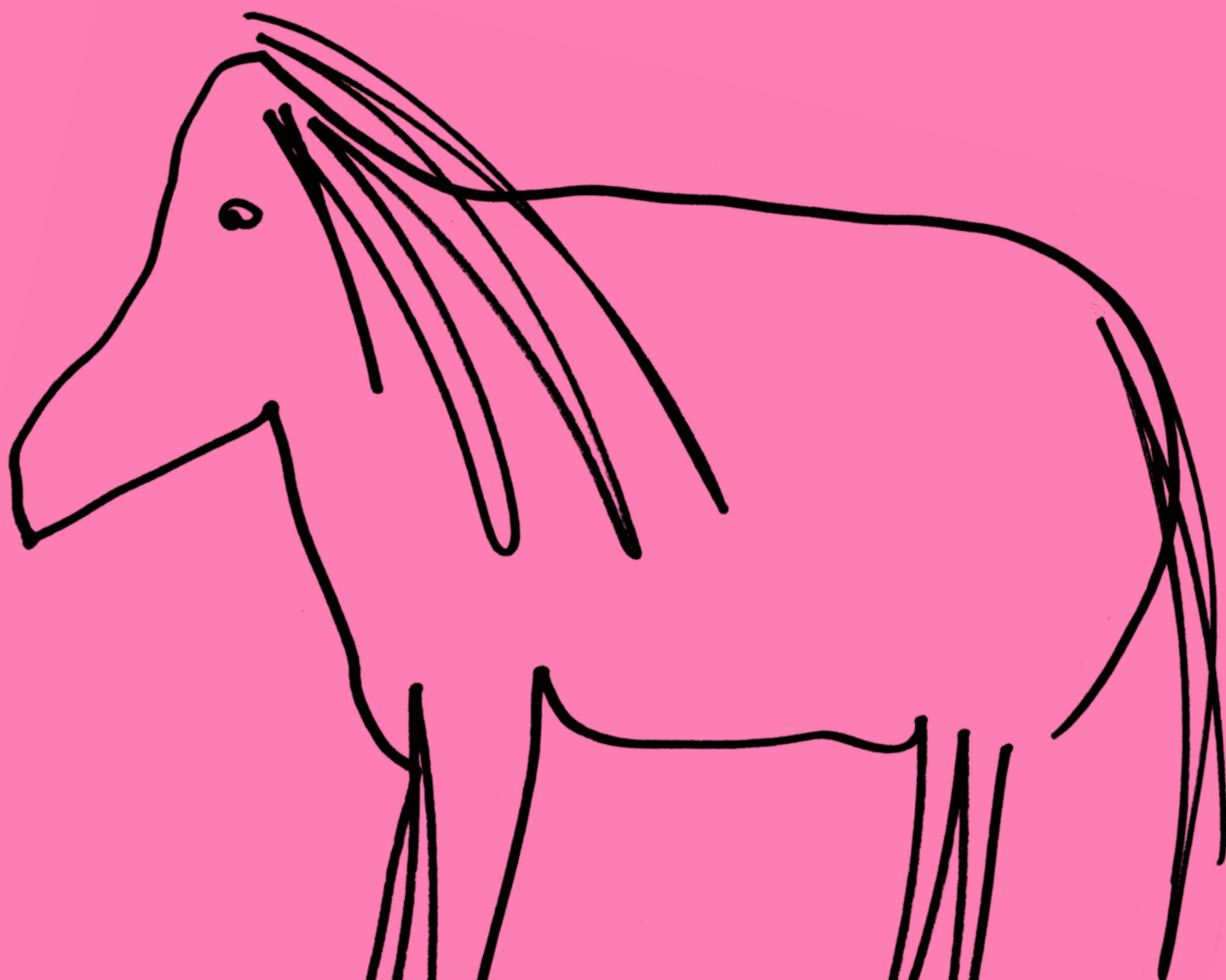


Let yourself be bad at things



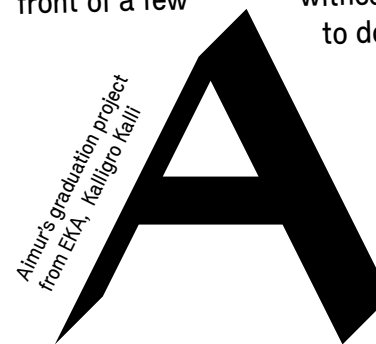
Laura speaks to Aimur and Andree from Tüpokompanii about the origins of their type foundry, their working process and the values embedded in their typefaces. Together, they reflect on the development of Vee, a typeface they're about to release, through the lens of amateurism, experimentation, and curiosity.

Laura: When did you first become interested in fonts and at which point did you start working together?

Aimur: We have a few theories. In the early 2000s, long before I knew anything about the discipline of graphic design, I would go to the heating plant where my mother worked and download fonts onto a USB stick. At home, I would simply look through them on Microsoft Word. In fourth grade, I was tasked with designing the class newspaper as part of a media course.

Andree: I was also dabbling in design during school, but I don't remember paying that much attention to typefaces specifically. I developed a deeper interest in them during professor Ivar Sakk's lectures at the Estonian Academy of Arts [EKA], where we would compare different typefaces. That's where I caught the bug. Ivar still emails us sometimes, asking for help identifying newer typefaces that he doesn't recognise.

Aimur and I studied together and were both interested in fonts, so quite naturally a healthy rivalry developed between us. All things considered, it seemed logical that one day we would start a foundry together. At our graduation after-party, in front of a few witnesses, we made a pact to do so.



