A detailed topographic map of the Zeeland area in Wisconsin. The map features contour lines indicating elevation, with peaks like Mt. Guyot (4500') and Mt. Slickney (3007') labeled. It also shows various trails such as the Zeeland Ridge Trail and the Thoreau Falls Trail, along with several ponds including Zeacliff Pond and Thoreau Falls Pond. The map is oriented with North at the top.

# ZEALAND

## CHARLES GIBBONS

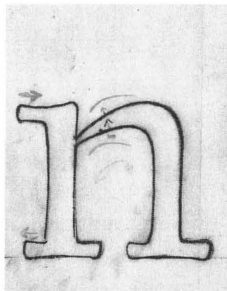
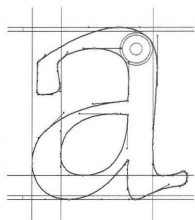
Much of the writing on type design reflects the technical and pragmatic aspects of its production; this approach frequently obscures the human dimension of an already arcane art. Now that computers have put type's tools within the grasp of many, its literature needs to respond in kind. Drawing a parallel between living and working with letters and exploring the natural world – this article, excerpted from the author's graduate thesis – offers a literary meditation on the motives for, and experience of, making type.

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# Reflections on Developing a Typeface

## ONE | LOGGING TRAIL

The Zealand Trail is relatively easy, following an old railroad grade much of the way and passing through an area of beaver swamps, meadows, and ponds. All major brook crossings are bridged.

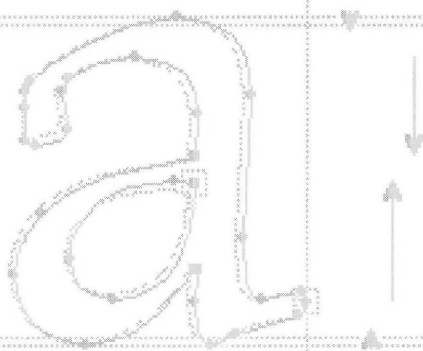
*AMC White Mountain Guide*

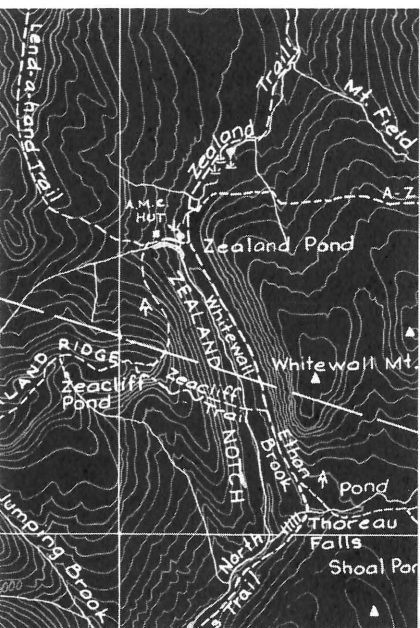
A script, in the sense of true writing, as understood here, does not consist of mere pictures, or representations of things, but as a representation of an utterance, of words that someone says, or is imagined to say.

Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*

**You're following in my footsteps here.** This was mostly written walking. Weaving home to school and back again. Pacing round my apartment. Ambling aimlessly about my neighborhood, notebook in hand, muttering to myself like a nut. I walked, gathering stories along the way. Maybe I had to be in motion myself to catch the fleeting words; maybe walking's the motor that drives my mind. I walked these words like a teething baby, like a restless, housebound dog, till they settled down. Much time – and more than a few miles – shaped these words, these words themselves about their shaping. Circular? Perhaps – but every circle's described around a single, necessary point.

I came here with a modest goal – to draw letters – and this is the travelogue of my two-year trip. This is the story of how I went in search of a single typeface – the one you're





reading about now – and of where I found it. It's the story of why I went looking in the first place, since I set out to do better something I could already do – or so I'd thought. Like any journey, mine has its beginning and end, its twists and turns, its unexpected weather and dubious drinking water. Like any journey, not everyone chooses to tag along so it falls to me to recount my adventures.

I was lucky to have a brightly blazed path to follow, a real trail in the real world, high up in the Whites – sometimes followed figuratively, sometimes literally. Over half my life now I've spent Thanksgivings in Zealand Notch in northern New Hampshire, where the Appalachian Mountain Club keeps a hut for hikers. Each year brings a different trip with a different group – some large, some small, some with friends and family, some with folks I've not seen since. Some years bring no trips at all, the weather too cold or logging road too icy to even try. And some years I lived away and couldn't travel east. This is as much a story of that place, and my place there, as of a typeface – so much so that telling one helps tell the other.

Some things are better shown than told, and the deeper we venture into letters' world the better our chances of apprehending what they actually are. Our path skirts techniques of making types and the particulars of their aesthetics – these are lands better charted on other, different maps.

Two events started me down this trail. John Benson and Kris Holmes during their brief visits here both pointed out the painfully obvious: I have hands I should be using. After all, that's where letters come from, their roots shaped through the interplay of hand, wrist, arm and shoulder with stylus, brush, chisel and pen. Machines have since interceded at our behest, casting words wide by fixing their forms, by trading one kind of life for another. I learned to letter through machines, through books and typesetting and computers, and these two years represent a journey, in part, from my head into my hands.

Every action has its opposite, and my hands have been busy talking to my head along the way. Lucy Hitchcock, when we'd just met, asked me perhaps the most difficult question I've faced here: Why I do what I do – why letters? That same day, as I stood with John Hegnauer staring at a piece of lettering, he admitted that after all his years carving, he felt he'd reconciled himself to the capitals but his relationship with the lowercase was still uncertain. Many would think it a bizarre thing to say. All that bothered me, though, was I'd never asked myself either question – at least not directly – and I knew I had to go looking for an answer.

Did I find one? Let me play guide and I can show you where I've been. Most places the path's wide enough to walk two abreast. No need to pack bread crumbs or silken thread: knowing how way leads on to way, I doubt we'd ever bother coming back.

## TWO | TRAIL HEAD

Lettering in every form gives me the purest and greatest pleasure, and at many times in my life it was to me what a song is to the singer, a picture to the painter, a shout to the elated, or a sigh to the oppressed – it was and is the most happy and perfect expression of my life.

*Rudolf Koch*

The Zealand Trail starts at a parking area just before the gate at three and a half miles from the highway. It is reached by following Zealand Road, which leaves the highway at Zealand Campground, about two miles east of Twin Mountain village. Zealand Road is closed to public vehicular use from mid-November to mid-May.

