

3

Inspiration

Explore the divine proportion.

Design with grids in mind.

Discover that inspiration is everywhere.



Introducing Grid-Based Design

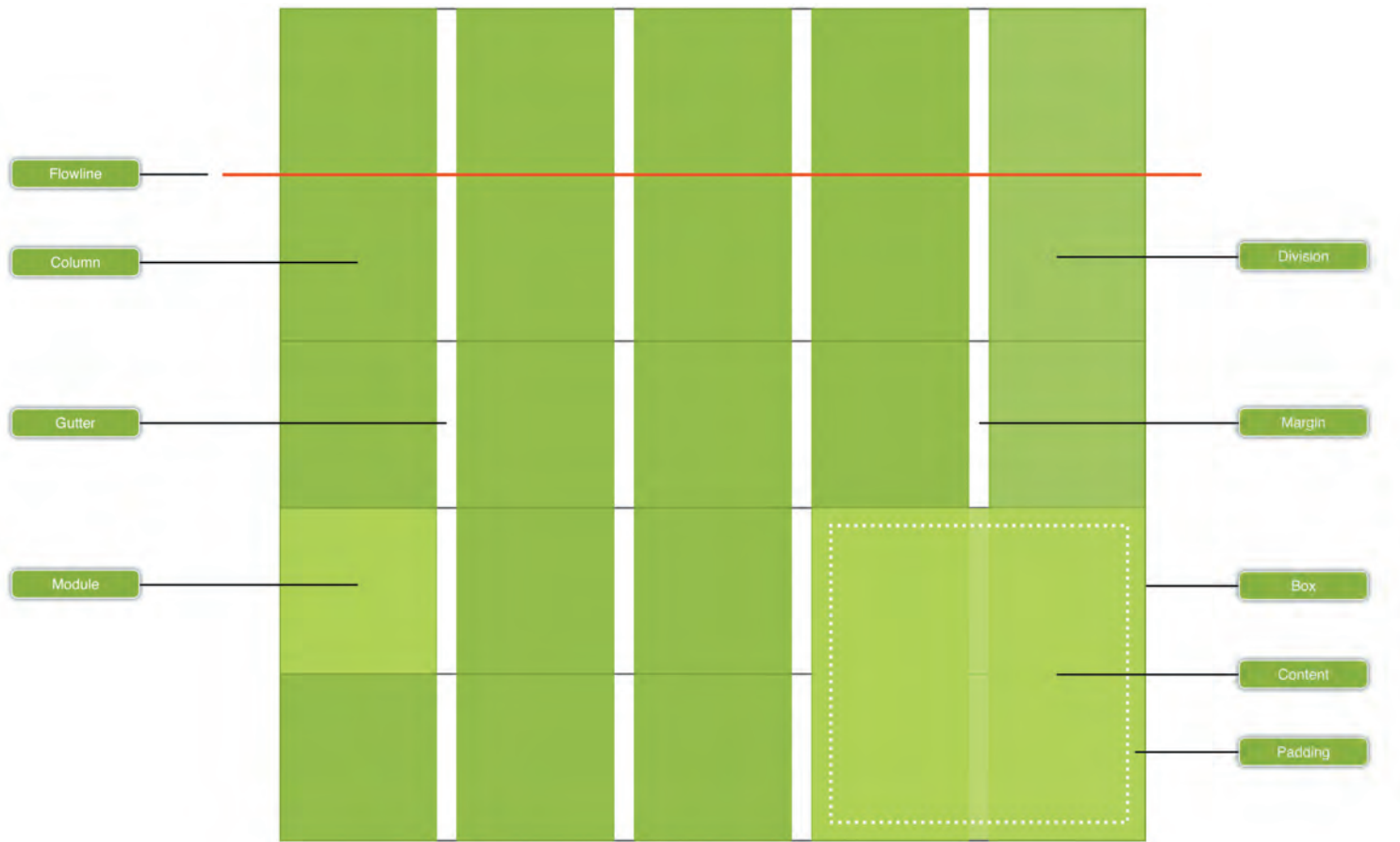
When you sit back in your comfy chair, close your eyes, and think about grids, what are the first ideas that spring to mind? I suppose that if your chosen career path has led you to wear a pointy hat and direct traffic, your mind might jump first to those yellow “don’t-enter-unless-your-exit-is-clear” grids at busy road junctions. But I’m assuming you chose instead to design for the Web and your ideas about grids are somewhat different. Still, there are parallels in the way some designers and some traffic police think about grids—that they are about rules or regulations, rather than about flexibility.

Technically speaking, *grids* are a combination of vertical columns, horizontal fields, and white space gutters. Translating that grid terminology into CSS, you can think in terms of divisions, margins, and padding (**Figure 3.1**).

Designers often think working with grids can be a restrictive rather than a creative process. They think basing a design on a series of columns and fields will limit their ability to make designs that break out of the literal box; in reality, the opposite is true.

My aim is to show you that designing with grids will lead to more, rather than fewer, creative opportunities; your designs will go in new directions, and using grids will provide you with a solid foundation for experimenting with new ideas.

I’ll begin with the theory behind designing grids in the context of Web design. You will then see how grids have been used across different media, and you will finish by using grids that have been influenced by other media to bring a fresh look to some of the common layouts and interface elements you design every day.



3.1 Comparing grid design and CSS terminology

The designer and the grid

I remember art-school lectures about proportion and balance. But as a fine-arts student, I preferred to spend my time in the printmaking room rather than in the lecture hall.

As with many designers working on the Web today, I was schooled in neither the theory nor the importance of using grids. It was only after I began working on the Web professionally that I became aware of their importance in helping make well-balanced designs. When I started reading about grids, I found that much of the information about them seemed to have little relevance to modern-day Web design.

Some of these discussions focus on mathematics and talk of the famous Fibonacci sequence. As someone who finds it difficult to remember the PIN numbers of two of my credit cards at any one time, mathematics was never a favorite subject.

When I began to consciously consider the grids I use in my everyday design work, I realized their tremendous flexibility, and I began to look for unusual grids I could bring into my designs.

When you start to look for examples of grid design in action, you won't have to look far. Open your morning newspaper or pick up a copy of a favorite magazine, and you'll see grids everywhere. When you take a drive through your neighborhood, grids appear in the design of buildings and in modern cities, even in the layout of the roads on which you are driving. The horizontal and vertical lines inherent in grids are almost everywhere in the world that we humans have designed for ourselves.

Grid design is a skill that is important for every designer to learn. Learning to work with their composition and proportions is one of the foundations for great design.

It is a mistake to think designing with grids is about making designs conforming to a rigid structure; in fact, the opposite is true. Grids help designers create arrangements and patterns that "feel right" and that people find comfortable to use.

Grids serve as a guide to designers to follow when they are placing objects on a page. They provide structure and add rhythm to a design. Using them helps designers create compositions that are easier for a reader to scan. Grids also present information in a way that is more neatly organized and therefore easier to follow.

Note

In *The Book of Calculating* in 1202, Fibonacci's number progression involved adding two numbers to arrive at the next in the sequence:

1, 2 (1+1), 3 (2+1), 5 (3+2), 8 (5+3),
and so on

That's always handy to remember when you're out shopping.

Thinking outside the grid

In her article for *A List Apart* magazine, author Molly E. Holzschlag explores the common ground between the uses of grids in the design of urban spaces with their use in Web design. You can find the article at www.alistapart.com/articles/outsidethegrid/.

*At some level, every designer is trying to
bring order to the world; it's the secret reason
we all practice this craft for a living. And
there's no better tool for achieving order in
design than the grid.*

—KHOI VINH, DESIGNER
www.subtraction.com



3.2 Designing with grids helps usability and accessibility

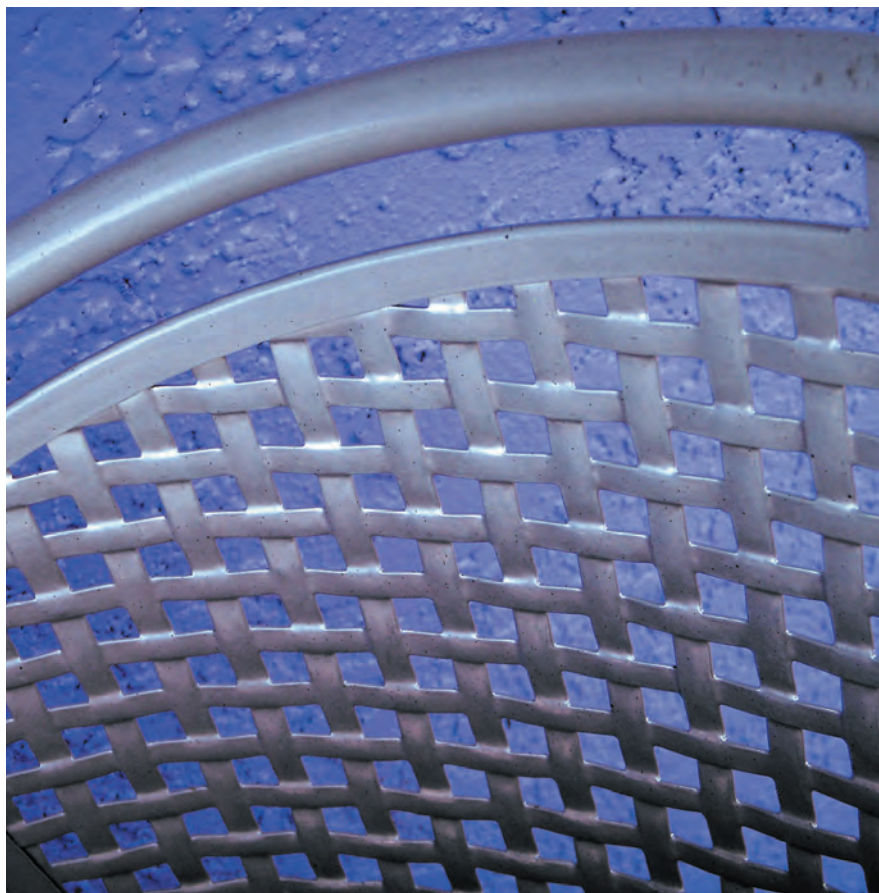
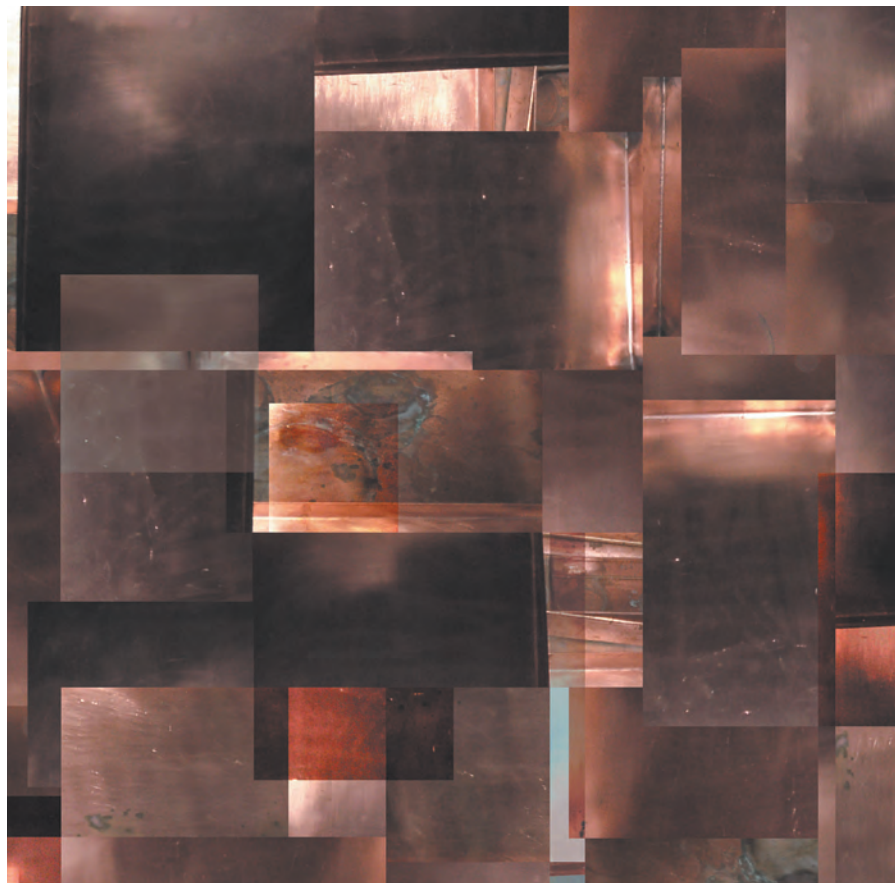
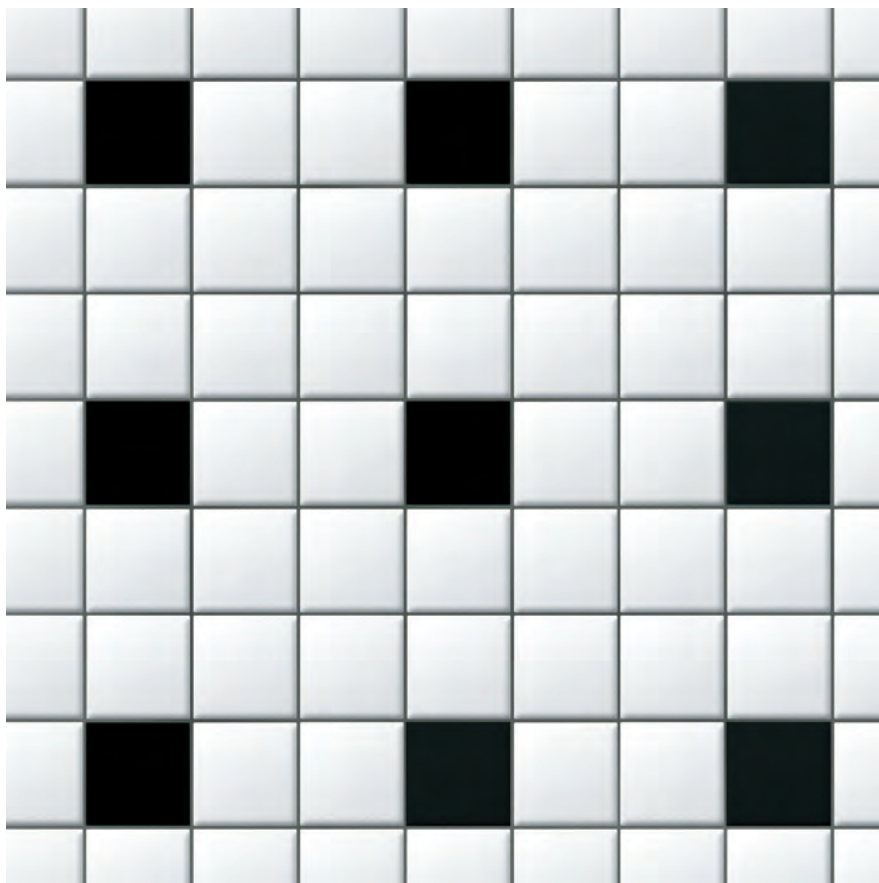
Look at the example of the two page layouts here (**Figure 3.2**). On the left, the lack of structure makes the page seem cluttered and chaotic. On the right, the reader can more easily understand the visual structure of the content. Applying this to the Web helps both usability and accessibility without requiring the designer to write a single line of code.

Sometimes a grid is subconscious to the layout and merely influences the visitor to follow particular patterns; at other times, its presence can be overt and define the design. The choice of whether to place the grid center stage or allow it to fade into the background will fall to the designer and the goals of a particular design.

The divine proportion and the rule of thirds

Many of the theories of grid design have a basis in the proportions that occur in the natural world and even in our own bodies. Take a look at your arms and note the distance between the tips of your fingers and your wrist. Compare it to the distance between your fingertips and your elbow.

Unless your genes include more gorilla DNA than you'd like your friends to know about, I'm guessing the distance between your fingertips and wrist is a third of the distance to your elbow. It's this divine proportion that has found its way into the thinking of a great many artists and designers throughout history.



A List Taken Apart

As computer monitors get larger and their resolutions get higher, many Web designers are tempted to make designs that fit just inside the now common 1024 × 800 pixel resolution.

When the online Web design magazine A List Apart launched a new design in 2005, much of the discussion around its design centered on the decision to use a fixed-width, 1024-pixel layout (**Figure 3.3**).



3.3 Dissecting A List Apart's structural grid

After the design was launched, I was lucky to interview A List Apart's designer Jason Santa Maria, and question him about the decision to drop support for window widths smaller than 1024 pixels. Santa Maria explained:

ALA (A List Apart) has always tried to be one of those sites at the front of the pack. We don't support 800 × 600 anymore, nor do we 640 × 480. Do you? People flipped when sites stopped supporting 640 × 480, now no one says a word. Things change. Trust me, you are going to see more sites stretching out their legs and putting their feet up.

—Jason Santa Maria

(www.stuffandnonsense.co.uk/archives/a_list_taken_apart.html)

Although the desire to design for the highest resolutions is understandable, it is important to remember that resolution does not always

equal the width of a visitor's Web browser. Visitors running Windows often keep their windows maximized to the full screen area, but many will be running their browsers with sidebars that contain bookmarks, browsing history, and more. These sidebars can quickly reduce horizontal screen space (**Figure 3.4**).

Note: Jakob Nielsen offers his advice on designing for flexibility at www.useit.com/alertbox/screen_resolution.html.

Mac users rarely extend their browsers to the full monitor width, so even when you consider the widescreen format of many Apple monitors, you can never trust that the browser window will be as wide as the screen area. Designer John Oxton explains:

I will continue to allow the 800 × 600 platform full access to my sites because until a month ago I had a screen that could only cope with a maximum of 1024 × 768 and with my browser side bar open, sites that allow access for 800 × 600 worked nicely.

—John Oxton (<http://joshuaink.com/blog/383/800-by-600>)



3.4 Reducing horizontal screen space

Fixed-pixel versus fluid width design

No doubt, the question of whether designers should attempt to develop their designs as fixed-width, liquid, or elastic layouts will continue to be debated for a long time to come.

Tommy Olsson has examined the advantages and disadvantages of each type of layout at www.autisticcuckoo.net/archive.php?id=2004/07/21/fixed-liquid-elastic.

Technically speaking, the *divine proportion* is a visual representation of the number Phi (pronounced “fi”), or the number 1.618033988749895. Don’t worry, for all practical purposes you won’t need to dust off your scientific calculator; when I mention the divine proportion, you’ll just need the first three numbers (rounded up to 1.62), and sometimes even fewer.

So, what does advanced mathematics have to do with design, and why am I talking about using a method for composition that has been around for centuries when working in a medium as young and dynamic as the Web?

