

APR 4 2008

On Choosing Type

FIRST PRINCIPLES

Typography is not a science. Typography is an art. There are those who'd like to 'scientificize'; those who believe that a large enough sample of data will somehow elicit good typography. However, this sausage-machine mentality will only ever produce sausages. That typography and choosing type is not a science trammled by axioms and rules is a cause to rejoice.

Before we get to the nitty-gritty of choosing type, let's briefly talk about responsibility. Fundamentally, the responsibility we bear is two-fold: first we owe it to the reader not to hinder their reading pleasure, but to aid it; second, we owe a responsibility to the typeface or typefaces we employ. Good typefaces are designed for a good purpose, but not even the very best types are suited to every situation. Personally, I'm always a little nervous about using a newly acquired typeface. A new typeface is something like a newborn baby (though it doesn't throw-up on you): don't drop it, squeeze it too hard, hold it upside-down; in other words, don't abuse it, treat it respectfully, carefully.



If you've understood the above two paragraphs, then you'll know that what follows is not a set of rules, but rather a list of guiding principles.

Sans or Serif?

In my opinion, a lot of time is wasted attempting to prove that one is better than the other for setting extended text. I suggest that you ignore the vague



American Apparel: Fashionable Basics. Made in USA. Sweatshop Free.

ADS VIA THE DECK

Popular articles

The origins of abc

Beauty & Ugliness

Best 'fonts' of 2009

How to make a font

Type terminology

Type history series

Web typography guide

On choosing type

Identify that font

Who shot the serif?

Arial vs Helvetica

Categories

Font News

Interviews

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Signage font design

Reviving Caslon

Acorde — the making of

Ode — the making of

Where does the alphabet come from?

Reviving Caslon [part 2]

Reviving Caslon [part 1]

Biome—the making of a typeface

OpenType substitution

Founders Grotesk

Why start a type foundry?

Grand Gargantua

The Vignelli 12

José Mendoza y Almeida

About typeface design

Emigre No. 70

Gutenberg Museum Library



NOVEMBER FONTS!

Manicotti
dez Petranian

OCTOBER FONTS!

Festival
Script

SEPTEMBER FONTS!

Malaga

AUGUST FONTS!

Domaine
Display

JULY FONTS!

Rolling

JUNE FONTS!

Luxus Brut

MAY FONTS!

Esmeralda

and inconclusive findings of such ramblings and decide for yourself. *Oh, but serifed types are better for extended text because the serifs lead your eye along...* Stop! Nonsense.



Rather than write another ten paragraphs on this topic, I'll simply say that *we read most easily that which we are most familiar with.* (feel free to disagree in the comments below). And if you're in any doubt as to whether sans serif typefaces can be used for body text, then turn left at the end of aisle three and make your way over to the *Swiss Typography* department.

Guideline One: honour content

This, of course, should be every typographer's mantra. In fact good typographers, most likely won't even have to consciously think about this—it's instinctual.

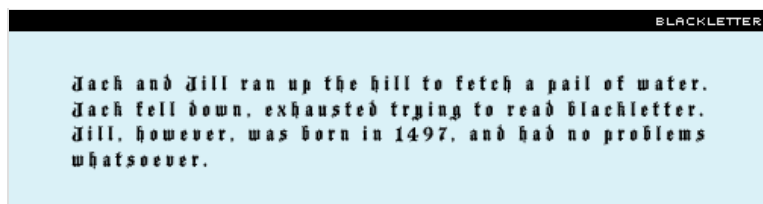
[typography] is a craft by which the meanings of text (or its absence of meaning) can be clarified, honored and shared....

—Robert Bringhurst

It's worth mentioning here that these principles are equally applicable to any medium. Some of my favourite typefaces look dreadful on screen; and even good typefaces like Georgia or Verdana, designed especially for the screen, often look at best mediocre on paper. Choosing type for the web is easier owing to fewer choices; however, that's beginning to change. We now have sIFR and 'web fonts', so it's all the more important to think carefully about the type we use. Is Times/Times New Roman—narrow set and designed for narrow columns—really appropriate for long-line extended text on screen?

Guideline Two: read it

And, no, I'm not being facetious. If you're setting text, whether it be for a novel about the Franco-Prussian war or for a single-word headline, read it—really read it. Reading the text will give up vital clues, not only for choosing the right typeface or typefaces, but will also be an aid in the overall design of the page. An example: you're setting text for an essay on the history of blackletter; so you set the text in blackletter, right?



