Emigre: The Typography of Graphic Design

EMIGRE

LITTLEBIT

Designed by Rudy VanderLans
and Zuzana Licko

Sometimes we come across work that we created way in the past and it brings a smile to our faces. Littlebit is a typeface that was originally created by Rudy VanderLans in 1985, although it wasn't called Littlebit back then. Actually it didn't have a name, because it didn't exist as an actual font. It was created as a series of letters using MacPaint, one of the first drawing programs that came standard with the Apple Mac 128K. To set words, VanderLans would simply "cut and paste" the letters together in MacPaint.

Those letters were first used in *Emigre* magazine #3 (1985) to create a headline that read "Boundaries Ignored." It was used again in the same headline configuration in *Emigre* #4 (1986). It was also used on a postcard. Then we never used it again. We're not sure why. Probably it was pushed aside or forgotten by an onslaught of new type designs we were working on in those days.

So after 37 years we removed the cobwebs, blew off the dust, took a close look at it, and realized it would be worthwhile to complete the character set and turn it into a usable typeface. VanderLans particularly liked the idea that each character was unique. Of course all letters are unique, but with a reductionist font like Littlebit, it is tempting to turn an "m" into a "w," a "p" into a "b," a "u" into an "n," etc., by simply rotating or flipping the characters. When redrawing some of the characters, we tried to resist the urge for repetition and instead emphasized distinctiveness.

Of course, since we are designers, who can't leave well enough alone, we made a few changes, mostly to the proportions and to some of the character shapes, and then also added 19 variations based on the same basic model.

Original version of Littlebit, published in *Emigre* #3, 1985.

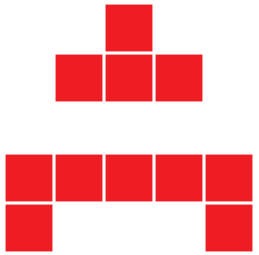
LITTLEBIT

SQUARE

As the name implies, Littlebit Square is composed from square pixels, just like the original bitmap design. But pixels need not be square anymore, so we had a bit of fun trying out different shapes. First we settled on a variant that switches out the square bit with a loop, named Littlebit Loopy, which was reminiscent of Slinky and Spirograph toys.

Then we also generated a series of variants composed from dot-shaped pixels, named Littlebit Dotty, and two versions that emphasized the underlying bitmap grid of the original design named Littlebit Blocky and Littlebit Griddy. We added Littlebit Twisty as a final variation, satisfied that we had thoroughly exhausted the idea of the original Littlebit design.

Working on Littlebit felt like we've come full circle, back to where

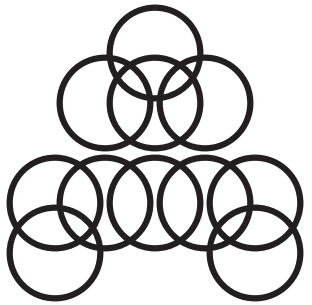


we started when we were using bitmaps as our building blocks to make letters. And while the tools to produce fonts are now extremely sophisticated, allowing for unlimited formal expression, it's still creatively satisfying, sometimes, to set restrictions and reduce choice to generate simplified yet readable letter forms.

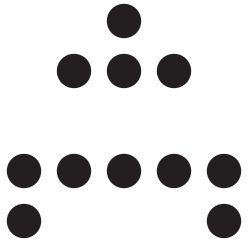
By the way, we don't suggest you use this font to set lengthy text, or any text for that matter. It works best in short headlines, word logos, drop caps and the like. Remember, sometimes a little bit goes a long way.

