FRANK RAUSCH

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Interview with Frank Rausch

by Afsaneh A. Rafii

Frank Rausch could just come across as a perfectionist, in reality, it is his devotion to craftsmanship that makes him tweak all these details you will probably never even notice, but which will inevitably make your digital reader experience so much better. Welcome to the world of user interface design.

Can you talk a little bit about your background and how you chose your current path? You have talked about a passion for creativity, one that is rooted in a desire for problem-solving.

I studied interface design in Potsdam, it was the very first year actually that the school had this programme.

I am interested in how you developed your sensibility for this topic, was it sort of accidental – something you discovered along the way, or was it something you were always interested in?

It was not obvious at all to me, like most things in life you only realize that it was meant to become this way when it has already happened. So, when I started out, at age 13 or 14, I was really interested in computers and I started programming with old books and manuals with the old PC. I started typing commands in Basic and I thought I was going to be a computer scientist because that was really the only profession that I, and everyone else around me, knew of at the time that were connected to computers. As I improved my programming skills I didn't have anyone to really mentor me back then, so I had to keep buying programming books and try to learn from them. I realized when I got more into this stuff that the fascinating part was actually making the user interfaces and thinking about the interactions, making a nice product. I made floppy disks and gave them to my friends and had them install my crappy apps and games. Though we didn't call them apps back then. I literally walked to school and handed these disks to those few friends who had computers.

I really wanted to make digital products but the connection came much later. I got interested in design because I actually thought industrial design was my thing. I was thinking about ergonomics and interacting with things. I had no idea at the time, in the late 90s, that there was a profession called user interface design.

I applied to the Industrial Design programme at a design school and they rejected me, which was fine because just a year later they started this Interface Design programme, which was exactly what I had always wanted to do: design + interaction + technology.

Title: Virtual Water App
Year: 2010
Poster design: Timm Kekeritz
App design: Frank Rausch,
Timm Kekeritz
App implementation:
Frank Rausch

*The interactive version
of a popular poster designed
by Timm Kekeritz in 2007.
Our attempt to make the
iconic design interactive,
more affordable, and more
portable than the poster
version. This was the first
app published by Raureif
on the iOS App Store.*
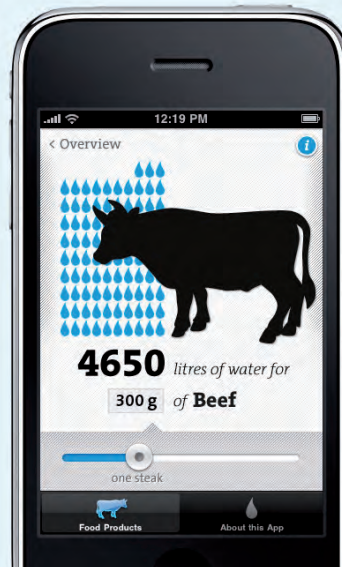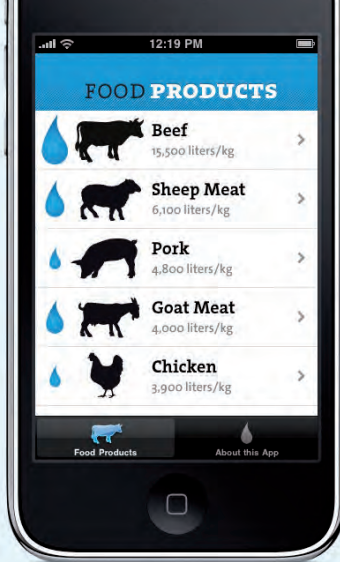
It is such a privilege to know at such a young age with conviction what it is that you want to do, and then finding the path that leads you to it.

Yes. It was also a little weird because at age 14 I was sitting at my computer instead of meeting friends. I was one of the not so nerdy nerds, but still it was not very common among my friends to have this obsession. Most would play games. I was more interested in building stuff.

