

Signed & Sealed

Madison's most familiar logos are a big part of the city's identity

By David Michael Miller

MADISON HAS BEEN BLESSED with an iconic skyline that gives it a strong visual identity.

But its true self-portrait can be found in the way its movers and shakers project themselves graphically to the public. From international brands to the rock band downstairs, every local player (including the city itself) needs a good logo — a symbol that will stick.

Arriving at that trademark can be a harrowing task. In coming up with a logo, designers have the responsibility of devising a picture that's worth a 1,000-word sales pitch that defines the ethos of the enterprise and hooks the eye with a combination of familiarity and novelty.

In Madison, where the populace is well educated, logo designs have the liberty to be sophisticated, yet good designers know that it's the simplest designs that often cast the broadest net.

What follows is an informal roundup of the better-known logo designs seen around town, with an eye to the locally produced crop. In many cases the typography has been removed in an effort to focus more on imagery than words. Some were the product of outstate branding campaigns that cost tens of thousands of dollars. Others were drawn by the company's proprietors for diddly. Whether born from sleek laptops or scribbled cocktail napkins, this gallery of marks can be seen as Madison's collective wink to the world.



Madison

Contested results

As the official symbol of a city government, it's certainly unconventional, yet the way the current Madison logo was selected symbolizes the city more than any visual aspect of the design.

In a plan hatched between then-*Wisconsin State Journal* editor Tom Still and then-Mayor Sue Bauman, a contest to design a new city logo was touted through then-Madison Newspapers Inc. as part of its sponsorship of the yearlong Celebrate 2000 project. Divided into "adult," "youth" and "whimsical" categories, the contest put few limits on the designers. Well, there was a strong suggestion that the winning design should reflect how Madison had changed (hint: include the new Monona Terrace).

The existing logo, created 20 years previously by Carrie Scherpelz of the local firm Reed-

Sendrecke, reflected a 1970s fascination with international symbols. By 1999, it was showing its age and was derided as the

"milk carton logo" and "the outhouses on the lake."

Bauman admired the "new spirit" that other municipalities' logos now displayed. She asked only that she choose the final design and that it not cost the city anything. Sponsors would provide the 15 prizes, with \$750 going to the winning adult designer.

After receiving over 500 entries, a panel of designers from Madison Newspapers, city arts administrators and Scherpelz selected five winning entries in each of the three categories. Of the five



The city's previous logo

Metal round

"City engineering is off on its own," says former Mayor Bauman when asked about the arty **manhole covers** that have for all intents and purposes taken over the city's official logo as a badge of civic pride.

Designed by Mark Schmitz and Tina Remy of Madison's ZD (Zebra Dog) Studios in 2006, the popular "sewer access cover" design began as a request from city engineer Larry Nelson for an emblem to adorn the Cottage Grove Road bridge, which spans Interstate 39-90.



The original bridge emblem design and the "sewer access cover"

Schmitz produced a dynamic low-angle shot of a radiant Capitol dome split between day and night, trumpeting a city that never sleeps, and rendered as if by Marvel Comics. Coincidentally in need of new sewer lids, the engineering heads then worked with the Neenah Foundry to transfer the design to 175 discs of 90-pound cast iron. During this leap, "they embossed where they should have debossed," remarks Schmitz. A Madison native with longtime family roots in the area, he still beams with pride at his creation.

Dome, sweet dome



Taste of Madison, 1980s

Logos featuring the Capitol building are a dime a dozen, which makes finding an original take as rare as a public bathroom on the Square.

In the 1980s no image could be more perfect for the first **Taste of Madison** festivals than this Capitol-as-silver-serving-platter. Reflecting the growth of the event over the years into a multi-music-stage extravaganza, the festival changed its logo in 2008 to something a little less formal.

Hands-down cleverest use of the city's silhouetted skyline in a logo has to be **Madison Property Management's** key, cut to local specs.



Patch work

Long before there were logos, heraldry and coats of arms represented authority. The logo of the **Madison Fire Department**, set within an eight-point Maltese cross, brings up an old tale about similarly adorned knights of the First Crusades. These Christian warriors were said to have risked their lives extinguishing their brethren when set afire by Saracens hurling flaming oil. Today the cross is a symbol of firefighters' willingness to sacrifice their safety in order to save others. Anyone have a church-state conflict with that?

The **Madison Police Department** logo is unique in Madison iconography in that it includes the lakes, or at least two of them, all protected within the traditional three-sided shield.

While it's hard to go wrong showing our geography, the map is marred by a clumsy, big-footed Capitol building that looks less like it's straddling an isthmus and more like it's sitting in puddles.



CITY OF



MADISON

Julie Mueller's entry, which won the advertised contest

adult winners, the mayor would then choose the city's official emblem.

The panel had awarded first place to a stylized alignment of Capitol and convention center behind rolling lake waves, submitted by local designer Julie Mueller. But Bauman (and the voting public at a Celebrate 2000 fair) preferred the third-place finisher, a presentation of the same scene but rendered as light and airy as whipped cream. For that logo, Cambridge native and recent UW grad Lia Miternique wanted to keep the scene full of the fun and energy she enjoyed in the city before she embarked on a design career in Lake Oswego, Ore.

Still, Miternique's choice of typeface perturbed Bauman, who wanted to swap it with lettering from another entry. As was made possible in the contest rules, the design was passed to Reed-Sendrecke for



CITY OF MADISON

Lia Miternique's original entry, which was selected by the mayor

some pro bono refinement.

A sailboat was removed and a new color scheme deployed. "Madison" was recast in the typeface Mistral, a fanciful font common to fashion mags and greeting cards that echoes the logo's loose strokes. The final design was unveiled in June 2000.

Now 10 years old, the logo has not exactly set the city aflame. "I don't like our logo very much. Whimsical, but not in a good way," says Mayor Dave Cieslewicz. "Having said that, I wouldn't put logo redesign at the top of my agenda right now."

An attempt to elicit a critique from the city's webmaster drew only a hushed chuckle. Even the winning designers feel a vague dissatisfaction, with contest champ Mueller claiming to have never received her \$750. Miternique, too, says, "I don't recall receiving anything for winning."