

Miami y la comunidad Buenos Aires

Un Poco Es Mucho

{A Little Is A Lot}

by Matthew Porter

It is a new year, but old prejudices linger. Every advertising agency (or design firm) that I ever have written about has either been an upstart, fast-start or a renegade branch office of a big, bad agency. Upon seeing themselves in the text of a CA mirror, nearly every one of them has expressed the concern that, serious audiences may view them as “boutiques,” and, therefore, unserious *artistes*. Time and again, I have told them all that their work will speak for itself and to let others believe what they will because you cannot change closed minds. If the approach is unique, if the work is intelligent, if the people are witty and if the production values sublime, they’re better than 99.99% of all the rest. They never believe me.

But what is so wrong with being called a boutique? How, then, should we identify small, exciting agencies defining themselves through great work in specific markets with remarkable new approaches to remarkably old problems? Are they boutiques? Are they mom and pops? Head shops where stoners lurk? How, conversely, shall we describe their antitheses: is a TBWA/Chiat/Day or other hydra-headed

José Mollá and Joaquín Mollá provided the caption information.

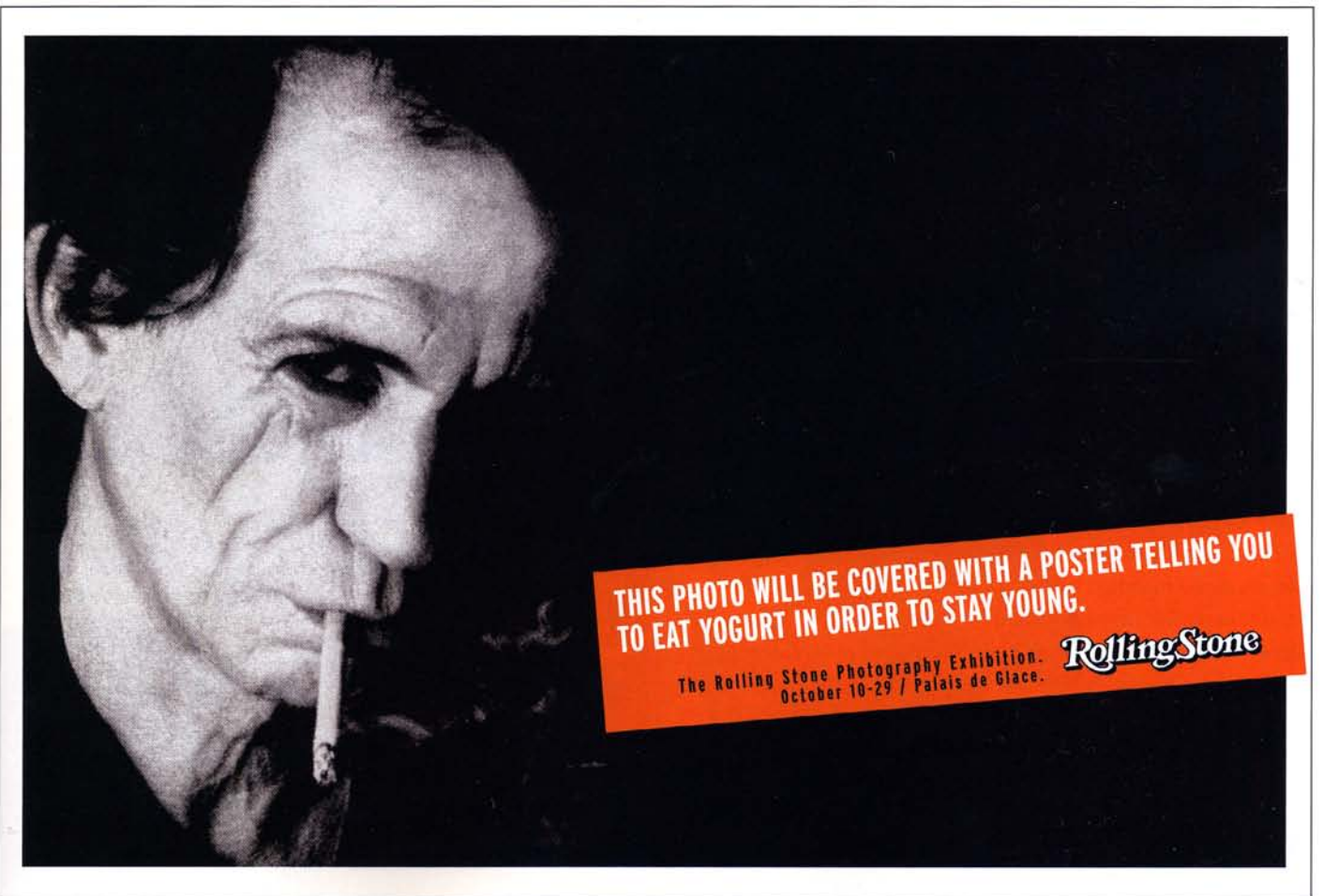
Right: **Two-page spread for P&C magazine**, a Latin American publication on advertising and communication. Ricky Vior/Mariano Cassisi, art directors; Luciano Belelli, writer; Joaquín Mollá/José Mollá, creative directors; Urko Suaya, photographer; P&C, client.

