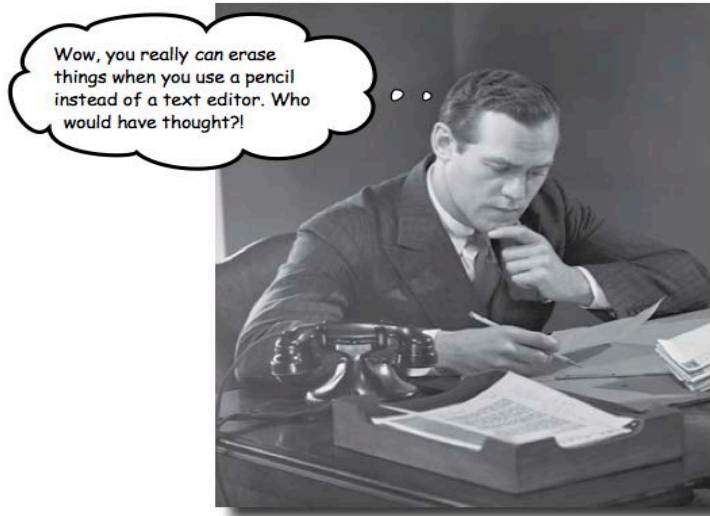


# HEAD FIRST - WEB DESIGN

Capitolo 2 – Paper Covers Rock

### *Paper covers rock*



**Tired of butting heads with a picky client?** Yeah, you know the type... every time you show them their latest crazy design idea, they've already moved on to another look... another color scheme... another entire web site. So how do you deal with **fickle clients** or those tricky **hard-to-get-right websites**? You start with paper, pencil, and a big fat pink eraser. In this chapter, you'll learn how to work smart before you dig into your HTML editor. Coming up with a **theme** and **visual metaphor** for your site, mocking up sketches in **pencil**, and using **storyboards** will turn you into a nimble, flexible web designer. So get out your sketchpad, and let's pre-produce!

## Mark's Trip to Japan

Mark loves to travel. After college, he took a year off to backpack around Japan and experience everything the island nation had to offer - from sushi to samurai. Now that he's back, he wants to document his experience with a great looking website.



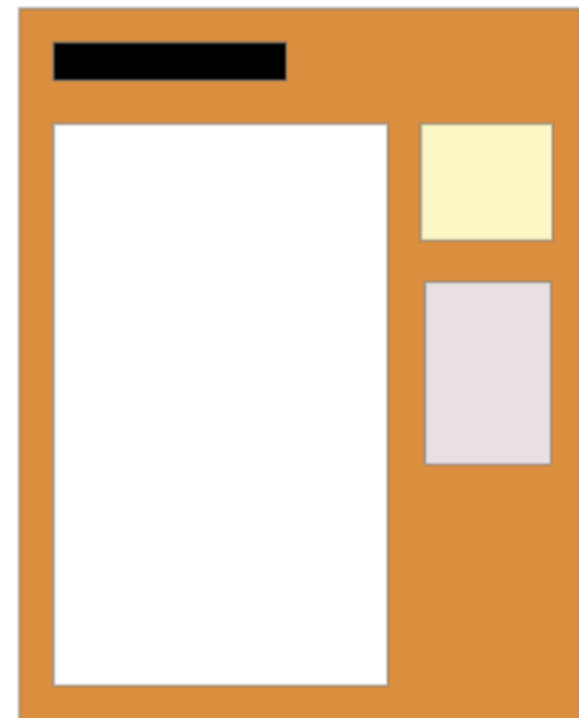
Since Mark has so much content, we can't just dive into the project and start laying down code willy nilly. We need to know exactly what we are designing first. In pre-production, we plan things out before we go digital. A little detour now will save us a lot of time when we start putting together Mark's site later.

But where to start? How about at the very beginning - with the site's design vibe. A **visual metaphor**, if you will.

# Think before you code

Pre-production is all about getting things right before you put down one line of XHTML. Its all about getting your site's design right on paper so that when you get to the point where you go to code, you know exactly what you are building, and you can be incredibly focused and efficient during development. Its also all about making sure that you work out any potential design problems before you invest a ton of time writing line after line of XHTML and CSS, only to find that you need to scrap everything and start again because your design has a critical problem.

