



# Tiny budget, evocative card

*Continued* ►

Turn a one-color business card  
into a visual statement.

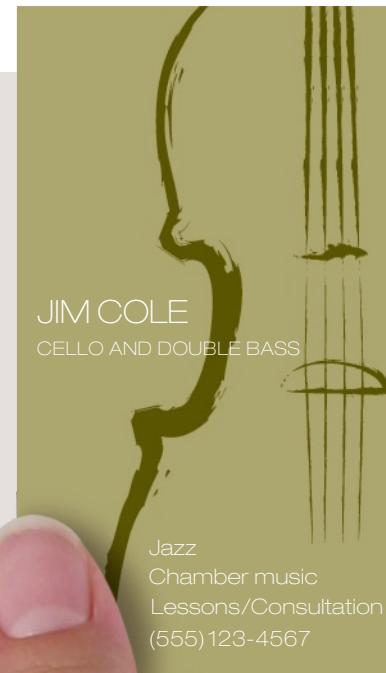
# Tiny budget, evocative card

Here's how to turn a one-color business card into a visual statement.



Jim Cole is busy. Between his chamber quartet, jazz band and six students, he's a musician on the move. He makes his music on the cello and the double bass, instruments as versatile as they are beautiful. What's cool about his business card is its visual economy—not just

that's it's printed inexpensively in one color, but that it gets a lot of visual atmosphere out of just a few elements. Set in faint tonal contrasts, the illustration dominates the space but does not overpower the card. It conveys the air of classical musicianship without being stuffy; it's simple and masculine. To achieve all this, the designer had many decisions to make. Let's see what we can learn:



## It's just one ink color on matte-finish paper

Designed and printed on a tiny budget, this card features a lot of sophisticated techniques. Key is that one ink on white paper yields three levels of tonal depth—dark, medium and light. This allowed the designer to get extreme with scale; the illustration is huge without overpowering the card. Thin type is modern and understated in size, yet holds its own in white. The rough brush stroke conveys the evocative lines of the instrument without appearing feminine. Similarly, the matte paper texture is masculine and earthy.

## Start with key words

The place to start is to determine what you want your design to “say.” This is especially important on a small job where every nuance counts. Begin by creating *key words*.



### Key words

Open a dictionary or thesaurus and find words that fit Mr. Cole’s character and work. For example, to convey a sense of **classical music** as well as a fine instrument: **formal, artistic, handmade, professional, masculine, craftsmanship**. To express **jazz** and that Mr. Cole is personable, mobile and easy to work with: **friendly, informal, upbeat, light**. You can see in these lists some opposites: formal/informal, classical/upbeat. This is what you want; opposites create tension that almost always yields better designs.

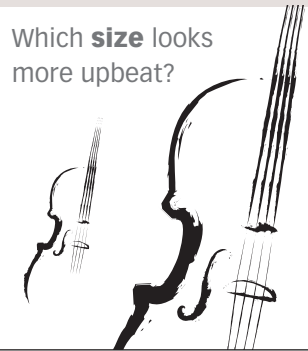
Because cost is a limiting factor, we won’t be using a photograph. Instead, we’ll develop a **style concept** based on the traditional-ness of **line**. We’ll look next at how properties of **line**, together with **size, color** and **value**, work together to express the design goal.

### Design: Every nuance conveys meaning

Which **line** looks more masculine?



Which **size** looks more upbeat?



Which **colors** look more classical?



Which **values** look more formal?



## What kind of line?

Lines are very expressive. Look carefully at your image. What do its lines say?

**Violins, violas, cellos and basses have some of the world's most beautiful lines. Look carefully, and write down what you see.**



(Above)  
**Converging lines** create motion; spiral is the focal point. Intricate detailing reveals hand craftsmanship; suggests skill, care, love, attentiveness to detail.



**Sweeping line** suggests airiness, grandeur, majesty.

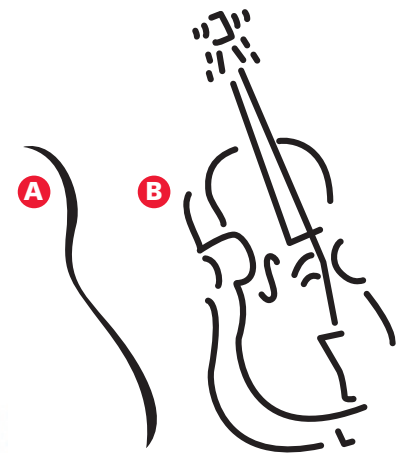
The edge can be seen as a sweep or a series of detailed curves.

