Real World HTML: Columns and Heresy
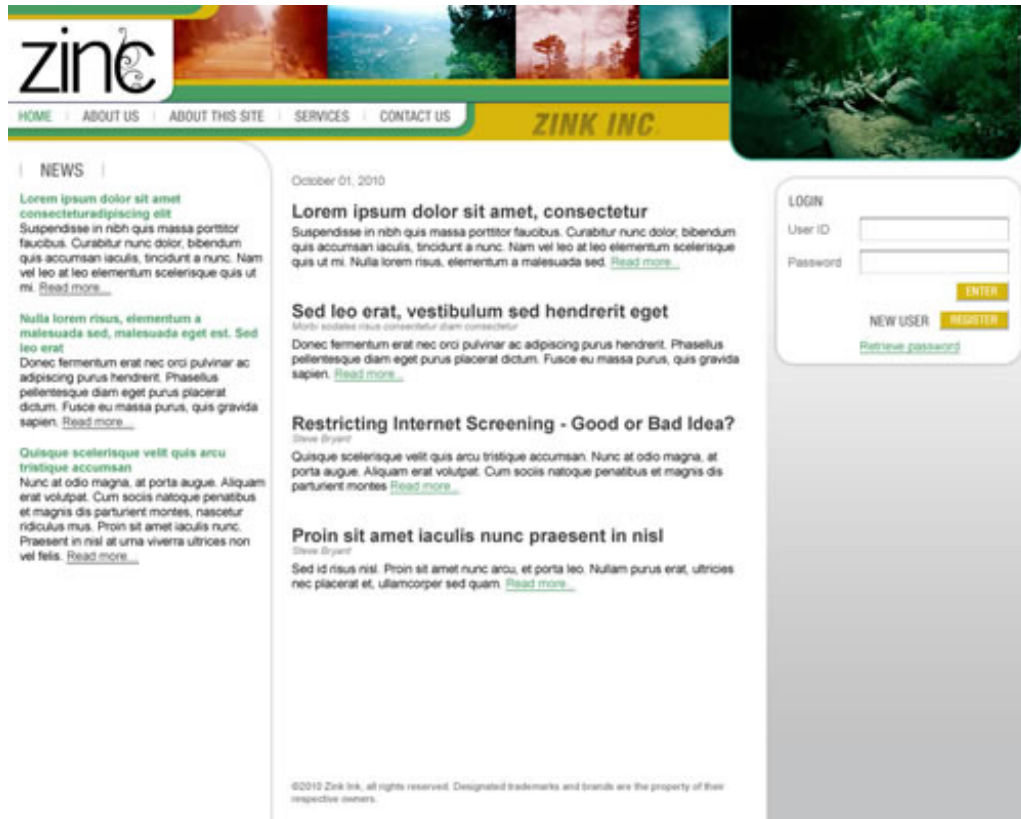
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Related Categories: HTML

In our last "**Real World HTML**" entry (a few weeks ago - sorry about that), we implemented the **site navigation**. Now we need to finish up the skeleton of the site.

Before we go on, let's review our design in all three states.

Pre-Login State:

Post-Login State:

Subsection State:

The site has a third column on the right only if the user is not logged in. The background for this column extends to the bottom of the page regardless of how much content is in the column. The copyright notice on the bottom of the site lines up with the bottom of both columns regardless of the height of any column, but in no case overlaps over any text.

Imagine how you might solve this problem for a second. The problem seems easy, but each solution presents challenges. Oftentimes, this solution sends people running for JavaScript hacks. This, in my opinion, is the wrong way to go. JavaScript should enhance functionality, not be a fundamental requirement for making the site design work at all.

Absolute positioning and floats are good solutions for many problems, but not for this one.

Instead, I am going to resort to (brace yourself!) tables. More accurately, one table.

```
<table border="0" cellpadding="0" cellspacing="0" id="body-table" width="100%">
<tr>
   <td rowspan="2" id="col-news" class="content-cell">
      <div id="news" class="cell-div">
      </div>
   </td>
   <td id="body-content" class="content-cell">
      <div class="cell-div">
      </div>
   </td>
   <td rowspan="2" id="col-login" class="content-cell">
      <div class="cell-div">
      </div>
   </td>
</tr>
<tr>
   <td id="footer">
      <div class="cell-div">
      </div>
   </td>
</tr>
</table>
```

Now I can style my cells appropriately. I added a div with a class of "cell-div" so that I could set the width of each cell and then add padding within it without worrying about the effects of that on width calculations.

I also took advantage of the "rowspan" attribute of the news and login columns so that those would each extend just past the footer cell and the footer would always remain at the bottom of the page

and below any content.

For the price of using a single table, I have avoided the need for any JavaScript, avoided the hassle of worrying with interactions of floats, and gotten my background and footer to line up exactly as I want - all on any browser from the very old to the very new.

It may be heresy, but it is effective.

Here is our site skeleton so far:

```
<!DOCTYPE HTML PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 4.0 Strict//EN"> <html>
<head>
    <title>Real World HTML: Example 1 (Zinc)</title>
    <link rel="stylesheet" type="text/css" href="/all.css">
</head>
<body>
<div id="container">
    <div id="header">
        <div id="nav-primary" class="nav"></div>
        <div id="nav-secondary" class="nav"></div>
        <div id="nav-tertiary" class="nav"></div>
    </div>
    <div id="body">
        <table border="0" cellpadding="0" cellspacing="0" id="body-table" width="100%">
        <tr>
            <td rowspan="2" id="col-news" class="content-cell">
                <div id="news" class="cell-div">
                </div>
            </td>
            <td id="body-content" class="content-cell">
                <div class="cell-div">
                </div>
            </td>
            <td rowspan="2" id="col-login" class="content-cell">
                <div class="cell-div">
                </div>
            </td>
        </tr>
        <tr>
            <td id="footer">
                <div class="cell-div">
                </div>
            </td>
        </tr>
        </table>
    </div>
</div>
</body>
</html>
```

I really think this is the best solution for the problem, but I am will to be proved wrong. If you have a better way, chime in. We will all be better for it.

One other thing to notice about this site. The curved line around "News". It curves around to the left wall, but when the user is logged in, the horizontal portion extends all the way in the other direction to the right wall as well.

Next time we will take a look at that.