

What typeface goes with that?

How to pick a typeface that complements a graphic.

Continued ►

Continued ►

What typeface goes with that? 0613

What typeface goes with that?

The key to coordinating type and graphic is to find what they have in common

You've found the graphic you want and need a typeface to go with it. How do you choose?

We think of type as something to read, but type is actually artwork: A, B and C are lines, corners and squiggles—*images*—to which we've assigned sound and meaning.

This is why type is so expressive. While the alphabet represents *data*, words in print convey playfulness, stateliness or business depending on how they're drawn.

Which is the key to selecting just the right typeface. Since type and graphics are, visually speaking, the *same thing*, the thing to do is to coordinate their visual properties.

We'll show you. In this article, Harry & Sons have a favorite graphic—this tree here—for which they want a complementary typeface to complete their business card. Watch.



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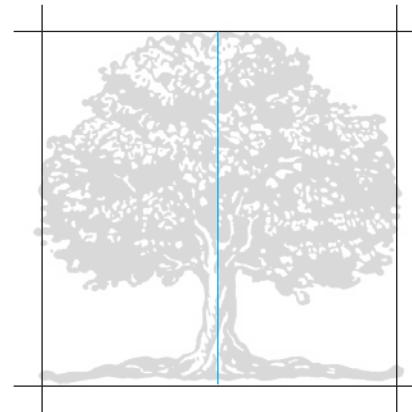
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Before



Evaluate the image

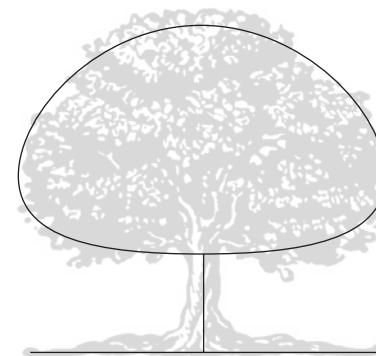
To coordinate type and image, we must first find their common visual properties. Start with the graphic, and evaluate it for proportion, shape, line and texture.



Proportions/mass

Proportions and mass are BIG and affect everything else. Because proportions can be deceptive, it's a good idea to draw a bounding box (above). Actually draw it; don't trust your eye. The tree is:

- square
- symmetrical
- upright

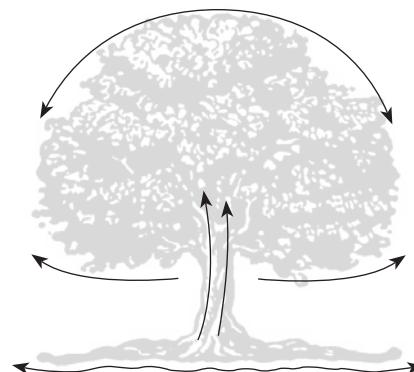


Shape

Shape is the primary quality by which we identify an image. The tree is an ovoid shape atop a straight-line, vertical trunk on a straight-line, horizontal base—something of an egg on a stick.

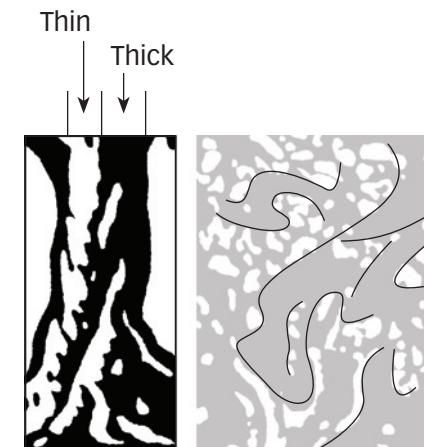


Because we tend to only identify images (“this is a tree”) and not really *see* them, this drill may at first seem like looking for faces in the clouds. But look closely; there’s a lot there.



Line

Line means the overall sweep or *drape*—as in the line of a dress—and it also means *edge*. Here, we see a predominantly horizontal sweep, a top-down drape and a gnarly, detailed edge.



Texture

The tree has a *lot* of surface texture. The irregular foliage is obvious and random, but note especially the interaction of thick-thin, negative-positive areas (squint and it’s easier); which appear as shapes and rivers—like the surface of a mossy pond.



First edit

There are *so many* typefaces available that we have to cull out many quickly. Start with the biggest elements—proportion and shape—and eliminate the styles that are most different.

