

Crafting Design Playing Cards

A look into the design and history

Whether you're a longtime playing card aficionado or just beginning your interest in cards, this booklet will help you develop your knowledge of playing card history and tradition. You'll learn to fully appreciate the subtleties that set one deck apart from another. In addition, you will gain insight into the decisions behind the major features and minute details that make Design (pronounced "J Design") Playing Cards® special. I trace the history, inspiration, and nuances of the 2005 Classic Paisley® and 2008 Classic Culture® decks. I also provide a detailed look at the redesign that resulted in the 2013 release of the Design Classic Victorian® deck. You'll find an image and discussion of each individual Classic Victorian court card, plus images of the 2008 version and cards from the historic 1770 Blanchard deck for comparison.

Introduction

Design Playing Cards® are a product of my passion for both design and playing cards. They are also a product for the card connoisseur, where I meticulously researched and composed every aspect to create a full-bodied aesthetic experience while carefully attending to practical function in actual play. Each Design Playing Card both pays homage to and innovates within the richness of playing card tradition. Playing card faces have a variety of properties that set one deck apart from another, including suits (pips, their layout, and their design), indices, and court cards. As I fashioned each card face, I compared and contrasted various historical and contemporary decks to get a feel for elements, poses, motifs, and distinctions that belong to each card. I took note of the many different designs of today's playing cards, including major brands such as Hoyle, Bicycle, KEM, A Plus, Copag, Congress, and Gemaco. I also received considerable insight from 15th to 19th century decks, in particular an American Civil War-era set. In revisiting the design in 2013, another major source of inspiration was the Blanchard deck from 1770, whose court cards I reproduce in this booklet.

Pips (Suits)

When they originated in 9th century Imperial China, playing cards had suits distinguished by symbols of coins or strings of coinage. Playing cards were introduced in Europe in the 14th century and exhibited considerable regional variation in the pips, or symbols designating the four suits. In the 15th century, German decks featured hearts, bells, leaves, and acorns, while Spanish and Italian decks used swords, batons (or wands), cups, and coins. Today's most common pips—hearts, diamonds, clubs, and spades—began taking shape in 15th century France.

While these symbols seem simple enough, close examination reveals a fascinating diversity from deck to deck. These familiar shapes are an important part of any set of playing cards, and Design Playing Cards® pips boast unique details that set them apart from other decks. The Classic Paisley® deck features a heart that bulges more at the top as it descends to its slender bottom tip. The spade mirrors this pattern with a prominent bulge, but in contrast to more typical spade designs, the Classic Paisley stalk isn't connected to the inverted heart. The club also has the unique floating stem; however, the three distinct circles that make up its leaves are inspired by the nearly independent cloverleaves found in the Hoyle deck of playing cards. The fourth pip, the diamond, is probably the most unique of the Classic Paisley pip designs. The traditional trapezoidal diamond has been refigured equilateral sides, while the quarter-moon edges recall the pronounced curves of the other three pips. As you view each of the cards, you can see the pip designs from the first iteration to those that are featured in the redesign.

Perhaps the aspect of Design cards that sets them most apart from other decks is the placement of the pips. The Classic Paisley deck alters traditional pip layout to produce more character and symmetry. The pips on the 2 and 3 cards are more centered on the card and nearer together, while the 4 card departs strikingly from customary layout with the pips lined up vertically rather than forming a square. The pips of the 5 and 6, although traditional in their layout, are closer in proximity to each other than the pips in a more conservative deck. The 7, 8, and 9 are distinguished by a pleasant symmetry, while the 10 is just as beautiful with a central column of four pips flanked by columns of three on either side. The Aces of Clubs, Hearts, and Diamonds each have a single large pip in the center, while the Ace of Spades features the more decorative Design Playing Cards trademark.

The pip arrangement of the Classic Paisley cards met with mixed feedback. Some players were enthusiastic about the novel layout, while others wanted a more standard pip formation. With the release of the Classic Culture® deck in 2008, I reworked the number cards and Aces to reach a balance of classic and individualist that has pleased players on both sides of the discussion. The Classic Culture deck reverts to the standard layout for the 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 cards, while maintaining the unique Design layout in the 7, 9, 10. Classic Culture decks feature an updated 8 card, lowering the four outside pips and aligning them with the other rows of pips. Finally, I placed the redesigned Design logo on the Ace of Spades. Having found the Classic Culture pip arrangement to provide the best of both traditional and innovative worlds.

The pips are revised in the 2013 Classic Victorian® deck, dramatically so with the spades and clubs. These two suits have their stems reconnected, with a graceful, champagne glass-like stem that particularly stands out in the clubs. The diamonds and hearts got a minor update with softer points, but the shapes remained much like the 2005 design.



Indices (Numbers and Typeface)

Early playing cards were not numbered; players simply counted the pips to determine the card's rank. Beginning in the second half of the 19th century, it became common practice to print an index (a number or letter identifying the card's rank) in two corners of the card. Card designers consider both legibility and aesthetics in selecting a typeface for the index. Typically, indices are printed with a slab serif or sans (French for without) serif font. Serifs are the small finishing strokes that give letter forms their "feet." This typeface you see as you read is an example of a slabe serif typeface looks like. While many serif fonts feature slender, tapering serifs, slab serif typefaces have thick, block-like serifs, and sans serif fonts lack serifs entirely. Slab serif and sans serif fonts are generally considered highly readable from a distance and at a variety of angles, an important consideration when players sit at a poker or blackjack table. For Design Playing Cards®, I chose a classy serif typeface that tapers more than typical slab serifs, but is still bolder and slightly bigger (in standard index) than most decks for easier readability from afar.