**Curvy lines** duck and weave. Spritely, playful, joyous.

**Straight line** Upright centerline suggests power, formality, dignity, stateliness.



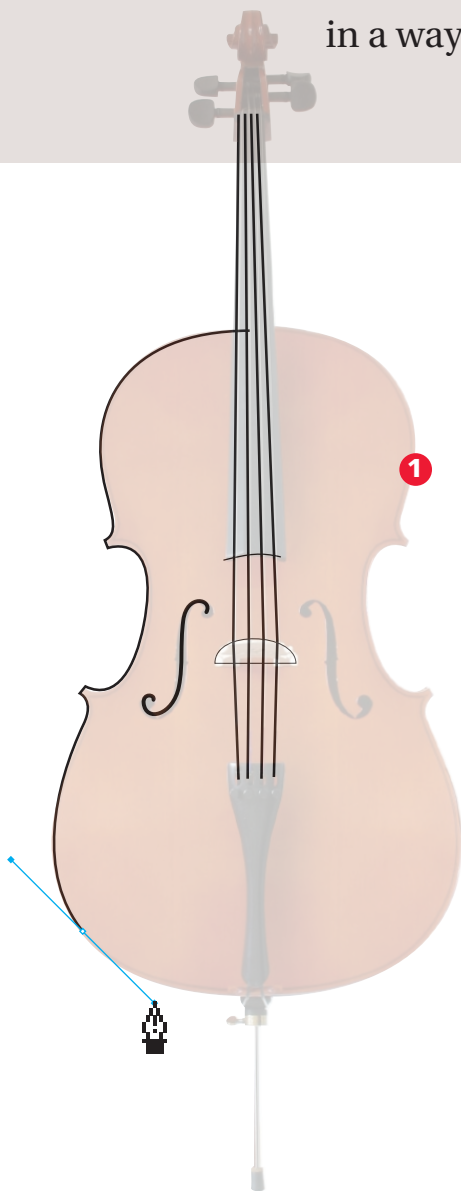
(Above)  
**Graceful lines** appear when the instrument is viewed from an angle. Smooth, sensuous, feminine.



**Drawn lines**  
Flat-nib pen line (A) flows like a ribbon, which conveys a sense of motion, water, air. Its associations are emotional, casual, feminine. A curving, single-width line (B) is gender neutral. By itself, the line has little character, but as a drawing it is light, casual, approachable.

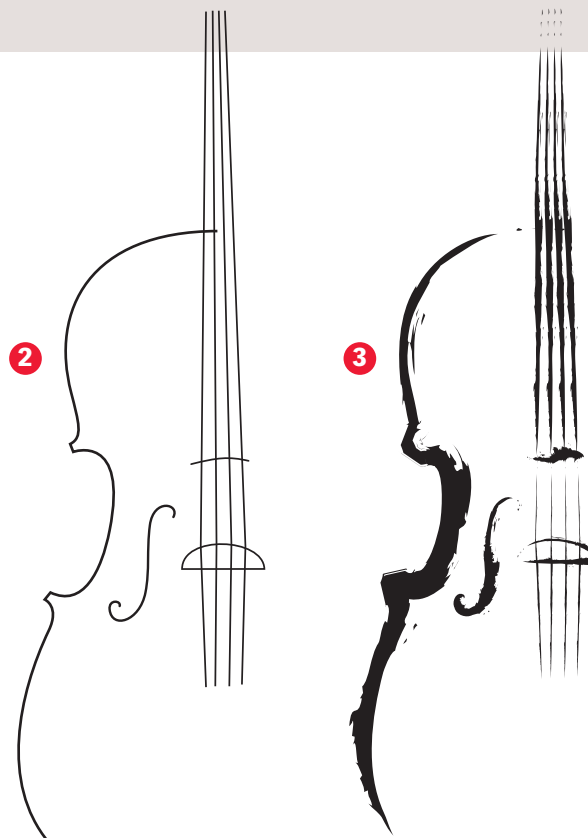
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Unlike the graceful, feminine lines of the instrument, a charcoal line is rough, bold and guy-like. Adobe Illustrator will create a rough stroke with a single click. It's easy:

