

UXPin

The Curated Collection of Web Design Techniques

# Cards & Minimalism





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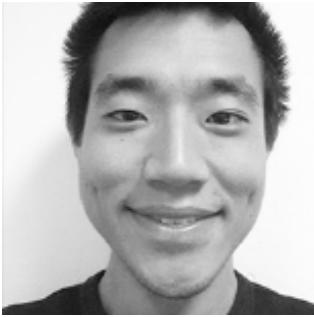
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Jerry Cao is a content strategist at UXPin where he gets to put his overly active imagination to paper every day. In a past life, he developed content strategies for clients at Brafton and worked in traditional advertising at DDB San Francisco. In his spare time he enjoys playing electric guitar, watching foreign horror films, and expanding his knowledge of random facts.

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Co-founder and head of product, Kamil previously worked as a UX/UI Designer at Grupa Nokaut. He studied software engineering in university, but design and psychology have always been his greatest passions. [Follow me on Twitter @ziebak](#)



Krzysztof is a graphic designer at UXPin. He is also a typography enthusiast and a founder of the global [Typeseeing Project](#). Since 2014, he has been an instructor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdansk, where he teaches his students about design theory and design software. In his free time, he enjoys playing and inventing board games. [Follow me on Behance](#)



With a passion for writing and an interest in everything anything related to design or technology, Matt Ellis found freelance writing best suited his skills and allowed him to be paid for his curiosity. Having worked with various design and tech companies in the past, he feels quite at home at UXPin as the go-to writer, researcher, and editor. When he's not writing, Matt loves to travel, another byproduct of curiosity.

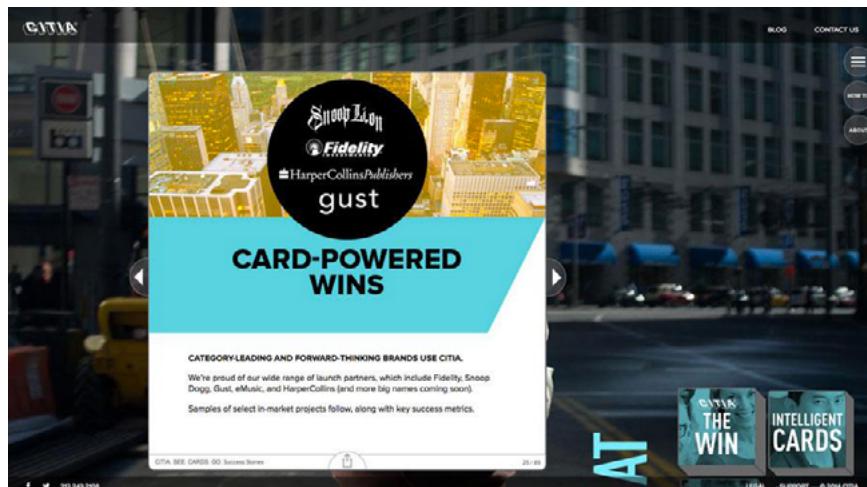
# Card-Style Web Design

Everywhere you look – from desktop websites to apps – you'll see images and text joined together as rectangular components. As we described in the free e-book [Web UI Patterns](#), each bite-sized chunk of information is known as a card.

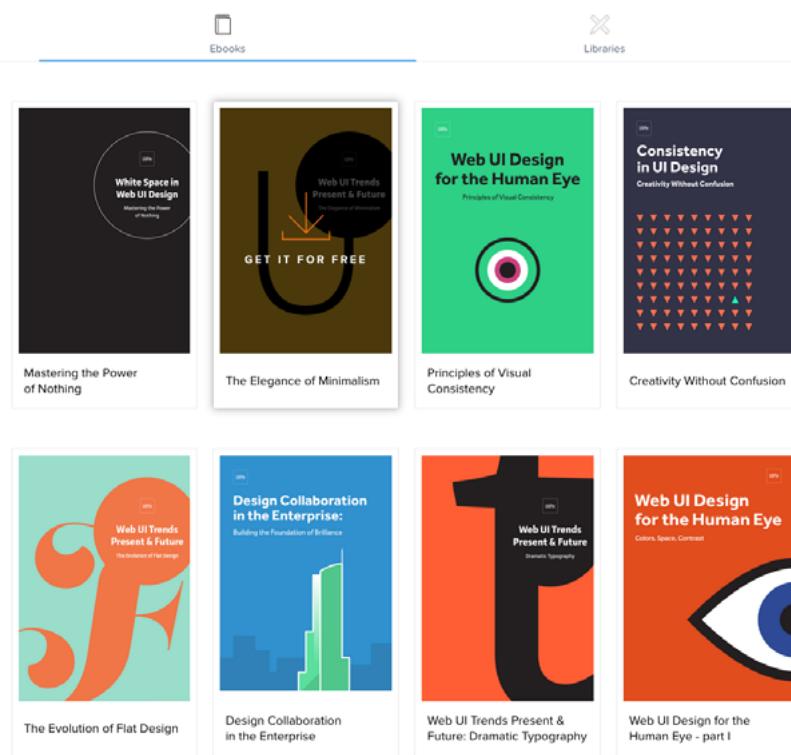
Because cards present each item on an equal plane, designers can organize large amounts of content while still enticing users to engage with each item (thanks to the snapshot format). Cards typically present a few distinct bits of information – image, headline, main text, call-to-action (such as a share button or link) – in a collective and cohesive block.

## A Primer to Card UI Design

Cards have been steadily growing in popularity for the past few years, starting with the image-sharing site [Pinterest](#) and evolving alongside other techniques such as [responsive design](#) and [flat design](#).



*Photo credit: <https://citia.com/content/title/citia>*



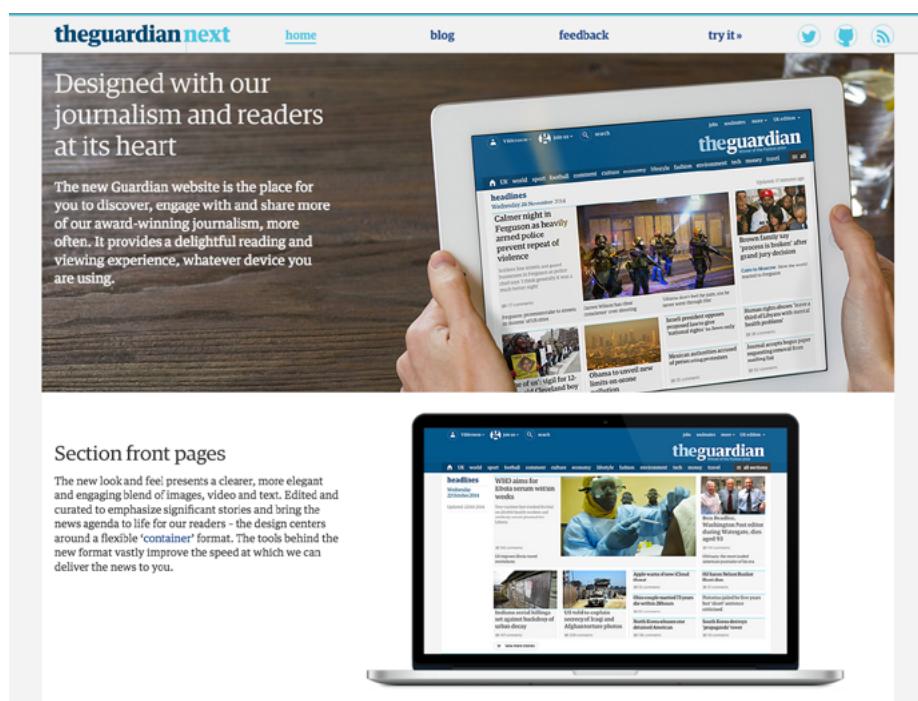
*Photo credit: [UXPin](#)*

Card layouts came to the forefront of web design when web giants Facebook and Twitter each adopted card-driven interfaces for their desktop and mobile websites. Both sites took full advantage of container-style design to group together information despite a nearly endless stream of activity.

Let's deconstruct the card for a moment. The best approach to this UI pattern is to think about each card as a singular thought. While cards contain different images, text, buttons, links, and other interface elements, every single card only suggests one primary action – whether that's clicking a link to expand the content or filling out a simple form.

## “Container-Style Design” and Cards

Card-style design has experienced quite an evolution as it's embedded itself as a core pattern in [grids](#), magazine, [flat design](#), and pin-style design formats. All of these techniques fall under the category of container-style design since the basic concept is the same – one block (or card) equals one chunk of user interaction.



*Photo credits: <http://www.theguardian.com/us>*

The best definition of container design itself comes from *The Guardian* newspaper which applies this layout style to their website.

As described in [their excellent piece](#) on the site redesign, a container (as you'll see below) is essentially a category of cards grouped in a horizontal format. Each page is created through stacking these containers in order of descending priority. Not only does each container function as a standalone content group, but they are also very responsive-friendly by easily adjusting to new screen dimensions.

**headlines**  
Thursday  
30 April 2015

**Freddie Gray killed after head 'slammed into bolt in back of police van', say reports**  
Injury on head of man whose death sparked Baltimore riots matched a bolt in the back of police van, according to local ABC news station  
**Ball** Rioter turned himself in - but family can't afford \$500,000  
587 comments

**Congress** Police body camera bill bogged down

**Opinion** We need racial justice and economic justice

**California** Lynching charge dropped against African American activist  
20 comments

**Surveillance** Germany

**Bernie Sanders to run against Hillary Clinton: 'We're in this to win'**  
Analysis Rise of progressive policies signals embrace of Sanders' ideals  
214 comments

**Torture** Psychologists met in secret with Bush officials to help justify program  
81 comments

**North Korea** Diplomats

*Photo credits: The Guardian*

Let's examine a couple manifestations of container-style design below – some of which prevail while others fade in popularity).

## 1. Pins

Attempting to mimic Pinterest, plenty of designers added elements that look just like the “pins” from the popular social media site. Unfortunately, the look quickly became stale since every site using the technique started to feel the same. In fact, Wordpress users quickly picked up on the technique by creating dozens of [pin-style themes](#).

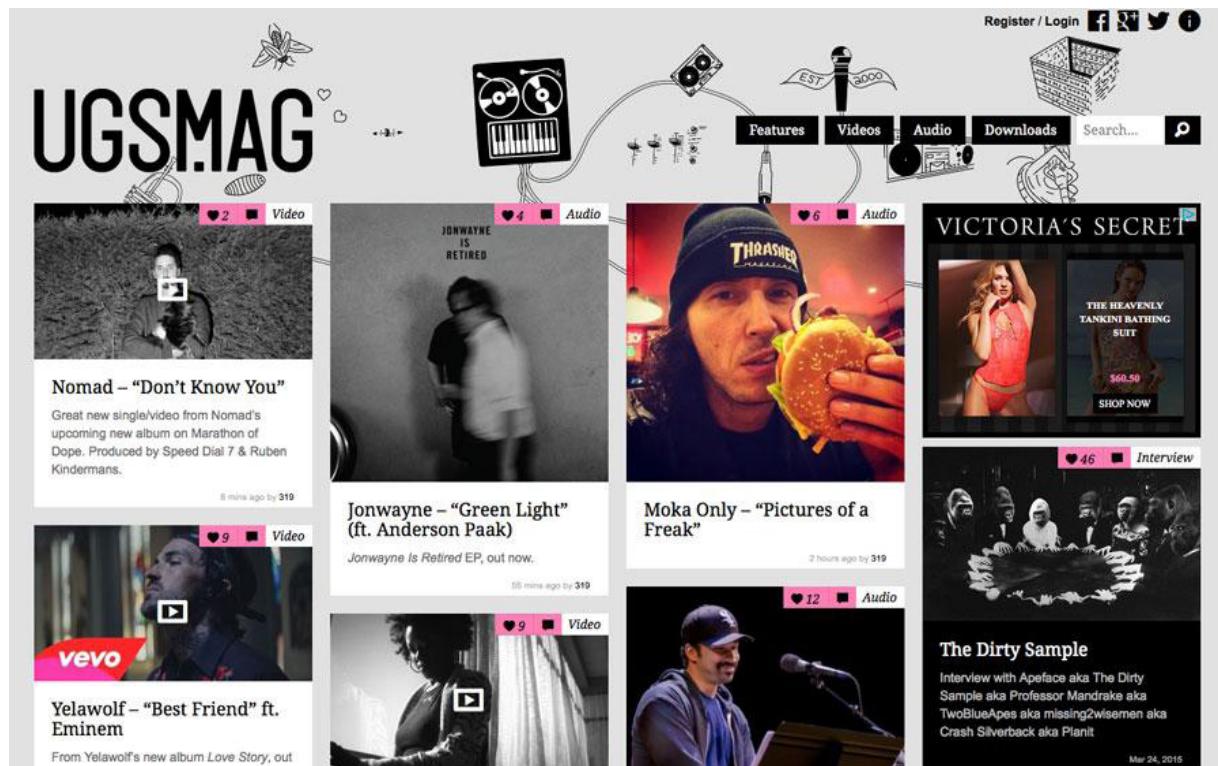


Photo credit: <http://ugsmag.com/>

The other problem was the inconsistent visual experience created when many of the links went to external sites or an internal webpage that looked quite different than original pin-style page. It was, though, the starting point to thinking about individual containers for specific bits on content. The philosophy broadened so that information in cards was more than links; content styles include video, images, forms and social sharing tools. In some interfaces, cards also served other purposes, including micro-interactions such as notifications.

