A brief history of typefaces
The invention of printing
Movable type was invented by Johannes Gutenberg in fifteenth-century Germany. His typography took cues from the dark, dense handwriting of the period, called “blackletter.”
The traditional storage of fonts in two cases, one for majuscules and one for minuscules, yielded the terms “uppercase” and “lowercase” still used today.
Working in Venice in the late fifteenth century, Nicolas Jenson created letters that combined gothic calligraphic traditions with the new Italian taste for humanist handwriting, which were based on classical models.
I admit I have had a little work done.

Robert Slimbach styled *Adobe Jenson* after Nicolas Jenson’s roman types and the italics of Ludovico degli Arrighi, created in fifteenth-century Italy.

I don’t look a day over five hundred, do I?
I admit I have had a little work done.

Robert Slimbach styled Adobe Jenson after Nicolas Jenson’s roman types and the italics of Ludovico degli Arrighi, created in fifteenth-century Italy.

I don’t look a day over five hundred, do I?

Glos appellatur mariti soror: atq; idem fratris uxor.
Leuir dicitur frater marit: quasi leusus uir.
Fratriz appellantur quasi fratrum inter se uxor
Amitini fratum & matris & fœminæ filii.
Patruœs matrum fratrum filii.
C désorini ex duabus editis sororum: de quibus exempla mult-
ta sunt in antiquis auctolibus: & maxime in Afracio: & ui-
ris uetutissimis scriptoribus.

Jenson’s roman typeface cut in 1470
The Venetian publisher Aldus Manutius distributed inexpensive, small-format books in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries to a broad, international public. His books used italic types, a cursive form that economized printing by allowing more words to fit on a page. This page combines italic text with roman capitals.
Sur quoy vous me permettrés de vous demander en cette occasion, ce que, comme j’ay des-ia remarqué, Sa S. Augustin demande aux Donatistes en une semblable occurrence: Quoy donc ? lors que nous lisons, oublions nous comment nous avons accoustumé de parler ? l’escriture du grand Dieu devoit-elle user avec nous d’autre langage que le nostre ?

Puis que Jesus Christ dit clairement

The quick brown fox ran over the lazy dog 2 or 3 times.

ITC Garamond, 1976

The quick brown fox ran over the lazy dog 2 or 3 (2 or 3) times.

Adobe Garamond, 1986

The quick brown fox ran over the lazy dog 2 or 3 (2 or 3) times.

Garamond Premier Regular, 2005

Garamond typefaces, based on the Renaissance designs of Claude Garamond, sixteenth century
Enlightenment and abstraction
The painter and designer Geofroy Tory believed that the proportions of the alphabet should reflect the ideal human form. He wrote, “the cross-stroke covers the man’s organ of generation, to signify that Modesty and Chastity are required, before all else, in those who seek acquaintance with well-shaped letters.”
Whereas humanist designers such as Geofroy Tory were inspired by the human body, this ideal letter-form was created along quasi-scientific lines. These engravings by Louis Simonneau is from an alphabet commissioned by Louis XIV in 1693. The engravings were the basis of a royal typeface (romain du roi) designed by Philippe Grandjean.
The types of the eighteenth-century English printer William Caslon are characterized by crisp, upright characters that recall the fluid strokes of the flexible steel pen and the pointed quill.
In the late eighteenth century, the English printer John Baskerville created type with such contrast between thick and thin elements that his contemporaries are said to have accused him of “blinding all the Readers of the Nation; for the strokes of [his] letters, being too thin and narrow, hurt the Eye.”
P. VIRGILII MARONIS

BUCOLICA

ECLOGA I. cui nomen TITYRUS.

MELIBOEUS, TITYRUS.

TITYRE, tu patuthe recubans sub tegmine fagi
Silvestrem tenui Mufam meditaris avena:
Nos patriae finies, et dulcia linquimus arva;
Nos patriam fugimus: tu, Tityre, lentus in umbra
5 Formosam refonare doceas Amaryllida silvas.
T. O Meliboe, Deus nobis hae otea fecit:
Namque erit ille mihi femper Deus: illius aram
Saepe tener nofris ab ovilibus imbuet agnus.
Ille meas errare boves, ut cernis, et ipsum
10 Ludere, que vellem, calamo permisit agreñi.

M. Non equidem invideo; miror magis: undique totis
Uique adeo turbatur agris, en ipse capellas
Proteus xeger ago: hanc etiam vis, Tityre, duco:
Hic inter densas corylas modo namque gemellos,
15 Spem gregis, ah! filice in muda connixa reliquit,
Saepe malum hoc nobis, si mens non lava fuiisset,
De coelo taetas memini praeclarem quercus:
Saepe finifra cava praeclis ab iverse cornix.
Sed tamen, ille Deus qui fit, da, Tityre, nobis.