Transit poster for Rolling Stone magazine. Federico Callegari, art director; Francisco Ferro, writer; Joaquín Mollá/José Mollá/Ricky Vior, creative directors; Rolling Stone, client.



prod. 6
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Understand the environment in which you interact.



THIS PHOTO WILL BE COVERED WITH A POSTER TELLING YOU TO EAT YOGURT IN ORDER TO STAY YOUNG.

The Rolling Stone Photography Exhibition.
October 10-29 / Palais de Glace.

Rolling Stone

mega firm a shopping mall? Are Publicis, WPP and other multinational advertising empires shopping mall management companies? Where would *you* rather shop?

La comunidad is a precocious five-year-old. Since its beginning in late 2000, it has received calls from numerous internationally recognized brands, including Citibank, Volkswagen, Virgin Mobile, Best Buy, Subway, Aiwa, Sanyo, Perry Ellis, *Rolling Stone* magazine, Nordstrom and MTV. A Latin “niche” player? Latin, si; niche, no. The South, Central and North American markets are not niches. Large, well-established agency cum shopping malls are huffing and puffing to keep up with this upstart.

The agency’s state secret is actually revealed in its name, la comunidad, “the community.” The operation is really more village than office—where everyone’s contribution is honored and essential, where the whole is greater than its parts. Their own literature expresses their mindset clearly and succinctly in two languages:

“Los diálogos son más productivos que los monólogos. Creemos en el trabajo en grupo, internamente y con los clientes. Proponemos un cambio total de actitud en la relación. Por esos formamos una comunidad con ellos durante todo el proceso de trabajo. Nos ayudamos mutuamente a ser mejores.”

“Dialogues are more productive than monologues. We believe in teamwork, both internally and with clients. That’s why we make our clients part of the community during the entire work process. It’s an exchange focused on making the client’s business grow. We help each other to become better.”

Idealistic? Naïve? Perhaps. But a refreshing departure from the Siegfried & Roy approach to advertising: smoke, mirrors, spandex, sequins and a blow dryer and—poof!—the crowd goes wild.

When the brothers Joaquín and José Mollá decided to start this venture, they turned to old friends and acquaintances to help them. Quite a few decided to take the leap with them. It began innocently. Two brothers, separated by time and distance, decide to spend a week sailing about the Virgin Islands, alone together. For both, life was good. Joaquín, then 30, was executive creative director at BBDO (Ratto) in Buenos Aires; José, then 32, was creative director at Wieden+Kennedy in Portland, Oregon. Secure and comfortable in their jobs, well regarded by their peers, the brothers lacked but one thing: the companionship of the other.