Designing Armitage

Art and Text

Favourite fonts of 2009

2010 type

The making of Vesper

Graphic Masterpieces

Neue Helvetica Arabic

Type education

Visual history of typefaces

Sex, lies, & type

Type Camp

Karbon Type

Tungsten Type

19th Century Designers & Engravers of Type

Encyclopædic type

Type Radio

Font-as-service

Calluna — a type with flow

Web fonts — where are we?

iQ font video

Mojo type

Klim type

Interview: Alice Savoie

Genuine imitations

Intensive type design course

Kern in space

Blackletter for a modern age

Show some restraint

The second coming

Typographic Desk Reference

WE love typography

Yes, we kern!

The first one's the hardest

Malabar released

Watchmen, watchtype

Read between the leading

TDC2 2009 results

iFont, iPhone

Chelsea, darling

Helvetica Moleskine

WIT: projected type

On diacritics

The week in type: going green

Inconspicuous vertical metrics

To a typetastic new year

Reminga bold italic

Best 'fonts' of 2008

the week in type — Zócalo

The Type Directors Club

Interview: Seb Lester

Free fonts from FontFont

30 inspiring type treatments

twiT — good type

Printing, 1947 [video]

Footnotes *†‡§

APRIL FONTS:

Shameless

MARCH FONTS:

magasin

FEBRUARY FONTS:

LANDMARK

JANUARY FONTS:

Bellissima

DECEMBER FONTS:

NEW Tungsten

OCTOBER FONTS:

Humming...

SEPTEMBER FONTS:

Hipster

AUGUST FONTS:

dumpling

JULY FONTS:

IDLEWILD
Pluto Sans

JUNE FONTS:

encorpada

MAY FONTS:

Junkydori

Candy

TRIM

lapture

APRIL FONTS:

wayfinding sans

Probably not. There is a place for considering the historical context; however, it would be wrong to stick rigidly to this method of choosing type. If you're setting a text on Neanderthal man, you're going to run into problems. (see *The Elements of Typographic Style*, chapter 6.3, for excellent coverage of this particular topic). On the other hand, if your only audience is the BAF (Blackletter Addicts Foundation), then perhaps blackletter is appropriate.

In addition to reading the text, one should attempt to understand it. This is not always possible. If you're setting text for an article on String Theory or Quantum Mechanics, then perhaps full comprehension is out of the question. However, attempt to understand the thrust or theme of the text.

Guideline Three: audience and canvas

Who will read your beautifully set text? Scientists, lawyers, engineers, echo boomers, children? If it's not obvious from the text, then find out. Historical ligatures may not go down too well with pre-school kids.



Consider too the canvas, the page. Perhaps you're setting text within someone else's page design and you have no control over margins or page dimensions. A cramped page, with small margins may benefit from a lighter type, whereas ample margins may well merit a blacker typeface. We'll look at this in much more detail in a future article.

Guideline Four: does it look right?

If your text's final destination is paper, then *print it and see*. Your type might look exquisite on screen, but a train wreck on paper. There really is no substitute for printing. If setting for the screen, then check it on both PC and Mac, and at different resolutions (screen sizes).

And finally...

Remind yourself that typography really is an art and that many of the decisions you make, including type choice, are subjective. If you're unsure, ask others (designers and non-designers) to read your work. And seek out examples of great typography.

In future articles we'll look at specific case studies, and examples of serif and sans serif typefaces that work well together, together with a list of my favourite typefaces. Perhaps you have your own methods for choosing type. If you do, then be sure to share them in the comments.

twiT — die neue

Sexy type

twiT — casanova

Vote iLT

Type links roundup

Sunday Type: tomato type

More articles

Interview: Ludwig Übele

Mightier type

Inspiring type

Kokoro type

Brave font: the movie

Diacritical challenge

Obama village

Sunday Type: lettercult

Flickr found type

Sunday Type: czech type

New fonts: Museo Sans

MA in typeface design

Designing books: a review

Sunday Type: tsang type

FF Meta Serif microsite

Sunday Type: circumflex type

Sunday Type: gilbert type

KABK Type masters course

Sunday Type: ornament type

Interview: Nikola Djurek

Sunday Type: favourite type

Sunday Type: birthday type

Sunday Type: book type

Letterpress from scratch

Sunday Type: napkin type

Sunday Type: incubator type

Arabic calligraphy

Sunday Type: stern type

Type camp 2008

Anivers—birth of a typeface

Sunday Type: vintage type

Type history [5]: Slab Serif

Sunday Type: paragraph type

Sunday Type: typesetting type

FF Balance review

Type history [4]: Modern

Sunday Type: Frutiger type

Interview: Stefan Hattenbach

Sunday Type: community type

eXtreme type terms [5]

