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National College of Art and Design  
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# Label Design 1870-1940, and its recent revival.

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# Introduction

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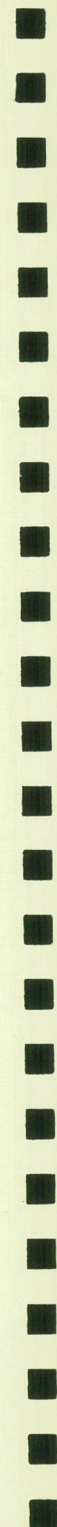
Label and package design has always been of special interest to me. In 1991, I read an article in *Graphis Magazine*, which featured the works of the top five Design Groups of America and Europe. I became interested in the work of the American based Joe Duffy Design Group. Then, in 1992, I was fortunate enough to be able to attend a seminar held in Dublin by Joe Duffy, discussing a wide variety of his own work, which can be characterised as the nostalgic revival of old label designs. This became the inspiration upon which I based my research.

However, while researching the Duffy Design Group, I began to realise that there are much broader aspects of label design to consider, taking in various design movements, each affecting label design in its own way. I became more interested in the source of inspiration of the Duffy Group, and began to explore the influences of various periods of Art on label design and its general appearance, which has undergone considerable change in the past two centuries. The changes which have occurred over the years are due to four main factors. These are as follows: 1. The development of reproductive techniques; 2. The influences of the changing tastes and social effects of the different movements on label design; 3. Letterforms and ornamentation; 4. More recently, the introduction of market research.

Today, labels clearly play a major role in everyday life in the twentieth century. Labels were not always used to such a vast extent; they originated from the simple practical necessity of identifying the contents of containers or indicating to whom they belonged. However, the

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quantity of information given on labels has grown over the centuries. Now, they not only identify the contents, but may also tell us about their quality, date of manufacture, sell-by date, quantity, price, ingredients and method of use. Our increasing need for information has made the need for labels indispensable.

I have decided to concentrate my research on a selection of labels of ordinary house-hold products, printed between 1870 and 1940. I hope to identify the various Graphic styles of these labels and the slight modifications which have been made over the years. I also intend researching the evolution of printing and reproduction methods, and typographical developments and styles, as these are directly related to the evolution of label design. I also wish to explore the influences of the various periods of art, as these had a considerable effect on label style, colour and typographical treatment. The periods I am concerned with are the late Victorian Period (1870-1899), Art Nouveau (1900-1919), and Art Deco (1920-1940).

For the purposes of my Thesis, I am dividing this subject into eight chapters, beginning with a brief history of labels followed by advances in printing and typographical developments. I will then proceed to analyse the three art periods and, finally, look at some of today's nostalgic revival, comparing them with the original items.



# History and Origins

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Labels have been used as a means of identification for centuries. Labels can be traced back to Egyptian times, when pieces of papyrus were attached to earthenware pots over three thousand years ago. The appearance of labels - hand-written information on a piece of paper - did not change until the sixteenth century, when evidence of the first printed labels were found on bales of cotton. Paper manufacturers were possibly the first to use labels in the form of wrappers, with a printed design in the centre. (*Opie, 1987, p.8*)

In the eighteenth century paper availability increased and manufacturing costs reduced. This encouraged paper manufacturers to use printed labels. Products requiring readily identifiable information were among the first to use printed labels. Medicine bottles utilised the clear legibility of printed labels from the early 1700s. During this period the function of the label was primarily to identify the contents of bottles or containers, and to communicate information such as instructions. The concept of branding products is relatively recent. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, all goods sold by shop-keepers were sold directly from the shelves or in unmarked sacks - commodities were weighed and wrapped in sheets of paper. During the Industrial Revolution (in the mid-Victorian period) over-production of goods and the introduction of retail distribution and pre-packaged goods meant that labels pasted onto jars, boxes and packaging became a necessity.



Until the end of the eighteenth century, printing labels was a very time consuming process. Labels were printed by hand on wooden presses, using hand-made paper. But, in 1798, two inventions helped accelerate the growth of labels, the paper-making machine invented in France by Nicholas-Louis Roberts, and lithographic printing by Alois Senefelder in Bavaria. Before the advent of Lithography labels were hand coloured, which was extremely expensive. For many years inventors toyed with various methods to find an effective but inexpensive way of producing colour. This led to the discovery of various techniques such as colour printing from wood engravings and from Chromolithography and Lithography. The introduction of colour printing influenced label designs, converting them into sales gimmicks for the packages they were applied to.

The expense involved in producing original plates for each new label design prompted printers to produce a large selection of stock labels - which included a space into which any manufacturers, or shop-keepers, could insert their name. These stock labels were used by smaller manufacturers and shop-keepers who could not afford personalised labels. They came in a wide variety of shapes and sizes, available in single colours or several colours, and could be applied to boxes and jars, etc. (Fig. 1a & 1b)

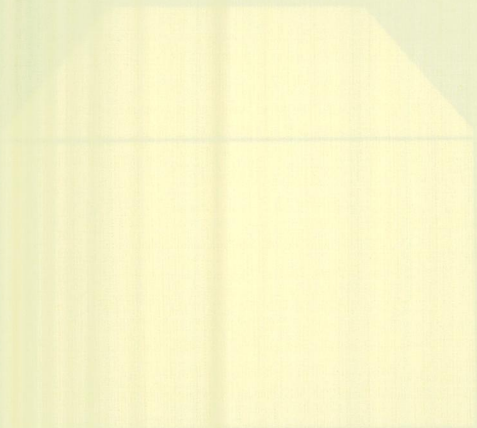
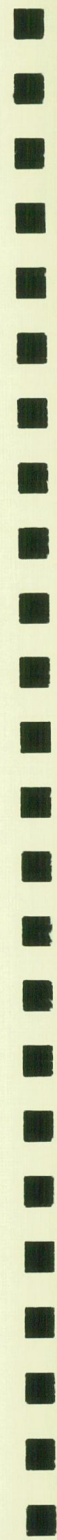
The nineteenth century also changed the basic functions of labels. Manufacturers realised that they could convey far more than just the identity of the product. They could be used to influence consumers' decisions. This led to an influx of sales devices. Manufacturers soon noticed that their products sold better if they had an element of prestige attached. The presence of the Royal Coat of Arms,



Fig. 1a. Chemist's stock label dating from the 1870s.



Fig. 1b. Sample page from a catalogue of stock labels by J & J Murdoch Ltd. Glasgow 1900s.

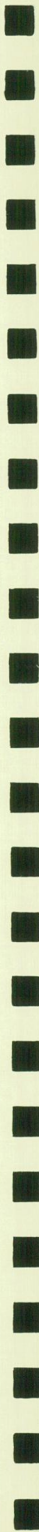


medals won at Trade Fairs or a testimonial from a highly respected analyst gave the product a sense of quality. This became very fashionable during the Victorian period. By the 1930s a further sales device was in general use - the direct incentive. Incentives had indeed been in existence since the 1880s, when, *Sunlight Soap* boxes offered £1,000 reward to anyone who could find any imperfection in their product. Other inducements were offered at the time, including the pack which had use after the contents were used. But, at the end of the 1950s, the promotional packs bearing competition details, free gifts or price reductions were the norm. However, I feel that this spoils the design elements of labels and packages.

Today's supermarket labels combine all of these ingredients - from the purely functional message, to the inducement factors. Now, labels must also conform to a string of legal requirements - the sell-by date and instructions for use. A further addition is the barcode, necessary for checkout automation. This is hated by the Designer as it is difficult to accommodate in the overall design. As regards the label itself, there have been few innovations, with the exception of the self-adhesive label in 1935, discovered by Stanton Avery of Los Angeles. More recently, a number of synthetic materials, based on plastic properties, have been developed to improve the label's wearing quality. In many areas the traditional paper labels have declined. Now, bottle, can and box labels are printed directly onto the surface of the containers.

In recent years the introduction of market research has had dramatic effects on the aesthetic appearance of labels. Now, before labels are created, researchers lay down its format, colour, illustration, and graphic properties on the basis of statistics, without any regard for aesthetic considerations. This is believed to influence the buyer into purchasing the product. This approach has resulted in the lowering of design standards, and is being rejected by some Designers.

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# Printing Developments

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In the nineteenth century, the appearance of label design was governed by printing processes, of which there was very few, and were rather limited in their applications. There were two basic types of printing used for the production of labels, relief and intaglio, both of which originated from the fifteenth century.

Relief printing (from the raised surface it employs) is best understood by reference to the ordinary office rubber-stamp. The raised portions of the stamp are inked and pressed against paper, leaving an impression. The woodcut printing process was based on this principle. It was also the first process which enabled the multiple reproduction of labels containing both text and illustrations. However, it lacks flexibility as the woodblock has to be engraved as a whole unit, and must be re-used as a whole, eliminating the possibility of up-dating the block or the label design. These restrictions have led to the development of letterpress, which also employs the principle of relief printing. Letterpress involves the use of metal or wood block. Characters which are placed in rows (making up lines of text), are placed in a chase and laid on a press. Ink is applied to their surface, paper is positioned on top and pressure is applied, which transfers the ink to the paper (*Robinson, 1991, p.35*). Much of the work of the general printer, from the time of Caxton to the middle of our own century, has employed the principle of working with wood or metal blocks. Pictorial images were mostly printed from wood because of the simplicity of the technique and the inexpensive and availability of the material. Woodcuts and engravings were frequently used for the decoration and illustration of labels as



they were easily printed along with the type. Which made this process an extremely popular method of producing labels. (Fig. 2)

Labels requiring more refined detail and traditional quality were normally engraved on wood or metal blocks and printed using the Intaglio method. There are various forms of Intaglio printing, but in all of them the printing image lies below the surface of the plate. "Printing is achieved by rubbing ink into the hollows of the plate, wiping it's surface clean, and then forcing the ink out onto the paper under great pressure. In copper-plate engraving, the oldest form of Intaglio printing, the marks are engraved by hand in the metal plate with a pointed tool called a burin" (Twyman, 1970 p.171). The whole of the image, including any wording, is rendered on the same plate, therefore it is unsuitable for long passages of text, but, for decorative and pictorial purposes, for title-pages, bookplates, certificates, and labels, this process is excellent. This method allows greater freedom, which Letterpress lacks. Engraving and printing by an Intaglio process does not favour printing solid areas - engraved letterforms were characteristically light. Fine lines and flourishes gave this process, and any labels printed from it, a distinctive style. (Fig. 3)

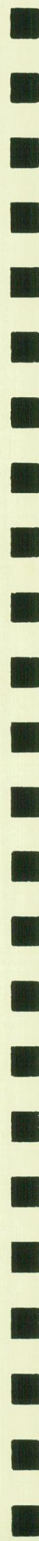
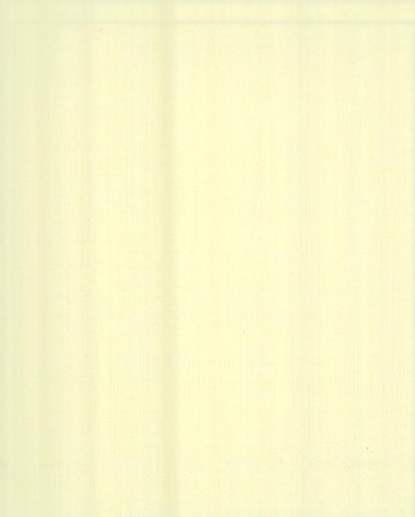
Lithography was the most flexible of all printing media, and could reproduce the works of the engravers, type founders, wood engravers and artists. there was no longer any limits to the reproduction of different shapes and colours."The principal of Lithography rests on two simple physical phenomena - that grease and water do not mix with one another, and that both are absorbed by a porous substance. Greasy marks drawn on stone will repel water, while the porous stone will absorb it. A subsequent application of grease-based printing ink will adhere to the drawn marks, but not to the dampened surface, and can be printed in the con-



Fig. 2. Old Brown London Soap. Comprises of two separate printings, firstly the wood-engraving was printed in red then the black text was printer using letterpress.



Fig. 3. Copperplate engraving from the late eighteenth century.



ventional manner" (Twyman, 1970, p.173). This process lent itself to the printing of labels. Subsequent developments of a transfer process allowed greater ease in making multiple copies of labels, which allowed maximum coverage of the Litho stone, thus speeding up the process and reducing printing costs. Full-colour printed labels could be achieved using this process, but it required a substantial amount of separate printings, (sometimes as many as twelve) each stone applied a different colour. "This process required a fine degree of judgement in analysing the colouring of the original design, and manual skills of rendering each component on separate printing stones. By printing each stone exactly in register, one image upon the next, the original colour design was reconstructed" (Robinson, 1991, p. 40).

(Fig. 4a & 4b)

Lithography had three main advantages, the first of these being the comparative ease of writing on stone or transferring text to it which had been written or printed on transfer paper (a greasy, gummed paper). The second was its suitability for the printing of work which combined text with images. Finally it gave greater flexibility to artists, as they were not bound by the horizontal and vertical stress of Letterpress printing; the lettering could curve, or move along any predetermined line. The letters could interweave and overlap. Also, type could be combined with illustrations instead of being inset or double printed by Letterpress.

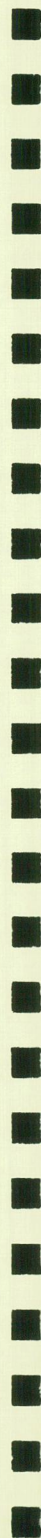
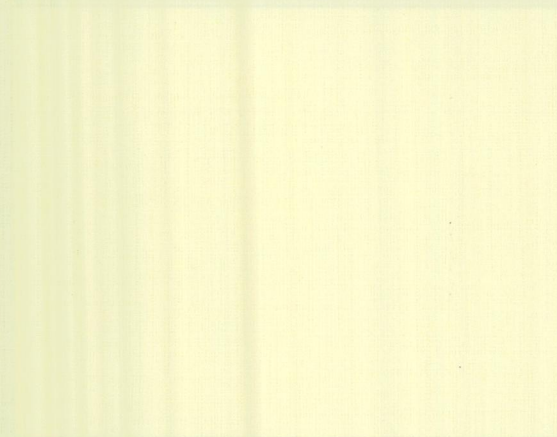
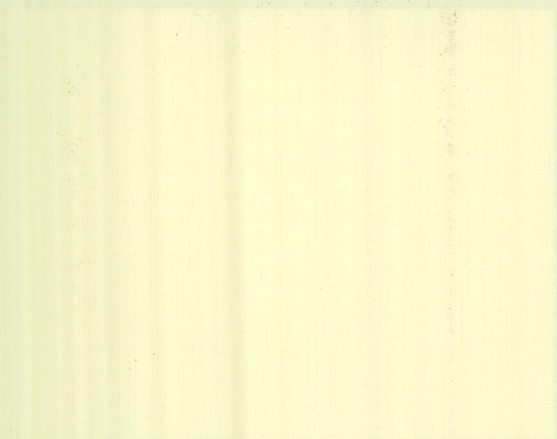
Commercial Lithography burst upon the world in the 1860s and '70s. It had converted the world to colour printing. Luxuriantly coloured images flooded the market. This process became the heart and soul of advertising and packaging. Lithography has seen many improvements over the years, but the principals of lithography are still unchanged. The introduction of photographic process in the area of printing greatly improved colour reproduc-



Fig 4a. Layered lithographic print for *Polvos de Reveals* scented sachet label. Makes use of vibrant colours and graded tones now available with this new process.



