WHO ARE YOU? GET A PERSONALITY

chapter five
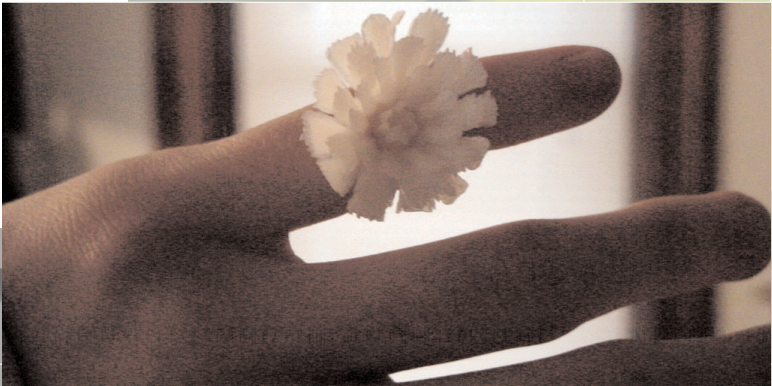
Our most memorable experiences are those we can not only see and hear, but also feel. Building such experiences on the Web requires an understanding of how the design of your Web site creates a personality that interacts with and speaks to your audience. A Web site needs to be both effective and affective: not only usable but likable as well. Therefore, designing an appropriate and engaging personality for your site is not the icing on the cake (as visual design is sometimes called): It is the recipe that determines your final result and whether or not it will appeal to your audience.

WHAT IS PERSONALITY?
[S E C T I O N   T I T L E]

All communication between people is filtered through their personalities. Your personality determines how you react and how others react to you. It is the part of you that makes you a unique individual and sets you apart from others[1]. As a result, it is also how people remember and define you.

This practice comes so naturally that personalities are not just reserved for people, but instead attributed to many different things, natural or manmade. Associating a personality with an object makes it unique and therefore memorable. *That movie is funny and intelligent.* The unique traits we identify with certain objects not only help us to better identify them, but also strengthen our relationships with them. We know we can count on certain objects to be helpful, reliable, fun, informative, and more. Reeves and Nass have argued that people especially attribute human characteristics to new media[2] (such as the Web). Perhaps the ability of such media to communicate with images, sounds and motion closely mirrors our own skills. Or maybe the complexity possible in new media keeps us as interested and engaged as another person might. Whatever the reason, new media applications are quite often perceived as distinct entities with particular characteristics.

As with all new media, the combination of organization, interaction, and presentation creates and supports the personality of a Web site. And while we can use nouns to describe the individual components that make up these lexicons, (photos, data, buttons, and so on), we turn to adjectives (funny, elegant, soothing, and so on) when describing their collective end product: the Web site's personality. A site's personality is directly responsible for its emotional impact: how it "feels." Is it enjoyable? Is it relaxing?

ONE'S PERSONALITY

"The effectiveness with which one can achieve positive reactions."

"Designates those things about the individual that are distinctive and set him apart from other persons."

"What is most typical and deeply characteristic of a person."

"The reaction of other individuals to a person is what defines his personality."

–Paraphrased from *Theories of Personality* (Wiley & Sons, 1970).

What kind of experience does the site provide for its audience as they surf through? Everything from the tone in which the content is written to the labels on the navigation menus contributes to the personality of a site. That is why, more so than any other design consideration, the personality of a Web site is responsible for a unified Web experience. Making sure that you have a consistent and clear point of view throughout your site allows you to build cohesive experiences for your audience instead of just a set of interconnected Web pages. It is these kinds of experiences that your audience attaches to and wants to repeat.

While everything within your site contributes to its personality, it is most quickly communicated and reinforced through your visual presentation. Your site's personality is directly reflected in the type, colors, and visual elements that make up each one of your pages. This is why the look and feel of your site should not be thought of as the last step in the Web design process. Instead, it should be the continual unification of every aspect of your site under a consistent narrative. One that perpetually communicates and reinforces what makes your site unique and worthwhile for your audience while establishing lasting emotional ties. In other words, you want to tell your audience a story, an informative and memorable one at that.

PERSONALITY A.K.A.

Though I use the word personality, many terms also refer to the same idea:

Look and feel
Tone and manner
Attitude
Narrative voice
Emotional impact
Particular flavor
Unique identity

[1] Hall and Lindzey outline several different definitions of "personality" in their book: *Theories of Personality* (Wiley & Sons, 1970).
[2] Their book, *The Media Equation: How people treat computers, television, and new media like real people and places* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), presents the results of numerous psychological studies in an effort to support this assertion.

LOOK AND FEEL

Everything on the cso.org site contributes to the feeling of sophistication and elegance present throughout the site. The colors, the type treatment, the photos, and so on all work together to tell a consistent story.

Creating a look and feel for your site is a natural part of the design process. You probably already have images or ideas that you associate with your site's content and message. They may come from previous experiences or from your understanding of what makes your site unique. To clarify, think of the associations you make with your content. What kind of imagery do you think of?

Each of the concepts of your site brings distinct colors, typefaces, imagery, and ideas to mind: a unique look and feel (see sidebar above). The combination of these visual elements (the look) elicits an emotional response from the viewer (the feel). Your site's look and feel gives it a particular flavor (or personality) that helps to get your message across: Who are you, and why should I care?

FEELS LIKE

The personality of a site comes through almost instantly. Therefore, you need to be certain it is saying what you intend. Think of the words "wedding" and "rugby." What kind of imagery do you associate with each word? Is it soft, velvety, flowing text with a cool pastel color scheme or a strong, dirty, and dynamic typeface with dark solid tones? Clearly, one of these says "wedding" quickly and confidently, while the other does not

Both the rugby and wedding sites seen here feature a delicate touch that seems more appropriate to marriage than rugby. The USA Rugby site manages to give the sport some sophistication with its look and feel, but it certainly didn't match my expectations.

It is worth noting that the bold, geometric type and dark, saturated image do add some strength to the layout, but it is offset by the delicate type treatments of the navigation system and the news links.

WHY HAVE A PERSONALITY?
[S E C T I O N   T I T L E]

Truth be told, this is actually a trick question. When it comes down to it, you really don't have a choice in whether or not you have a personality. Even if you were to restrain every part of your behavior that might betray your true demeanor, you would still end up with a personality: boring and cold. The same is true for Web sites. Even if you deliberately don't think about your site's personality during the design process, you will end up with one anyway. The colors, content, and visual elements (or lack of all

three) of your Web site all make an impression on your audience, intentional or not. Therefore, it is in your best interests to be aware of the personality you are creating for your site and make certain that is telling the story you want.

