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# Project Overview

Growing up as someone with a mixed ethnic background, I didn't always know much about the Mexican culture due to my family living so far away. When I got older and realized being an artist was my passion, I wanted to find ways to connect with my culture and celebrate all the beautiful parts of it through art. This project gave me a chance to get back to my roots in both a creative and cultural sense.

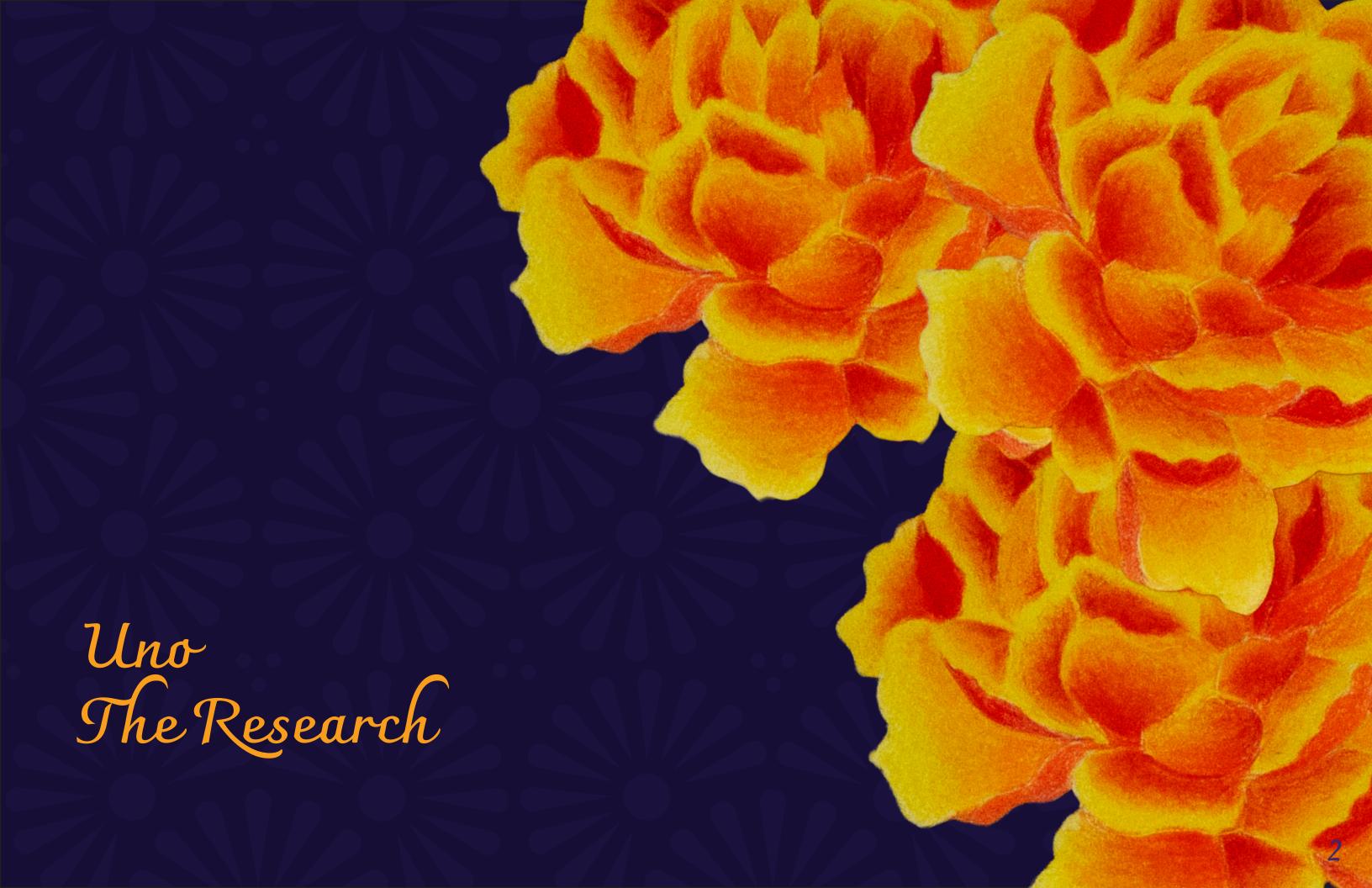
Creating my own Día De Muertos sugar skull has been in the back of my mind for a while, but I never found the right time to execute it until now. After thinking it over, I expanded the original concept to be a Día De Muertos inspired package design for an existing tequila brand that included a sugar skull bottle. With this idea in mind, I spent the next eight weeks creating a product that would make Sauza tequila unique compared to other brands on the market.