## 2. Metro & Flat Design

Coined by Microsoft, the Metro typography-based design language originated in 2006 as the earliest representation of **card-based flat design**.

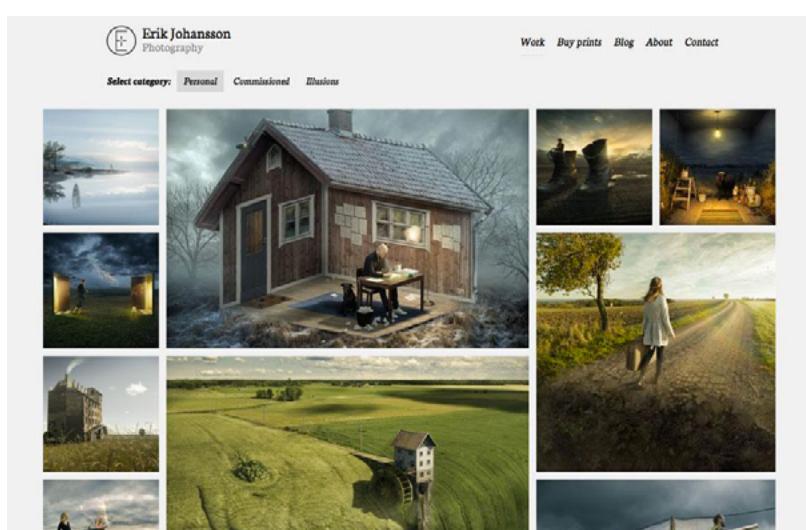


*Photo credit: <https://www.microsoft.com>*

While it still retains the colorful chunked-out look of its Metro roots, the company has now evolved its design language to “[modern design](#),” which is really just a fancier way of saying “flat design.” In fact, as we described in [Flat Design Trends](#), flat design is again evolving by embracing the textures, shadows, and gradients previously associated with more skeuomorphic techniques.

### 3. Grid (or Masonry)

The classic look of grids never really fades away.



*Photo credit: <http://erikjohanssonphoto.com/work/imagecats/personal/>*

Instead, designers are iterating the technique by adhering to a more strict grid or **masonry-style framework** that includes blocks of content either spaced out or connected perfectly throughout the layout. Some designers create the grid by weaving together cards or other container-style patterns, while other designers prefer a more purist grid to showcase images and graphics (more common in the stripped-down sites we explored in *[Minimalist Design Trends](#)*).

#### 4. Magazine-Style

While this design concept was almost exclusively used for news and **magazine websites**, it has also emerged as a popular option for content-heavy sites like portfolios and blogs.

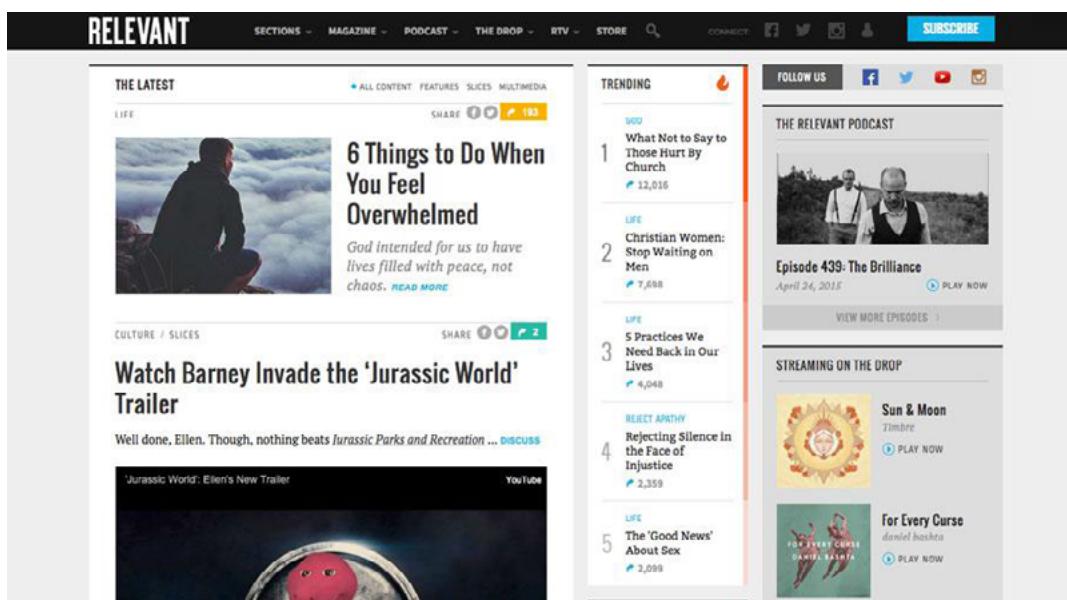


Photo credit: <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/>

Characteristics of this design style include blocks featuring a “teaser” image and text linking to a full article or post elsewhere on the site.

Interestingly enough, one of the most helpful ways to create a container-style design is to first start with an exercise in information architecture – [card sorting](#).

In this technique, you usually present physical cards (representing navigation or content items) to users for them to sort into their own categories or pre-existing categories. To create a cards layout, you can [conduct this exercise](#) yourself, validate with at least 5 users, then incorporate the most usable structure into your design. Of course, keep in mind that this technique is only helpful if you plan on categorizing your cards – it won't really help if you plan on just listing your cards in an infinite scroll without much structure.

Ultimately, container design works simply because the framework mirrors a familiar information model rooted in the physical world: one idea, one card.

## Cards, Responsive, and Mobile Design

One of the biggest reasons why cards became a popular design choice is their [compatibility with responsive frameworks](#). Not only are the digestible chunks a perfect match for most mobile user scenarios, the rectangular aesthetic also works well for the UI design itself.

Just think about the design of a card: it's almost the exact shape and size of a mobile phone screen. (Not exact dimensions because of all

the different models available, but a good representation based on aspect ratio.)

Card-style design lies at the intersection of design for desktops, mobile devices and interaction and usability. As we first described in *Mobile UI Patterns*, cards create a consistent experience regardless of device.

Consider the common *AirDrop* function on Apple devices. When you have incoming data, a card pops up on the screen as a notification with two options embedded – accept or decline. With a single action you can access (or refuse) this information. The action works in the same way whether you are on a phone, tablet or computer, which means that the user easily understands what is supposed to happen and how to use the design.

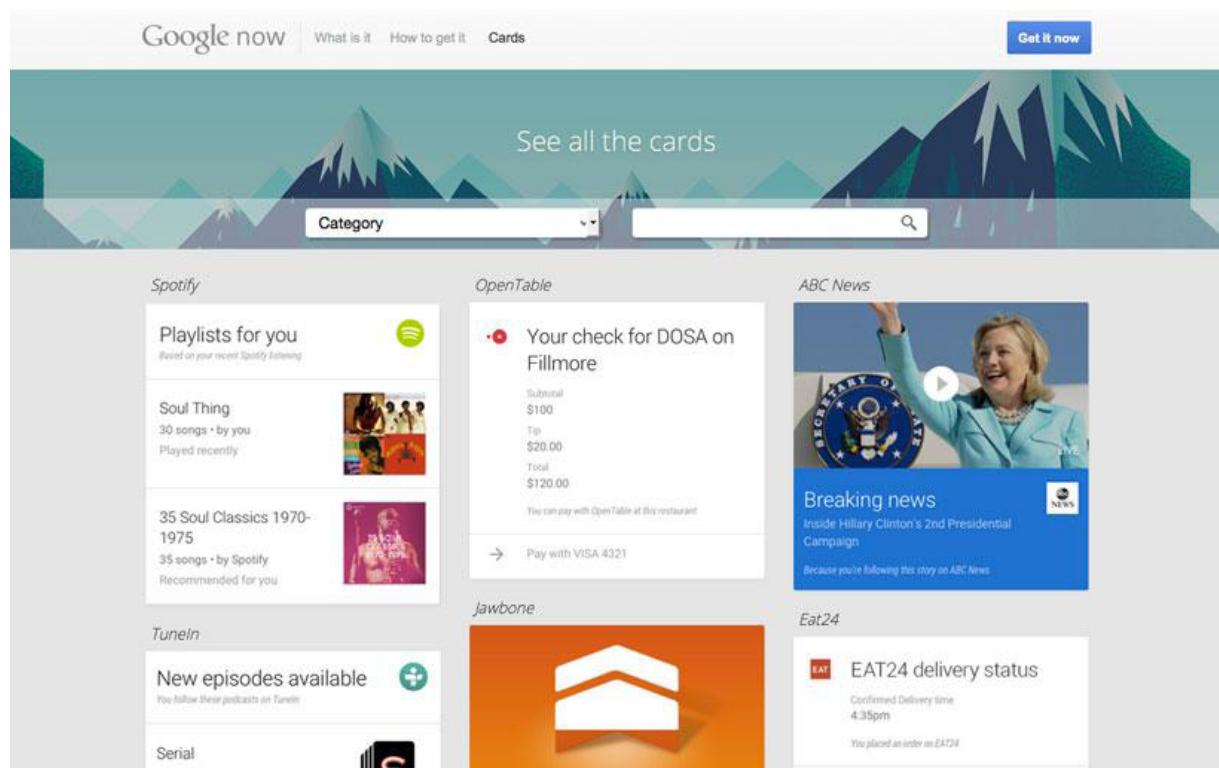
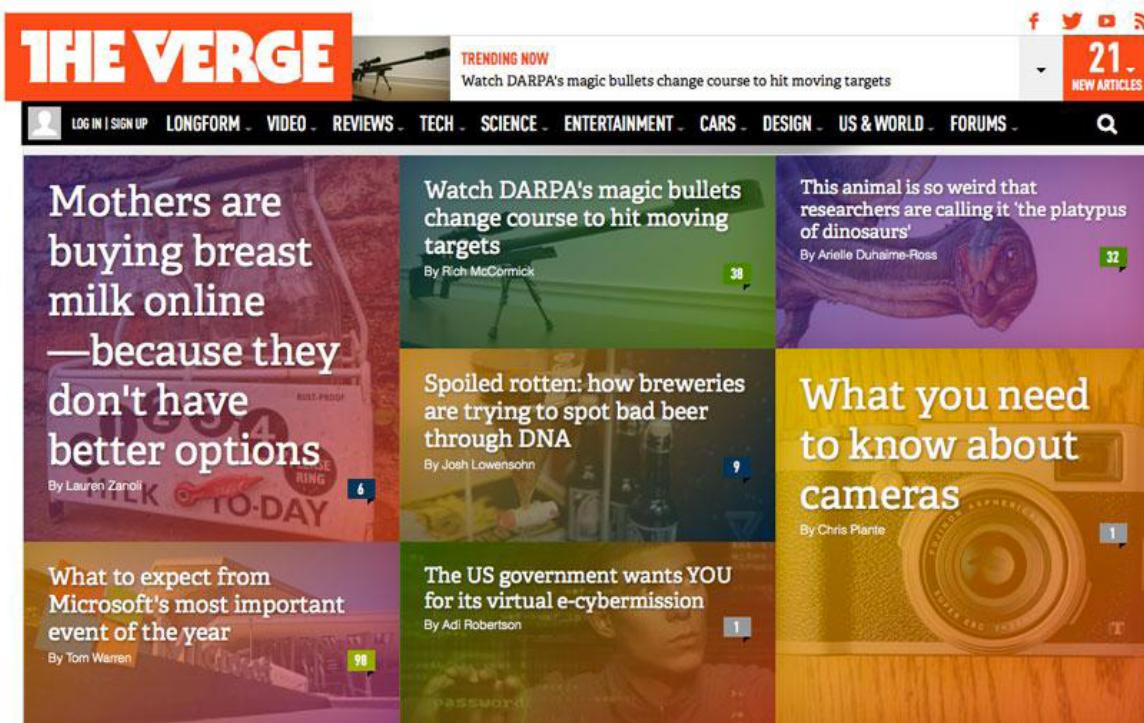


Photo credit: <https://www.google.com/landing/now/#cards>

In responsive design, cards work best when they are designed in frameworks to expand or contract, and sort and resort based on **breakpoints** and screen size.

