USING ART + DESIGN TO SPARK IDEAS
FOR MORE INTERESTING MAP LAYOUTS

IT'S ALIVE!

NACIS 2026, Hyatt Regency, Milwaukee, WI

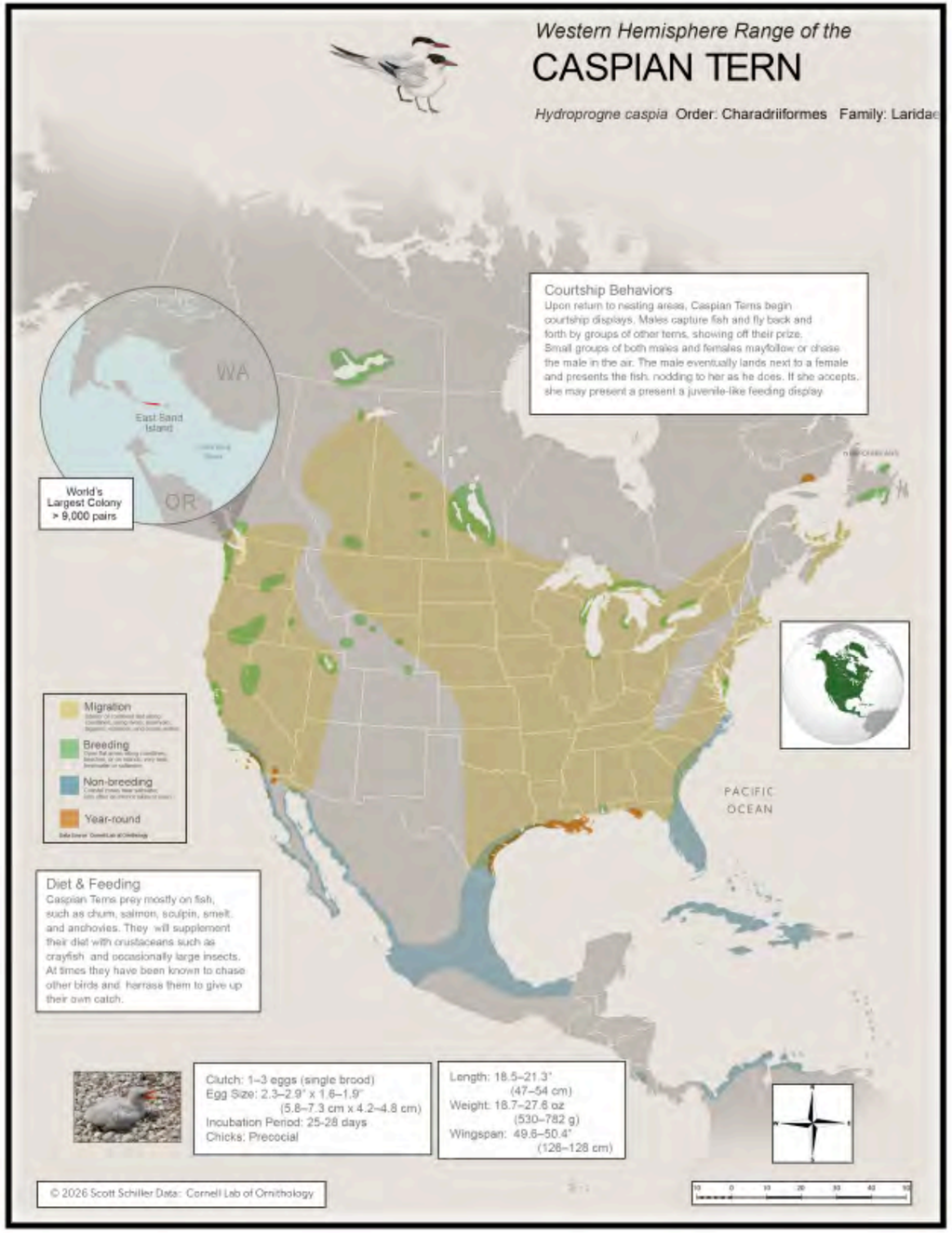


WHY DOES IT LOOK SO GOOD?



MANY PARTS OF A WHOLE

- Title
- Legend/Key
- Labels
- Descriptive text
- Annotations
- Graphics
- Inset and/or Locator map
- Scale Bar
- Compass Rose
- Metadata, i.e. author, source, copyright, credit
- Border or Neatline
- Graticules or Grid
- Date



WHAT TO AIM FOR

- ✓ Clear purpose
- ✓ Easy-to-follow hierarchy
- ✓ Simple colors
- ✓ Clean typography, readable text
- ✓ Balanced composition
- ✓ Eyes move around the page
- ✓ Sense of narration
- ✓ Arouses emotion

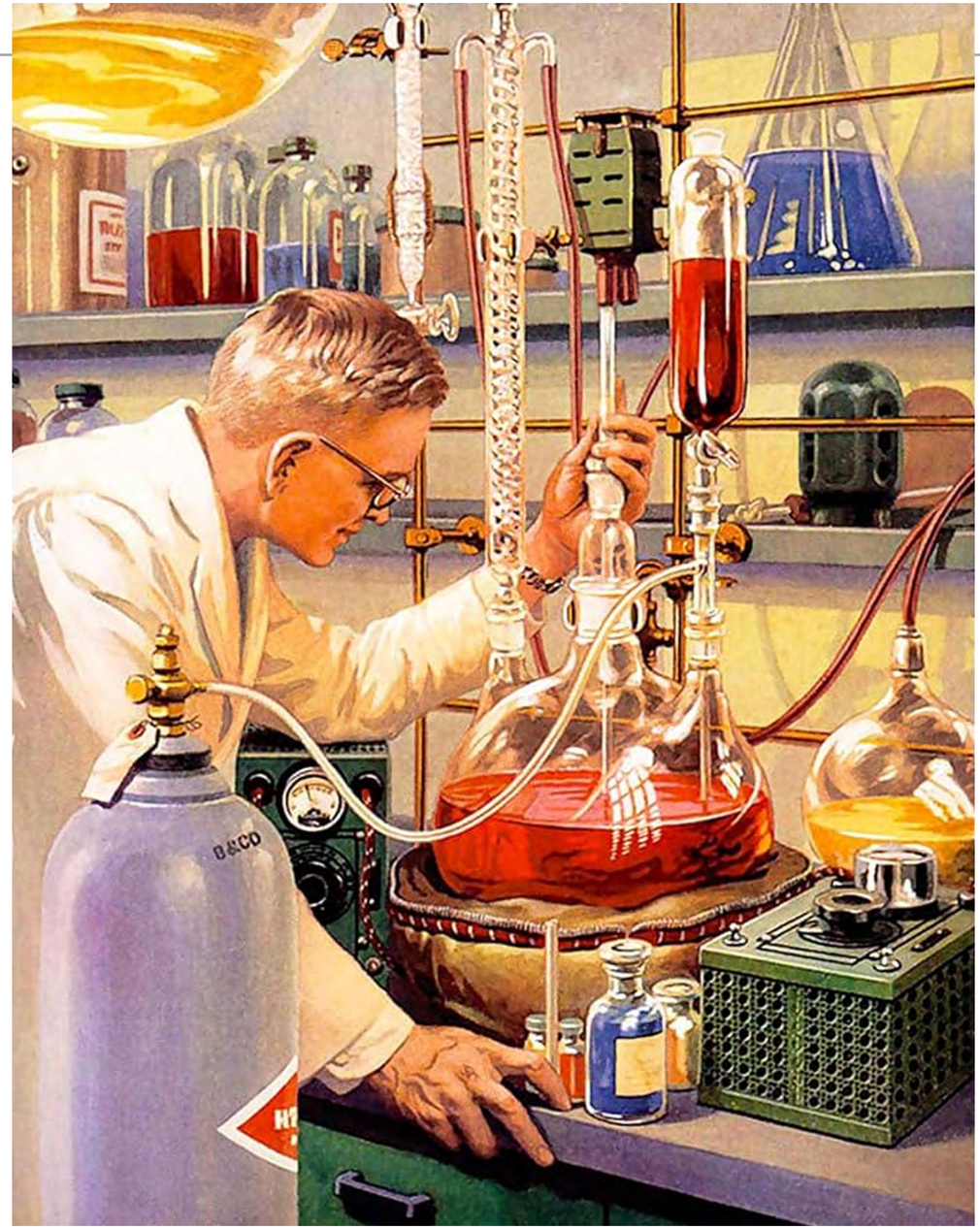


Sometimes our ideas come through bolts of lightning.
An explosion of information arrives in inspired moments.
In a way, these ‘aha!’ moments illuminate our way.

Rick Rubin, The Creative Act

EXPERIMENT, TEST, BUILD

- Be daring and adventurous.
- Break habits. Look for differences. Challenge convention.
- Widen your view. Mix things up to see what works best.
- Bring your own style and point of view to the layout.
- Tap into your intuition.





