

# Optimize your site experience and your image gallery for any device

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What is the best approach to show images on smartphones & tablets? To swipe or not to swipe? How about fluid videos?

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About a month ago I decided to heavily redesign my website. This little site has been my cutting-edge technologies playground for years but it was becoming outdated by some many ways.

The base points of the planned design were:

1. Mobile first. Mobile is unquestionably becoming the standard for content consuming - reading, browsing, looking. Even I find myself using my smartphone for reading the articles and using the laptop only for writing or creating content. Therefore the site needs to be at least as good on mobile, than on desktop, if not better.
2. Responsive images, fluid videos One of the main topics is to show my photos, I want them to be responsive and give the best experience on any device.
3. Get rid of round corners, box shadows, double borders, etc, in short remove unnecessary, outdated design features. I don't think I need to explain these :)

It's not that hard, is it? YES IT IS.

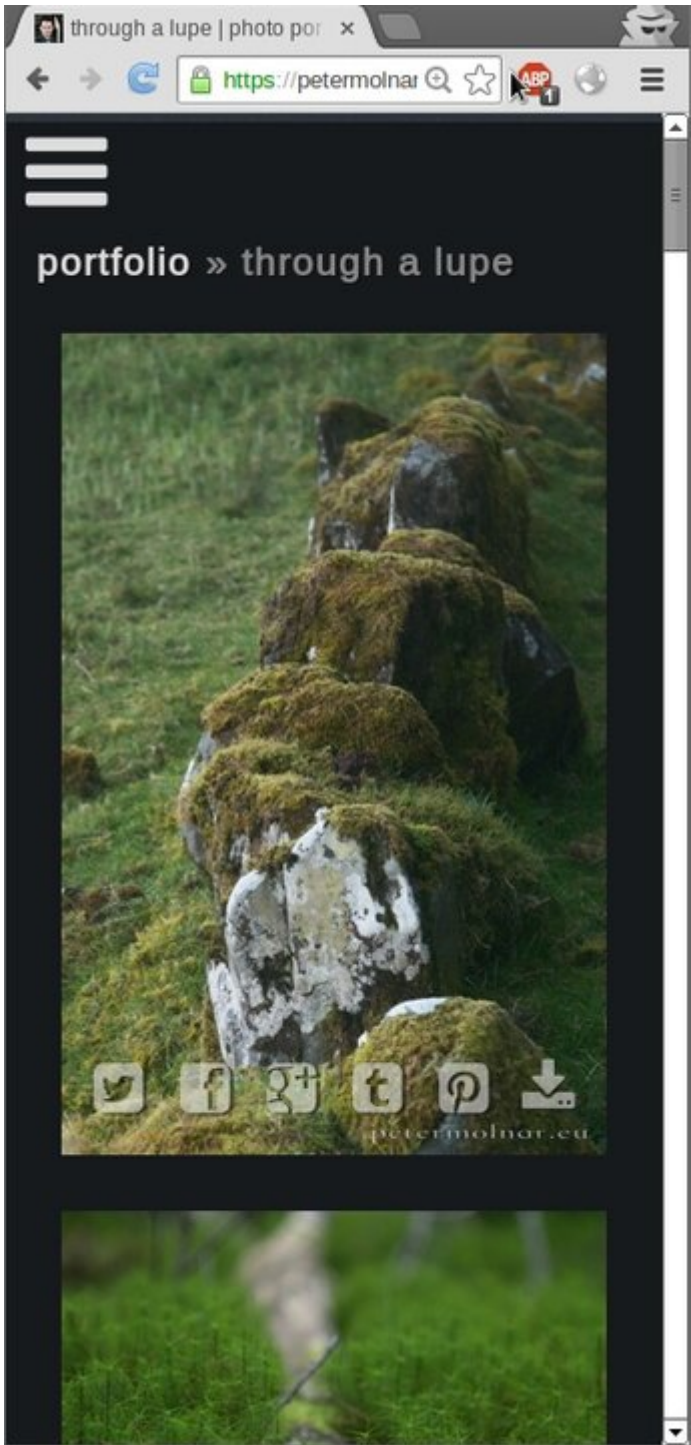
## The Problem: the image gallery

There are: carousels<sup>[^1]</sup>, lightbox<sup>[^2]</sup>-(clone<sup>[^3]</sup>) galleries, fancy over animated galleries<sup>[^4]</sup>, mobile friendly swipe galleries<sup>[^5]</sup>, the one I did for myself gallery<sup>[^6]</sup>, the other I borrowed into a WordPress plugin gallery<sup>[^7]</sup>, the old-but-still-cool gallery<sup>[^8]</sup>, even some 3D, real-life gallery mimicking ones<sup>[^9]</sup>, and soo many more... How could anyone choose from these? And which one is giving the best user experience?