Cards are especially powerful in responsive design because they allow information to populate based on device and screen size without disrupting the flow of the overall layout. Because each card easily adapts to horizontal or vertical layouts, a card-based interface may not require drastic restructuring for different orientations since every component is already neatly organized in its individual container.



*Photo credit: <http://www.theverge.com/>*

Not only can cards adjust to screen and device, but individual card containers can be designed specifically for the content within. Because each card is a rectangle, the design allows for a lot of flexibility with regard to the aspect ratio of the rectangle and how multiple

rectangles group and work together. Most commonly, designers stick to a framework with a fixed-width for each card and allow varying depths, at varying increments or in a handful of fixed-depth sizes, using equal spacing between each card.

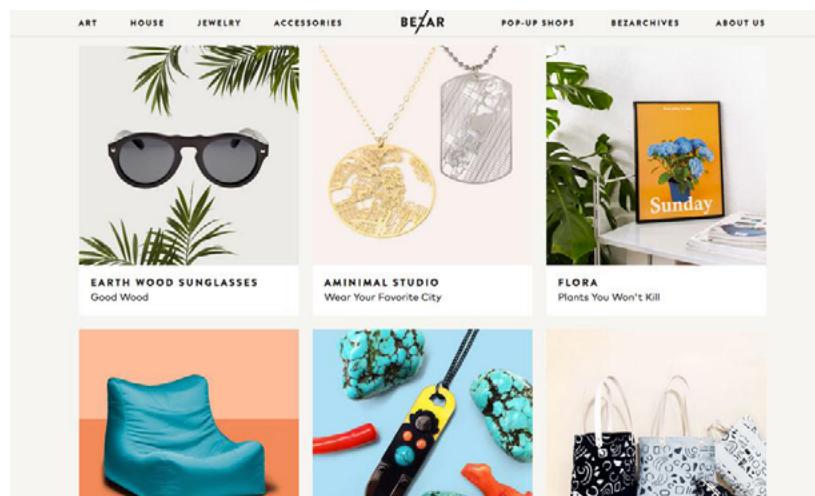
Some have even referred to card-style design as a native mobile format.

“The easiest form of cards to understand today are the cards by Tinder, Jelly, Spotify and others, where the card is a design metaphor for how to deliver information that is easy to read and act on, particularly for mobile,” said technology writer Taylor Davidson in his [excellent article on card design](#). “The rise of mobile created user interface and user experience pressures on many mobile websites and mobile apps, and the information and interaction design of cards emerged as a solution and an opportunity. When we rewire how we access the web, we rewire how we use it.”

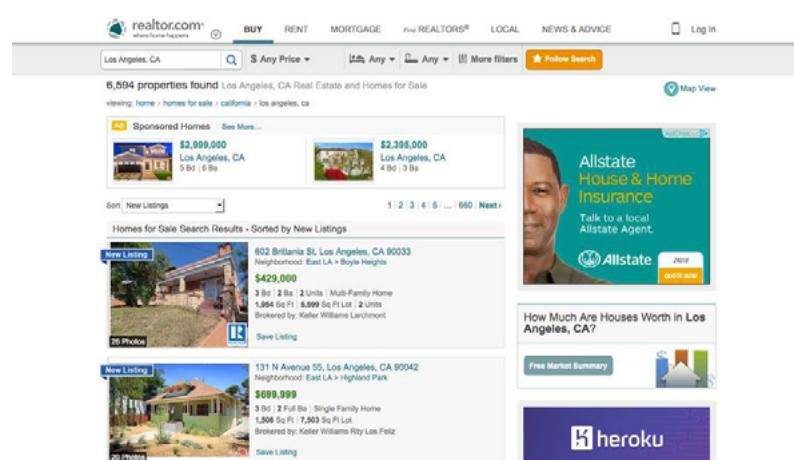
## Pros and Cons of Using Cards

As with any design technique, a card-style interface is not a magic bullet for perfect usability. Card design is actually one of the topics that designers seem to be able to argue about all day.

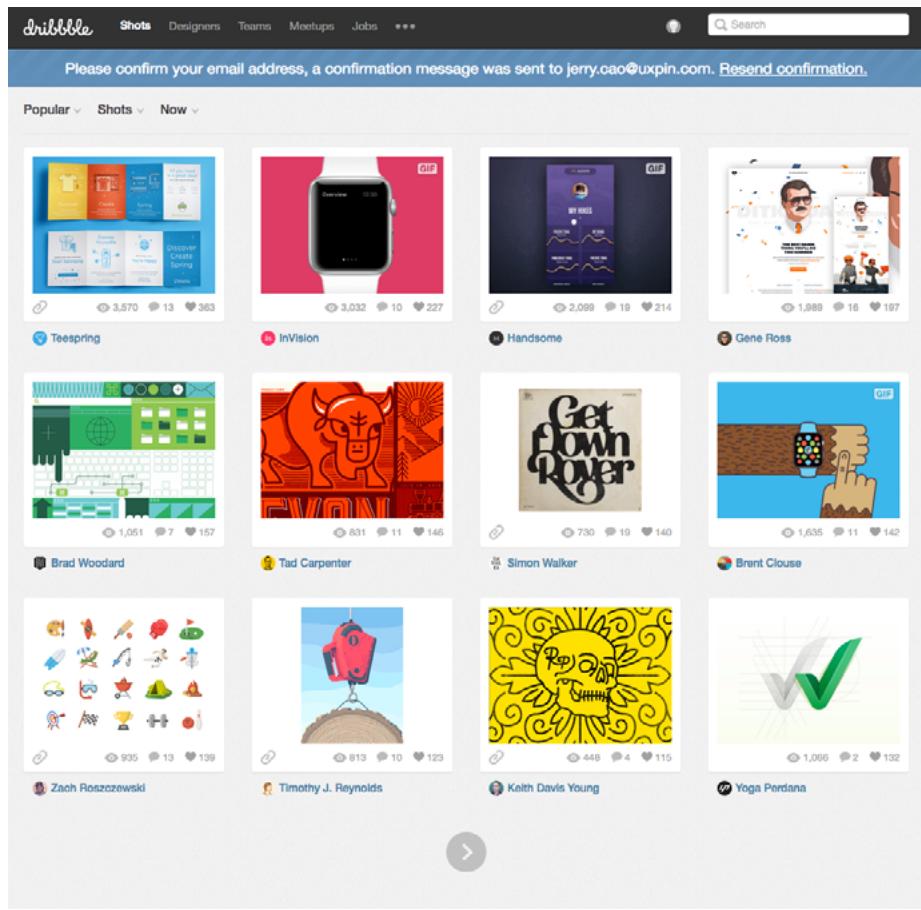
*Is it visual or interaction-based? (Arguably both.) Is it dated and stale? (Only if you design it that way.) Do users actually even like it? (When it's done well.)*



*Photo credit: [https://bezar.com/#=\\_](https://bezar.com/#=_)*



*Photo credit: [http://www.realtor.com/realestateandhomes-search/Los-Angeles\\_CA](http://www.realtor.com/realestateandhomes-search/Los-Angeles_CA)*



*Photo credit: [dribbble.com](https://dribbble.com)*

Cards have reached a level of mainstream saturation that also make them a controversial design choice. From retail ([Bezar](#)) to home sales ([Realtor.com](#)) to the focus of plenty of [Dribblers](#) (basketball cards), you can find cards in almost every corner of the web.

## Pros

- Responsive nature makes cards easy to use.
- Great for [aggregated content](#), such as pulling in information from multiple sources into a single website framework.
- Digestible content blocks are easy for users to scan so they can select and engage with only the information they desire.

- Easy to share: Just like a business card as a physical leave-behind, a card serves as the digital counterpart. Make sure to design cards so that they are easy to share on social media; this includes sizing for social platforms and including buttons for easy sharing.
- Cards are not limited to a certain aesthetic and can work with everything from flat or minimal to embellished designs.

### Cons

- The style can be somewhat overused and tired, especially for sites that just replicate the design of Pinterest or Facebook.
- Cards require development chops because it is more than just a look; cards require an active user experience that includes plenty of interactions and usability.
- Because cards are often used with sites that contain a lot of information, they can eventually produce cluttered feel.
- It can be difficult to create an effective design using this style. Successful card design requires careful attention to design details and mastery of design theory and techniques in what is often a small design space, that is then expanded to the full screen.

## Tips for Designing a Great Card

The one thing that everyone seems to agree on is that designing cards can be a difficult concept. Using a card interface requires clean aesthetics and direct user engagement with a distinct action. It requires a perfect marriage of visual design and usability principles.

According to [The Complete Guide to an Effective Card-Style Interface Design](#):

*The best card design is simple. It also features a rich content experience. For a successful card-style project, both of these elements must be present. But there are plenty of other design techniques that can add to functionality and aesthetics as well.*

*The great thing about cards is that there isn't really a pure set of design rules you have to follow. Basic principles of good design are all you need to understand to start making a card-style project.*

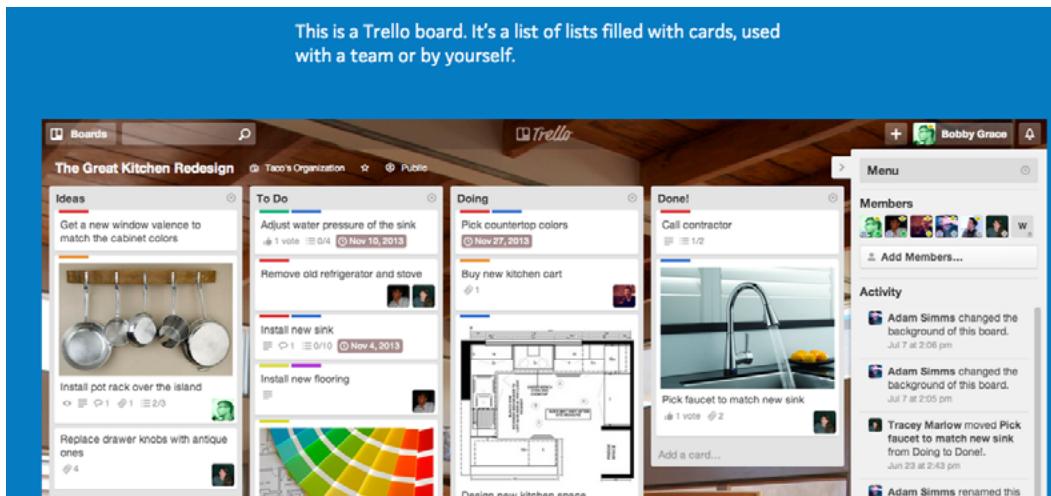
The guide boils card design down to seven design components:

1. **Use plenty of space** – White space helps provide organization and separation between elements within each card.
2. **One piece of information per card** – Think of each card as a unique call to action.
3. **Select a clear, crisp image** – Card images are often small and should be cropped and scaled appropriately for the containers in which they reside.

4. **Use simple typography** – While a fancy headline can work, simple typography rules in the often-small format.
5. **Include an unexpected detail** – Consider an animated effect, video, round frame or use a unique color scheme to make your cards stand out from what other designers are doing.
6. **Create an open grid** – Create a standard grid that outlines consistent spacing between cards and works across various sizes and breakpoints.
7. **Prioritize usability** – Focus on what each card is supposed to do ahead of the visuals and then design it to fulfill that user promise. As we recommended in *Interaction Design Best Practices*, Fitt's Law could not be more applicable here: create a generously spaced hyperlinks so that any click in any card location should activate that action.

