

Stop Stealing Sheep & find out how type works

Erik Spiekermann



Third Edition

Stop Stealing Sheep

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& find out how type works

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ADOBE
PRESS



Adobe

**Stop Stealing Sheep
& find out how type works**

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This Adobe Press book is published by Peachpit, a division of Pearson Education.

For the latest on Adobe Press books, go to www.adobepress.com. To report errors, please send a note to errata@peachpit.com.

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Acquisitions Editor: Nikki Echler McDonald
Production Editor: David Van Ness
Proofreader: Emily Wolman
Indexer: James Minkin
Cover Design: Erik Spiekermann

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ISBN 13: 978-0-321-93428-4

ISBN 10: 0-321-93428-8

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed and bound
in the United States of America

Page 8	Chapter 1	Type is everywhere. Type exists. It is a fundamental part of our lives. These simple facts are essential to understanding how to communicate more effectively.
26	2	What is type? Between type's past and its future, our present understanding of type is rooted in who we are and how we communicate. Type is a living entity integrated into society's moods and trends.
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60	4	Type with a purpose. Choosing typefaces for a particular purpose need not be more intimidating than planning your wardrobe. Matching an appropriate typeface with the right task is easy.
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180	10	There is no bad type. Type is a basic element of communication. As the means of communicating changes, type evolves in unique and lively ways.
196	11	Final form. Bibliography, list of typefaces, index.



11-06
(11-06)
11-06

STEALING SHEEP? Letterspacing lower case? Professionals in all trades, whether they be dentists, carpenters, or nuclear scientists, communicate in languages that seem secretive and incomprehensible to outsiders; type designers and typographers are no exception.

Typographic terminology sounds cryptic enough

We see so much type that we sometimes stop looking. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as in the case of this sign, which tells us that we may not enter this street between eleven and six, nor between eleven and six, and certainly not between eleven and six.

to put off anyone but the most hard-nosed typomaniac. The aim of this book is to clarify the language of typography for people who want to communicate more effectively with type.

These days people need better ways to communicate to more diverse audiences. We know from experience that what we have to say is much easier for others to understand if we

put it in the right voice; type is that voice, the visible language linking writer and reader. With thousands of typefaces available, choosing the right one to express even the simplest idea is bewildering to most everyone but practiced professionals.

Familiar images are used in this book to show that typography is not an art for the chosen few, but a powerful tool for anyone who has something to say and needs to say it in print or on a screen. You will have ample opportunity to find out why there are so many typefaces, how they ought to be used, and why more of them are needed every day.

This is a sidebar. As you can see by the small type, the copy here is not for the faint of heart, nor for the casual reader. All the information that might be a little heady for novices is in these narrow columns; it is, however, right at hand when one becomes infected by one's first attacks of typomania.

For those who already know something about type and typography and who simply want to check some facts, read some gossip, and shake their heads at my opinionated comments, this is the space to watch.

In 1936, Frederic Goudy was in New York City to receive an award for excellence in type design. Upon accepting a certificate, he took one look at it and declared that "Anyone who would letter-space black letter would steal sheep." Goudy actually used another expression, one unfit for print. This was an uncomfortable moment for the man sitting in the audience who had hand lettered the award certificate. Mr. Goudy later apologized profusely, claiming that he said that about everything.

You might have noticed that my book cover reads "lower case," while here it reads "black letter"—two very different things. Lower case letters, as opposed to CAPITAL LETTERS, are what you are now reading; black letter isn't seen very often and looks like this.

I'm not sure how "black letter" in this anecdote got changed to "lower case," but I've always known it to be the latter; whichever way, it makes infinite sense. By the time you finish this book I hope you will understand and be amused by Mr. Goudy's pronouncement.



See the changes made to the sign in the last two decades: the small picture on the right is from this book's first edition, printed in 1992; the one on its left is from the second edition in 2003.

PAUL WATZLAWICK

One cannot *not* communicate.

Equity

Paul Watzlawick (1921–2007) is author of *Pragmatics of Human Communication*, a book about the influence of media on peoples' behavior. "One cannot not communicate" is known as Watzlawick's First Axiom of Communication.

CHAPTER 4

*Type with
a purpose.*



YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE. It's late at night, your plane leaves at 6 AM, you're still packing, and you just can't decide what to put into that suitcase.

