

# EPIISODE 084

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## HAPPY SOCKS

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Yorgo Tloupas, Yorgo&Co.

AND

Paula Maso, Happy Socks

### **INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to The Follow-up, a weekly podcast that goes in depth into projects recently reviewed on Brand New featuring conversations with the designers, and sometimes their clients, uncovering the context, background and design decisions behind the work.

### **ARMIN VIT**

Hi, this is Armin Vit and welcome to episode number 84 of The Follow-up.

This week we are following up on Happy Socks, a Swedish designer, manufacturer, and retailer of socks inspired by, quote, everything from art, fashion, and pop culture to your beloved pet, your grandma's hair, and the humble yet mighty hamburger, end quote. The company began as an online product with a very respectable turnover of 1 million Euro in its first year and it has grown ever since. In 2017, Palamon Capital Partners acquired a majority stake in the company and helped launch its international retail program, with Happy Socks now sold in 95 countries, with 12,000 points of sale, and over 300 Happy Socks stores, selling over 40 million pairs of socks since its founding, partly aided by its celebrity partnerships and artist collaborations.

The project, designed by Paris, France-based Yorgo&Co, was posted on Brand New on April 8, 2024. You can pull it up on your browser at [bit.ly/bnpodcast084](https://bit.ly/bnpodcast084) that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast084, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Yorgo Tloupas, CEO and Creative Director of Yorgo&Co.; and Paula Maso, Chief Design Officer of Happy Socks.

Despite its great commercial success, Happy Socks was certainly in need of a more flexible identity to accommodate its retail and online growth and we learn that it took some time not only to convince the rest of the team to get the initiative started but that — after going through the whole rebrand process — it also took some energy to convince its board of directors that launching the new brand was the right step to take. We also hear about the small but mighty in-house team, The Happy Agency, and how they were able to implement an ambitious rollout that is still ongoing and how they drew so much energy and inspiration from the new identity. From Yorgo we get a glimpse into his and his team's working method and presentation skills which seem to have a fun hint of madness to them and how they were able to achieve infusing the letter "H" with just the right amount of happy.

Now, let's listen in as Bryony follows up with Yorgo and Paula.

**BRYONY** When it comes to socks, I find that those around me fall into two camps. The neutral, don't notice my socks group and the I am going to have a little bit of fun with my socks group. From the latter you find those who do it for the internal chuckle, and those who put them on display for others to notice. Whatever group you, the listener, happen to be in is not quite relevant today, but I can guarantee you a bit of a smile with this conversation regarding the rebrand of Happy Socks.

Paula and Yorgo, welcome to The Follow-Up.

**PAULA MASO** Hello, thank you so much.

**YORGO TLOUPAS** Thank you.

**BRYONY** In order to get started, it would be great if you introduced yourselves and what company you're representing today.

**PAULA** I'm Paula Maso. At the time of this project, I was working as Creative Director for Happy Socks, now Chief Design Officer and I've been working for Happy Socks for eight years.

**YORGO** I'm Yorgo Troupes, I'm a designer specializing in visual identity. I'm based in Paris—at the time of the project I was doing the same thing as I'm doing today.

**BRYONY** Wonderful. Paula, let's take a few minutes to establish the origins of Happy Socks and since your involvement has been going on for quite some time, I think you can give us a good insight into the quick growth, and very focused growth, and a little bit of where it stands right now 16 years after its original inception.

**PAULA** Happy Socks was founded in 2008 by two Swedish friends in Stockholm who had a very silly idea but very potent. And a funny little tidbit in Sweden, whenever you go into someone's house, you take off your shoes. That is just the custom in the country, so of course everybody has their socks exposed at all times, so that's where the idea came from. They were looking at everyone just saying, "everyone's wearing such boring socks". Victor in particular, who was a creative director at the time who is a designer, he just thought, why don't we make colorful socks? That was the beginning of the idea and that is still the idea of course an easy to replicate product. But I think that what made Happy Socks sort of boom and stand where it is today being a global brand—we are present in over 95 countries—is that not only the product was really beautiful and it disrupted and created a category, the one of colorful and novelty socks, but also created a lot of iconic campaigns and invested quite a lot in the universe of happiness that was in the beginning and continues to be super strong and recognizable almost 16 years later.

**BRYONY** What led you and those around you, the entire team, to consider a rebrand in this particular moment?

**PAULA** I think as the brand grew and of course we had other needs, the foundation of the brand, the digital presence of brand was minimal to

say the least. Also given that it was founded by two friends in a little bit of a punk style, things were done in a way that felt very organic at the time without necessarily having the considerations that the product might have needed in the future. As we grew the brand, we realized that the most important thing that we were lacking was having something to brand our products. If you can remember the previous logo, it has this kind of very script thin, almost a bit like comic font that was very hard to embroider. Obviously we work with knitwear, so it was very hard to embroider, very hard to knit, very hard to put in any type of digital space.

