

CREATING ILLUSTRATION PORTFOLIO ON A DIGITAL PLATFORM

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines portfolio as a concept and in practice. The goal of the project is to test different website platforms and determine which one of them functions as the best platform for a personal digital illustration portfolio.

The first part of the project explores the concept of portfolio and digital portfolio in general. The second part consists of a ranking of different platforms and presents their characteristic features and tools in five different categories, which consist of price, usability, layout, galleries and other features.

The final part of the project presents a summary of the results, showcases my own portfolio website which is built on the chosen platform (22Slides) and evaluates the results and my learning process.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Opinnäytetyöni tutkii portfolioa konseptina ja käytännössä. Työn tarkoituksena on kokeilla erilaisia nettisivualustoja ja määrittellä, mikä niistä toimii parhaiten oman henkilökohtaisen kuvitusportfolion alustana.

Työn ensimmäinen osuus tutkii ja taustoittaa portfolioa ja digitaalista portfolioa yleisesti. Seuraava osuus koostuu portfolioalustojen arvioinnista ja esittelee niiden ominaisuuksia ja työkaluja viidessä kategoriassa, joihin kuuluvat hinta, käyttökokemus, ulkoasu, galleriat ja muut ominaisuudet.

Työn viimeinen osuus tiivistää arviointiprosessin tulokset, esittelee oman portfoliosivustoni joka on rakennettu valitulle portfolioalustalle (22Slides) ja arvioi lopputulosta ja oppimisprosessia.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE TOPIC

The visual culture is in constant change. Modern technology opens up new possibilities for designers who must keep up with the times and embrace new methods of creative thinking and working. Presenting visual material is easier and faster than ever before but the amount of options also introduces challenges. Due to numerous ways to showcase creative work, it can be difficult to determine the most suitable ones that support one's personal purposes.

In the field of art and design, a portfolio is a collection of visuals that represents designer's visual identity, abilities, goals and motivation in the chosen area of expertise. It can function as a starting point for a professional career or as a collection of established work. Whereas a traditional collection of work usually consists of a folder and loose sheets, can a digital portfolio take any form imaginable.

The most common way to present artwork is a website, which can be either coded or built with a website platform. Website platforms provide versatile tools for portfolio creation, but choosing between them can be challenging, since they all offer features that make them seem like the most suitable option for presenting artwork.

This thesis examines different portfolio platforms and ranks them in pros and cons in order to determine which one of them functions as the best platform for a personal digital portfolio.

1.2 THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Which portfolio platform supports a personal digital illustration portfolio the best way possible?

1.3 THE GOAL OF THE THESIS

The idea for this project started with the need to build a personal illustration portfolio that reflects my visual identity. I'm very interested in illustration and wish to express myself professionally in the field of art and design in the future. Therefore I need a functional portfolio presentation that supports my artwork.

The primary purpose of this project is to examine which platforms function as the best base structures for a digital portfolio. The features of different platforms are evaluated from the viewpoint of my own personal artwork and the goal is to find a suitable platform that is in line with my set criteria for a portfolio presentation. The chosen platform will function as the base construction of my illustration portfolio, which I can later edit as my artwork and ideas evolve. That said, the result of this project is not meant to be stable and permanent, but something experimental that I can use as a starting point to present my artwork.

Digital illustration portfolio is a practical and current topic and offers all the components for a comprehensive project that allows me to use and showcase my creative abilities in a versatile way, both in terms of graphic design and illustration. All in all, this thesis is an important personal project that will hopefully result in a functional portfolio presentation that supports my current visual identity.

2 THE ELEMENTS OF PORTFOLIO

2.1 THE CORE CONCEPT OF PORTFOLIO

Portfolio is a presentation of professional work. In the field of art and design it's usually a collection of images, a visual resume equivalent to a written CV, that represents designer's identity, abilities, motivation, goals and professionalism in the chosen field of expertise. (Myers 2014, 2.)

The main aspects of a functional portfolio are interesting content and presentation, which together establish designer's identity in a memorable and distinctive way. Portfolio should function like a well-designed business card and tie the artwork and information together into a visually interesting presentation that can be easily linked back to a certain designer.

Portfolio can mean different things to different people depending on their professional status. For a student, a portfolio can function as a way of experimentation within the chosen field of profession and as a starting point for a career, whereas for established designers it's usually a promotion tool that is used to showcase published work.

To me a portfolio should be a simple presentation of work that functions as a starting point for a potential professional career, as I wish to express myself in the field of illustration in the future.

2.2 THE PURPOSE OF PORTFOLIO

Portfolio should have a goal (Clazie 2010, 9). The goal doesn't have to be specific since one will never know for sure what exact profession or visual identity one is to embrace in the future. The creative field and the work opportunities it offers are constantly changing, which results in that the creative path of an individual might be complex and take unexpected turns in different directions.

That said, instead of expressing that the portfolio should have a specific goal, it might be more convenient to say that it should have a direction. A direction is something that stems from the designers strengths and interests as a content creator. Before anything, one must know who they are as a designer: what are their skills, preferred ways of working and aspirations for a career (Clazie 2010, 18). Having a direction, whether it's defined or more vague, clarifies the purpose of the portfolio and determines the platforms and publication forms that the artwork is most suitable for.

Every designer has their own characteristic ways of working and preferred visual topics and themes that will always, in one way or another, find their way into the presentation of work. It's important to consider what kind of presentation matches the artwork and which platforms provide tools for a suitable presentation.

My personal artwork is, at the moment, probably most focused on story illustration. It's concept-driven and created with the mixture of gouache, ink and computer. The characteristic features of my artwork are details and visuals echoing the older world.

All these aspects together set a direction for my portfolio. First of all, the presentation should be constructed on a platform that is meant for visual work such as illustration in order to support my visual identity properly. Since the material is solely image-based, the presentation must utilize highly functional image galleries. Stylistically it should seek for a structure that is both fresh and timeless.



- THE HOUSE AT THE END OF THE ROAD -

IMAGE 1. Personal illustration work

2.3 CHOOSING THE CONTENT OF PORTFOLIO

Content is the most important element in a visual portfolio. It's the highlight of the presentation that showcases designer's abilities to generate different concepts. (Myers 2014, 10.)

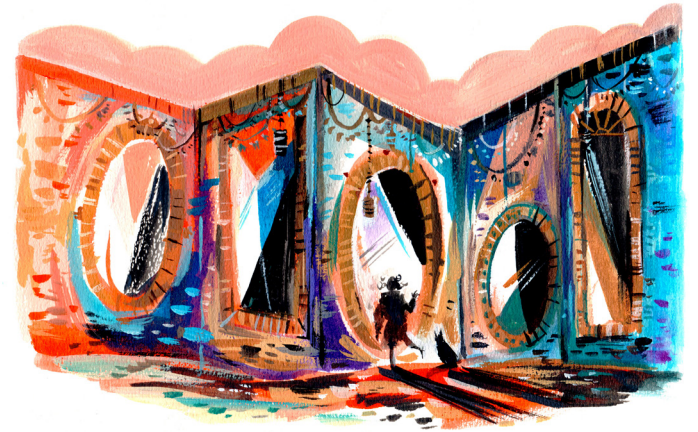
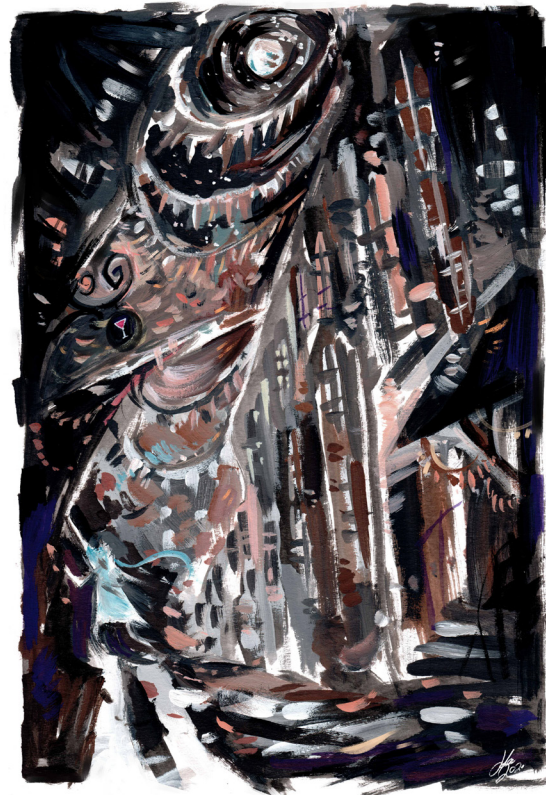
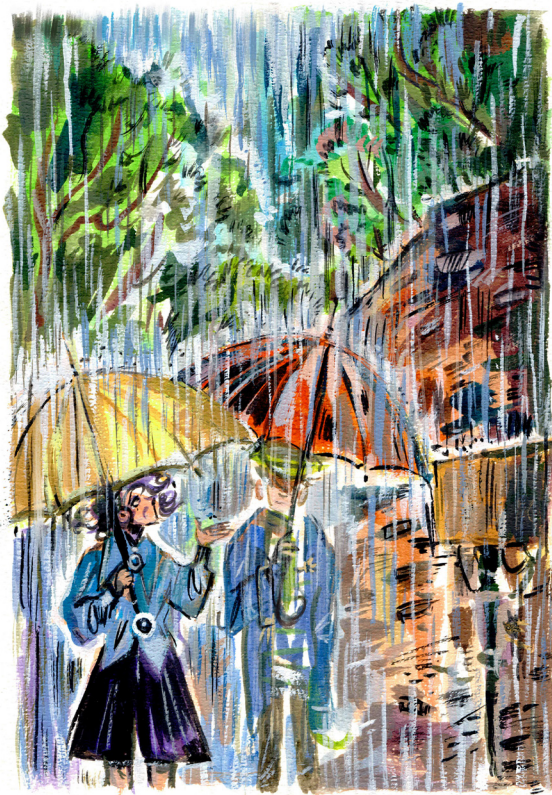
It can be difficult to determine what should be presented in a portfolio. No matter the chosen field of art and design, the creation process of portfolio should always be approached with quality over quantity in mind. That said, the material should be of limited amount but versatile enough to showcase the visual identity and skills of the designer (Taylor 2010, 10). The number of visuals in a portfolio depends on the chosen field and the nature of the creative projects. Clazie (2010, 102) states that the average number of images/projects in a digital, image-based portfolio usually lingers somewhere between 10-20. Images can be grouped into larger entities or presented as single images.

Portfolio can consist of client work or personal work. Both types of work are important when showcasing creative abilities. A client project indicates that the designer is able to adapt to different topics and themes and produce various concepts. Personal work, on the other hand, is often more individualistic and presents the unique personal vision of the designer more clearly.

The nature of the visual material depends on the professional position of the designer. A student portfolio, for instance, usually consists of material that is different in nature to that of an established artist. School work tends to primarily offer opportunities to explore across a range of disciplines and experiment with personal style instead of focusing on specific type of work. This usually results in that students have a miscellaneous collection of work that is versatile but not very focused. School work, as important it is as a way of developing personal skills, doesn't always reflect the designer's desired way of working or professional artistic image: work can look outdated or is simply not relevant or interesting in topics and themes.

In this case personal, self-initiated projects can work as a way of establishing a more focused career path, especially when it comes to designers with no former work experience (Rees 2014, 114). For me personal projects serve the purpose of a fun freetime activity and a way to experiment with different visual concepts within the field of art and design. Illustration is something I would like to work on in the future professionally, whether it's personal projects or client work.

Given this, personal projects come across as a natural choice of content for my portfolio, since they are something I have created a lot and from which I can easily build up a collection of work. They also represent my current visual identity in the field of illustration.



IMAGES 2-4. Personal illustration work

My illustration work is usually created with gouache, ink and computer. For this project I have gathered a small collection of work that is related to my personal projects and portrays my most recent skills as an illustrator in terms of the use of colours, technique and themes. Some pieces utilize more linework (as shown in image 2) whereas others come across as more conceptual (images 3 and 4).

2.4 THE PURPOSE OF DIGITAL PORTFOLIO

“Having a traditional non-digital portfolio is a bit like having your stage located in a small town only as big as you’re able to walk across. Having a digital portfolio is more like having it in Times Square.”

(Clazie 2010, 7).

The definition of a traditional portfolio is a folder that consists of loose sheets (Eisenman 2006, 9). Nowadays a portfolio can take any form imaginable and function as an interesting multimedia presentation. The most common and popular digital presentation method is a personal website, which covers many positive aspects that benefit designers.

Digital portfolio website is a place that collects the creative work, contact information and social networking channels together in a cohesive presentation. It’s a sign of an artist who has a stable and distinctive visual identity and direction. On top of the visuals it consists of, digital portfolio demonstrates designer’s skills within the use of the internet and digital software, which is an aspect that counts a lot in the modern visual work market (Myers 2014, 23).

What makes a portfolio website an especially effective and popular way to showcase artwork is its accessibility. Portfolio website is international and available to anyone, anytime and anywhere, making it an easy and effective way to showcase and promote artwork. It’s also easier to update than a traditional printed collection of work. Website gives designers opportunities to find their audience, maintain online connections and look for different work opportunities. Digital devices and new presentation methods make freelance work and the creative process more efficient.

3 PORTFOLIO PLATFORMS FOR ILLUSTRATORS

Website can be based on HTML coding or built with a website platform that functions as the base structure of a digital portfolio. Some website platforms are free and others are available for extra charge, whereas most of them provide free trial versions and additional features that can be unlocked by upgrading to a premium account.

Coding offers more possibilities in terms of layout customization and experimentation and can result in a more distinctive website layout, but it can also be a time consuming process. Many designers are not necessarily as interested in the technical side of the portfolio creation process as they are in creating artwork to which portfolio platforms can present a practical solution.

Choosing between different platforms can be difficult, since they all possess features that make them seem like a good potential choice for presenting artwork. Testing platforms helps with determining which one of them benefits one's personal needs the best way possible.

The platforms I've chosen for the testing process are ones that I've become familiar with over the years and tried out before either on school courses or in my freetime when looking for a suitable platform for my artwork. Some platforms were also found on several website listings which recommend portfolio platforms for designers.

In order to create a comprehensive ranking out of different options, I tried to pick platforms that are either solely targeted to visual designers or are otherwise commonly known as visual platforms. The platforms that ultimately made it into the test include Carbonmade, Wix, Squarespace, Adobe Portfolio, Format, Fabrik, Portfoliobox, Pixpa, 22Slides and Behance, which are evaluated in five different categories.

3.1 MY CRITERIA FOR A PLATFORM

Platforms vary in their features and built-in tools, and in order to evaluate them properly, one must have a general idea of what to look for in a portfolio platform. This following list of evaluation points has been solely created from my own perspective as a graphic design student. Saying this, it might be different to that of an established designer or someone from a different field of specialization. The list is based on my existing knowledge of the general features of platforms and consists of aspects that I think are important to take into account when choosing a platform. These points include:

1. PRICE

Is the platform free, expensive or affordable? Does it offer a trial version?

Website platform should offer either a free or trial version and be reasonable in price.

2. USABILITY

Is the general loading time fast or slow? What does the interface look like at first glance? Is the platform easy to navigate?

Platform should be easy and fast to edit and navigate. I'm looking for a simple presentation of work that is easy to construct without needing to spend an excessive amount of time on the editing process.

3. LAYOUT

What kind of layout does the platform utilize? Is it freeform or based on existing structures? Are customization tools broad or limited?

Platform should provide basic customization tools that make editing header element, colours, text and general structure possible. Customizable layout makes the presentation more distinctive and visually interesting.

4. GALLERIES

What are the gallery options? Are they customizable? Do they support image captions? What is the quality of images in galleries?

Galleries should be somewhat customizable in terms of style and structure. Platform should provide a basic thumbnail gallery which presents images in high quality and on large scale with image titles/descriptions.

5. OTHER FEATURES

What are the other features that the platform offers? Are these features useful or unnecessary?

Other features are an additional part of a website platform and not necessary. Useful additional elements include built-in social media links/buttons and a private website mode.

3.2 CARBONMADE

PRICE

Carbonmade offers a trial version with no time limit and several premium account options (\$8, \$12, \$12/month) which unlock a public visible website, more storage space, customization tools, ad-free interface, personal domain, developed analytics and the possibility to upload multimedia files.

USABILITY

The interface looks fresh and modern and has fast loading time. It can come across as confusing at first, since different parts of the layout are operated from different sections.

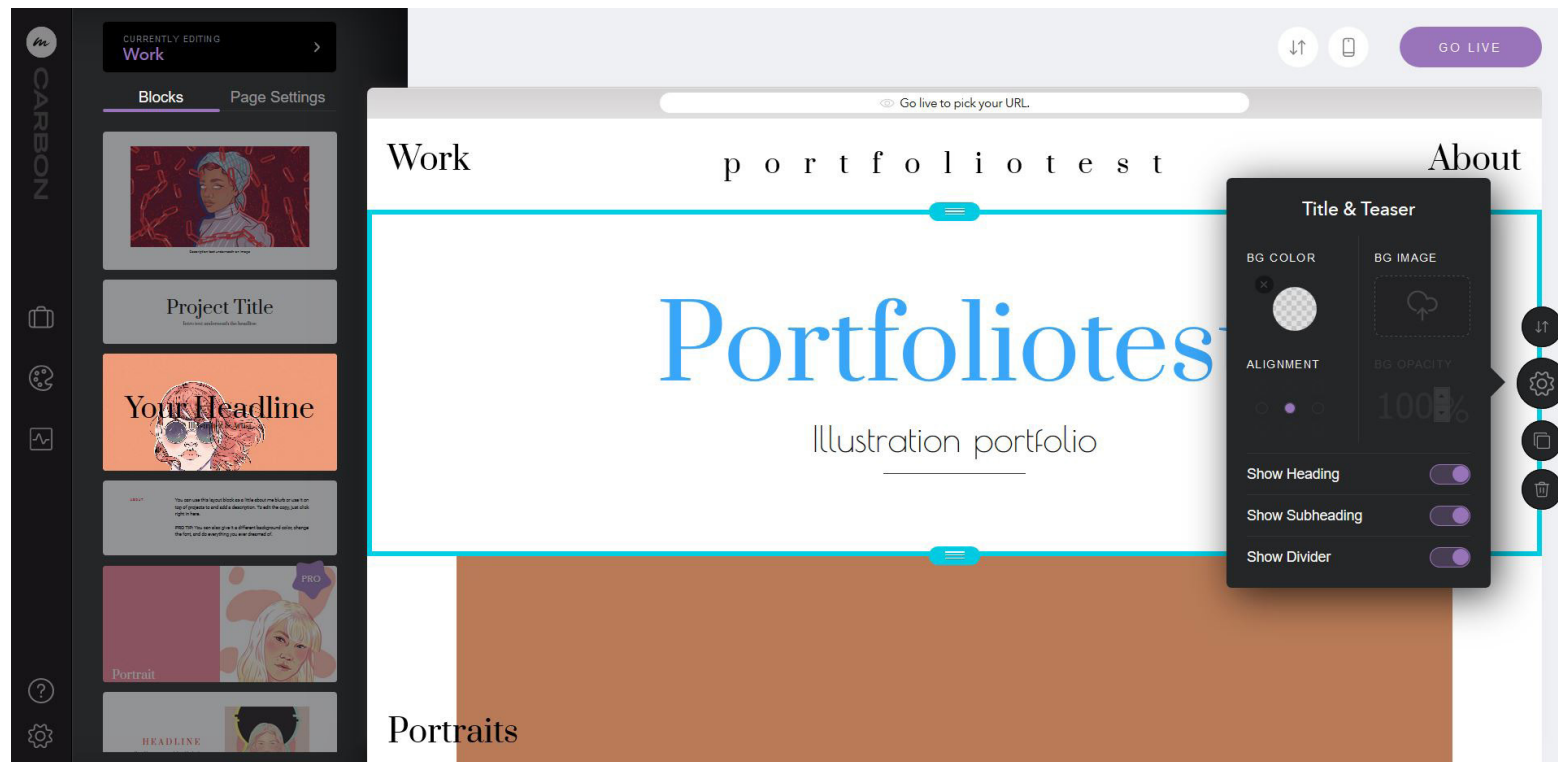


IMAGE 5. Carbonmade's editing interface

LAYOUT

Editing starts with a ready-made template, which can be modified block by block. Carbonmade utilizes a drag and drop system (as shown in image 6) and features a collection of block elements (e.g image, text and gallery blocks, columns and about-sections) that can be used in layout design.

