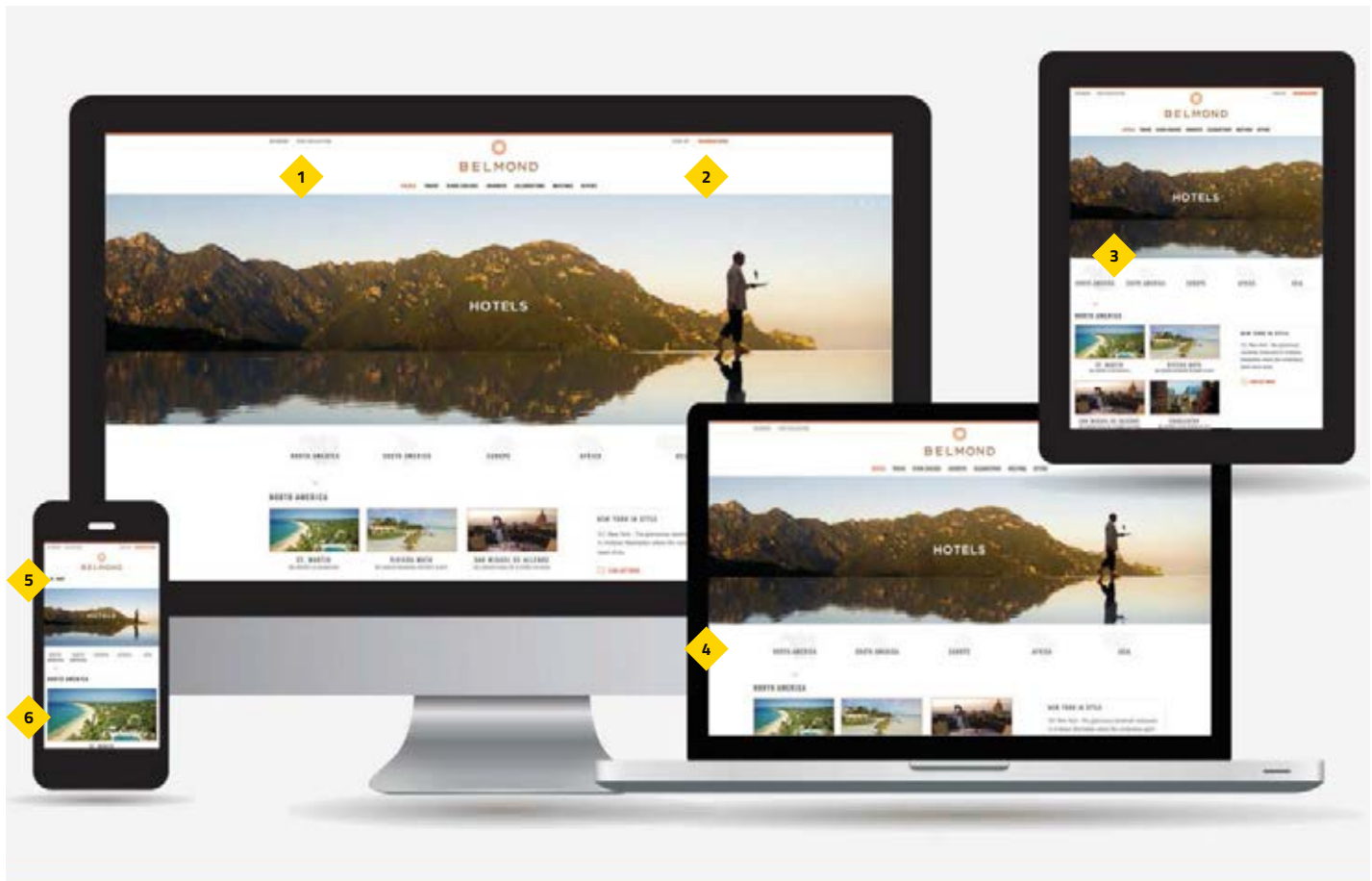


*HOW WE BUILT

BELMOND.COM

How Nevado brought updated responsive technologies and a clean new brand-forward approach to the site it first built in 2012



BRIEF

When Orient-Express Hotels introduced its new brand, Belmond, Nevado worked with the leisure company's in-house marketing team to implement a new brand-forward online approach, including revising the digital architecture and unifying 45 individual product sites.

