

961 GLYPHS

TYPOGRAPHY

SINGLE WEIGHT

CONDENSED

Tinsel

Typeface family  
by Michael Parson

# Introduction

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The story for the creation of the Tinsel typeface is closely linked to the work that I was creating as a graphic designer. At the time, I had the great pleasure of working on a series of Swiss film posters that covered a range of topics, from the serious to the silly, with some documentaries and TV shows along the way. It was a fascinating time being so close to the wonderful world of movies that create and deliver these mysterious worlds that we can all get lost in. It was also a very interesting learning curve for me as I started to slowly understand the mechanisms behind the promotional aspects of films. Not without a certain regret, but I rapidly understood that the creative years of the marvelous movie posters by Richard Amsel or Saul Bass had slowly been replaced by a more structured, data-driven approach; movies had become big-budget, serious affairs. Marketing strategy was more important than making some graphic exploration. But on the typography front, what was really interesting for me was learning about the so-called billing block and their rigid appearance. The billing block, as the name suggests, is the jam-packed list of credits that are featured on all movie posters; it names the various people, from producers to directors, who made the movie actually happen. It is maybe different in other countries, but I was always under very clear instructions from all clients; it had to be composed in a certain manner. Very condensed text, tight spacing, so aiming to fit a rather large amount of text into a neat little block. Despite this creative limitation, it did strike me as curious how once I added the block, the poster seemed real. It just goes to show how conditioned I had become and what expectations I held.

To my surprise, a few clients, notably from the marketing departments, actually suggested fonts, and it was nearly always Univers Ultra Condensed since the typeface was narrow, legible, and reliable. And while I had no qualms about the actual font that was designed by the legendary Adrian Frutiger, I could not help but be curious as to whether I could design a font to deal with these specific demands. This curiosity was the driving force behind the Tinsel typeface.

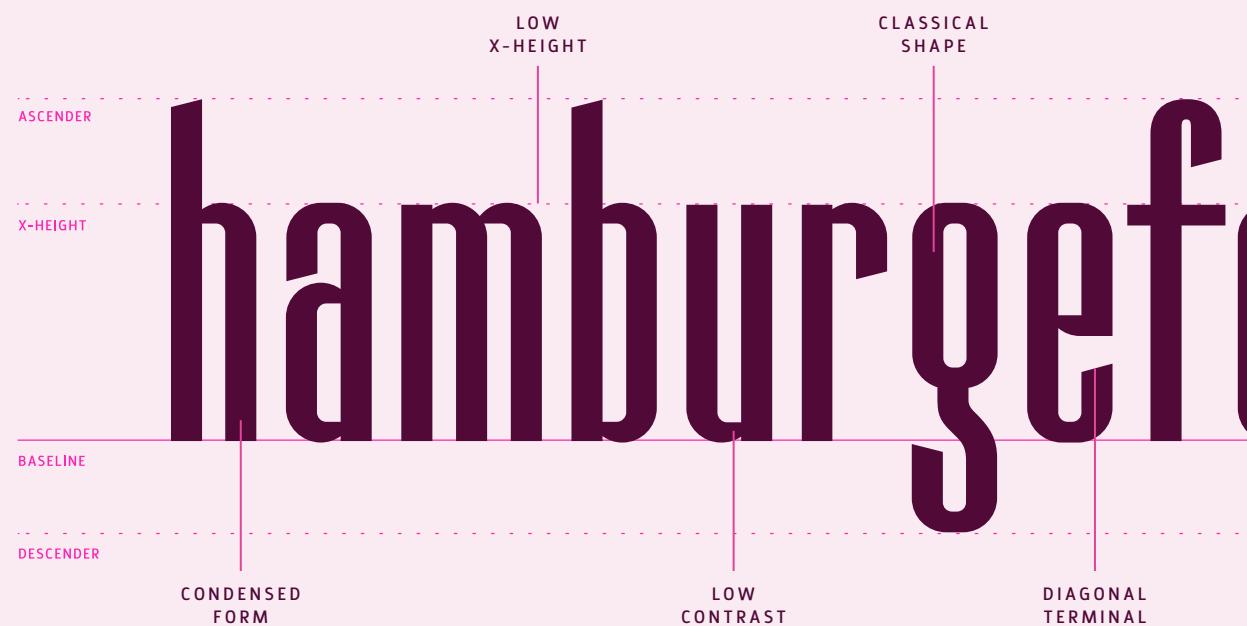
I therefore set out with the goal of creating a very task-specific typeface, a font that could fit the requirements of setting a large amount of text in a small space. But rather than dealing with how it could set continuous text, the goal here was to have a typeface that could compose headlines, titles, and content with varying levels of impact. With that in mind, I knew from the outset that I wanted to design a typeface that would include a series of variations or styles that could be employed to highlight different types of content. I finally settled on three major axes. Firstly, I would have a base font that could display the main text. The second variation would come from providing small capitals; these could be used to replace the lowercase forms to add extra styling. And the last feature that came from a layout idea I had employed was to feature an alternative version of the small capitals that would be underlined by a horizontal bar, a further manner to highlight certain content. With these three solutions, I felt that I had a solution that could be easily mixed and matched for setting interesting billing blocks.

