TYPOGRAPHY

THEORY

PRACTICE

DESIGN

Fundamentals & Principles

THEORY

0 1 //
TYPOGRAPHY the BASICS

Typography is the visual component of the written word.

A text is a sequence of words.
A text stays the same no matter how it's rendered. Consider the sentence "I like pizza." I can print that text on a piece of paper, or read it aloud, or save it in a file on my laptop. It'll be the same text, just rendered different ways—visually, audibly, digitally.

But when "I like pizza" is printed, typography gets involved. All visually displayed text involves typography—whether it's on paper, a computer screen, or a billboard.

Is typography an art? That's like asking if photography is an art. Certainly there are photographers and typographers whose ideas and techniques raise their work to the level of art. But at their core, both photography and typography perform a utilitarian function. The aesthetic component is separate. Being an effective typographer is more about good skills than good taste.

i-D

London Now
by Tim Walker

TW ID ADWOA D S

MORE DOESN'T MEAN GOOD

FONTS ACROSS THE WEB.

BUT WITH GREAT POWER COMES GREAT RESPONSIBILITY.

Typography is the art and technique of arranging type.

It's central to the skills of a designer and is about much more than making the words legible.
Your choice of typeface and how you make it work with your layout, grid, colour scheme, design theme and so on will make the difference between a good, bad and great design.

But good typography is often down to creative intuition.

There's an astonishing array of paid-for and free fonts to choose from online. Just because you can choose from a vast library doesn't mean you have to; there's something to be said for painting with a limited palette, and tried and tested fonts like Helvetica continue to serve us well.
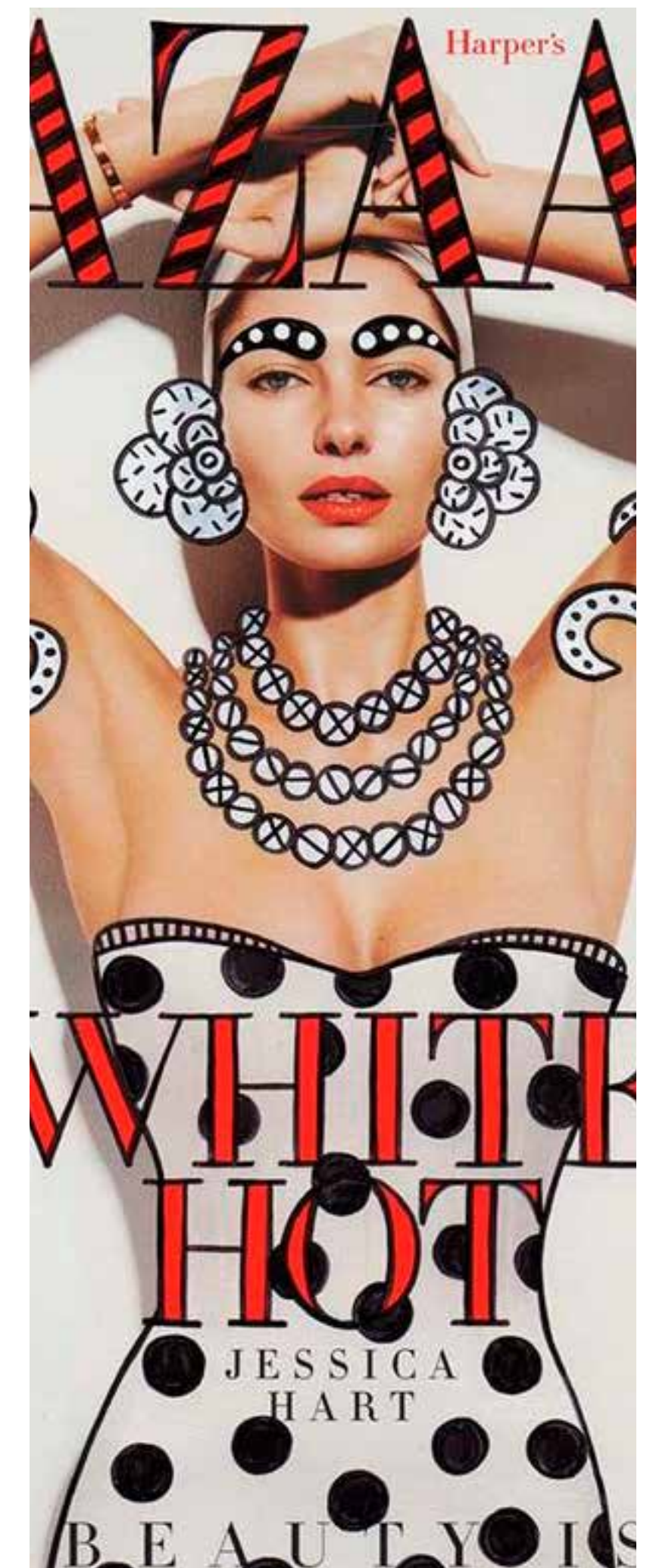
WHO IS TYPOGRAPHY FOR?

