

A logotype is a simple tool, like a hammer; it has a straightforward function. Anything that gets in the way of that function weakens the effectiveness of the tool. Keep it simple. You don't need an elaborate hammer, one with adornments. Same for symbols. Simplicity, clarity, elegance. And by elegance I mean the sort of form that a wide diversity of viewers will find visually active and easily remembered. Being memorable matters a lot. If the form is ornate, it can't stick in memory.

Such simplicity is hard to achieve if what you are after is attractive, memorable simplicity that carries your message without ambiguity. Simple and ugly is easy; simple and boring is easy; simple and vague is also easy. How, then, does a designer go about achieving this simple result, a hammer that hammers, a symbol that symbolizes? The answer itself is simple (It's the process that's hard): Study the client; study the audience. This is all about communication. The client sends; the audience receives. The symbol is the signal. So the designer must understand what the client needs to communicate to its audience and must also understand how the audience can best receive that communication.

Back to the *process*. When we have completed research and analysis, gained the requisite understanding of client and audience, tested the products and services, taken to ourselves the client's goals, made them our own, we begin the thrilling part; we begin to design.

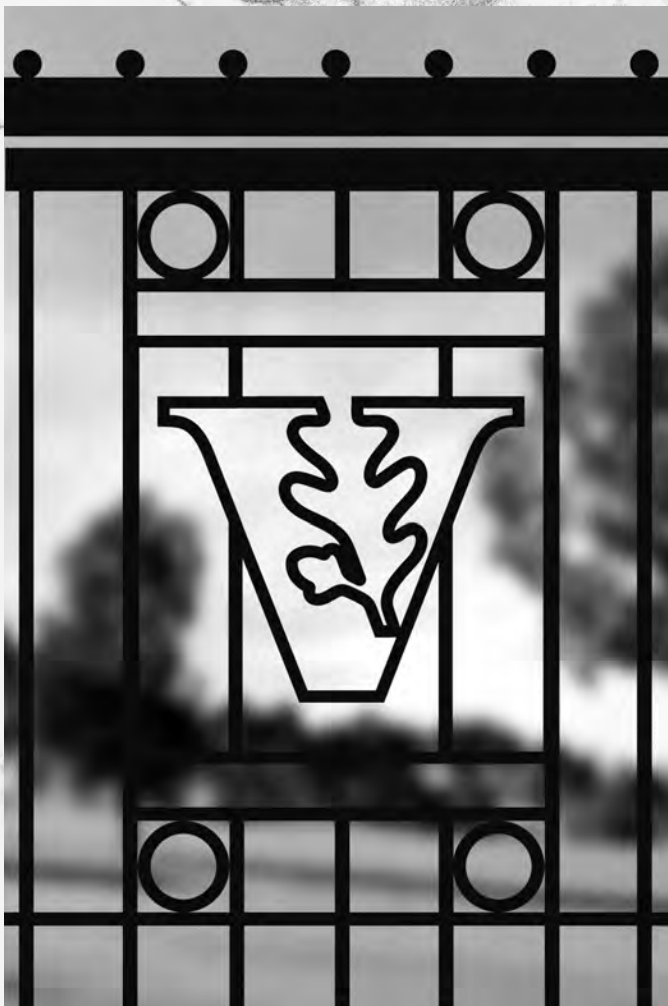
In our quest for an effective visual identity, we generate hundreds of possible versions. Almost all of these will be off the mark; a few show promise. It is only through this kind of visual exploration that an effective symbolic form begins to emerge. This procedure is common in nature and common in human endeavor.

Logotype 2002
Vanderbilt University

The identity integrates two symbols long associated with Vanderbilt: the oak leaf (strength and steadfastness) and the acorn (seed of knowledge). These elements also reflect the school's status as an arboretum.



VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY



Think of nature's ways: millions of seeds, a single plant takes root; millions of sperm, just one uniting with the ovum to form a single offspring. Think of the artist's ways: A few years before he died, Harry Callahan, a great photographer, turned over to the Center for Creative Photography (University of Arizona) more than 100,000 negatives that, by agreement, would never be printed. I asked Harry about this profligate abundance. He said, "I shoot a lot of film before I get a picture that I like."

Often a few of the numerous variations we produce during this beginning phase of identity development are delightful to look at. It is not the absence of visual appeal that disqualifies these candidates. Indeed, it is often disheartening to see them set aside. Function alone determines the outcome. We are looking for an image that captures and conveys the essence of the client's enterprise. Beauty is never enough. From those few forms that survive the cut, we close in on the strongest, and this becomes the center of our focus. Now we enter the realm of nuance, the designer's state of grace. Subtleties abound: form and counterform, negative space, light wells, and a host of other elements that greatly influence the final outcome but will escape notice of all but the sharpest eye.

How does Bach get from the “Goldberg Variations” that universe of emotional power? Ask Glenn Gould. The rest of us remain enthralled by that power and mostly ignorant of its technical origins. For students of design, however, visual nuance is their stock in trade. The angels are in the details.

If you turn to the pages of this book that deal with our development of symbols, you can get a feeling for the steps we follow and the strategies we employ. Once we have invented a logotype, we spell out for the client the many ways in which it can be used in particular contexts. These instructions and suggestions—a set of guidelines with examples of a various applications—are both liberating and constraining. We want the client to make optimum use of the symbol; we very much want it not to be misused. There is always ample room to adjust relevant design elements to suit particular applications (stationery, packaging, advertising, three-dimensional display, and so on). Colors may vary within prescribed limits; placement may sometimes be adjusted to suit particular purposes and media, as long as these adjustments fit one or another of the grid formats that we provide in our guidelines. A major goal for any visual identity is to build familiarity within the target audience, to prompt the viewer to “identify” the symbol with its source, the entity being symbolized. Consistency, that much-maligned hobgoblin, plays, in this case, a constructive, even essential, role in the optimum use of the symbol.

In addition to guidelines on paper, we give our client a DVD that shows the ways in which the logotype can be employed across a wide range of applications; and, when appropriate, we create a Web site (only accessible to the client) that provides essentially exhaustive guidance. Not all applications can be anticipated—institutions and corporate entities evolve—but basic principles of use can be clear enough to allow invention of new variations as new needs arise, while still sustaining the consistency so crucial to successful application of a visual identity.

I mentioned earlier, parenthetically, that the designer sometimes helps an organization “create” its so-called spirit or

personality. The more I think about it, the more I am inclined to view this function as a substantial part of the designer’s job. Unlike an individual, whose personality is, for the most part, set and inescapable even if difficult to define, an organization might have failed to achieve a state of maturation that allows it to see itself, and to be seen by others, as having any distinct identity at all. When this is so, when the organization’s identity, for whatever reason, remains amorphous, a strong symbol, properly presented, can give it a distinct, easily recognized, and favorable “personality.”

In this era of casual attire—lawyers at work in T-shirts, the Queen of England in blue jeans—clothes can no longer be said to make the man. The chairman of the board can dress like a college student, but the “clothes” an organization wears, its visual devices (logo, Web page, packaging, letterhead, and so on) have great meaning. Apple, for instance, has generated an upbeat mood in the market for computers not just because the hardware works well. The “look” counts. Product design and promotion design in all its ramifications have pulled that company out of the valley of the shadow and back onto the playing fields of business. If an organization lacks a distinct and positive personality, the designer can provide one—and I mean an *authentic* one, not just a superficial dressing up that fails to stand the test of time.

There is a corollary to this principle that *clothes (help) make the organization*. Design not only helps to identify an organization and thus improve its performance within its market (and here I mean market in the broad sense, where universities and foundations and art museums and other “not-for-profits” have a market); it also helps improve performance within the organization itself. There is nothing exotic about this phenomenon. Workers at all levels within an organization can get an emotional boost from the power that their organization’s visual symbol generates. Where does pride come from? We’ll leave the answer to the psychologists or maybe the geneticists and evolutionary biologists. There is no question, however, that pride is a motivating stimulus—sometimes a politically destructive one (think of Nazi pride)—and there is no question that being proud of your organization can prompt you to work

hard to fulfill its mission. Put simply, if you are an organization, good design is good for you, inside and out!

