Project 8-3: Designing the Basic Layout with CSS

You have done a lot of work in preparing this file for the use of CSS for both positioning and styling. As you'll see in this exercise, separating all of the content into discrete containers through the use of the div tag allows you to do some pretty magical things with your document. With all of the divs created and classes and IDs applied, you're now ready to begin the process of styling the page.

Step-by-Step

1. Click the New CSS Rule icon at the bottom of the CSS Styles panel.

Figure 8-21: *Click the flagged icon.*

2. The New CSS Rule dialog box opens. This should feel familiar to you from the previous unit.

3. Click the Tag option in the Selector Type dropdown menu.

4. Type **body** or choose body from the drop-down menu under **Selector Name**.

5. Make sure the **Rule Definition** dropdown menu is set to **caribe_styles.css**.

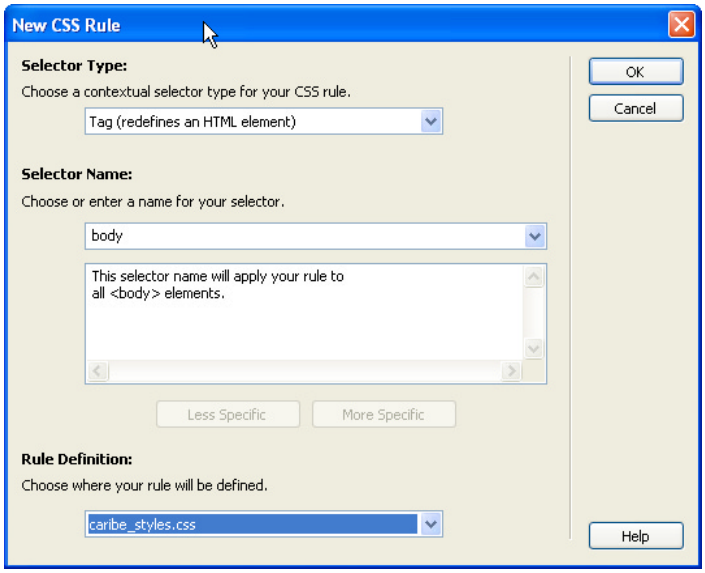

Figure 8-22: *Refer to the illustration above to ensure that all your settings are correct.*

6. Click OK.

7. The **CSS Rule Definition for body in caribe_styles.css** dialog box opens. Choose the Type category if it is not already selected by default.

8. From the **Font-family** drop-down menu, select the list that includes **Arial, Helvetica, sans serif**.

9. Next to the **Font-size** field, type **100** and choose **%** (percentage) as the unit of measurement.

10. Click the colour picker next to the Color field and select the colour black. The hexadecimal code for black will be placed in the field: **#000**. Note that Dreamweaver CS5 automatically uses the 'shorthand' method for writing the colour code, which reduces #000000 to #000.

