

THE TOTAL PACKAGE, COLLAB STUDIO

UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI,
SCHOOL OF DESIGN,
DAAP

Forged

4C Haircare

COMMUNICATION
DESIGN

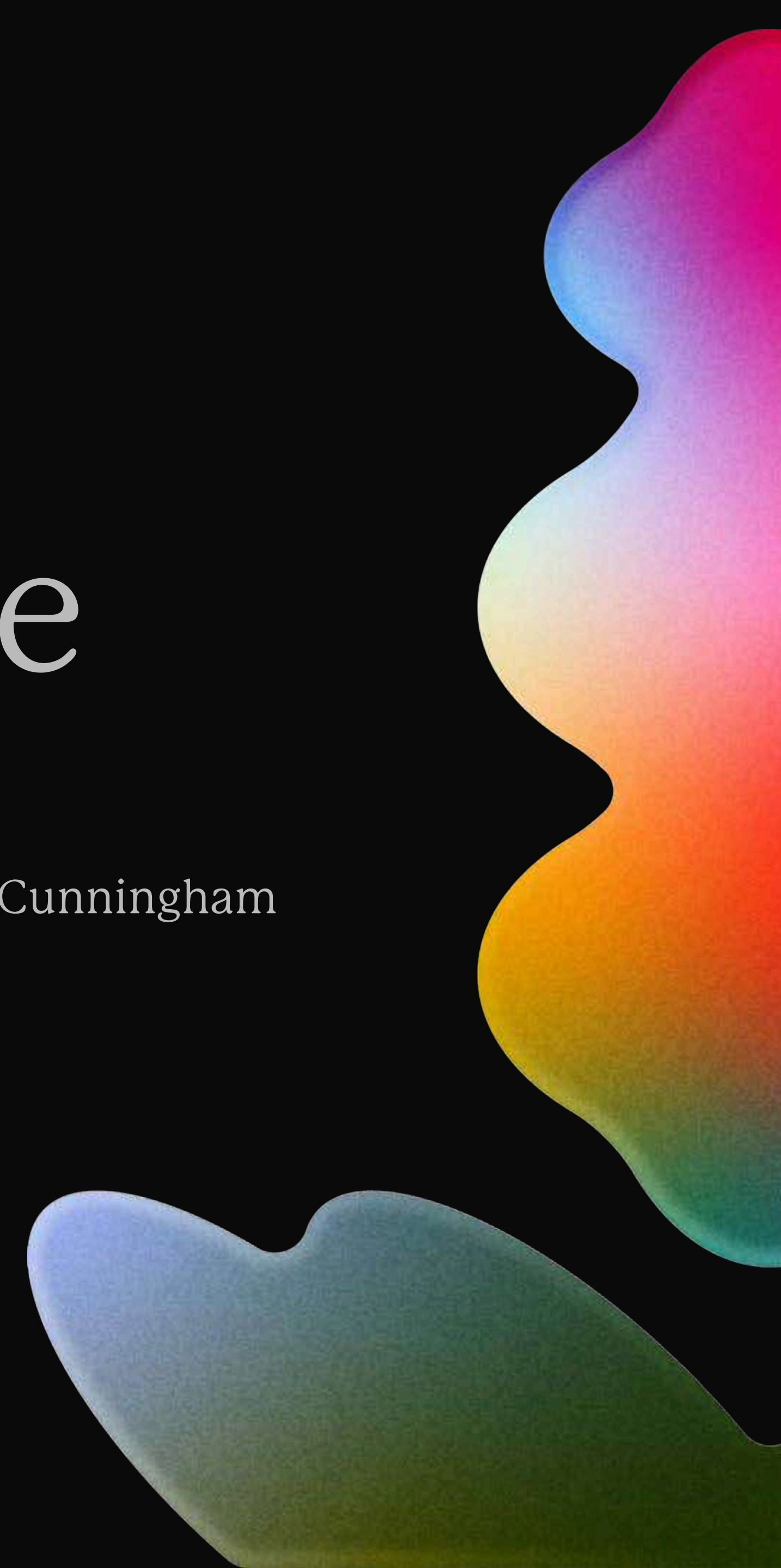
Laura Masur
Yazmyn Kitchen
Micah Shannon

+

INDUSTRIAL
DESIGN

Jackie Cunningham

PACKAGING + BRAND DESIGN
PROJECT CASE STUDY



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CH 01

The Problem



To start things off...

What exactly is 4C Hair?



Different Hair Types

UNDERSTANDING YOUR HAIR

The current hair typing system helps people determine what products they need to strengthen their hair and curl pattern.

Learning your specific hair type helps you **improve long-term hair health and routine.**

WHAT SETS 4C APART

Known for both its versatility and high maintenance, 4C hair...

- Has the tightest curl/coil pattern
- Has the highest density and fullness
- Is extremely versatile and moldable for styling
- Has the most shrinkage (can hide 75% of length)
- Is the most fragile due to sharp bends
- Requires the most moisture



	A	B	C
1			
2			
3			
4			

1 A 1 B 1 C

STRAIGHT

2 A 2 B 2 C

WAVY

3 A 3 B 3 C

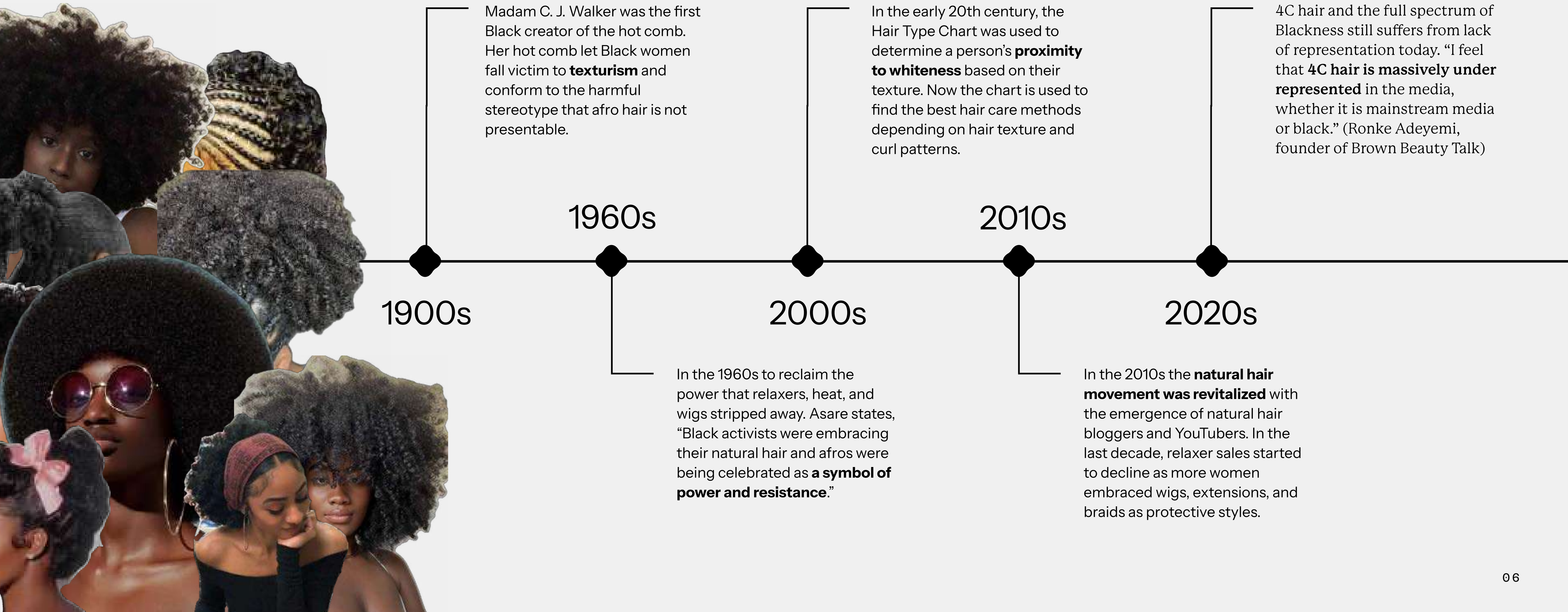
CURLY

4 A 4 B 4 C

COILY

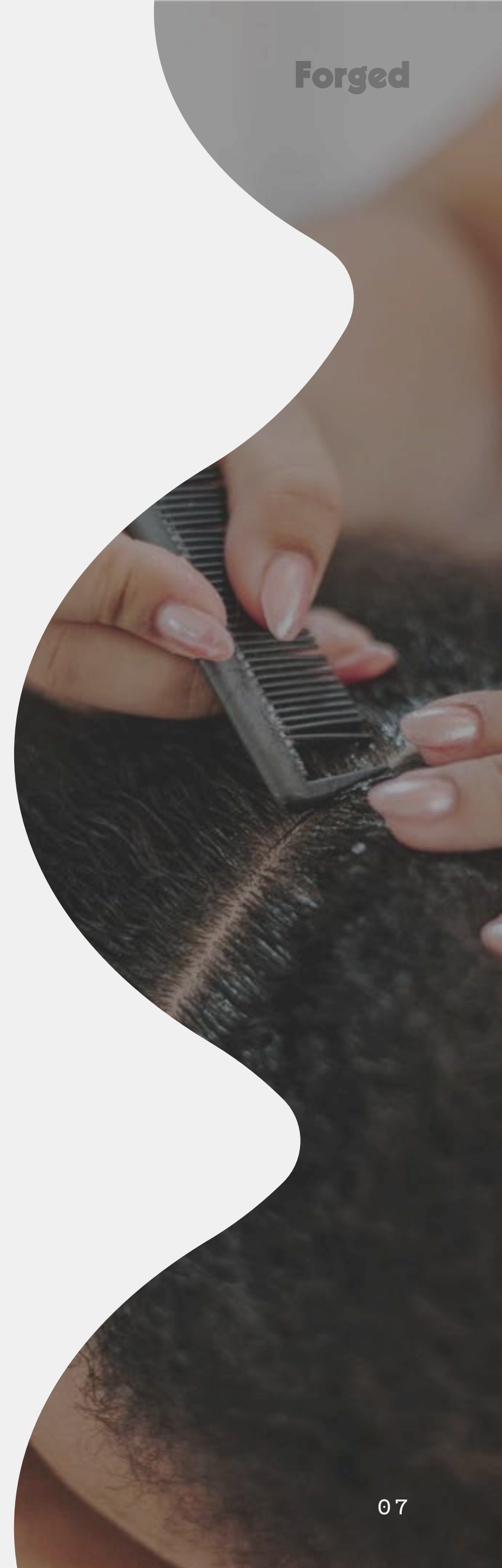
4C Hair Care Timeline

4C hair has been **severely unrepresented** in the hair industry for years. Today, there is a resurgence in Black Americans learning to style and take care of their natural hair.



The Problem

- ◆ The 4C hairstyling market is saturated with bloated kits and fragmented product lines that **overwhelm rather than support** daily care.
- ◆ Users are fatigued by low-quality items, styles that don't last, and confusing routines that lack clear guidance. Styling feels **messy, time-consuming, and physically difficult**, leading to wasted effort and money.
- ◆ Without a modular, routine-based solution, people **lack the clarity and efficiency** needed to maintain consistent personal haircare.



User Insights

◆ GABBY, HAIRSTYLIST

“So I started doing [hair] on my own at first. I think after a while when I was like 13, I told my mom, I'm like, yeah, don't touch my hair no more. I got it. Yeah. Like, all right, **I definitely left a mess, but I had to go for it.**”

◆ REDDIT USER

“I started learning how to care for my natural hair this year and I feel the same way. **It's not hard.** It just takes time to learn what works for you”

◆ REDDIT USER

“Now whenever I see strangers confidently embracing their hair in public—whether it's styled in braids, an afro, or any other form—I take a moment to celebrate and shower them with compliments on the **time, effort, and care** that goes into maintaining it.”

◆ JAY, HAIR CLIENT

“You see **education** a lot in beard care but not hair care.”

◆ YAZMYN, PRODUCT CONSUMER

“It took me a good **4 years to feel confident** doing my hair.”

Design Goals

We asked ourselves:

- ◆ How might we transform the challenges of 4C haircare into **empowering, grounded routines** that instill confidence through an intentionally-crafted product world built on clarity and ease?

Our purpose was to:

- ◆ Reimagine 4C hairstyling as a **stress-free, empowering experience**, providing tailored solutions, modular choices, and intentional designs. We aim to **instill pride, educate, and empower people to build lasting routines.**

Target Audience

The “Practical Creator”

Our audience craves **simplicity, reliability, and longevity** without compromising **personal expression**.

Whether streamlining their own routine or caring for others, they value understanding what’s in their products and why it works, seeking **trust, ease, and confidence** in every step.

THESE ARE PEOPLE WHO ARE

- Expressive and confident
- Practical purchasers
- Seeking consistency
- Trust-driven
- Intentional decision-makers
- Desiring efficiency in routine



User Personas



Kamiyah, the Self-Sufficient Styler

NEEDS

- Quick, manageable styles she can do herself
- Products designed for her hair type
- Low maintenance hairstyles

PAIN POINTS

- Complex routine eats into work and social life
- Finding quality products worth initial investments

GOALS

- Build confidence in self-styling and build a lasting routine that will promote hair growth and health

FAVORITE BRANDS



De'Andre, the Organized Caregiver

NEEDS

- Simple, repeatable styles to work on kids' hair
- Products that work as a system to help hair health
- Products that make him feel confident and capable

PAIN POINTS

- Chaotic mornings with routines that are too long
- Overwhelmed by too many products

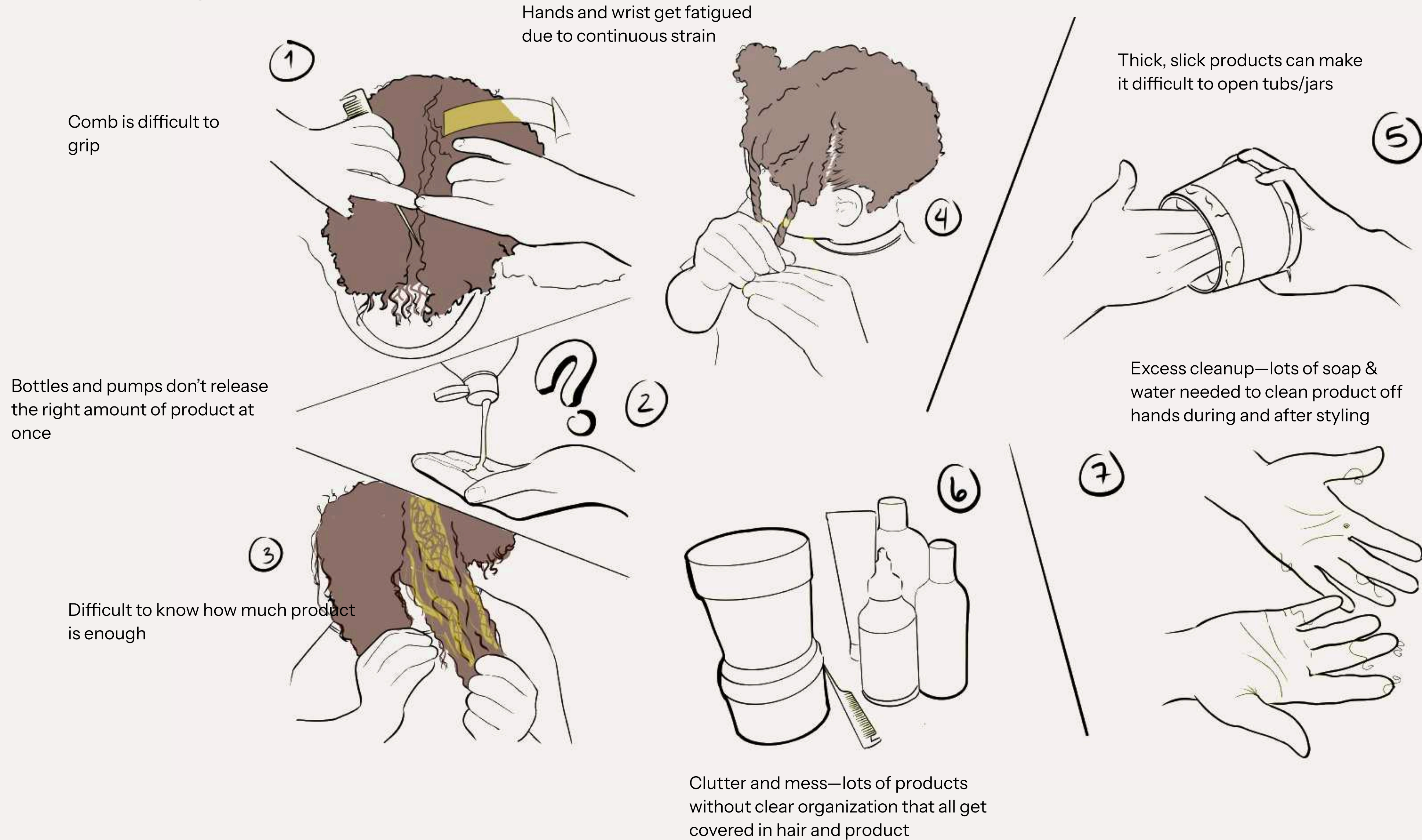
GOALS

- Perfect hairstyles that will last all day and build a lasting routine that will relieve stressful mornings

FAVORITE BRANDS



User Journey



Shared Values

As we studied our personas' specific needs, we worked to unearth the **common thread**—the abstract values that these individuals cared about most in their daily routines.

SELF-SUFFICIENT
STYLER



Craft
Grounded
Confidence
Longevity

ORGANIZED
CAREGIVER

CH 02

The Opportunity



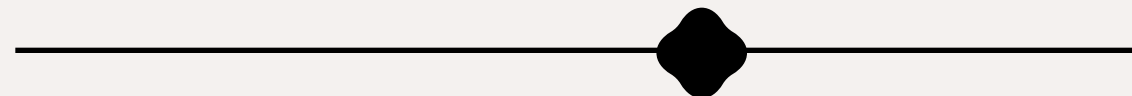
Key Competitors

User-brand relationships in the 4C market are built on trust and loyalty. Many brands master this but **lack true intentionality** for 4C routines. This was our opportunity—going deep and creating truly tailored products, crafted with **deliberate care**.

