Free eBook

Michał & Diana Malewicz

Design Styles

Learn about the most popular UI design styles and enhance your projects visually

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DESIGN STYLES

This e-book will be updated with new styles and trends when they appear - we will be adding to it via free updates so remember to register at **hype4academy.gumroad.com**

1.
Introduction

Introduction

Hello! Michał and Diana here.

The reaction to "Designing User Interfaces" was so overwhelmingly positive, that we decided to add a lot more content to the book.

The idea for talking about UI design styles in more depth is our response to many questions and requests we were getting. There are many styles, and of course the best way is to find a way to merge them and create something new.

But how?

Well, to do that consciously it's best to know each style in depth first. This book is going in-depth and with full detail into describing the main UI styles in both apps and websites, so you can start creating your own unique style based on the best practices from them all.

This is coming straight from the source, as we're the ones responsible for naming conventions of Neumorphism, Glassmorphism, Aurora, NeuBrutalism, NeuFlat and Claymorphism. Let's explore!
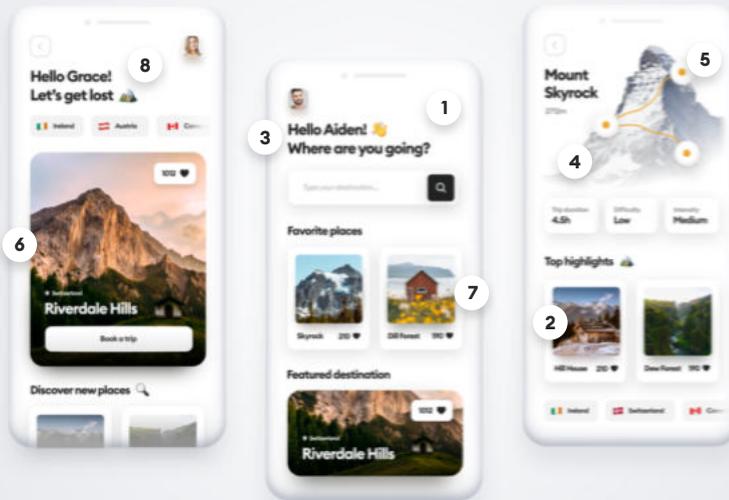
Diana Malewicz

Michał Malewicz
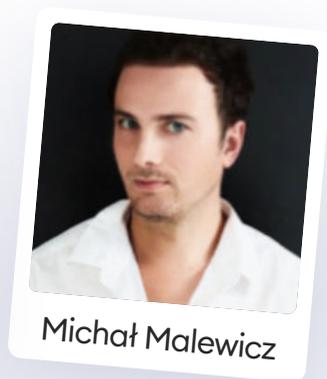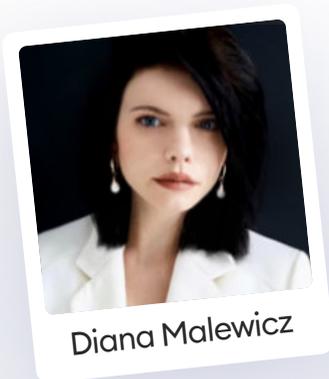
2.
Modern
Minimal

Modern Minimal

Modern Minimal is the newest, "modern, minimalistic" style in UI design that is trending right now. You can spot many inspirations from the different styles in it - but it all works together and doesn't exceed certain level of visual complexity.

In general, Modern Minimal style embraces the following characteristics: (1) Bright backgrounds and whitespace, (2) Subtle roundness on UI elements, (3) Big, readable headings, (4) Real-life photography, (5) Thoughtful use of colors, (6) Focus on contrast, (7) Limited use of effects, (8) Small details, often illustrated.
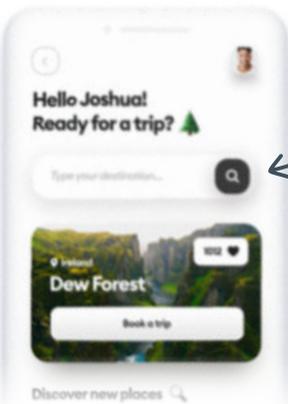
BRIGHT BACKGROUNDS AND WHITESPACE
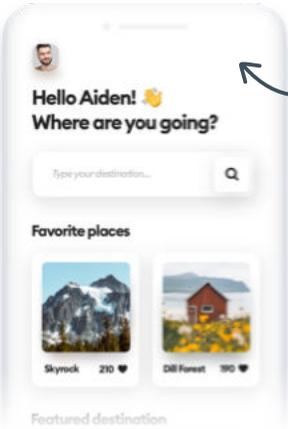
In Modern Minimal, the whitespace is king. The whole content of the interface is most often presented on a white or a very bright background.

The thoughtful use of whitespace makes the interface look clean, fresh and aesthetically pleasing in general.

SUBTLE ROUNDNESS ON UI ELEMENTS

The UI elements in Modern Minimal style are subtly rounded. It makes the interface look more organic and friendly. For example, famous Clubhouse rounded avatars make the whole product look more original and distinctive!

Rounded corners are more pleasurable for our eyes c(ontrary to the sharp ones). The trick is to not overuse the roundness, but rather save it for certain elements, like buttons and containers. The radius of the corners shouldn't exceed certain values (better slightly than fully rounded – this rule doesn't apply to the full rounded buttons though).

## BIG AND READABLE HEADINGS
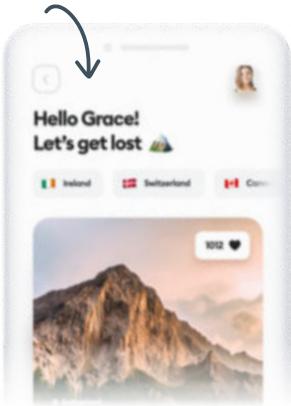
Big headings are readable and very accessible, and they are making the interface look more modern.

You can choose between sans-serif or serif, but it would be better to stick to the popular geometric sans-serifs like Gilroy, Sofia Pro, Lufga, or Circular. You can also try Pulp, Gordita, Visby, Konnect, Geliat, Galano or +Jakarta Sans.

REAL LIFE PHOTOGRAPHY
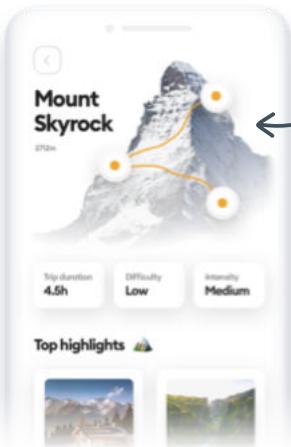
Modern Minimal embraces real-life photography. Real-life photos have one big advantage – they simply look "real" and they bring a touch of reality to digital products.

Our research studies on the projects we've been working on also clearly show, that users prefer photos to illustrations, cause they look more serious and they relate to real-life experiences on an emotional level.

Pro tip

You can find free to use, natural looking photos on sites like **unsplash.com** but always remember to check if it's neccessary to caption the author as the copyright conditions may vary.
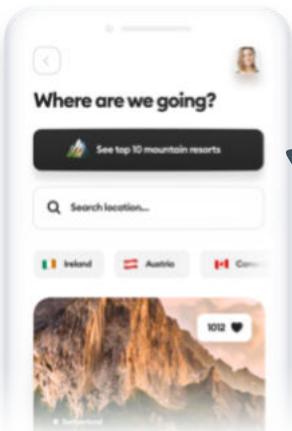
THOUGHTFUL USE OF COLORS
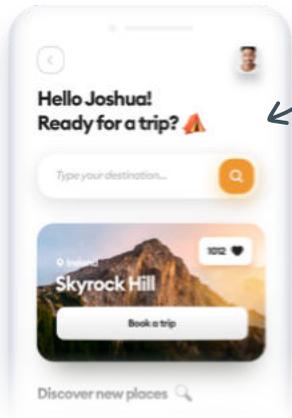
Modern Minimal style is often very minimal when it comes to colors. They are mostly reserved for the most important actions and/or accents on elements.

Thanks to that, the interface is pleasurable to look at, since no big splashes of colors scream for attention of the user all the time.

FOCUS ON CONTRAST

One great thing about Modern Minimal is its accessibility (that one thing that most styles are not so good at, apparently).
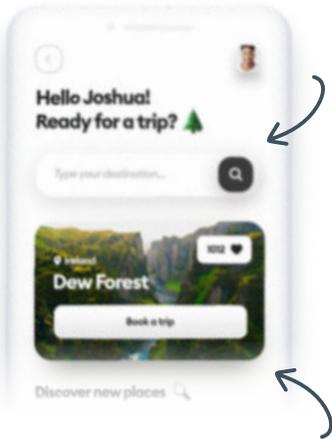
With enough contrast we can easily differentiate background from the elements, understand the visual hierarchy and use the interface with ease.

Pro tip

When in doubt, always check if the contrast ratio between elements and background is accessible and passes WCAG standards. You can do it at **contrastchecker.com** website.

LIMITED USE OF EFFECTS

Modern Minimal draws inspiration from many different styles and effects.

Subtle colorful shadows, blurred aurora backgrounds, embosses and even glassmorphic elements are welcome – to some healthy extent. Thanks to that, the interface can remain readable and visually uncluttered.

SMALL DETAILS, OFTEN ILLUSTRATED
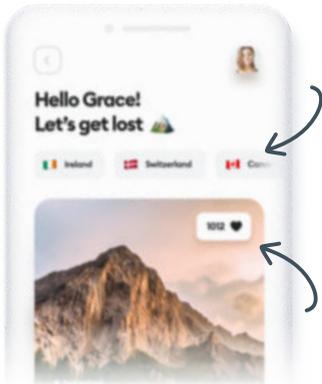
Modern Minimal pays huge attention to details.

Despite it's minimalistic form, it accepts small friendly elements – icons, emojis and other graphic elements such as patterns and collages, that mix up real-life photos with illustrations.

The use of the graphical elements that we're all used to using on a daily basis, makes the interface more welcoming, familiar and fun.

COLOR SCHEME

White color should be used as a background for the Modern Minimal designs. Other colors for background are not quite welcome.

Dark grey should be used as a main color for all the typography (note: never use pure black).
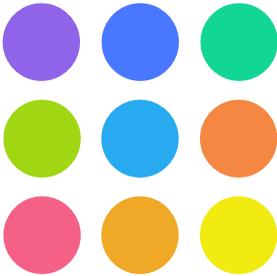
Accent color can be any color, but it should have enough contrast. Also use it in a very limited amount - do not exceed 10% on a single screen.

Keep in mind that some colors are linked to certain action statuses. For example, red often indicates error, so it's probably not a good idea to choose it as a main color for accents as it can be too triggering or misleading for users.

Some colors are reserved / linked to certain action statuses. ”
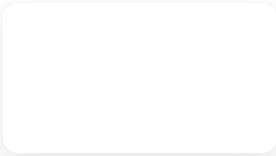
Cards should have a solid fill. They can have a simple, greyish shadow under them...

Card color: #FFFFFF
Shadow color: #E5E5E5
X:0   Y:3   Blur:10   Spread:0
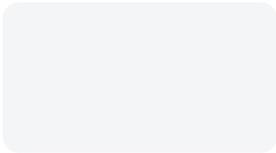
...or you can just design a simple, slightly darker containers without a shadow.
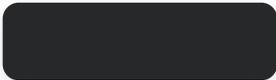
Buttons can also have a delicate shadow underneath them.

Fill color: #26282A
Shadow color: #26282A , with 10% opacity
X:0   Y:3   Blur:10   Spread:0

They can also be filled with a subtle gradient, yet not too colorful.

Fill color: #81DCFF - #4A77FF
Shadow color: #4A77FF with 10% opacity
X:0   Y:3   Blur:10   Spread:0

When choosing photos for the Modern Minimal intefaces, head for the natural, friendly feel and realistic models.

Photos shouldn't look staged or be strongly edited to avoid the "fake", dishonest feel.

Don't use childlish illustations, abstract drawings and caricature portraits. Instead, choose illustrations that are close to the reality as possible, so they create a professional, serious look.

Photos with shadows made right from the photos themselves are characteristical for the Modern Minimal style.

How to achieve this effect?

Simply duplicate the photo, put it underneath the first photo, move it down the Y axis and scale it down a bit.

Add the gaussian blur effect and decrease the opacity to around 10%.

"

Photos shouldn't look staged or be strongly edited to avoid the "fake", dishonest feel. "

Modern Minimal style embraces everything that makes the interface functional, but also friendly – and when it comes to the UI design, it's definitely the biggest challenge.

It doesn't really jeopardize accessibility in any way – which makes it a style that you can use on a daily basis, and not just for the Dribbble shots.

The interfaces should be minimalistic, which makes them more usable. But they should also induce all kinds of positive emotions through being aesthetically pleasing.

And, Modern Minimal style connects both!

3. Soft UI

Soft UI
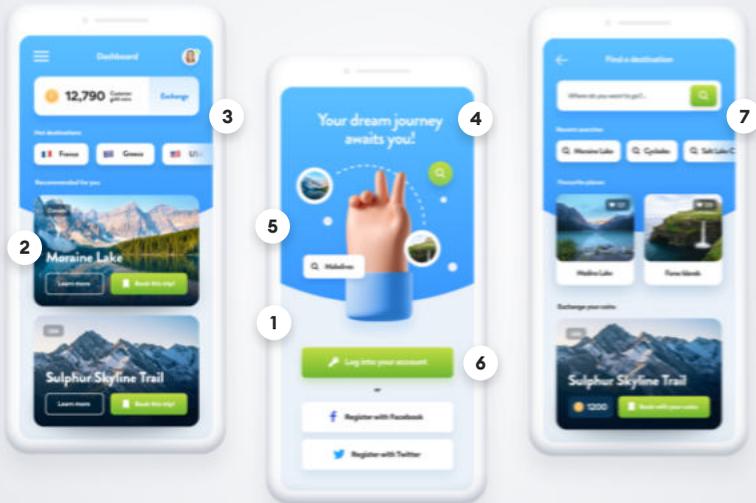
Soft UI is a combination of friendly, colorful gradients and shadows.
They make interfaces look alive, fresh and inviting.
Elements with tonal transitions & shadows imitate what we perceive
in real life – and that's why they're more familiar and understandable
even for non-tech-savvy users.

In general, Soft UI style embraces the following characteristics:
(1) Pastel backgrounds, (2) Round UI elements, (3) Vivid colors,
(4) Friendly typography, (5) Illustrations, sometimes mixed with
photographs, (6) Subtle colorful shadows, (7) Gradients.

PASTEL BACKGROUNDS
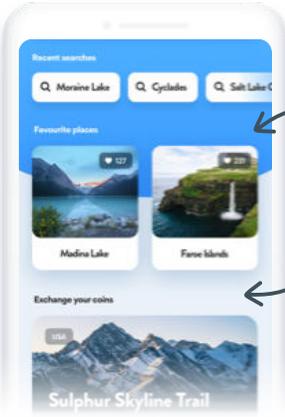
In Soft UI, we use pastel and colorful backgrounds. Contrary to the full-white backgrounds in Modern Minimal, pastel backgrounds create more "cozy" and friendly feeling.

💬

Pro tip

When using pastels, make sure that the UI is not too "blurry" or "dull" due to the low contrast. Always mix bright pastels with more juicy, vivid colors, to make the interface look more "alive".

ROUND UI ELEMENTS
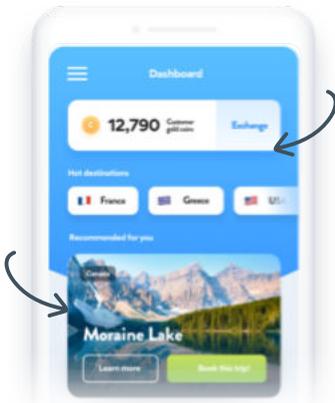
The UI elements in SOFT UI are often rounded. The main reason for this is of course to make the UI more friendly and appealing, and more pleasurable for the eyes.

The roundness can be used on content boxes, on buttons, on photos and icons.

FRIENDLY TYPOGRAPHY
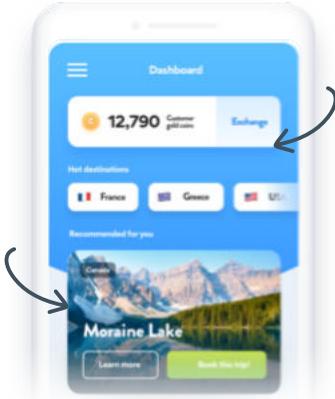
Vivid colors are widely used in Soft UI, often to balance the, subtle, delicate nature of the bright, pastel backgrounds.

They add the right contrast to the UI and they help to emphasize the most important elements and pieces of information.

Vivid colors are also used for CTA's and help the most important actions to stand out from the screen, so they are easily visible for the user.

VIVID COLORS
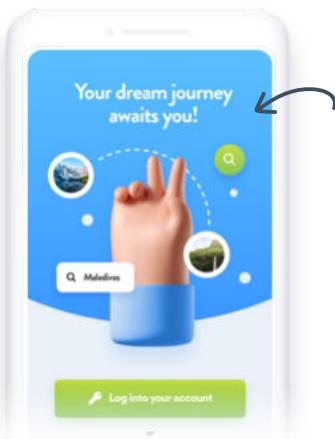
When designing in a Soft UI style, you can choose more friendly looking fonts. They mix well with the overall feeling of this style.

We used paid **Brandon Grotesque** font on the example screen - but you can also try using fonts like **Lato or Work Sans** (as they are free on Google Fonts).

ILLUSTRATIONS MIXED WITH PHOTOS
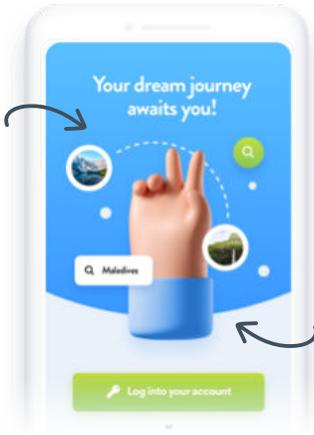
Soft UI is recognizable for the use of the characteristical, colorful 3D illustrations.

3D illustrations are playful and friendly, and they mix well with bright, happy colors and less serious typography. They also add a nice feeling of depth in interfaces.

3D illustations can also be mixed with flat accents, iconography and photography.

You can find similiar illustations on the icons8.com website.

COLORFUL SHADOWS AND GRADIENTS
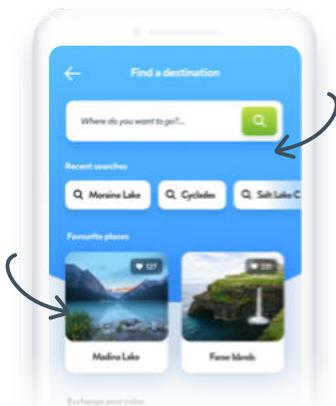
Elements in Soft UI can have a subtle, colorful shadows and gradients on them.

Shadows and gradients add depth and make the elements stand out from the background more.

They also create a 3D effect on elements which make them look slightly embossed and, in result, more clickable.

Colors are very important in the Soft UI style, so choose carefully. Think delicate pastels for a background, CTA that would be a very contrasting color. Then some more delicate colors for secondary elements, and a pop of color for accents.
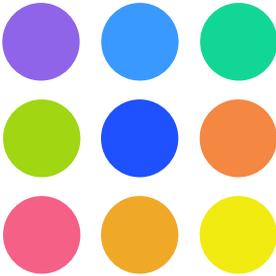
Primary, vivid color
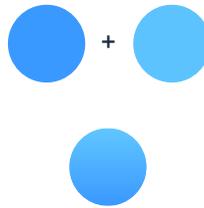
Primary + slightly brighter color = a good looking gradient
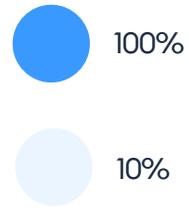
Decrease the opacity of primary color to 10% to get the perfect pastel background color

Primary color can be basically any color but make sure it's enough saturated and that the contrast of the color will be high enough to blend well with the delicate background.

After choosing the primary color do these simple steps to create the whole color palette for your Soft UI project.

Mixing two slighly different blues (darker and brighter) will result in good looking gradient. You can also easily get the right color for your background by simply decreasing the opacity of primary color to 10% or even 5%.

COLOR SCHEME

When you decide on a theme for your app, try to add a hint of the main color to your background. It will greatly improve the overall look and feel, because it helps all the other colors fit into place better. It also tricks our brains to like what we see a little bit more.

