

Behind the scenes of

MESO

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Project Brief

Meso, a Mediterranean restaurant chain present in major international airports, was in need of branding and collateral. Unlike the various fast-food and convenience food joints widely prevalent in airports, Meso offers a more elevated experience akin to fine-dining restaurants.

The restaurant specializes in cuisine from all seven countries within the Mediterranean region. The branding and collateral materials were to reflect the authentic and diverse dining experience they provide for airport travelers.

Objectives:

- Develop a branding strategy that **communicates the essence of Mediterranean** cuisine and culture in a delightful manner.
- Create visually appealing collateral materials that **enhance brand recognition and attract travelers**.
- Ensure **consistency in branding across all touchpoints**, including menus, signage, collateral, and packaging.
- **Enhance the overall dining experience** for travelers.

Deliverables:

Brand identity
Menus
Placemats
Coasters
Takeaway bags
Staff uniforms



Target Audience

Airport diners represent a unique target audience group because of their specific needs, preferences, and behaviors within the airport environment. Given Meso's offerings, it caters to an even more specific target audience.

- Because of their relatively higher price points and luxurious dining experience, customers typically dine at Meso when **they have more time** on their hands – long layovers, delayed flights, etc.
- Meso offers a quieter and more relaxed environment, which is why a majority of their diners are **solo travellers looking to get away** from the hustle and bustle of the airport.
- With its worldly cuisine and dining experience, Meso's diners come from **diverse demographic backgrounds**, including business travelers, leisure travelers, families, solo travelers, and international tourists.

Insight

Since Meso caters mainly to travellers looking to pass time before their flights or trying to stay awake and endure a long layover, **engaging diners** can help them beat boredom, add value to their experience, and alleviate their discomfort of dining solo.

Ideation

While the restaurant took customers on a culinary tour of the seven most popular cuisines of the region, I wanted to add to the experience with a tour of my own. I brainstormed for various ways that I could do this.



Having weighed out various approaches, I shared some concepts with peers and arrived at the final concept of **featuring food-related customs and sayings from each country** with accompanying quirky illustrations on the collateral. People found this to be the most engaging while remaining unintrusive and easy to consume.

Not only would this approach be in keeping with the cuisine and context, it would also offer customers **a more immersive dining experience, with stories that would engage, educate and delight** weary travellers as they stopped for a bite before their flights.

Research

Once I'd developed the idea to amuse diners with **facts, customs and idioms**, I went on to research and collect the same for each of the seven countries. This was a long and fascinating process during which I uncovered many gems and then chose the best ones under each category for use across placemats, coasters and menus.

Egypt

Eat with the right hand only.

It is considered a sincere compliment to take second helpings.

Looking at another person's food is rude and a sign of envy.

Always show appreciation for the meal.

Greece

Don't take a seat until you are told where to sit.

Don't touch your plate until the host begins eating.

When you are finished lay your fork and knife across the plate.

Plates are smashed to ward off evil during celebrations.

Turkey

Glasses are always refilled even before they reach the halfway empty mark.

Turks tend to eat at quite a slow, relaxed pace.

It is common to stop between courses to smoke a cigarette before moving on to the next dish.

Lebanon

"A day of honey, a day of onions."

Describes impermanence - the concept that things are always changing, that bitter days of onion will eventually end and there will be days of honey, and so on.

France

"To have an artichoke heart"

The expression is quite simply derived from a vegetable image, as many artichoke leaves as lovers, to mean falling in love often and easily.

The heart of the artichoke (also called artichoke bottom) is the central part of the plant from which all the leaves are attached. It is the heart of the artichoke that is edible and not the bitter leaves of the vegetable. We therefore eat the heart and a little of this heart on each of the leaves that we detach as we eat the artichoke. By analogy with the way of eating the artichoke, an artichoke heart gives a little of its love to each new person it meets. And since there are many leaves in an artichoke, it makes them lovers!

Moodboards

Culture

With all the content in place, the next step was to collect and organise relevant visuals that represented Mediterranean culture. From this moodboard, I derived inspiration for **colors, patterns and illustration styles for the customs/idioms.**



Moodboards

Food

This moodboard was assembled with visuals surrounding Mediterranean cuisine in order to gather inspiration for the food illustrations including **serveware, food forms, and even food handling behaviors.**



Tone of Voice

Combining Meso's elevated experience with the delightful nature of the concept, the intended tone for the brand identity and collateral had to be...

elegant
&
playful

Logo

Explorations

Enriched with visual cues, I proceeded to take an initial stab at the logomark. I sketched out concepts that utilised various different approaches including **food elements, geometric forms, and architectural structures.**

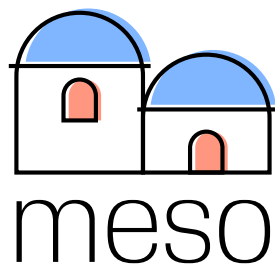


Logo

Refined options

Three concepts appealed to me the most for their **immediate recognition, inherent Mediterranean-ness, and their ability to pique interest**. These were developed into vector versions on Adobe Illustrator.

At this point, one logo stood out the most, capturing an **elegant playfulness** that was appropriate for Meso, but also offered **versatility** in its usage and a form that was **easy to incorporate** in various formats.



Final

Logo

Final versions

In keeping with the tone of voice, I played with this final logo to see all the **various compositions** I could use to fit it into different formats.



MESO

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Color Palette

Knowing that the **restaurant interiors** prominently featured blue tones, I knew that my palette would have to incorporate blue too. This worked well with the **inferences from the moodboards** and led me to a few different options of color palettes.

