

Out-of-this-world **PACKAGING**

Award-winning packaging designer Charles Woodhead talks 'boxed set design'...

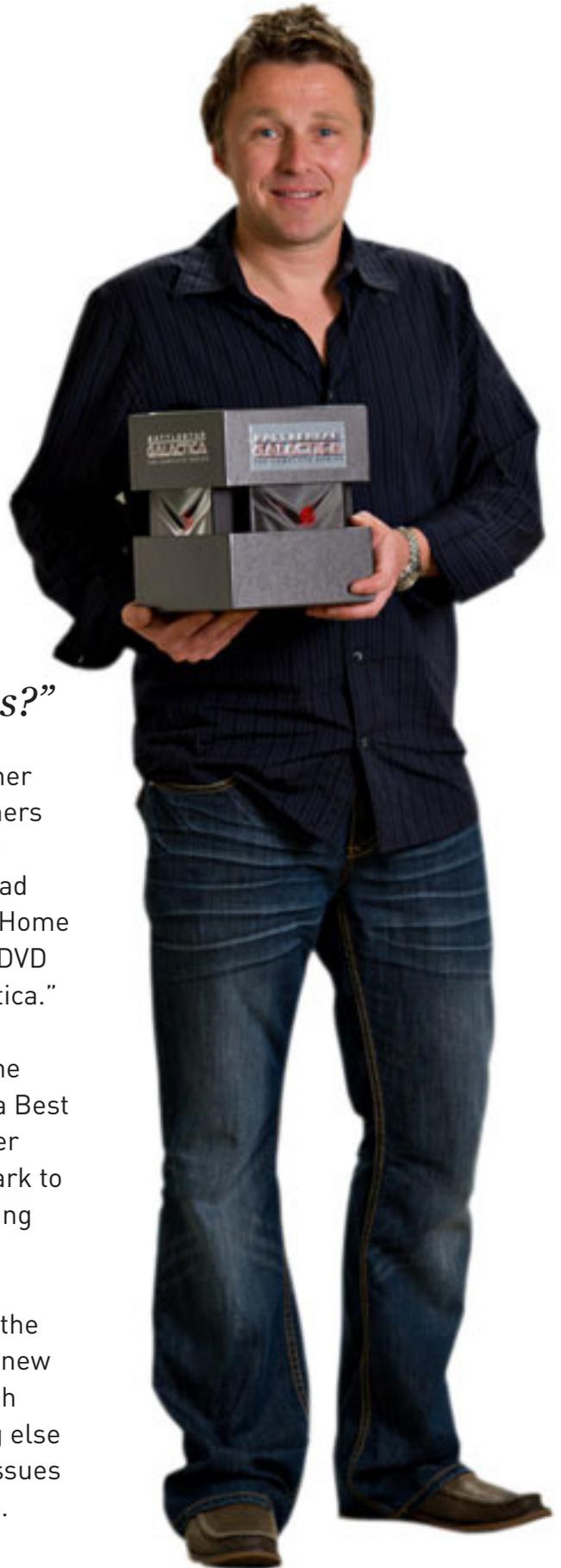
FiberMark Faces... *design*

“How are you going to develop an effective solution for holding the disks?”

According to award-winning structural packaging designer Charles Woodhead, it's the fundamental question designers are challenged with when creating compact disk, "boxed set" packaging. And, it's the very challenge that Woodhead wrestled with when he was tapped by Universal Studios Home Entertainment as the primary package designer for the DVD boxed set of its blockbuster TV series, "Battlestar Galactica."

The strikingly otherworldly package design containing the complete, 23-disk set of Battlestar Galactica DVDs was a Best of Show Gold winner in FiberMark's 17th Annual Specifier Awards. The awards are handed out annually by FiberMark to recognize design professionals who solve challenges using FiberMark products creatively and effectively.

Although Woodhead states that figuring out how to hold the DVDs may have been the central challenge, he says he knew intuitively that his design would also need to have enough sizzle and eye appeal to help set it apart from everything else on the retail shelf. The story of how he addressed both issues makes for a fascinating case study in creative packaging.



