



*just my
type
of game*

DESIGNING A TYPOGRAPHY CARD GAME IN 3 WEEKS

Deborah Owen



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setting the stage

emerging niches

Type design has existed for hundreds of years and has expanded exponentially since the advent of computers.

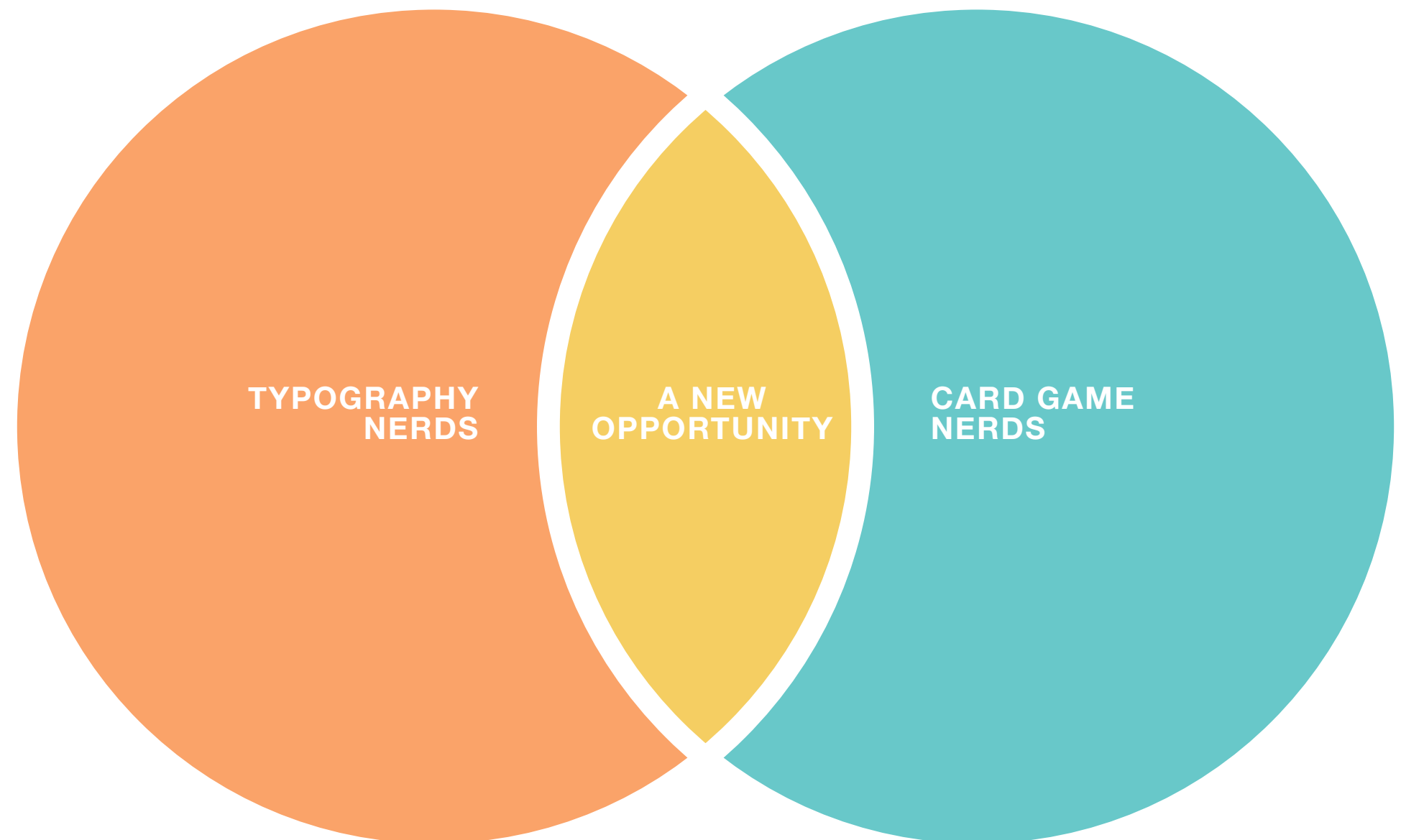
Now more than ever, with thousands of fonts at the fingertips of anybody on a device, people have a heightened awareness of typography. Type used to only concern graphic designers, but now most people in western culture have formed opinions on fonts.

In contrast to this digital evolution, we're seeing a resurgence of tabletop games after an era of computer and video games taking the top spot in the gaming industry. Now there's a growing market of niche board and card games, many of which found success on platforms like Kickstarter.

the opportunity

This creates a unique opportunity for a new product on the market. Between these audiences of font-lovers and game-lovers is a decent overlap. While there are games that include excellent typography, there are few games on the market that make the subject typography itself.

Over the course of 3 weeks, I set out to create one. The result was Quick Brown Fox.



the game

the premise

Prove you're the quickest fox in town by pairing the best fonts with different objects or scenarios each round. Papyrus on a blockbuster movie poster? Up to you!

When each unique Context Card is placed, your goal is to find the best font for the occasion. Each round, the judge picks the winning font. The first to win six rounds wins the game, and the title of Quick Brown Fox!

what's in the box?

CONTEXT CARDS

Each orange card features a description of some kind of text, ranging from billboards to book titles to product packaging. One card is presented each round.