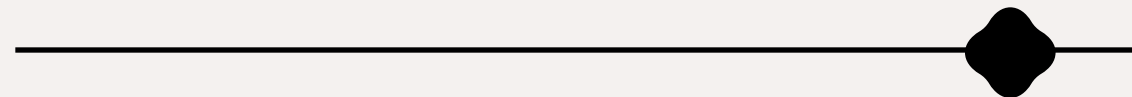


Pattern

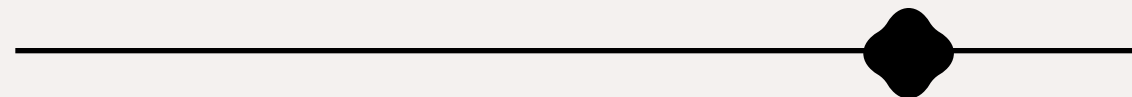
AFFORDABILITY



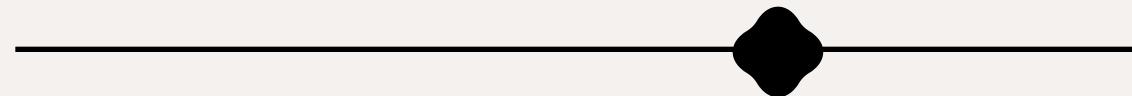
QUALITY



ROUTINE-BUILDING

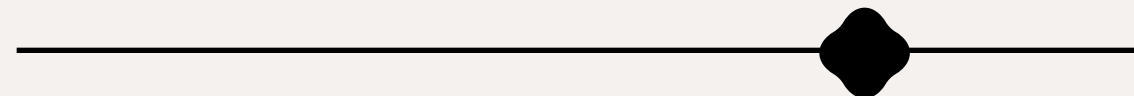


TAILORED TO 4C

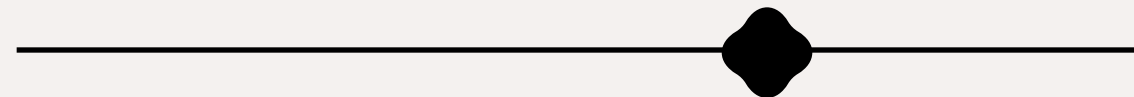


Shea Moisture

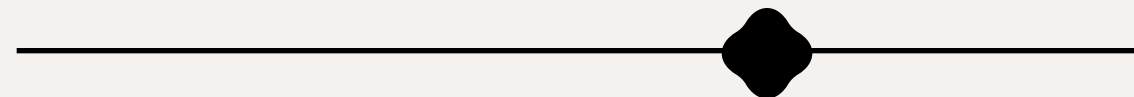
AFFORDABILITY



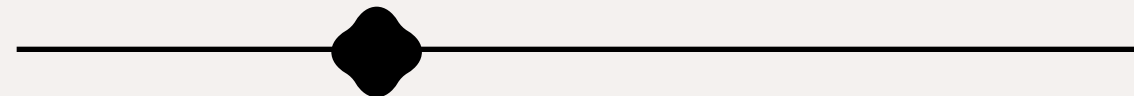
QUALITY



ROUTINE-BUILDING

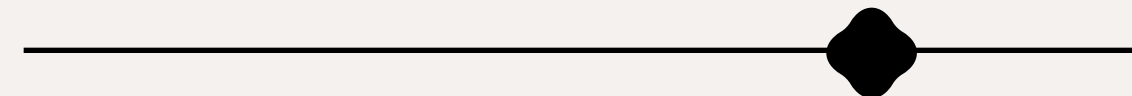


TAILORED TO 4C

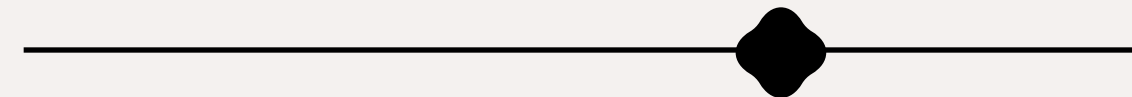


Mielle

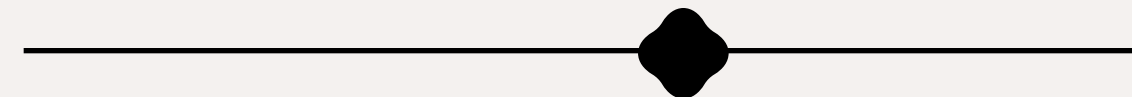
AFFORDABILITY



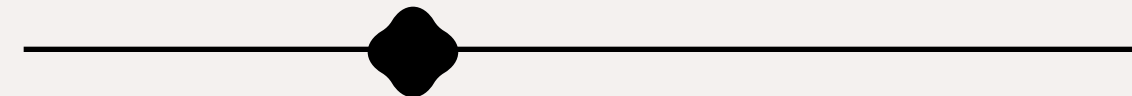
QUALITY



ROUTINE-BUILDING



TAILORED TO 4C



The Doux

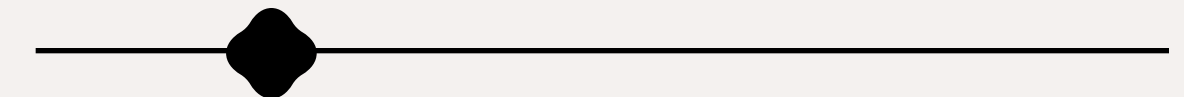
AFFORDABILITY



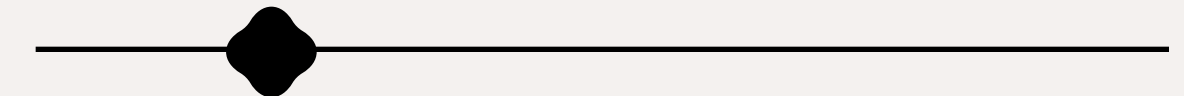
QUALITY



ROUTINE-BUILDING



TAILORED TO 4C



Opportunity Matrix

WHERE WE FIT

We found our opportunity space in the intersection of **comprehensive functionality** and **simplicity**.

In the current market, these two traits are typically diametrically opposed—either brands lean into simplicity and **don't provide enough support** or they attempt to be a comprehensive, all-in-one solution that **fails to empower personalized routines**.

HOW WE STAND OUT

We conquer this space by rejecting the market norms and creating something new—a **truly tailored system that strips away the noise** and meets users in their routines.



Shelf Analysis

In studying the current shelf, we identified key patterns that we could challenge to **distinguish ourselves from the crowd.**

FORM LANGUAGE

- Almost entirely stock bottles with little consideration for specific use and dosing
- Few premium finishes
- White, clear or colorful base
- Slippery cylindrical forms
- Lack of texture and brand

VISUAL ATTRIBUTES

- Confusing or overwhelming information hierarchy
- Overuse of colorblocking
- High gloss labels that feel cheap
- Too much or too little differentiation between SKUs

COLOR USE

We surveyed the top competitors' brand colors to find a distinct, ownable color opportunity that we could use to stake our claim in a dense market.



STOCK FORMS



COMPETITOR COLOR STUDY



OWNABLE COLOR



Harmful Design Patterns

In our research and in talking with users, we identified current trends and market patterns that **degrade users with 4C hair** and push negative stereotypes of Black culture.

DEGRADING PATTERNS IN THE MARKET

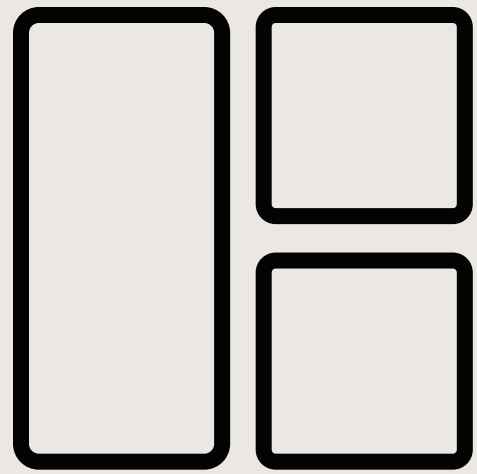
- Repeated use of golden accents that supposedly encapsulate an “African” aesthetic
- Tasteless fake kente cloth textures and “tribal” motifs with no regard for cultural context
- Earthy, melanin-derived palettes that equate audience with skin color
- Segregation of Black hair products and packaging from mainstream beauty aesthetics
- Product placement on “ethnic” shelves separate from main hair product aisles in stores
- Overuse of black silhouetted afro as the sole identifier, an over-simplification of the user
- 4C hair primarily shown in tight afros, disregarding its versatility and variability
- Tokenism by large brands creating product lines that claim to be for textured hair without true consideration for user

We sought to **counter these harmful patterns**, embracing the rich culture and history of 4C hair to create something that was **distinctly 4C**, not just a regurgitation of stereotypes.



Points Of Difference

Through our research, we defined a core set of attributes to differentiate from competitors and make our brand **uniquely valuable** in the 4C market.



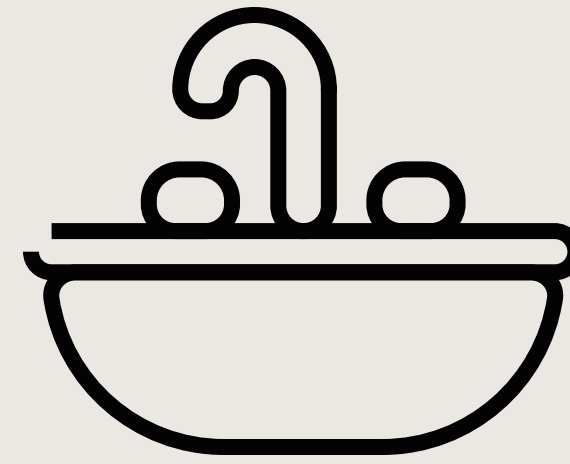
Modular

Create a scalable system that allows people to assemble a **tidy, personalized regimen**.



Routine-Building

Promote **long-term success**, empowering people to build ritualistic hair care routines.



Counter-Worthy

Deliver a solution that people will **display with pride** as an integrated part of their home.

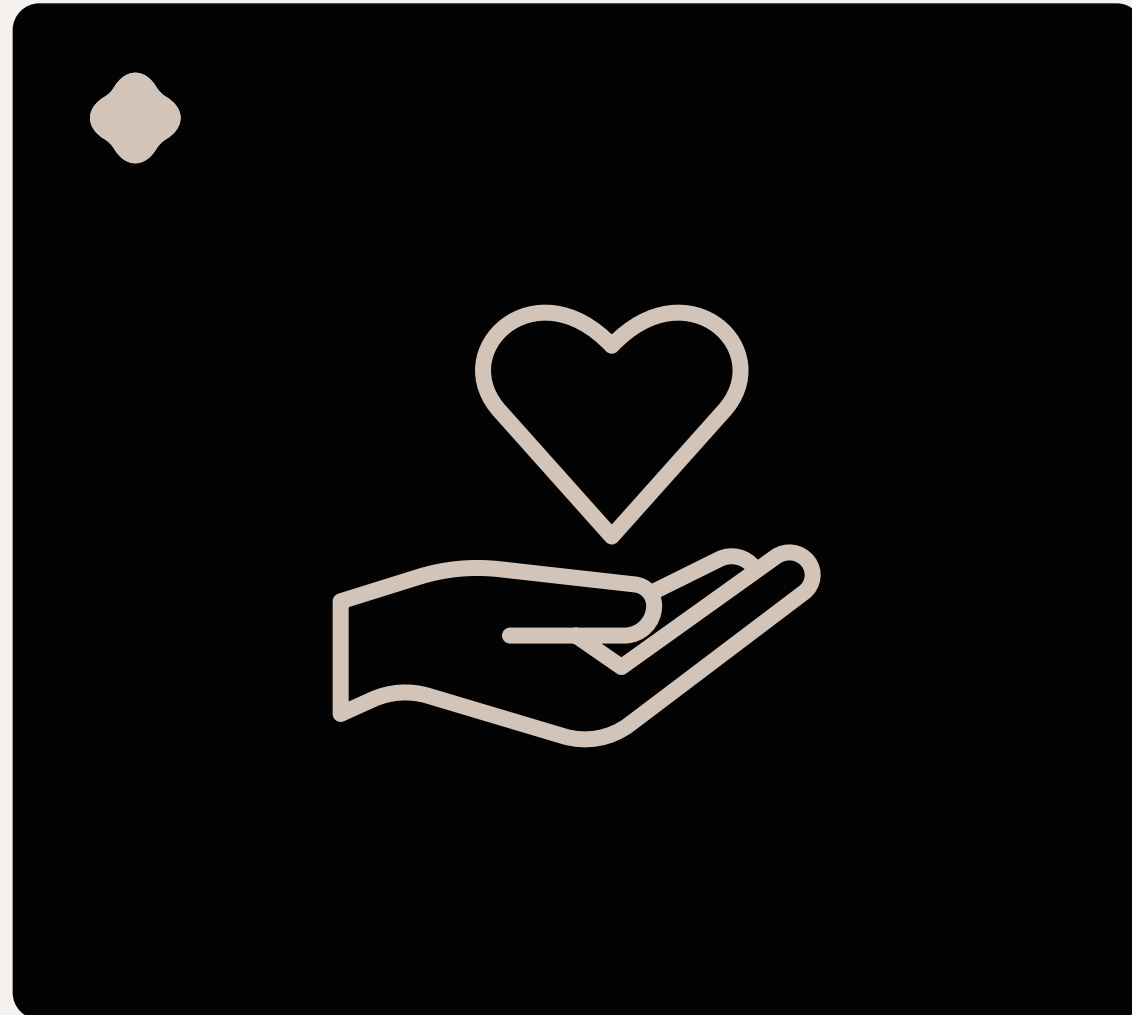


Tailored Form

Challenge stock packaging norms with a **carefully-considered form** featuring ergonomic grip, optimized dosing, and textural storytelling.

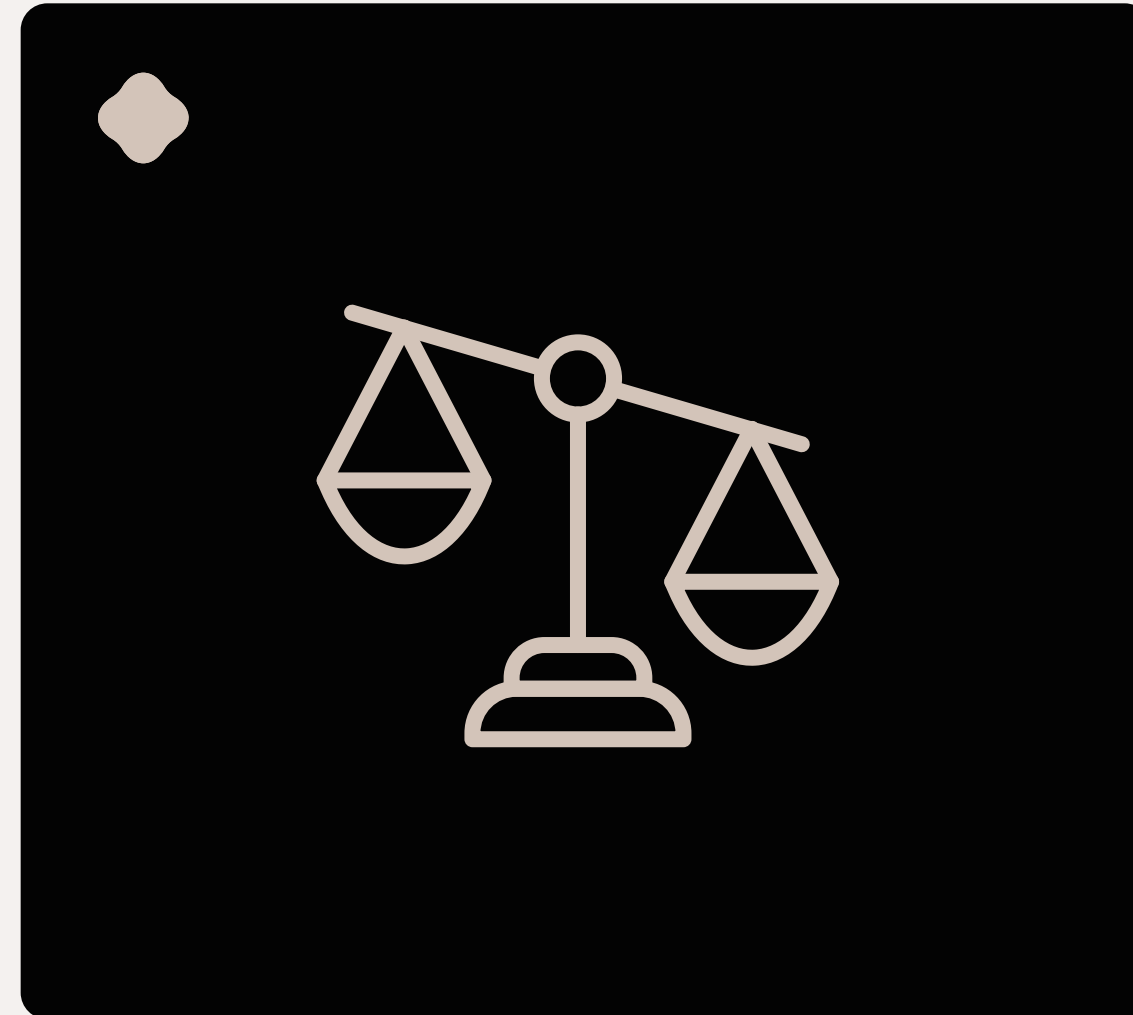
Brand Pillars

We built our brand pillars directly from our personas' shared values. This manifesto became **our cornerstone**—unifying every aspect of graphics and form while ensuring we never lost sight of our user.



