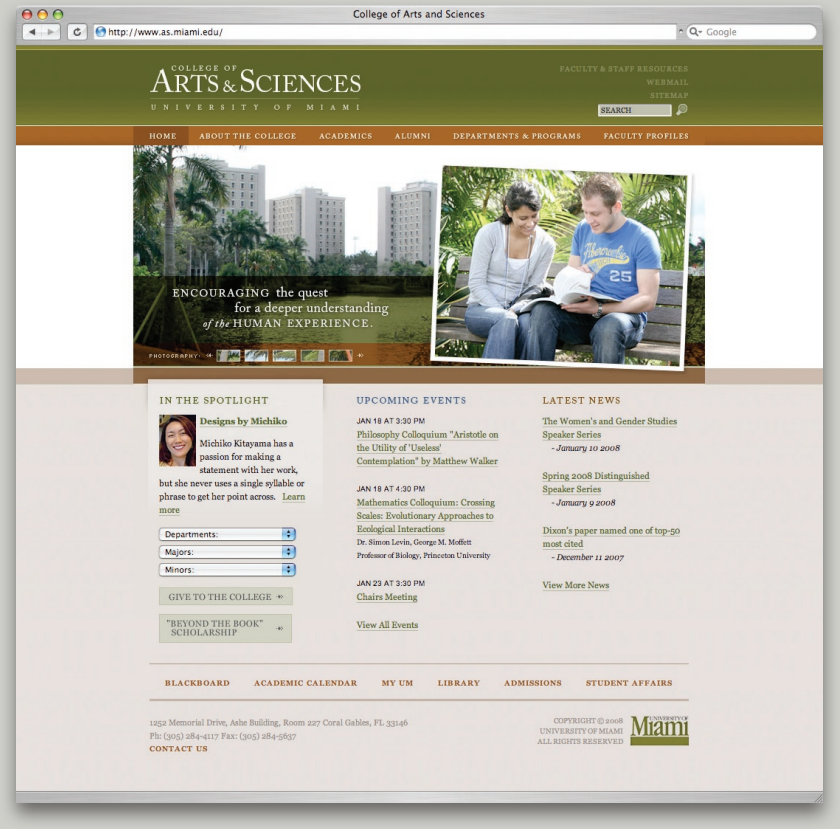
Lessons from a beautiful site



The University of Miami College of Arts & Sciences shows that beauty really is in the details.

Continued ►

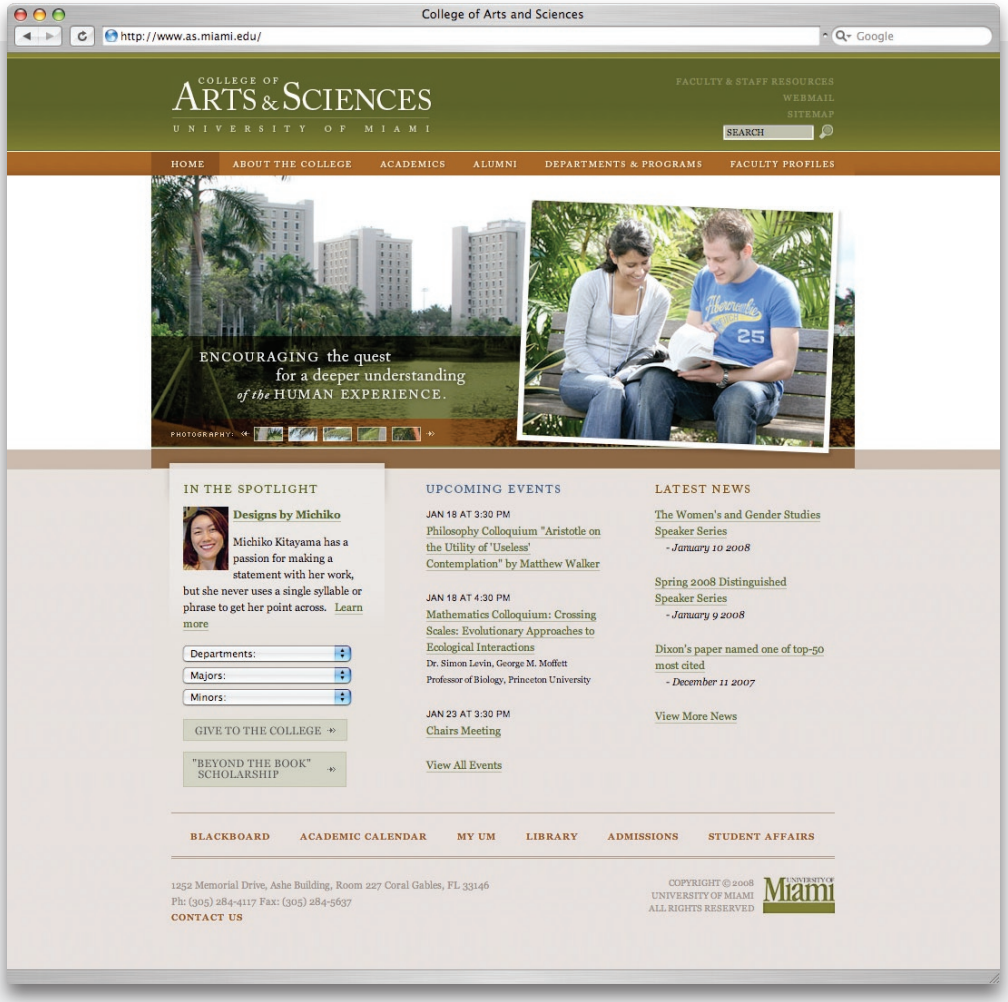
Lessons from a beautiful site

The University of Miami College of Arts & Sciences site shows that beauty really is in the details.

The best design is simple design: an idea, an image, a few words, open space. It's clear, attractive, memorable.

But real life is not often simple; it's full of *stuff*. People, programs and commerce all need attention and screen space, and this can make for a busy, complex site.