Fig. 4b. Magnification of Fig. 4a. Lithographic printing produced a unique stipple effect which increases with each additional application to form a relief pattern surface to the label.



tions. Separations could now be produced photographically and transferred to litho stones with transfer paper. This speeded up the process and reduced the amount of printings required to create full-colour images. Powered presses and improved paper feed mechanisms revolutionised Lithographic printing to a high quality and commercially successful process. Packaging companies and poster printing are the main users of lithography.

The next printing process to have an affect an the appearance of labels was screen printing which was developed in this century. "This is a very ancient Japanese technique, which used a refined form of stencilling, in which non-printed areas are masked out on a sheet of silk, stretched over a frame. Ink is forced out through the image areas by means of a rubber blade, known as a squeegee" (*Robinson, 1991, p.35*). In recent years silkscreen has been given a new lease of life, as a result of the introduction of photography and fine-mesh nylon and stainless-steel screens. Very precise work can be printed, by silkscreen, on machines capable of thousands of impressions per hour. This process is very flexible, enabling labels to be printed on the surface of containers, and, packaging made from materials such as glass, porcelain, plastic, etc. This process can adapt to the shape of containers and the printed image is extremely durable. (*Fig. 5*)

Printing processes and their improvements are directly related to improvements in design, the process in use today still uses the the principles developed in the pioneering years of printing. Lithography and silkscreen printing have been invaluable in the development of label design but Letterpress still holds it's own where quality type is required.

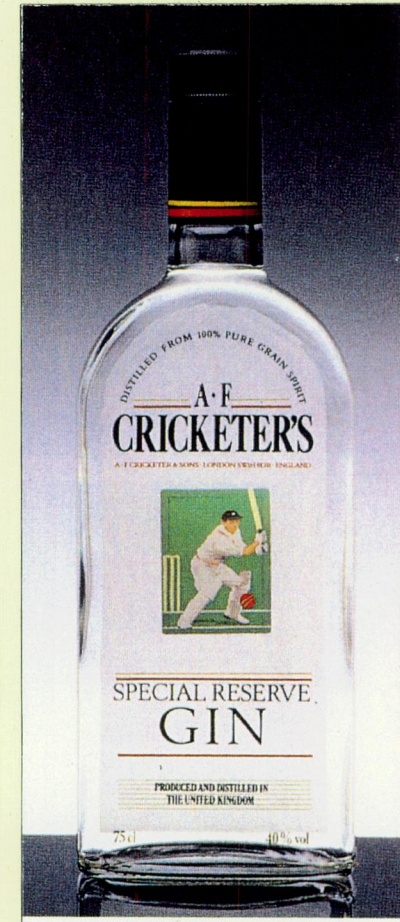
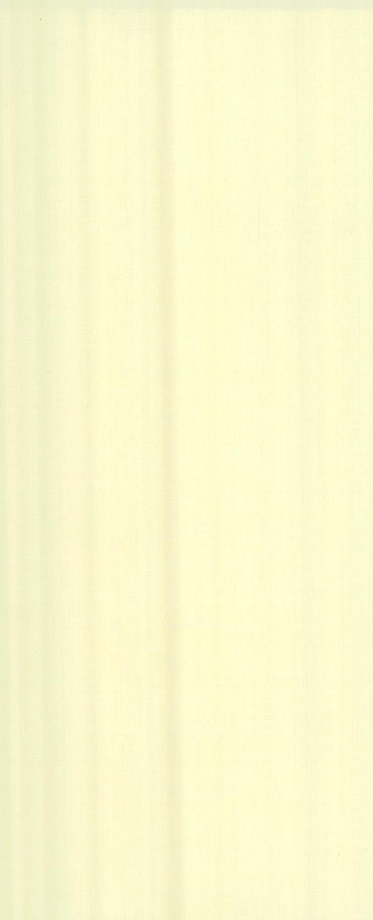


Fig. 5. Cricketer's Gin screen printed label, innovative use of screen printing creates a double sided label. Text is printed on the front of the bottle and the cricketer and wicket on the back which gives an illusion of three-dimensions to the label.



# Paper

When we think of labels, we automatically think of paper labels applied to packages. This was not always the case, as the development of paper has been slow and tedious. Stone, clay and papyrus were all predecessors of the paper label. Paper manufacturing took nearly one thousand years to reach Europe, from China, via the middle East and North Africa, to arrive in Spain in 1150 A.D., where it disseminated throughout the continents. The first evidence of paper used as labels can be traced back to the sixteenth century, when Brunswick Papermakers were wrapping their high quality writing paper in paper wrappers with a printed design on it. Paper was still an expensive commodity, so, in order not to waste any quality paper, a coarser brown paper - used for wrapping the higher grades of paper - was made from the residue, left in the bottom of the vat, after the high quality paper was made. This was not good enough for re-saleable writing or printing paper. (Fig. 6).

Paper continued to increase in popularity, with the discovery of new substances which could be used in its manufacture. In fact it can be made from any substance, capable of being mashed into a porridge-like pulp. "The pulp is held in a thin deposit on a supporting mesh, drained and dried. As it dries, the fibres of the mix interlace producing an integral sheet." (Lewis, 1962, p. 75). Among the substances used over the centuries are seaweed, straw, potatoes, leather strands, sails and ropes. In general the most common ingredients have been rags and wood-pulp. Rags are still used for expensive hand-made papers, but, in the nineteenth century, the mass market created the need for a cheaper material so wood-pulp was substituted.



Fig. 6. Sixteenth century Brunswick paper wrapper. The lettering and decorative borders on this label are reminiscent of Venetian book title-pages of the period.



Blank page with a vertical line of black squares on the right edge.

For the purpose of labelling rag paper is robust and durable, whereas wood-pulp is not and is prone to scuffing and tearing as the jars rub off of each other. This change was met with hesitation from printers.

Developments in printing processes simultaneously affected developments in paper manufacturing. Printing processes required paper with higher quality surface finish and the earlier hand-made papers had a rough, uneven surface which was highly absorbent, causing ink to bleed, making small text illegible. Further developments in the mesh trays, used in the manufacturing of paper, led to the introduction of two paper types (which answered the printers' needs), laid and wove. "Laid paper is produced by mesh with parallel wires. This paper is rather weak and tears easily along the parallel indentations. It can only be used for items with a short life-span. Wove paper is produced on a woven mesh of wire strands, this encourages the fibres to form a woven pattern on the surface of the paper, which adds additional strength and durability to the paper, making it suitable for label printing". It could also withstand the constant barrage of abuse and hardship which labels are subjected to.

*(Davis, 1967, p.50.)*

Printing press feeding systems required papers suited to their particular process. The introduction of Lithography in the nineteenth century required highly finished paper with a smooth surface. Paper produced on laid and wove meshes was unsuitable, because of the indentations on its surface. The paper required further after-treatment and "pressure-rolling was developed for this purpose, thus evening out any inconsistencies in the surface, producing a highly polished even surface. This process is known as calendering. Pressure-rolling is also used to produce embossed textures, such as leather ripples, woven sacking, etc." (This is achieved by texturing the metal rollers.) *(Richards, 1988, p.94.).*



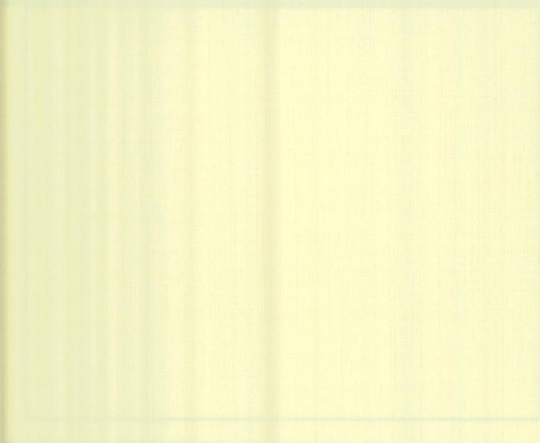
These structural changes in paper directly affected the physical appearance of labels. They lost their hand-made, hand-printed qualities, and began to reflect the highly finished qualities of lithographic printing on glossy, smooth-finished paper. Progressive experimentation in the production processes of paper continued to surface in labels. The 1800s produced numerous marbled papers, available in various colours and patterns. Despite the visual appeal of coloured patterns, black prints remained popular for many kinds of merchandise labelling. They were used by shopkeepers and by medicine vendors, who decided their bottles needed additional protection and some additional advertising in the form of label wrappers. (Fig. 7)

Printers' experiments with paper led to the discovery of embossing, which uses a metal die, applied to the paper under great pressure, forcing an impression onto the paper. The aim is to impress as deeply as possible, without penetrating the paper. The success of this process depends on the speed and the strength of the impact, plus, the thickness, texture and moisture content of the paper. (Richards, 1988, p.94). Decorative embossing found its way into the production of labels. Dodds, Kidde & Co. of London were the pioneers of this technique. They started business at the turn of the eighteenth century and remained in production until the late 1890s. Dodds' treatment of paper exploited a relatively cheap material in everyday use. The intricate relief effect was applied to virtually every sort of personal stationery, greeting cards and labels. This is often used as a border for labels - the image and text can be dropped in at a later date. Embossing labels and box lids brought glory to a host of ordinary things. (Fig. 8)

Fig. 7. Mrs. Wilson's Syrup paper wrapping label 1800s provides added protection to the product it also contains additional information, merits and testimonials promoting their product.



Fig. 8. Nineteenth Century Pin label uses embossing to create an elaborate border, with a space within which text was dropped in at a later stage.



Paper labels are extremely versatile. It's ability to stick to almost any surface and the lack of expense involved in it's production has made it a popular and wide-spread packaging material. However, advances in transfer printing in the nineteenth century has led to a steady decline in the paper label. By the 1880s there was an influx of tin containers using transfer printing - even though this method was more expensive - and the advantages of not using an easily soiled label was thought to be worthwhile. In more recent years the introduction of screen printing directly onto bottles and tins, and shrink wrappers (plastic film, printed in flat form and reformed to a tube shape, is placed around bottles, then, when heat is applied, it shrinks tightly and takes the shape of the bottle). This new process solved the problems of label damage, which, in turn, reduced the amount of damaged packages and products.

In the 1980s paper labels suffered a dramatic decline, but where quality and traditional values are required. I believe it is necessary to use paper in preference to screen printing or shrink wrappers, which can look tacky and cheap. The abundant varieties available today can only encourage designers to use it. Wide ranges of weights, textures, finishes, colours, and after treatments, give paper an aesthetic superiority. If combined with modern printing techniques, stunning label designs can be created. Paper can reflect any period in time, evoke both traditional values and slick modern designs. Paper is an extremely versatile medium, and an essential part of label design of the past, present and future.



# Typographic Developments

Until the start of the nineteenth century, type-faces produced by type founders and, in turn, on printed labels, remained rather bookish. (Fig. 9) Any printed labels before the 1800s were almost certainly engraved on copper or steel. This process had it's own characteristics, type was usually script - adapted from manuscripts of that time. This style became known as copper-script, and became synonymous with this process. Copperplate printing catered almost exclusively for the more refined, small-scale, jobbing work of general printers. The quality of the lettering depended solely on the talents and imagination of the copperplate engravers, engravers were used to reproduce elaborate scrolls, invitations, certificates, and written books of the time (Fig. 3). The Industrial Revolution, however, changed the appearance of labels - speed and impact of designs now took priority, typography became a powerful weapon in the battle for commercial success.

Manufacturers, needed to promote their products to a wider and wealthier market. This resulted in type foundries entering into a competitive race, to satisfy their commercial needs. New type-faces were designed. These were called display faces. Inspiration was sought from vernacular letterforms rather than the traditional calligraphic models. The type founders responded with a flood of new styles such as Fat-face, Square-serif and Egyptian, decorative and sans serif. These type-faces were available in a wide variety of different forms - three-dimensional, shaded outline, condensed, expanded and many more. From this moment onwards, type became influenced by the fashions of the particular times. Traditional type-

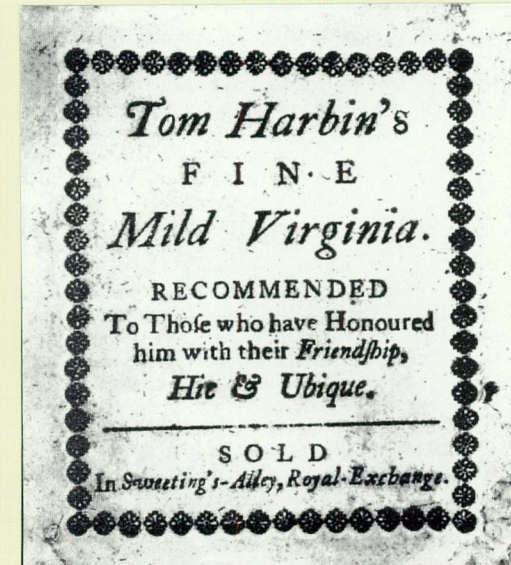
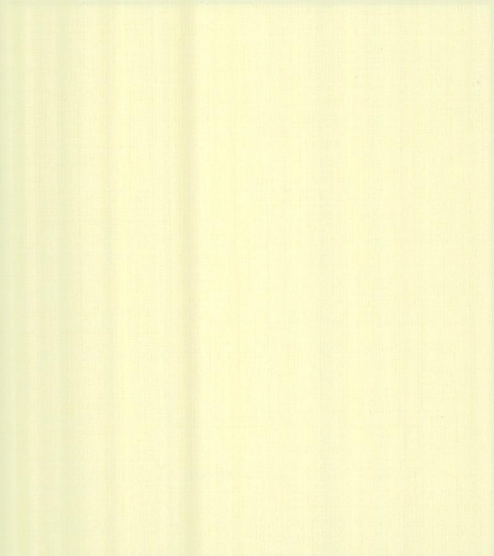


Fig. 9. Eighteenth Century label displays typography and layout reminiscent of book title-pages from the same period.



faces were sacrificed for the never-ending flow of new Display types on the market, making a more forceful presentation of the wording on labels and packaging.