Mastery of card design is all about flawlessly executing on the fundamentals of design theory 101 (which perhaps why it can be so difficult). Every card interface is only as strong as the design of each individual card.

When you think about it, you only have a few inches of screen real estate to organize multiple elements into an enticing visual teaser. Proper use of color, type, spacing and creating harmony is vital. Also, don't forget size and scale. While some designs can accommodate oversized or large cards, most require small cards (think mobile-sized) and the design must work in that tighter framework.



*Photo credit: <https://trello.com/>*

The [Trello](#) task management app (above) does a great job of overlaying a card-style interface on top of cool background images to create a custom dashboard for users. In this case, cards organize content and make information easy to find and use again and again.

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**Designer. Writer. Editor.**

Designer. Writer. Editor.

296 stories
89K shares
  
A 370K words
46K tweets
  
1.8K followers
14K likes

296 stories for 15 publications

**How to Start a Fashion Blog - Weebly.com**

Starting a fashion blog takes work, patience and dedication. Every fashion blogger needs to find a unique style and voice, conduct research, gather information and figure out ways to create the best content en route to a successful site. The following tips will show you how to start a fashion blog from the ground up.

**Conversion Rate Optimization Tips for Your Website - Weebly.com**

A great image can help your website, blog or online store capture attention and keep visitors engaged. However, it takes more than just expert photography to create great images for your site. Follow these image optimization tips to ensure that your images impress.

**5 Business Blog Tips to Attract More Customers - Weebly.com**

5 Business Blog Tips to Attract More Customers - We...

**How To Develop a Unique Brand Personality - Weebly.com**

How To Develop a Unique Brand Personality - We...

*Photo credit: <https://carriecousins.contently.com/>*

[Contently](#)'s portfolio-publishing platform uses cards to showcase an almost endless amount of links in a useful manner. Each article is linked using a card with an image and short description, with

multiple bits of micro-information (like Shares, Tweets, and Likes) included in each card. This is a perfect example of how to design a lot of information into a small card while maintaining an intuitive user interface.

## Thinking Beyond the Present

Card-style interfaces have been in a constant state of evolution and will continue along that path. You'll likely see the most innovation within the responsive and app design space, especially considering [Material Design](#)'s paper-like influence on Android app design.

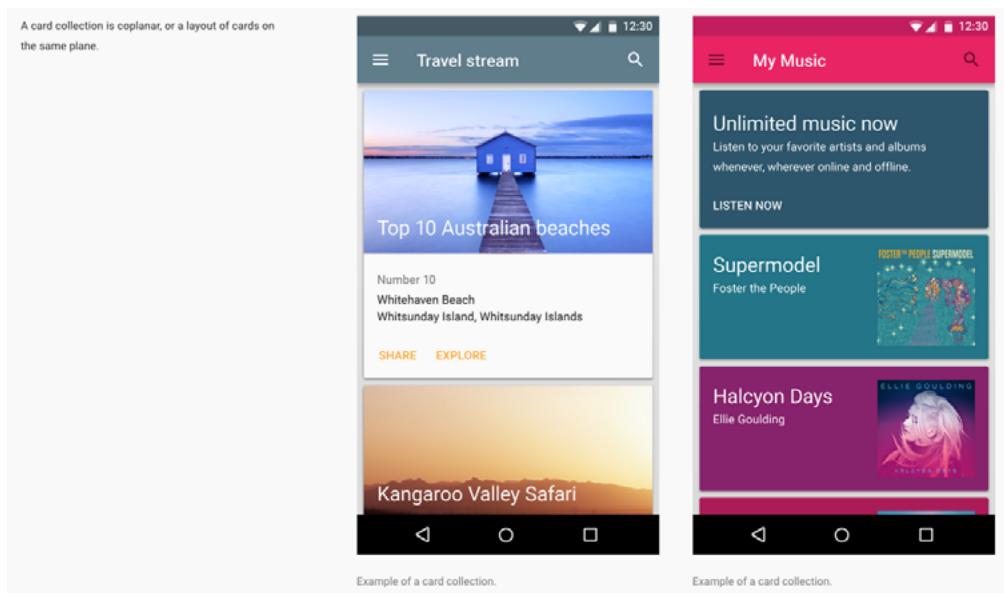


Photo credit: <http://www.google.com/design/spec/components/cards.html>

[Material Design](#) defines cards as “a piece of paper with unique related data that serves as an entry point to more detailed information. For example, a card could contain a photo, text, and a link about a single subject.”

Google's documentation is some of the most expansive on the subject of cards that we've seen to date. While a lot of what is suggested is almost overwhelming in its level of detail, Material Design provides a clear outline of what types of content, design and interaction contribute to a card stack that works.

Cards are an interactive tool by nature and interaction design is one of the most rapidly developing design disciplines. We wouldn't be surprised if, in the near future, you might start seeing more cards that feature video or auto-updating content.

While most designers use cards as a link to other content or information, cards can certainly work in more of a Material Design style of usability in which cards showcase information as **individual interactions** happen, from sorting automatically to including new or updated data such as the weather forecast. Windows Phone users are already accustomed to this type of interaction, but it could very likely expand to a wider Android user base.

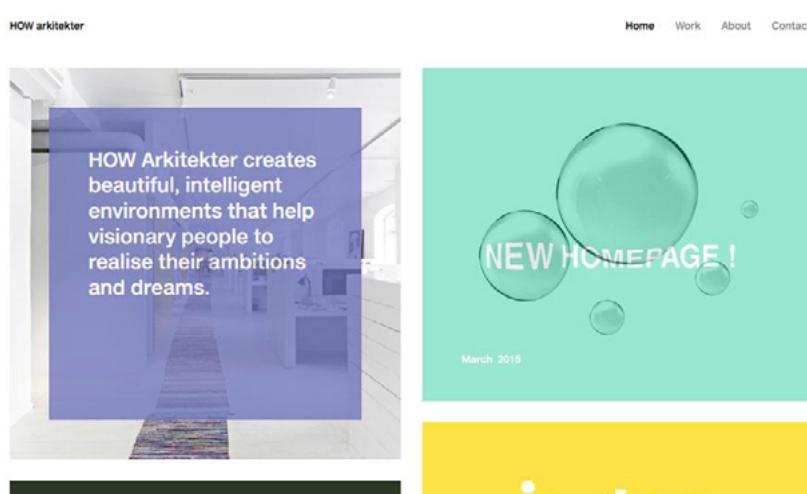
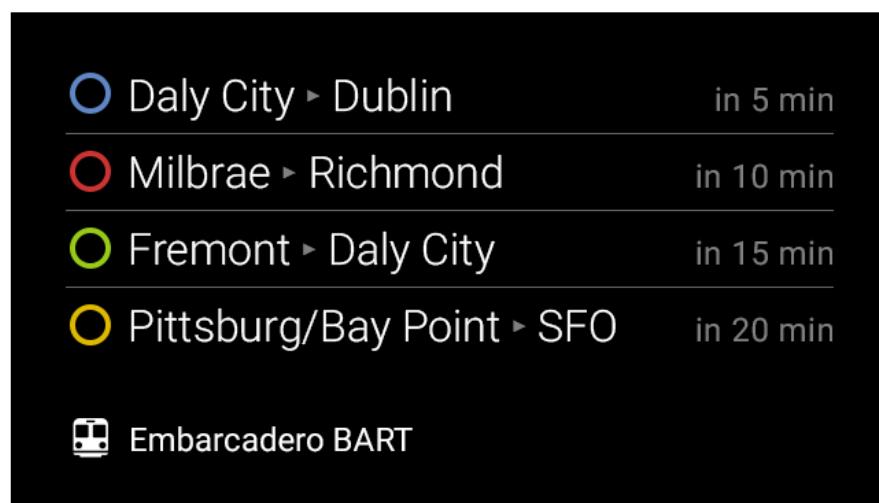


Photo credit: <http://www.howarkitekter.se/>

While designers have focused on cards that tend to be more “mobile-sized,” oversized card designs are also growing in popularity. Big cards, especially with bright colors and bold typography, can be a fun way to add emphasis to a web design and create distinct points of visual interest.

A mix of large and small cards can help focus users on specific content first and set a visual hierarchy among all cards. [HOW arkitekter](#) (above) uses a mix of oversized cards – some as links to other pages and some as direct information – to help users navigate the site while displaying important information. Bright color and simple typography leads the user through the content with ease and the oversized design with wide gutters is a fresh take on the card-based minimalist style.

The following example uses colors to denote important information about train lines and status.



*Photo credit: <https://developers.google.com/glass/design/style>*

Starting with Google Glass, cards have definitely left their mark in the wearables space. Even though Google Glass is widely considered a [consumer failure](#), it may yet survive in the [professional market](#).

While its future is undoubtedly in question, there is no doubt around its dependency on cards for its interface design. The product might have failed, but it will be interesting to see how the lessons learned from its design may apply to other augmented reality products (or even just to responsive and app design in general).

It's always fun to think about the type of technology that has yet to be developed – and how the old will become new again.

After all, let's not forget that cards were just plain pieces of paper before we saw their potential as a digital interaction design pattern.

## 10 Free Resources and Tools

1. [\*\*Tutorial: How to Build a Card Interface with Sketch App 3:\*\*](#) Learn to make your own simple card using Sketch, a new but popular web-focused design software.
2. [\*\*“Implementing the Card Ui Pattern in Phone/HTML5 Applications” by DZone:\*\*](#) Once you know how to design the aesthetic of a card, it's time to work on implementation with code. This article takes you through that structure.
3. [\*\*“Getting Started with jQuery Masonry” by Creative Bloq:\*\*](#) This plugin for web designers and developers is part of the magic that helps make grid- and card-styles layouts work seamlessly.

4. **CardStack:** The open source embeddable card runtime for cards that look like responsive web content, works like a mobile app, and feels like a saved file that you can share and reuse.
5. **10 Material Design Cards for Web in CSS and HTML:** As material design continues to grow, designing within its specific card guidelines will become more popular.
6. **Polymer:** Design custom “encapsulated and interoperable elements” using HTML.
7. **Masonry:** The JavaScript grid layout library works by placing elements in optimal position based on available vertical space, sort of like a mason fitting stones in a wall.
8. **“How We Used Card Sorting to Design a Style Guide for Web Developers and UX Designers” by Optimal Workshop:** Learn the technique that is the backbone behind the design theory.
9. **Bootcards:** Cards-based UI with dual-pane capability for mobile and desktop, built on the Bootstrap framework.
10. **“Why Cards Are the Future of Ads 00 And the Web” by Dan Ucko:** Card-style design works, especially for mixing in paid content. This article explains why it makes sense.

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# Minimalist Web Design

Minimalism is one of the most enduring visual frameworks in web design given its timeless elegance and clear presentation of content. While cycles of popularity come and go, the design technique is a classic and lasting visual philosophy for designers across all mediums including web design.

Although current minimalism is centered around [negative space](#) and black lettering – the core of minimalism – it is not a technique that is unique to web design. [Roots of minimalism](#) in design can be traced to the early 1900s as print designer Lucian Bernhard pioneered a simpler design language.

What's most interesting about the technique, however, is how it seems to glide through time. Designers of every era find themselves connected to a minimalist approach of some fashion, including the minimalism explosion of 2015.

## Thinking Minimally

*Less is more.*

Those three little words are the simplest definition of minimalism. The spirit of minimal web design is to create a high impact, impressive visual website without a lot of bells and whistles.

Minimalism in web design is the purest form of sculpture through subtraction – perfection is achieved not when there's nothing more to add, but when there's nothing more you can take away.

A minimal design by nature is not stark or barren, although it certainly can be.