*AMC White Mountain Guide*

How to explain the appeal of an unheated, unplumbed shack on a mountainside ledge? If I were you I wouldn't see it, but I'm not and I do. I can see morning's window frost, my crystalline breath clouding the air. I can smell evening's

fire, birch then oak, bright then long, set once the sky's drained of light. I can taste the sweetly metallic water, hear the icy pond's percussive settling, feel the rough planked floor. I keep it all deep within – a solitary preserve.

Sit at my studio desk here, picked for its windowful of trees and northward gaze. Sit and stare at the carrel. At the purloined National Forest sign. At the photos of the valley: Zeacliff and Whitewall and marshy scrub all bisected by a single nearby birch. Without planning to, I've taken the same picture every time I've been. I keep them pinned to my desk, turning them like calendar leaves to mark the months I'm missing.

Trip-morning wake-up: I go collect the others and we find a diner to load up on caffeine and cholesterol before hitting the road. And then the road: three hours' worth north of Boston. A half hour into New Hampshire we lose familiar radio and ride static the rest of the way. Urban sprawl collapses above Concord. By Cannon there's snow – always – and clouds. The highway grows narrowly rural; interstate becomes byway, asphalt, gravel, dirt, and then it all gives way to trail.

Pines wall the path for the first hundred yards then the woods begin in earnest. Each section's distinct from the last. Hike the Zealand trail enough and you get the pattern down cold: pines then boulders then roots then streams then swamp then pond and then the mountain – all uphill inbound. After a while you can do it in the dark – not a bright idea, but you can. I have. Once.

Go sit on the porch – go on. Or head up the falls, over a rock, a log, stepping light on ice or it's into the drink and down the mountain. Where it's steep or still running, turn into the woods and out again upstream for another look. Head up above Lend-a-Hand, up above the hydro pump, past the restricted use quarter-mile and off the trail, just to see. I plan every time to track the river up-mountain till it's so small I can dam it with my hand, and every time I start

up but then think the better of it. I've seen the Mississippi small up north and it hasn't been the same since. Why spoil things?

Then there are letters. How to explain the appeal of spending my life lost in this forest of signs? Indirectly – but what explanation isn't indirect? To really get it, you have to be there yourself.

The appeal? It shows in little things I do. In childhood, adopting the hands of people I admired, hoping perhaps to be admirable myself. I eventually gave that up to create my own scripts, carefully documented every few years in the back endpapers of an old type specimen book. In amusing myself for hours at lacing pages with nonsense phrases, watching my pencil-tip trace its path. In baking a gingerbread font to bring to class and regretting only I had time enough for the caps.

In sketchbooks packed with doodled letters; in letters scrawled on practically every paper surface in reach plus the odd wall or table, or the back of my hand. In a typeface I drew about a vacation in Vermont and the one I drew when my dog died – called *Aphasia*, for when words fail. It sits in a drawer somewhere. I've never used it and probably never will.

It shows in what I keep around me. In that poster from my high school newspaper's office, a misappropriated souvenir from some forgotten class trip. "Dix-septièmes fêtes musicales en Touraine," it says, though I really can't read it. I keep it for the lettering, a sweetly awful mixture of *Baskerville* and *Berling* – as if all the printer had was "B" types.

It shows in the California job case shadow box on the dining-room wall. In an old family gravestone in the hallway, whispering "Waters" in letters so weathered they're barely audible above the marble's white noise. In the old typewriter on my dresser, a Smith and Corona, purchased secondhand in the thirties – about when the hut was built.

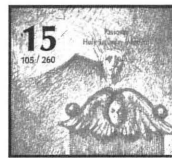
I came to type from reading. Readers, perhaps better than others, have a sense for the “missing,” for the mind preserved and reconstituted miles and years away from its source. Maybe we hear its echo. Maybe it’s that we absent ourselves, projected elsewhere to lead our shadow lives. Reading’s isolating, antisocial, almost autistically focused away from the world – and delightfully so. What’s abstract turns personal too.

So much of letters’ power over me is tied to silence and absence. Letters at play in writing conjure the missing: they recount the past, imagine the future, direct our actions, amplify the distant voice and recall those fallen silent. It wouldn’t be necessary otherwise – why write or read what we can simply say or hear?

So too, my sense of Zealand Notch is tied to absence. In a sense, being at Zealand is like being among letters. Its outside scale sets enough lead between my line and others’ to become legible to myself, and its pace promotes the reading. Less abstract, though, is this: I’d moved away and passed up trips. Having been away six years, I simply missed the place.

I missed the hut kitchen, its propane and iron and stalactite utensils lamplit orange and dripping on the floor. But I’m here not there – here – typing, where nobody ever types there – at least not that I know. I’d gladly be wrong and more gladly be there. Typing, or not.

I missed my insomniac nights in the bunkroom, headphones inside my cap, trawling for Quebecois chatter to mask the others’ sleep till I stumble myself and wake to stone-cold dead batteries. I still have the radio, though. Radio in the studio, at the dining room table, at the keyboard splining my way through the alphabet to cello or cuatro or maybe just the news, and then the room goes missing and I’m feet-up by the wood burner in the hut’s half light...



### THREE | ROCKS AND ROOTS

Leaving the parking area, the trail follows the railroad grade, then a bypass that is somewhat rough. It then returns to the grade and approaches Zealand River at about a mile, near some ledges in the stream.

*AMC White Mountain Guide*

Just as much as the word, silence is a creature of the alphabet: the pause between word and word, the silent contemplation of the text, the silence of meditative thought, are all forms of alphabetical silence... Most of us have, at best, only an inkling of the silence before words; and many of us have gone the opposite way, converting silence into something mechanical, into the no that separates beep from beep.

Ivan Illich and Barry Sanders, *ABC: The Alphabetization of the Popular Mind*

Much of what I know about letters I learned first in cemeteries. Old style, transitional, modern. Ligatures, letterfit, leading. Of course, stomping around in some disused graveyard limits the discussion somewhat – I didn't pair words with ideas until years later, but I had row after row of good and patient teachers.

They were everywhere we went. Across the street from school where bundled children harvested fall's colors. Behind the church, with the tire swing on which we cast ourselves like little pendulate angels. Back beyond the lumberyard – amusing in its own right – a lot full of revolutionary soldiers couched in the high grass. The lavish green expanse of the new cemetery next door punctuated nightly with bats and a single eerie gas flame.

