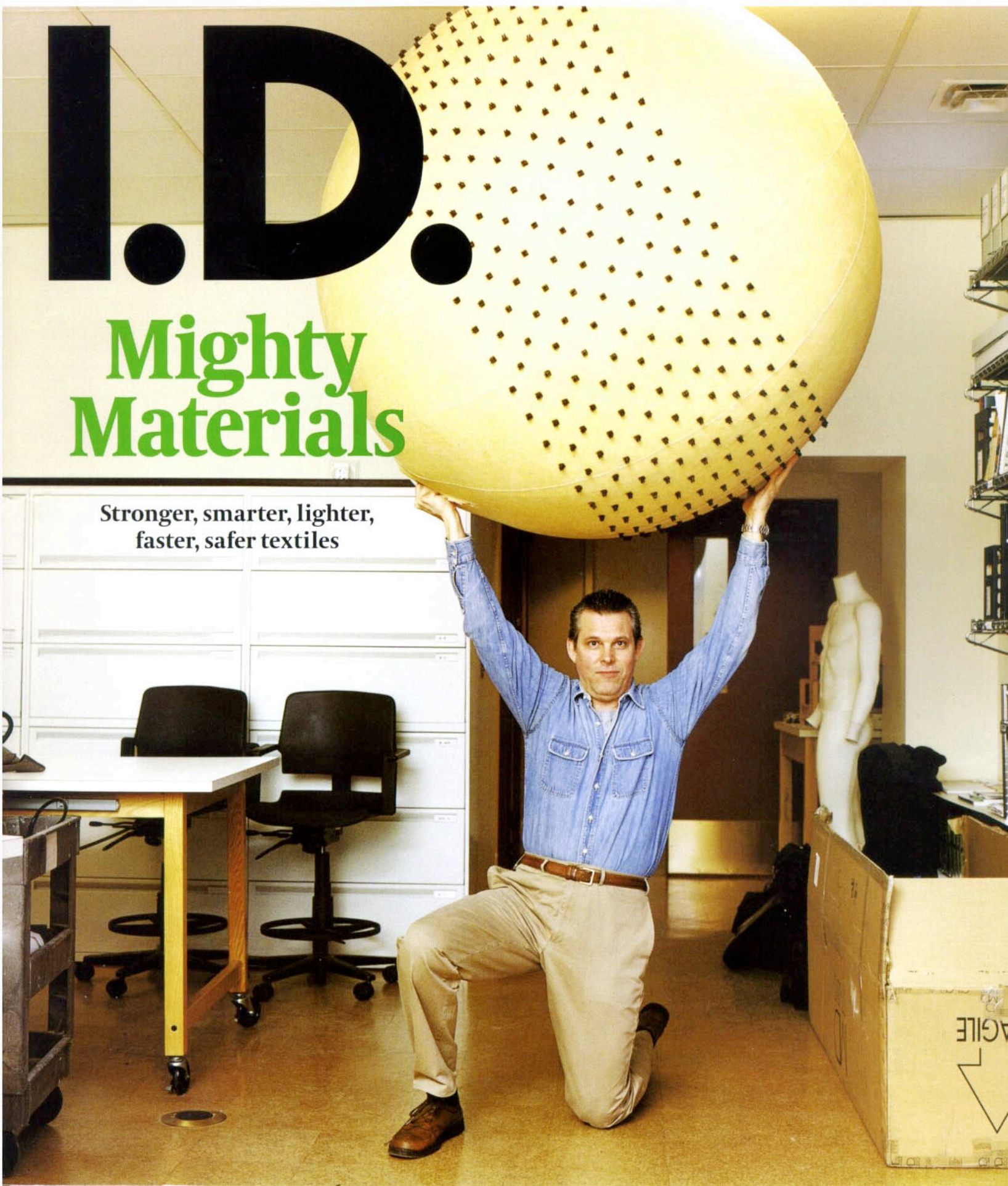


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Adopt a Font Feds approve new highway typeface

On September 2, 2004, Clearview Highway became the first federally approved road-sign font since 1949. Or rather, the family of 13 typefaces begun 14 years ago by environmental designer Donald Meeker and type designer James Montalbano received "interim approval," meaning that states are allowed but not required to use it. The font is currently in service in Texas, Pennsylvania, and parts of Canada.

Clearview's radical departure is an exaggerated x-height that reduces the size difference between upper- and lowercase letters. Studies have shown that revising the proportions improves legibility, a result that ran counter to the designers' training. "In changing the x-height in relation to cap height, we abandoned traditional notions of typography," Montalbano says. "But it made sense given what we've learned about cognitive recognition—on the highway, you're seeing only about four words at a time."

To really appreciate this typeface, you have to be moving at 45 mph. That's how Penn State and the Texas Transportation Institute conducted studies with subjects of all ages driving day and night. At that speed, Clearview can be seen an average of



top Clearview on Pennsylvania's Route 171 above Five different versions of the font in a test rack

1.3 seconds sooner than the current road-sign display font, Standard Alphabets for Highway Signs. The difference translates to 84 feet and a 20 percent gain in legibility.

Nonetheless, it took Arthur Breneman, the chief of traffic engineering and operations division for the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, three attempts to get interim approval from the Federal Highway Administration. It now goes to Federal Rulemaking for public comment and could become federal law in 2005 or 2006, says Meeker. "After all these years of dealing with the various bureaucracies, I never thought it would pass," Montalbano adds. Clearly, it's all in the pacing. www.clearviewhwy.com RHONDA RUBINSTEIN

Chop Shop Company recycles chopsticks for home decor

Every year, China goes through 45 billion disposable wooden chopsticks. That's 25 million trees annually if you're counting—and San Diego native Bryan Parks is. In January 2004 Parks established Kwytza Kraft, a company that designs and manufactures lamps, wine racks, magazine holders, and even tables of used chopsticks.

Parks first learned about China's mounting timber crisis—some environmentalists have warned that at the rate Chinese trees are being consumed, the country's remaining forests could be depleted within five years—in 2001 when he went to Kunming, capital of China's Yunnan province, to begin a two-year course of study in Mandarin. "In the beginning I would go to restaurants in Kunming and ask for their used chopsticks," Parks says. "I even picked up a bunch in the gutter—with gloves, of course."

Now his system involves a network of 40 restaurants and about a dozen collectors. The utensils are sterilized in boiling water and sent to a factory in Guangxi province, where workers weave the sticks into geometric home accessories based on Parks's designs. A small wastebasket (\$26) requires about 70 sticks; floor lamps (from \$134) take upwards of 1,000. Currently, the goods are sold on kwytzakraft.com and in eco-friendly stores around the U.S. Parks has made other changes since learning of the utensils' negative environmental impact: "I try not to eat with single-use chopsticks anymore, but I have to admit that there have been a few times, left with no other choice, that I have used my hands." www.kwytzakraft.com SONIA ZJAWINSKI

Kwytza Kraft's curvy table lamp made with recycled single-use chopsticks

