DESIGN DIRECTION

# Permissible Indulgence

Indulgence is being visually rewritten. Minimalist, medicinal cues are moving into food and drink, signalling a new era in which wellness, desire and discipline collide



Bunker Bang. Design by 1To3.Design Lab, China




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# At a glance

: **Context –** As wellness culture and functional indulgence reshape consumers' expectations, brands are softening hyper-stimulating design, balancing playfulness with restraint to signal mindful, controlled pleasure

: **Sectors –** Food & Drink, Health & Wellness, Packaging, Retail, Lifestyle, Beauty

: **Treatment –** Chalky whites, mineral greys and natural pastels are offset with vibrant accent colours, clean layouts with generous negative space, tactile textures, subtle gradients, bold yet minimal typography, silvers and chromes

**Pantone® colours:**
Olive Green
Lemon Tonic
Golden Nugget
Rosebud
Ultraviolet
Plein Air
Bright White
Steel Grey
Onyx



01 Night & Day. Design by Hello Comrade, Global; 02 Cacao Disidente. Design by S&Co., Colombia; 03 Joe Blake's. Design by EBBA Architects. Photography by Genevieve Lutkin, London, UK; 04 Noon, US; 05 Gem. Photography by Rikky Fernandes, US; 06 Elevate. Photography by Elspeth Vincent, UK

# Introduction

Self-optimisation culture – from biohacking to GLP-1 usage – is rewriting the rules of indulgence. Consumers are moving away from abundant, high-calorie, quick-fix cravings, favouring smaller, more intentional treats.

With about 1.6m UK adults and 19m US adults now using GLP-1 medication, demand is rising for nutrient-focused, portion-controlled formats (sources: University College London, Morgan Stanley). Yet the shift isn't about abstaining: Swiss chocolate manufacturer Lindt reports that GLP-1 users are eating more chocolate – just in smaller, more refined portions. As CEO Adalbert Lechner notes, shoppers are 'upgrading to premium products – small rewards with a moment of bliss rather than mindless munching' (source: Reuters).

These evolving habits reveal indulgence to be increasingly functional. Consumers are seeking products that deliver both nourishment and emotional uplift. From adaptogen candies to collagen-infused sodas and protein-enriched crisps, we've already seen a flurry of launches catering for these demands – each positioned as a win for both mind and body.

The Future Laboratory's Frivolous Foods design direction from 2020 highlighted the rise of bright, psychedelic palettes and mood-boosting designs engineered to stimulate pleasure and to cue temptation. While these 'dopamine dressing' aesthetics continue to thrive across digital and retail spaces, this visual language is beginning to soften. This emerging aesthetic balances joyful escapism with cues of restraint, incorporating bite-size packaging and playful, self-affirming copy that allows consumers to feel good about their consumption.

In recent months, brands, designers and creative agencies have been dialling back, pairing singular colours with creamy whites, generous negative space and clean, clinically coded palettes.

As Sprout Studios branding and creative director Ryan O'Donnell puts it: 'The era of 'more' packaging is over. In 2026, the brands winning aren't adding, they're editing. They're designing packaging that's smarter and more intentional from the start' (source: Sprout).

This move towards edited, intentional design communicates trust, efficacy and transparency, signalling a new wave of 'permissible indulgence'.

'Consumers are upgrading to premium products – small rewards with a moment of bliss'

*Adalbert Lechner, CEO, Lindt (source: CNBC)*




Matcha Chocolate Delights by NOON, US




Honey Department. Design by Foreign National. Photograohy by Graham Pollack, US

# Art Direction

## Monochromatic colour and deliberate negative space are being used to symbolise a defining shift in the food and drink category

Increasingly, food and drink brands are borrowing cues from beauty and wellness, where colour, typography and visualisation operate as recognisable cross-category signals.

Berry blues, peach pinks and honeycomb yellows signal flavour, offset by milky creams and mineral greys – a palette that borrows the functional minimalism of skincare brands like Dermatica, Rewire or Skin+Me. Bold, blocky type then anchors this in something more clinical: singular, confident messaging that conveys credibility and expertise.

This approach reflects a broader shift in how consumers read visual cues. As noted by 1928 Creative Studio, 'Consumers now associate white space, reduced clutter and simple typefaces with brands that are transparent, ethical and premium. But it's not minimal for minimal's sake – every design element serves a purpose. The colour, typography and layout reflect a clear message: less distraction, more trust' (source: 1928 Creative Studio).