Mine was an accidental exposure to letters. I went to play, to explore Salem's forgotten wilds, weaving between the open fields of markers and the encroaching woods – half expecting, half hoping to stumble on some secret coven or fortress. Playing twilight hide-and-go-seek, ducking behind markers where the others wouldn't go – sooner or later I was bound to look at what the stones said, and

*how*: the elaborate scripts, the wobbly spelling, the strange epigraphs.

Think about it: a lawnful of rocks bearing odd notes from the past (always the past, never the present or ever the impossible future) asserting *here lies*, begging *remember me*. A landscape of introductions, of calling cards – no throat clearing or handshakes among the reserved dead – with perhaps the occasional visit from increasingly distant friends and family. Like pausing to listen to an elderly relative's stories, I got to know my quiet neighbors, cobbling together bits of their lost worlds. *She came from England. He was only a baby. What a strange name. That was so long ago.* Puzzling over the more cryptic cases: 2 *Children. Mrs Eliza Fittypace 1771.*

Some yards had newer residents, new as in from this century, new like folks who moved to town some twenty years back and still don't quite fit in. They came with their newfangled ways, their flowers and flags and humorless sandblasted granite bergs adrift among the slate. I politely greeted the new folks and excused myself to rejoin my friends. The old stones' stolid, weathered resoluteness conjured a sense of mystery and allure the shiny new machined slabs could never match.

So it seems inevitable I'd turn to lettering, revisiting my childhood world and adding my voice to the silent conversation. But why make letters?

To find out what they are.

Letterers tend to be literal, to be interested in things not pictures, but also occultists, trying our hands at divining the alphabet's secret caballah, spelunking for hidden relationships, wrestling with these symbols as things-as-such.

Half their mystery lies in what they do. Letters are quiescent objects, spreading a meaningful silence in their wake. Each alone represents a silent potential. We see a letter – say z – and we call it by name. But paired with any other, our letter quickens and voices itself – “Oz.” For a

letter, being itself means denying itself – it means going as absent as readers. Writing conjures the hidden world within each letter, its alchemy transforming words from sound to sight. It stores speech: fished from the rushing stream of time, it points to its moment of capture. Pointing backward, it's tied intimately to memory. Making letters is just one way of exploring and perpetuating this mysterious transubstantiation.

(Of course it's also fun.)

#### FOUR | BROOKS AND BRIDGES

Originally called the New Zealand Valley, presumably owing to its remoteness, the name was shortened to Zealand for the convenience of the railroad and post office. Much of Zealand Notch and the area to the north was reduced to a jumble of seared rock and sterile soil by a series of intensely hot fires around the turn of the century. It has now made a reasonably complete recovery, a remarkable and outstanding testimony to the infinite healing powers of nature.

*AMC White Mountain Guide*

Letter-Cutting is a Handy-Work hitherto kept so conceal'd among the Artificers of it that I cannot learn any one hath taught it any other; But every one that has used it Learnt it of his own Genuine Inclination. Therefore, though I cannot (as in other Trades) describe the general Practice of Work-men, yet the Rules I follow I shall shew here, and have as good an Opinion of these Rules as those have that are shyest of discovering theirs. For, indeed, by the appearance of some Work done, a judicious Eye may doubt whether they go by any Rule at all...

Joseph Moxon, *Mechanick Exercises*

I wasn't a graceful child but rather the kind who trips on curbs and falls from trees. Luckily for me I could read and, luckier still, liked to from the start. Biographies and field guides and encyclopedias gave way to Updike and Irving who in turn passed the baton to Borges and Saramago and Perec and so on. It went likewise with drawing, the fridge plastered with portraits of parakeets and planes and

many-masted frigates. It seems only natural that someone tending to words and pictures should fuse the two in one life practice.

I remember catching my first glimpse of what books *are* down between the lines of what they *say*. I was nine, a fourth grader in the sixth grade reading class. We'd been assigned *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* – still new then, worth saying only because the later paperback's design tried to soar on clipped wings. The hardcover was open and airy, simple and graceful, and full of photos printed on vellum leaves that lifted like fog. It looked like the story it told. I loved the book so much I read all the author's others; I learned about birds and planes and flight. And I glided from contents to container, beginning to hear books speak in their typish voices. Even today, I keep a special place aside for *Optima*, *Jonathan Seagull's* font – though, like most things special, I don't really use it.

I grew from reading books to making them, and making them draws on reading them – on going and coming back again. And how the books flock from everywhere to my shelves. From down the street and from vacation layovers. From Europe and the Internet. From places I've forgotten and others whose names I've never known.

Midway. Biermeier's. Arion. Laurie's. Odegaard. Lee's. Hungry Mind. Powell's. Moe's. More Moe's. Prairie Lights. Bear Pond. Seven Mountains. Cody's. Turtle Bay. Carroll's. Veatch's Arts of the Book. Half-Price. Other Worlds. Avol's. Canterbury. Wordsworth. MIT Press. E. Wharton. Starr. Annie's. Serendipity. Pangloss. Zembla's. The Coop. Much Ado. De Buitenkant. Ursus. Waterstone's. Buddenbrooks. Cambridge Booksmith. New England Mobile Book Fair. Boston Book Annex. Wordsmith. Dawson's. Charlesgate. Goodspeed's. The Strand. Bookcellar Café. McIntyre and Moore. Schoenhof's. Stillwater Antiquarian. Chanticleer. Book House on Grand. Paul's. Hartley & Marks. East India Square. Brentano's. Dark Carnival. Bookends. Applause.

Harvard Bookstore. Bookworks. Cellar Stories. Walker Art Center. A Room of One's Own. Shakespeare and Company. Second Story. J. Rybski, Bookseller. Avenue Victor Hugo. Nicholas and Helen Burrows. Andover Books. College Hill. Oak Knoll. Myopic. Galaxy. Trident Bookstore Café. Trade Winds. Twelfth Street. Globe Corner. Williamson Center. Beasley. Dingman's. Nijhof and Lee. Granary. Joshua Heller. Mendelsohn and Bledsoe. Readers International.

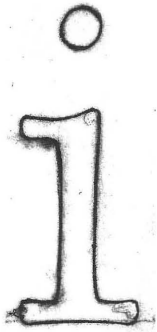
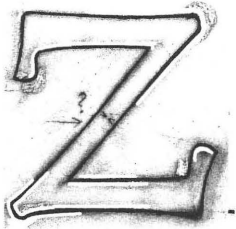
But not Amazon-dot-com. Not yet – no.

