

Background

A final assignment for the fall 2010 Visual Aesthetics class at Quinnipiac University Online was to identify a website homepage to redesign using visual design theory learned in class. The assignment focused on spatial design (“rule of thirds”) color theory, and typography. Selected websites were to meet a threshold number of page hits tracked by the website [Alexa.com](https://www.alexacom.com/).

I selected the website [Deep Ellum – Dallas, Texas](#) for its redesign potential, described in the Recommendations section of this document, and created a mockup that incorporated my redesign recommendations to:

- Follow the “rule of thirds” in the placement of visual design elements.
- Use a typeface that is legible and also fits with the design theme – in this case a theme for a historic neighborhood.
- Use colors that conform to color theory best practices. In the redesign mockup, a complementary red-blue color scheme was used.

I also considered the message that the website is intended to convey: to show a historic neighborhood with redevelopment potential to investors and visitors. I used a traditional serif typeface with a metallic look to convey the neighborhood’s 100-year-old history. In times past it was a hub both for “the blues” and for regional manufacturing. I used copyrighted and Creative Commons images to illustrate the website’s historical theme. These include:

- Old brick walls, copyrighted image by [Blackbirds26](#)
- Brass Instruments, copyrighted image by [Lovliestdreams](#)
- Street Mural – John Lee Hooker, Creative Commons photo by [Terry Shuck](#)
- T-Bone Walker, Creative Commons photo by [Heinrich Klaffs](#)

- Blind Lemon portrait, Creative Commons image by [Carlos Funk](#)
- Leadbelly, Library of Congress photo by [William P. Gottlieb](#)

I reorganized website content to meet business objectives, specifically to draw potential customers to the neighborhood.

The mockup based on these considerations is shown on page 2.

Recommendations:

Deep Ellum website redesign

The [website](#) for Deep Ellum, a Dallas neighborhood that has become an arts-and entertainment district, shows promise in creating a visual identity that references this district’s historic past. The site uses a tiled image of worn brick for its background and lettering that appears to be built from brick for its banner (see screen capture below). These brick images refer to neighborhood buildings, which were once factories and warehouses, and are now restaurants, bars, art galleries, stores of various kinds, and residential lofts.



Visitors unfamiliar with Deep Ellum, a corruption of “deep Elm Street,” according to [Wikipedia](#), probably wouldn’t understand this visual reference. They also probably wouldn’t find it appealing because there’s too much brick. The brick image spans the entire screen, vertically and horizontally -- suggesting a solid brick wall. This wall shuts people out rather than inviting them in and so defeats the purpose of any website, which is to attract visitors.

The image used for the website banner is weak. The lettering is poorly defined and the border/background suggests carelessness in a splash or spill. That is not the correct message for a website whose purpose is to convey the vibrant nature of Deep Ellum.

Other visual references could and should have been used. Deep Ellum was renowned as a jazz and blues hot spot in the 1930s, and music continues to play an important role in the neighborhood to this day. But there's no visual reference to music anywhere on the site or to the elm tree that is the neighborhood's namesake. A visual reference to either might be used to create an eye-catching banner that better represents the neighborhood's character.

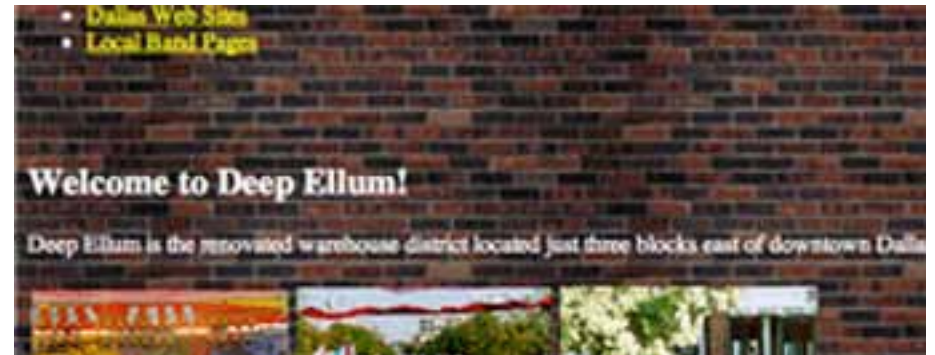
The top third of the page is devoted almost exclusively to the banner. A large blank space beneath banner lettering is the page's visual center, and there's nothing there. Brightly colored links at the far left of the screen are a redeeming factor. They provide both visual interest and page navigation (see screen capture below).



The link colors (pink for visited and yellow for unvisited) contrast nicely with the brick background and are used consistently throughout the website. But the links are too small for their purpose. From a design perspective, they fail to balance the heavy, but weak, lettering above, or the larger bold white text below. Bullets next to links add weight, but are used incorrectly, as bullets normally follow an introduction.

Body text for the site spans the entire screen, counter to typography standards for line lengths of 10 to 12 word for the web. Although the white typeface color contrasts nicely with the brick background, the contrast is insufficient for readability. Using different text and background colors (e.g., black on white) and shortening line length would

improve readability and, depending on other design choices, improve the homepage's design. Using serif or sans-serif typeface for headings and the opposite for body text could also improve readability while adding visual interest.



Photos in the “welcome” area, though colorful, are too small to convey much information. Larger versions of these photos should be used to build a page design with larger, more clearly defined visual elements. These would serve not only to make the design more visually appealing, but would also make content more accessible. Visitors drawn to a large photo depicting a neighborhood activity or business would likely read further and maybe participate or purchase. Depending on photo selection, visitors might better understand what the neighborhood is and decide to come for a visit.

In sum, I recommend limiting use of the brick image, replacing the banner, setting up clearly defined content areas (e.g., with three-panel page layout), replacing the background for text with a solid, neutral color, enlarging and reorganizing placement of photographs, and using two typefaces, possibly in a larger size. Although link colors are attractive, they are non-standard and should be revisited.

A mockup incorporating redesign recommendations is shown on the next page.



Deep Ellum

[Galleries](#)[Live Bands](#)[Bars & Restaurants](#)[Shops](#)[Residential Properties](#)[Arts Festival](#)[Murals Project](#)[Community Garden](#)[Historic Buildings](#)

Welcome to our neighborhood!



Street Mural - John Lee Hooker
Photo by Terry Shuck

Blues giants played here

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T-Bone Walker
Photo by Heinrich Klaffs

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Blues Men of Deep Ellum



Blind Lemon Jefferson



Leadbelly, Library of Congress