

Deconstructing Logo Design by Matthew Healey

pgs 204-206, 208-209

(on reserve:

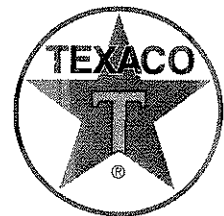
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... FORM & SHAPE

Most icons can be categorized into one of a few basic shapes: circle, triangle, square, rectangle, cross, star, shield, and so forth. This is not as reductive as it may seem.

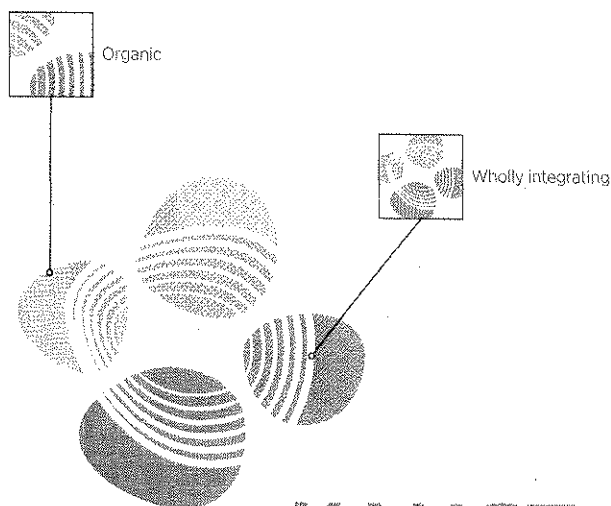
Our eyes and brains have a natural tendency to simplify and mentally classify what we see according to what is familiar. That's how we make sense of our surroundings. Designers can take advantage of this. Logos that fall easily into a recognizable shape category are more memorable and easier to associate with positive brand values.

Experienced designers also understand that this tendency to categorize means that every logo shape naturally acquires some kind of nickname (even unconsciously) in the minds of its audience. It is useful for the brand if viewers are offered a logo design that gravitates naturally to a familiar category and a positive nickname. Logos that try too hard to appear original risk ending up with an ironic or derogatory nickname. In the worst case, this may run counter to the brand's ideas and values. Infamous examples include the NASA "meatball" logo, the Lucent "coffee stain" logo, and the London 2012 Olympics "swastika" logo.



By joining an iconic symbol to a brand name, a logo is created.

- Client** KAUST (King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, Saudi Arabia)
- Brand story** An international, graduate-level research university dedicated to inspiring a new age of scientific achievement
- Agency** Siegel+Gale
- Creative director** Justin Peters
- Typeface** Bespoke
- Colors** Red, blue, green, and orange-yellow
- Design approach** As the traditions of Islam discourage the representation of people, most Islamic art is nonfigurative, so abstract logo designs are ideal. Rather than alluding to anything specifically scientific or technical, the designers crafted a set of irregular circles, connected by overlaid concentric rings. The many symbolic meanings of this icon are readily apparent, and appropriate

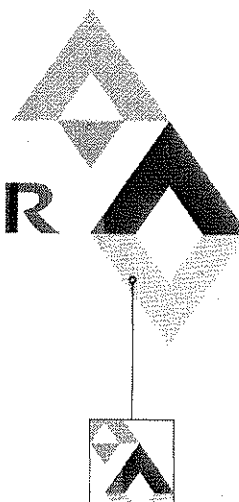


KAUST

King Abdullah University of
Science and Technology

- Client** Iskandar Malaysia
- Brand story** A region in southern Malaysia that hopes to develop into a sustainable, environmentally friendly metropolis within a few years
- Studio** Interbrand
- Designer** Karen Leong
- Typeface** Bespoke
- Colors** A changing palette of uncommon colors including orange, eggplant, turquoise, and lime-green
- Design approach** The design brief for this development zone called for emphasizing the combination of factors that make the region attractive for work, investment, and living. The triangles intrinsically symbolize wholeness, balance, and stability; the visual brand identity built with them is modular, allowing for a flexible communication system that can be adjusted for different audiences

ISKANDAR MALAYSIA



Vibrant

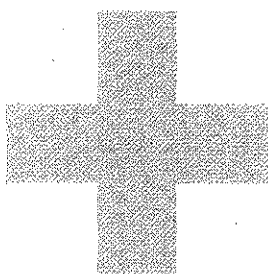
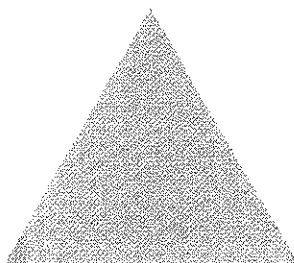
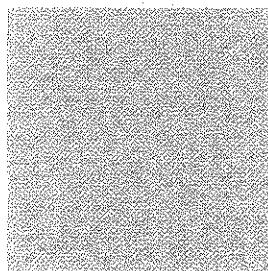
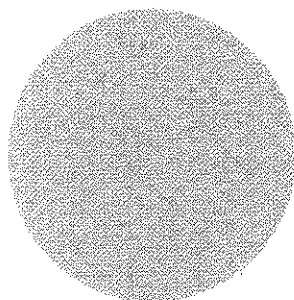
Universal or culturally specific?

Do shapes have intrinsic meaning? Yes and no. The significance we ascribe to shapes, consciously or not, is, to some degree, universal and humanistic, and, to some degree, dependent on our specific cultures. In almost every culture a circle represents the continuity of life, a star represents a quest for power or eternity, a shield stands for strength and authority. But other symbols' meanings are more culturally dependent. The best-known (and perhaps the most extreme) example of culturally determined meaning is the starkly diverging significance of the hooked cross, or swastika. In Asia, the ancient Mediterranean, and Mesoamerica, it has represented eternal life and good fortune for millennia; in Western cultures it is impossible to forget its association with Nazism and the Holocaust.