But I left out an important piece, I studied at FH-Potsdam. Lucas de Groot, who was a professor there, inspired me to do type design and I got hooked on type design. I think I visited his class almost every semester even though I didn't get any credits for the fifth and sixth time I attended. I was obsessed with the type world too suddenly. Nobody thought it would be a good match for the user interface part, but I kind of had a hunch about that, and it turned into a thing. I am grateful for this sort of weird combination which turned out to be useful.

Why do you think you were obsessed with type design at the time?

I liked the obscurity of it. People aren't for the most part even aware that type is designed. Suddenly, you learn how to do it and you learn to appreciate how difficult it is and how much goes into type design. It's a foundation for any kind of graphic design. It is a beautiful combination of simplicity and complexity. You have this black and white simplicity, you are within a grid and you are within lots of restrictions like: space, systems, cultural perception but within these limitations you learn that there are still thousands of variations of how you can solve a problem or how you can design something within this framework. Craftsmanship is the other aspect that I appreciate about it: making nice harmonious curves, contrasts that work.

In type design you become trained at recognizing whether something works visually. Just looking at black and white shapes and judging whether they are good or not, right or wrong. There is no formula but you learn to see stuff.

I think a lot of people take this work for granted, that in fact there is a sort of craft behind it.

Absolutely, and I think this sort of thinking in silos that we have seen in the industry for so many years, "this is designer work" and "this is developer work", I think this is going to merge. There is no way we can prevent this from happening, and I think that's a good thing. I see more and more students of mine becoming developer designers or designer developers, however you want to call it, with an interest in typography. I am trying to encourage these guys to do what they want to do, without someone else telling them that it is not possible. I experienced it in the first couple of years of my work. I did lots of client projects just on the design side, without any development, so I have seen

how frustrating it is as a designer to be told by developers over and over again: "no, you can't do this, the infrastructure does not allow this." I find that really empowering and I appreciate that people are now interested in this topic.

Within type design you have mentioned the idea of problem-solving again. I feel like that is something you go back to a lot. Where do you think that comes from?

I come from a family of engineers, my father is an engineer, my grandfather was an engineer, so maybe that can be chalked up to my German engineer-family upbringing. But I also think I emancipated from that. I think problem-solving is really important in design but if you are missing the non measurable part, you are missing out on

a lot. I am always frustrated in the industry, because process is very important while craftsmanship is kind of lost. Everyone has their own design thinking and method, etc. which is part of the process but you rarely see people talking about craftsmanship and the actual act of implementing something well. I have a feeling that will change. I don't really believe in process except for selling stuff to clients. Process is also more important when you are part of a bigger team.

Title: MoneyMoney macOS App
Years: 2010–2013 (as product owner),
2013–now (after sale as external consultant)
Designers: Frank Rausch, Timm Kekeritz

*A banking application
to manage personal finances.*

Title: OECD Better Life Index, OECD Data Portal
Years: 2011–2014
Design: Timm Kekeritz, Frank Rausch,
Moritz Stefaner (Information Visualization)