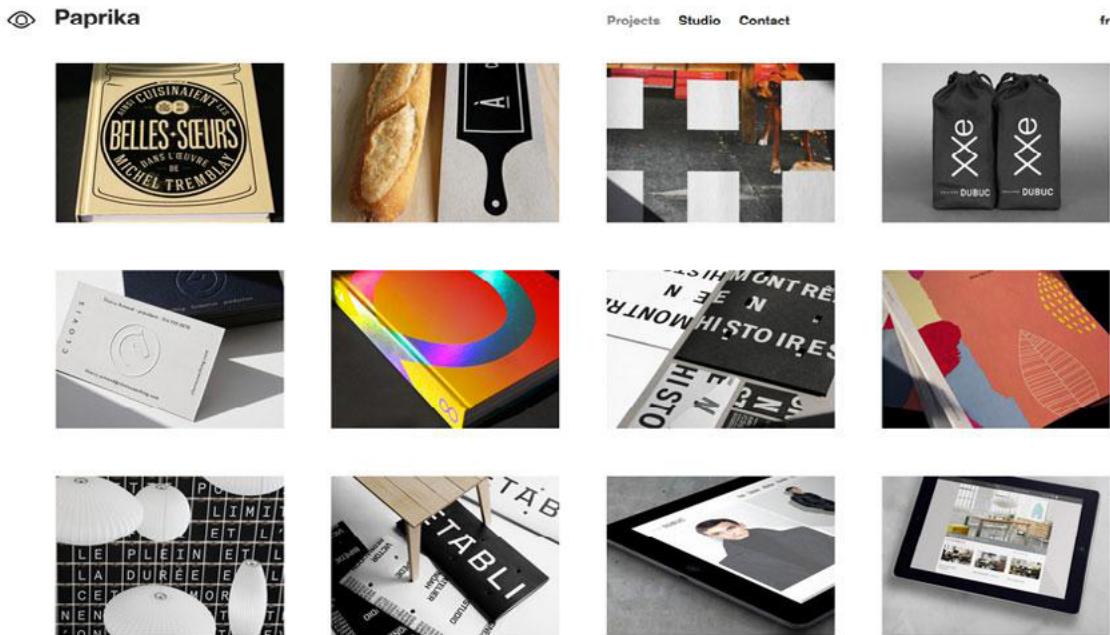
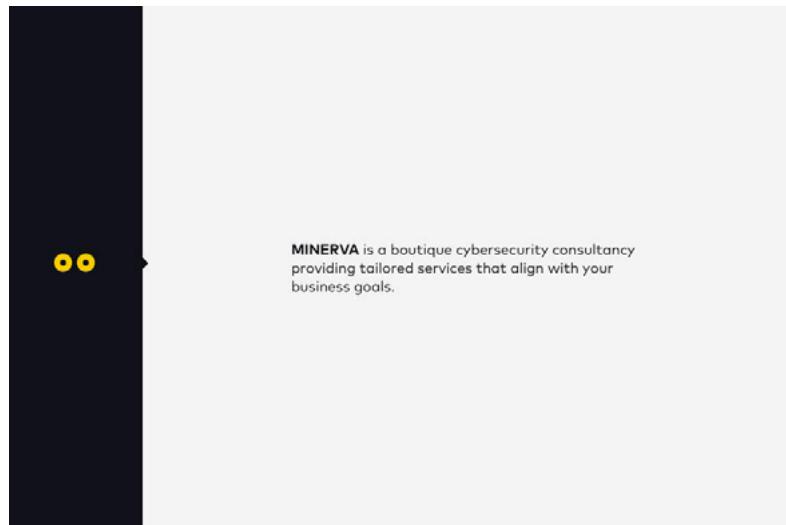


Photo credit: <http://paprika.com/>



*Photo credit: <http://minerva-is.net/>*



*Photo credit: <http://fabrik.co.jp/>*

Minimal design is intentional. It is an approach that strips most of the extra elements from a framework to leave only the necessary content and aesthetic. Most minimal website designs will not include a lot of color (palettes often only have one color aside from neutrals), texture or shapes or accents.

Minimalism works because it does what all design should do – put the focus and **emphasis on content**.

## Minimalism and Other Design Techniques

While minimal design has been around for almost a century, its popularity is partly due to other design techniques as well.

Minimalism correlates directly with many of 2015's biggest web design features – flat design, large photography, simple navigation and stellar typography. While the techniques are not always symbiotic, they are often shared.

### 1. Flat Design

While it was originally defined by an abundance of bright color, flat design has toned down and now works exceptionally well with minimal frameworks.



wrong time?

*Photo credit: <http://wonderfulcolorado.karshagan.com/>*

The techniques mesh because of similar characteristics in visual planning and in the use of content itself. Because flat design de-em-

phasizes design tricks, the stripped away concept pairs well with the philosophy of minimalism. The combination is quite common in modern websites – minimal visual hierarchy accentuated with touches of flat design in UI elements like icons and colors.

When it comes to comparing flat design and minimalism, designer and blogger Addison Duvall describes it best with a [food analogy](#):

*If flat design is a trendy new ingredient used in all the hippest restaurants, then minimalism is the classic cookbook that the very best chefs all consult when coming up with new ideas for dishes.*

## 2. Large Photography

For designers who feel that pure minimalist sites feel too emotionally distant, oversized photographs add a comforting touch of familiarity without dominating the foreground.

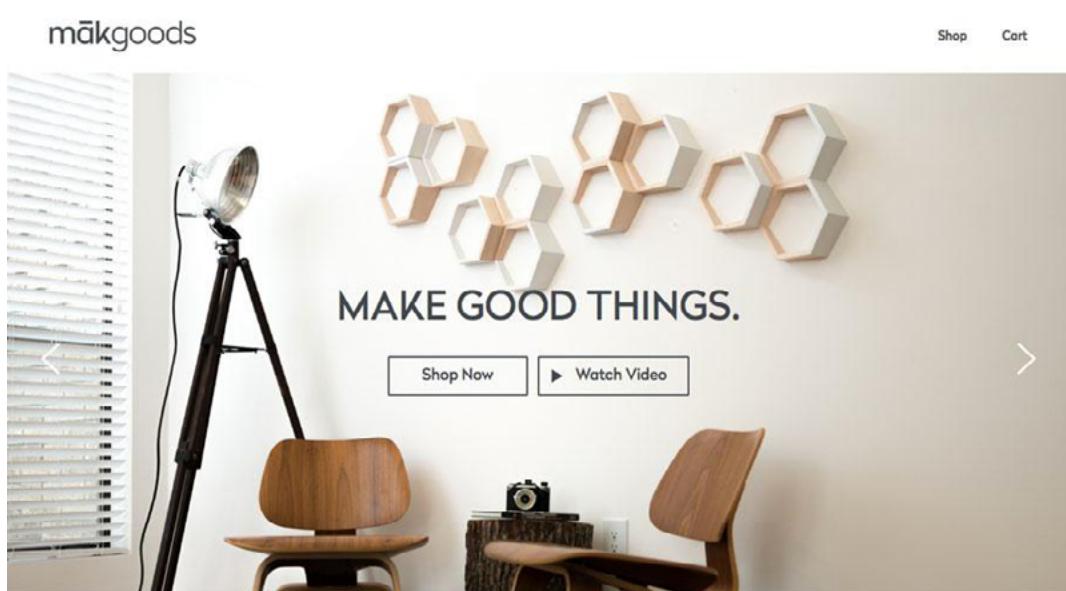


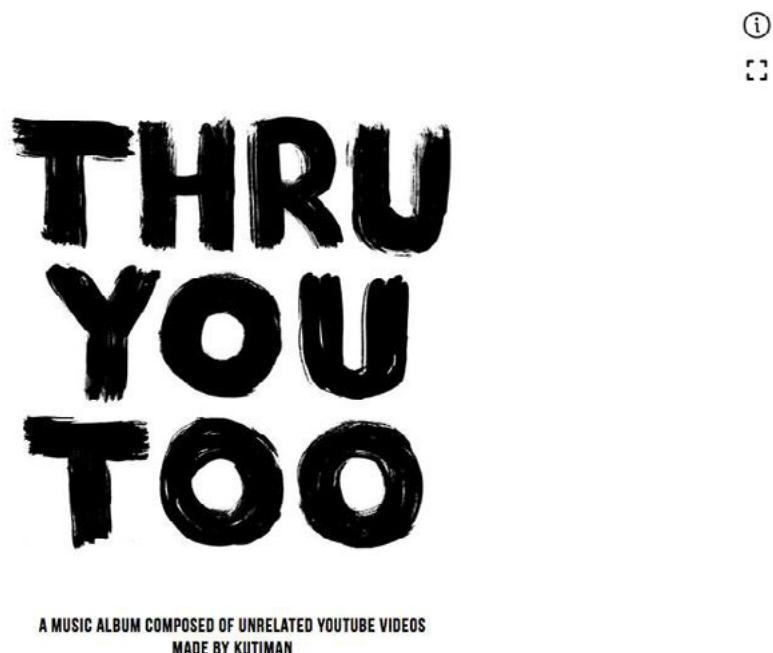
Photo credit: <https://makgoods.com/>

The most prominent form of artwork in minimalist design, [hero headers](#) and [hero images](#) are defined by a dramatic image or slider placed near the top of the scroll.

### 3. Simple Navigation

Minimalism meets the [hamburger icon](#).

It sounds simple enough, right? A simple design aesthetic paired with the simplest (and [most controversial](#)) of navigation tools. Even designers who are veterans of minimal frameworks are ditching traditional navigation for the hamburger icon to further trim the number of UI elements.



*Photo credit: <http://thru-you-too.com/#/>*

Before you implement a hamburger menu to help simplify your interface, make sure you're doing it for the right reasons. As Adobe

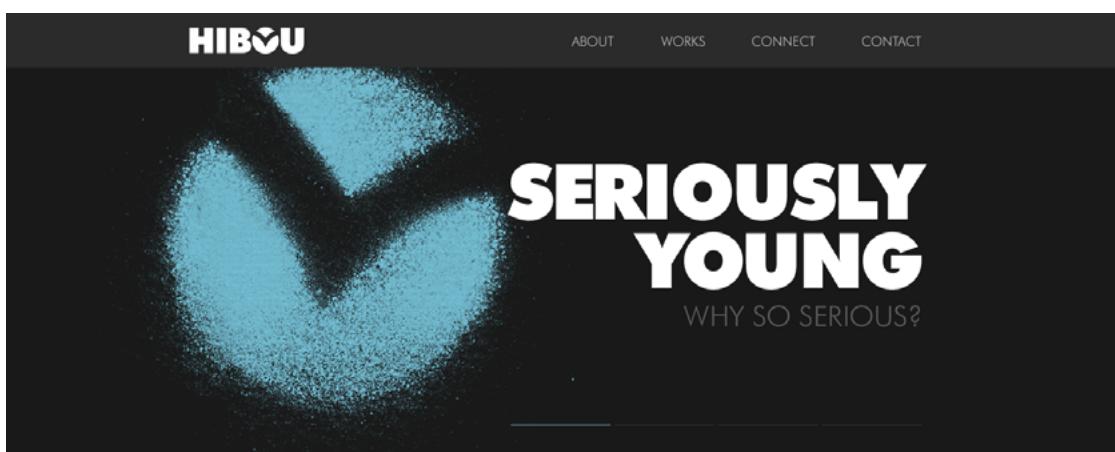
UX Designer Sandyha Talwalker suggests, make sure you understand the **primary, secondary, and tertiary functions** behind the navigation design.

Remember that hamburger menus also result in less discoverability of navigation items, and they can be less clear to people [over 44 years old](#) (as Linn Vizard of Usability Matters points out).

Know your users and the context, then decide if the hamburger menu makes sense.

#### 4. Stellar Typography

With an emphasis on content, comes an emphasis on readability and consequently typography. Beautiful, sharp and even [custom typography](#) is a perfect focal point in a minimal framework.



*Photo credit: [Hibou Digital](#) via [awwwards](#)*

Typography brings focus to the words and content while creating an intriguing visual. As we described in [Web UI Trends Present & Future: Typography](#), the most impressive examples of minimal

design and typography in 2015 often include bold styles with thick strokes and interesting letterforms as a dominant element paired with a more neutral typeface for other content.

## Design in Space

The primary design element that most people associate with minimalism is space. And in particular, white space. Lots of it.

But as we described in *Web Design for the Human Eye*, minimal design isn't just a small visual surrounded by a colorless expanse. The style also encompasses space of any color, although textures are not included in this context. White, black or very dark backgrounds are the most popular, but some designers also express negative space through full color backgrounds.

As shown below, [Lindvall A&D](#) uses a bright aqua background with simple navigation, elements and a line drawing on the homepage to lure users into the architecture firm's website.



