

**Script typefaces, currently enjoying an unprecedented popularity, bring a vital element of humanity to the digital age.**  
**By Paul Shaw and Abby Goldstein**

Opposite: a page from the 1882 specimen book of George Bruce's Son and Co., showing two of the New York type foundry's many pointed pen script faces. The upper face is Meridian Penman No. 2,053, a script with American-style flourishes, and the lower one is Meridian Penman No. 2,054, a standard English roundhand. Bruce numbered its typefaces for ease of organisation – at the expense of the customer's memory. Along with the Meridian scripts, there were also the Penman, Columbian, Madisonian, Graphotype, Running Hand and Notarial series. Most of the Bruce scripts, including the two here, were patented.

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# The line of beauty

What Desiderius Erasmus wrote about  
 Froben's Printing in 1517: It is enough  
 to know that a Book was Printed on the  
 Presses of Froben to be sure that it will be  
 Diligently sought for by the Learned.  
 Amerbach & Co. Erasmus. Froben.

The Book of M. Giovanni Battista  
 Palatino, a Citizen of Rome, in which is  
 taught the Manner of Writing all kinds  
 of Characters, of whatever nature; Ancient  
 and Modern . . . with Rules, Examples and  
 Proportions . . . Discourse on Cyphers . . . 1561

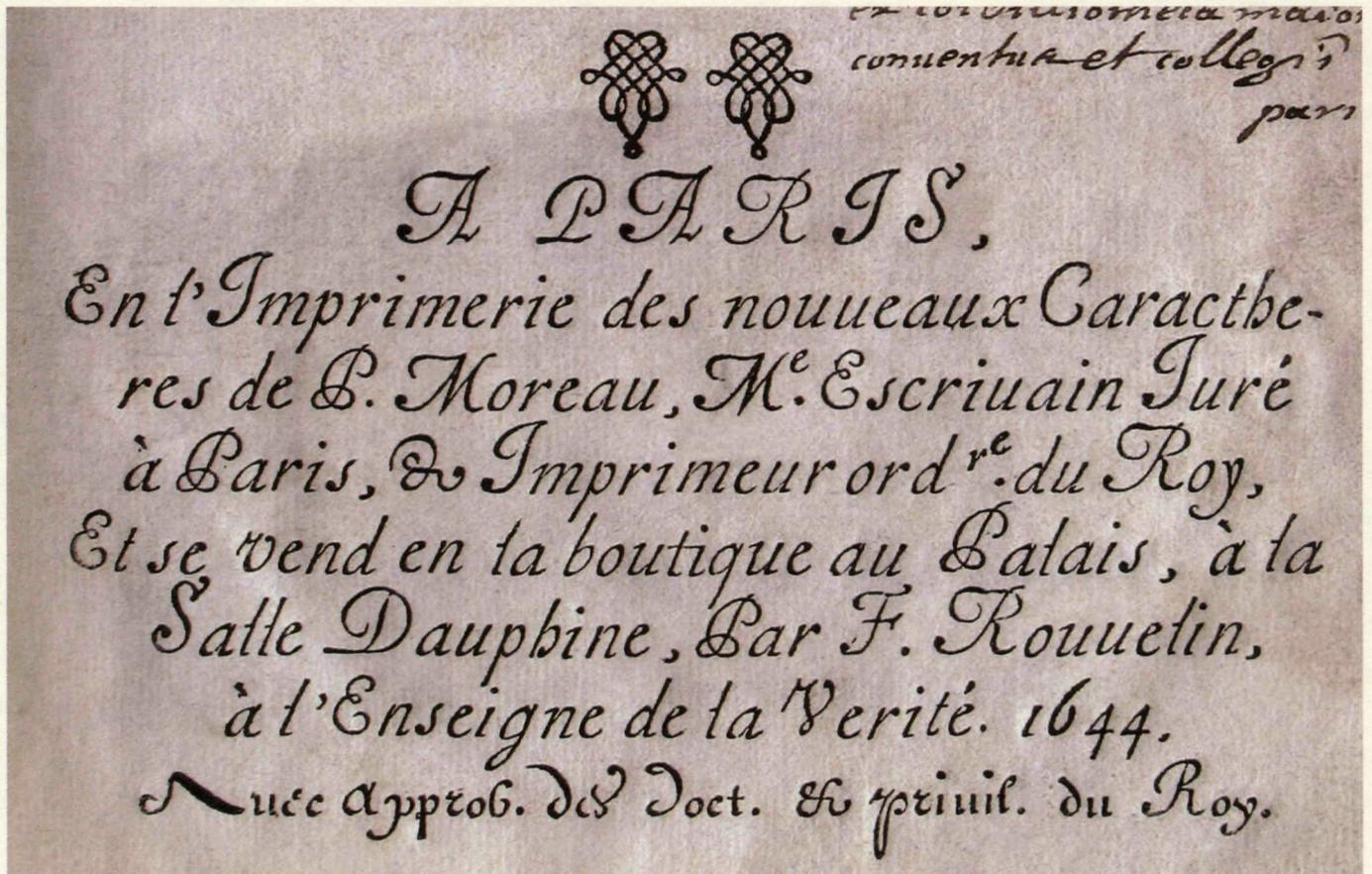
