

Unit 9: Design Critique

Project for Unit 9 is a written response which consists of two sections. The first section is titled Reflection. In this section, using questions which act as prompts, we are guided to reflect on the design and development of the website we have created for the class. The second section is titled Critique, where we go through the process of critiquing one website from group 1 and another website from group 2 considering aspects such as layout, typography, navigation, and flow.

Reflection:

Which existing websites out there most inspired your web site design thus far? When I was building my website I was inspired by websites of various categories of apparel retailers:

<http://www.jpeterman.com>

<http://www.jcrew.com>

<http://www.madewell.com>

<http://www.rennes.com>

<http://www.saksfifthavenue.com>

<http://www.neimanmarcus.com>

<http://www.theline.com>

<http://www.makieclothier.com>

<http://www.inhabitny.com>

The jpeterman site was seminal in introducing the possibility of selling clothes without using live models. Although the site as it exists currently features product photographs, many years ago, they sold all their goods using illustrations exclusively. What I learned from the other sites is the use of layout, typography, and negative space to create compelling websites. I adapted the use of extensive negative space to frame elements, the selection of color and typography to create mood and tone, and adherence to industry standards regarding layout to promote ease of use. However since the proposed business makes handmade clothing I decided to implement these design considerations so that the look and feel of the website consistently represented the nature and character of the product and business.

Which parts of your design are you most proud of?

I really like the sun image which I have used as the background for the website. In addition, I think the colors, typography, layout, use of negative space, and responsive design have come together well.

What struggles did you encounter in your design process?

The following aspects of the design process has been deeply interesting and satisfying: learning how to communicate using design, familiarizing myself with graphic design principles of alignment, balance, contrast, repetition, grouping, hierarchy, flow, learning typefaces and typography, acquainting myself with organized use of color to create tone, mood, communicate idea, creating an acceptable design for product and audience, learning to use html and css to create design.

Which struggles did you encounter during page development?

Struggles I had early in the development included centering the background image in the viewport and positioning the navigation bar. John Humbracht made suggestions which helped me to resolve these issues. The next major issues arose during responsive web development. I had difficulty scaling my product detail page. I had used the HTML tag aside inappropriately. The second issue was resizing the navigation bar into a toggle icon so that it remained in its original location. Dara Mao was able to assist me with these issues.

What did you learn from making your project responsive?

Struggling to make the page responsive i got a better sense of how the HTML and CSS come together to create dynamic layouts we see rendered by a browser. I gleaned insights into better coding practices for future projects and a tentative protocol for developing websites.

Design Process.

For Unit 1 I selected a background color, typeface, and generated some body copy. For all following unit projects I made a design decision to be true to these initial selections through to the end of the project to see where they would lead.

I let the background color and my initial typeface selection for Unit 1 dictate the rest of the design.

I selected Quicksand, a sans-serif font, because it appears to me to have a light, clear, quicksilver quality to its lines. Even though there are no gradations in line thickness the fluidity with which letters are expressed suited the nature of needle pulling thread. The color blue was the most soothing to me at the time I visited the w3schools website featuring Web Safe Colors. The peaceful nature of the color blue is also consistent with the character of needlework. It is slow and soothing.

The design and creation of the sun image was serendipity. I inadvertently made a sun while exploring Inkscape features. I like the Sun and looking at the Sun makes me happy so i decided to use the sun image i had created as a background image for the website. The sun image appears on all pages of the website except those featuring dresses. This sun image was originally an SVG file made in Inkscape. I exported it as a PNG file for use in the HTML document.

I would like to explain the role of the sun image on my site. The sun marks time. Sunrise to sunrise marks one day. We live our life in a collection of days. As adults we perform our livelihood in the course of a day. My work has been stitching dresses. So while the Sun has nothing directly to do with dresses, it is a reminder that we live in a day and that the work we do is done in the course of a day with the Sun in the background marking time. It is for this reason that I feel the Sun as a background is an apt representation of how i conceive of the work I do. I stitch dresses in time and against the backdrop of time.