What we like about the University of Miami's College of Arts & Sciences site is that it handles complexity beautifully. It does this in two ways: It reduces each element to its essence (the simple thing), then it beautifully crafts the details. A dozen visual techniques allow its many parts to coexist effortlessly. Let's look at a few.



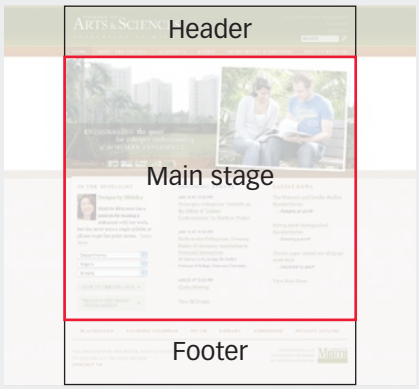
Home page Two dozen elements and links easily coexist on this inviting, visually coherent page.

Structure

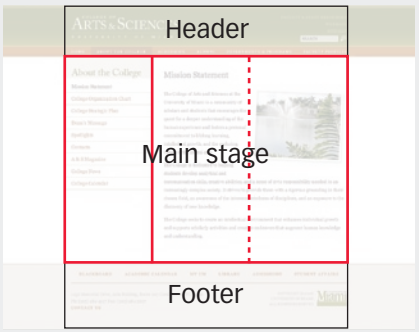
The site is conveniently screen size, not too long, so most of it is always visible. It is organized in three horizontal sections; each holds a different kind of information—permanent stuff top and bottom, active stuff in the middle.

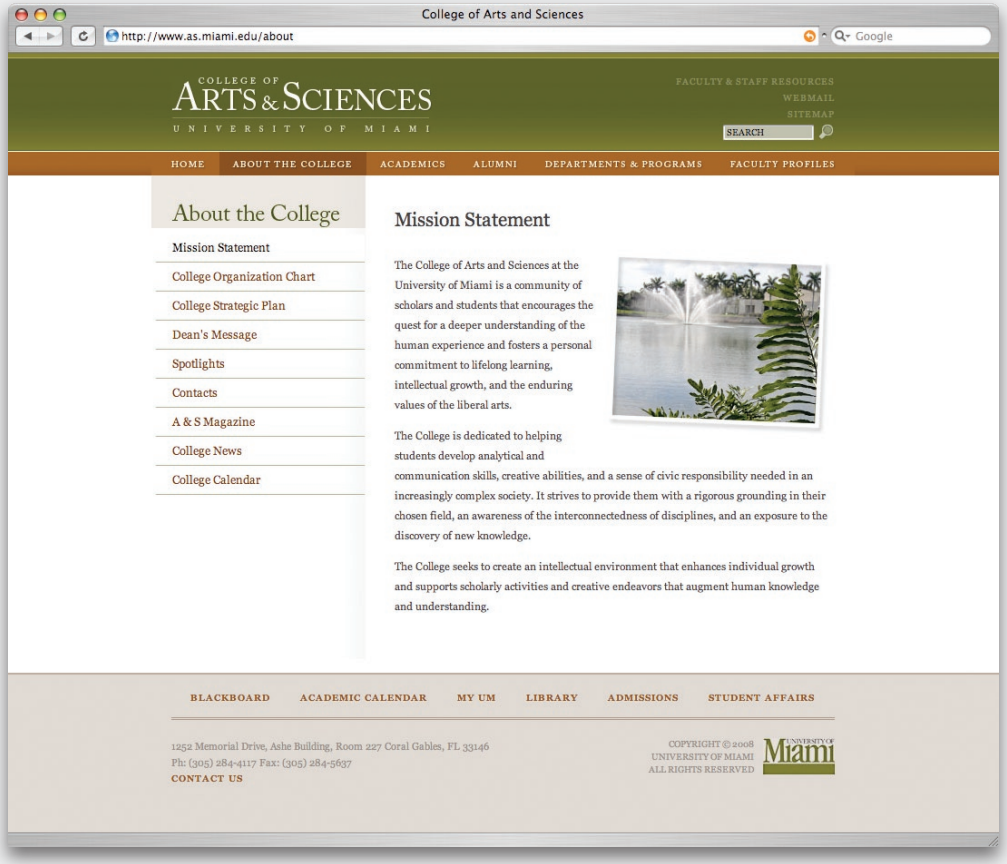
Color differentiates the sections
A white "center stage" is flanked by a dark header and light footer. These contain the foundational elements—logo, links, search and so on. The white center is active, with transitory stories, news briefs, stuff like that. Left, a screen-size space like this conveys a tight, organized impression and is easier to read than a scrolling page. Tight editing is key.