## Thinking about a visual metaphor





# A clear visual metaphor helps reinforce your site's theme

A visual metaphor takes advantage of familiar visual elements (such as images, interface elements, icons, colors, or fonts) to reinforce the site's theme. Say, for example, you are creating a children's online community site geared towards ages 7 to 10. You might think about using bright and bold primary colors with cartoony interface elements and fonts. These design elements reinforce the subject matter of the site: kid oriented, fun, etc.

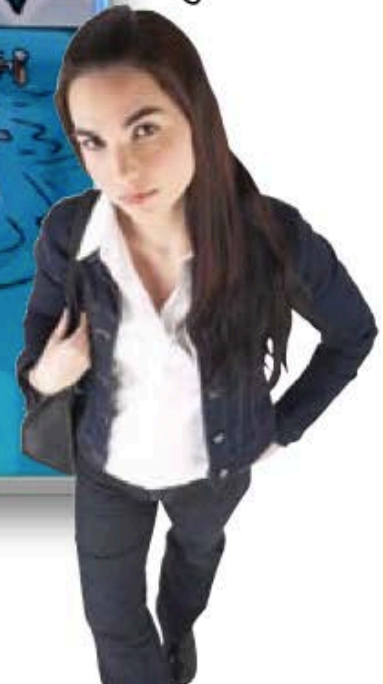
A visual metaphor can range from subtle (using colors that give the user an abstract feeling that the designer wants to associate with the site's theme) to direct (using graphics that tie right into the site's name or identity—like using graphics of rocket ships for a site called Rocket Ship Designs).

Bright bold colors and an arctic theme help set the visual metaphor for this site.



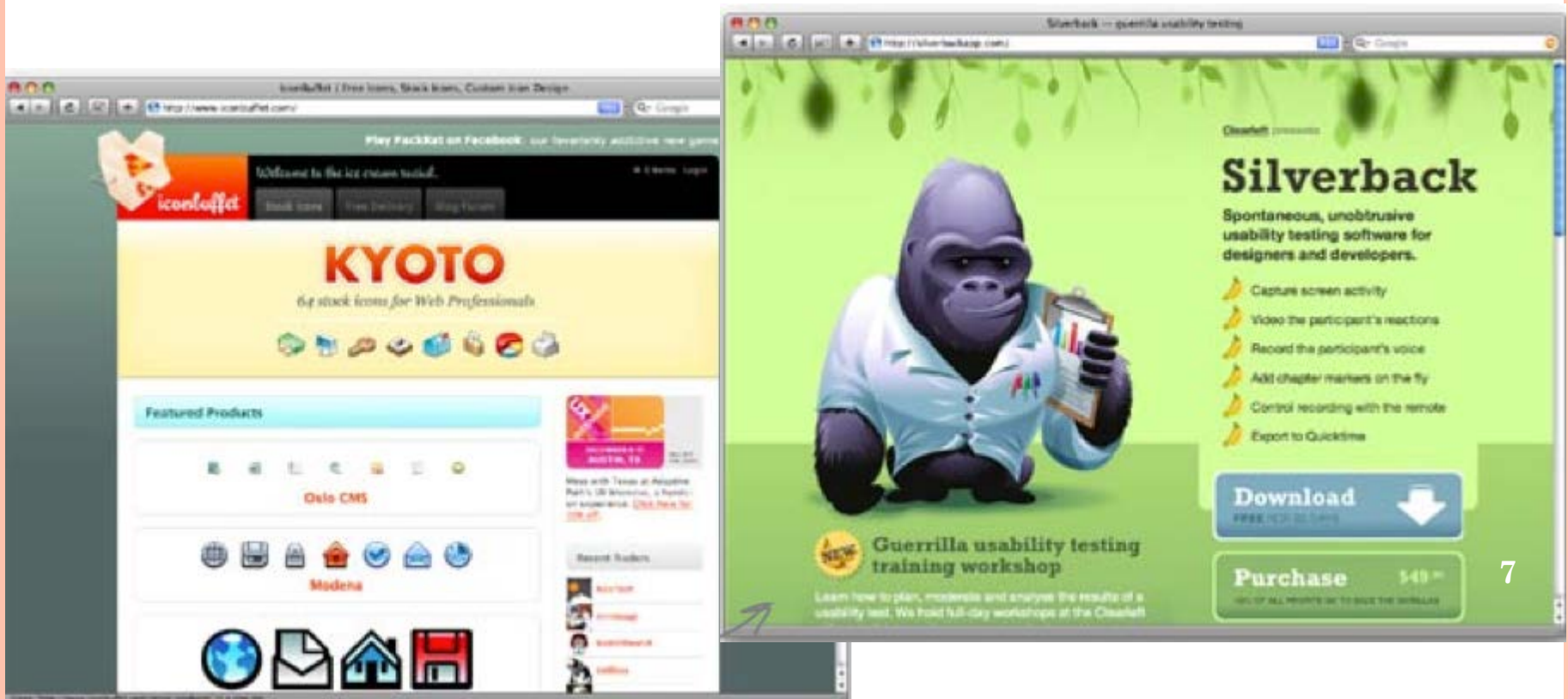
Hold on a second. What the heck is the difference between a site's theme and a site's visual metaphor?

