classification details

Eurostile is a geometric sans serif typeface. Derived from geometric shapes, these typefaces are characterised by key defining features such as a circular 'O', minimal stroke weight difference, vertical stress, sharp vertices and a single-storey 'a' comprising a circle and tail.

EUROSTILE ALDO NOVARESE NEBIOLO 1962

formal attributes and patterns

Eurostile uses the superellipse, or Lamé curve, as a foundation for its letterforms. Its vertical axis, horizontal terminals and minimal variation in proportions and stroke weights highlight the typeface's cohesive appearance. Stroke width tapers slightly as lowercase bowls interact with stems, just enough to offer elegance rather than disorder. These elements allow for a comprehensive look especially when displayed at larger sizes.
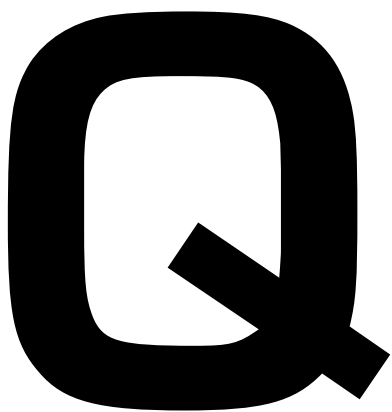
Closed apertures often reduce legibility, but not in the case of Eurostile. This potential issue is minimised by the use of the rounded square shape in comparison to a more circular one, as well as a high x-height and subtle overshoots. This lends to the typeface's readability even at smaller sizes.

Flat apexes and vertices paired with sharp crotches highlight the artificial, streamlined feel of the modern aesthetic. Square tittles add to the deliberately crafted look.
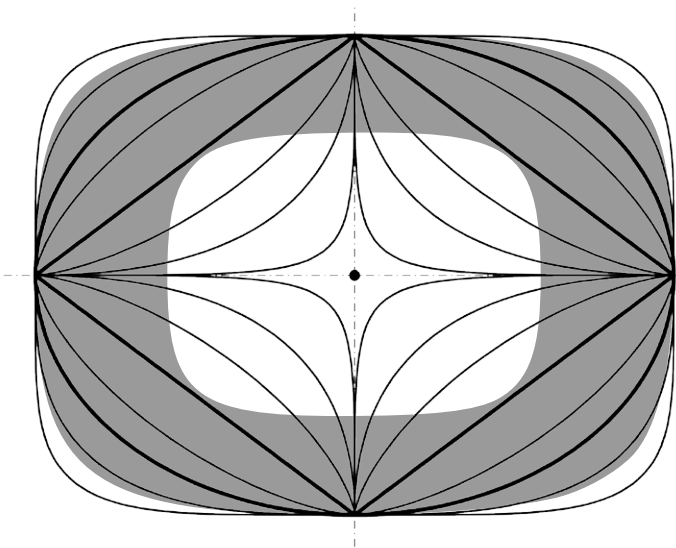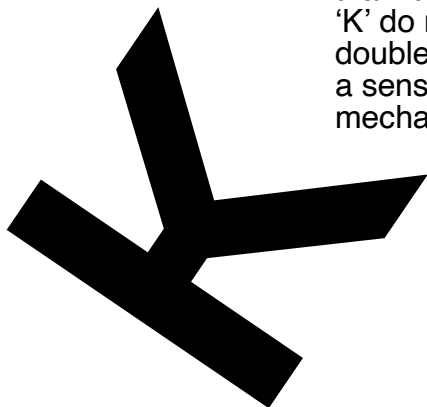