## Unruly scripts

Scripts, once the orphans of the type world, relegated to the back pages of type specimen books and ignored in typography manuals, now rival sans serifs as the fastest growing group of fonts, selling strongly to both amateurs and professional designers. This growth is being fuelled by a mix of high design (advertising and packaging) and low design (event collateral, especially wedding invitations).

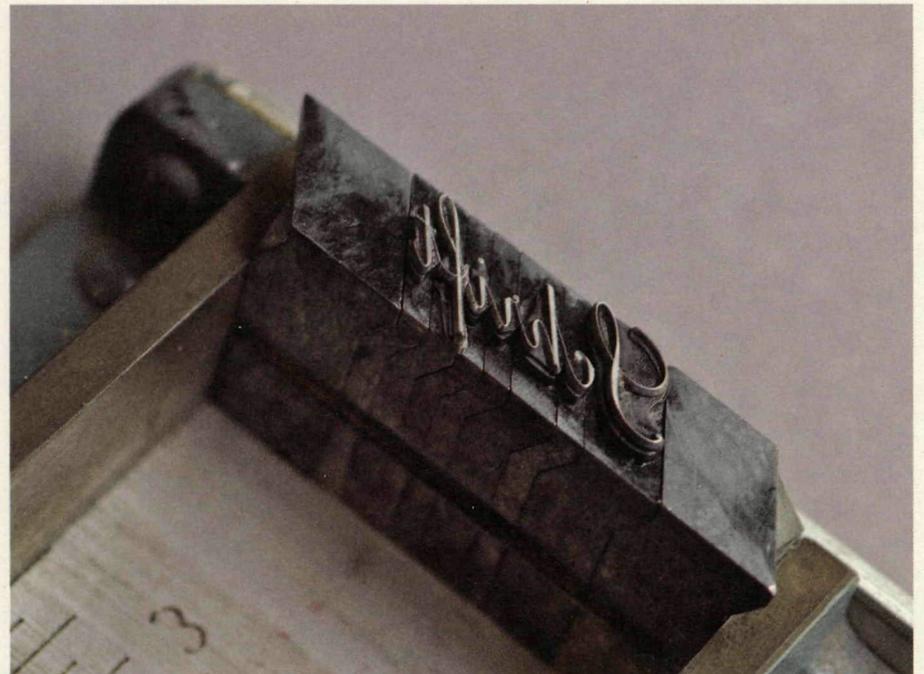
Scripts are an unruly lot, one of the principal reasons that they have been shunned by typographers in the past and

an explanation for the dearth of serious books on the subject. Defining them is difficult, especially since the word 'script' (like its German counterpart, 'Schrift') has so many meanings. Essentially, script typefaces derive their form from writing, whether formal or informal; whether done with a broad-edged or pointed pen, a brush, a ballpoint pen or an unconventional tool such as a ruling pen or spraycan.

Detail from the title page of *Les saintes metamorphoses, ou, Les changemens miraculeux de quelques grands saints* by I. Baudoin (1644). The text brags that the book has been printed in a new character designed by Pierre Moreau, Master Calligrapher in Paris and Printer to the King. Moreau's script typeface, first shown in 1643, is widely considered to be the first ever designed.



