

# A Digital Typeface for the Reimagined Field of Post-Digital Letterpress Printing.

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Post-Digital Letterpress Print Conference. Porto, Portugal, January, 2020.

Hello I'm Ana Sofia!

I'm originally from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, but I come from Seattle, WA where I have been living for 7 years now.

I'm a graphic designer and typographer by training, a type designer by passion, and a researcher and printer because I find it so fascinating.

Today, I'll be talking about my unique typeface project that I've been working on for a couple of years.

So let's jump to see where I'm coming from with that.

LETTERPRESS AT SCHOOL OF VISUAL CONCEPTS IN SEATTLE



Interior of SVC shop.



My exhibition poster printed at SVC.

Letterpress has been experiencing a resurgence driven by a new generation of printers who are reimagining the field.

In Seattle we have a very active community around the School of Visual Concepts Letterpress courses run by Jenny Wilkinson. The school is in the downtown area, just a block from Amazon's headquarters and close to many other tech companies. So we have a lot of young designers from the tech industry taking courses there and inspiring our long time letterpress community.

With my own involvement in letterpress, I'm coming from the typographic perspective. This poster printed for ATypI in São Paulo, illustrates that. Now it's here at the Conference exhibition.

So when I was looking for a type design challenge to tackle, I found an unaddressed problem in the new applications of letterpress.

PROBLEM | NEW TYPE DESIGNS FOR LETTERPRESS PRINTING?



A typeface to address  
the new uses of an old technology.

I realized that although there have been many letterpress,  
historically inspired digital typefaces released in the market...