n = 5, 3, **2**, 1.5, **1**, 0.7, 0.5, 0.3

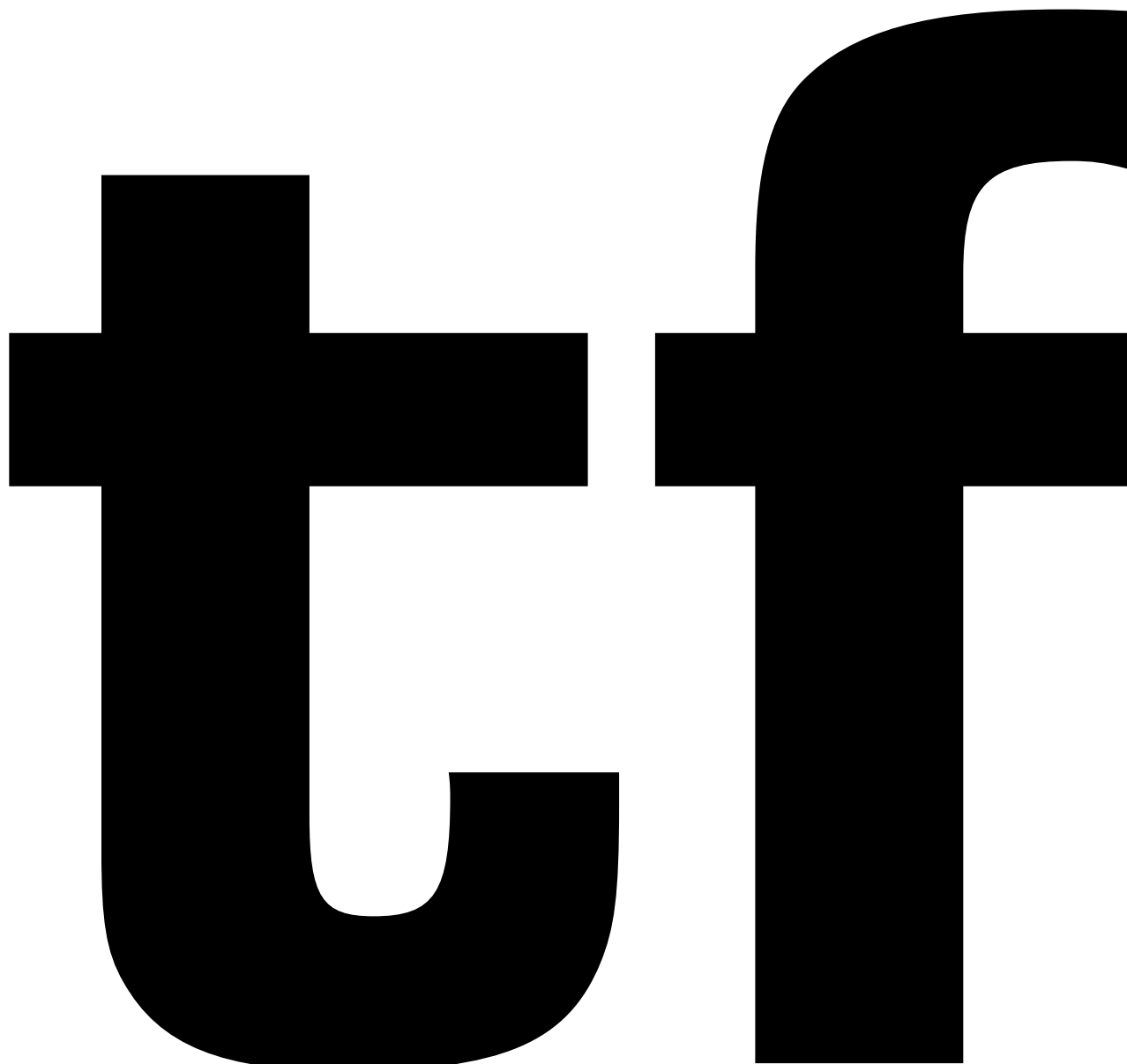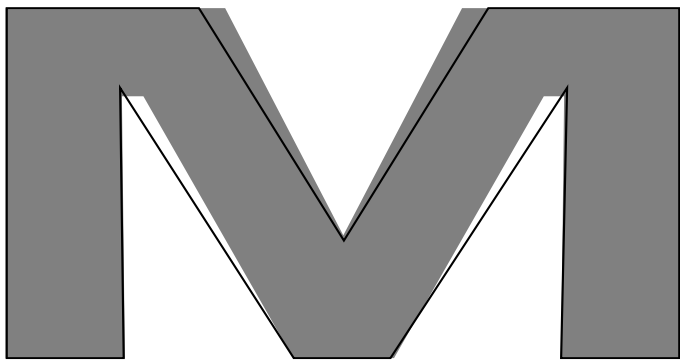san marino e citta nie