Cartoon penguins and comic-book style typography are definitely geared toward a younger audience.



# A theme represents your site's content

The word **theme** is used to refer to all kinds of different things in the world of web design—which can be kind of confusing. In this case, a theme is your site's purpose and/or content. So, the theme of amazon.com is an online merchant that focuses mostly on books. The visual metaphor uses design elements (color, graphics, typography, etc.) that reinforce the site's theme.





# Brainstorming: The path to a visual metaphor

Developing a visual metaphor is all about brainstorming—spending some time really thinking about your content, audience, and what visual elements you want to see on the page. There is no right or wrong way to do a brainstorm, just remember one thing: **don't discredit any idea or concept until after you are done brainstorming.** Once you have all your ideas down, you can go back through later and eliminate any that obviously won't work.

Write down everything that comes to your mind. Don't judge an idea until the end.

Map of Japan  
Food: Sushi, Sashimi, fish, Japanese pancakes  
Hiroshima  
The Golden Palace  
Japanese flag  
Travel journal/blog  
Photo Slideshow  
Food page

The brainstorm list can include design ideas, content considerations, site sections and even color and imagery.





# Develop a theme and visual metaphor for a project

Coming up with a theme and a visual metaphor can be tricky. Once you know what content you have to work with and have a few brainstormers under your belt, you need to start thinking about the best way to convey and display that content to the user. Color, layout, and element placement are all important factors when deciding the best way to reinforce a site's theme.

## 1 Chose some color palettes



Pick colors that work well with the content and support the theme of the site. Use services like <http://kuler.adobe.com> to build palettes and see how different colors will work together.

Make layout decisions based on content. The more columns you have, the more space you have to fill. Also remember that whitespace is important. You don't have to fill every available pixel.

## 2 Design layouts based on content



The use of imagery, iconography and text can help reinforce the site's theme by making the site "look like the content."

## 3 Use visual elements to reinforce the theme



This is where your brainstorm will help the most. Use that list to decide what should go where and what ideas won't make the cut.

**A visual metaphor leverages familiar visual elements (colors, fonts, icons, etc) to help reinforce a site's theme.**

# Page elements can shape your visual metaphor

Once you have a general site theme and have started to think about what you want on your site, you need to consider where all that content is going to go. How you layout your site will affect the overall visual metaphor by dictating what can and can't appear on

a given page. For example, if you only have a single column, it may be difficult to make your site “feel” like a newspaper or magazine. But add a few more columns and you can make that page mimic the grid-like, multi-column layouts of your typical daily paper.

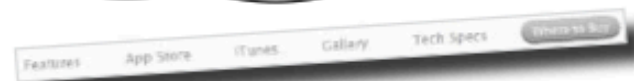




**Navigation** is essential for users to get around your site. Design, placement, and contents of this element will help convey your site's theme in different ways.



**Sub Navigation** displays content that lies under a main navigational item. This is usually only needed for larger sites and more complex content.



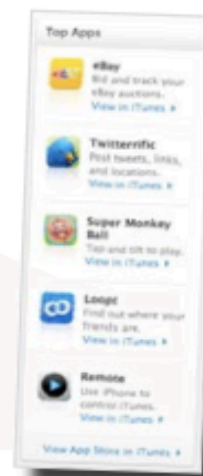
**Body content** is where all the magic happens. This is where you put the stuff people are coming to see. Whether it's images, a blog post, or a YouTube movie, all that stuff goes in the body.