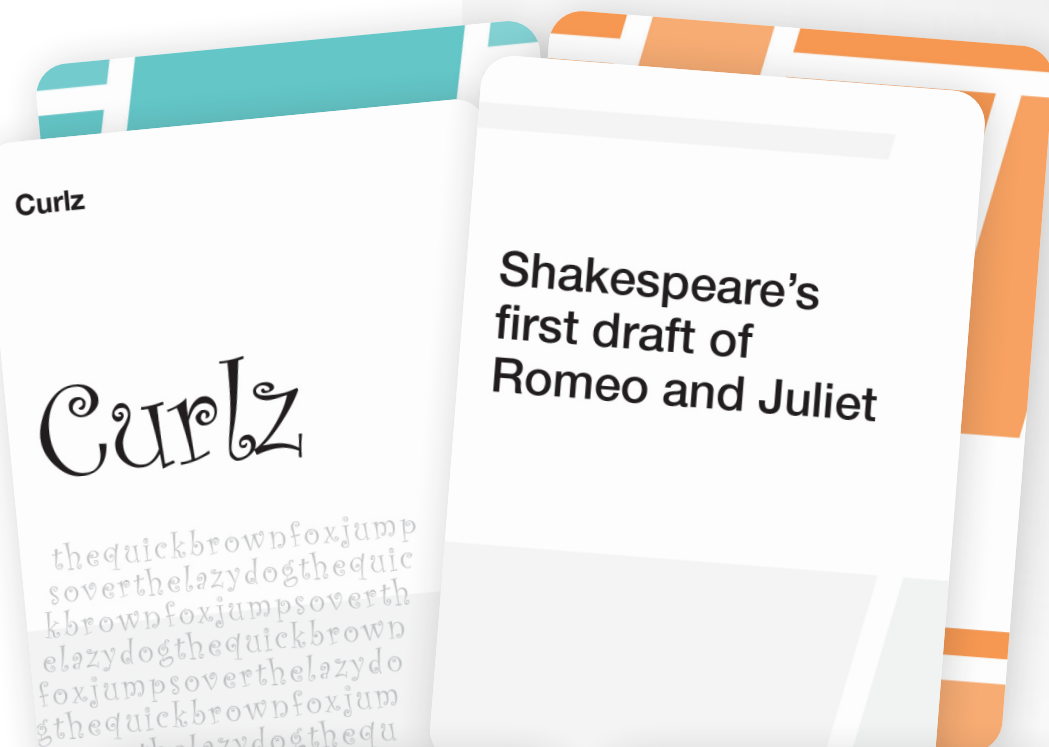
TYPE CARDS

Each blue card sports a unique font, showcasing both the font name and a sample of the font in action, with the familiar phrase "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog" repeated. Each round every player plays a Type Card.

MODIFIER CARDS

Among the blue Type Cards are modifier cards. These describe styles that can be applied to the font card. Each round a player can choose to play either a modifier card or a second Type Card to pair with their primary Type Card.

IN THREE WEEKS, I CREATED THE CONTENT AND DESIGNS FOR ALL OF THE FOLLOWING ASSETS:



308 TYPE CARDS

144 CONTEXT CARDS

54 MODIFIER CARDS

1 GAME BOX

1 RULE BOOK

2 ADS

initial concept

early development

The first major decision to make was how the game would function.