La: Did you already focus on fonts during your first year at EKA or did you develop that interest later?

An: In our second year we had a week-long workshop with the designers of Dinamo Type Foundry, Johanner Breyer and Fabian Harb. Ivar's lectures had made us curious about fonts and during Dinamo's workshop we were able to dip our toes into designing fonts ourselves. We learnt that the technical process was perhaps less daunting than we had anticipated. The class was a great introduction to the subject, and we also became acquainted with the Glyphs program. After this, whenever we started a new school project, our first thought was whether the assignment could be approached in the form of a font.

La: There have actually been very few people at EKA who have specifically focused on fonts.

An: To have two such people in the same year is incredibly rare – I think this gave us some confidence that we were on the right path.

La: How did you end up starting the foundry?

Ai: We had the initial idea in 2016, long before COVID. Back then, we were barely even thinking about the climate crisis. We were more carefree in our work and able to focus on theoretical questions related to our field, experiment, and play around. By now, there is so much more we need to consider – we have held on to our enthusiasm, but there is also a myriad of other responsibilities to attend to.

An: Officially, we founded Tüpokompanii around 2022, but it took another year or so to publish our website. Despite having a number of unfinished fonts, we realised that it would be impossible to release a larger collection straight away – it would have taken a very long time to finalise everything. Instead, we decided that for the launch, each of us would put out one finished type family. These ended up being Ladna and Trafarett.

By then, I had been working on Ladna for nearly a decade – I first conceived of it in 2014. The idea for Trafarett was newer: the font was developed relatively quickly, over the course of a year. In our view, these two typefaces formed a set that was both functionally and conceptually fitting for the launch. Ladna is a so-called workhorse, while Trafarett is a display typeface. Together, we felt they represented our approach to type design.

Like many other independent type design studios, our hope was to create a platform that would allow us to publish our own fonts (and, down the line, fonts by other authors as well). We've never been interested in large distributors such as MyFonts, with their oversaturation, lack of control, and cut-throat competition. We wanted to take the reins and be in control of when to publish our typefaces, how to present and price them, and how to tell their stories.

Ai: It's hard to say whether we would approach starting a foundry differently now. After all, I think we are trying to hold on to an illusion. Or perhaps it isn't an illusion, and we simply have to keep going and stay true to our path.

La: What exactly is this illusion?

Ai: Perhaps an illusion of the existence of an audience or a group of designers who value local cultural history and solutions born from a very specific context. I think we still believe in that. It's difficult to keep pace with newcomers who have shown us the level of competitiveness required for staying relevant.

I also find our location special. Not just Estonia, but Eastern Europe in general. The local history has not yet been as thoroughly explored, there are still many untold stories.

I have compared success in font design to sports: it isn't determined by a single measurable quality. Imagine a running track in a sports arena, with all these type designers constantly competing against each other. However, the audience keeps walking in and out – they weren't there for the starting signal, and they won't stay until the finish line. In a way, this is what makes it special. Anyone can take advantage of that moment. It may seem that Estonia's design field is decades behind because of the occupation period. But where we might feel that we are behind by an entire lap, to someone just arriving at the arena, it may look as though we are even in the lead. There is always so much potential, we simply have to make use of it.

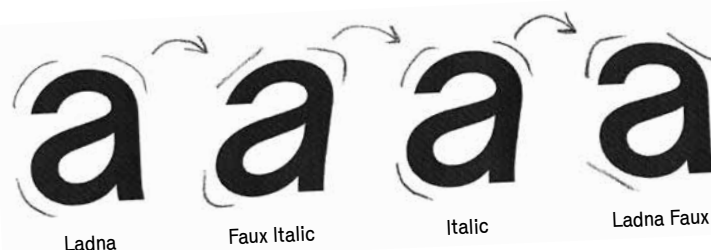
La: What values have been important to you in building the foundry?

An: We are constantly looking for solutions that are innovative in some respect, even if only for us. In a broader context, some of our ideas might seem quite ordinary but we are always on the lookout for an angle that would make the project feel fresh and bring a new perspective to the field. We seek ideas that haven't been explored yet, or at least not in a way that we find interesting. It can sometimes happen that while working on a font, someone else releases something similar. These situations are inevitable and we have learnt to accept them. Ultimately, we know that our idea came from our own process and everything else is a coincidence. Ideas are often floating around, with different people stumbling upon them at the same time.

La: Could you tell me a bit about the background of your fonts?

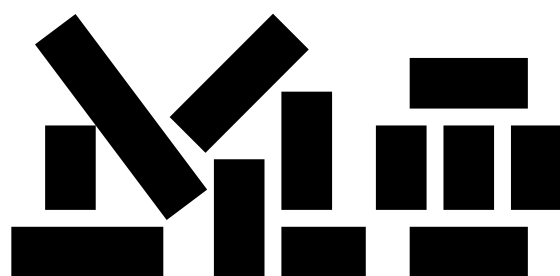
An: We could take any font in our catalogue as an example. The idea behind Ladna was to draw inspiration from street signs. It felt important as an act of preserving cultural heritage. Ultimately, the concept is not particularly original – there are many other fonts modelled after street signs. But they all look distinct from one another as there are different signs in different places.

Later, we had the idea of creating a faux style for Ladna. First, we slanted the Romans and made optical corrections to achieve "true" italics, and then slanted them back to an upright position. In this process, visual errors began to emerge – essentially it's a trick that could be done using Indesign. For us, however, this was innovative, and in a way, it felt like a statement: we took what might normally be dismissed as an amateurish faux pas and cemented it into a functional font.



