Sextan Text

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CHARACTER SET SEXTAN LIGHT • 533 GLYPHS

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Spacing a font is an art unto itself. Poor spacing can ruin an exquisitely drawn typeface, while great spacing can give a lackluster font new life. The shape of a letter works in concert with its side bearings, left and right. Small alterations to a character's form can vastly improve its spacing, while a previously troublesome letter may become cooperative through careful calibration of its side bearings. A properly drawn and spaced typeface should have an even color, exhibiting no distracting gaps or heavy spots within words. Once a font has been correctly spaced, each character will fit comfortably and evenly within its surrounding negative space.

Every lettering design is two things at once: it is language made visible and it is an abstract visual pattern. This can be expressed as the legibility-pattern scale. At one end is the public sign which must make no concessions to pattern-making in its rigorous clarity, but which is nevertheless, if it is well designed, a decorative object. At the opposite end is a text on the wall of a church, which is part of the church's architectural fabric and whose abstract patterns express a sense of truth and wonder -as do the great illuminated initial letters in the Book ofKells - yet which is also intended to be read.

X-height is the vertical measurement of a lowercase letter's main body, usually defined by the x. It differs from typeface to typeface. Increasing a font's x-height increases the apparent size of the letters and generally improves legibility at small sizes. An excessively large x-height can have the opposite effect, reducing the overall readability of word shapes and making the letters seem graceless. An x-height that is too small can produce letters that look top-heavy or stunted.

Typographic systems do not always remain static. Only the most rigid ideadriven systems of conceptual alphabets stay completely true to their origins. For the typical lettering treatment, alphabet, or font, the designer constantly refines and revisits the governing system as the project progresses. Sometimes a specific character presents new challenges to the system, forcing the designer to revise the parameters. New letters or words might suggest improved solutions to previously drawn forms. Creating lettering and type is a lengthy process involving numerous revisions to individual characters as well as to the typographic system.

Any lettering or type is based on a system. Like a moral code for the alphabet, typographic systems are sets of visual rules and guidelines that govern the actions and decisions involved in creating letters. These implicit systems enable characters to work together, by regulating and defining their appearance—dictating their shapes and sizes, how they fit together, and their visual spirit, as well as all other underlying tenets of the letters. Lacking a strong code, a lettering treatment or typeface rarely leads a successful life.

No successful typeface or lettering treatment just happens. Before the pencils are sharpened or the computer screen illuminated, there is an idea or concept. A designer understands the content that the letters will communicate and the context in which they will appear. The clearer this perception is, the more precise and powerful are the project's results. A well-developed idea contributes just as much as well-constructed characters to lettering and type's successful outcome.