5 KEY WAYS TO ELEVATE YOUR MAP LAYOUTS:

- FONTS
- COLOR
- ARRANGEMENT
- ART
- GOLDEN RATIO

GIVE A VOICE TO YOUR MESSAGE

FONTS



CAPTURE THE MOOD OF YOUR MAP

- Shape the tone and clarity of the map’s message.
- Grab attention, quickly communicate the theme
- Match the font to the mood
- Add another level of interest



TYPOGRAPHIC TIERS

- Size matters:
  - ✓ Big for title
  - ✓ Medium for labels
  - ✓ Small for descriptive text
- Organize text into tiers for easy reading and understanding
- Vary font weights, styles and color for hierarchy



CREATE A MOOD

COLOR



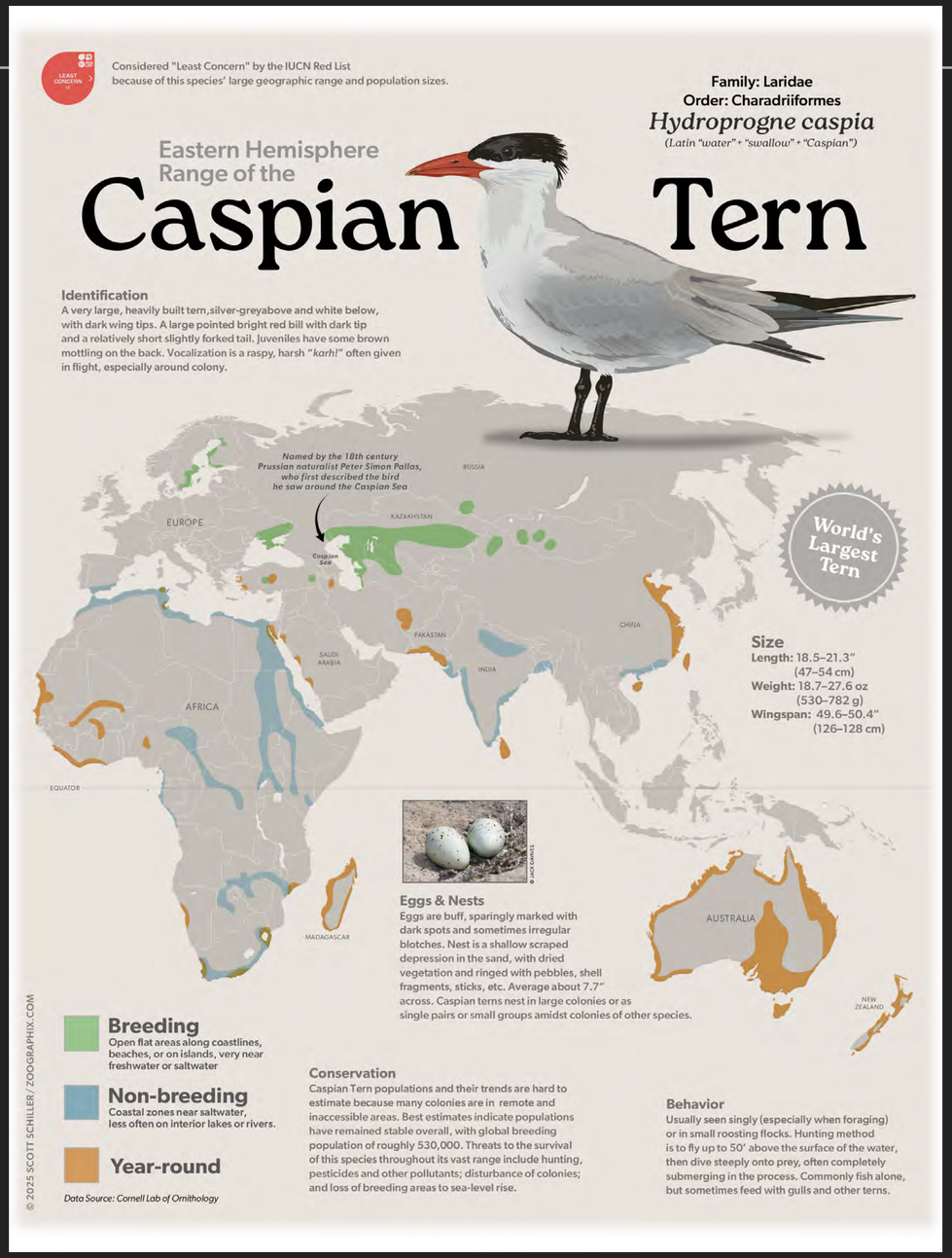
USING COLORS EFFECTIVELY

- Hue, contrast and value directs attention, and identifies, what matters most.
- Use bold or distinct colors for key elements, and softer tones for the rest.
- Try novel or unexpected combinations



THE POWER OF COLOR

- Echo colors in the map and the art
- Use restraint to avoid distraction or confusion
- Understand “psy-color-gy” to influence how the viewer feels or responds to the information



