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HERMANN ZAPF AND HIS DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

HERMANN ZAPF

Hermann Zapf rose to prominence in the world of letterforms after the appearances of his two best-known typefaces, Palatino (1948–51) and Optima (1952–55). This book was compiled by Zapf himself, and presents the highlights of his life's work (he was born in 1918) in the form he wants the world to see. Zapf's tone throughout is modest, for he subordinates himself to the traditions, and often gives credit to his teachers and colleagues. As we would expect from a typographic genius, the book itself is a masterpiece of design and production.

The text begins with an elegant, four-page introduction by Carl Zahn, a designer with the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The twenty essays by Zapf are primarily about type, with four on calligraphy, and one on "Public Lettering and Visual Pollution," addressed primarily to architects, city planners, and others involved with environmental graphics. The essays on type are of considerable historical importance because they document two technological revolutions that occurred during his career: photocomposition and digital type.

Zapf's youthful ambition to be an electrical engineer served him well in later years as type technology migrated from mechanical systems to computers. He was always among the first to try to get the best quality out of new technology. As early as 1964, he spoke publicly about the emerging role of computers, and fully half of the essays here deal with electronic type. His positive attitude toward technological change has definitely attracted other calligraphers to high technology, helping to bridge older traditions and the cutting edge.

Three former Zapf students have become leading pioneers in digital type design in the United States. Chuck Bigelow and Kris Holmes took Zapf's summer workshop at Rochester Institute of Technology. Bigelow later received a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship for his work in digital type generation, and their firm, Bigelow & Holmes, has become prominent for its work in digital type design. Sumner Stone, now type director at Adobe Systems, briefly worked at Hallmark cards to be near Zapf, who was their advisor and lettering tutor.

Bigelow, Holmes, and Stone got their start as calligraphers in Lloyd Reynolds's classes at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, where Stone remembers seeing the film, *The Art of Hermann Zapf*, produced by Hallmark. This led to a closer study of Zapf's calligraphy and type design, ultimately leading to digital type design. Although Bigelow, Holmes, and Stone may all have come to the new technology without Zapf's leadership, it is important to remember that his espousal of computers was not a popular view. The normal response to the arrival of phototype and then digital type was mistrust and a longing for the good old days. We can see from these essays that Zapf had the wisdom to take the long view, knowing that any new technology needed to mature, and the first clumsy steps were a necessary stage. He also knew that if skilled letter-artists did not step in, the engineers could make costly mistakes, which might delay the arrival of quality typesetting. Zapf helped to legitimize the technological future for calligraphers and typographers who were often spellbound by the past.

His role in calligraphy deserves further mention. I believe that there is no one alive who surpasses Zapf's virtuosity with the pen, and his work speaks for itself through the book's many plates. The four opening essays on calligraphy total only seven pages, but he makes it clear that calligraphy is the foundation for his work in type design. Calligraphy is
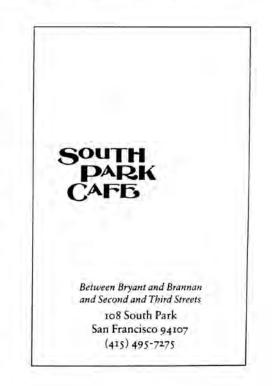
the critical confrontation with historic forms of a great tradition, a tradition that, if it is to survive, must be carried on within the conditions of our time. The many great inspirations of the past must serve as a starting point for practical applications in today's society. . . .

Freedom and discipline are the black and white counterparts in calligraphy, and it is in the hands of the calligrapher, matured by years of experience and training, to unite this freedom and discipline into harmony.

Zapf's "dance of the pen," rather than his more formal type design, is easiest to appreciate. His calligraphy expresses, through its gestures alone, a joy and mastery that thrills much as hearing a virtuoso musician or seeing a great dancer.

