

BUSINESS FORUM

On the trail of a corporate logo

Could an old photo from the company's early history be the key to its modern identity?

BY DAVID GRIFFITHS

Recently, while going through some old photographs at my firm, MMM Design Group, I came across a fascinating old print that featured an exotic backdrop of valley and mountain. In the foreground stood a co-founder, John McGaughy, dressed in a business suit and carrying a camera with a telephoto lens that hung loosely from his left hand. He was standing against a sort of balcony. A man I did not

It had been placed in a cardboard box along with many other photographs, probably by the co-founder himself — scenes from a 60-year career of old road trips, colleague roundtables, dinner engagements, public relations stuff. All photo opportunities that seem important at the time but later collect dust on the top shelf of an office closet or forgotten behind old correspondence files, never to be seen again.

Yet, to me, this was a very important photograph.

had stood for nearly 20 years until 1964, when the unexpected death of the other co-founder called for the formation of a new partnership and a new firm name. By 1981, the firm's name would change again for a third time, shortened and simplified to just the initials of the principals, as it remains today, but with one significant difference: A logo had been incorporated with the new company name.

a pattern of rectangular, interlocking boxes, grouped together, like some kind of Chinese puzzle. Indeed, I had often wondered about this before: How did our logo come to be? What was the inspiration behind this simple yet intricate pattern that had been integrated with the company name? What did it mean to those who had first created it? So not only did I seem to be the unofficial company historian, I became a sort of house detective or a student of iconography, a cul-

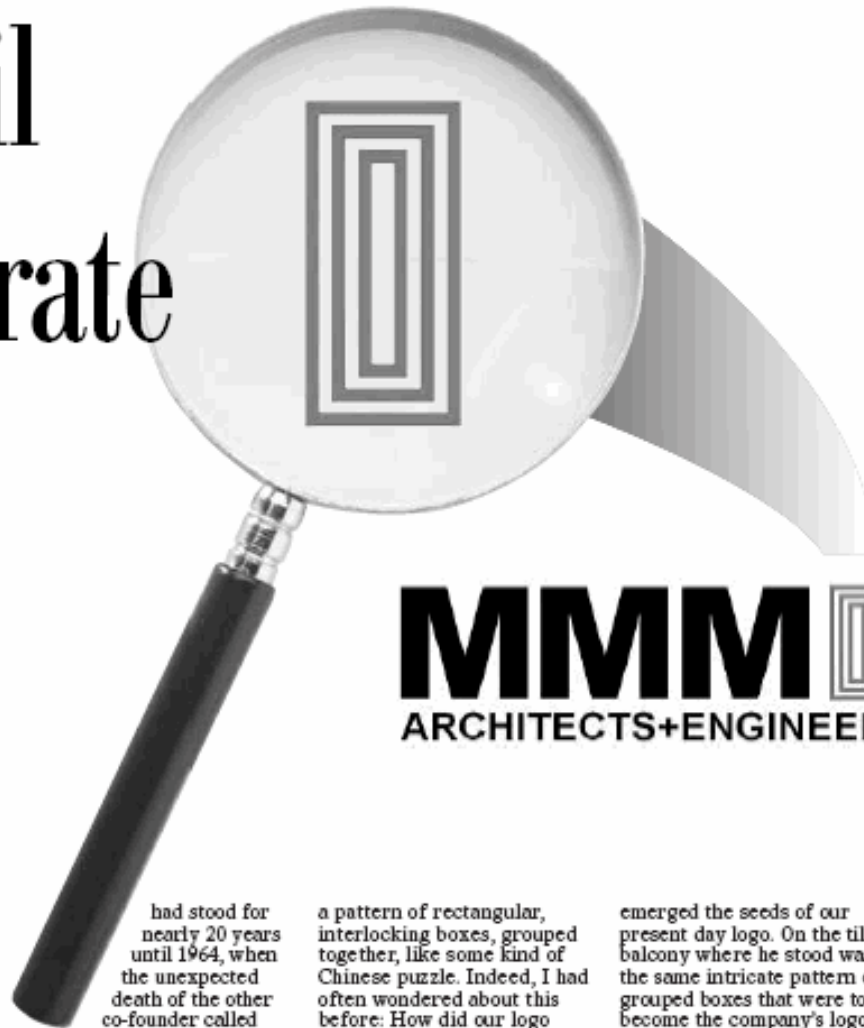
emerged the seeds of our present day logo. On the tiled balcony where he stood was the same intricate pattern of grouped boxes that were to become the company's logo in 1981.

Was the old photograph the key in creating this logo? Did McGaughy remember this particular scene of his travels and refer to it later, when the logo was created?

When I inventoried these old photographs, I had been careful to maintain their continuity, much as an archaeolo-

photographs associated with the print in question. One of them had been taken along some unknown city street, the scene foreign in its automobiles and architecture. On the background could be seen a fuzzy, hanging sign with the words *Chiến Cao*. Had the mystery photograph been taken somewhere in France? Or, more likely, perhaps it had been taken on a busy side street in pre-war Saigon, given the firm had worked in Vietnam during the late 1950s.

In the office, there was no



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know was standing with him, also in a business suit, holding what could have been a travel brochure.

The photograph had come to me from McGaughy's office after he died in 2002.

I had been cataloging any photos I could find of the company's early history back to 1945, when the firm had been established under the names of the two co-founders. This first company name

I had always felt a deep interest in the company's history. Here was a unique development in the history of the firm because the new logo implied a heightened sense of corporate identity:

tural philologist in corporate symbology.

From the newly discovered photograph of our co-founder, standing in the glare of the sun against an exotic backdrop of valley and mountain,

gist would in retrieving a set of bones or in assembling old pottery shards from a dig. Because there was nothing to indicate when the photo had been taken, how was I to date it? Then there were two other

longer anyone to ask. But I had found the origin of our logo.

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This newly-discovered photograph of the company co-founder, below right, reveals what could be the seeds of the present day logo.



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