Square

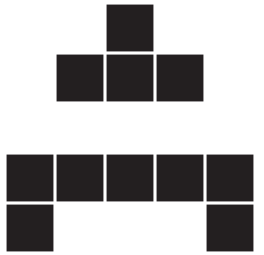
Loopy



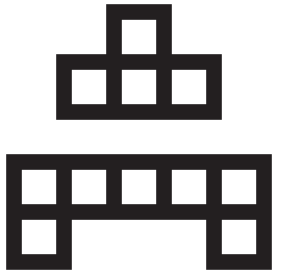
Dotty



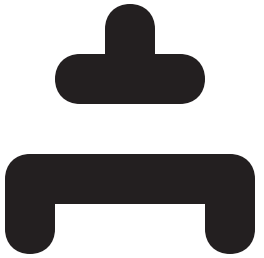
Blocky



Griddy



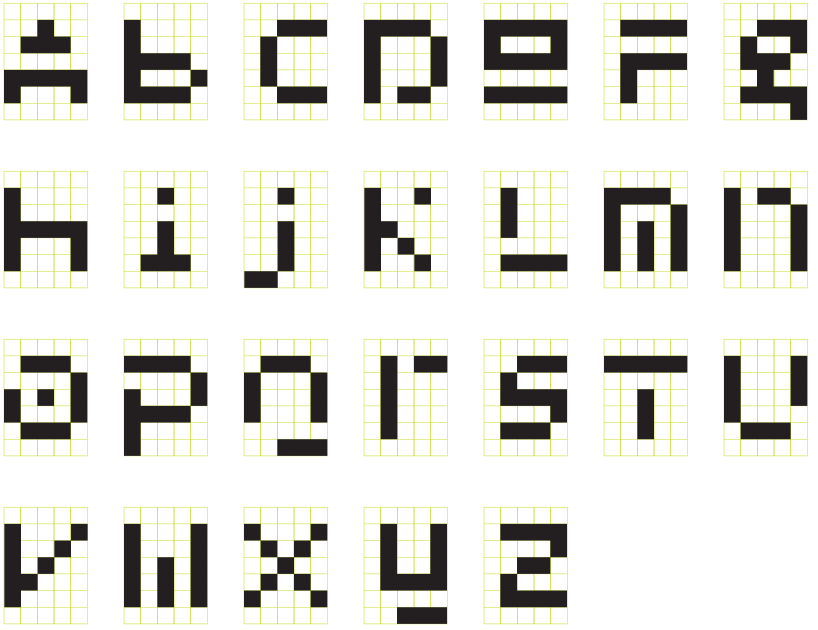
Twisty

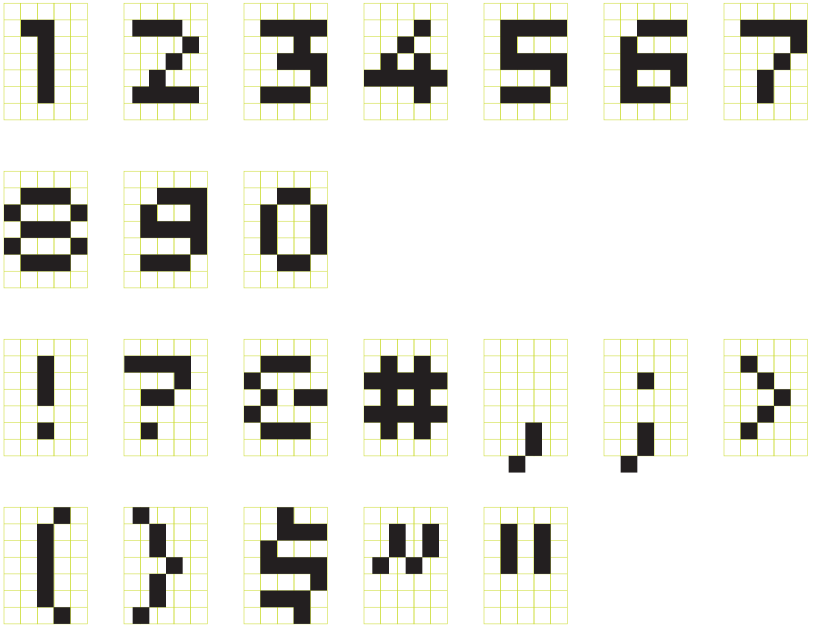


LITTLEBIT

SQUARE

Redrawn version of Littlebit, 2022.

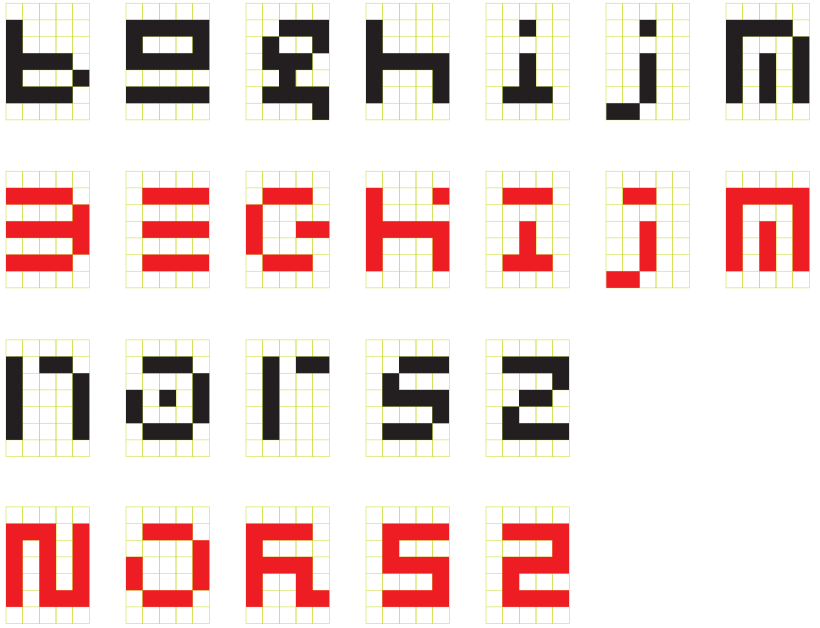




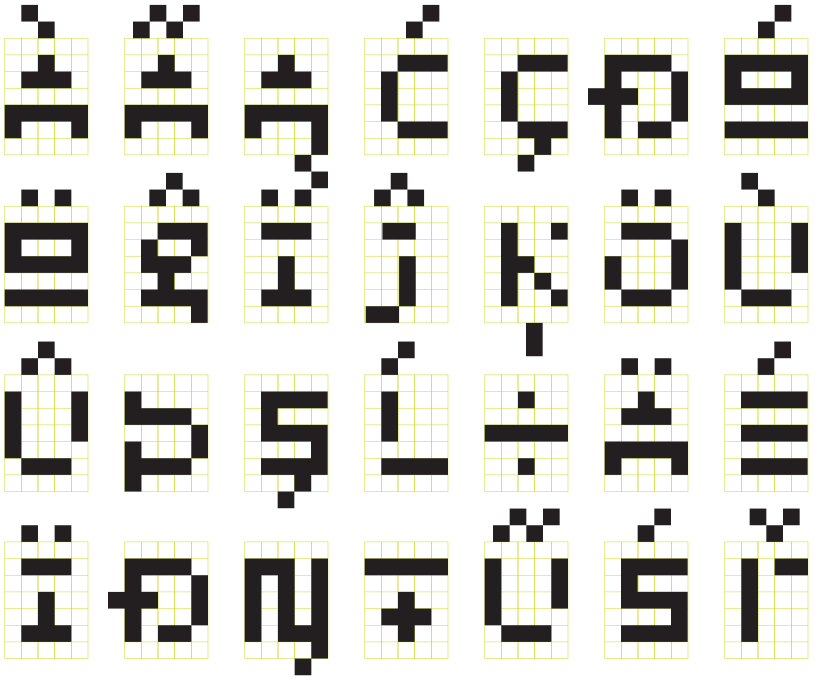
LITTLEBIT

SQUARE

Littlebit was originally designed as a unicase font. Meaning it had only 26 characters comprised of a mixture of upper and lower case forms. With this redesign, we made some of the characters case specific, shown in red.