We do quite a lot of gifting, 25% of our share of business comes from gifting and it was hard to see the logo if you were even one meter away, so it was kind of just something that was in our minds for a long time and also frankly, the logo looked quite uncool and outdated, so obviously us that worked in the design department and heading up the creative studio, we were always banging on marketing store like, please, let's do a rebrand until finally, I think everyone just got in unison, especially because of the digital applications that we were really lacking and the need to brand that product. Once we secured the budget, there was really no pushback. We were just all in for the project.

**BRYONY** How did you get involved?

**YORGO** Firstly, I want to say that I found out about Happy Socks when I lived in London. I think at the launch of the brand, the PR agency for the Happy Socks UK was one floor below in my live and workspace and I used to have a car magazine over there and so I get given gifting again some episodes from the So and I loved it, so I'm a big Sox fan. However, having said that, in France people don't necessarily take their shoes off when they walk into houses. I guess the brand could probably not have emerged in France where people are rude and walk into houses with wet shoes and that's what we do. It's almost ruder more brutal as a demand to ask people to take their shoes off. In France, people are always very offended. Also, they're very kind of,

I wouldn't say preppy, but people are proud of their shoes, so you ask them to take the shoes off and they're feeling naked anyway, so that's just a side note on happy episodes. How did it start? I guess most of our work, it's incoming calls from what I remember, Paula, you had someone in your design team who used to live in Paris and knew about my studio and me. Is that the case?

**PAULA** Precisely. Vincent was one of our French art directors. When we were gathering pitches from international agencies, he said, I know exactly the type of people that you need to do it with, and he had one name for us and it was Jorgo best pitch by far. It was a no brainer.

**YORGO** I was super happy. Each time new projects come in and I love how varied they are. Sometimes we'll do an alcohol brand, sometimes we'll do luxury jewelry, bread and sometimes it's going to be socks. I don't think it's going to happen twice, not that many big socks companies. I just came to see you right straight away.

**PAULA** First you sent, I think we just asked a bunch of agencies in between five or six, we sent a brief and you answered with that in such a wonderful way. I think you were probably the only agency that took time to go the extra mile to look at our logo. I think that what we liked about it is that you didn't focus on what was wrong, which I think a lot of agencies did, and they just went straight to the solution. You almost pointed out the things that were great about the previous logo in the sense that this can work and this is tied to your DNA, et cetera, and I think that that's what made us also connect with your initial pitch before you even came to Stockholm because there was a lot of positivity in it, so we felt like we would work really nicely with your studio.

**YORGO** Was the initial pitch a creative pitch or just like a strategy pitch? I can't remember.

**PAULA** It was more like a strategy pitch. It was just more to show your work and you went a little extra mile to study our previous logo and instead of completely trashing it, you still said some nice things, even though

I personally don't think there's so much nice things to say about it, we knew you had the right positivity for it.

**YORGO** Did I ever tell you about the anecdote of the House font? I think it's House Casual, the font you were using for the logo? [Yeah] I was organizing an event in Countryside UK, Goodwood for Mr. Porter, the fashion brand. Then I see this guy walk around our booth. We had a booth with a car, and exhibition, and stuff like that, and this couple walk around with cool House Industry bags. So I go and speak to them because it's a car event, this car freaks with Mercedes Benz bags and Ferrari caps, but no one with a type foundry bags. So I go up to the guy, I'm like, "Hey, nice bag, blah, blah, blah". Turns out it's Andy Cruz, one of the founders of House Industry and his wife and they're hanging around, et cetera, et cetera. I was like, "oh, by the way, I'm sorry, but I'm redesigning a logo at the moment, which is designed with one of your fonts, Happy Socks". We became super friends and love the guy, and when I had positive things to say about the previous logo, basically it was done with a typeface that I loved when I started graphic design [yeah], even though I don't think it obviously the best font to have for logo type on socks. I still have an emotional link to it and meeting the guy who designed the font years later, that was the best. Sorry, I just veered on the side.

**PAULA** It was cool at the time for sure. I agree. I remember when I discovered Happy Socks, I was living in Barcelona and they were being sold in super niche boutiques. Very cool. There was nothing wrong with the logo, it just some things don't age so well.

**BRYONY** And I think when you face the challenges of working with the logo and trying to place the logo, utilize it throughout the different materials, points of sale and things like that, that's when you start to see the little problems and the challenges. So Paula, as the project started and the team had identified some of these issues, what were the parameters or guidance that you provided Yorgo and his team to get started?