For, although Mr. Zukor had a representative in London, the agency waged only a picture-by-picture campaign. It was my first important assignment, pregnant with hope of more.



As I started to get to work on the base forms, I initially focused on the lowercase letters to get a sense of the overall DNA of the typeface. Starting with a few elementary letters that would allow me to explore the first guidelines, I initially focused on creating a traditional condensed grotesque design, so a narrow width with a tall form. I had chosen this direction since it corresponded to my desire to create a narrow design, but equally since the tall proportion of the letters lent them a stature that seemed correct for the world of cinema. This decision created a very dense form with a strong vertical tension, but which became a bit too heavy, too industrial for my liking. I therefore started to explore the contrast ideas, increasing the difference between thick and thin areas in a style that could be reminiscent of what is seen in serif designs. This small change gave the horizontal elements a lighter appearance and lent the design a more sophisticated style that seemed to match the glamour of Hollywood. While these first steps allowed me to advance on a whole range of letters, I quickly came across the question of how to treat the diagonals that would feature in the typeface. The traditional grotesque approach would be a mechanical approach, employing straight lines that cut through the shapes, yet this style seemed too dramatic. After a bit of research, I finally settled on a compromised idea, of employing a very progressive curve that gradually slopes into the angle. This had the effect of adding more fluidity and smoothness to the design while also further highlighting the vertical tension, since a large part of the diagonal stroke remained straight. While it may hinder the legibility at smaller sizes, it seemed like an important step to give the typeface a unique identity and voice.

Another central question was how I would treat the terminals, so the endings to the main strokes of the letters. I had found my approach to the diagonals an interesting route that had allowed the design to move away from a direction that was too rigid, and so I decided to pursue this idea for the terminals. On the main ascenders and descenders, rather than simply cutting the stem horizontally, I inserted a 72° angle to lighten the stroke endings. Not only did this intervention add an interesting dynamic, but it also helped differentiate between the lowercase l and capital i. I continued working through the first set of letters using these general guidelines, aiming to remain quite regular in most letter forms, yet opting to include the more historical shapes for the lowercase a and g since they offered more letter differentiation that would help the overall legibility.



→ A B C D E F G H I J K L  
M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y  
z → a b c d e f g h i j k l  
m n o p q r s t u v w x y  
z → A B C D E F G H I J K  
L M N O P Q R S T U V W X  
y z → 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Having worked through the lowercase forms, I turned my attention to the capitals and started constructing their forms using the same approach. To further the vertical tension, the x-height is relatively low, making the ascenders and descenders clearly stick out of the composition. One defining feature of the capitals was the decision to employ a low height for the horizontal bars, for example, on the H or E. This was once again chosen as a hint to the glamour of the original golden years of cinema, so taking on an Art Deco influence.

Having completed the base alphabet, I then turned my attention towards the two secondary styles that I had imagined from the outset. The first style was the small capitals; these are capital letters that are aligned to the x-height, or the lowercase letters. This secondary form was a pretty logical expansion and simply required me to adapt my capital letters to the smaller height.

With those letters complete, I could finally add the final style that I had imagined as the Title style. I again employed the small capitals but changed the alignment so that the letters would now align to the top of the capitals and would carry a small horizontal bar under each letter for added emphasis. The idea behind this style was to include a style that already included some design formatting, allowing an easy and quick typographic effect while composing texts.