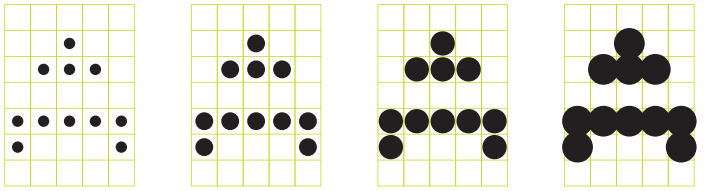


All Littlebit fonts have a full set of punctuation, diacritical and Central European glyphs. Below is a small sampling. For a showing of the complete character set, please visit the Littlebit page at emigre.com.

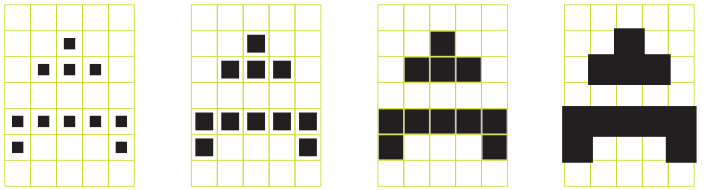


LITTLEBIT

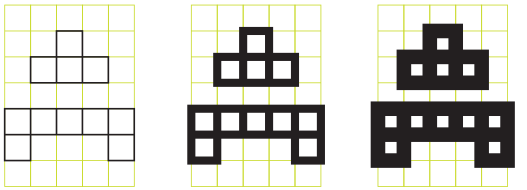
Three of the six Littlebit designs come in a number of “weights.” For instance, Dotty, which replaces Littlebit’s square pixels with dots, has eight different dot weights, while Blocky has six block weights, and Griddy has three grid weights.



Dotty 1 Dotty 2 Dotty 3 Dotty 4

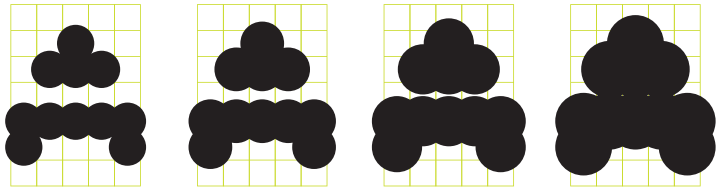


Blocky 1 Blocky 2 Blocky 3 Blocky 4

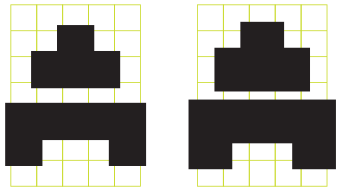


Griddy 1 Griddy 2 Griddy 3

For those designers who want something in between the weights we offer, we also made variable font versions of Dotty, Blocky and Griddy, allowing a continuous range of weights through on-the-fly interpolation.

