

CGS IB Gazette Website Design Analysis

Executive Summary

This document provides a comprehensive, expert-level analysis of the current CGS IB Gazette news site design based on the provided screenshot and live website. It evaluates aesthetic, usability, accessibility, typographic, and branding elements, and outlines priority action items for improvement, leveraging best practices from top editorial sites such as Beautiful News and The New York Times.

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1. Homepage Layout & Structure

Current State

- The homepage adopts a single-column, vertical arrangement.
- The top module features a large visual card for the lead/daily article, followed by a smaller, two-column area below, including a story preview and thematic images.
- Side navigation is present ("Home / About / Login") but minimally styled.
- Main menu is repeated horizontally and vertically.

Analysis

- **Broadsheet Spirit:** The vertical stacking is more reminiscent of a blog than a classic news broadsheet, which typically uses a strong hero section with distinct modular grids and multi-column layouts.
- **Hero Story:** The flagship article is visually prominent but lacks editorial hierarchy (e.g., category label or distinguishing feature).
- **Grid Discipline:** The lower section's grid is weak, with images and text misaligned. Sizing and whitespace do not follow consistent ratios, causing imbalance.

Improvement Areas

- Implement a multi-column modular grid for story previews (e.g., 3–4 columns desktop, 1–2 columns mobile)[1].
 - Use larger, more striking hero images with headline overlays for top stories.
 - Add clearer section/category dividers for recent news, opinions, arts, etc.
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2. Color Palette & Visual Hierarchy

Current State

- Uses muted greys (#EFEFEF) for background, but lacks depth or contrast.
- Action elements (search bar, blocks) seem undifferentiated.
- Only subtle accent colors are present.

Analysis

- **Visual Flatness:** The minimal color distinction reduces scanability. No consistent use of accent color for calls-to-action (CTAs).
- **Hierarchy:** Important elements (search, log in, lead story) blend into the background too much.

Improvement Areas

- Apply the recommended palette for explicit contrast:
 - #EDEAE4 for the search bar
 - #EFEFEF for global background
 - #FFFFFF for blocks, cards, and overlays
 - #4A6378, #0B6B53, #440D0F to anchor categories or tags, highlight navigation, and improve section labeling.
- Increase contrast for headers and CTAs, ensuring accessibility compliance (WCAG AAA minimum ratio).

Figure 1: Current homepage using a muted palette with subtle accents.

3. Typography & Font Usage

Current State

- Headlines set in a playful serif (but not Garamond or Playfair Display).
- Body and UI text using basic, perhaps system-default, sans-serif.
- No visible font scaling or hierarchy beyond color/size.

Analysis

- **Editorial Elegance:** The font choice for headlines is whimsical and less authoritative than EB Garamond or Playfair Display. It misses the “editorial seriousness” expected of a broadsheet.
- **Legibility & Readability:** Body font lacks sophistication and fails to deliver effortless, long-form reading.

Improvement Areas

- Use EB Garamond (or Playfair Display) for headlines/subheads.
 - Use Source Sans Pro or Open Sans for all UI/body text; adjust line-height for readability (1.5+).
 - Set font scales (major/minor) for visual hierarchy:
 - H1: 2.5–3em, H2: 2em, H3: 1.5em, body: 1em.
 - Utilize font-weight (bold for titles/subsection; medium for category labels).
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4. Navigation & Information Architecture

Current State

- Top nav menu is minimal, with repeated "Login" link and a basic list of site sections on the left.
- Search bar visually lost at top right, lacking clear affordance.
- No visible breadcrumbs, category navigation, or footer links.

Analysis

- **Discoverability:** Navigation is basic. No persistent cues to guide users through categories, archives, or trending topics.
- **Search UX:** The search bar blends in, does not invite user action.