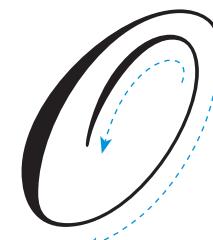
Incompatible typestyles



Condensed



Extended



Swoopy



Blocky

With a visual understanding of the tree, it's easy to see that condensed, extended and swoopy typestyles don't match its square proportions and symmetrical shape. The blocky typeface (above, right) is closest to square but artificially constructed, which is likewise dissimilar. The first edit in this case eliminates all typefaces except those with standard, squarish proportions and upright posture.



Second edit

What's funny is that squarish, upright styles comprise half the world's typefaces including all the standard ones! So we must look further.

The second edit: Line and texture.



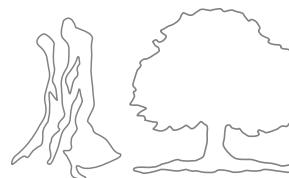
Standard-proportion typestyles: sans-serif and Roman

A b

Right proportions, wrong lines
Sans-serif typefaces are generally mechanical and tend to have uniform strokes, repetitive curves, straight lines and sharp corners. The lines and texture of these faces are quite unlike the natural, organic tree (below).

A b

Right proportions, better lines
Like the tree, old-style Roman typefaces are full of detail and variety. Their thick-thin strokes, serifs, terminals and counters create a lot of texture and interaction that can complement the richest, most detailed image.



A b



Harry & Sons
Tree Service
Pruning Removal
Trimming Stump
Removal Clean-ups
Firewood Removal
Clean-ups Firewood



What's left?

After two major edits we have a much shorter type list; we're down to standard-proportion, Roman typestyles. Which is best? In this case, line and texture are the keys—but now we'll look closer.



Roman typestyles



A b A b A b

Transitional

Modern

Oldstyle

Standard-proportion, Roman typefaces are the oldest* of all styles and the most common. They can be sorted into a half-dozen major categories, each with sub-categories. The basic proportions, serifs and thick-thin strokes make Roman typestyles easy and pleasant to read; as a result, they comprise most of the text in our books, newspapers and magazines.

*How old is old? [Trajan](#), one of today's most popular serif typefaces, is based on the engraved text at the foot of Trajan's Column in Rome inscribed nearly 1,900 years ago! Many other everyday serif typefaces are 100 to 300 years old. Talk about standing the test of time!



Tree Service

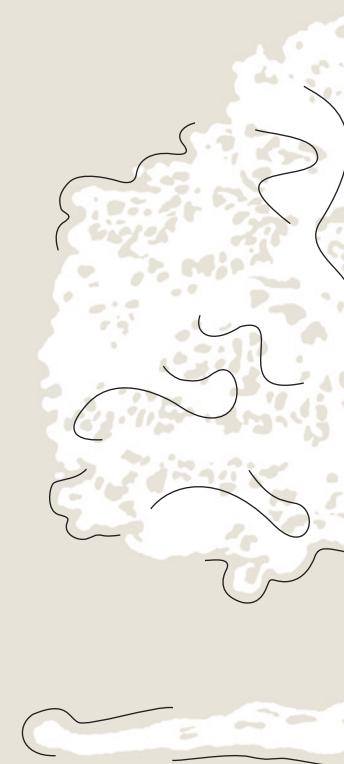
Middle Shape and pattern

A b e t g

Near Lines and edges

Harry & Sons Tree
Service Pruning
Removal Trimming
Stump Removal
Clean-ups Firewood

Far Texture and "color"



Times Roman

Popular Times Roman is a sharply defined typeface with pointy corners and thick-thin strokes of mechanical regularity. Its serifs have flat ends that are too small to blunt the sense they're tiny needles (above) that would prick your finger if you touched them. Times Roman is too uniform and too pointy to complement the rounded, organic forms of the tree.



Pay attention to the small lines, small shapes and especially the interaction between letters, which creates *texture*—the tree is full of texture! Do you see uniformity or irregularity, similarities or differences?



Tree Service

A b e t g

Harry & Sons Tree
Service Pruning
Removal Trimming
Stump Removal
Trimming



Bauer Bodoni

Part of the *Modern* serif category, Bauer Bodoni is an upright style characterized by extreme thick-thin contrasts and a uniform stroke so repetitive that it creates a pattern (left, bottom). Moderns are beautiful typefaces widely used in fashion and finance, but their sharp edges and geometric precision are machine-made and rigid, quite different from the soft, touchable tree.



