Thom Browne 1.2.3. - a brand extension of Thom Browne

Graduation Project 2014/15
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This process book gives you insight into how my graduation project came into being - from project sourcing to execution. It is structured according to the four graduation phases:

1. Preliminary research
2. In-depth research and Idea Creation
3. Idea Execution
4. Idea Presentation
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Orientation and Research.

The first phase focussed on preliminary Orientation and Research of finding a relevant graduation topic. It was important for me that the project represents my strengths developed through my Amfi career, as well as gives me joy.

In order to choose a suitable case, the topic needs to be investigated from various angles.

I investigated a brand which is facing a problem, that I want to solve within my project.
Before thinking about my graduation project, I reflected on 3.5 years Amfi and looked back at my skills and strengths. I had discovered that those lie within branding identities and strategic concepting. For my graduation project I aspired to apply this skill set by helping an existing brand solve a problem which inhibits them to perform well on the market.

Throughout my Amfi career I have gained various experience within the fashion luxury market through a six-months marketing internship at KaDeWe Berlin and numerous projects directed towards luxury brands. I decided to use the experience gained by targeting my project at a luxury brand.
Helping an existing brand become stronger.

Brand Identities and Strategies

The Luxury Market
Quirky Conservatism rooted in Mid-Century Americana

Core business: Thom Browne 'Uniform'

Small empire
Lack of innovation
Customer cannot dynamically buy into brand
Thom Browne
Spring/Summer 2015 Is Purely Aspirational

I will always have a soft spot in my heart for Thom Browne even though I’ll never be able to afford and/or wear it. Everything TB does always qualifies as #GOALS for me. In other words, it’s purely aspirational. It’s sort of like art, ya know? Like, you peep some really fucking fly ass art and then want to try it yourself, only to realize you used up all your artistic ability in elementary school art class, but you’re still really into it. This is clearly not Thom’s first rodeo and while there aren’t any elephant heads here, we have more than enough replacements, like crocheted flowers, padded blazers that make you look swell as fuck while still wearing tiny pants and enough candy cane striping to get you through the holiday season. Of course, the suiting is still on point as usual. I’m really just trying to modify my diet to fit into this gear and catch it when the sample sale hits next year.

Choice.

Luxury Brand Thom Browne.

The brand has limited assortment (main focus is on the grey shrunken suit aka Thom Browne uniform).

As it is a 4-digit commitment and is therefore not accessible to a big audience.
Interview

Store Manager THOM BROWNE Flagship Store New York

1) Which items do you sell most frequently?

Cufflinks, keychain, small items

2) What is more common? People buying one piece or shopping the entire 'uniform'.

There are a lot of people who go for the uniform as a base and then shop more items despite that.

But the uniform is the most aspiring look.

3) Does this mean there is a difference in customer?

Yes, in general you could say that there are older people who go for the uniform, simply cause they can also afford it. But despite that there are a lot of Asian students who shop the smaller items as that fits their budget more.

4) How would you describe the TB customer? (age, values, occupation)?

There’s really a variation in age. A lot of them are young Asians. In general it is a very broad range of people and they can’t really be put into boxes and particular occupations.

5) Do they ever ask for other products from Thom Browne? Like non-fashion related?

The store manager was not really clear about that however he said that there’s a high interest in more accessible goods. Especially from the younger people, like Asian students.

Conclusion

Store Manager recognises a big interest in more accessible goods. Uniform is the most aspiring look, as it best sums up Thom Browne identity.
Interview

Daniel Arosemena, former Thom Browne design intern

Basically, I want to explore ways of making the brand more accessible as mentioned earlier. We talked about the failed diffusion line before and when I read about TB often people say it’s highly aspirational to own something from the brand. Do you know if this is an issue in the company?

Yes, for sure. First of all the diffusion line completely failed because they still used the same suppliers. But Thom is very stubborn on the quality standards. It’s always about the best of the best leather - no compromises. And because it’s so classic it really means a lot to the company.

