

WHAT IS THE “CLOUD LIFT” GRAPHIC?

California Craftsman design commonly incorporates graphic elements that reflect a variety of California cultural influences and are repeated throughout to unify the structure and design of a room or even of a whole building.

“The Chinese or ‘cloud’ lift design recurs on the window mullions and furniture,”¹ of the Gamble House in Pasadena, one of the hallmark buildings of Greene & Greene, pioneer architects of the California Craftsman design movement.

The “Cloud Lift” graphic, illustrated here in the red-circled portion from a screen door in the Gamble House and inspired by Chinese furniture of the early 1900’s, will be the featured graphic element incorporated into the design of the furnishings of our new worship building.



The center segment in a three-segment horizontal line is slightly lifted. The image of the cloud brings our minds and hearts to what is uplifting, and transcendent.

The cloud serves that purpose in the Bible as well.

God guides the people of Israel, freed from slavery in Egypt, through their desert wanderings, in a cloud. “The LORD went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night.” Exodus 13:21

God appeared at the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem in a cloud “And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD. 1 Kings 8:10-11.

God appeared at Jesus’ transfiguration in a cloud. “Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Mark 9:7

Jesus ascended into heaven in a cloud. “When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.” Acts 1:9

A cloud is the means on which Jesus will return to judge the world. “Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. Luke 21:27 (ref. Daniel 7:13)

“The people recognize the cloud as the visible sign of God’s presence (Exodus 33:7-11). The cloud thus came to be both a symbol of God’s presence and a veil to hide the brilliance and strength of it.”²

The vertical bars sometimes seen radiating out from the center segment of the cloud lift graphic, as seen in the example, are said to represent the rays of the sun.³ The sun as a Christian symbol is most typically associated with the Resurrection of Jesus, the verification of victory won for humanity over sin, death and the power of the devil, on the cross and the central event of human history. It is the beginning of a new “day”. Matthew 28:1, Mark 14:2, Luke 24:1, John 20:1

The three segments radiate from a single common unseen center, reminding us that God could reveal himself to us in an infinite number of ways. The shape of the graphic is Trinitarian, reminding us that God is One and that God has revealed himself to us in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Finally, the cloud lift graphic might also be considered as an expression of mission. Note Exodus 40:34-38, “The cloud of his presence covers the tabernacle, and the glory of the Lord fills it. Now when the cloud lifts, the Israelites will know it is time to move on. And wherever they go, the Lord will be with his people in cloud and fire.”⁴

One graphic element within our design does not bring inspiration any more than human beings can live in isolation from God. “But only when it is all put together, ‘from the artist’s point of view,’ do these features become more than the disparate elements and achieve the transcendent experience of a Greene and Greene design.”⁵

¹ Arntzenius, Linda G., The Gamble House, University of Southern California, School of Architecture © 2000, p. 17

² Richardson, Alan, Ed., A Theological Word Book of the Bible, The Macmillan Company, New York, ©1950 The Macmillan Company, page 175

³ Gary M. Katz Online, Trim Techniques, Craftsman Mantelpiece (JLC 2005), <http://www.garymkatz.com/TrimTechniques/CraftsmanMantel-2005.htm>

⁴ Knowles, Andrew, The Bible Guide, Augsburg, Minneapolis, Text © 2001 Andrew Knowles, page 62

⁵ Smith, Bruce and Vertikoff, Alexander, Grene & Greene Masterworks, Chronicle Books, San Francisco, © 1998 Prchetype press, Inc., Text © 1998 Bruce Smith, Photographs © 1998 Alexaner Vertikoff, page 28