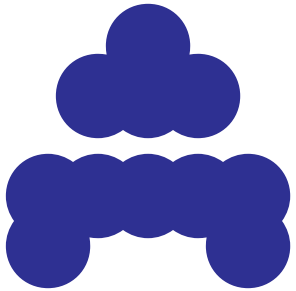


Dotty 5 Dotty 6 Dotty 7 Dotty 8

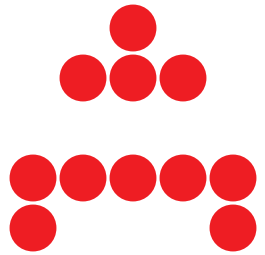


Blocky 5 Blocky 6

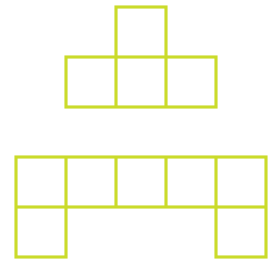
Dotty 6



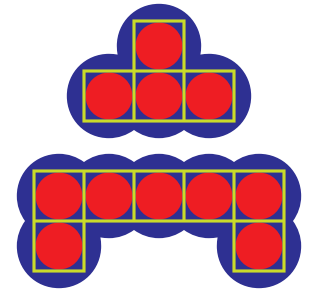
Dotty 3



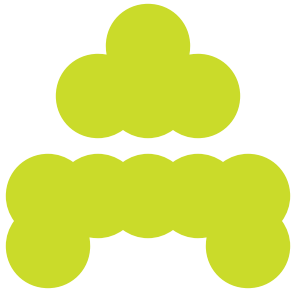
Griddy 1



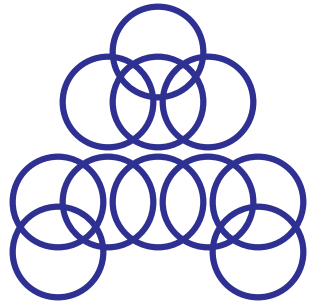
Dotty 6
Dotty 3
Griddy 1



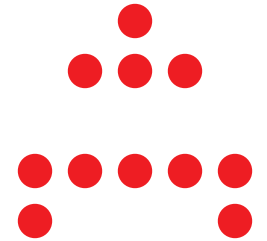
Dotty 6



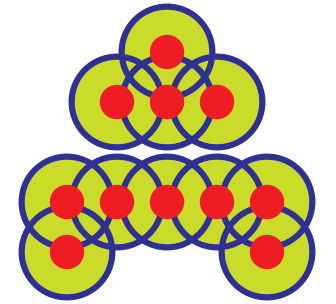
Loopy



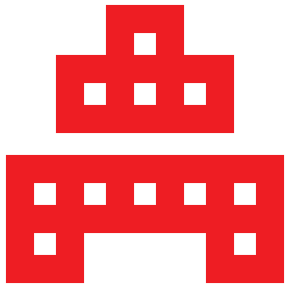
Dotty 2



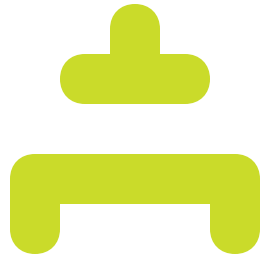
Dotty 6
Loopy
Dotty 2



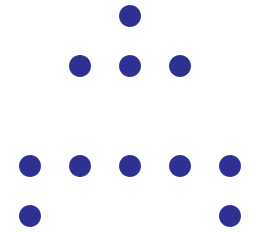
Griddy 3



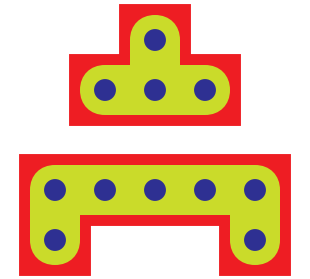
Twisty



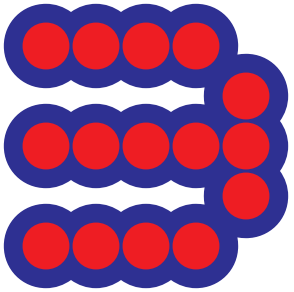
Dotty 1



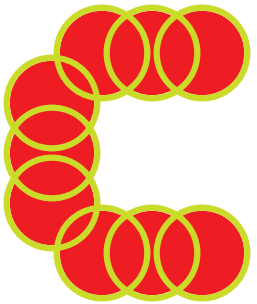
Griddy 3
Twisty
Dotty 1



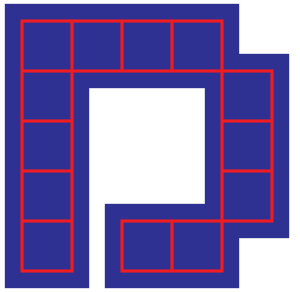
Dotty 6
Dotty 3



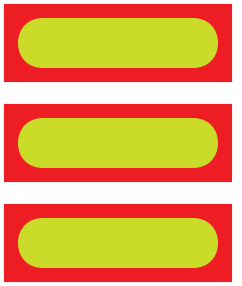
Loopy
Dotty 8



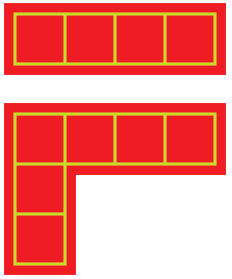
Dotty 6
Griddy 3



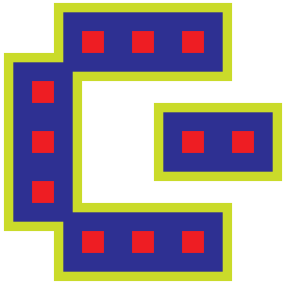
Dotty 6
Griddy 3



Blocky 5
Griddy 1



Griddy 3
Blocky 4
Blocky 1



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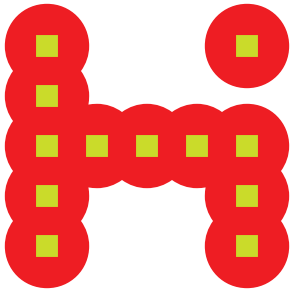

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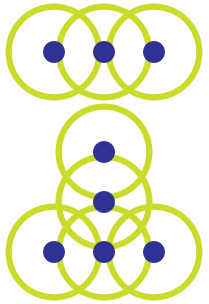
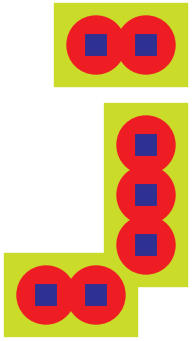
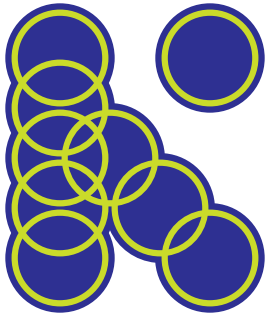


Blocky 6
Dotty 4
Blocky 1



Dotty 8
Loopy



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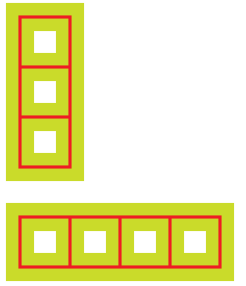
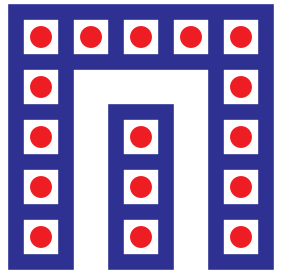
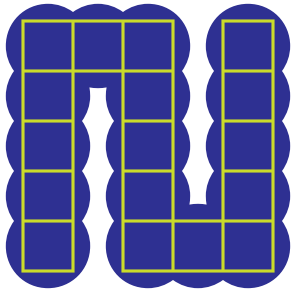