READER OVER WRITER

Readers, not writers.

Typography is for the benefit of the reader, not the writer.

This is obvious if you're a designer who didn't write the text you're working with. Then you approach the project as a special kind of reader—one whose job it is to create the visual component of the text so it reinforces the meaning.

It's a more difficult principle if you're a writer who has to handle your own typography. Then you have to negotiate the conflict between your primary perspective as a writer and a simulated perspective as a reader.

Always be asking yourself: what does my reader want? Typography has to be oriented to your actual readers, not idealized ones. Writers often get attached to idealized readers because those readers are easier to please.
Don't be lazy. Work hard to see your text as an actual reader will. You won't get it perfectly right.
But a rough approximation is better than no approximation at all.

TOILETPAPER
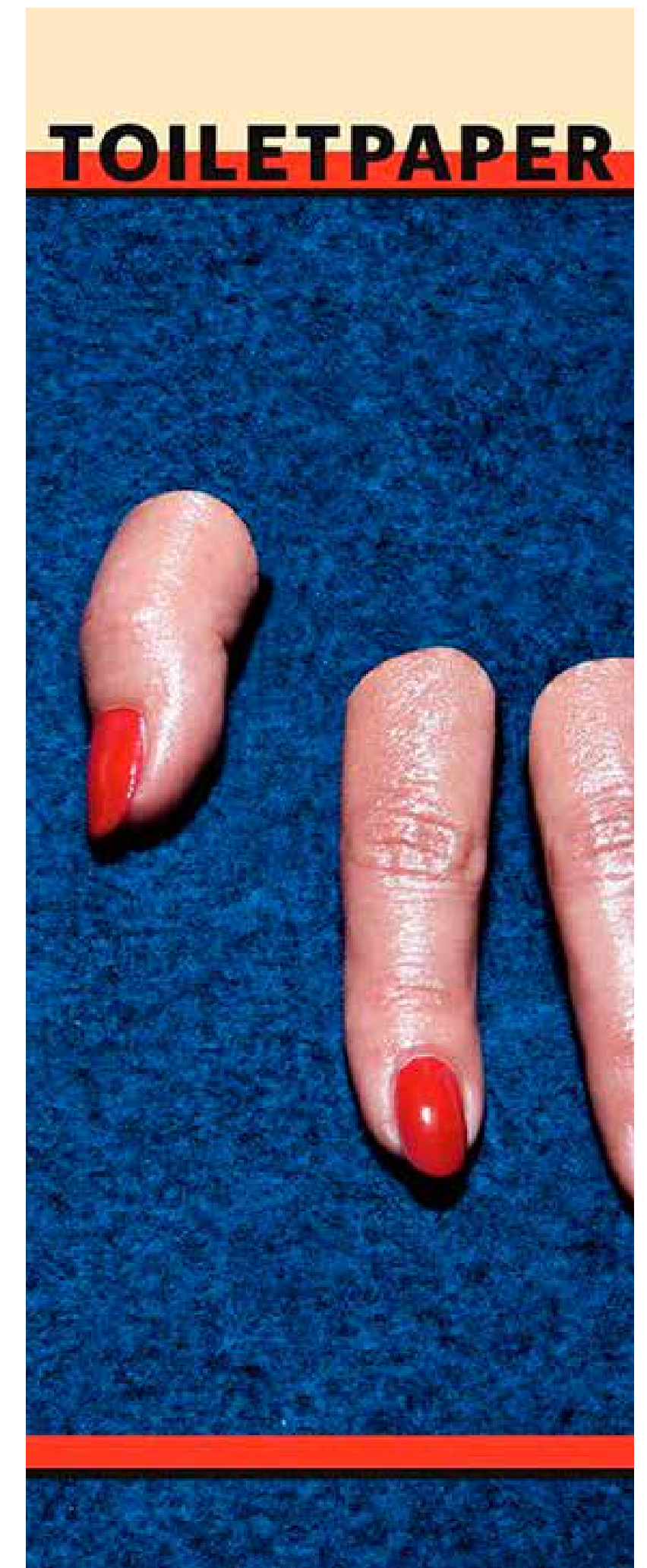
WHAT IS GOOD TYPOGRAPHY?

