

Tired of the same old type?

If you have a computer, you probably have a bunch of fonts—maybe even more fonts than you know what to do with! Mainstream desktop publishing programs such as Corel Draw!, Freehand, and Illustrator include hundreds of fonts.

If you purchased a dedicated sign-making program, you probably got even more fonts—probably many of the same ones. Despite the immense diversity caused by the sheer magnitude of the available fonts, somehow they all start look-

ing the same. Maybe it's not that they look the same, but many begin to look sterile after seeing them for so many years. Are they too perfect?

There are a half dozen “big players” in the font business, companies like Adobe, URW, Compu-graphics, Bitstream, ITC, Linotype and several others. Then there are many mid-sized font foundries around that offer their products through font distributors like Emigre, Precision Type, and Phil's Fonts. Next, there are scores of people who “design” fonts as free-ware or shareware for the Internet. Lastly, there are a few font designers, or small companies, who put the effort into their fonts in hopes of making a few dollars by distributing the products on their own.

Hooray for these small companies! After 15 years of seeing basically the same fonts packaged differently, we are finally seeing some letterstyles designed *by* sign makers *for* sign makers. Many of the original letters were even hand lettered with a brush. There have been exceptions, but until now the sign industry has had to use letterstyles mainly designed for printing

Peppermint Stick

House Industries: House-A-Rama League Night

CARAMEL APPLES

House Industries: SignPainter HouseBrush

WAFFLE CONES

House Industries: House-A-Rama Strike

Coconut Creme Pie

House Industries: SignPainter HouseScript

CARAMEL

House Industries: House-A-Rama Kingpin

Walnut Clusters

House Industries: House Gothic Light Four

SNICKERDOODLES

House Industries: SignPainter HouseUpright

Peanut Butter Cookies

House Industries: SignPainter HouseCasual

SUGAR COOKIES

House Industries: SignPainter HouseInformal

Strawberry Jam

House Industries: House Gothic Bold Three

and desktop publishing. That's not all bad, but like I said earlier, it gets a little boring and the looseness inherent in the old sign-making craft was lost in the process.

Not that long ago, lettering a sign involved a pencil sketch which was projected to a panel, or a charcoal layout was sketched directly on the panel. Then the skilled letterer grabbed the appropriate brush and carefully stroked the paint onto the panel. There was an energy, or "gallup" as the late George Seelander (*SignCraft*, March/April 1988) called it, that is often missing by the computerized "fonts" of today. Accuracy is easy now, but getting that artistic touch still takes skill and talent!

Making fonts from scratch is a long and tedious process. Even a basic character set will take 30 to 50 hours to produce. To me, a font is one of the true values of today. Support these vendors and respect their copyrights. (See the sidebar.)

A few of these small companies come to the forefront as I think about this article. There isn't room to show all the fonts these companies offer, so I just picked a few of my favorites to show here. You'll want to see all the rest, though.

*The Fontry, Rt 2 Box 238,
Watts, OK 74964; 918-422-5318,
800-996-WILD
www.signweb.com/fontry/
fontry@tcac.net*

Michael Gene Adkins from The Fontry has been making fonts for years. A year or so ago, he started digitizing some of the old Alf Becker alphabets and making them available over www.signweb.com. In 1930, Alf Becker produced a book called "One Hundred Alphabets". Currently, The Fontry is working out details to develop more of the Becker fonts in two versions—one with sign makers in mind and the other as a full desktop publishing font with the full character set. The Becker fonts are available for immediate download from their site.

They have also developed other groupings called Race Pak #1, Wild Bunch Pak #1-3, Signfaces Narrow #1, and Greek Pak #1. These include a wide range of creative letterstyles, most notable are the chiseled fonts in the Race Pak #1.

The Signfaces Narrow group are also very distinctive. Recently, he has begun digitizing a few of the old Frank Atkinson letterstyles although the future of those fonts are yet to be determined. Keep an eye on The Fontry for more good things in the future!

*SignDNA, 311-A First St,
Winters, CA 95694; 530-795-1637
www.signdna.com
signdna@mother.com*

Dave Simpson at SignDNA has been very busy in the past year or so! He has contracted with a few of today's top lettering artists to recreate some of their letterstyles. Veteran talents such as Crazy Jack

Wills, Paul Martin, Bob Behounek, Dan Antonelli, and others have supplied Dave with hand-lettered cards consisting of mostly scripts and casuals that will surely become workhorses in many shops. Dave has done a great job of capturing the snappy look and feel which makes these fonts unique and interesting.