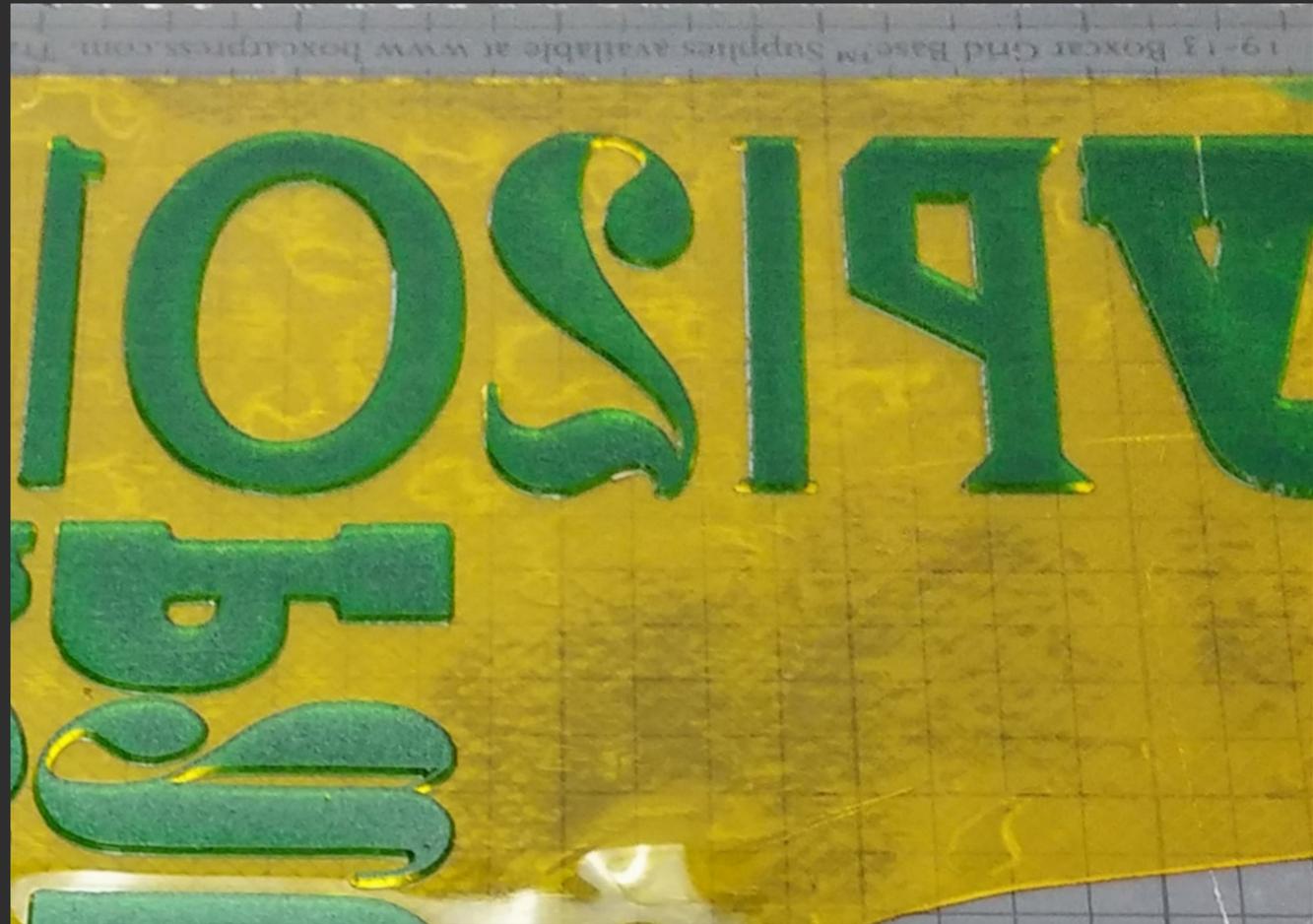
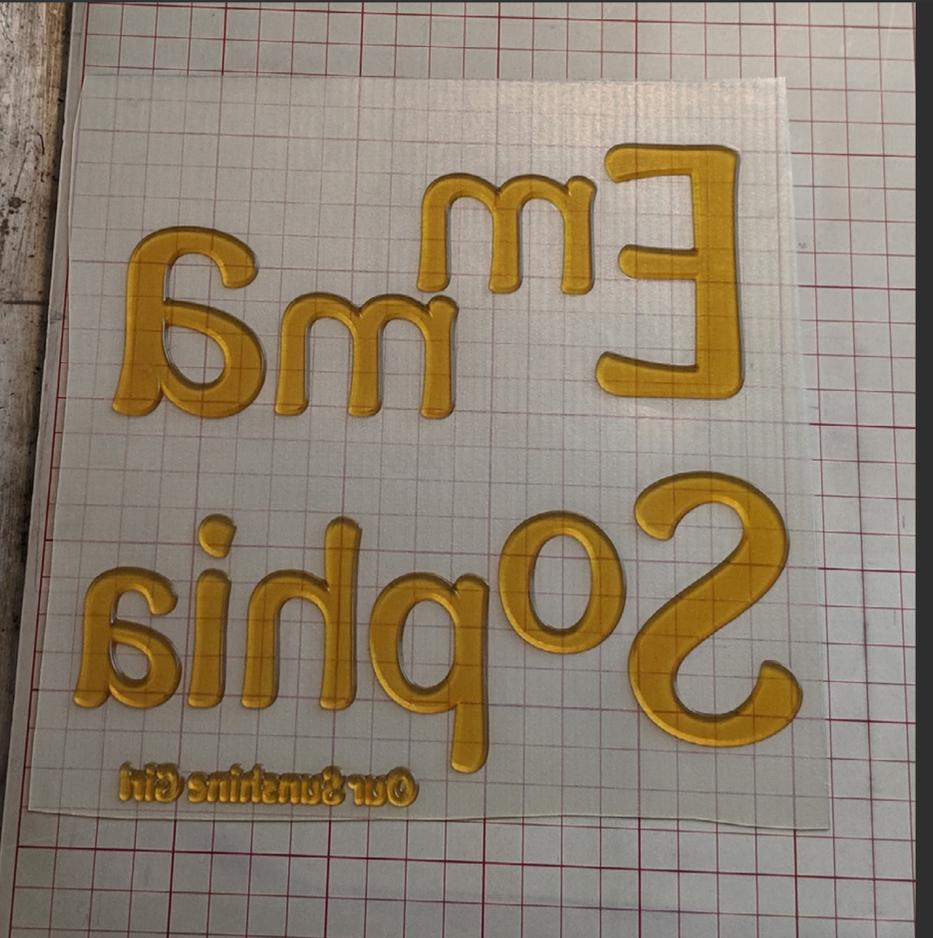
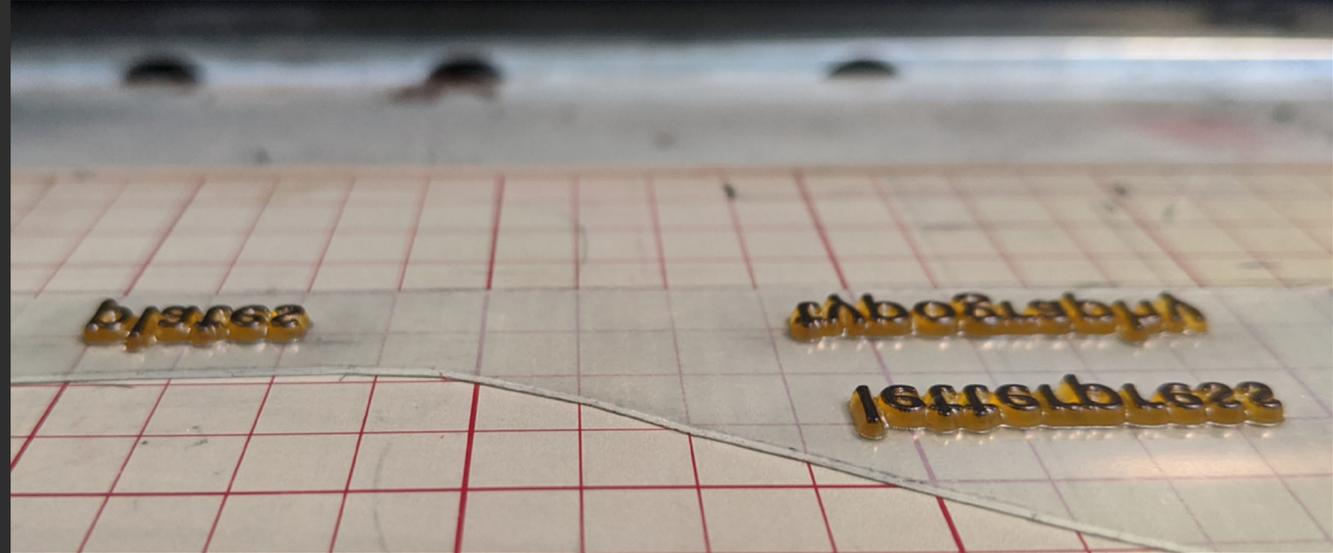
PROBLEM | NEW TYPE DESIGNS FOR LETTERPRESS PRINTING?

