



Bank and History

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Thirty years under the sign of the blue square

In the 1970s, a period of rapid and deep-rooted change, a pictorial language of symbols quickly became popular. Deutsche Bank recognized it would have to present itself differently to the public than before, if it did not want to appear old-fashioned. Its corporate design was decades old and stemmed from a period when the fixation on brand names and their logos was much less pronounced than today. The company logo at that time, an overlapping *DB* in an oval, was introduced in the thirties, although the Munich branch had already used an art nouveau variant of this before the First World War. A fundamentally new concept appeared to be the right answer to the bank's management: the letter mark was replaced by a picture mark.

Eight graphic artists participated in a competition, submitting 140 designs. The winner was the graphic artist, photographer and painter Anton Stankowski (1906-1998). In his atelier in Stuttgart he designed the new image of Deutsche Bank together with Karl Duschek and implemented it after winning the tender offer. This was because the new logo was to realign the entire image of Deutsche Bank "with discipline and consistency," according to Hans-Joachim Funck, in charge of the Central Advertising Department. The logo was thus only a first step, but also the most visible sign of a programme to "unify the image," which began to standardize the design of all of the bank's printed matter and the decoration of the branches.

The new logo was announced internally in a circular in October 1973. At the Annual Press Conference on April 2, 1974, the Spokesman of the Board of Managing Directors Franz Heinrich Ulrich only mentioned the logo briefly, that had been "officially" introduced during the period, but that had already been

displayed on the bank's Christmas cards in December 1973.

When the logo had arrived, the symbolic interpretation began: What does it mean? The staff magazine "db aktuell" conducted a competition to find a name for the new logo. More than 1,700 proposals were received by the editorial desk. Ideas such as "Success Vault", "Quasar" and "Euro Star" were rejected despite some very original reasons. The jury decided in favour of the "Wegweiser" (the "Signpost"). In the May 1974 edition of the customer magazine *Geld* ("Money"), the public was introduced to the new "Signpost for modern payment transactions": "Deutsche Bank has a new company logo. It was officially introduced a few days ago: a broad-edged square with a free-standing diagonal. Soon it will be seen in all of the branches, in the display windows, on billboards. It will come to you in your home on letters and account statements. Perhaps you will ask yourselves: What does such a symbol have to do with banking?" This was a question that not only a few people asked, and many could only slowly get used to the new symbol. A survey in the second half of 1974 showed that the logo was still often considered to be the symbol of a company from the iron and steel industry. However, after three years, the blue square was considered to be established on the market.

Blue had long been the traditional colour of Deutsche Bank. Along with the new logo, a new colour tone was introduced, seeing as the Advertising Department assumed "that blue is definitely the friendliest colour there is, seen positively by most people. Furthermore, it calls up associations which can be evaluated as positive for a bank, such as trust, reliability, but also a combination of rationalism and compassion."

The colour and the symbol have remained for more than three decades. The logo has proven itself as a timeless modern brand mark. What has changed, unavoidably, are the statements as to what the symbol stands for. "The solid frame with the ascending line stands for Deutsche Bank's commitment to

guarantee that customers' savings are securely invested and grow" – what today appears to be a conservative, modest interpretation from the customer magazine of 1974 has little resemblance with the Deutsche Bank of the year 2004.

From the basement and vault

"Berlin's ambition of becoming a metropolis of American speed has been partially fulfilled. A few days ago, Berlin experienced the sensation of bank robbery, an ingeniously executed break-in of a vault. Until now, our experience of such planned and successfully completed crimes come only from the fantastic stories of inventive criminal films and detective novels." The break-in at the branch of Disconto-Gesellschaft located on Wittenbergplatz in Berlin made the headlines seventy-five years ago and has remained until today one of the "most popular" crimes of German criminal history. Even the reporting of the noble *Frankfurter Zeitung* on the coup, "which stands uniquely in the history of bank break-ins", has something of a trace of admiration which ingenious robberies of banks have always generated. This attitude is reflected in Bertolt Brecht's famous question: "What is breaking into a bank compared with founding a bank?"

The Berlin break-in at the end of January 1929 was the work of two brothers, Franz and Erich Sass, a duo of crooks who had become known in Berlin through their spectacular jobs. They were actually considered to be stars of the underworld; primarily because of their innovative procedures and "professional ethics" according to which – as legend will have it – they, in the tradition of Robin Hood, had parts of their haul distributed among the destitute inhabitants of the Moabit neighbourhood in Berlin. They became famous through their penchant for innovation: they were the first to use a cutting torch to open safes. As the *Berliner Börsen-Courier* correctly indicated in 1928: "There is a permanent race going on between constructors and burglars of safes and steel vaults; every improvement in construction requires new break-in techniques."

The Sass brothers dug a tunnel in weeks of work from a neighbouring building, giving them access to the basement of the branch.

They arrived at the outer wall of the vault room through an air duct, and the vault did not resist long against their modern equipment. 179 safe deposit boxes were broken open, and the easily liquifiable portion of the loot was taken away. It was days afterwards before the crime was discovered: first it was believed that the lock on the vault door was defective because it could not be opened anymore. The burglars had blocked it from within. First estimates put the value of the loot at around 2½ million Reichsmark, although it was naturally difficult to receive reliable information from those who had been stolen.