Home page



Interior page





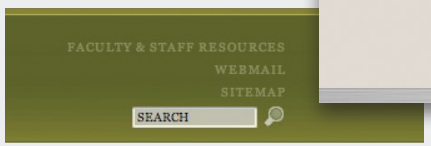
Header

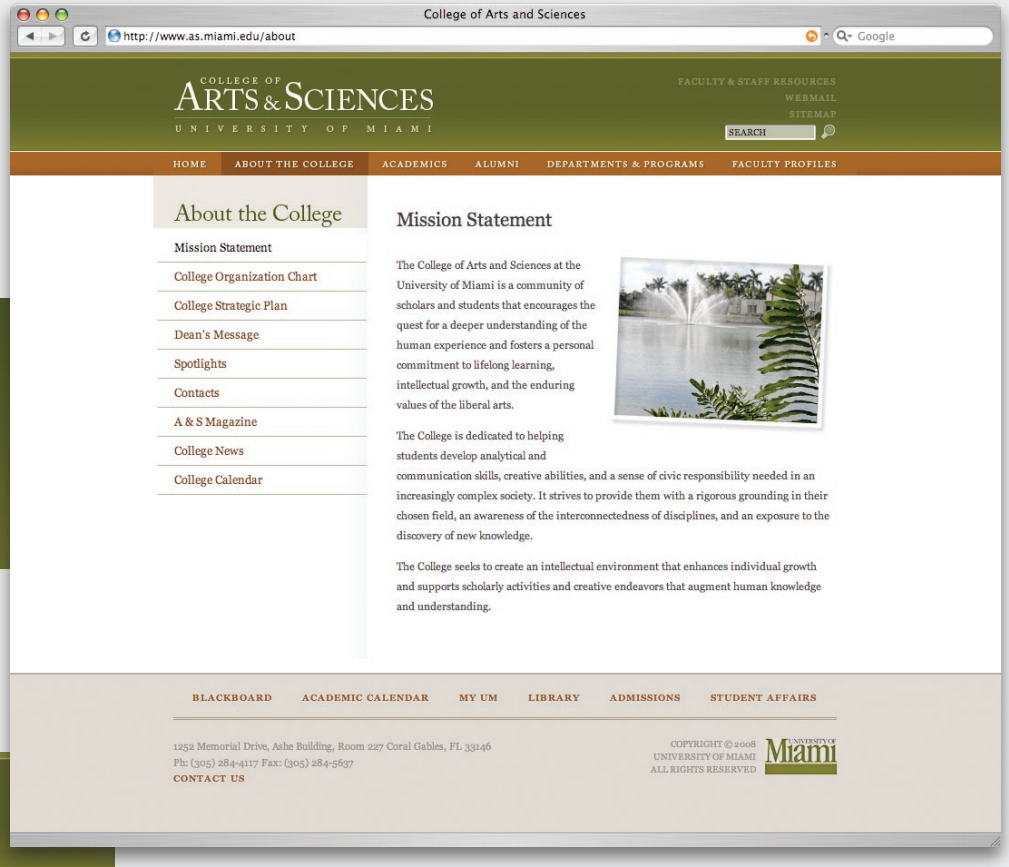
Two dark bands—one green, one tan—form a simple, substantial header that leads the site; logo and links are reversed in white. To soften the look, a faint gradient yields an understated illusion of radiant light.

Beautiful typography is the signature element of the site. Scholarly Caslon type in classic, old-style caps and small caps (big circle, below) conveys literacy and tradition; compact line spacing (small circle) keeps minor information from floating away. The two lines of small type are the same size but spaced differently; the more-important words are in panorama.

P-a-n-o-r-a-m-i-c letterspacing conveys elegance and stature. Note the tiny shadow. It's unusual to see such a modern artifact juxtaposed with old type, but its understatement is classy and in this case adds valuable depth.

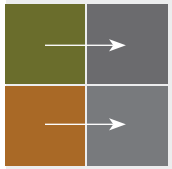
Right, four permanent links on the far right are tinted to appear barely there, yet remain easily accessible.



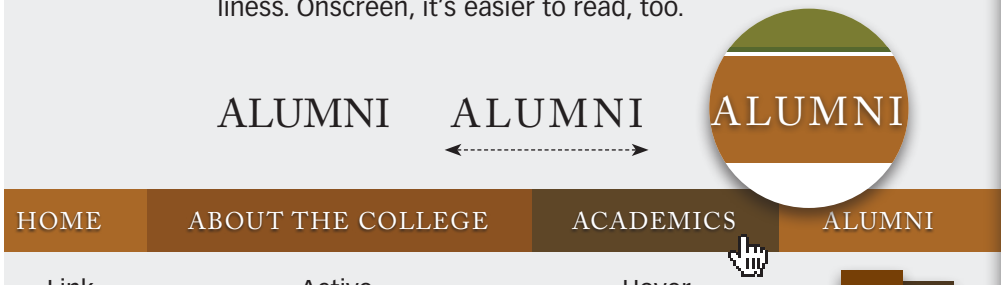


Main links

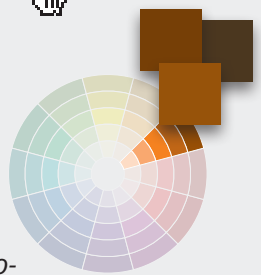
The highest-level links are in the tan header band. Typography, color and shadow are identical to the logo, which reinforces their connection and permanence.



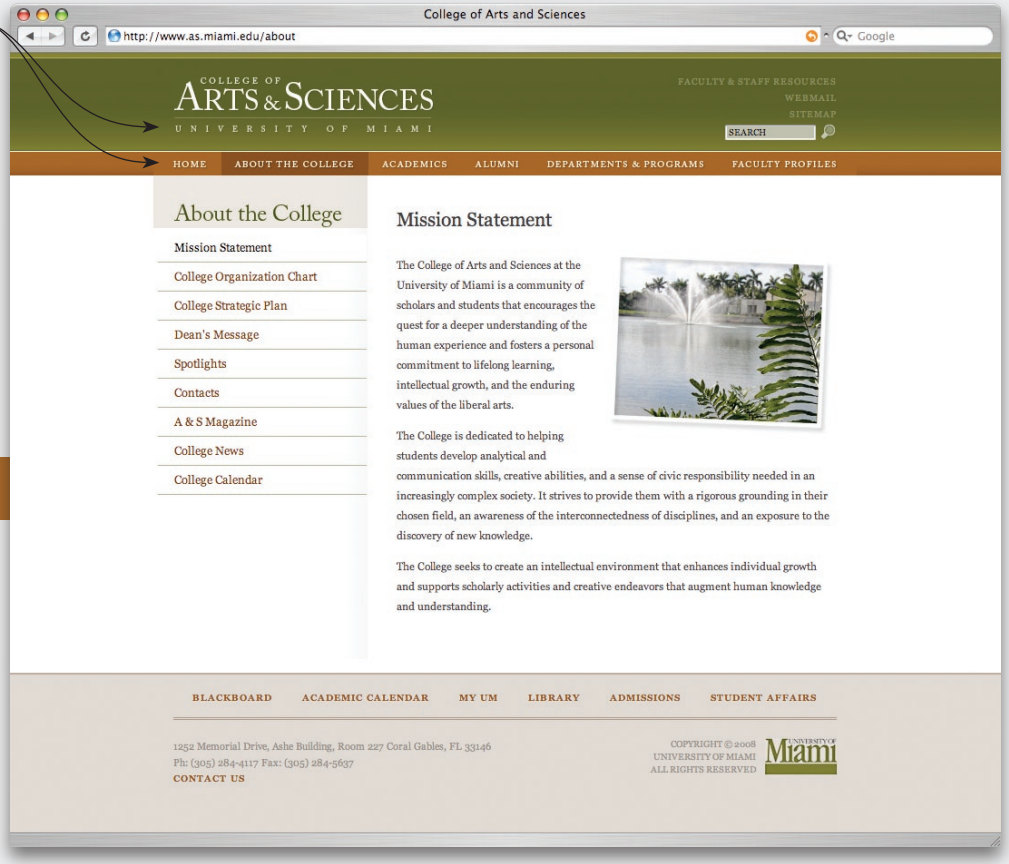
Left, tan band and green field are different colors but have virtually the same *gray value* (dark-light), which keeps the two connected while being different. Below, wide letterspacing is relaxed and less demanding than normal spacing and so conveys a sense of deliberation and stateliness. Onscreen, it's easier to read, too.