*My agency Raureif has created
both the Better Life Index website
and the OECD Data portal at data.oecd.org.*
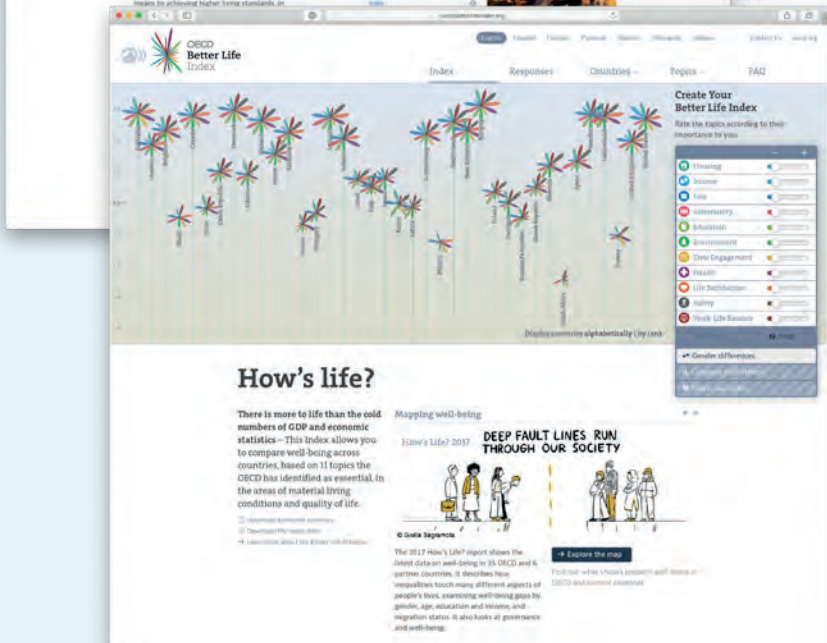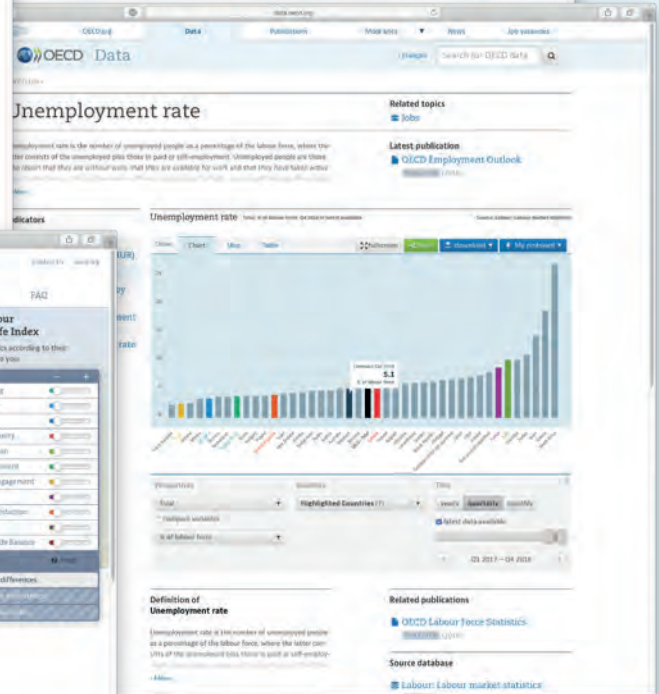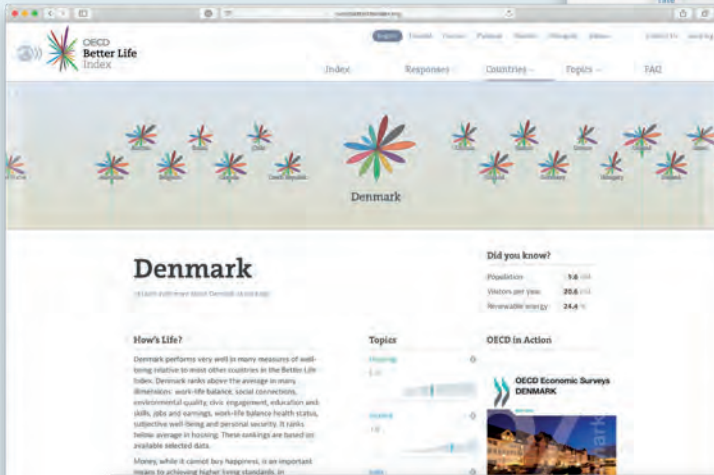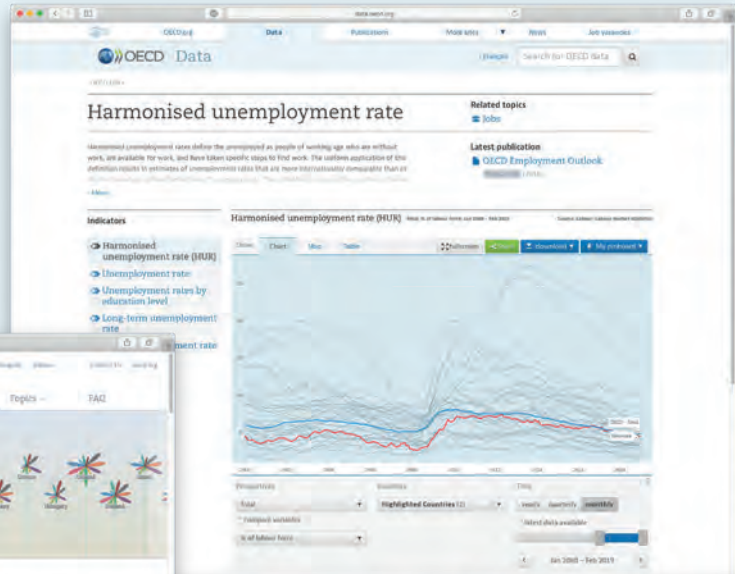
It took a couple of approaches to take that step actually, because for a while I thought that in order to navigate this industry you would have to be a part of the agency model. I took this for granted, and I had to rid myself of this notion. I mean, it was my own company, it's not like I was living inside the hell of someone else's agency. It was always clear to me that I wanted to build products, which we also did within the agency. Some were not successful, some were moderately successful, others were doing well but we never actually managed to come up with something that would sustain us, we did weather apps, scanner apps... Eventually,

