

# Introduction

“... Mr. Rauschenberg ...  
gained a respect for the  
grid as an essential com-  
positional organizing tool.”

—MICHAEL  
KIMMELMAN,  
on the importance  
of grids to  
the artist Robert  
Rauschenberg.  
*The New York  
Times*, May 14,  
2008, obituary for  
Rauschenberg

A grid is used to organize space and information for the reader; it maps out a plan for the overall project.

In addition, a grid is a holding pen for information and a way to ordain and maintain order.

Although grids have been used for centuries, many graphic designers associate grids with the Swiss. The rage for order in the 1940s led to a very systematic way of visualizing information. Decades later, grids were considered monotonous and boring—the sign of a “designersaur.” Today, grids are again viewed as essential tools, relied upon by professionals who are both new to the practice and seasoned by decades of experience.

Each of the 100 principles in this book exists to provide a helpful nugget as you build a layout, system, or site, and each is illustrated by a project designed and published (in old or new media) in the last few years.

I hope the examples in *Layout Essentials* will instruct, intrigue, and inspire, while guiding you to keep in mind a most essential precept of communication: relate your typography and layout to the material.

## ELEMENTS OF A GRID

# 1. Know the Components

The main components of a grid are margins, markers, columns, flowlines, spatial zones, and modules.

### COLUMNS

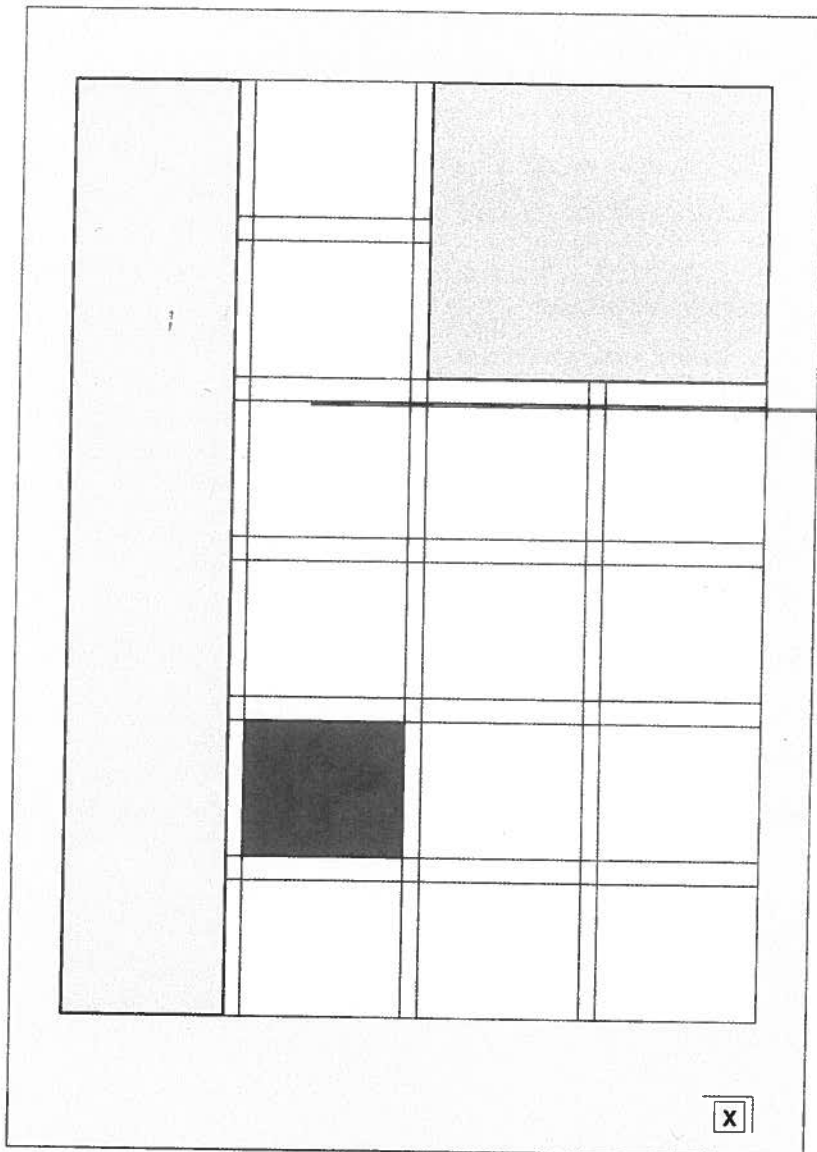
are vertical containers that hold type or images. The width and number of columns on a page or screen can vary, depending on the content.