When creating Web sites, we rely on the site's personality to provide emotional impact and a consistent point of view for our audience. The personality of your site provides the answers to the "who" and "why" questions of your audience in a clear descriptive voice. Whose site is this? Who is it for? Why should I be interested? Why should I trust it? By answering these types of questions, the personality helps to communicate the big picture of your site. When you realize that the focus and main message of many sites is blurred or lost under the haze of too many Web site elements and competing viewpoints, the value of a focused personality is obvious. An appropriate and evocative personal-ity not only tells the right story to your audience, but it also provides distinction, appeal, and wholeness to your site. If properly applied, these characteristics create meaningful and engaging communication that make visiting your Web site an enjoyable experience.

LESS IS MORE

37signals simple for sale

Signals

00 Start Here	**19** Suits Who?	
01 We See People	**20** Sloganeering	
02 Manager of External Reporting?	**21** A not "Q"	
03 <blink>12:00</blink>	**22** B2whatever	
04 Not Full Service	**23** Sightings	
05 Size Does Matter	**24** My Cousin's Buddy...	
06 $6,000,000,000	**25** Just Because You Can...	
07 Are They Experienced?	**26** Make it Useful	
08 Experience	**27** Simplicity by Design	
09 And I Quote	**28** Tulipomania	
10 Refugees	**29** Linkin' Logs	
11 Copy Righting	**30** ASAP	
12 Occam's Razor	**31** Reference	
13 Eight Seconds	**32** Highest	
14 Breadcrumbs	**33** What's in a Name?	
15 83%?!	**34** Our Team	
16 Short Story	**35** We Come in Peace	
17 No Awards Please	**36** Signal vs. Noise	
18 eNormicom.com	**37** SETI	

Work (new 11/19/01)

Case studies for some of our latest client projects:

- Transportation.com
- Advertise with Dex
- Kicksology
- MissileLock
- Zen Hospice Project
- More...

Other

Internal projects, press clips, appearances, and other goodies:

- Design Not Found
- Signal vs. Noise
- eNormicom.com
- ShirtSignals
- NYT article
- 37Fakebank
- More...

Though you might initially think that plain text on a white background is not much of a personality, the folks at 37signals are ready to prove you wrong. Though their site has no images and very little color, it has a very distinct and elegant personality–one that reflects the design philosophy of the firm and is appropriate for their audience (designers and potential clients). The stark presentation of the numbered links makes them all the more inviting and interesting.

THE POWER OF PERSONALITY

A well designed personality:

Tells the right story

Provides distinction

Appeals to and engages your audience

Unifies your site

When good information is given a poor presentation, its value may not be appreciated. The before and after shots of an article database show you how look and feel can influence perception of information.

It might be helpful to think of the personality of your Web site as similar to your product or company's branding. A *brand* can be thought of as an idea or impression made on your audience by their experiences with your services or goods and their presentation. The most influential form of branding is "the design, quality, and performance of the product" (Braunstein & Levine, 2000). However, on the Web, your site frequently is your product, and therefore its presentation and interaction are vital to creating a positive impression on your audience. An elegant and professional presentation can provide a convincing reason to trust an unknown site. This is especially true if you offer services that are only available online. I have redesigned the interface to several online information presentations, and though the actual information does not change, the perception of that information often does. For example, users that did not make use of the information resource prior to the redesign will often say, "I did not think the information was valuable, but the presentation of the data (after the redesign) gave it more validity." Though the value of the information really did not change, the perception did. Presentation can significantly alter a user's perception of reality. (Think bottled water.) But remember, a poorly designed presentation can create a negative impression, just as a well-designed one can create a positive one.

Branding has several other advantages that are especially apparent online. Because an effective use of branding creates customer loyalty and even dependence, online branding encourages return visits to your site and helps to create lasting relationships and emotional ties with your product or service. As Marc Braunstein and Edward Levine, the authors of *Deep Branding on the Internet* (Prima Venture, 2000), have said, "People go to a search engine when they don't know; they go to a brand when they do." In the preceding information resource redesign example, users continually return to a data source they perceive to be valuable. Branding also reinforces a particular and relevant idea for your product, helping to communicate the big picture of your site that helps to answer the "who" and "why" questions of your audience. But ultimately, branding your site through its personality creates a unique voice that engages and invites your audience–that is, it tells a story.

SAY THE RIGHT THING

The personality of your site allows you to get the correct message to your audience quickly and efficiently. *Am I here for rugby scores or to plan my wedding?* A quick glance at your site should remove any doubt. But with great power comes great responsibility. You need to be certain the story you are telling your audience is not only right, but right for them. But how do you know what is "right" when the appropriateness of a personality differs from site to site and audience to audience? Thankfully, the planning you did in Part 1 will help you to evaluate the different directions you might choose for your site's look and feel and come out with the best fit.

Having spent significant time defining your target audience and their shared culture, you now have an effective measure against which to gauge the appropriateness of your identity. How will your audience respond to the personality you have decided on? Will they be flattered or insulted? Will they feel empowered or uncertain? Remember that you need to meet your audience's expectations. If you do not consider how your audience requires your content, you will leave them feeling ignored and unimportant. This is especially true of their emotional expectations. If your site "feels" wrong, your audience is likely to be confused, or worse still, upset. To return to the wedding example, the personality of a wedding site needs to be comfortable and elegant. Visitors to the site have very fixed notions of what is appropriate and are unlikely to react favorably to anything out of place. The attitude of a rugby site would definitely not be a welcome sight when it comes time to select a wedding dress.

The right personality makes a connection with your audience that they will appreciate and remember. This is the first step to building a lasting customer relationship: letting your audience know you have thought of them. People want to feel involved. They want to belong. Instead of doing things the way you see fit, look at it from your customer's perspective. How do they expect this information to be displayed? What does this particular image say to them? Your audience will appreciate it, and the makings of a relationship will be underway.

BE UNIQUE

Why be different? Well, if we are to trust the ad campaigns of Dodge trucks, Apple computers, and Arby's sandwiches, different is better. Okay, but why? First of all, being different means being distinguishable. Your personality, just like your Web site's personality, helps to differentiate you from others. And when "others" consists of the millions of sites scattered across cyberspace, being different can really come in handy. If your site stands out, your audience is more likely to give it a chance or at least some thought as they surf by. Similarly, your site may stick out in their minds as they come across a need that you're able to fill for them. When every site looks the same, people have no compelling reason to choose one over the other, unless they are familiar with the firm or perform a comparative analysis (most often of price) to determine their best choice.

