Typeface design   Adrian Frutiger
Douane   1970–72

Starting in 1970, Adrian Frutiger (1928–2015) designed a signage font for Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris-Roissy that would go on to become the international standard for airport signage. The font was based on tests of legibility. Later on, the font, known as Roissy, was revised to create the famous Frutiger text typeface.

For the design of the signage font Roissy, Adrian Frutiger carried out detailed studies on legibility. The font was not to have any serifs, which would have been mere visual noise in this case. A character "had to have the same clarity as an arrow," he said. The open curve ends are important because they point to the next letter, making the words form an optical unity that is easier to grasp at a glance. This is highly significant at airports, where important information has to be caught by the eye instantaneously. Furthermore, investigations concerning both font width and weight, as well as the shape of the letters, were carried out. The variations of the lowercase a deserve special attention. Frutiger had already focused on open curve shapes in his very early drafts, and they accompanied him throughout his entire life. He considered them to be more human compared to fonts with closed curves such as Helvetica and Univers. In 1976, Linotype included the font in its phototypesetting range. For this purpose, the signage typeface had to be transformed into a text typeface. It was thus made slightly finer and slimmer, and somewhat richer in contrasts. Linotype initially named the typeface Roissy, but in order to protect it from plagiarism it was eventually given Frutiger's name. Ultimately, this did not help to protect the design, but it did help spread Frutiger's name more widely. (Heidrun Osterer)

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