Almost all texts communicate a set of points. Sometimes a text also needs to instruct the reader. Other texts offer warnings or admonitions. In every case, good typography supports and reinforces the message. Good typography makes the text more effective.

Three subsidiary propositions flow from this:

01 // Good typography is measured by how well it reinforces the meaning of the text, not by some abstract scale of merit. Typographic choices that work for one text won't necessarily work for another.

02 // For a given text, there are many typographic solutions that would be equally good. Typography is not a math problem with one correct answer.

03 // Your ability to produce good typography depends on how well you understand the goals of your text, not on taste or visual training.

WHAT IS GOOD TYPOGRAPHY?

GOOD TYPOGRAPHY

Reinforces the meaning of the text.

Typography is visual, so it's easy to conclude that it's primarily an artistic or aesthetic pursuit. Not so. Typography is primarily utilitarian.

Therefore, good typography is measured on a utilitarian yardstick. Typography that is aesthetically pleasant, but that doesn't reinforce the meaning of the text, is a failure.

Does that mean that effective typography can be ugly? NO.
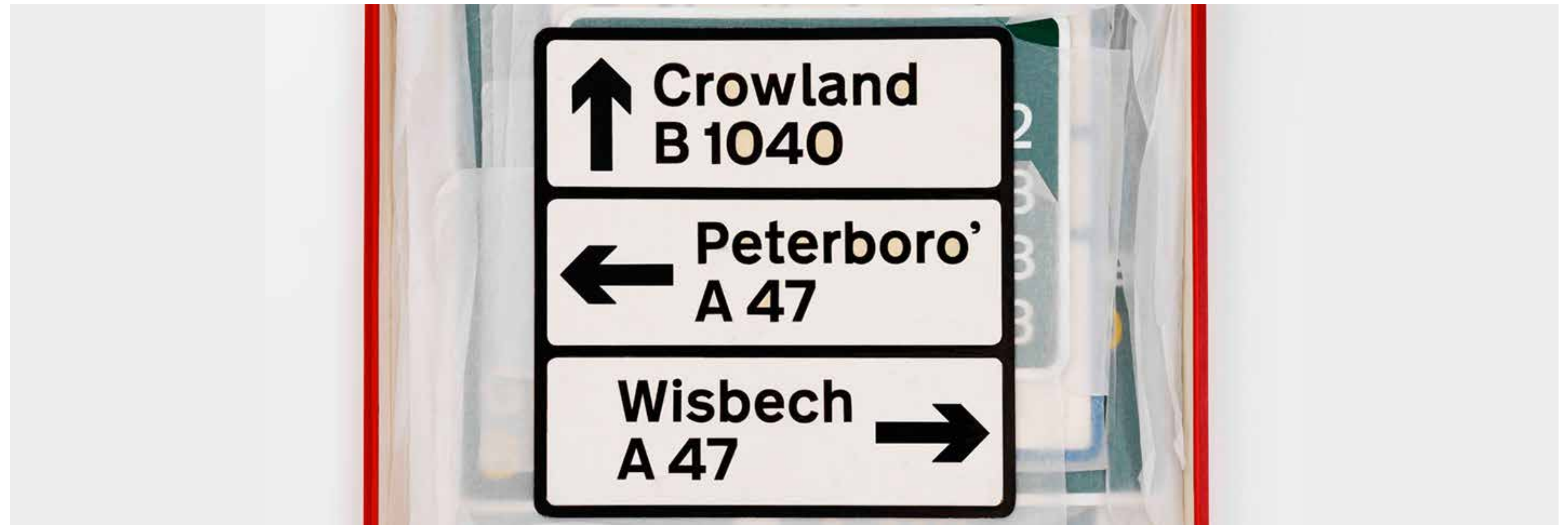
**W H E R E   D O
T H E   R U L E S
C O M E   F R O M ?**

Professional
typography.

