

The Birth of a Font – How Typeface is Designed

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If you are like most people, you probably don't give much thought to fonts and what it takes to design one. And, if you have never ventured beyond the **Format** menu located at the top of your computer screen and bravely clicked on **Font** to try out some different type styles, you may not even be aware of how many basic varieties are available.

Fonts are different designs for letters and numbers that are used to change the appearance of the documents we create. Some are plain, others fancy; some are whimsical, while others are bold. Font design is commonly categorized by a classification system labeling characters with familiar names such as *old style*, *modern*, *sans serif*, and *slab serif*, just to name a few. But where do fonts come from, and how are they created?

Typography is the art and technique of composing printed materials from movable type. You might never really appreciate the artistry and craftsmanship behind this type of design until finding yourself knee-deep and sweating in some intense "font-searching" task like selecting just the right wedding invitation.

Even a Novice can Create Professional Fonts

In today's technologically advanced world, there are thousands of font resources available through individual artists and graphic design businesses. There are also countless tutorials and software packages available for anyone, from novice to professional, to produce fonts on his or her own.

Designing typeface is a highly involved procedure, and it can take up to several months to plan out a design. While many designers prefer to draw their outlining designs by hand, most professional typographers now rely on a popular industry program known as Macromedia Fontographer to produce fonts. This digital program helps one create fonts by replicating handwriting.

Once a designer has completed the layout design, the next step is *hinting*. Hinting is a process of purposely distorting the designed fonts to achieve several different *resolutions* (a measurement of the output quality of an image in pixels) in order to achieve the most readable and attractive bitmap (fixed resolution) image possible.

A Passion for Font Design Revives the Handwriting of Historical Figures

Pia Frauss, a self-described hobbyist and font addict in the world of font design, maintains a web site showcasing her own creative font designs to the public. Her journey as a designer began with an interest in calligraphy and the history of writing. Pia, who lives in Germany, recalls feeling frustrated when she downloaded some free fonts from

the Internet and discovered that many were missing German characters. But it was her disappointment that provided the push she needed to enter the design arena.

Pia's skills in calligraphy have enabled her to create specialty fonts replicating the handwriting of historical figures such as Jane Austen (1775-1817), the English novelist who wrote *Pride and Prejudice*. "The idea of creating replica fonts came together with the font making tool (I was using)," explained Pia. "The process isn't much different from creating a font out of your own handwriting – you scan in your favorite document, dissect it by means of some graphic program, assemble two alphabets (upper and lowercase letters), and then transform them into letters using the font program. After that, you have to define what is called metrics, the distances those characters are to keep from one another when printed. Creating a font out of a document can be a time-consuming enterprise, [especially if] you want to make it similar to, and representative of, the source. [This] was certainly the case with my Jane Austen font. Procuring books containing photographs, or facsimilies of Jane Austen's handwriting during the last years of her life wasn't very difficult [as] I am living in a city sufficiently supplied with libraries."

A long-time fan of Jane Austen's novels, Pia was surprised no one had attempted to create a font replicating her formal, sweeping writing style before. "I really had a hard time getting convinced that nobody had ever bothered! Setting out to create one myself, as soon as it was within my reach, was an entirely natural thing to do," remarked Pia.

When considering the future of font design, Pia says, "According to an authority much revered by me, Professor Hildegard Korger, 'It's a bad thing that nowadays it's mostly done using computers. Computer programs, which allow even the untrained to easily create typography, are encouraging many would be designers to embark on typographic high-flights.'* It's of course in my own interest that I should disagree." She continues explaining, "...As a would be font designer [and] as a true font addict, I feel there can never be too much diversity. Getting a thorough formation in the craft and art of calligraphy is not within everybody's reach. So please, let the less lucky try their hand using a computer program. If they really love the art, they will learn it by doing; if not, they will by and by give it up. As the saying in my country goes: even a blind hen does find a crumb now and then."

It Only Takes an Hour to Create your First Font

Can just anyone create a font at home? According to many specialty programs for beginners, the answer is a resounding *yes*. One simple tutorial is available on-line at www.myfirstfont.com and instructs designers how to convert their handwriting into fonts.

To get started, you will need:

- Computer running Microsoft Windows
- Template character set (can be downloaded from the site)
- Marker (dark, preferably black)
- Printer

- Scanner
- Image processing software (Microsoft Paint will work)
- Font Creator (a program you can purchase or download for a fee)

According to myfirstfont.com, it only takes about an hour to create your first font.