Palace Script is one of a number of roundhand-based script types cast in metal that used wing body kerns to maintain a steep slope and still join smoothly. In a wing body typeface, part of the letter is cantilevered over the body of the next letter for support. To make the letters fit together snugly the bodies are bevelled near the face. These types are marvels of engineering and casting.



## At odds with metal

From the time of Pierre Moreau, credited with the first script typeface in 1643, punchcutters and type designers have been trying to imitate writing as closely as possible, a task at odds with the intrinsic nature of type. Written letters always vary, and sometimes they slope and join. Type is marked by uniformity and each letter is independent of the others. Furthermore, from Gutenberg's day on, the trend in metal type was toward smaller and simpler character sets, which runs counter to the needs of script

fonts for alternates and ligatures.

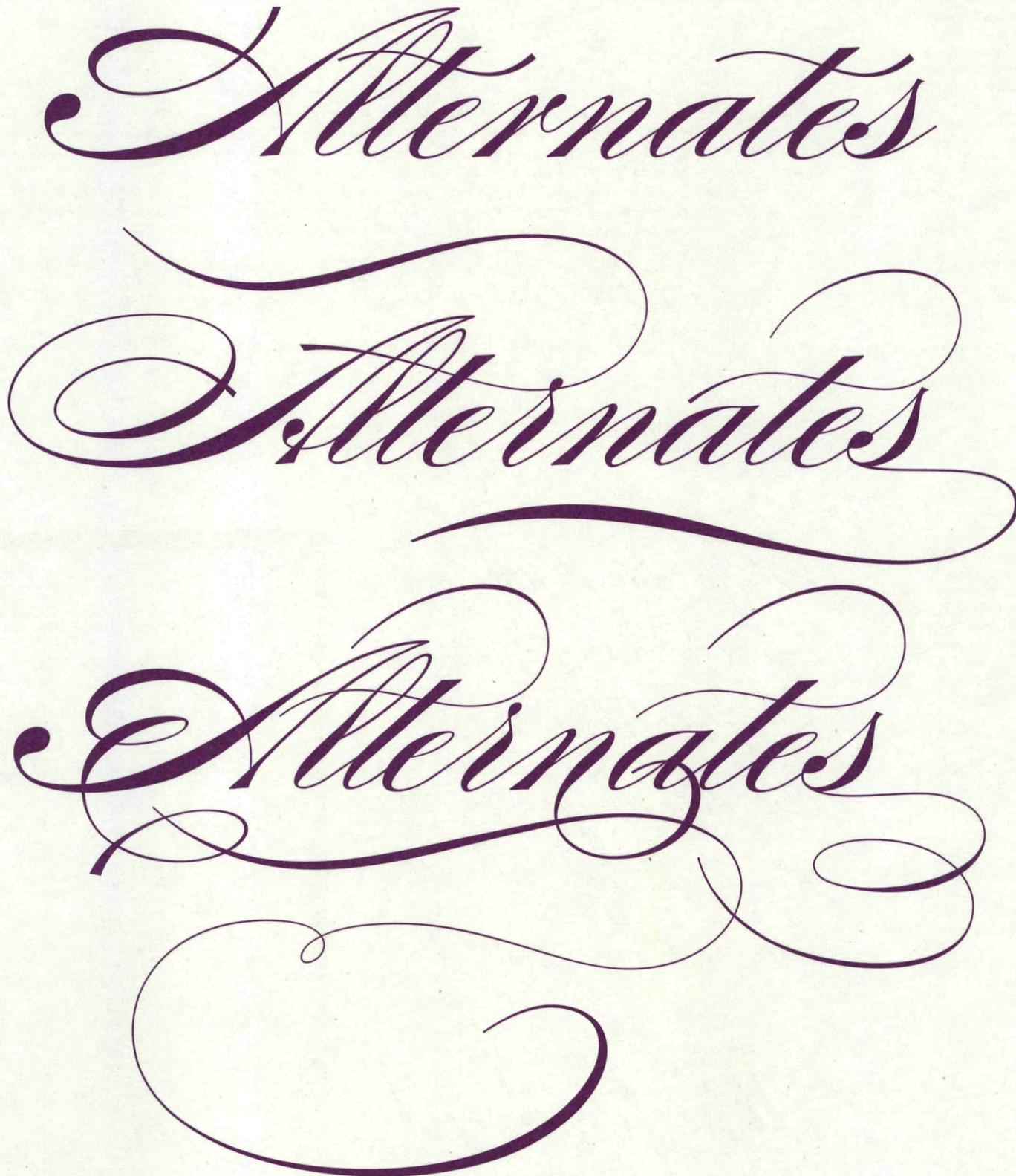
Photocomposition and digital type made it cheaper to include alternate characters and ligatures. Then, OpenType, with its palette of more than 65,000 glyphs, burst open the possibilities: type designers were no longer constrained to the 256-character ASCII set, nor were users stuck shuffling among multiple fonts to access a few extra characters. Now script fonts could have virtually unlimited alternates, ligatures and swash characters.

