WordPress, CSS and Adobe Photoshop

Launch a blogfolio

Christopher Cox explains how he used WordPress to create a slick online blog and portfolio site in one

Starting your own blog can be an effective way to drive serious traffic to your portfolio site. When I launched the current version of Changethethought (www.changethethought.com) in 2008, I was looking for more than just another updated version of my portfolio – and after three years writing ActionScript for Flash, I also wanted something that was simpler to operate.

WordPress offered the freedom to make a unique site, with quick and easy access to my portfolio, while also letting me engage with the online creative community on my own terms. The problem is, it pretty much comes out of the box. To make it unique, you have to find a 'theme' to modify and personalise – essentially a string of CSS documents that give your site a distinctive look and feel. If you don't find a theme you like on the WordPress site, STCFX (www.stcfx.com) is another good place to look.

A word of warning, though: CSS isn't easy. I taught myself the basics over four months (O'Reilly do a great set of books), spent a month customising my blog, then hired a company to finish it off. If you have little experience, I'd suggest working with someone who does. Over the following pages, I explain how I've customised Changethethought from a design perspective, to show how a free, open-source system like WordPress can be pushed to its limits.

You can download the latest version of WordPress from its site (www.wordpress.org), including a guide to get you started.

Christopher Cox
The founder of Changethethought, Cox works in a range of media and has recently launched a design studio under the same name.
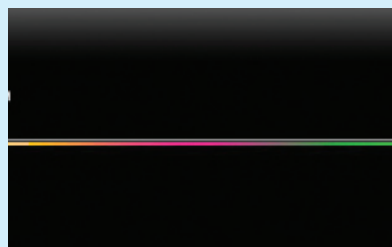www.changethe thought.com

On your disc
—— You'll find the CSS code that Cox used to customise his blogfolio on your cover disc, in the Resources section

Skills
—— Create a bespoke blogfolio in Wordpress
—— Drive more traffic to your site
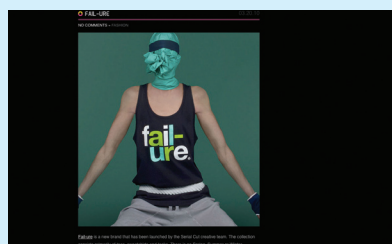—— Understand the possibilities of CSS in Wordpress
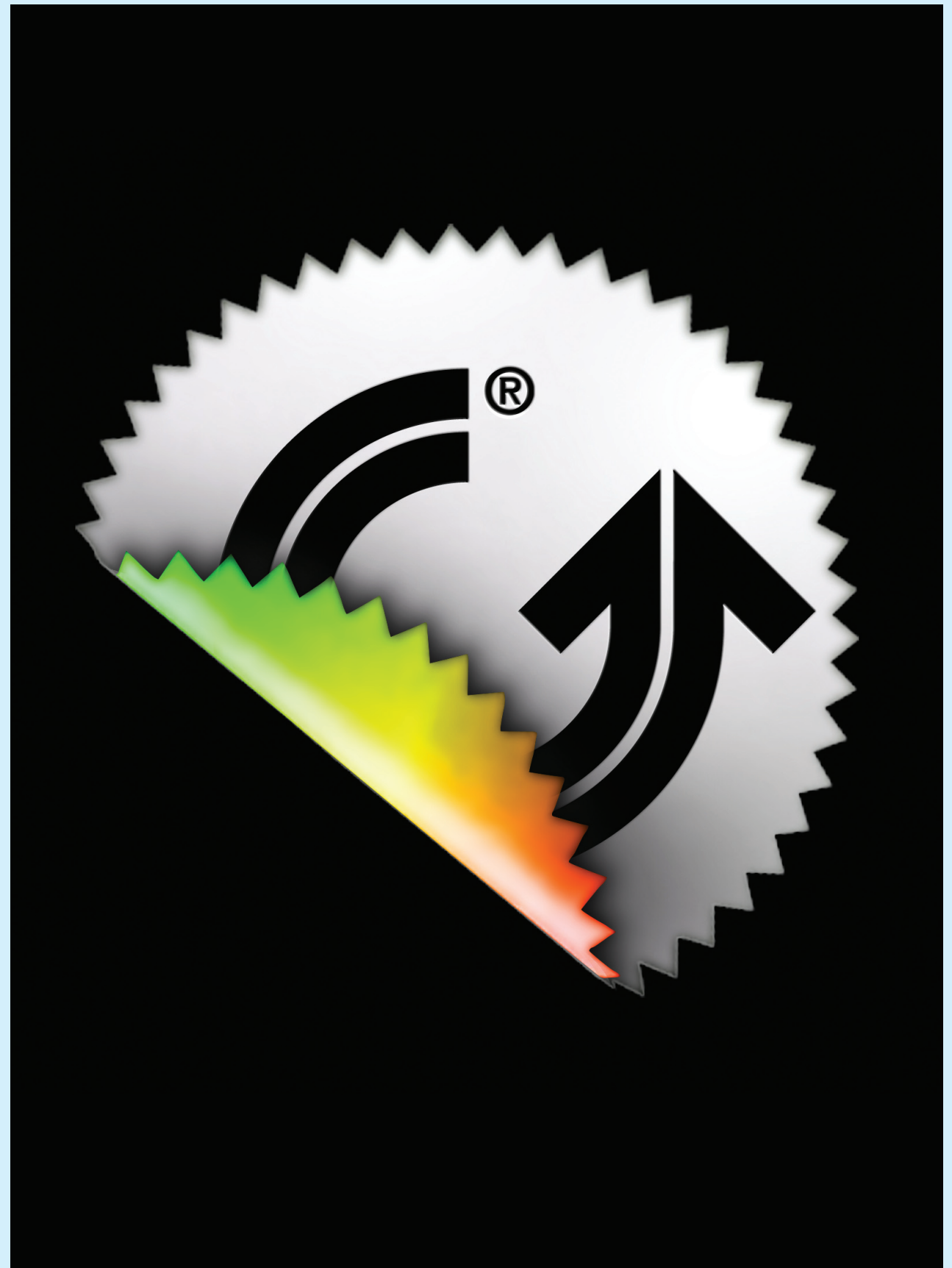
01___ A primary consideration should be the colour scheme you want for your blogfolio, and whether you want your website to be dark or light in its general appearance. What colour will your body copy and headlines be? I opted for a glossy 'tech-rainbow on black' look, to differentiate myself from the bulk of white-background sites in the creative blogosphere.
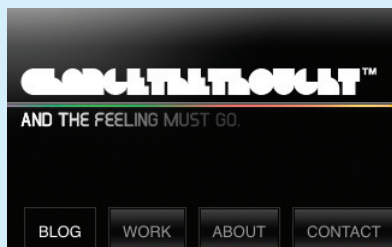