Option 1: This palette, although accurately Mediterranean, seemed **too clinical**



Option 2: This palette was very promising but appeared **too beachy**



Option 3: While this palette was elegant, it **wasn't playful enough**



Final

Option 4: This was a refreshing take on the previous palette, **perfectly balancing elegant and playful**, with a versatile neutral base and vibrant accents.



Color Palette

Once the color palette was finalised, I set guidelines for myself on the **appropriate usage of the colors** to maintain the integrity of the brand personality.



Melon

Secondary color for visual elements

#FF9A96

C 0 | M 71 | Y 61 | K 0



Ecu

Neutral tone for backgrounds and relief

#FBF6E9

C 1 | M 2 | Y 8 | K 0



Sherbet

Accent color for highlights in illustrations and text

#FF6E5D

C 0 | M 71 | Y 61 | K 0



Ocean

Primary color for main content

#4671FF

C 74 | M 59 | Y 0 | K 0

Typography

Having used the typeface 'The Bigmouth' for the logo, I knew it would be the primary and display font for the brand. I was on the lookout for **a typeface that complemented the primary brand typeface** and could be used across more widespread applications including sub-headings and body copy.

After studying various combinations, I identified Young Serif as the secondary typeface – another serif typeface **that bore some visual similarities with The Bigmouth and that lent itself well to being a body copy font.**

BIGMOUTH
and Gotham

BIGMOUTH
and Pill Gothic

BIGMOUTH
and Noto Serif

BIGMOUTH
and Young Serif

Final

BIGMOUTH
and Montserrat

BIGMOUTH
and Baskerville

BIGMOUTH
and Noto Sans

BIGMOUTH
and Poppins

Typography

With the brand typefaces set, I defined **guidelines for their usage** based on their attributes, to ease the process of designing layouts for the collateral.

The Bigmouth
160pt | 340 tracking

G R E E C E

Young Serif
16pt | 0 tracking

During celebratory meals, plates are smashed. (Even the Greeks hate doing dishes).

The Bigmouth
32pt | 160 tracking

GOURMET SANDWICHES

Young Serif
10pt | 0 tracking

(12:00 noon - 5:00 pm)

TOMATO CAPRESE IN FOCACCIA

Fresh mozzarella, tomato, basil and arugula on a artisan focaccia with extra virgin olive oil and balsamic glaze

Copy

Before creating the illustrations and working on the layouts, I decided to write the copy for all the collateral.

I identified that the placemats would feature dining customs, the coasters would feature food idioms, and the menu would feature the food facts. I looked at each piece of information I had chosen and tried various ways of writing it, finally arriving at a style that was **informative with a touch of wit**.

Original custom: In Egypt, looking at a fellow diner's plate is considered to be rude. When someone stares at another person's food, he or she sends a signal of desire and envy.

Copy options:

Observing what's on someone's plate is considered impolite.

It's considered rude to glance at another's plate during a meal.

Peering into another's plate is generally frowned upon.

Final → **Looking down into someone's plate is, well, looked down upon.**

Peeking at a fellow diner's plate is the ultimate culinary faux pas.

Glancing at a plate screams, 'I want what you're having!'

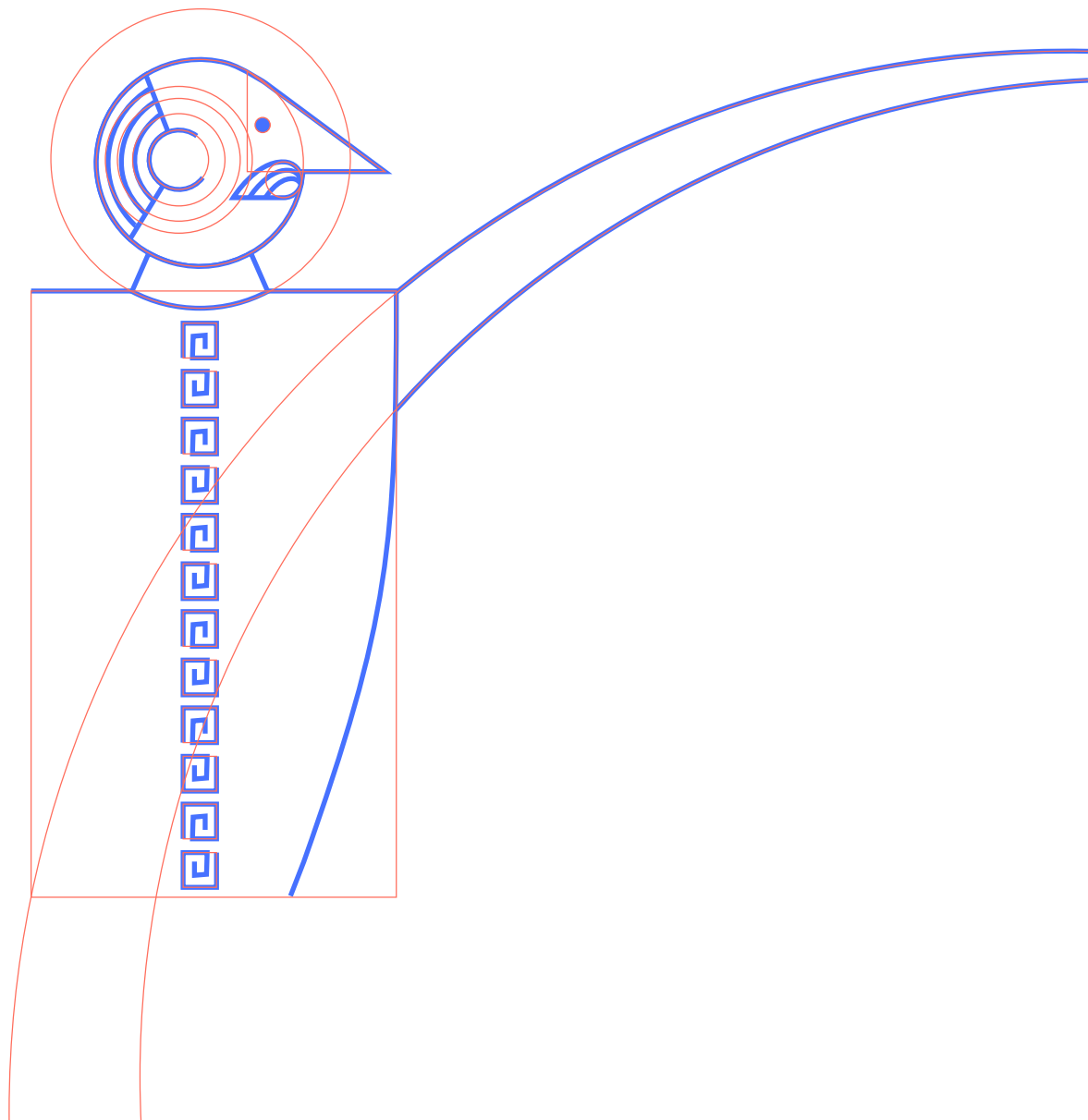
Eyeing someone's dish is envy in culinary code.

