

Design without rulers

Put away your ruler. Here's how to design the way you see.

Continued ►



Continued ►

Design without rulers 0664

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To the reader, it's a man watering the world. To you, it's lines, textures and funny shapes. Put away your ruler; here's how to design the way you see!

Ever watch a street artist at work? What fun! A splash here, a dash there, and from a blank canvas a picture just . . . appears. He uses no mechanical tools at all, no columns, rulers or guides, yet the result is a beautiful whole. *It's so fluid.*

The best design is like that.

To see how it works, let's design a page, but instead of a grid, we'll use this picture—*what we see*—as our visual guide. Its lines, shapes, proportions and their relationships will govern our choice of type, sizes, colors, layout and everything else:



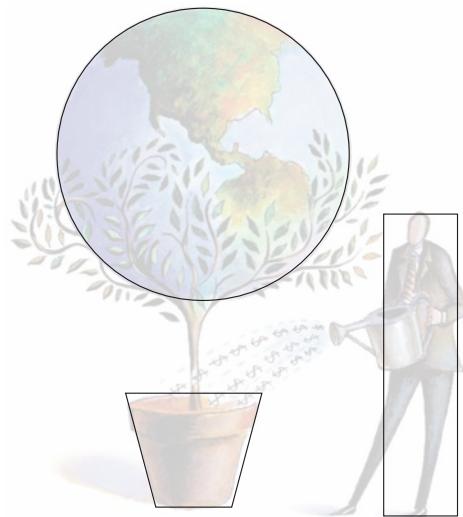
What can you see?

Measuring only by eye (closely, not exactly), can you answer the following?

- Is the man as tall as the globe?
- Is the man as wide as the pot?
- How many pots wide is the tree?
- What else in the picture is the size of the pot?

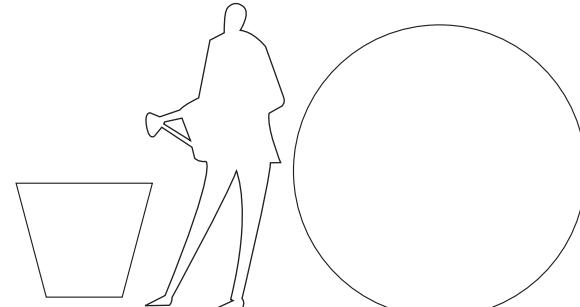
Take a visual inventory

Every image has lines, shapes, textures, colors and so on that can guide a design. First step is to take a visual “inventory.” Start with the big elements . . .



Basic shapes

The image is made of three basic shapes . . .



Sizes

It has a hierarchy of small, medium and large elements.



Layout

The composition is fairly balanced.

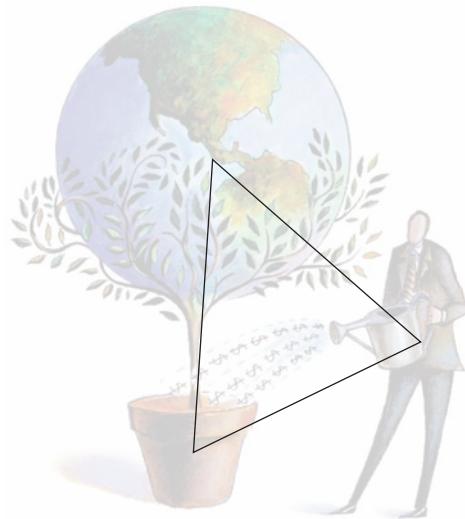
Focal point

A good image has a focal point. This image has two—one physical and one phantom.



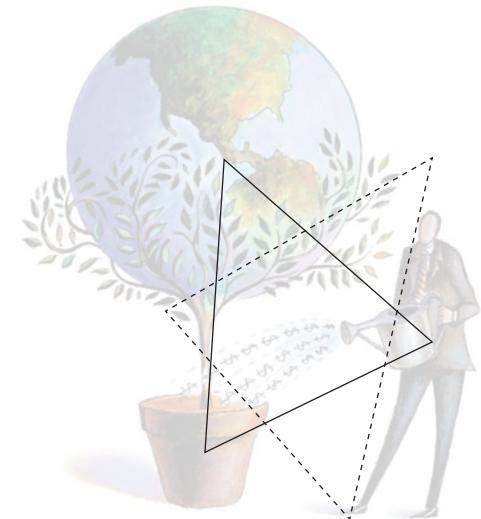
Physical

The primary focal point is usually the biggest, clearest or most vivid object in the image—in this case, the globe.



Phantom

The three forms create a compositional triangle, the center of which—just what you'd want—is on the money. The center is the strongest point of any visual field.



Secondary

The phantom is reinforced by the focal center of the white triangle. Had you noticed it?

Objects and spaces

The objects and spaces in this image are unusually repetitive . . .



The pot is the same size as the space above it . . .



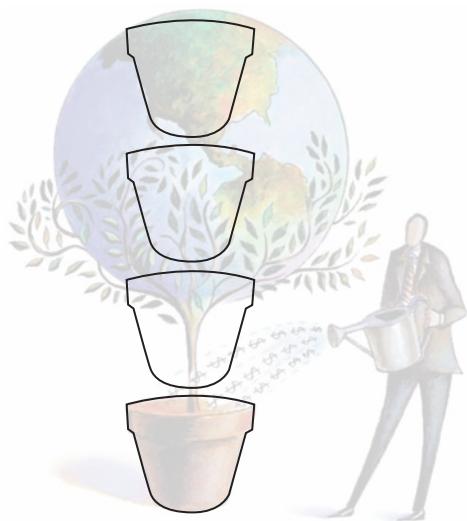
. . . and the size of the space beside it.



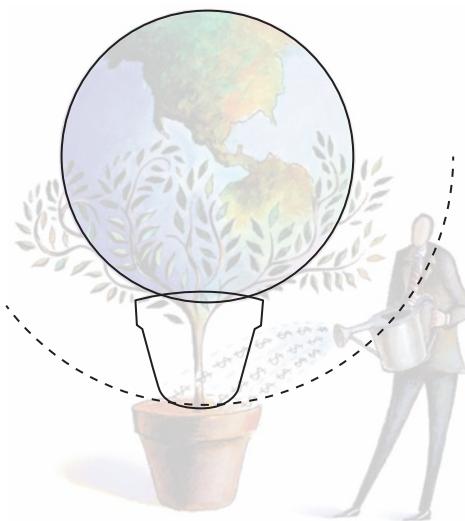
It's the same size as North America!

Close enough . . .

Artistic relationships are perceptual, not mechanical. If it looks close enough, it really *is* close enough, so inventory by eye, not with your ruler . . .



The image is four pots tall.