Ai: Most of my fonts are built around modularity. I create systems – whether consisting of three-to-five pieces or forty different elements – that can be used to construct letters and alphabets. This was already how I approached font making at school. It makes sense when you're just getting started: you don't feel the pressure to decide on the exact shape of a curve, instead you can simply rotate some blocks around. The process entails a certain abstraction that I like. I'm looking for a combination of warmth and a type of strictness.

I have recently started looking back at these early experiments and considered giving them another spin. Not necessarily to improve the systems themselves, but to squint my eyes and see whether these compositions might contain any beginnings of a more serious typeface.



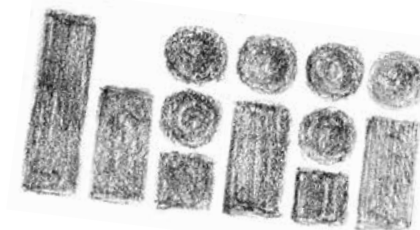
font Plokk

Could you bring a specific font as an example?

Trafarett

Ai: Trafarett is a direct reference to Futura Black and Kombinations-Schrift by Joseph Albers. When this font is printed using rudimentary methods or set through analogue phototypesetting, all kinds of unexpected things begin to occur. Some forms, for example, merge and melt into one another. I'm very interested in trying any font across different printing methods to uncover qualities that its original designer might not have anticipated. These deviations fascinate me.

Ai: Looking back, I could have realised at ECAL that I had already gained similar experiences at EKA to what I was looking for and there was no need to repeat that. I made big efforts to create a similar space for discussion. But as it turns out, that's not how it works – every place has its own climate.



Ai: A certain naivety comes into play here. The field of type design is incredibly wide and there are conflicting ideas of what constitutes naivety. A designer might dismiss something as naive just by looking at it, but I don't think it's possible to judge a work on appearances alone, without hearing out the reasoning behind the author's decisions.

La: Let's talk a little more about education. Aimur studied type design at ECAL, but as you mentioned, what interests you more is the perspective of a graphic designer. How has that shaped your approach to designing typefaces? And are there actually any type designers who haven't studied graphic design?

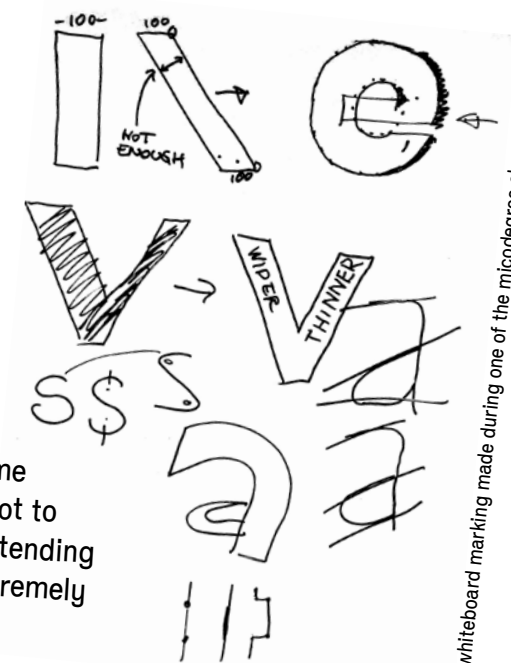
An: As far as I know, most type designers have a background in graphic design before specialising later. I remember how around the time of our graduation, designer Norman Orro suggested that if we decide not to study further, our fonts might stay fresher. Although Aimur ended up attending a programme focused on type design, the aim was never to become extremely professional. Rather, it was about learning the principles, to then apply them in a critical manner.

Ai: During my studies at ECAL, I became somewhat overtaken by that idea. I was spoonfed very specific knowledge – it was a great privilege to learn type design in this way. Nevertheless, I started pushing back against the rules, as I have a tendency to do, looking for a more independent path. At school, they found my rebelliousness difficult to accept. Some students know how to approach school very pragmatically, consciously avoiding certain topics which I would have wanted to discuss in depth. This created conflict. Perhaps it seemed as though I wasn't appreciative of the opportunities the school was offering me. I never intended to challenge anyone's authority, but somewhere along the way, a communication error occurred.

Ultimately, the point of studying type design is to learn the technical foundations. Perhaps you just have to suffer through that.

La: It's a niche field and there aren't fifteen schools to choose from to pick the one that suits you the best. In that sense, you might be right – the only option is to learn the foundations and decide later how to build upon that.

La: In 2022 you led a micro-degree course in type design at EKA. This gave you a sense of what it means to teach your own course, in addition to your experience teaching classes and workshops at the academy. Have you ever thought about what you would focus on if you could run a type design Master's programme yourselves?



whiteboard marking made during one of the microdegree classes

Ai: Well, you can't really compare running a micro-degree course to running a department. After the course, we actually started to feel that we needed to take a break from teaching. We have both been teaching for nearly ten years now. Those years have passed in a haphazard manner, learning the craft on our own along the way. In order to grow, we find it important to prioritise our own practice for a while – it has started drifting in a direction that isn't necessarily compatible with what is expected from a school programme, whether at Bachelor's or Master's level.

If we ever had the chance to run a one- or two-year programme in type design, it would be centred around in-depth individual research, for instance into (recent) historical examples. This would be supported by the practice of drawing type by hand as well as digitally, alongside the theory and practice of vectorisation. Type optics should be re-examined. I've noticed that in Estonia there are gaps in the knowledge and skills in this area, even when it comes to the work of the best graphic designers... To be honest, I don't think a traditional higher education institution is the most suitable environment for learning such a subject. Recently I've been toying with the idea of gathering a small group of like-minded people to practice and do exercises together. Like a contemporary scriptorium of sorts.

