



Daniela Macías

A proud native and longtime resident of Mexico City, Daniela Macias is a NYC based industrial designer with 14 years experience leading the creation of global household and consumer products for Colgate-Palmolive. In her current Industrial Design Manager role, she is responsible for the design leadership of expert cross functional teams working on packaging structures for Personal Care, Pet Nutrition and Home Care brands that hundreds of millions of people around the world love and use daily.

Throughout her career, she has overseen the design process of bottles, caps, barsoaps, dispensers, soluble pods and new experiences across a variety of categories, brands, packaging formats, scopes and markets. Her career journey – starting at one of Colgate’s manufacturing facilities, moving up to regional corporate offices in Mexico City, and elevated to cross category industrial design development role at Colgate-Palmolive’s global headquarters

in NYC — has forged her as a resilient industrial designer with empathy for both the business side and the people she designs for.

You'll find her work on shelves and homes all around the world, in brands such as Palmolive, Caprice, Ajax, Protex, Suavitel and Fabuloso. In her free time, you'll find her eating her way through NYC, riding her bike with her husband or taking care of her many succulents and her feisty senior chihuahua — Peppina.

FROM DREAM TO REALITY: CREATING MY PATH AS A WOMAN INDUSTRIAL DESIGNER OF COLOR IN CORPORATE AMERICA

Daniela Macías

I have now been working as a Global Industrial Design Manager for Colgate Palmolive in NYC for almost 6 years, and I can proudly say that I love what I do. But it wasn't always like this. Given the current state of major inequalities I see in the Industrial Design profession – being dominated by an overwhelming majority of white men coming from developed countries – I believe it is very important to share my experience trailblazing my own path within a Global Consumer Packaged Goods (CPG) company, coming in as the complete opposite of what the industrial design profession standard is: a woman industrial designer of color who comes from a developing country. Throughout almost 15 years, I have slowly but surely defied conventional career roadmaps and gone to great lengths to join the Global Industrial Design team in NYC: I've expanded my skills, overcame diverse obstacles and embraced every challenge with unwavering determination to carve out a place for myself in the industry. This is my story: one of resilience, self advocacy and the transformative power of pursuing an impossible dream in a world that wasn't built for me.

After graduating from university in Mexico, I found myself with an industrial design degree and virtually no experience, looking desperately for a job in my field. It was May 2008, and the job

market was going through a major downturn due to the global financial crisis. It didn't help that in my country, industrial design is not a very well known or developed design discipline, so the odds of me finding a decent entry level job weren't good. I was very worried, and so was my engineer dad who had warned me about going into this field as opposed to the much more employable worlds of engineering or medicine.

Almost a year later, in March 2009, I came across a job posting for a Junior Packaging Engineer at a Colgate-Palmolive manufacturing facility 4 hours drive from Mexico City, where I lived with my parents. The posting didn't really call for an industrial designer, but I knew I had all the skills — knowledge of 3D modeling, rendering, 3D printing, technical drawings. Not only that - the posting offered a livable wage and came from a big name company, so I immediately applied. As it turned out, the Packaging Engineering department needed someone urgently and I checked all the boxes. Three interviews and 2 weeks later, I was hired and moved out of state that weekend, ready to show up at work the next Monday. I was now living in a small town in the middle of the Mexican semi desert. I finally had a job but I had no idea what to expect.

The Factory in the Middle of the Desert

Within my first week, sitting in a cubicle in the depths of Colgate's largest factory in the world, I quickly realized that my actual job – drawing and managing the technical packaging drawings system – was not very exciting and was more technical than creative. The factory, on the other hand, was fascinating. I got to work side by

side with an experienced team of Packaging Engineers, providing them with design support and learning the packaging basics first hand. This initiation into the packaging world gave me unique insight into the complex process of bringing a design to life for high speed mass-production and into people's hands.

