

## **Avenir, the future for Amsterdam**

**By Henk Gianotten, August 07<sup>th</sup> 2003**, In recent decades the capital of the Netherlands has experienced both, rapid growth and the decentralization of its local government and all in a period when the expectations of its citizens and visitors were becoming more varied and demanding.

With all these changes the city council and its allied services felt an increasing need for a unifying visual identity that would be inextricably bound to the culture of their organization. An identity flexible enough to represent the diverse services within the municipality, yet links each of these with the larger whole. This unifying style also needed to make a confident visual statement for use on printed material, packaging, clothing, website, and a fleet of city-owned vehicles. Certainly the search for this new and clearly defined "face" would be an almost impossible task to present to designers.

Deciding on a new "visual identity" for non-profit and government organizations, then developing and maintaining it is an extremely difficult process, that is largely dependent on the components that make up the total identity.

It is far easier to create a unified appearance for two hundred shoe stores than it is to create a visual style that links tens of distinctly different departments and services of one local authority. To fully appreciate the complexity of this image-change it is necessary to look at the history of Amsterdam. It has always been a very liberal city, and its municipal services, like its citizens, have evolved within a system long accustomed to a great diversity of opinionated "faces". The challenge for Amsterdam was not only to visually link all its services and utilities, but to also create its own corporate image.

The project was begun more than four years ago when the city council made a thorough study to determine the distinguishing characteristics of its citizens and services. Based on the results a "character and face" were established for Amsterdam: straightforward, daring, friendly, explicit, reliable, headstrong, imaginative, enterprising and authentic. Any typography or design used to express this "face" would also need to be clear, direct and straightforward.

Once this was established the city council had enough information to invite designers to present their ideas within an organized competition. Design bureau Eden emerged as the winner and was asked to create the complete house-style. However, the task proved of such magnitude that the Amsterdam design studio Thonik was called in to assist.

## **United diversity**

For the basic house-style a number of characteristics had to be agreed upon. The three St. Andrew's crosses and the colour red are the most distinctive symbols. The red crosses, well-known throughout the world, are set one above the other in a vertical pattern. In addition to red, the colours of the basic house-style are black and two variants of grey. Using this as a base municipal services and city districts are allowed the addition of extra elements and a palette of 16 extra colours to create their own sub-house-styles. A surprisingly simple system for the use of these extra colours has been set up by the designers.

For all these "brands" or "products" the Avenir typeface must be used. This "symmetrical", straightforward sans-serif of Adrian Frutiger is well suited to the identity of Amsterdam.

By choosing an established font instead of having one specially designed, the designers have given availability top priority. The Avenir is used in the roman, medium, heavy and black weight.

For straight text a choice can be made from Avenir and DTL Documenta designed by Frank Blokland of the Netherlands. For budgetary reasons the Arial and Times New Roman are used for internal communication on PC's, while Verdana is the choice for the small sizes of types on the website. In the latter choice, screen legibility prevails over style.

For products such as reports, brochures, presentations, websites, posters and vehicle logo's, basic layout designs have been created. All product descriptions, EPS and GIF files are stored in the intranet and are available for participating partners via the internet.

Over time, the more than fifty different house-styles now being used in Amsterdam will be replaced by the new sub-house-styles. No compulsory time-frame has been imposed, thus allowing each department or service to decide autonomously the date of implementation.

## **Ideograms**

If a service or department needs to have its own "identity on brand level", it is possible, after consulting with the municipal project bureau, to develop a specific logo. Departments are free to use external designers and there is relative freedom given for the application of additional design elements.

There are, of course, some very specific guidelines.

The extra symbol must be placed under the three St. Andrew's crosses to form a continuous pattern. Further it must be a two-dimensional flat symbol which is easily recognized by the citizen as a link with the sender.

The symbol may be of either abstract or figurative design and must confirm to regulations on colours and size. The word 'Gemeente Amsterdam' must always appear in the Avenir typeface. The designers have also established "suggestions" for sub-house-styles for use on internal and external reports, brochures, magazines, posters and other carriers.