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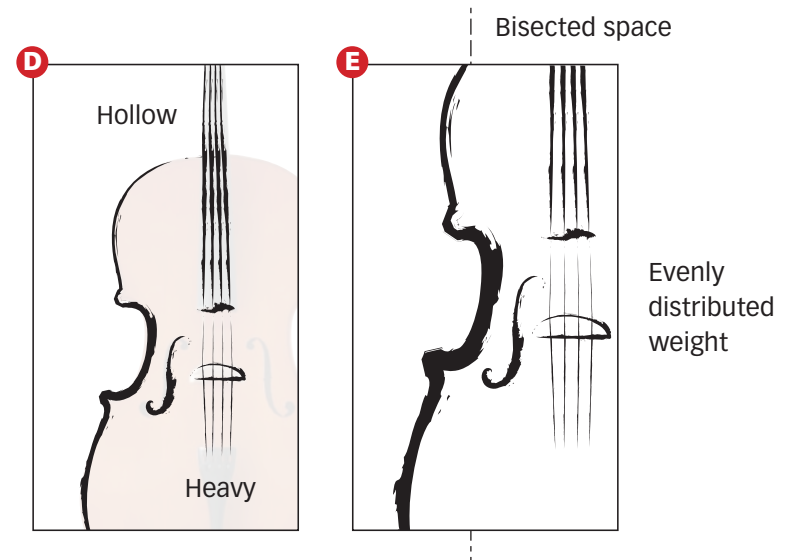
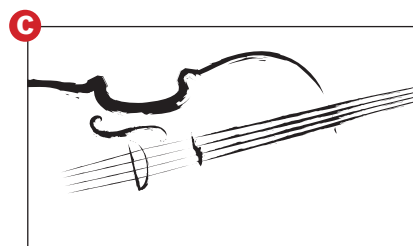
## How big, where does it go, and which way?

Size, position and orientation are key factors in how an image is perceived. As you create your layout, strive first to achieve clarity of message, then beauty.

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**(B) Big** Super size can have dramatic effect. In this case, however, the horizontal format crops too closely, and the key line of the instrument's body is lost. The result is spotty and unclear.

**(C) Sideways** Turn the image horizontally. It now flows with the space but again sends the wrong message; it looks like a guitar.



**(D) Get vertical** Rotating the card upright matches format to instrument and gets all the lines working together. Now the image is big and still fits the card. Note, however, that the tall neck leaves an unappealing hollow near the top and the weight near the bottom.

**(E)** Zooming closer bisects the space, distributes the weight evenly and shows off the rough, artistic line.

## What color?

Color is key to this job. We need not a palette full but a single color that can convey our mood and message in dark, medium and light values. Key to this is *saturation*.



**The color wheel** shows color relationships. In this case, it also reveals that *saturated* colors—really *red* reds and *blue* blues—are too bright for classical music or even jazz. What we need are *desaturated* colors, muted and sophisticated.



Saturated colors—the colors of kindergarten—are too bright for classical music.



The same colors, desaturated and darkened, are soft and rich and convey age, tradition, professionalism.

