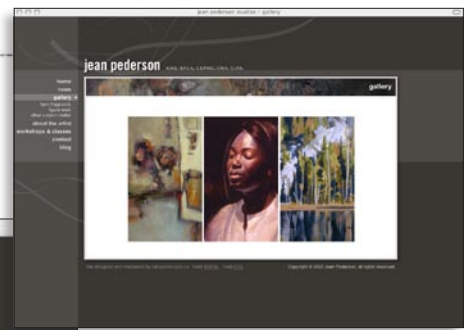
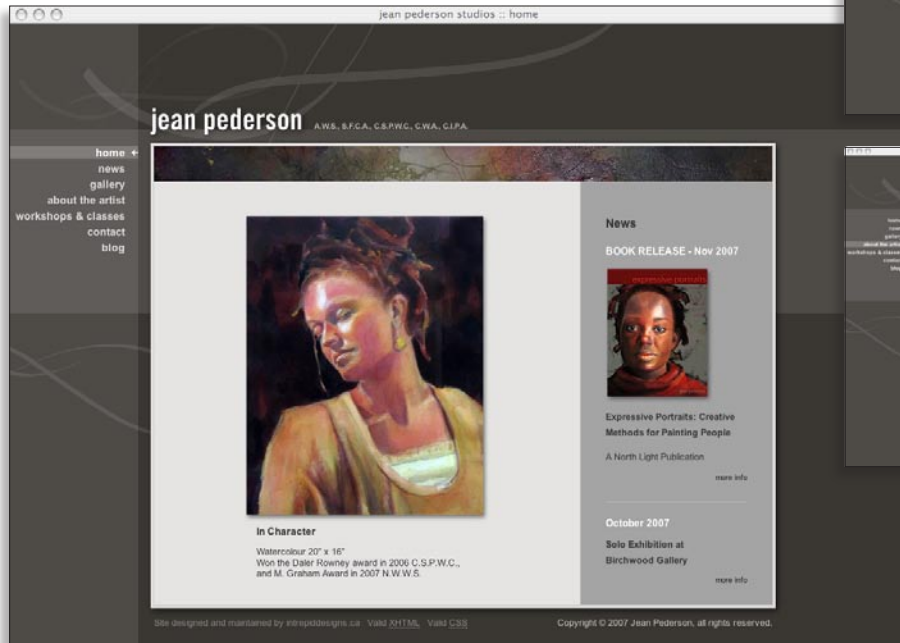


The background design of Jean Pederson's website is elegant and ties the site together without overwhelming her artwork.



# Top of the Web

## Take cues from these five artists who use their sites to enchant a worldwide audience.

■ By Lisa Hazen

It's an odd challenge—finding a way to represent the dimension and richness of fine art on a computer screen. Admittedly, nothing compares to the experience of viewing a work in person. But the Web is tops when it comes to sharing your work with a global audience.

You can't expect just to hire a Web designer and walk away with a full-featured site you love. There is no formulaic approach to Web design. Every potential client comes with different priorities and expectations. Being educated about your options and specific about what you want will help you develop a site that's useful and beautiful, one that represents you and your work well.

I've been a Web designer for almost 13 years, and I've witnessed the Web evolve from a novelty into an essential business tool. When I work with new clients, I first ask what they hope to achieve with their site, and that vision is what shapes the entire site's design. For

instance, if I have an artist client who wishes to use her site as a showcase for her body of work, I would build the site as an easily navigable online gallery. But if her main goal is to use the site as a vehicle to sell work directly to consumers, I would structure the site to orient visitors immediately to the art for sale and guide them through the process to make a purchase. Thus, let this be your

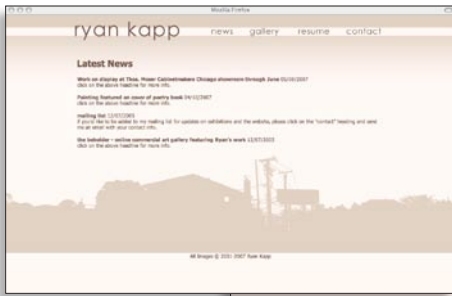
first question: What is it you want your site to do for you? Let the answer guide the way.

The following five sites are exemplary in a variety of ways; there's something to learn from each of them.

