

2021 Design Trends

At the start of 2020, we saw trends driven by the positivity and potential of a new decade as brands explored multisensorial experiences, dimensionality, and bold typography and colors. Fast-forward to 2021, and we are seeing design aesthetics and formats fueled by a year of dealing with the pandemic, racial justice activism and divisive politics. Yet as the pages that follow show, sometimes the toughest moments can inspire great beauty and creativity.

THE LITTLE THINGS

Designers have long been searching for ways to re-create tactile, print-like experiences online. The most joyous recent output of this trend comes in the form of decorative paper-thin shapes, known as stickers.

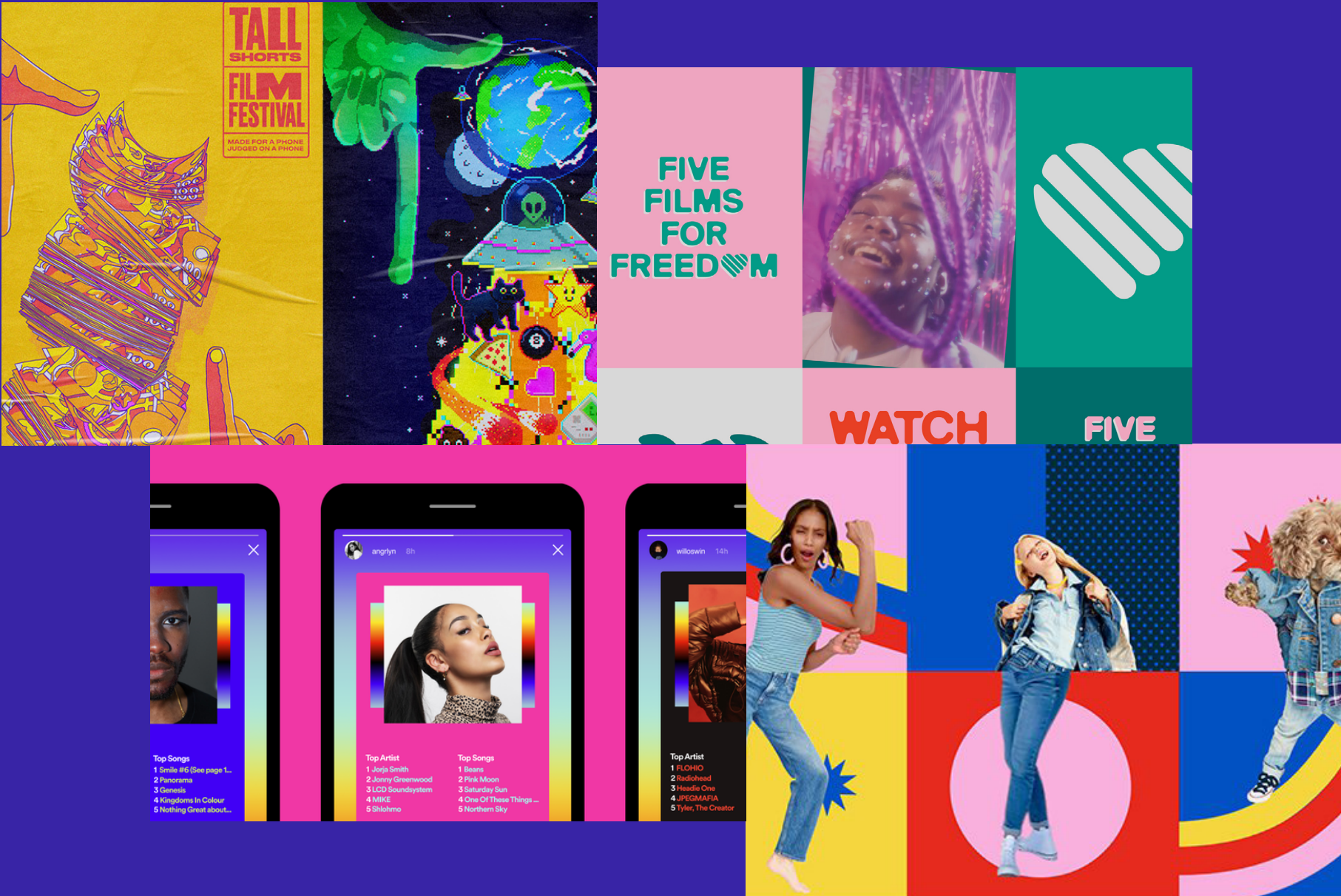
[Click all of the stickers on the following pages for more ideas that stick!](#)



Feeling Nostalgic

In the midst of a pandemic – a moment when hugs, social gatherings and traditions have been put on hold – many of us long for simpler times. This mindset has fueled the popularity of nostalgic design. From retro fonts to neon color palettes, we’re seeing a return to design styles that were popular in decades past. These nostalgic design elements are a way to drive positive emotions and comfort during these most uncertain of times.

