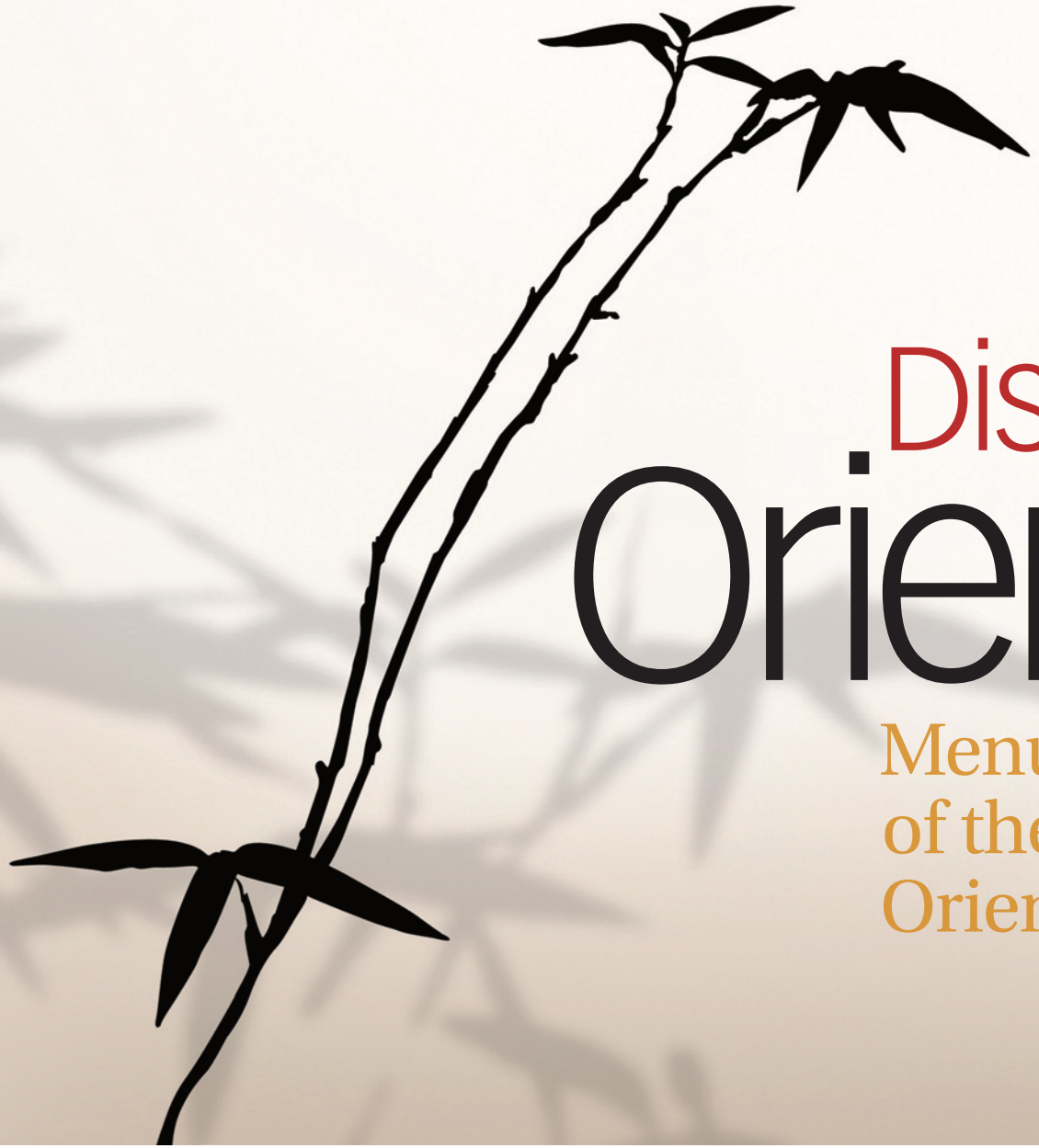


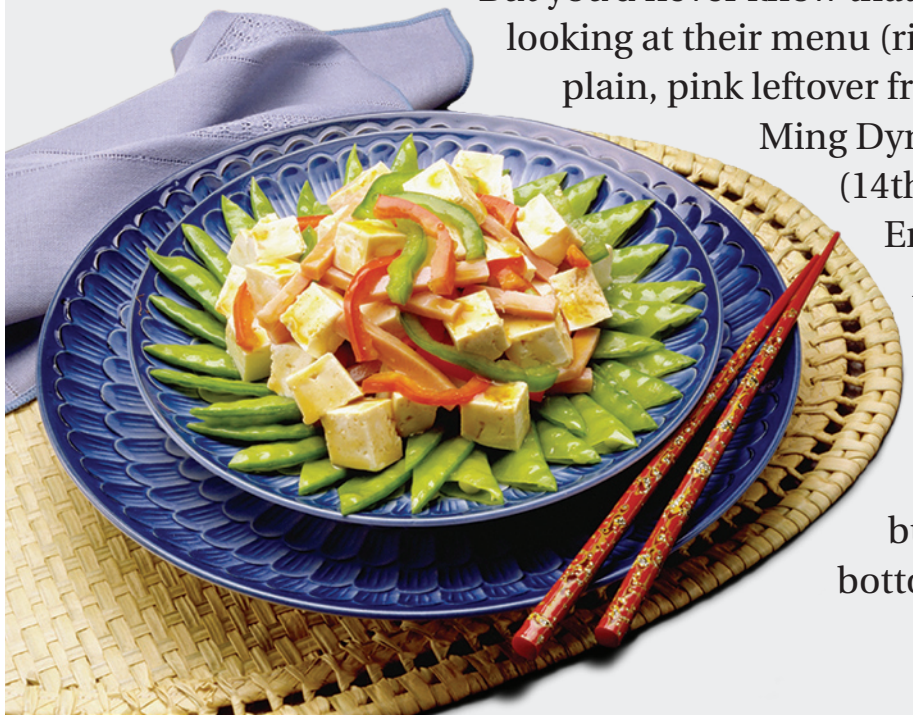
Distinctively Oriental

Menu captures the flavor of the Far East in a unique Oriental format.

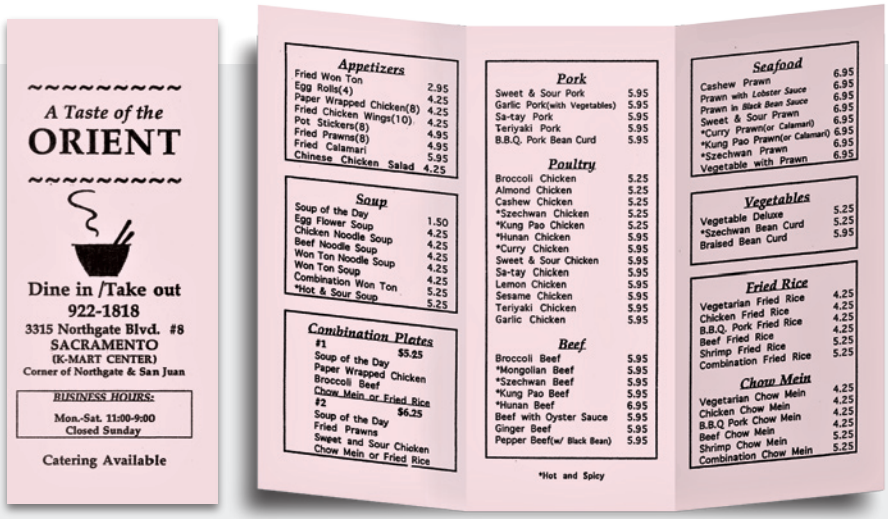
Continued ►

Distinctively Oriental

Take-home menu captures the flavor of the Far East in a unique Oriental format



Delicious, savory, mouth-watering Chinese cuisine—that's what the business-lunch crowd gets at *A Taste of the Orient,* a small, family-owned restaurant inside a neighborhood shopping mall. But you'd never know that by looking at their menu (right), a plain, pink leftover from the Ming Dynasty (14th-century English period). It's so nondescript! *A Taste of the Orient* needs a menu that's as beautiful as its food is tasty and that conveys its distinctive, Chinese culture. It needs a menu that will be posted on the office bulletin board, not hidden in the bottom drawer. Let's make one.