Q K a

Some of Eurostile's unique attributes include the asymmetricality of the cross strokes in lowercase letters 't' and 'f', with strokes longer on the right side. The 't' also includes a long, 180 degree curved tail, creating a horizontal terminal. The tail of the uppercase 'Q' is longer inside the counter than it is outside. The diagonal strokes in the letter 'K' do not touch the vertical stroke. There is a double-storey 'a'. All these elements give Eurostile a sense of character, while still maintaining its mechanical precision.

la diffusione del
KINASCIMENTO

t f

historical context

Eurostile was developed to succeed Microgramma, a 1952 typeface that Novarese had previously collaborated on alongside his teacher Alexandro Butti. Microgramma was a titling typeface consisting of only uppercase letters, which Eurostile extended on with an added lowercase as well as additional styles. Microgramma bold extended is almost identical to uppercase Eurostile black extended, with the exception of flat crotches in the former.

Outlined - Eurostile black extended; Grey - Microgramma bold extended

I WALK IN
I SEE YOU
I WATCH YOU
I SCAN YOU
I WAIT FOR YOU
I TEASE YOU
I BREATHE YOU
I SMELL YOU ON MY SKIN

HELMUT LANG
parfums

Text © Jenny Holzer, 1999
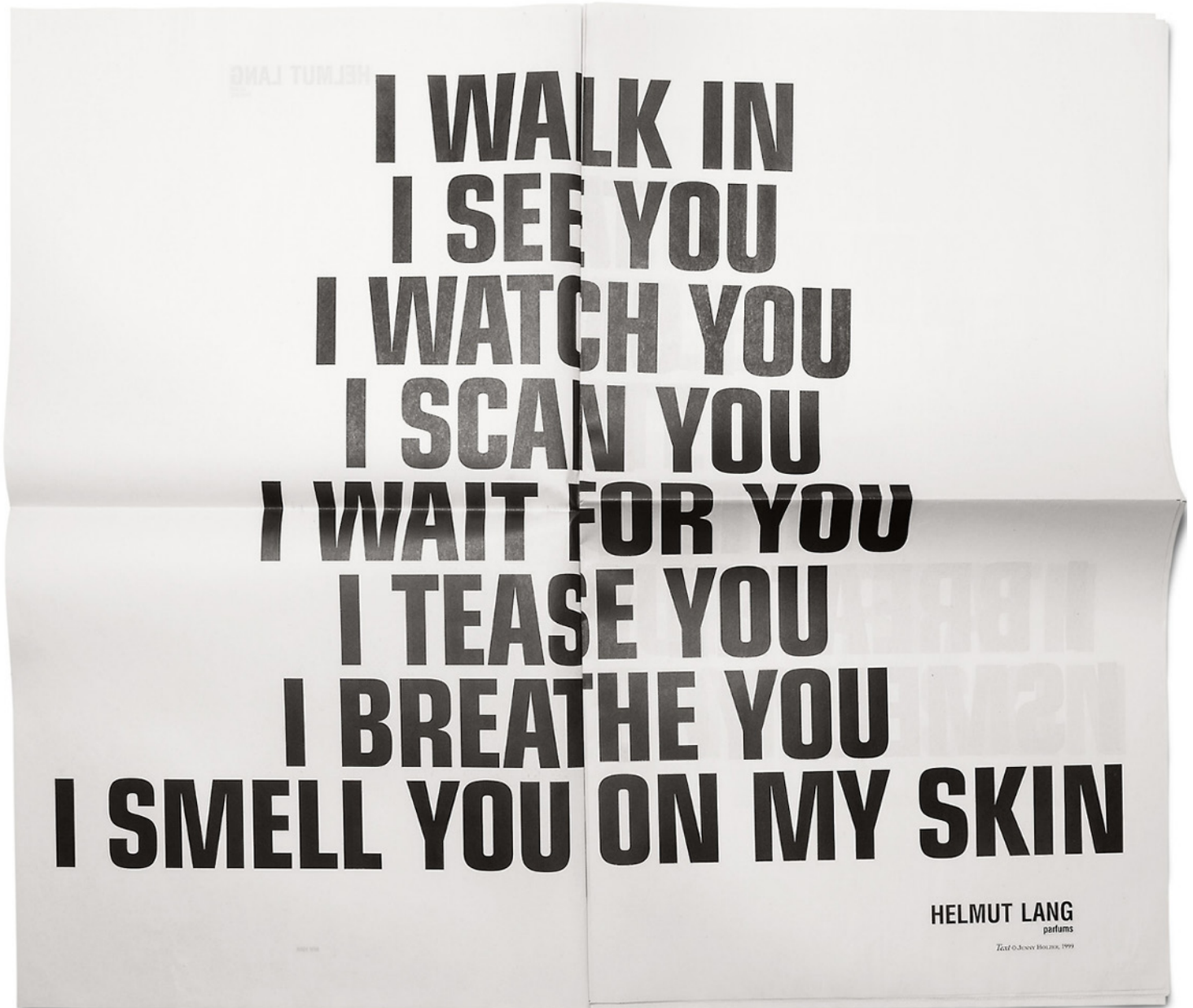
Helmut Lang perfume campaign (2000), Jenny Holzer & Marc Atlan

