

THE

POST

MEN

The fresh talents behind
Post Projects deliver a bold
and modern aesthetic to
Vancouver's design scene

By Jill Von Sprecken



“IT WAS A GAMBLE FOR SURE,” SAYS ALEX NELSON.

He’s talking about one of his early clients, the pioneering Brassneck Brewery—but he could just as easily be referencing his own venture, Post Projects.

The co-founder of the design company and partner Beau House first met at Emily Carr University of Art and Design. Just two years after graduating, the duo launched their own studio following a brief stint working for other firms. “Looking back on it, especially in the early days, it’s kind of mind-boggling how little we knew about simple things like talking about money, writing proposals,” House says. “It was an enormous transition.”

Since opening the studio in 2011, Post Projects has worked with local art organizations such as Western Front, and put its stamp on the visual identities of some of Vancouver’s most innovative and iconic brands: Revolver Coffee, restaurants Bambudda and The Birds & The Beets, and of course, Brassneck Brewery. “Seems like a given now, but when we did Brassneck, we hadn’t been given the opportunity to prove we could do something like that,” recalls House.

“Every year we do it better, and grow and learn things,” Nelson chimes in. “We still have our eyes on being a compelling agency that can take on a lot of different design problems. And a lot of the opportunities we’ve landed speak to that.”

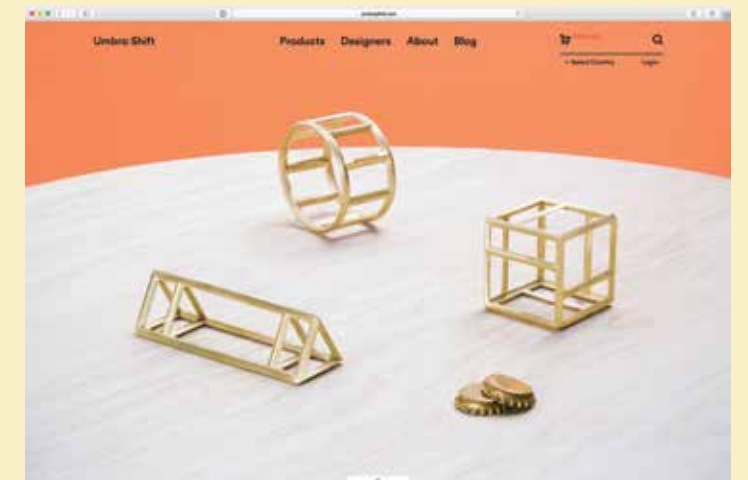
Those early successes led to larger prospects, helping to fulfill their ambition to extend their reach beyond the city’s boundaries. Their recent work with design-forward Umbra Shift, an offshoot of the Toronto-based housewares designer Umbra, was one such project. Nelson explains that before developing the brand extension’s rollout, the Umbra team realized that in the 37 years they were in business, “they’d lost a bit of their street cred, and wanted to gain some of that back.”

“When we came out of school, it was like, ‘All right, where do we fit in... oh, nowhere,’” says Beau House (right). So he and partner Alex Nelson (left) started Post Projects.



“We were lucky enough to be able to contribute to shaping this idea from a strategic level.”

ALEX NELSON, PARTNER, POST PROJECTS



↑ “So much of what we do is just traded online as an image. Basically, if you’re going to be a graphic designer, you also have to figure out how to be a photographer,” says Nelson. “One of the things Umbra Shift saw as a plus of working with us was that we would take good photographs of the things we made, which would then be a marketing tool for them.”





“I tend to look more for something tangentially related to what we’re working on, that we can then draw form from.”

BEAU HOUSE, PARTNER, POST PROJECTS



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“All of the clients we have and the work we do is reflective of the city of Vancouver,” says House. “Because it’s so isolated, it’s very easy to just pay attention to what’s happening in the immediate vicinity. But we try not to.”



THE BIRDS & THE BEETS PHOTOS BY GRADY MITCHELL

Post Projects was involved from the very beginning, when Umbra was making ground-level decisions on what exactly the line would be. “We were lucky enough to be able to contribute to shaping this idea from a strategic level,” says Nelson. Ultimately, they rolled that identity out to multiple platforms, from packaging and the website to printed materials and even photography. “A year later, we actually even designed the products,” he adds.

By any measure, the line was a success. Not only did it receive positive press worldwide, it also won the Editors Award for Best Accessories at the International Contemporary Furniture Fair (ICFF) in 2014, the year it launched.

“That was our first bigger project, where we had to work with someone outside of the city and just kind of meet over Skype,” says Nelson. “We didn’t really know how that was going to go, but it worked out pretty well.”

“The glass bottle packaging that we did for Brassneck was pretty unique for the category,” says Nelson. “There’s a fine balance between making sure you’re innovating and not pushing it to the point where it looks like it doesn’t belong.”



