BARBI BREEN-GURLEY
DRESSAGE WEBSITE

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Abstract

This is a report about a senior project website design. It is designed to broaden a customer base for a local company. This report contains information pertaining to the development of this website.

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Glossary of Terms

Dressage-Related Terms

Cribber — a horse that habitually chews on wood out of boredom or addiction. Many

horse owners are familiar with this behavior, and discourage it as best as possible. It

is unhealthy for the digestion, and secondary health problems can arise as a result.

Dressage — enthusiasts often refer to it as 'horse ballet' although this does not serve

adequately as a proper definition. It is an ancient form of horse riding and control

that is believed to have started during Ancient Greece. It began as a military necessity

in dealing with cavalry, but has since developed into an art form that was embraced

by European aristocrats in the height of its popularity during the Victorian era.

Piaffe — a dressage movement where the horse has a highly collected and cadenced

trot in place.

Pirouette — A movement in dressage in which a horse pivots on one hind leg an rotates

using the other hind leg while the fore legs are held aloft.

Passage — a highly elevated and extremely powerful trot used in high-level dressage. Both

the fore legs and hind legs are drawn up to more of an extreme than a working trot.

Stable — typically known as a building that is fitted with stalls in which livestock is

kept. Among dressage enthusiasts, it is also synonymous with the word 'ranch' and

implies something finer than a 'ranch' — suggestive of a fully equipped property with pristine arenas assembled with appropriate turf and stalls fenced with untarnished steel, where wood is inaccessible to horses and the feed is high-quality.

Tack — any of the equipment or accessories used for horses to wear while being ridden or for other purposes. This includes bridles, harnesses, saddles and so forth.

Design-Related Terms

Back-End — any coding or design entity that is used to form the appearance and content of a website for user interaction. This includes coding that creates forms, databases for various applications, and so forth. It is the structure that underlies what is called the front-end.

Bandwidth — throughput of data uploaded and downloaded between two computers. The larger the bandwidth the more data that can be transferred per second.

CMS — a Content Management System is a back-end program that deals with the content of complex websites. Various sites use these systems depending on application. It can be made to reconcile databases and designed to act as intermediary between back-end users and content.

CSS — also known as Cascading Style Sheets. It is a method of scripting that assigns various graphic objects for designing pages with user-defined features. It is used as an extension of the HTML, and makes use of a layering effect that cannot be used with

HTML alone. CSS can also be used for typesetting.

DSL — a Digital Subscriber Line is a circuit in a regular phone line that is faster than regular phone systems as they are used in Dial-Up to connect to the Internet. Its speed and bandwidth are comparable to cable, though somewhat slower.

Domain — construed as an address as it appears in a web browser. Typically, it contains the sequence beginning with "http://www" and ends with ".com", ".net", ".biz", ".gov", etc. It is also called a domain name, URL (Uniform Resource Locator), or web address.

Dropbox — a program that acts as an active server between computers. The service is amounts to having a thumb drive but requires all active computers with access to its contents to download the main program. From the server, users can edit content as necessary from any location.

External Link — a link to a site outside the one currently occupied by the browser. Often, linking to outside sites is considered to be of benefit to the site to which the link is referring. Without a means to reference a site from outside aside from a search engine, very little would prompt someone to access it.

Front-End — the appearance of a website. Typically, a graphic designer is relied upon to structure the arrangement of the website, though there is a lot of back-end work involved in developing the appearance.

KB — an abbreviation of Kilobytes. In terms of the contemporary computer. This unit of measure is somewhat outdated, except in reference to the size of web pages, as it is crucial to make them as small as possible.

Link — a line of text or an image that can connect two pages of Internet content. Accessing the page in reference can be done when a user clicks on it. The link is possible through the HTML (Hyper-Text Markup Language) coding system that consists of the following line of code: . Less-than signs and greater-than signs are used to enclose both the first and second halves of the code (is considered the second half), while a line of text or a reference to an image is placed between the two halves.

Splash Page — also called simply 'Splash', this is a web page that precedes the main web site. It is usually designed to be a teaser or a loading page for larger websites, or sites that contain significant amounts of multimedia. It is often designed with a different sensibility, and does not necessarily follow the same underlying grid as the pages within the main body of the site.

Trilithon — a Paleolithic construction consisting of two upright stones or columns with a horizontal stone laying flat atop both. The topmost piece is called the lintel with the two column stones called posts (e.g. Stonehenge).

Web Host — a company that provides server space to a company or individual that wants to have a website published on the Internet.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

Sea Horse Ranch is a company owned and operated by Barbi Breen-Gurley and her husband Geof Gurley in Los Osos. This company provides a number of services pertaining to horses and dressage including boarding horses, instruction in dressage as well as various clinics and seminars.

Barbi has been instructing dressage and has also been competing athletically on a national level since 1970. She has achieved numerous accolades and medals, and has also written a book on the subject, *Enlightened Riding*, with co-author, Janet Emmons.

Sea Horse Ranch was seeking a new website design to update its look and content. Their goal is to attract new clients and draw up enthusiasm with existing clientele. They also want to include some other new features.

Objective of the Study

I elected to design a website for the body work of the senior project. In this work, I wanted to exemplify the expertise and refined quality of design for which Cal Poly is renown.

Limitations of the Study

Cost Estimating. Initial estimates were a great surprise to the client. Given the inexperience of this designer in the process, a few compromises in compensation were made

assuming that some of the work for this project would include a lot of research in CSS and HTML coding for edification. Even so, the projection was much higher than what was set aside for this project. This was my first hurdle in the process of this study. After a lengthy discussion over the design process and the

Barbi Breen-Gurley has been an active dressage trainer and instructor since 1970 after attaining her BHSAI from Moat House, England. She has won numerous local, state and national championships each year and has been on the USEF long list and developing rider list several times on her different horses. She is a USDF Gold Medalist and has trained 7 of her horses to the Grand Prix level. She is a senior dressage judge and Quadrille judge.

