

HOT TALENT

Designing spouses

Espinosas prove creativity comes in pairs

It's not often that a married couple can be together 24/7 without driving each other a bit batty—let alone working closely on creative concepts that have attracted attention from the likes of American Greetings and Coca-Cola. But then most couples aren't Leo and Laura Espinosa.

The pair met in design school in the early '90s and set up a design house called Studio Espinosa in Cambridge, Massachusetts two and a half years ago. Now, they're getting ready for the launch of their first kids TV series *Sushi Pack*, which AG Properties picked up for development and production last year. And there's a lot more in the hopper for '07, as Leo and Laura apply their artistry to TV, consumer products and interactive projects for all facets of the kids demo.

In addition to *Sushi Pack*—a 2-D action/comedy about a gang of crime-fighting sushi that will debut in the U.S. this fall—AG has optioned *Wild Blue Yonder* (working title). The mixed-media preschool series revolves around three characters interacting with classic fables and is in development for production in 2008. In the short term, we can expect to see a lot of Harmony, the iconic star of a teen-targeted merchandise line Coca-Cola is rolling out this spring. Harmony is derived from Coke's famous "I'd like to teach the world to sing..." jingle, and Leo has reinterpreted the character for modern teens.



Otis and Rae, inspired by the Espinosas' kids, will star in a book next year

Leo, in particular, draws inspiration for kid designs and concepts from observing the Espinosa's two children, whom he affectionately refers to as "our little interns." The story behind one set of characters named Otis and Rae, he says, is really about the relationship between his son and his best friend, a girl who's a few years older. The gentle tales of the adventurous animal-like creatures impressed publisher Houghton-Mifflin, which has signed on to roll out a picture book based on the property in April 2008. The couple has retained the IP rights and will be looking to translate the book into TV and consumer products.

In interactive doings, Studio Espinosa has partnered with a Belgian firm called Le Ciel Bleu to produce an interactive web game for the new version of Sesame Workshop's *The Electric Company*.

Laura and Leo usually concentrate on Licensing Show as their forum for pitching new concepts, coming armed with at

least two new IPs every year that take them more than 12 months to develop. On the kids side of their idea portfolio, they're fine-tuning a girl-skewing concept called Kris Kros Apple Sauce that features a little pink pixie. And for boys, there's BMX Elliot, a lifestyle-oriented property that revolves around a madcap, bike-riding rabbit who wears a helmet all the time. **LC**



Fizzy Fruit finds followers in retail and promos

Fruit-flavored soda has been around for eons, but Fizzy Fruit turns the idea on its head and makes an unpopular food group fun for kids. The Portland, Oregon-based company that shares a name with its product has invented a top-secret process for injecting carbonation into grapes and slices of apple and pineapple. So kids can enjoy what they so dearly love about drinking soda (namely, the prolific burping), while still getting the vitamins and antioxidants found naturally in fruit.

The product is currently selling in Wal-Mart and 7-Eleven stores in the Southern states, with 5-oz packages of the gaseous grapes going for US\$2.49. The product has also caught the attention of Disney, which will partner with Fizzy Fruit on a promotional tie-in for *Meet The Robinsons*, the studio's newest CGI film scheduled to hit theaters in March. **GR**

