

## Layout design workshop

### Welcome!

Hey all, for this workshop, we'll be going through some general layout principles by going through some bad and good examples of web layouts and other various media. Then, we'll be doing some live examples for a group "critique".

### Overview:

#### General Design Principles

- Organization and spaces
- Colours
  - Saturation
  - Brightness
  - Value
  - Hue
- Text
  - Levels of emphasis

#### Good and Bad Examples

Spotting a bad design and how to fix it

### General Design Principles.

The practice of design is a fluid and dynamic process so when we talk about layout principles you should see them more as organization methods that are used in everyday life that have become coded into our visual perception: things such as titles, borders etc. just like how we learn punctuation to organized ideas.

If you go online, you'll probably find a whole bunch of rules about layout design that vary depending on the theme and media of the presentation, rules such as:

- Use borders when you want to draw attention to information
- Allow the edges of text columns, and artwork to create the illusion of borders
- Don't use borders

These are all valid rules depending on what you want to do, but they are just plain confusing. If you try to abide by all of these rules, you'll end up with a very rigid document that is able to

present information efficiently but has little appeal. A better way to learn layout design or to create your own layouts is probably to see examples of layout design with the same theme and presentation format, be inspired! And use it as a template to create your own.

## Organization



Equal spaces between objects, but no focus and no interest because of lack of varying sizes



Unequal spaces between objects, messy but intriguing due to contrasting scale and orientation



Interesting lines created using alignment and choices in proximity. When in doubt, always leave some more space.

## Colours

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

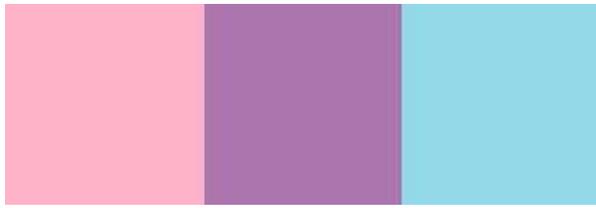
^That. Is. A. Good. Site.

It's a lot easier to pick out a good option from a list of options rather than staring at a blank page trying to come up with something. Google images is also a great source for inspiration.

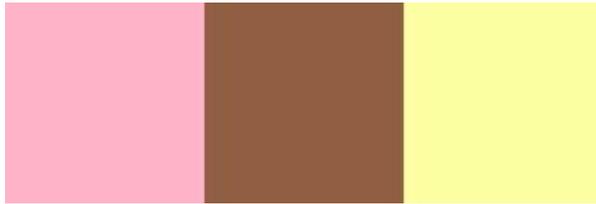


Generally speaking, there should be a general warm/cool theme to your design, and think about what the colour of your designs is communicating. Take the three small palettes for example.

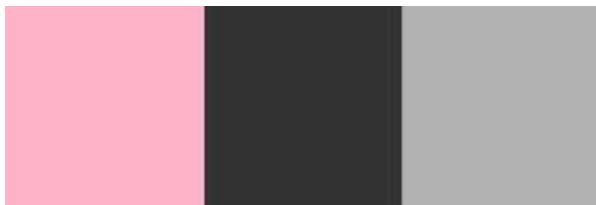
Pink is generally seen as a girly colour, and it definitely can be. The first palette conveys that. It's pink, purple and light powdery blue. People have preconceived notions of where they've seen that combination: Barbie dolls, fairy stories, and princess dresses. But the second looks a little more sophisticated, because a lighter colour is weighed down with some darker, heavier colours. And the third is obviously the colour palette for a bakery or a sweets place. Why? It reminds you of neapolitan ice cream doesn't it?



**SATURATION**  
**SATURATION**  
**SATURATION**



**VALUE**  
**VALUE**  
**VALUE**



**BRIGHTNESS**  
**BRIGHTNESS**  
**BRIGHTNESS**

### **Saturation, Value, Brightness, and Hue**

Hue: Colour.

Saturation: How much colour

Value: How dark the colour is

Brightness: How much white/black did you add to the colour

Generally speaking, when you're trying to make something look good, you'll need some colours on the darker end, and some on the lighter end. This is what I call lighter and heavier colours. Blues, browns and blacks are generally heavier, and darker in value, whereas reds and yellows are lighter. Of course there are exceptions, there always are.

