

FAIRPLEX

A family of 16 fonts

designed by Zuzana Licko



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Narrow Book

FAIRPLEX
NARROW BOOK
\$39

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

N. Bk. Italic

FAIRPLEX
NARROW BOOK ITALIC
\$39

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

Narrow Bold

FAIRPLEX
NARROW BOLD
\$39

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

N. Bld. Italic

FAIRPLEX
NARROW BOLD ITALIC
\$39

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abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

FAIRPLEX NARROW BOOK & BOLD
four font package

\$95.00

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FAIRPLEX
WIDE BOOK
\$39

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

W. Bk. Italic

FAIRPLEX
WIDE BOOK ITALIC
\$39

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

Wide Bold

FAIRPLEX
WIDE BOLD
\$39

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz123456789

W. Bld. Italic

FAIRPLEX
WIDE BOLD ITALIC
\$39

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FAIRPLEX NARROW MEDIUM & BLACK
four font package

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Narrow Medium

FAIRPLEX
NARROW MEDIUM
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N. Med. Italic

FAIRPLEX
NARROW MEDIUM ITALIC
\$39

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

Narrow Black

FAIRPLEX
NARROW BLACK
\$39

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

N. Blk. Italic

FAIRPLEX
NARROW BLACK ITALIC
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abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

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Wide Medium

FAIRPLEX
WIDE MEDIUM
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abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

W. Med. Italic

FAIRPLEX
WIDE MEDIUM ITALIC
\$39

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

Wide Black

FAIRPLEX
WIDE BLACK
\$39

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz123456789

W. Blk. Italic

FAIRPLEX
WIDE BLACK ITALIC
\$39

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz123456789

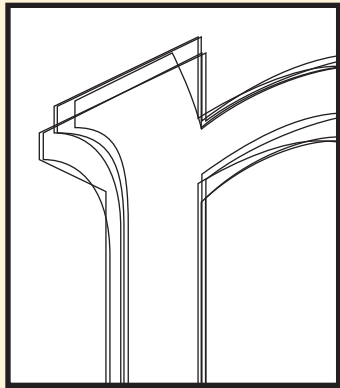
FAIRPLEX WIDE MEDIUM & BLACK
four font package

\$95.00

DESIGNING FAIRPLEX

The foundation for Fairplex began in January 1998. I wanted to develop a serif text face loosely based upon Garamond No.3. This resulted in many false starts, some of which turned into seemingly unrelated sans-serif designs, including Tarzana and Solex.

As the experimentation continued, it became apparent that Fairplex would not be the Garamond revival that I had originally intended; perhaps



I'll return to that sometime in the future.

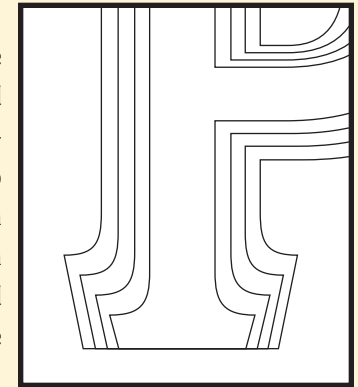
My goal for Fairplex became that of creating a text face that would achieve legibility by avoiding contrast, especially in the Book weight. This was spurred by experiences with my own eyesight, which is increasingly intolerant of high contrast typefaces when reading lengthy texts. (Especially when combined with paperback printing and less than perfect reading conditions!) As a result of its low contrast, the Fairplex

Book weight is somewhat reminiscent of a sans serif, yet the slight serifs preserve the recognition of serif letterforms.

When creating the accompanying weights, the challenge was balancing the contrast and stem weight with the serifs. To provide a comprehensive family, I wanted the boldest weight to be quite heavy. This meant that the **Black** weight would need more contrast than the Book weight in order to avoid clogging up. But harmonizing the serifs proved difficult. The initial serif treatments I tried didn't stand up to the robust character of the **Black** weight. Several months passed without much progress, and then one evening I attended a talk by Alastair Johnston on his book *Alphabets to Order*, a survey of nineteenth century type specimens. Alastair pointed out that slab serifs (also known as "Egyptians") are really more of a variation on sans serifs than on serif designs. In other words, slab serif type is more akin to

sans-serif type with serifs added on than it is to a version of serif type. This sparked the idea that the solution to my serif problem for Fairplex **Black** might be a slab serif treatment. After all, the Book weight already shared features of sans-serif types.

Shortly after this came the idea to angle the serifs. This was suggested by my husband, and was probably conjured up from his years of sub-conscious assimilation of the San Francisco Giants logo while watching baseball, and then reinforced by a similar serif treatment in John Downer's recent Council Design. The angled serifs added visual interest to the otherwise austere slab serifs.



The intermediate weights were then derived by interpolating the Book and **Black**, with the exception of several characters, such as the "n," which required specially designed features to avoid collisions of serifs, and to yield a pleasing weight balance. A range of weights was interpolated before deciding on the **Medium** and **Bold** weights.* *Zuzana Licko*



* Custom weights and widths of Fairplex are available upon request.
Special thank you to John Downer and Linnea Lundquist for help and advice.