The industrial designer in me also realized how every product we manufactured – shampoo, barsoaps, cleaners, hairspray, liquid soap, body lotion, fabric conditioner, toothpaste, mouthwash -- they all had their own, uniquely shaped container and label. I asked my manager (a non-practicing industrial designer) who was responsible for designing all these bottles and caps for the brands around us and produced daily by the millions in our facilities? I learned 3 things:

- 1. The global industrial design team was responsible for directing the creation of all our packaging structures*
- 2. There were only three global industrial design positions and they were based in NYC*
- 3. It would be super hard, if not nearly impossible for me to get there. There wasn't a career path to even attempt to get there, so no one had ever tried before*

I immediately knew THAT was what I wanted to do. I had no idea how I was going to get there, but I knew I had to hustle. I started with writing it down every year for 9 years in my personal development plan as my driving career goal: work as a member of the global industrial design team at the NYC headquarters. I was extremely driven, and with my manager's support, I made sure to pick up each and every random design project that showed up that would allow me to learn and harness my skills: benchmarking

competitors, leading creative workshops, 3D modeling, rendering pallets, prototyping concepts, photoshopping product pictures, sketching concepts, I did it all. It helped that I was the only one around with any actual design skills among my team of packaging engineers. Because the job that I was hired for (packaging drawings) needed to get done regardless of my aspirations, I also had to learn to juggle my “primary” job with the additional workload — but I was a woman on a mission and no one could stop me.

Being the first was fun but it also came with downsides. Not only did I have to become AutoCAD and SolidWorks proficient immediately, I also had to figure out 2D and 3D design software licensing, as well as maintain and operate an abandoned FDM 3D printing machine they hardly ever used. In this first stage of my career, I learned about our manufacturing processes, packaging materials, bottles and caps engineering, technicalities, specialized vendors, molds making, packaging protocols and tests, product specifications, production woes. I didn’t know this at the time, but 14 years later, this knowledge still comes in handy in my current position.

Two years in, the opportunity to design my first shampoo bottle came. It was time to replace the manufacturing molds for one of our Mexican shampoo brands, and the Global Industrial Design team was too busy working on major projects. I threw myself into it and worked non-stop and after hours for about 8 weeks, to create a new design in 4 different sizes, from sketch concepts to 3D that our machines could manufacture and our local marketing team would approve. My initiation was brutal: things took me too long, I made mistakes...it was quite a bumpy ride — but with the expertise and

support of my Packaging Engineering team, we made it. This first launch brought in some savings, and a much needed brand facelift. Surprisingly, out of all my babies, these bottles have endured and been in the market the longest – 12 years and running. They’re so efficient that they have proliferated across other Personal Care brands in our portfolio – I’ve even found a couple of copycat brands in the Mexican market! I was also granted my first ever U.S. design patent for this bottle. Today, you’ll find that first framed patent proudly hanging on my dad’s office wall – right next to the engineering and psychology titles of my siblings.

After that, small design projects began to sprout everywhere, and I kept saying yes, of course I can do that. I even got to travel for work for the first time with the Latin American Marketing innovation team, for a deodorant innovation project in South America. We went into people’s homes, interviewed and co-created with them, got feedback on our 3D printed prototypes...I was completely hooked, and the experience only confirmed that I was on the right track.

Sometime around my third year in the job, Global Industrial Design had their eye on me, maybe because I was the eager woman making noise from her corner of the world. To my disbelief, the head of Global Industrial Design at the time assigned me a wonderful, remote mentor to guide me. As it turned out, this mentor is now my manager and I still have the privilege to work with him. He patiently taught me the ropes of the job while working together on my first high stakes project: another shampoo bottle, this time for a big hair care brand. For the first time, I had real contact with the job I aspired to do. Through this first mentoring experience, I learned

how to manage full design projects: design strategy, ergonomic principles, designing for manufacturing, materials behavior, directing creative agencies, budgets and timelines, using research to inform our work, negotiating with our partners, storytelling and presenting to stakeholders, secrets of the trade.