Just listing dealers sends me scurrying closetwards to rifle through a box full of receipts and bookmarks, a well-blazed paper trail winding back a decade. My tax records... Well, let's just say the contrast is striking. Books are the real reason I've always driven a heap. Who needs safe, reliable transportation when they could have more books? Flocks of books. Gaggles of books. Murders of books. (Murders? Well, if that's what it takes...)

Books about type. Books about calligraphy. Books about printing. About binding. About reading. Books about words. Some, like *Mechanick Exercises*, preach fire and brimstone. Some, like *Typologia*, are more avuncular in their advice. Others simply are, their letters rustling through the leaves like a pup.

Of course many a calligrapher, cutter, and designer holds strong opinions about the “just shaping of letters” and a good many write those opinions down. Their claims trace back the path like bread crumbs – Arrighi, Cataneo, Moxon, Tory, Dürer, Fournier, Fleischman, Gill, Goudy, Warde, Smeijers – each piling their cairns with the stones at hand, each marking their given stretch along the trail.

Because so many have passed this way over so many years, we're yoked to rites and rituals that admit little change, even if we no longer understand their origins. It's easy to grow in mired in type's mundane arcana. Serifs or none? Cursive or sloped roman? Masons or Knights Templar? Every letter's a secret handshake. Take lowercase a, for example. It's the



letter I enjoy drawing most and least, my best friend and mortal enemy, my doppelgänger.

It all started years ago but still feels like this morning. It was a slide lecture and maybe I'd nodded off or maybe just looked away – I don't know. But I saw it: the ebbing afterimage of the perfect a. You know those dreams where you've solved the problem, found what you've misplaced, been reunited with your lost love – only then you wake and it's all gone? Well, it was all this and more. Were it not for a, I'd probably have strolled through the alphabet once and kept going. I'll probably spend all my days trying to find my way back to that spot.

Straight-backed or canted? Low- or high-waisted? Does the nose droop over the chin? Is the bowl square, round, lachrymal, open, closed? The joints abrupt or adnate? The style calligraphic or chiseled? Tails hooked or flat? Beak, bulb, ball, or teardrop terminal? High-stepping or round shouldered? The permutations are maddeningly endless – and for just one letter.

But that perfect a, that's what I think about. I think about it drawing a. I think about it drawing z. I think about it at the diner as I struggle to see the menu for the letters. I think about it as the film titles roll. I think about it driving, bending left and right across straight lines, tangent cosine sine, lane-change merge, counter stem serif. Slower for thick, faster for thin, modelling my strokes with throttle and brake.

We all fumble along in the dark toward the shadows of our ideals, searching for the best form for these containers of meaning – like good boots, comfortable and durable and treaded for the terrain. Of course, one ideal can reproduce itself with great variety, like genes.

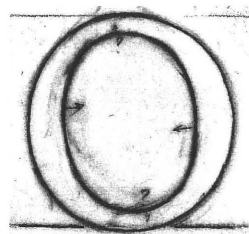
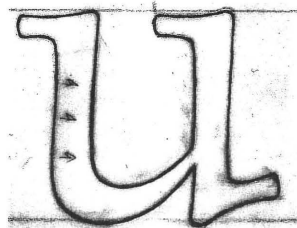
Imagine a snapshot from the *Garamond* family reunion: Monotype, Linotype, Ollière, Stempel, Simonici, Bertold, Ludlow, Ludwig and Mayer, ATF, Adobe. The black sheep, ITC peers from the back over its siblings' shoulders. Even the distant cousins, *Sabon* and *Vendôme*, smile for the

camera. Some soft, some angular, some round, tall, squat, or stately, a common blood courses beneath their disparate faces. And – what gathering would be complete without it – the obligatory skeleton peering from the closet: their name changed early from *Jannon* to *Garamond*, a seldom-mentioned graft to the family tree. Great effects spring from minute – but systemic – changes in form, but what distinguishes the *Garamonds* from each other is less skeletal than cosmetic.

Lettering is littered with such devilish details. Magic numbers abound: x-height is to ascender height as one is to the golden mean. Lowercase stem is to curve as lowercase curve is to uppercase stem, and uppercase stem is to curve – and all these as one is to one and a sixth. The whole series maps itself as a circle set tangent to two sides of a square plus an opposing corner. It goes on and on. As the Renaissance clockwork universe wound itself tighter – with the Earth spinning from center to edge – letters mirrored the shift, their proportions no longer cutting a human so much as numeric figure. Still, the early bias lingers in their names: faces, feet, shoulders, beards, ears, noses, chins, arms, legs. Tails? Well... The deeper you look, the fuzzier type's nomenclature becomes.

Paradoxically, just as computers have opened the gates to making type, they've closed others leading to understanding its workings. Types have gone from collections of physical objects one manipulates directly to minute computer programs – little homunculi that perform their own activities. What once was base lead has been transmogrified into pyritic vectors and bitmaps, PostScript and TrueType, justification and – most appropriately mysterious – hinting, the arcane protocols for deciding which border-straddling pixels get printed and which get dropped.

So many rules, so little time...



Letters are things, not pictures of things.

Eric Gill, *Autobiography*

At the height of land in the notch is Zealand Pond, which is unique for its having beaver dams as well as outlets at both ends; its waters eventually flow to the sea by both the Merrimack and the Connecticut Rivers.

AMC *White Mountain Guide*

Of course, learning the rules teaches less than half the real lesson. Much more comes through crafting these forms yourself, from feeling the lines and masses unfold in space and mind alike. From letting stems climb toward heaven, from arching a curve clear back to the ground, from standing on a new pair of serified feet. From getting caught up in the mess of it all.

And of course, I didn't know any of this before setting out to make types – I just did it. All the sketches I'd collected in notebooks reached a kind of critical mass that ignited a chain reaction. They'd started as random jottings, a gesture here, a phrase there, a caption or a note, blooming quickly into works of their own. Going from doodles to types was just a matter of taking the plunge, right? Wrong – sort of.

True, what I had was a typeface – *Aphasia* – but I'd hobbled it from the start. My choices about its very nature – its height, its caps-only two-line system – greatly limited its stride. Having fallen short of my mark, I took aim again at *Lowell*, a text face, and again the target went untouched. So I taught myself the rules and got about halfway there.

