CSS: Mini Events Calendar

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By Rachel Andrew

On many web sites you will see small calendars as a feature of the site design. Blogs use them as a way to jump to the entry for a given day, on a site for an organization you might find a calendar allowing the user to see at a glance on which days events are taking place, they can be useful on a Intranet site allowing important events in the company calendar to be flagged up in a small calendar displayed on each page. In this article we will learn how to style an events calendar using CSS.

We will walk through the steps of creating a calendar using an HTML table, complete with all tags and attributes to ensure that this table is accessible to users of alternate devices. Having created the calendar in the mark-up we will then move on to styling it in an attractive way using the CSS tools within Dreamweaver, in such a way that we do not add unnecessary mark-up to the page.
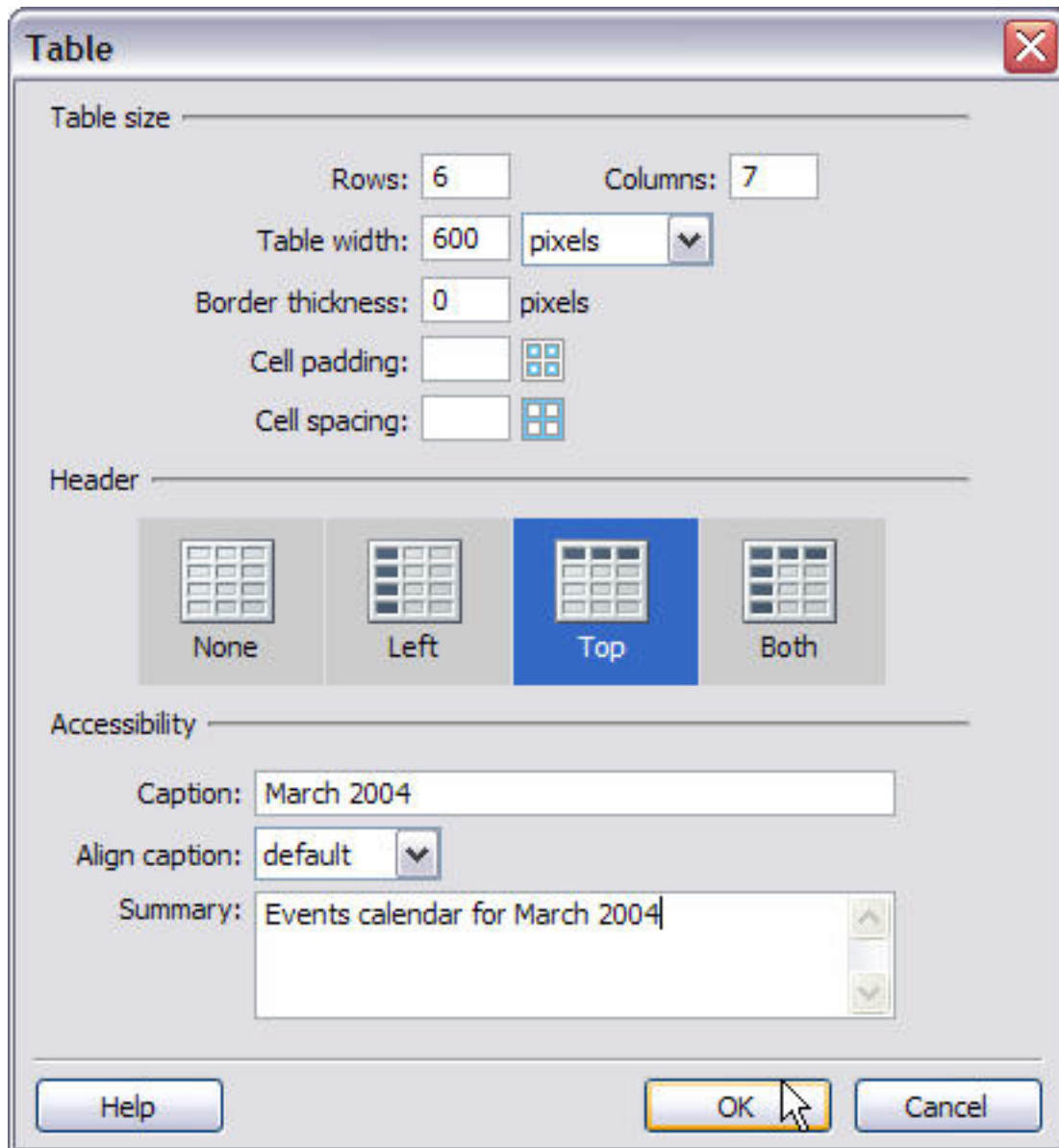
The Calendar

Our first step is to create our calendar. If you are working on a dynamic site, or using blog software you may already have a calendar ready to style, however in this first step we will be creating a calendar that is accessible and also that contains the correct mark-up to make it easier to style with CSS later. You should be able to edit the calendar that your script produces fairly easily in order to get it ready for styling with CSS.