### MODULES

are individual divisions separated by consistent space, providing a repeating, ordered grid. Combining modules can create columns and rows of varying sizes.

### MARGINS

are buffer zones. They represent the amount of space between the trim size, including gutter, and the page content. Margins can also house secondary information, such as notes and captions.



### SPATIAL ZONES

are groups of modules or columns that can form specific areas for type, ads, images, or other information.

### FLOWLINES

are alignments that break space into horizontal bands. Not actual lines, flowlines are a method for using space and elements to guide a reader across a page.

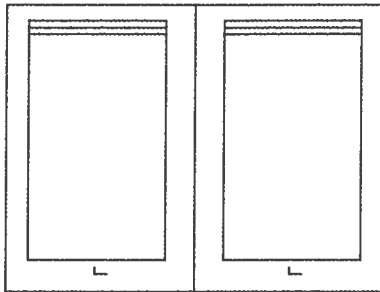
### MARKERS

help a reader navigate a document. Indicating placement for material that appears in the same location, markers include page numbers, running heads and feet (headers and footers), and icons.

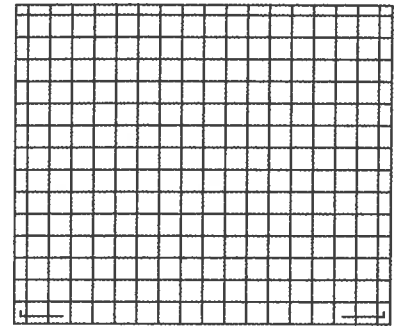
## BASIC GRID DIAGRAMS

# 2. Learn the Basic Structures

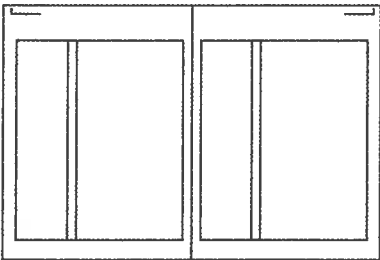
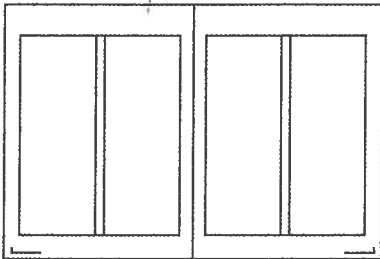
**A SINGLE-COLUMN GRID** is generally used for continuous running text, such as essays, reports, or books. The main feature on the page or spread is the block of text.



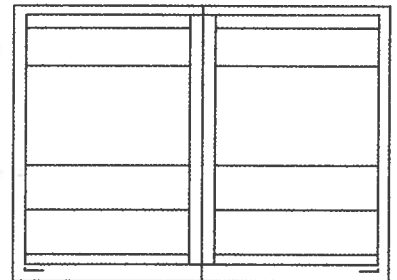
**MODULAR GRIDS** are best for controlling the kind of complex information found in newspapers, calendars, charts, and tables. They combine vertical and horizontal columns, which arrange the structure into smaller chunks of space.



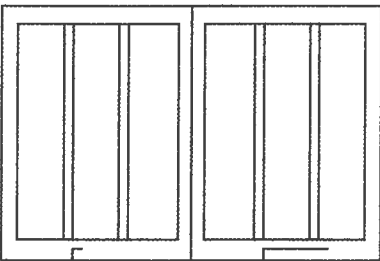
**A TWO-COLUMN GRID** can be used to control a lot of text or to present different kinds of information in separate columns. A double-column grid can be arranged with columns of equal or unequal width. In ideal proportions, when one column is wider than the other, the wider column is double the width of the narrow column.



**HIERARCHICAL GRIDS** break the page into zones. Many hierarchical grids are composed of horizontal columns.

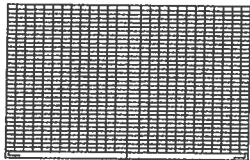


**MULTICOLUMN GRIDS** afford greater flexibility than single- or two-column grids, combine multiple columns of varying widths and are useful for magazines and websites.