Microgramma was originally designed to be used at very small sizes - hence the name. Because of this, the letterforms hold their shape effectively when blown up, its monolinear quality giving the typeface a rhythmic, modular character. Eurostile is therefore highly versatile, suitable for both body copy and titles. The square shape of the superellipse also allows letters to be spaced tightly with little white space, giving the typeface a well-balanced and uniform appearance.
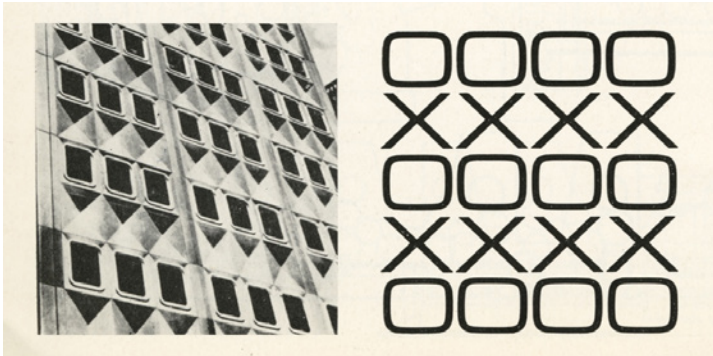
Visuals from Eurostile, a Synthetic Expression of Our Times (1964), Aldo Novarese
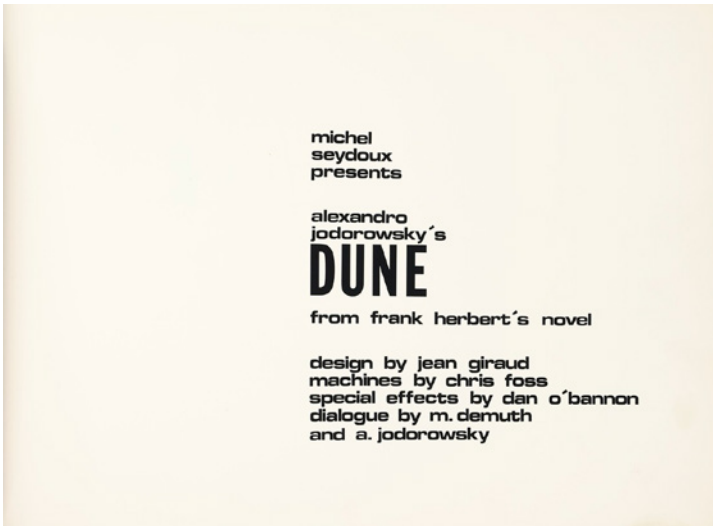
Storyboard title page of Jodorowsky's Dune (1975), Jean Giraud

