

UXPin

Minimalist UI Design Trends 2016

A Visual Reference Guide





Minimalist UI Design Trends 2016

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Index

A Few Quick Words	5
Minimal and Crazy Color	7
Tips for Using Crazy Color	9
Minimalism With Typeface Trends	10
Tips for Using Typeface Trends	12
Minimal Card Styles	14
Minimal for Wearables	18
Minimal Navigation Options	22
Minimal Design for Maximal Content	25
Takeaways	28
Practice What You've Learned:	
Designing A Flat Minimalist Site	29
How the Site Design Works	30
Minimalism & High-Definition Images	31
Flat Design Stands Out	32
Cards Organize Content & Improve Flow	33
Prototyping a Trendy & Usable Website	34
Conclusion	40

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A Few Quick Words

Long live minimalism.

It's the design trend that never gets old, and continues to evolve as other techniques come and go.

Minimalism is defined as a style that uses a sparse aesthetic and as few effects as possible to create a design that is harmonious, usable and sophisticated. While the style has been part of the design landscape for decades, the resurgence of Apple products and their connection to the style has helped push the trend forward again.



Photo credit: [Apple](#)

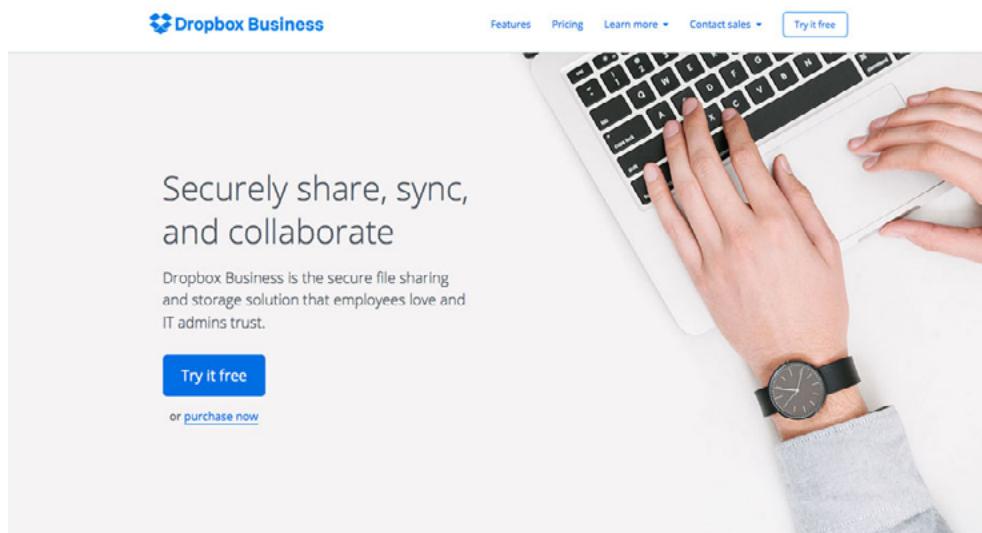


Photo credit: Dropbox

The websites for [Apple](#) and [Dropbox](#) are “poster” websites for minimalism. The designs feature prominent whitespace, simple navigation, a singular visual focus, clean typography and a true emphasis on content. Minimalism is perfectly described by [Kate Meyer for the Nielsen Norman Group](#):

When employed correctly, the goal of minimalist web design should be to present content and features in a simple, direct way by providing as little distraction from the core content as possible.

While these tenets are the backbone of minimalism, what’s particularly wonderful about this style is that it works with other trends. You find use the principles of minimalism with other trendy techniques to create interesting projects that are anything but plain. In this volume, will take a look at the ways designers are pushing the boundaries of minimalism.

For the love of UX,
Carrie Cousins

Minimal and Crazy Color

Because minimalism involves stripping away elements that are unnecessary, a strong focal area is important. That's where big, bold and even crazy color comes in.

Previously, we saw a focus on hero images and video – a trend that's still going pretty strong – but the shift has been toward color as a dominant element. Big color replaces some of the more typical white space that we're used to seeing with minimal designs.

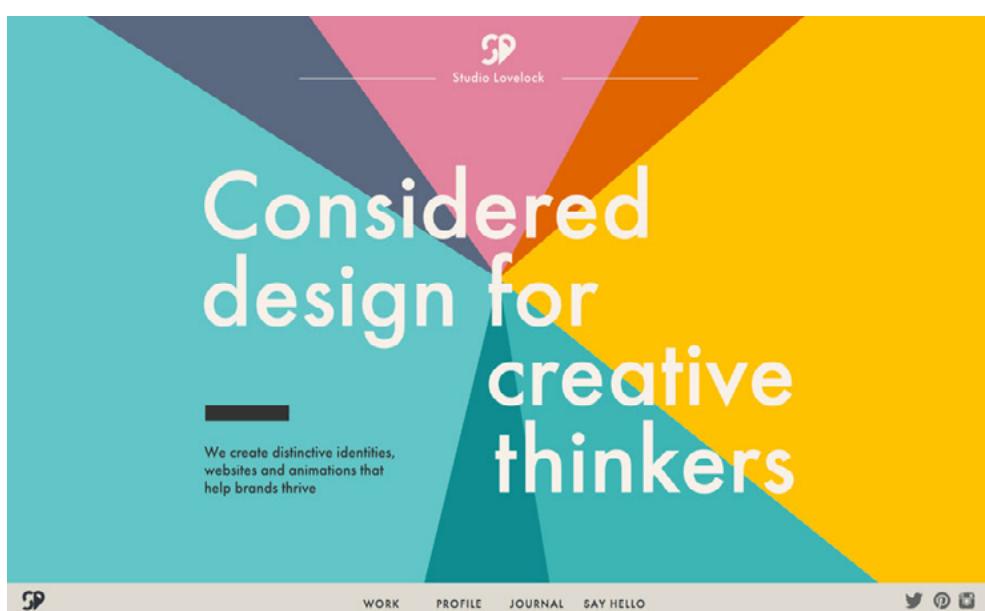


Photo credit: Studio Lovelock

The stunning result borrows some of the colors we've seen in flat and material design trends. This creates an overall look that's simple, engaging and demands attention.

[Studio Lovelock](#) uses a pinwheel of colors to create a full-screen header that draws users in. The text is simple and without any extra embellishment or words. Add an atypical bottom-screen navigation menu to keep the focus on the main image but provide a cue to scroll. Below the scroll, the site uses the same big colors in card-style elements to move users through the design. This makes navigating the content both easy and visually appealing, yet simple and elegant.