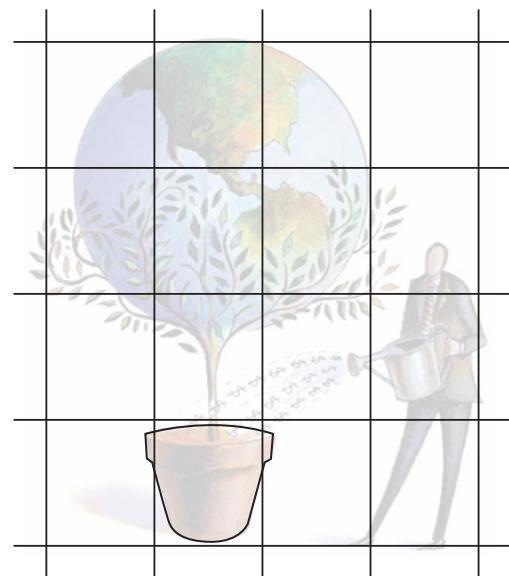
A one-pot space encircles the globe.



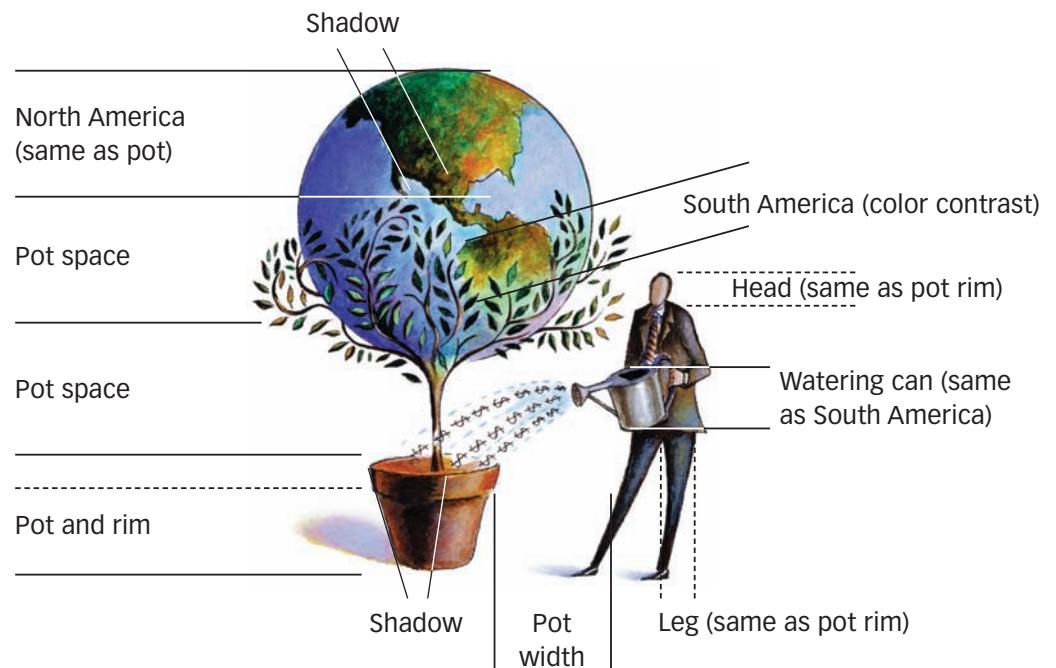
The man fits a pot space. This space is so repetitive . . .

A natural grid

This image has a natural grid that is unusually uniform.



... that it creates a whole grid! This is unusual.

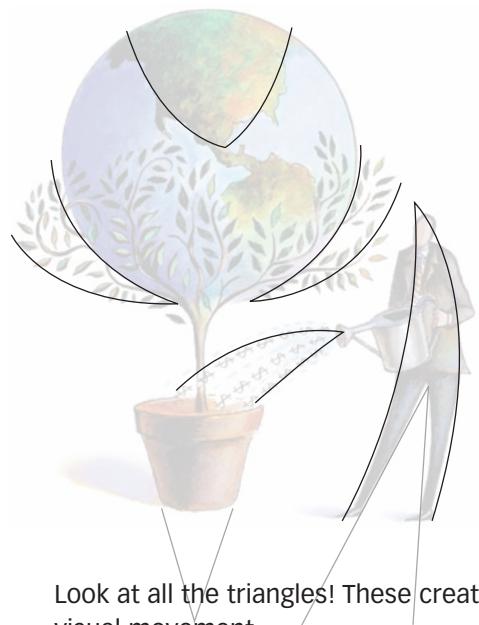


Smaller elements

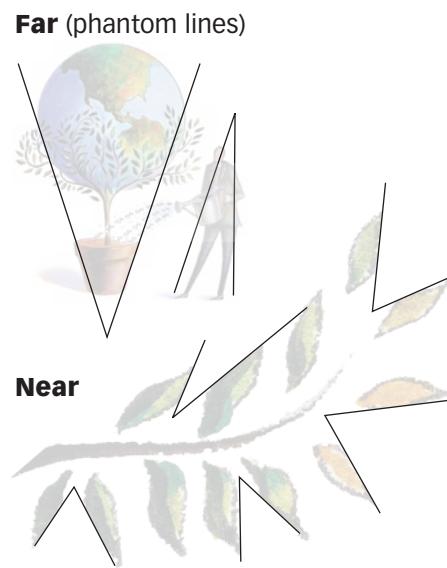
While you're looking at the large elements, make note of the smaller elements, too. Pay attention to edges and contrasts. Clear edges are like the man's head and legs. South America stands out because of its color contrast. The shadow areas have obvious weight. And so on. Take the time to consciously observe these things. What you're doing is training your eye. It will soon become intuitive.

Shape and texture

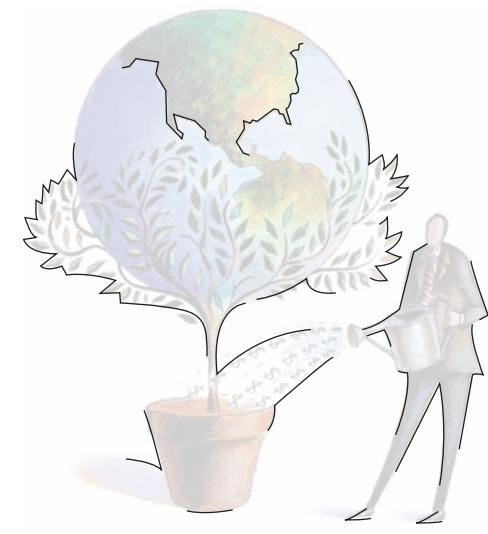
Be aware of what the lines are doing. Note if they're straight or curvy, where they're close or far apart, where they change direction, and so on.



Look at all the triangles! These create visual movement.



Triangles are evident at every distance from farthest to nearest.



The edges create a repetitive texture; note the pointiness throughout.

Choose colors

The next step is to create a color palette from the image . . .

A bazillion pixels!