Individual design elements like header, footer, main content block, galleries, grids, colours and text can be modified manually in alignment, colour and size.

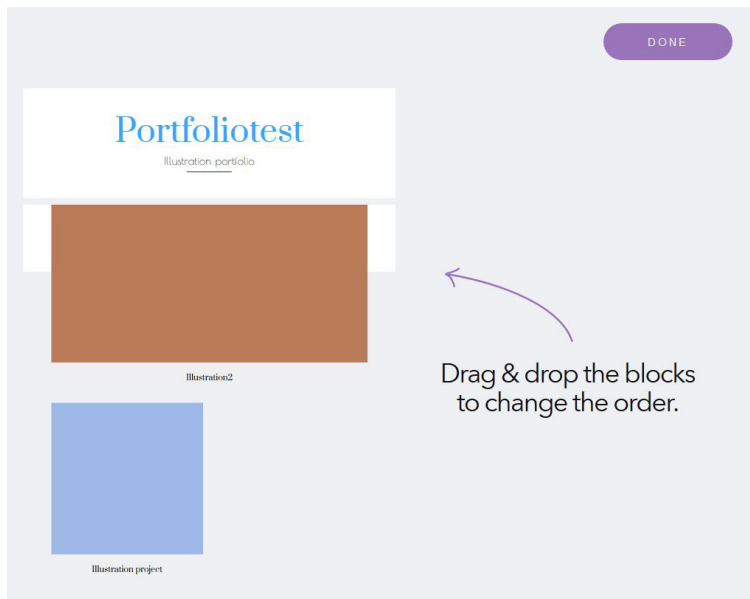


IMAGE 6. Drag and drop system

Platform provides a collection of serif and sans serif font options. The chosen typefaces function as primary and secondary fonts and are applied to the whole layout, which makes the layout cohesive but limits freedom with choosing fonts for different parts of the layout.

The trial version of the platform doesn't feature all customization tools, like certain block elements. In order to go live and view the website in full screen, it's necessary to upgrade to a premium account.

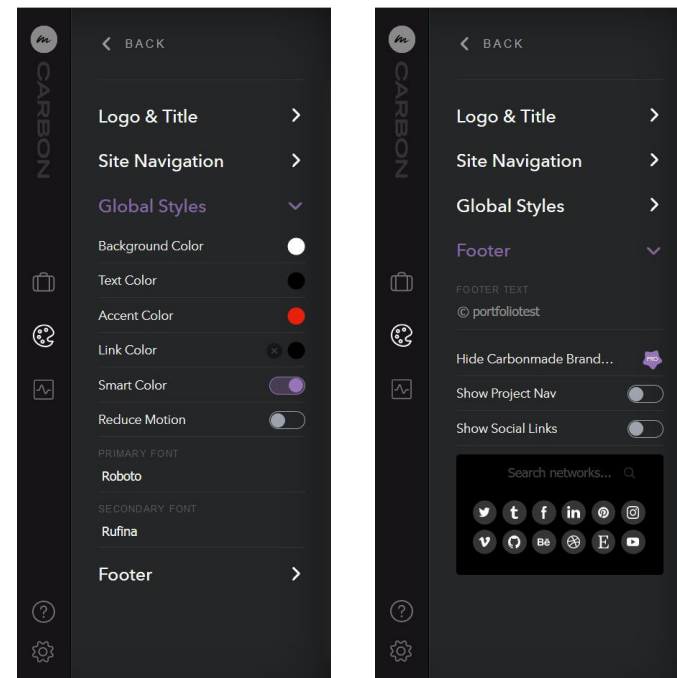


IMAGE 7. Tool boxes

GALLERIES

Projects are controlled from a separate project space. They can be saved as drafts or as published projects. Gallery options include e.g. square, masonry, rectangle and alternate forms. Gallery columns, gaps, width and background colour can be edited manually. The project thumbnail links can be changed in structure to a square form, but changing the actual galleries in form (to square) is not possible. Galleries present images on large scale and in lightbox mode, but don't support image captions.

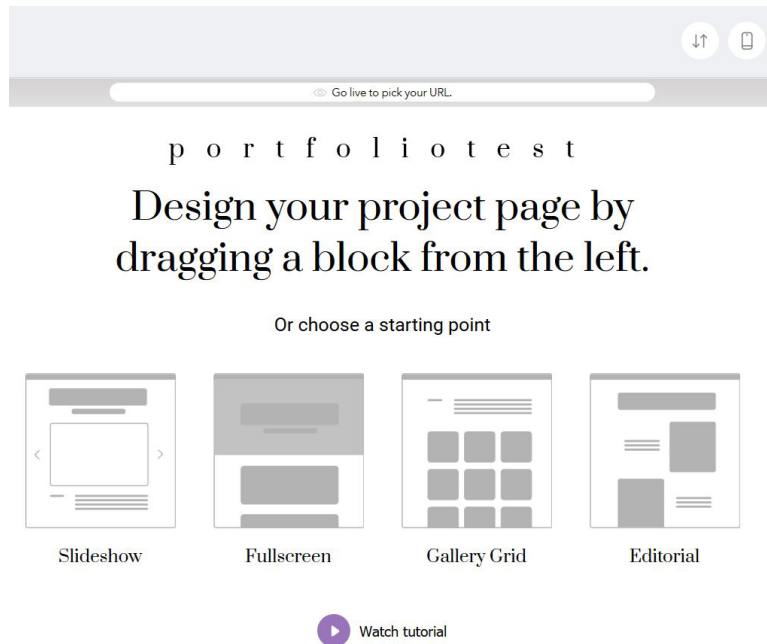
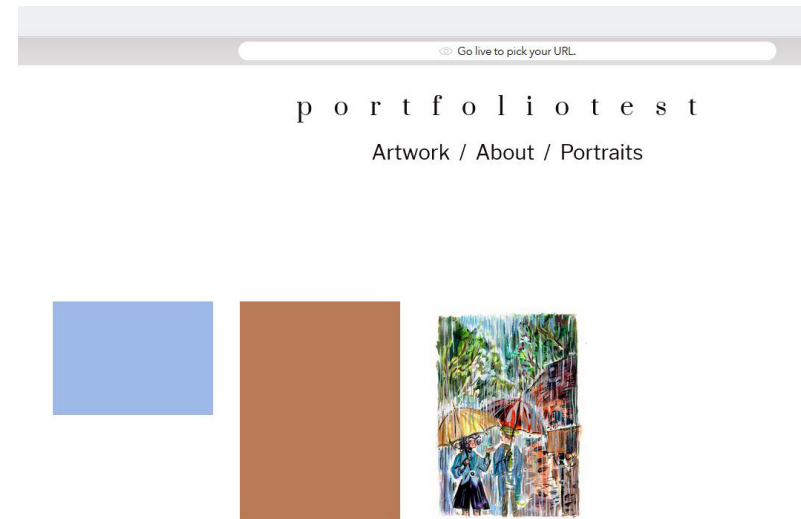


IMAGE 8. Gallery options of Carbonmade

IMAGE 9. Carbonmade layout test



OTHER FEATURES

Other features include built-in social media icons, starting tutorials and talentpool, to which joining is optional. It displays registered users and their portfolios from the Carbonmade database.

SUMMARY

Carbonmade is fresh, modern and offers quite versatile customization tools. All features cannot be tested properly before upgrading which limits the user experience.

3.3 WIX

PRICE

Wix offers a free plan with no time limit and four different premium account options (\$4,50, \$8,50, \$12,50, \$24,50/month) which unlock features such as a personal domain, more storage space, ad-free interface and the possibility to add videos on the site.

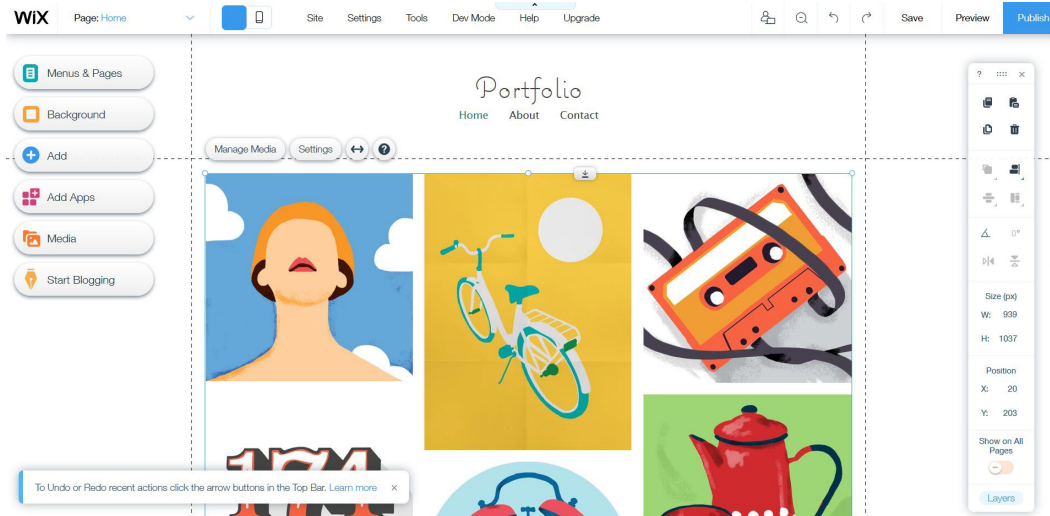


IMAGE 10. The default layout of Wix

USABILITY

Website can be previewed in full screen before publishing. It features Wix ad in the header which comes across as a distracting element (image 11). Editing process can be erratic: the editor might stop working abruptly in which case it needs to be closed and opened again to restart the editing process.

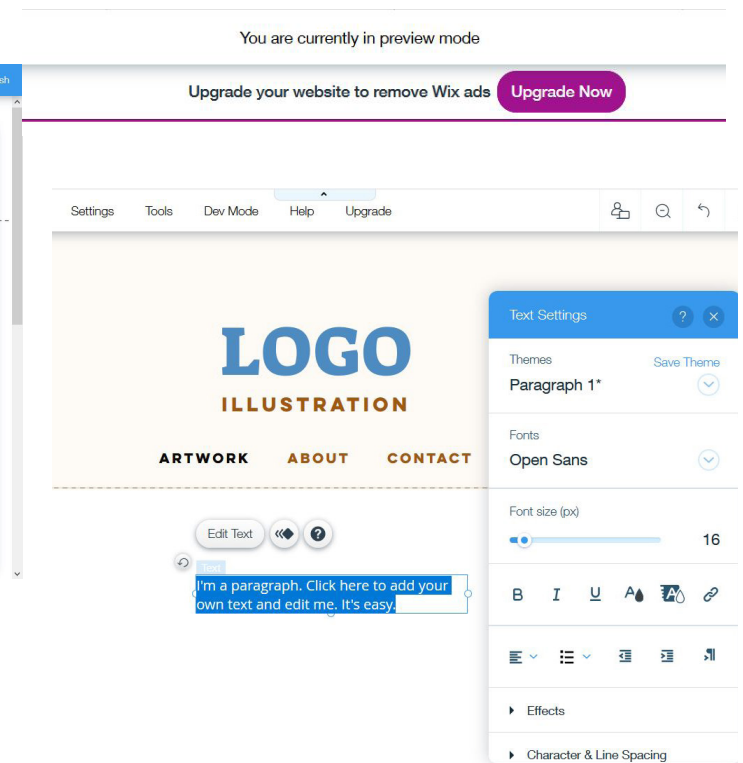


IMAGE 11. Wix header
IMAGE 12. Editing interface

LAYOUT

Website can be built from scratch and is easy and fast to construct to a desired form. Layout utilizes a drag and drop system in which all the individual elements can be edited separately.

Customization tools are versatile and easy to find on the sidebar of the interface. Customization boxes, which open up when editing individual elements, are solid and easy to use. Wix provides an unlimited amount of colour options that can be applied to individual elements and saved in the colour menu for later use. The platform has a versatile collection of default fonts. Loading more typefaces on the server is also possible.

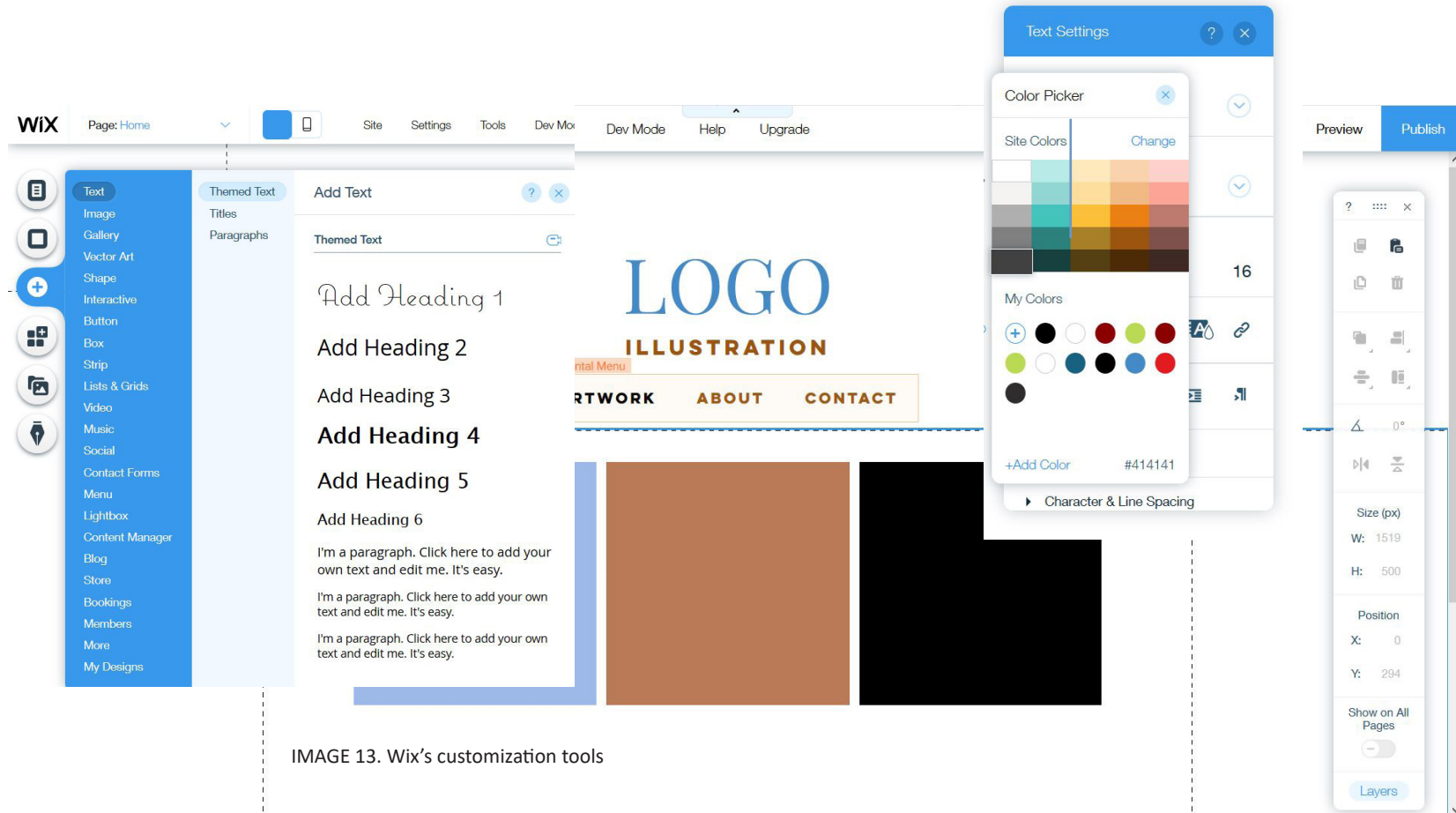


IMAGE 13. Wix's customization tools

GALLERIES

Gallery options include thumbnail, slideshow and other experimental galleries (e.g. honeycomb & 3D galleries). All image galleries support image captions. Other image related features are image sharpening tool (which can make images look a bit grainy) and different animation effects that can be applied to galleries and singular design elements.

The gallery options are versatile but not functional. Images can look small and blurry, especially when presented in a thumbnail gallery and in vertical mode, as image 14 shows. The image captions in thumbnail galleries take a little too much space from the image and they can't be changed in colour or type. Loading time of galleries can be a bit slow especially when viewing individual images on galleries.