Picking typefaces for a design job is a very similar experience. There are certain typefaces you are familiar with. You know how they will behave under certain circumstances, and you know where they are. On the other hand, there are those fashionable types that you've always wanted to use, but you're not quite sure if this job is the right one to experiment on. This is just like choosing which shoes to take on your trip – the comfortable ones are not the height of fashion, but the fashionable ones hurt. You might be able to stand them for a short reception, but not for shopping, let alone for a hike into the countryside.

Before you pack your font suitcase, you need to look at the task ahead. Strike a balance between practicality and aesthetics – that's what design is all about.

Gulliver is Gerard Unger's solution for many problems in newspaper design and production. It fits 20% more copy into the columns without sacrificing legibility and is sturdy enough to be carelessly printed on recycled paper. Quite a few newspapers around the world use it to good effect.

Coranto is Unger's latest typeface for newspapers. Designed in 2000, it is being used for *The Scotsman* as well as newspapers in Sweden and Brazil.

Tobias Frere-Jones's work on Poynter was sponsored by the Poynter Institute to answer the same question. He asked himself: how to retain copy without losing readers? As we read best what we read most, the designer stuck to familiar forms and returned to Hendrik van den Keere's seventeenth-century oldstyle roman. As different methods of reproduction and printing may add or reduce weight by a fraction, Poynter Oldstyle Text is offered in four grades.

While nobody has ever classified typefaces according to their problem-solving capabilities, many typefaces we use today were originally designed for particular purposes. Some of them are mentioned on page 33, but there are many more. Times New Roman was specially produced in 1931 for the London newspaper that gave its name to the typeface. In the late 1930s, Mergenthaler Linotype in the USA (led by Chauncey H. Griffith) developed a group of five typefaces designed to be legible despite the rigors of newspaper printing. They were, not surprisingly, called the "Legibility Group," and two of them are still very popular today: Corona and Excelsior. It might seem odd that legibility has to be a special concern when designing a typeface, but there are plenty of fonts around that are meant to be seen, not read; these typefaces are very much like clothes that look great but barely protect the wearer from the elements.

Handgloves

.....
TIMES NEW ROMAN

Handgloves

.....
CORONA

Handgloves

.....
EXCELSIOR

Handgloves

.....
GULLIVER

Handgloves

.....
CORANTO

Handgloves

.....
POYNTER OLDSTYLE BOLD

hand hand hand hand

.....
POYNTER TEXT ONE POYNTER TEXT TWO POYNTER TEXT THREE POYNTER TEXT FOUR



Going on vacation doesn't necessarily mean traveling to a warm climate, but it always means we can leave behind many of our conventions, including the way we normally dress — or have to dress, as the case may be. You pick your clothes according to what is practical: easy to pack, easy to clean, and according to what is fun: casual, colorful, loose, and maybe a little more daring than what you would wear in your hometown. The typographic equivalents are those typefaces that are comfortable to read, but which may be a little more idiosyncratic than your run-of-the-mill stuff. Serifs, too, can be casual, and "loose fit" is actually a typesetting term describing letters that have a comfortable amount of space between them. As it happens, quite a few of the very early typefaces from the Renaissance and their modern equivalents fit that description. They still show their kinship with Italian handwriting, which by necessity had to be more casual than rigid metal letters. If you were a scribe in the papal office and had to write hundreds of pages every day, you wouldn't be able to take the time to fuss over formal capitals. So the scribes developed a fluent, cursive handwriting, which today we call italic, because it was invented in Italy. You will have noticed that this whole page is set in a script font, and it feels quite comfortable. A conventional rule says that you can't set whole pages, let alone books, in the italics of a typeface. The only reason it might not work is because we're not used to it. As pointed out on page 41, we read best what we read most. But that's no reason not to take a vacation from our daily habits and look at something different, at least once a year.

To make a typeface look as casually elegant as FF Fontesque takes a lot of experience and effort. Nick Shinn designed Fontesque in 1994. It wasn't his first design, and it shows. Cafeteria indeed started on Tobias Frere-Jones' napkin, and he managed to balance activity with legibility in this freeform sans serif face.

Some typefaces have a leisurely look about them while conforming to everyday typographic expectations. Others were born with unusual, yet casual, shapes and make the best of it.