However, solving the size of the character

set was not the biggest problem facing typefounders: contending with slope was. Because metal type has habitually been fitted to a rectangular space, sloped letters required innovative solutions – and typefounders, especially those in the nineteenth century, were up to the challenge. They cast scripts with kerned bodies, winged bodies, angled bodies and bodies that zigged and zagged – all to allow scripts to properly slope and join.

### Burgues Script Alejandro Paul 2006 Sudtipos

This script, based on the showmanship calligraphy of American penman Louis Madarasz but created for the age of OpenType, has many flourished alternates, including capitals whose tendrils ensnare whole words. They need to be used with caution. In this instance, the super-flourished 'A' in the second example tangled with the 't' that followed, so it was dropped in favour of the addition of a detached flourish to create the exuberant bottom version of 'Alternates'.





Mistral by Roger Excoffon (1953) for Fonderie Olive. This is the front page of a 1953 type specimen issued by the foundry. The white and blue stripes indicate the body of each letter as cast in metal. Note the ligatures 'st' and 'qu' as well as the alternate final 'e' and the 'p' (a character designed to be an 'f', 'p' or 'l' depending on the context). (Courtesy of Sébastien Morlighem.)

F O N D E R I E O L I V E

*mistral*

*écriture*

*typo-*

*graphique*

## Seamless joins

The advent of photocomposition eliminated the physical barriers to joining letters in scripts. Snell Roundhand (1966), created for Mergenthaler's Linofilm machine, was the first script typeface that maintained a steep yet consistent slope. Matthew Carter, its designer, limited joins to the right side of each letter, thus negating the traditional difficulty of matching hairline strokes from adjacent letters. The execution of seamless joins was an important step towards the 'holy grail' of script typefaces that are indistinguishable from writing.

The next step was the significant increase in the number of alternate characters and ligatures that several 1990s PostScript fonts, most notably Poetica, Bickham Script and Zapfino, offered. But they achieved their expanded character sets by sleight of hand, as they were actually suites of related fonts: six in the case of Zapfino and 21 for Poetica (one of which consisted solely of 58 ampersands). Users were now faced with the new problem of having to juggle these fonts.

**Snell Roundhand**  
**Matthew Carter**  
**1966**

**Mergenthaler**  
**Linotype**

This groundbreaking pointed pen script remains popular due to its clarity and simplicity. It is the script for those who prefer sans serifs such as Univers and Helvetica.

Regular

**Poetica**  
**Robert Slimbach**  
**1992**

**Adobe**

The OpenType version of this quintessential chancery cursive combines the individual fonts of the PostScript version, making it easier to use Slimbach's many options. Here an alternate 'y' solved the gap created by the preceding 'r'.

Necessary

**Bickham Script Pro**  
**Richard Lipton**  
**1997-2004**

**Adobe**

This is the best of the many fonts based on English roundhand calligraphy. It is a carefully thought out design that does not overwhelm the user with too many alternate characters. Yet it has very useful ones such as the 'o' without an entry stroke and this fabulous 'st' ligature – designed so well that it does not collide with the dot of the 'i' before it nor the one after it.

Lophisticated

## The advent of OpenType

The answer was OpenType, with its huge glyph palette (intended originally for non-Latin types but equally valuable for scripts), which reduced scripts such as Poetica back to single fonts. (However, in practice glyph palettes can be as aggravating to handle as multifonts.)