Remember the faces in the clouds? It's a matter of training your eye, but once you can see patterns and currents, especially in the white spaces, your work will take a big step forward. Below, Gargoyle is a match:



Tree Service

A b e t g

See the similarities?



Harry & Sons Tree
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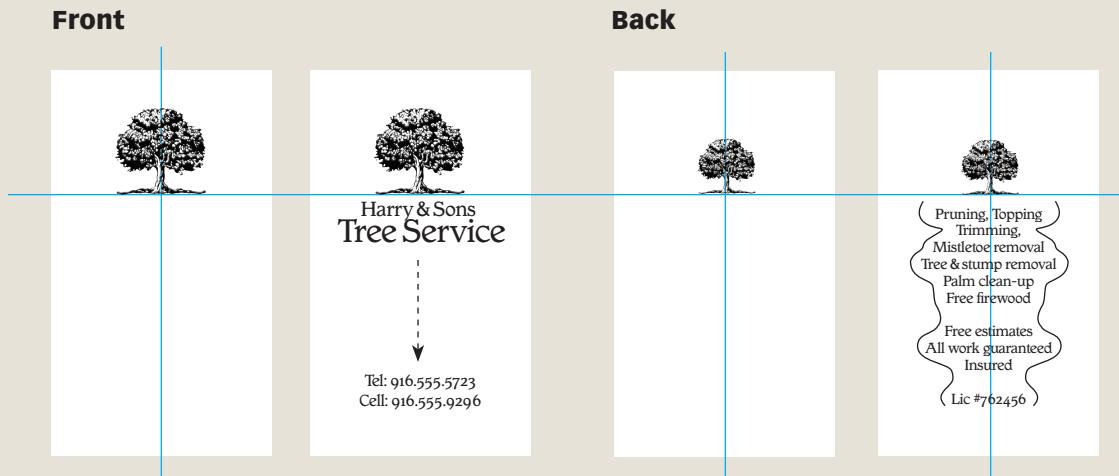
Gargoyle Medium Old Style

Gargoyle is a *Humanist* typeface; meaning it has *Old Style* proportions yet with the appearance of having been drawn by hand instead of mechanical tools. It's full of variety and irregularity, with low contrast between thicks and thins; funky, rounded corners and quirky serifs, few of which are alike. Its interaction of lines and shapes is warm, varied and organic just like the tree. *This is our typeface.*



Put it to work

As with the type, let the image influence the layout—here it's upright and stately like the tree, centered with irregular edges. The deep green color is richer and more organic than the original bright green.



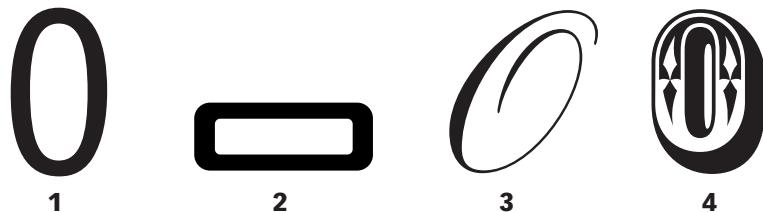
Everything builds off the tree. Turn the card upright, then run down the page just like a tree trunk—logo first, a phantom vertical, then phone numbers. This is the key information; the open space allows the eye to settle and take it in.

Same thing on the back but with a smaller tree and no name, so it's not confused for the front. Line-by-line presentation is easy to read and suggests an appropriately tree-like outer contour. Tree, typeface, layout and colors are now unified in a single look.