## DETERMINE THE APPROPRIATE GRID

### 3. Assess the Material



Content, margins, amount of imagery, desired number of pages, screens, and panels all factor into deciding how to set up a grid. Above all, the content determines the structure of the grid. The grid you use depends on each specific design problem, but below are some general guidelines:

- Use a **SINGLE-COLUMN GRID** when working with continuous text, such as an essay or a book. A single column of text can seem less intimidating and more luxurious than multiple columns, making it suitable for art books or catalogs.
- For more complicated material, **TWO-COLUMN** or **MULTICOLUMN** grids afford flexibility. Columns that can be further broken into two provide the greatest number of variations. Multicolumn grids are used for websites to manage a huge range of information that includes stories, videos, and ads.
- For a lot of information, such as that in a calendar or schedule, a **MODULAR** grid helps to arrange units of information into manageable chunks. A modular grid can also be applied to newspapers, which have many zones of information.
- **HIERARCHICAL** grids divide pages or screens **HORIZONTALLY** and are often useful for simple websites, in which chunks of information are ordered, to provide easier reading while scrolling down a page.

All grids create order, and all involve planning and math. Whether a designer is working in pixels, picas, or millimeters, the key to the rational order of a grid is making sure the numbers add up.

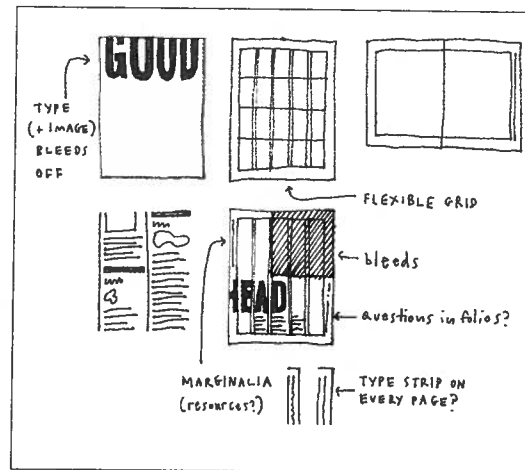
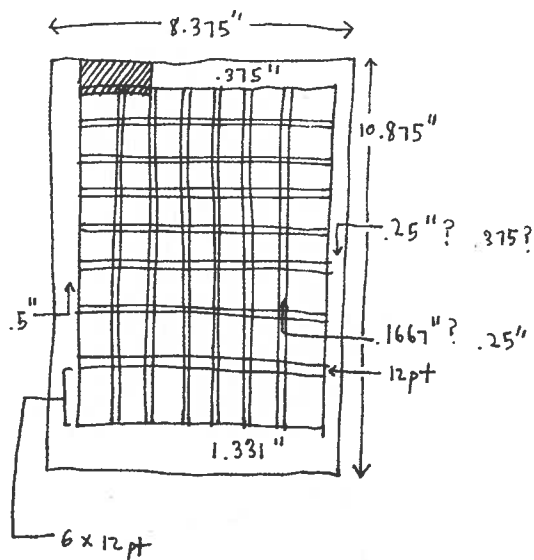
Project  
Good magazine

Client  
Good Magazine, LLC

Design  
Open

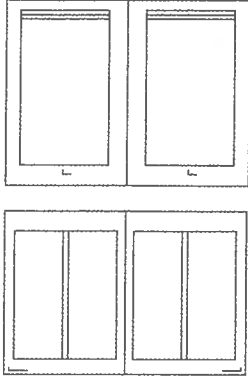
Designer  
Scott Stowell

Sketches by a master designer show how a grid evolves.



Developmental sketches show possible grids for the format of a magazine.

# 4. Put First Things First; Do the Math



Consider the main text first and analyze the project's complexity—most projects have restrictions, such as size, number of pages, and colors. When paying attention to the content, also factor in any project criteria.

Once you know the sizes of the page or screen and your basic text, figure out how the elements fit on the page. If you're working with text only, you can fit your text into the allotted number of pages. If you also need to include images, headings, boxes, or charts, first determine the amount of space needed for the text. The remainder is the amount of space left for imagery, charts, and other information. Often, you will need to simultaneously calculate numbers for all elements.

When you have determined the basic approach to the material and its fit, you can dive into the details of headings and hierarchies. (See next principle.)