### Fat-Face

Fat Face was the first face designed specifically for the printers of various packaging and advertisement material. It derives from the modern faces of the earlier part of the nineteenth century. Modern faces like Bodoni and Didot were models for the first display types. By fattening the thick letter strokes, reducing the weights of the serifs and cutting them in larger sizes they created what became known as Fat-faces. (*Perfect, 1192, pg. 19*) The first Fat-face was designed in about 1800, by Robert Thorne (1754-1820) Outlined, three-dimensional, and italic versions appeared shortly afterwards. Because of the vast varieties of Fat-face types available to printers, they began to use combinations of these, which resulted in cluttered layouts. (*fig. 10a*)

### Egyptian or Square-Serif

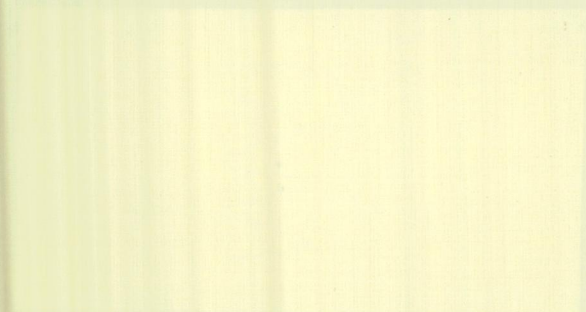
Shortly after the advent of Fat-faces, a second more significant type-face emerged - Egyptian or Square-serif. The first of these appeared in type founders' specimen books in 1817. Robert Thorne also designed several Square-serif types, he is also partly responsible for naming them 'Egyptian', as he was interested and influenced by the archeological digs in Egypt at that time. "These type-faces can be characterised by their un-bracketed serifs which were of the same thickness as the stem of the letter which gave them a monotone mechanical appearance which exemplified the spirit of the new industrial age." (*Twyman, 1970, pg. 19*) They had more impact than Fat-face and soon became popular in England, Europe and the United States. Square-serif types remained popular until the last quarter of the nineteenth century. (*Fig. 10b*)



Fig. 10a Thorn's Cannon Fat Face, 1803



Fig. 10b Egyptian, 1856



## Sans Serif

Sans Serif was introduced in 1816 by the Caslon Foundry. It is possibly one of the most influential innovations in nineteenth century type design. "They had monoline strokes without serifs. According to James Mosely, the sans serif was revived as a desperate attempt to recapture the spirit of the first roman letterforms. sans serif began affecting label typography in 1832, when the Caslon Foundry featured them in their specimen book. By 1850, a variety of different weights and variations were produced. The simplicity and flexibility of Sans serif design led to the development of families of sans serif types, which could be used as text and display faces, making sans serif appropriate for label design. (Fig. 10c)

## Decorative.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the English type founders were producing decorative types and an abundance of imaginative designs. In-line, out-line, three-dimensional, Tuscan, reversal, condensed, distorted, ornamental and many more. The black letter fonts also received a new lease of life in 1840s (these were practically neglected since the introduction of Fat-face). The renewed interest in the following decades of traditional Gothic letters were transformed to suit the purposes of Victorian designers.

The introduction of Lithography, in 1840, inspired new type-faces which could be incorporated into images. These were freely drawn and often combined with patterns and decoration. By the middle of the century, full-colour lithography was well established in the commercial field of printing, making even greater demands for striking letterforms. This forced Letterpress printers, and type founders, to produce a wider variety of letterforms which could match the freedom and variety being produced by lithographers.

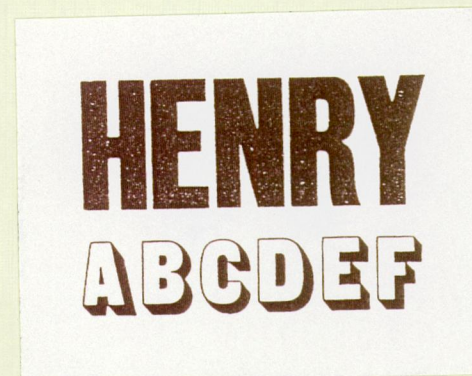


Fig. 10c Sans Serif, 1905

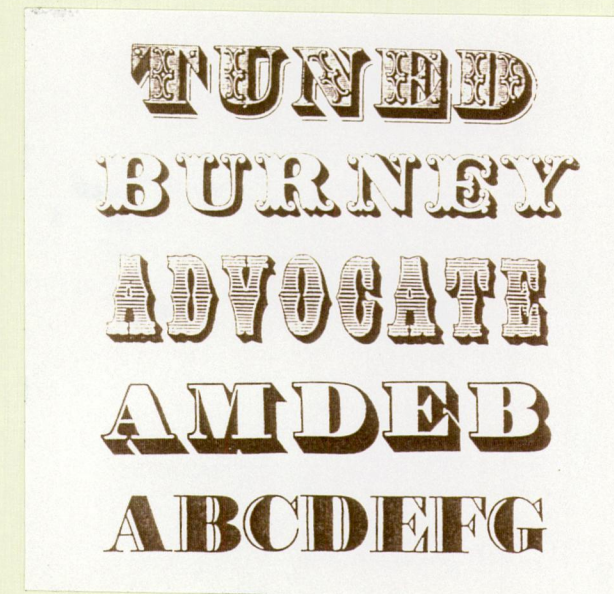
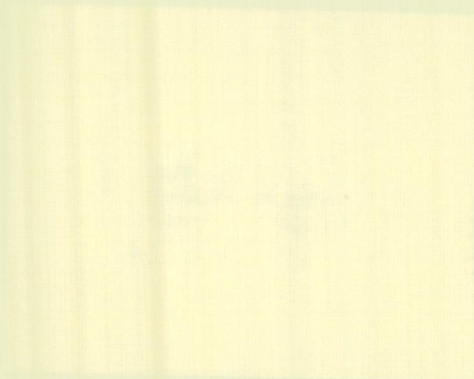


Fig. 10d Decorative



Victorian typographers treated letterforms as objects capable of being adapted to any form which the task in hand required - as if the letterforms were elasticated. Letterforms were elaborately decorated in abundance to suit the overall mood of the designs. Legibility was of secondary importance. Towards the end of this century, Art Nouveau influences had an effect on letterforms. Variations of the basic letterforms include organic and sinuous flowing lines.



# Victorian Period 1870-1899

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Although Queen Victoria was crowned in 1837, the style of architecture and decorative arts named after her actually began in the 1820s, and continued in England, America and most of Europe until the 1900s. I am looking at labels printed after 1870 and onwards, as these labels are graphically more interesting than those of the previous years. The Victorian style was the aesthetic response of a society to industrialisation.

“The Industrial Revolution was a mixed blessing in Britain. Along with technological developments, it also caused an increase in crime and a greater division in social classes. Between the middle and end of the nineteenth century, the once great English sense of social, civic, and artistic responsibility diminished. An uncontrollable need for wealth became, in effect, the motivating cultural force. As the desire for unlimited comfort spread from the wealthy to the middle classes, popular aesthetics were increasingly lowered.” (*Heller, 1988, p.15*)

This drop in aesthetic standards caused Victorian artists to turn to the past for inspiration. They borrowed elements of gothic and medieval styles. This indulgence in ornamentation, styled on historical forms, was believed to display a false impression of wealth - indulgence in ornamentation satisfied their need to have visible evidence of their social status. This exaggerated embellishment of ordinary everyday articles in the Victorian home created an atmosphere of luxury and comfort, and contributed to the cluttered look of labels from this period.



The Industrial Revolution created a surplus of goods, which in turn led to increased competition in the marketplace. Merchants endeavoured to convey the virtues of their products to the consumers. This encouraged the development of label design, and the methods of printing images with text. As a result of this, the Victorian style had a dramatic effect on the appearance of labels; elaborately ornamented labels were applied to ordinary everyday house-hold products. This much sought after style encouraged all social classes to purchase goods with the elaborately styled labels, thus disseminating the style through all social classes, making it extremely popular.

I have found that earlier Victorian labels can be easily characterised by their indulgence in heavy ornamentation. Images and engravings were frequently crudely drawn, typography lacked attention to detail and layout, and composition was generally poor. Earlier Victorian label illustrations were either engraved on wood-block or copper-plate, with the quality depending on the skill of the engraver. The label for *Stretch's Victoria Embrocation* (Fig. 11) shows a rather crude engraving in a cartoon style, with comic-strip balloons continuing the dialogue, "cured me and will cure you". This illustration tries to convey the wonderful healing powers of the liquid contained within the bottle. However, the exaggerated gestures, disproportionate limbs, and the patient's facial expression, are slightly light-hearted for the seriousness of medicine labels. Also the typography on this label lacks attention to detail; there are inconsistencies between the weights of characters and the letter spacing, (particularly in the word '*rheumatism*' - the letters *e*, *u*, *m*, and *a* all have different weights which causes the word to break into phonics). This shows that the engraver was not highly skilled and was perhaps a trainee. Most medicine labels from this period carried the signature of the doctor, which guaranteed that it was the genuine article, plus a blank block within which the grocer could put the name of his store.

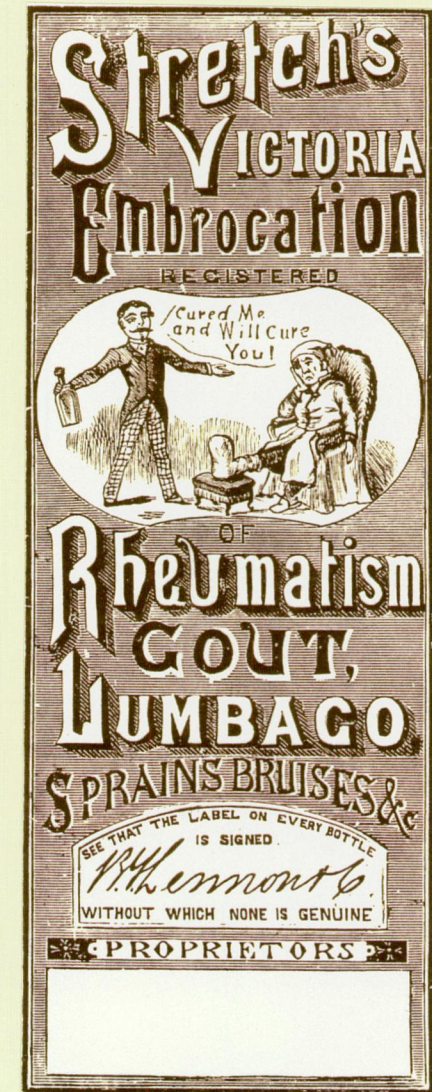
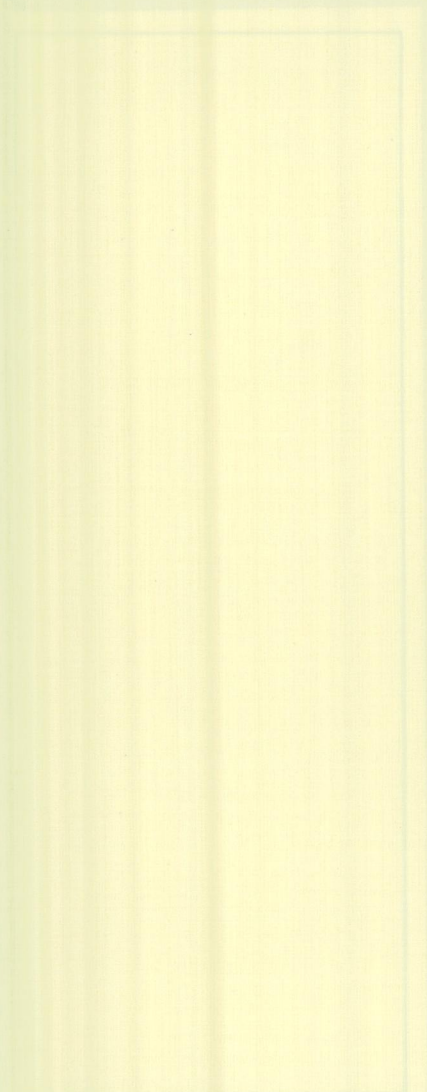
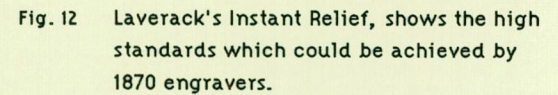
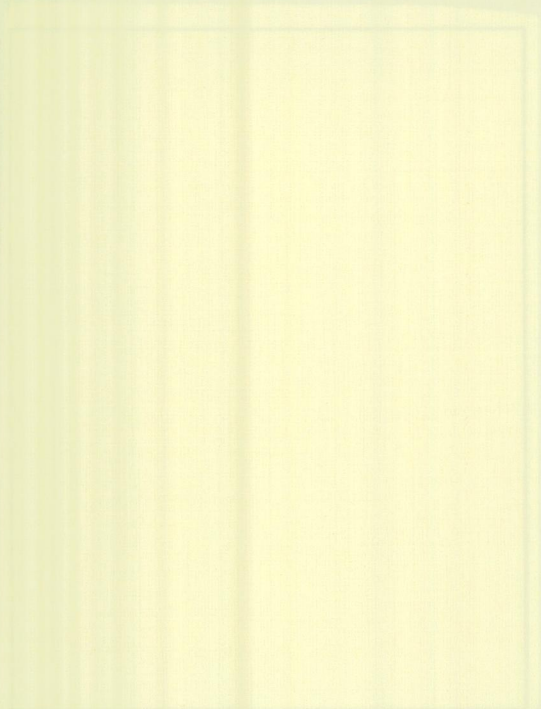


Fig. 11 Stretch's Victoria Embrocation, wood engraved label 1860s. Displays the signature of the doctor "without which none is genuine."



However, this type of label was still rather bland. Merchants required more distinctive labels, which in turn prompted the development of original display faces. These became emblems of Victorian label design. There was an increased availability of new modern faces - which can be identified by the contrast between thick and thin strokes. There are three basic font families, Fat-Face, Egyptian, and Tuscan, which became associated with Victorian label design.





The Victorian style also encouraged the ornamentation of letters, which was achieved by shadow effect or lining, to produce a three-dimensional appearance. Graphic Artists began to experiment and manipulate these new display faces, which greatly improved typographical layouts on labels. Some of the labels, comprised mainly of typographical solutions, are my favourite, from this period. The *Pure Cod Liver Oil* label is an extremely good example of period typography (Fig. 13). The layout of this label is particularly attractive. Ornamentation is used sparingly, purely to add character to the letter forms. There are two basic type-faces used, Tuscan and a Sans-Serif. Prominence was given to the product's name, with instructions given at the bottom of the label. This counter-balanced the illustration of the Cod fish. Scrolls and Vignettes created a window, or frame, which contained and reflected the characteristics of the Tuscan type-face.