Does this have anything directly to do with a dress or selling dresses? Do any of the hero images have anything to do with the sites they populate? In commerce very little of the material supporting the advertisement of a product has a direct correlation to what it is being used to sell. The connections are emotional, psychological made by designers to support their goals.

Selection of Josefin Slab as my second typeface for the website was motivated by my decision to find a serif font that had similar characteristics to the Quicksand typeface selected in Week 1 and used for the business logo.

However, I wanted something that was different enough to provide sufficient contrast to differentiate body copy from heading copy. Quicksand and Josefin are similar in that they both have a quality of lightness and airiness to them. However Quicksand is a sans-serif typeface and Josefin Slab is a serif typeface. In addition the strokes making up characters are different. While the strokes in Quicksand are of medium thickness, the strokes in Josefin Slab are thinner. Finally while Quicksand characters have a vertical axis and stress Josefin Slab has diagonal axis and stress.

Images are all slightly irregular - meaning they are not identical in size, color, tone. This is consistent with the nature of handwork. No two dresses I stitch are the same. So it makes sense that no two photographs of them are identical. The tools I use to make my dresses are a pair of scissors, needle and thread. I use an iPhone to take my photos. Each dress has its own 'personality' as whimsically represented in the recent Miu Miu movie featured on Business of Fashion website. (<http://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/fashion-films/top-10-fashion-films-of-the-season-2> ; also available on youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZMEByBDPPJM>)

The images on my website capture the idiosyncratic nature of the garment's manufacture, the garment itself, and the device used to capture the image. In addition the images were photographed in sunlight without aid of sophisticated photographic equipment. The background fabric used for the dress photographs is green dupioni silk. This fabric has been placed over a comforter which was placed on the floor. Four images were taken during the course of Web Design Cricuits class (the three pink dresses and the pale green dress). The remaining four images were taken many years ago and processed using image processing software i no longer own or have access to. While they are not identical in appearance to the four photos I created recently, they do not disrupt or detract from the tone of the website. All the photographs capture the quality of being wick and alive which is inherent to handwork. This quality is consistent in all the photographs and creates a body of images that is thematically harmonious even each image is different.

The overall theme I was trying to capture in the website was the delicate yet resilient, precise, idiosyncratic and unique nature of handwork. However I did

not want to suggest that idiosyncratic meant unfinished or unpolished. My dress designs can be simple or fairly complex and it is this balance I wanted the website to also have - complexity and simplicity.

It is highly likely that there are infinite ways to style the site's HTML content to convey a myriad of messages. Perhaps my design would have been different had I been more skilled in HTML, CSS, design and typography. As an experiment, I developed a site perhaps more obviously suitable for a handmade retail apparel website: <https://github.com/yuunaK/yuunaK.github.io/stitchery2/index.html>. In this website I have used serif and sans-serif typefaces that have are business-appropriate. Playfair Display SC , a serif typeface, for the business logo, This typeface is similar to the typefaces used in fashion magazines like Didot. For the body of the website I have used Junge, a serif typeface which has a light tone and quality and Lato, a very strong sans-serif typeface. In addition I have implemented the fashion color scheme of black, white and pale neutrals in the beige family.

However, the particular version of the stitchery site I submitted for Unit 8 most closely captures the idea I wanted to convey given the constraints of skill and time I had available while developing this project. Every single design decision I made when constructing the website had to answer the question "Is this consistent with the nature and character of the product for this site?" If there is a distinction between the two versions I would have to say that my primary submission is a fairly cerebral interpretation of the product while my second version is consistent with the physical and emotional aspects of clothing and clothing purchase.

Finally, the website is not merely a reflection of the product it is also in dialogue with current apparel industry practices. It challenges existing norms of what and how apparel is manufactured, presented and sold.