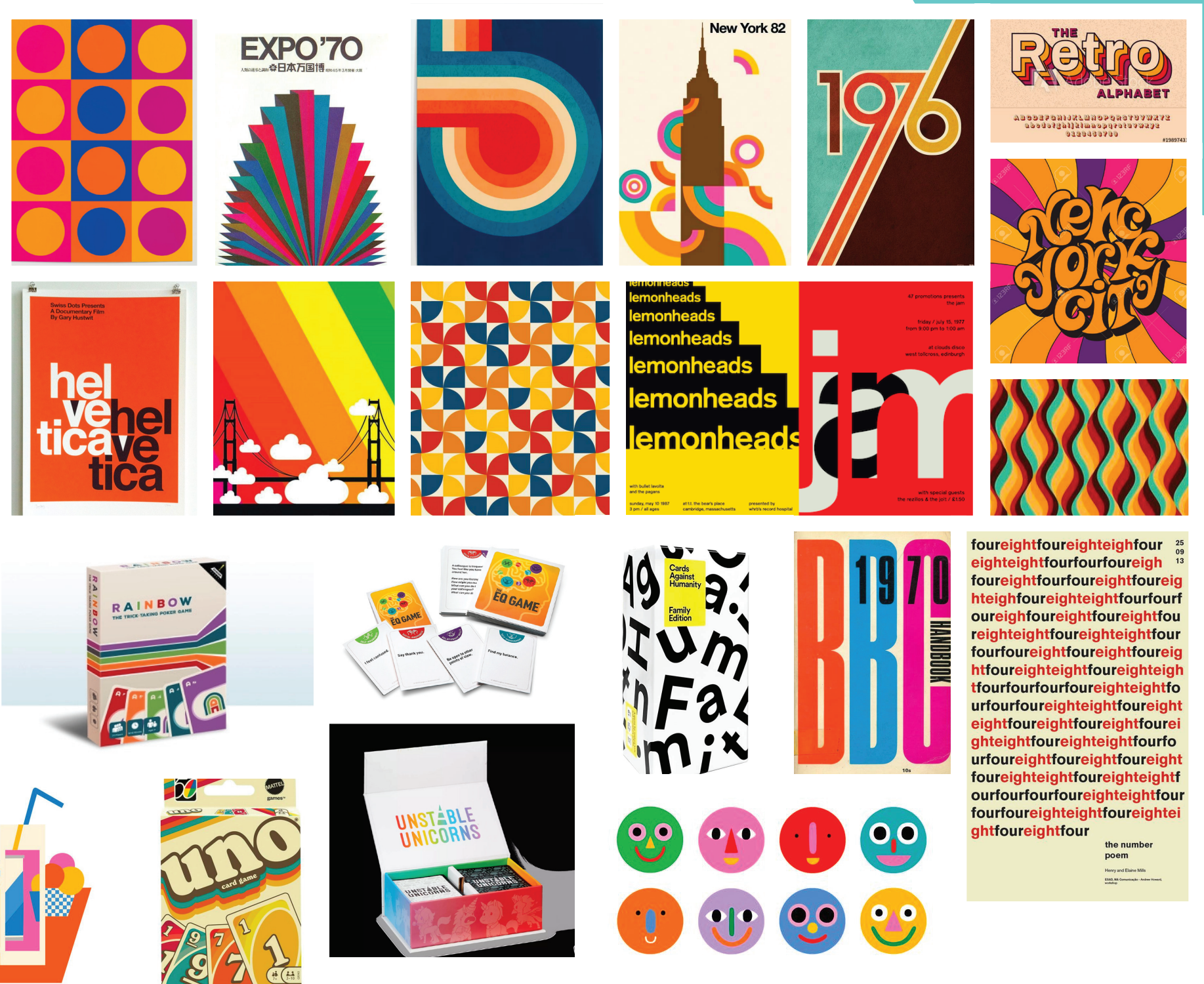
I pulled inspiration from Cards Against Humanity and Apples to Apples. This meant simple gameplay, broad appeal, and potential for interesting combinations to create a fun experience.

I explored making it a competitive game, where fonts have individual stats and characteristics. But determining the rules of gameplay quickly became complex. With only three weeks to design the game, I chose to simplify the rules to focus on the design.

a vintage approach

After loosely pinning down the rules, I shifted my focus to the style of the game. I wanted to choose something classic with a nod to the great typographic design of the past.

I knew I wanted to incorporate bright colors, so I started looking through historical typographic posters and narrowed in on some strong examples of Swiss design from the 1970s. I also examined popular modern game designs to see what elements they brought into their card and packaging design.



initial concept

target audience

While developing the style, I was conscious of the types of people who would be playing this game and the things they would be drawn to.

The types of people interested in fonts is as wide as the number of typefaces themselves, but some are going to be more inclined to play a party game centered around typography.

I developed a persona, trying to pin down both surface level characteristics and deeper values.



HARPER HELVETICA

PORTLAND, OR
BA IN CREATIVE WRITING
ENTRY-LEVEL COPYWRITER

Harper is an overachiever with a keen eye for detail. She leads a fairly minimalist lifestyle, wears mostly neutrals, eats avocado toast, and goes to Disneyland with her friends from college every summer.

She minored in graphic design and hangs on on #AristOfInstagram most of the time. On the weekends she goes adventuring in the mountains or stays at home reading memoirs or painting watercolor landscapes.

Sometimes she's perceived as being uptight, but it's her pursuit of excellence that drives her to always look for ways to improve.

She has a sarcastic sense of humor, and when she makes a friend she's fiercely loyal to them. She'll go with the crowd when it comes to picking party games, but on the inside she's always hoping for a quick-witted trivia or word game where she can show off her skills.

logo design

sketching an idea

As I ideated over the name of the game, the one that kept coming up was Fontastic. It had a bounce and a ring to it, so with the narrow time frame to work in, I ran with it.

I sketched a variety of layouts and styles, exploring interesting ways to have the letters interact with each other. I moved into actually designing several executions of the logo, trying different typefaces and colors.



hitting creative block

I sought out feedback, and the overall consensus was that it looked fine, it was just boring. This concept had a lot of untapped potential, and I was barely scraping the surface.

I moved on to designing the cards and packaging, and along the way found a solution I wasn't expecting.



logo design

revisiting the name

I'd settled on Fontastic and moved on, but I wasn't loving it. During the card design process (see page 11), I wrestled with how to display the font on the face of the card, I opted to use the phrase "the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog" to showcase each letter.

This sparked the idea of connecting the name of the game to the phrase. It's a playful reference that font lovers will appreciate and creates a purposeful connection to the design of the cards, unifying the game.

MODIFIED
ASCENDERS &
DESCENDERS
TIE IN TO
GEOMETRIC
DESIGN

ITALICS
INDICATE
MOTION TO
CONNECT TO
THE WORD
QUICK

REDDISH
BROWN & TAIL
TIE BACK TO
THE FOX

HELVETICA
NEUE BOLD
IS CLASSIC &
CLEAN

quick

brown
fox

FINAL LOGO DESIGN

card design

This game features three kinds of cards, with over 500 unique cards in total. Context cards showcase the different applications for each font, type cards showcase the font, and modifier cards are incorporated into the type cards and show different styles to apply to the font.