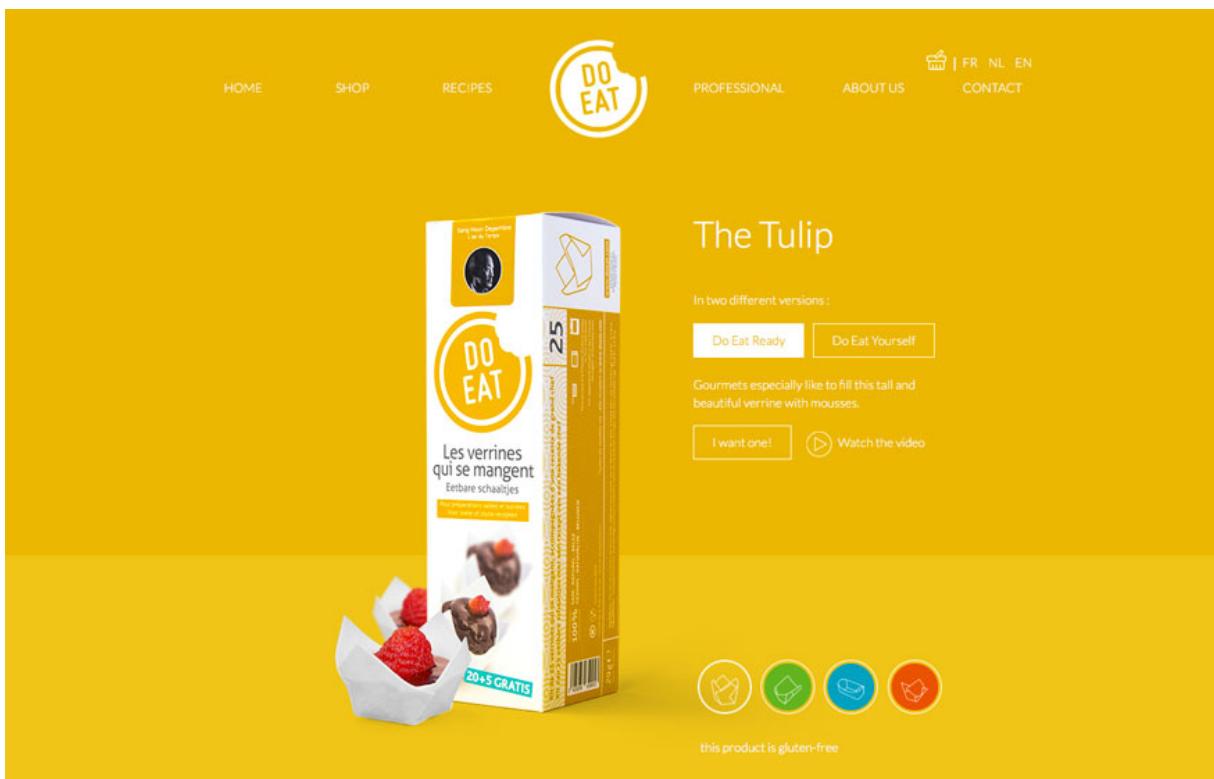


Photo credit: Do Eat

If the [Do Eat](#) website had a white background, we probably wouldn't even guess if it could be considered minimal or not. And that's precisely why the bright yellow background works. It creates the right

degree of surprise to entice users. The rest of the website design is simple and quite easy to use, with just the right balance of clickable elements and information.

Tips for Using Crazy Color

- Opt for bold hues with deep saturation
- Mix and match bright color with white or black typography
- Use a single color as the primary palette, including the background
- Plan “too much color” with care and mix up a rainbow style color palette
- Let color be the only “trick” in the design and keep everything else streamlined

Using “crazy” color choices can be one of the easiest and most fun ways to give a project a facelift. This is a great option for a minimal design, because there’s still plenty of visual interest and color can add a freshness that a more stark black and white design might lack.

Minimalism With Typeface Trends

When someone says “minimal typography,” what typeface do you visualize?

Maybe it’s Helvetica. Or something that looks a lot like it, with plenty of medium width, simple strokes that come together in a highly-readable sans serif.

Of course, this would be the textbook definition of typography for a minimalist design. But it doesn’t have to be the *only* definition.

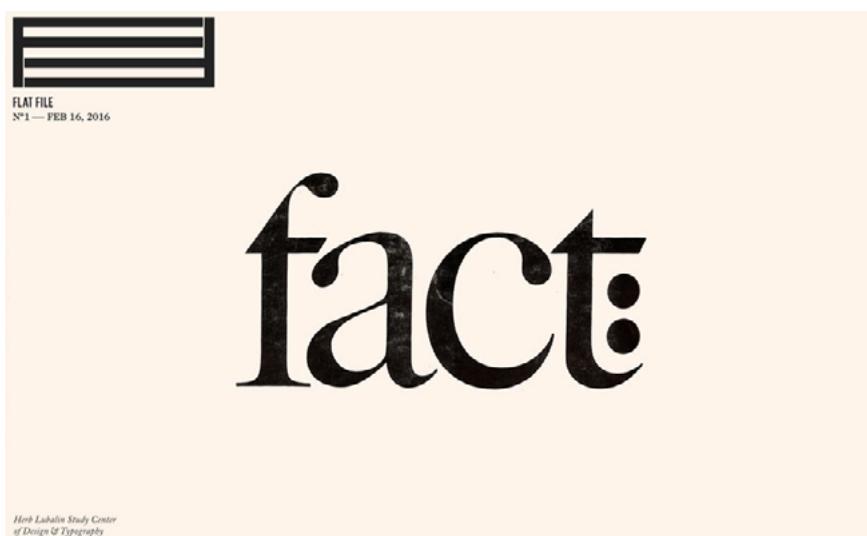


Photo credit: [Flat File](#)

When the rest of the framework is stripped down to the most basic of designs, a more trendy typography option can serve as the message and the dominant element. Vintage or retro grunge type and stacking type are time-honored designer favorites. When used right, they can add a spark to a minimal style.

[Flat File](#) uses a striking serif – ITC Caslon No. 224, to be precise. The type is roughed up, giving it a slight texture that feels both artsy and a critical component of the content. Simple scrolling effects contribute to this minimal aesthetic, because everything about the site is so easy and comfortable.

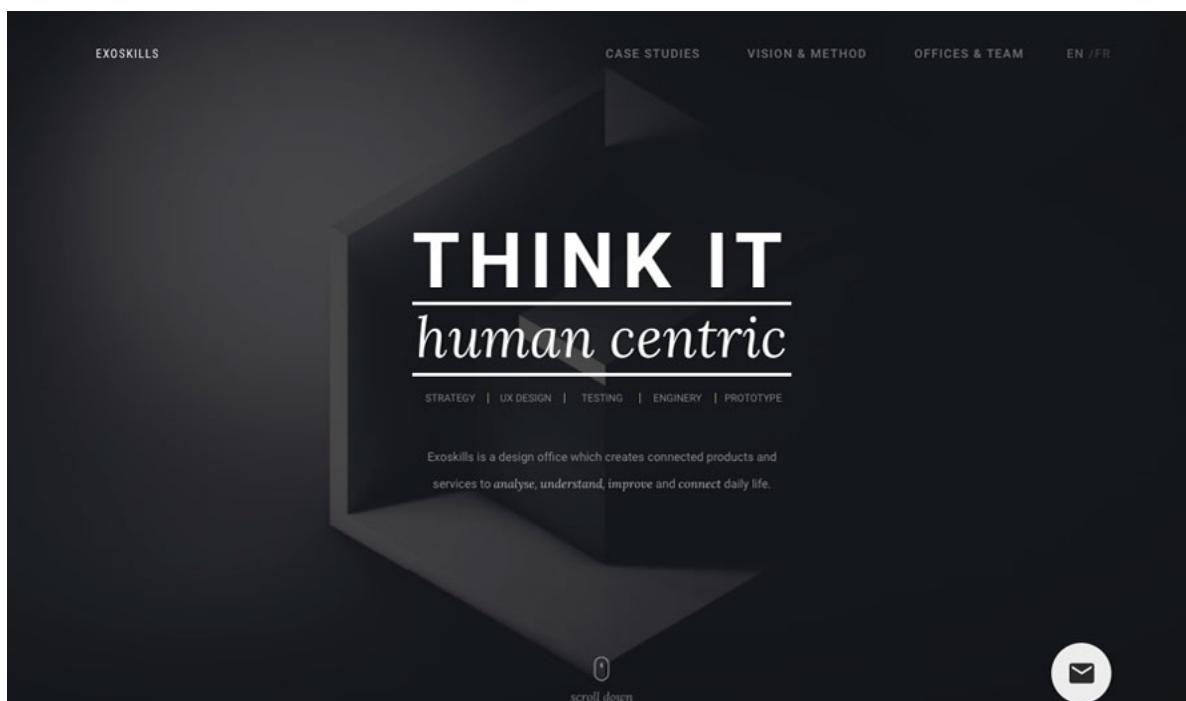


Photo credit: [Exoskills](#)

While [Exoskills](#) looks nothing like Flat File, it also combines a simple aesthetic, navigation and feel with bold typography as a dominant element. Multi-level stacked typography is popping up in a lot of designs. That's because it provides an interesting way to display in-

formation in readable way. As an added bonus, it also creates just the right hierarchy, telling users what's important.