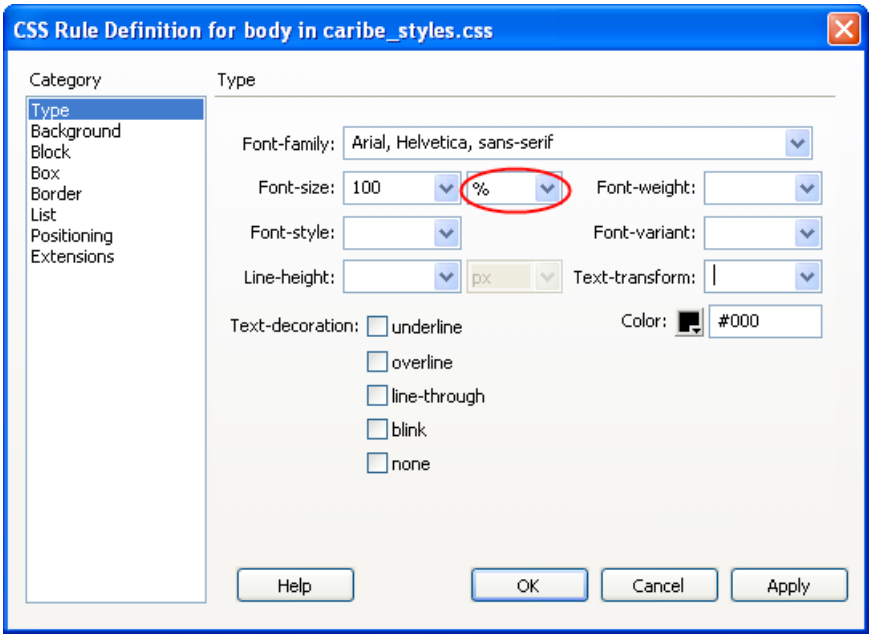

Figure 8-23: *When your dialog looks like this, click OK.*

Understanding Font Size Styles

You may be puzzled about what that figure 100% means. One of the goals of Web Standards is to make sure that pages are accessible to as many people as possible, including those with disabilities. Since many people have visual problems and almost everyone develops them as they grow older, it is a good idea to make sure that type is large enough for everyone to read.

Someone with impaired vision may have gone into the browser preferences and changed the default font size from 16 pixels to 18 pixels or higher. The 100% figure, therefore, means 100% of whatever the user has set in the browser preferences. In later exercises, you will scale other text such as **h1** and **p** from that user setting. By setting the body to 100% of the user's browser font size, all future font sizes will scale from that starting point. For example, if you later set the paragraph font-size to 85%, it will be 85% of the user's font preference, whether 12, 14, 16, 18 or more pixels.

CSS offers you a confusing number of units of measurement. In general, you'll want to stick to the best choices for online reading: percentages, ems, pixels or keywords. Except for print style sheets, you'll want to avoid points, inches, centimetres and other print-based units of measurement.

There are many debates about which unit of measurement is best on Web pages. You may want to read many of the lively discussions about this topic before you make your decision. For accessibility, many designers feel percentages and ems, both of which scale, are the best choices. On the Web, the em has come to mean the height of the font that is in use. You can read a comprehensive article about em units here:

www.communitymx.com/abstract.cfm?cid=C0410

Note: Because of browser bugs, you should not use ems on the body. You can, however, use ems on other elements after you set the body to 100%. Unless you are using something called an 'elastic layout' (which is beyond the scope of our discussion), percentage and em units can be used interchangeably. You will continue to use percentages in your style sheet.

Applying Background Colours and Images

11. Now select the **Background** category on the left of the dialog box.

12. Type **#012258** in the Background color field.

13. Next, select the **Box** category on the left of the dialog box.

14. Under both **Padding** and **Margin**, type 0 (zero). This will remove the margin or padding that the browser's style sheet places on the body and will set the coordinates of the page to 0 for X and Y.

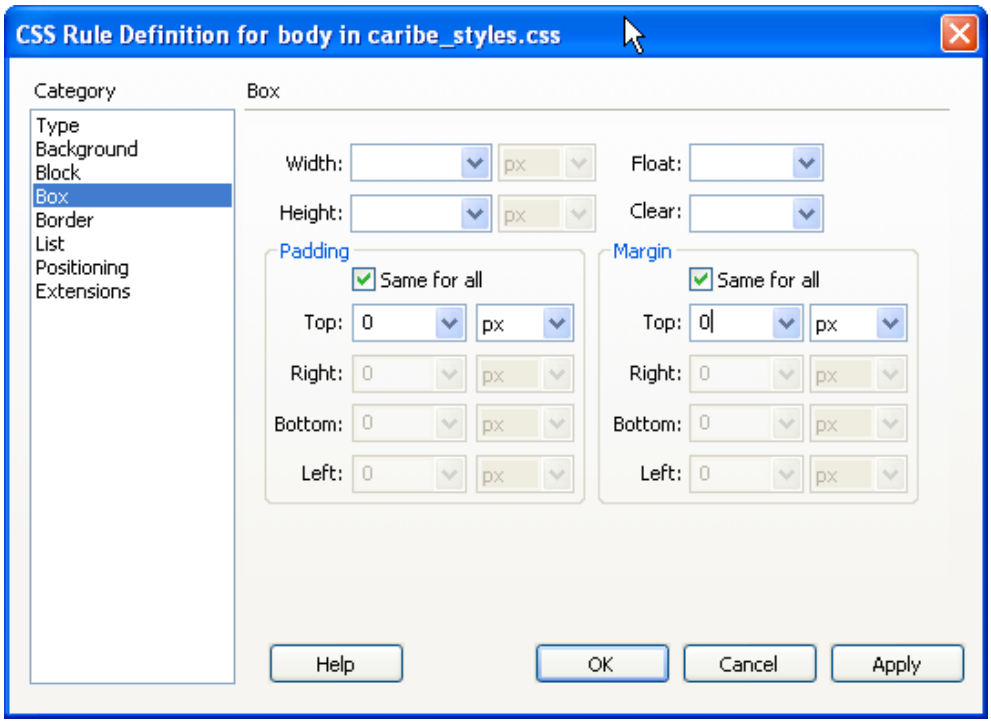

Figure 8-24: *Refer to the illustration above to ensure that all your settings are correct.*

15. Click OK to close the dialog box and apply the styles.

Compare your result with **Figure** 8-25.

