RECLAIMING JOY

2026 Trends Unwrapped

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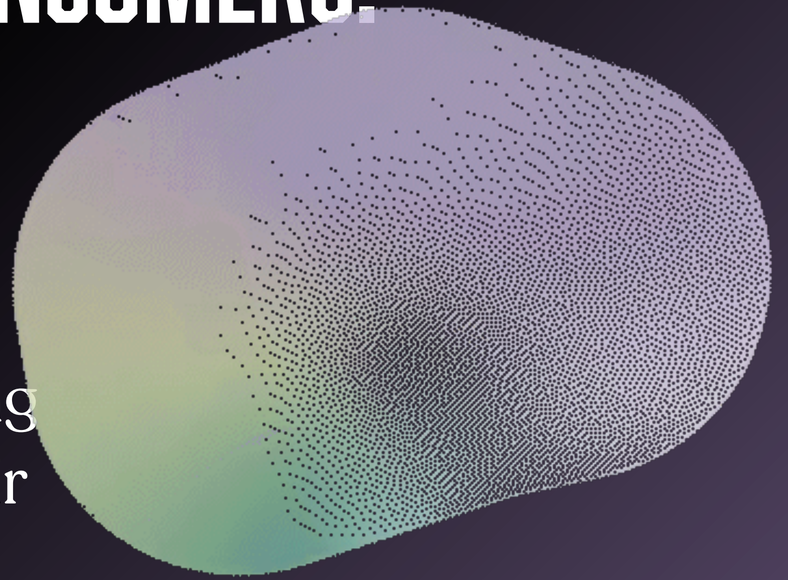
IN 2026,



JOY COMES IN MANY FLAVOURS.

This reclaiming of joy is fuelled by a generation that has learned that the world's challenges shouldn't stop them from experiencing the fullness of life.

AT SWEET&CHILLI, WE'VE SPENT THE PAST 20 YEARS CREATING BRAND EXPERIENCES THAT DELIGHT CONSUMERS.



In this mini report, we'll give you a taste of the many flavours with which joy is being expressed. We'll show you how consumers are finding connection, indulging unapologetically, and embracing friction to make their experiences genuine.

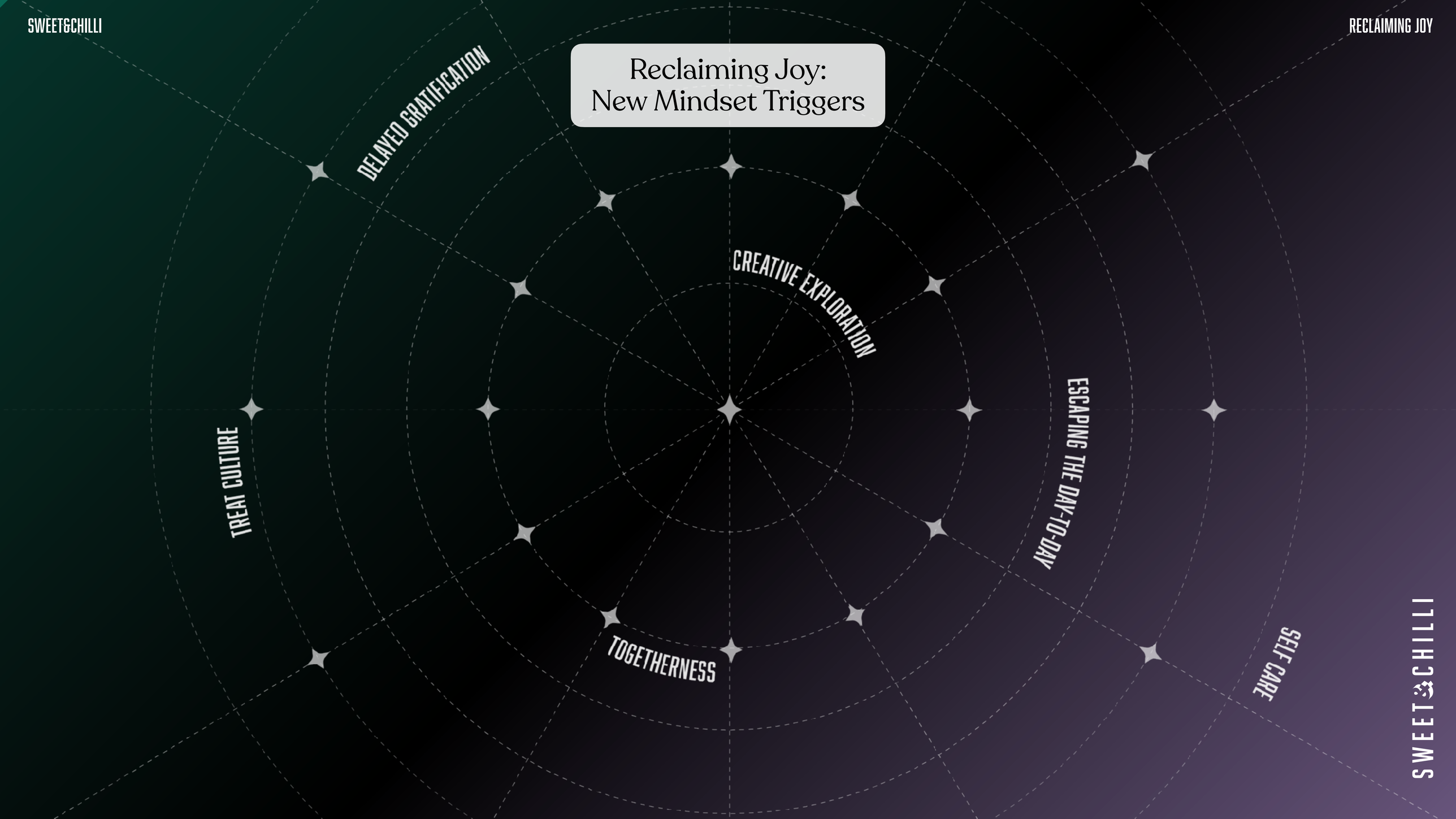
The key question: how can brands create experiences that use joy as a loyalty driver?