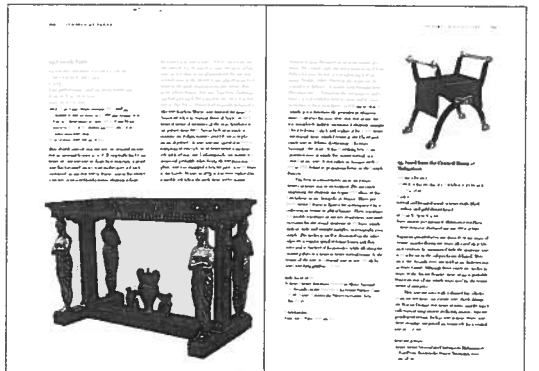
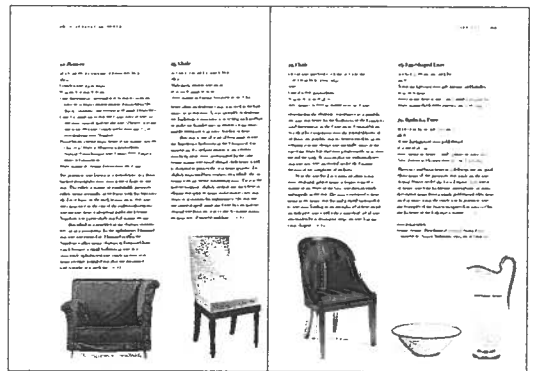
### TYPOGRAPHY TIPS

Type has a texture that springs from size, space, width, and line breaks. The consistent texture of running copy makes it easy for the reader to follow. It also provides a constant size within a story.

When dealing with a lot of copy, the typeface needs to be as functional as it is handsome. If the text forms a continuous story, it needs to be large enough, with enough space between the lines, to encourage a lengthy reading experience. If the columns are narrow, avoid gappy word spaces, by either setting type small or, alternatively, flush left, unjustified right.



A single column of text for this book of astronomical images echoes the idea of deep space.



A catalog with reams of text employs two columns to contain text and frame images.

Projects  
*Astronomy and  
Symbols of Power*

Client  
Harry N. Abrams, Inc.

Design Director  
Mark LaRivière

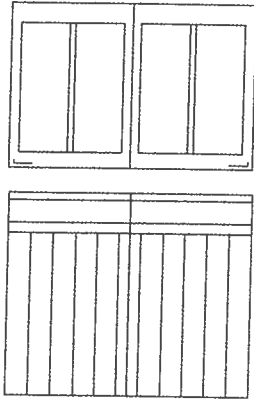
Design  
BTDNyc

Designer  
Beth Tondreau, Suzanne  
Dell'Orto, Scott Ambrosino  
(for *Astronomy* only)

Single or double-column grids depend on the content and extent of the text.

# HIERARCHY OF INFORMATION

## 5. Go Easy on the Reader



Does the material have headings? Subheadings? Lists? Bullets? If not, does it need any or all of the above? Make the most important information larger or bolder, or set it in another face to distinguish it from less-important text. Varying fonts as well as text size and weight can also help set apart different types of material, but keep it simple. If each style doesn't have a clear purpose, many different styles can be confusing.

Although size matters, space matters just as much. The location of a head and the amount of space surrounding it can also convey importance. To make a lot of disparate or varied material easy to parse, break it into segments for easy reading. Pull quotes are the visual equivalents of sound bites. Use sidebars and boxes to break information into chunks that can be easily skimmed. Typography can help a user immediately understand the content.

Project (on left)  
*Symbols of Power*

Client  
Harry N. Abrams, Inc.

Design Director  
Mark LaRivière

Design  
BTDnvc

Classical typography using the face Bodoni reflects the Napoleonic time period of the artifacts shown.

