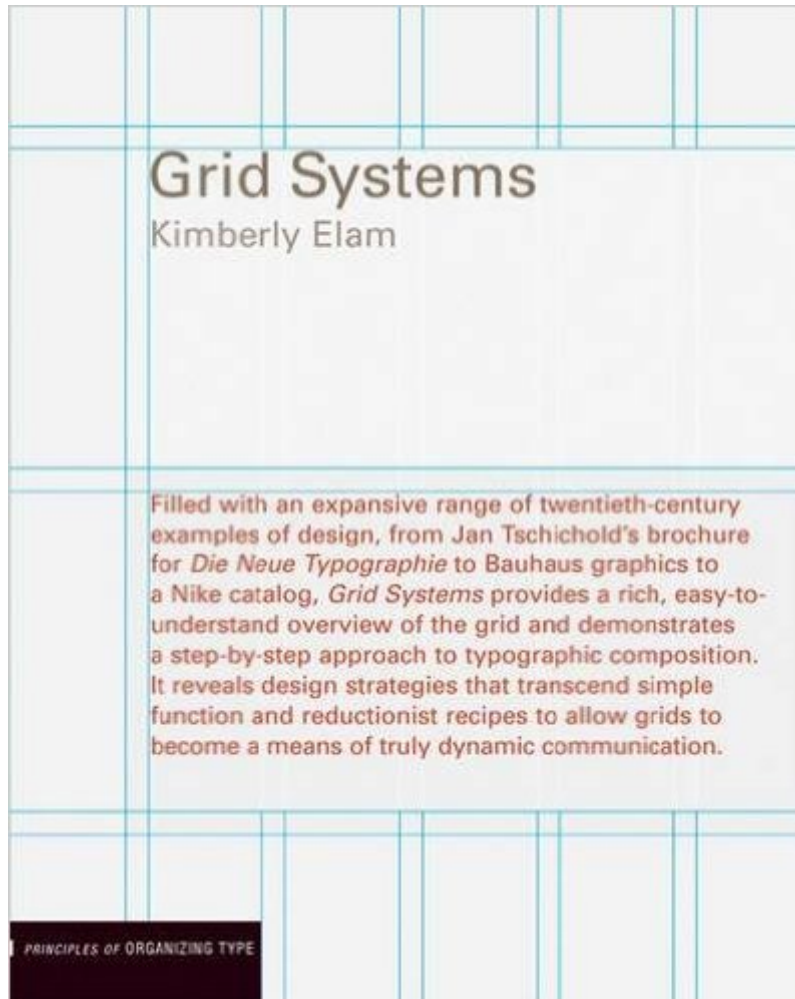


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Grid Systems: Principles Of Organizing Type (Design Briefs)



Synopsis

Although grid systems are the foundation for almost all typographic design, they are often associated with rigid, formulaic solutions. However, the belief that all great design is nonetheless based on grid systems (even if only subverted ones) suggests that few designers truly understand the complexities and potential riches of grid composition. In her best-selling *Geometry of Design*, Elam shows how proportion, symmetry, and other geometrical systems underlie many of the visual relationships that make for good design. Now, Elam brings the same keen eye and clear explanations to bear on the most prevalent, and maybe least understood, system of visual organization: the grid. Filled with extensive research and more than 100 informative examples from the Bauhaus to Nike ads, *Grid Systems* provides a rich, easy-to-understand overview and demonstrates a step-by-step approach to typographic composition. It suggests design strategies that transcend simple function and reductionist recipes to allow grids to become a means of truly dynamic communication. Any designer, educator, or student will benefit greatly from this elegant slim book, chock-a-block full of colorful examples, helpful vellum overlays, and Elam's insightful analysis.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

You may at first be tempted to buy this book for one or more of the following reasons: (a) if you leaf quickly through it, you'll see lots of grid thumbnails, which may give you the impression that a range of different grid possibilities is carefully explored and explained; (b) you'll also find several design

pieces (pictures of posters, ads etc) with transparent overlays containing grids, suggesting that each piece is carefully analysed and explained;(c) it's published by Princeton Architectural Press, so hey, it must be good. Unfortunately, if you do buy the book for one of the reasons above, you're in for a lot of disappointment. You'll find that the actual text is like a series of quick notes such as what you'd expect to see in a slide show, except that there's no speaker or presenter to give you the actual explanations and help you make sense out of all the images. In other words, you'll be confronted with a few bits of text that don't really teach you much besides a few (very few) basic concepts and which don't even properly explain the images. (And if you really believe that an image is worth a thousand words, good luck deciphering the message.) Most pictures of ads and such are accompanied by transparent overlays; some of these contain lots of lines, circles and crosshairs. You'd think there's an explanation somewhere as to what all the lines, crosshairs and whatnot mean, but that's not the case. Take the Nike ad on pages 64-5, for instance. The overlay has a complex grid with four darker areas, and five even darker ones, plus external lines that seem to indicate that some sort of proportion exists (and is therefore going to be explained).

I became aware of how important grids are when I was at art college and came across the first issue of a new design magazine, 'New Graphic Design' in 1958. Published in Switzerland in English, German and French and containing dozens of pictures but without a strict grid all the issues of this stunning publication would look a mess. The grid, put simply is a framework which allows several elements (photos, graphics, text, display type etc) to be placed in a rectangle and all work towards one aim, clarity of presentation. Virtually all publications use a grid (in its simplest form it could be called the type area) check out the page number position in a magazine, always in the same place defined by the grid. Having used grids for years I'm surprised that there is so much confusion but that was before I read through Kimberley Elam's book. The straightforward becomes the obscure despite the good intentions. The most useful parts are the pages that use a see-through overlay, revealing the essence of the grid and nicely some disasters, too. What could be simpler than the two examples shown on page thirty-eight and nine, Christof Gassner's 1960 redesign of one page of a theater program, from the dull and confusing to something so elegant and simple. What is really interesting about the page is that it is all done with type only. Page forty-five uses another overlay for the contents spread of a book (designed by Drenttel Doyle Partners in 1988) the see-through reveals a simple grid but the actual spread is a complete mess with type everywhere, even the three words 'Table of contents' is letterspaced in two typefaces, roman and sans.

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