TAKE THIS AS A SMALL

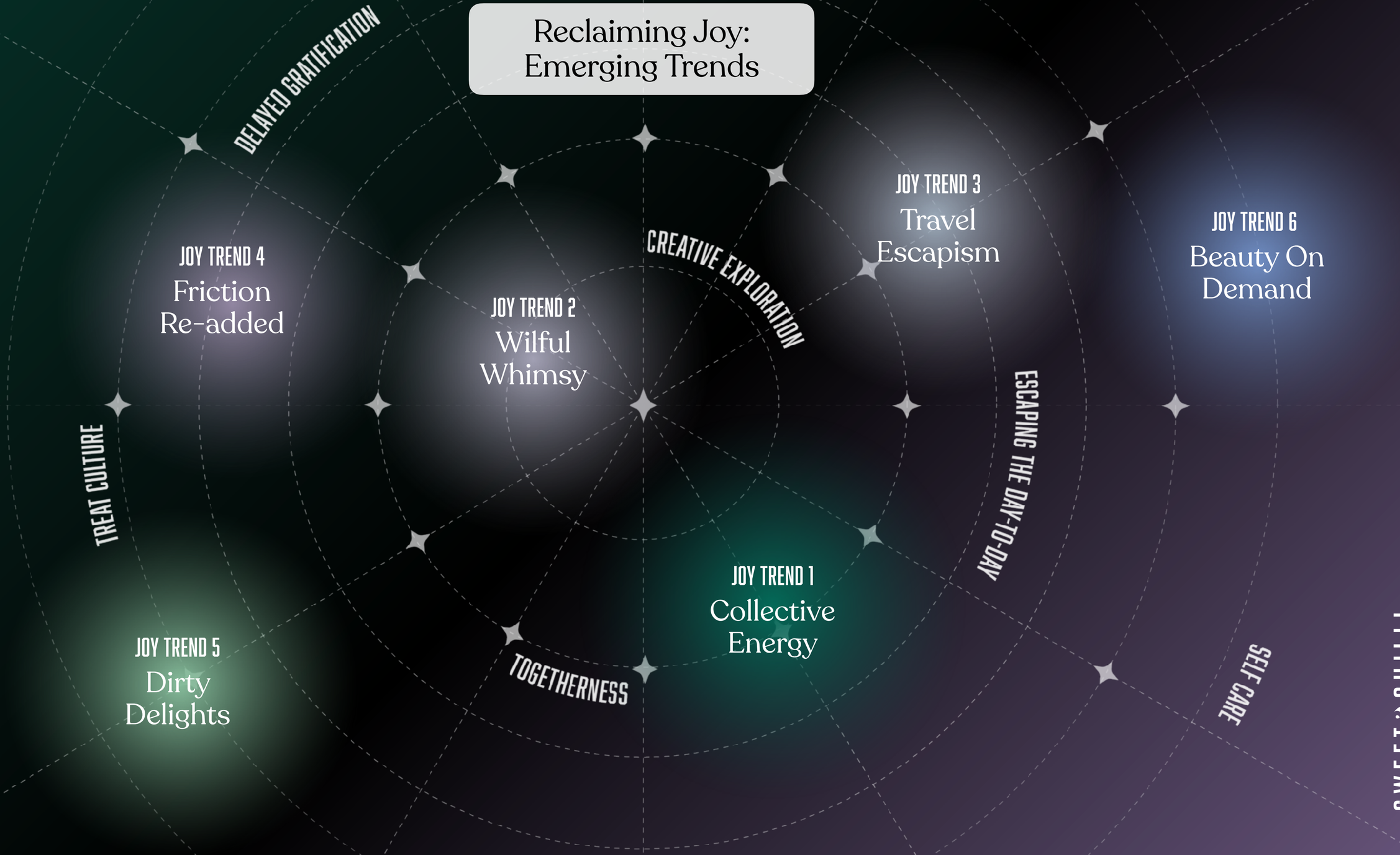
Token of Joy

FROM US TO YOU. WE HOPE IT INSPIRES YOU TO BRING THE SAME TO YOUR AUDIENCES.