I tackled a handful of challenges on the way to reaching a final card design. They needed to look good and they needed to be functional, which is easier said than done.

considering function

The cards needed to make sense when a player picks them up to play for the first time. They needed to introduce a simple system so a user knows enough information that they can successfully play. That meant the layout needed to take into account how a user would hold and play cards in their hand.

CONTEXT CARD

Your minimalist
vegan friend's
holiday card

TYPE CARD

Jokerman

Jokerman

thequickbrownfoxjumps
overthelazydogthequic
kbrownfoxjumpsoverth
elazydogthequickbrow
nfoxjumpsoverthelazyd
ogthequickbrownfoxju
mpsoverthelazydogthe
quickbrownfoxjumpsove

MODIFIER CARD

wavy warp

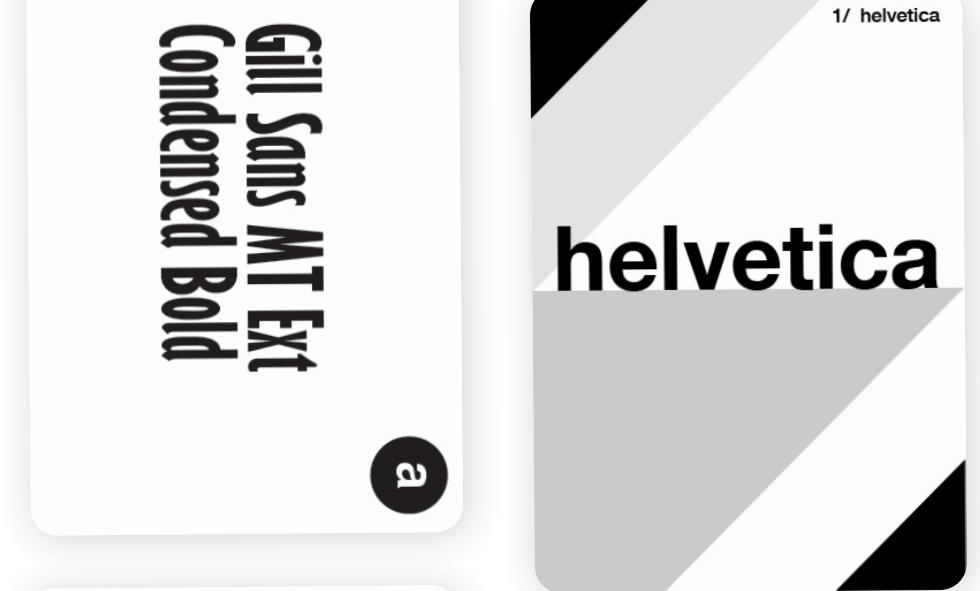
wavy warp

card design

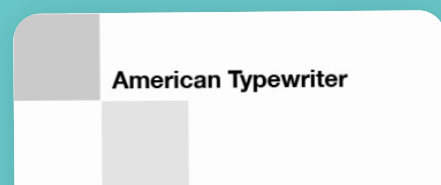
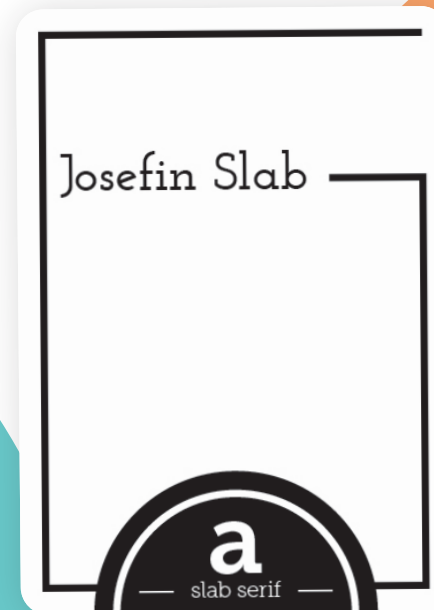
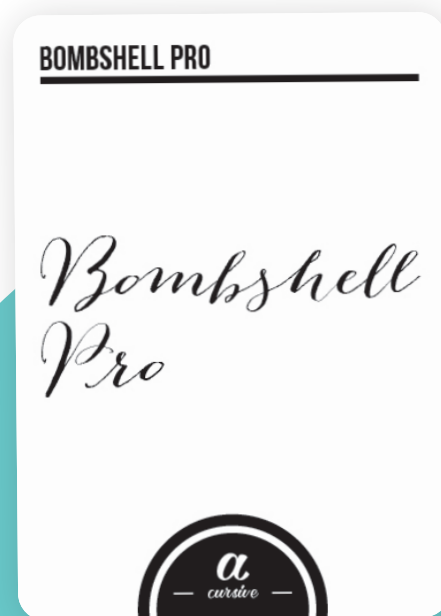
type cards

I explored dozens of concepts for the type cards. These were the hinge-point for the entire game, so if these fell short, everything would.

