Paul Bunyan Design Assemblage

A Senior Project

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of the Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Fine Arts

by

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ABSTRACT:

This project contains a design assemblage dedicated to the legendary figure, Paul Bunyan. The system includes, a typeface, a logo, a color palette, a pattern, and a poster.
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CHAPTER I—INTRODUCTION:

PROBLEM: Translate traditions of American Folklore and early pioneers into a design system including a graphic mark, a pattern, a display face, a color palette and a poster. Elements will collectively celebrate the enchanting qualities of the early American frontier through distinctive typography and imagery, generating nostalgia and a genuine appreciation for this past time.

The display face aims to be experimental, with a masculine quality yet maintaining an appeal to both genders. Although reminiscent of lumberjacks, it will stray from literal representations (i.e. wood grain illustrations, or tools of the trade). Like any successful typeface, the characters will be distinct but unified in appearance. It will be most legible from a minimum of 19 points in size.

The logo is essentially a tribute to the legendary Paul Bunyan. It will have a bold sense of his “larger than life” presence however, it is important for viewers to receive it with a positive connotation, and not see it as destructive or menacing. In order to preserve a charming, playful aesthetic it will be more of an editorial illustration than a reproducible mark at a range of sizes.

The color palette will include natural, subdued, “earthy” tones evocative of early grey mornings.

The pattern is representative of wood grain.

The poster, like the logo, will idealize the life of Paul Bunyan, combining an unconventional grid, exaggerated contrasts in type and imagery, and also romanticize frontier life to form a narrative.

LIMITATIONS: With any project, it is likely to assume that there will be a number of limitations to consider. The budget ($100) inhibits the types of materials available for use. This later played into effect when deciding to create stamps as an inexpensive alternative to carving individual wood blocks for the my letters. My skill and experience required to create wood blocks was also a limiting factor, so stamps were a likely choice.

GLOSSARY:

Display face: a typeface created for best appearance at large display sizes (typically 36 points of larger) as it might be used for a major headline in a newspaper or on the cover of a book.

Font: a particular size of a typeface.

Pangram: a sentence that contains all of the letters of the alphabet.
Paul Bunyan: a mythological figure who is usually believed to be a giant as well as a lumberjack of unusual skill.

Typeface: a typeface comprises as set of characters that share certain design features such as x-height, serif shape, and stroke weights. Helvetica Medium, Helvetica Black and Helvetica Bold Oblique, for example, are typefaces.

Substrate: the base material onto which a design will be printed. i.e. paper, wood, plastic, fabric.

(Following figure is from, Thinking with type: A Critical Guide for Designers, Writers, Editors, & Students, pg. 34.)
CHAPTER II—REVIEW OF RESEARCH

My direction of study was lead by personal inclinations for American folklore. My father liked to tell tall tales about his own life and growing up, so I developed an appreciation for the art of story-telling. In school, I learned about Johnny Appleseed, John Henry, Pecos Bill and Paul Bunyan. I loved laughing about the outlandish things they did, and I admired these men for their courage. These figures were important to me while growing up because they represented independence and innovative thinking, which were qualities I was brought up to value.

Not only am I emotionally drawn to the subject matter, but I also am intrigued by the opportunity to create an original typeface. In my early years as a graphic designer, I often felt limited by the number of font choices available on the computer. I did not understand how the tactile imperfections and rawness of hand-drawn typography could actually add to a composition. When designers such as Ed Fella and Marian Banjtes came to speak at Cal Poly, I was inspired to have more freedom with the type I used. So when I considered the direction for my Senior Project, designing my own custom typeface was obvious.

Even though this project has many personal connections, I also had to consider how my audience would receive the work. In college, I am surrounded by educated, middle to upper class “hipster” men and women. I have observed a few distinct trends within this circle in the areas of fashion and ideals that I believe have roots in the American frontier.

Concerning fashion, an up rise in thrift store shopping has created a relapse in 90’s “grunge” style. The messy unkempt hair and the got-dressed-in-the-dark look with worn-in cut-off jeans looks like a cross between a burly lumberjack and a homeless person. The style makes the wearer looks like they get their hands dirty and might know a thing or two about the outdoors. But in a day and age where we are so dependent upon technology, we have lost touch with nature, so it’s no wonder this style is grasping back at a more simple life.

