

BY ILENE STRIZVER

# FONT SELECTION

## MADE EASY

*Finding fonts online can be a time-intensive and frustrating endeavor. Here, type expert Ilene Strizver provides an overview of various type foundry websites and offers tips to make choosing fonts easy and fun.*

If you've searched the web for just the right font, you know you have countless options. How many? Ten thousand? Thirty thousand? Try 55,000+, with new ones popping up online every day. These fonts consist of original typeface designs, historic revivals and interpretations (and reinterpretations), as well as added weights and different versions of existing designs. This can make selecting a typeface overwhelming. To complicate things, you have to wade through a multitude of font foundries and distributors whose primary marketing tool is the web. The font libraries of these foundries and distributors change constantly; so do their sites as they redesign and add new tools and features.

We've done a survey of typographic websites and broken them down by size and library in an attempt to make font selection easier and more efficient for you.

### Large Foundries and Distributors

This group offers the largest number of fonts, usually from a variety of foundries and designers. Site features such as font try-out utilities, typeface search applications, font identifiers and specimen materials vary from site to site. This can make font selection exciting or painful.

Additional site features meant to entice, inform and entertain can include informational content, e-newsletters, forums, best-seller lists, pricing specials—and occasionally, free fonts. Most sites offer immediate downloads and tech support.

#### MYFONTS

[www.myfonts.com](http://www.myfonts.com)

MyFonts offers thousands of fonts from many foundries and designers. Although somewhat cartoonish in design, the site is professional, uncluttered, easy to navigate and extremely robust.

An important element in selecting a typeface in the digital age is the ability to set words in a font at varying sizes within the foundry's website. This is especially helpful for display usage for which sharpness is less of a problem onscreen. TestDrive is MyFonts' try-out utility. TestDrive allows you to set the text of your choice in any size and type style onscreen. You can even compare two type styles at a time, which is a real timesaver.

MyFonts has a powerful search engine at the top of every page. In addition, fonts are indexed by foundry, category (also known as classification) and designer. The site has five discussion forums, including one on font identification. WhatTheFont is MyFonts' fully automated font identifier; when you upload a scanned image of several letters, it compares your sample to a database and sends you a match in seconds.

#### FONTS.COM

[www.fonts.com](http://www.fonts.com)

Fonts.com from Monotype Imaging Inc. (formerly Agfa Monotype) is a font provider with a long pedigree. The site began by offering the Agfa font collection along with the highly esteemed Monotype Library. It now includes the ITC typeface library (acquired in 2000) as well as a growing collection of typefaces from other designers and foundries, both large and small. Fonts.com is one of the few sites to offer free catalogs of its complete library.

This is an invaluable courtesy in a world where printed materials are dwindling due to their high cost.

This site has downloadable PDF specimens for new releases and is backfilling the ITC and Monotype libraries. The company also has two newsletters, one electronic and one print, announcing new releases and pricing specials. But Fonts.com's most notable feature is the content. There's an abundance of articles about typefaces, type history, professional typesetting, designer and foundry profiles, book reviews, type trading cards and the history of the alphabet.

### **THE LINOTYPE LIBRARY**

[www.linotype.com](http://www.linotype.com)

The Linotype Library has been around for more than 100 years and is known for its professional, high-quality typefaces. Many of the most well-respected designers have contributed to the library, including Hermann Zapf and Adrian Frutiger. The Linotype Library continues releasing top quality, innovative new designs, as well as refining and expanding Linotype classics such as Neue Helvetica, Optima Nova and Avenir Next.

The site is clean, simple and fairly easy to navigate with most of the features accessible from the home page. The Linotype site has extensive search features, with more than 200 search words to help you navigate the library. The Font Lounge lists hundreds of designers with links to their typefaces. Linotype also offers pixel fonts for digital or screen design.

### **ADOBE TYPE LIBRARY**

[www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com)

The Adobe Type Library bills itself as a source for

“world-class fonts from internationally renowned foundries, award-winning type designers, and distinguished design studios.” Although the type library web page is a little difficult to find amidst Adobe's software products, you'll find that it's an excellent resource for technical and historical information. The site is somewhat corporate in design and a bit tedious to navigate, but there's a lot there if you take the time to go through it.