Court Cards

The court cards are the most salient cards of a deck, defining the look and feel of the entire set. As I created Design Playing Cards®, I carefully researched the poses, distinctions, and traits of the kings, queens, and jacks of historical and contemporary decks. Each Design card is a careful blend of tradition and innovation, resulting in a nuanced and harmonious set of court cards.

Classic Paisley® and Classic Culture® playing cards echo the poses of all the Blanchard court cards except the Jack of Diamonds and the four queens, but there is that balance of keeping an equal number of six left- and right-facing poses. In the Classic Victorian® redesign, I changed three of the cards (the Queen of Clubs, Jack of Clubs, and Queen of Hearts) from the Classic Paisley and Classic Culture poses, breaking that balance with five left- and seven right-facing court cards. Further details on poses are provided as you read through the individual court card designs.

Although Design court cards in the Classic Paisley and Culture designs each have their own unique personalities, they honor the traditional traits of each individual card:

- Though all four queens hold flowers, the Queen of Spades is the only queen armed with a scepter;
- The Jacks of Hearts and Spades and the King of Diamonds are the only three shown in profile;
- The King of Diamonds brandishes an axe;
- The Kings of Spades and Clubs hold their swords on guard, while the King of Hearts wields his behind his head (giving him the dubious title of “Suicide King”);
- The Jack of Clubs holds a spear or lance and has a feather in his cap;
- Although tradition is unclear on what the Jack of Spades holds (in early decks, it appears to have been a sword handle), I have portrayed him with a jeweled baton;
- The Jack of Hearts holds an axe in one hand and a leaf in the other; and
- The Jack of Diamonds carries a sword.

While staying true to the typical traits of the court cards, I added a few nuances as well. In tribute to early playing cards, the Design Jack of Hearts has his second hand showing, holding his axe. Departing from custom, I portrayed the Queen of Spades with her hair down rather than tucked inside her headdress. I have seen similar hairstyles in only two other instances: in the Hoyle decks and in the cards used in a game show from the 1970s and 1980s called Card Sharks. In another unique touch, I play with paradoxes on some of the cards. For example, the Queen of Spades holds a white rose (a symbol of peace) and the Queen of Hearts holds a black one (love can be fatal).

In the 2013 release of the Classic Victorian® deck, I made a number of changes to the court cards. I modified the flowers given to each of the queens and made slight modifications to the crowns. I also adjusted the color scheme, using the same palette but rebalancing the colors highlighted in each suit. In the remaining pages of this booklet, I discuss each of the court cards individually, displaying the original Classic Culture card and the updated Classic Victorian card alongside the historic Blanchard deck for visual comparison.

King of Clubs

I worked within the same palette across all Design Playing Cards®. In addition to the basic tones of black and white, I used accent colors of red, gray, and yellow, with a pale peach flesh tone for the hands and faces in all of the suits. In the clubs suit, red and gray are the primary accent colors, while yellow is not used as much. The crowns of the clubs court cards are set apart from those of the other suits, containing no yellow. The clubs as a suit represent the farmers.

While early court cards must be held upright to properly view the royal personage (see the Blanchard deck), modern playing cards feature reversible images, with a head at both ends of the card. Giving cards a mirror effect as you turn them 180 degrees is one of the trickiest challenges in playing card design. While I used a halfway point and designed one half of each of the court cards, I always wanted to keep in mind how elements were going to overlap and mingle with each other. In the reversible image, the upper and lower versions of the King of Clubs each have a single left hand grasping a sword. However, following tradition, the King of Clubs holds both a sword and an orb. Since traditionally in the reversible design he has only one hand to do both, the orb is positioned near the king's left hand to show he carries it as well. The orb represents the world conquered by Alexander the Great, who traditionally has been associated with the King of Clubs. This is one of the instances where I use the historical speculation to play into the design: since Alexander was a conqueror, I gave the King of Clubs shoulder armor, whose double square cross design is echoed in the his belt buckle, a central pivot upon which the card is rotated to achieve reversibility. This double square cross inside a circle will also appear in the dress of the Queen and the robes of the Jack.

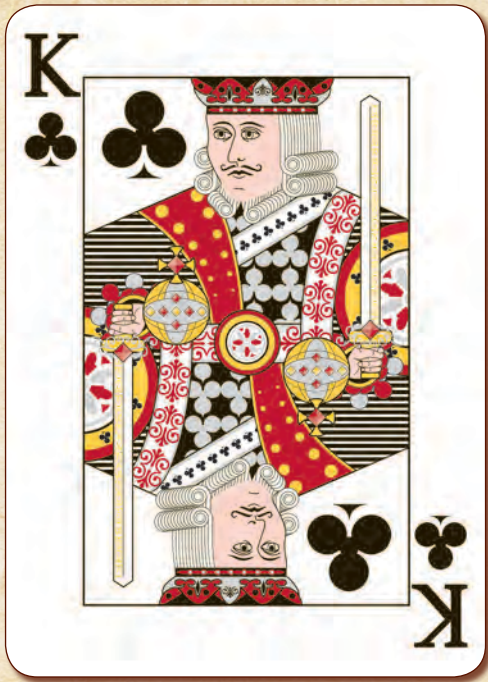
As is customary, the King of Clubs is dressed with a sash across his right shoulder. While the Blanchard deck depicts it as a simple, thick swash of black, the sash has been transformed in many deck designs. In the Classic Victorian® deck, the sash of the King of Clubs is embroidered with a design motif echoed across the clubs suit: a red square cross inspired by the gray square cross adorning the King's orb. Although in certain designs religious overtones are present, my choice of the square cross is not for religious purposes, more of an appreciation of the symmetry it presents. It also functions as an added motif to use in conjunction with the club suit that ties the design of the clubs court cards together. The red square crosses are repeated on a background of white as the border along the left side of the King's robe. You will notice other nuances, not specifically called out, recurring throughout the other clubs court cards as well as you compare and contrast.

