

## Vaviblog: Design brief

I am inviting web designers to submit outline sketches for a WordPress web site. This is essentially a beauty contest. There is no fee to enter, nor will I pay for sketches. I will pick one designer to do the final theme for the site. I will pay real money for the finished site design. Please indicate a fee when you send your outline sketches. I need all this by 18 August 2008.

**Background:** N.I. Vavilov was a Russian scientist and one of the world's first and greatest plant explorers. He travelled the world gathering crops and their wild relatives and established the first modern genebank in St. Petersburg. He developed the notion of centres of diversity, the places where modern crops were domesticated, and realized early on the importance of agricultural biodiversity as the foundation for future improvements in farming. Unfortunately he fell foul of Stalin and his advisers, and died in prison in January 1943.

Vavilov kept a journal on his expeditions across five continents. Using that as his guide a modern plant explorer, Gary Nabhan, set out to retrace some of Vavilov's journeys. In his new book *Where Our Food Comes From* Nabhan reports on how things have changed, usually for the worse, since Vavilov visited.

If Vavilov were alive today he would be blogging. We will be using his journals and Nabhan's book to create that blog. This brief sets out some of the basic concepts that should inform the look and feel of the Vaviblog.



**Overall:** The site should not look like one of those I'm-pretending-to-be-a-real-journal-with-lined-pages-and-handwriting sites. That said, there's absolutely no harm in using specific visual elements that might be associated with a journal. Gold-embossed lettering, a touch of leather binding, appropriate Russian iconography; all of these could have a place. I also

have some visual elements personal to Vavilov, such as his signature, that could find a place.

**Content and organisation:** The bulk of the content will be extracts from Vavilov's journals and Nabhan's book. I guess these will run about 500 words each, on average. It should be obvious to the reader which is which. Each page will need to acknowledge the support of Bioversity International ([www.bioversityinternational.org](http://www.bioversityinternational.org)) and The Christensen Foundation (<http://www.christensenfund.org>) with their logos, linking back to their sites. A link to Gary's book would be good too. Other links may be needed.

There are plenty of photographs; old monochrome ones, where quality may not be too good, and modern colour images. I think a specific photo gallery would be good on the site, as well as images in some, but not necessarily all, of the posts. The gallery could be styled differently from the main site, but should obviously be part of the same family.

The underlying organising principle is that these are journeys. We therefore need to see where in the world we are. Content will be geotagged, and maps are essential. Each expedition probably merits its own map, with maybe an overall map of all the expeditions. Is it also possible automatically to make the posts and photos appear on Google Earth?

The two principles, Vavilov and Nabhan, need brief biographical pages. Vavilov's nemesis Trofim Denisovich Lysenko may make an appearance too. So we need a Cast of Characters page. There may be other static pages too.

There should be space for displaying other kinds of content, for example RSS feeds from similar sites, individual items dealing with Vavilov or agricultural biodiversity elsewhere on the internet and so on.

Community is important. Vavilov and Nabhan will essentially be inviting conversation from readers, and so careful thought needs to be given to comments, making it easy to contribute and to follow the discussions. I also hope to create a persona for Vavilov outside this blog.

I have no strong views about whether the home page should be a static page drawing elements from the rest of the site, or a normal blog-type page. Either approach would be welcome.

For outline design purposes I am happy for you to use body copy, stock images, and anything you can dredge up on the internet. If you want specific material I can try to help locate it, and will certainly do so for the final designs.

**Platform:** I am most familiar with WordPress, and I am expecting a WordPress theme. I also know that WordPress is capable (with plugins) of doing everything I have described above. But I am open to other suggestions if you can make a very compelling case.

**Russian Version:** It is possible that there will be a Russian-language version, and if possible it should be easy to adapt the design to use Cyrillic characters, but for now this is a minor consideration.

**Next steps:** At this stage I want to see your sketched vision of how various pages will look, with some indication of how they will work too, but not a finished working theme. For now, static pictures of what the pages will look like, made in Photoshop or as screen captures, are all I want. I would like to see three specific samples: home page, individual post (with comments) and a Maps page.

I will try to answer any questions you email me: [jcherfas@gmail.com](mailto:jcherfas@gmail.com)

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