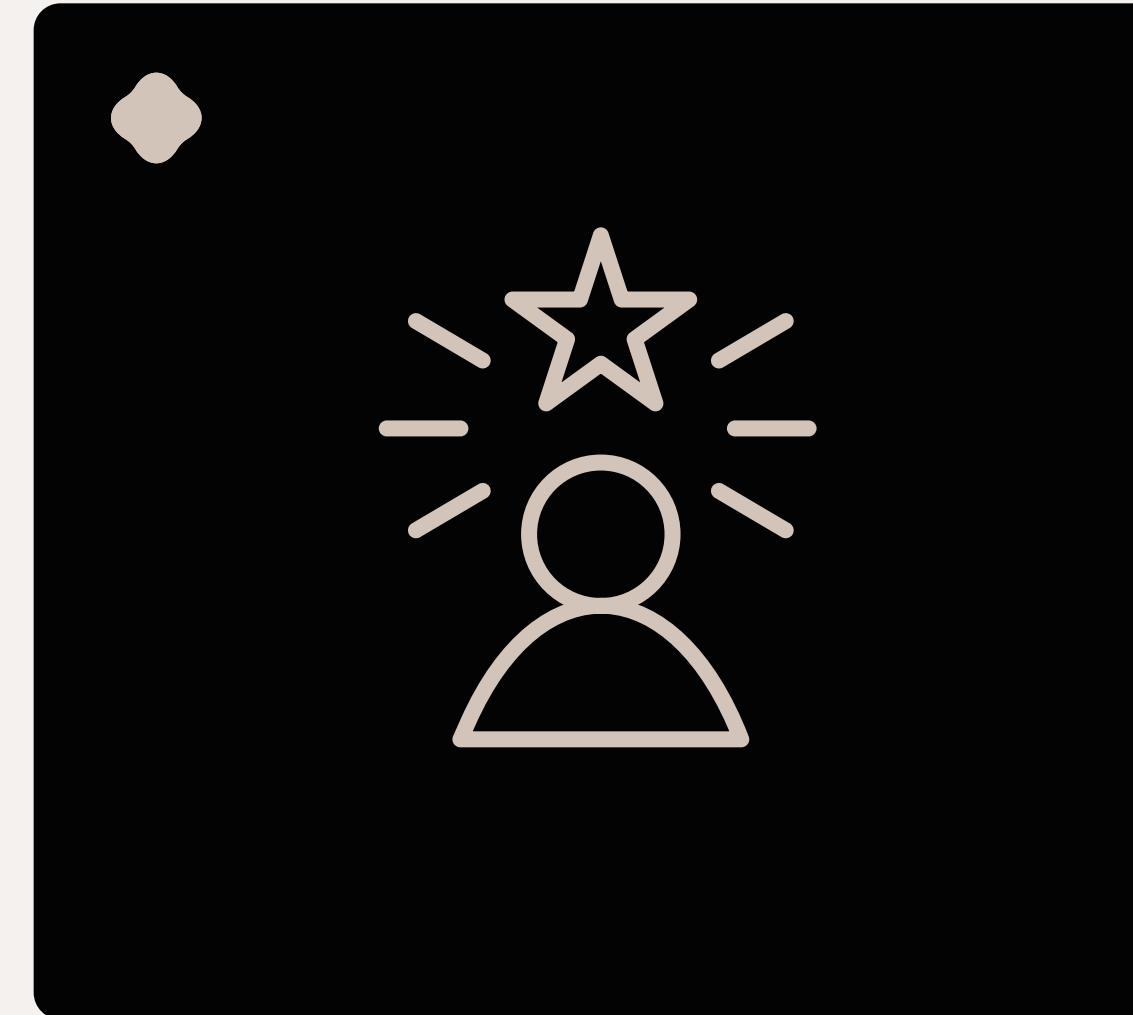
Craft

We create tailored tools that reflect the user's specific needs with intentional design. The care and effort we put into our products mirror the dedication that goes into 4C hairstyling.



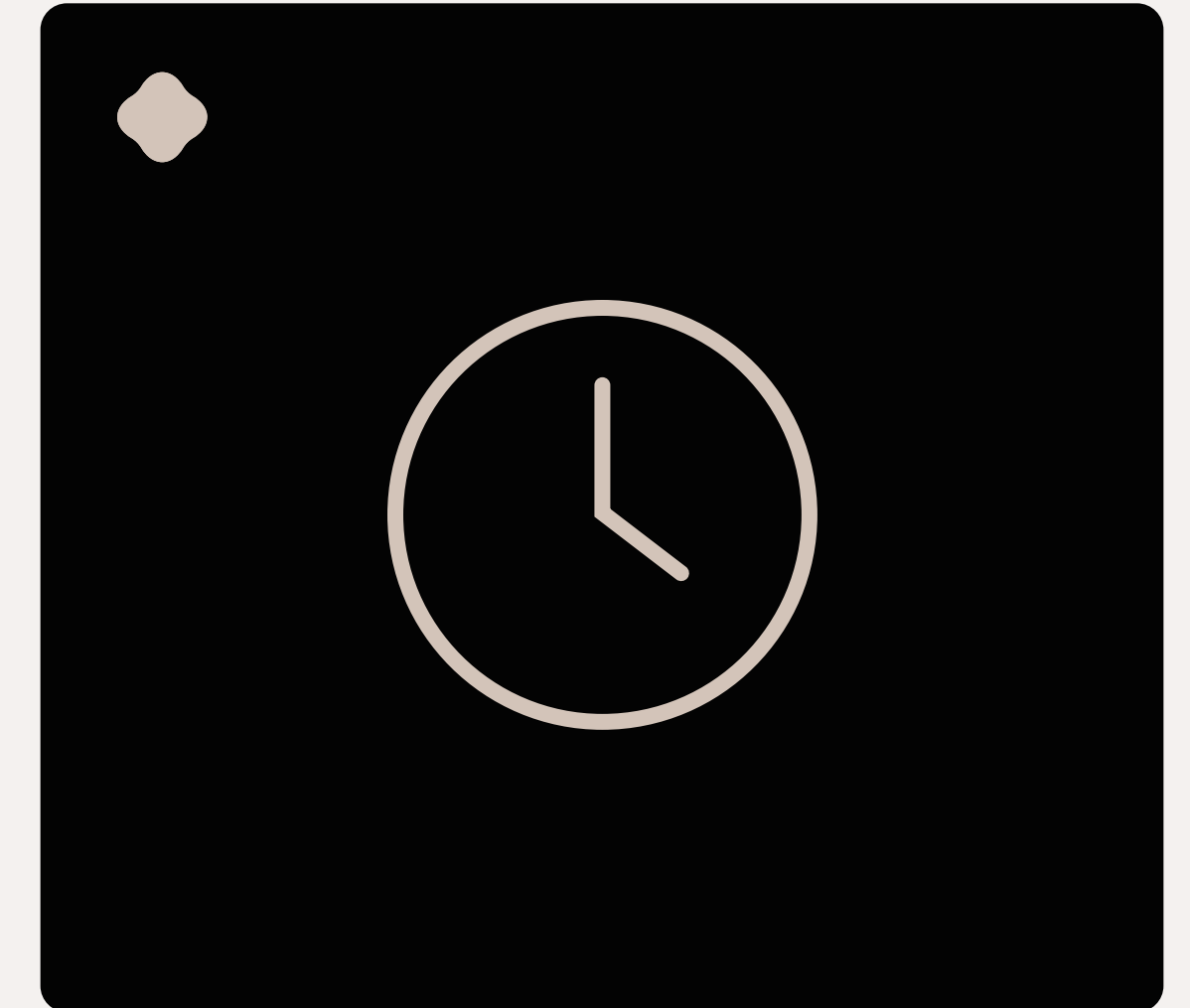
Grounded

We take the stress and mess of 4C haircare and turn it into calming ritual. Our modular system fits seamlessly into users lives and homes.



Confidence

We meet users with clarity and ease, empowering personal routines that let people fearlessly own their 4C hair.



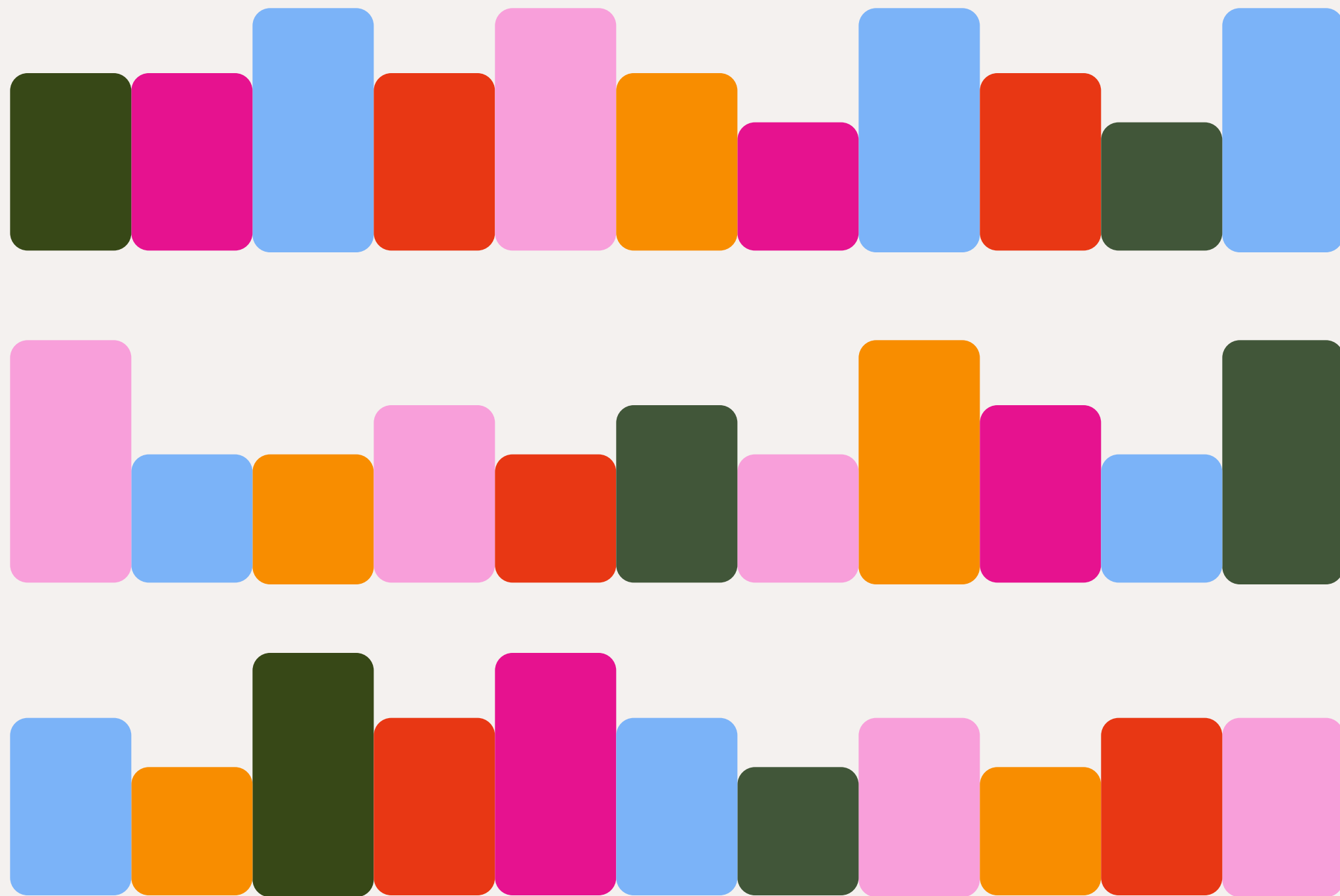
Longevity

We set people up for lasting routines, not a quick fix. Our system is designed with growth and change in mind, resulting in seamless, fluid routines that last a lifetime.

Modular System

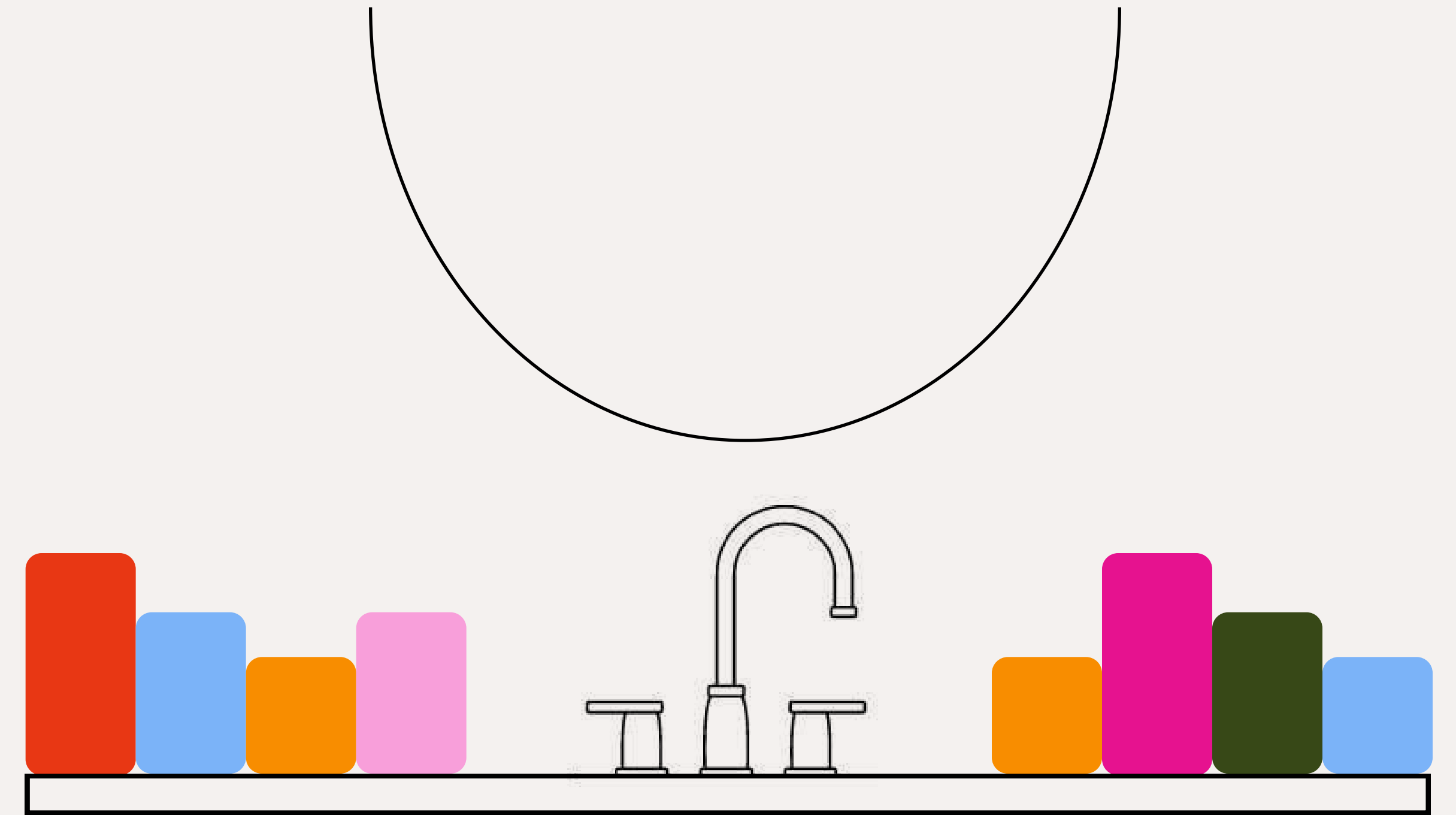
A modular suite of products that can be **mixed and matched** to build a personal routine.

Our initial plan was to create all-inclusive bundles and kits of products, but quickly found that these approaches fell short of the users' true desire for a customized routine. What people really needed was a system that allowed them to mix and match products and build their own routines.



Realizing that everyone's specific hair needs are different, we decided that our products needed to **work in unison, in any combination.**

This system allows people to build routines around themselves, rather than being prescribed a one-size-fits-all solution.



Modular System

We chose 3 products based on our personas' desire for **easy, time-saving natural hairstyles.**

Together, they can be used to achieve the following styles that are:

- Quick and lower-effort
- Easy for everyday styling
- Gentle on scalp and hair

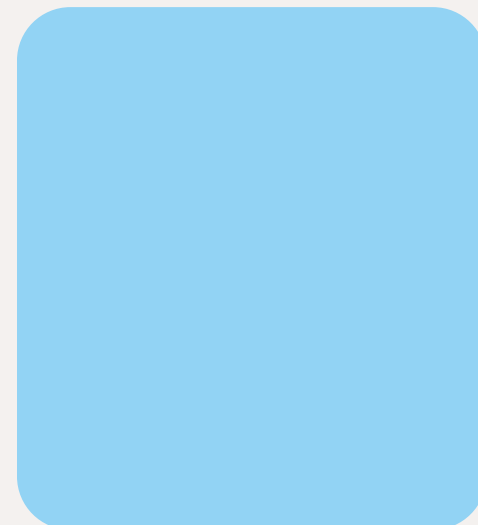
LEAVE-IN CREAM



RICH HAIR OIL



STRONG HOLD STYLING GEL



TWIST-OUTS



SLICK-BACKS



FINGER COILS



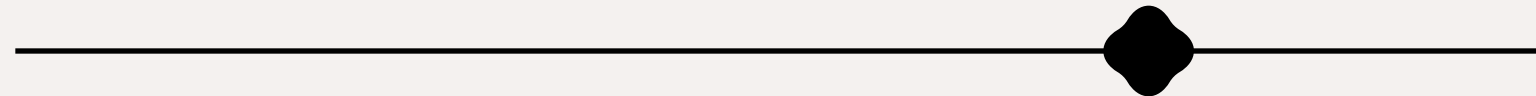
Product Visualization



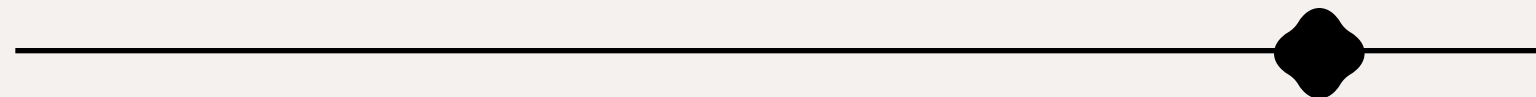
Leave-In Cream

Thick, buttery, and rich—similar to body lotion or softened butter.

VISCOSITY



OPACITY



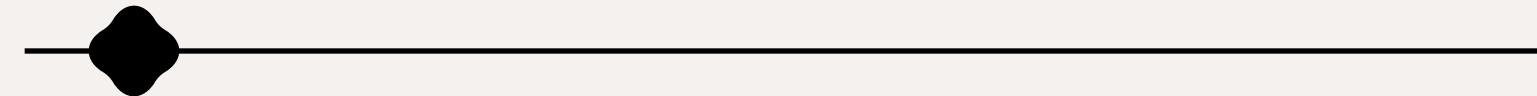
Product risks: Residue buildup, separation, product waste



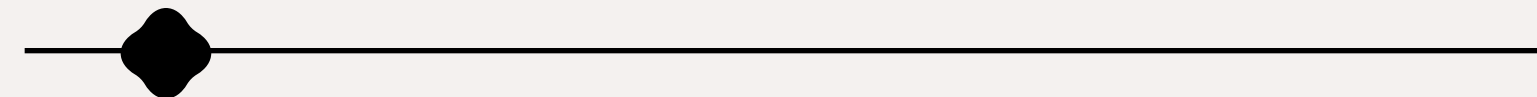
Rich Hair Oil

Flowing, glossy, and instantaneously smooth, with a clean, non-tacky finish.

