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ISTD TypoGraphic 67  
'I wonder' issue

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A totally Dutch issue created, edited and designed by David Quay  
with contributions from:

Jan Middendorp: Amsterdam bridge lettering

Ramiro Espinoza: Leo Beukeboom – Bars, beer and belettering

David Quay: Benno Wissing's Ahoy alphabet

Chantel Hendriksen: The Hallen Gallery corporate identity

Arie Lenoir: Dutch printers and their position in the design industry

Summary and final word: David Quay and Roel Stavorinus

I would like to dedicate this issue to the memory of Tony Forster FISTD,  
a good friend, mentor, letter designer and calligrapher who died in April 2008.

David Quay, June 2008

I wondered a lot when I first moved to Holland.

At the end of the sixteenth century, how did this small country stand up against Spain,  
the 'mightiest' empire on earth, and in just a few years become the greatest trading  
nation and maritime power, giving the British fleet its worst naval defeat in history?

During the seventeenth century 'De Gouden Eeuw', The Golden Century, produced such  
exceptional figures as the painters Rembrandt, and Vermeer, and philosophers Erasmus  
and Spinoza. The cities of Amsterdam, Leiden, Haarlem, Middenburg and Delft grew to  
magnificence. Dutch painters produced over eight million paintings in that time, many  
for export.

This history has a direct bearing on the design situation today.



In the 'Roze Buurt', Red Light District of Amsterdam, this prostitute has a beautifully lettered sign, but slowly the area is being cleaned up. Already many of the cabin windows where prostitutes sit are given over to young fashion designers to display their work. This is part of the city's strategy to give itself a more upmarket image and so attract more 'creative people' to the city.

*Super Dutch*, one of many books in recent years promoting Dutch design and architecture.  
Design: Mevis & Van Deursen

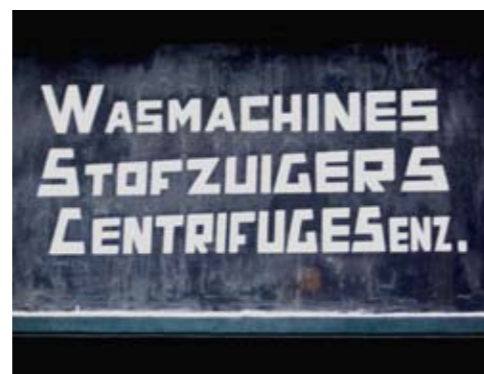


Chest of drawers and chair.  
Designer: Tejo Remy, 1991,  
available from Droog Design.



Bno (Dutch design organization) annual appears every two years.  
Designer: René Knip.

Vernacular lettering Vijzelstraat, Amsterdam, destroyed 2007.



I have been living in Amsterdam for the last eight years. What initially attracted me was its design culture and being able to cycle everywhere. Everything was exciting and new, but after the honeymoon period, normal daily life takes over, and I started to question whether Dutch design was all it seemed. This issue of *TypoGraphic* explores some of these issues and whether the Dutch design phenomenon is what it seems.

What perception does the average tourist have of Holland: a country of clogs, tulips and windmills, or beer, drugs and sex; or 'design land', which is how the Dutch government is now trying to portray their country. At a recent gallery opening of Dutch design in Tokyo, the organiser, Margo Konings said, 'Het is de bedoeling dat we Nederland als designland internationaal op de kaart zetten', 'We mean to set Holland on the world map as the international designland'.

Erik Spiekermann once said the Netherlands is the most over-designed country in the world! In a recent book on graphic design, *A Century of Innovation*, Alston Purvis and Cees de Jong describe 'how the national character of the Dutch was formed by the eternal battle against nature'. This helped to produce a very self-reliant, independent and confident people. With a population of 16 million in a land one-sixth of the size of England, it is the most overcrowded country in Europe.

The Dutch say themselves, 'God made the world, but the Dutch made the Netherlands'. This is certainly true. A large percentage of the land has been reclaimed from the sea, and the rivers in the south are heavily protected by dykes. The hand of man has left little to chance and nature has been totally constrained. Twenty-seven per cent of the land is below sea level and another 33 per cent is seriously threatened by flooding. From the twelfth century onwards, everything has been meticulously designed, windmills, bridges, dykes, storm barriers and canals. Windmills have now become a Dutch cliché but at one time they drained and kept the land dry. The Dutch now use electric pumps, and if stopped, half the country would be under 30 cm of water within 48 hours.

Much of today's wealth was founded in the 'Gouden Eeuw', the golden years of the seventeenth century, when the Dutch were masters of the sea and the greatest traders in the world. The patrician class invested heavily in culture; in Amsterdam there were 24,000 painters in a city of 200,000. With few natural resources, heavy industrialization was impossible – trade, fishing and agriculture were and still are the mainstay of the economy. Today the Dutch export 75 per cent\* of agricultural produce abroad. There is still a heavy emphasis on the importance of culture, with many funds and foundations investing in the arts and design, an ethos fully supported financially by the government, who know that creativity, innovation and knowledge economy (kenniseconomie)\* are the keys to the future. The foundations have been taken over from the patricians, and many private businesses also have important art collections as with the former PPT, post office.

\*The Central Bureau of Statistics says that 75 per cent of all agriculture (including the products that are made from it, e.g. cheese) is going abroad.

\*Centraal Planbureau

The Dutch are very practical – the Dutch designer does not look far for inspiration: a pile of old drawers found in the street waiting for the dustmen, or old rags can be utilized and turned into something useful and attractive. The graphic designer René Knip is a case in point and for him vernacular lettering is full of inspiration. Allied to a very Calvinistic outlook, the Dutch reject anything that is trivial or superfluous. Dutch design is not flashy or flamboyant; the products of Alessi the Italian manufacturer are far too self-consciously designed and styled for a luxury market to go down well with the Dutch public. Conspicuous wealth is frowned upon – better scruffy, old, battered brogues than shiny leather Italian shoes! To quote the 'Prensela Stichting' website: 'Nederlands design heeft goede inhoud en fantastische functionaliteit, maar is niet sensueel en niet esthetisch' – 'Dutch design has good content and fantastic functionality, but is not sensual and not aesthetic.'

René Knip  
[www.atelierreneknip.nl](http://www.atelierreneknip.nl)

Dutch design is a clash of egos, with some designers trying to stamp their personal signature on every piece of work. This sometimes leads to very interesting results and occasionally the client-message is totally sublimated to the designer's wishes. A joking comment was heard several years ago from one of the directors of DieTwee, 'Those Two', a very successful graphic design company in Utrecht: 'In America the designer does what the client wants, in the UK the designer does what the client needs and here we do

DieTwee  
[www.dietwee.nl](http://www.dietwee.nl)

'Komen jullie weer bij ons eten?'  
Come over again and have dinner with us? An invitation to eat with a Muslim family in the month of Ramadan.  
Poster design: Koweiden Postma.

'Snelbuffet', lettering created by René Knip for HEMA. René Knip specializes in environmental lettering.



Small posters sites including rounded pillars are used to promote both cultural and commercial events.



