

Fun with words and pictures

Wired magazine's table of contents is a toy box of visual techniques that you can use on all kinds of projects.



Our busy, sound-bite world puts a premium on being brief, visually and verbally. Few examples of brevity are better than magazines' tables of contents. Part talk show, part road map, a contents page rolls a maga-

zine's voice, typography, graphics, colors and other elements into a compact menu of titles and micro-"trailers" that convey a lot in tiny spaces.

Take Wired magazine, which is famous for its tight, high-energy integration of words and images. Its contents page is a party mix of numerals, illustrations, lists, bars and visual sprites—a toy box of visual techniques that can be applied to all kinds of small-space projects. Let's scoop up the lively stuff that makes it work.



Unusual is that it's mainly visual, not verbal. Wired's contents page makes the reader work for its information. This task is made interesting by a smorgasbord of visual techniques that are wry, cool, funky, surprising—everything but obvious; getting the reader to figure it out is key to its engagement.

Reconfigure the images

Every image has an expressive core. To reveal it, big graphics are not simply shrunk but reconfigured by masking, re-cropping, rearranging and so on.

Un-crop

The Nikon is lifted from a page of cameras, then un-cropped, so it now looks at you like a big, robotic eye.



Downsize

Pieces are cut from a much bigger collage and rearranged for the tiny space, which is oh-so-much more effective than merely resizing the large original.



Mask

The red diving helmet is extracted from its background, which simplifies it, essential for small graphics.

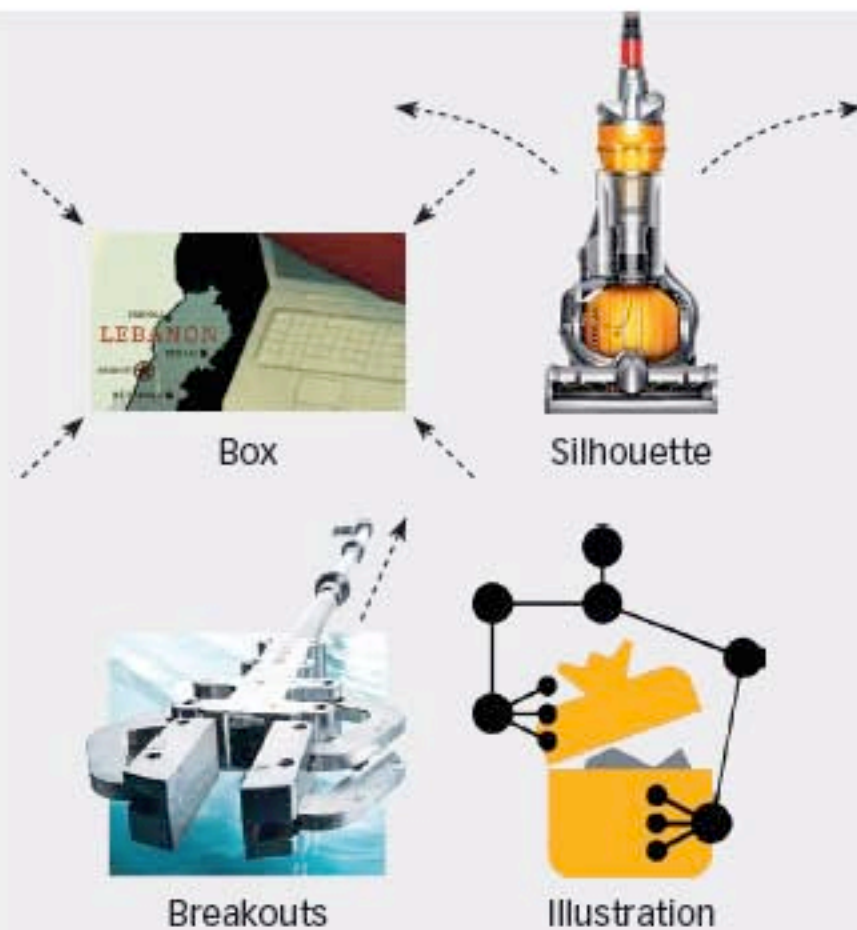


Super-crop

Full-size Jeff Bezos is just right for the editorial layout but radically cropped for the contents page, which fits and focuses attention at the same time.