References

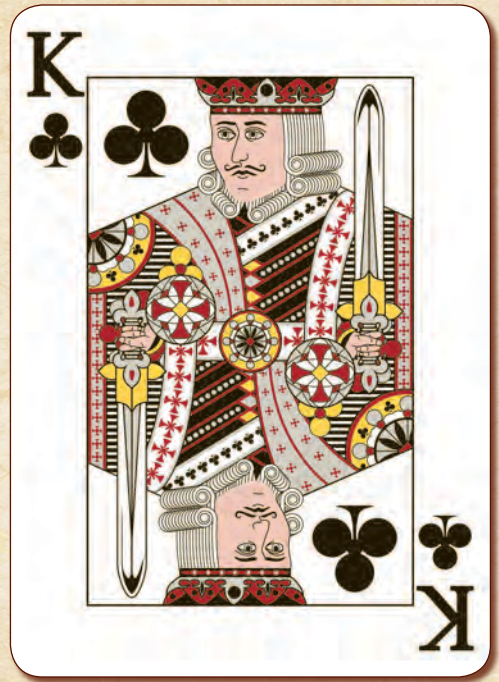
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Playing_card

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_the_Great

Before



After



Blanchard



Queen of Clubs

In homage to the Blanchard and other historical decks, I designed the Queen of Clubs around half-circle motifs inscribed with the same double square cross featured in the shoulder armor and belt buckle of the King of Clubs. The Queen's shape is bound by a bold band of red square crosses on a white background, echoing the edges of the King's robe. The bodice of her dress is defined by stripes of gray dots and solid black, overlapping in the center to form a row of diamond shapes in the center and providing a sense of embroidery (the stripes, dots, and diamonds of this fabric can be seen in attire of the Jack and King as well). Utilizing a yellow chain of clubs, I softened the hard edges. Instead of creating a typical yellow headdress for the crown, I played off the simple black and gray curves of the principal half-circle motif.

Traditionally, the Queen of Clubs has the longest hair of the four queens. While the length of her hair is on par with the Queen of Hearts, I wanted to style it more with some layering and simple curls. She holds a flower that falls in line with the overall club style, with its extended and rounded tips. The edges of her mouth are gently upturned, as I designed half the court cards to be smiling and the other half to be more stoic. Lastly, her pose matches the Blanchard deck design; we see this left-gazing pose in some of the other modern deck designs.

While modern court cards may not have much reference to actual people from history or mythology, it has been speculated that early decks had such a reference. The Queen of Clubs is sometimes known as Argine (an anagram of *Regina*—Latin for “Queen”) or Argia, in Greek mythology the mother of Argus who built the ship, *Argo*, in the Jason and the Argonauts story.

References

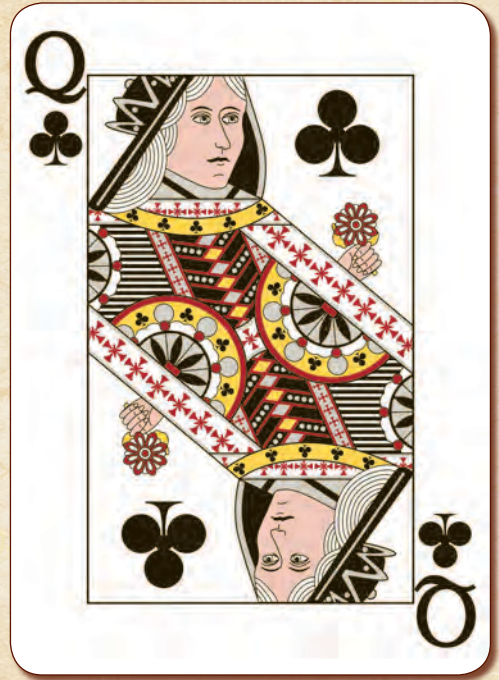
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Playing_card

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argia_\(mythology\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argia_(mythology))

Before



After



Blanchard



Jack of Clubs

Amongst various modern designs, the Jack of Clubs' pose is varied, with him looking to his left in most instances, including in previous Designs. In the 2013 Classic Victorian® deck, I match the Blanchard example to give him more of a presence in the overall scheme of the court card designs. The Jack of Clubs tends to look like the weakest court card in other renditions. This could be with his pose or with his facial expressions. I found that changing his position during my revisions emphasized his importance.

In early naming speculation, the Jack of Clubs is Sir Lancelot du Lac, one of Arthur's Knights of the Round Table. In other traditions he represents Judas Maccabeus, a leader of the Maccabean revolt against the Seleucid Empire between 167-160 B.C.

Traditionally, the Jack of Clubs holds a spear or a lance and his cap is trimmed with a feather, as in the Design examples, or sometimes a leaf, as in the Blanchard card. I appreciate the differences as I see them across many designs. The three black half-rectangles shown in the Blanchard version of his hat have continued through the centuries of playing card design, but in my design, I matched the style of the queen's crown to give him an equal royal presence.