Above: Four posters from this spring season. From left to right:  
Mevis en Van Deursen  
Maureen Mooren  
Studio Dumbar  
DieTwee.

Right: Robin Uleman's large format catalogue for Vreeman Publishers shows two distinct typographic styles. Placed one over the other – is this a search for novelty?

Far right: Experimental Jetset's poster for the play, 'Kliene Oogjes', Little Eyes. Shows their very distinctive and simple and playful approach to typography.



what the designer wants'. This is of course not true in most cases, but the comment does reflect a certain attitude of the designer/client relationship; and most clients are very happy with what their designer does for them.

Jacques Koeweiden says that there are many Dutch designers who only work in the cultural sector and on government-sponsored projects. They sit in their 'ivory towers' and look down on designers who work for commercial clients. A young designer recently said to him, 'How can you work for HEMA (HEMA is a Dutch chain with at least one department store in every city), it's such commercial work'. Jacques replied, 'That his company's design for HEMA is seen by millions of people a year, whereas culturally-sponsored work is mainly seen by an elite few, and the designers who do such work have no real connection with everyday people. Without the heavy subsidies, in his view, they would not be able to survive in the 'real world', adding that in the UK designers have the versatility to work for both a museum and a supermarket, and that they must do so as there aren't any subsidies. Design must stand on its own two feet! Jacques Koeweiden is against all forms of subsidy.

Jacques continued, 'A good designer should be able to work in both the cultural and commercial sector, and what is the definition of cultural design? A museum or a theatre group is also trying to sell itself, to attract visitors, even more so today in competition for the public's leisure hours. Mobile phones, i-pods, window-shopping in HEMA are also part of present day culture, so why in Holland is designing for this market seen as 'getting your hands dirty'? What gives us the right as designers to discriminate between what we perceive as high or low-brow activities? We are supposed to serve all people, not just the cultural elite. Two Dutch students from the ArteZ Academie, Arnhem, discussing this comment from Jacques Koeweiden said that this elitist attitude is already endemic in their academy.

Government support and financial funding from various cultural foundations for many cultural projects puts Dutch designers in a unique position. Sheltered from the harsh reality of the market place, designers have more creative freedom and opportunity for experimentation, resulting in a rich, diverse and sometimes self-indulgent visual culture. That is not to say that designers from other countries are less creative, but lack the greenhouse conditions and tradition of experimentation that are unique to Holland.

The exhibition entitled the 'Golden Age – Highlights of Dutch Graphic Design (1890–1990)' which toured through eastern Europe in 2008, ending 2009 in Madrid, is supported and organised by the 'Prensela Stichting'. In Bucharest, at the exhibition opening, the Dutch minister of cultural co-operation, said that the English are far more advanced than the Dutch in promoting design, and that the connection between industry and design is on a much higher level. Hans Olderrarris, 010 publisher, later retorted that the Dutch have no industry to connect to! Olderrarris also said it was very necessary to subsidise small projects – books about culture, artists, architects, and designers – and to promote exhibitions abroad, to bring revenue, albeit indirectly, back into the country.

Dutch cities are very small, therefore there is little space for the gigantic billboards seen in other countries. Along the Dutch highways, distracting posters and clutter are forbidden. For this reason the cities are full of small round poster sites where posters both commercial and cultural are pasted. They provide a rich and varied playground, where often the most important elements of design are the interesting uses of typefaces and typography. The Netherlands provides a rich typographic landscape. With all manner of styles in all directions it is also often a confusing visual landscape, with some graphic designers 'digging up' retro typefaces from old American ITC catalogues, with others into baroque typography and patterns. The last few years has seen the rise and success of three young designers called 'Experimental Jetset' who recently designed the new corporate identity for the temporary Stedelijk Museum CS, Amsterdam. They believe they are the heirs of Wim Crouwel. By revisiting the 'International Style' with clarity, freshness and openness, their work has created a new design dialogue.

Many Dutch graphic designers say that the great days of Dutch graphic design are over, that in a society that has everything, there is nothing more to do, and that design is slowly being eroded by marketing. In some instances this is true, but Dutch designers

Jacques Koeweiden is a partner of the Amsterdam based design company Koeweiden Postma.  
[www.koeweidenpostma.com](http://www.koeweidenpostma.com)

On graduating students can apply for 'startstipendium' (start up stipendium) or a WWIK (law for work and income for artists) and for special projects they can apply for funding from the Mondriaan Stichting (foundation).  
[www.mondriaanfoundation.nl](http://www.mondriaanfoundation.nl)

The Prensela Stichting is a Dutch organisation that supports and promotes design and fashion.  
[www.prensela.org](http://www.prensela.org)

Hans Olderrarris is a partner of 010 Publishers.  
[www.010publishers.nl](http://www.010publishers.nl)

Experimental Jetset  
[www.experimentaljetset.com](http://www.experimentaljetset.com)

Robin Uleman  
[www.robinuleman.nl](http://www.robinuleman.nl)

Dance piece, 'Twenty' made for the Nederlands Dans Theater, Peter Bil'ak in collaboration with choreographer Lukas Timulak.



still find new avenues to explore. With the link between all the arts becoming increasingly more blurred, designers are seeing themselves as communicators in whatever field they wish to express themselves. Type designer Peter Bil'ak is a perfect example, besides designing typefaces he also choreographs modern dance.

Peter Bil'ak  
[www.typotheque.com](http://www.typotheque.com)  
[www.timulak.com/oneness/den\\_haag](http://www.timulak.com/oneness/den_haag)

Dutch design still inspires. Droog has influenced furniture and product design worldwide even though it's now fallen into mannerism and its new showroom has become an up-market souvenir shop for chic tourists. The Academy in Eindhoven still attracts many international students, as does the Rietveld, Amsterdam. Masters students from last year's Sandberg Institute ask difficult and critical questions about our graphic design and communication profession. Many are concerned about the way graphic design and media is being increasingly used as a marketing and propaganda tool – that design, which in Holland for a long time has been used for social benefit, is no longer helping people but working against them. This shows that many young Dutch design students are still concerned with the moral issues of what we do.

Design Academy Eindhoven  
[www.designacademy.nl](http://www.designacademy.nl)

Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam  
[www.gerritrietveldacademie.nl](http://www.gerritrietveldacademie.nl)

Sandberg Institute, Amsterdam  
[www.sandberg.nl](http://www.sandberg.nl)

In 2007 the Freddy Heineken bridge was rebuilt, and the letters were also newly cast. The letters are cast in one piece along with the bar that holds them all together.

'Gemeentegiro', Council giro, also attributed to Anton Kurvers.

Museumbrug, original letters.



Living in the centre of Amsterdam I was always intrigued by the lettering on bridges, of which there are nearly 2000. Nearly every bridge has its name in the same letter style that came out of the Amsterdam School of Architecture from between the wars. It is not a typeface I would ever want to recreate, as for me it would steal its soul. Now it can be used for a 'weekend away in Amsterdam' brochure, and even for things that hold no connection whatever with the Netherlands. Many design writers have conjectured as to who the original designer was, but it still remains an enigma. Jan Middendorp in his book, *Dutch Type*, possibly made the best guess. He recently came across a young Argentinian designer, Ramiro Espinoza, living in Amsterdam who had digitized his own interpretation of the typeface in three weights. He too has researched into its history and came to the same conclusion as Jan Middendorp who gave me permission to reproduce his text.