This combination of eye-catching typography in a minimal design is a great option for design projects that need to convey simplicity, harmony and organization. It also serves as a starting point for designs that lack other elements or that want users to focus on reading the message on the screen. Be aware of size when it comes to this text-heavy style. On smaller devices, it's important to watch the sizing of responsive typography – particularly with more complicated typefaces – to ensure readability remains intact.

Tips for Using Typeface Trends

- Use trendy typography for a specific purpose such as a logo or headline
- Complicated typefaces, such as vintage grunge, often need to be displayed at larger sizes
- Don't grab a new typeface just because it's cool; it should match the mood of the project
- Not all trending typefaces will work with minimal, styles that lack long tails, swashes and flourishes are the best options

Typeface trends can evolve and change quickly. Use this technique only if you are a constantly tweaking the design, because you would

end up with something that looks dated. By applying a type trend to a very specific part of the design, such as in the hero image or main navigation, you can easily use a trend while it's popular and change course when needed.

Minimal Card Styles

Card-style interfaces might have been one of the biggest trends of the past year. Thanks in part to [Google's Material Design](#), cards are the go-to design pattern for many Android-based mobile applications and for Apple apps as well. Cards are also finding homes in plenty of desktop sites.

The popularity is due in part to the phenomenal usability of cards. Something [Pinterest](#) has known about for sometime.

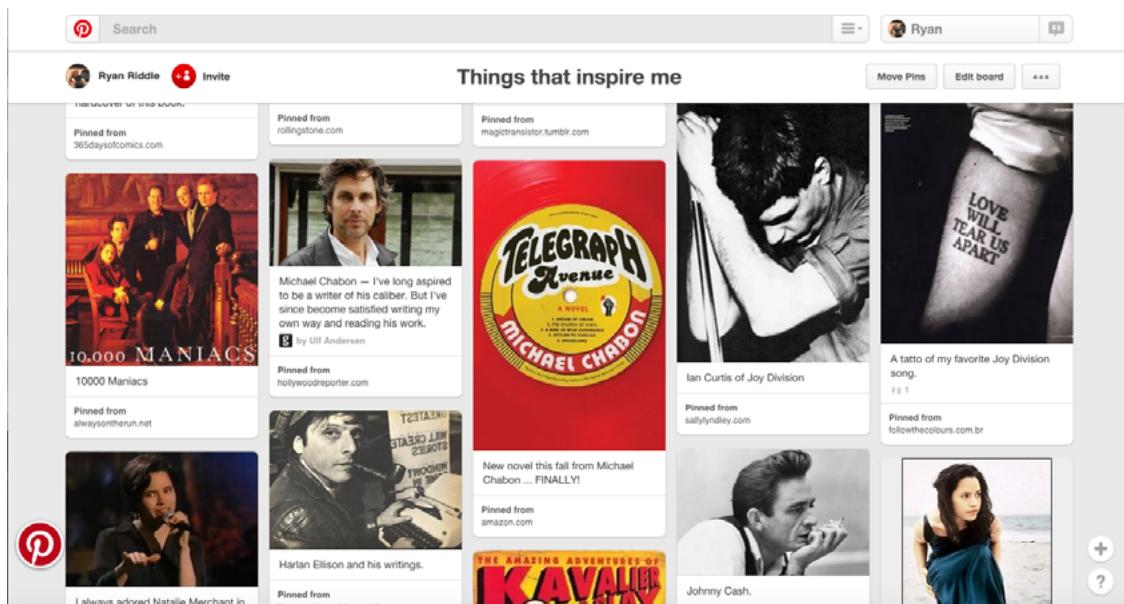


Photo credit: [Pinterest](#)

Cards are a simple method of creating organization and flow in a design. Plus, they work with almost any type of content:

- Photos
- Text
- Video
- Coupons
- Music
- Payment information
- Signups or forms
- Game data
- Social media streams or sharing
- Rewards information
- Links
- Combinations of elements

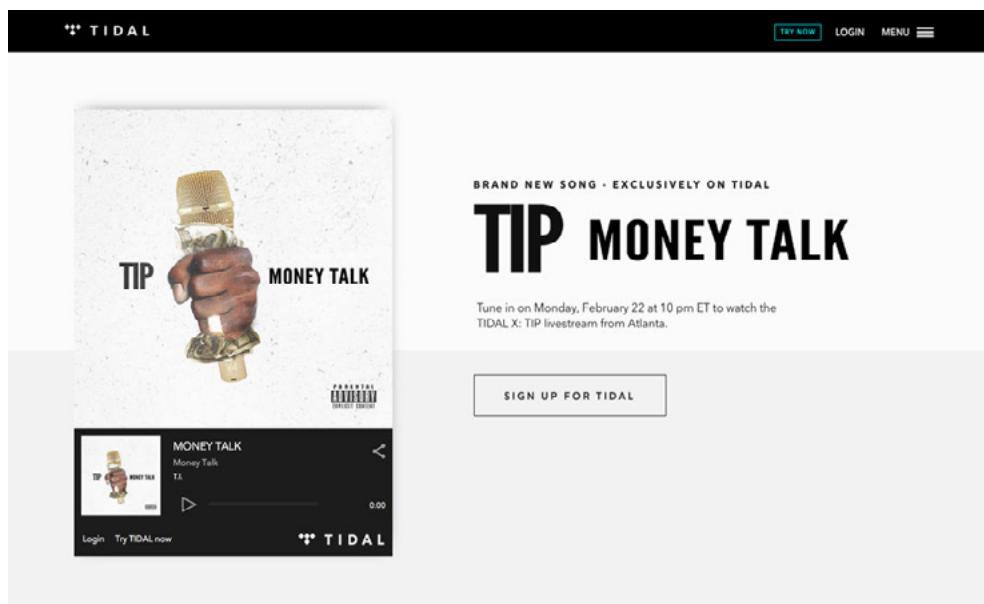


Photo credit: Tidal

Cards also rely on established user behavior patterns, making interfaces easy to use. Every element lives in a container that relates to

a specific action, such as activating a link, filling out a form, sharing on social media, or watching a video. While the first cards resembled e-playing cards, newer card-style interfaces are much sleeker.