### **The Problem**

The current bottle design for Sauza tequila doesn't do much to make them stand out from other tequilas that are available. Sauza has an amazing history that shows the craftsmanship and pride of the Mexican people that isn't particularly being reflected today. Even though Sauza is the second-oldest tequila on the market, their current packaging doesn't entice the consumer to learn more about them as a brand.

### **The Solution**

The main goal is to create a Día De Muertos inspired tequila bottle and package design that sets Sauza tequila apart from other brands. I want to honor the colorful history and traditions of Mexico and Sauza tequila in a way that makes them stand out to the consumer while enticing them learn more about the brand and culture.





# Brand

To kick off this project, I first sought out a tequila brand with a history rooted in tradition and pride. That search led me to Sauza tequila, the second oldest tequila brand on the market. Sauza was started by Don Cenobio Sauza at the oldest registered tequila distillery, La Antigua Cruz in 1873. Don Cenobio is considered the "father of tequila" because he determined blue agave was the best agave for making tequila in the 1890s, and the rest of the industry followed after him.

In 1909, Don Cenobio left Sauza tequila to his son Don Eladio Sauza. During the Mexican Revolution, Don Eladio rallied patriotic sentiment to establish tequila as the official spirit of Mexico. While his father had made Sauza the first tequila to be exported to the US, Don Eladio began establishing more distribution centers to increase the exportation of Sauza. In 1946, he left Sauza to his son Don Francisco Javier Sauza.

During his tenure as head of Sauza tequila, Don Francisco wanted to elevate tequila from a campesinos (peasant farmer) drink to a refined spirit for the upper class. He also found that at foreign expos, other companies were making pseudo-tequilas so he lobbied former President Jose Lopez Portillo to create the Label of Integrity decree in 1974 that states only true tequila can come from the State of Jalisco. When he sold the company in 1988, he had managed to modernize and elevate his grandfather's company while still preserving their rich history.

Photo Credit: www.sauzatequila.com



# Tequila

Like most other companies, Sauza developed other types of tequila under different brands, but there are only three main types of tequila that are sold under the Sauza name: Hacienda Silver, Hacienda Gold, and Conmemorativo Añejo.

Specifically for this project, I wanted to focus on the Conmemorativo Añejo type of tequila since conmemorativo in English means commemorative or celebratory. Considering my package design is centered around Día De Muertos, a time for celebrating the lives of loved ones who are no longer among us, it seemed fitting to focus on the Conmemorativo Añejo tequila.

This tequila is made from the blue weber agave plant with the juices being cooked after they have been extracted from the piña, or the heart of the agave plant. Once it's been cooked, the tequila is then aged in toasted American oak casts which is what gives the tequila its unique color. The final product smells of cooked agave with herb and peppercorn undertones that have a smoky and peppery taste.

# Competition



### José Cuervo - Why are they Sauza's competitor?

José Cuervo is the oldest tequila brand on the market, and Don Cenobio learned how to make tequila from its founder Don José Antonio de Cuervo. Both tequila brands generally taste similar but José Cuervo does offer more types of tequila that are sold under their main brand. They also both fall into the same price categories, but with José Cuervo offering more types of tequila, they do have some varieties that are a bit more expensive.



### KAH - How does it compete with my project?

KAH runs at a higher price point than Sauza, and they have sugar skulls featured on their current bottles. KAH has also done skull head bottles in the past as a special edition, but these aren't readily available. Their package design also takes inspiration from other Hispanic and Latin countries that celebrate holidays like Día De Muertos. The three main tequilas that they make are sold in white, gold, and black bottles to represent Bolivia, Peru, and Nicaragua respectively.



### **Epifania - What makes them stand out?**

The most expensive brand to compete with Sauza is Epifania at \$130 per bottle. The thing that sets Epifania apart from other brands on the market is that their tequila is sold in a hand-painted skeleton bottle with some sugar skull designs on their faces. Each bottle takes three days to make, but they do only offer one type of tequila which is Azuel Anéjo.