What professional writers know about typography can usually be traced back to unreliable sources. I'm sure they were all lovely resources, but chances are they were unprofessional.

So it's not surprising that bad typography habits get passed along. What's surprising is how tenacious these habits can be.

This wasn't always true. For a long time—the typewriter era and then the early computer era—professionals could afford typesetting and printing devices that were substantially better than what individuals could afford. Hence the typographic standards of professional publishers were far out of reach.

This is no longer the case.
Typesetting technology available to individuals comes nearly up to the standards of professional typesetting. On the screen, there's no difference. Technological excuses are no longer acceptable.

**RULE
NUMBER 01**

*Body text
over the rest.*

This is a bold claim, but I stand behind it: if you learn and follow these five typography rules, you will be a better typographer than 95% of professional writers and 70% of professional designers.

The typographic quality of your document is determined largely by how the body text looks. Why? Because there's more body text than anything else. So start every project by making the body text look good, then worry about the rest.

In turn, the appearance of the body text is determined primarily by FOUR typographic choices.

vais Teixeira no *Comércio do*
indo política e sociedade, mas
erários: «Como são julgados em
-1927: 1); «Portugal na Exposição
sco Ibañez» (23-II-1928: 1).
pelo vimaranense no jornal portuense
onio Zozava, facto que mereceu relativo
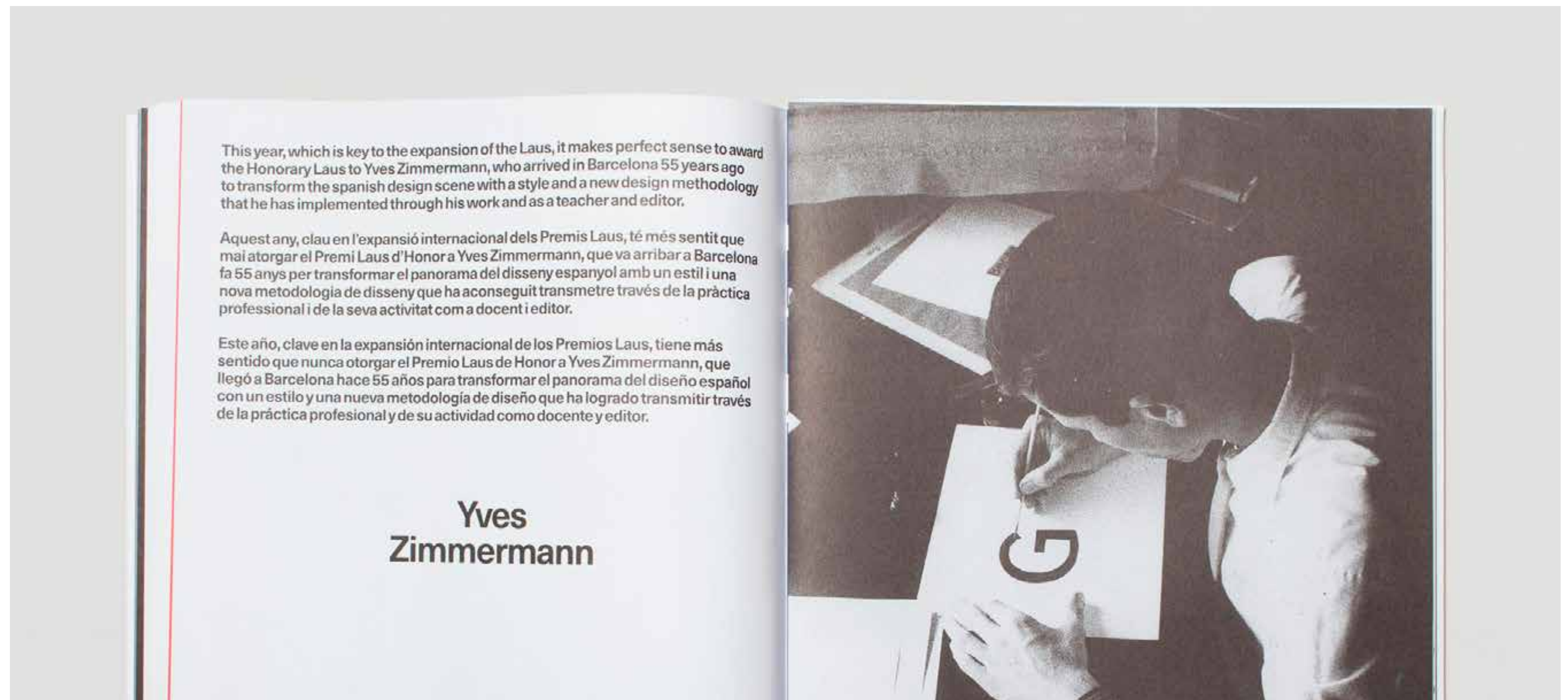
O COMÉRCIO DO
PORTO
27-IX-1927