The **footer** portion of your layout can hold anything from copyright information to duplicate navigation links. Users will often look to this section for links or content that can't be located anywhere else on the site.



**Sidebar**s can hold everything from link lists to extra body content. They can also be useful for ancillary navigation and archive links for blogs.



**Whitespace** (which is also called negative space) is the area between all the different design elements on your page. Whitespace helps to break up blocks of content (which contributes to contrast - something that we'll talk about a little later in the book), gives the user's eye a little rest, and focuses the user's eye towards content.

# Use storyboards to develop ideas and save time without code

One of the most important things in pre-production is the storyboard (sometimes called concept art). Storyboards are used to visualize your design in its entirety. They give you a chance to see how colors interact with one another, how interface elements play off one another, how your navigational system looks, how your visual metaphor plays out, and whether content is represented in the best way possible.

Storyboards give you a painless way of catching any potential design problems before you get to the stage where you build your design in XHTML and they become major obstacles. Storyboards are also a great way to play with design ideas and visually brainstorm.

Don't be afraid to write on your boards. Marking them up is one of the advantages of testing designs on paper.



The storyboards aren't an exact version of the final site, but they are where many of the main design elements are considered.

**You may even want to create your storyboards in a photocopy of an empty browser window. This is a great way to give your client the necessary context.**



# Don't design for yourself!

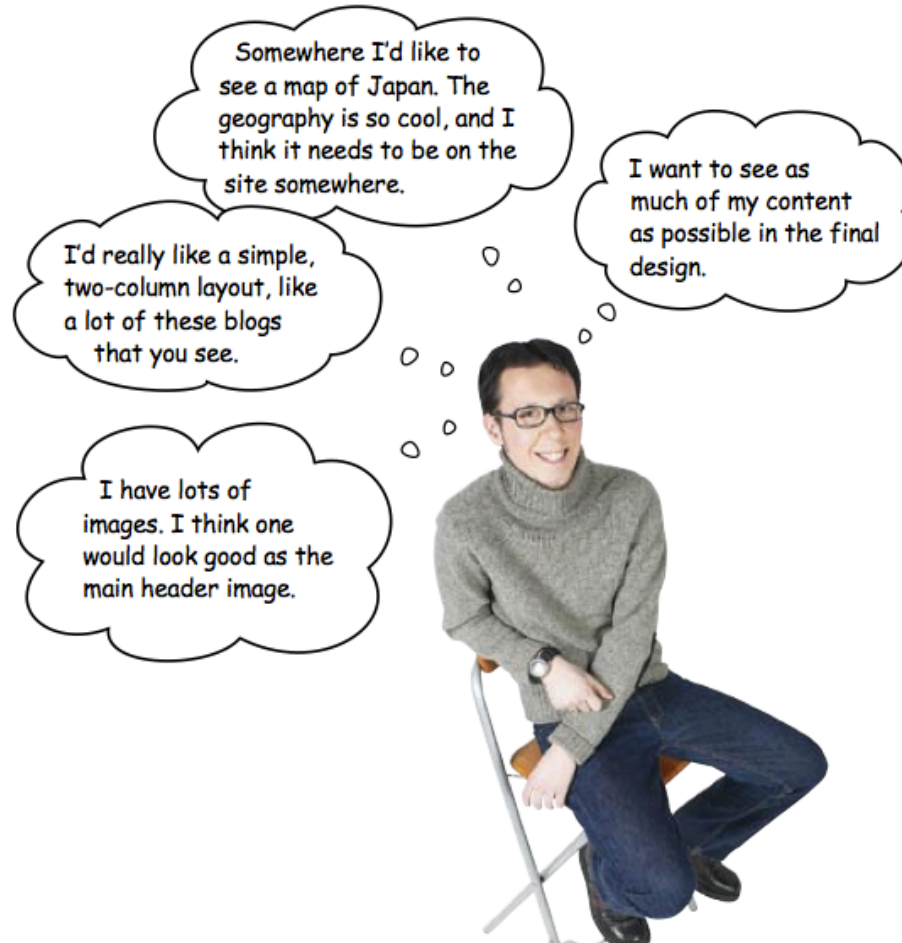
Remember, when you are designing for a client, it isn't about you—it's about the clients needs. And taking the client's needs into account obviously starts as early as storyboarding. Getting your client involved in the design process could be as simple as sitting down for a meeting, having them fill out a design survey or sending them early storyboard designs throughout the pre-production process. Not only will this allow you to build designs that your clients really like, they will be appreciate being involved in the process.