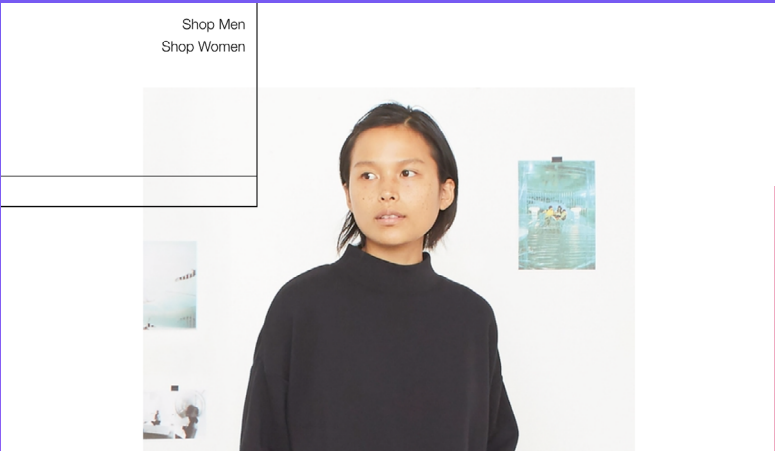
A unique take on this trend is the rise of retrofuturism. Characterized by bright colors, geometric typography and curved illustrations, retrofuturism has become popular thanks to it’s bold, imaginative outlook, creating nostalgia-like longing for a time that has yet to come.



Standing Boldly with Gen Z

2021 will strongly challenge traditional ideas of “good design.” We’re seeing best practices and trends tossed aside as designers embrace experimental and unexpected twists – replacing simplification with more expression.

While this trend isn’t new to cutting-edge designers, its reach has expanded, especially as a vehicle to communicate with a younger audience. The need for companies to stand openly, boldly and without ulterior motives is manifesting in images of new, confident personas dressed in vivid colors and stark photography. From this year onward, the motto is “I’m ugly and I’m proud!”



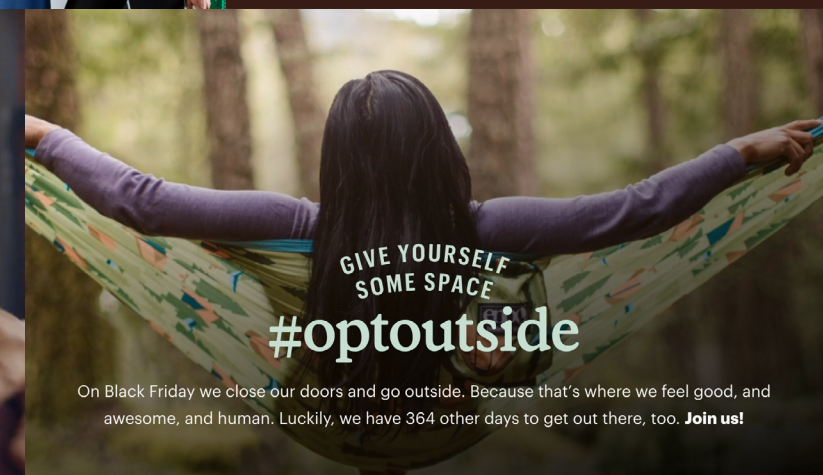
“People who are young, who are on the internet, they are not looking for traditional, they are not looking for the status quo red, white and blue. They need something with more depth.”

Carahna Magwood
Deputy design director for Joe Biden's presidential campaign



Getting Involved

Across the globe, 2020 brought deep-seated issues to the surface, inspiring a wave of activism and engagement and a new trend in social movement design. We've seen this trend come to life with hand-lettering on protest posters and informational design in social media posts – two grassroots ways to educate and disseminate important messages. 2021 is shaping up to be a pivotal year when everyone, including designers, gets more involved.



Good Vibes Only

2020 was a year of heavy emotions, including frustration, sadness, anger, anxiety and fear. In 2021, many of us hope to restore our psyche through life, nature, liveliness, and other joyful activities that have been lacking in quarantine. For many, joy might also come in the form of playful distractions or ways to pass the time. We expect to see companies and communities bring positivity and happiness back into their design aesthetic through bolder color themes, outdoorsy illustrations and fun/mindless interactivity.