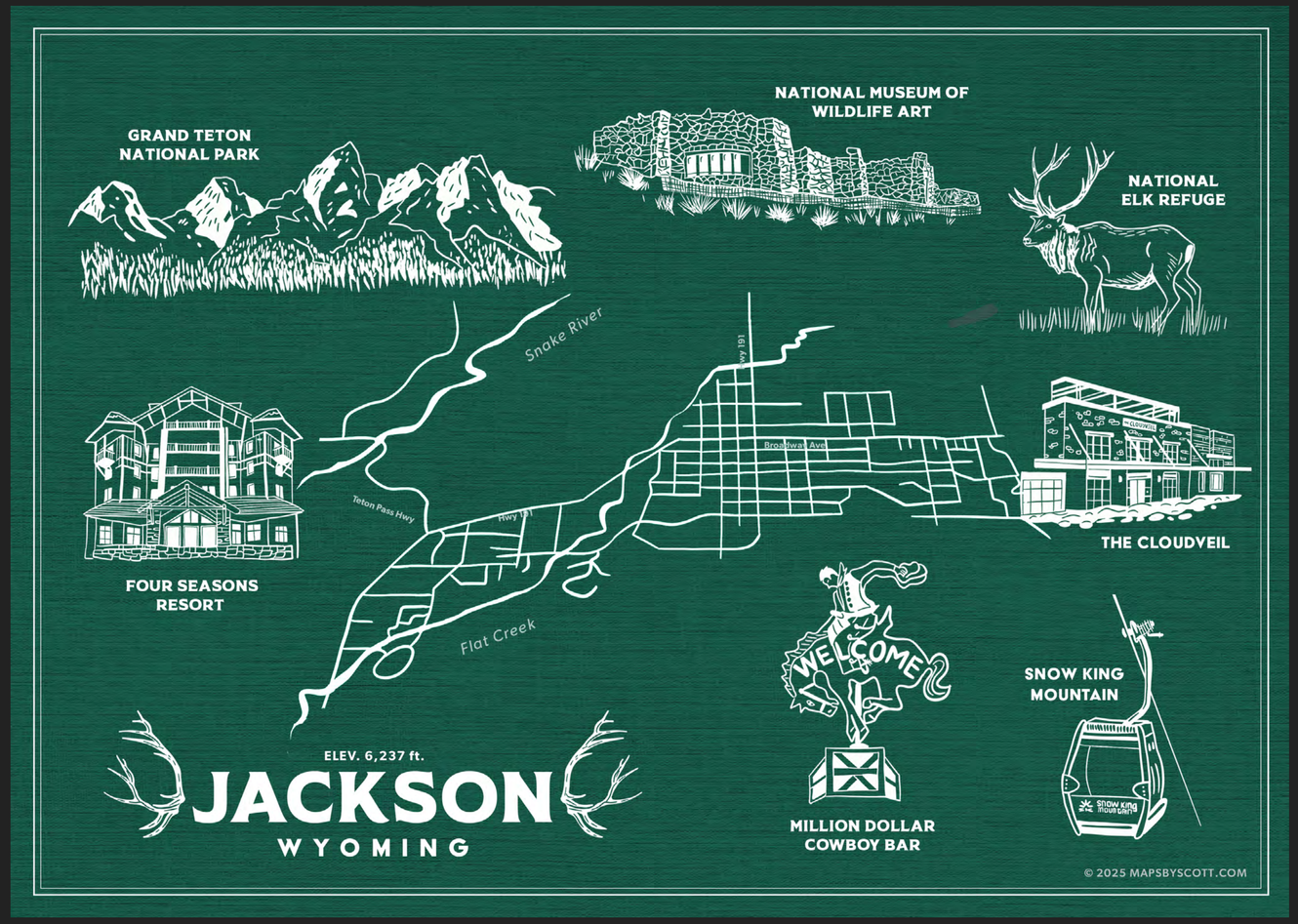
GIVE IT ROOM TO BREATHE

ARRANGEMENT



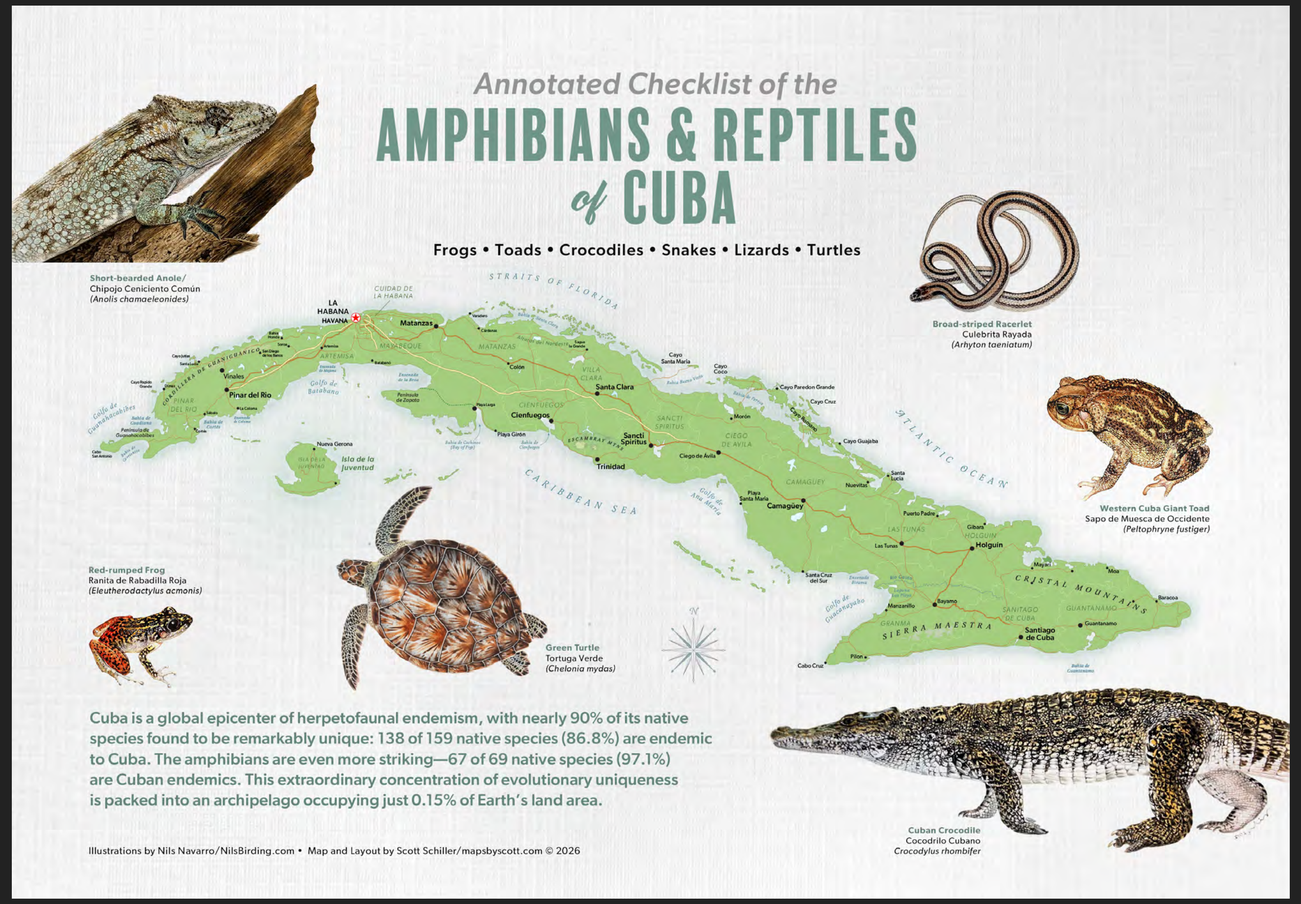
ROOM TO BREATHE

- Be thoughtful about placement of elements. Randomness can raise questions or confusion.
- Size and proportion keeps the layout visually interesting and balanced
- No boxes, no sharp divisions



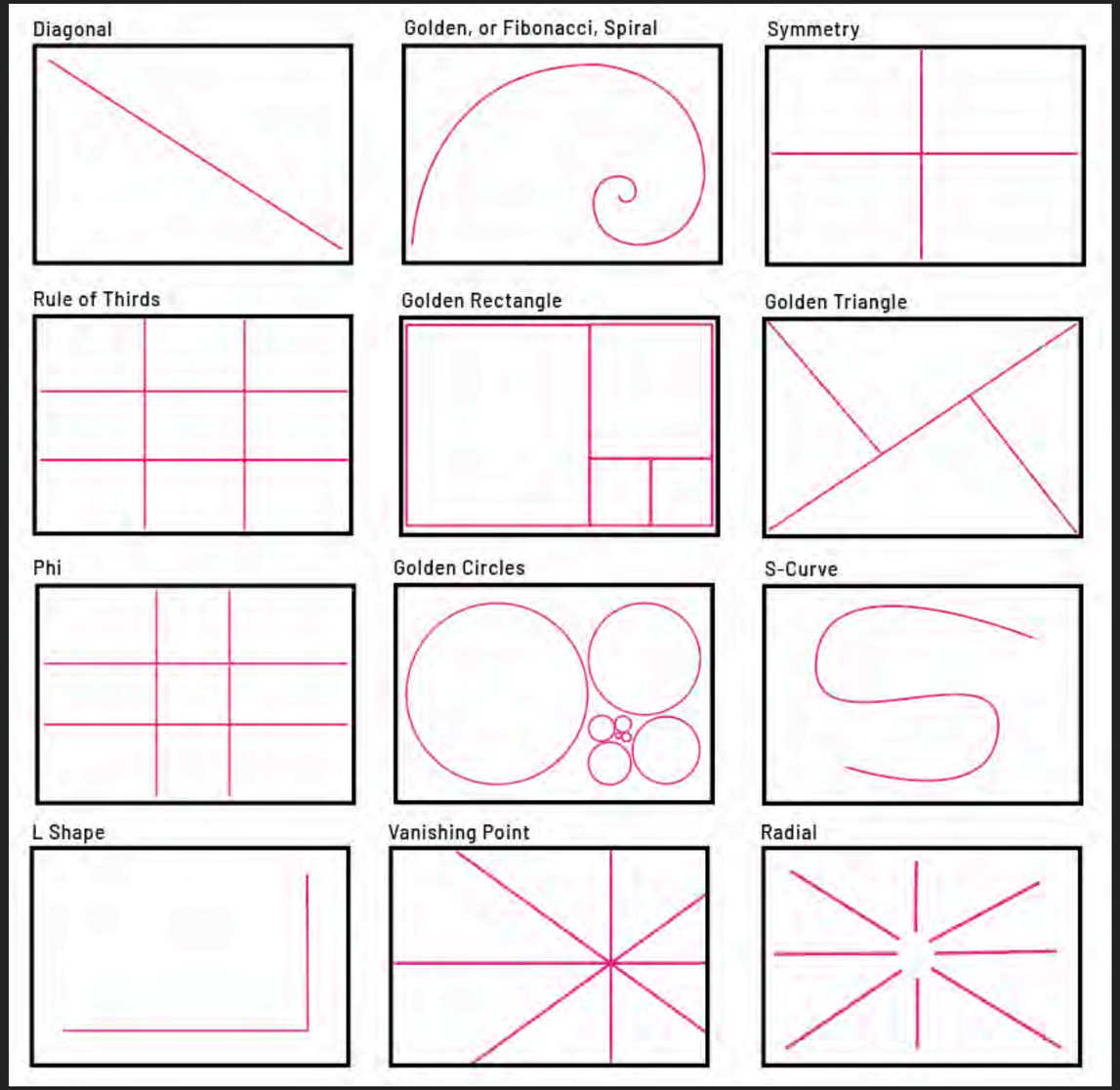
GO WITH THE FLOW

- Isolation and spaciousness draws attention
- White space is an invisible river that flows throughout the layout
- Simplicity and balance lets the eye wander freely
- Varying the size of elements directs attention and creates interest



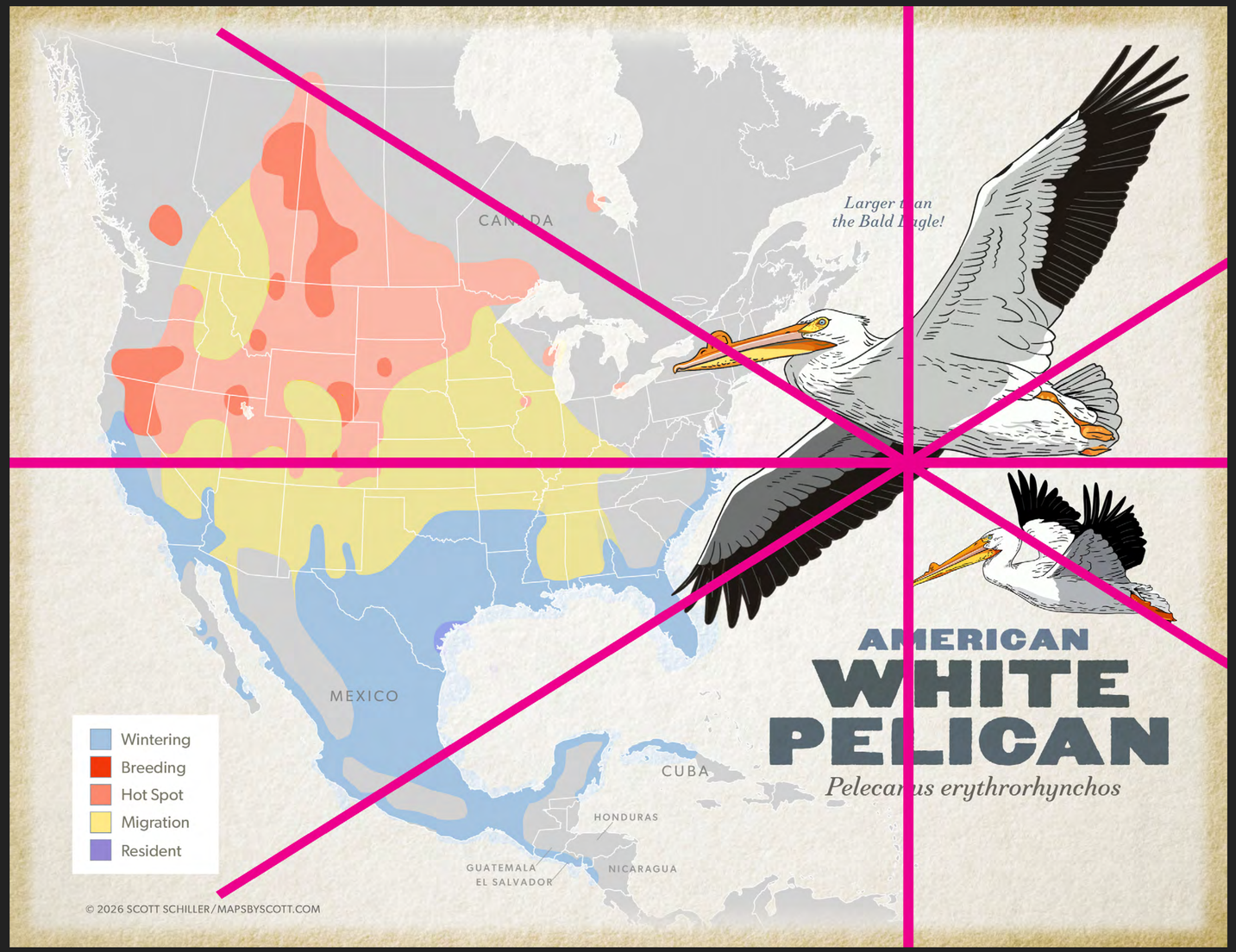
THE GRID IS YOUR GUIDE

- Guides the viewer’s eye through your design
- Helps you decide where to place objects (at intersections or along the lines)
- Try off-center placement, odd groupings and line patterns to create a more natural and energetic flow