Not only does being unique distinguish you from the competition, it, more importantly, helps to explain who you actually are. A recognizable Web site personality can define a business and reinforce familiarity. After all, if something is distinct, you tend to remember or at least recognize it. This is great news for the notoriously short attention spans of Web visitors. The sooner they can figure out who you are and what you have to offer them, the more pleased they will be. But being recognizable among the crowds of Web pages strewn throughout cyberspace is no small feat and is especially difficult when you need to be recognized for the benefits you bring to your customers. It is hard enough to just look different when compared to millions of sites, much less to be known as different. This is why a superior Web experience does not rely on presentation alone. The organization (content) and interaction (service) of your site both reflect strongly on your personality.
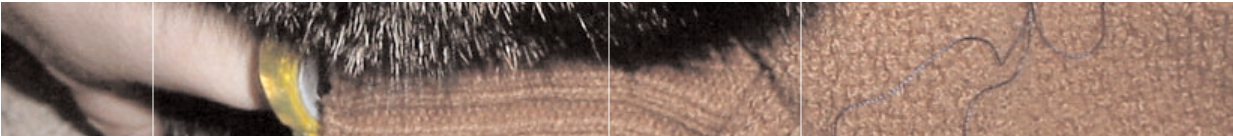
Having quality content or interaction systems (such as effective online customer support systems) reflects favorably on your site's personality and can help give you the type of distinction presentation alone might lack. In fact, many sites with a poor visual presentation remain popular on the merits of their content alone. Does their audience enjoy bumping through the site's awkward graphics and hard-to-read labels? No, but the personality of the content (it could be high-quality, funny, worthwhile, and more) makes the rest bearable. Would their audience be happier if the personality of the presentation matched the personality of the content? Of course. They like the content, don't they? Such a site would be well served to improve its presentation. Not only would it enrich their current customers' experience, but a presentation that reflects the site's content would tell the site's story to newcomers as well. *Hey, we have quality content, come take a look.*

INVITE AND ENGAGE

At some point, all of us have selected our dinner destination with just a passing glance. *Hey, that place looks nice. Let's go in there.* The character of a building or its décor may seem inviting or intriguing enough to convince us to give it a try. This scenario isn't restricted to dining out. It occurs everywhere, and especially online. *Hey, this site looks trustworthy. Let's see if they have what I am looking for.* Just like physical structures (restaurants, hotels, homes, and so on) can be inviting or foreboding, so can Web sites. A unique and appropriate Web site can attract us with its visual presentation just as a restaurant can with its facade. And this doesn't just apply to first-time customers. When we return to the same restaurant, we still appreciate the impression its character makes on us. Our familiarity with the visual presentation of the establishment reassures us that the content (the food) will likewise be as we expect. If the façade of the restaurant looked run-down when compared to our last visit, we would, more than likely, question whether the food took a similar dive. For this reason, to say a site is inviting is a measure of how appealing it is to its intended audience, first-time visitor or devotee.

Usually, this appeal is emotional. Something about a site or physical structure elicits a positive reaction from us. It could be the color, the type treatment, or a particular visual element. It could be that it says the right thing to us or that it stands out from the crowd. Whatever the exact reason, we make a positive connection with its personality. The site becomes more tangible: something we can feel and relate to (and ultimately trust). This connection allows us to explore and interact with the site. We feel we know its character and move from search to purchase confidently and comfortably. The personality of the site not only lets us know we are welcome; it keeps us engaged and interested.

Just like the ambiance of a cozy restaurant can persuade us to linger after dinner and slowly finish our drinks, the personality of a Web site can likewise keep us engrossed. Web sites with personality do not simply provide information: They provide an experience. Experiences are memorable and involve a lot more than facts. As Nathan Shedroff has said, "Experiences are the foundation for all life events and form the core of what interactive media have to offer." (New Riders, 2001) Because experiences are immersive, they keep us engaged and interested. A quality Web experience is more akin to talking to a good friend than struggling through a dense math textbook. You actually enjoy yourself, instead of continually checking to see when i will done.

BRING IT ALL TOGETHER

Whether the company is selling tennis shoes, basketball shorts, or golf socks, Nike manages to retain the characteristics of its personality (brand). That means you can expect the same quality and commitment to innovation from your golfing slacks as you do your Air Jordans. This relationship is beneficial to both parties. You know you can count on having a quality pair of slacks, and Nike can count on customer confidence and loyalty, even in new products. The Nike brand (its unique story) brings divergent services together under the same narrative.

Similarly, a consistent personality for your Web site can unify your various services and content under a common "feel" or attitude. The connection your audience makes with your site can reflect positively on your content, products, and services. A quality experience on an e-commerce site can lead to the perception that the goods available there, likewise, measure up to the same standard. You can also use this perception to introduce new services to your audience. When you apply the same look and feel to your latest service, your story continues, and the associations your audience makes with your brand are expected and invoked.

A consistent personality is also useful for bringing together the various pages and content of your site. If all the sections and subsections of a site "feel" the same way, a sense of place is created, and your audience thinks of your site as a distinct entity. I mentioned this before when discussing a "unified graphic language" (Chapter 4), but now extend the discussion to include the entire user experience: organization, interaction, and presentation. Bonding your site with personality creates a coherent identity and a continuous story for your audience to follow and appreciate.

HOW TO GET A PERSONALITY

[S E C T I O N   T I T L E]

As you know by now, every site intrinsically has a personality. It comes from the presentation and substance or "design, quality, and performance" of your site. Because the personality is there whether you like it or not, the real question becomes "How do you get the right personality for your site, one that reflects your particular message and is appropriate for your audience?" You want a personality that will attract and engage your visitors and distinguish your site from the rest of the Web with both its attitude and its assets.