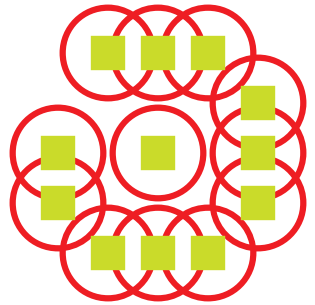
Dotty 6
Dotty 3



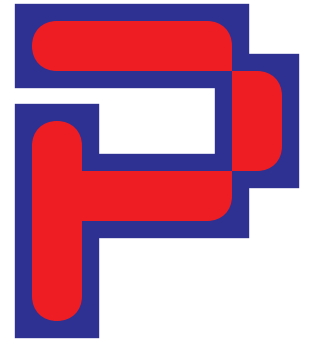
Dotty 6
Griddy 1



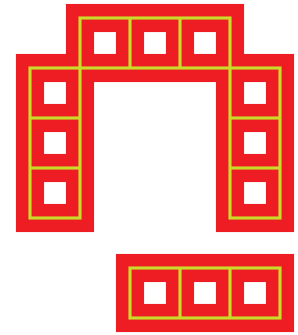
Loopy
Blocky 2



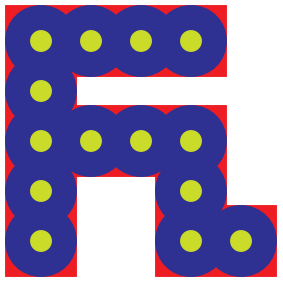
Blocky 6
Twisty



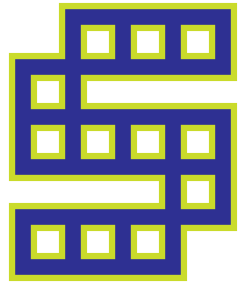
Griddy 3
Griddy 1



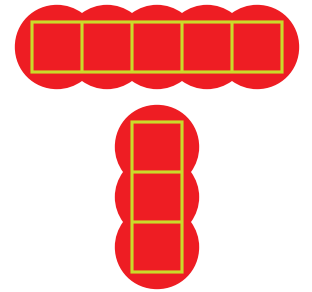
Blocky 5
Dotty 5
Dotty 1



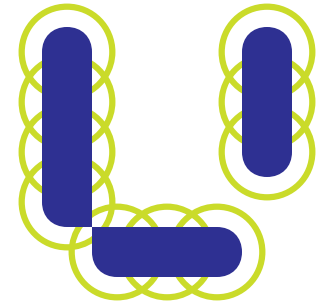
Griddy 3
Griddy 2



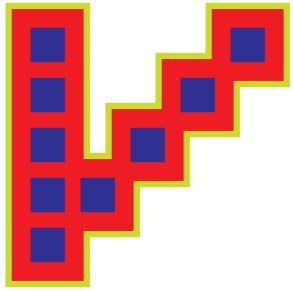
Dotty 6
Griddy 1



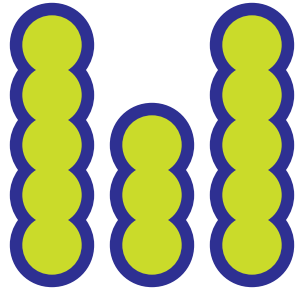
Loopy
Twisty



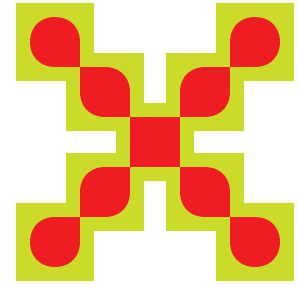
Blocky 6
Blocky 5
Blocky 2



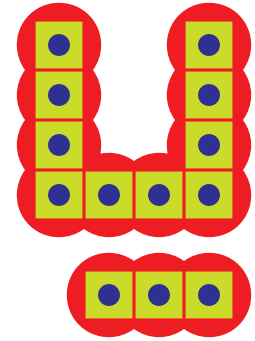
Dotty 6
Dotty 4



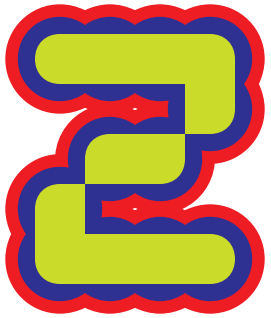
Griddy 3
Twisty



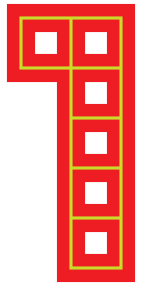
Dotty 6
Blocky 3
Dotty 1



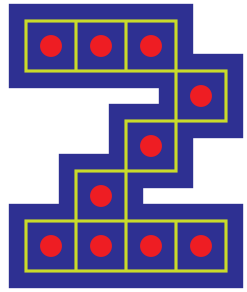
Dotty 8
Dotty 6
Twisty



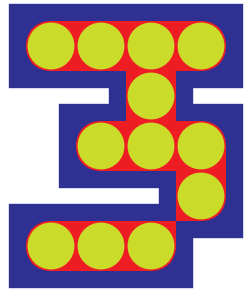
Griddy 3
Griddy 1



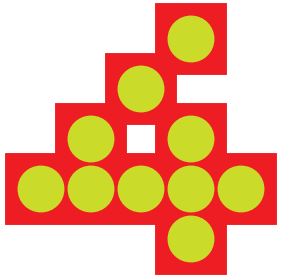
Blocky 6
Griddy 1
Dotty 1



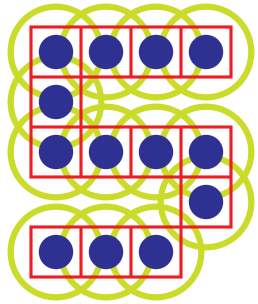
