

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.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>

What I learned from these 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 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 business and product niche.

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?

Familiarizing myself with graphic design principles, learning typefaces and typography, acquainting myself with organized use of color to create tone, mood, communicate idea, creating an acceptable design, learning to use html and css to create design have made the class very interesting and absorbing.

Which struggles did you encounter during page development?

Struggles I had early in the development included centering the background image in the viewport and getting the navigation links in the spot i wanted them to be located. John's suggestions helped me to resolve these issues. The next major issue was to get a floated element to respond the way i wanted it to when the browser window was being resized. The last issue was resizing the navigation bar into a toggle icon. Dara 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. I made a design decision to pursue these selections through to the end of the project. I let the background color and my initial typeface selection dictate the rest of the design.

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 and 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.

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.

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 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 as the recent Miu Miu movie featured on Business of Fashion website suggests has its own personality. 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.

The overall theme I was trying to capture in the website was the delicate, 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.

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 layout, typography, and navigation establish a clear hierarchy and flow of elements which in turn create a comfortable user experience.

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.

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.

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.

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.