VISCOSITY



OPACITY



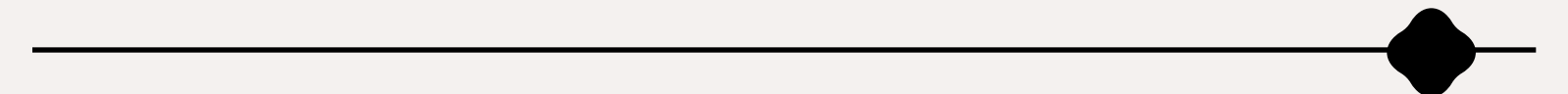
Product risks: Over-dosing, slipperiness, sunlight can oxidize oils



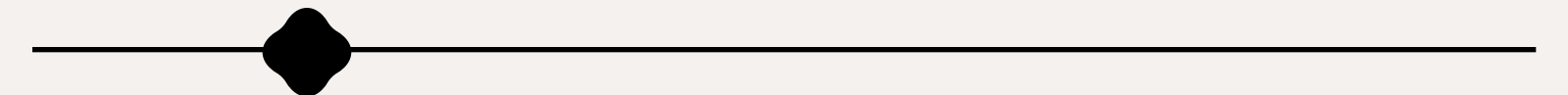
Strong Hold Styling Gel

Dense, elastic, and tacky—similar to firm honey or resin.

VISCOSITY



OPACITY



Product risks: Dry-out, stringing, contamination, texture instability

CH 03

The Process



Where It Started

The package that sparked our interest in the 4C space—this bottle of hair oil.

PROBLEMS

- A** Difficult to open flip cap with poor dosing
- B** Weak twist grip
- C** Poor seal prone to leaking
- D** Non-descript bottle that looks like everything else on the shelf
- E** Slippery cylindrical shape
- F** Overwhelmingly text-heavy design with no clear brand voice
- G** Confusing information hierarchy and color use
- H** Flimsy plastic that flexes in hand



Early Form Ideation

INTEGRATION OF PRODUCT + FORM

Low fidelity prototyping allowed us to explore **breaking conventions of stock packaging** and unveiled insights into user-product interactions.

THINGS WE EXPLORED

- Grip and tactile storytelling
- Nested geometry and organization
- Magnetism and snap-fits
- Abstraction of 4C hair
- Ergonomics and specific use cases
- Product scale relationships
- Combination of primitive and organic forms
- Graphic and form interaction



Form Ideation

We developed a **family of form** that our products exist within.

ORDER AND CHAOS

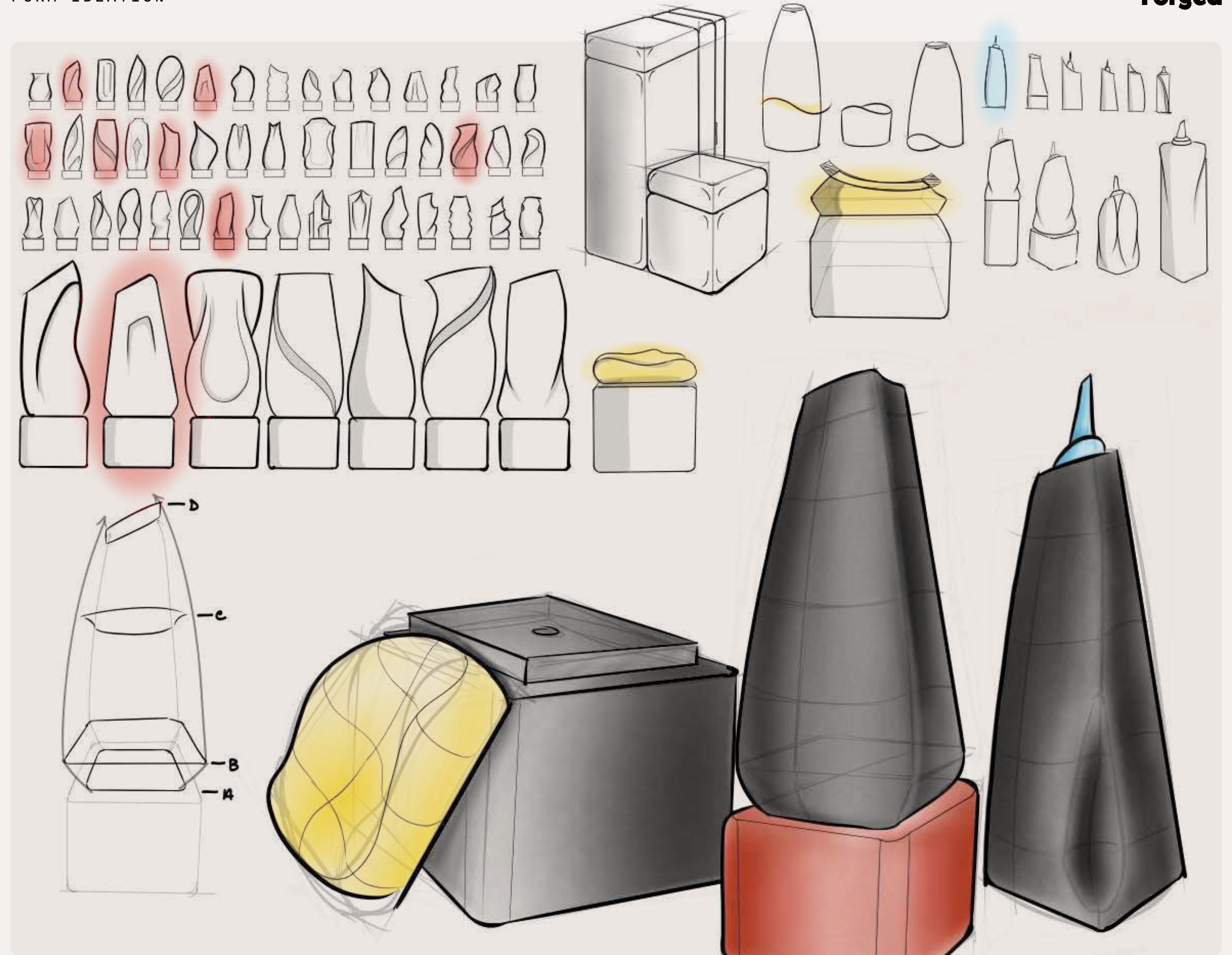
Solid, stable bases with organic flow towards the top of forms mimics the nature of 4C hair styling.

ERGONOMICS

Indents and form features promote single-handed styling without risk of slipping.

NESTED GEOMETRY

Each solid base has the ability to nest against each other, leading to simple organization that reinforces our modular system.



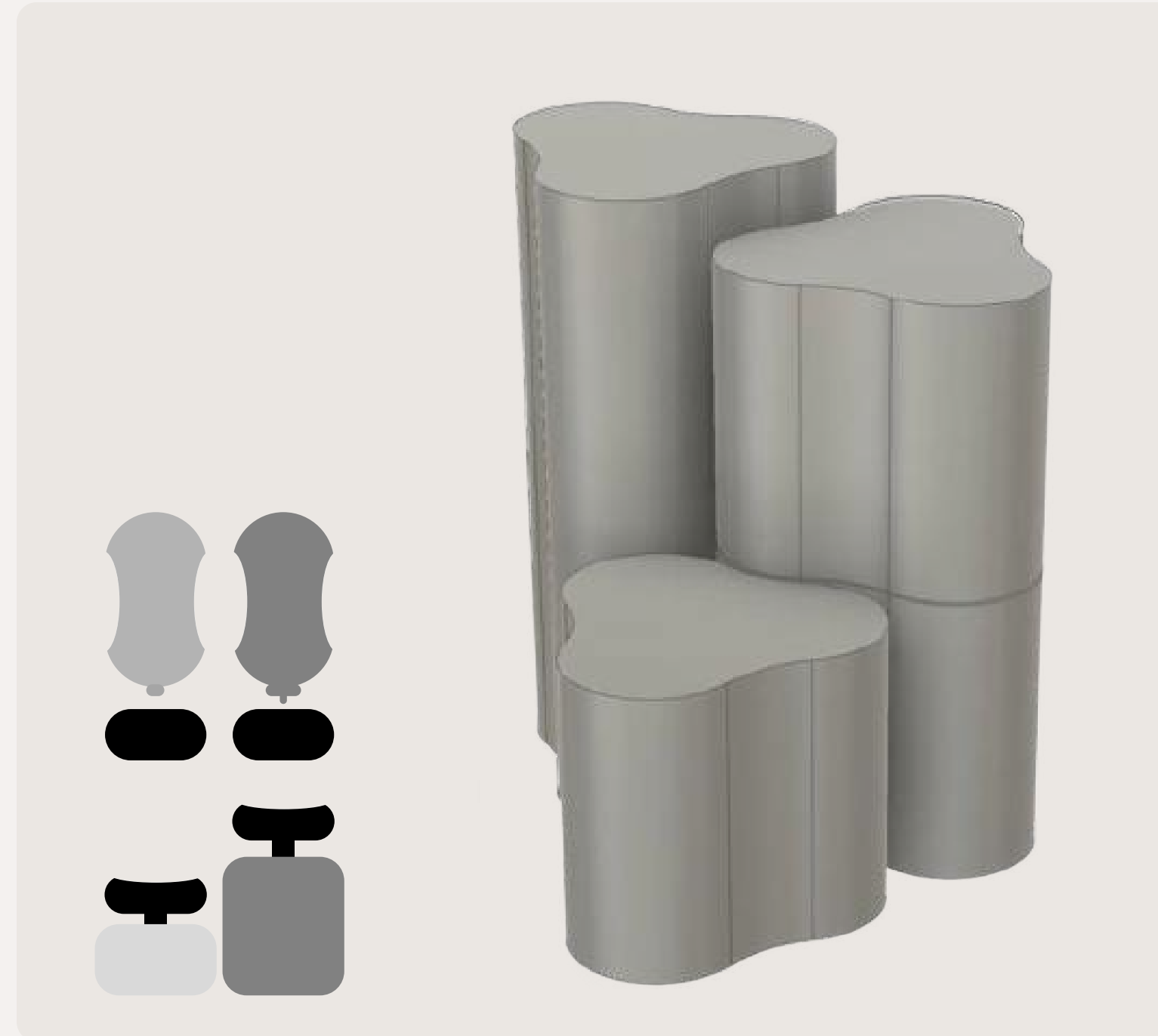
Form Development



Longevity

SEAMLESSLY NESTED FORM

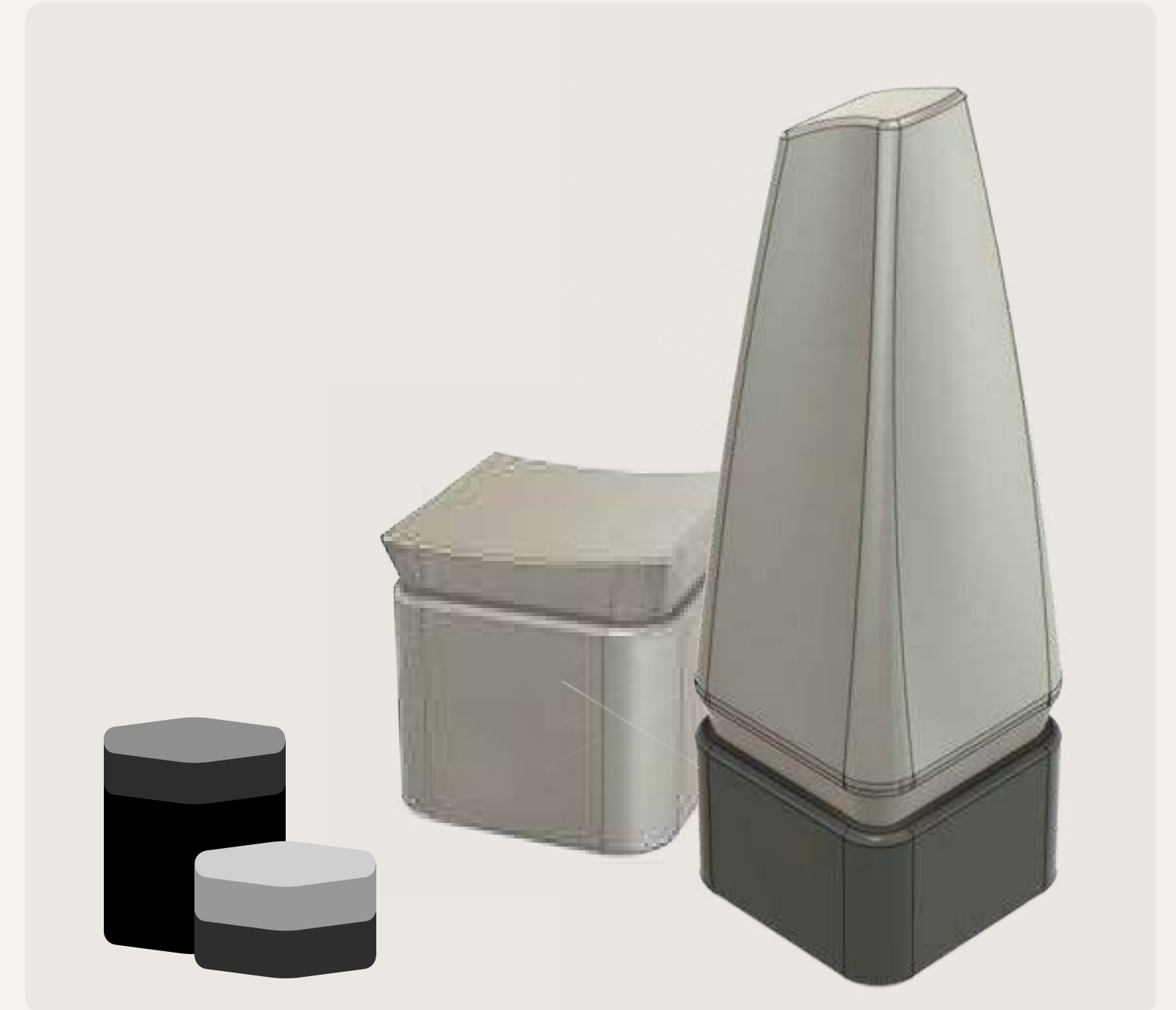
To reflect the idea of repeated routines and consistent results, we developed tear-drop shaped packaging that nests seamlessly into one another. This allows products to feel like a natural extension of daily rituals. The form itself encourages repeated use, reinforcing trust and routine.



Confidence

MODULAR STYLING

Each component fits perfectly within a modular system, making it clear how products interact and ensuring users can combine and use them effortlessly. The form guides the user, reducing friction and building confidence in styling outcomes.



Craft

METICULOUS QUALITY

Every bottle is treated as a carefully crafted tool, with forms tailored to their function. We explored more unique and refined bottle shapes, emphasizing intentionality and premium quality. Each product earns its place in the user's home, reflecting the meticulous care and effort behind the design.

Dosing Study

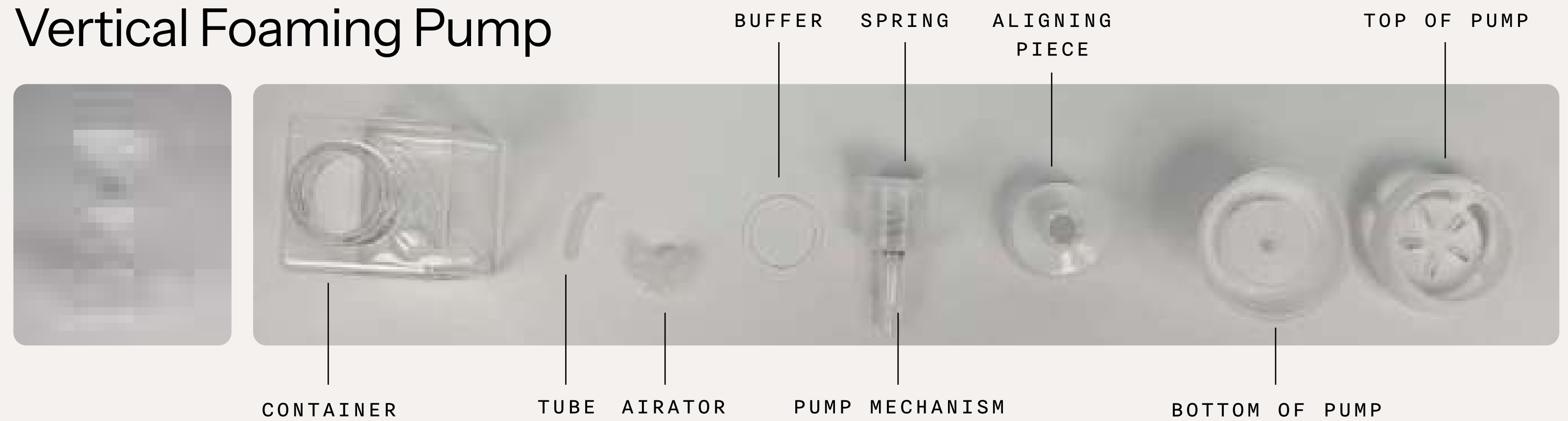
PRODUCT TEARDOWNS

We found **analogous inspiration** from the beauty and cleaning industry to improve dosing mechanisms within our products.

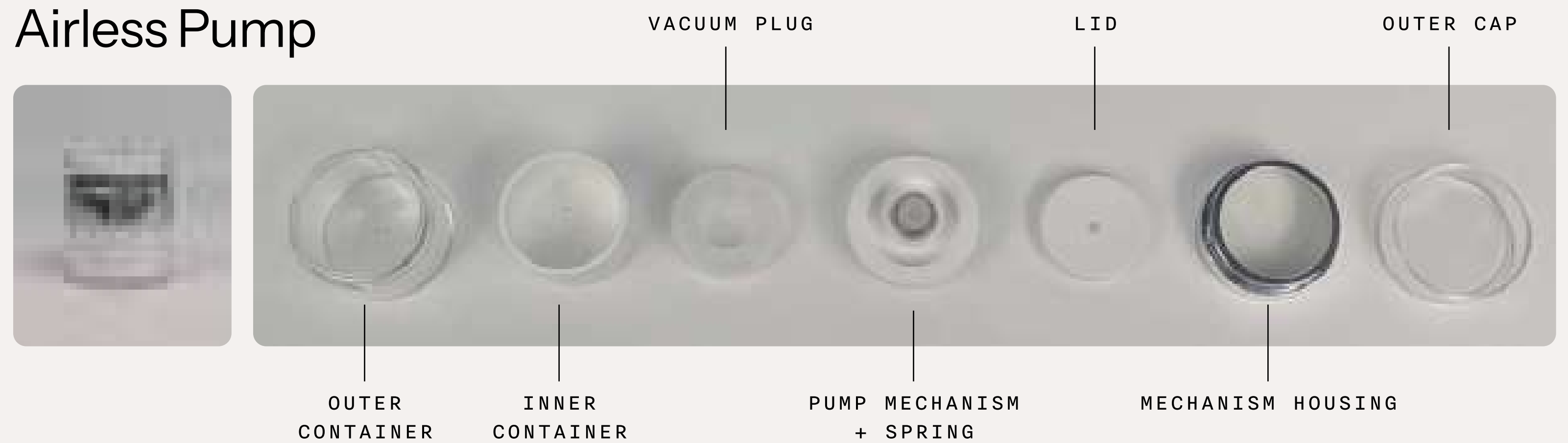
Product teardowns revealed the **optimal manufacturability and dosing experiences** based on our products' viscosity.

