



At the Midnight Hour

As part of the preparation for my upcoming new print series, I have to create a website for it. Given that I generally begin a new series only every few years, and with the internet in a relatively early stage of evolution, I have to study up a bit each time I do this, as there are always new technologies to incorporate, not to mention new fashions in web design.

A major change taking place these days is that people are more and more accessing the internet from mobile devices. For the most part, these have smaller screens than traditional desktop computers, and in the case of small phones, these screens can be very small indeed. A page design that works well when viewed on a large computer monitor can fail catastrophically when accessed through a portable phone.

Given that my work is visual - not text based - the proliferation of small screens is not something that I welcome, but it is also something that I cannot fight. The smartphone is here to stay, and I had better adapt to this trend, or lose viewers.

So I buckled down to the job last month; I looked for websites that were handling this situation well, studied their internal coding, and learned quite a bit about how to create what is coming to be called Responsive Design. I then sketched a number of possible ideas for my new site, and set to work to build it.

This was all going on while I was still busy with printing work on the final print in the previous series, so for the most part, I did the computer work in the evenings. And as anybody who has been in a similar situation will instantly understand - working on an interesting computer programming situation in the evenings will inevitably lead to a later and later bedtime. One tends not to notice the passage of time, and suddenly it's one o'clock, or much later. I 'sleep in' the next morning as a consequence, thus making the next evening even later, and after a few days of this, I find myself one 'evening' noticing a gradual lightening of the sky out the window behind my computer screen. I've pulled an all-nighter!

Because I live alone, none of this really makes much difference. I'm healthy, eat well, and get plenty of exercise, so I do end up getting the sleep I need, whether it be during the night, or during the day. But this is causing a bit of 'stress' with my mother, who lives in Vancouver - around seven hours 'ahead' of my time zone. We share an internet messaging service, and can thus see when the other person is online. She can do the arithmetic, and when she comes on the computer at around ten in the morning her time and sees that my machine is active - at three AM - she's not so happy about it!

I got a short and sharp email from her the other day when this happened yet again. "Shouldn't you be in bed?!" I refrained from making a quick reply, "Mom, I'm sixty years old; don't nag me!" After all, I understand her concern perfectly, and if I were to see one of my own daughters doing the same thing, I too would send the same kind of email. (And in fact, I'm sure that this is why the two of them rarely use that same message service - they know that their dad would be able to see what they are up to!)

Well, Mom can relax for a while; the new website is ready and published, and I'm back to a more normal routine. And - the new site seems to work perfectly on even the smallest phone screens; 'burning the midnight oil' turned out to be well worth it!

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