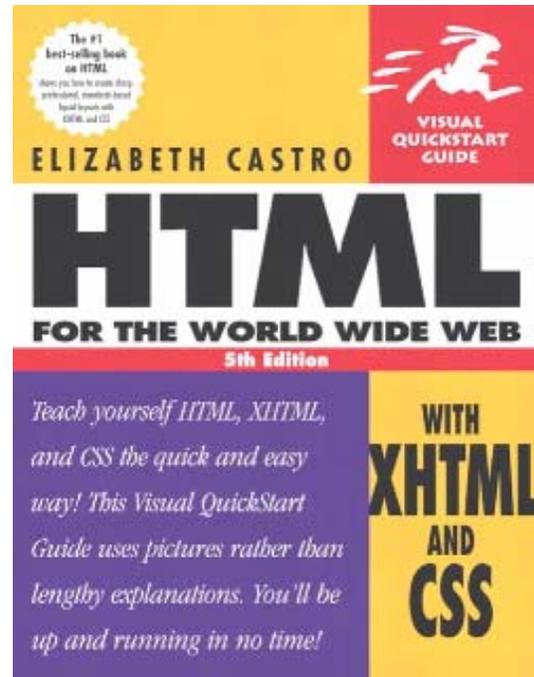*Book Review:*

HTML for the World Wide Web with XHTML and CSS: Visual QuickStart Guide, 5th Edition.

Reviewed by Jim Macak,

January 2006

During my presentation about building a web site "from scratch" at our December Double Click main meeting, I recommended a book about writing "code" for web sites. The subject of this book review is that very book, *HTML for the World Wide Web*. I hope to expand upon my brief comments at the meeting about the book and give you enough information about it for you to determine if you might have an interest in it and if it would fit your needs.

The full title of this volume is *HTML for the World Wide Web with XHTML and CSS: Visual QuickStart Guide, 5th Edition.* The author is Elizabeth Castro. As part of the Peachpit Press "Visual QuickStart Guide Series," *HTML for the World Wide Web* is written for readers who have an interest in learning how to write the under-lying code for web sites at a beginning or intermediate level. Visual QuickStart Guides are intended to take an easy, visual approach to teaching their subject, using pictures and concise text to guide the reader through the process of learning.

Foregoing long-winded passages, the illustrated straightforward commentary explains what you need to know in a logical fashion, building up your knowledge base from the most basic concepts to intermediate mastery of web page construction. Once you've worked through the book, it will serve as a reference guide in your future web page authoring. Well-indexed and with an intelligent chapter organization, *HTML for the World Wide Web* continues to serve as a reference for me.

Why bother to learn HTML coding? Certainly there are software programs available that offer a WYSIWYG interface that will "create" the HTML code that underlies a web page for you. However, there are many benefits if you learn HTML coding yourself: You'll save the purchase cost (sometimes quite high) of the HTML coding program. You'll never have to learn how to use the program. You'll never be limited by any program's features (or bugs!). You'll be assured that your HTML code is completely standards-compliant (assuming you've checked it yourself). You'll be intimately familiar with the code

that you've hand-written and be able to modify it and customize it with little effort to exactly match your requirements.

HTML for the World Wide Web presents easy to follow illustrated instructions that take you through the complete process of creating a web page, step-by-step. Starting with the first line of code for a web page, explanations for choices and options are clearly presented and the effect of the code can be easily seen on the same page of the book.

Happily, there is no flipping of pages between text and its associated picture in a Visual QuickStart Guide book. Each concept is covered on its own page with its own illustration. This method of presenting just one relatively simple concept per page and illustrating that concept makes learning HTML coding from this book not only painless but also fun and interesting.

Following is a sample page from the book:

Starting a New Paragraph

(X)HTML does not recognize the returns or other extra white space that you enter in your text editor. To start a new paragraph in your Web page, you use the p tag.

To begin a new paragraph:
1.   Type **<p>.**
2.   Type the contents of the new paragraph.
3.   Type **</p>** to end the paragraph.

Tips

•   In HTML, the closing </p> tag is optional. However, it is required both in XHTML and when applying styles to a paragraph. Therefore, I recommend always ending a paragraph with </p>.
•   You can use styles to format paragraphs with a particular font, size, or color (and more). For details, consult Chapter 10, *Formatting with Styles.*
•   To control the amount of space between lines, consult *Setting the Line Height* on page 164. To control the amount of space after a paragraph, consult *Adding Padding around an Element* on page 188 or *Setting the Margins around an Element* on page 189.
•   One quick and dirty (and valid) trick for adding extra space between paragraphs is to type ** ** (a non-breaking space) between each additional p element. Better yet, use CSS *(see pages 188–189).*
•   You can align the text in the paragraph by typing `align="direction"` in the opening p tag, where *direction* is left, right, center, or justify. But note that the align attribute has been deprecated in favor of style sheets *(see page 171).*

Figure 3.12 *Enclose each paragraph in opening and closing p tags. If you don't close them (which is perfectly legal in HTML but not XHTML), styles won't be applied properly.*

Figure 3.13 *The amount of space inserted by default with a p tag depends on the size of the text surrounding it.*

This 5th edition of *HTML for the World Wide Web* covers not only the web-coding standard of the past few years (HTML 4) but also the new standard of xhtml. Furthermore, the book thoroughly presents CSS (Cascading Style Sheets), the accepted method of designing and coding the layout of modern web pages. Thus, what it strives to teach you is quite up-to-date.

The one place the book is a bit dated is in its references to web browsers. This is under-standable, given the rapid development and introduction of new web browsers over the past few years. Although new browsers like Safari and Firefox, etc., are not covered in the book, this is not much of a problem because the book teaches coding that is com-pliant with web standards, and this matches perfectly with the new browsers that comply with web standards much better than the previous generation of web browsers.

HTML for the World Wide Web doesn't require that you be a programming genius to learn web coding, yet it doesn't treat you like a "dummy" either. You'll have to put a bit of effort into the learning process, but,

as I wrote above, with this book, learning to produce a web page can be a stimulating task rather than a boring or tiresome one. If there's only space for one book about the basics of web page coding on your bookshelf, this is the one to occupy that space.

Title: *HTML for the World Wide Web with XHTML and CSS: Visual QuickStart Guide, 5th Edition.*
Author: Elizabeth Castro.
Publisher: Peachpit Press
ISBN: 0321130073

List price: $21.99. (The cost is only $15.39 if you register with Peachpit Press and order directly from them on their web site.)
<http://www.peachpit.com/title/0321130073>

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