Presenting your site in an appropriate tone and manner requires some initial decision-making and an understanding of how the components of your site contribute to its look and feel. In other words, how can color, type, visual elements, and interaction establish an attitude that is prevalent throughout your site? As I mentioned before, the personality of your site is most quickly communicated through its visual presentation. Though every person is likely to react a bit differently to it, certain general tendencies can help you understand what the visual presentation is saying to your audience. Principles in color theory and typography can tell you how the visual characteristics of your site are likely to be interpreted. And a deliberate choice of visual elements and interactions can reiterate your main message. Through these techniques, you can design a consistent personality that breathes life into your site.
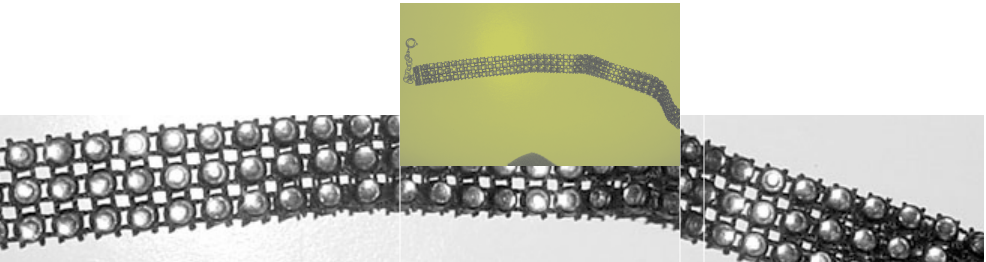
INVESTIGATING THE POSSIBILITIES

In Chapter 2, I briefly touched on some planning you could do to get early ideas for your site's personality. These ideas were recorded on sample combinations that help visualize some possible directions. Though sample combinations are a great place to start, when you finally decide on your personality, you will have to consider several factors:

History: What is your client's current branding strategy? Do they have an established graphic language? Do you need to consider carryovers from previous site designs?

Audience: How will they react to the personality? Is it appropriate? What do they expect from your site?

Competition: How can you stand out from your rivals? What story are they telling?

Connotation: What associations come with your product? Do they match your site's personality?

Coming up with the right look and feel for your site involves a lot of research and reiteration. Don't expect to get it right the first time. Instead, explore several directions and reap the benefits of the design process: think, design, test, and repeat.

USING COLOR

Perhaps no other design element has as much influence on how we feel in a space (a Web site, a home, and so on) as color. Colors can instantaneously change our moods and alter our opinions. They can make us comfortable, put us in a state of awe, or get us excited. Our

"Color adds tremendous meaning to communication as it vitalizes thevisual message, delivering an instantaneous impression that is, most often, universally understood."

PANTONE guide to communicating with color. (Grafix Press Ltd, 2000)
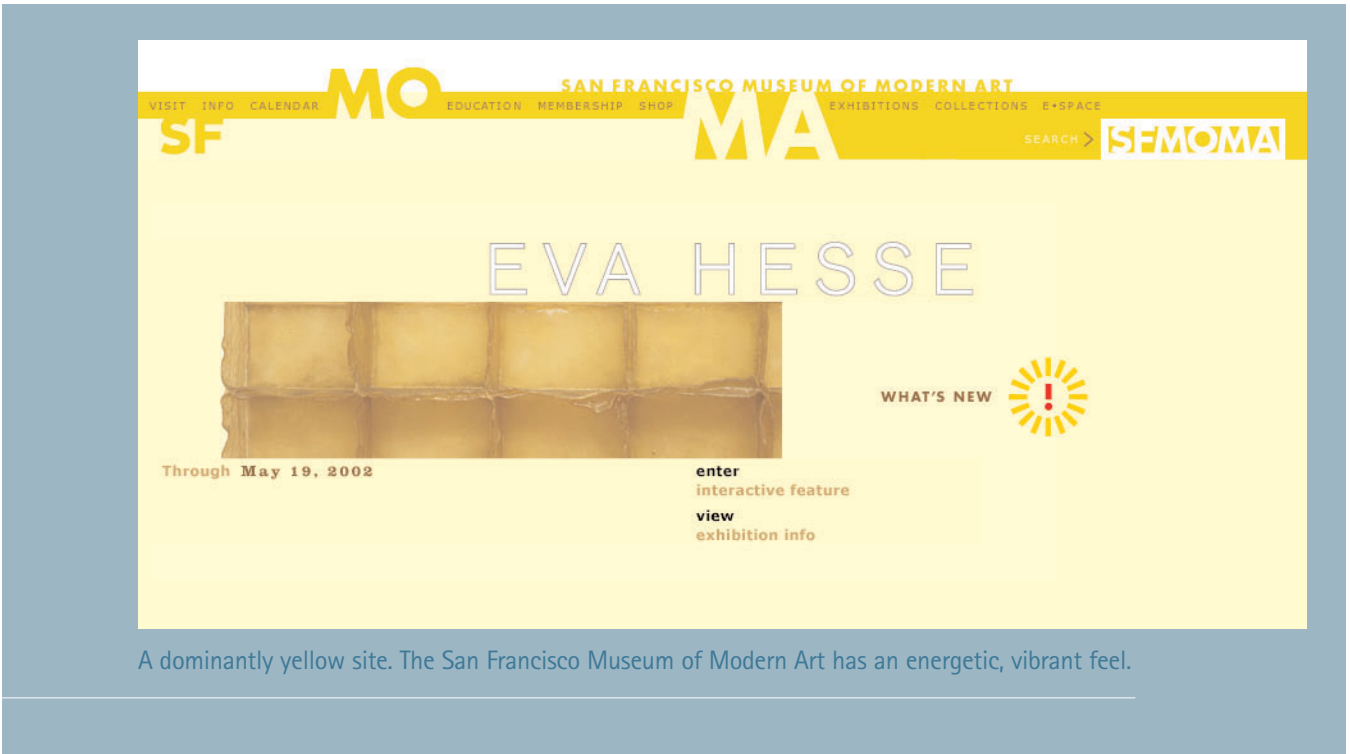
A dominantly yellow site. The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art has an energetic, vibrant feel.

personal experiences, shaped by unique circumstances and societal influence, determine our responses to color. Our reactions can range from smitten to sickened and come charged with emotion. Color psychology outlines how we react to colors and provides us with the knowledge we need to elicit positive responses to the colors that shape our Web site personalities.

For example, we tend to associate the color yellow with energy and life. Ask nearly any child to draw the sun, and they instinctually reach for the yellow crayon. Yellow's connotation with energy and its brightness also means it is sometimes perceived as "speedy." Even the large numbers of cabs seen whizzing through busy city streets may also have some influence on this perception.

COLOR CHARACTER

Red: Vibrant, passionate, love, war. A very strong and attention-grabbing color, red is charged with emotions.

Violet: Regal, sacred, sensual. In deep shades, violet is luxurious. When lightly tinted, it is aromatic and spiritual.

Blue: Cool, dependable, sophisticated, sky, water. Blue is full of depth, constant yet dynamic.