Shown here is a vertical foaming pump and an airless pump we tested for our gel, using gel recommended by 4C stylists.

Vertical Foaming Pump



Airless Pump



Dosing Mechanisms

We created intentionally **tailored dosing experiences** for each product.

TWIST-OPEN DISPENSING LID

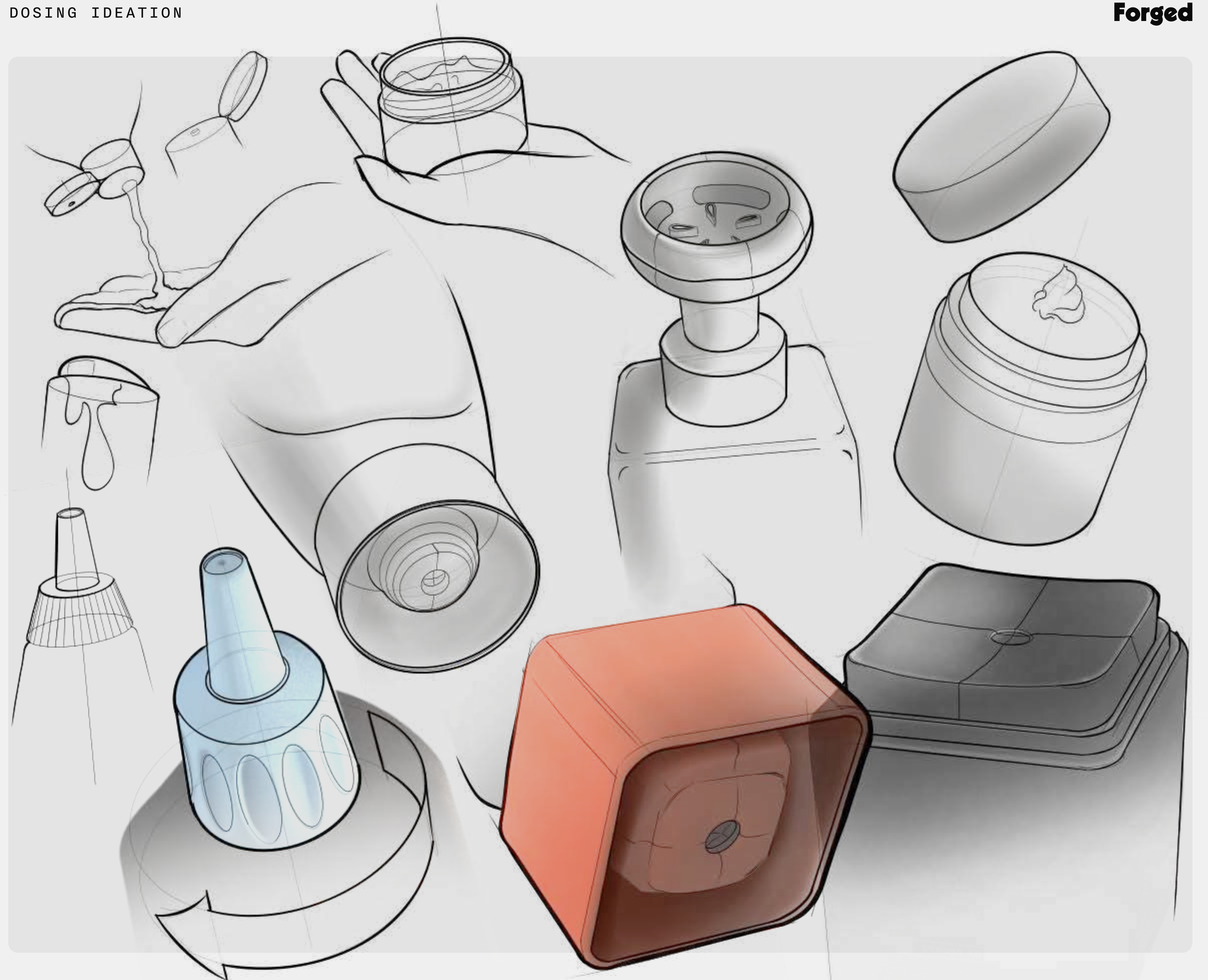
- Best for Rich Hair Oil.
- Provides variability of oil flow adjustable to user's needs. As the user twists, more oil can flow.

GRAVITY SQUEEZE BOTTLE

- Best for Leave-In Cream.
- Squeeze allows user to dose to delight.
- One-handed action rather than removing an additional cap from the bottle.

AIRLESS PUMP

- Best for Strong Hold Styling Gel.
- Specific dosing per pump allows user to build habits around their "optimal" amount of gel.
- Protects gel from drying out between uses and during long styling sessions.



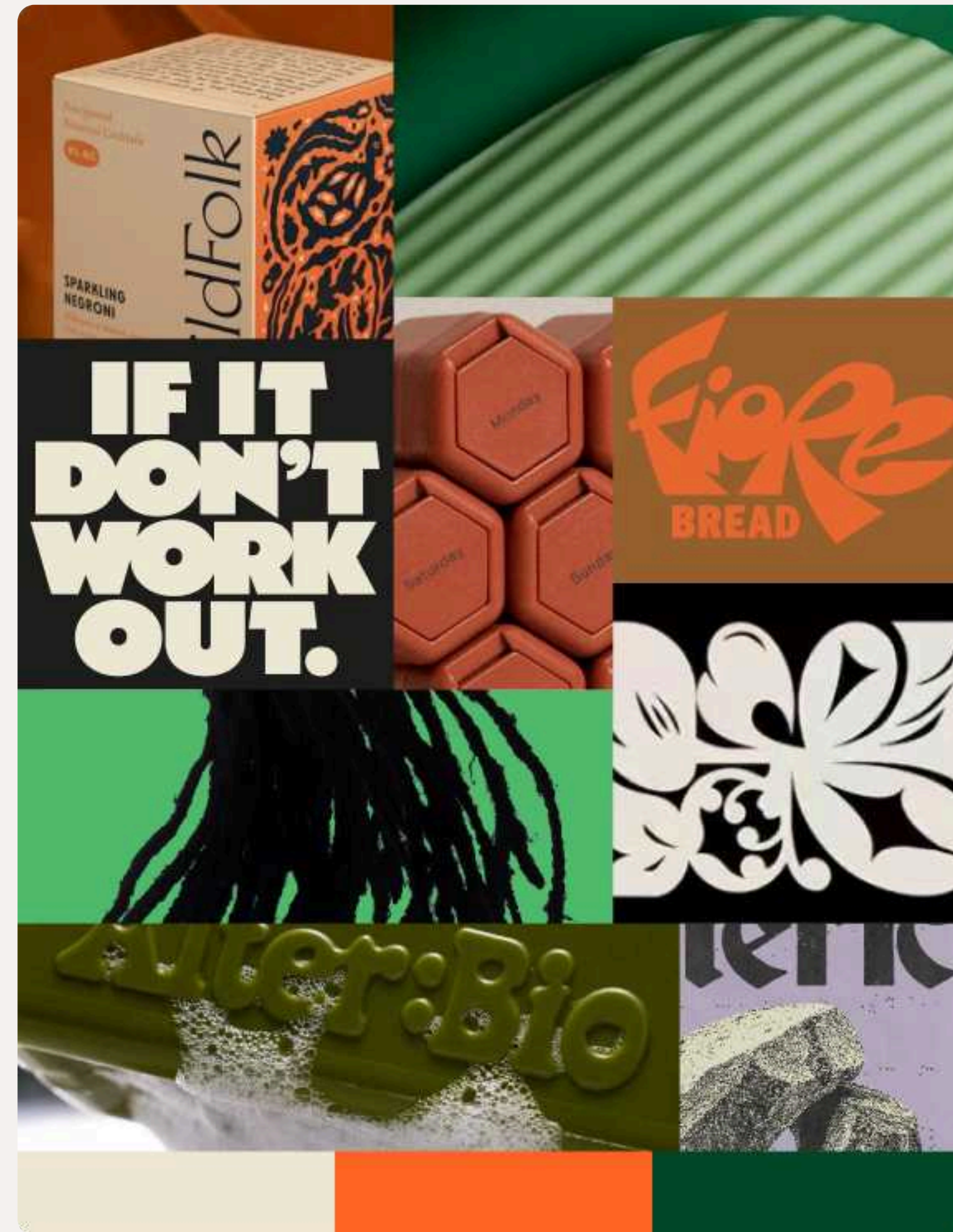
Visual Territories

EVERYDAY GLOW



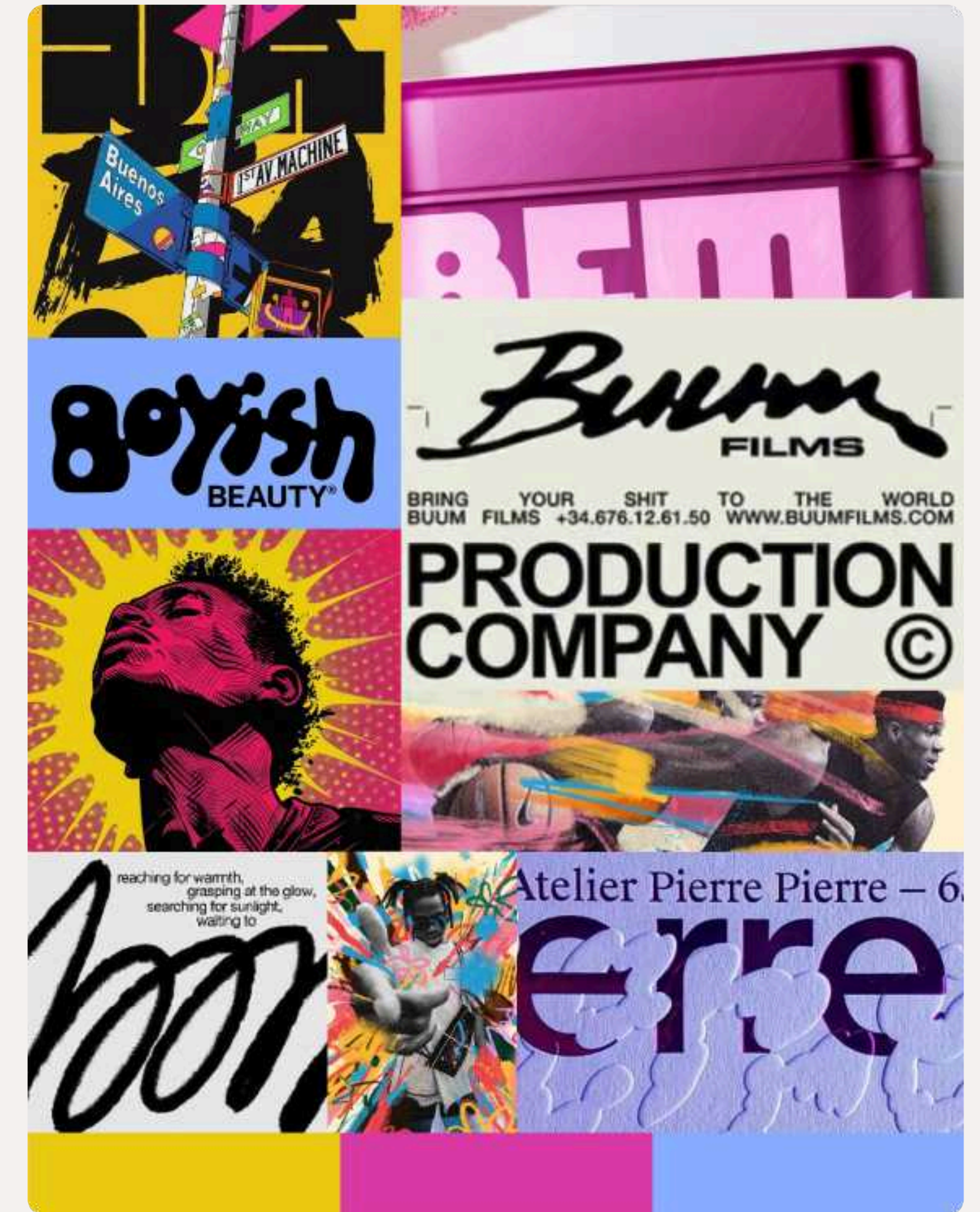
Authentic Clarity Confident

WILD HARMONY



Controlled Chaos Grounded Ease Raw Energy

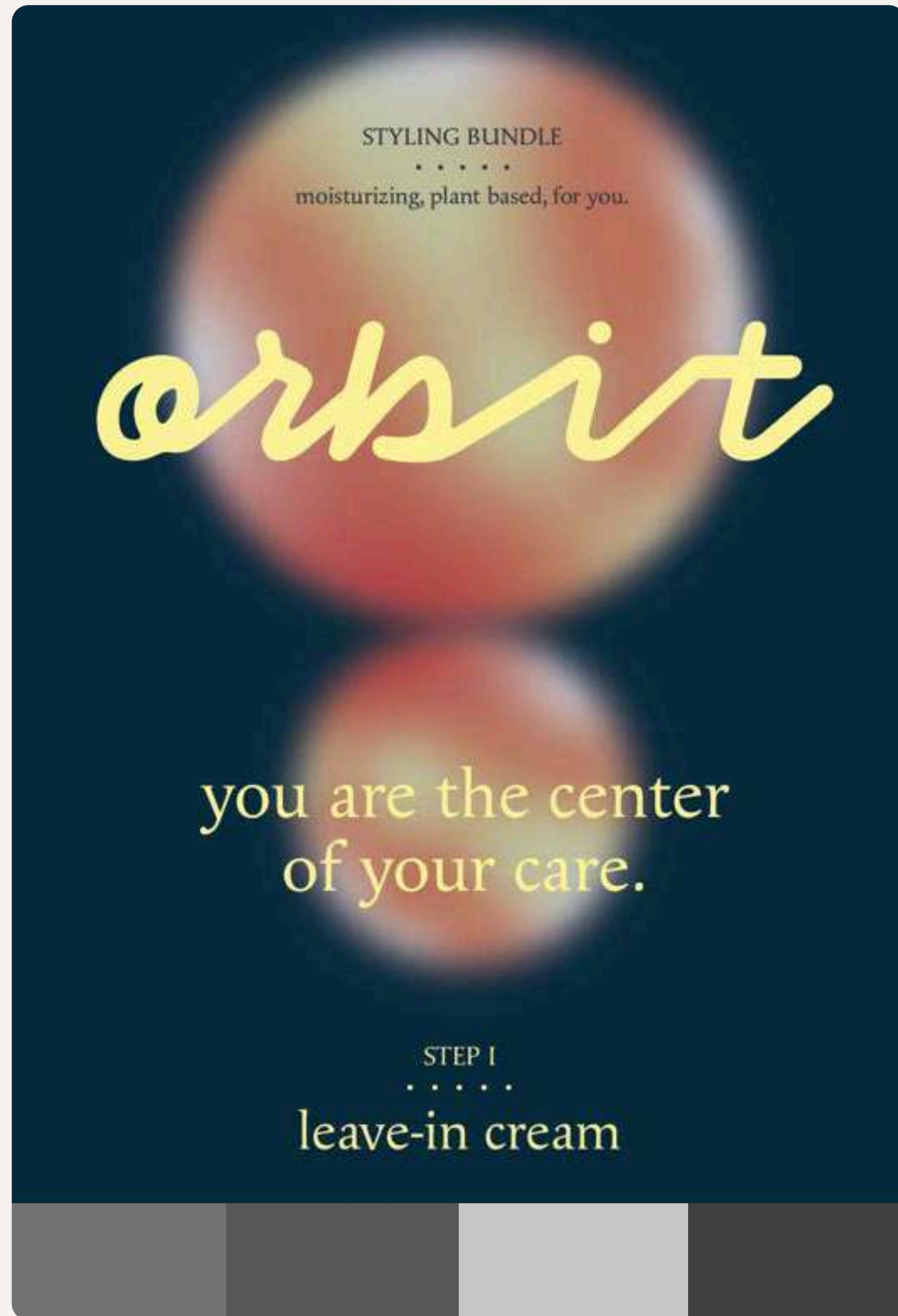
TLC (TENDER LOVING CARE)