That color-consistency is what makes Soft UI projects really shine. Don't go overboard though, a very subtle tint of the main hue will be enough. The idea is to be slightly off-white, not a fully saturated new color. You can pick a primary color (from the button for example) and then make the brightness higher, and saturation lower until it's just a little off-white.

The button average color with saturation at 5% and brightness at 96%

Just white.

BOOK A TRIP

The button average color (primary)

The button average color with saturation at 5% and brightness at 96%

Just white.

BUY THE TICKETS

The button average color (primary)

"
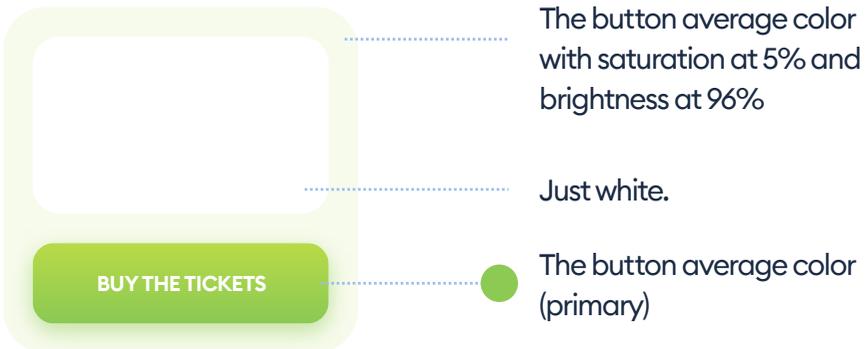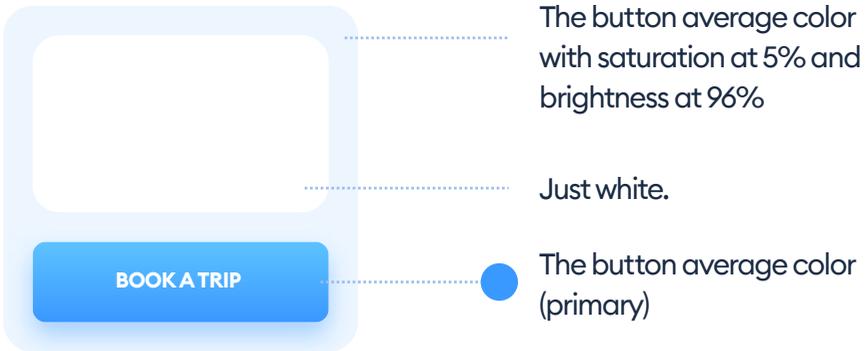
Add a hint of your primary color to your backgrounds. "

GRADIENTS

To make gradients look subtle and realistic, you can use just one color on both ends. Then make one of the ends brighter by increasing Brightness (around 5 points) and decrease Hue (5 to 10 points).

Now, stretch the anchors of the gradient, so that the color transition becomes very smooth. The gradient will be barely visible but still makes the element look a little convex.
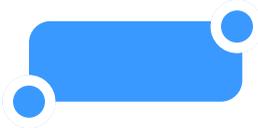
Hue: -10
Brightness: +5

This approach works with nearly any color, so it's a great way to start a gradient exploration for the project.

White

#E2F0FF

For white elements, make a gradient using white and a very delicate color that matches the background. Just make sure it has enough contrast and doesn't blend too much with the backgrround.

"

Subtle gradients with small difference between the colors look a lot more realistic."

Create a few font sizes (preferably up to 5 and don't exceed that limit) – bigger size for titles and subtitles, smaller for content, the smallest one for least essential details. The hierarchy rules from the Typography chapter all apply here as well.

If you start with a pre-defined set, the constraints can actually lead to some very creative uses. If you really need to change a size or a weight, simply do it in all of the screens.

Friendly and soft

or

Serious and Professional

You should pick the font to fit the product. If it's a B2C, friendly and open app or website, it's best to use slightly rounded, organic typefaces like **Brandon Grotesque**, **Muli,** or **Lato.**

If the product is serious - either B2B, or simply in the fintech, medical or other serious industries - it's best to stick with the classic types of fonts - but there's still plenty to choose from.

You can also stay safe with Roboto or San Francisco (for Android and iOS respectively), or try **Gilroy**, **Montserrat** or **Poppins**.

FONT COLORS

As we all know, we should avoid pure black fonts whenever possible. The contrast they have, especially on white backgrounds is too high on a display that is glowing into your eyes. But using gray can be pretty boring. Here's a solution:

Regular, boring gray.
#7C7C7C

Gray with a tint!
#65758E

Black.
#000000

Gray with a tint!
#283344

Try to add some character to your app with a hint of color in the background. Then match the font color with that background.

As you can see in the example above, the regular gray font looks a bit unnatural. That little tint makes a big difference in the first impression of your project.

It makes the font match the project, without sacrificing accessibility, as the contrast is still high enough. This is one of the subconscious effects but it really works - people simply prefer matching colors.

You can make that difference even more subtle - it can be nearly gray, but even a smallest amount of the primary color tint will still make it fit the entire interface better.

ROUNDNESS & ANGLES

Sharp corners don't really exist in nature, if you zoom in close enough. They're also associated with danger and seriousness. So if we want our project to be friendly and open, it's best to go with some rounded corners.

BOOK A TRIP   BUY THE TICKETS

Serious   Friendly
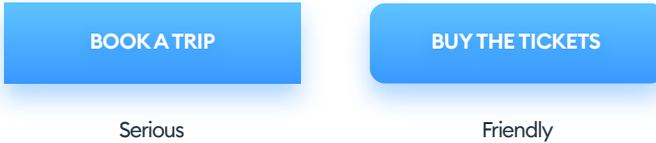
A small roundness is more than enough here. You can use fully rounded buttons (pill buttons), but they're a bit difficult to align with other UI elements. And even that small roudness in the example on the right is already making it look friendly.

For common elements, like buttons, try to come up with angular gradients instead of the classic top-down ones. It will make the interface pop out a little bit more and make it more organic, realistic and friendly.

BOOK A TRIP   BUY THE TICKETS

The optical goal for a nice looking button is to still have "most of the darker shade" near the bottom. But you can tweak the angle like in the example on the right to make the button look more natural.

Of course if you're using that angle, you should then keep it consistent in all similar elements (badges, other buttons etc.) Don't go for the obvious / default solutions with either gradients or colors.

Shadows define how close or far an object is. That helps with building hierarchy."

Shadows are an integral part of the soft-ui style. It is important, however, not to overuse them. Adding a shadow to every on-screen element will create a blur-overload and make the interface less pleasant visually.

It's best to reserve shadows mostly for the cards, buttons and avatar photos and leave everything else flat. Avoid using shadows on very small objects and icons, as it can create a fuzzy-edge look that makes the interface feel messy.
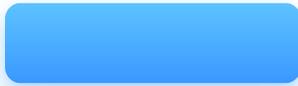
Y=4, Blur=8
40% opacity
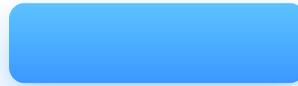
Y=8, Blur=16
40% opacity

Avoid using the X value for shadows - keep it at 0. The Y value depends on the size of the object. If your button or card is higher than 32 points, you can easily use 8 or 16 for the Y value. Blur looks best when it's about double the Y value, so for Y = 8, use Blur = 16. Pick the shadow color from the bottom of your object and set the color opacity to between 20 and 40% depending on your color and the background. It has to be visible, but subtle.
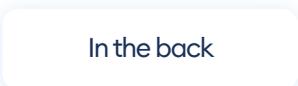
In the back

Closer to you

Blur also helps with showing depth. You can use a larger Y and Blur values to show elements that are closer to the user (more important) and smaller values for objects that are more in the back.

MULTI-COLOR SHADOWS

If you have an object that has multiple colors in it, you can easily create a multi-color shadow for it. All you have to do is to export that object as a bitmap and then blur that bitmap and put it under the main object. To achieve the right effect play with the blur values and opacity.

By moving the blurred image a little bit lower you create the illusion of a higher Y value.

They work great for presentation purposes, but when coding a multi-color shadow, all parts of the object will simply have to cast their own shadow that comes from their color.

This is a very quick and easy solution for good looking multi-color shadows that are perfect for showcases or portfolio images. They can also work really well for illustrations - in that case it's good to "bake" the shadow in with the actual image, or export it as a blur for the developers.

You can make your product look way more engaging and interesting, by putting some illustrations on the screens like registration, onboarding, or empty states.

If you're not an illustrator, or if you don't know any 3D software, don't worry - there are plenty of resources to use on the web. Our favourite ones are from the icons8.com and we use them on a daily basis.
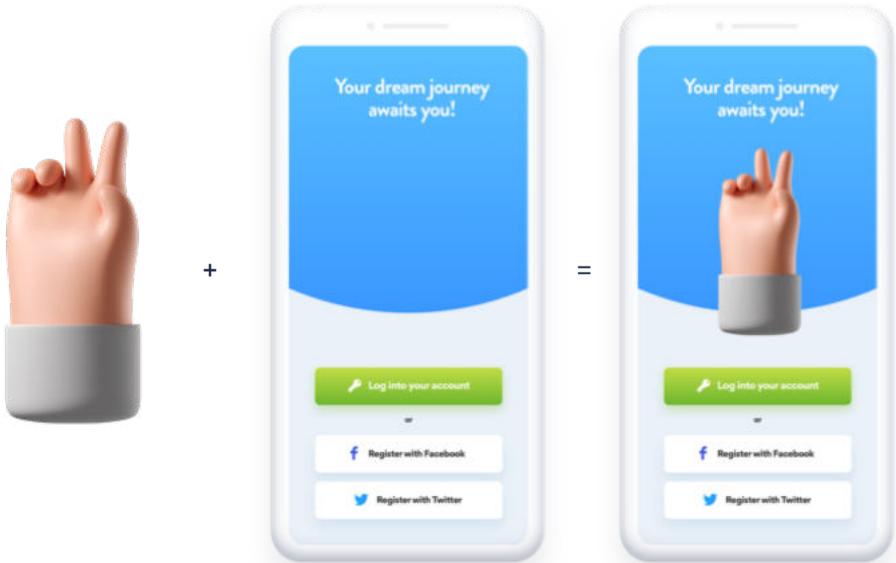
Pick an illustration (we've picked a simple 3D hand). Choose the screen on which you want to create the collage. You can create some irregular shape as a background and fill it with a vivid color/gradient.

Place a 3D object on the screen, so it lays both on the colorful object and the regular background - it will create an interesting effect.

Blending mode: "Color"
Opacity: 80%
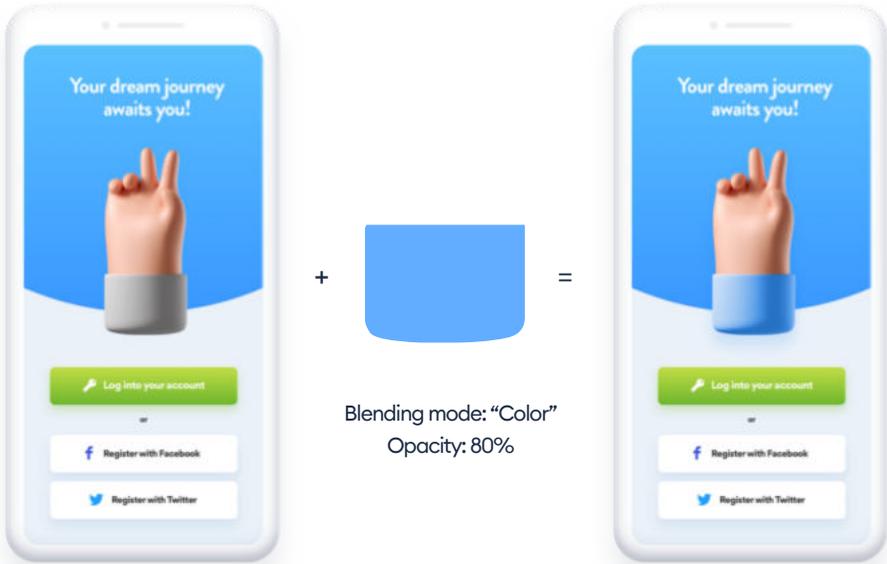
If some part of the illustration doesn't quite match the background, you can always recolor it. Draw a simple shape of the part that you want to recolor using pentool, fill it with the right color and change the blending mode to "color". Change the opacity to get the best looking result.

To make the 3D element pop even more, you can add a subtle shadow underneath it. The more you want the element to stand out and float over the background, the more darker and bigger the shadow should be.
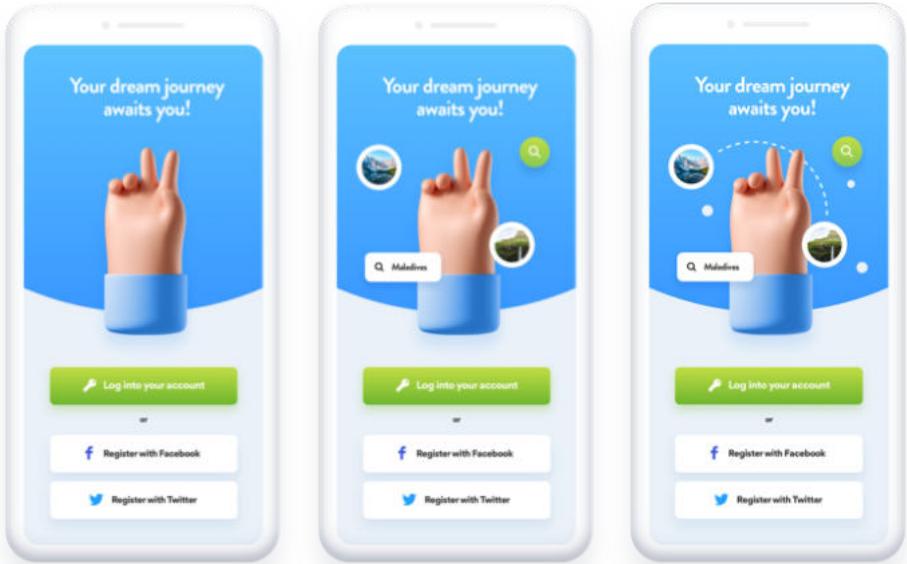
Make the illustation even more interesting and alive by adding some other elements around it.

For example, you can use fragments of the product UI - a search icon, a button, text field, photos in rounded frames, user avatars - to create an unique look that will also match with the product's aesthetics.

You can make the collage look complete by adding some finishing touches like little shapes, lines and scribbles around the main elements.

"

Illustrations and photos make the project look more interesting and engaging. "

4.
Flat
UI

Flat UI
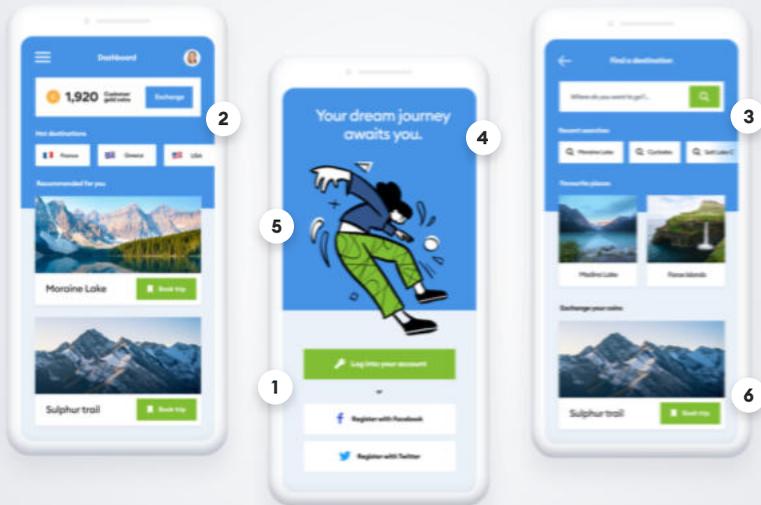
Flat Design is a UI Design Style close to minimalism, but there are many variants of it having only some, or all of its stylistic features. You can say, that flat design is as far away from Skeuomorphism, as it can be. It uses only 2-dimensional "flat" (hence the name) elements to define the entire interface.

In general, Flat UI style embraces the following characteristics:
(1) Flat elements with solid fill (2) Sharp edges on elements (3) Subdued colors, (4) Simple typography, (5) Flat illustrations, (6) Very subtle shadows.

FLAT ELEMENTS WITH SOLID FILL
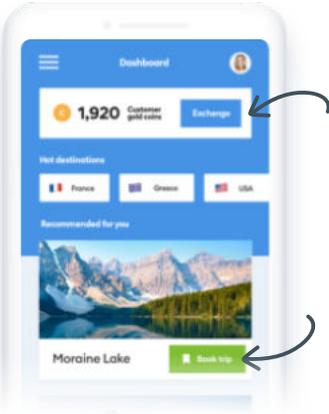
Most UI elements in Flat have only a solid fill with no visible effects like shadows and gradients.

It's mostly due to the fact that Flat UI forgoes the real-life inspirations like shadows and gradients, as they imitate the natural lightning and 3D nature of real life objects.

SHARP EDGES ON ELEMENTS
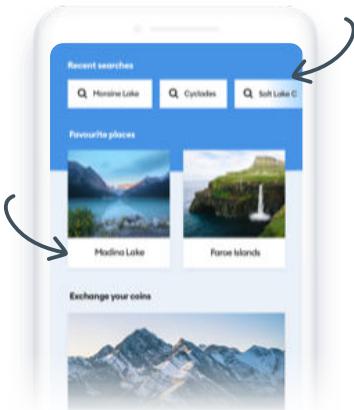
The UI elements in Flat UI are rather sharp then rounded.

You can perceive roundness on the elements as another effect that can be simplified to a simple, sharp-edged shape.

They also create more serious and professional look contrary to the rounded elements.

Pro tip

You can still add a subtle roundness to the edges. A 1-3 point roudness is still acceptable since it's barely visible - but it will still make the elements more pleasurable to look at and more friendly for the eyes.
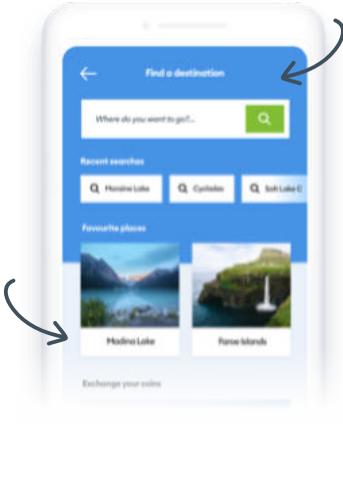
Colors of the Flat interfaces are sightly desaturated and less bright comparing to the Soft style.

Backgrounds are mostly pure white or have a delicate tint of color.

The color palette of the Flat UI's is often monochromatic, or has just one contrasting color for accents and CTA.

SIMPLE TYPOGRAPHY
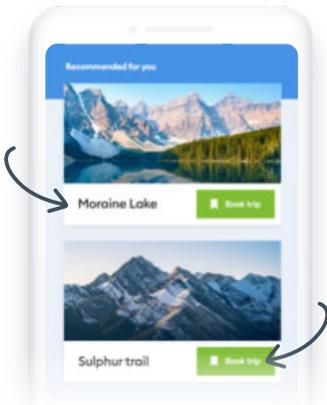
Flat UI embraces simple, classic typography.

The most obvious choices for this kind of interface would be Roboto or San Francisco. But you can experiment with other similar sans-serif fonts. Choose mostly regular or medium weights.

Pro tip

Although differences between platforms are very subtle those days, **use Roboto for native Android products, and San Francisco for iOS products.** Always check the platform guidelines to avoid mistakes.

FLAT ILLUSTRATIONS
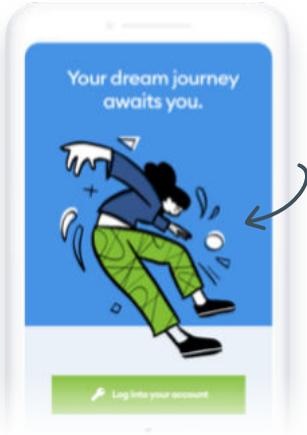
Flat UI looks good with flat illustrations. 3D imagery would look rather weird on a fully flat, strict interface (although it depends on a project).

You can buy the premade illustrations or try and create them on your own. Later in this chapter we will show you how to draw a simple character using only simple shapes and lines.

