Before

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MAKEOVER ESSENTIALS

Almost all those household makeovers you see on TV are within the realm of the possible, given a little know-how and the right tools. *Web Design Before & After Makeovers* is going to help equip you with the information you need to successfully make over your Web site. But you'll want to be sure to gather the right tools for the job before you start.

In this chapter, you explore the essential software tools that you need for getting the most from your makeovers. These tools help you design, lay out, and manage your Web site, create textual and graphical content to place on it, and test and debug your pages. While many quality software applications can handle these sorts of jobs, here are my recommendations as you assemble tools for your Web makeover toolbox. These are the tools I swear by for all of my Web design work.

Macromedia Dreamweaver: Your Command and Control Design Center

Let Macromedia Dreamweaver (or a comparable alternative tool) serve as your "command and control" center throughout your Web site design and development process.

Available for both Mac and Windows, Dreamweaver's integrated design environment packs in all of the page-design and site-management accessories you need with a mouse click.
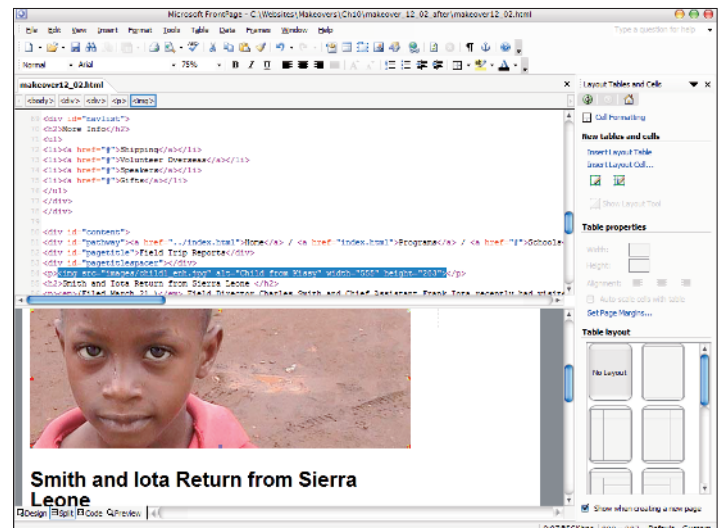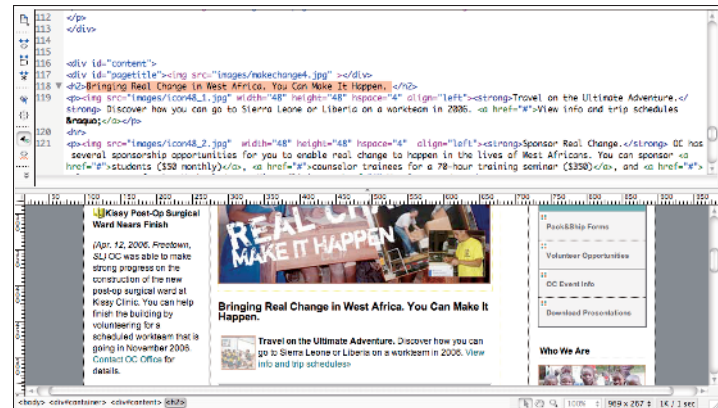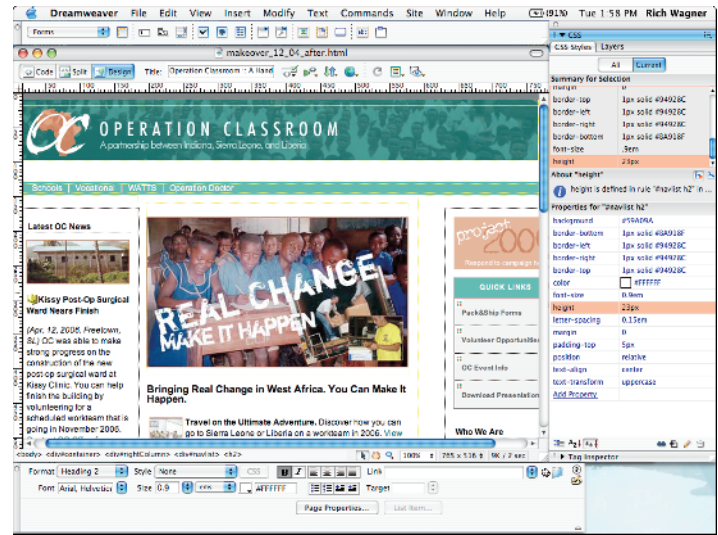
A powerful Web page editor is crucial to performing great makeovers. After all, whether you are working with textual or graphical content, Cascading Stylesheets (CSS), JavaScript code, or DHTML, when all is said and done, you are always working with an HTML file. Dreamweaver sports a powerful page-design environment that allows you to work with a page visually and on the underlying code itself.