Another feature of OpenType that has been especially fruitful for scripts has been the innovation of contextual alternates, characters whose presence and frequency in a text is automatically determined by software programs such as InDesign.

When contextual alternates first appeared, with Adobe's InDesign 1.5 in 2001, they seemed to be the perfect, pain-free way to insert proper f-ligatures in ordinary fonts and choose among alternate letters in script fonts. The proving ground was Caflisch Script Pro (2001) – released in conjunction with InDesign 2.0 – but soon other scripts (most notably Zapfino Extra in 2003 and Bickham Script Pro in 2004) were reconfigured to take advantage of this new technology.

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### Zapfino Hermann Zapf 1998 Linotype

This popular script is often used in a default manner that does not do justice to its richness. Zapf has provided a wealth of alternate characters that when used properly can create a variety of subtle rhythmic changes.

Handwriting  
Handwriting

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### Caflisch Script Robert Slimbach 1993 Adobe

This script was based on the ballpoint pen handwriting of book designer Max Caflisch. Its even rhythm is due to a chancery cursive foundation. It is therefore informal and stylish at the same time.

Pidgin English

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### Caflisch Script Pro Robert Slimbach 2001 Adobe

The OT version of Caflisch Script has contextual alternates that InDesign automatically inserts. Most of the time this is a good thing, but sometimes it is better to turn that option off and explore the glyph palette for a more vibrant result.

Pidgin English

## The quest to look natural

Smaller foundries jumped into the game, beginning with Christian Robertson's Dear Sarah Pro (Betatype) in 2004 but most notably Sudtipos (Burgues Script, 2007; Poem Script, 2011), House Industries (Studio Lettering suite, 2008) and Underware (Liza Pro, 2009) over the following five years. Each of these last three designs upped the ante in what contextual alternate programming could do to better simulate the vagaries of letters written by hand. Burgues Script reintroduced extravagant swash letters and flourishes;

the Studio Lettering suite of Sable, Slant and Swing added language as a contextual feature driving the choice of alternate characters; and Liza Pro greatly expanded the range of options that a font could have in the quest to look natural. The floodgates for script fonts were now wide open.

Despite their great potential, contextual alternates have not been a panacea. In the case of script fonts, they sometimes hinder good typography, since the programming rules they operate under often fail to take into account anything more than a desire

for a random frequency of letterforms and the creation of discretionary ligatures. The focus is on avoiding repetition as much as possible – 'Liza makes your letters look different all the time,' says the blurb for Liza Pro on the MyFonts website – even though all writing, from casual to careful, is marked by the repetition of similar, though not identical, letters. Obvious differences among alternate characters are more typical of formal scripts than informal ones. In calligraphy – as opposed to handwriting – they are design decisions, sometimes

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### Dear Sarah Pro Christian Robertson 2004

#### Betatype

This is a pointed pen script based on the handwriting of an ordinary individual rather than a writing master. It has a set of ink splotches that can be used to hide inelegant joins.



Dear diary

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### Poem Script Alejandro Paul 2011

#### Sudtipos

This is a nineteenth-century American-style pointed pen script, like Compendium and Burgues Script (see page 57) from the same designer. Its alternate characters benefit from restraint.



Extravagant

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### Liza Pro Akiem Helmling, Bas Jacobs, Sami Kortemäki 2009

#### Underware

This casual, brush-based script is notable for its large number of alternate characters, only a few of which are shown here.



Flourishes  
Flourishes

conscious and at other moments intuitive, made by scribes looking to shape letters into words and words into lines and lines into well balanced texts.

In contrast, the alternate characters found in informal scripts are the residue of physiological and emotional factors, such as the speed of writing and the writer's mental state. This means that the variations in form tend to fall within a narrow range, one of the reasons that handwriting can be linked to an individual. The most natural of casual script fonts, such as Cafilisch Script

Pro or Toni Haaparanta's Suomi Hand Script (2008), are those that recognise this and do not try to show off. The latter claims to eschew 'OpenType magic' in favour of 'hundreds of ligatures, connecting pairs and trios of letters'. Contextual programming can act like magic – watching characters change as they are being typed can be mesmerising (or unsettling) – but designers are often better advised to turn off such features and rely on their own knowledge and skill in choosing the right letter or ligature for a given spot.