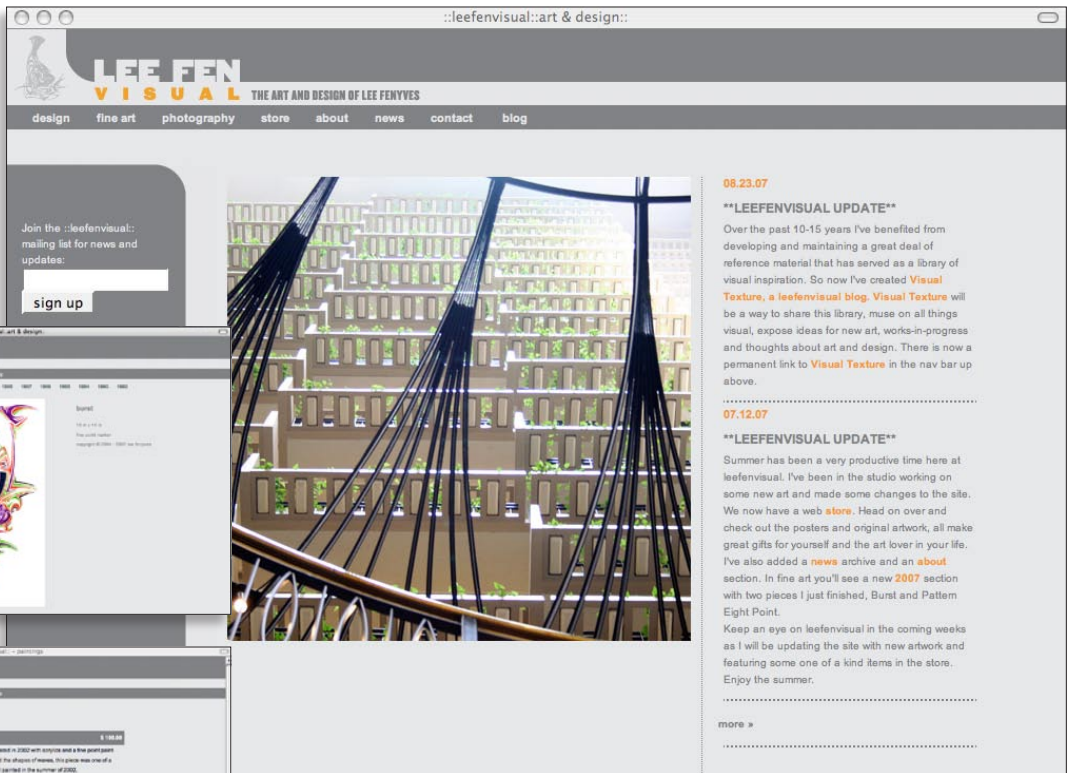
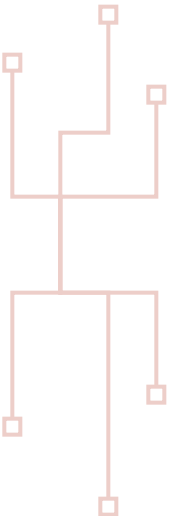
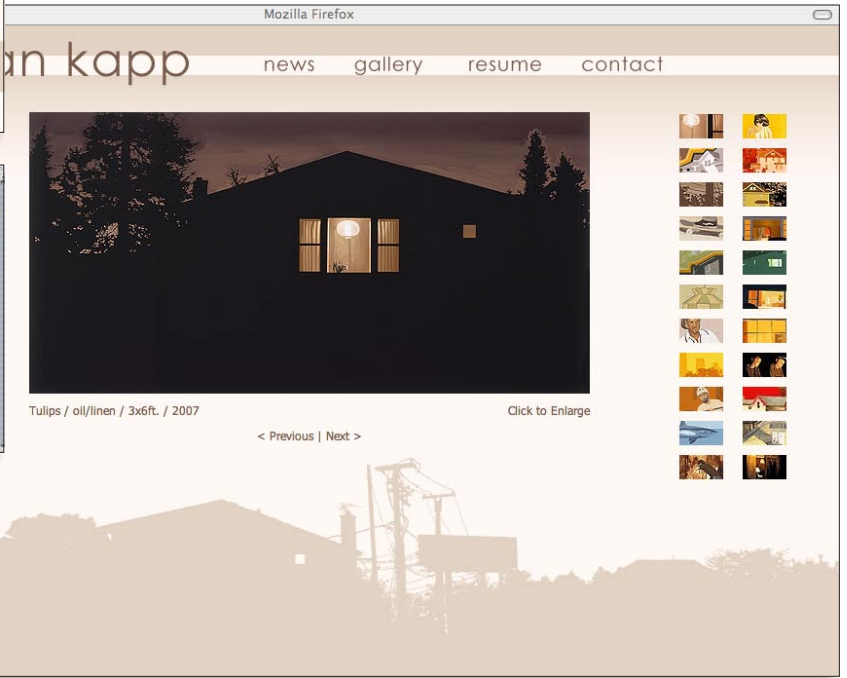
### Set the stage ([www.jeanpederson.com](http://www.jeanpederson.com))

The structure and design of your site shouldn't overwhelm your work, but rather let it take center stage. On her site, Calgary, Alberta, painter Jean Pederson uses a dark gray background with an arabesque flourish to set

■ **Lisa Hazen** is a Chicago-based writer and Web designer. Take a gander at her own website at [www.lisahazen.com](http://www.lisahazen.com).