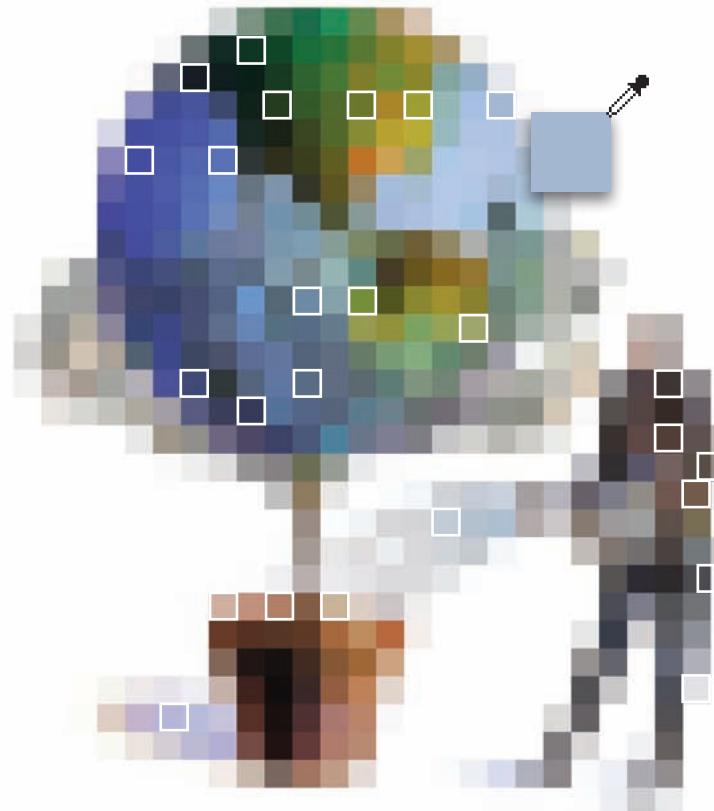
Color plays a major role in design. The easiest and best place to get a perfectly coordinated palette is the image itself. First, reduce its thousands of pixel-size colors (right, inset) to a workable few by applying Photoshop's or Illustrator's built-in *Mosaic* filter (far right). Rarely will you want more than 64 colors, and usually 32 or even 16 are better. For fewer colors, increase the Cell size; for more, decrease it.



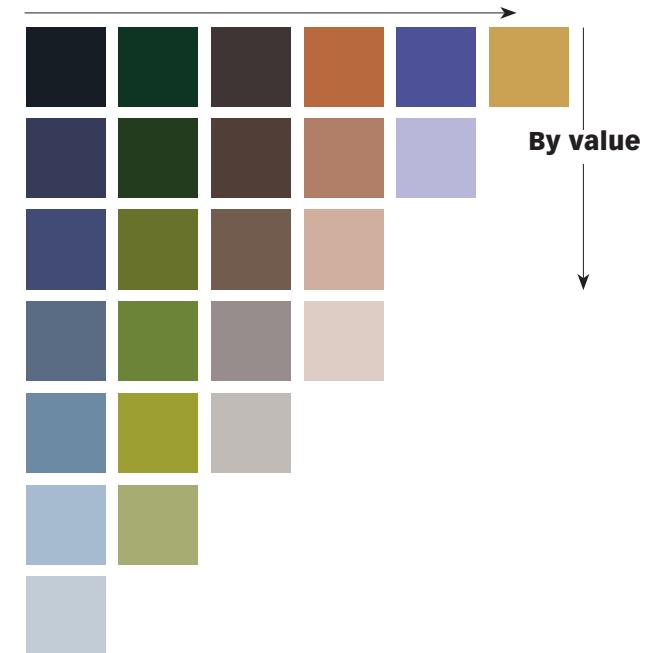
Organize

Sample color swatches with the eyedropper tool, then arrange the swatches by color and value . . .

You can see in *Mosaic* mode that the image has several major colors—the blues and greens of the globe, terracottas of the pot and grays of the man. Sample dark, medium and light pixels from each (right). Neatly arrange your choices by color, then by value (dark to light). Take the time to actually do this; you'll be surprised by how much it helps you visualize. Sample a few minor colors—in this case yellows and violets—that can be used for complements and counterpoints. Discard lookalikes.



Arrange by color



Try each one on

Try the image atop a swatch of each color. What you'll see is that every color you picked automatically coordinates, because it's already in there! Cool.

Warm colors

Warm colors are soft, earthy, welcoming, suitable for environmental messages. Note how the blue globe stands out against its opposite colors, the terracottas.



Cool colors

Cool colors are more direct and somewhat businesslike and aloof. The blue globe now blends into the background, and those opposite oranges stand out.



Select type

Next, we need a typeface that feels like the image.



Type is graphical

There are many ways to choose a typeface. You may have a house style, so no choice is required. You may have a look already in mind—say, formal or businesslike or collegiate. You may have a new favorite to try out, which is always fun.

Whatever the case, the thing to keep in mind is that type is graphical, just like an image. Its lines will sweep or jog or dive. It will have tooth and grain. When you add type to a design, its visual characteristics interact with those already on the page, for better or for worse.

For this article, the image is driving our choices; our goal is to match the visual

properties of image and type. Our type choice must also be functional—beautiful, readable, reproducible.

So what's here? We've seen that the image is full of texture; it has a rich, detailed surface and a lot of "leafy-ness." The leaves are pointy, evenly spaced and actually look a lot like serif type.

Let's look at typefaces in three common categories to see what we can see.

Glypha
Myriad Pro
Galliard



Three viewing distances

Compare the type to the texture at three distances—near, middle and far; it will look different at each. Many typefaces are better at one distance than another.



Glypha is outdoorsy

A beautiful slab serif with perfect letterfit, Glypha is boxy and clean, with hard edges and repetitive shapes. It's excellent in both headlines and text—an uncommon asset—and its bold, slab sides make it a natural for rough, outdoorsy topics like our environmental project. Glypha is also very easy to read. Problem? It looks nothing like the image.



Far

oðal, ræsesar eru og comuniuncationa jocallt eru og aðrossi meir-
eþbörðum um to qefjol cæfir fyrir resones inn til þursfisti, fœrujor-
ðrumsess díomáttu in fyrri díuein seðfor. Þótt mið aðal er me-
tefnið fyrir ófært og ógögn fyrir óvælu eða ófært og ógögn me-
tum. Þá er meðal annars ófært og ógögn fyrir óvælu eða ófært og ógögn me-

Middle

There has never been a greater opportunity for private enterprise to do good for everyone on earth by creating new business growth in the green sector. Join us for a day as we explore how to deploy capital resources in industry, technology, research and communications locally and across international boundaries for both private and public benefit. To reserve a seat, log onto www.greenenergyasia.org.

Turn it upside down

A reliable way to “see” a typeface is to turn it upside down, which reveals its ridges, hollows and funny knicknacks that are always felt but normally unnoticed.

Near



Myriad is crystal clear

For outright visual clarity, there is probably no typeface better than Myriad. Extremely good in headlines and short passages of text, Myriad's large, open counters and minimal forms retain their clarity at even the lowest resolutions. Myriad projects a light, fresh, clean look that's a natural for green topics, but it doesn't look like our image.