*Photo credits: <http://www.jonaslindvall.com/>*

Interior pages fit into the minimal style as well, with simple images against a stark white background. A common element across the color and white pages, both pages include plenty of negative space (alternate term for white space) which further emphasize the images on the page.

LINDVALL A&D



*Photo credits: <http://www.jonaslindvall.com/>*

Generous negative space [creates a sense of luxury](#) while drawing the eyes more towards the visuals. The treatment makes a lot of sense for this architectural design firm, considering how they want to appear sophisticated and draw attention to the most important part of the page: the images of their work.

To learn more about using negative space as a design tool, we highly recommend [this practical guide](#) from Six Revisions.

## Create Visual Harmony

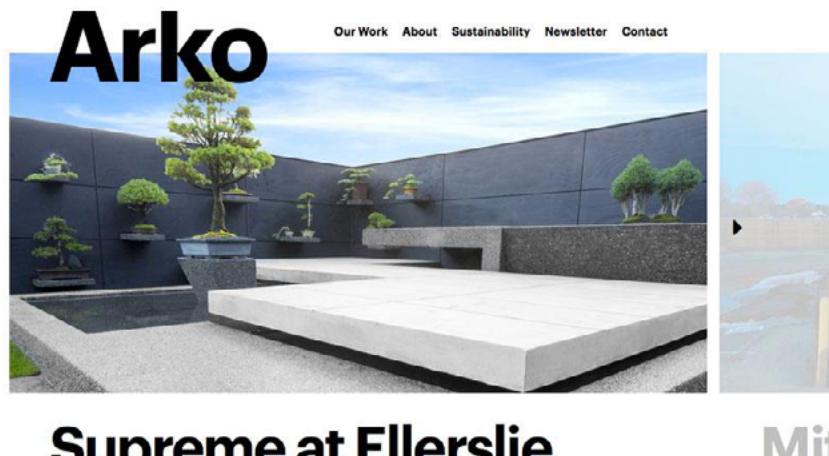
To be most effective, a minimal design framework needs a solid backbone and structure. The key components of visual organization in-

clude a strong grid, visual balance, and close attention to alignment. A strong grid is the foundation for organization. The grid creates a sense of space and where space “lives” in the design, helping the designer place and arrange elements in a way that communicate purpose.

It's also very important to clarify that alignment is not the same as centering content.

While many minimal designs include the bulk of content in the center of the screen, it is not the only solution. Elements can be aligned anywhere along a grid – text, in particular, can be aligned to the left, right or center.

**Arko**, below, does a great job of mixing and matching alignment styles to create visual interest and balance while using plenty of white space.



## Supreme at Ellerslie

Mil

Commercial Residential Our concrete exhibition garden won three awards at the Ellerslie The exhibition itself is a journey. The deliberately minimal palette The path surface was finished with a texture roller to give a Commercial Residential Ra off

*Photo credit: <http://www.arko.co.nz/>*

When it comes to minimalism, many people jump to perfectly symmetrical concepts, but this is not a necessity. Because content will likely

be simple and streamlined, the most popular ways to accomplish this are through pairings of large and small elements that balance each other out.

Balance comes in four forms:

- 1. Horizontal symmetry:** Both sides of the screen have equal weight with similar groupings of elements.



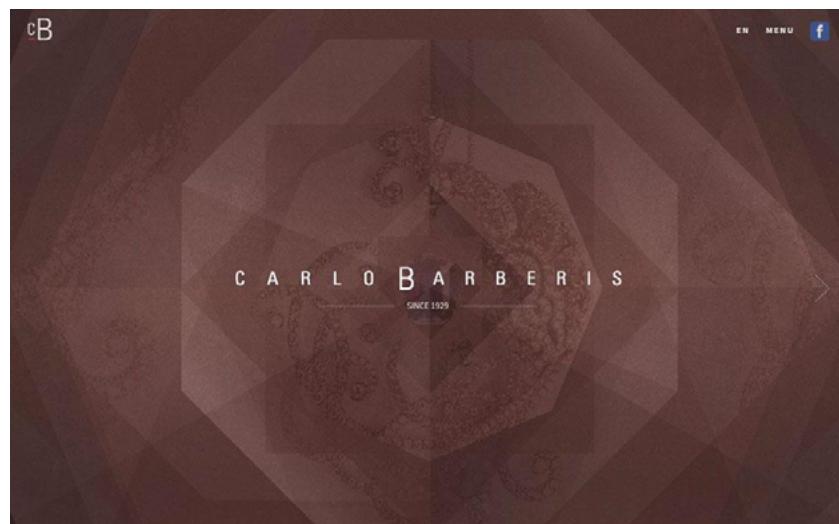
*Photo credit: Hungcwot via awwwards*

- 2. Approximate symmetry:** Elements are different on the screen, but the visual weight is the same; this is often accomplished by pairing a lot of space or one large element against a grouping of smaller elements.



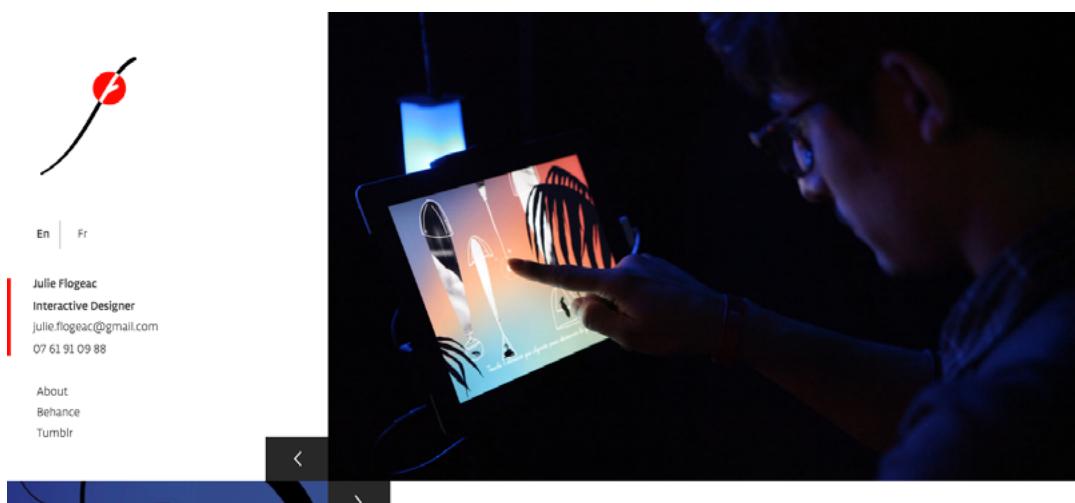
*Photo credit: Squarespace*

3. **Radial symmetry:** The focal point of the design starts in the center of the screen and moves outward in an almost concentric-circle style pattern, such as the [Carlo Barberis site](http://www.carlobarberis.com/en/) below.



*Photo credit: <http://www.carlobarberis.com/en/>*

4. **Asymmetry:** Objects are designed to purposefully counter one another on the screen with shapes, colors and sizes of contrasting styles. This is arguably the most difficult layout to execute well, considering there's only a fine line between a visually interesting layout and a confusing mess.



*Photo credit: Julie Flogeac via awwwards*

## Contrast Elements

The white background is such a popular choice among minimalist designers because it's the perfect canvas for creating contrast. A hallmark of minimalist design, black or white backgrounds are commonly overlaid with small colorful elements or a bold image.

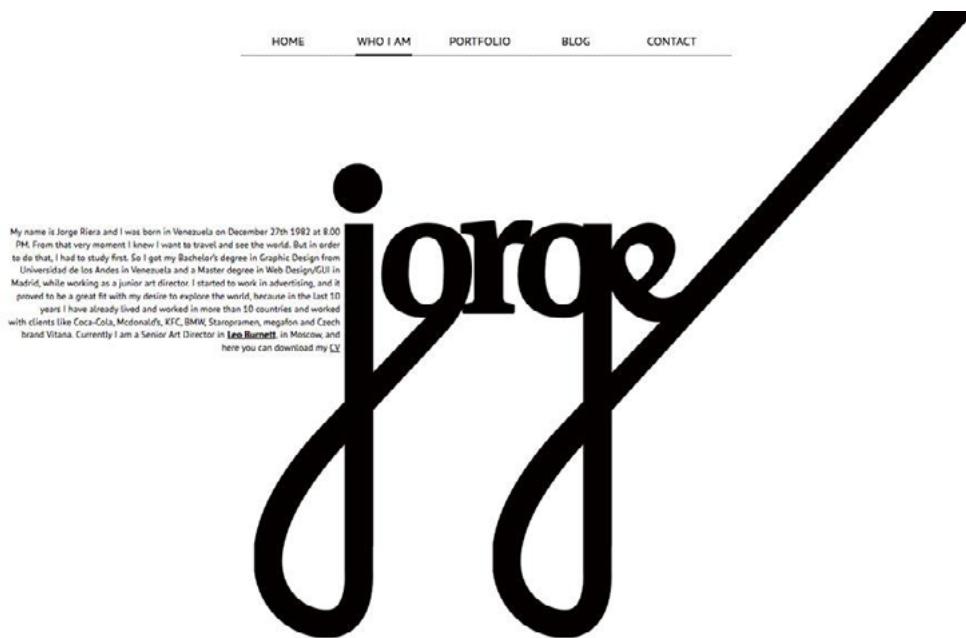
As we described in *Web Design for the Human Eye*, designers can create contrast with color, size, shape, location and scale. Contrast brings focus and attention to a design element, but also creates a sense of direction and hierarchy so that users feel guided through the visuals. Photographer Jorge Riera's site uses contrast in beautiful ways that change page by page. On the homepage, a large white canvas includes simple, single-line navigation and a large image and the bottom of the screen in black with thick strokes and a bold feel.

HOME WHO I AM PORTFOLIO BLOG CONTACT EN / CZ / RU



Photo credits: <http://www.jorgerieraflores.com/>.

Move to the “Who I Am” page for a lesson in typographic and size contrast – custom lettering versus a simple sans serif, and oversized font versus a size that many designers would consider more appropriate for **microcopy** rather than body copy.



*Photo credits: <http://www.jorgerieraflores.com/>.*

Normally, we'd recommend against this tactic due to accessibility and usability issues, but this is an edge case in which small body copy might actually be acceptable since it's not the focal point. Instead, most of the page is occupied with images and examples of work (as you scroll down), which makes sense for an art director who probably prefers to show rather than tell.

## How to Design Minimally

A minimal design framework can be a challenge if you are not prepared. Designers – and clients if the site is work for hire – must be willing to do without a lot of common design elements and features. Content and messaging must be streamlined and simple.

