

Contenu



A font specimen book from Hackberry Font Foundry

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Introducing Contenu

This new font family is a culmination of over forty years of learning typography and nearly two decades of font design. Contenu is the new book font family designed for an upcoming book on book font family design. The name is French for content and this is what the family is designed for: text, body copy, and book layout. If it has a style is it a modern take on oldstyle serif font loosely based on using Jenson as a mask.

I thought it might be instructive to understand my starting point a little better. My original inspiration was a little font that came with my old LaserMaster printer which I bought for my commercial printing program in the early 1990s. It was called Minister.

As usual, I heard all kinds of things about the font that had no basis in reality. I was originally under the impression that it was an old Dutch Bible font. It is easy to see now that it was a loose copy of the original by Fahrenwaldt.

ABCDEFGHIJKLM
 NOPQRSTUVWXYZ
 Z @#\$%^&*()
 abcdefghijklmnopqrs
 tuvwxyz1234567890!

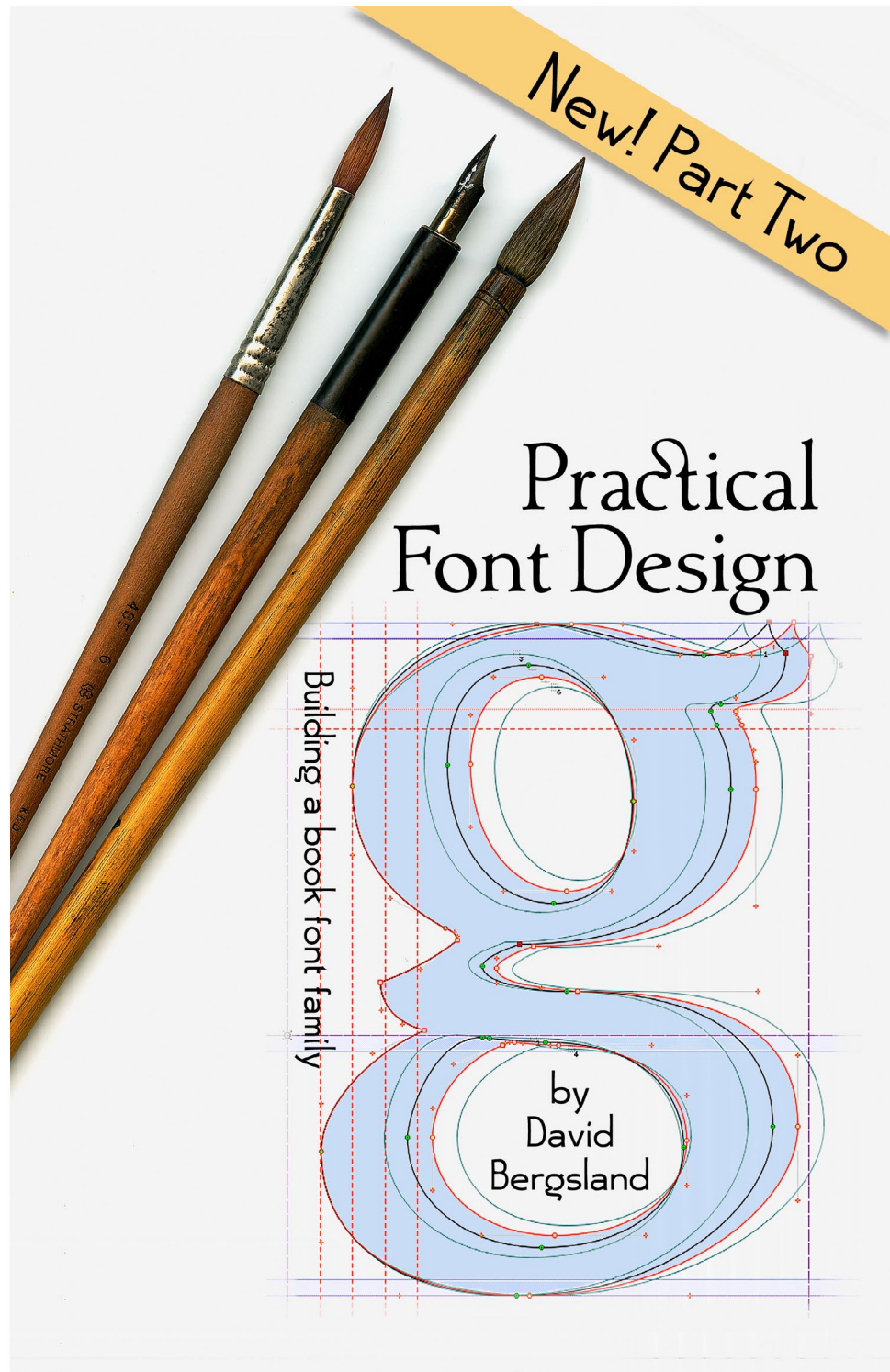
Minister: designed by Carl Albert Fahrenwaldt
 1929 for the Schriftguss Foundry Set in Bergsland Pro

As you can see above, Bergsland Pro (which was where my original serif designs ended up after developing it into an OpenType Pro font) was really only vaguely related to the original.