Far



reservoirs and communications local and across international borders now to develop sustainable reservoirs in upstream, downstream and across mountain in the green sector. Join us for a day as we explore how to do more for everyone on earth by creating new business growth in the green sector. There has never been a greater opportunity for private enterprise to do good for everyone on earth by creating new business growth in the green sector. Join us for a day as we explore how to deploy capital resources in industry, technology, research and communications locally and across international boundaries for both private and public benefit. To reserve a seat, log onto www.greenenergyseminar.org.

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Watch the surface

While you're comparing lines and edges, pay attention to surface texture, too. Note the leaves are irregular and grainy, with a mottled blend of colors.



Galliard Roman is textured

Galliard is a Roman typeface with chiseled features and sharp, exaggerated serifs. Its thick-to-thin strokes help make Galliard easy to read, although its angles would be tiresome in large amounts. It comes in several weights, it's well proportioned, it has the easy familiarity of serif type, and it looks like the leaves! Galliard will be our choice.



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Layout

Layout is where those lines, shapes, spaces, colors and textures finally get put to work. We'll illustrate how by designing a legal-size brochure page.



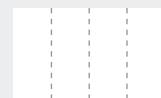
Work to the image

First step is to place the image on the page. Where, and how big? Key is to have visible relationships. Because the globe and its pot have a strong central line (right), center page will be its strongest position, where each will reinforce the other. (Remember, it's center-*ish*; none of this is ruler exact.) Similarly, the pot space we saw encircle the globe will be visible as a top margin (above).

Legal-sized brochure, 14" x 8½"



For this design, we've hidden the non-printing fold lines (left); we care only about what the eye can see.



Set the headline

A rule of design is to work with what's in front of you; don't arbitrarily make stuff up. Here, the headline picks up the visual characteristics of the globe.



Type based on size, color and texture

(Top) Placing a headline across the top is normal, but don't do it; the straight, horizontal line is a *foreign object* that's different from what's in front of us. Instead, a block of overlapping lines in Galliard Ultra mimics the size, mass,

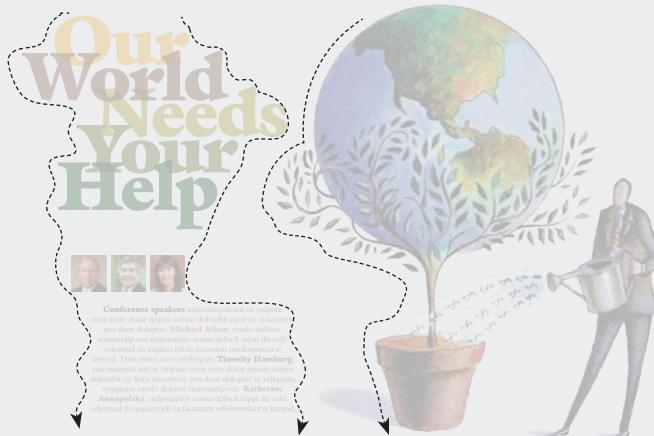
color and texture of the globe, a visible relationship. Its position beside the globe (above) strengthens the connection. Note how the interaction of translucent serifs (white

inset, above) mimics the size and texture of the leaves.

Margins are unaligned in any way.

Add photos and text

As you add things to the page its complexity increases, and it becomes increasingly difficult to sustain visual coherency. Pay attention to what's happening *around* your material—in the margins, at the edges, between things.



Rectangular space, organic design

A paradox of design is that while nature is organic and irregular, paper and text blocks are rectangular. These rectangles have strong and often unwanted visual presence, and it's a challenge to "unrectangle" a page without messing up the reading. But there are ways. In this case, the photos and the text remain unaligned, yet meander downward following the general contours of the globe (above). Unlike a standard text wrap, make sure that no identifiable white shapes form between elements.

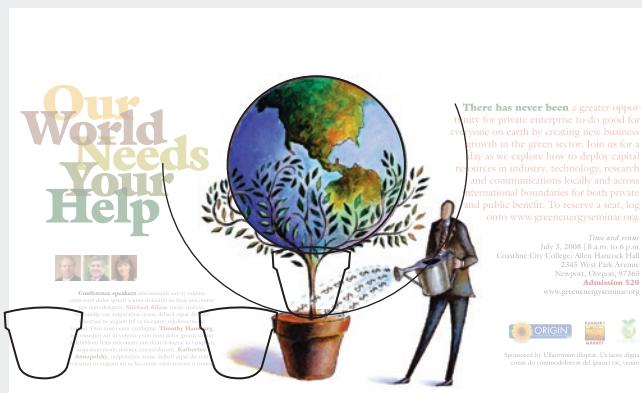


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velerstrd ut augiam iril ea faccumin odolorecer
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sequatur modo dolerce tumansdip ent. **Katherine**
Annapolsky, nulputatinis nonse deliscit utpat dit volt
velerstrd ut augiam iril ea faccumin odolorecer si nsmod.

Toothy texture (Left) Set in Galliard Ultra and colored like the globe, the speakers' names stand out from the surrounding text, while the whole paragraph has the texture of the illustration, an easy blend of form and function.

Align to the paper

The paper is also an active element that can be used as needed. Here, the lead paragraph and key details are aligned right to an edge, establishing a visual anchor.



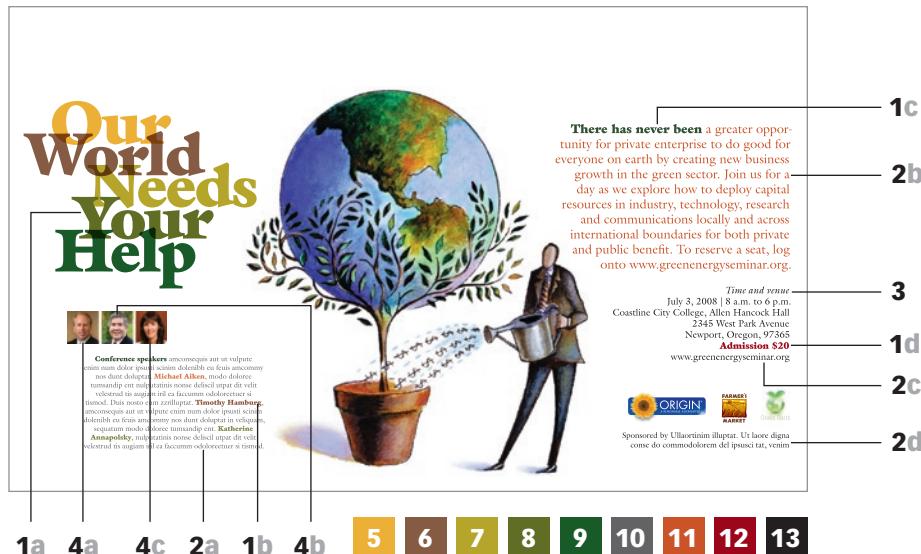
If you've taken the time to thoroughly inventory your image, you'll find yourself seeing (or feeling) things you'd otherwise miss. Above, the pot space recurs almost intuitively between elements on the page. As a result, while the layout appears only loosely structured, it has real coherency that's felt more than consciously observed. Note also that the lead text block in the upper right, like the headline across from it, is the general size and shape of the globe, another intuitive setting.