**PAULA** I think the first one because of really the need that we had to effectively brand the product in a permanent way, be it through embroidery or being able to knit it, I think that the first request that we had was to develop an icon apart from developing the wordmark as well. And then of course given that we had that issue of our previous logo not aging well and feeling quite outdated, we were quite clear in that we wanted something that felt quite unique to us, and I hate the word timeless, but that had some at least intention of being timeless or an intention of having more longevity and not necessarily too trendy. Also, the fact that we were quite clear of what were our main applications. We have of course our retail stores, so we needed to have facades, et cetera, but also in our gifting, our labeling, social media, super important and our e-commerce is quite a large share of business as well, so it kind of needed to be applied to all of those different things and work just as well. And apart from that, I think that we are a brand that has worked really hard in trying to establish what our vibe is in terms of, it had to be playful, it had to be bold, it didn't have to take itself too seriously, and it had to communicate happiness as soon as you saw it. I think that was the general brief that we gave.

**YORGO** Honestly it was very nice and positive brief, but challenging as well. We had lots of conversations about this, about the how to express happiness.

**BRYONY** Once you received the brief and the basic premise, what were the initial steps your team took before launching into creative?

**YORGO** We always try and dig deep into the stories of brands, so sometimes we work with really ancient French brands, we are based in Paris, so we quite often get brands that are more than 200 years old, or 300 years old, so there's a lot of stuff to go through. With Happy Socks obviously there was much less history, but it was still interesting. And really the main thing, I've got a passion for designing icons, basically symbols, and the fact that Paula and her team came for that was a present from God, I was like, oh, perfect, let's concentrate on this and let's start with it. Literally that's where we started from and knowing the issue

of the smiley, you can't really do a logotype with a smiley because the smiley corporation is going to come after you. How do you express happiness? So I did like I always do automatic writing, so I write on a piece of paper words linked to the project, literally whatever comes through my mind.

So I had a column called "socks", which under it I wrote whatever came through my mind, so feet, but also smell, also missing—there's always a missing sock, so there's one left. I don't have all the words. And then under the column "happy" lots of words as well, the smile, the smiley eyes, the love, whatever. And then from that I started drawing logotypes in my studio we've got a system where I'm always at the start of the design of logotypes of icons basically I love doing them and it's the pleasure I have of having a team working with me is that I can concentrate myself on that. I did a few different options. Did I go to Stockholm before presenting anything?

**PAULA** You came to Stockholm before presenting anything, and then when you came back to present your initial findings, it was super cool 'cause you had taken so many pictures of signs, like neon signs, like Stockholm is full of neon signs. You took pictures and I think now that I'm remembering it, you took pictures of this parking garage.

**YORGO** Oh yeah, that one

**PAULA** In which each floor has these concrete blocks.

**YORGO** Amazing.

**PAULA** The first floor it says one, the number one is carved out. It's incredible. The architecture of the parking garage is made of these very bold, iconic numbers, and now that I think about that reference, that's probably where the spark came from in a way.

**YORGO** Yeah, a lot of inspiration came from that first trip to Stockholm, seeing the offices, meeting the people, seeing the whole system of the brand and going around the city. I do this thing which I call the "typographic



tourism”. I always put the hashtag on my pictures, but wherever I travel in the world, I look at signs and there’s always so much to be seen. I mean, I guess every graphic designers can the same thing, but Stockholm was [laughter] bonanza of amazing signs. I was like, oh my God. I noticed a lot of script typographic signs like geometric scripts, so scripts are kind of mechanical and not just handwritten. So I had this kind of typographic inspiration and then the start of the idea of how to propose an icon. Usually, funny enough, most of my logotype projects, one of my first options ends up being the final one here. The first draft didn’t have the icon. It had three options. One of them was a monogram with “H-S” intertwined, it was okay, but it didn’t express happiness in my opinion. What was the other one. Do you remember?

**PAULA** I actually have a hard time remembering because I only remember the shock that I had when I saw the “H”.

**YORGO** The “H” came later.

**PAULA** It was almost like amnesia after that.

**YORGO** I didn’t have the “H”, what I had was a very funny idea. It’s the first time I dance during a client presentation. I had a silhouette of a dude, of a human person, very geometric doing a heel-click, you know the when you’re happy and you jump [yeah] and you click your heels and you land back... Broadway-musical kind of move. At some point during the presentation, the first presentation I got up and I said, “what are the different ways to express happiness, smiling, but also this”, and I walked into the corridor and I did my heel-click jump, and then we showed the logo on the screen. So that was kind of funny, ended up not working funny enough [laughter], it was super difficult to draw that.

