
McDonald's Fast Food Pack

Fast Food Nation

In the late 1960s, when McDonald's was remodeling its restaurants, the company considered doing away entirely with the famous Golden Arches symbol. But design consultant and psychologist Louis Cheskin advised against depriving the public completely of the reassurance of "Mother McDonald's breasts." So McDonald's kept the symbol in its logo and advertising.

The famous logo, with the two arches combined to form an "M" for "McDonald's," had debuted in 1962, though the company had by then been publicizing "the Golden Arches" for several years. But the basic idea of a yellow arch goes back to Richard McDonald's original design for remodeling the very first McDonald's restaurant in San Bernardino, California, around 1948. He thought an arch or two would give the building a "lift," at least psychologically (the first arches may not have been load-bearing). His architect hated the idea, but Richard persisted. The original design evolved: from one arch to two; from semicircular to parabolic in shape; from red to yellow.

The parabolic shape was perhaps inspired by Eero Saarinen's 590-ft St. Louis arch, which had not yet been built (it was finally erected in 1960) but which had won an architectural competition in 1948, receiving much publicity. The bright yellow color, suggested by a local neon sign maker, was intended to help make the arches visible from far away. That was important to the car culture near Route 66. The arches became standard on McDonald's restaurants until 1968, when the mansard roof design was adopted and the arches were eliminated from the buildings. Subsequently arches have been revived in some locations.

What does the logo stand for? Quality, speed, convenience, and (with respect to profits) thrift. In the case of French fries, great attention was paid to improving and standardizing every stage of their preparation, cooking, and serving. The cardboard scoop/container is itself a marvel of industrial design. It helps even minimally trained employees serve almost exactly the same number of fries, without spilling. Less-skilled servers can be paid lower wages; portions are standardized in size; waste is reduced. The shape also displays the fries in such a way as to make even a small portion look generous.