Green: Fresh, relaxing, earth. Green is very balanced and calm, a natural color.

Yellow: Sun, energy, warmth. Yellow is welcoming and full of life, a happy color.

Orange: Strong, vital, hot. Orange is the warmest of colors, a healing and playful hue.

If you're interested in more information on color responses, pick up a book on color theory.

Contrast our associations with yellow to our feelings for the color red. Red is associated with love and war, two of the most emotionally charged words around. As a result, red demands our attention and is effectively used for stop signs and to mark danger. The importance of red is highlighted by the fact that cultures with only three defined words for color always identify black, white, and red before any other color[3]. Designers, familiar with red's ability to take charge of composition, use it knowingly to focus our attention on important information. Specific groups rely on red's strength to interpret meaning in their daily jobs. Investors, for example, know when they see red that their investments are heading south. (As a result, they're probably not willing to decorate their homes with red hues.)

As you can see, the associations and emotions that come with colors are deep rooted. Color instantly gives everything it adorns a unique character. The world around us, our place in it, and our past all influence the moods and ambiances that colors create for us. Though as individuals we are likely to have differences in how we interpret colors, certain associations and reactions that are common to us all. By understanding these, we can successfully make use of the emotional qualities of colors to create appropriate personalities for our Web sites. We can formalize some of these by looking at the basic principles of color theory that tell us why and how colors work.

THE COLOR WHEEL

The color wheel is an important reference for understanding the fundamental relationships of colors. The wheel is broken up into three types of colors: primary, secondary, and tertiary. *Primary* colors are fundamental (they cannot be made by mixing other colors) and include red, yellow, and
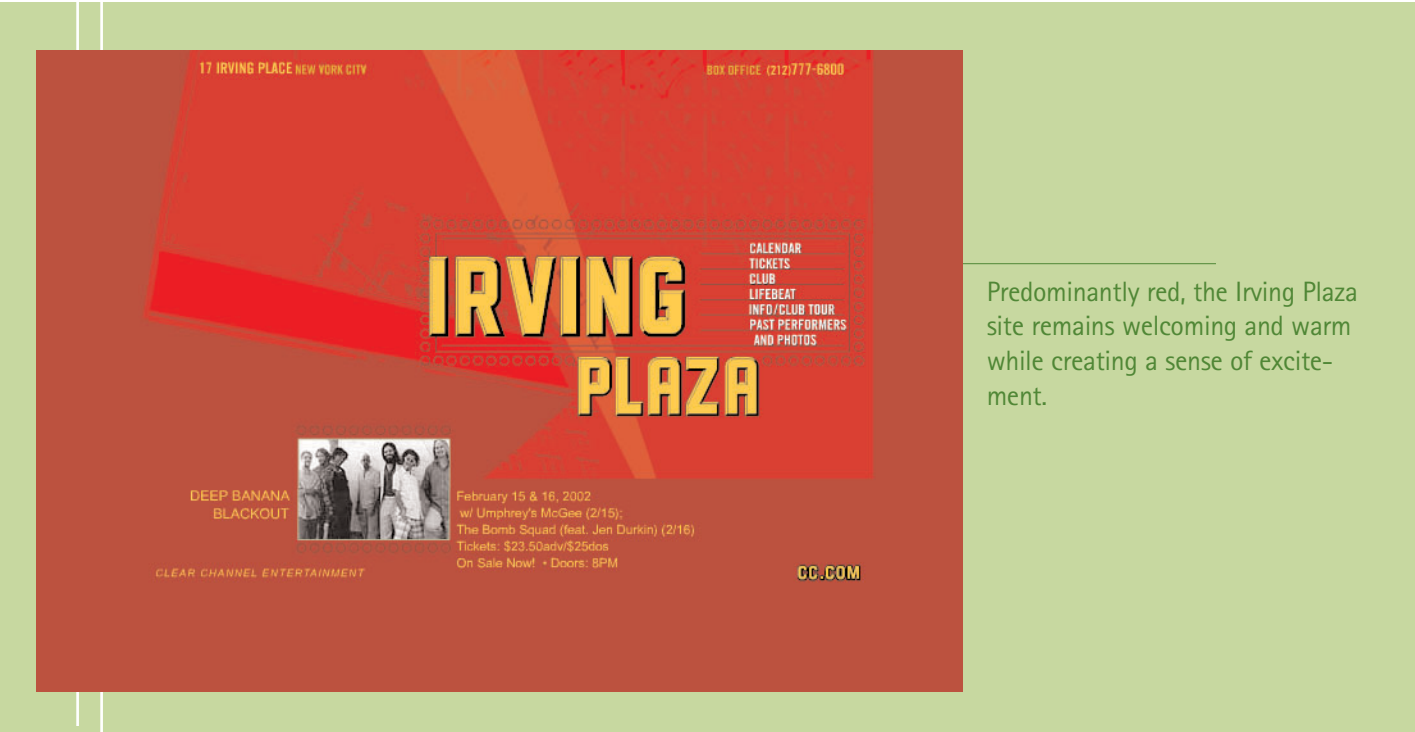
Predominantly red, the Irving Plaza site remains welcoming and warm while creating a sense of excitement.

blue. The *secondary* colors (green, orange, and violet) are derived by mixing equal amounts of the primary colors. The *tertiary* colors (yellow-green, blue-green, blue-violet, red-orange, and yellow-orange) are a combination of secondary and primary colors.

The color wheel presents the visible spectrum in a circular arrangement that illustrates the relationships between colors. When all 12 colors of the color wheel are properly positioned, they create a natural spectrum.

Edward O. Wilson outlines the growth of color terms in his book Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge (Vintage, 1998).

WARM VERSUS COOL

Colors can be described as either warm or cool. The distinction comes naturally to us from our experiences with the world around us. Warm colors (red, orange, and yellow), found at the top of the color wheel, are inviting and cheerful because we associate them with the heat we encounter from the sun and fire. Cool colors (blue, violet, and green), on the other hand, are universally seen as calming and composed because we see them in the sea, sky, and forests. (It's worth noting that violet and green are unique because they can appear warmer or cooler depending on their composition. The more red in a violet, the more hospitable it appears.)

The distinct effects of warm and cool colors are important to consider when designing spaces. Too many cool colors, and a space can seem cold and unfriendly. Too many warm colors, and it can become stuffy and hot. Additionally, warm colors are said to *advance,* which means they make surfaces appear closer to you than they actually are. Cool colors, on the other hand, tend to recede, which is why they make great background hues. They sit back and do not compete with the information you need.