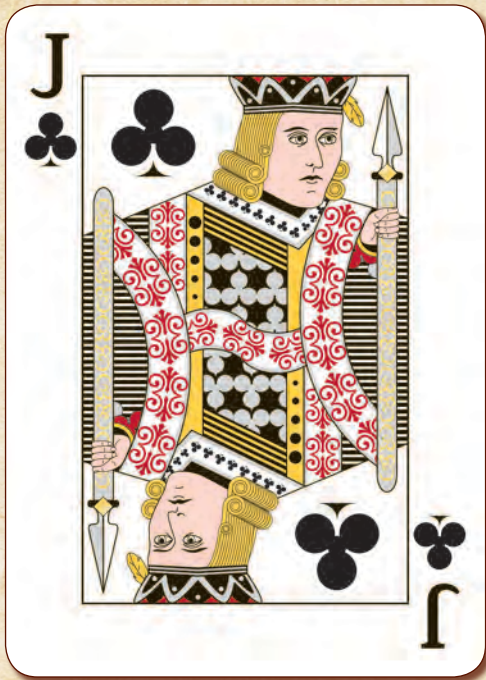
All the weapons of the Classic Victorian court cards are styled similarly, giving a sense of continuity to the deck. The Jack's spear, as with the King's sword, is adorned with a classic fleur-de-lis emblem. I also incorporated a banner wrapping around its base. As in the Blanchard deck, the Design Jack's sleeve flares outward and connects to the spear.

References

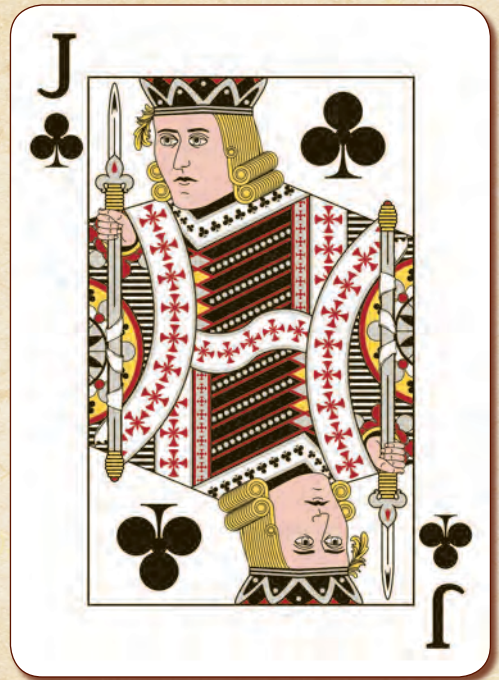
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Playing_card

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judas_Maccabeus

Before



After



Blanchard



King of Diamonds

In the color palette I used for the diamonds, black makes only a small appearance, while red, gray, and yellow are the focal colors. While yellow was only a highlight color with the Clubs, this secondary color is on full display with the diamonds, pairing nicely with the gray and red. I have dressed the King of Diamonds with a traditional harlequin pattern, while the gray band with white diamonds forms his sleeve as it overlaps on his reverse image.

The King of Diamonds is one of three playing cards customarily shown in profile; in fact, I cannot recall any modern design where he wasn't shown either in profile or facing to the left. More often than not, he is depicted with one hand raised and the other holding an axe (rather than a sword as do the other three kings), as we see in the Blanchard example. The raised hand has been variously portrayed in modern and early designs: the right hand with the palm facing the viewer (as in Design Playing Cards™) or the left with the back of the hand visible (see the Blanchard example). I really enjoy this particular update in regards to way the King of Diamonds holds the axe, which sports the fleur-de-lis motif. It is not often that we see court cards with both hands showing—traditionally only the King of Hearts displays both his hands.

It is speculated that the King of Diamonds represents Julius Caesar, the famous Roman general and statesman whose assassination marked the demise of the Roman Republic and the rise of the Roman Empire.

References

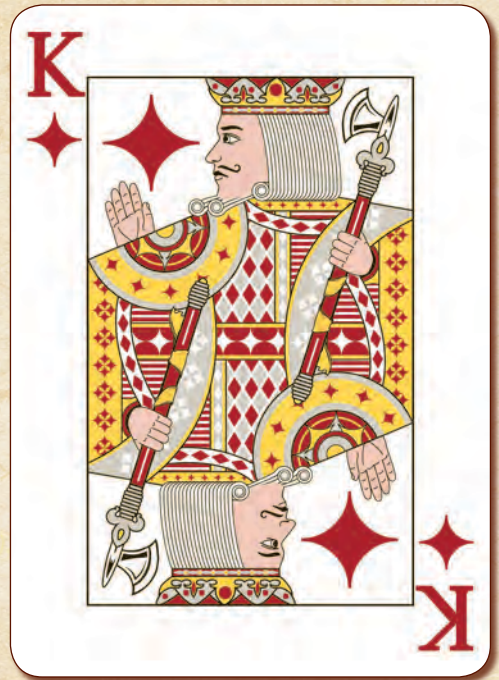
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Playing_card

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julius_Caesar

Before



After



Blanchard



Queen of Diamonds

Each of the four queens symbolizes an emotion. While the Queen of Clubs represents contentment, the Queen of Diamonds embodies jealousy. This emotion is consistent with the character traditionally with which she is associated: Rachel, second wife of the biblical patriarch Jacob. While the Clubs mingled gray and black in the crowns, the diamonds see the same gray paired with red. I enjoyed designing the hairstyles for all of the court cards. Some maintained modern looks, while others are a unique departure as we see in the Queen of Diamonds with simple layering.

Like the other court cards in the diamonds suit, the Queen is clothed in harlequin-patterned robes, as is traditional and an obvious fit for this suit. Following the Blanchard example, the half-circle motifs are much more pronounced in the dress of the Queen of Diamonds than those featured in the Queen of Clubs. These vintage motifs are incorporated more often than not into modern designs, and Design Playing Cards® follow suit.

The Queen's hand, carrying a daisy and surrounded by a circular cuff, emerges from her main design. This detail in posture, reflected also in that of the King and Jack of Diamonds, is a nod to some of today's Piatnik decks. Although the Blanchard deck portrays the Queen of Diamonds looking to her left, most modern designs, including Design Playing Cards, pose her facing rightward.