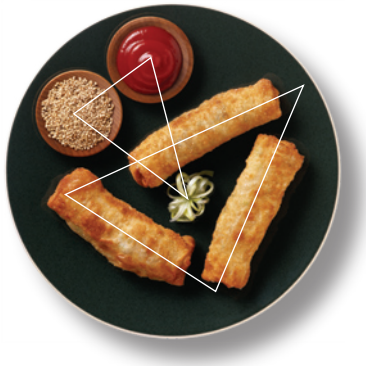


Before (above)
Just the facts, ma'am. The data's all here, but delete the bowl, and there's not one visual clue to let us know this sheet is about Chinese cuisine. A take-out menu needs the diner's eyes to do what his nose can't—lure him back to the restaurant. That requires beauty.

It's not designed at all

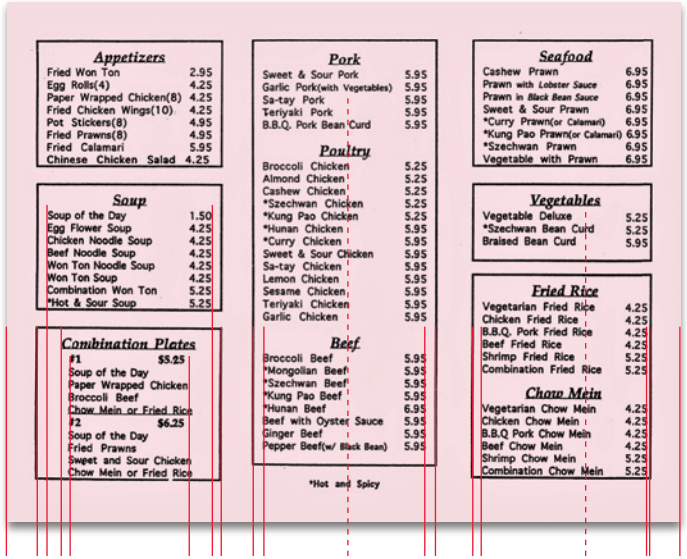
The ink's on the paper, all right, but the page is not designed; it's just filled in. The designer left his visual tools of scale, contrast and depth at home!

(Right) The outside panel has a focal point (the bowl), and it's in the right place (the center), but it's too small—*too much like everything else*—to have an impact. The name's in a good place, too, surrounded by (mainly) open space, which makes it easy to read, but it's so nondescript it has no voice. Name, location, phone number and hours are all needed to *do business,* but unlike what the chef prepares, none of it has been artfully *presented.*



Outside spread

Inside spread



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Good design is intentional. At left, three circles and three rectangles have been arranged in two triangles around a focal point centered in the large circle (the platter). That's design, and it's attractive. Above, the center panel is typographically different from the other two—a normal visual device—but for no apparent reason. That's accidental, and it's unattractive.

Boxes everywhere

Boxes corral the many kinds of dishes. This makes sense organizationally, but the pencil-thin lines have no beauty and are unnecessary, too; the open space alone is sufficient to create separation between sections. Random margin widths disrupt any possible visual rhythm.

Look. Read. Learn.

Begin the redesign by researching what *Chinese* looks like. Actually do the work. Don't rely on your memory, or you'll end up using clichés like fortune cookies and chopsticks.

The world of China

Don't dream up images—you'll get better results (more easily, too) if you *look* them up! Research books, magazines and online photo sources. Visit Chinese restaurants. What to watch for? Pay attention to physical attributes like shapes, colors, textures; sensual qualities like sound, smell, touch; and hidden intangibles, especially of history, culture and tradition.

Mask Ancient, heroic, religious, theatrical, colorful, multi-textured

Restaurant Neutral colors, spot lighting, intricate woodwork

Fortune cookie "Moon cakes" predate Ming Dynasty; sweet, happy, circular, tan

Wok Colorful, hot, fresh, round, aromatic

Bamboo Natural, elegant, cool, spare

Screen Fine furniture, inlaid, historic, story-telling, seen in the restaurant

Characters Ancient, wet brush, calligraphic, fluid, painstaking, distinctively Oriental

Colors Red, gold leaf

Start with format and background

Two images can anchor the design—the folding screen because it resembles the folded sheet, and the bamboo plant, which will make a graceful, *placid* background.

Screens are usually decorated with landscapes, plants and figures and typically have three or four panels. Conveniently enough, the two-fold menu has three panels.

Crop the image

Like the story on a folding screen, crop the image to span the page and fit its proportions. Note how it's balanced—about half image, half background.

With the image in place, it's time to turn the background into a beautiful canvas on which to paint our words.

Create a silhouette

To create the illusion of a shadow cast against the screen—or visible through the screen—first separate the bamboo from its background.

What we're about to do is reduce the full-color photo to solid black & white with no grays. For an organic image like this one with a distinct silhouette and where precision is not vital, Photoshop's Threshold slider is ideal.

Open the image
Change its mode to Grayscale (Image>Mode>Grayscale).

Set the threshold
Select Image>Adjustments>Threshold, check Preview, and move the Threshold slider. Everything above the threshold is white, and everything below is black. Adjust for greatest clarity, then click OK.

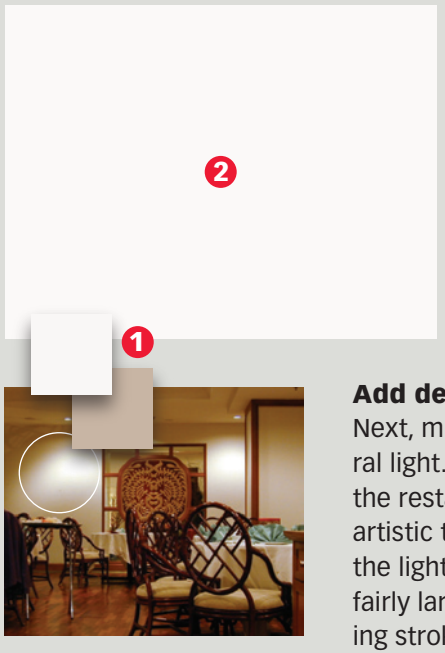
Invert and clean up
Invert black and white by selecting Image>Adjustments>Invert. Erase any leftover spots and unwanted parts. If necessary, use the Brush tool to paint and redefine some parts. Save a copy (or a layer) of this image to use later.

Create the illusion of natural light

Turn the black silhouette into a soft shadow by blurring and lightening. Then paint depth and radiance onto the whole page.

