

Designing CSS Layouts for the Flexible Web

June 11, 2008

Voices That Matter: Web Design Conference

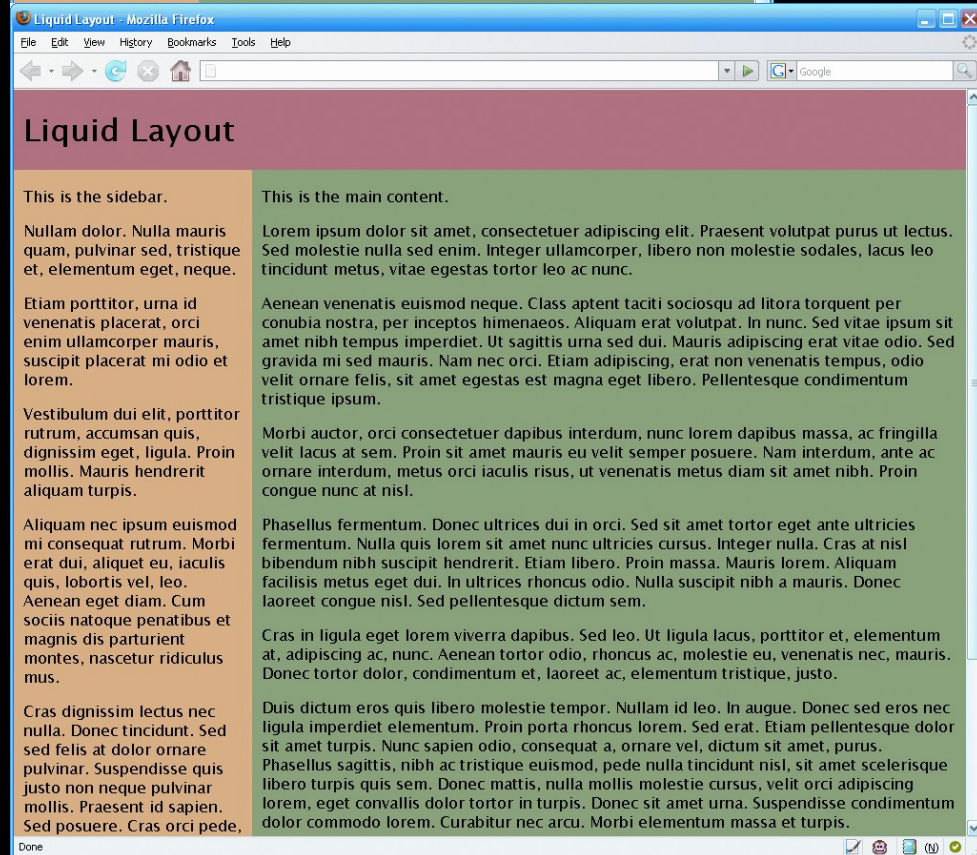
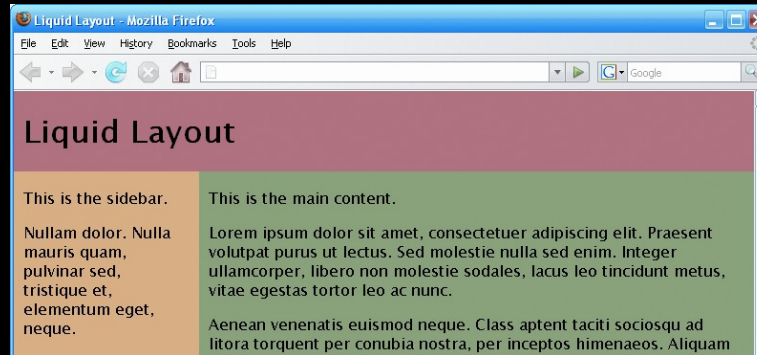
Zoe Mickley Gillenwater

What is flexible design?

- Overall width is not fixed number of pixels
- Liquid (or fluid)
- Elastic
- Hybrid