Jan Middendorp: Amsterdam bridge lettering

Jan Middendorp is an independent writer and designer based in Berlin. This extract was taken from his book *Dutch Type*, published in 2004 by 010 Publishers. Email: [jan@dorpdal.com](mailto:jan@dorpdal.com)

Educated as an architect, Anton Kurvers (1889–1940) was closely connected to the Amsterdam School, but was never involved in the kind of large-scale town planning project that Berlae, De Klerk or Kramer took on. Kurvers worked as a painter, decorator, designer and graphic artist and became deputy head of the Public Works office in Amsterdam. He is best known for the postboxes and the postage stamp machine he designed for the Dutch PTT (commissioned by J F van Royen) and a postbox for the Amsterdam City Bank (Gemeentegiro). He was also a prolific designer of books and posters. In this printed work he explored a limited number of constructed letterforms, some of which were based on the hand-lettered captions in his architectural sketches. These alphabets are typical of the Amsterdam School of Architecture: part geometry, part decoration; defying typographic tradition; original and unorthodox, sometimes to the point of being illegible.

The Amsterdam School is a style of architecture that arose in the early part of the 20th century in the Netherlands.

The style, highly influenced by Expressionism, was characterized by the use of rounded, organic façades with many purely decorative, non-functional elements such as spires, sculptures and 'ladder' windows (with horizontal bars reminiscent of ladder steps).

A working drawing of the bridge letters was made in 1952 by the department of 'Publieke Werken', Public Works. Piet Schreuders thinks that they overdraw existing cast letters giving an inaccurate representation.



The most famous alphabet the Amsterdam School produced is one whose maker has remained anonymous, the 'Amsterdamse Brugletter', Amsterdam Bridge Type, made by, or for, the Public Works department. Amsterdam boasts around 2,000 bridges and sluices, most of which have a name. Somewhere around 1930 it was decided that all bridges with names were to have identical cast steel nameplates, attached to the railings on either side of the bridge. The steel alphabet of capitals designed for this purpose consists of typical engineers' or architects' letterforms (that is: with no typographic refinements) in a style related to certain letters on Amsterdam School buildings. The designer Piet Schreuders, who was asked in 1989 to supervise the letterspacing of bridge names made with newly cast Brugletters, researched the alphabet and hypothesized that it might have been drawn by the architects Kramer or Van der Mey. I would say that Anton Kurvers is a more likely candidate. Not only did he work at the Public Works department, he also designed book covers using letters that have various traits in common with the Brugletter.

The movement had its origins in the office of architect Eduard Cuypers in Amsterdam. Although Cuypers wasn't a progressive architect himself, he did give his employees plenty of opportunity to develop. The three leaders of the Amsterdam School – Michel de Klerk, Johan van der Mey and Piet Kramer – all worked for Cuypers until about 1910. Impetus for the movement also came from the city. In 1905 Amsterdam was the first city to establish a building code, and the city hired Johan van der Mey afterwards, in the special position as 'Aesthetic Advisor', to bring artistic unity and vision to its built environment.

Around 1992 the bridge typeface was digitally revived by Amsterdam-based designer René Knip, working at Studio Anthon Beeke. In early 2003, Argentinian type designer Ramiro Espinoza released a rather literal adaptation of the bridge alphabet, Mariabrug.





Het Schip (The Ship) 1917, is one of the most important social housing buildings of the Amsterdam School. Architect Michel de Klerk (1884–1923). Original house numbers from the same period.



Ramiro studied at the 'Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunst' Royal Academy of Art, The Hague. It was a very formal training with an accent on calligraphy, which formed the basis of the letterforms. I have the impression that he wasn't always that happy there. These cliques were very exclusive and if you were not part of one you felt excluded. We talked a lot about type design and the differences between one culture and another. These conversations helped to define my thoughts: the Dutch typefaces reflect the Dutch personality, being very workmanlike and pragmatic – Scala Sans is a good example. Many Dutchmen eat, because like a car they need fuel, they eat good basic food and many like to eat at six o'clock sharp. The Spanish (Ramiro is Argentinian) eat late and for pleasure, they talk with animation and with many hand gestures; these find their way into their type design. A curve of a letter is not purely functional, it can also be exaggerated for pleasure, as with Picasso's drawings of voluptuous women. This 'vreugde', joy, is not found in many Dutch type designs, a Calvinistic mentality still exists, especially in the North; if you have too much pleasure there will be some form of retribution!

Ramiro Espinoza became interested in type design when he was a student at the 'Universidad Nacional del Litoral' in Santa Fe, Argentina. After graduating he taught Typography at the Universidad de Buenos Aires (under the direction of Silvia Gonzalez). In 2003 he moved to the Netherlands and studied at the KABK in The Hague. Since then he has been a contributor to 'Tipográfica' and 'Typo' design magazines and he has also designed several type families and researched vernacular Dutch lettering. [www.re-type.com](http://www.re-type.com)

KABK, Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunst. [www.kabk.nl](http://www.kabk.nl)

When I first started to visit Amsterdam I fell in love with the traditional brown cafés with wooden floors sprinkled with white sand and 'Persjes', small Persian carpets on the tables instead of tablecloths. Many of the cafés had their name painted directly on to their glass windows in a very distinctive script. Slowly the names are disappearing, and those that are left are slowly fading through window cleaning. Ramiro told me about an old retired sign painter, Leo Beukeboom, who painted many of the cafés on request from the Heineken Brewery. The art of sign writing is now virtually dead. Leo was the last and nobody wanted to be his apprentice (ah!) and those few that are still sign writing are in Leo's eyes 'Clumsy clods'! Ramiro had a long conversation with him and here I give the edited version. I also visited Leo to talk to him myself, and became immediately captivated by the animated stories of his life. Often Leo would burst into singing old Dutch or German songs; Leo's mother was German and came from a poor family arriving in Amsterdam in 1923 with only a suitcase. She was an accomplished pianist and knew all the German classic writers – Goethe, Schiller, Rilke – and she learnt to speak perfect Dutch without an accent, which helped her during the war years when Germans were heavily despised. Leo also speaks perfect Dutch. This surprised me as he lives in an area where the equivalent of English Cockney is spoken. He only speaks a few words of English, but loves his tawny English port!

Leo has probably done more in branding Amsterdam than any design group could possibly do. Over thirty years he has painted thousands of cafés and restaurants using his own particular letter style. Now we live in an age when the same plastic peel-off letters cover the whole globe; Leo's lettering was always different for every assignment. He was always required to paint the Heineken logo in Egyptian. He painted it from memory and every one is slightly different. Leo hates the way everything is becoming standardised and is losing its character.