▶

GOOD RULES OF TYPOGRAPHY

RULE NUMBER 02
Small is better than too big.

POINT SIZE is the size of the letters. In print, the most comfortable range for body text is 10–12 point. On the web, the range is 15–25 pixels. Not every font appears equally large at a given point size, so be prepared to adjust as necessary.

**RULE
NUMBER 03
Vertical distance.**

LINE SPACING is the vertical distance between lines. It should be 120–145% of the point size. In word processors, use the "Exact" line-spacing option to achieve this. The default single-line option is too tight; the 1½-line option is too loose. In CSS, use line-height.

GOOD RULES OF TYPOGRAPHY

Horizontal width.

LINE LENGTH is the horizontal width of the text block. Line length should be an average of 45–90 characters per line (use your word-count function) or 2–3 lowercase alphabets, like so:

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyzabcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyzabcd

In a printed document, this usually means page margins larger than the traditional one inch. On a web page, it usually means not allowing the text to flow to the edges of the browser window.

RULE
NUMBER 05
Fonts, yes fonts!

And finally, **FONT CHOICE**. The fastest, easiest, and most visible improvement you can make to your typography is to ignore the fonts that came free with your computer (known as system fonts) and buy a professional font.
A professional font gives you the benefit of a professional designer's skills without having to hire one.

You can still make good typography with system fonts. But choose wisely. And never choose times new roman or Arial (except Arial Black), as those fonts are favored only by the apathetic and sloppy. Not by typographers. Not by you.

**KEY RULES
TO TYPE THEM
ALL.
06.
Avoid goofy fonts,
monospaced
fonts, and system
fonts.**

That's it. As you put these five rules to work, you'll notice your documents to start looking more like professionally published material. If you want to achieve more, let's look at more rules.

Use curly quotation marks, not straight ones.

" QUOTE "

George Orwell

SUMMARY OF KEY RULES

08/09.
SPACES

Put only one space between sentences.

Don't use multiple word spaces or other white-space characters in a row.

**Here's a paragraph with one space between sentences:**

I know that many people were taught to put two spaces between sentences. I was too. But these days, using two spaces is an obsolete habit. Some say the habit originated in the typewriter era. Others believe it began earlier. But guess what? It doesn't matter. Because either way, it's not part of today's typographic practice. If you have to use a typewriter-style font, you can use two spaces after sentences.

The same paragraph, with two spaces between sentences:

I know that many people were taught to put two spaces between sentences. I was too. But these days, using two spaces is an obsolete habit. Some say the habit originated in the typewriter era. Others believe it began earlier. But guess what? It doesn't matter. Because either way, it's not part of today's typographic practice. If you have to use a typewriter-style font, you can use two spaces after sentences. (These are also known as monospaced fonts.) Otherwise, don't.

"ONE TWO"