Stempel Schneidler combines friendly letter shapes with high legibility — you can use it every day without it becoming restrictive like a necktie.

A typeface that looks casual, even "nice," but is still good for real work is ITC Flora. It was designed by the Dutch type designer Gerard Unger in 1980 and named after his daughter. Ellington, released in 1990, is a design by Michael Harvey, the English lettering artist and stone carver. Both typefaces are quite unusual and therefore not often thought of as useful text faces. But they are.

Many typefaces designed to look "friendly" tend to appear patronizing. They can be so nice that you quickly get tired of them. When you're looking for casual typefaces, the obvious candidates are, of course, the scripts. Most, however, are not suited to long spells of reading, just as sandals are very comfortable, but not when walking on rocky roads.

Handgloves

STEMPEL SCHNEIDLER

Handgloves

ITC FLORA

Handgloves

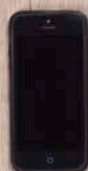
ELLINGTON

Handgloves

FF FONTESQUE

Handgloves

FB CAFETERIA



Most type is used for business communication of one sort or another, so it has to conform to both written and unwritten rules of the corporate world. Just as business people are expected to wear a suit (plus, naturally, a shirt and tie), text set for business has to look fairly serious and go about its purpose in an inconspicuous, well-organized way. Typefaces, such as Times New Roman and Helvetica fit this bill perfectly, not by their particular suitability but more by their lack of individualism.

However, just as it is now permissible in traditional business circles to wear fashionable ties and to even venture into the realm of Italian suits that are not black or dark blue, typographic tastes in those circles has widened to include other typefaces, from Palatino to Frutiger.

Generally, it is very simple to classify a particular business by the typefaces it prefers: the more technical a profession, the cooler and more rigid its typefaces (Univers for architects); the more traditional a trade, the more classical its typefaces (Bodoni for bankers).

The trouble is that there is no law against speculators employing a true classic, trustworthy typeface in their brochures, lending these unsavory entities typographic credibility, although nothing else.

To show the subtle differences between fonts at this size, we've set the copy at left in a variety of types, one for each paragraph. Handgloves at the bottom of this column shows them in sequence.

Frutiger, originally designed in 1976 by Adrian Frutiger for the signage at the Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris, has become one of the most popular typefaces for corporate use.

Palatino, designed by Hermann Zapf in 1952, owes its popularity – especially in the USA – largely to its availability as a core font on PostScript laser printers. It is nevertheless a welcome alternative to other, less suitable, serif fonts.

Adrian Frutiger designed Univers in 1957. It was the first typeface to be planned with a coordinated range of weights and widths, comprising twenty-one related designs, recently expanded to 59 weights (see page 89).

ITC Bodoni is one of many redesigns of Giambattista Bodoni's classic typefaces from the late eighteenth century. It shows more color and stroke variations than other Bodoni revivals, and is available in three versions for different sizes.

Handgloves

FRUTIGER

Handgloves

PALATINO

Handgloves

UNIVERS

Handgloves

ITC BODONI SIX

Handgloves

ITC BODONI TWELVE

Handgloves

ITC BODONI SEVENTYTWO





①

THE REAL WORKHORSE

TM

④

FF UNIT MEDIUM

②

③

If it were just a little heavier, News Gothic by Morris Fuller Benton, 1908, would be a favorite workhorse typeface. ITC Franklin Gothic, a 1980's re-design of Benton's original typeface from 1904, has more weights as well as a condensed and a compressed version plus small caps.

Lucas de Groot designed his Thesis family from the outset with 144 weights. The Thesis Sans family has become an alternative to Frutiger in corporate circles, as it is both neutral and versatile. Lucida Sans, by Kris Holmes and Charles Bigelow, 1985, has sturdy, rugged letter shapes. Its sister typeface, Lucida, remains one of the best choices for business communications printed on laser printers and fax machines.

FF Meta has been called the "Helvetica of the 90s." While that may be dubious praise, Meta is a warm, humanist alternative to the classic sans faces. Lots of detail make it legible in small sizes and "cool" rather than neutral. You should also look at the condensed weights of Frutiger as useful, but underused alternatives.

FF Profil is one of a new generation of modern sans faces. Designed by Martin Wenzel in 1999. PTL Skopex Gothic is Andrea Tinnes' take on the classic Angloamerican genre, it gives News Gothic an interesting twist.

