

The private Ringling College of Art and Design is located in Sarasota, Florida. Ringling was founded in 1931 and is strictly an undergraduate school offering BFA and BA degrees in a variety of artistic categories.

The index of the Ringling web page is simple and understated. The background colors are muted dominated by light greens, white, and mauve while photography flashes on top of color washes. The site features photographs of the campus buildings as well as student artwork and students/faculty in motion. Images are contained in unique linear shapes with quirky organic curves and indents. This adds a bit of spice to ordinary rotating imagery. Organic shapes cut into photographs to create a surprising sophistication appropriate to an art college.

The typography is quite simple and is comprised of type "imagery" and actual generic serif html text. The college logotype is prominently displayed unobstructed in the top left corner. It is predictable, however appreciated, the audience is prospective students and parents and college recognition is important. The majority of text is html, which is great for searching and keyword recognition. I'm sure Ringling wants as many hits as possible, with more words, more likely this will happen.

Ringling navigation is very clear and straightforward. Ten top-left placed rectangular knock out text blocks give the user text buttons for further exploration. They sit atop imagery and are in plane view. This is very positive. Often over ambitious designs disguise navigation, here it is still visually consistent, but very accessible. Each button has a rollover that changes from white to a different color. When clicked the button becomes illuminated in its color and a submenu appears. Again, straight forward information, very helpful! In addition to the prominent detailed left navigation Ringling chose to put "quick" links in the top right corner to guide viewers to contact, site info, site map, and search. The type is very small, but is consistent from page to page allowing the user to access frequented pages with ease.

Site layout is based off of a header with imagery and subsequent three columns. Dominant layout is relegated to the left, substantial body text is center, and changing imagery lives in the right column. Layout is consistent from page to page; there is no jitter, which is good. The full width on the index is about 700 pixels, which fits comfortably on my screen. There is a vertical scroll for more text, but it is secondary text, so I do not mind. However, they do seem to be lacking imagery, as the same picture of girl with printer and screen printer are constantly repeated. I get a bit confused, I think, "Did I look at this page before?" I tend to use imagery as visual clues, so this is a bit distracting. Upon each navigation button click a new page appears with appropriate text and a nice subtle vector shape Flash animation on the right. It adds some variety to a fairly consistent layout.

<http://www.ringling.edu/>

Upon viewing source code it is apparent Ringling is using code from a specific source. Code states " This website is powered by TYPO3 - inspiring people to share! TYPO3 is a free open source Content Management Framework initially created by Kasper Skaarhoj and licensed under GNU/GPL. TYPO3 is copyright 1998-2006 of Kasper Skaarhoj. Extensions are copyright of their respective owners. Information and contribution at <http://typo3.com/> and <http://typo3.org/>" This organization seems very concerned with usability. It is evident in Ringling's site, because it is very accessible.

This site leaves me with a pleasant feeling. It's airiness and calm colors with minimal flash and dazzle sends a message consistent with what an arts basic academic college would want to project. When I visit this site I am able to navigate with ease, find information I need, quickly, and leave satisfied. I am given samples of work and facilities and feel like my education there would be efficient and in a technologically savvy facility. The breeze of information also suggests efficient faculty and accessible classroom learning. The tone is very professional, yet informative and snazzy. There are no over the top features, but just enough dazzle to keep a young perspective student interested as well as the more reserved parents. It also shows their understanding of balancing design appeal and technology. Often people are dazzled by design but there is no true content, here Ringling balances everything, very important. It shows they have thought about how to present themselves in the internet community.

<http://www.ringling.edu/>

Meredith College is a private women's college located in Raleigh, NC. It was founded in 1891. Today Meredith offers over 50 undergraduate majors and masters programs in business, music, nutrition and education.

The Meredith homepage is centered clutter of text, image and color bars. Green, blue, orange, maroon, and yellow dominate fields. The header features photographs of students, flashing pull quotes and several Meredith College logos. Images are featured in silhouette, offset rectangles and are grided. A jumble of text is encased in a table.

The typography is inconsistent in size and weight. The majority of text is san serif html text. The college logotype is placed top slightly off left. It begins to blend into the cluttered table below. It is good it is there, but another Meredith logo encased in a circle over shadows it. The majority of text and links are html, which helps get as many site hits when people google search.

The Meredith navigation is muddy and not straightforward. There are numerous links and headlines making the true navigation hard to find. The main navigational bar is a blue bar residing below flashing photographs at the top of the page. Five options are presented as text images. No rollovers are employed. Which is probably good, because there is already a lot going on. One positive point is a simple "quick nav" at the bottom of the page featuring quick contacts, site map, and directory options. This busy intro suggests Meredith is a bustling place with lots going on. I only question, is there too much! There are options to read more about headlining articles, to click on students and hear about their experiences, send an e-card (seems a bit absurd for a home page), read study abroad journals, click on gateways, or links, in addition to the navigation of about, academics, admissions, student life, and campus resources. Once entering the site, there is no way back to the home/index page. I find this troublesome, considering they spent so much time cramming information onto their homepage! What if I want to send an e-card! How ever will I get back there? Retype <http://www.meredith.edu>, well that just seems silly!

