

Recent highlights from the Ideas blog

Brainiac; Sure, it's gold, but does it open?

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Author: Shea, Christopher

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The Olympic medals awarded in Vancouver next month will be cool, bearing the imprint of work by a First Nations artist (that is, a Native Canadian) and stamped out of undulating sheets of metal, but they would have been ever cooler had more of the original design survived.

The prize-winning plan of Omer Arbel, a Vancouver-based industrial designer, was for a locket-like medal with two halves: open it and out came a small pendant. "One of the things we found sad about Olympic medals is that they go into a case or on a shelf, and no one engages with them as part of daily life," Arbel tells *Metropolis* magazine. (It's tacky to wear a two-year-old bronze medal with a business suit, don't you know.) "The idea here was that the pendant could be worn every day." And while the medals would adhere to the locket motif, the shape of each would vary slightly - unique, like an athletic performance.

That idea proved too expensive, and seemed insufficiently Canadian, so Arbel was asked to incorporate patterns from the work of the native artist Corrine Hunt. He stuck with the uniqueness angle, however: Some medals would be plains-flat and others mountainously wavy, reflecting Canadian topography.

In the end, the medals will all be wavy, but uniformly so. "I still like them," Arbel told the architecture and design magazine. "They're beautiful objects."

I am sorry, Mr. Einstein, but you're just not that{hellip}interesting

Sally Quinn, a doyenne of Washington hostesses and wife of the former Washington Post editor Ben Bradlee, now writes a column about how to be a good dinner-party host and guest. A recent topic was how to keep people from dominating the conversation with tedious business-chat. What could be worse than a banker who won't stop talking mergers and acquisitions with another banker at a table of guests with varied interests? That's actually not a rhetorical question, for Quinn has a ready answer: "I'll tell you what's a real killer: scientists. The only way you can handle them is to keep them away from each other at the table or get them to talk to the whole table about what they are working on. And then change the subject."

And then change the subject. So, eminent Boston-area scientists, you may want to think twice about accepting a Quinn invitation when you're called to Washington to testify on a beige topic like global warming, stem cells, the war on cancer, or nuclear proliferation. I mean, yawn.

Can a Helvetica love a Courier?

If you've spent much time in an office, you'll eventually take a test that purports to divine your personality type. Are you, say, an "ESTJ," your worldview shaped by Extraversion, Sensing, Thinking, and Judgment? Or perhaps an "INFP," your interactions characterized by Introversion, iNtuition, Feeling, Perception? Those categories are from the famous Meyers-Briggs typology.

The design firm Pentagram has created a tongue-in-cheek site for font aficionados, "What Type Are You?", that combines psychological jargon with a literal reading of "type." A seated pseudo-shrink, shot from the neck down and sporting appropriately therapeutic attire - sport coat, cardigan, ascot, creased cords - asks four questions about your personality and then boils the answers down to a typeface.

On my first pass, I was diagnosed as Courier, the IBM typewriter font dating to 1955. Pentagram's eloquent psychiatrist glosses Courier thusly: "It is a democratic typeface that everyone can type in. You do not have to be bold; in fact, you cannot be bold in Courier. If you are an everyman and an everywoman in a thoroughly modern way, and modernity means you do not want to shout about it, then Courier is your type."

I know Courier mostly as the font that got you an additional 20 pages on your senior thesis, no extra work required, because its spacing is so ample.

So: What's your type? (Go to www.pentagram.com/what-type-are-you. You must use the password "character" to play.)

Christopher Shea is a weekly columnist for Ideas. He can be reached at brainiac.email@gmail.com.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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