Three shades of tan define the link states *normal, active* and *hover;* this quietly but very clearly tells the reader where he is. Shades are progressively darker versions of one color—a *monochromatic* palette, right—that change the message without changing the subject. Nice.



Link type matches the logo.



Sub links

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ACADEMICS

Dean's Message

Reverse the colors The beautifully uniform look of the site results from as few typographic differences as possible. Left, the sub links retain the type *size* and *style* of the main links but just change case and reverse color.

Dean's Message

Spotlights

- A Chemical Change
- Designs by Michiko
- Religious Perspectives

Contacts

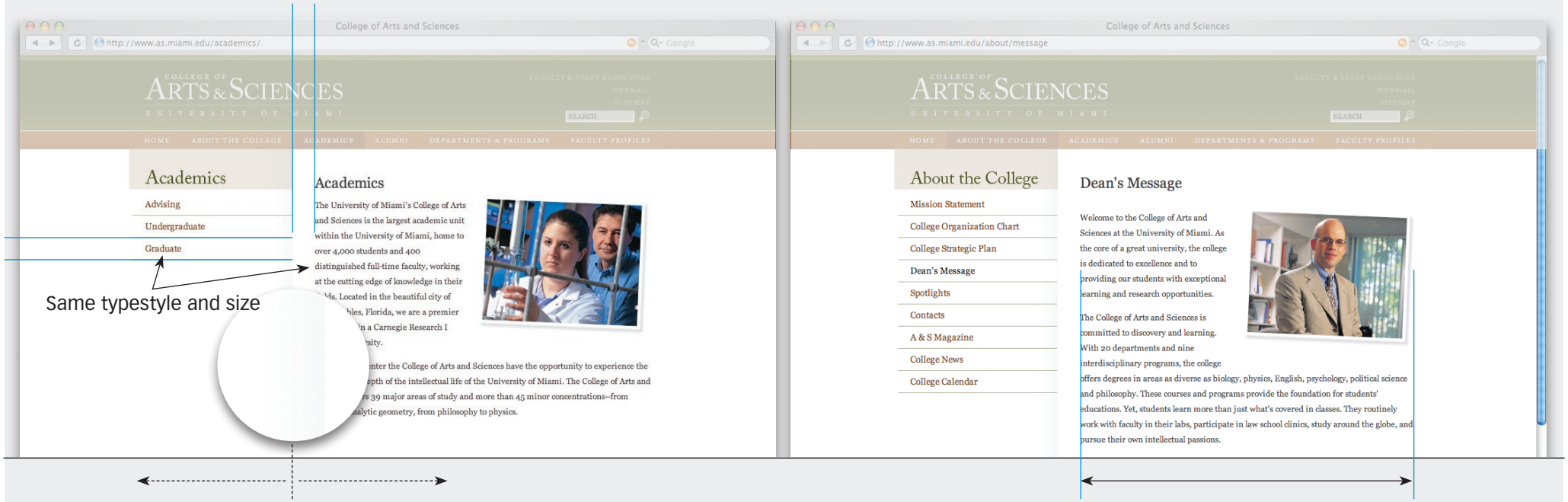
A & S Magazine

75%

As the links descend, the type color changes to black, then to gray. Note one typeface in one size easily conveys four levels of information.

Main stage

Between header and footer, a white "main stage" is the focal point of the site. On each page, one short, book-like article is set in widely spaced lines of serif type, which conveys an airy, literary look that's very pleasant to read.



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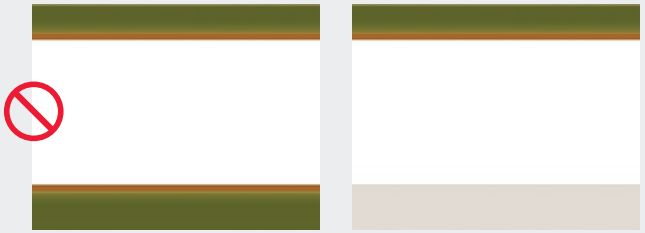