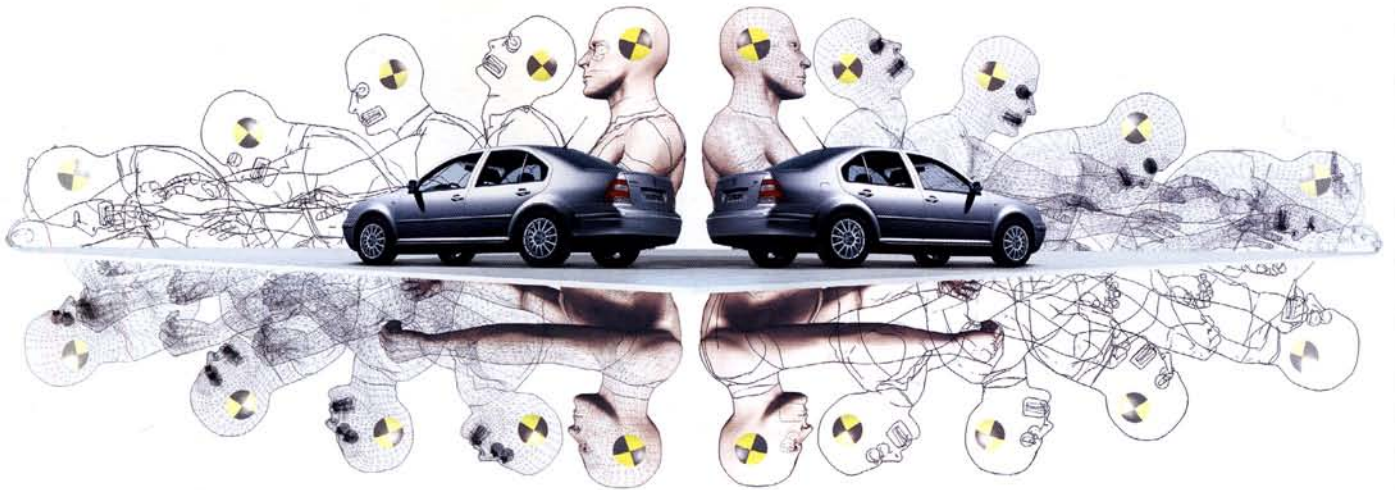
Whether the love, rum, sun, sea or combination of all, the two began to discuss leaving their comfortable positions to begin anew—together. There was more than one family precedent: both father and grandfather had founded and operated




© Federico Callegari

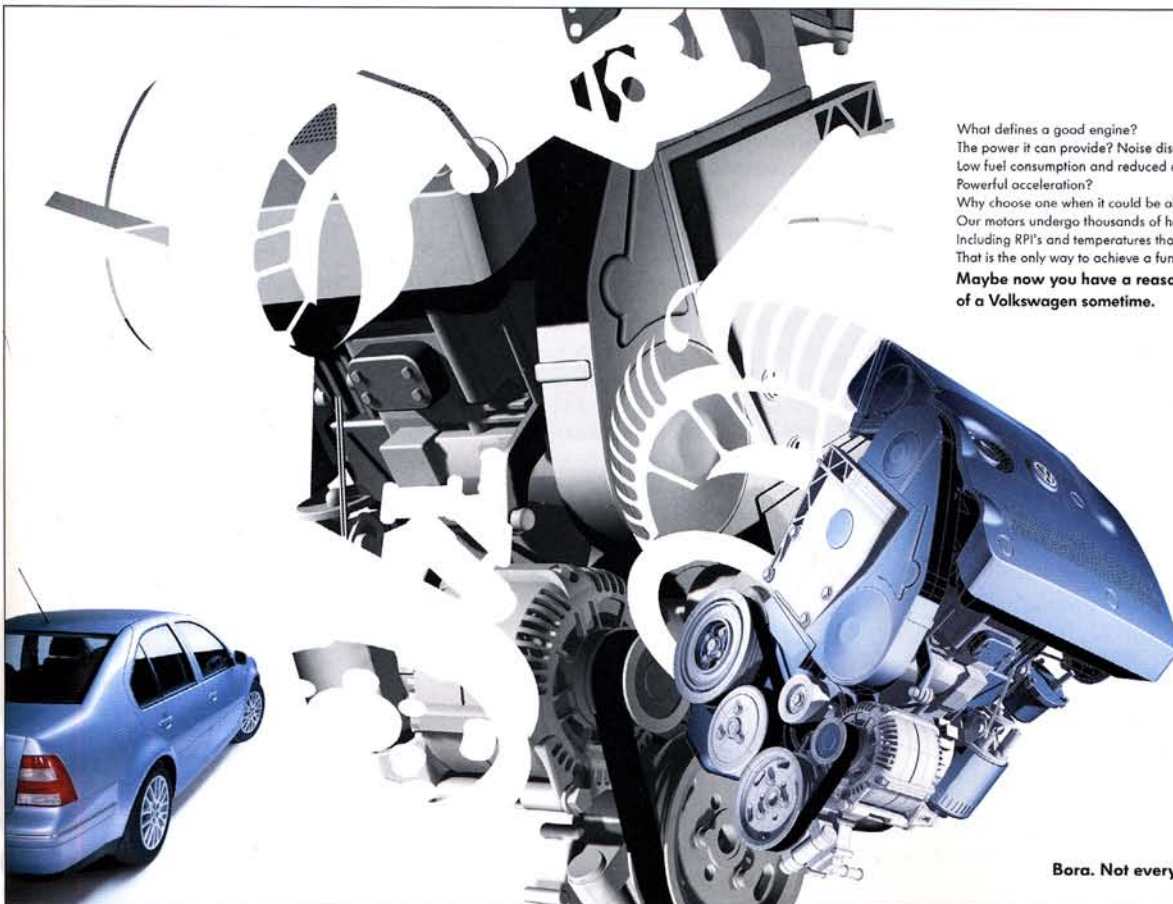
This page: Above: **la comunidad staff** in no particular order: José Mollá, Jen Patterson, Madeline Enriquez-Sendra, Caroline Wu, Vivien Nouel Estrella, José Huerta, Carmen Johnson, Laurie Malaga, Earl Larson, Maria Abella, Victoria Acevedo, Gustavo Lauria, Luis Erazo, Federico Callegari, Giselle Pinto, Fernando Mondejar, Francisco Ferro, Romina Levi, Mariano Sigal, Mariano Cassisi, Ricky Vior, Joaquín Mollá, Juan Moralejo, Virginia Perdomo, Angeles Seber, Julia Poggio, Germán Flores, Julián Montesano, Gabriela Vargas Ordoñez, Julieta Rey, Laura Visco, Raul Vassena, Martín Jalfen, Anabella Bacigalupo, Marcelo Fernández, Ezequiel Frascarelli, Elvis Presley, Facundo Perez, Alfredo Barrios, Gerardo Matamorros, Zeli Diaz, Frank Sendra, Camilo Mehía, Leo Prat.