CLOSE UP

(1) The ever-present navigation offers access to Belmond's worldwide collection of hotels, trains and river cruises in just one click, on any device. (2) Key calls to action – including the newsletter and reservations layer – feature in a prominent place, highlighted in the brand's strongest accent colour 'Orange Flare'. (3) The excellent, responsive slideshow plugin Flexslider is used along with rloadr to ensure optimised images are served to the correct device. There's an option to display short

captions, which can be a great story-telling device. (4) Responsive and interactive regional navigation is used to guide the user around the 'Hotels' page, scaling graphics and adjusting fonts to fit the space. (5) Mobile navigation is stored away behind the hamburger icon to make use of the viewable space. Full width, clickable menu items make this a breeze to use. (6) The responsive template stacks large, clickable imagery for mobile, bringing related offers alongside for desktop users.

**JAMES
SCULLY**



James is Nevado's key account manager and creative director. He led the team responsible for the creative side of the site

**MATT
WILLIAMS**



Matt is Nevado's senior interactive designer. He worked with James as part of the creative team on this project

**ANDY
WOOD**



Andy looks after digital strategy for Nevado, ensuring the solution meets the client's business objectives

> Belmond is a global collection of hotels and travel adventures in some of the world's most inspiring destinations. As part of a new strategy and branding initiative, it worked with the consultancy responsible for its original site – London-based Nevado – to help redevelop its company's entire online portfolio. This time around, the project included a refresh of the corporate site, 45 product sites, booking engines, numerous language templates, intranet and extranet. We caught up with the pros at Nevado to find out how they tackled this mammoth task.

net: Why don't you introduce yourselves?

AW: Nevado is a digital consultancy and ventures operator. Some of our work is for clients like Belmond, but we also run several online projects of our own. We like to think that being our own clients (on our ventures) makes us more understanding towards our consulting clients. Four of us founded the company in 2006 and we've grown to 20 staff.

net: This isn't the first time you've worked on Belmond's site, is it?

JS: We've got an ongoing relationship with this client, and this is actually the third time we've redesigned its main brand site. Normally redesigns are for modernisation, but this one was a bit different. The client had a new brand strategy and naming convention which not only resulted in a new brand name (Belmond) but a new brand architecture that pulls together all of its product brands.

net: What's it like revisiting a site you've worked on before? Is it liberating, or does it make it difficult to be critical?

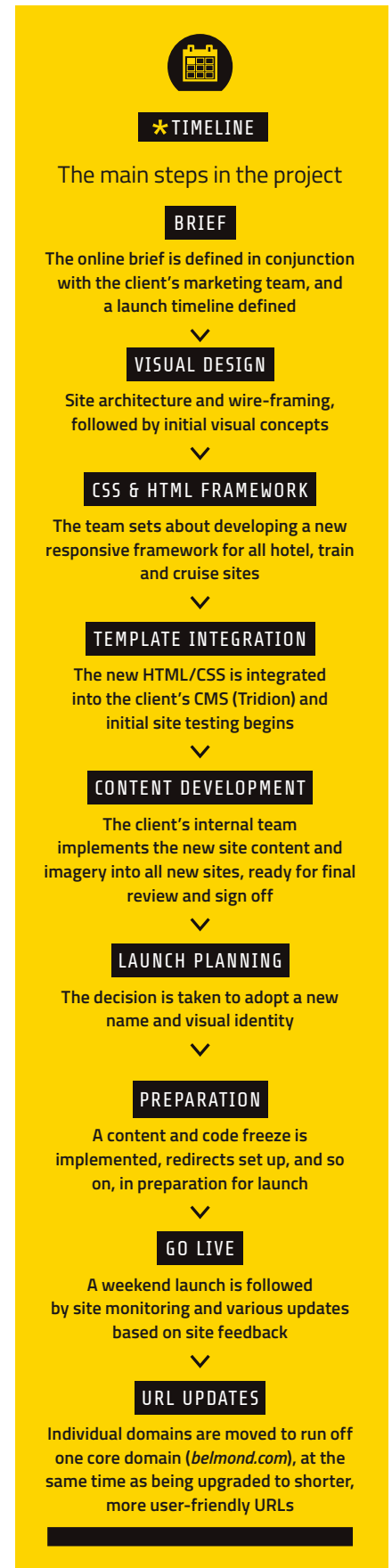
AW: It depends on the objectives and how things have moved along, technically, in the interim. The new strategy was a big driver of the look and architecture of the new site, but it was also an opportunity to evolve some functionality. The previous site was built when responsive design was really starting to kick off. Running it for two years gave us enough time to reflect on what could be done more elegantly – for example, using analytics data to understand user behaviour more fully and optimising the UI accordingly.