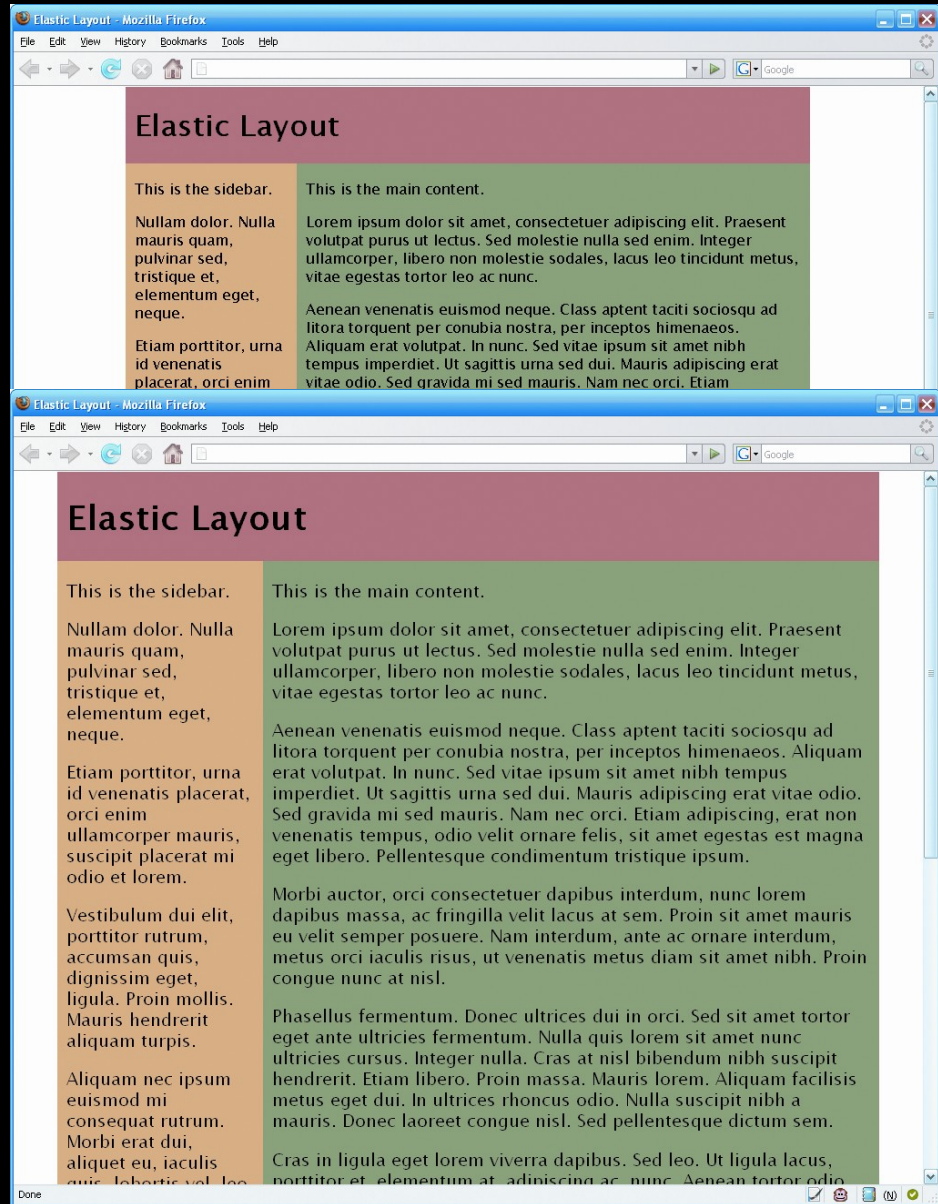
Liquid

Width adapts
to **viewport**



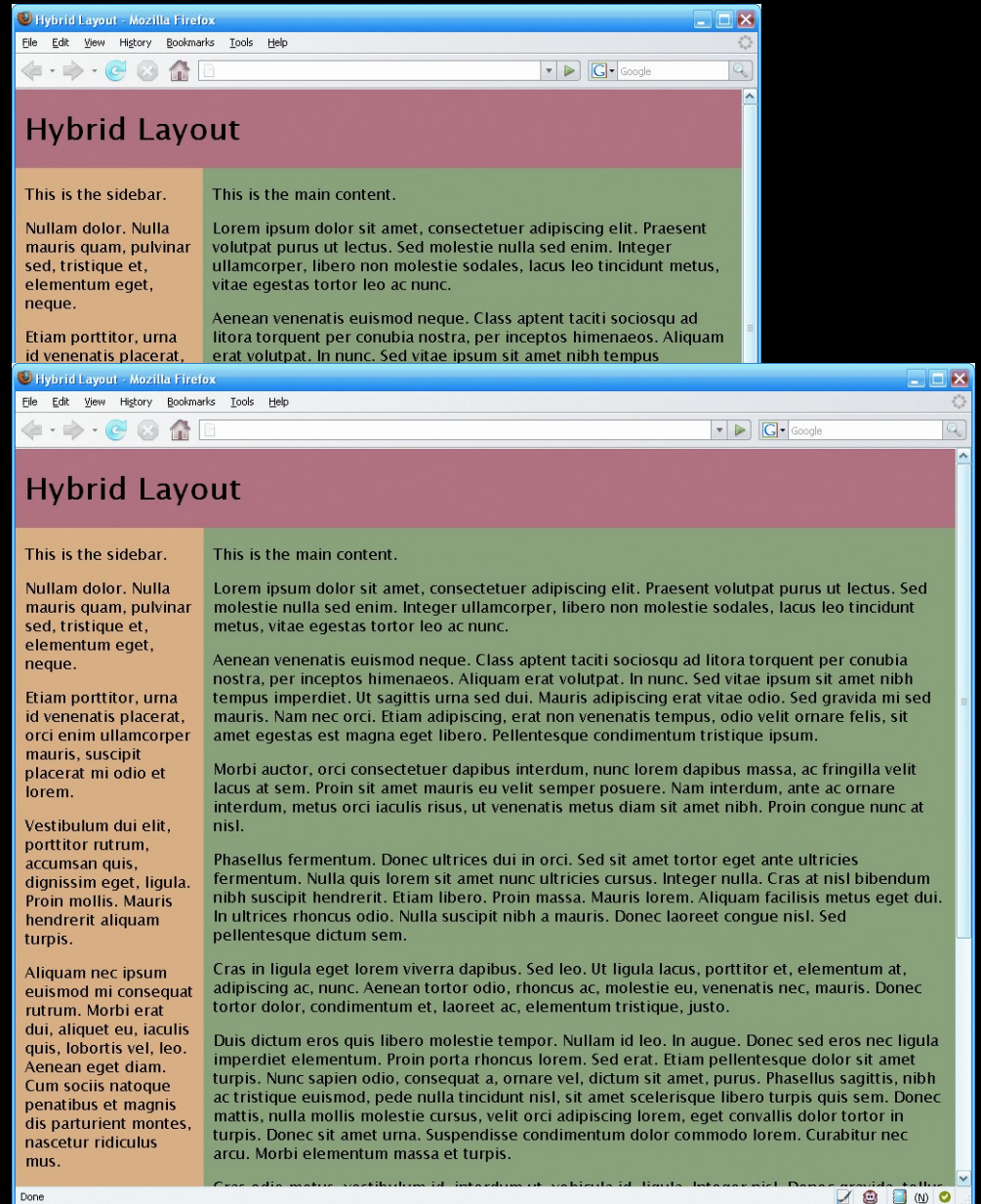
Elastic

Width adapts
to **text size**



Hybrid

Mixture of
fixed-width,
liquid, and/or
elastic for
column widths



Why bother?

- Disclaimer: fixed-width layouts are not evil
- But, flexible layouts have benefits:
 - Take advantage of screen real estate
 - Less chance of horizontal scrollbars to increase usability and readability
 - Respect user preferences
 - Increase accessibility

Image from flickr, "swimming upstream" by tempo

**Don't swim upstream
if you don't have to**

Design differently from the start

- Not every comp can be turned into liquid or elastic layout
- Learn which design features aren't “flexible-friendly” and how to change them so they are

Goals of this presentation

Fixed-width designer:

Make designs more adaptive to user preferences

Flexible designer:

Know what to watch out for/plan for in comps to make construction easier, layout more robust

Non-designer:

Identify problematic design elements to convince designer to change or tweak yourself

Not just avoiding fixed widths

Web Designer's Creed:

Thou shalt avoid fixed **heights** for anything containing text.

Width affects height