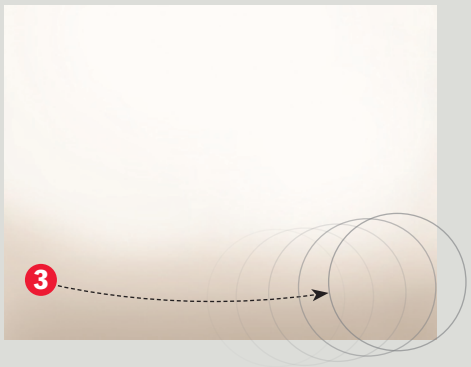
Blur and lighten

Return the image to CMYK Mode (Image>Mode>CMYK). To soften, select Filter>Blur>Gaussian Blur, and enter a Radius amount. What you want is a soft but still-distinct silhouette, which in this case was 10 pixels. Lighten the result by lowering the opacity to about 10%.



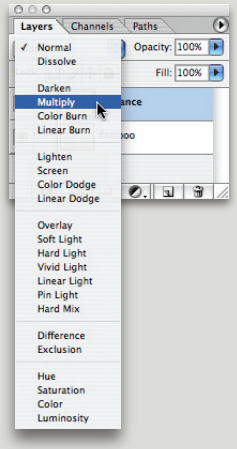
Add depth and radiance

Next, mimic the dark and light qualities of natural light. First, sample a light and dark color from the restaurant (1). (This "color connection" is an artistic tie-in.) Create a new layer, and fill it with the light color (2). With the darker color and a fairly large, soft brush, make a smooth, sweeping stroke across the page (3).



Combine

Set the new layer's blending mode to Multiply, which allows the bamboo layer beneath to show through. The result is a convincing illusion of bamboo seen through a paper screen.

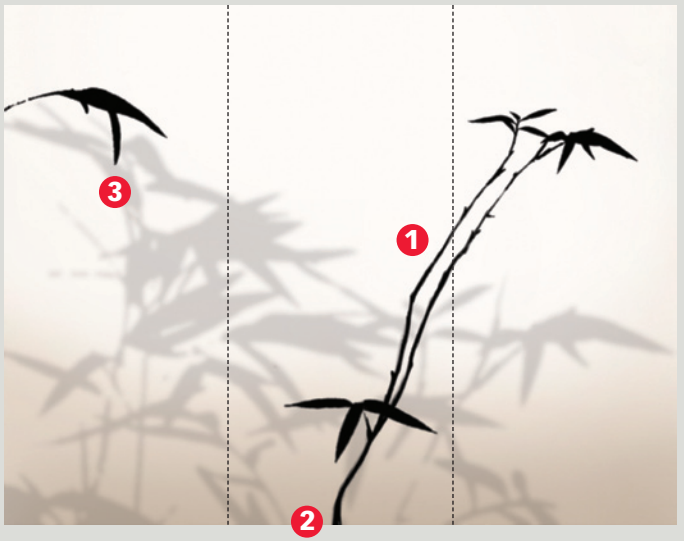


Add bamboo to the foreground

With the shadow and lighting established, give the page more depth by adding black bamboo, which yields a beautiful foreground-background effect.

Isolate
Retrieve the saved black & white copy, move its layer to the top, and set its blending mode to Multiply. With the Brush and Eraser tools, isolate a few bamboo leaves.

Separate
Note that as big as the shadow is, its light value and soft edges make it recede. Create a forward dimension by moving black leaves to the center of each panel. The contrasts of *edge* (hard and soft) and overlapping elements (dark, medium, light) results in real depth.



Connect
Get artistic! With the Brush tool, create your own bamboo plant by connecting the leaves (1) and adding a stem (2) that anchors plant to page. Then add another leaf (3) to serve as a downward pointer to the list of menu items that will eventually go beneath it.

Create a focal icon

The original bowl is a good, simple icon for the restaurant; it suggests eating, chopsticks say Chinese, and steam says hot and fresh. A stamplike effect makes it bolder and even more Chinese.

In Chinese brush paintings, a stamp, which is typically red, is often used as a signature. Its imagery can be evoked by turning the bowl into a stamp.

A rubber stamp begins as a fairly sharp image that degrades as it unevenly hits the paper and more as the ink soaks in. Time can further wear it down. The result is a rich, interesting texture. Here's how to mimic that in Photoshop.

1) Create the image

The original image can come from almost any source (ours was a scan), so *in some way* get it into a Photoshop file—Resolution 300 ppi, Color Mode RGB Color, Background Contents Transparent—turn it into a selection, and knock it out of a shape you've drawn. You want the results to resemble the image above.

2) Roughen the edges

Set the Foreground and Background colors to red and white, respectively. Go to Filter>Sketch>Torn Edges, and for this size and resolution enter the following: Image Balance: 25; Smoothness: 1; Contrast: 15. Click OK.

Click . . .
. . .dab . . .

3) Sharpen, then dab

In Filter>Sharpen>Unsharp Mask, apply the following settings: Amount: 100; Radius: 25; Threshold: 0. Click OK. Next, with white as the Foreground color, select the Spatter brush (here, number 39). Using various brush sizes and opacities, click-dab to soften and basically mess up the edges.

Select a display type

Nothing evokes China as readily as its unique, calligraphic characters, which on the menu must be conveyed with Western-style type. In general, you'll see wet brush, dry brush and artificial styles. Dry-brush font *Ruach* in this case is best.

Reference character
Once you've found a style that you like, note how it's drawn. Pay attention to its edges, stroke ends, thick-to-thinness and general slant or direction, then look for similarities in Western typestyles.

Wet brush

Orient

Visigoth Regular

- Fat, slow strokes
- Fairly upright
- Soaked into the surface
- Visible paper texture

Dry brush

Orient

Ruach Plain

- Fast, light strokes
- Clean edges and rough ends
- Closest to handwritten
- Most like the sample

Artificial

Orient

Choc ICG Regular

- No brush marks
- No bleeding
- Clean edges and ends
- Poster-like

Select a complementary text typeface

For the small type used for listings, look first for clarity and then for a complementary line or shape. Clarity usually requires "open" letterforms and little detail.

Appetizers

Fried Won Ton

Egg Rolls (4)

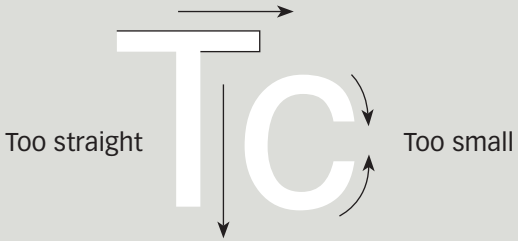
Paper-wrapped Chicken (8)

Fried Chicken Wings (10)

Pot-Stickers (8)

Sans-serif Helvetica

Although popular, Helvetica is not especially clear at small sizes, because its small apertures tend to close up. And its straight lines are too rigid to complement free-flowing Ruach.



Appetizers

Fried Won Ton

Egg Rolls (4)

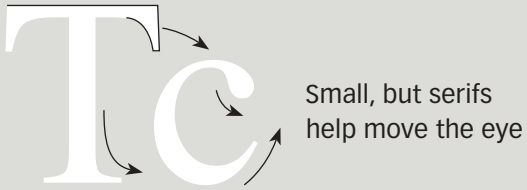
Paper-wrapped Chicken (8)

Fried Chicken Wings (10)

Pot-Stickers (8)

Roman serif Times Roman

Roman serif faces are more refined and generally easier to read, because serifs help move the eye from letter to letter, but they're full of tiny detail and stylistically very different from Ruach.