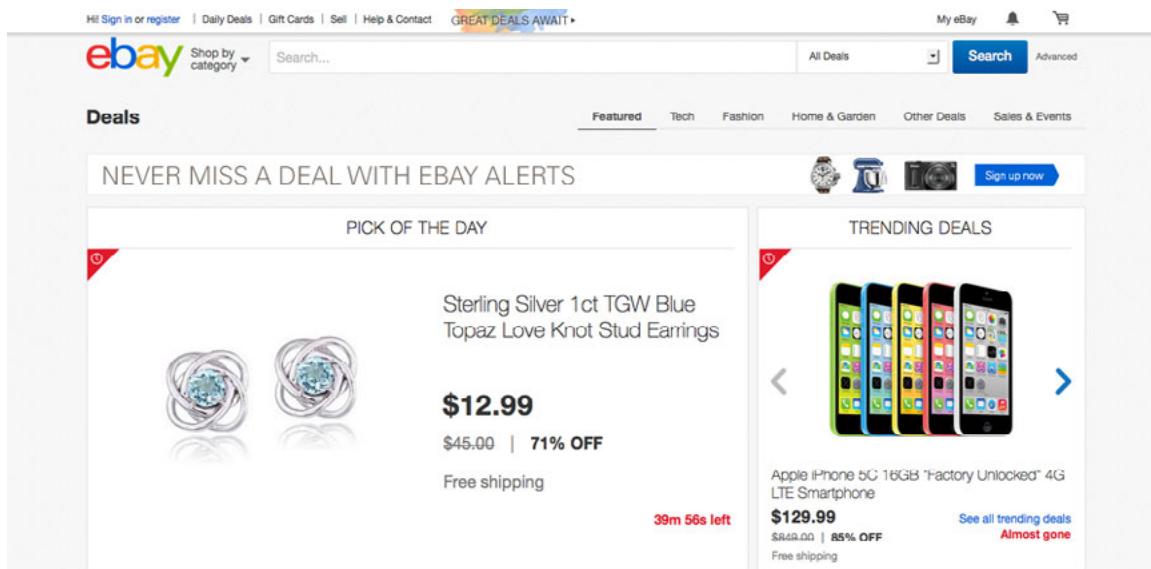


Photo credit: eBay

That's why big-name websites are using card-style design patterns in a minimal framework. Cards are a visual element that relates to a specific action against a simple backdrop, as seen above in the designs for [Tidal](#) and [eBay](#). This simplicity is easy to look at, feels unobtrusive and the simplicity is calming, which gives the user the feeling of control. That they have the power to do what they want on the site. It's no wonder than a combination of minimalism and cards is a popular option for sites where users have choices to make, from picking a song to buying socks.

Cards are a fluid option that can work between desktop and mobile sites responsively. However, it's important to note that cards will look (and maybe even function) differently between devices. Look back at the eBay design above. The cards are different sizes and the “pick of

the day” is horizontally oriented, while the “trending deals” is more square. Each of these shapes presents a problem on mobile, with a solution that is more vertical. Each card will reshape for smaller device sizes.

Here’s a few things to keep in mind when using cards in a responsive design:

- Is the text equally readable on desktop and mobile devices?
- Do shapes work with device aspect ratios?
- How will photos and images look across devices and will they be the same or different?
- Are the clickable and tappable areas the same? (It is recommended to make the entire card a single linked element.)

If you want to learn more about designing card-style interfaces for mobile design, check out this free e-book [*Mobile Design Trends 2016*](#).

Minimal for Wearables

One of the most practical uses for minimal design is in creating interfaces for wearables. With a limited canvas size and a backlit black or very light background, simple design is a must for these *even smaller* devices.

Wearables embody the minimal motto, “less is more.” Every element of the design must have meaning, from text to images to motion to UI elements and actions. They need to be designed in a way that feels like a one-step process. Each screen must be accessed through an easy action without instruction. (Primarily because there’s not any room to provide such information.)

With wearables, minimalism is used for apps and interfaces that might not opt for this style otherwise, such as games or information collection and distribution (news or list-making apps). Technology and adoption of wearables is also relatively new, encouraging a more simplistic approach. People who buy wearable often have a task-based objective for using the device, such as runners that track

time and distance, or people that need constant access to email or other specific notifications.

Minimalism is the go-to choice for wearable interfaces.

But it goes one step further than just minimalism in the design. It is minimal in how it works as well (which is important with other minimal interfaces, but is less imperative). Every action in a minimal wearable design must relate to a task that is designed as simply and seamlessly as possible.



Photo credit: [Fitbit](#)

The other consideration that makes minimalism so popular with wearables is the inconsistency in device and screen types. Some devices have full-color screens, others are only dark and light. Some devices use touch, while others use physical interaction tools. To create an interface that is most accepted across device types, a minimal interface is a requirement. (Just think of all the devices where you might use the [Fitbit](#) interface – online or on a phone, but also on an Apple

Watch, one of the many Android-based smartwatches or on Fitbit's own band or watch face.)



Photo credit: [Tiny Pong](#)



Photo credit: [Wunderlist](#)

[Tiny Pong](#) and [Wunderlist](#) are wearable apps that exist for very different reasons – a game versus a to-do list tool. One uses the physical digital crown for interactions; the other is rooted in touch. One features a monotone color scheme; the other is full color. Despite the differences, both use simple, minimal interfaces to help users make the most of their functionality.

Having a firm grasp on minimal concepts is going to be an essential part of the repertoire of any designer working with wearable design. The canvas is too small to think about it in any other way.

Minimal Navigation Options

When you think about minimal design, navigation is not always one of the first things that comes to mind. This is partially due to the design itself. Many minimal designs actually hide some or all of the navigation to streamline the visuals.

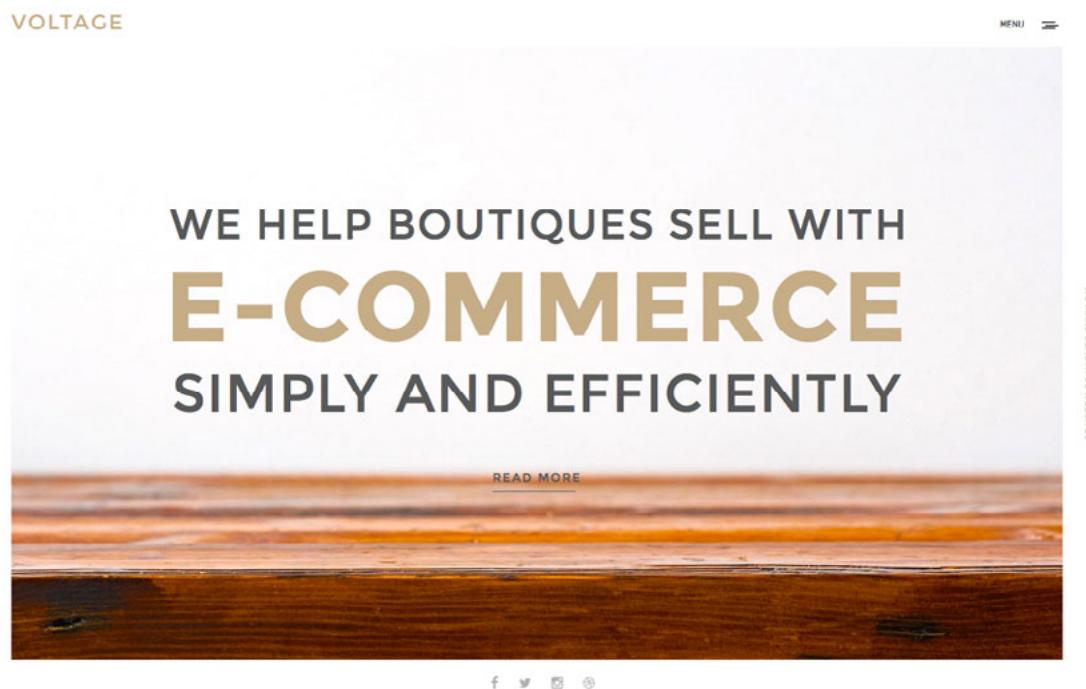


Photo credit: [Voltage New Media](#)

For example, the often-debated hamburger icon, and related hidden navigation, is part of this conversation. The stacked icon that expands

to a full list of menu items remains a popular design choice, especially in minimal frameworks and [mobile UI](#).

A slightly different take on this icon is employed by [Voltage New Media](#). Click the off-center hamburger icon, and it expands to a half-screen style navigation menu. This style, which is often no more than a colored box containing a simple logo and list of link options, is extremely popular and growing. It works with the minimal style because you can strip plenty of “junky,” but necessary elements from the main canvas in a way that users understand. (Love it or hate it, almost everyone understands how to use the hamburger menu.)