My typeface is not a revival.

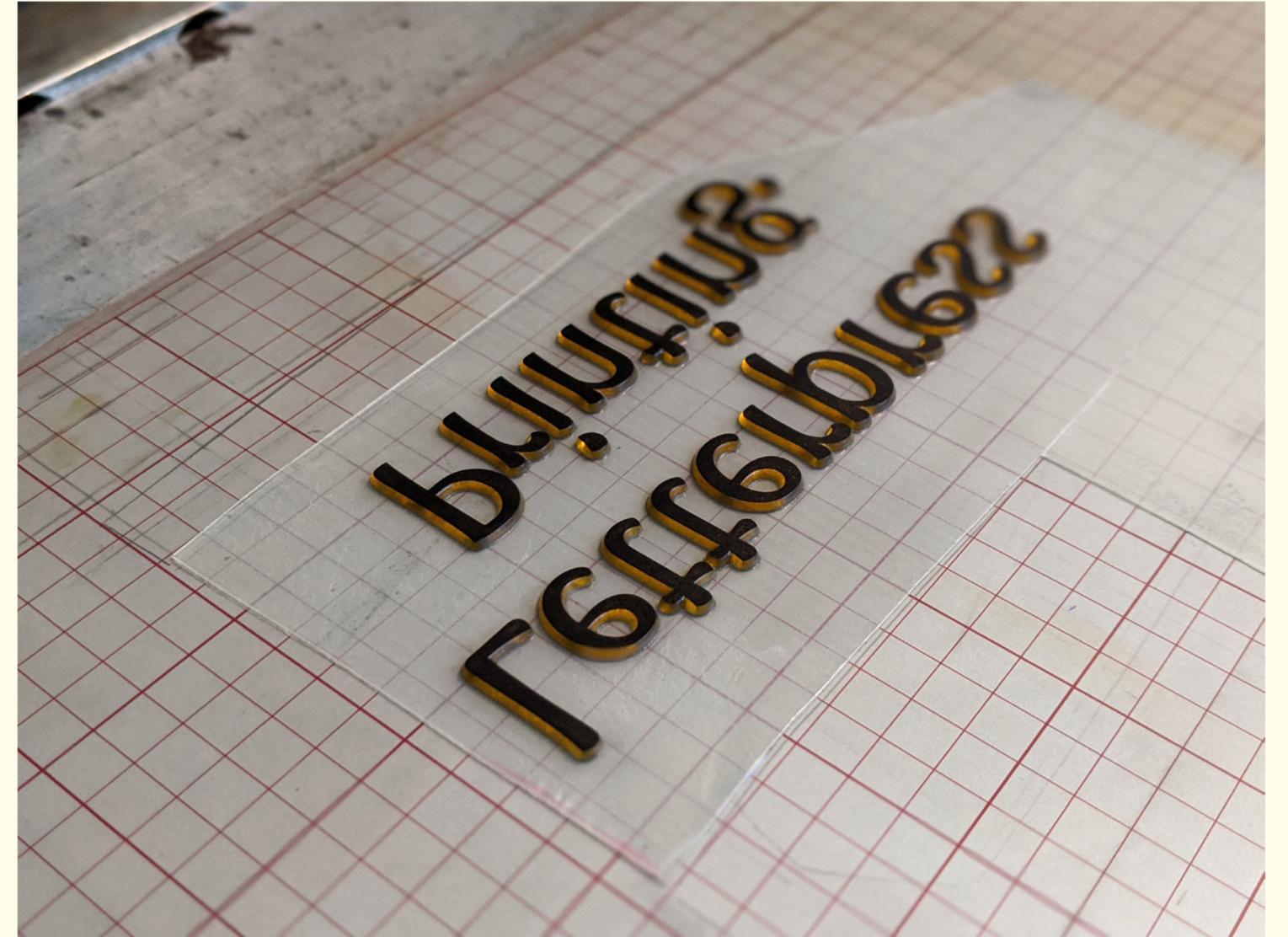
R

... we're not seeing a proportional effort to develop new type designs, functional for both letterpress and digital uses. Especially regarding typefaces for paragraphs.