**Swing:**  
Studio Lettering suite  
Ken Barber,  
Tal Leming  
2008

**House Industries**  
This is a monoline  
Speedball B-nib style  
script with a good  
sense of bounce.

Friendly

**Sable:**  
Studio Lettering suite  
Ken Barber,  
Tal Leming  
2008

**House Industries**  
This is the best of the  
Studio Lettering trio  
of fonts. Sable is a  
beautiful pointed  
brush script that  
marries elegance  
and informality.

Casual

**Slant:**  
Studio Lettering suite  
Ken Barber,  
Tal Leming  
2008

**House Industries**  
This is a rare  
backsloping script.  
It is based on lettering  
made with a  
Speedball steel  
brush. It is only  
available in one  
weight.

Script

**Suomi Hand Script**  
Tomi Haaparanta  
2008

**Suomi Type Foundry**  
This brave attempt  
to create a true  
handwriting font is  
full of two- and  
three-letter glyphs  
but has no alternate  
single letters. Here  
three, multiletter  
glyphs ('Scr' + 'pt' +  
'type') are used to  
create the words.

Script type

## Handwriting scripts

Scripts can be separated into formal and informal (or casual) groups – with handwriting fonts being subsumed into the latter.

Because they are so intimately tied to the act of writing, they can be further subdivided into four subcategories based on tools:

- broad-edged pen (e.g. Veljovic Script),
- pointed pen (e.g. Tangier),
- brush, both flat and pointed (e.g. Stentor),
- other tools: pencil, pen, crayon, marker, ruling pen, spraycan, etc. (e.g. Twang).

Most of these tools leave distinctive traces that can be found in script typefaces. The exception is the group of script fonts based on lettering that itself is imitative of writing, but in an exaggerated or heavily stylised manner (e.g. LHF Ballpark Script by Tom Kennedy or Magneto by Leslie Cabarga).

**Veljovic Script LT Pro**  
Jovica Veljovic  
2009

**Linotype**  
This is a broad-edged pen script in the chancery cursive style.

Broad-edged

**Tangier**  
Richard Lipton  
2010

**Font Bureau**  
A contemporary pointed pen script.

Pointed pen

**Stentor**  
Heinz Schumann  
1964

**Typoart**  
Elsner + Flake  
This is a flat brush script involving many changes of writing angle. One reason that it is non-joining is that it was designed for metal setting.

Brush

**Twang**  
Timothy Donaldson  
1995

**Letraset**  
This is a script based on writing with a home-made ruling pen, emphasising the splatter created when the flexible blade 'twangs'.

Ruling pen

## To join or not to join?

Scripts have different characteristics and, hence, different terminology to that of romans and sans serifs. Continuous joining is an important feature, though not essential. Formal broad-edged pen scripts – such as chancery cursives (e.g. Poetica by Robert Slimbach) and rondes (e.g. ITC Redonda by Gérard Mariscalchi, 1998) – and brush scripts (e.g. Sunetta by Werner Schneider, 2005) often do not.

Formal pointed pen scripts (e.g. Libelle by Jovica Veljovic, 2009, or Compendium by Alejandro Paul, 2007) and most

informal scripts (e.g. Liza by Underware, Zapfino by Hermann Zapf, and Caflich Script by Robert Slimbach), regardless of the underlying tool being imitated, join up frequently.

**Magneto**  
**Leslie Cabarga**  
**1995**

**Font Bureau**  
This example of a stylised script is based on mid-twentieth-century industrial nameplate lettering such as that seen on American cars, refrigerators and other appliances.

*Drawn*

**ITC Redonda**  
**Gérard Mariscalchi**  
**1998**

**ITC**  
The ronde was a seventeenth-century French broad-edged pen script. Some of its letters are difficult to decipher.

*Rondes*

**Sunetta**  
**Werner Schneider**  
**2005**

**Linotype**  
This contemporary pointed brush script comes in three versions. With judicious care they can be mixed, as here, to achieve additional results.

