

Less



Nine

Less

I came across this beer can design recently and it prompted an interesting question around branding. Is this beer can branded? Obviously it is, but the heavily restrained design suggests a possible intent to not be branded. I am thinking here of MUJI and their intent to be a no-brand brand, meaning the focus and investment was to be on the product and not on who was offering the product. The contrast to this would be a brand like Pepsi who recently changed their look once again with the narrative to better fulfill the energy of the brand through a visual identity that is vibrant, excessive, and presumably with lots of excess. Pepsi is a brand that lives and breathes in the excess. They struggled with the previous branding because it was a more restrained design language, arguably more sophisticated in its flatness and graphic-intelligence. Pepsi has returned to excess, three-dimensionality and shadows, things visually popping off the page/can. Menaud is a brand that lives in the less.

The Menaud beer can is intentional in its simplification, which places greater emphasis on the lack of visual imagery and on what imagery does occur. This is not to say that Pepsi's design is not intentional, but the excess can hide intention. One can hide errors and poor decisions when there is excess. This is how magicians work; they are speaking and distracting you through exuberant hand gestures and comedy as they slip the card into the person's jacket.

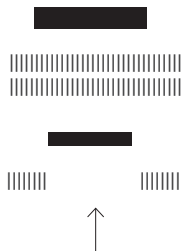
I am old enough to remember the No Frills packaging that used to be in my local Shop Rite™ supermarket. The package design had an all-white base and black sans-serif type face. I can't recall the type, but it was likely Helvetica because of how prolific that type was then. The No Frills brand was the Shop Rite™ house brand; no big marketing budgets and excess so the product could be offered at a lowered price. If I recall, the packaging was named "No Frills" and stated as such on it; what today is the Amazon brand. Target, most noticeably, changed the house brand from a no-frills to a branded product, in some cases creating package designs that were more engaging than the branded products, and the less has become an intentional reduction often seen as more premium, funny enough.

The Menaud beer can design has precedence in the No Frills branding, but it also has precedence in early modernism. The architect, Le Corbusier, in the beginning of the twentieth century heralded a revolution in design calling for a rejection of the excess and decoration common at the time and highlighting recent engineering artefacts as the future: grain silos, ship architecture, and a range of product and furniture designs that were created with a focus on efficiency and functionality with decoration not being added because they were not intended to be sold to consumers. It was a, *when no one is looking we can create things that are expressions of what they are rather than having to be decorated or made fancy to impress an audience*. Le Corbusier named the engineer as the future designer. Corb was followed by Loos who outrightly declared decoration to be a crime and then by Mies van Rohe who stripped architecture down nearly to its absolute essence. Mies was not a functionalist though, for example the columns of the

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Barcelona Pavilion are beautifully designed and finished in highly reflective chrome. In this case the intent of the chrome was to further diminish the presence of the column and allow the emphasis to be on the space (the absence of architectural elements) and the few planes, or walls. Mies was interested in dematerializing architecture and placing an emphasis on space and experience, while working with the reduced palette of architecture in manners rooted in architectural classicism.

I have visited a great deal of architecture and the building with the greatest impact that I have ever experienced was Mies' National Gallery. I was never so impacted by a work of architecture. He managed to achieve the sublime in the building form, creating an emotional response in relation to its scale and form. This building changed my perception on architecture and design. The Menaud can is not capable of achieving such an affect, but I do believe it is a design in the lineage of modernism and the Miesian approach to design, and as such it is highly successful. Maybe it's the beer of intellectuals, people who appreciate art more than football, although I would find this to be sad. I think American brand and advertising too often plays to the bottom denominator and in doing so reduces the conversation. Like the magician, they distract through the excessive noise. I like the thought that a beer drinker can also appreciate literature, finding pleasure in the strike-through text, and doesn't need to be told false stories that the beer water comes from mountain rivers or was transported by special horses across the American landscape. Maybe if we had more Menaud type packaging people wouldn't be so upset about a beer brand making a special can for someone they appreciate. There is great value in the *less*.



The design focuses your attention on the composition and arrangement. There is a clear hierarchy—through scale of the type—and through a vertical building of the type. The design is classic in this sense:

- Headline
- Secondary 1
- Secondary 2
- Tertiary
- Base (Brand)

This is another nice subtle move of having a space at the bottom footer, relative to the center axis, and shifting the volumes and alcohol information to the left and right. It also balances with the large open space above the product type name.



White space. People are so afraid of white space, but the space in a design is as important as the figures, John Cage taught us this with his performance of “4’33,” but this is also a move rooted in modernist design. LeCorbusier introduces the large blank space in his early design for the Villa Schwob at La Chaux-de-Fonds in Switzerland. There is an interesting effect that happens when you create a large blank space that adjusts the viewers attention to the composition of the design. I presume it is the brain seeking to understand the vacuum and find the order and system.

I love the strike-through title. I don’t know what it means, but for a visual language that is text-dependent the strike-through uses the lexicon of text for differentiation.

The brand is made prominent, within the subtle mannerism of the design language, by a contrast with a sans-serif type for the product contents.



Color: The product is without color, using a simple white base with black text. The white blends nicely with the aluminum of the can offering a subtle trim at the top and bottom.

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