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Figure 1 - This is a sample of type as it is rendered as copy in the Georgia typeface (top) and the same copy rasterized for 72 dpi (bottom).

implications of a design overhaul of the entire site, an agreement was made to a slightly reduced estimate.

Initial Sketches. During the initial stages of production, the look of the web pages were sketched out in Illustrator, which is unorthodox, illustrative flexibility was needed for forms such as silhouetted floral patterns that were being considered. Unfortunately, the method was becoming unwieldy and the ability to simply cut and paste the pages up into HTML proved impossible. Given that the 'Calendar' page would be updated regularly, and that body copy can lose fidelity after being converted to images (see Figure I), it was decided that the whole site should be transferred to CSS (Cascading Style Sheets) code eventually.

Figure II - One of the first sketches I laid out in Illustrator before implementing a CSS format. In this phase of the construction, I considered creating boxes in the page I could later place text boxes in with CSS. Concerned about the size of the page as it was forming, this plan never came to fruition, though it may be something I'll explore in another project.

Coding. After realizing that the site needed more adaptability, focus was transferred to making the site with CSS. It turned out that the photographic textual backgrounds captured on the first photography session were too large and cumbersome to manage in the context of coding (Figure II). In keeping with the necessity of minimizing the space it occupies, it has been suggested that web pages should be no more than 40 KB.

Background Design. In order to fix the problem with the empty background, it was necessary to replace it with something smaller. In my search, it was discovered that many

websites employed a technique in designing a very small illustration at 16 × 16 pixels that can be repeated in a pattern horizontally and vertically across an entire page without burdening the web page with long loading time (Figure II & III).

Photography. A week since the third meeting (see pg 28, Stages of Development) the digital photography to be supplied hadn't been received and the progress of the project had been waning. A second photoshoot was ventured with Noelle Luchino at Sea Horse Ranch to capture Barbi as she practiced in the morning at Sea Horse Ranch. It was agreed that she would see the photographs of her horsemanship before publication. After reviewing the photographs from the second visit, Sea Horse Ranch decided that none of them were appropriate. Their reasons were as follows: The photos were taken during a practice session with Barbi and her prize-winning horse; she was not dressed in formal attire, nor was their performance on that date on par with the skill for which she is best known (Figure IV).

By the fourth meeting with Geof, additional photos that had been referenced in the notes that Sea Horse Ranch pro-vided for content had not been received. In this meeting, Geof emphasized that
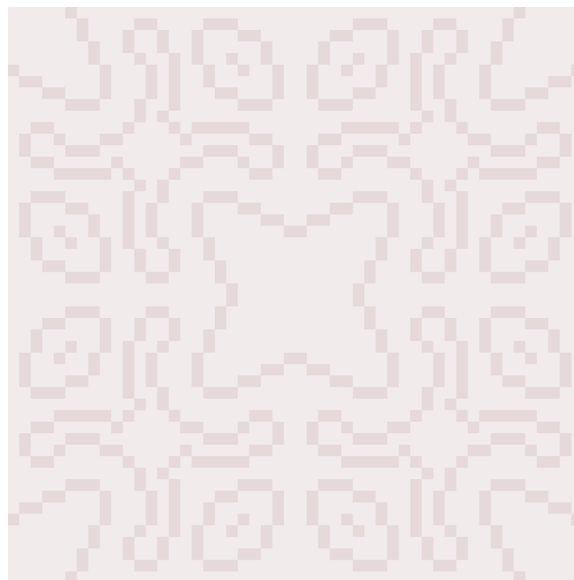

Figure III - This 16 × 16 pixel square is repeated vertically and horizontally over the page so that the browser only needs to access this tiny image once. A photographic background would be much larger.

Figure IV - Photograph by Noelle Luchino with Victorian style framework treatment as implemented in the new website.

there needed to be a strict formal adherence to the notes provided in terms of which photographs were to be seen at which points in the website. Also, some photographs were deemed to be inappropriate in the context of dressage. For instance, an image from the first photoshoot was taken in which Octango was chewing on his nameplate (see Figure V). This nameplate was carved out of wood, and unbeknownst to this designer horses that tended to chew on wood were considered 'cribbers', and therefore shed an unfavorable light on both Barbi and Sea Horse Ranch. Unexpectedly, since he had seen many of the photos that were to be put in use for the website since the beginning, Geof had shown disapproval for the photos in place, and put stern emphasis on Barbi's image to other dressage riders. Further, he indicated that any photographs of Barbi not dressed appropriately for the activity shed a negative light on her. He was disconcerted by the way the photograph had been taken of Barbi riding Octango (Figure IV), stating that photographs with horses and riders only be taken in such a way as to include either a whole profile at ninety degrees, including the legs in their entirety, or with the horse and rider at full frontal, including the legs and hooves in their entirety.

Figure V - Who would think this picture would cause such a stir! Obviously, the people in the horse community. Hopefully, Octango didn't get punished as a result of it...

Scope of Contract. Geof insisted during the fourth meeting that the website was to include a 'Testimonials' page, which had not previously been discussed. It was noted that this would mean additional fees due to the additional page being out of the scope of the original agreement.

After this meeting a great deal of progress was made. Most of the complications were derived from the problem of not having all the desired photographs and having to scour current resources for photography Barbi had referenced in her notes. It was necessary to charge fees for proofreading and data-entry, as these were uncharacteristic for the job, and copy had to be physically typed in instead of simply placing (copy and paste) it in to their respective pages since the digital counterpart was not available.