Sunday Type: crossword type

Web typography Q2, 2008

Sunday Type: mirror type

Interview: Nadine Chahine

eXtreme type terms [4]

Sunday Type: matrix type

Interview: Jos Buivenga

Sunday Type: ampersand type

MARCH FONTS:

Storefront

JANA THORK

Sybarite

FEBRUARY FONTS:

Avellana

JANUARY FONTS:

PARITY

Streetscript

DECEMBER FONTS:

Ernestine

NOVEMBER FONTS:

Bookmania

daisy

OCTOBER FONTS:

Delisia

John Sans

SEPTEMBER FONTS:

Filmotype Gay

AUGUST FONTS:

Pluto

JULY FONTS:

Ideal Sans

MAY FONTS:

Pronto

APRIL FONTS:

Gneisenauette

MARCH FONTS:

Sweet Sans

Hamish M

Great work, John!

Choosing type can be really hard; and often I'll fall back on the defaults of Helvetica and such.

I was lucky with the recent logo I made for [MontrealPython](#), it was just around the time that Museo came out, and it worked out perfectly.

I'm starting to develop a better sense of type, and finding the right font seems to be getting easier as time goes by. So my only tip is to keep at it, experiment, have fun, and you will see improvement. :)

APR 4, 2008

Kyle Meyer

Beautiful overview. I heartily agree about the rendering of certain typefaces on screen as well; Futura in particular does not seem to fair well on the web.

APR 4, 2008

Jon Tan

Great read, as always, John.

For screen type it's also worth understanding the [smooth anti-alias point](#) in XP using Standard rendering, and understanding system anti-alias generally for faces at different sizes. I always pay special attention to finding a comfortable scale when designing for the screen across platforms.

APR 4, 2008

Jonas

Do you really think that anybody cares besides you typo freaks?

APR 4, 2008

Lowije

@Jonas

Readers may not care, they might not even consciously notice, but can you say for sure it won't make a difference in how they feel, perceive and understand what they read?

APR 4, 2008

Manuel, *Æstheticrew*

"Sausages, responsibility, Nonsense." – That's headline material, heh!

And i was disappointed when i read "And finally..." – I wanted to read more, i wanted to go on, wanted to have a few more nods. Great read,

eXtreme type terms [3]

Sunday Type: dotsquared type

On choosing type

Arise Sir Erik

Sunday Type: Farnham type

eXtreme type terms [2]

Sunday Type: bright type

eXtreme type terms [1]

Sunday Type: Monday type

From Moleskine to Market

Sunday Type: illegible type

Typographica: best of '07

Sunday Type: sound of type

Web typography guide

TDC2 2008 winners

Sunday Type: fruity type

Small Caps

Sunday Type: pointy type

Typeface Review: Arnhem

Sunday Type: sponge type

Interview: Jean François Porchez

Sunday Type: Frodo type

New Fonts: Archer

Mel Gibson type

FontBook review

Why Bembo sucks

Creación de fuentes: Joulos

Sunday Type: spaced-out type

Type history 3: Transitional

Sunday Type: potato type

Tipos: Humanista

New font: Unit Rounded

Criação de Fontes

Ellen Lupton interview

Sunday Type: iso type

Web typography

Sunday Type: feel type

Neil Summerour interview

Sunday Type: Evan's type

Kris Sowersby interview

Sunday Type: x-rated type!

Counterpunch: book review

Sunday Type: gift type

Logo, font & lettering bible

Sunday Type: Freudian type

Font creation case study: Joulos

Sunday Type: crap type

Type history 2: Old Style

Sunday Type: National Feijoa

At last! FF Meta Serif

Widows & orphans

Smashing Free Fonts

Type history 1: Humanist

FONT magazine

The apostrophe

So you want to create a font: 2

FEBRUARY FONTS!

Carter Sans

JANUARY FONTS!

