°2

RAILS DISPLAY TYPEFACE: PARALLEL LINES

Superfried used parallel tracks to create a pair of outline display faces for font foundry Hype For Type, as part of a series of experimental typefaces inspired by unused ideas from previous projects

MARK RICHARDSON
GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Mark trained as a scientist, and worked as an in-house designer at a newspaper before forming Superfried. The London-based studio works across graphic design, branding, illustration and type.

THE DESIGN BRIEF
Mark Richardson

As a designer, you'll inevitably produce work that doesn't get used. Sometimes I revisit those ideas and think again about whether there's something useful there. It can be good to look back at your own work rather than trying to reinvent the wheel every time.

While I sometimes use standard typefaces for logo designs, some projects call for a more bespoke approach. This has grown into a passion for creating experimental typography based on discarded logo designs, although sometimes I find the style only works with the letters pictured in the mark and won't lend itself to a full character set. I'm not a true typographer – I approach these projects as a graphic designer who loves type.

I posted a tweet last year saying I wanted to take these typefaces to the next level, and asking if anyone knew any foundries that might be interested. Someone suggested Hype For Type and helpfully copied them into the reply. It was already an ambition to collaborate with them, so I was delighted when they asked me to send some work over. There are now 11 Superfried typefaces for sale through Hype For Type, including Rails.
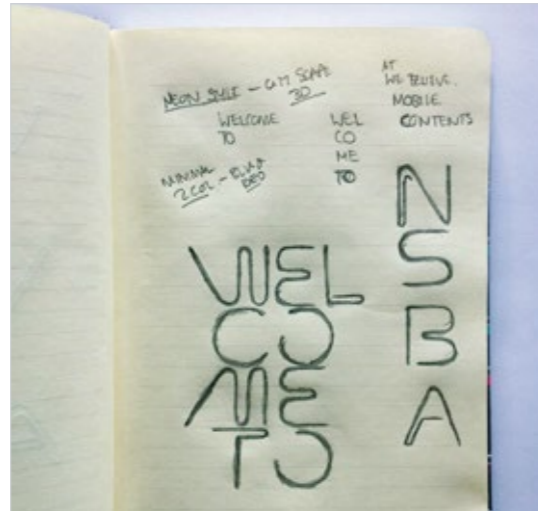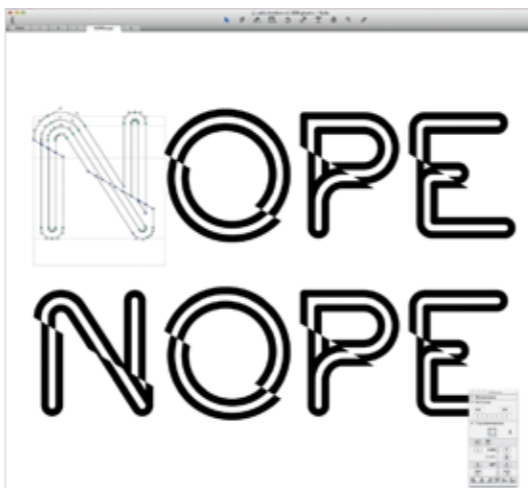

■ STAGE ONE The initial sketches for a neon type style developed for client brochure illustrations, a project that was cancelled.

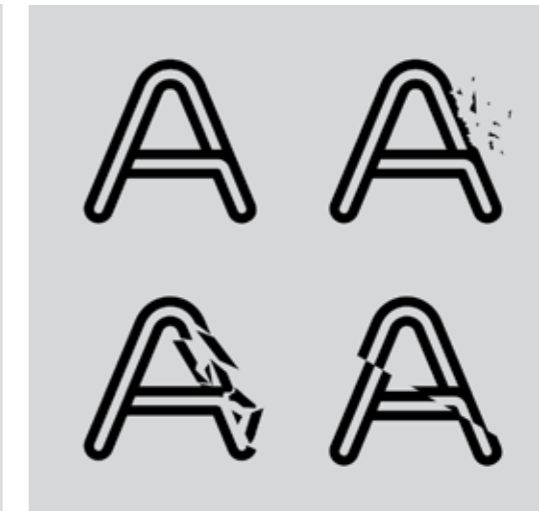■ STAGE TWO Rather than waste the work, Richardson developed it into a complete typeface, Neon – featuring two styles.

■ STAGE THREE This demonstrates the evolution of Neon into Rails, which clearly combines elements from both of the Neon styles.

■ STAGE FOUR Richardson felt Rails looked too clean. Dramatic explosions proved too complex, but a simple slice effect worked.