Linotype (the owner of Minister's copyright) writes that Minister was based on Garalde types with an oblique stress, wide caps, and strongly concave serifs. I have no idea which fonts he used for his inspiration.

Contenu comes from these roots, though it has gone far afield in the past couple of decades. Finally, it is my own and does what I want it to do.

I hope you like it!



An excerpt from my new book:
*Practical Font Design:
 Building a Book Font Family*

Book font family characteristics

Like I said, I probably wouldn't last long with the Helvetica Neue/Garamond combo. I made it for two pages—longer than normal for me. Here we have switched to Contenu/Aerle Thin. I wanted to set this sample for the type specimen in the new font family.

What we need to discuss now are some of the characteristics that are necessary for book fonts. Some of it will be others' opinions (which I will label, if I know). Much of it will be personal. Like all font designers, I am highly opinionated. Of course, that is necessary. Why else would a person spend so much time developing a private vision of font design to present to the world? All I really have to offer as a font designer is my personal vision.

My plan is to go through my decision-making process so you can do the same as you develop your fonts. There is no right or wrong here. All you have to guide you in the process is your personal sense of style—what's right and wrong. Remember that style is learned, so you are responsible to educate yourself and fill your mind with images of what you like and do not like. The result will be your personal vision. For something font design, we are not talking entirely fine art—where good is defined as what you like and bad is defined as what you don't like. For us, this is a practical craft with rigid limitations. Our task is to find our personal vision within those limitations.

Text versus display

John Berry wrote this for *CreativePro* in 2001 in a three-part series in his *dot-font*: column entitled *Book Design*. "Look for a typeface whose letter shapes are based on traditional forms, for the simple reason that we're used to reading them. A text face should also have clearly differentiated letter forms; if the letters are based too closely on the same shapes (like many geometrical faces), then it will be hard to distinguish them in running text.

"For typesetting books, it's useful to choose a type family with a truly comprehensive set of members. A book face should always include old-style figures and true small caps, as well as a full set of ligatures."

This does give us a clear place to start our quest for an excellent book font design. The rest of the characteristics are lost in the mists of time. Over the years I've read and heard many various attributes of

book fonts, but as I go through my library and search the Web it is really hard to find anything.

It's much like my book on forms design. All designers have to do them, but no one wants to talk about it. It's that horrible, boring work no one admits to actually producing. Somehow book design and book fonts seem to be the same type of niche.

Family weights

"Regular is the roman weight of a font that just can't bring itself to be called Roman, often in a Sans that was never meant for body copy. Text is for setting long blocks of text as opposed to ad copy. Book often seems to mean that some foundry is milking a cash cow and churning out more weights of a font than are really necessary..." James Puckett, on a forum on Typophile

And this is one of the nicer comments. Many modern typographers consider book weights to be a stupid anachronism that should be eliminated. The basic problem is that digital font managers (like InDesign) classes R, Roman, Regular, Book, Plain or Normal as the same weight—interchangeable. There is a lively discussion every time this comes up, because most of us who have set type before 1990 believe that Book is between Light and Medium and many of us would put medium in the R, Roman, Regular, Book, Plain or Normal group.

So let me share what I was taught by my first art director back in the 1970s:

Book is a weight designed for setting books that is darker than light and a little lighter than medium—usually slightly condensed to allow for more words per line in long runs of copy (as in a book). Book weights tend to be more elegant with slightly more fluid curves.

For my purposes, Book is my lightest weight. It is elegant enough to be used for what is called display work: large heads, brochure copy, and so on. I use it for the body copy of my book, but it is really too light to be used smaller than eleven point or so.

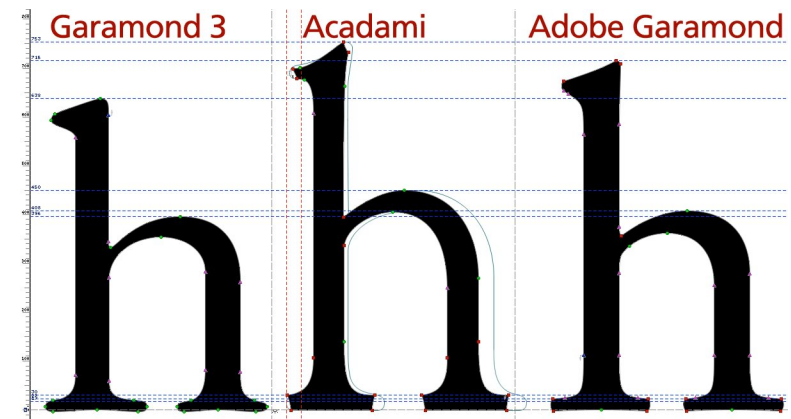
For small type and reversed type I have Medium. I formerly called this Plain or Regular and had no style after the font name. There is not enough contrast to use medium and Book together so I have a bold for the Book weight and a Black for the Medium Weight. The result is an eight-font family: Jarvis Book, Jarvis, Jarvis Bold, and Jarvis Black plus the four italics.