La: Let's talk a little about your collaborative process. Why did you decide to start working together?

An: We were always sending each other our works and references, discussing and reflecting on them together. We share a similar taste and vision in many respects. In that regard, it has made sense for us to work together. The volume of work that gets done is greater, too: if you work alone, you might get stuck perfecting a detail, whereas it's really helpful to have someone else already looking at a different nuance. However, this was never the main reason for working together, it was more of a bonus.

Ai: I could even imagine more people joining our team. There's hope that a new generation of people is coming up, with a deeper interest in this world of fonts.

For us, working on the same font is still not a fully seamless process. But maybe the reason is that we haven't yet been able to both dedicate ourselves to it full-time. If we somehow managed to do that, working on a single file would probably become smoother too.

koalia

La: How does the process of creating a new typeface usually begin? Do you first discuss it in detail or simply start working away at it?

Ai: It depends. Often, while working on a project, we are already thinking about new ideas. It's like a brain worm – you might have a deadline looming, but in the back of your head, a completely different idea is taking shape. You then scribble it on a sheet of paper and soon enough, you're working on a file. You get hit by adrenaline and want to develop it as much as possible, just to have something to show to your partner. To surprise him with a sketch and hear what he thinks.

At school, I wasn't always putting enough ideas down on paper. More often, I would process them in my head. Now, when collaborating, I try to make many sketches and work through my ideas before sharing them.

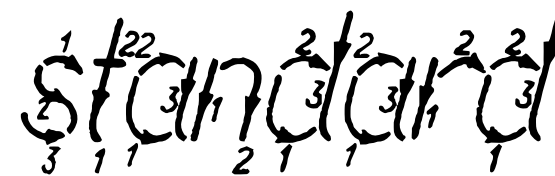
An: Aimur indeed has a tendency to work on these secret projects. At the same time, he's worried whether any of it makes sense and that he should really be working on something else. Meanwhile, he somehow ends up with an almost finished project. I've always liked the results, and he has supported my initiatives as well, so the collaboration actually works. Sometimes we do quite different things but that's what makes it interesting. And in the end, there isn't much criticism we need to give each other. More often, we just begin discussing the technical aspects – how to structure some details of the typeface. We don't really go over each other's work with a red pen.



La: How much do you think you influence each other?

An: Depends on the project. We are currently working on a font named Trajektoor. It has been digitised based on the standard instructions that architects would use to draw, with the help of a ruler, the lettering on their project drawings. There are many Soviet-era manuals that teach how to construct these letters, containing diagrams with small arrows and numbers. Aimur has long had the idea that the diagrams themselves could be made into a font, with the construction instructions surrounding each letter. At some point, I started bringing this idea to life.

Once we have an idea and a relatively clear sense of direction, we don't necessarily need to work on the same file together. Basically, one of us just has to give form to the idea, and usually we agree on how it should be done.



La: How important is it to you that a typeface begins with an idea? I don't necessarily mean a specific technical concept, but rather a conceptual one?

An: Sometimes, these ideas aren't that deep and instead grow out of a form. Or, in the case of Aimur's modular typefaces, from a system or a principle. At the same time, when looking for an innovative visual language, it helps to have a guiding idea or a method. It's hard to create new shapes in isolation. A clear concept is like a compass that helps keep the project on course throughout the entire process. With a strong idea behind it, a typeface almost designs itself.

Royale

Ai: The technology becomes the tool.

An: My font Juunior started with the principle of stretching out round shapes. When you apply an idea systematically, it leads to something new and exciting.

Ai: Type design is a silly field in the sense that letters need to remain recognisable – the same shapes they have always been. At the same time, we are constantly looking for something new. The goal is to find a combination that is at once familiar and distinct.

I agree that with enough work, time and dedication, almost any idea can be executed well. Conversely, no idea is strong on its own: it always requires thoughtful development.

La: I'm personally very interested in where ideas come from and what inspires people. As you mentioned, ideas don't necessarily have to be that original, what matters is how you work with existing material. Where do you usually find inspiration for your ideas?

An: I've been doing less of it recently, but during my studies I spent a lot of time digging through all kinds of online archives where old type specimens are uploaded. I was constantly saving things into folders, like producers searching for a rare vinyl to sample. It's essentially the same process. We are looking for something that hasn't been done yet, as far as we know anyway.

For instance, we are soon launching our font Turist, which is based on a typeface found online, Venezia, published by Keystone Type Foundry in 1906. I hadn't come across a digitised version of it yet, and couldn't find anything when I started searching. This was a good enough reason to start working on it. And not just because it hadn't been done yet, but the typeface also felt fresh, despite being more than a century old. It seemed like it still felt relevant today.



Venezia

Turist

Aimur, on the other hand, has collected a lot of local Estonian printed matter. Our collection is constantly growing. Sometimes, as was the case with Turist, the source material is quite concrete. At other times, we notice a single misprinted letter in a publication, which becomes the starting point for an entire typeface.

Ai: I'm indeed very interested in the history of printing. I work at the bookshop Raamatukoi, where I come across all kinds of publications from the past century. One of my tasks is to leaf through them and spot any major defects. Sometimes I take advantage of this obligation and spend more time flipping through a book, at which point I might discover interesting printing errors. I often try to find out what exactly went wrong in the printing process, how that delicate distortion made its way onto the printing plate.