VERY SUBTLE SHADOWS
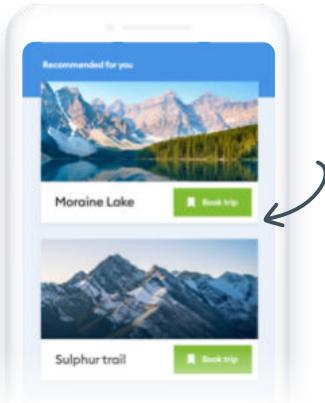
Although Flat UI is mostly flat, you can add a very subtle shadow underneath some elements - for example, content cards.

Similar effect can be found in Material Design, that puts a great focus on the visual hierarchy of "cards" - and despite the fact that the most UI elements are fully flat, the cards have shadows to show that they are floating over the background.

Flat UI embraces simple solid colors, shapes and classic typography. "

The first big jump into truly Flat UI Design was made by Microsoft with the release of Windows 8 and Windows Phone. It used completely flat, sharp-cornered tiles, simple, clear typography, high contrast and saturated colors across the interface.

Microsoft was a bit late to the party and failed to attract many developers to create apps for this platform (there was no official Instagram app for example) which led to it becoming just a part of the design history.

iOS and Android prevailed, while Windows Phone is no more. But knowing what we know now about what makes a design friendly, the style itself may have had something to do with the cold user reception too.

IOS 7

The wildly controversial iOS 7 was released in 2013 and it was Apple's turn to dive into flat, two-dimensional UI's. After the initial response, the UI had been modified more towards "modern UI" to add a bit of that friendly, humanistic approach to it. The reason for the shift to happen after a few years was that users had already learned and understood the skeuomorphic UI, so they didn't need the extra help with understanding how the phone works.

iOS 6 settings icon (on the left) vs the iOS 7 flat redesign (on the right) caused a lot of controversy with users. Icons by Apple.

Back in the 1920's, Russia, Germany and the Netherlands started an "International Typographic Style". It was then later refined by Swiss Designers in the 1950's, earning itself the name of "Swiss Style".

The initial idea for this style, was to deliver a solution to a problem based on the actual problem, while previously the artistic solution to a problem was to "create beauty".

Swiss design is heavily based on clean typography, grids, left-aligned text, sans-serifs, bold, saturated colors and sometimes assymetry in the layouts. This style is still the base of most modern design styles and it spawned likely the most famous (aside from Comic Sans of course) font ever: **Helvetica**. It was created in the 1950's as part of the Swiss Style, and was initially named **Neue Haas Grotesk.**

Michał Malewicz, Diana Malewicz

UI Design Styles

This is what this book's cover would've looked like if it was created in the Swiss Style. Notice the bold, saturated blue, simple, geometric forms as the visual and clear, grid-aligned typography.

This is a cover/poster protoplast of what later became Flat UI Design. The influences from the 50's are still with us and are a part of pretty much every design style out there.

"

Flat design uses sans-serif fonts, solid colors and well defined grids to deliver high readability.”

FLAT UI DESIGN NOW

Flat design still exists in modern day posters, but both Microsoft's and Apple's failed attempts didn't help bringing it to the mainstream. In a way Material Design was using a lot of the same principles that Flat / Swiss Design promoted, but added shadows (and later gradients) which later influenced the most popular styles and trends we use today.

There are however, areas in which flat design is still king. Mainly e-commerce websites and luxury brand apps. These sites often feature beautiful, professionally made photos of the products, and want those photographs to speak for themselves, with the design fading into the background. They use high-contrast, clear typography and stay away from gradients, textures and shadows.

Cobbles Classic Tee
€99

Add to cart

Summer set
€150

Add to cart

Summer set
€150

Add to cart

Flat design works well for e-commerce, because it doesn't take any attention away from the product. Through high contrast, high readability and good typography it communicates style, fashion, high quality and attention to detail.

It can feel a bit "overwhelming" and serious, even business-like, so in more consumer-facing products it's good to actually mix it up with some soft/modern UI.

The main rule of Flat UI is to remove the unnecessary effects and styling. Keep all objects simple, readable and straightforward.

Soft UI   Flat UI

In general shadows are a very good way to communicate that something is a button and can be pressed. In Flat design they're removed leaving us with a button-resembling rectangle. The only characteristic of it is the fill color and the spacing. There is no gradient and no shadow. The corners could be rounded (for a bit of that friendly effect) but it's not as common in the "true" flat design style.

The idea here is to only keep the essentials. Without the actual shape or the text inside, the user wouldn't know it's a button. So these main characteristics have to stay in order for this UI element to make sense.

Obviously removing these attributes causes some controversy. We are reminded again and again that purely flat interfaces are harder to grasp by the users, and flat buttons are processed a lot slower than ones with a shadow.

That's simply how our brain works - the **flatness** of flat design doesn't exist in nature. That's why this style is probably not recommended for consumer products (ones aimed at the "general population").

"

Remove the unnecessary effects and styling - keep it stupid simple."

COLORS

Flat design is often associated with strong, solid colors. Although in most examples they are somewhat subdued - they have slightly lower saturation - you can also try and work with more vibrant ones. The choice of colors should depend mostly on the product's characteristics.

Subdued colors

Vibrant colors

When building a palette with vibrant colors, it's best to avoid the highest possible contrasts (between white and black) and instead use muted variants of the same color for the text.

BOOK A TRIP

White text looks good and readable on most subdued colors. The contrast between both colors in on point.

BOOK A TRIP

White text looks a little bit too "sharp" and hurts the eye due to the very high contrast between colors. So it's a good practice to use slightly darker color than pure white (#00000).

BOOK A TRIP

On a bright, pastel colors it's good to use a dark color for the text.

Longshadows - now, nearly forgotten were a flat version of shadows. They weren't breaking the rules of a flat design, because they didn't really add any perceived depth to a design.

The idea was to add a simulated, usually diagonal, completely flat shadow to an object for it to catch more of our attention. It can be used on any type of object, including circles, although it does look a little bit better with more complex, angluar shapes.

To create a classic flat "long shadow" all you have to do is create a shape (making sure all the lines are going in the same direction) and then changing the background color to the same background, but with slightly decreased brightness (even -10 will be just fine)

It's best to start with a 45 degree angle and to actually create "helper lines" before you draw your shape. All those lines need to be parallel to each other for the illusion to look good. If one of the lines is off by even one degree it will be visible to the user right away.

While currently "out of style", this concept can still look quite good if used scarcily in a design - for example you can use it to bring one, most important object to a front, or even under an illustrated character.

When shadows, gradients and photos can be distracting, you can also use flat design to comunicate basic design ideas. We called it pre-fidelity (before even low-fidelity designs), when you can communicate ideas before jumping into detailed visual representations.
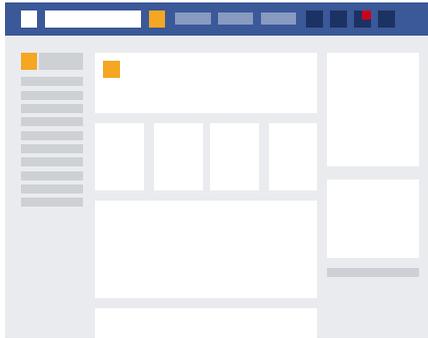
Can you guess what this product is by just seeing the blockframe?

One great concept is blockframing. Think of it as a wireframe, but without the extra borders, grey colors and bad alignment. It can help with the initial planning of a layout, can be turned responsive with Auto-Layout tools and you can also add annotations to describe the features.

But because it's not as busy visually, it's a lot better to present new features or the general layout choices to a client than a complex, overloaded with content wireframe.

You can also use flat design for flow diagrams (for which using shadows would be a really bad idea) or even mid-fidelity prototypes. By removing the borders, shadows and gradients, and keeping text to a minimum you can focus on the actual flow of the product and make the necessary adjustments.

Blockframing is a great way to showcase a proposed layout without too much focus on the details."

Flat style is the most common with flat illustrations. Characters created in this style are very popular when mixed with other design styles like material design, soft-ui and modern design.

Basic shapes   Additional shapes   Shadows and details
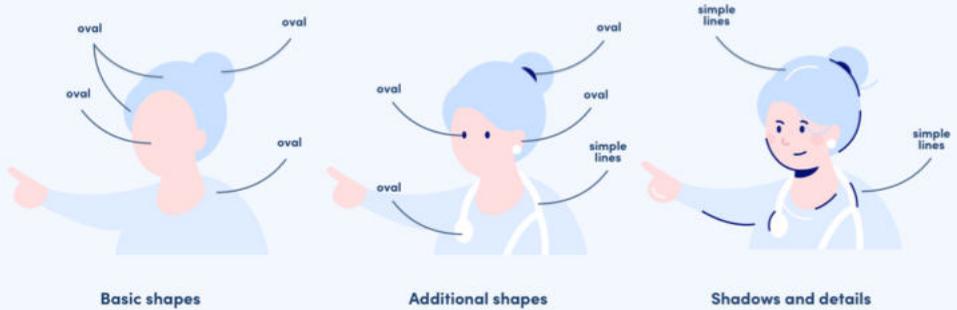
Here's an example how with a couple of very basic shapes and only flat color fills you can create a nice looking character for your design. Of course it requires some practice, but flat illustration is still one of the easier kinds to learn and master.

You can use a high contrasting lines as shadows and highlights, to make your character stand out even more. It's all just a combination of simple, basic shapes like ovals and lines.

The best thing about these kinds of illustrations is that they can be exported as SVG (or other vector formats) and used both in apps and websites with infinite scalability, which comes in handy with responsive design breakpoints. It's also fairly easy to animate them, if you create the limbs as separate layers, as there aren't many color differences between shapes.

FLAT BUTTONS

As we mentioned at the very beginning of this chapter, buttons are identified faster, if they cast a shadow. But since we're exploring flat-design and there are almost no shadows in this style, there are other ways to help our buttons stand out a bit more.

To make your flat buttons stand out you can use:

BOOK A TRIP

High contrast CTA - when the Call to Action is a very intense color, it catches the attention much faster.

BOOK A TRIP ›

Additional arrow to the right of the text (enforces the action by showing it's direction)

BOOK A TRIP ›

You can also put a darker shade background box under the arrow.

BOOK A TRIP

An angular or trapezoid shape can add direction to the button.

BOOK A TRIP

Or you can create a flat shadow, as a slightly darker rectangle just under the main shape.

Keep in mind that a barely visible, low contrast flat button will be very difficult to spot and take action on.
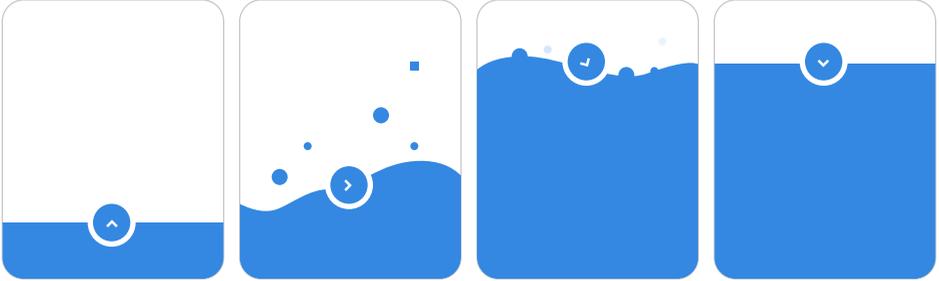
"

**With Flat Design you
need to make your CTA
buttons stand out even
more to be noticed.** ”

Just because the design is flat, doesn't mean it cannot be animated in a visually complex, entertaining way. Rubber-banding effects and fluidity can look very well in this style.

A simple background extension can move in a wave with flat particle effects to make it more interesting and engaging. Don't forget to also rotate the arrow!

You can also animate your illustrations - a simple hand wave on the login page, or even just blinking can add the "fun factor" to an otherwise static design. Obviously don't try to go over the top with the animations either. Too much movement can be distracting and can scare away the users.

Color transitions are also an interesting way to use animation in large backgrounds - they can be coded so even the most distant colors on the color wheel can seamlessly transition into each other. It can be a great way to differentiate specific pages or main sections of the product. Above you can see a color transition from red to blue.

5.
Dark
Mode

Dark mode

Dark mode became popular around the time when OLED screens started appearing in mobile devices. In most cases, it's a second interface style of an app or website, and the user can choose between dark and standard versions.

Many designers believe that the "Dark Mode" UI is more comfortable for the eyes, especially when viewed at night. "Dark Mode", however, in some instances, helps in reducing the energy consumption of your device. But let's not be afraid to say it. The main reason for dark mode is that it just "looks cool."

HOW TO START A DARK MODE PROJECT

When you're designing a dark-mode only project or a portfolio piece, you have a lot more flexibility in how you start the project. The starting point is always the color definition. If your goal is to add a dark-mode version to an existing product, consider doing it in a way that's **aligned with your brand identity**. The change isn't merely an inverse of colors and needs some thought on how to make it work for your product.

Let's start by defining the color palette. Start by outlining your primary CTA and accent colors first - both for a new project and a dark-mode version of an existing one. Here's an example.

Main CTA color: #2273FF	Accent color: #EA753B

If your saturation is too high or brightness value is lower than 50, you may consider a brighter version of your primary color, as the contrast between it and the dark background will end up being too low.

| #0E2366	#153599	#2273FF
⚠ 1.0:1 AA Failed	⚠ 1.3:1 AA Failed	✅ 4.5:1 AA Passed

Always test the CTA contrast ratio against the second darkest hue you've defined. You should arrive with the primary CTA contrast passing the AA ratio.

The main rule with picking dark-mode complementary colors is to have them both bright and slightly desaturated. Some shades (especially dark blue and purple) with high saturation usually don't pass the contrast checks for accessibility.

Hello
Bye!

Hello
Bye!
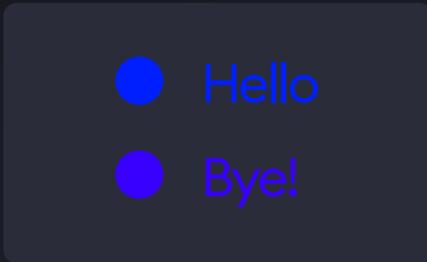
(!) Most high saturation (100) colors are very hard to see on a dark background.
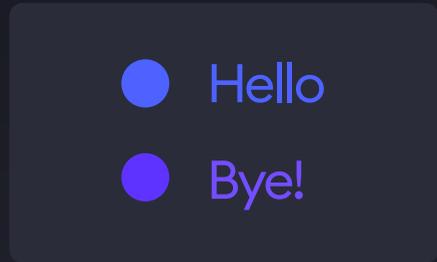
(✓) Decreasing the saturation makes a big difference for the same hues.

If you have a set of colors, including system status ones, you can create a special version of that set made for dark mode. The best way is to modify each color with the same saturation decrease first and then test both the looks of the color and its contrast. Adjust, so it works both ways.

Light background main colors
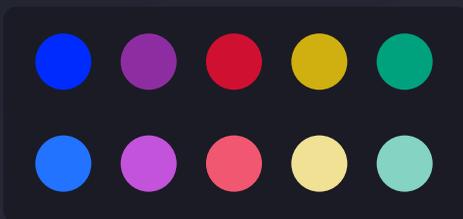
Same colors on a dark background

Saturation and brightness adjusted.

"

Start with defining your CTA and Accent colors, but make sure the CTA contrast to the background is high enough.”

DARKNESS GRADATION

While this chapter title may sound like a goth-metal band debut album, it's also one of the more important rules when designing for Dark Mode.

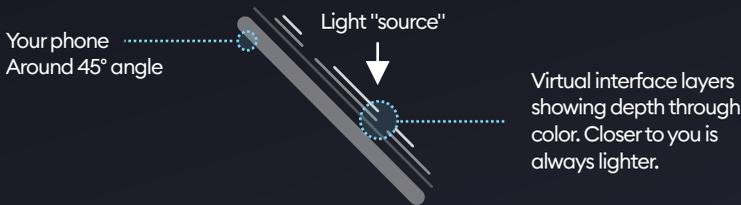In most digital products, we assume a top-down light source, because this is how we hold and use our phones most of the time.

Your phone
Around 45° angle

Light "source"

Virtual interface layers showing depth through color. Closer to you is always lighter.

Knowing that you can start from the very bottom of #000000, which on OLED screens saves a little bit of battery life. That would be your base color for most popular devices out there. Define at least four additional dark-mode layers just in case, but remember that they should have a bit of your CTA color hue in them to match it well. Avoid using pure-grays unless your brand uses them. For our already defined example, the set can look like this:

base	level 1	level 2	level 3	level 4
#000000	#13151A	#262B33	#39404D	#4D5666
#2273FF	Saturation: 25 Brightness: 10	Saturation: 25 Brightness: 20	Saturation: 25 Brightness: 30	Saturation: 25 Brightness: 40

To create levels 1-4 we simply take our main blue CTA and decrease the saturation to 25, giving it four distinct brightness levels.

#000000	#151515	#303030	#454545	#606060

Now that we have our layers thought out let's put them all together as a vertical stack.
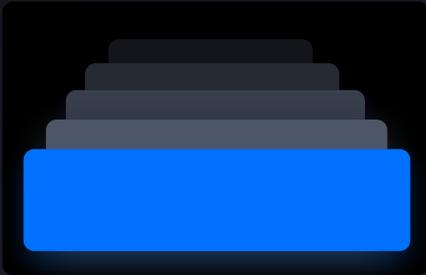
This stack shows how each color feels closer to the screen, the lighter it gets. The primary CTA can exist on any of the top 3 layers, but often it's the nearest object to the user.

The arrangement can use only a couple of layers in one place once you put it in terms of a user interface, but the hierarchy should always stay the same.

Avoid putting a darker background shade on a lighter one, or your users will lose that sense of depth that helps with understanding the proper relation between layers. Remember that your main product structure only needs about three layers to accomplish most of the typical tasks. You can define each layer for specific purposes, i.e., layer 2 is for card backgrounds and layer 4 for text-inputs.

If you decide to go with a gray color scheme, you need to decide whether you want to go warm, cold, or neutral. In a way, your primary color palette can determine that for you, but if you're building a product from scratch and starting with dark mode, this may come in handy.
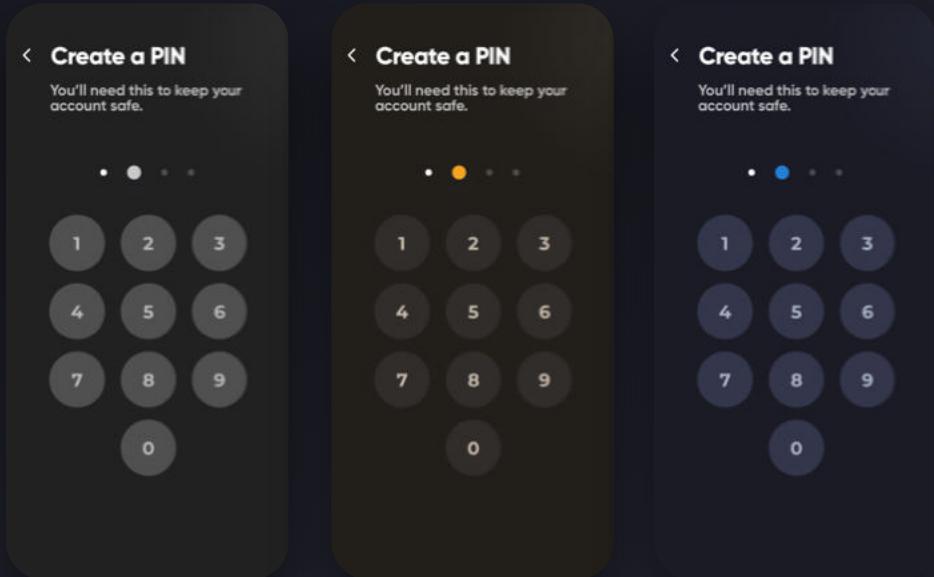
Neutral palette, based on pure grays.

Warm palette based on grays mixed with brown.

Cold palette based on grays mixed with blues.

You can either use pure-grays (a little bit boring option) or mix a hint of another color into your dark-grays. Depending on which color you choose, you can achieve a completely different look and feel. Warm hues coming from browns and greens can feel friendlier, while blue and purple tones can work better for more serious use-cases.

DARK MODE AND PURE BLACK

Pure black doesn't exist in nature. An unnamed super-dark MIT developed material is still about 0.005% away from pure black. Our vision can't merely determine true black, so we approximate it.