"ONE TWO"
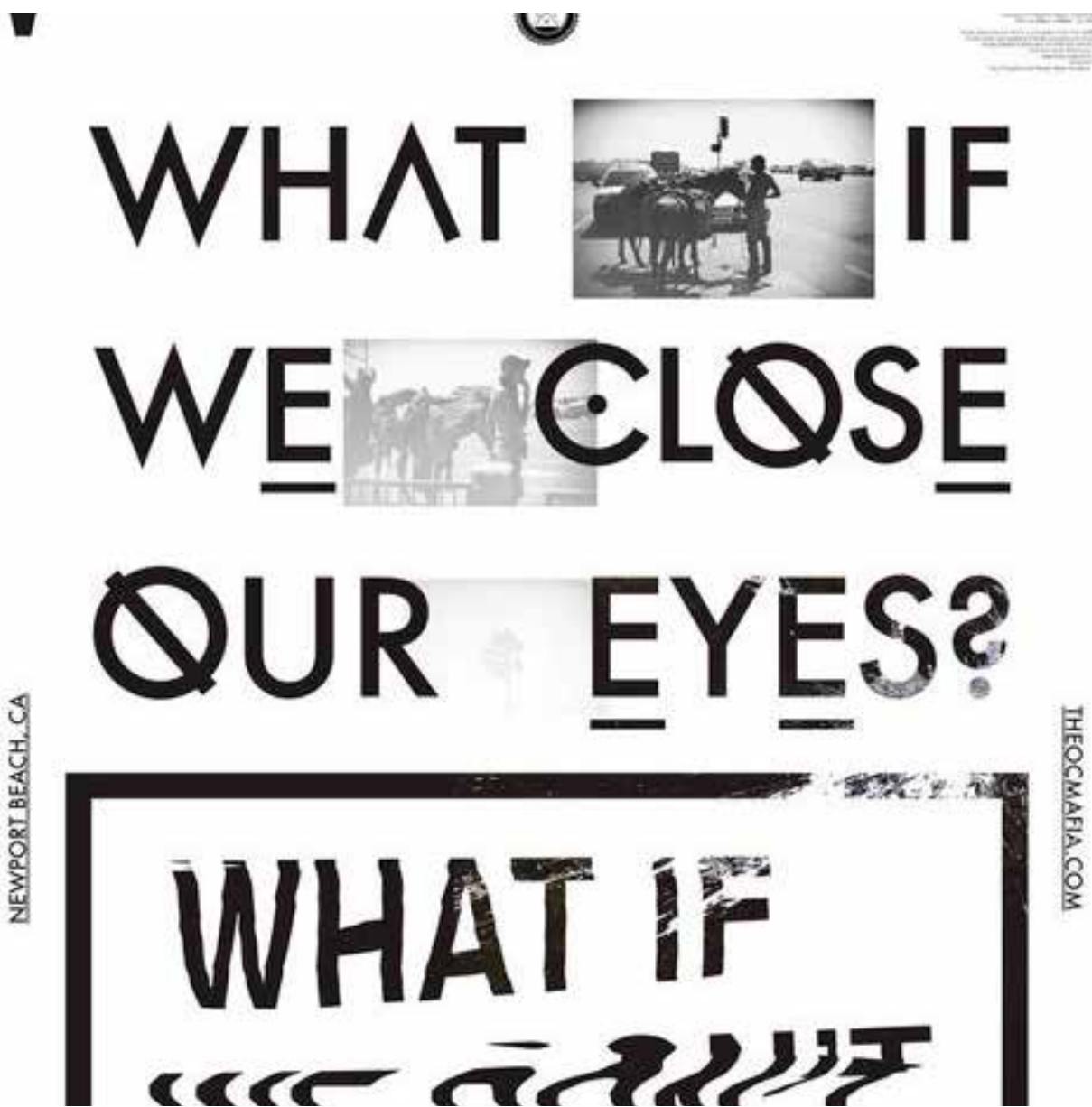
**10.
SYSTEM
UNDERLING**

**Never use system
underlining
(unless
it's a hyperlink),
make your own.**

11.
TEXT
ALLIGNMENT
Use centered text sparingly.

" QUOTE "

" QUOTE "

" QUOTE "

12.
BOLD VS ITALIC
Use bold or italic as little as possible.

" QUOTE "

" QUOTE "

" QUOTE "

13.
ALL CAPS

All caps are fine for less than one line of text.

SHE GOT ME LOVING IN THE MORNING. GOT ME SINGING IN THE POURING RAIN. GOT ME WRAPPED AROUND HER FINGER. I'M PERFECT IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND. MESSAGE COULDN'T BE MUCH CLEARER. LIKE A METAPHOR OF MAKE-BELIEVE. BUT SOMEBODY WOULDN'T PINCH ME. THAT WOULD BE THE END OF THIS DREAM. WELL PARDON MY MANNERS. JUST SOMETHING ABOUT YOU TURNS ME TO A SAVAGE. IF IMMA BE HONEST I CAN'T HELP BUT TO STAY. YEAH, I'M LOSING MY BALANCE. GOT ME RUNNING INTO CIRCLES AROUND YOU TO PLEASE YOU. I DO WHAT I NEED TO.

