

In the last 25 years, there has been an explosion of sans serifs that are based on humanist handwriting and traditional typefaces, rather than on strict geometry.

Sans serif typefaces, with their oval shapes and variations in stroke thickness are extremely readable and have a graceful, human appearance. These are the most calligraphic of the sans serif typefaces, often with higher stroke contrast than other sans serifs, making them the best sans serifs for long reading and small text.

Humanist sans serif fonts have diagonal or vertical stress. Most of them have true italics, not just slanted versions of the roman letters. They have a very open aperture. Aperture refers to the size of the opening on characters like “a” or “e.” This helps us to avoid confusing an “e” for

an “o.” They should not be set with the letter-spacing too tight.

Traditional sans serifs, like Futura or Helvetica, are relatively geometric and have little line width variation. They can be hard to read as text typefaces.

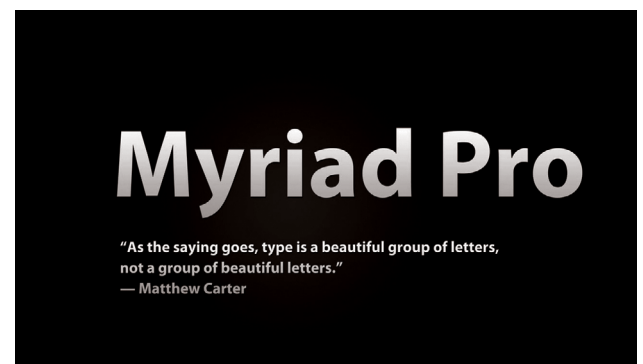


Figure 1

Adobe’s Myriad, (Figure 1) which was developed quite deliberately to be neutral in appearance, was designed collaboratively by Carol Twombly and Robert Slimbach.

FFMeta (Figure 2) is full of little details that take it away from rigidity, such as the flip to the top of the straight



Figure 2

stroke in the lowercase “n” or the varying angles at which the strokes are cut off.

Meta was designed by Erik Spiekermann originally as a commission for the Deutsche Bundespost (West German Post Office).

As the typeface would be used repeatedly in small sizes on potentially poor paper stock, they needed a very legible, neutral and space-saving typeface.

Whereas traditionally, typefaces are designed to be viewed beautifully large, the goal with Meta was

to produce a font which worked well in small sizes. Meta has open joins to combat poor definition, optical illusions, and over-inking. For instance, the joins of the stems to the branches in letters like “h” and “n” are deep enough to prevent dark spots; this also improves legibility at small sizes.

Throughout the 90s, Meta was embraced in all sizes and weights by the international design community,

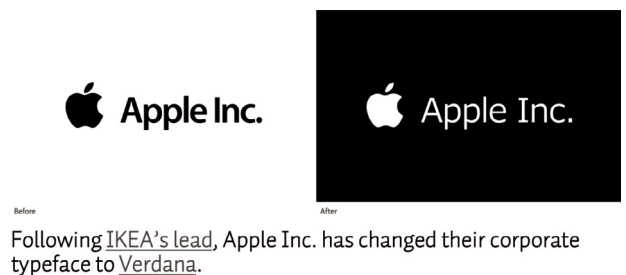


Figure 3

dubiously praised as the “Helvetica of the 90s.” Ultimately, Bundespost decided not to implement this new exclusive typeface for fear it would “cause unrest.” Meta has been

adopted by numerous companies and organizations as a corporate typeface.

Verdana (Figure 3) was created by Matthew Carter for Microsoft Corporation, designed to be readable at small sizes on a computer screen.

The lack of serifs, large x-height, wide proportions, loose letter-spacing, large counters, and emphasized distinctions between similarly-shaped characters were chosen to increase legibility.

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One of the biggest reasons for Verdana’s resurgence is its wide multilingual support, which is increasingly becoming important as global companies expand.