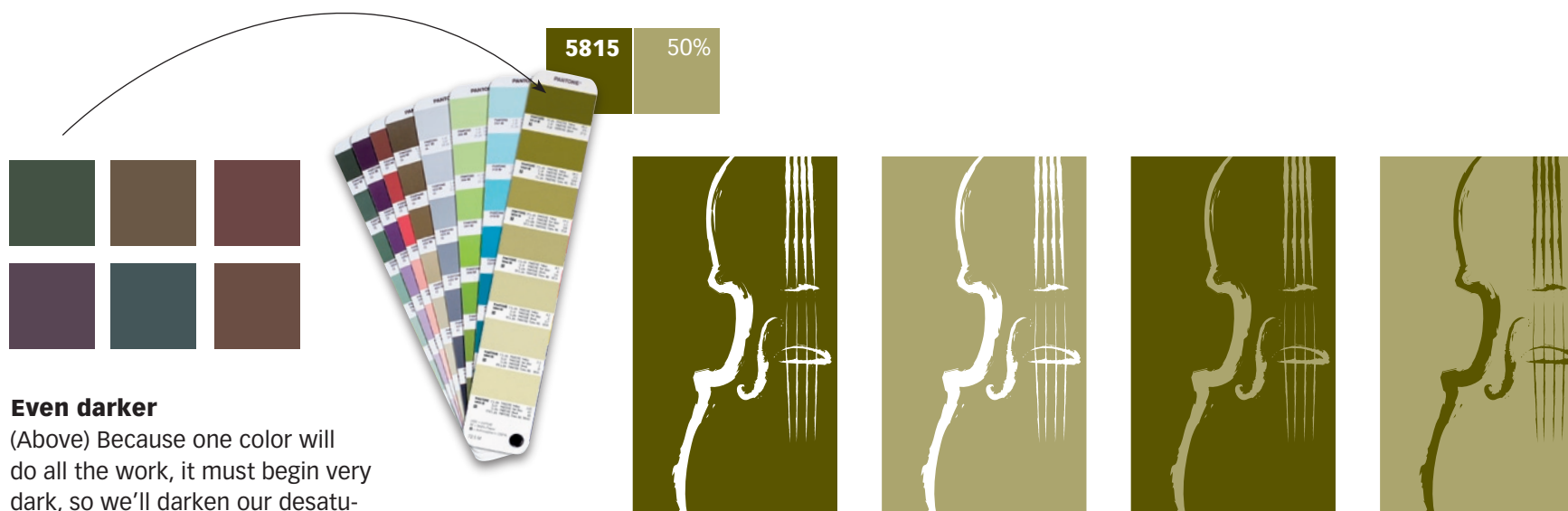


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Because desaturated colors are mostly gray, they can be fully lightened or darkened without changing their essential color. This allows us to use all the values of our one color!



### Even darker

(Above) Because one color will do all the work, it must begin very dark, so we'll darken our desaturated colors further, all the way to -60. Note that heavily darkened, desaturated colors look almost alike. As a result, all will function pretty much the same; the gray does the real work, and the hint of color provides the flavor.

**Convert to Pantone** So far, the color wheel has been a helpful reference to get us into the color ballpark. But now we must convert from its *process* colors, which are used for four-color printing, to a single spot color. For that we'll use the Pantone Matching System. Pantone is accessible in the color libraries\* of Photoshop, InDesign and Illustrator. Just select your choice from the list, and add it to the color palette.

Our card uses Pantone 5815 at full strength and tinted 50%. On white paper that yields our three values—dark, medium and light. Note above the different expressive character of four combinations.

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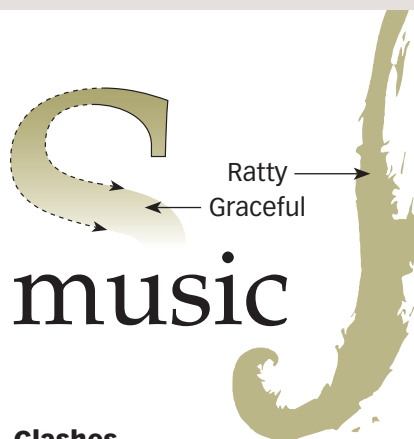
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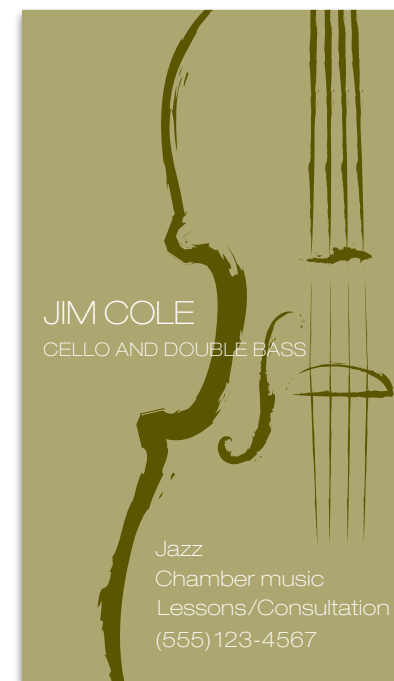
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### Complements

