

FAIRPLEX

A family of 16 fonts

designed by Zuzana Licko



F

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Narrow Book

FAIRPLEX
NARROW BOOK

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

Wide Book

FAIRPLEX
WIDE BOOK

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

N. Bk. Italic

FAIRPLEX
NARROW BOOK ITALIC

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

W. Bk. Italic

FAIRPLEX
WIDE BOOK ITALIC

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

Narrow Bold

FAIRPLEX
NARROW BOLD

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

Wide Bold

FAIRPLEX
WIDE BOLD

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz123456789

N. Bld. Italic

FAIRPLEX
NARROW BOLD ITALIC

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

W. Bld. Italic

FAIRPLEX
WIDE BOLD ITALIC

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz123456789

FAIRPLEX NARROW BOOK & BOLD
four font package

EMIGRE.COM

FAIRPLEX NARROW MEDIUM & BLACK
four font package

EMIGRE.COM

Narrow Medium

FAIRPLEX
NARROW MEDIUM

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

N. Med. Italic

FAIRPLEX
NARROW MEDIUM ITALIC

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

Narrow Black

FAIRPLEX
NARROW BLACK

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

N. Blk. Italic

FAIRPLEX
NARROW BLACK ITALIC

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

FAIRPLEX NARROW MEDIUM & BLACK
four font package

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Wide Medium

FAIRPLEX
WIDE MEDIUM

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

W. Med. Italic

FAIRPLEX
WIDE MEDIUM ITALIC

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

Wide Black

FAIRPLEX
WIDE BLACK

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz123456789

W. Blk. Italic

FAIRPLEX
WIDE BLACK ITALIC

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz123456789

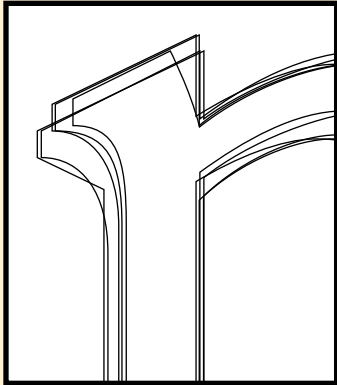
FAIRPLEX WIDE MEDIUM & BLACK
four font package

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DESIGNING FAIRPLEX

The foundation for Fairplex began in January 1998. I wanted to develop a serif text face loosely based upon Garamond No.3. This resulted in many false starts, some of which turned into seemingly unrelated sans-serif designs, including Tarzana and Solex.

As the experimentation continued, it became apparent that Fairplex would not be the Garamond revival that I had originally intended; perhaps



I'll return to that sometime in the future.

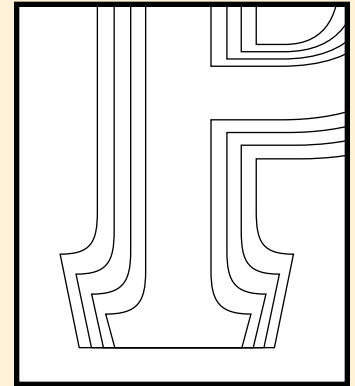
My goal for Fairplex became that of creating a text face that would achieve legibility by avoiding contrast, especially in the Book weight. This was spurred by experiences with my own eyesight, which is increasingly intolerant of high contrast typefaces when reading lengthy texts. (Especially when combined with paperback printing and less than perfect reading conditions!) As a result of its low contrast, the Fairplex

Book weight is somewhat reminiscent of a sans serif, yet the slight serifs preserve the recognition of serif letterforms.

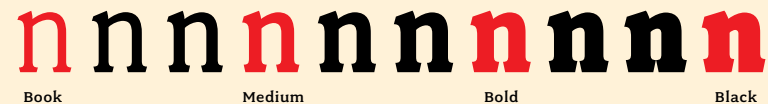
When creating the accompanying weights, the challenge was balancing the contrast and stem weight with the serifs. To provide a comprehensive family, I wanted the boldest weight to be quite heavy. This meant that the **Black** weight would need more contrast than the Book weight in order to avoid clogging up. But harmonizing the serifs proved difficult. The initial serif treatments I tried didn't stand up to the robust character of the **Black** weight. Several months passed without much progress, and then one evening I attended a talk by Alastair Johnston on his book *Alphabets to Order*, a survey of nineteenth century type specimens. Alastair pointed out that slab serifs (also known as "Egyptians") are really more of a variation on sans serifs than on serif designs. In other words, slab serif type is more akin to

sans-serif type with serifs added on than it is to a version of serif type. This sparked the idea that the solution to my serif problem for Fairplex **Black** might be a slab serif treatment. After all, the Book weight already shared features of sans-serif types.

Shortly after this came the idea to angle the serifs. This was suggested by my husband, and was probably conjured up from his years of subconscious assimilation of the San Francisco Giants logo while watching baseball, and then reinforced by a similar serif treatment in John Downer's recent Council Design. The angled serifs added visual interest to the otherwise austere slab serifs.



The intermediate weights were then derived by interpolating the Book and **Black**, with the exception of several characters, such as the "n," which required specially designed features to avoid collisions of serifs, and to yield a pleasing weight balance. A range of weights was interpolated before deciding on the **Medium** and **Bold** weights.* *Zuzana Licko*



* Custom weights and widths of Fairplex are available upon request. Special thank you to John Downer and Linnea Lundquist for help and advice.

