Ethan Marcotte

RESPONSIVE WEB DESIGN

FOREWORD BY Jeremy Keith

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD

Language has magical properties. The word "glamour"—which was originally a synonym for magic or spell-casting—has its origins in the word "grammar." Of all the capabilities of language, the act of naming is the most magical and powerful of all.

The short history of web design has already shown us the transformative power of language. Jeffrey Zeldman gave us the term "web standards" to rally behind. Jesse James Garrett changed the nature of interaction on the web by minting the word "Ajax."

When Ethan Marcotte coined the term "responsive web design" he conjured up something special. The technologies existed already: fluid grids, flexible images, and media queries. But Ethan united these techniques under a single banner, and in so doing changed the way we think about web design.

Ethan has a way with words. He is, of course, the perfect person to write a book on responsive web design. But he has done one better than that: he has written *the* book on responsive web design.

If you're hoping for a collection of tricks and tips for adding a little bit of superficial flair to the websites that you build, then keep looking, my friend. This little beauty operates at a deeper level.

When you've finished reading this book (and that won't take very long) take note of how you approach your next project. It's possible that you won't even notice the mind-altering powers of Ethan's words, delivered, as they are, in his light-hearted, entertaining, sometimes downright hilarious style; but I guarantee that your work will benefit from the prestidigitation he is about to perform on your neural pathways.

Ethan Marcotte is a magician. Prepare to be spellbound.

—Jeremy Keith

1
OUR RESPONSIVE WEB

> " *Something there is that doesn't love a wall…"*
> —ROBERT FROST, "Mending Wall"

AS I BEGIN WRITING THIS BOOK, I realize I can't guarantee you'll read these words on a printed page, holding a tiny paperback in your hands. Maybe you're sitting at your desk with an electronic copy of the book up on your screen. Perhaps you're on your morning commute, tapping through pages on your phone, or swiping along on a tablet. Or maybe you don't even see these words as I do: maybe your computer is simply reading this book aloud.

Ultimately, I know so little about you. I don't know how you're reading this. I can't.

Publishing has finally inherited one of the web's central characteristics: flexibility. Book designer and publisher Craig Mod believes that his industry is quickly entering a "post-artifact" phase (http://bkaprt.com/rwd/1/), that the digital age is revising our definition of what constitutes a "book."

Of course, web designers have been grappling with this for some time. In fact, our profession has never had an "artifact" of its own. At the end of the day, there isn't any *thing* produced by designing for the web, no tangible objects to hold, to cherish, to pass along to our children. But despite the oh-so-ethe-real nature of our work, the vocabulary we use to talk about it is anything but: "masthead," "whitespace," "leading," even the much-derided "fold." Each of those words is directly inherited from print design: just taken down from the shelf, dusted off, and re-applied to our new, digital medium.

Some of that recycling is perfectly natural. We're creatures of habit, after all: as soon as we move into a new city, or start a new job, we're mapping previous experiences onto the new,
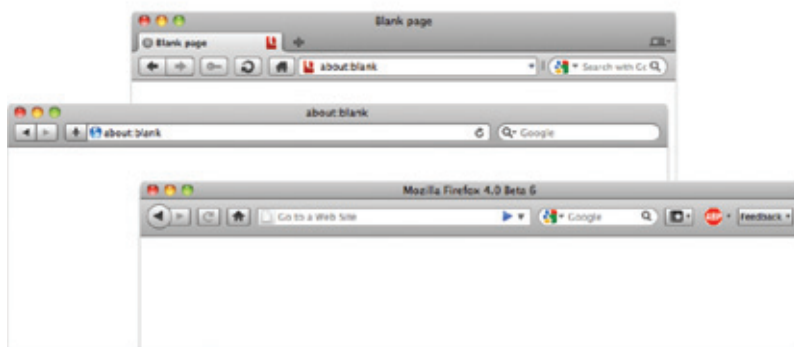
FIG 1.2: The browser window, our true canvas. (For better or worse.)

more foreign one, using them to gradually orient ourselves. And since the web *is* a young medium, it's only natural to borrow some terms from what we know: graphic design provides us with a rich history that spans centuries, and we'd be remiss not to use its language to help shape our industry.

But our debt to print goes much deeper than language. In fact, there's another concept we've borrowed, one we might not acknowledge all that often: the canvas (FIG 1.1).

In every other creative medium, the artist begins her work by selecting a canvas. A painter chooses a sheet of paper or fabric to work on; a sculptor might select a block of stone from a quarry. Regardless of the medium, choosing a canvas is a powerful, creative act: before the first brush stroke, before striking the chisel, the canvas gives the art a dimension and shape, a width and a height, establishing a boundary for the work yet to come.

On the web, we try to mimic this process. We even call it the same thing: we create a "canvas" in our favorite image editor, a blank document with a width and height, with dimension and shape. The problem with this approach is that we're one step removed from our *actual* canvas: the browser window, and all of its inconsistencies and imperfections (FIG 1.2). Because let's face it: once they're published online, our designs are immediately at the mercy of the people who view