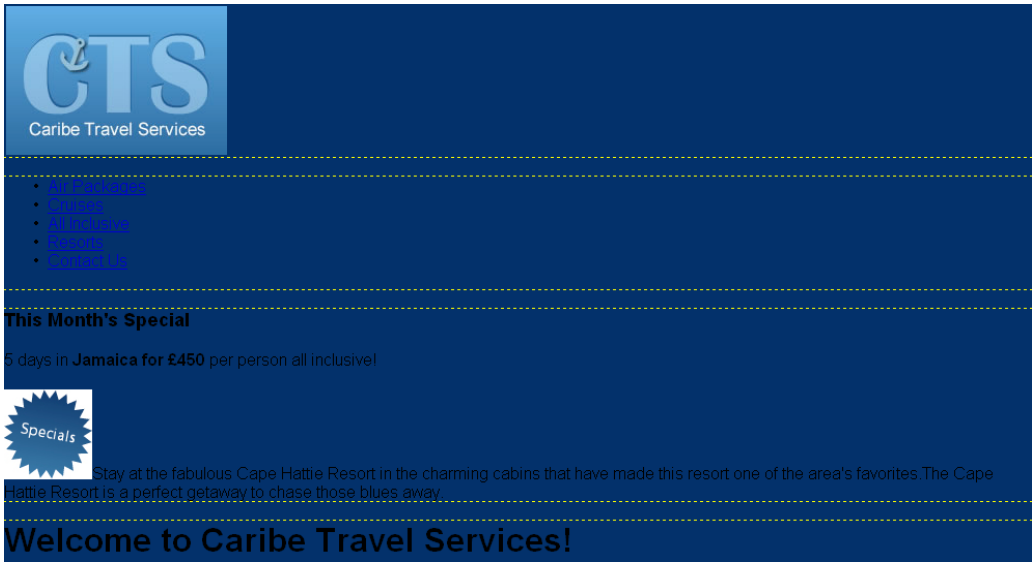

Figure 8-25: *You may be surprised at what you see. Remember, the body tag applies to the entire page. Until styles that are more specific are added to other areas of the page, you will see the body background colour. You'll change that in just a minute.*

If, at any time, you make a mistake and want to edit your rules, you can select one in the CSS Styles panel and then click the Pencil icon at the bottom. This will open the CSS rule dialog box you have just worked with, so that you can select a category on the left and make your changes.

Alternatively, you can use the 'Properties for' pane in the CSS Styles Panel to quickly modify or add new properties – see **Figure 8-26**.

Figure 8-26: *Notice the two buttons at the top of the CSS Styles panel:* ***All*** *and* ***Current.*** *You can view a list of all styles or just the one you have selected on the page.*

Creating and Positioning Page Containers

16. Click the New CSS Rule button at the bottom of the CSS Styles panel.

17. From the dropdown menu under 'Choose a contextual selector type for your CSS rule', select **ID (applies to only one HTML element)**.

18. Type **#container** in the Selector Name field.

    This name matches the name you gave the Div that wraps around all the other Divs and content in the page. When you write a selector with the same ID you gave a Div, the styles will automatically apply to it.

19. Make sure the **Rule Definition** dropdown menu is set to **caribe_styles.css**. (From now on, assume that you will always choose this option.)

