

A Brief History of Fonts in Transit

Before you fall back on the old standbys of Helvetica and Gotham, here are a few fonts favored by wayfinding designers and the histories behind them.

DIN

DIN PRO LIGHT

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()“”‘’

DIN PRO REGULAR

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()“”‘’

DIN PRO MEDIUM

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()“”‘’

DIN PRO BOLD

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()“”‘’

DIN PRO BLACK

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()“”‘’

HISTORY

DIN, an acronym for the German Deutsches Institut für Normung (German Institute for Standardization), and the name of an increasingly large realist sans-serif typeface family. In 1936 the German Standard Committee selected DIN 1451 as the standard typeface for use in the areas of engineering, technology, traffic, administration and business. Among the other recommendations adopted by this committee was an early precursor to the typographic grid.

The earliest version of a DIN typeface was released by the D Stempel AG foundry in 1923. Stempel's design was based on a 1905 typeface for the Königlich Preußische Eisenbahn-Verwaltung (Royal Prussian Railway Administration) and was applied mostly to schematics and blueprints. This version later became the basis for DIN-Engschrift (Condensed). In 1929, the Berthold foundry released a version, and it, too, was used mostly for technical drawings. Both of the early DIN typefaces were made available as lettering templates cut from an acetate material for drafting use. Both of the earliest DIN typefaces were used primarily in oblique form.

Popularity grew rapidly, once the DIN typeface was adopted. The most widely-used of the DIN-1451 group was DIN-Mittelschrift (Medium). It was released as a metal type, as acetate stencils for smaller applications, as larger metal stencils for application to vehicles and in train yards, and as cast metal lettering for street and building signage. Polish and Cyrillic variants of the face were developed in the 1940s.

Though Bauhaus used a DIN-inspired logo in catalogs and in a periodical during the 1930s, DIN did not become popular in print until the 1960s. The transferable-lettering-sheet company, Letraset made several variants available in the 1970s. By the late 1980's, use of DIN typefaces were appearing in European and North American graphics work. In 1995, Dutch typeface designer Albert-Jan Pool drew a multi-weight version, eventually licensing it to FontShop International as FF DIN. The FF DIN family, unlike DIN 1451, uses simplified-standard weight names.

Frutiger

Despite its original intention as airport signage, Frutiger has a universal quality that makes it appropriate for many applications; a favorite typeface among advertising agencies, it is a equally successful in text and display work.

FRUTIGER LT STD 45 LIGHT

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()'''''

FRUTIGER LT STD 55 ROMAN

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()'''''

FRUTIGER LT STD 65 BOLD

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()'''''

FRUTIGER LT STD 75 BLACK

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()'''''

FRUTIGER LT STD 95 ULTRA BLACK

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()'''''

HISTORY

Frutiger is a sans-serif typeface by the Swiss type designer Adrian Frutiger. It was commissioned in 1968 by the newly built Charles De Gaulle International Airport at Roissy, France, which needed a new directional sign system. Instead of using one of his previously designed typefaces like Univers, Frutiger chose to design a new one. The new typeface, originally called Roissy, was completed in 1975 and installed at the airport the same year.

Frutiger's goal was to create a sans serif typeface with the rationality and cleanliness of Univers, but with the organic and proportional aspects of Gill Sans. The result is that Frutiger is a distinctive and legible typeface. The letter properties were suited to the needs of Charles De Gaulle – modern appearance and legibility at various angles, sizes, and distances. Ascenders and descenders are very prominent, and apertures are wide to easily distinguish letters from each other.

The Frutiger family was released publicly in 1976, by the Stempel type foundry in conjunction with Linotype. Frutiger's simple and legible, yet warm and casual character has made it popular today in advertising and small print. Some major uses of Frutiger are in the corporate identity of Raytheon, the National Health Service in England, Telefónica O2, the British Royal Navy, the London School of Economics and Political Science, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the Conservative Party of Canada, the Banco Bradesco in Brazil, the Finnish Defence Forces and on road signs in Switzerland. The typeface has also been used across the public transport network in Oslo, Norway since the 1980s. In 2008 it was the fifth best-selling typeface of the Linotype foundry.

Gill Sans

Used by London and North Eastern Railways, British Railways, BBC, British Government. "The Helvetica of Britain".