LFT Etica

DECEMBER FONTS!

capucine

NOVEMBER FONTS!

AMBICASE
acorde

OCTOBER FONTS!

Raniscrypt

SEPTEMBER FONTS!

Geotica

AUGUST FONTS!

FORZA

JULY FONTS!

Houschka**LADY RENE**

JUNE FONTS!

Whitney
YumHu,
Γούτνει &
Multiscript

MAY FONTS!

buttermilk

APRIL FONTS!

Graphik

MARCH FONTS!

Lyon Text

mate!

@Jonas: 13.000 typo freaks are reading this, that is hell of enough of a reason in my book to click publish.

APR 4, 2008

Jonas

@Louije

Same question to you; can you say for sure it will make a difference? I can agree that it matters to a certain level but this is a never ending story.

APR 4, 2008

Chris Papadopoulos

Nice overview that contained some funny lines as well.

I'm especially looking forward to more discussion on when and how to mix serif and sans-serif typefaces. I have my own thoughts on how to do that best, but I'll be interested to hear this from somebody with who has focused on this much more than I have.

APR 4, 2008

Shivadas

Thanks John!

I have a very hard time choosing type, I'm just starting out and was wondering:

What would anybody here suggest as a nice site/book that is like a library, that is a good way of looking for an appropriate font?

Thanks again!

APR 4, 2008

Dougal M

My thing these days is to really try and use typefaces designed this century. Even when I see Interstate (probably the most used brand font of the 90's) I see an old face - when I look at Helvetica, Univers and anything else by amazing Swiss typographers - I see valuable work that is relevant today only as historic artifacts. Yes we learnt a great deal from Jan Tschichold, Max Meidinger and Adrian Frutiger - but today we can also learn from Hoeffler Frere Jones and Ourtype and Jann Fromm.

The fantastic thing about this website is that there is absolutely tons of great references to contemporary type here that it should be easy to find great relevant contemporary type.

No offense Hamish (love the Montreal Python design) - I'm all about new type though.

APR 4, 2008

Sunday Type: Spiekermann

Made with FontFont

So you want to create a font: 1

Sunday Type (first ever)

Ellen Lupton, the movie

Subscripts: font news & Links 2

Subscripts: type news & links

If fonts were chocolate

Thinking With Type: review

Arial vs Helvetica

Typoholism — an addict's tale

15 excellent examples of Web typography 2

15 excellent examples of Web typography 1

iLT investigates: type torture

Fresh faces, fine fonts: Montag

Decline & fall of the ligature

Typenuts, the funny side of typography

The return of the serif

Typography kills!

Who shot the serif? Type terms

Identify a font

Other type

Typography tags

the Font Wall

Type books

Wallpapers & widget

Typography videos

Download FREE fonts

Type sites

Fontlab font editors

Ministry of Type

Phinney on fonts

Type Directors Club

TypeOff

Typographer

TypeFoundry

the Grid system

Opentype.info

Typblography

John D. Berry

Typophile

FontFeed

Le Typographe

Typographica

Typofonderie

FontStruct

Type Sites

Fontwerk (German)

Unzipped

Web typography

Fleuron

Jon Tan

Nice Web Type

FEBRUARY FONTS:

Allumi

Armitage

Vitesse

Ingeborg

DECEMBER FONTS:

MUSEO Slab

St Atmos

ORBE

Whitney

Civilite

NOVEMBER FONTS:

Plumero

Vesper Pro

Starling

OCTOBER FONTS:

TUNGSTEN

Swift Neue

semilla

SEPTEMBER FONTS:

Alpine Script

AUGUST FONTS:

Calluna

JULY FONTS:

fuga

JUNE FONTS:

adios script

Guy Leech

Another important thing to consider may be the spelling of what you're reading: "An example: your setting text.."

And an excellent write-up; myself, I find that text on screen prints far larger than it looks, for whatever reason. Gets me a lot of times when I first print something out.

APR 4, 2008

TypoJunkie

I can't wait for your favorite typeface combinations John!

For me, choosing typefaces is as fun, important and interesting as designing the page margins and guidelines. I guess the way I go about it depends on the project. If I need them to contrast I'll go one way, but if I need them to complement each other I'll choose differently. I remember using Adobe Caslon and Legacy Sans for a school project, with some lists set with Bell Centennial. Good times!