References

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Playing_card

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rachel>

Before



After



Blanchard



Jack of Diamonds

The Jack of Diamonds holds a rapier sword adorned with the fleur-de-lis accents. You will notice in the Blanchard deck that his weapon is more of an axe however. One of his main distinguishing marks is the broad sash he wears. This was a bit challenging to align when I mirrored the image, but it was quite fun to work through the design equation and ultimately achieve success. Using the unique concave square Design Playing Cards® diamond pip, I repeated it three additional times to form a bigger diamond for the motif featured in the gray sleeves. As with the King and Queen of Diamonds, certain elements are repeated across the suit: the harlequin pattern in red, gray, and white; a bold half-circle motif; and the traditional diamond shape (more tall than wide).

Like the Jack of Clubs, the Jack of Diamonds traditionally does not have a mustache. His pose varies across ancient and modern designs, but in the Classic Victorian® deck I follow the more accepted pose of him looking to his right.

There has been a good deal of speculation about who the Jack of Diamonds could represent, but the most common forerunner has been the Trojan prince Hector, who in Greek mythology was the greatest fighter for Troy in the Trojan War.

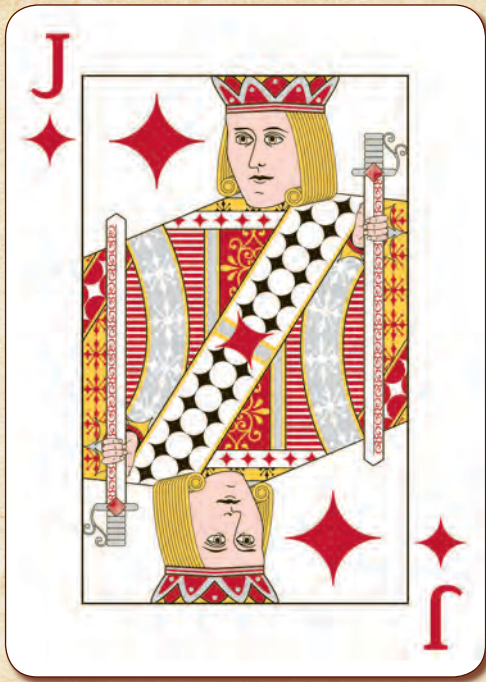
The diamonds as a suit represents the merchant class. I suspect this was given that representation as the name of diamonds conjures up jewels and jewelry—items highly valued, bought and sold.

References

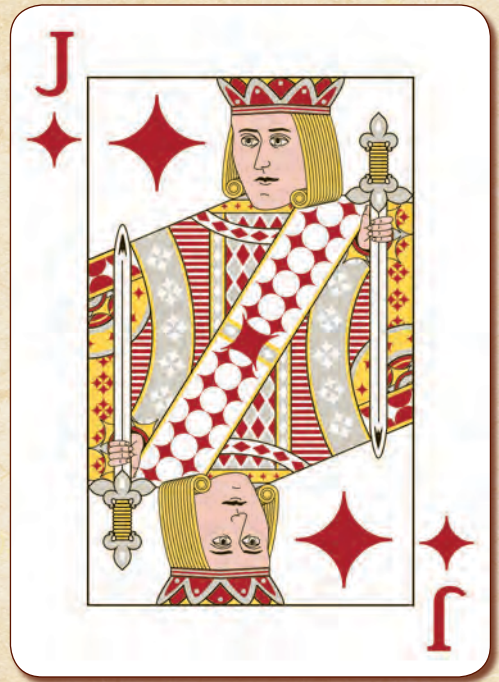
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Playing_card

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hector>

Before



After



Blanchard



King of Hearts

Next up are the heart court cards, which as a suit represent courage and the highest development of humanity. They are also sometimes represented as the church or clergy. The King of Hearts holds the dubious popular nickname "the suicide king." While early depictions certainly exaggerated the sword behind his head, leading to that distinction, I prefer the interpretation that he is swinging the sword behind his head in preparation for a mighty blow. This understanding is in keeping with his traditional association with Charlemagne, the first Holy Roman Emperor. While Charlemagne began his career as ruler of the Frankish Kingdom, through his military conquests he subdued the Saxons and Bavarians and pushed his frontier into Spain. He expanded his kingdom into an empire that incorporated much of Western and Central Europe.

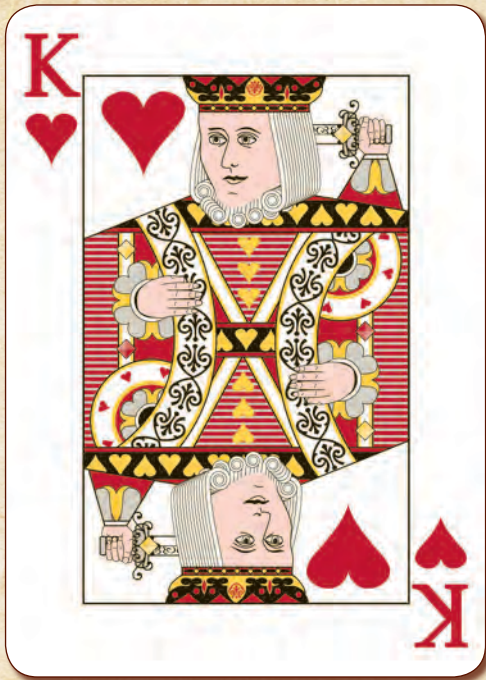
In most modern designs of the King of Hearts, his sword placement is horizontal. While I kept that look in the original Design Playing Cards® deck, the new Classic Victorian® design places it at an angle to highlight the drama of wielding a sword. While we see the King of Hearts with a moustache in the Blanchard example and in some current designs of playing cards, he has only a beard in the Design depiction. As for his pose and attire, I kept with tradition. He faces to his right, keeping his right hand in view across his chest and depicting his courtly robe sleeves (adorned with the black fleur-de-lis) fully extended across his torso. With gray taking a backseat in the color scheme for hearts, I primarily employ a red and black combination in the design of the King of Hearts, using yellow and white as secondary accents. I did employ gray horizontal stripes on his robes to create a cross shape in subtle historical reference to Charlemagne's coronation as Holy Roman Emperor, which took place with the church's blessing in Old St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

