

STRATHMORE GRAPHICS GALLERY

CS4

ROCK AND ROLL
HALL OF FAME + MUSEUM



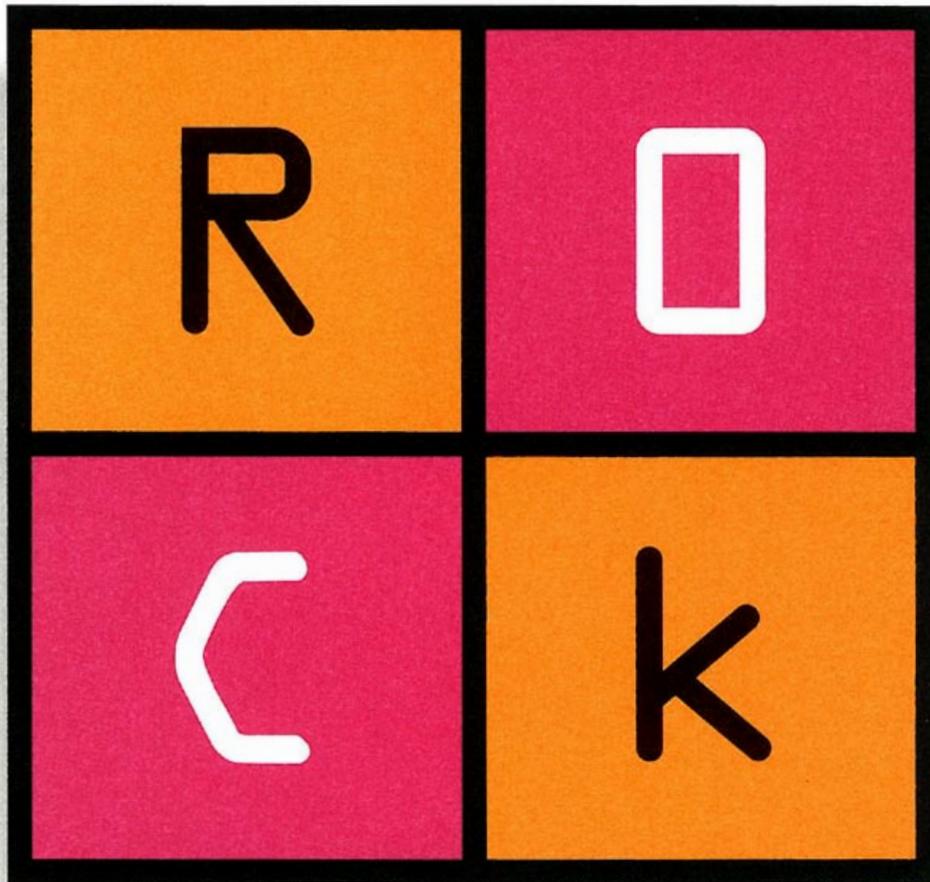


STRATHMORE CASE STUDY NO. 4

This Case Study series from Strathmore Papers is intended to provide insights into the reasoning behind design solutions and to help companies understand the value that good design can bring to their own marketing communications program.

The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum was an idea born in the brains of

votes and was awarded the site. A combination of state, county, city and private industry funds totaling \$92 million was raised to underwrite the ambitious venture. But bickering and logistical barriers delayed and dragged out the dream. By the summer of 1993, ground had been broken for the Museum. But it was only after Dennis R. Barrie was hired as the third



Abmet Ertegun, CEO of Atlantic Records and Jann Wenner, Founder, editor and publisher of Rolling Stone, back in 1983. They wanted to bestow a prestigious honor on the musical artists and non-performers who have transformed rock and roll from outlaw music to international phenomenon. The first inductees were welcomed in 1986 in New York City. But the Hall of Fame needed a permanent home which would also be an educational institution and a museum.

In a nationwide radio call-in competition, the city of Cleveland piled up the most

executive director that finally, there was a whole lot of shakin' going on.

This is the story of how one man unified 60 strong personalities from different backgrounds, industries and with different agendas to ensure that rock and roll's rich heritage will be preserved and perpetuated. And how a never-say-die graphic design firm invested its time and talent to promote the nation's most radical museum to an estimated one million visitors annually eager to pay the pioneers of rock a little R-E-S-P-E-C-T.