However, in addition to page editing, Dreamweaver helps you manage your entire Web site and its assets.

Alternatives

Microsoft FrontPage is a secondary option that some Windows users may prefer, especially for those experienced Microsoft Office product users.

No matter what tool you use, opt for a tool that provides both visual and code views of the Web page and that has the site support features you need as you design pages.
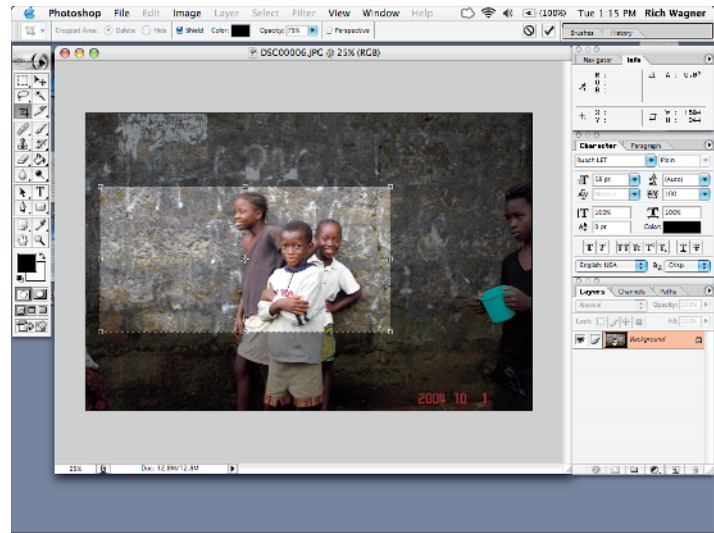
Adobe Photoshop: Your Visual Sidekick

Nice-looking, optimized graphics are an essential component to nearly every well-designed, professional-caliber Web site. As such, even if you don't consider yourself a graphic artist, you'll still want to opt for a professional-grade image editor. The hands-down winner in this category is Adobe Photoshop. Even though you may use only a small percentage of its expansive functionality, Photoshop is well worth the time and monetary investment you'll spend in order to get quality results for your Web site.

Photoshop and its trusty sidekick ImageReady handle all of the essential image-related tasks you need to perform with your Web site. Common tasks you'll perform include the following:

➤ Cropping and resizing an image

➤ Optimizing the file size of an image

➤ Overlaying anti-aliased text on an image

➤ Slicing up a large image into a set of smaller ones

➤ Adjusting an image's brightness, sharpness, or color

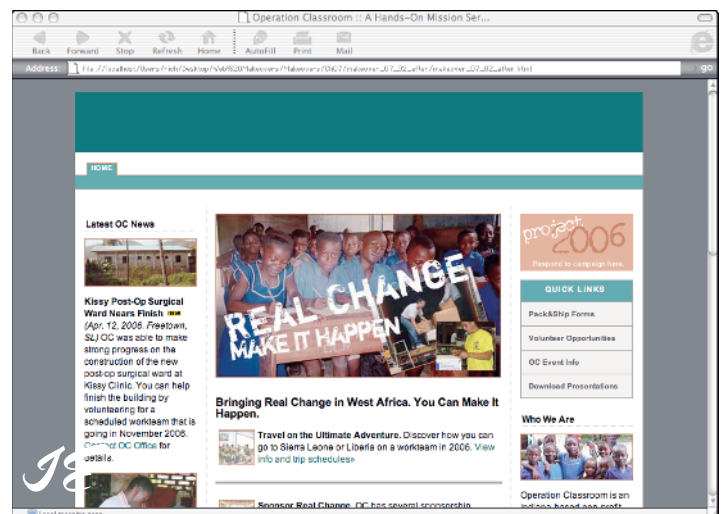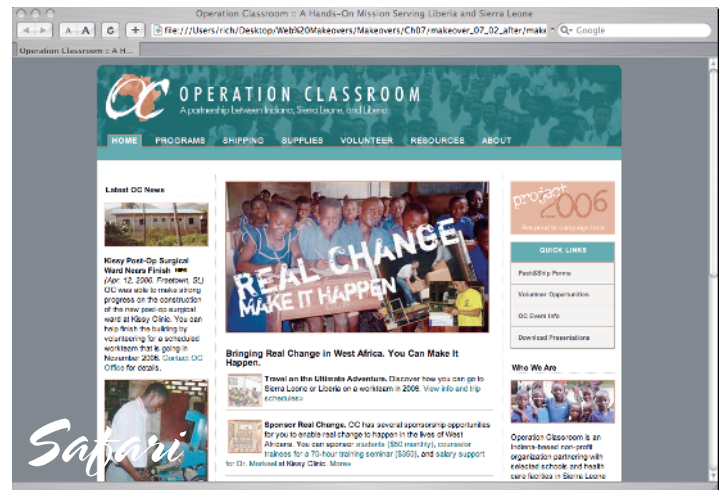➤ Transforming an image through special filters
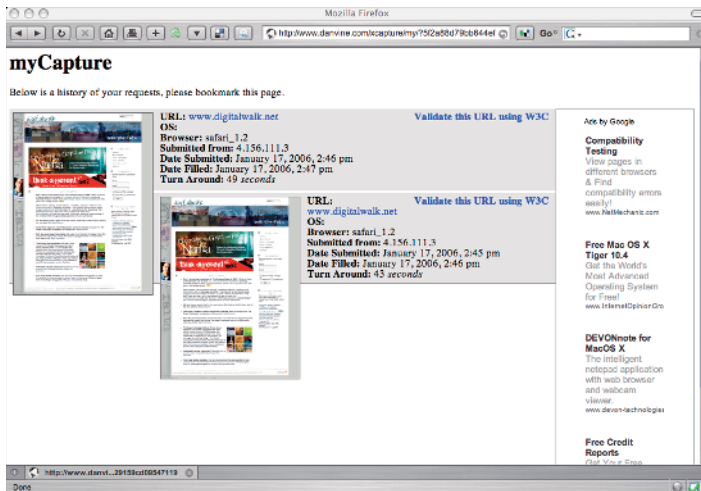
Web Browsers: Your Test Suite

Every Web designer has his favorite browser. Mainstreamers opt for *the* standard, the latest version of Microsoft Internet Explorer for Windows. Underdogs, on the other hand, root for Firefox, the "Young Turk" of the browser world. Mac fans love Safari, while others — particularly nonconformists or purists — opt for one of the many niche browsers available.

The problem comes in when you begin to unconsciously design a Web site specifically for your browser of choice, ignoring the idiosyncrasies and differences that exist with the others. For example, the figures on the right show the same HTML file in two browsers. Safari displays the Web page as intended, while Internet Explorer for Mac doesn't correctly display the menu or header.

Therefore, you want to be sure to test your made-over Web site on multiple browsers before going live. The more browsers you test on, the better. But, if you choose only two, be sure to choose Internet Explorer (80–85% market share) and Firefox (10%).