All this may seem to impose too limiting for creative design, but the products created thus far by a variety of in- and external studios and Dutch designers provide evidence to the contrary. The guidelines prevent chaos and, in the hands of professionals, can result in surprisingly creative expressions.

### **The pace of change**

In the past few months more than ten different sections have taken the first steps into the changeover to the new house-style. The transformation is especially visible on the completely restyled website [www.amsterdam.nl](http://www.amsterdam.nl). For this, highly innovative navigation and information structure techniques have been used; with simple symbols the user is led to internal and external links, anchor links and downloadable PDF's.

The website was a use for which the new house-style could be implemented in a relatively short time. The new style will also quickly find its way to latest reports, posters and up-to-date printed information. But, for most of the services and departments the implementation will be gradual. Like most cities, Amsterdam is publicly funded and must use these funds with care. A clean sweep to put a new visual image in place would create unnecessary – and therefore unacceptable – expense.

So, existing printed material will first be used up, city vehicles will only be provided with new logos as necessary, and individual city districts will not change their style until they themselves come to recognize the advantage of doing so. Design bureau Eden and the municipal project bureau are available to guide the various services and to ensure that both internal and external designers are able to make the most expedient choices.

Although there was some initial scepticism, the various partners involved are now extremely satisfied with what has been achieved. The city council has successfully established guidelines for visual representation, and in doing so has enhanced the dynamic image of the city. Nor, as some feared, has creativity suffered.

A large number of designers and DTP-professionals at studios and printers have discovered that working in accordance with clear guidelines can raise the quality of their designs and elevate their reputation. The challenge of a difficult assignment can lead to a finer result.

In fact, the city of Amsterdam and the designers received the Netherlands House-style Prize 2003; a gratifying recognition.

### **The Avenir is a great success in the Netherlands**

Adrian Frutiger, the internationally successful type designer of, among others, the Apollo, Centennial, Didot, Frutiger, Glypha, Icone, President, Serifa, Univers and Versailles, worked for more than two years on the designing of the Avenir. He is highly renowned for his successes in the design of sans-serifs, and with the Avenir he proved that he could master even the most difficult ones.

Design studio Thonic has used the Avenir for many years and with great success on both the design of individual printed material and complete house-styles. Nikki Gonnissen and Thomas Widdershoven show their work, complete with many examples, in the book Thonic which is available in several languages.

The Avenir is issued by Linotype Library and is made in PostScript, TrueType and OpenType in the weights light, book, roman, medium, heavy and black. Six oblique weights are also available. The city of Amsterdam's website is [www.amsterdam.nl](http://www.amsterdam.nl).

**From November 2003 on** Linotype Library GmbH will be offering the new Avenir Next, a product belonging to Linotype's Platinum Collection. Avenir Next then offering many more options for professional use, like a range of 48 weights, containing the necessary fine graduations, true Obliques, Small Caps and condensed weights. Avenir Next has been reworked by Adrian Frutiger himself in cooperation with Akira Kobayashi, Type Director of Linotype Library GmbH. For details, orders and pricing please contact Linotype directly at [sales@linotype.com](mailto:sales@linotype.com).

We are available if you would like further information or if you would like us to send you a digital photo of the event:

Linotype Library GmbH  
Du-Pont-Straße 1  
D-61352 Bad Homburg  
Phone: +49 (0) 61 72 484-24 60  
Fax: +49 (0) 61 72 484-499  
E-Mail: [info@linotype.com](mailto:info@linotype.com)

You will find more information as well as typeface application samples on the Internet at [www.linotype.com](http://www.linotype.com).

Linotype Library GmbH, a member of the Heidelberg Group, was founded 116 years ago. Its headquarters are in Bad Homburg, Germany. Based on this long tradition Linotype Library develops state-of-the-art font technology, and today offers more than 5,500 original fonts, covering the whole typographic spectrum from antique to modern, from east to west, and from classical to experimental. Because of the browser and the navigation system FontExplorer, all of them (in PostScript™ and TrueType™ format) are available not only on CD, but also can be ordered online for instant download at [www.linotype.com](http://www.linotype.com).

In addition to supplying digital fonts, Linotype Library also offers comprehensive and individual consultation and support services for font applications in worldwide (corporate) communications.