The 300-page Adobe Type Reference Guide is one of the best type catalogs around. Available from the Adobe Store for \$25, it makes a valuable addition to any type-reference library. Adobe also has excellent PDF specimen materials for fonts that include a full glyph complement—important for an OpenType font. Other resources on the site include a 20-page font primer PDF that covers typographic terminology and concepts, character access charts and font embedding.

### **ITC FONTS**

[www.itcfonts.com](http://www.itcfonts.com)

ITC Fonts is the online store for International Typeface Corp., the legendary type foundry that led the pack in typeface design 30 years ago. It's still going strong, offering a balanced mix of classic and contemporary text and display designs, including a large collection of calligraphic and handwriting fonts. The search engine links to partner site Fonts.com, which offers convenient access to thousands more fonts.

The ITC Fonts site is also the home to Upper and Lower Case Magazine, which features archived articles, designer profiles and the For Your Typographic Information series. Type trading cards and ITC classics are also available.

## FONTHAUS

[www.fonthaus.com](http://www.fonthaus.com)

FontHaus offers name-brand fonts from some of the top foundries in addition to its own collection. The newly redesigned site is stylish, organized and intuitive—“easy-in, easy-find, easy-out,” as they say.

The FontHaus site has extensive search options at the top of every page. FontHaus offers a Top 50 Best Seller list as well as a Top 10 Per Foundry list. The top of the home page has a Big Type Sample in a variety of fonts that rotate with a click. The seductive, large displays and the simplicity of the operation make it addictive.

The company's online magazine, x-height, features articles about fonts, type design, designers and technology, all written by industry experts. In addition, FontHaus offers clip art, illustrations and stock photography, which makes for convenient one-stop shopping. This site is fun to use.

## FONTSHOP

[www.fontshop.com](http://www.fontshop.com)

This is a great source for every taste bud. The site, which is clever, robust and European in flavor, contains all the necessary features, including easily acces-

sible search words and categories, and customizable type samples. FontShop offers many fonts rarely found on other sites, which makes for a diverse international collection. Read the clever typographic musings of Erik Spiekermann (as well as other contributors) in the online Font Magazine. The site also has a type glossary and some excellent suggested links. FontBook, the 1,500-page type reference book of thousands of type samples, is pricey at \$99, but well worth it.

## PHIL'S FONTS

[www.philsfonts.com](http://www.philsfonts.com)

Phil's Fonts is a distributor offering fonts from more than 75 foundries worldwide. The site is simple and easy to navigate, but there's not a lot of content or features. Phil's Fonts' online magazine, WIT, has some interesting interviews, typeface histories and articles. The site also offers an FAQ page and a list of useful links.

## VEER

[www.veer.com](http://www.veer.com)

Veer is a relative newcomer to the font business, but has lots to offer. Although Veer is primarily known for graphics products, check out this stylish, well-

## HAPPY HUNTING: FONT-SELECTION TIPS

**1** Take advantage of keyword searches to narrow your hunt. Sometimes you know the name of the typeface you're looking for, but other times you only know the style, personality or category. In other words, your design solution hinges on one of those “I'll know it when I see it” fonts. Many foundries have powerful keyword search capabilities to help you find what you're looking for. The search words vary by foundry and can include general categories such as serif, sans, decorative, calligraphic or condensed. More detailed categories include stencil, grunge and futuristic. Application search categories can include invitations, posters, book text, time periods and styles such as western, medieval and Art Deco.

**2** Ask foundries for help with font identification. Did you ever see a typeface in an ad or a logo that you want to use, but you don't know the name? A number of foundries offer font-identification services. Some are automated: You answer several questions or e-mail a scan, and a list of possible matches comes up in seconds. Others offer a custom service, where you fax or mail the sample to the foundry's staff, who will try to identify the font. Generally, these services are free.

**3** Make sure you're getting the exact font you need before making a purchase. Many designers get confused when they see the same typeface offered on different sites at different prices. In many cases, different distributors offer fonts from the same

type libraries. In other instances, the font might be a different version or interpretation of the same type style. You'll often find this with fonts such as Bodoni and Caslon.

**4** Take advantage of the freebies. Sign up for e-newsletters to keep abreast of new releases, specials and other valuable information. If your inbox gets flooded, you can always unsubscribe. Order every free print catalog and brochure available.