I decided to put my passion behind solo projects and I started working on this V for Wiki app, which was the second Wikipedia app that I made. The main goal was to make a showcase for my work and really illustrate what it is that I am talking about, when I am teaching or speaking at conferences, but luckily it also became commercially successful and allowed me to make a living with it. You can talk a lot about how typography sucks digitally but if you don't have a way to show how to make it better, then it's not really credible.

There are several reasons for that, the most obvious one being that I used Wikipedia a lot and I think many people do. The fact that Wikipedia's data is open and accessible made it easier to use. If I had wanted to improve the user experience of Spiegel online for example, I would have had legal problems from the start – the difference is in the license model of the data. The problem I faced, of course, was that people said you can't resell the Wikipedia data since it is free. But I don't resell Wikipedia content, what I sell is basically a pair of glasses to see Wikipedia in a nicer way. I am also giving back to the community because I open source most of the code that I use to extract data from Wikipedia.
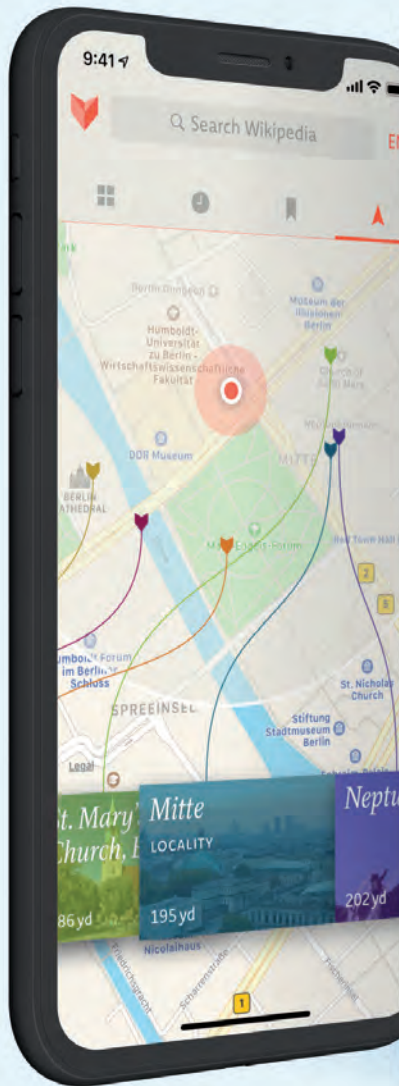
Title: V for Wiki
Designer: Frank Rausch
Years: 2016–now (constantly changing and improving stuff)

*A reader app for Wikipedia with obsessive attention to (typographic) detail.
Winner of the German Design Award 2017.*

In talking about the shift from paper to digital you have said that simulation is never as good as the real thing, so there is no point in trying to simulate paper when creating digital content. Do you, however, think that it was a necessary transition? Would people have been able to make the leap without having been able to compare it to the medium they had known best until then?

