

WHAT ARE MOOD BOARDS

BACKGROUND

A mood board is a type of collage consisting of images, text, and samples of objects in a composition. It can be based upon a set topic or can be any material chosen at random. A mood board can be used to give a general idea of a topic that you were given, or can be used to show how different something is from the modern day. They may be physical or digital, and can be “extremely effective” presentation tools.

Graphic designers, interior designers, industrial designers, photographers and other creative artists use mood boards to visually illustrate the style they wish to pursue. However, they can also be used by design professionals to visually explain a certain style of writing, or an imaginary setting for a storyline. In short, mood boards are not limited to visual subjects, but serve as a visual tool to quickly inform others of the overall “feel” (or “flow”) of an idea. In creative processes, mood boards can balance coordination and creative freedom.

“We dig into cultural trends, our collective memory banks, past studies and relevant archives to gather imagery. Visuals that we believe are relevant to the brand and compelling to the people a brand seeks to connect with. This is where the designing starts—as we begin to turn words into pictures—as we create a holistic, visual expression of our brief. We create a collage, along with our clients, to establish an aesthetic filter through which design decisions will be made.”

Joe Duffy in Everyone’s a Designer

FROM JOE DUFFY

Years ago, we—namely Dan Olson, one of our creative directors—came up with an idea of what we now refer to as our “visual brief.” It is quite literally a collage that paints a picture of the world we’d like to design in. After we’ve agreed with the client on the written brief that outlines all the goals and parameters, we start bringing it to life, visually. Please note, this is not a so called “mood board,” where planners tear out pictures from People magazine to try to evoke an emotional understanding of the target audience. It’s rather a piece of art, made up of the scrap we designers collect, shoot, draw and edit, along with our clients, to make sure of two things: 1) We’re on the same page before we start designing and 2) we’ve created a filter through which design decisions on type, layout, color, photo/illustration style, etc., can be considered and evaluated.

First, the final visual brief for First Reserve beer, beer that was made from a recipe from the Civil War era, in the Southeast U.S., when molasses replaced hops that were in short supply. This got us started and we’ve continued this creative step on every brand design project since.



Second, is a more recent visual brief for Herradura Tequila that was created from imagery we collected on an immersion trip to the tequila region of central Mexico.



The real advantage of developing a visual brief with our clients is that it genuinely involves them deeply in our creative process at the beginning of it, the place where the idea is developed. It's a way for us to interpret the words they've provided—which are always important—and making sure that what we think words like “innovation” and “passion” look like for them, are re-interpreted as visual design principles like “modern” and “bold.”

The words and the pictures, together, push us all through levels of interpretation that can bog down the process and kill great creative ideas. Pairing words with pictures helps all involved to understand and agree that, “we mean this (picture), when we say this (word).” Once we're in agreement, we're then allowed to do what we're getting paid to do—design. The collaboration upfront eliminates the element of surprise when we eventually present our design work. Surprise is often the kiss of death, no matter how brilliant we think our solution might be.

**FROM DUFFY & PARTNERS
DEVELOPMENT OF THE LOGO FOR THE
SUSAN G. KOMEN FOUNDATION**