Typography and colour became integrated towards the middle of the period. Of course, this union was gradual, developing from a single colour (usually black) in the first half of the 19th century. In the second half of the century colour printing became progressively less expensive and two and three-colour labels became more wide-spread. Towards the end of this period colour Lithography had become commercially accessible to label printing. Full-colour images could be produced quickly and cheaply.

This integration of typography and colour produced some striking period labels. Primary colours were favoured, reds, blues and yellows of varying strengths. Combined with white and black, to produce labels with extremely effective shelf impact. Some of our most famous and instantly recognisable labels were produced from this style. *Colman's Mustard* (Fig. 14) is one of the classic labels designed in the 1870s. It has remained almost the same to the present day, apart from a modification in 1975 (when the bull's head was dropped in favour of the Royal Crest but, in 1980, the bull's head returned with additional Victorian period copper-plate

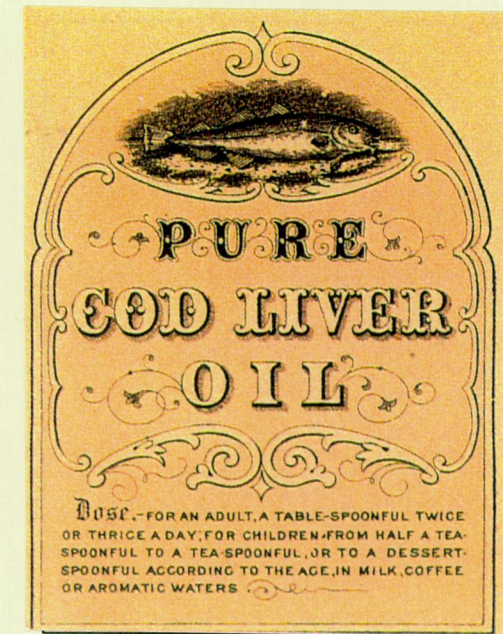


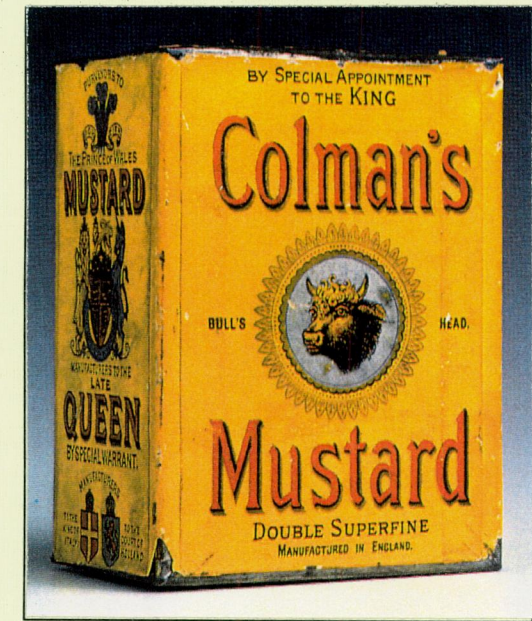
Fig. 13 Pure cod Liver Oil 1895, this pleasing label shows tasteful use of period typography, ornamentation and layout.



type-face). The obvious mustard yellow with contrasting red has been a successful choice, proving that good design can survive the passage of time.

*Sunlight Soap* is possibly one of the most famous of all Victorian labels (Fig. 15). Launched in 1884, it continued to expand. In 1889 *Sunlight Soap* was the first soap to be sold in cartons. Previous to this it had been wrapped in parchment paper. When William Lever (manufacturer of *Sunlight Soap*) announced in 1889 that there was to be a reward of £1,000 for anyone who could find any imperfection in his soap, it became known world-wide. With such a strong testimonial, how could you go wrong?. The *Sunlight* type style is reminiscent of Egyptian faces and had an inlay of white in each letter. As these boxes were of considerable size (each box contained 12 tablets of soap), illustration and ornamentation could be applied. An illustration of a washer woman and floral decoration reflected the freshness of the product inside. The unmistakable colour combination - navy blue, red, yellow and white - has remained unchanged, as has the *Sunlight* type-face, except for the simplification of the logo-type by removing the white inlay. *Sunlight Soap* is now sold in two-tablet packs, but the label still holds it's Victorian characteristics.

Typography remained a strong element of Victorian label design, through all ranges of products. The *Royal Baking Powder* label (Fig. 16) shows how strong typography and primary colours can produce a striking label. The curving effect on *Baking Powder* is synonymous with Victorian typography. Flowing ribbons providing adequate decoration to complement the curving *Royal* Fat-face font. The illustration is quite interesting; it shows the product itself rather than the manufacturer's portrait or the place of manufacture, which implies that this product is of a high standard and capable of selling itself.



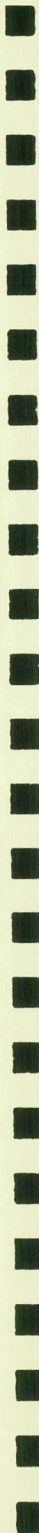
a.



b.

c.

Fig. 14 Colmans Mustard's label design has undergone subtle modifications over the years, but the label design still retains its original characteristics. a. 1870s, b. 1975, c. 1980s.





a.

Fig. 15a. Sunlight Soap box label, designed for retail display out-lets. This carton displays additional information about the £1000 reward.

b. 1930s, Sunlight Soap Box shows slight Modification of the sunlight logo-type and simplification of the overall layout.

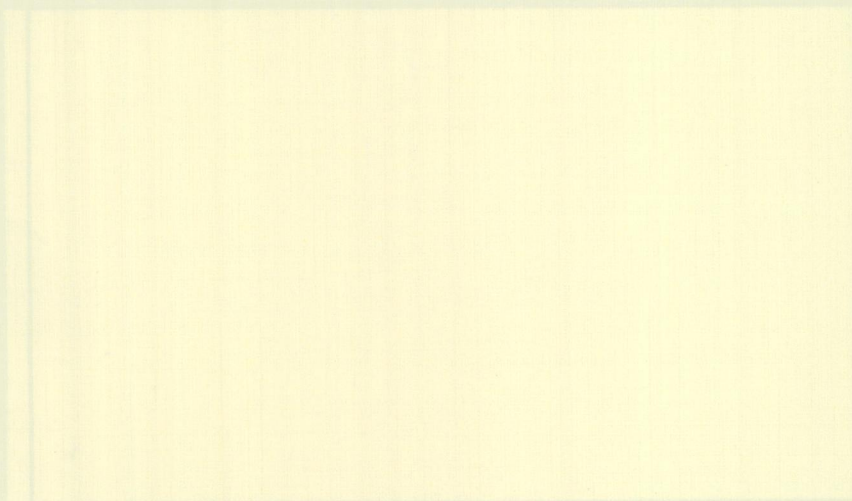
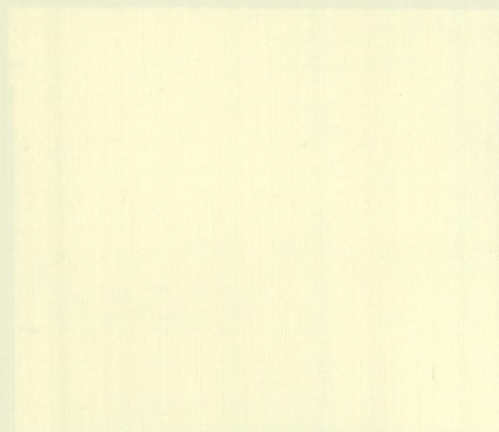
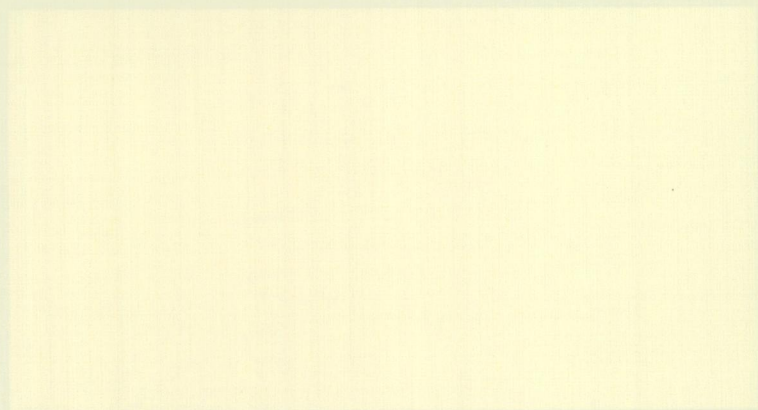
c. 1900s, Sunlight Soap wrapper, has dropped the cluttered layout in preference to a simplified Victorian revival of borders and ribbons, however it is still reminiscent of the original design



b.



c.



Lithography had a dramatic effect on illustration. This process allowed natural colours to be used, graduated and toned down. This broke away somewhat from the bold colours previously used. This printing technique was used to provide glamorous pictures for perfume bottles and cigar boxes. The *Havana Cigars* label shows two interesting qualities of Victorian label design (Fig. 11); firstly, the extremely high printing and finishing standards and, secondly, the emphasis which is placed on medals and crests won at various trade shows. These were symbols of quality and reliability and this label displays them to their full potential, with the two ladies holding the medals aloft. The medals were printed in gold and embossed, which gave them an added sense of quality. This tradition has almost faded out completely, as only some products still show their medals (eg. *Colman's Mustard*).

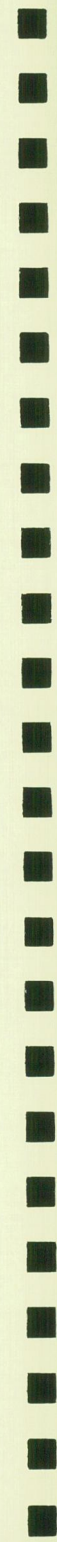
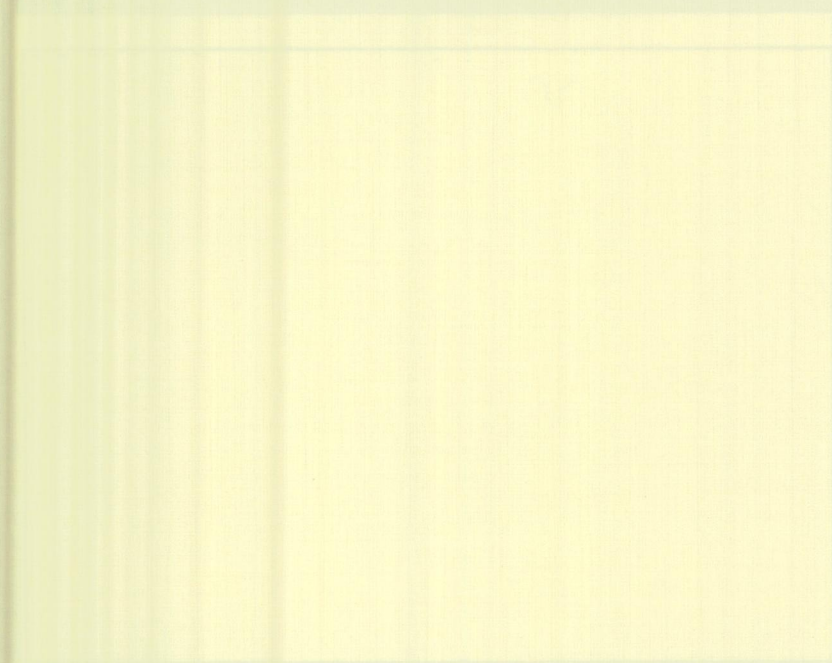
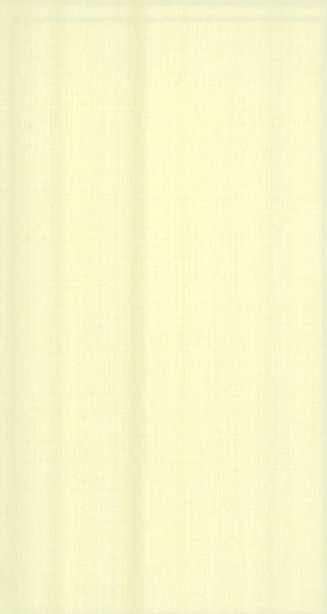


Fig. 16 Royal Baking Powder 1890



Fig. 17 Havana Cigars, demonstrates some of the finest commercial printing Process from this period and also displays a variety of medals won various at trade shows.

Fig. 17



## Chapter 6

# Art Nouveau 1900-1919

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At the turn of the century the Industrial Revolution had changed the function of grocery stores. They became distribution centres for pre-packed goods, rather than traditional stores, (where goods could be examined before purchasing), now customers were relying on the wording on the labels of products. An increasing variety of brands and products were beginning to become established. Consumers had a wide variety of products to choose from, which encouraged manufacturers to up-date their labels and make use of the new Art Nouveau style which was beginning to emerge.

The Art Nouveau style dates back to the 1880s. It began in England, but France became the main contributor to this style. "The entire Art Nouveau period was a rebellion against the entire Victorian era. The theory behind this style of design was to revolutionise every aspect of Design in order to become compatible with the new era and technology." (*King, 1980, p. 7*) Art Nouveau designers obtained their inspiration from nature by abstracting organic forms to produce curvilinear and floral relief patterns and borders. (I think these floral borders are reminiscent of Celtic borders and filigree of illuminated manuscripts.) This style spread across Europe rapidly. Poster design was the first commercial art form to use this style, labels began to emerge with Art Nouveau characteristics in the early 1900s.



When researching labels printed during this period, I found many samples of labels with Art Nouveau characteristics for toiletries and confectionery (most of which seem to have originated in France), but few labels for general food products. The latter tended to hold on to Victorian style and in their label designs.

Most of the labels of this period can be characterised by their use of sensuous lines, intertwining floral patterns and illustrations of beautiful women with flowing hair. A label for *Savon Idea*, toilet soap shows these characteristics quite clearly (Fig. 18). This label was designed by Alphonse Mucha in 1900. A French designer, Mucha was one of the leaders of this movement. He is best known for his illustrations and hand-drawn type. The execution of this label is typical of Mucha and this period - stylised line drawing, flowing hair, windswept clothing, floral motifs, and pastel colouration.

The appearance of letterforms had greatly improved since the Victorian era. Display-Faces gave label designs a dramatic and well overdue facelift. Sweeping, slick stream typography and elaborate initial capital letters were the order of the day. Designers had a new approach to typography. They began to break away from traditional methods of typography and show higher levels of creativity and originality towards their work. Perhaps this is due to developments in printing techniques - as Lithography was an extremely flexible process, compared to the restrictions of Letterpress. This enabled Brush Script, display lettering, to be used extensively on labels and advertising posters throughout the earlier stages of the Art Nouveau movement (Fig. 18).