conceptual underpinning of design

Novarese describes Eurostile as a 'synthetic expression of our times'.[1] It was designed to be a symbol of its era's civilisation, capturing the zeitgeist of the 60s. Inspiration stemmed from the era's mid century architecture, as well as the fast-paced activity of technological advancements.

The superellipse shape mimics the frames of old television screens and train windows, giving the typeface an industrial, machine-like appearance. Bauhaus notions of simplicity, functionality and efficiency are evoked through the architectural elements of the typeface, emulating a mathematical quality, giving the typeface a harmonious compositional balance.

Interestingly, Eurostile became the most popular typeface in science fiction, appearing in media such as *Star Trek: The Original Series* (1966) as well as *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). Although the typeface was not originally designed to elicit a futuristic feel, its strong and repeated use in science fiction contexts soon established it as a representation of the future.

However, this association in fact reflects the era's spirit, highlighting humanity's increasing fascination with space travel and rapid technological progress.
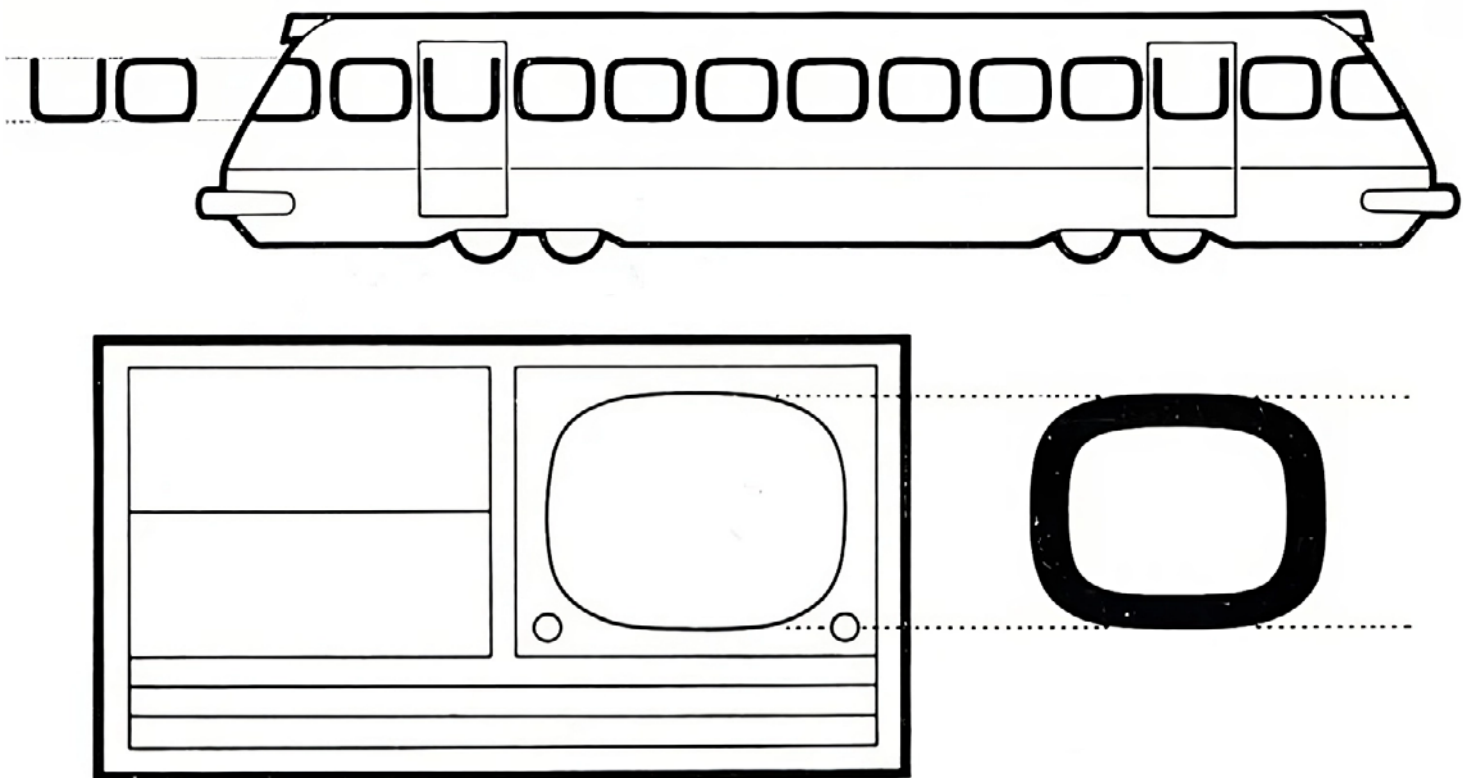
Visuals from Eurostile, a Synthetic Expression of Our Times (1964), Aldo Novarese

