



Meta

The Typographer's Chameleon

master of disguise

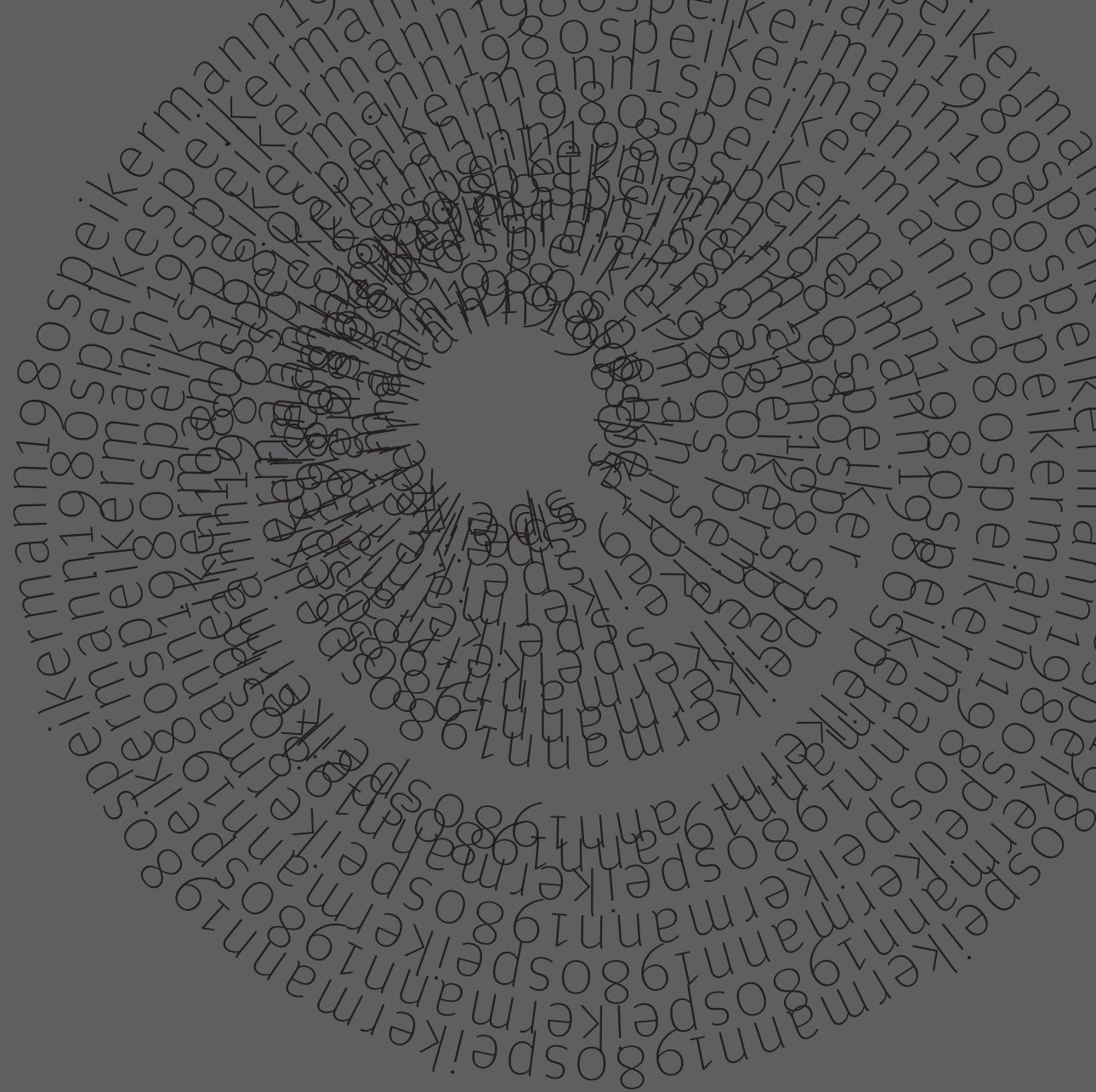
If you have ever seen a chameleon change its color, you will notice just how much this lizard can become a whole different animal, all while maintaining their essence: what makes a chameleon a chameleon.

Of course, many other members of the animal kingdom have similar abilities, but none exemplify what it means to be a “master of disguise” quite like the chameleon.



The Meta Typeface is to typography

As the chameleon is to the wild.



Meta, first designed by Erik Speikermann in the late 1980s, is a humanist sans serif with mostly uniform characters, save for the slight curves on the ends (called terminals) of lower-case letter strokes.

Typically, sans-serifs typefaces do not have many (or any) typographic gestures at the terminals.

futura

For instance, Futura does not have spurs (little feet propping up the lower corners of lowercase letter), and the apex and vertex (the pointy ends of angles) of the capital M and W are complete points without squaring off.

meta

Meta, on the other hand, has these “humanist” or organic details that set it apart from other, more geometric sans-serifs.