Verdana first shipped with Microsoft Internet Explorer 3 in 1996. Being one of the ‘Core fonts for the web’—a set of fonts which also includes Arial, Comic Sans, and Times New Roman

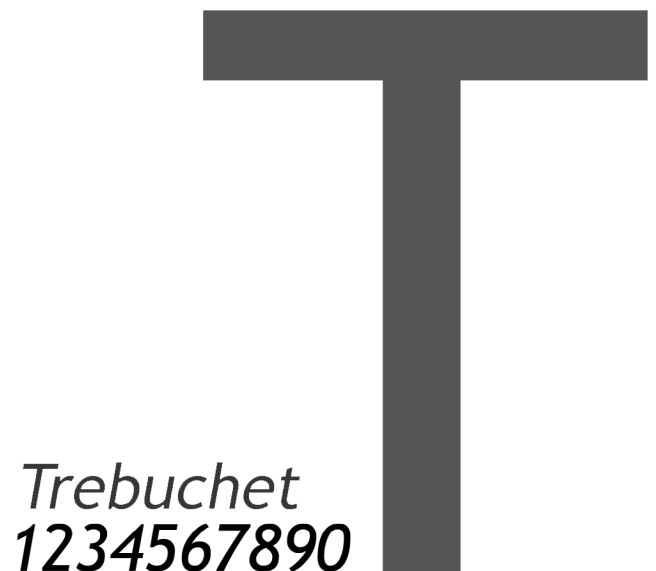


Figure 4

HUMANIST sans serifs

The Presence
of the Hand

Curated by

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Rudy VanderLans

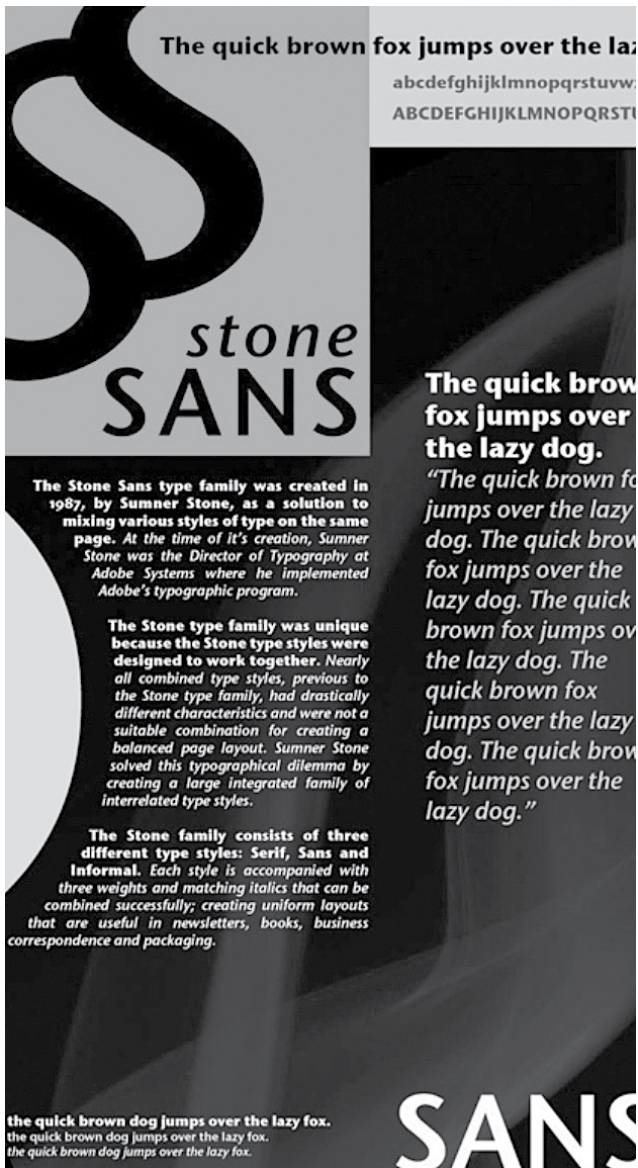


Figure 5

—Verdana has become one of the most widely used fonts on the web.

For more examples of humanist sans serif typefaces see figures 4&5

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