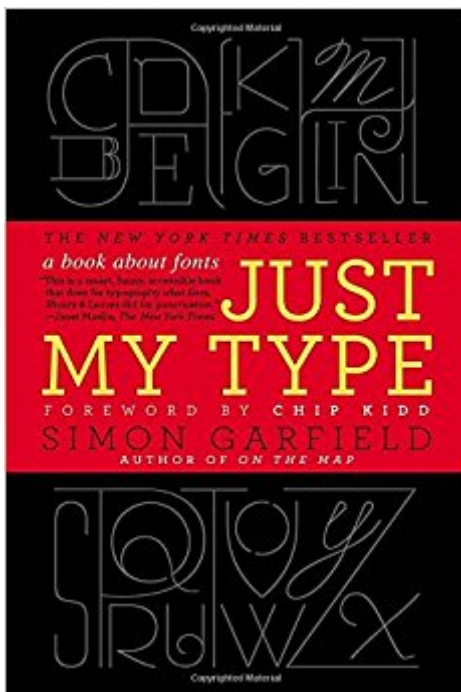


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Just My Type: A Book About Fonts



Synopsis

A delightfully inquisitive tour that explores the rich history and the subtle powers of fonts. Fonts surround us every day, on street signs and buildings, on movie posters and books, and on just about every product that we buy. But where do fonts come from and why do we need so many? Who is behind the businesslike subtlety of Times New Roman, the cool detachment of Arial, or the maddening lightness of Comic Sans (and the movement to ban it)? Simon Garfield embarks on a mission to answer these questions and more, and reveal what may be the very best and worst fonts in the world. Typefaces are now 560 years old, but we barely knew their names until about twenty years ago, when the pull-down font menus on our first computers made us all the gods of type. Beginning in the early days of Gutenberg and ending with the most adventurous digital fonts, Garfield unravels our age old obsession with the way our words look. Just My Type investigates a range of modern mysteries, including how Helvetica took over the world, what inspires the seemingly ubiquitous use of Trajan on bad movie posters, and what makes a font look presidential, male or female, American, British, German, or Jewish. From the typeface of Beatlemania to the graphic vision of the Obama campaign, fonts can signal a musical revolution or the rise of an American president. This book is a must-read for the design conscious that will forever change the way you look at the printed word.

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Customer Reviews

Best Books of the Month, September 2011: Simon Garfield's TMs Just My Type presents an

entertaining history of fonts, from font "pirating" dating back nearly as far as Gutenberg to the creation of Comic Sans and Ikea's font-change controversy. With a variety of recent, news-making examples and font samples throughout, *Just My Type* explains how and why certain fonts can elicit emotions or gut-instinct reactions. Garfield's humor and historical anecdotes add to his deep understanding of how something as simple as font choice can speak volumes about our cultural climate--and why it's so easy to agonize over what font to use on a party invitation. Whether you're already a font aficionado or can't tell the difference between Times New Roman and Arial, this entertaining history will give you a greater appreciation of the typefaces that surround you every day. --Malissa Kent --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"This is a smart, funny, accessible book that does for typography what Lynne Truss's best-selling *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* did for punctuation: made it noticeable for people who had no idea they were interested in such things." • Janet Maslin, *The New York Times* "Whether you're a graphic designer or a layperson with no background in this area, reading what Garfield has to say will change the way you perceive the written word forever." • *The Los Angeles Times* "A deliriously clever and entertaining book" • *The Boston Globe* "Informative, delightful" and essential reading for word geeks everywhere." • *The Seattle Times* "Lively [] intriguing [] a cheeky book about the human side and our reaction to fonts." • *Seattle Post Intelligencer* "Highly entertaining [] Garfield takes readers on a rollicking tour of the world of typography, from book jackets to road signs, TV shows to computers." • *USA Today* "Reading Simon Garfield's *Just My Type* can transform your daily life into an endless quest for knowledge of the typefaces in which signs, books, magazines, newspapers, etc. are set." • *Washington Post* "Garfield's romping history (with multitype text) is zestfully informative." • *Booklist* "Funny and fascinating, irreverent and playful yet endlessly illuminating, the book is an absolute treat for the type-nerd, design history geek, and general lover of intelligent writing with humor." • *The Atlantic* "A thoroughly entertaining, well-informed tour of typefaces" • *Kirkus* "Garfield has a light touch and moves effortlessly among various aspects of typography past and present [] Highly recommended to all, whether or not you feel predisposed to like this kind of thing! Eye-opening and mind-expanding!" • *Library Journal* "A lively romp through the history of fonts. Garfield's evocative prose [] entices us to see letters instead of just reading them." • *Publishers Weekly*

Simon Garfield has a way of taking something you never think about into an engaging read that makes you wonder how that ever escaped your notice. This time it is fonts. Gutenberg printed and now I have a million choices in my word processor and maybe sometimes I think a book or sign looks funny and that is it. But no fonts are so much more than that they have genders and nationalities and personalities and rules. Small chapters look at different fonts, families, or the people who made them. I think I am also sad that I never had a John Bull printing kit. Very interesting and made me look around and think about the text in a way it is never meant to be noticed if it is doing its job

