

FONT
REVIEWS

Jill Bells'
Clover, Swank, and Gigi

Creative Alliance/Agfa/Monotype/ITC

Reviewer: Ed Fierro

"When developing a script font, search for the ideal, but don't idealize the search." These words, from an unknown typographer, urge designers to look for the unpredictable, even eccentric, aspects of handwriting and hand lettering which can be built into a successful typeface.

Experienced type users have long appreciated this signature quality in Jill Bell, type designer and lettering artist. Known for her ability to create type that appears handwritten and presents handsome, complex settings, Bell has developed many fonts that are favorites among designers.

Among Bell's fonts are Clover, Swank, and Gigi. They share a number of qualities, some barely noticed under casual observation. However, each also achieves a unique personality that depends partly on subtle changes in scale and direction within a format of handwritten appearance.

Clover, with its even stroke weight and harmonious, rounded letterforms, evokes a friendly personality. Although

the baseline conformity is uniform throughout the characters, changes in lowercase letter height give the font an animated appearance. This is enhanced by the descending strokes of some characters – *h, k, l, m, n, s, u,* and *x* which fall below the baseline and maintain the font's style. A tightly curled stroke is featured in the counter of the unusual lowercase *a*.

A variety of curled strokes also defines the uppercase, which includes the more compact *A, G,* and *S* in comparison to the wider stance of many of the other characters. The curled, descending strokes of the *M* and *N* add vertical scale, while the descending stroke of the *J* is a handsome resolution to a difficult style problem. The only hint of dissonance here is the *C*: it could be argued that a slight change of direction would be more in keeping with the rest of the uppercase letterforms.

Many opportunities for interesting variations of kerning and baseline shifts can be seen in Clover's lively, almost bouncing settings. The font's strong personality can adapt itself to more condensed word shapes and individual letter positions that emphasize movement.

Swank with its unusual assortment of shape variations, make this one of the

more interesting faces in use today.

The rougher, sharply angled lines of the font allude to true pen-based handwriting, with many tightly curled finishing strokes that recall those in Clover. The descenders of the lowercase *f* and *y* are done in handwritten format, while those of the *g* and *j* are finished with the curled stroke. Enhanced vertical flow and the curled strokes are also included in the *k, s, t,* and *w,* adding to the font's balance of shapes.

Swank's uppercase members include many beautifully detailed characters. The crossbar of the *A*, for example, is a single stroke, while that of the *H* is drawn in handwritten format. The *H* is also significantly shorter than the *A*, yet they exist harmoniously. The dynamic vertical strokes of the *B* lend an added flavor of handwriting's randomness, while the curled stroke of the lower counter maintains the style.

Combinations of curled stroke endings also make for interesting characters here. The *T, F, X,* and *K,* for example, all include at least two curled lines each, with variations in line direction and stress. Only the *J* appears not quite up to the stylistic flair of the other letterforms, considering the handsomely finished loops of the *G* and *Y*.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N
 O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
 a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0
 ! @ # \$ % & * () a / D < > f i f l † ° ☆ ♥



Clover



Known for her ability to create type that appears handwritten and presents handsome, complex settings. Bell has developed many fonts that are favorites among designers.

If you don't want the
Light of the Silvery Moon
to tarnish
Play it on a Wurlitzer

Original lettering from which
Swank is based

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R

S T U V W X Y Z

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

! @ # \$ % ^ & * () + ☺ / € < > fi fl † ° · Swank Bold

Known for her ability to create type that appears handwritten and presents handsome, complex settings. Bell has developed many fonts that are favorites among designers. ☺

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

! @ # \$ % ^ & * () + ☺ / € < > fi fl † ° · Swank



The nonranging elements of the numeral set will make designers want to use numbers in every project that includes the font. Interestingly, the curled strokes of the 3, 5, and 9 recall the numerals of John Bell's (1746-1831) type.

Made popular through wide usage in everything from newspaper ads to music packaging, Gigi includes many subtle scale changes in its lowercase that add to its charm. The *a*, for example, almost appears too small if compared to the other characters. The *f* and *h* are, likewise, seemingly oversized with their prominent ascenders. Yet in actual word composition, the font harmonizes very well with its combination of scale adjustments and angles.

Gigi's curled strokes may echo some of the attitude of Clover and Swank, but here they seem to become more integral to the letters. The *o*, *s*, and *g*, for example, are largely defined by these shapes. Significant variation in stroke width adds emphasis to the large ascenders – *k* and *l*, for example – while remaining more even in descenders (*q*, *y*, *z*).

Among the uppercase letters are many style attributes that customize individual letters within the active design of the font. The deep, curled descender of the *J* and the uneven height of the *W* are standouts. Subtle changes in direction and shape are seen in the cross bars of the *A*, *F*, and *H*, each enhancing the balance of their respective characters.

Gigi's hand lettered appearance and many thick/thin stroke changes make for energetic settings. Some designers prefer to kern words uniformly to reduce overall width, but Gigi's visual signature is unmistakable.

For designers who often rely on script faces, there are many choices in the more traditional, formal areas. Fonts like Clover, Swank, and Gigi offer an alternative for those applications where a specific personality is required. They're as much a part of a complete type library as the standard choices for text and display, adding some distinctive, versatile style.

Ed Fierro is a graphic design and principal at Evans/Fierro Associates in Santa Barbara, California. He also writes for *Critique*, *ID* and *HOW*.

A B C D E F G H I J K
 L M N O P Q R S T U
 V W X Y Z
 a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p
 q r s t u v w x y z ♣ ♠
 ♥ ✱ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0
 ! \$ % & * () / < > fi fl . Gigi



Known for her ability to create type that appears handwritten and presents handsome, complex settings. Bell has developed many fonts that are favorites among designers.