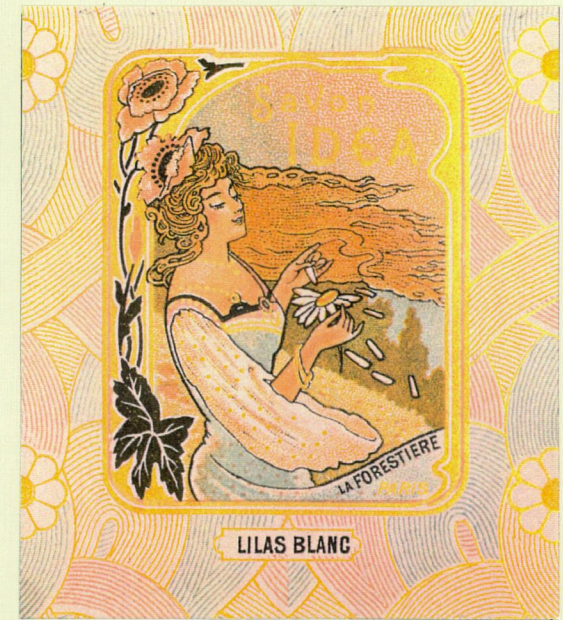


Fig. 18 Savon Idea Toilet Soap designed by Amphose muca in 1905, this label shows illustration, colours and typography typical of this period



Art Nouveau designers produced one off, hand-drawn novelty types for their commercial designs. This created an abundance of unique hand-drawn letterforms with Art Nouveau trademarks of floral borders and swirling decorative letterforms which became known as brush scripts. Labels designers made use of the marriage of floral, free-flowing illustrations and letterforms. These Brush Script lettering were used to complement illustrations. Needless to say they adopted their characteristics of flowing organic forms and intertwining lines. These earlier Brush Script letterings formed the structure and style upon which the first completed Art Nouveau alphabets were styled in the early 1990s (Fig. 19). Designers looked upon these typefaces as a basic structured form which could be manipulated and distorted to suit their particular needs, this resulted in an abundance of unique and imaginative compositions, most of which combine a number of typefaces. The label for *Devonshire Cream Toffees* shows the diversity of typefaces which appeared on a single label and even a single word (Fig. 20). This label is comprised of three basic typefaces which have been modified to create a distinctive logo type. The capital letter of *Cream* is based on the C in the typeface *Kalligraphier*, (Ref. Fig. 19); capital T, in *Toffee*, from *Wolton* (Ref. Fig. 19); and the A in *assorted* is from *Aegean* (Ref. Fig. 19). The combinations of various typefaces was widely used to give a unique and distinctive appearance to the label.

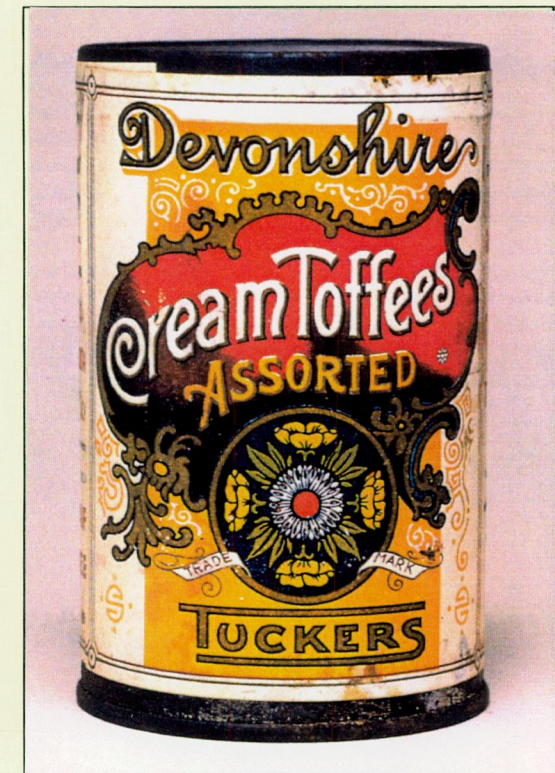


Fig. 20 Devonshire Cream Toffees Displays the vast varieties of typefaces which can appear on a single label.

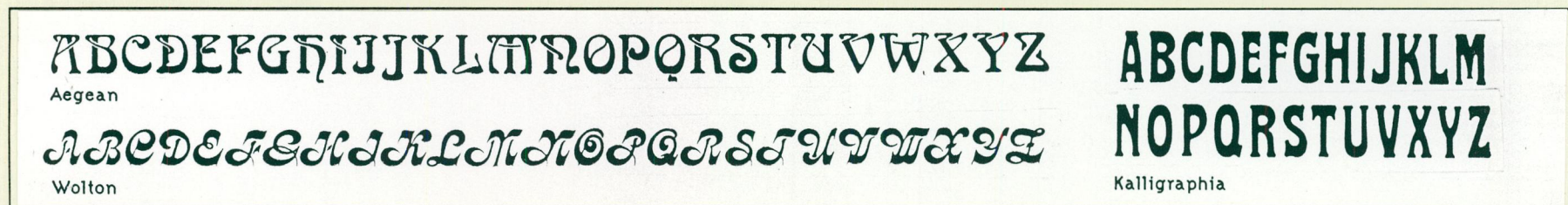
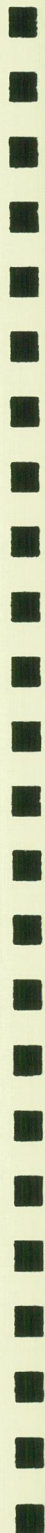
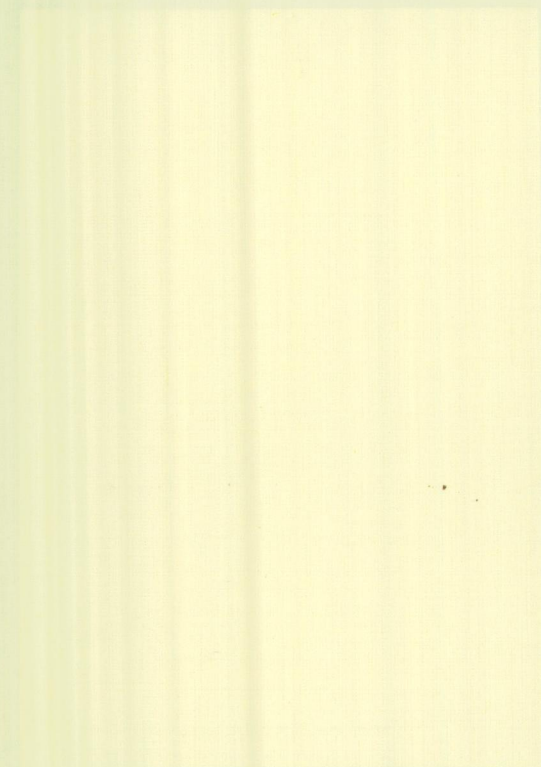


Fig. 19 Art Nouveau type faces;  
Kalligraphia, Wolton and Aegean



The Art Nouveau movement also produced labels which reflected the artistic rather than the functional side of design, obscuring the surface of labels just as the Victorian era over-ornamentation had. A 4711 talcum powder label from 1909 shows complete over-indulgence in superficial floral borders and lack of attention to the typographical elements (Fig. 21). However, the 4711 emblem and flashy light blue and gold colour-scheme are still in use today.

If Victorian and Art Nouveau labels are compared, the advances in typographical composition are extremely noticeable. Fig. 22 shows two labels for *Lipton's coffee*: Fig. 22a illustrates Victorian label design and Fig. 22b shows the same brand of coffee with a 1905 Art Nouveau label design. The distinguishing factors (apart from colour, which possibly depended on the blend or strength of the coffee) are mainly in the composition of the text. In the Art Nouveau label text is not restricted to the horizontal and vertical axes of Letterpress printing. The overall layout has lost all the crammed, cluttered Victorian appearance. The label has a lighter, airy feel to it, and it makes use of the flowing floral lines to create windows for the text and illustrations. Royal Crest and trade show medals were still used as product endorsement, but this faded out towards the end of this movement.

In the final years of the Art Nouveau movement, label designs were becoming stylised - the emphasis changing from artistic to a more functional graphic approach emphasising typography and simplifying the overall composition by reducing the amount of elements contained on the surface of labels. Colour became stronger and contrasting colour combinations with clean typographic



Fig. 21 4711 Talcum Powder

Fig. 22a  
Lipton's coffee label  
produced by letter  
press printing

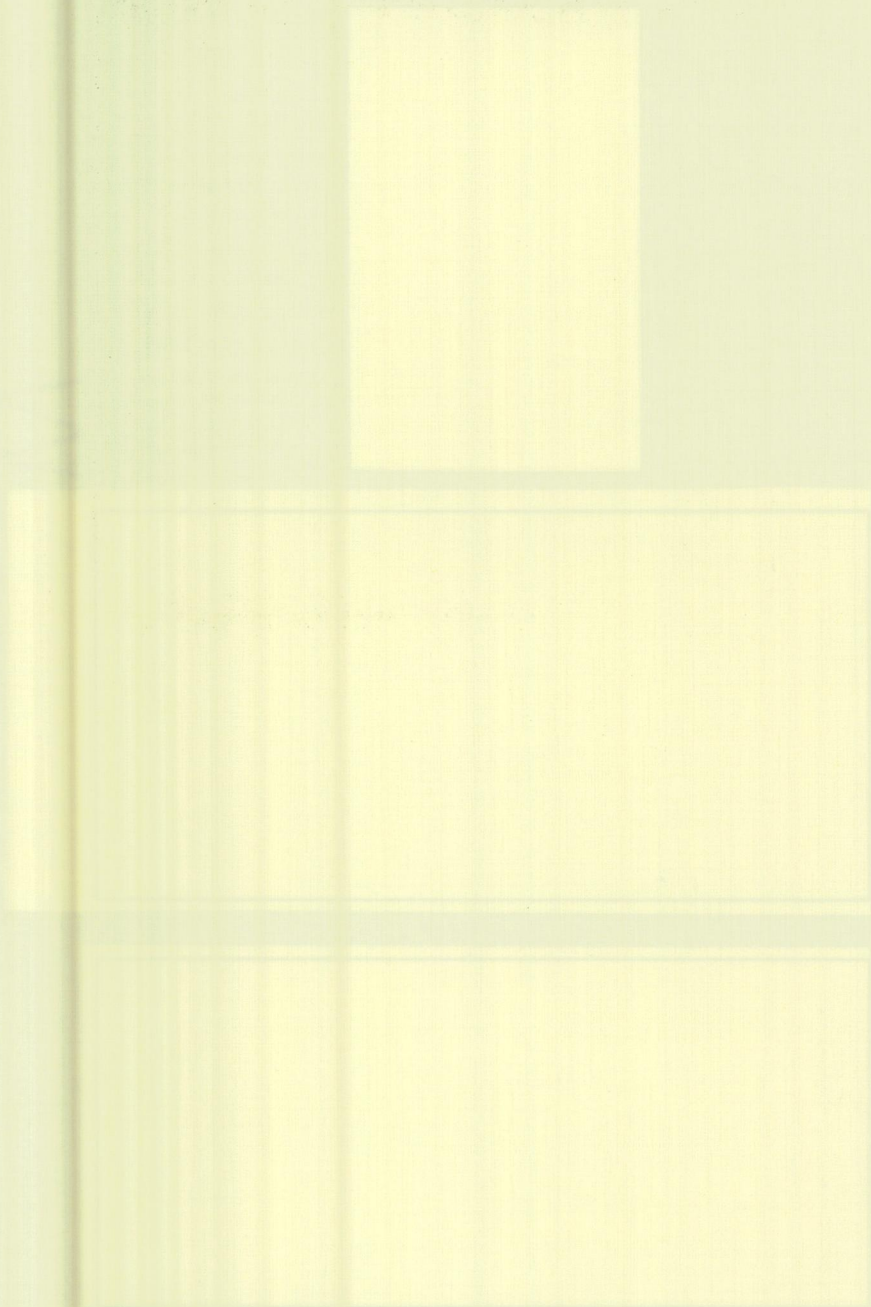
Fig. 22b  
Lithographic print  
with Art Nouveau  
characteristics



Fig. 22a



Fig. 22b



solutions became the norm. *Cuticura Soap* label (Fig. 23) shows these characteristics extremely well - a clean typographical solution, with subtle use of Art Nouveau elements on the capital C and modest ornamentation to either side of the word *Soap*. I prefer later Art Nouveau Designs. Their efficient use of typography has a timeless quality. I feel these labels have greater impact when on the grocery store shelves.

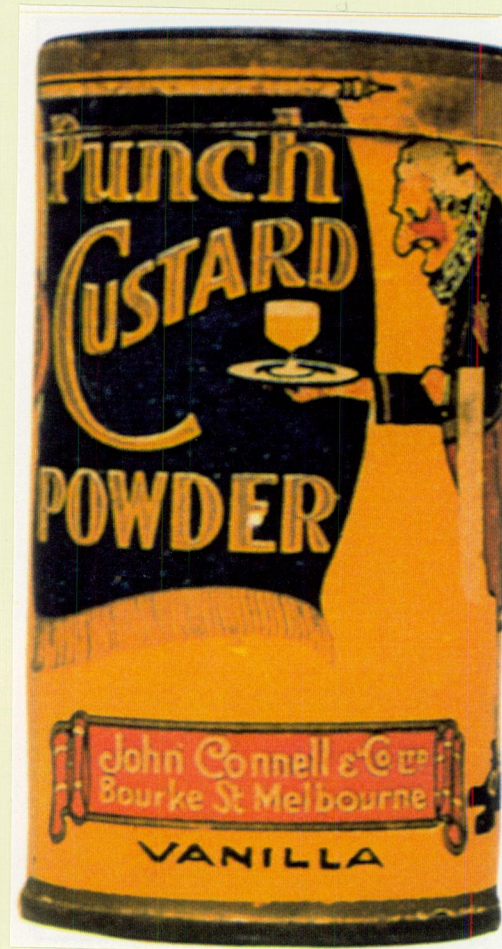
The Art Nouveau period is also responsible for introducing the product character, which is intended to be used as an advertising device and give the product label a distinctive appearance (Fig. 24). These promotional characters have been used continuously to the present day. By the end of this period a great abundance of new brands had been established, offering vast varieties of household products - washing powders, and new culinary delights. This increase in product ranges had a dramatic effect on label designs. During this period and after, label designs were improving, and increased competition between brands helped raise the standards of label design to a fine art.