Pure black (#000000) is generally not recommended in design, especially when paired with white (#FFFFFF). The super high contrast pure black brings to the table, combined with the screen glowing that contrasts right into our eyes, can create eye strain and impact readability. And since this combination doesn't exist in nature, it may seem jarring to the eye.

Unless you're using an OLED / AMOLED screen that is.

In that specific case, the black pixels are not on, which decreases the eye strain and increases battery life. Due to the screen's reflective qualities, it's never purely black, but rather a reflection of your surroundings.
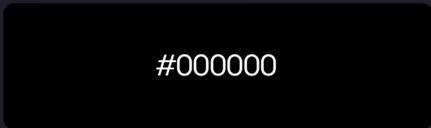
#000000	#0E0F11

Pure black works well for OLED screens.

For other types of LCD displays it's best to use a dark gray with a hint of our main color as the base.

If you decide on using pure black, make sure that other grays cover most of the area. It works best as a base, the bottom-most layer of the stack. That way, it can give depth and context to all the other layers and a sense of grounding of the entire design.

Doing it on an OLED screen has the added benefit of longer battery life, while the dark-gray shades are purely an aesthetic choice.

"

**Pure black #000000
improves battery life
on OLED displays.** "

DARK MODE AND SHADOWS

Shadows are not recommended for the main dark-mode backgrounds. It is primarily because a dark shape casting a dark shadow creates an illusion of a blurred edge. That, in turn, decreases the readability and contrast between the layers.

| Lighter shadow | Darker shadow | No shadow |
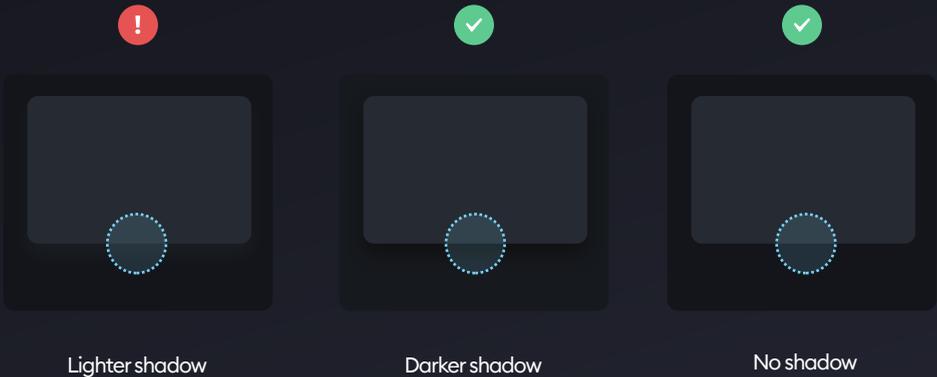
They can work with some background combinations, but they make it longer to process the image and understand the hierarchy. If you're using a dark-gray background, you can try adding a pure-black shadow (with decreased opacity and some blur!) and see how it works.

To make your buttons or accents pop, however, you can add a colorful, lighter shadow so they can stand out more from their backgrounds. You can see an example of this on the right.

Generally, a full white text on the dark background can have a bit too high of a contrast to be comfortable to read. You can "cheat" this perception by using that full-white text, but with varying levels of opacity. Try to keep in mind that the resulting blend of foreground (text) and background still have to meet the contrast standards for accessibility.

But that hint of the background added to the font color "grounds" it a bit and makes it fit the overall layout a lot better.

A quick brown fox

Full white (#FFFFFF) has a very
high contrast against a dark background.

A quick brown fox

One way of handling it is to decrease
the opacity of the text. In this case it's 80%.

As long as the contrast is high enough to meet accessibility guidelines, you can develop three distinctive opacity levels for various importance values.

A quick brown fox
Titles and body copy: 80%

jumps over
Less important objects, 65%

a lazy dog
Labels 50%

You can use pure white for CTA buttons, and then use a mix of three opacity values starting at around 80-90%.

Keep in mind that the most translucent color still has to pass the contrast checker test of AA. Having three values here will allow us to show proper hierarchy and guide the eyes to the right spots.

Just as with "light mode" avoid using small, light fonts in your projects. Anti-aliasing and lower opacity can make them practically unreadable, even if the contrast ratio appears to be right.

A quick brown fox	A quick brown fox

A light font can disappear
on the dark background.

Test the different weights, but start
at least with regular.

In some cases, it may mean that you need a different font-weight for dark mode than what you have in the regular version of your product.
You can either adjust the light-mode to be uniform or create a dark-mode exception for matching legibility.

Regular12	=	Medium12

If you document your exceptions or "tokenize" them in your Design System, they're not a wrong approach. The less "moving parts" in a transition like that, the better. Just remember to also think about the overall style of the product. So don't be consistent just for the sake of consistency. Do it when it makes sense.

While choosing the font itself, make sure it works well when the colors are inverted. Some fonts (and especially their anti-aliasing definitions) can look thinner than their light-mode counterparts. If your typeface of choice doesn't work well with dark mode, consider changing it across the product.

Dark mode can save battery life on OLED screens. That's a fact. But it does so by switching off the unused pixels. If your product is animation-heavy (or even has a lot of scrolling text - like a blog post), it may be better to forgo that battery life extension and go with dark-gray for the backgrounds.

The effect is called "black smearing" and could be fatal for readability in text-heavy, scrolling designs.

A quick brown fox
A quick brown fox
A quick brown fox
A quick brown fox

The display will try to keep up with the scrolling, but there usually is a visible gap between the pixels turn on, which leads to smudging and a follow-up trial of decaying pixels.

A quick brown fox

Any non-pure black shade will do the trick because the pixels will turn on even for #000001, and the problem will disappear.

The benefits in terms of battery life will be marginal to non-existent, though.

"

**Avoid pure black backgrounds in UI's that have a lot of animation or scrolling.**"

Creating a dark mode design is rarely just about inverting the colors. As we've mentioned before, lighter elements are always closer to the user, while darker are further away. Knowing that here's what happens when we convert a stack of cards just by inverting the colors.

As you can see, our stack is also inverted, and the card that's nearest to us is the darkest one of them all. This inversion creates a bad hierarchy and makes the dark mode harder to use.

What you should do instead is to define each color individually with a similar brightness difference between every level of the stack.
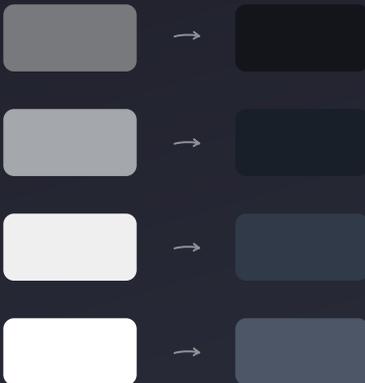

So a corresponding light-mode lightest value will match the dark-mode lightest one.

The most important rule is to have an optically similar difference in lightness between the modes' levels.

LARGE COLOR SURFACES

While large, colorful surfaces can be complementary to white cards, when we flip the switch towards dark mode, they can have the opposite effect. In most cases, they take the attention away from the task at hand, so they need to be reworked into dark mode.

I'm talking both about overlays (under popups and action sheets) but also larger navbars or colorful backgrounds in profile sections.
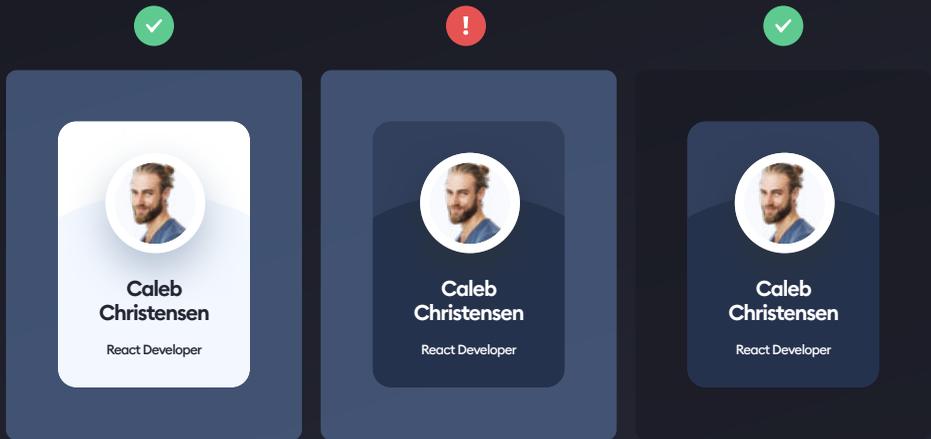

Blue overlay works good with white cards.

But with a dark card the background can catch more focus than the cards itself.

So, in dark mode it's best to mute the overlays a bit and make the cards stand out more.

The easiest way to figure out if a background color is taking too much focus is to check if it's optically brighter than the elements on top of it (in our case, the cards). If it is, it breaks the natural dark mode hierarchy and should require a redesign. Of course, the new, darker background should still have a hint of our primary hue added to it - just make it darker.
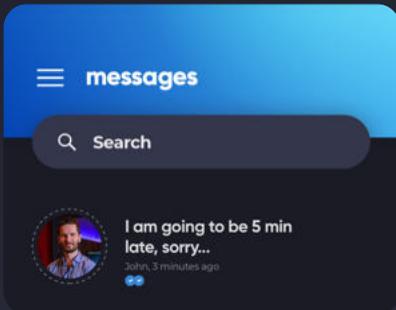
Navigation bars often have a brand color background. While it usually works well in light mode, it can become tricky when designing the dark version, as the header (navbar) will suddenly take a lot more focus.
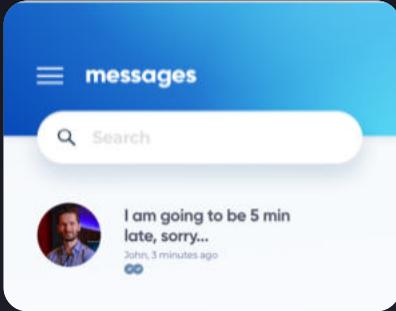
Blue navbar doesn't distract from the white background.
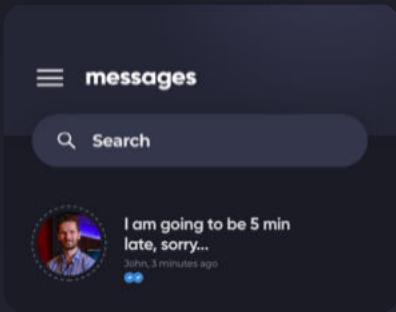
In dark mode it's best to use the primary blue for accents and go with a subtler background.

With a dark main background the blue navbar takes nearly all the attention.

You can use that background color as an accent in dark mode, or even merely as a bottom border of the navbar to keep a little bit of that connection. The accent can also simply be in the navbar icons.
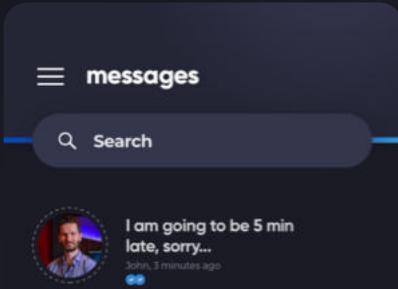
The accent color was used on the thin line that divides both sections and also indicates a search input field.
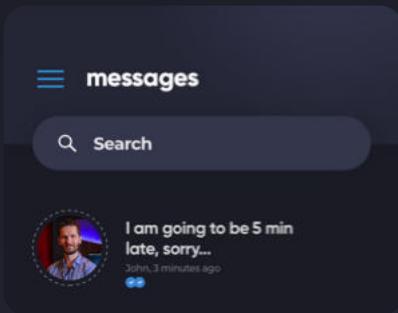
You can also use accent colors on elements such as icons (hamburger) or notifications.

"

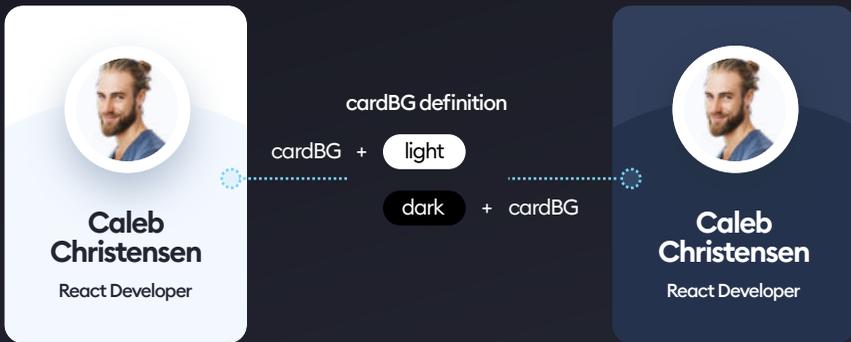**Large color surfaces can be very distracting in dark mode. "**

If you already have a design system or a design library, the best approach is to duplicate it, modify the basics, adjust the rest, and then merge under the new names.

That way, you can keep the dark-mode only conventions and have a system that will continue being flexible even with the planned inconsistencies.

cardBG definition

cardBG + light

dark + cardBG

Caleb Christensen

React Developer

Caleb Christensen

React Developer

Documentation should cover and emphasize the differences, so the developers understand which tokens to use for which mode. The tree structure should start with the style: light or dark, and then go down the same branches, but with the adjusted colors and fonts.

Some companies name their modes as part of the internal branding, so light can be "snow" while dark can be "coal" or "carbon," but while it looks cool in company style guides, it's one extra step to comprehend for the new hires, so the easiest way is to go with light and dark.

I created a Dark Mode mini course on YouTube that you can access right now, completely free. It covers most of the topics from this chapter, with even more examples and context.
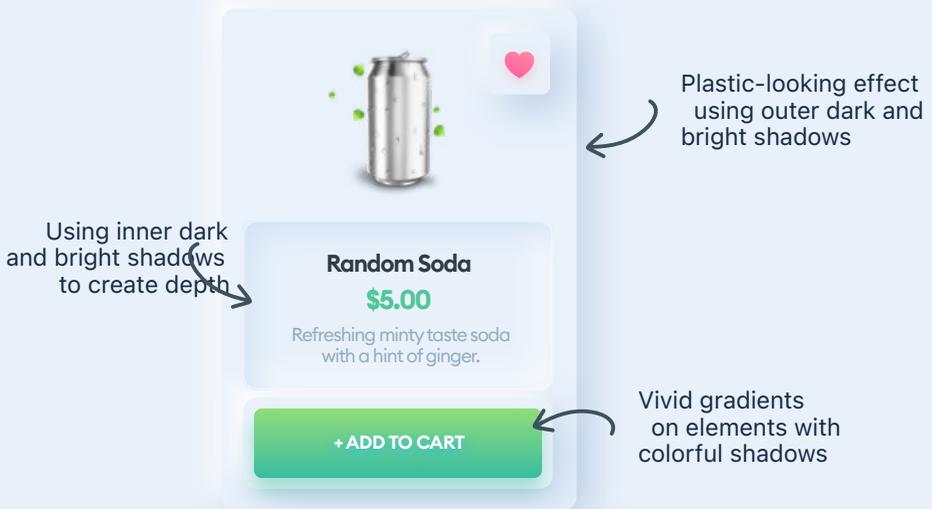
6.
Neumorphism

Neumorphism

Plastic-looking effect using outer dark and bright shadows

Using inner dark and bright shadows to create depth

Random Soda
$5.00
Refreshing minty taste soda with a hint of ginger.

+ ADD TO CART

Vivid gradients on elements with colorful shadows

Neumorphism is a Visual design style popularized on Dribbble by Alexander Plyuto and his November 2019 shot called "Skeuomorph mobile banking." A couple of days later, during our design event Mike analyzed this as a potential design trend and named it New-Skeuomorphism, which quickly became Neumorphism - a name that was first used Mike's December 2019 Medium article.

Naming and analyzing this trend was the best way to find out what it can be good for, and where are its shortcomings. Let's focus on a couple of good (and bad) practices.

The idea behind neumorphism is to use inner or outer shadows as the only defining characteristic of objects.

Background:
#E8F1FA
	Outer shadow:
	#FFFFFF at 100% opacity
	blur=20 ; X=-8 ; Y=-8
		Outer shadow:
		#C6DBF1 at 40% opacity
		blur=20 ; X=8 ; Y=8

Background:
#E8F1FA
	Inner shadow:
	#FFFFFF at 100% opacity
	blur=20 ; X=-4 ; Y=-4
		Inner shadow:
		#C6DBF1 at 40% opacity
		blur=20 ; X=4 ; Y=4

The main characteristics of neumorphism are:

Colorful pastel background (for this effect to work, the page background needs to be the same color as the object background)
Soft outer shadows, dark and light (that define the object shape and to make the shape look embossed)
Soft inner shadows (that define the object shape and to make the shape look pressed/concave)
Rounded corners (the sharp corners doesn't really go well with this effect)

With all the problems this design style has, why should you even consider doing a neumorphic design in the first place?

First of all, it helps you understand how light and dark shadows can bring an object to focus, and this can be useful even in non-neumorphic designs.

But also, knowing all the styles will simply let you merge them together to achieve interesting, unique results. In many cases, and especially in portfolio projects you need to switch styles in order to excite. A portfolio full of Material Design projects will get boring very quickly, even if the projects themselves are all really good.

Play around with it!

The main thing to remember is to try and come up with a unique take on this style. You don't need to use the desaturated light-blue like everyone else. It can also work in dark-mode, or with a hint of any other color out there.

The idea is exactly the same, just keep in mind that the dark background has to be light enough, so a dark shadow is still visible on it. Below you can see an example of the same two shapes, but this time on a darker background.
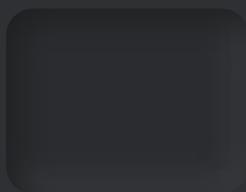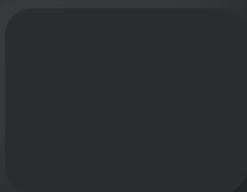
DARK MODE OPTIONS

When building a UI design portfolio, it won't hurt to have one or two shots done in Neumorphism, but the best way to actually stand out is to use the dark mode version of it.
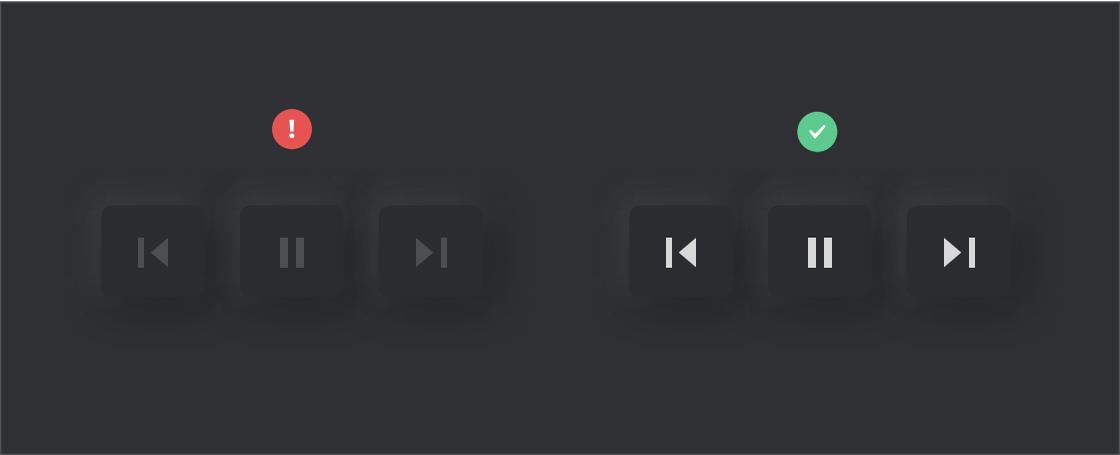

One thing I noticed in dark-mode neumorphic projects, is that the icons on buttons (if you really have to use it for buttons) are often also quite dark. That low contrast may look a bit more natural, but it's one of the main problems with accessibility that this style reinforces.

Make sure that the essential elements don't also blend in too much with the background - they need to be front and center - fully visible, in order for the interface to make any sense.

