

(Left) The elephant sign is a well-known landmark in the Seattle area.

residents, the big, pink elephant is almost as much a symbol of home as the Space Needle or Mount Rainier.

Since 1951 Elephant Car Wash's rotating, neon elephant has been a Seattle landmark; elephants now grace nine Elephant Car Wash locations in Seattle and surrounding areas. (<http://www.elephantcarwash.com>) The Battery Street elephant, the most well-known of them all, has even been on television shows and in magazine articles, commercials and countless tourist photographs.

The first Elephant Car Wash on Fourth Avenue and Lander Street in downtown Seattle was the first "automatic" carwash. While most carwashes relied entirely on plastic bristle brushes and human labor, original Elephant owners Archie, Dean and Eldon Anderson invented hands-free machines that cleaned cars more safely and reliably. In 1982 Bob Haney bought the Elephant Car Wash chain from the Anderson brothers. The car washes have long since abandoned the plastic bristle brushes in favor of high-tech, hybrid-blend cloths and high-pressure water cleaning. Elephant was among the first car washes in the country to make the switch to cloth.

SPARKLING BOOMERANGS IN THE INLAND EMPIRE

Sparkle Carwash in San Bernardino, California features multi-colored boomerang fins, another reminder of vintage cars of the same design. The wash draws loyal customers throughout the Inland Empire. The area goes for months without rain, making carwashing a necessity, so it is important to have a carwash you can rely on.

Pat Troy, MCA executive director, recalls Sparkle Carwash from her time in San Bernardino more than 30 years ago. "When we moved to Southern California in 1971, I asked my uncle, in nearby Rialto, to recommend a good carwash. He babied his cars, especially his Desoto. He told me to go to Sparkle Carwash where he had gone for years. Even back then, it was like stepping back in time. My 1967 dark blue Dodge Coronet 440 always came out looking great! They did

a fine job of washing the car, but it was definitely a feel good experience for the driver as well."

THE GREEN OCTOPUS GRABS ATTENTION

Octopus Car Washes Inc. is in business since the inception of the industry in the early 1950s. Managed by region, the Octopus Carwashes are found in 23 locations in six states; Illinois, where it all started, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, New Mexico, and Wisconsin. (<http://www.octopuscarwash.com>) Some still feature the original bright green octopus exhibiting its dexterity with carwash supplies and tools dangling from its tentacles.

In 1953, car washing pioneer and founder, John Jurkens, opened his first Octopus Car Wash in Rock Island, Illinois. The devotion and enthusiasm Jurkens has put into developing and exploring new avenues of washing cars still holds true today. His love for a clean car was the ultimate drive and the importance of washing cars without the use of any friction was his dream. This evolutionary process spanned approximately 25 years; and today, all his washes have a series of arches to clean cars without the use of pads or brushes.

After operating many car washes in the midwest, Jurkens expanded to primarily the Southwest. Over the years he has bought, renovated, built and sold over 30 car washes, at one time operating the largest group of car washes in the country. John Jurkens and his wife, Alice, currently reside in Albuquerque, New Mexico where the family own and operate seven Octopus Car Wash locations. Today he spends much of his time tweaking the washing formulas, striving for that perfect mix.

Charlie Gates, chief operating officer of Octopus Carwashes, says, "The octopus has given us a long-range brand recognition." Gates is also vice president of the Southwest Carwash Association.

Pam Piro, now the CEO of Unitec Electronics, remembers visiting the Octopus Car Wash in Madison, Wisconsin as a child. She recalls, "I loved going to the Octopus. We went to the University Avenue location. I loved running to the

Ken Brott, V.P. of Marketing at DRB Systems offered, "Both Octopus and Elephant car washes are venerable in their communities due to their long standing in the business community and due to their very unique signs. Both are so linked into society in their city that even directions are given based on the elephant or octopus at their respective locations."

big windows to watch our car through the carwash. The big green carwashing Octopus holds fond memories for me."

According to Ken Brott, vice president of marketing at DRB Systems, "Both the Octopus and the Elephant are venerable in their communities due to their long standing in the business community and due to their very unique signs. Both are so linked into society in their respective cities that even directions are given based on the Octopus or the Elephant."

So it really isn't that these 1950s vintage washes decided to set themselves apart with a "retro theme." They picked good, strong images to build their brand, decades before branding was a hot topic. Today their themes seem "retro" and fun; that is part of the magic. But truth is these washes just keep on doing a fine job year after year. They please their loyal customers and they come back, as do their children and grandchildren.

For more fun down nostalgia lane, take your peek at www.Roadsidepeek.com/roadusa, a tour of 1950s roadside signage and buildings.

Brenda Gracely is a free-lance writer/ editor and she makes her home in Colorado Springs, CO.