The most important function of the card is to display the font. My first thought was to make the name of the font as large as possible, but with such varying name lengths, that proved to create a super inconsistent design. With varying name lengths, this also introduced the problem of barely showcasing the font at all if it had a short name.



EARLY TYPE CARDS



card design

visualizing the font

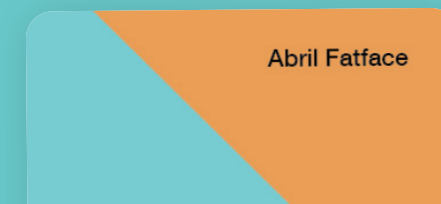
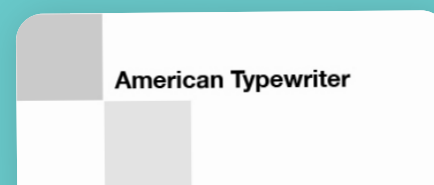
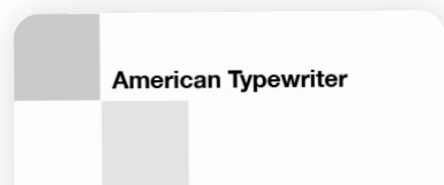
I needed to include examples of the font on the card, but it needed to look intentional and interesting. I created layouts with a lot of letterboxes that looked interesting, but were too busy to function, relied too heavily on color, and would take weeks to individually design.

I played with using Lorem Ipsum or just the alphabet, but it ultimately wasn't serving the purpose of showcasing the font. Then it all clicked.

Instead of generic filler text, using a phrase that's intended to showcase all the letters was an ideal solution.



LATER TYPE CARDS



card design

final type card

SMALL LABEL
IN HELVETICA
FOR QUICK
SORTING AND
UNIFORMITY

Elsie

BODY COPY OF
"THE QUICK
BROWN FOX..."
SHOWCASES
THE FULL FONT

thequickbrownfoxjum
psoverthelazydogtheq
uickbrownfoxjumpsov
erthelazydogthequick
brownfoxjumpsoverth
elazydogthequickbro
wnfoxjumpsoverthela
zydogthequickbrownf
oxjumpsoverthelazyd
ogthequickbrownfoxj
mpsoverthelazydogt

LARGE
DISPLAY OF
THE FONT
NAME

Elsie

ANGLED
RECTANGLE
BACKGROUND
TIES IN TO
THE PACKAGE
DESIGN

card design

modifier cards

Creating modifier cards introduced new challenges because I had to stick to the rules I'd laid out for the type cards, and introduce a slew of circumstances where I would break those rules.

context cards

Similarly, the context cards needed to feel closely related to the type cards but needed adaptations because they served a different purpose. The same background element was kept, while all the headings were made uniform and the body copy displaying the font style was removed.

dramatic all caps

**DRAMATIC
ALL CAPS**

MODIFIER CARD

**Will you marry
me? on the side
of a blimp**

CONTEXT CARD

card design



card backs

The backing card design was developed concurrently with the packaging. These needed to tie together the bright branding of the game with the content of the cards.

They also needed to establish some organization so players know what to expect from the game. Using a color-coding system helped tie in brand colors and make it easy to sort all the cards.

problematic modifiers

I originally designed a modifier card back, but as I considered the flow of gameplay, it made more sense to incorporate them with the type cards.

My biggest struggle was incorporating them into gameplay while keeping them anonymous. I talked through this with others, and explored solutions like creating a card dock,

making everybody play a modifier every turn, or adding a paper clip for players to pair their cards with.

All of these options had different pros and cons, but no satisfactory solution. So instead of changing the design or adding a major element to the gameplay, I removed the anonymity and the different card back, simplifying the game.

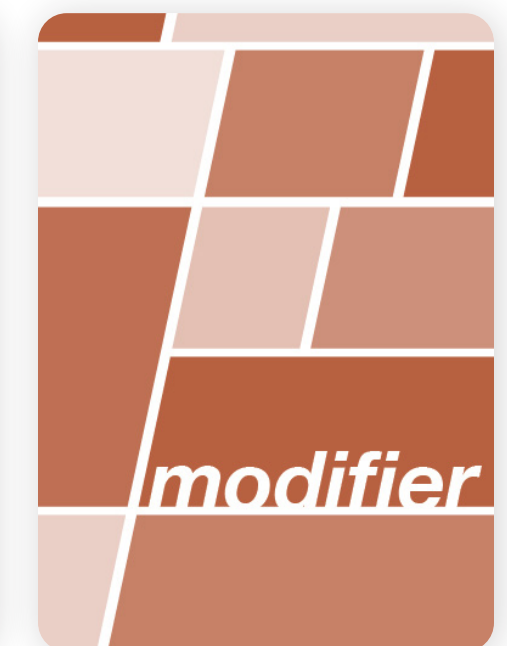
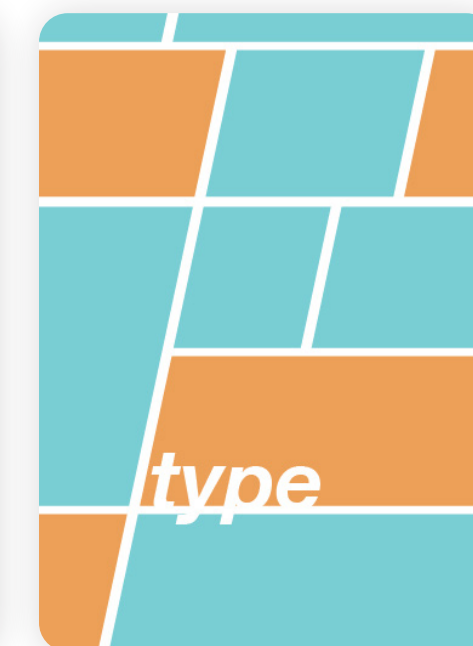
CONTEXT CARD