ROCK AND ROLL HALL OF FAME + MUSEUM

Every time someone asked him for his business card, Dennis Barrie, executive director of the new Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland, knew he needed to get moving on a serious graphic identity system. “I used to cringe when I would hand out my cards. They were hideous and I always felt like a pauper,” he says. “Usually, I would stash them in my desk drawer and pretend I didn’t have any more.” Sending a letter on Museum letterhead was just as humiliating, he grimaces.

Barrie’s response is understandable. He is not some administrator running down a checklist of projects to complete. Nor is he a vintage rock and roll superfan with the dream job and day-glo memories. Dennis Barrie has an aesthetic sensitivity honed over a career as an internationally distinguished art museum director, cultural historian, consultant and Ph.D. He is also the third director to tackle the herculean task of creating a Cooperstown for pop music legends, an interactive Smithsonian enshrining the legacies and personal treasures of more than 100 rock and roll icons inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame since 1986.

Barrie also knows the sheer power of visual communications, and he is not afraid of taking risks to call global attention to a worthwhile cause. During a decade as director of the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati, he spearheaded the controversial exhibition: “Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment in 1990.”

But Barrie was frustrated by his makeshift stationery for another reason besides its dreary, all-type design. There was no logotype that reflected the scope of this mammoth undertaking, no graphic hint of the compelling architecture of the Museum itself. What’s more, the story behind the \$92 million structure housing the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame was key to the challenge of making it a worldwide attraction and it simply wasn’t being told graphically or promotionally.

The Museum was to be designed by the same man who created the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, the Museum of Modern Art in Athens, the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C., and the expansion of the Louvre in Paris. But when I.M. Pei was approached and offered the design commission, he declined it. The 78-year-old celebrated architect confessed he didn’t know a thing about rock and roll and wasn’t all that enthralled with either the music or the musicians.

But after the Hall of Fame founders, led by co-organizer Jann Wenner, editor-in-chief of *Rolling Stone* magazine, gave Pei a crash course on the roots of rock and roll explaining that R&R was a bouillabaisse of Dixieland, jazz, blues and gospel music, Pei accepted the assignment.

Clearly, Pei added a landmark — if not a centerpiece — to the Cleveland skyline. Perched on the shores of Lake Erie, the 150,000-square-foot Museum is designed of interconnected geometric forms and cantilevered wings anchored by a 162-foot tower. Visually, it looks as if a glass-and-steel “tent” has been slipped over the tower to create a pyramid resting on a 60,000 square-foot plaza. Inside are exhibits ranging from Elvis’ leather outfit and guitar from his NBC “Comeback” show in ‘68, Grace Slick’s dress from the original “Woodstock,” John Lennon’s Sgt. Pepper jacket and handwritten lyrics, Wilson Pickett’s Gibson J200 acoustic guitar, even some Everly Brothers’ grade school report cards.



Yet 18 months before the opening, Barrie had no way of graphically conveying his mission. He had a file cabinet stuffed with presentations from design firms.

But the Museum's 60 person Board of Directors — half of them

Cleveland's civic movers and shakers who helped raise \$92 million in bonds, and the other half ultra-hip New York music industry moguls — squabbled over the earlier graphic concepts and could never agree on a theme. Barrie and his staff were at ground zero.

"I think the assignment was somewhat difficult," Barrie concedes. "Obviously, we were looking for a logo design that conveys some of the attitude of rock and roll and reflects the iconic images. Yet, we didn't want to be cliched. We're a museum, an institution. We're not a Hard Rock Cafe. We're not a Planet Hollywood. We have a serious purpose and we'll be here for a long time."

Rather than award the entire graphic identity program to one firm, Barrie held a competition. Four large New York graphics consultancies and one Cleveland firm were approached and paid \$2500 to create a logo. He didn't hold out a carrot and a promise of future work. Barrie knew that just getting one logo blessed by his combative Board of Directors was going to be a donnybrook. He wanted to see how the design firms fared under fire.