In a new document in Dreamweaver, insert a table that has 7 columns and 6 rows.
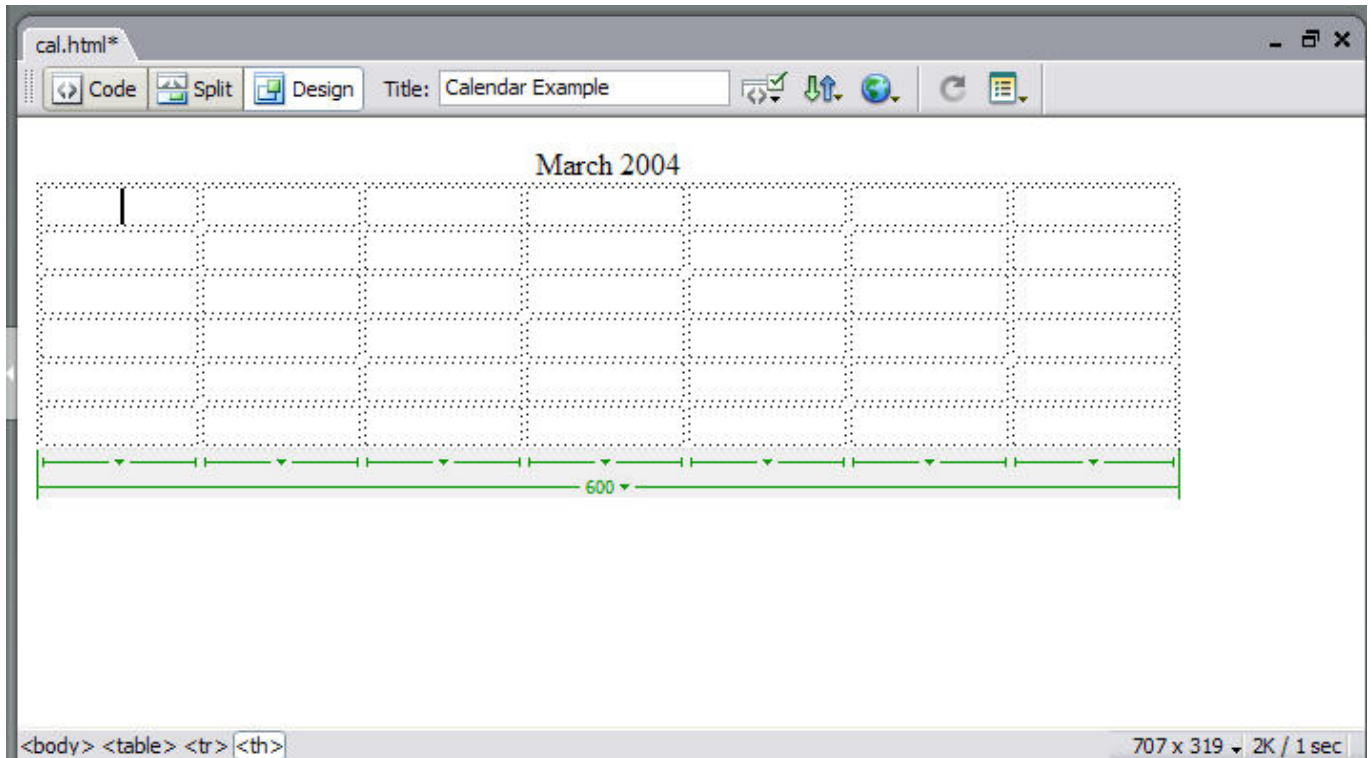
In the Header section select 'Top'.

Under Accessibility give the table a caption of 'March 2004', and a Summary of 'Events Calendar for March 2004'.
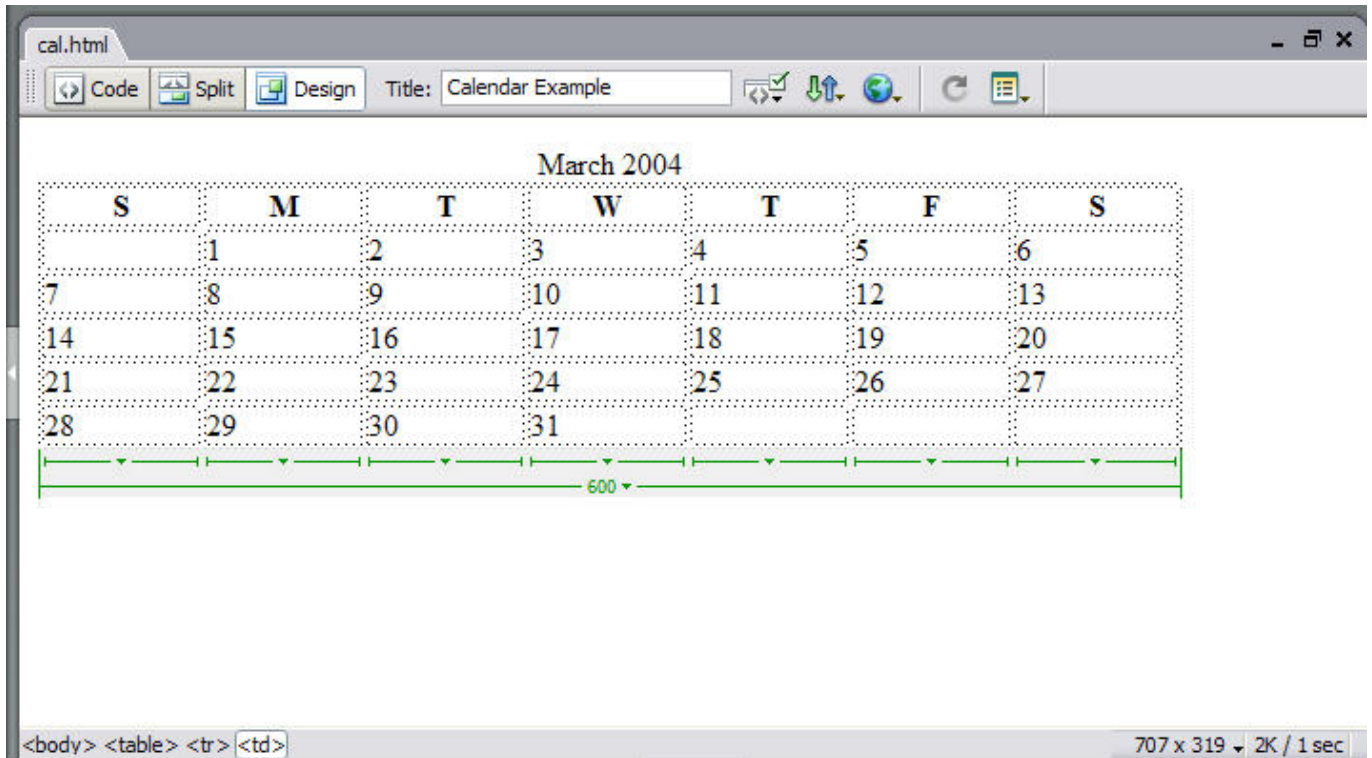
Insert Table Dialog