Liquid:

Change in viewport width



Text wraps differently



Change in number of lines
of text



Change in height of block
text sits in

Elastic:

Change in font size



Change in height of text
characters



Change in height of block
text sits in

Avoid:

Irregular shapes defining a text area

Irregular shapes defining a text area

Example:

Recent Comments

“ **congrats! hilarious video too Lisa!...** by **ComposeAnalysis**

“ **Thanks to every one who participated and...** by **Mostly Lisa**

“ **[...] Contact [...]...** by **MostlyLisa.com: Lisa Bettany. Canada's Sexy Geek Blog » Blog Archive » And the Vector-sized glory goes to...**

“ **I vote "Not the Fish", just becuae he's...** by **Grant**

“ **I'm with you! For the past few days** by **Dan**

Recent Posts

★ **And the Vector-sized glory goes to...**
12-03-2008

★ **[UnDigg] Omg. I had so much fun at SxSW.**
12-03-2008

★ **Vote for the First Annual Vectorama Winner!**
10-03-2008

★ **Don't Mess with my Vectorama!**
10-03-2008

★ **Audition Peep Show #2**
08-03-2008

Site by Coding Monkeys

about Lisa

Lisa Bettany lives in Vancouver, BC, Canada. She is a multimedia producer, model, actress, blogger, and geek. She mostly comes out at night... mostly.

