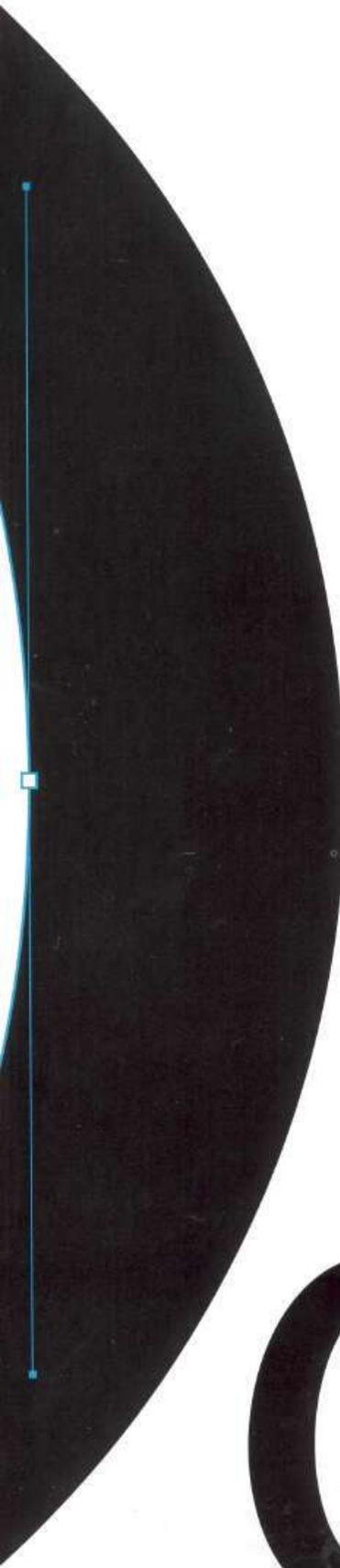


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When Sibylle Hagmann fell in love with the type design of William Addison Dwiggins, the result of her cross-century infatuation was a fresh take on a long-buried experiment: a typeface that delivers the best of then and now.

BY TAMYE RIGGS

adile

Seventy years ago,

American type designer William Addison Dwiggins began work on two new typefaces for Mergenthaler Linotype.

His plan was to develop a better alternative to popular advertising types of the day such as Amsterdam Typefoundry's Egmont and Monotype's version of Cochin. Although Dwiggins worked on Experimental No. 221 and Experimental No. 222 (later known as Arcadia and Charter) for nearly a decade, these types were never completed or released to the public.

East-forward to 1994. Sibylle Hagmann, a young Swiss designer, had pursued her undergraduate degree at the Basel School of Design, an institution deeply rooted in International Style and modernist ideas. After graduating in 1989, she worked for five years as a graphic designer in Switzerland, including stints at Eclat and Zintzmeyer & Lux (now part of the Interbrand Group) in Zurich. Although her career path might sound ideal to many designers, Hagmann wasn't satisfied with the direction she was heading.

Hagmann, now 41, reflects on what was to be a major turning point in her life. "I was already tired of working for clients at that point and wanted to find out if I should change my professional direction altogether," she says. She applied to the graduate program in graphic design at the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia and was accepted. "I was strongly attracted to CalArts because it had a completely different approach to methodology and graphic design in general and an interest in typographic experimentation," she says.

At the same time, her then boyfriend (now husband), Fabrizio Gabbiani, was invited to begin post-doctoral studies at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, so the couple relocated to the Golden State in 1994. "It was an enormous struggle," she says. "There was a language barrier, a new culture to deal with, immigration issues, etc."

Despite the difficulties inherent in a transatlantic, cross-cultural move, Hagmann thrived in California's freer creative climate. During her studies at CalArts, she had the good fortune to take a type design class from Jeffrey Keedy, whose lettering experiments and namesake Emigre release epitomized the raw, deconstructed typographic vibe of the early 1990s. Hagmann performed her own typographic experiments, encouraged by her innovative teacher and the decidedly unmodernist air in southern California.

