

RATTLE AND HUM

Designs for a new Mexican Diner

Dairin van Niekerk of Derin Ashley Design was recently guest lecturer to the fourth year design students at the University of Pretoria. In this interview she and Mike McWilliams of Sans Serif review five of the more successful projects with Lesley Pretorius and the student designers.

THE BRIEF

Rattle and Hum is a new diner opening in the heart of Johannesburg's trendy, upmarket suburb, Melville. The diner requires a distinctive image to set it apart from all other restaurants/diners/cafes that appeal to the same target market. Melville is well known for its restaurants, thus competition is fierce. The image projected by Rattle and Hum needs to be carefully considered so that it stands out on its own as something completely different and exciting.

FOOD STYLE: The food is Mexican. It is hot, interesting and colourful.

INTERIOR STYLE: The interior of the diner is quite a contrasting mixture of styles: on the walls are strong fifties images, such as posters of Harley Davidson motorbikes, Cadillacs and Buicks.

There is an old petrol pump in one corner and a jukebox in another. Car numberplates are stuck against the walls next to bright neon signs advertising Budweiser, Southern Comfort etc., and old ceiling and desk fans are scattered about. Combined with all this, a strong Mexican atmosphere is evident.

MUSIC STYLE: Music that is played very loudly includes The Gypsy Kings, Vaya Con Dios, Texas, UB40, Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly, Louis Armstrong and The Hothouse Flowers.

DEMOGRAPHICS: All races, male and female, A and B income groups between the ages of 18 and 36.

PSYCHOGRAPHICS: These people always have enough money to go out and have a good time. They enjoy socialising and keep up with fashion and trends. They are aware, liberal and ambitious, drive fast cars and like interesting cuisine. They enjoy movies like *Bagdad Cafe*, *City Slickers*, *Silence of the Lambs* and *Dances with Wolves*, to name but a few.

DESIGN THE FOLLOWING ITEMS FOR RATTLE AND HUM DINER:

1. Rattle and Hum logo, using the tricolour system for lithographic printing.
2. Colourbreak overlay of the above logo.
3. A two colour version of the logo for silkscreen printing.
4. Take-away packaging for one large pizza. Box size: 250 x 250mm, 40mm deep, for lithographic printing.
5. Take-away paper cup for flexography printing.

6. Three different sauces- Chilli, Barbecue and Taco- in glass bottles with labels for lithographic printing.
7. Point of purchase dispensing system for the three sauces at the cash register, in any medium, to encourage impulse purchasing.
8. Menu design reflecting the fun and excitement of eating at the Rattle and Hum Diner. Size: A3 folded to A4 both sides, for lithographic printing.
9. Other promotional items including matches (Flexo), T-shirts (Silkscreen) and any other fun items you would like to propose (or have time to produce).

THE PROJECTS

Eleen: I found it quite a challenge to combine the fifties concept with the Mexican character.

The element which I think works best is my pizza box. I wanted to make of it something more than just a discardable container- something one might want to keep, which could then have the secondary function of acting as an advertisement for the restaurant.

My point of purchase stand features a mechanical hand which, at the press of the appropriate button, produces a bottle of sauce. I did not resolve the technical problems involved, and though a dispenser of this type would be enormously expensive to produce, we were encouraged to think creatively and were not penalized for the fact that something might be impossible to produce.

Dairin: This was one of the projects that really succeeded in combining the fifties style and the Mexican atmosphere. It is bright and exciting, and reflects just what the restaurant is about: bright, noisy, loud, spicy. It works also in terms of colour and in terms of the strong graphic consistency. This student successfully tied it all together.

Mike: I know that you were not restricted to a budget by the brief, but it is well to remember that budget is always very important from a client's point of view. Often one has to make a die-cut for a new box, so that in itself need not make the box more expensive. However, it is easier in many cases to source a die from the printer and merely apply your design, which will save costs considerably. Eleen's complicated die will be expensive, and the locking device is not as secure as it could be.

Eleen's logo



From a graphics point of view the dispenser works well. The neon tubing added to the existing graphic elements produces something reminiscent of a jukebox with a definite fifties feel. The logo incorporates a typical American auto of the era, polka dots and the dusty desert feel of the Mexican landscape- the cactus, a lost cloud.

