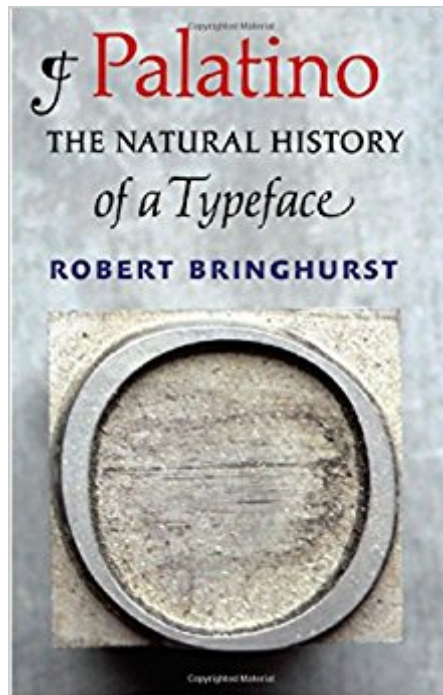




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Palatino: The Natural History Of A Typeface



Synopsis

Last spring the world lost one of the greatest practitioners of the graphic arts of the past century. Hermann Zapf, born in 1918, died in his sun-and-book-filled studio in Darmstadt at the age of 96. As a book designer, a type designer, an advocate, a teacher and above all, as a calligrapher, the world has seldom seen his equal. And the book here described will probably share that distinction, for in these 296 pages, the author, poet, polymath, and fellow type traveller, Robert Bringhurst, does full justice to Zapf's genius. He takes as his theme Palatino, probably the most widely known and used of all Zapf faces, and traces its development, with all its infinite permutations, and often invisible refinements, through a long and fascinating history. But if Palatino provides the *tenor*, the variations and transformations, the imitations and confluences-from hot metal, through the brief interlude of film setting and finally into the digital world-provide the *musical* *descants*. Bringhurst has orchestrated all the parts; included with the text are over 200 illustrations of design sketches, working drawings, smoke proofs and test prints, matrices, foundry and Linotype patterns, all printed in five colors. Included (at no extra charge) is an eight page letterpress signature, printed in one color directly from handset foundry and Linotype hot metal by Jerry Kelly. If you want background, it is all here, in encompassing detail: a fully illustrated account of Palatino and its extended family: foundry and Linotype, Michelangelo, Sistina, Aldus, Heraklit, Phidias, Zapf Renaissance, PostScript Palatino, Aldus Nova, and Palatino Sans. And more. Much more. More than you would believe existed. But beyond that, the book is an argument, and a convincing one, that artists who create letters can, and should, be judged by the same standards and held in the same esteem as composers who write music and artists who paint on canvas. They are all cut from the same cloth. Bringhurst asks the question: Can a penstroke or a letterform be so beautiful it will stop you in your tracks and maybe break your heart? In this groundbreaking, seminal and totally original book, issued in an edition of 1,000 copies, he answers the question: It can.

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Customer Reviews

Palatino is more than a type nerd's delight or an ode to a great typeface. In telling the story of Palatino from foundry type to digital type, Mr. Bringhurst has in effect recounted the technological history of type in the 20th century. His book is an elegant and methodically thorough investigation of how technology has influenced design, positively as well as negatively, seen through the lens of a single typeface. Whether one likes Palatino or not, Mr. Bringhurst's book is an instant classic. --The Wall Street Journal

Robert Bringhurst is a renowned Canadian author, poet, and typographer. He is the author of the highly-praised *The Elements of Typographic Style*, as well as numerous works of prose and poetry. He is also an accomplished translator and linguist and has translated works from Haida, Navajo, classical Greek, and Arabic.

(My husband is writing this review, since this was an Xmas gift for him). To be honest, I'm actually surprised that this book ended up being published the way it has been. The conception, content, page design, and general presentation of the material is wonderful. Herman Zapf (The Wizard of Fonts) is probably the best known of modern type designers, and Palatino is certainly one of the best known fonts in the world. This book is basically a history of the conception, design, creation, and production of Palatino faces and the many, many variations thereof. I'm genuinely surprised that the author, Robert Bringhurst, a Canadian poet and typographer, most likely best known for his masterwork, *The Elements of Typographic Style* allowed this book to be published in the way it has been, and at such a high price. For \$65 I was expecting really well crafted work, well printed and of extremely high quality. What we get, however, is an average quality hardback. It's OK, but I don't think it's worth \$65 in terms of production quality. The covers are bowing after just a couple of weeks, the tension of the signature stitching is uneven, meaning that the book has several preferred pages at which it falls open, even before having been read. I was under the impression that David R. Godine, the publishers, cared more about the books that went out under their imprint. However, the biggest surprise of all is the actual typesetting. It feels sloppy, and lacks the crispness and color

of *The Elements of Typographic Style*. While the page design, by which I mean the elements of the page and how they (should) interact, is great, the layout is poor. There is not enough white space and the pages feel crowded. But the biggest turd in the sorts (actual characters used) - I genuinely can't understand how a book about one of the ultimate type designers, written by one of the world's best typographers can omit using even the simplest ligatures - not only are correct sorts for ffl and ffi missing, but there are not even the correct ligatures for fi and fl! This really is unforgivable. It's like opening a bottle of fine wine but finding bits of insects in it. The only reason I can think is that the book was not set by Bringhurst*, and that Godine produced it for the minimum price possible. The physical artifact comes from China which may account for some of this. Overall, the subject matter and content deserves five stars, but the execution is terrible and barely deserves one star. So three stars, since you can't really get this much information anywhere else at all easily. This could have been SO much better. What a shame.* The colophon states that Bringhurst did in fact typeset the book, but I find that so surprising that I left my first guess in this review.

It was a surprisingly smooth read for a Bringhurst, whose poetic language is mostly kept until the concluding chapter (I am an impatient reader, and cannot finish his famous *Elements*). It is full of original drawings, patterns, specimens, including actual samples printed with metal. Many of these are hard to find, and it is very nice to see them in one place and in well-presented context. I have no problem recommending this to anyone interested in the typeface, the designer, or typefaces in general. Despite some belief that typography of the book itself is awful, I think it is a well considered one and shows the Bringhurst staple, as clearly stated in the book that he did it himself. First of all, the fi and fl ligatures in Aldus (the text face used in the book) are indeed not used, and I assume the reason was that they are designed as disconnected to begin with but spaced too tight, so it was better to not use it. Therefore I think Bringhurst made a very smart decision. Moreover, he uses ff and ft ligatures that are not supported in the font, and he must have custom-made them just for the book. You cannot call this lazy. I also praise the choice of Aldus as the text face; reading this in Palatino would have been too obvious and distracting (I find Aldus more comfortable to read). The use of Palatino Sans for caption and Sans Informal as its italic is a brilliant choice too. Given the specific nature of the topic, the book has to be expensive in my opinion. This is clearly not for everyone. I would agree it could be bound better for the price, but considering it went through letterpress as well, it is not fair to compare it with normal offset book. The jacket design is a regrettable one though, far worse than the limited edition design. Having said that, the author did as best job as one can do to document one typeface, and just a bad jacket design

isn't enough to lose a full star.

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