

Century

The “super family” has become a staple of typographic communication. While they’re often seen as modern design innovations, super families have actually been around for more than a century. The rise of these typographic juggernauts is a tale of typographic tenacity.

Family Beginnings

The lineage of the first typeface super family dates back to 1894, to the fruits of the collaborative labors between publisher Theodore Lowe DeVinne and typographer Linn Boyd Benton. DeVinne, a prominent book and magazine publisher, was dissatisfied with the typefaces that were popular for text copy in the 1890s. He approached the recently formed American Type Founders and convinced ATF to develop a custom font that DeVinne believed would be more legible and attractive to his readers.

At the time, Benton was director and chief technical advisor at ATF. Although his main interest was the mechanics of type founding, Benton also designed (or, probably more accurately, design directed) a number of typefaces. In this capacity, it fell to him to work with DeVinne. In 1894, the new typeface was ready, and since its debut would be the setting of DeVinne’s Century magazine, it was named Century Roman. In addition, DeVinne also commissioned a design referred to as Century Broad-Face, which could be used when text columns were set wider.

Good Idea, Too Bad It Didn’t Sell

DeVinne used Century Roman over a number of years for setting the magazine, books and other publications. The typeface, however, never became popular with other printers and typographers. The condensed proportions of Century Roman, which suited DeVinne for setting his magazine, were considered too narrow for general use. In an attempt to make the family more of a commercial success, Benton designed a somewhat wider version called Century Number 2. This design didn’t sell well either.

Around the time that ATF released Century Number 2, Benton’s son, Morris Fuller Benton, joined the firm. One of the younger Benton’s first assignments was to develop yet another reworking of the original



THE CENTURY FACE was designed to make for the Century Magazine a blacker and more readable type than the thin and gray-printing old-style letter in which it had been printed for many years. The haircompact composition in a narrow measure, this style of face is properly adapted. THESE ARE THE SMALL CAPITALS and *these the italic characters of this font.*

THE CENTURY BROAD-FACE was made by the De Vinne Press for service on books to be set in a broad measure, which do not require a compression of letters for the saving of space. relief of white is diminished. THESE ARE THE SMALL CAPITALS and *these the italic characters of this font.* The lower-case alphabet of this

FIRST CENTURYS

Century typeface. Similar to his father's earlier attempt at a redesign, Benton expanded the design slightly to be more acceptable for book printing. This design's proportions were somewhere between those of Century Roman and Century Broad-Face. To make its intentions clear to the type-buying public, and to distinguish it from the earlier Century typefaces, the completed design was called Century Expanded—although it still has relatively narrow proportions.

From the late 1800s to 1937, Morris Benton was actively involved in developing the ATF typeface library. This included both sorting through the menagerie of typefaces ATF had inherited from the 21 companies that made up the conglomerate and adding new designs to the company's offerings. Benton was able to explore many possibilities for developing a type family. Most that he created were built along traditional lines, in which one set of design characteristics is carried through several variations of weight and proportion. With Century, however, Benton broke new ground, building the family along similar proportions and structural guidelines but changing the design characteristics. Whereas Century Roman and Century Expanded were designed with characteristics similar to Scotch Roman, the next member of the family would signal a stylistic departure. The Century Oldstyle design, released in 1906, was based on forms found in Caslon or Jenson. Century Catalog followed several years later, essentially the same design as Century Old Style but with long ascenders.

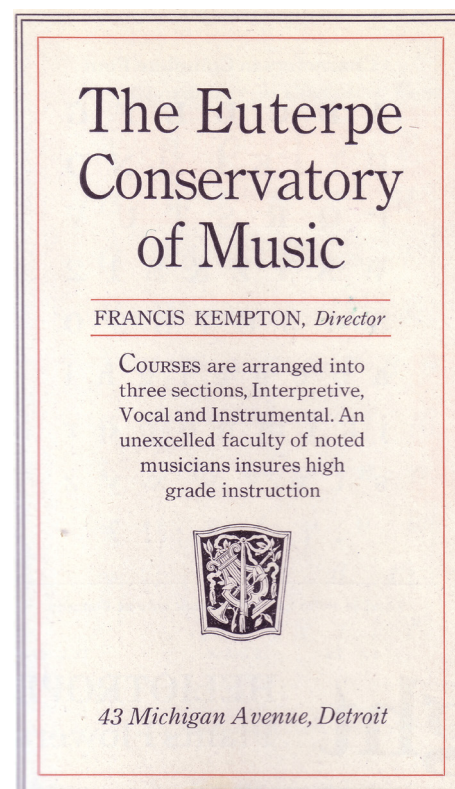
Another Publisher, Another Century

In 1915, Ginn & Company, a textbook publisher, approached ATF with a request for a typeface to use in schoolbooks. Benton had been interested in early studies about typographic legibility and readability, and this seemed a natural project to test some of the new theories. He began his work by doing further research into a study by Clark University on the relationship between legibility of type and the eyesight of children. Other academic studies on typeface legibility also added parameters for the new design. However, since some of the materials suggested various design aspects that make these early explorations into legibility research somewhat suspect, it is probably Benton's intuition and skill as a type designer, more than clinical research, that made Century Schoolbook the typeface it is.