Absolutely, it's kind of like having training wheels on your bike. Metaphors and simulations in the digital realm are of course guides, and they help you out quicker than if it were totally abstract. You have to give digital stuff some shape so why not rely on things that people bring from outside the digital realm. The digital world has been around for about 40 years now, the graphic user interfaces were created in the 70s, so of course back then it was even more important to simulate stuff. But now that people are growing up with digital first, we can let go of some of these simulations. If you think about reading apps, the first iterations were flipping pages with animations, there was simulated paper texture behind glass. They got rid of all this stuff. People kind of have accepted that it is not paper. Now most apps are scrolling and not page flipping. So, simulation was great as a transition but it is not a viable model going forward. You see this with the phone icon now. The phone as an object doesn't exist anymore.

How can storytelling become a part of user interface design? And can the storytelling only be a reflection of the time your user is in because you have to reference their visual vernacular, more so than being a reflection of the designer-the phone which you mentioned is a perfect example?

You absolutely have to consider the user's context, it's the same in movies for example, even science fiction, which is supposed to show the future, has elements from the time it was created in. This applies to culture in general and user interfaces are part of culture and should be treated as such, just like books, movies or anything else.

Schrift · Interface · Ide

Fonts in Apps

Monotype

Dieses E-Booklet ist optimiert für Tablets

Mobiles Leb

8

Leuchtende Buchstaben

g g g g g

Die Entwickler von Leitsystemen haben es zuerst entdeckt: Hinweise auf selbstleuchtenden Displays erfordern eine andere Strichstärke als jene auf Schildern mit Auflicht. Das gleiche gilt für die Kombination von Weiß-auf-schwarz-Beschriftung mit einer Schwarz-auf-weiß-Beschriftung.

Die helleren Flächen überstrahlen die dunklen, was zu einem fetteren bzw. leichteren Schriftbild führt. Falls dieser Effekt nicht durch einen Schriftwechsel kompensiert wird, entsteht bei der Wegeleitung eine ungewünschte Priorisierung.

Auch bei Mobilgeräten sind unbeleuchtete (E-Book-Reader) und hinterleuchtete Bildschirme (Smartphones) in Gebrauch. Ein geübtes Auge erkennt, welche Auswirkungen die Lichtsituation auf den Lesekomfort hat. Schriftfamilien mit vielen Strichstärken helfen beim Kompensieren negativer Effekte.

Monotype

Ko

11

Besser lesbar

Hamburgermenü

Der **Raum zwischen den Buchstaben** ist für die Lesbarkeit genauso wichtig wie die Buchstaben selbst

Prägnante Buchstabenformen in einer Schrift helfen dabei, Wörter schneller zu erfassen.

gd
gd

Offene Formen lesen sich besser und ...chen den Buchstaben.

...ormen

Auch wenn Apps wie eine neue Erfindung gehandelt werden, sie sind es eigentlich nicht. Früher hießen sie ›Programme‹ und liefen auf klobigen Kisten mit flackernden Bildschirmen.

Was sich geändert hat, ist unser Verhältnis zu diesen Anwendungsprogrammen. Weil sie auf mobilen Geräten laufen, haben wir Apps jederzeit griffbereit in der Tasche. Oder am Handgelenk. Wie selbstverständlich nutzen wir mit ihrer Hilfe praktische Dienste, meist viele Male am Tag.

Dabei geschieht vor allem eins: Wir lesen. Erinnerungen, Nachrichten, Mitteilungen, Playlisten, aber auch Menüs und Buttons. Wir lesen mehr denn je.

Smartphone-Mixgefäß

FF Franziska™ Jakob Runge · FontFont

Smartphone-Mixgefäßrückwand

Sirba Nicolien van der Keur · TypeTogether

Robust, vielseitig, platzsparend, enthält griechische und kyrillische Zeichen

Icon-Font mit den wichtigsten Symbolen für Apps und Web, Teil des Pakets **FF UI Icons**

FF Dingbats 2.0™ UI Johannes Erler, Henning Skibbe · FontFont

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Glattmacher

Rendering
Rendering
Rendering
Rendering

Grob aufgelöst kann ein und dieselbe Schrift sehr unterschiedlich dargestellt werden – je nach Rendering-Software und Betriebssystem.