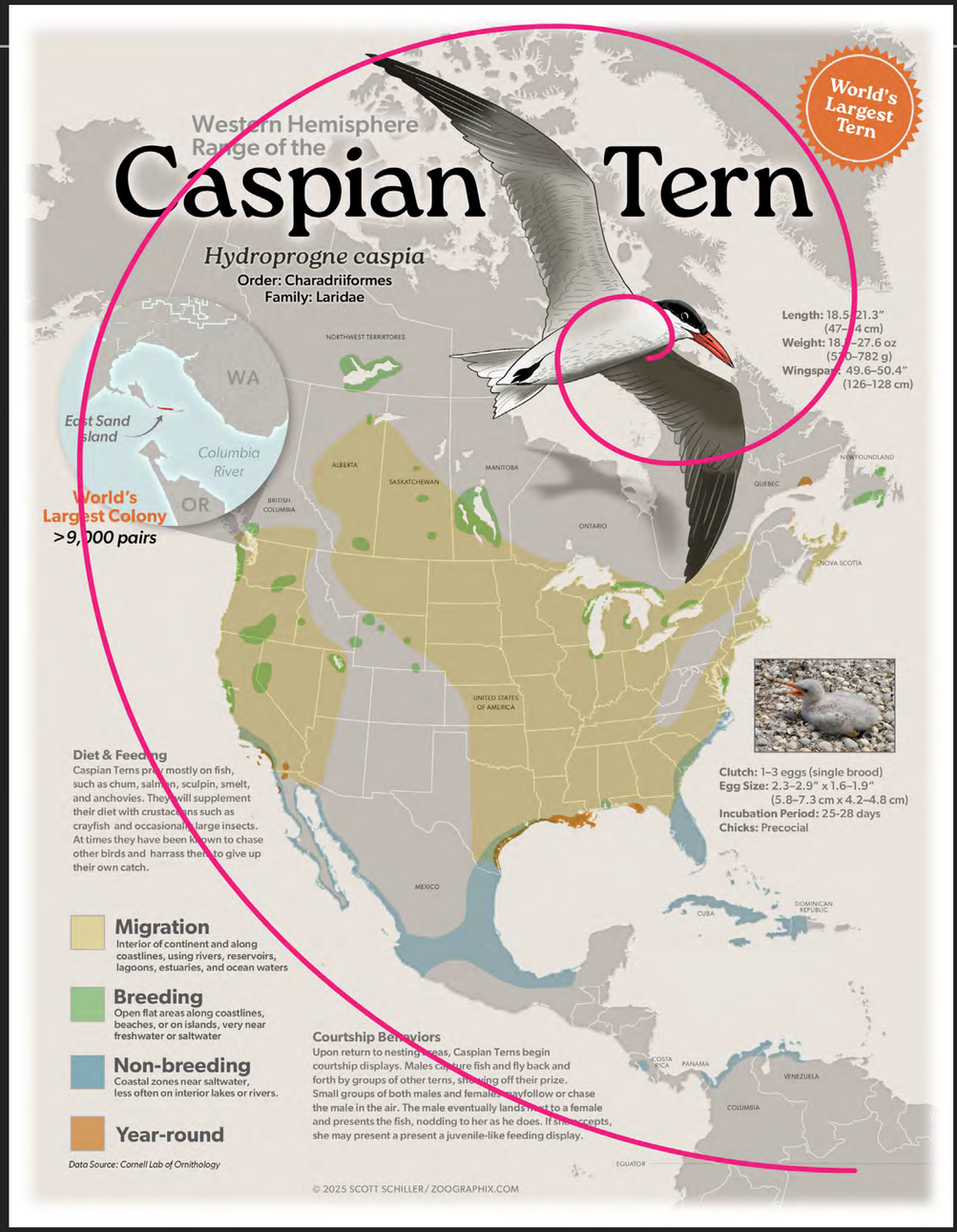
THINKING INSIDE THE BOX

- Determine a focal point and which grid works best



SPIRALS CREATE ENERGY

- Determine a focal point and which grid works best
- Place key elements along the grid to create a visual flow



ADD BEAUTY & CHARM

ART



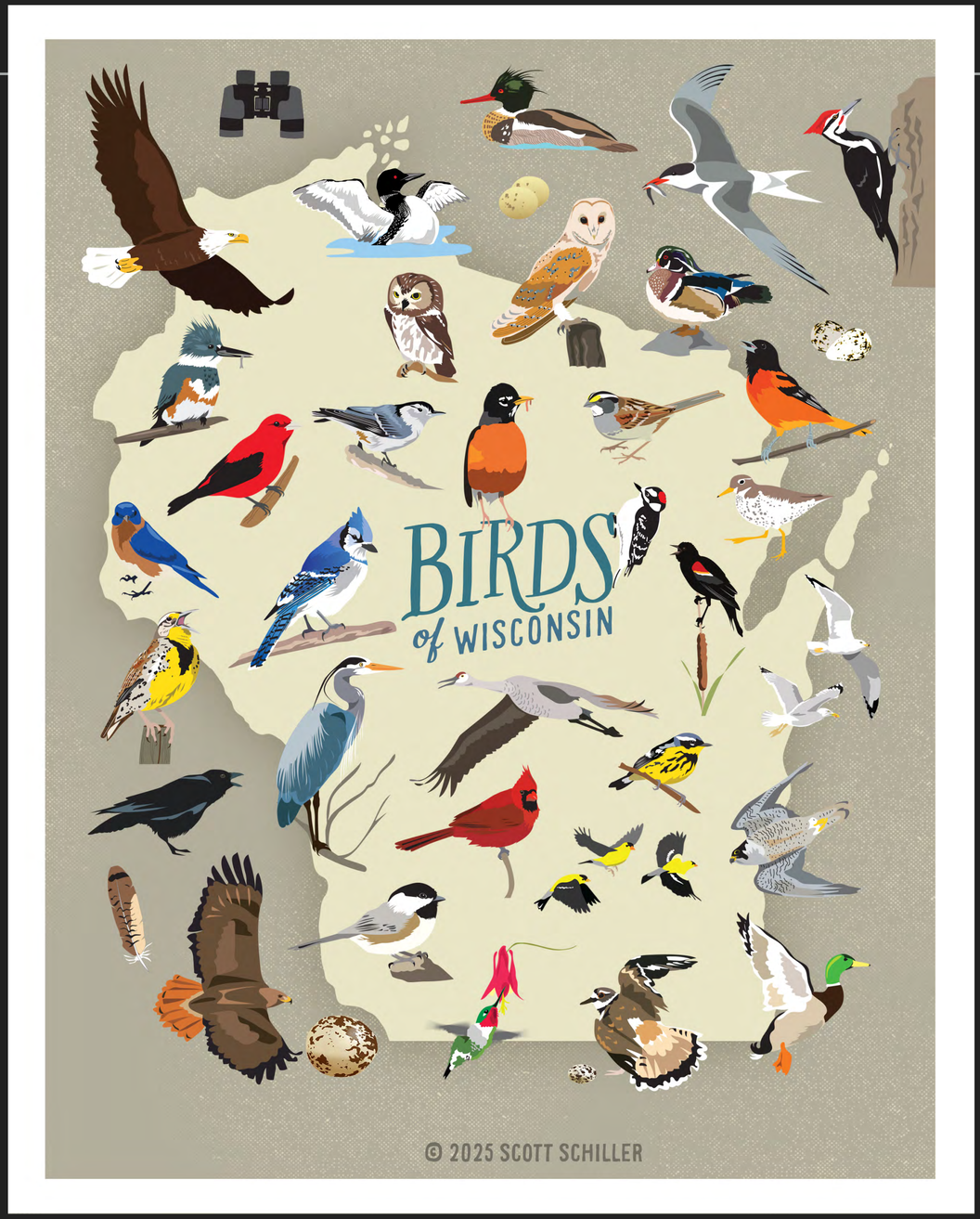
ILLUSTRATIONS & PHOTOS

- Artistic elements are not just something pretty to fill up space – they should impart meaning and relevance.
- They should be relevant to the map's story, or at least represent the content.
- They should amplify the message, not compete or confuse.
- They should be a natural and harmonious addition, a supplement not a distraction or an afterthought or add-on.



