

Eye on Evanston: Thoughts on Design | Hayward Blake, Design Evanston founding member

by [Jack Weiss, Design Evanston](#) April 11th, 2023

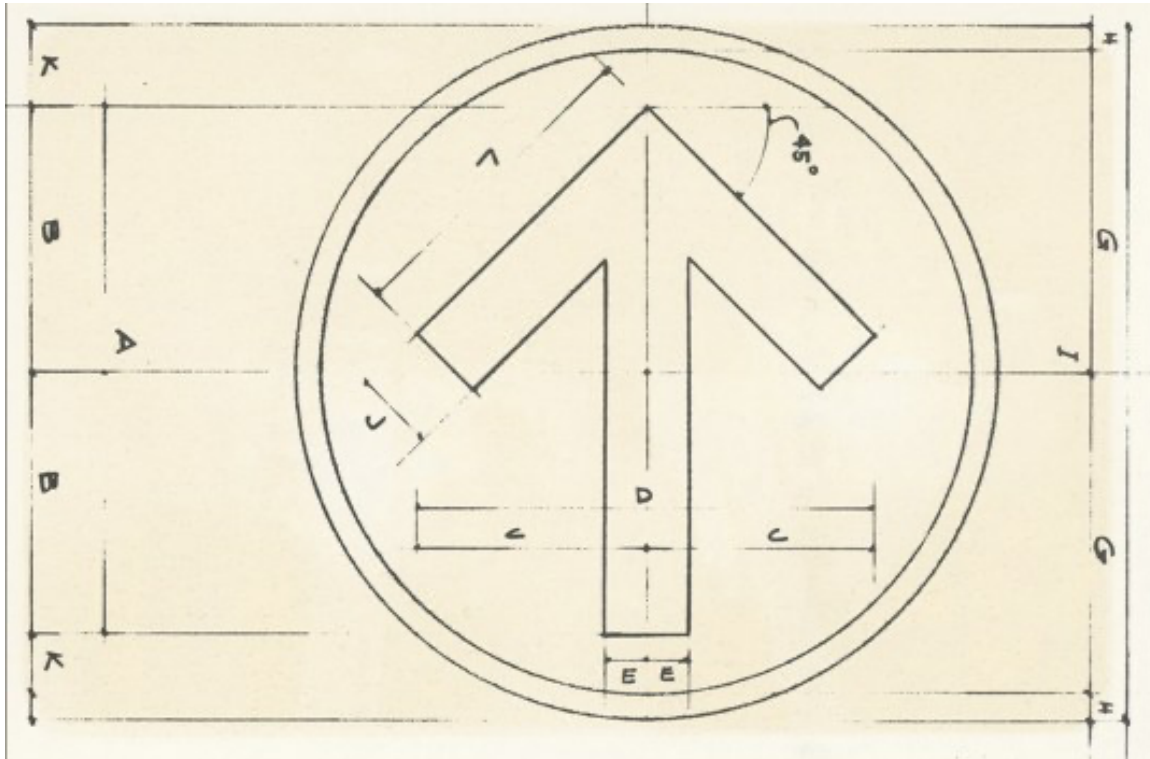
Born in West Haven, Connecticut, Hayward Blake served as a technical sergeant in the U.S. Army Signal Corps (1943–47) and landed at Utah Beach after D-Day. After the war, he studied art and design at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh and graduated from the Cambridge School of Design.



Hayward Blake, c. 1981. Credit: Chris Blake

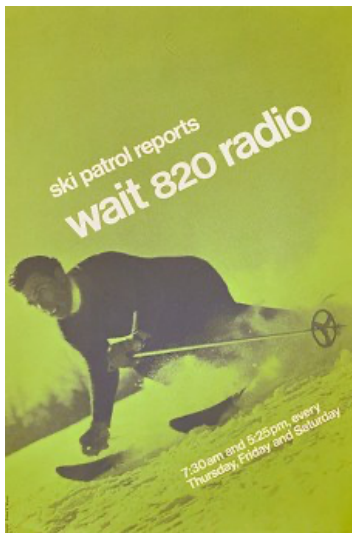
In 1952, Blake moved to Chicago, where he attended the Institute of Design. After working in design at several firms, including the Container Corporation of America, Raymond Loewy's Chicago office and Sears Roebuck & Co., he became design director at Ekco-Alcoa in Wheeling, Illinois.