Jedes Betriebssystem nutzt eine eigene Methode, um die skalierbaren Buchstabenkonturen eine mit Pixeln zu füllen und Treppchen zu glätten (›Rendering‹).

Falls ein App-Entwickler die volle Kontrolle die Schriftqualität wünscht, zum Beispiel Rendering Lese-App, kommen eigenständige Rendering als fertiges Software-Modul zum Einsatz, Beispiel iType von Monotype. iType läss unter iOS oder Android einbinden und Einstellmöglichkeiten für die optimal mehrerer Schriftsysteme.

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ontrastprogramm

Der Unterschied zwischen Hell und Dunkel ist fürs angenehme Lesen essenziell, denn ohne einen Kontrast zwischen den Buchstaben und der Fläche dahinter gäbe es nichts zu lesen.

Allerdings weisen hinterleuchtete Displays einen sehr hohen Kontrast auf, der bei längerem Lesen die Augen ermüdet.

– Besser ist daher dunkelgrauer Text vor weißem oder leicht getöntem Grund.

– Nur bei starkem Sonnenlicht ist es ratsam, den maximalen Kontrast auszureizen.

– Bei dunkler Umgebung funktioniert negative Schrift sehr gut (heller Text vor dunklem Grund), weil gleichzeitig die Gesamthelligkeit sinkt.

Normplusultra

Gute Apps haben eins Leitlinien ihrer Plattfo zu erfinden.

Der Zurück-But Der Hinzufügen-Bu rechts im Kreis. W Kachelprinzip. St wir fühlen uns z

Obwohl iO Design-Konve und dieselbe gleich ›anfüh verknüpft B über Syste

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Persönlichkeit

Schriften sollten einerseits die besonderen Eigenschaften einer App bekräftigen, aber auch bei der Bedienung zuverlässig Dienst leisten. Mischen is possible: Ein geschickter Schriftmix hält die Balance zwischen Emotion und bester Lesbarkeit.

hriften können ausgefallen und genre... klein gesetzten Inhalte ... Schrift

23:42

Prima Warenkorb

The advice you have given to young designers seeking a start in your field, was to really train their eyes, and give themselves a lot of practice in order to hone their craft. I found this particularly interesting because I noticed that in examples of corrections that you have brought to existing digital designs, like Wikipedia pages for instance, you often qualified something as not looking good, whereas to my layman's eye, it seemed ok. So, my question is how do you know that every tweak or correction you bring actually improves the user experience and is not just the implementation of an obsession for perfection on your part?

It is definitely both. It's a valid question and I don't think that most people would appreciate that I made one specific correction, in one specific context which they don't see, but the general feedback I get is that people think the product is better, they just can't quite put their finger on why they think it is better. I think that in the end a good product is the sum of its details, all the little improvements add up, even if it is made up of things people do not directly perceive. That's also part of craftsmanship, you do things that you know are supposed to be that way because it makes it better. You could be done at 95% and are really putting in the last 5% for yourself or anyone else who shares an obsession for details, but I also think that's totally acceptable. This really applies to any craft, even when you buy a sofa, real effort is in the details, like the legs that you don't see being polished. That's the type of thing you do for yourself, when nobody sees the detail, but you know you did the best you could.

Most design work is a very subjective application of a maker's vision, do you feel like there is a notion of objectivity to designing typography for user interfaces, because it underlines the ease of interaction with a device? (making text easy to process for the eyes and the brain?)

There is an approach to it, but there is really no way to measure it. There are processes you follow of course, like the four parameters for typography (setting the size, adjusting the horizontal rhythm, line length, and vertical spacing) but in the end it is only experience that can show you if things work or not. The more you know, the easier it is to make decisions. If you don't know anything, then it is difficult to even start tackling the problems. You can extrapolate that to anything. If you don't know the rules or traditions, you don't know how to break the rules.