References

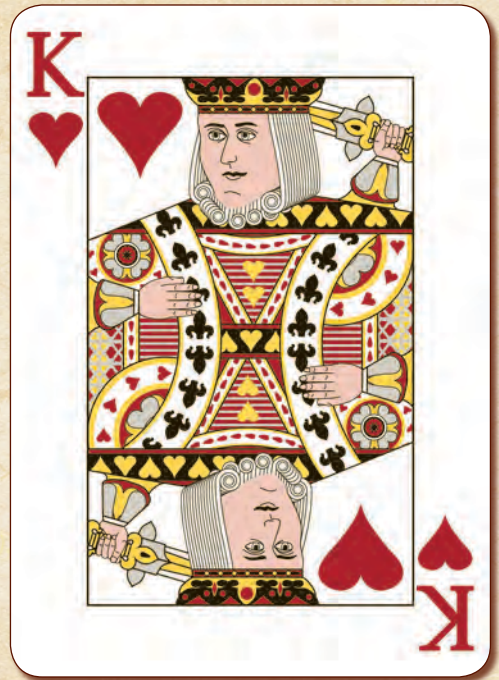
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Playing_card

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlemagne>

Before



After



Blanchard



Queen of Hearts

The Queen of Hearts is probably the card most referenced in pop culture, often mentioned in song lyrics and romantic dialogues as both a mender and breaker of hearts. In reference to that ambiguity, the Design Queen of Hearts holds a black flower. Blacks and reds play off each other, underscoring the paradoxical theme carried throughout the hearts court cards: "love can be fatal." The Queen's background is in harmony with this theme as well, as she is traditionally associated with the seductive character Judith. The Book of Judith—sometimes considered the first historical novel—is included in some versions of the biblical Old Testament. Judith, the heroine, is the widow of Manasses. She uses her charm to become intimate with Holofernes, a general in the conquering Assyrian army. When she is finally allowed to spend the night in his tent, however, she beheads him, giving Israel a chance to counter-attack the Assyrians.

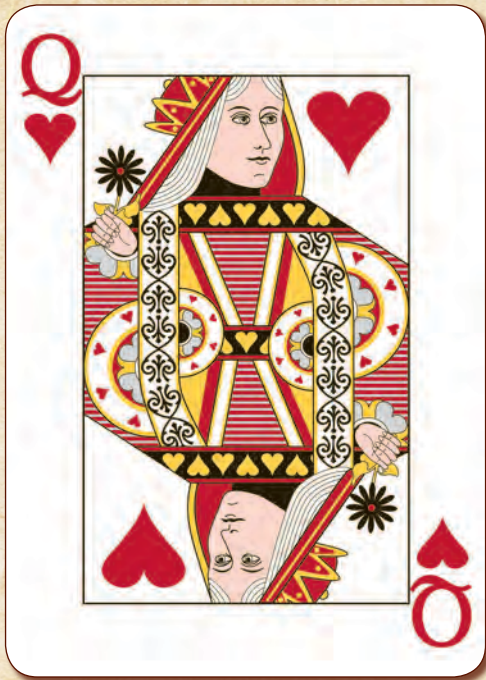
In earlier renditions of Design Playing Cards® (Classic Paisley® and Classic Culture®), the Queen of Hearts looks to her left, but in the Classic Victorian® deck she gazes rightward, as in the Blanchard example and in most modern designs. In contrast to the clubs and diamonds, where gray is the secondary color in the crowns, here yellow takes the limelight, accenting the primary red color of the hearts suit as it does black in spades. I added gray and red embroidery to the yellow fabric between the fleur-de-lis sashes. The gray lines are actually overlapping outlines of the heart pip, repeated both right-side-up and upside-down to create a tiled pattern. This embroidery can be seen in the apparel of the King and Jack of Hearts as well.

References

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Playing_card

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Judith

Before



After



Blanchard



Jack of Hearts

The Jack of Hearts is identified with Étienne de Vignolles, nicknamed La Hire, a French military commander during the Hundred Years' War and close comrade of Jeanne d'Arc (Joan of Arc). Along with the King of Diamonds and Jack of Spades, he has been one of the three royal personages depicted in profile since the introduction of playing cards to Europe. Traditionally, he holds an axe and a feather, leaf, or sprig of grain. In the Blanchard example, it appears to be some sort of staff or walking stick. In earlier Design Playing Cards®, the Jack of Hearts held a leaf; however, in the Classic Victorian® deck he proffers a sprig of grain. I chose this over the common leaf depiction.