Using the divine proportion as a guide when composing your layouts can help improve the balance of your designs, whether you are designing for a fixed-size piece of paper or a flexible browser window. The divine proportion has been used throughout the history of architecture, art, and design and is as important today as it was centuries ago.

The divine proportion for the Web

Whereas the canvas width in print design is determined by the width of the media—a newspaper, a magazine page, a conventional sheet of paper, or even a poster—the canvas size on the Web is not fixed. It is determined by the browser window width minus any open sidebars.

Arguments will no doubt continue to rage on between those who prefer to make fixed-width designs for what they think is the average minimum window width (nominally 800 pixels) and those who believe designs should be flexible to make the most of a visitor’s screen space, no matter what the window size.

Now you can put the theory into action by using the divine proportion to create harmonious layouts for both fixed-pixel width and flexible designs.

Fixed-pixel width design

For the first example, you will be creating a common fixed-pixel design that sits just inside an 800-pixel width browser window. For now you can forget about the actual window width or whether a visitor has any sidebars open. It has become common practice to shave off 30 pixels to allow for scroll bars, arriving at the width of 770 pixels so favored by many fixed-pixel aficionados.

Fire up your calculator, and divide 770 by 1.62. Unless you need new batteries, you should arrive at 475 pixels, a useful width for main content that also provides a comfortable line length for reading text onscreen. Now take those 475 pixels away from your total width. This will give you a sidebar width of 295 pixels, which is ample room for supplementary content and even a good-sized search input (**Figure 3.5**).

Many designers start their designs by deciding on an arbitrary width, often a width they stick to regardless of the content they are presenting. You can also work with the divine proportion in the other direction. Imagine that the site you are designing features a large branding image, perhaps one that has been carried over from an offline advertising campaign. Using the divine proportion, you can calculate the correct overall width from the dimensions of the image.

For this example, the image is 400 pixels wide. Multiply this by 1.62 to give you an overall design width of 648 pixels, slightly narrower than common layouts but one you can use to interesting effect (**Figure 3.6**).

You can then divide these columns using the same proportions to create an interesting microgrid to create a balanced structure for even the smallest design elements on your page (**Figure 3.7**).



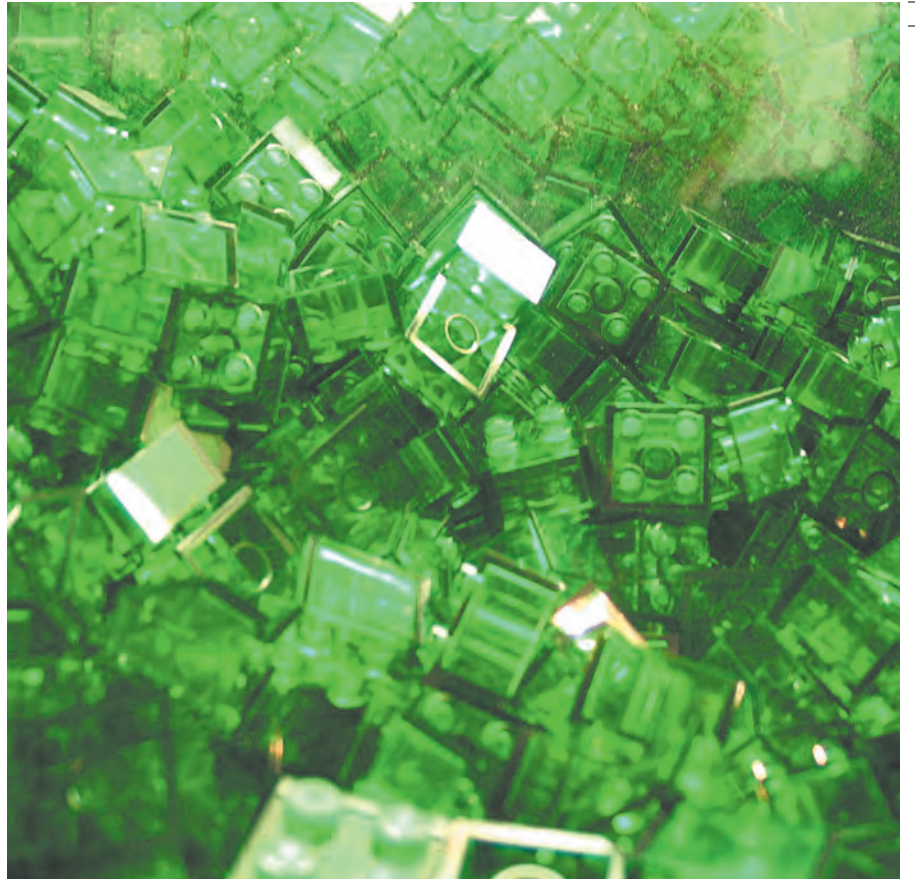
3.5 Establishing correct column width



3.6 Calculating layout width from an image



3.7 Creating microgrids



Rule Britannia

If pixel perfection is your thing, several tools and methods can help you ensure that your elements are lining up with the proportions of your grid.

You can apply CSS background images to almost any XHTML element, including block-level divisions, paragraphs, lists, or inline elements. For precision, add a background image of a ruler to an element (**Figure 3.8**).

Note: You can download a handy premade ruler image courtesy of Greg Storey at www.airbagindustries.com/archives/airbag/ruler.php.

Chris Pederick's Web Developer extension for Firefox contains both a handy ruler that you can drag over any element in your browser window and line guides that ensure your elements line up in the way you intended.

For a way to add measuring tools in any browser that supports JavaScript, you can create bookmarklets that use PNG image alpha-transparency to add a grid-pad image either to the `<body>` of the page or to a division overlaid onto your design (**Figure 3.9**).



3.8 Adding a ruler image

Note: Andy Budd's Layout Grid Bookmarklets are available for you to bookmark at www.andybudd.com/archives/2006/07/layout_grid_bookmarklet/.

Although these techniques and tools are not strictly part of grid-based design, they can prove extremely useful when placing your design elements in your layout grids.

SUBTRACTION GRID IMPOSITION

One easy way of ensuring that your designs stay on the grid when implementing them with markup and CSS is to use the CSS `background-image` property to keep your grid visible as you work.

Although visual tools including Macromedia Dreamweaver have long had features to place tracing images, Khoi Vinh has brought this technique back to the surface.

Note: You can find out more about Khoi Vinh's grid imposition method at www.subtraction.com/archives/2004/1231_grid_computi.php.



3.9 Overlaying a grid-pad image

Elastic design

Whereas on the Web the number and width of columns that are used in a design are often chosen arbitrarily, this has not been the case with the design of newspapers. In newspaper design, the column count and proportions have always been based on the width of the *measure*, the number of characters of text in a horizontal line. Because traditional broadsheet newspapers use a larger format, they can have more columns yet keep the width of the measure to a level that keeps reading comfortable.

Line length and readability are perhaps more important onscreen than they are on paper. Designs based on em units will shrink and grow as the visitor changes the font size in their browser, keeping line lengths to a more optimum width for easy reading.

This “elastic,” em-based design technique can prove extremely effective. It has been put to varied uses including designs planted in the CSS Zen Garden as well as the homepage of Mozilla.

For his Elastic Lawn (www.csszengarden.com/?CSSfile=/063/063.css) design for the CSS Zen Garden (**Figure 3.10**), designer Patrick Griffiths chose a width of 48 em for his layout. To use Phi to find the divine proportions for this design, divide 48 em by 1.62, and you get the following:

Overall content	Main content	Sidebar
48 em	29 em	19 em

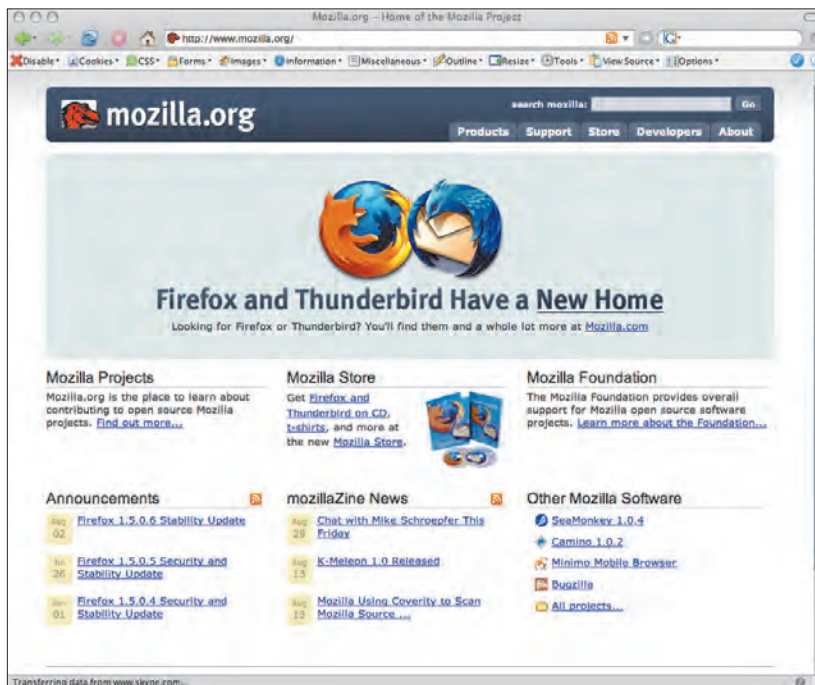
3.10 Patrick Griffiths’s em-based design, Elastic Lawn, at three different text sizes.



To give you the proportions for your design details, you can subdivide this grid again to create a set of fully elastic microgrids.

The homepage of Mozilla (**Figure 3.11**) shows great elastic design in action. Using ems allows the content area to shrink and grow when the visitor changes the size of the text. To ensure that text lines do not stretch beyond a comfortable width, the Mozilla designers have limited the maximum width of their content to 70 em:

```
body {  
  min-width: 610px;  
  margin: 20px; }  
  
#container {  
  max-width: 70em;  
  margin: 0 auto;  
}
```



3.11 www.mozilla.org

About em units

An *em* is a “relational” unit of measurement, which, when used on the Web, will change when a visitor either increases or decreases the default text size in her Web browser. Technically speaking, one em is equal to the distance that is horizontally equal to the type size. For example, 1 em of 12-point type is 12 points. You can find out more about em units and the measure, plus find an interesting follow-up discussion, at www.markboulton.co.uk/journal/comments/five_simple_steps_to_better_typography/.

A note about gutters

In Web design, gutters are not the spaces alongside the pavement that are filled with potato crisp packets and cigarette ends; instead, *gutters* are the gaps separating columns, and they prevent text or images in separate columns from butting into each other.

I prefer to add left and right margins or padding to a column’s child elements to create the effect of gutters, rather than applying margins or padding to the columns themselves. This avoids the need to use a box model hack when designing for Internet Explorer 5 and 5.5 for Windows (or Internet Explorer operating in “quirks” mode).

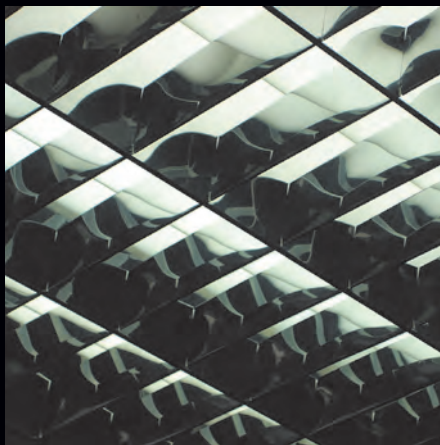
Using Mozilla's width as your starting point, divide its 70 em by 1.62 to establish the divine proportions for the elastic content area and sidebar. You get the following:

Overall content	Main content	Sidebar
70 em	43 em	27 em

Interestingly, Mozilla's designers have chosen to use percentages rather than ems for the widths of their columns. This allows their flexible design to shrink and grow when both the text and the window is resized:

```
#side {  
float: left;  
width: 23%; }  
  
#mainContent {  
float: right;  
width: 75%; }
```

Whether you choose to implement fully elastic layouts or a combination of elastic and fluid layouts, these techniques work equally as well as fixed-pixel designs when working with grids.



Fully flexible layouts

Grid system design has historically been based on fixed sizes. Designers working on the Web have had to adapt many traditional techniques to accommodate the variety of platforms, windows, and browsing environments on the Web.

It is this visitor control over the browsing environment that makes the Web so different from other forms of screen and print media. Any changes to text size, screen resolution, or the size of the browser window can impact a design enormously. The challenge is for Web designers to create a flexible design that will adapt to these changing conditions. It is here that a well-designed grid can often help you.

Giving up control over the width of a design can be a tough challenge for even seasoned Web designers who may be more comfortable creating fixed-pixel designs. Designing a grid using flexible percentages can create the most powerful layouts for your designs. A fluid grid will expand and collapse along with a visitor's window, and they make no assumptions about window size or resolution. This type of layout will also better accommodate visitors with open sidebars of browsing history or bookmarks.

Here once again, the divine proportion can prove to be a powerful tool for designing a flexible, asymmetrical grid. Starting with a 100 percent browser width, divide by 1.62 to give you the harmonious widths of both the main content area and the sidebar.

Overall content

100%

Main content

62%

Sidebar

38%



A few words about line length

Reading text on a computer screen is more difficult and tiring than reading on paper. Ensuring that your content can be read comfortably is essential if you want your readers to enjoy reading your content.

The *Web Style Guide: Basic Design Principles for Creating Web Sites*, by Patrick J. Lynch and Sarah Horton, says this: “Research shows that reading slows and retention rates fall as line length begins to exceed the ideal width, because the reader then needs to use the muscles of the eye and neck to track from the end of one line to the beginning of the next line. If the eye must traverse great distances on the page, the reader is easily lost and must hunt for the beginning of the next line.”

Restricting the length of any lines of text by using `max-width` is just one of the ways you can make your content more appealing.

Joe Clark has written an interesting article about line lengths when reading from a screen at <http://blog.fawny.org/2005/09/21/measures/>.

Now, to ensure that the line length of your text content does not become uncomfortable, you can choose to limit the overall width of your design. Following the example set by Mozilla, you might choose to limit your design to 70 em here by setting `max-width` on the `<body>` element:

```
body {  
width : 100%;  
max-width: 70em;
```

So far, all the grids you have explored have been based on the divine proportion or golden section. These are known as *asymmetrical* grids because of the proportions, or ratios, of their columns. Another highly useful grid design is already in use across many different mediums but is found less often on the Web. This is known as a *symmetrical* grid.

Rational grid design

Designers choose to work with grids for many reasons. Grids also help maintain consistency, particularly over a large number of pages. In a printed book, the number of pages is limited by practical considerations such as size and weight. The number of pages it can contain does not limit a Web site. Establishing this consistency of layout will help visitors navigate both individual pages and entire sites. This is one of the key goals of designing good Web usability (**Figure 3.12**).

Grids also help the designer organize branding, content, and navigation into spaces. With the enormous variety of objects now vying for a visitor’s attention, it is the precision and flexibility that comes from designing a solid symmetrical grid, based on a rational ratio, that can help a designer bring order to that potential chaos.

Symmetrical grids are divided into a number of equal width columns, such as six, eight, or sometimes even more columns, in what is known as a *rational* ratio. This symmetrical layout helps create balance across the design but at the same time gives the designer a greater number of layout options by enabling him to create “supercolumns” by allowing content to span across two or more columns.

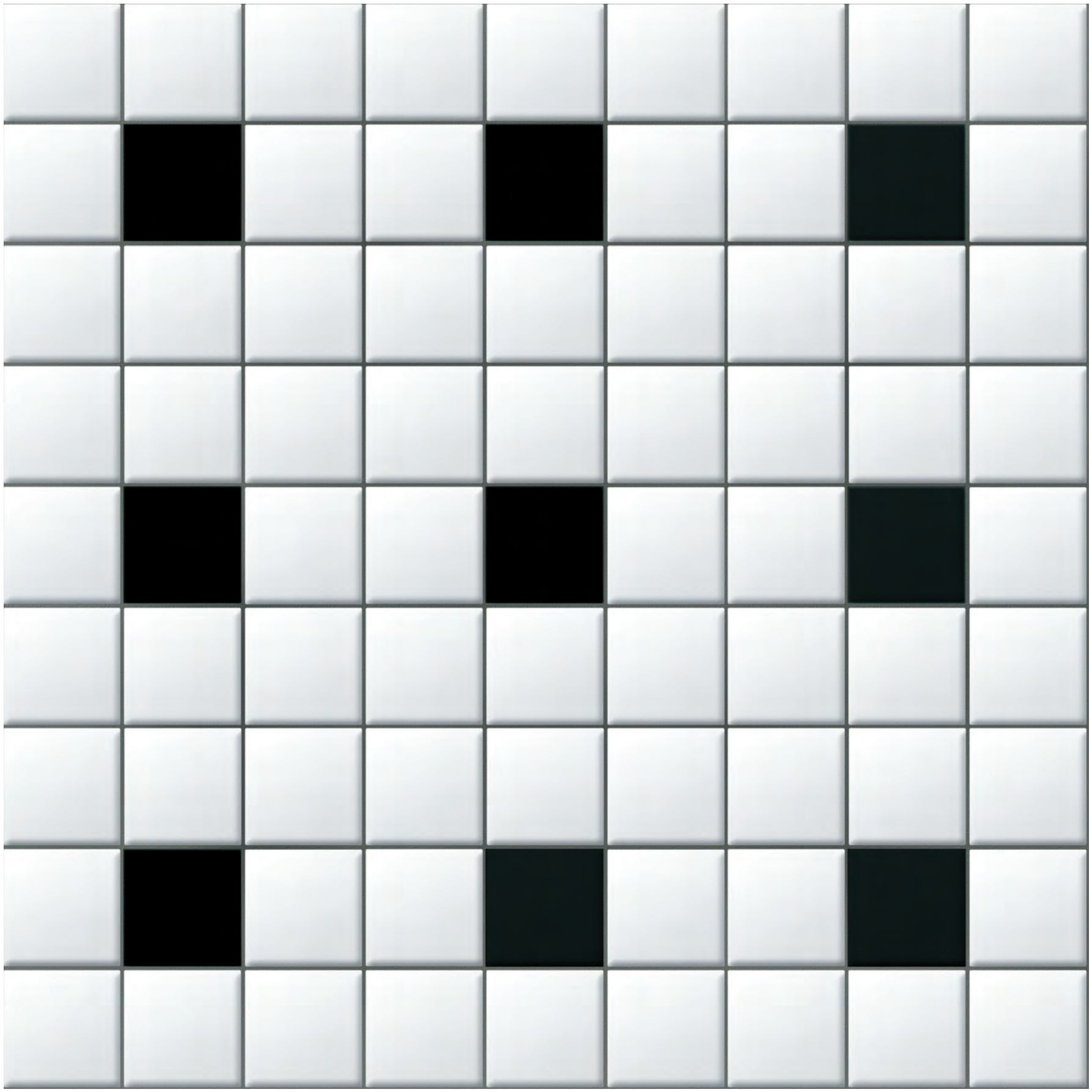
The ratios of the columns in a rational grid do not always end in a symmetrical or even a balanced design. You can create many interesting and unusual asymmetric designs by

starting with a symmetrical grid to give you a solid structure and the correct proportions for your elements.