I show on page 209 the symbol we designed for the New Bedford Whaling Museum because it demonstrates my point about the inside-outside effect that strong visual identity can bring to an organization. The museum staff is enthusiastic about the symbol (one of the workers installing signs there told us he is having it tattooed on his arm), and the press includes it when running articles on exhibits at the museum, PR exposure that would ordinarily cost a lot of money. The result: higher public attendance, reduced staff turnover.

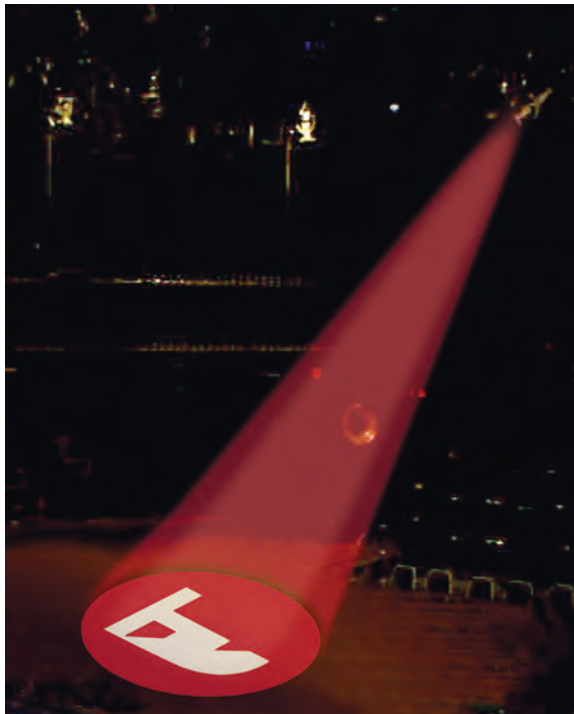
At the risk of sounding grandiose, I’ll mention, in passing, what I regard as a beneficial side effect of good design. Ugliness can be emotionally costly; it can be stressful the way harsh noise is stressful. Visual dissonance, like a wrong note in music, can set the mind on edge. Some of us have a high tolerance for disorder and feel no unease in an ugly place, don’t even see it as ugly. But most of us find such environments dismaying, even depressing. As previously mentioned, I have no data from research to support this contention, but I do contend that our public health, in general, would be much improved if we were to design with greater care our cities, towns, and suburbs and all the manufactured components of our physical world. We seek solace in natural settings, and we are increasingly aware that those wild places must be protected from the damage of human exploitation. We are failing, though, to defend ourselves against the damage that urban and suburban ugliness can do to human health. Some will say that beauty and ugliness are subjective concepts, that what you find attractive I might well find repulsive. How, then, are we to determine an optimum visual experience for the human population as a whole? I think this argument, which sounds reasonable, is probably wrong. It seems to me that there is a human nature, that we have in common across cultures a sense of visual harmony that brings us ease and a sense of visual dissonance that brings us discomfort.



Here are some of our early sketches for the visual identity for Trinity Repertory Company.



TRINITY



In our concept for banners, we demonstrated how only a small portion of the symbol could be present yet still retain meaning and identify Trinity Rep.



Identity 2001

Trinity Repertory Company

The guidelines we give to a client—the rules to follow when using our design in various applications—are not meant to be strict decrees.

Trinity Repertory Company, one of the best theatrical groups in the U.S., has a long tradition of excellence: great plays, great acting. Still, it was widely considered “high falutin’, high society,” and its new creative director wanted, indeed needed, to expand the audience. This director, a remarkably dynamic and inventive man, did us the great honor of hiring Malcolm Gear Designers to assist him in this daunting task. At the outset, we suggested that the whole enterprise “lighten up” and seek explicitly the attention of the younger set within the community, while retaining the loyal allegiance of current supporters.

