



Metro Letters: A Typeface For The Twin Cities

Deborah Littlejohn

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Can a typeface communicate the unique character of a city? This is the question the University of Minnesota Design Institute proposed when it began the project "Typeface: Twin Cities" and commissioned six teams of talented typographers to create a custom font for Minneapolis and St. Paul. "Typeface: Twin Cities" was an experiment to further understand the relationship between typography and urban identity that sought not to brand the cities themselves but to engage the public's awareness and appreciation of design and typography throughout the metro area.

What began as an attempt to discover a subtle form of civic identity evolved into the invention of a truly unique concept. The Twin font is accompanied by a software program that can link the typeface via the Internet with live databases detailing the Twin Cities' urban conditions-wind, temperature, traffic congestion-and these variations visibly affect the type's appearance. Metro Letters recounts the complete process behind the development of a font that aims to visually represent the diversity of the Twin Cities and inspires other designers to devise their own new ideas, innovative prototypes, and creative experiments.

Deborah Littlejohn has been resident design fellow at the University of Minnesota Design Institute since 2002. She is a partner in Gusto, a St. Paul design firm.

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