Descending sizes Finally, text aligned right descends to the lower right corner, the natural exit point of the page, in increasing detail. Note the ragged left edges meander loosely around the image as before.



Article resources



Typefaces

- 1 (a-d)** [ITC Galliard Ultra](#) | a) 78 pt
b) 9 pt, c) 16 pt, d) 12 pt
- 2 (a-d)** [ITC Galliard Roman](#) | a) 9/11 pt
b) 16/19 pt, c) 12/14 pt, d) 10/12 pt
- 3** [ITC Galliard Italic](#) | 12 pt

Colors

- | | |
|-----------|------------------|
| 5 | C7 M32 Y90 K40 |
| 6 | C31 M67 Y80 K45 |
| 7 | C25 M23 Y100 K10 |
| 8 | C50 M27 Y100 K38 |
| 9 | C70 M35 Y80 K50 |
| 10 | C0 M0 Y0 K75 |
| 11 | C15 M80 Y100 K5 |
| 12 | C0 M100 Y85 K40 |
| 13 | C0 M0 Y0 K100 |

Images

- 4 (a-d)** iStockphoto.com | [a](#) [b](#) [c](#) [d](#)

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Dexter Mark Abellera Staff designer

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For presentation format

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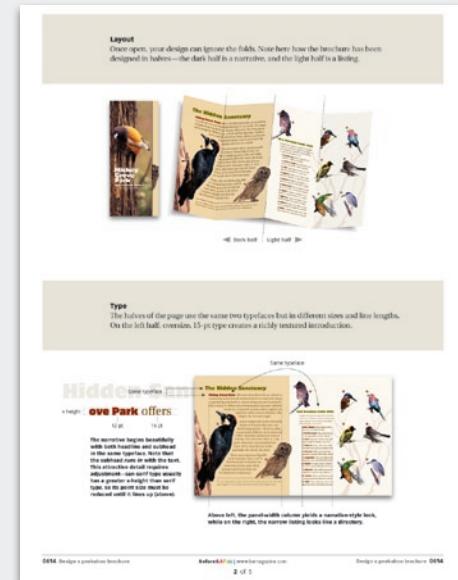
Print
Format: Landscape
Page Size: Fit to Page



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Presentation format or
Paper-saver format

For paper-saver format

[Print: \(Specify pages 23–33\)](#)



