



Challenger 1  
Jakob Kahlen

Challenger 2  
Shane Mielke

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# Designer challenge

Acclaimed designer Hydro74 asked three creatives to redesign his portfolio website, and judged the results

Having spotted on our Twitter feed that Florida-based illustrator and apparel designer Joshua Smith, aka Hydro74, was looking to redesign his portfolio website, we decided to approach this month's Challenge from a different angle. Hydro74 would set the brief to our three creatives, provide the necessary assets, and comment on the results. "I'm not a web designer by any means, so it's hard to convey my

thoughts to pixels as fluidly as I do with vector development," begins Smith's brief. "My personal goal is to develop a clean, professional-looking site that's not overly complex, but with a few embellishments to keep it concurrent with various web trends." He goes on to reference a select handful of sites that he admires, including Limited Hype ([www.limitedhype.com](http://www.limitedhype.com)) and the portfolio sites of creatives Till Wiedeck ([www.tillwiedeck.com](http://www.tillwiedeck.com)) and Justin Thomas Kay ([www.justinthomaskay.com](http://www.justinthomaskay.com)). "In the end, I want my site to serve two purposes: an easy-to-review site for a high-end client, but with a core structure that I can reuse to highlight the fonts I develop on my sister site, Legacy of Defeat ([www.legacyofdefeat.com](http://www.legacyofdefeat.com)) as well."

For Smith, the fundamental elements of his redesign should be a white background – "I'm tired of black" – and a very simple navigation, with easy-to-scroll-through images. But steer clear of Flash pop-up scroll bars to cycle through the work, he warns: "I think that's generic, and it seems to downgrade your work. Other than that, I'm open to all suggestions." First up for the challenge is Jakob Kahlen, partner and creative director of Danish outfit Hello Monday ([www.hellomonday.com](http://www.hellomonday.com)). When he's not working with the likes of IKEA, Microsoft and Ericsson, Kahlen can also be found

lecturing students in interactive design at the Danish School of Media and Journalism. Shane Mielke, a designer and creative director at 2Advanced Studios ([www.2advanced.com](http://www.2advanced.com)) was our second participant. Experienced in all aspects of web design, he also serves a judge on the prestigious FWA Site of the Year awards. Last to rise to the challenge was New York-based art director Rina Miele ([www.honeydesign.com](http://www.honeydesign.com)), who lists the "smell of vinyl toys" and traditional art practices among her passions.

Challenger 3  
Rina Miele



**Jakob Kahlen**  
When I first browsed through Joshua's work, I really just wanted to do a simple full-screen Flash site, showcasing the amazingly vivid and detailed illustrations that Joshua does. But from the brief it seemed that he was after something else, so I took on the challenge of making his blog-style portfolio work.

I was still keen on having at least one large piece of recent or prominent work at the top of the frontpage. And I added an info box with a short project description, controls for an image slideshow (I'm thinking a combination of close crops, overview images, and images that show the work in context) and some social media buttons, making it easy to share the featured content.

To add some fun to the browsing experience, I chose to have a sorting mechanism on the front page directly underneath the large feature, instead of a traditional category navigation. By clicking the tags, the teasers will update on the fly. The list of teasers will expand as much as needed, making the page shorter or longer.

The user also has the opportunity to choose between two different views: columns of three teasers of work, or a more traditional blog view with wide images on top of each other.

At the bottom of the page I added a traditional footer, where the user will always be able to find a short bio, Twitter feed, and a random Hydro74 typeface with a link to the font store.

I think it would be much easier for users to appreciate his work if it was accompanied by descriptions of the project, the process, the background story, context – anything that can put the work into perspective. By adding short descriptions on the front page teasers and more thorough ones on the folio pages, his collection of work will appear even more impressive.

Design-wise, I kept things really simple. A black, white and gold colour scheme and fonts that aren't too attention-grabbing seemed to be the best match to most of his work.

**Hydro 74's feedback**  
I'm very impressed by this layout: it's extremely straightforward and easy to see what's offered via the work I've produced. The colour tones and structure, along with the grid, complement each other well. As far as what I desired for the visual aspect, the design is pretty spot on. Given the choice, I'd probably want the social media contacts to be a little more obvious, and it would need a small logo for Brass Tack, my streetwear label.

**74**  
WORK  
SHOP  
ABOUT  
CONTACT



**THE PRESETS ILLUSTRATION**  
Illustrations for Scion event The Preset.  
Work included illustrations for posters, programs, apparel and website.

**SORT BY:** ALL / MOST RECENT / SELECTED / AWARD WINNING / IN THE PRESS /  
**CATEGORY:** ALL / POSTER / PRINT / APPAREL / TYPOGRAPHY / ILLUSTRATION / FONTS /



**ZOO FORTY ONE**  
APPAREL PRINT  
Misc. apparel illustrations for Zoo Forty One. Work included illustrations, posters, logos, type treatments, apparel, etc...