Peeking at plates is the silent scream of food jealousy

Illustration

Construction

My visual research indicated that Mediterranean aesthetics were typically **rooted in simple geometry** and so I began constructing Meso's illustration style using basic shapes to create the forms.

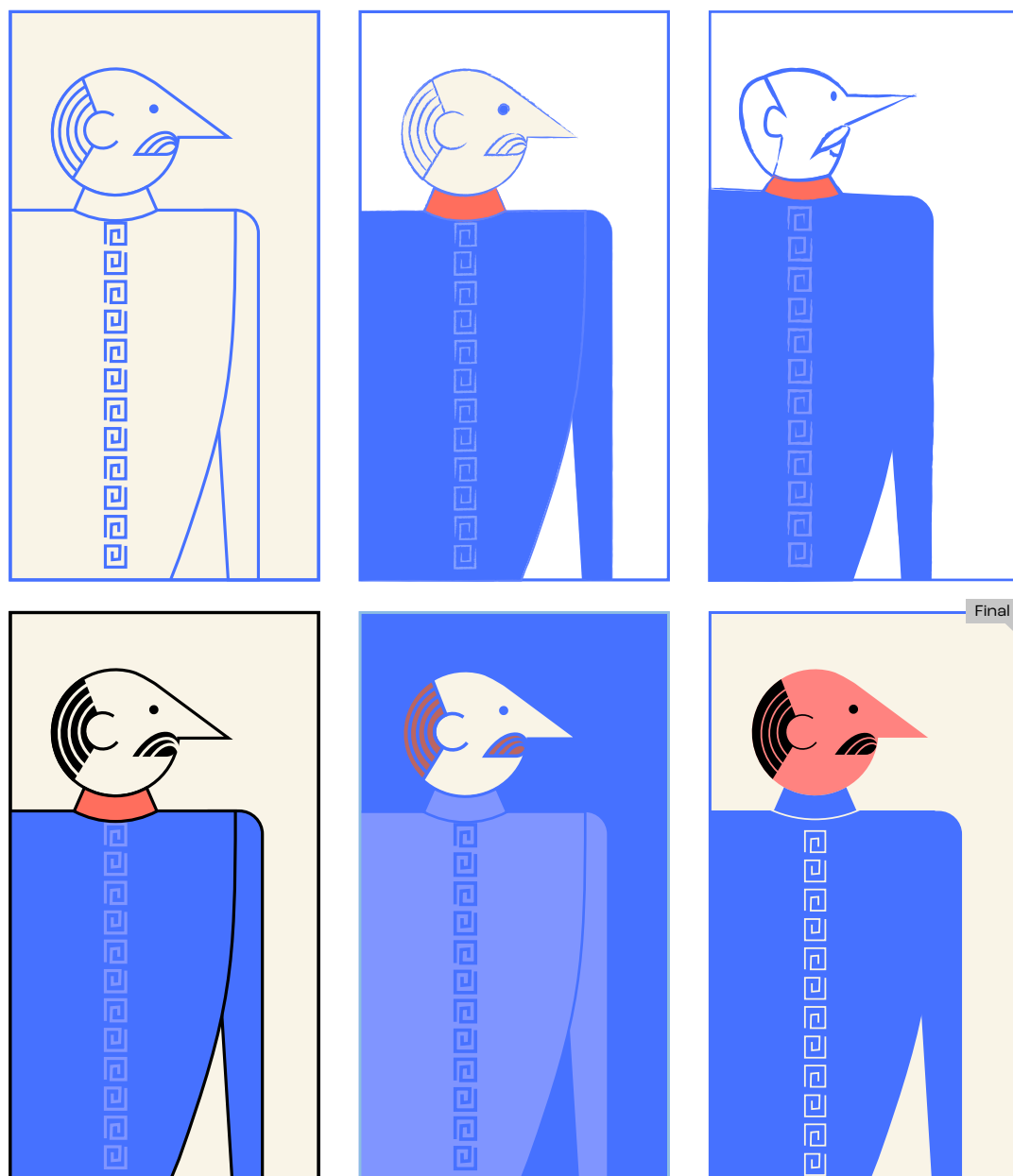


Illustration

Styling

With the geometric style in place, I experimented with fills, strokes, negative space, line quality, color, and contrast.