Back to Mexico City

Four years and a handful of industrial design projects later, in 2013, I transferred to the Mexico City regional offices so I could get closer to the strategic side of the Latin American business. The next four years of my career, I got deeper into Latin American industrial design work, and this time I was exposed to a radically different side of Colgate: our brilliant R&D scientists, marketing innovation teams, consumer insights and graphic design teams. In this phase of my career I learned about the development of our formulas, the power of our brands, the people who buy our products, the fierce competition in the hyper saturated Latin American market, pricing strategies, the artwork process, the nuances between Latin American countries' needs. And while all of this was happening, the packaging drawings system still was my responsibility. At this point though, I had done enough foundational work to improve the system and had enough Industrial Design workload that I was able to justify hiring an intern, at first half time and then full time, to help manage and roll out the system across the Latin American continent. It wasn't a perfect scenario and I had to negotiate heavily with my managers, but I knew that not having to do everything myself and getting to focus on the work I actually wanted to be doing –

managing industrial design projects – was a win for me, and a step in the right direction.

A First Taste of NYC

In 2016, several Latin American industrial design projects under my belt and countless self-advocating conversations with many managers later, the opportunity to spend 7 months in NYC learning from the Global Industrial Design team finally became a reality. GD&P (Global Design and Packaging) brought me on a Short Term Assignment, an internal company program to develop talent and address business needs. For the first time I got to see everything I had been working on and more, from a Global point of view: the complexities of governing massively large brands, all the resources that go behind strategic initiatives, key stakeholders, regional differences and their impact on our brands. I absorbed EVERYTHING I could in those 7 months, networking and learning directly from the people I looked up to become one day. Achieving my dream – to work as a member of the global industrial design team at the NYC headquarters – felt within my reach for the first time ever. At this point, all I could do was continue doing good work, advocating for myself, and patiently wait for my opportunity to come.

From Mexico to NYC, finally!

A little over a year after coming back from my brief experience in NYC, the impossible happened: one of the three global industrial design positions (the one overseeing Home Care and Pet Nutrition) unexpectedly opened up. I immediately applied, nervously went through the hiring process, and I got the job. About 4 months and a stressful working visa process later, in January 2018 my husband,

my chihuahua and I were all packed up and on a plane to NYC, where I would begin to live the dream I had been pursuing for 9 years. The feeling was familiar, just like when I started this job in the middle of the Mexican semi desert: I had no idea what to expect and was still in disbelief that this was all actually happening to me.

It has been almost 6 years since I took over my current role as Industrial Design Manager for Home Care and Pet Nutrition at our global headquarters in NYC. In these years, I have been managing global and regional industrial design developments that prioritize the people we design for, while building on brand experience and creatively solving business problems for the organization. In these years, our small team has worked hard to evolve the role of ID into becoming strategic creative partners, by expanding our skills into design research and design led innovation to feed our work and empowering teams to harness their creativity.

In a company that produces oral care, personal care, skin care, home care and pet nutrition products for all kinds of people all around the globe, our primary packaging plays a major role in the perceived value of our heritage brands and as such, has very high performance expectations placed upon it. Our packaging actually becomes how people experience our brands, and is the first physical point of contact, which continues throughout the useful life of the product in people's homes until it is disposed of. Consequently, in my world, our considerations are not limited only to the traditional aspects of good design such as form and function. We also have to consider the brand, the consumer's journey, technical constraints, production limitations, sustainability, shelf requirements, global

trends, and the burning needs of the business at the time. All of these considerations are taken into account and baked into a single design solution that satisfies everyone's needs

To help us manage the madness and sheer volume of work, we often have to rely on our secret weapons: the super talented industrial design agencies we work with, who in practice become team members and who we get to learn from every day when we co-create together to achieve a common vision. At this stage I get to learn from these world class agencies and from my ultra talented ID peers about global brand design, design strategies and frameworks, breakthrough R&D developments, early innovation research, packaging and materials innovation, global marketing and the nuances of regional needs, business cases, supply chain efficiencies, sustainability efforts, industry trends and standards and future possibilities.

The cherry on top is getting to live and experience NYC: the most diverse and creative city in the world that inspires me every day, and where there is an actual Industrial Design community of talented professionals, along with an incredible number of events, exhibitions, panels, conferences, studios, trainings, workshops – it's all beyond my wildest dreams.

