

**Creative Type: A Sourcebook of Classic and Contemporary Letterforms** / Cees W. de Jong, Alston Purvis, Friedrich Friedl.--New York, NY: Thames & Hudson, dist. by W. W. Norton, September 2005.--400 p.: ill.--ISBN 0-500-51229-9: \$50.00.



Translated from the Dutch, this book is primarily a survey of contemporary typefaces, along with a handful of classic faces from the past. Although “sourcebook” is an accurate description, the book is somewhere between a manual for the professional graphic designer and a historical survey of typography. While seemingly a reference title, the lack of a comprehensive index relegates the work to the general collection in most libraries. While there is a slight emphasis on Dutch examples, coverage extends to all parts of Europe and the United States.

The authors, a Dutch former publisher and now design consultant, an American graphic design scholar, and a German former typesetter and now professor of typography, have each contributed an introductory essay. Purvis, the American, and Friedl, the German, have both written extensively on graphic design. Purvis presents a selective survey of major twentieth century figures from the art and commercial worlds, followed by Friedl’s analysis of the themes and printing innovations introduced in each decade of the twentieth century. In his essay, de Jong, the Dutchman, compares the digital era of typography of the last few decades to the previous historical period. One overriding theme of the book is that since contemporary production of typefaces has been profoundly influenced and simplified by the use of computers and other digital media, type designers look to the classics for inspiration and can reinvent old styles in new and interesting ways.

The bulk of the book, “Fonts and Type Designers,” covers roughly thirty typefaces created between 1985 and 2004. Each of these is represented by a one-page biographical description and history, usually followed by several full pages of the typeface alphabet and other graphics. The same format is used to describe eighteen “Modern Classics,” from Stempel Garamond, created by Claude Garamond in 1543, to Akzidenz Grotesk, created by Günter Gerhard Lange in 1969.

At four pounds, *Creative Type* is weighty. It is printed on heavy, glossy paper, with full-color images of font families, posters, advertisements, magazine covers, and other graphics on almost every page. The book’s presentation is eclectic, with text and illustrations interspersed, but those that should correspond to one another are not usually on facing pages. An index to the typefaces with a full list of available forms--regular, bold, heavy, italic, small caps, etc.--completes the work. The book also contains a list of Web sites to consult for purchasing individual fonts.

The most compelling reason to add this book to one’s collection would be its inclusion of very contemporary typefaces. But, there has been no lack of books on contemporary typography and graphic design for the practitioner in recent years. Other recent histories of typography include *Typographers on Type: An Illustrated Anthology from William Morris to the Present Day* by Ruari McLean (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995); *Twentieth-Century Type Designers* by Sebastian Carter (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995); *Typography: An Encyclopedic Survey of Type Design and Techniques Throughout History* by Friedrich Friedl, Nicolaus Ott, and Bernard Stein (New York : Black Dog & Leventhal, 1998); *Twentieth-Century Type* by Lewis Blackwell (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); and *Modern Typography* by Robin Kinross (London, England: Hyphen Press, 2004).

*Creative Type* is recommended for art and design collections, especially for libraries supporting programs in graphic or communication design. One seeking a meatier design history or more extensive coverage of contemporary typefaces and type designers might benefit from one of the additional titles mentioned above.

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