**PAULA** I think we liked it, but it was interesting how the process went because I think that we really liked the thought behind especially that logo, and I think ultimately it did become some sort of humanized figure [yeah] .of sorts. So I think that that was perhaps out of all of the proposals, the one that we liked the most because it had this energy, it had

this thing that makes you connect or relate to the figure. It was just perhaps a little complicated and we needed something even simpler for the purpose that we were looking for. But I think that was perhaps the first step towards the current icon.

**BRYONY** So what were the steps between that first round presentation, which included other ideas that didn't end up being used in the end and bridging that into developing the "H" icon.

**YORGO** We came back to Paris, [laughter]not empty ended I would say, because some of the proposals, like the graphic system that we had, et cetera, et cetera, was already in the right direction and started drawing again. And then I did this "H" with a very smiley middle bar of the "H" kind of curvy, and then Alexis, one of my partners in the team, creative directors since 10 years now took it—that's the way we normally function, so I do the first drawings of the logo, I go on computer, do some stuff, and then when I'm stuck I'm like, "Hey guys, how would you improve this?" And he improved it radically because he made it all angular, which looked a bit like one of the fronts we had proposed to start with, and then he was just fine tuning of that face, of the "H" to see how happy we made it, how surprised, how flexible, what could we do with it and we were super convinced of this. We knew we had it. Did we just present that back or did we have another option?

**PAULA** I remember clearly that you came back, but I think you probably did the other proposal just to make this one fly even higher, but you were so excited about it, so it was like a no brainer. And when you showed it, it was a unanimous feeling. It was just so instant, and powerful, and simple, and happy, and iconic and it was just fantastic. I think also you showed us these references of these totems and how faces are so important in culture and they've always been throughout many different cultures and historical moments, et cetera, [oh yeah] so I think it was also really nice references. But now thinking about that parking lot and stuff, one of the things that we talked about was that

it felt quite brutalist in the build. There's something clunky about it. I think that's what makes it really playful as well.

**YORGO** Yeah, I remember I had that page where whatever references I put in presentations, they're never graphic design references or almost never. If they are graphic design references, they're going to be from the brand. Say, I'm going to design fonts for Cartier, I'm going to dig into the Cartier archive and show them what they've done. In that case, it was a page where I had a weird house in Japan in the shape of a face. I had a mask from Ghana in Africa. I had a painting of Malevich with a face. I had a Saul Steinberg mask of a face. I had a Keith Haring face. I had many different faces from art and culture, and that was really to show the different ways of showing a face. Even with that "H", each millimeter of change that we would do in the angles, and the position of the eyes, and the size of the eyes would change the expression. One of the hardest things to draw a face, to be honest. And I remember seeing some comments on Brand New where people were like, "oh, it doesn't look happy to me", and I was like, "yes, it does look happy" [laughter].

**BRYONY** Maybe not ecstatic!

**PAULA** Which is what we liked.

**YORGO** Yeah, it didn't look too stupidly glad of being alive. It was just like it had a bit of a smirk, which was cool.

**PAULA** And I think for us as a brand that of course sells the idea of happiness, we really struggle sometimes when we do, for example, photo shoots and you see some of the photographers and stuff telling the models to really smile, and for us what we want to elicit is a true feeling of happiness that you make the connection in your brain of something that you think is funny, et cetera. Instead of us feeding you an image of a smile necessarily. So I think that that's also what resonated to us. It had the right level of seriousness, I guess, so that it didn't become childish because that is also the balance for us as a brand.

**YORGO** And one thing which we did in the creative process, how did we end up with the “H”, is we had started to develop a custom font with those angles, the kind of brutalist system that you mentioned and the uppercase letters. That’s what I did. I took the “H” from the uppercase letters, I mean I put a smile in it and then Alexis tweaked it again, so it looked even more like the typeface, and then we tweaked the typeface again and it all worked together. What I really wanted to avoid, I don’t think it’s a solution for brands, is that the “H” of the typeface is the same “H” of the monogram. It’s a different shape, and if you look on the website or on Brand New, you can see the difference. It’s not exactly the same. The only brand I think which does that well, the same letter for the monogram and the wordmark is a Fila the shoe brand. It’s a very simple “F”. You’ve got four letters. It’s easy, but it can go so wrong. I think to put the icon as the first letter of the brand. In any case, your brand is not “H”, it’s “HS”.

**PAULA** Exactly.

**BRYONY** And you developed this typeface as part of the monogram, and I guess that’s where it started, and then you developed it as part of the communications, Correct?

**YORGO** It all worked together. Basically the font was there somehow... From the font we created the monogram. Then the monogram was a bit more angular, so it made the font become even more angular because everything was work in progress at the time, and then that was the beginning of the whole system. But what’s interesting is how we didn’t want to erase the past of Happy Socks, and that’s why we created the Happy Script, that geometric script typeface, which we talked about earlier, which was inspired by those store signs in Stockholm.

