

A Guide to Creating Iconic Brand Marks

Third Edition



David Airey

THE
MIND
SIGHT
OF
THE
MIND

Logo Design Love, Third Edition
A Guide to Creating Iconic Brand Marks

David Airey

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Introduction

Distilling the essence of a brand into a mark that works at an inch in size – that’s what logo design is really about. It’s the designer’s paradox: to take something vast – vision, values, voice – and reduce it to something small enough to sit on a pen cap or appear as a favicon.

Every company needs a logo, and someone has to design it. That someone might be you. But once you’ve landed the client with big ambitions and a budget to match, how do you create something that stays relevant – not just next year, but for decades?

That’s where the idea for this book began.

Logo Design Love shares what I’ve learned about designing successful marks, from working with clients around the world to studying the craft of many respected designers. This third edition includes almost everything from the first two, expanded with new case studies, updated perspectives, and more lessons from the field. Whether you’re starting your first independent project or refining the process you’ve used for years, my aim is to motivate, inspire, and better prepare you to handle the challenges of working as a designer.

Who am I to offer this advice?

Since 2005, I’ve run an independent design studio specializing in logos and visual identities, documenting much of the journey through my design websites, books, presentations, and interviews. Along the way, I’ve shared the thinking behind not only my own projects, but also those from renowned studios in many different countries. I focus on what rarely appears in portfolios: how designers win client trust, what they ask in early conversations, and how they present ideas in ways that help build consensus. Those unseen parts of the process are often the most valuable.

Over the years, *Logo Design Love* has found its way onto the desks and bookshelves of designers in all kinds of roles: freelancers, agency creatives, students, and brand founders alike. Many readers have said they appreciate the honesty and practicality of the examples and advice. This edition continues to build on the same transparency around how identity work really gets done. I'll share not just the polished end results, but also the client conversations, early sketches, idea presentations, and moments of doubt – all that contributes to the wins that follow.

Whether you're a student, an independent designer, part of a design team, or an entrepreneur launching your own business, I hope this book gives you a clearer view of how great logos are made and helps you create some of your own.

Had I known in 2005 what I know now, I'd have saved myself a lot of second-guessing and quite a few sleepless nights. Here's to helping you avoid some of that yourself.

Thank you very much for joining me.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large, prominent capital 'D' at the beginning.



Chapter four

Foundation first

Before you begin sketching ideas or refining letterforms, there's something more important to understand: your client. Who are they? Why have they come to you? What do they hope to achieve? The answers form the foundation for any successful identity project. Design isn't decoration. It's a strategic response to a business need. And without clarity about that need, your work will lack direction, no matter how beautiful it is.

Gathering information needs time, focus, and a measure of restraint, especially when you're tempted to move straight into the creative phase. But rushing through discovery increases your chances of missing the mark. And a missed mark is costly, for you and your client.

Setting the tone

At the start of nearly every design engagement, there's tension – yours, your client's, or both. That's natural, because the designer-client relationship is rarely effortless.

As a designer, you need to be as selective with your clients as they are with you. I occasionally receive messages like this:

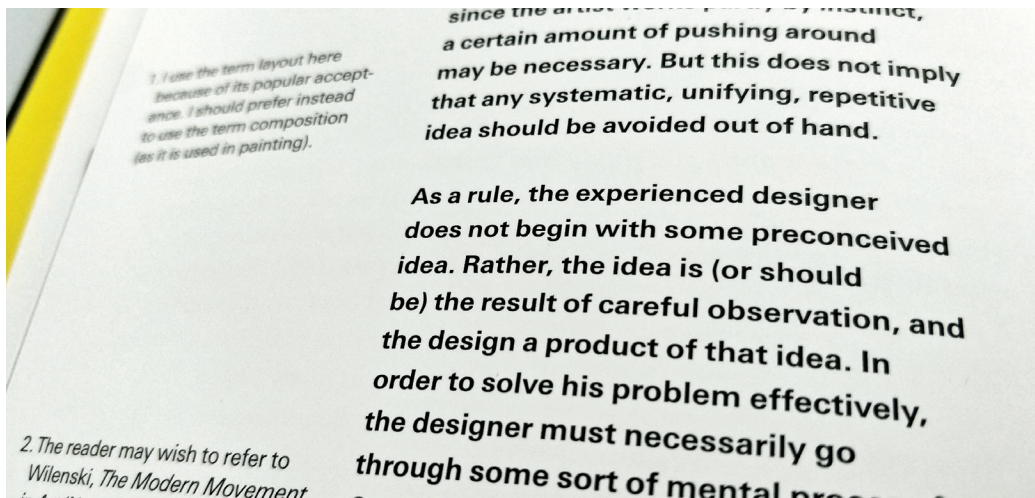
“I need a logo, but I know the design I want. I just need someone to make it.”