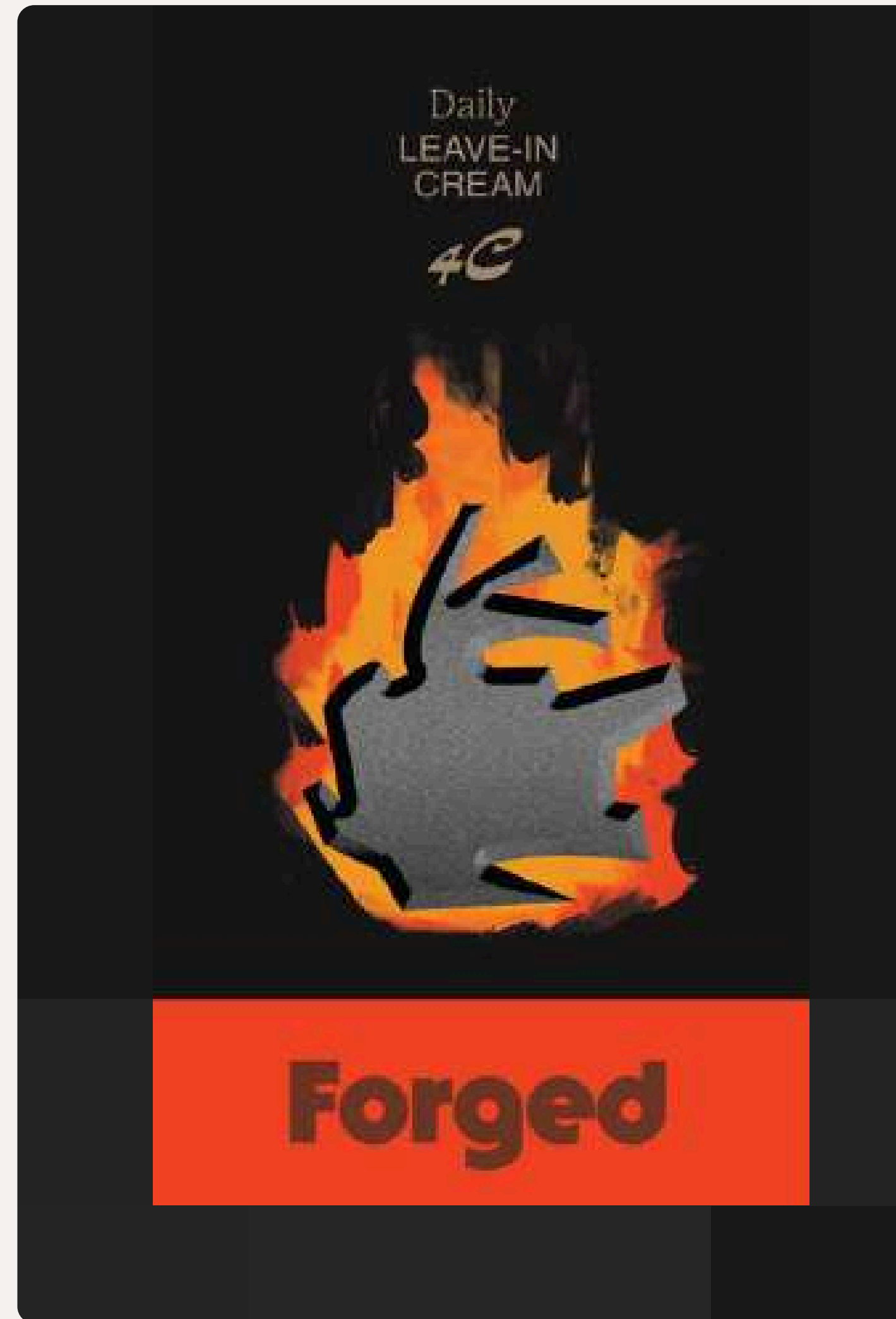
Empowering Bold Proud

Graphic Explore

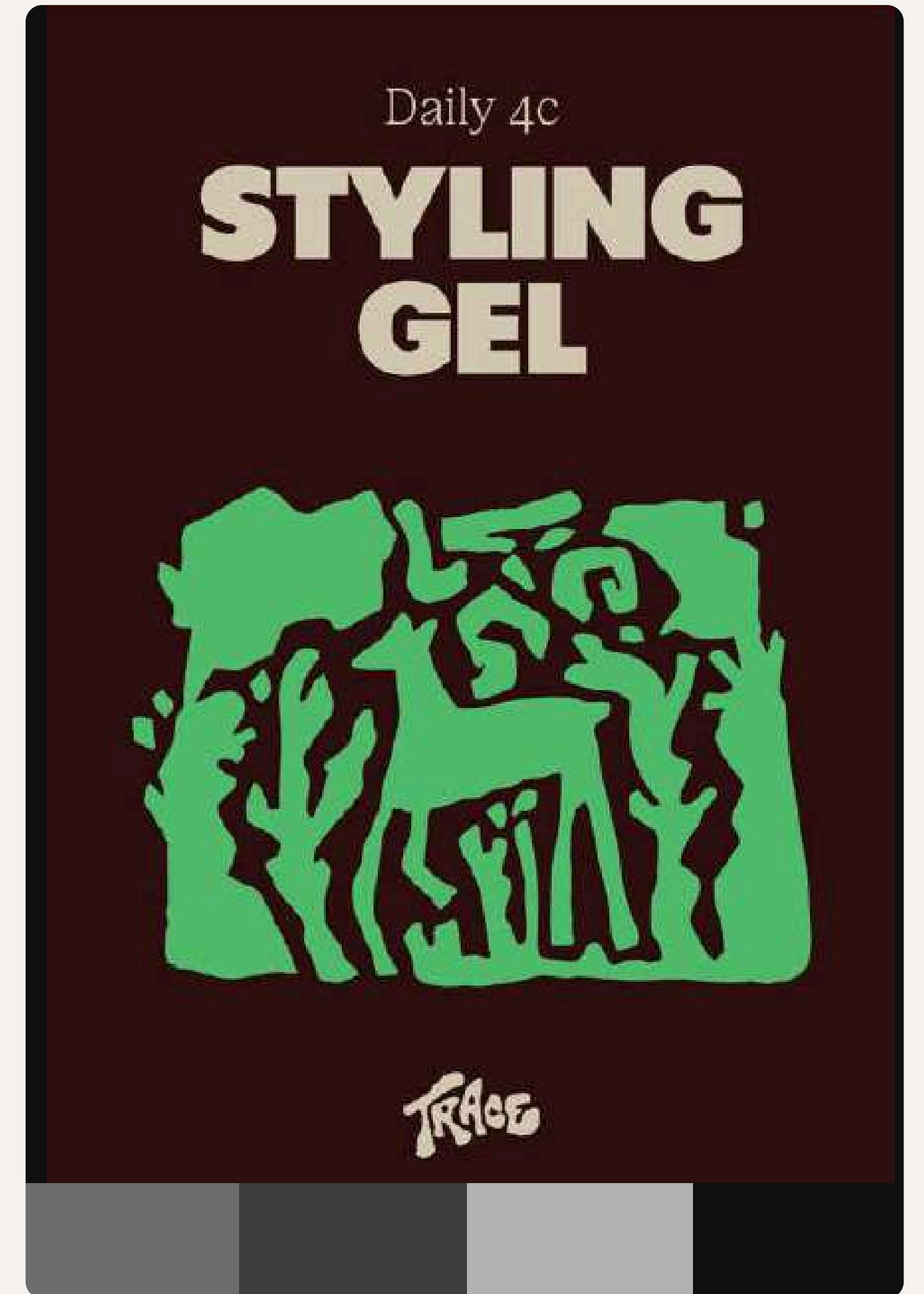
EVERYDAY GLOW



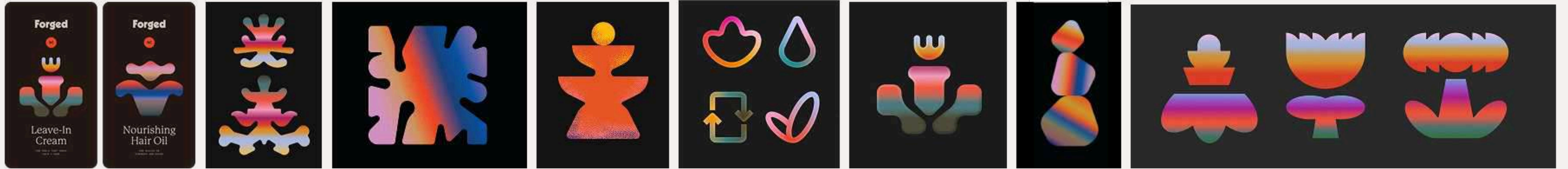
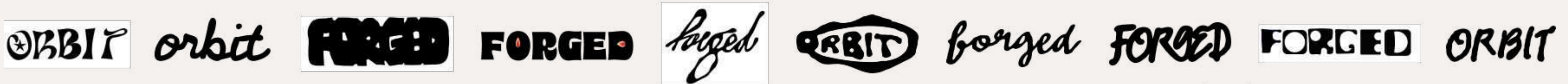
WILD HARMONY V1



WILD HARMONY V2



Graphic Explore



Final Visual Direction, “Crafted Glow”

RAW ENERGY BALANCED EXPRESSION BRAZEN TYPOGRAPHY CRAFTED FORM SEAMLESS REPETITION ORDERED CHAOS



CH 04

The Solution



We are
Forged
Routine crafted
around you.

4C

“Forged” means to make, shape, and create. We celebrate the artistry of 4C haircare and the hands, tools, and daily rituals that shape beauty with time,

intention and care. We honor the process of shaping, molding, and refining and instill pride in building personal routines that reveal your most authentic self.

FORGED



Visual Identity

Our graphic language is infused with the core brand pillars—the consistent thread that ties together our **mission and execution**.

CRAFT

The maker's touch is evident in every detail, from the hand-sculpted floral shapes to the subtle rounding in the wordmark's interiors. Small technical typography shows intentional craft.

GROUNDED

The upright flowering forms symbolize rootedness in routine. Graphic layouts exudes quiet clarity with symmetry and balance.

CONFIDENCE

Rising upwards in a fierce display of color, the blossoms radiate proud confidence. The bold wordmark is a proclamation of ownership, staking our claim as the fearless leader of 4C haircare.

LONGEVITY

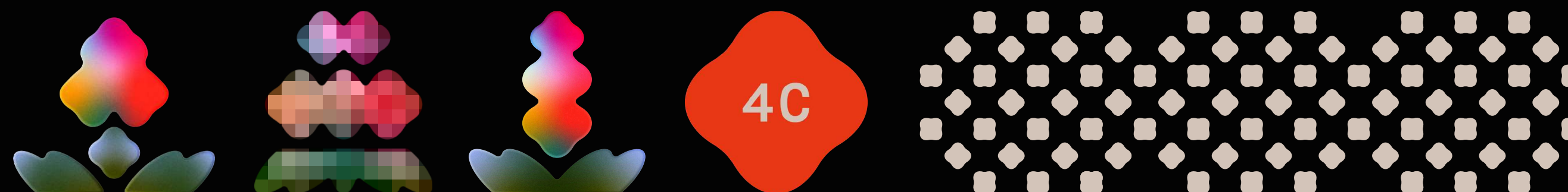
Repetition of form, the undulating edges of the graphics, and the ebb and flow of gradients speak to a continuation of time and morphing personal routines.

BRAND IDENTITY

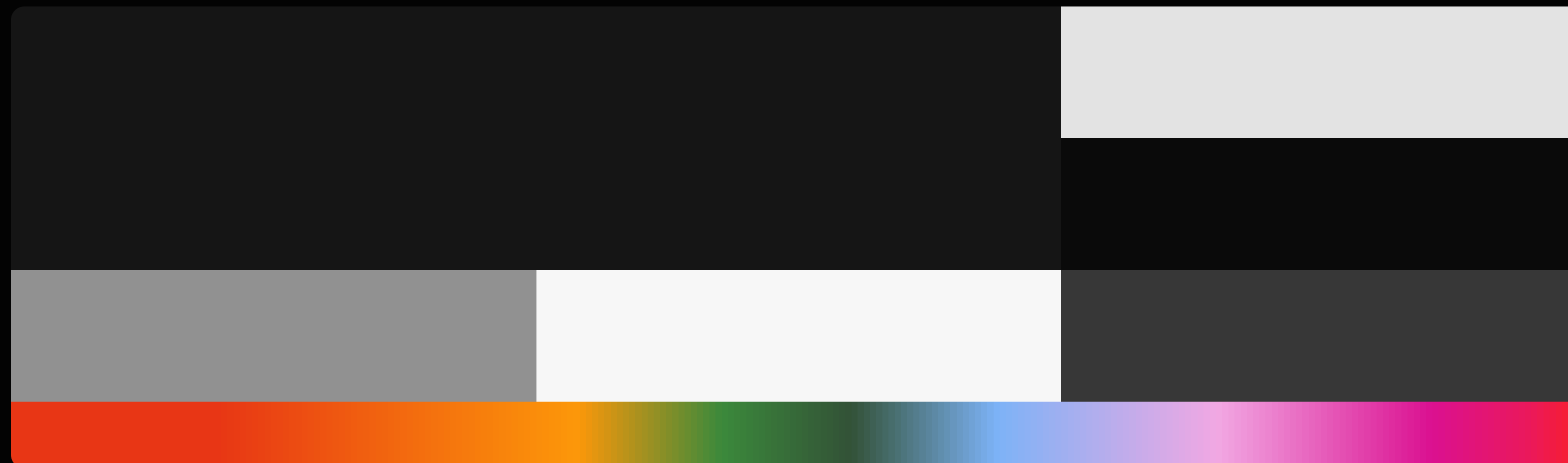
WORDMARK

Forged

ILLUSTRATION + ICONOGRAPHY



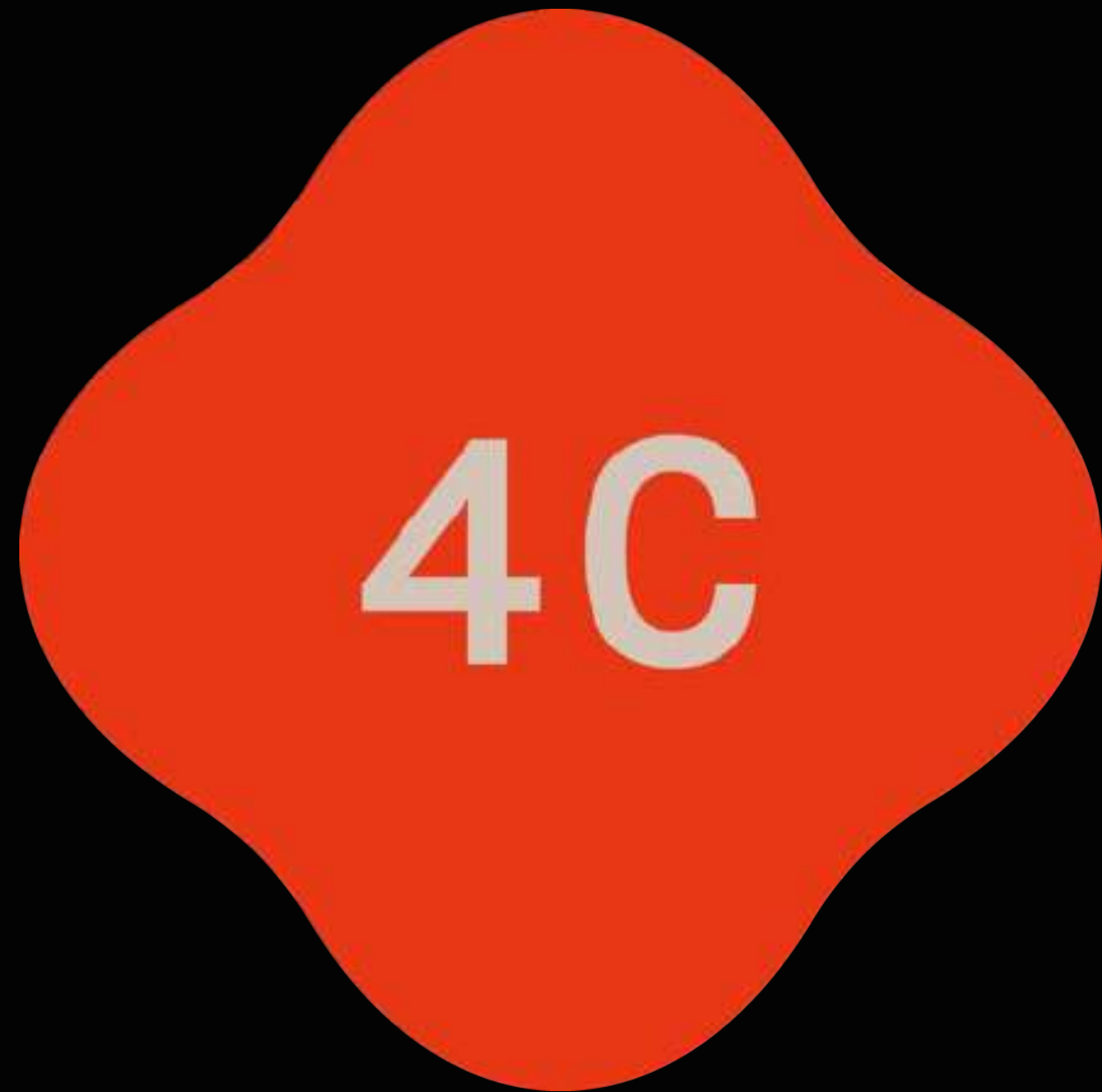
COLOR PALETTE



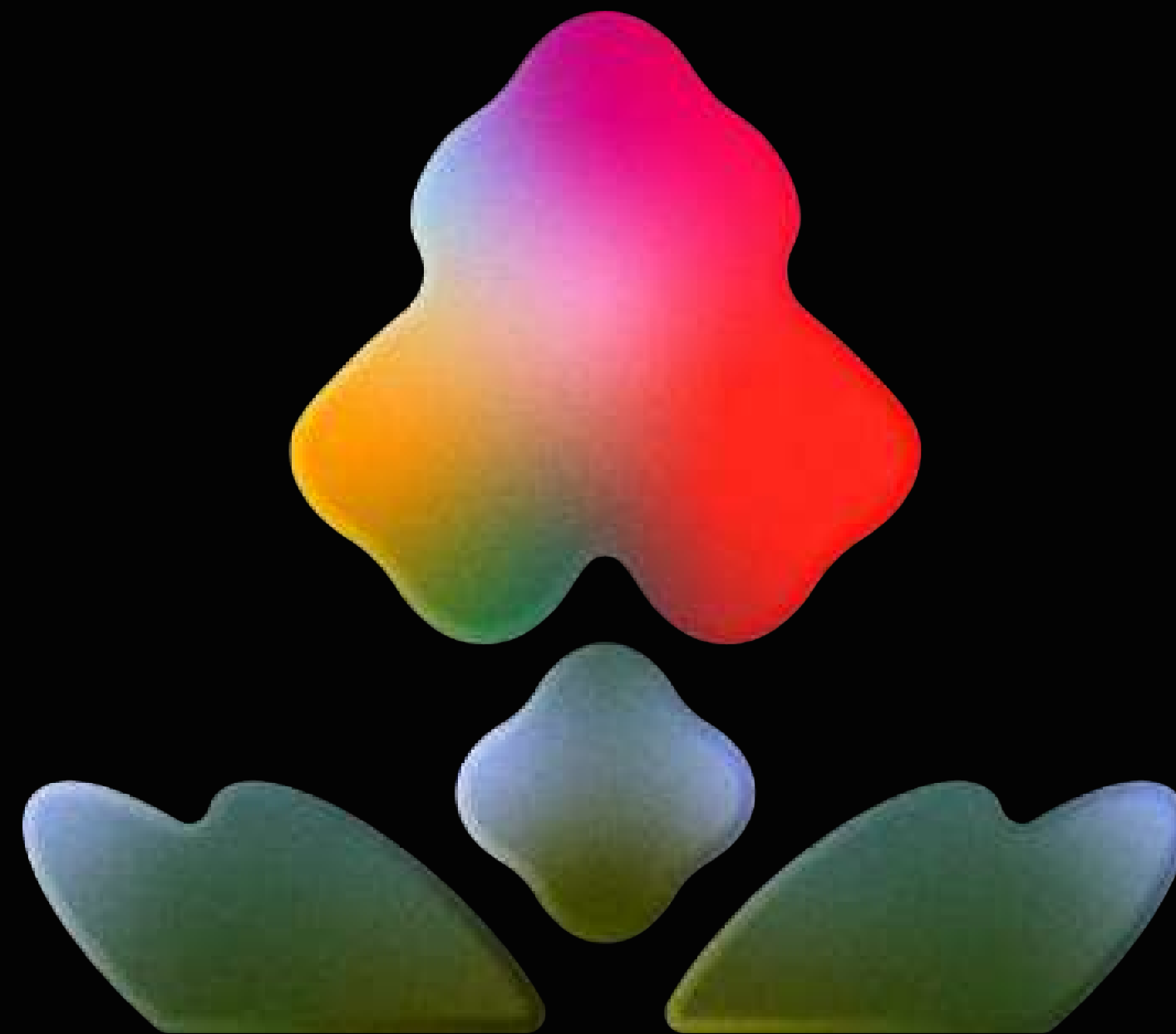
4C Shape Language

We created an ownable shape language that feels uniquely 4C, centered around this molded, 4-sided icon that resembles hand-formed 4C hair. The shape represents our dedication to hand craft