net: How has Belmond's business changed since your initial site launched?

AW: The new marketing strategy meant major changes in the presentation of the product collection. Belmond consciously chose to move from a soft master brand in which each product had a distinct identity, to a brand-forward convention in both naming and identity. So, the famous Hotel Cipriani went from being Hotel Cipriani to Belmond Hotel Cipriani, and introduced a new visual identity. This had a big impact on how the products were pulled together online. It moved from having multiple product sites on different domains to a single site on the *Belmond.com* domain.

net: How did you use colour in the new site design?

MW: The new visual identity included some strong accent colours alongside a set of more subtle tones. The strongest brand



1 Hand-drawn sketches on a whiteboard showing a site map with categories like 'HOTELS', 'ASIA', 'NORTH AM', 'SOUTH AM', 'EUROPE', 'RESTAURANT', and 'S NIAHTS IN BRAZIL'. A flowchart below shows a process from 'Traffic' to 'Book Now'.

2 A wireframe of a 'BELMOND IS A COLLECTION OF ICONIC HOTELS, TRAINS AND RIVER CRUISES WORLDWIDE' page, listing various travel options across different regions.

3 A wireframe of a homepage featuring a large image of a hotel entrance and a grid of smaller images representing different travel experiences.

4 The final website homepage with a large hero image of a pagoda at night. The text 'DISCOVER OUR WORLD' is prominent. Navigation buttons include 'BOOK NOW', 'EXPERIENCE', and 'SIGN UP'. Promotional banners for 'SAVE 20%', 'ICONIC TRAINS', and 'NEWS & OFFERS' are visible.

5 A 'JOURNEYS IN...' section with a list of regions: AFRICA, ASIA, BRAZIL, EUROPE, PERU, and MAKE AN ENQUIRY. Below it is a 'DISCOVER BOTSWANA WITH BELMOND' section featuring a photo of a man and text about the Okavango Delta.

*** EVOLUTION**

A look at the sketches, wireframes and discarded ideas that led to the final design

(1) Scoping of the site started with pen and paper, mapping out the key changes that needed to be put into place for the new brand. (2) With brand and product menus now sharing the same space, getting the IA correct was of utmost importance. (3) Different options were explored for the 'Hotels' page before a decision was made to use an image-based directory. (4) A highly visual approach was favoured for the homepage, providing an opportunity to show off the image library. As the build progressed, regionalised, prominent calls to action were added. (5) The strongest brand colour, 'Orange Flare' was added in sparingly throughout to highlight key calls to action.

