

Jim Parkinson

BY MARK EASTMAN

Chances are if you've been to the newsstand you have seen this designer's work but were unaware of it. Although logotype and typeface design permeate the culture we live in, this kind of work is often one of the less-celebrated areas of design. It's estimated that there are probably about 400 people worldwide who currently make their living designing and producing typefaces. Jim Parkinson is one of these unique individuals. Over the past 25 years, Parkinson has produced mastheads and typefaces for major magazines and newspapers in the United States and abroad. Additionally, he has designed a number of distinctive display and text typefaces that reflect his expertise in the realm of letterforms. He is jovial, easygoing and has a great deal of knowledge about lettering and typography.

Parkinson graduated from the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland in 1963 with a degree in advertising design. He has worked in many different areas of design: as an illustrator, a sign letterer and a graphic designer. For the past decade he has concentrated primarily on typeface designs.

He attributes his early interest in lettering to Abraham Lincoln Paulsen who was a neighbor while Parkinson was growing up in Richmond, California. Paulsen called himself "The Wizard Penman of Contra Costa County" and would frequently do trick lettering upside down and backwards at parties and events. He also did showcards—handlettered signs usually done on hot-press poster board—for retail displays and shop windows. Parkinson

remembers as a boy of seven sitting in Paulsen's studio and just watching him letter.

After his graduation from CCAC, Parkinson took a position at Hallmark in Kansas City. When he arrived and discovered they were really interested in someone to illustrate flowers and bunny rabbits, he was transferred to their lettering department at his request.

It was there that Parkinson produced playful and informal lettering for greeting cards and during this time worked with a person who would become a second major influence on his career. Parkinson worked alongside German lettering master Hermann Zapf, who Hallmark hired as a consultant on two different occasions to develop typeface designs. "He didn't understand *greeting card* lettering..." Parkinson says with a laugh and a big smile, but he says watching Zapf letter, being around him and seeing how he produced typefaces were experiences that have influenced his own lettering and type design work to this day. At one point Hallmark decided

to commit lettering to film strips for photo-composition. Even today, some of Parkinson's early handlettered typefaces are still in use at Hallmark, although they now have been digitized.

After a few years at Hallmark, Parkinson returned to the San Francisco Bay Area and started out on his own. As he developed contacts with art directors and editorial clients, his business grew. He has subsequently produced logotypes and typefaces for a long list of clients including the *San Francisco Examiner*, *Newsweek*, *Mother Jones*, *Fast Company*



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Top: Parkinson's personal logotype.

Below: A selection of magazine masthead logotypes Parkinson has created and/or refined.

California

mother JONES

PARENTING

Esquire

InStyle

Rolling Stone

FAST COMPANY

Newsweek

SIERRA

DE FINANCIËLE MORGEN NATIONAL POST

The Metropolitan San Francisco Examiner

The Washington Post ILTA-SANOMAT

and *Rolling Stone*, for whom he produced a number of typefaces as well as completely redesigning their logotype for the tenth anniversary issue.

Before digital technology, producing typefaces was an extremely laborious process, done entirely by hand, usually with a lettering or technical pen. It was difficult to see an entire typeface and making adjustments and corrections was time-consuming. The advent of font creation software, such as Fontographer® in 1985, revolutionized the process of creating typefaces. Parkinson initially resisted the computer, but he found that he was getting fewer calls from clients who had gone digital. It wasn't until Parkinson worked as an on-staff typeface designer at the *San Francisco Chronicle* that he actively started to use the computer to produce typefaces. At the time the only technology he'd been relying on was the telephone. However, once he found what the computer could do and how it fit in with producing type and lettering, there was no going back to inking on boards. While at the *Chronicle*, Parkinson produced new typefaces designed specifically for newspaper typesetting requirements.

When he went to work for the *Chronicle*, Metro was the newspaper's display face, a geometric sans designed by William Addison Dwiggins. Metro was Dwiggins's first commissioned typeface for Linotype, made available in 1929, and his response to sans-serif display faces such as Erbar, Kable and Futura, coming from Germany in the '20s. Metro had been a signature typeface for the *Chronicle* since the '40s and one that no one wanted to replace. The width of its characters, however, made it difficult to set headlines for single columns. The *Chronicle* also had recently changed their printing process which was making Metro and their existing text type, Corona, look too heavy. Newspaper type is generally more compact and has a lower-case with greater x-height for legibility than book typefaces. Counters are also more open and ascenders and descenders are shortened to accommodate setting the type with solid leading. While on staff at the newspaper, Parkinson reworked a new set of Metro display faces and adapted another Dwiggins typeface family, Electra, to text type more suited to newspapers. In Parkinson's new Metro Condensed display typefaces, the