METOODILINE

lühikeste
Uno Laht

At the TYPA printing and paper arts centre in Tartu, there are old printing presses, including a large offset printer from the 1970s or 80s. I'm not using the correct terminology, but it has a lot of cogs, and if there's even a minimal error between their radiuses, something starts slipping inside the machine and a ghostly image appears over the printed text.

The most difficult question is whether the idea has potential, and if so, how to translate such mistakes into a digital font. I often come to the conclusion that it can't be done or that it simply doesn't make sense to imitate the error. Instead, it can be successfully reproduced in the physical world, creating a certain enjoyable sensibility that is characteristic of old books. The graphic designers of that era might have cursed the poor paper and print quality, but to me, some contemporary books look so perfect that they almost feel eerie, as if they weren't objects from the physical world at all. What I do is look for a bridge: a way to recreate that specific warmth through a typeface or through the process of printing.

La: You brought up working with archival materials. How do you approach bringing a century-old design into a contemporary context? Do you look for qualities in the original design that already feel contemporary, or do you simply try to reimagine an old design in a new way?

An: Depending on the project, it can go either way. In the case of the typeface Vitamiin, I noticed a detail on an early 20th-century poster: the terminals of the hand-painted letters varied – some were round, others angular. This approach felt contemporary to me, I hadn't seen this kind of variation applied to a typeface before. The letterforms themselves weren't as important to me as these details, from which I was able to create a new system.

On the other hand, in the process of digitising Turiist, I had to make decisions about how to leave out elements that felt a little outdated. I had to look at the bigger picture through a contemporary lens and make it more digestible.

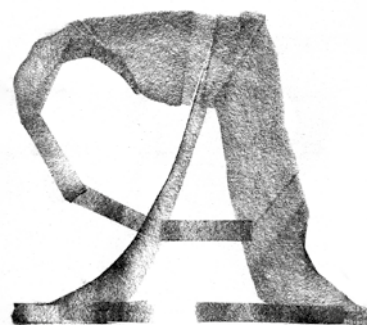


Ai: In a way, it works to our advantage that it takes so long to make a font. Some typefaces can be finalised almost mechanically, based on a clear idea and set of principles, but with others, you need to create a temporal shift for yourself, to put something on paper and leave it to ferment.

If you stay up to date with what is happening in the field of type design, you might be tempted to react to or oppose some currents at once. At the same time, the field is highly oversaturated, the discussion is constantly evolving, and it is impossible to respond in time to the original ideas that sparked these conversations. In that sense, it doesn't make much sense to aim to meet some metric of trendiness.



Something that I'm also interested in is straying off my own path. When making a typeface, I can follow certain principles for a certain period of time, but at some point, as I'm nearing the end, I tend to put a spoke in my own wheel, to see if everything still holds together or if it needs another spin. It can create interesting results.



Vee Thin
Vee Thin Italic
Vee Light
Vee Light Italic
Vee Regular
Vee Regular Italic
Vee Medium
Vee Medium Italic
Vee Bold
Vee Bold Italic
Vee Variable

The aim was never to become extremely professional. Rather, it was about learning the principles, to then apply them in a critical manner.

a certain abstraction

Some forms, FOR EXAMPLE, merge and melt into one another.

leave it to ferment

potential

Ideas are often floating around, with different people stumbling upon them at the same time.

shape

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What exactly is this

I was also dabbling in design during school.

Ladna is a so-called

orkhorse.

I think we STILL believe in that.

PRINTED USING RUDIMENTARY METHODS OR SET THROUGH ANALOGUE PHOTOTYPESETTING

FLOATING AROUND

A certain naivety comes into play here.

I would go to the heating plant where my mother worked and download fonts onto a USB stick. At home, I would simply look through them on Microsoft Word.

HOW TO TELL THEIR STORIES

Raamatukoi

WARMTH and a type of STRICTNESS

I FORGET

TO CLEARLY

ARTICULATE

he's worried whether any
of it makes sense and
that he should really be working
on something else

GRAPHITE RUBBINGS

flipping letters

HE IS QUITE UMBLE, WHICH IS PERHAPS TYPICAL OF HIS
GENERATION. HE CLAIMED THAT HE HADN'T DONE MUCH AND
THAT HE HAD "SIMPLY LOOKED AT THAT HELVETICA FONT."

scriptorium
historical
a contemporary

stretching out ROUND shapes

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references, discussing and reflecting on them together.
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it was more of a BONUS

Soviet

annuals

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ideas. It's like a brain worm – you might have a deadline looming, but in
the back of your head, a completely different idea is taking shape.

HAPHAZARD

How much do you think you influence each other?

We actually started more often
brushes

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO
START WORKING TOGETHER?
secret projects

La: What was the process of making the Tartu fonts like?
It was a commission – did you simply create a typeface
based on the brief or was there more collaboration
between you, the client and the design studio?

Ai: AKU's moodboards already included some
Tartu street signs. But they might not have
expected us to relate to them so literally.

Kompanii

An: The design studio working on the visual
identity for the city of Tartu, AKU, commissioned
us to make the typeface. They didn't really art
direct the font, but we met with them occasionally
to show our sketches. The central and most
interesting cut of the typeface is called Semiootik,
and it's based on the principle of flipping letters to change
their meaning – an upside down V becomes an A, and
so forth. That was probably the thing we discussed
the most. The designers at AKU would test the cut
in their designs and this process revealed the favourite
letterforms and those that didn't work at all.

An: The font also features a third, more decorative
style, Tartu Geneetik. We spent a long time
searching for the right form, as our sketches
didn't quite work for AKU for one reason or
another. Aimur eventually came up with the
idea of introducing an element of calligraphy,
which immediately brought the cut to life.