The emptied safe deposit boxes, 1929

The break-in took place when the big Berlin banks had already been working for some time on a new version of their business conditions for the rental of steel safe deposit boxes. In September 1928, the General Counsel of Disconto-Gesellschaft had proposed a limit on the bank's liability for the contents of safe deposit boxes. The old version stated: "Disconto-Gesellschaft has had a room (steel vault) constructed which

reliable technicians believe is secure from fire and theft and in which iron safe deposit boxes are located.” He asked “whether the introductory words of these conditions still apply today (especially to our branches and deposit-taking branches), and whether the clauses concerning the monitoring and security of the safe deposit boxes can remain without a risk to us, namely considering the recent break-in attempt executed against the steel vault of a deposit-taking branch of Dresdner Bank, and also considering the hostile position often taken by the courts towards banks.” The Munich branch of Disconto-Gesellschaft wrote calming words after the crime to the Berlin Legal Department: “You may be interested to know that we by chance have heard that the university Professor Dr. Cosack, as part of the oral law exams yesterday, dealt with the break-in in the Kleiststrasse deposit-taking branch and argued the position that this was doubtlessly a case of force majeure.” Banks’ liability for the contents of safe deposit boxes was loosened already in the year 1929. Simultaneously, increased efforts were made to secure the vaults. An informative report appeared in the now forgotten magazine *Wahre Detektiv-Geschichten* (“True Detective Stories”) dated October 18, 1930 (DD-Bank stands for Deutsche Bank und Disconto-Gesellschaft, which had merged the year before): “Between Leipziger Strasse and the avenue ‘Unter den Linden’, there is a gigantic block of buildings: DD-Bank. A city within the city. The Criminal Department of DD-Bank is the only one of its kind in the world. [...] It has a ‘criminal card catalogue’ and a gigantic picture archive with photographs of the expert criminals of the world. Here we can find in-depth ‘wanted posters’ with exact résumés and descriptions of personal features along with the aliases of

the bank robbers. [...] A new achievement is the ‘electrical ears’. This is an entirely new invention that went into operation for the first time a few weeks ago. The electric ears are microphones attached to the ceilings of the vaults. All of DD-Bank’s deposit-taking branches have this equipment in their vaults. They are continually connected through an open line to the bank’s centralized eavesdropping center in its main building. Every noise in the vaults of the various deposit-taking branches causes a light signal to come on here. The guard on duty then switches in and can listen through the loudspeakers of the eavesdropping system to what the microphones attached everywhere pick up. A single official can thus monitor all of the deposit-taking branches and protect the big bank’s vaults from break-ins.”

Although the Sass brothers were arrested by the police after their break-in in 1929, it could not be proven that they committed the crime. They had to be released. After Hitler took power, they fled to Denmark. They continued to frequent criminal circles, were arrested, convicted to a term in prison, and, after their extradition to Germany in 1940, were shot in the concentration camp Sachsenhausen. Their lives have been the subject of several films and books; Erich Kästner is said to have been inspired by them to write his book “Emil and the Detectives”. Even until today, the majority of their loot has never been found.

Further sources:

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From the bank counter to Bayreuth

Promoting culture today forms an important part of Deutsche Bank’s commitment to society. However, it would seem improbable that famous artists should come from the ranks of its staff members. Here is the historical proof of the contrary:

On January 22, 1917, the Frankfurt branch of Disconto-Gesellschaft, ‘Am Rossmarkt’ (now Deutsche Bank’s main branch in Frankfurt), hired a new staff member: Franz Völker, 17 years old, the son of a laundry owner from

Neu-Isenburg. The young man had sought a “transfer into one of the apprenticeship positions becoming free in your esteemed institution”, in accordance with the standard wording of that time, with the bank, which was glad to accept him due to the chronic lack of personnel in the middle of the First World War. Franz Völker thus went through the rather unsystematic stages of an apprenticeship training that was usual for the period. As a bank official, Völker first worked

in bookkeeping and at the coupon desk, later as a cashier in one of the Frankfurt deposit-taking branches (city branch) of Disconto-Gesellschaft, and finally in the same function at the main branch 'Am Rossmarkt'. What could not remain a secret from the bank for long was that its "intelligent, industrious and trustworthy" staff member was a passionate singer, who took part in an amateur competition of the recently founded Frankfurt Radio Station and promptly came in first place. He had won the favour of the listeners by singing the tenor's aria "Freundlich blick ich auf diese und jene" ("Questa o quella") from Verdi's opera "Rigoletto". Afterwards, the various operas took note of Franz Völker. The step from a middle-class existence into the uncertainty of a singer's career was not easy for Völker, who had meanwhile founded a family. And so he hesitated to relinquish his position as a bank official. He only accepted the offer from the Frankfurt Opera after his employer assured him that he could return to the bank within the period of one year if he did not succeed on the stage. He left Disconto-Gesellschaft at the end of August 1926 (three years later it merged with Deutsche Bank).

Already in November of 1926, he played the role of Florestan in Beethoven's "Fidelio", marking his renowned debut on the stage. From this point on, Franz Völker was a quickly rising star, and the possibility of returning to the bank counter was soon forgotten. In 1931 he accepted an engagement with the Vienna State Opera, and in 1935 Völker became a member of the ensemble with the Staatsoper Unter den Linden in Berlin. The peak of his singing career was in his performances at the Music Festivals in Bayreuth in the years 1933 to 1942. Above all, in his roles as Lohengrin and Siegmund, Völker set benchmarks as a Wagnerian tenor which many consider have yet to be surpassed. In 1952 he ended his

career on the stage and worked primarily as a singing teacher during the years until his death in 1965.



Franz Völker (1899-1965) in 1917

Lost and found

Taken from everyday life

1963: "Abs travelled a lot around the world, but he had never been to South Africa. 'Why don't you fly there?', I said to him. 'You know a lot of people there that visit you often. Harry Oppenheimer, for example. It would be a good idea if the No. 1 from Deutsche Bank

were to fly there and show himself.' 'Good, then I'll fly there,' he acceded. 'It would be nice if you could come along.' So we flew together."

Casimir Prinz zu Sayn-Wittgenstein: *Was bleibt ist die Erinnerung*. Berlin, 2002, p. 179.