One of my favorite layout techniques starts by first defining a grid and then creating rectangles and other shapes whose proportions are defined by the grid. Moving these elements inside the grid and even allowing them to overlap, often suggests interesting new ideas for layout.



3.12 Establishing consistency in layout at <http://web.burza.hr/>



Grids in Contemporary Web Design

For me, one of the most enjoyable parts of the creative process is the freedom to experiment. It can be fun and rewarding to push paint around a canvas or make cuttings from magazines and move them around a collage to see what happens.

Often the most exciting results can come from the most unexpected of combinations. If something doesn't work, it doesn't matter; scrunch up those pieces of paper, throw them into a corner, and start again. The worst thing that can happen is that your mother, partner, or office cleaner will complain about your blatant disregard for tidiness.

Many times my decisions over layout and proportions happen organically and are not backed by any logic—and almost never by mathematics. I'm sure as a designer that I'm not unusual in occasionally designing layouts in a happy-go-lucky, feel-good fashion. Only much later in my design career did I see the enormous creative opportunities that designing with grids can offer.

Grid design has become a popular topic of conversation among Web designers, and many are turning to grids to help them make stunning and distinct designs. I want to share with you some of my personal favorite sites that have made strong use of grid-based design techniques.

Subtraction

One of the most talked about grid-based designs is the striking, black-and-white Subtraction. In addition to using stark imagery and minimalist typography, designer Khoi Vinh has used a powerful eight-column grid to underpin every aspect of his design (**Figure 3.13**).

In many grid-based designs, the grid takes a backseat. In Subtraction, the grid positively climbs into the front seat and grabs hold of the steering wheel (**Figure 3.14**). Every aspect



3.13 www.subtraction.com

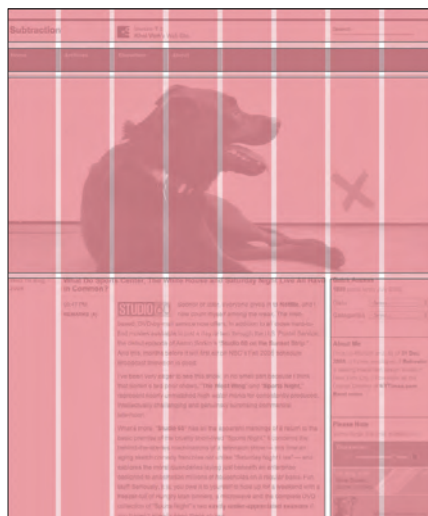
of the design is bound to the grid with almost obsessive precision. The grid dictates the size and position of each of the elements in the branding area, including the logo and the search input. Navigation links also align perfectly to the grid structure, and it is because of this attention to detail that the links are not overshadowed by the large image below them, an image that spans all eight columns (**Figure 3.15**).

Subtraction's eight columns also combine to form four supercolumns to add focus to the articles in the main content. The reader's eye flows immediately to the main content.

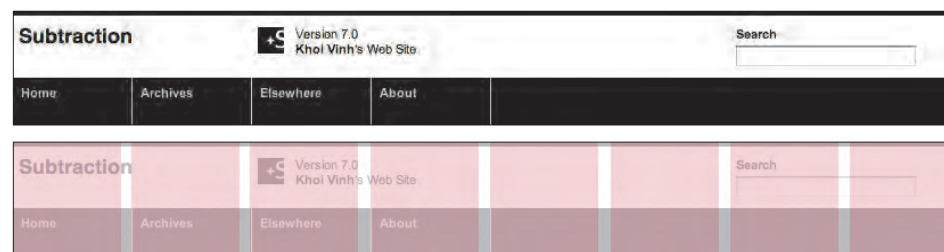
Vinh added flow to what could have easily become a rigid layout by allowing his titles to span an additional column to the left. This highlights the publication time and the number of reader remarks (**Figure 3.16**).

Many designers and their clients leave no pixel untouched. Subtraction leaves much of the left column empty, and it uses white space to allow its content room to breathe. With so much content being presented on a single page, Subtraction's design could easily have become overwhelming to the reader. Vinh has prevented this information overload by cleverly using vertical height.

Subtraction continues to use its eight-column grid in even more surprising ways as you scroll down the page. The layout changes when the focus moves from internal to external content, and these two areas are cleverly divided by another large column-spanning image (**Figure 3.17**).



3.14 Dissecting the Subtraction grid



3.15 Navigating Subtraction

Vinh uses shorter fields to present his links to external sites, and every one of the eight columns features his content: dates, star ratings, link information, and navigation tools.

Note: You'll be amazed at the intricate design details that Khoi Vinh has created at www.subtraction.com.

Subtraction succeeds because of its designer's understanding of grid-based design and how this knowledge has allowed him to present his content in a structured and ordered way.



3.16 Remarking on Subtraction

Categories							
Art	37	Design	221	New York	52	Subtraction	93
Baseball	8	Macintosh	148	News	91	Technology	231
Behavior	58	Miscellaneous	89	Personal	104	Television	43
Books	24	Movies	75	Photography	7	Travel	42
Business	31	Music	81	Politics	83	Web Design	108
Comics	29	Net Culture	131	Pop Culture	120	Weblogs	50

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3.17 Dividing and subtracting



3.18

www.airbagindustries.com

Airbag Industries

Compared to the overt complexity of Subtraction, the design of Airbag Industries seems almost understated (**Figure 3.18**). At first glance, it might be difficult to notice the impact that its design grid makes (**Figure 3.19**).

For Airbag Industries, designer and airship enthusiast Greg Storey based his design on a subtle, four-column, symmetrical grid. Two of the columns have been combined to hold the main content for the articles. The central column, adorned with a Hawaiian beauty and palm trees, breaks a common three-column convention by drawing your attention to the central portion of the page because of its background color and imagery.

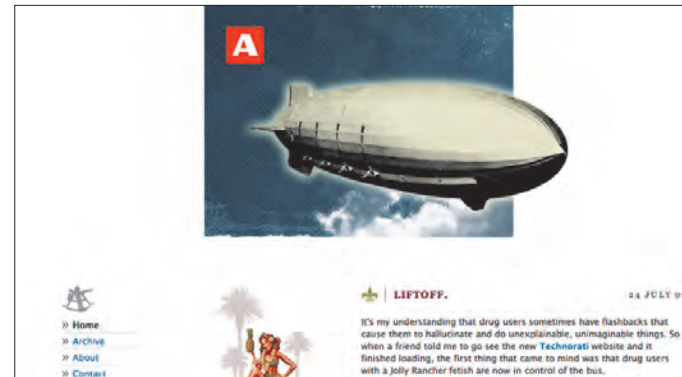
When I first saw Airbag Industries, I was initially irritated because the tops of the three columns were not aligned vertically, with the left column starting 60 pixels above the other two columns. Later I noticed that the positioning of this left column visually connects the airship image with the content below (**Figure 3.20**).

One of the design details I particularly love about Airbag Industries is that on the homepage, Storey has used the proportions of his grid to determine the size of the airship image.



3.19

Investigating the Airbag grid



3.20 Left: The irregular alignment of the tops of the columns leads your eye into the content. Right: The effect is lost in my modified version where the columns are straightened.

Look closely, and you will see that not only does the width of the image match the width of two of his columns but also that the airship itself, floating gracefully out of its bounding rectangle, is the width of those two columns (**Figure 3.21**).

The attention to the grid continues to the bottom of the page where the bear image also matches perfectly the width of the center column (**Figure 3.22**). On a page containing this much content I would have liked to see that this image also linked to the top of the page, but even without a link, the image bleeding off the bottom of the window is a neat way to let the visitor know they have reached the end of the content. I'm not so sure I agree with Storey's choice of alternative text for this bear image, but that can be a conversation for another day:

```

```

For me, what makes this site interesting is how it uses the design grid consistently across all its pages and how it uses the grid in different ways.

Note: Take a ride on Greg Storey's airship at www.airbagindustries.com.

I find the design decisions Storey has made and his clever use of a simple, symmetrical four-column grid intriguing. It demonstrates clearly that designing to a grid can suggest subtle ideas that may not have otherwise presented themselves.



3.21 Matching the width of two columns



3.22 Reaching the bottom of the page

Jeff Croft

Of all the sites that rebooted for CSS Reboot, one in particular, Jeff Croft's, stood out (**Figure 3.23**)—not because of lively, colorful imagery, rounded corners, or gradient backgrounds, but because of its solid use of a design grid (**Figure 3.24**).

Note: CSS Reboot is a community Web design event where Web designers and developers from all over the world launch their CSS-based redesigns simultaneously. You can find out more and participate in a future event at www.cssreboot.com.

Many of the designs that appeared first on CSS Reboot this year divided areas of content into horizontal bands or fields. Croft's use of light text against a darker background, combined with his bands, give his design a strong horizontal focus.

Croft again uses a four-column, symmetrical grid. The main content in horizontal panels, both above and below the fold, spans two columns. This arrangement goes from the top to the bottom of the homepage. Although the horizontal stripes reduce the visual impact of vertical columns, your eyes still follow their invisible lines.



3.23 www2.jeffcroft.com



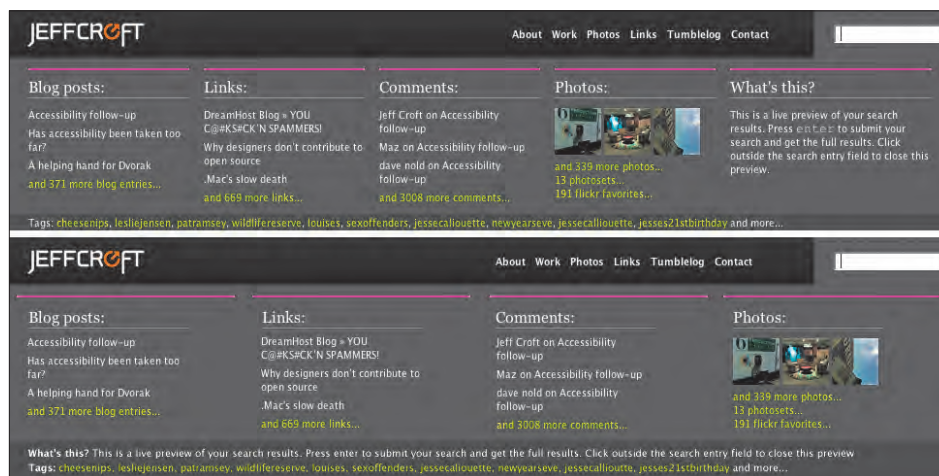
3.24 Rebooting with the solid grid

Croft's grid loses some of its structure in what is perhaps one of the most technically impressive parts of the site. The technical achievement of the site's live search draws together search results not only from his articles but also from comments, links, and even photos on Flickr. In the live search area, the results are divided into five unequal columns. These columns use a different ratio to any others used throughout the site, and the layout would be much stronger if it used the same four-column grid and moved the explanation text to underneath the results (**Figure 3.25**).

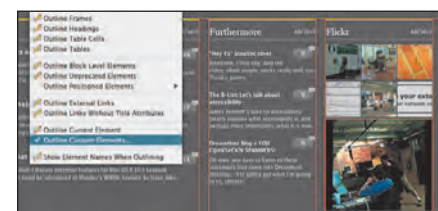
Digging deeper into Croft's CSS, I was interested to see that whereas I prefer to use margins or padding on child elements to simulate gutters, Croft chooses to use margins on his columns.

You can see this by using the Outline Custom Elements feature of the Web Developer extension to outline the divisions (**Figure 3.26**).

Note: Dig deeper and learn more about how Jeff Croft implemented his design at <http://www2.jeffcroft.com>.



3.25 Above: Original search area layout. Below: Modified layout making use of the grid.



3.26 Using the Web Developer extension to highlight divisions

Veerle's Blog

Whereas Airbag Industries has a light and airy feel, Veerle Pieters' Blog uses dark gray background colors to bring her content into focus (**Figure 3.27**). This is helped by the use of a strong four-column, symmetrical grid that paradoxically results in an asymmetric rather than symmetric design (**Figure 3.28**).



3.27 Symmetric grid with an asymmetric design at <http://veerle.duoh.com>



3.28 Designing to the grid

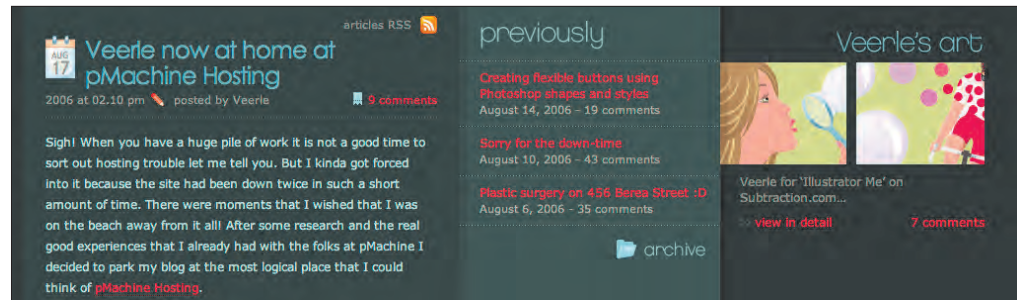
While the bright branding illustration spans three of the four columns, two columns join to form a supercolumn to hold the most recently published article.

On first seeing this site, I was confused why Pieters chose a lighter gray background for her previously links to older articles, because my eye was immediately drawn to that column, rather than to the content of the main article. Visiting this site on a regular basis has made this concern fade because the lighter color provides a useful way to emphasize the column structure of all the content on the page (**Figure 3.29**).

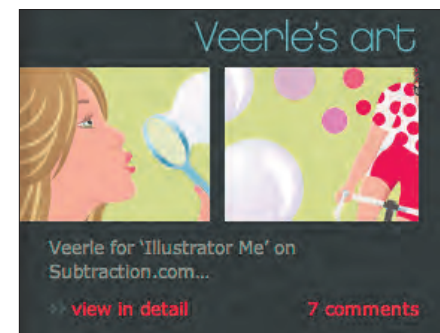
One of the design features I particularly enjoy about Veerle's blog is the way she has used a subtle shadow to emphasize the border between the third and fourth columns. Instead of overtly dividing the layout at this point, Pieters cleverly uses images to join these columns in a subtle but effective way. This adds movement to the design by drawing your eyes across all the columns (**Figure 3.30**).

Throughout its design, Veerle's blog is playful with the four-column grid, switching effortlessly between content that spans two or sometimes even three columns. This design succeeds not only by basing the layout on a grid but by also not being defined or constrained by it.

Note: Explore the subtle ways that Veerle Pieters plays with grid design at <http://veerle.duoh.com/>.



3.29 Emphasizing columns with color



3.30 Drawing your eyes across columns



Looking for Grids Outside the Web

Grids existed long before the Web. Though I won't be around to find out for sure, I'll lay bets that grids will continue to influence designers long after the Web has transformed into some future incarnation.

One day I'm sure that all the clothes we wear will be made of shiny material and that we will eat a three-course dinner in three tiny pills. Over the second course, the roast beef and Yorkshire pudding pill, I'll wager that we'll look back on today's Web and smile as we remember when Ajax was as shiny as our trousers. But for now, the Web is young, and we still have much to learn.

I hope future generations will learn lessons from what we are doing today. In the same way, we can look at media that has been around for far longer than the Web to gain some of our inspiration. Many of these sources of inspiration are all around us. Some of them may even drop through your letterbox or be left at the end of your driveways every day. I'm talking about your daily newspaper.

Learning from the daily paper

Whether you live in Baltimore, Bournemouth, Beirut, or Bangkok, newspapers are similar in some ways and different in others. All newspapers share a common substrate, and their text and images are made from millions of tiny dots of ink. Whether you read a highbrow broadsheet or a tacky supermarket tabloid, ultimately newspapers will be discarded, be recycled, or end their days lining the bottom of a rabbit's cage.

Aside from their enormously important job of lining pet cages the world over, newspapers provide a source of inspiration for the grid-hungry designer. The differences in newspaper grids and the many ways they use grids to create so many varied results can be a fascinating subject to study.



Using traditional eight-column design

Many broadsheet newspapers share a traditional, eight-column grid design that is possible because of their larger paper size. This complex grid enables these publications to present a large amount of text content in a strictly ordered fashion to maintain readability and to allow their pages to be folded into quadrants. This has proved particularly important to readers on crowded commuter trains who every day need to combine their morning fix of news with an exercise in origami.

In this type of design and in many others, the number of columns that a story spans will be dictated by the importance of that story, and often this hierarchy is visually displayed in imaginative ways.

To visually enforce this hierarchy and to aid readability, a story's headline will always span the same number of columns as the body copy of the story. This column spanning can be extended to images and to the masthead, nameplate, and even advertising space that has been sold on the page. Although the traditional grid goes back many years, many of the design devices it creates can be updated for the Web on sites that present large amounts of body text.

In your design for the Web, it is unlikely that you would ever present your content in as many as eight narrow columns. However, it is this flexibility of using and combining this number of columns that can lead to impressive visual results. On the next pages are four alternative content layouts based upon the grid used by the *Hindustan Times*.

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Using contemporary six-column design

There has been a progressive decline in the popularity of the traditional eight-column newspaper grid and a widespread adoption of a simpler, six-column design. This switch has not limited the number of design variations that can be based on this layout, however, as a look at many of the inspiring newspaper designs from around the world today will demonstrate.

From across the United States, Europe, the Middle East, and beyond, millions of people consume their daily news from pages that have been designed using six columns. Many of the core design devices from traditional eight-column grids remain, and often these devices have been given new life.

Column spanning remains a key design technique and some newspapers, including *Die Welt* from Germany, use headlines that span multiple columns and are also center justified.

In many cases, the six-column design is supplemented by a seventh, slightly wider column on either the far left or the far right. This column often contains information about news items that will be found on the inside pages, not unlike the sidebar found on almost every content-rich Web page. On the next pages are four alternative content layouts based upon the grid used by France's *Le Figaro*.



Using alternative newspaper layouts

Neither the eight-column grid nor the common six-column grid will suit every type of publication, language, or culture. In many examples, an even number of columns has given way to an uneven number such as five or seven columns. In many parts of the world and in many publications, the number of columns does not change many of the underlying principles of either newspaper or grid design.