Our generation has also seen a lot of corruption. Political, religious and social figures have continually let us down and broken our trust. We are in search of a role model, specifically one who is respectable. Lumberjacks are the epitome of masculinity. They are masters of their craft, with awareness of their surroundings and of themselves. The may be of the lower class, but they work hard and live a simple life. Twenty-somethings romanticize this lifestyle, knowing they are bound for corporate America, but can still sleep under the starts like mountain men. So the goal of this project is to take this iconic figure and the lifestyle that has been diluted into a crude fashion statement and bring back the authenticity of these roots. Rather than belittle or distort, this design assemblage will genuinely celebrate Paul Bunyan’s legacy.
CHAPTER III—PROCEDURES AND RESULTS

PROCEDURES:

Before I began to design any elements, I created a mood board to get a general idea of the style I was aiming for. Many of the images came from rustic cabin furniture designs and folk music posters. There were numerous examples of letters that had been constructed out of wood, that I referenced from the book, Playful Type: Ephemeral lettering & Illustrative Fonts. Some adjectives to convey the images I included are: bold, wood cut, contrast, natural, bronzy, quaint, old, quirky and textured.

A general rule I imposed on myself was not to rely on the computer for much of my drawings. I wanted to keep my digital distressing to a minimum and emphasize the natural curves, and idiosyncrasies that arise from unexpected slips of the hand.

THEMATIC IMAGERY:

Originally I intended to draw little woodland creatures and tools of the trade that would correspond to each letter of the alphabet. However, I came to the conclusion that these images would ultimately be distraction from developing the typeface. I wanted to allow the letters to speak for themselves.

TYPE:

Phase I: Without any formal training on how to design a font, I used a variety of resources to figure out how to begin the process. However, it seemed like all of my instructions pointed to just start sketching! In the book, Thinking with type, by Ellen Lupton, it showed an example of the early stages of the typeface “Castaways,” which was based off of commercial signs in Las Vegas. The designer, Ken Barber, would draw the letters by hand and digitize the outlines. So I followed suit, and used grid paper to draw multiple variations of each letter—it was essentially trial and error. I knew that I wanted to establish a sense of power and boldness, so I started with a general idea of the characteristics that I wanted to include: unusual crossbar heights, wide bases and rough angles that looked like they had been cut out of wood. I did not have a typeface that I looked at for reference because did not want it to influence my stylistic decisions. I also knew from the beginning that because of these bulky characteristics, this typeface would not function for large bodies of text.

Phase II: I sketched out a rough idea for all the letters but I was having trouble with maintaining consistency and getting the exaggeration of the “illusion of an ants-eye-view” in all of my letterforms. A suggestion was made to take an already existing font and distort it in Adobe Illustrator to get a better idea of the perspective. Although I was initially concerned about looking at a preexisting font, I actually found this really helpful to observe how the dimensions change, and it gave me such an appreciation for the time it takes professional typographers to get the proportions to look right. Then, to my surprise, once I had all of the letters sketched out, it was much easier to develop a sys-
tem to unify them. I matched up the angles, the height and width of the legs and the location of the crossbars. I also started basing the letters off of one another, which was helpful not to start from scratch each time. For example, “T” and “J” share similar characteristics, as well as “B”, “R” and “P.”

**Phase III:** I refined my letters, making them all a bit wider, and redrawing the angles to be more consistent. I had 4 different angles that I integrated into each letter. In order to check the angles, I drew them on a transparent ruler, so that I could superimpose the ruler on top of the perimeter lines.

**Phase IV:** Unfortunately I feel like I could refine these letters for years and years, but I needed to start to think about how I might include texture into the font. I didn’t want to do hand-drawn grain overlaid on it because I thought it looked too busy, and distracted the eye from the form. I wanted the letters to have a solid fill, with some distressing. Ideally, I would want to carve the letters into individual wood blocks. I researched some different carving techniques, from chiseling them with hand tools, to a pantograph, which is basically a fancy router. However, due to limitations in my experience with woodcarving, this did not seem like a viable option for me to do them myself. I also considered hiring a professional to carve the letters, however I was concerned about the expense, time and limitations on size.

**Phase V:** I asked a friend for advice about how to achieve more texture in my letterforms, and he suggested I try rubber stamps. I loved the idea of this because it seemed more manageable. I dropped by San Luis Art Supply downtown and talked with Neil, the owner to get some pointers. He gave me some more advice on materials. I calculated that I needed around an 11 x 11” sheet. He suggested I check out the Speedball eraser on-line for the best prices. I bought some black liquid ink, some carving tools, and a small sample eraser to test it out. I researched online how to transfer my design onto the eraser, and the cheapest way seemed to be tracing the design with graphite pencil and placing it upside down on the eraser and rubbing the back of it. From there, the carving was easy. Unfortunately the liquid ink did not stick to the smooth surface of the eraser when applied with a foam brush, so I had to purchase an inkpad instead. Luckily, the inkpad had a porous surface, which is what actually created the texture I was looking for. I didn’t even have to distress it. What I like most about this method is the imperfections that come with hand-carving. All of the little knicks and holes and over cuts show up.