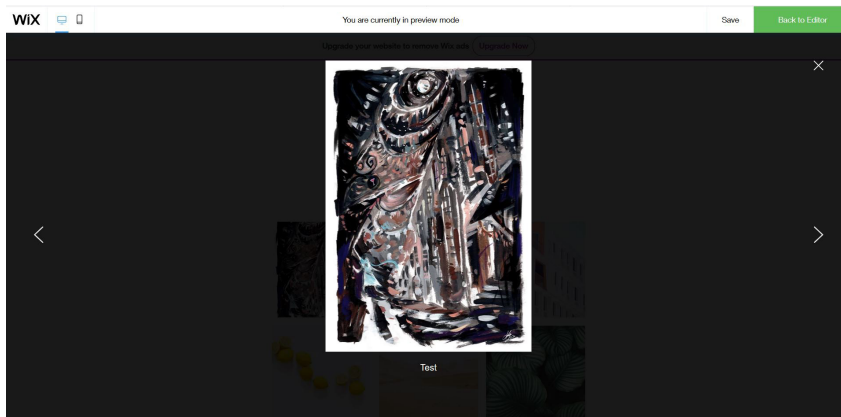


IMAGE 14. Images look small in the lightbox mode

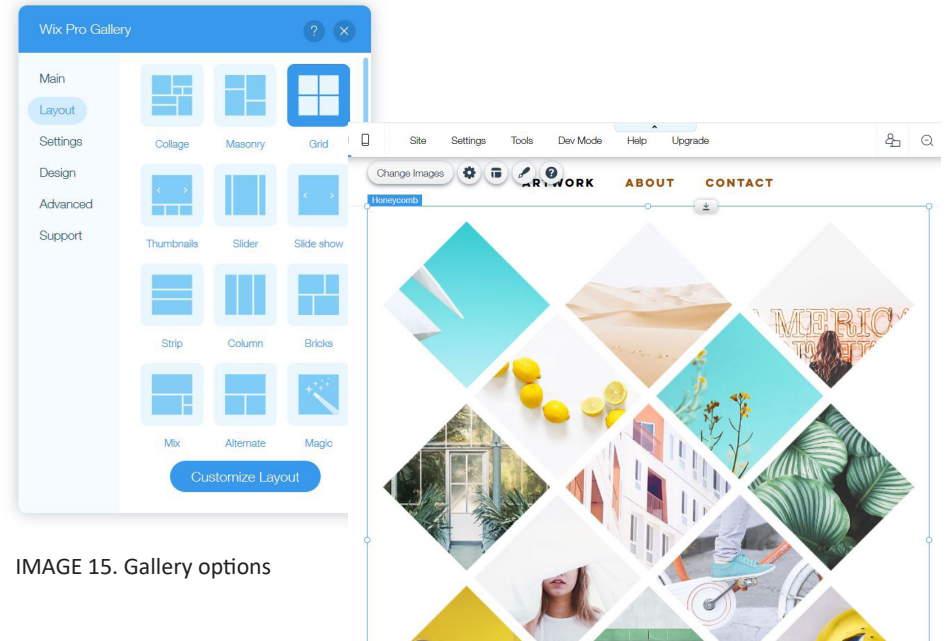


IMAGE 15. Gallery options

IMAGE 16. Honeycomb gallery

OTHER FEATURES

Other features include built-in social media icons, site history tool can be used restore former versions of the layout, blog and apps (like Wix forms and rollover image effects). Wix has separate optimization systems for computer and mobile. Editing both interfaces separately can result in two distinctive and interesting layouts, but it can also be a time consuming process.

SUMMARY

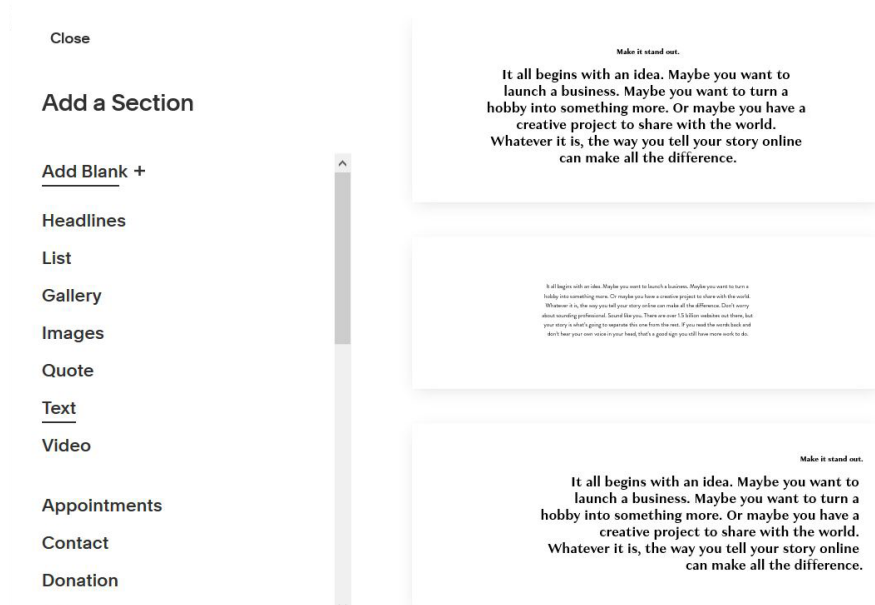
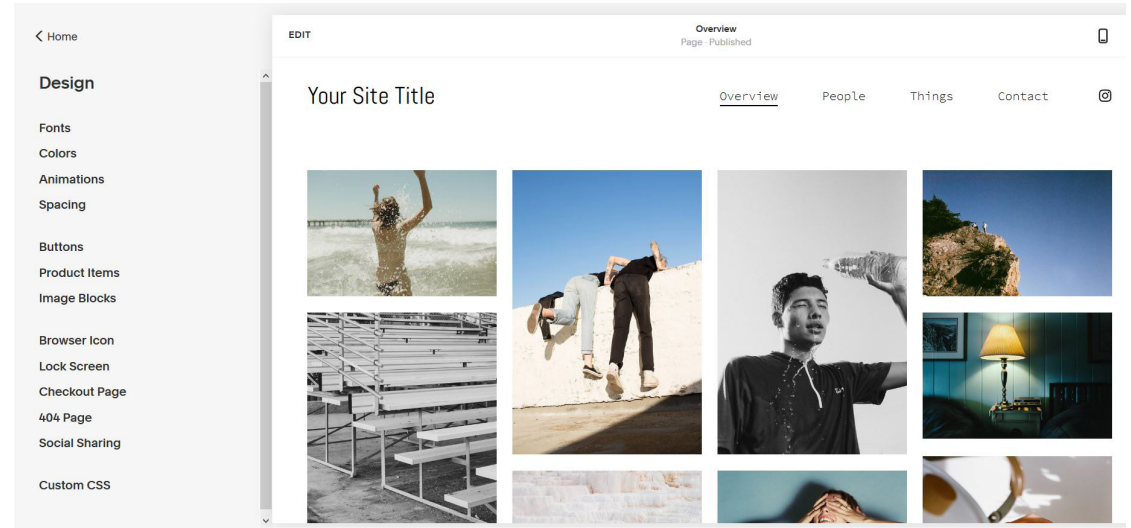
Wix comes across as a visually attractive and versatile platform but has shortcomings regarding the presentation of visual material.

IMAGE 18. Squarespace's default layout

3.4 SQUARESPACE

PRICE

Squarespace offers a free trial version (14 days) and four premium account options (\$11, \$17, \$24, \$36/month) which unlock features such as a personal domain and live website.



USABILITY

Squarespace is functional, structured and visually fresh. Website can be previewed in full screen mode. Loading time can be slow when saving and previewing the website. Every modification must be saved manually after editing and before previewing, which is time consuming.

IMAGE 17. Layout elements can be picked manually

LAYOUT

Website can be built upon one of the existing themes and edited block by block. Platform utilizes a drag and drop system and offers multiple different default structures, like image and text, column systems and contact forms that can be used in layout design.

Squarespace provides a versatile collection of fonts which are separated into different categories: serif, sans serif, and mixed. Colours are operated as colour themes, in which all the individual design elements can be changed in colour (e.g. headlines, background and text colour).

Deleting unnecessary blank spaces is challenging and singular elements and spare negative space are difficult to align and adjust. The layout doesn't provide vertical menu system (the tools to edit navigation are difficult to find).

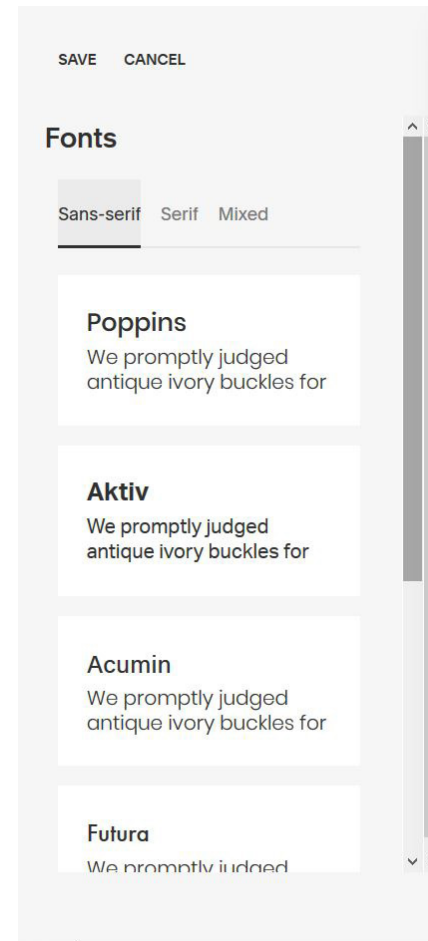
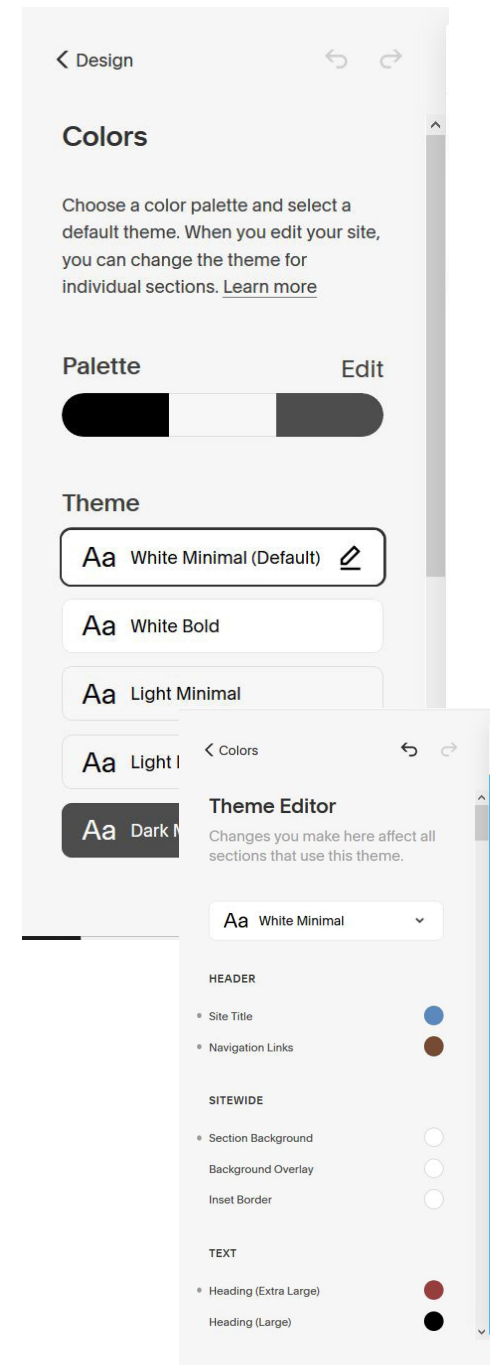


IMAGE 19. Tool bulks



GALLERIES

Squarespace galleries present images on large scale, as image 20 shows. Galleries load fast and lightbox options are versatile (background colours etc. can be changed). Gallery-based tools are located on the general design bulk instead of gallery-based options, which makes them difficult to locate. Image descriptions are not visible in any of the galleries, they only act as alt texts for search engine optimization.

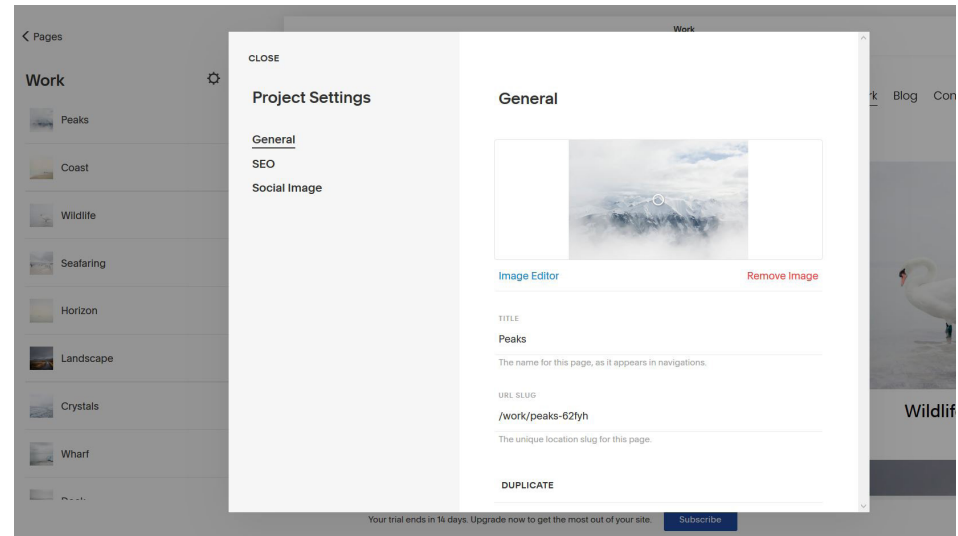


IMAGE 21. Gallery settings

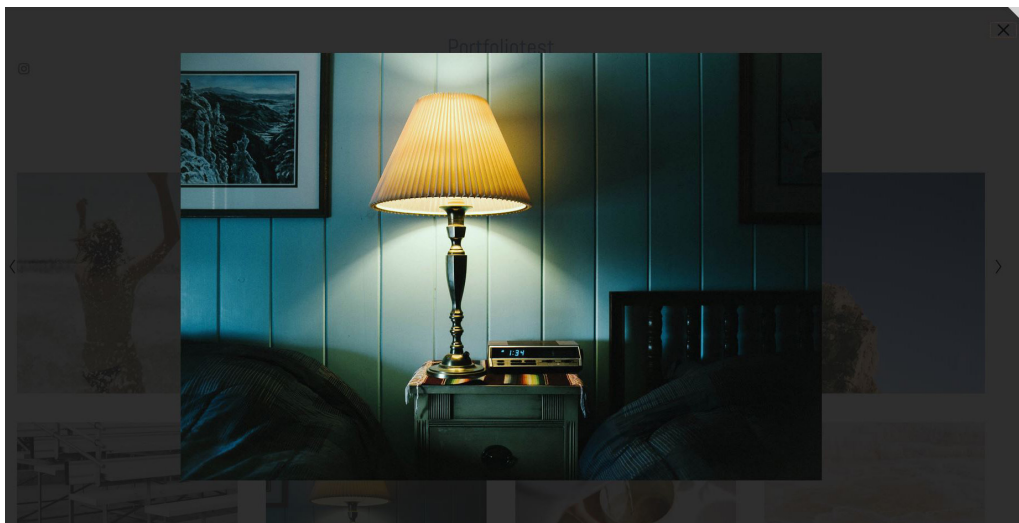


IMAGE 20. Lightbox mode

OTHER FEATURES

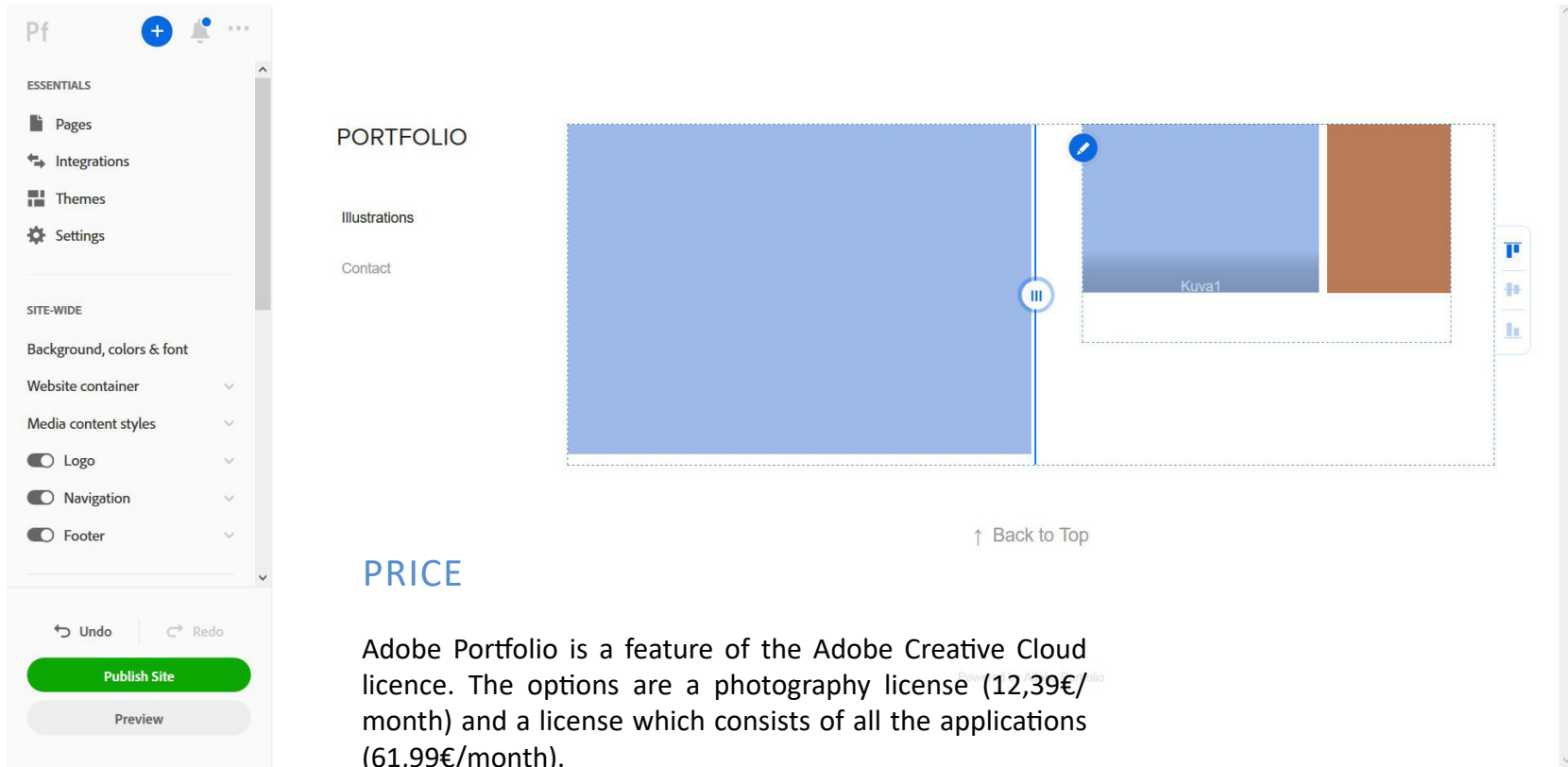
Other features include a private website mode, blog, shop and custom CSS.

SUMMARY

The website looks very structured and clear in the preview mode, but the interface itself is a bit complicated. Platform provides quite versatile customization tools. Galleries are functional, but don't support image captions.

3.5 ADOBE PORTFOLIO

IMAGE 22. Adobe Portfolio's editing interface



PRICE

Adobe Portfolio is a feature of the Adobe Creative Cloud licence. The options are a photography license (12,39€/month) and a license which consists of all the applications (61,99€/month).

USABILITY

Adobe Portfolio is sleek, clear and quite easy to use. The website can be previewed in full screen before publishing. Loading time is a bit slow, especially when moving from one page to another.

LAYOUT

Editing starts with a theme. Colours and typefaces are customizable. Common colour scheme - dark or light - is a global style and applied to the whole layout.