We began with a basic idea. Actors assume roles. That’s the job. A skillful actor can take on the identity of a wide diversity of characters. We wanted a symbol that was similarly agile. If the symbol were seen to be entertaining, potential ticket buyers might, in fact, buy tickets. Entertainment, after all, is what theater is about. A play can make you laugh or cry or both, and it can make you think; but it better be entertaining or it will fail.

The illustrations shown on this page are just a few of those that we included in our “concept presentation,” and by this term I mean the set of possibilities that a designer shows a client in order to give that client’s own in-house designers a sense of how a symbol can be adapted to suit particular functions. A concept presentation focuses on ways in which the symbol, the concept, can be adjusted for varying purposes. Not all such symbols require this flexibility; some remain fixed in form and color no matter what, and that fixity can be a virtue.



We had a great time working with Trinity, and the results were beyond expectations. The audience for its productions doubled; fund-raising jumped ahead of schedule. It would be grandiose to pretend that our symbol made all the difference; it is fair to say it helped a lot. What helped too is the high quality of Trinity productions and the hard work and creative vigor of their marketing people and members of the fund-raising group, all of whom saw the value of effective design. For a designer, good clients are those who recognize the power of design. It is almost a law of nature that a designer needs a good client in order to produce a good design.



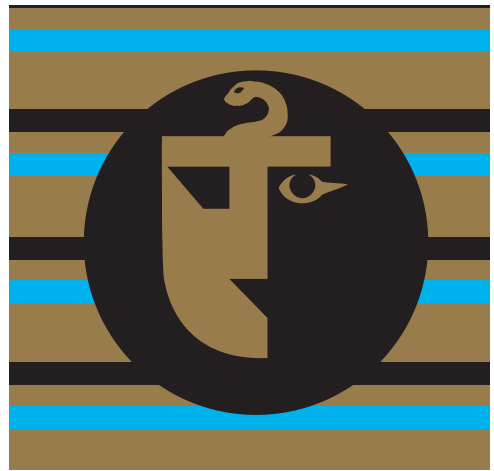
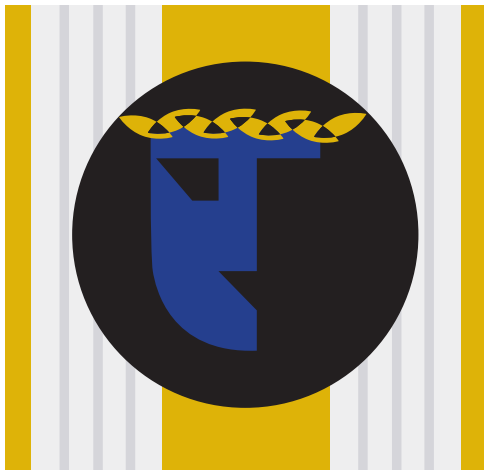
The palette we proposed for the stationery allows different colors to be used.

