

A Type Buyers Primer for 2007 by Stephen Symons

Typography has never been healthier; 2007 will no doubt have visual communicators from all disciplines ogling over a plethora of stunning fonts on offer from individual typographers, boutique font foundries and type giants such as Linotype and Adobe. The new millennium's typographic renaissance has presented creatives with a palette of unprecedented scope, often overwhelming mere mortals who simply cannot afford to purchase entire font collections at the hint of a new project.

The following article hopes to serve as a simple primer for those looking to add a contemporary and fresh typographic flair to their designs.

Sebastian Lester's sans serif fonts, Neo Sans and Neo Tech's are a must for those who wish to add a subtle technical modulation to a project. Lester's attention to detail is very seductive and there's no hint of sterility so often associated with typefaces of a similar style. The kerning is surprisingly tight and precisely spaced, allowing for broad typographic application. It's equally at ease at display and bodycopy sizes, and a hybrid version of the two fonts was designed as the official corporate font for IBM's recent re-branding. Neo Sans and Neo Tech are available from Monotype.

Eric Olsen's Klavika font is another sans serif of note. Klavika's squarish letterforms have a warmth and flow that won me over immediately. Much like Neo Sans, it's not too clinical and its compact range of weights work well at all sizes. Klavika will leave a unique typographic footprint on any corporate identity, and it is more than willing to be married to a serif font if the need arises. Klavika is available from the Process Type Foundry.

Proxima Nova is Mark Simonson's masterpiece. It's a gorgeous sans serif that has obvious hints of Hoefler's Gotham, Frutiger's Avenir and Berthold's timeless classic, Akzidenz Grotesk. Proxima Nova is no geometric style imitation; she's a sophisticated lady with an emphasis on legibility at even small type heights. This is partly due to an exaggerated x-height and a host of expert typographic features. Brochures, catalogues, corporate reports and even magazines will adore Proxima Nova. Visit Mark Simonson Fonts for more info.

When type icon Anton Frutiger and Linotype's Type Director Akira Kobayashi completed Avenir Next, (essentially an extension of the 1988 classic Avenir) "fontophiles" were delighted with the addition of a set of true italics and small caps, along with a re-visited suite of 6 weights. At long last Avenir had true typographic versatility, in addition to condensed companions for each weight and style of the normal release. I'm amazed that so many magazines using Frutiger's original version have not discovered this gem. Its combination of classic geometric lines and beautiful sense of flow places Avenir Next in the upper realms of Post Modern typography. Get it for your next CI from Linotype.com.

Just when you thought Grunge typography had been added to the deconstructivist scrap heap along comes Boycott, brainchild of Japanese architect and type designer, Ryoichi Tsunekawa. Despite Boycott's distressed appearance it's surprisingly legible and fresh. Its prize winning features are different versions of each letter, accessible via the caps or lowercase option. Boycott is available from MyFonts.com and is ideal

for display use. You might want to check out Misprinted Type's Downcome and Dirty Ego if distressed typography gets your creative juices going.

Although Adobe Garamond Premier Pro by Robert Slimbach is over two years old it continues to be one of the most overlooked serif fonts on offer from Adobe. It's a gorgeous interpretation of Garamond, including four optical sizes, five weights and a host of OpenType features. Slimbach's version is a tour-de-force, including superb Greek versions of the font. Adobe's site has the following to say about Garamond," Slimbach has retained the optical characteristics and freshness of the original designs, while creating a practical 21st-century type family". Visit Adobe.com for more info on this immensely versatile font.

Another serif font that deserves serious attention is FF Maiola designed by Czech typographer Veronika Burian. Maiola received a commendation at the Creative Review Type Design Awards for 2006 and a TDC Certificate of Excellence in Type Design in 2004. It's a stunning serif text face that has an obvious angular vitality, and has been described as "a warm typeface with a discrete play of irregularity and multiple angles". If you're searching for a unique serif, with a distinct angular flavour pay a visit fontshop.com.

One of my favourite contemporary serifs is Prensa (Spanish for press). Although Prensa was designed by Cyrus Highsmith over 4 years ago it has yet to gain the recognition it deserves in the design community. Highsmith apparently arrived at this family's distinct character through his process of "wrapping outside curves around the inside, deliberately creating tension between the two," This effect is really noticeable in the italics, and heavier weights of this unique typeface. Among other uses, Prensa is recommended for newspaper and magazine use where it is equally at home at header or copy sizes.

It's interesting to note that a calligraphic font was voted best font of 2006 by MyFont.com. Canada Type's Swan Song has been extremely popular over the past year partly due to its effortless swashes and artistic personality. Unsurprisingly, DearJoe 4 by JOEBOB graphics was chosen by customers of MyFonts as the best handwriting font of 2006. The font has a slightly distressed edge to the outlines and the characters were designed to connect to each other within each word, as they would be in real hand-written script. Both fonts are a must have for wine label designers looking for a calligraphic flair that contrasts with evergreens such as P22 Cezanne.

Joshua Darden's Freight family (available from Garage Fonts) deserves special mention due its sheer immensity and attention to typographic detail. It consists of almost 100 styles, including serif and sans serif styles. The serif font has an angular quirkiness reminiscent of Prensa and is ideally suited to magazine and newspaper use, while the sans serif echoes the clarity of Lucas de Groot's classic The Sans.

FF Sanuk by Xavier Dupré is a seven-weight family that runs the gamut from a delicate hairline to a chunky fat face. Sanuk (the Thai word for pursuit of happiness) is a lively font with a fun personality and is the perfect choice for uncomplicated text and display typography. The letterforms flow smoothly and there's an obvious lack of harsh angles; perfect ingredients for the most hospitable font of 2006.

Xavier Dupré's other masterpiece, Emigre Vista Sans was Winner of the TDC Super Family Award in Type Design in 2006. Each of Vista's six weights includes alternate, small cap, and italic variants for a total of 36 fonts in the family. The font was inspired by Erik Spiekerman's FF Meta, and the idiosyncratically decorative lettering of shop signs in Sumatra. Vista Sans has a wonderful balance between functionality and expressiveness. Purchase this definitive font from émigré.com.

Last but certainly not least, is James Greishaber's ubiquitous Cézanne Pro in OpenType. Although P22's Cézanne has received a tremendous amount of misuse the extensive array of OpenType features including new alternates, ligatures, and swashes will undoubtedly inject fresh creative scope into this seemingly exhausted font. The OpenType features allow for a far more convincing rendition of the artist's hand writing, and hours of typographic experimentation on the part of the designer.

Designers should consider paying a visit to the Hoefler & Frere-Jones Font Foundry (www.typography.com) and investigating the rounded version of their flagship Gotham. According to their website, "Our rounded Gotham typeface, inspired by signs on buildings, celebrates the workmanlike "draftsman's alphabet" at a monumental scale." It initially appears to be a mere hybrid of VAG Rounded and Gotham, but on closer inspection there are subtleties that will have you completing the online purchase form in no time.

All the fonts listed in this article are available online from their respective typographers or font foundry. Don't even entertain the idea of using a knock-off or PDF extract of the font as it will leave you and your work feeling somewhat deflated due to the lack of kerning pairs, incomplete character sets and the absence of any OpenType features.

An excerpt from Adrian Frutiger's keynote speech at Type 90 sums it all up, "If you remember the shape of your spoon at lunch, it probably is the wrong shape. The spoon and the letter are tools; one to take food from the bowl, the other to take information off the page... When it is a good design, the reader has to feel comfortable because the letter is both banal and beautiful...".

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