Mark Schwartz, partner in Nesnadny + Schwartz, Cleveland's largest graphic design firm, had his bulletproof vest on from the start. "It was really the impossible task but, in my mind, every logo is the impossible task. Let's have a symbol or a type treatment that says everything about what this institution is going to be." Schwartz, who talks in bursts like an Uzi, wasn't asked to illustrate how the logo would look in applications or to even choose a color scheme. "As long as

you're working responsibly — in the context of reproduction clarity and how it translates digitally — applications and color are a forgone conclusion in my mind."

Schwartz, 38, who admits he wasn't a rock and roll diehard, galvanized the entire 10-person staff of his Cleveland office to work on the logo. "Everybody was interested in the project. We needed to address the iconography of the I.M. Pei pyramid and address all of the complexities of rock and roll." Luckily, Schwartz had a staffer, Tim Lachina, who is "incredibly knowledgeable" on rock and roll.

The staff was almost as psyched as the Rolling Stones on opening night of a world tour. "We could smell the importance of this project, not just in this market, but for the world," says Schwartz. "And given the players involved nationally and internationally, it was clearly an important engagement for us."

Still, N+S was walking a very visible tightrope. The New York music contingent wanted a mark that "captured the energy and essence of rock and roll." Cleveland civic and corporate powers saw the distinctive I.M. Pei structure as "Cleveland's version of the Sydney Opera House."

The designers struggled with the balancing act — building or music — and in its "hundreds and hundreds of logo sketches," leaned toward the latter. Says a gutsy Schwartz: "Yes, it's an important building but it's of little importance compared to the history of rock and roll. We didn't really feel the building should be the hook. It was limiting, especially for the performing arts." Plus, he adds, "we wanted something more playful, irreverent, a little more fun."

Nesnadny + Schwartz presented its preliminary logo concepts in a series of spiral-bound books. Each was divided by a single sheet explaining the design rationale in several simple sentences. By the time N+S were preparing its third book of ideas, only one other design firm remained in the competition and its mark was favored by a majority of the New York board. Schwartz was morose. "I was convinced somebody had come up with this drop dead



perfect mark and they should just go with it. But we hadn't seen it so we were still fighting for the project." When he finally saw a fax of their idea — a pyramid with a guitar neck coming out of it — it was very similar to 20-some logos N+S submitted in book three.



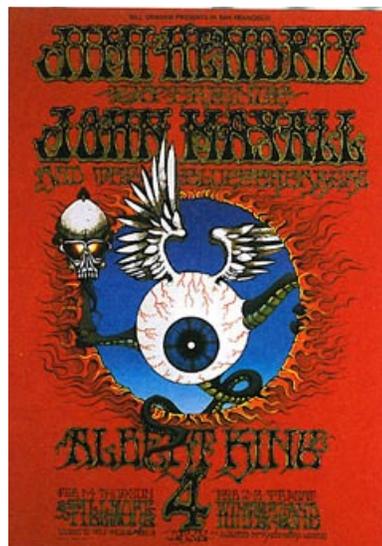
Schwartz went back to the drawing board. The N+S solution: a pyramid-shaped guitar neck moving outward in to the future contained in a circle of type. A stacked version and a horizontal version went over to Dennis Barrie. The 11th hour scramble paid off. Nesnadny + Schwartz broke out the champagne. "I was very impressed with the breadth of their presentation and all of the options Mark and his people gave us," Barrie says.

One of Schwartz' brightest ideas—even though the firm wasn't asked to present them — was showing how the logo would work within a graphic identity system plus "applications." Bingo. N+S was assigned to execute the designs of "everything from banners to business cards."



Schwartz and his staff had the Museum's graphic ID system designed in their mind for months. "We knew we had to come up with the logo but we never thought for a second it would sum up the institution." He considers a logo little more than a "signature that sits next to the address but it doesn't drive the corporate identification system. We felt the ID system should really be unique."

Drawing on rock and roll's "wealth of imagery," N+S made a bold decision: letterhead for "important communications" would have a full bleed photograph of an artifact from the Museum's collection on the back. One sheet, for instance, has a photo of Elvis Presley's RCA



"Nipper" dog printed on the back. Another sheet shows Jimi Hendrix' Stratocaster guitar on the flipside. Envelopes use similar photos on the back flap and business cards have photos from the collection on the reverse side. "Actually, we proposed this even before the final logo was approved," smiles Schwartz. "Everybody fell in love with it."