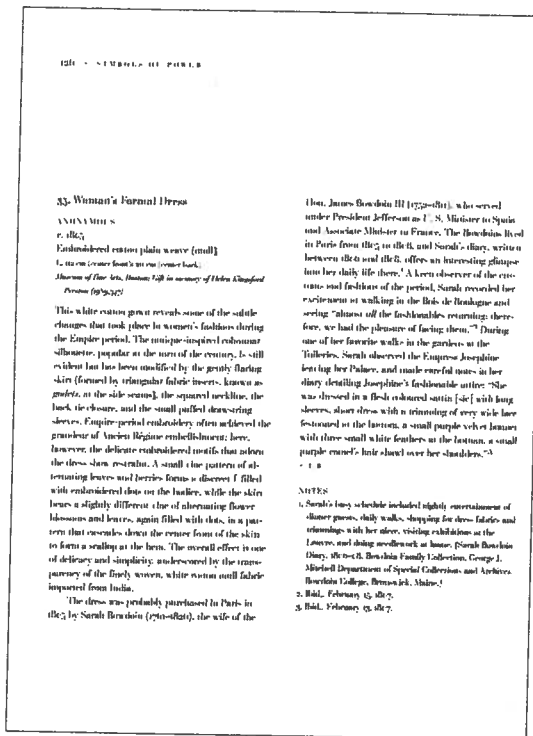
Project (on right)  
*Blueprint*

Client  
Martha Stewart Omnimedia

Design Director  
Deb Bishop

Designer  
Deb Bishop

Contemporary typography is clean, informative, and assertive.

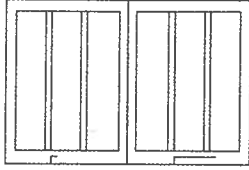


For those starting out and using only one typeface, a rule of thumb is to set up a hierarchy by incorporating roman upper- and lowercase and italic upper- and lowercase fonts. For more complex information, use various typefaces and sizes to set off chunks of text.



Varying typefaces and sizes and setting material within boxes are ways to handsomely contain a large range of information.

# 6. Determine an Order



Rarely are all images in a piece used at the same size. Just as text conveys information, image size indicates the importance of an event or subject. Some companies rank images in size order prior to proceeding to layout. Others rely upon the designer to define

an order or bring drama to a piece by varying size. Of course, some complex images need to be larger simply for readability's sake. In addition to function and dynamics through size, projects also need variation to keep the reader engaged.

**halte-jeux**

des collaborations s'installent à nouveau. Et quand les projets échappent à la facilité du décor gratuit, du "graphique", quand ils réintroduisent la question du sens, c'est généralement autour de la typographie que ça se passe, en assumant quelque part une fonction d'information... Avec l'information comme alibi, mais pas uniquement... Si on revient sur le début de notre discussion, à Bobigny, tu as fait quelque chose qui ressemble à une enseigne, mais c'est quand même le mot "Danse" que tu as écrit, et non pas "Centre national de la danse"! Et quand tu fais une proposition pour le tramway de Nice, tu ne produis pas une sculpture abstraite: c'est quand même d'un "T"! PdS: Oui, mais il y a des gens qui vont passer devant pendant des années sans décrypter ce "T"... Il y a même quelque chose d'un peu plus

subtil: j'ai toujours mis la face bleue dans un sens de circulation, et la face rouge dans l'autre: quand tu es entre deux stations, tu sais dans quel sens tu vas... SG: Elle est donc vraiment très fonctionnelle, ton intervention! PdS: Oui et non... Parce que c'est une chose qui ne se proclame pas. Et quand l'enseigne est de profil... SG: On ne sait pas où on va? ●

Images can be half a column, one column, or two columns wide. Occasionally breaking the grid can add drama and call attention to an image. It's possible to signal the importance of an image by the amount of space it fills.

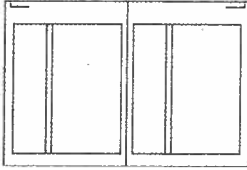
Project  
étapes: magazine

Client  
Pyramyd/étapes: magazine

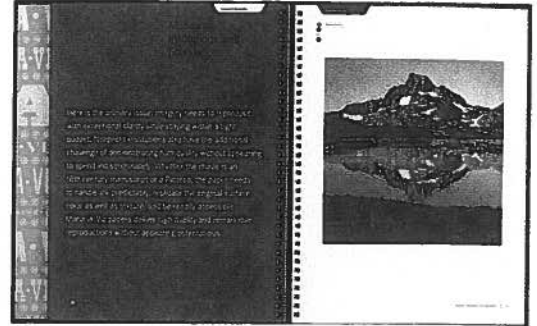
Design  
Anna Tunick

Images of varying sizes establish a pecking order for visuals.