## Día De Muertos

The last part of my research was to learn more about the holiday that would inspire my package designs. Día De Muertos (Day of the Dead) is a two-day Mexican holiday in which the spirits of loved ones are reunited with their living families. People believe that the passageway from the living world and the land of the dead will open and spirits can return. In most cultures, death would be a sad occasion but this holiday is one that celebrates the life of the people we care about instead of mourning that they are no longer with us.

While some people may think that the holiday is "Mexican Halloween" because of how close it falls on the calendar and people dress up in costume, it actually traces back to an Aztec festival that celebrated death and honored the goddess of death who protected the souls of loved ones in the afterlife. Día De Muertos is probably the most well-known holiday celebrating death but there are other countries like Columbia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua that have similar celebrations.

Photo Credit: dayofthedead.holiday





## Día De Muertos Continued

One of the important parts of Día De Muertos is when families gather together to set up ofrendas (alters) for their loved ones. Items like photographs, food, water, candles, flowers, and things the departed loved can all be found adorning an ofrenda. Another key item for ofrendas is a calavera (skull) that can be made out of different materials but most commonly is made of sugar. These skulls are brightly decorated and typically have the name of a departed loved one on the forehead.

These alters are meant to be a place where families can leave offerings for the souls of the departed to enjoy for a few more nights every year while they are visiting the land of the living. The act of setting up an ofrenda can be seen as an event to receive the spirits of loved ones and then taking it down is a way to bid them goodbye until next time.

Modern celebrations of Día De Muertos see cities having grand parades with large flower-covered floats and people dressing up skeletons. In some places, communities set up a large ofrenda in a central location where all the locals are able to contribute. While Día De Muertos may have started with the Mexican people, today everyone is welcome to respectfully participate in the holiday as we remember the loved ones we hold dear.

Photo Credit: pinterest.com



## Moodboard

The moodboard I created for this project was made with the intention of capturing the spirit of Día De Muertos. When most people think of the holiday, they often will remark on how bright and colorful every aspect is, which is something I wanted to capture. From the skeleton costumes to the ofrendas and sugar skulls, Día De Muertos showcases that even though it revolves around death, it truly is a time for the celebration of life for both the living and the dead. My moodboard helped me develop the main colors I would use for my project while also giving me inspiration for all the small details I used with every piece I created.





























## Icons

Throughout this project, there are four main icons that I wanted to incorporate throughout my designs because they have significant cultural meaning during Día De Muertos. I picked these icons out after my research phase and saw that they are prominently displayed in a lot of the images I used for my moodboad. Keeping these icons in mind helped me determine even some of the smaller elements for specific parts of my project.



### Calaveras (Skulls)

Made from all kinds of materials like sugar, clay, and more, calaveras are a prominent cultural icon for Día De Muertos. In addition to being decorations, people often paint their faces like sugar skulls for local parades and celebrations.



#### **Flowers**

During Día De Muertos, flowers, specifically Flor De Muerto (Mexican Marigolds), are used to guide spirits to their family's ofrenda. They also symbolize beauty and the fragility of life.



#### **Candles**

Almost every ofrenda includes candles to help departed loved ones find their way back to the land of the living. They also represent the love their families have for them even after they've passed.



### **Alebrijes**

Alebrijes are brightly colored creatures that are made up of different traits from multiple animals. Some consider them spirit animals that help guide loved ones to and from the realm of the dead during the celebrations.

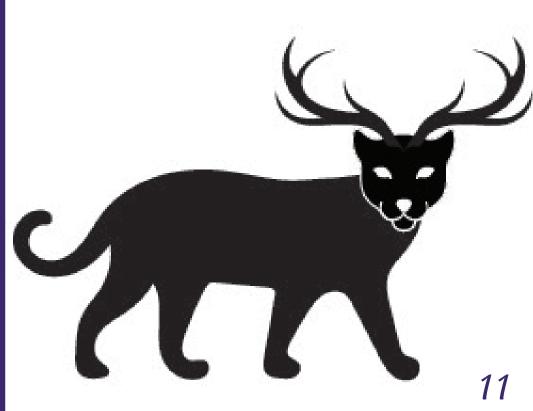
## Sketches

For this project, I only did three different sketches since I wanted to freehand some of the designs for a couple of the final pieces. I first started with a digital sketch of La Catrina where I mapped out all the main features I wanted her to have. The goal of that sketch was to get the angle of her head, the placement of her hat, and the markings on her face in the right spots so I could transfer the outline onto my final medium.