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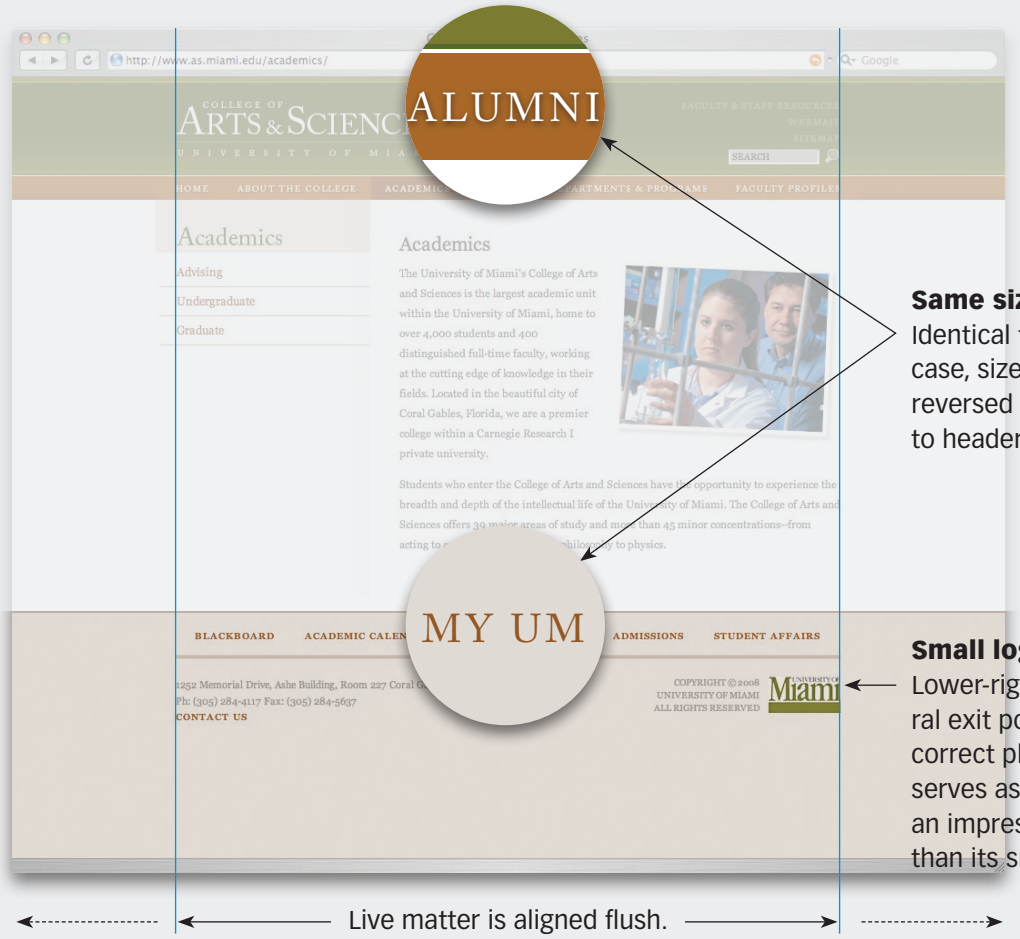

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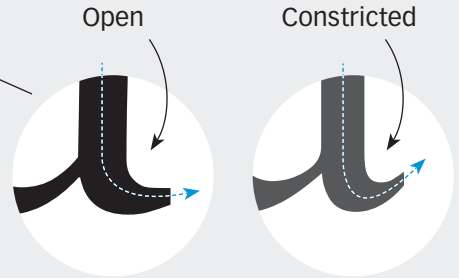

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Word- and letter spacing is as important as letter shapes, and here Georgia also excels. At text sizes it is smooth, repetitive and rhythmic.

Georgia

Academics

The University of Miami's College of Arts and Sciences is the largest academic unit within the University of Miami, home to over 4,000 students and 400 distinguished full-time faculty, working at the cutting edge of knowledge in their fields. Located in the beautiful city of Coral Gables, Florida, we are a premier college within a Carnegie Research I private university.

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Times

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Georgia reads better online Unlike Times, which is a print typeface adapted for the screen, Georgia was designed specifically for onscreen use. As a result, its letter- and word spacing at low resolution is smooth, repetitive and rhythmic, while Times' is often choppy and fitful, an effect not visible in print (above). Even in print, however, Times' thinner stems and serifs yield an edgier, less coherent look.

Article resources

Typefaces

1 Adobe Caslon Regular SC & OsF (www.adobe.com)

2 Georgia (www.fonts.com)

Design

Jody Ferry (www.jodyferry.com)

WebLinc, LLC (www.weblinc.com)

Colors

3	R245 G245 B245
4	R215 G209 B202
5	R151 G83 B10
6	R118 G63 B6
7	R75 G55 B31
8	R75 G82 B26
9	R103 G107 B30
10	R140 G70 B6

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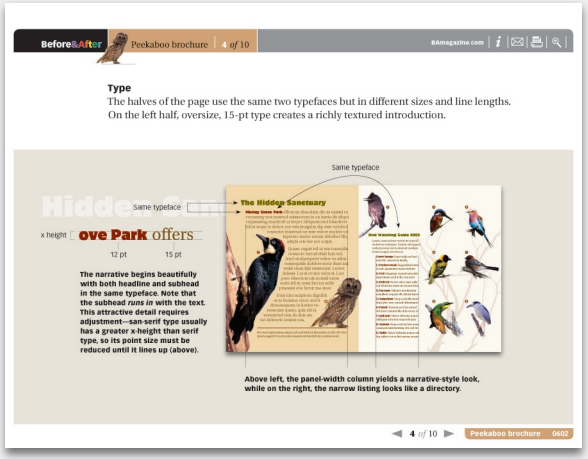
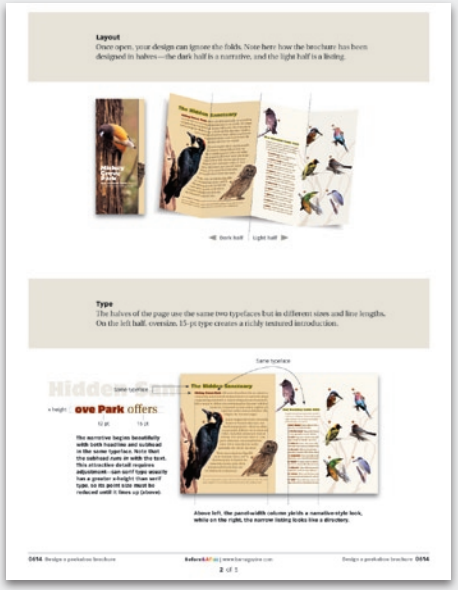


