Lessons in typography

Must-know typographic principles
presented through lessons, exercises,
and examples.

Jim Krause

CREATIVE CORE BOOK03

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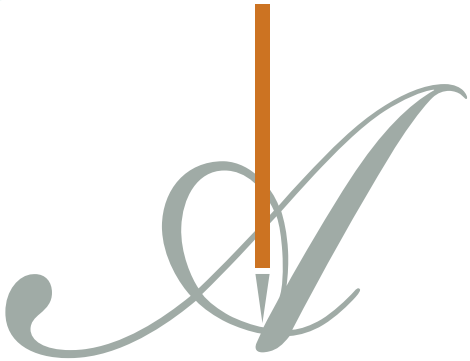
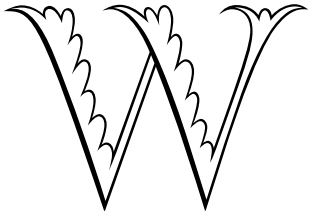
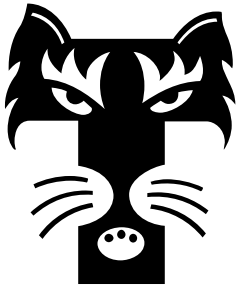
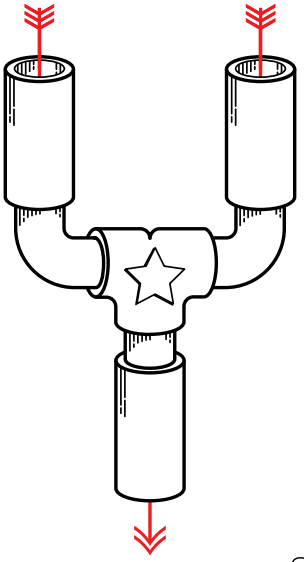


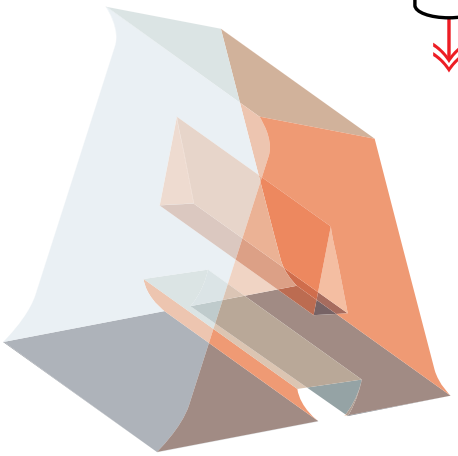


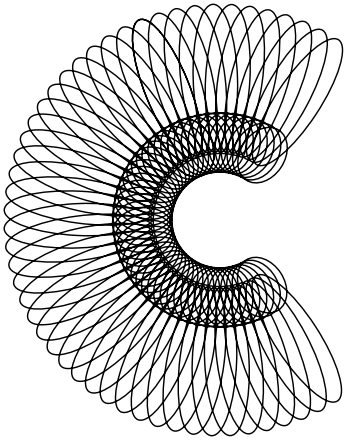


The illustrated letter

A number of off-the-shelf typefaces offer characters that are stylized or semi-realistic depictions of objects, plants, animals, and human beings. Got a few novelty faces of this kind in your cache of fonts? Every so often, they can offer a quick solution to a layout need.