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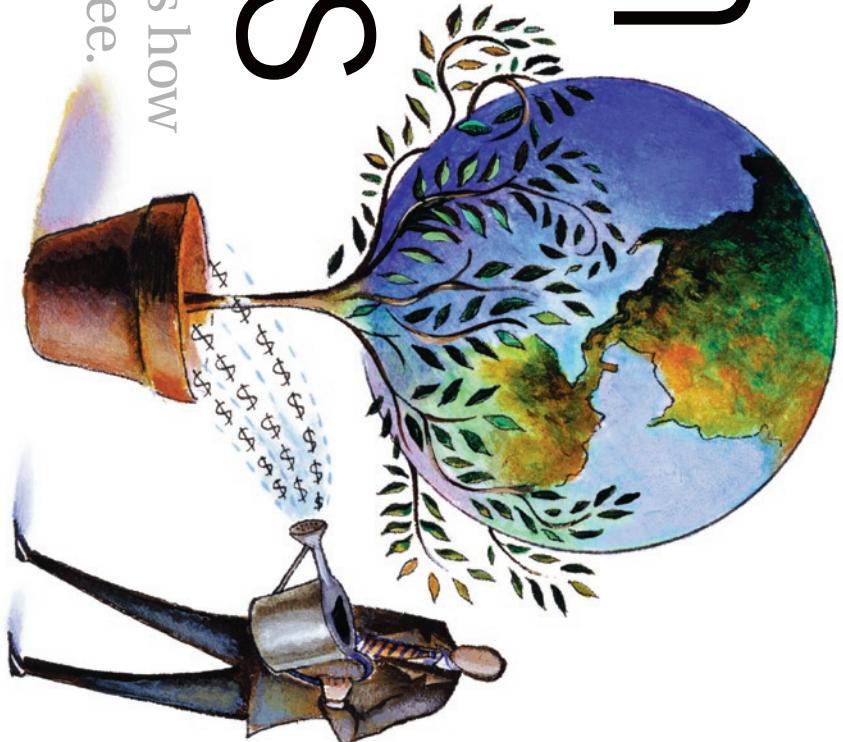
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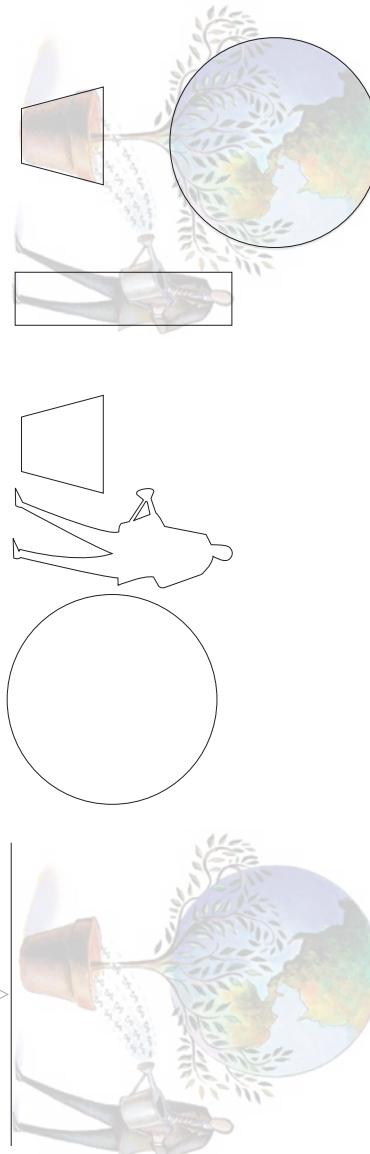
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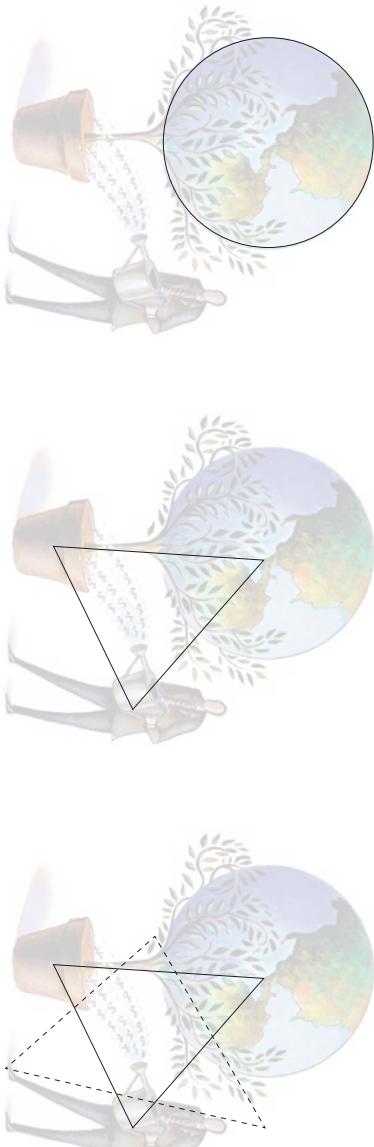
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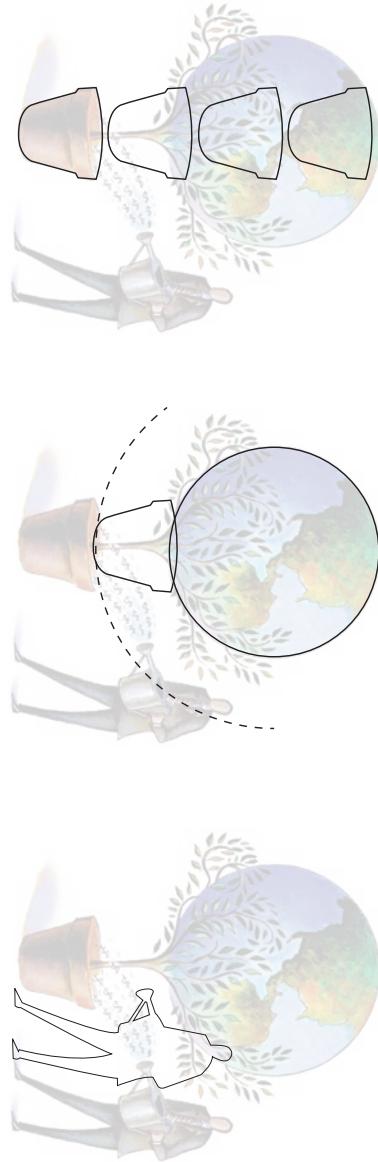
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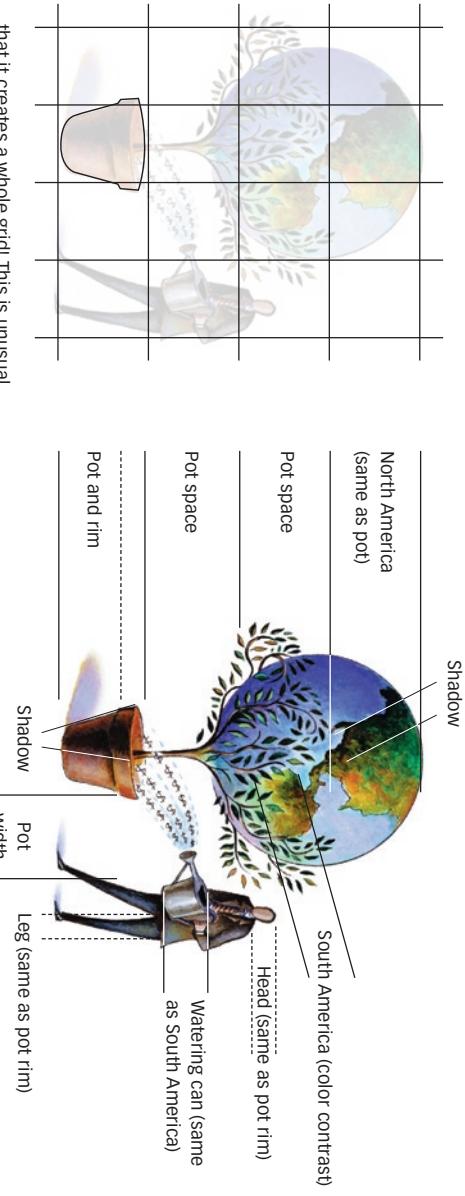
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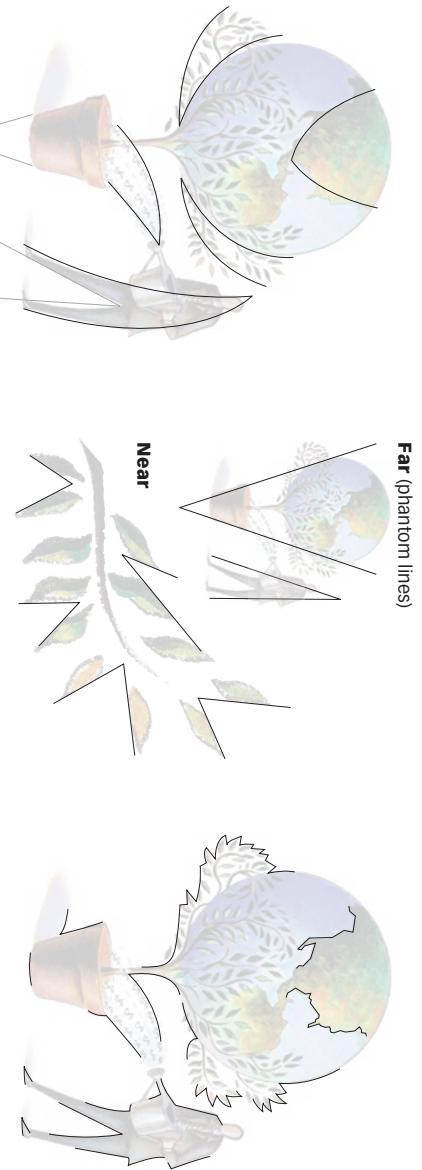
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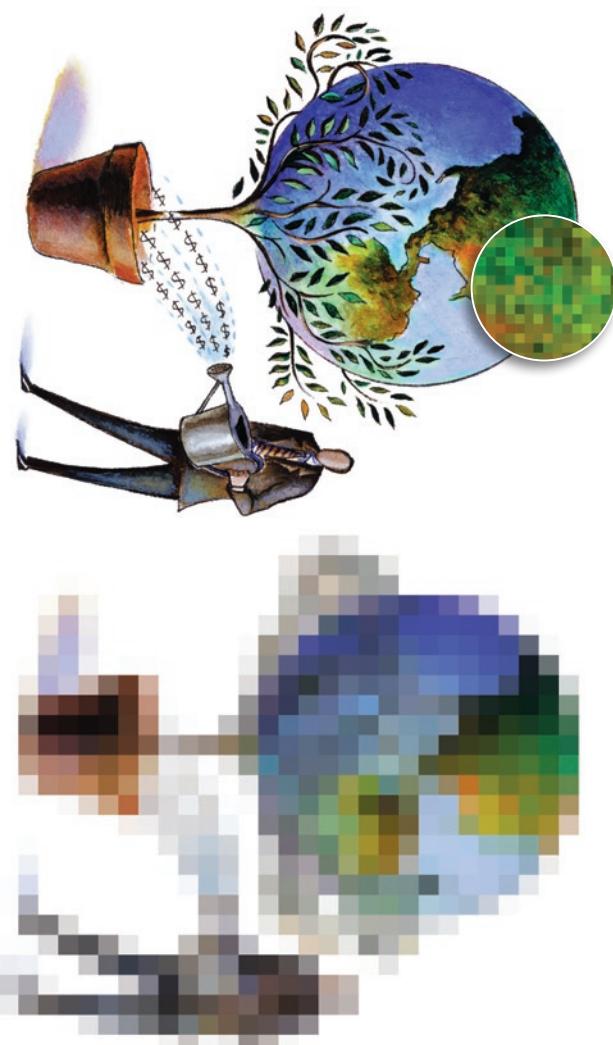
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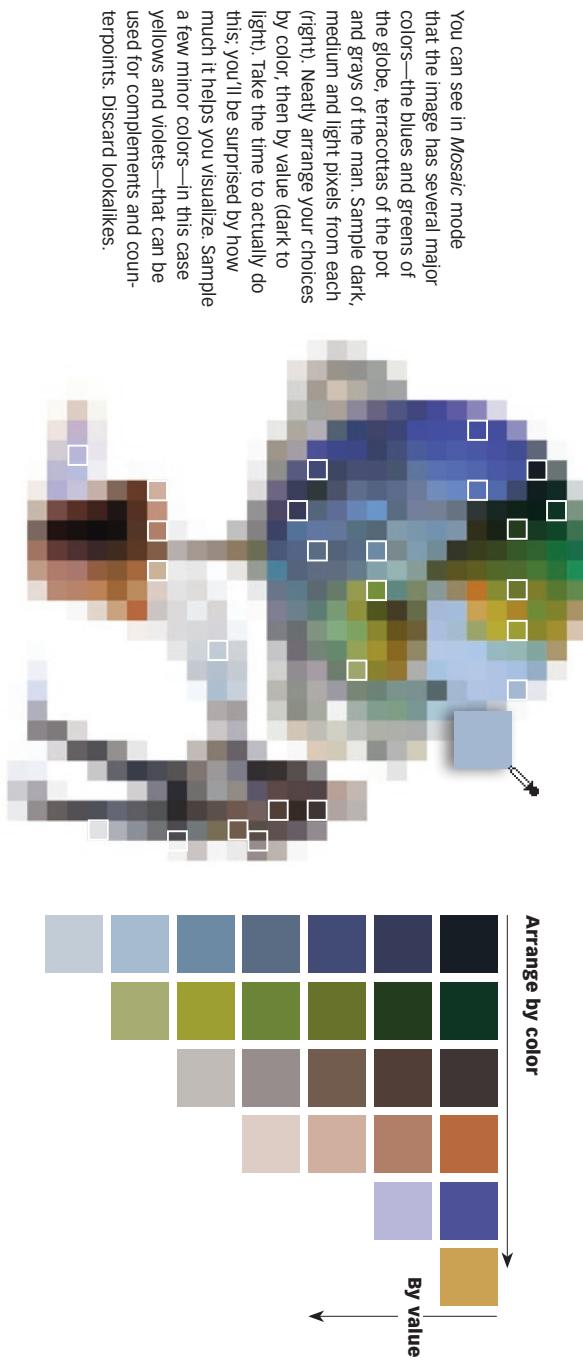
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Note the leaves are irregular and grainy, with a mottled blend of colors.



