

Chapter 1: Personal Web Sites

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- ✓ Getting your message out there
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- ✓ Creating the pages

The Web is accessible to anyone. If you're an artist, author, or musician, a Web site is a wonderful way to promote your skills. Whether you're published or not, a Web site is a way to show your work to the masses. Many personal Web sites, however, are poor reflections of what the artists have to offer. In this chapter, Doug takes the lead and shows you the prototype he's creating — the makeover of a musician's Web site.

Tailoring the Site to Your Client

When you design a site for a creative person, the site needs to reflect your skill as a designer as well as your client's personality and personal taste. Some creative types have a tendency to go over the top. You might end up having to be the voice of reason if you encounter a client like this.

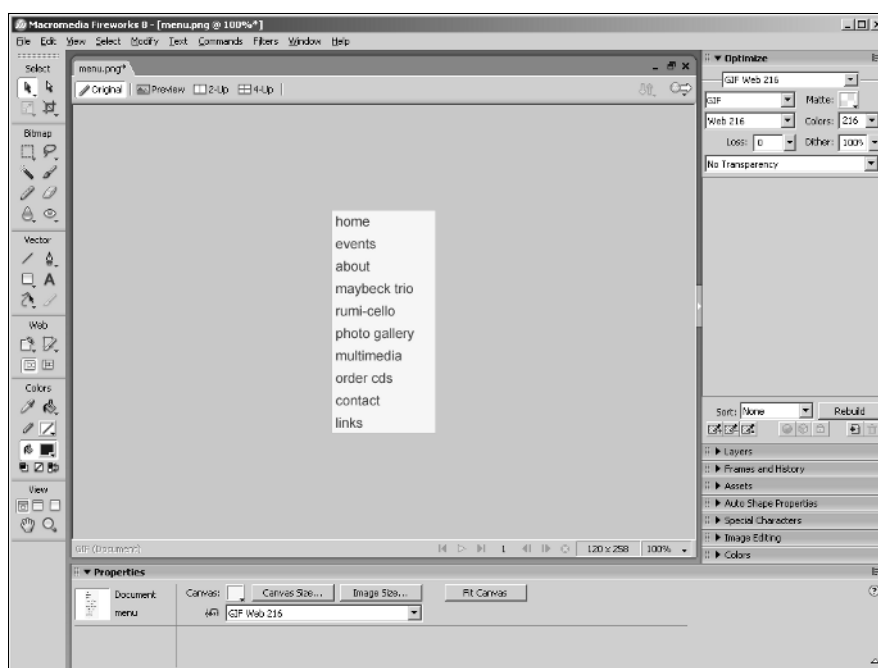
When I first began the task of redesigning a Web site for a busy cello player, my first step was to find out more about her needs and what type of Web designs she liked. She sent me the URLs of a few sites she likes, and we discussed her needs, likes, and dislikes. She wanted

- ◆ A site that's easy to update and maintain.
- ◆ A site with tasteful colors and graphics.
- ◆ A photo gallery she can easily update.
- ◆ A page with video and audio clips.
- ◆ A discography page with links to sites where people can purchase her work.
- ◆ A page with a schedule of upcoming performances.

Creating the Home Page

The home page is the window to every site. Therefore, it should load quickly and be inviting and compelling enough to entice the visitor to click a few links. Before coming to grips with the design for my cello-playing client's site, I created the navigation menu for the site. I used Fireworks to create a vertical navigation menu with rollover buttons. (See Figure 1-1.) I created the banner in Fireworks as well. I exported the menu as HTML and images and the banner as images. I optimized the buttons and banner as GIF files.