Ramiro Espinoza: Leo Beukeboom – Bars, beer and belettering

Ramiro Espinoza interviewed Leo Beukeboom several times between 2006–2007. Here is an edited version.

Leo Beukeboom was born in 1943 in De Pijp, Amsterdam, a working-class area built in the late nineteenth century behind the Heineken Brewery. At its heart was, and still is, the Albert Cuyp market. Leo had seven sisters and two brothers. The family of twelve lived in an apartment of three small rooms in Van Ostadestraat. Leo adds: 'We were poor, but I came from a very warm nest, we were a good Catholic family. I lived there, up three flights of stairs above the prostitutes.' The prostitutes are still there today!

Leo continues about his further education: 'I wanted to go the Radio Technical School in Hilversum, but it was far too expensive for my parents. I then tried to join the Film Academy, but I had only finished basic secondary school level so I went to the Grafisch Lyceum, Amsterdam, instead. After graduation my mother read a job advert in the newspaper for a handy young man, who was good at drawing. It was at Koersen's, a printers owned by Mr Koersen who was a well known member of the 'Tweede Kamer', Second House for the political party KVP 'Katholieke Volks Partij', People's Catholic Party, from 1956–1962. During the war they printed 'Het Parool' – the resistance, and therefore illegal newspaper.



The Café Mulder a typical old 'bruin café' on the corner of Vijzelstraat and Heinekenplein showing Leo's version of Garamond capitals.





The only requirements of Heineken was that their logotype always appeared in Egyptian. Leo painted the logo each time from memory without a template, as he did with all the various brewery logos.



So now I was a compositor and attending a course in layout at the Grafisch Lyceum in the evening. Then one day at work, a letter tray slipped out of my hands and fell on the floor. I was quite small and the tray was very heavy. I laughed my head off – there were thousands of letters all over the floor. Mr Koersen himself called me into his office: “Mr. Beukeboom, you are fired!” Okay. Two or three weeks later I found another job at the printers Van Velzen, on the Ruysdaalkade, a very cosy, small printing office, with a pleasant boss, I felt at home. Van Velzen was a commercial printer and they printed amongst other things menus for the Apollo Hotel.

When I was nineteen I had to do National Service, but I refused the military and did two years’ social service in Eindhoven instead. Meanwhile I received my layout certificate from the Grafisch Lyceum and finished my social service in Eindhoven, but I did not go back to Van Velzen. I then wanted to start up as a small tradesman, and first I thought about the profession of ‘ochtendster’ (scrap metal dealer). I went out every morning and evening looking for scrap iron, lead and copper on the streets. Wandering around finding bits and pieces, filling my bicycle carriers and selling it in the morning. Every day I earned a bit of pocket money.

When I was sixteen I started to paint signs for pub owners, like small announcements for billiards tournaments. I made big boards for the butcher shop: ‘Roast beef for sixty cents a kilogram’. So, in the end I didn’t become an ochtendster, otherwise I would have been an antique dealer by now, ha ha! That’s also a beautiful profession, isn’t it?

At the Grafisch Lyceum we drew basic letters. Ornamental letters came secondary, but we did not do any calligraphy; that I did for thirty-five years painting windows! We drew the letters using a pencil and filled them in with Indian ink. We also determined the page size, designed the layout, letters, text columns and all the other material included. I did some calligraphy with a pen on board. On the Albert Cuyp market they all knew me, “Leo can do paintwork for you, boards, windows, the lot!”

At Grafisch Lyceum, Amsterdam, we received *Letterproef* catalogues published by Tetterode, a company that sold type and printing. It was our graphic design bible and was simply divided in five categories: Garamond, Bodoni, Egyptian, Gothic and Ornamental typefaces. From these five categories you could extract all the different letter types – everything you wanted to create.

Tetterode bv  
www.tetterode.nl

I remember a Mr Vleugels. He was a very good layout teacher, a real graphic artist. What he said, he really believed in. He spoke with a calm voice, he showed something and he could describe it perfectly. He asked you: “What exactly do you see?” In that way, he taught you to remember things thoroughly and be able to reproduce it. I work now by intuition.

In painting letters I became conscious of the unity and opposites, letting black and white ‘gear’ into each other. Form and counter form ... it’s the cosmos, those figures, they are working with each other ... on the one side it’s letting the matter dominate; on the other it’s letting space dominate. You make those two, in proportion, just slightly touching, complementing each other. My work, it’s a kind of meditation, for sure it is! Space and matter, they supplement each other. The Chinese are really good at that and know how to make a perfect balance. Later I did some letter painting for several Chinese restaurants in Amsterdam. I had to paint these characters, hundreds of them. They just asked me: “Can you paint that?” and my answer was always: “Of course I can, no problem.” Afterwards they all told me I was a good Chinese letter painter, I did learn to read and understand some of the characters. Of course I cannot read them all but I knew how they moved and the way the Chinese hold their pencils, yin and yang.

In 1965, an old school friend of mine was in the lettering business, making signs, ‘Sale is on, everything has to go’. He had a lot of work for me, but it was common, screaming colours, done with water paint – much too vulgar for me. Then an old school mate came along. He was the window dresser for the Heineken brewery and told me they were looking for a sign writer. Their old employee, ‘Ome Jan’, Uncle Jan had just retired. They decided to put the work out instead of hiring a new employee. They asked me, “Leo, are you interested?” Well, of course I wanted that!

oud bruin  
de koninck



Leo's variation of Garamond for the Café Dopey and a beautiful example for the Café Captein.



Leo's delicate interpretation of Jan van den Velde's Script.



My first window in 1967 was on the Constantijn Huygensstraat, on the corner of the Jacob van Lennepkade, now called Café de Muizeval (mousetrap). The brewery came to have a look, and said: "Well, it looks good, neat, and the pub owners are satisfied." So, from that day on they gave me assignments, carte blanche. "Could you do a window here? Do you want to go there?" I worked independently, they came to me, and I answered all their requests. Although everyone called the pub De Muizeval it wasn't its proper name. The actual name was the Cheerio, but there was this small mousetrap included in the sign, so it was nicknamed De Muizeval. Later it had new owners, and they decided to re-name the original name. I went back and painted De Muizeval on the window, really big!

The pubs of the Heineken Brewery used more ornamental letters for their windows. Ome Jan used ornamental letters, so did I but for other pubs, like Café Dopey's, I used a variation of Garamond. It was during my time at the Grafisch Lyceum, Amsterdam, that I really got to like Garamond capitals and made my own variation of the typeface. The letter you use on a pub window depends on the type of pub. If you have a traditional brown café, with lace curtains on copper curtain rods, with stained glass windows, you choose a nice, ornamental curly letter\*, because it fits in with the environment. It is not the information that counts, because everyone can tell it's a café, but it's about decoration, about creating an atmosphere. For the lettering on the traditional brown cafés I developed my own script based on the calligraphy of Jan van den Velde.

\*Leo talks about his 'curly letters'. The actual Dutch word is 'Krullendletters', 'krullend' meaning curly, but the correct English translation is 'flourished letters'.