[Read more](#)

Irregular shapes defining a text area

Example:



Bubbles- Black
\$7.99 CAD

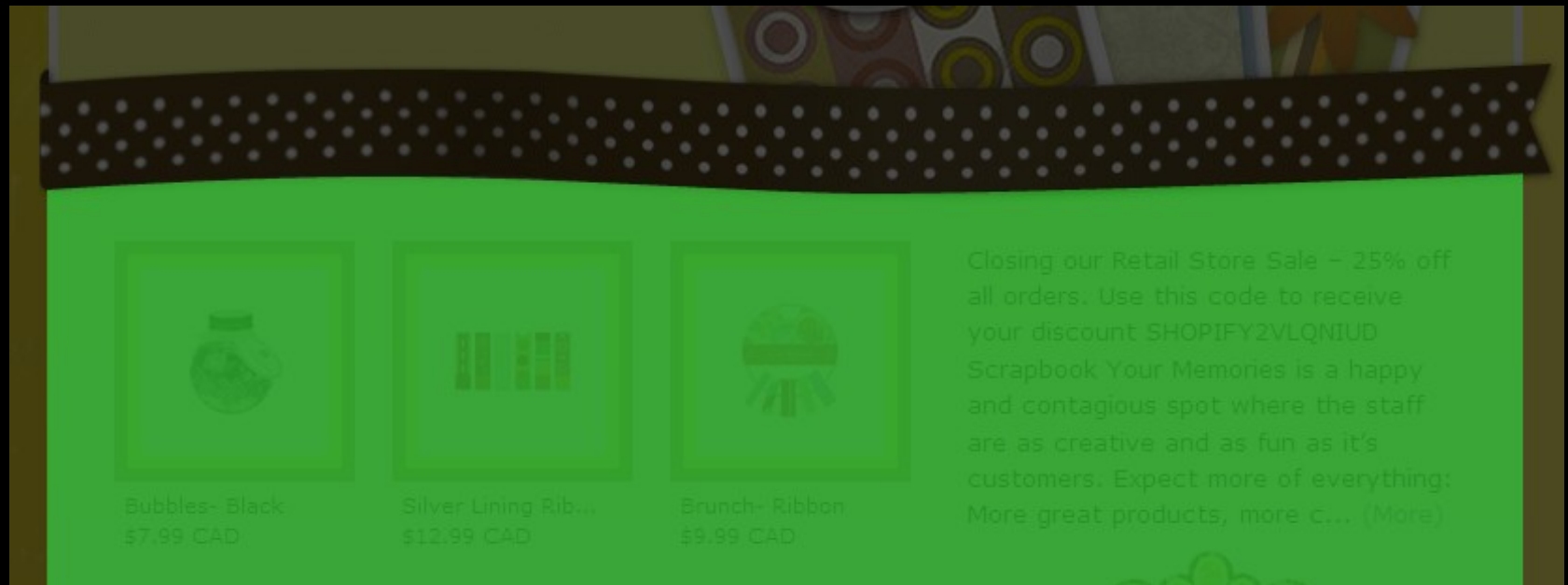
Silver Lining Rib...
\$12.99 CAD


Brunch- Ribbon
\$9.99 CAD

Closing our Retail Store Sale – 25% off all orders. Use this code to receive your discount SHOPIFY2VLQNIUD
Scrapbook Your Memories is a happy and contagious spot where the staff are as creative and as fun as it's customers. Expect more of everything: More great products, more c... ([More](#))

Irregular shapes defining a text area

Example:





**Are we stuck with only
straight rectangles?**

Irregular shapes defining a text area

Solution: Tile irregular pattern



"So don't let me give up trying, I'm beginning to receive the strength I need. To keep me on the straight and narrow..."

Download songs here

"So don't let me give up trying, I'm beginning to receive the strength I need. To keep me on the straight and narrow..."

