The Mike DeBenedictis Web Site Presentation
An Examination of the Web Design Process

• Step One: Needs Assessment
Mike DeBenedictis, my client, is a self-published Boston area singer-songwriter who has performed throughout New England for the last five years. As a young musician his marketing has been extremely limited, and establishing a consistent fan base and touring schedule has yet to occur.

• Discussing his needs for a website, we took a look at his current internet persona and established a new strategy to improve engagement.

Quoted from the written assessment, "Our goal is to provide Mike with an attractive website that brings his content to the forefront for easy consumption by fans, one that will remain relevant and is easily adapted to his needs as his following grows. By creating a more sincere platform for his art, one hopes that his ability to achieve representation and recognition is increased."

Therefore, in conjunction with more aggressive marketing tactics, we could expect to see an increase in singular site traffic over the visitation of his current multiple host-arrangement, hopefully allowing the clients he is trying to groom the opportunity to linger with and remember his content more distinctly.

• Step Two: Architecture Diagram
As Mike has relatively minimal content to distribute at this juncture, the arrangement of his diagram is simple. It is also perhaps a bit non-traditional and something that I suppose I would change in future iterations. Rather than separating the home-page from other content, I am treating everything as single level by allowing the intended landing page (which lists out show dates and locations) to function as the home page whilst eschewing the redundancy of the home as a separate entity.

As Mike becomes more famous and his shows more frequent, the need to separate these two items would become more functionally motivated and then perhaps the following diagram • could be implemented instead. This would allow more breathing room for additional content and follow a more conventional structure in which the home page spotlights only the most contemporary items. But let's focus on what's happening now, shall we?

• Step Three: Wireframes
This phase was probably one of my favorites as it gave a more tangible representation of the arrangement of content in regards to hierarchy and 'real estate' considerations.
I think it is a common sentiment for those who can't draw very well, but I find that working in black and white and strictly pencil is where my drafting work shines, and upon the introduction of color I have a tendency to [air quotes] ruin things. This was obviously a different working environment but shares some similarities.

• An aspect of this step which I found challenging was curbing my urge to make thing "yell". As I typically design things like posters and signage that trend towards a more generous use of the canvas, it required an extremely conscious effort to tone things down, particularly typographically. But I noted that some of the most successful (and broadly implemented) models of web design allow for more white space and framing, so I adjusted things accordingly as you can see here.

• Step Four: Sketches
In order to produce the wireframes, I had already done a fair amount of preliminary sketching to block out the space. With these drafts, I tried to really push myself to examine any unexplored iterations. In the more finalized sketches, • such as this one, the end result is fairly conservative. My more radical ideas required skills that were beyond my reach or were unnecessarily ornamental, and as Mike's musical arrangements are fairly traditional this is much more in line with his body of work.

• Step Five: Static Mockup
By this point, I'd really narrowed my designs down to two layouts which are essentially top vs. side navigation. I was interested in using the typographical treatment from the most recent album cover for a logo, but that was met with some resistance so we explored some other options in between. I also had an interest in featuring photography but it was agreed upon that the image with the most suitable resolution was a bit too intense… I kind of love it, but it really just doesn't represent what Mike is all about so I moved forward with the top nav treatment. • So here you can see some of the early visuals for the site, some of which evolved between this stage and the final execution, but not much.

• Step Six: Html Conversion

So here is where we get to the whole enchilada! Though extremely labor intensive, this part was probably my favorite. I looked at my site here the other night and discovered I had some markup that old browsers don't understand so I tried add fallbacks… but I included screenshots here in case everything "broke down" again.

• So here is the shows page. Points of interest- The div containing the embedded video is designed to be a receptacle for whatever announcements or new content comes up. The shows div is a table, and there is a hidden cell for a "buy tickets" button, whenever that becomes an option. The name of the venue is an anchor leading you to the external site, and the social media buttons at the bottom are a sprite.

• The about page doesn't have many special features to call out, so we will keep moving. It is a little awkward and unbalanced, I would definitely describe it as a missed opportunity.

• The music page is very straightforward. This screenshot of the site is from before I remembered to add the album credits to the page, but you can see the copy in the html behind it.

• This page was both the hardest thing to accomplish and one of my prouder pages. I used separate thumbnail images to reduce the loading time of the page, and then have a CSS based lightbox to allow scrolling through full-sized images. The image gallery is also in a flexbox, which allows the images to retile
• according to the width of the browser window.

The videos section is a little awkward in this arrangement but that's ok. This feature is pretty cool when it works but definitely needs some conventional sizing fallbacks which I have foolishly not included. This is something I would absolutely adjust for the future, and I would make my lightbox function with JavaScript. • I *was* able to make a somewhat convincing lightbox feature from only CSS by placing the images into an unordered list, declaring the thumbnails as anchors, and then heavily modifying the overlay div to correspond with my whims. One can then click the arrows to continue through the images or close it with the button at the top.

A best-practice I learned from this page was to apply a size class to all my images in the Html ("thumb" and "large" for instance) and use a CSS declaration to specify the size of that particular class. Time-saver! Also, for a naming convention to organize my thumbnails and full-sized images in a single folder, I used the identical title plus the suffix "-th" which results in the thumbnails staying alongside their original sized brethren.

• Moving on, we end up at the final page. Here, one can subscribe to the mailing list or submit a contact form. I find few artists are available for contact directly, and headliners tend to just list out their booking agents in various continents. So I would imagine that as things progress, we could lose the contact form on this page but for now, it seems like a reasonable inclusion.

The mailing list is really the thing we want to push though, and perhaps making it a button in the header that uses Javascript to make it an overlay over the guest's current page would be a swifter way of getting people to engage.

• If I could start this site over, as hokey as it is I would probably work more on centering the body with consistent left and right margins. I got really caught up in making things expand to the right in the early stages of html conversion, but I began to realize that wasn't really what I needed to be so focused on nor was it being executed particularly well.

I know saying that selecting a different client is kind of a crappy thing, but my secondary client choice (also a musician) has better photos to choose from and, surprise surprise, just made a website through squarespace or something. It would have been interesting to have him provide me with the same source materials and see how different the two sites turned out. I also know he would have been easier to get content from directly rather than from downloads off Facebook.

So in summation, I feel like this went pretty well for me and through trial and error I really isolated the things that I understood well and those that I have a looser grasp of. I'm really excited to do this again for my own work sometime!