From the outset, I had imagined these different styles as three distinctive weights; this meant that the Tinsel typeface included three weights that could either be employed as a family or then simply as stand-alone fonts.

A tremendous impression was given to both Mr. Zukor and the Lasky Company by an organization of the distributors who had been handling our films six months after I had and I went into business.

TINSEL REGULAR

TINSEL SMALL CAPITALS

A TREMENDOUS IMPRESSION WAS GIVEN TO BOTH MR. ZUKOR AND THE LASKY COMPANY BY AN ORGANISATION OF THE DISTRIBUTERS WHO HAD BEEN HANDLING OUR FILMS SIX MONTHS AFTER I HAD AND I WENT INTO BUSINESS.

TINSEL ALTERNATE SMALL CAPITALS

Since the origins of the typeface were rooted in the world of films, I wanted the name to reflect something cinematic. I had started to look at various names of actors or films, but that direction seemed to connect the design too strongly to a period of time or theme. I then started spending more time researching the origins of Hollywood, which I view as the birthplace of the moving picture. The name "Hollywood" seemed too obvious, but upon further reading, I came across alternative names that were used to describe the place as a glittering dream for filmmakers; one was "the dream factory," but that sounded like a reality TV show. The other commonly used name was Tinseltown, as a reference to the shiny, magical world of film, and something sounded very appealing in the name! So I finally decided to adopt part of the name, focusing just on the tinsel that reflected the solid construction of the letters and the work that they aimed to evoke.

Despite being used in my design previously, Tinsel was officially released in 2010 through the T26 foundry. After a slow start, it gradually started to find its audience both within the world of film and also in more surprising activities.

MR DENZEL WASHINGTON  
106 North. Vine Street  
DANIEL DAY-LEWIS PERFORMED  
Tourist buses & fleets of cars  
PRISIONEROS DE LA TIERRA  
A chain five miles long  
I DECIDED TO SLEEP ALONE  
Plains of California  
USA WE USED TO LOVE YOU

It was my introduction to a recurrent tragedy in my career as producer. Various times I have been attracted by Griffith successes only to find that they could not thrive in another environment. Just like *Trilby* when no longer confronted by the hypnotic baton of *Svengali*, so many of the men and women who have worked under Mr. Griffith can not perform when deprived