Article resources



Typefaces

- 1 [ITC Franklin Gothic Book Comp](#)
- 2 Porsche logotype
- 3 [Shelley Andante Script](#)
- 4 [Rosewood Regular](#)
- 5 [Futura Medium](#)
- 6 [Times Roman](#)
- 7 [Bauer Bodoni Roman](#)
- 8 (a-d) [Gargoyle Medium Oldstyle Figures](#) | a) 14 pt, b) 22 pt, c) 11/13 pt, d) 10/11 pt

Colors

- | | |
|-----------|----------------|
| 10 | C8 M8 Y22 K6 |
| 11 | C25 M0 Y45 K75 |

Images

- 9 [CSAimages.com](#)



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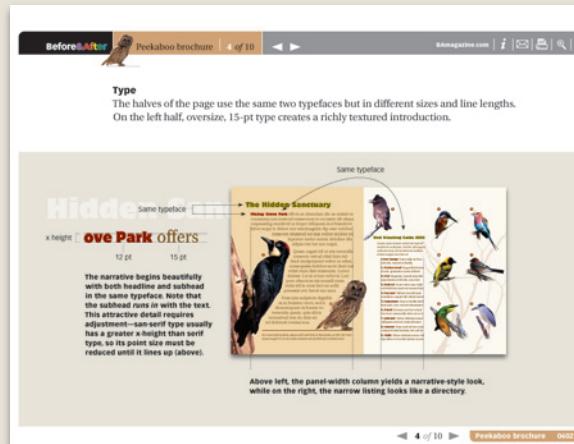
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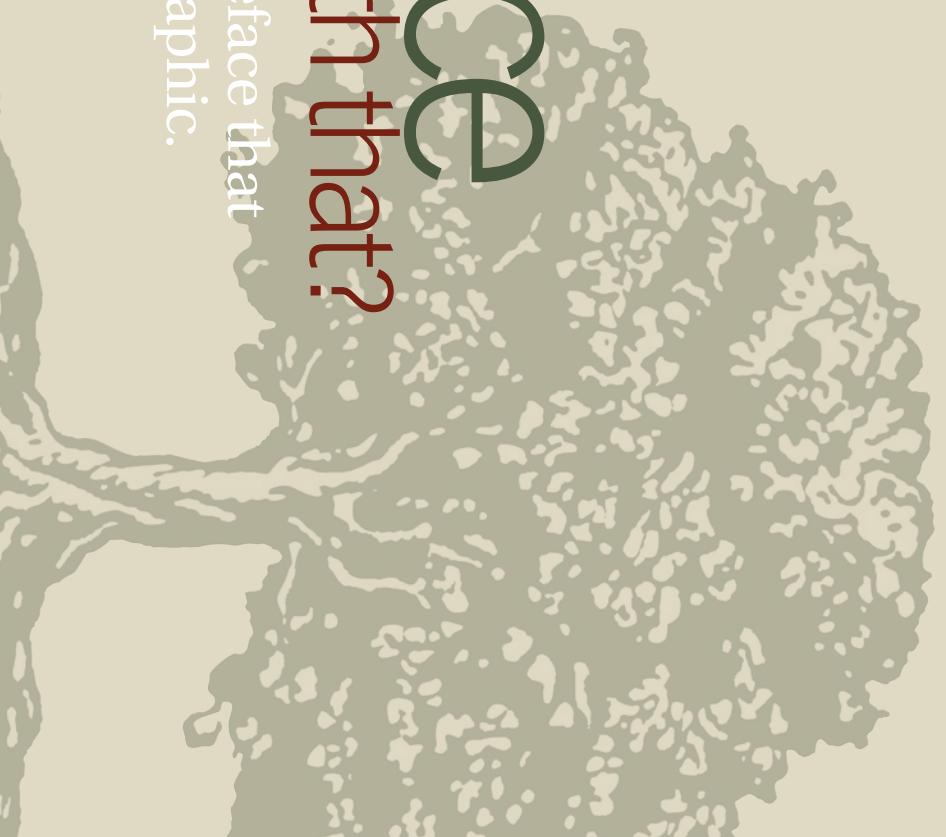
Legend
Landscape
Your design can ignore the folds. Note here how the brochure has been designed in halves—the dark half is a narrative, and the light half is a listing.

Hidden Park offers
Same typeface
x height 12 pt 15 pt
The narrative begins beautifully with both headline and subhead in the same typeface and scaled to the width of the page. Note that the subhead runs in with the text. This is a good way to make adjustment—sans-serif type usually has a greater x-height than serif type. So its point size must be reduced until it matches up (above).
Above left, the panel-width column yields a narrative-style look, while on the right, the narrow listing looks like a directory.