GILL SANS STD. LIGHT

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()“”

GILL SANS STD. REGULAR

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()“”

GILL SANS STD. BOLD

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()“”

GILL SANS STD. EXTRA BOLD DISPLAY

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()“”

HISTORY

Gill Sans became popular when in 1929 Cecil Dandridge commissioned Eric Gill to produce Gill Sans to be used on the London and North Eastern Railway for a unique typeface for all the LNER's posters and publicity material.

First unveiled in a single uppercase weight in 1928, Gill Sans achieved national prominence almost immediately, when it was chosen the following year to become the standard typeface for the LNER railway system, soon appearing on every facet of the company's identity, from locomotive nameplates and station signage to restaurant car menus, printed timetables and advertising posters.

When British Railways was created by nationalisation in 1948, Gill Sans was used in much of its printed output, including timetables. Specially drawn variations were developed by the British Transport Commission for signs, but these characters are not authentic Gill. The corporate rebranding of BR as British Rail in 1965 introduced Rail Alphabet for signage, and Helvetica and/or Univers for printed matter. Other users included Penguin Books' iconic paperback jacket designs from 1935, and Gill Sans became Monotype's fifth best selling typeface of the twentieth century.

The typeface continues to thrive to this day, often being held to bring an artistic or cultural sensibility to an organization's corporate style. Prominent users include the BBC, which adopted the typeface as its corporate typeface in 1997. Until 2006, the corporation used the font in all its media output; however, the unveiling of its new identity for BBC One and BBC Two has signalled a shift away from its universal use, as other fonts were used for their respective on-screen identities.

Monotype themselves use it in their corporate style. Railtrack (and now Network Rail) used Gill Sans for printed matter.

The British Government formally adopted Gill Sans as its standard typeface for use in all communications and logos in 2003.

Helvetica

Used by New York City's Metropolitan Transportation Authority, Chicago Transit Authority, British Airports Authority, Danish railway company, Metro (Underground) in Madrid, Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority

HELVETICA NEUE LT STD 45 LIGHT

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()“”‘’

HELVETICA NEUE LT STD 55 ROMAN

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()“”‘’

HELVETICA NEUE LT STD 65 MEDIUM

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()“”‘’

HELVETICA NEUE LT STD 75 BOLD

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()“”‘’

HELVETICA NEUE LT STD 85 HEAVY

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()“”‘’

HELVETICA NEUE LT STD 95 BLACK

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()“”‘’

HISTORY

Helvetica is among the most widely used sans-serif typefaces. Versions exist for the following alphabets/scripts: Latin, Cyrillic, Hebrew, Greek, Japanese, Korean, Hindi, Urdu, Khmer and Vietnamese. Chinese faces have been developed to complement Helvetica.

Helvetica is a popular choice for commercial wordmarks, including those for 3M, American Airlines, Helvetica is widely used by the U.S. government; for example, federal income tax forms are set in Helvetica, and NASA uses the type on the Space Shuttle orbiter. Helvetica is also used in the United States television rating system.

New York City's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) uses Helvetica for many of its subway signs. But Helvetica was not adopted as the official font for signage until 1989. The standard font from 1970 until 1989 was Standard Medium, an Akzidenz Grotesk-like sans-serif, as defined by Unimark's New York City Transit Authority Graphic Standards Manual. The MTA system is still rife with a proliferation of Helvetica-like fonts, including Arial, in addition to some old remaining signs in Medium Standard, and a few anomalous signs in Helvetica Narrow.

The **Chicago Transit Authority** uses Helvetica on its signage for the Chicago 'L'. The former state owned operator of the British railway system developed its own Helvetica-based Rail Alphabet font, which was also adopted by the National Health Service and the **British Airports Authority**. Additionally, it was also adopted by Danish railway company DSB for a time period.[16] Canada's federal government uses Helvetica as its identifying typeface, with three variants being used in its corporate identity program, and encourages its use in all federal agencies and websites.

Philadelphia's SEPTA uses Helvetica exclusively for its signage.

The logo and graphic identity of the **"Metro" (Underground) in Madrid** are Helvetica Regular and Helvetica Neue.