In creative studio Foreign National's latest art direction for Honey Department, a white-gloved hand squeezes an aluminium tube, pushing out a thick, viscous gel – 100% raw honey that might seemingly lend itself more to a night-time skincare routine than morning porridge.

This same beauty-adjacent language carries through to other recent launches. Canned energy drink brand Update, redesigned by creative agency Day Job in collaboration with Kim Kardashian, has been described by Fast Company as 'Skims you can drink', translating the minimalist, refined-led ethos of Skims into a sleek, functional beverage format (source: Fast Company).

Elsewhere, the influence shows up through typography, rather than form. Barnacle Brothers' botanical rum brand, designed by Monday Creative, prioritises typographic scale and contrast, using oversized, gloss-varnished letterforms that pop against a matte base, with each flavour defined by a single crisp hue.

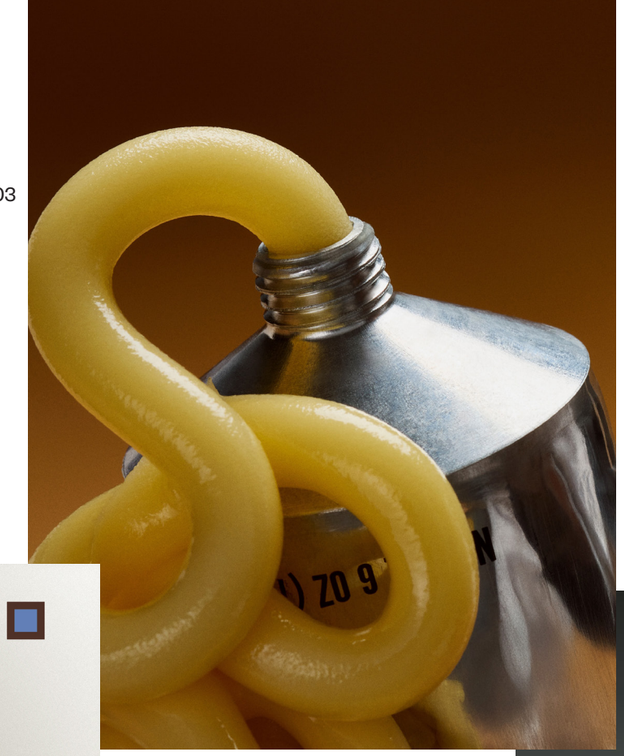
Taking a more natural approach, cocoa-based energy bar brand Bunker Bang, designed by 1To3.Design Lab, layers buttermilk creams, soft pistachio greens and passion fruit yellows with visuals of ingredients dripping in fruit curds, creating a natural yet indulgent, flavour-forward identity.




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# Key Takeaways

: **Colour** – Monochromatic palettes drawn from natural sources paired with muted creams and chalky whites create a clinical-coded aesthetic that signals ingredients and flavour as natural, honest and elevated

: **Language** – Self-affirming, empowering copy like ‘legendary’, ‘uplift’ and ‘good-guilt’ communicates controlled pleasure, giving products a voice that balances indulgence with intention

: **Cross-category Inspiration** – Food and drink brands are borrowing visual and experiential cues from beauty and wellness, using minimal, functional design and clinical-coded colour palettes to translate indulgence into controlled, lifestyle-driven moments

01 Barnacle Brothers Tea Infused Cocktails. Design by Monday Creative, UK ; 02 Bunker Bang. Design by 1To3.Design Lab, China; 03 Honey Department. Design by Foreign National. Photograohy by Graham Pollack, US; 04 Noon, US; 05 Cacao Disidente. Design by S&Co., Colombia

# Packaging Formats

**Driven in part by the rise of GLP-1s, brands are increasingly designing for self-restraint, portion control and slimmed-down appetites**

Packaging and consumption formats are being re-imagined with bite-size, dose-like portions that merge indulgent taste with clinical precision. This mirrors the broader aesthetic shift seen across food and drink: chrome accents, clean whites and pharmacy-coded minimalism now frame these small formats as both functional and instructional.

Building on this, language such as ‘dose’ and ‘balance’ positions these bite-sized treats as mini-supplements, meticulously designed to support personal wellbeing. Time-based eating cues and the rise of Chronodiets emphasise this – as demonstrated by Mid-Day Squares PB&J ‘no-bread’ Squares – positioned as a nutrient-rich prescription for afternoon energy slumps.

As food consultancy Harris and Hayes tells The Future Laboratory: ‘We’re seeing a lot of new dosing-style packaging – Monday–Sunday daily dose formats, on-the-go individual portions and beyond-shot measures that borrow from broader wellness and pharmaceutical categories. Bombarded by wellness messaging and targets, these formats tap into our increasingly ‘quantify everything’ culture.’