Appetizers

Fried Won Ton

Egg Rolls (4)

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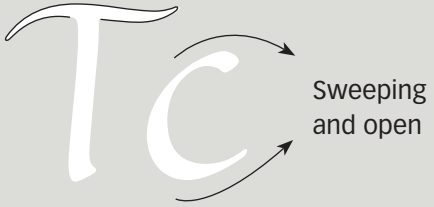
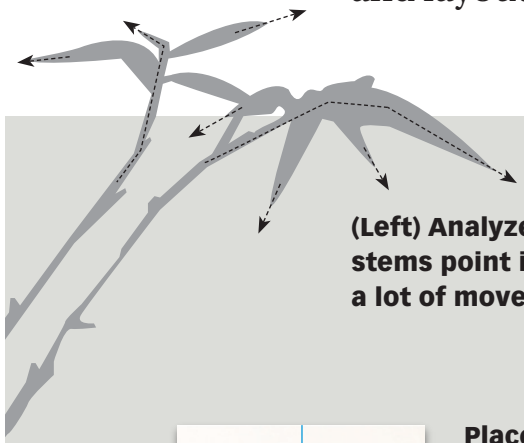
Calligraphic Sanvito

Simple lines, BIG counters, BIG apertures and a sweeping stroke yield both clarity and calligraphic style without the brush details. Sanvito is a good complement to Ruach.

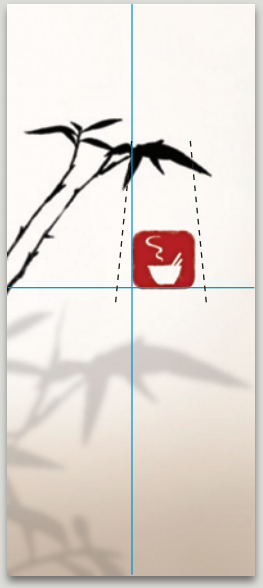


Complement image and layout

With the bamboo already on the page, create a relationship between image, type and layout by mimicking its spiky visual qualities.

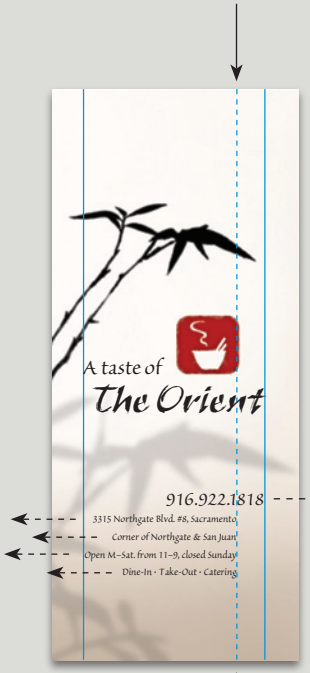


(Left) Analyze the bamboo based on line and direction. Note that its leaves and stems point in different directions—horizontal, diagonal, vertical—which creates a lot of movement and tension. This action can be mimicked in the layout.



Place the seal
What size should the seal be? Generally speaking, work with what's in front of you. Here, the bamboo is governing the design, so give the seal similar mass, and place it directly beneath the downward-pointing "umbrella" about mid-page.

Place the business name
The bamboo leaves have both size and directional differences. Mimic this with two type sizes and staggered placement, which moves the eye similarly and puts tension into the layout.



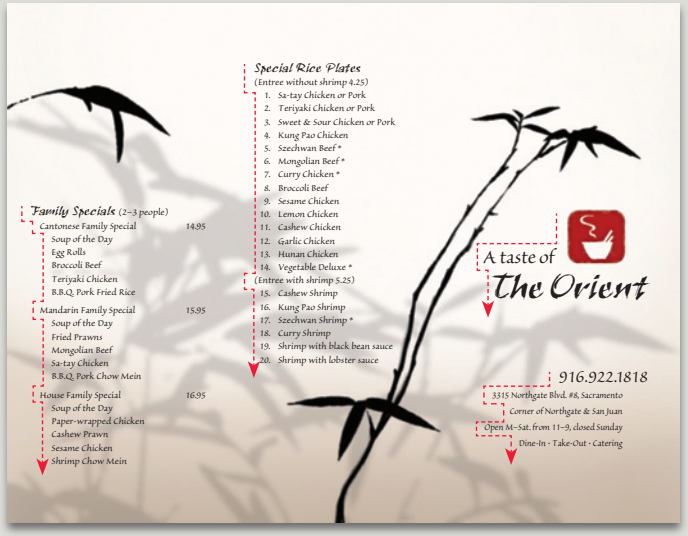
Place the contact information
Since this is a take-home menu, the phone number needs to be prominent; here, its size and right offset make it stand out. Remaining information aligned with the seal establishes continuity yet retains the staggered movement.

Aligned with seal for continuity

Organize the menu items

All those boxes on the original menu are unnecessary; the white space alone is sufficient to separate the sections beautifully. Simple tab indents identify columnar elements and mimic the bamboo, too.

Visual relationships
Above, the headline x-height determines the text size. Below, its overall height governs section spacing.

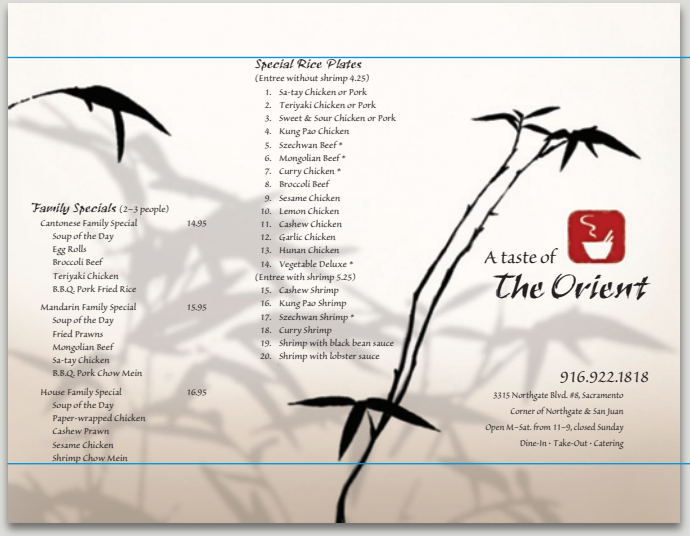


Tab indents rather than flush-left alignment yield text blocks that have staggered edges similar to the bamboo and cover layout.

Repeat inside

What's good for the outside is good for the inside. Create continuity easily by repeating the background, margins, column guides and type treatment inside.

Outside spread



Inside spread

Repeat the background Use the same background image inside as outside, but to make space for the menu items delete the foreground silhouettes. Carry over margins, guides and type treatment. Note that the bamboo shadow is reversed to create the illusion of transparent rice paper.

Color unifies the elements

It's time to add color. Our eyes connect similarities—*this* like *that.* Color the headlines to match the seal already on the cover. The contrast of gold adds depth and spices up the hot palette.

Phone number in gold distinguishes it from the food categories and adds another level of depth.

Remember to work with your visual research; don't pull design decisions from a hat. Note here the gold color is from a research image (page 4).

Prices are subject to change

The beauty of this simple menu is that the background—which bleeds—can be commercially printed in large quantities, then *A Taste of the Orient* can update items as needed and print fresh copies on a desktop printer.