On trailblazing new paths

Disclaimer: Colgate-Palmolive has been my mothership and where I've learned my trade, so I can only speak from my experience working for it as an American based CPG.

Like anything in life worth pursuing, it hasn't all been picture perfect. The path that I've created has been plagued with uncertainty every step of the way. More often than not, I am the only woman designer of color in the room coming from a developing country, which means that sometimes, my perspective is not always aligned with the general consensus. Multicultural differences pop up every day, and I've had to learn to navigate them as best I can. As part of an extremely small team, it is tricky to get everything done and career growth opportunities are limited. As I've grown into my role and interacted with more people at different levels, I've had to learn to stand my ground and speak my mind, while still being able to keep an open mind and be respectful. A lot of design projects die on the vine, and all you can do is learn from it and move on, because there's just so much to do and always something more urgent to take care of. Navigating constant and cyclical change inside and outside the company can get very challenging. Conflicts are inevitable as much as unfavorable outcomes: projects that never flourish, diverse budget ranges, differing points of view, outside world influences out of our control. Let's not forget, we all went through a global pandemic and had to figure out how to work from home and keep creating value. The process of obtaining a U.S. working visa can be complicated and a heavy burden, not only for me but also my small family. Because of my country of origin, we have to go through the process every year, and it can get very stressful. Living far away from loved ones and our countries of origin is hard, and it can get quite lonely. And then of course, building my career exclusively at Colgate means that I am ultra specialized in what I do, which is a double-edged sword. I never got

to work for an agency or do agency work – but I have become an expert who excels at translating the company's needs into an effective design strategy to develop a design solution that connects all the dots – physical brand experience, aesthetics, CMF possibilities, ergonomics and dispensing, brand and category fit, market context, manufacturing constraints – and is feasible within our capabilities.

I didn't know this when I started, but I consider two key ingredients to be extremely relevant enabling factors of my career progression. One is that Colgate-Palmolive's core values align with my own (courageous, inclusive, caring), and the second is what I consider to be Colgate's main strength: the diversity among CP people. I am fully aware that I did not get here on my own, and I am incredibly lucky to have encountered other kind and talented male designers who became my allies: whether they've hired me, advised and mentored me, believed in me, fought for me, taught me, encouraged me, elevated my work or cheered me along my path. They've stepped up and have been instrumental in clearing the path for me at different points in my career, helping me figure out how to get to a place that had no official map. This is especially relevant given the depressing current state of the ID profession: There are 15,702 employed industrial designers in America. Only 18% (2,912) are people of color (latino, black, asian) and only 18.5% (2,826) are women. Although it's hard to know the exact split of women of color in industrial design working for CPGs, it is fair to assume this number is extremely small. In contrast, CPGs own the design and production of 85% of ALL the products that we interact with daily – yogurt cups, cleaner bottles, disposable razors, barsoaps, boxed

pasta, you name it. And women make up 70–80% of purchasing decisions in the market — including the men and children in their lives, and they are all using these products. So I wonder: why shouldn't women get a say on how these products are created? How can anyone come up with a design solution for a problem they are not aware exists or can't understand? We all have biases and blindspots, that's normal. But this is exactly why giving a voice and fostering diverse talent coming from diverse backgrounds is so important, and an invaluable asset for any company whose focus is top tier innovation and creativity. By stepping up and giving a seat at the table to more women industrial designers of color in companies and agencies can drive this change, and help pave the way towards truly inclusive and universal design that is better for everyone.

Sign me up!

If after reading all of this (thank you!) you are up for the challenge of carving out a place for yourself leading a creative career path within corporate culture, here's what I've learned:

On a personal level:

1. ***Be yourself, be brave, be different: staying authentic to yourself throughout your career gives you the confidence to make better decisions, and it will guide you like a north star. It takes a lot of courage to be authentic and work for what you want, so be prepared to stay brave through it all. It's good to be different – new perspectives are key when designing for a diverse audience, and it is easy to forget the struggles in other***

socio-economic groups and geographies. Whenever I am the only one speaking out about certain things that only I can see, it starts a conversation and gets people thinking differently and beyond their biases. This skill is a prerequisite to influencing key decisions and enriching your work with something only you can bring to the table.

