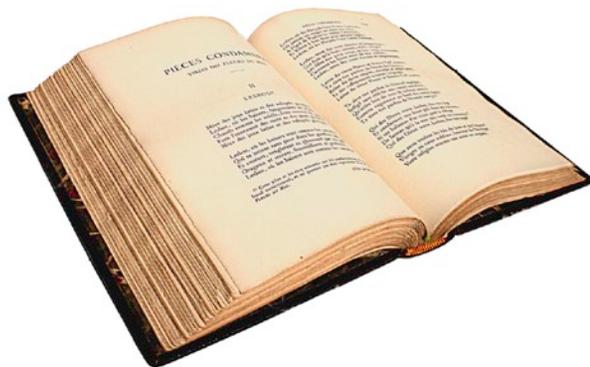# Designing Projects on a Classical Grid

Look at the pages of the book below, an early 1900s edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. What are your first impressions? Do you get a sense of timelessness? Do you feel comfortable? Do you feel like you could read it easily? There are reasons for that.

By RUFUS DEUCHLER

You know that changing color, images, or typefaces can radically affect the emotional response of your reader to your design. But how often do you consider the effect of the layout grid underneath all those elements?

In this article, you'll learn how to create a classical grid. Its symmetry, wide margins, and homogeneous texture put the reader at ease and evoke tradition, timelessness, and even luxury. To create this classical grid, you'll geometrically divide the page into a perfect mix of margin and live area; that is, where you'll place text and images.

1 Create a New Document

In InDesign, go to **File** > **New** and enter the page width and height of your project. Don't worry about Margins for now; you'll take care of them at a
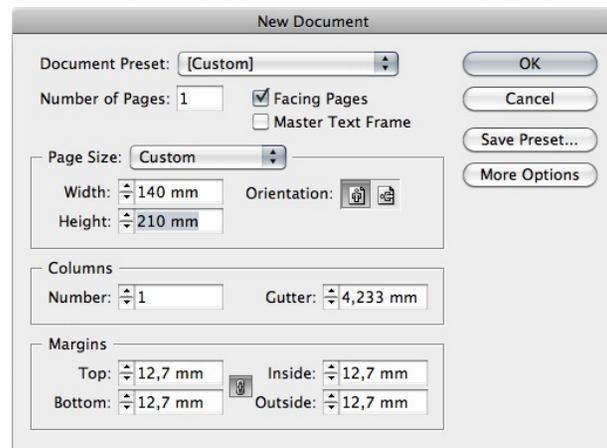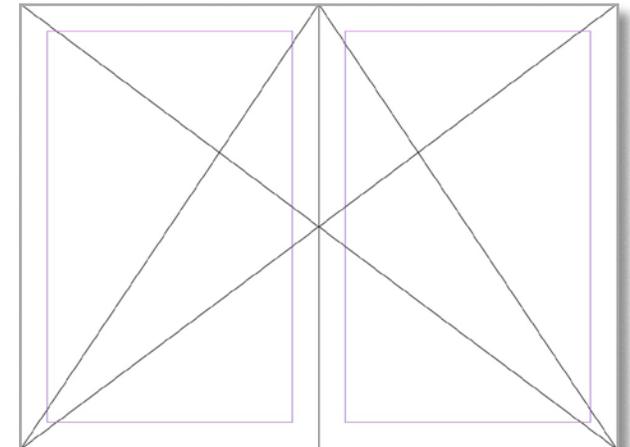
later stage. And because this is a classical layout, there are no page bleeds.

2 Divide the Page

Open the Pages panel and click the Master page thumbnail in the Pages panel.

You're going to divide the page equally between the margin area and the live area. Use the line tool to create diagonals and vertical lines for both the individual pages and the spread, as shown below.

Draw one set of vertical line from where the diagonals intersect, and a second set of diagonals between the two vertical lines. You may need to zoom into the intersections (circled in red in the figure on the next page) to make sure that the drawing is precise, because with classical things, precision is the key.
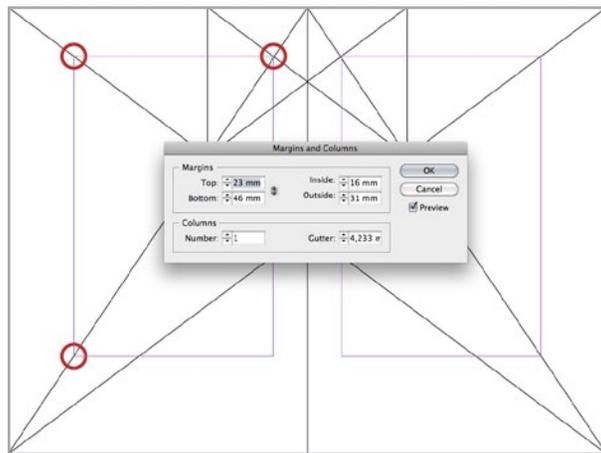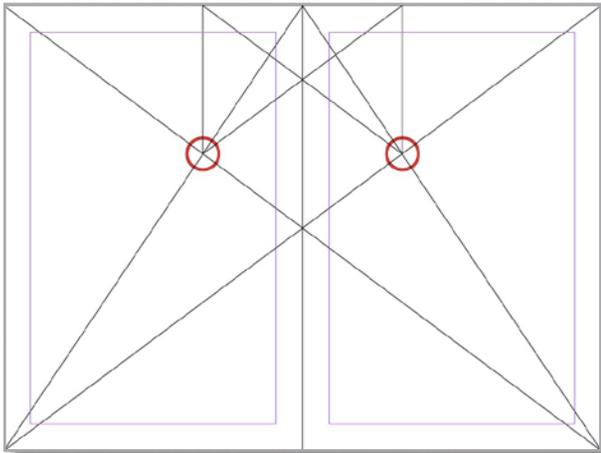
Tip: Group the diagonals and save them as an InDesign Snippet so you can reuse them anytime without having to redraw them. You can download an INX sample file here.