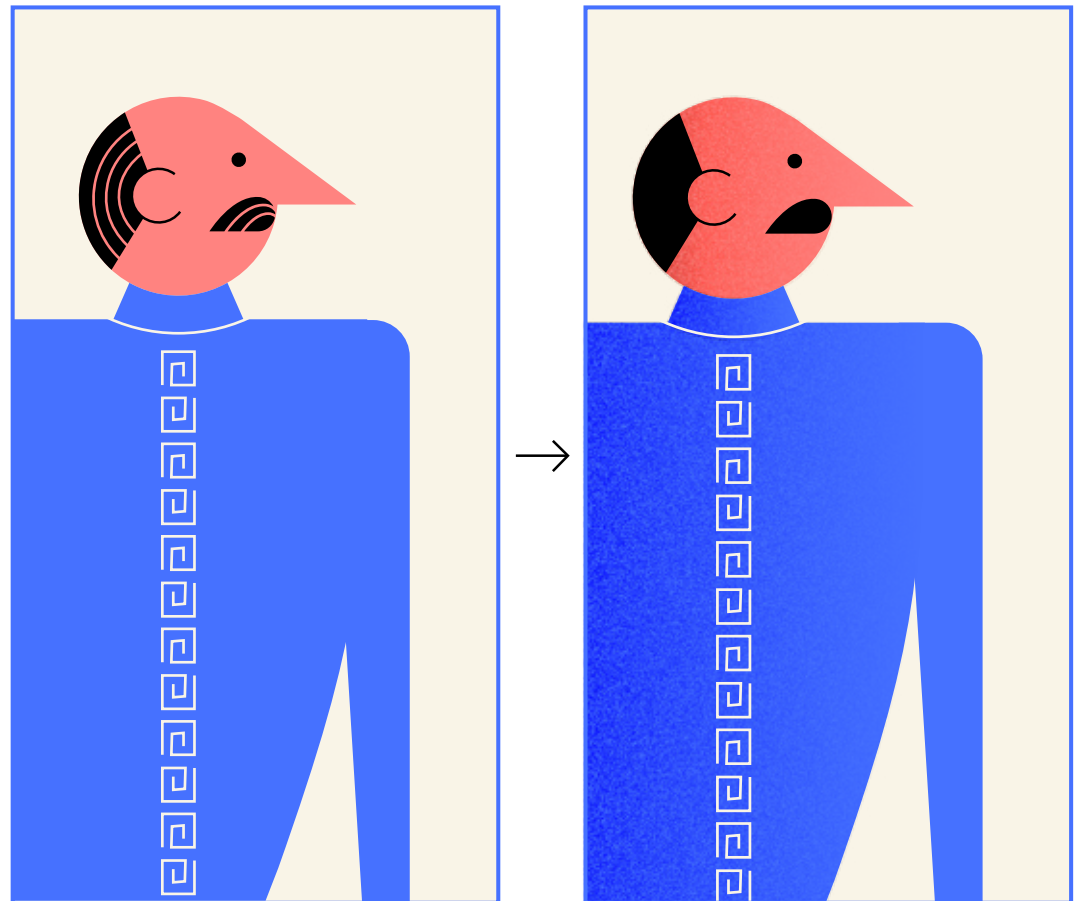
I finally chose a style that used all **color-filled shapes with ample contrast against the background and strokes to add detail.**



Illustration

Detailing

Upon closer evaluation and feedback from others that the illustration style looked a little flat, I decided to reduce some of the stroke detailing and instead use **noise to create depth, texture, and complexity.**



Final

Illustration

Male characters

Taking **cues from the attire and facial features** of people from the Mediterranean countries, I sketched and then developed the characters that would be used to tell the food-related stories across the collateral.

To ensure an almost-equal balance, I chose to represent countries by either male or female characters based on which had more discerning visual traits.

Greece



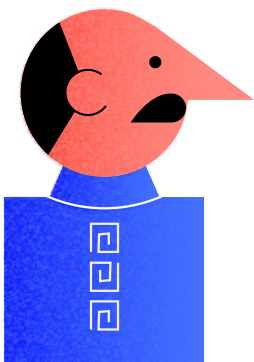
Spain



France



Turkey



Illustration

Female characters

The female characters used the same basic geometric construction but with **more slender features** and an array of interesting hairstyles.

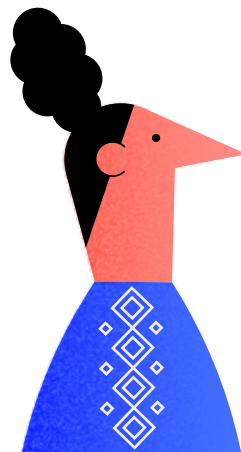
Italy



Lebanon



Egypt



Illustration

Scenarios

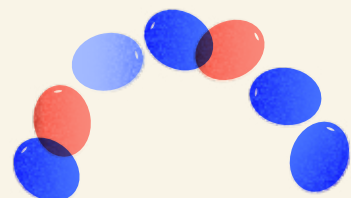
Each scenario for the placemats and coasters were visualised in as many interesting, whimsical ways as I could think of, and then **the most promising sketches were turned into final illustrations.** I decided to use characters for the placemats, balanced with just objects on the coasters.

SPAIN



Taking a long afternoon nap after a longer lunch is not only customary, it's necessary.