Reclaiming Joy: New Mindset Triggers



Reclaiming Joy: Emerging Trends

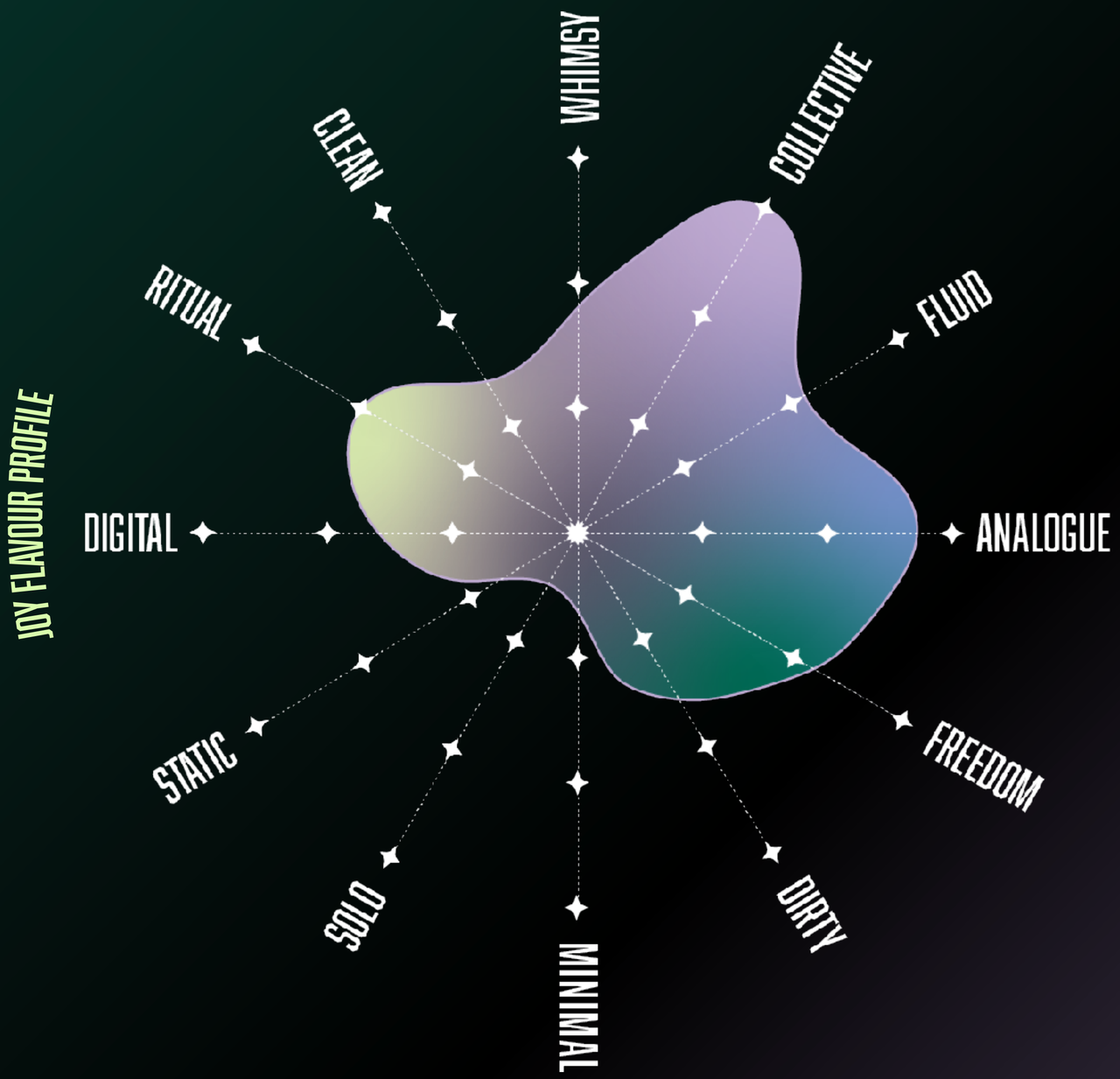


Reclaiming Joy / Trend 1

COLLECTIVE Energy



Image credit: dhash on Instagram



COLLECTIVE ENERGY

Digital isolation. Self-optimisation. Curated individualism. These defined the last decade. But something's shifting. People are rediscovering the effervescence that can only come from connecting with each other.

PETALS AT THE PUB











MICROTREND:

FIGHTING THE LONELINESS EPIDEMIC

Interflora is challenging stereotypes, hosting ‘Petals at the Pub’: a men’s floristry workshop to help them talk, connect, and open up about their mental health.

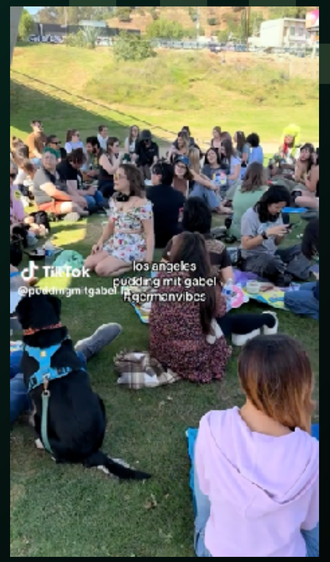
Image credit: Interflora

PUDDING MIT GABEL











MICROTREND:

FROM MEME TO MOVEMENT

The ‘Pudding mit gabel’ (pudding with a fork) trend has recently exploded. Starting as a meme, it quickly became an excuse to connect in real life, filling TikTok with videos of hundreds of young Germans descending upon local parks to eat pudding. Now this ironic catalyst for connection is spreading around the world.

