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Digital Media Foundations 1112

December 7, 2020

The Legacy of Jan Tschichold

As the vast empire of woodcut printing crumbles beneath the mass integration of lithography and photography, 20th century avant-garde typography continued to revolutionize because of typographers like Jan Tschichold. Jan Tschichold was a well-known calligrapher, graphic designer, typographer, author, and teacher who had a significant impact on transforming the world of modernist typography and graphic design. His influence reverberates through generations as his very name has become a staple in the history of graphic design and modernist typography.

Jan Tschichold was born on April 2, 1902 in Ledzig, Germany, where he would spend his childhood training in the visual arts. Jan Tschichold grew up with his mother and father, Maria & Franz Tschichold. His father was a sign writer, and as such, he provided Tschichold with an early introduction into the world of lettering and calligraphy. Despite Tschichold's attraction to the graphic arts, particularly calligraphy and typography, he became an illustration teacher because his parents worried he would



Figure 1. Early Work from Jan Tschichold, 1923

become a fruitless artist. Even so, at seventeen Tschichold began to douse himself in typographic studies and practices. He furthered developed his calligraphic ability while adding engraving, wood cut printing, lithography, bookbinding and many other creative skills to his arsenal. Though self-taught, Tschichold's extensive studies and passion for the graphic arts separated him from multitudes of typographers and graphic designers at the time.



Figure 2. The Bauhaus.
<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-03-11/why-the-bauhaus-still-matters>

Tschichold's artistic curiosity led him to Weimar, Germany to see the first public exhibition of an influential German art school known as *The Bauhaus* in 1923. The Bauhaus was founded by “architect Walter Gropius as a school of arts and crafts in 1919” (Richard Hollis, Jan Tschichold: a titan of typography, www.theguardian.com). The

exhibit included designs from well-known artists such as, Herbert Bayer, Paul Klee, László Moholy Nayj, and Wassaly Kandinsky. The exhibition embodied the concept of modernity by presenting new ways to integrate art with emerging technology. The presentation of foreign art styles like, Constructivism, Destijl, & Dada broadened Tschichold's perspective of art and design. He was especially impacted by Hungarian artist, designer and photographer, László Moholy Nayj's short essay, declaring that photography and type can work together in a design to convey its message. After this introduction into modernist typography led by Moholy Nayj and El Lissitzky, Tschichold grew frustrated with the current political and artistic state of Germany. He embraced Russian Constructivism and changed his first name to “Ivan” as testament to his support of soviet ideals.

Following Tschichold's revelation in 1927, he joined a modernist typographer group formed by German artist, Kurt Schwitters, called *The Circle of New Advertising Designers* also known as,



Figure 3. Cover page of *Die neue Typographie* by Jan Tschichold. (http://www.designhistory.org/Avant_Garde_pages/DieNeueType.html)

The Ring. This group established the principles of The New Typography movement (*Die neue Typographie*), which aimed to revolutionize the relationships between imagery and printed text to convey messages in a more dynamic, progressive, and thought provoking way that closely emulated the spirit of modernity.

Tschichold acquired works from numerous members of *The Ring* including, Moholy Nayj, El Lissitzky, Herbert Bayer, Piet Zwart, Max Burchartz, and Willi Baumeister, compiled their works and ideologies, and published modern typography's landmark book

and his most influential work, *Die neue Typographie* (1928). This book would become “instrumental in defining ‘The New Typography’” movement in Weimar, Germany (Bard New Typography 2019 Exhibit). His book held typographers still clinging to gothic scripts, mono-alignment, and ornamental illustration in contempt, while idolizing and explaining the key design principles his group demonstrated through The New Typography movement. Tschichold outlined the tenets of modernist typography as asymmetrical layouts, intentional use of negative space, strictly sans serif typefaces, dynamic use of visual hierarchy and integration of photography and type. These foreign ideas of typographic design were controversial, but became widely used shortly after his publication.