Print
Format: Landscape
Page Size: Fit to Page

Save
Presentation format or
Paper-saver format

For paper-saver format

Print: (Specify pages 14–19)



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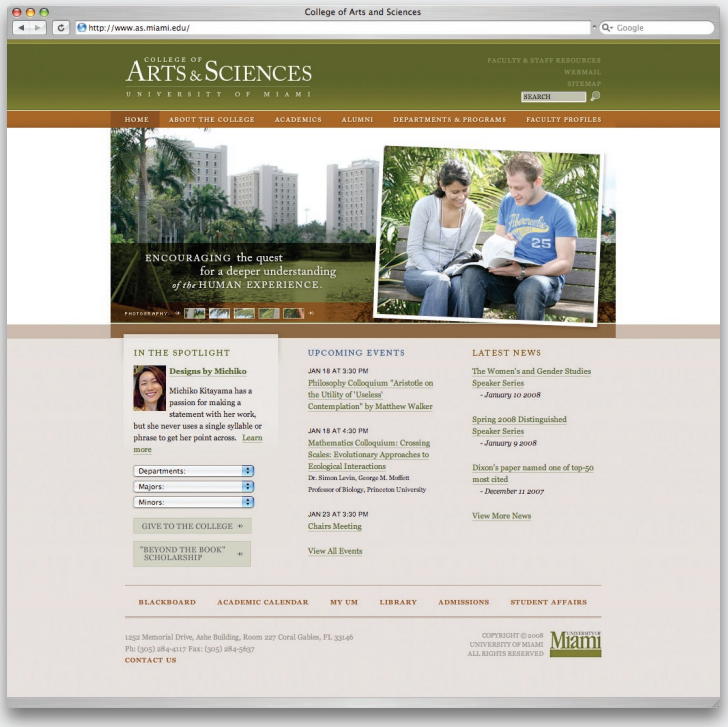

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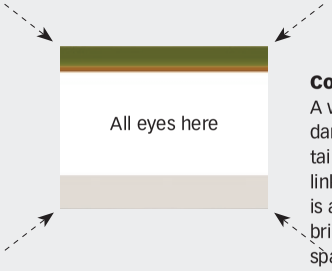

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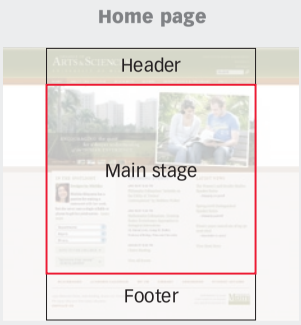

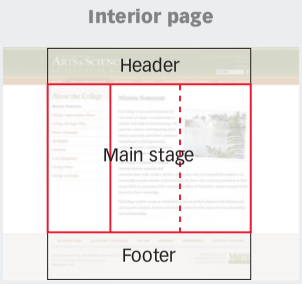

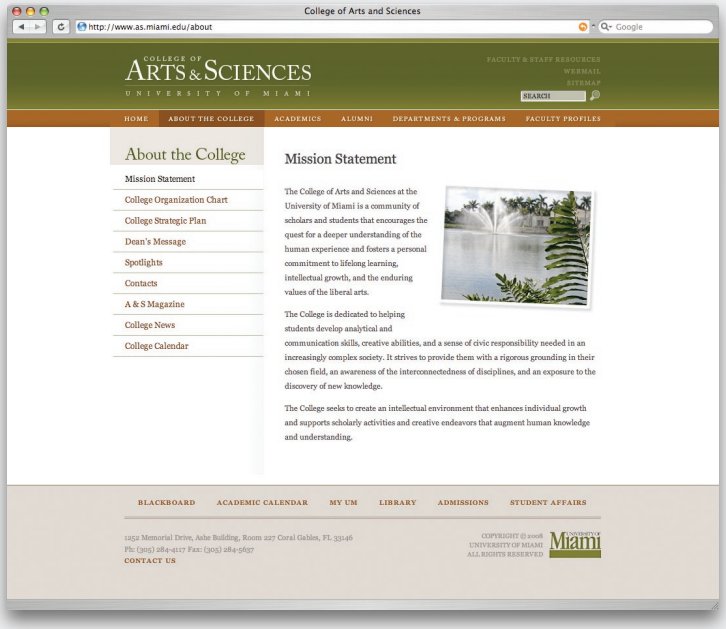

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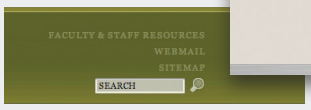