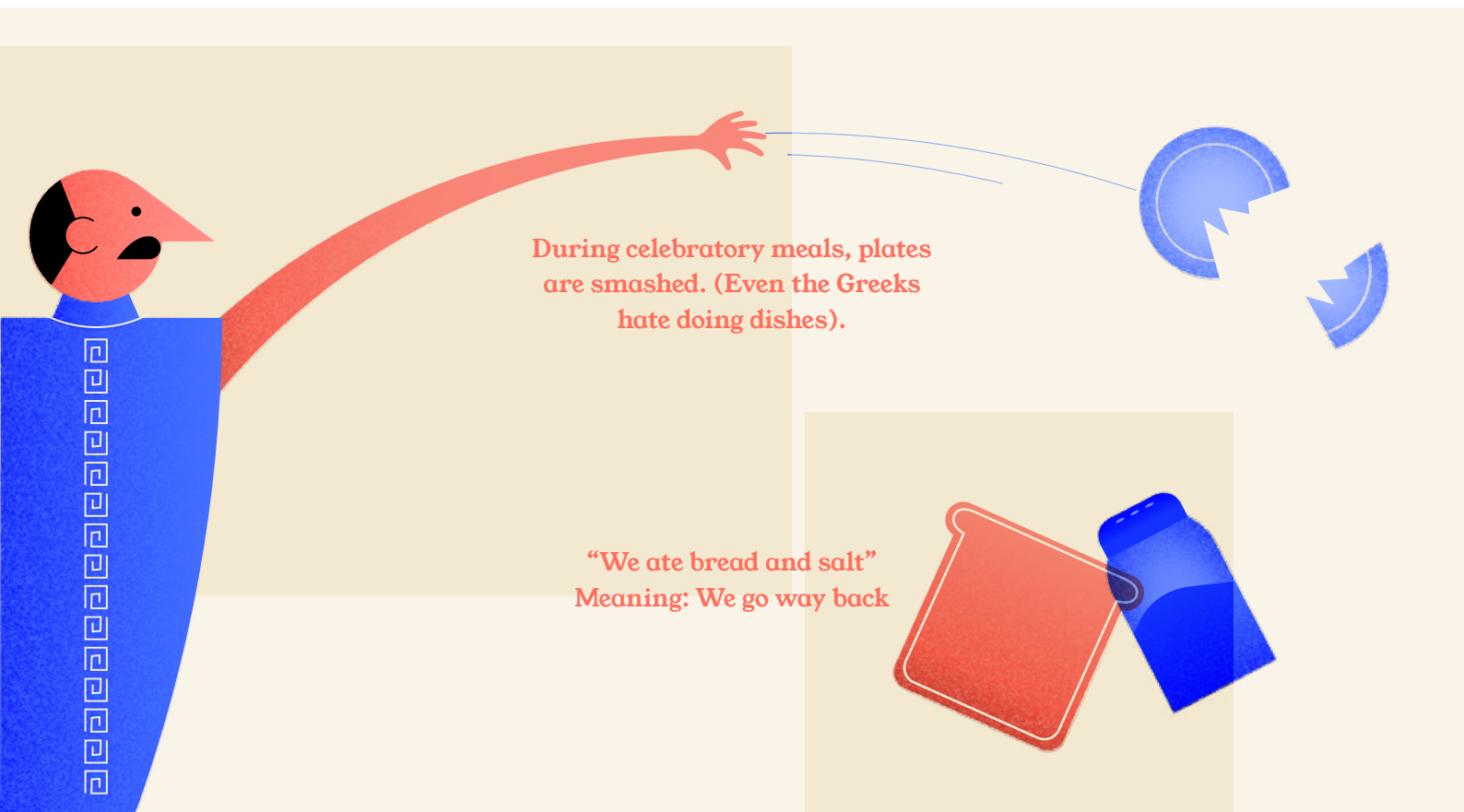
"To have bad grapes"
Meaning: To be in a bad mood



Illustration

Scenarios

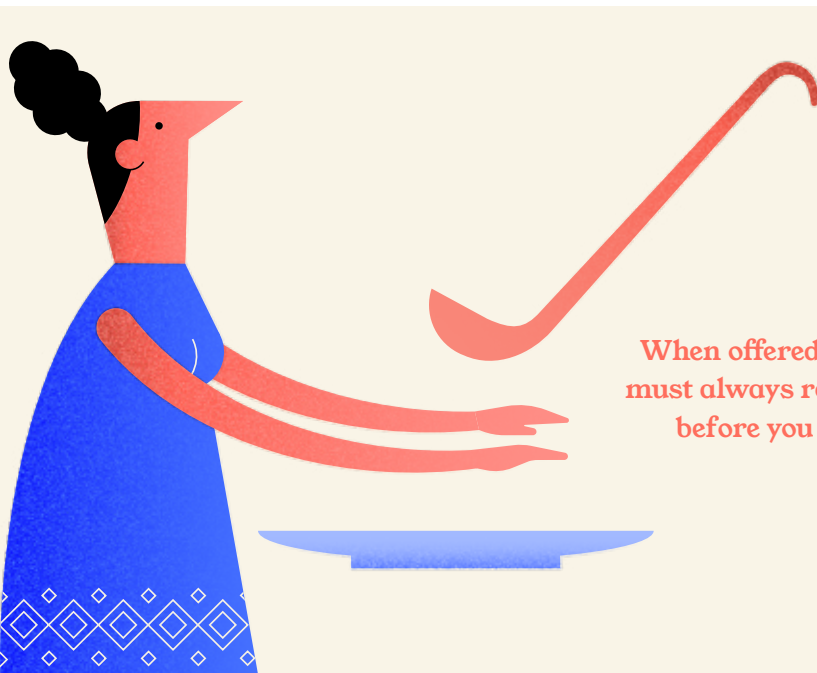
GREECE



Illustration

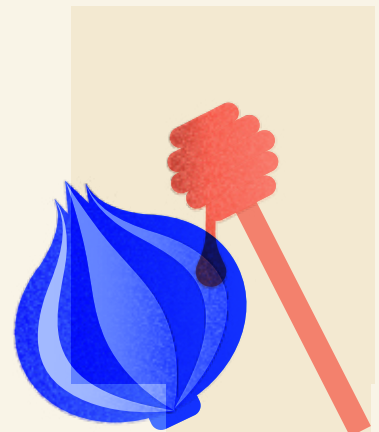
Scenarios

LEBANON



When offered food, you must always refuse twice before you accept.