As for the bottles, the swing labels carry the logo, while the different types of sauce are indicated on labels stuck onto the bottles. While swing labels are a nice idea, they are things which tend to get ripped or torn off very easily. In this case they bear your main identity, while the rest of the bottle bears the type identity. This is not a great move from a marketing point of view: the main identity can easily fall off and when people want to know where you bought that great chilli sauce, nobody will remember. If you were going to split the two, I'd put the main identity on the bottle and the variant on the label or the cap. Utilize the cap. You've also given the variant a lot more space than the main identity.

Amelia: I enjoyed doing my own thing, taking an idea and developing it. I started off using a typical Mexican woven cloth, but soon realized that I needed a more fun feeling. My inspiration came from old cowboy movies, in which the Mexican is usually depicted slouching along on his little donkey in the blazing sun, followed by a couple of buzzards.

I was very nervous about using the yellow, it is such a strong colour, but decided in the end to stick with it instead of using, say, red.

Dairin: Your first designs were quite ordinary, but improved as you went along. Though there is not much of a fifties feeling in evidence, there is a great sense of humour. You communicate this sense of humour very well through the character of the crow. He is never static. The project showed a lot of innovation. The dispenser especially is very humorous and really enhances the final product. Yellow says a lot about the restaurant. Yellow, for me, is a happy colour- a good choice rather than the predictable orange or red for this particular project.

Mike: This was a favourite mainly because it demonstrates such a leap of the imagination. The only predictable element used

Using a minor character like the crow from old western movies, successfully encapsulates the atmosphere of the restaurant.



was the Mexican cloth. You went that step further than the stereotypical donkey or sombrero, and focused on the crow, a minor character, but one which encapsulates the whole atmosphere perfectly.

Sometimes, from a business point of view, these solutions are the difficult ones to sell to the client: they take the client so far from where he thought he was going to be, that sometimes he will kick against them. Everyone has preconceived ideas. If a restaurateur who has been to the USA and knows what a typical Mexican restaurant looks like were to come back here and commission someone to do a design for such a restaurant, he might find it hard to accept this kind of approach. It requires a client who can make a similar leap of the imagination to accept a project like this.

Monty: The reason I chose the iguana was because I wanted to get that rattly feeling, that jive feeling of the restaurant. The animal is scaly, lives in the Mexican desert, and is rugged. Having decided on the iguana, I then developed separate elements related to heat, which would evoke the spiciness of the food, and used them on the bottles for variety: the sun, a cactus etc., because I was afraid of 'killing' the animal image if it was used too much. Also, I changed the position of the elements to avoid monotony. I realize that the keyring as it is, is impractical, but it could be printed on a plastic disk.

Dairin: Your lizard describes the name Rattle and Hum very well- the scales, the movement, the bright colours all done in a fun way. Without using obvious music symbols or instruments you succeed in visually describing the name of the place. It is a very innovative approach. The elements in your dispenser and

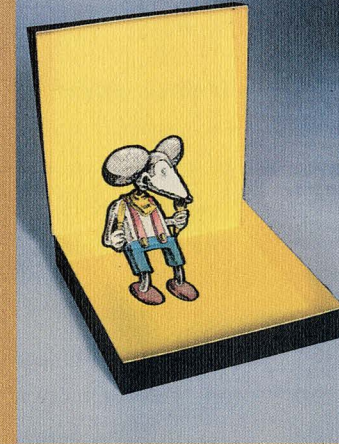
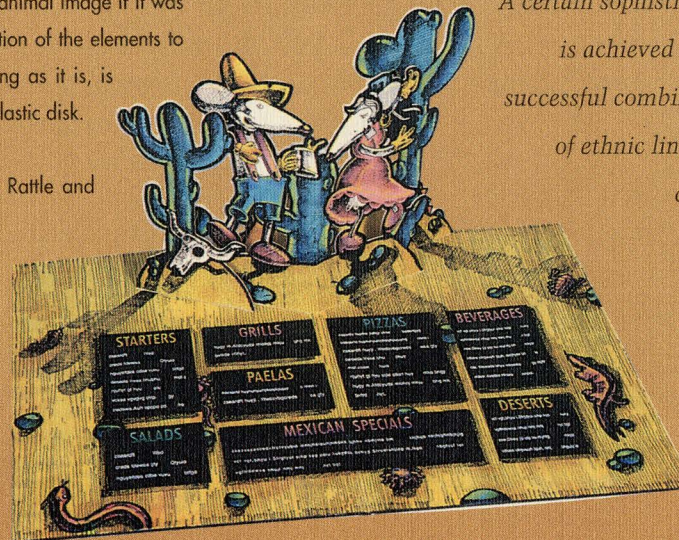
menu move away from your initial style: not distracting, but detrimental to strong branding of your product.

