AN ICON YOU SHOULD KNOW...

Zuzana Licko

Slovak-born American type designer, born 1961

Zuzana Licko is a type designer who runs Emigre, a digital type foundry in Berkeley, California, with her husband, Rudy VanderLans. Her first fonts were made for the coarse pixels of the first Macintosh, and she turned that limit into a style. Later she drew new versions of classic book faces, such as Mrs Eaves. Read this page in about five minutes, then use the links at the end to look deeper.

FURTHER LOOKING

Emigre: Her foundry, with font pages, type specimens and essays. emigre.com
Emigre: The Lo-Res page, home of Oakland and her other pixel fonts. emigre.com
MoMA: The collection page for Oakland. moma.org
Video: SOTA 2013 Typography Award: Zuzana Licko
Website: Mrs Eaves



Filosofia type sample, 1996. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0. Full credit on page 3.

01 Fact Sheet

1961	Born in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia.
1960s	Comes to the United States with her family at age seven.
Early 1980s	Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, where she meets Rudy VanderLans. She earns a degree in graphic communications.
1984	The Macintosh comes out, and she and VanderLans buy one. Emigre magazine starts the same year.
1985	She and VanderLans start selling her fonts as Emigre Graphics. She designs bitmap fonts such as Oakland.
1986	Designs Matrix.
1996	Designs Mrs Eaves and Filosofia, her takes on Baskerville and Bodoni.
1997	Receives the AIGA Medal with VanderLans.
2005	Emigre magazine ends after 21 years.
2013	Designs Program and receives the SOTA Typography Award.

Life and career Milestones tied to the key works

FOUR KEY WORKS, PAGE 2

1985 Oakland
1986 Matrix
1996 Mrs Eaves
2013 Program

02 Four Key Works

Licko's typefaces are shown below in openly licensed type samples. The four run from her first pixel fonts to a font about the craft of type design itself.

1985: Oakland

Letters built from screen pixels

Licko's first fonts were bitmap designs for the coarse screens and dot matrix printers of the early Macintosh. She has said you could not shrink a classic print face to 72 dots per inch and keep its character, so she built letters from the pixel grid itself. Oakland was one of these early fonts. In 2001 Emigre grouped Oakland and her other bitmap fonts into one family called Lo-Res. The Museum of Modern Art showed Oakland in 2011 as one of the digital typefaces in its permanent collection.

LOOK FOR Curves made of square steps | Shapes that snap to a grid

See Oakland in the MoMA collection →



Oakland, 1985. Wikimedia Commons, CC0 1.0.

1986: Matrix

Sharp serifs that saved memory

Matrix grew out of the proportions of her bitmap fonts. Printers of the time had little memory, so Licko kept the points needed to draw each letter to a minimum. That gave Matrix its small triangular serifs, which take fewer points than square or curved ones. Matrix became one of Emigre's best sellers. In 2007 Licko started a full rework called Matrix II, with less contrast and new styles. The sample below shows Matrix II.

LOOK FOR Small pointed serifs | Simple strokes with little contrast



Matrix, 1986. Wikimedia Commons, CC0 1.0.

1996: Mrs Eaves

A classic book face, made new

Mrs Eaves was Licko's first try at a traditional typeface. It is based on Baskerville, which John Baskerville designed in England in 1757. She named it after Sarah Eaves, his housekeeper, who later became his wife. Licko made the strokes heavier than most digital Baskervilles and lowered the x-height, the height of letters like x and o, to keep the page looking light. Emigre says Mrs Eaves has outsold all its other fonts many times over.

LOOK FOR Short lowercase letters next to tall capitals | Wide letters with soft contrast



Mrs Eaves, 1996. Wikimedia Commons, CC0 1.0.

2013: Program

A type designer's typeface

Emigre calls Program a type designer's typeface. It is about the small details type designers fret over, and it mixes stroke endings and weights that are not usually found in one family. It has rounded edges that copy how ink spreads in printing. It also has ink traps, small notches cut into joins to fight that same spread.

LOOK FOR Notches cut where strokes meet | Soft, rounded stroke ends



Program, 2013. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.0.

TRY THIS

Draw the letters of your name on a grid of 10 by 10 squares, filling whole squares only. Then redraw them on a 5 by 5 grid. Which shapes did you have to change to keep each letter readable?

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REFLECT

Think About It

Licko's early fonts look the way they do because the first Macintosh could only show coarse pixels. What limit in your own tools or time could you turn into a style?

03 Sources

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Flamon. *Oakland (typeface name)*. Type specimen set in Oakland Ten, 21 Aug. 2024, via Wikimedia Commons. Dedicated to the public domain under CC0 1.0. Accessed 26 Nov. 2026. Rendered from SVG.

Esinconis. *Matrix II OT*. Type specimen of Matrix II, 21 July 2022, via Wikimedia Commons. Dedicated to the public domain under CC0 1.0. Accessed 26 Nov. 2026. Resized for display.

Esinconis. *Mrs Eaves Sample*. Type specimen, 19 Mar. 2023, via Wikimedia Commons. Dedicated to the public domain under CC0 1.0. Accessed 26 Nov. 2026. Placed on a white background.

FontShop. *Program*. Type specimen, 10 May 2013, via Wikimedia Commons. Licensed under CC BY 2.0. Accessed 26 Nov. 2026.

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