0414 Design a presentation brochure
0415 Design a presentation brochure
0416 Design a presentation brochure

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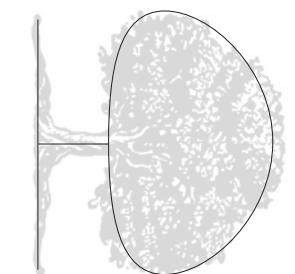
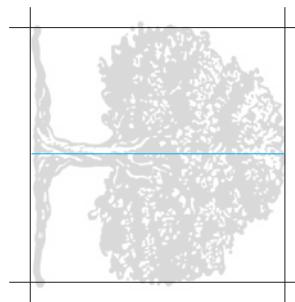
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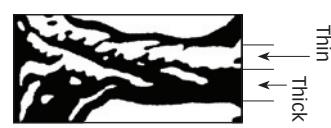
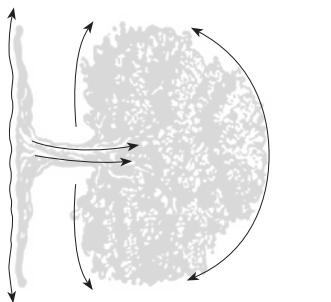
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- symmetrical
- upright

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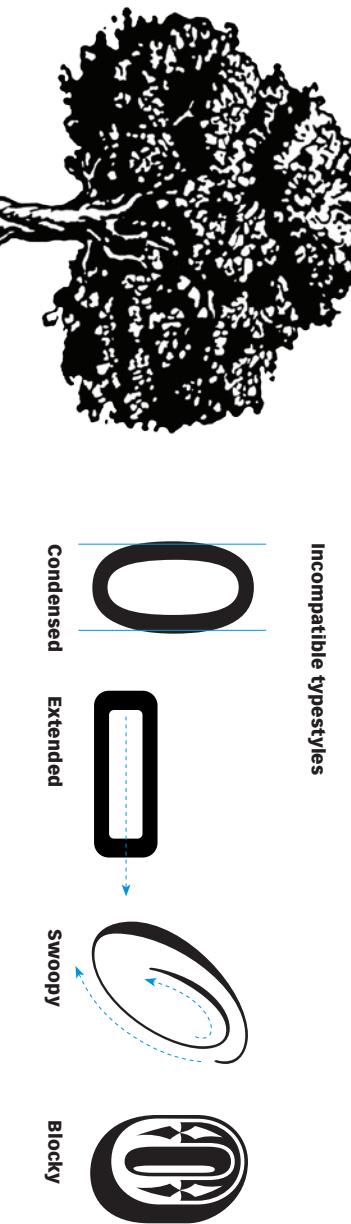
Texture

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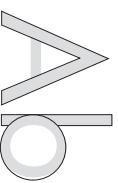
A b A b