Image credit: Mashable, TikTok, the Washington Post

Reclaiming Joy / Trend 2

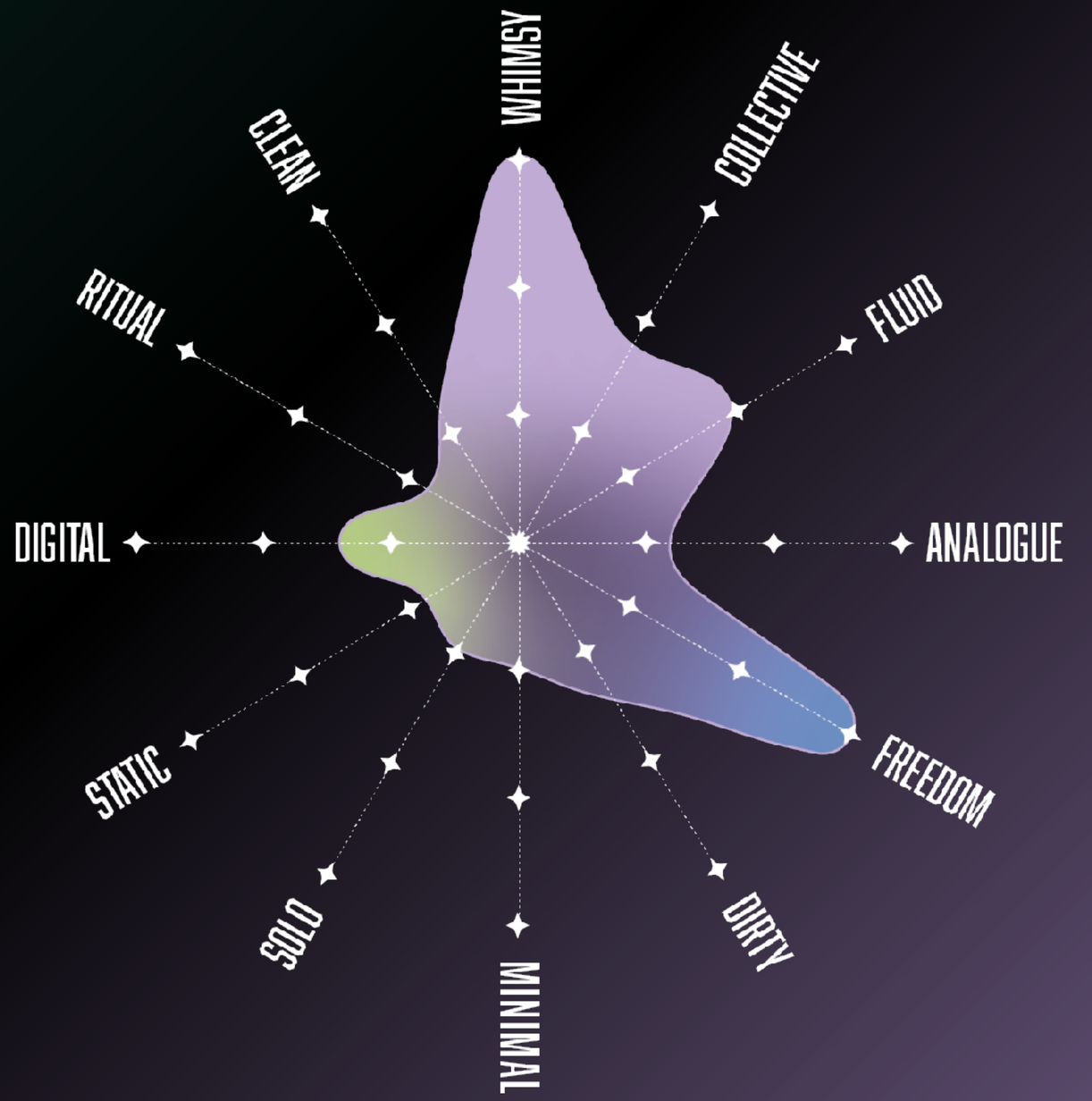
WILFUL Whimsy

Image credit: Mushroom Forest by Cheng Tsung FENG, photography Neil Shiang,

WILFUL WHIMSY

After years of beige minimalism and inoffensive 'millennial-grey', the pendulum is swinging toward a joyful absurdity.

"Whimsy" has become a global design language, inviting consumers to step out of their serious lives and into spaces that feel like fantasy made real.



EQUESTRIAN MYSTERIES











MICROTREND:

LUXURY ESCAPE ROOMS

Hermès invited guests to play detective by transforming a New York pier into an equestrian themed, theatrical maze complete with secret passages, oversized carrots, and saddle-strewn rooms.

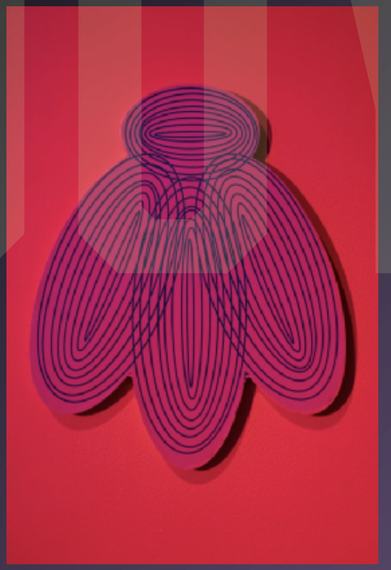
Image credit: Design Boom

WE FOUND JOY









MICROTREND:

TRANSFORMING SPACES

Courvoisier tapped designer Yinka Ilori to create ‘We Found Joy’, an immersive experience that transported their guests from Chelsea, New York to Jarnac, France. The event featured a flowing LED screen that transitioned from day to night, and a meandering table inspired by the river at the Courvoisier Mansion.