### **Texts – typography**

When considering written material in layouts, there are two basic aspects to consider: font and organisation (similar to overall organisation but there are some specifics that concern texts uniquely) <http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2010/12/14/what-font-should-i-use-five-principles-for-choosing-and-using-typefaces/> gives a great beginners guide to font choice.

Here's a quick footnotes version to when to use the 6 types of font: families

- Geometric: clear, objective, modern, universal, (if used badly, cold, boring, impersonal)
- humanist: less consistency, more detail, varied line weights, akin to handwriting, empathetic (if used badly, wishy washy, fake)
- Old Style: classical as its name suggests good for reminiscing (if used badly, outdated)
- Transitional & Modern: strong, stylish, virtuosic, dynamic (if badly used, pretentious but only to those who care... much more of an arts history thinking)

- Slab Serif: quite volatile, authoritative, friendly, nerd, tough guy, rural, urban (can become conspicuous in the wrong context)



As for organization, we'll have to dive slightly into typography. Here are a few summary points in typography that are helpful when considering layout: but we won't be going into all that, but if you are interested there are great online courses and videos to watch

- Using contrast and scale
- Choosing the optimum line length
- Aligning and spacing characters, words, and paragraphs
- Kerning and kerning pairs\*

\*With digital font, regular sized fonts are already programmed with correctly spaced kerning pairs but when working with larger fonts the space between characters expands

Cool video using fonts! [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z1d-\\_Ho-QYM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z1d-_Ho-QYM)

Apart from typography principles, there are the traditional organization methods such as using headers, titles etc. to create hierarchy in your layout

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**Document title** **<h1>**  
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**<section>**  
**Important heading** **<h2>**  
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**<section>**  
**Less important heading** **<h3>**  
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## The Bad

This is probably the easier part of this workshop as most anybody can spot bad design, what we hope to do here is find some of the fundamental design principles that these bad examples have broken

Ex1.

Let's look at some bad examples of layout organization:

You can usually find examples of bad layout design in places where there is no unifying theme or focus, such as the classifieds in newspapers, ad-filled chat rooms, places that are noisy like a loud room where everyone has a megaphone and trying to get your attention. This information is usually not in sequence, and lacking any coherent organizational logic that could allow the viewer to "start" and "finish". (this is not always a desirable trait depending on what you want to achieve but is a convention that allows the viewer to better understand and digest contiguous ideas... we'll get to that later on)



This website is trying to advertise for what seems to be a tuxedo renting service run by a person/organization named Yvette. That took a good 15 minutes to figure out.

Now, there is a designed focal point to this website (being to advertise for Yvette) but its incoherent organization of material and ideas makes it feel like many conflicting ideas bundled together making it difficult to understand what the point of this website. There's a picture of a plane, a painting, some squiggles, a bit of Spanish, Japanese, and Korean, a lot of clashing colours. You can't reach an easy conclusion to what all this is and how any of it is connected because it's trying to do too many things at once on the same page. It's both selling products and asking for help at the same time, it's trying to reach out to too many audiences and thus loses its focus, and once your brain loses focus as it's distracted by all the noise it becomes easy to just give up and exit the site forever. Also, it feels cheap because it's telling you that these people

couldn't put any effort into the organization of their website, so how good could their stuff be anyway.

Let's try one with less problems

Ex 2.



Now this website, which is advertising for electronic repair services is considerably less cluttered and disorganized than the previous example. It has coherent organization; it focuses on one audience at a time namely the consumer of their services and have siphoned other information onto other pages but it is still difficult to read the page because it has put an emphasis on almost everything on the page except the LG logo which ironically pops out more because it has now become the sole refuge on which your eyes can rest from the terrible use of colours, fonts, and borders.

## The Good

Now that we've gone through a few bad examples let's look at some better examples of layout design.

Now, just a quick reminder that what is considered good design in some cases is not necessarily good design in others, just like how good website design doesn't automatically translate into good design when put into a pamphlet or a book. There are some general principles like coherent organization that are universal in layout design but even that isn't exactly true, so examine these following examples with a critical eye for their context, audience, and media.