AVOID UNIFORMITY

The biggest problem of Neumorphism is that most designers try to overuse it. When every single on-screen element is done in this style, it becomes a bland, boring image that gives this trend its bad name.
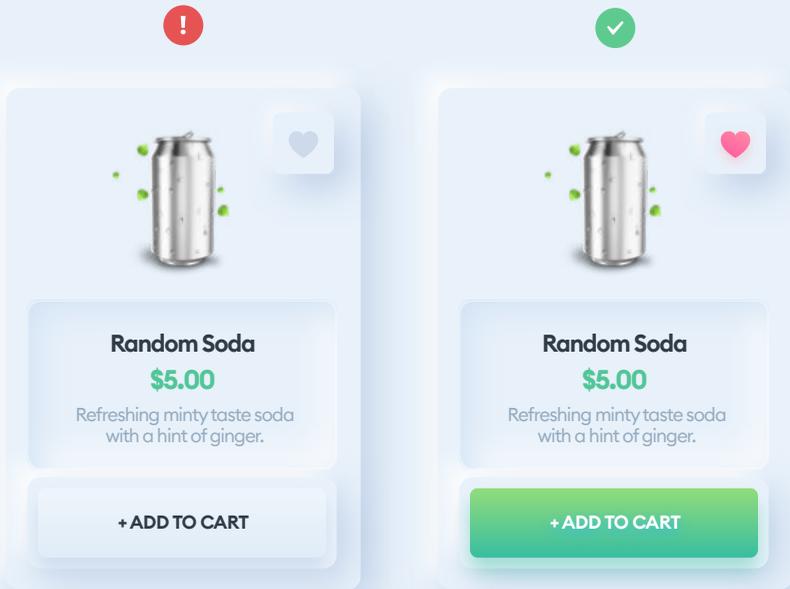

In this product card example every single element is created using the neumorphic style - including the card itself. And while it works quite well for the card, having buttons done in this style and color too makes it very monochromatic and boring. Neumorphism works best when it's only used on high-level interface elements (like product cards) - where the interface would still make sense even if the effect was to be removed.

"

Don't use Neumorphism for every single object in your UI. It works best if it's used on one or two elements only. "

BUTTONS ARE A BAD IDEA

Buttons are almost an obvious choice for this style, especially with how the inner shadows create the obvious "pressed" look. The problem with this approach is that the difference between these states (visually) is too low. Some people may not see it at all, and some screens can render them looking practically the same.
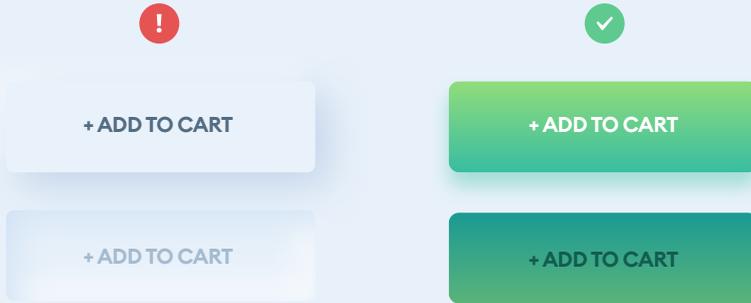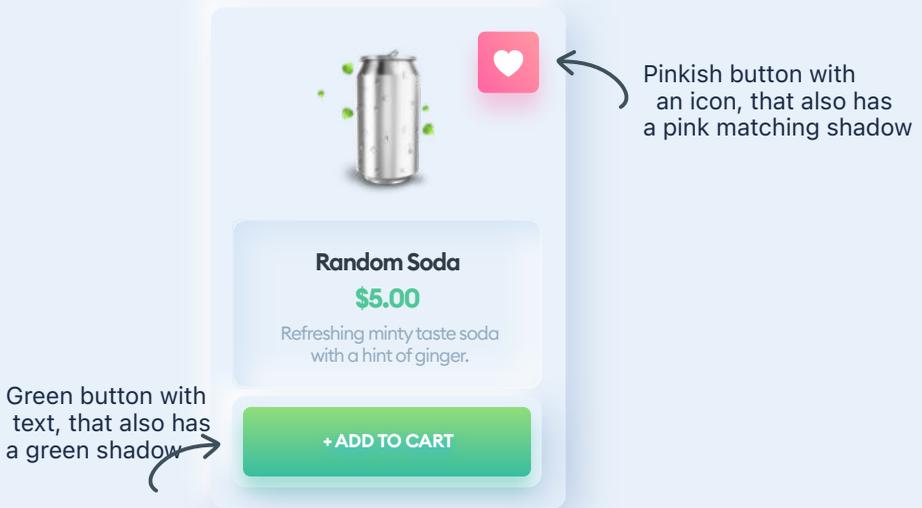

If you want your pressed state to look similar, you can use two rules that we covered in earlier chapters. If something is closer to you, it means it's lighter and bigger. So you can make the pressed state of the button darker and slightly smaller to show the pressed state.

This kind of button will be both more visible and more engaging at the same time. The main issue with neumorphic buttons is that they blend too much with the rest of the interface, making the Call to Action a lot weaker in the process.

GLOW AND SHADOW EFFECTS

One way to make a neumorphic interface more interesting and pleasant to look at, is to use colored shadows and glow effects to counter the alredy existing, barely visible shadows.

Pinkish button with an icon, that also has a pink matching shadow

Random Soda
$5.00
Refreshing minty taste soda with a hint of ginger.

Green button with text, that also has a green shadow

+ ADD TO CART

This helps for those important UI elements to stand out from the simplicity of the card - additionally enforcing them as call to actions.

Since most of the shadows and highlights in this style are supposed to blend with the background, experiment with highlights and shadows that do the exact opposite. The shadows also add another layer of depth to the interface, as they visually separate the colorful objects from the extruded backgrounds - they seem to float above the cards.

But the most important goal of exploring Neumorphism is also learning how you can use multiple shadows, blurs and borders to achieve effects that you're after. A good example is the semi-realistic buttons - they are done with just the basic shapes and shadows that can come in handy with other types of design.

Being proficient with the use of the tools we have is important. But trying to figure out what else can we show visually with these techniques can be a lot of fun and this is the most important part of this style. You don't need to 'use' it in real products, but knowing how to make a semi-realistic button will open your mind to whole new set of possibilities of what you can create.

Enjoy!

LEARN MORE

Watch our original Neumorphism Figma Tutorial coming straight from the author of the trend:

7.
Glass-
morphism

Glassmorphism

Gradients on borders that imitate the real lightning

The frosted-glass effect on elements

329
Friends

7

Lily Anderson
Product Designer

**+ ADD TO FRIENDS**

Call Lily

The background blur effect

Glassmorphism as a trend came from our goal to organize the recent UI styles a little more. Sure - the frosted glass effect has been here from the early days of Mac OS X, through Windows Vista, Microsoft's Fluent Design System and iOS 7. But it lacked a proper definition that would be independent from any specific company and their design system.

In November 2020 we started analysing the "glass effect" and created the most comprehensive guide on how it transformed over the years and how it's currently used in User Interfaces.

Glassmorphism uses background blur effect to imitate the "glass effect" - it simply blurs every element and image that is underneath it.

No background blur   With background blur
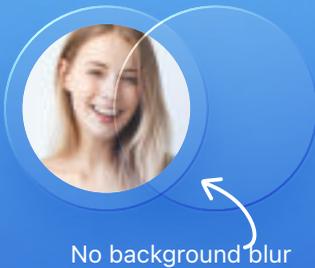
The main characteristics of glassmorphism are:

**Transparency** (that allows the frosted-glass effect to appear using a Background Blur mode)

Multi-layered approach (there needs to be something under the object so there is something to blur)

Vivid colors (the background blur looks best when there is high saturation and contrast of the background)

Subtle light border (often filled with black and white gradient and set to the overlay blending mode to imitate the real lightning)

HOW TO ACHIEVE THE EFFECT

The main mistake people do is trying to decrease the opacity of the entire object. As you can see in the example below, doing that will result in the blur being turned off (Sketch doesn't have this problem, though).
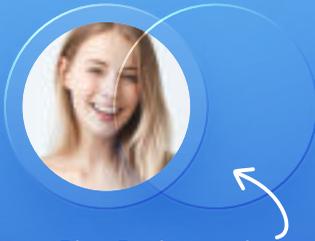
Blur: Background blur at 8
Opacity 0%
Fill 100%

Blur: Background blur at 8
Opacity 100%
Fill 10%

The easiest way of testing whether the background blur effect is working is by using two shapes (like in the example above). When you use one shape over a blurred background, you can actually think the background blur is working even when it's not.

The level of the background blur is of course up to you, but with typical shapes we usually start with a value of 8. Going below that would likely make too much of the background bleed-through which will make text and icons on our blurred background clash with what's underneath. This in turn makes it less accessible and simply less pleasnt to look at.

The concept of Glassmorphism also allows for more than one translucent layer - you can actually stack them in an imagined-vertical space to create hierarchy and depth. Part of that depth comes from soft, subtle shadows added to the glass panels, but you can actually influence it even more by varying the blur and transparency value between layers.

Far away, so it has lower transparency

Closer so it has higher transparency

Subtle shadow for extra depth

The rule from Dark mode applies here as well. The closer something is to us, the more "virtual light" hits it, so it makes it that much more transparent and/or lighter.

It also means the layer that's at the bottom of the stack should be the least transparent with the highest background blur value.

There are two good ways of achieving a nice glass fill. One is simply by filling our shape with a solid color. The other, which makes it look even more natural is done using a radial gradient from the same color (on both ends) but with varied opacity in the gradient.



Solid white fill at
20% opacity
and 8p Background
Blur
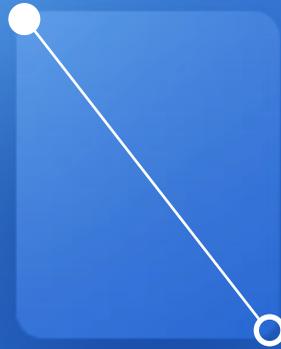
Diagonal radial
gradient from
white to white,
starting at 100%
opacity to 0% opacity

If you're working on a portfolio project that won't likely be coded, it's ok to use the radial gradient technique. It looks a bit more natural, organic and simply more fun. So if your goal is only to showcase your color-matching skills and overall aesthethics I'd say - go for it!

But it's really difficult to recreate it in code (especially on the web), so for coded projects always stick with a solid color. The difference in the effect is not worth that extra developer work.

Create a glass edge around our virtual glass sheet - it's just a simple border around the object. It needs to have decreased opacity, so it blends with both the card and the background. The border should almost always be white - because an edge usually is a highlight.
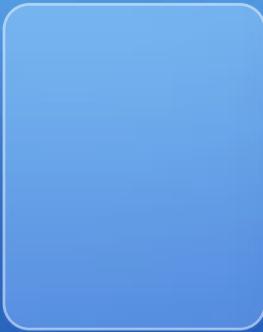
Solid white inner border with 40% opacity

Solid white inner border with 40% opacity and the "Overlay"

If you made an outer border, it would blend only with the background making the edge less natural. And once again there's a safe version here and a Dribbble portfolio-ready one. The safe one is simply adding an inner border at a decreased opacity. You can see it on the left in the example above.

The portfolio-version also adds an "Overlay" blending mode which does blend the border a lot better with the background, but is really bad for the performance of the coded product. You can see how that Blended border turns a bit more pink near the bottom.

"

Use glassmorphism on non-essential objects with hierarchy good enough so they're easy to understand even with the effect turned off. "

ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility is an essential part of a truly good user interface. It doesn't of course mean you should crank the contrast up to 11 every time. It means that your color, font and contrast choices should be made deliberately in a way to include as many users as possible.

And while obviously a simple white background with black text is going to be more accessible than a glassmorphic card, it's still possible to make it work.

The first rule of accessibility in both this style and Neumorphism is, that you should have well enough hierarchy of objects and contrasts of essential elements (text, icons, buttons) that turning off those decorational-cards won't affect the experience as much. That way people with vision problems, who are unable to see that effect, will still be able to use the interface without it.

DON'T OVERUSE IT

So once again - don't use "glass" as a material for buttons, text-fields, checkboxes and so on. You can use it for cards and group backrounds, but only when the internal hierarchy of those groups is clear. It means you need to work extra hard on the margins, spacings and sizes of everything that's on the card, so it's easy to understand it's a group even when we turn off the background completely.
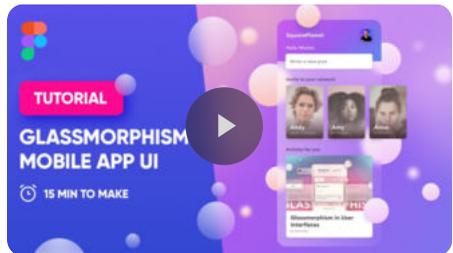
This style CAN be accessible. It's a bit more work to make it right, but it's important to always consider accessibility.

Watch the very first glassmorphism video in which I explore how I came up with the trend and show how it evolved from the beginning.

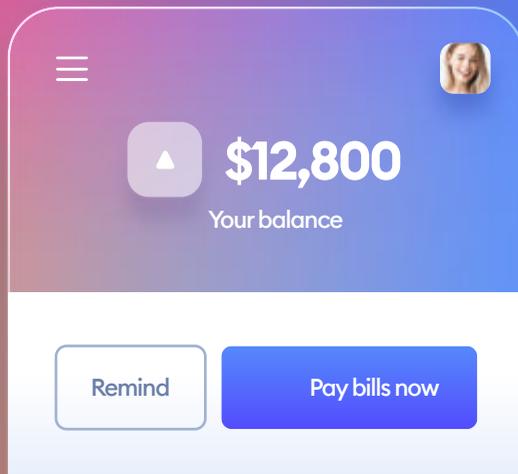I also made a couple of very popular tutorials for the trend:

8.
Aurora UI Gradients

Aurora UI Gradients

$12,800

Your balance

Remind

Pay bills now

Aurora is another partial design trend. It means that it's more of a set of particular rules rather than a style on its own.

The emergence of these new, more organic UI styles comes from the fact that every seven years (give or take) people get bored with the currently dominating trend and want a change. Flat, minimal design has been with us for over seven years now, so experimentation right now is all about departing from those minimalist principles.

Aurora, as a name comes from the northern lights - as it's a blurry mix of colors that looks a little bit unnatural, yet still beautiful. Of course you can use any color for this effect, so it's not limited to how a real Aurora looks like.

ACCESSIBLE USER INTERFACES

The main rule of user interfaces is clarity - an interface should be readable and easy to understand. It means that we shouldn't really experiment too much with the crucial, essential parts of an interface. Buttons, forms, dialogs and text blocks should all follow the rules of accessibility and well structured in terms of hierarchy.
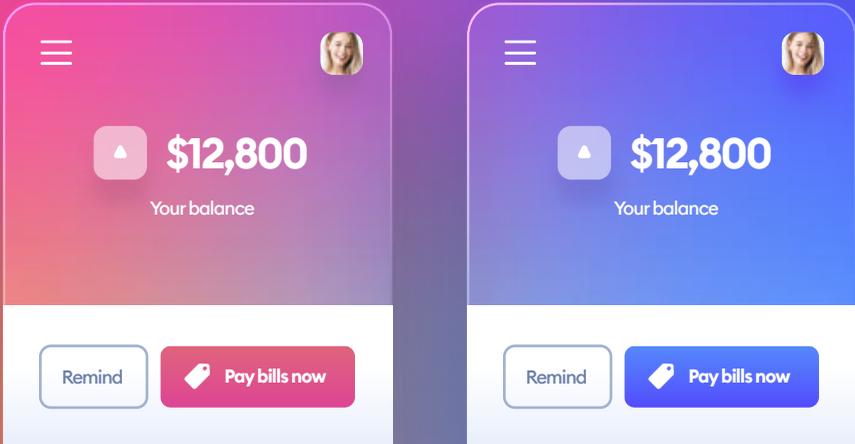

But there's one area that we can still be playful in, and that's ornamentation. Backgrounds are one of, but not the only, decorative elements that when done right can add emotional value to an otherwise minimal interface.

That emotional value is what the customers are looking for, so experimenting with ornamentation and backgrounds can help a product stand out without limiting any of its accessibility. Because even if those decorative elements are not visible to the users with vision problems, they won't impair their ability to actually use the essential parts of the interface and get the job done.
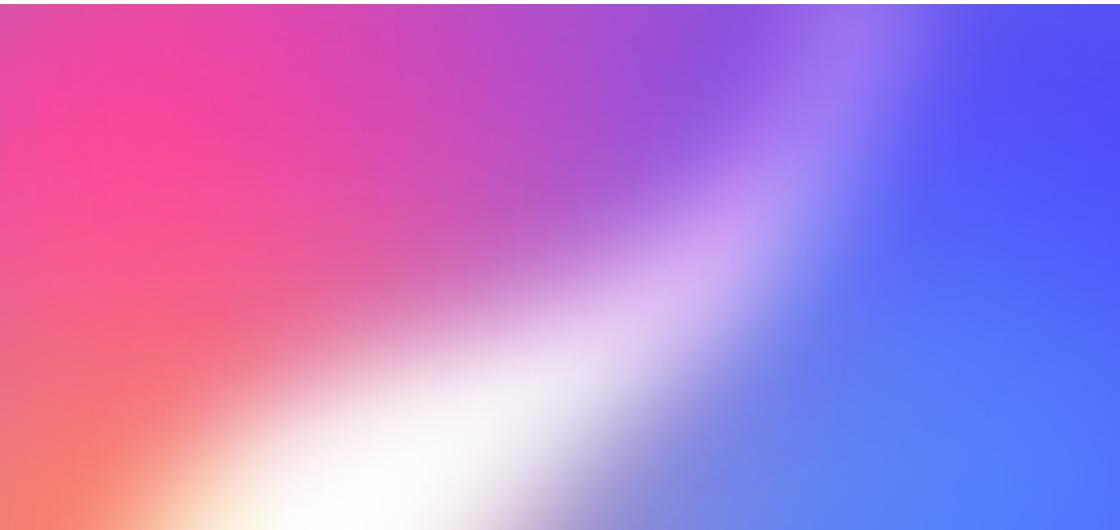
HOW TO ACHIEVE THE EFFECT

There are many ways to achieve this effect, and you can also merge them together. The easiest way is with using colorful, blurred ovals.
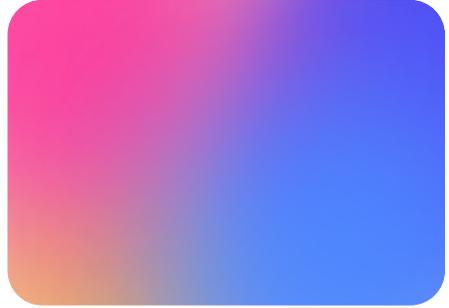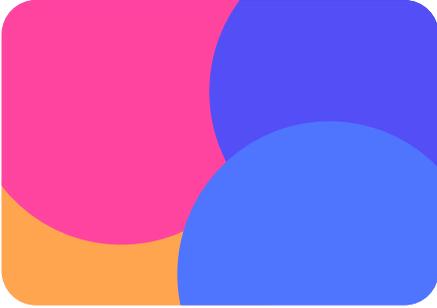

It's good if the colors you pick are close together on the color wheel, and that they're not too saturated. Then simply blur them (with the maximum blur value) and play around with the size and opacity of the blurred circles.

You can also add an irregular, swirly shape (white works best) and blur it to make the color transitions even more irregular.

You can also use multiple radial gradients on the same rectangular shape and play around with their sizes and opacities. For the colors to merge, just make sure the hues in the middle of the image are fully transparent.
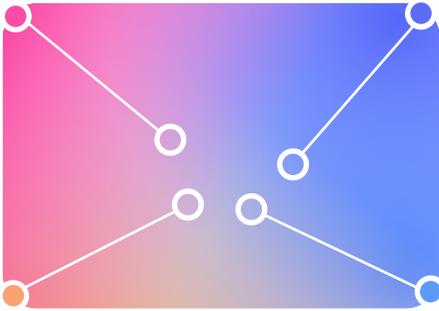
Using this method you don't need a mask for your shapes, but it's a little harder to modify the colors and add new ones with precision - you need to determine each color area on a list and move its handles instead.

The last, and also the easiest way is to simply blur a photo. It's the easiest way to achieve this effect in code, but it's not going to work with just any photo. The image has to be made up of similar hues, not too colorful.

If some parts of the image don't turn out the way you imagined after applying the blur, you can mask them with blurred circles of another color for the desired effect. Or you can simply get color inspirations for the first method using a photo, but then just use the colors as blurred circles instead.

