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Rating

Overall Rating: 4.66
★★★★★ (best)

Swedish Campground

Author: Andy Hertzfeld

Date: August 1983

Characters: Susan Kare, Steve Jobs

Topics: Software Design

Summary: How we got the unusual symbol used for the menu command key



We thought it was important for the user to be able to invoke every menu command directly from the keyboard, so we added a special key to the keyboard to invoke menu commands, just like our predecessor, Lisa. We called it the "Apple key"; when pressed in combination with another key, it selected the corresponding menu command. We displayed a little Apple logo on the right side of every menu item with a keyboard command, to associate the key with the command.

One day, late in the afternoon, Steve Jobs burst into the software fishbowl area in Bandle III, upset about something. This was not unusual. I think he had just seen MacDraw for the first time, which had longer menus than our other applications.

"There are too many Apples on the screen! It's ridiculous! We're taking the Apple logo in vain! We've got to stop doing that!"

After we told him that we had to display the command key symbol with each item that had one, he told us that we better find a different symbol to use instead of the Apple logo, and, because it affected both the manuals and the keyboard hardware, we only had a few days to come up with something else.

It's difficult to come up with a small icon that means "command", and we didn't think of anything right away. Our bitmap artist Susan Kare had a comprehensive international symbol dictionary and she leafed through it, looking for an appropriate symbol that was distinctive, attractive and had at least something to do with the concept of a menu command.

Finally she came across a floral symbol that was used in Sweden to indicate an interesting feature or attraction in a campground. She rendered a 16 x 16 bitmap of the little symbol and showed it to the rest of the team, and everybody liked it. Twenty years later, even in OS X, the Macintosh still has a little bit of a Swedish campground in it.



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