In 1961 he founded Hayward Blake Design. One of the firm's first major projects was designing the signage system at O'Hare International Airport for C.F. Murphy. Blake's innovative arrow in a circle preceded the arrow design developed by the U.S. Department of Transportation by nearly two decades.



Design for O'Hare Airport signage arrow, 1963. Credit: Chicago Design Archive

Another of Blake's clients was Maurice Rosenfield, owner of WAIT-AM, a Chicago-area radio station. He worked with Rosenfield to design the titles for the 1973 film *Bang the Drum Slowly*.



WAIT-AM radio poster, c. 1972.
Credit: Courtesy of Chris Blake



"Bang the Drum Slowly" film titles, 1973.
Credit: Courtesy of Communication Arts magazine

In 1975 Blake was contracted by the City of Evanston to create new design formats for its parking signs, which had become visually complex and difficult to understand. His solution, appropriate for the times, was to simplify the language, use the typeface Helvetica and standardize tpestyles and sizes.



Hayward Blake with a prototype City of Evanston parking sign in 1975. He simplified the signs and used a single typeface to enhance clarity. Credit: Rhodes Patterson



A parking sign before Blake's redesign. Credit: Courtesy of Communication Arts magazine



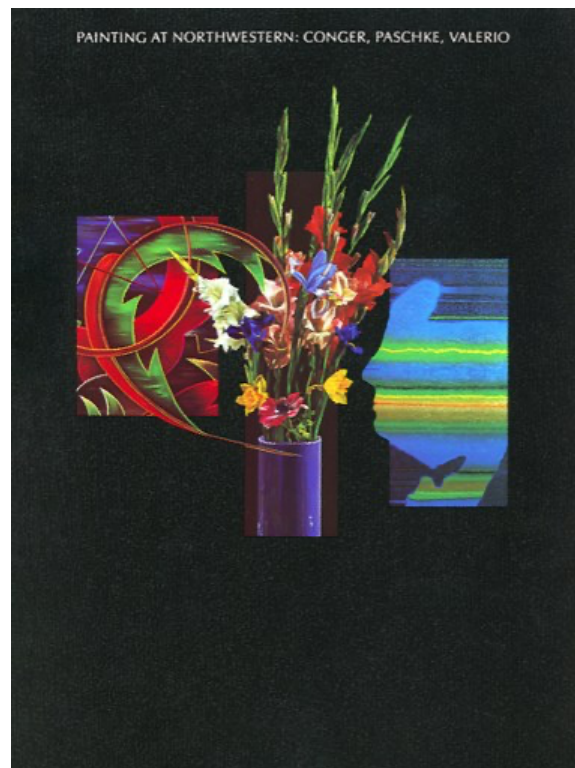
The same sign after Blake's redesign. Credit: Courtesy of Communication Arts magazine

In the late 1980s and 90s Blake designed a number of limited edition books for leaders of prominent Evanston families including Henry Crown, Tom Galvin and the Shure Brothers. He also designed publications for the Chicago Times Co., PB Publications, Evanston Public Library and the City of Evanston.



"Shure" book, 2001. Credit: Chicago Design Archive

Later projects included catalog designs for Northwestern University's Mary and Leigh Block Gallery and an identity program for a South Dakota newspaper, the Rapid City Journal. As a result of his interest in newspaper design, Blake taught design classes at Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism for several years. Numerous publication design projects, including newsletters, newspapers and magazines, dominated his work in the closing years of his design career.



“Discoveries from Kurdish Looms,” a 1983 exhibit catalog from the Mary & Leigh Block Gallery at Northwestern University. Credit: Courtesy of Chris Blake

“Painting at Northwestern,” a 1986 exhibit catalog from the Mary & Leigh Block Gallery at Northwestern University. Credit: Courtesy of Chris Blake

Blake was a longtime member of the Society of Typographic Arts and served as president in 1959. He was named a fellow in 1966. He was also a member of the Caxton Club from 1960 until his death in 2020. He served on its governing council from 1978-83 and was president from 1991-93. Over the years he designed award-winning invitations and books for both organizations.