With that said though, organization is always key, even if you are trying for an "organic" look or even "chaotic" that doesn't mean you don't organize it usually means you find the right graphic

to convey emotions or ambiance and find ways to vary your organization to emulate spontaneity that can still be easily (or not so easily depending on your fancy) understood.

Ex 1.



It's more an artistic piece than an organized layout. This piece might have been inspired by the organization in the rest of the website/publication, or could be what inspires the organization of the rest of the publication (this publication might choose to organize the rest of its materials using hexagons as textboxes/to frame pictures then organize other pieces using the dividing diagonals).

This piece does however make use of organizational principles such as contrasting color scheme of warm for the foreground objects and cold in the background, and division methods (blocking vs. linear cuts) to draw attention to the center and establish a foreground and a background. Its choice of images and text also makes the idea it tries to convey quite intuitive – as a gallery/document of “spatial” projects in several locations. So while it is quite arbitrary you can see that it chose to use some organization principles to make it readable in a certain way where the text is first read so as to understand the images behind it. Also, the choice of background graphic to be “empty” aids in foregrounding the text... if there were people or other subjects in the picture it might distract the viewer from the visual path set out by the contrasting divisions and cause your eyes to meander to and from the separate elements making this cover lose its impact overall and lose focus from “space” which is the theme of this piece. (this could be amended by blurring unnecessary subjects but that's something else to talk about some other time)

One way to go about designing layouts is to use design principles to help resolve initial ideas instead of having them completely dictate it. Of course you can and should use some principles in the initial stages of design but do play around with the idea a few times before setting it down in stone.

Ex 2.



Just like the previous example this one uses a clear organization principle to its benefit to accent its striking images which become the obvious centerpiece in this magazine.

A clear visual hierarchy is established in varying the scale of the pieces in relation to one another as well as the use of colour better observed in the opposite corners featuring a red hand using warm colours to contrast the cold blacks.

Another concept being introduced in this piece is the rule of thirds that has been analysed in the following image

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rule\\_of\\_thirds](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rule_of_thirds)

Which basically prevents anything to be placed directly in the center line to create asymmetry, often used in film to convey motion and create heirarchy also to prevent tension when viewing layouts instead allowing the eye to roam across the page (similar to the movement idea)

\*



### Excellent vs. Terrible and Good vs. Okay

It's always easier to point to wrong things when there's a lot of things that are wrong.