She got me loving in the morning. Got me singing in the pouring rain. Got me wrapped around her finger. I'm perfect in the palm of your hand. Message couldn't be much clearer. Like a metaphor of make-believe. But somebody wouldn't pinch me. That would be the end of this dream.
Well pardon my manners. Just something about you turns me to a savage. If imma be honest I can't help but to stay. Yeah, I'm losing my balance. Got me running into circles around you to please you. I do what I need to. So pardon my manners. Just something about you turns me to a savage.

O N E   T W O
o n e   t w o

14.
SMALL CAPS

If you don't have real small caps, don't use them at all.

EASY GOES
EASY DOES

E☐☐☐ G☐☐☐
Easy Does

ONE TWO
One Two

**15/16.
KERNING**

Use 5–12% extra letterspacing with all caps and small caps.

Kerning should always be turned on.

She got me loving in the morning. Got me singing in the pouring rain. Got me wrapped around her finger. I'm perfect in the palm of your hand. Message couldn't be much clearer. Like a metaphor of make-believe. But somebody wouldn't pinch me.

She got me loving in the morning. Got me singing in the pouring rain. Got me wrapped around her finger. I'm perfect in the palm of your hand. Message couldn't be much clearer. Like a metaphor of make-believe. But somebody wouldn't pinch me.

**ONE TWO
ONE TWO**

SUMMARY OF KEY RULES

17/18. INDENTATION

Use first-line indents that are one to four times the point size of the text, or use 4–10 points of space between paragraphs. But don't use both.

If you use justified text, also turn on hyphenation.

She got me loving in the morning. Got me singing in the pouring rain. Got me wrapped around her finger. I'm perfect in the palm of your hand. Message couldn't be much clearer. Like a metaphor of make-believe.

She got me loving in the morning. Got me singing in the pouring rain. Got me wrapped around her finger. I'm perfect in the palm of your hand. Message couldn't be much clearer. Like a metaphor of make-believe.

She got me loving in the morning. Got me singing in the pouring rain. Got me wrapped around her finger. I'm perfect in the palm of your hand. Message couldn't be much clearer. Like a metaphor of make-believe.

She got me loving in the morning. Got me singing in the pouring rain. Got me wrapped around her finger. I'm perfect in the palm of your hand. Message couldn't be much clearer. Like a metaphor of make-believe.

ONE AND TWO THREE AND FOUR FIVE SIX SEVEN EIGHT NINE TEN

ONE TWO THREE FOUR FIVE SIX AND SEVEN EIGHT NINE TEN

19/20.
LITTLE GLYPHS
Use ampersands sparingly, unless included in a proper name.

In a document longer than three pages, one exclamation point is plenty.

QUOTE!THE REST IS JUST ALL QUOTE. BECAUSE QUOTE & QUOTE AINT AS COOL AS QUOTE AND QUOTE.

ELLIPSES

In certain contexts it may be common to indicate interrupted dialogue with an ellipsis. But in most writing, the em dash is preferred.

"Yes, that's true, but ..."

nay

"Yes, that's true, but—"