You might notice that predominantly cool-colored sites tend to show up more frequently than warm-colored sites. With screen real estate already at a premium, and lots of information to squeeze into every layout, few sites are willing to increase the congestion by adding lots of advancing warm colors.

COLOR THERMOMETER

Warm colors: Red, yellow, orange

Warmest color: Orange

Cool colors: Blue, violet, green

Coolest color: Blue

Can appear warm or cool depending on proximity to other colors: Green, violet

HOT AND COOL

The predominantly cool color scheme of the Cintara site is composed and intelligent. The warm colors present in the Nitro snowboards site, on the other hand, create an excited and aggressive feel.

ADVANCE AND RECEDE
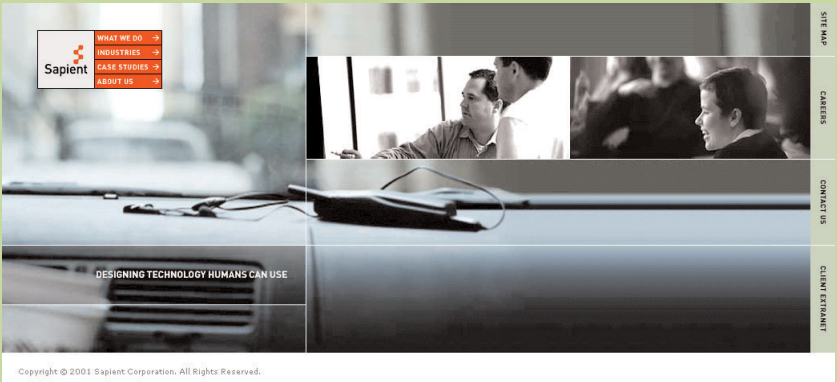
On the Sapient home page, the cool colors of the background image recede, while the warm colors (red and orange) advance. This works to bring the navigation system to your immediate attention. The effect is especially pronounced because orange and blue sit opposite each other on the color wheel. As a result, there is a lot of contrast between them.

CONSTRASTING COLORS

Colors that sit opposite each other on the color wheel are referred to as *contrasting colors.* When used with equal brightness, these colors have a tendency to compete with each other for attention and result in color schemes that are active and full of energy. This visual phenomenon is referred to as *simultaneous contrast.* For example, you're likely to encounter simultaneous contrast in a lot of sports team identities, such as the orange and blue of the Chicago Bears or the purple and yellow of the Minnesota Vikings. The further apart two colors sit on the color wheel, the more they contrast with each other. Therefore, if you want to add some tension or excitement to your Web site's personality, consider widening the gap between your colors.

SILMULTANEOUS ENERGY

The visual phenomenon known as simultaneous contrast occurs when two contrasting colors are used with equal brightness. Their pronounced differences are made all the more vivid by their opposite nature. Blue, in this case, appears at its brightest when positioned next to orange (as seen in the Nike Town site). The same blue next to purple appears a lot more relaxed and especially tranquil when paired with another blue. As you can see, how a color "speaks" to you largely depends on the colors next to it.

Contrasting colors are also often referred to as *complementary.* The opposing nature of the two colors results in a balance (for example, cool blue and warm orange). Recall from Chapter 4 that we are constantly seeking balance in our surroundings and our lives. Because of this, a combination of two contrasting colors can provide the harmony that we seek and make compositions feel complete and comfortable. This is especially true when one color is dominant, and the other emphasizes the qualities of the dominant color by providing a contrast to it: a complement. Such a use of contrasting colors can create personalities that feel complete or together.

A   C O M P L E M E N T A R Y   B A L A N C E

Two complementary colors can be used to create balance within a composition. Though the orange is the dominant color in this design (creating an animated and strong feel), the inclusion of the blue navigation elements adds harmony. This prevents the warmth of the orange from being overbearing and balances the composition.

C O M P L E M E N T A R Y   A T T E N T I O N

The contrast naturally present in complementary colors is the perfect way to bring attention to certain portions of a layout. In the Streams.com site, it brings important links to the attention of the audience.

Contrasting colors can also be used effectively to bring attention to important areas of your site. When one color dominates and the other is used sparingly as an accent, you can draw attention to certain elements of your site. This is useful when you emphasize elements that describe your site, such as a logo or tag line.

ANALOGOUS COLORS

Colors next to each other on the color wheel are referred to as *analogous* or *harmonious* colors. These colors work well together because they are closely related. For example, violet, blue-green, and blue violet all share a common base color: blue. Because these colors blend well together, they create pleasing or tranquil personalities. Analogous color schemes can be expanded to include several neighboring colors, thereby increasing the range of the scheme. This can create personalities that are more complex and diverse.

MONO VS. POLY

A monochromatic color scheme stands in stark contrast to the majority of Web sites. In the Linkdup.com site, a palette of blues keeps the interface unified and unobtrusive, allowing the color accents (site images), which make up the site's content, to attract and keep audience's interest.

NEXT TO YOU

Colors that neighbor each other on the color wheel create comfortable and visually pleasing presentations. In this example, red-violet, yellow, orange, and pink create a tepid and vibrant personality.
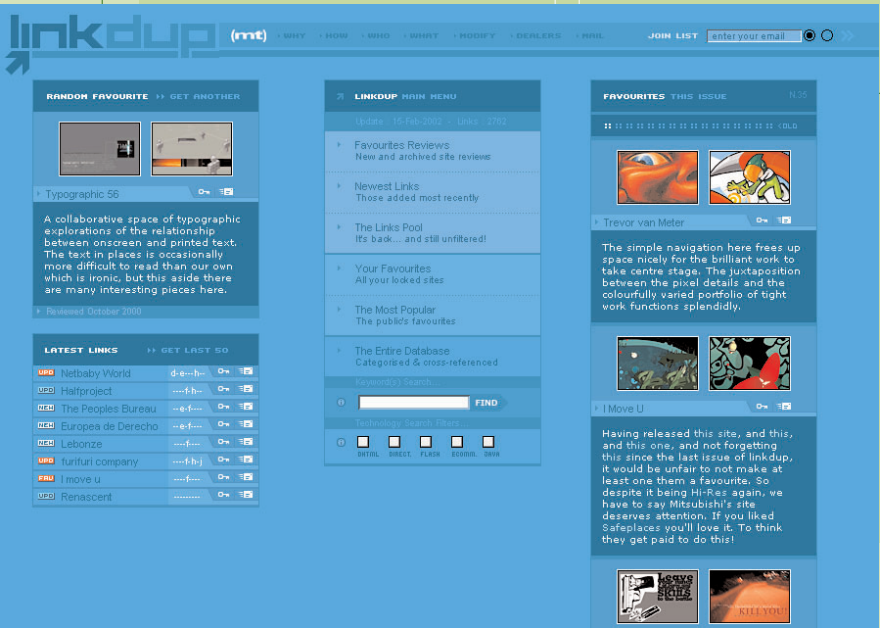
THE MONOS