Jan van den Velde (1568–1623), was the most important Dutch writing master of the 17th century. He was known internationally for his virtuosity and flamboyant hand. A century later George Bickham engraved his work.

Heineken gave me carte blanche, but the letters 'Heineken' always had to be painted in Egyptian. Most café owners didn't have a clue about design, so when I discussed the design with them I always took a piece of paper and drew examples in different letter types for them. Most times I drew three types: one in curly letters, one in Garamond and one in italic. I showed them what would look best on their window. Of course I would try to nudge them carefully to choose the curly style. But, after all, it was their decision that counted.

I do not have a favourite style; that depends on the café. But I have a real affinity with Garamond. The windows of Café Alverna on the Bilderdijkstraat are in Garamond. What I really liked there, was the people who owned the pub and worked there. I worked with pleasure there, it was quiet, nice and friendly. Those owners had their own opinion, they knew what they wanted, and that was my cup of tea. We spoke the same language, those people were small tradesmen too, and they had style, oh yes. Nice, I still sometimes have a drink there.

I have many interesting stories to tell, and here is one: It happened at Café Flora, on the Amstelstraat. I had just finished doing some lettering for the sandwich shop Het Kappertje, when a café on the other side of the road asked me to do their window too. So I take my little ladder with me, my brush that was still on my pot of paint, and moved everything across the road. They asked me if it was okay to do it right away, I said "Of course, no problem". It was about four or five-thirty, I measured with my piece of chalk, painted the window, was paid and then it happened: a big bang and jingling of glass ... someone just threw a bar stool through the window of Café Flora. They put in a new window, and after a couple of days I went back and I painted the same thing again.

A Belgian café owner saw my work in Amsterdam, he especially liked my curly letter type. He was visiting Café de Geus (it doesn't exist anymore, different owners). He asked for the name of the painter, and they gave him my number. He called me from Belgium with the request to come over and do some work for him. He said: "Eating, dining, sleeping ... no problem, and don't be modest when you make your invoice!" That is so typically Belgian, they're much more generous than the Dutch. I stayed in a lovely hotel and the food was fantastic. The year after, he had more work to do, and the year after that too. The man was called Mr Van den Boekaerd and his wife was called Trudy and she was German. He took me to his cafés, I painted a lot of windows there. They were all fond of my curly letter type. I believe it was 1990. Three summers in a row, I painted about eighty windows in Gent and some in Kortrijk as well.

I really learned to appreciate Belgian beer over there. Van den Boekaerd asked me what



'I amsterdam' logo changes places every few months. This one sits on the banks of the IJ overlooking Amsterdam Noord. The logo has been personalised for 'Koninginnedag', Queen's day with a crown from revellers. Another version sits on Museumplein and tourists climb all over it to be photographed.



my favourite beer was. He figured out which beer suited me best. He came up with a Westmalle, and it was my favourite indeed! In 1990 you couldn't buy it in Amsterdam. I learned to like it in Gent, drinking it from those beautiful big round beakers.

I've always used the same gloss paint, although it's improved over the years – from Univerf a shop near the Albert Cuyp, on the Gerard Douplein. Very nice people, I've known the family for years, the father for thirty-five years, and now his sons, one of them is called Ron. I can remember when his father had a small paint shop. It has changed a lot now. I've always bought my brushes from Van der Linde, a shop on the Rozengracht – they have drawers full of brushes. I always looked for the marten, the synthetic marten, those were better than the real marten. Real marten brushes are more expensive, and they say they are the best, but not for me. Whenever I cleaned them the hairs split, and they had to stay straight up. So I used the imitation marten, which is made of ox hair. Most sign painters use a maulstick, a little ball on a stick to steady your hand. But I never used a maulstick, I just painted from the wrist.

Univerf-Colorite  
Gerard Douplein 6  
1072 VE Amsterdam  
(020)6790942

Van der Linde  
Rozengracht 36-38  
1016 NC Amsterdam  
www.vanderlinde.com

I worked during spring, summer and autumn, and sometimes in winter, as long as the temperature was above zero. When it was freezing it was too cold to work. I think three degrees is cold enough to stay indoors! I used to live in Gerard Doustraat and had my atelier round the corner in Hemonystraat, in the basement. Very nice place, but in the end it was far too big a space for me. I had so much stuff there, and a piano! Every Friday night and Sunday afternoon friends would come over to play the piano, sing, perform, play games, table tennis, chess etc. It was a bit of a community centre, a lot of fun. We had 'graanjenever', grain gin; when it was freezing the fridge used to be full of it. I lived there from 1972 until 1990, for almost twenty years. I also played a bit with wood, creating all sorts of things, just for fun. Carpentry at the end of the day was a nice compensation to the concentrated work of sign writing during the day. I loved it! I also kept chickens in the back garden and supplied eggs to all my neighbours. Since 1990 I've lived and worked from the ground floor of my house in Govert Flinckstraat.

Five years ago I gave up work after suffering a stroke. I do feel a bit handicapped, it's so annoying. This arm it has been asleep (tingling) for five years now. I don't understand why the doctors don't bother to look further to find the cause of it. I'm convinced that it can be cured. They gave me physiotherapy, but it was terrible, totally childish and useless, like throwing a ball back and forth ... stupid! I've never been to a doctor, never used any medication. And out of the blue, you go to bed feeling healthy, you wake up, stretch, and then you feel your legs tingle ... and it doesn't go away, it stays like that for ever ... it always tingles, twenty-four hours a day.

Looking back I always enjoyed my work and made a good living from it. I always started my working day at noon. It was freedom, to have my sleep, drink my coffee, read the papers ... start work at noon. In the summertime I worked sometimes until nine, nine-thirty. Most cafés weren't open till noon so I went there in the afternoon, and worked till sunset. In cafés they don't have strict working hours, that suited me perfectly. Even now not being able to go out regularly I am never bored, never depressed and have always been on the sunny side of life!

Leo Beukeboom likes to receive visitors who are interested in his work. He is free most afternoons but he only speaks Dutch and German.  
leobeukeboom@gmail.com