3 Define the Margins

Select the master page in the Pages panel (or make sure you're viewing the master page), then choose **Layout > Margins and Columns**. Deselect the Chain icon so that you can set each value separately.

Adjust the Margins of the master page so that the corners of the live area intersect the lines, as shown below. You can zoom in and eyeball the positions, or you could use the Measure tool to find the value.

Now you have geometrically divided the page into a perfectly symmetrical mix of margin and live area.
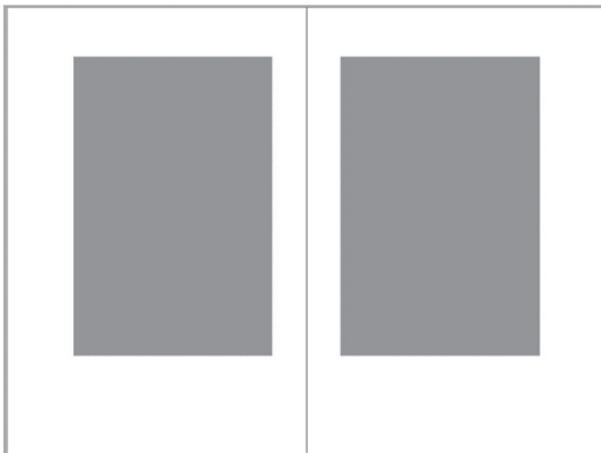

At this point, you can define the areas for page numbers and running titles. To do that, pull a few guides out to align to each side of the live area you defined and a guide that intersects at the bottom. (You can hold down the Cmd/Ctrl key while dragging to ensure that you get a spread guide instead of just a single page guide.)
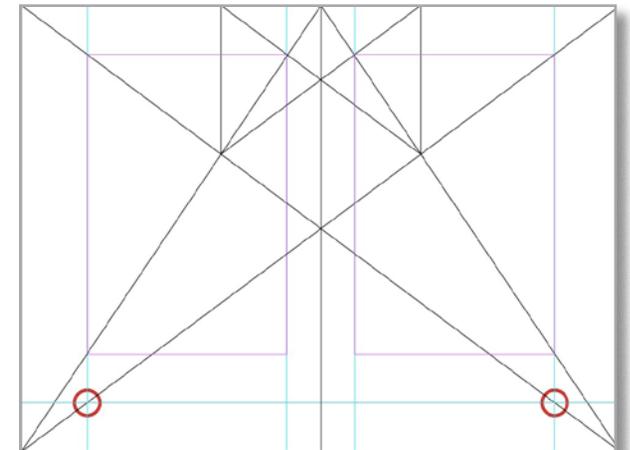
4 Adjust the Margins

Depending on your project, you may find that you need to adjust the margins so that they take up more or less than 50% of the page. For example, if your art director says you need to fit more information on each page. You can do so, while still maintaining a sense of the classical, by adjusting the margins following the diagonals, as demonstrated in the figure on the next page.
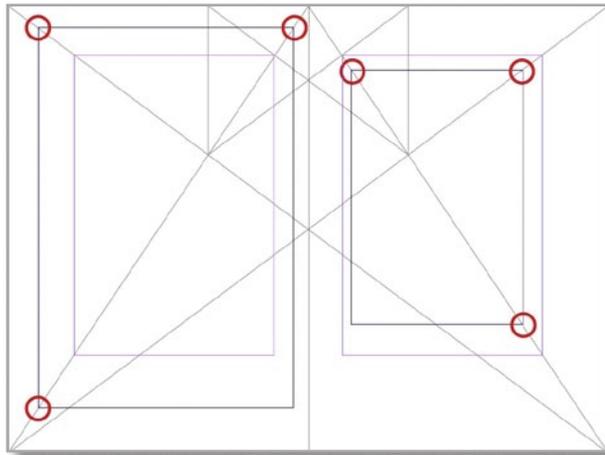
The left-hand page is an example of a content-heavy project. The right-hand page luxuriates in white space. Keep in mind that narrow margins can make your publication feel cheap; just look at any discount paperback.

5 And Now for Everything Else

How you'll fill this classical grid depends on your project, but there are some basic guidelines. For example, a classical serif typeface is the best complement, preferably an OpenType font that includes ligatures and other refinements. Point size and leading are also important, of course; the designer should determine these according to the page size and margin size.

Symmetry is also key. Move back from your layout and contemplate the grey (live) are in respect to the white margins. Do you get a sense of balance? If you don't, something needs to change.

■

Rufus Deuchler is a communication designer who has always been fascinated by technology that makes creation easier. He is an Adobe Certified Expert - Print Specialist and Adobe Cross-Media Guru since 2002. He consults and trains on Adobe software and workflows to the publishing industry. Rufus has authored interactive courses and magazines articles and is the webmaster of the first InDesign User Group in Italy. He has been the teacher of graphic design to U.S. students for more than ten years and was a software evangelist at Adobe Systems until November 2009.

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