DATEBOOK BOOK REVIEW TV WEEK REVIEW

Steals Clock, Faces Time
Steals Clock, Faces Time

Steals Clock, Faces Time
Steals Clock, Faces Time

**Quick and handy
storage boxes**

BY CALVIN ARMSTRONG

If you ever needed a fast way to store things without having to go through the hassle of assembling boxes, now there's a way to store things in seconds. The Pop-Box comes flat and instantly folds into a box that's convenient and simple to use. The boxes are constructed of sturdy, cardboard with a moisture resistant coating and have a special fold-out top. The boxes are available in sizes ranging from small, medium, large and extra large and are strong enough when assembled to stack twelve-high.

Above: New and refined newspaper nameplates. *De Financiële Morgen* (Brussels, Belgium), *National Post* (Toronto, Canada)—designed along with a set of five sans serif display typefaces called *Post*, *The Metropolitan* (San Francisco), *Ilta-Sanomat* (Helsinki, Finland).

Typefaces designed for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Section headings for the newspaper in Blueplate.

Original Metro Bold, Medium and Parkinson's new Condensed Bold, Condensed Medium designs.

Sample type set in Electric, a text type family based on Electra redesigned for newspaper typesetting requirements.

overall character widths and stroke weight were reduced for a more efficient character count. The design was done in a way that maintains the feel of the former Metro but with a more contemporary appearance.

The original book text face Electra—although considered to be a modern classic roman—was not black enough, particularly at smaller text sizes. To suit the needs of newspaper typography the thin strokes were increased in weight; serifs were extended to balance the other changes; and x-height of the lowercase was increased. Parkinson relates that he had never produced a text type family before and producing the new family of faces known as Electric, “was a learning experience.” One major advantage of producing digital type for the *Chronicle* was the relative speed with which Parkinson could see actual printed versions of the typefaces in use. This greatly facilitated fine-tuning and completing typefaces in a shorter period of time. Although many compromises had to be made in terms of design for newspaper typesetting requirements, the look and feel of Electric works efficiently while keeping in spirit with Dwiggins’s Electra type designs.

Some other notable display typefaces Parkinson produced for the *Chronicle* are Blueplate and Banner. The newspaper had been using one of the bold extended Copperplate faces, an engraver’s typeface. Despite having the distinction of being designed by Frederick Goudy, Copperplate suffers from a rather stiff geometric form and its ubiquitous use as a popular display face. Blueplate, Parkinson’s new design, shares some aspects of Copperplate in terms of width and weight, but is much more fluid in the rendering of the strokes and serifs with a less structured rhythm more akin to a handlettered showcard display face. Banner is a family of sans serif condensed display faces that have a bold, industrial-strength appearance.

Parkinson’s logotype and custom typeface design work for magazines and newspapers has complemented his personal typeface design projects which are, he says, “...like Muzak®, they’re always running in the background.” Since the early ’90s he has produced a number of display typefaces for retail distribution.

Right: ITC Roswell™, a sans serif display family (International Typeface Corporation www.itcfonts.com).

ITC Bodoni™ Six Italic, this face and the Bold Italic were produced under the art direction of Sumner Stone (International Typeface Corporation www.itcfonts.com).

Jimbo™ Multiple Master, a showcard display face which allows the user to interpolate Jimbo into a range of custom widths and weights. Shown are four of nine default instances included with the typeface (Adobe Systems, Inc. www.adobe.com/type).

Sample type set in Mojo™, a display face with roots in the type of turn-of-the-century Viennese poster designer Alfred Roller (Adobe Systems, Inc. www.adobe.com/type).

Diablo™, a display face interpreted from early showcard lettering (AGFA/Monotype Creative Alliance www.agfahome.com/agfatype).

ITC ROSWELL SC TWO ITC ROSWELL SC THREE
ITC ROSWELL FOUR ITC ROSWELL SC FOUR

ITC Bodoni™ Six Book Italic

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijkl

Font excellence in typography is the result of nothing more than attitude. Its appeal comes from the understanding used in its planning. The designer must care. In contemporary advertising the perfect integration of design elements often demands unorthodox typography. It may require the use of compact spacing, minus leading, unusual sizes, weights and proportions —whatever is needed to improve appearance and impact.