Critique

Review one website from group 1 and one website from group 2. Comment on each website's layout, typography, navigation, and overall flow.

Group 1

<https://medium.com/>

<http://www.sagmeisterwalsh.com/>

<http://squarespace.com/home/overview/>

<http://www.businessoffashion.com/>

Group 2

<http://www2.warnerbros.com/spacejam/movie/jam.htm>

<http://cavs.mit.edu/>

<http://www.spectrumpowderworks.com/>

<http://mimarch.net/>

Review of <https://medium.com> from Group 1. Medium is a website which features a collection of articles or stories written by a number of different authors - a hybrid between an e-zine and a blog, a place where anyone can write a blog post and have it edited by others who use the site before publishing to Medium.

Medium uses a two column layout sandwiched between a header at the top and a footer at the bottom. The left column is reserved for a listing of articles and the right column is a content rich navigation bar. The left column or the content column uses the following pattern for each article: a logo, name of category, author's name and date published to Medium, image associated with article, title of article, a one sentence lead in, and 'continue reading' button captioned with an approximate time it will take to read the article.

Medium uses a color scheme of white, grays, and limited use of green to highlight. White is used for the background color, shades of gray for most of the typography, and a light shade of green for 'continue reading' and name of article's category.

The typography relies on a sans-serif typeface to give the site a modern feel. Contrast is achieved using font-size (from small to large) and font-weight (super light to heavy, bold).

All elements on the page are framed in plenty of negative space. Content is grouped by function. The website name is in the top left and beside it are links to articles selected by staff, another link to top articles as determined by views/ votes, and bookmarks. At the top right are three call to action buttons: sign up/ sign in, write a story, search. In the content column, all the articles stack on top of each other so viewers can scroll down until they find an article that piques their interest. The right hand column is divided into three sections. At top are links to categories or tags to articles that might interest the visitor. The middle portion contains a link to an about Medium page. The lower third of the right column lists the top 5 articles by title.

The careful use of alignment, balance between positive and negative space, use of contrast through grouping and typography, and efficient implementation of navigation establish a clear hierarchy and flow of elements which in turn create a comfortable user experience. Lastly, the site is responsive and scales very effectively at different widths.

Review of mimarch.net from Group 2. Mimarch dot net is the business website for Mimar Architects and Engineers. The website as it currently exists lacks clarity. The layout is cluttered, redundant, unfocused. The layout does not display focal point. There seems to be minimal hierarchy between elements. Grouping, alignment, balanced use of positive and negative space, consistent use of typography and color are not used to organize content or assist visual flow. Finally, the site does not scale as we resize the browser window.

The site design does not implement successful balance of positive and negative space. There is insufficient negative space surrounding elements on the page. Negative space is not used to enhance visual flow, chunking of information, nor create places for the eyes to rest.

The various elements are not aligned in terms of size, spacing, placement. Elements cut into each other, on top of each other. Contrast is not skillfully handled.

Content is repeated in four different locations: vertical navigation bar in top left corner, horizontal navigation bar in header, navigation bar in footer, rapidly scrolling links in the hero image. This last is also somewhat jarring visually. While repetition is an important design principle, repetition has not been done successfully here in this website.

Content is not organized by function or category. Body copy are mostly headings of categories or functions. The image in the center of the page is not styled so that it acts as a visual focus. Also, there is a layering of thumbnail images over the central image that creates visual clutter. Typefaces, font-sizes, font-weights are not used in a systematic fashion to create visual ordering of the page. The color scheme is not used to enhance the website, organize information, or create highlights.

This site may benefit from an application of the Rule of Thirds or the Golden Mean. Eliminating repeated elements can potentially increase negative space on webpage. Organizing content according to category or function can facilitate grouping and separation of content. Focal point, hierarchy, and flow can be achieved through color and typography (distinct typefaces, font-size, font-weight, font-style). Lastly, determining the needs of audience can determine whether a responsive site would enhance business goals.