

The Story of
EAGLEFEATHER
by David Siegel

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BACKGROUND: FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

"I attend the greatest of all churches," Frank Lloyd Wright once said. "I put a capital *N* on *N*ature and call it my church." Wright was born in 1867 in southwestern Wisconsin, his father a preacher and musician, his mother a teacher. His mother, determined that he was to become a great architect, taught him to study the rhythm and interconnectedness of nature. His father taught him music and structure. Wright left his formal schooling at the University of Wisconsin to go to Chicago in 1887. There he worked for architect Joseph Lyman Silsbee. Later that year, he entered the firm of Adler and Sullivan, where he formed a close relationship with the great architect Louis Sullivan. He learned to draw everything from houses and buildings to trees, flowers, landscapes. To him, everything was connected and part of nature, which he studied with the enthusiasm of a biology student. Following Sullivan's example, he taught himself to make beautiful renderings.

After a successful apprenticeship, Wright became Sullivan's "Chief of design." Although he annotated his working sketches with quick, hard-to-read pencil scribbles, his demand for impeccable presentation drawings was

legendary. He often altered one of his draftsmen's work, adding coloring, textures, shading, trees, birds, flowers, and, of course, his own lettering.

Wright's fascination with lettering emerged during his twenties, as he experimented with letters to make his drawings complete. He was so prolific, so obsessed by the idea of "organic" architecture, that by 1900 he practically designed a new alphabet for every client. A trip through the archives shows a bewildering array of alphabets, ornaments, and details. In everything he did, Wright blended nature and formalism. His designs show respect for time-honored forms, yet incorporate straight lines, circles, and proportions that are uniquely his own. As the American counterpart to the Arts and Crafts Movement in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century, Wright had a significant influence on the graphic arts. Taken as a body of work, Wright's letterforms were as varied, innovative and numerous as those of Eric Gill or Edward Johnston.

ABOUT THE FONT

Though the Olive Hill project was never completed, the typeface has come to life. From an initial sample of 19 letters, type designers David Siegel and Carol Toriumi-Lawrence completed the character sets according to the standards set by the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation. In 1992, Siegel spent two days in the archives looking for samples. After sorting through dozens of designs—from sketches for single letters to fully-specified typefaces for signage—Siegel hired Toriumi-Lawrence in March 1993 to begin production work on “Eaglefeather”.

Siegel, who designed the best-selling typeface Tekton for Adobe Systems, knew exactly what he wanted from “Eaglefeather”. It has a more formal, draftsmanlike look than Tekton, yet it still preserves the “blobs” left at the end of each stroke by a technical pen. The original hand-lettered design has been adapted with all the professional marks of a serious typeface. Toriumi-Lawrence paid particular attention to the double-bar horizontals of A and H, matching them with the E and F to set a consistent, yet not irksome, theme. Even at small sizes, the

double bars behave nicely. This, of course, was Wright's brilliant idea. But when it actually worked in blocks of text—something Wright never tried—the design team was both excited and amazed.

Since the name of the project (Olive Hill) did not express the the look and feel of the typeface, the designers chose another name from the Frank Lloyd Wright legacy: "Eaglefeather". The name "Eaglefeather" came from another Southern California project. It was to be a house for Arch Oboler, a radio and film writer/producer, built on a mountaintop overlooking Malibu. Although the house was commissioned and drawn in 1940 (and never built), this early Frank Lloyd Wright typeface, both in its formal and informal versions, seems to clearly embody the name "Eaglefeather". In fact, the name actually inspired both lower-case designs. Notice that the horizontal strokes are thinner than the vertical strokes . This is true even in the round characters, which are not true circles. Notice that the stems of the caps are just a little bit heavier than those of the lower case, so as to preserve the overall appearance. Notice that the tip of the A pokes above the top of the P and H.

Toriumi-Lawrence, a former member of the Adobe type staff, designed many of the characters. She used a program called Fontographer to do the drafting. There are three weights, all carefully designed to complement each other. There are hand-tuned italics. There are two styles of numbers—lining figures and old-style figures. To get an appreciation for the extra work that goes into a hand-tuned italic, compare the “Eaglefeather” italic ‘H’ and ‘O’ with the Adobe Tekton counterparts. Adobe Tekton, unfortunately, is machine slanted, with no corrections. The caps have two complementary sets of lower case letters and a full set of small caps to complete Wright’s design. Her execution of the small caps shows her experienced eye. Siegel was impressed: “I told Carol the small caps should be like kids—with their big feet and splayed legs—awkward, ungainly, hoping some day to ‘grow into’ their serifs. Carol did a great job.”