Click OK to insert the table into your document. The text entered under caption (March 2004) will display above the table cells, the summary will not appear in Design View or in the browser as it is information for people using text only devices such as screen readers so that they understand the context of this table.
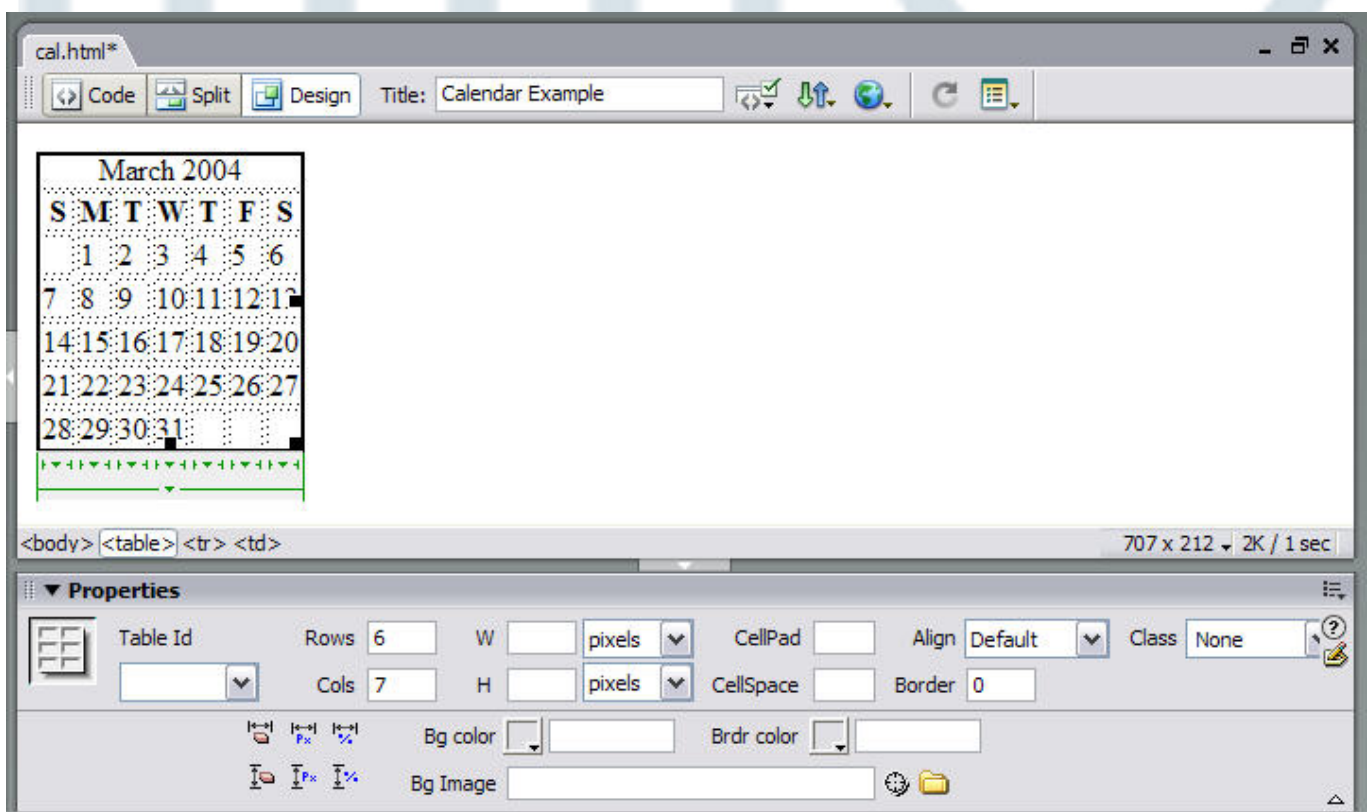
The table in Design View

We now need to populate our calendar with the dates. In the top row of the calendar write out the days of the week (in single letter format) S M T W T F S. The days are going into the table heading row as when we created the table we specified that the first row should be headings. Dreamweaver (and most web browsers) style the table heading (<th>) tag by centering it in the cell and displaying it in bold type. This will help to make it obvious to users of text only devices that these are the headings for the column below.

Now add the days, the first day of March 2004 is a Monday so start with '1' in the first row under 'M' and work along until you get to 31.

The Calendar Table with dates entered

If you entered a width for the table as I did, to prevent it collapsing while it had no data in it, remove it now so that the table collapses to the width of the data.

The Unstyled Calendar

Switch into Code View to see the mark-up that has created this calendar.

```
<table width="600" border="0" summary="Events calendar for March
2004">
  <caption>
  March 2004
  </caption>
  <tr>
    <th scope="col">S</th>
    <th scope="col">M</th>
    <th scope="col">T</th>
    <th scope="col">W</th>
    <th scope="col">T</th>
    <th scope="col">F</th>
    <th scope="col">S</th>
  </tr>
  <tr>
    <td> </td>
    <td>1</td>
    <td>2</td>
    <td>3</td>
    <td>4</td>
    <td>5</td>
    <td>6</td>
  </tr>
  <tr>
    <td>7</td>
    <td>8</td>
    <td>9</td>
    <td>10</td>
    <td>11</td>
    <td>12</td>
    <td>13</td>
  </tr>
  <tr>
    <td>14</td>
    <td>15</td>
    <td>16</td>
    <td>17</td>
    <td>18</td>
    <td>19</td>
    <td>20</td>
  </tr>
  <tr>
    <td>21</td>
    <td>22</td>
    <td>23</td>
    <td>24</td>
    <td>25</td>
    <td>26</td>
    <td>27</td>
  </tr>
```
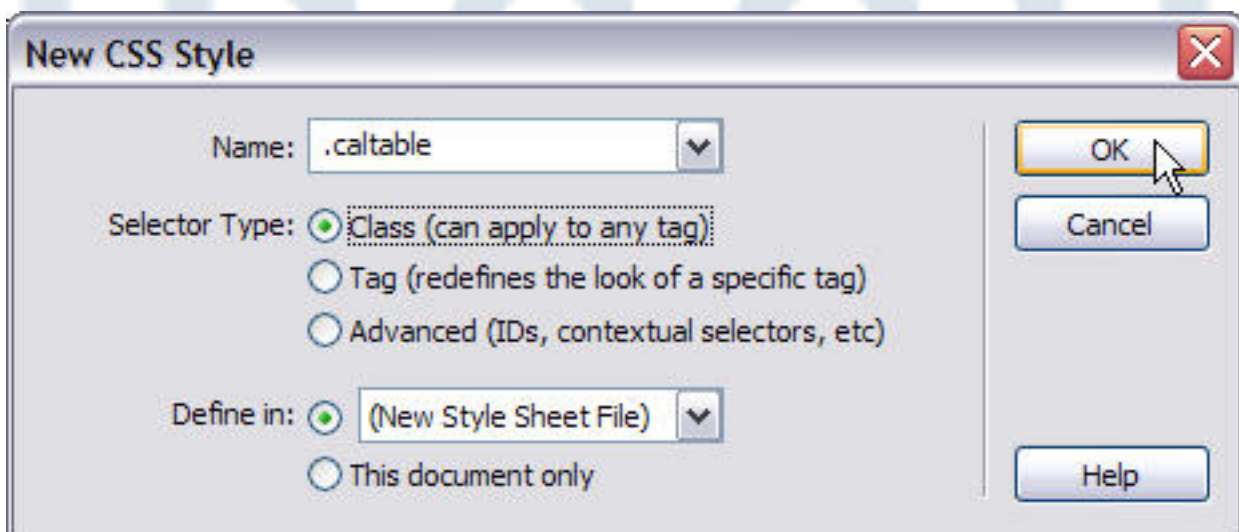
```
  <tr>
    <td>28</td>
    <td>29</td>
    <td>30</td>
    <td>31</td>
    <td> </td>
    <td> </td>
    <td> </td>
  </tr>
</table>
```