Someone who knows exactly what they want doesn't need a designer. They need a technician. If you're being hired, it's because you're the expert. Your role isn't to be directed, it's to guide, create, and solve. If the relationship feels off, address it early with open communication that's honest, respectful, and clear. That's how strong partnerships are built.

Questions before ideas

Understanding your client's motivations is about more than setting minds at ease, it's about establishing a clear and strategic basis for your work. Before you can design anything of lasting value, you need context. And that starts with asking the right questions.

Paul Rand addressed this point in his book *A Designer's Art*, saying, "The experienced designer does not begin with some preconceived idea. Rather, the idea is (or should be) the result of careful observation, and the design a product of that idea."¹



In other words, your job is to uncover and define the problem before attempting to visually solve it. Prioritize a structured conversation with your client where the answers you gather become the backbone of your design brief – a practical, working document that outlines goals, defines expectations, and gives both parties a common language to refer to throughout the project.

A good design brief is much more than paperwork. It's a contract of clarity and a written understanding of what success looks like. It gives shape to what can otherwise feel abstract. When you and your client agree on the objectives up front, you're better equipped to navigate disagreements later. And disagreements should be expected. Let's say your client objects to a direction you've taken or suggests changes that feel misaligned. Instead of relying on personal taste or emotion, you can return to the brief. It gives you something solid to point to, a record of shared intent. That doesn't mean you'll always push back; often, you'll adjust your work in response to feedback. But the brief ensures those adjustments are purposeful and not arbitrary.

Consider, for example, a logo I designed for Lee Haze, a running coach in England. The brief called for a simple, relevant, and distinctive mark – something with lasting clarity, not driven by trends. As the design phase progressed, Lee began to question whether the preferred concept might be too minimal. Instead of revisiting the logo itself, I referred back to the original brief and introduced the full identity system. This included a distinctive brand color, recommended typefaces, a relevant brand gallery, and a variety of mockups showing the logo in real-world use. Seeing the design applied to apparel, social media, and training materials helped shift the perspective. The simplicity of the mark wasn't a limitation; it created space for the wider identity to shine. With the brief as our guide, we could move forward with clarity and confidence.

There are a variety of ways to gather information for the design brief. You might meet face to face, schedule a video call, or communicate entirely by email. For some clients, a carefully crafted digital questionnaire works. In my experience, a real-time conversation is much more revealing. What matters most is that you create the conditions for honest, detailed responses, and that you listen more than you speak.



Haze Running

The outline of the symbol matches the outline of a 400m running track, while the two lines subtly reference the relationship between coach and student.

The vibrant green helps differentiate from similar coaching businesses.



The brief should reflect everything you've learned: the client's business goals, competitive landscape, creative preferences, audience insights, and success criteria. Avoid unnecessary jargon or filler. This is a document to clarify and guide, acting as a project anchor for use throughout the project. It will help you prioritize ideas, justify decisions, and stay aligned with the client's vision. It's there to prevent the work from drifting too far from its original purpose, even when your creativity takes you somewhere unexpected.

A strong brief doesn't constrain creativity. It channels it.

