

10 simple things about  
The Simple  
Visual Analysis and Projections



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## 1 The Simple Is a List of Ten Ingredients

The backstory of The Simple trend is fairly simple. The downturn has caused people to re-evaluate their lives, their expectations of what a successful life consists of. People are looking to an idea and image of The Simple. But the story of The Simple is a little more complicated. The Simple isn't simply back to basics; there is no turning back the clock on iPods, LCD TVs or broadband internet connections. As director Martin Scorsese said about film directing: "There's no such thing as simple. Simple is hard." And though The Simple is not as simple as it may look at first sight, this report will enable you to lock on to the major visual trend of the moment. As simple as 1, 2, 3.

## 2 The Simple Is a Value

"Millions of people, everyone out for themselves, can this really be the only way?" says the voiceover on the ad for Chivas Regal, as one man turns around and walks against the flow of commuters on their way to work. What makes the idea of The Simple so emotionally and psychologically powerful for consumers is that it can be communicated and grasped so simply, as in this Chivas Regal spot - the Simple act of one man going against the crowd. This spot ticks off many key features of The Simple. The voiceover



88057876, Mike Harrington, Digital Vision



Chivas Regal

continues as a list: “No! Here’s to doing the right thing, to giving a damn. Here’s to the straight talkers who give their word and keep it, to knowing the true meaning of wealth. Here’s to a code of behaviour that sets certain men apart from all others.”

The Simple isn’t just a look, a design style or even a lifestyle. It’s a value, demonstrated in the Chivas spot by images showing a football player picking an opponent off the

ground; a barefooted guy giving a piggyback to his girl; guys helping a driver push a stalled car; a group of friends, spiritually satisfied, having done their job. The story of the Chivas spot is constructed as a list, and as a way of conveying The Simple through structure, the list is a guide. The Simple appeals because for consumers who are either anxious or looking for direction as the values of the economic bubble collapse, the list offers the gift of simple clarity.

**3 The Simple Is Messy** We’ve been tracking the ebbs and flows of The Simple trend in tearsheets and in images sold on our website since our *One Life* report in 2005. Back then the most striking ads were “Dirt is Good” for Persil laundry detergent, which counterintuitively celebrated dirt with images of people enjoying themselves covered in mud, and the “My Life, My Card” campaign for American Express, with actors like Kate Winslet and Tina Fey responding to such life questions as “Childhood Ambition?”

The image style for the campaign was documentary portraiture, the celebrity shot in an environment that was a little messy and occasionally chaotic. Which is another way The Simple is visually coded. Again it might seem counterintuitive; one might think The Simple can only be represented through an image of minimalism, but The Simple as messy, disordered, pictures someone who has their values in order. They know what’s truly important isn’t the state of their home; it’s the state of their kids, their friends and their family. It’s about psychological improvement rather than home improvement. And since the downturn, we have seen a surge of interest in images anchored in the ideas, aesthetics and values of The Simple. To sum up the contradictory nature of The Simple in one sentence: Expect to see more images with high-production values that look clean and simple (see point 8) and images with low-production values that look cluttered and full of life.



My Life, My Card American Express, Global











