

# Lucie Lacava

Lucie Lacava has a keen eye for typography unlike any other newspaper designer. Her favorite fonts are Bodoni, Futura, and Helvetica. "Bodoni is the most elegant font ever designed. It is no surprise that its endless variations are long-time favorites of fashion magazines. I love Futura for its bold weights, its hard edges, and even strokes. It has a great presence even in smaller point sizes. And then there is Helvetica, which has a ubiquitous quality. It never calls attention to itself; like tofu, it can be transformed into anything you want." Interestingly, Lacava never uses these fonts in her projects, often preferring to commission designers to create new ones.

Among her influences, she cites two people who shaped her attention to detail and methodology from a young age. Domenico, an amateur painter and friend of her father, gave Lacava her first set of watercolors and taught her how to add shading with pencil. She was just six years old and she practiced this technique over and over again on a bottle until perfecting it. The other is her father, a professional tailor. She would spend hours in his atelier, leafing through books filled with illustrations of elegant men dressed in suits and tuxedos. She would also take scraps of fabric and use them to design outfits for her dolls. "I think this early exposure to art and precision had a major influence on who I became," she reveals.

Lacava is fluent in four languages and had considered becoming a translator. But she soon realized that her passions lay elsewhere. In college she studied visual arts and graduated in design. Her first professional project was creating advertisements for a friend's store, something that called upon her drawing skills. These ads caught the eye of the commercial department of the *Montreal Gazette*, which hired her as an advertising creative in 1982. Later, she joined the paper's recently formed graphics department, designing front pages before becoming art editor in 1987: "A men's fashion front was my first SND-award-winning page, a nice homage to the years spent roaming around a tailor's shop," she remembers fondly.

In 1995 she founded her own studio, Lacava Design Inc., in Montreal, where she also teaches at the Université du Québec. The studio has produced over 100 projects in nine countries, all with her distinctive stamp. "My approach looks back while looking forward.



Like the city it serves, a newspaper also has a history that a designer has to respect. I think after *USA Today*, newspapers went too far. Everybody wanted that colorful look with graphs and charts all over the place. I tend to be very classic in my approach to typography and design." Like a true archaeologist, Lacava rummages through the history of each newspaper, imbibing its personality. Some clients may worry that her proposals will be too retro. But what she is really examining are previously used graphic details and other elements that made the newspaper original in the first place.

Lacava's designs prove that classic does not equal boring. "News doesn't necessarily break in print anymore. There is no longer a need for boldness and urgency," she explains. This type of thinking is characteristic of her methodology, which she also applies to newspapers that might lack a long history. For the design of the *National*, a 2008 English-language project in Abu Dhabi, she chose Plakat for the headlines, "for its similarity to Helvetica," and Arnhem for the body text. "I wanted the headlines to feel familiar to the expats working in the UAE." Here, the palette uses cool tones, considering the hot, desert environment within which the newspaper is published: "I wanted readers to feel like they were in an oasis as they read the paper."

In general, Lacava is restrained in her use of typography, subscribing to "less is more." This approach can be traced as far back as her successful redesign of *Le Devoir* in 1992, in which she used only two fonts, a choice that went entirely against the then dominant fashion that followed the arrival of the Mac. "Many newspapers had gone font crazy," she says. The *Le Devoir* project had a huge impact on her career and earned her worldwide attention. She was given only four months to complete the project after the failure of the original agency. Due to financial and time constraints, creating custom typography was not an option. Hence the design had to rely on the fonts already available at the paper. The result was a triumph: circulation boomed and the SND named *Le Devoir* one of the best-designed newspapers in the world. The paper hired Lacava as art editor, a post she stayed at for the next year and a half. Twenty-five years later, *Le Devoir* called on her again. In November 2017, the newspaper merged its various entertainment and travel sections into a new daily tabloid. →

1. A type-only front page for the Les Arts section of the Canadian newspaper *Le Devoir*, which Lacava redesigned in 1992. It combines Torino and Century fonts.