Content Provided by Client. When photography from Geof was finally received, they were reviewed and their quality was in question, as they are neither current, nor are these photos of the same caliber as that of Noelle's. Many of the photos are scratched or cluttered with dust. Often the horse and rider were out of focus, and because the form of the subject is more important to dressage riders and trainers, they often don't have any

compositional energy (Figure VI). Due to the limitations of the contract and the respect given to client's priorities, the photos were posted with no enhancements made to quality.

Client-Designer Relations. Over the course of this project, unbeknownst to this designer, Geof Gurley did not make any attempts to communicate

Figure VI - This is an example of how dressage photographs generally look. They're taken specifically to display the form of both the rider and horse working in tandem. While this is appealing to many riders, it is not always exciting to look at.

the progress of the project with key partners, namely Barbi Breen-Gurley, his wife. The conference that followed Barbi's initial response to the website is the sixth since the beginning of the project. This was a lengthy meeting that involved a lot of explanation on the part of the designer in terms of putting reason to various design choices. She was not only disinterested, but believed that her new choices were exactly what she wanted, despite advisement to the contrary.

Explanations for design solutions did not satisfy her, and much of the basis of her decision-making was grounded on the issue of her inability to see the web page or the copy. She agreed, however, to leave certain things, trusting in some of the aesthetic solutions in terms of the theme, though many of the changes she wanted in exchange

This is Comic Sans MS
This is Georgia

Figure VII - More inexpensive websites are limited to type bundled with browsers. It's best to use some discretion and avoid fonts that don't exemplify one's clients.

did not meet approval with the designer. She was determined to put the text in all of its forms in the font Comic Sans MS and color them either blue or purple

(see Figure VII and VIII, respectively).

By the end of the meeting, the sum total of changes amounted to a great deal of work. A change order agreement was the first step in this process. This needed to be finished and signed afterward, because Geof believed it was ill-advised for the subject of financial concerns to be mentioned in Barbi's presence, or it would take much longer. As it was, the meeting was two hours in length.
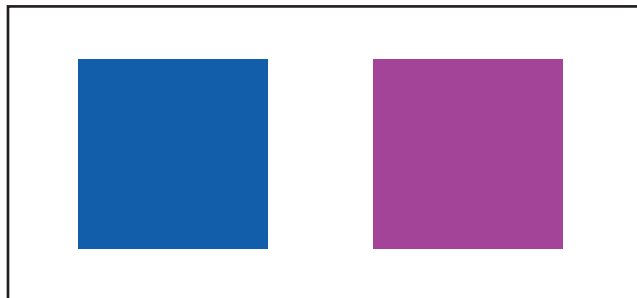

Figure VIII - Barbi's colors. They provide contrast and tension when placed close together. Although this combination may work under some circumstances, in copy it would be repulsive.

Chapter II – Review of Research

Cost Estimates

Research on estimates was made by investigating the protocol of seasoned web designers. It was important to know the order of operations, and the approximate way in which time was apportioned to each stage of the project. It was also necessary to know the amount of work that typically gets contracted out, and how that reflects on the estimates.

From the early stages of this research, it was discovered that there were a variety of levels of web design based on complexity. Because there are a variety of formats concerning the way a website is used, some of the billing is thusly complicated. For sites that are used as Blogs, treatment is fairly simplified, whereas sites that are termed e-commerce, the complexity can be colossal.

An estimate was managed based on a paradigm put in place by individual web designers as well as through researching service providers and their stipulations. Whereas the production of an entire website can be expensive, beginning at approximately $2000, sub-pages can be included at a nominal fee. The reasoning behind this is that the effort to constructing the website as a whole is a far more difficult task when compared to adding to something that has already undergone massive development.

Also worth noting is that currently, there are a number of services provided to businesses that supply website templates at nominal fees starting as low as $35. These

services are very well advertised on the Internet and on television. Because they are cheap, they undermine the quality of real design services.

Marketing

Marketing research proved to be the most difficult to ascertain. According to Geof, the majority of those that avail themselves of Barbi's services are women who are retired or are of retired age, or anywhere within ten years of that approximate age range. In these terms, it was a challenge to research this particular niche market given that their services are limited to providing to those who reside in the Central Coast of California. On a national level, contrary to Geof's observation, both men and women are attracted to the sport. According to various sources, dressage courts the same demographic as that of ballet dancing. This is not substantiated.

In general, however, it is apparent that most of the participants of dressage are of the upper-class income bracket. In order to be able to stable a championship-level horse, the grooming and constant exercise necessary for competition, it is necessary to have a kempt and properly maintained property. In most cases, an arena is also be necessary. All the tack and proper dressage uniform costs in addition to horse maintenance can add up to a very costly endeavor.

History of Dressage

In my effort to better understand dressage as it is seen today among enthusiasts and athletes, my collective research branched toward the historical and artistic. Much of the information I needed was through Geof and Barbi.

Dressage is a sport that had seen a great deal of refinement during the Renaissance, but it is speculated that it has been in existence as long ago as Socrates' lifetime. Written work on the subject by Xenophon (of Ancient Greece) are extant and fairly comprehensive. Dressage as we see today has adapted into a form of art and sport that reached a pinnacle of popularity among aristocrats during the Victorian era, and perhaps some time before. Portraits of Napoleon figure dressage elements prominently (Figure IX), and there were a number of painters that addressed dressage specifically in their work in the same way that Degas focused on ballet. It is also a recognized sport in the international Olympic Games.