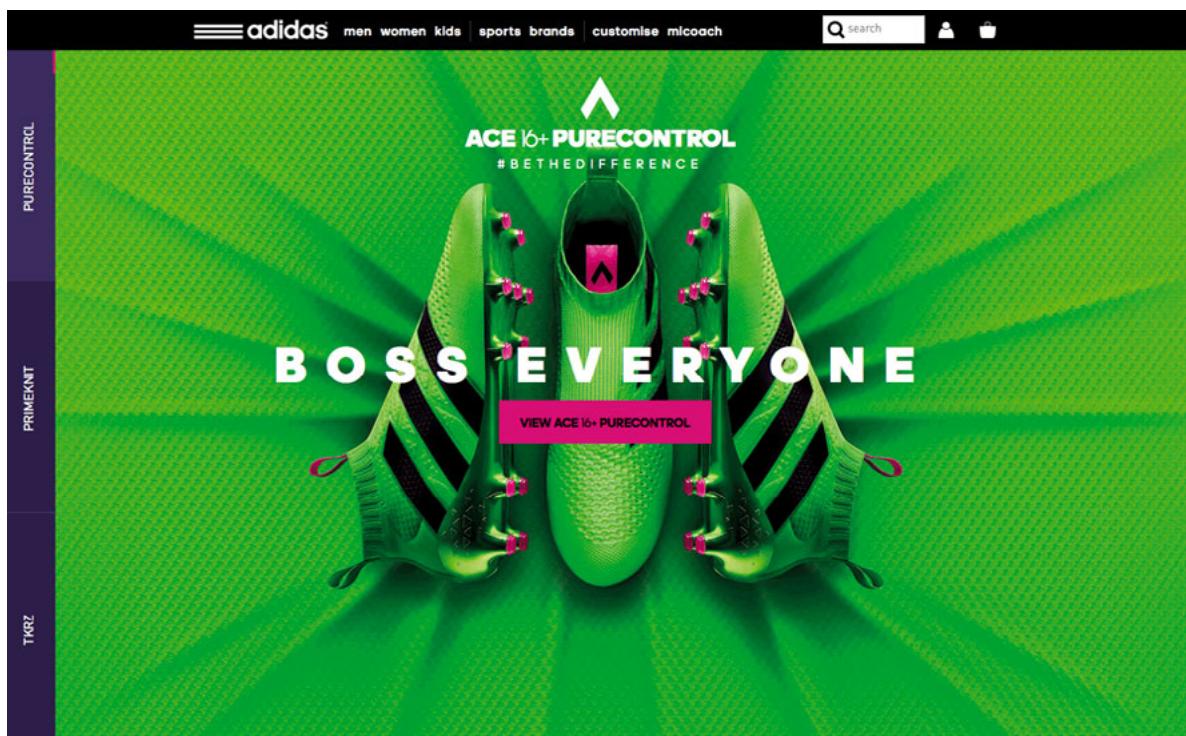


Photo credit: Adidas

The appearance of minimal navigation is growing in designs with more complex aesthetic patterns as well. Take the United Kingdom's [Adidas](#) site, for example. The homepage (minus the busy textured

background) is sparse. There's a simple row of top page navigation, a bouncing arrow at the bottom of the screen to help users scroll for more and hidden pop-out navigational elements on the left side of the screen. All of these techniques are commonly featured in minimal designs and are simple to understand and use, even with more complicated website designs.

If you want to go beyond minimalism and learn some navigation, check out the free ebook [*Web UI Best Practices*](#).

Minimal Design for Maximal Content

It might seem like a juxtaposition of sorts, but designers are finding creative ways to use minimal design styles even with a lot of content. This can be pretty tricky to do. It takes a design and content team that has a lot of trust in one another to create the right balance between content and design. This can be really effective for e-commerce websites, which often contains hundreds of inventory pages along with long-scrolling pages to showcase products and styles.

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Photo credit: Jatex

Jatex and Groupon are each in the business of selling products. The sites are designed as almost a yin and yang of how to do minimalism for sales.

[Jatex](#) features its main product, orthopedic devices, against an all white background with limited navigation and plenty of whitespace. The homepage is an almost text-book example of what a minimal design looks like. Start moving through the site and there is a lot of information about this product, including specifications, capabilities, quality questions and answers and contact forms for medical professionals. The organization is clear and simple for a websites contains complex and complicated content. The clear structure and space contribute to overall readability and make it seem easy, even for a user who stumbles on the site by accident.

Nordstrom's [front page](#) is also a good example. It strikes that balance between short concise copy and an engaging minimal design. There's just enough copy to get you interested to click through to a department to see more on shoes or suits.

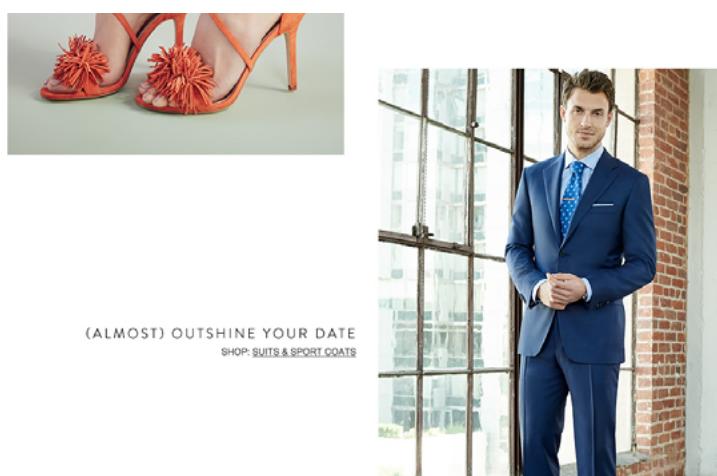


Photo credit: Nordstrom

The screenshot shows a Groupon product page for "Gourmet Dipped Strawberries and Chocolate Treats from Shari's Berries". The main visual is a white plate filled with various chocolate-dipped strawberries and chocolates, some with nuts and drizzles. To the right, a large green button says "\$15 BUY!". Below it, a summary table shows the original value (\$30), discount (50%), and savings (\$15). A timer indicates "LIMITED TIME ONLY" with "1 day 15:15:58" left. Below the main image are five smaller thumbnail images of different dessert items. At the bottom, there are social sharing icons and a link to "In a Nutshell".

Photo credit: Groupon

When you first look at the product page for [Groupon](#), you might start to second guess the idea of minimalism in the design. But look a little closer and you'll find that there's a lot of content, but it is organized in a way that captures the spirit of minimalism. The interface uses a single focal point (the picture) with only the most necessary elements to help users interact with the design. The more involved content falls below the scroll. This keeps things sparse up top with an image, short description and purchase information. (What more do you need?).

Working with complicated content does not mean the design has to be cumbersome; it's actually the perfect setup for a minimal aesthetic. Separate content into groupings to make it manageable and use principles of space, alignment and clean typography to create hierarchy and easy reading.

Takeaways

Minimalism as a design concept is somewhat rigid on its face. The limits of the style can feel rather restricting to some designers, but that does not have to be the case.

Minimalism can extend to be a little more colorful, a little more complex and a little more visually interesting. That's what we are seeing for sure with a lot of projects. Designers are using minimalism to help shape effective interfaces, aesthetics and user flows. They are adding in touches of other trends – particularly flat and material design – to create something users want to interact with.