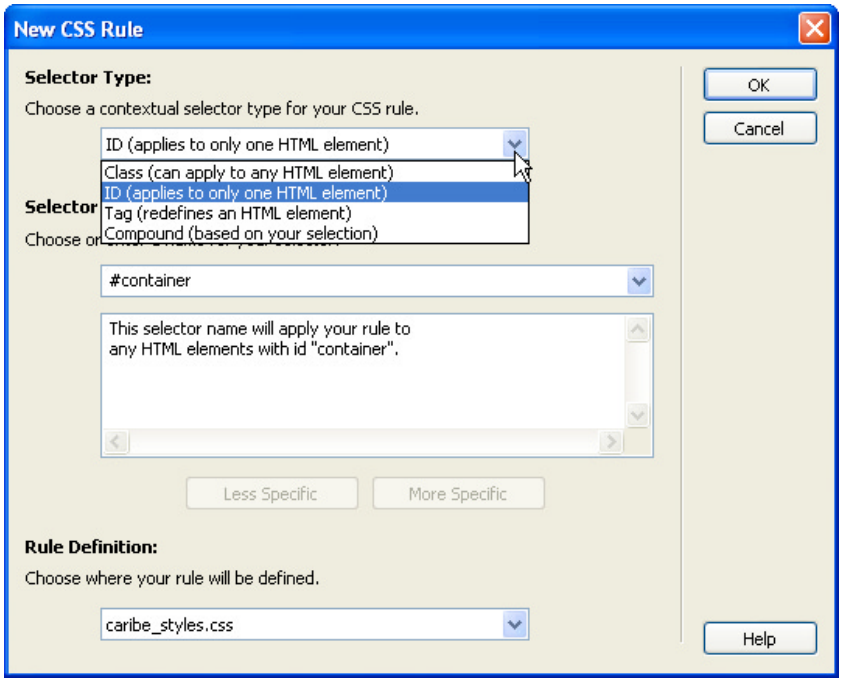

Figure 8-27: *Ensure your dialog looks like this before proceeding.*

20. Click OK. The CSS Rule dialog box opens.

21. Select the **Background color** category on the left.

22. From the colour swatch, select white (**#FFF**).

23. Click the **Browse** button next to the Background-image field.

24. Navigate to the images folder within the assets folder and select **container_bg.jpg**.

25. In the Background-repeat dropdown menu, select repeat-y. This will tile the 200 pixel wide image vertically down the container div, thus giving the illusion of a coloured left sidebar column. This is called 'faux column' technique.

26. Select the Box category on the left.

27. In the width field, type **960** and leave the default unit of measurement at **pixels**.

Determining the optimum width for a fixed-width layout keeps changing as monitors become more sophisticated and possess higher screen resolutions. The most common screen resolution used to be 800 by 600, but almost no one uses a resolution that low any more. The 'lowest common denominator' screen resolution you'll now encounter will probably be 1024 by 768. You won't set the width to 1024, however. You need to leave space for the 'browser chrome' and have an even dimension that will allow you to divide your layout into balanced proportions; thus, we arrive at 960 pixels. This trendy new design specification that many designers are using is the width of the Dreamweaver CSS Starter Pages that we will be discussing later in this unit. You can find many tools and grids for laying out designs of 960 pixels at **http://960.gs**.

28. Under Margin, deselect Same for all.

29. Type 0 (zero) for Top and Bottom margins.

30. Select **auto** from the dropdown menu next to Right and Left. The auto value will place equal amounts of space on either side of the layout, thus centring it.