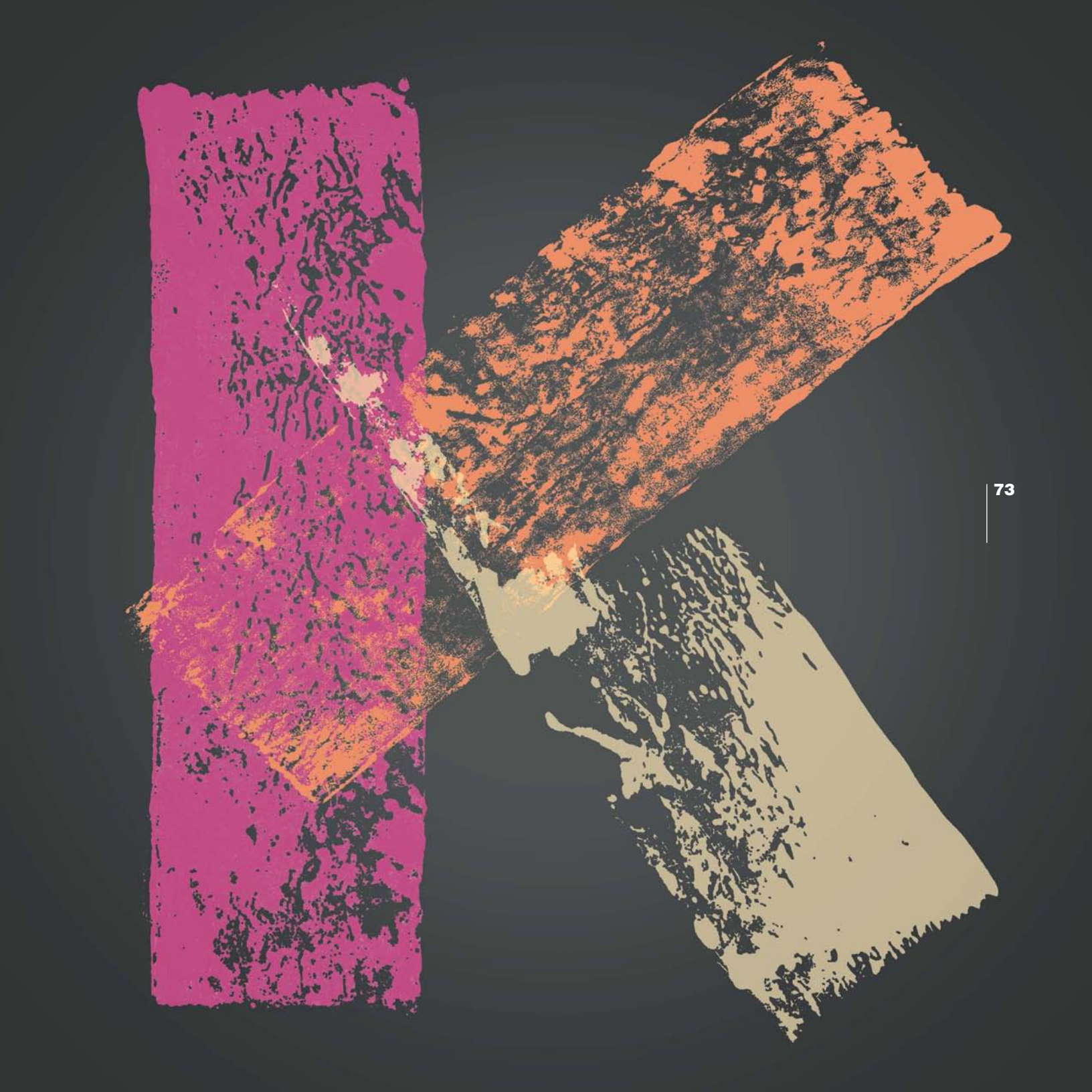


The letter as illustration

Working on a single-letter monogram, initial cap, or page graphic? What about creating a custom-made illustration of your typographic character? A rendering that connects with both your piece's theme and its subject?

You can create typographic illustrations like these using digital media or traditional analog tools (as in the case of the capital K shown at right, which was created with acrylic paints and a small print-making ink roller).

Don't automatically shy away from opportunities to draw, paint, or otherwise render typographic characters for projects that call for them—even if you don't think of yourself as a competent illustrator. Nearly all designers are capable of producing eye-catching visuals using a combination of their sharp eye for evaluation and whatever illustration skills they can call their own.



MONOGRAMS AND LETTER SETS

In design, monograms are usually defined as logos and graphics built from one or more initials. Monograms can be made purely from type, they can include imagery, and they can be fashioned inside a border or set against a backdrop.

It's only natural that many companies use monograms as part of their logo since these kinds of letter-based designs connect naturally with the company's name while also conveying sought-after thematic expressions through the style and aesthetics of their presentation.

Some individuals also enjoy having a personal monogram created for use on calling cards—and on whatever else they think might be enhanced by a visual reminder of themselves.

You'll notice that some of the monograms featured here make use of existing typefaces, while others employ custom-built letterforms. Either route can work, of course, so consider both options when developing designs of this kind. (Ideas borrowed from the letter-building strategies mentioned on pages 61–62 could come in handy if you're considering creating a monogram from scratch, as could the hand-lettering advice offered on pages 125–127.)

What's the best way to begin a monogram project? Same way as you'd begin just about any other creative typographic endeavor: by identifying the feelings and ideas your creation ought to communicate (page 108); surveying the fonts available on your system and elsewhere (pages 148–149); and making thumbnail sketches of potential solutions (page 109).

Monograms

Each of these single-letter examples has something to say about the thinking that can go into the creation of a monogram to help it deliver its aesthetic content and thematic feel.

Among other things, a monogram can be: assembled by integrating a letter with imagery; created using an existing typeface and a simple backdrop; built to resemble a dimensional form; constructed by extending an ornamental image or two from a typographic character; illustrated to include something like a hard-spiked Mohawk to playfully connote feelings of menace; enhanced using Photoshop effects; rendered in a way that depicts real-word interactions between objects; crafted to resemble an in-perspective 3D structure; devised by combining a letterform with a symbol; fabricated using a grid of shapes (see also page 63), fashioned entirely from straight and/or curved lines; or drawn from scratch using a visual vocabulary of either simple or complex forms.

You can use these aesthetic, conceptual, and structural approaches to create monograms as well as multi-letter headlines and logos (more on those kinds of applications in Chapters 3 and 4).

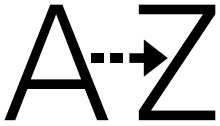
Pairs and sets

You can apply the same single-letter design ideas demonstrated on the previous page to multi-character monograms.

Monograms made from multiple letters also offer added opportunities for aesthetic and thematic expression because of the potential for interaction between their two or more typographic characters.

Though monograms may not always be the best or only solution for logo projects, designers often include one or two when presenting branding ideas to clients—especially if a company's initials present unique visual and conceptual design opportunities.

Legibility is important with monograms, just as it is with words. That said, a monogram can gain a certain amount of leeway in this regard when you're planning to always—or almost always—present it in conjunction with the fully spelled-out words its initials represent. For example, if the U, V, and W in the monogram above were always presented in clear association with words that begin with these three letters, it's central character would likely be understood to represent both a V and a pair of scissors (an understanding that might be lost if the monogram were *not* shown with words with corresponding initials).



Ways of saying *and*

Working on a logo for a company with a name that's two words with an *and* between them? Think a monogram might suit the project? If so, then spend time and effort thinking about and thumbnailing different ways of presenting the idea of *and* within your design.

Sometimes, the way *and* is conceptually and/or aesthetically handled within a monogram is precisely the thing that gives the design its extra measure of interest and appeal.