As we approach the 68th anniversary of the opening of Roy and Estelle Kelley’s first hotel in Waikiki and as we focus on how the world perceives our fast-growing company, I thought readers would find it interesting if I said a few words about the origin and significance of our logo. Where did it come from, and how is the image of a sailing canoe related to the fascinating history of early Pacific travelers and our company’s mission and direction?

After Roy and Estelle opened their first hotel, the Islander, on Seaside Avenue in 1947, they turned their focus to developing additional hotels in Waikiki’s Lewers Street area, next to Fort DeRussy. Extensive damage to beachfront apartments in that area caused by the powerful shock waves from the test firing of the fort’s coastal artillery battery at the beginning of World War II had created some real estate bargains. Recognizing this, my parents bravely invested in building the Edgewater, Reef, Reef Towers, Reef Lanais and Coral Seas hotels as quickly as possible. That group of hotels was marketed under the Waikiki Hotels brand, but there was little coordination of advertising materials, font, style, etc., among the properties.

That practice changed in 1963 when Roy agreed to build four properties on land owned by the Queen Emma Estate – one on Waikiki Beach and three on Kūhiō Avenue. The Outrigger Canoe Club had occupied the beachfront lot since 1908, so Roy decided to call the flagship hotel, the one on the beach, the Outrigger Waikiki, and he dubbed the entire new group – Outrigger Waikiki, Outrigger East, Outrigger West and Outrigger Surf – the Outrigger Hotels.

At that point, many companies would have turned to a specialized firm to research and design an appropriate logo. In those pre-Internet days, there were just a few national design companies of that nature. Between them, they were responsible for most of the nation’s major corporate work including the iconic logos of AT&T, IBM, Chase Bank, NBC, etc. Their fees were exorbitant. Even local designers charged dearly for work of this kind.

Money was very tight in our company, so on December 20, 1965, while construction of the Outrigger Waikiki was underway, Roy, a trained architect and excellent watercolor artist, took out a piece of paper and sketched his concept of a logo for the hotel. It featured the word Outrigger in a distinctive script, which was superimposed on a sketch of an outrigger canoe.

From his notes on that sketch, it looks as though he then sent it to a gentleman named Don Allison for refinement and finished versions in color and black and white.

When the Outrigger Waikiki opened in 1967, the logo used on the letterhead mirrored the wording in Roy’s sketch, and the canoe had been slimmed down to a modern shape that would fit neatly beneath the script (see page 2).
About 1979, my wife, Linda V.G. Kelley, a talented artist, sketched a new version of a logo for the Outrigger Hotel group. It incorporated an outrigger canoe, Diamond Head, a palm tree and Waikīkī Beach.

This concept went through several iterations and the next version simplified the canoe and added the waves of the Pacific and a sail that evoked the spirit of the Polynesian voyaging canoe Hōkūle'a.

The sketch to the right (above) with my handwriting on it, indicates I was involved in the fine details of the artwork.

Those who design logos for a living understand that a great logo works at the emotional level. In a well-done logo, the deepest parts of the brain react to the colors, shapes, lines, fonts and symbolic elements. We thought the movement of the waves, the feeling of exploration and the Pacific-Polynesian symbolism all conveyed the qualities of the company the logo embodied.

The artwork was accepted as the official Outrigger Hotels logo, although we still had to decide whether to call the group “The Outrigger Hotels” or “Outrigger Hotels.” So we produced the two versions (above and top right) and tried to decide which one we would use. It was not an easy call.

The movie “The Social Network” suggests that Facebook founders Mark Zuckerberg and Eduardo Saverin went through a similar process. In a memorable scene, they are shown meeting in a restaurant with Napster co-founder Sean Parker. The meeting becomes acrimonious but, as Parker is leaving the room, he turns and suggests they drop the word “The” from the company’s name, The Facebook.

They did and the value of that advice is reflected in the market capitalization of Facebook, Inc., which just replaced Walmart as one of the top 10 companies (by market capitalization) in the Standard and Poor’s 500 index.

Like Zuckerberg and Saverin, we dropped the word “The” and became Outrigger Hotels. Rest assured, however, that we are not currently considering an IPO!

So we finally settled on this logo (left), which we used for many years.

As our company grew, the Outrigger script was given a sleeker, more modern look. The image of the canoe, sail and waves was also revised but we kept the basic concept. It still stirs my emotions; hopefully it does that for others as well.

As we have grown into a firm that now has hotel, condominium and timeshare properties open or under development in seven countries, the name of the corporate umbrella was changed to Outrigger Enterprises Group (below left). To the right is our newly updated corporate logo, again keeping our legacy in mind.

This umbrella group encompasses various hospitality operations.

The outrigger canoe, Diamond Head, a palm tree and Waikīkī Beach.

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Our core hospitality division is now devoted to owning and operating world-class beachfront resorts around the world. Accordingly, we call that branch of our company Outrigger Resorts.

However, the logo based on an image of a voyaging canoe in open water is still the focus of attention. Beneath the canoe, the moving waves and open circle give a feeling of constant change and exploration.

The unique sail configuration, similar to the sails used on ancient Polynesian canoes, also conveys the unique qualities of our company. For ancient Polynesian seafarers, the concept of kaukahi, “singleness of purpose,” was essential to any voyage. Everyone’s well-being and ability to safely cross the vast ocean to reach their destination depended on working together and focusing on a shared mission and goals.

That concept is more valid than ever in today’s fast-moving, complicated, dangerous world and, appropriately, the outrigger canoe on display at the Outrigger Waikiki Beach Resort is named Kaukahi.

Kaipo Ho, Outrigger’s cultural experiences director, feels the three-pointed, claw-shaped sail of the canoe is also a graphic representation of the three core elements of hospitality in our company’s culture – Place, Host and Guest.

In short, our logo inspires us to follow in the path of our predecessors who crossed vast oceans over a thousand years ago. It tells us to look forward, beyond the horizon, work together and embrace all that we discover with open arms, open hearts and open minds.

credit: Polynesian sailing canoe as visualized by artist-historian Herb Kawainui Kane (1928 - 2011)