Basic styles

Words (or numerals) and images tightly interact. There are a dozen or so basic configurations. Each configuration conveys some kind of meaning.



Images

Cropping conveys meaning—a standard **box** is formal and restrained, a **silhouette** is open and free, and a **breakout** conveys motion.

Illustration is iconic, artificial.



Sizes

Size in real life conveys two things—how big or small an object is, and how near or far away it is. Same-size elements are flat and static. Mix sizes liberally to convey depth, motion, *activity*.



Relationships

Numerals can be placed next to, on top of, behind and beside the image, and can look like stickers, peekaboos, labels and physical objects, depending on which one you use.

Basic typography

Small spaces require super-tight writing and typography. A word or two in three or four styles and sizes combine in each message. Each level signals a difference.

Contributors

This month's writers and artists.

Rants

Reader rants and raves.

Start

ESSAY Technolust takes down the housing market. **ROVER** Meet NASA's Mars Science Lab. **Q&A** Nicholas Carr rains on cloud computing. **HOW TO** Skip sleep. **TOOL** Nuclear vise grip. **ATLAS** Worst airports ever.

Posts

RELATIONSHIPS Confessions of an online Scrabble cheat. **FORENSICS** A controversial new DNA test. **HYGIENE** Scrubbing a jet engine.

Play

PLAYLIST Smart's Fortwo. **PRINT** Superhero close-ups. **MUSIC** iTunes imposters. **ARTS** Space case. **TEST** Body by Panasonic, lens by Leica.

Found

Artifacts from the future.



For maximum clarity in the tiny space, cinema-style typesetting separates numbers from text flush down the middle.

Short copy, multiple styles Quick! How do you jam a section head, page number, six sub-section heads and six headlines into one, easy-to-read square inch of space? By using four, carefully crafted levels of type, like this:

Section head

Big, bold, serif, upper- and lowercase

Start 33

ESSAY Technolust takes down the housing market. **ROVER** Meet NASA's Mars Science Lab. **Q&A** Nicholas Carr rains on cloud computing. **HOW TO** Skip sleep. **TOOL** Nuclear vise grip. **ATLAS** Worst airports ever.

Page number

A light version of the section-head typeface, for continuity, colored gray to avoid looking like spots; matches section-head x height.

Sub-sections and headlines

Light and bold versions of one sans-serif typeface; one upper-case, one lower. Note sizes (right).

ATLAS Worst

Basic layout

A strong, repetitive structure is a must. Put words on one side, images on the other, which keeps the look consistent no matter what's on the page.



A place for everything

The page is divided into two main zones—text column on the left, images on the right—then two small ones—logo at the top, heavy footer at the bottom.



Flirty

Like sloshing party beverages, the images splash over everywhere—here, across text column and footer—but the page structure remains in place, which is why it looks right even with different images.

Techniques



Transparent

Page number through the windshield is faded slightly to mimic the glare of real glass.

Unexpected viewpoint

Is that a tugboat or a camera? Hard to tell at a glance, which creates the double-take.

Snapshot

Ordinary, rectangular mug, a counterpoint to all the exuberance



Standing by

Superhero by number looks surprisingly dimensional.

Crunching a number

The Mars Rover rolling along

Platform

An 84 as a three-deck performance stage

Teensy

Just ordinary page numbers, useful for contrast

Crash landing

Jet sprawled over the footer, number behind

Sprites
Tiny, fully rendered drawings dot the pages, stepping, crawling, flying (below). Fun.



Array of styles—sleek, ratty, dark, light, big, small—keeps the layout moving.

Cutout photo
High-tech pliers step off the page.

Boxed

Suck it up
Oversize Dyson Hoovers the page number.