**NIKE LT 1/1 PROJECT**  
PRINT  
Special project of a pair of shoes in a custom box for LaDarian Tomlinson, Running Backs in the NFL and a key player for the San Diego Chargers...



**JOKER BRAND**  
APPAREL ILLUSTRATION  
Misc. apparel illustrations for the Joker Brand. Work included illustrations, posters, logos, type treatments, apparel, etc...



**BRANDS FOR TOYS**  
HASBRO ILLUSTRATIONS  
Various illustrations done for Hasbro Toy's brands. Work included Transformers, Power Tour Guitar, Mighty Muggs, etc...



**SMASHING PUMPKINS**  
POSTERS  
Various posters done for the band Smashing Pumpkins. Work included illustrations, posters, logos, type treatments, apparel, etc...



**DCMA COLLECTIVE**  
MISC. PRINTS  
Various posters done for the DCMA collective. Work included illustrations, posters, logos, type treatments, apparel, etc...

**ABOUT HYDRO74**  
Hydro74 is a Orlando based designer, otherwise known as Joshua M. Smith.  
The soul purpose of my career is to push the boundaries in doing what I feel is relevant to the market as well as extract various elements and trends to be able to offer them up in my own personal work. But let's be honest, I do what I love because I love it. Not because I have to do it, nor am I forced to do it, but rather passionate about doing what I do. I firmly believe in having set style tones, yet a sense of diversity to make any various project unique to the demands that are set forth.  
[Http://www.brasstackapparel.com](http://www.brasstackapparel.com) If you buy a Shirt this weekend, You get a free vader print.  
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**TWITTER @HYDRO74**  
Made a awesome Orzo, and watching Let's go to prison... Good day so far...  
@brandon\_w\_boyd just a mouse and mousepad...  
@drawsgood no worries.  
[Http://www.brasstackapparel.com](http://www.brasstackapparel.com) If you buy a Shirt this weekend, You get a free vader print.

**FONTS AT RANDOM**  
**RAZOR BLACK**  
LIVE WRONG AND PERSPIRE  
TRUE TYPE AND POST SCRIPT DISPLAY FONT

HYDRO74



## Shane Mielke

The brief outlined a predominantly white, very simple homepage structure containing a blog feed, Twitter feed, featured fonts, and newsletter sign up that would be easy to review for clients. Joshua's current homepage felt too much like a generic WordPress site. In his current site, the blog info dominates the page, the content feels squashed and there seems to be nowhere to truly feature a project in a special way.

I wanted to make his homepage more memorable by spreading the information out vertically, making things easier to read, and telling more of a story from top to bottom, with large featured areas to start and end the site.

I also wanted to create a main feature area with a sense of reality and depth that would bring the artwork to life. This area would serve as a playground outside the blog entries, where he could promote specific projects without locking them into a generic rectangle blog format.

The current design is missing some of the intricate details from Joshua's work, so I tried to subtly infuse some into the design bordering in ways that wouldn't compete with the actual work. Patterns were added into the header bars, and various logos and skulls were added strategically in areas like the copyright bar to break up the repetitiveness of the site. I also tried to create interest and break outside the rectangular borders by making his infamous script logo peek out from areas and in backgrounds.

The site ends with another featured playground that's inverted to contrast the rest of the site. This not only adds diversity of style, but also generates interest from top to bottom – telling a story and allowing Joshua to promote even more products or projects.

### Hydro 74's feedback

This layout definitely has a lot of potential, but for me, there may be too many elements involved – which make it fairly tricky to take in visually. The simple, straightforward aesthetic gets a little lost in places, and when a site competes with the work, it can make the work seem less complex. But there's a great boldness to Shane's design – if he stripped away some of the background clutter and changed some of the typography, I think this layout would be pretty sweet.



## Rina Miele

Joshua wanted to change his online presence, stripping much of the content that was making the page too heavy. His current site is a sensory overload, so I decided to focus on the absolute bare essentials, and use minimal styling on the page: I didn't want to clutter it with too many bevels, drop shadows or other graphic elements. The idea is to create a more traditional design sense – thoughtful typography, a logical and purposeful layout – and let the work speak for itself.

I had to decide whether or not featuring Joshua's blog on his website homepage would still be a good idea for the new design. The benefit of incorporating blogging features is that it makes a more sustainable site. Sometimes projects can take time to wrap up, leading to a lack of portfolio updates and a stale web presence. Utilising a blog model ensures a constant flow of new material, and keeps people coming back for more.

The right-hand portion of the page is the 'meat' of the site, where the bulk of the content is displayed. The composition here is cropped for Projects' page format, but more content would run down the page. And when you click the navigation, the content is swapped out.

The left-hand column is the 'potatoes' of the website, where all the utilitarian features exist. Starting from the top, we have the navigation, Twitter feed, newsletter sign up, store callout, and networking links. Joshua can include other pieces of promotion here as well.