Styling the Calendar

Now that we have a calendar created with clean, structured mark-up we can begin to style it using CSS.
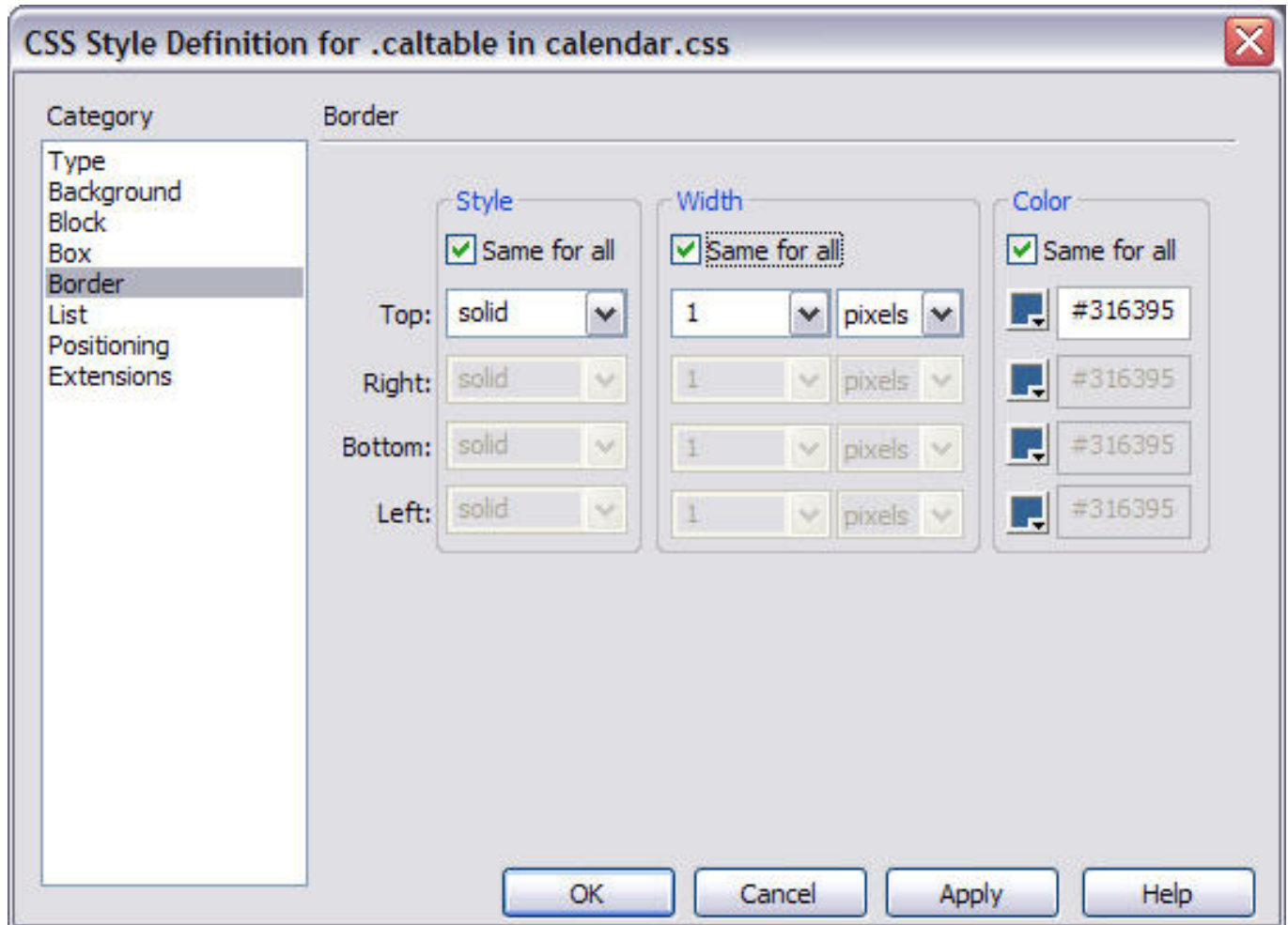
In the CSS Styles Panel in the Design Panel Group click 'New CSS Style' and in the dialog that opens create a class named 'caltable'. If this is an existing site and you already have a stylesheet then you can create these styles in your existing stylesheet file, otherwise select to define in '(New Stylesheet File)'.