■ STAGE FIVE Whilst developing Neon, a simple, alternative typeface emerged: Rails. The '4' proved particularly tricky to get right.

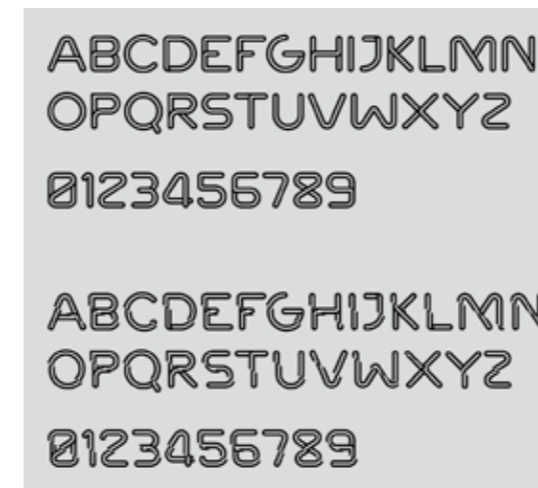■ STAGE SIX Once complete, the Rails characters were transferred from Illustrator to Glyphs for clean-up, tweaks and spacing.

■ STAGE SEVEN Initially, 'Broken' was to be a second style via shift, but including the numbers required an extra typeface.

■ STAGE EIGHT Testing complete, it was time to experiment with marketing visuals: "Fun, but surprisingly difficult," says Richardson.

HOW I WORK

MARK RICHARDSON DESCRIBES THE EVOLUTION OF HIS TYPE DESIGNS

When I first started playing with type, I used the FontStruct (www.fontstruct.com) website, which generates a set of basic shapes that you can use to form a simple typeface. That was the basis for my first typeface, Blox, based on an old experimental logo for Superfried, which was made available as a free download. It got some great feedback, which inspired me to carry on. The limitations of FontStruct led me to seek out some new software, and I briefly worked with FontForge (www.fontforge.org) before discovering the Glyphs package (www.glyphsapp.com), which is fantastic. It's highly affordable at £30 for the mini version or £200 for the complete software, and it's very user-friendly.

I mainly design my type in Illustrator, but sometimes it just isn't accurate enough – plus it can be frustrating trying to deal with fiddly things such as double points. There are times when I need to go in closer, and that's where the Glyphs font software comes in handy. I've even been known to bring logo designs into Glyphs to get the extra level of control it affords.

PROJECT EVOLUTION

EACH STAGE OF THE TYPEFACE'S CREATION PRESENTED SUPERFRIED WITH A NEW DESIGN CHALLENGE

REGENERATING IDEAS
In the run-up to the August launch of Superfried's typefaces on Hype For Type, I reworked our old fonts and developed three new faces. Box was developed from an unused club logo. Neon came out of some type with a minimal futuristic feel, developed for a brochure that never saw the light of day. And Rails originated from Neon.

PAPER FOUNDATION
I don't tend to produce polished drawings, although I do use sketches to get some basic ideas down on paper. Once I've seen that they are going to work, I'll move onto the Mac. When a typeface has started life as a logo idea the basic building blocks are there already, so there tends to be minimal sketching required.

LAYING THE TRACKS
Rails is made up of parallel lines with twists and curves, but the letterforms are quite standard shapes. I created a broken version so people can disturb the flow with disruptive characters. I considered incorporating the styles into one typeface, but I wanted a full set of numerals in both, so it made sense to create two standalone faces.

QUIRKY CROSSOVERS
Some of the characters in Neon have nice crossovers, and Rails picks up on these. These details add interest to some letters that might otherwise have been that bit too simple. The characters '8' and '&' are among my favourites to design as you can experiment with overlaps and other features without risking legibility.

FAMILY RESEMBLANCE
The number '4' was tricky to get right and it went through multiple iterations. I don't develop strict rules for each character to conform to, but I do pay attention to whether they look like part of the same family. For example, if you look at the letter 'R' in Rails it's clear to see that this has evolved from the letter 'P'.

SPLITTING IMAGE
I had to get the spacing and kerning to work. In Rails Broken the letters aren't just split but are also offset, so the letter spacing needed further adjustment. Slicing and offsetting the characters increased their height, so I went back to the display version to ensure the European accents didn't require vertical adjustment.

DO THE TWIST
Rails Broken works well for editorial use, and I envisaged a distorted headline for impact. Developing marketing materials and designing with the typeface lets you discover its limitations. I made tweaks at this point. The campaign shows a woman wearing the number '8', emphasising the twisting nature of the typeface.