

PATRICK McNEIL, creator of designmeltdown.com

THE WEB DESIGNER'S IDEA BOOK

the ultimate guide to themes, trends and styles in website design



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DEDICATION

For my biggest fan, my mom Alyce

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patrick McNeil is a freelance web developer and the creator of www.design-meltdown.com. His diverse interests have merged web technology and design, resulting in work that touches everything from high design to hard-core programming.

Ultimately, his love for design, inspiration and sharing knowledge has fueled his passion for running Design Meltdown, where he has cataloged and observed web design trends over the last few years. It is this passion that led to the creation of this very book.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book would never have been possible if it were not for the hundreds of designers pouring their hearts into their work and making such a feast of beautiful web design. I thank them all for their inspiring work. I also owe a debt of gratitude to the loyal readers of Design Meltdown who have continually affirmed the need for resources such as this. Many thanks go to the fine people at F+W Publications for taking on this project and making this all come together. Most of all I want to thank my wife Angela for her many hours of listening to me drone on about web design, and my mother, who is perhaps my biggest fan, reading every last word I produce. She also helped pull together the mountain of release forms needed to make the book possible.



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WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

Cataloging web design is a dangerous business that starts with a few obvious topics and soon leads to hundreds of categories and thousands of samples. This book represents two years of just such methodical activity. Inspired by the work of Steven Heller in his book *Genius Moves: 100 Icons of Graphic Design*, I searched for inspiration in modern web design patterns by creating the website Design Meltdown. The result of this experiment exceeded my expectations. The inspiration I found in these random groupings snowballed into the book that is before you today.

To say that it is a challenge to create a current book about the web is

an enormous understatement. By the time this book is published, countless samples will have changed while others will have disappeared completely. This is to be expected. In fact, it is the web's continuous growth and change that appeals to many web designers and keeps the industry exciting. The irony of such change is that it creates an endless need for resources like this book.

I like to think of this book as a snapshot in time. It captures the web as it exists in 2008, showcasing the very best we have to offer at this time. The inclusion of certain topics and the exclusion of others reflects the status of the industry and will hopefully serve

as a reference point in years to come. I like to think that web design, like print design, can be nostalgic, and that old styles can return from the grave to find new life. The industry has gotten to a point where it is truly respected as a legitimate platform for commerce, and more interestingly, design. As a result, the quality has improved immensely. I hope we do not look back on this era's web design with disdain—as we sometimes do the earlier years of the Internet—but instead appreciate the works that have been created and allow them to re-inspire us to shape the future.

—Patrick McNeil, July 2008

01

Blog Forum Event E-Commerce Free Script Church Personal Design Firm Photography Portfolio Web Hosting Web Services Web Software

SITES BY TYPE

The selected site types presented in this book barely scratch the surface of possibilities. In fact, one could easily create an entire book based on the cataloging of sites by their industry or purpose. The selection of topics here, such as web services, software and the ever-present need for web hosting, serves to represent some of the most active segments of the online world. From portfolios and blogs to church sites, these categories showcase some of the finest sites in each segment, and effectively capture exciting new areas of development right now.

BLOG

An entire book could be written on beautiful blog design, so it seems absurd to present only a few examples here. Unfortunately, the scope of this particular book requires me to limit these examples to a few incredibly beautiful ones. The biggest challenge for blog designers is to create a fresh, new design that isn't stuck in a basic blog default template.

One design pattern that works well is to highlight the most recent post on the homepage so it stands out. A remarkable example of this is North x East. This beautifully crafted blog essentially has the title of the most recent post displayed prominently in the main banner. This is one of the most distinct and effective implementations of this particular style. It appeals to repeat visitors by making the most recent post easy to find. Instead of facing the overwhelming task of choosing from a list of interesting

titles, even new users are encouraged to dig deeper on this site by starting with the suggested post.

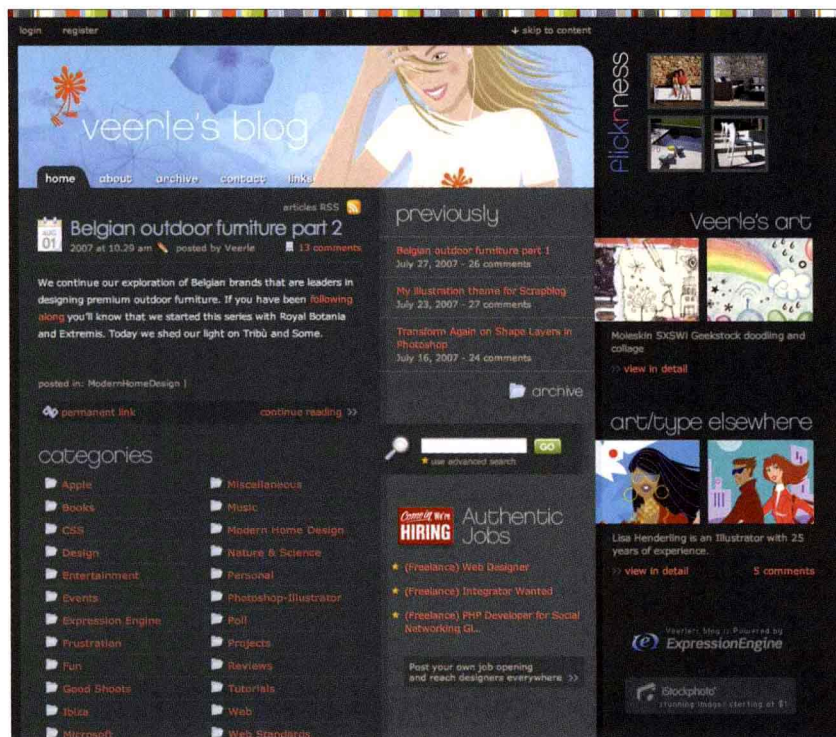
Another nice example of the highlighted post is on Veerle Pieters's blog, which displays the most recent post on the left and a list of previous posts next to it. A short excerpt, a date icon and a large title all help to set the highlighted post apart. Another nice feature of this blog is that it focuses more on the categories of the posts than the order in which they were written. This topic-oriented organization suits the site's content and readers. This is a subtle distinction, but it is certainly different from the default configuration of most blogging engines.

