The following are reflections on learning points after landing our first big independant website contract. Aside from the technical aspects of the job and actually "making the thing", other experiences included negotiating the contract, and figuring out design/information architecture dilemmas. Hopefully our reflections will allow other first-time web contractors to learn from our experiences.

In essence, I (Leslie Wilson) landed a deal through random social connections to make a fairly straightforward wordpress site for what ended up being almost 10k when I'd never made a website for someone before. Looking back to the conversations that led to this deal, I can only hope to recapture my negotiation style and repeat the performance in the future, and to this day I'm not exactly sure how it happened. I soon realized I'd need help with the job and so down the road, hired Nate Weeks for some backend help.

Contract Negotiation

To make a long story short, the future client and I fell to talking about his abysmally organized website as it related to his SEO (how easily his site would show up in a simple Google search). He'd gotten analytics that said people weren't visiting his site as much as his competitors. He knew his SEO needed big improvement and asked me how it could be done. After reviewing the state of his website I gave him an honest answer- that the current organization dragged down SEO because, quite simply, **no one could find anything.** I told him correcting SEO would take more than a band-aid approach, it would require a brand new site. I never offered my services as I felt timid at the idea, but he assumed that since I was familiar with the SEO side of it I was just playing hard to get. At some point I sensed a certain desperation from him to hire me, so I went with it.

As he started asking me what a new website might cost, I was honest and started thinking about the react websites I'd known people to make for larger companies and estimated it at around 40k. I told him a friend might do it for less. So when we decided I'd do his project for about 10k I think he saw it as a steal and I, to be totally honest, had no idea if I was conning the life out of this man or if my services could actually be worth that much. After having looked at the original website, however, I was fairly confident that I could make information architecture improvements right off the bat that would increase his sales. So I decided to go for it, and figure the rest out later.

The Original Website;

COOPER LACE

HOME | DESIGNS ▾ | ABOUT | MEASURING / CARE | SET DECORATIONS | MUSEUM | BLOG | CONTACT | REWARDS | SAMPLES

NORTH AMERICA'S SOURCE FOR SCOTTISH LACE CURTAINS

Free U.S. Priority Ground Shipping!
Full-Sized Panels on Loan   Returns Cheerfully Accepted*
*within 30 days on stock items

Visit our Customer Gallery and Testimonials Page

Exclusive Madras Lace Curtains

The most distinctive, artisan-designed selection of Arts & Crafts, Victorian, Art Deco and Mid-Century lace curtains available, woven only for us in the highest quality 100% Scottish cotton.

Historic Nottingham Lace Curtains

The finest collection of Victorian, Edwardian, Arts & Crafts and Art Deco Scottish Cotton Nottingham lace curtains dating from 1870-1930 and are suitable for all historic and vintage interiors.

Founded in 2007, Cooper Lace is the largest North American resource for Scottish Cotton Lace Curtains in both Nottingham and Madras weaves. We offer exclusive historic lace curtain panels in the widest range of patterns including the Classical, Victorian, Craftsman, Art Nouveau, Art Deco, Scottish Cotton Lace Curtains and Mid-Century Modern styles. Our heritage lace curtain panels provide beautiful privacy and allow sunlight to gently filter into your home. We promise you the fastest, most personalized service of any firm, and will help you select the best pattern and size for your room on an individualized basis. Please call or email us for immediate assistance, and ask about our Lace-on-Loan full-sized samples.

Cooper Lace Has Been Featured In:

AMERICAN BUNGALOW   ARTS & CRAFTS HOMES AND THE REVIVAL   The New York Times

Old House JOURNAL   ★ StarTribune

Los Angeles Times   San Francisco Chronicle

To learn about historic reproduction Wilton, Brussels and Axminster carpets from 1790-1950, please go to historic-carpet.com.

Lace Curtains | Designs | About Us | Measuring | Care | Custom | Testimonials
Blog | Contact | Rewards | Samples
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Information Architecture

The single most important factor for great SEO is having great content. Second most important is organizing content to both be crawlable by Google and catch the attention of users. Third comes performance- if a page loads too slowly bounce rates skyrocket. Some low-hanging fruit regarding organization included;

Menu issues

> "Controlling the menu controls what choices people can make. When people are given a menu of choices, they rarely ask: "what's not on the menu?", "why am I being given these options and not others?", "do I know the menu provider's goals?", "is this menu empowering for my original need, or are the choices actually a distraction?" (e.g. an overwhelmingly array of toothpastes)." - _Jessica Schilling_

The primary information architecture issue our client faced in this regard was simply that his menu didn't provide a clear avenue to purchasing lace curtains. This, one would assume, was the entire point of his website, so it was totally unacceptable.