**PAULA** The neon signs, yeah.

**YORGO** Because it’s also a reminder of the previous logo, which was a script typeface. That was why this one came about.

**PAULA** And that one is the complimentary font that we use for accents and communication, et cetera. I think we've talked a lot about the icon of course, because that was really the most significant change because we didn't have an icon before, but the wordmark itself and the font that was developed because an entire font was developed for us to use lower communication, and that was also a fantastic addition for the entire branding and such a luxury I think to have, and it is such a good looking font. I don't think I've told you this after we worked together Yorgo, but every time I use that font it looks like a million bucks. It's so nice. It doesn't matter what you put behind it!

**YORGO** You have to thank Martin, our in-house type designer who did an amazing job on those two fonts. Really.

**PAULA** I'll send him a personal letter of appreciation, and if I don't, please, Martin, if you're hearing this, we thank you.

**YORGO** He likes his call of consult.

**PAULA** I had recently a big fight with our CEO who is quite new in the business and wants everyone to work on Google Slides of course because of shareability, et cetera, but we're like, "but what about the font?" And it's such a struggle. It was such a fight between us and he's like, "Paula, but we need to be able to share this, we cannot just work on Keynote where it's like, I don't know a dinosaur in a way just because of the font", and I was like, "yes, we can!" [laughter]

**BRYONY** So what was the final resolution?

**PAULA** [Yeah] The final resolution is that whenever I really want the font there, I will create my slides, save them as a png and insert them into the Google slides.

**YORGO** Oh my God!

**PAULA** It's a whole layer of work.

**BRYONY** Well, but you're committed.

**PAULA** Very unnecessary... [yeah] for sure!

**BRYONY** And once you started to develop all of the different assets and you started to develop a voice and how you're treating photography, what was the back and forth between both teams in developing how all of those would work?

**YORGO** We work with a lot of big corporations and some of them over the last 10, 15 years I've started creating in-house design studios, okay? Happy Socks have. got the Happy Agency. Is that how you call it, Paula? [Correct.] The Happy Agency is in-house and is by far the most efficient, nice, tasteful in-house studio I've worked with. So we produced a set of graphic guidelines, which was very much a happy guidelines book. It's very colorful, it's got a lot of humor in it, but a lot of what came out on the market was done in-house by you guys respecting those guidelines, but even when you veered away from them, it was for the good, not for the bad, which is usually the opposite that happens, you know? to be honest.

**PAULA** I'm glad you say that because we have tweaked it a few times and hoping that you haven't seen it, so...

**YORGO** No, I've seen some tweaks.

**PAULA** Didn't want you to get upset [laughter].

**YORGO** I've got some stuff that I would not necessarily have done, but in the end I think it was really good and we use it as a case study for our other clients sometimes. We say, look at how well they've applied the thing, look at the commitment, and we show that small video, which is on our website and on Brand New, which you guys developed the cartoon animation with the logo type, the icons kind of swimming in a pond.

**PAULA** Exactly.

**YORGO** And this is mind blowing. Sometimes I kind of forget to say we didn't do it. I'm like, oh yeah, this thing came out.

**PAULA** [Laughter] You can steal it, it's fine.

**YORGO** No,, no, no I'm not going to steal it. I do say this was done in-house by the client and it's phenomenal.

**PAULA** It's such a nice system to work with. I think we were a bit afraid because sometimes you go so fast when you're developing it. I don't know, it was maybe a month and it was done because we were working towards the launch of Fall/Winter '23, which was when we wanted to go out with a big bang and of course we need to do a rollout globally. It was a logistical challenge. It was more on the implementation side of things to change the label of millions of product, the signage on 300 stores worldwide. It was huge endeavor.

**YORGO** That's another thing where you impressed us is when you gave us that rollout document, I was like, wow, it was millimeter week by week over two years on how you were going to roll out the identity. I've had very long identity reviews, especially in alcohol brands 'caues they have so many bottles that they need to sell before they can have the new label on it because you had also all the packaging, all the stores, et cetera, et cetera. You had this very precise rollout system, which was kind of scary because I was thinking, when is this going to come out? I mean this is very far away, and also very reassuring because it showed that you were committed to make sure that in three years every Happy Socks store or packaging was going to bear the new identity.

**PAULA** That's the power of good project management and if I'm going to call it someone by name, it would be Sophia Åkerpalm who did everything with military precision, for sure.