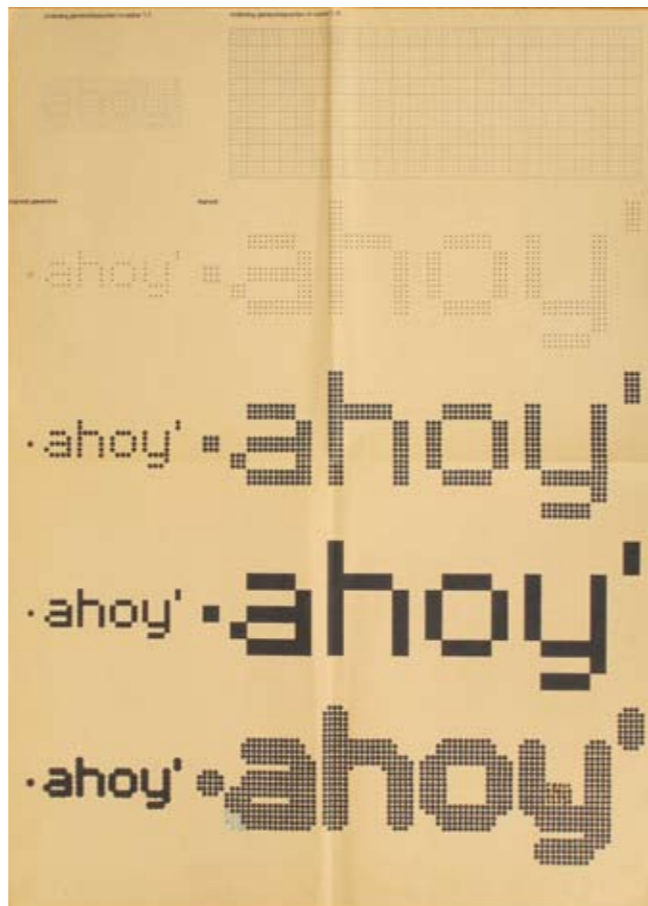
The visual landscape of Dutch design is very much a typographic one, where type is often the main focus of the design process. The recent branding of Amsterdam created by Kessels Kramer is a case in point. Large three-dimensional metal letters 'I amsterdam' sit on the banks of the IJ and on Museumplein where it is a favourite with the tourists. The new branding campaign is either liked or hated by Amsterdam residents. The most common complaint is that if Amsterdam is so proud of itself, why is the logo in English? But of course it has to be in English to be international – that's marketing!

'I amsterdam' is the new motto for the City of Amsterdam. It is a marketing initiative developed over the last year as a means for the city to assert its profile on the international arena.  
www.iamsterdam.nl  
www.kesselskramer.com

David Quay: Benno Wissing's Ahoy alphabet

I have always been drawn to the type-related work of Wim Crouwel and his colleagues at Total Design Amsterdam, one of the most influential design groups to come out of Holland in the sixties and seventies. Through Crouwel, I became acquainted with the work of Benno Wissing, a partner at Total.

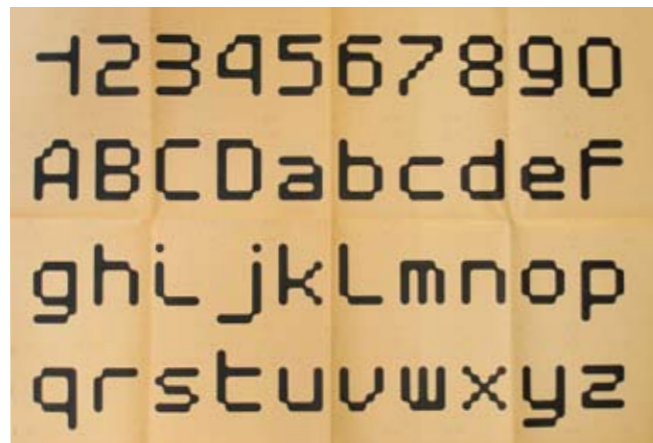
David Quay is a partner in The Foundry, London. In 2000 he moved to Amsterdam, where he specializes in typography and type design. He teaches and gives workshops internationally.  
www.davidquaydesign.com  
www.foundrytypes.co.uk



Original slides of the signage system in the Ahoy. Slide collection Ben Bos.

Benno Wissing was also responsible for the original signage design at Schiphol Airport. The sign shown here is designed by Paul Mijksenaar, based on Wissing's original concept.

Technical plans of how the on-off (0-1) scheme worked, and below the final alphabet – the capitals were never employed.



In 1969 Wissing designed the corporate identity for the Ahoy Exhibition Hall, Rotterdam. The Ahoy is a flexible space for sports, concerts, and exhibitions that can accommodate audiences from a few dozen up to 10,000. The basis of the identity centred on a typeface that Wissing himself drew. It was designed around the time when Crouwel and Jurriaan Schrofer were also designing minimal typefaces on a very strict grid.

Benno Wissing died 7 January 2008

I travelled there one day to see if anything was left of Wissing's original work. It was very disappointing, there was nothing left. Everything had been replaced with the bland and commercial design work often seen in these kind of places. This prompted me to want to find out more about Wissing and his work, but there is scant information available. However, he visited Holland in 2005, and I was able to meet with him. He gave me all his archive material relating to the Ahoy alphabet and permission to digitize it as a typeface. Later I met Ben Boss, also a Total partner, and received from him a large number of slides taken of Wissing's Ahoy signage 'in situ'.

Crouwel remarked that of all the Total designers at that time Wissing was 'party philosopher' and the hard man of the grid! The alphabet was based on a strict grid of six horizontal and nine vertical lines. A system was proposed to electronically create variable text. Individual lamps lit up the letters, hence the idea to use simple, matrix-based letterforms. Several models where tested with on-off (1-0) schemes. The resulting typeface took into account the 'possibility to produce letterforms in all kinds of ways, without loss of characteristics' by varying the 'signal' for each unit or pixel, so it would be possible to generate different typefaces or styles. Unfortunately the proposed system proved too expensive; eventually the signage was produced as conventional fixed signs. The matrix-based lettering was retained, resulting in letterforms that were rather unusual and immediately recognisable.

Benno Wissing's comments taken from an interview with Kees Broos, Total Design self-promotional book, 1985.

'At the very start of our activities Friso (Kramer), Wim (Crouwel) and I understood very quickly, that in dealing with large projects, a number of things had to be standardized so that the arrangement of information could be more easily programmed, and more time would become available for handling intrinsic problems. If there were to be variations in the final product we looked for variations within a modular system, so that mutual relationship, inter-connection, clustering and related industrial realization would be self-sustaining. This principle was applied in architecture, industrial and graphic design. That's the history of the birth of the grid! A cuckoo in the nest?'

There was a great deal of influence from the Bauhaus: industrialization, the module, simplification, standardization, measurability, visual rhythms, functionality, expression of applied technology, the importance of proportions. Our early work looked dogmatic!

The Hallen Haarlem are the three buildings shown here. The small building in the middle is the museum entrance. To the right is the old 'Vleeshal'. The poster on the right shows three exhibitions using different typefaces. The painters are all linked by school or period; the subtle use of colour brings them together.



Even today letterforms still play a very important part in Dutch graphic design. Last year there was an exhibition of the late nineteenth-century painter Isaac Israels at the Hallen Art Gallery, Haarlem. This gallery is housed in an old meat hall called De Vleeshal, built between 1602-1605 and was originally a hall where butchers sold their goods. The heads of bulls and rams on the façades are reminders of the original function of the building. The Israels exhibition was outstanding but what really impressed me was the use of typography inside the gallery and on posters and promotional material. What I really liked about the identity was its reliance solely on type. Type is the identity! I wondered who had designed the identity, and eventually found out through the gallery website: Cobbenhagen en Hendriksen. I cycled out to see Chantal Hendriksen and Marijke Cobbenhagen at their studio in the east of Amsterdam, a huge high-ceilinged room in a old school in Willem Beukelsstraat. I started by asking Chantal how they both met.