For example there was one item labeled "designs" that dropped down to 3 choices: "Exclusives", "Historic / Nottingham" and "designs"(again). I felt "designs" was not specific enough; it said nothing about actual "curtains" or "purchasing", rather sounded like an artist advertising different styles. This and other issues (including verification by Google analytics that his homepage was a sink-trap) made it apparent that people were not able to travel from point A to point B upon arrival.
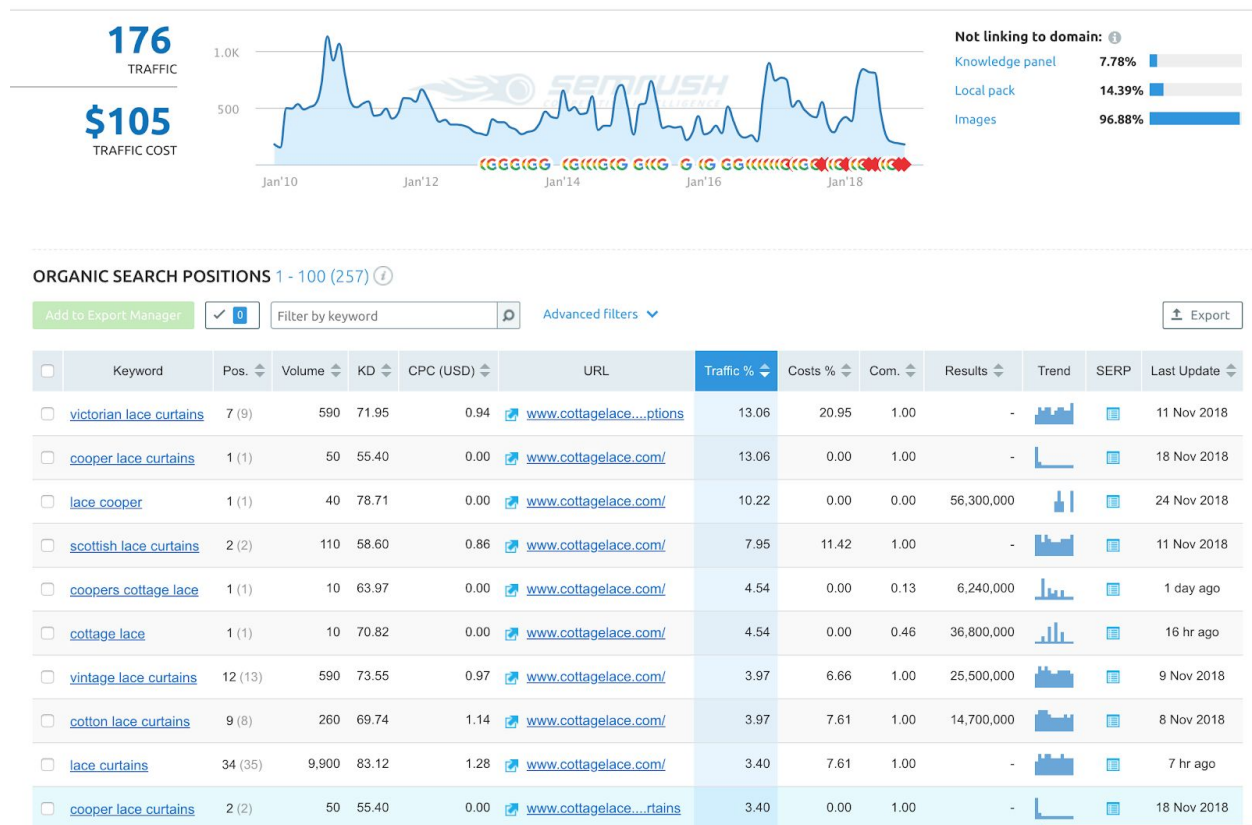