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A b A l l A b

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Oldstyle

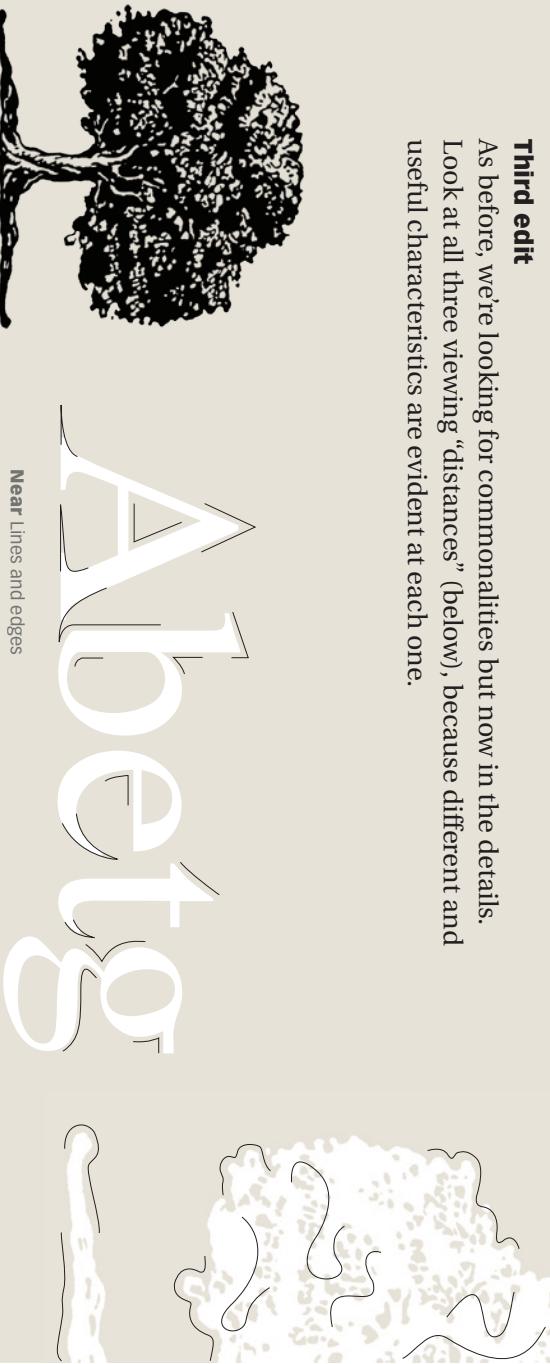


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Third edit

As before, we're looking for commonalities but now in the details. Look at all three viewing "distances" (below), because different and useful characteristics are evident at each one.



Near Lines and edges

Tree
Service

Middle Shape and pattern

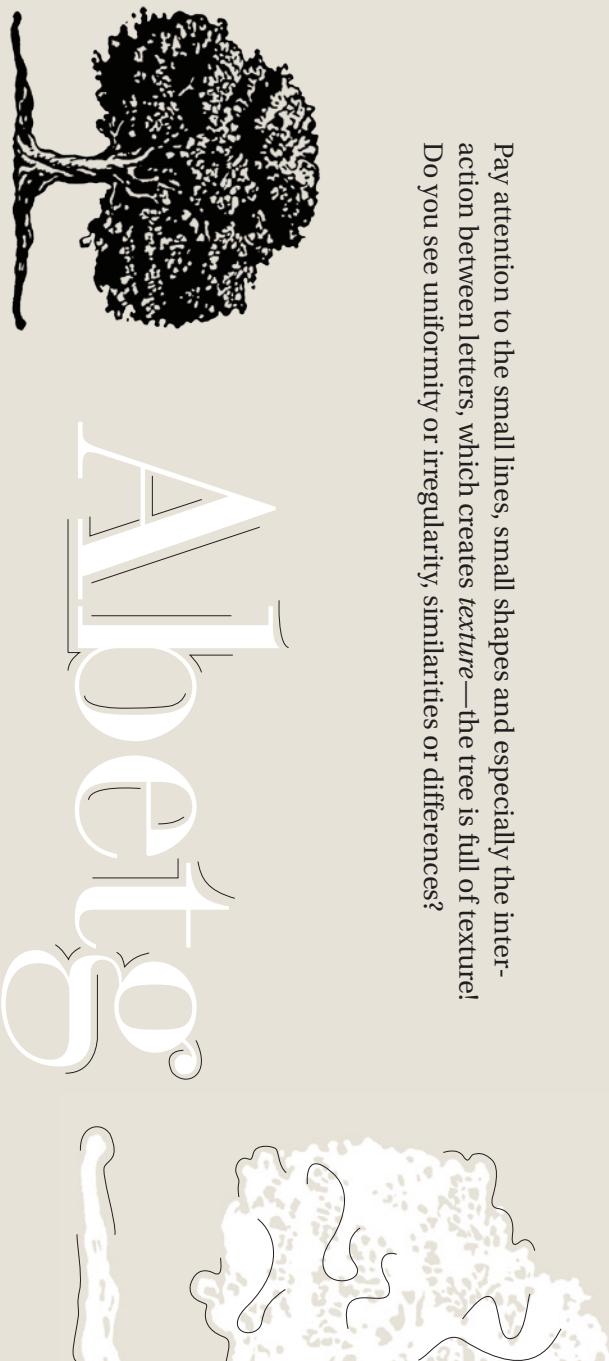
Harry & Sons Tree
Service Pruning
Removal Trimming
Stump Removal
Clean-ups Firewood

Far Texture and "color"