THE “WOW” FACTOR

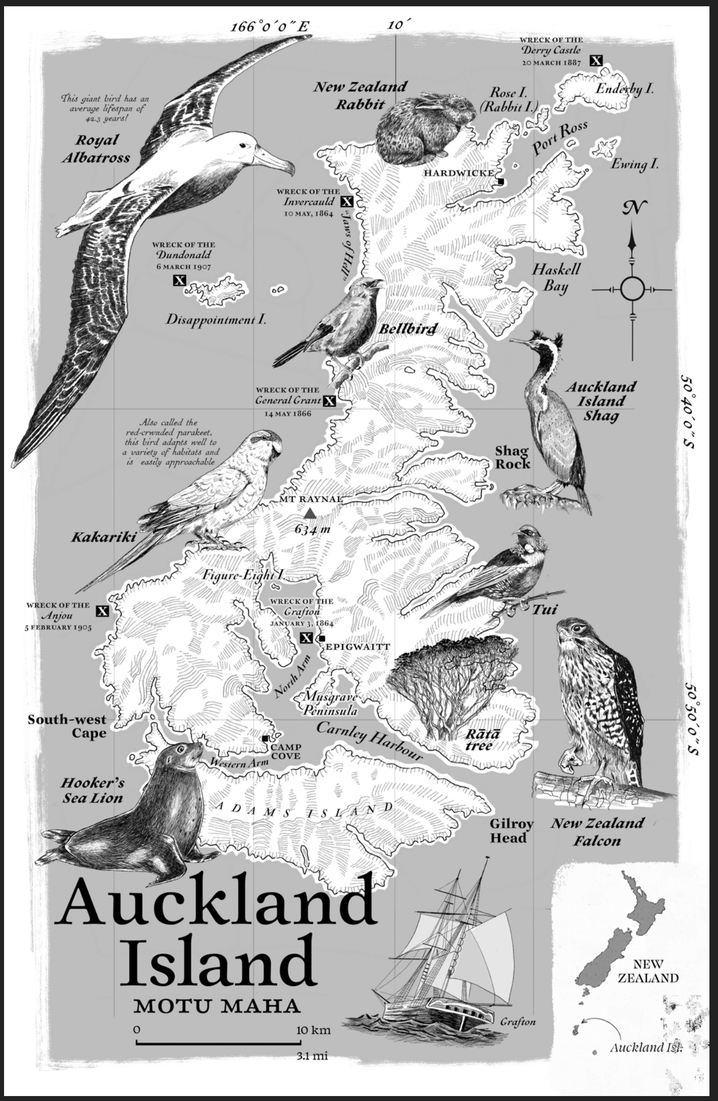
- You can customize to match the color, tone & style of the map itself
- It adds another layer of visual interest – colors, shapes & sizes
- It focuses attention and instantly conveys the subject or message of the map
- It moves the eye around the layout, as a focal point or as accents
- It adds a memorable element of beauty



CHOOSE A STYLE THAT MATCHES

- Detailed or simple
- Hand-drawn or digital
- Solid or line art
- Realistic or abstract
- Colorful or b/w





IGNITE THE DIVINE SPARK

GOLDEN RATIO

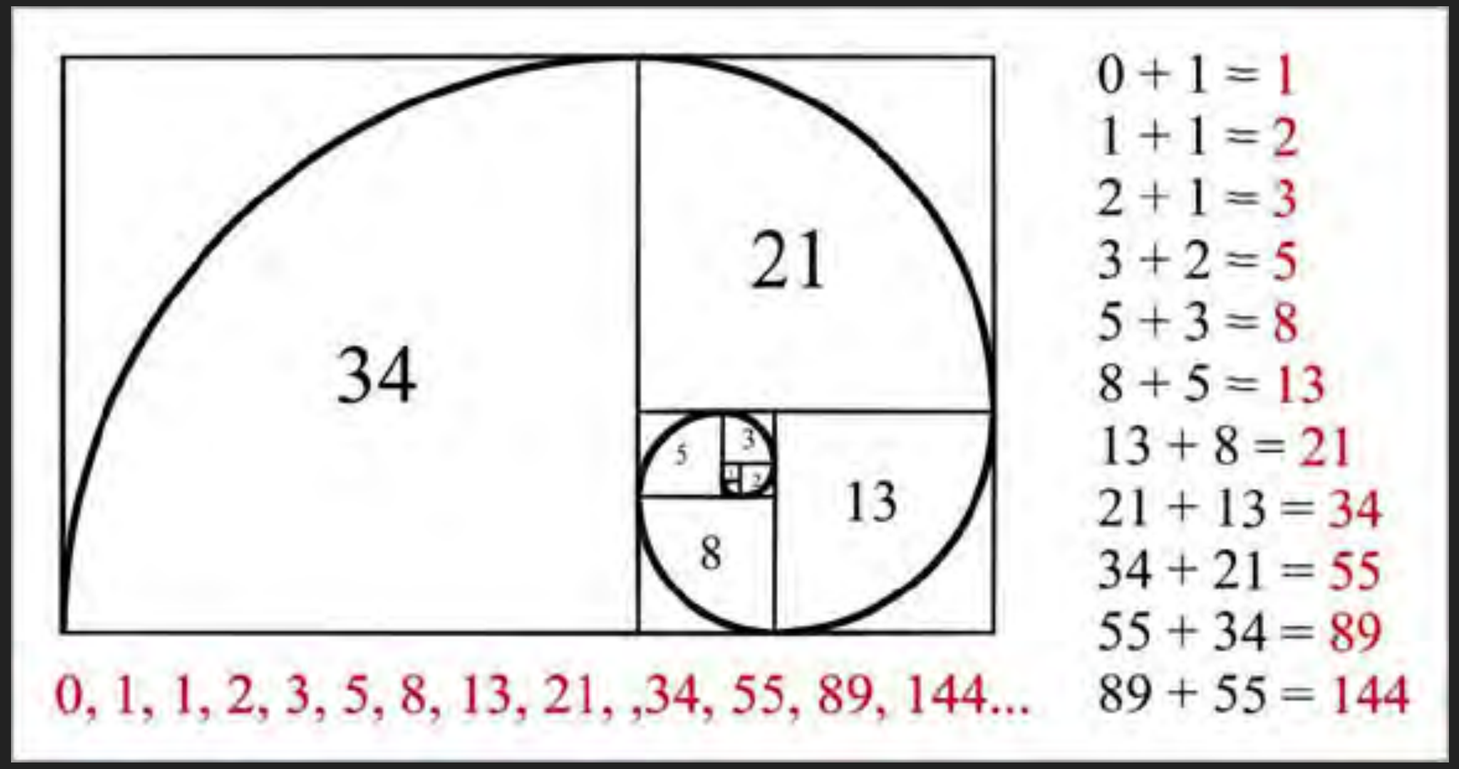


The invisible threads of mathematics are laced through all natural beauty. When we come upon these ratios when making art, they soothe us. Our creations are inspired by the relationships that we are most awed by.