Ryan Kapp describes his website as an elaborate business card that has opened up new audiences to his work.



By making it possible to buy his work directly from his website, Lee Fenyves gets his art out to a global audience.

## □ Getting web-ready

Preparation is half the battle in building a successful website. The better organized and informed you are, the more smoothly the entire process will go. Here are seven things you need to know.

- 1 Claim your domain.** First, determine what you want as your Web address. I suggest using your name if you primarily work on your own. (For instance: janedoe.com versus janepaintsclouds.com.) This will be easier for others to remember, and you want to be in control of your name anyway. It's easy to reserve a domain—and cheap, too. Prices start at about \$9.99 per year from registrars like GoDaddy.com.
- 2 The bare bones.** Every artist's site has different needs. But there are several things that every site should have—a gallery of your work, your bio and your contact information. If you're not an "e-mail person," definitely include your phone number. An artist's statement gets you bonus points.
- 3 Take your best shot.** Your site—and most importantly, your work—will only be as good as the images you use on the site. If you aren't equipped to shoot or scan your work adequately, invest in someone who is. This is no place to skimp.
- 4 Take a field trip.** Spend some time online and make notes about what sites you like and what sites you don't. Make sure to note what it is you like about each site. Do you like the color palette of a particular site? The way the navigation is structured on another? Does it annoy you how long it takes a certain site to load? All this information will help your Web designer create a design you love.
- 5 Know whom you're dealing with.** Just because your next-door neighbor's teenage nephew says he designs websites doesn't mean that he should design yours. You want a site that can go the distance and age well. You also want a design that can be easily updated with new work or information. Look for a designer with experience and references. One of the best ways to find a designer is by asking friends and colleagues for references. If there's a particular website you like, contact the site's owner to ask for the name of the designer who built it. You can also contact your local artists' guild for references.
- 6 Ask the right questions.** Once you find a designer, ask her to walk you through what the process involves, step by step. For instance, what is the time frame for each stage of the process, and at what points must you be available for review? What is your responsibility and what is hers? (Would you be charged extra if the images you provide are not Web-ready?) Is the charge hourly or a flat fee? What sort of contract is offered, and is there an option for a kill fee? (This is an agreement where they are paid a percentage of the contracted fee if you decide to dissolve the business relationship.) How easy will it be to add new content and images to your site once the site is complete?
- 7 Tell the world.** Do you have business cards? Print your Web address there. Friends with websites? Ask if you can trade links. Are you a member of an art forum like ArtistsNetwork.com? You get the drift. Don't just launch your site and expect people to find you—use every means necessary to drive traffic to your site.

off her paintings. A sliver of brushwork detail along the top of each page is a consistent, unobtrusive way to tie the site together graphically.

For Pederson, the key to finding the right site design involved research and communicating clearly with her Web designer about what she wanted from her site. "I spent a great deal of time visiting other artists' sites to see what I liked—and what I wanted to avoid—in my site design," she says. "I was able to tell my designer exactly what I wanted."

### Show your style ([www.ryankapp.com](http://www.ryankapp.com))

While it's important to create a site that allows your work to shine, your site design should also represent your artistic style. A silhouetted street scene occupies the bottom of each page of Chicago-based painter Ryan Kapp's website. Streetscapes are a common motif

in Kapp's work, a visual element that ties all the work together and presents a cohesive portfolio.

Investing in a Web presence opened up a whole new audience to Kapp's work. "Since the site launched, I've received numerous inquiries about my work from people who've discovered the site," he says. "This includes galleries, collectors, publishers, art students and fellow artists. My site serves as an elaborate business card of sorts in that someone who sees my work in a publication or as a link on a different website can come to my site to see more of what I do."

### Close the sale ([www.leefenvisual.com](http://www.leefenvisual.com))

Many artists not only showcase their work through their site but sell it, too. By incorporating the ability to purchase from your site as part of the design, you can sell more work.



## Blog it

Not ready to go live with your own website just yet? With a little Web know-how, you might find that setting up a blog for your art works for you. On any of the websites below, you can pick a template and a name and just go for it, or—if you know some HTML—you can customize your page.