TARTU

a a

The idea for the Semiootik cut emerged out
of a conversation between Aimur and our friend,
designer Henri Papson. In the studio's original
brief, they suggested creating three cuts that
would refer to the past, the present, and
the future.

a e

Ai: We adopted a semi-fictional approach to the typeface.
When looking at the street signs, we started questioning
why the letters looked slightly off. Considering the limited
timeframe, we didn't have the chance to conduct proper
historical research, so I made an intuitive assumption:
perhaps the sign painter was using brushes that didn't
hold enough paint to draw the full letter in a single motion.
This might have resulted in a slightly uneven line.

We tried replicating the brush movements to see
where the point with the least paint or the narrowest
edge would appear. Based on this principle, we
were able to create the entire alphabet.

Ai: They even proposed it could just be alternate
characters. Originally, they only wanted a
single font with one cut. We were the ones who
suggested to expand the scope of the project.

An: As the budget was limited, AKU suggested
keeping the workload as small as possible.
Despite that, we wanted to create something
we felt passionate about, not simply complete
the task. It's hard to determine how much our
typeface influenced their visuals and vice versa,
but generally, they were designing their system
independently, and we were relatively free to
do what we wanted with the font.

By now, our
typeface Tallinn
Grotesk is almost
finished as well,
and we've learnt
that there were no
brushes involved,
instead, stencils
were used, along
with other methods
of applying paint.

Tartu
Tartu
Tartu

La: Did they have a more specific direction in mind for the
typeface – besides the idea of the past, present and future?
Did they share any visual examples?

La: Is Tallinn Grotesk also a commission?

An: It did indeed start as one. In 2025, an Olympic Sailing Regatta themed exhibition was held at the Estonian Museum of Architecture. When conducting research for the exhibition, original sketches emerged of an information graphics font, Tallinna Infošrift, that was intended to be used during the 1980 Tallinn Regatta. Originally, it was planned as a wayfinding typeface for the whole city of Tallinn, but as was typical in the Soviet era, the idealistic plan never materialised. However, the original drafts for the typeface had remained and their designer, Tiit Jürna, is still around.

We had just finished creating a custom typeface for designer Bruno Tomberg's retrospective at the Estonian Museum of Applied Art and Design. Grete Tiigiste, a curator at the Museum of Architecture, then invited us to join her Regatta exhibition team and digitise Jürna's drawings into a workable font.

Ai: With the financial support from the exhibition we were able to almost finalise the first cut of the typeface, which designer Mirjam Varik then used for the exhibition graphics. We are now in the final stages of expanding the type family, and Andree has been working hard on it. We hope to complete the font by the end of this year.

We'd also like to create a printed specimen for the typeface. We have collected many archival photographs, and together with our intern at the time, Georg Ander Sild, we made graphite rubbings of the Tallinna Infošrift lettering on the plaque of the Olympic cauldron by the Piritä River. Within the local design field, this is a very unique project. It is extremely rare for a typeface designed from scratch to be completed in Estonia. Although Tallinna Infošrift was never cast for letterpress, original working drawings for signage were produced.

REGATI

Long before we learnt about these drawings, Ivar Sakk gave me some low-quality photographic slides of the typeface that had probably already been copied several times. If we hadn't found out that these original sketches existed, this version of the typeface's story would have remained untold.

With some fonts, it's fun to speculate freely, but when you're dealing with something this unique in the Estonian context... As the first people to interpret this typeface, it didn't feel right for us to impose our own style on it. Now one chapter has been completed, and perhaps other versions will follow.

La: Did you talk to Tiit Jürna as well? How did he feel about young designers making a new font based on a typeface he made – or at least started?



photographic slides of Tallinna Infošrift (Tiit Jürna)

An: He was very excited about us doing all this work based on his "hand-wobbling", as he called it.

Ai: He is quite humble, which is perhaps typical of his generation. He claimed that he hadn't done much and that he had "simply looked at that Helvetica font." He saw his typeface as a knock-off and didn't consider himself as its author. In his view, the author was still Max Miedinger. We explained to him how today discussions around authorship have changed, and that it's perfectly acceptable to build on historical examples.

Especially because he said that he didn't actually copy Helvetica, but studied and analysed it instead. He then drew entirely different adjustments, proportions, and details. That is what makes me the happiest within this project. I would love to show more designers who worked during the Soviet era that their practice was, in fact, world-class. At the time, they may have felt they had fallen far behind, but 30 or 40 years later, we see their work in a different light.

La: I would also like to talk a bit about our collaboration. Has it ever happened before that a designer knocks on your door with some rudimentary sketches, asking if you'd be interested in developing them into a new font? How did you feel about that suggestion?

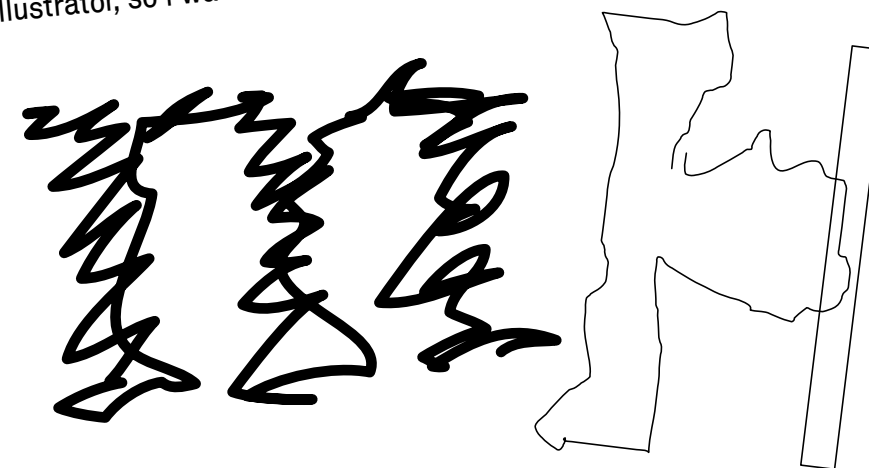
An: We found it to be a really nice challenge. It was the first time something like this had happened.