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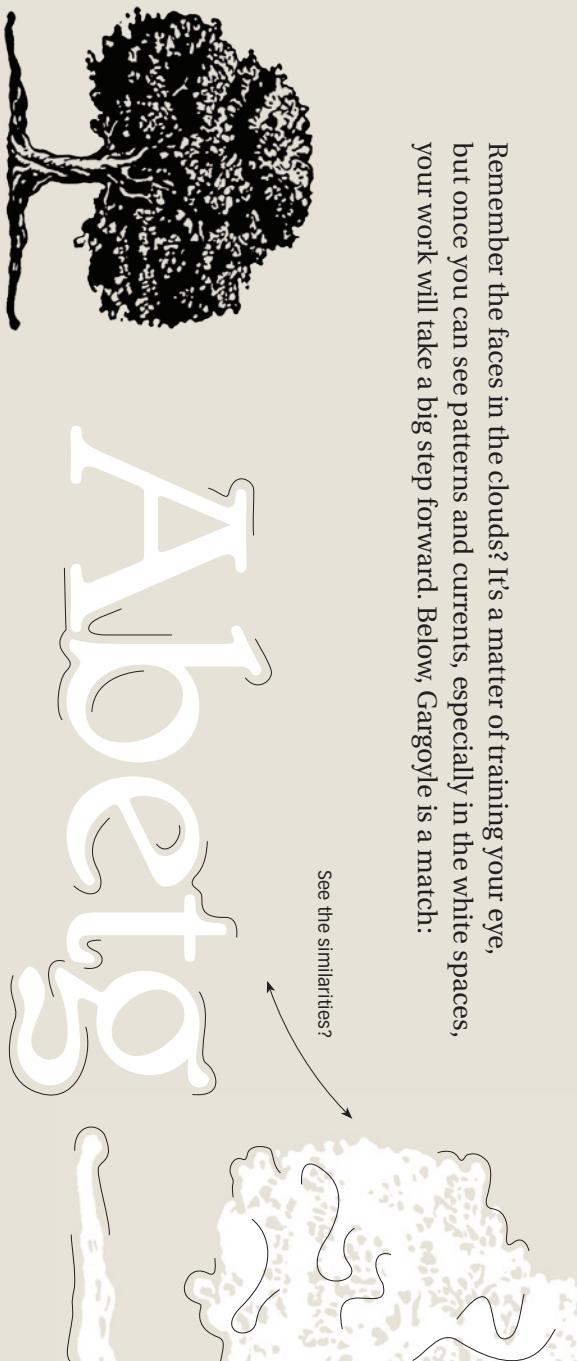