**Blogger** and **Wordpress** offer blogs for free; **TypePad**'s plans start at \$4.95 per month. TypePad and Blogger allow you to upload images directly to your blog; Wordpress requires you to save your pictures elsewhere, which you can do at any of the image hosts listed below. The tricked-out photo site **Flickr** can act as a blog in itself. —*Grace Dobush*

### Blogging sites

- [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com)
- [www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com)
- [www.typepad.com](http://www.typepad.com)

### Image hosts

- [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)
- [www.photobucket.com](http://www.photobucket.com)
- [www.imageshack.us](http://www.imageshack.us)

Lee Fenyves paints, draws and does screenprints in San Francisco. His site beautifully displays the range of his work (even including scans of pages from his sketchbook to give a behind-the-scenes look at his process). And Fenyves has found that providing his work for sale online—with the help of e-commerce platform Shopify ([www.shopify.com](http://www.shopify.com))—has been one of the best ways to hook new buyers.

“I had been using guerilla tactics to sell my work—posting on message boards and selling on poster websites,” Fenyves says. “Adding shopping functionality to my site was inevitable, and so far it’s been a success. Selling my work online instead of just in a gallery allowed me to get my artwork in front of a global audience.”

## Share yourself ([www.eugeniafoster.com](http://www.eugeniafoster.com))

Your website isn’t just an opportunity to promote your artwork—it’s a way to introduce visitors to you as both an artist and an individual. The site for Mobile, Alabama-based painter Eugenia Foster has an extensive gallery that showcases dozens of her paintings and prints. Foster also includes an artist’s statement that explains what she draws upon when creating work (“the excitement of travel, the beautiful forms and colors in nature or the beauty of the human form”) and her inspiration (“my four wonderful adult children and six grandchildren”).

This openness helps Foster connect with visitors on a different level. Foster has found that her site opens up her work to a whole new audience. “I travel a great deal and paint on site,” Foster says. “It’s fabulous to be able to hand the random tourist—who has been watching me make small ink and watercolor studies—my card with the Web address. This has been a great way to introduce myself and my work to new friends and interested parties.”

## Be dynamic ([www.coandco.ca/ray/index.html](http://www.coandco.ca/ray/index.html))

Your site shouldn’t just be a static portfolio—it should be a dynamic entity that invites visitors to contact you, interact with you and return to see your newest work. Making a habit of frequently adding news, events and art to your site gives visitors a reason to return.