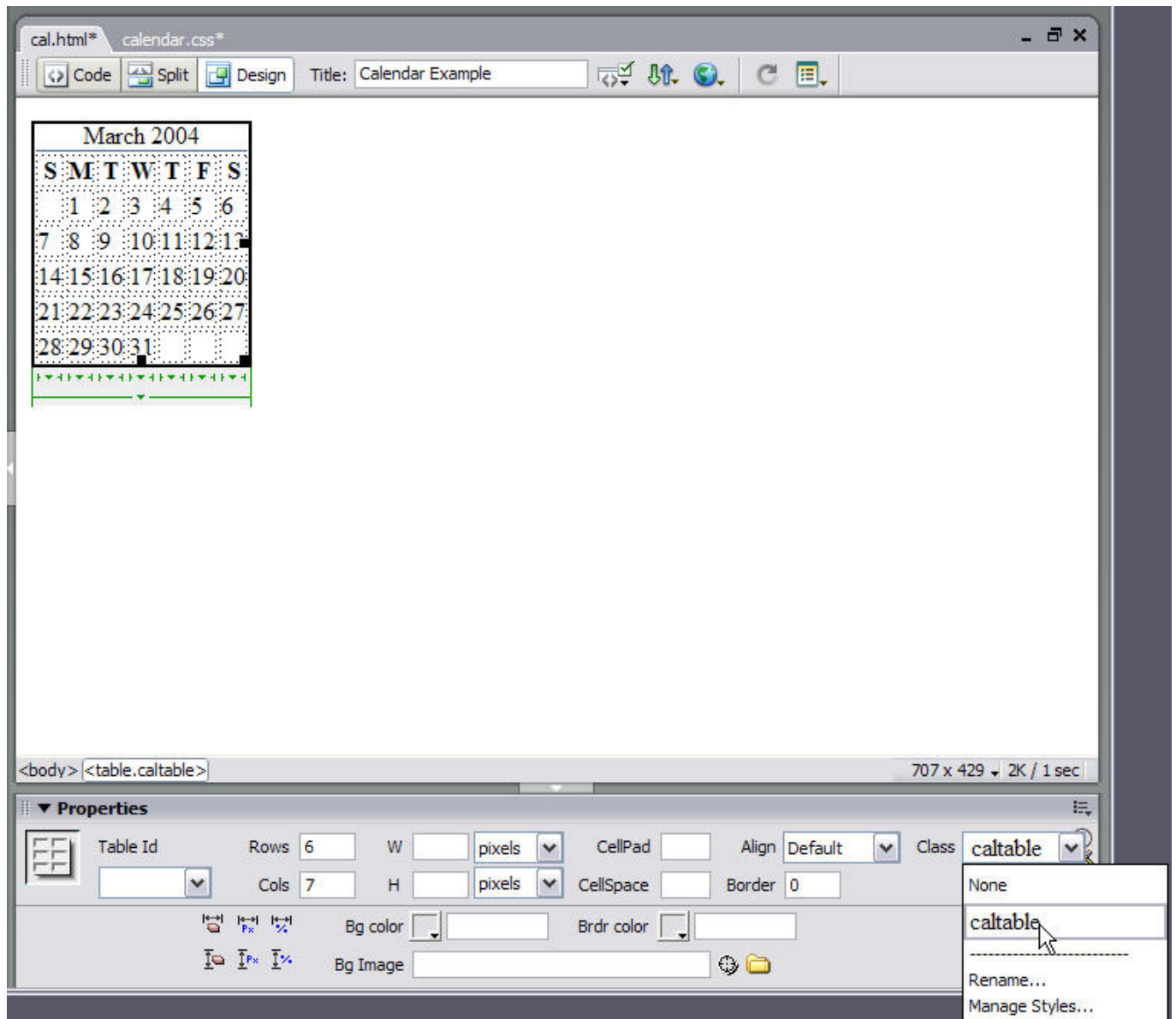
Create a class named .caltable

Click Ok and name and save your stylesheet if you are creating a new file. It will automatically be attached to your page.

The styles we are creating here will be applied to the table tag. Give the table a border by selecting the Border category and choosing a Solid, 1 pixel width border in #316395.

Adding a border to class .caltable

Click Ok to close this dialog and create the class. Select the table and apply class .caltable to it using the Properties Inspector.
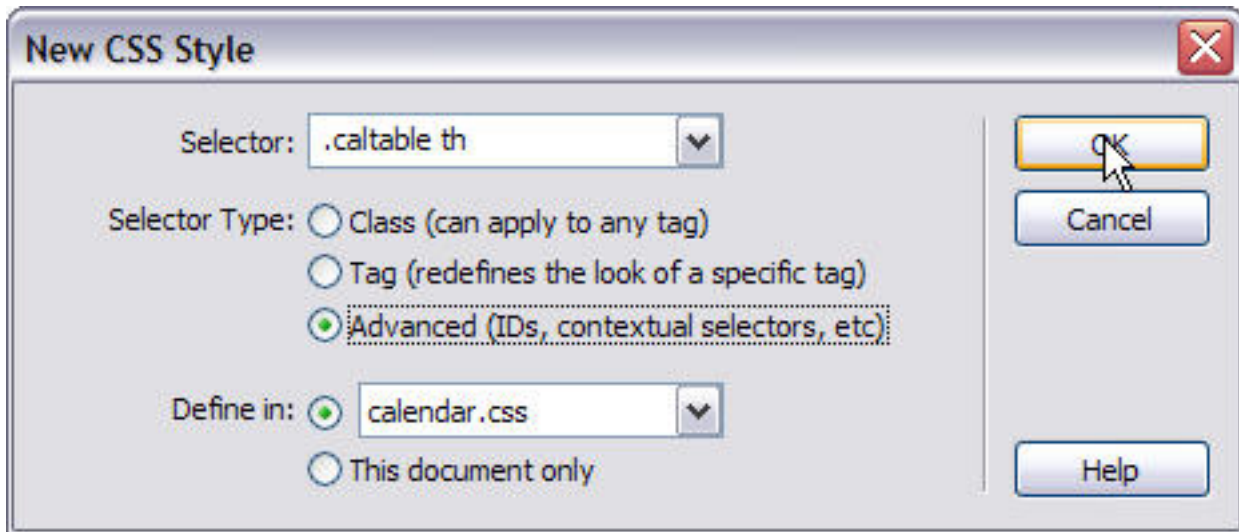
Applying the class to the table