20 T. Urbem, quam dicunt Romam, Meliboe, putavi
Sultus ego huic nostro similem, quo facta solemus
Pallares ovium teneros depellere fretus.
Sic canibus caulos similes, sic matribus hædos

Text Page of Baskerville's Ving3, Birmingham, 1757 [8 1/2 x 5 3/4 inches]
P. VIRGILII MARONIS

BUCOLICA

ECLOGA I. cui nomen TITYRUS.

MELIBOEUS, TITYRUS.

TITYRE, tu patulæ recubans sub tegmine fagi
Silvestrem tenui Musam meditaris avena:
Nos patriæ fines, et dulcia linquimus arva;
Nos patriam fugimus: tu, Tityre, lentus in umbra
5 Formosam reponare doces Amaryllida silvas.

T. O Meliboe, Deus nobis hæc oitia fecit:
Namque erit ille mihi semper Deus: illius aram
Sæpe tener nostris ab ovilibus imbuet agnus.
Ille meas errare boves, ut cernis, et ipsum
10 Ludere, quæ vellem, calamo permisit agresti.

M. Non equidem inideo; miror magis: undique totis
Usque adeo turbatur agris. en ipse capellas
Protenus æger ago: hanc etiam vix, Tityre, duco:
Hic inter densas coryllos modo namque gemellos,
15 Spem gregis, ah! silice in nuda connixa reliquit.
Sæpe malum hoc nobis, si mens non læva sufflet,
De coelo tactas memini praedicere quercus:
Sæpe sinistra cava praedixit ab ilice cornix.
Working in the media of engraving and the flexible steel pen, eighteenth-century writing masters such as George Bickham created lavishly curved scripts as well as finely detailed Roman capitals rendered in high contrast. Such alphabets influenced the typeface designs of Baskerville, Didot, and Bodoni.
The French printer Firmin Didot took Baskerville’s initiatives to an extreme level by creating type with a wholly vertical axis and razor-thin serifs.
LA THÉBAÏDE,
OU
LES FRÈRES ENNEMIS,
TRAGÉDIE.

ACTE PREMIER.

SCÈNE I.

JOCASTE, OLYMPE.

JOCASTE.
Ils sont sortis, Olympe? Ah! mortelles douleurs!
Ou un moment de repos me va coûter de pleurs!
These roman and italic letters were printed by Giambattista Bodoni. They exhibit extreme contrast between thick and thin elements.
Adria, città antica d'Italia, che diede il nome al Golfo Adriati. Adria, ville ancien, qui a donné le nom au Golfe Adriatiq.

These roman and italic letters were printed by Giambattista Bodoni in 1788.
Monster fonts
The rise of advertising in the nineteenth century stimulated demand for large-scale letters that could command attention in urban space. In this lithographic trading card from 1878, a man is shown posting a bill in flagrant disregard for the law.
Fat Face is an inflated, hyper-bold type style developed in the early nineteenth century. It is Bodoni on steroids.
Extra Condensed typefaces, first seen in nineteenth-century advertisements, were designed to fit tall letters in narrow spaces. Such letters were made from wood rather than metal, because lead is too soft to hold up under the pressure of printing large-scale letters.
Egyptian, or slab typefaces, introduced around 1806, transformed the serif from a refined detail to a load-bearing slab.
The type historian Rob Roy Kelly created this chart to illustrate how the square serif was manipulated to create ornamental variations.

Chart illustrating how a variety of letter styles derived from a basic Antique.
This 1875 American advertising poster uses a dozen different fonts to maximize the scale of letters in the space allotted. Although the typefaces are richly varied, the centered layout is static and conventional.
This Dada poster uses a variety of typefaces as well as advertising “cuts” (stock illustrations available in the printer’s shop). The layout is innovative and dynamic, fighting against the grid of letterpress. Iliazd, 1923.
Reform and revolution
Edward Johnston created this chart of the essential characters of Roman inscriptions in 1906 as part of his quest to revive the search for an essential standard alphabet. He was reacting against the monstrosities of nineteenth-century commercial advertising.
Golden type was created by the English design reformer William Morris in 1890. He sought to recapture the dark and solemn density of Nicolas Jenson’s pages. Morris was a design reformer who was critical of industrial production and saw ugliness in nineteenth-century commercial printing.
Compare William Morris’s Golden to its Renaissance source, the typefaces of Nicolas Jenson.

Côlòbrini ex duabus editi sororibus; de quibus exempla multa sunt in antiquis auctoris & maxime in Affraniis & uiris uëtutissimis scriptoris.

Jenson’s roman typeface cut in 1470.
Glos appellatur mariti soro: atq; idem fratris uxor.
Leuit dicitur frater mariti: quasi leuus uir.
Fratriæ appellantur quasi fratrum inter se uxores.
Amitini fratrum & matris & foeminae filii.
Patruels matrum fratrum filii.
Coëbrini ex duabus editi fororibus: de quibus exempla mul-
ta sunt in antiquis auctonibus: & maxime in Affranio: & uir-
ris uetutissimis scriptionibus.