Blocky 6
Twisty
Dotty 3



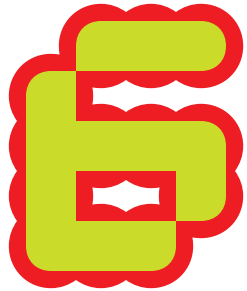
Blocky 5
Dotty 3



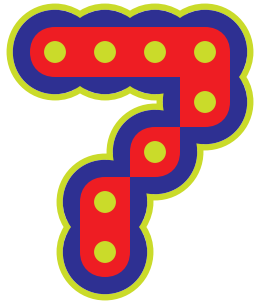
Loopy
Griddy 1
Dotty 2



Dotty 6
Twisty

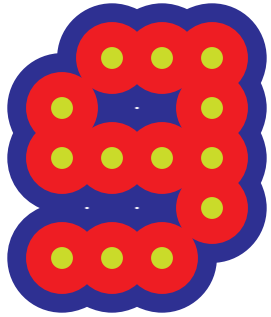


Loopy
Dotty 6
Twisty
Dotty 1

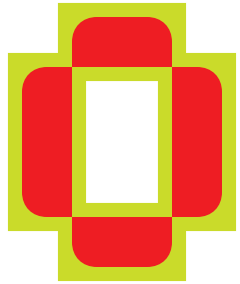


Blocky 6
Twisty

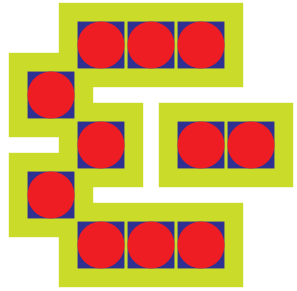
Dotty 8
Dotty 5
Dotty 1



Griddy 3
Twisty



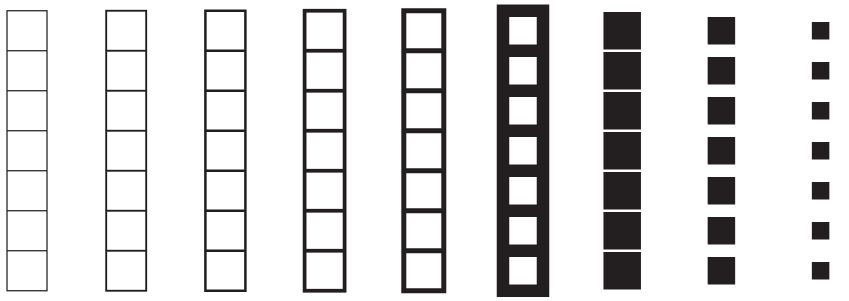
Blocky 6
Blocky 3
Dotty 3

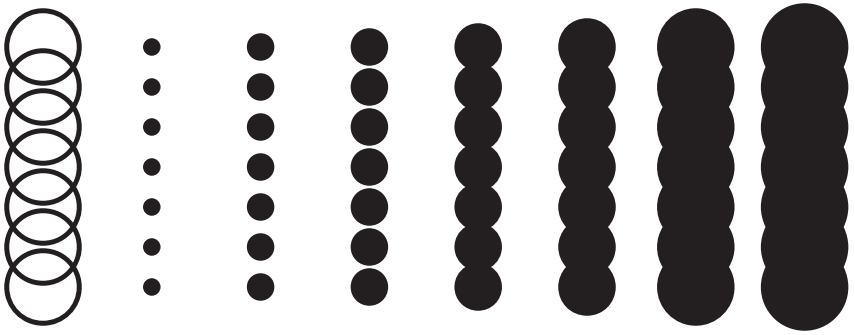


LITTLEBIT

GRID BARS

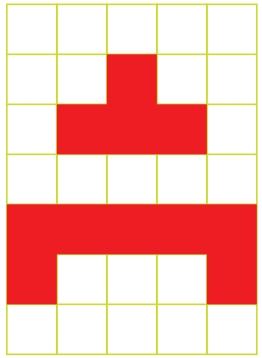
Each Littlebit font also contains a number of glyphs of “grid bars” of various types and weights. By repeating these glyphs they can be used to create background grids that perfectly fit any of the Littlebit fonts.



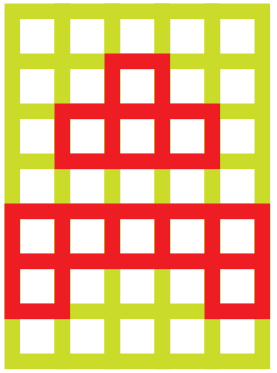


In addition to the grid bars contained in each Littlebit font, which can be accessed through the glyph palette, there is also a separate font containing all the grid bars, as well as grid boxes of various weights, named Grid Bars.