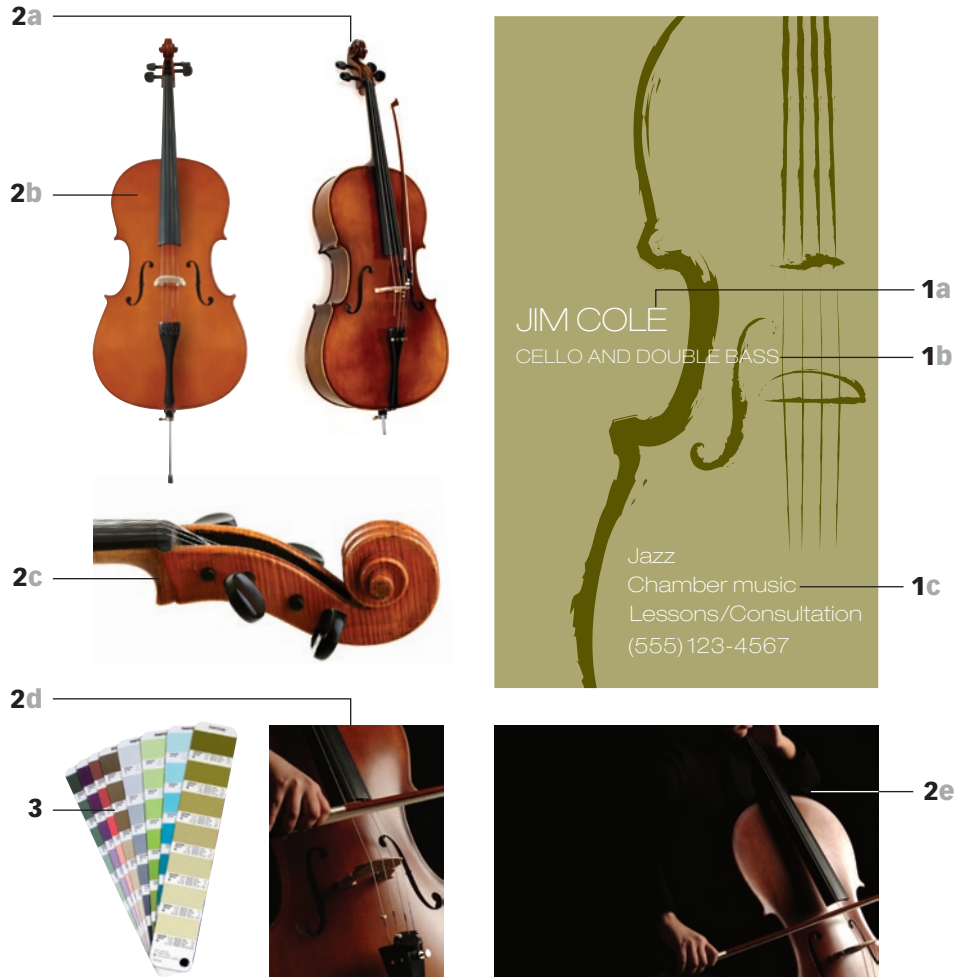
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### Our finished card

Simple, clear, handsome, cheap.

## Article resources



### Typefaces

1 (a-c) [Helvetica Neue 33 Thin Ext](#)

- a) 12 pt, b) 7 pt, +40 letterspacing,
- c) 8/11 pt, +20 letterspacing

### Images

2 (a-e) [iStockphoto.com](#)

[a](#) [b](#) [c](#) [d](#) [e](#)

3 [pantone.com](#) | [Pantone formula guide](#)

### Program

[adobe.com](#) | [Adobe Illustrator](#)

### Colors

4 PMS 5815

5 PMS 5815/50%



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**Gaye McWade** Associate publisher

**Vincent Pascual** Staff designer

**Dexter Mark Abellera** Staff designer

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[Print: \(Specify pages 1–11\)](#)