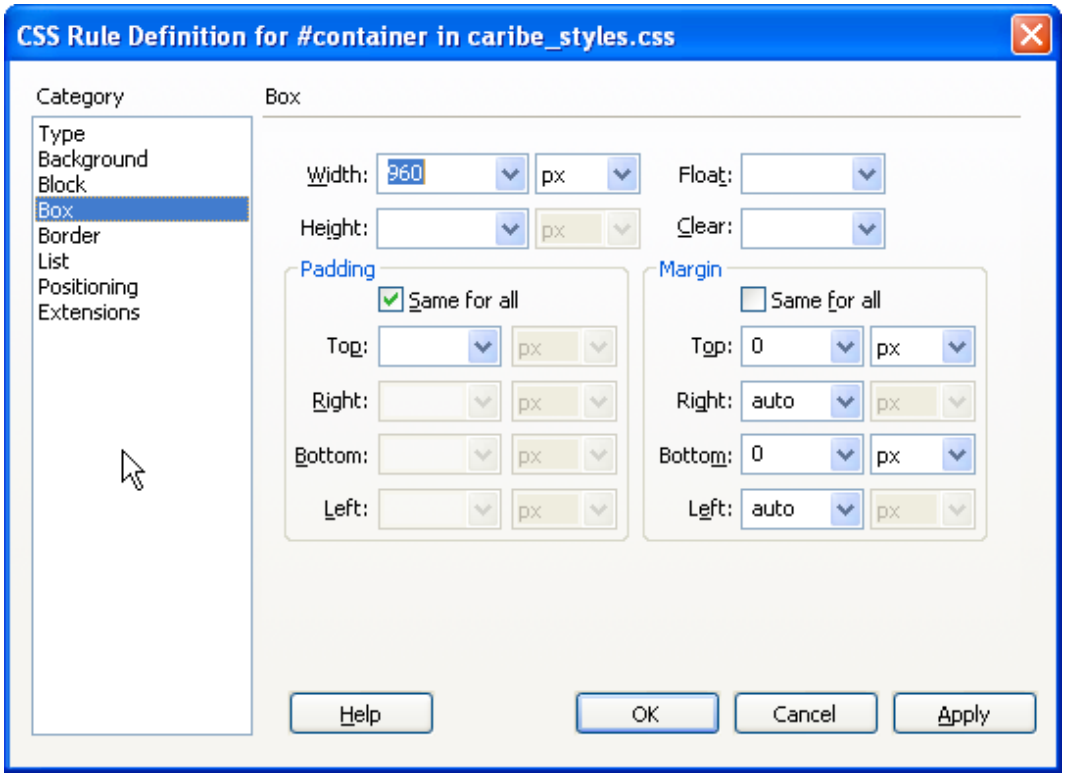

Figure 8-28: *This will allow a visitor whose screen resolution is set to 1024 by 768 to see all your content. (Subtracting some pixels allows room for the browser chrome.)*

31. Click OK.

Figure 8-29: *Your page should be easier to read as the background colour displays only in the part of the page outside the container div.*

32. Click the New Style icon at the bottom of the CSS Styles panel.

33. Under Selector Type, select the ID option.

34. In the Selector Name field, type **#sidebar**.

    Remember that this rule will target its styles at the division in the html page with the same id name.

35. Click OK. The New CSS Rule dialog box opens.

36. Select the Box category on the left.

37. Type **200** in the width field and leave the unit of measurement set to **pixels**.

38. Choose **Left** from the Float drop-down menu.

39. Deselect the **Same for all** checkbox under Padding.

40. Under Padding, type **10** (pixels) for Bottom.

Note: You may start to notice that you aren't adding padding to the left and right sides of the main Divs. Remember that padding adds to the width of an element. We are carefully figuring out the maths for the sidebar and mainContent Divs that will sit next to each other and that will need to add up to 960 pixels. Even a pixel more would cause trouble. To add breathing room between content in the Divs, we will instead add padding and/or margins to elements such as paragraphs and headings within the Divs.

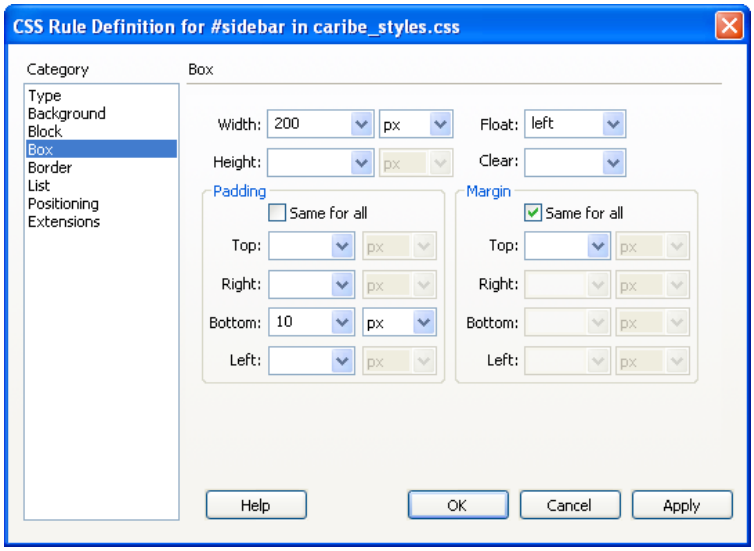

Figure 8-30: *Refer to this illustration before proceeding.*

41. Click OK. You should see your sidebar move into place as a left column. The content area still wraps around it, however. Let's style it now and change that.