LOGO:

**Phase I:** I wanted to stray from representing Paul Bunyan’s facial features, because I feel that it would take away from the legendary aspect of his nature. I researched imagery associated with guilds and craftsmen, and a common characteristic was a crest because it symbolized honor and tradition. Figuring out what lumberjack imagery to use wasn’t exactly rocket science, though I did considered illustrating an oversized boot that would be trampling through the forest, before deciding to use an axe and a tree. The
problem with the boot was that it had a menacing connotation and I wanted the mark to have a friendly appeal and have an immediate connection to Paul Bunyan.

Phase II: After first draft, I received some feedback to push logo to have a more playful approach. I added a classic banner with “Paul Bunyan,” written on it to add a storybook element. Then I made the stump larger, to take up more space in the crest and create a little more interest in the positive and negative space. The stump was also more easily recognizable when the viewer could see the wood grain. I also experimented with different angles of the axe to achieve a more dramatic visual impact, however I had trouble getting the axe to look like it was sitting in the wood properly. The angle made it look like it was floating above the surface.

Phase III: The available photos of the perspective I wanted to achieve for the axe chopping a stump were limited, so I borrowed an axe from a friend and chopped some wood myself and photographed the correct angles. This made the illustration much more authentic and I finally was able to get the axe to settle correctly. It still needed more refining and I needed to figure out which areas to shade.

Phase IV: In the final stages, I narrowed down the number of weights I used for the lines in the drawing.

COLOR PALETTE:

The colors I chose are natural and subdued in saturation. I wanted the palette to stay masculine as well, so I incorporated a lot of blue hues. The overall effect is reminiscent of an early morning mist in the forest.

PATTERN:

I wanted to keep this design as a simple line drawing. I researched different types of wood grain, found some photographs, and kept in mind some general characteristics while sketching out the forms. The most iconic part of wood grain is where the ovals are formed in between the sets of vertical lines. I used slightly transparent graph paper to be able to combine the strongest elements from a variety of sketches. In order to get the pattern to connect, I photocopied the composition and stacked it on top of one another, then I connected the remaining lines. For the sides, I just transferred the three lines from the right over to the left side, making sure there wasn’t too much of a gap between them. When I was done with the basic lines, I added some variation in line weight.

POSTER:

Phase I: I researched different ideas for compositions for my poster. Initially my idea was to create a modern ABC poster that was not for the nursery wall, but the living room. I considered different substrates other than paper to print the poster on, whether that was screen-printing it on wood, making wood blocks, or even a fabric banner.
Phase II: Once I had all of my initial sketches for the letterforms, I photocopied each letter and then made enlargements and reductions for each of them. I cut them out and played with different compositions by hand.

Phase III: After fruitless attempts at creating an engaging ABC poster, I started thinking about how I might break down the tradition structure of the ABC sequence that is read from left to right, and rather form a shape with the letters. I gathered inspiration for the imagery from pangrams that I researched. A few that stuck out, had related somewhat to my theme, for example, “Pack my box with five dozen liquor jugs,” and “My girl wove six dozen plaid jackets before she quit,” evoked some imagery from the early American frontier lifestyle. I tried to assemble the letters into a jug-like shape, only to dismiss the idea because it did not represent the theme very well.

Phase IV: I received more direction to find some inspiration in the Hatch Show Print. This collection of music posters was printed using the letter-press, so they all had a similar style that I was looking for. They used bold, iconic imagery and had a minimal use of space. I also opened up the option to use additional typefaces in my poster, realizing that the goal of the poster was no longer to showcase the entire alphabet, but to promote Paul Bunyan.

Phase V: With this new emphasis, I decided to reference some lyrics from Disney Movie musical about Paul Bunyan. In it, they describe him as, “63 axe handles high, feet on the ground, head in the sky.” I couldn’t realistically fit all 63 axes in there, but I wanted to exaggerate the boot and have it extend outside the frame. So I used the same boot that I had sketched out for my logo. I created two compositions with opposing boots so that they can be placed next to one another and form a larger image. I scanned in a variety of hand-made textures to overlay over the shapes for an added dimension.
THE FINAL PROJECT:

TYPEFACE:

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
LOGO:
COLOR PALETTE:

C: 45
M: 47
Y: 50
K: 11

C: 28
M: 0
Y: 22
K: 25

C: 72
M: 30
Y: 34
K: 25

C: 40
M: 0
Y: 25
K: 67
PATTERN:
POSTER SET:

63 AXL ANNOLS
HIGH
ILLI ON THE
GROUND
ALAO IN THE SKY

THE LEGENDARY
PAUL BUNYAN
63 axe handles
high
left on the ground
head in the sky
POSTER RIGHT—Larger view:
BIBLIOGRAPHY