Summarize the business

Here are a few questions to use as a starting point. Every company is different, and every industry has its unique points, so change this as needed.

In her book *Designing Brand Identity*, Alina Wheeler framed it well with these four essential prompts:²

- Who are you?
- Who needs to know?
- How will they find out?
- Why should they care?

Once you've covered those basics, dig deeper. Ask how much the product or service will cost the customer, and what the company's projected annual sales are. These answers give you context not just for design, but for positioning and scale.

Summarize the project

As well as understanding the business itself, you need clarity on the scope, goals, and practical details of the project. Asking your client these questions will help you get there:

- What are your goals for the new identity design?
- What specific deliverables do you need from me?

- Who will be involved from your team, and what roles will they play?
- Are any outside agencies or partners involved? If so, how will they contribute?
- What's motivating this project now? Why is this the right time to pursue it?
- What's your ideal timeline, and what's driving that deadline?
- What concerns do you have about the process? Are there any potential obstacles you anticipate?
- Is there anything about your organization – culture, structure, past experiences – that might make this project easier or more complex?
- What is your estimated budget range?
- Are you speaking with other designers or firms? If so, when do you expect to make your decision?

Who decides?

One of the most important questions to ask is: Who makes the final decision? You need to know who has the authority to approve the work you're presenting. In larger organizations, your initial contact may be a project manager or marketing director rather than the CEO, and that's perfectly fine for gathering information. Just be sure you understand who will ultimately sign off, and try to involve that person when it's time to present your work. We'll cover presentation strategies in Chapter eight, "The art of the conversation." For now, your focus is on collecting the insights that will shape your design decisions.

Give your client time and space

These questions are a strong starting point. You'll probably have more to add, because every industry has its own quirks, expectations, and specific requirements. As you ask your questions, don't rush the client to answer. Allow time for a follow-up where necessary, as you'll likely end up gaining more insight. Stay open to seemingly off-topic comments, too, because at this stage every detail can open a new avenue to explore.

But maintain the focus

At the same time, don't let the conversation drift into a one-sided directive. This phase is about clarifying the project and creating alignment around the outcomes it's meant to achieve. That level of focus will give you the insight you need to meet, or even exceed, expectations.

Chances are, your client's answers will prompt relevant follow-up questions. That's a good thing. In addition to sparking fresh design ideas, this kind of engagement helps build trust and leads to stronger, more confident decisions down the line.

Research with purpose

Once you've gathered the initial information, take time to carefully review it. Ask yourself:

- What are the client's concerns?
- What does the company want to emphasize?
- What is it really selling?
- How does it want to be perceived in the market?
Identities that are stylish and nice to look at might win awards, but they don't always win market share.

The next step in the discovery phase is doing your own research. Learn as much as you can about the company: its history, its current identity, and how that identity has shaped public perception. Don't overlook past visual identity efforts, either, as they often reveal useful patterns or pitfalls.

Then, turn your attention to the competition. Study how rival companies present themselves – what visual cues they rely on, which colors and typefaces they use, how their messaging comes across, and what design elements seem to resonate with their audience. Take note of the kinds of campaigns or marketing strategies that are gaining traction. These insights not only inform your thinking but can also shape the mockups and presentation materials you create, helping your client

understand how your proposed identity will compete, and stand out, in a crowded marketplace.

Assembling the design brief

Documenting the information can mean taking notes during a meeting, recording phone or video calls, editing an email exchange, or distilling a conversation down to its most essential parts. Designers need to be editors, too. It's wise to create a succinct, accessible document that you and your client can refer to throughout the project. Share a copy with everyone involved, and keep one close at hand for follow-up meetings.

On your end, the brief helps keep your designs focused. I'm sure I'm not the only designer who's chased a few far-fetched ideas now and then. That doesn't mean the brief can't include a level of playfulness. As Luke Tonge explained, "The privilege of being a designer is that essentially we get to play with stuff for our jobs – drawing, making, building. [...] We're not saying there isn't rigor and seriousness needed, that there aren't KPIs, and shareholders. But I think when there is a focus on design being very results driven, we risk dumbing down and dulling down design, and losing the joy, and the magic and the excitement."³ Relevance, of course, is crucial, and a solid brief helps keep your work on track.