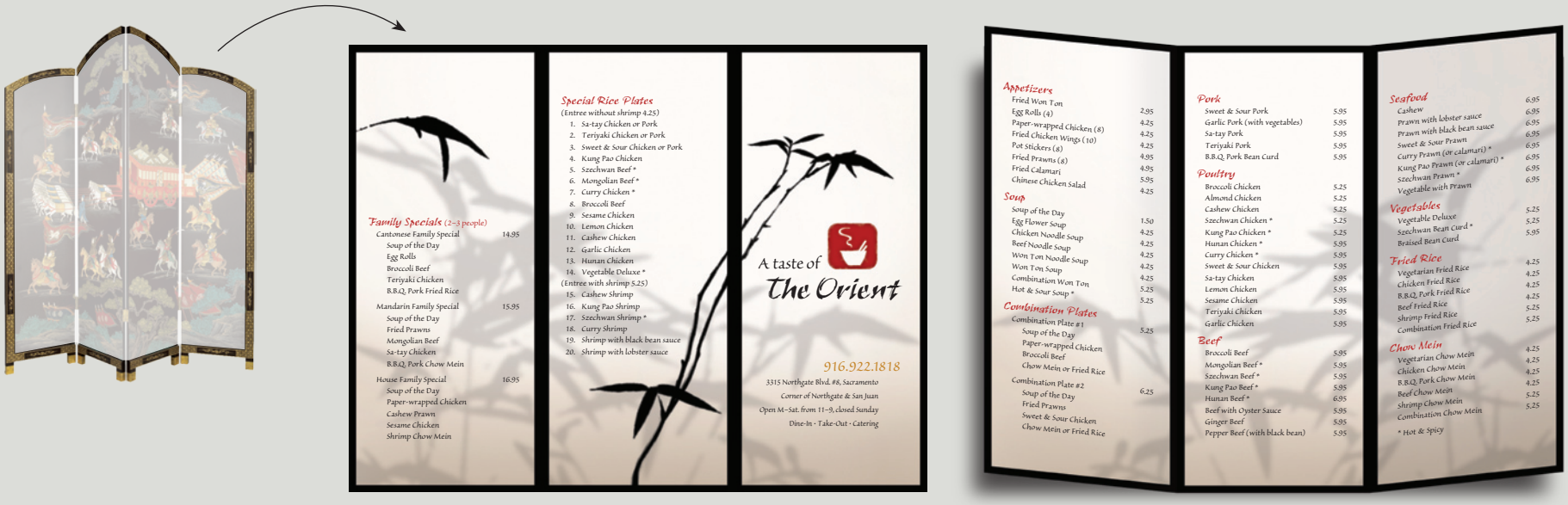
Pre-printed shells . . .

. . . items updated, printed . . .

. . . and folded for presentation.

By the way . . .

As an option, a heavy frame around each panel looks *a lot* like a folding screen.



With the addition of the black frame, each panel becomes its own separate zone, a result similar to the original menu in which each category was boxed in. But unlike the unattractive original, several elements tie the zones together:

1) The black silhouette spans two panels
2) The bamboo shadow spans all three panels
3) The red color repeats throughout.

An accordion fold like the screen would have been artistically truer, but the content of the menu wouldn't permit it.

Article resources

Typefaces

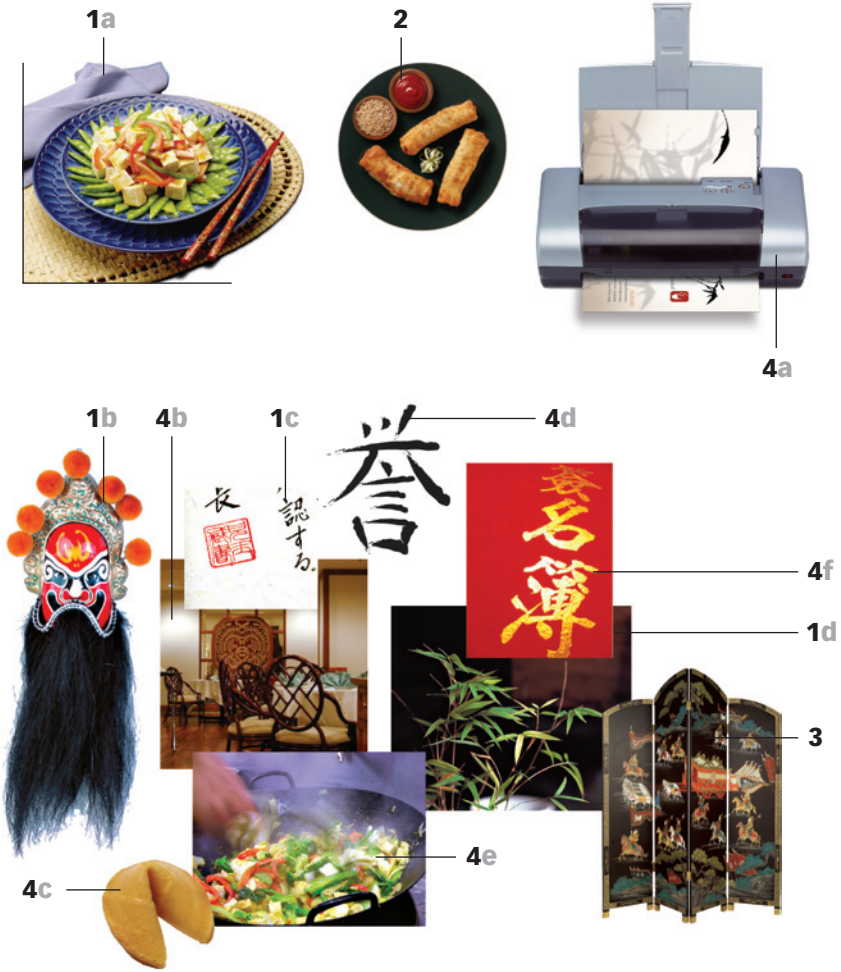
1 (a–b) Ruach Plain | a) 43 pt, b) 16 pt

2 (a–d) Sanvito MM | a) 27 pt, b) 24 pt, c) 13/13 pt, d) 13/15.6 pt

Colors

3	C**0** M**90** Y**80** K**25**
4	C**0** M**40** Y**90** K**15**
5	C**22** M**26** Y**34** K**0**
6	C**2** M**3** Y**4** K**0**

Article resources



Images

1 (a–d) Photos.com | a b c d

2 Photodisc/Veer.com

3 Stockbyte/Veer.com

4 (a–f) istockphoto.com | a b c d e f

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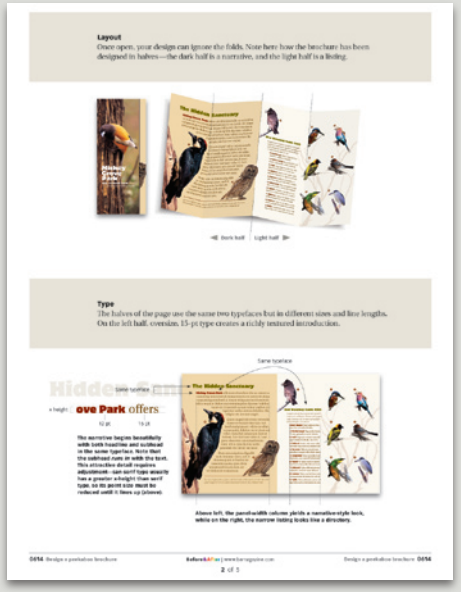
For paper-saver format

Print: (Specify pages 22–31)



Distinctively Oriental

Menu captures the flavor of the Far East in a unique Oriental format.