Does a logo need a consistent shape, or indeed any shape at all? What about a constantly changing free-form logo that defies categorization? The Austrian-Italian designer Alexander Egger, for example, frequently deconstructs the standard notion of what a logo is and what purpose it serves. In the identity for the redhot marketing agency, each employee completes the logo by hand in his or her own unique way. This presentation of the identity supports the brand concept that redhot is a boutique firm delivering personally tailored solutions.



The swastika, or hooked cross, and six-pointed star have different meanings in Asia than in Europe or North America. Here the two symbols are combined on a centuries-old mandala from India, on which they represent life and hope.



The most fundamental shape is a line. Because it is so basic, however, a line cannot hold much meaning and, therefore, must be turned into a more complex shape before it becomes a logo. The following eight basic shapes all have some universal meanings; many also have culturally specific meanings beyond those mentioned here. Of course, there are shapes beyond the eight listed below. Human and animal shapes are popular in logo design, as are natural forms such as leaves, but many of these are abstracted or stylized in such a way that they become circles, squares, or triangles. Some logo shapes are also hard to put into just one category. Although our brains find it easier to remember something if we can label it, shapes that defy ready classification also intrigue us, and become memorable in that way.

Circle

Circular, or nearly circular shapes are the most organic. Rendered with depth, they become spherical or globular. Circles and globes remind us of the sun and moon, eggs, and droplets of water, and because of this, they are often used to symbolize the life cycle. More abstractly, a circle symbolizes the turning of the seasons, the unity of the world, or the "music of the spheres." Arcs and crescents—parts of a circle—symbolize the heavens, or the flight of an object, and represent security, protection, trust, and faith. A figure 8 (two interconnected circles) is a common symbol for infinity.

Square

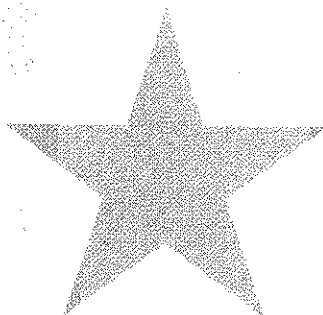
Perfect squares seldom occur in nature, but they are the most basic shape drawn by humans. The square and the cube represent order, rationality, and establishment of control over the natural elements. The rectangle—or elongated square—forms the basis of most compositions: the "golden ratio" established by the ancient Greeks is the most visually satisfying and can be found again and again in Western art and architecture, as well as in graphic design. Many logotypes are arranged into invisible "golden rectangles."

Triangle

Whether equilateral or isosceles, right-angle or oblique, the triangle is often used to establish a sense of constructive tension in a composition. Nature prefers pairs and circles, so our brains often struggle, unconsciously, to resolve a triangular shape into something simpler. Triangles and pyramids command our attention and have been used to represent authority, conflict, and sexuality. As arrows, triangles are universal indicators of direction.

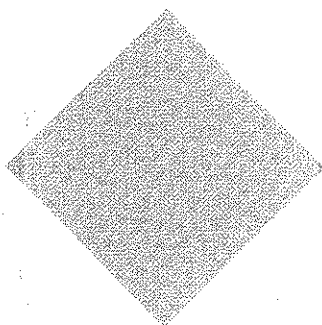
Cross

A cross, the intersection of two lines in whatever proportion, is the next most common symbol. In ancient times crosses symbolized intersection, the four points of the compass, and the abstraction of the human figure. In many cultures a hooked cross, alone or along a zigzag line, symbolizes the continuity of life and good fortune. In Western cultures an upright cross represents Christianity and its rituals.



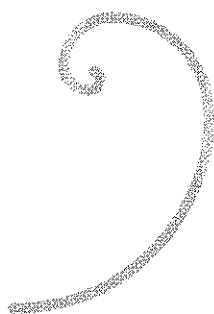
Star

Five, six, seven, eight ... however many points they have, stars are among the most romantic and inspiring of our symbols, as well as the most popular in logos and trademarks. Stars symbolize eternity, hope, energy, faith, freedom, and the quest for life. Their ubiquity and their use to represent widely diverging, even opposing, concepts make them perhaps the most paradoxical of symbols.



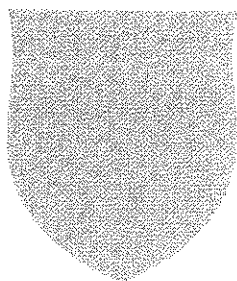
Diamonds, pentagons, and hexagons

Some diamonds are squares or parallelograms rotated 45°, while others are irregular pentagons, resembling the cut stones used in jewelry. The symbolic meanings of diamonds tend to be more culturally specific than universal, but they often represent refinement, quality, or luxury. Hexagons, because of their natural ability to form a beehive cell pattern, can be used to represent networks or social structures.



Spiral

The cross-section of a nautilus shell is a well-known image because of its beautiful proportions and mathematical regularity, but there are other types of spirals as well. They fascinate us because they can go inward and outward forever. Spirals can represent infinity, the mystery of life, the natural order of the universe, and the serenity and solemnity of nature.



Shield

The most artificial of the major shape categories, shields can come in many varieties, derived from classical or modern armor designs. Often an amalgam of squares, triangles, and circles, they represent security, protection, strength, and authority. Interestingly, their association is often more with peace than with conflict. The human face is essentially a shield shape.