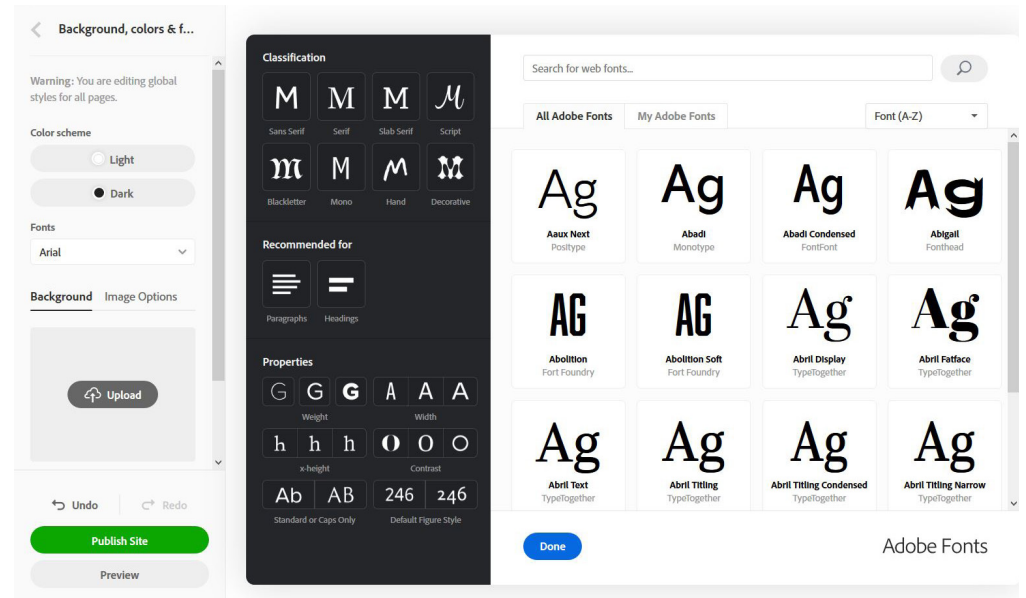


IMAGE 24. Adobe Portfolio has an extensive built-in font gallery

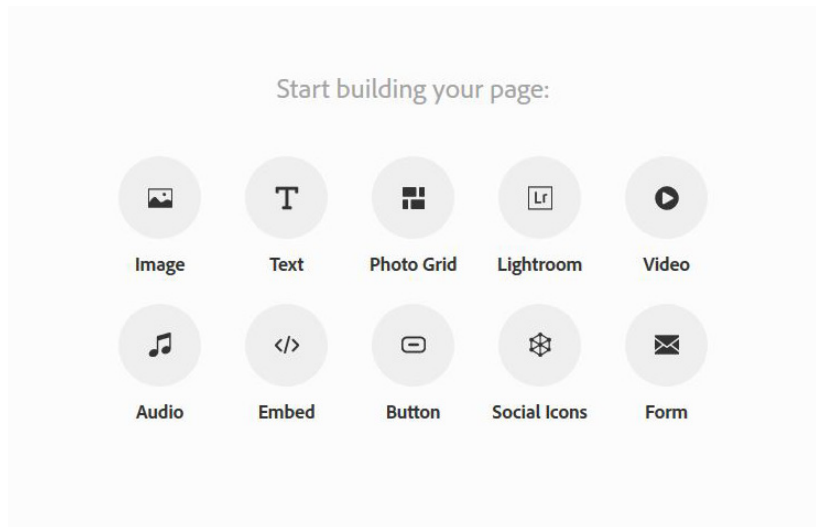


IMAGE 23. Tool bulk

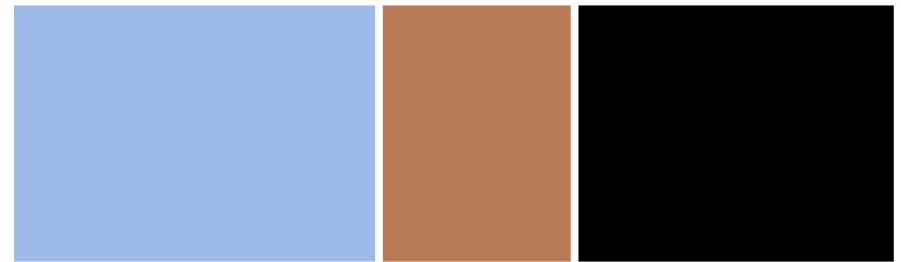
As shown in the image above, the platform provides an extensive font gallery in which typefaces are divided into separate categories (e.g sans serif, serif, ornamental, gothic etc.). A change in types affects the whole layout, editing separate text elements by typeface is not possible.

IMAGE 26. Gallery grid

PORTFOLIO

Illustrations

Contact



↑ Back to Top

GALLERIES

Galleries showcase images on large scale and in lightbox mode. They also support image captions and can be divided into columns. Galleries are not very customizable in terms of structure and can't be changed to a square or slideshow gallery. Image captions cover the images a bit (as shown in image 25).

OTHER FEATURES

Other features include linking to Adobe Lightroom, integration to Behance and password protection.

SUMMARY

Adobe Portfolio is a simple interface that provides basic customization tools. It's a built-in feature of Adobe Creative Cloud, which makes it an easy choice for students and designers who have access to Creative Cloud applications. The galleries are not, however, very customizable or versatile.

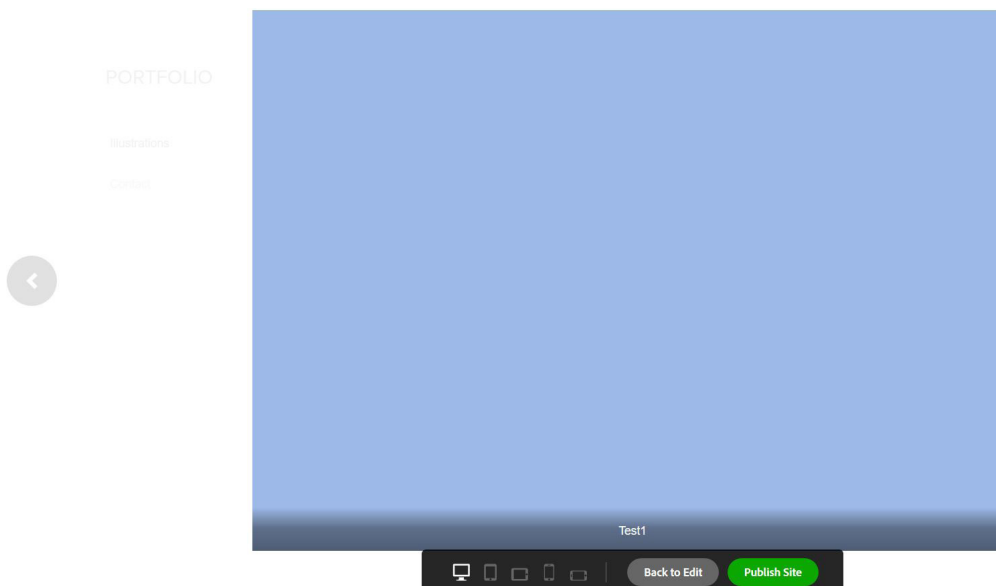


IMAGE 25. Lightbox mode

3.6 FORMAT

PRICE

Format offers a trial version (13 days) and three premium plans (\$12, \$18, \$25), which unlock more storage space, mobile optimization, personal domain and advanced search engine optimization.

USABILITY

Format is easy to navigate and offers a straightforward presentation of work. Everything can be found on the design bulk on the left side of the interface, as shown in the image below. The website can be previewed in full screen. Loading time can be a bit slow in the editing interface. Unknown errors may occur.

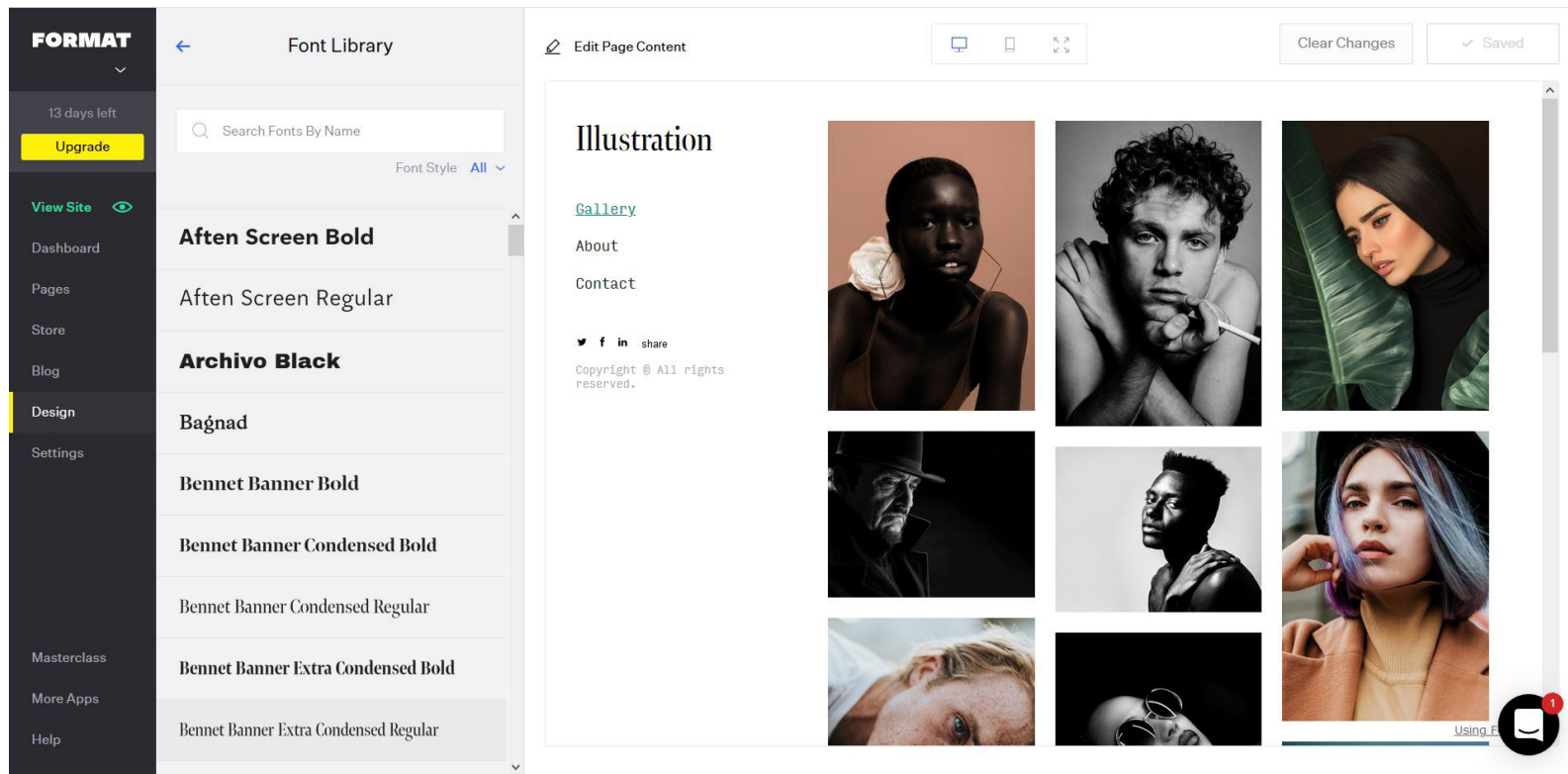


IMAGE 27. One of Format's default layouts

LAYOUT

Customization tools are tied to the chosen theme and vary depending on the template, offering either more or less possibilities in terms of customization. The alignment of navigation can be changed to horizontal or vertical on any theme. Format offers various font options and utilizes key colours which set the colour scheme for the whole layout.

The header element showcases only the title text and doesn't support additional text elements. Links (pages and images) can't be clicked in the preview mode, which limits the viewing experience.

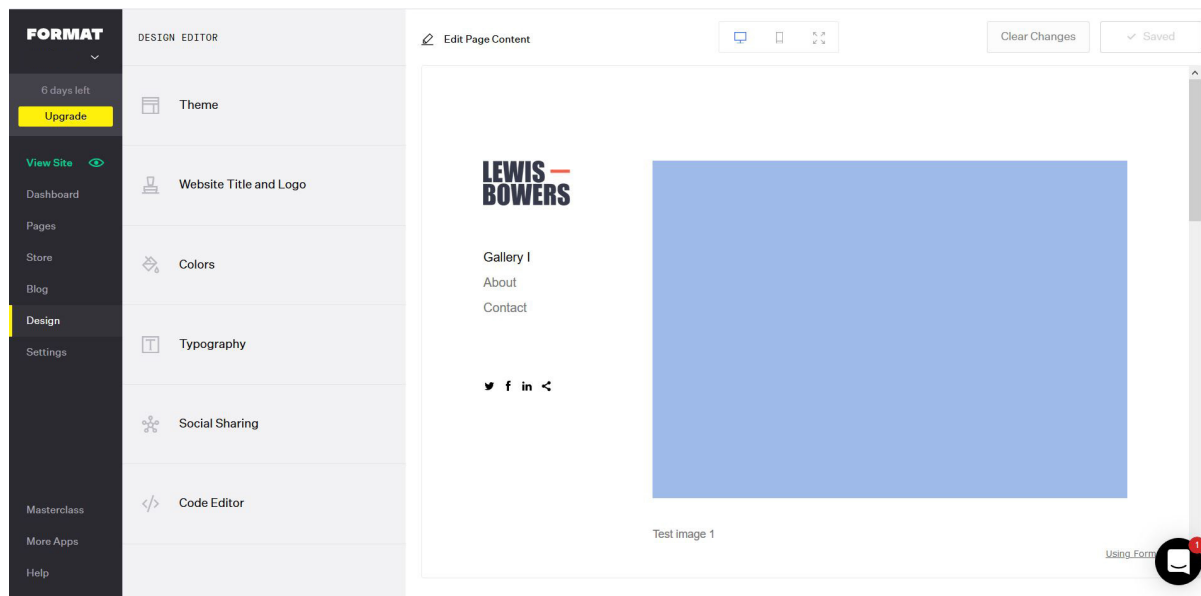


IMAGE 28. Editing interface

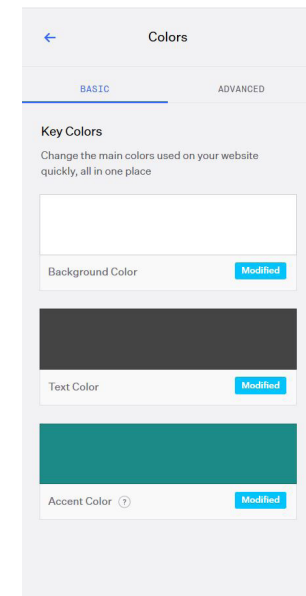


IMAGE 29. Key colours

GALLERIES

Galleries showcase images with titles in a bordered lightbox view. Image captions are customizable in terms of fonts and colours and feature alt text options for SEO. Gallery options are, however, tied to themes: changing the theme also changes the gallery presets. This makes adjusting galleries to the desired shape difficult.

Preview: Gallery I

Illustration

[Gallery I](#)

[About](#)

[Contact](#)

✉ f in share

Copyright © All rights reserved.



IMAGE 31. Preview mode



IMAGE 30. Lightbox mode in thumbnail gallery

OTHER FEATURES

Other features include store, blog, apps (Format for iOS, for Adobe Lightroom etc.) and a spotlight section which features designers' portfolios.

SUMMARY

Format provides highly functional thumbnail galleries that support image captions. The interface is, however, confusing and scattered. Creating a desired layout can be frustrating since customization tools are tied to the chosen theme.

3.7 FABRIK

PRICE

Fabrik provides a trial version (14 days) and 3 premium account options (7,92€, 11,67€, 18,34€/month), which unlock more project space, blog posts, storage space, site security and additional support.

USABILITY

The interface comes across as confusing at first. The information is scattered around (e.g. navigation pages are created and added to the menu in different sections). Differences between sections (e.g. portfolio & projects) are not clear. Website can be previewed in full screen.

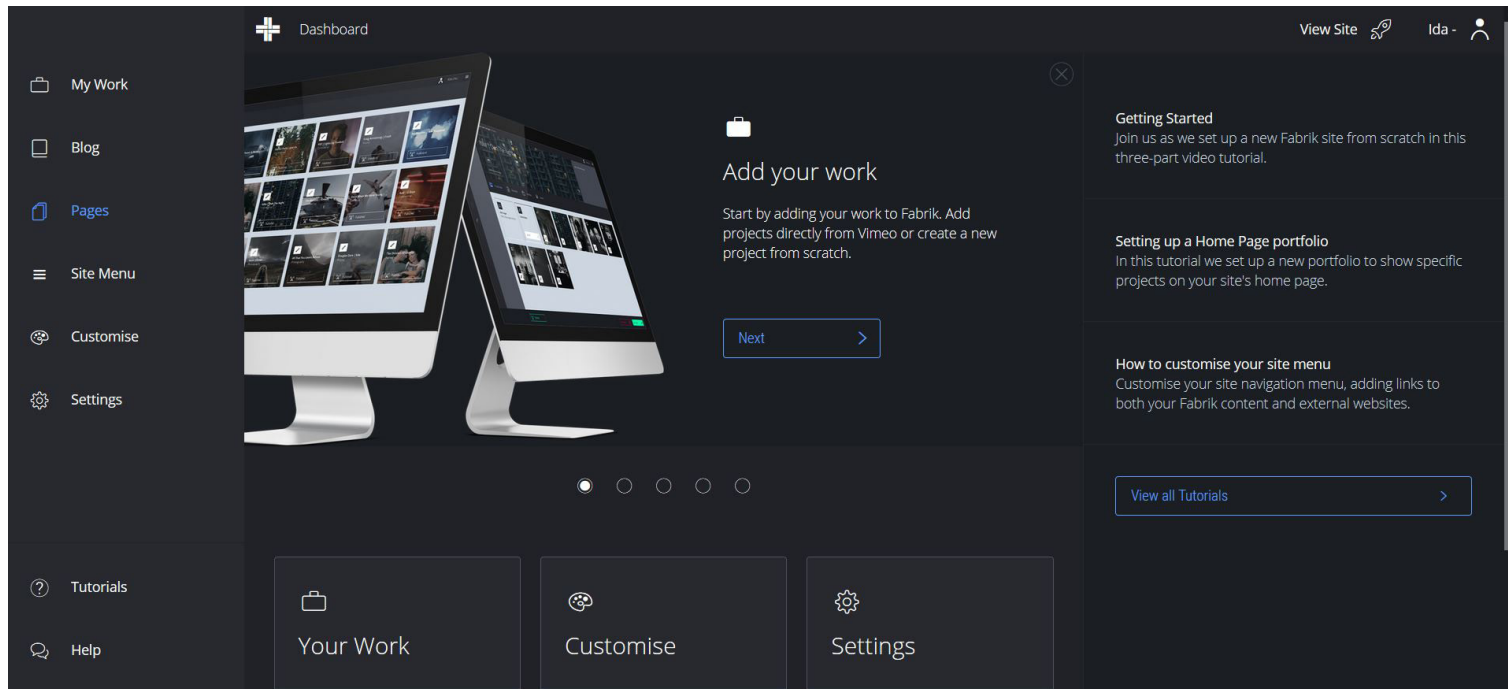


IMAGE 32. Fabrik's dashboard

LAYOUT

Individual design elements (like header and text elements) can be modified manually. Fabrik provides an extensive collection of typefaces, which features fonts from both Google Fonts and Adobe Typekit, as shown in image 35.