This is an idea that's unlikely to pass, contributing to the overall timelessness of minimalism. That's why this trend withstands the test of time so well. Designers can evolve minimalism and traditional roots of design theory to work with modern techniques for projects that are simple, organized and user friendly. Isn't that what good design is all about?

Practice What You've Learned: Designing A Flat Minimalist Site

Some trends are popular for a reason: they just work.

They're easy to build, users are accustomed to them, they're flexible across many viewports, and they present information in a meaningful, aesthetically-pleasing way.

Take this [awwards-winning site](#), for example:

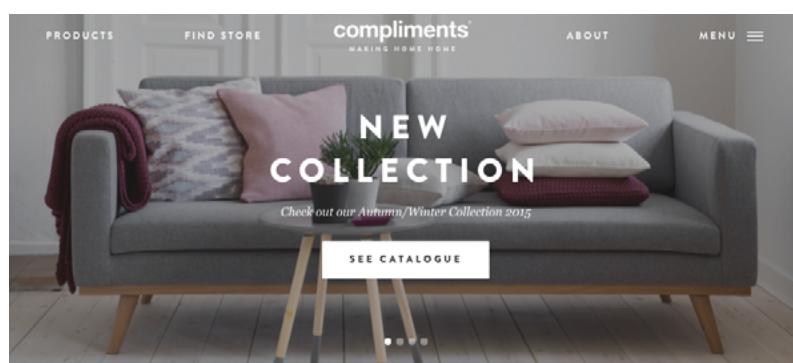


Photo source: Compliments

It looks great *and* works well. But why, and how can we replicate its success?

In this step-by-step lesson, we'll show you how to build a similar site that incorporates flat design, minimalism, cards, and HD images.

Now that you've learned the principles behind successful minimalism, it's time to try your hand at designing a beautiful and usable minimalist interface.

How the Site Design Works

What makes this site appealing and functional? We notice several design decisions at first glance:

- Imagery is content
- Pages load with a fade effect
- The flat-inspired aesthetic creates visual maturity that matches the brand
- The home page is arranged in a card-based interface
- There's both a navigation bar *and* a nav menu to support a full responsive experience

Minimalism & High-Definition Images

In a site whose goal is to sell products, showing the wares is essential. A single photo gives people an easy-to-read first impression. But it has to be the right photo, though: one that represents the product's qualities, not just what it is. Images tell a sort of story.

As described in the ebook *Web Design Trends 2015 & 2016*, large photos are trendy today because they're easy to read. At the same time, mobile-savvy websites use fewer, smaller photos because mobile bandwidth is limited... and can get expensive, depending on users' data plans.

How do we reconcile bandwidth with quality? Minimalism.

In web design, minimalism doesn't just mean "do more with less" – it communicates the same amount with less clutter. Use of muted colors that coordinate well across all imagery and visual design elements (header, footer background and typography).



70% JPG
29.7kb



70% JPG
35.4kb

Photo source: Compliments

There's another benefit. Photos with coordinated color schemes (on the left, in the above comparison) download faster because JPG photos with less contrast compress better than high-contrast photos. That means we can use larger, higher quality images for about the same number of bytes.

Flat Design Stands Out

Design elements with single, simple colors appear to sit flat against the background. It's great at eliminating distractions to focus users' attention on content – in this case, products – but it also complements the site's elegant look and feel.

Consider the hero carousel. Its relatively bold, pure white text stands out from the photos upon which it sits. Users can't *not* notice it, yet it doesn't detract from the overall look.

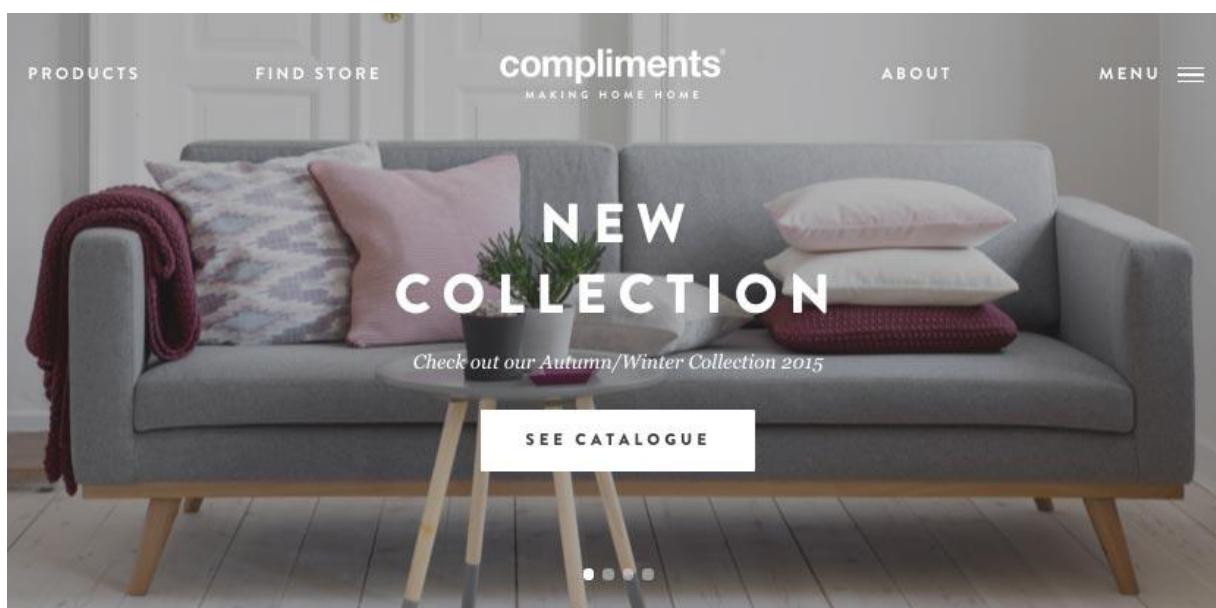


Photo source: [Compliments](#)

In the cards below, generous white space – a flat color – does the opposite, making the products pop out in sharp relief. And where photos do have backgrounds, those backgrounds are clutter-free and evenly lit. You might even say, flat.

Cards Organize Content & Improve Flow

Card-based designs begin with a grid, but understanding why helps us use them effectively.

Adaptive design: The blocky, no-frills layout compresses well on small screens while expanding well on large ones.

Bite-sized chunks: Small dollops of information are easy to digest. That means the less information per card, the better. Notice also that each card uses the same *types* of information, which both helps users compare the items and learn the interface at the glance.