Although it had the logo design and graphic identify system under its belt, Nesnadny + Schwartz never assumed it would become the exclusive design firm for the Museum. "We really try to have our corporate identity work be as elastic, flexible and responsive as possible," explains Schwartz. That's why he produced three logos — circular, stacked and horizontal — instead of one. He says there are dozen of licenses involved "producing everything from pencils to leather jackets" and he knew their design firms didn't want to be handcuffed by one rigid treatment of the mark.

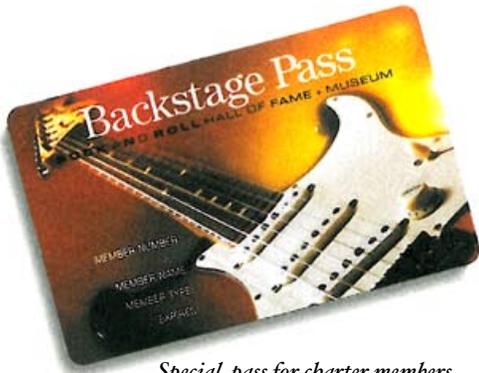


"This has been a huge learning experience for us," says Schwartz. Not necessarily a lucrative one but Schwartz and his partner Joyce Nesnadny knew that going in. Yet the tradeoff, he says, was the opportunity "to be on the ground floor of what can be one of the most exciting institutions in the world."

"The truth is no one got rich off this," says Dennis Barrie. "We told people there was very little money to do this project." So committed was N+S to this museum, N+S, in addition to its compensation, has donated professional graphic design services worth just over a quarter million dollars.

Meantime, Barrie is handing out his business card these days and getting a surprise reaction. "People want to collect my business card. It's funny. You go from a card people probably threw in the wastebasket to 'oh, can I have one of those?'"