Continued ►

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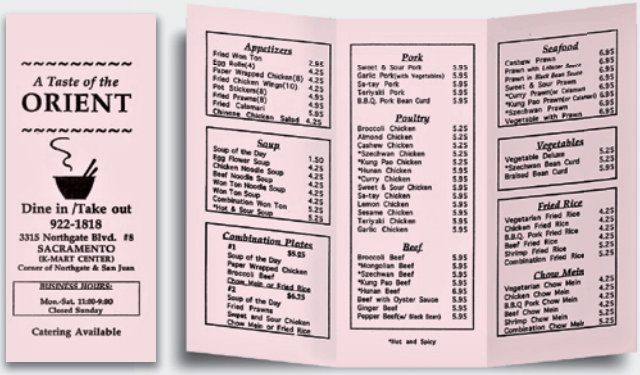

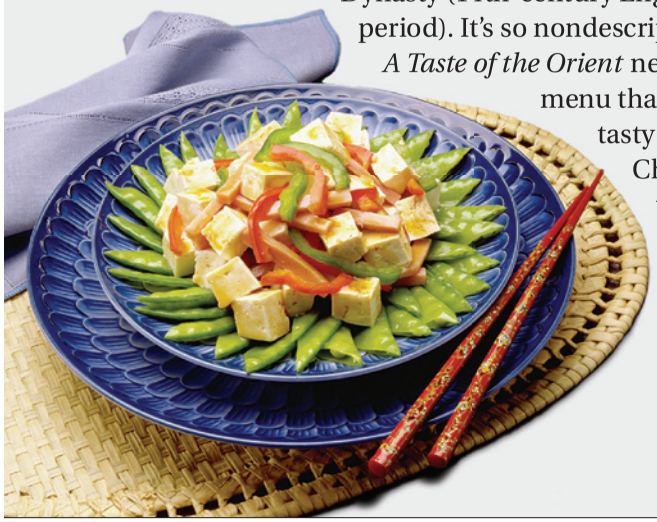

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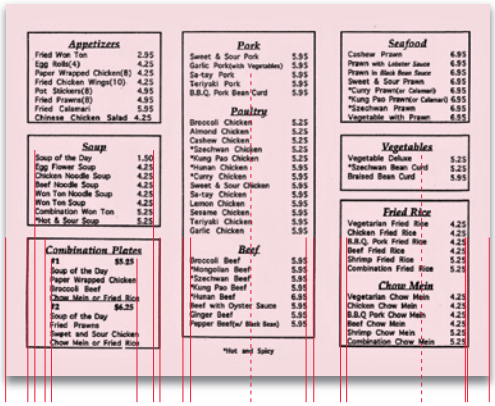
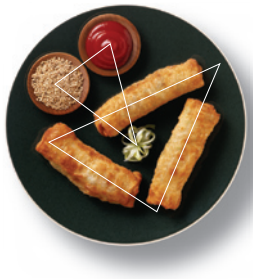
Outside spread

Inside spread





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Boxes corral the many kinds of dishes. This makes sense organizationally, but the pencil-thin lines have no beauty and are unnecessary, too; the open space alone is sufficient to create separation between sections. Random margin widths disrupt any possible visual rhythm.

Look. Read. Learn.

Begin the redesign by researching what *Chinese* looks like. Actually do the work. Don't rely on your memory, or you'll end up using clichés like fortune cookies and chopsticks.

The world of China
Don't dream up images—you'll get better results (more easily, too) if you *look* them up! Research books, magazines and online photo sources. Visit Chinese restaurants. What to watch for? Pay attention to physical attributes like shapes, colors, textures; sensual qualities like sound, smell, touch; and hidden intangibles, especially of history, culture and tradition.

Characters Ancient, wet brush, calligraphic, fluid, painstaking, distinctively Oriental

Colors Red, gold leaf

Bamboo Natural, elegant, cool, spare

Mask Ancient, heroic, religious, theatrical, colorful, multi-textured

Restaurant Neutral colors, spot lighting, intricate woodwork

Fortune cookie "Moon cakes" predate Ming Dynasty; sweet, happy, circular, tan

Wok Colorful, hot, fresh, round, aromatic

Screen Fine furniture, inlaid, historic, story-telling, seen in the restaurant

Start with format and background

Two images can anchor the design—the folding screen because it resembles the folded sheet, and the bamboo plant, which will make a graceful, *placid* background.

Screens are usually decorated with landscapes, plants and figures and typically have three or four panels. Conveniently enough, the two-fold menu has three panels.

Crop the image
Like the story on a folding screen, crop the image to span the page and fit its proportions. Note how it's balanced—about half image, half background.

With the image in place, it's time to turn the background into a beautiful canvas on which to paint our words.

Create a silhouette

To create the illusion of a shadow cast against the screen—or visible through the screen—first separate the bamboo from its background.

What we're about to do is reduce the full-color photo to solid black & white with no grays. For an organic image like this one with a distinct silhouette and where precision is not vital, Photoshop's Threshold slider is ideal.

Open the image
Change its mode to Grayscale (Image>Mode>Grayscale).

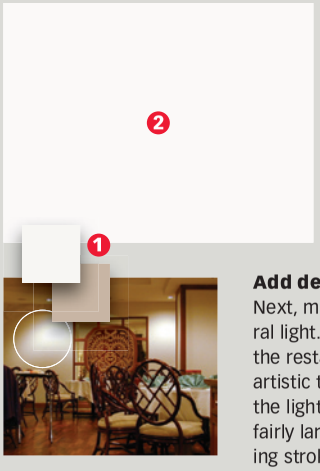
Set the threshold
Select Image>Adjustments>Threshold, check Preview, and move the Threshold slider. Everything above the threshold is white, and everything below is black. Adjust for greatest clarity, then click OK.

Invert and clean up
Invert black and white by selecting Image>Adjustments>Invert. Erase any leftover spots and unwanted parts. If necessary, use the Brush tool to paint and redefine some parts. Save a copy (or a layer) of this image to use later.

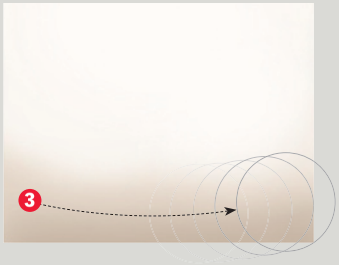
Create the illusion of natural light

Turn the black silhouette into a soft shadow by blurring and lightening. Then paint depth and radiance onto the whole page.

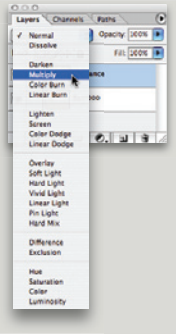
Blur and lighten
Return the image to CMYK Mode (Image>Mode>CMYK). To soften, select Filter>Blur>Gaussian Blur, and enter a Radius amount. What you want is a soft but still-distinct silhouette, which in this case was 10 pixels. Lighten the result by lowering the opacity to about 10%.



Add depth and radiance
Next, mimic the dark and light qualities of natural light. First, sample a light and dark color from the restaurant (1). (This "color connection" is an artistic tie-in.) Create a new layer, and fill it with the light color (2). With the darker color and a fairly large, soft brush, make a smooth, sweeping stroke across the page (3).



Combine
Set the new layer's blending mode to Multiply, which allows the bamboo layer beneath to show through. The result is a convincing illusion of bamboo seen through a paper screen.

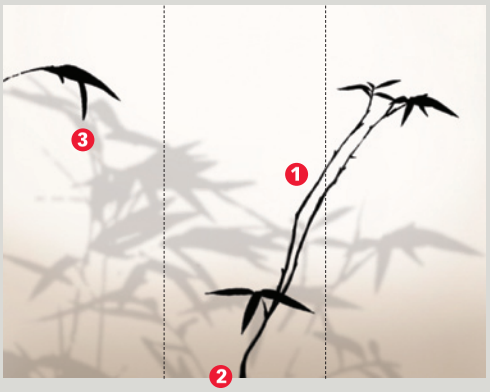


Add bamboo to the foreground

With the shadow and lighting established, give the page more depth by adding black bamboo, which yields a beautiful foreground-background effect.