Oh, and I recently mixed Mousse Script with Dederon Sans. It looks REALLY nice.

P.S. I sent you a couple of emails John, I hope you got them?

Cheers!

APR 4, 2008

Kabari

I was thinking about this article when I was browsing the book Amazon feels that I should read and noticed this:

Guideline Three: audience and canvas

http://www.amazon.com/dp/0446501646/ref=pe_24570_8760790_fe_im

rather ominous font choice there :)

APR 4, 2008

APJ

Ah, the subtlety of type :)

I agree with Dougal M for personally I see that using typefaces of this century helps in reflecting the spirit of our age.

Man I'm lucky an acquaintance introduced this site to me.

Keep up the good work!

APR 4, 2008

Dan Dill

I find the example of the appropriateness of type to content at

Le Blog Design et Typo

Friends of Type

Links

MyFonts

YouWorkForThem

Coudal

Jason Santa Maria

Elliot Jay Stocks

Smashing Magazine

Daring Fireball

Admin

Register

Log in

MAY FONTS!

Memeriam

Sentinel

APRIL FONTS!

Comenius

MARCH FONTS!

Gotham cond'

FEBRUARY FONTS!

kewlscrip

JANUARY FONTS!

Buffet Script

DECEMBER FONTS!

Great circus

compendium

NOVEMBER FONTS!

MEGALOPOLIS

OCTOBER FONTS!

RePublic

SEPTEMBER FONTS!

Mokka

AUGUST FONTS!

electra LT

Fournier MT

JULY FONTS!

Metallophile

Brioso Pro

JUNE FONTS!

haptic

MAY FONTS!

<http://campaignstops.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/04/02/to-the-letter-born>

very compelling. Scroll down there to see the example using the word “change”.

APR 4, 2008

Alec

Loved the Lilo & Stitch example! A perfect case-in-point.

You note that some fonts that look good on screen wind up printing out badly; I’ve noticed that it can also be the case that some fonts that look bad on screen can print out rather nicely. So “there’s no substitute for printing” is really true in every case.

APR 4, 2008

Dougal M

Thanks for the nod APJ - also agreed on the comment about this site - only discovered it today - like home for a geek like me - rare to find an oasis like this for type lovers.

Cheers.

APR 5, 2008

Uriá Fassina

Another great article John!

I’m very curious about the other “ten paragraphs”!!
Can you share this ideas with us?

Cheers from Brazil.

APR 5, 2008

Christie Calin

I really agree with this article. Especially the section that states that if you want to know what it will look like in print, then print it. I have been working on a poster in Illustrator lately, and thought all looked pretty good on screen, but upon printing it, found a number of things that didn’t read well. Thanks for the sound advice!

APR 5, 2008

Stephen Tiano

John, this is, after all, what it comes down to, isn’t it: choosing type—what, how, why? Excellent idea bringing it back around to something so elemental to what we all do and concern ourselves with.

I still wonder, however, just now and again, is there or isn’t there

Dolly
paradigm

APRIL FONTS:

Rouge

Bree

Breadiba

MARCH FONTS:

Sarah Script

Rany

FEBRUARY FONTS:

Declaration

COOPER

Estilo Script

JANUARY FONTS:

Anziano

Sacre Bleu

Kari

Affair

DECEMBER FONTS:

National

NOVEMBER FONTS:

Mesh

MyFonts

continuing empirical evidence for the belief that serif type is superior for long stretches in that it results in greater comprehension? I mean, Wheildon's book is actually old by now. Does anyone know of more recent studies?

And Jonas, this is the nub of why type matters outwardly and why we discuss it so much in our "inside sports" kind of way. Inwardly, however, well, it's *our* art for many of us. Would you have told the Impressionist crowd of painters who hotly discussed their end of painting that it didn't matter. And, anyway, you have me curious—seriously—matter to what or to whom? I mean, what and who are the measuring stick for "mattering"?

APR 5, 2008

Cody

Fantastic! Been waiting for this one.

I'm 150% with Manuel, "Sausages, responsibility, Nonsense." is probably the best headline I have ever heard for any type related article.

APR 5, 2008

inspirationbit

a big round of applause for this article, John. I too hope you'll write more on this topic.

Some questions I have: why did you suggest against "using a newly acquired typeface"? Well, not really against, but with caution, love and care (does it mean we should abuse "old friends"?). At some point we would need to use a new type we've never used before. Shouldn't we treat it the way we treat more familiar types and basically follow your own guidelines here and see if it works for our particular project?