Image credit: Yinka Ilori

Reclaiming Joy / Trend 3

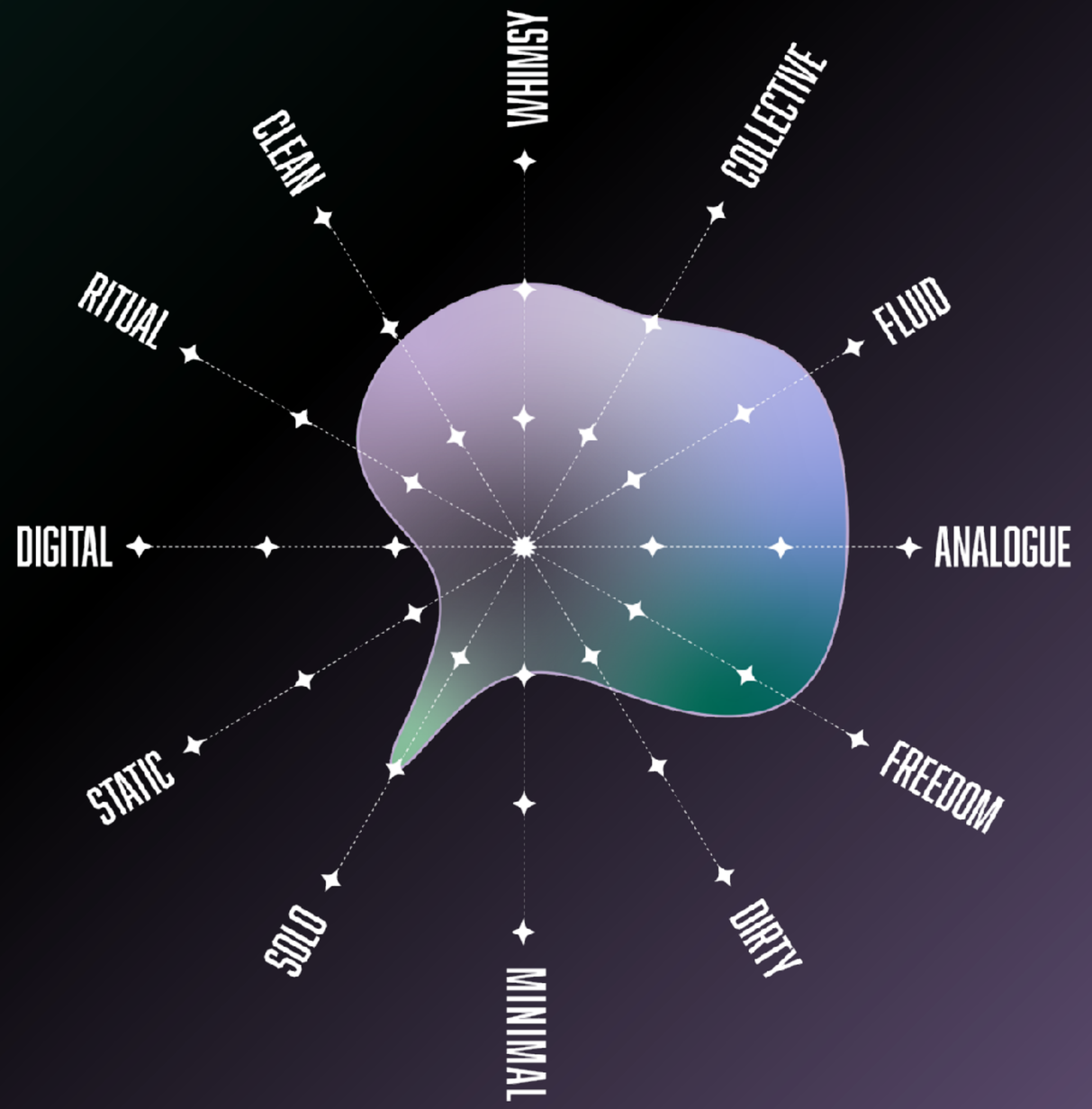
TRAVEL Escapism

SWEET&CHILLI

Image credit: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

TRAVEL ESCAPISM

Travel is being reimagined. Gone are the days of passive sun-lounger breaks - today's travellers want immersion, purpose, and play. Holidays are becoming portals into new worlds, new skills, and new communities. Whether guided by a tastemaker you trust or shaped around a passion you love, escaping now means expanding who you are.



HOSTED ESCAPES









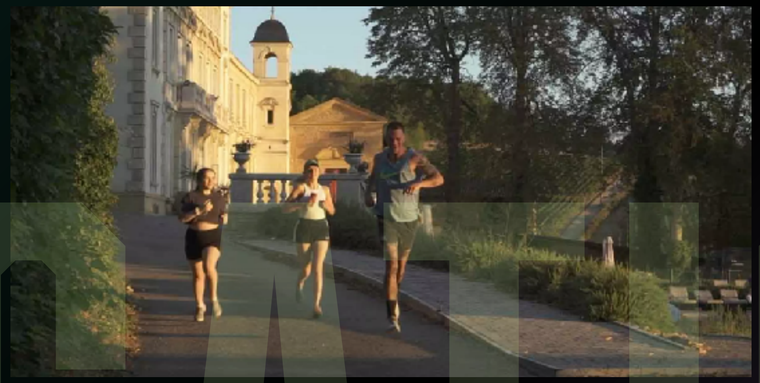
MICROTREND:

INFLUENCER & CELEBRITY-CURATED TRIPS

Influencer-led travel is turning holidays into curated, community-first adventures. Travellers join creators and public figures they trust for itineraries shaped by personality and shared interests. From Callie Thorpe's women-only Morocco trips to Rio Ferdinand's Football Escapes, these journeys blend connection, confidence and culture - where the host becomes the hook, and the destination follows.

Image credit: Subtoll, Instagram, Football Escapes









MICROTREND:

HOBBY-LED ESCAPES

Hobby-led escapes turn holidays into passion trips. Travellers are booking pottery retreats for hands-on calm, joining run-club and marathon weekends abroad for challenge and community, and escaping with groups like Ladies Who Lit for slow, book-centric breaks. Travel becomes less about ticking sights off, and more about deepening the things you love.

