TheMix Arabic: balancing handwritten and geometrically constructed letterforms.

Creating a matching Arabic typeface for the Thesis font family was an idea that had preceded the Typographic Matchmaking project by five to six years. I had contacted Lucas de Groot about this and though he was interested, it still took some time and a proper and well-structured framework to make this idea into reality. So when Lucas was approached about taking part in this project, he welcomed the idea and was looking forward to the learning experience that would result from this pilot project. I began looking for a suitable Arab partner for Lucas. Following Lucas’s wish to work on this project with an Arab calligrapher, Mounere El Shaarani was invited as his partner. Mounere was a good choice not only because of his versatile skills as a calligrapher, but also because of his natural interest in Arabic typeface design. Mounere’s career has spanned writing, artistic calligraphic work as well as design work. In addition to being a famous artist/calligrapher in the Arab world, Mounere had worked for several years at publishing houses in Beirut, designing book covers and Arabic lettering for his covers. Moreover, over the years Mounere had developed his own mix of original (and sometimes hybrid) calligraphic styles that he not only uses in his paintings, but some of which eventually became fully developed alphabets.
The design concept. The idea of matching a western designer with an interest in mixing Latin styles with an Arab calligrapher with the same interest in mixing Arabic calligraphic styles, both proficient with lettering yet interested in more simplified contemporary design, seemed like the perfect solution at the time. This choice and team also fitted the idea of developing the Arabic version of the hybrid family member of the Thesis font family - TheMix. For me, TheMix embodied some of the subtle experimental approaches to type design (specially indicative of the typographic design trends of the 90s). I always felt that kind of approach was also necessary for Arabic type design, especially knowing how easy it would be to develop such experiments with a script that is inherently rich with variety and flexibility. TheMix was also the best font to start with since it carried serifs on some letters and not others, and it had some cursive qualities and roman humanist proportions and strokes, though it is almost monoline sans serif. Both these latter qualities made it much more easily compatible with the Arabic lettering tradition. It was also the best font to start from, since it is the one that would eventually be a nice match for both the serif and sans serif fonts of the Thesis family. And so the concept of a fresh and contemporary-looking Arabic typeface was born.

The design process. Once the choice was set on the font to develop and the team members had been selected, the two designers were introduced and a face-to-face meeting between them was arranged. Lucas flew to Cairo, in November 2005, where he stayed for about five days and met and worked with Mounear at his studio. Other than providing a good opportunity to work together, Lucas’s trip to Cairo was a true eye-opening experience. For the first time in his life, he came into contact with the variety of lettering in the Arab urban environment. He photographed and observed the vernacular visual culture of one of the most culturally significant Arab cities of all, Cairo. In addition, meeting Mounear has made Lucas realize that there were far more Arabic lettering styles that he could use in his design than the familiar Ottoman Nashli styles that Western designers (and Dutch designers in particular) are most familiar with seeing and associating with as ‘the authentic Arabic’. With Mounear’s encouragement, Lucas’s trip gave him the confidence to attempt this fresh approach and to create an authentic Arabic match for his Latin font. Three days of sketching and working sessions with Mounear laid the foundations for the later work on the development of TheMix Arabic typeface.
Lucas presented his early research in Cairo and his sketches during the workshop that took place at Mediamatic in Amsterdam (in January 2006). TheMix Arabic project looked the most developed at the time. The design already had a very strong personality and looked like a true match for its Latin counterpart. Unfortunately, the work stalled until July 2006, for little design development had taken place since the Cairo working sessions. The collaboration between Lucas and Mounir seemed to only work when they were physically in the same place; remote communication between them (by phone and email) was scarce and not very efficient. I visited Lucas in Berlin at the end of July in order to troubleshoot, discuss the design so far and devise a plan on how to continue and complete the project. A few weeks later, Lucas emailed Mounir and me his second version of the design, which was then returned to him by email with Mounir’s comments and corrections.

In November of 2006, we got the 3rd and improved version of the design back from Lucas. Still the design was far from completion; there were too many design decisions to be finalized and Lucas had several technical issues he was uncertain about. I asked Nadine Chahine’s help in this matter and she agreed to meet with Lucas (since they are both living in Germany) in order to guide and help him through the final stages of the design and production of his fonts. The initial contact and commentary from Nadine to Lucas was done by email. However the planned face-to-face meetings between the two failed to materialize and the design development was halted again. Forced to meet the deadline of the mutual publication of all the typefaces of the Typographic Matchmaking project, I finally suggested to Lucas to get some technical assistance from another designer. This designer (who wishes to remain anonymous) completed the final touches of Lucas’s designs, solved all remaining technical glitches, and also developed the regular version of the typeface (since Lucas had only worked on the bold version himself). This has been the procedure for making Lucas’s TheMix Arabic fonts fit for publication and release, while still meeting the deadline of this book’s set publication date.

In 2007, after a few more meetings, Nadine and I worked with Lucas to further develop the design and create the final version. The design was then sent to the printer and printed in February 2008. TheMix Arabic was officially launched in May 2008. TheMix Arabic was designed by Lucas’s idea to create a new typeface that would be used in Arabic typography. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts.

In 2007, after a few more meetings, Nadine and I worked with Lucas to further develop the design and create the final version. The design was then sent to the printer and printed in February 2008. TheMix Arabic was officially launched in May 2008. TheMix Arabic was designed by Lucas’s idea to create a new typeface that would be used in Arabic typography. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts.