42. Click the New Rule icon.

43. Select the ID option under Selector Type.

44. Type **#mainContent** in the Selector Name field.

45. Click OK.

46. Select the Box category on the left.

47. In the Width field, type **760** pixels. (200 for the sidebar will bring the total width to 960.)

48. From the menu next to Float, select **Left**.

49. Remove the **Same for all** checkmark from the settings for Padding.

50. Type the following values under Padding:

    Top: **10** (**pixels),** Right: **0** Bottom: **10 (pixels**), Left: **0**

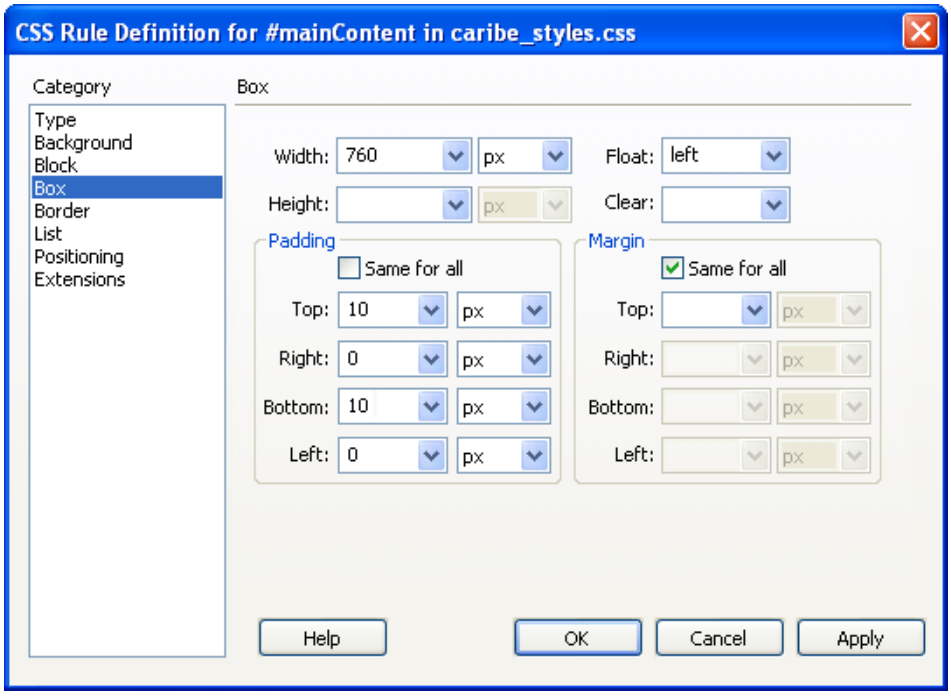

Figure 8-31: *Make sure your settings are as per the above.*

51. Click OK.

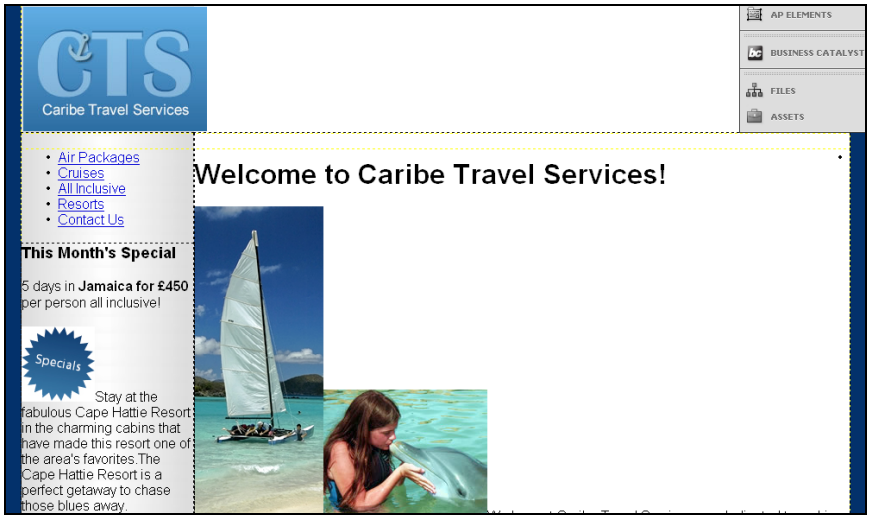

Figure 8-32: *You should now have two distinct columns that sit next to each other.*

Now it's time to style the header and footer.

