

Fontographer basics

Fonts are to a designer what a horse is to a cowboy. You are not going to get very far without them. But finding that perfect font can be a problem. What if you want a font that is far out in left field (I'll stop with the metaphors now)? What if you absolutely love every bit of a font but that darn ill-designed "Y". While Illustrator allows you to modify the look of single instances in a font, Fontographer allows you to modify the font itself. It also allows you to design whole typeface, either from scratch, from an existing typeface, or from an image, such as sketches of letters. By the way, this is the program many professional type designers use.

INTRODUCTION

A typical traditional font (we will avoid Open Type) comes in several different flavors. Two of these which are widely used are TrueType and Postscript. Both of these are good file formats for fonts, and both are capable of saving 256 different 'characters' per font (usually accessible by holding down the option or command keys when typing a letter). What this means is that you can have a font that not only includes upper and lower case letters, but numbers, punctuation, and a large number of symbols (such as a copyright mark), accent marks, etc. This doesn't mean a font has to include 256 things. Some fonts include upper case letters and nothing else.

SYSTEM THINGS

Before using Fontographer you need to know a bit about fonts. They are stored as files that are specific to each computer. If I send you a document that uses Helvetica and you do not have Helvetica, it will not show as Helvetica. Well, of course everyone has Helvetica on their computer, but not so for all fonts.

In Macintosh System X fonts can be stored in a variety of places. You should be storing yours in the following folder: Hard Drive / Users / Student (or other user) / Library / Fonts. You could also store them in Hard Drive / Library / Fonts. There are other places fonts are stored in System X, but these are the main locations.

OPENING A FONT

To open a font in Fontographer, either navigate to the sample fonts in the Fontographer folder

or to the fonts in the fonts folder in your computer (I just told you where they are located). What you see when you open a font is a chart showing all of the designed characters.

MODIFICATION

Double-click on a character and you can edit it. The tools in the resulting letter modification window are much like those in Illustrator, but there is no selection tool, only a direct selection tool. To move an entire shape, just select all the points (like in Illustrator). Oh, and by the way, hollow is selected for a point, solid is not - just the opposite of Illustrator.

When you are done modifying a letter, just close the box and your modifications will show as filled on the main chart.

CHANGE NAME

At some point you need to change the name of your font to something you would like to see in the font menu - go to Element / Font Info and change the family name.

SAVE & GENERATE

When you save your work it will not be a font, but a Fontographer file (.fog) that will open in Fontographer for further editing.

To make an actual font, go to File / Generate Font Files. In this box you have to click on "Advanced" to change one very important thing, which is the font "ID" number. Computers do not look at font names when using them, but only the number, so if you do not change this number you will have two fonts with the same ID. Not a good situation. Change just one number in the ID - odds are very good it will not be the same as any other font.

Now go back to "Easy". Set the computer type to Macintosh, and the format to TrueType. With TrueType you do not need separate bitmap fonts, so this option is easier (not that Postscript is difficult). As I said, you don't need any Bitmap sizes, so leave this blank.

At this point you can either generate your fonts back into the Fonts folder or put them somewhere else and copy them there later.

TEST IT OUT

After you put your font into the fonts folder, test it out. First you need to quit and re-open any application that you want the font to show up in since fonts are read when only when an application is opened.

MAKE A SAMPLE

Every type designer makes a nice sample sheet to show off the font. It usually includes a sample of all the characters and maybe a sentence or a few paragraphs which shows how it might look. Photoshop is good for a simple sample because you know the shape of the letters will not change no matter what computer you use to open the JPEG (or better yet) GIF file you save.

You could also use any other program (like Illustrator), but if you do, make sure your output is not font-dependent - exporting or saving the file in PDF format is safe way to go.

ADD YOUR OWN

To add a logo or change the letters to your own handwriting is easy. Scan your letters or symbol and open in Photoshop. Drag a marquee around the letter or symbol you want and copy it.

In Fontographer activate the Template Layer (below the tools in the letter modification window) and paste. You can move or size your template using the pointer tool. Now change back to the Outline Layer and in the menus go to Element / Auto Trace. To keep things simple, go back to the template layer and hit the Delete key. You can make a whole alphabet like this with a new document (File / New Font) and going back and forth from Photoshop. Experiment with the tracing options - basically they control how accurately a tracing is made. More accurate is not always better!

MORE

Good fonts (not the free kind), use kerning pairs and other options you will probably not want to deal with. Some are simple, like changing the width of the appearance of a character by dragging the right line in the letter modification window. Others are very time consuming. Peruse the manual - you might learn a few important things you don't know about fonts.