

Audience Analysis

The audience for this website will be composed of users seeking more information about me. Because it is a personal website and not merely an online professional portfolio, the site's users will likely have quite varied needs. A potential employer may be seeking examples of my professional work or my résumé, while a classmate or instructor may want to know about my academic interests and any research I am involved in. The user may even be someone simply seeking more information about me outside of the professional or academic world. Regardless of a given user's intent, their first goals will be the same: they will want to get a feeling for who I am, and navigate to the specific information they seek as quickly as possible.

Design Approach

Navigation:

In order to make my website as efficient as possible from a user standpoint, the most important design challenge was to address the above need for easy navigation to specific information. To do so, I created a splash page that allows the user to jump directly to one of three primary sections on the site: about me, professional work, or academic work. These sections address the three main user groups I expect to visit the site, and allow a user to avoid sifting through information that is irrelevant to their needs.

Once past the splash page, the site's navigation system is very simple, and intended to be straightforward and understandable to any user. Navigation within a category is achieved by choosing topics from the navigation panel on the left side of the main content area. The box surrounding this panel and the content uses enclosure to connect the two elements and suggest that only information within the box will be changed by choosing a new topic. Should the user wish to switch to a different top tier category, this navigation is achieved by clicking on one of the three "tabs" below the header. The active tab is shifted down relative to the others and has simulated LED lights to further differentiate it.

Structure & Design:

I chose to border all sides of the page with fixed-size structures and further enclose the primary content area within a frame. Doing so ensures that the entirety of the page is displayed within a frame of static size that does not adapt to an individual page's content. This structure serves multiple purposes. From a navigation perspective, this allows the header bar and navigation functions to be constantly visible to the user regardless of how much content they may have scrolled through within the inner frame. On a more aesthetic note, this fixed outer frame conveys conciseness. Although there may be a large amount of text or other content to be scrolled through within the inner frame, one of the first things a user will notice is that the browser window itself requires no scrolling. So, while this apparent conciseness may be somewhat misleading, it is in my opinion better than potentially discouraging a user with a dauntingly large page.

I based the framing elements of my site (the header, tabs, and side structures) on the traditional Japanese *torii* gateway structure. While the site's design is a highly stylized and industrialized interpretation of the torii, I believe the source inspiration is easily gleaned by someone familiar with them. Materials Science & Engineering is a discipline whose foremost institutions and companies tend to have very strong cultural ties to Japan. My intention is that the blended influences will appeal to Japanese users who may be put off by the simplistic and "straight to business" designs commonly used by most Western engineers.

Most of the design nuances of the site were selected to enforce the modern and industrial look I intended. I chose Tahoma as the site's primary typeface because its relatively tight width makes it appear more modern than many alternate sans serif typefaces. Since it has recently become a standard font in OS X, Tahoma is now more acceptable as a primary web typeface. In the site's header, however, I wanted a serif typeface for my name that would appear slightly more formal than the rest of the site's text. Georgia was my ultimate choice, since it's wider and more prominently seriffed than the more common serif typefaces.

The site's color palette is dominated by brushed aluminum imagery coupled with solid grayscale tones which give the page a metallic appearance. I built on this metallic appearance by adding "bolts" and various lighting effects to increase depth and realism. For the color of the "LEDs," which again were added to improve differentiability between active and inactive tabs, I settled on a deep blue. I tried other common colors such as red and green, but none complemented the metallic tones as well as blue did.

Ultimately, I feel that my website's visual design is sleek and professional, while still having a fun stylization that sets it apart. Users will be able to get a sense of my style and design sensibility without being detracted from the site's actual content.