**5** Download PDF specimens and print them out. You can organize them by foundry and category to create your own specimen books. Why? Print specimen materials are becoming scarce due to the high cost. PDFs are the next best thing, especially for text faces. Print specimens on a laser printer to get the best representation of the typeface. Inkjet printers tend to distort spacing and make type look heavier.

**6** Don't be afraid to try OpenType fonts. They're becoming increasingly available from foundries (in some cases, OpenType is the *only* format available). With its cross-platform capability and expanded character set, OpenType is on its way to becoming the font format of the future (and the present for some users).

**7** Devote as much time as you need when selecting a typeface. Your choice can make or break a job!

organized site with large, sharp typeface displays and PDF versions of the company's fabulous free print catalogs.

## Boutique Foundries

These medium-size foundries have loyal followings due to the quality and uniqueness of their type libraries. Their sites might have fewer features than the larger distributors, but they don't need as many, which makes font selection and purchasing simpler and quicker.

### FONT BUREAU

[www.fontbureau.com](http://www.fontbureau.com)

Roger Black and David Berlow founded Font Bureau in 1989 to meet the needs of the publishing industry. Since then, the Font Bureau library has grown from 13 fonts to more than 500. The site is clean and classy, as are the font offerings, which are exceptionally displayed online as well as in downloadable PDFs. There are inviting designer bios and free catalogs that are typographic works of art. But first and foremost, Font Bureau sells some of the most gorgeous typefaces around.

### ÉMIGRÉ

[www.emigre.com](http://www.emigre.com)

Émigré caused quite a stir when it first appeared on the scene in 1984 with anti-establishment designs, but has since become a household name in the type and design community. The site, although minimal in design, is effective. Émigré always has excellent print catalogs and type-specimen materials. But its claim to fame is still its exciting, innovative, well-crafted typefaces. Émigré Magazine is a much-coveted, award-winning publication. It showcases the impressive type library, and the articles are thought-provoking and inspiring.

### GALÁPAGOS DESIGN GROUP

[www.galapagosdesign.com](http://www.galapagosdesign.com)

These folks, known by many as type technologists, design some of the industry's most creative typefaces. The font library, although not huge, encompasses a broad range of styles. The warm, inviting site is simple to navigate, and it has a great visual index of fonts, expressive typeface displays and downloadable PDF specimens for all fonts.

## Indie Foundries

Small, independent foundries are doing some of the highest quality typeface design. These "micro" foundries prefer to control their own destinies by marketing and selling their own products rather than licensing to larger distributors. They're usually one-person studios (with the occasional assistant) that often supplement their type-design work with custom typeface design, logos and lettering.

Although the font offerings of these small foundries might be few, they're often sparkling jewels in a sea of anonymous pebbles.

### TERMINAL DESIGN

[www.terminaldesign.com](http://www.terminaldesign.com)

James Montalbano is known for his large, legible type families. Check out his stylish display designs as well.

### HOUSE INDUSTRIES

[houseind.com](http://houseind.com)

Entertaining and innovative text and display fonts are the company's specialty. Kooky and cool.

### STONE TYPE FOUNDRY

[www.stonetypefoundry.com](http://www.stonetypefoundry.com)

Every one of Sumner Stone's typeface designs is an elegant gem.

### HOEFLER & FRERE-JONES

[www.typography.com](http://www.typography.com)

Jonathan Hoefler and Tobias Frere-Jones are two extremely talented young designers with old-world sensibilities.

### MVB FONTS

[www.mvbfonts.com](http://www.mvbfonts.com)

This is the site of Mark van Bronkhorst, designer of the best-selling ITC Conduit and more.

### ASTIGMATIC ONE EYE

[www.astigmatic.com](http://www.astigmatic.com)

This is an entertaining site with funky, fun fonts.

### CHANK

[www.chank.com](http://www.chank.com)

You'll find lots of grunge, retro and handwriting fonts.

### FONT DINER

[www.fontdiner.com](http://www.fontdiner.com)

This fun site offers the biggest and best collection of retro fonts.

### MARK SIMONSON STUDIO

[www.ms-studio.com](http://www.ms-studio.com)

You can find some nice faces in this small but diverse collection.

### P22

[www.p22.com](http://www.p22.com)

This site features decorative fonts inspired by art and history. Museums love P22.

### STEREO TYPE HAUS

[www.stereotypelhaus.com](http://www.stereotypelhaus.com)

Find cutting-edge fonts from around the globe. **HOW**

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