Right: **Two two-page spreads for Volkswagen Bora.** Luis Ghidotti, art director; Matias Ballada, writer; José Mollá/Joaquín Mollá/Ricky Vior, creative directors; Volkswagen, client.




One of the best ways to avoid accidents is for drivers to see and be seen.
 This is why the engineers at Volkswagen insist on providing cars with ample windows,
 visibility side lights and elevated break lights.
 Systems like the ABS and the development of an electronic program like the ESP allow the vehicle
 to maintain its stability when faced with extreme situations.
 Even then, side protection beams would support the force in the event of a collision and would absorb
 all of the energy through programmed deformations.
When deciding on a car, you're probably thinking more about comfort than anything else.
Coincidentally, during most accidents people are thinking about anything else.

Bora. Not everyone sees everything. 



What defines a good engine?
 The power it can provide? Noise discretion?
 Low fuel consumption and reduced emissions?
 Powerful acceleration?
 Why choose one when it could be all?
 Our motors undergo thousands of hours of continuous operation,
 including RPI's and temperatures that wouldn't exist in a real life setting.
 That is the only way to achieve a functionally perfect engine.
**Maybe now you have a reason to raise the hood
 of a Volkswagen sometime.**

Bora. Not everyone sees everything. 



successful ad agencies in Argentina. Advertising was in the blood. But it all happened so fast. “We knew we would never be ready, so we just did it” says José. Within a month, the Mollá family posted a surprise ad in the Buenos Aires daily, *Clarín*, congratulating Joaquín for opening the Buenos Aires office. Wieden asked José to stay for two more months. Joaquín learned about the ad when a friend called him to tell him about it. The headline read, “His grandfather opened an ad agency. His father opened another ad agency. Joaquín, you haven’t learned anything.”

The way it began is the way it is. It was a business founded on familial love, guided by consummate trust and powered by boundless confidence. The two creative brothers, both writers, brought tremendous assets to the table.