Structural issues

On the back-end, things were very funkily laid out. URLs were full of dashes and keywords with no clear hierarchy. If linked to on a social media post, URLs are often left untouched and a long and unclear 'slug' as they call it, is less likely to be clicked. It can also be less clear to a Google bot crawling your website, what the page is about. As the URL also shows up prominently in

search results, it's just good to be clear. For example a product URL on his old site might look like this: https://www.cottagelace.com/The-Eastlake-Panel-and-Sidelight-Lace-Curtains, which is a bit of an organizational nightmare - it means that every file on his old website is in one home folder, when you might expect something more like: https://oldeworldelace.com/product-category/lace-curtains/cotton-lace-curtains-scotland/.

Analysis Tools

We did more in-depth analysis of the old website, and talked to a few industry veterans about possible available tools to help us in our goals. After extensive research we decided to use SEMrush, which lets you look at your websites' current rank on a number of keywords, as well as determine what keywords drive your traffic. SEMrush also lets you look at your competition for individual keywords, and how many hits they get. You can collate, organize and display the data in all sorts of different ways to create reports. Here is the basic output from a SEMrush search on cottagelace.com:

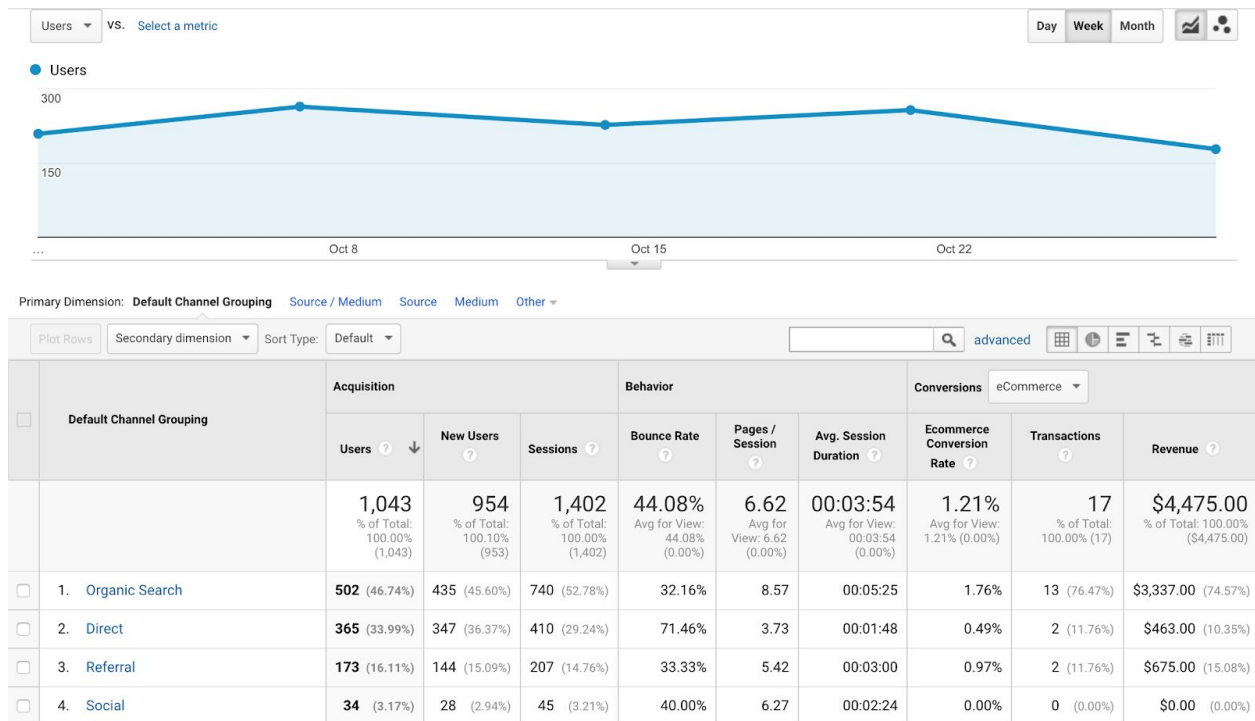|	Keyword	Pos.	Volume	KD	CPC (USD)	URL	Traffic %	Costs %	Com.	Results	Trend	SERP	Last Update
	victorian lace curtains	7 (9)	590	71.95	0.94	www.cottagelace....ptions	13.06	20.95	1.00	-			11 Nov 2018
	cooper lace curtains	1 (1)	50	55.40	0.00	www.cottagelace.com/	13.06	0.00	1.00	-			18 Nov 2018
	lace cooper	1 (1)	40	78.71	0.00	www.cottagelace.com/	10.22	0.00	0.00	56,300,000			24 Nov 2018
	scottish lace curtains	2 (2)	110	58.60	0.86	www.cottagelace.com/	7.95	11.42	1.00	-			11 Nov 2018
	coopers cottage lace	1 (1)	10	63.97	0.00	www.cottagelace.com/	4.54	0.00	0.13	6,240,000			1 day ago
	cottage lace	1 (1)	10	70.82	0.00	www.cottagelace.com/	4.54	0.00	0.46	36,800,000			16 hr ago
	vintage lace curtains	12 (13)	590	73.55	0.97	www.cottagelace.com/	3.97	6.66	1.00	25,500,000			9 Nov 2018
	cotton lace curtains	9 (8)	260	69.74	1.14	www.cottagelace.com/	3.97	7.61	1.00	14,700,000			8 Nov 2018
	lace curtains	34 (35)	9,900	83.12	1.28	www.cottagelace.com/	3.40	7.61	1.00	-			7 hr ago
	cooper lace curtains	2 (2)	50	55.40	0.00	www.cottagelace....rtains	3.40	0.00	1.00	-			18 Nov 2018