Website Grid Layout

A standardized feature common among websites appears to be that of a simple grid that allows for vertical adaptability. As a general rule, it is best to make every page accessible from every other of the site so that navigation is simplified. It is also common practice to place the navigation links closer to the top of the document. For smaller websites, this is as simple as placing a link in the main navigation to every page in the entire site. For larger sites, these would fall into the primary category, wherein various links to subordinated pages can be navigated from there. Therefore, the

Figure IX - The equestrian portraits of Napoleon featured dressage posturing and movement. This is called a pirouette.
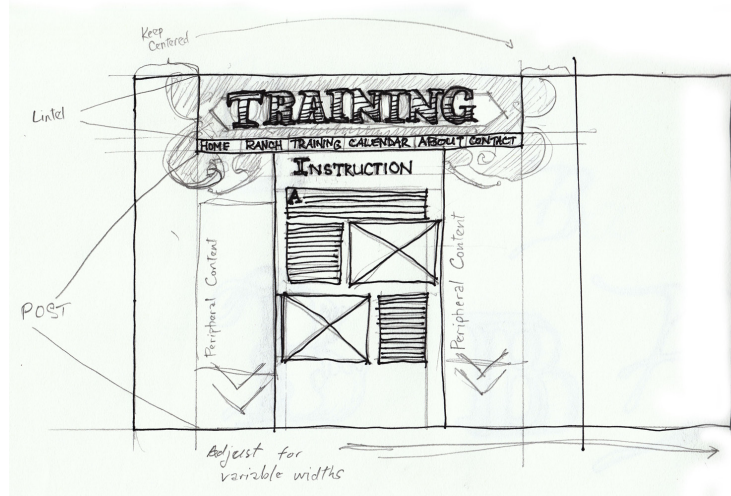
Figure X - This is a preliminary sketch of a sample page for the site. I indicated on this page that I wanted to center the content so that it's adaptable to a variety of computers and browsers.

grid appears structured like a trilithon, with two uprights supporting a lintel at the top. The body content is contained in the 'doorway' of the shape (Figure X). Listed within either 'column' shape to the sides can be a length of secondary or tertiary navigation as well as a number of external links. There is no ostensible methodology for organizing these links.

Website Design

A document that explained the content of the Sea Horse Ranch site was provided by the company. The old site provided additional reference. In terms of complexity, the site for Sea Horse Ranch proved to be relatively small. Some css and html knowledge was a necessity; however, the design would be the unifying aspect of the main body of this project.

As mentioned, it was during the Victorian era that in Europe among aristocrats dressage was immensely popularized. This is significant in
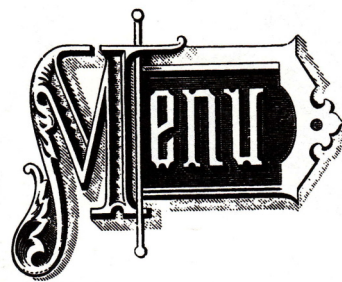

Figure XI - a sample of a Victorian style header. I especially appreciate the illustrative quality of the initial.

that the style of design I've chosen harkens back to this time period specifically in order to present a style and aesthetic unity to the website. Among the features of design during this era include the emphasis on typographical hierarchy with various classical treatments and illustrative floral patterns (Figure XI).

It may seem at first contradictory to design a contemporary website in a Victorian style, however, it has been noticed in numerous variations in contemporary design—foregoing, of course, the saturation of content that tends to create confusion on playbills and broadsides (Figure XII).

Due to the popularity dressage earned during the Victorian era, a motif was chosen that could be recognizably inspired by a visual theme of that era. The homage creates a juxtaposition that utilizes an old-fashioned visual style in a more contemporary format.
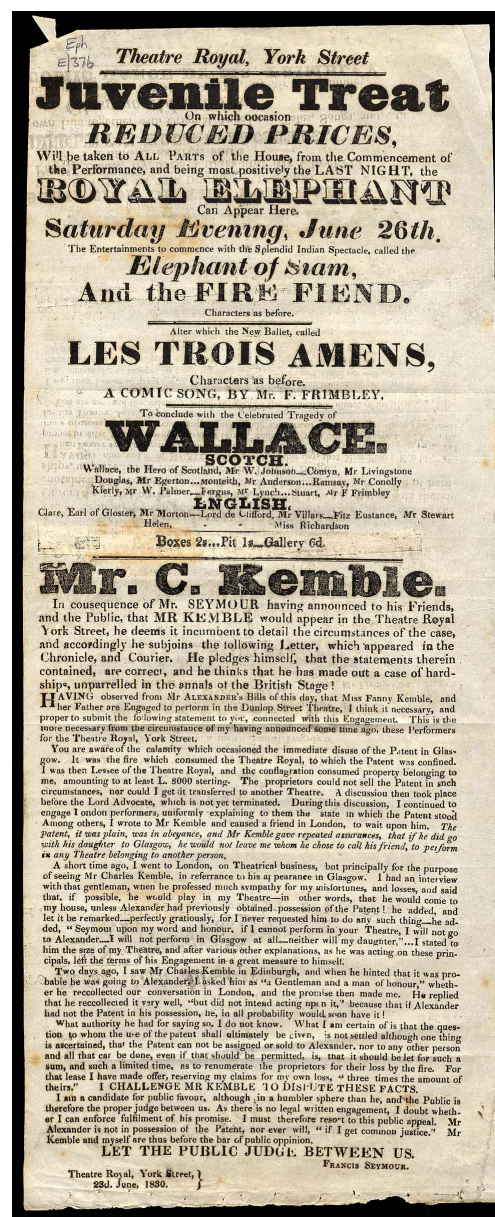