PROBLEM | PHOTOPOLYMER PLATES



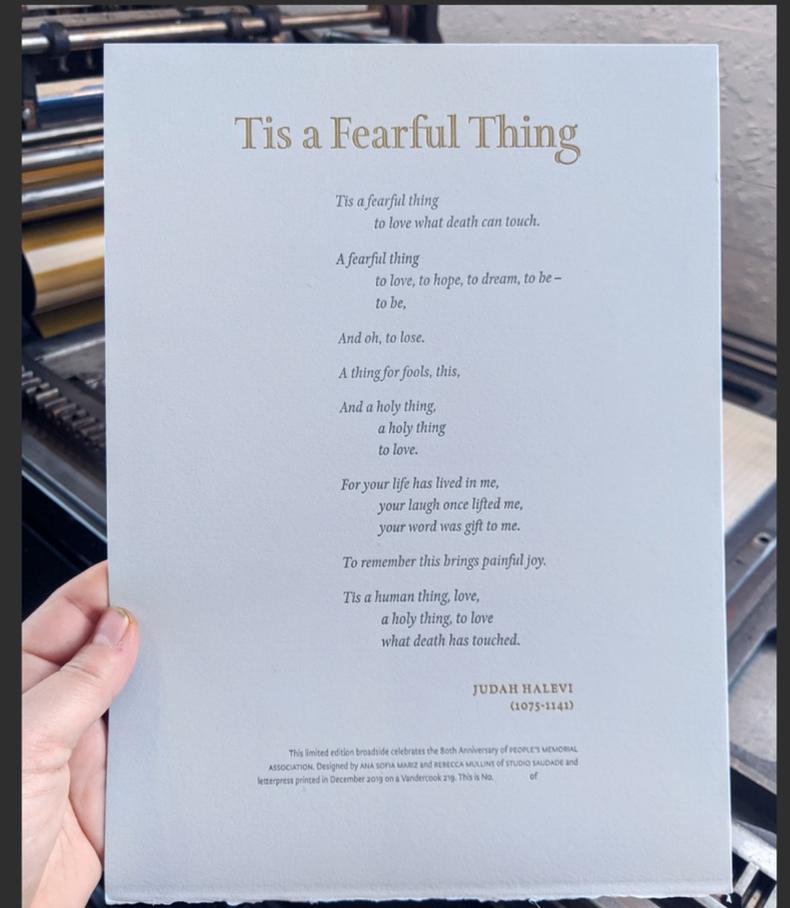
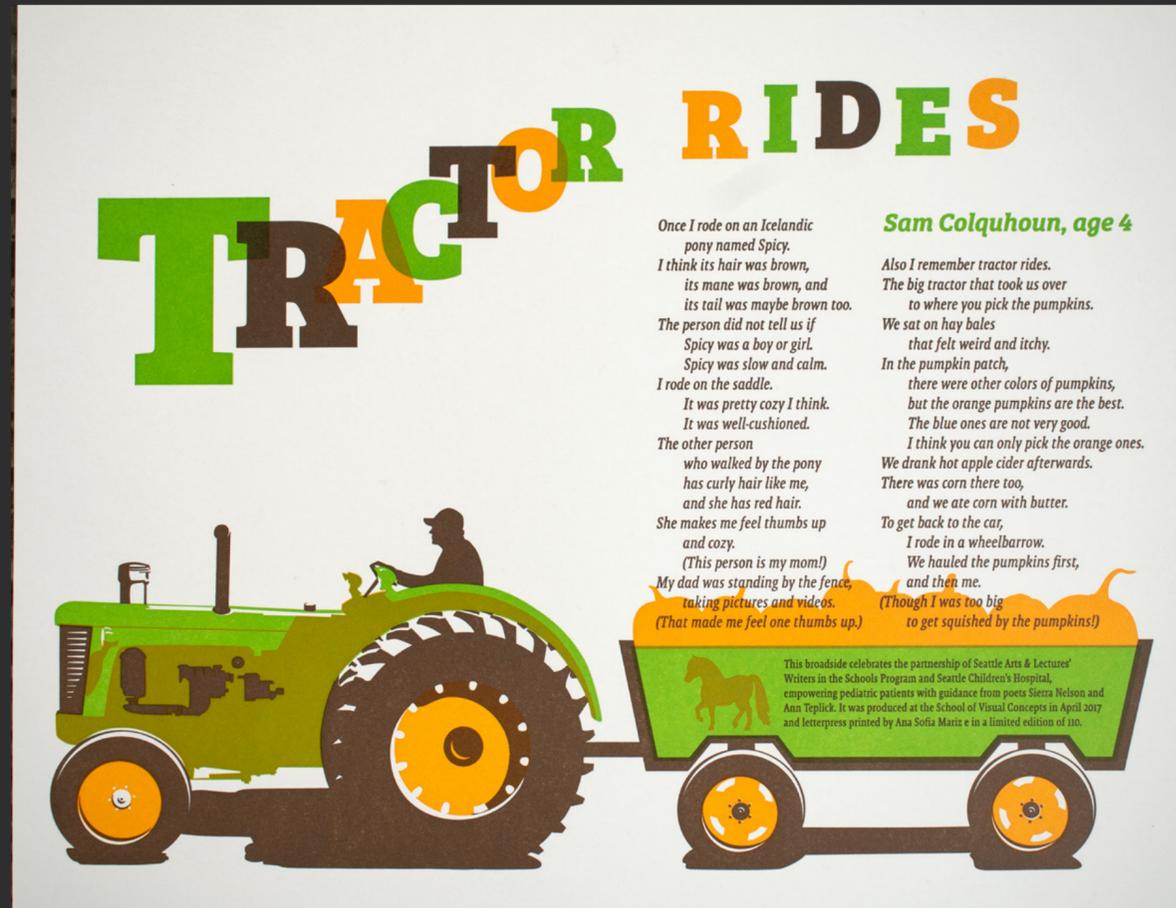
What I'm seeing in the letterpress community that got the wheels turning for me and my project starts with photopolymer technology, which crept into and transformed letterpress by inviting in a new demographic of artists and people interested in letterpress aesthetics.



# PROBLEM | PHOTOPOLYMER | THICKER PAPERS, DEEP IMPRESSION

Biodegradable plastic sleeves  
Soy-based ink  
Active recycling program  
VOC-free ink solvents  
Biodegradable plastic  
FSC-certified acid-free paper

*We print, because we care and love our friends, family, and environs. So*



Today, letterpress is used largely to print posters, cards and coasters, covers, broadsides and lets not forget the fine stationery like invitations and even business cards. All these pieces usually require thicker papers as opposed to the two sided documents like book pages, newspapers and magazines which used to be longtime traditional applications printed in hot or cold metal type; back until offset and digital print came a long.