■ Calling a typeface "a real workhorse" doesn't mean that others don't work, it just means that it is one of those that don't look very glamorous and is consequently not likely to be known by name; such types, however, are used every day by designers and typesetters because of their reliability.

● If you set a catalog for machine parts, or instructions for using a fire extinguisher, you're not worried about subtly curved serifs or classicist contrast. You need letters that are: clearly distinguishable; compact, so enough of them fit into a limited space (is there ever enough space?); and sufficiently sturdy to withstand the rigors of printing and copying. Here's what is needed in a hardworking typeface:

① A good regular weight – not so light that it will disappear on a photocopy (everything, it seems, gets copied at least once these days), and not so heavy that the letter shapes fill in.

② At least one bold weight, with enough contrast to be noticed, to complement the regular weight.

③ Very legible numerals – these must be particularly robust because confusing figures can be, in the worst of cases, downright dangerous.

④ Economy – it should be narrow enough to fit large amounts of copy into the available space, but not actually compressed beyond recognition. A typeface fitting this description would also fare very well when faxed.

FF MARK BOLD

Handgloves Handgloves

NEWS GOTHIC

Handgloves Handgloves

ITC FRANKLIN GOTHIC

Handgloves Handgloves

THEESIS SANS

Handgloves Handgloves

INTERSTATE

Handgloves Handgloves

GOTHAM

Handgloves Handgloves

FF META

Handgloves Handgloves

FF META CONDENSED

Handgloves Handgloves

FRUTIGER CONDENSED

Handgloves Handgloves

FF PROFIL

Handgloves Handgloves

PTL SKOPEX GOTHIC

Handgloves Handgloves

ITC OFFICINA



*One
of the few sanctuaries for old
aristocratic traditions is
Society.*

SNELL ROUNDHAND

*Top hats, cummerbunds, patent
leather shoes, and coats with tails are all
remnants of the eighteenth century,
when countries were run by
kings and queens who spoke French to
each other and their entourages.*

SNELL ROUNDHAND

NOT

FF SCALA JEWELS

*much of that remains, except for maitres
d'hôtel at posh restaurants who fake French
accents and wear coats with tails.*

KÜNSTLER SCRIPT

OF COURSE

MRS. EAVES

*French is still the official language
of the diplomatic corps. Typographically speaking,
we have reminders of these somewhat
antiquated traditions in the accepted and expected ways
of designing invitations and programs.*

MRS. EAVES ITALIC

CENTERED TYPE AND
A PREFERENCE FOR FONTS THAT COME
FROM A GOOD BACKGROUND IN
COPPER ENGRAVING OR
UPPER CRUST CALLIGRAPHY.

COPPERPLATE

And, of course,

MATRIX SCRIPT INLINE

those very familiar four letters, »rsvp«, which mean
»please let us know whether you're going to be there,«
but actually stand for »Répondez s'il vous plaît.«

SUBURBAN LIGHT

There is no category known as "formal fonts," but a number of typefaces come from that background. The text at the left is set in Snell Roundhand, a formal script from the 1700s, redesigned in 1965 by Matthew Carter.

Apart from formal scripts such as Snell, Künstler Script, and others like it, there are the aptly named copperplates. They look formal and distinguished and are even available in a range of weights and versions, but they all lack one important feature: lowercase characters.

Other typefaces that owe their appearance to the process of engraving into steel as opposed to writing with a quill or cutting into wood are Walbaum, Bauer Bodoni, or ITC Fenice. They can look formal and aristocratic enough to make a favorable impression when printed on fine paper.

While FF Scala Jewels is an extension of the FF Scala family by Martin Majoor from 1993, which is a contemporary interpretation of classic book typefaces, Mrs. Eaves is Zuzana Licko's idiosyncratic take on Baskerville, as seen from Berkeley, California in 1996. It is named after Sarah Eaves, the woman who became John Baskerville's wife. Licko's Matrix Script Inline from 1992 gets closer to American vernacular, and Rudy VanderLans' 1993 Suburban connects classic scripts with, well, suburban neon signs. And, as VanderLans proudly proclaims, Suburban is the only typeface in existence today that uses an upside down / as a y.