Century Schoolbook's initial appearance was in a 1920 supplement to ATF's large type catalog published several years earlier. This was followed by a much more elaborate showing in the company's typographically famous 1923 typeface catalog.



CENTURY EXPANDED, A NARROW TYPEFACE WITH A WIDE NAME



CENTURY SCHOOLBOOK FROM THE 1923 ATF CATALOG

Attributes

If Century were a sport, it would be cricket; if it were music, it would be soft rock; if it were a flavor — you guessed it — vanilla. This isn't to say that Century design has no distinguishing characteristics; it's just that they are subtle. Only Century Oldstyle stands out as the design iconoclast of the family.

All the Century designs are a little on the chunky side — the Roman weights are just slightly heavier than those of the Times New Roman® typeface. Additionally, the contrast between the thick and thin of character strokes is a little less obvious than in Times New Roman. Century's serifs are also somewhat heavier and longer, with more bracketing than delicate text typefaces like Baskerville or Garamond. Although these traits don't add up to a typeface that's particularly graceful or beautiful, they do bring forward a design that's exceptionally legible and easy on the eye, even in long blocks of text copy.

Decades after Benton retired from ATF, the Century family was enriched with yet another new member, Century Nova, designed by Charles Hughes in 1964. This condensed face follows in the footsteps of Century Expanded and is available in digital form as the SG Century Nova™ typeface.

Although you can't get Morris Fuller Benton's original Century Schoolbook as a digital font, you can get a couple of excellent revivals of the design. First is Linotype's New Century Schoolbook® typeface, which was drawn by the company's design staff in 1980. Next is the Monotype Century Schoolbook™ design, the Monotype revival that's slightly more expanded than Linotype's version, in addition to being more faithful to the Benton original. The Monotype designers had based their work on the 1920 font, while the Linotype version was based on its earlier, machine-set and duplexed metal version of the ATF typeface. Monotype's Century Old Style™ design is also a faithful rendition of ATF's original Century Oldstyle.

ITC Century

International Typeface Corporation also issued an adaptation of the Century design style. The ITC Century® design is a melding of the basic proportions and characteristics of the original Century with Century Expanded and Century Schoolbook. Tony Stan, the designer of ITC Century, based his work primarily on Century Expanded. However, he incorporated the stronger character stroke, smooth weight transfer, serifs and bracketing of Century Schoolbook and thus made the design less delicate and more useable.



A CENTURY BASED ON OLDSTYLE
LETTERFORMS



CENTURY IS MORE INDUSTRIAL
STRENGTH



SG CENTURY NOVA, A DIGITAL
VERSION OF CENTURY NOVA

The Century family is in fact a dynasty! After several generations, it is now enjoying its third century as a powerful typographic communicator.

ITC CENTURY

As with the ITC Garamond™ family, ITC Century was originally released in just Light and Ultra weights. Similar to ITC Garamond, the family was subsequently enlarged to its present size of 16 weights, in response to popular demand.

Easy To Use and To Read

Century typefaces can be used for text copy in virtually any document, but don't count on them to add beauty or distinctiveness to a project. One of the design's greatest attributes is its "industrial strength." It easily survives wide ranges in typesetting parameters: it can be set tight or loose, in long lines or short, with negative linespacing or wide horizontal bands of linespace, and it looks just fine. The only caveat is that letterspacing shouldn't get so tight that serifs touch. Unusually tight letterspacing or kerning creates dark spots in the text that distract readers. Odd shapes may also appear, detracting from the innate legibility of the face.

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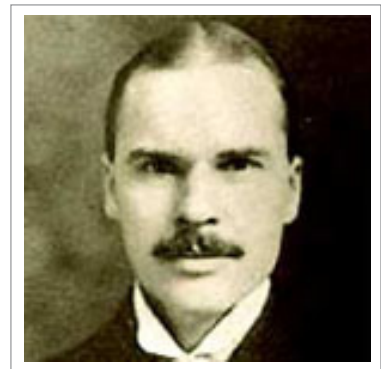
Monotype
Century
Schoolbook

New
Century
Schoolbook

DIGITAL CENTURY SCHOOLBOOKS

ITC Century

**STRONG STROKES AND SMOOTH
WEIGHT TRANSFER**



MORRIS FULLER BENTON

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