Rich's Take: If you use Windows exclusively and don't have access to a Mac, you can still perform a sanity check to ensure that your Web site displays properly with Mac's Safari browser. Go to www.danvine. com/icapture to use the free iCapture service. iCapture looks at the URL you submit and creates a JPG image of the Web page based on how the Web page displays in Safari. You can then view or download the resulting image.

The following list shows the approximate market share of the most widely used browsers on the market.

Browser	Share
Internet Explorer (Windows)	85%
Firefox	10%
Safari (Mac)	2%
Netscape	1%
AOL Browser	1%
MSN Explorer	.5%
Opera	.5%

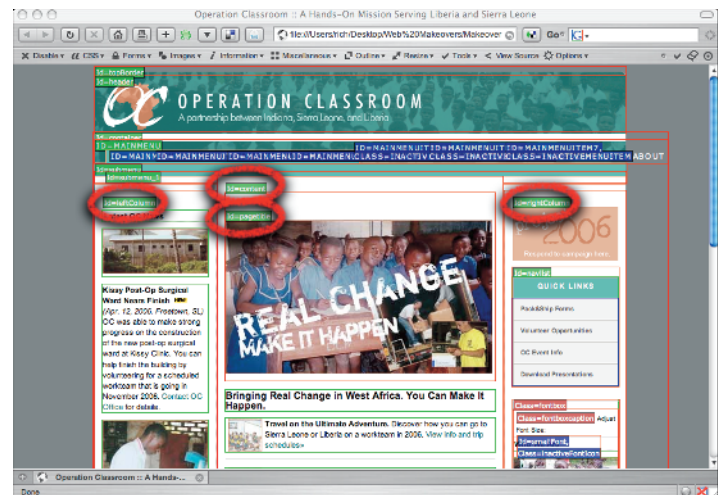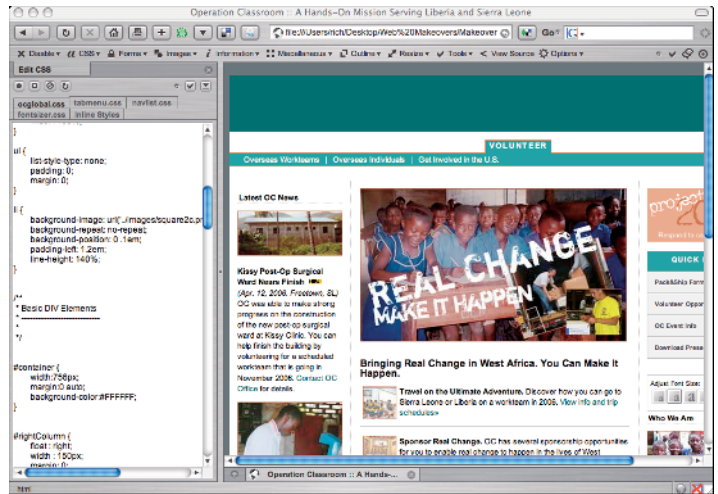# Web Developer Extension for Firefox: Your Interactive Debugging Environment

For much of the lifespan of the Web, debugging Web pages has been a trial-and-error process. It usually goes something like this: You do your best to design and code your page and then open it in your browser to test it. If something displays or executes incorrectly, then you redo the process.

However, a third-party extension available for the Firefox browser provides a "makeover of sorts" to the debugging process. The Web Developer extension is the handiest interactive debugging tool I've come across that takes much of the guesswork out of debugging.

For example, trying to debug CSS styles can be a painful and laborious process because of the cascading effects of the technology. Web Developer allows you to work with and modify CSS styles within the "live" browser environment itself.

Second, trying to understand the layout of a Web page can be confusing when working with multiple `div` elements or tables. The Web Developer extension allows you to easily label your block elements and provide outlines for these regions on your page.

Third, the Web Developer extension provides one-click access to several online analysis tools. You can view a speed report of your page, validate a page's HTML, links, CSS, and more.

These examples are just a small sampling of the many features and capabilities of the Web Developer extension.

You can download the Web Developer extension at `http://chrispederick.com/work/webdeveloper`. The extension is made available under the terms of the GNU General Public License.