Mike: One criticism: it might be a dicey solution in that lizards and food don't go together well in many people's minds. I'm sure it is not a problem if aimed at the young market (as indeed this brief specifies), but the more conservative person might have objections to the connection. I think you do get away from the problem though, by the very graphic treatment of the lizard. It is very far removed from the real thing.

The other problem is that while you've used the lizard on one bottle, you don't have it on the other two at all and from a brand identity point of view, this is not good. The graphics are unique enough to get away with it to some extent, but I would either use it on all of them or not at all. Your pizza box is one of the most successful in the class.

Sarel: I really thought about the type of people who would frequent the restaurant, and decided to aim at the yuppie market. For my logo I wanted to get an ethnic feel as well as

*A certain sophistication
is achieved by the
successful combination
of ethnic lines and
colour.*



portraying the sounds- rattle and hum. The shape of my logo reminds me of a Christmas cracker- something associated with festivities and good eating. I tried to keep it simple.

Dairin: I liked the abstract aspect of the logo. It succeeds in describing Rattle and Hum in an abstract way- the liveliness and sharpness of the logo reinforce the character of the restaurant. It is fairly trendy too. What I really like is the element of surprise in every aspect of your project: the figures on the inside of the pizza box, menu and drinking cup. That is what actually made your project come alive- without this, it would have been very ordinary. I was very pleased with your progress from applying just the logo to including secondary elements. Your die-cut on the menu is very impractical and the Rattle and Hum is far too small on your bottles. It's fine to use it small in the restaurant itself, but in a supermarket it would just disappear. The branding is too weak.

Mike: I'd like to comment on your choice of material: black is very nice, but a matt black is really difficult to keep tidy. Can you imagine what your pizza box or cup would look like three seconds after you put your greasy fingers on them? One has got to be careful of this kind of thing.

The die-cut on your menu is also problematical: it would soon become dog-eared, unless you built it out of masonite or something similar. There are ways to solve the problem, for instance redesigning it with fewer edges that can bend and break. The pop-up part of the menu is impossible to make in a



*Type is a very strong
element in this logo,
while the colour
combinations contribute
to its success.*

Sarel's logo

single die-cut because you have overlap which can't be cut flat. The elements as they are at present would have to be individually cut and pasted up, so you are really talking a lot of money per menu- you would make the printer rich. The impact is wonderful, and as a project it is a pinnacle, but you would probably find at the end of the day that, very disappointingly, you would have to use some kind of a tent-fold that would still pop up, but where the design could be printed on in its entirety without all the present intricacies. It is good though, that you were prepared to stretch far and produce something this intricate- it really shows creativity.

*A unique and appealing
logo depicting the
armadillo.*



Wynand: I started off looking at what the Mexicans ate, and discovered one of the little known and unusual things to be armadillo. As I was also looking for an identity that was cute, and that people would identify with the way they would with a

pet, I decided that the animal would fit perfectly. My main problem then was combining the fifties and the nineties atmosphere, so I took the idea of using the grille of a fifties car done in a contemporary style.

Dairin: The logo is successful: the actual image says a lot about Rattle and Hum in terms of the sound that the scales of the animal might make as he moves. I find the armadillo very cuddly and lovable, a nice image to attach to the restaurant even though it is a trendy place. I like the innovative and interesting way you've used the armadillo character.

What strikes me as problematic is that your name is not as strong as the animal. The logo is not as resolved as it could have been. On the menu and the pizza box the fifties feeling comes through very well, but in the logo itself it does not.

The point of purchase stand is great, but unfortunately the bases of the bottles are obscured when placed in the stand.

Mike: Yes, it is a striking design. The front of the menu is excellent. I agree that the name of the place needs to be stronger: If you look at an example like Eagle Insurance, where you see the eagle depicted as well as the words 'Eagle Insurance', you could get away with a name that almost disappears, because the logo repeats it. But this logo says armadillo and that's what people are going to remember, not the Rattle and Hum.