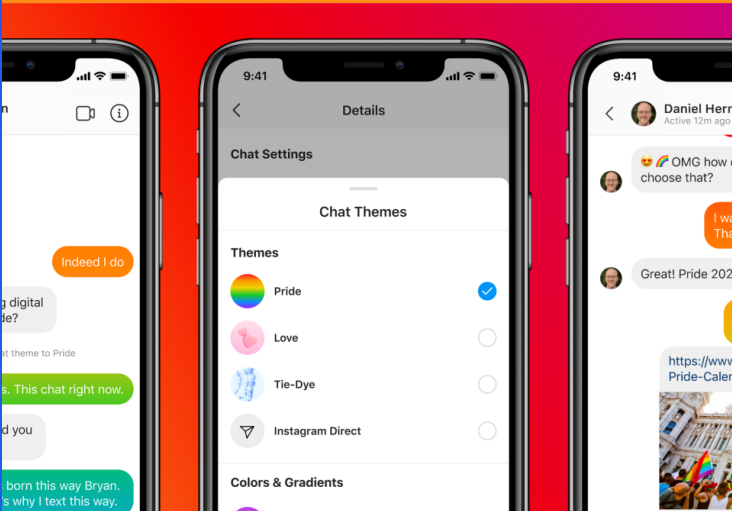
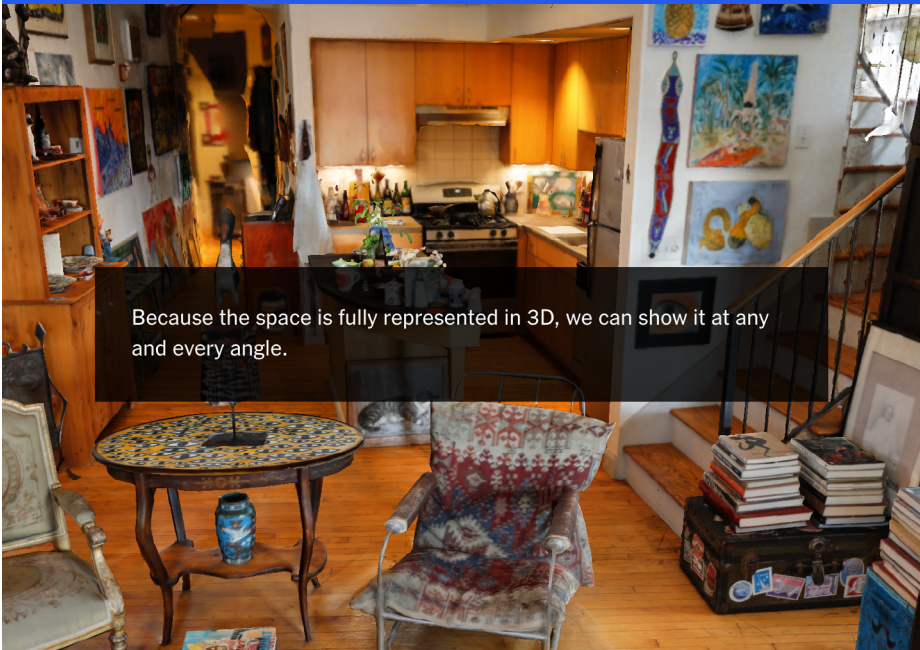
2021 Marketing Tactics

Augmented Reality

At a time when most of us are at home far more than usual, we're longing for experiences. Augmented reality can bring the outside world in, and brands that tried it in 2020 reported an increase in consumer engagement.

Websites & UI

In 2020, moving content online became imperative – as did creating an intuitive and enjoyable interactive experience. This trend will continue to champion the user and their increasing appetite for control.