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CLOSE ENCOUNTER

Sibylle Hagmann first encountered Charter in 1996. This specimen (above), reproduced in Walter Tracy's seminal typographic work, "Letters of Credit," shows the 14-point Charter lowercase. Mergenthaler Linotype cut these letterforms in 1942, later pairing the lowercase with Electra caps for a private text setting.

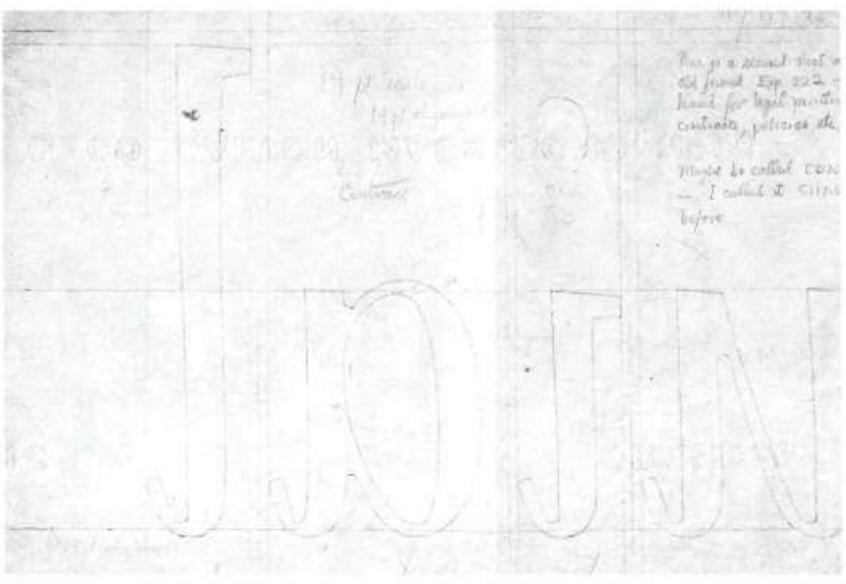
Love at first sight

As part of her self-imposed educational mission at CalArts, Hagmann got acquainted with 20th-century American type designers. In Europe, she'd never heard of Dwiggins, and was unfamiliar with his work. At CalArts, she quickly became fascinated by the diversity of his work and his interests. In addition to developing an admiration for his typeface designs, Hagmann was impressed by one of his unusual creative pursuits: making marionettes. As much as his craftsmanship and body of work, Dwiggins' evident humor and intriguing persona inspired Hagmann to learn more about him.

"There's a continuing attraction to his personality and being, which perhaps renders me almost a bit uncritical towards his work," Hagmann says. Midwestern-born Dwiggins followed traditional values of aesthetics, she observes, never embracing the European-imported



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FRESH TYPE
 This sketch (above), thought to be circa 1938, showcases the Charter upright script concept. Dwiggins' witty notes offer an intriguing glimpse into his thoughts on this experimental design. He considered the "non-slant" italic a fresh idea in modern type and thought it would "catch the advertising crowd."