“A day of honey, a day of onions”
Meaning: A good day, a bad day



Illustration

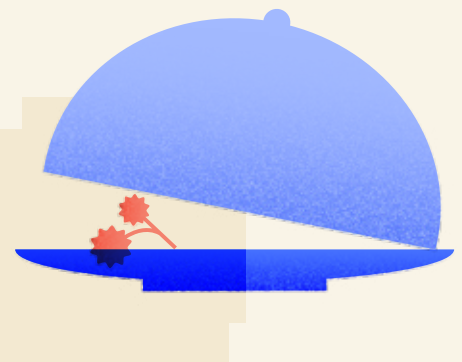
Scenarios

TURKEY



The Turks never see the glass as half empty. They refill it before the halfway point.

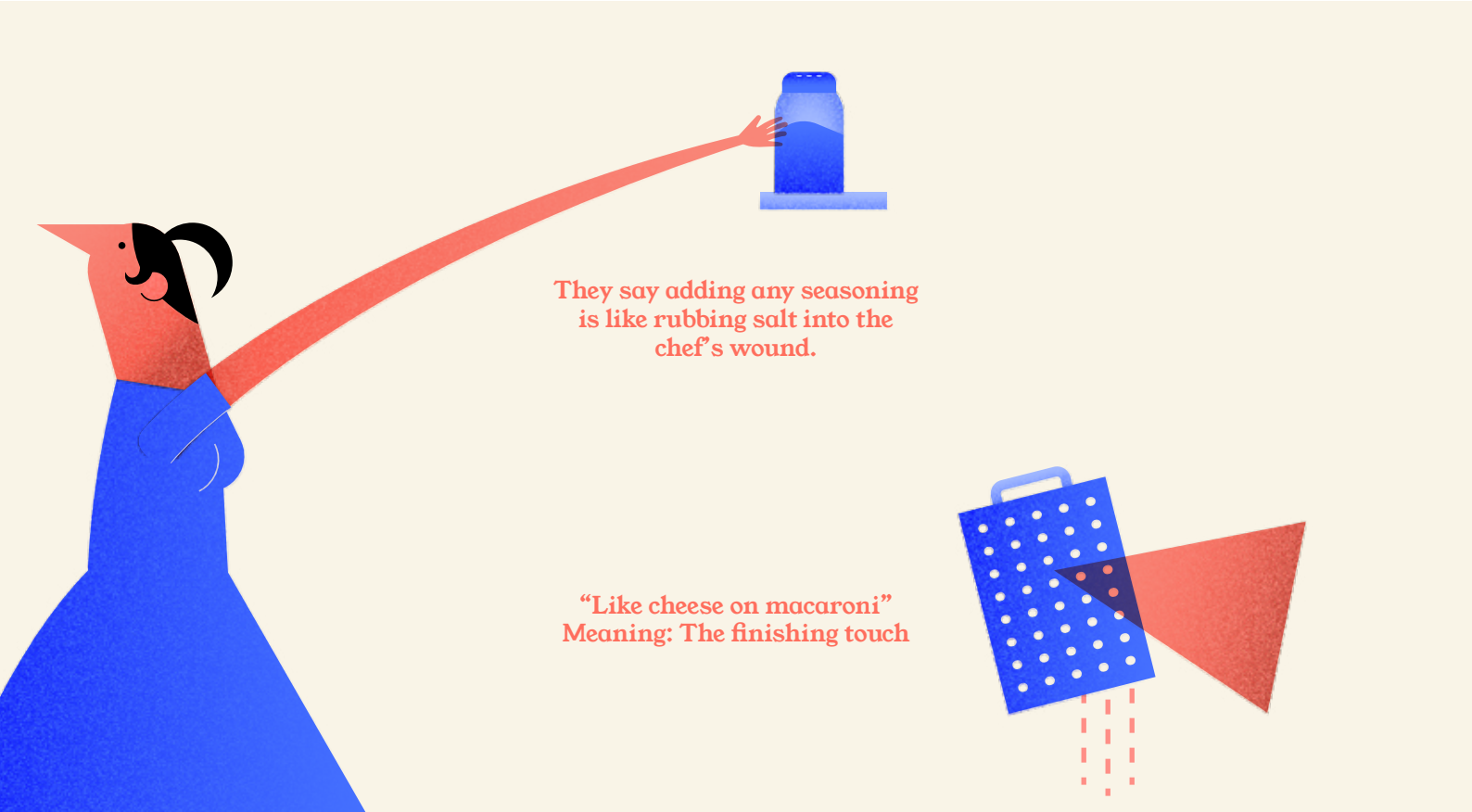
“Being parsley to everything”
Meaning: Being nosy