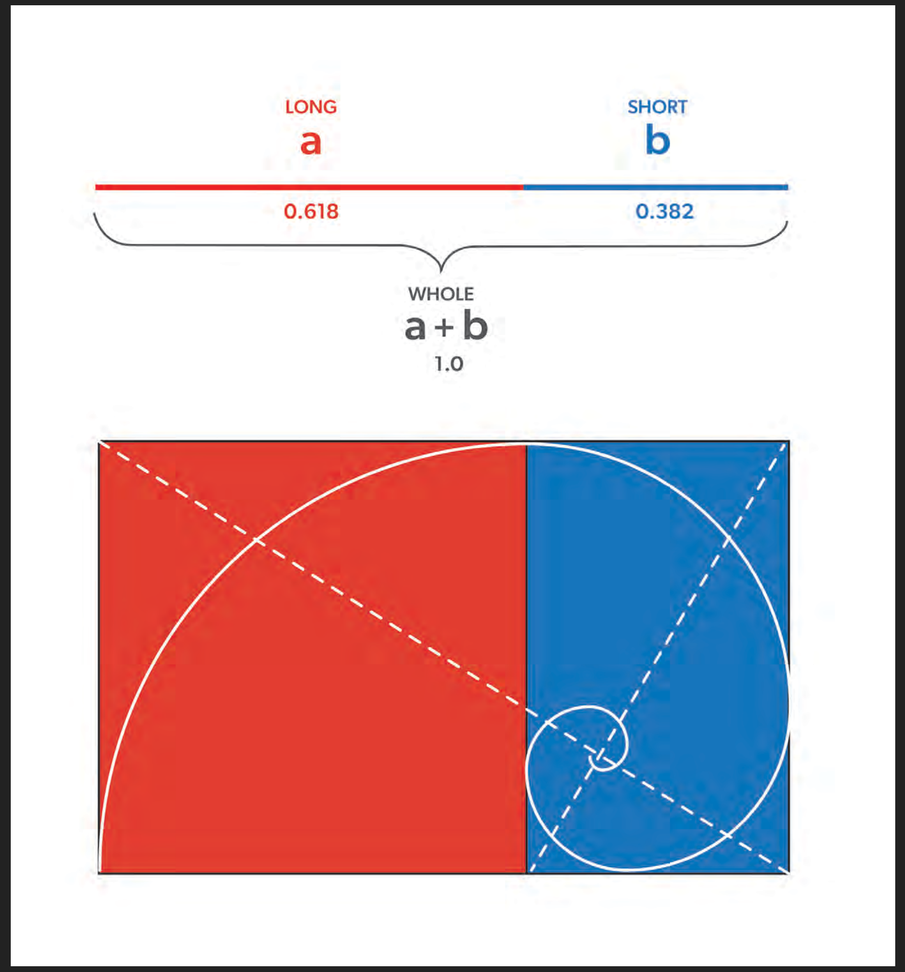
Rick Rubin, The Creative Act

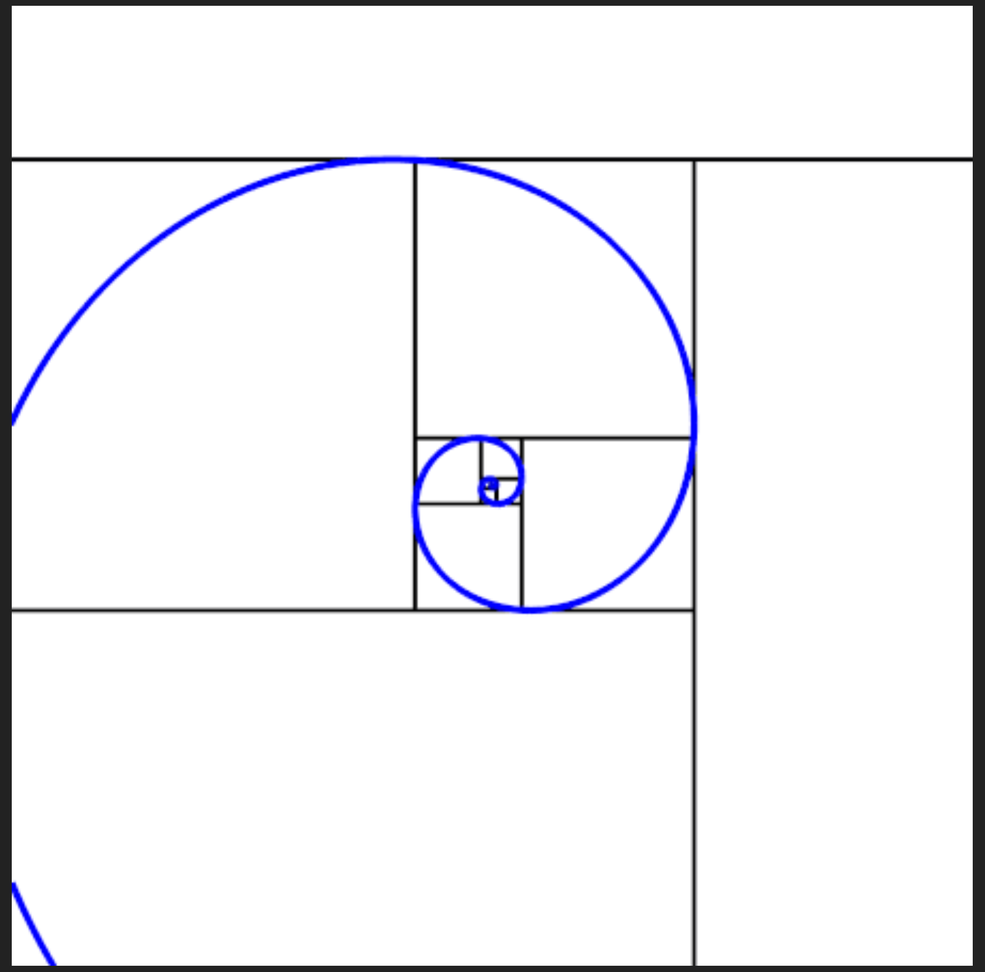
WHAT IS THE GOLDEN RATIO?

- Phi Φ
- Golden Proportion
- Golden Ratio
- Golden Mean
- Golden Spiral
- Divine Mean
- Fibonacci Sequence



GOLDEN RATIO

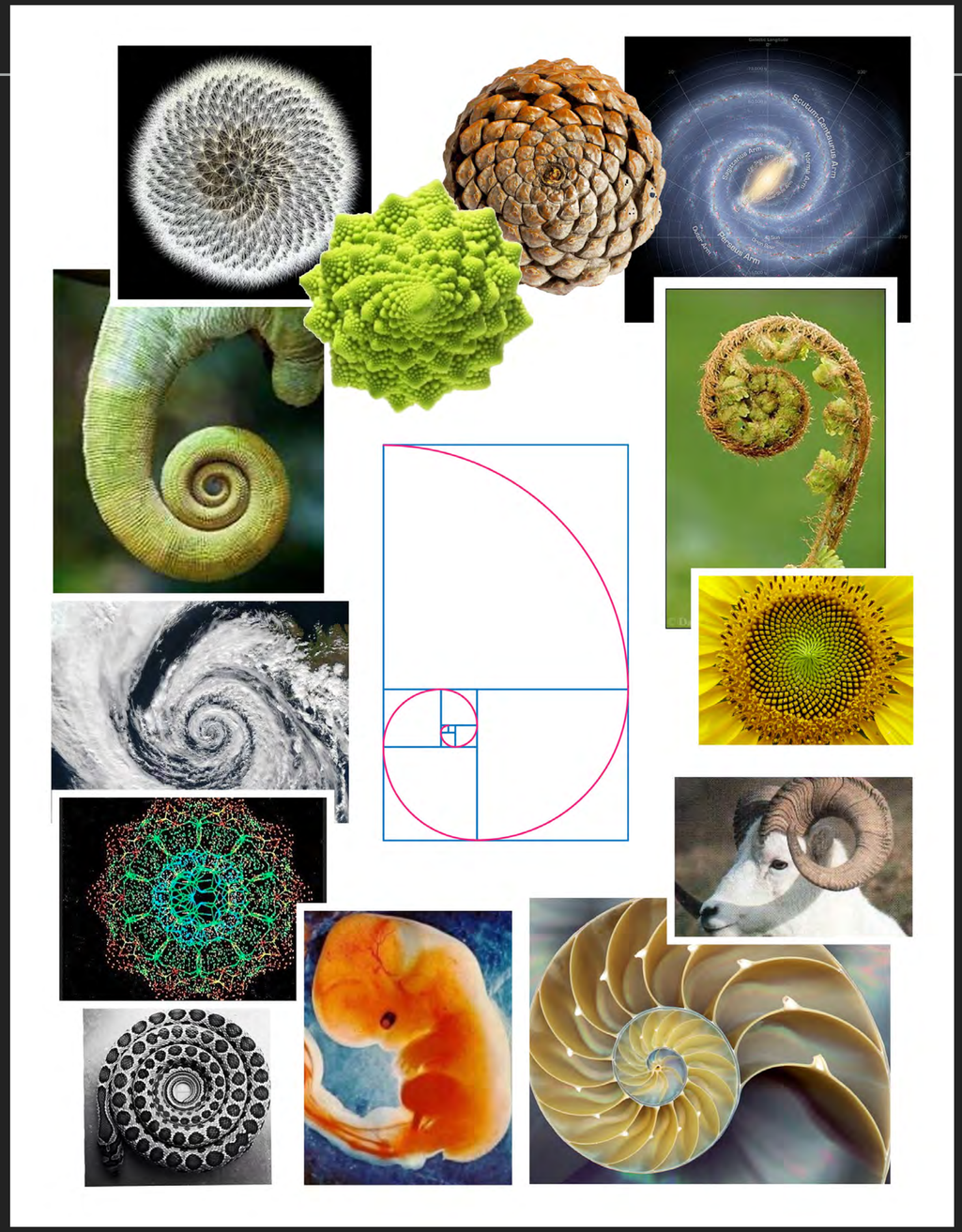




CODE OF THE UNIVERSE

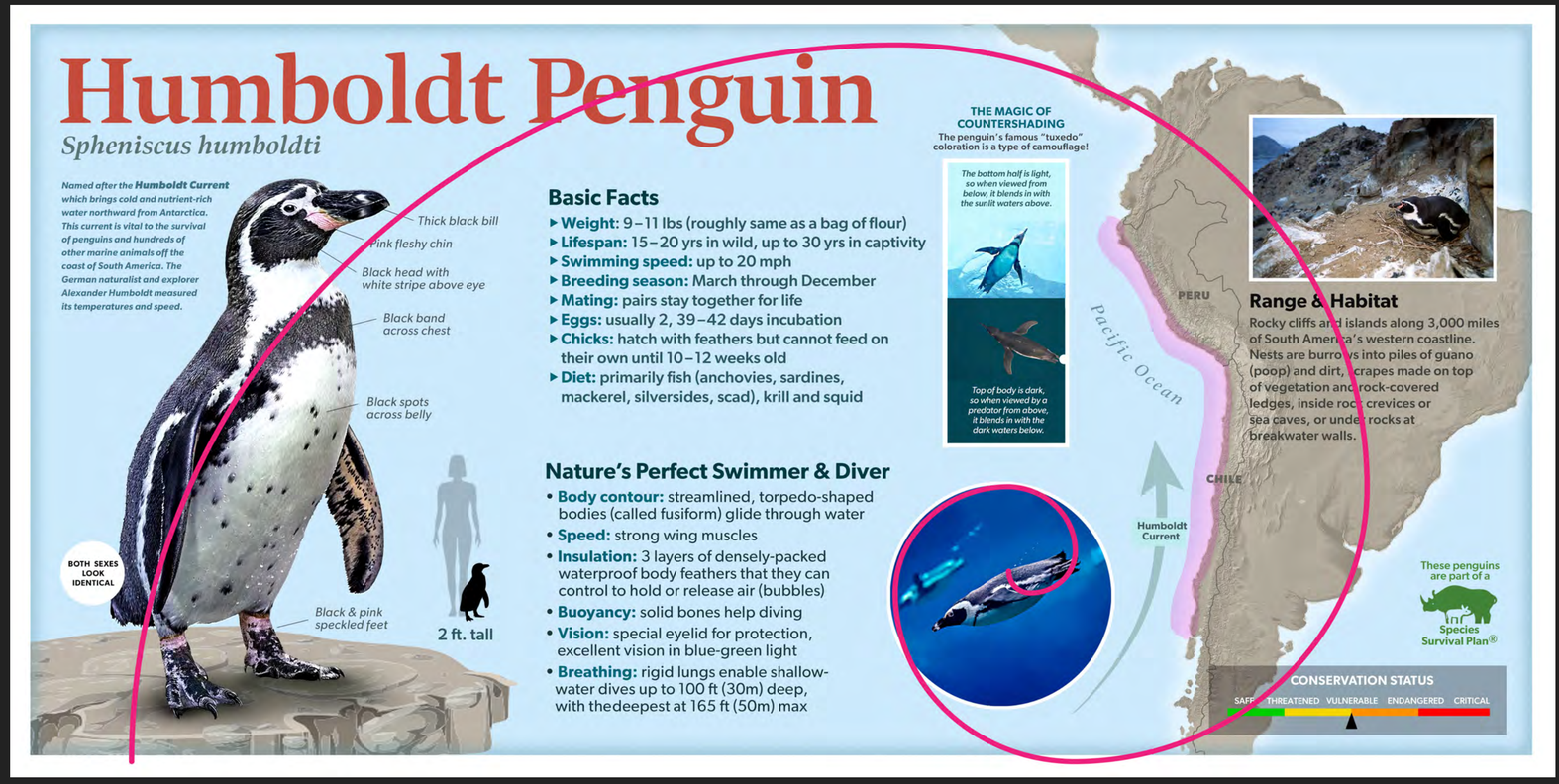
If you know what to look for, you see it everywhere:

- nature
- fine art
- architecture
- music
- weather
- graphic design
- photography
- financial markets
- technology & computing
- human body and DNA

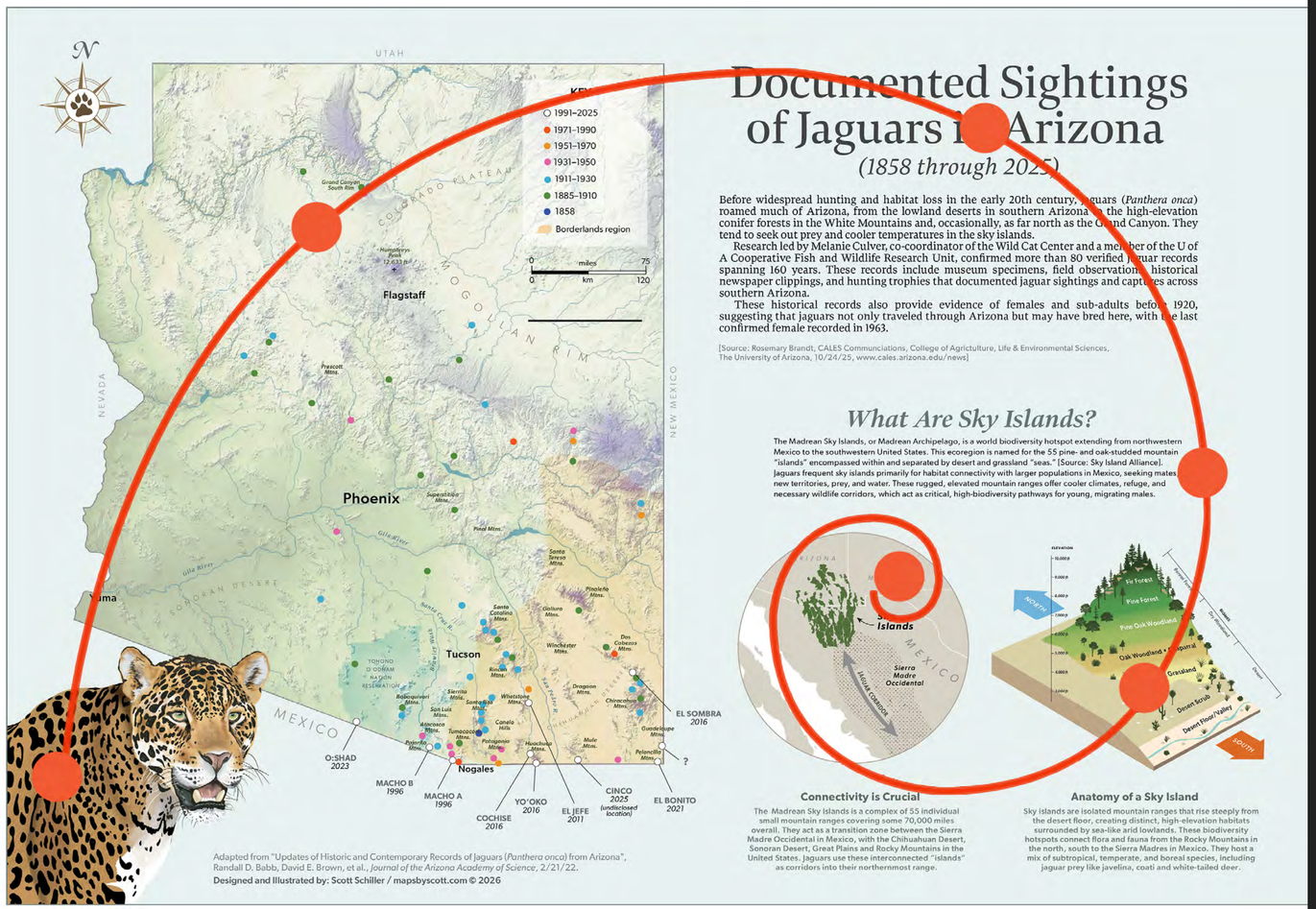


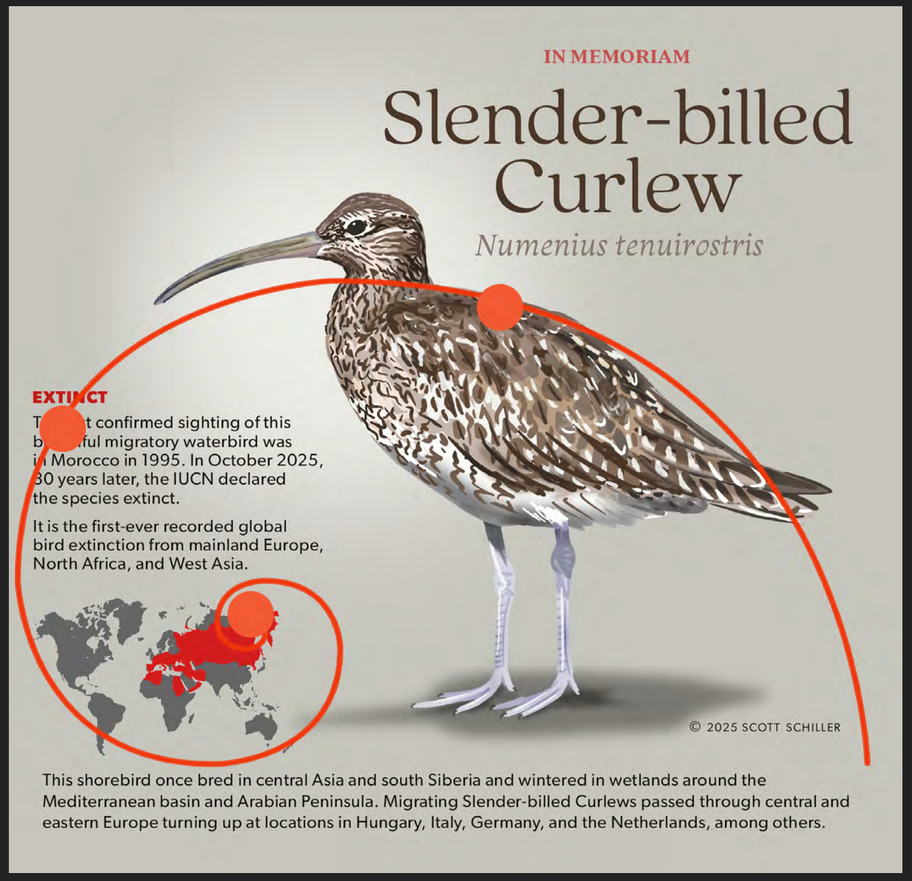
WHY USE THE GOLDEN RATIO IN LAYOUTS?

- It imparts a quiet order and subtle harmony
- Creates familiarity and relatability
- Guides you where to position things
- Just feels “right”