Figure XII - A sample of a playbill from the Victorian era and it's typographical treatment. I would naturally push toward a reductive style. There are far too many typefaces for this single document.
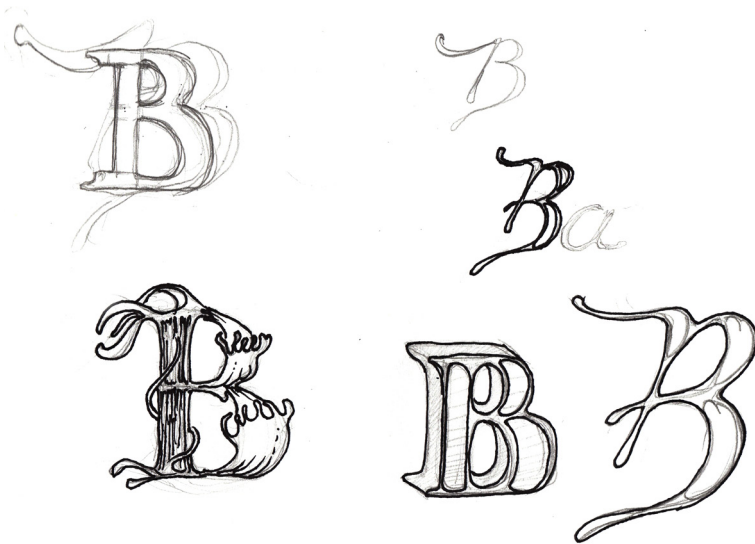
Scrollwork taken from a royalty-free Victorian illustration was selected to act

Figure XIII - Illustrative initials I sketched for the treatment of the header for the final website header. Time did not allow for more experimentation.

as a background to the header (Figure XIV). A palette of muted hues complementary to the blue and purple Barbi has chosen as her colors (Figures VIII & XV) was blended and used as fill for the various shapes. Thusly, a developed a header for each of the web pages was designed.
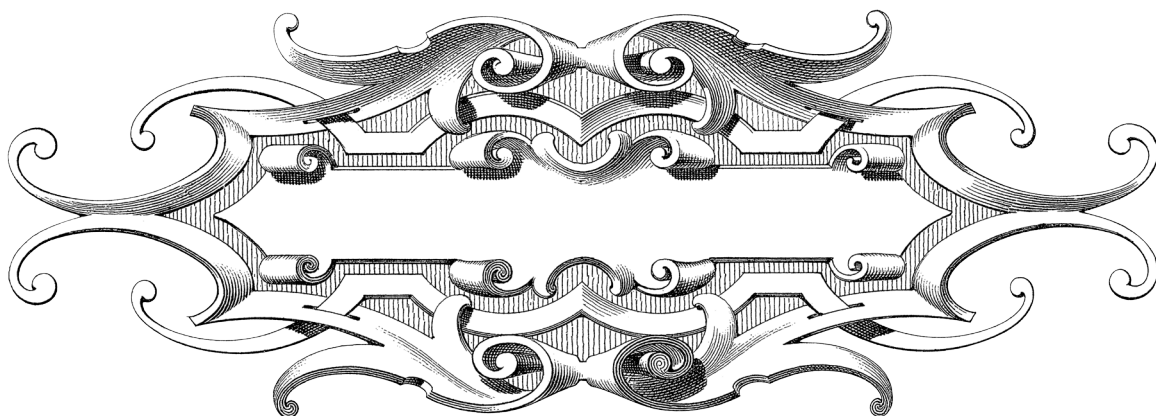
The main body copy was typeset in Georgia because it is not Times New Roman and most browsers were supplied with this serif typeface (Figure VII). It was set in gray, and not solid black so that it wouldn't clash with the style of the document. In addition to this, drop-caps and the first line of first paragraphs in small-caps was also conceived. Great strides were made to typeset the copy with sensitivity and concern for the overall look of the site (Figures XVII through XXII).

Website Photography

There needed to be a method of unifying photographs with the typographic and design structure. Also, it would have been ideal to use a different photo of texture as a

Figure XIV - The Victorian-style scrollwork that is set behind the header is cropped and muted for the website.

Figure XV - The current logo dedicated to the Sea Horse Ranch and Barbi Breen-Gurley.

background image for each page (Figure III). This did not happen as planned (see Chapter I: Limitations of Study, pg 12).

During the ideation phase the photographer, Noelle Luchino, assisted with providing photography for the general style of the website. She took shots of various textures and objects that characterized the rustic atmosphere, such as wood siding and fencing with paint chipping and crackling in interesting patterns, gray decaying wood with grain texture, rusted old tools and other objects, as well as close-up shots of the horses' mane and hide.

These photographs proved to be invaluable to addressing the overall image of the website, in

addition to the use of Barbi's chosen color palette. These are Pantone Purple C and

Pantone PMS 286 (as seen in the logo, Figure XV). Both are bold colors, and best used

sparingly with sensitivity to color hierarchy. These are colors that would get noticed first,

possessing a strong tonal quality. It is apparent when looking at the website previously

published for Sea Horse Ranch, there was little care taken in its use. For instance, all

typographical treatments are either purple or blue in color, with very little variation in

scale or weight to indicate hierarchy (Figure XVI).

Figure XVI - This is a sample of the website that was set up previously. Note that hierarchy is confusing, and the color of type is exclusively either blue or purple. There is some confusion on the page, though not to excess, however there is some compression degradation of the logo and some of the photographs.

Chapter III – Procedures and Results

Design Approach

A number of protocols and procedures appropriate to business dealings for designers will be employed to facilitate this study. Once a client is acquired, a proposed estimate of cost will be made. This estimate will be the sum of portioned work and time to various activities that are cumulatively make the sum total of the finished product. These activities include the following: Research, Sketches or Drawings, Variations, Photography, Typesetting, Proofreading, Photograph Retouching, Administrative Duties, Client Consultation and others as they pertain to the project itself.

Designer-Client Approach

The approach with the client will be adaptive, though suggestions will be made in accordance with education, expertise and experience attained by this designer. It is anticipated that the client will challenge expertise or ability, and in response a stance of compromise will be assumed depending on how resolved the client is on each subject.

Cost Estimating

This project began with an estimate of cost as well as a contractual agreement between this designer, identified as 'mcvicker design' and Sea Horse Ranch representative, Geof Gurley.