yay

21. Use proper trademark and copyright symbols—not alphabetic approximations.
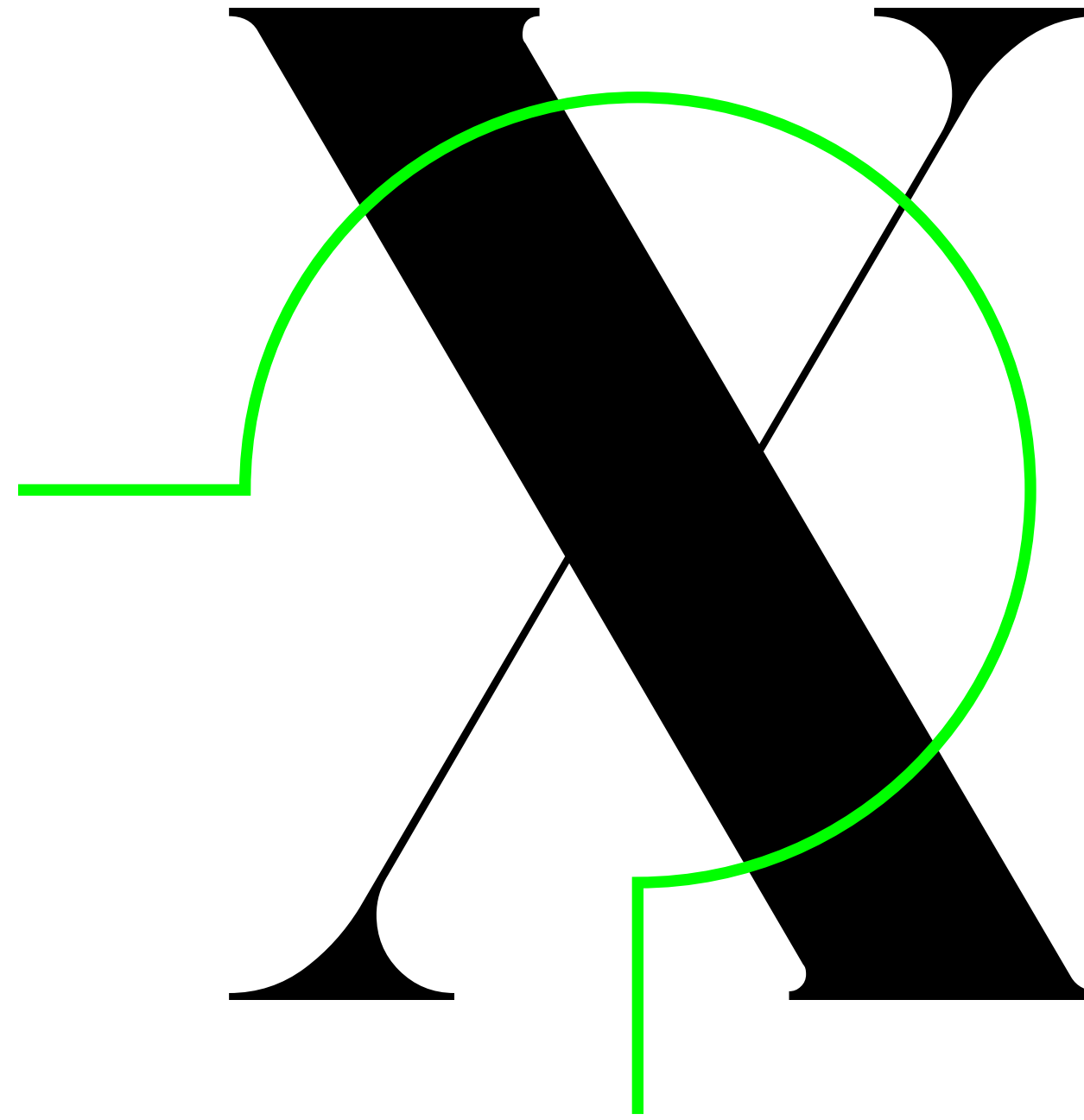® © ™

23. Make ellipses using the proper character, not periods and spaces. An ellipsis is a sequence of three dots used to indicate an omission in quoted material. Ellipses are frequently approximated by typing three periods in a row, which puts the dots too close together, or three periods with spaces in between, which puts the dots too far apart. So use the ellipsis character, not the approximations.

24. Make sure apostrophes point downward.

25. Make sure foot and inch marks are straight, not curly. Foot and inch marks–also known as minute and second marks or prime and double prime marks, depending on what they're labeling–are not curly. Use straight quotes for these marks. Typography purists would point out that proper foot and inch marks have a slight northeast-to-southwest slope to them: –118° 19′ 43.5″

LAMPSHADES ON FIRE

Photography **JOHN DOE**
Styling **DANA DOE**

Lorem ipsums anti omnis que voluptant aut od estrunt. Aquae. Norse dolorem seduntius etus cus doloribeatia natibus iusceGtution vo cus molorum ute volorep tibeaqu ibust, con nos dotam quidis utet quam se peribus dolorpo.

delibus, cone es kum ressit orequdipsunt haciet umeturi ut eos eosam ilorendit

TYPOGRAPHY

THEORY

PRACTICE

DESIGN