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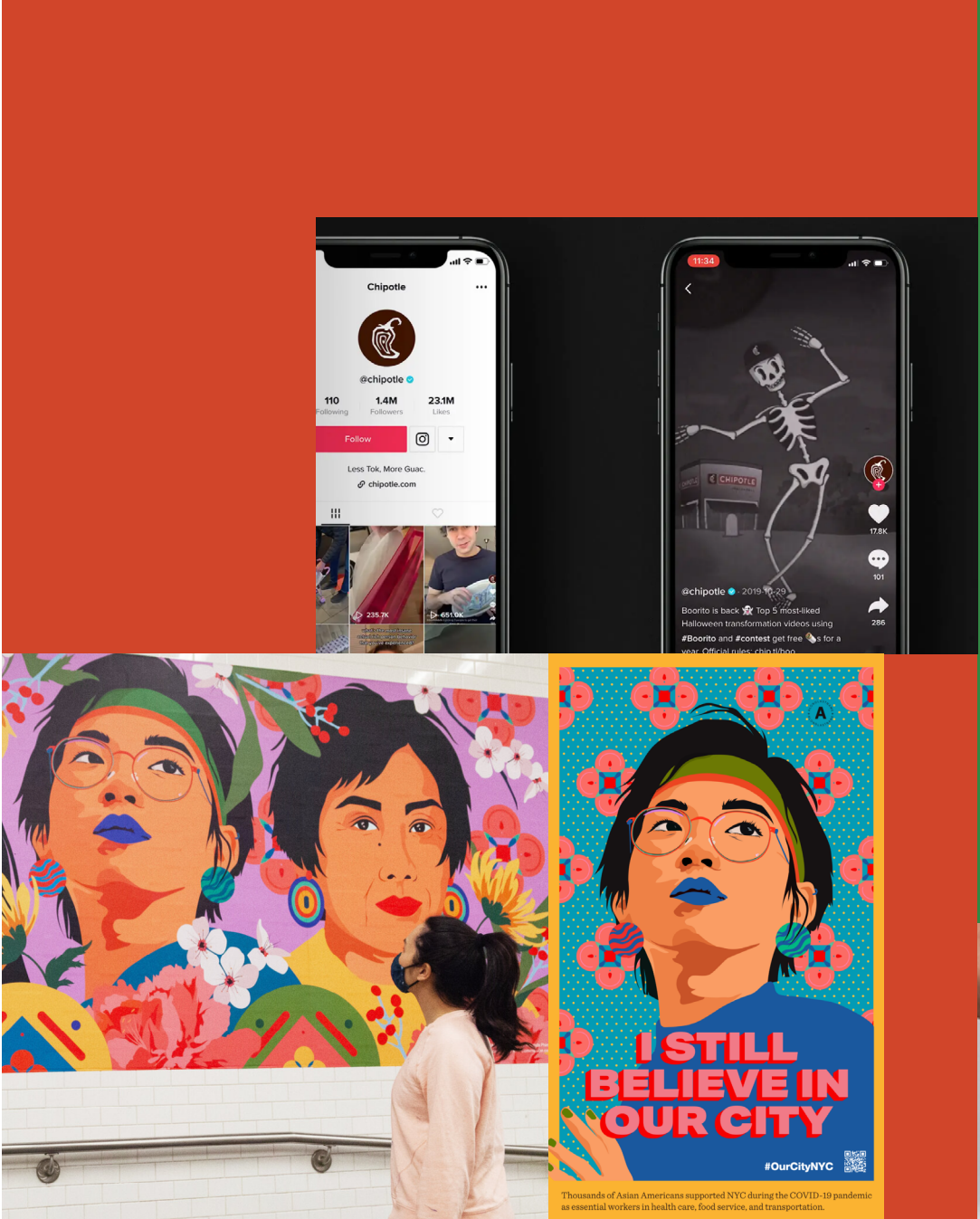
2021 Marketing Tactics

QR Codes

While many designers and marketers may have wondered if QR codes were waning in popularity, this past year has shown us they have surprising sticking power. A great way to bridge print and digital experiences, they can be found in many campaigns and can even lead to TikTok- or Instagram-style videos.

Mailing & Packaging

Packaging and mailing are other areas that have shifted due to the coronavirus pandemic. With sustainability remaining top of mind in 2021, brands are also focused on new priorities like hygiene and designing for e-commerce.



Moving Forward

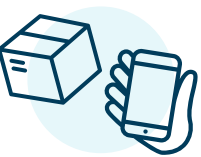
While some of the trends in this report may not be applicable to your specific audience or in line with your brand guidelines, there are elements that can be translated to whatever challenge you may be facing. We've highlighted three examples below. Depending on your challenge, some trends might make more sense than others. For example,



IF YOUR GOAL IS TO REFRESH YOUR BRAND OR MARKETING CAMPAIGN, don't be afraid to break out of the mold, expand your color palette, add in something whimsical or select an unexpected typeface.



IF YOUR GOAL IS TO HAVE YOUR BRAND FEEL MORE AUTHENTIC TO YOUR CLIENTS/CUSTOMERS, commit to educating yourself and your team, as well as acknowledging and speaking out about important events happening in the world.



IF YOUR GOAL IS TO GRAB PEOPLE'S ATTENTION IN A COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT, try out a new marketing tactic for your brand, such as augmented reality, QR codes, or sustainable mailers and packaging.



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