FUTURA

on the town

LYON TEXT

Going out on the town allows us to do the things
we don't get to do in the office,
and to wear all the trendy stuff that we can never
resist buying but don't really need
on a day-to-day basis.

THEINHARDT

typetrends

FF DIN /
FF DIN CONDENSED

There are typefaces that are only suitable
for the more occasional occasion. They
might be too hip to be used for mainstream
communication, or they could simply
be too uncomfortable – a bit like wearing
very tight jeans rather than admitting that
they don't fit us any longer. Very often
these offbeat fonts are both – tight in the crotch
and extroverted.

INTERSTATE BOLD CONDENSED

FUN FONTS

INTERSTATE LIGHT

The entertainment value of this sort of typographical work
is often higher than that of the straightforward corporate stuff,
so there's a great deal of satisfaction gained not only from
the words, but also from the fun of being able to work with really
unusual fonts.

GRAPHIK

NEUE HELVETICA 75

Fashionable faces

One thing leather jackets have on trendy typefaces is
that the jackets get better as they get older, which is more
than can be said about some of the typefaces we loved
in the 1980s but would be too embarrassed to ask for now.
Like all fashions, however, they keep coming back.
Don't throw away your old fonts – keep them for your kids.

What makes typefaces trendy is
almost unpredictable – much to
the chagrin of the people who have
to market them. A corporation, a
magazine, a TV channel can pick a
typeface, expose it to the public,
and a new typographic fashion
can be born. But, like with fashion
and pop music, it usually takes
more than one designer in the
right place at the right time pick-
ing the right font off a web site
or out of a catalog.

Typography is as much a mirror
of what goes in society as the
styling of cell phones or cars.
Cars still take half a dozen years
from concept to production, so
their designers have to anticipate
trends. As cars are the icons of our
mobile society, their design, in
turn, does create trends. While
technology allows us to produce a
font in weeks – if not hours – from
rough sketches or ideas, it still
takes a few years for a typeface to
get to market and to the attention
of the font-buying public. Right
now, early in the 21st century, we
are seeing a return to the time-
honored classics and their modern
interpretations. We have also
learned to live with bitmaps, both
as a necessity and as a fashion
statement. Most industrial type-
styles have been exploited, from
monospaced typewriter faces
through electronic font generators
to industrial signage. And some of
the most used typefaces were first
produced for the signs above or
freeways. Interstate is Tobias
Frere-Jones' interpretation of
the white-on-green letters in the
USA, while FF Din expands
the model used on Germany's
autobahn. Ironically, if a typeface
has been designed for one par-
ticular purpose, it seems to look
really good on anything else.

BROADWAY LINE
AND STREET

TO 8TH STREET
←

METROPOLITAN AVE
GRAND STREET

23RD STREET

CLINTON-
WASHINGTON AV.

LORIMER ST.

14TH

AVE

PENN. STATION

TO CROSSTOWN LINE
→

As long as you print on paper, the choice of typeface is first and foremost governed by the content of the message, then the intended audience, and only lastly by technical constraints.

Architectural type has to compromise between materials and legibility. A mosaic made up of millions of pieces would allow for smoother letter-shapes, but would neither be as durable nor as affordable as one with coarser bits.

When we move from almost limitless resolution on paper to images generated by cathod rays or liquid crystals, we enter a world of optical illusions.

Those have to make up for the lack of high fidelity and trick our eyes into seeing life-like images rather than spots of colored light (see page 132). On the screen, colors are not mixed from

CMYK: cyan, yellow, magenta, and black

(the k really stands for key), but are broken down into RGB: red, green, and blue; letters are composed of course lines or dots, and black is not an ink, but the absence of light. Typefaces have to work very hard under these conditions. There is no room here for leisure fonts, nor for scripts or some of the trendy faces that hide more than they reveal. The workhorses for “old” media work well in the new. Rugged construction, clear counter spaces, easily discernible figures and well defined weights have all been mentioned before as being prerequisites for anything which has to be read under less than ideal circumstances.

And whatever progress technology brings in the future – staring into light coming from a screen is not what human eyes were made for.

All those minute details that make a good typeface pleasant to behold and easy to read, actually add noise. The absence of these details would make the type look cold and technical, as if generated by machines and legible only for machines.

