1902 Johannes Tschichold was born in Leipzig, Germany in 1902. At the time, Leipzig was known for being a prominent center of publishing and printing in Germany. His father was a scriptwriter, which led young Tschichold to have an early interest and understanding of typographic forms. He wanted to become a professional artist, but his parents worried that the career would be too unstable. He then proposed studying to become a lettering artist, and since this was similar to his father’s profession, they gave in to his request. Even at an early age, he began to teach drawing and illustration.

1914 Tschichold’s interest in calligraphy and script writing was sparked by a visit to The World’s Fair for Books and Graphics in 1914. He studied much on his own and delved deeply into these topics. From 1919 to 1921, he was taught by Walter Tiemann and later studied typography under Hermann Delitsch at the Academy for Graphic Arts in Leipzig. While there, he very thoroughly impressed his peers & professors with his knowledge and abilities. In 2 years he was teaching a script writing class with Delitsch, and was accepting commissions for designing advertisements. Tschichold’s foundation in calligraphy was somewhat unique, since many modern typographers had backgrounds in painting and architecture.

During the early years of Tschichold’s design career, Germany entered, fought in, and lost the First World War. Following the war, the country struggled with financial instability and political unrest. Frustrated with the current state of Germany (both politically and artistically), Tschichold became interested in the revolutions in Russia and changed his name to Ivan in support of their ideas.

At this point in time, font usage was not consistent, type wasn’t set at even heights, and layouts were sloppy. Tschichold was frustrated by modern typography, and when he attended the 1st Bauhaus exhibition in 1923 in Weimar, he was very much inspired by their unique and refreshing ideas. There, he was exposed to the works of designers such as Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Zwart, and especially Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Herbert Bayer and El Lissitzky, who would later become a good friend.

Jan started to move away from advertising towards book design. He published many books that were intended for educational purposes and produced many works in the New Typographic style. However, in 1932, the Nazi Party came to power, and they were suspicious of the “un-German” Tschichold. His family had just moved from Munich to Berlin, and the Nazis searched his home, imprisoning his wife when he was away. On his return, he was able to free her, but was kept in prison for several weeks before being released. Immediately afterwards, he said, “I will not stay in this country for one minute longer than I have to.”

With the political climate changing rapidly, it was no longer safe for the Tschicholds to stay in Germany, so they moved to Switzerland. He was able to get work teaching at the Basel School of Applied Arts and the publishing house Benno Schwabe. There, he published the book *Typographische Gestaltung,* another one of his famous works about The New Typography. However, in the years following the Second World War, he began to step back from his strict adherence to modernism and embraced his more classicist roots.

The same year, Tschichold got a teaching position at the Vocational School for Graphic Arts in Munich with the help of Paul Renner, who would later consult Tschichold for his typeface Futura. Renner convinced his colleague to change his name, since Ivan was not appropriate any longer for obvious political reasons. He changed his name to Jan, more in the spirit of his birth name Johannes. Around this time he married Edith Kramer and they had a son named Peter.

Three years afterwards, Tschichold published his most well known publication, Die Neue Typographie, *The New Typography,* which was a textbook officially stating the principles upheld by the movement. Tschichold wanted there to be consistency in typography and his design philosophy was in the spirit of the machine age, an era which was at its peak at the time between the two world wars. This book influenced many designers, one of which was the American designer Paul Rand.

Also in this year, Tschichold and other designers formed a group called the Ring Neuer Werbegestalter or the Ring of New Advertising Designers. This group existed for the purpose of promoting members’ works, and they supported The New Typography’s philosophies such as the use of bold rules, primary colors, strong contrasts, and clarity. Because of this group, Tschichold gained many international contracts and was kept very up to date on what was happening in the design world.

**The New Typography:**

- energetic and dynamic layouts,
- strict adherence to grid systems,
- white space as a graphic element,
- exclusive use of the sans serif.

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1925  
Tschichold’s style and philosophies began to change. He embraced the work of the avant-garde movement and strongly rejected the classical traditions of his past. In 1925, he wrote an article, *Elementare Typographie,* which became a manifesto for what would later be known as The New Typography movement. The article claimed that the purposes of typography and design are to be functional, communicative, simple, and compelling. Sans serifs were the only acceptable typefaces and images were the preferred medium for illustration. This publication was quite controversial, and people either passionately adopted or strongly rejected his ideas. With it, he started to become very well known and spoke about his philosophies around Europe.

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The New Typography was a response to the disorder of typography in Europe at the time, and after it gained such a wide following and made pioneering changes in design, Tschichold felt that it had reached its limit. Progress had been achieved and wasn’t as needed anymore. He slowly began to embrace more classical design principles. After the war, he reflected back, detecting, “the most shocking parallels between the teachings of Die Neue Typographie and National Socialism and fascism.”

Tschichold did not want to spread the same ideas that had made him leave Germany.

He then felt that typographers should uphold humanist ideals and gain inspiration from the past. In 1947, he moved from Switzerland to London to redesign materials for Penguin Publications. Similar to how he set standards for the New Typography, Tschichold set about to create composition rules for the company with clear design standards and specifications. It took a while for the designers to follow his guidelines, which emphasized legibility, wide margins, balanced type styles, and simplicity. However, his rules were eventually adopted, and he poured himself into designing book covers. To him, they were a neglected but very important part of the book. They were the readers’ first glimpse into the book, and they set the tone for the content with its style.

By the end of his time at Penguin, Tschichold had overseen the publication of over five hundred books, a contribution that he was very proud of.

He moved back to Switzerland in 1949, feeling that his work was complete. He passed on his title to another designer who faithfully kept to the same standards that his predecessor had set. He continued to write, work, and speak around the world, but focused more on typography. His views on typefaces shifted, and about sans serifs he said that they are “certainly not the most legible typeface when set in quantity, let alone readable... Good typography has to be perfectly legible and, as such, the result of intelligent planning.”

This appreciation and desire for readability led him to create yet another one of his most important contributions: Sabon, a beautiful and elegant typeface that received much praise and success.

Jan Tschichold passed away in 1974 in Locarno, Switzerland, where he lived in a small house with beautiful gardens and rooms lined with books. Even after his death, his legacy was survived by his books and his students, both of which testify to his genius and skill.

“we do not need [more] pretentious books for the wealthy, we need more really well-made ordinary books”

Jan Tschichold