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David Mitchell, courtesy of Standard Dose

# WELLNESS, NOT WEED

It's found its way into everything from chocolate and cosmetics to pillows and activewear. The purported wonder panacea for a multitude of illnesses, including Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, cancer and depression. CBD, short for cannabidiol, is one of over 100 chemical compounds found in the cannabis (marijuana or hemp) plant. And the stores dedicated to selling it want to steer clear of the stoner stereotypes associated with its source.



Within the ever-growing and wide-ranging wellness economy lie niche areas of rapid growth, and CBD is a case in point. According to recent research published by Savills: ‘The market is currently worth £300 million in the UK, a figure that is expected to more than triple in the next five years. That equates to a £1 billion market in CBD alone by 2025. The number of CBD oil users also doubled from 125,000 to 250,000 between 2017 and 2018.’ And in the US, leading cannabis researchers BDS Analytics and Arcview Market Research project that the collective market for CBD sales will surpass \$20 billion by 2024.

The global complementary and alternative medicine market is growing in general. With this comes a focus on natural remedies, so it’s understandable that a plant-based product like CBD is taking off. But this all-natural image has long been associated with weed, too. In many cases, CBD is looking to shed the stereotypes surrounding marijuana, including the plant’s distinctive leaf shape – its brand, in a way. (It’s worth noting that cannabis itself is also undergoing a similar rebranding exercise in order to be seen as more medicinal.)

A bit of terminology: cannabis is the umbrella term for marijuana or hemp, marijuana is a high-THC variety of cannabis plant, and hemp is a high-CBD variety of cannabis plant. Part of the marketing strategy for CBD is about defining the key differences between the product and its source. For one, CBD can be legally obtained more widely than cannabis. That’s largely down to the second way in which they differ: CBD won’t get you high. In Switzerland, for example, THC is illegal whereas cannabidiol is not – because it doesn’t produce the psychoactive effects of THC, the active ingredient in cannabis. Plus, unlike some prescription medications, CBD is not addictive.

So how do you convey all of this in the spaces selling CBD? Maurice Mentjens confirms that there’s a lot of misinformation surrounding such products, leading to a fear of their use. The Dutch designer recently realized the first store for CBD brand Cibdol, in Amsterdam, and says he didn’t want to include any marijuana references in the interior because of any potential negative associations. Instead, he looked to the brand’s Swiss roots. ‘Switzerland is known for its high quality, tradition, trust and purity, but also for its big pharmaceutical companies.’ Mentjens filtered these qualities into an interior that features vertical wooden displays – a nod to the architecture of cosy Swiss chalets – and a drawer-filled wall inspired by apothecaries, creating a link between CBD and medicine. Tradition is overthrown through materiality. Mentjens clad the drawers with mirrors to produce a ‘clean, high-tech appearance’ and dynamic reflections of the interior and products. Not to be confused with ‘trippy’, mind you.

Similarly, Batek Architekten was briefed by Vaay to create a CBD store in Berlin devoid of marijuana stereotypes. To appeal to its target market – young professionals who are open to trying new things – Vaay asked for something clean, simple and modern. Despite following a scientific approach, with a team of biologists, doctors and researchers developing products around the themes ‘relax’, ‘recover’ and ‘sleep’, Vaay didn’t want anything too sterile or laboratory-like, an aesthetic that’s taken off in physical retail in recent years. ‘The branding of the products is very bold with strong colours,’ says Patrick Batek of Batek Architekten. ‘We decided to let the products be the focus against a muted white interior, using only powder-coated metal and stained wooden slats. The interior is the stage that lets the products shine.’