The masterpieces of the book, in my opinion, are five of the color calligraphy plates (done between 1969 and 1971) in sgraffito oil and tempera technique on prepared panels (plates 148–9, 161–2, 168). They each contain a geometric drawing plus calligraphy or lettering, rendered against mottled backgrounds in rich, subtle

colors, roughly two feet high. The words are from diverse sources: Lao-tzu, Goethe, Plato, Josef Albers, and the American calligrapher, Paul Standard. Each of these panels is a distillation of Zapf's best, demonstrating his unequaled ability to "unite freedom and discipline into harmony."

Many of the typefaces Zapf has designed are very calligraphic, including the little-known proprietary alphabets for Hallmark Cards: Firenze, Uncial, Winchester, Charlemagne, Stratford, and Scriptura, all displayed in the book's "Complete List of Type Designs." A special surprise for me was Linofilm Venture, based partly on Zapf's own informal handwriting and first sketched with a Japanese felt pen. While most of Zapf's cursive types are dressed up as if for a dinner party, Venture is in blue jeans and sneakers. Its informality stands out strongly against Zapf's usual elegance.

A more substantial typeface, shown here for the first time, is Zapf Renaissance Roman and Italic (plus Bold and Light versions.) The italic has many swash variants and ligatures, rivaling Jan Van Krimpen's Cancelleresca Bastarda for variety. This is a virtuoso design. The delicate serifs and thin strokes indicate that it was not intended as a utilitarian textface, but rather for display or short texts in larger sizes.

A recurring theme in Zapf's essays is the lack of copyright protection for typeface designs. Except for Germany and France, international copyright law does not cover typefaces. As a result, piracy is legal, depriving designers not only of income but also of control against unauthorized changes in the designs. Zapf laments that his efforts and those of his colleagues to influence copyright law have failed in the United States. One explanation that I hear from time to time is that Congress feared that allowing individuals to copyright alphabets could endanger freedom of the press. The logic of that is as faulty as the copyright law.

Zapf may have inadvertently hurt the cause by citing three lawsuits where the courts ruled in favor of the pirates: American Type Founders against Damon & Peets for making electrotype copies of ATF

"Zapf Renaissance Italic," Zapf. (From *Hermann Zapf*.)

Cheltenham in 1905; Keystone Type Foundry against Portland Publishing Company; and in 1917, Frederick W. Goudy, then America's most prominent type designer, against a copyist named Hansen. In one decision, Zapf tells us unhappily, the court wrote, "Type has no other characteristics except utility." No legal precedent is cited in support of Zapf's position.

Zapf praises the International Typeface Corporation (ITC) for devising methods of trade that encourage legitimate licensing of their typefaces to other vendors. As a result, ITC has been largely successful in preventing unauthorized copying of its typefaces, including ITC Zapf Chancery, ITC Zapf Book, and ITC Zapf International.

Subsequent to the publication of this book, Zapf has lent his support to the new

Typeface Design Coalition. The TDC is supporting the Industrial Innovation and Technology Act (S. 791 and H.R. 379), which provides some protection for designs of "useful articles," including typefaces.

There have been other developments in the past few years, again not cited in the book, which demonstrate a trend within the type industry to act in accord with Zapf's ideas. In the absence of legal protection, segments of the industry have been self-regulating—believing ethical guidelines to be good business.

A key dispute has been whether typefaces should be licensed as a standard practice, or whether licenses should be granted selectively at the discretion of the typeface company. Zapf is a spokesman for the de-

signers who want the licenses to be sold to any firm willing to meet the standard terms (they are willing to grant a two-year period of exclusivity to allow the company to recover its development costs).

This stand has brought Zapf into conflict with Linotype, the owner of three of Zapf's best typefaces: Palatino, Optima, and Melior. It has been suggested that Linotype, by refusing licenses to several companies, may have inadvertently encouraged design piracy. When denied a license for popular designs like Zapf's, some vendors have taken the last resort (legal nevertheless) of making unauthorized copies and giving them new names.