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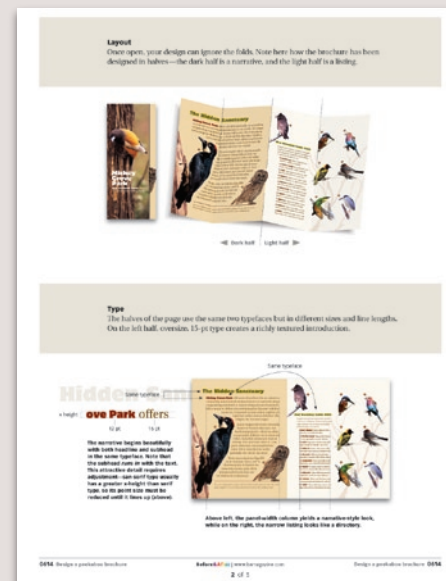


### Save

Presentation format or  
Paper-saver format

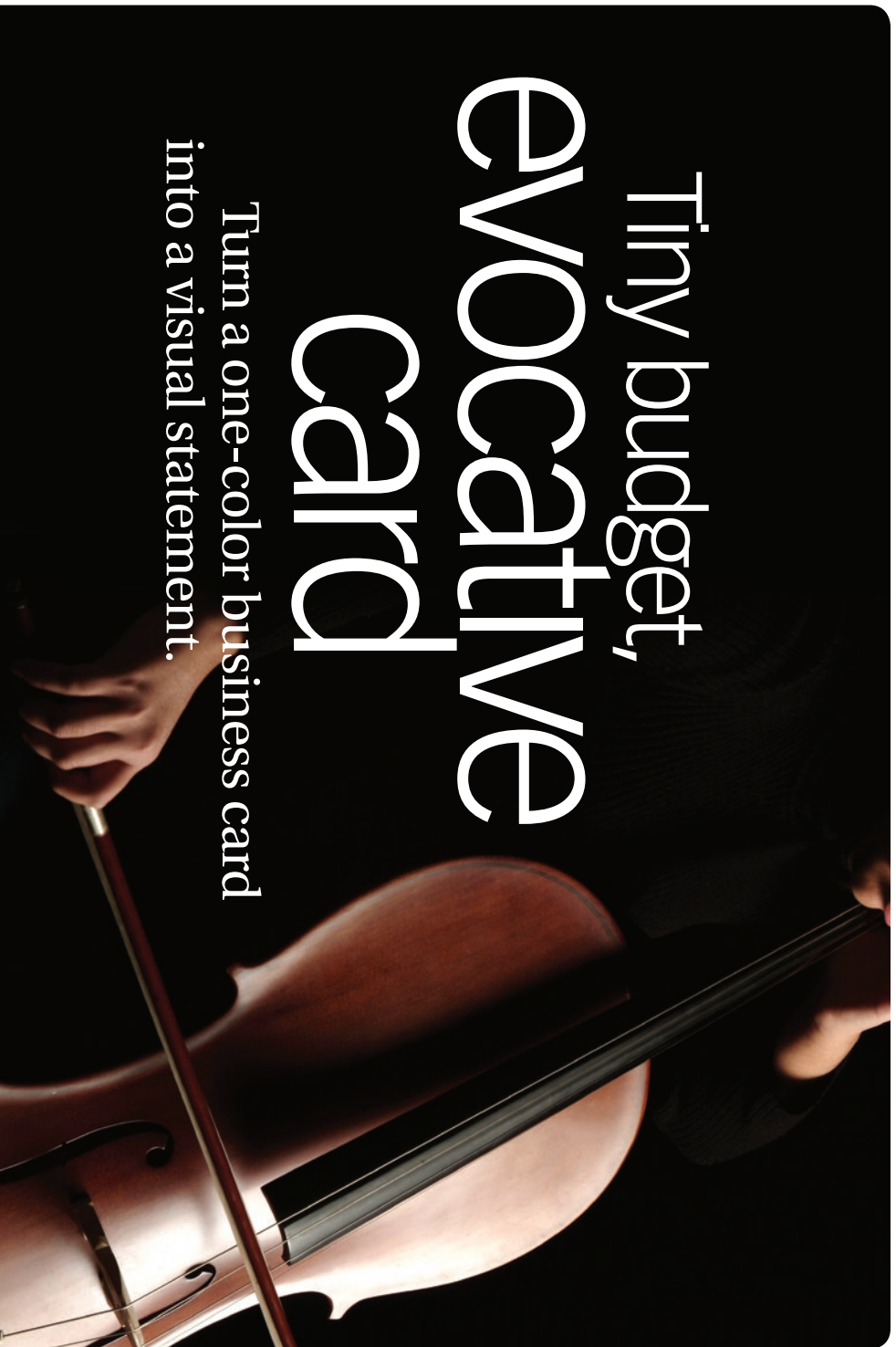
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[Print: \(Specify pages 13–18\)](#)