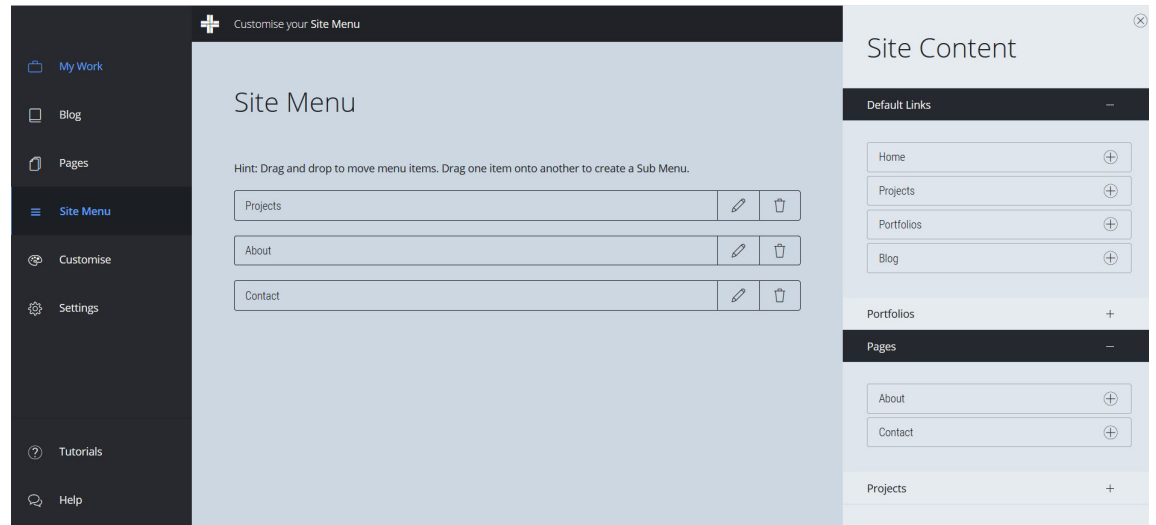


IMAGE 34. Site menu bar

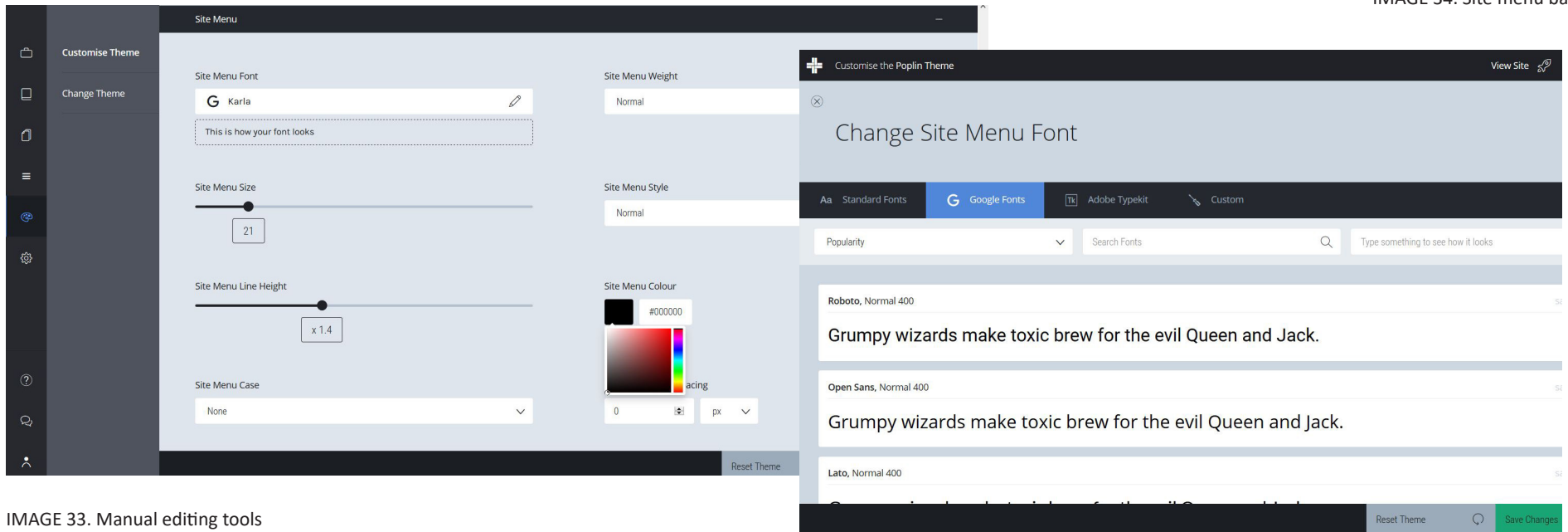
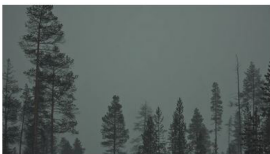


IMAGE 33. Manual editing tools

IMAGE 35. Font gallery

GALLERIES

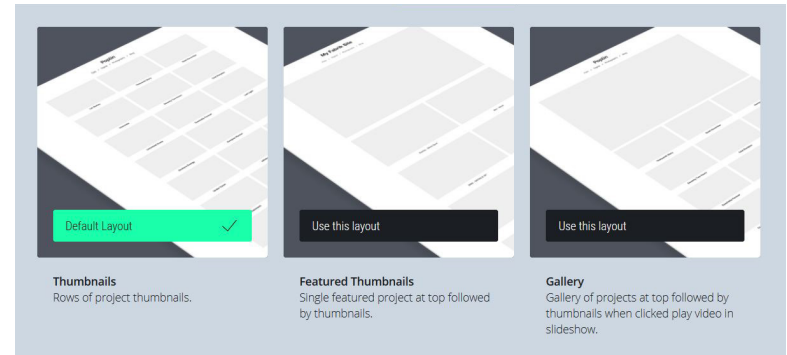
Fabrik offers various gallery styles from grid to a video presentation. The thumbnail gallery option is functional and presents image captions. Presentation style (grids, slideshow etc.) can be chosen separately for different projects. Projects function as individual pages separate from other main pages (e.g. about, contact). Setting up a desired gallery can be difficult.



Example Project

IMAGE 36. Layout test

Ida -
[Artwork](#) / [About](#) / [Contact](#)



Thumbnails

Rows of project thumbnails.

Featured Thumbnails

Single featured project at top followed by thumbnails.

Gallery

Gallery of projects at top followed by thumbnails when clicked play video in slideshow.

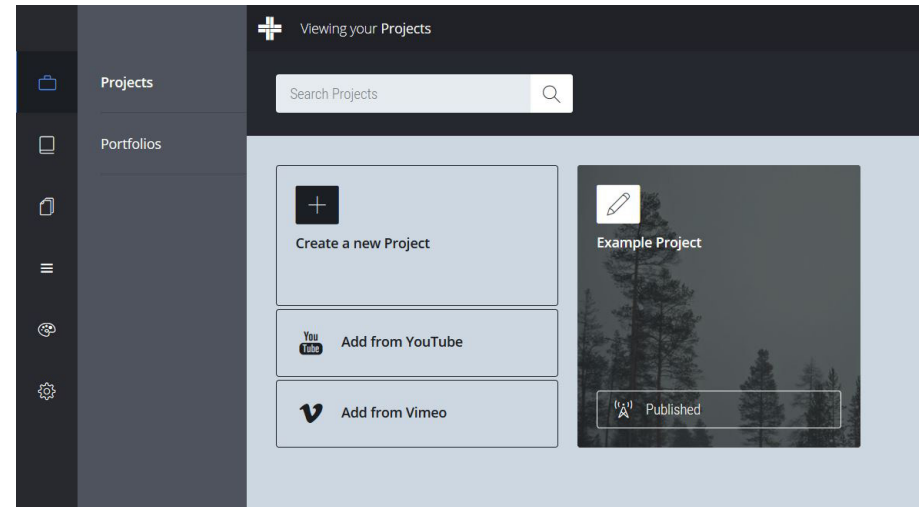


IMAGE 37. Project forms
 IMAGE 38. Project space

OTHER FEATURES

Other features include built-in social media icons, private site and blog.

SUMMARY

Fabrik provides quite functional galleries but has a complicated editing interface.

3.8 PORTFOLIOBOX

PRICE

Portfoliobox offers a trial version (30 days) and three premium account options (\$0,9, \$7,9, \$14,9/month), which unlock more storage space, personal domain and advanced editing tools.

USABILITY

Portfoliobox is easy to use. Website can be set up in a few minutes and previewed in full screen before publishing.

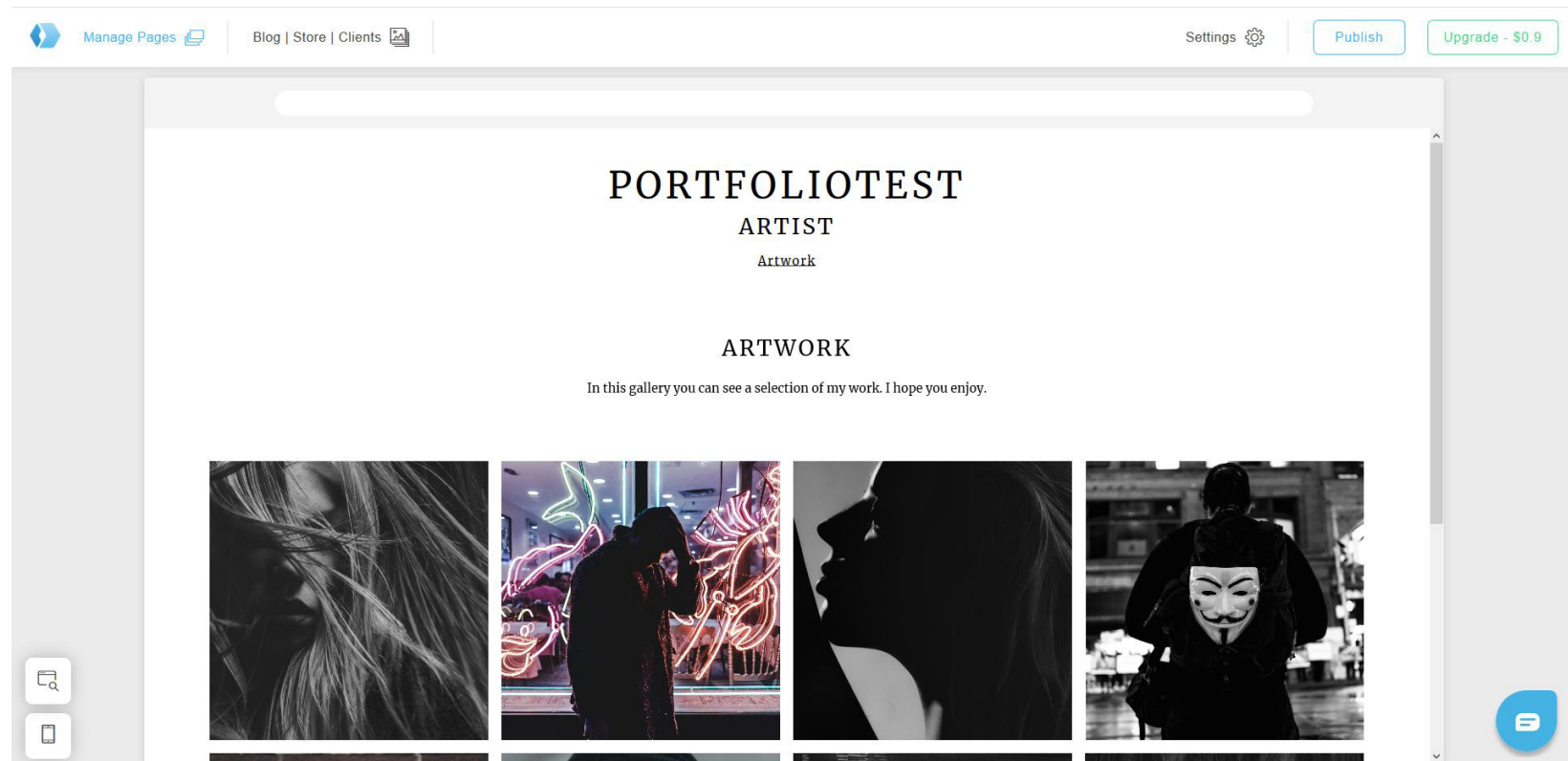


IMAGE 39. The default layout of Portfoliobox

LAYOUT

The layout is clean and simple. It's not based on existing themes, building starts from scratch. All the elements that can be used in layout design are located in the same section, as image 41 shows.

The structure can come across as stiff. Colours and typefaces can be modified to some degree, but separate design elements can't be moved around.

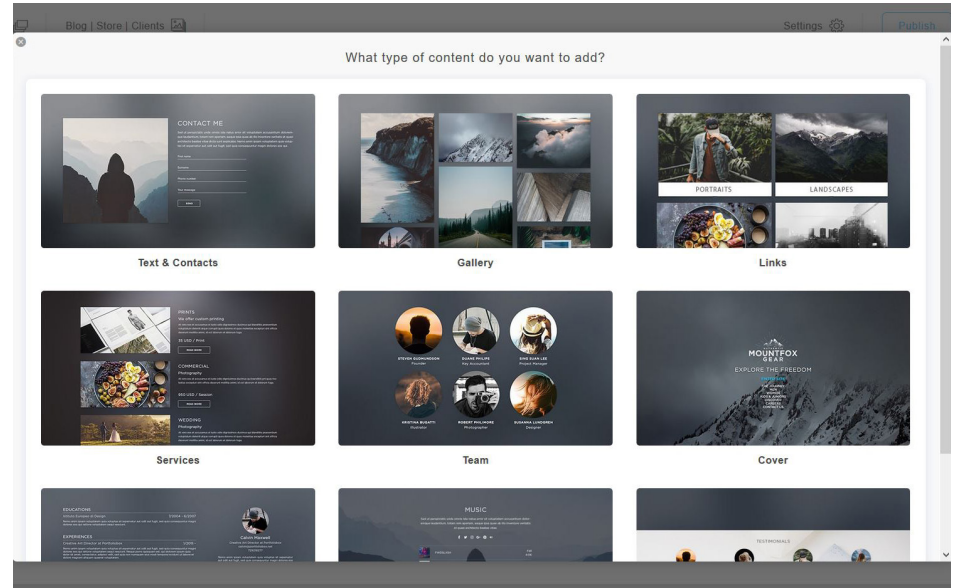


IMAGE 41. Layout elements

PORTFOLIO

ARTIST

[Artwork](#) [About](#) [Contact](#) [Portfolio](#)

CONTACT

Your name

Your email

Your message

SEND

IMAGE 40. Built-in contact form

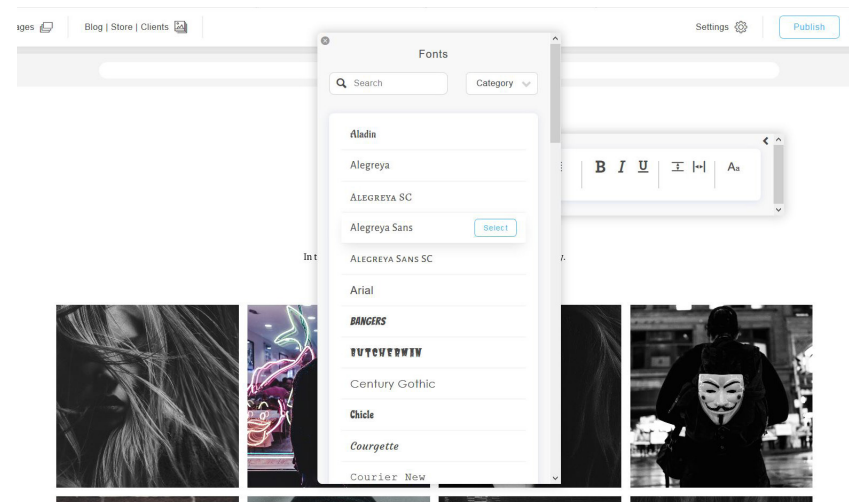


IMAGE 42. Font options

GALLERIES

Galleries are easy to adjust. They present images on large scale and support image captions which cover up images a bit. The loading time of galleries can be slow when viewing the website in full screen mode.

Advanced gallery options (e.g. changing size, margins and background) can only be activated by upgrading to a premium account.

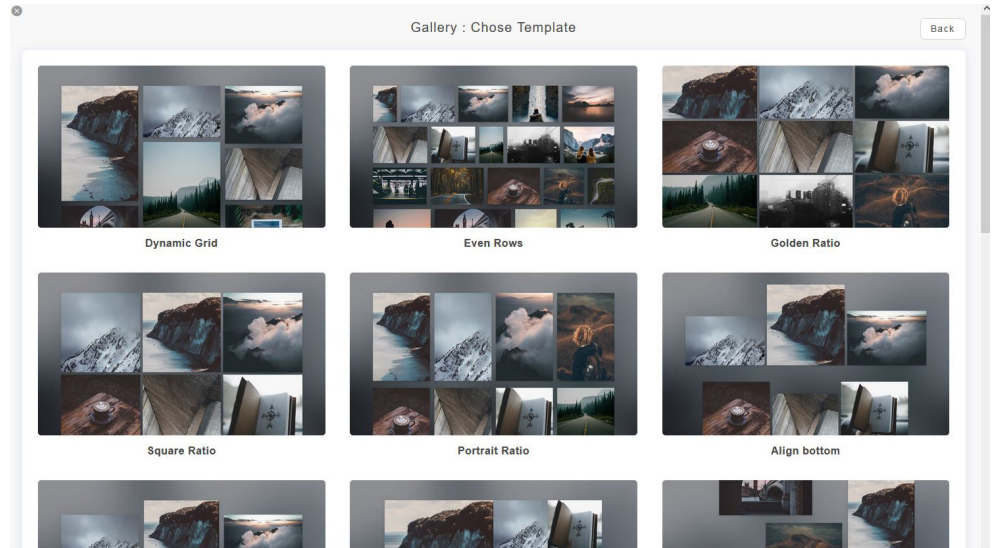


IMAGE 44. Gallery options

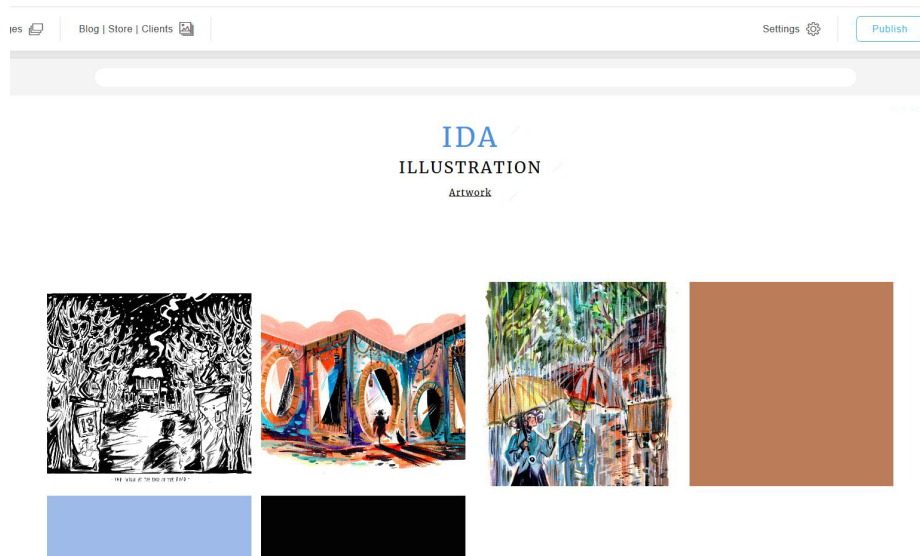


IMAGE 43. Layout test

OTHER FEATURES

Other features include shop, blog and custom CSS.