Whether the front page is largely visual as in the example of Ukraine's *Segodnya* or text-based as in Belgium's *De Morgen*, many of the same principles of visual hierarchy, column spanning, and variation in headline type sizes and faces apply.

Of course, not every newspaper uses a grid in ways that might be familiar to Western readers. The chaotic layout of Japan's *Asahi Shimbun* might seem strange to Western eyes and is largely dictated by the Japanese language and its vertical text flow. It would be dangerous for Web designers in Western cultures to assume that all Web design should follow the same, predominantly Western model. The Web is a medium with a global reach.

Note: Newseum at www.newseum.org is a site devoted to reproducing newspaper front pages from around the world every day. Typically it contains more than 500 pages from almost 50 countries.

Internationalization will become only more important in the future, as more people outside of the so-called developed nations get online. Looking at how news content is presented in other languages, character sets, and orientations will give you some idea of the challenges ahead when designing Web sites that have a truly global reach. On the next pages are four alternative content layouts based upon the grid used by Japan's *Asahi Shimbun*.

The long way round

After a journey around the world of newspapers, it's time to bring grids a little closer to home, to the homepage of a popular news site to be precise. This is no time to put your feet up, because in the next section, you will see how using a grid derived from a newspaper can work with Newsvine.



Bringing New Grids to Web Design

You have learned the importance of grids in creating visual order. Rather than leading to repetitive designs, they can inspire a wide variety of designs that present information in a structured way while at the same time maintaining the designer's ability to surprise the reader. It is important to remember that no matter how detailed the grid, it is always the designer who is in control, whether the end result of the design is a personal Web site, blog, portfolio, or a widely circulated newspaper that is read by hundreds of thousands of people.

So far you have been concerned with the use of grids in traditional news media. What about news outlets on the Web?

Breaking news

Launched in 2005, Newsvine (**Figure 3.31**) has become a popular news outlet with more than 400,000 unique visitors per day reading and discussing its news. Newsvine's topics include politics, sports, and technology. Its sources include mainstream news agencies such as Associated Press and its own member-contributed links to stories, articles, and blog posts.

The designers of Newsvine's homepage have succeeded in bringing a large amount of information and links into the site's layout, which is fixed and centered at 932 pixels.

I was interested to see the effect that bringing a popular, contemporary newspaper grid to Newsvine would have. In this section, you will dissect the layout of the current Newsvine homepage design, modify and remake the design, and see the effects of merging it with some common newspaper layout techniques. You will see the results of the following:

- Setting a baseline grid
- Creating columns, supercolumns, and gutters
- Using microgrids to give balance to design details
- Making images flexible in size



3.31 www.newsvine.com



3.32 Highlighting columns and gutters in the current Newsvine homepage

First, let's break down the layout of the homepage by overlaying a semitransparent layer to highlight its columns and gutters (**Figure 3.32**).

The proportions of this layout and the center column are dictated by the size of the lead story's image. The left column is sized to suit the minimal content that it contains, and the right column fills the remaining horizontal space. "Below the fold," only the center and right columns are combined, and they have been divided to form two more symmetrical columns that hold categorized links to other parts of the site.

Leading with the grid

Designing with grids is more than simply creating columns; it is about the horizontal as well as the vertical. Whereas in print design, this horizontal baseline grid will often be determined by the size and leading of your text, on the Web the fluidity of layout and text sizes make it difficult to control every aspect of a grid in both dimensions.

When you do establish a series of horizontal baselines, you can improve the horizontal flow of your content and create a cleaner, more constant feel. For this realign of Newsvine, I have chosen a contemporary five-column grid that would be ideally implemented using a flexible, liquid layout. I have deliberately chosen to work on a wider-format canvas because I find I am less tempted by the urge to shoehorn content into a narrow width that might be better suited to a fixed-pixel design.

The baseline grid I have chosen to use has been set to 100 pixels between each horizontal line; it's not too detailed to be restrictive or too open to be of less use in aligning the design elements. It is this five-column layout and the baseline grid that will provide the backbone of the design (**Figure 3.33**).

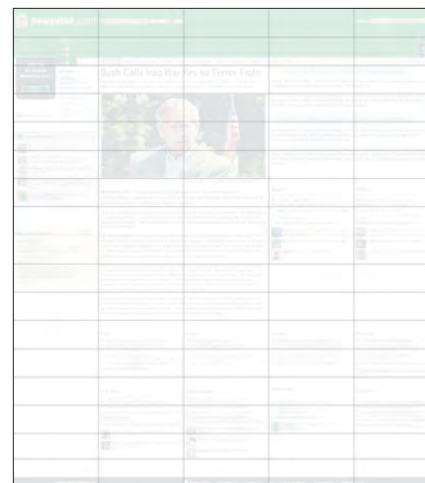
Note: I prefer using Macromedia Fireworks for making my page layouts because it enables me to use its frames, originally intended for making animated GIF images, to store variations of my designs within a single design file.

This completed grid can be combined with a colored overlay to show the structure of the columns more clearly. For the area that will contain the lead story, two of the columns will be combined to form one supercolumn. Combining columns when content requires a wider area is one of the aspects that makes working with grids in this way so flexible (**Figure 3.34**).

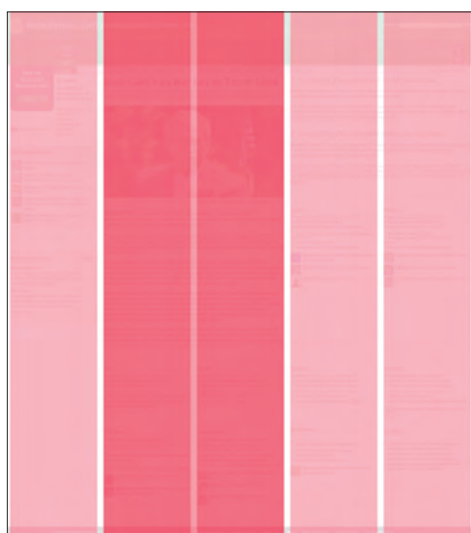
In a slight departure from the existing Newsvine design, I have chosen to feature the full text of the lead story plus more information from two further articles. This content will also span two columns. The next task is to block out these areas and add gutters where the supercolumns will be subdivided (**Figure 3.35**).

Blocking out different types of content by using varying opacities to indicate their relative importance or hierarchy is a useful way to create a diagram of a visitor's possible path around a page. In the illustration shown here, I have blocked out the branding and navigation areas in black, and stronger colors indicate the most important content. This provides a highly visual structure into which to flow text and images. It also helps illustrate which content will likely appear above the fold, in this case set at 700 pixels from the top of the design and indicated by a dotted white line (**Figure 3.36**).

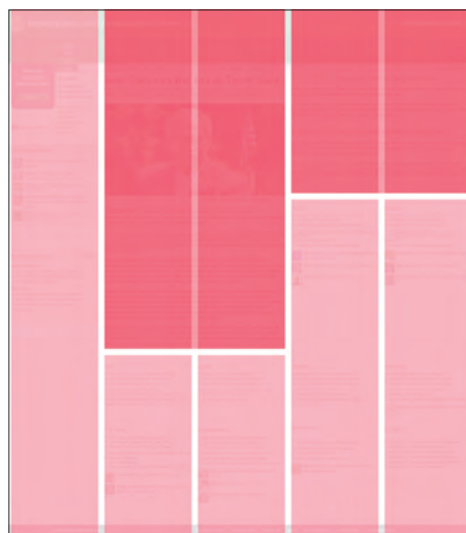
Note: Judging the precise position of the fold is an almost impossible task. The height of the *viewport* (the area of a Web browser through which you view the page), and therefore the fold, will vary with so many factors, including the screen resolution and window size and the size and quantity of an open browser's toolbars. If it is important that particular content appears above the fold for most users, it is important to test your design in as many different browsing environments as you can.



3.33 Providing the backbone with a baseline grid



3.34 Combining columns



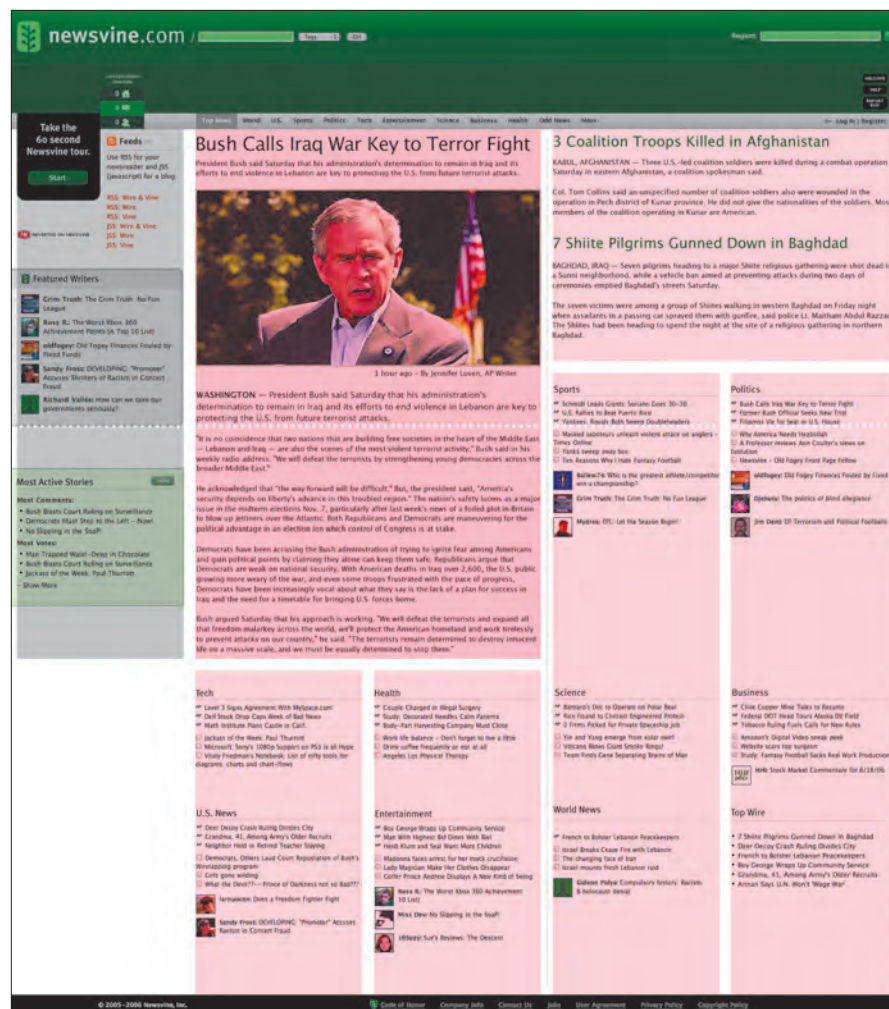
3.35 Blocking out content areas



3.36 Indicating the fold with a dotted line at 700px

With the content areas now mapped out, it is time to import the content. I have used actual text and images from Newsvine as they appeared on the site at the time so you can compare the grid-based design and the live site with less difficulty.

Using column overlays as a guide takes the guesswork out of aligning content to a grid, and the baselines makes it far easier to create a more balanced vertical alignment of the elements (Figure 3.37).



3.37 Laying column structure over the design

Exposing dirty little secrets

The devil is in the detail, or so some say. With the main content flowed into the grid, it is time to learn more about how working with a grid can help you with many of the fine details of your designs.

When you have established the main proportions of a grid, you can further subdivide each of its modules, using either the same proportions or perhaps the divine proportion or the rule of thirds, if you prefer. This lets you precisely position elements within each module inside microgrids, which will help you keep your designs balanced right down to the finest details.

Zoom into the branding area at the top of this design. By overlaying the grid onto the design, you will see how a simple microgrid has helped to neatly arrange the various tools under the logo (**Figure 3.38**).

To achieve this, I have divided this module into four evenly spaced columns. These microcolumns not only ensure that the conversation tracker and the Take the 60 Second Newsvine Tour panel are well positioned, but they also influenced their widths (which are slightly different from how they appear on Newsvine) so they match this new grid.

You may also have noticed that the size of the logo has increased to match the width of the grid module containing it.

Engaging in news manipulation

Having brought the full content of the lead story onto this page, I had to find a new position for the story's summary. Taking inspiration from newspaper design, the main headline and the summary now appear above the main image. This works especially well in leading your eye to the story and brings content above the fold.

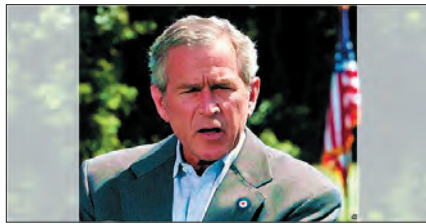
Zooming back into the design, you will see how working with a baseline grid can be extremely effective for working with the horizontal alignment of your elements. For example, the paragraph of text to the right is aligned with the top of the main image, creating balance within the design. Although horizontal alignments can be difficult to maintain when the quantity and size of text in the browser window are likely to vary, striving to achieve good horizontal as well as vertical structure should be an important part of your design (**Figure 3.39**).



3.38 Arranging site tools with the help of a microgrid



3.39 Achieving horizontal alignment can often be difficult on the Web



3.40 Using backgrounds to create elastic images

Keeping you in the picture

If you have been paying really close attention, you may have noticed that in this realign, the lead-story image is wider than in the original. Like Newsvine, many sites are developed with fixed-pixel widths, mainly because they use either inline images or branding graphics that are a fixed size. In flexible, liquid layouts, fixed-sized images can cause headaches for designers because they remain of a fixed size no matter what the flexible layout is doing around them. Unlike vector graphics, bitmap images rarely scale effectively and although you can resize images with percentages or em units, none of the current techniques for flexible images is perfect in every respect. To obtain a wider image for a flexible layout at a larger window width and a narrower image at smaller window sizes, try this CSS `background-image` workaround technique.

For this example, I have placed the image as the background to an added `<div>` element. I left the width of this division flexible with only its height and right and left margins set:

```
div.lead_image {  
  height : 300px;  
  margin : 0 10px; }
```

To make this technique effective, create an image that is slightly wider than will be needed. It is important to ensure that its main focus remains in the center. You can attach this image as a background image using CSS; it should be positioned centrally (note that if the browser window is enlarged, such as it is in Figure 3.40, more of the background image is revealed):

```
div.lead_image {  
  height : 300px;  
  margin : 0 10px;  
  background : #fff url(lead_image.jpg) no-repeat center; }
```

If the browser window is enlarged, more of the background image is revealed (**Figure 3.40**).

In sites where these images may change dynamically and may even be populated from a database, attaching a background image to a `<div>` element in an external style sheet might not be possible. You can still utilize this technique by using a combination of external and inline CSS. (Although I would ordinarily advise that you remove all styling information from your document and place it in external CSS files, this is one situation where you can justify using inline styles.):



3.41 Completing the Newsvine realign

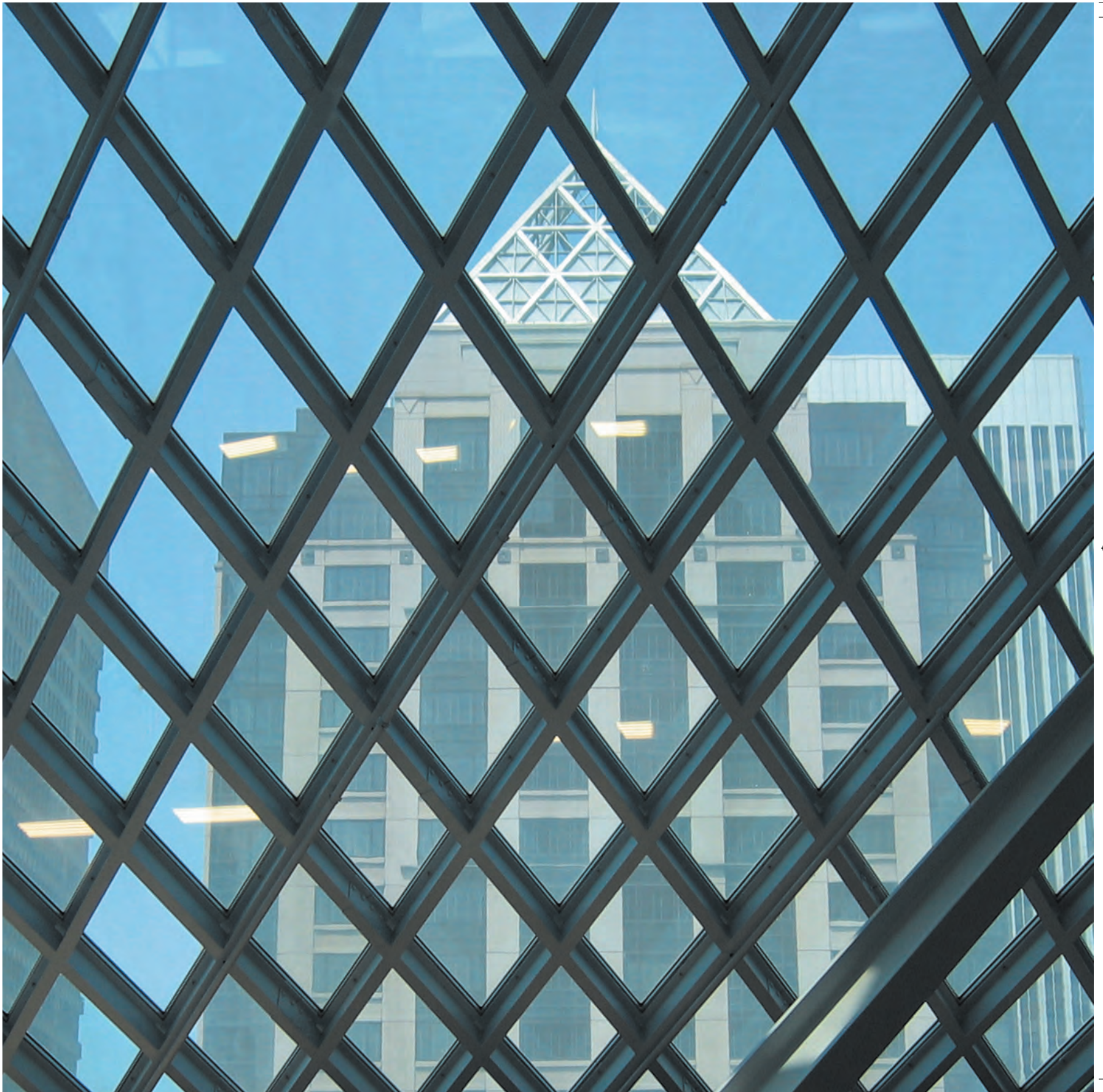
```
<div class="lead_image" style="background : #fff url(lead_image.jpg)
no-repeat center;">
```

```
div.lead_image {
height : 300px;
margin : 0 10px; }
```

Hold the front page

With all the pieces in place, the press is gathered in the briefing room, and fingers are poised over camera shutters. The grid-based realign can be revealed (**Figure 3.41**). This reworking of the already impressive Newsvine demonstrates that creating a solid grid and using it for the basis of your page layouts down to the smallest of details will pay real dividends. For more experiments in flexible width and elastic image techniques, go to www.clagnut.com/blog/268/ and www.htmldog.com/articles/elasticdesign/demo.