52. Click the New Rule icon.
53. In the New CSS Rule dialog box, select the ID Selector Type.
54. Type **#header** in the Selector Name field and click OK.
55. Select the **Background** category on the left.
56. Click the **Browse** button next to the Background image field.
57. Navigate to the **header_bg.jpg** image in the Images folder in the Assets folder for the site.
58. Set the Background-repeat option to no-repeat.

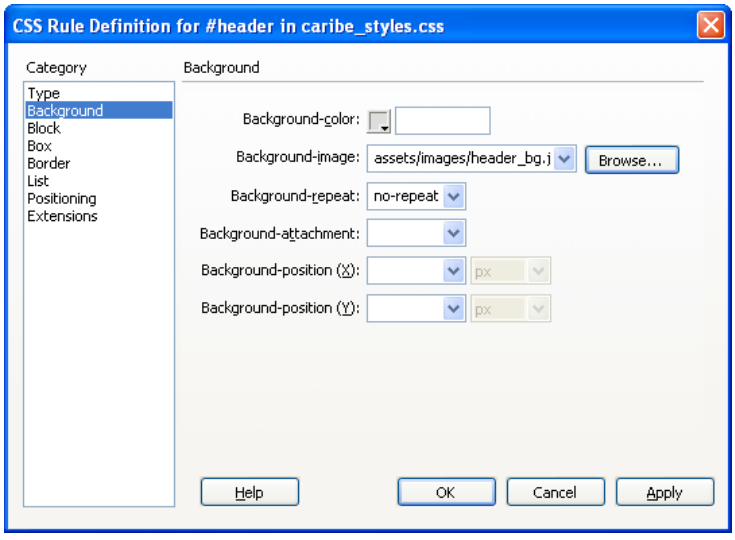

Figure 8-33*: The header background image is set to no-repeat.*

59. Click OK.

60. In the New CSS Rule dialog box, select the ID Selector Type.

61. Type **#footer** in the Selector Name field and click OK.

62. In the CSS Rule dialog box, select the Type category on the left.

63. Next to the Color field, select white from the Color swatch: **#FFF**.

64. Select the **Background** category on the left.

65. Next to Background-color, type **#3773A5**. This colour matches the bottom of the background image you are going to tile horizontally across the footer div. If a visitor increases the text size (and thus increases the height of the footer), when the image ends the background colour will seamlessly blend with it.

66. Click the **Browse** button next to the Background-image field.

67. Navigate to the **footer_bg.jpg** image in the images folder of the assets folder in your site.

68. In the Background-repeat drop-down menu, select **repeat-x**. This will tile the image horizontally across the footer.