This refocuse in application was also followed by a change in the desired depth of impression, especially by the upcoming new generation of designers eager for that amazing tactile feel of letterpress..

If in the traditional letterpress world, kiss impression was the best practice that helped preserve the precious metal and wood fonts, with polymer plates this requirement is gone.

Now let's look at what are the implications of this for typography.

On one hand, reproduction technologies have evolved through centuries to translate type into completely flat and very precise surfaces. And today type designers are not only mainly designing on retina like screens but also for high res screens.

Fearful Thing

*Tis a fearful thing  
to love what death can touch.*

*A fearful thing  
to love, to hope, to dream, to be –  
to be,*

Fearful Thing

*Tis a fearful thing  
to love what death can touch.*

*A fearful thing  
to love, to hope, to dream, to be –  
to be,*

On the other hand, here is an example of how a digital design can translate in letterpress. On your left is the digital file and on the right is the print. By the way, the font of the text, Arepo Italic, is actually a Display face, intentionally selected and tracked to print well in this piece.

What I want to point out is how the original letterforms can be impacted, especially at small sizes. And, even if the careful printer avoids any over inking, in deep impressions, the third dimensional effect creates areas of light and shadow that affect the overall typography.

To reconcile the new letterpress applications and its typographic fall outs.

I suggest instead of blaming the ink, the paper or the printer to offer them better tools. Previously tested and intended for those applications.

From a graphic design perspective, it's critical to have typefaces that can be used across different platforms and media to create a consistent visual identity.

This is how I met the rational and the inspiration to create my first type design.

Hi, I'm  
Vine!

As a starting point I set myself to work on a functional contemporary sans serif that can be expressive enough in headings, while also useful in small text and caption sizes.

Now I will highlight how designing simultaneously both for letterpress and digital print led me to this typeface design.

# A NEW TYPEFACE DESIGN | INTRODUCING VINE | POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS



Vine Airways

aiga  
design  
conference

## 15 ideas for random acts of kindness to get you started.

Is this the most gob-smacking, unexpected scientific finding you'll ever hear about? No! But it is one of the most important and practical. Living in a modern world saturated with loneliness, division, and gloom, this study is a lovely reminder that making both yourself happier and the world a bit better is within reach.

To make putting this research to use even easier, the team behind it helpfully included a list of small acts of kindness they gave to study participants to spark ideas and help anyone begin their own mood-boosting regime of daily kindness.

"We specifically selected acts based on affordability, ease of opportunity and commonality," note the researchers, so most of the following suggestions should be within your reach no matter your means or specific situation.

1. Give a book, some art, or music — and include a note of kindness;
2. Ask someone if you can help them with a problem;
3. Meditate on kindness;

For letterpress I was imagining it would be very useful in short paragraphs or caption sizes like colophons or informational texts in stationery like holiday and business cards.

Beyond letterpress I imagine it being used in branding, packaging and editorial. I even received a hint that it would make a good candidate for a logo in the aviation industry, because of its movement and airy qualities.

Let's see what you think.

Vine Regular version 29 from January 2020.

nnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ  
1234567890 - - — Â, Ô. “É não!” 4,0’  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstu ywvxz  
têm, off. guare: wú; aí são, à ño! so?

As an on going project, what I'm sharing here today is my core Master for the Regular weight and Roman style and text size. And also some tests for a range of weights. Later I plan to branch an optical size axis and an axis for impression depth.

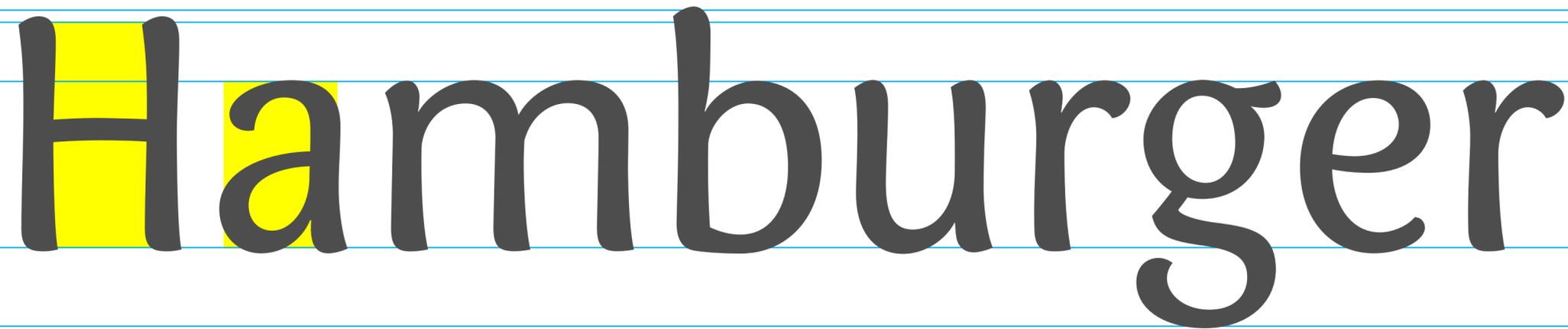
Hamburger

- » Tall x-height
- » Semi-condensed
- » Modulated strokes
- » Simple terminals
- » No serifs
- » Open counters
- » Clear joints

So let's talk about the specific technical features that make this design work for both letterpress and digital.