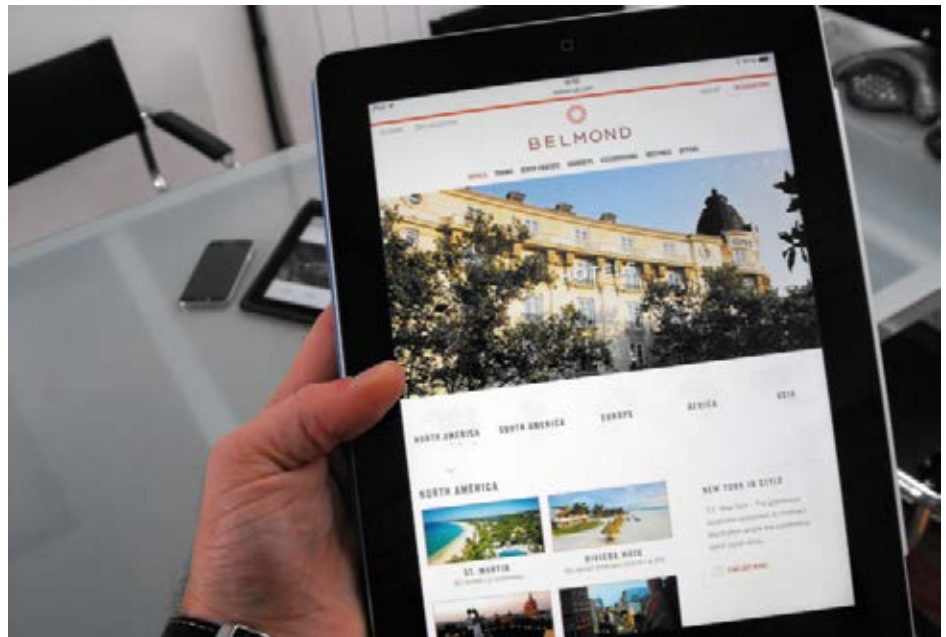
► colour, 'Orange Flare', was used sparingly to highlight key calls to action, with subtle greys sectioning out other content areas. The header needed to be clearly separated from the main content area as this had to house the ever-present navigation bar. Belmond has a fantastic image library with the photography running the show on most pages, so colour needed to be kept simple but precise.

net: What about typography – did you make any clever decisions here?

MW: The new visual identity dictated various weights of Trade Gothic for body copy. We kept the online selection to a minimum, with Trade Gothic Condensed Bold 20 being used for headings and a regular weight, Trade Gothic Roman – for the body font, along with a bold version for highlights. Minimising the number of font variations helped reduce page load time. The font files are self-hosted on the site where possible, eliminating the need for lots of third party plugins, which can also hinder page load.

net: What was your experience of making the site responsive?

AW: It's a wonderful thing to know that a site you build is going to be accessible on as many devices as possible. However with such a diverse range of tablets and phones on the market, there are always those more stubborn, lesser-known device types that can be unpredictable. We have a good test bed within the office to monitor sites across the board – there are mobiles, tablets and laptops running virtual machines with browsers old and new. This is topped off with our browser stack account, which helps pick up many other devices out there.



Different devices A significant part of the redesign involved ensuring the site was fully responsive. Here is the Belmond.com 'Hotels' page, displaying comfortably on an iPad in portrait orientation

net: How did you manage the need to change the scale of the site inside browser windows?

MW: The bare bones of the responsive template run on a set of the most common media query breakpoints. These are a good starting point, but we needed to consider all of those devices with dimensions in-between. To cater for devices at lower widths, the site makes use of percentage-based columns until there is sufficient space to display a centred, fixed-width site. In places (for example, for the main homepage caption), the site also takes into account the height of a device screen, manipulating content on that basis.

The site's flexibility doesn't just stop at screen size, but also considers the user's screen resolution, device type, bandwidth and region. It employs the excellent plugin `riloadr`, which serves the relevant sized imagery to the correct device. The graphics have been designed to cater for hi-res screens, ensuring the site remains

sharp in all situations, and providing fallbacks for those older browsers that can't cope with recent techniques.

net: How did you handle touch interactions on the site?

MW: As a general rule, hit areas are kept large for buttons on touch devices, and hover states kept to a minimum. Blocked elements make use of JavaScript, so the whole element is clickable. The product homepages contain a wonderful scaling montage. On a desktop monitor, a caption indicating link destination is revealed on hover. For touchscreen devices, these captions remain visible, and the whole tile is clickable. Clear, categorised, tabbed information – as used for the day-by-day itineraries on the river cruise detail pages – reduces the need for extensive scrolling on smaller screens.

One big change was the primary navigation. On mobile, the display has been replaced by a hamburger menu. Loosely based on Osvaldas Valutis' responsive drop-down HTML structure (netm.ag/valutis-263), touch interaction is enhanced with the use of DACHCOM's excellent `doubleTapToGo.js` plugin, providing one-touch interaction of navigation items for touchscreen devices, and working as a mouse-driven hover menu for desktop monitors. ■



Evolving designs Site architecture decisions began with pen and paper sketches exploring different options. Here you can see how the designs began to evolve

► **Next month:** How Zaraguza created Heineken City Symphony