

San Francisco Chronicle

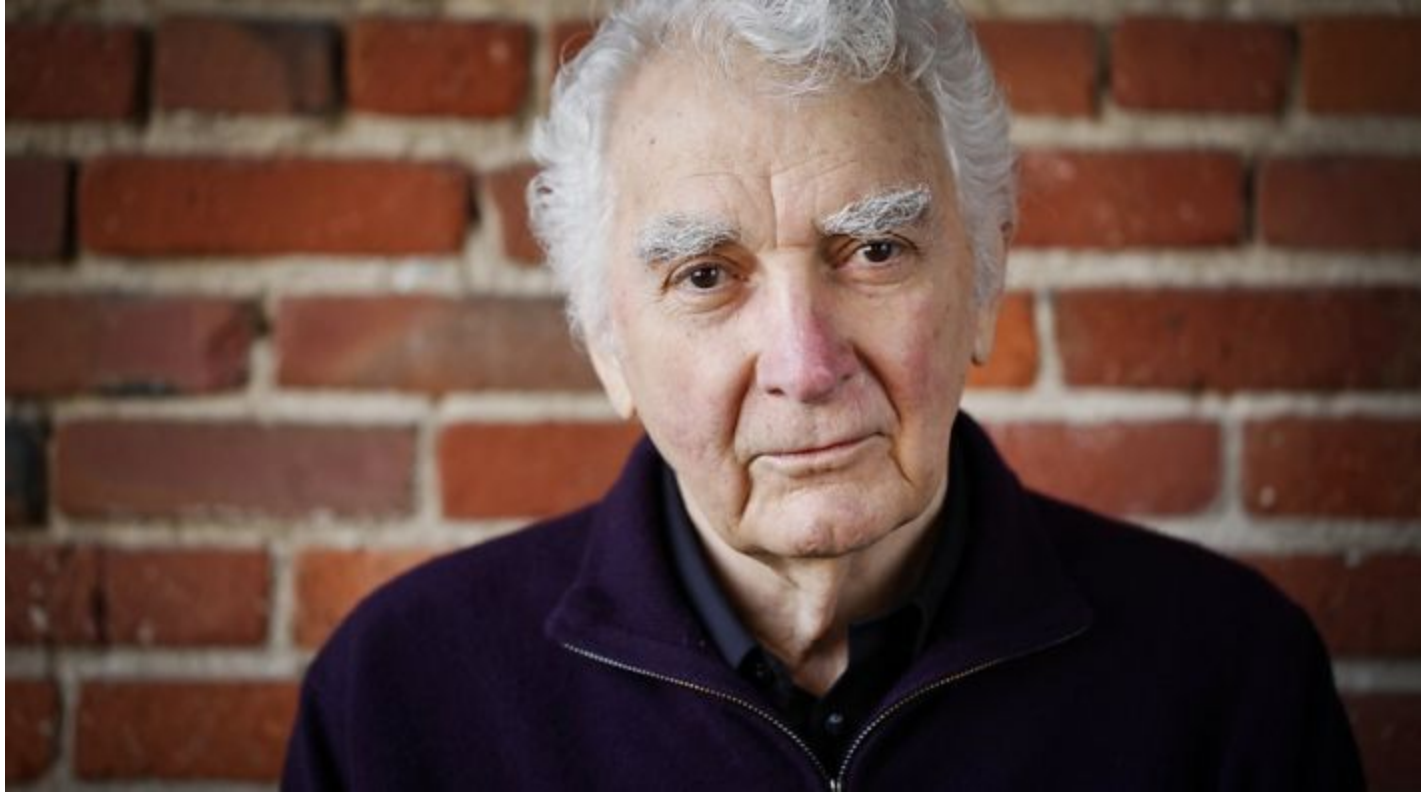
<http://www.sfchronicle.com/style/article/Primo-Angeli-S-F-s-poster-boy-4448320.php>

San Francisco Chronicle

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Primo Angeli - S.F.'s poster boy

For decades, Primo Angeli celebrated and shaped clients near and far. He's back



Russell Yip, The Chronicle

Primo Angeli, above, and posters for the 1996 Olympic Games and the 50th anniversary of the Golden Gate Bridge. His book is "Primo: Celebratory Posters."

Beth Hughes

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Over 30 years, Primo Angeli built an international reputation for his work in packaging, corporate identity and poster design from his Potrero Hill office. His clients included global brands like Coca-Cola and DHL, and international events like the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games. None of this meant he was above designing for regional or local icons like the Boudin Bakery.

In 1999, after a run that included creating more than 40 labels for beer makers large and small and more than 350 awards, Angeli sold his design studio for an undisclosed sum. Retirement? For a designer of his stature, there is no such thing. Yes, there was the Italian interregnum, but as his new firm, Primo Angeli-Stapley Hildebrand, proclaims, "He's back!"

But did Angeli ever really leave?

After all, a designer must design, and a designer so closely identified with San Francisco that he created the official poster for the Golden Gate Bridge's 50th anniversary must work in "The City." Angeli now shares the title of co-creative director with Aaron Stapley, and Jason Hildebrand retains his title as production director of the Potrero Hill studio.