Type designers cut their teeth by chewing on old designs, ingesting them, and allowing them to course through their own systems. You are, it seems, what you eat. Nutrition is the key benefit to revivals – a far cry from the economics and fashions that drive Type Design: The Business.

If you read enough books, look at enough samples and specimens and examples – enough stuff – it lodges firmly in your head. Byzantine iconography. Kolo Moser's bookplates. Will Bradley's Victor bicycle catalogues. Dutch type designs. Fred Goudy may have said the old fellows stole all our best ideas but what he didn't mention is that sometimes they'll share their loot. Just as history offers riches through the stories it tells, it also makes a great collaborator.

This is where the *Fleischman* types come in. I'd stumbled on them in an old French book on *Civilité* types and – love at first sight – knew I had to have them. Trouble was, they weren't for the having, having only been cut in metal – and even those types were held for the foundry's private use. So I did the sensible thing: I made my own.

Half their enduring attraction is... physical. I admit it. Their limbs long and slender, their shoulders high but round, their full, curved bulbs... I'd better stop there. But the attraction's other half – the better half, as it were – lies in finding and then following Johann Fleischman's path, in learning from his example. These types were originally made by hand: punched into steel, cut with a graver, filed down, even hand cast in lead. Looking closely you grow aware these were things, not pictures – objects with a physical, sculptural presence denied today's digital types.

Mr. Fleischman was esteemed for his precision, but in fifty years' work you know he had to slip every so often with that graver and gouge himself, mingling blood and lead. Few chances come along to get cut on a keyboard.

Stone carving is another matter.

I've cut myself sawing down stock, carving, even sharpening my chisel. So it goes – the small price of moving from working after hands to working with them. Stone work's intensely gratifying in its own right, the materials and tools, the pace, the play of light, the sense of having actually made some thing – so much so that after taking John Hegnauer's

carving class I signed up to work independently with him, trekking weekly down to his workshop, a treat in itself.

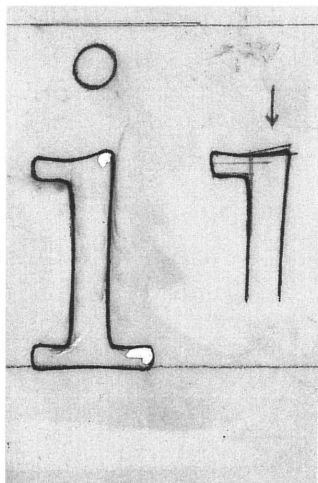
Learning to cut letters was, and remains, profoundly humbling. That I know something about type didn't mean I knew anything about stone – and I didn't – and after playing with letters for years I found myself a beginner all over again. The challenge of working in a new medium wasn't really surprising. What was, however, was realizing how much I stood to learn about letters themselves.

Pen-drawn letters grow from the inside out, their edges shaped by the mass of the stroke. They express their forms more directly than do their constructed siblings because, like Siamese twins, the left edge of the nib always knows what the right does. A drawn letter's contours act more like fraternal: although born together, one edge may bear little resemblance to the other. They make their own ways in the world.

In stone work, the medium dictates the forms even more compellingly. The v-cut channel dives and rises through the stone like the wake of a playful dolphin. Like rivers, deep channels run wide and shallow ones narrow. These letters aren't cut in the stone so much as from it – they're the places where the stone isn't, light and shadow pooling in its place. And – again, like a river – the deeper the channel, the more of each it gathers.

We start with pens long before going near chisels. Stone doesn't have an *Undo* button, so planning is key. The quick decision of what to do yields to the long process of deciding how to do it. Sketches build up to carefully inked layouts and overlays, and overlays of overlays, drawn and redrawn till every detail's right. Carving shares type design's inverse relationship between the spontaneity of form and the effort required to make it seem so. Both strive for vitality, both always struggling uphill against the weights of their rigid and unyielding media.

When time comes to move from paper to rock, we wander into the yard where slate reclines against the house.



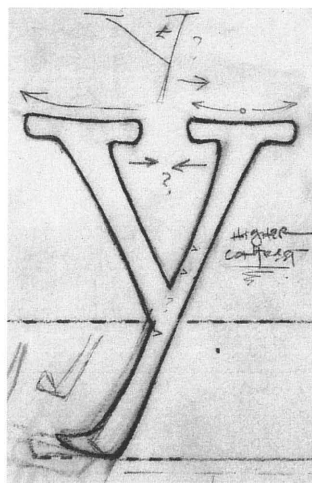
We page through the sheets until John finds one that says it's right for me – stone's yet to take me into its confidence, so he translates. He slides it out and tips it back; its face shimmers darkly, like graphite. Milky iron veins stream within.

I've more than I need, so we carry it stretcher-like to amputate the extra stock. Surgery takes only minutes: power tools do the big work. We quickly strip away what took ages to condense from silt and grit, layer after layer, diving years below the surface, grinding our way back in time. I help where I can but watch mostly, surprised at the speed with which we reveal the rock's secret face.

Next comes the part I do myself. John hands me two small ceramic blocks, one rough one smooth, and the hose. Working wet, my task is to rub the surface smooth. He demonstrates: water on the stone – water everywhere – he places the first block on the slab and glides it in e-like loops, drawing a slow diagonal from corner to corner. If I'm listening, the slate's ringing tune will tell me I'm bearing down enough or too much or going too fast or slow or missing spots. I ask when smooth is, and he just says I'll know. And then he leaves us alone.

Within minutes I'm soaked and stiff, my fingers stinging from November's wind and the exertion, pain creeping elbowwards. I've got two scraps of slate, still warm from the sander, in my pockets for heat. The slate hums to itself in enjoyment. I focus on keeping its sound constant.

Its murmuring grows seductive, and the kneading motion hypnotic. My gaze wanders. Scudding gulls, a broken boat, a rusting iron rail. The stone's song reels me back. I grow aware of our courtship, of planning our future together, our collaboration. Of conjuring a pristine new face – not better, just different. I rinse away the creamy sludge of ground rock to see what we've made. What greets me is a real tabula rasa, seeming less stone than geometry made solid. Its iridescent surface mirrors the sky, defying



me to cut it. For the first time I'm wary of what I've done: I've thrust my idea of beauty at this stone and now, at last, I can hear its voice telling me to keep my promise. All I can do is stare – we're ready.

