

# Inside Trader Joe's Podcast Transcript – Episode 53: How To Make A Trader Joe's (Part 2)

Tara: It turns out you can't make a Trader Joe's in just one episode. It's impossible.

Matt: So this is how to make a Trader Joe's Part Deux.

*[Theme music begins and two bells at a neighborhood Trader Joe's.]*

Matt: All right. So where did we leave off?

Tara: A neighborhood Trader Joe's needs to look like the neighborhood. So Matt and Javier are among the crew members who are working hard to help make this new Trader Joe's in Parker, Colorado. They're in charge of creating these big, beautiful murals in the store.

Matt: So how's it coming along, guys?

*[Transition to the art guys - Matt & Javier.]*

Matt (Guest): So far we've got the larger murals are up and in action. Some of the more iconic mountain peaks, and then we, in Colorado, are known for our sunrises and sunsets making the sky super colorful so that allowed us the opportunity to involve a lot of color in our murals so that it's not just, you know, blue sky and brown or gray mountains. You know what I mean? We spent time driving around and looking at our surroundings. There's a lot of things from the original town of Parker in the early 1900s that still exist. We built some of those things hoping that people should recognize them.

Matt: So it's interesting to hear you use the phrase, you know, building, building things. It sounds like you're maybe making things in three dimensions. Is it painting? Is it illustration, collage? How are you making this work?

Matt (Guest): The backgrounds are, would you say 100% painted?

Javier: Yeah, yeah. They're painted on canvas.

Matt (Guest): And then we've used like, some wood and other materials to kind of emulate 3D, what would you call that 2.5?

Javier: 2.5D, yeah.

Matt (Guest): It's made to look like it's 3D.

Matt: I'm assuming that you're having conversations with Captain Ty and the rest of the crew. Was there a particular stylistic approach that was highlighted?

Matt (Guest): The most that was really asked of us was to kind of push the envelope a little bit and see how original we could make the store look in comparison to other stores.

Javier: Like a great example for that is, the first mural as you walk in the store has a large barn, and it's 12 feet long and about four feet high. And it's made to look exactly like the real barn with windows and doors and everything. And I think that kind of stuff is like the real sort of difference, where like before, when we would paint murals for Trader Joe's, it'd just be a flat picture of a barn, you know? It wouldn't exist in space the way it does. So I think the stuff that Matt has done with that is pretty unique.

Tara: They trust that you understand what we want from making this look like a neighborhood store.

Matt (Guest): Yeah, exactly.

Tara: You have an idea of what makes sense.

Matt (Guest): Oh yeah. No, it's been good times (chuckles).

Tara: We know that you're busy getting these murals finished in time for store opening soon, so thank you very much. And go have fun doing more art.

Matt: Indeed, thank you.

Javier: We will. Thank you. (laughs)

Matt (Guest): Thank you.

*[Music ends. Transition to store signs - Chloe.]*

Tara: So murals are big signs. Big kind of works of art, right? But we also need regular size signs, also works of art in their own right. Matt, did you bring the standard Trader Joe's signs from the office? Did you send those out to Parker?

Matt: No, I didn't and that's because there aren't any.

*[Upbeat music begins.]*

Tara: Wait, what?

Matt: Deliberately, by design, on purpose, we don't have a central sign supply depot because that would be really boring.

Tara: So here in the new Trader Joe's in Parker, Colorado, in addition to everything else she'll be doing in the store, one of the crew members who will be making signs is Chloe.

Chloe: Hi.

Matt: Hey.

Tara: And so you're putting together signs for what we call end caps.

Chloe: Yeah.

Tara: Why are products put on an end cap? What drives that?

Chloe: Section leads might want to draw attention to an item, whether it's one that's already getting a lot of attention that might be a customer favorite, maybe like the underrated product that hasn't caught on yet, but we know it's good and we're just putting it out there.

Matt: Kinda like smoked trout?

Tara: (laughs)

Chloe: Exactly.

Matt: Could be one of those things that you would want to do a special little something for.

Tara: So the products that end up on an end cap, they're not dictated to you by some central location.

Chloe: Oh, no, we're not really talking to anyone when outside the store. Every single product in this store essentially has to have a tag listing its price, of course, as well as two bullet points explaining what it's like and something you can use it in or for.

Tara: Every product on the shelves has its own handmade sign.

Chloe: I just finished the flower section, which we're always gonna have the most fun with but we just got some rainbow gypsum or baby's breath.

Matt: Sounds like a new ice cream flavor.

Chloe: Right? (laughs) It looks pretty. It looks like cotton candy almost so, one of our bullet points is, not edible, not candy. Just (laughs)...

Matt: That's helpful, yeah.

Chloe: Yeah. (laughs)

Matt: What is the, in your sign making experience at Trader Joe's, the most challenging product to produce a sign in support of this product? What is the most difficult product you've had to make a sign for?

Chloe: I'm looking at a sign right now, the New Zealand Sweet Apple Rings, which is unsweetened, unfiltered. Honestly, anything that has a very long name is very difficult to make a sign for. (laughs)

Matt: Okay. Like for me, it would be mayonnaise.