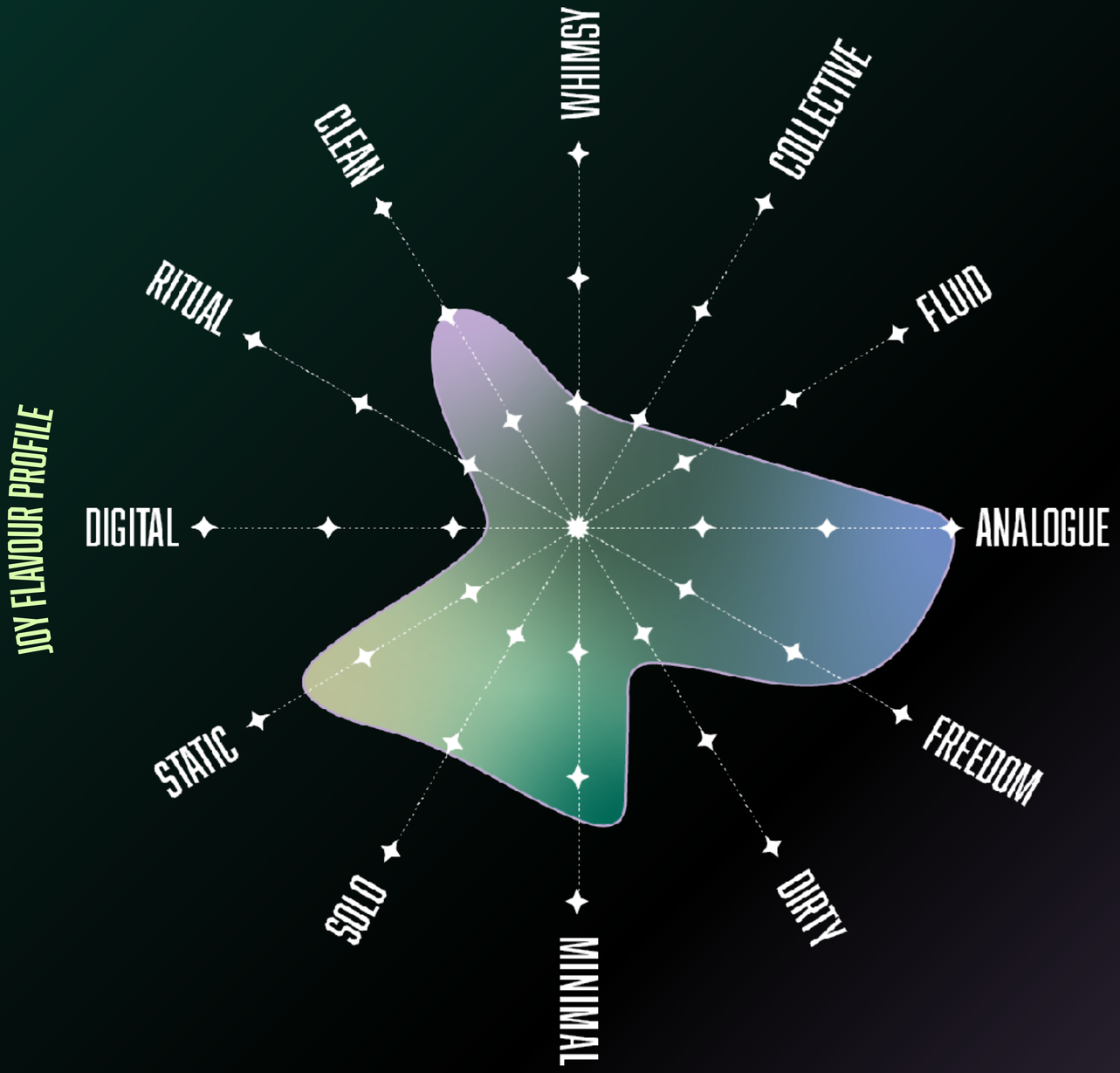
Image credit: Subtoll Instagram, Ladies Who Lit

Reclaiming Joy / Trend 4

FRICTION Re-Added



Image credit: Louis Laboratory, via Pexels



FRICTION RE-ADDED

As brands race to create a world without friction, consumers, especially younger generations, seek out experiences that require effort. This counter movement has re-discovered discovery, proving that real taste can't be predicted, pre-selected or algorithmically generated.

BLIND BOXES









MICROTREND:

BLIND BOXES

Blind boxes are enticing consumers, adding friction to indulgence by bringing the element of surprise to purchases. Pop Mart has led the way, dominating with the ravenously sought after Labubu dolls. But that's not all; people can now purchase mystery books, beer and wine. Even trading cards are making a comeback.

Image credit: Pop Mart, XIA YU/VCG VIA GETTY IMAGES, SKIDDLE

DISCOVERIES









MICROTREND:

ANALOGUE DISCOVERY

With algorithms dictating more and more of our media diet, people are turning back to physical media and 'dumb' tech. Vinyl and Mp3 players replace streaming, point-and-shoot cameras usurp smartphones. Even zines are making a comeback as people curate their own content, choosing imperfect beauty over software standardisation.

Image credit: JEENAH MOON - THE WASHINGTON POST - GETTY IMAGES, Adorama, molempire