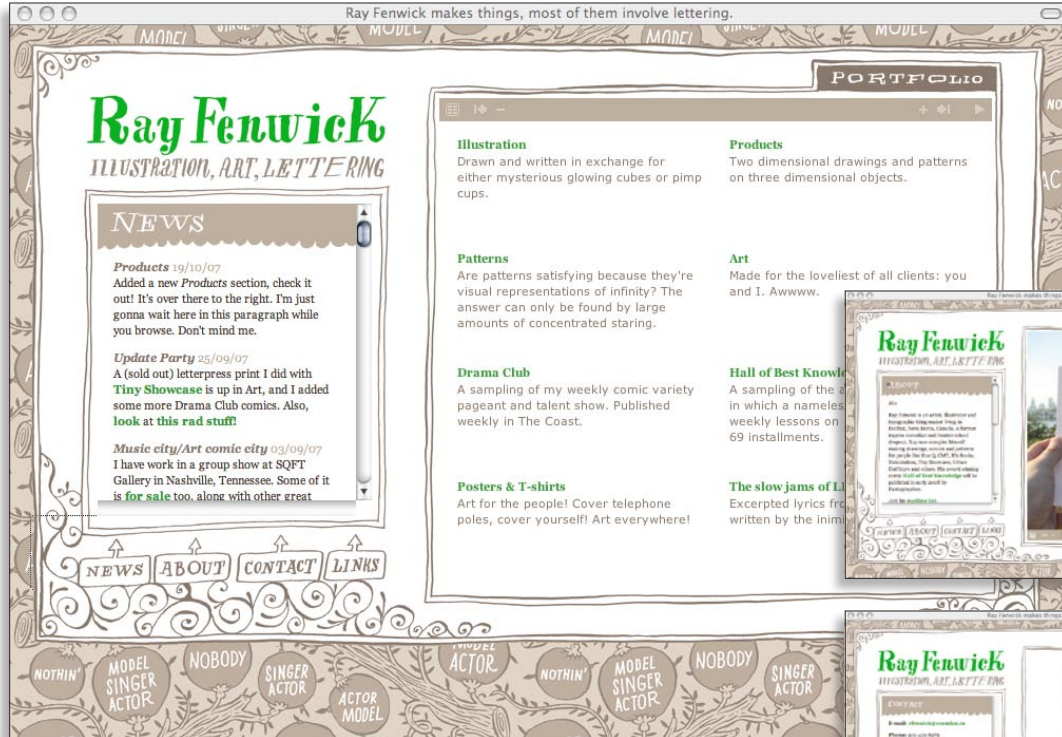
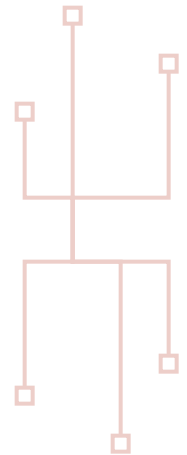
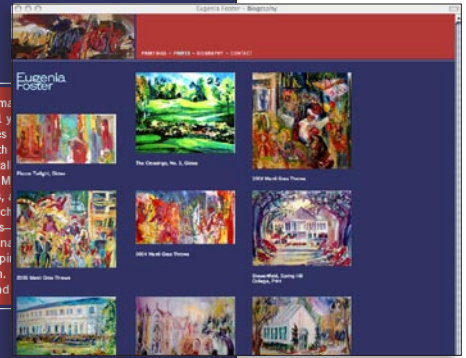
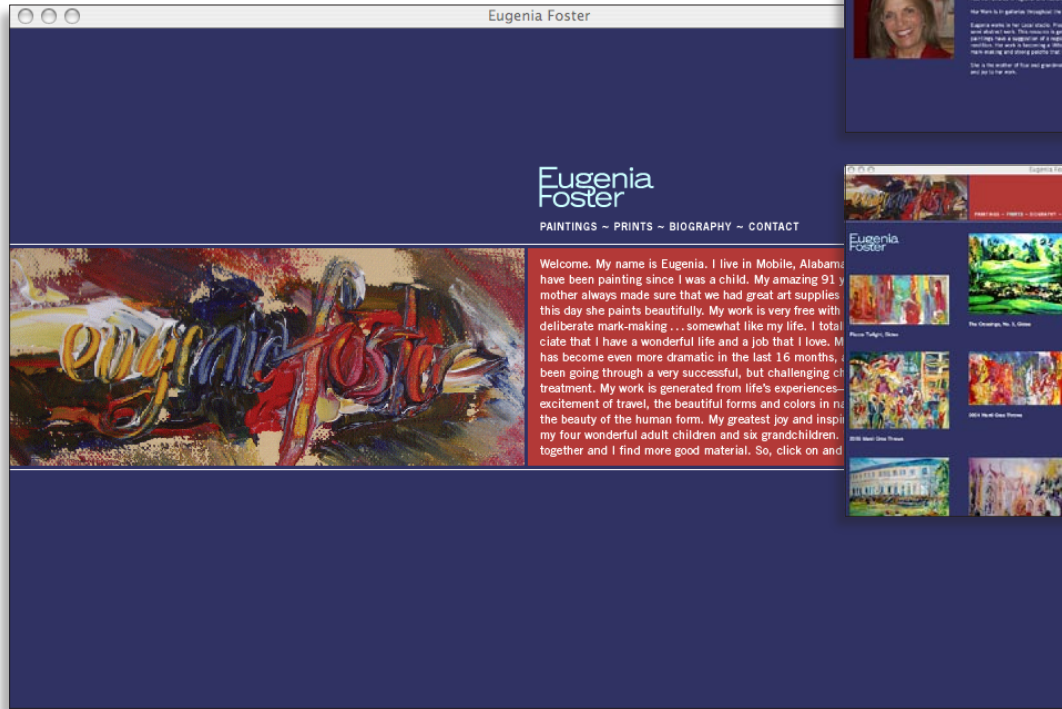
Nova Scotia illustrator Ray Fenwick created a site that he could easily update with news, press mentions and gallery showings. He collects e-mail addresses from visitors and sends periodic messages to this mailing list.

“Updating my site with recent information is a highly visible sign that the site is active, and I think that’s the key,” Fenwick says. “If things are too quiet on your site, people move on and probably don’t come back. It’s important to show them it’s worth their time to come back—often.”

**Go for it.** Although pulling together a site won’t happen overnight, the work will pay off. “For years I avoided developing a website as it takes a great deal of thought and time to present your work appropriately,” Pederson says. “Over the past year I’ve had more than 25,000 hits from 87 countries around the world. Wonderful letters have been written to me. I appreciate and respond to every one. Gallery, sales, publication, workshop and opportunities to be a juror have resulted from my website.”

What will yours bring? 

Eugenia Foster gets personal with her website's visitors by sharing her story in an artist's statement.



Ray Fenwick frequently updates his website with press mentions and gallery showings.