The packaging of Standard Dose’s products, another burgeoning CBD brand, is almost the opposite: subtle and muted, the amber glass bottles popularized by Aēsop a common sight. For their interior of the Standard Dose store in New York City, SR Projects and Tuna followed suit. Calm and serene, the shop could be mistaken for a yoga studio. And it does, in fact, include a meditation space, as well as a tea bar and beauty counter. To create what’s intended as a retreat in the busy NoMad neighbourhood, the team pulled together tactile materials, soft lighting and casual furniture to convey calmness. ‘I think the main misconception around CBD is its association to marijuana and that you’ll always find it at your local head shops along with other cannabis products,’ says Sacha Roubeni, principal of SR Projects. ‘Standard Dose has done a great job of not only “rebranding” CBD as a plant-based wellness product but of establishing a transparent vetting process in an otherwise unregulated industry.’ Since CBD is a relatively new industry, ‘there hasn’t been much precedent for this kind of a shop,’ he continues, ‘let alone one that is centred around the health and wellness sector. We had no choice but to be innovative.’ As an example of this innovation he speaks of, Roubeni points to the artificial CoeLux skylight in the meditation room, which offers ‘natural’ light in an otherwise dark, windowless space.

With more and more companies cropping up to cash in on the CBD phenomenon, it’s not hard to get your hands on some. Even household name Martha Stewart has launched a range of wellness products that includes gummies and oil drops, with hemp and CBD company Canopy Growth. Although many CBD companies offer webstores – and e-commerce shows no sign of slowing down – physical CBD stores can help to build trust. For such a specialized product, experts can be on hand to offer individualized advice for treatments and personal-care products.

Not all markets are open for business, though. CBD may be more avail-

able legally than cannabis, but it’s not legally available everywhere – or sometimes only with a prescription. But this, too, appears to be shifting. Inkwood Research reported that ‘Asia-Pacific is one of the untapped CBD markets and represents enormous market opportunities to benefit from the global trend of legalization of cannabis. For instance, in 2018, Thailand announced it would be the first country in Asia to legalize the production and cultivation of marijuana crops.’ What’s more, ‘the Asia Pacific CBD skin care market is estimated to grow significantly and record a CAGR of 28.25% during the estimated period of 2020-2028. The rising interest by countries to legalize marijuana is providing enormous growth opportunities for the market in the region.’

Batek believes that as the market expands, CBD-related interiors should naturally look different to reflect their location. ‘Consumers are steering away from wanting commercial interiors repeatedly realized in different locations around the world. The product itself is the CBD; the shop interior should vary.’ He believes that this, combined with consumers wanting innovative shopping experiences, gives architects the opportunity to experiment with cutting-edge concepts. Mentjens feels that experiences could play an even bigger role in such interiors: ‘A CBD spa or treatment centre would be very interesting, too.’

There’s a missed spatial opportunity so far, though: incorporating hemp itself as a material. Perhaps future CBD interiors could capitalize on the material’s diversity and sustainability as part of a holistic hemp story. **TI**

PREVIOUS SPREAD **For their interior of the Standard Dose store in New York City, SR Projects and Tuna followed combined tactile materials, soft lighting and casual furniture to convey calmness.**

RIGHT **The artificial CoeLux skylight in Standard Dose’s meditation room provides ‘natural’ light in an otherwise dark, windowless space.**







Responding to Vaay's request for a clean, simple and modern Berlin store that would appeal to open-minded young professionals, Batek Architekten let the graphic product packaging make the spatial statement.





Milk van Lili

In Amsterdam, Maurice Mentjens referenced Cibdol's Swiss heritage in its first physical store. An apothecary-inspired drawer-filled wall refers to Switzerland's wealth of pharmaceutical companies, while vertical wooden displays create the connection to alpine architecture.



**REBRANDING** Stores selling CBD are currently trying to depart from marijuana stereotypes by focusing on the substance's wellness and medicinal qualities. They also have to educate their audiences on the differences between CBD and THC, the psychoactive component of cannabis. Sometimes that education is by the design – spaces with zero getting-high hints. There's an air of *Frame's* 130 Post-Clinical Look Book at play – the aesthetic softening of clinical interiors in line with the holistic wellness industry. What's interesting is the dissociation from cannabis as a natural product. It's also understandable, since the plant's distinctive leaf shape is so iconic, and the current goal is to disconnect from preconceptions. But perhaps once the distinction has been well and truly secured, and if natural medicine continues to rise, the pendulum will swing in the other direction.