In response to this disagreement, the Association Typographique Internationale (ATypI) proposed a moral code regarding the copying of typefaces, with interesting results for Zapf. The code stated that any company denied a license could ethically copy the design of typefaces at least 15 years old. The 15 years was later softened to "an appropriate space of time."

The ironic consequence for Zapf was that when Bitstream, a digital type company in Massachusetts, was denied licenses to Linotype Palatino, Melior, and Optima (all more than thirty years old), Zapf worked as a paid consultant to Bitstream, personally supervising the copying of these faces. Renamed Zapf Calligraphic, Zapf Elliptical, and Zapf Humanist, each received significant minor design adjustments. Bitstream reports that Zapf now prefers his unlicensed, digital versions to the original metal designs he made for Linotype.

Matthew Carter, the creative director at Bitstream and a superb type designer himself, is very sensitive to the ethical issues surrounding typeface copying. Perhaps Bitstream's alliance with Zapf will help to free up the licensing process, or else encourage companies to work directly with the designers when making typeface copies under the ATypI ethical guidelines.

Zapf's ideas on typeface licensing have also had considerable influence on Adobe Systems of Mountain View, California. Adobe is the largest vendor of digital typefaces for use with desktop computers, and

its type division, like Bitstream, is under the creative direction of a leading type designer: Sumner Stone.

Consistent with Zapf's advice, Stone has voluntarily brought Adobe into licensing arrangements with ITC, Linotype, and other major type companies. As a result, designers and vendors have received their fair share of the sales, and have been reassured about the integrity of the designs. Stone in turn has earned the trust of the type designers with whom he is now working to develop totally new typefaces.

At Bitstream, Carter too has earned the confidence of his colleagues, and is bringing out a series of new typefaces, including Bitstream Carmina, designed by Zapf's wife, Gudrun Zapf von Hesse, and Bitstream Amerigo, by the Dutch designer Gerard Unger.

This story of design protection demonstrates that these essays by Zapf have had an enormous impact on their audience, and have helped to shape business practice during these times of rapid change. Although he has yet to see true copyright protection, Zapf has helped the industry find other forms of protection, and has clarified the issues so that we can discuss them more productively.

In Zapf's closing essay, "Public Lettering and Visual Pollution," he contemplates the jungle of signs and advertisements in public places, where

everything is too large and brutal looking; bad letterforms predominate. . . . Unfortunately, it seems everything that increases business disturbs the good image of a city.

Zapf proposes restrictions, such as limiting certain colors for use only in traffic signs, and praises Dayton, Ohio; Kansas City, Missouri; and Rothenburg and Dinkelsbühl, West Germany, for successfully regulating street signs.

He then entreats architects to improve the quality of letters on buildings. "Some architects think that if they use a sans serif typeface everything will look modern." Since very little about the history of letterforms is taught in schools of architecture, Zapf suggests that the architect find a graphic

designer to choose the lettering for the building. He mentions the excellent letterforms created by John E. Benson of Newport, Rhode Island, for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Benson, who carves letters in stone, has done many important commissions, including the East Wing of the National Gallery and the Boston Public Library. In San Francisco, Christopher Stinehour is emerging as another master carver of letters for buildings.

Zapf also examines subway lettering, praising Edward Johnston's 1916 alphabets for the London Underground, and deploring Milan's use of tightly spaced capitals, which are hard to read from a moving train. Not one to make idle complaints, Zapf is full of suggestions, and even refers us to organizations (ICOGRADA, AIGA, and AGI) that offer advice to architects and public planners.

In addition to the plates and essays, this wonderful book lists the publications, films, and articles by Zapf, his complete type designs (including illustrations and annotations), and extensive comments on the plates. Zapf's brilliance with letterforms, his thoughtfulness, and his enthusiasm for grappling with the challenges of technology and commerce are well documented here. This is, in my opinion, a book deserving careful study by anyone who works with letterforms, or who just wants to feast his or her eyes on sublime designs.