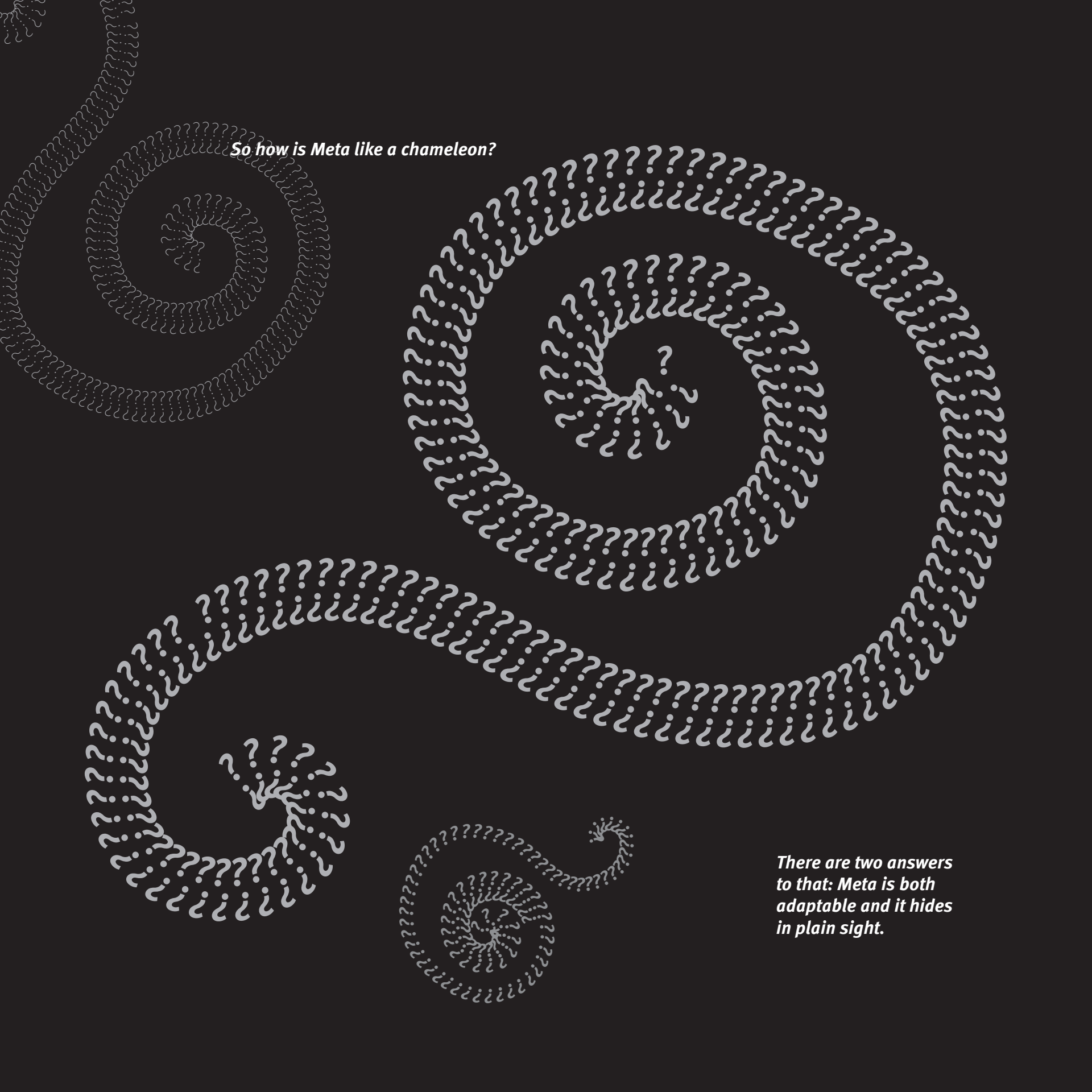
Another key characteristic of Meta is the notch under the arm of the lowercase y (more clearly visible in heavier weights)

y

Speikermann was intentional about this: he wanted Meta to be the “antithesis of Helvetica,” a famously rigid and geometric sans-serif typeface.

Meta is set apart from Helvetica by having a more “upright” look. The lowercase e, o, and c are all almost-perfect circles with bowls (completely closed shapes of negative space) and counters (partially closed shapes of negative space) that merely cut into them. Meta’s same lowercase letters are oblong in shape.

Helvetica
Meta



So how is Meta like a chameleon?

*There are two answers
to that: Meta is both
adaptable and it hides
in plain sight.*

After Spiekermann's Meta type was not picked up by the West German Post Office, the institution which initially asked him to create this new typeface, he decided to expand upon the original. He knew that despite the fact that Meta was a failure in its original purpose, the typeface had value in its unique typographic "voice." He created variations in width, weight, and italics, which meant there were eventually dozens of fonts that fell into the category of Meta. Some were "condensed," some "bold," some "book" or "light." And there were combinations of these as well, such as a condensed light font. The typeface chameleons into many different visual forms, but each iteration relates to that inherent Meta-ness that signifies its identity.





You may not initially recognize Meta by name, but you have probably seen it many times in many places. The Weather Channel logo is written in Meta, as well as companies like Herman Miller, and Schaeffler Group. Meta is also used for the Imperial College London, the Greek government, and signage around the Netherlands. Meta is effective at what it was designed to do: fit everywhere, stand out nowhere.

***Now that you are on the lookout
for the Typographers Chameleon,***

***you may spot it hiding
in other places as well***