Isolate
Retrieve the saved black & white copy, move its layer to the top, and set its blending mode to Multiply. With the Brush and Eraser tools, isolate a few bamboo leaves.

Separate
Note that as big as the shadow is, its light value and soft edges make it recede. Create a forward dimension by moving black leaves to the center of each panel. The contrasts of *edge* (hard and soft) and overlapping elements (dark, medium, light) results in real depth.



Connect
Get artistic! With the Brush tool, create your own bamboo plant by connecting the leaves (1) and adding a stem (2) that anchors plant to page. Then add another leaf (3) to serve as a downward pointer to the list of menu items that will eventually go beneath it.

Create a focal icon

The original bowl is a good, simple icon for the restaurant; it suggests eating, chopsticks say Chinese, and steam says hot and fresh. A stamplike effect makes it bolder and even more Chinese.

In Chinese brush paintings, a stamp, which is typically red, is often used as a signature. Its imagery can be evoked by turning the bowl into a stamp.

A rubber stamp begins as a fairly sharp image that degrades as it unevenly hits the paper and more as the ink soaks in. Time can further wear it down. The result is a rich, interesting texture. Here's how to mimic that in Photoshop.

1) Create the image
The original image can come from almost any source (ours was a scan), so *in some way* get it into a Photoshop file—Resolution 300 ppi, Color Mode RGB Color, Background Contents Transparent—turn it into a selection, and knock it out of a shape you've drawn. You want the results to resemble the image above.

2) Roughen the edges
Set the Foreground and Background colors to red and white, respectively. Go to Filter>Sketch>Torn Edges, and for this size and resolution enter the following: Image Balance: 25; Smoothness: 1; Contrast: 15. Click OK.

Click . . .
. . .dab . . .

3) Sharpen, then dab
In Filter>Sharpen>Unsharp Mask, apply the following settings: Amount: 100; Radius: 25; Threshold: 0. Click OK. Next, with white as the Foreground color, select the Spatter brush (here, number 39). Using various brush sizes and opacities, click-dab to soften and basically mess up the edges.

Select a display type

Nothing evokes China as readily as its unique, calligraphic characters, which on the menu must be conveyed with Western-style type. In general, you'll see wet brush, dry brush and artificial styles. Dry-brush font *Ruach* in this case is best.

Reference character
Once you've found a style that you like, note how it's drawn. Pay attention to its edges, stroke ends, thick-to-thinness and general slant or direction, then look for similarities in Western typestyles.

Wet brush

Visigoth Regular
- Fat, slow strokes
- Fairly upright
- Soaked into the surface
- Visible paper texture

Dry brush

Ruach Plain
- Fast, light strokes
- Clean edges and rough ends
- Closest to handwritten
- Most like the sample

Artificial

Choc ICG Regular
- No brush marks
- No bleeding
- Clean edges and ends
- Poster-like

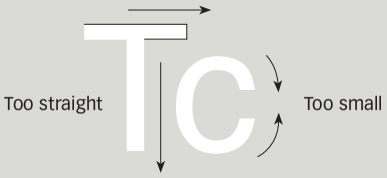
Select a complementary text typeface

For the small type used for listings, look first for clarity and then for a complementary line or shape. Clarity usually requires "open" letterforms and little detail.

Appetizers
Fried Won Ton
Egg Rolls (4)
Paper-wrapped Chicken (8)
Fried Chicken Wings (10)
Pot-Stickers (8)

Sans-serif Helvetica

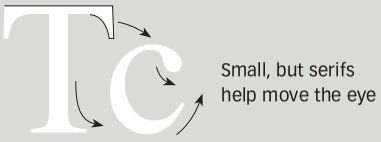
Although popular, Helvetica is not especially clear at small sizes, because its small apertures tend to close up. And its straight lines are too rigid to complement free-flowing Ruach.



Appetizers
Fried Won Ton
Egg Rolls (4)
Paper-wrapped Chicken (8)
Fried Chicken Wings (10)
Pot-Stickers (8)

Roman serif Times Roman

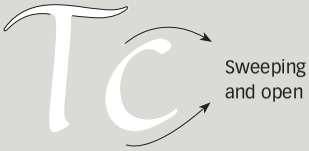
Roman serif faces are more refined and generally easier to read, because serifs help move the eye from letter to letter, but they're full of tiny detail and stylistically very different from Ruach.



Appetizers
Fried Won Ton
Egg Rolls (4)
Paper-wrapped Chicken (8)
Fried Chicken Wings (10)
Pot-Stickers (8)

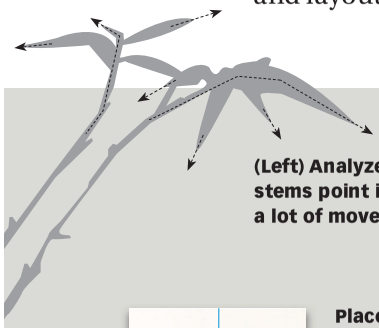
Calligraphic Sanvito

Simple lines, BIG counters, BIG apertures and a sweeping stroke yield both clarity and calligraphic style without the brush details. Sanvito is a good complement to Ruach.

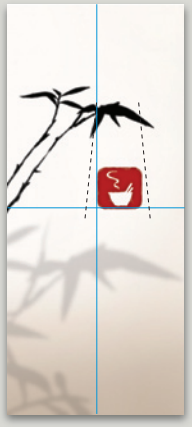


Complement image and layout

With the bamboo already on the page, create a relationship between image, type and layout by mimicking its spiky visual qualities.



(Left) Analyze the bamboo based on line and direction. Note that its leaves and stems point in different directions—horizontal, diagonal, vertical—which creates a lot of movement and tension. This action can be mimicked in the layout.



Place the seal
What size should the seal be? Generally speaking, work with what's in front of you. Here, the bamboo is governing the design, so give the seal similar mass, and place it directly beneath the downward-pointing "umbrella" about mid-page.

Place the business name
The bamboo leaves have both size and directional differences. Mimic this with two type sizes and staggered placement, which moves the eye similarly and puts tension into the layout.

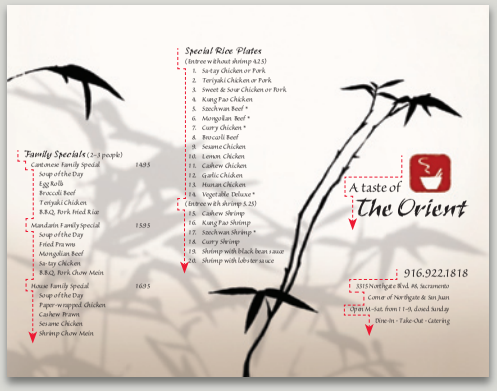
Place the contact information
Since this is a take-home menu, the phone number needs to be prominent; here, its size and right offset make it stand out. Remaining information aligned with the seal establishes continuity yet retains the staggered movement.

Aligned with seal for continuity

Organize the menu items

All those boxes on the original menu are unnecessary; the white space alone is sufficient to separate the sections beautifully. Simple tab indents identify columnar elements and mimic the bamboo, too.

Visual relationships
Above, the headline x-height determines the text size. Below, its overall height governs section spacing.