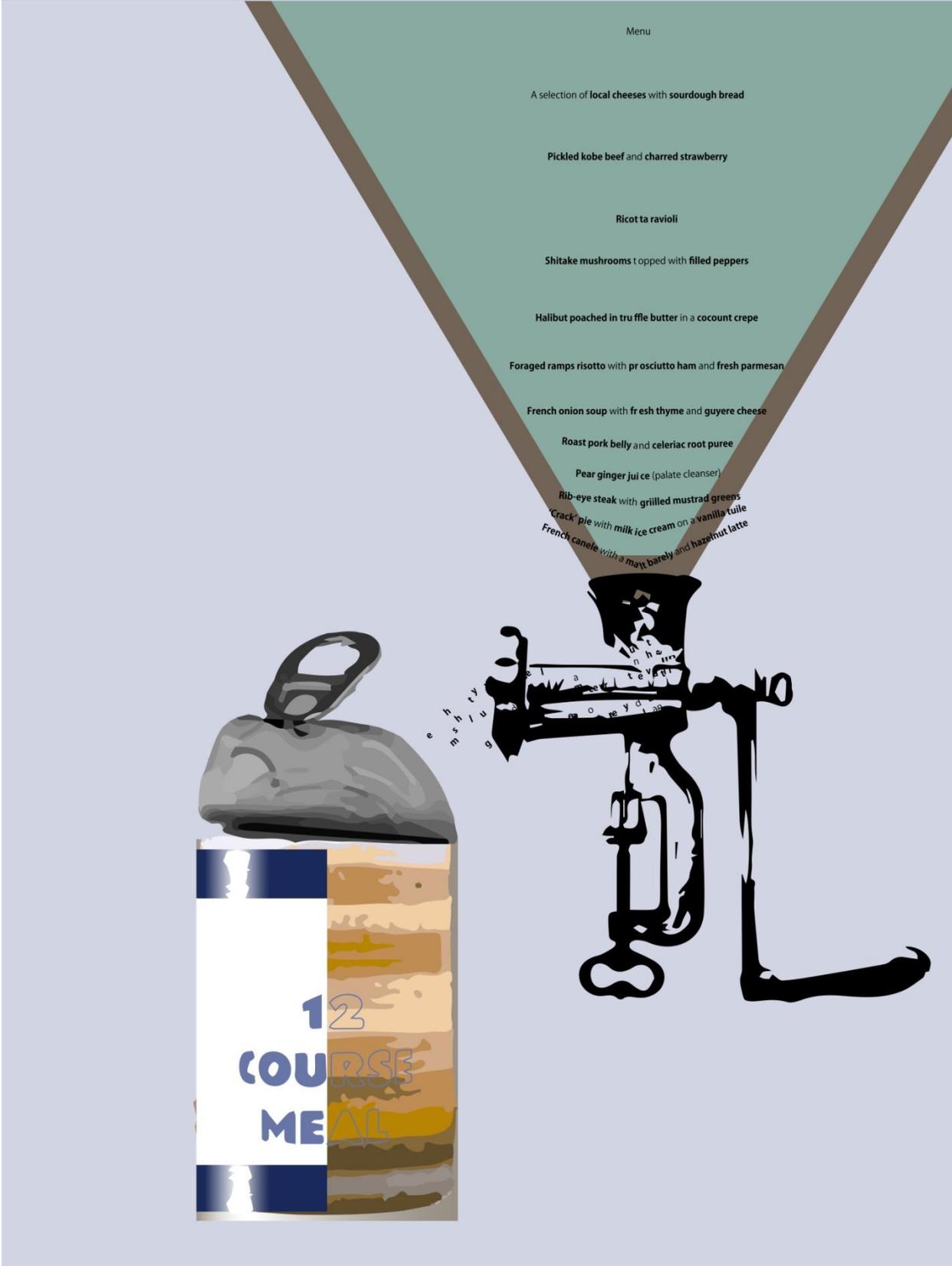
**On the Menu...**

- ☞ A selection of local cheeses with sourdough bread
- ☞ Pickled kobe beef and charred strawberry
- ☞ Ricotta ravioli
- ☞ Shitake mushrooms topped with filled peppers
- ☞ Halibut poached in truffle butter in a coconut crêpe
- ☞ Foraged ramps risotto with prosciutto and fresh parmesan
- ☞ French onion soup with fresh thyme and guyère cheese
- ☞ Roast pork belly and celeriac root puree
- ☞ Pear ginger juice (palate cleanser)
- ☞ Rib-eye steak with grilled mustard greens
- ☞ 'Crack' pie with milk ice cream on a vanilla tuile
- ☞ French canéle with a malt barley and hazelnut latte

© Chris Godfrey/Vimeo

(Retrieved from: <http://www.whatsonsanya.com/sanya-wine-2086.html>). There's nothing *wrong* with the design per se, but the way things are laid out just seems a little...amateurish. So let's make some changes. What it actually is is a thesis project by a design student major so you'd expect better, even when taken out of context. Of course this image is efficient but it is also cramped with text and images and a lack of contrast in lighting making the thumbnail pictures seemingly just as important as his thesis project on the left. So First things to do is reconsider the organization, "when in doubt space them apart"

So here's what we did:



It's by no means a perfect example but you can start to see how using the principles we've learnt so far can go to improving the legibility, flow, and overall quality of the layout. By using an ordered contrast in colours instead of the previous layout which included all those individual pictures of food, using a simpler palette can create emphasis and hierarchy within the project and thus make the project stand out more as a piece.

By using the rule of thirds and a slight variation in the size of the elements, one big piece and a medium piece, we prevent there being too much static tension on the page and instead create a comfortable fluidity to the piece.

Of course there are still many things to be improved on but hopefully you can start to see how using design principles can help resolve your layout design to make better quality work. Layout design like any design is an iterative process where you can work and reworking your subject so really all you need to do is keep on trying. The more you do and the more you see the better your sense of judgement will become and the higher the quality of your initial ideas will be.