TYPE CARD



EARLY DRAFTS, INCLUDING THE MODIFIER



packaging design

original packaging

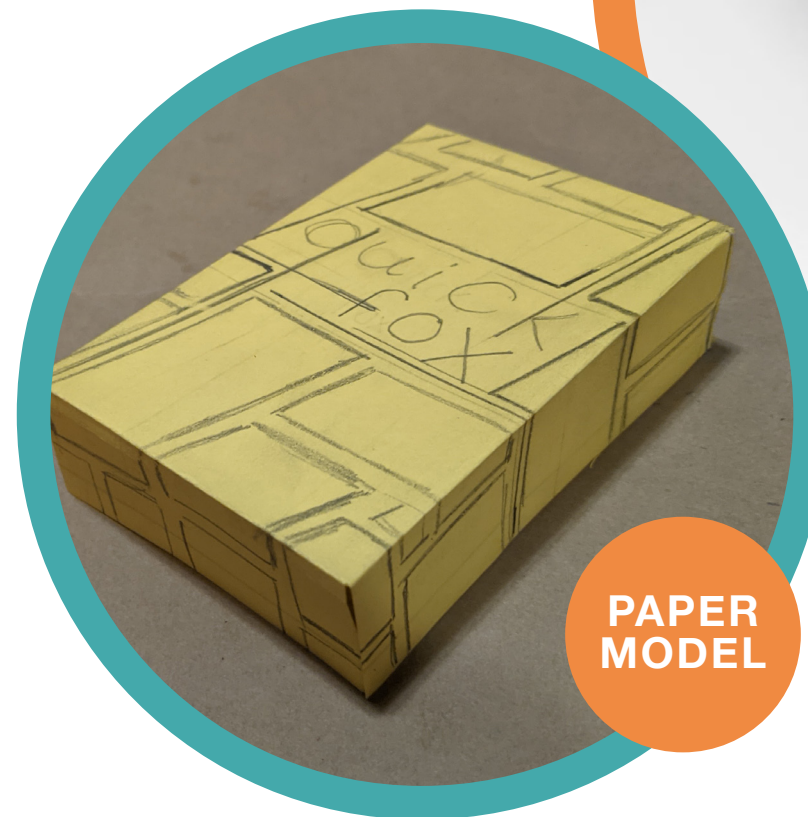
The strong logo design served as a framework to build the rest of the package design around. I wanted to keep things fairly minimal and geometric, so I capitalized on the slanted ascenders and descenders to build a cubed layout around. Pretty quickly I had a strong first draft.



designing for 3D

While my initial design looked good on a flat screen, a box isn't intended to stay 2D. I needed to factor in how the design would wrap around the corners and adjust accordingly.

The simplest way to test this out was by sketching out a simple 3D model on paper and tweaking it until I found the effect I wanted. I carried this into the package design, then tested it on a 3D model in Adobe Dimension to check how it wraps.



PAPER MODEL



FIRST 3D MODEL

packaging design



packaging design

the rulebook

Rulebooks are often neglected in the game design process, so they usually fall flat. I chose to keep the design extremely simple, but still intentional. The best way to tell is by showing, so visuals of the cards were built into the rulebook.

As with every other element, I needed to consider how it would print and how a player would hold and use the rulebook. Because of how condensed the game is, a full book wasn't needed so I designed it as a simple tri-fold, just wide enough to fit in the box.



The Objective

Prove you're the quickest fox in town! When each unique Context Card is placed, your goal is to find the best font for the occasion. Each round, the best font wins. The first to win six rounds wins the game, and the title of Quick Brown Fox!

The Game Cards

Context Cards. Each orange card features a description of some kind of text, ranging from billboards to book titles to product packaging. One card is presented each round.

Type Cards. Each blue card sports a unique font, showcasing both the font name and a sample of the font in action, with the iconic phrase "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog" repeated over and over. Each round every player plays a Type Card.

Among the blue Type Cards are modifier cards. These describe styles that can be applied to the font card. Each round a player can choose to play either a modifier card or a second Type Card to pair with their primary Type Card.

To Start the Game

Shuffle the blue deck of cards together and the orange deck of cards together.
Set out a deck of Type Cards and a deck of orange cards. The player whose name is alphabetically first is the judge for the first round.
The judge deals out 7 Type Cards to each player. Each player can look at their cards but keeps them anonymous from every other player.



To Play the Game

The judge picks a Context Card from the top of the deck, reads it out loud, and places it face up in the middle of the table.