In 2007, after a few more meetings, Nadine and I worked with Lucas to further develop the design and create the final version. The design was then sent to the printer and printed in February 2008. TheMix Arabic was officially launched in May 2008. TheMix Arabic was designed by Lucas’s idea to create a new typeface that would be used in Arabic typography. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts.

In 2007, after a few more meetings, Nadine and I worked with Lucas to further develop the design and create the final version. The design was then sent to the printer and printed in February 2008. TheMix Arabic was officially launched in May 2008. TheMix Arabic was designed by Lucas’s idea to create a new typeface that would be used in Arabic typography. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts.

In 2007, after a few more meetings, Nadine and I worked with Lucas to further develop the design and create the final version. The design was then sent to the printer and printed in February 2008. TheMix Arabic was officially launched in May 2008. TheMix Arabic was designed by Lucas’s idea to create a new typeface that would be used in Arabic typography. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts.

In 2007, after a few more meetings, Nadine and I worked with Lucas to further develop the design and create the final version. The design was then sent to the printer and printed in February 2008. TheMix Arabic was officially launched in May 2008. TheMix Arabic was designed by Lucas’s idea to create a new typeface that would be used in Arabic typography. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts.

In 2007, after a few more meetings, Nadine and I worked with Lucas to further develop the design and create the final version. The design was then sent to the printer and printed in February 2008. TheMix Arabic was officially launched in May 2008. TheMix Arabic was designed by Lucas’s idea to create a new typeface that would be used in Arabic typography. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts. TheMix Arabic is a typeface that is designed to be used in Arabic typography and is available in both Arabic and Latin scripts.
من عدة الصناعات الإنسانية وهو رسوم وأشكال
الحروف تدل على الأفكار المفهومية الحالية على
ما في النفس. هو أي شيء عن الدلالة القوية و
الشريعة إذا كانت في متناول الإنسان
التي يميزها عن الحيوان، والذين يضعوا
على ما في الوضع، وذات الأجسام التي
تقلد الحرير، وهو مستقلة وتحت
الآراء والビュー، تتعلق بما في
الوضع، وأيضًا فهي تتعلق على ما في
الوضع وتقلد الحرير، وهو مستقل
المعنى، كما ويعتبرها على العلم

Writing is the outlining and shaping of letters to indicate audible words which, in turn, indicate what is in the soul. It comes second after oral expression. It is a noble craft, since it is one of the special qualities of man by which he distinguishes himself from the animals. Furthermore, it reveals what is in (people’s) minds. It enables the intention (of a person) to be carried to distant places. It enables (people) to become acquainted with science, learning, with the books of the ancients, and with the sciences and information written down by them. Because of all these useful aspects, writing is a noble craft.
Writing is the outlining and shaping of letters to indicate audible words which, in turn, indicate what is in the soul. It comes second after oral expression. It is not a noble craft, since it is one of the special qualities of man by which he distinguishes himself from the animals. Furthermore, it reveals what is in (people’s) minds. It enables the intention (of a person) to be carried to distant places... It enables (people) to become acquainted with science, learning, with the books of the ancients, and with the sciences and information written down by them. Because of all these useful aspects, writing is a noble craft.
Roberto Lopardo

[Handwritten text: I want to stay away from this place and have more time to myself. When I'm poor, I play with others. I feel like I'm playing with beauty.]

111
VILLA 111

Creek Contemporary Art Fair, Dubai 2007

Above and opposite page: Cover and spread for an exhibition catalogue of VILLA 111, a group show of faculty from the American University in Dubai. Design by Studio International Almeria, photograph (cover) by Roberto Lopardo.
Lucas de Groot. Born in The Netherlands and studied at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in The Hague under Gerrit Noordzij. He worked for four years with the Dutch design group BRS Preamelsa Vonk, and also taught at the Art Academy in Den Bosch. He moved to Berlin in 1993 to join MetaDesign where he worked for another four years. As typographic director at MetaDesign in Berlin, he worked on a range of corporate design projects; from logos, magazine concepts and custom typefaces, to fine-tuning and implementing type. In 1997 Lucas accepted a part-time teaching position in Potsdam, a former East German city just outside of Berlin. The Fachhochschule Potsdam was founded shortly after the unification of Germany and is currently the only school in Germany to employ a Professor of Type Development. Together with the Dutch typographer Wim Westerweld he started a new company. Under the name FontFabrik he offers services like type and logo development and digital implementation to design and advertising agencies. For the German magazine DER SPiegel, Lucas designed an exclusive series of fonts. For SUN Microsystems, two exclusive type families were designed. For the Dutch Ministry of Landbouw Natuurbeheer en Visserij, FontFabrik developed an exclusive typeface family. In addition to his famous and extensive Thesis font family, he has developed several typefaces that are published by his own private font foundry, LucasFonts.
Mounir Al-Shaarani. Born in Syria and graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Damascus (1977). He studied under the great Syrian calligrapher, Badawi Al Dirany. He works as a calligrapher and book designer, since 1968. He has designed several custom typefaces that were used on his book covers and personal work. His work has been exhibited internationally; in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, Switzerland, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Yugoslavia, India, England and the USA. He is highly regarded internationally for introducing uniquely innovative calligraphic styles and for taking his inspiration from everything around him (old and new).