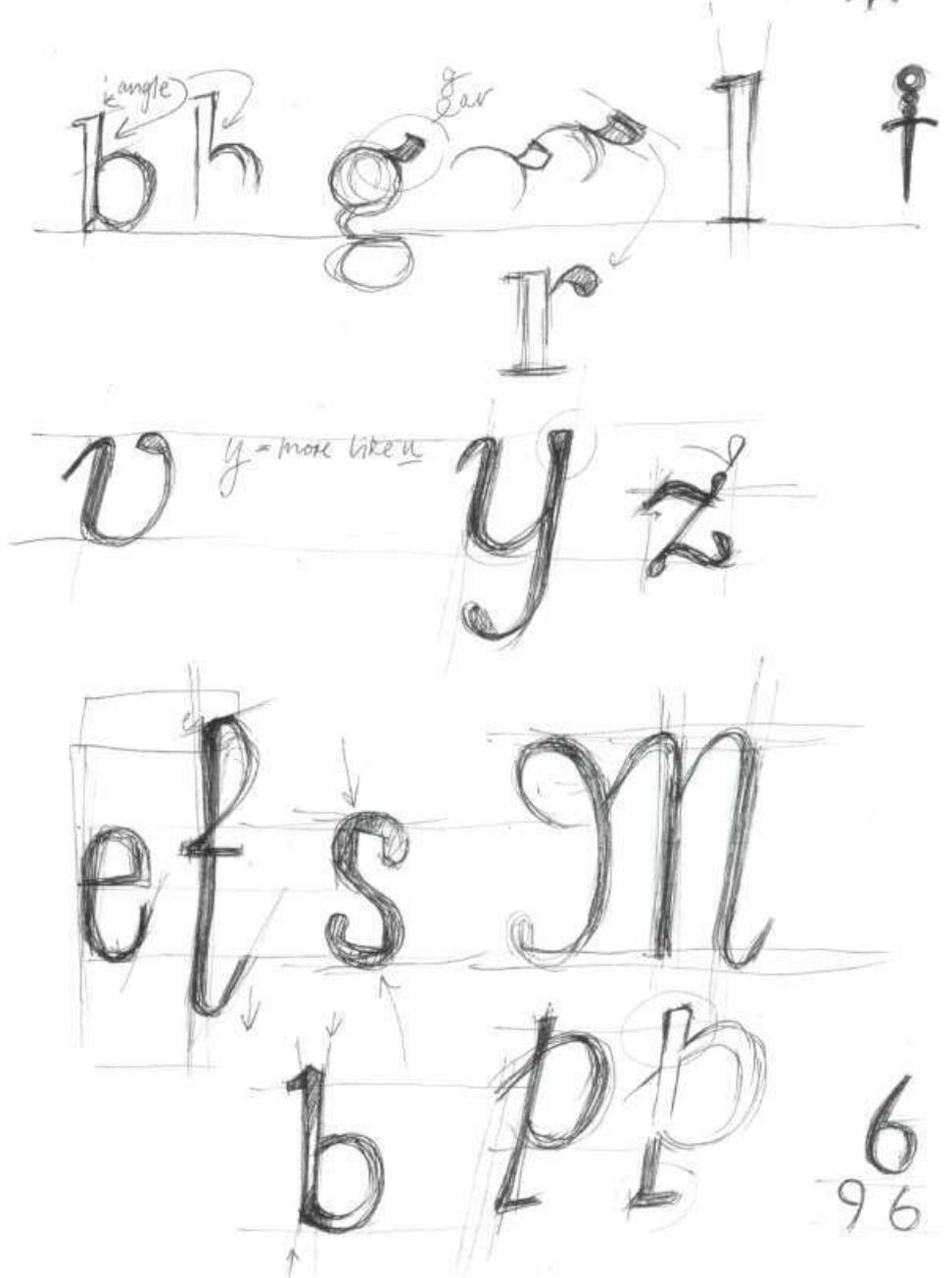
ETCHY IDEA
 This thin paper drawing of Charter letters (right) is dated n. 14, 1942. The mention "Contract" as a possible name for the typeface references Dwiggins' notion (at the same time) that it could be used for deeds, contracts and other legal documents.

modernist movement. "He was a modernist in a cliffert sense," she says. "He took inspiration from Eastern cultures, experimented tirelessly with form and color and embraced new technology."
 She also admires Dwiggins' writing, which she feels conveys the "pacifist and environmentalist undertone someone well aware of the 20th-century's human fighting (war) and a rising ignorance of nature's ways." His type experiments display a fluidity and a sense of playfulness that celebrate the contours found in nature while also offering stability and a firm foundation for communication.
 While studying Dwiggins' types, Hagemann developed a specific interest in Charter, mainly due to its musical appearance. The face was designed as an oblique (or cursive) companion to the roman Arcadia. Hagemann was particularly attracted to Charter's upright

italic. "It seemed an odd typeface," she says. "The details and curves of this face are fascinating and complex, especially when looking at original drawings."
 Dwiggins' Charter experiments were far removed from Hagemann's early training in graphic design, which was strictly rooted in modernism. At the Basel School, ornate design "wasn't even mentioned or talked about—it didn't exist," Hagemann says. "I wanted to challenge myself in specifically looking at this [Charter] and see what I could do with it. I wanted to explore forbidden ground."
 Not one to be satisfied with a mere revival, Hagemann chose to develop a complete text family around a reinterpretation of Charter. She envisioned a set of typefaces that would showcase and complement the playful nature of Dwiggins' original concept while allowing for serious typographic use.