Invitation to the Society of Typographic Arts' Middleton Award Ceremony, 1988. Credit: Chicago Design Archive

An Evanston resident for many years, Blake served on the boards of the Evanston Art Center and the Evanston Sailing Club. He designed brand identities for both in the 1970s. He was a founding member of Design Evanston in 1980 and was elected president in 1985, serving for one year.

evanston sailing club

Hayward Blake's Evanston Sailing Club logo, c. 1976. Credit: Reconstructed by Jack Weiss

In addition to his involvement in the Chicago-based Society of Typographic Arts, Blake was elected to the 27 Chicago Designers in 1961, was chairman of the organization in 1969 and a member until 1987. As a member of the American Institute of Graphic Arts, he was named an AIGA Chicago Fellow in 1999.

Blake lived with his family at 1017 Ridge Court in Evanston for many years before moving to Wilmette. After the death of his wife Simone in 2007, he dealt with a series of medical issues and his health declined. He spent his final years in assisted living at the Presbyterian Home's McGaw Care Center in Evanston. He died March 13, 2020.

A Side Story: The Design Partnership

In 1968 Hayward Blake joined Bruce Beck and three other designers in forming The Design Partnership, which explored the idea of “working separately together” as a design collaborative.

In 1972 they moved their office from Chicago to the Fountain Square Building at 1601 Sherman Ave. in Evanston. The offices moved to 820 Davis St. in 1978, after Jack Weiss had joined as a partner.

In a 1970 feature story on The Design Partnership, Dick Coyne, publisher of Communication Arts magazine wrote:

“There are four senior partners – Bruce Beck, Hayward Blake, Lindell “Bud” Mabrey and Henry Robertz—in The Design Partnership. Jack Weiss is an associate partner and Ken Kaiser is a junior partner. The total staff numbers 26 and they operate out of offices in Chicago and Evanston.



The Design Partnership's Evanston partners, 1970. Rear, from left: Lindell Mabrey, Henry Robertz, Hayward Blake. Front, from left: Bruce Beck, Jack Weiss. Credit: Courtesy of Communication Arts magazine

“With that much description, The Design Partnership sounds like a normally structured design firm with the capability of handling very large projects. Sometimes they do. But there is something unique about the organization. It is also four more modestly sized firms that can operate individually or in tandem: Bruce Beck Design Associates, Blake & Weiss, Mabrey / Kaiser Design, and Henry Robertz Design.

“All four are highly reputed Chicago design groups with histories that range from nine to twenty-nine years. Between them they have expertise and experience in every area of design with a considerable overlap in most areas. Each of the four senior partners is a member of the prestigious *27 Chicago Designers*.

“Each of the partners had already been operating out of space in the same building at 205 West Wacker Drive. They had become friends and were used to bouncing ideas off each other. No one takes credit for first suggesting they form the partnership. It just seemed a natural evolution from being friends to being partners. A shift from Chicago to Evanston was also deemed desirable since all the partners lived to the north and commuting could be minimized. For some it could be cut to a walk or a bike ride.

“The partners found an interesting location, a whole floor of a triangular-shaped building that was primarily one large open space. It had 6,000 square feet and a 16-foot ceiling. A carefully thought-out interior design plan turned this into a handsome, functional working space with all of the amenities an artist / designer could want. They share photographic and reproduction

facilities containing all new equipment. There are reception, conference, and library areas. There's even a kitchen and dining area for entertaining or for restful lunches."



Interior view of TDP's second-floor space at 1601 Sherman Ave. Credit: Courtesy of Communication Arts magazine



Floor plan of The Design Partnership at 1601 Sherman Ave. Credit: Courtesy of Communication Arts magazine

This essay expands on content that appears in Evanston's Design Heritage: Architects, Designers & Planners, 2020.

Design Evanston's "Eye on Evanston" articles focus on Evanston's design history and advocate for good design in our city. Visit designevanston.org to learn more about the organization.

Source: Evanston RoundTable 4.11.23