Reclaiming Joy / Trend 5

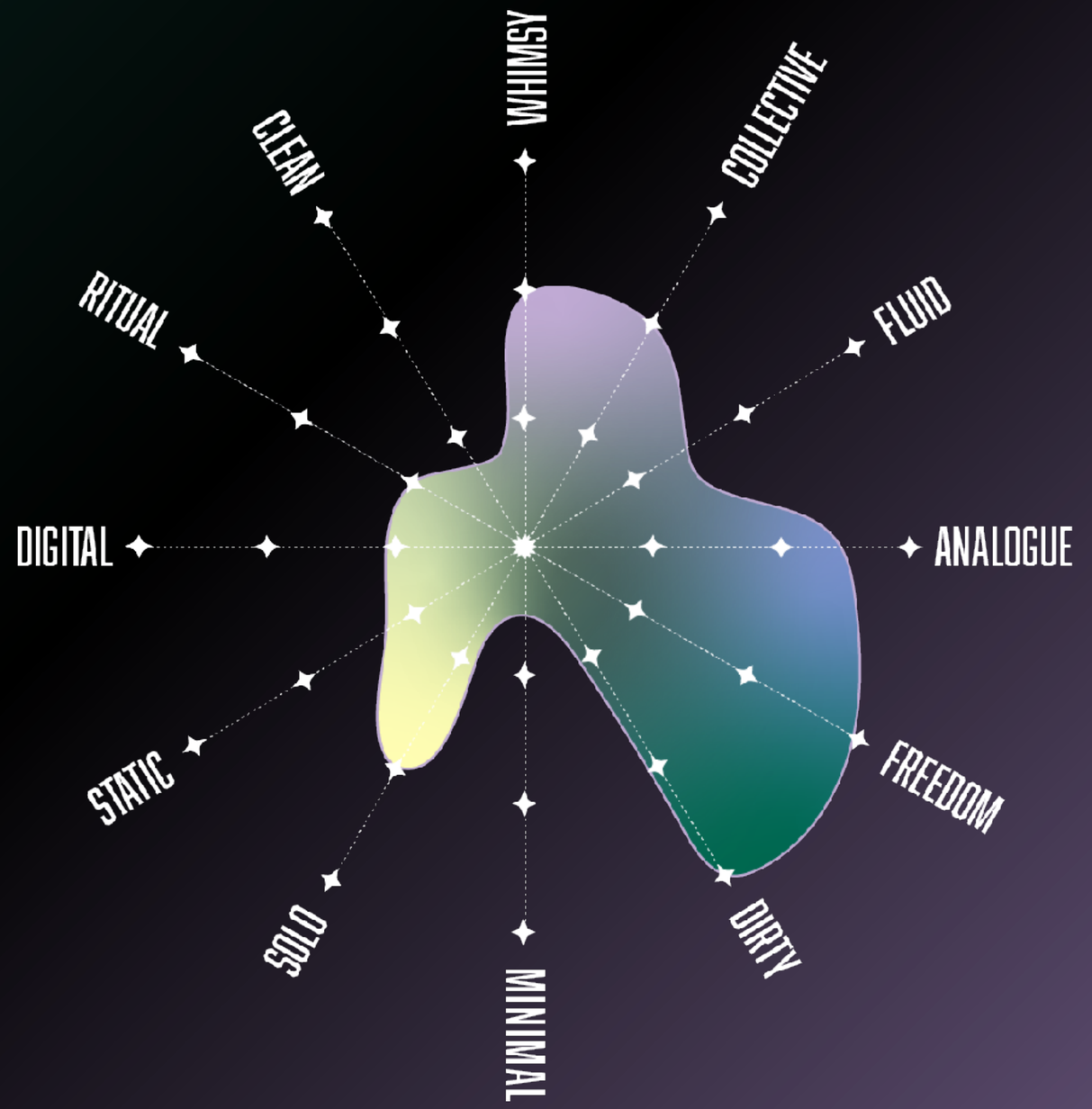
DIRTY Delights



Image credit: Fien De Vos

DIRTY DELIGHTS

The wellness backlash is here, and it's delicious. Last year's brat summer taught us that we shouldn't be ashamed of the messy parts of life, and we've taken this lesson to what we eat and drink. After years of clean eating and optimisation culture, consumers are embracing unapologetic indulgence, and brands are racing to meet them.



DIRTY SODAS









MICROTREND:

DIRTY SODAS

From ‘Dirty Sodas’ piled with toppings, to ‘Heavy Sodas’ made with double or triple the syrup, TikTok is awash with people turning simple drinks into indulgent flavour experiences. Even the humble glass of water can’t escape as people fill them with sweets, electrolytes and glitter to create giant flasks of ‘Loaded Water’.

Image credit: Swig, Drips, Reddit, ShutUpImTalking.com,, TikTok, Pinterest







MICROTREND:

SCENT SNACKING

In the era of ubiquitous GLP-1 drugs, 'scent snacking' sees people drawn to sugary, dessert-like perfumes - a trend some link to appetite changes and the desire for dopamine hits without calories. Brands are embracing the new reality with playful cultural markers like novelty Ozempic Christmas tree baubles at Selfridges or the Lidl croissant perfume.

