

# & Faces



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# 8 Faces #1

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# Welcome

A note from the editor



I'd love to hear from you! Email your thoughts and suggestions to: [editor@8faces.com](mailto:editor@8faces.com)

MY INTEREST IN TYPOGRAPHY WAS piqued as a child when my grandfather showed me his collection of metal type. It was gently nurtured throughout my design career and then renewed with vigour just a few years ago with the launch of John Boardley's *ilovetypography.com* (John wrote and designed the

'*Type Matters*' article that follows), but it wasn't until quite recently that I really started to *appreciate* type. It was a logical spiral into obsession from there: in the same way that learning to play an instrument changes the way one hears music forever, a love of type opens a whole new world in which it's impossible to look at letter in the same way ever again.

I'm not alone in feeling this way, but it seemed to me that we devotees of typography were poorly served in the offline world: printed magazines dedicated to the subject were expensive, bloated with ads, and inaccessibly highbrow. Plus, as someone working predominantly on the web, I wanted to

make something *real*! Something tangible that I could touch, smell, and keep forever. And I knew that other people would want the same thing. Thus, *8 Faces* was born.

Everything about this project shouldn't work: A printed magazine launched in a digital age. A niche subject with a limited audience. A large financial outlay in the aftermath of a recession. Oh, and an editor who's never done anything like this before! But it's my belief that passion makes up for naivety, and that our collective love for type is a force to be reckoned with.

Thank you for reading our debut issue.

Elliot

# TYPE MATTERS



**F**OR FIVE AND A HALF CENTURIES it has educated, shocked, placated; it has admonished through treatise, praised through poetry; it has fomented war and promoted peace; it has elicited and inspired every conceivable emotion. From the mundane to the metaphysical, typography has changed the world. Not convinced? Then close your eyes for a moment and imagine, if you can, a world without type.

Some five hundred and fifty years ago, a Mainz goldsmith invented, not the book (which had been in existence for at least two millennia); not even printing (the Chinese had been printing texts since at least the eleventh century), but rearrangeable, *movable* pieces of cast metal type and a press for printing with them. These reusable *sorts* could be arranged to form any and every word. Typography—the craft of arranging type—was born.

The earliest printed books were virtually indistinguishable from those penned by contemporary scribes. This was not an attempt by printers to dupe their readers into believing they were reading handwritten texts, but rather was about producing letterforms that readers would be instantly familiar with; and so it was that the first printed books were set in Textura or ‘blackletter’ types modelled on the popular Gothic book hands (Textualis) of fifteenth-century Germany. Likewise, the first printed books in Italy employed types modelled on the rounder, broader forms of the Italian humanist scribes of the Renaissance, who looked back to the so-called Carolingian miniscule or *littera antiqua* (mistakenly attributed to antiquity) and other Precarolingian scripts. Blackletter’s demise (or the decline of types modelled on Gothic scripts), and the rapid ascendancy of the roman type since Jenson, can be attributed in large part to the incunabular publishing tycoon that was Aldus Manutius, the most powerful publisher in Europe.

Fundamentally, our letterforms have changed little over the past five hundred & fifty years, but the craft of typography has witnessed many changes. Letterpress, which had remained virtually unchanged for the first three hundred & fifty years, was mechanised with the invention of Friedrich Koenig’s steam powered cylinder press, first used by *The Times* newspaper in 1814. Within half a decade, rotary presses were pumping out ten thousand newspapers an hour. Next in line for



mechanisation was the typesetting and typesetting itself. The Pianotyp (1840) paved the way for the Linotype, Intertype, and Monotype typesetting machines. By the middle of the twentieth century those behemoths were being squeezed out by offset lithography, phototypesetting and, by the 1980s, digital typesetting, and fonts as software.

In some respects, anyone who hits keys on a keyboard is involved in creating typography, but a keyboard-tapper is no more a typographer than a monkey wielding a paint brush is an artist; or a monkey in front of a keyboard, for that matter. A true typographer is an expert type-setter, one who is cognizant of the rules, yet skilled enough to break them with impunity, all the while respectful of the author and the text; and acutely aware of his responsibility to the reader. That is not to say that typography is some mystical art. Sound typography is achieved with not too much effort: attention to measure and the balance between black & white—both inside and between letters (micro), and that which lies beyond (macro); a type that is big enough to read comfortably, outer margins generous enough for even the most ample thumbs, inner margins broad enough so that text does not fall into the gutter, and a typeface or typefaces appropriate to the subject matter and the substrate, whether that be metal, plastic, paper, or an LED screen. Perhaps one of the greatest barriers to good typography is (the designer's) ego: not so much form before function, but ego before form before function. In typography perhaps our mantra should be: type before function before form. In a book it is the text that forms the page—all other elements are accoutrements, their inclusion hinging on what they can bring to the text, to the typographic page.