*Written*

**Libelle**  
**Jovica Veljovic**  
**2009**

**Linotype**  
Another example of a contemporary pointed pen script.

*Formal*

## Rhythm and sensibility

The new prominence of script typefaces means that designers need to expand their typographic knowledge. They need to learn new terminology, gain an understanding of the tools and mechanics involved in calligraphy and handlettering, and set aside classicist or Modernist notions of good typography. Using script fonts is not about hierarchy – there is no pairing of roman and italic, and no ranked combination of caps, small caps and lowercase – or contrast (scripts tend to be loners rather than members of families with multiple weights).

It is not about kerning and tracking, either, since anything other than fine adjustments of letter and word spacing will destroy the rhythm and joining that is integral to scripts.

First and foremost, script typography is musical. Scripts – whether formal or informal, joining or discursive – have a rhythm. A formal script, such as Snell Roundhand or Michael Clark's Pouty (2000), has a steady rhythm, while an informal script such as Stephen Rapp's Memoir (2008) or Steinweiss Script (2010) has a syncopated rhythm.

A steady rhythm is created by consistency in letter height, branching, arch shape, joins and intervals (counterspaces and the spaces between letters). In contrast, these features are deliberately inconsistent, yet controlled, in a syncopated script. Furthermore, syncopation relies on the presence of alternate characters that vary in form, baseline position, slope and method of joining. Uncommon ligatures are essential. The difficulty in designing a good informal script – as attested to by the many failures littering the typographic landscape

**Pouty**  
**Michael Clark**  
**2000**  
**Font Bureau**  
An elegant contemporary interpretation of a chancery cursive with an unusually large x-height and a very light weight.

Melody

**Memoir**  
**Stephen Rapp**  
**2008**  
**Stephen Rapp**  
**Lettering Design**  
A casual pointed pen script with a good set of alternate characters that provide a subtle bounce.

Rhythm is the  
key to scripts

**Steinweiss Script**  
**Michael Doret,**  
**Alex Steinweiss**  
**2010**  
**Alphabet Soup Type**  
A goofy monoline script, based on the writing that Alex Steinweiss used on his Columbia Records album cover designs (see Eye 76).

Bespoke

today – is controlling syncopation so that it appears to be natural and pleasing no matter what the combination of letters. The role of the typographer is to maintain or enhance the rhythm of the script, to let its personality flower.

The current embrace of scripts, especially those sporting a riot of swashed and flourished letters, on the part of designers is a continuation of the decades-old rebellion against the less-is-more philosophy of Modernism. But swashes and flourishes have been abused – both

by graphic designers and type designers. Learning to use them well involves restraint, but most of all it involves the balance of white space and of text. This is something that goes beyond an understanding of calligraphy. It cannot be achieved through the use of contextual alternates. The only solution is to have a good design sense.

The popularity of scripts is not a fad, however fleeting the fame of many of them will be. They are here to stay because they fulfill the needs of the amateur designer as well as the professional. Scripts are

malleable. Most importantly, they are personal. They encompass a variety of styles and they suggest a plethora of emotions. Scripts are human. As the digital world takes over more and more of our lives, they provide a link to the physical and tangible world we are leaving behind. When print is dead, scripts will remain. @

Cafflich Script and Cafflich Script Pro (both by Robert Slimbach for Adobe). The top example shows the PostScript Cafflich Script (1993); the second and third show the OpenType Cafflich Script Pro (2001), first as set with InDesign determining the contextual alternates to use; and then with co-author Paul Shaw choosing the alternates. The text is from an actual letter by Cafflich; Shaw made decisions based on what Cafflich did in his penmanship.

heute habe ich Deine gestern eingetroffene Sendung durchgesehen und habe mich dabei an der Zeitschrift

heute habe ich Deine gestern eingetroffene Sendung durchgesehen und habe mich dabei an der Zeitschrift

heute habe ich Deine gestern eingetroffene Sendung durchgesehen und habe mich dabei an der Zeitschrift

Variations on a word set in Libelle (2009) by Jovica Veljovic, showing use of alternates and swashes starting with the default setting.

reproduce  
reproduce  
reproduce

Thanks to Elsner + Flake, FontShop, House Industries, Linotype, Monotype Imaging, Suomi and Underware for supplying fonts. Libelle, Memoir, Pouty, Stentor, Sunetta, Tangier and Veljovic are available from their foundries and FontShop.

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