Download songs here

.....
Straight & Narrow © S. Wiffen 2005

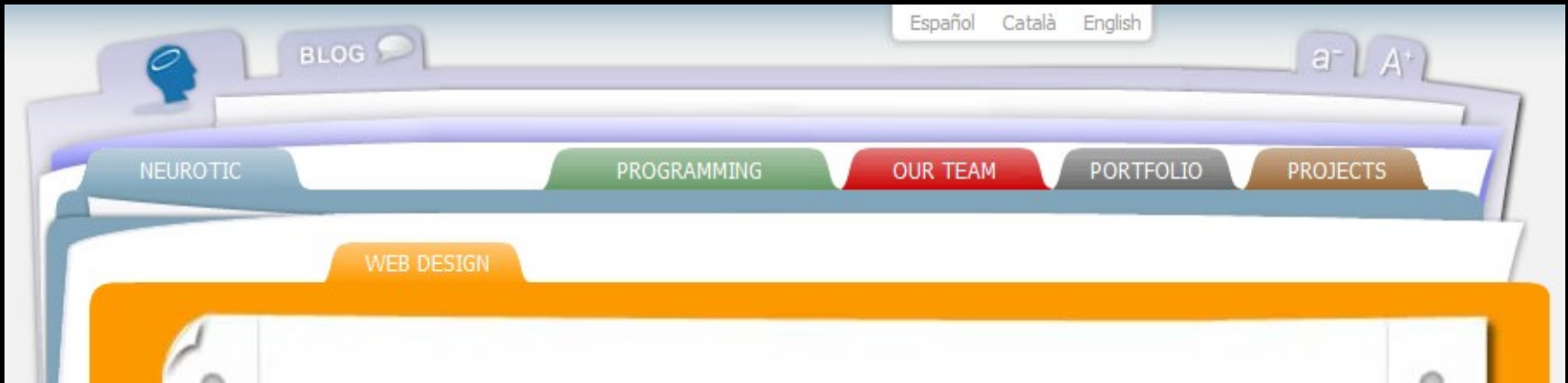
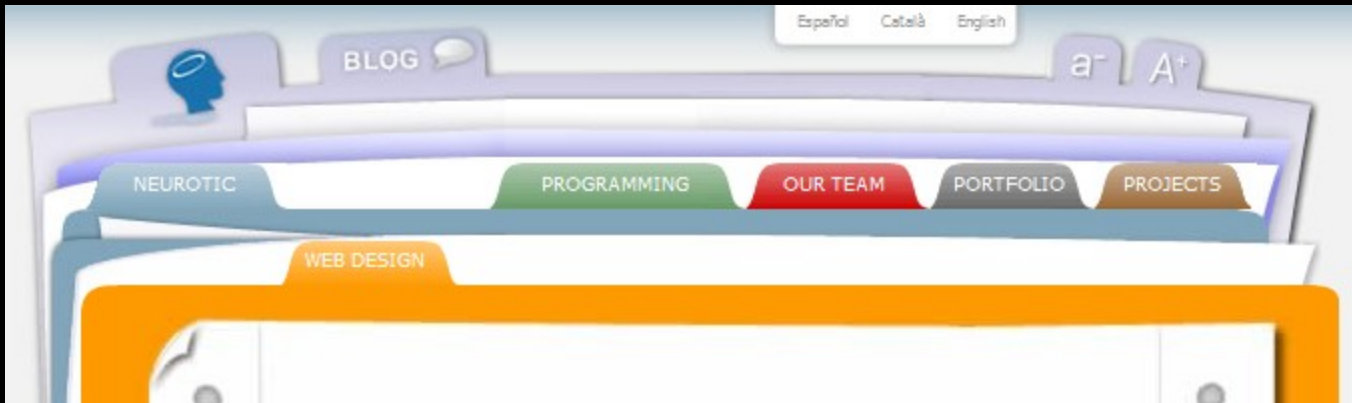
join mailing list

Enter your email to receive regular updates

Signup

Irregular shapes defining a text area

Solution: Tile straight piece



#2

Avoid:

**Text matched with images that can't
expand**

Text matched with images that can't expand

Example:

The screenshot shows the etonDIGITAL website. The navigation menu includes: Home, Why etonDIGITAL?, Services, Our work, Weblog, and Contact us. The main content area features a blue banner with the text "Web 2.0 experts at your service" and a description of their services. To the right, a "Featured projects" section is presented as a sticky note, featuring a project for pod3.tv with the tagline "Because everyone's got a story to tell" and a list of services provided: Design, XHTML/CSS, and Drupal CMS.

ED etonDIGITAL
WEB 2.0 EXPERTS

Home Why etonDIGITAL? Services Our work Weblog Contact us

Web 2.0 experts at your service

Here at etonDIGITAL we do everything web and more. From web design and development, to interactive Flash development, and everything in between - we deliver polished, professional, and affordable products that get you the attention you deserve.

www.w

Featured projects

pod3.tv
Because everyone's got a story to tell

Website: www.pod3.tv
We did: Design, XHTML/CSS, Drupal CMS

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a single, ripe, dark red cherry. The cherry is attached to a short stem and is being held between the thumb and index finger. The background is filled with out-of-focus green leaves, suggesting a cherry tree. The lighting is bright, highlighting the smooth texture of the cherry and the skin of the hand.

