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Born in 1928 in Unterseen, Switzerland, Frutiger began his career by assisting his father who was a weaver. His strong interest in the design aspects of weaving lead him to an apprenticeship with Otto Schaeffli at the Zurich School of the Arts in Interlaken. In 1951, Frutiger completed a history of the development of the western alphabet, all cut from wood. His later writings all echo his mastery of historical issues in graphic communication.

Frutiger's outstanding school projects attracted the attention of an ambitious type founder named Charles Peignot. Peignot ran a family business, Deberny and Peignot,with a focus on emerging technological changes in the type industry. In 1952, he invited Frutiger to work for his company in Paris. Frutiger designed three fonts for traditional hot metal process, President (1953), Phoebus (1953), and Ondine (1954). He also supervised the adaptation of classic fonts such as Garamond, Baskerville, and Bodoni to the new photo-typesetting process of the Lumitype.

Frutiger's1957 sans serif family for the lumitype, Univers, established his international reputation. He devised a rational system for the extended modern typeface family with double digit numbers to describe weights ranging from light, 45 to heavy, 83. The first number represents the weight and the second the condensation. Higher numbers represent heavier weights and more condensed kerning. Additionally, an even second number signifies an oblique letter.

At the same time his contemporary in Switzerland, Max Miedinger, produced Helvetica. Both these faces illustrated the post-WWII Swiss Style. They were grotesque sans serifs without the rigid geometry of the earlier Bauhaus sans serifs. They served the communication needs of expansive and increasingly international coporate marketing strategies. Frutiger was instrumental in the adoption of western type as a global standard and stated:

"Today we are witnessing the crystallization of the roman alphabet as an international text face."

Univers brought Frutiger many public commissions including an invitation to create all the signs at the Orly airport. In each project, Frutiger continued his investigation of the western alphabet but also the broader question of how signs and symbols communicate to a mass audience. He notes in his book *Signs and Symbols* (1997),

"Since new places and routes are constantly coming into existence and new means of transport into use, with a continous need for modernization and automation, there is a corresponding need for the invention of new instructional signs conveying the understanding of an unequivocal practical message."

adrian frutiger

In 1962, he opened his own studio, Atelier Adrian Frutiger, in Paris where he worked for three decades. In addition to new typefaces such as Apollo for Monotype he also created a series of abstract woodcuts illustrating a book of Genesis published by Pierre Beres.

In the 1970s, Frutiger created a fascinating typeface called OCR-B. It was the first typeface designed to be read both by machines (Optical Character Recognition) and people. He also continued his public design work in making all the directional signs at the Charles de Gaulle airport. Frutiger drew his inspiration for these airport signs from his earlier work, Univers, as well as the curvature of the airport architecture. Linotype published this work as a new typeface, Frutiger, in 1976.

Frutiger continued active work in the 1980s with Avenir (1988), Versailles (1982), Breughel (1982), and Linotype Centennial (1986). In 1994, he returned to his native Switzerland and in 1998 Anne Cuno, a Swiss television, producer aired her documentary of his life. His outstanding design work that displayed consummate technical skill, an awareness of typographic history, and a focus on the future of communications won him numerous awards and a central place in the history of typography.