In the next section, I share some of my favorite techniques, including how to set the mood for your designs, use paper and virtual scrapbooks, work more efficiently with photos and images, and extend your browser with helpful tools. Perhaps most important, I'll encourage you to look outside the Web for your design inspiration.



Finding Inspiration in Unexpected Places

Last year, I was visiting the Tate Modern art gallery in London with a friend who is a fellow Web designer. Walking the galleries and browsing the shelves of the Tate's bookshop, I was surprised to learn from him that he rarely looks beyond the Web for his design inspiration. Instead, he keeps a bookmarks folder full of sites he admires for their layouts, navigation, and other design details. Later, munching a muffin in the gallery's café and musing over what he told me, I realized my friend might not be uncommon among Web designers in his approach.

Doing a homepage makeover

One late night last year, finding it hard to go to sleep, I sat up watching reruns of home-decorating shows on UKTVStyle, a UK satellite TV channel that shows wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling home makeovers.

On the schedule that night there was the glossy and extravagant *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, which was more about demolishing and rebuilding than making over. There was *Changing Rooms*, where two couples decorate a room in each other's houses, with the help of designers who have not spoken to the couple for whom they are designing. And lastly there was *House Invaders*, a typically British low-budget affair where the team decorates your entire house in one day using only leftover materials you have stored in your shed.

In between all the paint effects, MDF (a.k.a. particle board), and cans of frosting spray, I spotted a show presented by a flamboyant interior designer, Lawrence Llewellyn Bowen. Unlike many of its rivals, this makeover show took the viewer through the process of designing the room; they started with the client brief, visited inspirational locations, explained design decisions, and finally performed the "reveal"—that moment where ordinarily sane people leap up and down whooping (in the United States) or quietly sobbing "It's so lovely; isn't it, Norman?" (in Britain).

After several hours of nonstop designing, painting, whooping, and sobbing, I spotted several parallels between these home makeover shows and Web design.

4 Tartan

MINISKIRT WITH BLACK BELT



WOODEN TOOTHBRUSH AND GLASS HOLDER.

200 10 Greek islands for 10 very different holidays. Choose your favourite for a unique summer break

209 The canny traveller. Latest news and tips from our travel editor

33 Win a dream holiday, £15,000 in cash or £20,000 to spend as you like

199 Our exclusive wine offer

206 GH by post. Money off a Singer sewing machine and a discount at The Cotswolds Company

209 Special events for you

210 Treat yourself and raise money to beat cancer

★213 FREE! CLARINS DAY CREAM WORTH £25 WHEN YOU BOOK A LUXURIOUS FACIAL

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SCOOP!

Matalan is up to date with the blue trend. We love the vintage-style kitchen accessories, including bowls, £1.50, bedlinen (double-duvet sets, £17) and cotton towels, from £2.95 each. Call (01695) 552400, matalan.co.uk.

6 Skinny belts

ORANGE WITH GOLD-TRIM BUCKLE; PURPLE WITH GOLD-TRIM BUCKLE

Fresh thinking
Salad chiller bowl with servers, £8.95

Picnic mix

Inject some fun into your outdoor dining

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FEBRUARY 2006

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THE PHILIP STEIN MAGNETIC WATCH

What is it? A watch with a specially designed magnetic chip to 'protect your' electromagnetic field against electronic pollution', which mobile phones and computers are said to produce. Oprah and Madonna are fans.

Tester's verdict: 'I was sceptical about the claims (more energy, better sleep), especially with such a hefty price tag, but after three months of wearing it, I'm sleeping a lot better.'

Price: Ernest Jones and Goldsmiths shops nationwide, from £325.

10 ways to look and feel amazing in July & August

BEAUTY SCHOOL

I'm all out of advice on frankincense and myrrh, but I can help you out with a little seasonal gold. Gold make-up is not, repeat not, the same as bronzer – you're not trying to imply that you've stepped off a plane from sunnier climes. It's gold you want, not orange, bronze or any other

same time – ie, eyes and cheeks (try the same with blue or green, however, and you'll see what I mean), but only if neither is heavy-handed. Think gold dusting rather than bullion. Apply as little as possible of your regular base, then lightly brush gold eye shadow on the lid, getting

brown. On cheeks, apply a liquid or powder where the light catches your cheekbones, going out in a line towards the top of your ear, or along where your cheekbones would be if you hadn't had that last mince pie. **HP**

Les Papillons, Poudre Delicate,

Extreme Makeover: Home Edition

Most Web site redesign projects follow a similar approach to *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*: “This site is not good enough anymore,” shouts the client. “Let’s tear it down and rebuild it bigger, glossier, and with more appliances than we had before!”

You can start whooping now if you like, but this approach is really rather sad. There are probably at least a few good features of your old site that you will lose in your desire for something new. There is also the high cost of bulldozing the site and rebuilding it, not to mention the inconvenience and hard work involved.

And don’t forget your visitors; they will be more than a little confused when they turn up to your house and find that it is unrecognizable from the last time they visited. They might even drive straight by and mistakenly pull up outside your neighbor’s property, the house farther down the street, without concrete Roman pillars.

Changing Rooms

Watching the shocked faces of *Changing Rooms* contestants as they see their cozy living room transformed into an airport lounge or Spanish-style bar has a curious appeal. In contrast, the idea of a designer creating a new look without considering what is best for a client does not.

I can imagine that in the commercial real world away from the telly, few of the *Changing Rooms* designers would be asked back to decorate another room if they worked in that way. Designers should never stick to their own preconceived ideas of what would be best for a client. They should always consider their client’s needs and the needs of the people who will use that room regularly. Then again, you may have clients or managers who are like those on *House Invaders*—clients who expect you can create an entire site for very little money using leftover markup and CSS!

After several hours on the sofa in the company of carpenters, decorators, and electricians, not forgetting of course the ever-smiling hosts, I drifted off to sleep thinking about whether some of the processes that I had seen could be effective in Web design.

Facing page: Magazine cuttings from my scrapbook containing inspiration for interfaces and layouts

Introducing mood boards

One of the techniques that interested me while watching Bowen's show was that in the weeks *before* redecorating, Bowen asked his clients to make a mood board to help in designing their new room.

In interior design, *mood boards* can be a highly effective way to bring together inspirational images, ideas, and materials on a large piece of mat or mounting board and to see how well they work in combination. It asks that the client consider the mood they want to create for their room, considering not only the visual aesthetic but also the emotions that the colors, lighting, and textures can create. An interior designer might ask his client, "Are you looking for a modern, high-tech look with stripped floors, minimal décor, and hard, shiny surfaces? Or are you aiming for a warmer, more organic feeling, with warm colors and a range of soft textures?"

The benefits of client and stakeholder participation can be enormous in any design process. If you are able to involve the key people for whom you're designing a site, actively challenging them to participate in the predesign phase, creating mood boards for their project can help reduce your time spent on exploratory ideas.

Working closely with the client or stakeholders will also help you reduce the risk of them getting a nasty *Changing Rooms*-style surprise. It has been my perhaps refreshing experience that helping everyone understand the benefits of creating a mood board and then encouraging them to participate in making one has always paid dividends.

Using mood boards for Web design

Mood-board design elements can come from almost anywhere. If the goal is a modern, high-tech look, the mood board might contain cuttings from magazines, such as adverts for shiny cars, high-tech gadgets, or brushed stainless steel appliances. Participants might have glued scraps of shiny fabrics or aluminum foil to the mood board. There may even be photographs of giant silver robots from 1950s sci-fi movies.

On the other hand, if the aim is for a fresh pastel look, the mood board might be filled with photographs of cottage gardens, a pastel paint chart from a hardware store, or soft cotton fabric samples. You might even encourage participants to make creamy marks on the board using oil pastels to see how well the different colors and textures combine.

Facing page: A mood board containing magazine cuttings from my scrapbook

2

linens are sold off the roll, and a selection of lighting and ceramics is also available.

4 **Taken from original** watercolours by Joanna Twinn, these greetings cards show pretty scenes of a vegetable garden, potting shed, doorstep and country kitchen, among others.

5 **Old-fashioned milk paint** is made with traditional materials and methods that predate the use of petrochemicals, making it an environmentally friendly choice.

LY
DECISIONS
AND WE KNOW ABOUT



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Keeping a design scrapbook

Many of my art-school friends kept their scrapbooks chock-full of design inspiration as obsessively as I sharpened my pencils. It was only much later in my design career that I realized how important it is to keep a design scrapbook.

Like many designers, I now keep paper scrapbooks that are filled with cuttings from magazines or newspapers, photographs, postcards, and even old chocolate wrappers—anything that catches my eye because of interesting typographic treatments, unusual shapes, or color combinations.

Keeping a paper scrapbook, rather than an electronic one, can be useful not only for collecting scraps of design inspiration that can suggest new ideas for Web page designs but can also result in the often accidental and random combination of elements that can sometimes occur. For example, mixing and matching cuttings from classical broadsheet newspapers with snippets from children's comics or teenage magazines can lead to some surprising results. This is an effect that rarely happens when you scan design elements and store them on your computer.

Designers, developers, and everyone involved in the creative and technical process of creating a Web site should find that keeping a design scrapbook of their own can be useful, often in several ways.

Scrapbooks for developers, am I serious?

Yes! It helps developers better understand the job of designers by making both think about aesthetics. Both know that their work will have a critical influence over the quality of the design final and that their combined efforts are the key to that quality.

Scrapbooks are tactile, solid explorations that can help us all better appreciate how important typography, white space, and even the simple alignment of elements inside a grid can be to the overall polish of a design. When everyone involved in the creative and technical processes thinks more about aesthetics, we will all take greater care to achieve that polish.



SXSW 2005 invites

LUNAR HEIGHTS

FRIDAY, MARCH 18 @ ZERO DEGREES
405 E 7TH ST, AUSTIN, TX
10-13PM DONT SLEEP

ALSO FOR YOUR AURAL PLEASURE...

BAVU BLAKES
ZION I

**THE LUMPY TEXTURE
AND PROCESSED TASTE OF
POWDERED YOGHURT JUST
CAN'T BE BEATEN.**

PHONIC SECURITY PASS
PHOTO: [Portrait of a man]
DATE: 3/17/05
NAME: [Signature]
SIGNATURE: [Signature]

STUDENT ID
NAME: ANDY CLARKE
ADDRESS: 8111 2 1/2 WEEKS STREET
MARTIN LUTHER KING, NOTTAM
SQUIRE ST. YEAR: 10
DATE: 03/17/05

THE OTHER CONCERT FOR AFRICA
SHEKX
Wings in the Streets
Valium Probenchood
Sun. Dec. 22nd 8pm
S & L Club (Welfare)

ERYKAH BADU
LIVE AT SXSW
FEATURING JAY ELECTRONICA
CONTROL ROOM
REC ORDS
MUSIC HALL
MARCH 19th 8PM A.D. 10PM
CONTROLRECORDS.COM

BAD BREAKERS PRESENTS
17 OCT - THE FAVERSHAM
PEOPLE UNDER THE STAIRS
+ GIANT PANDA

UNLESS YOU TRY THIS.
vs. real milk. Powdered egg vs. real egg. Powdered yoghurt vs. real yoghurt.
It's a no-brainer to us.

THE TUESDAY CLUB
 SATURDAY 23RD SEPTEMBER
 @ SHEFFIELD OCTAGON

VALVE
 SOUND SYSTEM

HYPE
GROOVERIDER
DILLINJA
LEMON D
MAMPI SWIFT
CRAGGZ &
PARALLEL FORCES
MC'S EKSMAN, FEARLESS,
FOXY, TONN PIPER, E-LL

9PM-1AM, THE OCTAGON, SHEFFIELD UNIVERSITY, GLOSSOP RD, SHEFFIELD, S10 2HU. TICKETS £14 ADVANCE
 AVAILABLE FROM BOX OFFICE 0114 223 8777, JACK'S RECORDS, COOLWAX, FOREVER CHANGE

tiles
 rooms
 kitchens*
 accessories style

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Create
 your perfect price plan

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WE ARE T
ASICS GEL-
 WE ARE LONG DISTANCE TRAI
 EQUIPPED WITH
 THE LATEST TECHNOLOGIES L
BIOMORPHIC
 THIS MAY SOUND LIKE
 SCIENCE FICTION TO
 AND ACTUALLY, TO OTHER SHOE



THINK ABOUT IT...

The 1970s made **The Who** biggest, loudest, greatest rock'n'roll band in the world. Yet behind the rock-god personas and stadium-raising anthems was a man in glorious turmoil. **Phil Soutcliffe** revisits the Who's decade of lost innocence, tragedy and redemption, and from page 82 introduces the greatest in-concert Who photos from the era.

from the **70s**

From big hits to lost classics, from gentle folk rock to



LET'S SEE ACTION

Fashion Week special



Welcome
Explore
Discover
Relax
Manchester
Art Gallery



OMG WEEK!

Who the
best
world.
d

Make out



liverpool biennial

16 Sept-26 Nov 2006

www.biennial.com

GET
INVOLVED
OPEN
MIC
EVERY
SUNDAY

1

C

36

We Love Posters!

Poster makes

Get creative and try one of these cool ideas for using your posters!

What you need:

- pen poster glue foam
- scissors sellofape ruler
- fun shapes ribbon

What to do:

Put your poster on the foam, draw around it with your pen, then draw a squiggly line a few centimetres away from the poster. Cut out the squiggly line and the middle shape to get your frame! Put the frame face down, put your poster over it (so you'll be able to see the pic) and tape it down. Glue on some funky shapes and tape on ribbon.



FIVE-O-D-E CRACKER



This is a crossword without clues. Each number represents a different letter of the alphabet and all 26 letters are used. We've given you the first three letters: T = 17, E = 8, X = 19. Write these on the grid opposite. Then start working out which numbers represent the other letters. Use the smaller grid and the alphabetical list underneath it to keep track of the letters you've identified. When you've finished, a mystery word will appear in the shaded squares.

Keep track of your letters here

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
							E					
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
			T		X							

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

8	21	21	9	1	18	1	9	10	2	16	7	15
11		20		16		12		20		10		17
13	10	9	1	8	16	15	8	7	7	10	14	8
26		9		7		2				19		12
7	8	5	16		1	10	7	9	1	18	1	17
				8	5	10		3	9	20		16
22	9	24	16		20	18	13	13	15	17	6	8
11				12		9				8		25
4	10	11	17	9	10	20	16		23	18	20	21
20		9		20		9		10		20		18
	2	20	23	8	20	17	9	10	20	18	24	7

WRITE THE MYSTERY WORD ON THE COUPON ON PAGE 36 AND YOU COULD BE A WINNER!

Psychic hotline

Our team of top psychics will give you a one-to-one consultation on what the future holds. Get the lowdown on love, money, health and more about any...

Live Ps
09064
Text Ps
RPLPS
Live Me
09064

WIN MINI SU-DOK-OH 20 x £25 IN CASH

Fill in each empty cell so each row, column and 3 x 2 block contains all the numbers from 1 to 6. The numbers in the yellow squares make up the answer.

	6	3			
	2	1			
6					2
	6	1	2	3	

Find the phrase

Ooh, I think I've finally got it! Have you?

Look closely at the clues below. Some make a catchphrase, others a common word. Got 'em? Answers on page 36.

WEEK 10: £50,000

herring

can can

somewhere

rainbow

bjaockx

just for fun

FRUITY FUN!

Yes! I would like...

- Quarterly every three
- One-year Get your for FREE to you
- Two-year Get your for FREE to you

Your details:

Name: _____
Address: _____
Postcode: _____
Telephone: _____
Email: _____
Date of birth: _____
Parent's signat: _____

Postag:

P	S	D	U	E	L	V	G	S	Z	Y	E	Z	Y
A	I	M	Q	F	J	X	J	M	A	N	I	S	P
V	L	N	Y	S	W	K	J	E	Y	P	L	E	K
Q	Q	J	E	F	L	M	L	R	K	T	V	O	Q
C	R	Z	E	A	V	A	R	Z	T	O	N	X	
E	A	A	S	E	P	E	A	E	R	C	D	O	
H	P	B	Q	H	B	P	N	F	R	T	N	N	
Q	P	O	T	W	O	I	L	A	T	H	J	Q	
V	L	T	A	D	R	R	M	E	P	Q	J	Z	T
X	E	R	B	A	P	U	A	P	S	F	F	S	D
F	T	Y	T	A	S	E	O	N	L	N	H	X	L
S	F	C	W	T	J	C	A	M	G	Z	Q	C	W
L	E	Z	A	N	G	B	L	R	S	E	O	K	J
N	B	S	X	W	Q	D	B	E	N	U	A	K	Y

just for fun

WIN!

Tell us which summery fruit isn't hidden in this grid to be in with a chance of winning an iDrop MP3 player!

iDrops

How to enter
Send your answer, name and address in a sealed envelope marked W.I.T.C.H. search 17

WIN £50,000 JACKPOT!

Plus £1,000 every week

It's week 8 of our Jackpot game. With only three more weeks to go, including this one, be sure to try your luck at winning. This week, the jackpot is a huge £40,000. Good luck!

STEP 1 — THE 10 WK GAME
This week and for the next two weeks, five different numbers will be printed on the Lucky Numbers page. You need to match your five numbers (see step 3) to win.

STEP 4 — £1,000 BONUS
In addition, there's one bonus £1,000 to be shared between all winners who match that week's £1,000 number. This number changes every week.

STEP 2 — JACKPOT 10Y
This week's jackpot is £40,000 and it grows by another £5,000 every week. So by the end of the 10 week run, the jackpot prize could be a whopping £50,000.

STEP 5 — GET YOUR WEEKLY PICK ME UP
You need to keep buying your Pick Me Up every week to match the new numbers and find out the text and phone lines that change every week.

STEP 3 — TEXT OR PHONE
Text LUCKY8 or call 3058. You'll receive five numbers per entry. If they match those printed, then you may have won!

STEP 6 — THE RULES
You must be 18 or over and each call or text costs £1 (ROI 150c per call and 2 euros per text). Each week's game starts Thursday and lasts until midnight Wednesday.

WEEK 10: £50,000

WEEK 9: £45,000

WEEK 8: £40,000

Looking at magazines for interface inspiration

Next time you are in the supermarket queue or in line to buy a pack of twenty Rothmans at your local newsagent, pick up a magazine at random. Don't worry too much about the subject matter or the looks you may get from fellow customers; just pick it up and flick through its pages.