## The solution - for now

I don't have The One True Answer, I only have my answer: **for mobile, go as static as possible.**

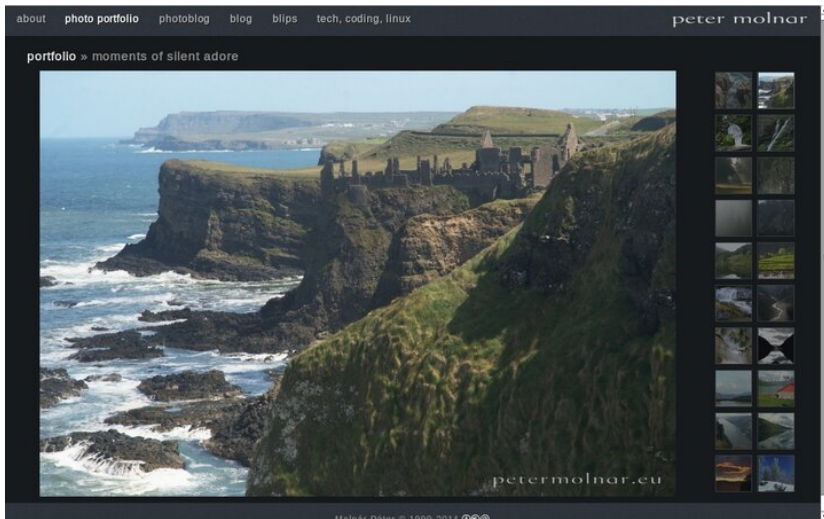
Remove the fuss, remove basically everything that could make the visitor miss an image. Swiping can be buggy, can be counter-intuitive. Full screen pop-up galleries, slideshows, carousels are all hiding the overview option and they require the user to rotate through all the images. They are also without the ability to quickly revisit one. (Why sliders and carousels are evil?<sup>[^10]</sup> and a brief explanation why you should never use them<sup>[^11]</sup> ) For mobile, thanks to the mostly vertical displays, you can simple place the images below each other and have vertical scrolling.



gallery\_mobile

But the desktop is still a different world. (*I'm not messing with the touch screen desktops yet, that still needs to evolve and show the actual usage patterns.*) Desktops have mouse which is a high precision tool compared to your finger. They are mostly horizontal compared to the vertical screen ration on the handhelds so if'd I want static images, I'd need to create horizontal sliding for the same experience making the landscapes full-screen size, and that is a bad idea<sup>[12]</sup>. Sticking to the original, thumbnails-and-preview layout it is then.

The **desktop** version **can stay fancy**.



gallery\_desktop

Until the actual picture set<sup>[13]</sup> tag truly emerges, I need to stick to CSS3 media query based background changing<sup>[14]</sup>. Ugly as hell, but it's at least scriptable and even saves bandwidth a little.

## How about the videos?

Thankfully this topic is much easier due to the already present different resolutions on most of the video sites. The List Apart article *Creating Intrinsic Ratios for Video*<sup>[15]</sup> made a clear point for presenting fluid videos on a page, and for WordPress, check out *WordPress Canvas - Responsive Videos*<sup>[16]</sup> and use it without even touching code.

Of course it might need some hacking and maximum width limiting if you want to avoid fullscreen videos on desktop, but it's much easier than with the image galleries.

## The cons?

There are always cons, and in our case, it's the different design. I used to have customers, where no matter what I said, no matter how I tried to make them understand, what is screen resolution, or pixel density, they wanted their websites, galleries and everything look exactly the same on all device. (*Of course it's not possible.*)

But this is something you need to learn to live with. We're using our mobile devices very differently than we used our desktops. Even the social activity shows a crazy difference on behalf of the mobiles. So let's face it: we need different layout to have the same effect.

## Future issues: the limits of media queries

There is also another problem which we are soon about to face. I'm using this to add the desktop additions to the LESS stylesheet:

```
/* DESKTOP */  
@media ( min-width : 960px ) and ( orientation: landscape )  
and ( -webkit-max-device-pixel-ratio: 1.5 ),  
( min-width : 960px ) and ( orientation: landscape ) and ( max-  
resolution: 220dpi ),  
( min-width : 2400px ) and ( orientation: landscape ) and ( -  
webkit-max-device-pixel-ratio: 1.9 ),  
( min-width : 2400px ) and ( orientation: landscape ) and  
( max-resolution: 290dpi ) {  
}
```

CSS

The first two for traditional desktops, the second pair for retina desktops. But with 4K, there's more to come, again.

## Credits

Featured image icon is from Ian Crowter's Responsive Web Design article.<sup>[17]</sup>

## Links

1. <http://jetpack.me/support/carousel/>
2. <http://lokeshdhakar.com/projects/lightbox2/>
3. <http://planetozh.com/projects/lightbox-clones/>
4. <http://dropthebit.com/demos/photobox/>
5. <http://photoswipe.com/latest/examples/jquery-mobile.html#Gallery1>
6. <https://petermolnar.net/adaptive-responsive-css3-gallery/>

7. <http://trentacular.com/2009/10/galleriffic-2-0/>
8. <http://www.dhteumeuleu.com/not-in-vein>
9. <http://www.dhteumeuleu.com/he-knew>
10. <https://yoast.com/opinion-on-sliders/>
11. <http://shouldiuseacarousel.com/>
12. <http://www.nngroup.com/articles/horizontal-scrolling/>
13. <http://www.w3.org/TR/html-picture-element/>
14. <https://petermolnar.net/linux-tech-coding/adaptive-responsive-css3-gallery/>
15. <http://alistapart.com/article/creating-intrinsic-ratios-for-video>
16. <http://wordpress.org/plugins/wc-responsive-video/>
17. <http://www.iancrowther.co.uk/responsive-web-design/>

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