Joaquín was highly regarded throughout South America for his award-winning work at BBDO. José had polished his reputation in the United States for four years serving the esteemed Wieden+Kennedy. “Working with Dan was the best thing that could happen to me. He’s so smart and such a nice guy. He’s my advertising father,” said José. For all their similarities, their differences were (and are) the glue that binds them.

“There’s a lot of admiration and respect for each other.” Joaquín explains, “We can yell at each other and then be over it in an instant. Bad feelings don’t build up, boil over and consume the office. Because we can be honest with one another, the honesty helps eliminate the kind of crap and politics that mark big agencies. This means we can resolve issues fast.” And that means they can find more appropriate and better solutions to client problems fast, too. What’s not to like about effective solutions, well executed on time and on budget? Nada.

This simpatico relationship between the brothers is the heart and soul of the agency. It reflects a place that cares for, respects and trusts colleagues. The two approached other friends and colleagues, like Ricky Vior or Leo Prat, creative directors, or Facundo Perez, now head of production in BA, to join them.

Other equally talented and motivated people came to fill

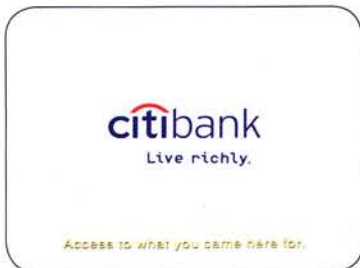
growing needs. Today there are 35 people in Buenos Aires and 25 in Miami. “We control growth,” adds José, “because we want to carefully preserve our culture and the quality of our product. We do this to protect ourselves and to protect our clients. It works for us.”

Joaquín adds that choosing the right people to bring on board is as vital to the agency’s success. “The creative product comes from many,” he says. “It is not one person’s achievement. That is why it is important to have the right people. You must let them be themselves and speak their minds, even if sometimes an opinion can be harsh. If such criticism is coming from the right place, it will be accepted and it will make the individual better. If it is delivered by a person who does not understand this, it will only hurt.”

José says their approach to interpersonal relationships carried over to their approach with client assignments as well. “Just as we want the people we work with to be themselves, we work to convince our clients to let their brands be themselves,” he explains. “Consumers have access to so much information. They know when you’re lying. So why pretend to be something you’re not? It’s very expensive and unappealing.”

Says José. “I cannot imagine doing this without Joaquín, but we cannot imagine doing this without people like Ricky, Facundo, Leo, Fede, Mariano, Martín, Caroline, Julián and the rest. Nearly everyone who helped us start up remains with us. These people took a risk because they had faith in us. You cannot imagine how that trust motivates Joaquín and me to repay them.”

This page: “Aiwa had seventeen walls on different buildings across Buenos Aires, a city that was going through a deep economic depression. That’s why the concept for the campaign is ‘**The city needed music.**’ We decided to represent seventeen different music styles to extend the brand’s audience. This way, you put together the campaign as you cruise through town. In the process we worked in conjunction with different artists: painters, illustrators, sculptors, photographers, graphic designers and 3-D designers.” Federico Callegari/Luis Ghidotti/Mariano Cassisi/Leo Prat/Ricky Vior/Luciano Bellelli/Joaquín Mollá/Matías Ballada, art directors; Matias Ballada/Ricky Vior, writers; José Mollá/Joaquín Mollá/Ricky Vior, creative directors; Vladimir Naskoff, photographer; Aiwa, client.



This page, left: **Television commercial for Citibank.** "This work humanizes the Citibank brand showing that it understands Hispanics living in the U.S. There's not much they can do about the downside of living there, but they can definitely help on the upside, making it worth it."

