

# universal lettering

after the wwl, society was able to see just how pain war can bring. the technology that we had been developing betrayed us, instead of helping us. in an effort to articulate the pain that they were experiencing, the germans developed expressionism, seeking to capture how beauty is not always beautiful. members of the berlin dada movement, many of whom were also germans immigrating to berlin, were not amused with the expressionists, believing they were focusing on sitting in their emotions instead of focusing on what they believed the war truly taught them: that nothing matters. russia was also processing its post-war emotions through constructivism, a design movement seeking out a utopia, formed through communism. through these movements, the bauhaus was born. in 1919 in weimar, walter gropius decided to combine the kunstschule, a school that focused on the fine arts, and the kunstgewerbeschule, a school that focused on applied arts, creating the staatliches bauhaus, the national house of building. the program sought to help students realize their full artistic potential by each creating their own styles. however, as times began to shift, so did the focus and location of the school, whose professors began to focus on constructivism, clarity, and function and the building was relocated in Dessau, Germany. the world was continuing to move into an industrial direction. soon, to say that the bauhaus had no inherent style was no longer true. they were striving to be at the head of all graphic design, emphasizing grids, angles, photography, and geometry. though constructivism had large connotations of the russian government, the bauhaus sought to depoliticize design elements and to create international,

war-neutral elements. in 1923, herbert bayer, a bauhaus student, that morphed into a bauhaus professor, decided to work on a font that would be able to encapsulate all of that and create a universal typeface: universal lettering. bayer, who was very influential to the bauhaus, wanted his type to appear very technical, featuring "strokes of a uniform thickness, obviating the calligraphic element of most type." it was created to be printed by machines and feel mechanical, so bayer created the entire typeface "using only the compass, t-square, and triangle", using only perfect circles and straight lines. he also eliminated all capital letters, because he felt it would be easier for people to read and learn. it cuts out what he believed was not needed, making the typeface very streamline and functional. though he was trying to be thorough in creating something that could be culturally androgynous, the germans felt this type was very "ungerman" due to it being based in roman type (while germans were using black letter) and having no capitals (capitals are more important in the german language than many others). eventually, "universal became symptomatic of all that was wrong with the bauhaus in the minds of right-wing politicians." the design of this typeface was never officially turned into a typeface of its own until the digital age, where it is now known as p22 bayer universal. being that the letters are made to be as streamlined as possible, there are several interesting characters, such as the letter "q" having an open counter in order to distinguish it from the "q". also, none of the descenders have the curve to them that we are used to seeing, for example in "q", "p", "q", and "y".