Whatever you find yourself flicking through, you will almost always find an interesting idea for the layout of an interface element, perhaps a form on a puzzle page or maybe even a different treatment for a sidebar. If you don't feel like splurging on *Woman's Weekly* or the latest copy of *Celebrity Tittle Tattler*, don't worry—you can always find magazine inspiration for free.

Once the inspiration bug has bitten you, tearing pages out of the magazines left in doctors' waiting rooms can become quite a habit. I have found that if my kleptomania raises eyebrows among fellow patients, saying, "It's OK, I'm a designer" keeps the tutting noises to a minimum. Wherever you can find magazines, looking at the page designs, from the front contents pages to the small ads at the rear, can inspire you to think differently about various elements in your designs.

Getting typography inspiration

Newspapers and magazines can inspire not only new ideas for grid layouts; they can also be an amazing source of inspiration for typography. But inspiration for type is not only confined to the printed page; you can find it all around you. Whether you are stacking your supermarket trolley with everyday essentials or flipping CDs in your local music store, you will find hundreds of type design ideas in one store alone. If you are a scrapbook and chocolate junky like me, pasting your empty chocolate bar wrappers into a scrapbook can often provide not only new ideas for type but also some interesting juxtapositions of different but complementary styles.

Typography and lettering styles make up so much of the world that we see around us everyday. Walk outside your front door, and it will be only seconds before your eyes will fall on typographic design. Shop signs may have become familiar, but they are also often some of the most varied forms of typographical design you will encounter; posters and advertising billboards jostle for our attention, and when they have been exposed to the ravages of the weather, they will take on new characters as they degrade.

Typography resources

Particletree's Kevin Hale has compiled a list of some great typography resources in his *Typography Crash Course Roundup* at <http://particletree.com/notebook/typography-crash-course-roundup/>.

Andy Hume has also written a comprehensive article called "The Anatomy of Web Fonts" at www.sitepoint.com/article/anatomy-web-fonts.

• THE CHORDS • THE ORDINARY BOYS • SECRET AFFAIR • THE HIGH NUMBERS

PRIMAL SCREAM

"DAMAGED?
WE NEARLY
DIED!"

R I X

**THE
TRUE
STORY
OF HIS
ROCK
REVOLUTION**

**SPECIAL
ANNIVERSARY
EDITION!**

NOVEMBER 2006 £4.10 US\$8.99 CAN\$12.95



It is the TV stronghold of mods, the frighteningly clean, sharply-dressed arbiters of tomorrow's tastes in practically everything

HELLO DARKNESS MY OLD FRIEND

"KIDS ARRIVED WITH LONG HAIR REALISED THEY WEREN'T PUNK AND STARTED CUTTING THEIR HAIR OFF"

... INTO SWINGING LONDON, HE LED
... REVOLUTION. FORTY YEARS
... ETERNAL POWER OF
... "GENIUS!"
... PHENOMENAL!"
... DJS JEFF BECK.

Mecca for mods?

Theories,
rants, etc.

OCEAN COLOUR SCENE • QUADROPHENIA • THE CREATION • READY STEADY GO!

AFTERWORD

The Borderline
ORANGE V...
OFF MANETTE ST, SOHO

THURSDAY 5th OCTOBER
REVITALISED US SONGSTRESS BACK WITH
EILEEN RO

FRIDAY 6th OCTOBER
THE STONE ISLAND RETURNS
LARRY MILLER
+NELL DRYDEN +DERWENT

MONDAY 9th OCTOBER
US SINGER SONGWRITER RETURNS FOR MORE SHOW
RADNEY FOSTER

TUESDAY 10th OCTOBER
WE

WEDNESDAY 11th OCTOBER
THE BAST

THURSDAY 12th OCTOBER
KEVIN

FRIDAY 13th OCTOBER
DA

MONDAY 17th OCTOBER
KRIS DEL

TUESDAY 18th OCTOBER
WILLY LEAY BAND
+SOUTHPLAY +THOMAS HEYMAN

FRIDAY 27th OCTOBER
THE UK'S BEST AMERICAN WRITER
PETER BRUNTNELL BAND

MONDAY 30th OCTOBER
AUSTRALIAN ROCKERS RETURN
THE SAINTS

WEDNESDAY 1st NOVEMBER
SINGER SONGWRITER NIGHT
KRISTINA OLSEN & PETER GRAYLING

FRIDAY 3rd NOVEMBER
THIS IS THE BIG DREAM THEATRICALS
SCARLETT RIVERA RO FIDDLE AND BELLING THUNDER BASS PLAYER
HIGHWAY 61 REVISITED

THURSDAY 14th NOVEMBER
WATSON
TIMES HAND

FRIDAY 17th NOVEMBER
MINETTE NAPOLITA
OF CONCRETE BLONDE - SOLO PERFORM

MONDAY 20th NOVEMBER
ROTTEN SUPERGROUP RETURNS
THE RESENTMENT

TUESDAY 21st NOVEMBER
JELLSMAN RETURNS
H KEIT

WEDNESDAY 22nd NOVEMBER
BARBONE BAND
AMS

THURSDAY 23rd NOVEMBER
AMERICAN ROCK
SADIE

FRIDAY 24th NOVEMBER
A ROCKABALLY RETURNS
FINCH

MONDAY 28th NOVEMBER
LE

TUESDAY 29th NOVEMBER
ME

MONDAY 4th DECEMBER
RETURN OF CANADIAN SINGER
FRED EAGLESMITH

FRIDAY 8th DECEMBER
THE FRANK & WALTER

FRIDAY 15th DECEMBER
WILL BULLY AND THE LADY'S CHRISTMAS BASK
THE INMATES CHRISTMAS PA

SATURDAY 16th DECEMBER
THE PIRATE

RIZZLA
FINEST QUALITY GUARANTEED BY
QUALITY PAPERS

Using sIFR for fine typography for the Web

Typography has long been a source of frustration for visual designers working on the Web. The limited set of fonts you can rely on to be installed across a range of platforms and operating systems have meant that little progress has been made in creating attractive typography.

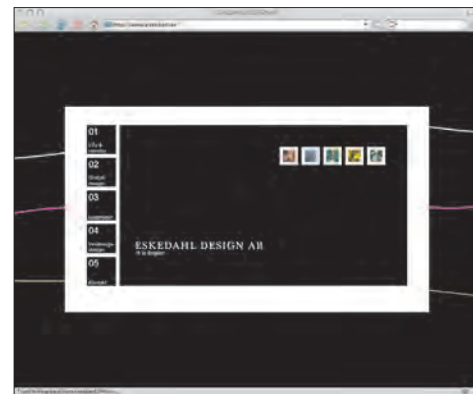
In the past few years, designers have been working hard to overcome many of these limitations by creating new techniques and workarounds that provide more control over typographical style. One of those techniques, sIFR (scalable Inman Flash Replacement), achieves fine typography through a combination of CSS, JavaScript, and Macromedia Flash.

In the absence of font embedding, sIFR enables you to embed any font in a Web page by including it within a Flash movie. Whereas in the past, Flash was criticized for its lack of accessibility, sIFR uses Flash in combination with meaningful markup to preserve the structure, meaning and accessibility of your document. sIFR works by enhancing only the design of the page and leaves the document itself untouched, maintaining wide accessibility and not impacting search engine optimization.

sIFR can be particularly effective when used to style headings, such as `<h1>` or `<h2>` elements inside your designs. When JavaScript is available in a visitor's browser, a customizable JavaScript file parses the content of your page, looking for the specific elements or `class` or `id` attributes you have earmarked for replacement. The script measures and extracts the content of these elements and in a split second creates a Flash file for each one containing the extracted content, rendered in any typeface you have chosen. This Flash file is then overlaid on top of the original elements.

The inventors of sIFR have created an elegant solution using a combination of standards-based technologies that degrade well under a variety of conditions. If either JavaScript or Flash is unavailable in their browser, visitors will see the standard browser text in the element, styled with CSS. This transcendent approach provides a more advanced design to visitors with browsers that support the full range of sIFR technologies.

Note: You can read about the background to sIFR at www.mikeindustries.com/sifr/ and download the latest sIFR source files and documentation from developer Mark Wubben at <http://novemberborn.net/sifr3/alpha>.



Reexamining Flash design

Flash design has not undeservedly been criticized in recent years for its long download times, its poor general usability, and its lack of accessibility. Many designers passionate about standards-based design have largely dismissed Flash and have concentrated instead on what is and is not possible with CSS.

CSS design galleries multiplied because designers have been hungry for new inspiration and examples of good CSS-based design. In the process, many of these galleries have concentrated on particular design trends or techniques such as dark color schemes or flexible layouts, and others such as Stylegala have grown to include articles on design and forums for discussing design or CSS.

Outside the world of CSS, Flash-based design has continued to be a dominant force, and many of the sites showcasing the work of graphic designers or illustrators continue to be made almost entirely in Flash. As a technology, Flash not only includes its own powerful scripting and behaviors but it also largely frees designers from many of the constraints placed upon them by the grid-like constructs of HTML tables and a conventional approach to CSS. It can be no accident that many designers have chosen to work with Flash.

Flash has liberated them from worrying about browser compatibility issues and the typographical limitations of standard browser text. As a technology specifically designed for presenting rich graphic and media content, it provides the perfect playground for creative ideas.

However, many of the designs that are implemented with Flash could just have easily have been produced using meaningful markup and transcendent CSS, albeit without some of the slick motion effects and interactivity that are some of Flash's fortes. Looking outside the narrow field of the CSS design galleries to what is being created in the industry at large can be a powerful source of creative inspiration, and Flash and design showcases such as Netdiver are packed with creative ideas, with many—but not exclusively—created using Flash.

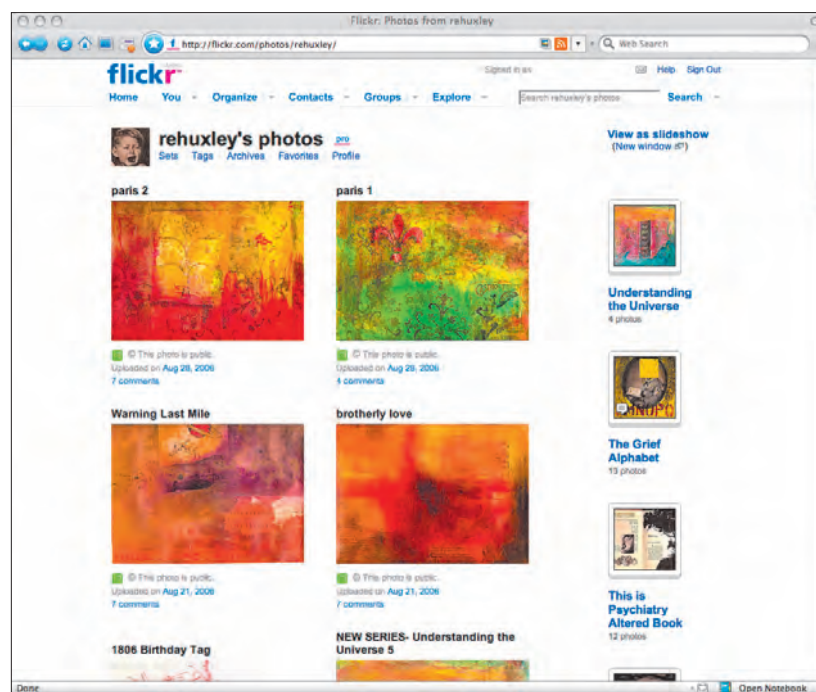
Note

As interest in the creative possibilities of CSS has increased, online galleries of CSS-based designs have become popular destinations, both as wider sources of inspiration and also as references of specific design topics including dark/light, high-contrast designs and flexible layouts. Although most of these sites now feature much of the same examples, others surround their galleries with discussions, forums, and community news. Two of the CSS gallery sites that remain in my bookmarks include Stylegala (www.stylegala.com) and CSS Beauty (www.cssbeauty.com).

Working with images and photos

It was not so many years ago that the photography process was complicated, inconvenient, and expensive. It involved the agony of choice: “Do I buy a 24- or a 36-shot reel?” This was closely followed by the agony of indecision: “Should I take another one in case the last one won’t come out?” Then after an encounter with the white-coated teenager in charge of the automatic-processing machine at Boots or Walgreens, it involved the disappointment of finding only three photos worth saving. The rest would be stored in boxes in the attic to be uncovered centuries later. That was certainly my experience; I hope yours was better and hope, in several hundred years, your descendants won’t find your boxes and wonder why some of their ancestors in the late twentieth century had no heads.

Thank heavens for the inventors of digital cameras and also the clever people who invented free photo storage and sharing services such as Flickr and Yahoo! Photos and who made photography so much easier and more fun (**Figure 3.42**).



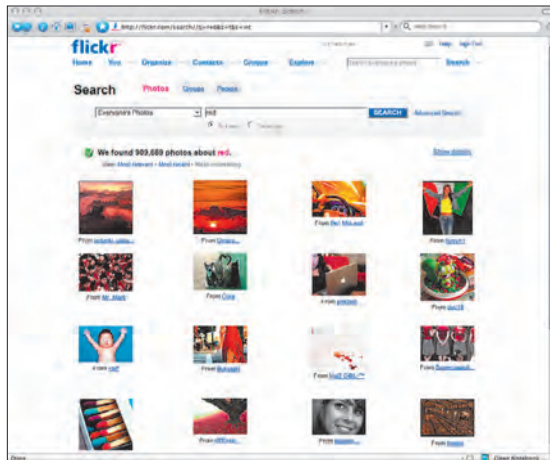
3.42 www.flickr.com

Photos are a great place to look for inspiration for your Web designs. Whether you are looking for layout ideas, color schemes, or simply a new starting point for a new creative concept, flickering through Flickr can be an enjoyable and productive way of finding that spark for new ideas.

Flickr for inspirational photos

If you ever need a quick inspiration fix but your coffee-table magazines are all used up and a walk to the local newsagent is out of the question, Flickr and similar photo storage and sharing sites are an amazing source of new inspiration for design ideas (**Figure 3.43**).

One useful tip for finding the most unexpected combinations of images is to search for general terms such as *red*, *grid*, and *shiny*, rather than for specific topics. Because its many thousands of contributors constantly update Flickr, even a wait of a few minutes can give you a totally new set of inspirational results.



3.43 Sourcing inspiration from Flickr

Note

Please check for copyright and Creative Commons licensing. Many people using Flickr share their photos quite freely, but not everyone does. Fortunately, Flickr lets you search within a particular Creative Commons license, including licenses that allow you to reuse images without permission or attribution. In some cases, if there are restrictions, you can write to the photographer, who may give you permission based on your need.



transient disorder of ...

307.45 Phase shift, disruption of 24-hour sleep-wake cycle

307.46 ...

307.47 ...

307.48 ...

307.49 ...

307.50 ...

307.51 ...

307.52 Pica

307.53 ...

307.54 Psychogenic ...

307.59 Other

Enuresis

Encopresis

Psychalgia

Psychogenic

Tension headache

Other

Other and unspecified special symptoms of syndromes, not elsewhere classified

reaction to stress

... changes of emotions

HYPOTHESIS

Problem

$$\begin{bmatrix} 2 & 0 & 1 \\ 0 & 2 & 1 \end{bmatrix}$$

y

$P_3(0, 2)$

$P_2(2, 0)$

x

$P(-2, -2)$



SECTION THREE

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

The rules which have been reviewed in the preceding sections are disregarded when their application would isolate the fundamental principles of ...

... both short- and long-term memory

... impairment is short-term

... long-term memory impairment

... information is of common

during

the

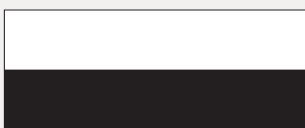
to

from

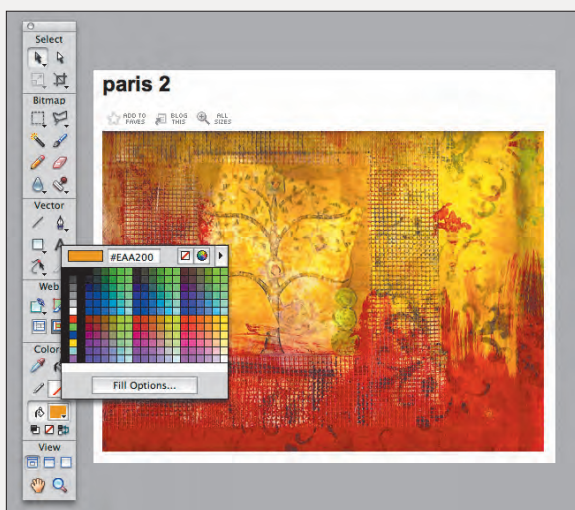
Creating color palettes

When designing a color scheme, the colors I find in photography and fine art often influences me. One of my favorite techniques creates a selection of complementary tones from just two or more sampled colors. I love Fireworks and prefer to design my Web graphics with it, but you can easily adapt these steps to the imaging program of your choice:

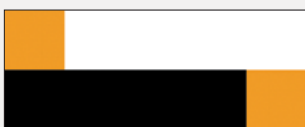
1. Start by making a white canvas (usually 250×100 pixels), and then add a 250×50 pixel black rectangle to that base layer:



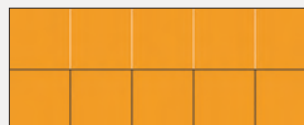
2. Sample one color from the photograph of the painting:



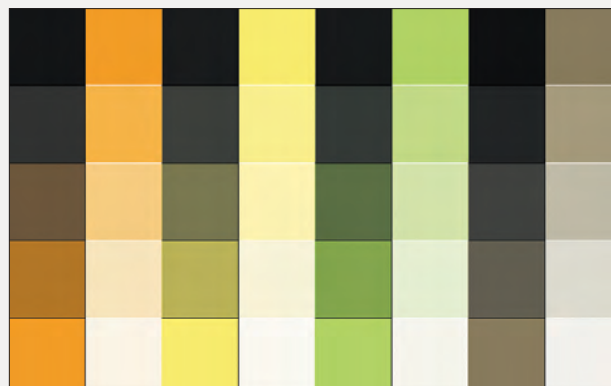
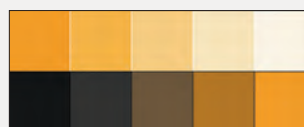
3. Create two 50×50 pixel squares, and fill them with that color. Place one colored square over the black rectangle and the other over the white base:



4. Duplicate both squares four times, and then arrange them horizontally across the canvas:



5. Finally, adjust the opacity of each square (usually 100%, 75%, 50%, 25%, and 10%) to allow progressively more of the base color to show through the squares. This will create ten tones from a single color and is easy to replicate for additional base colors:



Note: If you would prefer a more automated way of using this technique, Steve Chipman has created a JavaScript-powered Color Palette Creator, which is available on his Web site at http://slayeroffice.com/tools/color_palette/.