WIDE
BLACK

DETROIT EGYPTIAN

WIDE
MEDIUM ITALIC

and other typographic curiosities

NARROW
BOOK

SOOTHING

SERIFS

NARROW
MEDIUM

WIDE
BOLD

CHROMOLITHOGRAPHY

NARROW
BOOK ITALIC

Subconscious Assimilation

NARROW
BOLD

ARMATURE

NARROW
BLACK ITALIC

typeface manufacture

WIDE
BOOK

FINE TYPE SPECIMEN

WIDE
MEDIUM

Americana

WIDE
BLACK

WINK

CLASSIFYING FAIRPLEX

The essence of a letterform is dictated by an inner framework — its “armature,” as the late type designer Warren Chappell called it. A letterform with serifs has a personality greatly influenced by how its serifs are constructed. Serifs reveal a certain kind of attitude and orientation. In the history of type, Zuzana Licko’s new series, Fairplex, finds a place among few antecedents. The serifs come from primarily nontypographic sources, but the skeletal forms are clearly recognizable as being typographic in tradition. Fairplex is a rare combination of elements from three distinct media:

- chromolithography of the late 19th and early 20th centuries
- American sign painting during approximately the same period
- display typefaces designed between ca. 1840 and ca. 1980



Figure 1.



Figure 2.

The Fairplex serif style was more common in commercial lithography and American sign painting (Fig. 1) than it was in type, but it had no single, established, standard form. Lettering artists introduced their own interpretations. In sign painting, this serif mode, with its pronounced bracketing and angled terminals, was known as the “Detroit” style during the early 1900s. In the lithography trade, there may have been another name, but it seems to have had no given name in the realm of type, in which names of letter styles and serif kinds were generally known by their rou-

WIDE BLACK ITALIC *flames*

WIDE BOLD COLD WATER CANYON

NARROW BOLD ITALIC *Indigenous shrubs of Santa Monica*

WIDE BOLD PLANOGRAPHIC

NARROW BOOK PRINTING

NARROW MEDIUM sliding aluminum doors

NARROW BLACK QUALITY

WIDE BLACK ITALIC *agri business*

NARROW BOOK BAKERSFIELD, CALIF.

WIDE MEDIUM Light Sweet Crude

NARROW BOOK FANDANGO

NARROW BLACK YUMMY YUCCA CALCULATOR

tine inclusion in the full names of the faces. In the sign trade of a century ago, Fairplex would likely have been classified as a “Detroit Egyptian” lettering style: “Detroit” referring to the kind of serif, and “Egyptian” referring to its basically monoline structure or “armature” (Fig. 2).

Neither “Detroit” nor “Egyptian” are widely used terms in today’s classifications of types. Alas, in the one area of printing where Fairplex has definite ancestors, namely planographic printing employed to manufacture product labels, there seems to be no compendium of all the lettering styles available. Maybe they weren’t all documented.

The one place where the fashion remains in modern use is on granite grave markers, which are inscribed not by hand any more, but instead by masking and sandblasting (Fig. 3).



Figure 3.

In any case, even though Fairplex is indeed a new typeface design, it sits squarely in a camp of commercial lettering first seen in common use more than a century ago. It is therefore a very likely candidate for the same kinds of color effects that helped this grand style rise to prominence initially: inlines, outlines, centerlines and shadows. *John Downer*

IMAGE SOURCES

FIGURE 1: Snow King Baking Powder cardboard sign from *Country Store Antiques* by Don and Carol Raycraft. Photocopy detail from a photo by Carol Raycraft

FIGURE 2: From *Atkinson’s Sign Painting up to Now, 1909*, by Frank H. Atkinson. Published by Frederick J. Drake & Company, Chicago.

FIGURE 3: Gravemarker at St. Joseph Cemetery, Iowa City. Photo by John Downer.

FAIRPLEX NARROW BOOK, **BOLD & ITALICS** 10/13 POINT

If one is inclined to wonder at first how so many dwellers came to be in the loneliest land that ever came out of GOD's hands, what they do there and why stay, one does not wonder so much after having lived there. None other than this long brown land lays such a hold on the affections. The rainbow hills, the tender bluish mists, the *luminous radiance of the spring*, have the lotus charm. They trick the sense of time, so that once inhabiting there you always mean to go away without quite realizing that you have not done it.

FAIRPLEX WIDE BOOK, **BOLD & ITALICS** 10/13 POINT

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FAIRPLEX NARROW MEDIUM, **BLACK & ITALICS** 10/13 POINT

Men who have lived there, miners and cattle-men, will tell you this, not so fluently, but emphatically, cursing the land and going back to it. For one thing there is the divinest, cleanest air to be breathed anywhere in GODs world. Some day the world will understand that, and the little oases on the windy tops of hills will harbor for healing its ailing, house-weary broods. There is promise there of *great wealth in ores and earths*, which is no wealth by reason of being so far removed from water and workable conditions, but men are bewitched by it and tempted to try the impossible.

FAIRPLEX WIDE MEDIUM, **BLACK & ITALICS** 10/13 POINT

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Text excerpted from *The Land of Little Rain* by Mary Austin. Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1903.

WORLD MATERIALISM

FAIRPLEX NARROW BLACK