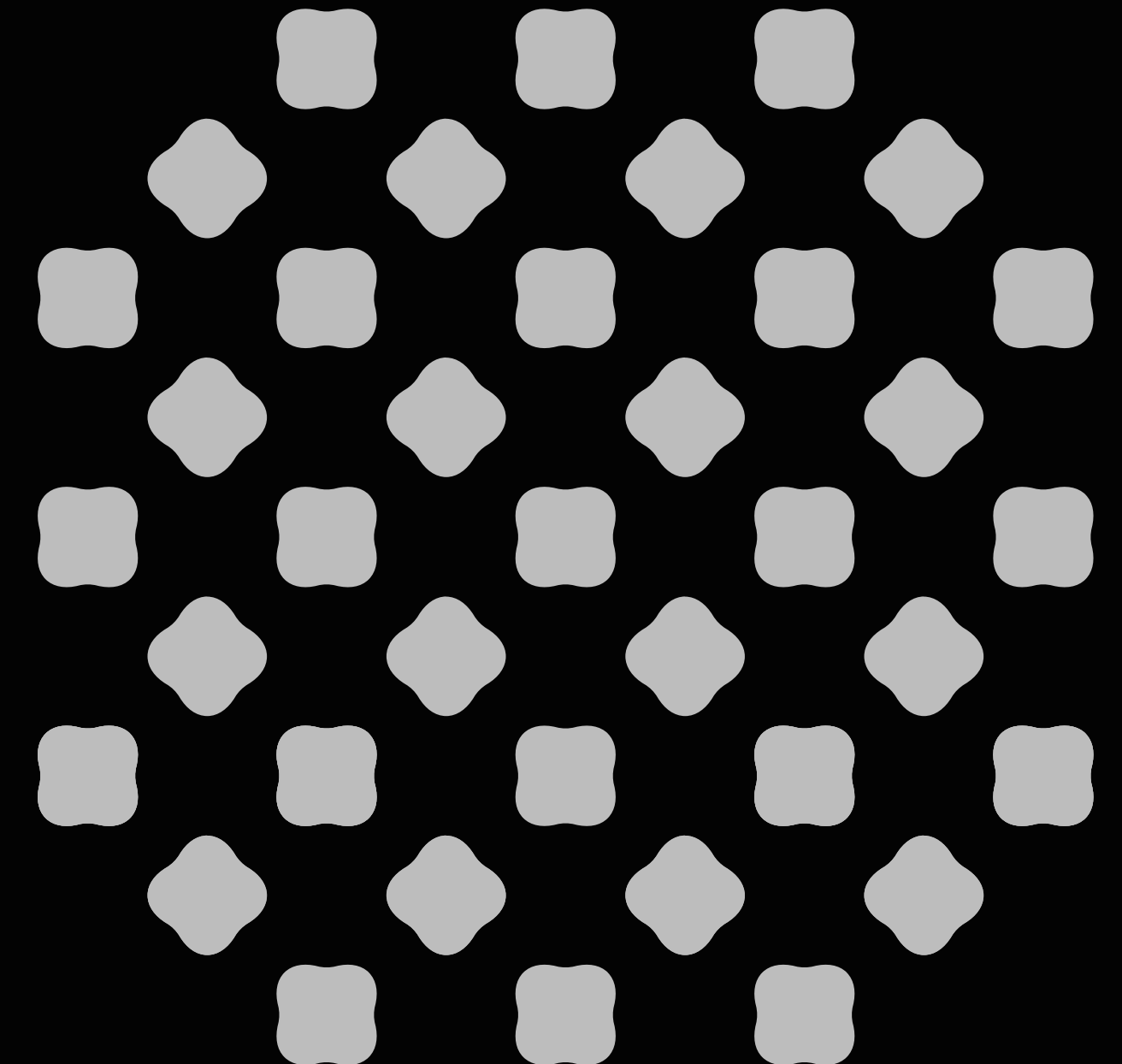
and is infused throughout the brand—from iconography to illustration to pattern—reinforcing the principle that **our identity is built on 4C**, through and through.



4C IDENTIFIER



ILLUSTRATIONS

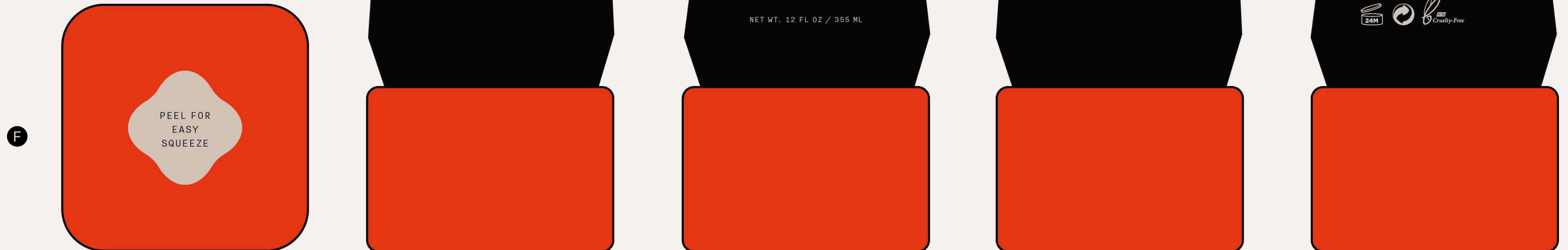


TACTILE PATTERN

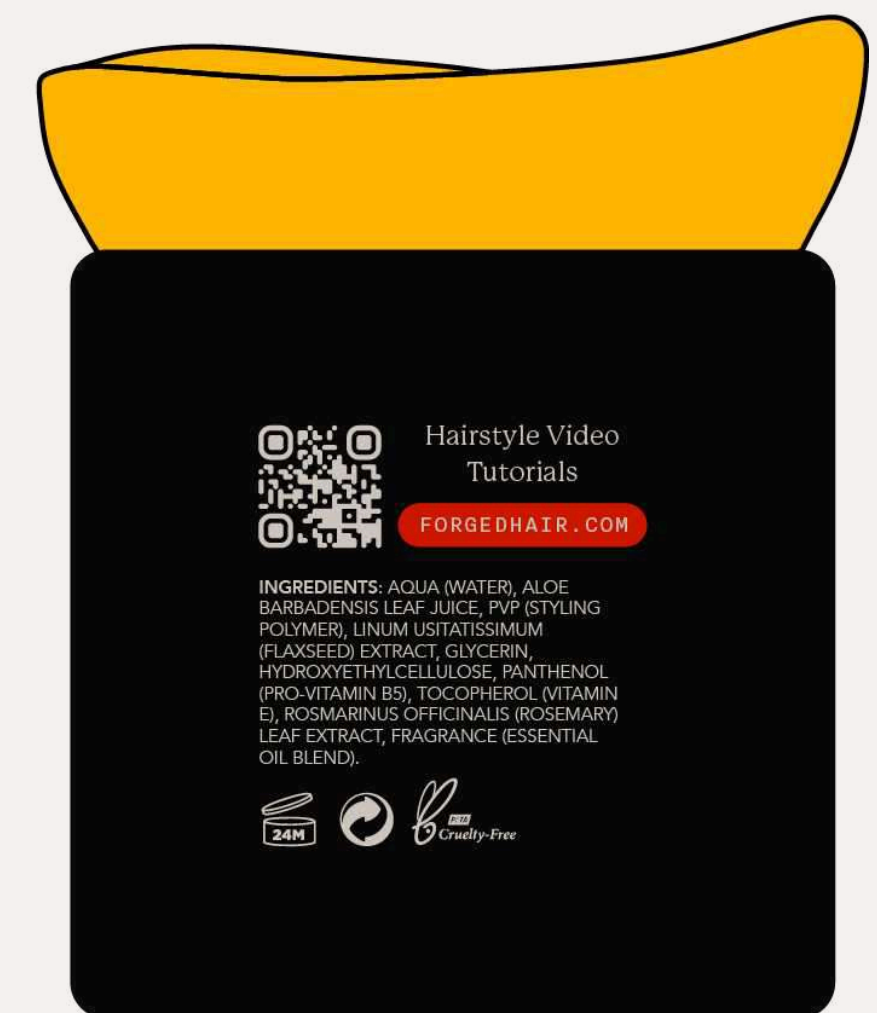
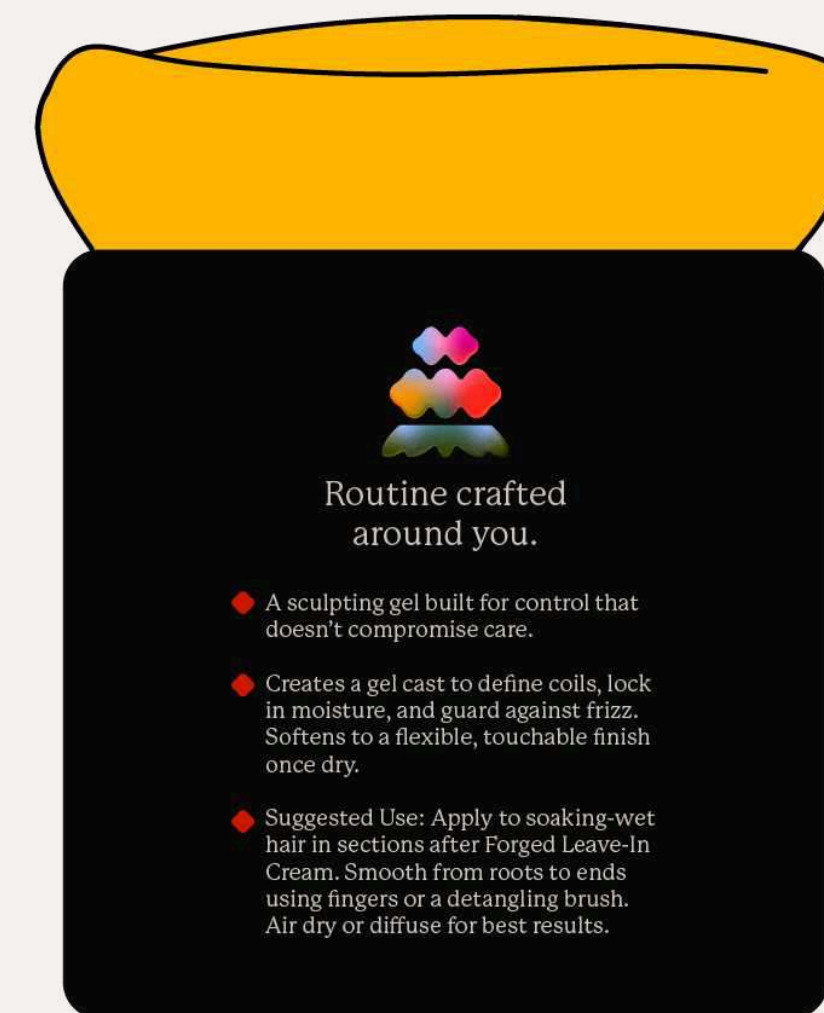
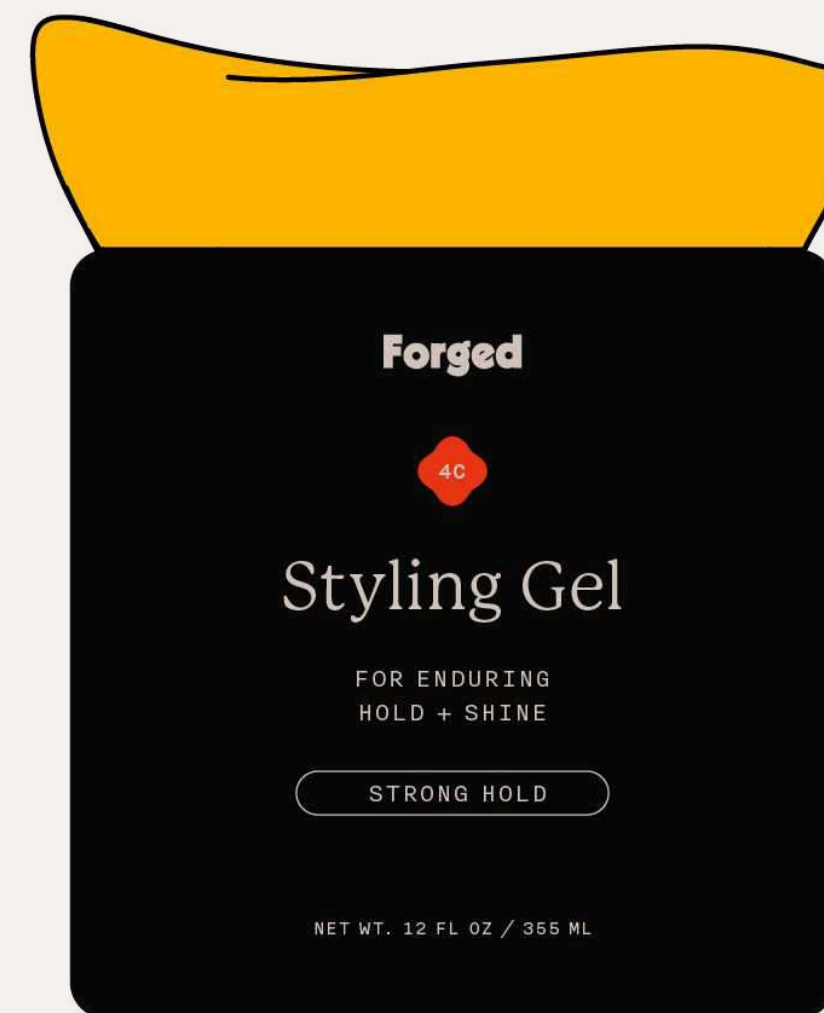
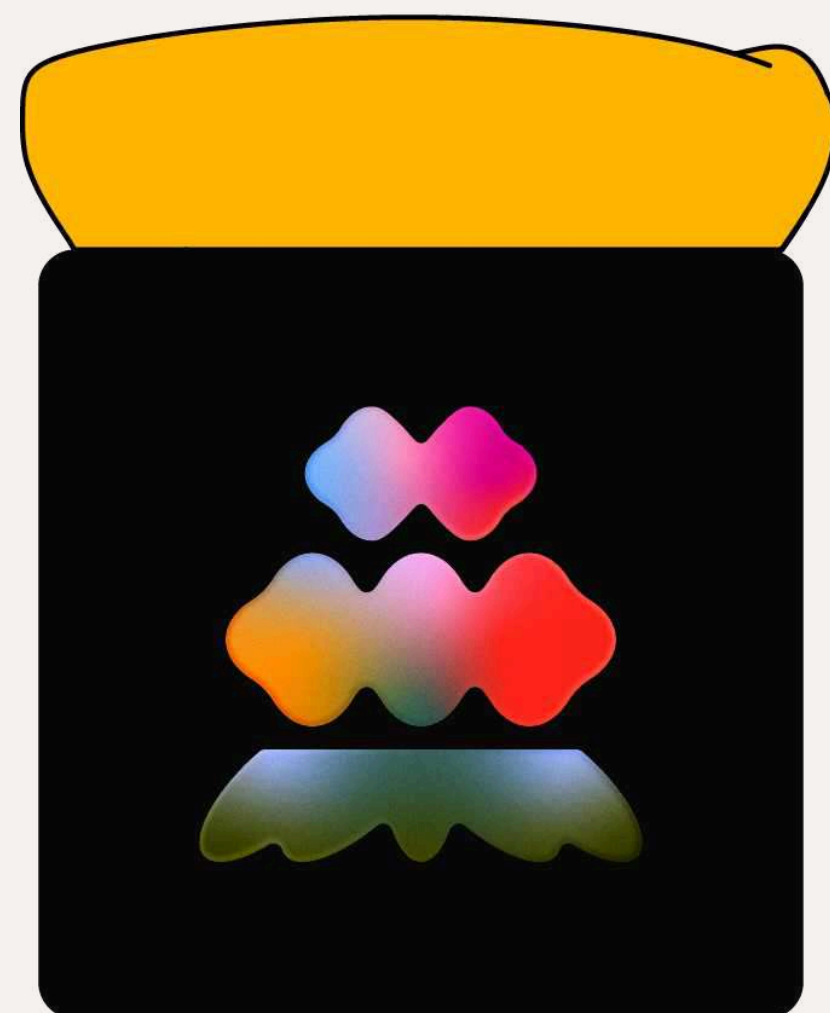
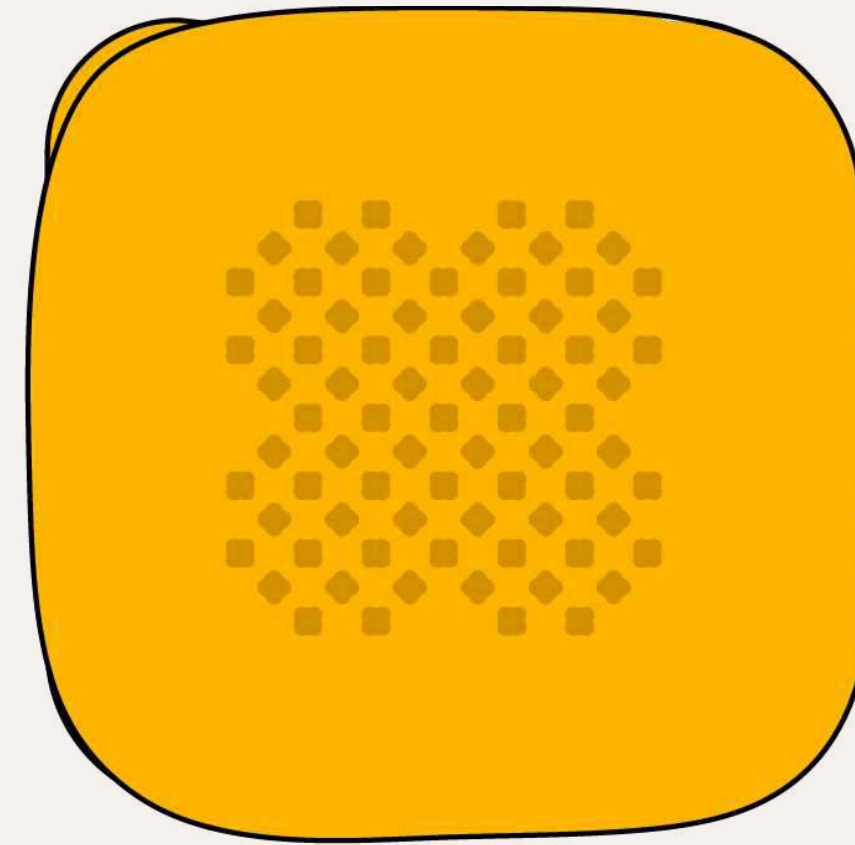
Graphics Flat Lays

FEATURES

- A** Prominent “4C” icon acts as an on-shelf identifier, representing our mission to be distinctly for 4C hair first, not as an afterthought.
- B** Clear, descriptive **product name and claims**.
- C** Vibrant **flower illustrations and cap colors** differentiate SKUs as unique artifacts that can be gathered to build your routine.
- D** Mission-forward **back-of-back** with compelling storytelling and instructions.
- E** **QR code** to online resources and video tutorials to empower users to grow in creating a truly personalized routine.
- F** Interactive **sticker** over dosing mechanisms prevents leaking during transport.