69. Select the Box category on the left.

70. Deselect **Same for all** under Padding.

71. Type the following values under Padding:

    Top: **10** (**pixels),** Right: **0,** Bottom: **10 (pixels**), Left: **0**

72. From the drop-down menu next to Clear, select **both**.

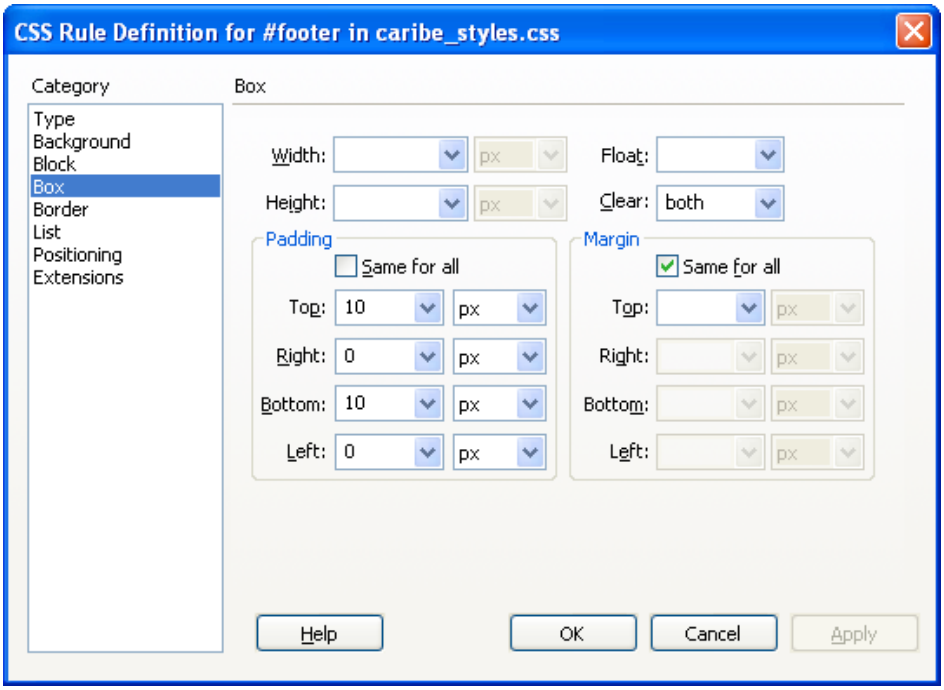

Figure 8-34: *Add the clear property with a value of* both *to the footer.*

You will remember from Unit 7 that floats need to be cleared so that content beneath them will not creep up if the floated column is longer than the main content column.

73. Select the Position category on the Left.

74. From the menu next to Position, select **relative**. This property and value gives IE6 the *hasLayou*t it needs to properly clear. (We will discuss *hasLayout* and the problems it causes later in this unit.)

75. Click OK.

The W3C states that margin and padding are written in this specific order: top, right, bottom and left. Many designers remember the order with this acronym: **TRBL** for trouble, which you will surely be in if you get the order wrong.

You now have the footer style added to your layout – see **Figure 8-35**.

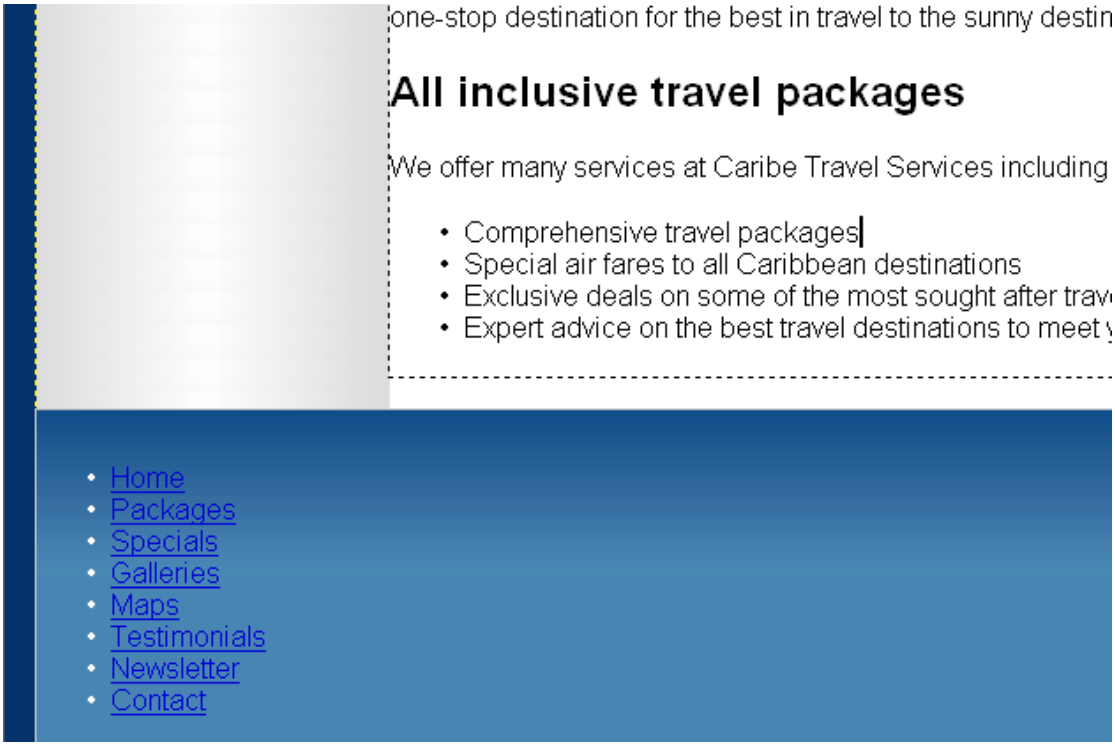

Figure 8-35: *The footer div has both a background image and colour.*

In the next exercise, you will add two custom classes to set up floats for images. Keep all files open as you continue designing the layout.