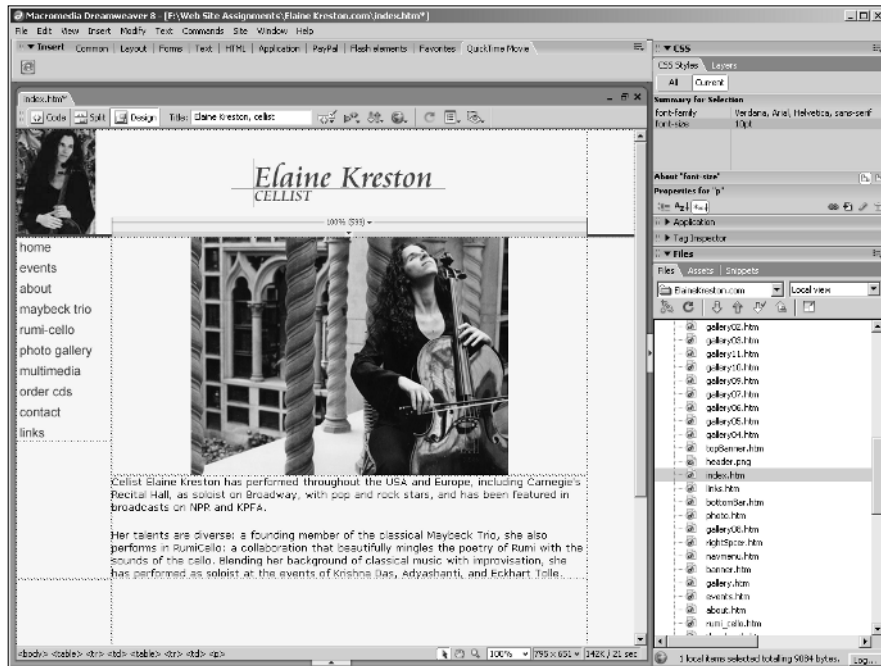
Figure 1-1:
Creating the
navigation
menu.



Her original site had a lovely picture of her playing her cello beside some ornate columns. I loved the shot and decided to use Active Slideshow Pro (which is covered in Book V, Chapter 4) on it. I started with random motion and then used the Slide To Center option. (See Figure 1-2.) In essence, it's a one-slide slide show, but the effect draws the viewer into the site.

To finish off the home page, I decided to add a bit of sound. I didn't want to increase the amount of time it took the page to download, so I used a five-second clip from a Bach Cello Concerto. I created the sound file for the home page in Flash and added it to the HTML document. (See Book V, Chapter 2 for more about incorporating sound on a Web site.)

Figure 1-2:
Adding
pizzazz to
the home
page.



Creating Other Pages

To meet my client's goals (see the earlier section, "Tailoring the Site to Your Client"), I had a slew of pages to add after creating the home page, which I discuss in the preceding section. This section covers those other pages.

The photo gallery

One of the site owner's requests was that the site be easy to edit. That left me with a few concerns regarding the photo gallery. I could have used the Image Gallery Magic plug-in in Dreamweaver to create a stunning gallery, but that would have required that a Web designer make the updates. I ended up creating a gallery in Flash. The gallery was published as an SWF file and added to the Web page. When the gallery loads, the first image in the gallery is displayed. The gallery (shown in Figure 1-3) comes with buttons that load the previous or next image. The images are numbered sequentially. When the cellist wants to change images, she can keep the same file names (`img1.jpg`, `img2.jpg`, and so on). She just resizes the images to fit the gallery and uploads them to the Images folder on her server. Based on our initial conversation, I knew she had the software and knowledge to perform this task.

Figure 1-3:
A Flash
photo
gallery in
an HTML
document.



The discography page

The cellist for whom I'm creating the site is quite prolific. She has an album of her own and has played on several others. In addition, she's created original soundtracks for two yoga DVDs. The volume of work had to be presented in a logical manner that she could easily edit. The albums were resized into thumbnails in Fireworks. Each thumbnail is housed in a table. Each thumbnail is a hyperlink to the Web site where visitors can purchase the work. (See Figure 1-4.) In addition, the site has a page to order CDs.



When you're creating a Web site, you can never take a visitor for granted. The visitor might not think of going to the Order CDs page, but when he sees the pointing hand appear when passing his cursor over one of the images, he'll be tempted to click it just to see what happens. It could result in a sale.

The events page

In addition to teaching music and recording, the cellist frequently performs. Therefore, she needed an events page, such as the one shown in Figure 1-5, to keep visitors informed. I created a table with two columns and multiple rows. The left column contains the date and time of the event, whereas the right column contains information about the event. An events page like this is easy for a site owner to edit.