The problem here is the confusion software has with Jarvis Book and Jarvis. Often, these two will be considered the same weight by our software. So for this family we will use Book, Medium, Bold, and Black.

At least this is the plan at this point. These projects soon develop a life of their own, though.

Vertical metrics

One of the first and major determining characteristics of a book font family is the set of vertical metrics. Here again we need to look at normal to see how readers' expectations fit into this. Let's look at three examples.



As you can see, the two Garamonds are not very close to each other. This is commonly true. As I am looking for a set of metrics I can use, I check out Jenson, Janson, Galliard, and Caslon. Jenson is closer to Garamond 3. Janson is almost identical to Acadami. The rest fit in the general area.

In the back of my mind I remember the basic setting of the phototypesetters of the 1980s. At that point we were using huge x-heights and ridiculously tight letterspacing. As a fashion statement, it could be very pretty. But then any fashion statement looks pretty for the season in the hands of a sensitive stylish designer.

My frustration was that the machines I was using (mostly Compugraphics) were rigidly set up with a third for the x-height, a third for the descender, and a third for the ascender. The cap height was about 5% less than the ascender. So, let's compare the three above with that phototypesetting norm.

	Compugraphic	Garamond 3	Acadami	Adobe Garamond
Ascender	667	638	753	715
Cap Height	637	608	679	660
X-height	333	396	450	408
Descender	-333	-220	-250	-269

The final part of this package is built-in leading. Do I want any, and if so, how much? If we add up the ascender/descender we see that

Garamond 3 has 142 units of built-in leading. Acadami is a tad larger than the font size so there is a bit of overlap, and Adobe Garamond has 16 units of leading built in.

So, with all of that in mind, I need to make some decisions. Garamond 3 seems a bit extreme to me. Actually Jenson seems to be closer to what I want. So, let's look again. As I check, I find that the overshoot x-height of the Jenson H is 396, but the overshoot x-height of the G is 408.

So, as usual, I am guessing. Here are my arbitrary figures to start with. I am going to use Jenson as my mask with the metrics you see below. I am going to leave 50 units for leading 40 top and 10 bottom. I want my cap height distinctively shorter so we will give that a 7% reduction. To keep the font a little narrower, I plan to make the x-height a little shorter, so I set that at 365.

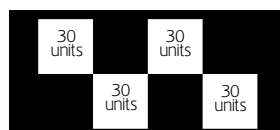
	Compugraphic	Adobe Jenson	Acadami	Book Family
Ascender	667	711	753	710
Cap Height	637	608	679	660
X-height	333	400	450	365
Descender	-333	-276	-250	-240

Then I pasted in all the characters for the 8-bit font from a 90% wide version of Acadami. I then deleted all the composite characters as I will be generating them after I get the basic 62 characters completed: A-Z, a-z, and 0-9.

Then I finished off the font info dialog in FontLab. I chose the name Content because content is mainly told by the text. I also enjoy the little play on words assuming that I will finally be contented with my new book font family. Much later I decided that I liked the French word for content better, so the name became Contenu. Even later than that I decided that the display version of the fonts will be called Titre, the French word for title.

Letterspacing

One of the major differences between text and display fonts is the letterspacing. Body copy must have much more letterspacing. I know that, but then I checked out the basic spacing for Garamond, Jenson, Galliard, and Caslon. I was amazed at how large the sidebearings are in those fonts.



As you may remember, in my Practical Font Design book I suggested 90 units from the stem to left as a maximum. I used 30 as the minimum for curved letters like OGCD. And my absolute minimum for letters like the AVWXY was 15 units. In checking out the four classics it seems

like 120, 60, and 30 are much closer to normal for text fonts. So I made a little shape to help me measure that—then I dropped it into the I slot.

As I have gone through the design of this family, I have been struck by the obvious fact that all of my fonts to this point have been set up with display letterspacing. I've been talking about designing book font families, yet my letterspacing was closer to what normal designers use for display fonts. This has caused me to revise my plans for this font family.

The need for text and display versions

As I come back here to write this, I have worked my way through the design of the four roman fonts: book, medium, bold, and black. I am now working on the design of the italic members of the family.