We can now create styles for the cells that contain the days of the week, because we marked these up as table headings <th></th> this is as simple as creating CSS rules for the th tag within the table with the class .caltable.
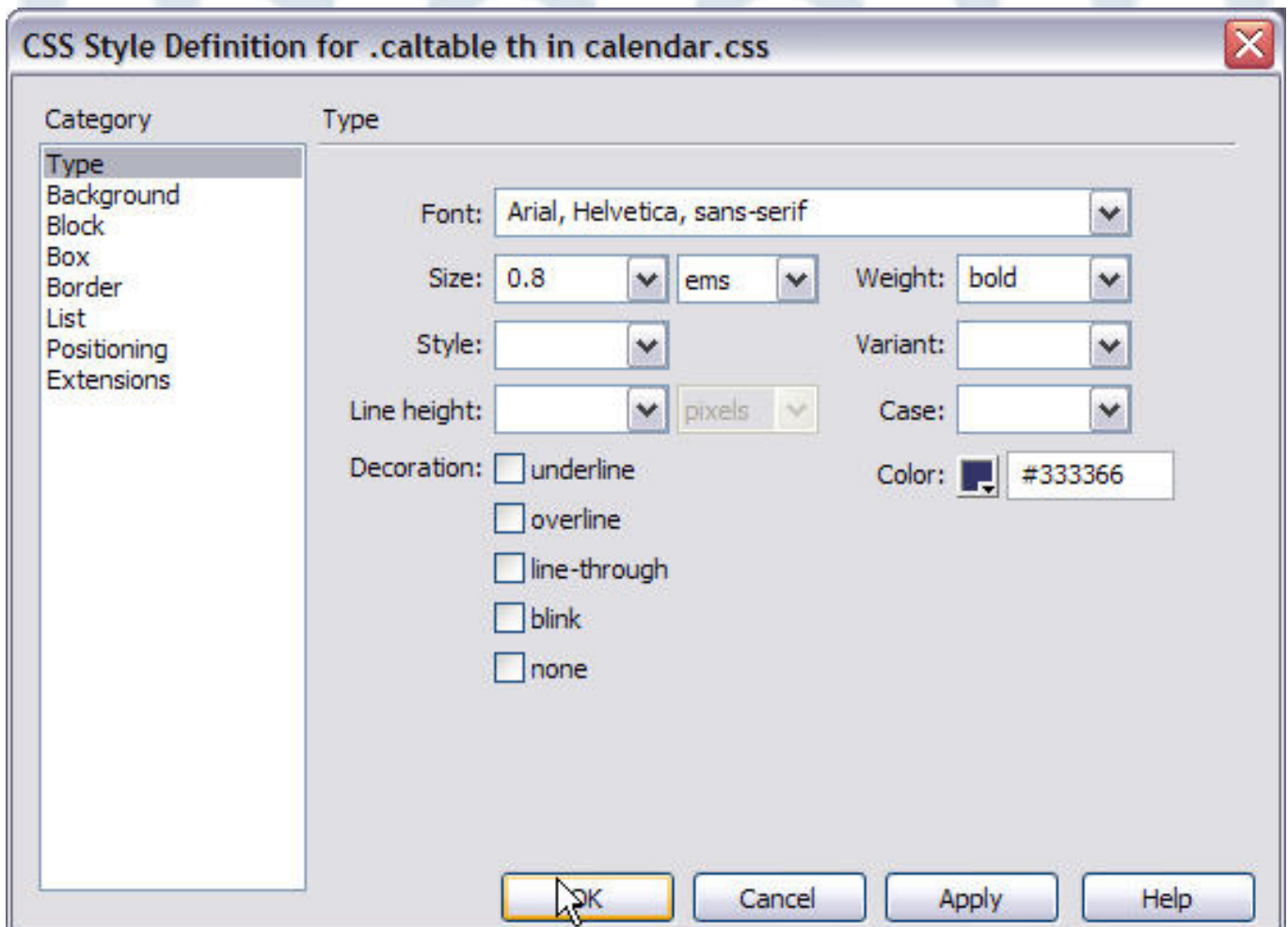
Create a New CSS Style. This time, under selector type choose 'Advanced (IDs, contextual selectors etc.)'. In the box at the top of the dialog (Selector) type .caltable th
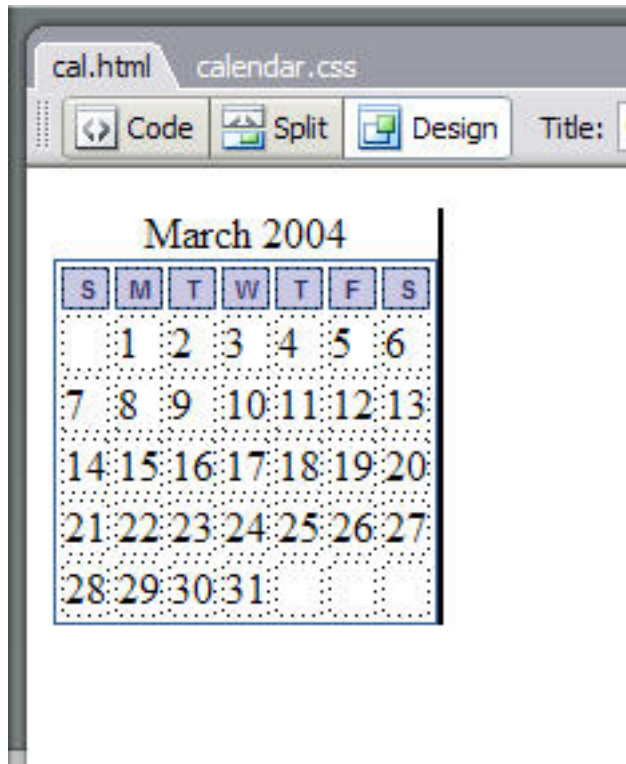
New CSS Style for .caltable th

You can now create styles for the th tag. These styles will only affect the th tag within our calendar table, so won't effect any other tables that you have marked up in your site. In the Type category I have set the font to 'Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif', 0.8 ems, bold, color #333366.

The 'Type' category

In the Border category, I am giving my th tags the same border as the table – solid, 1 pixel, ##316395.

In the Background category, I have given the th tag a background color of #C9C9E4. Click OK and your headings should immediately change to reflect these styles as the class .caltable is already applied to the table they are in. You don't need to add classes to each individual cell.
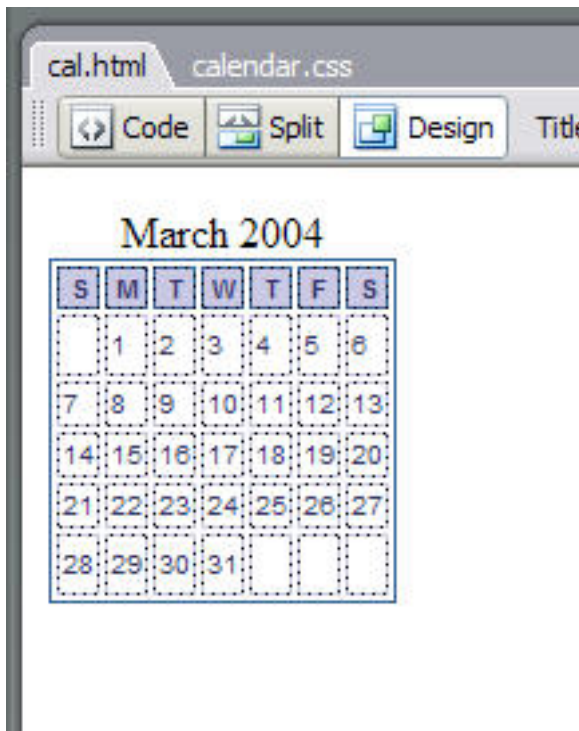

The Calendar after styling the headings

You can now repeat the process to style the table cells – td tags within the table with the class .caltable.