The next two sketches I did for this project were for the alebrije that would be placed on my final candle design. Since alebrije are creatures that have traits from different animals, I came up with two different designs that both have features from symbolic animals. I created both of these sketches digitally first then transferred them onto the candle to be executed in colored pencil. While I always had a solid plan of what I was doing for this project, I knew that because I was creating a lot of the pieces by hand, certain aspects of my designs would probably evolve as I worked on them. This process allowed me to really push my ideas and end up with the best representation of my skills.













To kick off my project, I started with the traditional illustration that would be featured on the front of my package design. One prominent figure that is seen during Día De Muertos is La Catrina, drawn by the famous Mexican artist José Guadalupe Posada in the 1910s. She was created as a reminder for the Mexican people that no matter the color of your skin, how rich or poor, or what society you belonged to, everyone would end up as a skeleton in the end. Today people dress up as La Catrina since she has become a symbol of pride in our culture and staying true to who you are.

Pride in our people and culture is the reason I chose La Catrina for the front of my packaging. Since she started out as a lithograph skeleton, I drew her in black and white to pay homage to her original portrayal. The marigolds in La Catrina's hair I did in bright colored pencils as Día De Muertos is a very colorful celebration of life for our loved ones.





# Sugar Skull Bottle

To help Sauza stand out from other brands on the market, I wanted to create a sugar skull-designed bottle for their tequila. While other brands have used sugar skull designs on their bottles, there is only one other brand that has bottled their product in a glass skull but was just a limited-edition item. With so many other tequila bottles looking the same, I knew that a sugar skull bottle would help Sauza pique the consumer's interest and be something that collectors might seek out.

To start this piece, I chose a darker background color for the skull in order to be a good contrast against the bright colors I chose for the designs. I then replicated some of the same elements that I had drawn onto my La Catrina illustration to tie the two together. Lastly, I added some new elements to the design like the flowers on the temple and back in addition to a heart surrounding the top of the bottle to make this piece unique.

While some of the designs were already planned in order to tie back to other pieces, this sugar skull bottle was largely freehand. The reason I did that was because true decorative and candied sugar skulls are made the same way. Artisans in Mexico will paint skulls in between customers and families gathering together to make their own candied ones to place on their ofrendas. I wanted to keep some of the handcrafted feeling in my bottle design to honor the traditional way these sugar skulls are created by the Mexican people.



# Ofrenda Candles

During Día De Muertos, candles play a significant role in helping to guide the spirits of our loved ones to the ofrenda where they can collect the offerings for them. For this candle design, there were a couple of key elements that I wanted to include, the first of which was an alebrije. Since some people believe that alebrijes are spirit guides and candles help guide loved ones, it made sense to put the two elements together.

One of the alebrije's I designed is a Xoloitzcuintli, also known as a Mexican hairless dog, with monarch butterfly wings. Xolo dogs have a symbolic history that dates back to the ancient Mayans who believed that they were sent to protect humans in life and then guide them to the afterlife when they passed. Monarch butterflies have also come to be an important symbol because every year millions of monarchs arrive in Mexico in time for the holiday as they reach the end of their migration journey which has led people to believe that they are souls returning for Día De Muertos.

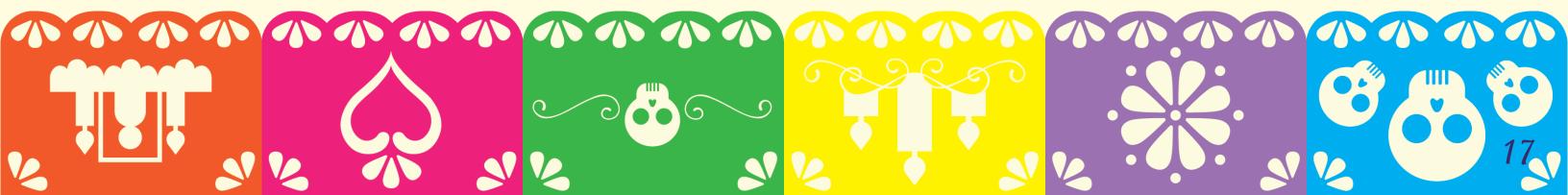
The second alebrije is a jaguar with white-tailed deer antlers. The symbolism for jaguars also date back to the Mayans, representing both strength and courage, but were also said to be able to cross between the living world and the afterlife as well. White-tailed deer symbolize goodness and some believe that they are a message from the divine. The symbolism for all of these creatures is why I chose them for my alebrijes.