The "Lace Curtains" keyword was the biggest driver of traffic, but 11th in page ranking and just outside of Google's first-page. He had also completely fallen off the radar in rating for "lace curtains" and sat at 34th. This report also told us to be sure that "victorian lace curtains" and "scottish lace curtains" show up as keywords because they were driving the most traffic.

Google Analytics

We used Google Analytics to look at the traffic numbers and bounce/conversion rates. Some key things we noticed looking over his site is that he has a very low percentage of mobile traffic, and a 0% conversion rate for mobile users. More recently his conversion rate on mobile had improved, but the traffic numbers could have been better. Thus another focus was to make his site way more mobile friendly.

	Device Category	Acquisition			Behavior			Conversions eCommerce		Ecommerce Conversion Rate
		Users ↓	New Users	Sessions	Bounce Rate	Pages / Session	Avg. Session Duration	Transactions	Revenue	
		1,099 % of Total: 100.00% (1,099)	998 % of Total: 100.00% (998)	1,498 % of Total: 100.00% (1,498)	44.33% Avg for View: 44.33% (0.00%)	6.76 Avg for View: 6.76 (0.00%)	00:03:56 Avg for View: 00:03:56 (0.00%)	29 % of Total: 100.00% (29)	$12,137.00 % of Total: 100.00% ($12,137.00)	1.94% Avg for View: 1.94% (0.00%)
☐	1. desktop	661 (60.15%)	606 (60.72%)	883 (58.95%)	41.90%	8.08	00:04:20	18 (62.07%)	$4,048.00 (33.35%)	2.04%
☐	2. mobile	264 (24.02%)	242 (24.25%)	367 (24.50%)	50.14%	4.20	00:02:55	4 (13.79%)	$1,092.00 (9.00%)	1.09%
☐	3. tablet	174 (15.83%)	150 (15.03%)	248 (16.56%)	44.35%	5.83	00:04:04	7 (24.14%)	$6,997.00 (57.65%)	2.82%

Most of Cooper Lace's traffic was from organic search- no one was linking to it from social media or any other secondary source. We figured a heightened social media presence might help drive traffic to the site.