PLAYFUL FORMS

Hagmann's studies for Odile Upright Italic and Italic (pen on paper, July 28, 2005) evoke the playful feel and subtle movement of Dwiggin's Charter letterforms.



"Taking Dwiggin's form ideas as an inspirational source and starting point, I aspired to find a new and contemporary letter definition," Hagmann says. Her work on this project—which would eventually become the Odile family—served as a break with her past, moving her away from the rigid principles she learned in Basel.

Hagmann began serious work on her Charter reinterpretation in 2000, visiting the project whenever possible through 2005. Since Charter had never been completed, the original design consisted of a lowercase character set and a few decorated caps. Hagmann used her imagination to flesh out and refine a complete character set for the base design before developing the larger Odile family.

She alternated periods of intense design work with quiet pauses, during which new interpretations of the letterforms developed, each bearing subtle changes. "My work pattern was similar to Dwiggin's," Hagmann says. Over time, she became increasingly interested in designing a serif typeface suitable for extended text.

The weight that became Odile Upright Italic defined the design approach and language for most family members, Hagmann says. In particular, the characteristics of the lowercase 'a', 'b' and 'n' were central: 'a' for its one-storied form and calligraphic end stroke; 'b' for its definition of the bowl; and 'n*' for the characteristic vertical stroke and transition into the curve. "These rather conspicuous details were weakened in all other weights but the initial caps."

Designing the upright italic was a particular challenge, she says. "It's tricky to make the type stand up straight and not have it look as if it would fall either backward or forward—for that, Dwiggin's construction is impressive. I think mine is much more straightforward, not as formulated." The difference, to a large degree, comes from working with different tools. Dwiggin drew his forms with French curves, while Hagmann edited straight lines and Fontographer-defined curves. "It's such a different working approach," she says. "When working digitally, nuances seem to easily get lost or forgotten."

Romancing the font

When designing typefaces, Hagmann starts with pencil sketches and progresses to working digitally in Fontographer and FontLab.

"I'm about to make the full jump to FontLab, but I still like the drawing interface in Fontographer," she says. As she works, she frequently prints variants of a few letterforms, making adjustments that will be carried throughout the character set. "I always start with the lowercase letters, such as 'a', 'b', 'n' and 'e', then let the uppercase fall into place."

Hagmann's visual references for Charter were limited. She studied The Typophiles' two-volume chapbook set, "Postscripts on Dwiggin's" (1960), an example of Charter shown in Walter Tracy's "Letters of Credit" (1986), and "The Song Story of Aucassin & Nicolette" (a Golden Eagle Press book from 1946, which paired the Charter lowercase with the small caps from Dwiggin's Electra).

"From these somewhat limited resources, I always perceived the face as an oddball of a typeface, feminine in connotation but male-engineered," she says. Dwiggin's was apparently in touch with the feminine side of his types as well; in a 1938 memo to Linotype type director C.H. Griffith, he suggested they change the name of Arcadia, Charter's roman companion, to "a rather romantic and 'female' name? 'Diana'?" Although Griffith demurred, Dwiggin's liked the idea that these "romantic" faces could be used in authoritative documents. Hagmann was just as determined to develop graceful types that would hold up under heavy use.

Hagmann had personal reasons for selecting the name for her latest type design. She gave birth to her daughter, Odile (now 4), during a time of intensive work on the font family. "These were my two babies I carried at the same time," Hagmann says.

Hagmann worked through the summer of 2005 to finalize the Odile family, concentrating on its details and forms. She finished in May 2006, with help from New York City-based font foundry Village to complete the OpenType programming and publish the family (Odile is now available exclusively from Village, www.vllg.com.) Hagmann estimates that she's spent at least 1,800 hours on Odile since she started the project.