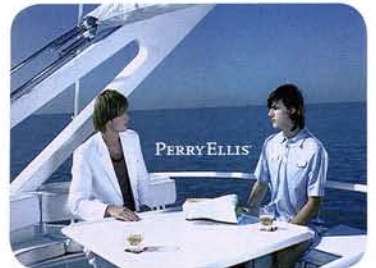
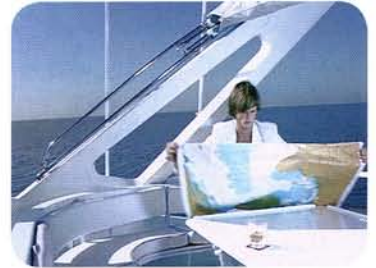
"Aspirin" :30
 (A Latino enters a drugstore. In a strong accent, he asks the pharmacist for some aspirin)
 Man: Aspirin please?
 (The pharmacist looks very very American and, of course, doesn't understand what he is asking for)
 Pharmacist: I'm sorry I don't un...?
 Man: Aspirin.
 (The pharmacist doesn't understand and in an overly nice way asks again with an almost robotic smile)
 Pharmacist: Uhhm...
 Man: Aspirin!!, As- pi- rin!
 Pharmacist: I don't, I don't...?
 (There is an awkward silence between them. Finally the pharmacist gets it)
 Pharmacist: Aaahh!! Aspirin!
 Super: Hay mejores razones por las que elegiste los Estados Unidos. (There are better reasons why you chose to come to the United States)
 Anncr. (VO): Presentamos un nuevo tipo de cuenta que te ayuda a vivir mas comodo.
 (Introducing a new kind of bank account that helps you live more comfortably)
 Super: Citibank access account.
 Anncr. (VO): Citibank access account. Para acceder a lo que viniste a buscar.
 (Citibank access account. Access to what you came here for)

Mariano Cassisi, art director; José Mollá/Joaquín Mollá/Hugo Zogbi, writers; José Mollá/Joaquín Mollá/Ricky Vior, creative directors; Citibank, client.

Right: **Perry Ellis television commercial.** "Perry Ellis needed to recover their soul and coolness. This is part of a bigger campaign that makes fun of the fashion world."

"Yacht" :45
 (Open on a yacht in the middle of the ocean. There is a chill-out kind of party going on. It's super cool. We see girls and guys, all models, dressed in Perry Ellis clothes, looking fantastic. We zoom in on models lazily lying around. One model is staring into the horizon. There is soft chill music playing in the background. The camera then focuses on two male models sitting at a table, apparently having a drink. One model has a map in his hand. The model begins to fold the map back up again, but is unable to fold it correctly. The model starts getting frustrated. He opens the map up again and attempts to fold it again. The model gets more nervous. He again tries to fold the map another way, but it doesn't fold up right. Meanwhile, the other model is just staring at this, not moving. The model with the map finally folds it in an uneven way and slides it over to the other model with a look of resignation)
 Super: Our models suffer too.

Máximo Vazquez/Ricky Vior, art directors; Leonardo Prat, writer; José Mollá/Joaquín Mollá/Ricky Vior, creative directors; Agustín Alberdi/Andy Fogwill, directors; Landia Republica, production company; Perry Ellis, client.



la comunidad

It would be wrong to regard la comunidad as merely a Latin agency. Yes, most of their clients in Argentina hire them to reach audiences across South and Central America. And, yes, clients in the United States hire them to reach their growing Hispanic markets in the near and abroad. But more and more U.S. clients have discovered that effective, funny Spanish ads are often effective, funny English ads, too (see work for Citibank and Volkswagen). La comunidad's work is consistently witty, stylish, thoughtful and exquisitely produced.

The agency's approach to the Citibank campaign is a good example of how the agency solves client problems. La comunidad and partners went to the target...in their own living rooms. "We interviewed people at home," says José. "It was a team effort. Many of us attended at least some of those face-to-face meetings. We knew many Hispanics in the U.S. were bank averse and that this lack of deposits limited their access to the U.S. financial system. We had our assumptions, but we wanted to hear it from individuals."

The people told them stories of the myriad of cultural and language misunderstandings they typically confronted. With the tagline "access to what you came here for," the campaign suggests empathy by putting the viewer in the shoes of the newcomer. In one hilarious spot, a Hispanic man requests an aspirin in clear, if accented, English. The doe-eyed, frizzy-haired, obnoxiously chirpy Caucasian pharmacist asks the man to repeat his request again and again. The Hispanic fellow patiently, slowly enunciates the word "aspirin" each time, suggesting that he is both used to the incomprehension, cluelessness and patronization of Caucasian Americans. To the people at la comunidad, the salient fact is that the spots demonstrate that the brand is listening and understands its target audience, and telling them, in effect, "Hey, there might not be much we can do about the downside of life in the U.S., but we can definitely help on its upside by making it more worthwhile."