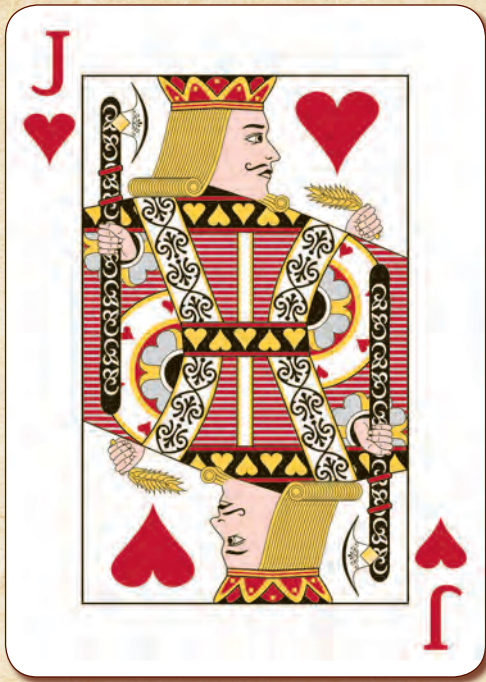
Not too many modern designed jacks feature a beard or facial hair apart from the moustache. The Design Jack of Hearts is unusual in that he sports a bit of a goatee, as was fashionable in Shakespeare's time period. Another unique feature here is that both his hands are visible, each holding one of his traditional objects. I did this to bring a little more attention to his axe as in typical modern design the axe feels like it just sticks out from behind his head. This is the same reasoning used when I redesigned the King of Diamonds. While both hands are visible in the court cards of historical decks such as the Blanchard example, most modern designs hide one hand, keeping both in view only on the King of Hearts.

References

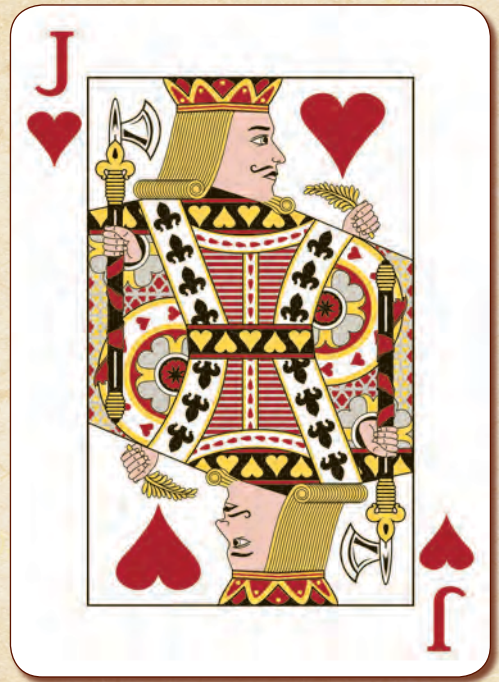
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Playing_card

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Hire

Before



After



Blanchard



Kings of Spades

Growing up, we played many games as a family. Playing cards provided us with many hours of fun, laughter, and friendly competition. As long as I can remember, spades was the suit I preferred. I think it was because all of the spades court cards looked to their left, while the poses in other suits varied. I have always been intrigued with the various court card designs and poses, and have amassed quite the collection of playing card decks. This passion has led me to design and create this unique set of Design Playing Cards®.

The King of Spades is identified with the Old Testament David, slayer of Goliath, famous psalmist, and uniter of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. In medieval times, David was a symbol of chivalry. His pose has always been looking to his left. I haven't come across a modern design where it deviated from this, although it may exist somewhere. The King of Spades always holds a sword, although the Blanchard example is quite worn, showing broken outlines of it.

The thick black robe lines featured in the Blanchard example have typically inspired modern-day designs of this king. I've adapted these curves as the bold red and yellow edges of his robe. In the original Classic Paisley® design, the two upper robe lines were separated from the lower ones by the King's belt; however, with the Classic Victorian® update, I made them each a continuous shape. I really enjoyed this redesign in part because of how well the diamond pattern works on this chest to appear almost as chainmail. The addition of the spades curling up on the half circle motifs also works quite nicely.

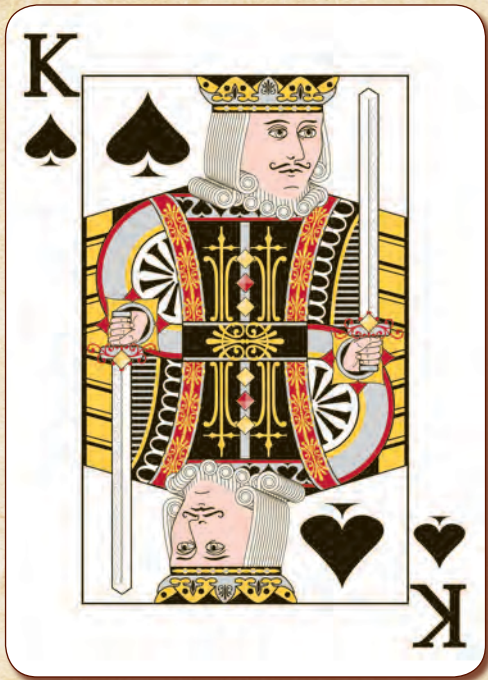
Finally, one part of the overall redesign was to accentuate the eyebrows. In reviewing the Kings of Clubs, Hearts, and Spades, as well as the Jacks of Diamonds and Clubs, you can see how it makes an impact on the facial expressions, both smiling and stoic.

References

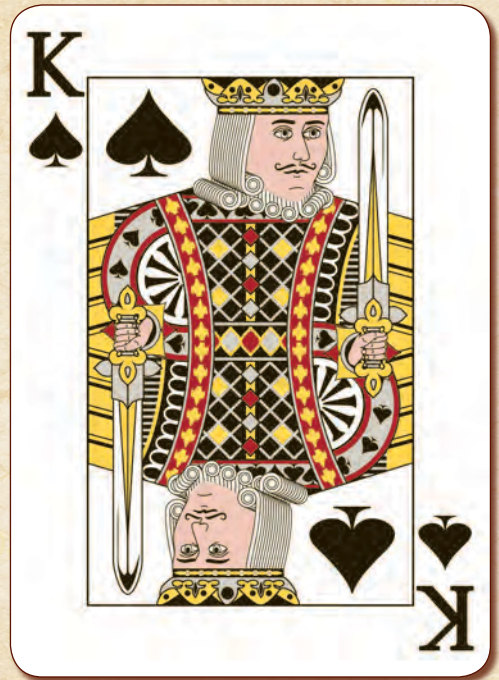
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Playing_card

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David>

Before



After



Blanchard



Queen of Spades

While the Queens of Clubs, Diamonds, and Hearts represent contentment, jealousy, and deception, respectively, the Queen of Spades represents power. She is the only armed Queen and is referred to as either the Greek goddess of war, Pallas Athena, or as Jeanne d'Arc (Joan of Arc). Nicknamed "The Maid of Orléans", Joan of Arc is a folk heroine of France and a Roman Catholic saint. Claiming divine guidance, she led the French army to several important victories during the Hundred Years' War, paving the way for the coronation of Charles VII of France.