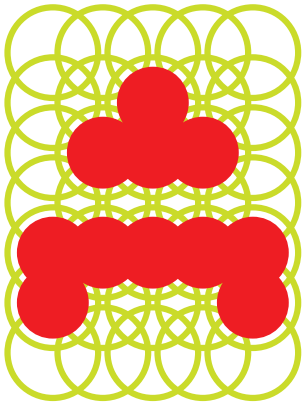
Square



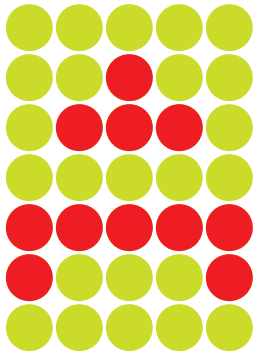
Griddy 2



Dotty 5



Dotty 3

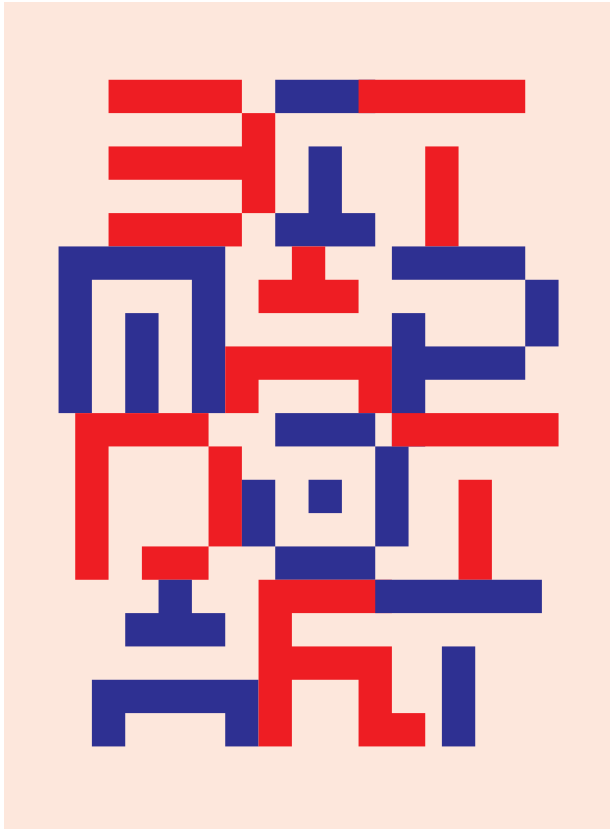


LITTLEBIT

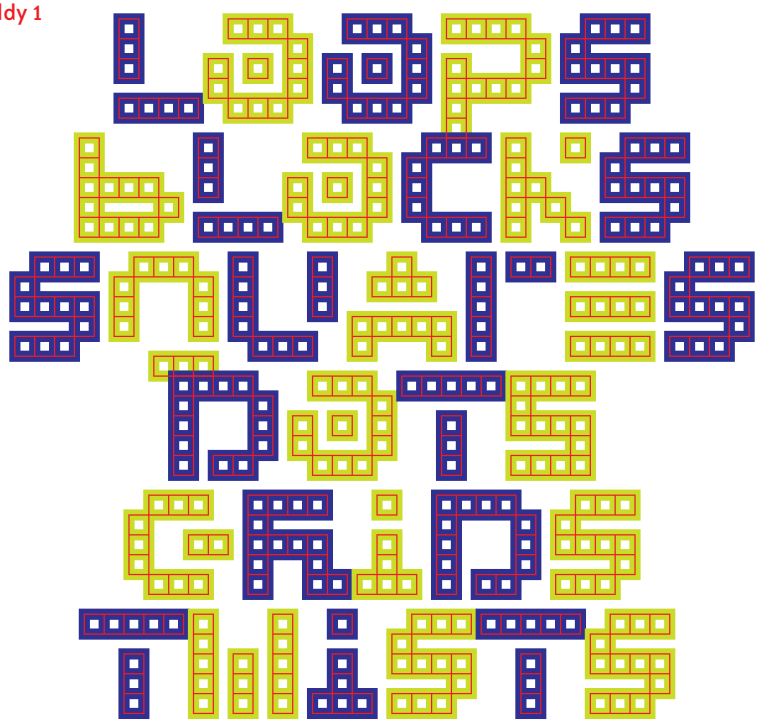
LINE SPACING & TRACKING

To have ascenders and descenders perfectly touch or overlap when setting multiple lines of text, use leading in 12.5% increments of the point size. To have the characters touch perfectly horizontally, set tracking in increments of 125 units.