Beginning with the research phase, a very comprehensive lesson on dressage was

needed; its history, the discipline and any design or artistic references associated with the sport. Preliminary searches also included any classical artwork containing horses and horse sports so that a cross-reference with dressage further on could be made.

Stages of Development

Meetings with Geof Gurley, representative of Sea Horse Ranch, were conducted on a bi-weekly basis. Each meeting was a milestone in the progress of the project.

During the first meeting, cost estimates were established and the contract was signed. A few preliminary discussions of Barbi's intentions for the project were also made.

The second meeting consisted of discussion of early sketches of the work in progress. I designed a page in Illustrator (Figure II) by this time. Geof approved of the progress and the design at this time.

Photography was the primary subject of the third meeting. Geof encouraged me to go to the ranch and take photos of the scenery. He did not make explicit what he wanted photographed, and maintained that the photographer could drop in at any time. He provided phone numbers for contacting the lead ranch hand. The program, Dropbox, was first introduced at this stage to encourage Barbi to participate in the project.

Contact with Geof was maintained between the third and fourth meetings as he wanted to see contact sheets of the photography taken on the two sessions that were conducted since the third meeting.

During the fourth meeting, Geof expressed disapproval of the photography (see Chapter I: Limitations of the Study, pg 14).

The fifth meeting with Geof was to go over more details, and for him to review the site as it had been nearly completed. During this consultation it was probably the third time I spoke to him about a program called Dropbox. It is a program with which he could access the folder as work was being completed. Since starting the coding process (prior to meeting four), Geof was encouraged to access the website from his home computer. It was agreed by this time that we were only putting in the finishing touches of the project, and that all that it needed was to be made public.

The sixth meeting is outlined in detail on page 17 under Client-Designer Relations. Prior to this meeting, Geof took the first steps in making Barbi aware of the project and its progress.

Description of Website

The Home page outlines in brief the services Barbi and Sea Horse Ranch provides and entices one to look further into what these services have to offer. The 'Sea Horse Ranch' or 'Ranch' page outlines the features of the ranch, and discusses the boarding and feeding practices. On the 'Training' page, Barbi indicates the methods and practices involved in training dressage. The 'Calendar' page is to be updated periodically with events and clinics that Barbi and Geof will be providing in the near future. The 'About' page is a page that outlines Barbi's brief biography, much like an 'About the Author' does, featuring her photograph. Finally the 'Contact' page contains information on getting in contact with the company.

Chapter IV – Summary and Recommendations

This was a study of the client-designer interaction, and how the process unfolds. As can be ascertained above, many complications can arise in the ordeal. There are times in which one can act preemptively against some of these contingencies, and times that they very probably cannot be predicted.

Dressage was researched in a historical context as well as a contemporary one. It was then placed it in a visual terms, and then worked out in design, giving it a feeling and atmosphere. After sketches were worked out, it was put into code and made into a working website. Many of the design decisions that were made were at first appreciated and after further deliberations were critiqued and replaced by other solutions. Many of them were disliked completely.

A major deterrent to completing this task and seeing it to its end is the very probable scenario in which a designer's sensibilities are at odds with the goals of a client. In many cases, critiques of creative decisions are a result of the client's contrary attitude, or a misguided assumption about design and ownership of advertising material.