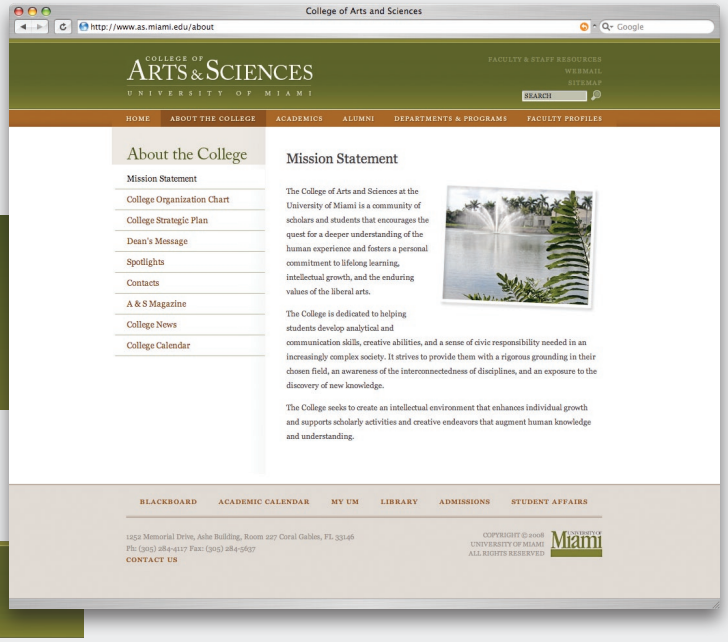

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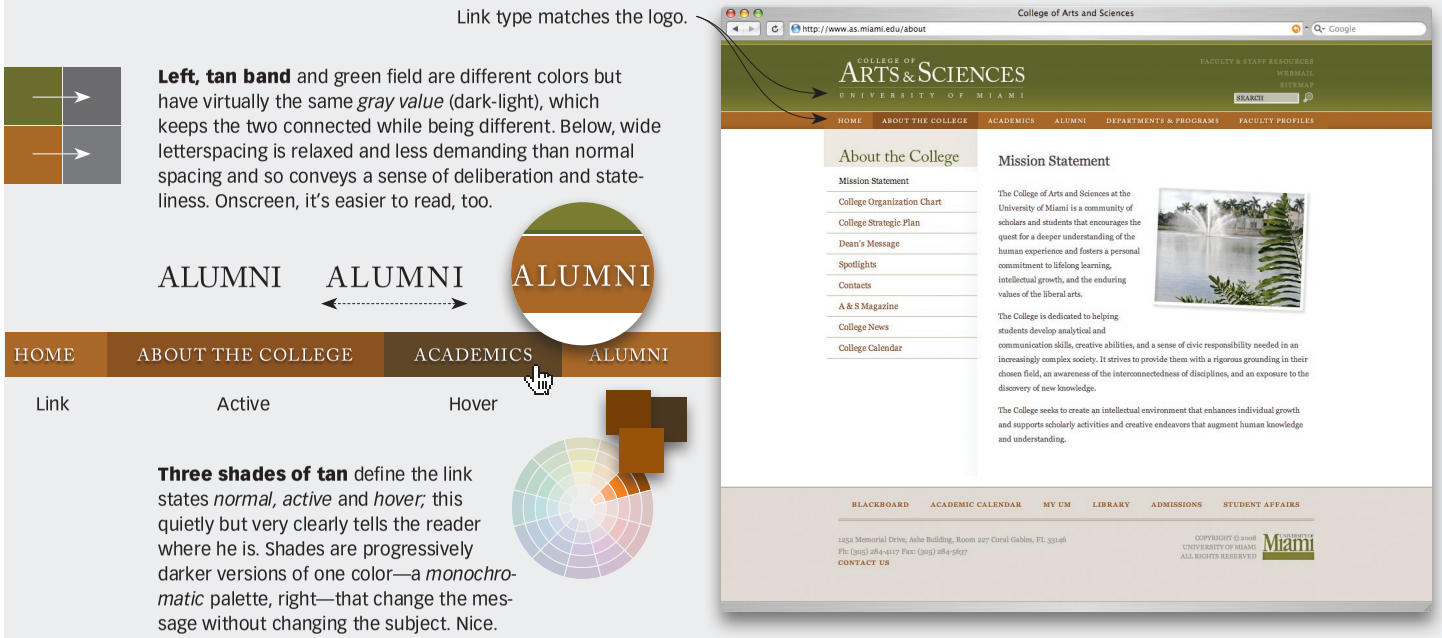

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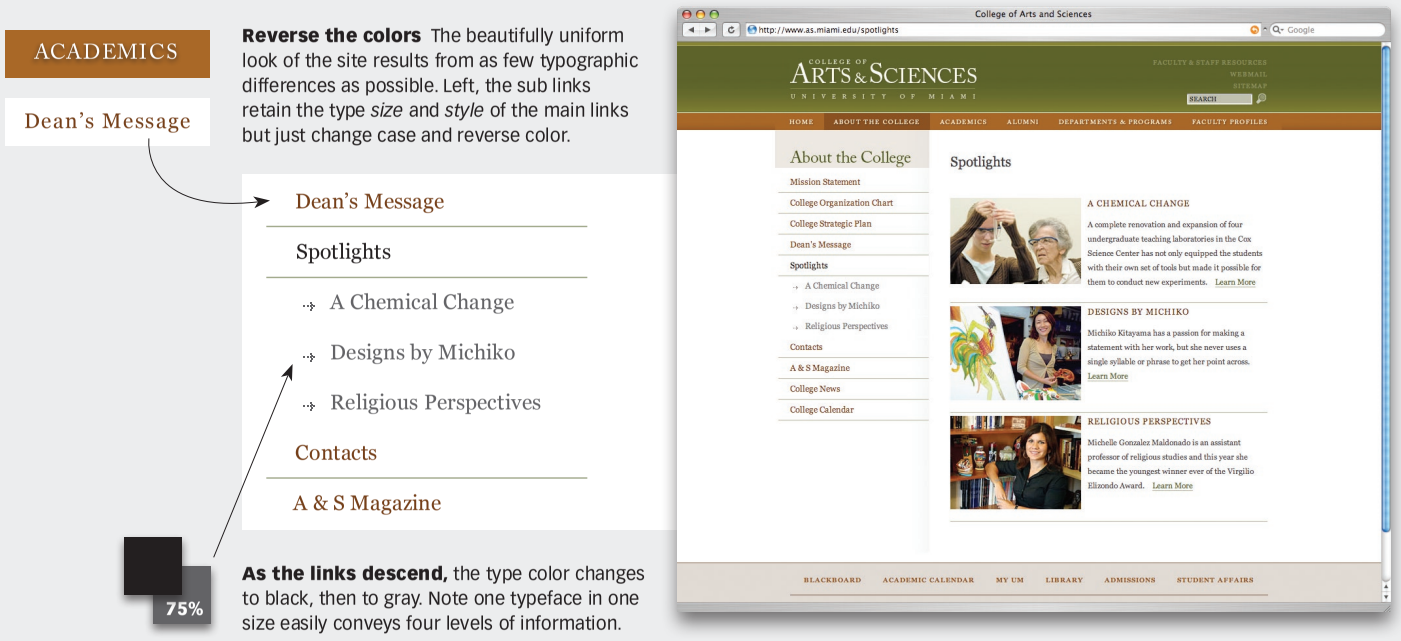

