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A different way of working

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Category: project

Description: Essay and intro to pattern project

The graphical browser turned 20 years old last year. [NCSA Mosaic](#), created at the University of Illinois, supported images of up to 216 colors using a new HTML tag called "img". What began as a project to structure and share academic content, The World Wide Web quickly served as a distribution center for designs produced for the printed page. Static designs and image assets were downsampled and placed online as additional output.

The web browser of this decade has reversed this workflow -- with web experiences being primary in design emphasis and sophistication. As a rendering engine, the browser can display live type and shapes with output almost indistinguishable from any Adobe product. APIs, animation and user-interaction, are just some examples of why the browser has become a more satisfying place to site projects -- even for non-browser consumption. As a design tool, the browser allows for direct engagement with its display through the web socket and web inspector. As Dan Michaelson states [later in this book](#), "cars don't let you change their design while they're running, but web browsers do."

The recent advances in the web browser are so robust, that it is my go-to tool in developing almost any project -- no matter where it's sited. Working within an IDE or within the Web Inspector allows for radical and measured adjustments with several taps of an arrow key. I first discovered this in 2011 while showing students how to make patterns in HTML and CSS. By altering numbers in CSS, whole layouts shift, causing reflows and unexpected crops. Each tap of the keyboard produces a radically different formal solution... each pleasurable.

And as it turns out, this pleasure and discovery translates to more everyday design problems: flyers, posters, and books. It's a different way of creating printed designs through the manipulation of text and numbers with realtime feedback in the browser.

Every tool has its purpose. But it's our role as designers to stretch the definition and use of that tool for creative effect.

I have been using the Web Inspector for the last couple years to make adjustments to designs. Designing patterns is perhaps the simplest way to make this process clear. Whereas a dialog box might be needed to make global adjustments in Illustrator, altering margins or border width in the browser can provide immediate access to a multitude of ideas. David Reinhardt refers to responsibility as an important aspect of process. That a process of immediate feedback is valuable in terms of making adjustments. Tools for making that allow for an "aha" moment seem critical when faced with infinite options.

This real-time working process, where the rendering engine and the tool become one. The volley between plan and result gets collapsed into one act. This is more than an issue of speed. There is a cognitive shift, from pre-meditated to reactive. Each tap of the keyboard alters one number, but in doing so, the entirety of the composition changes.

Moving a mouse with your hand while looking at how the screen translates that act has its own potential for surprise. But it's really a simulation of a purely manual acts, such as collaging images together. And although adjusting numbers in the browser's Web Inspector is quantitative, it is more identical to collage than WYSIWYG design methods.

The following patterns are the result of this play and the inspiration for the course that produced this book.