SUMMARY

The platform is very easy and effortless to navigate and use, but it doesn't offer much in terms of customization, especially when it comes to galleries. All gallery-related tools cannot be tested without upgrading to a premium plan.

3.9 PIXPA

PRICE

Pixpa offers a free trial version (15 days) and four premium account options (\$6, \$9, \$15, \$25) which unlock more storage space, personal domain, live website and mobile optimization.

USABILITY

Interface is clear and easy to use, but doesn't come across as very intriguing visually. The website can be previewed in full screen.

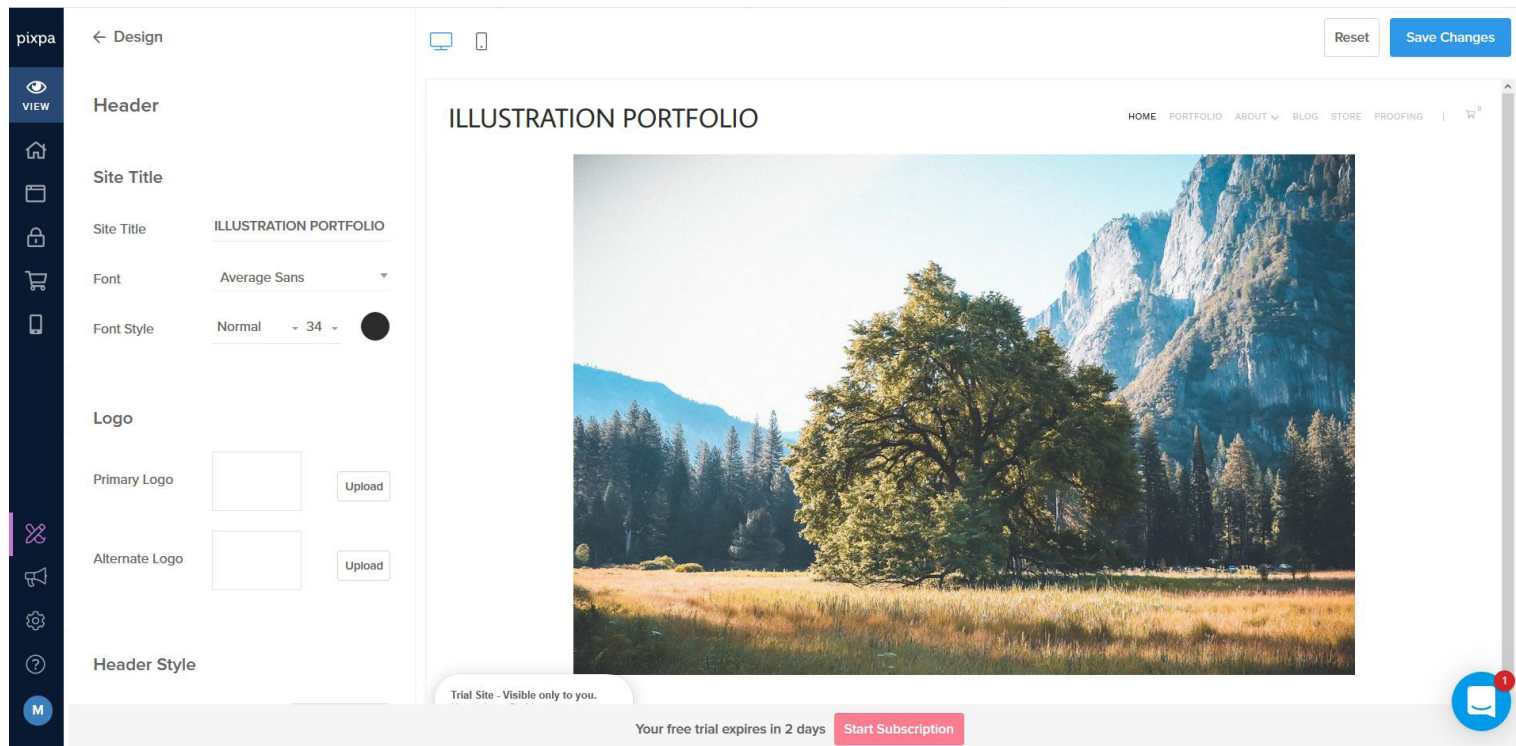


IMAGE 45. Pixpa's default layout

LAYOUT

Layout is simple and sleek and divided into two parts in which the other controls the menu and the other the design elements.

Pixpa offers various customization tools. Site width and the size of margins, header and footer elements can be changed. Colours can be modified to some degree (e.g. text, header, footer and background colours). Font options are quite versatile.

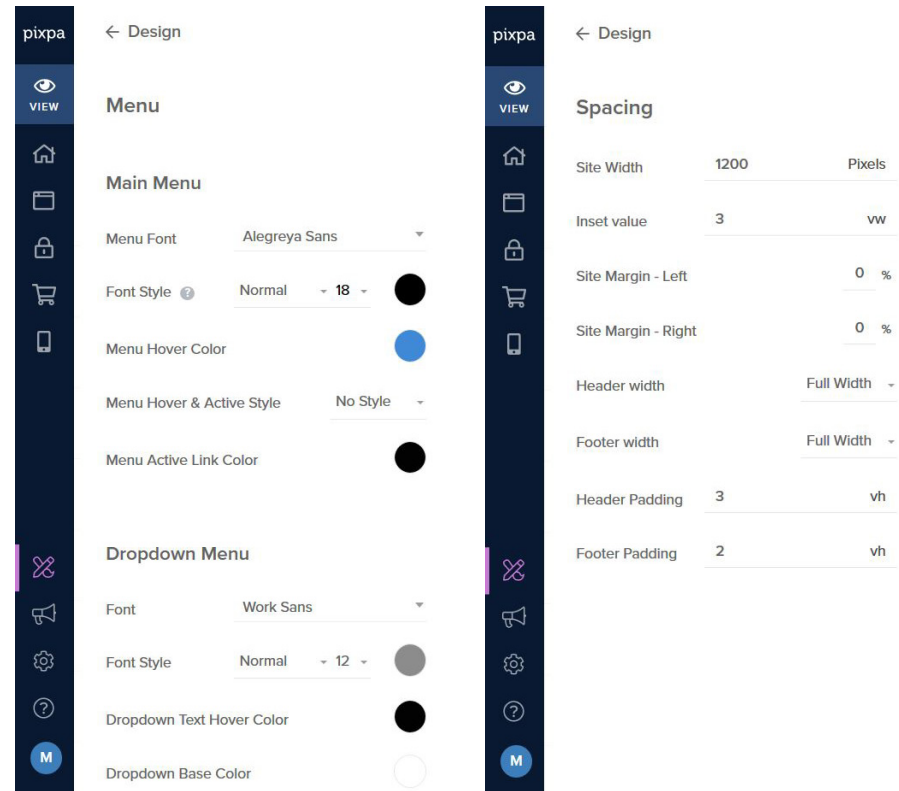


IMAGE 46. Tool boxes

GALLERIES

Pixpa offers numerous gallery options (e.g. thumbnail, slideshow and single image). Galleries can be adjusted in width. They support image captions which can be modified in alignment (to make the text appear e.g. next to the image or under the image in a lightbox mode).

Choose Your Gallery Layout

Close

Save

Fixed Grid Layouts



Block Pattern Layouts

IMAGE 48. Gallery options

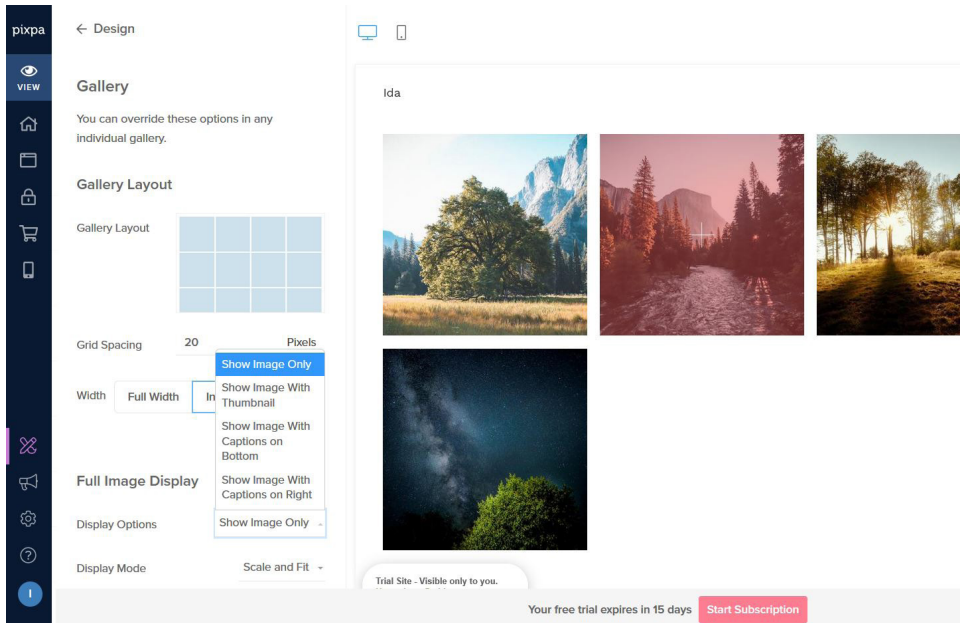


IMAGE 47. Gallery view

OTHER FEATURES

Other features include social media links, password protection, image watermarks, online store, blog, possibility to create a mobile app and custom CSS. The layout can be restored to a former version by using site history tool.

SUMMARY

Pixpa is a clear and simple interface that offers quite functional tools and gallery options. Platform doesn't come across as very interesting visually, the layout is a bit too fixed and structured.

3.10 KROP

PRICE

Krop offers a free trial version (14 days) and a premium account (\$8.25/month) which unlocks a personalized domain, Instagram integration, custom CSS and advanced analytics.

USABILITY

Krop is a simple, easy-to-use portfolio platform. It has a fast loading time both in the editing and previewing space.

LAYOUT

All design tools can be found on the the sidebar of the interface, as shown in the image below. Content and layout are edited separately from different sections, which can make the editing process confusing.

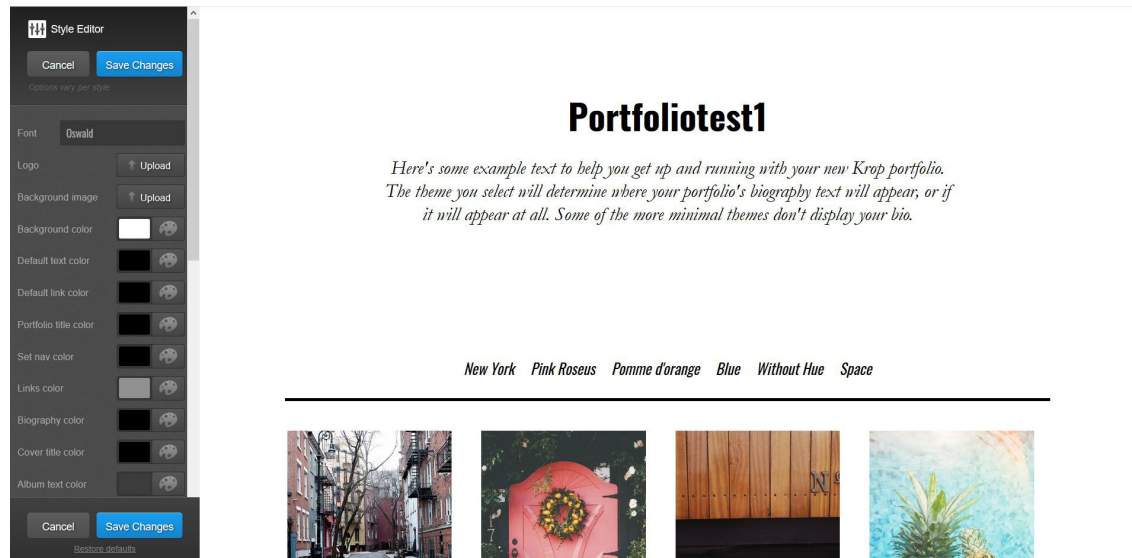


IMAGE 49. One of Krop's default layouts

Portfoliotesti

Pomme d'orange
Blue
Without Hue
Space



Pomme d'orange



Blue



Space

IMAGE 50. Preview mode
IMAGE 51. Artwork is uploaded as albums

Upload Images

Upload More Images

Pick a name for your first album:

Title

Save Cancel

Other ways to upload

Embed Youtube Embed Vimeo

Upload from Dropbox Embed Soundcloud

GALLERIES

Krop presents images on large scale and in high quality. Gallery options are limited. Images are grouped into projects/albums by default and presented as individual images inside each project. I couldn't find any thumbnail/slideshow gallery options. The platform doesn't support image titles/descriptions.

OTHER FEATURES

Other features include integration to Pinterest and social sharing possibilities.

SUMMARY

Krop offers a clear and simple interface and presentation of work, but lacks in gallery options.

3.11 22SLIDES

PRICE

22Slides offers a trial version (30 days) and a premium plan (\$10/month) which unlocks a personal domain name and full time use of the website.

USABILITY

Platform is simple and functional. Loading time is fast both in the editing space and in preview mode. Website can be previewed in full screen and set private before publishing.

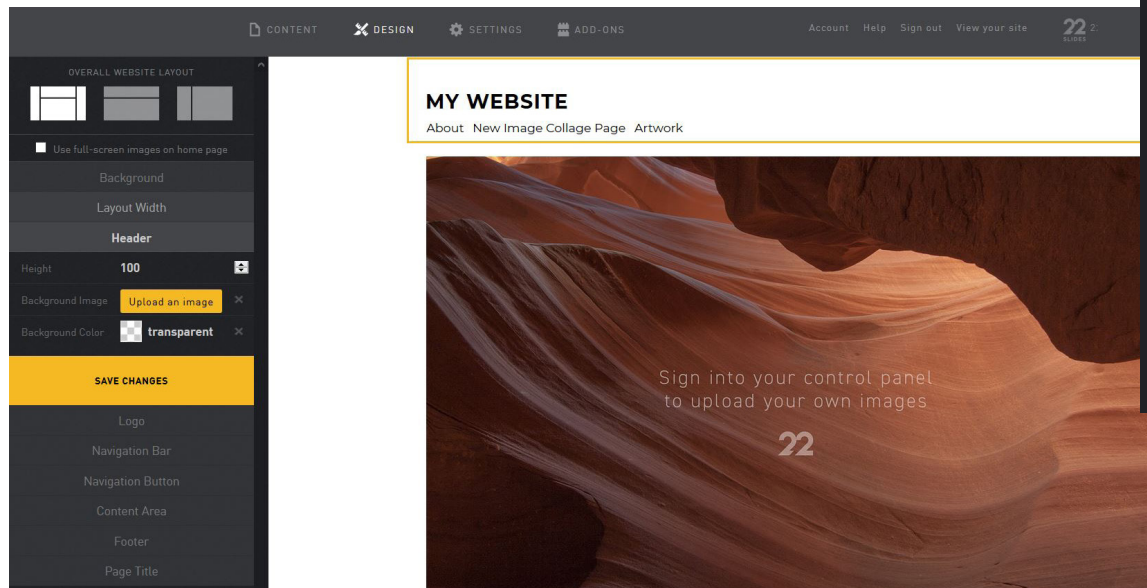


IMAGE 52. The default layout of 22Slides

THE LAYOUT

The layout doesn't rely on any existing templates. Every individual page is created upon the chosen structure, whether it's a gallery, text page or link (image 53).

Pages are edited separately on the design window. Individual elements and sections can be adjusted manually (e.g. position of navigation, layout width and visibility of elements).

