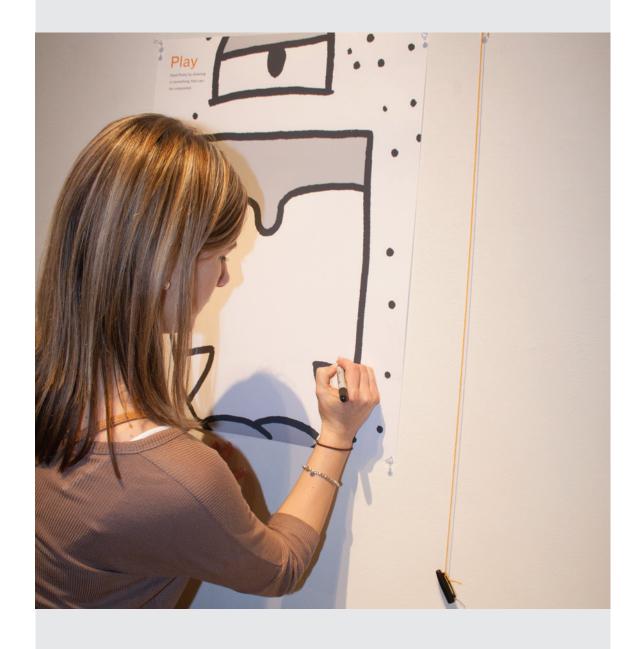
















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VITA

Miguel Angel Martinez was born in Houston, Texas on February 5,

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Since receiving an AA in Graphic Design in 2000, and graduating with a BFA in

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various design agencies in Houston. In 2005, he launched Studio Martinez, an

independent graphic design studio.

In 2008, Miguel enrolled in the MFA program at Texas State University-

San Marcos.

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This thesis was typed by Miguel Angel Martinez.