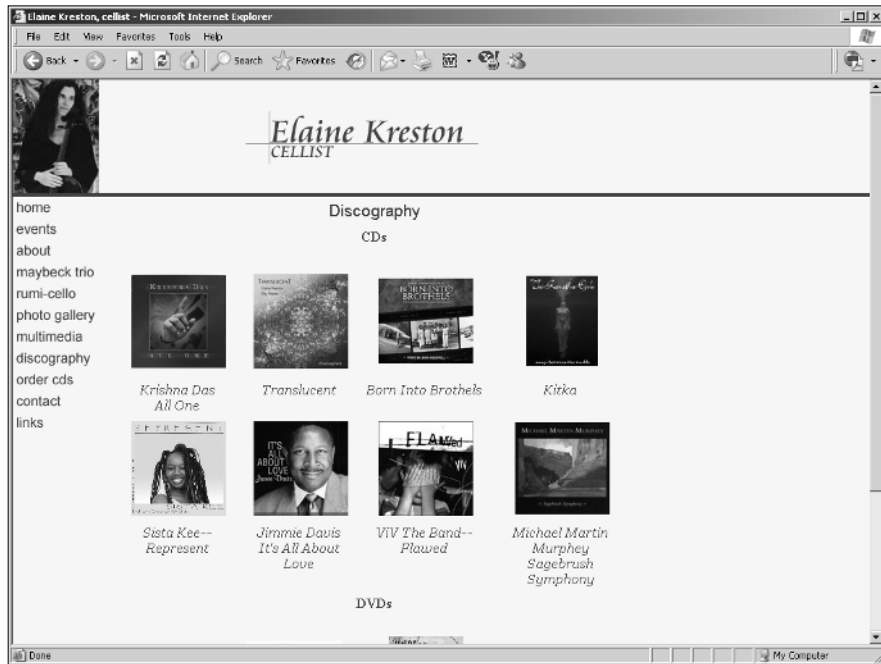


Figure 1-4:
The discography page.

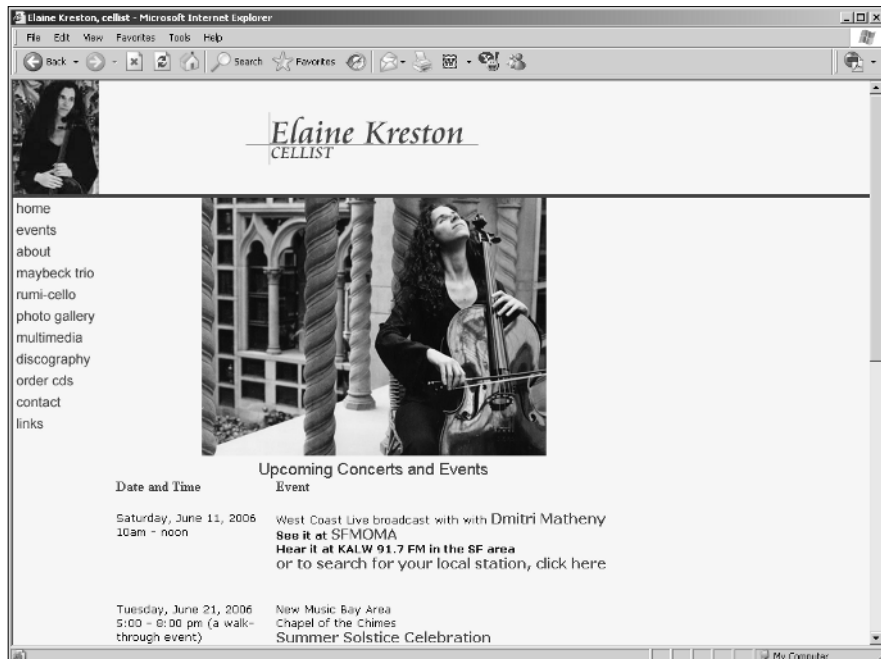


Figure 1-5:
Keeping site visitors informed about upcoming events.