Chantal Hendriksen: The Hallen Gallery corporate identity

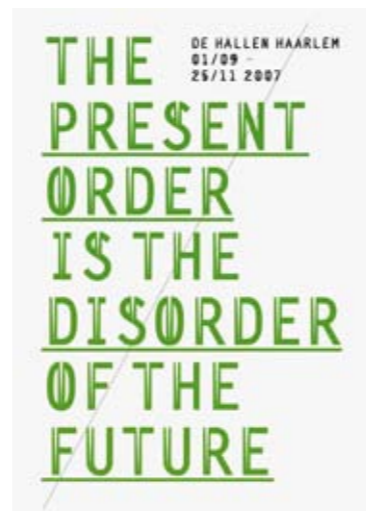
'We met at the Werkplaats Typografie, Arnhem – before that I studied at the Rietveld Academy, Amsterdam, and Marijke studied at the Art Academy, Utrecht. During the Werkplaats we both continued living in Amsterdam, and while commuting daily between Amsterdam and Arnhem we spent a lot of time discussing our profession.

Chantal Hendriksen is a partner in the design company Cobbenhagen en Hendriksen. [www.cobbenhagenhendriksen.nl](http://www.cobbenhagenhendriksen.nl)



Poster above and invitations right show that each exhibition has its own unique typeface, but each typeface is linked by the 'V' incision. Hotel Alfa photograph shows the original inspiration behind the house-style.

09.06.2007 - 19.08.2007



Werkplaats Typografie  
www.werkplaatstypografie.org

From there we started slowly working on projects together. After a while we noticed that we complemented each other in the design process, so we decided to rent a studio in Amsterdam, and became Cobbenhagen en Hendriksen.'

After an initial meeting with the client in Haarlem they noticed an interesting looking typeface in an Amsterdam hotel window. There was a division that cut vertically through each letter. This idea was what inspired our identity for the Hallen identity.

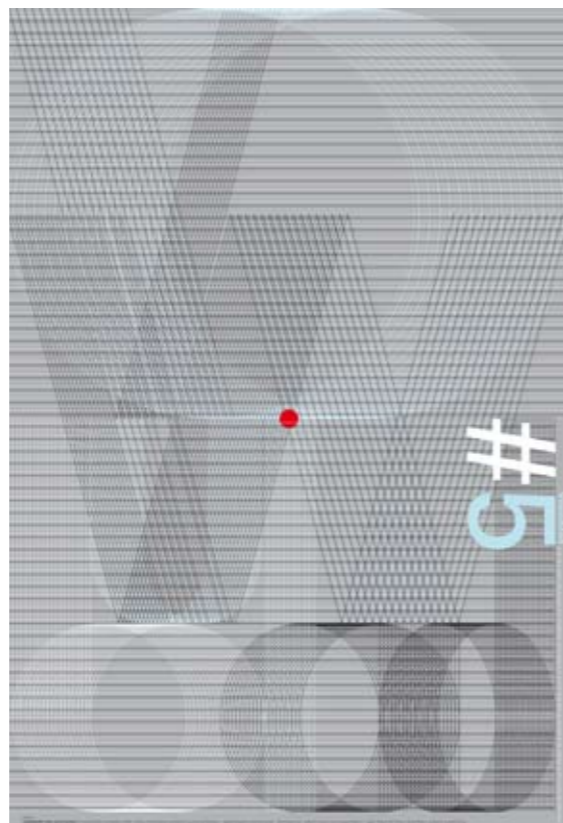
After we drafted the letters, we rejected this specific typeface because of its nostalgic appearance. The idea of having a division we kept, but we decided to do it ourselves and started cutting vertically into every possible typeface. After having a one-day lesson in FontLab we were able to adapt potentially any font we wished. Now we could use a different typeface for every artist, creating a personal identity for each one, visually connecting them with all other exhibitions and to the De Hallen, Haarlem itself.

The main point of the proposal for the identity for this contemporary art museum was that it should function on different levels. De Hallen Haarlem has quarterly exhibitions. Each of these four exhibitions as well as the different artists have their own 'identity' without losing the overall identity of the museum itself. The museum comprises three neighbouring buildings on the Grote Markt in Haarlem.

Although their typefaces work perfectly in the identity context there are many small details that could be improved to compensate for the 'V' incision. It was their own decision to take this route, a fairly labour intensive way, but it was a problem to do it as quickly and efficiently as possible within the budget available.

The collection of De Hallen Haarlem includes almost 10,000 works in a diverse range of media, spanning three periods: pre-war modern art, post-war modern art and contemporary art. Just as the Frans Hals Museum focuses in large part on the work of 16th- and 17th-century Haarlem artists, De Hallen features 'local heroes' in its modern art collection, such as the painters Jacobus de Looy, Henri Boot and Kees Verwey. De Hallen is a part of the Frans Hals Museum  
www.dehallenhaarlem.nl

Vouwblad is a series of publications by Lenoirschuring in collaboration with various designers who visualize their passion for their profession and show the beauty that can be brought about by text, image, material and colour. Below: designed by Richard Niessen and Esther de Vries. Right: designed by designstation for Maria Blaisse.



Sion Phillips is a young designer who has recently moved to Amsterdam looking for a job. I met him after he first arrived and gave him some advice, mainly on finding a place to live, which for non-Dutch is like looking for 'Een spelt in een hooiberg', a needle in a haystack! Over a beer he told me how surprised he was with the quality of printing and how the printers themselves added so much to the design culture, interacted with designers on the same level and were very active in supporting design – and not just as a promotion for their businesses. Sion asked me how this situation came about – it is something I have also often wondered. I asked Arie Lenoir of Lenoirschuring, the printers of this journal, his thoughts on this matter.

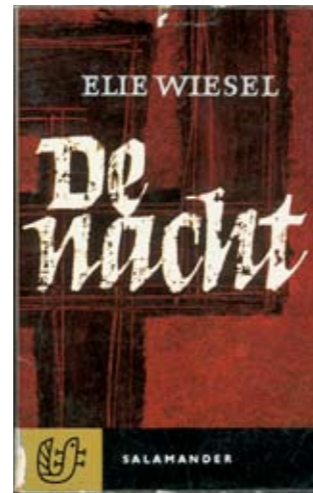
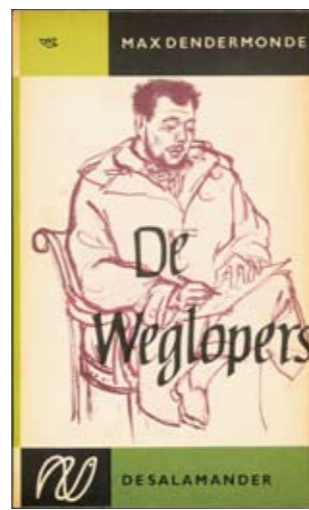
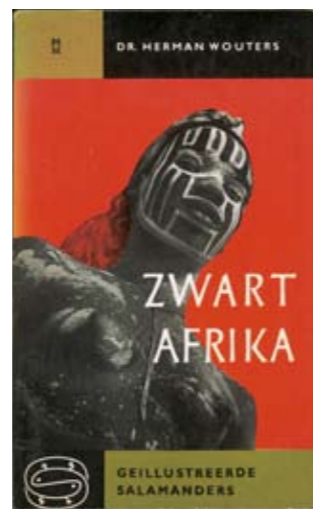
Arie Lenoir: Dutch printers and their position in the design industry

'Arie, can you give us an insight into the relationship between designer and printer in the Netherlands?' David Quay asked me. Of course, I said 'yes' – being a committed advocate of our graphic design profession and convinced of the importance of this unique relationship in Holland.