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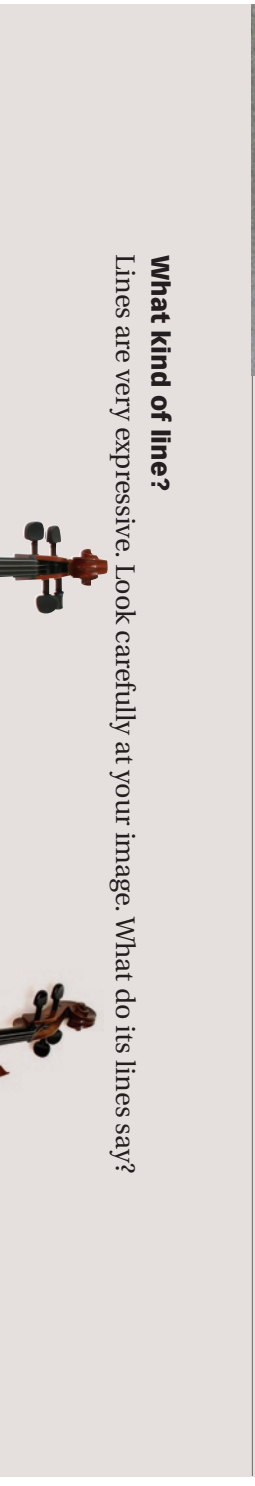
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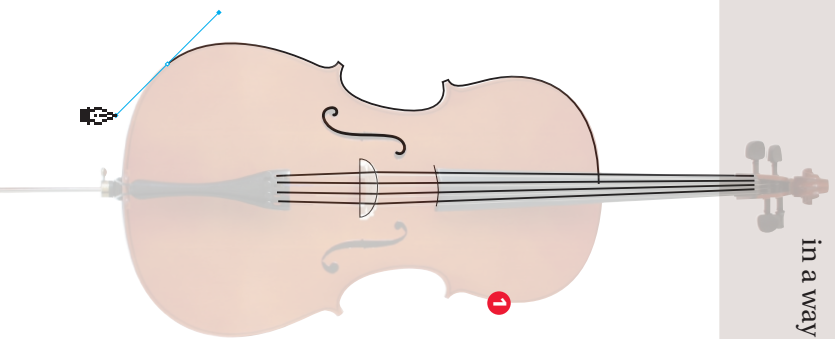