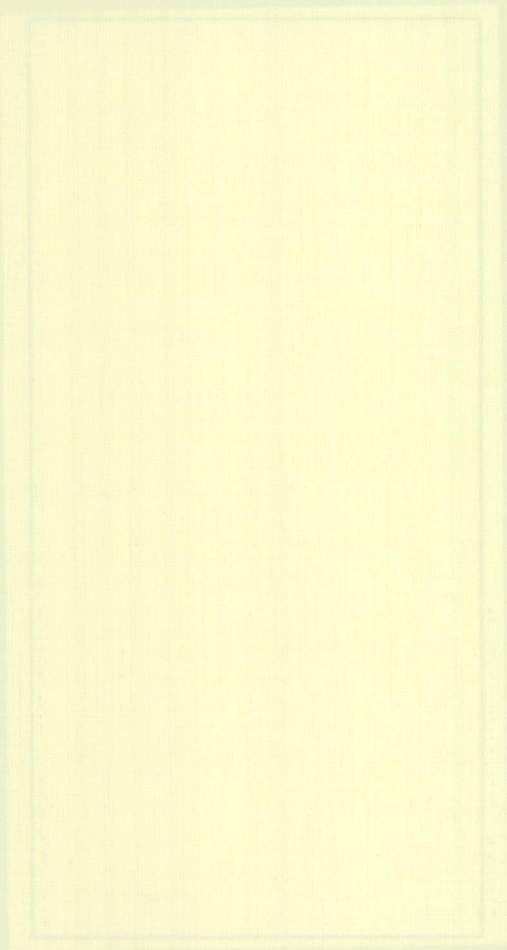


Fig. 23 Cuticura Soap 1900s.



Fig. 24 Punch Custard 1900s, uses a butler character to endorse on their labels and advertising posters





100-100-100



# Art Deco 1920-1940

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“The new machine age came striding into the 20th Century with a confidence and enthusiasm welcomed by modern designers, influenced by the straight line work of Macintosh and various fine art movements - French Cubism, Russian supermatism, and Dutch Constructivism. The new modern or modernistic design was taking the consumer world by storm. These modernist styles were forged into a broad international style called Art Deco”. (*Jankowski, 1992, p.13*).

This style affected architecture, furniture, clothing and graphic arts between the two world wars. As Art Nouveau began to fade designers associated with the Deco movement responded to the demands of the new industrial culture. Consequently, style favoured geometric rather than assymetric, rectangular rather than linear forms.

“Art Deco sought inspiration from rather exotic cultured styles and prehistoric art forms, tribal Africa, Aztec, Persian and Folk Art of Europe. The discovery of Tutankhamen’s tomb in 1922, near Luxor, provided reference material for Art Deco designers. Art Deco ornamentation became a unique configuration of Egyptian zig-zags, sun bursts, and lightning bolts. These graphic symbols became associated with modern living and represented the elegant lifestyle associated with this era.”

(*Heller, 1988, p.127*)

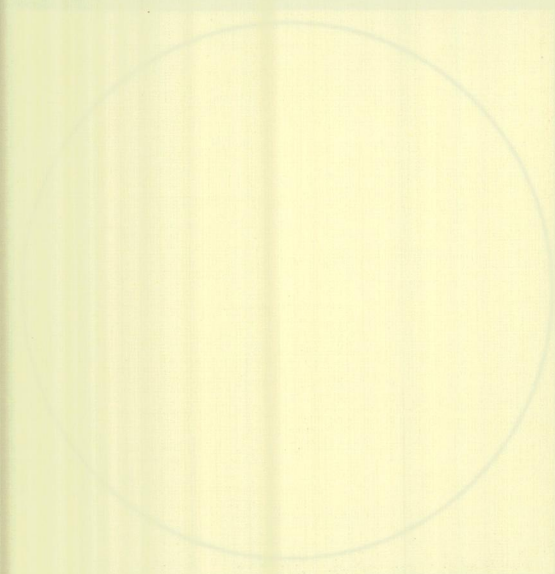


Advertising typography and layout acted as the primary communications of the Deco graphic style. After the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes* (an exhibition in France, 1925, comprising exhibitors from all over the world) helped popularise the geometric styles. After the exhibition the geometric style spread all around the world and became popular as a commercial style. Graphic Art was responsible for carrying the spirit of modernity into every aspect of daily life; magazines, posters, and product labels became the main carriers of this style. As in the Art Nouveau movement, luxury items were the first to conform to this new Deco style. The luxurious lifestyle produced an abundance of products. Cosmetics, face powders, soaps and perfumes became essential requirements for the '20s elegant female image. Innovations from the machine age provided stunning new visuals to be exploited by the Graphic Artist. Labels featuring airplanes, ocean liners and sky scrapers became typical imagery. Consumers became obsessed with a mania for the new which was reflected in packaging and label design. Modern images influenced consumers to purchase products featuring symbols of the modern world.

Art Deco graphic style was based upon the principle - less was more. Reduction of shapes and simplification of illustrations became synonymous with this style. Background detail was reduced; ornamentation was used sparingly, if used at all. It became a significant element of the label's design. White space was consciously used as an important part of the overall design. The use of symbols and abstract images to convey complex visual messages simply and quickly was the main purpose of this reduction and simplification of style. Eyes became dots, and a mouth became a single line. *Matite, Face Powder* wrapping label, 1925 (Fig. 25) uses this simplified form of illustration to convey the elegance and luxury of the product inside. This combined with an overlapping pattern on the sides produces an exquisitely designed label.



Fig. 25 Matite Face Powder wrapping label 1925.



Further simplification of illustration methods produced illustrations comprised of basic graphic shapes, in flat colours. *Outdoor Girl, Face Powder*, (Fig. 26), shows an illustration comprised of the simplest of shapes to convey a lady playing golf, obviously outdoors, her coat blowing in the wind. These type of images became a popular way of portraying women's newly found freedom. Women were taking an increasingly important role in everyday life; outdoor sports, smoking and socialising were all associated with the new found lifestyle. Women's bodies were depicted, not with the normal curves and proportions, but rather as tubular forms, slightly elongated. Straight cut hair - styles, slanted eyes and angular gestures, became the new appearance of fashion at the time. Smoking was used to portray elegance and became a very popular habit, associated with the '20s. Cigarettes were used as props during conversations. *Supreme Dental Powder* depicted the increasingly popular habit and it's ghastly side-affects (Fig. 27).

Layouts became freer - in order to obtain a greater variety of combinations it was necessary to break away from the horizontal and vertical grid structure and develop an alternative, oblique curves and diagonal layouts were introduced into label designs. Typography played one of the most important roles in this movement. Modern display-faces produced by type founders are the triumph of this style. Type founders promoted novelty display typefaces in their specimen sheets, which increased availability and usage of these fonts. One of the most influential typefaces was Pignot, which was designed by A.M. Cassandre. These typefaces were lighter and more elegant. Sans-serif typefaces were modified. No longer of uniform thickness with geometrically formed characters, they began to feature contrasts between thick and thin lines and design idiosyncrasies. Re-styled sans-serif typefaces like Futura, Gill sans, Kabel, and Bernard gothic became popular. (Fig. 28) *Red Circle coffee* label (Fig. 29), utilises a re-styled sans-



Fig. 26  
Outdoor Girl Face Powder,  
displays simplified  
illustration technique

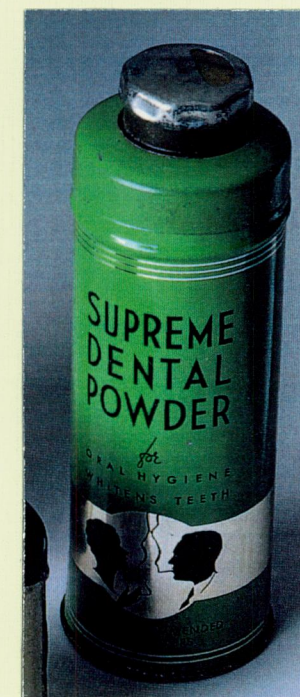
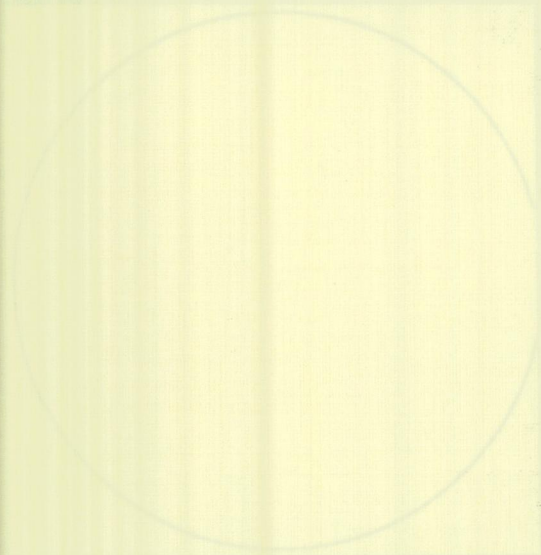


Fig. 27  
Supreme dental  
powder, early  
example of a  
transfer printed  
label 1920s.



## PEIGNOT

A<sub>A</sub> B<sub>b</sub> C<sub>c</sub> D<sub>d</sub> E<sub>e</sub> F<sub>f</sub> G<sub>g</sub> H<sub>h</sub> I<sub>i</sub> J<sub>j</sub> K<sub>k</sub> L<sub>l</sub> M<sub>m</sub> N<sub>n</sub>

O<sub>o</sub> P<sub>p</sub> Q<sub>q</sub> R<sub>r</sub> S<sub>s</sub> T<sub>t</sub> U<sub>u</sub> V<sub>v</sub> W<sub>w</sub> X<sub>x</sub> Y<sub>y</sub> Z<sub>z</sub>

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

## Futura

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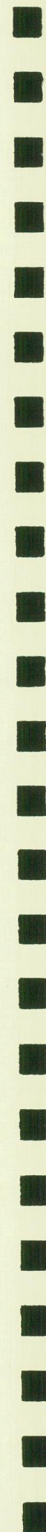
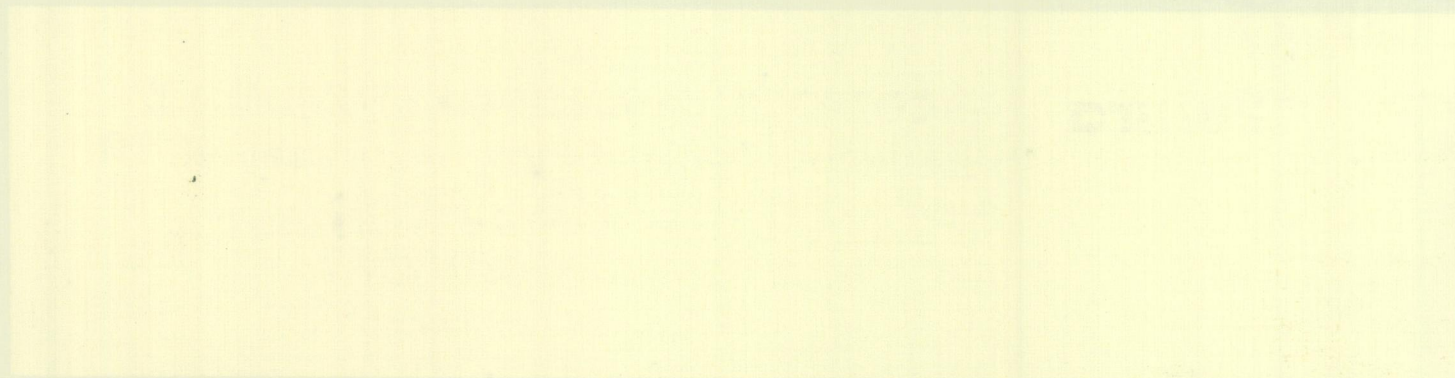
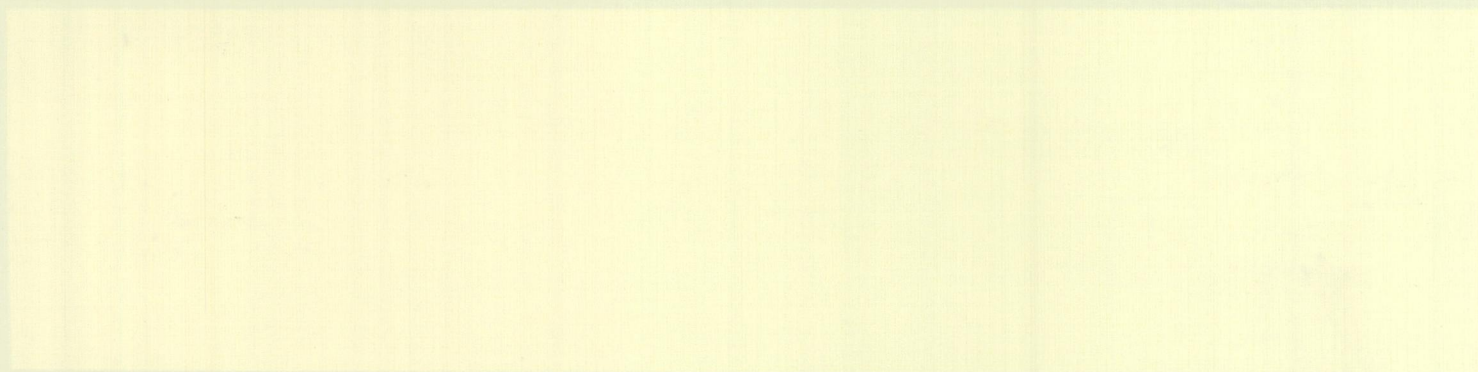
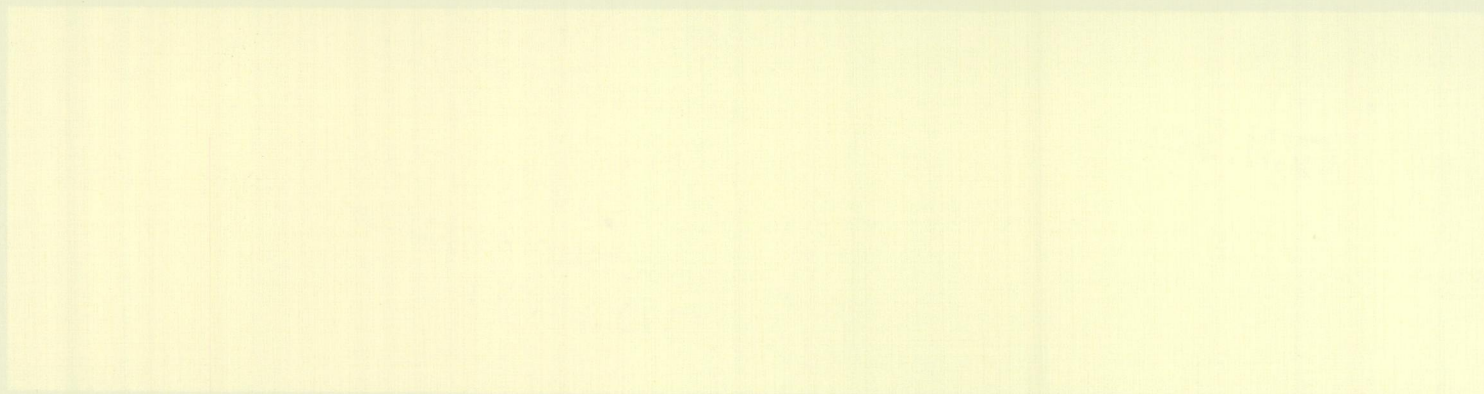
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyzæœfffl  
&ÆŒ£1234567890.,;:-!?"'()

## Gill Sans

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyzæœfiffiffiffi  
&ÆŒ£1234567890.,;:-!?"'()

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyzæœfiffiffiffi  
&ÆŒ£1234567890.,;:-!?"'()

Fig. 28 Selection of Art Deco type faces which includes Cassandre's Pignot, Futura, Gill Sans



serif typeface. The concept of placing lines of text between larger type was relatively new, providing an interesting layout. These typeface's conveyed the sales message quickly and forcefully. According to Jankowski "modern commercial Art had become 'the art of elimination.'" Fancy scroll work, meaningless borders, and detracted from the selling value and had no place in modern label design.