Create the New CSS Style in exactly the same way as you created the style for .caltable th except in the New CSS Style dialog create it for .caltable td.

In the Type category I have defined the font as 'Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif; 0.8 ems; color #333366'.

In the Border category I have create a solid, 1 pixel border with a color of #C9C9E4 – the same color as the background color of the heading cells. Click OK to see your changes in the calendar.

After styling the td tags

In Dreamweaver and if you preview in the browser you will see there are still gaps between the cells. To remove these gaps (if you want to) open your CSS file in Dreamweaver and find the section for .caltable:

```
.caltable {
    border: 1px solid #316395;
}
```

Edit this section to add the line border-collapse: collapse;

```
.caltable {
    border: 1px solid #316395;
    border-collapse: collapse;
}
```

This change will not render in Dreamweaver, however if you now preview your calendar in a web browser you will see that there is no gap between the different cells of the table.

The calendar in a web browser

We can now style the month heading above the calendar, once again, we marked up this heading within the table by using a caption tag so to style it we simply need to create styles for caption within the class .caltable.

Create the New CSS Style as for .caltable th this time typing .caltable caption in the box.

Under the Type category, I give the caption a font of Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif; 0.9 ems; bold; color #ffffff.

Under the Background category I give it a Background color of #333366.

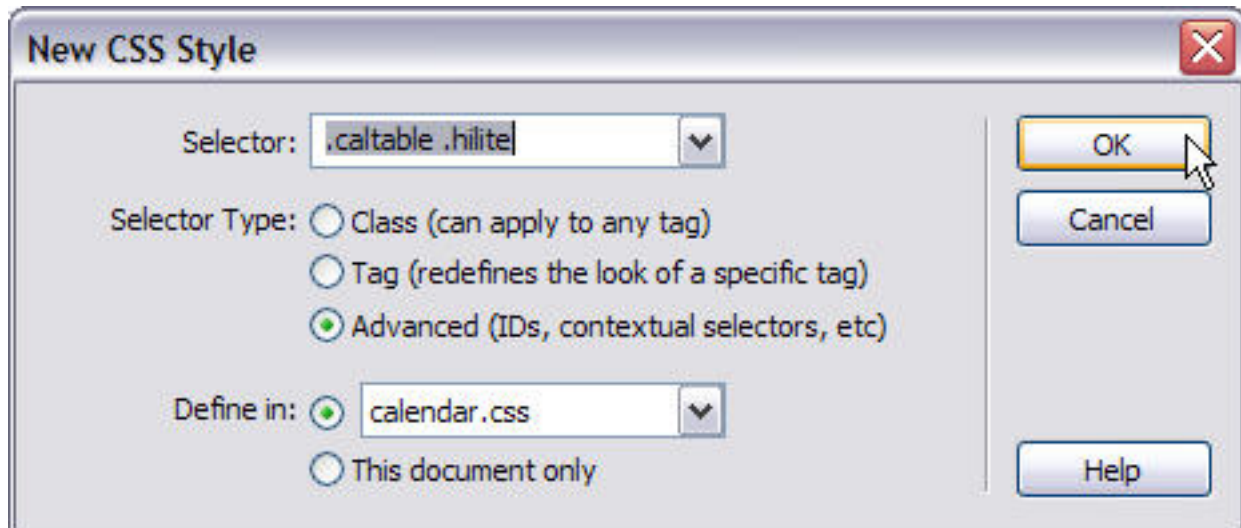Under the Border category I give the table a 1 pixel solid border of #000000 (black).

The calendar complete with caption in the browser

So far we have managed to style this whole calendar with only one addition to the mark-up – the class applied to the table itself. Often you will see that people have created styles for a table and applied them by adding a class to each td, you can usually avoid all of this extra mark-up by using selectors that only style tags within a container that has a class or id applied to it.

Where you might want to apply classes to cells in this table is where a cell contains a date that is a link. In blog applications calendars are sometimes used to link to the entry for that day and in that case, the linked entry would go to the blog for that day. Or, you might launch a pop-up window on click of a link detailing an event that is happening on that day or link to an informational page about the event. Highlighting the days that have a link makes it easy for the visitor to see which days to click on.