Odile includes the roman, italic, bold and bold italic variants common to most text families but goes far beyond those basics. Hagmann drew beautifully proportioned small caps for the roman and italic—a must for setting fine typography. Odile displays its more spectacular charms in two sets of decorative initials, a stunning collection of ornaments and the upright italic style so close to Dwiggin's heart. Odile's OpenType feature set is robust, with support for more than 100 languages, a variety of ligatures, six numeral sets, the elusive interrobang and much more.

Hagmann didn't see the original Charter drawings until a 2006 visit to the Dwiggin's Collection housed in the Boston Public Library's rare books and manuscripts

section. "It was rather enlightening to finally see the Charter drawings and to see how cleverly Dwiggin's constructed the curves," she says. She saw his pencil sketches for his decorative Charter uppercase forms only after completing Odile but in hindsight feels her interpretation is true to the spirit of his experiments.

Kent Lew, a Massachusetts-based type designer who has studied Dwiggin's types extensively, appreciates Hagmann's approach. "She seems to have taken one of Dwiggin's more unusual (and marginal) designs and used it as a springboard—not for a revival, but for a thoroughly contemporary exploration of the underlying ideas." Lew, who published his own Dwiggin's-inspired typeface, Whitman, with Boston's Font Bureau, says, "Sibylle has made the concepts her own, with results that reference the past and pay tribute to Dwiggin's work, but stand entirely separate, on their own, and very much a part of our own time and sensibilities."

VARIATIONS ON A THEME
Hagmann used laser prints and colored pencil sketches on white paper to refine the drawings for Odile Deco Initials in the summer of 2005. Notations indicate areas needing adjustment and possible variants for some forms.



A happy marriage

Hagmann has long been fascinated by typeface design, and her love of letterforms shows in every project she undertakes. "Switzerland has a strong type-design tradition with Adrian Frutiger, Helvetica, Hans Eduard Meier, etc., and I certainly carried some of that away from my undergrad training," she says. Her dream is to work exclusively on her own type design and typographic art projects. In this regard, she feels a connection to Dwiggins—he also had an affinity for "self-invented" projects and turned his back on the advertising world in order to do what pleased him. "I admire this decision made during a time when it perhaps wasn't all that easy to earn a living," she says.

Although Hagmann isn't the most prolific type designer, the time she takes crafting her typefaces is well-spent. Even before its public release in May 2006, Odile created a stir in the design world. The Swiss Federal Office of Culture honored Hagmann with a 2006 Design Award for Odile. The typeface was used to great effect by designers Mathieu Christe and Zeina Maasri in "Territoire Mediterranee," published by Labor el Fides in Geneva and named one of the most beautiful Swiss books of 2005. And Hagmann presented on Odile at TypeCon2006 in Boston during a festival celebrating Dwiggins.

Odile is just the latest in a series of celebrated types from Hagmann. She began sketching Cholla in

1996, just before graduating from CalArts, later digitizing the face. Cholla was first used by Denise Gonzales Crisp at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena in 1999 and gained a great deal of attention from the design community. The type family was published by Emigre in 1999, and it took honors in typeface-design competitions by the Type Directors Club and Association Typographique Internationale in 2000-2001.

Hagmann's next major foray into type design put her in the spotlight once more when she was invited to participate in the Twin Cities Design Celebration (TCDC) in Minneapolis/St. Paul in 2003. This endeavor was a project of the University of Minnesota Design Institute, spearheaded by Janet Abrams and Deborah Littlejohn. Six international type-design studios, including Hagmann's Kontour, were each charged with the task of developing a custom typeface that would embody the character of the Twin Cities. Her TCDC typeface submission, TwinCities, was showcased in "Metro Letters," a book documenting the project. A pre-release version of Odile was also featured in "Metro Letters."

