

Kristi Bryden - Pattern Library

User Feedback : Front-End Developer

Initial Thoughts:

This library is off to a great start and I think the vision and direction are extremely clear. This is obviously in its very early stages of development, and as such, is a little difficult to use. But that will change of course as you continue to develop as well as make revisions to the library. I really enjoy the open-source aspect of this project, in that it is publicly available on GitHub. By making your Sass files (uncompressed CSS) available for use, you already have a working developer version of your library. For those less development inclined, they can simply just take the compressed CSS as is, which includes the default CSS rules for your HTML, and run with that. I think this is something you should keep in mind moving forward in development, and definitely call out on your website as well as GitHub Repo.

Testing Debrief:

I'm currently working on a new website and I thought that as a good test for your pattern library, I would attempt to use that as my CSS base. Long story short, the library needs more development before it can become easily usable. But again as mentioned, that will fall into place as you continue to flesh out the library itself. Based on what was available at the time, which was mostly just navigational rules, I was able to see where the project was going, which ultimately leverages classes placed into HTML elements. From there, the magic just happens. If only. But I think you're 100% on the right track with your approach.

As I was playing around with the available classes, I found myself having to make multiple tweaks to get my custom styles in order. This mostly involved just writing overrides for the CSS. I then realized that it would have been better to just have worked off of the Sass files, but my scenario I set for myself was to try and work with the compressed version only. Not exactly a great test scenario since I had a specific design vision for my site in mind, but hey, lesson learned. Moving forward, I will try my hand at the developer version of your library and see if that meets my needs better, which I imagine it will, since I like to tweak things into oblivion.

But what I learned from testing the library in its default state led me to speculate on your development process, for which I have recommendations.

Recommendations:

I am curious as to how exactly you are developing each piece. What does your workflow look like? Are you constructing them with display on your library website in mind? Or are you building them separately in a sandbox type of environment?

I might recommend doing the latter. That is, taking just raw HTML, just enough for the module you're building, and writing your CSS around that. The idea being, that if someone similarly had just raw HTML and they plugged in the default library, added the classes, what happens at that point?

If that's what you're already doing, then awesome. If not, maybe consider that. Or rather, consider the end user when they begin to use the library and how that all comes together as easily as possible.

I think this type of workflow is especially useful for the compressed CSS version. Just the plug and play version if you will. But it could also work great for the Developer (Sass) version, in that you can understand how best to code your variables and rules so custom changes become quick and easy.

Project Potential:

While working with this and preparing my feedback, I've been speculating on the potential for this project, which I think is enormous. It's certainly going to take a lot of work and revision, because you're essentially taking it upon yourself to develop something that makes other developer's workflows easier. That's a difficult target to hit.

But again, I can't say enough how awesome it is to have two versions of this library: A simple version and a developer version. I think this is a great approach that will appeal to wide variety of users. That being said, that makes your job even more difficult as you have to consider these audiences individually.

One of the coolest potential aspects of this project is that it is conducive to rapid, maybe even real-time prototyping. If one was working with the developer version of the library, changes to a site or application could theoretically be done in a conference type setting on the fly. Imagine a client's reaction to that. That's about as agile as agile gets.

Lastly, given that you're managing everything with classes, there's also the potential to introduce features with JavaScript. You can bind additional classes to HTML elements via event handlers that target your CSS classes, in addition to a number of things that I don't even know about I'm sure. But you could definitely do a lot of cool stuff with a pretty minimal JavaScript if it's just leveraging CSS class changes. Or at least I think so. JavaScript is never that easy lol.

Summary:

You're 100% heading in the right direction, and all I would suggest is how to optimize your development workflow in a way that's congruent with the goal of this library. You want to make this as easy as possible, which is certainly a challenge, so put yourself in the shoes of a developer adopting this library as best you can. Where are they in their process when they plug this in? There may be more than one scenario for that, but considering those use cases may help make your development easier.