The physical distance between Toronto and Vancouver led to predictable hurdles, such as the time difference and the realities of not working in the same room. Others, like finding a consistent level of quality, were less predictable. “Production-related stuff probably is the most complicated,” says House. “We’re here, they’re in Toronto, and the printer is in China.” Nelson agrees. “That kind of stuff always comes up with projects. There’s always something to figure out.”

One of the biggest challenges that the duo faces is also a recurring one: how to get someone on board with an idea, often without either party knowing what the finished product will be. “Design is really about persuasion,” Nelson says. “It’s like asking somebody to buy a car they haven’t seen.”

“Or it might be a motorcycle,” House adds. “They’re buying what you’re doing, and invariably you don’t know what the outcome of the process is going to be. So that is very hard.”

If the objective is to give an abstract idea form, then at Post Projects that process often begins with typography. With Brassneck, the designers focused on the brewery’s name, defined as a cheeky or brash quality. “With the big, bold, tall type, there’s this confidence that we were trying to get across,” says Nelson.

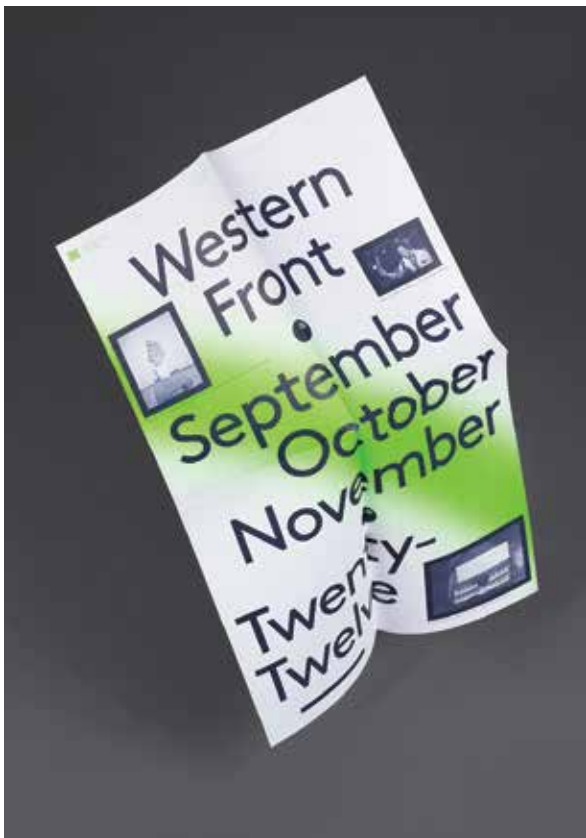
Similarly, for The Birds & The Beets, they created a custom typeface with the help of Ross Milne, a type designer and recent addition to the studio. “I think that makes us pretty special,” says Nelson. “He has a very unique education. He went to the Netherlands and studied at KABK, the Royal Academy of Art. There are only a handful of people in Canada that have taken that program.”



BRASNECK PHOTOS BY LUCAS FINLAY



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 “I don’t think we have a style,” says Nelson. “But there’s a focus on typography”—like in this identity for Vancouver restaurant Bambudda.



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 Post Projects got their start producing collateral for local arts organizations including Western Front.

A focus on typography isn’t their only approach though, and House explains that for him, any number of things can inspire. “I tend to look more for something tangentially related to what we’re working on, that we can then draw form from.” Once they have a well of imagery to reference, they take it to the client and begin the process of closing doors. “It’s about shutting off possibilities, because anything’s possible in the beginning,” he says.

In addition to Milne, the bright, sparse studio has seen a number of rotating international collaborators who keep overhead low and ensure a focus on the work. Although the team is aware that Post Projects is still in its fledgling stages, they also know how far they’ve come. Nelson explains that there were a few years where “it was really like being in the Wild West.”

Being a new studio with young employees has the benefit of offering clients a fresh perspective, tempered by international influences thanks to the Internet, which was available throughout the designers’ school years. “You could see what was happening in Berlin and London and New York. Your exposure to what was possible in design was really broad,” says Nelson.

On the other hand, the pedigree required to work with large, international brands comes with experience. But the studio has seen a steady upward trajectory, and their work with Umbra opens the playing field to similar opportunities. “You prove yourself with each job. But there has to be growth,” says Nelson. “The work that you do, you tend to get more of it,” House adds.

When asked if they could endorse their particular method of starting a design studio—that is, to dive right in—House doesn’t hesitate, saying that he’d “totally recommend anyone else do it.” Nelson takes a more circuitous route, first advising the ambitious to study the inner workings of larger agencies. “But we didn’t do any of that,” he says thoughtfully. “We just kind of tried to figure it out.”

Jill Von Sprecken is a Vancouver-based editor and freelance writer.