

# Meet Carolyn Davidson, the woman behind the iconic Nike Swoosh

In order to know where you are going, even in design, it is always important to look back at all the people who helped get one's industry to where it is. Since we're celebrating women's month in South Africa, we decided to take a look into graphic design to see which iconic women helped to get us here.



One of those women is Carolyn Davidson, the woman who designed the iconic Nike Swoosh back when she was still a student at Portland State University.

Long before former Design Indaba Conference speaker Dan Wieden coined “Just Do It” for the brand, Davidson was approached by Nike’s co-founder Phil Knight to come up with an identity for the company. At the time it was trading as Blue Ribbon Sports.

The brief was clear, albeit challenging to crack - the logo needed to convey a sense of fluidity and motion, without resembling any of the brand’s contemporaries back in 1971. This included brands like Puma, Adidas and Onitsuka Tiger.

Davidson started the process by sketching a range of options on tissue paper, which she’d then lay over a drawing of a shoe. When review time came, she presented five or six options, none of which had the executives completely sold.

She’d have liked to go back and refine some of them but fate had it that there were production deadlines to be met and so

the checkmark was the winner. Phil Knight commented, “Well, I don’t love it, but it will grow on me.” Such is the authority of that mark that in 1995, the 'Nike' was dropped, and the Swoosh became the singular brand identifier.

Davidson became known as the “Logo Lady” and went on to spend the next five years with the company, sharing her logo love with other clients as a freelancer over the next 30 years.

It’s hard to believe that the job earned her \$35 back then. While her work was part of a defining moment in sports and pop culture, Davidson tells [NPR](#), “I’ve pretty much stayed under the radar, and nobody knows who I am.”

Image via [Alchetron](#).

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