Preface

sn't it always the way? You take five-hundred-odd manuscript pages, some ninety thousand words, about two hundred thirty figures, and six months of your life trying to explain something, and then some hotshot comes along and sums it all up in a single sentence.

It happened to me when I submitted this humble volume for the approval of Eben Hewitt, series editor of the Garage Series books. He came back with the following—and I quote: "Campbell does a terrific job of illustrating that not only are both design and usability important—they might even be the same thing." When I read that, I nearly fell off my chair. "That's it!" I shouted. "That's what I've been trying to say!"

But then it occurred to me—who else might be reading this? Who at my publisher might be weighing a twenty-word summary against a ream of manuscript and thinking about all the time, effort, and capital that would be saved by putting out a pamphlet or an information sheet or even a clever slogan instead of a full-blown book? How would Hewitt's devastatingly insightful comment affect the terms of my contract? My advance? This especially was a concern, because I had already spent it.

Fortunately for me, the thunder didn't come down. This book quietly went into production, and nobody seemed to notice what Eben Hewitt—a Java programmer, no less—had done. And now, nobody ever will.

Or maybe my saving grace was that, while Hewitt can spout off all the encapsulated central theses that he likes, the book before you, while never achieving the level of clarity of an E. H., provides the details as consolation. It

shows by way of many, many examples how design and usability are inexorably intertwined. It even takes a stab at why.

So, if you're an ideas person, a high-concept hierophant with a sixth-level intellect—an Eben Hewitt, if you will— read no further. My series editor just gave you everything that this book has to offer. But if you're like me, more like a fire hydrant than a hierophant with an intellect nowhere near the sixth level, who likes pictures, examples, code snippets, and someone to explain them all: Welcome to *Web Design Garage*.

Perhaps a word or two about the organization of this book is in order. *Web Design Garage* is a bit like object-oriented programming, in that you dip into the library (or the book, as it were); pull out what you need; mix, match, and combine; and get back to work. Instead of traditional chapters, there are topics: eighty-six of them, to be precise. Topics range from short, article-length pieces to chapter-size ruminations, depending on the subject at hand. I put these topics into eight general categories or parts to help you find what you're looking for as quickly as possible.

For best results, don't read this book from cover to cover—you might find that it skips around too much. Occasionally, it repeats itself in the interest of keeping the topics as self-contained as possible.

Your best approach is to refer to the topics that help you to solve specific problems that you're having with your site and to chart your course from there. If any given topic alludes to a design technique like grouping or a technology like Cascading Style Sheets that you aren't as familiar with, you can flip to the topics about these subjects and expand your horizons.

With Web design especially, diverse roads tend to join up, and they all lead to the same place (more or less), so you'll weave your way through the entire book eventually. But you'll do it by following your own path, not the abstruse labyrinth of the author's inner mind. The hope is that you come away from *Web Design Garage* with something approaching a nonlinear experience, much like surfing the Web.

For myself, I like to think that *Web Design Garage* is a kind of fantasy adventure story, one of those choose-your-own-plotline types. You, the hero, are trying to put together the components of a magic spell that will save the kingdom. To do this, you must pore over poorly documented ancient formulae. There's even a recurring villain: the marketing department, who emerges when least expected to hijack your site and use it to brainwash your visitors into buying things. All this technology talk is just a metaphor anyway. Look past it, and you'll find a real page-turner.

If you are reading these words, and if I am right about to whom this book would appeal, then you are a person of obvious taste with some knowledge *a priori* about how to build a Web site. Maybe you're the sole in-house Web designer/developer at your place of employment. Maybe you're self-employed,

and you need to build a Web site for your business. Maybe you're an *artiste*, and the medium of the Web intrigues you. Maybe you just enjoy the technology stuff and on the weekends you like tinkering with power beyond human control. Whatever your situation may be, most of the topics assume a baseline familiarity with the essential procedures, like creating HTML documents and working with scripts. If you know a little already, this book helps you to learn a lot more.

But if I am wrong, which is as likely as not, then please begin your *Web Design Garage* journey with *Part VIII: Basic Training Topics*. When I wrote this section, I pretended that I didn't know anything, and I tried to explain the most basic concepts of the craft to myself in the clearest way possible. The idea here is that, even if you have never seen the letters *HTML* arranged in that particular sequence before, you can start with Part VIII and go on to use the rest of the book.

And, what the heck, even if you know a thing or two, you might have a look at Part VIII anyway, just as a refresher. Many Web designers, including this one, are self-taught. We all have these little gaps in our educations. Maybe Part VIII can make a few things clearer for you, just like Barney Marispini and Rob Streeter (the technical editors on this book) helped me to close up some of the potholes in my own education. I owe you one, guys. In fact, I owe you several.

While I'm on the without-whoms, I would be remiss if I did not mention John Neidhart of the Barbs, John Fuller, Raquel Kaplan, Robin O'Brien, Kathleen Addis, Julie Nahil, Dmitri Korzh, and everyone at Prentice Hall PTR who made this book happen. Thanks also to the usual suspects at Studio B, both old and new: Neil Salkind, Lynn Haller, Stacey Barone, Katrina Hillsten, and Jackie Coder.

A special admission of indebtedness emanates directly from me to those persons whom I did not have the pleasure of meeting virtually or physically, whose names I do not know, but whose efforts contributed to the care, feeding, and production of this book and its author, much like a superhero who defends a city anonymously.