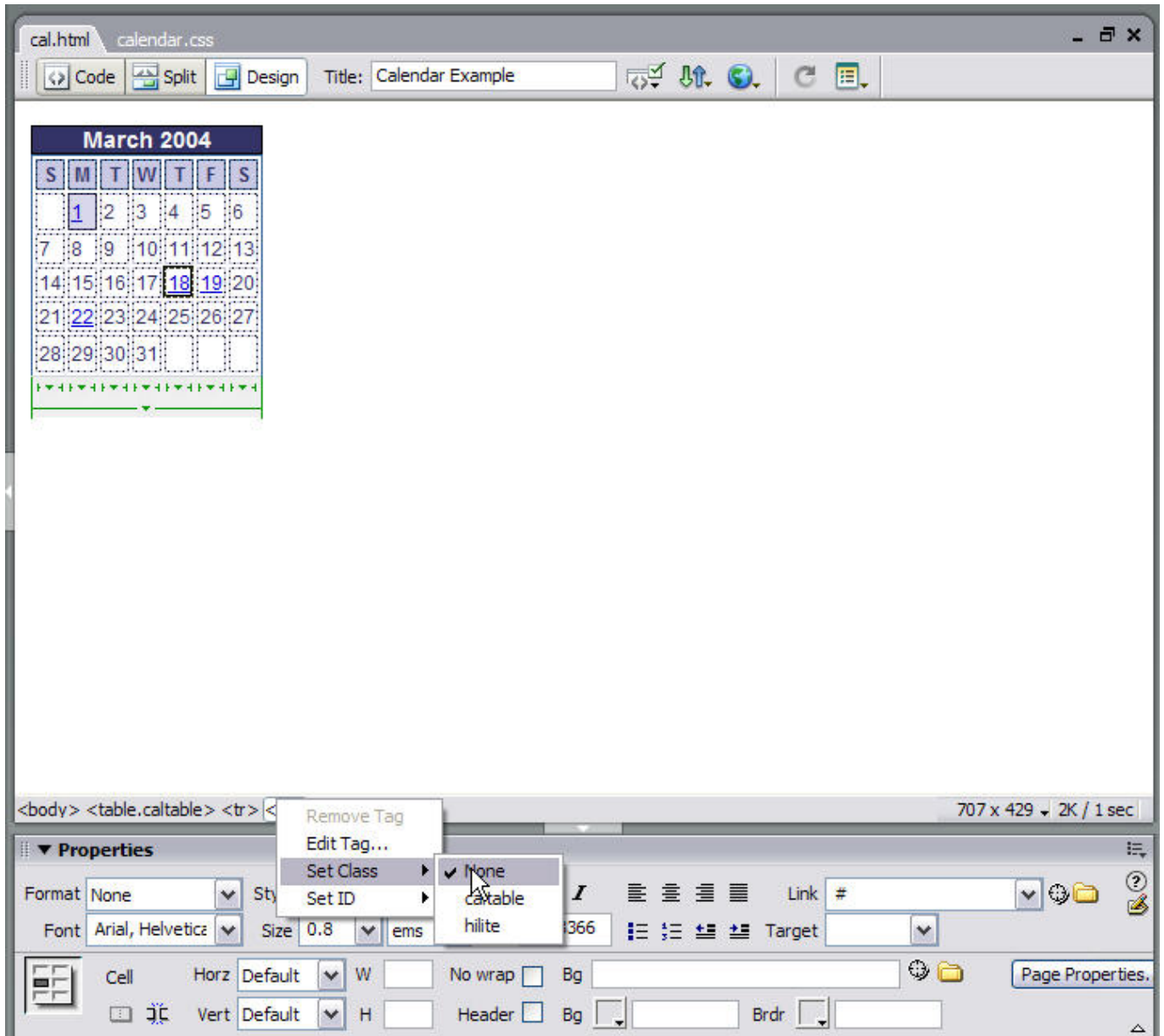Create a New CSS Style, this time type .caltable .hilite into the box.

Create a class for .caltable .hilite

You can now specify the look that you want for highlighted cells. I have simply given then a background color of #D8D8EB and a border in the Border category of 1pixel solid #333366.

After clicking OK to create this class you will need to apply it to cells that have a link within them in order to create the highlighting effect. To apply the class, select the td you wish to highlight and apply the class using the Properties Inspector. Repeat this for each cell that you wish to highlight. If you were creating a dynamic calendar with a server side script you would need to write out this class on table cells that contained a link.
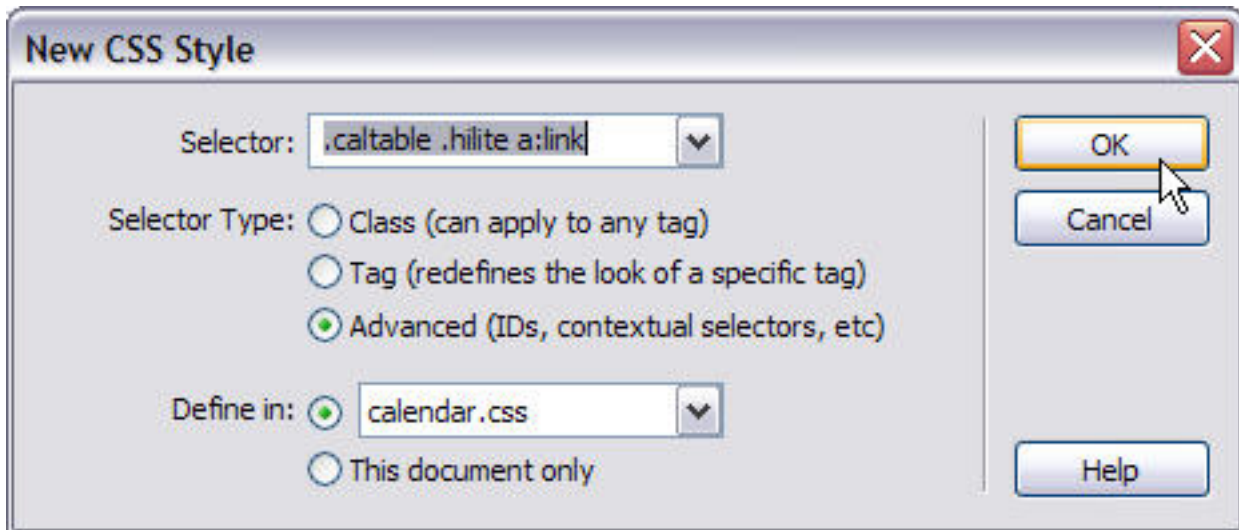
Setting the class hilite on the td tag

You can also style the links within these highlighted cells without adding an additional class to the a tag.

Create a New CSS Style for .caltable .hilite a:link

Creating a New CSS Style for .caltable .hilite a:link

You can then set styles for the links within these highlighted cells. I have simply made them a darker blue (#000033) and bold in the Type category.

You then need to repeat these styles for .caltable .hilite a:visited. You might want to use a slightly different style – perhaps a lighter color for visited links so that a user can easily see that they have visited that event or posting. If you wanted you could add a class for the hover state to create a highlighting effect onmouseover. Remember that you need to create the different states of the link in the following order: LINK, VISITED, HOVER, ACTIVE.

Summary

In this tutorial we have looked at how we can take a calendar, marked up as a plain html table and style it as an attractive part of your site. What I have concentrated on doing here is starting from the basis of a well marked up and accessible calendar and then adding styles to create the look but not effect the mark-up. By applying a class to the containing table and then styling the elements within it we also keep the mark-up to a minimum, which will assist load time of the page. Tables can quickly create a huge amount of mark-up if non-essential classes are applied to each cell. You can use this same technique in many situations, for example giving a form a class or id and then being able to create styles for all input tags within that class.

Use this calendar as a starting point for further experiments. If the very tiny date cells are too small for you try adding padding to their CSS to add some more space around the figure. You could use these same techniques to create a larger events calendar with events actually displayed within the cells for that date, experiment with different border styles, attractive ways to style the caption and so on.