You are looking at it right now, and if it is doing its job, you don't even notice it. It might represent a creation that has taken centuries to come to its current state of perfection, or it might be something that a dedicated specialist worked on for years and brought out a decade ago. It represents artistry directed within a circumscribed realm. I am talking about the font in which these letters are presented. Thirty years ago, fonts were usually the interest of only a select few in the printing world, but now every computer is charged with fonts and everyone gets to be an amateur typographer (technically, the font is a specific set of metal parts, or digital files, that allows reproduction of letters, and a typeface is the design of letters the font allows you to reproduce, but you can see how the words would get used interchangeably). Simon Garfield is not a professional typographer; his role is bringing out fine nonfiction about, say, stamp collecting, history, or the color mauve. But he has an amateur's enthusiasm for fonts, and communicates it infectiously in *Just My Type: A Book About Fonts* (Profile Books). This is not a collection of type designs, though there are many illustrations. In most cases it won't help you in finding out what font you happen to be looking at (but it will tell you how to do so in surprising ways). It is a book of appreciation for an art that is largely invisible, but is also essential. I would not like to read pages set in any of the fonts in one of Garfield's last chapters, "The Worst Fonts in the World." On the list is Papyrus, which caused a stir when it was used extensively in the film *Avatar*. The expensive film used a free (and overused) display font, and font fans noticed. There was also a font war (also known as a "fontroversy") when in 2009 Ikea decided to change its display font from Futura to Verdana. The change inspired passionate arguments in mere bystanders, "like the passion of sports fans," says Garfield, and the *New York Times* joked that it was "perhaps the biggest controversy to come out of Sweden." The biggest of font wars has had a comic edge to it, and it is the starting point for Garfield's book. Comic Sans is a perfectly good font. It looks something like the letters you see in comic books, smooth, rounded, sans serif, clear. Because it caught on and was quickly overused, there has been a "ban Comic

Sans" movement. Even the heads of the movement, which is somewhat tongue-in-cheek, admit that Comic Sans looks fine, say, on a candy packet; but they have also seen it on a tombstone and on a doctor's brochure about irritable bowel syndrome. If you see a font and you wonder which one it is, you can take steps to identify it. Lots of people like to do this. It is especially useful to examine the lower case g. (The other character that reveals a lot is the ampersand, which, maybe since it is not a letter or a punctuation mark, appears in exuberant eccentricity even in some calm fonts.) That g has a lot of variable points; it might have a lower hook or it might have a loop, it might have a straight line on the right, or the upper loop might have an ear that rises or droops, and this doesn't even get into whether the upper loop is a circle, a long or wide ellipse, or has uniform width. Take a look at the g letters shown here, or in your regular reading matter, and you will be amazed at how variable a selection of even only a few can be. If you have your g, you can look it up in font books, but there are so many fonts now that no book comes close to showing them all. There's an application for the iPhone which allows you to take a picture of the letter in question, upload it somewhere, and then get suggestions of possible matches. Or you can go to a type forum and ask there, because there are lots of people devoted to hunting down this sort of thing. And they take it so seriously that, as on many internet forums, they get rather snarky about disagreements. If you don't pay attention to fonts (and most of them do their work best by not calling attention to themselves), Garfield's entertaining book might get you started. There are chapters about the difficult matter of copyrighting a font, because if you design a good font it is easy to copy it, and there isn't much that can be done about font piracy. Font designers work for love, not money. There's a chapter on "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy white dog" and other phrases that show all the letters, or particular words that display a lot of the letters most important to font design. There's plenty of history starting with Gutenberg and the historical Roman types from which are descended many of the fonts we read every day. Between the chapters are "font breaks" to praise Albertus or Gill Sans and to tell about how they came to be designed, with plenty of anecdotes and other funny or sad stories. This is a delightful, amusing book about a whole world most of us take for granted.

I recently took a printmaking class with emphasis on letterpress and text, so I wanted to get some background on the cultural heritage of type and print media so I could better map out what pitfalls lay before me in terms of choosing a particular typeface. This is a fascinating read about a topic that is entirely pervasive yet so often unnoticed in our culture. That the shapes of our letters convey as much meaning as the content is something that we take for granted- this book was certainly

enlightening. Perhaps, this is not the subject matter for absolutely any reader- and interest or curiosity in the subject matter at hand will definitely be useful, but it does not require one to be a die-hard about type in order to appreciate it. Though the author freely admits his hard-core enthusiasm for type, he does not present information in a way that discourages someone new to the subject from jumping right in. He has definite personal tastes- ones that you may disagree or concur with at your leisure without losing too much stake in the overall book. Your feelings on Comic Sans or Papyrus are left to you without an overbearing sense of judgement- though it is interesting to learn why they hold such notoriety in contemporary society. Overall a nice mix of history and contemporary views, blended with humor and a clear love for the topic. Not structured to be the kind of book that keeps me riveted for its entirety, but rather one that I can pick up at any point and feel enjoyment. A good casual read that I feel leaves you for the better at its end.

Just My Type is a "litte book" on typefaces and printing directed to the layman, not the professional or type aficionado. For example, the author tells you where the terms "lower case" and "upper case" originated -- I never knew that. I also found the brief discussions of the legal issues faced by type designers educational. Now I know why Helvetica is not widely available on computers. On the other hand, without at least a minimal interest in typefaces, I doubt the reader would get very far before setting the book aside. Fortunately, I have a sufficient background in "printing" (predating the choice of fonts to select on the computer -- not including reviews) that I made it to the end. The most frustrating thing to me was the absence, in a significant number of situations, of actual examples -- printed in the book -- of the typefaces, and their nuances and their differences, that the author was discussing.

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