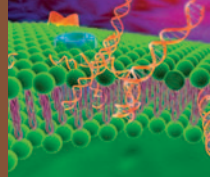




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Micro-pancakery shakes up breakfast category with innovative packaging

HAND-DRAWN ILLUSTRATIONS AND A NEW ECONOMICAL POUCH articulate the gourmet pancake paradise of Boulder-based Birch Benders.

Kari Embree,
Senior Digital Content Editor

What started out as food for thought developed into a hassle-free pancake for Birch Benders Micro-Pancakery co-founder and CEO Matt LaCasse. Fascinated by the idea of cracking an egg over a griddle and magically getting a gourmet pancake (rather than a fried egg), LaCasse set to work. This very idea became the brainchild for his innovative approach to America's much-loved breakfast tradition. As a result, the world's first natural and organic, just-add-water pancake & waffle mix was born.



Lizzi Ackerman and Matt LaCasse lead the gourmet brand.

Instead of having to make the decision between food that is nutritious and food that is convenient, consumers can finally have it all with this natural and organic brand. The company's flagship product comes in an elegant

jar and preparation is as easy as 1-2-3. All that is required is adding water to the fill line on the jar, shaking, and pouring the batter onto a hot griddle or waffle iron. This eliminates the extra steps involved with going to a grocery store to get eggs or milk—and also the mess of cleaning up. No more dirty bowls and washing dishes. Current available package formats include pouch, large jar, small jar and bulk.

In the beginning

Back in 2011, when LaCasse co-founded Birch Benders with fellow pancake enthusiast Naomi Honig, the two saw a connection between the lighthearted and timeless tradition of birch bending—forever immortalized by American poet Robert Frost in his famous poem “Birches”—and the merriment of pancake making. The underlying theme in Frost's poem draws upon imagination, escape and transcendence—all concepts that Birch Benders wanted its product line to embody.

“It all goes back to our mission statement,” says LaCasse. “We believe that some of the best moments



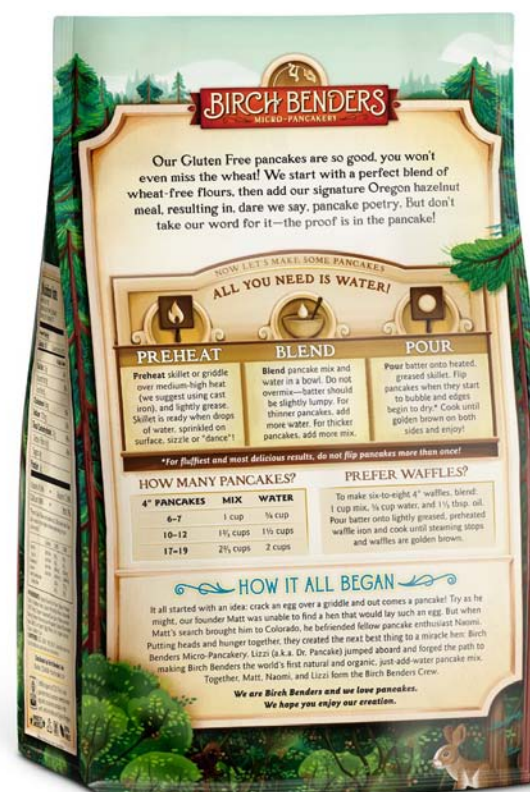
New pouches officially launch this March.

in life are spent around the table with the ones you love. We're very family-oriented people, and in these crazy, busy, over-scheduled days, we want to do our part to bring people back together. Our goal at Birch Benders is to make the world a more beautiful and delicious place...one pancake at a time.”

The duo hit the ground running and created seven restaurant-quality flavors for consumers to enjoy in the comfort of their own homes. Shortly after, Lizzi Ackerman came onboard as COO and helped the team forge ahead into the marketplace.

When the summer of 2012 rolled in, the company was selling its products through independent and specialty retailers, as well as online through its website (www.BuyPancakes.com). In the months to follow, Whole Foods locations in Colorado and Utah signed up to sell the product line. The company is expected to expand to regional Whole Foods in the coming year. Birch Benders also sells to gourmet gift box companies and luxury hotels and residences, such as The Broadmoor (a five-star resort in Colorado Springs).

