

# Design Savvy: It Takes A Practiced Eye!

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The skill needed to design sophisticated and tasteful web sites with wide appeal can be developed by practically everyone. A good first step in developing this skill is to observe. Not just look, but thoroughly observe. As you visit sites on the web, really look at how they are constructed. When you find one that appeals to you, spend some time there. Scrutinize it in depth. What is it that draws you and why?



Learning to design web pages is both a structured process and an individualized one. There are a number of different ways to learn the basics, from memorizing and using straight-forward html coding on your own, to using html editors that plug in the code according to your direction. Both methods work, and suit people according to their personalities, time constraints, learning curves, and personal preferences. What is not so easy to learn or delegate to an external program editor is how to design a site with style and savvy.

You've seen it before. The commendable yet obvious lack of experience demonstrated in home pages that sprawl from one side of the monitor to the other, with a few "stock" graphics or animations stuck in for good measure. The owner may be proud, and rightly so. This is, after all, their first attempt at creating their own unique web signature. That same owner, two years down the road, will likely look back at their initial pages with some amusement. They tried, yes, but the savvy just wasn't there, nor the style.

On the other hand, you may come across a site obviously created by a professional. Functional yes, but a site that does not ignite your interest all that much. Well laid out, great navigation, good quality graphics, yet you do not feel life or energy or any dynamic feature. What is missing? Is it the color scheme? The routineness of the layout? Uninteresting images? Answering these questions can help you begin to develop the eye that is needed to truly "get" what is inviting, what appeals on a grand level, what draws a visitor back time after time to any particular web site.

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Color scheme?

Use of space and objects?

Quality of the content?

Visual appeal of the graphics?

The use of Java, Flash, Shockwave?

The unique look?

If it is truly a top notch site, you will likely answer in the affirmative to most of the above characteristics. Great sites combine the triad of visual appeal, functionality, and valuable content. After you've looked at the site for awhile, click on "View Source" and study the html code used. This is a wonderful way to begin to understand how people create great sites. You can learn from the experts how to arrange your code to get quality looking web pages. Of course, you would not copy their code per se, but you can learn a lot about layout, spacing, use of java and other advanced applications to make your site both functional and stylish.

Sites that really stand out use visual metaphors and a thematic approach to the use of color, layout, space, titles, navigation aids and how the content is presented. All of the elements blend, creating a harmonious feel that captures the reader's attention with the desire to see more. You can have the best content in the world, but if set in a humdrum visual environment, the chances that people will stay to read your golden nuggets are slim. At first, start out simple. As you gain

confidence, experiment - but remember, to keep it clean. Avoid the "bells and whistles" unless they really do enhance your site.

A fantastic place to start observing well-made sites is offered by [The Design Project](#), a collection of dozens of outstanding web designers who offer advice, their insights into what makes designs memorial, and examples of their work. Expert advice in how to create a flawless web site is also offered by [Glass Dog](#). The step by step approach presented helps you to see "the forest for the trees" when deciding how to fashion your web site and to learn how to make it stand out in the crowd.

Both of these sites can guide you in developing that critical discerning eye that sets the average web designer apart from the visionary one. It takes a practiced eye, but once you've developed one, your creations will shine with your own ingenuity and spark. Who knows, you could create your own "wave" in this growing cyber-ocean of mediocre, good, great, and ground-breaking web design. We all have to start somewhere. Developing a keen eye is what gives you the edge. So start looking, really seeing, and in your mind's eye, envision the site that would best reflect your style, your savvy, your self, your content.

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