Note

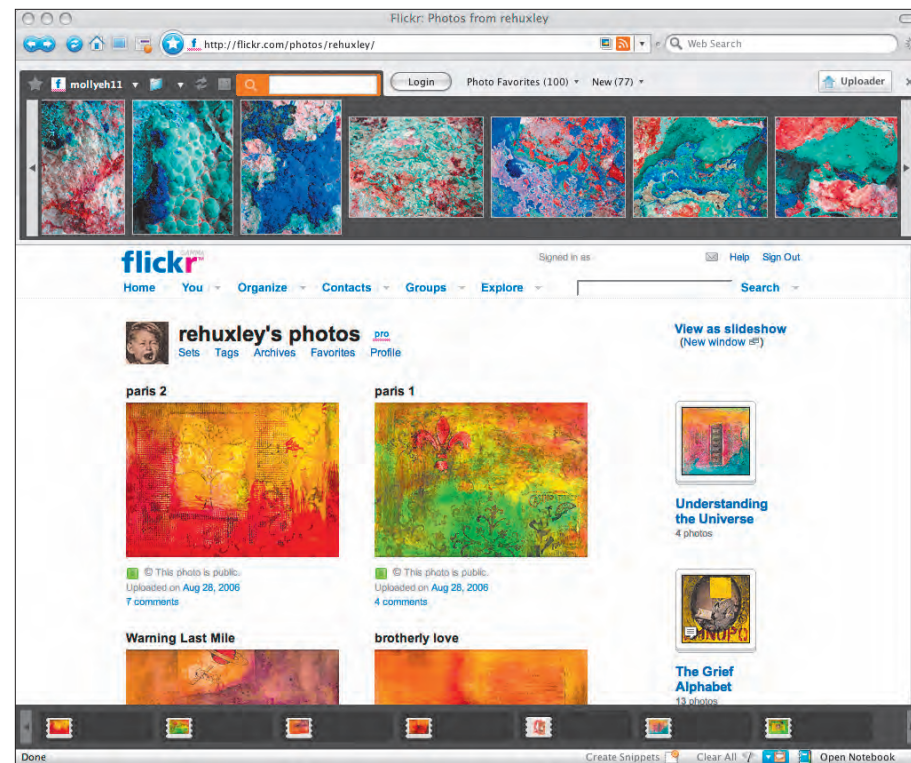
You can download the Flock browser for Windows or Mac OS at www.flock.com. Many useful Firefox extensions will also work with Flock, or you can download specific extensions for Flock from <http://extensions.flock.com/extensions>.

Flock for photo research

Once you start using Flickr on a regular basis to look for inspiration from its millions of images, you might find it helpful to use some of the photo integration features of Flock, a browser based on Firefox that is available for both Windows and Mac OS.

Flock integrates with Flickr and Photobucket, another photo service, to help you work with these sites from inside your Web browser (**Figure 3.44**). Flock's photo "topbar" contains a handy set of tools for searching both sites.

When you have found inspiring images, Flock's photo tools make it easy for you to drag images into a snippets bar and save them for later. When you have finished searching, you can use the uploader to store your found images on Flickr, perhaps in a "Found Inspiration" set.

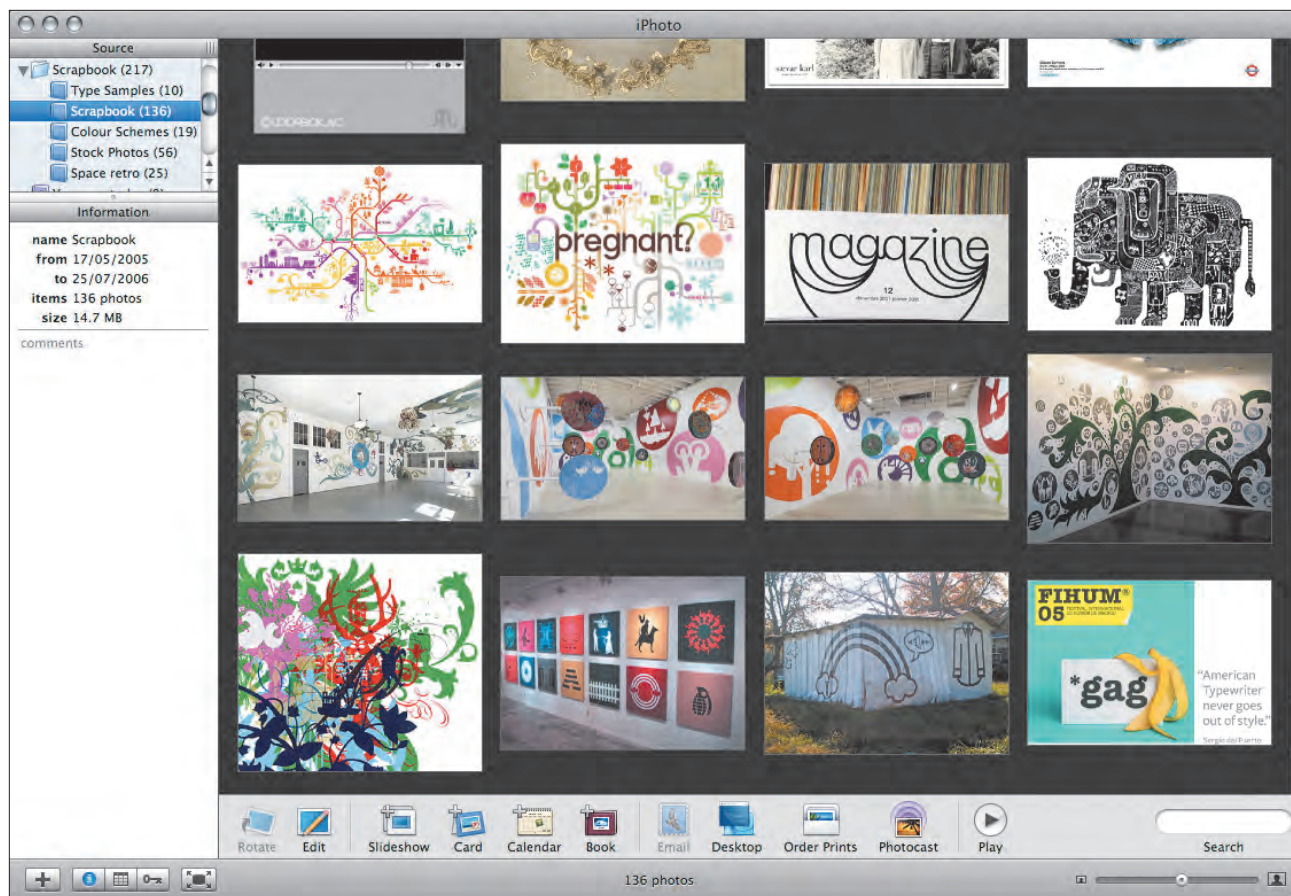


3.44 Saving photos in Flock

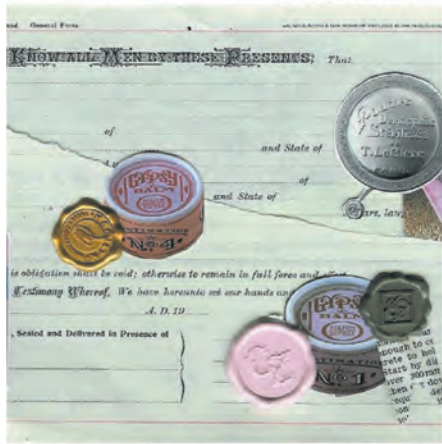
iPhoto scrapbooks

The habit of keeping paper design scrapbooks is less common among Web designers than it is among traditional graphic designers. If paper, tape, or glue sounds too messy for you, then you do have less sticky alternatives.

For example, designer Jon Hicks chooses to store scans of his design ideas, paper sketches, and found inspirational type styles and colors in folders he creates within the Apple iPhoto photo application for OS X (**Figure 3.45**). You could easily do the same in the imaging and photo applications of your choice.



3.45 Storing inspiration using iPhoto



Fine Art Activities

Many discussions about standards-based design revolve around the technologies you use: markup, CSS, or JavaScript. Other common conversations cover best practices for how you use these technologies. These conversations are important, because striving to develop new techniques and sharing ideas on how best you can use them will benefit not only designers and developers but also the visitors to the sites you create.

That these conversations have focused on technology is not surprising. In the move from using old-fashioned methods to standards-based methods, both visual designers and developers have had to learn a great deal, not least about each other and how they can better work together.

Technology is only part of the story, and markup, CSS, and other languages are only some of the tools you have in your toolbox. In fact, they are only a means to an end and should never be an end in themselves. When you remove beauty and aesthetics, code is simply something to be read by machines. It is only in combination with design that they can make an end result that people will enjoy using.

Designing is more than creating attractive visuals

It is easy to think visual design is about making attractive-looking interfaces. But design is more than that; it is about evoking feelings and emotions in the people who visit a Web site. Create the right mood, and visitors are more likely to want to interact with your site, no matter how much Ajax or other interactivity you have used in creating it.

Design helps convey brand values in ways that are just as important as usability or the slickness of an interface's operation. A well-crafted design provides a framework in which interaction can operate, never the other way around, and it is important to always keep in mind how a visual design can add meaning to a site that goes far beyond the pixels drawn on the screen.

Taking the focus off technology

I know few designers or technical developers who have been formally educated in the broad spectrum of Web skills. Many designers have learned about the nuances of markup and CSS through reading and their own experimentation, and few developers have gone to art schools where the teaching is largely focused on concepts rather than techniques. It is now critical that designers have a better understanding of technical issues while they are designing and that developers look outside their areas of interest to get a different perspective on the work of visual designers.

In this section, it is time to take a break from thinking about technologies and how and where to apply them. It's time to put the various techniques and inspirational sources you have seen together in a short series of activities that have been designed to broaden your creative thinking.

If you are a developer who is more at home in a text editor or even a command-line tool, right about now you might be thinking about fast-forwarding to the next part where you can get your hands dirty with CSS selectors. But hold it right there; an element of creative thinking pops up in every activity related to Web development, and developers can learn much from understanding the creative process of designers.

If you are a visual designer, you may already be working with some of these techniques in your work; however, just like taking a holiday in the sun, it can never hurt to recharge your creative batteries and possibly gain a new perspective on the methods you use.

CSS hasn't revolutionized web design.

The reason lies not with the technology (which is revolutionary), but with the designers using it. Most designers have simply swapped the old technology (tables and font tags) for the new technology, without fully exploring what's so completely new.

—JEREMY KEITH
<http://adactio.com/journal/1149/>

Save over
50%



Enhancing the mood

If you were expecting that this part of the book came with a free holiday in the sun, sorry, but I lied. But never mind—holidays can be overrated, and you still need to collect materials for your mood board. You shouldn't have to look too far; you can find a wealth of inspiration without even leaving your home. You can collect these inspirational materials from everyday items, and you can combine them on a mood board in interesting ways.

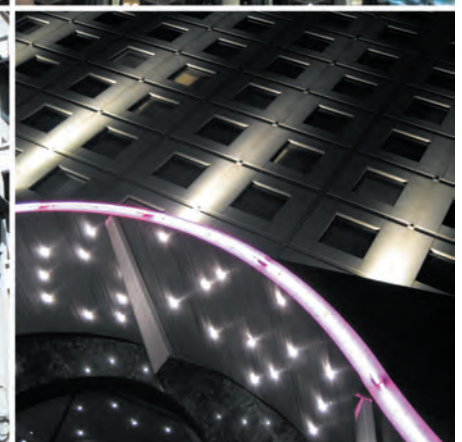
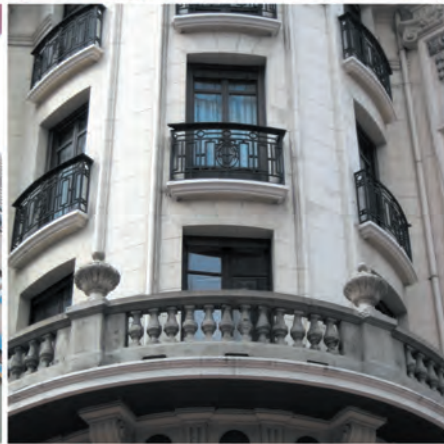
Please don't imagine this book as your art teacher. I might have grown a beard long enough for a badger to live in while writing it, but I have not worn sandals and have never, ever listened to the Grateful Dead. Think of it more like a client who has come to you with a need for a Web site to promote a shiny new kitchen gadget. Your first task is to collect materials for a mood board that you can show to your client before you start work on your computer. The aim is to find the right tone for the site by looking at examples of shininess.

Your first stop might be the stack of magazines that have been piling up in the corner of your room. The more varied your reading material, the better. Flicking through their pages, you might find advertisements for everything from shiny kitchen appliances to shiny cars, perhaps starkly lit in the photo studio to show off their curves and angles. Magazine advertising can be a terrific source of ideas. Look for examples where the highly reflective surfaces have been extenuated or perhaps where the colors have been muted to give a minimal, high-tech feel.

Where better to look for inspiration for a shiny new appliance than in the kitchen itself? It's time to raid those kitchen cupboards and drawers and dig out the shiny packaging you will find. Chocolate bars and crisps are not only great for eating; they can also be colorful and reflective. Open the wrappers and slide out the contents; the wrappers will be easier to stick onto your mood board without their contents, and if you don't feel like adding a few extra pounds, you can always have someone else eat them for you.

Aluminum foil is not only great for roasting chickens; it can be crumpled up and then smoothed to create some amazing reflective patterns. Experiment by sticking the foil onto your mood board, both shiny and matte side up, and look at the ways it reflects the room around you and the other elements of your mood board.

Creating a mood board can be a fun and informative way of testing what your client likes to see without looking at other Web sites from a similar field. The combinations of imagery and materials can help spark new ideas, and in some cases they can even become pieces of interesting art in their own right.



Looking for a different perspective

When I first started art school, the first few weeks were different from what I had ever experienced. Whereas during high-school art lessons the emphasis was on technique and the end result of achieving a qualification, at art school we were encouraged to unlearn much of what we had been taught. Here the emphasis was on thinking differently, and the early weeks contained various activities designed to help the students break away from old-school thinking.

One of the first activities that the unsuspecting students were asked to enter into and one that I still love to inflict on unsuspecting conference audiences, involved nothing more than standing on the nearest chair or table to get a different perspective on the space around us. If you don't feel too much like getting strange looks from your colleagues at work or maybe your fellow passengers if you are reading on a bus, you can look at the world around you in other ways without too much embarrassment.

It really was not that long ago that the Web was new and exciting. For many people the Web has largely become an everyday tool to get things done: buy a book, book a flight, or pay off your credit card account. These were all activities that only a few years ago you would have accomplished by a trip into town. Just like the town or city where you live, the Web has become familiar.

It is often true that when you see something regularly enough, you become desensitized to it. When you drive or walk around the town or city where you live, you will probably already be familiar with most of its visual landmarks. You might already hardly notice the fronts of office buildings, banks, cafés, and shops you see every day.

On your next journey to work, take your eyes off your newspaper or iPod screen and look around you for things that are different. These things don't have to be new additions to the urban landscape; they might just be new to you because you haven't gone looking for them.

If you live in most parts of Europe or in much of the central and eastern United States, many of the buildings around you will have stood for almost a century or sometimes even much longer. Where I live, in the north of England, many older buildings have survived both World wars and the overzealous urban planners of the 1960s, and in one form or another, they retain some of their original character.



At ground level, many of these older buildings in cities such as Manchester or Liverpool have been redeveloped to accommodate modern shop fronts or offices with large areas of glass and modern signage. But up above, you'll often still see glimpses of what was there before.

Your own town or city may have a wealth of architectural history only a few feet above your eye level. This might include details in stonework or windows, which you might easily miss when you are focused only on getting to where you are going. The next time you are traveling to work, look up above eye level to get a different view of what you thought you knew. (Just be sure to keep half an eye on where you are going to avoid walking into a lamppost or falling over the newspaper seller on the corner.)

You can also get a different perspective by climbing the fire escape to the roof of your building or lying down on a bench and looking up at the buildings around you. You will see a different view of what you thought was so familiar.

Many of the sights in an urban environment can provide new and interesting ideas. By looking at the grid designs of many buildings, you may get ideas for innovative new grids for your Web page layouts that you may not have seen otherwise. Whereas you have seen that many newspaper designs are based on symmetrical grids, the proportions of buildings from different angles may inspire you to take a different approach. Where a building's grid has been softened by nature taking back control, perhaps where trees have softened the view or ivy has grown on the face of a building, you might be inspired to make designs that have a much more asymmetric feel.

All it takes to find inspiration is for you to go looking, and when you find something new or different that motivates you, share it by uploading photos of what you have found online to inspire others.

InCinemas

LITTLE MANHATTAN

DETAILS 129 mins, June 30
DIRECTOR Mark Levin
STARRING Josh Hutcherson, Bradley Whitford, Cynthia Nixon

YOUNG LOVE BLOSSOMS IN MODERN-DAY Manhattan, but don't vomit just yet: this observational teen comedy has just enough sass to win over wary adults. Much like TV's *Wonder Years* (which director Mark Levin also story-edited and produced), it's narrated by 17-year-old Gabe (Josh Hutcherson), who recalls the summer he started to look at schoolmate Rosemary (Charlie Ray) in a new light. Romantic obstacles include her flowergirl duties and his shyness over kissing, and by using Gabe's POV, the film depicts the uncertainties, agonies and joys of first love with accuracy, affection and wry humour. Some points are laboured, and the build-up of Gabe's crush is overlong, but this remains an unexpectedly enjoyable little film that should have done better at the US box office. **ANNA SMITH**

LOBO

DETAILS 125 mins, June 14
DIRECTOR Miguel Courtois
STARRING Eduardo Noriega, Silvia Alonso, Patrick Brice

BASED ON TRUE EVENTS IN '70S SPAIN, in which 'El Lobo' ('The Wolf') infiltrated the higher echelons of terrorist group ETA, this taut political thriller – an award-winning smash hit in Spain – crackles with edginess, energy and contemporary frisson in precisely the same way that the Interpreter didn't. As a friend of several ETA activists, 'Tami' (Eduardo Noriega) was well-placed to infiltrate the Basque separatists, but soon found himself at odds with both the rival factions of the group and the demands of his secret-service paymasters. Though set during the dying days of Franco's dictatorship, Courtois' film has plenty to say about such timely issues as the blurred lines between freedom fighter and terrorist, activism and anarchism. **DAVID HUGHES**

★★★★

GLAM BAND ALERT!