It starts with a

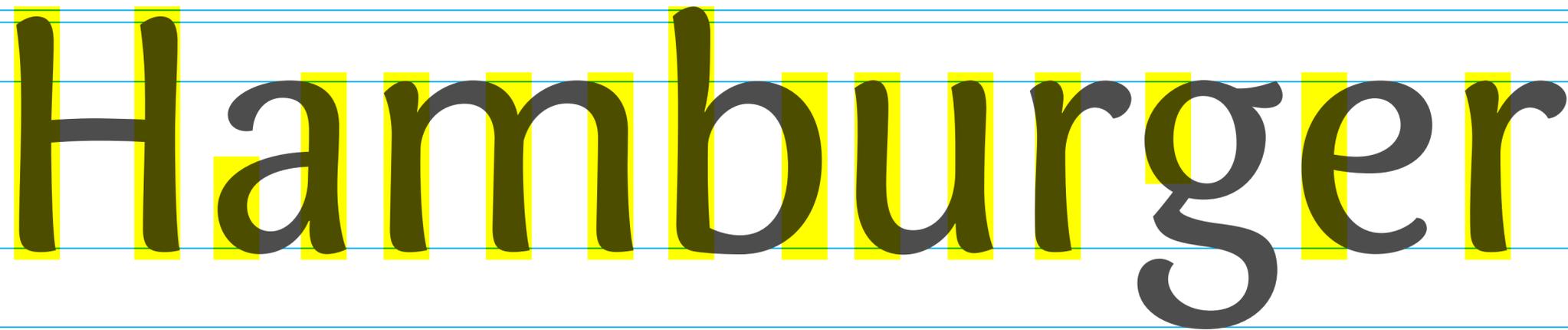
— Tall x-height to give space for the counters and have more readability at smaller sizes;



Hamburger

- » Tall x-height
- » Semi-condensed
- » Modulated strokes
- » Simple terminals
- » No serifs
- » Open counters
- » Clear joints

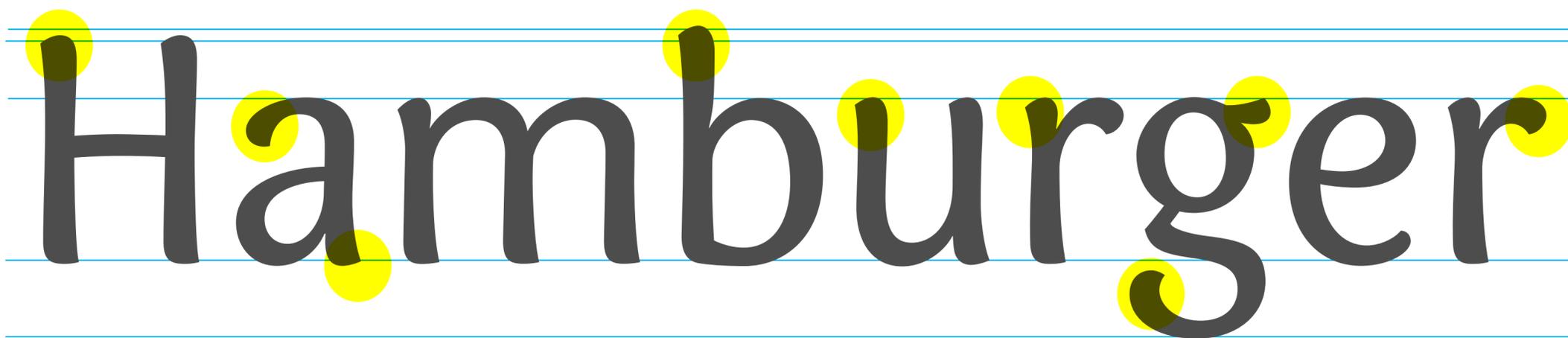
— Semi-condensed proportions to be economic yet elegant  
balancing the tall x-height;



Hamburger

- » Tall x-height
- » Semi-condensed
- » **Modulated strokes**
- » Simple terminals
- » No serifs
- » Open counters
- » Clear joints

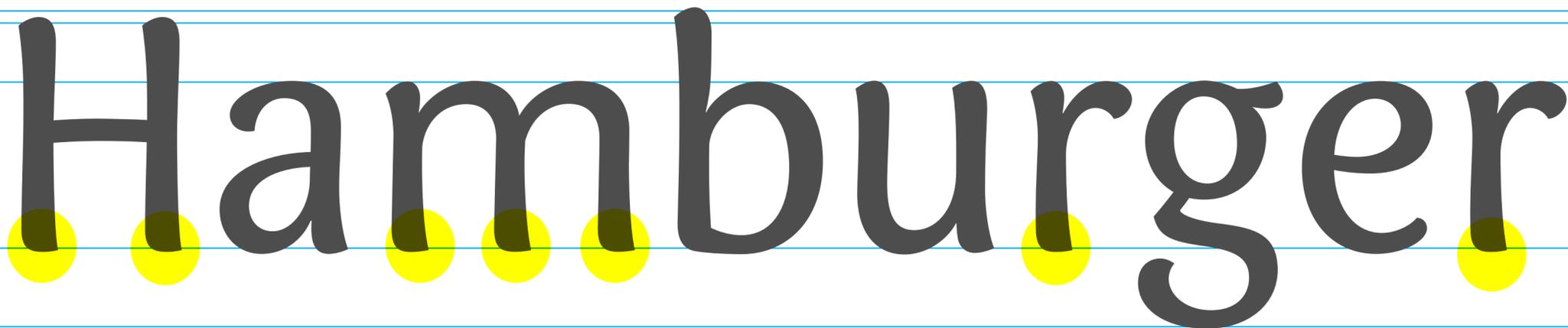
— Soft, modulated strokes that makes it warm, informal, and adds movement while also feeling natural and forgiving of the irregularities of soft papers and impressions;