The designer of typefaces suitable for on-screen reading has to balance the requirements of the precise but cold medium (light emitted by all sorts of tubes, crystals, diodes, and plasmas) against our need for subtle contrast and soft shapes. And as most of what we read on screen eventually gets printed as well, these alphabets have to offer enough traditional beauty for us to accept them against the competition we've grown used to over 500 years.

Slightly extended lettershapes have more open counters and are thus more legible, but need more space. Subtle contrast between thin horizontals and thicker verticals doesn't translate well into single pixels and tiny serifs may look delicate in display sizes, but on a screen will only add noise at 10pt or less.

The screen fonts offered by Microsoft and Apple work well under all circumstances, but have become too ubiquitous to lend an individual note.

Matthew Carter's Verdana has become a very successful face on paper as well, while Bigelow & Holmes' Lucida, initially designed for laser-printers in 1983, looks also great in high-resolution and is one of the best screen fonts around. FF Typestar by Steffen Sauerteig has those rugged shapes reminiscent of typewriter faces and suited for rough conditions on screen or paper.

Handgloves

Look at these faces at very small sizes and you get an idea of how they will perform on screen.

Handgloves

Look at these faces at very small sizes and you get an idea of how they will perform on screen.

Handglove

Look at these faces at very small sizes and you get an idea of how they will perform on screen.

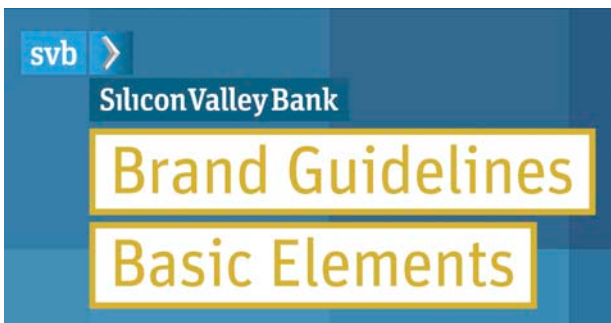
And if a text is mainly meant for the screen and for very small sizes, pure bitmap fonts work well. If you print them, the pixels are small enough to all but disappear. This is 7pt Tenacity Condensed, a bitmap font from Joe Gillespie.

CEAD

P

Brands have to speak their own authentic language. Type is visible language. Using a bland or overused typeface will make the brand and its products or media equally bland and even invisible. Having an exclusive typeface designed or adapted used to be expensive, technically challenging, and difficult to implement. Not anymore. Whether it's just one weight for a packaged product or a large system for everything, corporate fonts have become a major source of work for type designers.

Some companies take an existing face and simply change the name to make it more identifiable – license models exist for that purpose. While they're at it, they often add their logo or other glyphs that can then be accessed via the keyboard. And if the chairman (or his wife) doesn't like the shape of a certain character, that can also be adapted. All with the blessing and preferably the involvement of the original type designer. As a lot of these people are no longer available (think Bodoni, Caslon, or Garamond), the foundry that has the license for the particular typeface will be happy to help.



In 1990, Kurt Weidemann designed a trilogy of faces for Mercedes-Benz that was, in fact, a comprehensive system for all their brands and subbrands. Corporate A stands for Antiqua, the serif version for the car brand; S is Sans, intended for the trucks division; and E is Egyptienne, the slab typeface for the engineering group. This was the first typographic tribe, a family of families. It is no longer exclusive to Mercedes-Benz, so every backstreet garage can now have at least a premium name over the door.

Handgloves

CORPORATE A

Handgloves

CORPORATE S

Handgloves

CORPORATE E

Silicon Valley Bank took the easier route: they chose FF Unit and FF Unit Slab, changed the name for easier recognition, and got a license to distribute it to their suppliers and branches.

Handgloves

SVB SANS

Handgloves

SVB SLAB

When General Electric started work on its new brand position in 2004, it commissioned an exclusive typeface to express the new direction, perhaps too transparently named GE Inspira. It works well for a large company that makes everything from jet engines to lightbulbs.

Handgloves

GE INSPIRA REGULAR

Handgloves

GE INSPIRA BOLD

SHERLOCK HOLMES

No, Watson,
this was
not done by
accident,
but by design.

Monotype Baskerville

Sherlock Holmes is a fictional detective created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930). Holmes' extraordinary powers of deductive reasoning carry him, along with his somewhat befuddled partner Dr. Watson, through some of the most complex mysteries in detective fiction.

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