Pick the right images

Text matched with images that can't expand

Solution: Masked images

Get Inspired ▾ To the Point ▾ The Buzz ▾ Nuts & Bolts ▾ Behind the Scenes ▾ Home

Maximize Productivity:
Please Choose: ▾

Grow Your Practice:
Please Choose: ▾

Get Found:
Please Choose: ▾

See Solutions in Action: DEMOS
Please Choose: ▾

Everything the Doctor Ordered!

Sesame is the one-stop communications solution connecting 1,000,000+ patients to their orthodontists and dentists online right now. Sesame keeps patients connected to your office, reminds them what's great about your practice, and makes it easy for them to spread the word.

[Meet your new patient ▸](#)

Home

Text matched with images that can't expand

Solution: Masked images

Use the proper CSS to ensure text has enough space to sit in




Text matched with images that can't expand


Solution: Variable cropping

CSS technique, but requires designing with right type of images

Case Studies




East Riding of Yorkshire Council: Play and free-time strategy




East Lindsey District Council: Play Strategy

Case Studies



East Riding of Yorkshire Council: Play and free-time strategy



East Lindsey District Council: Play Strategy

Text matched with images that can't expand

Solution: Variable cropping

Can stitch together multiple to make longer

WILLAMETTE | *The first university in the West.* [A-Z Index](#) [Search](#) [Support WU](#)




About Willamette
Admissions
Academics

Welcome to Willamette
FACULTY IN THE NEWS:
Willamette University Musician Takes Home Grammy
Willamette Music Instructor Molly Barth

News Headlines
Hallie Ford Museum of Art Wins Grant from Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian
The Hallie Ford Museum of Art at Willamette

WILLAMETTE | *The first university in the West.* [A-Z Index](#) [Search](#) [Support WU](#)



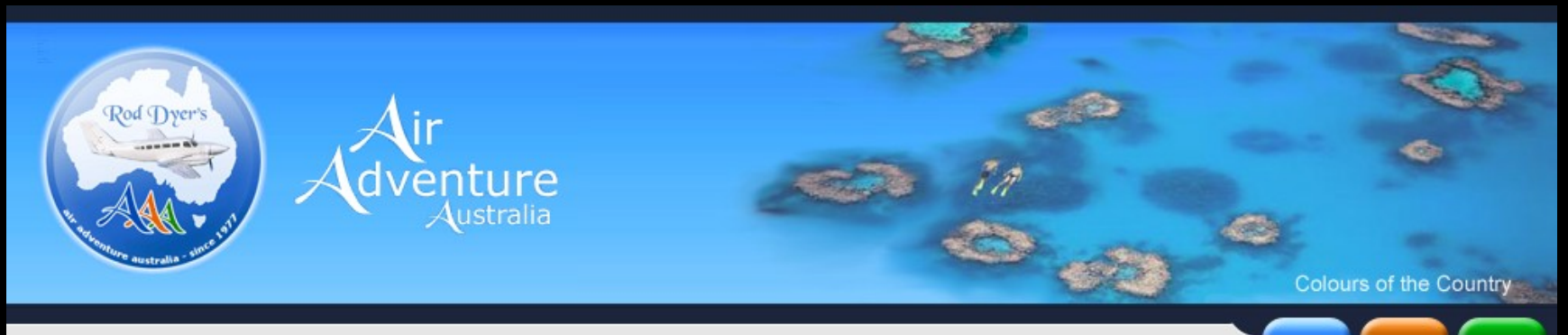
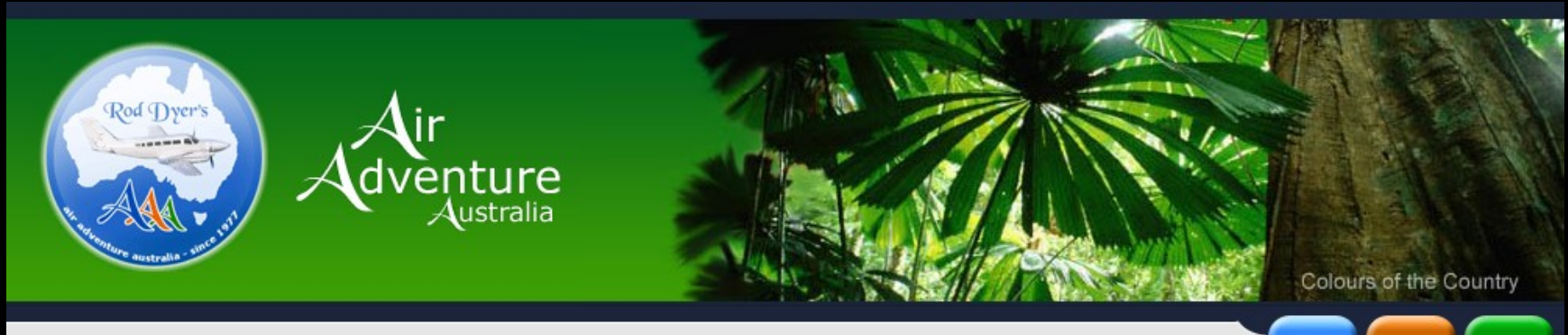
About Willamette
Admissions
Academics