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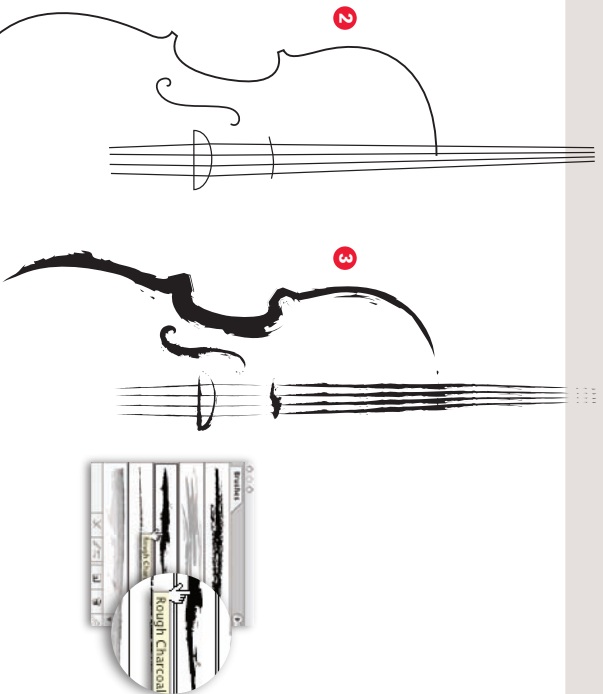
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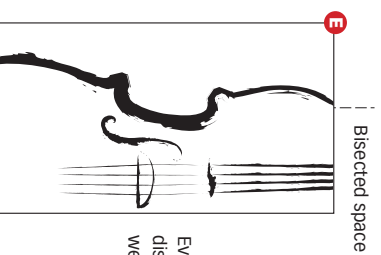
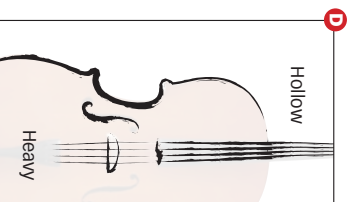
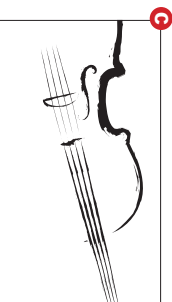
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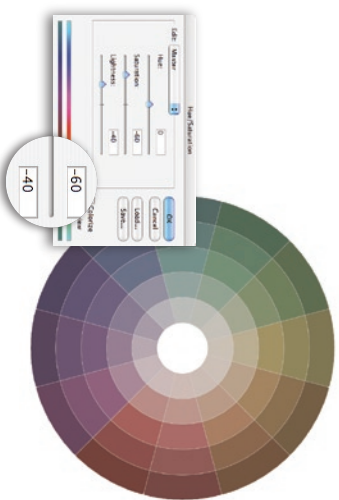
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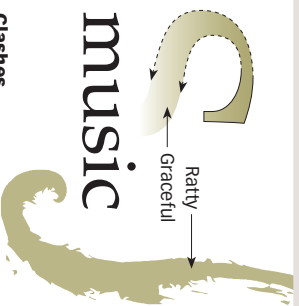
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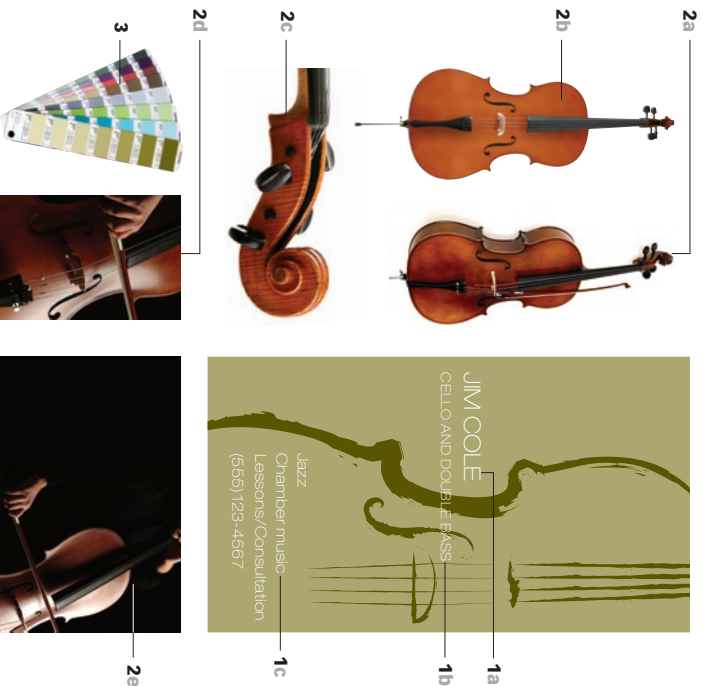
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## Article resources



- 2a** —
- 2b** —
- 2c** —
- 2d** —
- 2e** —
- 3** —
- 1 (a–c)** Helvetica Neue 33 Thin EXT  
a) 12 pt, b) 7 pt, +40 letterspacing,  
c) 8/11 pt, +20 letterspacing
- Images**
- 2 (a–e)** iStockphoto.com  
[a](#) [b](#) [c](#) [d](#) [e](#)
- 3** pantone.com | [Pantone formula guide](#)
- Program**  
adobe.com | [Adobe Illustrator](#)

## Colors

- 4** PMS 5815
- 5** PMS 5815/50%

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