MIXING WITH GLASSMORPHISM

Organic, uneven gradients like that work especially well with Glassmorphism, but they are not limited to just one companion-trend. You can use a background done in this way with a regular, minimal interface to make the cards and menus pop, while preserving the minimal aesthetic of the first plane.
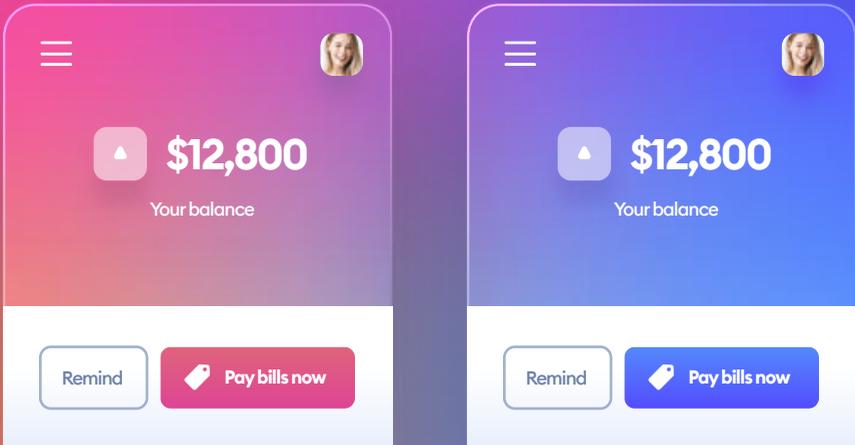
As users are taking kindly to those soft, friendly backgrounds, it's important to try and experiment with how you can integrate them into your workflow. Keep in mind, however, that it's more of a style dedicated towards consumer products and won't really work as well in a professional or serious setting.

Experiment, find a style that works for you, and most importantly - have fun!
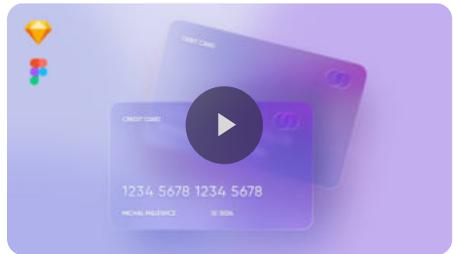
"

As long as the essential UI elements are readable and accessible, you can experiment with backgrounds and ornamentation for a more friendly look & feel. "

Watch the very first Aurora UI video in which I explore how I came up with the trend and show how it evolved and how you can use it in your projects.

I also made a couple of very popular tutorials for the trend:

9.
Claymorphism

Claymorphism

There is a new design trend emerging and this time it's also stepping outside of the UI world and into the art space.

Hello, Claymorphism! 👋

Depth reimagined. Again.

Let me start with the obvious. For reasons I stated in the very first article, Neumorphism didn't really take off. I don't think the biggest issue with it was accessibility, as it could be made accessible with a few tweaks. No, the bigger issue was that it was simply visually boring in most of the examples. To achieve a level of fidelity that would compensate for that, it would require a lot of artistic skills and almost impossible front-end capabilities.
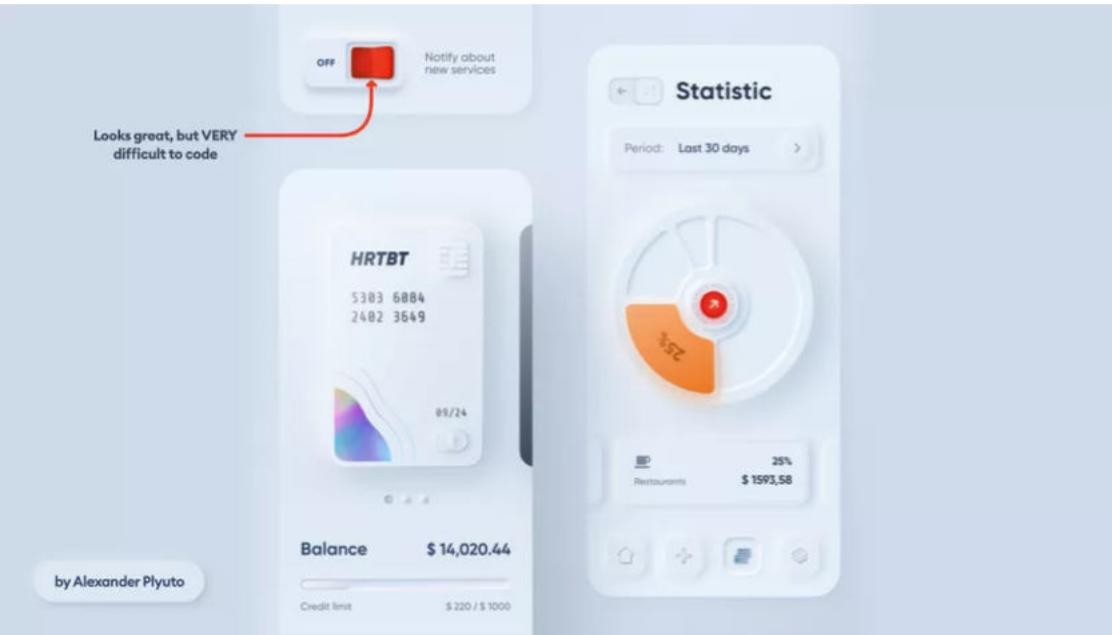
Here, you can see the very first and most popular Neumorphic image by Alexander Plyuto. This image, as a return to skeuomorphism was the reason I decided to write a bit more about this new extruded-plastic trend and give it the name - Neumorphism.

In the example the red button, while looking very nice visually, is also almost impossible to code easily.

It had a group of very strong supporters in the dev community, and some products were actually built using that style—for better or for worse.

However, designers were increasingly becoming bored with the typical flat-layered designs of most products. It seems like people wanted more depth, even if fake, but not necessarily done in the way neumorphism tried it.
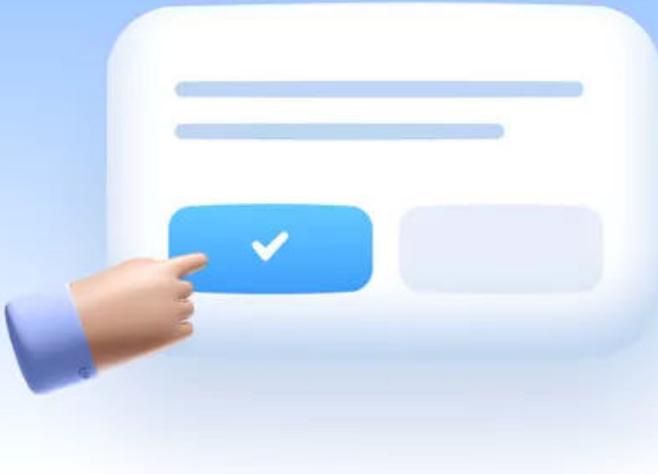
Some real products were actually built using the Neumorphic style. "

Since the early days of flat displays, we tried to simulate depth on them. That high-level skeuomorphic approach helps us better process what we're looking at, while also being more friendly, organic and simply human.

Fluffy, friendly, 3d

With the advent of metaverses and rising popularity of NFT's the 3D scene exploded. Tools like Spline also democratised the landscape the way Sketch did when all designers worked in Photoshop.

But one particular style of 3D seems to be gaining popularity, often mixed with otherwise minimal designs. I call it „fluffy 3d" and the first time I noticed it go mainstream was when the startup Pitch used it as their cute key visuals. Since then Amrit Pal Singh, Sam Briskar, the team at Icons8 and others explored this style pushing it further through artwork, UI assets and iconography.

"

**3D became hip and
trendy as an art style.** "

Fluffy 3d fit quite well in the otherwise minimalist design world, but one by one those flat surfaces began to inflate a little to match the style of the artwork.
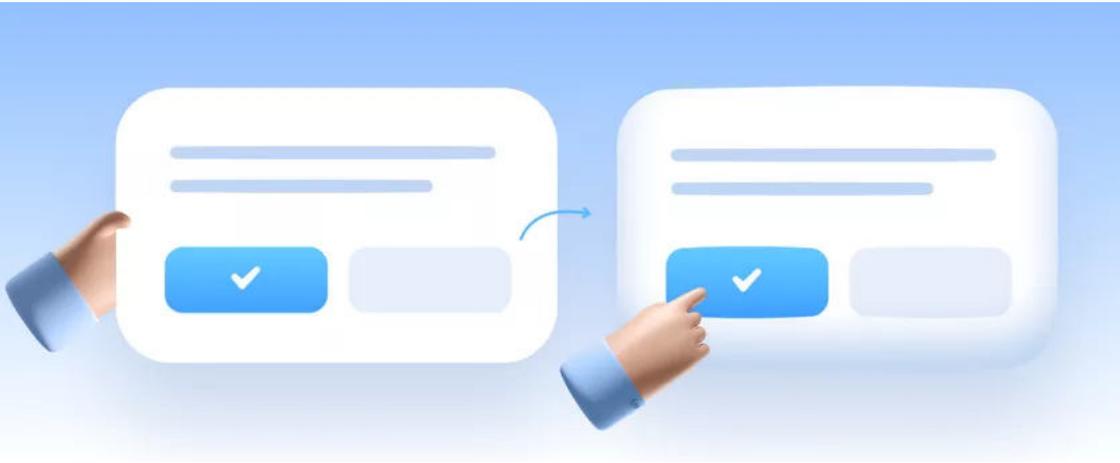
Inflating 3d shapes

The best way to think about is, if you simply inflated your neumorphic, or even minimal shapes. Simply puff some air into them, like they were a balloon.

Instead of mostly flat surfaces with a little concave, they are now 3d dome-like structures - very round, very three-dimensional and soft.

They come in many styles and form, but the most characteristic is a solid-color shape, with slightly expanded roundness, to reach outside of just the corners and inner shadows to indicate depth.

In a way the cards and buttons are starting to simply match the 3d-images used to accompany them.

In one of my larger UI studies back in 2015 we actually tested a „fluffy 3d" button against other option, and it anihiliated the competition among the general population. Only in the tech-savvy group it wasn't the main preference.

Friendly, but limited in scope!

The friendliness of those shapes, along with the 3d imagery creates a slightly child-like interface. To counter it, it's good to use minimal typography, strong accent colors good contrast.

If we went too far and used decorative fonts and pastels, it would maybe fit a very narrow category of products, but for most it would simply be unusable.

Of course not all products can benefit from this style - as it's mostly aimed at consumer-driven products. If you're thinking about using it for a banking app, or a professional grade analytics tool, then reconsider. It will do more harm than good in projects like these.

t's not really possible to achieve in CSS just yet, but some clever developers are already working on modifiable SVG's so it's only a matter of time when it can get coded.

We created a simple CSS generator you can use right now to get the inner shadows right.

You can find our CSS generator at:
**https://claymorphism.com**

Pro tip

Claymorphism can be a nice way to make parts of the interface stand out, but avoid applying those CSS styles to every single UI element. It will make the design overwhelm the content - a really bad outcome.

"

**Users tend to prefer
buttons that look 3d. ”**

Claymorphism doesn't try to immitate being connected to (or extruded from) the background. The shapes are lighter, inflated and naturally float above the surfaces. The main difference between Claymorphism and traditional floating cards is that the shape appears thicker also when viewed from the side like in the example below.
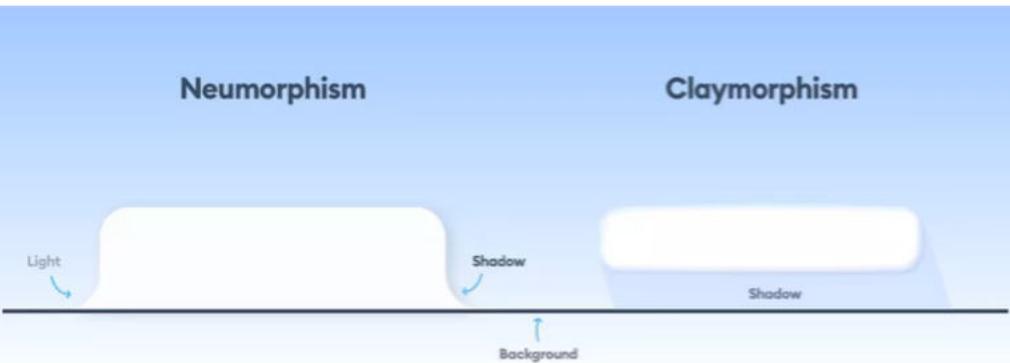
That clear separation from the background also means, that a claymorphic card can be lighter than the background and not use the exact same color.

If trying the technique, make sure the card is lighter than the background. An object optically closer in an illusion of 3d layers is always lighter than the layers behind it. This is why in our examples a white, claymorphic card is presented on a light blue background.

Technically, with dark-enough (but still subtle) shadows it's possible to use both a white card and a white background but it's important to pick the inner and outer shadows well, so they don't blend together creating a blurry-looking edge.

The whole effect is achieved using two inner shadows that give it that clay-like, 3d look. The top-left inner shadow has to be slightly lighter, while the bottom-right inner shadow has to be a little bit darker. The outer shadow is also not always necessary. You can go with just an inner shadow instead.

Inner shadow
x: 12, y:8, blur: 16
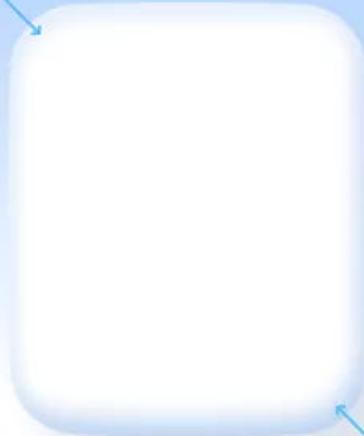
Outer shadow
x: 24, y:24, blur: 48

Inner shadow
x: -12, y:-8, blur: 16

That gives us a lot more flexibility with styling and allows use on various background types.

It's important to keep the blur value of both inner shadows the same, otherwise the card may look crooked or placed diagonally in 3d space.

Similarly to Neumorphism, Claymorphism is also a combination of inner and outer shadows. However, the depth against the background is only done using one larger shadow—often also moved along the X axis a little which breaks most of the conventional UI shadow rules.


While it's still recommended to use a natural drop shadow that's only using the Y axis, in some instances the cards can actually cast a shadow slightly to the side as well, utilising the X axis like in the example above.

It's good however, to keep most of the smaller objects shadows across the Y axis, so the interface won't float to the side optically too much.

It always starts with a rectangle or a square. Then the next step is rounding the corners, usually beyond 50% roundness possible for the size of our rectangle. If you prefer, you can skip step 3 and apply inner shadows to a regular rectangle instead. It makes the effect more interesting, but also more difficult to code.
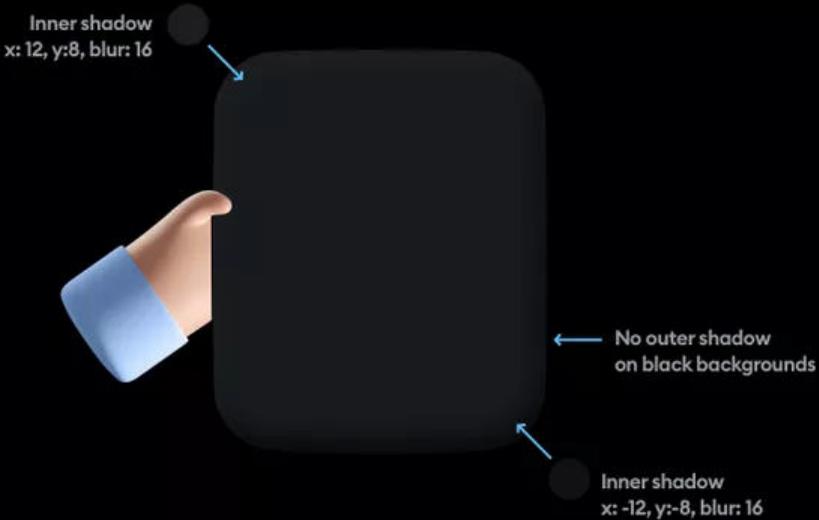

Step 1   Step 2   Step 3   Step 4
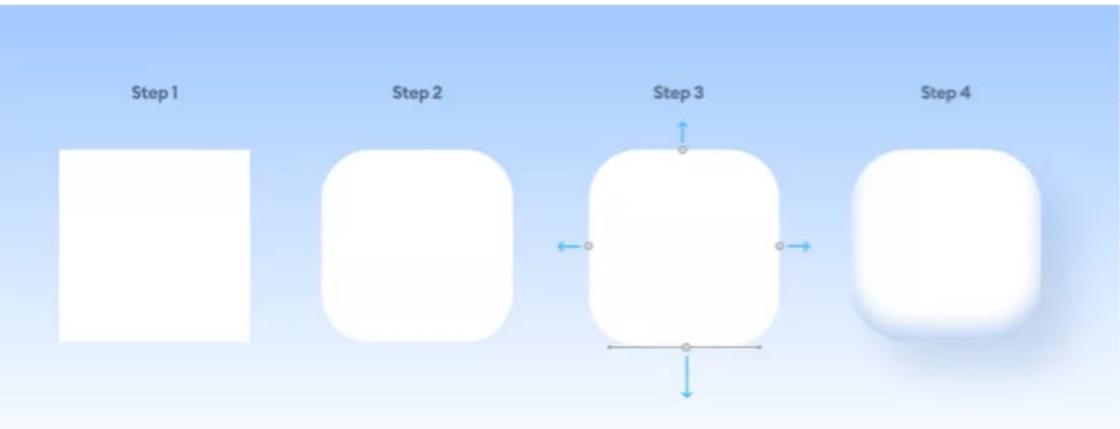
In step 3 we use the path tool to add additional points exactly in the middle of each side of the rectangle, switch them to mirror-style handles and drag them outwards. As an example, the top point will go to the top, bending the top edge and making it slightly curved.

If your edge is forming a sharp corner with two straight lines, you must switch it to the mirror option and drag the handles out to both sides.

Claymorphism can work well for some friendly, consumer-facing products, but it's definitely not fit for all kinds of applications.

Inner shadow
x: 12, y:8, blur: 16

No outer shadow
on black backgrounds

Inner shadow
x: -12, y:-8, blur: 16

Claymorphism also works in dark mode, but only when the shape itself isn't completely black. As with neumorphism, we need to be able to see the inner shadows against the background for the effect to work.

When using dark-mode cards with lower contrast, make sure the foreground (text and buttons) are fully visible and have high contrast against the background. The internal-layout of the card must be readable and easy to understand even without the background present.

Contrary to Neumorphism, it's best to avoid same-color buttons on cards, instead opting for vibrant, saturated gradients.

As Glassmorphism has become one of the cornerstones of modern UI design, it can be merged with Claymorphism too, for interesting results. Adding a delicate inner-shadow to a fluffy glassmorphic pane works, and can look interesting and fresh when done right.


I wouldn't recommend overusing the glass-claymorphic effect however, as it's not as accessible, as a standard one-color card with no transparency.

If we're going transparent, it's also important to make the inner (and outer) shadows a little darker so the effect is fully visible.

Both virtual, and augmented reality are likely here to stay. Whether it's the rumored Apple glasses, or Facebook's Metaverse—there will be more interfaces right before our eyes.

The benefit of Claymorphism is that it's tangible. The fake 3d effect allows for much faster processing of panels and buttons by our brains. A scenario that's perfect for all kinds of realities, both augmented and virtual.
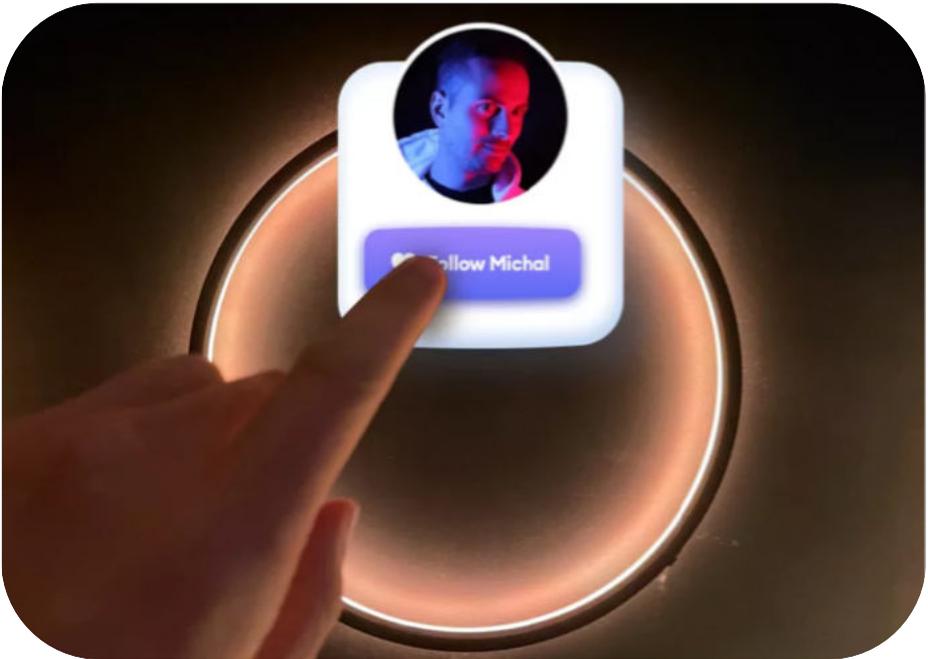
Of course, with real 3d, the effect won't have to be simulated, as panels could simply be real, 3d objects.