As Jan Tschichold's influence spread throughout Europe, Nazi Germany's ruler, Hitler, began to crack down on anti-fascist propaganda, particularly modernist art. In the spring of 1933, Nazi soldiers raided dozens of universities burning "thousands of 'un-German' books in huge bonfires" (BRIA 13 2b The Suppression of Art in Nazi Germany, www.crf-usa.org) along with modernist posters, paintings, furniture



Figure 4. Modern Art Bonfire in Nazi Germany, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/book-burning>

and ceramics. During this mass artistic censorship operation, Jan Tschichold was arrested along with his wife, Edith Kramer, and son, Peter. They were held in the custody of national socialists for six weeks. "A kind police officer ... provided Tschichold with a passport" (Nikola Milosevic, Jan Tschichold, www.widewalls.ch) and immediately after their release, Tschichold fled with his family to Switzerland where he continued working as a teacher and a typographer.

Jan Tschichold lost contact with the members of *The Ring* and eventually began to lose faith in the principles of The New Typography movement. He reclaimed his childhood love for classical Roman typefaces and openly condemned his 1928 manifesto, *Die neue Typographie*, for being "too authoritative and inherently fascistic" (Jan Tschichold, www.famousgraphicdesigners.org). In 1935, Tschichold was invited to England by Lund Humphries Printing Firm, to view their exhibition of his work. There, "he was commissioned to redesign the firm's letterhead, and to design the 1938 Volume No. 40 of *The Penrose Annual*" which Humphries later published (Jan Tschichold, <http://adcglobal.org/hall-of-fame/jantschichold/>). During his stay in England, he was

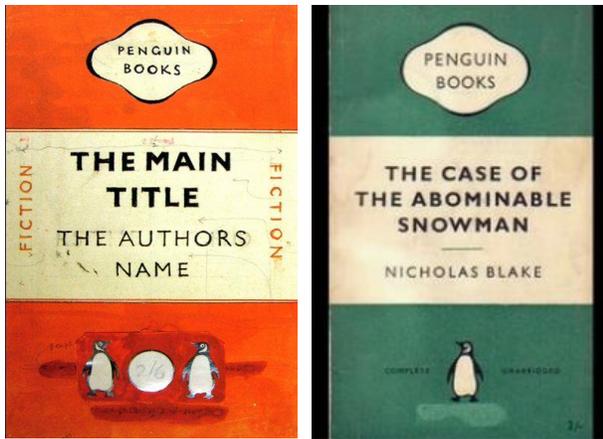


Figure 5. Penguin Books Paperback Cover Designed by Jan Tschichold, www.penguin.com.au

requested by Allen Lane of *Penguin Books* to work as a book cover designer to increase their professionalism and branding effectivity. He redesigned their logo and created many book cover designs using the colors: orange for fiction, dark blue for memoir, yellow for history, pink for cookery, and turquoise for

contemporary non-fiction (A Guide To Penguin Specials: short, original, affordable and oh-so colourful, <https://www.penguin.com.au/books/lists/418-colourful-bunch>). Tschichold retired from the company after publishing 500 book designs and an instructional typographic handbook for the company's paperback cover.

Jan Tschichold lived the rest of his life in Switzerland, where he continued his career as a book designer and typographic consultant for publishing and business firms. Tschichold later created the well-known typeface



Figure 6. Sketches for Sabon, 1965, designhistory.com

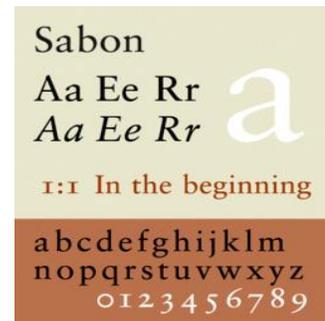


Figure 7. Sabon, <http://retinart.net/artist-profiles/jan-tschichold/>

Sabon. He worked on Sabon for three years and it was released in 1967 “as part of a joint venture by the Monotype, Linotype and Stempel foundries” (Sabon By Linotype, www.fonts.com). Sabon was originally made by request of a German type foundry, for a typeface with equal spacing in the Roman and Italic translations. This font would also behave the same way with single-type-setting machines, foundry type for hand composition and linecasting.

Jan Tschichold was born into a family of typographic artists, setting him on an early stage to graphic design success. He accrued teaching experience working as an illustration teacher at a young age while continuing to study typographic design and the art of printing. His vast knowledge enabled him to be commissioned as a type designer and calligrapher while his curiosity opened new doors with modernist typography. Jan Tschichold remains an icon in the world of typography for his manifesto, *Die neue Typographie*, and continued to influence the corporate world of design and advertising. Jan Tschichold died on August 11, 1974, but not after creating a revered legacy for the next generation of graphic designers, calligraphers, and typographers to build upon.

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