About Typeface Families

By Allan Haley

WHEN TYPEFACES WERE FIRST INVENTED, the notion of having a family of type hadn't occurred to anyone. All fonts were simply roman designs. In the early 16th century, cursive – or italic (named after Italy, where the idea was popularized) – type was introduced. There were still no typeface families; romans were one style of type and italics were another – much like serif and sans serif.

In the late 1700s, foundries began to release fonts in families – pairing roman and italic designs that matched each other in style. Later the concept of typeface weights and proportions was added to the typeface family mix. In the 20th century, type families were enlarged even further with the introduction of different designs such as condensed, expanded and outlined.

Linex Sans Light
Linex Sans Light Italic
Linex Sans Regular
Linex Sans Italic
Linex Sans Bold
Linex Sans Bold Italic

Typical typeface family

Modern Type Families

The person generally credited with conceiving the modern idea of a typeface family is Morris Fuller Benton, director of typeface development for American Type Founders in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Benton's premise was that typefaces within an individual family would share the basic

Cheltenham Oldstyle
Cheltenham Wide
Cheltenham Medium
Cheltenham Bold
Cheltenham Bold Condensed
Cheltenham Bold Extra Condensed
Cheltenham Bold Outline
Cheltenham Oldstyle Condensed
Cheltenham Italic
Cheltenham Medium Italic
Cheltenham Bold Italic
Cheltenham Bold Condensed Italic
CHELTENHAM BOLD EXTRA CONDENSED TITLE
Cheltenham Bold Extended
Cheltenham Extrabold
Cheltenham Inline
Cheltenham Inline Extended
Cheltenham Inline Extra Condensed

American Type Founders Cheltenham

characteristics of the parent design, but with individual variances. The Cheltenham, Century, Cloister, and Stymie typeface families are just a few of the designs developed under Benton's watchful eye.

Benton's original vision has been modified and expanded several times over the decades. Type families have become larger, more diverse and better thought-out.

Planning by the Numbers

In 1957, the Swiss type designer Adrian Frutiger designed a new kind of type family. Because he felt that the traditional system of providing names – "bold," "semi-bold," "semi-bold condensed" and so on – was confusing and outdated, he proposed a logical, systematic numbering scheme. In Frutiger's system, each typeface was given a two-digit suffix. The first digit classified the alphabet weight, with 3 indicating the lightest weight in the family and 9 the boldest. The second digit identified the typeface proportion, with higher numbers for condensed designs and lower numbers for expanded designs. In addition, if the second number was odd, the typeface

Univers 45 Light
Univers 46 Light Oblique
Univers 55 Roman
Univers 56 Roman Oblique
Univers 65 Bold
Univers 66 Bold Oblique
Univers 75 Black
Univers 76 Black Oblique
Univers 85 Extra Black
Univers 86 Extra Black Oblique

Univers 39 Thin Ultra Condensed
Univers 49 Light Ultra Condensed
Univers 59 Ultra Condensed
Univers 47 Light Condensed
Univers 48 Light Condensed Oblique
Univers 57 Condensed
Univers 58 Condensed Oblique
Univers 67 Bold Condensed
Univers 68 Bold Condensed Oblique

Univers 53 Extended
Univers 54 Extended Oblique
Univers 63 Bold Extended
Univers 64 Bold Extended Oblique
Univers 73 Black Extended
Univers 74 Black Extended Oblique
Univers 93 Extra Black Extended
***Univers 94 Extra Black
Extended Oblique***

Family organized around numbering system

was a roman design; if it was even, the typeface was italic. Thus Univers 39 is a very light condensed roman, while Univers 56 is a medium-weight italic of normal proportions. Neue Helvetica and Serifa are two other type families that use this numbering system.

Extended Type Families
Some typeface families are made up of two or more sub-families. ITC Stone is a good example. Its sub-groups consist of Serif, Sans, Humanistic and Informal. Each design has roman and italic versions in three weights for a total of 24 individual typefaces. The four designs share the same cap height, lowercase x-height, stem weight and general proportions. Each typeface, however, is designed to stand on its own as a useful, distinctive communication tool. Thesis and ITC Legacy are two other popular typeface families that are made up of sub-families.

ITC Stone Serif
ITC Stone Sans
ITC Stone Informal
ITC Stone Humanist

Extended type family

Size-specific Families
Another kind of type family has different designs for use at different sizes. ITC Bodoni is such a family. It's comprised of three size-sensitive variants, named Six, Twelve, and Seventy-Two. These were designed to emulate the differences in the progressively-sized metal punches that Giambattista Bodoni created for his original fonts. The numerical designation indicates

ITC Bodoni Six Book

ITC Bodoni Six Book Italic

ITC Bodoni Six Bold

ITC Bodoni Six Bold Italic

ITC Bodoni Twelve Book

ITC Bodoni Twelve Book Italic

ITC Bodoni Twelve Bold

ITC Bodoni Twelve Bold Italic

ITC Bodoni Seventy-Two Book

ITC Bodoni Seventy-Two Book Italic

ITC Bodoni Seventy-Two Bold

ITC Bodoni Seventy-Two Bold Italic

Size-specific type family

the optimum point size at which each design should be set – but, as with most typographic decisions, there are no hard and fast rules. FB Californian and ITC Founders Caslon are two newer size-specific typeface families. ■