Yet another example of this approach is Eleven3. The primary brand of the site takes up the majority of the screen when the site initially loads. What follows is

standard blog content, except that, again, the newest post is emphasized. This unique approach meets the traditional needs of a static sales-oriented site with the fresh content of a thriving blog.

The final twist on this pattern is to display the full content of the most recent post. Design 2.0 does this. Users can easily read the new content without having to click past the homepage. Interestingly, this minimal approach is perfectly aligned with the overall minimal style of the blog.

Ultimately, the goal of blog design is to capture new visitors while rewarding repeat users. Creating an easy-to-consume design is a key piece of the puzzle. Making a distinct and beautiful design is certainly another. These samples have done both.



http://veerle.duoh.com



http://northeast.com



http://www.eleven3.com



http://design2-0.com



http://www.thedesignedtree.com

<http://www.irvelasco.com>

<http://aialex.com>

<http://www.obeattie.com>

<http://contactsheet.de>

<http://tatteredfly.com>

FORUM

Forum design can be difficult. A balance must be struck between the need to be unique and the need to meet user assumptions about how forums function. It is clearly a bad idea to disorient visitors by changing the standard forum layout too much. However, the forum will not stand out in the default design and layout, which is anything but beautiful. Some forums need to stand out more than others, but all forums need to be easy to use. Most forum applications are loaded with features that users don't need or understand. The designs selected for this chapter have reduced the forum to its most critical elements while managing to produce beautiful sites.

Of these samples the Designs Advice forum stands out the most. It sticks with some of the traditional interface elements but still manages to brand the

system effectively. Most of the extra, unneeded items have been removed. This cleans up the site and makes the wealth of information it contains far easier to consume. The site successfully balances the need for a unique brand and a user-friendly format.

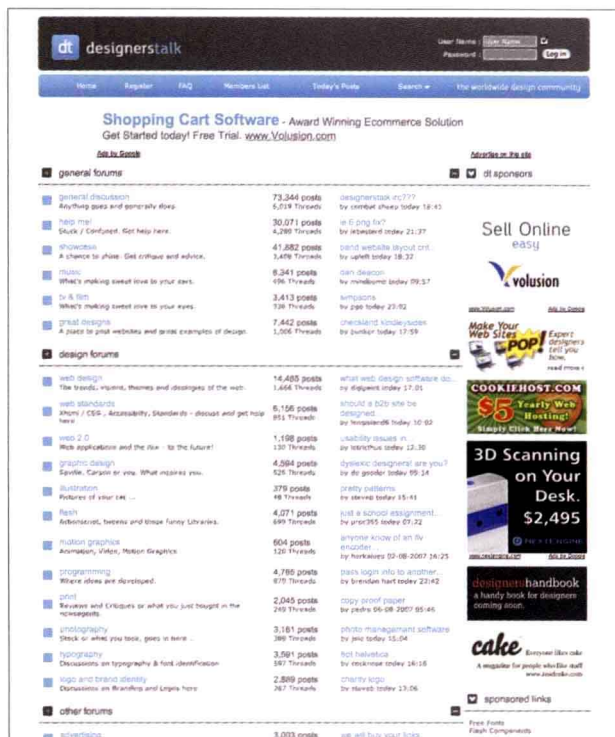
The price of success is more success. How can an effective forum design stand the test of time and thousands of posts? What happens when it contains so many posts that no human could ever consume them all? This is precisely the problem that Designers Talk faces. At the time of this writing, this general forum has over seventy thousand posts. On top of this, it contains over twenty-five different forums. The key to this forum site's success is how the design cuts through the clutter by suggesting a hierarchy of information. Instead of

presenting a ton of elements with the same weight, the designers made the important elements more noticeable. Because of this, it is surprisingly easy to scan the long list of forums to find one of interest. Once inside a forum, the layout is amazingly clean and easy to read. Again, skimming for a topic of interest couldn't be easier. Together, reasonably sized text and a bold color create the user-friendly interface.

One of the biggest potential pitfalls of any forum design is going with the default skin. Most forums contain too much information. Let's face it—if a forum is reasonably active, will anyone care what the last post date was? Assume that users want to read something, and help them find topics of interest by creating a design that is easy to dive into.



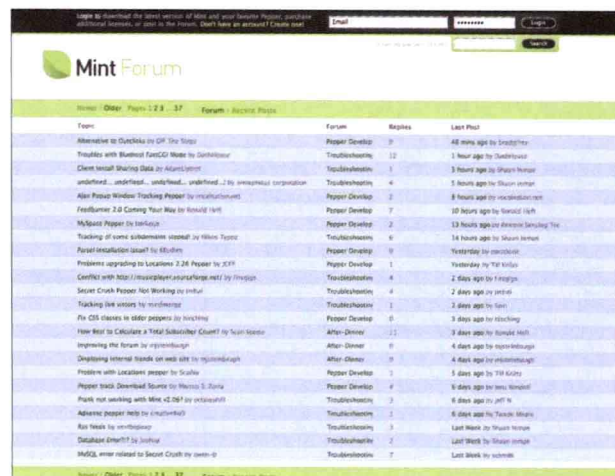
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<http://www.designerstalk.com/forums>



<http://www.designleague.de>



<http://haveamint.com/forum>



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