Ai: We have been looking for opportunities like this, although admittedly we haven't put much effort into actively finding them.

While teaching the micro-degree course at EKA, we talked with Ivar about doing something similar. During one of the lessons, he showed us some sketches that he had drawn on paper while travelling – he had lost his computer, or maybe it had broken.

La: Many designers are interested in how fonts are made and might like to try creating one themselves, but they lack the necessary knowledge and tools. The world of type design can often feel inaccessible and distant, and from a technical standpoint, making fonts comes across as a complicated process. These days, any scribble can be turned into a fun font, but creating something more elaborate can feel daunting.

Our project started during the micro-degree course. I developed my idea over a very short period of time. I hadn't actually joined the course with the intention of designing fonts right away. Rather, it seemed like a short, fun course that would give me a better understanding of the work that goes into creating a typeface. My hope was that it would make it easier for me to do collaborative projects in type design in the future. I was also never very good at Illustrator, so I was excited to play around with it a bit, draw some curves.



At first, I made quite a few fun and intuitive sketches for fonts, but later I felt the urge to focus on something more specific. For instance, to choose a sans-serif font and explore what it would be like to create something similar. I didn't have any grand ambitions to reinvent something. What did you see in my sketches, did you have a sense of where to start or how to proceed?

After my initial experiments, I was perhaps expecting you to articulate your feedback in a more precise way. But in the end, graphic design and type design are two very different worlds. As a graphic designer, you probably respond and form opinions more intuitively.



Vee process sketch made during the microdegree course

Ai: In the context of this project, I found your drawing style interesting. It wasn't amateurish in the sense of displaying carelessness, laziness, or a lack of precision. It's intriguing to look at drawings where you can sense that the author's actions were deliberate, but that they perhaps lack the experience to fully realise their vision.

The project was a good learning process for me. I was reminded once again that, at the beginning of any endeavour, I tend to get overly enthusiastic about every possible direction. With each new project, I see the potential to create the most special thing in the world. It was the same with your font. I started analysing all kinds of details that were simply the result of hurried movements. I don't want to pass judgement on whether over-analysing is necessary or not... I've noticed that if I don't do it, I'll regret it later.

La: It was compelling for me to follow your working process. I also recognise the tendency towards over-analysis that you mentioned, in myself. But this time, I felt that I lacked the knowledge to provide very specific feedback. I found it more interesting to give you the freedom to explore and see in which direction you would take the font. At the same time, as probably became apparent to you during the process, I do have very specific preferences in certain matters.

Speaking of time, over the years I've realised that life is short, and if you want to try different things – and sometimes even surprise yourself – you can't spend endless amounts of time on a project. Even if you invest more time in something, the result isn't always worth it. As you've probably noticed, I also like a slightly unfinished visual feel, something that doesn't come across over-refined.

An: I'm happy with our direction and the result. The font is rather straight-forward, simple – a little workhorse for you. And I feel like it somehow suits you.

Ai: In the end, as this was a collaboration, whatever ambitions we might have had, we couldn't simply pull the blanket entirely to our side. This made decision-making easier.

An: And it's nice that the typeface doesn't have too many frills or try too hard to show off. It's laconic, and what makes it special is hidden in the finer details. This leaves space to play around with the design, the typeface doesn't need to have the loudest voice in the room.

La: I liked how, during our meetings, we assessed together whether any letters were trying to do too much. Now, in the final stages of the process, I feel like there isn't much left for me to comment on. You've put in a lot of work, and that's evident in the result. Vee has a lot of character.

An: I'm glad to hear that, as it probably shows that we've been able to steer the typeface towards a result you may have originally envisioned, but perhaps would have struggled to reach on your own. We're on the home stretch now and just need to push it over the finish line.

La: Aimur, you mentioned how, at first, you saw so many different possibilities for where this project could go. Since type design isn't my focus, I wouldn't have been able to even conceive of some of the directions that you were considering. From that perspective, it's nice for me to have these discussions, although I can imagine that you might feel some potential was left on the table.

Ai: No, not that. It's just that, when analysing myself, I realise I tend to pile up ideas. This is, of course, connected to the thought that life is indeed short. Andree and I have also realised that we probably can't complete all the typefaces we would like to. In that sense, it's perhaps a little childish to try to add every bell and whistle to all projects.

La: We could also discuss the font Venus that Vee is based on. While working on this project, you've probably spent a lot of time looking at and analysing the source typeface. What would you say makes Venus special? What is your contemporary view of it?

Nr. 1965a. Corps 84 (7 Cicero). Min. 24 kg — 3 A 8 a

Elektra

excerpt from Bauer Type Foundry's Venus specimen

Ai: I didn't actually look at the original that much. I was more focused on your drawings and the initial file. I was drawn to the idea of letting myself be guided by what you had made – that you are the source material. The connection to Venus is clear and obvious anyway.