Typefacts

Editorial   Kontakt

Deutsch   English

Suchen

Artikel

Startseite

Artikel

- Anführungszeichen
- Apostroph
- Binde- und Gedankenstrich
- Schöner twittern
- Tastaturkürzel
- Typo kompakt
  Alternativschriften
  Auslassungspunkte
  Das Et-Zeichen
  Grad, Fuß, Zoll, Minuten, Sekunden
  Kerningtest
  Ligaturen
  Ligaturen einfügen
  Papierformate
  Seitenproportionen
  Sonderzeichen einfügen
  Vier Typo-Sünden
  Zahlengliederung digital
  Zeichen zählen
  Zeilenabstand

Alternativschriften

Nase voll von Helvetica? Satzgesehen an Gotham? Der Prof empfiehlt immer nur Rotis? Typefacts hilft! An dieser Stelle zeige ich die besten Alternativen zu alteingesessenen und inflationär verwendeten Schriften: »Helvetica ist wie Toastbrot. Schmeckt nach n…

Anführungszeichen

Es gibt kaum eine Sache, die häufiger falsch gemacht w… unsere liebevoll »Gänsefü… genannten Anführungszei… liegt zum einen an Unkan… anderen aber natürlich au… mehr an unserer urzeitlich… Tastatur, die die korrekten…

Apostroph

Der Apostroph ist ein faszinierendes…

Auslassungspunkte

Der Begriff Ellipse bezeichnet in der Typografie die drei Auslassungspunkte, die Teile eines Wortes oder eines Satzes ersetzen sollen. Statt einfach drei Punkte aneinanderzureihen, sollte das in professionellen Schriften enthaltene eigene Zeichen (auch…

Binde- und Gedankenstrich

Ein kleiner Unterschied m… Wirkung – und häufig fals… gemacht. Die beiden Gesc… Bindestrich »-« und Geda… »–« unterscheidet meiste… Länge, und dennoch ist es… andere als egal, welchen d… man verwendet. Bindestr…

Typefacts

Editorial   Kontakt

Binde- und Gedankenstrich

Ein kleiner Unterschied mit großer Wirkung – und häufig falsch gemacht. Die beiden Geschwister Bindestrich - und Gedankenstrich — unterscheidet meistens nur ihre Länge, und dennoch ist es alles andere als egal, welchen der beiden man verwendet.

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  Zeichen zählen
  Zeilenabstand

Anführungszeichen

Es gibt kaum eine Sache, die häufiger falsch gemacht wird als unsere liebevoll »Gänsefüßchen« genannten Anführungszeichen. Das liegt zum einen an Unkenntnis, zum anderen auch natürlich auch einmal mehr an unserer urzeitlichen Tastatur, die die korrekten Zeichen gut versteckt hält. Letzteres ist mit der Tastaturkürzel-Übersicht von Typefacts kein Problem mehr, aber was die mangelnde Kenntnis angeht …

Anführungszeichen (doppelt öffnend)	Anführungszeichen (einfach öffnend)	Anführungszeichen (einfach schließend)	Anführungszeichen (doppelt schließend)
U+201E	U+201A	U+2018	U+201C
⌥+^	⌥+S	⌥+#	⌥+2
Alt+0132	Alt+0130	Alt+0145	Alt+0147

Anführungszeichen werden zum **Zitieren von Textpassagen**, zur **Ironisierung** und **Distanzierung** genutzt. Zur Verschach-

Title: Partly Cloudy Weather App
Year: 2012
Designers: Jana Kühl, Timm Kekeritz, Frank Rausch

Partly Cloudy visualizes weather conditions on a rotary dial.

You made the V for Wiki App, which is a Wikipedia reader and offers a much improved user experience. In one of the talks you gave, you mentioned that you had met part of the actual Wikipaedia team and were aware that they have to work under a lot of design constraints, and face resistance from the users in brining changes. Why is that? Why, if making design improve- ments to existing platforms creates a better reading experience, there is still resistance to change?