02___ The header serves as the anchor to your site. You can design it in Photoshop or Illustrator, and save it as a JPEG. Some out-of-the-box WordPress themes will let you change your header image without touching the CSS – if not, then you'll need to direct the header tag in your CSS to where your header image lives on your host server. You'll find my CSS code on the cover disc if you want to explore this further.

03___ Creating customised buttons for your theme goes a long way to developing the look of your blogfolio. I created mine in Photoshop frame-by-frame, designing both the rollover state and the rollout state, and plugging them into my theme's style.css document, which you'll also find on your disc. When the button is inactive the images are knocked out, leaving only the outline.
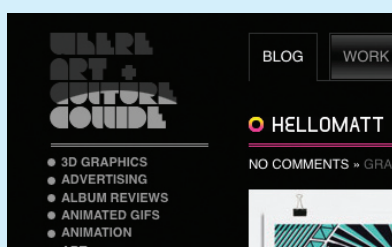

04___ Many WordPress themes allow you to alter the Categories header to suit. I chose the font Bifurk and, in Photoshop, used a semi-circle highlight to make the image more dynamic, as if it were backlit. WordPress also lets you modify your site beyond a simple blog format by adding widgets. My sidebar includes a world news vs. creative news widget, which I customised with CSS to match the look and feel of my site.

05___ The size of the images used on your blogfolio is another key factor in customising your site. You can go big or small, experimenting with thumbnails that WordPress can auto-generate. I went for fairly large images (545 pixels wide), on the premise that creative people like big pictures. I kept this image size consistent across both the blog and portfolio sections of the site.
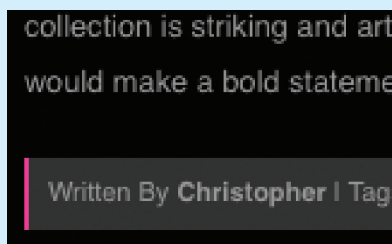

06___ The signature or sign-off is an effective visual indicator to the reader that they've reached the end of the post. It can also be used to hold your tags. I used a solid grey bar to serve as a strong break between posts.

Ryan Schude has spent the last ten years moving between Chicago, San Francisco, San Diego and LA. All the while he has been building a tremendous portfolio of photography including some amazing set piece imagery that turn everyday environments into unique works of art.

Written By **Christopher** | Tags: Art, California, Los Angeles, Photography, Ryan Schude

ROCK OF THE EYE

NO COMMENTS » GRAPHIC DESIGN
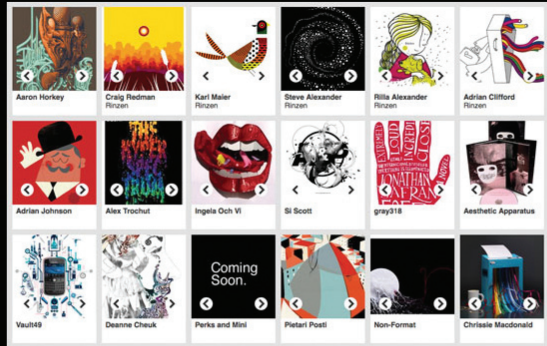
Rock of the Eye is an attempt by two reps with a nearly identical aesthetic to bring the work of what they describe as design-celeb' and 'illo-stars' to the attention of young creatives in Australia for the purpose of inspiration.