All players quickly choose a font card to play that best fits the description on the Context Card. Players may choose to pair a second font card with their card. Players place their cards face down in front of them and keep their choice hidden until everybody has placed their cards down.

When everybody has chosen their cards, players reveal their font choices starting with the player to the judge's left. If a player has played two cards, they reveal both cards. Players are now encouraged to lobby for their font choices. The judge selects the winning font from among the Type Cards.

The winner keeps the Context Card they won in front of them on the table in order to keep score. The first player to 6 cards wins the title of Quick Brown Fox.

The judge discards all played Type Cards from the round and each player draws one new card. The player to the left of the judge then becomes the judge of the next round.

Gameplay continues until one player earns 6 Context Cards.



printing process

From the beginning, I'd determined that I would have a print-ready game within the three weeks of the project. I researched print options extensively, going to local print shops, researching online, and visiting a custom board game store to learn how they plan around the printing process.

This research hugely informed the decisions I made throughout the design process. I considered the weight and texture of the material to print on, and the cost effectiveness of using color ink on every card. I adapted my plans from the beginning to make sure I was conscious of how it would carry over when printing.

adapting to limits

But more important than having a printed game by the end of three weeks was having a strong design. Due to budget and time constraints, I decided using 3D mockup files would be a better use of resources.



advertising

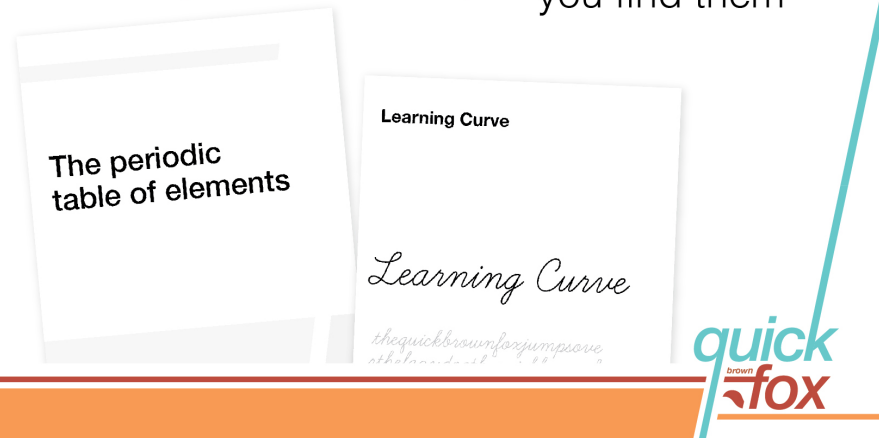
designing a message

No matter how good a game is, if it doesn't make it to the right audience it won't matter. After inhabiting the game so intensely for two weeks I thought piecing together an interesting ad series would be simple. I was wrong.

I struggled to find examples of advertisements for games that went beyond the surface-level "Buy me now" type of message. With my deadline in sight, I decided to run in that direction.

These initial ads were fine – but safe and boring. They didn't have a distinct voice and were generically designed for broad appeal instead of targeting.

the game of
fun fonts
and the places
you find them



ORIGINAL AD DESIGNS

THINK YOU'RE THE
QUICK FOX
IN TOWN?

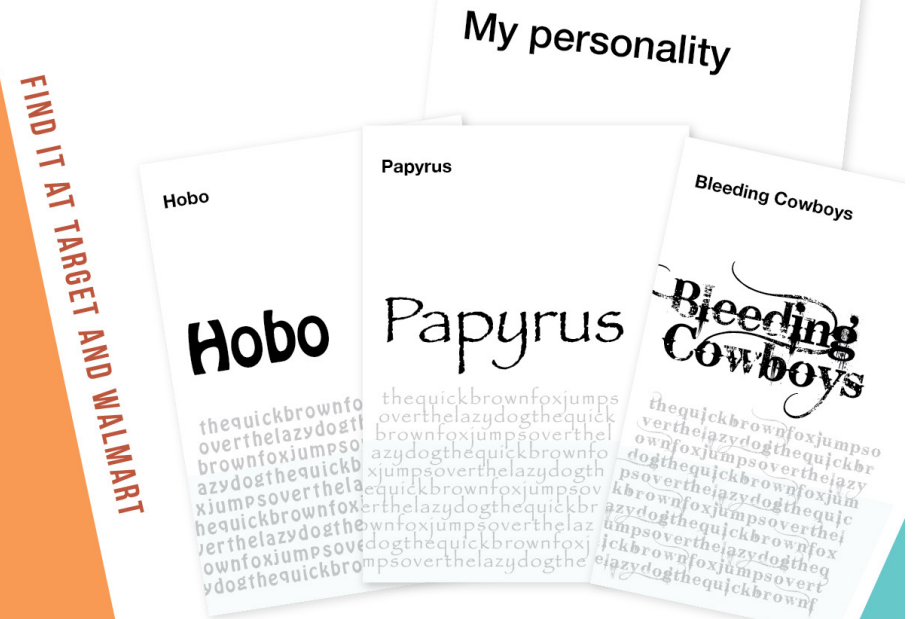
PLAY THE #1 GAME
FOR FONT ENTHUSIASTS



FIND IT AT TARGET AND WALMART

IS YOUR SOUL
HURTING YET?