As can be expected from any interaction between a designer and client, any number of complications can arise in any combination. It is recommended for further research to continue in this vein in order to accumulate a broader sense of this experience.
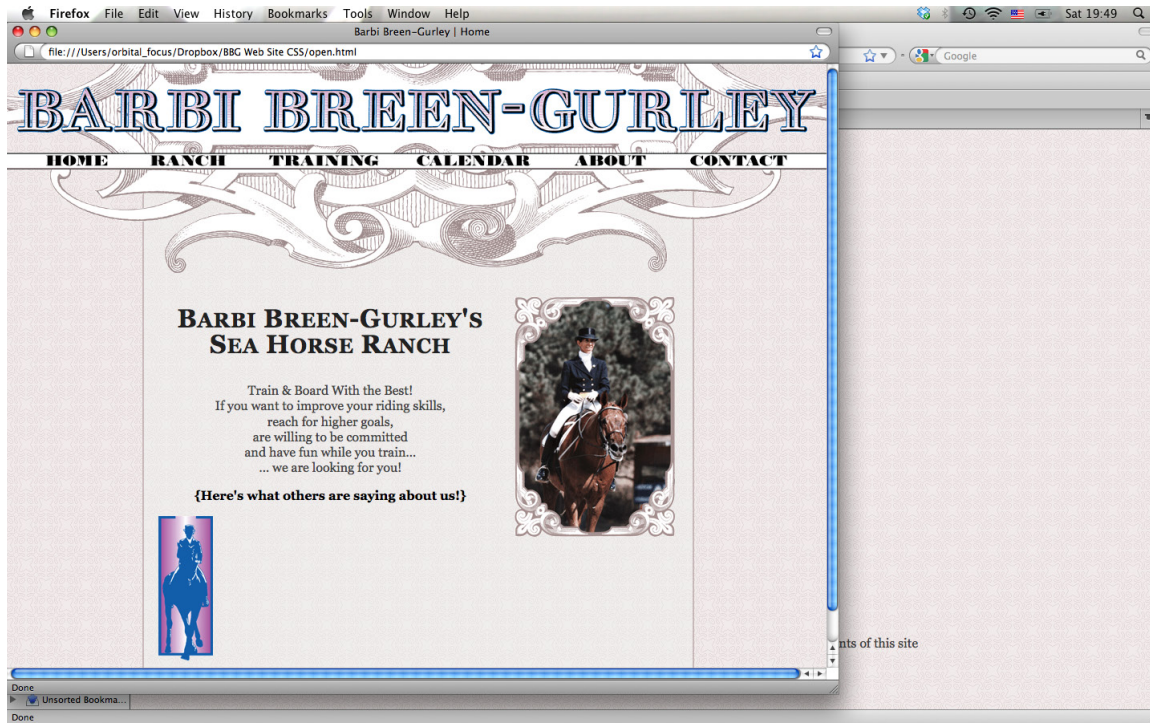
Figures XVII—XXII - This is a small sample of the progress I had made by the time Barbi had finally