1   Aldo Novarese, "Eurostile, a Synthetic Expression of Our Times," Pagina, International Magazine of Graphic Design, n.d.

AaBb●cDdE●
Ff●gHhIiJjKk
LlMmNn●oPp

Futura

Futura (Paul Renner, 1927) is a historical comparative, a classic example of a geometric sans serif influenced by the Bauhaus design style. It uses a perfect circle for the letter 'O' and as a foundation for the typeface, as opposed to a superellipse. Futura uses the simple, single-storey 'a', more open apertures, a lower x-height, and sharp apexes and vertices. Lowercase ascenders often extend above the cap height. The typeface embraces a more pronounced geometric simplicity than Eurostile.

typeface

Futura medium

typeface

Eurostile bold

predominate tech

Hot metal typesetting was the most widely used method in printing at the time Eurostile was designed, its precision well suited for the precise details of geometric typefaces.

The phototypesetting process was also emerging at the time, as the method offered more flexibility whilst being less labour intensive. Nebiolo failed to embrace this modern technology, but many other manufacturers did, using the phototypesetting method to offer other copies of Eurostile under different names. In the 80s, Eurostile was digitised by Linotype, creating Eurostile LT. Other versions offer small caps, oblique fonts and stencil variants.

In 2008, the typeface was expanded and reworked by Akira Kobayashi. Using the original metal font specimens, he was able to adjust curves and stroke contrasts in order to better capture details that had been lost during the conversion process from metal to photo to digital typesetting.

weights

Eurostile was originally made up of seven variants; regular, extended and bold extended, followed by bold in 1964, condensed in 1966, then bold condensed and compact bold condensed in 1967.

Visual from Eurostile: Nera Stretta Compatta (1962), Aldo Novarese

special features

Eurostile has limited language support, offering the Latin (with diacritics), Greek and Cryllic alphabets only. Ligatures are not supported. The modular quality of the typeface is retained across the alphabets, utilising reflection and inversion. This lends the typeface a comprehensive feel, despite the lack of languages.

Eurostile's special characters feel somewhat disorderly, with more variation in stroke width, especially in the Percent and At symbols. The Copyright symbol, using a perfect circle, feels unconventional for Eurostile, as the superellipse has been used consistently throughout. Opentype features are limited; small caps, fractions, superscript and subscript.