What is becoming obvious as I think about it and test out my new book family, is that I am going to need to make a text version and a display version. Knowing me, you probably have some idea of how much I am looking forward to that bit of drudgery. But there is now real way around it, as far as I can tell.

The embarrassing thing about all of this is pontifical pronouncements I have made in the past about such matters. They all ignored the letterspacing issues. This goes to show how ignorant I have been while learning all of this stuff.

The need for a sans version

Coupled with the letterspacing issues is the need for a sans font with the same vertical metrics. Much of this has been triggered by the ease with which we can now use run-in headers—what InDesign calls nested styles.

Simple things like this run-in header: have proven very problematic as I am forced to go through the adjustments necessary to make the font sizes compatible with widely varying x-heights. In this sample you can see the issue clearly. The x-height for Amico makes this run-in appear to be much larger next to the Contenu. Plus, it is just ugly to have the two fonts with differing x-heights on the same line of type.

Contenu Book 1010

One of the great undiscovered joys of life comes from doing everything one attempts to the best of one's ability. There is a special sense of satisfaction, a pride in surveying such a work, a work which is rounded, full, exact, complete in its parts, which the superficial person who leaves his or her work in a slovenly, slipshod, half-finished condition, can never know. It is this conscientious completeness which turns any work into art. The smallest task, well done, becomes a miracle of achievement.

Og Mandino

Contenu Book 1011

One of the great undiscovered joys of life comes from doing everything one attempts to the best of one's ability. There is a special sense of satisfaction, a pride in surveying such a work, a work which is rounded, full, exact, complete in its parts, which the superficial person who leaves his or her work in a slovenly, slipshod, half-finished condition, can never know. It is this conscientious completeness which turns any work into art. The smallest task, well done, becomes a miracle of achievement.

Og Mandino

Contenu Book 1012

One of the great undiscovered joys of life comes from doing everything one attempts to the best of one's ability. There is a special sense of satisfaction, a pride in surveying such a work, a work which is rounded, full, exact, complete in its parts, which the superficial person who leaves his or her work in a slovenly, slipshod, half-finished condition, can never know. It is this conscientious completeness which turns any work into art. The smallest task, well done, becomes a miracle of achievement.

Og Mandino

Contenu Book 1013

One of the great undiscovered joys of life comes from doing everything one attempts to the best of one's ability. There is a special sense of satisfaction, a pride in surveying such a work, a work which is rounded, full, exact, complete in its parts, which the superficial person who leaves his or her work in a slovenly, slipshod, half-finished condition, can never know. It is this conscientious completeness which turns any work into art. The smallest task, well done, becomes a miracle of achievement.

Og Mandino

Contenu Book 910.8

One of the great undiscovered joys of life comes from doing everything one attempts to the best of one's ability. There is a special sense of satisfaction, a pride in surveying such a work, a work which is rounded, full, exact, complete in its parts, which the superficial person who leaves his or her work in a slovenly, slipshod, half-finished condition, can never know. It is this conscientious completeness which turns any work into art. The smallest task, well done, becomes a miracle of achievement.

Og Mandino

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Og Mandino

Contenu Book 1113.2

One of the great undiscovered joys of life comes from doing everything one attempts to the best of one's ability. There is a special sense of satisfaction, a pride in surveying such a work, a work which is rounded, full, exact, complete in its parts, which the superficial person who leaves his or her work in a slovenly, slipshod, half-finished condition, can never know. It is this conscientious completeness which turns any work into art. The smallest task, well done, becomes a miracle of achievement.

Og Mandino

Contenu Book 12114.4

One of the great undiscovered joys of life comes from doing everything one attempts to the best of one's ability. There is a special sense of satisfaction, a pride in surveying such a work, a work which is rounded, full, exact, complete in its parts, which the superficial person who leaves his or her work in a slovenly, slipshod, half-finished condition, can never know. It is this conscientious completeness which turns any work into art. The smallest task, well done, becomes a miracle of achievement.

Og Mandino

Contenu Book 10/12

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. *I Corinthians 13: 4-10*

Contenu Book Italic 10/12

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. I Corinthians 13: 4-9

Contenu 10/12

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. *I Corinthians 13: 4-9*

Contenu Italic 10/12

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. I Corinthians 13: 4-9

Contenu Book Bold 13/13

If a man is called to be a streetsweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a great streetsweeper who did his job well. *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Contenu Book Bold Italic 13/13

If a man is called to be a streetsweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a great streetsweeper who did his job well. *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Contenu Black 13/13

If a man is called to be a streetsweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a great streetsweeper who did his job well. *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Contenu Black Italic 13/13

If a man is called to be a streetsweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a great streetsweeper who did his job well. *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