But I mean yeah, they can’t produce a lot of quantities because of that. It’s a big problem to make revenue when everything is so freaking expensive. I mean there’s a leather bag and it’s 40.000 dollar. That’s insane!

And maybe this is a good example: I once had to make a table cloth and cushions for this presentation on American Designern for future students. And every normal company would say let’s cut costs but I needed to take the most luxurious Mohair fabric which is like 200$ a meter! And then I had to line it and finish it off with the grosgrain RWB. It was so expensive and effortful for just a presentation.

And I means they use the same fabric suppliers as Chanel and McQueen.

So would you say that Thom Browne is rather stubborn in this?

Yes totally. He does not really think about the money aspect. He just thinks about the quality that needs to be the best of the best. That’s why there’s all these prices.

So to sum it up, do you think there’s an accessibility issue?

Yes, I mean it’s not only that it’s so expensive but also that the sizes and everything make it even for some people who would want to own a suit impossible. Cause they simply can’t fit it. So therefore yeah it’s definitely not accessible to a lot of people.

Conclusion

Interview with Daniel has revealed that the brand is very stubborn in changing this, but lack of accessibility results in stagnating growth for brand - long-term negative effects.
Survey on Thom Browne's image and accessibility (65 fashion-conscious respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>too expensive</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack of presence</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not available in my city</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quality-price ratio</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If I gave you money right now to buy anything from the brand, what would it be?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>complete uniform</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a classic item (i.e. shirt or trousers)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seasonal collection piece</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accessories (bag, shoes)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grey suit</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

Survey concludes that main reason for non-purchase are exclusive price points. ‘Lack of presence’ and ‘not available in my city’ contribute to the low production quantities that result from stagnating growth (that is also related to the too exclusive price points).

Uniform is furthermore most striking element, as it best describes the identity. Therefore the sentiment that uniform portrays needs to be maintained!
Research question.

How can Thom Browne become more accessible without diluting its brand identity?

Sub questions:
What is the identity of Thom Browne?
Who is the mentality group of Thom Browne?
What are competitors doing in order to become more accessible?
Which trend can the brand benefit from?

1) brand book
2) brand strategy for extension
3) visualisation of product line or experience
The second phase revolved around diving into the chosen topic with diverse research methods. The goal was to answer the subquestions and eventually define an idea that answers the main research question.

I structured the in-depth research according to my sub questions:

1. Brand
2. Mentality Group
3. Competitors
4. Trend

Eventually I came up with a problem-solving idea that concluded my research.
Interview

Daniel Arosemena, former THOM BROWNE design intern

Did you have constant references in the design team that you were working with? Something that every collection is inspired by?

No, we did not have any exact references. The brand is very much Thom Browne - his personality builds the entire brand. So he would give us directions. However, what I really realised is that he likes structure. We would always know that he for example would hate a diagonal line. He is a hundred percent rooted in the 50s and 60s in America. The entire office looks like this.

One time he got a present from someone - a flat plasma screen - and he gave it to someone from work. Because he did not know what to do with it. He thought it was very unrelated to him or his the brand.

The menswear however has more of a design consistency than womenswear. Thexy try to improve that now.

There were however 3 suit styles that came back in mens every season.
- The Sack (looser fit, patch pockets, bigger silhouette)
- The High Arm Hole (Low Rise skinny trousers, tight arms/very high)
- classic (traditional TB suit, with high waist trouser without belt loops, slim fit)

What is the design signature of the brand?

Everything is basically white and medium grey. Furthermore, the branding is the RWB (Red/white/blue) flag that is used on every garment. They use grosgrain fabric for this branding signal. The proportions are very important for Thom Browne. The trouser proportion is always the same.

Which values would you describe the brand with? What makes it unique?

The brand is very recognisable for this iconic reference of classic tailoring and then modernising that with humor. So I would say its a witty take on traditionalism.

I feel like the brand is always about the ‘routine’ - that’s what also the uniform stands for. Do you agree with this impression?