With this foundation in place, let's look at how others have gathered insight from their clients and used it to create effective, lasting results.

Tapping into something special

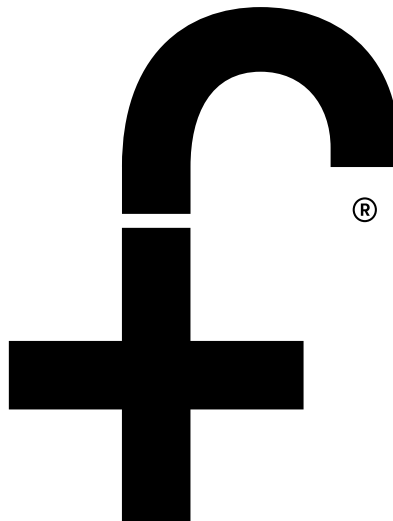
In 2023, Flipper Taps launched a 5-in-1 faucet brand that offered hot, cold, filtered, sparkling, and boiling water, and was available in a range of finishes that coordinate with a variety of kitchen surfaces.

London-based Red Dot Studio was hired to create the name and visual identity for the unique product. The work needed to communicate the practical benefits

of the category, reassuring customers that this was a credible alternative to established brands, while helping it to stand out as a more desirable, design-oriented choice. Whereas most competitors focused purely on function, Red Dot wanted to elevate Flipper by showcasing both its performance and aesthetic appeal.

The team developed a name and identity that celebrates Flipper's ability to effortlessly switch between everything you could want from a kitchen tap. At the heart of the project is the "f" monogram, paired with a plus sign to suggest there's more to discover. The broader identity reinforces Flipper's versatility, going beyond functional box-ticking to position it as a truly versatile design statement.

Flipper Taps,
by Red Dot Studio





In the previous chapter, I mentioned that rules are made to be broken. This next example does exactly that – using a highly detailed logo in a fantastically distinctive way. That said, a simplified version was still included in the identity toolkit for reproduction at the smallest of sizes.

Nature's poetry

There's no shortage of frozen desserts in supermarkets, but few offer much in terms of actual nutrition. In partnership with a Swiss food lab led by former Michelin-starred chefs, Bimmi created a range of frozen snacks made entirely from fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, and wholegrain cereals, aiming to nourish without compromising on the flavor you'd expect from a more indulgent treat. This bold new category in Swedish supermarkets called for a distinctive identity and packaging system.

Enter Stockholm-based studio Bedow. Their scope extended beyond the logo to include copywriting, art direction, graphic design, packaging, illustration, and type design.

While Bimmi's methods are innovative, the product is all natural, reflected in the tagline, "Nature's Poetry." To express both sides of the brand, Bedow created a suite of assets that feel handmade and organic, yet are used in inventive and contemporary ways.

Inspired by concrete poetry (the idea of using letter arrangements to enhance the meaning) the Bimmi wordmark was crafted on an Olivetti Lettera 32 typewriter, with each letterform composed of hundreds of smaller typed characters. The result is a scalable, variable mark: the larger the wordmark, the more analog letters it contains. Supporting copy was also set using the Olivetti and paired with a series of cut-out ingredient illustrations, reinforcing Bimmi's wholesome appeal, even from deep within the freezer.

bimmi

bimmi

bimmi

To reflect the natural, handcrafted essence of the Bimmi brand, Bedow used analog type created on an Olivetti typewriter.



bimmi display
10 pitch x 25

a b c d e
f r u i t



Field research that makes a difference

When Federal Express Corporation invented the overnight shipping business in 1973, the market was simple: one country (the U.S.), one package type (letter), and one delivery time (10:30 a.m.). By 1992, the company had expanded its offerings, adding next-business-day and two-day economy options, and shipping packages and freight to 186 countries. But by that time, a growing number of competitors had entered the market, creating the perception of a commodity industry driven by price. As the most expensive service, Federal Express was losing market share.

