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The non-designer's design book (4th edition) pdf

Very accessible intro for beginners. I always thought you "just have to have an eye for good design" as if it were an inborn trait... but of course there are principles you can learn, and this book strikes me as a good place to begin. There are plenty of before-vs-after examples, which works really well for me: showing exactly how each principle can be applied. Some of the "after" examples are still cheesy—but at least they are cleaner and more consistent than "before," and I think that's the point. This book *doesn't* teach specific design choices for conveying a specific style (elegant, minimalist, classic, or whatever). It teaches general principles, so that once you choose a style, you can convey *that style* well (even if it's a cheesy style). An untrained person's might convey "I don't know what I'm doing / I made these choices by default." After learning these principles, your work will convey "I know enough design to make these choices deliberately" (even if the style you choose isn't one that other people might choose). Finally, the book has the best novice-level intro to fonts/typefaces I've ever seen (not that I'm an expert). A sensible way to categorize them (finer than just serif vs. sans), helpful examples of what does & doesn't work when, and suggestions for specific nice fonts in each category. I'm also pleased that she doesn't bother wasting time on the difference between "font" vs. "typeface" (which I've heard a million times, but can never remember, and anyway seems only relevant if you're trying not to annoy OCD graphic designers). Notes to self: * In a way, this gives me more appreciation for the "infographics" stuff that statisticians like to make fun of: pretty posters with random numbers made big or called out somehow (but disconnected from each other, not compared on graphs like what "I" think of as "real" data visualization). It does take design skill to make a good infographic—it's just that they highlight isolated numbers in a way that's no different from highlighting isolated words or phrases. Making the "87%" pop out in "87% of statisticians make fun of infographics" is no different than making "Shakespeare" pop out in "Shakespeare was ranked the world's bestest playwright"... whereas making a data visualization that highlights the "connections" between numbers is a different skill. * p.9: "This book is written for [...among others...] statisticians who see that numbers and stats can be arranged in a way that invites reading rather than sleeping" :)* p.13: Her 4 main design principles are Contrast, Repetition, Alignment, and Proximity (making for a memorable acronym). Repetition and Alignment are pretty straightforward. Proximity is a concept that's helping me understand why my page layouts never look good. I always thought it's most logical to space all the elements apart evenly... But that leaves the reader with no groupings to connect related things, and no way to tell what's important if everything is its own separate piece. See p.20-22 for a great example. Contrast seems especially relevant to dataviz too: "If the elements [...] are not the same, then make them very different." E.g. if you want people to distinguish groups on your scatterplot, make the points' colors or shapes *very* different, not just subtly different, and so on.* p.56: "Feel free to add something completely new simply for the purpose of repetition." That is, if you just have text and no graphic that ties your layout together, consider adding something just for the sake of having a motif you can repeat. Nice example on p.82 with the small triangles. Also, "It's fun and effective to pull an element out of a graphic and repeat it." Her clipart teapot (for a tea party invite) has triangles—so she makes more of them and scatters a few about the page nicely.* p.63: "Don't be a wimp." This caught my eye a few times flipping through the book (nice case of repetition!), but I was confused... Now I see what she means: "If the two elements are sort of different, but not really, then you don't have contrast, you have conflict. ... You cannot contrast 12-point type with 14-point type. ... You cannot contrast dark brown with black. Get serious." Also a nice example on p.68: "Are the rules supposed to be two different thicknesses? Or is it a mistake?" Again, very relevant to dataviz, as well as presentation (slideshow) design. Your audience should be able to tell when something changes, and it should be clear that the change is intentional: the contrast should be dramatic. Otherwise they'll be wondering: is that font/color/size really different or am I just seeing things? Does it signify something meaningful (helping me by flagging important differences), or was it put in there at random (just confusing the reader)? This also seems relevant to her discussion of centered alignment on p.38: "The line lengths are not the same, but they are not really different. If you can't instantly tell that the type is centered, why bother?" It's an interesting justification for (almost always) using left- or right-aligned text instead of centered: to help readers see clearly that the alignment is intentional.* p.75: Just don't use Times Roman and Arial/Helvetica. They are so common that, even to the untrained eye, they convey "I use decades-old defaults instead of thinking about what I do," which doesn't send a professional message.* p.100 and 176: good tips on flyers and general design-process tips, which also seem especially helpful for dataviz, academic posters, slideshows, etc. Pick a focal point and really contrast it with everything else. ("...if everything is large, then nothing can really grab a reader's attention.") Make subheadings that also really contrast the body text, so readers can skim to grasp your point and decide if it's worth their attention (or find something that'll hook them), instead of being turned off by a massive wall of text. Use proximity to group sub-parts sensibly, and use repetition and alignment to help readers navigate these sub-parts easily.* p.104: She gets into more detail about typefaces later, but here are concrete suggestions for basic heading-vs-body distinctions. Headings: a heavy black version of a sans serif, such as Eurostile, Formata, Syntax, Frutiger, or Myriad. Body: a classic oldstyle serif (Garamond, Jenson, Caslon, Minion, Palatino, or Warnock Pro Light), or a lightweight slab serif (Clarendon, Bookman, Kepler, or New Century Schoolbook). * p.132-138: Great introduction to typefaces, in 6 categories. I knew about serif, sans serif, and other a.k.a. just plain weird fonts. Her breakdown has 3 groups of serifs (Oldstyle, Modern, Slab Serif): 1 group for Sans Serif; and 2 groups of "other" styles (Script, Decorative). Script vs Decorative seems pretty clear, and both are best used sparingly ("if the thought of reading an entire book in that font makes you wanna throw up, you can probably put it in the decorative pot.") Sans Serifs are those without serifs; straightforward enough. Also, they usually are "monoweight"—"letterforms are the same thickness all the way around" unlike most serif fonts. But a few Sans Serifs do have some thick/thin transition, which makes them more similar to Serifs (and therefore makes them worse choices if you're trying to contrast them with a Serif). Often good for headings. As for the three Serif categories: Oldstyle are classic, invisible, and usually the best for long body text. They are not monoweight—there is a moderate transition between thin and thick parts of the strokes on each letter, and if you draw a line through the thin parts of the 'o' or 'a' it'll be diagonal rather than vertical. The serifs on lowercase letters are slanted. Modern have more dramatic differences between the thick and thin parts of the strokes, and a line through the thin parts will be vertical ("vertical stress"). The serifs are thin and horizontal, not diagonal. More elegant but less readable than Oldstyle. Slab Serifs are like Moderns but thick all around: almost no difference between thick & thin, but still vertical stress and horizontal serifs. Readable and clean.* p.158: I didn't know there was a difference between italic vs. oblique or slanted typefaces. You can take the "roman" (standard?) version of the typeface and just slant everything, but the "italic" version is entirely redrawn—some of the letters look substantially different than just slanted versions of the roman ones. If you're using italics for contrast, make it a real contrast by using actual italics vs. roman, and not just regular vs. slanted roman.* p.170: "Try to verbalize what you see. If you can put the dynamics of the relationship into words, you have power over it. ... Name the problem, then you can create the solution." Again, very relevant to learning dataviz by critique as well.* p.179: "As a college teacher, all the quizzes, tests, and projects I give are 'open book, open mouth.' Students can always use their notes, they can use their books, they can talk with each other, they can talk with me. ... I was much more likely to retain the correct information if I wrote down the correct information. Rather than guessing and then writing down a wrong answer, the process of finding the correct answer on a test was much more productive." Might be worth trying next time I teach dataviz. ...more

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