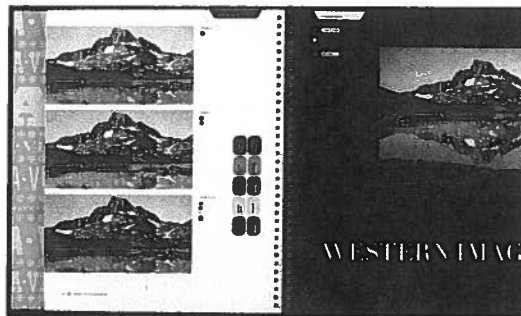
# 7. Consider All Elements



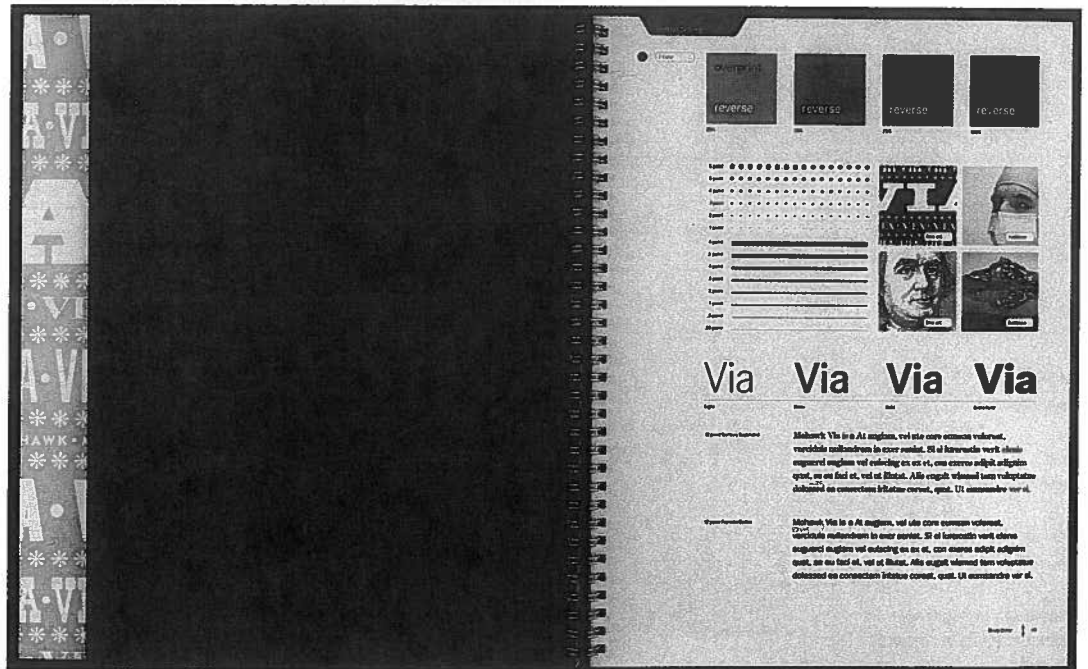
Depending on the medium or project, grids can isolate elements, by presenting type in one column or zone and images in another. Most grids integrate type and image, giving each enough emphasis to clarify information for the reader.



Emphasis on text. Here, the text is by itself on one page, with the image on another.



LEFT AND BELOW: A grid can let an image march across columns in a horizontal fashion, with captions below, or it can stack images vertically, with captions to either side of the image.



Project  
**Mohawk Via**  
*The Big Handbook*

Client  
 Mohawk Fine Papers Inc.

Design  
 AdamsMorioka, Inc.

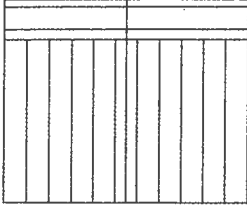
Designers  
 Sean Adams, Chirs Tallion

Grids control varied imagery  
 in a paper promotion.