imprudent, eccentric, and communication
for a quick, effective, and efficient response
and new products. Join the
sector. Join the
industry to do good for everyone.
Dive into our new, green, and vibrant
benefit. To reserve a seat, log into
the event.

Galliard Roman is textured
Galliard is a Roman typeface with chiseled features and sharp, exaggerated serifs. Its thick-to-thin strokes help make Galliard easy to read, although its angles would be tiresome in large amounts. It comes in several weights, it's well proportioned, it has the easy familiarity of serif type, and *it looks like the leaves! Galliard will be our choice.*

There has never been a greater opportunity for private enterprise to do good for everyone on earth by creating new business growth in the green sector. For a day as we explore how to develop capital sources in industry technology, searching communications locally and across international boundaries for both private and public benefit. To reserve a seat, log into

Layout

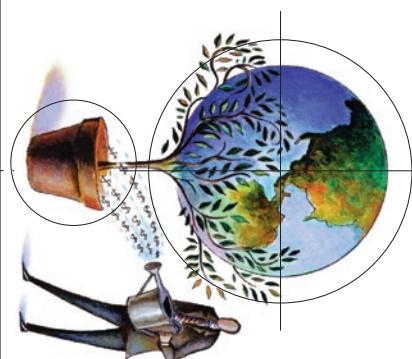
Layout is where those lines, shapes, spaces, colors and textures finally get put to work. We'll illustrate how by designing a legal-size brochure page.

Legal-sized brochure, 14" x 8 1/2"



Work to the image

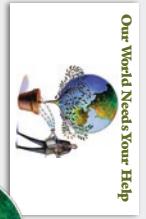
First step is to place the image on the page. Where, and how big? Key is to have visible relationships. Because the globe and its pot have a strong central line (right), center page will be its strongest position, where each will reinforce the other. (Remember, it's center-ish; none of this is ruler exact.) Similarly, the pot space we saw encircle the globe will be visible as a top margin (above).



For this design, we've hidden the non-printing fold lines (left); we care only about what the eye can see.

Set the headline

A rule of design is to work with what's in front of you; don't arbitrarily make stuff up. Here, the headline picks up the visual characteristics of the globe.



Our World Needs Your Help



Our World Needs Your Help



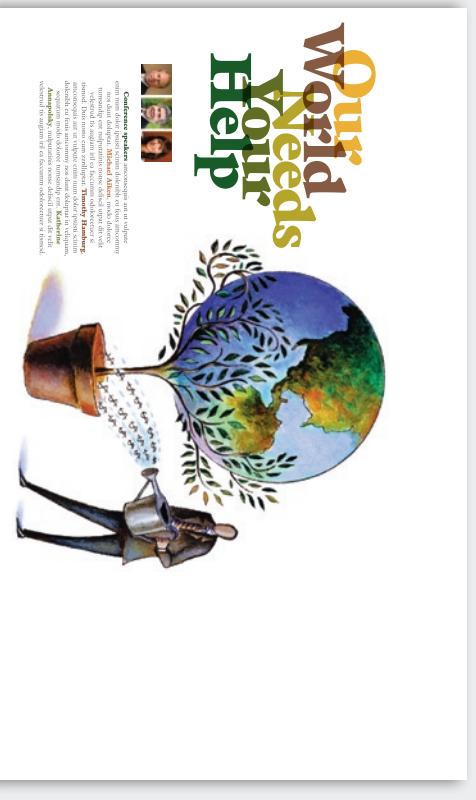
Our World Needs Your Help

Type based on size, color and texture

(Top) Placing a headline across the top is normal, but don't do it; the straight, horizontal line is a *foreign* object that's different from what's in front of us. Instead, a block of overlapping lines in Galliard Ultra mimics the size, mass, color and texture of the globe, a visible relationship. Its position beside the globe (above) strengthens the connection. Note how the interaction of translucent serifs (white inset, above) mimics the size and texture of the leaves. Margins are unaligned in any way.

