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Mark O'Neil,
CEO & President,
Columbia
Shipmanagement

TOMORROW'S
WORLD TODAY

A Cypriot Living the American Dream

Christos Joannides, Founder and Creative Director of award-winning, luxury branding agency Flat 6 Concepts, talks about his own entrepreneurial journey, the continuous search for simplicity and quiet elegance, and the way digital technology has changed brand marketing.

By Marianna Nicolaou



I have been staring at my laptop screen for a good half an hour, looking at vivid colours, emerging from minimal, clever designs, morphing into enthralling and whimsical pictures. I observe the delicate lines celebrating space, stillness and serenity, along with vivacious, fiery twists. The man behind these creations is inspired, he tells me, by world travel and beautiful, bespoke, simply designed items. Indeed, he seems to adore all things Art.

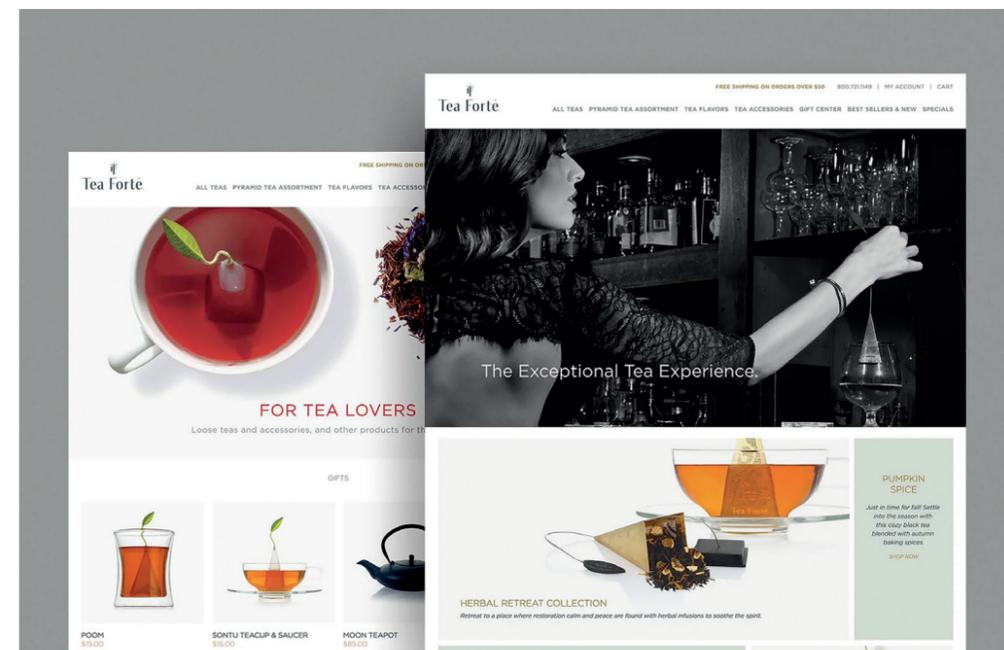
“My childhood dream was crystal clear. It went something like this: apply to college in Southern California, preferably Los Angeles; find a way to make a decent living; become an American citizen. Check, check and check”, he informs me, clearly pleased to have seen that particular dream come true.

Like many other Cypriots before him, Joannides had always been fascinated with the US, and it was to take him from Nicosia, where he grew up, to Pepperdine University in Malibu, where he studied Journalism and History of

Art. He remains captivated by the world and philosophy of Ancient Greece and Italy, the elegance of France and the sincerity of Japanese minimalism. He loves the work of Pablo Picasso, Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, Ellsworth Kelly and Jean-Michel Basquiat but includes Rembrandt on his list, and also appreciates the photography of Peter Lindbergh and Helmut Newton.

He sees in colours, and expresses himself through the unique patterns that occupy his mind and find refuge in his designs.

Joannides’ father was an architect and he had a major impact on Christos’ design aesthetic during his formative years. “My father often talked about Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright and the Bauhaus movement,” he reminisces. “So, as an impressionable young kid, that train of thought became my prototype. The Bauhaus had far-flung effects on not just architecture but the whole

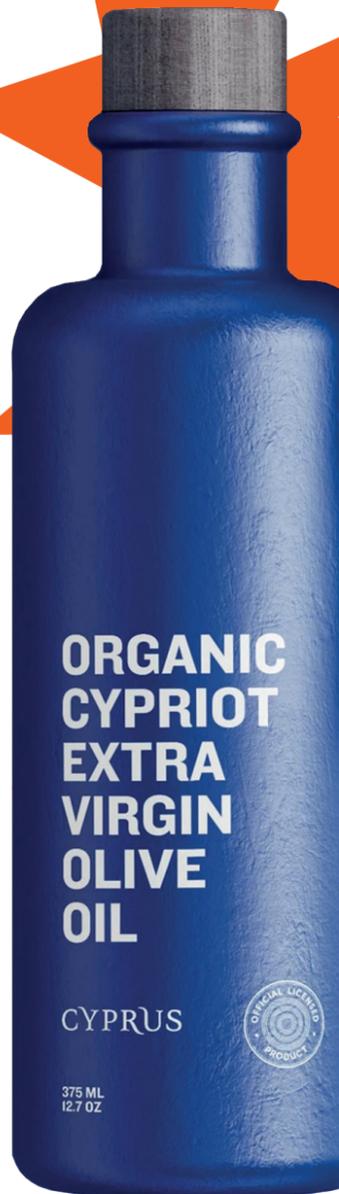


world of design, including graphic design, which became my favourite. I soaked up the distinct, minimalist aesthetic. To this day, I am a sucker for simply designed things that are made well and serve a function.”