Map

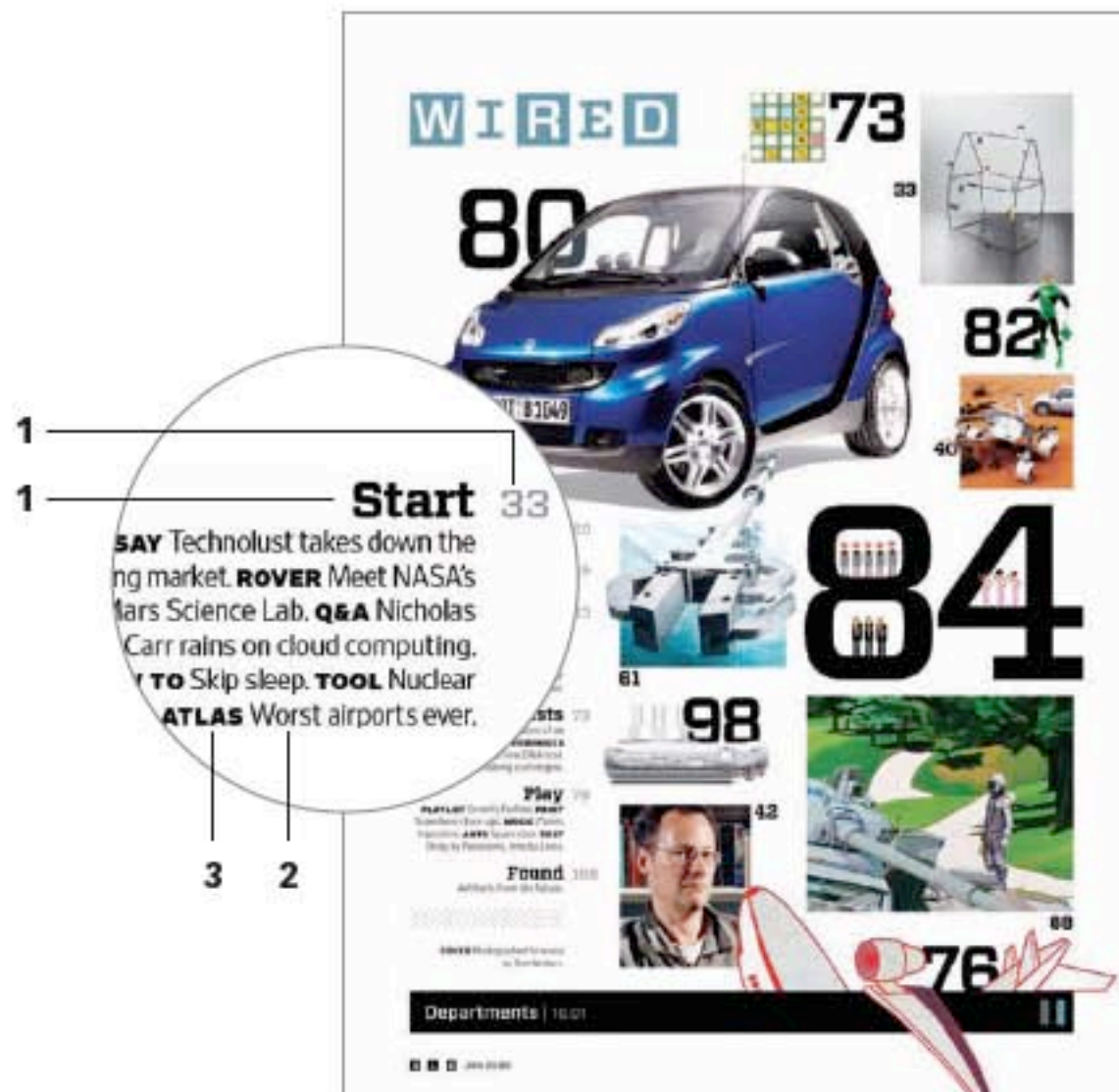
Simple illustration

Complex illustration

Breakout

Icon

Article resources



Typefaces

The following typefaces were custom-designed by [Hoefler & Frere-Jones](#) for Wired Magazine:

- 1 Vitesse
- 2 Retina
- 3 Retina Bold

Credits

Wired Magazine (www.wired.com)