# Candle Papel Picado

The second element for my candle design that I wanted to capture was papel picado, or perforated paper. These banners are made from sheets of tissue paper that are carefully cut in order to depict different scenes or symbols that have meaning to the celebration. It is a craft that is created and on display for more occasions than just Día De Muertos but can commonly be seen incorporated into ofrendas during the holiday.

Each of the six different papel picado banners that I created showcases some icons that can be found in my other designs. For example, flowers are featured on both my illustrated packaging design and sugar skull tequila bottle. Additionally, the heart icon can be seen around the top of the tequila bottle and is a popular symbol in Mexico for expressing love and passion. Since these banners were placed on the top and bottom of my candle design, I also wanted to include a small ofrenda scene on one of the banners to pay homage to where this candle would be during Día De Muertos.





## Poster Card

The last piece I wanted to include with my bottle design was a poster card. Sometimes when brands create a beautifully designed package, the consumer wants to keep it, but it can be hard to keep lying around their home depending on the size. This card is something that a person can keep without needing to hang onto the actual packaging the bottle comes in unless they wanted to.

The front of the card features the La Catrina illustration that I did for the front of my packaging and the same dark background I created as well. Then on the backside of the card is a story with more information about some of the elements I've used throughout this project. This story tells the consumer what Día De Muertos is and why it's an important holiday for the Mexican people. I also made sure to include La Catrina in as well so they would be able to understand why she is featured on the front. When including Sauza at the end of my story, I wanted to finish it in a way that seemed like they were making a toast with the consumer. Saying salud at the end of a toast is a tradition my family has always done when we are celebrating different occasions, like Día De Muertos.

The full story is available on the following page.

# Poster Card Story

Every November, families gather together to celebrate the life of loved ones that are no longer with us. Día De Muertos is a long standing tradition from Mexico that sees people embracing death and welcoming spirits back to the land of the living for a short time. This holiday was created based on our ancestor's belief that death was not an occasion to mourn but to honor those who mattered in our lives.

With bright colors showcased everywhere like in paper banners and elaborately decorated ofrendas, the celebrations have grown to also include new customs and icons over time. One face you're bound to see around modern day fiestas is La Catrina. It's easy to spot the beautiful skeletal woman with her elegant outfit and adorned by a large feathered hat. While starting out as a drawing, she has become a symbol of the pride we have in our people and staying true to who you are.

On holidays like Día De Muertos, welcoming new ideas and customs in our celebration is important to making our culture flourish but we should also never forget our beautiful history of rich traditions. Being one of the oldest tequilas in the world, we at Sauza know it's important to not only honor our past but also rejoice what lies before us in the here and now. We hope that next time you're honoring the people in your lives, you'll make us a part of the celebration.

To those who are gone, never forgotten and our loved ones here today we say - ¡salud!

Refreshingly Real Mexican Tequila Learn more at www.sauzatequila.com

# Final Package Design

Once all the separate pieces of my project were finished, I focused on creating the final package design. For most of the packaging, I used a dark purple color so that my illustration would stand out on the front and made a subtle floral background pattern that matched the flowers on the back of my bottle design. While creating my mockup, I also decided that the sides of the package would have plastic windows so the consumer could see the sugar skull bottle inside. Lastly, I added a raised base on the inside of the package to mimic the different levels of an ofrenda and also be a place where both the candle and poster card would be stored.







The biggest thing this project has taught me is that roots are important in two ways: supporting and researching them. Like many other artists, I started out with just a pencil and paper, but as I've progressed in my career, I've gotten further away from traditional meDía. Every single piece in this project had some element that was done completely by hand, and they've each helped me improve skills that haven't been used in a while. I'm thankful for the opportunity to get my hands dirty for the first time in a long time and help support my creative foundation.

Additionally, the research I did not only helped me feel more connected to my culture, it also gave me an incredible groundwork to guide my designs. There was much I didn't know about Sauza and Día De Muertos that without spending time digging into them, I wouldn't have been able to give this project true meaning. I can say that every pencil mark and paint stroke had a specific purpose to them because of what I had been able to learn.

In the end, this project was not only a way for me to challenge what I thought I was capable of as a designer but also reminded me how lucky I am to be a part of such an amazing culture.