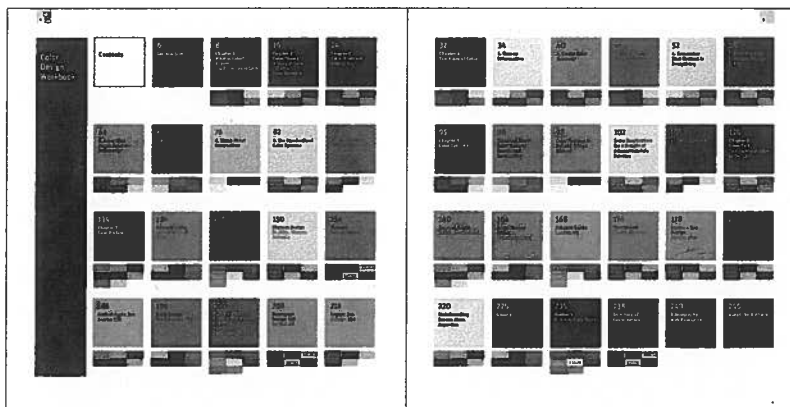
# COLOR

## 8. Define Space with Color



Color is a way to make modules or sections stand out. Color defines space as well as helps to organize elements within a space. Color also enlivens a page and provides a psychological signal for the kind of message that's being conveyed. When setting up colors, consider the audience. Saturated colors attract attention, while desaturated colors support the material in a more understated way. Too many colors can cause a piece to be busy and hard to navigate.

**A CRUCIAL PRODUCTION NOTE ABOUT COLOR**  
We live in an RGB world, in which both clients and designers view almost everything on screen. Colors on screen are luminous, saturated, beautiful, and RGB. However, there is a big difference between color on screen and on paper. Be aware that traditional four-color printing will require the careful choice of paper and a good amount of color correcting to approximate the luminosity of the color seen on screen.



Colors can act as containers for separate bits of information.

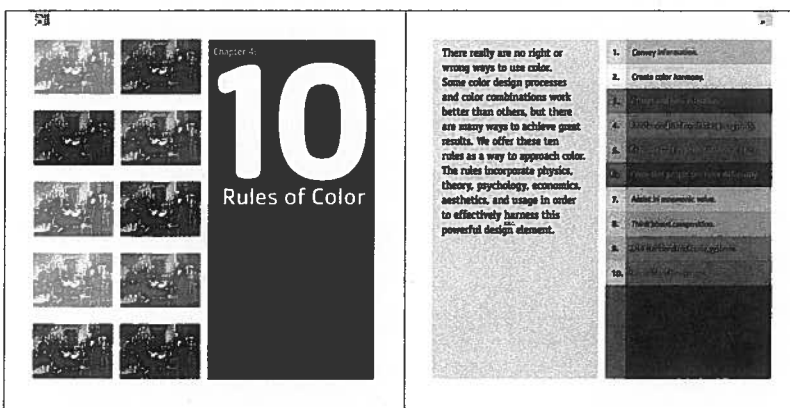
Project  
*Color Design Workbook*

Client  
Rockport Publishers

Design  
AdamsMortloka, Inc.

Designers  
Sean Adams, Monica Schlaug

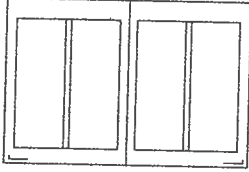
Spreads from this book demonstrate how color can serve a strong function as well as add a strong and bright presence to a piece.



Color sets off blocks of information, whether it is used in modules, boxes, or blocks. Modules can be quasi-ornamental—setting off colored boxes against boxes containing text—or functional, helping to differentiate between various kinds of boxed text.