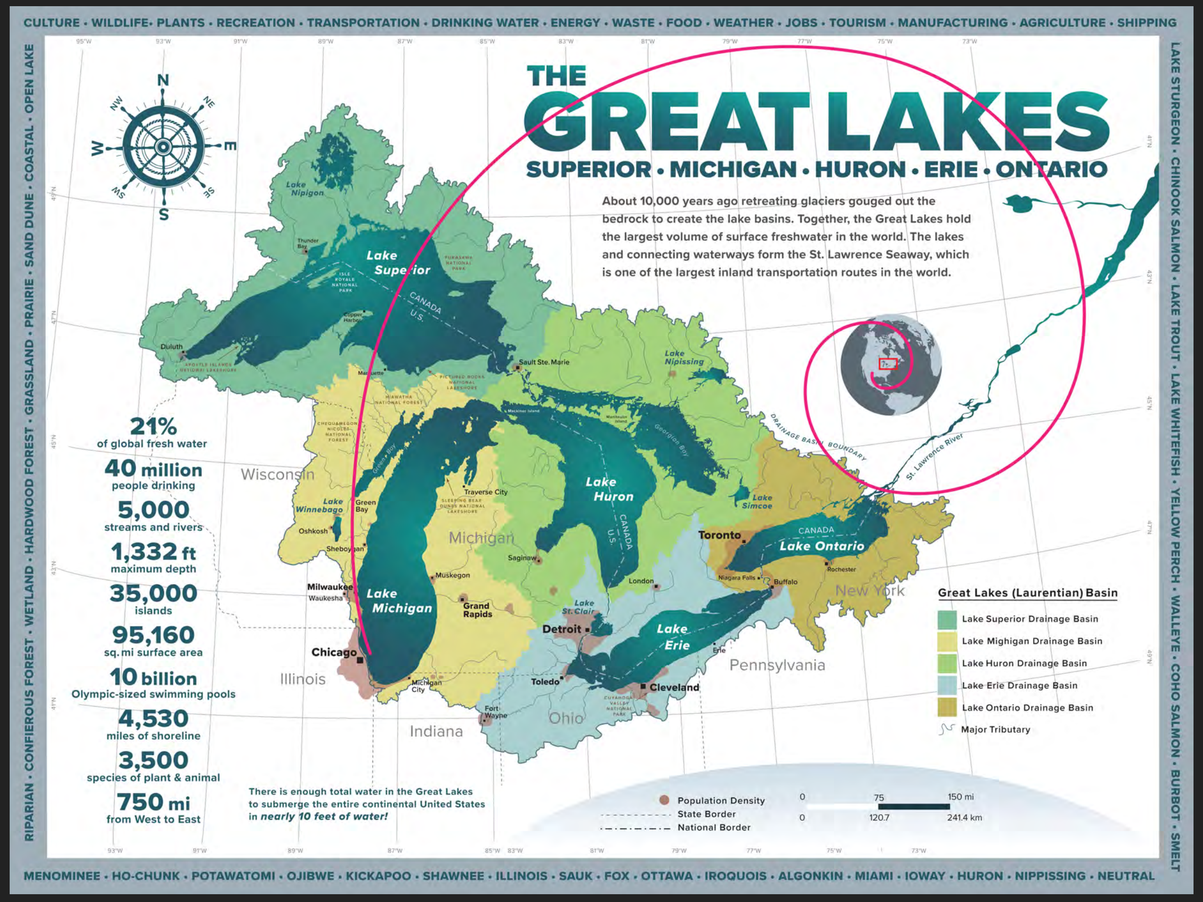


GOLDEN RATIO





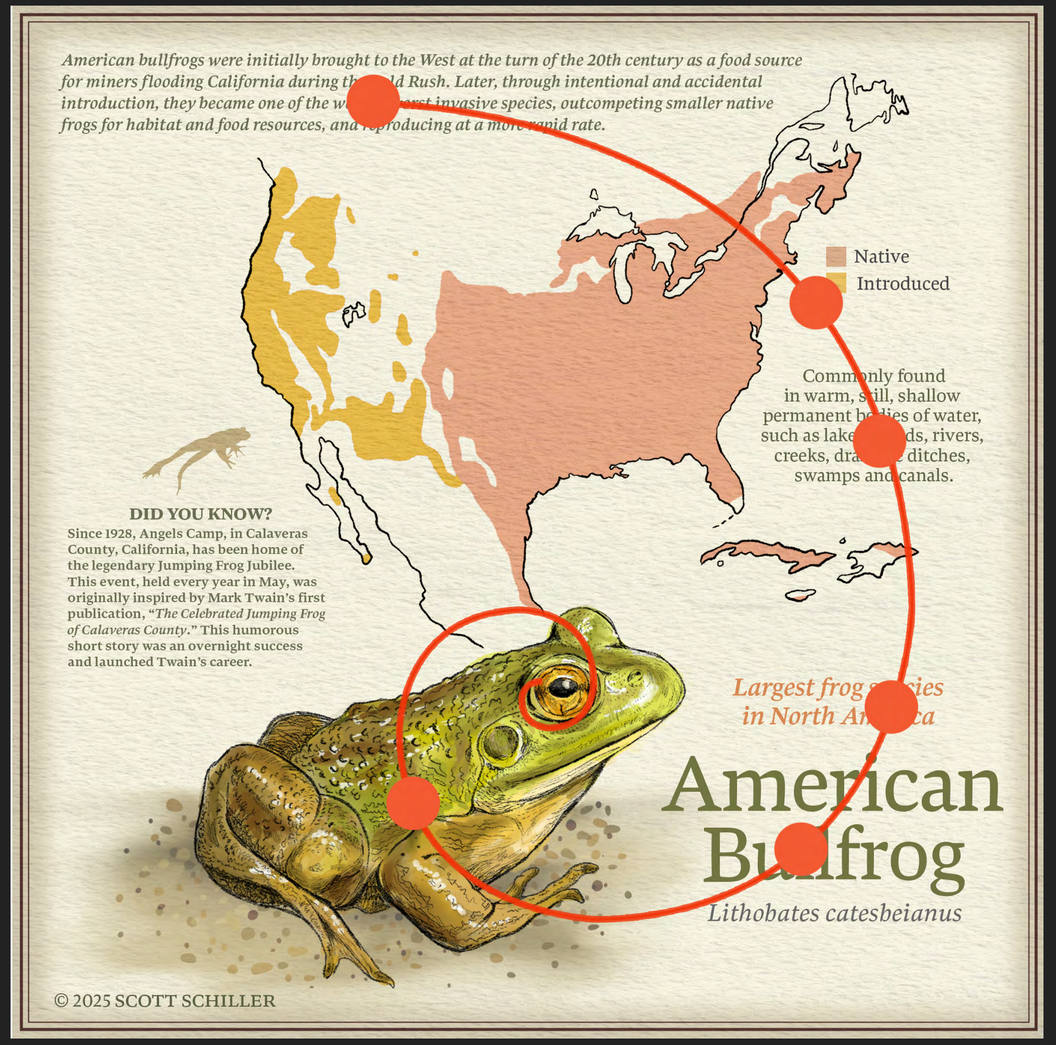
GOLDEN RATIO

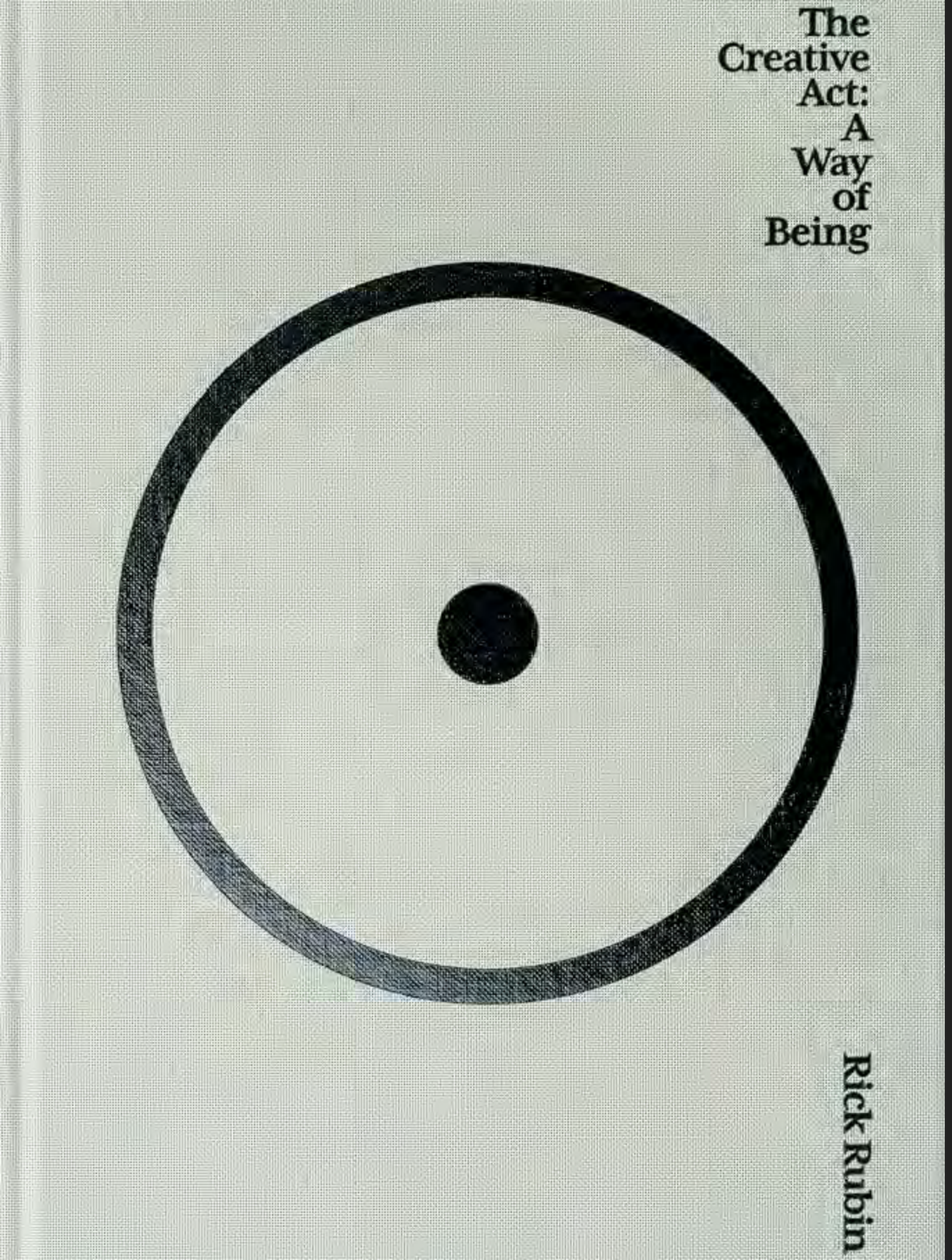




APPLY THE GOLDEN RATIO

- TYPE: create proportional hierarchy
- COLOR: build balanced palettes
- ART: find the most meaningful locations
- GRID: establish a visual flow





> No matter what tools you use to create,
> the true instrument is YOU.
> And through you, the Universe
> which surrounds us, all comes into focus.

RICK RUBIN

THE CREATIVE ACT: A WAY OF BEING

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Maps by Scott
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HAPPY MAPPING!

THANK YOU