## SIX | HUT AND FALLS

The Zealand Trail skirts Zealand Pond and ends at two and a half miles, where the Ethan Pond Trail continues straight ahead and the Twinway turns right to Zealand Falls Hut, a quarter mile away...

*AMC White Mountain Guide*

I almost never hike alone. Some of the reason's practical, like being able to split the load, having someone along in case of accidents – that kind of thing. But mostly I hike with other people for the company. That's how I started and now it's hard to imagine doing it any other way. Type's always been the opposite – something I did on my own, cloistered away in the spare bedroom, in the office on weekends, in my corner of the studio. I'd even taught myself how to do it – which is typical among type designers. It was hard to imagine working any other way, but it was the recent, welcome company of two fellow travelers that helped steer me towards my final destination.

Probably the hardest part of cutting letters in stone, for me, has been letting go of my typish ways. Yet while John's been teaching me to carve, he's grown increasingly curious about what makes me see letters the way I do – and about the idea of adapting one of his projects into a typeface. One day, he arrived at my studio with a packet of drawings and photos of a Gulf War memorial plaque he'd cut several years ago: the lettering sturdy, muscular and brushy at once – an upright roman he though would lend itself to reading. He told me he'd watched me at work on my types and it looked pretty simple: I fiddle with the mouse, I type in numbers, I move lines and boxes around the screen. I

Char	T
Width	654
Left	0
Right	10
Kern	0

could only agree, and told him so. It is just that simple, in the same way stone carving's just a matter of whacking rocks with sharp sticks. So, once we stopped laughing we switched roles and I began to show John how to get letters from a mouse.

His initial digital steps were every bit as clumsy as my lapidary ones. All the things I've come to take for granted were new to him: the trash can, the pull-down menus, even the dilemma of when the mouse rolls to the desk's edge before the cursor reaches its mark. Then came the more complex issues. Yes, we can feed a paper drawing into the machine, but, no, that doesn't mean we can type with it. That comes later. And no matter how sophisticated these things have become, the computer's still an idiot. We have to tell it everything we want it to know: How many letters in a font. Which letters. Which keys on the keyboard correspond to which shapes. What shape for each letter. Which parts are solid and which are empty. How much white space goes between them.

This last one's toughest and the least expected. Working by hand we tailor each letter's shape and position to its context – the artist guides every step – but a typeface has to walk on its own. The designer teaches it how by drawing both the black marks and the white ones. Like houses, letters in a font each sit on a lot; some space belongs to the right side, some to the left. As with metal type, these spaces – the sidebearings – never change. The challenge is to imagine the space around each letter so it fits well with all its neighbors fore and aft in literally hundreds of combinations. Call it typographic *feng shui*.

After studying his composition for the plaque, John had picked representative letters and painted them white on yellow trace. We scanned them, cleaned them up – trading black for white and white for yellow along the way – and began creating digital outlines over the images of the originals. This time, I did most of the direct work and explained

what I was doing along the way. The parts of a font – outlines, bitmaps, metrics, hints. The twisted logic of vectors, especially the game of using the fewest points possible to get the fullest rendering. Within a few days we had most of a working lowercase. We called it *Derne Street*, after the site for the memorial. John took samples home to consider.

The next week he came back with a new set of letters, still on yellow trace but now drawn as pencil outlines, still clearly the same letters but different too. His original monumental forms grew spindly drawn small and he'd tried imagining them being small first. The brushiness disappeared some, replaced by more assertive serifs and hairlines, and the whole set more solid. This time he encouraged me to interpret the drawings, letting my ideas about typographic forms mingle with his about inscriptional ones, and the more I did it, the more my own letters began to take on the feel of the hand-made.

Apparently there's a real Hunger Mountain somewhere deep in Vermont's Green Mountains. There's also a slightly surreal one in Montpelier, a food co-op where my friend Mary Trafton – “Moon” to me and to many – does all the lettering, all by hand. Lettering for posters, for placards, ads, signage, cakes – you name it. Even for their web site. (*Co-op... Web site?*)

I've always envied her handwriting. It's rolling and generous while mine defies even my own attempts at reading. Over the years I've amassed a stash of letters and postcards, and even envelopes, hoping one day to “do something” with her script. Every so often I'd suggest she ought to try it herself and she's always brushed it off.

I love visiting the co-op. Grocery stores, libraries, bakeries, gas stations – the best smelling places ever. Being one of these four alone would make Hunger Mountain a treat, but what nails it is this: the place's full of letters. Big ones, little ones, brightly colored, bouncing everywhere – they're on the walls, in the windows, stuck to display cases, pinned

to the staff, and lurking in the rest rooms. Now, grocery stores are full of type anyway, but this is different. It's as if Moon's hand conducts the chorus of voices. It's like being in her head. Better yet, it's like being inside my own head, only with a deli counter.

Last time I was there, last summer, we were standing in frozen foods and Moon admitted all the lettering was keeping her from doing more illustrative work. We met as design students, and she's always tended more to pictures than words. I've enjoyed that she's been doing something like what I do, but I can also see how she might want not to. While pretending to examine some faux ice-cream, I casually suggested we might try making types out of her lettering.

And this time she agreed.

Before leaving the co-op, we'd picked which script to adapt and defined our method's madness. The big poster lettering was too active to domesticate. Her writing hand was too cursive, the letters too interdependent stand alone. But the letters she drew for the display cards were just right and she could just pick old ones out of the recycling bins. Within days of returning home I received a package with some three hundred index-card-sized samples and my work on Hunger Mountain began.

Cataloging Moon's lettering was even more like being in her head than was being at the co-op. As I sorted through the cards, I grew ever more aware of her habits as a writer. first the back slant, the leaning left that makes it all seem about to take flight. Then the way double letters rise through the word. The places where caps and lowercase mingle and the others where they stand apart. Places where things jumble together, others where they've room to breathe. The often backwards g's.

Interpreting the letters was easy and spacing was a breeze – the rules relax for handwritten fonts. What was difficult, and more than a little strange, was the sense of trespassing I got from working with her letters. We've been

vanilla  
apples  
spam  
gristle  
tofu  
pizza  
sterno

friends for years now, but this felt like going through her medicine cabinet. As the font took shape, I began thinking I could write like this myself.