Dan Antonelli's group consists of three unique prismatic fonts. As if all of that weren't enough, Dave has just finished a collection of 15 scripts, casuals, romans, and sans serif typefaces designed or modified by the late great Mike Stevens, author of *Mastering Layout*. Dave worked from the original show-

Cluster Bars

House Industries: Tiki Sands

FUDGE DELIGHT

House Industries: Tiki Palms

MINT STICKS

House Industries: Tiki Hut

Watermelons

House Industries: House Gothic Black

coconut creme

House Industries: House Gothic Bold Two

Blueberry Muffins

House Industries: Tiki Holiday

Salted Peanuts

House Industries: Tiki Magic

Orange Sherbert

The Fontry: Race 1 After Disaster Chiseled

Lemon Drops

The Fontry: Race 1 Brannt Chiseled

Hazelnut Cream Clusters

The Fontry: Race 1 Excursions Alt Chiseled

Sugar Cookies

The Fontry: Race 1 Koncrete Blokk Chiseled

CHOCOLATE

The Fontry: Becker #93 Steele Moderne

Frosted Donut

The Fontry: Becker #70 Advanced Modern Poster

Pineapple Cream Pie

The Fontry: #44 Chicago Modern Thick & Thin

Pumpkin Pie

The Fontry: #67 Roman Modern Thick & Thin

Peach Cobbler

The Fontry: Atkinson Egyptian

Rhubarb Creme

The Fontry: Atkinson Signpainter's Devinne

cards that Mike used for his books and newsletters. This pack is available from Dave at SignDNA or from SignCraft for only \$199 plus shipping and handling! The other font packs are available at affordable prices directly from SignDNA. Keep 'em coming Dave!

*Projected Photo Graphics,
HCR79, P. O. Box 1089,
Crowley, CA 93546; 714-846-9413,
www.2projected.com
projected@ibm.net*

Gordon Madison at Projected Photo Graphics has spent a few years developing and perfecting his new "Two Stage" fonts, along with a variety of high resolution bitmap enhanced fonts. The two stage fonts allow you to add a variety of natural "Brush Stroked" outlines to a basic font. His CD titled "Fast Fonts" contains 130 custom True Type fonts, 100 high resolution texture fills and 3,800 finished characters.

*Active Images, 430 Colorado
Ave. Suite 301, Santa Monica, CA
90401; 310-458-9094,
www.comicbookfonts.com
Richard@Comcraft.com*

Richard Starkings and John Roshell at Comcraft/Active Images have been creating a spunky group of "comic book" fonts. The collection they call "Balloon Lettering" is of special interest since many of them are based on the lettering of some of your favorite comic book artists such as Jim Lee, Joe Madureira, & Tim Sale. Most of these fonts have a distinctive "handwriting casual" feel which is unlike many of the standard casuals that are available.

While the classic comics and cartoon fonts probably best fit the hand lettering profile of this article, you'll also want to check out their horror, gothic and fantasy fonts and their sci-fi, hi-tech, and futuristic fonts. You never know when you will need to do that sign

for the Halloween Haunted House! I also like the “Phasesonstun” font. You might sneak this one into a layout where Compacta Bold might be just a little too boring.

In the examples, many of these fonts may look like a single font of all caps, but Comicraft digitized a complete different set of letters which look very similar to the caps for the lower case characters. As with normal handwriting, most people seldom make two letters exactly the same. When typing in the words “Apple Pie” it is possible to use two different “p”s and two different “e”s. It might be a subtle

point, but it is nice to see the effort! Comic Book fonts are available in a variety of methods. Fonts are available individually or in groups and the entire collection is available on two CDs. Check out their colorful Web site, too!

*SmartArtz Publications,
SmartArtz, P.O. Box 435, Moorebank
1875, N.S.W. Australia;
www.smartartz.com
info@smartartz.com*

John Rigby at SmartArtz Publications, from Australia, has created a book titled “The Big Brush—Signs and Fine Art” which is available from his publishing company or

through *SignCraft*. You have the option of purchasing the accompanying CD, which contains all the files used in the actual color plates in the book. Along with the images, you get 13 fonts. (I count 12 plus a font called Sprint Car containing 10 numerals.) Or, you can buy the fonts separately—either individually or in sets.

Five have an old time “period” look and feel. You also get a nice prismatic font. The remaining six fonts fall into the “Casuals” category. He calls them “Bash Styles”. My favorite is Sydney Jumbo, but the rest are also quite unique. Without a doubt, the group of

Blueberry Muffins

Sign DNA: Stevens Du Vall Casual DNA

Mint Chocolate Chip

Sign DNA: Stevens Tahoe DNA

DELUXE BANANA SPLIT

Sign DNA: Stevens Staton DNA

Cherry Tart

Sign DNA: Stevens Big Red DNA

Strawberry Shortcake

Sign DNA: Stevens Big Medicine DNA

Watermelon

Sign DNA: Stevens Happy Script DNA

Lemon Meringue Pie

Sign DNA: Stevens Magic DNA

Apple Cranberry Crisp

Sign DNA: Stevens Phoenix DNA

Fudge Royale

Sign DNA: Stevens Big Sur DNA

RASPBERRIES

Sign DNA: Stevens Staton Bold DNA

Hot Cherry Turnovers

Sign DNA: Stevens Master DNA

Butterscotch Delights

Sign DNA: Stevens ArRoyo DNA

Ice Cream Sundae

Sign DNA: Stevens Vasona Sho-Card DNA

Pecan Pie Alamode

Sign DNA: Stevens Tenor DNA

Vanilla Creme

Sign DNA: Stevens Stix DNA

Mike Jackson: Tired of the same old type?

casuals have a hand-lettered appearance.