Hamburger

- » Tall x-height
- » Semi-condensed
- » Modulated strokes
- » **Simple terminals**
- » No serifs
- » Open counters
- » Clear joints

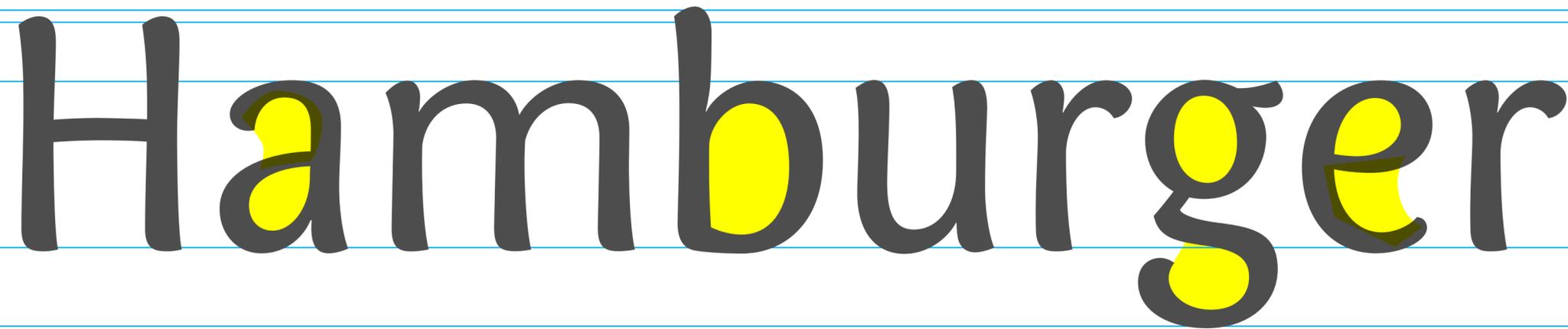
— Simple terminals...



Hamburger

- » Tall x-height
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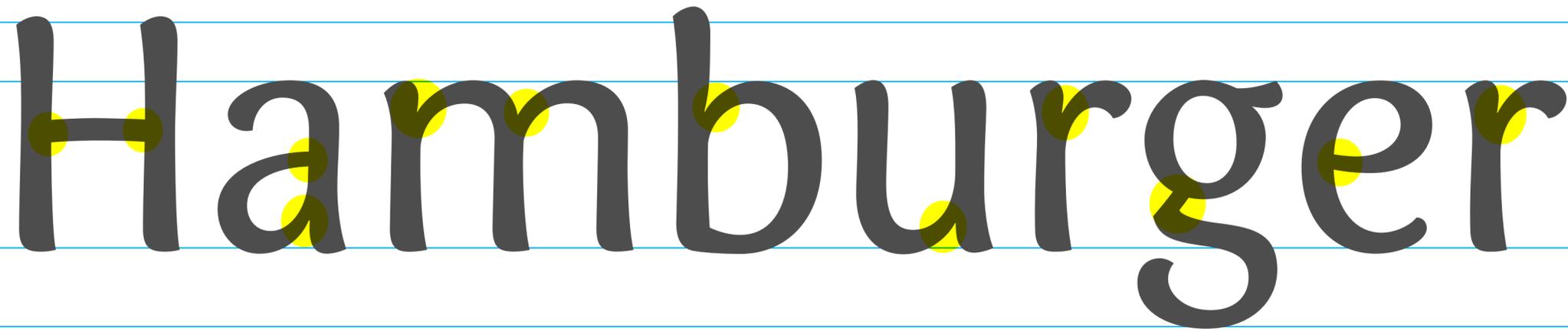
...and no serifs — that don't require extreme precision to be well reproduced while revealing a contemporary organic sleekness of the virtual tool;



Hamburger

- » Tall x-height
- » Semi-condensed
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- » No serifs
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- » Clear joints

— Open counters...



Hamburger

- » Tall x-height
- » Semi-condensed
- » Modulated strokes
- » Simple terminals
- » No serifs
- » Open counters
- » **Clear joints**

...and clear joints, to help highlight and preserve the essence of the letterform in deep print.

Overall this sets it's basic anatomy to be resilient and flexible in various conditions with a good range of design space to be further explored.

# PROOFING VINE | VANDERCOOK 219



dodonaena age goaded dodonaena none nonego age gad endogen adage noon endogen an adon gag eggnog addenda dagga ego danae deadened aged on denned geode gaga a dodonaena deeded en neo gagee goad deadened agada donna dang dodonaena dodonaena an done anne deaden dead one nag and doodad enneagon end need gondang doggoned aged do deodand nonage doggoned gone a dodonaena noded anna

Vine 27, Regular 8pt.