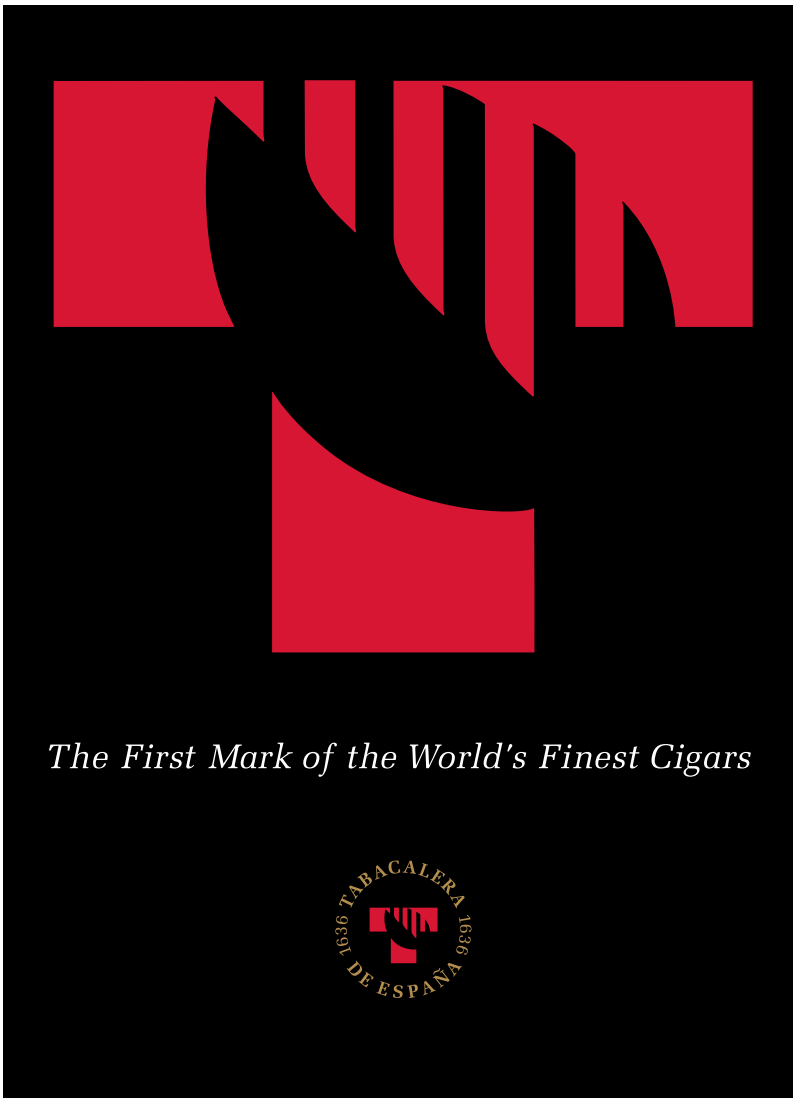




Feeling of creative fun arises from adding or removing components.

The image is applied to various objects.





Branding Identity 2001
 Tabacalera de España

The world's oldest continuously running corporation, est. 1636

A global corporate identity program that was developed into branding identities for special, handmade cigars and applied to such things as cigar bands, packaging, point-of-purchase displays, signs, trade-show exhibits, and giveaways.

It is a pleasure to produce and use hand drawings, wood-burn real wood boxes, and engrave and emboss unique papers.



Concept drawing.



Concepts for Romeo y Julieta cigar box and band.



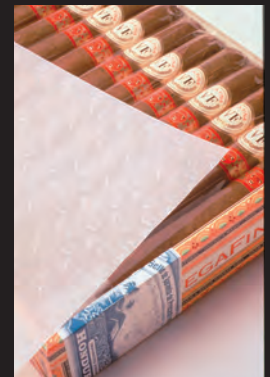
Packaging for two kinds of cigars.



Cuff links and lapel pin.



Mock-up for Romeo Solo cigars.

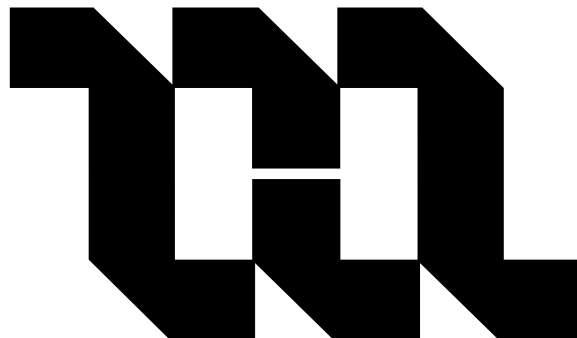


Double banding and embossed insert sheet.

Counterform/Form

In these three examples, black letterforms generate counterforms.

The white letters provide a focal point, giving the symbol visual life, as they move in and out of focus with a blink of the eye.