Good typographers and good type designers obsess over the detail, so that readers don't have to. For many these minutiae are inimical to the design, and in some respects that view—their perceived invisibility—confirms their efficacy. Those 'invisible' details, however, sum to a page that not only pays homage to the text, but aids the reader—to repurpose Adam Smith's metaphor, *typography is text's invisible hand*. From a macroeconomic metaphor to a cooking analogy. The master chef uses numerous ingredients, in varying quantities. Sometimes just a pinch of this, a dash of that; indeed, perhaps so little that most but the informed gourmand would not detect their inclusion. Likewise, fine typography is about the harmony, the blend of many ingredients coalescing to a beautiful, legible and eminently readable page. This magnificent recipe we call typography is a truly awe-inspiring thing, and it matters for so many reasons but, above all, typography matters because words matter.

# Erik Spiekermann

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

He's been called *the godfather of type* by some. To others he's simply known as *Uncle Erik*. Is it possible to discuss the subject of typography without mentioning him? We caught up with Erik Spiekermann and learned that no-one else is allowed to touch *The FontBook*...

[spiekermann.com/en/](http://spiekermann.com/en/)

I THINK IT'S FAIR TO SAY THAT WHAT YOU DID WITH the creation of *FontShop* basically revolutionised the industry. Were you aware of that at the time?

Of course not! [LAUGHS] I think it's fair to say. I think it's true. But it was something that was obviously desired by the industry and I was the right person, in the right place, at the right time.









How do you feel about it now as you look back on what you've created?

Well, we created a few hundred jobs around the world and they still make great stuff. There are two things: there's *FontShop*, the distribution network, which is not the only one anymore — just the *best* one — and it still has an edge because it's run by people who really know what they're doing; they're all real type nerds. And the second one is the *FontFont* library. That's my baby. That's still fun because it allows me to meet all these great type designers. Some people call me '*Uncle Erik*'! It's great to have been there at the start and to have found and supported some really good talent, and it's nice to see that you create something, you like it, it grows, and it's amazing.



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With *FontFont* and *FontShop*, you've been in the position of forming both a successful foundry and a successful font distributor. Do you think this has given you a fairly unique view of the industry?



Yes, I sense what people need in the design business because I'm in the design business myself. Type design for me is a hobby – it's my second or third hobby. I think it's important that I'm actually more a *user* of type: it's turned me into a better *maker* of type.

In the world of typography, northern Europe has traditionally been seen as something of an epicentre. Do you think that still holds true or is it changing?

It used to be but not anymore. The stereotype was nice because

the history of printing started in northern Europe, but as with everything else, that's changed a lot. I'm really happy to see that now, for example, type design in South America is exploding. What I find most satisfying is that they may go to the schools here in Reading or in the Hague – which are the two best type design schools – but they come back and they have their own flavour; so there's distinctive Mexican type design, Argentinian type design, Brazilian type design. They have this edge in the same way that you and I can tell type from an English one, from a German one, from an American one. And I love how we all conform to the twenty-six characters and we have, what – five per cent or ten per cent leeway? It's like music: we use the same notes and the same key, but music sounds different: you can tell London music from Berlin music, and the same goes for type. It makes me really happy there's no divide anymore.

Now people who use the Arabic alphabet are starting to say, '*we're a little bored seeing all this stuff in Latin. We want our own!*' Essentially the Arabic alphabet is based heavily on handwriting; there are obviously mechanically designed Arabic alphabets but, by and large, if you make an Arabic *Univers*, it

can be quite controversial. Just like how it would have been in the 1500s here. *You can't do that – it has to be written by hand. It has to show the stroke of the quill!*

Is that changing, too?

Of course. They want the magnitude that we have and there's no reason why they can't have it. They say, '*you have Univers and Helvetica and 140,000 others, so why don't we have those?*' And we have to start designing this stuff, and yes, there's the issue of it originating from handwriting, but it isn't going to stay that way.

Do you see that as a challenge for Western designers? To bring some of those principles to a language they're unfamiliar with?

Yes. I just did some collections for a Hebrew version of *Meta*. I was just doing physical corrections to the drawings – where strokes meet and where curves should be and what not – but there are difficulties because I can't read it. I can really only judge it technically, which is very difficult. But why should they imitate *Univers* and *Meta*? Instead, just like the Mexicans and the Argentinians are suddenly doing this amazing stuff, I can see the same thing happening in India.