Jenson’s roman typeface cut in 1470

Compare to Adobe Jenson, used today.

Robert Slimbach style

for Nicolas Jenson’s

the italics of Ludovic

ted in fifteenth-cen
This logo for the Dutch avant-garde journal De Stijl was designed by Vilmos Huszar in 1917. The letters consist of pixel-like blocks.

Theo van Doesburg, founder of the De Stijl movement in the Netherlands, created this alphabet using only perpendicular elements in 1919.
Herbert Bayer designed universal, consisting of only lowercase letters constructed with circles and straight lines, at the Bauhaus in 1925.
Designed by Paul Renner in Germany, 1927, Futura is a practical and subtle font that remains widely used today.
The Dutch designer Wim Crouwel published his designs for a “new alphabet,” consisting of no diagonals or curves, in 1967.
Lo-Res Family designed by Zuzana Licko for Emigre, 1985

Family Credo?

A matrix is nothing to be ashamed of.

A matrix is nothing to be ashamed of.

A matrix is nothing to be ashamed of.

A matrix is nothing to be ashamed of.

A matrix is nothing to be ashamed of!
The French designer Philippe Apeloig created these contemporary variations on reduced, geometric typefaces.
Type as narrative
I am not perfect.

Designed by Barry Deck in 1990, Template Gothic was inspired by letters drawn with a plastic stencil. The typeface thus refers to a process that is at once mechanical and manual. According to Emigre, Template Gothic “reflects Deck’s interest in type that is not perfect; type that reflects more truly the imperfect language of an imperfect world, inhabited by imperfect beings.”
DON’T KNOW MUCH ABOUT HISTORY?
don’t know much about history?

DEAD HISTORY

ABOUT DEAD HISTORY

P. Scott Makela created the typeface Dead History for Emigre in the early 1990’s by manipulating the vectors of two existing fonts: a traditional serif font and the Pop classic **VAG Rounded**. Makela labelled his work “100% digital.”
Back to work
I am a lady; I don’t kiss and tell.

I am a lady; I don’t kiss and tell.

I AM A LADY; I DON’T KISS AND TELL.

I AM A LADY; I DON’T KISS AND TELL.

Did you hear about Mr. Baskerville and Mrs Eaves?

The typeface Mrs Eaves was named after John Baskerville’s housekeeper, Sarah Eaves, who also happened to be his mistress and creative assistant. Designed in 1996 by Zuzanna Licko, Mrs Eaves became one of the most popular typefaces of the late twentieth century. In an interview Licko said that creating her own revival of the eighteenth-century types of Baskerville “presented [her] with the opportunity to design some fanciful ligatures which help create visual interest and are reminiscent of customized lettering.”
Mrs Eaves

Mrs Eaves
Baroque • BAROQUE • Baroque

I MAY LOOK BAROQUE, BUT I DON’T NEED FIXING.

Fred Smeijer’s Quadraat offers a crisp interpretation of typographic tradition.

It looks back to the sixteenth century from a contemporary point of view, as seen in its DECISIVELY GEOMETRIC SERIFS.
Note the vertical italic; this is seen a lot in contemporary European typeface design.
Advertising and design serve to amplify the value of useful things, transforming functional tools into alluring *fetishes* that promise to satisfy emotional as well as material needs. A Eureka vacuum cleaner claims not only to sweep clean the rug, but to give its user all her heart desires.

Modern designers, working in the ambitious decades between the last century’s two world wars, emphasized and transformed the technologies of mechanical reproduction. They sometimes buried evidence of the hand in order to objectify the machine.

The mass manufacturers
Knockout Overview

Residential Realtors  Relevant Rockworks  Researcher Revealed
Restauranteurs  Reconstructible  Restorativeness
Retranslated  Refreshment  Recessionals
Recreation  Rectilinear  Restrictive
Redouble  Readouts  Resistant  Romance
Rollouts  Roundel  Roasted  Ratifies
Recline  Recess  Recital  Rained
Riches  Relate  Relied  Rattle
Radial  Roast  Rains  Rises
MINERAL DEPOSITS

MINE

NINE FIVE

36 Miles Underground

IRON ORE

SEVEN NINE

FORTUNE IN GEMS & METALS

SEVEN SEVEN

Riches of the earth sold

FIVE SEVEN

HINTERLAND CLEARED OUT FOR SHOPPING MALLS

THREE ONE

CHEMISTS

FIVE THREE

ONE THREE

Giza, by David Berlow, Font Bureau
Logotype for MICA (Maryland Institute College of Art), using Giza typeface by David Berlow (modified).
Clearview Hwy is the new typeface developed for use in U.S. highway and street signs. As they are adopted over time, the United States will become the most legible place on Earth. The designers' goal was to create more readable road signs without having to make the existing signs bigger (which would cost a huge amount of money as well as causing more visual clutter and crowding.) Designed by Don Meeker and James Montalbano. Available from http://clearviewhwy.com.