Arie Lenoir is a partner of the studio and printers, Lenoirschuring. They specialize in working with designers.  
www.lenoirschuring.com  
www.vouwblad.com

My partners Ron Schuring and Stefano van der Knaap trained as printers. I'm not really a printer, I studied economics. While studying I happened to do the administration for a small printing office. That's how my obsession with print started. In 1987 Ron and I founded Lenoirschuring: printers for graphic designers and businesses. Since then we have shared the sweet and the bitter, putting all our energy into the business, and now with 16 employees, run elaborate pre-press and new sheet-fed offset printers. The work we produce is further enhanced by motivated paper suppliers and bookbinders able to put the most extraordinary applications into practice. Every day we work together with graphic designers to achieve the closest interpretation of their vision. A simple reflection – the designer designs, the printer prints – but together we create exceptional books, house styles, annual reports, posters, calendars, you name it. The moment that makes it all worthwhile is when you handle the first copy of a complex production process, when you briefly hold your breath, when you leaf through attentively, when you focus on the smallest deviations and details, and when you think, after all the efforts you have made: 'shit, this is good!'. I believe that both designer and printer share these feelings. It is the essence of the relationship. However there is more to this; it should be something like client-designer-writer-photographer-paper supplier-printer-binder plus all the others involved. The feeling of pride about the end product should be shared by everyone. This is where vision, aesthetics and technical execution all come together.

Lenoirschuring will open an exhibition of the covers of the Salamander paperbacks on 26 September, 2008. A catalogue will be printed with over 1200 covers that were published between 1958–1966. Eight books were selected for the 'Best verzorgde boeken', Best Designed Books between 1958–1962. Six of the prize winners are shown here.



Over the years there have been many long-term collaborations between designers and printers. The Graphic Culture Foundation is making an effort to stimulate printing culture in the Netherlands. The Foundation has some 220 contributors, mostly from the printing industry, with a focus on the cultural side of business. Some examples from the past are big names like Drukkerij Trio, Mouton & Co, Meijer Wormerveer and Steendrukkerij de Jong. Johan Enschede & Sons, printers of Dutch currency, deserve special mention. For generations this distinguished 300-year-old company formed the structure within which top designers like Jan van Krimpen, Sem Hartz and Bram de Does were able to develop their expertise. In the second half of the 20th century, designers like Jan Bons, Ben Bos, Pieter Brattinga, Wim Crouwel, Gert Dumbar, Dick Elffers, Jurriaan Schrofer and many others made design a real profession themselves and have been awarded internationally. Irma Boom, for instance, will be honoured with an exhibition of her work in 2009 at MOMA, New York.

[www.grafischecultuur.nl](http://www.grafischecultuur.nl)

The Netherlands is a small country with an established printing industry. Currently there are approximately 2,500 printing companies with around 45,000 employees. My guess is that there are about 15,000 graphic designers. Graphic design became a real industry in the sixties. Dutch graphic culture is elaborate, with annual awards for several categories of print work. These awarded graphic products often find their way into museum collections and are part of our national heritage. The Graphic Culture Award is the most prestigious award in the Dutch graphic industry. Since 1989 it has been awarded fourteen times to a person or institution for highly meritorious work. Alongside designers such as Pieter Brattinga (1998) and Anthon Beeke (2004), five graphic entrepreneurs have been awarded. Outstanding examples of printing entrepreneurs that are or have been closely connected with leading designers are: Frans Spruijt (1989), Henk van Stokkum (1993), Cor Rosbeek (1999) and the duo Jan de Jong/Chang Chi Lan Ying (2005). Frans Spruijt is a shining example – as a person, and as an entrepreneur – of an inspired graphic artist. Cor Rosbeek, in my opinion, deserves to be given the title 'best Dutch printer ever'. With my friends Jan and Lan Ying I share the love of beautiful print work. These collaborations have benefited and pleased all print work enthusiasts. I feel fortunate to be one of them. Of the relationship between designer and printer in the Netherlands – beautiful things are made together!

Frans Spruijt – 'Mijn interesse zat in hoofdzaak in letters', My basic interest was in letters.  
[www.martspruijt.nl/fransspruijt](http://www.martspruijt.nl/fransspruijt)

Cor Rosbeek  
[www.rosbeek.nl](http://www.rosbeek.nl)

Jan de Jong/Chang Chi Lan Ying  
De Buitenkant Press  
[jandjong@xs4all.nl](mailto:jandjong@xs4all.nl)

Summary and final word: David Quay and Roel Stavorinus

Dutch graphic design has an enormous international influence. One only has to pick up any international design magazine and there is nearly always an article featuring Dutch graphic design or designers. The Dutch designers' continual exploration for new and interesting forms always surprises and is often imitated.

Two comments stay in my mind that seem to me to signify the Dutch approach to design: Jacques Koeweiden's observation that 'There are certain designers who do not like getting their "hands dirty" with commercial work'; and the rather jokey comment from Dietwee, 'Here we do what the designer wants'. Designers in Holland often project a similar image to that of the autonomous artist. That maybe okay for Dutch clients but not if you're approaching internationally established clients.

Dutch designer Barbara Asselbergs, on a recent visit to London with a group of Dutch students, was astounded by the high level of professionalism and presentation at design consultancies Bibliothèque and Johnson Banks. Students were treated as clients and given presentations that had just been shown to prospective clients in Japan. I asked Roel Stavorinus, a friend who has worked for many leading design companies in Amsterdam, for his comments:

'Dutch designers behave like designers, sometimes like artists even. Creatively they are outstanding, but they often forget the context of their design work. They sometimes do not realize that they are being commissioned. English designers are more likely to behave like design consultants: being aware of the duty their design has to play to meet the client's goals. Only a few design companies in the Netherlands know how to work pragmatically within a corporate commission and still maintain their creative integrity. 'Often they have learned this skill from English designers.'

Roel Stavorinus is an independent design consultant.  
[www.metroel.nl](http://www.metroel.nl)

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Founded in 1928 and celebrating its 80th year, ISTD aims to inform and inspire graphic designers, typographers, writers and educators engaged in the field of visual communication. ISTD establishes and maintains typographic standards by publishing and promoting the highest quality contemporary practice. ISTD Membership denotes not only competence to design, but also acceptance of agreed ethics and standards of working.

Designers can apply for individual Membership through submission of their work. Design companies and other related organizations can also support the ISTD through Corporate Membership. Application for Institutional Membership is now open to colleges and universities.

For more information about ISTD and how to become an ISTD Member visit:  
[www.istd.org.uk](http://www.istd.org.uk)

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