From Tradition to Innovation

Woodhead first plied his craft and profession in his native Yorkshire, England, where, after studying structural packaging design “at university,” he took a job as an entry level designer with what he calls a “mom & pop” packaging company. “Their newest machine was from, like, 1965 or something, so it was a great opportunity to learn traditional ways of design and manufacturing,” he explains. A Los Angeles resident for the past eight years, Woodhead says that the design firm where he was working last year was tasked with delivering to Universal a set of concepts for the Battlestar Galactica packaging project.



Apparently, with his innovative design for the box set, Woodhead was able to leave tradition behind—or at least keep it in the background. “For quite a while, I’d been playing with ways to overlap disks in some sort of holder, but it was very much on the back burner,” Woodhead explains. “When this job came up, with the number of disks we were trying to contain, I felt it was the perfect time to bring the overlapping idea up again—to bring it back into development.”

It was a timely idea, he thought, because of the “Cylons”—the armored, cybernetic Battlestar Galactica creatures—which boast a gleaming silver-metallic exterior. “Cylon was the perfect sort of creature that would allow me to complement and reflect off the shiny compact disks.”

Solving the Cylon factor

But how could they develop a way to hold the disks and make it look like a Cylon? That was another challenge, Woodhead says. “You start from how you are going to hold the disks. Once you can create a system for doing that, you can then take whatever method that happens to incorporate and expand it and apply it to the whole boxed set.”

Naturally, budget was a consideration. “To hold down costs, we needed to try and make common as many elements as possible—to be able to use a common die.” But once he created the carton to hold the disks, Woodhead says he then started asking himself, “How am I going to put this into a boxed set and make it look really cool?”

“We went down one road and it wasn’t really a ‘Wow,’” Woodhead explains. “We could see that we had ended up with a big space in the middle of the package. So, we said, we’ve got the big box and know what we want to achieve with it, but we’ve got all this wasted space in the middle; how are we going to solve this?”

At first, Woodhead tried adding another layer of Cylons, so that when the moveable “lid” was pulled up, it revealed a whole army of the battle-ready robots. Then, in the 11th hour before the design was due, Woodhead says he hit upon another solution and brought it in to the client meeting. In this one, the Cylon’s ominously gleaming red eye

became a focal point of the design. And, importantly, it added a collectible Cylon toy to the packaging. “It happened in the final days before we had to get the brief back to them,” he recalls. “I showed them what I had in mind and said that I thought this idea was way cooler than what they were originally looking for.” The clients were sold as soon as they laid eyes on it, and no one was happier about it than Woodhead. “If time allows, I like to offer that to clients—something that might be outside the scope of what they asked for, but nevertheless creative enough to win the day,” Woodhead adds. The whole process went surprisingly quickly. Woodhead says that the design was about two months in development, but that getting production of the design up and running added an extra four months.

Paper that sells ideas

Woodhead is quick to insist that the paper he selected for his design helped sell the project. “We used [FiberMark’s] Carbon-X by Corvon® on the first round, and then went to Metal-X by Corvon® for subsequent rounds. I was playing with that range of papers because I wanted something that looked like metal but wasn’t silver foil—something that had a real, high-quality feel to it.” Although he says that it’s often not the case, the Universal clients accepted Woodhead’s paper spec immediately. “They got it from the start; they could see what I was trying to do and how it would work.”

Woodhead’s rationale for using FiberMark papers was simple, he says. “I like the quality and the feel of them, and they wrap really well—so cleanly. Especially when you’re doing initial samples, it’s so forgiving; it doesn’t tear in corners or crack with use—and its very durable as well. In fact, the paper is so strong an element of the design that it can sell the package without my having to put artwork and other design elements on it.”

Woodhead was aware of the Metal-X family of papers from his association with FiberMark’s California-based sales rep. “We got very lucky with this one,” he says. “When the client came back and wanted to add the toy and the lid, because we had all this room in the center of the package, there was already room to add the toy without too much design change.”

The designer is confident his packaging will stand the test of time. “With the exception of a few minor issues with the disk holders themselves, we’ve had very few complaints, and there’s been a series of reorders. It’s probably going to be a design that they’ll keep and just continue reordering over time.”

Woodhead thinks the Battlestar Galactica packaging project perfectly reflects his philosophy about packaging design: “The way I work is that I like to start from the beginning and work out. Everything is very organic in the development. You have to start with what it is you’re packaging. There’s no point in trying to develop a package and then attempt to fit the product into it.”