Square
Point size: 100
Line spacing: 62.5
Tracking: -250



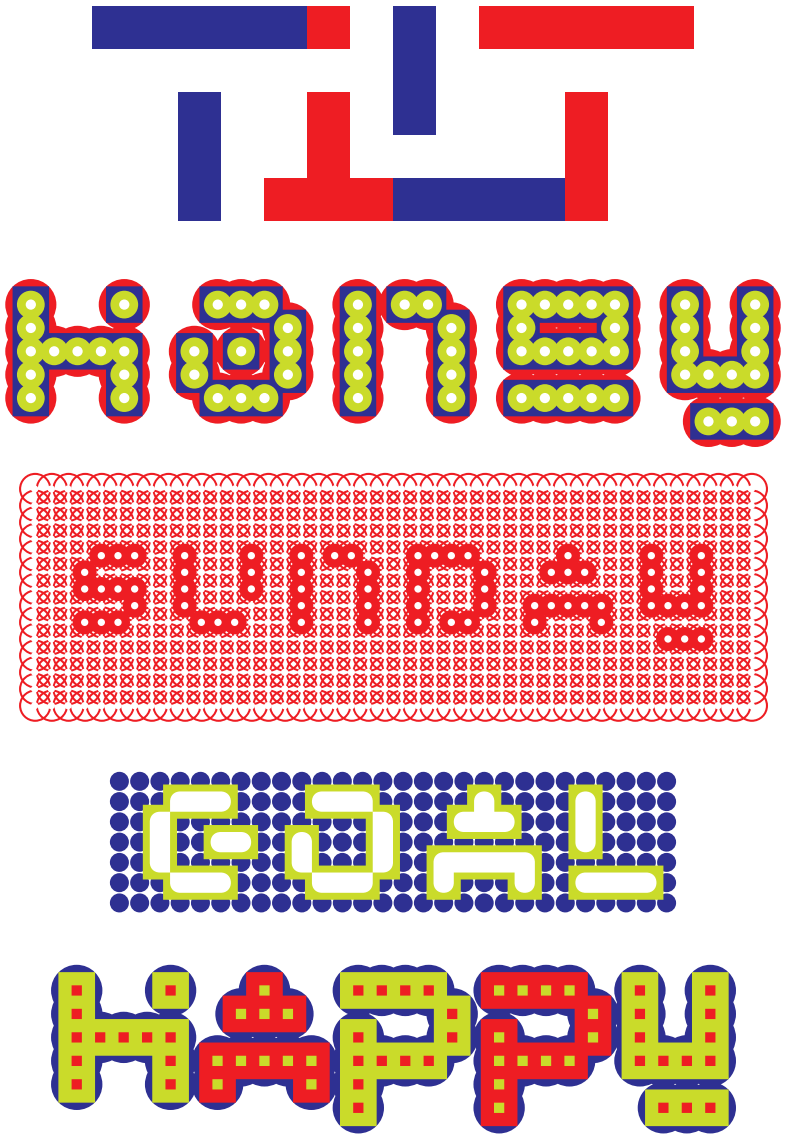
Griddy 3
Griddy 1

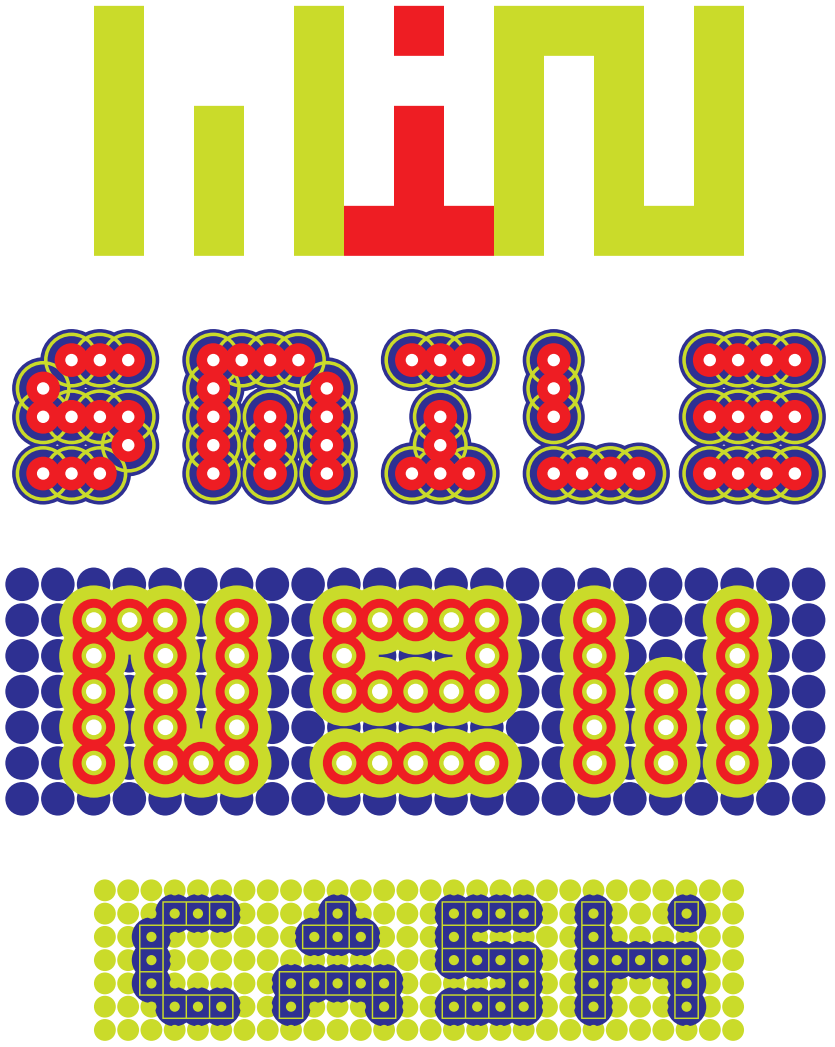


Square

bitmaps make the world go round

LITTLEBIT





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LITTLEBIT

SHOUTOUT

You're probably familiar with Sputniks and Beatniks, but how about Gridniks? "Mr. Gridnick" was the nickname for Wim Crouwel, the statesman of Dutch design known for his strict adherence to grid-based graphic- and type design. Littlebit owes much to the typeface designs of both Wim Crouwel and Juriaan Schrofer, who were colleagues at the Amsterdam design studio Total Design. Coincidentally, this is the studio where Rudy VanderLans started his design career as an apprentice designer fresh out of design school in 1979.

Griddy 3
Twisty
Dotty 1

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