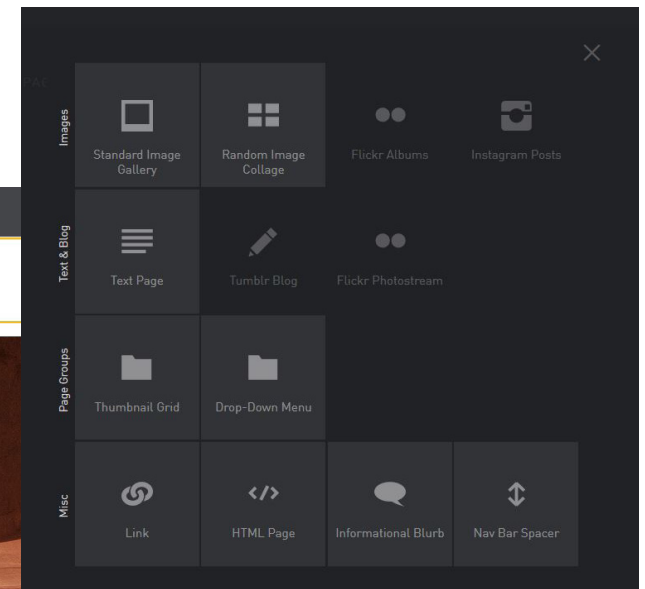
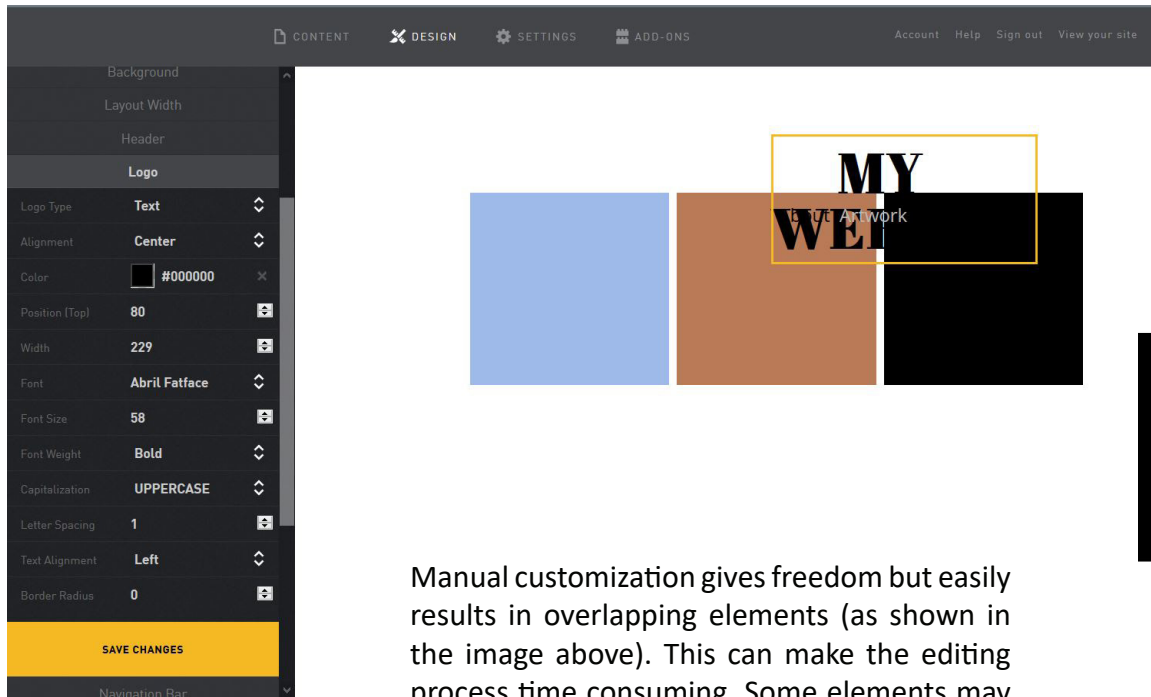


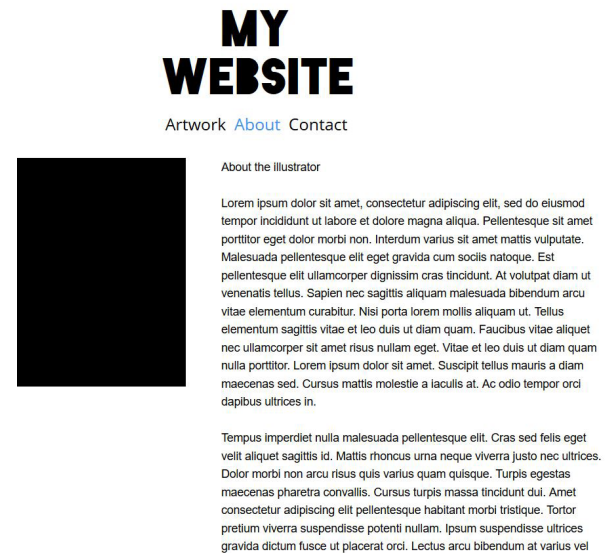
IMAGE 53. Page structure options

IMAGE 54. Overlapping elements may occur

IMAGE 55. Text elements require additional work in order to adjust them properly



Manual customization gives freedom but easily results in overlapping elements (as shown in the image above). This can make the editing process time consuming. Some elements may require additional CSS-coding to make them more personalized (e.g. built-in contact form).



Interface provides basic font options which are limited but suitable for website use. Colours can be edited manually and adjusted according to specific parts of the layout.

GALLERIES

As shown in the image 56, 22Slides offers various gallery options, including carousel, grid, tiles, blocks, list and horizontal galleries. The best part of 22Slides is a functional thumbnail gallery (image 57), which provides sharp image quality and shows image captions on hover. Additional image related features are image download blocker, that can be used to protect artwork and image sharpening tools.

22Slides has, however, a few faults. Individual images are difficult to place on pages and their position and size cannot be changed manually. Changing the number of gallery lines/rows can be difficult since this feature is only available in certain gallery layouts.

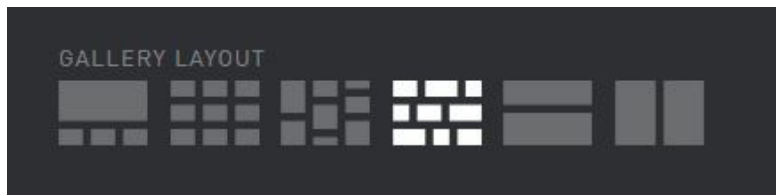


IMAGE 56. Gallery layout options

MY WEBSITE

About Artwork Contact

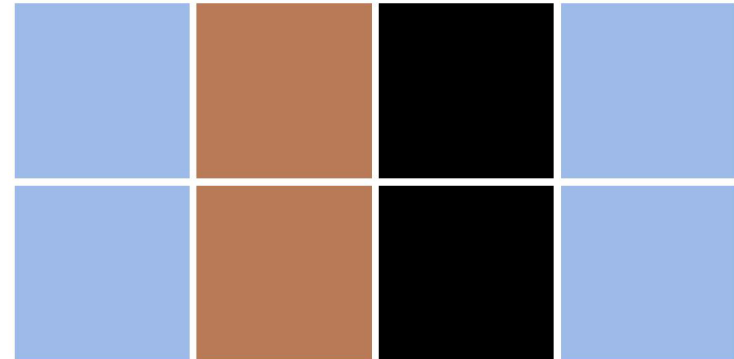


IMAGE 57. Square thumbnail gallery

© My Website 22

OTHER FEATURES

Other features include social media links and custom CSS.

SUMMARY

22Slides is simple and easy to navigate. It offers a variety of customization tools and a functional thumbnail gallery which presents images on large scale and with captions. Layout may require additional work.

3.12 BEHANCE

PRICE

Behance is free without limitations and the only platform that doesn't offer any premium plans.

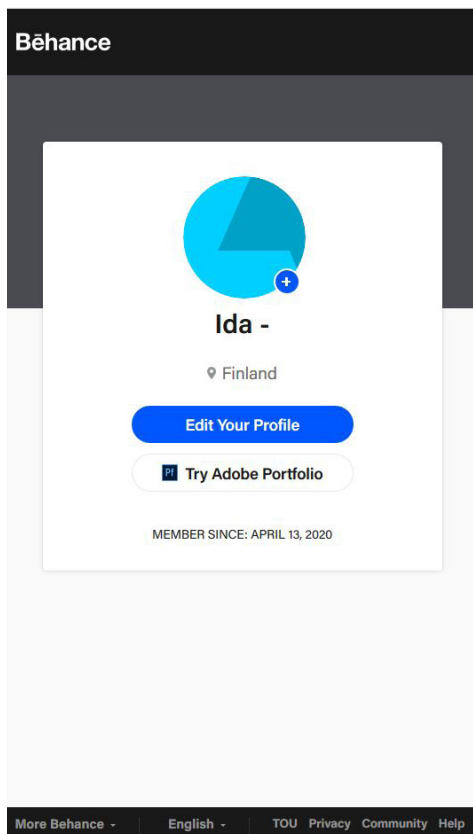


IMAGE 58. Profile information

USABILITY

Behance is an easy-to-use showcase platform that provides tools for a simple presentation of work and in the meantime connects the artwork to the surrounding visual network. Behance, unlike other showcase platforms Coroflot, Dribbble and ArtStation, is targeted to designers from all fields of art and design, which makes it a versatile community and portfolio platform. It's easy to use and navigate.

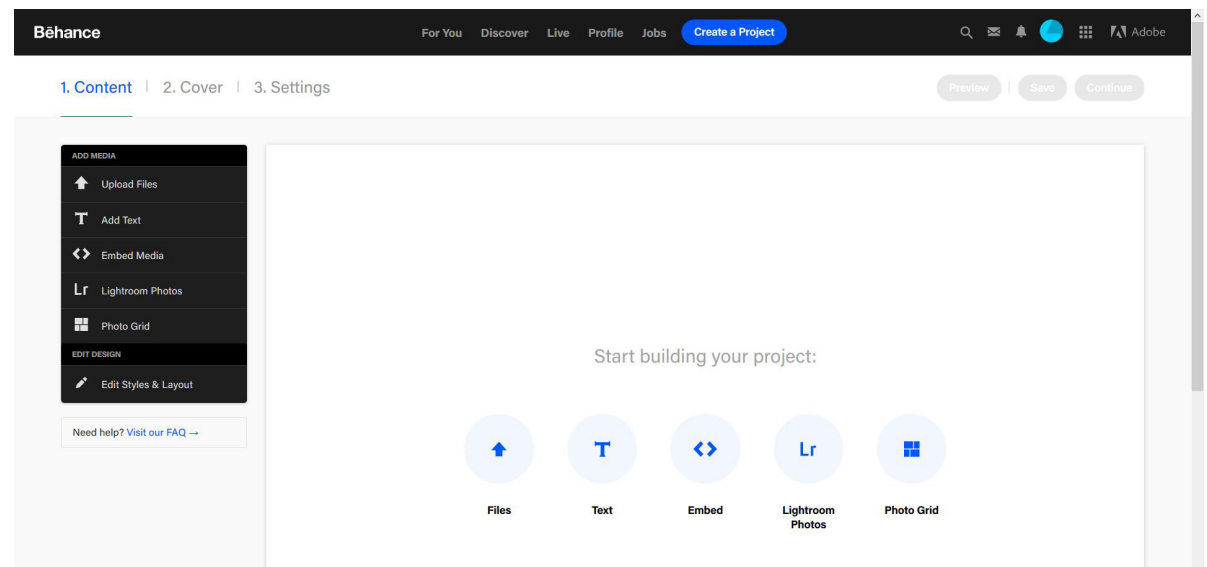


IMAGE 59. Editing space of projects

LAYOUT

The grid-based default-layout is divided into individual projects and is customizable to some degree. Banner image, profile picture and project cover images are all editable elements.

Individual projects can also be modified in style, for example by adding simple dividers, adjusting project header elements, switching to different text types and choosing suitable gallery forms, as shown in the image below. Behance doesn't, however, provide tools for a more personalized presentation: every profile utilizes the same structure. It's not a stand-alone website.

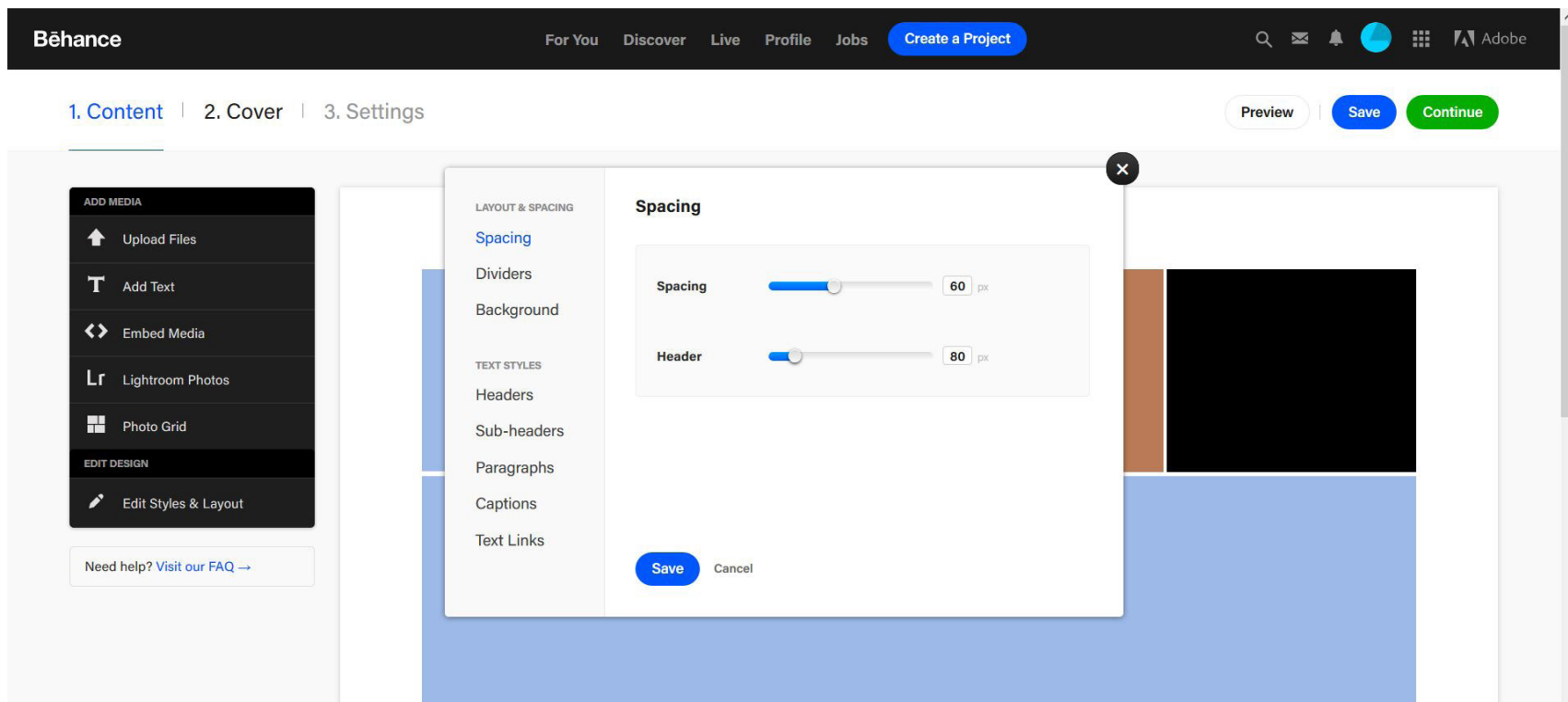


IMAGE 60. Behance's gallery customization tools

GALLERIES

Behance users can create an unlimited amount of projects that can be saved either as drafts or published immediately.

Thumbnail gallery presents images on large scale, but doesn't support image captions. The form of the thumbnail gallery cannot be changed, for instance, to a square grid gallery.

Images can alternatively be placed on a vertical row, where the size of an individual image cannot be changed, causing it to take too much space on the page. Images are not viewable at one glance (as shown in image 62). Scrolling up and down to see a single image makes the viewing experience time consuming and burdensome.

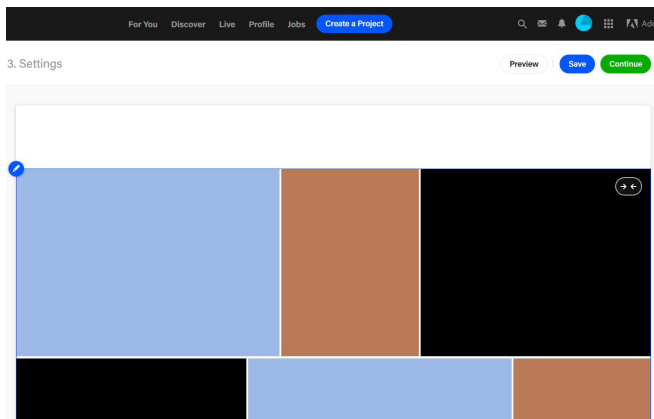


IMAGE 61. Thumbnail gallery

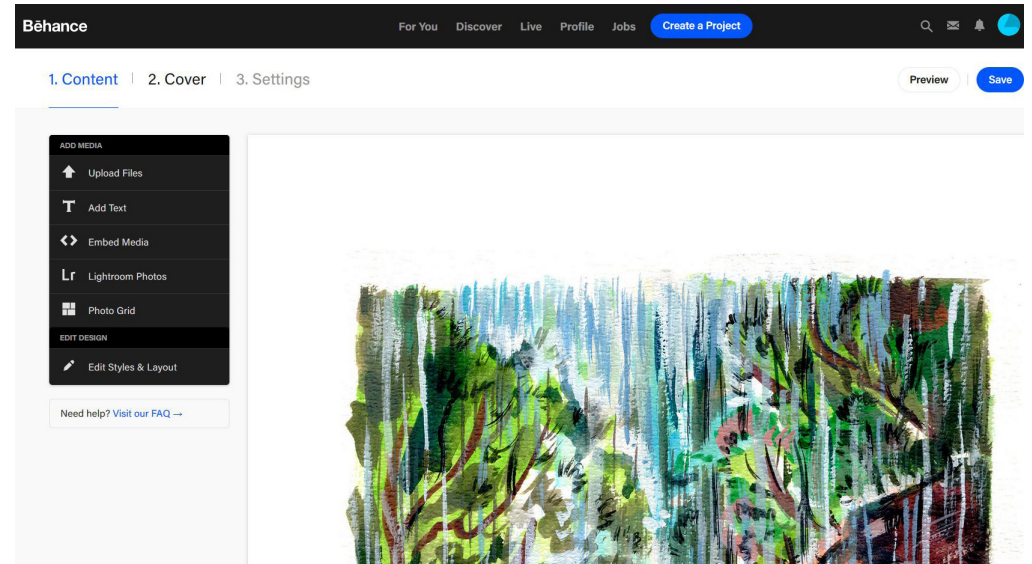


IMAGE 62. Image on a vertical row

OTHER FEATURES

Other features include a sidebar section for personal details (e.g. about-section, links to other websites, social media channels), Behance app for mobile, networking possibilities, connection to Adobe Creative Cloud and the possibility to send messages and search for jobs.

SUMMARY

Behance is free and therefore the most accessible platform out of the ones in test. It provides a simple and clear presentation of work. Galleries could utilize more customization tools in order to make them more functional and personalized.

4 THE SUMMARY

The result of the ranking is that every website platform has their own positive aspects, but none of them functions as the perfect platform that offers everything to portfolio creators. An ideal all-in-all package doesn't exist, due to various reasons.

4.1 LACKING ELEMENTS

This testing process clarified that a functional gallery is the most important element in a portfolio platform. Although many platforms provide quite versatile gallery options, a thumbnail gallery that presents image captions is a feature that falls short in many portfolio platforms.

Thumbnail gallery is an easy and effective way to view a collection of work as a whole. It presents images in a solid grid of squares and showcases only a small portion of the image which can then be either magnified or opened up to a larger view in a pop up window. In addition to being visually functional, thumbnails improve the website's loading time by keeping the image files small (Myers 2014, 125). Usually thumbnail galleries support built-in image caption tools, which make writing titles and descriptions for each individual image possible. The captions show up either on hover or alongside the image in lightbox mode.



IMAGE 63. Wix's default grid gallery options showcase the typical forms of thumbnail galleries

The functionality of thumbnail galleries varies depending on the platform. Some platforms provide thumbnail galleries in which the images look too small when viewed in the lightbox mode (Wix, for instance) whereas others present images on large scale but with non-existent titles and descriptions (e.g. Squarespace). Few platforms feature functional galleries with image caption tools, but their common problem is, in contrast, a confusing and scattered interface that is not very inviting or accessible to users (e.g. Format and Fabrik).

All platforms function quite well if one wishes to present artwork in another form of a gallery, for example in a slideshow or on vertical or horizontal rows on a page. Thumbnails, though, often come across as a more user friendly and visually appealing way to view artwork, especially when it comes to projects that consist of multiple separate images. I personally find the thumbnail presentation the most appealing gallery form, since it's an easy way to view a collection of work as a whole and add captions to singular images.

The shortcomings regarding galleries might be partly due to the characteristic nature of some of the platforms. General website platforms, such as Wix, are not merely meant for visual designers. Therefore they don't have to provide comprehensive gallery tools to designers who only make up a small portion of the clientele. Another reason for the lack of important elements might be updated interfaces. The new Squarespace 7.1, for instance, doesn't support image captions in thumbnail galleries whereas this feature was included in the previous versions of the platform. Many updated platforms are, though, still in the testing phase, and time will show whether they will add the missing features to future versions.