Once you click something, you enter the site, which then carry's a more consistent layout. The blue navigation, which is found on the home page, stays but changes to green. Site page layout is based off of a header with imagery and two columns with footer. Additional links are in a small column on the left while; text and imagery are in a larger right column. The right column is relative so line length shifts when the user adjusts the window size. All text is html. Imagery is scattered throughout body paragraphs, all very inconsistent. An ugly orange header with people and text overshadow the Meredith logo. We are

<http://www.meredith.edu>

prompted to believe this college is called "I BELIVE" not Meredith.

One interesting part of their navigation is the inclusion of breadcrumbs. Since there are so many levels to this site, you could easily get lost, but a trail just beneath the top navigation lets us know how deep we are into the sight.

Investigation of the source code reveals the structure of the page. The styles are controlled by an external style sheet. Also a template with clearly defined regions, such as "main body and title", controls the pages. This will make editing and additional pages easier for the web creator. There is an abundance of relative links. The code is fairly simple, employing tables for the main structure.

This is my alma mater and I dearly love my time there, but must admit there website is very confusing and jumbled. I have seen it go through much iteration in 6 years. They have made improvements like unifying departmental pages, before they were all different and there was no consistency. However, I do not believe their current site is the best option. There are just too many options everywhere. It becomes this huge jumble of important, unimportant and silly information. My suggestion would be pair down the links, or organize material more efficiently so it will fit under appropriate navigation.

<http://www.meredith.edu>

The Yale school of art offers degrees in graphic design, painting, printmaking, photography, and sculpture. The visual arts program was started in 1832. They offer undergraduate and graduate studies.

This is truly a unique experience. Upon entering the Yale University School of Art I was confronted with a black and white image repeating in the background and neon boxes with brightly colored Helveticaesque text. With boxes telling me the last person to edit the site. With some investigation I find that the Yale art site is a wiki, a collaborative site, similar to the online encyclopedia, Wikipedia. Yale does have a disclaimer stating certain areas are locked and content remains consistent and reliable. Navigation is set in black text in a white rectangle on the left of the screen. Rollovers indicate that these buttons will link you to important information, as stated in the navigation keywords. The color pallets seem a bit retro, say 1980's but are fresh and clean. There are no flash animations to distract me; the date is present and features headlines of the day. Also the school address and phone are discreetly displayed at the top. Once you begin clicking into the site things change a bit. However address, photo background, type choices, and navigation remain the same. For example on the admission page, the design goes to three columns, with html text in the center column. Just above these three columns is a sub navigation easily guiding the user to more detailed information pages.

The typography is plain and is comprised of generic multi colored serif html text, both regular and knock out. The college logotype absent from the page completely, however a large orange headline instructs us that this is the Yale University School of Art. Clear use of style sheets is evident and hierarchy is defined through pixel size and color of type.

Yale navigation is clear and straightforward. Fifteen words placed left in rectangular white blocks give the user buttons for more options. Fifteen may seem like a lot of options, but frankly I prefer that. I know when I click recent changes that are what I am going to get! There are no hidden messages under only five main navigations. This multiplicity allows the Yale site to be very specific. This is great! The navigational column is presumable in a table fixed above repeating imagery. This is very positive. Confusing navigation is problematic; here it is still consistent and accessible across the board. They offer a home button in their primary navigation, this is great! I am able to go back to the beginning whenever I choose.

Site layout average size typically employing three columns. The full width on the index is about 700 pixels, which fits comfortably on my screen. Vertical scrolling reveals more text. All html text is clean and

<http://art.yale.edu/Home>

uncluttered. It is great, I feel like what information I need, and I can read with ease. Key headlines and important messages are included in the header or third column. This separation allows the busiest visitor to gain access to imminent information.

The Yale source code is very simple. I was actually able to follow it. No flash, no template (which I wish there was), just good styles and tables. This site is still visually very appealing in its simplicity and highlight of information. Rotating image banks feature, what is student art or facilities. It is nice, for a change, to see something so simple, but I suppose it has to be because of the wiki nature of the site.

The experimentation of an academic site employing wiki ideology is exciting! As a potential student, I see that Yale is someone exploring the possibilities and really pushing the boundaries. This was really something different! I would absolutely be interested to learn more. Their simple clean design seems to merge modernist ideals of legibility and information presentation with more post-modern ideals of target audience and layout experimentation. I see this site as fusing traditional with technology.

<http://art.yale.edu/Home>

In addition I thought I would include a few links of some overly "flashy" websites, that may initially appear pretty, but just become too much, and I immediately want to leave.

<http://www.medthink.com/home.html> (confusing flashes make me a bit seasick)

<http://www.mullerphoto.com> (weird flash navigation leaves me waiting for loads and my wrist hurting as I drag from photo to photo!)