JIMBO
MULTIPLE MASTER

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqr
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklm
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijkl
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghij

APPLIED RHYTHM TECHNOLOGY :: BASIC CHANNEL
SEVENTH PLANE :: SPACETIME CONTINUUM
SINGLE CELL ORCHESTRA :: TECHNICOLOR
LIVE FEBRUARY 23RD
PERFORMING AT THE VECTOR LOUNGE :: SAN FRANCISCO

DIABLO

**DISPLAY
BIG SALE AID
STRIKING :: BOLD
TYPE THAT TALKS**

FF MOTEL GOTHIC™
ABCDE12345

the **DUDE**
MOTEL
STABLES • POOL *and* TV

Showcard Moderne™
ABCDEFGHabcdefgh123

Fresh Alaskan
KING
CRAB

EL GRANDE™
ABCDEFGH1234

MÁS MÚSICA
RADIO!
MUNDO
TODOS LOS EXITOS

FF MATINEE GOTHIC™
ABCDE12345

GRAND LAKE
THEATER

and
CAFÉ

PARKINSON

New wing to the southwest will be completed by April
NEW MARBLE FLOORS
AN AMALGAMATION OF THE FINEST MATERIALS FROM ITALY, COSTA RICA & HOBOKEN

Hand-carved

A level of craftsmanship worthy of the Renaissance Masters

Young student stuns all her teachers

BUILDS CIVIC MONUMENT USING ONLY THREE PAPER CLIPS

Memorial to Famous Dry Cleaners

WHITE LINEN

Fundraising event left my entire wardrobe caked with mud

Loud & Boisterous Shareholders

People paid \$50 each to arm-wrestle the Board of Directors

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER STARTED A FOOD FIGHT

Handful of caviar strikes forehead

POLICE ARRIVE TO QUELL HIGH-CLASS DISTURBANCE

TRIAL IN NOVEMBER

FF GOLDEN GATE GOTHIC™
ABCDEFGH123

CRYSTAL
PALACE
COCKTAIL LOUNGE

SHOWCARD GOTHIC™
ABCDEFGH1234

THE MAN
WHO KNEW
TO MUCH

POSTER BLACK™
ABCDEFGH12345

TRY OUR DELICIOUS
BAR•B•Q
CHICKEN & PORK RIBS

Typefaces designed by Jim Parkinson (clockwise from the top left):
FF Motel Gothic™, FF Matinee Gothic™, FF Golden Gate Gothic™ (Font
Shop International www.fontfont.com), Showcard Gothic™, Poster Black™,
Parkinson™, El Grande™ and Showcard Moderne™ (Font Bureau, Inc.
www.fontbureau.com).

Parkinson is an avid collector of type in the form of vintage specimen and lettering books, magazines, printed ads and other ephemera. Many of his display fonts reflect his appreciation for vintage handlettering styles. Showcard Moderne, a display Roman distributed by the Font Bureau, is typical of these styles. The informal qualities of these faces most likely evolved out of a need to letter showcards quickly; and Parkinson has interpreted the informal aspects of this kind of lettering so well that they do not come across as digital faces. His typeface Jimbo for Adobe Systems, Inc. started out as “just a big, fat, happy showcard face” and subsequently evolved into a multiple master display face allowing a multitude of weights and widths unusual for a retro-inspired display face. Mojo, another display face for Adobe, is a lettering style that Parkinson says he has frequently used before for editorial stories related to psychedelic era music subjects. This face evolved from a German poster Adobe Systems had found. To produce Mojo, Parkinson reworked the letterforms, cleaning up

inconsistencies, and filled-out the complete character set of this typeface.

His typefaces that comprise the FF Moderne Gothics: Golden Gate Gothic, Matinee Gothic and Motel Gothic distributed by the Font Shop International, reflect showcards and also letterforms that evolved from the welded-metal construction of three-dimensional sign lettering found on theater marquees and storefronts of the past.

Although most of Parkinson's typeface designs have been display faces, he produced the No. 6 Italic faces of ITC Bodoni under the art direction of Sumner Stone.

Because of the relatively small size of electronic art for logotypes and typefaces, Parkinson works out of his home studio and is able to deliver proofs and final art with ease via e-mail to his clients in Europe, Central and South America and elsewhere. When asked what he anticipates doing in the future, Parkinson responds that he is perfectly happy doing logotypes and typeface design. “There are always typefaces to do,” he says with a characteristic grin. For now it looks as though he has much to be smiling about. ■

Jim Parkinson's Web site can be viewed online at:
www.typedesign.com