National Steinbeck Center
http://www.steinbeck.org/

Background:
The National Steinbeck Center is a museum focusing on the life and cultural milieu of John Steinbeck, located in Salinas, California. The National Steinbeck Center strives to develop dialog, engage community and promote creativity through the work of John Steinbeck. Under the section “About the Center” they state their mission and give a brief statement about their location, programming, and history as an organization. Their mission states, “The National Steinbeck Center... building community, celebrating creativity inspired by the words of John Steinbeck.”

Overall Assessment:
The National Steinbeck Center thought out and nicely organized webpage. It is visually striking and clean looking. I really like the way the National Steinbeck Center’s website uses colors as a means of coding of the drop down menu and side bar navigation. The website is very straightforward and easily navigated. The sections are clearly labeled. It links to both Facebook and Twitter making it clear the institution takes advantage of social media sites. A nice addition to the site, which I don’t see very often are quote rotating on the header from visitors of the museums with their name and hometown attached. It’s a great way of connecting the museum to the website, their visitor and the greater community, as well as making the museum as an attractive and marketable travel destination.

Design:
The home page is a black background with white and yellow type as the prominent color font, but several other colors are used. The National Steinbeck Center’s
website is extraordinarily colorful. There are dozens of rotating photos, which give perspective into the architecture of the facility, the exhibits and the visitors. There is prominent logo in top left corner reinforcing and highlighting the branding of the museum, linking the website to the other print material of the institution. Photograph of John Steinbeck frames the left side of the webpage, a sample of his writing frames the right side, while his signature functions as the header. A photograph of the Center’s building is central. The website has several pages and subpages ranging from “Plan Your Visit” to “Become a Donor” There is a What’s New and Upcoming Events calendar which makes up the content of the homepage. On the right column there is a prominently placed donate line, a PDF to link to download the winter 2010/11 Newsletter, a link to kidsclub, Facebook, twitter, and their flickr accounts. The sidebar navigation is repeated by framing the bottom of the page.

**Navigation:**
As the user moves down the page, the navigation stays in place, which can be disconcerting and mildly aesthetically displeasing, but does keep the navigation readily available. The dropdown menu lining the bottom of the header and the side navigation are color coded as such: “Plan Your Visit”; “Visit”, “Exhibitions & Programs”; Participate, “Educational Resources”; Learn, “Become a Member”; Join, “Become a Donor”; Support, “About the Center”; Discover, “Museum Store”; Shop Opening up a subpage, the sub-navigation lines the left side of the page allowing to the user to easily maneuver around the subsection. By clicking the National Center’s Logo in the top left hand corner it will take the user back to the homepage, the navigation and logo can be found on every page.

The primary navigation has several dropdown sections highlighting the important aspects of the website. Clicking the newsletter, museum store, and fundraising options takes the user to a different interface.
Suggestions:

I think this website is sophisticated, functions well and is nicely designed. I would standardize the interfaces of the website. Certain areas such as the store and membership take the user to a site designed differently then the standard homepage. For purposes of standardization, aesthetics, and appeal I would like to see the entire site with one set interface.