Colour played an important part in Deco style: lively, intensive, raw colours - oranges, blues, canary yellow, jade, turquoise, greens, ruby red, and black were widely used. These solid colours were believed to have greater impact and could provide a readily identifiable image, if utilised in the correct manner. *Outdoor Girl* label (Fig. 30), uses contrasting blue and orange and a simple graphic style to produce an instantly recognisable image. Deco styles used colour economically; stunning two-colour combinations convey messages much faster than elaborate full-colour labels.

Actually, the Art Deco period was generally a time of turmoil and trouble. The stylised or elegant face of Art Deco labels represented design rather than reality. Graphic designers subconsciously intended to promote a spirit of elegance, the exotic, speed, power, exuberance, and liberation. Positive images provided most of the graphic images for the increasing product range; objects pointing to the sun and contemporary sky-scrapers symbolised the future. Labels depicting such scenes provided a sense of escapism, focusing on the future. Labels also became a way to show off their mechanical innovations. Fig. 31 shows a variety of labels containing a selection of innovations, planes, trains, building constructions, sky-scrapers, sky lines, etc.

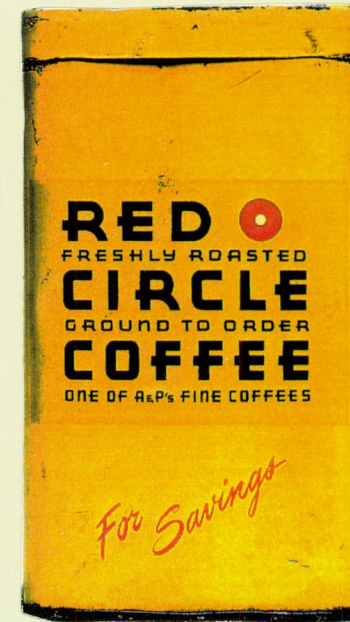


Fig. 29  
Red Circle Coffee  
Label, typography  
was beginning to  
gain priority in  
Deco style labels.



Fig. 30 Outdoor Girl Face Powder, simplified  
graphics and contrasting colours  
produce a striking label design.

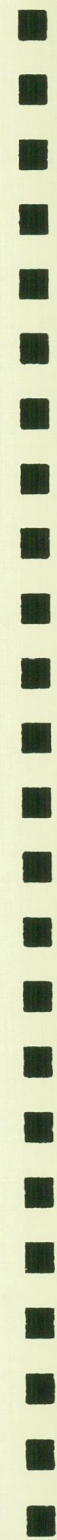
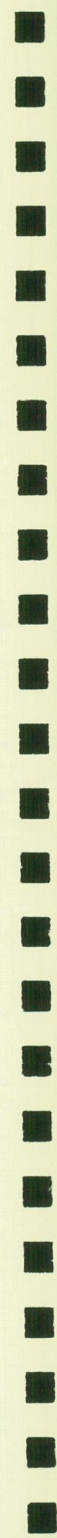
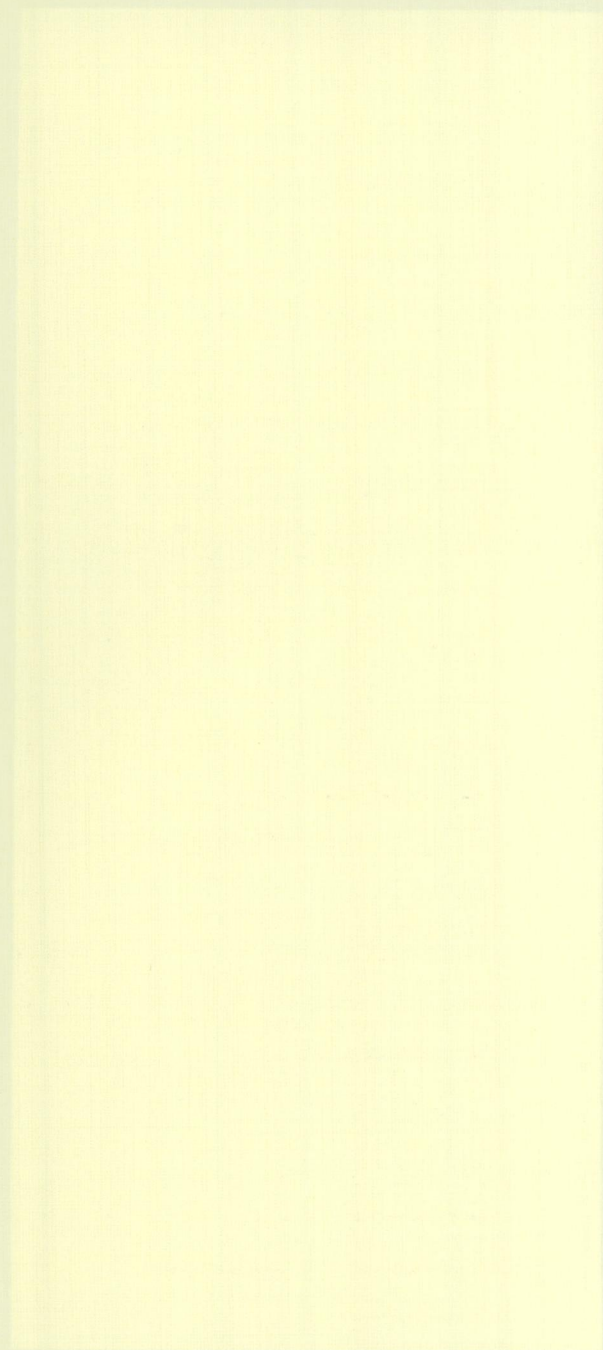
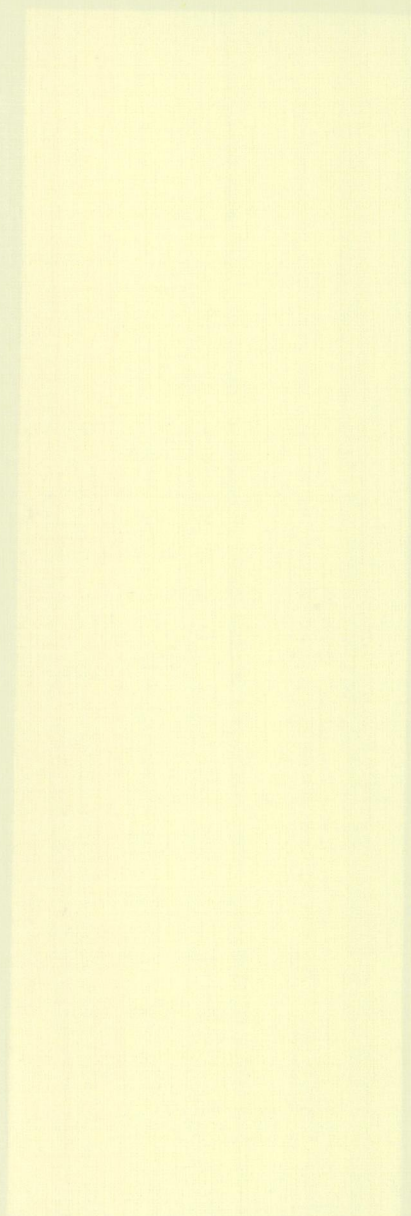
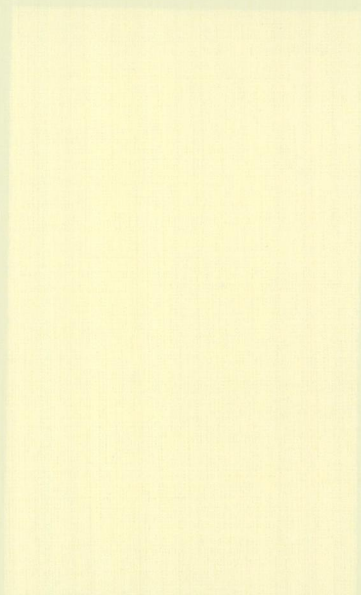




Fig. 31 Selection of labels from the Art Deco period which evoke a positive outlook on life. Symbolism includes speed, new innovations, sky-scrapers and sunbursts.



# Today's Nostalgic Revivals

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The biggest change to label design came about with the advent of the supermarket, which emphasised labels as an instrument which could influence consumers to purchase the product. Also, the introduction of market researchers, who compile information on the marketplace which help marketers and designers decide on the colour shape and illustrations which the product should contain to be successful in the today's marketplace. This has its good and bad points. Some designers value the market research and utilise the compiled information to point them in the right direction before they start designing the label. But there are those who believe the marketers destroy the creativity of designers, limiting them to a set criteria which the finished label must contain. I believe that market research should be utilised purely as a source of information from which designers can obtain any relevant material, such as the specific marketplace and the age group of the consumers. But, creative decisions should be left with the designers to communicate the message as they see fit.

Today's label designers do not appear to have any dominant style of design. Styles are changing so quickly that it is difficult to pin-point a particular style. Whether it is New Age, Avant Garde, etc., I believe the majority of today's labels are lacking in individuality and creativity. A recent survey by *Graphis Packaging* (1991), on the quality of label and package design revealed that there are a select number of design companies who are producing high quality label designs which effectively communicate the visual message to their consumers. Ten percent fell into this category. Eighty percent produced ordinary unexciting labels. Ten percent remaining failed to communicate the correct message to their consumers.



Companies are only beginning to realise how important good design is, and how it can improve the identity and style of the product. Well designed labels require an adequate budget for sufficient research and design if it is to be successful in today's market place, (which is suffering from the problem of more of the same!). This can be related to the introduction of computer-aided design, which flooded the market with labels lacking in creativity and originality, or executed in modern styles which will date very quickly. Label designers should be capable of withstanding the passage of time without becoming out-dated. The recent nostalgic revival of historic styles is showing some promising label design. Products which wish to be associated with traditional values and quality are beginning to use the Victorian styles, which are steeped in traditional values.

America has been the leader in this nostalgic revival of old style label designs. Perhaps this is because of the American's love of tradition and traditional values. The Joe Duffy Design Group is one of the pioneering firms promoting nostalgic revival. This group has earned a reputation for impeccably rendered graphic styles which are more decorative than conceptual. In its seven years of existence, the Duffy Group have forged a look which combines rustic simplicity with a high degree of elegance, producing labels and packaging which appeals to a broad range of the consumer market.

The Duffy Group uses period graphic styles from the Victorian and Deco eras, combined with modern papers, materials and finishing techniques, to produce a 1990s period label design. Duffy stresses that "these are not copies of Victorian labels, but they merely use traditional layouts as reference material." He also states that "nostalgic labels should only be used in situations which relate to old traditional values which have been around for generations, or have



been handed down from generations." The label for *Classico Pasta Sauce* (Fig. 32), designed by Duffy, shows Victorian characteristics because the sauces are based on authentic regional Italian recipes. The designer chose Goudy, old-style type-face, ornate borders and an illustration technique inspired by old wood engraving, combined with a muted colour scheme of reds, yellows, blues and browns (which are reminiscent of the early Victorian hand-coloured labels), to produce a label which is steeped with authenticity. This label conjures images of home-cooking, traditional recipes, and freshly grown ingredients, which gives a sense of the organic quality of the product inside. He also applies paper labels onto the screw-top cap (in preference to screen-printing). This consists of an enlargement of the main illustration, text and a border. The brand name is carried on a thin strip around the side edge of the lid. This additional labelling re-enforces the quality of the product inside.

Leading design firms around the world are beginning to follow the Duffy Design Group's nostalgic revival. Design firms such as Gerald Reis and Company (U.S.A.), Harte Yamashita and Forest (U.S.A.), London Design Partnership (GB.), and David Davis Associates (GB.) are producing extremely well designed labels.



Fig. 32 Classico Pasta Sauce, superb example of 1990s period design.



Food products seem to be most affected by this revival, especially luxurious gourmet products, aiming for a high quality market. A label for the *Victorian Pantry Collection of Mustard* (Fig. 33), designed by Gerald Reis & Co., uses Victorian ornamentation, in the form of a lattice work background, to produce a soft old-fashioned look combine with bold graphics that would suggest the tangy flavour of the mustard. To give this product a distinct identity they used fussy Victorian-style graphic borders and backgrounds, and highly stylised wood-cut illustrations. The style of the illustrations and the colouration is similar to that used on the *Classico Pasta Sauce* label. This product has also returned to paper and old style tin jar containers which creates a precious quality around the whole design.

It is not only borders and illustration techniques that provides inspiration for today's designers. Period typography is enjoying a comeback; sweeping logo-types, curved text and text contained in boxes are being used also. The label for *Contadina Pizzeria Kit* (Fig. 34), uses Victorian typographical layout and decorative borders which are reminiscent of Italian mosaic tiled floor panels, combined with modern photography, to create an overall feeling of a late 19th century Italian family kitchen. The arrangement of the typography has several Victorian characteristics. The Fat-Face font and enlarged C in *Contadina* with the O positioned within it, the curvilinear form, drop-shadow on *Pizzeria*, the box and border around the word *Kit*, contribute to the traditional appearance of this nostalgic label.