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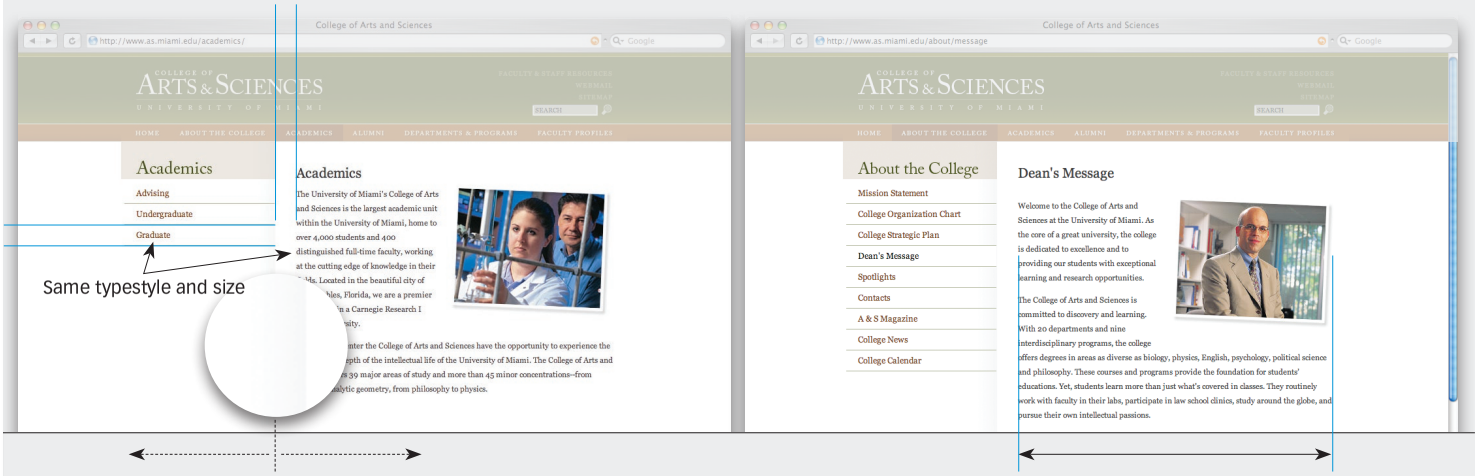

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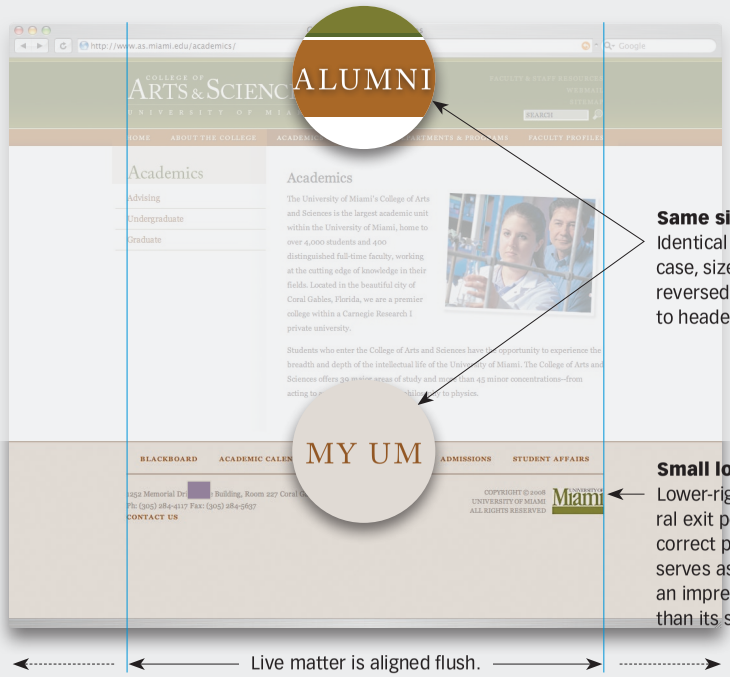

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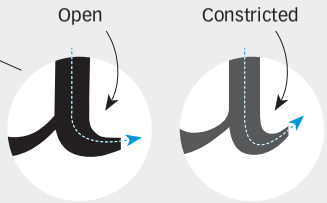

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Georgia

Academics

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Students who enter the College of Arts and Sciences have the opportunity to experience the breadth and depth of the intellectual life of the University of Miami. The College of Arts and Sciences offers 39 major areas of study and more than 45 minor concentrations -- from acting to analytic geometry, from philosophy to physics.

Times

Academics

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Georgia reads better online Unlike Times, which is a print typeface adapted for the screen, Georgia was designed specifically for onscreen use. As a result, its letter- and word spacing at low resolution is smooth, repetitive and rhythmic, while Times' is often choppy and fitful, an effect not visible in print (above). Even in print, however, Times' thinner stems and serifs yield an edgier, less coherent look.

Article resources

Typefaces

1 Adobe Caslon Regular SC & OsF (www.adobe.com)

2 Georgia (www.fonts.com)

Design

Jody Ferry (www.jodyferry.com)

WebLinc, LLC (www.weblinc.com)

Colors

3	R245 G245 B245
4	R215 G209 B202
5	R151 G83 B10
6	R118 G63 B6
7	R75 G55 B31
8	R75 G82 B26
9	R103 G107 B30
10	R140 G70 B6

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Gaye McWade Associate publisher
Dexter Mark Abellera Staff designer

Before & After magazine
323 Lincoln Street, Roseville, CA 95678
Telephone 916-784-3880
Fax 916-784-3995
E-mail mailbox@bamagazine.com
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