Yes, totally. He is very much about the structure. They use that in the performance for the show but he’s also about that in his life. Eating the same thing every morning etc.

In womenswear they want to develop that further now as well. They have the monday to friday looks for S/S 15 and they want to continue with that for the next seasons onward as well.
Main Key Words:

Mid Century Americana
White and Medium Grey
R/W/B Grosgrain
The Suit
Routines & Uniforms
Structure
'In a world where the average men’s wardrobe consists of T-Shirt and jeans, his aesthetic -50’s and 60’s Americana, in particular Steve McQueen in The Thomas Crown Affair and JF Kennedy, suddenly feels entirely fresh.’


‘I want to get across the American sensibility of the 1950’s and 60’s. The sensibility of things being more effortless and easy and very clean. I think that is something that is 1) very timeless, always fashionable but 2) really masculine.’

- Thom Browne at the Fairchild Fashion Media Men’s Wear Summit 2013
The grey suit that Thom Browne reintroduces, derives from Mid Century Americana, when said suit was the office uniform. It stood for conforming to the ambitious-driven American lifestyle. It was the time when people were happy with having one choice and the routines that came with it.
Thom Browne brings back this mentality in a time when people strive for variety. The conformist uniform therefore becomes a non-conformist gesture.

Also, within the suit genre, Thom Browne goes against the grain. Armani defined the suit silhouette in the 90’s with his soft jackets and comfortable fit. When Thom Browne came along in the 00’s he dusted off the stuffy reputation, by shortening the length and tightening the suit. He defined the new, modern menswear silhouette.

'Thom Browne made wearing a suit everyday cool again.' - i-D, Thom Browne on revolutionising menswear, 2011.
Collection Analysis

Runway collections F/W 14-15 to F/W 15-16

Collection serves to reinvent the 'uniform'.

'I really wanted to bring serious man's hand-tailoring to the girls' - Thom Browne, i-D 'Thom Browne on revolutionising Menswear', 2011

SS 15 in womenswear: 'Monday-Friday' Looks to create more routine in the female wardrobe.

To conclude: It's all about masculine, effortless routine derived from the grey suit
Serious traditional tailoring with playful twist, through eclectic use of fabrics or funny details. Traditionalism receives a fun, quirky make-over.

The love for the uniform reflects in both mens - and womenswear. Very masculine approach. It’s all about the sartorial effortlessness that the grey suit brings along.

QUIRKY CONSERVATISM
Physique.

Masculine Tailoring.
Grey Shrunken Suit.
-1.5 inch ankle.
Uniform.

Relationship.

Everyday Cool.
Routine.
Distinction.
Non-Conformist.
Exclusivity.

Reflection.

Sartorial Differentiator.
Nonconformist Conformity.
Personality.
Quirky Conservatism.
Refreshing Traditionalism.
Cool.
Masculine.

Culture.
Mid Century Americana.

Self-Image
Feeling cool in a suit.

Brand Prism, according to Joel-Noel Kapferer
Survey (65 fashion-conscious participants):

Appreciate Unconventionality and Uniformity that brand embraces. This needs to come back!
Can you tell me something about the target customer? Who buys Thom Browne and what kind of guy is that?

We, in the design team never designed for a specific kind of guy because the brand works with its references. But from what I experienced, it’s mostly young entrepreneur guys who want to buy the whole package cause that’s what it is about. It is not a banker guy but someone who wants to look cool in a suit.

The Japanese make a very big percentage of customers. That’s because they first of all fit into the sizes and secondly they are very intrigued by this American vibe the brand has.
Observations

Group Members of Facebook Group: THOM BROWNE NEW YORK Sell/Buy/Trade/Talk

Augie Kramer
January 27
Any blazers out there size 3 for under $500?
Like · Comment

El Caba likes this.

Steven Yi
you’d have a better chance winning the lottery
January 27 at 5:07am · Like · 4
Sample Sale is main Thom Browne shopping possibility (80 percent off). As sample sizes are 00 (female 36) so many young Asian students take the possibility to make a purchase as they also fit skinny sizes.

