

How Two Designers Created A Weed Brand With Whimsy

Cross a design mind with a very hippie childhood, and you get a very groovy vibe.

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Among all the vape brands out there designed to evade attention (inhaled, not seen, thank you), Sonder is unabashedly eye-catching. Its products are packaged in bright, nostalgic colors and highly stylized fonts and have cheeky names like Green Crack and Dead Head OG; its website is a magic show of floating boxes, spinning pens, and mirror-fringed dancers that appear literally out of the blue.

The branding, not surprisingly, is the creation of two successful designers, Faun Chapin and her wife, M. (Meg) Paradise, who founded Sonder in 2017.

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Chapin, a graduate of Yale University's graphic design MFA program, had grown up around pot. Her mother single-handedly raised three children while maintaining a cannabis farm in Mendocino County, California. (Sonder now gets its plants from Chapin's brother, Leif Bolin, and his wife, Jessica, who is also a second-generation cannabis farmer taught by her mom.) "When the hippies came and moved from the cities into the Emerald Triangle, the women were responsible for doing all the gardening, and back in the day you would grow your cannabis next to your tomatoes," says Chapin, pointing out that most of the original growers were female.

It was in 2011 when Chapin teamed up with Paradise, whose career included a stint at the buzzy branding agency Red Antler, to start their own design studio. They named it Guts & Glory and in the past eight years have worked on campaigns for clients like Starwood Hotels, New Belgium Brewing, and Purina. As for the inspiration behind Sonder? This is how they explain their double vision:

The Name

Chapin: "Sonder is a name M. brought to the table. What it means to us is that moment of awareness, that connection to yourself and to the world around you. We really love that idea because ultimately that's what cannabis does: It helps facilitate that moment of presence. For us, there's even a musical sound and visual rhythm to the name. We show that by having rhythmic waves everywhere on the packaging. In French, it actually means 'to probe,' and in German it means 'special.' "

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Image Credit: Courtesy of Sonder

The Box

Paradise: "Sustainability is top of mind for us, so except for a plastic tube that is compliant with child-resistant laws, everything is biodegradable, and the paper we are using is imported from London. From a design perspective, we specialize in creating visual images where we reach back into the past, take something from the present, and mix it together. It looks simultaneously like something you've seen before and at the same time is new. In this design, we reach back to cannabis's past."

The Images

Chapin: “We set out to design a language rooted in the rich history of cannabis from the '60s and '70s. It was an OG time of cannabis culture and cultivation. Psychedelic era. We spent a lot of time around Mendocino, and if you look at the front of the packaging, we abstracted the California coast in a super simple yet graphic kind of way, with wavy lines and the sun setting. When you slide it open, there's a design of outer space. The reveal gives the user a moment of surprise and joy.”

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The Colors

Paradise: “Cannabis can be a full-spectrum rainbow in how there's so many different ways to experience it. We really wanted the packaging to capture that. We set out to design something very iconic, where you could see it across the room or point it out in an Instagram post. As two designers who started a cannabis company so we could be our own clients, being able to create extravagant packaging was high on our list.”

Chapin: “We built a brand that could allow us to evolve and add to the colors and the complexities. We want this world to be vast and expansive always, with moments of curiosity, wonder, and exploration.”

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