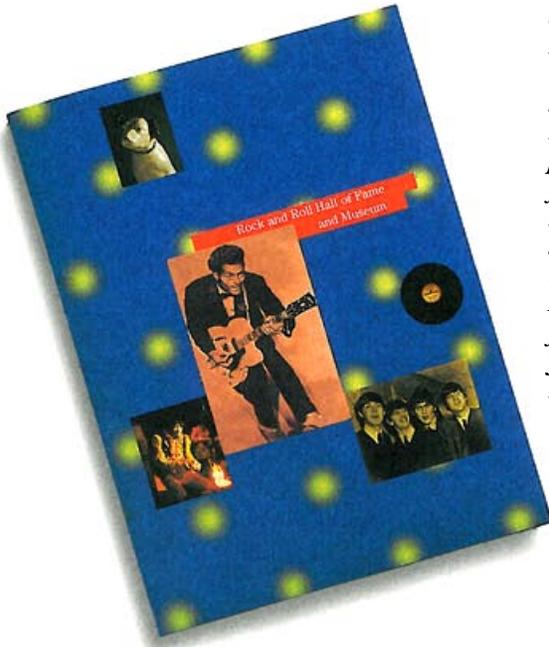




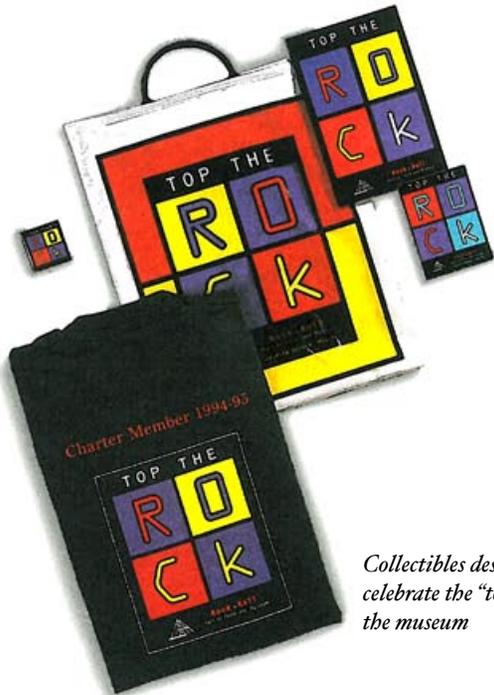
Special pass for charter members

The logo design and corporate identity system were Nesnadny + Schwartz's premier performance for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum and cemented the client relationship for other graphic gigs. N+S designed a keepsake press kit no journalist would ever toss. The official T-shirt followed by a line of exclusive merchandise that's already generated several million dollars in sales. A fluorescent orange and pink direct mail membership package for rock buffs (it pulled 50,000 new members and approximately \$2 million in new revenues). A clever series of oversize black and white postcards with 90s kids in 60s gear. A Top the Rock bag stuffed with collectibles for the Museum's "Topping Off" ceremony, and Liner Notes, a superb, bi-monthly membership newsletter.

Still, even after earning its chops, N+S had to climb back in the ring to beat a handful of major New York design firms to win a coveted job: producing a 16-page, 9-color brochure for raising funds and amassing memorabilia from artists and the music industry. Museum curators handed it to 200 artists and their representatives and it was mailed to a list of managers and record industry executives. Among the trophy momentos it generated: a guillotine from an Alice Cooper concert. Said Chief Curator Jim Henke: "From a curatorial standpoint, it was the most important promotional tool we had."



Portfolio to house news and background information



Collectibles designed to celebrate the "topping off" of the museum



For rock buffs: a direct mail package to solicit membership



Think rock and roll and your brain is flooded with memories of pompadours, pony tails, dance contests, beach parties, screaming fans, swiveling hips, strutting superstars, Motown, long hair, ripped jeans and tie-dyed tee shirts. A half million, half naked diehards, sun-baked and mellowing out on the sounds. Love, peace, satisfaction, doobies, good vibrations and throbbing guitars.

Think about housing four decades of the music, the props, the personal possessions of the recording artists, songwriters, musicians and the backstage talent in a single structure with a mind-blowing design. With a library for R&R historians and scholars. With state-of-the-art, multimedia exhibits of rock pioneers and today's headliners in action. With live performances and retrospectives on the history and the heritage of a music that loosened up the world.

Now, think about capturing it all on paper.

Mark Schwartz and Joyce Nesnadny, partners in the Cleveland-based graphic design firm of Nesnadny + Schwartz thought about it constantly and creatively. Their strategy, reflected in their winning competitive bid to design the Museum's graphic identity program, was clearly contrarian. No eye-popping colors. No San Francisco psychedelics. No glitzy shortcuts for a quick impact. N+S opted for a pure and subtle design solution that clearly communicates the raw energy and longevity of the music.

The paper selected for the graphic identity system perfectly mirrors the subtlety N+S was trying to achieve. Strathmore Elements met the designers' criteria of "reinforcing the visuals without overpowering the image." Holding up a sheet of subtly patterned letterhead, with a photograph of Elmore James' guitar printed on the

back, makes the instrument look like a full-sheet musical watermark. But the see-through image disappears when the sheet is put down on a desk.

Schwartz regards Elements as quite "unique. We tested it extensively for printability and laser compatibility. It has a beautiful surface, a little bit harder than most letterheads and not quite as toothy. That's a nice balance for writing or typing without disturbing the photographic imagery on the back of the sheet." The hardness of the letterhead makes the photograph on the back all that more dramatic when a letter is removed from the envelope, which also has a photograph on the back flap.

Elements was chosen for several other reasons, contends Schwartz. The patterns, (lines, dots, and squares) have a now-you-see-it, now-you-don't characteristic. "It's very much there when there is nothing typed on the letterhead. And it becomes background when there is a letter," says Schwartz. The grade, recycled and uncoated, nevertheless has the smooth, rich feel of a coated sheet.

The color palette — Toyo Blue 0920 and Toyo Purple 0975 — matches well with Elements in a soft white shade. "We have reasonably high chromiums on the page yet it's dark enough to Xerox. Every ID system we do has to pass the Xerox test," says the designer.

Schwartz says Elements letterhead is not used sparingly. "We've done several mailings to our 47,000-plus members and we used Elements most of the time." For cost considerations, though, letterhead with a photograph on the back is not used. "It was very important to us to use this grade because it isn't a run of the mill sheet. It's an inventive paper. And that's what this institution is — inventive."