Secretly overjoyed to find another Bauhaus loyalist – after all who can deny the splendour of merging artistic media into one unified approach, combining individual craftsmanship with mass production and function? – I am now eager to find out more about the adventurous journey that led to the creation of Flat 6 Concepts.

“Before starting Flat 6 Concepts, I was a partner in a design firm that was spearheaded by my late brother Stefanos and a third partner. I was the head of branding, marketing, photography and developing our online presence. I did that for 10 years, until 2008 when the Great Recession hit the United States and we lost most of our clients seemingly overnight. With two young children and a mortgage, I had to do something quickly,” he explains. “So I started Flat 6 Concepts with the intention of providing sophisticated visual communication to clients that would appreciate my aesthetic of simplicity and quiet elegance. I started out designing websites and brand identities and then branched out to print and did literally everything in between. Today, Flat 6 Concepts provides a diverse range of work, including naming, logo and brand identity design, packaging design, art direction and complete full-scale advertising campaigns both print and online. Our philosophy is ‘Simpler is always better’ and we strongly believe that good design lasts longer.”

Joannides informs me that when his agency is commissioned to take on a project, the first step always involves discovery and research, delving into the client’s mentality and environment. “We do a deep dive into the client’s industry, their goals and why they are seeking to rebrand or change their brand strategy. We do a brand audit to find out what was working, what wasn’t, and how much change needs to happen so as to not alienate their existing customers,” he says. I ask him which projects remain closest to his heart. “I think my proudest work has been with luxury tea maker Tea Forté, luxury outdoor umbrella manufacturer Santa Barbara Designs, luxury Miami based men’s fashion boutique Sartorial, and my latest project for French luxury skincare line Vie de Mer.” I note the repetition of the word ‘luxury’, which is evidently no coincidence. Indeed, in 2014, Joannides encouraged the Cyprus Tourism Organisation to rebrand his homeland, by creating a new logo and the slogan ‘Beauty Worth Revisiting’, to give Cyprus a more upscale image to appeal to a higher class of traveller, focusing especially on potential American visitors. Eight years



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on, I am keen to hear his professional opinion on the current design marketing of the island abroad – whose new logo he admits is ‘too trendy’ for him – as well as his thought compass for his own creation back then. “The tagline I came up with almost 10 years ago was Cyprus: Beauty Worth Revisiting, which piques your curiosity whether you have visited the island before or not, and conveys an intellectual and more elegant approach. I am happy to see that there is an effort being made to upgrade the image of Cyprus abroad,” he continues. “Evidently visitcyprus.com (which serves as the official portal of the Deputy Ministry of Tourism) has seen vast improvement, although I still feel that the site lacks an elegant user experience (UX) that would serve the visitor much better.”

The brand ecosystem that Joannides constantly needs to navigate through currently faces many paradoxes: the need for brands to hold onto their heritage while innovating and walking hand in hand with technology, growing while maintaining an aura of exclusivity and rarity. “Digitalization has changed how all brands, not just luxury brands, market their products. The biggest shift as of late has been the advent of software that enables 3D hyper-realistic digital renderings. This new technology allows brands to show their products in a different light, accentuating intricate design details, whether it’s a Tom Ford belt buckle or the dials on an Aston Martin dashboard,” he notes and adds. “Apple does this flawlessly when displaying new products on its website. A look at the latest Cartier or Rolex advertising campaigns confirm that details are indeed what make the design. Quality and craftsmanship are two key components in marketing luxury products. This hyper-realistic

computer-generated imagery plays to that sentiment.”

Joannides sounds like a man who is aware of the changing world around him but is not at all scared by it, so I can’t help but wonder what the greatest challenge could be for him right now.

“My greatest challenge, other than growing my business without sacrificing the integrity of the work, is to convince clients of the importance of a cohesive and well-thought-out branding strategy that can really change the perception of their product or service. My dream is to work with more European clients. I was recently in Milan for a client and it felt good coming back to Europe for work – and always a little pleasure!”

On a more personal note, Christos Joannides admits that the pandemic lockdown was a time to reset and rethink, thus becoming more of a minimalist, seeking less but better of everything. “Subsequently, that idea seeped into my work, leading me to strive for more meaningful work with people I like and respect, as opposed to forcing certain relationships that ultimately never end well. We have always lived in a fragile world – the pandemic simply brought that to light,” he says tenderly. “Our clients own businesses or are startup entrepreneurs. Most of them are very aware of the world around them. Everyone adjusts accordingly and everyone has different tolerances. I am always sensitive to that and cognizant of it.” It is obvious that Joannides embraces many different philosophies but, above all, he knows how to simplify his life, declutter his environment, and provide his creations with value.

His final message to all fellow dreamers, does not disappoint.

“To all those youngsters out there, dream big and be careful what you wish for!”

A true romantic, with whom I couldn’t agree more. **G**