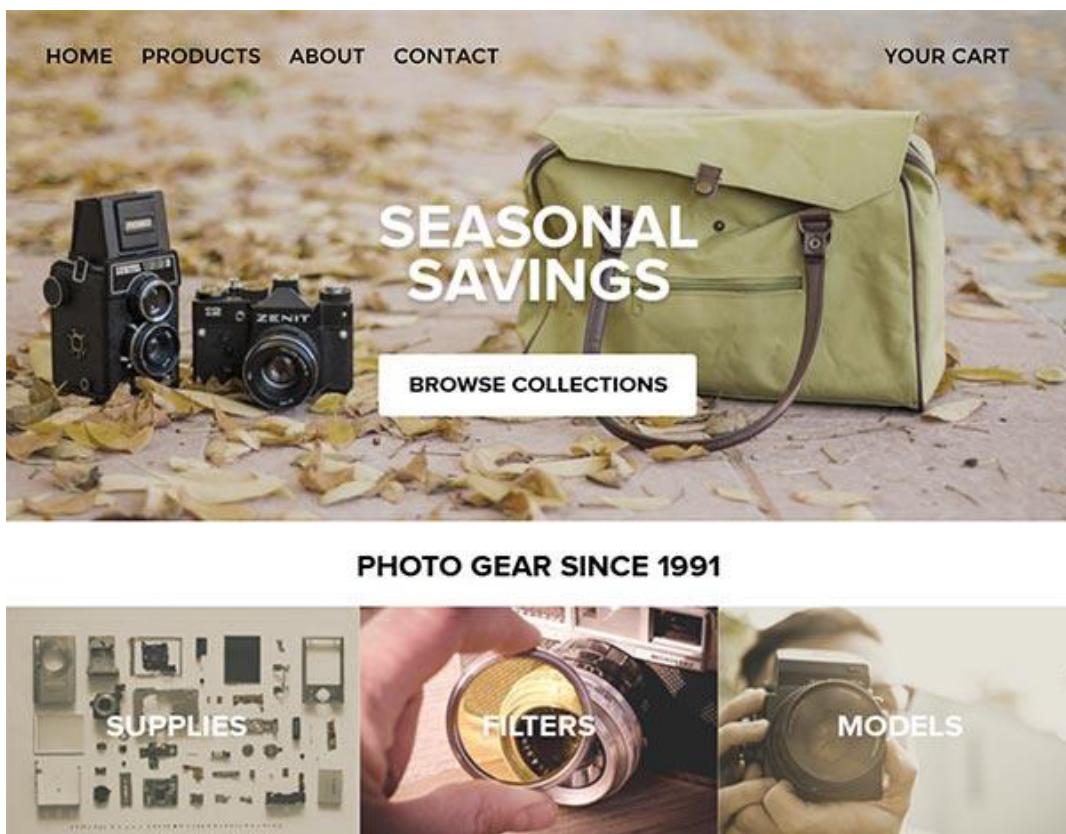
Best practices for card design:

- Each card communicates only one cohesive idea.
- Plan for cards to stack and sit side-by-side.
- Make the entire card area tappable.
- Space between cards helps them stand apart, but too much space creates distracting gaps. Mind your gutters.

Prototyping a Trendy & Usable Website

We can apply these rules of minimalism, flat colors, cards and HD imagery to our own work.

Here's what we'll build as we start in [Photoshop](#) and end in [UXPin](#):



(See the [live prototype](#).)

1. Get the materials

Start by gathering the images you need. Make sure they use similar colors or tints – in this case, we even added a dash of color to a few grayscale images to make them match.

You'll also want a site outline: specific pages, or at least the broad sections, the site will contain.

2. Decide on priorities

Thinking mobile-first forces us to set priorities.

What do people need to get out of the home page? What image(s) will inspire them to act? Decide what content is vital to users from all devices, and what you can afford to only show for users with larger screens.

For the homepage, we've created the visual hierarchy as follows:

- **Primary:** Hero image encouraging users to browse product collection
- **Secondary:** Establish credibility with clear tagline highlighting 25 years in business
- **Tertiary:** Show additional products with 3 side-by-side cards

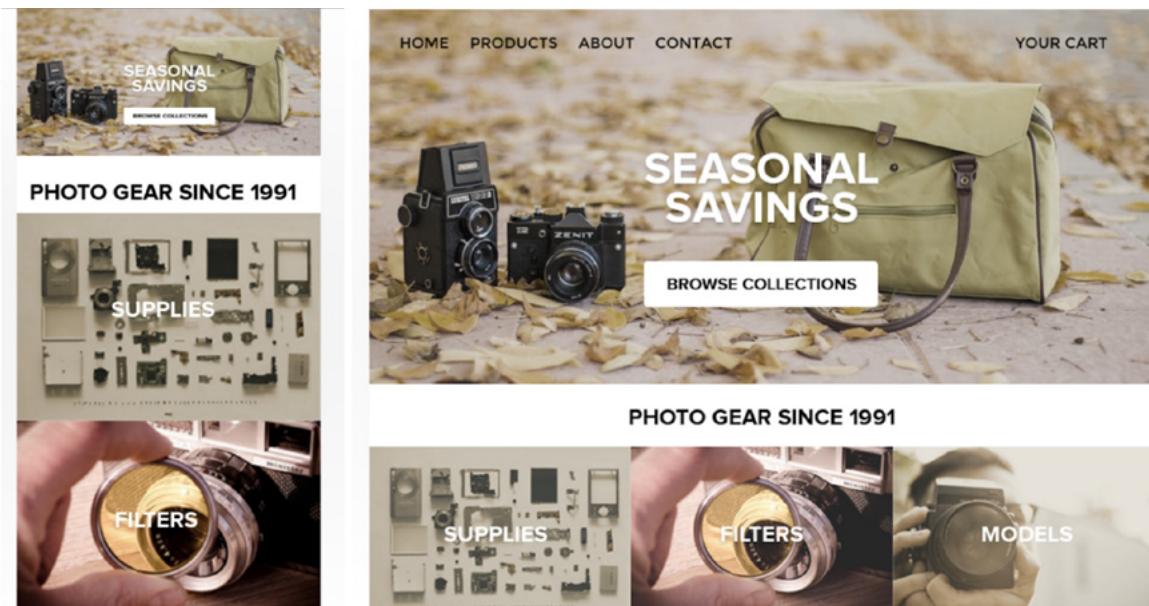
By designing your content first for smaller devices, you progressively enhance your experience as the viewport increases. The opposite approach risks creating a mobile experience that feels like an afterthought.

3. Lay out the pages

We start with the mobile-optimized view to make sure that the visuals for our priorities actually fit the canvas. From there it's a matter of setting the cards adjacent to each other on wider canvases.

That's part of cards' convenience: they flow from left to right, top to bottom, to fill users' screens as best they can.

Homepage



Collections Page

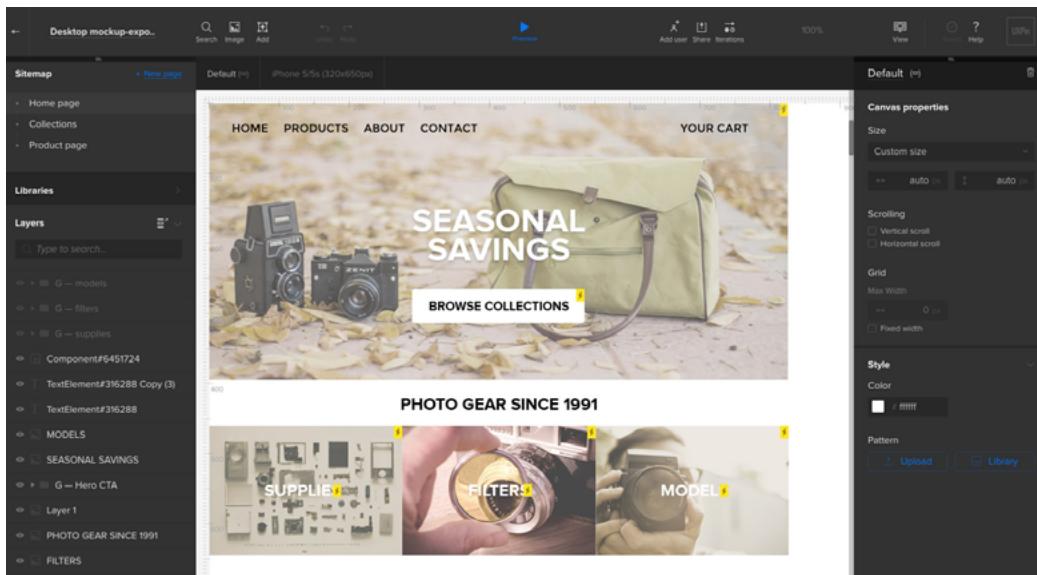


As seen above, the next step is to assemble the parts in [Sketch](#) or, in this example, [Photoshop](#). We create both mobile (left side) and widescreen (right side) versions to visually confirm that our priorities do, in fact, work.