	Default Channel Grouping	Acquisition			Behavior			Conversions eCommerce		
		Users ↓	New Users	Sessions	Bounce Rate	Pages / Session	Avg. Session Duration	Ecommerce Conversion Rate	Transactions	Revenue
		1,043 % of Total: 100.00% (1,043)	954 % of Total: 100.00% (953)	1,402 % of Total: 100.00% (1,402)	44.08% Avg for View: 44.08% (0.00%)	6.62 Avg for View: 6.62 (0.00%)	00:03:54 Avg for View: 00:03:54 (0.00%)	1.21% Avg for View: 1.21% (0.00%)	17 % of Total: 100.00% (17)	$4,475.00 % of Total: 100.00% ($4,475.00)
☐	1. Organic Search	502 (46.74%)	435 (45.60%)	740 (52.78%)	32.16%	8.57	00:05:25	1.76%	13 (76.47%)	$3,337.00 (74.57%)
☐	2. Direct	365 (33.99%)	347 (36.37%)	410 (29.24%)	71.46%	3.73	00:01:48	0.49%	2 (11.76%)	$463.00 (10.35%)
☐	3. Referral	173 (16.11%)	144 (15.09%)	207 (14.76%)	33.33%	5.42	00:03:00	0.97%	2 (11.76%)	$675.00 (15.08%)
☐	4. Social	34 (3.17%)	28 (2.94%)	45 (3.21%)	40.00%	6.27	00:02:24	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	$0.00 (0.00%)

A last interesting piece from Google Analytics indicated which parts of his website were common landing places. In rebuilding the site it would at least be important to redirect traffic from those links, to their closest analogs on the new page;

What pages do your users visit?

Page	Pageviews	Page Value
/	314	$1.30
/Historic-Nottingham-Lace-Curtains	252	$2.60
/Cooper-Lace-Exclusives-Lace-Curtains	206	$0.00
/lace-descriptions	133	$0.00
/measure-care.asp	64	$0.00
/Hunter-Rose-by-Dard-Hunter-Lace-Curtains	57	$0.00
/The-Grecian-Panel-an...delight-Lace-Curtains	36	$0.00
/Old-Colony-Lace-Curtains	35	$0.00
/The-Eastlake-Panel-a...delight-Lace-Curtains	35	$0.00
/Cherwell-Lace-Curtains	33	$0.00

Last 7 days ▼   PAGES REPORT >

In this case "/Historic-Nottingham-Lace-Curtains" was the most important landing page (after the home-page) and "/Cooper-Lace-Exclusives-Lace-Curtains" ranked a close second. We wouldn't be exactly duplicating those terrible URLs but could redirect traffic from them to similar pages.

Screaming Frog

We used Screaming Frog to crawl the site and check for duplicate content, odd meta tags, and other things that can lower your SEO ranking. Crawling Cooper Lace revealed a few things that could be changed. For example, some of his meta-tags (which equated to the 'short descriptions you'd see browse through your search results) were overly-long and were being cut off. This lead to lower click-thru rate as partial-descriptions are nonsensical and don't catch

people's eyes. There was also duplicate content which automatically lowers your SEO score in the Google algorithm. Interestingly, the website had been updated from http to https a couple of years ago, but both addresses seemed to still be functioning. The current webmaster did a work-around by canonicalizing all the https versions of each page, but having both up can still be detrimental to SEO.

It wasn't all bad, however. All images already had alt text, which made them readable by Google's crawlers. There were no broken links that might lower the SEO or damage the click-through rate and every page had H1 and H2 content which is necessary for Google crawlers to map out the structure and content of the website.

