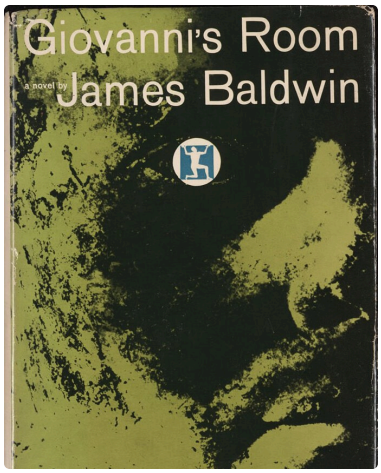
AN ICON YOU SHOULD KNOW...

Seymour Chwast

American graphic designer, illustrator and author, born 1931

Seymour Chwast is an American graphic designer, illustrator and author, born in the Bronx in 1931. He co-founded Push Pin Studios in 1954 and led it for decades. He mixed old type, flat color and funny drawings at a time when many designers wanted clean grids, and his posters still make strong points with a light touch. Read this page in about five minutes, then use the links at the end to look deeper.



Jacket for Giovanni's Room, 1956. Wikimedia Commons, public domain in the US. Full credit on page 3.

FURTHER LOOKING

Seymour Chwast Archive: The official archive, with a chronology of his career and records of his posters, books and magazines. seymourchwastarchive.com

Museum of Modern Art, *End Bad Breath*: The collection record for his 1967 poster. moma.org

AIGA Medal: AIGA's list of medalists, with Chwast in 1985. aiga.org

Website: Seymour Chwast Archive

Video: Seymour Chwast: Inside the Mind of an International Design Icon

Instagram: @seymourchwast

Reading: Chwast, Seymour. *The Push Pin Graphic: A Quarter Century of Innovative Design and Illustration*. Chronicle Books, 2004.

Reading: Chwast, Seymour. *Dante's Divine Comedy*. Bloomsbury, 2010.

Reading: Chwast, Seymour. *At War with War*. Seven Stories Press, 2017.

01 Fact Sheet

1931	Born August 18 in the Bronx, New York.
1951	Graduates from the Cooper Union. Over the next few years he works for *The New York Times*, *Esquire*, *House & Garden* and *Glamour*.
1953	Makes the *Push Pin Almanack* with friends from Cooper Union.
1954	Co-founds Push Pin Studios with Milton Glaser and Edward Sorel. Reynold Ruffins joins soon after.
1956	Designs the dust jacket for the first edition of James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*.
1957	Starts the *Push Pin Monthly Graphic*, mailed to about 3,000 art directors. It runs until issue 86 in 1980.
1970	The show "The Push Pin Style" opens at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in the Louvre, Paris.
1975	Glaser leaves, and Chwast leads the studio.
1983	Inducted into the Art Directors Club Hall of Fame.
1985	Receives the AIGA Medal. The studio becomes The Pushpin Group.
2010	Begins a series of graphic novels for Bloomsbury.
2023	Receives a National Design Award from Cooper Hewitt.

Life and career Milestones tied to the key works

THREE KEY WORKS, PAGE 2

1956 *Giovanni's Room*

1968 *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*

1968 *Sigmund Freud Had It*

02 Three Key Works

Most of Chwast's posters, magazines and illustrations are still in copyright, so they are linked under Further Looking. The three works below are in the public domain in the United States because they were published without their own copyright notice.

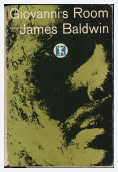
1956: *Giovanni's Room*

A quiet face for a daring novel

In 1956 the Dial Press published James Baldwin's novel *Giovanni's Room*. The Morgan Library & Museum describes the first edition's pictorial dust jacket as designed by Seymour Chwast at Push Pin Studios, which was only two years old. The jacket shows a face painted in black on acid green, with the title and author set plainly at the top. A rare book dealer wrote that the design "hinted at introspection and struggle but gave little away."

LOOK FOR A face that fills the whole cover | Just two strong colors, black and green

See the Morgan Library record for this edition →



Giovanni's Room, 1956. Wikimedia Commons, public domain in the US.

1968: *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*

Playful type for a film critic

Pauline Kael's second collection of film reviews, *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, came out in 1968 from Atlantic, Little, Brown. The first-edition jacket is credited to Chwast. The title is drawn in fat, bouncy letters in pink and yellow, above an old movie camera on a tripod. Hand-drawn type and borrowed old-fashioned objects, like this camera, are part of the Push Pin style.

LOOK FOR Hand-drawn letters that swell and bounce | An old movie camera that stands for film itself



Kiss Kiss Bang Bang, 1968. Wikimedia Commons, public domain in the US.

1968: *Sigmund Freud Had It*

A paper ad with a famous face

In the 1960s and 1970s, Union Camp hired illustrators to make posters for its Williamsburg Offset printing paper. Each poster showed a famous man who, like the paper, "had it." Poster House says Chwast made at least two for the series under art director Hal Josephs, and dates this one to 1968. Freud's gray, finely drawn head fills the sheet. Small color figures, such as a snake, a woman on a couch and a devil, sit on his head and shoulders. Poster House reads them as the demons of his subconscious. One line of small type at the bottom finally names the paper.

LOOK FOR A gray drawn face with bright color cutouts on top | Heavy rounded title letters over a tiny sales line

See the Poster House record for this poster →



Sigmund Freud Had It, 1968. Library of Congress, public domain in the US.

TRY THIS

Chwast often borrows a style from the past to make a new point. Pick an old ad style, such as a toothpaste ad or a seed packet. Use its layout and type to say something new about a topic you care about. Keep one joke at the center and cut everything that does not serve it.

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REFLECT

Think About It

Chwast's *End Bad Breath* uses a joke to say something serious. Think of an issue in the news. What familiar image could you turn upside down to make people stop and look?

03 Sources

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"Sigmund Freud Had It / S. Chwast." *Prints and Photographs Online Catalog*, Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/pictures/item/99400725/. Accessed 23 Nov. 2026.

"Seymour Chwast." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seymour_Chwast. Accessed 18 Nov. 2026.

IMAGE CREDITS

Seymour Chwast, Push Pin Studios. *Giovanni's Room*, first US edition dust jacket. Dial Press, 1956. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain in the United States (dust jacket published without its own copyright notice, tagged PD-US-dust-jacket on Commons). Accessed 18 Nov. 2026.

Seymour Chwast, jacket design. *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, by Pauline Kael, first-edition dust jacket. Atlantic, Little, Brown, 1968. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain in the United States (published without its own copyright notice, tagged PD-US-no notice on Commons). Accessed 18 Nov. 2026.

Seymour Chwast. *Sigmund Freud Had It*. Poster for Union Camp's Williamsburg Offset paper, 1968. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, POS - US .C59, no. 22, via Library of Congress. Public domain in the United States (published without copyright notice, with no known restrictions on publication, per the Library of Congress). Accessed 23 Nov. 2026. Cropped to the poster edge and resized for display.

Process Circles. Full Color Icons. Supplied series branding asset.