Impersonation's an easy place to become lost on the way to somewhere of your own. With so much history, so many fine examples, it'd be easy to simply bear witness to others' passions and obsessions. Sure, I'm charmed senseless by Moon's seemingly effortless art and frequently floored by John's work. The shelves and drawers are full of forgotten letters to rewrite. But along the way, my goals shed some of their modesty and grew curious about what lay off the beaten path, if even just a bit to the side. Working with others only heightened my need to find my own work, to find my own way – but it didn't suggest how.

So much of this journey's been in my little Rhode Island world: from home to school and back; in some classroom, studio, lab, or elevator; up and down the handful of streets whose names I know. Last fall arrived with the frustration of being blocked on two avenues – working and walking. My daily trek's a poor substitute for woods. I try to compensate by threading my way through back streets, farther from traffic and closer to trees. I cut across playing fields and lawns to feel the ground's soft give beneath my feet. But city walking, no matter how quiet the street or how dense the leaves, offers little relief from my peopled world.

Sitting at my desk, my window's warm colors announced winter's approaching cold. It also reminded me the longer I spent inside, the more likely I'd think myself into a corner. If I couldn't resolve my relationship with letters, perhaps I could at least resume my old one with Zealand.

When a type design is good it is not because each individual letter of the alphabet is perfect in form, but because there is a feeling of harmony and unbroken rhythm that runs through the whole design, each letter kin to every other and to all.

Frederic Goudy, *Typologia*

Zeacliff Trail runs from the Ethan Pond Trail a mile south of its junction with Zealand Pond, to the Twinway just west of the Zeacliff outlook. It is an attractive trail, but extremely steep and rough in parts, and not recommended for hikers with heavy packs. Practically all of it is in the Pemigewasset Wilderness. The high point of the ridge, Zealand Mountain, is wooded and viewless but there is a magnificent outlook from Zeacliff, overlooking Zealand Notch and the eastern part of the Pemigewasset Wilderness from the east end of the ridge.

AMC *White Mountain Guide*

Six years I'd been away. Six years since that last trip – the Bad Trip, ditched at the mouth of the ice-glazed logging road – followed by a long Midwestern hibernation. Six years, but no more. Not enough time? Skip something. Car won't make it? Borrow one. Boots shot? Re-sole 'em. Thanksgiving came and I dropped my schedule, rented a car, and fixed my boots. I convinced my old friend Steve to drive so I could ride shotgun, staring out the windows.

Omens forewarned a repeat trip. So much around me had changed. The new bypass. The condos and malled farmland. The traffic lights and satellite dishes. Even the forest service had begun charging for parking. I feigned stoicism: nothing's constant as change. But one thing startled me, the one thing I'd never expected to see. There was no snow – not along the road, not above treeline, not on the refrigerated ski-slopes. This wasn't a place I knew anymore.

We drove the logging road – asphalt, gravel, dirt – below the crepuscular midday sky. We parked in silence. We grudgingly dropped our five bucks in the parking box. We loaded out and geared up. We hesitated at the trail



head and finally started in. A windless snowfall greeted our arrival on the trail, and I started to think this might work out after all.

Of course Zealand had changed too. At the valley's north end where woods open into marsh marks the spot I'd always snapped the pictures that line my desk. Where usually I caught it by chance, this time I came stalking. Staring at the image day in and out had burnt it into my mind; finding the angle should be a breeze – just line up Zeacliff, Whitewall and that birch and say cheese. Five minutes, then ten, pacing back and forth along a few yards of trail. This tree or that one? On the trail or in the muck? What about over by that rock? I shot half a roll right there and only after getting the film processed did I realize what'd happened: my birch had snapped in half in the ice storms two winters back. We slogged through the deepening snow and climbed to the hut.

The first day's snow gave way to the sort of bright gloveless day made for a stomp in the woods, and we decided to head up to Zeacliff. We packed lunches and water and a camera – the usual – plus a few oddities. Steve pocketed his cell phone to test modernity's reach; I grabbed my compass, rarely needed on so familiar a trail. Plus, I stashed my chisels and mallet. Sure, I'd come to get away from school and work, but I brought sketchbooks and carving gear, just in case, and I had an inkling of something to do.

From the falls up to Zeacliff's a short trek – maybe a leisurely hour's walk. One year I snuck out while the others slept and climbed up to the dawn and back for breakfast without admitting where I'd been. The view's worth a day's drive-and-hike, and more than once we'd made the trip up and back in a day just to see it. From the edge you can eye the Presidentials and Washington's weather station gleaming in the morning light. You can peer down over the whole notch, still lined with railway beds sixty years after the tracks came up.

By the time we made the outlook, the clouds that'd dozed late in the valley had all burnt off. A young couple emerged dogs-first from the west trail and paused for a break. We unpacked lunch. I played with the compass. Steve abandoned his hopeless quest for a dial tone and took to his camera. I moved close by the cliff and spread out my gear.

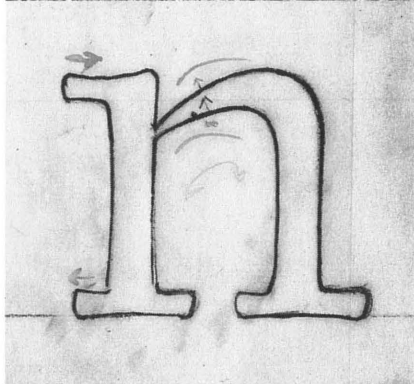
And I carved. No drawing. No preparation but for sharpening chisels and shaving ice from my stoop. I carved where ten years previous I'd had lunch, where seven back we'd all posed for the camera, where twelve I'd heaved that rock over the edge unthinking. I carved, squatting back against the drop, not daring to look behind.

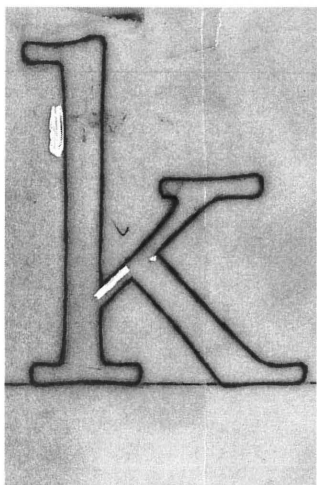
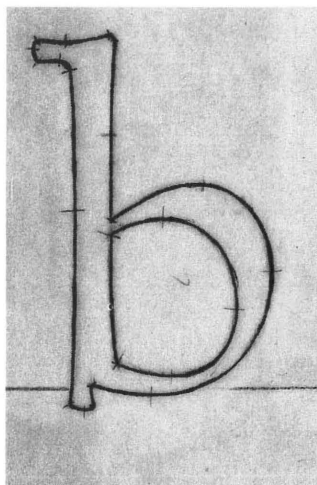
I carved, swapping one granite-blunted chisel for the other, the new one cold in my hand, the old sinking warmly in the frost. One channel cut, I'd stand, stretch, twist, have a bite of sandwich limp with snow, and start the next. One channel, two, three – and above, one wedge cut and then its twin.