**TINSEL REGULAR - 16 PT**

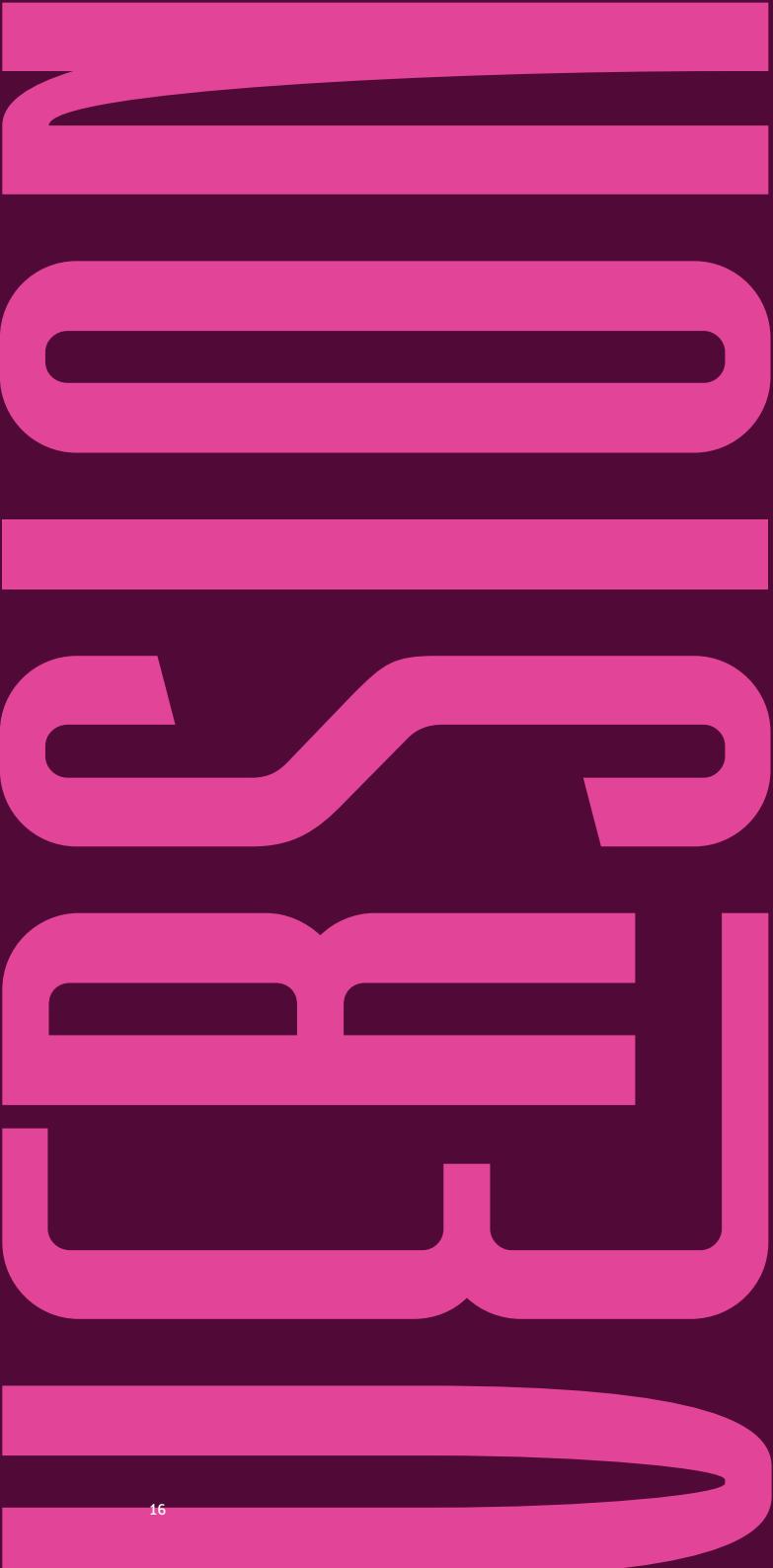
About six months after Lasky and I went into business these functionaries decided that in order to make themselves a real force they would have to guarantee to theatrical managers throughout the country a larger number of pictures. Their organization, under the name of the Paramount Pictures Corporation, requisitioned one hundred and four films a year, of which our company agreed to supply thirty-six. As this was just three times the num-

## TINSEL REGULAR - 27 PT

New people were being added. So swift was the pace of progress that De Mille's brother William, whom we had sent out meanwhile as a scenario-writer, frequently voiced his leading plaint. He liked to work by himself in a little building away out in a field, but to save his life he could not move that little building fast enough. "I wake up in the morning after I've just staked

### TINSEL REGULAR - 20 PT





# New version

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As I had done with a series of other classical typefaces, I decided to remaster the Tinsel typeface in 2025 to bring the design up to standard with the new technical requirements. The main questions this time were in relation to how the fonts actually functioned in real life and how users had responded to the three letter styles. As I had seen with a few other designs, the implementation of Opentype features in the current era means that most users are now familiar with substitutions and finding their way inside a single font file. So while my original idea of delivering the small capitals and alternates as separate styles was interesting at the time, it now felt a bit obsolete to change fonts simply to access a feature. In an age where a single variable font can include a range of weights, it seemed only logical that Tinsel should be available as a single font file that included all the styles. So after a long hesitation, I finally decided to combine the three fonts into one. The small capitals can now be accessed as an Opentype feature that converts the lowercase letters. The additional title style is also included, but this time as an alternative to the small capitals and with a change to my application of the underscore idea. I decided to go further into the process by adding a secondary, top stroke that would then completely enclose each letter. This decision was made as a way of further distinguishing the style from the small capitals, and with a more central alignment, it matched the capital forms better. These two additional letter forms can therefore be easily accessed and mixed with each other to create vibrant and distinctive designs that will highlight the text.

The alternative feature also includes a small range of alternate glyphs; these include the ampersand or percentage symbol that can be replaced for a different style at the click of a button.