Angeli's imprint on San Francisco's landscape is so deep it may go unnoticed even by natives and longtime residents. The logo for Boudin Bakery with its sheaves of golden wheat and link to the Gold Rush with "Since 1849"? That's Angeli. P.G. Molinari & Sons, makers of Italian-style dry fermented sausages? Angeli again. Posters for the San Francisco Symphony, Grace Cathedral, the San Francisco Film Festival, the San Francisco International Airport? Yes.

They're collected in his latest book, "Primo: Celebratory Posters" (Año Nuevo Island Press, 166 pages \$55). When cities elsewhere celebrated San Francisco with festivals, Angeli created the posters, including one from 1992 San Francisco in a Sydney celebration. It may be the ultimate work hard/play hard image for Baghdad by the Bay - the Transamerica Tower spearing a pimento-stuffed Martini olive.

Angeli, who admits to a young 81, connects many of San Francisco's eras with his body of elegantly expressive posters. An academically trained printmaker, he established himself in the early 1960s in a city that has been known as a center for fine printing and design since the Gold Rush. He made his name in Silicon Valley, creating names and visual identities for companies emerging in the predawn of tech as we know it. His poster with the words "The Silent Majority" depicts a photograph of a row of tombstones in the Colma military cemetery taken by Lars Speyer, a frequent Angeli collaborator. The image "portrayed the reality of war and was a touchstone for all sides for or against the war," says Angeli of the phrase President Richard Nixon used in a 1969 speech. Three days after the speech the Western Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam distributed the poster at a San Francisco peace march.

Kevin Starr, the former California state historian and author who is now a professor at the University of Southern California, calls it "one of the great posters of the 20th century."

Angeli says that "in terms of idea and production, it was the fastest concept-to-street poster I have ever created and probably the finest."



Courtesy Primo Angeli

The 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta poster designed by Primo Angeli.

Angeli earned his bachelor of arts degree in painting and printmaking at Southern Illinois University Carbondale in 1957 and his master's in communications design from the same institution in 1959. His graduate thesis was "The Visual Symbol as Tool in Communications." His advisers were renowned 20th century futurist Buckminster Fuller, who described himself as a "comprehensive anticipatory design scientist," and Harold Cohen, the founder of the design department who had studied with Lazlo László-Nagy and Serge Chermayeff.

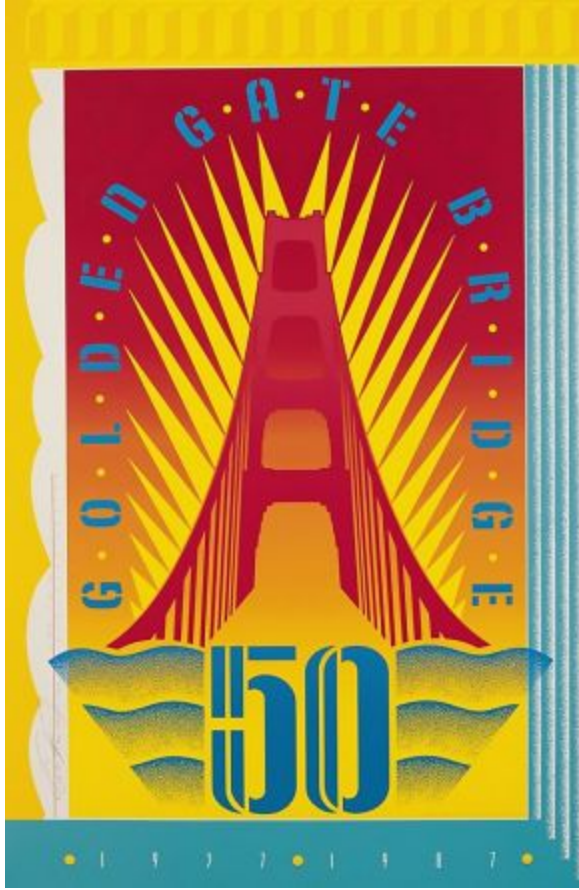
It was a golden time in the perfect place as the field of commercial design transformed into graphic design, and Angeli soaked it up. Then he packed his car and decamped to San Francisco where reality hit hard.

"Nobody knew much about graphic design," he says. "I couldn't find a job and I wound up near Palo Alto where new things were going on." His graduate work on trademarks paid off, at \$50 per design.

By the 1970s, San Francisco was known for graphic design in part due to Angeli's ability to convey a complex narrative visually. Starr says Angeli's work helped San Francisco develop a reputation for aesthetic and creative edginess: "He wasn't the only one who did this, but Primo is part of it and he helped anchor it in San Francisco."

Today, Angeli is back in full swing. He's working with clients on branding, packaging and strategic design for his new firm while marketing his book and posters on the side online. His reputation precedes him and is growing anew. He brought in the Ergobaby account. Stapley describes building on Angeli's experience with beer companies. "We were thinking a craft beer company, maybe working for free kegs," but within days Angeli had delivered "an incredibly large beer company."

"The amount of enthusiasm he brings to the studio, it's unbelievable," says Stapley. "It's what he lives and breathes. It's very inspiring. He's tapped in, he's an original thinker."



Courtesy Primo Angeli

50th anniversary of the Golden Gate Bridge poster designed by Primo Angeli.

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