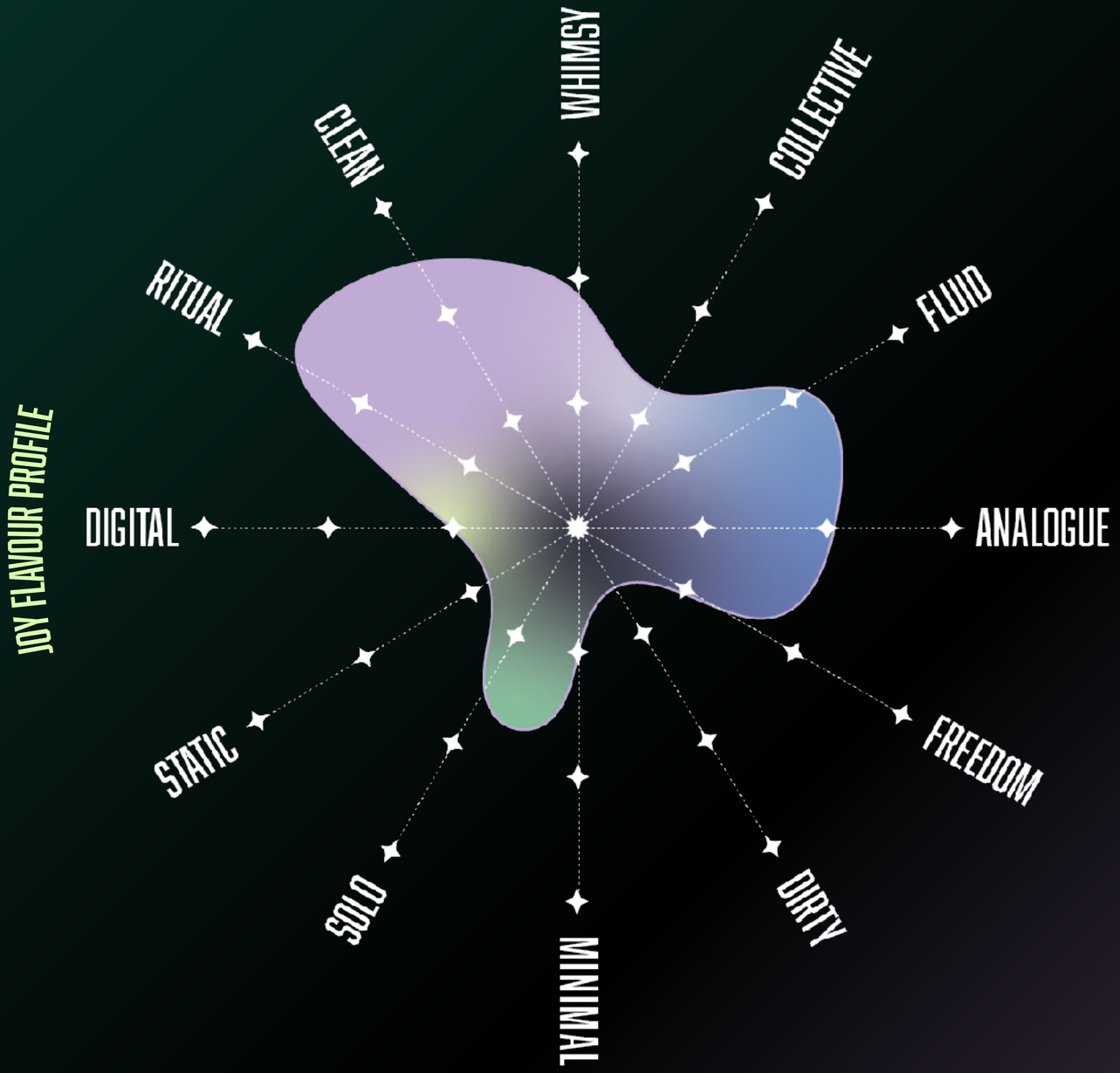
Image credit: Instagram, LIDL US, MARLI BLANCHE

Reclaiming Joy / Trend 6

SELF-CARE On Demand



Image credit: Carly Fridhandler



SELF CARE ON DEMAND

Beauty waits for no one, and now consumers can access it wherever they want. They're throwing off embarrassment and adorning themselves whenever they need to, turning every space into a temple of self-care. The message is clear: transformation doesn't require a destination, just time and the willingness to claim it.

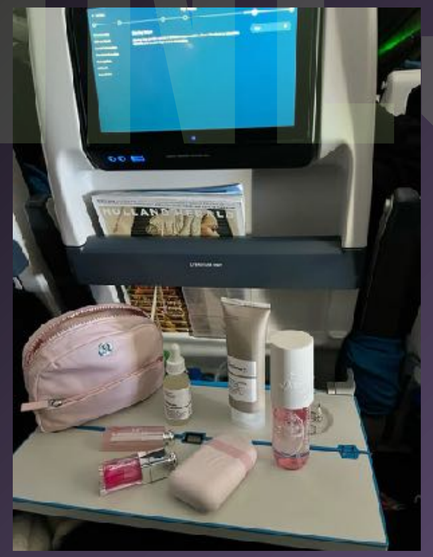
IN-FLIGHT ROUTINES











MICROTREND:

FLIGHTS AS TEMPORARY SPAS

What started off as an influencer trend became a common sight on planes - we are breaking barriers, publicly flaunting our intense beauty regimes mid flight. We've turned plane seats into flying palaces of self care. Airlines can capitalise on this by adding beauty to their in-flight menus.

Image credit: CANDACE MARINO, Pinterest

COLLAGEN COFFEE









MICROTREND:

GOING OUT AS BEAUTY ROUTINE

Collagen Coffee has emerged as a way for people to add skin rejuvenation to their caffeine hits. With outlets in Paris, Bali and Maroc, 48 Collagen Coffee takes this a step further. Combining a coffee shop with a wellness parlour complete with LED face masks, they've created an elevated beauty experience available downtown.

Image credit: 48 Collagen Coffee

The 6 Trends Reclaiming Joy in 2026

COLLECTIVE ENERGY



WILFUL WHIMSY



SELF-CARE ON DEMAND



TRAVEL ESCAPISM



DIRTY DELIGHTS



FRICTION RE-ADDED



SWEET&CHILLI

2026 is the year when consumers will re-embrace joy.

They'll find it in colour and connection, whimsy and escapism.
They'll meet new friends and discover new ways
to enjoy time with old ones. They'll seek out the unexpected and
prioritise self-care whenever and wherever.

Sweet&Chilli will be part of this journey,
helping brands create experiences that deliver
the joy their customers crave.

Ready to explore what this means for your brand? Let's talk.

THE SWEET&CHILLI TEAM WISHES YOU A

Joyful Holiday!

WE LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING TOGETHER IN 2026.

hellouk@sweetandchilli.com