Instagram Accounts show off their purchases. Very committed to Thom Browne and wear it Mo-Fri as daily uniform.
Interviews

Group Members of Facebook Group: THOM BROWNE NEW YORK Sell/Buy/Trade/Talk

Anna Lena Götzmann 😊 feeling hopeful
March 19

Hi everyone,

Thanks very much for accepting me to the Thom Browne group! I am a Branding student from Amsterdam and a huge enthusiast of the brand, to the extent that I made Thom Browne my graduation project.

I really appreciate this group and your compassion for the brand. For my research I would be super happy if I could ask you a couple of questions on what it is you love about the brand etc. This way I can get a better idea on how the brand could become more accessible without diluting its value.

Promise to not steal too much of your time but I think your opinion is very valuable for my project.

If you would be up for that, just comment under this post and I will send you a private message with some short questions.

Cheers,
Anna

Methodology

I interviewed 11 members of the group through individual facebook chats. Besides finding out what they appreciate about the brand, I was interested in which way I could make the brand more accessible without disappointing the hard core fans. The goal was to find a way in which they would still be supportive.
Key Insights

What they appreciate about Thom Browne.

1. Turning something basic, classic into something special
2. The unconventional approach to American tradition
3. Thom Browne is not tailoring for special occasions but it is a daily uniform.

'I wear Thom Browne because it does not make you look like a plain jane office guy' - Andy Tija

'I feel that people often look at Thom Browne and aesthetic as the next level of fancy when it’s actually the opposite.' - Ashton Hepburn

Conclusion

Thom Browne is about the conservative made cool/fun and not about the fancy.
The main competitors of Thom Browne are brands which also follow an unconventional approach to tailoring.

Maison Margiela and Comme des Garçons are the most aspiring competitors, as they manage to make their brand accessible to a large audience, while still being perceived as creative companies that have a clear identity that seeps through on all levels.

(50 out of 67 respondents of my survey, related Thom Browne to Maison Margiela and Comme des Garçons.)
Brand extensions are a prominent tool to make luxury brands accessible. Contrary to diffusion lines, they do not water down the brand value but extend the brand vision into an accessible category, using the same amount of creative spirit.

Although Thom Browne is rooted in American tailoring, its main competitors are brands known for unconventional tailoring, such as Comme Des Garçons and Maison Margiela.

Due to their conceptual ready-to-wear lines, these brands need accessible lines to maintain a feasible business, translating their creative vision into commercial categories.
What is increasingly clear, is that watered down versions of main lines no longer convince customers to buy. Customers are increasingly well-informed and look for integrity in a product.

- Do diffusion lines still make sense?, Business of Fashion, 2015

Brand diffusions which recently died

Marc by Marc Jacobs
Kors by Michael Kors
Burberry Sport
Miu Miu (from Diffusion branded towards sister brand)
Comme des Garçons avoided diffusion lines from the beginning. We never liked the idea of diffusion because it waters things down. It dilutes the idea. When we did a second line for Comme des Garçons, we deliberately made it longer - Comme des Garçons, Comme des Garçons - because it wasn't a diffusion line, it was an extension:

The thing that comes off the real thing, so you keep the spirit. The concept behind it is no lesser than the first Comme des Garçons line.

- Adrian Joffe, Tending the Garden of Comme des Garçons, Business of Fashion, 2013

Conclusion

Brand diffusion is no longer credible. The contemporary way to go is extending into a more accessible product category. Creating a brand extension that uses the same amount of creativity and Thom Browne identity but in a new territory.
The Trend Wonderlust is about seeing the extraordinary in the ordinary. This fits with the nonconformist conformity of Thom Browne. The paradox of conventional becoming unconventional is very relevant in today’s zeitgeist of digital flux.
WONDERLUST: Seeing the extraordinary in the ordinary

Overwhelmed by oversaturation, customers are captivated by the overlooked beauty of the conventional.
Methodology: Brand extension, translating brand vision into more accessible product category

Uniformity + Everyday Cool

= Daily and basic = Routine
Repeatedly the same pattern everyday

THE DAILY MORNING ROUTINE

Monday - Friday always the same structure

Is something very conventional and often overlooked

Blends in with Wonderlust Trend
THOM BROWNE 1.2.3. embraces the simplicity of the daily morning routine through a product line of everyday essentials.