> **Claymorphism may find many use-cases in VR and AR interfaces, because it looks "tangible", like a real object in space. "**

Watch the very first Claymorphism video to learn more about the style, and follow my very first, easy to do tutorial.

10.
Neubrutalism

Since the material design revolution, we have been stuck with various versions of the modern-minimal style. Nice, rounded edges on everything, soft, colorful shadows and subtle, pretty gradients. That candy-like style almost appears to give out a bit of a glow.

Hello   A candy-style, glowing, modern-minimal button.

Every seven years, however, the pendulum swings back between full-on skeuomorphism and complete minimalism, landing at a slightly different approach each time.

People simply get bored with how their apps and websites look after six to seven years. They need a change. Various styles, like Neumorphism, Glassmorphism and Aurora emerge to fill that gap. To bring the people something new and interesting in their interfaces - even if short-lived.

They did, however, bring a little bit of experimentation into the stale UI world.

"

**People get bored with
how their apps and
websites look after six
to seven years."**

Neubrutalism, or Neobrutalism as some people call it, is a mix of regular brutalism in web design and more modern typography, illustration and animation standards.

The fact that it exists makes me happy, because we do need alternatives-otherwise our UI's will get boring and repetitive and I don't want to see another Material design taking over *everything*.
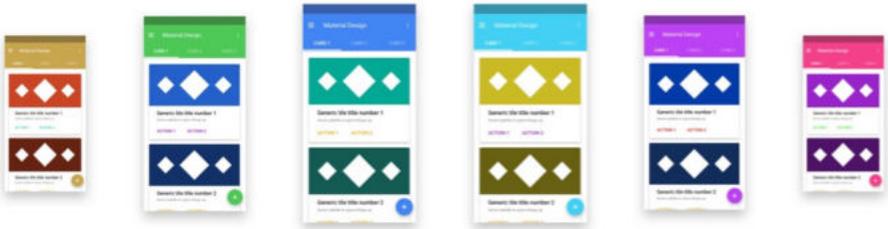
The similarity of most Material Design products made the UI landscape very boring.

Brutalism is a 1950's architectural trend that was abandoning all decorations, and creating brutally simple buildings made from concrete. They often weren't even painted to emphasize their brutal nature. Big, brutal blocks of concrete.

It was the architects showing they were bored with the status-quo and trying something different. That feels very similar to the current search for the UI trend to take over interface design.

Source: Unsplash

Brutalism examples by Yan Ageenko / Mitya Andrievskiy

Some forms of brutalism have existed in graphics design before, but they often broke most of the typical layout rules, with huge text blocks often getting out of view. It was mostly popular in poster-design / graphics-design but some attempts to use it on the web existed as early as the late 90's.

Neo brutalism ditches most of that and merges traditional layout concepts with super-high contrast, solid, often purposefully clashing colors and simpler, yet quirky typography.

That typography was used both as the main message, and as background, often causing text overload in the projects. That, combined with sharp contrasts were supposed to grab our attention and hold it because it was very different from typical posters that we're used to.

And for the most part - it worked. That's why this style of poster design is still popular to this day, albeit it mostly fits concerts and art exhibitions and wouldn't be really used for a yoghurt commercial.

CONTRAST

Let's start with super high contrast. Neo brutalism is not afraid of merging pure black (#000000) with other colors. That is a practice most other design styles try to avoid, because while keeping accessible contrast, we don't want to create eye-strain in our users.

Also, in dark mode some combinations of #000000 with other colors can cause a "ghosting effect" on scrolling. You can read more about it in the chapter dedicated to dark-mode.

Main palette accent color

Infused black
#282525

Neubrutalist black
#000000

In most current UI styles it is popular to "infuse" black with a bit of the accent color-like a little bit of red in the example above. It helps the color to connect with other hues better, while avoiding too high contrast and eye-strain.

While this "infusion" can also work in neubrutalism, the colors are definitely darker and contrast much sharper here. Combined with desaturated, colorful backgrounds, completely black typography can actually feel new and fresh to users - because for years they've been used to that infusion and grey-black combinations.

If you decide to go with pure-black, make sure that your accent colors are not at full saturation however, because that kind of overload will definitely not be well received.
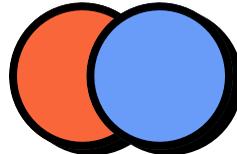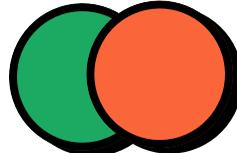
COLORS

The colors are going in directions that most other styles would dismiss as ugly or clashing, like mixing shades of red with blue or green. The main difference, however, is that now these colors are also desaturated. They are "in your face" without being over the top with contrast.
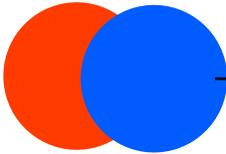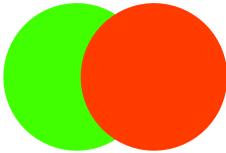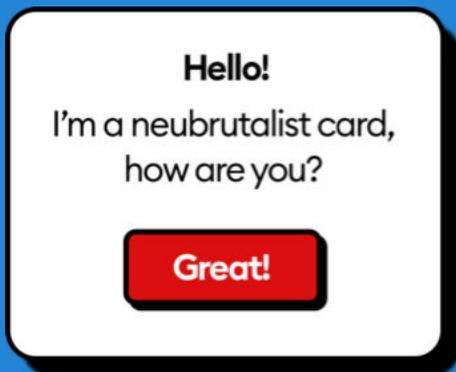
Saturation: 100

Saturation: 60

At full saturation, these color combinations should not be used.

When desaturated and with a thick outline, they can work well

There's a primary color in each case-which serves as a brand color, and often dozens of secondary or accent colors. They often accompany specific sections of the website or app-like color coding categories. The 60/30/10% rule can also be applied here.

Hello!

I'm a neubrutalist card, how are you?

Great!

Brand color
Background
60%

Text color
Fonts and outlines
30%

Accent color
CTA's
10%

Avoid fully saturated color combinations when designing neubrutalist UI "

Outlines play an important role in this style, as they're used to emphasize cards, windows and buttons and make them more visible. Many popular UI styles completely drop the outlines, often using shadows as the outline
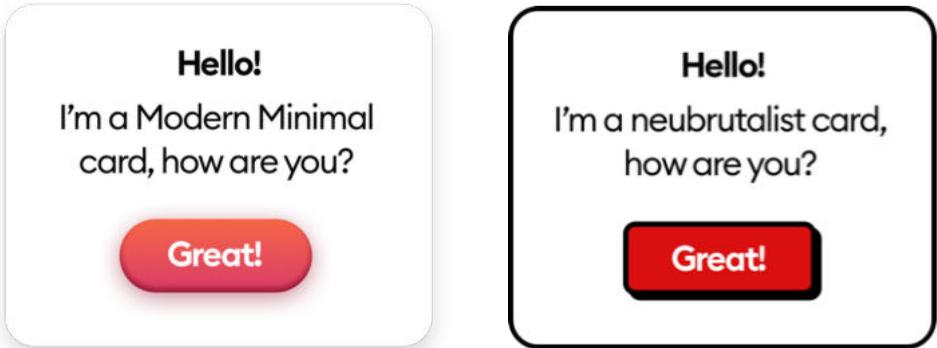
As you can see in the example above, a modern-minimal card (on the left) simply uses a shadow going straight down (with the x value at 0). It allows for the shadow to trace the outline of the card, that's otherwise a white rectangle on a white background. It's the shadow that makes it visible.

In Neubrutalism, however, we don't shy away from thick, dark outlines on both cards, buttons and tabs. They range anywhere from 1pt width, to even 10pt in some cases. In the example above (right) the outline is 3pt, which makes it stand out and makes it instantly visible.

Of course you can still go without an outline in this style - it's not mandatory to have one, but it's one of the main differentiators for Neubrutalism and is also the thing that I believe gives it that fresh, new look. All the above styles, and more, are permitted.

WINDOWS

One thing that's also really popular, is the use of the computer-window pattern - either emulating the Windows or Mac with minimize, maximize and close buttons being placed on specifically differentiated title bar.
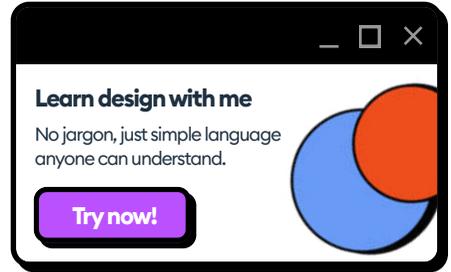
Of course, the windows don't have to directly copy the OS trends, they can create their own little icons, or completely drop them from the top bar.

I believe, this is often done as a way to showcase how a SaaS product operates - because obviously it has windows inside and that approach helps make them more visual and easier to showcase.

MENTAL ASSOCIATIONS

It's showing how things are "happening in our app" which makes the feature easier to remember afterwards.

It's important, however, to only use that concept if it fits the product category. It does work for Software, but will definitely not work for most physical products or consumer facing services. The methaphor is not going to work when the product in question doesn't actually use any "windows".

> ⊙
>
> **Pro tip**
>
> Make sure both the style, and the used metaphors match the overall style of your product. You don't want random, out-of-place elements showcased as they can only confuse the users further.

"

Dark, thick outlines are very popular in this style, but are not required."

The main rule of neubrutalist shadows is to avoid using blur on them. We want them as sharp as possible, looking as if there's simply another, darker rectangle underneath our main card or button.
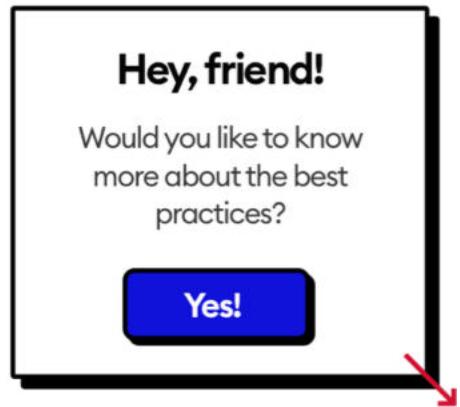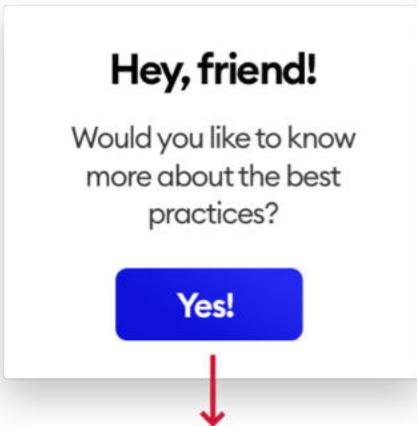

Example A   *Example B*   *Example C*

We can use a pure black shadow (example A), or a -20 Brightness of the same color our element uses (example B). We can also combine it with an outline (example C).


The shadows also break another rule typical to most other design styles - they share the same X and Y value, making them display diagonally at a 45° angle. Most modern shadows only use the Y-axis to show the shadow facing down and spilling to the sides.

The purposeful low-fidelity of the shadows helps the cards and buttons stand out more and can be used in a nice way for onPress animations.

Neo brutalism is also quite democratic. It often uses shapes styled in a default presentation software way – like you can see in this Figma example.
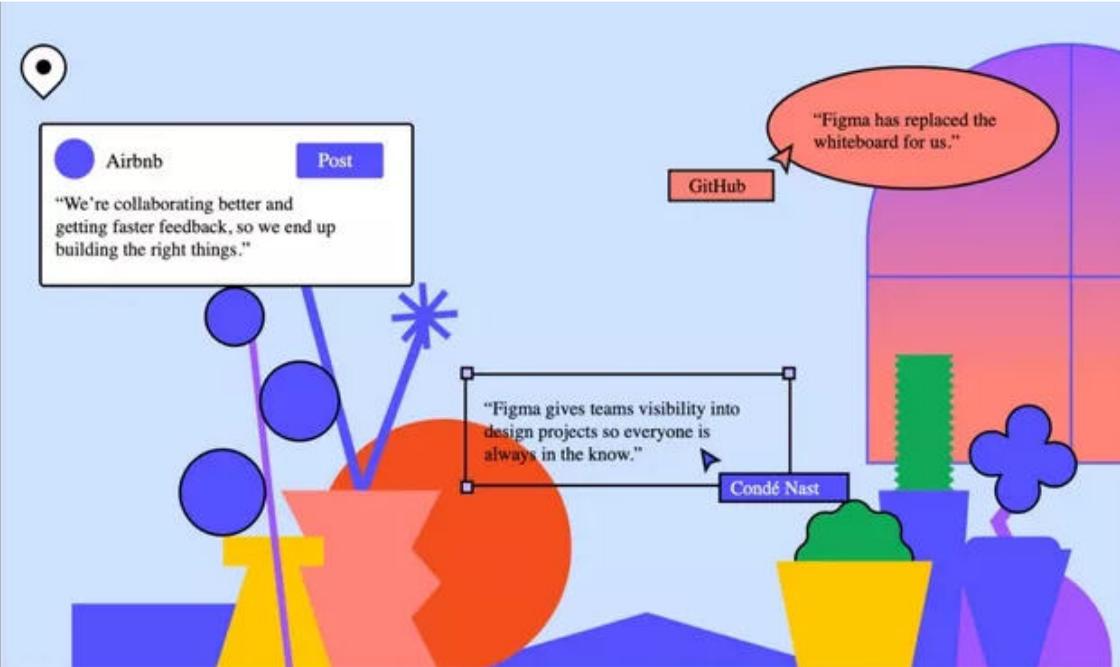
There are three cards visible on this screen and they're purposefuly inconsistent. What's more striking, is that the most typical looking card also has the button slightly misaligned. The text in the Post button is too far to the left, and the button itself is also placed at a different distance from the right, than it is from the top.
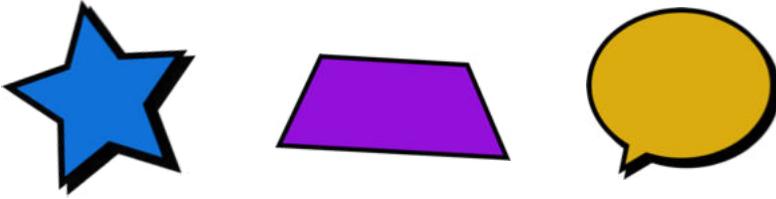
That way of styling normalizes the ugly and makes it easier to approach for beginners – they'd be thinking "I could do that myself!" and I believe this is the exact reasons some brands went with this style. It's non threatening and anyone could do it.

The shapes above look like the clip-art or preset shapes in your PowerPoint or Keynote - the generic shapes that you can add to your presentations. The shadows, line thickness and colors are all different on purpose, so you can easily find the right shape on your canvas and manually change it.

But here, in this style, we embrace the generic, presentation-software like shapes and use them as illustration.

DEMOCRATIZATION OF DESIGN

That presentation software connection does go a little further. When Sketch launched, and later Figma and Adobe XD, it was precisely that presentation software UI and drawing tools that they initially emulated.

This led to UI design specific tools growing in popularity, and allowing more people - often not skilled in graphics design - take a swing at UI themselves. This style is democratic that way, in terms of being very forgiving of ugly color and font combinations - we can always say it was done on purpose.

> **Pro tip**
>
> Just because you CAN use a style, doesn't mean you have to use it. Make sure a style compliments the product and doesn't negatively impact how users perceive it.

" The complete lack of sophisticated styling helps many people with thinking they can do it themselves too! "

Typography plays a very important role in this style, but it behaves in a lot more conservative ways. While the fonts in both our examples are a little quirky, or funky and not as minimalist as typical "cool" fonts of modern minimal, they're presented in a way pushing for maximum readability.

There's enough whitespace, and the fonts are generally quite thick, which matches the overall typography trends. The same rules you've been using in Modern Minimal also apply here.

Decorative fonts are sometimes also used, but the most popular style is still the modern sans-serif. The difference is that it's often a sans-serif with a couple of letter looking different, or even plain weird - on purpose. A good example is the letter a in the new Gumroad logo which is a lowercase glyph pretending to be capitalised.

Illustrations in this style usually combine colors that wouldn't really work in modern minimal – often ones that don't work that well together like red and blue, or red and green. The colors are also quite vibrant, with high contrasts and defined edges.


There seem to be no rules here – some lines are thick, some are thinner, and all looks seemingly random – adding to that "I could do it myself too" attitude.

While I understand the premise behind it, I'd suggest to try to keep the line-thickness and corner roundness consistent, as the sharp contrast and vivid colors are already making a visual splash - there's no need to add to the chaotic nature of this style even more.

ANIMATION

Gumroad also merges various illustration styles with photography, fake-3d and some nice parallax scrolling effects.

Most of the smaller, decorative elements move independently from the backgrounds and the main images, creating depth in an otherwise strongly 2D style.
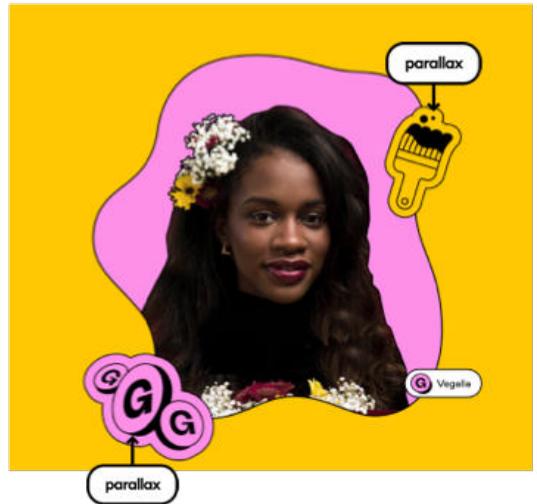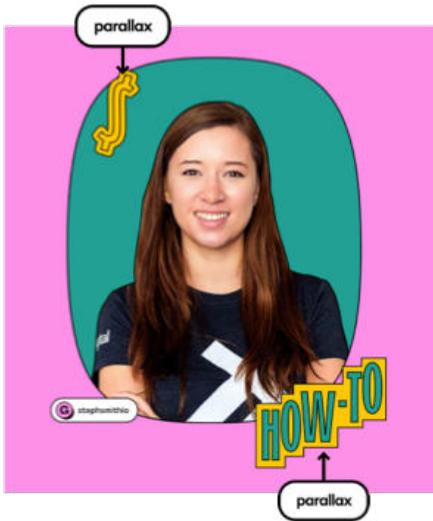
Those effects, especially the parallax, act as a counter balance to the generally low-fidelity of the images themselves. Without animation, the appeal of these websites would be a lot lower.

If you're planning to explore neubrutalism, remember about the animations and the extra decorations. They make the design a lot more interesting than just increasing the contrast and adding an outline to every object.

Parallax can be communicated to the developers by showing an example, and other, more-complex animations should be created as previews before any dev work happens.

"

**Animation brings the otherwise low-fidelity visuals to life. "**

SUMMARY

This is definitely a start of a new design direction and I can't wait to see how other companies and brands will push it further. There's a lot more potential here for creative uses of animation, 3d or fake 3d and some better font and color combinations.