4.2 PRICE QUALITY RATIO

The price quality ratio of most website platforms is not very convenient: the plans are pretty expensive considering their function and the amount of features they offer. The basic plans that typically linger around \$4 to \$8/month offer a personal domain, but lack in an ad-free interface in turn. The next premium plan is usually twice the price of the previous plan. A professional website doesn't come across as expensive in the long run since it supports the designer's visual identity in a stable way. Then again, paying for a platform that doesn't function in the desired way is not purposeful.

4.3 THE IDEAL PLATFORM

The best portfolio platform is yet to come. Designers should have an access to a functional platform that is affordable and provides necessary gallery options and layout customization tools. A platform that utilizes Wix's layout tools (font and colour options and manual layout alignment), Squarespace's structure and thumbnail galleries and 22Slides' or Format's image captions would come across as a great mixture of tools for a professional designer who wants to build a portfolio website with ease but in a unique way. In this scenario a slightly higher price wouldn't be a problem either. On the contrary, the service would be worth paying for.

4.4 THE POTENTIAL PLATFORMS

Even though each platform in test had shortcomings regarding the user experience, galleries or customization tools, there were platforms that fulfilled the criteria I had set for a portfolio platform moderately well. The main criteria included accessibility, thumbnail galleries and basic customization tools. The platforms that possess these qualities are Squarespace, Wix, Behance and 22Slides.

Squarespace is both functional and customizable with general pricing. It offers enough features to make the website look distinctive but in the meantime keeps the presentation simple and effective. Squarespace offers versatile gallery options, but lacks a bit in the adjustability of the general structure. It doesn't support image captions. Titles and descriptions in thumbnail galleries are an important part of the presentation of creative work, and if it wasn't for the lack of this element, Squarespace would come across as a suitable platform.

Editing **Wix** layout was by far the most fun experience: it offers freedom that other platforms don't. Despite having a variety of customization tools and a versatile collection of gallery options, Wix lacks a bit in the presentation of visual material. Images (especially vertically set) look small in thumbnail galleries, and the loading time of individual images can be slow.

Behance offers the elements for a simple presentation of work that doesn't cost anything and in the meantime connects the artwork to the surrounding visual network. It might not be a unique stand-alone website, but fulfills its purpose as a simple collective of work that can function as an additional website to a main portfolio. Behance is not dependant on monthly costs and therefore available at all times. Platform could, however, utilize more versatile customization tools and gallery options.

4.5 THE CHOSEN PLATFORM

On this basis, the platform I have chosen for my illustration portfolio is **22Slides**, which is easy to edit and adjust to the desired form. The platform provides functional thumbnail galleries with image captions and basic customization tools (like editable header and structure) which are the features that I was primarily looking for in a portfolio platform.

During the project I realized that I'm not currently looking for a paid platform, since I'm a student on a budget and don't have a comprehensive collection of artwork that requires continuous hosting at the moment. 22Slides provides a free trial version which benefits me as this portfolio is merely meant to be an experimental project and not a permanent construct.

Whether or not I will continue using this particular platform in the future and in the long run depends on the evolution of other platforms and my own artwork. For now, 22Slides serves my purposes and is a platform that I would consider using in the future as well.

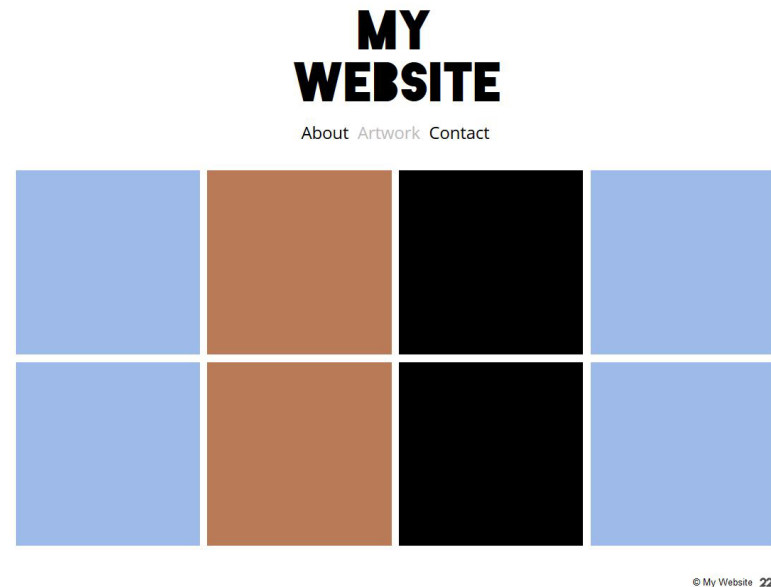


IMAGE 64. Functional thumbnail gallery was one of the main reasons to choose 22Slides

5 THE ELEMENTS OF MY PORTFOLIO WEBSITE

5.1 LAYOUT DESIGN

The layout of a digital portfolio is usually clear and simple. This stylistic choice can be seen in many default layout themes of different portfolio platforms that all utilize a structure in which negative space plays a prominent role. A simplistic style often comes across as the best option in layout design, since it lets the presentation breathe and makes the small design elements stand out (Lawn, as cited in Taylor 2010, 98).

Website layout is usually either centered or aligned on the left or right side of the interface. 22Slides offers tools for a presentation that is customizable in terms of individual design elements. Changing the alignment of navigation and body content is possible with manual editing tools. I have utilized a center-aligned layout in which all the design elements are positioned in the middle of the screen. This ensures that the website is responsive and likely to perform in the desired way under different conditions (e.g. when viewing the website on mobile and on tablet and in different browsers) (Clazie 2010, 55).

Ida Amanda

ILLUSTRATION

ARTWORK ABOUT CONTACT

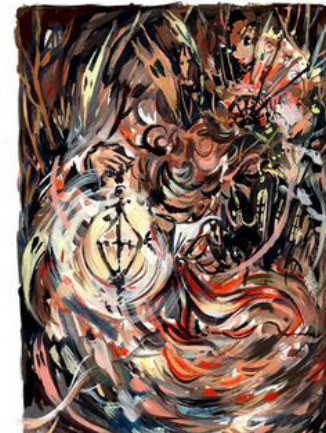
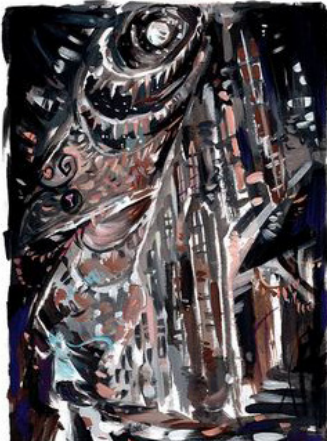
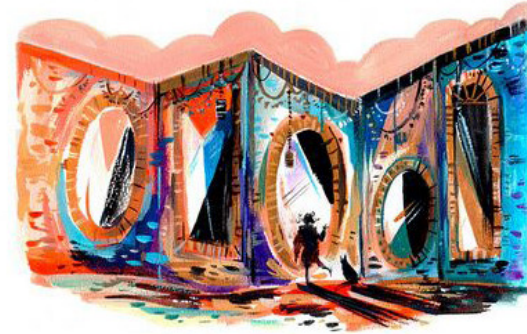


IMAGE 65. The layout of my portfolio is aligned on the center

www.idamanda.22slides.com

5.2 TYPEFACES

22Slides provides tools that make changing text colour, size, alignment and width possible in every context. The primary typeface I have used in my portfolio presentation is a light Open Sans, which is featured both in the main body text and in the navigation links. Open Sans is a clear and simple sans serif typeface and particularly suitable for online use. It's a cross-platform font and therefore available on every device, including computer, tablet and mobile interfaces and different browsers (Myers 2014, 161). Open Sans, besides being a functional and easy to read, is visually appealing and blends in with the other design elements and artwork. The size of the body text is set to 16px, which is the suitable text size for online material (WebsiteBuilderExpert 2019).

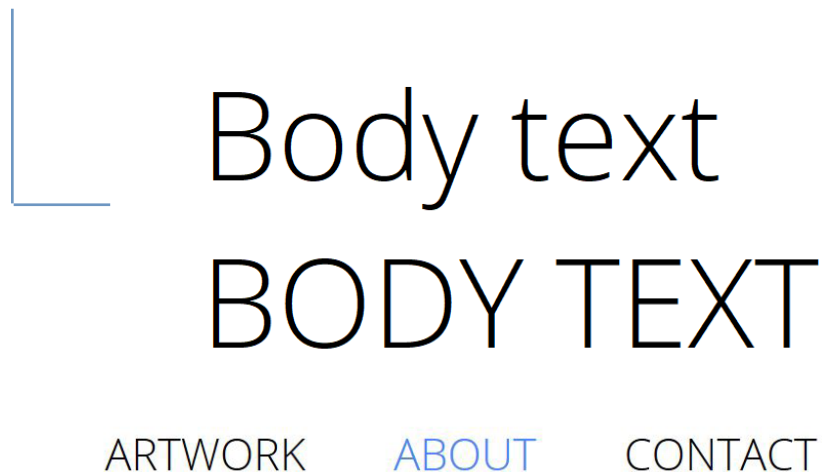


IMAGE 66. Navigation bulk

Header

HEADER

Using common sans serif typefaces throughout the layout can, however, come across as toneless and institutional (Budelmann, Kim & Wozniak 2010, 46). More personality can be evoked by pairing different typefaces. According to Tselentis (2012, 152), combining sans serif fonts with more descriptive scripts or slab serifs, thick and bold typefaces, can produce visually interesting combinations and contrast, especially when used in various different contexts (e.g headlines in contrast to subtle body text).

In order to make the layout a bit more typographically distinctive, I have used an ornamental font called Mountains of Christmas as the main header text. It suits the style of my artwork and makes the presentation visually interesting. The header text is a graphic element, since the particular font is not included in the 22Slides font gallery.

5.3 COLOURS

Colours have great impact on visual material and they function in multiple ways. In layout design they can highlight certain design elements or bring the layout together in a cohesive way. Effective and appealing use of colours brings out the best of the interface and makes it visually distinctive. (Myers 2014, 139.)

It's important to consider how colour translates to the message of the portfolio since it can either enhance or degrade the overall presentation. Portfolios, in general, usually utilize a simple colour scheme that only consists of a few subtle colours. According to Tselentis (2012,172), a cohesive layout can be built with a single hue of a colour.

The colour scheme I have chosen for my portfolio consists of whites and blacks. White functions as the background colour and negative space of the website and makes the artwork stand out, whereas body text is set in black. The only colour spot of the layout is a shade of blue which shows up in the header text and headings and in the navigation links as the hover colour. The shade of blue occurs in my artwork, which makes it a suitable choice of colour.

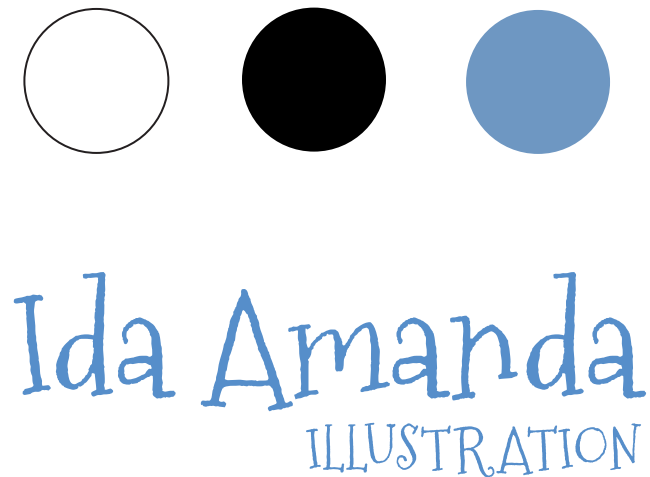


IMAGE 67. Header text element

5.4 GALLERY

The most prominent part of a website is home page which can function solely as the landing page or as the main gallery of the portfolio.

The home page of my portfolio functions as a gallery, which makes the first impression of the site visually interesting. A separate home page can, to my mind, come across as an unnecessary element in a more simplistic portfolio since it doesn't really bring any additional value to the presentation. My portfolio doesn't feature an intro or sequence screen which leads to the home page either, because that can be seen as somewhat superfluous in a portfolio website (Hayman, as cited in Rees 2014, 38-39).

22Slides offers multiple different gallery forms, including a simple square thumbnail gallery and several masonry and slideshow galleries. The gallery form I have chosen to present my work with is a thumbnail gallery, which is a functional and visually appealing way to view artwork.

Eisenman (2006, 76-77) states that projects and individual pieces benefit from short segments of text which can describe, for example, the image title, task, process and designer's role in the project. One of the main reasons I chose the thumbnail gallery we're the image captions, which describe individual images in more depth. 22Slides offers a thumbnail gallery where image captions show up on hover. This is an efficient way to provide more information about individual images without making the text elements a distracting part of the viewing process.

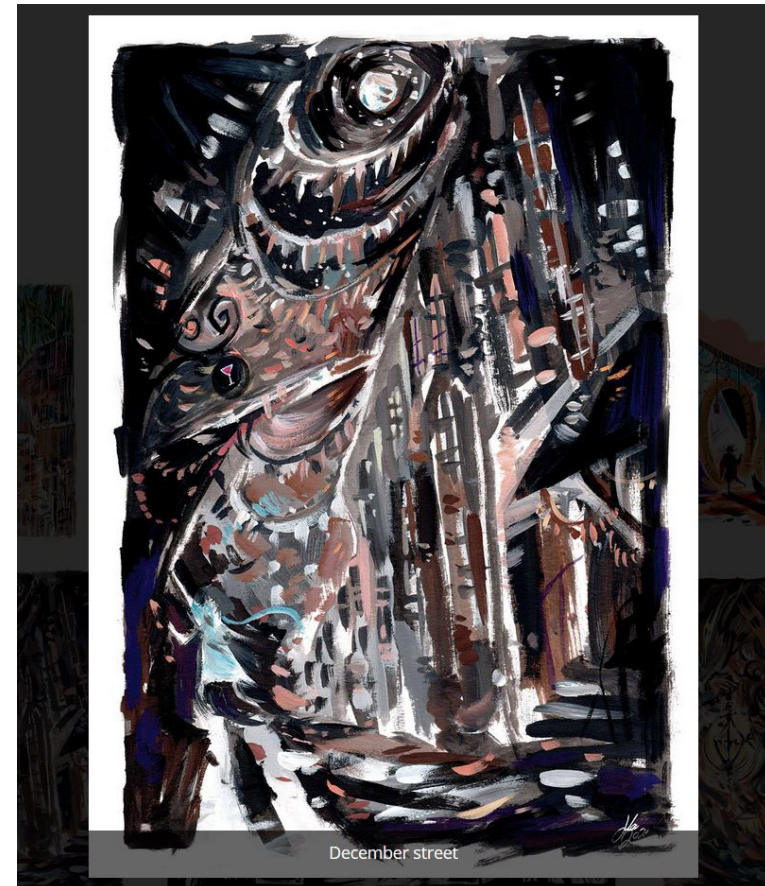


IMAGE 68. Lightbox mode

5.5 ABOUT-PAGE

About-page tells the essential information about the designer and their visual identity. It can be stylistically more experimental or traditional depending on the chosen field of art and design. Some about-pages only describe the designer in a few words whereas others go for a more detailed approach.

My own description is quite simple. It contains the basic information, such as the country where I'm based, the field of focus and the preferred tools of working. It also mentions a list of several freetime activities which are related to the field of arts in general. The description is accompanied with an illustrated profile picture, which I think is a suitable way to portray myself as an illustrator.

According to Myers (2014, 32 & 131), about-page can feature a list of other things as well. The most common ones are resume, list of education and awards and exhibitions. For now, I have included a list of my education which tells about my artistic background.

Ida Amanda

ILLUSTRATION

[ARTWORK](#) [ABOUT](#) [CONTACT](#)



Hello. I'm Ida, an illustrator and graphic designer based in Finland.

I have a passion for illustration, storytelling and character creation and usually work with gouache, ink and computer.

Besides illustration I'm interested in other forms of art and enjoy music, films and series.

EDUCATION

Lahti Institute of Design - Graphic design (2016-2020)

Edinburgh College of Art - Illustration (2018)

IMAGE 69. About-page provides the essential information

5.6 CONTACT INFORMATION

Contact information must be clear and easy to find. It can take the shape of a built-in contact form or be presented as an email address or phone number.

Featuring all three contact options on a website is the best combination (Clazie 2010, 126), but not necessary. Usually an email address is the simplest and easiest way to get the message across. Featuring both an email address and a contact form on a website can, however, come across as a more user-friendly option, since it takes the viewers into account and lets them choose the preferred way of communication.

For this reason I have added both an email address and a contact form on my portfolio website. 22Slides provides a built-in contact form which was a bit challenging to modify to the desired shape. The final form was created with the help of CSS in order to include the essential information elements in the contact fields.

If you're looking for an illustrator, feel free to contact me:

idamandaillustration@gmail.com

Name:

Email address:

Subject:

Message:

Send

IMAGE 70. Contact form

6 IN CONCLUSION

6.1 THE RESULTS

The main goal of this project was to examine which platforms support a digital portfolio the best way possible and provide tools for a personalized presentation of work.

The result of the project comes across as surprising. When I began working on this project, I was sure that I would find multiple suitable platform options that I would want to use as the base of my portfolio. The final result ended up being quite the opposite as none of the platforms in test seemed to offer the combination of features I was looking for.

While several platforms functioned in the test considerably well, they all presented noticeable shortcomings, which made choosing between platforms difficult. What made the testing process more challenging was my own mindset of wanting to know whether I would use certain platform features also in the future. I quickly realized, however, that it's impossible to predict how my own personal requirements for a portfolio platform change since they are tied to the evolution of my artwork.

Given this, one shouldn't necessarily think about what the platform is missing, but instead focus on the qualities and features that serve one's personal needs at the specific moment. The only way to go about choosing a platform is to determine what are most essential elements in a presentation, choose a platform and see how it functions in use.

All in all, I came to the conclusion that my own visual identity and requirements for a portfolio might and will change in the future. The decisions that are made regarding platforms are not permanent and therefore a project such as portfolio should always be treated as an experimental one that is constantly on the move and changing.

6.2 EVALUATION OF THE PROCESS

In the beginning of this project I was aiming to cover a larger amount of information regarding both portfolio and brand. I soon realized, however, that these additional aspects hindered my working process, making it difficult to narrow down the topics I wanted to cover and questions I wanted answers to.

In order to make the working process more efficient I should have determined the exact topic of the project earlier on and fully focus on it. A considerably large amount of time was spent on lingering between different things.

Then again, all this was part of the thesis process, which ultimately resulted in valuable findings in terms of the platforms and portfolio design.

Overall, I'm quite pleased with the result of this project as I managed to pull it together in a considerably short amount of time. I found answers to the question I had set for the project in the beginning, even though the findings weren't quite what I expected.

The portfolio I have created serves as a good starting point for me. Whether or not I will continue using this platform in the future or transfer my material to somewhere else depends on the evolution of different platforms and my own artwork.

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