Add photos and text

As you add things to the page its complexity increases, and it becomes increasingly difficult to sustain visual coherency. Pay attention to what's happening *around* your material—in the margins, at the edges, between things.



Rectangular space, organic design

A paradox of design is that while nature is organic and irregular, paper and text blocks are rectangular. These rectangular angles have strong and often unwanted visual presence, and it's a challenge to "unrectangle" a page without messing up the reading. But there are ways. In this case, the photos and the text remain unaligned, yet meander downward following the general contours of the globe (above). Unlike a standard text wrap, make sure that no identifiable white shapes form between elements.



Toothy texture

(Left) Set in Galliard Ultra and colored like the globe, the speakers' names stand out from the surrounding text, while the whole paragraph has the texture of the illustration, an easy blend of form and function.

•**Speakers** anteconquis aut
ipsum scimus dolentibus cu feu.
Alport. **Michael Aiken**, medico.
nt mutuariatis conse discit utp
is argum ril ea faccium dolore
ut vulpere enim num dolor ip
antomoy nos dunt dolop
dolore tumsandip. ent
-minis nose de-
-dolop

Align to the paper

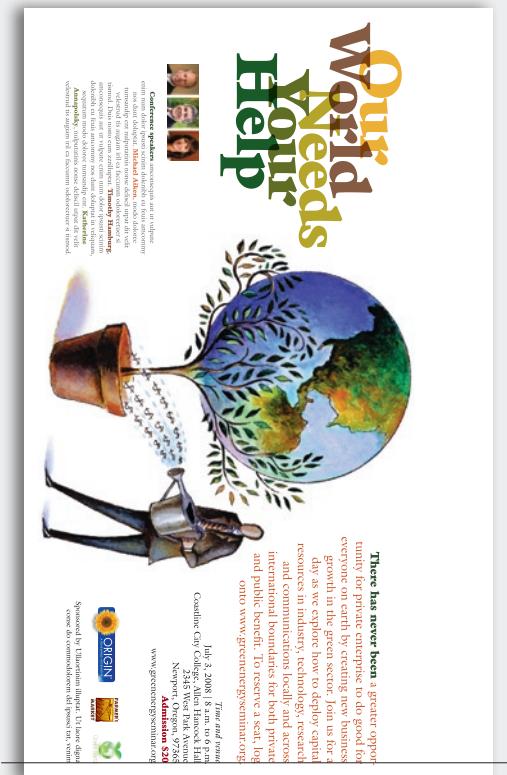
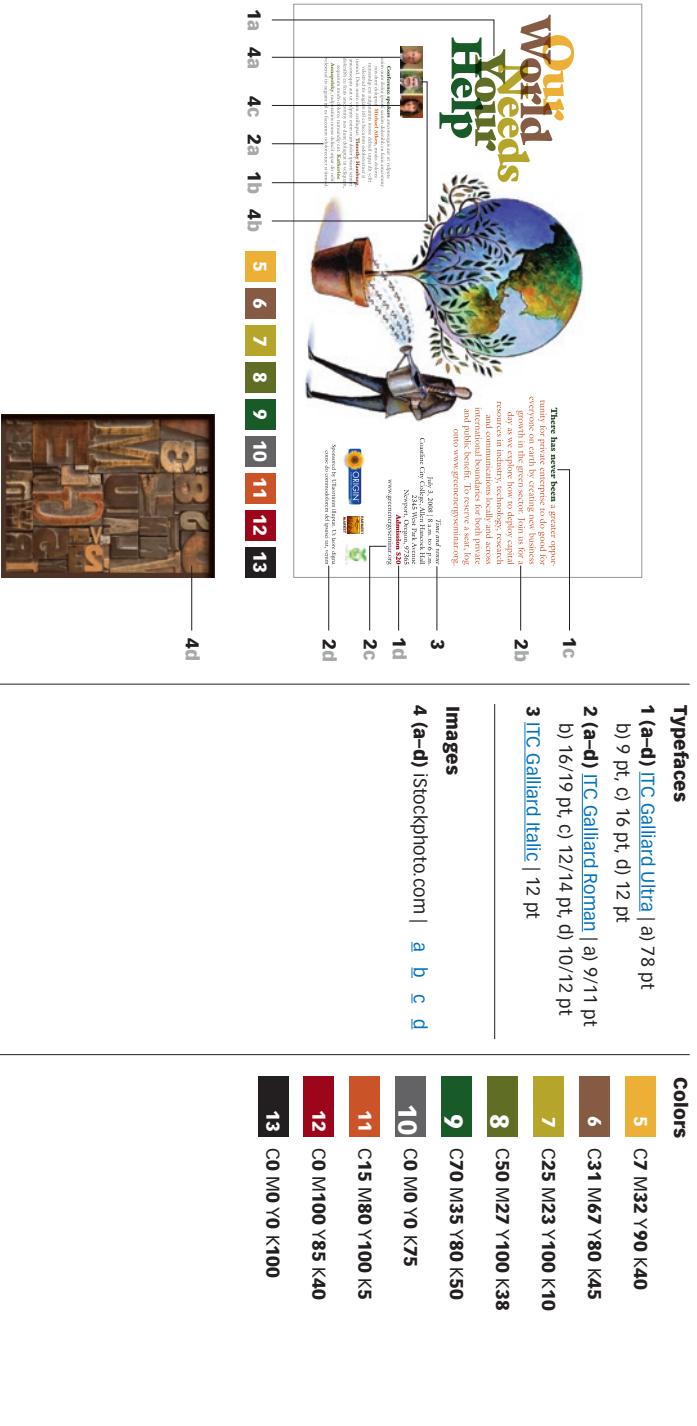
The paper is also an active element that can be used as needed. Here, the lead paragraph and key details are aligned right to an edge, establishing a visual anchor.

Parallel lines have an automatic relationship



That recurring pot space If you've taken the time to thoroughly inventory your image, you'll find yourself seeing (or feeling) things you'd otherwise miss. Above, the pot space recurs almost intuitively between elements on the page. As a result, while the layout appears only loosely structured, it has real coherency that's felt more than consciously observed. Note also that the lead text block in the upper right, like the headline across from it, is the general size and shape of the globe, another intuitive setting.

Article resources



Descending sizes Finally, text aligned right descends to the lower right corner; the natural exit point of the meander in increasing detail. Note the ragged left edges loosely around the image as before.

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