And what if after all those four steps you mentioned above we're still unsure which type to choose? What's the next guideline (after keeping in mind that typography is an art)?

APR 5, 2008

Nick Shinn

Jonas, all that matters is that the typographer who uses the font understands it, because readers don't use fonts, they read pages. The typographer creates the page as whole.

Sure, if the typographer is heavy handed, the reader will be like, "Too much salt!" or some such thing, but if it all fits together then, "Mmm, what IS that taste?!" — and it's likely that quality ingredients were cleverly combined.

APR 5, 2008

Manuel, *Æstheticrew*

Nick, that poetic comment of yours is sooo "quote material". It would

make a perfect poster combined with Jonas question. Thanks to the both of you :)

APR 5, 2008

Manuel, *Æstheticrew*

Kabari, your link leads me to something about “Homicide Detective Lauren Stillwell”, are you sure that your link is correct?

APR 5, 2008

mr_H

Right on the spot!

can't wait to read more of this :)

APR 5, 2008

kremalicious

really nice article!

thanks for this

APR 5, 2008

miha

Very, very nice, I've been waiting for this. These are really the first principles, and even this whole page has a quote at the bottom that fits perfectly with today's theme :)

APR 5, 2008

Leah

Another great article! I admit I've been slack in checking iLT lately, which is of course only to my detriment. As winter draws to an end here in Cape Breton I'm pulled more to the outdoors than to the computer room. But on a gloomy grey day, what is more sunshiney (or at least, attractive) than a good bout of iLT? Nothing, I say...

I digress... :)

I feel like the only solution for the problem of how to choose type is really ... experience. And of course the guiding principles you list here, but I feel as though those would come through experience and that experience would affect how you'd use the principles. Sort of a round-about, circular-type thing.

And it's true what **Stephen Tiano** says, that it's good to bring it all back to this, the choosing of type, the practical use of it.

As always, I really do love iLT!

APR 5, 2008

George Wiscombe

Another(!) fantastic article!

It's all been said but lots of sound advice, proofing paper&screen, sausages&nonsense and the serif/sans debate.

Looking forward to the next one!

APR 5, 2008

Eben Sorkin

Typography can be an art, but 99% of the time it's a craft. Type is in service to meaning. As you put it "honour content". Making that #1 was astute indeed. But I would say when you do that it's not a medium for self expression very often. Hence (mostly) not an art.

APR 6, 2008

Stephen Tiano

Or perhaps *that* is the art: "honoring content" and keeping one's own expression out of it.

Quite a number of year's ago, at the start of a civil service career during the day, I began law school at night. I left when I realized that I would be going from job to school and studying on weekends for three years, no way for me to live while still single.

The class I that gave me the most difficult time was legal writing. The hardest thing in the world for me was to write with every last ounce of my voice wrung out of my writing. Doing the research was fine; but losing the *me* in my writing was the back-breaker.

I suspect that book design in particular, and typography in general, that is totally in service to meaning and the reader is painfully hard for some of us. This is why it so deserves its place as #1 on the hit parade here.

APR 6, 2008

gabyu

Very interesting post. +1 RSS

thanks.

APR 6, 2008

prisca

great article - loved your samples, especially the Lilo&Stitch example.

thanks ;)

APR 6, 2008

LaurenMarie - Creative Curio

I sure love how unassuming your approach to this subject is, John. You have so much knowledge on it, yet I never feel like you are at some lofty level in the art that I could never hope to achieve. You are not above us preaching down, you are right along side, helping us up to a higher degree of understanding.

I'm really looking forward to those case studies you mentioned at the end!

APR 7, 2008

Shriphani

Hi,

On the subject of choosing a particular typeface, can you please mention the various cases where small type / big type score over each other ? I know that you love big type but there are a few blogs such as codinghorror.com and [The Daily WTF](http://TheDailyWTF.com) which use small type and seem to have a very huge list of loyal readers. Does small type score over big type when the target audience of a blog is the geek crowd ?

Thanks.

APR 7, 2008

Simon

Great article - and so very true. Janson is a favourite for extended text, especially if leaded a bit.

@Shivadas

I would recommend Rookledge's International Typefinder, ISBN 1856694062.