"When all you do is talk about yourself," says José, "others run away from you. When you meet someone who is interested and listens to you, you are attracted to him or her. It is the consumer's perspective that is important."

"This is an ego-driven business," says José, piloting his boat towards Miami Bay. On board, five or six others, concluding a long day with a beer, some music and a fine, late October sunset over Miami. We are on our way to take a look at a property being considered to replace the quirky *Richard Petrie meets Hugh Hefner* (take my word for it) canal-side 6,000 square-foot ranch they now call home. José continues, "We believe in the collective ego. For Joaquín and myself, it would not seem right to put our name on the front door. Why not

Ricky's? Why not Facundo's? Why not our favorite director of photography? They're as much a part of this as we are."

Facundo Perez says the agency's approach enables each project to assume its own rhythm and personality. "We want each assignment to have its own identity," he explains. "We don't believe in formulas. Lives aren't guided by formulas, are they? Lives are led and face constant surprise. Like people, a project can 'live,' changing and growing as it grows, assuming a unique and unrepeatable personality. The only standard is that the proper solution for the consumer, the brand and the budget must be found. The rest has no limits."

That does not mean that every idea is a homerun. Sometimes, la comunidad offers clients something they *can* refuse. "It's not like you're only going to come up with one good idea in all your life," says Ricky Vior, creative director. "I take 'no' as a stimulus to think that the next idea will probably be better than the previous."

If you visit their Web site (www.lacomu.com), you will notice a jar filled with different kinds of beans. Click on one and it sprouts, click another and a different bean sprouts. The metaphor is that it takes all kinds. Ricky is Ricky, hand-rolled cigarettes, inscrutable age, brooding sensitivity. And Vivien is Vivien. And Fede is Fede. And the accountant is over 80 years old and still balances the books with a pencil and eraser. Cool.

We should all be so fortunate to be a part of a loving, creative, generous family where people are happy and fulfilled. Will it come to an end? Will that ending be happy or sad? Joaquín, José, Ricky, Leo and the rest appear more focused on today than tomorrow. Right now, work is a pleasure and colleagues are treated as members of an extended family. Today, a home doubles as an office, lunch is served three times a week. At this moment, staff meetings can be held in the pool and client meetings may convene on a boat, in full view of sunsets over Miami.

But this is no ship of fools. They all know there are always debts to pay. As José reminded me in our last conversation, "Bill Bernbach once said, 'It's not a principle unless it costs you something.'" So far, no one's sent the people at la comunidad the bill for being themselves. Perhaps they're too busy shopping at an advertising shopping mall run by an advertising shopping mall management company. Perfecto. **CA**



This page, left: **VH1 television commercial.** "This campaign communicates what makes VH1 unique and different from MTV. "A musician's life is more than just videos."

"Parent's Meeting" :60

(Open on an elementary school classroom. There's a parent-teacher meeting going on. The teacher is talking while the parents, who are sitting in the children's desks, listen attentively)

Teacher: My name is Mary and I'm your children's teacher. Um...If you take a look at the program... Paragraph 1 please. You will notice...

(We see someone interrupt her. It's a man, about 38 years old. Pyrotechnics commonly used by '80s bands explode around him everytime he talks)

Father: Excuse me... Hi everybody... I'm Jenny's father. SFX: Guitar riff. Explosions.

Father: I don't understand the French language really...

Teacher: What exactly are your concerns?

Father: Aren't they too young to learn another language?

SFX: Guitar riff. Explosions.

Another Father: Yeah, I agree with him.

Teacher: Don't worry. Recent studies have shown that the younger they start learning, the easier it would become for them.

Father: Is French obligatory?

SFX: Guitar riff. Explosions.

Teacher: They can actually choose between three languages: French, Spanish and German.

Father: German also?

(We see once again the explosions around him)

Teacher: Yes, however, let me clarify again you must choose between one of the three languages.

Father: Oh, that's great. Because I always wanted Jenny to grow up without pressure. In a normal environment.

SFX: Guitar riff. Multiple explosions.