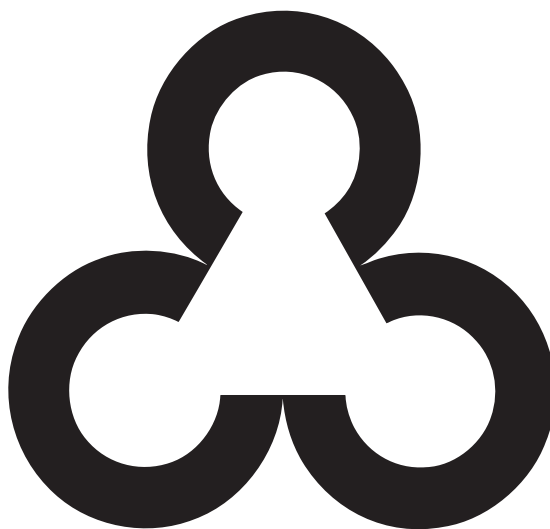


Symbol 1967
Mount Holyoke College

The M is the dominant element; the H emerges.



Symbol Study 1980
The Department of Health and Human Services
You see the two Hs before you notice the S.

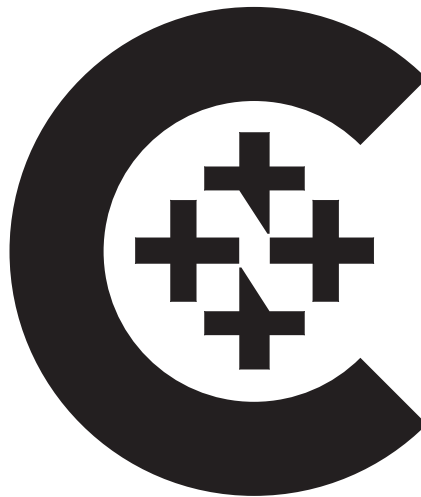


Symbol 1962
Color Concentrate Corporation
A symbol for the industry, not intended for the general public.
Color concentrates are pulverized between three rollers. The inside white form is the strongest and is noticed before the Cs.



Symbol 1992
Manomet Observatory

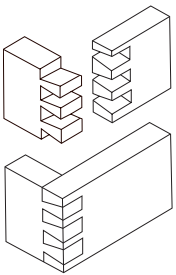
Interface between sea and land. The interdependency of drawn elements, form and counterform, represents the interaction of wildlife populations and natural systems.



Symbol 2005
Catholic News Service

The N in the center of the symbol, representing *News*, is formed from the counterform area of the historic Catholic crosslet—which stands for spreading the word to the four corners of the world.

Once the viewer recognizes the N, it is never forgotten. The symbol continues to be active each time it is seen.



Branding Identity 1999

FreemanWhite, Inc.

An architecture, engineering, and consulting company that bases its business on entering into partnerships with other businesses.

The symbol, with its form and counterform, conveys the idea of dovetail joinery.



Symbol 2000

New Bedford Whaling Museum

A museum devoted to the history of the American whaling industry, when sailing ships dominated merchant trade and whaling.

Posters 1969

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

An example where white is the form, symbolizing the museum, and the darker color is the counterform.

We wanted a poster that conveyed the symbolic power of this monumental building while remaining a viable piece of art on its own.



These one-color posters serve a dual purpose. They are sold in the museum shop as independent works; they are also used to promote events, by overprinting messages in the white area.

The shapes were drawn and redrawn many times to achieve the right curves, the planar quality, and the interaction between form and counterform.

If the outline of the building had simply been traced from a photograph, the poster would have seemed flat and inactive, failing to capture the rhythmic form of Frank Lloyd Wright's building.

The poster is printed from one printing plate with only one color on each poster, requiring a change of ink for each color.

Production costs were kept to a minimum. We did this design in 1969; the poster has been reprinted many times since then, raising a lot of money for the museum. I have seen them hanging on walls throughout the world.