Federal Express
Corporation
An earlier, less
distinctive design



To reaffirm its leadership and better communicate its expanding capabilities, the company hired global design firm Landor in 1994 to help reposition the brand.

Research played a critical role in shaping an effective and lasting design solution. Over nine months, the internal research teams at both Landor and Federal Express collaborated on a global study. The results showed that most businesses and consumers were unaware of the company's international reach and full-service capabilities. Many still believed Federal Express only shipped overnight and only within the United States. Landor also explored how the name was perceived. The word "federal" was often associated with government and bureaucracy, and "express" was widely used – more than 900 U.S. companies had it in their names.

There was a bright spot, though. The public had already embraced the nickname “FedEx,” often using it as a verb – “I’ll FedEx it to you” – regardless of the actual service provider. The abbreviated name tested better, suggesting greater speed, innovation, and technological edge than the formal name.

Landor recommended that the company adopt “FedEx” as its communicative name while keeping “Federal Express Corporation” as the legal name.

FedEx logo options



More than 300 design concepts were explored, ranging from subtle evolutions to completely new directions. The chosen logo and abbreviated name gave the company greater consistency and stronger brand impact across every touchpoint: packaging, drop boxes, vehicles, aircraft, uniforms, and customer service centers.


This project is a powerful example of how rigorous field research can lead to a clear brand strategy and an iconic, lasting mark.

FedEx, by Lindon Leader
while at Landor



The FedEx logo is prominently displayed on the side of the white van. The word "FedEx" is written in a large, bold, sans-serif font. The letters "Fed" are purple, and the letter "E" is red with a white arrow pointing to the right, which is the classic FedEx logo. The background shows a city street with a brick building and a window with a potted plant.

Express

The "earthsmart" logo consists of a green circle with the word "earthsmart" in lowercase white letters inside it.

earthsmart
FedEx Low Emission
Hybrid Electric

NYS DOT 32691
US DOT 86876

fedex.com
1.800.GoFedEx



NO CASH ON BOARD



The World On Time

240512 JRB



Bringing the details to life

Designer Maggie Macnab was asked to create a new logo for the Heart Hospital of New Mexico. A teacher who has taught brand identity at the University of New Mexico for more than 10 years and a past president of the Communication Artists of New Mexico, Maggie believed it was vital to clarify her client's expectations from the very beginning.

During the information-gathering stage, Maggie met with the hospital's design committee, which included doctors from merging small practices and representatives from the funding insurance company. When asked what was required from the branding project, the committee outlined three main goals: The identity should have a New Mexico look and feel, it must clearly relate to cardiology, and patients should feel confident that they are in very good hands.

In her broader research, Maggie discovered that the Zia symbol had long been used as the official emblem of New Mexico. The Zia are an Indigenous tribe based at Zia Pueblo, known for their pottery and use of the Zia pictograph. Although the symbol is widespread in the region, the Zia consider it sacred and hold the rights to its use.

"I realized the Zia symbol could connect all three project criteria," said Maggie. "So I encouraged the doctors to meet with the elders at Zia Pueblo and formally request

The Zia sun symbol



permission to use it.” She knew the symbol had often been used inappropriately, appearing on everything from work trucks to tourist merchandise without respect for its cultural significance.

After receiving approval from the elders, and following dozens of sketches and experiments, Maggie developed a mark that integrated a heart shape with the palm of a hand. The Zia symbol served as the foundation, representing both the state of New Mexico and the idea of compassionate, hands-on care.

Heart Hospital
of New Mexico,
by Maggie Macnab

“Symbols are derived of nature, and this knowledge is common to every human on earth, although it is not discussed much, let alone taught in most design classes.”
– Maggie Macnab



HEART HOSPITAL *of* NEW MEXICO

Maggie’s thoughtful approach not only led to a meaningful and relevant design but also earned the trust of the Zia. The elders gave their blessing to the hospital grounds and even performed a ceremonial dance at the groundbreaking event – an act that provided strong public relations support for the new facility.