Welcome to Willamette
FACULTY IN THE NEWS:
Willamette University Musician Takes Home Grammy
Willamette Music Instructor Molly Barth won a Grammy Award at this year's ceremony, along with

News Headlines
Hallie Ford Museum of Art Wins Grant from Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian
The Hallie Ford Museum of Art at Willamette University received a \$15,000 grant

Text matched with images that can't expand

Solution: Blend into background



Text matched with images that can't expand

Solution: Blend into background



Rich online **functionality** with Defacto: make your business fly.

Learn more [about Defacto](#) ▶



Rich online **functionality** with Defacto: make your business fly.

Learn more [about Defacto](#) ▶

Text matched with images that can't expand

Solution: Scalable images

CSS technique, but requires designing with right type of images

LA STORIA DEL CASTELLO DI BOLGHERI



Le origini del Castello di Bolgheri risalgono al 1200. Fin da allora proprietà della famiglia dei Conti della Gheradesca. Nella seconda metà del 1700 vengono effettuati restauri e migliorie al palazzo e la costruzione delle cantine. Nel 1895 viene modificata la facciata del castello, con la realizzazione della torre e dei merli così come ancora oggi essa appare. **La Storia del Castello**

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VINO ED OLIO



* CASTELLO DI BOLGHERI

AGRITURISMO



* PODERE SAN SEBASTIANO

VINO ED OLIO



* CASTELLO DI BOLGHERI

AGRITURISMO



* PODERE SAN SEBASTIANO

Avoid:

Fixed-width, full-width content

Fixed-width, full-width content

Example:

What We Offer

Classes & Programs

Personal Training

Fitness Center

Aquatic Center

Child Care

Medical Services

Nutrition



“My successes have been numerous and wonderful, I have lost 20lbs and many inches, I have cut my blood pressure

Personal Training



Quickly and safely achieve your fitness goals under the direct supervision of a qualified fitness professional with Roseville Health & Wellness' personal training programs. Train with some of Northern California's finest degreed and nationally certified professionals to fine-tune your fitness regiment.

Our personal trainers will help you decrease body fat, improve strength and increase coordination, flexibility and muscular balance. You'll learn the correct way to use equipment and the appropriate form and technique necessary to maximize your results.

Fixed-width, full-width content

Example:

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Roseville Health & Wellness Center. The header features the center's logo on the left, which consists of a square containing the letters 'R' and 'H' above a stylized 'W' and 'C'. To the right of the logo, the text 'ROSEVILLE HEALTH & WELLNESS CENTER' is displayed in a clean, sans-serif font. In the top right corner, a dark red badge reads 'Voted Roseville's Best & #1 in Nation'. Below the header is a navigation menu with five green buttons: 'Home', 'What We Offer', 'Success Stories', 'Membership', 'About', and 'Contact'. A large, dark red banner below the navigation contains the text 'it's all about total body wellness in a comfortable and supportive environment' in a white, cursive font. Below this banner are three photo-based sections. The first section shows two smiling women with the text 'it is possible!' and a 'MORE' link. The second section shows a group of five diverse people smiling together with the text 'you can do it!' and a 'MORE' link. The third section shows three women in a pool with the text 'feel your best!' and a 'MORE' link. Below these sections are three columns of content. The first column is titled 'Wellness Memberships for' and lists 'Individuals', 'Families', and 'Seniors'. The second column is titled 'Whatever your' and lists 'Age', 'Shape', and 'Size'. The third column is titled 'Our Wellness Center has' and lists 'Fitness Center', 'Aquatic Center', and 'Personal Training'. Each list item is preceded by a right-pointing arrow icon.