We did notice that many of the h1's were repetitive and non-descriptive. When the h1's don't relate to the content on the page, crawlers can't accurately map the site and rank pages. For instance, on many pages the h1 reads "Free U.S Ground Shipping!." That is, this phrase is the h1 at the top of nearly every page and doesn't actually allude to the pages' content. It was also interesting to note from these analytics that the robots.txt file included in the top-level directory of most sites was preventing the blog and a few other pages from being crawled;
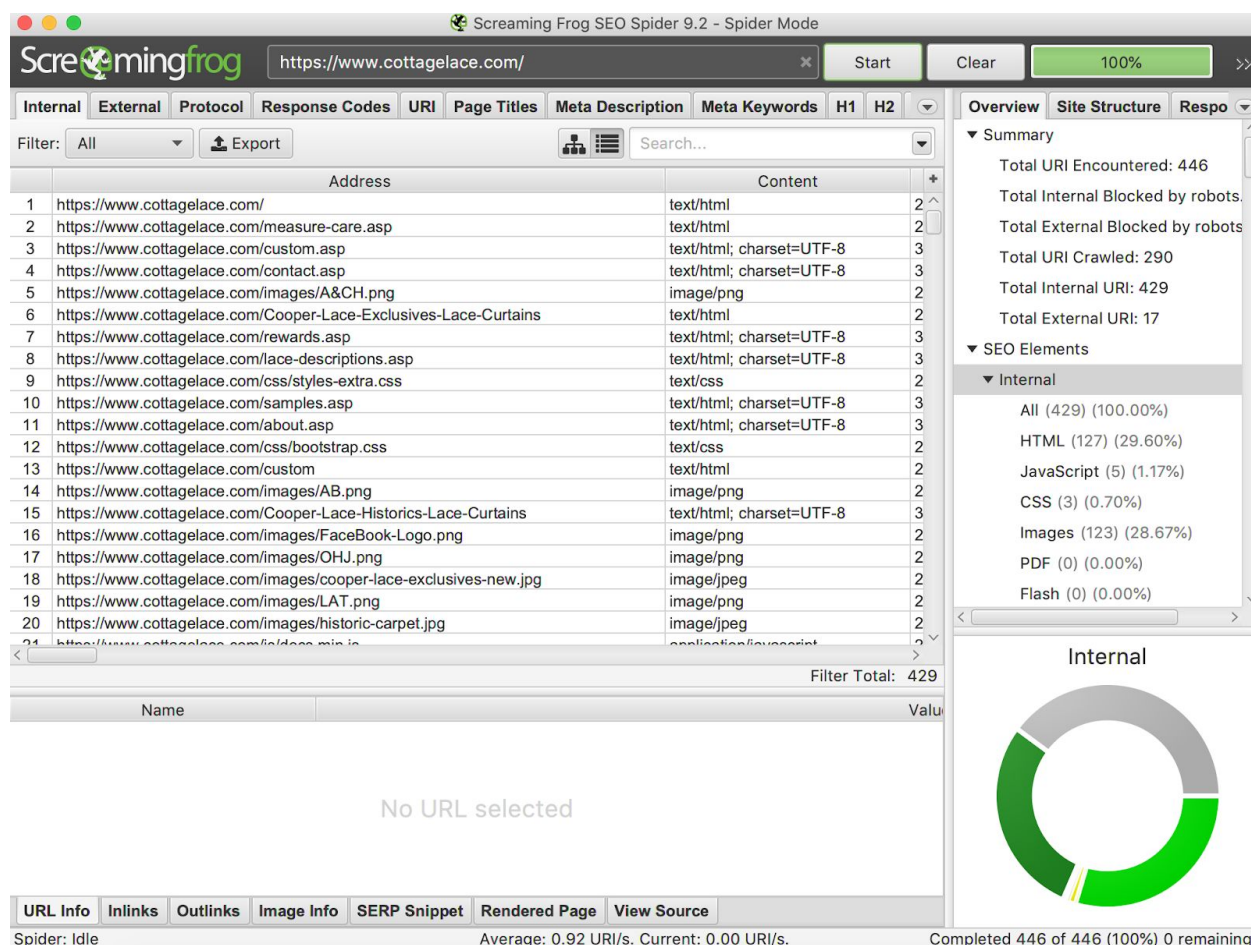
In this rebuild we focused on having much clearer URL layouts with H1 tags that were descriptive for each section. We were also careful about including meta-tags of the right length, alt-image text and all the other small factors that were already working well on his old site.

UX Design

Organization was easy- but the look and feel of it? That's when I realized I had no clue and Nate had even less of a clue.

It was the kind of thing I expected to learn on the job and so thought it would be the most time-efficient strategy to **employ safe design choices until this project lent me more experience**. I decided to stick to the old layout/color initially because the client hadn't expressly disliked it. It was important to keep focused on the nature of the problem, in that all our client wanted was that people actually *arrive* at his site.

At this point Nate and I made our first mistake in using beaver-builder for page content and choosing a fairly minimal and customizable template for wordpress called Customify that we knew would require more coding. We chose to use this rather than a framework that would give more premade layout options.

The thoughts behind this decision were fueled primarily by a lack of familiarity with wordpress and WP plugins on our part. Our naivety led us to believe that a customizable template would help us avoid the 'cookie cutter' look some WP sites have, even if we ended up putting more time into its creation. This could not have been less true. In reality this decision led to having to essentially re-do the entire site after finishing the homepage and realizing that custom-coding things like a shopping cart and the store layout would be a heck of a lot more work than we were ready to do.

