

New Fonts to Make You Think

# Typosphere

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TYPOSPHERE: NEW FONTS TO MAKE YOU THINK  
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# Introduction

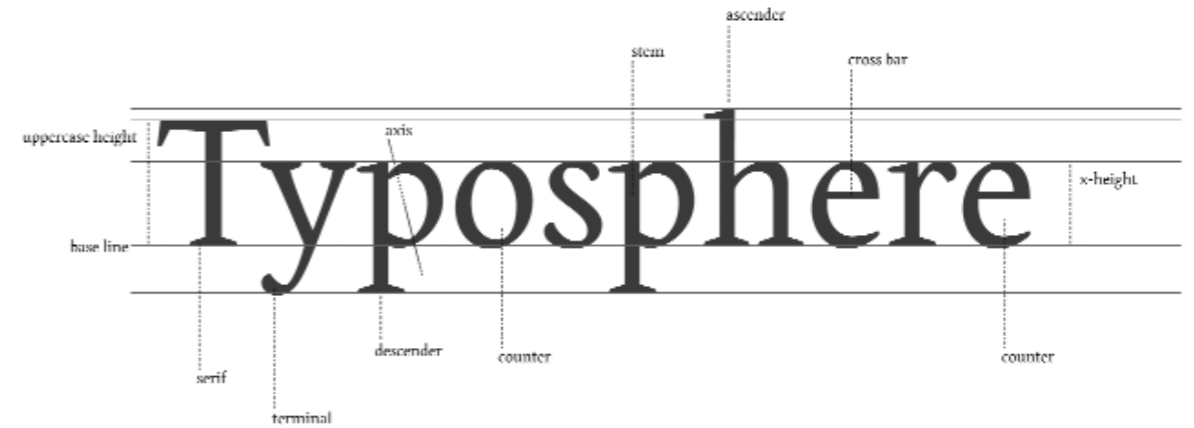
In the early nineties, a huge number of graphic designers launched themselves into creating typefaces. Both the technological revolution that preceded the appearance of the first Macintosh computer, in 1984, and the development of relatively user friendly typeface production software encouraged many designers to enter a field, limited previously to highly experienced professionals.

The appearance of the computer brought with it a greater sense of freedom, and allowed the graphic design world in general to explore the apparently non-existent limits of this new technology. Large numbers of creators generated masses of bizarre pieces, mostly of an experimental nature, and the frenetic rhythm of production inevitably affected their quality, both in graphic and typeface design. However, from this technological revolution, like all revolutions, arose a relatively short period of energetic, large-scale production, which came to an end as quick as it had started. By the end of the nineties the world of graphic design had settled down. Those experimenting with type design returned to graphics; some went on to web design, the new revolution, and typeface designers ruled their roost once again.

This return to specialization was owed in part to the appearance of more complex typeface production software, which required the user to have a greater level of understanding. Unicode, for example, is an encoding system which could identify the glyphs that each typeface contained. It locates a specific glyph in a typeface's database, when that typeface is used. OpenType, a project started in 1995 and developed by both Microsoft and Adobe, was finally to produce a new typeface format, which, in reality, is a hybrid of existing formats and new extensions. OpenType is a versatile format, compatible with both platforms, Mac and PC, which also allows the development of large character sets. A single font may contain up to 65000 glyphs compared with a previous 256.

This feature favors the development of typefaces that contain various writing systems within a single font. It also allows the production of complex writing systems, like Japanese, which uses two syllabic alphabets, hiragana and katakana, one ideographic, kanji, and also in recent years the so-called romaji (Latin alphabet). OpenType also allows users to add other features, like small capitals, alternative characters, ligatures, old style figures etc., attributes that till now had to be separated into different fonts named "expert", which were aimed at professional graphic designers.

In short, these new technologies have once again limited typeface design to professionals with an in-depth knowledge of both the new tools and the traditional techniques, which consists of much more than merely creating attractive shapes. In the words of Paul Renner: "Heed this professionals: typeface design is technology and it is art".



## Arm

Upper diagonal stem in the letter "k".

## Ascender

Stem of the lower case that ascends above the x-height.

## Axis

Angle of inflexion where the thinner strokes of a typeface meet. Depending on the design, it could be oblique, vertical or non-existent.

## Base line

Line which supports the x-height.

## Beak

A stroke which joins a stem with its serif.

## Body

Height of the typeface, which is measured from the ascenders to the descenders.

## Character

Graphical representation of a sound. For example, "a" and "A" are a single character.

## Counter

Interior, empty space that some glyphs present such as the letters "o", "d", "p", etc. "Counter" also refers to the exterior spaces of some glyphs; like, "C", "c", "S", "s", "n", etc.

## Descender

Stem of the lower case which descends beneath the base line.

## Ear

Terminal of the letter "g".

## Glyph

Graphical representations of a character. For example: "a" and "A" are the same character but, "a" is a glyph and "A" is a different glyph.

## Old style figures

Figures set designed to be used in long text. They have ascenders and descenders.

## Serif

Stroke at the end of the stems in roman typefaces.

## Spur

Circular ending of some letters such as the "a", the "j", the "f", etc.

## Tabular figures

Figure set designed to be used in tables or in any other kind of layout that requires vertical alignment of figures. Each of the figures occupies exactly the same space horizontally which means they can be aligned vertically.

## Tail

Oblique stem of some glyphs; among them, the "R", the "K" and the "O".

## Terminal

Final stroke of a stem.