Okay, even if we used storyboards,  
we'd still have gotten it wrong.  
How can we come up with a design  
Mark likes?



# Mark's design thoughts

Its time to go back to the drawing board with Mark's design. However, this time we're going to do things right. We're going to go straight to the source (Mark) and find out exactly what he wants to see in his site's layout and design.



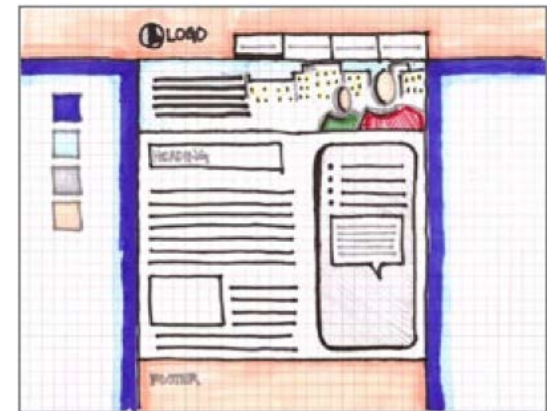
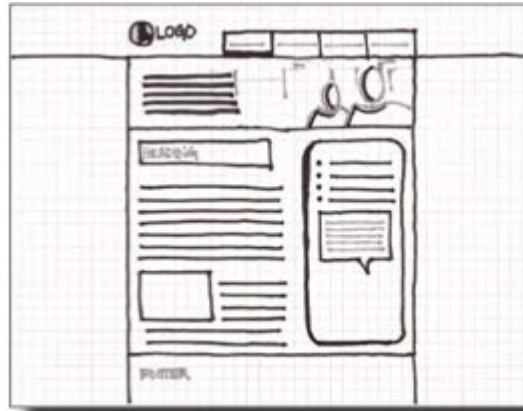
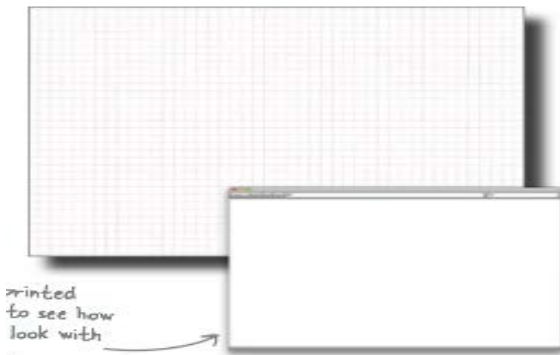
# Creating a storyboard

Creating storyboards is pretty straightforward, and everyone has their own methods for creating designs on paper. However, there are a few things to consider when putting together your boards. Here are some tips for getting started:



## Find some paper and make your grid

Grab a piece of paper (8.5 x 11 is perfectly fine) and sketch out or fold the paper to create a grid. You might even want to use a piece of graph paper, which has the grid built right in. Why a grid? Well, grid's are amazingly important to the design process. A grid (which we'll talk about a lot more later in the book) provides a way to line up elements when you are creating your storyboard. Grids also provide a foundation that allow you to layout your site with solid order and visual logic.



## Sketch out your design

Here is where the rubber hits the road. Draw out your site's interface in as much or as little detail as your project needs. **All of the site's text can be replaced by lines or a box with the words "text appears here."** The point of the storyboard is not to see the actual content—it's to play with and finalize the layout.

## Add color and finalize your storyboard

It's important that you add color to your storyboards—really important. So break out your pencil crayons and add color to your storyboard. Yes, we know, the colors you use in your storyboards are not going to be exactly what will appear in the final (digital) design. However, they will be close enough to see how colors play off of one another and make any changes if necessary. When you are finished with the colors, tie up any loose ends you have—and Voila! One supremely awesome storyboard!



## BULLET POINTS

- When you pre-produce a site, you are able to try out design ideas out on paper—thereby avoiding potential mistakes in coding which could cost time, effort, and possibly money.
- A Visual Metaphor leverages visual elements (images, icons, colors, or fonts) in order to unconsciously reinforce the site's subject matter.
- When applying a visual metaphor to your site, be subtle and don't overdo it.
- Storyboards are hand drawn concept art storyboards that are used to visualize your design as a complete entity.