Sometimes the most appropriate color scheme may consist of only one color. Monotones are schemes that use a single neutral color (such as gray or beige) of varying tints and shades. *Tints* are created by adding white to a color, and *shades* appear through the addition of black. Monochromatic color schemes use varying tints and shades of a single color. Both monotone and monochromatic color schemes can express a simple, contemplative personality and create unique sites that stand out from the color rich palettes of most of the Web. However, they both are difficult to keep interesting as well. The amount of contrast available between the softest pink and the darkest red is often not enough to create visual interest and instead you may have to rely on texture or pattern to keep things moving in your visual hierarchy.

DOMINANT PERSONALITY

When choosing color combinations that embody your site's personality, it is important to maintain a dominant color. The dominant color establishes the mood for your site and keeps your audience's attention focused. If every color is competing for attention, no one wins, and your site's personality comes across as schizophrenic and disorganized. The sense of a coherent narrative is lost, and your site is left trying to tell too many stories at once. Instead, select the story that is the most interesting and appropriate for your audience and let the dominant color tell it.

BLUE IN CHARGE

Though the background (largest surface area) in this layout is white, the dominant color is blue. Blue, echoed in the text, image, site identifier, footer, and navigation, sets the tone for the site: a cool, sophisticated feel.

ESTABLISHED COMBINATIONS

Another important point to note is that many color schemes have symbolic meanings associated with them. Color combinations can bring political, racial, and even corporate messages to mind. This can be a powerful form of branding, and most companies do have "corporate colors" reflective of their corporate message. For example, it might be difficult to create a site in red, white, and blue that does not bring America to mind. If you're trying to create a patriotic site, this association is to your advantage. If you're not, you may be sending your audience the wrong message. As another example, using a color scheme of yellow, red, and blue (the three primary colors) brings ideas of simplicity and basics to mind.

Perhaps the most established of all color combinations are those found in nature. These color schemes are universally seen as harmonious because they are common to us all[4]. For this reason, colors found in nature are often used in interface design.

[4]Edward Tufte claims that "a good way to avoid charkjunk [disruptive visual elements] is to use colors found in nature, particularly toward the lighter side, such as grays, blues, and yellows of sky and shadow." (Visual Design of the Interface, IBM, 1989)

USING TYPE

Contrary to popular belief, all text does not have to be read to be understood; type can also communicate visually. Just like colors, *typefaces* (designs of type) each have a distinct character and tell a different story. We count on typefaces to explain which movies will scare us and which ones will make us laugh. Typefaces let us know which laundry detergent is gentle and which one is tough on dirt. They influence the magazines we read and the clothes we wear. Your choice of typeface can support the message of words, or in the case of company names, it can provide a message. What does IBM mean? The choice of type lets us know we are dealing with reliable technology systems.

The feelings your audience associates with different typefaces can largely be attributed to their unique visual characteristics: how closed-in or open they are, how tall versus wide they may be, or how angular or smooth they appear. The *gestalt* (set of elements considered as a whole) of each typeface contributes to its unique character (see sidebar). Certain typefaces (with thick stocky letterforms) appear strong and rugged, while others (with thin curvy letterforms) are delicate and refined. More than likely, the typeface you use on your baby shower invitation is not the same one that adorns your favorite hockey team's uniform.

WHAT TYPE ARE YOU?

From techno typefaces (the Whitney site) to grunge fonts (Rustboy.com), your choice of typeface adds character and emotion to your site.

Untitled (Three Asian Cheerleaders), 2001
Fujiflex print mounted on aluminum, 40 x 72 in. (101.6 x 182.9 cm).
Collection of the artist; courtesy Massimo Audiello, New York

TYPEFACES

The elements that contribute to the unique character of each typeface are

The height of capital and lowercase letters

The contrast between the thick and thin portions of letters

The height of ascending and descending letters, such as d and q

The thickness of the letterforms (bold, thin, and so on)

The spacing between letters

The smoothness, crispness, or roughness of edges

The presence of decorative elements such as serifs, terminals, and hooks

The style of the face (italic, mono type, and so on)

Perhaps the tallest hurdle you will encounter when looking for the perfect typeface is the sheer number of choices available to you. With the advent of the Web and personal computer, typefaces have become easy to make and even easier to distribute. In an effort to narrow your choices, it might be beneficial to look at some general categories of typefaces.

Old Style: Developed out of traditional handwriting, these typefaces have an inviting, elegant, and classic appearance: Garamond, Bembo, Palatino, Times.

This is an example of Garamond.

Modern: Though still graceful, modern typefaces are more stylized and may appear less friendly than old style faces: Bodoni, Didot, Walbaum, Pergamon, Corvinus.

This is an example of Bodoni.

Slab Serif: These typefaces stand out and have thick serifs and a strong appearance: Clarendon, New Century Schoolbook, Courier, Rockwell, Serifa, American Typewriter.

This is an example of Clarendon.

Sans Serif: Without decorative serifs, these frequently geometric typefaces are functional and practical: Futura, Syntax, Formata, Univers, Gill Sans, Helvetica.

This is an example of Futura.

Grunge: These frequently distorted and energetic fonts are about fun and emotional impact: Angstgirlymusic, Surfstation Fonts (Foodshow, Fructosa, Fango), Psycho Poetry, T-26 Fonts (Bundy, Damage, Finial).

This is an example of Angstygirlymusic.

Retro: Mimicking the signs of the '50s, '60s, and more, these fonts have a unique style that adds lots of character: Parisian, T-26 Fonts (Psychedelic, Pop, Zavtone), Eccentric, Moonglow.

This is an example of Parisian.

Techno: Combining a space age feel with high-tech mechanics, these fonts are often the choice for technology corporations: T-26 Fonts (Aerator, Aeos, Euphoric, Evolution),Surfstation Fonts (Tseries), Russel Square, Shuriken Boy.

THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF AERATOR.

Pixel: Mimicking the anti-aliased presentation of screen fonts, these typefaces reflect the pixilated nature of the computer screen: Bubble dot, Digital, Dot Matrix.