Graphics Flat Lays



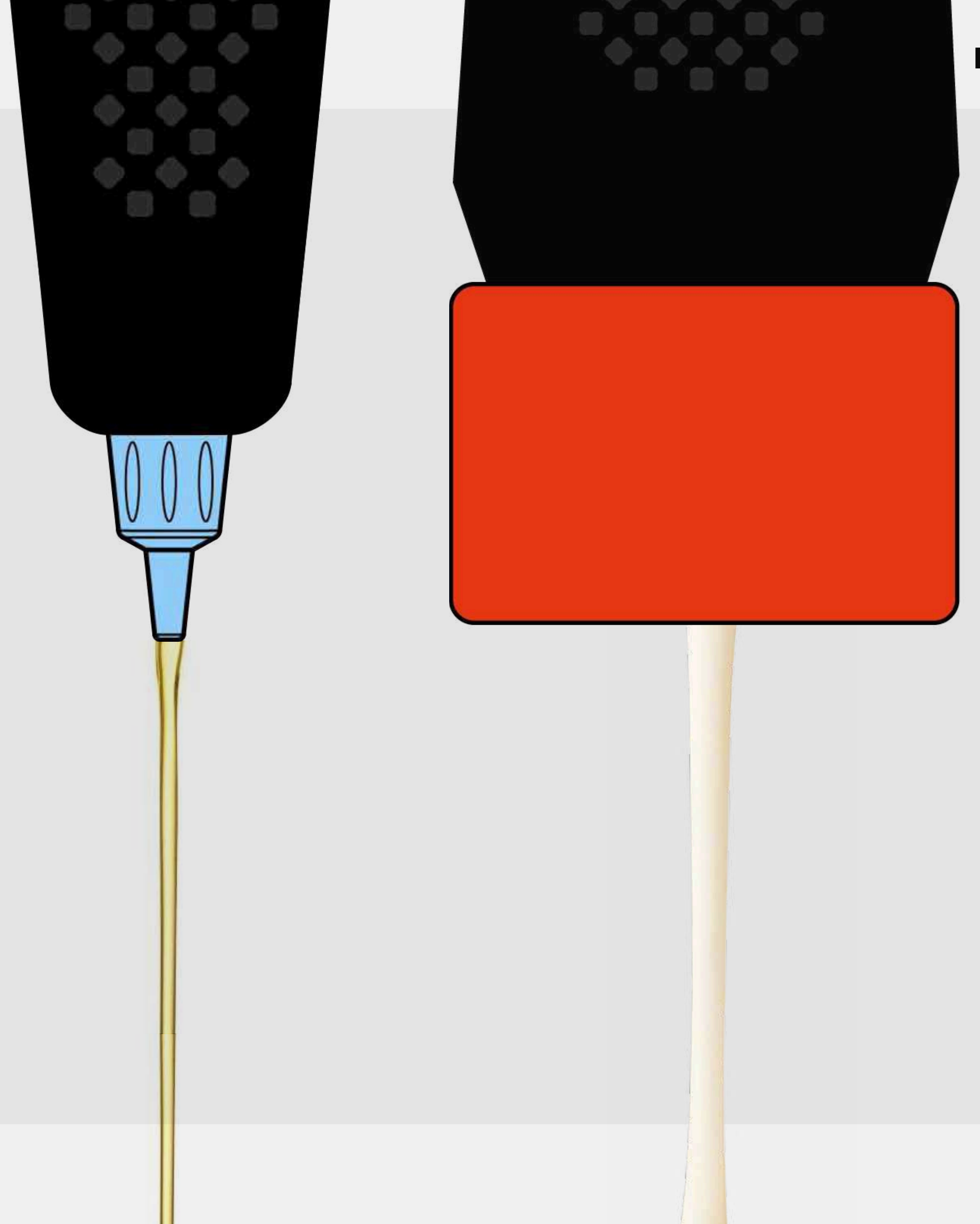
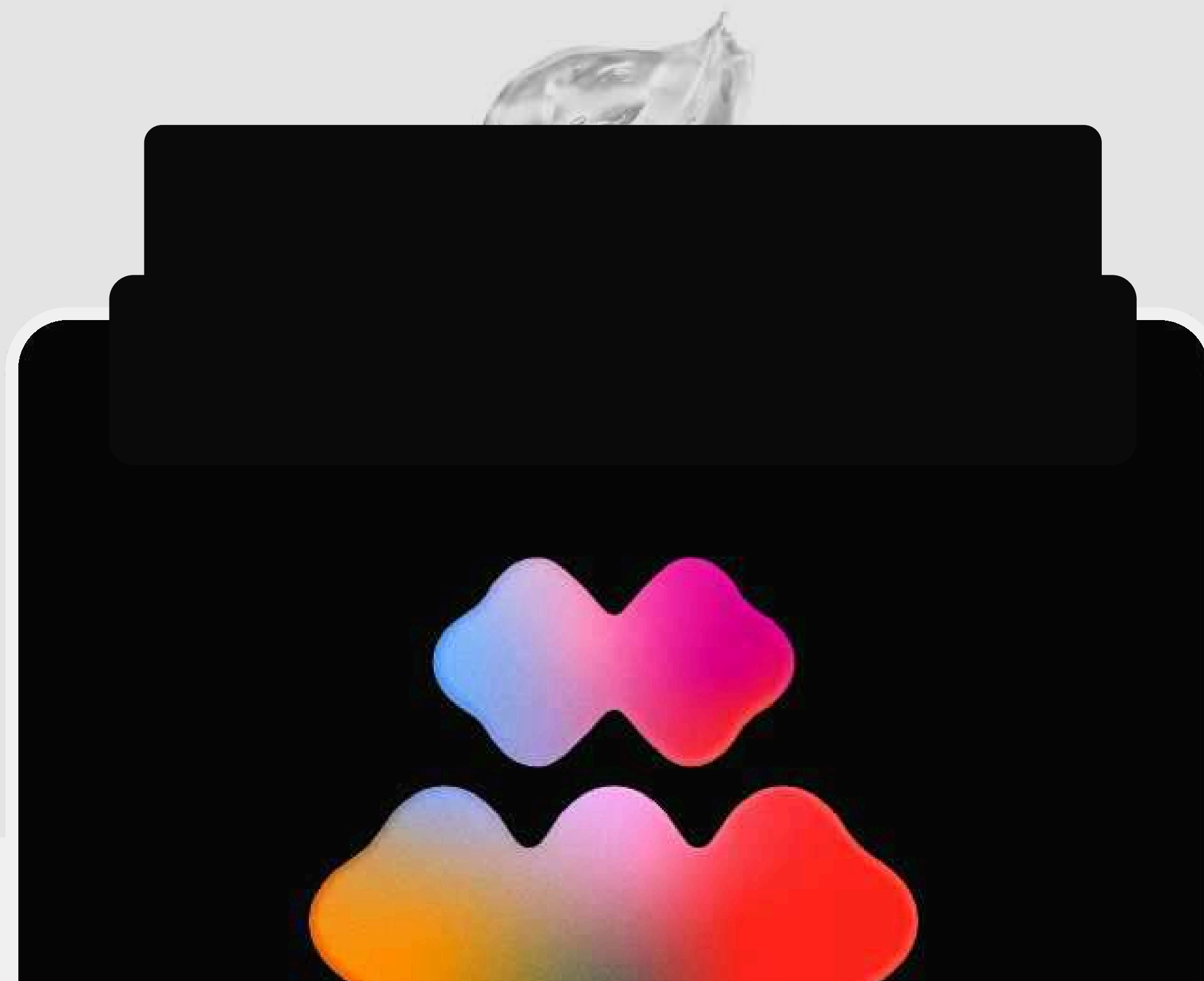
Graphics Flat Lays



Form Considerations

DOSING

Uniquely tailored dosing experience for each product.





MODULARITY

Items fit together in any arrangement—tidying counters, saving space, and adding an element of haptic delight.



A



B

LEAVE-IN CREAM

- A Single-handed dosing experience with “EZ-Squeeze”-inspired mechanism.
- B Embossed pattern and wordmark and subtle convexity/concavity increase grip while using.



A



B



INJECTION-MOLDED
POLYPROPYLENE LID

DISPENSER

SPRING

AIRLESS PUMP
MECHANISM

VACUUM PLUG

INTERNAL TUB

INJECTION
BLOW-MOLDED
HDPE EXTERNAL
TUB

STRONG HOLD STYLING GEL

- A Ergonomic lid with tactile pattern aids grip for product-covered hands.
- B Airless pump mechanism simplifies gel dosing while styling and preserves product quality.

RICH HAIR OIL

- A Twist-open cap provides varied oil flow based on user's needs.
- B Embossed elements, ergonomic thumb rest, tactile lid, and subtle convexity/concavity all increase grip while using.





Tactility

High-end matte finish and embossed textural storytelling **directly interact with the hands** throughout styling. The details are not just decoration, but are ingrained in the routine.



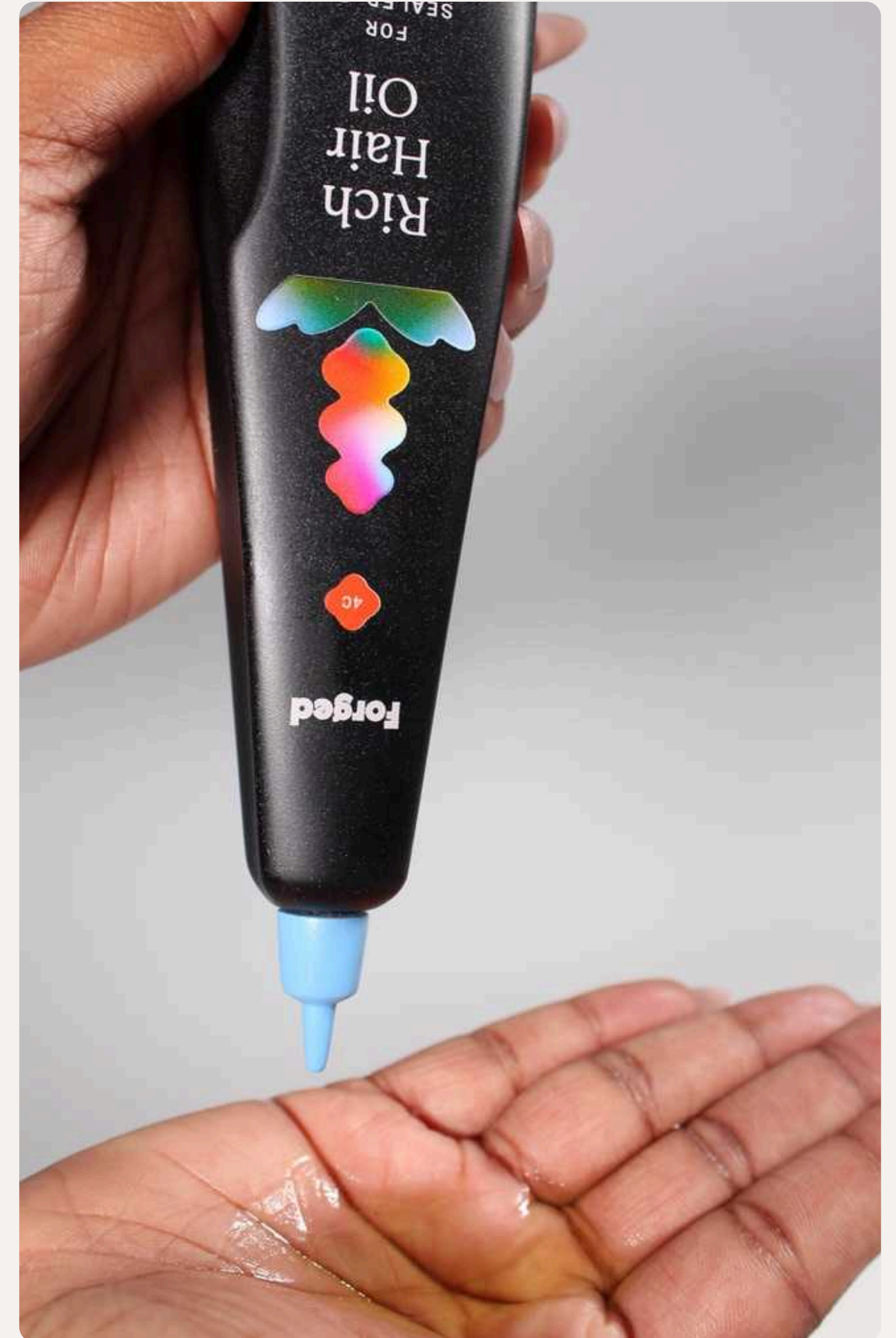
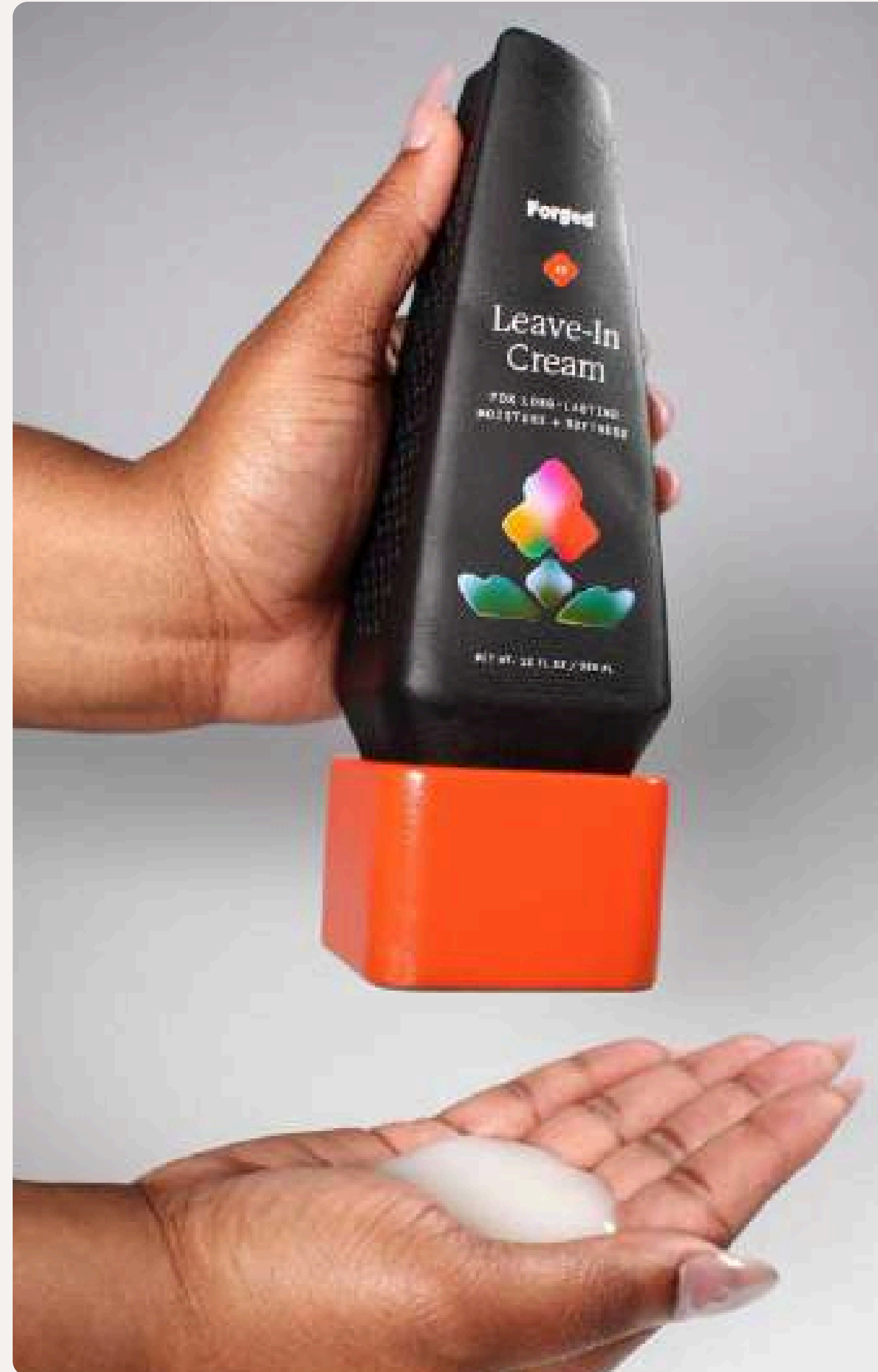
Delightful Interactions

Dosing combines elegance, simplicity and play, creating **moments of delight** like the satisfying push and release of the airless pump.



Intentional Dosing

Ensuring users get just enough product, each dosing experience is designed for both **variation and repeatability**, ensuring that users can fine-tune product amounts with consistency.



Ergonomic Grip

Fitting **snugly in the hand**, the organic forms show deliberate attention to detail, guiding the users' hands in intuitive interactions.





THE TOTAL PACKAGE, COLLAB STUDIO

UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI,
SCHOOL OF DESIGN,
DAAP

Forged

Thank You!

DESIGN CASE STUDY