It's just because people don't like change. I don't appreciate change in small things either. Someone once said that if you change a website that people use a lot over night, it will feel like you have rearranged their living room. If you change stuff, it makes a lot of people mad. It might even only make 10% of the people mad, but they are very vocal about it. That's a big problem in design by committee or community. If you have too many opinions and try to mangle them into one design, then usually it shows: it feels like a compromise, and it looks like one too. If you want a good experience, then sometimes you have to make decisions that are not very popular.

What would be the project of your dreams going forward? Which wheel would you like to reinvent?

I would like to set as a career goal digital typesetting that is so good that it indistinguishable from high quality manual type set books, because we still have lots of problems in digital. We are still missing this manual line breaking. If you have a book that is layouted by one of the great typographers of the past 100 years, you will still see that the quality of the line breaks is much better. In digital, there is no one who actually makes these decisions. We could try and put all of this into algorithms but I don't think that's a good idea, so I have high hopes for machine learning. I think machine learning and AI will make typesetting much better, because you can just train them with high quality stuff from the past 100 years.

DESIGN   FRIENDS

PUBLICATIONS

01 **CHRISTOPH NIEMANN** Illustration Design	2009	
02 **MICHEL MALLARD** Creative Direction	2009	
03 **FUN FACTORY** Product Design	2009	
04 **ANDREAS UEBELE** Signage Design	2010	
05 **HARRI PECCINOTTI** Photography	2010	
06 **KUSTAA SAKSI** Illustration Design	2010	
07 **5.5 DESIGNERS** Product Design	2011	
08 **NIKLAUS TROXLER** Graphic Design	2011	
09 **JOACHIM SAUTER** Media Design	2011	
10 **MICHAEL JOHNSON** Graphic Design	2011	
11 **ELVIS POMPILIO** Fashion Design	2011	
12 **STEFAN DIEZ** Industrial Design	2012	
13 **CHRISTIAN SCHNEIDER** Sound Design	2012	
14 **MARIO LOMBARDO** Editorial Design	2012	
15 **SAM HECHT** Industrial Design	2012	
16 **SONJA STUMMERER &**		
MARTIN HABLESREITER Food Design	2012	
17 **LERNERT & SANDER** Art & Design	2013	

18 **MURAT GÜNAK** Automotive Design	2013
19 **NICOLAS BOURQUIN** Editorial Design	2013
20 **SISSEL TOLAAS** Scent Design	2013
21 **CHRISTOPHE PILLET** Product Design	2013
22 **MIRKO BORSCHE** Editorial Design	2014
23 **PAUL PRIESTMAN** Transportation Design	2014
24 **BRUCE DUCKWORTH** Packaging Design	2014
25 **ERIK SPIEKERMANN** Graphic Design	2014
26 **KLAUS-PETER SIEMSSEN** Light Design	2014
27 **EDUARDO AIRES** Corporate Design	2015
28 **PHILIPPE APELOIG** Graphic Design	2015
29 **ALEXANDRA MURRAY-LESLIE**	
High Techne Fashion Design	2015
30 **PLEIX** Video & Installation Design	2016
31 **LA FILLE D'O** Fashion Design	2016
32 **RUEDI BAUR** Graphic Design	2016
33 **ROMAIN URHAUSEN** Product Design	2016
34 **MR BINGO** Illustration Design	2016

35 **KIKI VAN EIJK** Product Design	2016
36 **JEAN-PAUL LESPAGNARD**	
Fashion Design	2017
37 **PE'L SCHLECHTER** Graphic Design	2017
38 **TIM JOHN & MARTIN SCHMITZ**	
Scenography Design	2017
39 **BROSMIND** Illustration Design	2017
40 **ARMANDO MILANI** Graphic Design	2017
41 **LAURA STRAßER** Product Design	2017
42 **PHOENIX DESIGN** Industrial Design	2018
43 **UWE R. BRÜCKNER** Scenography Design	2018
44 **BROUSSE & RUDDIGKEIT** Design Code	2018
45 **ISABELLE CHAPUIS** Photography Design	2018
46 **PATRICIA URQUIOLA** Product Design	2018
47 **SARAH-GRACE MANKARIOUS**	
Graphic Design	2018
48 **STUDIO FEIXEN** Visual Concepts	2019

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