If a user wishes to read a full article on the blog, rather than loading a new page, the content would just expand downward. This way, the user doesn't have to leave the space and lose his place, making the experience as seamless as possible. The other site content would disappear, and return when the user clicks away from the article. Portfolio items would function in a similar fashion: clicking a piece of work would expand to give detail shots and more project info.

### Hydro 74's feedback

I absolutely love this layout: it's clean, simple and to the point. However, on closer inspection it's missing core Hydro74 pieces, and is initially confusing as to whether it's a blog or portfolio. In conclusion, Jakob has clarified the need to make sure relevant, colourful work can be seen immediately, while Rina has captured the tone and structure that I desired – and Shane delivered a bold look and feel. A mixture of these would be ideal: thanks to all three for their vision.

# HYDRO74

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Featured Work  
Store  
About  
Contact

### TWITTER

Yeah... got scammed... but the smile is priceless. <http://twitpic.com/18b9ph> 2 hours ago

Yes!! Hydro does Emo... this will be my new facebook profile... <http://twitpic.com/18b9ry> 2 hours ago

@rusaloves @fretto Think we need to talk about a hydro design donation to you! Let's grab dinner soon! 2 hours ago

@cleardesign no deadline... just one of those, 'might as well try it out' things 8 hours ago

FOLLOW ME ON TWITTER

### NEWSLETTER SIGNUP

Sign Up >

### NEWEST FONTS

CORTEZ  
MOOD BLACK  
SACRED BLACK  
THAI BLACK  
hydro script  
cadaver script

CLICK OUT THE STORE



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# TOURNAMENT READY NIKE NCAA JERSEY DEVELOPMENT

Written by: Joshua Smith March 21st, 2010



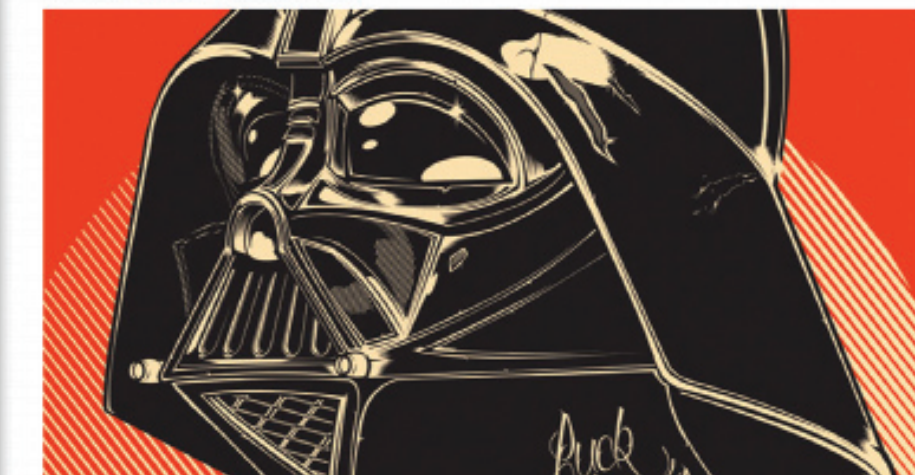
Nike just released it's Tournament Ready, Hyper Elite Uniforms that Hydro74 had the pleasure of assisting with. I was contacted to help develop mesh artwork for the back of the Jersey & Sleeve for Kentucky, Michigan State, Syracuse, Miami, St. Johns, Uconn & Texas. Here in the next few weeks I'll update the portfolio with images so you can view them. In the mean time, check out it out: [Nike Tournament Ready](#)

Just got word from Nike that the Elite Fit Auromesh Jersey's are dropping. I'm pretty stoked since this past year I had a great opportunity to work with various NCAA teams as well as a couple international teams to develop some unique art for jersey's as well as working with some amazing Creative Directors over at Nike. This piece featured is Kentucky. Other teams that should be dropping soon that I developed art for should be: Miami, Michigan State, St. Johns, Syracuse, Texas & UConn. Once everything is released, I'll show...

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# DARTH VADER PRINT

Written by: Joshua Smith March 21st, 2010



I was recently contacted by Michael over at [Ventilate](#) to be part of their downloadable poster series. The concept was 'What inspired you 10 years ago'. The piece is pretty obvious but in 2000 I remember still being excited about the new Star Wars series and seeing more and more Obey posters flooding the internet. Granted, Episode One of Star Wars was a disappointment since at the end, it didn't make a lot of sense and really lacked a core protagonist, but ... visually, amazing. Anyway, that is a whole different debate. And let's all face it. As much as you might say you hate Obey, you really appreciate it and admire the success that [Shepard](#) has done with it from a small paper sticker. I personally admire him and his work so any chance to rip the Chinese Propaganda style poster color themes... I'm down.

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