PLAY THE #1 GAME
FOR FONT ENTHUSIASTS



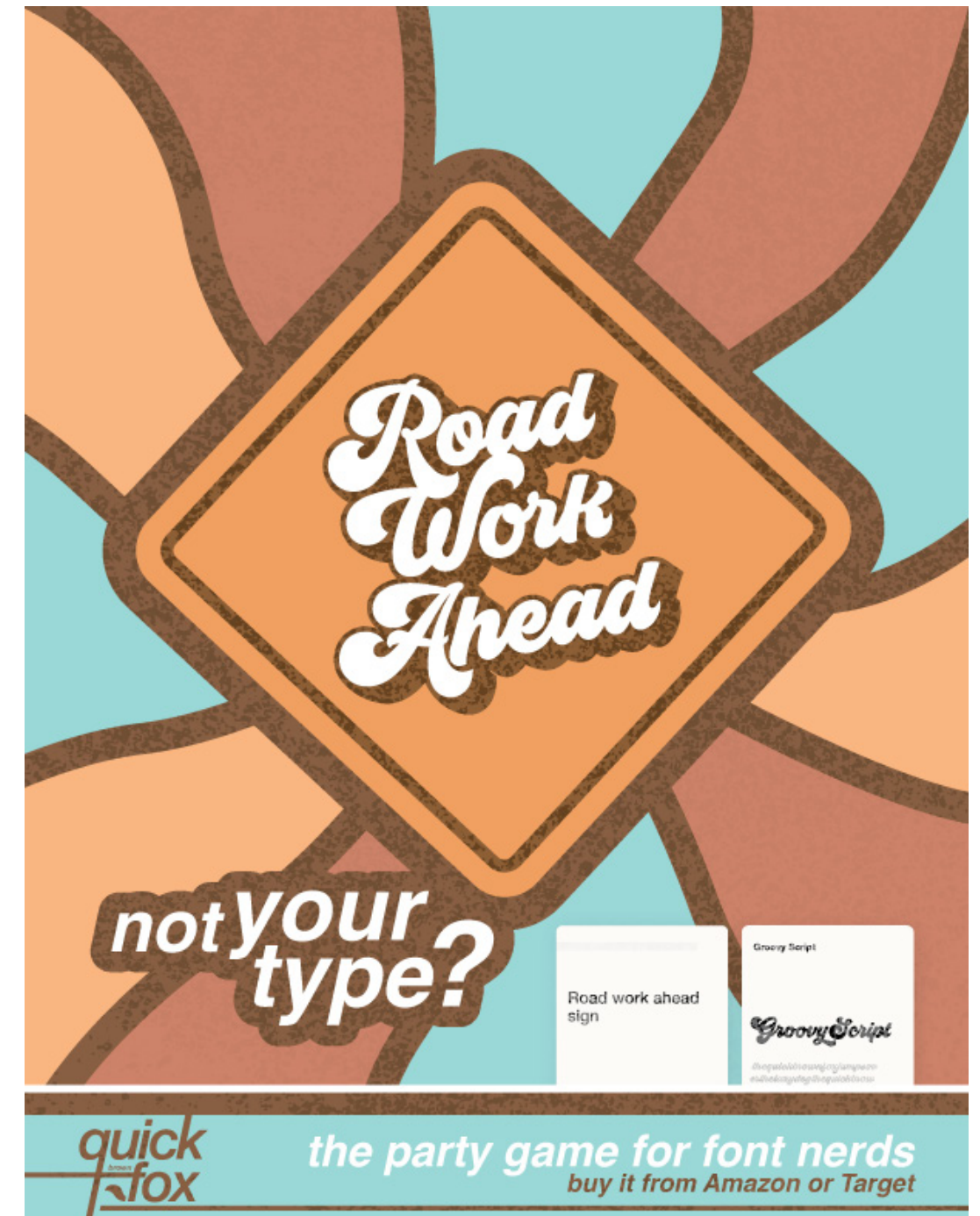
FIND IT AT TARGET AND WALMART

advertising

selling the experience

I was initially so focused on showing the game itself that I lost sight of the fact that what people want to see is the experience of playing the game. After talking with some industry professionals on how to capture the message and experience, I took a totally new approach.

I started over, this time creating vector based designs that showed the jokes that could come about from playing the game. These illustrated the creative potential of the game to those within the niche audience of font-and-card-game lovers.



key takeaways

Designing a card game isn't a simple feat. The entire process of product design involves making decisions with a user in mind while staying under the constraints of creating tangible deliverables.

Taking my knowledge of user experience design and applying it to a printed product was eye-opening. Introducing the physical world as a factor was an exciting challenge. I needed to consider how people hold something in their hands, what size they'll read things at, and how a 2D design would look on a 3D box. I also had to think about how different print materials would affect durability and tactility.

Developing a distinct visual style that can look good with 300 different fonts is a huge challenge. It took reducing things to their simplest forms and being conscious about every design decision I made along the way. But the result was a product that, despite its simplicity, still had personality and style.

Creating a card game on my own in only three weeks was a concentrated, self-directed course on critical thinking and problem solving that has refined my skills as a designer and pushed me to the next level.

**Problem solver &
graphic designer**

Deborah Owen

**Deborah
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