

Whippoorwill E-Comment

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ON TYPEFACES

Does the typeface in the heading look familiar? Here's how it looks when you see it on TV.

WALT DISNEY PRESENTS

I doubt that this face ever existed in a metal font because it is not a particularly good looking face. It is obviously a titling font and would never be considered as a book face. I like it when used very judiciously.

This brief article is about some of my adventures in type faces. When I first joined the AAPA many moons ago, letterpress reigned. There were a few papers reproduced by mimeograph, which many members seemed to consider second-class publications. Typewriter faces were so ordinary, and had very little beauty. Besides, with fixed inflexible type sizes and spacing, either pica or elite, lines could not be justified without inserting ugly extra spaces between words. Justification always looked artificial.

I knew virtually nothing about typefaces, but as a beginning hand press printer, it was fun to study the history of typography and learn about the venerable tradition of the hand punch-cutters who were reported to have created beautiful type faces. I had little understanding about what *beauty* meant, though some faces in the small bundle papers looked better than others

to my inexperienced eye. It took me a while to learn the basic faces. There were many articles in the bundles extolling *My Favorite Typeface*. I read them avidly and in a short time the typographic prejudices of the few active members became mine. I began buying types that were praised and learned there were some faces that had to be avoided at all costs.

Century Expanded was damned by one self-appointed expert who said it was a poor book face. And there were some really ugly faces that no self-respecting hobby printer should ever consider, the chief example of which was Cheltenham. One only had to glance at a lower-case g to see why it was a lousy face.

g

I avoided the face for years and collected traditional book faces which I was told I couldn't go wrong in choosing. I truly learned to love Garamond, Caslon, Baskerville, Centaur and a number of other classical faces. I found great beauty in a Garamond lower case g, and even wrote about it once.

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After a while I had to admit that I had become a type snob. I couldn't stand to read a page of typewriter type, nor would I write a letter with such a face. Courier was better than the old standard face, but only marginally so.

Through the years I have created a few lengthy books with hand-set type, which was more a test of discipline than anything else, and discovered that Century Expanded, Kelsey's old Century Roman face, was superior in legibility to most other faces I had. It just had to be leaded an extra 1 point, and often 2 points and it looked like a completely different, easy to read face. Fred Liddle put me onto that fact, for which I was appreciative. Cheltenham proved to be a beautiful, very clean and evenly spaced face that I have used successfully despite the bastard g. I began to question many of the authoritative proclamations and evaluations of type faces by some amateur journalists.

The revolution in printing that has occurred in the last 30 or so years, and the evolution of computers and digital typography freed me to experiment endlessly with faces I never had hopes of owning and using. We have witnessed the near abandonment of letterpress printing in the AAPA bundle, and the ardent embracing of desktop publishing using true-type fonts. Still, I don't recall reading any *My Favorite Computer Type Face* articles.

Most hobby printers seem to avoid some excellent faces, such as Times Roman and Baskerville. Times is the most basic Roman face today in computer generated copy. For the purist, of course many true-type fonts are not really authentic reproductions of the metal versions. Some are though. Check out Harold Segal's Baskerville 353, which is a true copy. His digital

typography, like his metal, is impeccable.

What are my favorite digital typefaces? I will compile a short list:

Garamond, Bookman Old Style, Baskerville, Bembo, Caslon, Cheltenham, Californian, Century Expanded, Janson, Perpetua, Times New Roman, & Georgia.

As you can see, I still prefer the classical type faces. The face used to create this small journal is Palatino. I found that most typefaces look much alike in very small sizes, and the personalities of the letters are not detectible until they are ,much larger. Note that my changing typographic tastes preferences still militates against san-serif faces. Surely the most attractive such face is Hermann Zapf's Optima. And I believe that the sharp even appearance of a laser printed page of a choice typeface on a decent paper is something that many letterpress hobby printers would trade their souls to accomplish. I find the greatest beauty of printing that is done on large flatbed hand presses on dampened handmade paper.

I urge you not to accept uncritically, the recommendations of self-proclaimed typographic experts. And most certainly, not mine! The operant word is *uncritically*. Experiment with different type faces and make up your own mind as to what looks attractive. This is easily done on a computer.



This is the work of J. Hill Hamon, a long time AAPA member who lives at 1515 Evergreen Road, Frankfort, Kentucky 40601. KyHamon@AOL.COM who wonders why, after producing 42 e-journals for the association, they are not considered worthy of being listed by the Historian in the official AAJ records.