Illustration

Scenarios

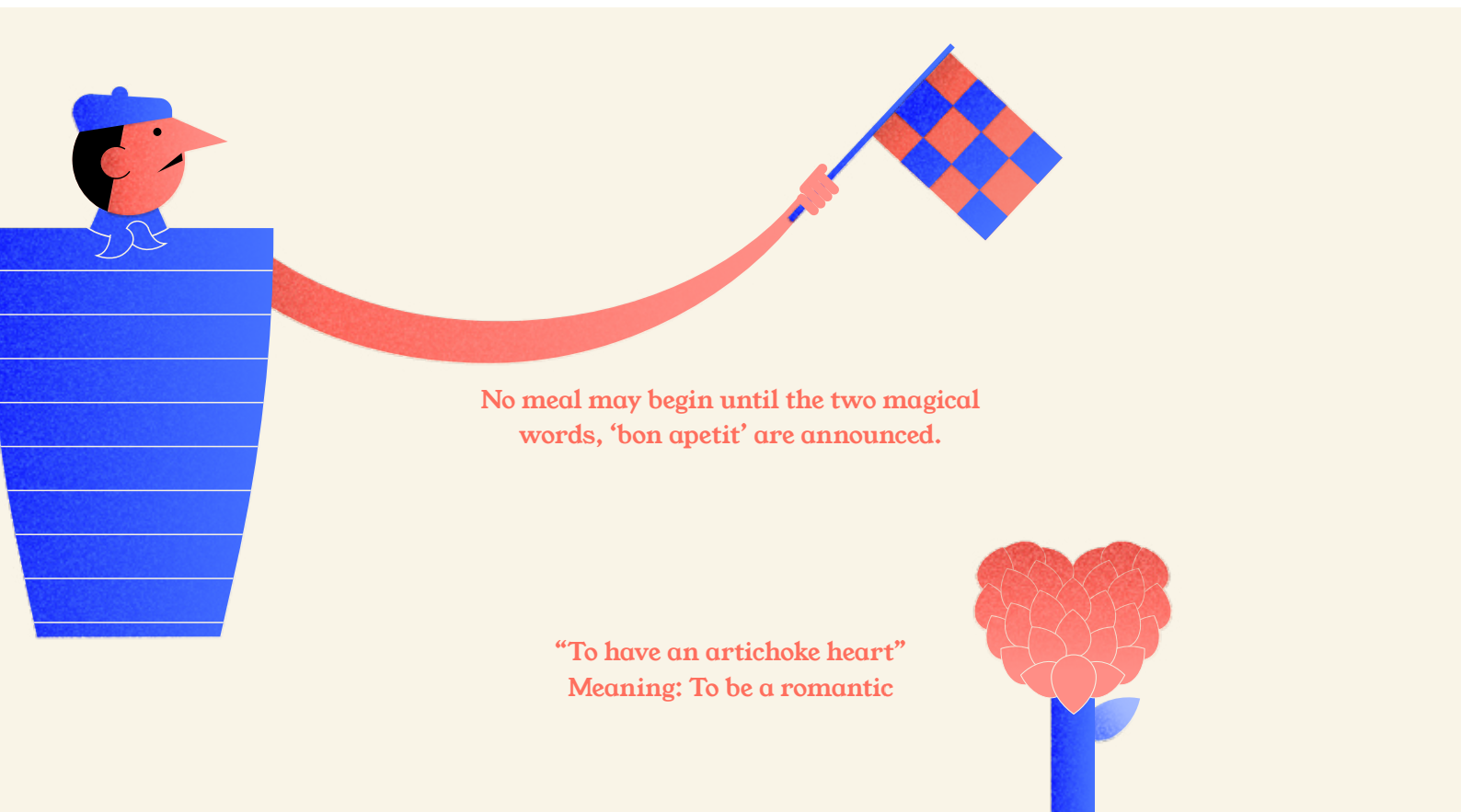
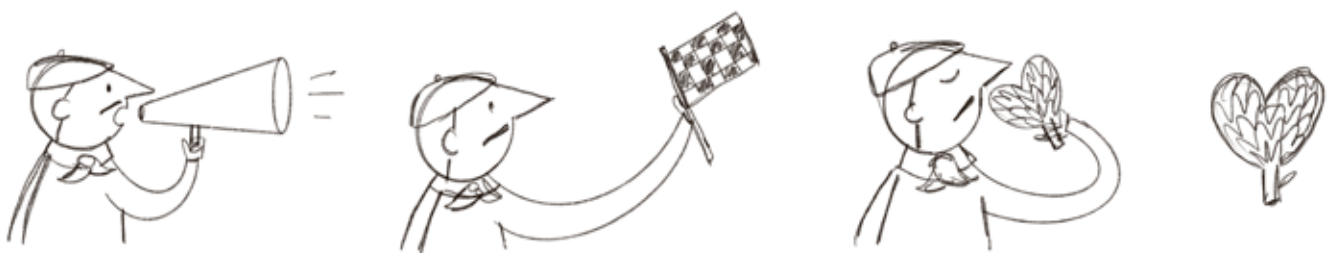
ITALY