The multimedia gallery

With the advent of high-speed cable modems, adding video and audio to a Web page is feasible. When you create a Web site for a musician, a page with multimedia clips (as shown in Figure 1-6) is the ideal way to showcase her talent. I recorded video of the cellist while I was attending a writing conference in San Francisco. I recorded her in several picturesque areas of San Francisco. The last clip was recorded on Baker Beach with the Golden Gate Bridge in the background. I edited the video and replaced the audio captured by the video camera with the cellist's studio recording of Bach's "Suite No. 1 for Cello" — the same piece she played while I shot the video. I edited the video and rendered it as a QuickTime MOV video file. The QuickTime Player was embedded in the page and linked to the video. In addition, I added several audio clips to the page. Book V covers incorporating multimedia elements in your Web design.

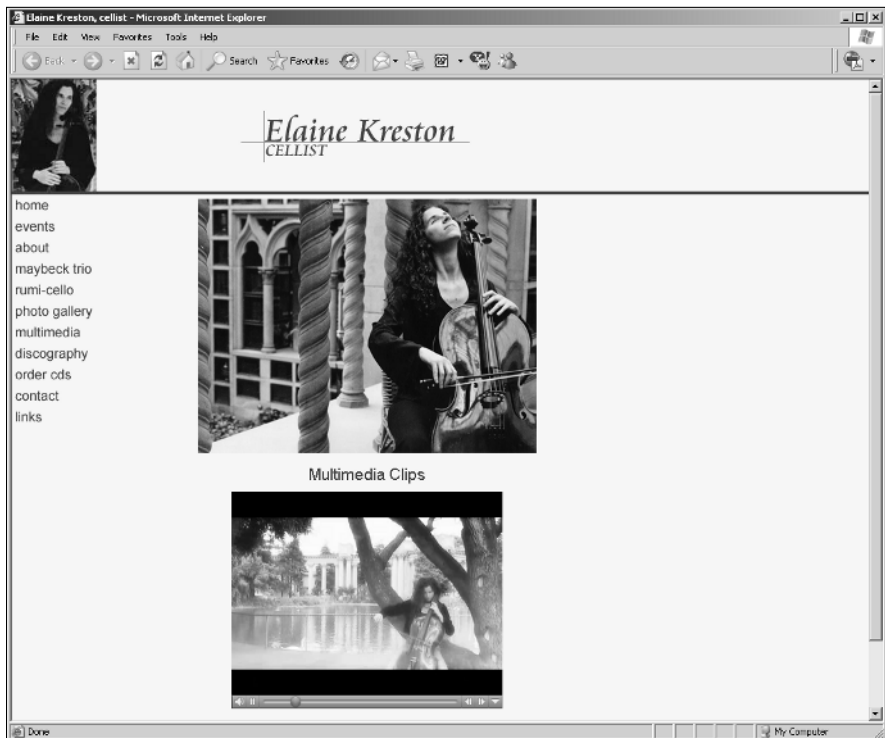


Figure 1-6:
A multi-
media page
with audio
and video
clips.

Editing a Personal Web Site

When you create a personal Web site, you take the same care as you do with any Web site. However, most people who can afford to hire a designer to create a personal site want to edit the site themselves. Therefore, you need to put some safeguards in place so the site owner doesn't turn your handiwork into something that looks like an experiment from a 4th grade student gone amuck. Make sure you create the page with a template. Create editable regions in which the site owner can update material. The areas that can cause the most problems are menus nested within a table. Most menu buttons are rollovers. If the client accidentally deletes a button, the results can be disastrous. This area should be locked. You should also lock the header and footer.



If your client tells you she wants to edit the site, include the cost of a copy of the Contribute application with your design fee. Just about anyone can master Contribute, including the aforementioned 4th grader. But don't just drop a copy of Contribute in your client's lap and wish her good luck. Sit down with your client and show her how to connect to a site and edit a page. You should also show her how and when to use tables, insert images, create links, and so on. If you take some time to show your client the right way to edit a site with Contribute, it can save you from having to deal with a phone call from a panicked client who messed up your design so badly that even you won't recognize it.