Chloe: (laughs)

Tara: (laughs)

Matt: Like I would make a sign for mayonnaise and it would just say, "Mayonnaise, keep it to yourself."

Chloe: (laughs)

Tara: Matt, you just made a lot of mayonnaise's fans very unhappy.

Matt: It's true. And they'll be okay.

Tara: Thank you, Chloe. We appreciate your time.

Chloe: Thank you. It's nice talking with you guys. Have a good one.

*[Music ends. Transition to section leaders - Lauren & Theresa.]*

Tara: Now let's talk to some people who are gonna have new roles at this store.

*[Light upbeat music begins.]*

Lauren: My name is Lauren. I absolutely live and breathe Trader Joe's and it's a passion of mine. I went to middle school, elementary, middle school, high school in Parker. I moved to Denver for three years and Parker is just pulling me back and I'm really excited to open this new store.

Theresa: I'm Theresa. I actually live in Parker, and I'm so excited to be part of building a new store.

Tara: So each of you are crew members who are going to be section leaders. What does it mean to be a section leader?

Lauren: Section leader is ownership over a specific section in Trader Joe's, whether it's perishable, whether it's dry, whether it's a big section, whether it's a small section, it's you

having the passion and the eye for ordering that section, remerching, facing. You wanna show off your section and be proud.

Matt: You know I think we need a retail jargon alert. In fact, we need two.

*[Jargon Alert - News Flash Sound]*

Matt: Remerching. Facing. What are these things? Remerching, shorthand for remerchandising, is to rearrange where products go on a shelf in a given section, in a particular part of the store. Now that is something that's decided at each store by the crew members in that store. There's no central planogram. There's no central service office telling you where the ketchup has to go. Your crew members in your store, they make those decisions. And facing. Now facing has a couple of potential meanings. It could mean after a busy day pulling products forward so that the shelf looks full, facing them forward. It also means the number of facings, or instances of a product that are on a shelf. So that's another decision that the crew gets to make. There's no set number that ketchup must always have three or five or seven facings. I mean, I love odd numbers, but that crew member leading that section in that store, that person gets to make that determination.

Theresa: It's like your baby. So I'm gonna be the section lead over the dairy section. It's just about knowing the product, knowing what our best sellers are, making sure that the signs look really good, building a team around that. So training is a big part of it too. You know, in the past I worked at other grocery stores and I just love the freedom that we have.

Matt: Tell us some more about what that freedom means.

Theresa: For instance, I, basically, I have had the freedom to decide where the products are gonna go. At other grocery retailers it's not like that. They have it all planned out for you already and it's very rigid and strict and you have to just follow that and don't stray from it at all. And it's like we have a creative freedom to make our section what we want it to be. For example, Oat Beverage is the star of the dairy section. You know, and I've already spoken with the art team about like, let's make a sign that really pops for that. And the signs are creative and fun too.

Lauren: Yeah.

Theresa: Which I really like.

Lauren: I'm a section leader for Fresh. I'm the fresh section leader. A good idea we had for Fresh is having personal crew favorites. Having a little circular sign that says, "This is my favorite salad for the month", or "Lauren's favorite," "Theresa's favorite."

Tara: So with that in mind, let's talk about favorites. What is your favorite product in the section that you think customers are gonna respond to?

Theresa: I am a really big fan of that new Brown Sugar...

Lauren: Oh my goodness.

Theresa: Creamer.

Lauren: So good.

Theresa: Yeah, so good. (laughs)

Lauren: I like the pizza dough cause I'm Italian, I'm from New Jersey. I've made strombolis and garlic knots and calzones and personal pizzas.

Tara: Yeah, that's a good one. Okay, this is a brand new store. You're gonna have some customers who walk through the door who have never been inside a Trader Joe's before. If you had to come up with one thing that you hope they'll take away from their first Trader Joe's experience to tell their family and friends, what would that be?

Theresa: The customer experience. Just not going off of a script or anything, really making each interaction as authentic and sincere as we possibly can.

Lauren: Yeah. I want customers to feel comfortable, safe, secure, and that they can turn to any one of us crew members and we're happy to help. I want them to be as happy as I am.

Tara: Can't ask for more than that really.

Girls: (laughs)

Tara: Thank you.

*[Music ends. Transition to neighborhood shares program - Ashley.]*

Ashley: Hi, my name is Ashley. I am a mate at Trader Joe's in Colorado, Parker, our new store.

Matt: Have you ever been on a podcast before?

Ashley: This is my first time, obviously. (giggles)

Matt: Well, just be yourself, that's what we do. And if we can get away with it...

Ashley: (laughs)

Tara: Tell us Ashley, how long have you worked with Trader Joe's?

Ashley: I have worked with Trader Joe's for nine years. I started in Southern California and moved out here to Colorado six years ago.

Tara: Excellent! We wanna talk to you specifically today about our Neighborhood Shares Program. What's that process been like as you gear up to get the store open?

