

History of the Grid in Design

I want to touch on a bit of history about the evolution of the modern grid.

It dates back to before the invention of movable type and printing. Simple grids were based on optimal proportions ...or mathematical measurements of the page and were used to arrange handwritten text on pages.

In the early 1950's after World War II, a design movement emerged from Switzerland and Germany that has been called Swiss design; also known as the International Typographic Style. A few graphic designers, including Max Bill, Emil Ruder, and Josef Müller-Brockmann, devised a flexible system to help designers achieve coherency in organizing the page.

The result was the modern typographic grid.

The grid was first used in Europe and then in the United States and has been a major force in design.

These pioneers approached solutions in a more universal and scientific way. Personal expression and eccentric solutions to design problems were rejected. In this paradigm, the designer's objective was to achieve clarity and order in spreading important information to the public.

By the mid 1970s instruction of the typographic grid as a part of graphic design curricula had become standard in Europe, North America and much of Latin America. The graphic style of the grid was adopted as a look for corporate communication.

In the early 1980s, a reaction against the entrenchment of the grid, particularly its dogmatic use, and association with corporate culture, resulted in some designers rejecting its use in favor of more organic structure or a deconstruction of the grid.

The mid 1980s brought the Apple Macintosh computer, and the transition away from type being set by typographers to designers setting type themselves resulted in a wave of experimentation, much of it contrary to the structured and clean Swiss design.

In the 1990s, David Carson threw out the grid entirely and is known for his innovative magazine design, and use of experimental typography. He was the art director for the magazine Ray Gun and his widely imitated aesthetic defined the so-called "grunge" era.

Well that's the life of the grid. You really need to practice using the grid and get the feel for the design space you are working in.

Trust me.

Your life in the world of design will be much easier once you commit to the grid.