

My Typeface Design Fantasy – Cloister XL Superfamily

Description

In the spirit of “you never get what you want if you never tell anyone you want it,” I’m just going to put this here so it stops rattling around in my head.

For background, check out how Emigre edited their low-x-height typeface Mrs Eaves Serif to make [Mrs Eaves XL Serif](#). Then check out how they made [Mr Eaves XL Sans](#) as its companion sans.

Jenson Re-interpretations

Of all the re-interpretations of Nicolas Jenson’s original typeface, [URW++’s cut of Cloister](#) is my favorite. I like almost all of the lettershapes (only about the /P/ do I wonder whether a certain specific different choice would work). I really like the double-sided serifs on the top of the /M/. I really like the top-serifs on the /b/d/h/k/l/. I like an /e/ like that if the angle isn’t too ostentatious. I like the tops of the /W/. Perhaps the leg of the /R/ could be a little bit more like [Monotype’s Italian Old Style](#). Overall, Cloister URW is not too light, not too heavy, not too quirky and unreadable, not too blah and boring. It hits my sweet spot.

Except for that x-height. It is way too short.

I’ve been experimenting with Jenson revivals lately. I like a certain [Golden Type](#) vibe to them, but toned down to where it doesn’t stick out. So I’ve set text in Italian Old Style, [Cloister CG](#), and [Goodchild](#), the latter being a fresh Jenson reinterpretation with a large x-height.

The Trouble With X-Heights

Goodchild has much to recommend it. It’s so clean. It’s so understated and readable, but retains a touch of quirkiness that brands it as a look back at western civilization’s earliest successful typeface. It has little to no Golden Type influence, but because I find it to be so finely crafted, I didn’t think I minded the differences. I thought I had found my new typographic “home.”

But I made an x-height matching text setting between Cloister CG and Goodchild, and that’s when a funny thing happened. While Cloister’s cap-height was quite too large, Goodchild’s cap-height suddenly looked anemic. It turns out, you actually can have too much of a good thing — too much x-height. (To me, [Open Sans](#) proves this as well.) I’ve re-evaluated my x-height preference: not too big, not too small.

The Design Spec

So! This brings me to my point: I would like a typeface family designed. Serif and sans, roman and italic, regular and bold weights, a total of 8 fonts in the family.

The serif roman regular and the serif roman bold based closely on Cloister URW — with a “clean finish” — but with the vertical proportions adjusted, a *la* Mrs Eaves XL Serif, per some numbers that I’ll give below. Let’s call it “Cloister XL Serif” for now.

The sans roman regular and sans roman bold based on this Cloister XL Serif, but transmogrified a *la* Mr Eaves XL Sans. I like a double-story /a/ and /g/ in my sans faces. More Humanist than Grotesk; perhaps a little bit Geometric, but not much. Little to no stroke modulation in the sans; while [Optima](#) is very nice, I lean towards [Frutiger](#) with perhaps a touch of [Avenir](#) (but not so much [Gill Sans](#)).

For the italics (serif and sans, regular and bold) I’m not as particular about what they’re derived from. For the serif italics, I’d be happy with something that closely follows an existing cut of a Cloister italic, or other Jenson revival; I’d be similarly happy to check out a type designer’s creative ideas. Just so the vertical proportions are consistent with the other faces in the family. But the OpenType feature to be able to choose some shapely swash caps alternates would be fantastic.

For the sans italic, I generally favor faces that have been called “true italics” rather than obliques. That means at least a single-story /a/ and /g/ in the italic (for both the sans and, most certainly, the serif). What else it may mean I don’t know. But again, something derivative or something new and creative, either is fine, just so long as it fits in with the other faces in the family.

The Proportions

Which brings me, finally, to the vertical proportions. I’ve experimented quite a bit lately with bitmap fonts and “torturing” the proportions of existing fonts, so I could come to an understanding of what I think works for fonts at different sizes, say for both printing and the web. (So, yes, I’d like the family to be at least somewhat functional as web type, especially the sans.)

I’ve come up with a way to indicate vertical proportions: em/ascender-height/cap-height/x-height/descender-height. So, in the design phase, if the vertical “grid” is set at 1000, I might describe the vertical proportions with a string of numbers like 1000/735/680/445/250.

Which, incidentally, is pretty close to the actual vertical proportions I’d like to see for this family. X-height around 440 and not to exceed 450; cap-height in the 665-685 range; ascender-height a bit above cap-height, and a descender length that’s appropriate to all of the above.

This would be the same as saying 11/8/7/5/3, or 15/11/10/7/4. That is to say, I would like to be able to set this at 11px on the web, for the x-height to be 5 pixels at that size, and for it to *work*. Five pixels should be enough to make a nice clean /a/e/s/ (those are the letters that have three horizontal strokes in the space of the x-height). Or, at 15px the x-height should be 7 pixels — yet more room to do a nice clean job of the /a/e/s/ at that size. And while I’m talking about web-font implications, I should mention that the typeface should probably be [designed as a PostScript, rather than a TrueType](#).

Horizontal proportions? That, also, would be more up to the type designer. What’s easy? What looks

good? But not too narrow; I'd prefer that the letters err very slightly on the side of being wide, or wide-ish.

TL; DR

And that's pretty much the design spec. In short, a cut of Cloister URW with adjusted vertical proportions — x-height not too big, not too small — and a matching companion humanist sans that's perhaps somewhat Frutiger-esque (but with double-story /a/ and /g/ and a "true italic").

If you have a good idea about how to get such a thing made, please comment. The [Open Font Library](#)? [Kickstarter](#)? [Google Web Fonts](#)? [League of Movable Type](#)? If you're interested, let's talk.

Category

1. Uncategorized

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