Interstate

Familiarity lies at the heart of legibility. Interstate is based on the signage alphabets of the U.S. Federal Highway Administration, letterforms absorbed at a glance everywhere we drive.

INTERSTATE LIGHT

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()''''''

INTERSTATE REGULAR

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()''''''

INTERSTATE BOLD

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()''''''

INTERSTATE BLACK

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()''''''

HISTORY

Interstate is a neo-grotesque sans-serif typeface designed by Tobias Frere-Jones in the period 1993-1999, and licensed by Font Bureau. The typeface is closely related to the **FHWA Series** fonts, a signage alphabet drawn for the **United States Federal Highway Administration** in 1949.

Frere-Jones' Interstate face, while optimal for signage, has refinements making it suitable for text setting in print and on-screen, and gained popularity as such in the 90s. Due to its wide spacing it is best suited for display usage in print, but Frere-Jones later designed another signage typeface, Whitney, published by Hoefler & Frere-Jones, which bears a resemblance to its ancestor while being less flamboyant and more economical for general print usage, in body copy or headlines.

The terminals of ascending and descending strokes are cut at an angle to the stroke (see lowercase t, and l), and on curved strokes (see lowercase e and s), terminals are drawn at a 90° angle to the stroke, positioning them at an angle to the baseline. Counters are open, even in the bold and bold condensed weights, further contributing to **legibility**.

The font is used by a number of large organizations in their logotype and branding materials. Notable examples include Sainsbury's Supermarkets, recent signage for Southwest Airlines, Invesco Perpetual, UK rail company c2c, Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College, Lamborghini and Cognizant Technology Solutions. In May 2008 Ernst & Young adopted the use of Interstate in marketing materials and reports as part of a new global visual identity.

In 2004, The Weather Channel started using the fonts on-air and on IntelliStar systems. It was added to TWC's WeatherSTAR XL in a graphical update in 2005. It was mainly retired in 2008, for Helvetica Neue and Akzidenz-Grotesk.

In November 2006 the US Army launched its Army Strong ad campaign, utilising Interstate as its primary typeface for all ad material.

Scala Sans

Created for the Whitney Museum, this font is commonly used in wayfinding systems including the Turner Center Building and other Museums

SCALA SANS LIGHT

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()“”‘

SCALA SANS REGULAR

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()“”‘

SCALA SANS BOLD

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()“”‘

SCALA SANS BLACK

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()“”‘

HISTORY

FF Scala Sans is a humanist sans-serif typeface designed in by Dutch designer Martin Majoor in 1993 for the Vredenburg Music Center in Utrecht, the Netherlands. It was designed as a companion to Majoor's earlier serif old style typeface FF Scala, designed in 1990.

Like Eric Gill's 1927–30 design Gill Sans and Hans Eduard Meier's typeface Syntax, both upper and lower case are structurally modeled on serif old style faces. The lowercase roman a and g are two-story. FF Scala Sans italics are true italics, not sloped roman. The lowercase a, e, v and y are particularly calligraphic. FF Scala Sans is a very complete sans-serif in its inclusion of true small capitals, lining and non-lining (old style figures) and many ligatures. In 1993 an additional condensed width of the typeface was released. The typefaces are available through Font Shop International.

Whitney HTF

Created for the Whitney Museum, this font is commonly used in wayfinding systems including the Turner Center Building and other Museums

WHITNEY HTF. LIGHT

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()''''

WHITNEY HTF. BOOK

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()''''

WHITNEY HTF. MEDIUM

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()''''

WHITNEY HTF. SEMIBOLD

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()''''

WHITNEY HTF. BOLD

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()''''

WHITNEY HTF. BLACK

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
12345678910\$%&()''''

HISTORY

New York's Whitney Museum asked Tobias Frere-Jones to develop an institutional typeface Frere-Jones subsequently created the Whitney font. The two key deliverables that Tobias Frere-Jones had to deliver to the Whitney Museum combined flexibility for editorial requirements whilst institutional integrity for the Whitney Museum's public signage.

Whitney bridges the divide between editorial mainstay such as News Gothic (1908) which is an American "gothic" and signage applications standards such as Frutiger (1975) a European "humanist" in a design font. This is achieved via "Its compact forms and broad x-height use space efficiently, and its ample counters and open shapes make it clear under any circumstances." [2]