**YORGO** It was military, yeah.

**PAULA** But I think working with the logo in terms with our in-house agency, and I don't really mean to sound like a kiss ass here, but I think that we were so inspired by working with you and your team. You were all so nice and so diligent and smart. When we received the first batch of the logo that we had to apply on our gifting, one of our directors went out

and printed different sizes of the logo and then built, I don't know, we had like 45 different boxes and he placed the logo on the left, on the middle, on the blah, blah, blah. Everyone was taking so much care of how we were going to apply this brand new shiny logo. I don't know. It just spilled over the rest of our creative processes in a really nice way.

And I think as a brand it also gave us an opportunity to implement a lot of other changes that we wouldn't have done otherwise. For example, our labels had a plastic hook now that we were going to have to rebrand and redo labels. We said what an excellent opportunity to get rid of plastic and do paper label instead. Or the website was kind of okay, but now that we were going to rebrand, why don't we do a whole new website? It really just catapulted a series of changes that have been really fantastic for the brand.

**BRYONY** And how big is your in-house team?

**PAULA** In the Happy Agency? Uf! maybe 10.

**BRYONY** Just to put it into perspective, this two to three year rollover because I'm assuming you're trying to use up all the old packaging before you introduce the new packaging and not just send everything to the landfill and things like that [yeah]. It is not only sustainable, it's also financially more stable.

**PAULA** Yeah, yeah, for sure.

**BRYONY** To put into perspective 300 stores worldwide, all of these things, 10 people, that's a lot. You were very busy I'm sure for several months there.

**PAULA** The in-house agency is 10 people. At Happy Socks we're around 100 worldwide and I think that everybody internally had to touch upon this project at some point or another. Not everyone in the agency was necessarily working with this either because we have of course some copywriters or people doing photo shoots that were not



necessarily super involved in the project, but it was definitely a core team driving this.

**BRYONY** You also mentioned somewhere along the way there you said, a month. Was the beginning to end a month from when you reached out.

**YORGO** Oh no!

**BRYONY** I imagine it was a little bit longer. How long was the timeline when you first reached out to when you were ready to launch?

**PAULA** I think less than six months.

**YORGO** No!

**PAULA** I think we had a timeframe... yeah...

**YORGO** That short?

**PAULA** I think so. I think it was super tight.

**YORGO** A funny moment as well was the final presentation where everything was kind of agreed between you and I, Paula and our teams, but then there was a big presentation of the final Happy “H” typeface, et cetera, option to the board, right?

**PAULA** Correct, exactly.

**YORGO** That was intense [laughter]. That was intense because in my mind the whole thing was validated and then I get this message, well, you have to come to Stockholm to present to the board to get final approval. I’m like, what do you mean by final approval? I thought it was finally approved. It was, but there was still the risk of someone saying no. I mean was there a risk?

**PAULA** It took us so long to convince the organization to do a rebrand because of course of all of the implications, financial, logistic, et cetera, that it was kind of bad timing because at the time that we managed to convince people secure the budget, okay, let’s go do the pitches, then

it was mid-pandemic. Of course the retail landscape started failing considerably. So of course there were some voices in the organization, particularly from a more financial board level that were rightly so asking the question, “is this actually the right time to do a rebrand?” Knowing that all of that old product that wasn’t in fact old because one of the wonderful things about Happy Socks is that no one can tell one season from the other. It’s not like regular fashion. You are a fashion item, but you’re a bit outside of that fashion seasonality, so to say.

So of course they were saying by doing this rebrand that’s going to age this product that we could potentially sell for many more seasons, that was a big question mark and that’s why we said, Yorgo, you need to come here and convince these guys that this is the right move and not to be scared and that it is, especially in the face of adversity and scarcity, it is our job to present ourselves as happy and plentiful, and that’s also what people need in their life right now. That was the move that they made and in terms of the logistical part, we actually said there is absolutely no issue in having the old logo next to the new one for, we counted it for four seasons, essentially. It is not going to landfill. It is still in stores, looks a little bit odd, but there are worse things in life.

**BRYONY** Yeah, but the consumer also understands that.

**YORGO** I guess they do, yeah. And that final presentation, once I realized it was like a make or break situation, it was like, oh God, so I came with Victoria of my team. I can’t remember if Alexi was there, but I did my usual theater thing. It’s like a representation where for one hour I explained the thing. I’m very didactic also because one of my jobs is being an art teacher, so I take precautions to be very clear about what I’m showing and I know that people don’t necessarily know what branding is about, et cetera, et cetera. And to me the reward, I mean one of the rewards, first of all, people were convinced, but on Zoom was one of the two founders who had only a limited interest into this, he was not part of decision making team, I guess he was part of the

board. He said the nicest thing, I can't remember. He was like, "I wish we had thought of this back then. Such an improvement." And you're like, God, I mean these guys started, it's his baby [yeah], and literally I come and I don't erase everything, but I shake the tree quite a bit and he was so enthusiastic about it. That was the nicest thing ever, to be honest. What was his name? I can't remember.