Thankfully we ended up using Flatsome, which had a lot of great templates and easily toggled options to do most of what we needed to do.

Settling on the look and feel of the homepage, even after moving over to Flatsome and exploring the design options this framework gave us, was by far the hardest part. This is mainly because we soon realized the homepage dictated the style of the rest of your website.

Design cycles went from a homepage that was *painfully reminiscent* of the old site (but better organized):

COOPER LACE

Call us: (802) 275-4567

North America's Source
for
Scottish Lace Curtains

Cooper Lace offers the largest selection of **Madras** and **Nottingham Lace Curtains.** We guarantee the fastest, most personalized service selecting the best pattern & size for your windows by **loaning you full-sized panels.** Cooper Lace provides **free ground shipping** in the US, & a generous return policy.

Victorian
Federal, Colonial Revival, Neo-Classical and Edwardian

Arts and Crafts
Including British, Mission, Craftsman and Art Nouveau

Art Deco/Modern
Including Later Revivals and Mid-Century Modern

Set Decoration
Rush service for Films, Televeision and Theater

Public Buildings
Government, House Museums and Hospitality Industry

Archival Madras
Historically inspired designer goods

Cooper Lace's quality service has been featured in Famouse Magazines...

For media inquires, contact 413-218-5785

ARTS & CRAFTS HOMES AND THE REVIVAL
Old House JOURNAL
AMERICAN BUNGALOW
The New York Times
San Francisco Chronicle
Los Angeles Times

To one that was *too far from* the style of the other site such that our client decided his audience needed something less 'modern' or 'trendy' looking:

COOPER LACE

Call us: (802) 275-4567

Victorian-Style
Federal, Colonial Revival, Neo-Classical and Edwardian

Shop Victorian

Arts and Crafts
Our Exclusive Historically inspired designer goods

Shop Exclusives

Modern/Art Deco
Our Exclusive Historically inspired designer goods

Shop Modern

Arts and Crafts
Our Exclusive Historically inspired designer goods
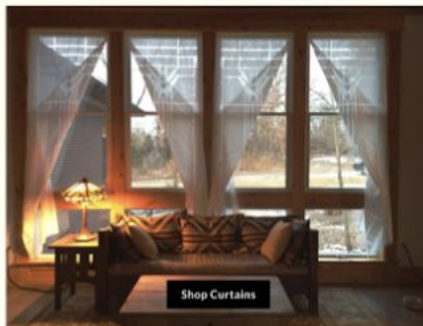
Shop Curtains

COOPER LACE IN FEATURED FILMS
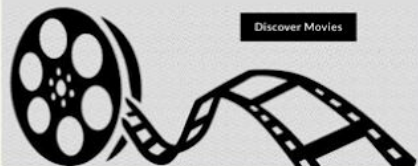
Discover Movies

Public Buildings
Government Buildings, House Museums, Hospitality Industry

...We Make Curtains for Castles.