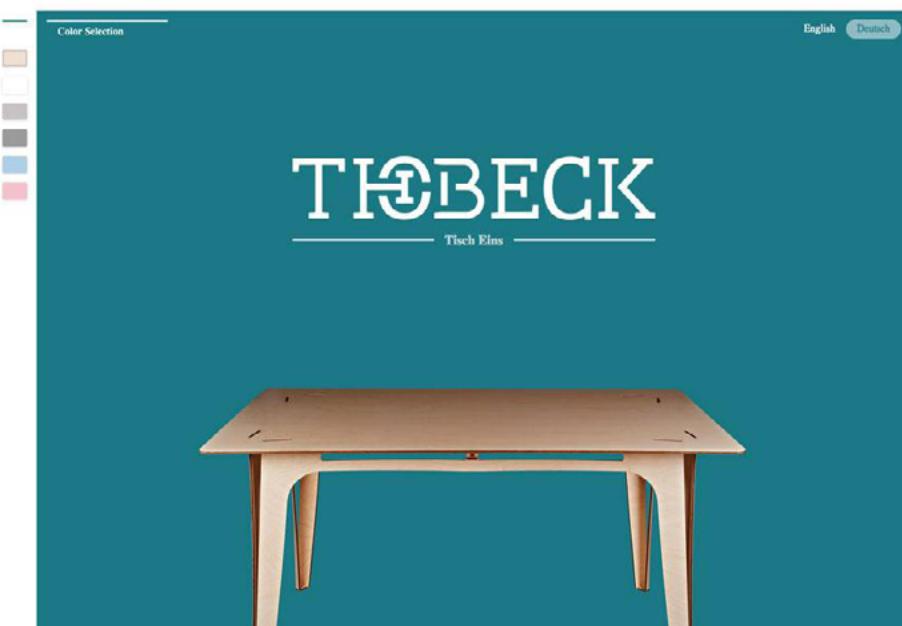


Photo credit: <http://thobeck.com/>

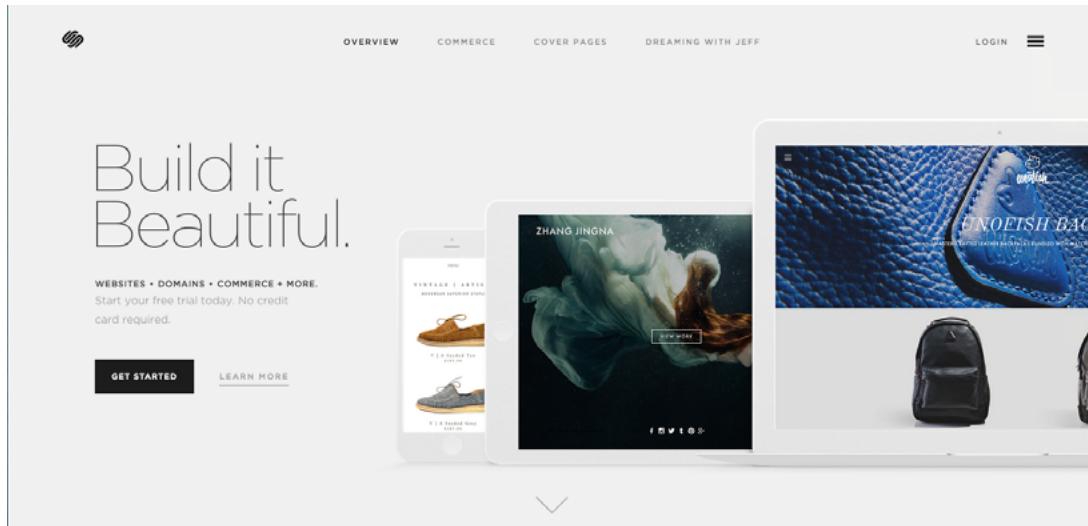


Photo credit: <http://www.cultivatedwit.com/>

For these reasons, minimalism is most commonly used for agency sites and creative portfolios – it can be difficult to execute for larger businesses considering the vast inventory of content and the unfortunate reality of separate departments (like marketing) arguing for different priorities.

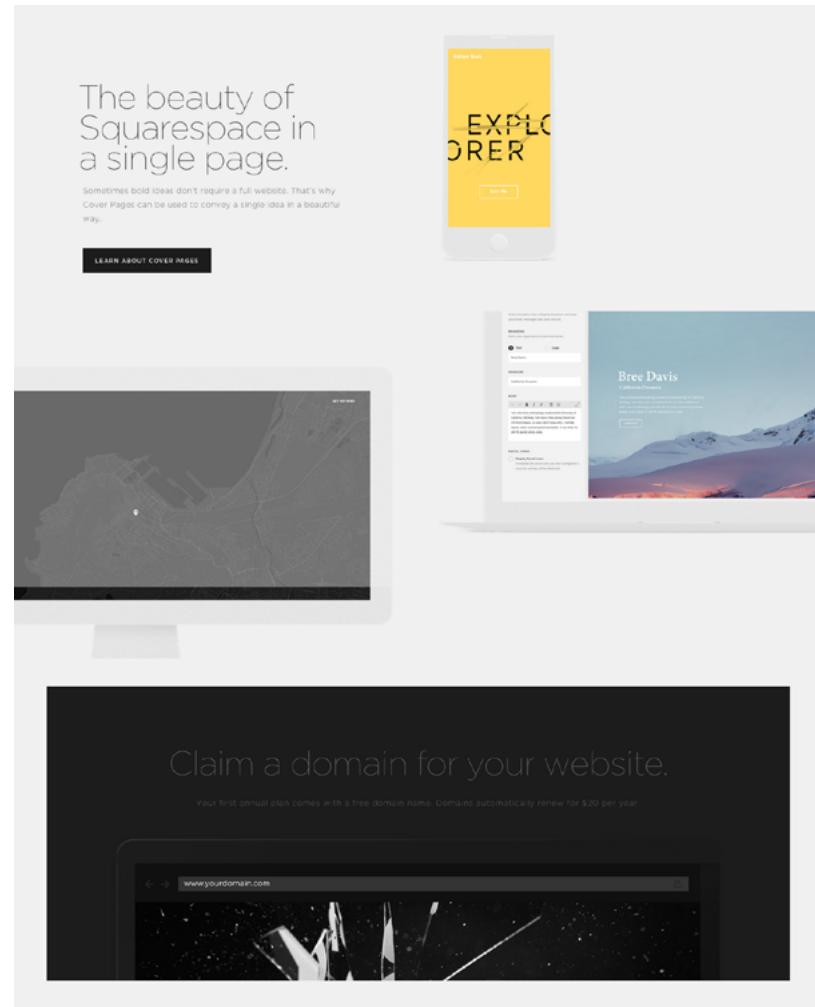
However, you could pursue the option of creating a landing page using the minimal style that serves a gateway to the rest of the site or other information. Even if you don't follow this exact tactic, you can still achieve a more minimalist look across the entire site by designing from the content outwards.

As [Squarespace](#) shows below, exercise Hemingway-like discipline in your copy, then pair it with captivating images.



*Photo credit: Squarespace*

Be realistic with how users browse sites by placing high-level content at the top of the scroll (sparse copy and images), then increasing the density of text and images as the scroll deepens.



*Photo credit: Squarespace*

To prevent visual burnout, you can apply the different types of symmetry we discussed earlier to different parts of the scroll as well as alternating the placement of text and images for a [Z-shaped reading pattern](#).

While this doesn't fit the popular minimalist aesthetic, remember that minimalism is more of a design philosophy than a single look. It's just been expressed in such similar ways that we've come to expect minimalist sites to be pure white backgrounds with either text-only interfaces or a strict grid layout. As Squarespace elegantly demonstrates, it's more important that you follow the spirit of minimalism.

Here's some more tips for simplifying your web UI designs:

- Group your site content into a handful of major sections (five or fewer if possible)
- Determine necessary elements – logo, navigation, body content, contact – and get rid of everything else
- One content concept or idea should occupy a page
- Pick a single visual to focus on for each part of the scroll
- Prioritize content and only use the top five items
- As you iterate the design, adopt a subtractive sculpture mindset and try to remove as much as possible at each step
- Start the design in black and white (or a low-fi wireframe) and only add visual touches, such as color, after the basic design is complete
- As dictated by [Hick's Law](#), limit choices for users so that a page only leads to one place or call to action (aside from basic navigation)

Common elements that are left out of minimalist design frameworks:

- Social media icons or links
- Bulky footers or sitemaps
- List-style widgets, such as top or recent posts

## Minimalism is Not for Every Site

Minimalism can be a difficult design technique to use. It requires a specific and focused attention on content and desire for every piece of the site to fall into that pattern.

For content-heavy sites (like Medium), minimalism is surprisingly effective. Because minimalism is all about trimming secondary features, the content stands out even more within a disciplined interface. On the other hand, minimalism doesn't work quite as well for sites that are ad-heavy, must include an abundance of features (or user options), or feature content for children.

Ad heavy sites and minimalism can be a challenge because the minimal style may differ drastically from what is coming from an ad server. The ads – while often separate from the main content – can detract from the design and actually prevent users from accessing the content.

When put up against a busier framework, minimalism can often get lost because of its innate simplicity.

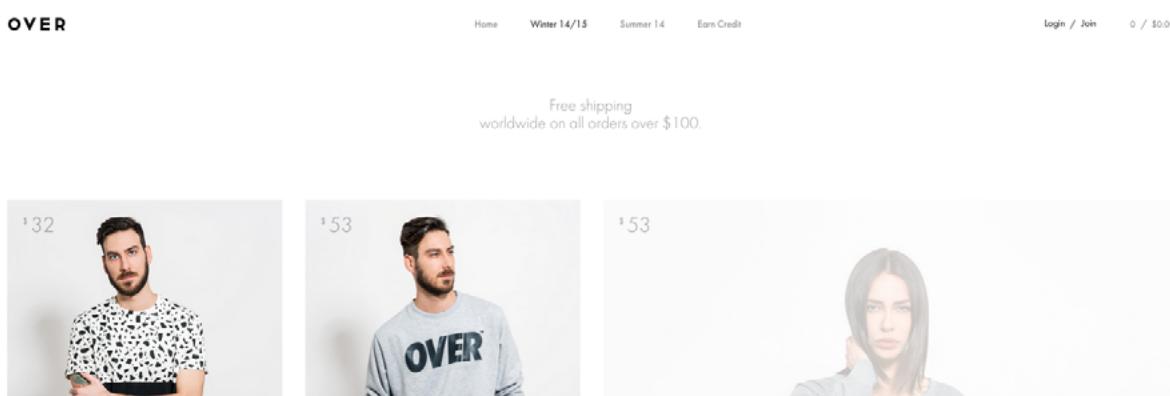


*Photo credit: <http://weplaydots.com/twodots/>*

The same concept applies to sites with a lot of features. While there are a few out there, such as the popular [Two Dots](#) (above), games are a prime example of sites that include too many features for a minimal style design to be effective.

Generally, e-commerce tends to be another area where some concepts of minimalist design may be suitable, but an overall minimalist aesthetic is not realistic due to the enormous amount of information needed to describe and actually sell items.

Of course, this depends greatly on the type of ecommerce site. Some clothing retailers (like [Over Clothing](#) below) can pull off the minimalist look by revealing more information on hover. Remember, however, that this is only possible because it suits the users (street fashion connoisseurs probably appreciate a more avant-garde design) and the content isn't overly complex (you don't need multiple tabs for technical specs).



*Photo credit: [Over Clothing](#)*

The same design would not work so well for a general ecommerce site like [Ebay](#) or [Amazon](#) who require complex information archi-

lectures and whose wider audience probably appreciates a more traditional UI design.

Sites designed for younger users should also avoid minimal frameworks in most instances. The simple design is often seen as “boring” for a set of users that wants to be stimulated and usually have shorter attention spans.

Like we emphasized in *Web UI Best Practices*, don’t apply a design technique just because it’s the hip thing to do. Know your users, create your personas, then make sure your design decision helps them best accomplish their goals.

## Minimalism Will Not Die

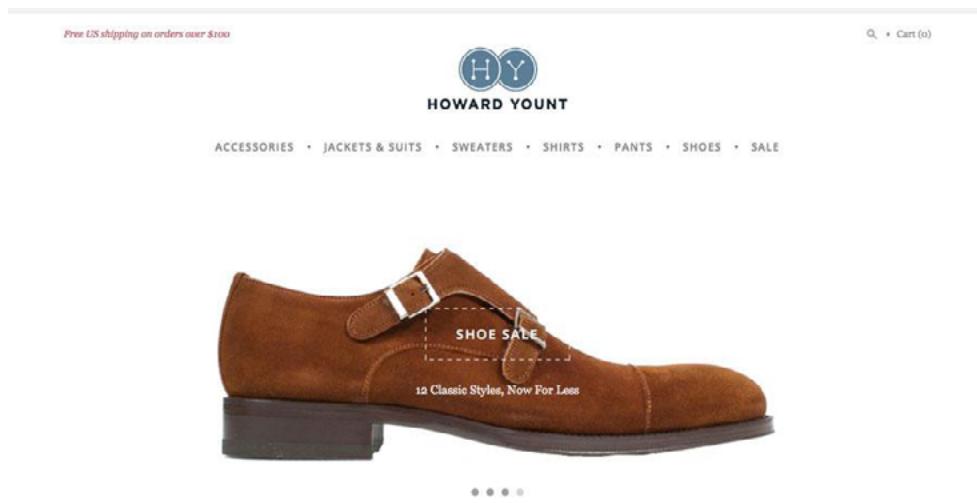


Photo credit: <http://www.howardyount.com/>

Minimalism prevails because it is an effective and visually stunning option for designers. Like all lasting design philosophies, it’s experi-

enced multiple evolutions over time and meshes well with a variety of other design languages and design techniques.

Minimalism is effective and lasting because:

1. The classic style has roots in fundamental design theory [over 100 years old](#).
2. Minimalist design is a natural fit with responsive design frameworks.
3. Less information for browsers to process leads to faster site load times and better site performance.
4. The concept is content-driven, which could not be timelier given the rise in [content-first design processes](#).
5. It applies to a variety of disciplines beyond web design, such as architecture, interior design and art.

