Alda
Alda
a new text typeface
DESIGNED BY
BERTON
HASEBE
Conceived and developed
at the renowned
TYPE & MEDIA
master course
AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY of ART
THE HAGUE, THE NETHERLANDS
The original idea for Alda came from exploring an alternative approach to generating different typeface weights by adapting the characteristics of physical objects. I was interested to find out how far this could be pushed before the letters became a parody of what they referenced. Initially I took this treatment very literally, with the boldest weight expressing the tension of bent steel, and the lightest being as spineless as a rubber band. This allowed me to infuse each weight with unique characteristics, where the bold is robust and angular, and the light is delicate and soft.

The three weights of Alda were inspired by the characteristics of physical objects.

The logical outcome of perseverance in art Instruments 
Various Weights

I | INTRODUCTION

Alda was designed during my study at the 2007-2008 Type and Media program, a Master course at the Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten (KABK) in The Hague, The Netherlands.
As I sketched iterations of this idea, I also questioned the terminology often used to describe a typeface's properties. I wondered whether characteristics such as “robust,” “sturdy” or “elegant,” are natural to certain weights. For example, would “elegant” or “refined” ever be used to describe a bold weight of a typeface, or is this a contradiction of function? This led me to explore a variety of stylistic directions and weight structures all within the framework of a single typeface family.

The goal of this process was to eventually produce a typeface family that would exhibit seemingly inconsistent details specific to each weight. These differences would be obvious at large sizes, yet be cohesive in appearance at small text sizes.

II | RESEARCH

During this exploratory phase I closely studied how weight systems were handled in other fonts. Univers, for example, increases its contrast and width as it gets bolder. This allows its counters to remain open in even its heaviest weights. Akzidenz Grotesk, in comparison, has less of a change in width and contrast, resulting in bold letterforms that have much smaller counters and a darker overall color. Both treatments differ significantly and reflect a subjective preference of the designer; choices based on function and context. Observing these differences gave me insight into how these proportional treatments affect the relationship between a bold and regular weight, and how they work together in display and text sizes.

I also made a list of personal preferences based on qualities that I admired in other contemporary typefaces such as FF Balance and FF Legato by Evert Bloemsma, Parry by Arthur Schmal, and Dolly by Underware. Though these typefaces are unrelated in construction, historical references and overall logic, they shared two qualities: low contrast and a warm, friendly character.
Alda’s regular weight started during a class project with Dutch type designer Peter Verheul, where students first hand drew an alphabet, then digitized it to set text. Though Alda has deviated significantly from these letters, the initial drawings share a similar warmth with the final version.
Around the same time, I was also influenced by certain traits in Jan van Krimpen’s *Lutetia*, a typeface designed in 1923-25 for the Dutch printing house *Joh. Enschedé en Zonen*. The idiosyncratic proportion and details gave it a liveliness on the page that I was particularly drawn to. Characters such as the d with its rotund and slightly wide form, as well as the swooping a, exhibited an expressiveness that helped me define my limits of proportion and consistency.

Revisions to Alda’s first drawings were made by altering the digitized version, as well as by drawing on laser printouts. In the end I used these revised letterforms as a basis from which to develop the final typeface.

A selection of progressions from the early versions to present.
I then spent a number of months drawing and redrawing what would become the regular weight, trying to establish its armature and details, and determining its proper heaviness and color. After resolving the basic structure, I applied both bracketed and unbracketed serifs to the letterforms to test how these small changes affected Alda’s overall character and texture. This exercise also informed what details would change in Alda’s light and bold weights. I came up with a variety of treatments that would add individuality at large sizes, but would diminish as the letterforms reduced in size.
After exploring serif treatments, I decided to reference different types of letter constructions for the bold and light weights. These weights are informed by two extremes. The bold weight was derived from the motion of the broad nib pen, allowing for cuts in the inner counter as a result of the calligraphic tendencies of the pen. The light weight referenced the gestures of a pointed pen, which would accommodate more swooping letterforms, especially in the case of the italic.
The regular weight was conceived to act as a middle point between the two weights. Serifs were designed to shift between weights from bracketed to unbracketed, where cuts would logically soften or curves gradually harden, depending on which direction the weight shifts.
I soon realized that the logic of a scale between hard and soft didn't need to be implemented rigidly. Certain characters adapted to these style shifts more naturally than others. The drop terminal on the lowercase a, for example, seemed to make a bigger jump between the bold to the regular than the regular to the light. In such instances I made changes based purely on stylistic judgements, giving preference to what looked best in the overall context of word shapes.
For a while I struggled to give the regular weight its own identity. Next to the playful look and feel of the two other weights, the regular felt too much like a literal intermediate. To fix this, I took creative liberty with certain details, mostly by extending and accentuating its serifs.

Initially, certain serifs for the regular weight were a combination of a straight exterior contour and a curved inner counter. In these instances I decided to eliminate the inside bracket, and extend the unbracketed serifs to become more vertical in nature, a detail that became specific to the regular weight. In comparison the bold weight has squarish, stubby serifs, while the light weight is bracketed. I decided to keep the f with its original treatment to add variety and reference the light weight.
Alda’s italic has more gesture and movement than its roman, and it was a good chance for me to push the idea of tension and materiality in the expressiveness of these styles. Each weight of the italic changes slant, allowing its underlying structure to complement the details and character specific to each weight. As a result, the bold italic is very upright and sturdy while the light italic is very swooping and graceful.

The hierarchy of relationships between different weights of the roman and italic.
Alda Regular 8/10 point | THE ORIGINAL IDEA FOR ALDA came from exploring an alternative approach to generating different typeface weights by adapting the characteristics of physical objects. I was interested to find out how far this could be pushed before the letters became a parody of what they referenced. Initially I took this treatment very literally, with the boldest weight expressing the tension of bent steel, and the lightest being as spineless as a rubber band. This allowed me to infuse each weight with unique characteristics, where the boldest weight expressed the tension of bent steel, and the lightest being as spineless as a rubber band. This allowed me to infuse each weight with unique characteristics, where the bold is robust and angular, and the light is delicate and soft.

Alda Regular 9/11 point | THE ORIGINAL IDEA FOR ALDA came from exploring an alternative approach to generating different typeface weights by adapting the characteristics of physical objects. I was interested to find out how far this could be pushed before the letters became a parody of what they referenced. Initially I took this treatment very literally, with the boldest weight expressing the tension of bent steel, and the lightest being as spineless as a rubber band. This allowed me to infuse each weight with unique characteristics, where the bold is robust and angular, and the light is delicate and soft.

Alda Regular 10/12 point | THE ORIGINAL IDEA FOR ALDA came from exploring an alternative approach to generating different typeface weights by adapting the characteristics of physical objects. I was interested to find out how far this could be pushed before the letters became a parody of what they referenced. Initially I took this treatment very literally, with the boldest weight expressing the tension of bent steel, and the lightest being as spineless as a rubber band. This allowed me to infuse each weight with unique characteristics, where the bold is robust and angular, and the light is delicate and soft.

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