**PAULA** Mikael [Söderlindh].

**YORGO** Thank youou. Thank you Mikael.

**PAULA** He's been working in advertising as well. He really understands the power branding, even though he's not super active in the company anymore, his opinion carries a lot of weight. It's of course and influence. The moment that he said it, I think everyone else was like, "okay, we got it".

**BRYONY** We're on board. So that was a specific little feedback, but Paula, what kind of feedback are you receiving from customers and distributors, retailers, everybody who's involved with Happy Socks.

**PAULA** People are loving it and it really allowed us now every Happy Socks product has the little "H" knitted in the back of the cuff. I think that really elevated the product. It refreshed the brand. I think people are starting to recognize it. Riding my bike and there was this really cool guy in front of me wearing Happy Socks with the hem rolled up, not to be caught on the chain, and it looks so beautiful, just a little "H" going around in the pedal. We're not doing any type of tracking in any official way, but so far at least the qualitative type of feedback has been nothing but super positive and for us as a brand looking at our future growth, what we want to do is to develop in other product categories that I think so far our brand name has kept us a bit stuck because we have the word "socks" under our name. But since the inclusion of the "H", because we're using that to brand our CEO calls it the Happy Group and that's kind of where we want to go if we want to make

Happy Shirts or Happy Whatever and that logo will become the icon for whatever product category we choose to expand in.

That really is a proof of how powerful a project like this can become in inspiring you to think outside the sock.

**YORGO** It's funny that you say that, 'cause I have this theory that I try to explain to brands that are launching... When you launch a brand—I quite often get contacted by people who want to launch like a beauty brand or whatever—and I've got this theory, I call it the 3-D theory. I say think in 3-D, not obviously physical 3D. There's three words that start with D, that's my marketing side, inventing theories like that [laughter]. And first D is Distinguish, make sure you don't look like the others in your market. Second D is for Despotic or Dictatorial, so whatever identity you decide, don't allow things to go berserk on the side or everything, be dictatorial in the way you apply things. And the third D is Deploy. When you launch a brand, make sure that in five years, if you are, I don't know, sandwich sauce company, you can open a hotel without it looking weird—and that was the problem with Happy Socks before because it says socks, you can't open a bar or launch shirts, right?

**PAULA** Precisely.

**YORGO** That's the power of icons and that's why I say to brands, make sure your icon is versatile enough so that tomorrow you can do razors and bicycles and you're not going to be stopped. I didn't know you were having these talks in-house. That kind of proves that theory of the 3-D.

**PAULA** Absolutely, and that was really the spark that's ignited it.

**BRYONY** The spark or the permission to move forward because sometimes you have those ideas but you're like, well, but we have the word socks, so... [correct] This is where we are, this is our market, these are our walls, and all of a sudden those walls can be moved.

**PAULA** For sure.

- BRYONY** Of this entire project, what was the most satisfying aspect of either the process or the outcome? Anything.
- PAULA** I think for me it was the process and I think I would speak for the team as well. Working with an in-house team can be super nice, but the few times when we get to work externally, that is also an opportunity for us to get new ideas, take a little peek into somebody else's working process as well. It was really seamless to work with you, your and your team who are all absolutely fantastic and sweethearts also.
- YORGO** I'll tell them.
- PAULA** It wasn't only the result of it, but it was also the human quality that was included in that and I think at Happy Socks we can't be Happy Socks by being super harsh and corporate in a way.
- YORGO** Yeah, Nasty Socks.
- PAULA** Yeah, exactly. I think that we found a really good partner in meeting us in that energy because I think we were all having a lot of fun. It was just the creative juices that were flowing at the moment were super cool to work with.
- YORGO** Thank you. The process was amazing. First of all, going to Stockholm was amazing. I have to say I'd never been to Sweden [laughter, and Sweden I have to also point it out is the country where people know how to build brands. It's insane. I'm not even going to talk about Ikea or Tetra Pack or the super famous ones. If you're going to buy roof racks for your car, the best ones are going to be Thule from Sweden because they know how to build a brand. If you're going to buy an electric car today, I would personally buy a Polestar. If you're going into a Polestar store in Stockholm, it's branding to the ultimate level. Swedish people know how to build brands and I could feel it within the company and it was interesting because you see it in alcohol brands, furniture brands, fashion brands and the socks brands, so that was a very enlightening moment to discover the Swedish branding culture.