WIDE
BLACK

WIDE
MEDIUM ITALIC

NARROW
BOOK

NARROW
MEDIUM

WIDE
BOLD

NARROW
BOOK ITALIC

NARROW
BOLD

NARROW
BLACK ITALIC

WIDE
BOOK

WIDE
MEDIUM

WIDE
BLACK

DETROIT EGYPTIAN
and other typographic curiosities

SOOTHING

SERIFS

CHROMOLITHOGRAPHY
Subconscious Assimilation

ARMATURE
typeface manufacture

FINE TYPE SPECIMEN

Americana

WINK

CLASSIFYING FAIRPLEX

The essence of a letterform is dictated by an inner framework — its “armature,” as the late type designer Warren Chappell called it. A letterform with serifs has a personality greatly influenced by how its serifs are constructed. Serifs reveal a certain kind of attitude and orientation. In the history of type, Zuzana Licko’s new series, Fairplex, finds a place among few antecedents. The serifs come from primarily nontypographic sources, but the skeletal forms are clearly recognizable as being typographic in tradition. Fairplex is a rare combination of elements from three distinct media:

- chromolithography of the late 19th and early 20th centuries
- American sign painting during approximately the same period
- display typefaces designed between ca. 1840 and ca. 1980



Figure 1.



Figure 2.

The Fairplex serif style was more common in commercial lithography and American sign painting (Fig. 1) than it was in type, but it had no single, established, standard form. Lettering artists introduced their own interpretations. In sign painting, this serif mode, with its pronounced bracketing and angled terminals, was known as the “Detroit” style during the early 1900s. In the lithography trade, there may have been another name, but it seems to have had no given name in the realm of type, in which names of letter styles and serif kinds were generally known by their rou-

WIDE
BLACK ITALIC *flames*

WIDE
BOLD COLD WATER CANYON

NARROW
BOLD ITALIC *Indigenous shrubs of Santa Monica*

WIDE
BOLD PLANOGRAPHIC

NARROW
BOOK PRINTING

NARROW
MEDIUM sliding aluminum doors

NARROW
BLACK QUALITY

WIDE
BLACK ITALIC *agri business*

NARROW
BOOK BAKERSFIELD, CALIF.

WIDE
MEDIUM Light Sweet Crude

NARROW
BOOK FANDANGO

NARROW
BLACK YUMMY YUCCA CALCULATOR

tine inclusion in the full names of the faces. In the sign trade of a century ago, Fairplex would likely have been classified as a “Detroit Egyptian” lettering style: “Detroit” referring to the kind of serif, and “Egyptian” referring to its basically monoline structure or “armature” (Fig. 2).

Neither “Detroit” nor “Egyptian” are widely used terms in today’s classifications of types. Alas, in the one area of printing where Fairplex has definite ancestors, namely planographic printing employed to manufacture product labels, there seems to be no compendium of all the lettering styles available. Maybe they weren’t all documented.

The one place where the fashion remains in modern use is on granite grave markers, which are inscribed not by hand any more, but instead by masking and sandblasting (Fig. 3).



Figure 3.

In any case, even though Fairplex is indeed a new typeface design, it sits squarely in a camp of commercial lettering first seen in common use more than a century ago. It is therefore a very likely candidate for the same kinds of color effects that helped this grand style rise to prominence initially: inlines, out-lines, centerlines and shadows. *John Downer*

IMAGE SOURCES

FIGURE 1: Snow King Baking Powder cardboard sign from *Country Store Antiques* by Don and Carol Raycraft. Photocopy detail from a photo by Carol Raycraft

FIGURE 2: From *Atkinson's Sign Painting up to Now*, 1909, by Frank H. Atkinson. Published by Frederick J. Drake & Company, Chicago.

FIGURE 3: Gravemarker at St. Joseph Cemetery, Iowa City. Photo by John Downer.

FAIRPLEX NARROW BOOK, **BOLD & ITALICS** 10/13 POINT

If one is inclined to wonder at first how so many dwellers came to be in the loneliest land that ever came out of GOD's hands, what they do there and why stay, one does not wonder so much after having lived there. None other than this long brown land lays such a hold on the affections. The rainbow hills, the tender bluish mists, the *luminous radiance of the spring*, have the lotus charm. They trick the sense of time, so that once inhabiting there you always mean to go away without quite realizing that you have not done it.

FAIRPLEX WIDE BOOK, **BOLD & ITALICS** 10/13 POINT

If one is inclined to wonder at first how so many dwellers came to be in the loneliest land that ever came out of GOD's hands, what they do there and why stay, one does not wonder so much after having lived there. None other than this long brown land lays such a hold on the affections. The rainbow hills, the tender bluish mists, *the luminous radiance of the spring*, have the lotus charm. They trick the sense of time, so that once inhabiting there you always mean to go away without quite realizing that you have not done it.

FAIRPLEX NARROW MEDIUM, **BLACK & ITALICS** 10/13 POINT

Men who have lived there, miners and cattle-men, will tell you this, not so fluently, but emphatically, cursing the land and going back to it. For one thing there is the divinest, cleanest air to be breathed anywhere in GODs world. Some day the world will understand that, and the little oases on the windy tops of hills will harbor for healing its ailing, house-weary broods. There is promise there of *great wealth in ores and earths*, which is no wealth by reason of being so far removed from water and workable conditions, but men are bewitched by it and tempted to try the impossible.

FAIRPLEX WIDE MEDIUM, **BLACK & ITALICS** 10/13 POINT

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Text excerpted from *The Land of Little Rain* by Mary Austin. Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1903.

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DOLLARS!

WIDE MEDIUM

WIDE MEDIUM

WIDE BLACK

WIDE BLACK

WIDE MEDIUM