The upper-case (and small-cap lower case) J was the most difficult character of all. Many early reviewers encouraged the design team to dispense with it and “make a more normal J.” But this just encouraged them. They wanted to be true to the Frank Lloyd Wright origins, and

they knew they could pull it off if they just sweated the details to make it fit. Many days were spent adjusting spacing to get the most harmonious look for most character combinations. While there are still a few intractable character combinations, Siegel feels the effort was worth it. And many people who see it as a finished product agree. “Eaglefeather” simply wouldn’t be “Eaglefeather” without the “escalator.”

HOW TO USE THE FONT

When making decisions about type and design, the best rule of thumb is to keep things simple. If you can make a document work with fewer typefaces, you will send a more coherent message. This is why we designed “Eaglefeather” in such a great range, with so many character sets that all work together. You can use the informal and the formal in the same document because they are cousins, not strangers. Furthermore, notice that the italic for both formal and informal is the same design—the only difference is the name.

The informal design is an upright italic. Use it in any situation where a handwritten look is desired. It complements the formal nicely. For example, if you have a long

quotation, use the upright italic (informal) rather than the slanted italic. Slanted type is difficult to read after a line or two. The more you use “Eaglefeather”, the more you will find uses for the informals. Use the informal whenever you need a “voice:” to narrate children’s books or stories, for the dialog-bubbles in cartoons, for labels and captions, for long quotes, in headlines, etc. Use the italic whenever you want emphasis, in the form of a whisper. Use the bold—sparingly—when you want to shout!

Don’t be afraid to adjust the kerning. Because of the Capital *J*, there are certain situations you may want to fix. For instance, *JT*, *JM*, and *JH* are all situations where you might want to actually play with the outlines of the letters or at least kern them a bit tighter to suit your uses. Similarly, when using small caps, the combinations *si*, *sj*, etc, are all situations where you might want to try raising the *s* or lowering the following character. For *Ji* and *Jh*, etc, simply kern them tighter for a custom fit.

Use the light characters for initial caps. If you set a paragraph in regular weight “Eaglefeather”, and you want a large cap to start off the paragraph, use a light weight cap at about twice the size of the text. If you

want to reverse it out of a dark rectangle, however, you should probably use a heavier weight for knocking out. This is a general rule for reversing type out of solid shapes: don't use light type for reversing out.

CREATIVE U/E/L

Eaglefeather's characters can be used for letters, faxes, notes, memos, even spreadsheets! While it is a versatile and useful font for everyday documents, it is in the hands of trained typographers and graphic designers that "Eaglefeather" really shines. The weight ratios provide good contrast, and the text face is suitable for long passages. Readers hardly notice the double-bar design in long runs of text, so don't be afraid to use it for books and reports. Designers can use the small caps in many ways. By using a program like Adobe Illustrator or Aldus Freehand, designers can make outlines out of the type and create their own ligatures. This is something Frank Lloyd Wright himself loved to do with type. He often combined H & T, W & R, and many other pairs. In titling, you can make a small O and insert it (by raising and kerning) in a word like "FLOAT," where it nests right inside the L. "FLOAT,"

If you have the small caps, you also have the non-lining numerals, also called old-style figures. Use these in text, where your intention is to have them fit into a line along with the other characters. Dates and addresses are a good use of old-style figures. Use the lining figures for prices and numbers in tables. If you do use the lining figures in text, you might want to make them about a half-point smaller than the text size, so they don't stand out so much.

FOR FURTHER READING

Frank Lloyd Wright Collected Writings, Vol II: 1930–1932 (including autobiography), by Frank Lloyd Wright; Rizzoli Press, NY, 1992.

ABOUT THE FRANK LLOYD

Wright Foundation

Eaglefeather is the first digital typeface licensed by the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation.

The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, based at Taliesin West, in Scottsdale, Arizona, was established in 1940 to own and protect the architect's work and continue it after his death. His drawings, manuscripts, personal docu-

ments, and the rights to his designs, symbols and logos, and the use of his name reside with the foundation. The Foundation oversees numerous museums, exhibits, and houses throughout the world.

Taliesin West continues the architectural apprenticeship, professional design, and degree programs started by Frank Lloyd Wright. It continues to serve as a source of inspiration for young architects, as well as a fascinating and educational stop on any tour of the Scottsdale/Phoenix area.

For decades, the foundation has licensed companies to reproduce works of Frank Lloyd Wright and make these reproductions available to the public. Authentication by the Foundation assures the public that the reproduction faithfully recreates Wright's original design.

The archives, located at Taliesin West in Scottsdale, Arizona, consist of Wright's drawings, correspondence, manuscripts, and other documents and provide for study of the ideas and architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright.

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