100%

DEFAULT GLYPHS

100%

ALTERNATE GLYPHS

So as I worked through this first phase of compiling the three fonts into a single file and updating the letters, I also implemented a further update that seemed obvious: the expansion of the character set. While the original release had simply contained the basic Latin diacritics, this new version has now expanded the range to include all Latin accents and therefore expand the language support to over 250 Latin-based languages. So in this initial phase, the main goal was to expand the glyphs, include the various additional OpenType features and equally use the opportunity to bring some slight adjustments to the actual letterforms, principally to ensure a better balance or harmony. One particular difference is my approach to the uppercase N that has seen a major revision. In the original font, I had used a form that was inspired by the lowercase letter but with an adaptation on the alignment. And while I still find the shape interesting, when employed in text, the letter clearly lacked legibility and letter differentiation; it needed a revision. So taking a cue from the diagonal approach of the K, I have reworked the N into a more classical capital shape, this is now seen in the uppercase letters and the small capitals.

Typographic

TINSEL REGULAR

TYPOGRAPHIC

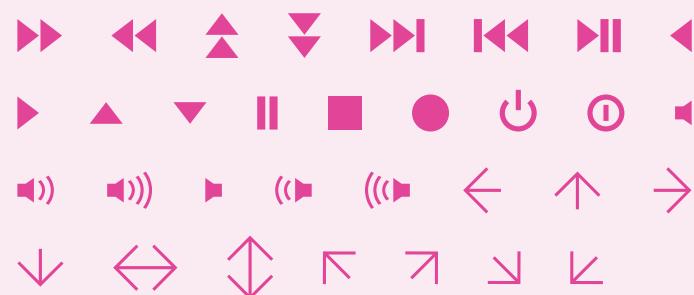
TINSEL SMALL CAPITALS

TYPOGRAPHIC

TINSEL ALTERNATE SMALL CAPITALS

I then turned my attention to the implementation of the various ligatures that the original version had included. Since quite a few of the ligatures became obsolete with the new small capital feature, I reviewed the selection by expanding certain combinations but removing others that were less employed. Tinsel now includes a range of lowercase ligatures, plus some discretionary ligatures for a more classical style and over eighty capital ligatures that can be easily integrated into any string of text. To replace the ligatures that I had removed, I decided to go further into the idea of layout effects by creating a series of wordmarks that are slightly inclined with a series of diagonal strokes. These small logos can be used in titles or logos to highlight certain content or simply bring an additional graphical element to a composition and can be accessed by activating the Titling feature.

Following that logic of including some additional graphical signs, I decided to include a small collection of symbols and arrows that were related to the cinematic theme. There are ten directional arrows, either aligned to the small capitals or capitals, plus a small collection of interface pictograms that were related to the cinematic theme and could be employed for navigation design or simply as an additional graphical element.



TINSEL ADDITIONAL SYMBOLS

AB AC AD AE AE AH AI AK AL AM AL  
 AO AP AQ AB AS AI AU AW AX  
 AY AZ EA EE EH EI EL EM EN EO EQ  
 ER ES EST ET EU EW EX EY EZ HA KC  
 RD HE HG RU HK LL HM RU HQ KB  
 HS KT RU RW HY LA LE LL LO LT LU LY  
 MA MB MC MD ME ME MG MH MU  
 MJ MK ML MM MU MO MP MQ MB  
 MS MT MU MU MW MX MY MZ QU  
 RA RD RE RH RI RO RT RTE RU RY ZA  
 ZE ZH ZI ZO ZU

TINSEL DISCRETIONARY LIGATURES

ALL AM AND BUY BY CCI CLOSED  
DE DES END EST EI FIN FROM HOW  
IF IL ILS IN IS IT LA LE LES LTD  
NEW NOW OE OPEN OR PM THE TO  
UN UND UNE WIN YOU