- 2. Speak your mind & trust your instincts: it's easy to get discouraged from saying what you really want to say in a room full of professionals. However, trust that your perspective is unique and valuable, and there is a reason you are in that room bringing your expertise too. On the same note, only you know what you can take upon yourself and what you are capable of or not. I've been careful to not go down a path that doesn't feel right to building the future that I envisioned, even if it seemed like the easy choice, a quick win or others were pushing me to do it at the time.***
- 3. Be kind, always: It doesn't matter if you plan on staying for a short or long time, I've been shocked to find out that the design and packaging industry is extremely small and people tend to jump from one to the other constantly, so the odds of you encountering someone you worked with in the past are very high. I once read that people won't remember what you said but they will remember how you made them feel, and I consistently find this to be true.***

On an industrial designer level:

- 4. Let go of designer's ego: We designers tend to define ourselves by what we create, and we are super proud of our***

work. However, in a CPG company where so many people from different disciplines are contributing, ownership can get very blurry. Sure, your work is important and contributed to it all, but because it's a team effort, most of the time you won't get individual credit and you have to be ok with that.

- 5. Find the gaps & be proactive: As in any company, the bottomline is profit, so there are always opportunities for improvement and we are encouraged to find them. As an industrial designer, I get a kick out of solving problems, and this mindset drives me to identify gaps and opportunities and build something to address it. This approach creates more work for me – but I've also brought added value to the company that hasn't gone unnoticed.*
- 6. Prioritize learning & wear many hats: Knowing your strengths and investing in expanding your skillset will pay off in the long run, and it is good to keep flexing your creative muscles. Whether it's taking a design course, going to conferences, reading a book, working on a passion project, picking up a new language, or being taught by the brilliant people around you, learning comes in many forms and it all helps you become a better designer. There are many things to do in a CPG and everybody is busy, but I've found that us Industrial designers are naturally curious and can pick up just about any skill if it will help us do our best work. This tends to be a lethal combination - in a good way!*

On a career level:

- 7. Self advocate & communicate your successes: I promise you, no one is going to give you anything if you don't constantly ask for it as loudly as you can. In Mexico we have this saying: "you already have the "no", what's the worst that can happen if you ask?" Of course you have to actually do the work first, but making sure to communicate your successes and being your own cheerleader can get super uncomfortable, but is extremely important. How else will leadership notice and help grow your potential?**
- 8. Cultivate mentors & allies: I've been extremely lucky to have people believe in me and advocate for me throughout my career. However, connecting with people doesn't just happen on its own - I've had to work to identify, create and strategically maintain these relationships, and I have learnt to make sure to give some value back to them as well (reverse mentoring is a thing!). I usually go for senior people who I admire and feel a connection with. In the past, my mentors used to be all men, but as I network more, I find myself gravitating towards women leaders that I find authentic and deeply admire. At this stage in my career, I have also started mentoring young women designers, and I love it.**
- 9. Play the long game: There will be roadblocks and people who say no, there will be delays and things out of your control, it will get uncomfortable and stressful and scary at times, you might get sidetracked for a little while. Of course, there will also be a lot of satisfaction, small and big wins, exciting opportunities, valuable friendships and joyful days. It's all part of the journey. Finally, because of their huge size, things in**

CPGs feel like they happen in slow motion. If you're restless and prioritize meteoric growth, it might not be the place for you. Patience and good work can pay off, but only if you're willing to play the long game - and even then, things might not work out. Some of the best advice I've received: you're running a marathon, not a sprint.

At this point, I realize how much hard work, skill, opportunity and luck have come together to make my dream come true. I do not know where my career will take me next, but I am excited to pay it forward by continuing to open new paths for other women who look like me, and doing what I can to push them forward. A first small win: the role I started in still exists in Mexico City, but it is now an official Packaging Industrial Design role. It is now being led by a brilliant young woman who I just agreed to mentor and that I see so much of myself in. I know that's exactly what Daniela from 14 years ago dreaming from her cubicle in a factory would have wished to have.