The Queen of Spades of Design Playing Cards® turns to face over her left shoulder, a pose which follows most modern day designs. I prefer the left-facing pose to how she is in the Blanchard example because her position as the only armed and most powerful queen is undermined if she is looking to her right. For the same reason, I changed the Queen of Hearts to face right in the Classic Victorian® deck, because I felt that having too many queens looking in the same direction weakens the power position of the Queen of Spades.

Typically, the Queen of Spades is the only queen to have her hair tucked back into her headdress, as we see with the Blanchard example, although exceptions include the cards used in the game show Card Sharks and in Hoyle brand playing cards. Design Playing Cards also depart from this tradition, depicting her hair as long and flowing. Another aspect in her design that differs from most is how her hand carrying the flower is depicted. The majority of designs show the Queen of Spades with her arm extended and her hand bending in from the side, as we see in the Blanchard example. In the Design decks, however, it emerges from her robe, which is also the way it is depicted in Hoyle decks.

Just as the Queen of Hearts carries a black flower in a nod to the paradox of love and death, the Queen of Spades holds a white flower to symbolize the contrast between peace and war. The white flower is also a nod to the historical character Joan of Arc, who was considered a pious woman.

References

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Playing_card

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeanne_d%27Arc

Before



After



Blanchard



Jack of Spades

The Jack of Spades, the third court card typically shown in profile, is speculated to be Ogier the Dane, son of Geoffrey, king of Denmark. According to legend, he had a son who was slain by Charlot, son of Charlemagne. Seeking revenge, Ogier sought out and slew Charlot, and was only barely prevented from killing Charlemagne. He resisted Charlemagne for seven years but made peace with him to fight at Charlemagne's side against the Saracens, in which battle he slew the giant Brehus. It comes as no surprise that the Jack of Spades is associated with such a martial figure, as the Spades represent the military—also the reason that all the Spades court cards carry weapons.

The Jack of Spades has always fascinated me, in part because of me trying to decipher what he was holding in vintage playing card designs. Over the years, I thought of it as something along the lines of a jeweled scepter. As I reviewed the history of playing cards, however, it seems to me that the scepter is a result of reinterpretation and misunderstanding of earlier designs. As we see in the Blanchard example, the Jack of Spades holds his sword by its blade, with the hilt in clear view. In the Classic Victorian® redesign, I honored this depiction of the Jack holding up the hilt of his sword.

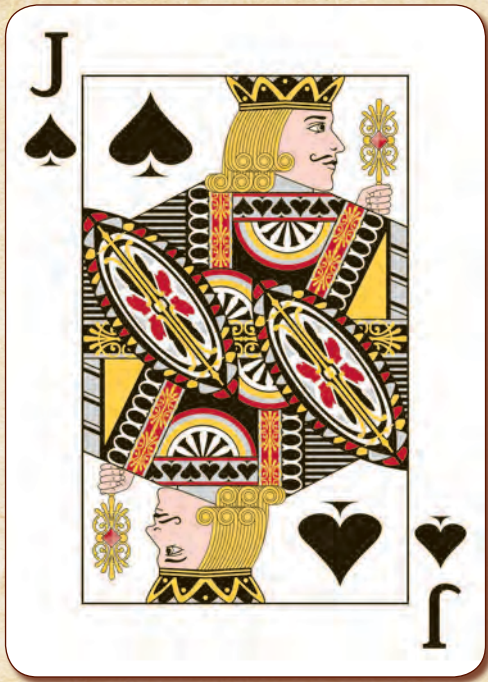
One of the other traditional aspects on the Jack of Spades has been how the shirt's sleeve has overlapped on the left side to break up the typical court card's shape. Here, I have maintained that overlap, but instead of a sleeve design, it is more of a shield, embroidered with the spades suit and crosshatch design also reflected in the clothes of the king and queen. It also adds another element to the military theme of the spades as it is rare to find a shield melded into court card designs.

References

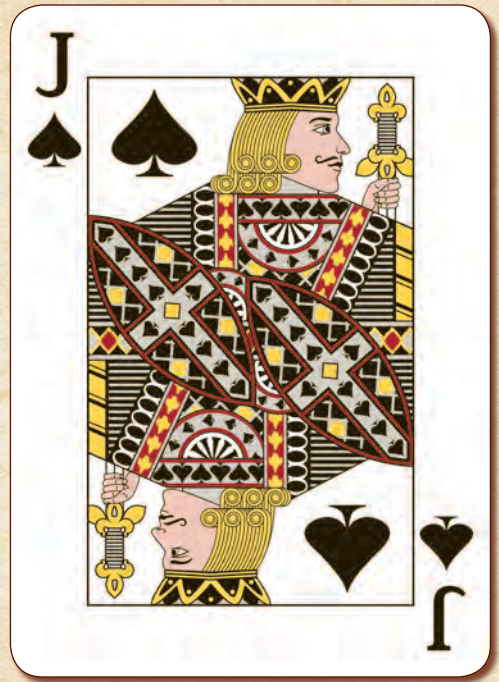
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Playing_card

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ogier_the_Dane

Before



After



Blanchard