THOM BROWNE = NONCONFORMIST CONFORMITY

THOM BROWNE is renowned for playing with the paradox of conventional and unconventional. By launching a line of everyday products the brand makes a quirky differentiation towards traditional luxury brands.

1. EAT BREAKFAST
   Breakfast classics

2. GET READY
   Toiletry basics

3. OFF TO WORK
   Stationary essentials
In phase three, I gave my idea more depth and actualised it. I decided to visualise the first product launch through three products and wanted to execute how the product will be introduced towards the consumer. Hereby I respected the Thom Browne identity in all choices.

Divided into:
Product Visualisation
Retail Environment
Decision for first Product Season:

- Coffee Mug
- Toothpaste
- Pen

They are all very representative products for the product categories:

1. Eat Breakfast / Breakfast Essentials
2. Get Ready / Toiletry Basics
3. Off to Work / Stationery Classics

Translation

Creating a product that is not only generic depiction of the object but that also breathes the brand and concept (conceptual translation!)
Insight

Work with Standardisation of 1960’s. Back then it was considered to have one shape that is standardised. Anonymous shape & repetition.

Fits very well with Thom Browne uniformity!

Graphic shapes, standardized shape with i.e. rectangular details. Not organic or decorated. Very masculine / clean.
Toothpaste.

Gathering Information for Briefing. Challenge: Create a product that is not purely generic but breathes Mid Century Vibe.

Colgate in 1950’s

Insight.

Toothpaste in 1950s was very simply designed. Effortless and very Thom Browne. Nowadays there’s so many attributes to a toothpaste that need to be communicate and complicate the product (design).

Work with design simplicity
Contemporary Inspiration.

Clean surface design, minimalist. Experiment with Color, smaller lid than tube is more design-driven. Experiment with squared and rounds / no organic shapes.
Gathering Information for Briefing. Challenge: Create a product that is not purely generic but breathes Mid Century Vibe.

Pen.

Insight.

Pen in penholder very Mid Century Americana. Instead of having a zillion pens flying around, there was one essential pen that was always in the same place - on the desk.

Every office had one and very Thom Browne uniformity / simplicity of the one choice.
Contemporary Inspiration.

Experiment with block for the pen. Hexagon Shape could be nice to get in graphic element. Needs to look neat and
Design Experiments.

Experiment with block for the pen. Hexagon Shape could be nice to get in graphic element. Needs to look neat and

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Design Methodology.

Challenge is to create uniformity within all the diversity of products.

That is a) essential for a credible brand extension b) intricate to the Thom Browne identity

Idea.

Work with block-element, a graphic detail that comes back in all the products. Height in all of them is the same.
Experiment with block for the pen. Hexagon Shape could be nice to get in graphic element. Needs to look masculine and clean. Three Mugs to visualise the standardisation concept and fitting with Thom Browne 1.2.3. concept.
In order to create continuity with the coffee mug, the toothpaste should share the same cube element.
Same block as other products should come back in pen as well. Hexagon shape of pen furthermore adds masculinity and repition. Very Thom Browne.
Surface Design.

Apply Design Credentials of Thom Browne (Medium Grey + R/W/B) onto products. R/W/B is great reference to Thom Browne 1.2.3. and the importance of the number 3.

Shy away from unofficial branding but rely on established and recognisable options. Upper examples most suitable. But horizontal stripe is not Thom Browne! It’s about vertical. Try the stripe of below examples on steel surface (above).
Surface Design.

Shy away from unofficial branding but rely on established and recognisable options. Upper examples most suitable. But horizontal stripe is not Thom Browne! It’s about vertical. Try the stripe of below examples on steel surface (above).
**Decision Surface Design.**

Simplicity in surface design goes with Mid Century Americana tone of voice.