This is an example of Bubbledot.

Scripts: These fonts emulate handwriting and include old world black letters, gorgeous calligraphic strokes, and cartoon lettering: T-26 Fonts (Aqualine, Bacchus, Escrita), Isadora, Bickham Script, Ex Ponto.

This is an example of Aqualine.

In addition to your choice of typeface, the surrounding elements and spacing of your type helps determine what your audience hears. Placing an elegant script typeface in the midst of computer imagery can make a strong statement on the merits of rarity alone. Placing a lot of space in between letters can make a typeface feel more delicate or open. Tightening the letter spacing can make a typeface feel more complete and solid.

USING VISUAL ELEMENTS

Though colors and type play a big role in setting the tone for your site, numerous other visual elements come into play as well. Images (in the form of line art or photographs), abstract shapes, textures, and patterns can strongly influence the look and feel of your site. Though such visual elements can complement or distract from your main message in an infinite number of ways, the principles behind why a certain visual element works and another doesn't are the same for photographs and shapes as they are for colors and type. When deciding on visual elements for your site, consider

Appropriateness: Is this visual element right for your audience? Does it support the story you are trying to tell?

Interest: Does this visual element help to keep your audience engaged? Does it take attention away from important information?

Unity: Does this visual element reinforce your narrative? Is it consistent with the look and feel of your site?

Images: Images are basically static representations of reality. As such, they are a powerful means of communication. Because they are rich in texture and shape, photographs and line art attract and hold your audience's attention (see Chapter 4). As a result, they can break up static text and create areas of visual interest in a layout. Images also communicate concepts quickly and effectively (remember a picture is worth a thousand words). Therefore, you should always select photos and line art that support your site's personality. If your emphasis is on being a "people-centric" company, then by all means include images of people. In fact, consider using closeups that showcase their individual traits and identify them as distinct individuals. If, on the other hand, your emphasis is on speed, consider blurred photos of motion or transportation systems to get your point across (see sidebar on next page).

A DRIVEN PERSONALITY

The mostly monochromatic color scheme of the Nissan cars site makes use of similarly tinted images to communicate a message of speed, power, and refinement. The "worm's eye" view and the blurred background elements of the photo help set the tone and mood for the site. But it is the combination of many visual characteristics that really define the personality of this site:

Cool colors: Refined and composed

Blue: Bold, dynamic and full of depth (ocean, sky)

Monochromatic: Contemplative, almost Zen-like qualities

Contrasting colors (the touches of orange): Excitement and visual interest

Abstract shapes (squares): Strong and stable, crisp

Type: Crisp, modern sans serif font

Images: Speed and power, knowledge, and elegance

All these visual characteristics work together to tell Nissan's story and create a coherent look and especially feel.

The style of image you choose can also influence your site's personality. Grainy, out of focus, black-and-white photos can contribute to an old world feel, whereas, a polished modern cartoon style can create a fun and relaxed atmosphere.

GOOGLE DOODLES

Though Google's home page is relatively simple (it is basically a search box and logo), a lot of personality is communicated through variations to the Google logo (as seen in these Winter Olympics features). These small, yet important details have helped make Google one of the most well-liked and used sites on the Web.

Abstract Shapes: Abstract shapes such as boxes, spheres, and so on can communicate a lot of ideas through their visual characteristics. For example, a box with sharp and crisp edges appears correct, strong, and secure. As such, it would be appropriate for a construction company or industrial manufacturer's site. The right angles and defined forms bring to mind math and machinery. In contrast, such shapes would not be reflective of the personality of Barbie.com. Barbie is more at home in flowing, organic shapes with soft edges and delicate forms. This example brings up the most apparent distinction between abstract shapes: *organic* versus *manmade.*

NATURALLY OR MANMADE

Organic   Man-made

Organic shapes are flowing, and full of life, while manmade shapes remain constant and precise.

SHAPING OUR PERSONALITY

All shapes have a distinct voice that contributes to our site's personality.

Square: correct, stable, mechanical, deliberate

Circle: complete, vibrant, alive

Triangle: dynamic, smooth, quick

Organic: natural, unique, spontaneous

Organic shapes are imperfect and resemble forms found in nature. They tend to be more round and flowing than manmade shapes, which usually consist of right angles and crisp, well-defined edges. Though many Web sites stick exclusively to one type of abstract shape or the other, there are many instances where a combination of the two best tells your story (see sidebar below).

Textures and Patterns: Textures and patterns provide a tactile sense of your site's personality. Does it feel soft to the touch? Or is it rough and rugged? Like shapes, textures can be organic or manmade. Manmade textures and patterns, such as grid lines (see sidebar above) and other geometric patterns, bring to mind precision and detail, whereas organic textures tend to be more casual and earthy. Because textures tend to be very detailed, they can easily take over a personality. Remember, your eyes are drawn to areas of complexity (see Chapter 4). The Herman Miller site above is a good example of making sure that patterns play a supportive role. Because they are rendered with very light lines, the patterns do not take over the personality or the visual hierarchy of the site.

USING INTERACTIVITY

Communicating a personality through the types of interactions present in your site is a significant part of creating an engaging and appropriate experience for your audience. Should your site be serious, consisting of data queries for cold hard facts? Or is it better off being playful, with fun, almost game-like interfaces? Perhaps you are best suited creating a more mysterious interface that your audience needs to explore. The personality of your site and your audience's goals should determine which route you take. But when attempting unique forms of interaction for your site, keep in mind the issues surrounding standard Web interactions (Chapter 3). Introducing a new way of interacting with your site might actually result in an inferior user experience when the interactions you employ end up confusing your audience.

TEXTURE AND SHAPE

⊕ HermanMiller.com   for the Home

Search

The Collection   Home Office Products

for the home

Modern classics to suit your lifestyle.   Desks and ergonomic chairs that fit right in.

ⓘ Contact Herman Miller for the Home
◍ Ways to Buy from Herman Miller for the Home

Within the nearly monotone color scheme of the Herman Miller site, organic and manmade shapes work together to tell the right story. The organic shapes (within the round navigation buttons), and the manmade shapes (the squares and rectangles) mirror the design aesthetic of Herman Miller's products: functional yet flowing furniture. Organic shapes reflect the uniqueness and emotional qualities of the products, while the manmade shapes communicate stability, strength, and correctness. Also note the use of patterns in this site. Not only do the grid lines imply rigid design specifications, they echo the textures present in the products.