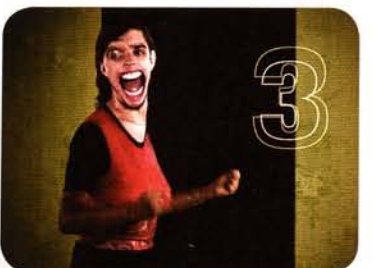
Super: A musician's life is more than just videos.

Camera Card: VH1. Beyond music.

Julian Montesano/Ricky Vior, art directors; Martín Jalfen/Leonardo Prat, writers; José Mollá/Joaquín Mollá/Ricky Vior, creative directors; Agustín Alberdi/Andy Fowill, directors; Landia República, production company; VH1, client.

Right: "This is for a show where kids vote online everyday for their favorite videos. The **countdown bumpers** are based on finding an interesting way to show that behind each video, there are the votes of thousands of people. That's why the idea is to show characters that are made out of many people."

Ricky Vior/Máximo Vazquez, art directors; Leo Prat/José Mollá, writers; José Mollá/Joaquín Mollá/Ricky Vior/Cristian Jofre, MTV, creative directors; Ricky Vior/Leo Prat/Máximo Vázquez, directors; la comunidad, production company; ALT Production House, post-production house; MTV, client.



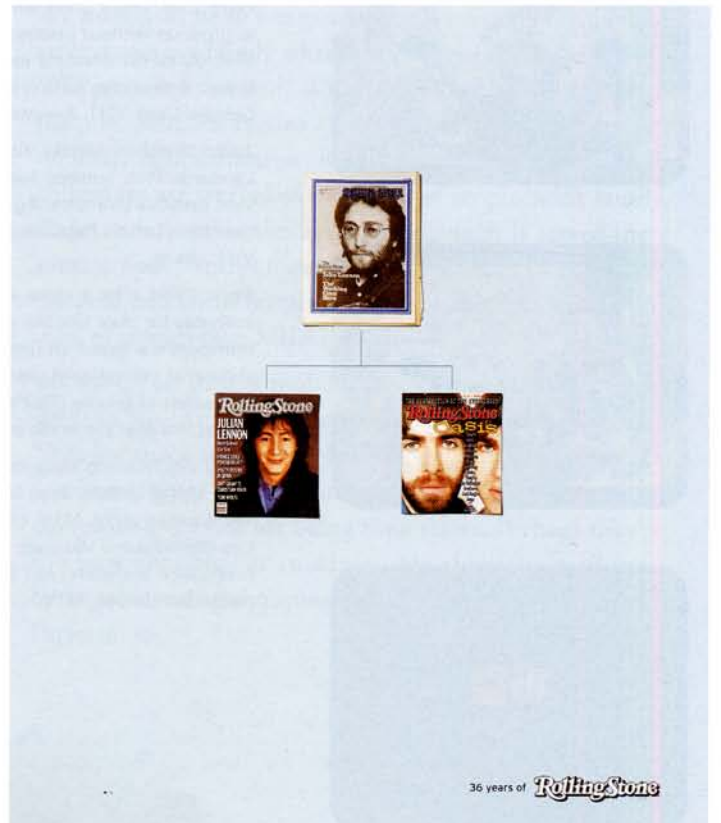
la comunidad

This page: **Single-page ad promoting the final production run of the classic Volkswagen Beetle.** Mariano Cassisi/Julian Montesano, art directors; Martín Jalfen, writer; Joaquín Mollá/José Mollá/Ricky Vior, creative directors; Volkswagen, client.

Single-page ad for *Rolling Stone* magazine. Federico Callegari, art director; Gustavo Lauria, writer; José Mollá/Joaquín Mollá/Ricky Vior, creative directors; Rolling Stone, client.

Right: **Two-page spread for VH1.** Julian Montesano, art director; Leo Pratt, writer; José Mollá/Joaquín Mollá/Ricky Vior, creative directors; VH1, client.

"When you see a note stuck on a building buzzer, you can't help but read it. Aiwa needed to communicate the power of their audio systems, so **500,000 post-its** were printed and placed with different handwritings. They were seen by an average of ten people per building, getting massive results at a very low cost." Luis Ghidotti, art director; Matias Ballada, writer; Joaquín Mollá/José Mollá/Ricky Vior, creative directors; Aiwa, client.





Beyond music.