I carved, there at that enchanted place at the top of the forest, thinking of the valley below. Thinking how first I came to ramble, but came now to take my rest cure – to stand still, to mark the distance between last year and this and plot a course from this into the next. Thinking how this place has taken root in me and how I hoped it would remain. Thinking of all the woods had given me and all I'd taken. What could I give in return?

I carved a simple compass flower legible from every angle, a single arrow-capped N aimed away from the abyss, or a Z leading back down the trail to the hut. What else could I do? I told the mountain what it already knew but lent it my voice to tell others who came this way.

Without quite knowing why, the trip back down the mountain was strangely restful. The sky kept clear all evening. Dinner turned out. For once I slept the night through at the hut. And packing out the next morning, one thought turned over and again in my mind: If I could





give Zealand letters, couldn't it give them too? I'd found my bearings and a new collaborator.

We've hiked the trail and climbed to the outlook. All the way it's been Zealand River, Zealand Pond. Zealand Hut, Zealand Falls. Zealand This, Zealand That. At long last we've come to the trail head of *Zealand Type*. It's gooch time.

One of the ways I can tell I'm going hiking is that I make gooch – trail mix. It's my favorite ritual – better even than waterproofing my boots, which is hard to beat. The night before a trip I gather up all the fixings, whatever's around or whatever I got for the occasion. I pile it all on the counter and then mix it together in a stock pot and then heap it into little baggies till the pot's gone empty. I make a lot more than what's needed since a lot gets eaten before we even hit the road.

Every batch is a little different but it's still good old gooch and that's how it goes with type. The table's cleared, my pencils and pens and erasers and paper assembled, sketches and notes pinned up among the photos and snatches of found lettering. Tea's made and a Greg Brown album plays in the other room. The last two years float behind my eyes like a filter coloring my vision and guiding my hands. How to decide what goes into the mix?

Gooch has to be easy to pack, has to be dry so I can grab a handful, has to be full of carbs for energy. It has to be edible – it has to work. Type's fixings go the same way.

This type, this Zealand, should capture my sense of the place for which it's named. It should reflect what I've learned about letters along the way. And most of all, it should work as a typeface. The third thing is what it does; the other two are only why, and why changes. Every batch is a little different.

So, broadly, *Zealand's* sturdy and durable. It's built with direct, sensible shapes, some rough, some worn and weathered. It's meant to seem as inevitable as rain, to be exquisitely crafted but not fussy. Like the land itself, it

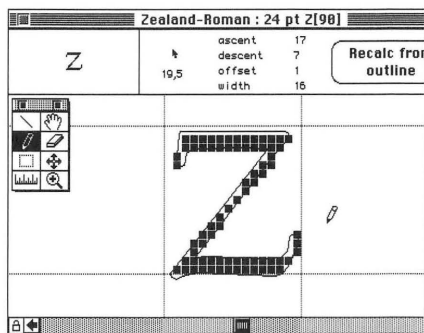
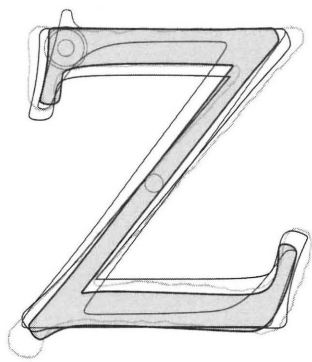
risers and falls. It bends like swung birches then switches back, and every so often it trips you up. It's relatively easy going since all the major brook crossings are bridged. Even the letterfit moves like a group – spread out enough so each feels more part of the land than the pack but near enough each other to help out in a bind.

All along the way we can spy evidence of other hikers. There's Goudy and his *Village No. 2* ambling through the trees. There Dwiggins and his clan; cautious *Electra* clutching for handholds over every stream, *Caledonia* racing ahead, poor *Eldorado* bent in the undergrowth, and old Bill himself waving his arms and laughing. *Fleischman* steps lightly to avoid tilling the soil with its sharp feet, but off the trail – where the leaves are trodden black – weaves *Vendôme*, mildly deranged, pitching over onto its pack. Harder to spot is Jim Parkinson's *Showcard Moderne* splashing loudly upriver beside the trail, leaving neither print nor scent. And Will Bradley's passage is impossible to ignore: who else would spin an endless thread of bicycle treads?

A type's like a whole plot grown from a single seedling. *Zealand* sprang from a random doodle, just a single spatulate serif – then a pair, an arch, a stem – then a p. The whole set spread out quickly once it took root, but it still needed a lot of tending to grow evenly.

Sketches gave way to formal studies, and the studies to finished drawings. Pencil changed to ink and sometimes back again, the letters' contours shifting like strings vibrating to rest. Early characters modeled for later ones, lowercase for capitals, and the letters themselves for the punctuation and odd sorts. And hand-work gave way to the computer and its shifting contours, pen and pencil becoming points and pixels.

All the time I worked on the drawings – and even after, while minding the p's and q's of spacing and hinting and editing bitmaps – I carried my inspiration with me. I packed photos from the valley, photos of the hut and falls; of



Zeaclyff and Whitewall; of birch and pine and Canadian jays scrambling for dropped trail mix. Pictures hang on the fridge. Pinned there next to the monitor at the studio is this month's valley, full of spring's explosive green. Every so often I'd pause to examine a letter or even just a stem or gesture and ask, *Is this Zealand?*

So, I greet my Zealand letters at the hut beside the falls – where wilderness and civilization contrast and converge like wool and gor-tex. We can sit in the sun and read *The Magic Mountain*. We can soak ourselves in the snow and then dry out next to the stove. We can bake cookies and make soup and even toss a salad... but then we'll have to face the outhouse. My friends feel right at home here in this curious blend of worlds: after all, it reflects their mixed lineage. On one side of the family lies speech, on the other writing. Natural and made, things and pictures of things. Together we can draw on calligraphy and carving, on *Hunger Mountain* and history and on sixteen winters' hiking mixed with one life's passion.

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