Supplement brand GEM transforms daily multivitamins into chewy, dense chocolate, citrus and ginger cubes, wrapped in white glossy packaging and presented in bite-size formats that command the consumer to ‘eat your nutrients’. Meanwhile, Bline Water references self-care with a bath bomb aesthetic: drop the vitamin C ball into a glass and watch it fizz, transforming your water into a zesty dragonfruit infusion.

These playfully precise portions not only heighten desirability but also foster trust: consumers feel confident they are receiving the right ‘hit’ for their functional needs. As Vogue observes in its food trends analysis: ‘In 2026, comfort eating is less about indulgence and more about ritualised emotional regulation,’ – a shift that helps explain why dose-led, ritualistic formats resonate so strongly with today’s consumers (source: Vogue).




Gem. Photography by Bailey Rebecca Roberts, US




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‘In 2026, comfort eating is less about indulgence and more about ritualised emotional regulation’

*(source: Vogue)*




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# Key Takeaways

: **Portioning –** Bite-size, single-serve formats are a response to GLP-1-driven behaviours, enabling controlled indulgence and reducing overconsumption

: **Format & Ritual –** Packaging adopts medicinal cues and time-based rituals, with formats designed to feel like a medicinal dose for midday energy boosts and daily immune support

: **Perception –** Small, precise portions enhance desirability while building trust, framing indulgence as measured, functional and aligned with wellbeing rituals



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01 Bunker Bang. Design by 1To3.Design Lab, China; 02
The Bline Water, France; 03 Oshun, UK; 04-05 Noon, US



LERA. Interior design by air.atelier, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

# Consumption as Ritual

As appetites shrink and wellness culture intensifies, restaurants are designing experiences where pleasure is delivered through ritual, sequencing and precision

In New York, Italian restaurant Tucci has responded to changing diner demands with its carefully crafted Ozempic Menu, offering smaller, more flexible portions – sometimes down to a single meatball. Similarly, the Fleur Room bar serves 'mini- Martinis' for £6.65 ($9, €7.65) each, compared to their standard £14 ($19, €16.15) price point.

As restaurants redesign menus, cafés and juice bars are translating clinically coded wellness cues into spatial design. EBBA's Joe Blake's Espresso Bar in Holborn, London, re-imagines the café as a modern-day pharmacy, offering a daily dose of coffee within a calm, paired-back interior. A milky screen behind the bar reveals the back-of-house in a nod to environments where pharmaceutical products are kept visibly on display.

In the North of England, Leeds' Blank Street Coffee takes a similar approach, pairing pristine white interiors with soft pastel greens that recall the muted tones of hospital waiting room chairs. Other matcha-focused cafés follow suit: Cologne's IMPI adopts bold, blocky typography, printed across IV bags for their social media posts, while Amsterdam's LERA Matcha presents its stock across steel shelves, with block text-stamped tins labelled 'your dose of self-love'. The brand summarises the space as 'minimal, clean, muted by design' (source: Instagram).

The HeyTea shop in Shenzhen, China, extends this aesthetic into a more immersive spatial expression. Designed by AAN Architects, the space takes cues from ancient rituals found in Chinese valleys, in which people gathered around water and floated rice wine cups on winding streams. A white table flows through reflective chrome interiors, set beneath an undulating ceiling reminiscent of rippling water. Conceived as a 'creek in a valley', the space creates gentle distances between guests – allowing individuals to sit privately, couples to talk among themselves, and groups to gather.

Together, these ideas reveal how food and drink spaces are increasingly re-imagining the act of eating and drinking as ceremony. Pleasure is written into the choreography – conscious sips, savoured flavours, moments of pause – rituals that slip easily into the wider lifestyle gestures that these spaces now support, making wellness feel intentional, elevated and quietly indulgent.