Digital file

**dodonaena age goaded dodonaena none nonego age gad endogen adage noon endogen an adon gag eggnog addenda dagga ego danae deadened aged on denned geode gaga a dodonaena deeded en neo gagee goad deadened agada donna dang dodonaena dodonaena an done anne deaden dead one nag and doodad enneagon end need gondang doggoned aged do deodand nonage doggoned gone a dodonaena noded anna**

**Vine 27, Regular 8pt.**

Letterpress

dodonaena age goaded dodonaena none nonego age gad endogen adage noon endogen an adon gag eggnog addenda dagga ego danae deadened aged on denned geode gaga a dodonaena deeded en neo gagee goad deadened agada donna dang dodonaena dodonaena an done anne deaden dead one nag and doodad enneagon end need gondang doggoned aged do deodand nonage doggoned gone a dodonaena noded anna

Vine 27, Regular 6pt.

**dodonaena age goaded dodonaena none nonego age gad endogen adage noon endogen an adon gag eggnog addenda dagga ego danae deadened aged on denned geode gaga a dodonaena deeded en neo gagee goad deadened agada donna dang dodonaena dodonaena an done anne deaden dead one nag and doodad enneagon end need gondang doggoned aged do deodand nonage doggoned gone a dodonaena noded anna**

**Vine 27, Regular 6pt.**

Now I want to share some examples of my letterpress proofing process.

So far I have been printing with photopolymer plates from BoxCar Press on a Vandercook 219 press.

One of the interesting things to notice — when looking through a lupe or, in Portuguese, “conta fio” — is how the ink can expand more in certain areas than others. This of course also depends on the side you’re feeding your paper.

Here again is an example of a digital file and it’s letterpress print.

PROOFING VINE | FIRST ROUND | SIMULATING “REAL DESIGNS”

For Lulu Mako  
...  
And what you should know  
about your mama.

William  
Shakespeare  
In memorium

Ava  
Brooklyn  
Ceruti  
April 24, 2004 – October 14, 2017

If you can see the magic,  
then time is your wizard.

Vine the fun, stable  
companion for  
your next project.

f y t

Emma  
Sophia  
Our Sunshine Girl

Here is my first set of proof for Vine.

It was driven by a suggestion coming from Sumner Stone, who has been an adviser in this project, to do simulations of “real graphic designs” to see how my typeface design would respond.

This proof gave me some initial understanding on how the design details were appearing in different scales and directed some core design changes. For example, there were several vertical ink traps, like in the letter f here, which felt overdone and didn't help the design so I removed them.



Here is a second round of proofs where I targeted to test some technical aspects like tracking according to weight variation over a range papers and both rubber and oil inks.

Some initial observations:

- no noticeable difference among different inks;
- worked amazingly legible at 6pt.
- will benefit from opening more tracking for text and caption size

# A Digital Typeface for the Reimagined Field

## of Post-Digital Letterpress Printing.

type design

letterpress

photopolymer plates

Letterpress printing has been experiencing a resurgence driven by a new generation of printers who are reimagining the field. Yet, we are not observing a proportionate effort from the type design community to supply digital fonts adequate for this new market.

As appreciation for three-dimensional deep impression printing has spread, so has the need for digital fonts, which can withstand these new technical conditions. The strong pressure, especially on thick soft papers, can make the ink spread significantly. It might fill white spaces irregularly and can distort original designs. In addition, the third dimension creates new areas of light and shadow inside and around the letterforms. With all of these effects, many of the new digital typefaces can have their features distorted and blurred.

Throughout our process we have been generating proofs in letterpress presses like the Vandercook 219 and using different types of papers, inks, and typographical settings. We generated tests of sizes, trackings, and design samples for a range of weights.

To address the growing need for digital fonts adequate for the demands of post-digital letterpress printing, we have developed a typeface design which is flexible enough to be used across a wide range of sizes and applications.

The main features of our new typeface design are: big x-height and open counters; semi-condensed proportions; soft, slightly modulated strokes; and simple endings and clear joints. The result is an approachable, friendly, informal yet sturdy sans serif. Inspired by the new uses of letterpress printing, it retains its main features and attractiveness across a range of sizes and applications beyond letterpress. It is expressive enough for titles, and it is still legible and pleasant in short paragraphs with point size as small as 6pt.

In a broader scope, we intend to share the research and design behind this font in order to contribute to an international conversation about the future of type design for digital and letterpress applications.

*Excerpts from the abstract submitted for the conference.*

Featuring digital and letterpress tests for the typeface Vine Regular at 6, 8, 10, 16, 48 and 72pt, on Mohawk Superfine Eggshell 100 cover.

Designed and presented by Ana Sofia Mariz at the Post-Digital Letterpress Printing Conference in Porto, Portugal, January, 2020.

Now, in my current round of proofing for my core design, I'm testing my assumptions about digital printing, to see how different can be the appearances of the exact same digital font when printed on a high quality laser printer versus a flatbed press using photopolymer plates.

# A Digital Typeface for the Reimagined Field

DIGITAL PRINT LETTERPRESS

photopolymer plates

of Post-Digital  
Letterpress  
Printing.

type design

letterpress

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It contains parts of the abstract submitted for this conference in different sizes, ranging from 6 to 72pt.

Here you can see highlighted in blue are the parts printed in digital and in yellow are the letterpress ones.

This proof is helping me to gather information on the best way to branch from the core design and to develop the depth of impression axis.

I'd love to talk more but predicting a short amount of time I brought copies to share with anyone interested to know and continue this conversation.

THANKS!



Find the full transcript  
of this talk on my  
website, Feb 15th.

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[#vinetypeface](https://twitter.com/vinetypeface)

Thank you very much. I hope you enjoyed.

I'm looking forward to engaging and answering any questions about this on going project.