

The independent theme developer's

FIELD GUIDE

to modern WordPress



HI, I'M
MICHELLE.

I **Design**
& **Build**
DIGITAL
INTERFACES



Rockstar at saying stuff.
Adorable badass.
Carefully curated
spontaneity.
Meticulously organized
chaos.
The Anxious Alicorn.

The Hero's Journey

Intro graphic background

The hero's journey

- 12 stages of transformation in 3 acts
- Our hero embraces a disruption, faces challenges, and comes out changed



The Ordinary World

The life of the independent theme
developer

Ordinary World graphic background

The independent theme developer

- Client Service
- Creation and Building
- Support
- Consulting
- HR, Finance, Marketing, Janitorial

The independent theme developer

- Fine-tuned workflows
- A custom suite of tools
- Knows what to do
- Knows where to get help

Ordinary World graphic background

Call to Adventure

The release of the Block Editor, WP5.0 (Dec 2018)

The release of Full Site Editing, WP5.8 (July 2021)

Call To Adventure graphic background

The call

As a service provider:

- WYSIWYG interface
- Powerful content layout

As a developer:

- Faster page builds
- Easily register global styles
- More unified theming framework

Call To Adventure graphic background

The inevitable journey

Call To Adventure graphic background

Refusal of the Call

Resistance to adopting new tooling
and workflows

Refusal of the call graphic background

The resistance

As a service provider:

- Glitchy interactions
- Missing features
- More support requests
- Too many options

As a developer:

- Inconsistent documentation
- New development tools and language
- Missing or obscured functionality
- Constant changes

Refusal of the call graphic background

The impossible journey

Refusal of the call graphic background

Meeting the Mentor

Finding the support you need to
move forward

Meeting the Mentor graphic background

Finding support

- social & slack communities
- tutorials & talks
- developer.wordpress.org
- learn.wordpress.org/
- fullsiteediting.com

Managing expectations

- changes, support, & updates
- learning new skills through paid projects
- take the journey at your own pace

Crossing the Threshold

Get your bearings in the new editor interface

Crossing the Threshold graphic background

Navigate the post editor

- Block & Pattern Inserter
- Block Settings
- Post Settings
- Block Toolbar
- Screen Options
- Document Overview

Several slides with screenshots of each (6.3+)

Create & copy blocks within the editor

- Visual Editor vs Code Editor
- Block locking

Several slides with screenshots of each (6.3+)

Navigate the FSE Editor

- View, Edit & Create Templates
- View, Edit & Create Synced & Unsynced Patterns (6.3+)
- View & Edit Styles
- Navigation & Pages (6.3+)

Several slides with screenshots of each (6.3+)

Benefits & Obstacles

Benefits

- Understand the new interface from a client perspective
- Understand the options available to us as a developer

Obstacles

- Not many

Change Level: Low
Time Level: Medium

“Stats page” design

Tests, Allies, Enemies

Adapting your PHP/Classic Theme

Tests Allies Enemies graphic background

Block content support in traditional themes

• basic theme supports

- <https://developer.wordpress.org/block-editor/how-to-guides/themes/theme-support/>
- least amount of work, but also less modern/recommended

Block content support in traditional themes

adding theme.json

- <https://developer.wordpress.org/block-editor/how-to-guides/themes/theme-json/>
- settings - replaces `add_theme_support` for enable/disable of features, theme presets (color/spacing/fonts/sizing/etc), adds block-level controls
 - <https://fullsiteediting.com/lessons/remove-settings-in-theme-json/>
- styles - appearance of elements, blocks, and variations
 - <https://fullsiteediting.com/lessons/global-styles/>
- custom - any custom variables you need

Possibly several slides with screenshots, or just one as a synopsis

Block content support in traditional themes

use css variables

- use the theme.json variables in your css as much as possible
 - `--wp--preset--{category}--{slug}`
 - `--wp--custom--{nested}--{object-keys}`
- variables/settings are automatically loaded in both editor and frontend
- `enqueue_block_assets` to show your css in the editor and frontend

Screenshots

Benefits & Obstacles

Benefits

- Opens up the block editor to client & developer use
- Provide branding control via theme styles and default controls (limiting options)

Change Level: Low
Time Level: Medium

Obstacles

- Setting up theme.json
- Reworking CSS to use variables

“Stats page” design

Approach the Innermost Cave

Block Editor development (without
Javascript)

Innermost cave graphic background

Expanded block options

- Block Patterns (in code)
- Block Styles
- PHP Block Templates
- PHP Block Locking

Probably several slides with screenshots of each

PHP Custom block tools

- ACF Custom Blocks (PHP)
- MB Blocks

Benefits & Obstacles

Benefits

- Additional customization options (bespoke needs)
- Additional controls and guided brand options (locking it down)

Obstacles

- Time to set up
- Learning new functions
- Block template PHP syntax

Change Level: Low

Time Level: Medium

“Stats page” design

The Ordeal

Building a Full Site Editing (FSE)
theme

Ordeal graphics background

Building with “block grammar”

- <https://fullsiteediting.com/lessons/block-grammar-basics/>
- <https://wordpress.org/plugins/create-block-theme/>

Expanding on theme.json

- register all custom patterns/templates for your theme
- theme style presets
- <https://fullsiteediting.com/lessons/global-styles/>

look into registering template parts vs patterns, has this changed in 6.3?

Templates & template parts

- <https://fullsiteediting.com/lessons/templates-and-template-parts/>
- <https://fullsiteediting.com/how-to-lock-blocks-and-templates>

PHP templates in FSE

- <https://fullsiteediting.com/lessons/how-to-use-php-templates-in-block-themes/>

Benefits & Obstacles

Benefits

- Fully take advantage of FSE

Obstacles

- Full rebuild
- Learning new, unsupported syntax
- Lack of error reporting (WSOD)

Change Level: High

Time Level: High

“Stats page” design

Reward

Becoming a FSE developer

Reward graphics background

The (Long) Road Back

Block Editor development (with
Javascript)

Road back graphics background

Expanding core with JS

- <https://developer.wordpress.org/block-editor/how-to-guides/javascript/js-build-setup/>
- Block Styles in JS
- Block Variations
- WordPress Scripts Package
 - <https://developer.wordpress.org/news/2023/07/beyond-block-styles-part-1-using-the-wordpress-scripts-package-with-themes/>

Screenshots (possibly several slides)

Benefits & Obstacles

Benefits

- Controls more seamlessly integrated with UI

Obstacles

- Familiarity with CLI
- Setting up build tools
- Package and dependency management
- JS syntax

Change Level: High

Time Level: High

“Stats page” design

Resurrection/Success

Building Custom Blocks

Resurrection graphics background

Custom Blocks

- <https://developer.wordpress.org/news/2023/02/static-vs-dynamic-blocks-whats-the-difference/>
- Static Blocks
 - Content is known when saving a post (in the editor)
 - <https://developer.wordpress.org/block-editor/how-to-guides/block-tutorial/writing-your-first-block-type/>
- Dynamic Blocks
 - Content is calculated when the post is rendered (PHP)
 - <https://developer.wordpress.org/block-editor/how-to-guides/block-tutorial/creating-dynamic-blocks/>

Possibly broken into two slides?

Benefits & Obstacles

Benefits

- Fully custom functionality
- Fully custom UI

Obstacles

- Lack of documentation (“wild west”)
- Setting up build tools
- React syntax

Change Level: High

Time Level: High

“Stats page” design

Return with the Elixir

A larger suite of tools

Elixir graphics background

The Hero

You are a hero every step of the way

[Back to hero graphics background](#)

QUESTIONS
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Here's how
to get in
touch:

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