Illustration

Scenarios

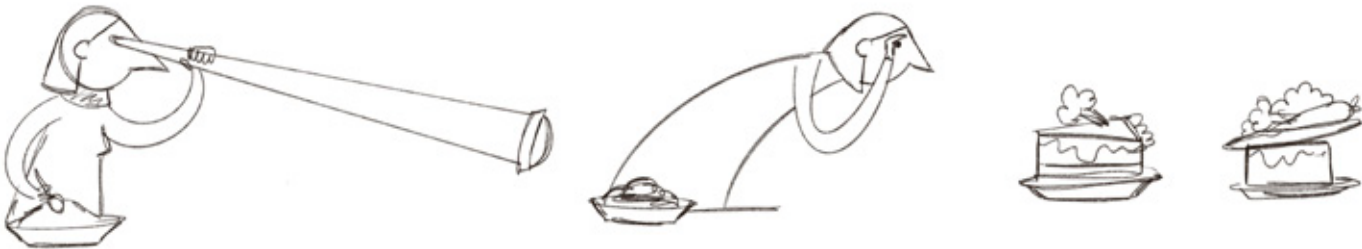
FRANCE



Illustration

Scenarios

EGYPT

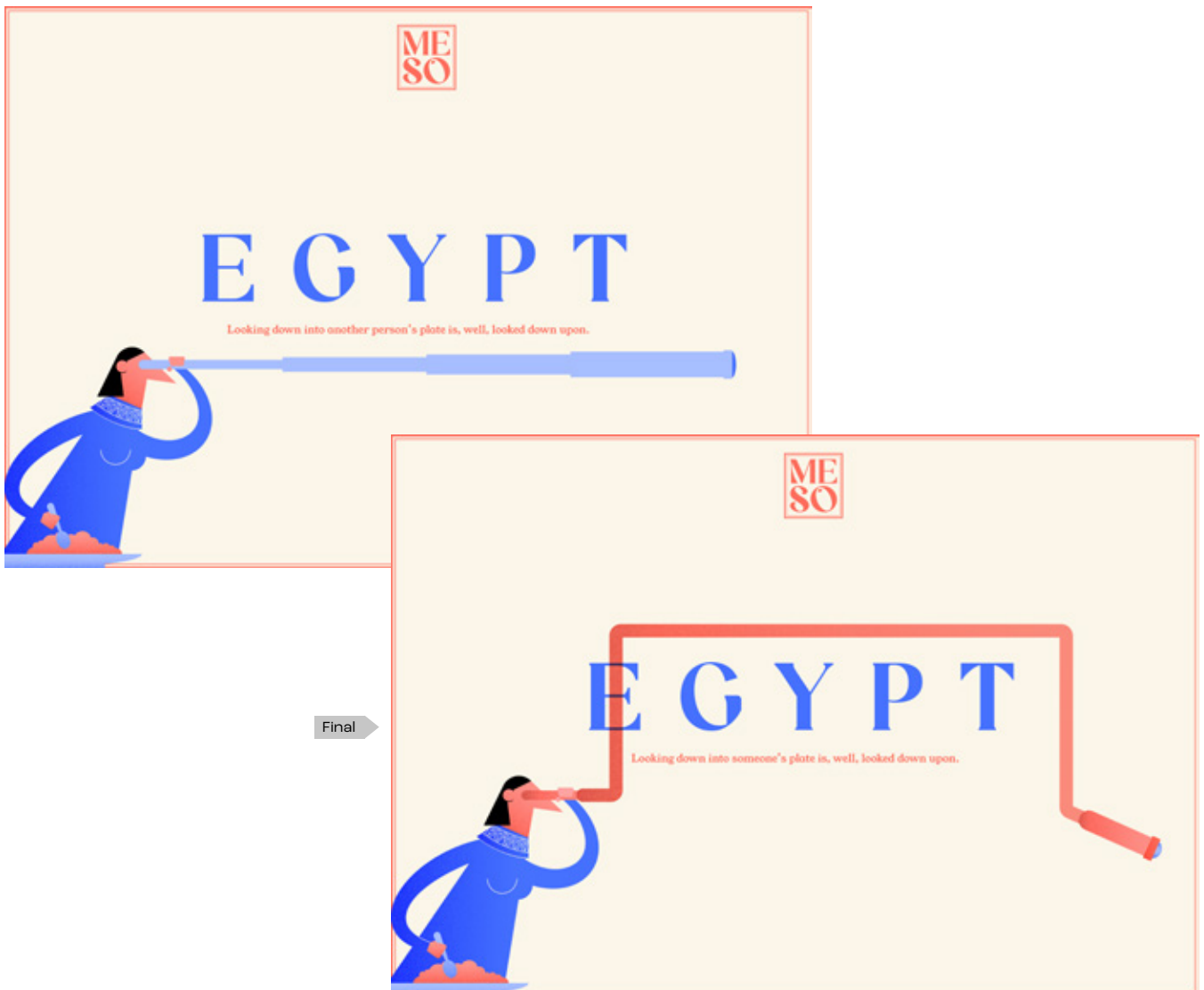


Layouts

Placemats

With the typography and illustration guidelines set, laying out the basic elements of the placemats was easy. However, I still **wanted to create a visually unexpected composition**. I decided to use the length of the space to enhance the whimsy of the illustrations, while placing the text square in the middle for maximum emphasis.

A couple of trials led me to the final layout that **stretched the illustration across the placemat and included interplay between the text and illustration through overlays**.



Layouts

Coasters

For the coasters, I experimented with reversed colors but fell back to the subtle Ecrú backgrounds as they were easier on the eyes and provided the right contrast for the content. The **same overlay concept was implemented** in these as well, but just between the elements of the illustration so as not to compromise readability in this smaller format.

Final



Layouts

Menu

Trials for the menu began by laying out all the textual content and looking for opportunities to add relevant illustrated concepts. While I tried to use the overlays in this, it created clutter because of the amount of content and interfered with the function of the menu. I settled on **including the food facts and illustrations in strategic negative spaces, but retained the whimsically exaggerated human forms.**

PASTA BOWLS
(12:00 noon - 5:00 pm)

Pasta was originally eaten by hand, without any sauce!

CHOICE OF PASTA
Spaghetti/ Fettuccini/ Penne/ Forfalle/Fusilli served with Garlic bread

CHOICE OF SAUCES

Marinara- classic Italian tomato sauce with garlic and basil	£250
Alfredo Sauce- heavy cream with parmesan and butter and fresh mushroom	£250
Aglie E Olio - pasta tossed in garlic ,olive and chilli flakes	£250

ADD ONS:

Grilled chicken breast	£120
Grilled prawns	£225

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ADD ONS:

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Final

Layouts

Takeaway bags and uniforms

Having been given the specifications of the final bags and aprons that Meso would use, I could only play with the visuals I would place on them. I decided to use the most **playful versions of the logo** to ensure that these pieces of the puzzle were just as delightful as the others, but maintained the minimal elegance of Meso.



The End

Although in Mediterranean countries, it's polite to leave a little food on your plate when you've finished eating to indicate you've been well fed and aren't still hungry.