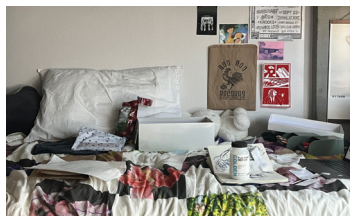# form follows function: swiss design

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alexandra castro

International Typographic Style developed in Switzerland changed the global interaction of typeface. Switzerland turned into a hub for design in the 1950s due to its surroundings and neutral ideas.

A typeface is very similar to how people speak, it is representative of a tone when language can't be. International Typographic Style, which has been also referred to as "Swiss Style" or "Swiss Design" emerged in the 1940s and 50s. It refers to a Sans-Serif typeface revolving around a grid-based design. Many of them consist of asymmetrical elements while keeping a consistent pattern and more structured appearance. It does its job of keeping the reader's eyes tied to what they are reading and also manages to eliminate distractions.
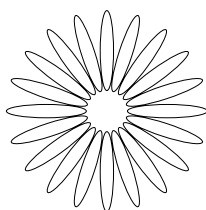
01 duality

This style of design was a major way that visual communication came about. The International Style turned into a more plausible way to communicate using both words and images. Swiss Design was commonly used for different types of media; music, books, movies, etc. Unlike anything previous, this style became applicable to nearly everything. Sans-serif typefaces gained their popularity fairly quickly and can be found anywhere. Their easy applicability adds a significant amount of value as to why they are seen internationally.

02 internationality

The International aspect of Swiss Style soared for multiple reasons, one of these reasons revolves strongly on the time frame of its development. Switzerland was a country that remained neutral throughout World War II, their design did the same. "The clean, minimalist approach to graphic design emerged in the 1950s out of Switzerland and Germany. Unlike the flourishes of the Victorian era, or the splashy patriotism of the years surrounding World War I and World War II," (Rhodes 2016). The country's effort to be unbiased was also what allowed the globalization of the different typefaces' functionality. A few other reasons for the idea of Switzerland being a home for International Typographic Style was the education happening there.

03 education & research

Multiple design centers greatly impacted what was happening in Switzerland and its development. Educational institutions like the Zurich School of Arts and Basel School of Design, as well as The Bauhaus and Ulm School of Design which surrounded Switzerland, were influential to this rise of typography. Basel and Zurich were known as centers for art and design. According to House of Switzerland, "Zurich-based designers championed the use of a layout grid and the Helvetica typeface developed by Max Miedinger, Basel-based designers used layout grids more selectively and favoraed Adrian Frutiger's Univers typeface." Zurich which geographically is closer to Germany, had more in common to Germany's design institutions like Bauhaus or The Ulm School.

04 ulm school of design

The Ulm School of Design, also known as Hochschule für Gestaltung HfG Ulm, was at its peak amid the rise of Swiss Design becoming an International Style. The philosophy of the Ulm school was closely linked to the idea behind Swiss Style, as they both embraced the idea of "Form Follows Function." The Ulm school was very distinctive during its time open as the education revolved around ideas separate from just creating. "Multidisciplinary context of design beyond the Bauhaus approach of integrating art, craft and technology. The subjects of sociology, psychology, politics, economics, philosophy and systemas-thinking were integrated with aesthetics and technology." Design Addict writes, elaborating on what the curriculum looked like, "Progressive approaches to the design process were implemented within the departments of Product Design, Visual Communication, Industrialized Building, Information and Filmmaking."

05 helvetica

Stepping back into Switzerland, we see the beginning of Helvetica. Helvetica is a sans-serif typeface that changed everything for visual communication. Named after Switzerland's Latin name, Helvetica is what became universally recognized. This typeface has been noted to be a representation of modern design. It takes the aspects of the Swiss Style like using "the grid" technique and minimalism. This smooth typeface is a mix of transparency and still assertive or directly to the point. The font itself can be taken in many different directions and it is considered to be interpretive and flexible. While many typefaces can only say one thing Helvetica can say anything (Hustwit, 2007, 30:09). Even now nearly 70 years later, Helvetica is still very alive and is still recognized. When the Macintosh was first available, Helvetica was the default. Helvetica can even be spotted in most government forms today. This fresh and easy feeling Helvetica supplies is very addictive, throughout the letters themselves or the spaces and whiteness between.

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dreaming of kimchi