An: Venus is an interesting typeface because it appears timeless in a very specific way. It is very much a product of its time, yet it can still be easily used today. In a way, I find it charming how some typefaces possess this quality of timelessness, and others do not.

Ai: I have personally never used Venus. Trying to recall what it looks like, I feel that Laura's Vee is somewhat like our era's version of it. Vee attempts to resemble the original typeface, but it doesn't come entirely naturally, because it is very much tied to our own time.

La: That's of course a question of perception. It's difficult to pinpoint what makes something feel contemporary. Perhaps it's easier to recognise what makes something feel old-fashioned.

Ai: I think it's clear from looking at Vee that it was created after the year 2020. At the same time, I don't know whether it will continue to feel like a 2020s typeface in the future, or if people might mistake it for something much newer. But in the end, it's not that important to think about.

La: I agree. I've used Venus so much that I just intuitively like its overall look. I've never really worried about whether it feels old-fashioned or not. For me, creating a typeface based on Venus was also a kind of tribute – that's where the name of the typeface comes from as well. Vee builds upon specific characteristics of Venus that I've always found charming.

An: I think we partly consider Venus to be timeless because of the way you use it. You have shown us that it's possible to use it in a contemporary way. Generally, timeless fonts tend to have a rather neutral character, but Venus is a special case: it looks quite extravagant while still feeling fresh.

Ai: I'm really put off whenever I see a classic typeface being used for some generic trendy commercial design. I get this flash of anger – I don't think the person behind such a design senses the nuances of the typeface. Luckily, I haven't seen Venus being used in that way.

La: The original plan was to create this font just for my personal use. I liked the idea of having a typeface that I could use for most of my designs, at least for a while, especially for self-initiated projects. Both of you were quite excited about this idea as well. But as we went on, I started to feel that it didn't make sense to keep it only to myself. Since we had already created this font, why not share it with others? We'll see what kind of life it takes on.

Ai: We designed Vee in a way that it doesn't necessarily appeal to everyone, it may be more attractive to designers of a certain niche. But in reality, isn't it nice that we don't get to decide what kind of life the typeface takes on after its release, and that all kinds of surprises can occur? I don't have to like all of them, but I can still learn from them. This helps us understand how the typeface is perceived and what the era we're living in is like.

La: I'm a big fan of Conan O'Brien, the American comedian and TV personality. Right before our meeting today, I watched a video on YouTube from a few weeks ago in which he was giving a speech to Harvard graduates. O'Brien reflected on his own studies at the school and how, after graduating from Harvard, he became someone who makes a living by coming up with silly ideas. At one point, he said: "Let yourself be bad at things." I found that to be a really nice idea, and one that also summarises how I currently approach my work.

An: That's a nice idea to live by... or in a way, it feels hopeful and reassuring.

Ai: Especially once you have more experience and no longer need to question every decision. I keep reminding myself of the same thing.

La: Despite having worked as a designer for almost fifteen years, I still feel like an amateur in every way – like a child who, every now and then, has to put some work out in the world without fully knowing how to. But I suppose that's how it is. In the end, we are all the children we used to be, just in a different guise.

An: I think that's a very healthy approach. There are certainly designers out there who see themselves as full-scale pros and don't allow that child within them to shine through. You need to find that child and nurture them.

The conversation took place over Zoom on 1 June 2026, with Laura joining from her home in Amsterdam, Aimur from Tüpokompanii's studio, and Andree from home while simultaneously entertaining his children.

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Tallinn, 2026

Tüpokompanii is a type design studio based in Tallinn, founded in 2022 by Andree Paat and Aimur Takk. Their practice spans designing retail typefaces, custom type design commissions, and teaching. Through a “mistake-driven” approach, Andree and Aimur explore unexpected qualities within letterforms, using experimentation to uncover new possibilities and challenge conventions in type design.

Laura Pappa is a freelance graphic designer based in Amsterdam. Her practice encompasses both commissioned and self-initiated projects, as well as occasional teaching. Her independent work includes publishing the series “Exercises in Practical Mischiefery”, writing, and occasionally designing objects. Last winter she initiated Fruit Basket, an event series in Amsterdam centred on non-expert knowledge and activities in public space.

Else Lagerspetz is a freelance graphic designer and cultural worker travelling between Tallinn, Helsinki and Amsterdam. She works on design, translation and writing commissions, in her personal practice, she is interested in the intersections of written language and visual form, both as an object of research and as an approach.

VEE

1. the letter V

2. something shaped like the letter V

a flock of birds

a fork in the road

an unfinished triangle

an arrow pointing down

U V W X Y

A V is a U that wanted to stretch its legs, a W is two V's standing next to each other shoulder to shoulder, an X is two Vs climbing on top of each other, a Y is a V that wanted to be taller...

Vee is a collaboration between Laura Pappa and Tüpokompanii (Andree Paat and Aimur Takk), developed from a micro-degree course in type design taught by Aimur and Andree at the Estonian Academy of Arts in autumn 2022.

Vee draws inspiration from Venus, a sans-serif typeface family released by the Bauer Type Foundry in 1907 that was popular throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Having regularly worked with Venus in her own designs, Laura was eager to develop a typeface that references its distinctive character while introducing new qualities of its own. Vee could be considered Venus' younger, more mischievous sister.

Cuts:

Vee Thin, *Vee Thin Italic*, Vee Light, *Vee Light Italic*,
Vee Regular, *Vee Regular Italic*, Vee Medium,
Vee Medium Italic, Vee Bold, *Vee Bold Italic*,
V e e V a r i a b l e

Designers:

Aimur Takk, Andree Paat, Laura Pappa