

**2005 AIGA Medalist:
Bart Crosby**

Recognition
2005 AIGA Medal
Born
1943, Michigan City, Indiana

By Alice Twemlow
September 1, 2005



Bart Crosby found his way to art and eventually to design through his love of lettering, cartooning and sign painting. While he was a student at Isaac C. Elston High School in Michigan City, Ind., he earned money by painting signs for the town Chevrolet dealer and numbers on cars at the local drag strip. It seemed to Crosby as if he'd found his vocation and life's calling, but another sign painter, who lettered signs for Crosby's father's office supply store, told him he should go to commercial art school instead. The sign painter suggested he try the American Academy of Art in Chicago, which was only 60 miles away from Michigan City.

Crosby spent an exhilarating three and one-half years at the Academy learning skills such as illustration, life drawing and oil painting. It was only in the last six months before graduating that he discovered a class called Lettering and Packaging. The class was taught by Joseph Welna, who had worked in the office of renowned industrial designer Raymond Loewy.



AIGA rebranding program, 1999



The City of Chicago Millennium Celebration Identity and branding program, 1998



AIGA in Chicago: logotype and newsletters, 1987



The University of Chicago Graduate School of Business, naming, identity and branding program, 1999

It was in Welna's class that Crosby learned how to render letterforms by hand using pen and ink without benefit of a straightedge. Crosby's first job out of school, in 1964, was at Union Carbide's Food Products Division, where he drew dancing farm animals and hand-lettered logos on meat packages, with names like "Farmer John's Sausage." It wasn't long before Crosby realized he was destined for bigger challenges.

Inspired by a series of packages his former tutor showed him that used just solid, primary colors and Helvetica type, he rushed to work with its creators: Design Consultants Incorporated (DCI), the founders of which, like Welna, had apprenticed at Loewy's studio. Apart from a brief and unsatisfying defection to the advertising world—as a designer at Higgins Hegner Genovese International—Crosby spent six years at DCI, as a senior designer and then their design director. He ran large identity and packaging projects for brands such as Masonite Corporation, Mexican Airlines, Carling Black Label and Morton Salt, but his real design epiphany came when he received a mailer for a lecture by John Massey, design director at Container Corporation of America (CCA). Crosby recalls the mailer as an abstract composition of blue squares and white lines on a red background. "It knocked me out," says Crosby, "and I knew that wherever it came from was the next step for me."

The Center for Advanced Research in Design (CARD) was an independent design studio headed by Massey and endorsed by the design-forward CCA. There, Crosby was plunged into a heady—and at times overwhelming—design immersion course in which he worked alongside notable designers such as Massey himself, Tomoko Miho, Rick Eiber and Joe Hutchcroft. Crosby was senior projects director at CARD until 1974, when he left to set up his own studio. Quickly realizing that he needed some kind of infrastructural support, Crosby accepted an offer from Robert Vogele to merge his office into RVI Corporation. The arrangement at the resulting firm



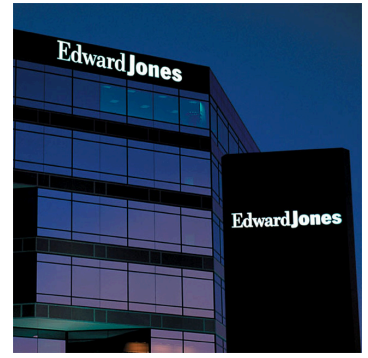
G.D. Searle & Co. Identification and branding program, 1985-1998



U.S. Canoe and Kayak identity program and uniform design, 1991



Logotypes and symbols, 1967-2003



Edward Jones Investments identity and branding program, 1995



Typography Resource Identity, literature and advertising program, 1982



worked well until 1979, when Bill Bonnell, a former CCA colleague and then design director of JCPenney, urged Crosby to partner with him and run the Chicago office. This is the company that two years later would become Crosby Associates, and where Crosby has been president ever since.

Crosby has conceived, designed and directed hundreds of identification, branding and communication programs for corporations large and small. At Crosby Associates, he provides strategic and design direction to the majority of the firm's projects and programs. Even though Crosby says he would title his memoirs *The Reluctant Proprietor*, and he relishes the physical act of designing more than being a manager, he is still a successful firm owner and his relationships with clients are long and steadfast: He worked with the paper company Champion International for 27 years, with G.D. Searle & Company for 23 years, with American National Bank for 12 years and with Sara Lee for 17 years.

Crosby has made a significant and enduring commitment to AIGA. He has been an executive vice president and served on the organization's board of directors. He was the founding member and a president of the Chicago chapter and in 2000 was made a Fellow. He has been involved in numerous AIGA initiatives, including helping to shape the first AIGA conference and the 1991 Chicago conference, and has spoken at many ensuing conferences. Perhaps his most profound contribution to the organization was his development in 1999 of a coherent AIGA identity system—a daunting task considering that his clients were 15,000 designers, and the designer of the original mark was none other than Paul Rand. The clarity, down-to-earth practicability and elegance of Crosby's solution—based around a system of colored squares—won him the respect of the design community and a continuing working relationship at the strategic level of the organization.

Crosby's approach to design is an incongruous mixture of handcraft and high-level design thinking. True to his roots as a letterer and illustrator, he continues to hand-produce logos and symbols for universities, health centers and industry leaders. Also true to his roots at the drag strip, and despite his careful approach to design, Crosby races his custom Riviera blue (Pantone Process Blue) Porsche GT3S at raceways around the country, adorned with a beautifully crafted number.

His company is also renowned for its strategic approach to design. A Crosby Associates project always begins with information gathering, planning, and the defining of objectives, intentions and goals. With confidence, in the deep tones of his mid-century radio voice, Crosby says that he is inspired not by the act of designing, but by the problem itself: "Design needs to have a reason for being." Yet, given the reason, he will craft a thoughtful and complete strategic framework for the solution, still loving every intuitive moment he invests in sketching just the right solution.

Copyright 2005 by *The American Institute of Graphic Arts.*