Written By **Christopher** | Tags: Australia, Graphic Design, Illustration, Melbourne, Rock Of Eye

ALEXA MEADE

NO COMMENTS » ART

"Alexa Meade's innovative use of paint on the three dimensional surfaces of found objects, live models, and architectural spaces has been incorporated into a series of installations that create a perceptual shift in how we experience and interpret spatial relationships."

Alexa Meade is a 23-year-old artist based in Washington, DC. She graduated with a degree in Political Science from Vassar College in May of 2009. She spent several summers interning on Capitol Hill and in 2008 was a press staffer on the Obama Campaign.

Her painting techniques push the boundary of perception by compressing three dimensional subjects into two dimensional planes. Essentially, Meade wraps live subjects (people) and objects in paint reversing the normal approach of an artist painting from a source subject and instead painting directly onto the source subject.

I wanted to apologize for getting to this one late. I actually saw this a week back, had it logged in a document somewhere and just never got around to having the time to post it this week. Do check out Meade's work as it is definitely a fascinating approach to the accepted approach to paint and canvas.

Written By **Christopher** | Tags: Alexa Meade, Art, DC, Painting, Washington

PREVIOUS ENTRIES ➡

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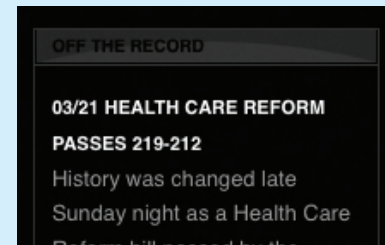
07_____ The theme of my site incorporates a single sidebar widget that allows for multiple rows of information. The top row is the News widget, but the remaining rows show recent items added to both my portfolio and online store as thumbnails.
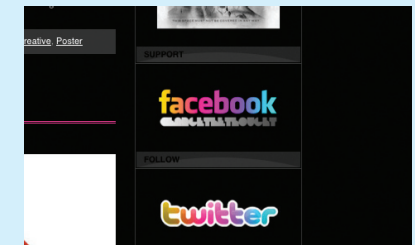
08_____ I've also used my sidebar to include link-backs to my Twitter and Facebook accounts, adding rainbow gradient fills to the logos in Photoshop to tie in with the site's theme.
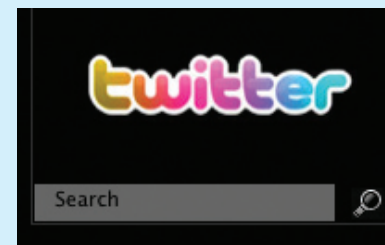
09_____ A search bar is an important feature for any archive site like a WordPress blog. I created a custom magnifying glass graphic for my search icon in Photoshop – it may seem like a small thing, but taken together, careful touches like this give your blogfolio a bespoke, professional feel. You don't have to start from scratch – one useful shortcut is simply to customise some existing icons in Photoshop.
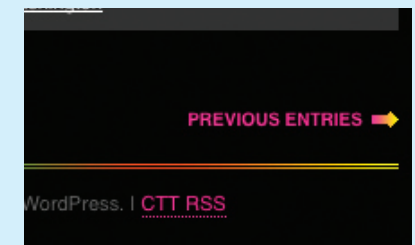
10_____ The bottom dividing line of the site is your last chance to reinforce the look and feel of your blog. I've reused a section of the rainbow header, and swapped the location of my Previous and Next button links – this feels more intuitive, since 'previous' actually takes you to the 'next' page of the site – and added a customised arrow icon. Again, all of this is possible by modifying the theme's existing CSS code.
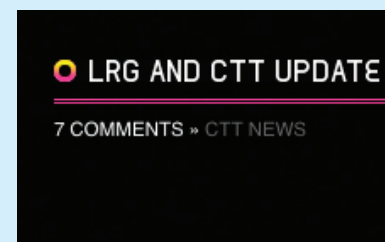
11_____ It's your decision as to whether you want to allow readers to leave comments after your posts. I left the function on for my blog, but turned it off for my portfolio – I get enough criticism about my work from clients. You can control the look of your Comments section by implementing a commenting widget into your WordPress theme. I asked a developer to alter mine, and designed the image iconography in Photoshop to match the rest of the site.
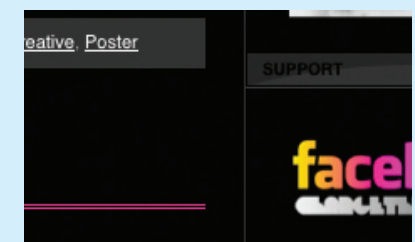
12_____ Pages are static subsections of a WordPress site, that can be used to house anything off the main blog – I've used them to house my Work, About, Contact, Shop and Downloads sections, for instance. You can customise these too: I've used headers that I designed in Photoshop (again using the Bifurk font) as a callout to each subsection. Aside from the copy, the rest of the information is all conveyed through bespoke imagery, created in Photoshop.