Our client revealed (albeit rather late) that his intended audience mainly consisted of *seniors citizens.* At this point I settled on something that put all possible categories of item **right in your face** as the previous site kind of did, while still offering better images, better organization and better user experience:
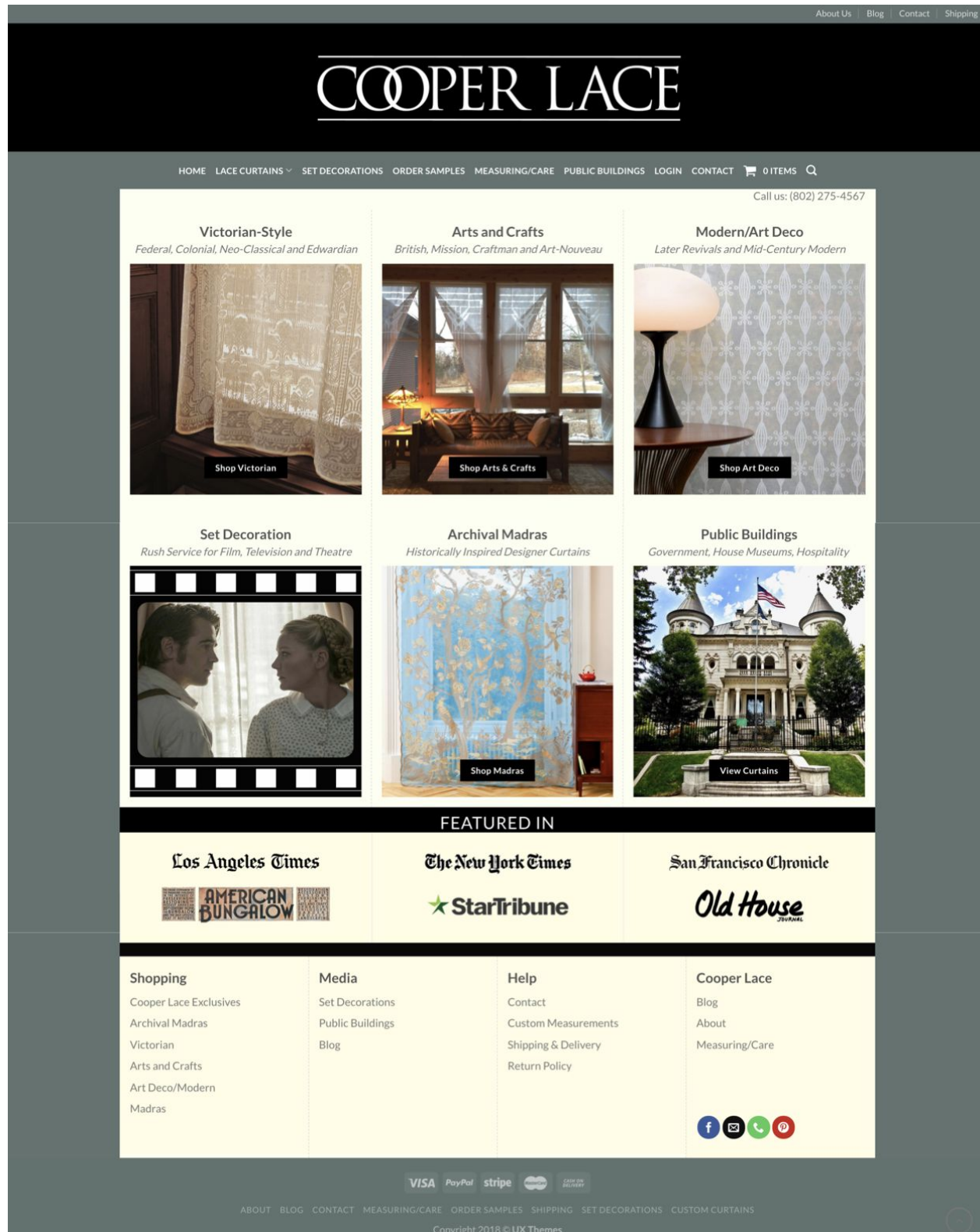
Looking back on my design choices, it is easy to track the evolution of decision-making. From being too afraid to stray from the original design, to then feeling more confident and familiar with

the tools available and *overdoing* it trying to get creative and modernize the look of it, to then returning to some happy medium.

In summary, the initial negotiation and coming up with both back and front-end solutions proved more challenging than we'd thought it would be. Much of it is intuitive but laying out a website with proper URL structure and h1's/meta-tags that tell a clear story to crawlers and anybody that visits the site takes planning. Making sure pages and images are clearly labeled and cater to what people are searching for is critical. There's a lot to do aesthetically to capture people's attention, however it's important to make sure these aesthetics don't affect performance (i.e. images must be properly compressed so the site loads quickly and everything works on different screen sizes).

Working with modern frameworks and visual editors makes all of this easier than coding yourself- however there is certainly something to be said for putting in the time to make things customized and tailored to your clients' needs. The experience overall was rewarding. I'm hoping the website I build as my final plan project will serve to advertise our future website design company **QUAD_DUB[WWWW]** Wilson & Weeks Web Work. Unfortunately the URL for our future is outside of our price range for now.

wwww.com		bulk search 🔍
✕ **wwww.com** TAKEN		💲 make offer

Suggested Results hide

	wwww.net PREMIUM	$16,125.00 Renews at $14.98/yr	🛒 add to cart
🔒	Positive SSL ⓘ	$8.88/yr	🛒 add to cart
🐙	EasyWP Managed WordPress in under 30 seconds ⓘ	$1.00/mo	🛒 add to cart