

“Symbols: A Handbook for Seeing”

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It’s time to replace the image of the Nazi swastika seared in my brain with the spiritual swastika, a thousand-year-old sacred symbol. The beauty of its form is unchanged, but its power to represent evil in the last century has contaminated its use. A symbol’s multiple meanings expanded by time and diverse cultures inspire further interpretations, like the intriguing cover design of [Symbols](#), by Mark Fox and Angie Wang. The title’s silver-and-black typography plays off a full-page embossed symbol that combines four ancient icons in a fresh, new way.

Organized by chapters that group symbols into nature, animate, human, man-made and abstract, the text is designed to be easily referenced. Readers can progress chronologically or cross ancient and modern worlds by jumping to symbols of lightning, spiders, teeth and spirals. The authors have selected more than 400 examples, including both historical and pop-culture references. For example, the door/gate symbol presents both an entrance to a sixteenth-century Shinto shrine in Japan and a movie poster featuring Jack Nicholson maniacally grinning through the splintered door in *The Shining*.

Fox and Wang are collaborators at [Design is Play](#), a studio in San Francisco, and *Symbols* showcases Fox’s mastery of logos and Wang’s mastery of typography. The book’s elegant design and intelligent wit create an enjoyable reading experience. With so many examples, an index helps readers find work by the artist of their choosing, including Maya Lin, Leni Riefenstahl and Ed “Big Daddy” Roth.

[Symbols: A Handbook for Seeing](#)

By Mark Fox and Angie Wang

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