“It’s always a good idea to be sensitive to things like this,” Maggie noted. “Showing courtesy and respect for traditions can lead to powerful, unexpected connections. It’s essential for collective acceptance.”

Giving form to language

One powerful question to ask clients is what words they want people to associate with their brand. It might seem simple, but those words can serve as an essential bridge between strategy and design.

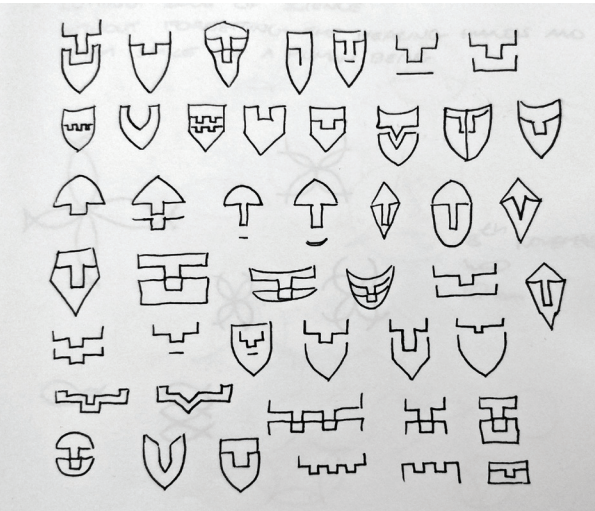
When I was hired to create a logo for Tenon, a freight and logistics company based in Mexico, the founder emphasized that trust and security were non-negotiable. In his industry, shipments going missing or getting damaged isn't just inconvenient, it can be financially devastating. The brand needed to communicate strength, reliability, and protection.

To translate those qualities into something visual, I ran a mind-mapping session, something we'll cover in Chapter seven, "The language of marks." The word "shield" surfaced – a classic symbol of defense and trust. From there, the design direction became clearer. We weren't just drawing shapes. We were giving form to business values. The final logo combined the letter "T" with a shield, subtly reinforced by the brand's name, Tenon, a reference to the woodworking joint known for its strength and precise fit. That fit served as a metaphor: a dependable connection between the business and its customers, built to last.

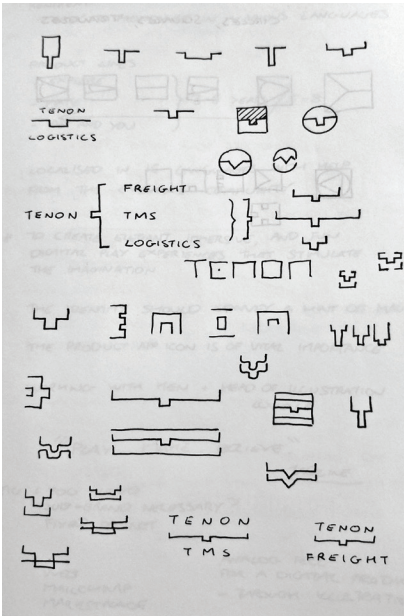
Think of it this way: Good designers don't just sketch logos, they translate language into symbols. When you take the time to truly listen and learn from your clients, especially their industry concerns, you're not only more likely to deliver a logo they believe in, you also build trust. That trust turns into future work and a reputation for thoughtful, meaningful design.

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1. Paul Rand, *A Designer's Art*, Princeton Architectural Press, 2016, 4.
2. Alina Wheeler, *Designing Brand Identity*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2018, 2.
3. Rob Alderson, "Birmingham Design Festival Focuses on Play to Lift the Gloom," *Design Week*, www.designweek.co.uk/birmingham-design-festival-focuses-on-play-to-lift-the-gloom.



The Tenon logo combines a shield, a stylized "T," and a tenon joint.



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