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Trimming

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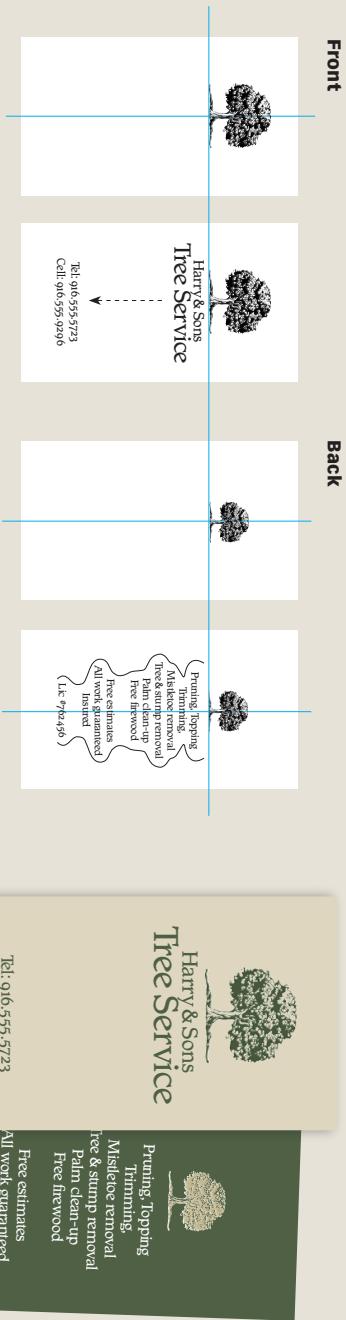
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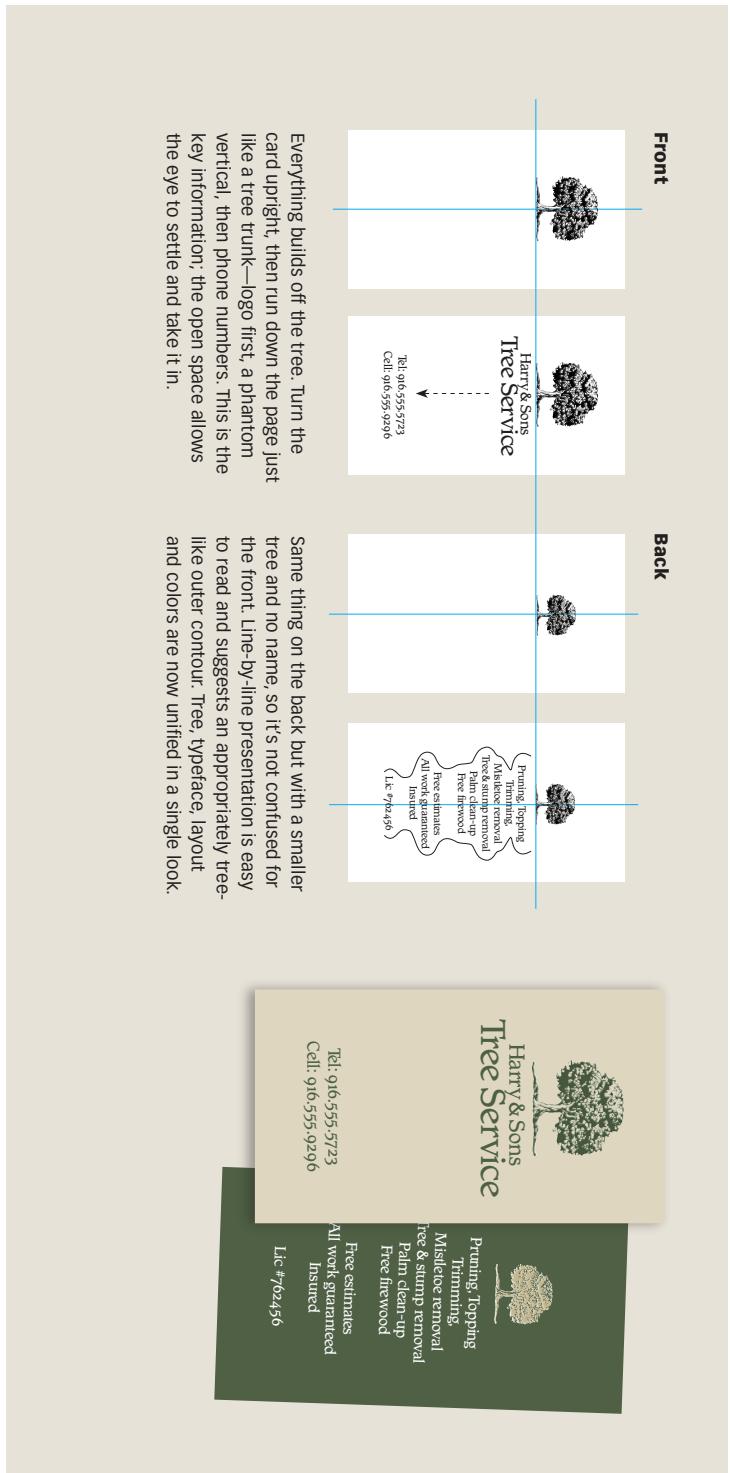
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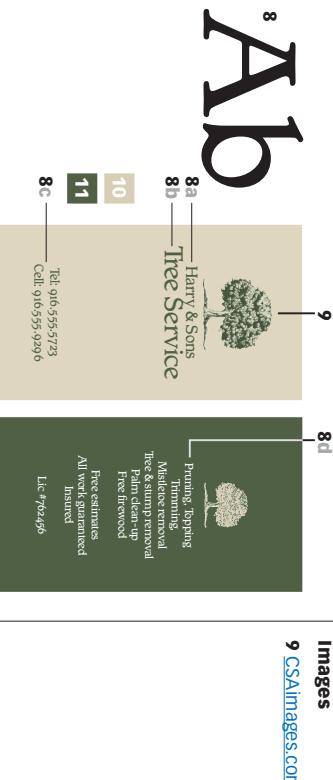
Figures | a) 14 pt, b) 22 pt, c) 11/13 pt,
d) 10/11 pt

Colors

- | | |
|----|----------------|
| 10 | C8 M8 Y22 K6 |
| 11 | C25 M0 Y45 K75 |

Images

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