Improvement Areas

- Expand nav bar to include major sections (News, Opinion, Arts, Sports, Student Life, etc.).
 - Make search bar more prominent (#EDEAE4 background, accent icon border).
 - Include drop-downs or hoverable mega-menus for large categories.
 - Add a sticky header/footer for quick back-to-top, popular tags, or latest stories.
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5. Imagery & Visual Content

Current State

- Hero article features only headline and excerpt, lacks rich imagery.
- Subsection uses stock news photo and a newspaper collage.
- Image aspect ratios are inconsistent.

Analysis

- **Editorial Impact:** Top stories need high-quality, relevant images (or infographics), ideally with overlaying titles to maximize impact.
- **Consistency:** Images should share aspect ratios, padding, and border radii—currently missing.

Improvement Areas

- Implement Beautiful News-style hero module: large feature image, headline overlay, and a visually distinct category label[2].
 - Standardize all images to 16:9 or 4:3 ratios for consistency.
 - Use border-radius, shadow, and spacing for elevated cards.
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6. Accessibility

Current State

- Minimal contrast for text and interactive elements.
- No evident ARIA labels or semantic HTML for navigation.
- Unclear tab ordering or keyboard navigation.

Analysis

- **Readability:** Low-medium contrast may hamper visually impaired users.
- **Semantic Elements:** Nav and sections should use `<nav>`, `<main>`, `<section>`, `<footer>` for screen reader compatibility.

Improvement Areas

- Raise contrast on key text (at least 4.5:1 ratio).
 - Ensure all images have alt text describing content.
 - Use semantic HTML elements; add ARIA labels for all interactive elements.
 - Enable proper tab order for navigation and forms.
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7. Responsive Design

Current State

- The screenshot shows desktop layout; unclear responsiveness on smaller screens.
- Side navigation may be hard to use on mobile.

Analysis

- **Mobile Grid:** Multi-column story layout may collapse improperly on phones/tablets.
- **Navigation:** Hamburger menu or collapsible nav is missing.

Improvement Areas

- Use CSS grid/flexbox for adaptive multi-column layout.
 - Test font scaling, menu accessibility, and image cropping at breakpoints (320px, 768px, 1024px+).
 - Add mobile-first sticky header/nav toggle.
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8. Branding & Editorial Voice

Current State

- Brand title ("CGS IB Gazette") present, serif font.
- No explicit tagline, brand guidelines, or visual storytelling elements.
- Editorial tone not conveyed in UI cues.

Analysis

- **Brand Identity:** Needs a declarative tagline, improved logo/expression, and more “editorial seriousness.”
- **Editorial Voice:** Lacks section-specific styling/tones (Opinion, News, Culture).

Improvement Areas

- Use accent colors per section to visually brand categories.
 - Add a brief mission tagline below logo/header.
 - Reinforce editorial tone with classic broadsheet design cues (drop caps, quote callouts, timeline tickers).
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9. Actionable Recommendations

Immediate Priority

1. Redesign homepage to use a Beautiful News–style hero module featuring the daily flagship visual story.
2. Implement disciplined multi-column grid for recent stories (3–4 columns desktop, stacked mobile).
3. Adopt recommended color palette for visual hierarchy, contrast, and section cues.
4. Upgrade typography to EB Garamond/Playfair Display for headlines; Source Sans/Open Sans for body.
5. Expand and unify navigation (persistent category bar; prominent search, mobile menu).
6. Standardize images with aspect ratio, overlays, and improved spacing.
7. Enhance accessibility (contrast, semantic HTML, labels).

Short-Term

1. Introduce a footer with links to archives, popular sections, social media, and contact info.
2. Add editorial storytelling elements (drop caps, pull quotes, infographics).
3. Integrate user profile area (for logged-in contributors).
4. Develop landing pages for major categories.

Long-Term

1. Establish full brand guidelines: logo, tagline, color uses, type hierarchy, editorial tone.
 2. Create interactive features (comments, newsletter signup, trending ticker).
 3. Regularly audit and update UI for accessibility and best practices.
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10. References

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