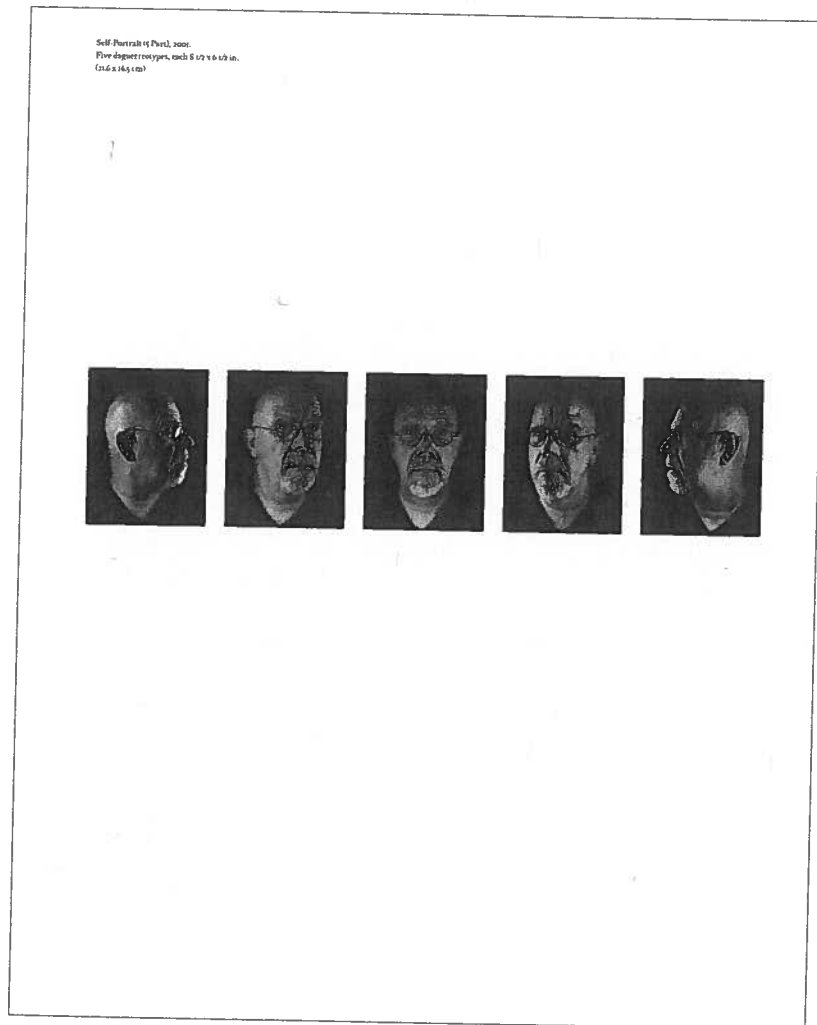
## SPACE

# 9. Communicate Using Space



Space communicates volumes. Although a grid must be strong and clear enough to hold rafts of information, it's not necessary to fill every part of it. Space sets off the message, giving appropriate room

for reading and understanding text. By design, a large amount of space creates drama and focus. Space can signal luxury or importance, and the absence of anything else on the page transmits a definite aesthetic.



The use of space is a conscious design decision to give the reader pause.

Project  
Chuck Close | Work

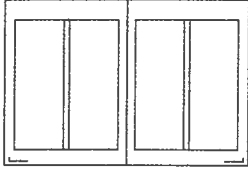
Client  
Prestel Publishing

Design  
Mark Melnick

Like design, art is about space.

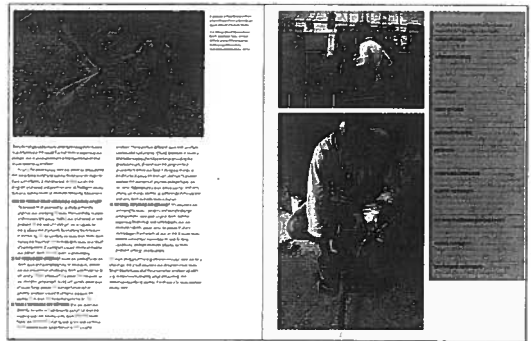
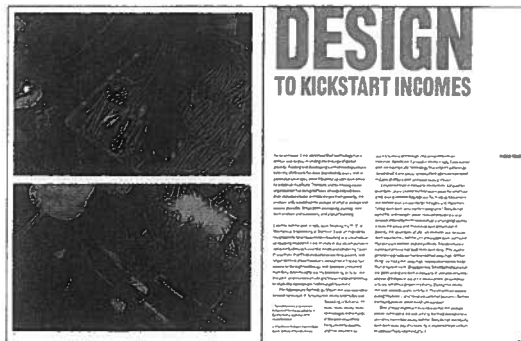
# RHYTHM AND FLOW

## 10. Pacing Sets the Tone



Some grids include mechanical, clear, repeated, or marching columns of images or information to catalog as much material as possible. However, most grids also allow for lyrical movement from one block of information to the next, from spread to spread, or

from screen to screen. The pacing of material on the page makes a difference in attracting or sustaining interest. Pacing can stem from variation in sizes and positions of images and typography as well as the amount of margin around each image.



**Project**  
*Design for the Other 90%*,  
exhibition catalog

**Client**  
Smithsonian, Cooper-Hewitt,  
National Design Museum

**Design**  
Tsang Seymour Design

**Design Director**  
Patrick Seymour

**Art Director/Designer**  
Laura Howell

The flow of layouts tells a  
100% clear story.

Continuing a story from one page or spread to the next calls for a sense of movement and variation. Images in varying sizes enliven

this story and help guide and intrigue the reader. Image sizes can be determined by the importance and quality of the content.