All products share same material and stripe branding = uniformity

Stainless Steel = medium grey. cool. masculine.
How does Thom Browne 1.2.3. launch in line with Thom Browne identity?

‘Show don’t Tell’ - the brand does not focus on excessive promotions / no campaigns etc.
The main focus is on the fashion shows and story-telling retail spaces.

>> Assortment is too small to have its own shop but would well benefit from dedicated retail space for story-telling (same way as ready-to-wear does)

Idea: Pop Up Installation at Multibrand store to get more people familiar and make the brand accessible for them.

Choice : DSM London, Tokyo, NY (great promotion platform and stock Thom Browne RTW.)
Store Analysis

Investigating the existing retail spaces of Thom Browne to create a recognisable connection with Thom Browne 1.2.3. pop up installation.
Materials

Grey Marble.
Brushed Metal.
Leather.
Glass.
Fluorescent Light.
Venetian Blinds/
Wood

Textures

Sleek surfaces.
Antiseptic.
Flat.
Does not evoke emotions.

Shapes

Linear.
Stripes.
Squares.
Streamlined.
Geometry.

Colors

Cool Colors.
Medium Grey.
White.
Metal.
Pinch of Brown.
Almost Monochrome
How to create a story-telling retail space for Thom Browne 1.2.3. in line with the Thom Browne criteria?

Thom Browne 1.2.3. = Everyday Essentials

Destination for Everyday Essentials = Supermarket

Supermarket = Sterile Space

Sterile Space = Thom Browne Retail identity
Supermarkets arose in the 1950s. Several factors contributed to the rise of supermarkets in the 1950's. The expansion of suburban living areas was one of the greatest contributions on their rise.
Challenge

creating a fashionable supermarket.

Concept: Antiseptic Supermarket = Sleek Textures + reflecting fluorescent light

Grey Marble and Fluorescent light already very prominent in Thom Browne retail identity.

Add steel in combination with ceramic tiles to add cool supermarket vibe.
**RETAIL CONCEPT**

**Interior Strategy**

1. Thom Browne is about Uniformity - find ONE way to showcase all three products alike.

2. Product display needs to suit everyday essentials / supermarket vibe

3. Product display needs to fit masculine coolness of the brand

**IDEA**

Use Refrigerator as display as it suits the conventional-becoming-unconventional paradox.

+ suits material palette: sleek materials & cold touch

Example below is more feasible and realistic for a in-store installation (takes up less space and easier to set up).
Rendering.
Working with LightUp program, to get a realistic mood for the retail environment. Experimenting with R/W/B fluorescent light divided across three fridges.

Conclusion:
Less is more and more on brand. Only use it for signs/ navigation otherwise it looks too clownesque and loses mandatory cool.
Presentation.

For the last check I fine-tuned the product line and tried to finish off the project through a fitting final presentation.

With this I also aspired to make a translation from 2D to 3D.
Toothpaste (Cosmetics) is different from objects as it runs out/ disposable.

Razor more in line with products and the continuous loop that brand values.

Safety Razor has been huge in 1950s, replacing the straight knife for more precise cut.
In the 1950s, safety razors replaced straight knives for more functional shaving (very conservative and Thom Brown) but also shaving was considered serious business. That's why razors were very design-driven.
Making project come more to life through mock-ups of first product season.

Ideas.

**3D-Printing**
No, as printing layers have cosmetic disadvantage.

**Model-making**
No, because of too-short notice for model-maker

**Modifying existing products**
Yes, as products are not that difficult to find and branding is easily applied.
Translation.

Sourcing existing products in metal look and creating the steel coaster / block present in all product (as this creates and symbolised the infamous uniformity within the line.)
Idea.

Translating flat product boards into something more 3D physical (works with the retail environment very well.

Idea: Creating Coasters with grid surface for the three products, as product display and 3D version of board.
Decision.

long boards work better, as they connect illustration and product in one and it is not perceived as separate parts.
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