looked at the website. Among the critiques were that the type was too small and that it needed to be in color and set in Comic Sans.
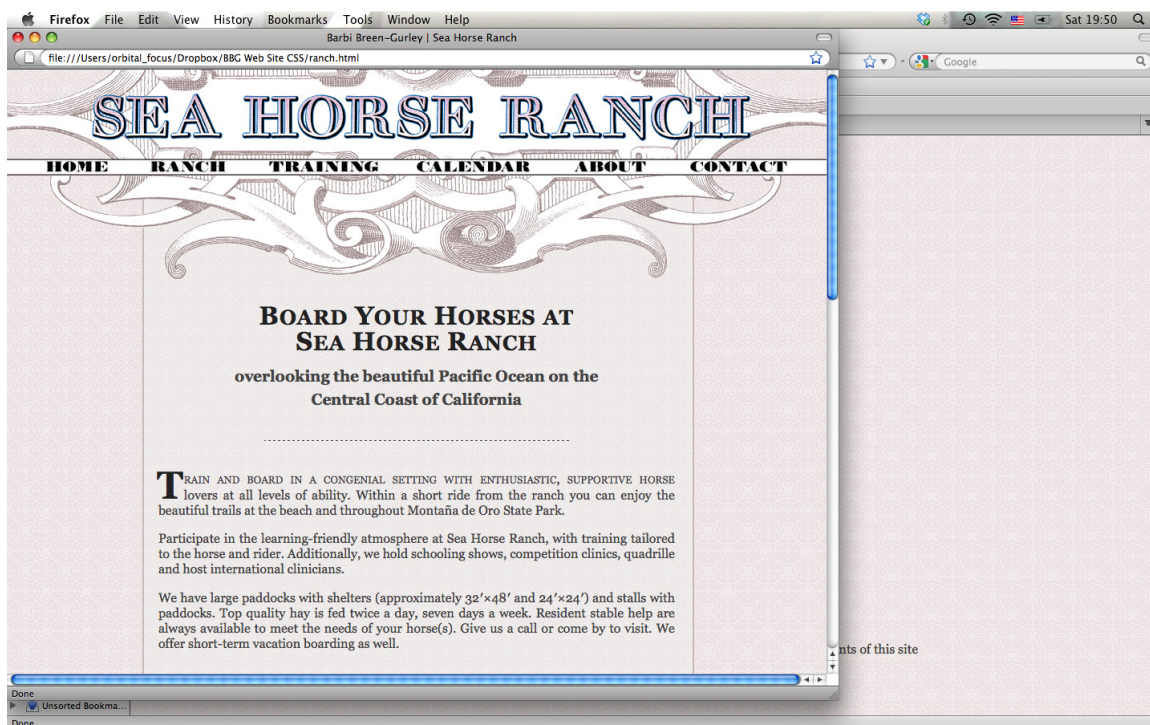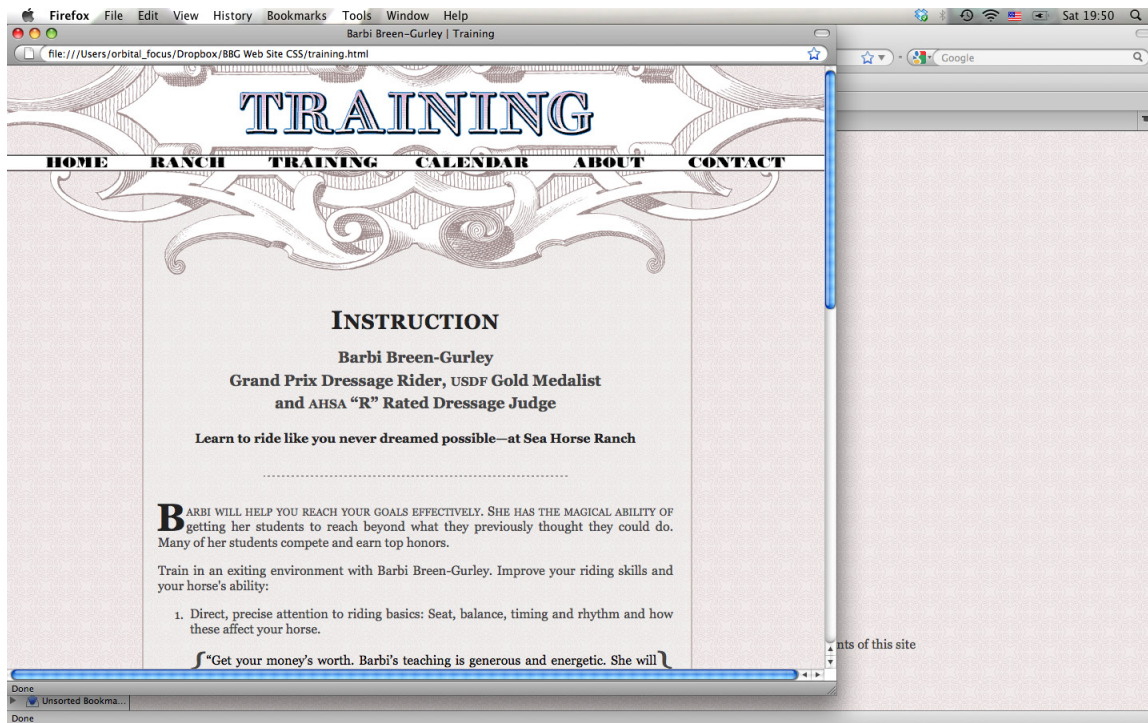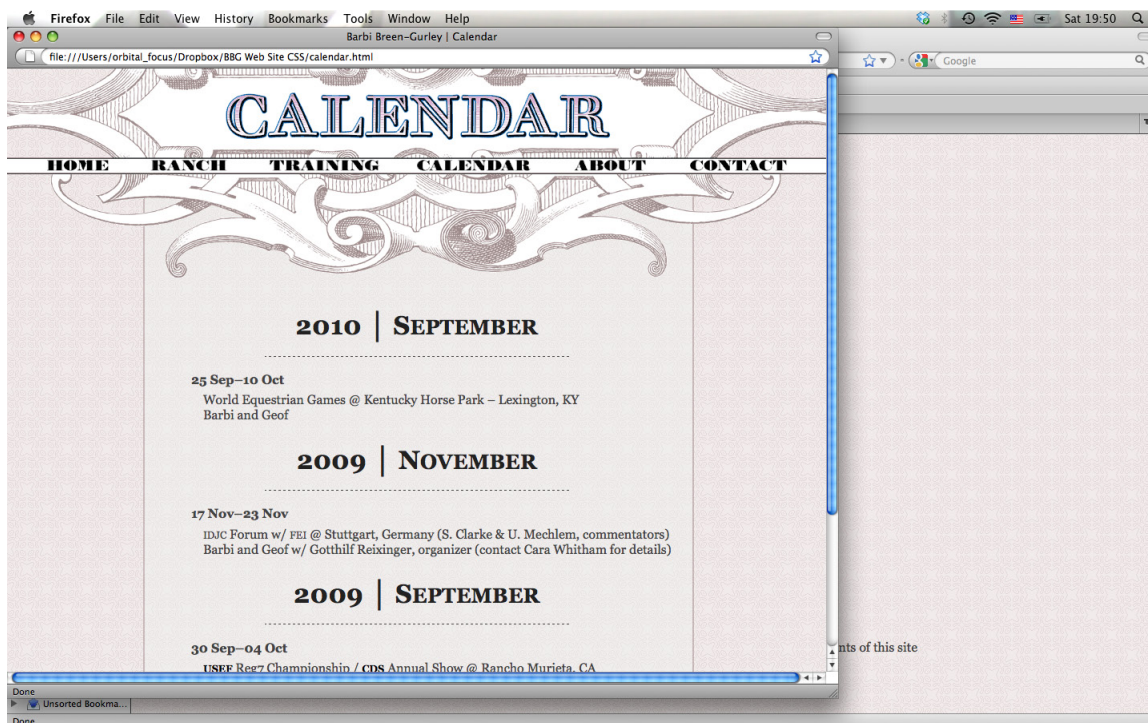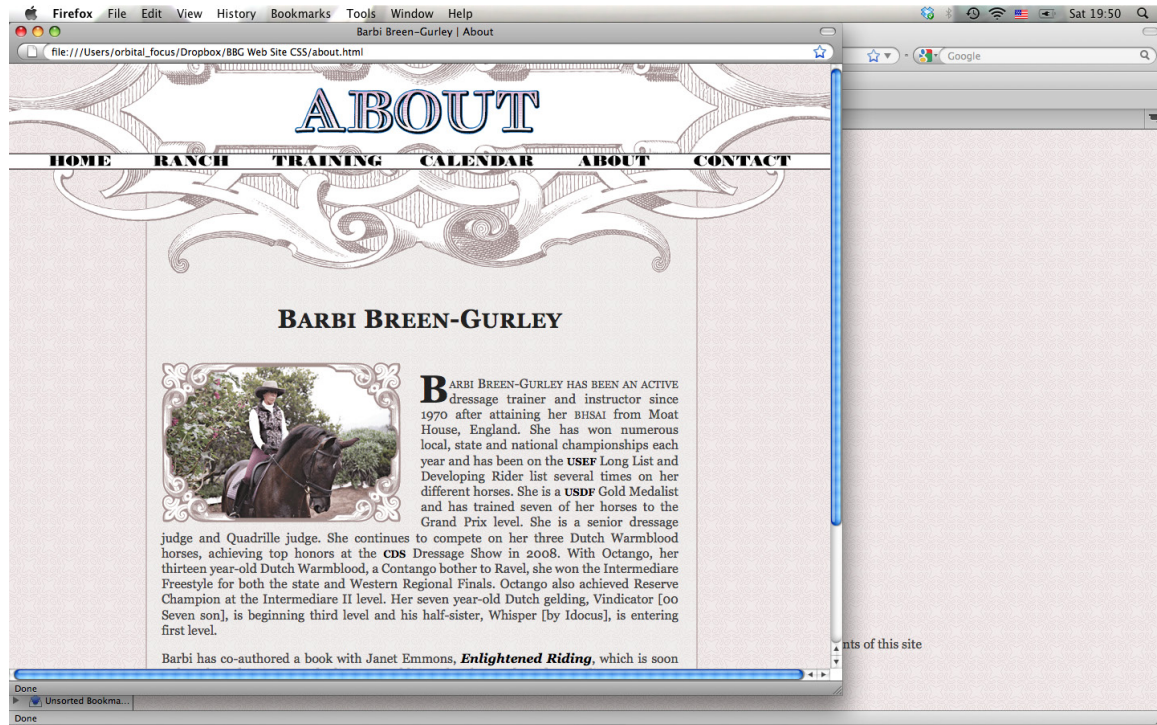
Figure XIX

Figure XX

Figure XXI

Figure XXII

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