While moving toward her goal of working strictly in the typographic realm, Hagmann continues to develop graphic design projects for web and print. She moved to Houston in 2000 when Cabbiani was offered a position at Baylor College of Medicine. She now operates her studio, Kontour, in Texas oil country while tending to daughter Odile and her two-year-old son, Nicola. Recent clients include the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston and the Dallas Museum of Art.

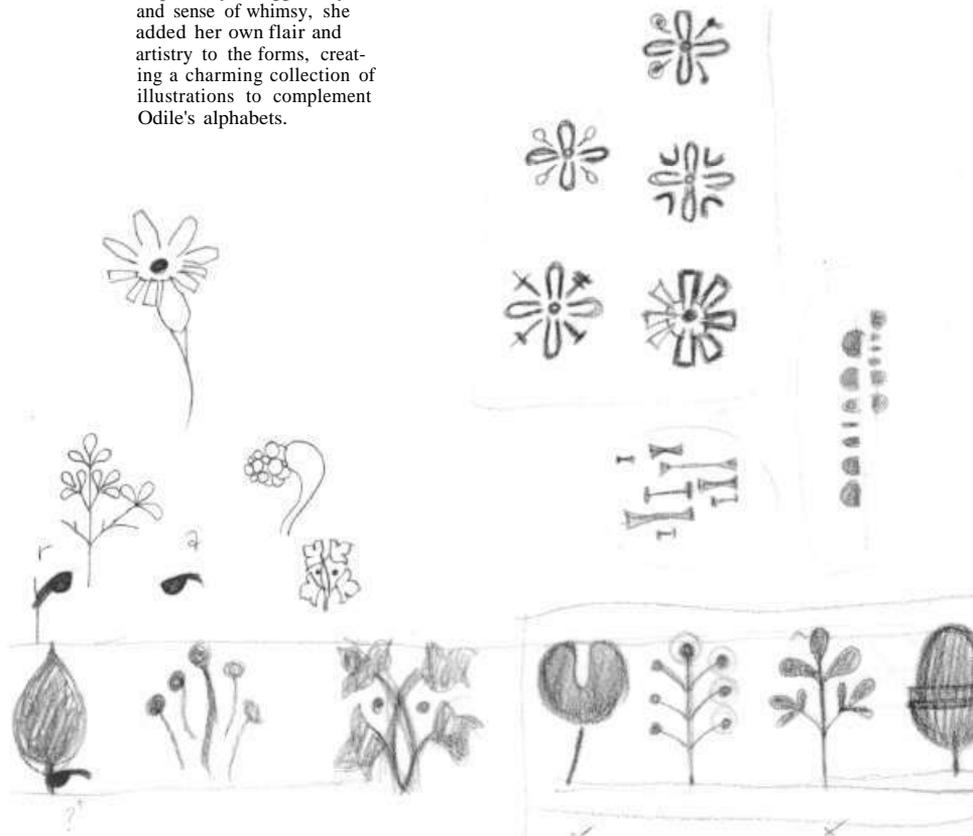
Teaching also fills the financial gaps—Hagmann has taught at several southern California universities and currently serves as an assistant professor in the graphic communications program at the University of Houston's School of Art. "I enjoy teaching, even though it's a tremendous amount of work," she says. "I like being around people who are about to become fascinated with the topic of visual communication, form and typography."

Hagmann's next typographic venture veers sharply from North American culture—she's working on sketches for a new type family inspired by Spanish letterforms. Although she has no plans to expand Odile in its serif incarnation, Hagmann isn't finished with this typographic baby just yet. "There is a sans Odile in the drawer," she says, "but it needs to be worked out in more detail." That sounds like something Dwiggins himself would appreciate. HOW

Tamy Riggs is a writer, editor, *designer and mom living and working on the island of Alameda*, just across the bay from San Francisco. She's also the executive director of *The Society of Typographic Aficionados*. www.typeife.com; www.typecon.com

A SENSE OF WHIMSY

Hagmann made colored pencil sketches on drafting paper when working on these studies for Odile Ornaments. Inspired by Dwiggins' style and sense of whimsy, she added her own flair and artistry to the forms, creating a charming collection of illustrations to complement Odile's alphabets.



Odile

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