FINAL COMMENTS

Lesley: I am interested to hear how the project was rated by the class. Did you find it enjoyable and educational?

Students: It was a very wide project and quite hard to finish on time. Concept-wise we were really pushed by Dairin: no boring concepts were accepted and she would keep sending us back for more research. There were no given solutions. Everyone could do with the project what they liked and we worked to create our own styles.

It was hard to come up with something using both themes without producing a cliché. Simplification to arrive at a well resolved logo was problematic to some, and in some cases oversimplification and then re-adaptation of elements caused problems. What many of us did was simply to stick the logo everywhere without thinking of a creative solution for every separate item.

This project was good for building confidence: We saw that we were able to handle an encompassing project and were bold enough to do what each one personally wanted to- putting our personal stamp on the work and being encouraged to develop a personal style.

Lesley: Dairin and Mike, in general terms, what are your impressions regarding the production and final presentation of these projects?

Dairin: We got some excellent results. I was surprised by the transformations that took place between the first concepts and the final work



Mike: What impressed me as a businessman was to see that experience isn't the be all and end all. I have seen work here that ranks with the best, done by people who have never been employed. All they need is a bit of steering from a practical point of view.

The diversity was amazing. They are all at the same University, have the same lecturers, yet come up with such variety. I can't think of a design company who, if they'd given this project to all their designers, would have come up with the vast range of solutions that the students did. Very often you have fashions which permeate the industry and everybody does a variation on the theme. Only the execution sometimes differs. Here the thoughts were really poles apart. Also, most of them worked. It's easy to be poles apart with ninety percent of them not working, but most of the projects were saleable, and even the small percentage that weren't could be made so with a little bit of work.

In design one should always aim for the ultimate and really try to achieve that. As a designer you should never be brought back by the client or client service person saying: no well you can't do that, and that's too expensive, because then you end up with rubbish. It is good that the students went ahead and did things which are possibly either very difficult or impossible to produce; at least they could then cut back from a pinnacle rather than from a plateau.

From a practical point of view there are a few things I'd like to point out. There are certain things one would not be able to produce, for instance printing on the black box, or printing dots inside the cup- I'm sure you can't get this kind of waterproof stock.

I find the allocation of resources in general to be somewhat lopsided: all the students have gone to the fast moving items like the pizza and spent big money on their packaging instead of paying more attention to that of the higher value items like the bottles of sauce. The sauce will sell slower and cost more than the pizza. It would be easier to justify expense in packaging on the bottles than on a fast mover like the pizza, whose packaging will be discarded anyway. The bottle might sell for R8.50 apiece so if you spend R2.00 on packaging you're still making a profit. But if you have a pizza box which costs R8.50 to produce, you'll price yourself right out of the market- the box should be going for around eight cents apiece. The attraction to expend more effort on the design of the box might have been the size of it in comparison with that available on the bottle, but the challenge lies in applying good design and branding to all the elements.

Lesley: One of the dilemmas in design education is deciding how much emphasis to place on practical, technical aspects on the one hand, and creativity and innovation on the other. It's difficult to achieve a balanced education within a set period of time.

Dairin: Only a certain number of students will ever really achieve that all-roundedness. In this case five students did. I think the best thing a lecturer can do for students is to draw out their potential without allowing them to lose confidence in their creativity. I feel that it is the creative side of a designer which should be encouraged at College or University, the technical side can be learned later. One has to be aware of course of

basic limitations and possibilities, but you can learn even that within the first few months of working.

Mike: I agree that practicality is easily learned: once you end up with a budget, that tells you what you can and what you can't do. Sometimes it doesn't even have to be taught, one can learn it by experience. Creativity, well I don't know if it can be taught, it can certainly be encouraged. Very few people are going to go out of here and start their own businesses straight away. They'll be under the supervision of someone with the required practical knowledge. I think it might be better to keep the production side away from the designers and let them fly. If a designer is constantly told: you can't, you can't, you can't, you'll block the creativity and end up with plateaus instead of the pinnacles we've seen here today. It is also important to give designers the confidence to argue their case, which is hard for them as they are graphic communicators

Dairin: Yes, if there is one thing one might add to a graphic design course it is verbal presentation skills. Many designers battle with this.