

NCstate

ALUMNI MAGAZINE

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**Tapping Into Their
Inner Musician**

Putting Pen to Paper

The Classroom Goes Digital

CREATING T Y P E S

THE TOOLS IN FRONT OF EACH STUDENT WERE SIMPLE: A sheaf of paper, a vat of thick India ink and a pen that was little more than a handle and a piece of folded metal. Stroke by stroke, they learned to vary the width of a line with the angle of the pen, to control the flow of ink with pressure on the page.



Shelley Gruendler '94, above, helps a Type Camp participant use pen and ink in a workshop on Facebook's campus. Left, The term "hack" is used at Facebook to describe someone who can design a clever solution. Gruendler and Carol Fountain Nix '92 MS hold a hand-lettered sign at a Facebook workshop.

Using old-school techniques to help today's digital designers appreciate typography's nuances and complexities.

by SYLVIA ADCOCK '81

LETTERING by CAROL FOUNTAIN NIX '92 MS



It was a low-tech lesson in a world where fonts are selected from a drop-down menu with the click of a mouse, where emails trump letters and fewer elementary schools teach cursive. And it was happening in the most unlikely of places: the sprawling Menlo Park, Calif., campus of Facebook, where about two dozen employees of the Internet giant had gathered last fall for a session of Type Camp, a roving typography studio run by Shelley Gruendler '94.

Gruendler, who lives outside Vancouver in Canada, founded Type Camp in 2007 at a time of rising interest in typography and hand-lettering among graphic designers. Type Camp's clientele, at seminars offered around the world, are graphic designers, of course—but also engineers, animators, computer scientists, gaming programmers and what she calls "typography hobbyists."

Typography encompasses the design, execution and treatment of type, whether it's on paper, a computer screen or a billboard, based on the idea that the shape and style of letters can convey a mood and a message. Although most of us don't notice it, typography reaches us on many levels. Advertisers use type to create excitement and sell a product. A typeface or letter shape is chosen specific to the information being conveyed; while a fancy script is appropriate for a wedding invitation, Goodyear uses a heavy block type to brand its tires.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF CAROL FOUNTAIN NIX '92 MS AND SHELLY GRUENDLER '94

After Gruendler received a degree in graphic design from NC State, she went to work as a book designer for UNC Press and developed a passion for type design. "Try walking down the street and not see letterforms," she says, using the term typographers use for the structure of a letter. "You can't do it. It's everywhere. It's in your email. It's on movie posters when you are trying to decide which movie to see." Gruendler went on to get a master's and Ph.D. in the history and theory of typography and graphic communication from the University of Reading in England, one of the few places in the world offering post-graduate degrees in typography. After teaching college in England and Canada, she decided to put together a way to give designers more hands-on instruction. "It's a chance to experiment in a safe environment," Gruendler says. "If they make a mistake, it's OK—it's just a letter on a piece of paper."

abc abc abc

Hand-lettering can produce different types of script. Above, uncial, old English and traditional italic.



From left: The letter "O" is constructed with two separate strokes; motion and speed make expressive letters; hand-lettering can be abstract.

A TYPEFACE CAN'T DO

This!



Above, writing tools with different kinds of nibs create a variety of lettering styles. Below, Gruendler and Nix at Facebook.

The seminar last October at Facebook was one of several Type Camp has offered recently in the West Coast's high-tech neighborhoods, including a full-day session at the Adobe MAX conference in Los Angeles, Calif. Among those in attendance were designers from Adobe who create fonts, a typesetter from Wikipedia, a senior designer for Twitter and a few Apple employees. "We're bringing out their inner Luddite," says Carol Fountain Nix '92 MS, one of the instructors at Type Camp.

As communication has become increasingly digital, the number of typefaces available to any computer user has exploded. As a result, typography has become more important to companies like Adobe and Google, which provide fonts for on-screen use. And using a pen rather than pixels to create letters, Nix says, can result in more organic and expressive shapes and can inform a designer's thought process. Although the tools are pen and ink, the classes involve more than creating a fancy script. The

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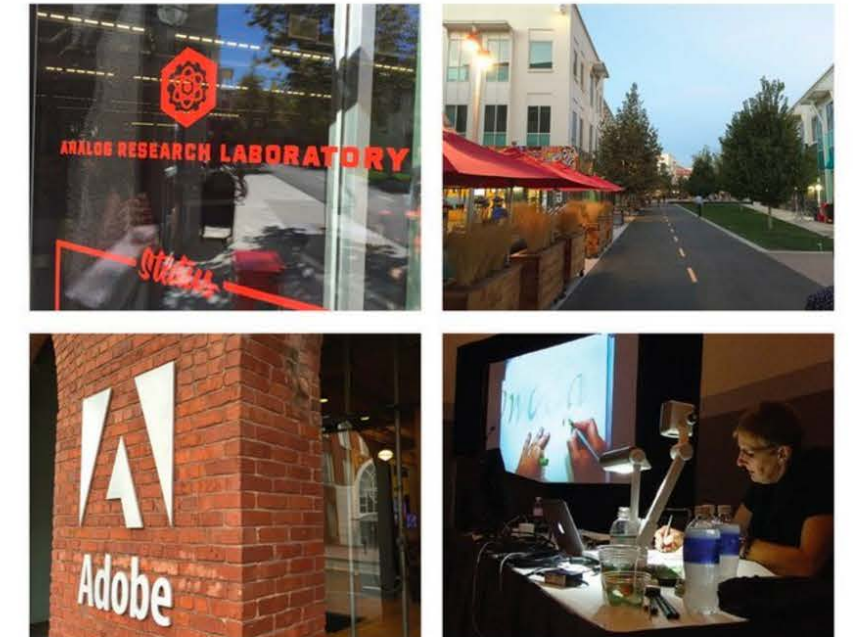
—Erik Vorhes, user interface engineer, Facebook

students end up with more expressive letterform than what most people imagine when they think of calligraphy, says Nix, who lives in Raleigh and until June was head of marketing communications for NC State's College of Design.

Creating letters by hand trains the eye to see things in a different way, says Gruendler. For instance, writing two or three letters together forces the writer to think about the spacing between the letters. "You have to slow down and make decisions," she says. Hand-lettering "trains your eye to see the spacing. If you are on the computer, someone has already made that decision for you."

Erik Vorhes, a user interface engineer at Facebook, says he found it fascinating to work with ink and paper. "Most of my time is spent in front of a keyboard and computer monitor—and this was a breath of fresh air, real and concrete," he says. And because it's ink, there's no eraser—and certainly no "delete" key. Making mistakes and being comfortable with mistakes is a valuable part of the process, but at a place like Facebook, that can be a challenge, Nix says. "These are high achievers, these are people who are not used to not doing something well," she says. "They are used to cause and effect—'If I do this, something will happen.'"

For today's type designers, who are crafting typography for all kinds of media and devices, "learning how the hand and eye coordinate to craft a letterform is a huge asset," Nix says. "Whenever you put a pen to paper, it's unique."



Above, students learning about letters at Facebook. Clockwise from top left: the workshops were held at Facebook's Analog Research Laboratory; a view of the Facebook campus; a workshop at the Adobe MAX conference; outside Adobe headquarters.

On the Web: typecamp.org