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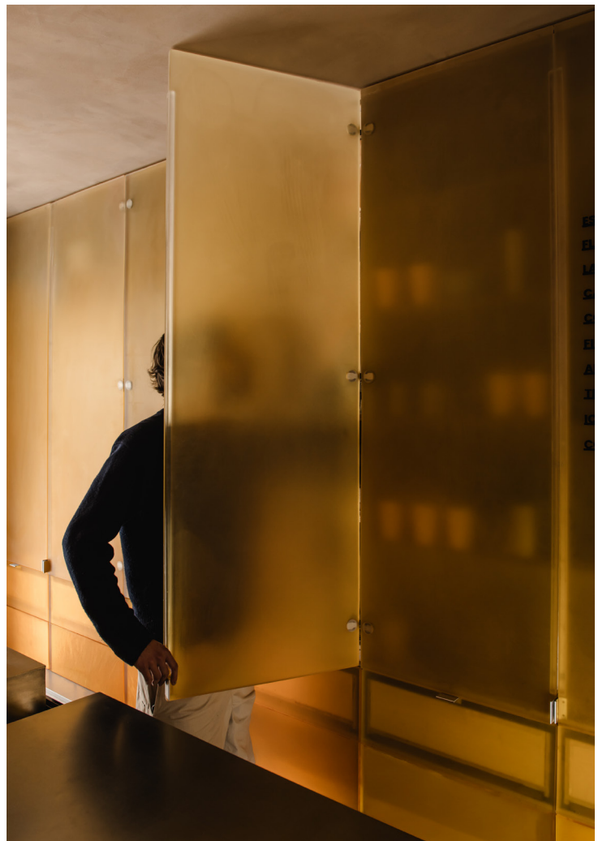
# Key Takeaways

: **Curated Environments** – Cafés and restaurants are designing spaces that signal wellness and precision, using colour (whites/silvers), materials (metals/chromes) and spatial cues to create calm, almost pharmaceutical environments, that encourage guests to slow down and pause

: **Ritualised Consumption** – Meals and beverages are framed as intentional, time-based experiences, with portioning, sequencing and presentation turning indulgence into mindful or restorative moments

: **Functional Indulgence** – Every touchpoint, from packaging to interior cues, reinforces a sense of purpose, allowing consumers to feel they are correcting or enriching themselves with a measured dose of indulgence

01 LERA. Interior design by air.atelier, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; 02 Juvo, Australia; 03-04 Joe Blake's. Design by EBBA Architects. Photography by Genevieve Lutkin, London, UK



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‘Conceived as both a daily ritual and a momentary refuge, the space is designed to serve commuters seeking a quick, restorative dose of coffee’

*EBBA (source: Dezeen)*

# Talent

## Hello Comrade

Amsterdam-based Hello Comrade builds outspoken, system-driven brands shaped by strategy, research and egoless design. Its work for Night & Day, Amo Tequila and Orange Toucan reflects a commitment to opinionated, future-proof identities. Operating as a global collective, the studio creates holistic brand systems that prioritise audience behaviour, cultural relevance and long-term creative conviction.



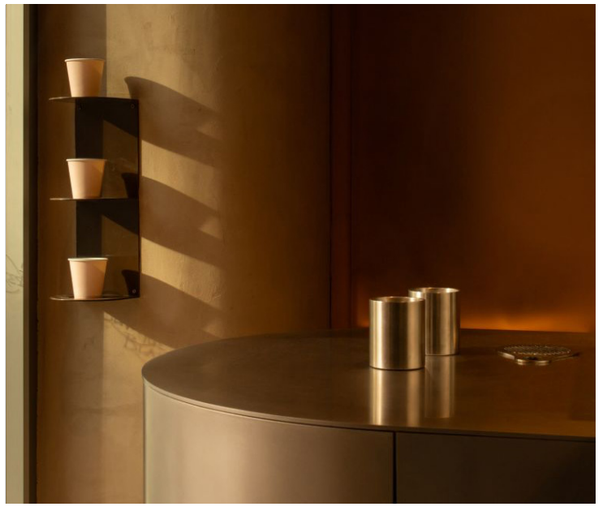

## 1To3.Design Lab

1To3.Design Lab is a Shanghai-based studio blending intellectual minimalism with soft, precise expression. Projects such as CHO Chocolate and Bunker Bang nutrient bars reveal their concept-driven geometry, often derived directly from product form. Calm palettes, generous space and refined structure define identities that feel breathable, contemporary and meticulously considered.




## EBBA Architects

EBBA is a research-driven architecture and design practice based in London that creates quietly progressive spaces rooted in material clarity and emotional resonance. Led by Benni Allan, the studio crafts buildings, interiors and objects that feel familiar yet provocative. Award-winning and hands-on, EBBA focuses on poetic qualities that shape meaningful experiences across cultural, residential and retail environments.



Left to right: Orange Toucan. Design by Hello Comrade, US; Bunker Bang. Design by 1To3.Design Lab, China; Joe Blake's. Design by EBBA Architects. Photography by Genevieve Lutkin, London, UK