## Thinking Beyond the Present

Because we have seen it happen in print design areas, it is likely that minimalism will ebb and flow for years to come in web design as well.

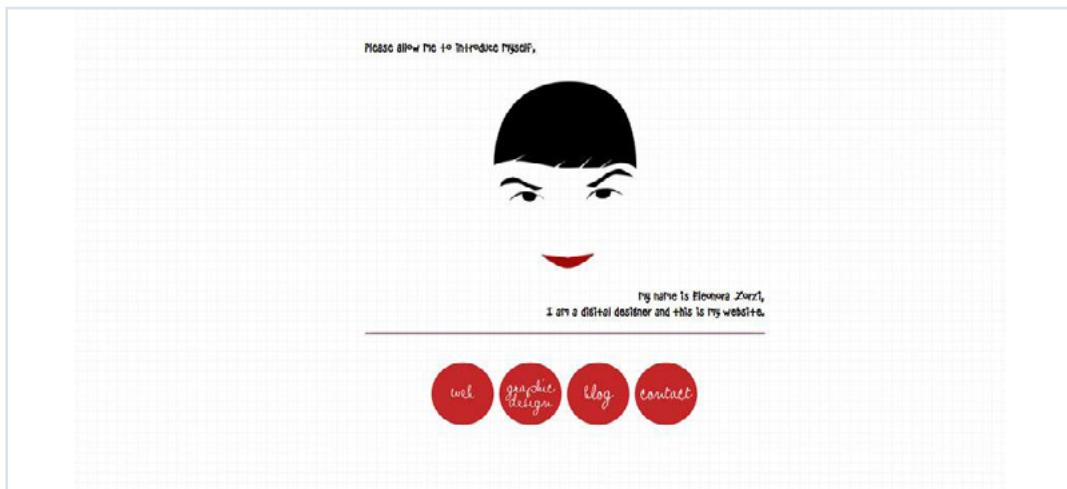
As with any popular design technique, the initial surge in popularity will likely be followed by a pull-back of sorts where almost opposing techniques will find popularity before the technique circles back again.

To the end, minimalism will continue to be a popular option but is likely to evolve into a style that is a little less stark. As we have seen with techniques such as flat design evolving into “[almost flat](#),” minimalist design will become richer (and more usable) as UI designers experiment with texture, color and effects – as well as moving away from symmetrical patterns.

Let’s explore a few of these evolving elements below.

## 1. Minimal texture

Designers will expand from stark background styles to include a more pale or almost unnoticeable texture with a aesthetic plan that is minimal in every other way. This breakaway from a purely minimalist style still has roots in simplicity but with a little more ornamentation.



*Photo credit: <http://ezorzi.com/>*

## 2. Reverse colors

While white backgrounds have been the dominate feature in minimal design (giving a very literal meaning to whitespace), designs

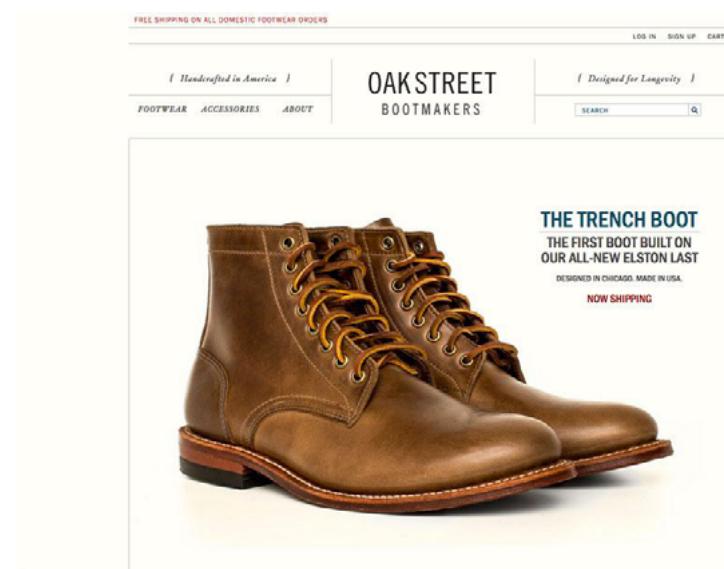
will continue breaking from this pattern by using more color, backgrounds that are dark with lighter text, or a monotone color scheme using various shades of the same hue.



*Photo credit: <http://www.bb-b.net/en/>*

### 3. More interactive effects

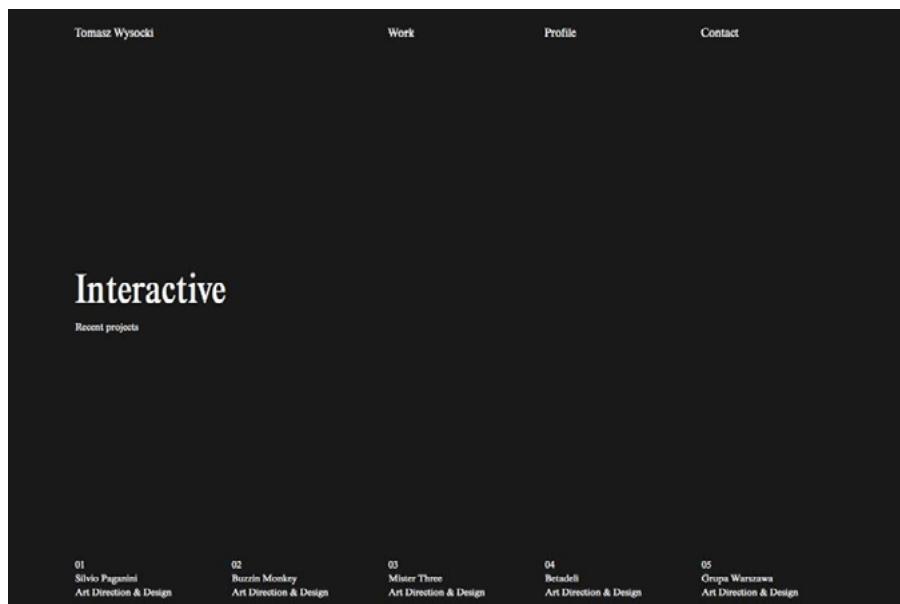
Of course, minimalism is also traditionally defined by a lack of effects. Simple animation in the minimal style will become more popular as more designers appreciate that minimal does not equal static.



*Photo credit: <http://oakstreetbootmakers.com/>*

## 4. Move away from symmetry

The current minimalist landscape is dominantly symmetrical, but that is certainly not a law. While balance is important, actual symmetry is not.



*Photo credit: <http://theafrix.com/work>*

More websites will actually use asymmetrical concepts to create organization, balance, a strong minimal aesthetic – and because it just leads to more interesting visual designs.

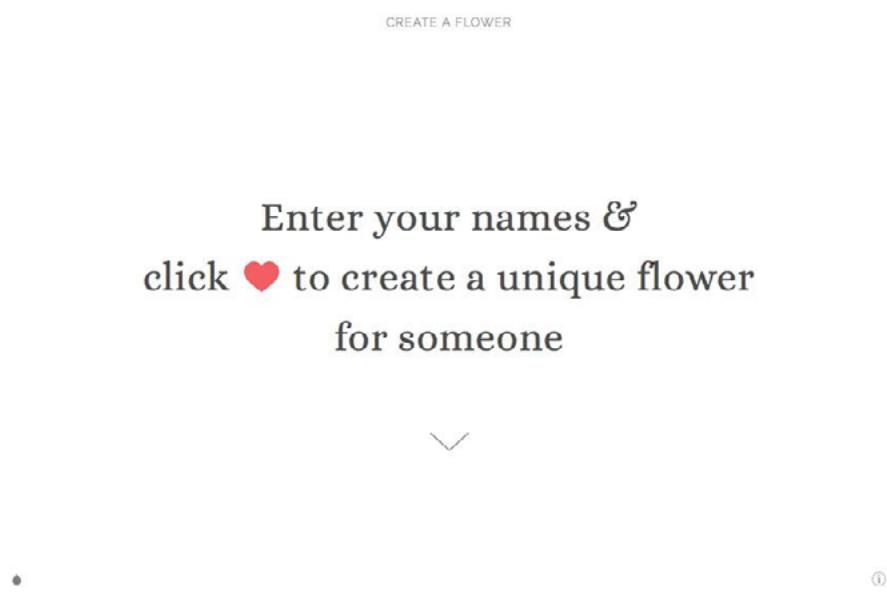
## 5. Improved usability

Ironically, minimalist sites should be more usable (in theory) since the content is clear and less distractions exist on the screen. However, you can easily run into the issue of **minimal design that's too minimal**.

For example, as Delwin Campbell describes in the above article, using a purely icon-based navigation may confuse users if your

visual metaphors aren't straightforward. Or, as Tara Hornor suggests in her [excellent article](#) on UXBooth, designers may only allow users to explore the site in a linear fashion, restricting the freedom of users to choose their most efficient path.

To swing the pendulum back towards functional aesthetics, we're starting to see more designers embedding traditional interface elements like clickable elements, scrolling designs, and additional calls to action into minimalist designs.



*Photo credit: <http://wildflower.resn.co.nz/>*

As we mentioned before, don't mistake the expression of minimalism with its intent.

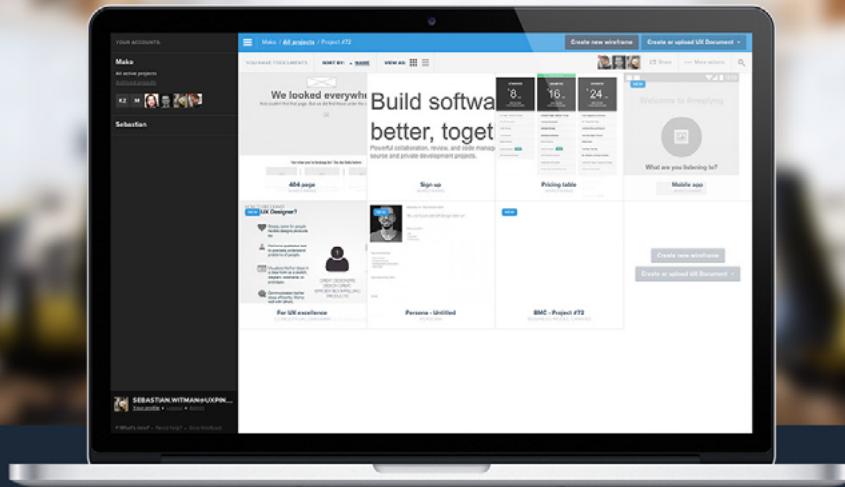
It's not about white space and grid layouts – it's a design philosophy that prioritizes content. Never misinterpret minimalism as a design goal, otherwise you'll just as likely find yourself deleting elements with irreplaceable functionalities.

## 10 Free Resources and Tools

1. **Color Contrast Checker**: Enter the color values you plan to use to see if they are different enough to be accessible and provide a high-impact visual.
2. ***Design Principles: Connecting and Separating Elements Through Contrast and Similarity*** by Smashing Magazine: It's important to think about design theory and basics when creating a minimal framework, particularly space and contrast.
3. **25 Sets of Icons for Minimal Web Design**: Simple icons can be an easy way to add links without a lot of clutter in a minimal framework.
4. **Responsive Grid System**: Organization starts with a solid grid and framework. There are a variety of options from two to 12 columns to work with.
5. **“Get inspired: 50 Awesome Examples of Minimal Typography” by 1<sup>st</sup> Web Design**: Much of minimalism centers on typography; here's a great gallery of examples.
6. **Create a Minimal Portfolio Website Design Tutorial**: Designed for beginners, you can learn the process of creating a simple minimal site in Adobe Photoshop.
7. **Gallery of Minimal One-Page Websites**: The stripped-down technique is easy to see – especially the use of black and white – in this gallery of minimal styles.

8. **Siiimple:** The CSS gallery focuses on coding for simple and minimal design styles.
9. **Best Minimalist WordPress Themes:** Not all the themes in the gallery are free, but it's a good starting point if you are looking for a theme to create a minimal web design.
10. **Minimalist Color Palettes:** Not every minimal outline needs to be black and white, here's a little color inspiration.

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