APR 7, 2008

Robert

Really good article. I think I deal with that question everyday... serif or sans serif :)

APR 7, 2008

lanotte

This article is a really great read.

I have to say that I love Helvetica and all its many versions. I almost always begin a design with Helvetica so that I can design without thinking about the type. Many times I feel Helvetica works out, and when it doesn't I use a short list of my favorites...Futura, Gill Sans, Bernhard Modern, Garamond, Universe, and RotisSemiSans or SemiSerif. When those don't achieve what I am looking for (which is rare) I branch out.

I truly feel that typography is best used in the simplest form you can find for your solution, and should fall to the background. A place where

only a fellow designer, lover of type, would be able to really see what the type was doing. It should bring harmony to a page and at the same time illustrate what the writer is saying.

Typography truly is an art...well said John!

Looking forward to your list of favorites!

APR 7, 2008

Pedro Assumpção

Congratulations, great post.

I hope see more of this kind of subject.

Thanks,

Pedro

APR 8, 2008

Caleb Cushing

Don't forget to check your fonts on linux as well. Just because things render in firefox on windows doesn't mean they will on linux.

APR 9, 2008

Tom

Very good article.

I'm trying to go deep into typography, it's a really amazing world :)

APR 9, 2008

Bob

Very interesting article. Very important if it comes to custom designs. I had a teacher once who explained to us why some fonts are more popular than others. He claimed this is due to the fact that Arial for example is seen as pictures and not like writing. Don't know if it's true but an interesting thought.

APR 9, 2008

Berni

'Typography is not a science. Typography is an art.'

You are absolutely right, John.

Thanks.

APR 10, 2008

misaias

HELP PLIS!

Does someone know the name of the typography used in the title of the issue U&lc?

APR 12, 2008

*johno (iLT)***misaiaias**

If you mean this logo:



then it was drawn by Herb Lubalin. It was later modified a little by Cynthia Hollandsworth and Ed Benguiat.



APR 13, 2008

dougalM

Hi John, really enjoying your site. I have to admit I was a bit disappointed with the Typographica favorite typefaces of 07 – many of them seemed to be very rooted in old styles. I have had a bit of a problem with this for a while now – a lot of companies, even Hoeffler Frere Jones releasing a new version of the Scottish font they call Chronicle which is beautiful but very ubiquitous too but not of this century. I really am on a bit of a mission at present to persuade clients who are looking for an identity overhaul, to buy into contemporary faces which speak the language of today. While I respect the history of the Swiss Modern typographers such as Frutiger and Meidinger, I also feel that because their work is so readily available to designers - and all designers know that they will be safe with a Swiss Modern 60's choice and also have them all in their type library's – well there's a kind of safe and easy way out there. I worry that a) if we don't support great new type designers maybe they won't stay in business and b) if we don't use new typefaces our work will all end up looking them same – kind of like in the modernist years. Helvetica is so ubiquitous these days (you must have seen the film) that it would be impossible to suggest it if you were trying

to create brand differentiation for example – it also was designed (well really redesigned) to not communicate character- but to deliver words. That whole concept was great in the 60's modernist world but it's not great now – clients are desperate to be different and we only really have a few basic tools to work with: type, colour, composition, photography etc. If one of these key elements is not doing any work then the rest of the work is let down. Consider Obama's use of Gotham in his campaign for change – what would we be saying if they'd selected Helvetica or Univers? He made a very bold and very American statement with the selection of type and it showed. I think it's important to understand the story behind a typeface you might select – to see if there are connections to the design project you may be working on.

I love American type and I'm really enjoying some new European type too. Lets support the guys who are building the word architecture of the future.

Cheers,
DougalM

APR 19, 2008

Edie Weinberg

I remember U&lc had a great pull-out poster of what fonts went together harmoniously and which shouldn't be combined. It was a great help on the occasions when I was stuck.

MAY 1, 2008

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 2013: [06] [05] [04] [03] [02] [01]
 2012: [12] [11] [10] [09] [08] [07]
 2012: [06] [05] [04] [03] [02] [01]
 2011: [12] [11] [10] [09] [08] [07]
 2011: [06] [05] [04] [03] [02] [01]
 2010: [12] [11] [10] [09] [08] [07]
 2010: [06] [05] [04] [03] [02] [01]
 2009: [12] [11] [10] [09] [08] [07]
 2009: [06] [05] [04] [03] [02] [01]
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