ROSEVILLE
HEALTH & WELLNESS
CENTER

Voted Roseville's Best & #1 in Nation

Home What We Offer Success Stories Membership About Contact

it's all about total body wellness in a comfortable and supportive environment

it is possible! MORE

you can do it! MORE

feel your best! MORE

Wellness Memberships for

- Individuals
- Families
- Seniors

Whatever your

- Age
- Shape
- Size

Our Wellness Center has

- Fitness Center
- Aquatic Center
- Personal Training

Fixed-width, full-width content

Solution: Non-full-width images

Recent Work

 **Odyssey Learning Systems Inc.**
XHTML / CSS

 **Vancouver Comedy Fest**
Print Design

 **HMA**
Print Design

Recent Work

 **Odyssey Learning Systems Inc.**
XHTML / CSS

 **Vancouver Comedy Fest**
Print Design

 **HMA**
Print Design

Fixed-width, full-width content

Solution: Scrollbars for large content

CSS technique using overflow property



The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying a comic strip. The comic is titled "Consumption" and is dated February 15th, 2008, by Joshua Porter. The comic depicts two characters: a blue one and a green one. The blue character says, "Since you bought 'Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, & Swallow Citizens Whole' we recommend you buy...nothing. Nothing at all." The green character responds, "Now TH recomme". The comic is displayed within a browser window that has a scrollbar at the bottom, indicating that the content is wider than the browser's viewport. The URL "bokardo.com" is visible in the address bar.

Comic: Consumption February 15th, 2008
by [Joshua Porter](#) | [8 Comments](#)

Consumption

Since you bought "Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, & Swallow Citizens Whole" we recommend you buy...nothing. Nothing at all.

Now TH recomme

bokardo.com

Porter, a web designer/developer, researcher, and writer. I live in Newburyport, MA, USA.

WHAT IS SOCIAL DESIGN?

SOCIAL DESIGN is design that focuses on the social lives of users. It deals with the activities, behaviors, and motivations of people who work and play together through software interfaces. It is built on the observation that many of the decisions we make are greatly affected by those we surround ourselves with in our social lives: our family,

What's wrong with this picture?

Beechwood Animal Shelter

Search: go [Skip to Main Content](#)


[Home](#) [Adopt a Pet](#) [Get Involved](#) [Our Programs](#) [News and Events](#) [About the Shelter](#)


Beechwood Animal Shelter is a no-kill animal rescue and adoption center that works tirelessly to help rescued dogs and cats find loving adoptive parents. Find out more [about us](#), our [programs and services](#), and [how you can help](#).


you can help
please donate today


meet us
May 10 next adoption fair


Another happy ending
"We adopted Dutch earlier this spring. Dutch is doing great and loves to play in the yard with our other two dogs. Everyone he meets wants to take him home. He's very well behaved, great around children of all ages and loves giving doggie kisses."

 **Styx**
Shorthair, black
Male, 2 years

 **Shelby**
Yellow lab mix
Female, 8 years

 **Picasso**
Shorthair, orange tabby
Male, 10 months

 **Alley**
Longhair, gray
Male, 5 years

 These are just a few of the hundreds of dogs and cats we have available for adoption right now. You can use the form at right to find your perfect pet. Please also consider fostering a pet until it can find a permanent home.

Type:
 Dog
 Cat

Breed Type:
 Any
 Purebred
 Mixed Breed

Sex:
 Any
 Male
 Female

Length of Care:
 Adopt
 Foster


A more flexible-friendly version

Beechwood Animal Shelter

Search: go [Skip to Main Content](#)

[Home](#) [Adopt a Pet](#) [Get Involved](#) [Our Programs](#) [News and Events](#) [About the Shelter](#)

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please donate today




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Male, 2 years




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Male, 10 months



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Longhair, gray
Male, 5 years



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Type: Dog Cat

Breed Type: Any Purebred Mixed Breed

Sex: Any Male Female

Length of Care: Adopt Foster

search



How it might look narrower

Beechwood
Animal Shelter

Search: go [Skip to Main Content](#)

Home Adopt a Pet Get Involved Our Programs News and Events About the Shelter

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Type:
 Dog Cat

Breed Type:
 Any Purebred
 Mixed Breed

Sex:
 Any Male Female

ADOPT ME!

Flexible design inspiration

www.zomigi.com/blog/inspiration-for-flexible-web-design

Questions?

Zoe Mickley Gillenwater

design@zomigi.com

www.zomigi.com