Card-based layouts are simple and flexible: stacked components simply flow right-to-left as traditional web pages [are wont to do](#).

4. Design & test the interactions

A static mockup shows how a site looks, but a prototype represents how the site actually works.



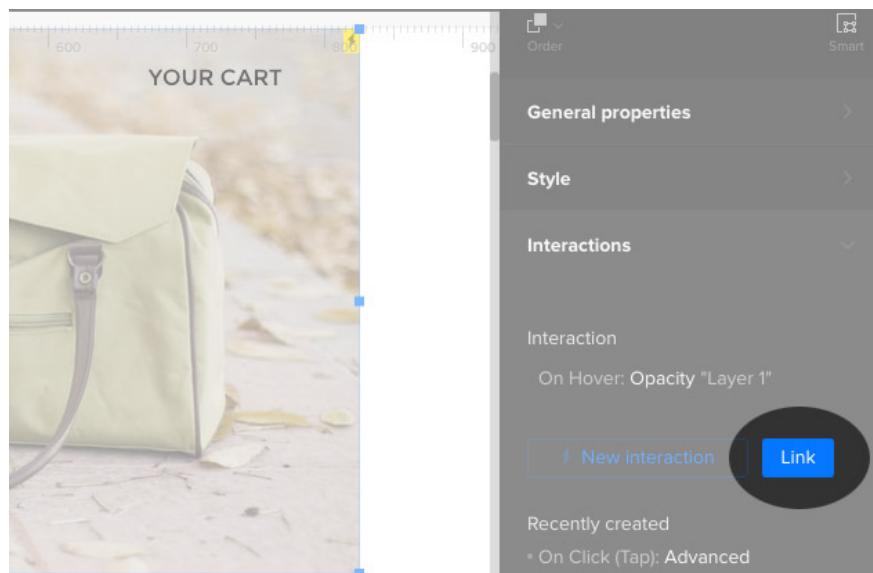
Using [the handy plugin](#), next we'll import the layered Photoshop file into the collaborative prototyping app [UXPin](#). By adding interactions and linking pages together, we can refine our user flows and overall site usability.

The PSD import preserves all layers, making each its own object to which we can assign actions – like [tapping to different pages](#).

5. Add links

Static mockups are misleading. They don't show a website's user flow – in this case, how we plan to get users from their first impression to browsing the collections.

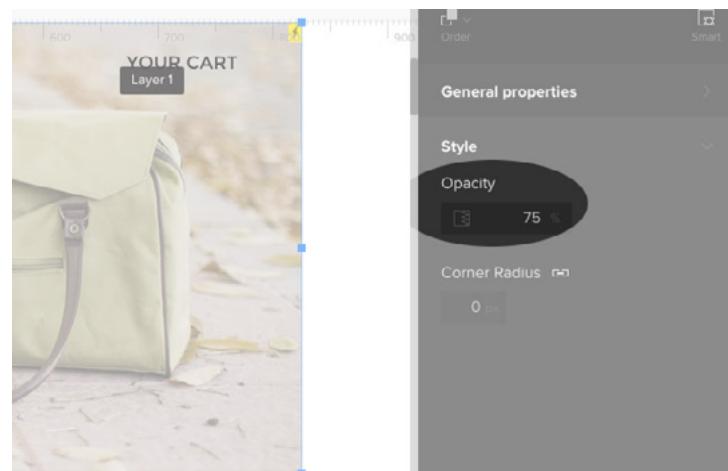
Tap on a photo to reveal its options. Then tap the lightning bolt icon and its “link” button. Choose an appropriate page and you’re good to go.



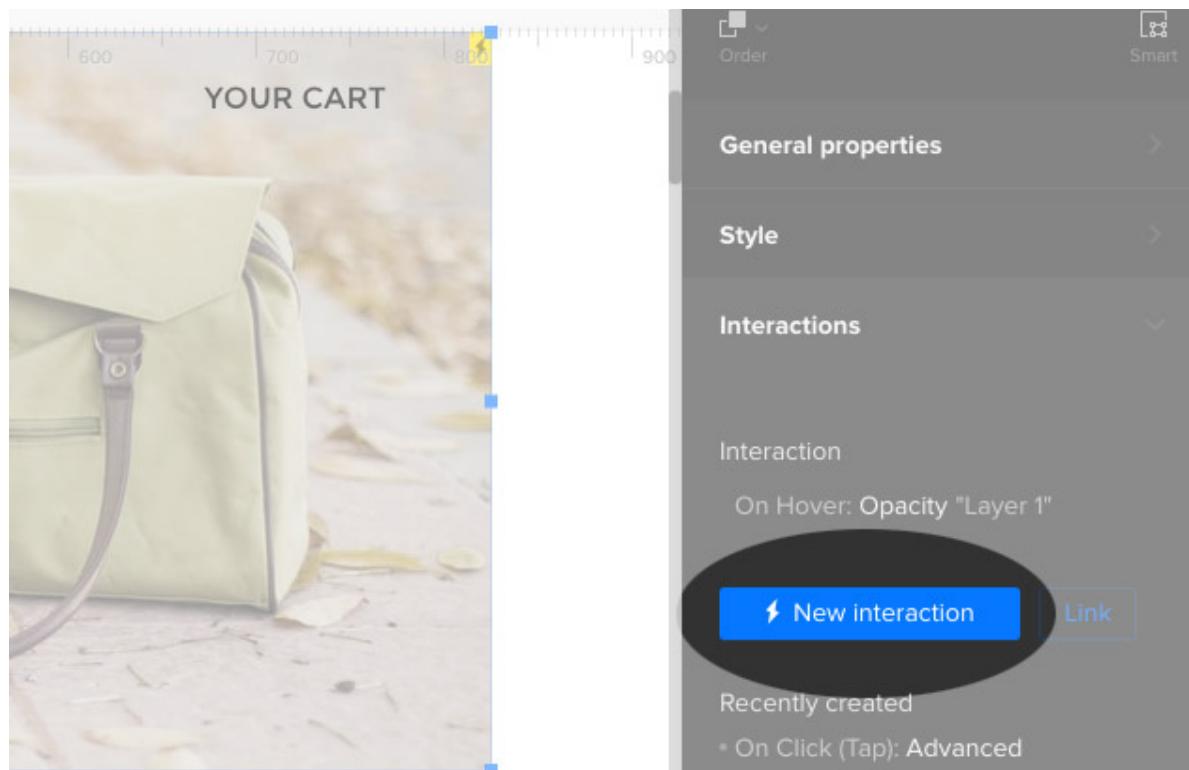
6. Add a little extra

Although it's tappable, this prototype is still a little... bland. We can spice it up with a few simple hover effects.

First, set the photos' opacity to about 85% by tapping on their “info” palettes.



Then add a hover action that changes its opacity back to 100%.



You can see the result by hovering over the photos in this [live prototype](#).

From here, the next step would be to run a usability test with at least 5 users. We can use UXPin's built-in tool to run our own test, or you could use a service like [UserTesting](#) to recruit and run the test.

Once you've analyzed the test results, it's time to iterate the design and test again. User validation is the key step that helps transform acceptable websites into exceptional websites.

Conclusion

Some trends are popular because designers like them.

Others are popular because they're proven, usable, and easy to build. By themselves, cards, HD images and minimalism are great techniques. But when used together for the right user-focused reasons, they can make a site loved by users and win awwwards.

If you found this lesson helpful, feel free to try it yourself with either Photoshop or Sketch for the static design and UXPin for the interactive design. UXPin offers everyone a [free trial](#).

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- 🕒 Import files from Photoshop and Sketch

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