There are also ten new styles now available from SmartArtz. These new styles are again a combination of casuals and scripts. You can also get these fonts from *SignCraft*.

House Industries®, P.O. Box 30000, Wilmington, DE 19805-7000; 800-888-4390, 302-888-1218 <http://www.houseindustries.com>
andy@houseind.com
roat@houseind.com

House Industries® is one of my favorite font sources! By looking at their Web site, there are six guys just having a blast making retro stuff. Their collections are beauti-

fully packaged. You even get a special theme T-shirt with each collection. You'll have to see one to know what I am talking about!

Not long ago, they issued their "Sign Painter" font kit which included two scripts and four casuals along with a collection of 17 specialty words. These guys really nailed them. They look exactly like the hand lettered scripts and casuals that were all around me when I first started painting signs.

Every few months, I receive a catalogue from them announcing a new package. The last one was the "House-a-rama" collection which included several retro bowling alley fonts and images. Too cool! House Industries has

also worked with Ed "Big Daddy" Roth to create the Rat Fink Fonts collection. The kit includes eight fonts, 32 eps "Monster Icons," a Rat Fink T-shirt and special '60s style packaging.

If you have access to the Internet, visit www.houseindustries.com and get on their mailing list. While there, download a free font called "House Slant". I've mentioned only three of their packages, but they have a lot more. Check out their Tiki Type collection of bamboo looking fonts, their Haunted House collection and also the House Gothic font set.

SPICE CAKE

SmartArtz Publications: Fine Works—Sydney Jumbo

Peanut Brittle

SmartArtz Publications: Fine Works—Prizmatize

Spearmint Delight

Smart Artz Publications: Fine Works—Big Brush

Cherry Swirl

SmartArtz Publications: Fine Works—Fatstuff

Cherry Cola

Comicraft/Active Images: CC Comiczrazy Bold

RED LICORICE

Comicraft/Active Images: CC Sez-Who

SALTWATER TAFFY

Comicraft/Active Images: CC Phases-On-Stun

HARD ROCK CANDY

Comicraft/Active Images: CC Absolutely Fabulous

LEMON DROPS

Comicraft/Active Images: CC Jim Lee

APPLE PIE

Comicraft/Active Images: CC Astro City

Want to see even more great fonts?

Buy 'em—don't share 'em!

At least from my perspective, these small font foundries deserve our utmost respect and support. In many cases, the end product is a labor of love instead of something that puts the owner in a big new house along a golf course fairway.

If you do like their “stuff”, buy it! If you do buy it, don't give away copies to your friends and associates! For every copy that is bootlegged, a potential sale to the designer is lost, and if these ventures are not profitable, they will quit making them.

The biggest problem facing any of these small companies is exposure to the market in the form of advertising. A small black and white ad in just one magazine can cost over \$1000 per issue! Do the math. I think you'll realize that these entrepreneurs have to sell a lot of fonts to pay for just one ad in one magazine.

As artists, most people in the sign industry are keenly aware of how it feels to have their design efforts ripped off. The next time a friend asks you for a copy of a font, remember that it might end up being you that gets burned in the long run. If these companies can't make money, they will quit making fonts. Enough lecture from me! — M.J.

*Silver Graphics, Roger Hartley,
P.O. Box 485, Pennington Gap, VA
24277; (540) 546-3800 voice, (540)
546-2380, fax(800) 888-1550
www.naxs.com/silver/fonts.htm
gfx@naxs.com*

Roger Hartley at Silver Graphics probably fits into this list somewhere. I ran across his Web site one day and bought his CD collection of fonts called “The Great American Font Works”. It consists of 132 fonts for \$59 plus \$5 shipping. Silver Graphics does include quite a few fonts that I have never seen anywhere else, and they are well done. In a recent conversation with Roger, he commented that at the time he digitized the fonts, people were wanting and expecting perfectly clean and accurate fonts—even if the original source art was a bit on the sloppy side.

Now you see a lot of rough fonts. “Things may be coming around full circle now”, he said. The CD is a great buy and I am sure you will find uses for many of his unique offerings. With 132 fonts, there is a good variety of contemporary, scripts, casuals, and vintage fonts. Don't miss out!□



After over 23 years of running his own commercial shop, Mike Jackson and his wife, Darla, now operate Golden Era Studios in Jackson,

Wyoming, and do a variety of sign-related projects. His Web site is www.goldenstudios.com. His e-mail address is golden@goldenstudios.com.

Cinnamon Roll

Silver Graphics: Carrie Lane

TAFFY

Silver Graphics: Gigabyte

ANGEL FOOD CAKE

Silver Graphics: Jalopy

Banana Bread

Silver Graphics: Kapanti

PUMPKIN PIE

Silver Graphics: Phoebe

Starlite Mints

Silver Graphics: St Croix