TINSEL WORDMARKS

# From December 19th 1978

DEFAULT LINING NUMERALS

# From December 19th 1978

TABULAR LINING NUMERALS

# From December 19th 1978

HANGING NUMERALS

# From DECEMBER 19TH 1978

SMALL CAPITALS NUMERALS

# FROM DECEMBER 19TH 1978

ALTERNATE SMALL CAPITALS NUMERALS

1 9

D1 N7 08

19/78

TITLING NUMERALS

SCIENTIFIC NUMERALS

FRACTIONS

For the numerals, I also wanted to use the new version as an opportunity to expand the styles and solutions. For the default form, I maintained the lining numerals that had featured in the original version; these numbers align with the capitals. They have largely kept the same form as the original numerals, but the alignment of the horizontal stems has been expanded to open the counter forms for better legibility. A secondary set of numerals can then be selected for use in running text that features lowercase letters; these are the hanging numbers. With a lower alignment and ascenders and descenders that mimic the rhythm of lowercase letters, their texture is better suited for the smaller letters. Both sets of small capitals, both the default and alternate, include a full set of numerals that are aligned so as to match the sequence. A further set of numerals, this time employed as scientific numerals, is equally featured and can be used as either inferior or superior figures in chemical formulas or other settings. These same smaller figures are then employed as a further set in the fraction feature; this will allow the composition of any set of fractions by simply separating the values with a slash bar. Since I had added the Titling feature, I used the opportunity to also include some Titling numerals, and these were inspired by the countdown that is seen at the beginning of films or TV shows, so a number enclosed in a circle. The numbers are obviously static but could be used to great effect in animation by adding the rotation stroke to signal each passing second.

Thanks to these various updates, Tinsel is now available as a single weight typeface, but one that contains even more characters and features than the original three weight family.



Mark Wallengren & Kim Amidon  
EDWARD M. & PAULINE (née Maddern) KIMBALL  
He was born May 11, 1926  
CULTURAL MONUMENT REGISTERED  
Famous Celebrity Boulevard  
CAPITAL OF UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
Drive the North La Brea Avenue  
HOUSE OF THE RISING  
Old blue eyes sings  
SPRAWLING CITY THAT STRETCHES

# Conclusion

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Originally conceived as a real solution to a design problem I was facing, Tinsel actually coincided with a time when my work on movie posters was coming to an end. While I did manage to employ the typeface on a few posters, it actually became a useful tool for a much wider range of projects, from branding and interface design to some editorial work. Since its original release, it has also found a worldwide appreciation as a simple yet effective solution to setting text in small areas.

With this new version, I hope that Tinsel will become even more useful and simple in its application. By delivering all the features in a single file, the typeface can now showcase all its versatility while also highlighting some of the newer features, like the wordmarks that I am curious to see in real-life settings! With an expanded character set and this wide range of features, Tinsel aims to be a one-stop solution for composing text while being able to highlight certain elements or sequences.



IT WAS MY INTRODUCTION TO A RECURRENT TRAGEDY IN MY CAREER AS PRODUCER. VARIOUS TIMES I HAVE BEEN ATTRACTED BY GRIFFITH'S SUCCESSES ONLY TO FIND THAT THEY COULD NOT THRIVE IN A ENVIRONMENT. JUST LIKE TRILBY WHEN NO LONGER CONFRONTED BY THE HYPNOTIC BATON OF SVENGALI, SO MANY OF THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE WORKED UNDER GRIFFITH CAN NOT PERFORM WHEN DEPRAVED OF HIS INSPIRING FORCE. MEANWHILE THE JACQUIN COMPANIES HAD BEEN CYCLOPSING CO

an experimental fusion  
of hip-hop & jazz

**HOSTED BY GURU**

FEATURING  
CARLEN ANDERSON  
ROY AYERS  
DONALD BYRD  
N'DEA DAVENPORT  
RONNY JORDAN  
COURTNEY PINE  
LONNIE LISTON SMITH  
MC SOLAAR



NEW TELEVISION SET  
(Boyz n the Hood)  
MAX VON SYDOW  
Larry von Zell  
BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN  
Charming Bette Davis  
2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY

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Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences (AMPAS)

GONE WITH THE WIND

# Complete character set

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**CEREMONY 10.01.1978**  
overlooking the ocean  
**AREA #190-871-662**  
reserved for animals & plants  
**ENTERING HOLLYWOOD BLVD**

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Tinsel typeface  
by Michael Parson  
1 weight  
Display

[www.typogama.com](http://www.typogama.com)

Specimen Layout: Michael Parson  
Text & visuals: Michael Parson  
Font used: Tinsel  
Longer text & notes set in  
Prox Regular

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