A Brief History of Fontesque

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With the release of his new Fontesque Sans, Nick Shinn surveys the Fontesque years

**Emblema XLII. De secretis Natura.**

In Chymicis veránti Natura, Ratio, Experientia & lectio, sint Dux, scipio, perspicilia & lampas.

1618 This wobbly type, which wasn’t locked up firmly enough in the chase, is an extreme display of the haphazard quality present to some extent in all letterpress printing. Now we’re surrounded by precise, mass-produced articles, and this faulty old type becomes a thing to cherish, an icon of what it means to be human, to be imperfect. It’s a feeling I set out to express in Fontesque. Atalanta Fugiens.

1947 Precursor: mid-century, there was a lovely, loopy style of lettering practiced by artists like Alex Steinweiss.

1949

Deconstruction

Grunge Irony

1994 The New Typography of the Heroic Desktop Era had many factions, mostly anarchic.

1995 The FontFont corporate yellow is a strong, economical branding, but it can look cheap and industrial. So I made the Fontesque specimen booklet full of racy, colorful eye-candy, like the flyers that designers get from Photoshop, Quark, etc.

1999 In Canada, Fontesque has become very popular for restaurants and food packaging. Now, about that ff ligature…

1991 In this piece of calligraphy I had begun to experiment with controlled irregularity.

1999 Earlier types,

1921 Frederic Goudy drew his imperfections impeccably: “I made no attempt to eliminate the mannerisms or deficiencies of his [Garamond’s] famous type, realizing that they came not by intention, but rather through the punch-cutter’s handling, to his lack of tools of precision and his crude materials; for he worked “by eye” and not by rule … Drawings like mine which were made free-hand, were not the sort usually worked from at the Monotype Company, so there was a constant fight to see that the workmen did not “correct” what seemed to them to be bad drawing on my part. If I intentionally gave a letter an inclination of one degree, they straightened it up. My serifs, which had a definite shape, were changed to meet their own ideas, since they “had always made them that way.”

—F. W. Goudy, Goudy’s Type Designs, 1946

1991 No buscaba la rosa

inmóvil por el cielo busca otra cosa

1991 La rosa...
I worked on a Mac for several years before taking the plunge into Fontographer—I was busy enough wrestling with Quark, Illustrator and Photoshop. What got me going was an event organized by David Michaelides of FontShop Toronto in the Fall of 1993, with Neville Brody and Matthew Carter showing their stuff. It was great to see two people with such differing visions of type design doing their own thing: so why not me? The initial sketches were done quickly in one “performance”, to try and capture an intuitive sense of letter-form.

1994 The first settings (left) were made from unaltered scans of letters I had traced, with a Fineliner, over the original sketch (top). The letterforms of the final font (right) are close to the original drawing, but with a strong typographic color.

1996 North American typography is fast and carefree — the designer here uses a dropshadow and some serious horizontal scaling to get the type to stand out and fit. Woman’s World.
1995 Art director has fun with Fontesque Ornaments in chewing gum ad.

1997 (Above) The art director used the wavy Fontesque wordforms as a watery metaphor.

1999 (Left) Fontesque’s irregularity allows designers to change the proportions of letters (C), or even invert them (s).
2001 Why didn’t I do this before?
It finally dawned on me that a number of serifed FontFonts, such as Scala, Quadraat and Eureka, had spawned sans versions, so I thought it was about time Fontesque joined in.

1. Fontesque Extra Bold is used as reference.
2. The Sans letter is pencil-traced over the serif.
3. Tracing is scanned, filled, cleaned up in Photoshop.
4. Scan imported into Fontographer template.
5. "Autotrace" creates rough outline path.
6. Outline path cleaned up point-by-point.
7. Adjustments made in relation to other letters.
8. Serifed character outline is pasted into template layer of the Ultra Light Fontographer file.
9–10. Skeletal paths drawn by eye, using the pen tools in Fontographer.
11. "Expand stroke" creates a perfectly even weight.
12. Extra Bold and Ultra Light are "blended", in varying proportions, to create the intermediate weights.

Nick Shim (www.shinntype.com) has collected these samples of Fontesque in use in Canada. He apologizes for not knowing the names of the art directors and graphic designers who created the packages and ads.