Keep an eye out for The Puppini Sisters – a '40s-inspired trio, who perform classic pop songs like *I Will Survive* in their own unique style! Their album *Beltsa Bottom Dollar* is out on July 19th and will add a touch of glamour to the music scene! Go to www.thepuppinisisters.com.

16 FRIGHT NIGHT!

A hair-raising Halloween party for your little ghouls and goblins

18 FIREWORK FOOD

Sparkling food ideas for the fifth of November

20 IN THE POT

Comforting casseroles make good value, great tasting family meals

24 BRING A BOTTLE

The finest beers and wines to take the chill off an autumn evening

26 CATCH OF THE DAY

Delicious, nutritious fish dishes to enjoy any day of the week

28 SNAPPY SUPPERS

Delicious meals that are ready to serve

FRANCE

BY BRUNCH the coffee! setting up for

SUNDAY SPECIAL

Rate it!

Think Pink hair straighteners. **Clamp up your hair in style!**

Kittens. **Is there anything cuter?**

School holidays. **Big weeks of no homework and no stress. Yay!**

Losing your earring backs. **Why don't they come with spacers?**

The World Cup. **How it's over, who'd have thought we'd miss watching football?**

Sunburn. **Labster red is not a good look, plus it's dangerous.**

Hate it!

Ask the expert

Nutritionist Julie Dean answers your questions.

Why is it so important for children to drink water?
 • Dehydration can affect children's development, and can cause lethargy and constipation. Children who are drinking enough water will feel healthier, have more energy and find it easier to concentrate, too.

How much water should my child be drinking?

• Just like adults, children need around six to eight glasses of fluid a day. More fluids are required in hot weather and after exercise.

How do I know if my child is drinking enough water?

• Check the colour of their urine, which should be very pale. When



MIDSOMMER
 ORGANIC
 SUNFLOWER
 OIL



WISH LIST

1 Last-minute present hint to our loved ones – this DAB digital radio has been designed by the king of glam prints himself, Matthew Williamson, and is therefore Very Desirable Indeed. It's available from branches of John Lewis, all of which are open until at least 4pm today; £125, 08456 049049 (johnlewis.com).

2 Mug trees are inexcusable. Mug racks, on the other hand, are rather a good idea since they take storage pressure off shelves and cupboards. This one comes with four colour-toning mugs. One for the must-buy list, we reckon; £25, by Joseph Joseph, 020-7261 1800 (josephjoseph.com).

3 Come January, the design world will be focusing on all things Chinese, so why not get ahead of the trend by knocking yourself up a cushion in one of John Stefanidis' new Beijing fabrics? Pricey, but so right for 2006. Ladakh silk taffeta in Dusky Blue (W: 130cm), £129.95 a metre, from John Stefanidis, 020-7808 4700 (stefanidisfabrics.com).

4 This is the perfect stocking. Made from folksy American fabrics, it has the family heirloom feel that's so important at Christmas, but without any of those nasty, musty smells. If you can't make it to London ECI today, at least you can phone up and reserve one for next year. Patchwork stocking, £35, by Chica Wixon, from Saloon,

BRAZILS

A study from the University Of Illinois suggests brazils might help prevent breast cancer, thanks to their high selenium content. They give you an energy buzz, too.

ALMONDS

These are real heart savers, as they're rich in a form of vitamin E called alpha-tocopherol, which lowers your risk of cardiac disease.

MACADAMIAS

University Of Hawaii found that people who ate high-fat macadamias had the same cholesterol levels as those on a low-fat diet.



Overheard
 YouTube popularity is hell unless you're a fucking saint with nothing to hide, or you have indestructible confidence levels.

Emmalina, 18-year-old YouTube star
myspace.com/emmalina

5 Balance scales

Spring balance scales,



INGREDIENTS
 Conservation Grade Wholegrain Oat Flakes, Raw Cane Sugar, Nuts (16.5%), Flaked Almonds, Roast Hazelnuts, Flaked Brazil Nuts, Pecans, Conservation Grade Barley Flakes, Vegetable Oil (Rapeseed Oil, Palm Oil), Rice Flour, Dehydrated Coconut, Conservation Grade Wholegrain Oat Flour, Sea Salt, Natural Hazelnut Paste.

ALLERGEN INFORMATION
CONTAINS:
 Oats, Barley, Almonds, Hazelnuts, Brazil Nuts, Pecans

MAY CONTAIN:
 Wheat, Eye Milk, Sesame Seeds, Other Nuts

Source of fibre
 No artificial flavourings, colourings or preservatives

Non GM

Store in a cool, dry place and re-use the inner pack to preserve product life. This pack is sold by weight and not volume. Some settling of contents may have occurred during transit. To redistribute the mix before opening – turn box on side and shake gently.

AtHome/DVD Club FURTHER VIEWING

Run out of Woody? Try these...

DUCK SOUP (1933)
 The Marx Brothers' unique mix of cerebral wit and perfect slapstick is a huge influence on Woody, and as Groucho he found a way into his own on-screen comic persona: a smart-arsed wisecracker, fuelled by nervous energy, forever chasing after unattainable women.

8 1/2 (1962)
 Fellini's masterpiece in cinematographical and philosophical terms lifted

BEST SELLERS

The big make-up houses produce bucket-loads of their best-selling bases – here are their most popular.

- 1 Bobbi Brown Stick Foundation, £24 (16 shades); the original stick foundation and still one of the best.
- 2 Yves Saint Laurent Radiance Smoothing Foundation, £26.50 (eight shades); contains light-reflective particles to give tired skin a glowing boost.
- 3 Lancôme Adaptive, £20.50 (nine shades); mattifies and moisturises at the same time.
- 4 Diorskin Pure Light, £22 (six shades); gives an oil-free, fresh finish.

NEW BOOKS

Switch off your telly and read something instead!

The Story Of Film
 By Mark Cousins
 Suggested by: Pavilion
 Price: £25.00
 Film history is no simple thing. It is filled with more twists than an M Night Shyamalan picture, more nuances than Citizen Kane and more stories than there could ever be time to tell. Giving anything more than a whistle-stop tour is a laborious undertaking for both writer and reader. However, Mark Cousins sails through the vast sea, Hollywood and the European avant-garde to Japanese and other non-Western filmmaking. As every fan for it, it's inclusive, colourful, provocative and probing. This is a truly important piece of film history literature. **Read it now.**



ER SINGLES OUT ON MONDAY

The White Stripes
My Doorbell
 One of those new-fangled piano-based White Stripes songs and impressively catchy. Without doubt, summer 2006's finest knock-down-ginger anthem. **PQ**

John Legend
Number One
 Produced by Kanye West. What, you need more? OK, then – lush, authentic, big-hearted '60s soul, fat with skipping strings and honeyed harmonies, plus a plucky rap interlude from Kanye that manages to turn excessive eBay usage into a top drawer disc. **PC**

Alabama 3
How Can I Protect You?
 Normally as irritating as a jar of Chris Tarrant's, the Alabamas have unexpectedly barfed up a wonderful rap-blues morality tale with a starburst of a pure-pop chorus. The kind of record that will win back a lover the day after you were caught shagging their dog. **PC**

Various
More Soul Than Wipon Casino
 In which resolutely indie types like Comet Gain and Airport Girl proffer cover versions of soul classics. And what do you know, they're all rather ace and straight-down-the-line renditions apart from Airport Girl's club-footed rendering of The Otays' divine 'Lipstick Traces'. Sell, three out of four and all that. **PC**

Cranebuilders
Public Space
 Glimly chugging Lou Reed-style deadpan riff pop that stalks along for three-and-a-bit joyless minutes and never gets anywhere near a moment of

Launch Platform
 New websites that challenge or inspire

www.adobe.com/products/flash/special/fashioniversary
 Designed by Blitz

What would the web look like without Flash? It's unimaginable. In its 17th anniversary, Adobe has created an interactive timeline, and two interviews with design's chief software architect, Kevin Yank, and plenty of other interesting info.

TOP 5 OFFICE FAVOURITES
 The DVDs our colleagues keep pinching...

1 HOUSE OF FLYING DAGGERS
 20th CENTURY FOX
 When they borrow it they say 'it can't be better than Harry'. When they bring it back it's a very different story. Epic and beautiful, this flick's always going walkies...

2 MEET THE FOCKERS
 UNIVERSAL
 When they borrow it they say 'it can't be better than Harry'. When they bring it back it's a very different story. Epic and beautiful, this flick's always going walkies...

TEAM AMERICA: WORLD POLICE
 PARAMOUNT
 You might have guessed from previous 'office favourites' that the humour round here isn't that highbrow. The popularity of Team America proves it.

GARDEN STATE
 UENIA VISTA

to mum
 I hated going walking from I remember

Scrapbooking with a goal in mind

I always recommend designers look for inspiration wherever they go without an end result in mind. By keeping an open mind to whatever you see around you, you will not be limited by the practicalities of how useful an item might be or how you can use it. Sometimes you are looking for a specific spark to add something different to a design, and you will need to set out to look for that special something.

If you are as bored as I am with the traditional arrangements of many online stores and the way they present their products and you are hungry for something a little different, go looking for the many different ways products are presented in different forms of print. In magazines, products are arranged in hundreds of ways, and many of those ways can make for unusual product displayed if adapted for the Web.

Magazine Contents pages from different types of publications can also provide clues to new ways to present content on a site's homepage. All the key elements are there: summaries and links to pages inside the magazine, featured or lead stories, and often a letter from the editor that could so easily become a company's key message to their customers. These pages are full of content and links that when transposed to become Web pages can provide highly useful content to readers and also enhance a site's search engine visibility.

Of course, slavishly copying a design or layout from one medium into another is never going to achieve the full benefits of that new medium. The Web is not print, and a Contents page is not a homepage; yet we can be inspired by looking for creative opportunities in similar or related places. You can even give the most common Web interface elements a new lease on life by bringing in ideas from unexpected places. The humble sidebar, common to most Web pages, can benefit from techniques more commonly found in print. Images that break out of their columns to add a more organic visual flow can help Web designs avoid looking too structured or boxy. You can give form elements, very difficult to present in new and interesting ways, a new twist by adding graphic details that may be inspired by a teenage magazine's puzzle page.

Looking at the design elements you create time and time again in different ways can be creatively liberating, and with today's techniques of using CSS, JavaScript, Flash, or a combination of all three, you now have fewer restrictions on what you are able to achieve creatively on the Web.

Magazine cuttings from my scrapbook suggest new and interesting ways to design for the Web



Product
Brownie

Prep Date
3/1/05

Initials
9M

Discard Date
3/14/05



THURSDAY

10

MAR 05

NOT FOR SALE

KEEP
THIS TRANSFER/
FARE RECEIPT
AS PROOF
OF PAYMENT

7 USE FOR :00
8 TRAVEL IN ANY :00
9 DIRECTION UNTIL :30
10 TIME INDICATED :30
11 :30
12 :30

CONTROL NUMBER 274777



The Fine Art of Web Design

In this part, you have seen how important it is for designers to look outside to both new and established media and bring some of those ideas to the Web. You have also seen how you can bring new life to your designs without thinking first about the constraints of implementing those designs in legacy browsers.

Today, thousands of sites—from blogs to designer portfolios and from small businesses to multinational corporations—all rely on CSS. This has caused even experienced Web designers to wonder whether we can learn much more about Web design and about CSS. In 2006, Australian developer and cofounder of the Web Standards Awards gallery site, Cameron Adams, wrote about closing the gallery:

Now we've arrived at a situation where beautiful sites with beautiful code are being produced by the hundreds; every month, every week, every day. It's no longer a myth that you can produce a stunning site with Web standards. We feel that our mission is complete, that standards have now ensured their rightful place in the process of Web design. So, it's time to hang up our spurs.

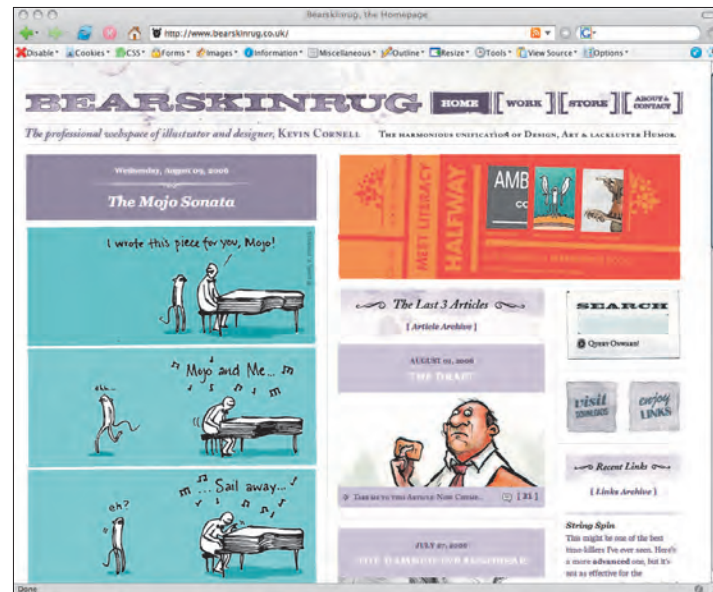
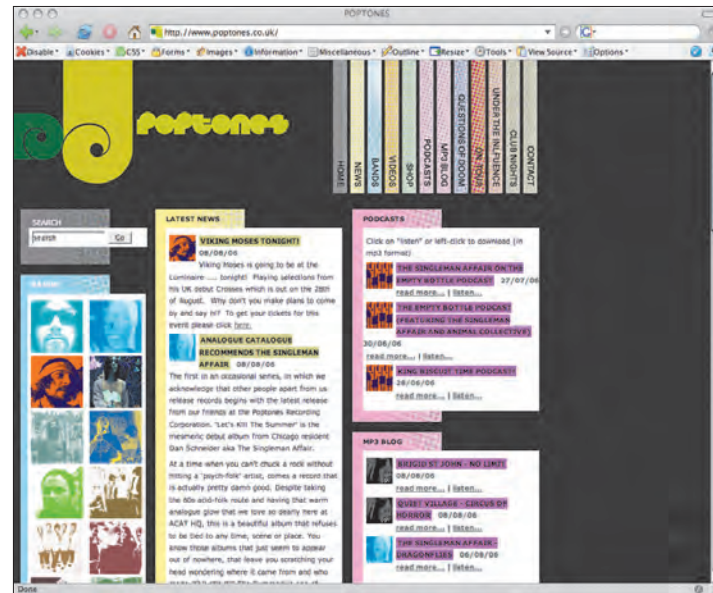
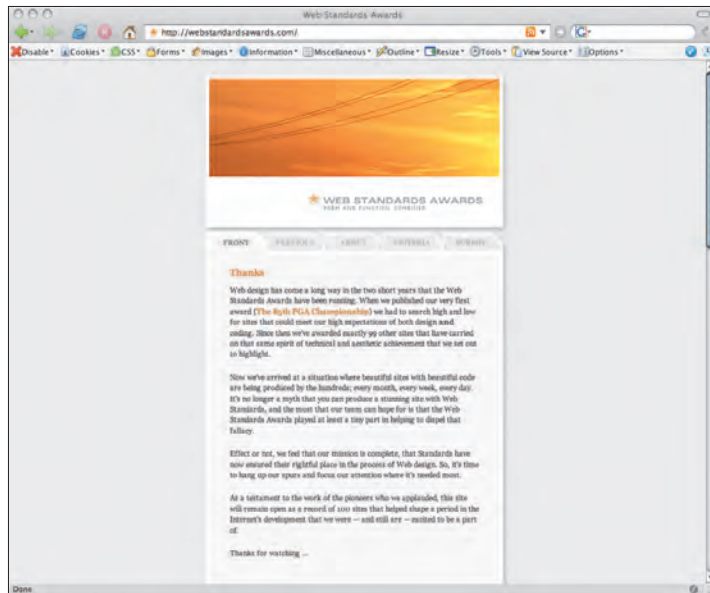
—Cameron Adams (<http://webstandardsawards.com>)

Along with other online galleries showcasing CSS design, the Web Standards Awards site (**Figure 3.46**) succeeded in demonstrating that using valid, meaningful markup and CSS can result in highly creative sites. But I question Adams's notion we have reached the limits of what we can learn or should aim to achieve. Should we accept that we have taken CSS design as far as we can? Are we prepared to believe that there is little more we can do?

Designers should do more

We have not reached the pinnacle of what we can achieve with CSS-based design. Even though the Web is still relatively young, we have already been told what good Web design should be. Usability specialist Jakob Nielsen has repeatedly said that good design is about conventions and about following rules: typically his rules.

One of Nielsen's central themes is that visitors have been taught what to expect from the Web sites they visit regularly, and therefore this familiarity creates conventions Web designers should follow when creating usable Web sites.



3.46 Taking CSS to new heights

I'm not dismissing Nielsen's respected ideas out of hand. But I do take issue with his notion that just because visitors are familiar with a convention, that makes it right in all cases. After all, how can you know yet what is good Web design when the Web as a mainstream, commercial medium is still only a decade old?

Throughout the history of art, successive generations have often rejected the conventions of the past and invented new rules to challenge the old. In modern times, the cubists, abstract expressionists, and pop artists of the 1950s and 1960s looked at what went before, assimilated some ideas, and rejected others. They often looked to the modern world for their inspiration and incorporated modern ideas and materials to create new and exciting work.

Popular music takes inspiration from what has gone before, but when done well, it is not afraid to adapt to modern tastes and prides itself on making previous generations uncomfortable with new sounds. Without the Beatles there may not have been the Jam; without the Jam there may not have been Oasis—or the Brit pop bands that followed them.

You can and should be continually making and breaking rules as you learn more about the Web and how people use it. Now is not the time to stop. Much of the recent buzz over Web 2.0 solutions assumes we have learned something from Web 1.0. I believe the Web is far from version 2.0; it is barely into the alpha version, and I see many of the mistakes of the past being repeated again, this time with the added gloss of big footers, rounded corners, and often inappropriate uses for Ajax and related technologies.

We must ask ourselves, have we really understood everything there is to know about what makes a well-designed Web site? Is the layout and structure of Amazon the pinnacle of what can be achieved with e-commerce? Does the simplicity of Google's antidesign mean that search interfaces have reached their minimalist best? When we look at the Web today, it's clear we have so much more to experiment with and to learn.

It is important to remember that the Web is a creative industry and visual designers and developers should not solely focus on technologies; instead, you should focus on what you want to achieve creatively. Only then should you use the most appropriate technologies to accomplish your creative goals. The world around us is a collage of inspiration, and the Web is a collage of technologies. The key to success is knowing when and how to best use those technologies: This is what makes Web design a fine art.