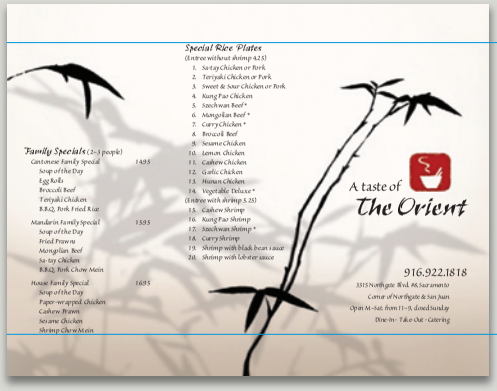


Tab indents rather than flush-left alignment yield text blocks that have staggered edges similar to the bamboo and cover layout.

Repeat inside

What's good for the outside is good for the inside. Create continuity easily by repeating the background, margins, column guides and type treatment inside.

Outside spread



Inside spread

Repeat the background Use the same background image inside as outside, but to make space for the menu items delete the foreground silhouettes. Carry over margins, guides and type treatment. Note that the bamboo shadow is reversed to create the illusion of transparent rice paper.

Color unifies the elements

It's time to add color. Our eyes connect similarities—*this* like *that.* Color the headlines to match the seal already on the cover. The contrast of gold adds depth and spices up the hot palette.

Phone number in gold distinguishes it from the food categories and adds another level of depth.

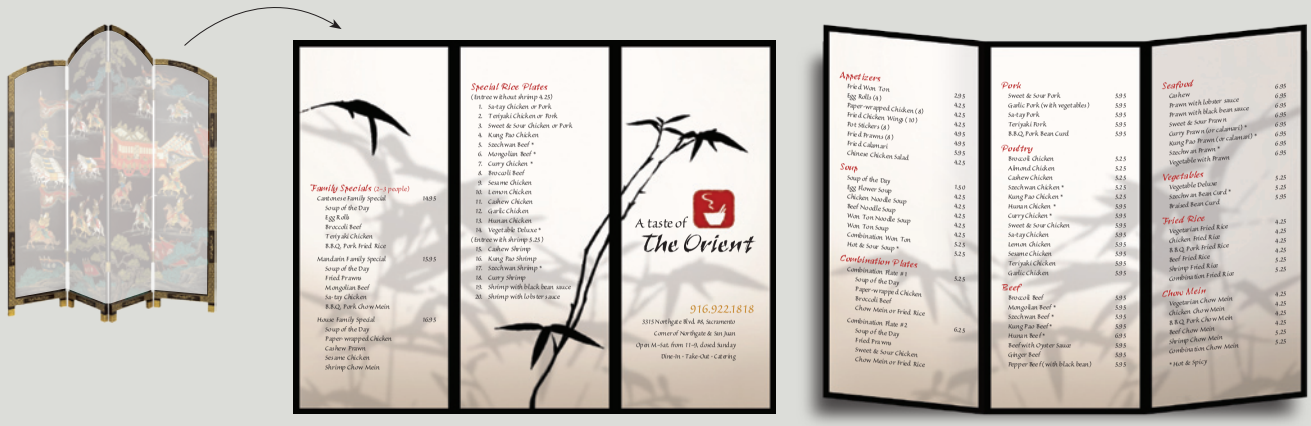
Remember to work with your visual research; don't pull design decisions from a hat. Note here the gold color is from a research image (page 4).

Prices are subject to change

The beauty of this simple menu is that the background—which bleeds—can be commercially printed in large quantities, then *A Taste of the Orient* can update items as needed and print fresh copies on a desktop printer.

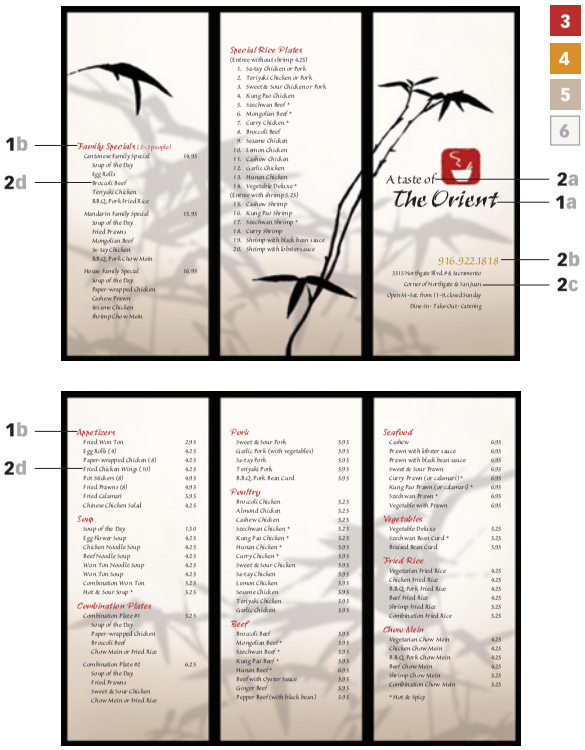
Pre-printed shells . . . **. . . items updated, printed . . .** **. . . and folded for presentation.**

By the way . . .
As an option, a heavy frame around each panel looks *a lot* like a folding screen.



With the addition of the black frame, each panel becomes its own separate zone, a result similar to the original menu in which each category was boxed in. But unlike the unattractive original, several elements tie the zones together:
1) The black silhouette spans two panels
2) The bamboo shadow spans all three panels
3) The red color repeats throughout.
An accordion fold like the screen would have been artistically truer, but the content of the menu wouldn't permit it.

Article resources



Typefaces

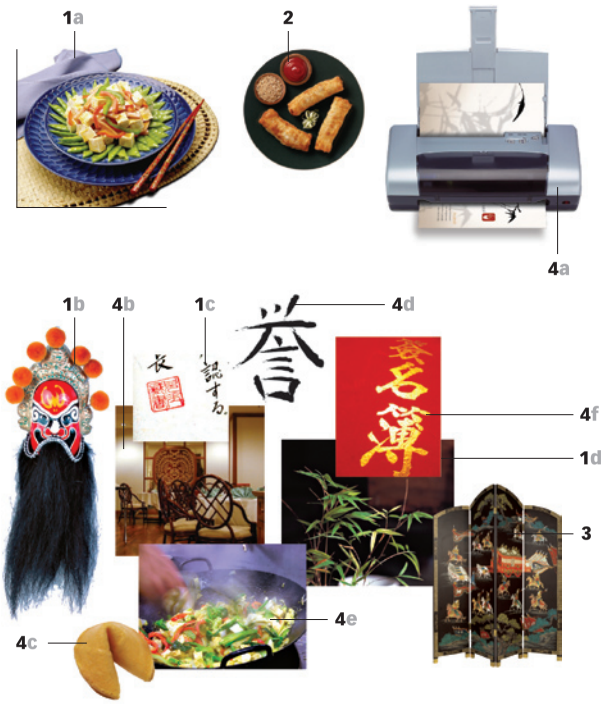
1 (a–b) Ruach Plain | a) 43 pt, b) 16 pt

2 (a–d) Sanvito MM | a) 27 pt, b) 24 pt, c) 13/13 pt, d) 13/15.6 pt

Colors

3	C0 M90 Y80 K25
4	C0 M40 Y90 K15
5	C22 M26 Y34 K0
6	C2 M3 Y4 K0

Article resources



Images

1 (a–d) Photos.com | a b c d

2 Photodisc/Veer.com

3 Stockbyte/Veer.com

4 (a–f) istockphoto.com | a b c d e f

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