Ashley: A lot of it was done by Jen in the office because she wants to make sure that we have an equitable partner who's gonna get our food where it needs to go. If you actually go to where the shares are gonna be handed out and you see the process of what it looks like, and our crew members see the process, you start to make the connection. If you know that your neighbor who lives in your community needs to be able to eat that food, you're gonna take a lot more care. I get really proud when I look at my fellow crew members and there'll be three bad oranges in a four pound bag of oranges and they'll reach their hands in there and actually grab out a moldy orange and compost it and give the rest to donations. And that happens at every store. And people understand where this food is going and that people need it.

Tara: These are people in our neighborhoods. These are people in our communities who are just, at this moment in time, in need of a little extra help when it comes to putting food on the table.

Ashley: At my last store, which was the Littleton store, a lot of people who volunteer at food banks are actually older people who are the people who can't really do the exposure that maybe somebody else might be able to do. So they asked us to come and give away food with them. Every crew member who wanted to actually went and handed out the shares. And literally there was a line of cars 25, 50 cars deep, where people were pulling in and we loaded their trunks with food for them to take home.

Tara: I've heard stories over time from folks who have been recipients of our Neighborhood Shares and who, when their situations improved, came back and shopped with us and said that they hadn't shopped with us prior, but that the food they received from us via our Neighborhood Shares Program via their local food bank was so good that they made special trips to come to Trader Joe's after that.

Ashley: I've actually heard that a lot as well, myself. One person we actually ended up, I believe, making her a special shopping cart for Thanksgiving dinner because she had dietary restrictions. I know she was suffering from an illness and she had to be on a specific diet. And she told me after she couldn't believe the generosity that we had, number one done that, but that we had things that fit her needs. She actually became a regular customer and she came in every week and she would say hello. And you know, I didn't tell anybody else that I knew that she had come from the food bank, just I was always really happy when I saw her shopping in our store again.

Tara: It's a great story.

Ashley: I think the one thing that's really touching to me is walking into that food bank and just knowing that we're about to make a huge difference for them. Because the next time I walk into that food bank, once we're open, it's gonna be filled with Trader Joe's products.

Tara: Well, Ashley, I don't wanna take up any more of your time.

Ashley: Thank you for including me. I know you may end up kind of cutting me totally out, but I'm glad that (laughs) I got to have this, so thank you.

Matt: Speaking from experience, I'm totally used to being cut out. It happens all the time, but I think you're gonna be safe on this one, Ashley. So thank you.

*[Music ends.]*

Tara: You know I'm always proud to work at Trader Joe's, but really never prouder than when I think about the Neighborhood Shares Program.

*[Light music begins.]*

Matt: We take it very seriously in every store and that's why we already have Ashley working on it.

Tara: Before we leave our friends and crew members here in Colorado, I wanna check in with Captain Ty and Regional VP Phil one more time.

*[Small transition to Ty and Phil.]*

Matt: Hey Ty, congratulations. You have hired such an impressive crew here.

Ty: Yeah, I know. I'm surrounded by greatness, yeah. But like I was really concerned about hiring cause that's been a challenge, you know, over the last year or so, but man, they've been the best interviews and moms and retirees and high school kids and, you know, kind of every walk of life and I think it's gonna be a nice blend.

Phil: Ty was talking to these people several weeks before they came to this store. They were working with Ty to make sure they wanted to teach people that were new, that they were going to be patient, that they were gonna be passion-forward, if that makes sense, not just that they lived close to this. That said, we have a lot of people that are right here in this community that are veterans that get to come home to open a Trader Joe's. It's pretty exciting.

Ty: Yeah, even me, just personally, I live pretty close to this store and I've been commuting, you know, and driving on freeways for seven years and picking up my daughter from track practice is a 20-minute thing so, this is our neighborhood store.

Matt: Okay, so let's look into your crystal ball. What do you want this store to be? And beginning with that end in mind, what do you see ahead for the Trader Joe's in Parker?

Ty: I think it'll be a special one. My hope is that we kind of create a store, you know, that is really in tune with the neighborhood, that family shop, that kids enjoy being at, that we become the favorite grocery store of Parker.

Matt: I love it.

Tara: It's a big ask, but at the same time, it's kind of what we all strive to do. When you're shopping at Trader Joe's, when you're operating at Trader Joe's, when you're in there doing the work, you want people to be happy in there.



Phil: I would say that to watch the birth of a store is one of the most exciting and fulfilling things you can do and exhausting. It's like less important to parenting.

Ty: Yeah, I have 80 kids, right?

Tara: (laughs)

*[Music ends. Closing music begins.]*

Tara: Okay, Matt, through the magic of podcasting, we now fast forward.

*[Tape fast forwarding.]*

Tara: Those interviews were recorded when the new Trader Joe's in Parker, Colorado was still under construction. We can now announce that the Trader Joe's is officially open for business. So...

*[Bullhorn button turns on, slight feedback. Next line is on a bullhorn.]*

Tara: Attention listeners south of Denver, check out the new store in Parker.

*[Bullhorn effect ends]*

Tara: And thanks for checking out Inside Trader Joe's, too. If you enjoyed it, please write a review and hit that free subscribe or follow button.

Matt: It *is* free and worth every penny.

Tara: Until next time, thanks for listening.

Matt: And thanks for listening.