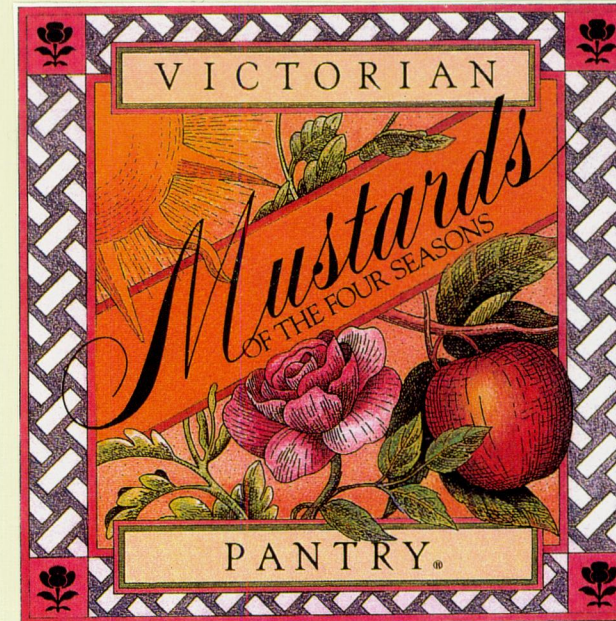


Fig. 33  
Victorian Pantry  
Mustards 1992,  
revives traditional  
Victorian illustration,  
borders and  
typography.



The tin packaging  
container adds  
authenticity to  
the product

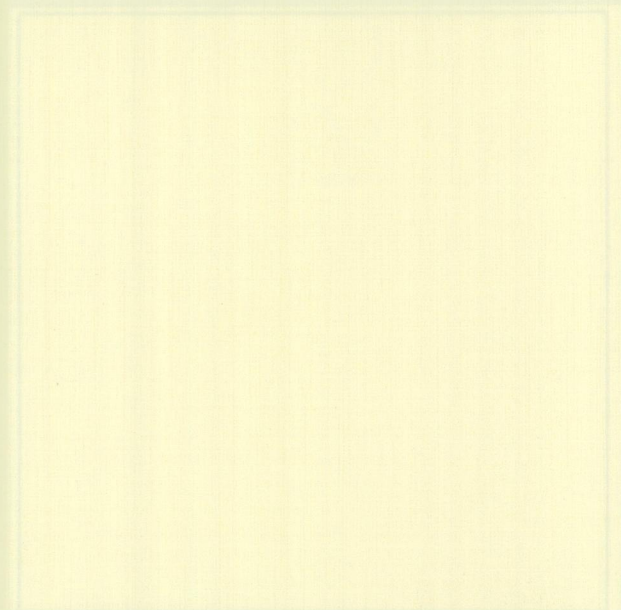
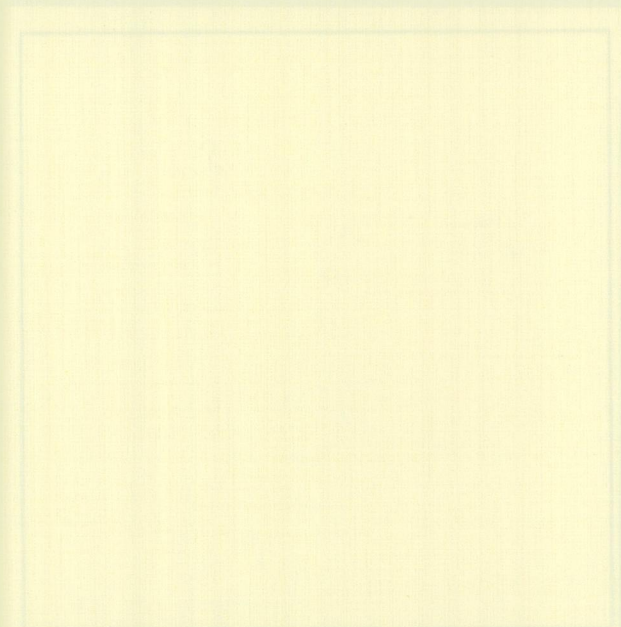
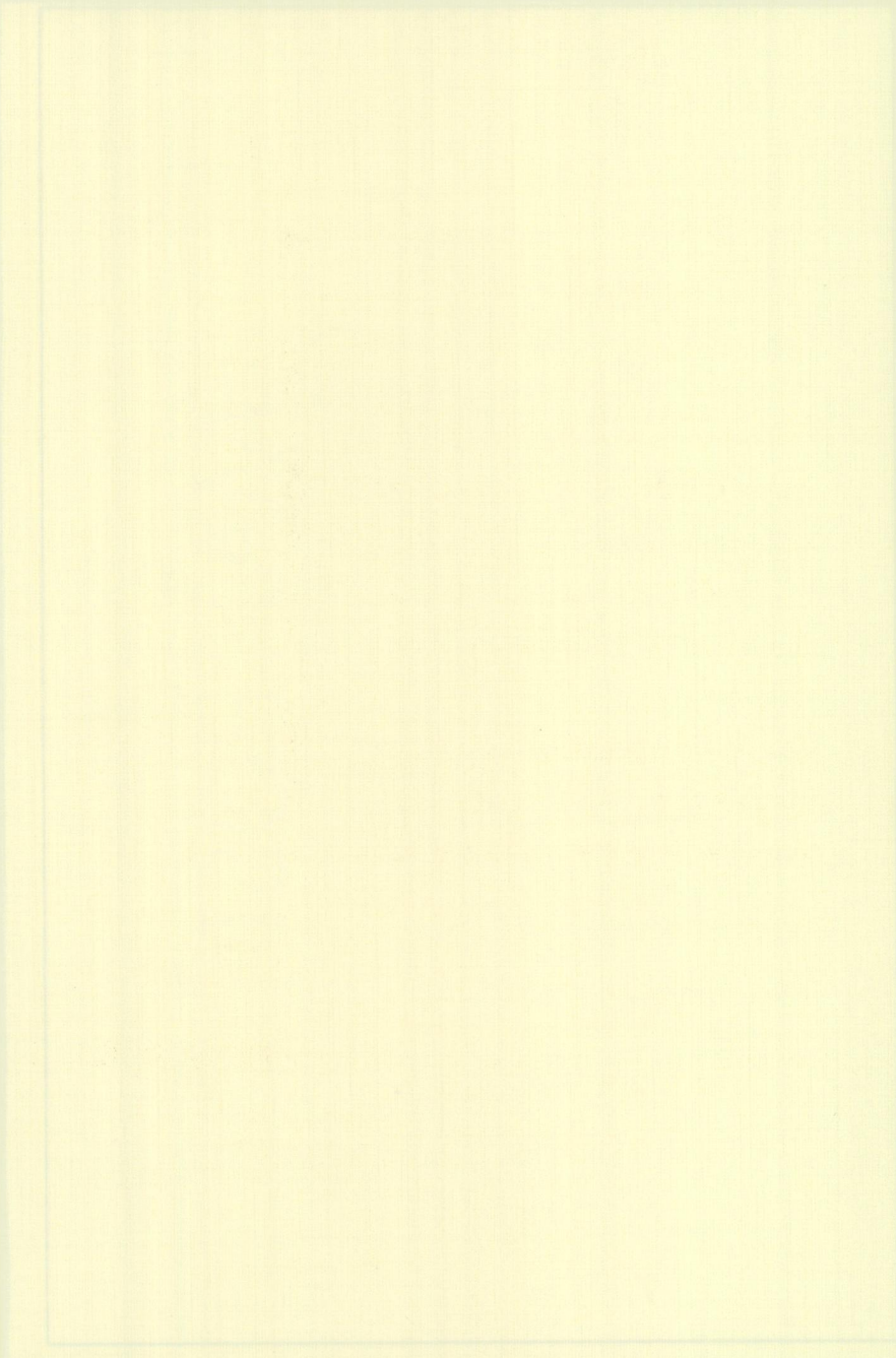


Fig. 34 Contadina Pizzeria Kit, enforces a sense of traditional Italian home cooking.





The Victorian Period is not the only style which is being used for reference in the nostalgic revival. Art Deco is also enjoying its come-back. The elegant typography and images from this period have been the source of many label designs over the years. The simplistic Sans-Serif type-faces have never really died out, they have been continually used throughout the years, as modern trends are tending to favour lighter freer layouts, simplistic use of space, we should see quite a lot of Deco inspired labels in the future. The Deco style doesn't have the same traditional values as the Victorian era, therefore, it tends to be used on products requiring a more modernistic, elegant, new-age appearance. The label design for *Avon Sky Way* (Fig. 35), body care products for men, reflects strong characteristics of the Deco period. Images of sky-scrapers are used to evoke a metropolitan, masculine appearance. Combined with clean, airy typography and Deco period colouration, it produces a strongly classical '30s feel.

It is important to realise that today's designers are not merely plagiarising old label design, but are using them only as a source of reference, taking relevant characteristics and combining them with modern design techniques and rendering skills. These well-designed nostalgic labels provide a fresh approach to label design, and will most probably feature in the label design reference books of the future.

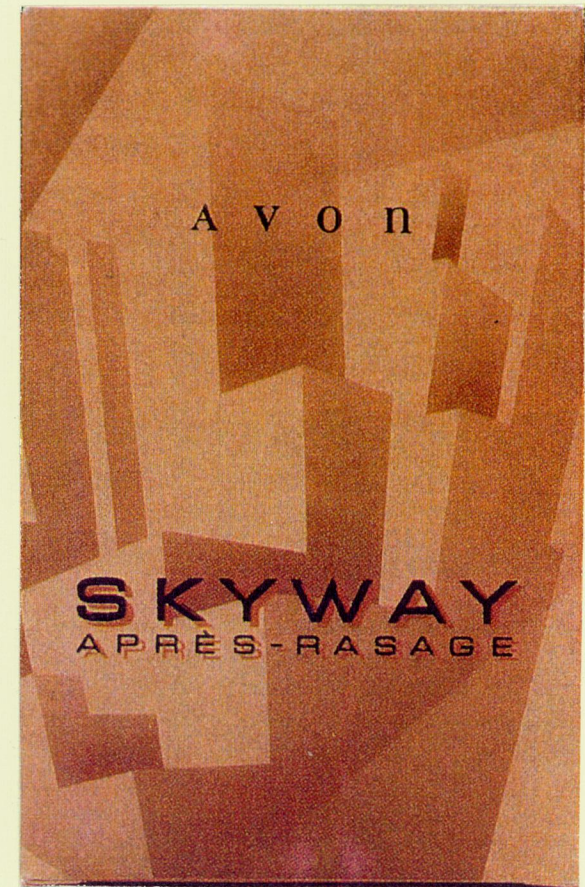
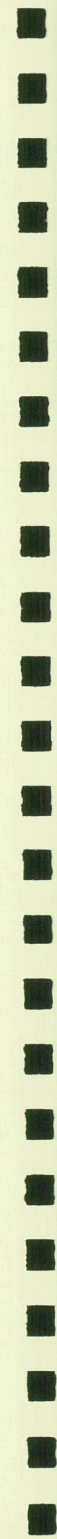


Fig. 35 Avon Skyways 1991



# Summary and Conclusion

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Labels have always played an important part in our society. For centuries, from Egyptian times over three thousand years ago, the basic function of labels has been to identify the contents of containers. This remained unchanged until the middle of the nineteenth century when, with the Industrial Revolution's over-production of goods and the introduction of pre-packed goods, labels were transformed from being merely functional items to becoming commercial necessities. Now, consumers were relying on the appearance and wording of the labels to influence their decisions.

There are three identifiable graphic styles which have made a considerable contribution to the appearance and development of label design: Victorian period, Art Nouveau, and Art Deco. Each reflects more than just the tastes and social affects of the various periods, but also the advances in reproduction methods and their understanding of design and its functions.

The Victorian Period is responsible for giving the label its first identifiable graphic style. In the earlier stages of this period style was governed by the printing process, but increased interest in label production led to the development of new techniques which could answer the commercial demands. Letterpress engraving and then Lithography combined with the Victorian love of elaborate ornamentation, giving labels distinctive Victorian characteristics. Towards the end of the Victorian Period, the introduction of modern faces, combined with stronger colours, contributed to the production of extremely effective label designs.



The next style to affect label design was Art Nouveau, which began to emerge in the 1900s. This style was in complete contrast to the Victorian period. Inspiration was obtained from nature, and this was reflected in label designs which were easily identified by the sinuous lines and illustrations of women with flowing hair, and inter-twining floral patterns. The Art Nouveau period gave label design a new lease of life; layouts became freer as designers began to experiment with type and composition. I found the latter stages of the Art Nouveau period had more to offer label design. By this stage the brush-scripted type had been adapted into complete alphabets which could be manipulated by designers, producing unique letterforms which became synonymous with the era. This period also encouraged and accelerated the development of colour Lithography, required by the colourful illustrations which used graduated, natural colours. Labels designed during the closing years of this style showed creative use of typography and composition. Combined with simplified illustration and bolder colours, it produced the most interesting labels from this period.

The Art Deco period, powered by the machine age and a mania for the new, forged a new graphic style which became obsessed with any images which reflected a new age and positive attitudes. The discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922 was the most influential discovery during this period. Label designs reflected this by the use of stylised zig-zags, sunbursts and lightening bolts. Simplification of illustrations and the exclusion of superficial ornamentation became the main characteristics of this style. The Art Deco period also developed a modern approach to design, and the principle of 'less is more' was adopted by all commercial designers. Designers were striving to produce instantly recognisable graphic symbols and this was achieved by the simplification of illustrations, use of white space and simple elegant typography. Label design became extremely functional and were a way of portraying the luxuriant, elegant life-styles associated with this period.



Of the three movements, the Victorian Period is associated with the main developments in label design. The advances made during this period out-weigh most of the other periods. However, the others had their own unique characteristics to offer. The layouts of Art Nouveau and the simplification of the Art Deco period are equally important to the appearance of label design.

Today's nostalgic revivals are utilising the various graphic styles associated with the old world rather than any technical developments or design processes. The Victorian Period is constantly being used as a source of inspiration for the label designers of today. They may use borders, typography and layouts adapted to suit the content of modern designs. Art Nouveau is not being used as much as the others, as this style is less appealing to the today tastes. However, it was crucial in the development of label design. Art Deco style is also enjoying a comeback. The slick imagery and elegant typography, produce an extremely attractive style, which is being used to portray luxury and quality.

The majority of today's labels are rather bland, with no obvious style attached. Market research and computer-aided design are partly responsible for this. However, if they are used in the correct context, they can help in the overall design process. Market research has played an important part in most of today's nostalgic revival of old label design.

Today's most interesting label designs seem to have utilised market researchers and designers working in unison in order to communicate the correct message to the consumers and, secondly, to evoke the correct response from the general public. The old world historic graphic styles are providing interesting resources for designers to use in modern contexts. These old



graphic styles can be given a new lease of life when combined with modern printing technology and with the vast variety of paper and finishes available to the designers. Paper labels are beginning to make a resilient come-back. These are aesthetically more pleasing compared to plastic shrink wrap or silkscreen printing. Design Groups such as the Joe Duffy Group and Davis Associates are encouraging these trends, producing immaculately designed 1990s period label designs.



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