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Designer Interview: Robert Bergman, Bergman Associates

By [Marie Redding](#), Senior Editor.

Robert Bergman has an uncomplicated philosophy when it comes to package design. "No matter what a brand's tone or message is, a package must always be stunningly beautiful," he says.

While working in the fashion industry, Bergman gained an appreciation for beautiful aesthetics. "Image and status are so important in both fashion and beauty, so package design is especially crucial to the success of a beauty brand," says Bergman.

Bergman began his career working for Fabien Baron, helping to design *Interview* magazine and launch Baron's design and ad agency. He went on to become creative director of *Vogue* magazine in Brazil. Next, he was vice president of creative at L'Oréal for four years. Now, as creative director of his own agency, Bergman Associates, he is able to divide his time between fashion and beauty clients—which he feels is a definite advantage over other package designers who aren't connected to fashion.

"It's surprising how few fashion insiders there are in the beauty business—that must really limit creativity. The beauty industry is so tightly linked to the fashion business, so I can't imagine doing one without the other. In order to stay on the edge, it's absolutely crucial," Bergman says.

Bergman's recent projects include designing the packaging for L'Oréal's Vive Pro brand; L'Oréal Professional's new Texture Expert line, which launched in October and replaced the Textureline and Tecni.art brands; and Shu Uemura's new hair care products launching worldwide this fall. Bergman was also personally recruited by L'Oréal's CEO, Jean-Paul Agon, for what he calls "every art director's dream project." He was asked to redesign the Maybelline brand and reposition the world's number one cosmetics company by modernizing its packaging, advertising, and merchandising.

Modernizing Maybelline

Bergman began working on the Maybelline redesign in 2005. The project took a year and a half. Bergman redesigned all of Maybelline's packages, repositioned the brand's photographic style, and supervised the company's ad agency in order to modernize its ad layouts. The new typography and logos are being phased in now on Maybelline products sold all over the world. The new cosmetic packages will gradually launch throughout the next year in all markets.

"The brand was in need of a major change. There were literally hundreds of sub-logos—a different one for each product, each with its own multiple fonts and drastically different personality," says Bergman. He says that this communicated a confusing message to the consumer.

One change that Bergman feels drastically alters a consumer's perception of the brand is using uppercase letters for the product names. "An important part of Maybelline's core message is the empowerment of women. It makes sense that the world's largest cosmetics brand should stand up for women in all ways, so the new typography conveys pride and power," he explains.

Shu Uemura's Minimalist Design



Bergman designed the typography that wraps around Shu Uemura's translucent hair care bottles

Shu Uemura's new hair care line launched worldwide in September. Bergman designed the packaging and promotional material. He also handled the creative direction for the ad campaign and photo shoots. His design inspiration came from a combination of fine art and traditional Japanese design principles.

"I created the Shu Uemura lines to be as close to fine art as a consumer product can be," he says. Bergman describes the way the typography wraps around the translucent bottles as "seamlessly perfect." He also made sure that the type seems to morph, reflect, and refract as the bottles are turned.

The unique shapes of the shampoo and masque product bottles were created in collaboration with French industrial designer Christophe Pillet, a former associate of industrial designer Philippe Starck. "The curved shapes, color, translucency, and caps were difficult to perfect," says Bergman.

The outer boxes contain the following quote from Shu Uemura, who approved all of Bergman's designs: "Creating something that is universally beautiful, that is art."

It was important to Bergman that the packaging reflect Shu Uemura's history of minimalist design. "I wanted to find a fresh and modern approach to that minimalism," he says.

Tips from an Expert

Good design always "connects" with a brand. Bergman says that he always needs to gain a thorough understanding of a brand, including its marketing point of view, before beginning a new project. Instead of simply relying on the creative brief given to him by clients, he conducts his own question and answer session. "I have to dig a little deeper and get my clients to tell me all about the brand's core message," he says.

We asked Bergman if there were any particular rules for updating a brand's packaging so that its design looks modern. "Although there are certain design cues that shout modernity, it can't be defined as a particular font or design element," he says. Bergman describes it as "brilliant balance—a composition of just the right ingredients that jumps off the package." That's when he can tell if a project is going in the right direction. "It usually involves a lot of experimentation, and then there's suddenly that 'Wow' moment where it all comes together," Bergman says.

Focusing on the big picture is another one of Bergman's tips. "We know from test results that consumers don't see fonts or textures—they see the cumulative effect. It's this combination of different design elements that give a brand its personality—and this is what the consumer sees," Bergman explains.

Packaging is such an important part of everyone's daily life. "It's the part of design that we can all actually touch," Bergman says. When asked what he finds most satisfying about his career, he replies: "If we are successful as designers, then we are enabling people to touch beautiful things many times a day. This is what I hope I'm achieving."



Bergman redesigned all of Maybelline's packages, repositioned the brand's photographic style, and helped to modernize the brand's ad layouts



Christophe Pillet helped design Shu Uemura's unique shampoo and masque product bottles

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