Then obviously the collaboration with the client that understood everything. You knew what you were talking about, you had clear objectives, you were very organized. Once again, I work with a lot of French brands, some Italian, but the best ones start with the word S, Swedish and Swiss. Those are my two best clients in terms of organization. I don't want to be chauvinistic or anything. And then the enthusiasm once we unlocked the icon system was general, so excited. I would say the only frustrating thing is we never communicate on our projects at Yorgo&Co. until the product is out. I see a lot of designers doing mockups. There's no mockups on our website. There might be one mockup somewhere. That was the frustrating thing waiting for the first physical store to open.

**PAULA** Yeah, I know.

**YORGO** I was like, when is it coming out? And when it came up...

**PAULA** Torture.

**YORGO** When I saw the first picture of the light box of this smiling "H" that was like, oh my god, this is it.

**PAULA** It looks so good.

**YORGO** We finally achieved Deployment of a brand which needed this, could see that, before that. You know I'm half of Greek, during the process, I passed by the Happy Socks store in Athens and I was like, I can't wait until it's got the happy "H" because here it doesn't work. They had this kind of generic circle with Happy Socks written in it. It looked like a mockup in real life, so yeah, that was the most exciting thing and also the most frustrating. The time it took for us to be able to communicate—took a long time for us to be able to talk about it.

**BRYONY** It was a wonderful collaborative project that came from an internal need that wasn't desperate, but you knew the challenges that you had Paula with your team in using the brand and you had this aspiration and

you made it happen internally by finally getting the budget approved and the process seems to have been really smooth and seamless and joyful in many ways. As you try to bundle up what happiness is without it being in your face, screaming “happy!” because that would be detrimental to the brand actually, and take away from the fun aspect of the socks, which are a little tongue in cheek, a little surprise whenever you get to see them either on a bike or a friend’s house when everybody takes off their socks. That project management from beginning to end, especially through the remaking of all of your stores and packaging and items and all of those things has been instrumental to this seamless process from we want to do this to, it’s out there in the world in, did you say 95 countries?

**YORGO** Yes, yes, I did.

**BRYONY** That is gargantuan. I can’t even imagine [exactly]. 300 stores in one country, I can see. 300 stores, 95 countries, that is insane and it is a wonder to watch how it has happened and how it’s been implemented, and I cannot wait to see 10 years from now where the brand is if it’s beyond or still focused on socks, but that continuous growth is something that I expect to see throughout time.

**PAULA** Me too. Stay tuned.

**BRYONY** I want to thank you both for being on The Follow-Up with me.

**YORGO** Thank you.

**PAULA** Thank you so much. It was a pleasure.

**YORGO** And it’s a great idea to do this podcast systems. That’s the behind the scenes thing that you don’t normally get to hear. We are lucky. Imagine if Happy Socks had been the most horrible, mean client. I would not been to do that podcast [laughter].

**PAULA** I mean for me being the client, which feels weird ’cuase I was on Yorgo’s side for many years freelancing as a graphic designer. When I went to work for a company and became the client, I made a promise to

myself never to work with people whose work I didn't absolutely admire, and when you work with them, you kind of want to give them the full key. When you give them the trust, that's when the magic happens and then whatever hurdle you have, you're going to get to a solution because all you have is respect for them. Otherwise, why would I hire you? That makes no sense. We do that with our photographers as well. Sometimes they're like, but what should I do? I'm like, you tell me. That's what we're here for. I'm not here to tell you exactly what to put in your pictures. I'm not here to tell you exactly what to put in anything. At Happy Socks we are a creative company and what we want is to foster a network and a community of true creatives where they can use our brand as a platform for the creative expression as well. And I think that's why it has worked well for 16 years.

**YORGO** Thank you.

**BRYONY** You're building each other up.

**PAULA** Yeah, I really believe in that.

**BRYONY** Wonderful.

**PAULA** Thank you for having us.

**YORGO** Thank you, Bryony. Thank you Paula.

**ARMIN** I'm not gonna lie and admit that out of all the conversation the thing that excited me the most and that I would love to get a peek at is the 3-year spreadsheet breaking down the rollout. No amount of amazing design can overcome poor planning so it was great to hear that there was a comprehensive blueprint to deploy the new identity, which sounds like it was a joy to create between the two teams. Another highlight was the serendipity of Yorgo meeting House Industries' Andy Cruz at a car show... it's the kind of stuff that makes you believe that stars align in weird ways sometimes. But you don't come here for my philosophical musings so we'll instead finish by applauding Paula's take on fully trusting the people she works with, which is a philosophy



that cuts all ways, whether you are an in-house team working with outside design firms or a design firm working with illustrators, animators, type designers, and more because as this project demonstrated, trust equals happiness.

Today, thanks for listening, until next time, we'll be here, we hope you'll be there.