The company's jars are also featured as a welcoming gift in the national residences of Inspirato with American Express, a private club for



luxury travelers with a \$450 million collection of Signature Residences. Moreover, the Ritz-Carlton Club in Vail recently added Birch Benders jars to its new amenities program, allowing guests to prepare and enjoy gourmet pancakes without ever having to leave their suites.

Spurred on by such a successful launch, Birch Benders wanted to stretch their brand's legs. After countless conversations with customers and hundreds of product demonstrations, Birch Benders came to realize what worked...and what needed work with their products and branding. The team decided to take the brand to the next level after developing a thorough understanding of what they envisioned for the future.

Birch Benders reimagined

“What we realized in looking at our category is that no one's really pushing the envelope when it comes to pancakes and waffles,” says Ackerman. “We wanted to reinvigorate the category, to elevate the pancake experience. We call ourselves a micro-pancakery—in part, because we were really inspired by American microbreweries and the incredible amount of creativity and artistry that goes into



The company's flagship products come in elegant jars, and preparation is as easy as 1-2-3.

their consistently top-notch branding. We wanted to bring that same level of artistry to the pancake and waffle industry, and to craft our products with the love, care, and attention to detail that's become the standard among microbreweries."

To do that, Birch Benders partnered with award-winning design and advertising agency **Moxie Sozo**. Over the course of nine months, Birch Benders worked closely with the Moxie team to not only reimagine their brand, but also reimagine and rewrite the standards for branding in the pancake/waffle mix category. The new jars just hit the shelves and have been very well received.

So, what's the end result? A brand new illustration for the world of Birch Benders. For starters, Classic Recipe draws the consumer into an autumn birch forest, where friendly bears are pouring maple syrup onto a delicious stack of pancakes. Chocolate Chip sets the scene against the rolling hills and snow-capped peaks of the Swiss Alps, where jubilant chocolatiers are drizzling syrup over a heaping helping of chocolate chip pancakes. Banana Buckwheat depicts a sunny, warm Ecuadorian jungle where squirrel monkeys garnish pancakes with freshly chopped bananas. According to Birch Benders, every flavor has its own setting, its own identity, which the new branding helps bring to life.

To coincide with the relaunch of the jars, Birch Benders introduced 24-oz resealable pouches in four of their top-selling flavors: Classic Recipe, Gluten Free, Six Grain Cinnamon and Chocolate Chip. "The pouch was a strategic decision we came to after considering our growth and expansion into national and international markets," says Ackerman. "We realized that in order to reach these markets, we would need a mass-market-ready product—one that would deliver the same premium branding and quality mix, but at a lower price. We knew that we'd be able to achieve this with a well designed pouch."

The Birch Benders team ultimately pursued a pouch design never before seen in their category: a five-sided, flat-bottom, resealable stand-up pouch or "box" pouch. To help them bring this concept to life, Birch Benders chose to work with one of the most respected and innovative companies in the flexible packaging industry, **Innovative Packaging Solutions, Inc. (IPS)**.

"We wanted our pouches to be striking and one-of-a-kind, like our jars, so we approached IPS based on their reputation for high quality and innovation," Ackerman explains. "They were also able to help us find the best solution for meeting our pricing requirements. We needed the pouches to be exquisite, but also economical enough to sell at a competitive price point. We're thrilled with the results we achieved from working with the amazing team at IPS."

"The beauty of the five-sided pouch," says LaCasse, "is that it allows us to have maximum brand impact without the additional costs. It's an efficient design that keeps the primary focus right where it should be - on the deliciously playful, hand-drawn illustrations. The result is a gorgeous product at a competitive price."

"IPS was the clear choice to fulfill our vision because they care as much as we do about the quality of our packaging," adds Ackerman. "They were so helpful and hands-on every step of the way - from refining the shape, to choosing the right materials, to perfecting the production process, to making sure the colors popped!"

Birch Benders Micro-Pancakery's new pouches officially launch at Natural Products Expo West, March 2014, in Anaheim, CA. **PD**

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