The style works especially well for brands or products designed for creatives. Both Figma, and Gumroad are primarily targetting that category as well. Because of very relaxed rules regarding composition, shapes, colors and more, it allows to showcase each creator in a way specific to them.
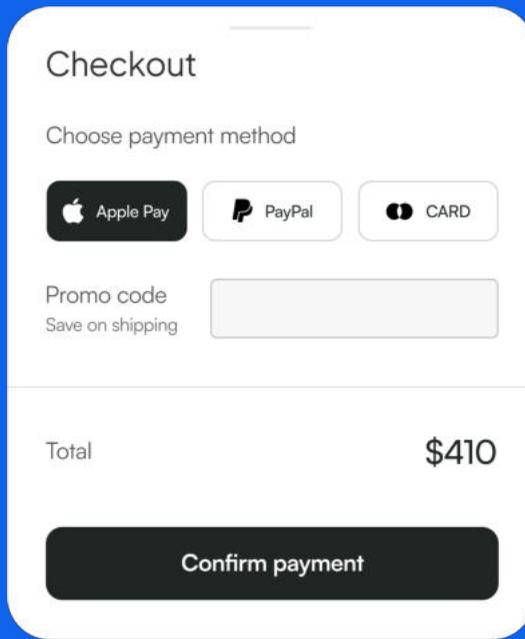
LEARN MORE

You can learn more by watching a comprehensive video about this trend that I recorded for my YouTube channel.
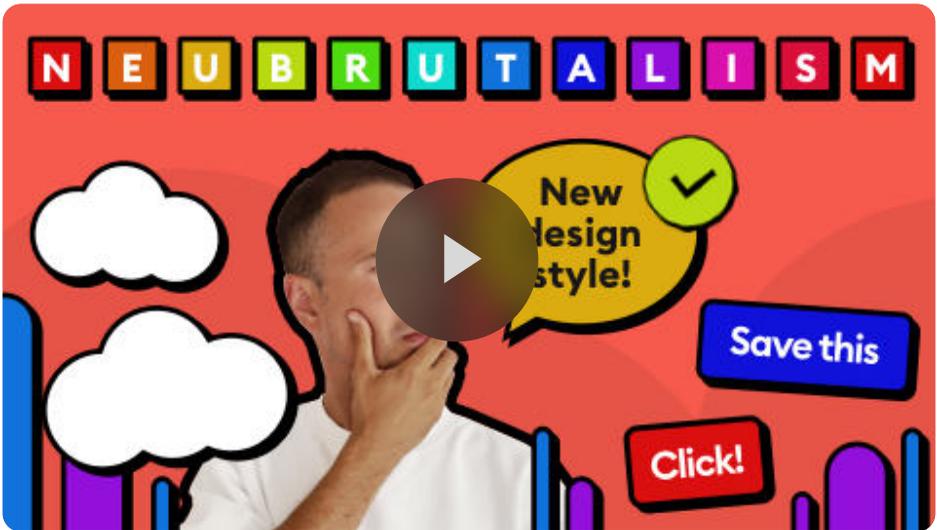
11.
NeuFlat

Design trends, or styles, are constantly in motion. Minimalism however, is always in-style. It exists in many different forms, ranging from the Swiss Style, through the failed iOS 7 attempts at super-light typography, all the way to some forms of neumorphism. None of these really caught on in User Interface design.

Those crazy ideas like neumorphism, claymorphism were a way to try and get out of the materialesque evolution of soft, colorful shadows and playful gradients.

Then NeuBrutalism came along and redefined the game. While the style itself doesn't really fit most businesses, it enabled designers to explore deeper and a merge of Neubrutalism and traditional flat design came to be.

I called it the NeuFlat Design, because while retaining some of the main Flat / Minimal characteristics, it also borrows from a couple of other styles in pretty creative ways.

The best way to start talking about NeuFlat is by showing an example first, and then breaking down what else can be incorporated into that style. From what I've noticed across the industry, the freshness and high contrasts of this style are helping it grow in popularity across modern, "cool" products.
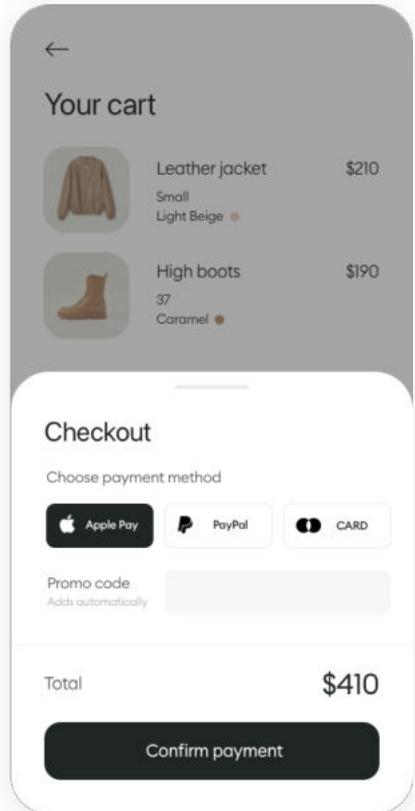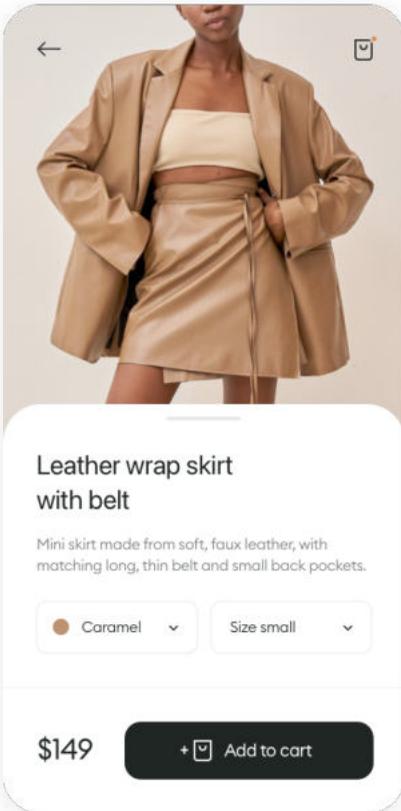
Shadows in the example above are added to the white parts of the screen are visible on a white background of the page only. More examples on the following page.

Leather wrap skirt with belt

Mini skirt made from soft, faux leather, with matching long, thin belt and small back pockets.

Caramel

Size small

$149

+ Add to cart

Explore & shop

Your favorite premium brands gathered in one place

Let's shop!

Search product or brand...

New arrivals   Trending now   Coats & Jacket

Checkout

Choose payment method

Apple Pay

PayPal

VISA

Promo code

Total

Confirm payment $410

Snap Light Beige $210

High boots $190

Caramel

Noma
SS 2023

Faux leather blazer
$210

Ling
$110

Your wallet

12000 LTC
170 USD   +17,22%

Buy Litecoin   Sell Litecoin

Today

Received Litecoin   +17,0000 LTC

Sent Litecoin   -1,0001 LTC

Paid with Litecoin   -4,2990 LTC

ADD LITECOIN TO WALLET

Unlock your wallet

Use Face ID to unlock your wallet

Use PIN instead

Filter transactions   Apply

Available

All   Sent   Received

Lightning   On

Search (recipient, sender...)

Type name, surname...

You are purchasing

12000 LTC
approx. $12,0918

From payment partner

coinbase   Estib

Available   Instantly

1 LTC Price $151,31

Payment fee $11,10

Total payment $162,41

No other fees will apply.   Buy Litecoin

Create your passcode

Please type your PIN number

1   2   3
4   5   6
7   8   9
0

Invalid Paper Key

The Paper Key you entered is invalid.

Type Paper Key

Type 24 keywords in the right order to unlock your wallet

"

NeuBrutalism came along and redefined the game even when it's not really going to be a big thing "
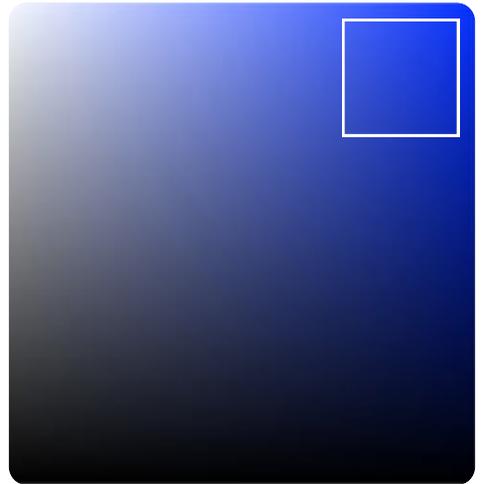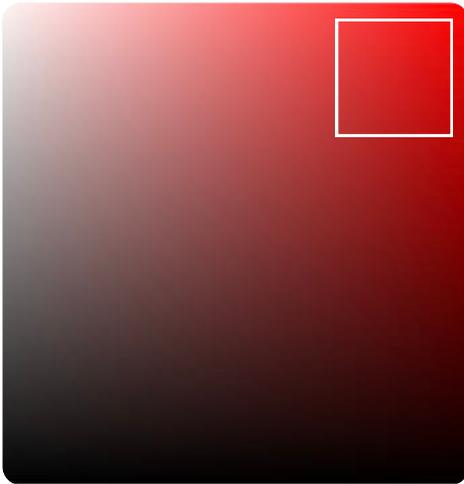
Higher contrasts are in, including vibrant, punchy colors. You can add a pastel background, but main elements should come with a punch. They need to stand out and be vibrant.

High contrast can go a little too high, so let's avoid that by keeping saturation below the 95% threshold.

aim to be here

65%   95%

Try picking the main accent color from these areas of the color spectrum:

Pro tip

By mixing a vibrant color from one of these areas with white, black and dark-grey, you end up with a modern looking, attention-grabbing interface that truly stands out.

Inspire!

Bigger type is in, and not just on Landing pages. Even in mobile apps people like a punchy headline.

Try bumping up your headings by 2-4 points, and with that they don't need to be as bold anymore. Go with regular for that clean, minimal look without sacrificing readability with the light ones.
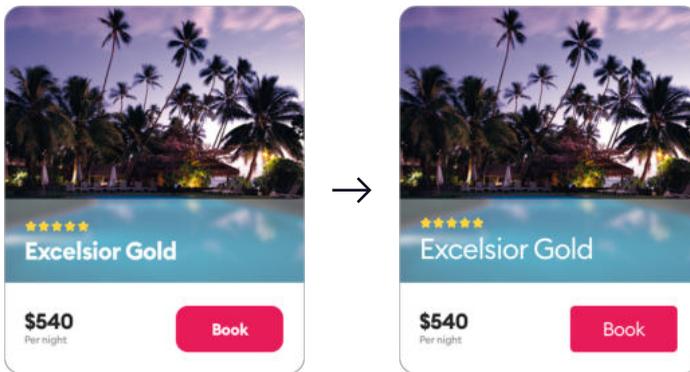
Larger headings can now use a thinner typeface. Just make sure they're still visible and readable.

"

Use larger fonts for headings. When they're big they can also get thinner and still stay readable. "

This rule is one that can be broken, as NeuFlat works pretty well with rounded and pill shapes as well, but it's good to start to experiment with sharper ones, as they can add class and style to a product. Of course make sure it fits - sharp corners won't work for a friendly product for the general population of consumers. For something cool, edgy and modern - for sure!

friendly   serious

A great pick for that style is between 0 (completely sharp) and 8 points of roundness for larger elements, or 4 points for smaller ones. This is what a button could look like within those guidelines.

Download	Download	Download
Roundness: 0	Roundness: 4	Roundness: 8

When the digital revolution of touch interfaces began, we needed rounded and friendly objects so people would feel less threatened by new technology. These days are now gone, most users can easily operate a modern device so there's no need for either skeuomorphism or very rounded corners. Let's say that now interfaces can get a little bit more serious and professional.
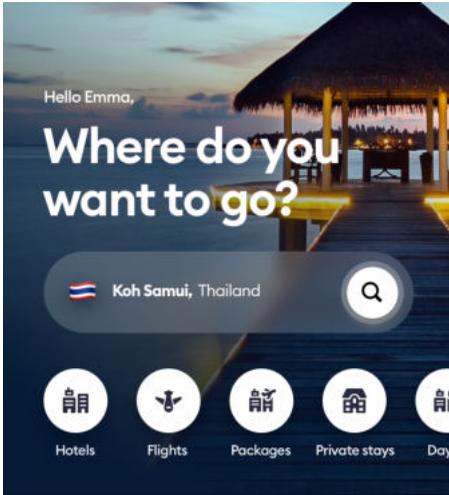
Pro tip
When in doubt, use the 8-point roundness as it has a great balance between friendly and professional. It also allows for pretty easy alignment of form elements.

One or two layers can have the glassmorphism effect to spice up the otherwise minimal design.

If you pick your backgrounds right and if you do have control over them, you can use a glass panel for a search bar, or some icon backgrounds.

The effect works best paired with really beautiful photos or colorful mesh-gradients but it's very important to make sure the text is going to be readable at all times. Sacrificing readability for flashiness is a bad idea.

Just don't make it all glass please, that sucks. Think a single overlay on a photo to show a name or some icons like in the example above.

Many designers consider the glass (background-blur) effect to be 'cool' and often decide to use it on every single UI element they can - from cards, to buttons and form fields.

When overused it greatly reduces readability and takes away that classy, minimal look and feel you should be going for with this style.

Pro tip

Used moderately it can highlight a specific UI element, but it's best to avoid using it for buttons altogether - they should always be strong, vibrant and very visible.

GLASSMORPHISM?

These two app designs are a great example of how you can integrate glassmorphism in a subtle way (left), or go for a full-glass effect, resulting in very hard to read and unpleasant interface (right)
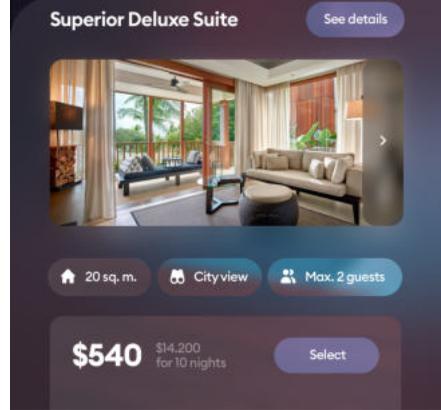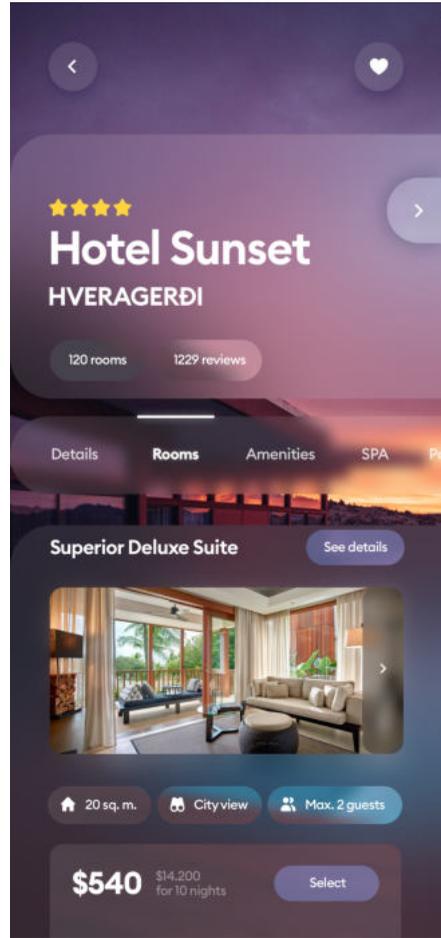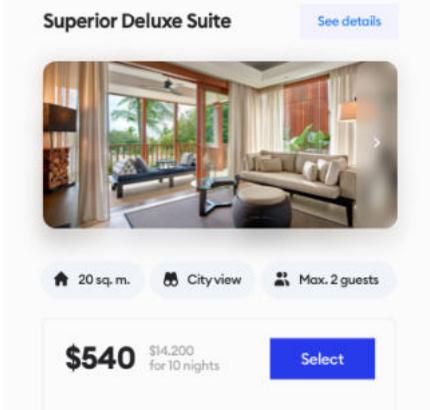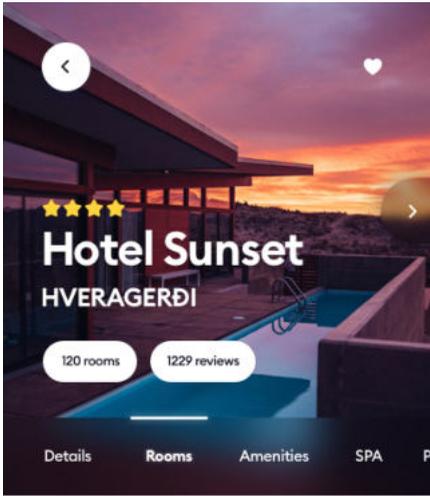
By adding glassmorphism only to two elements on the entire screen, it retains clarity, good structure, hierarchy, and still is able to use the "cool frosted glass effect" effectively. Remember: do not overuse!

"

**Too much glass effect
and you'll end up with
unreadable, unfriendly
visual mess. "**
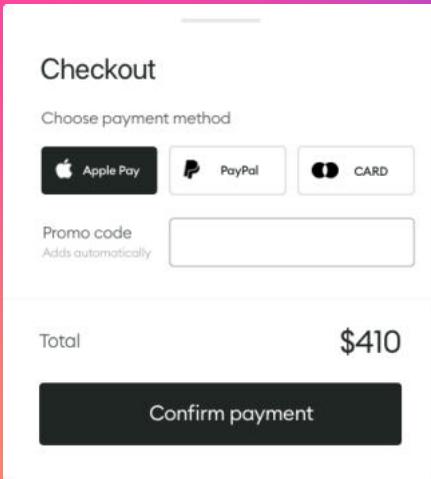
Aurora, or mesh gradients can serve as a real-life looking balance to the otherwise minimal fronts. If you want to learn how to create these colorful backgrounds, check out the dedicated chapter in this very book.

They are best to use as main background or on a card or two to break up the monotony of the interface.

It works great to highlight high-contrast, but very minimal interface elements like the checkout confirmation card presented above. The difference between the stark contrasts of the card and the colorful background makes it more visible and easier to process while keeping it fun and colorful.
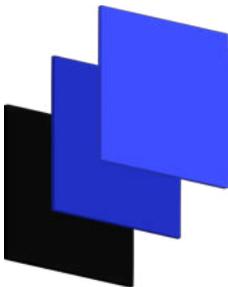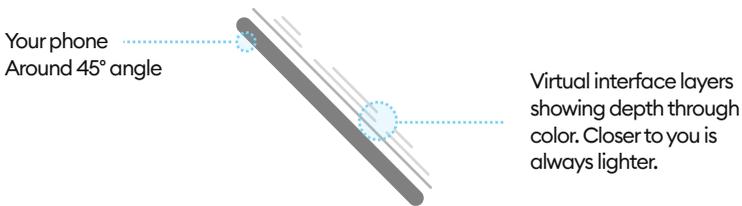
They can be done using more vibrant, contrasting colors, but in that case it's good if the remaining elements aren't as strong visually. You can find an example of such use below:
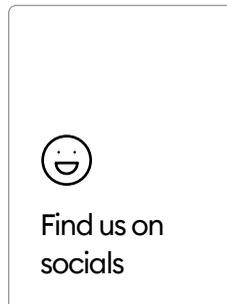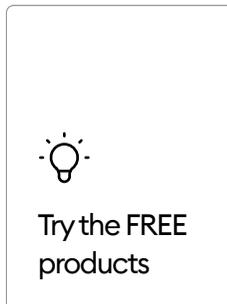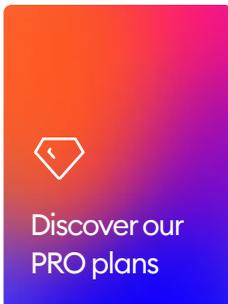
You can show depth by lightness of layers instead of shadows now. The good thing about it is that some displays were showing shadows in a dirty looking way, with ugly banding like this (show shadow banding example).

With just lightness we can still show depth. That's because we naturally hold our phones at a roughly 45 degree angle and the sun or ceiling light is shining from the top.

Your phone
Around 45° angle

Virtual interface layers showing depth through color. Closer to you is always lighter.

That means that layers that are closer to use are perceived to be lighter - no need for extra shadows. You can use this effect to your advantage to structure the layers of your interface. Start with the darkest one in the back, and the lightest ones towards the front.

In some small objects (like the one presented below) very soft, barely visible shadows can still be ok, but as an exception rather than a rule.

Hello, Cornelia
cornelialawrence@mail.com

Gradients are realistic. No surface in life is really a truly solid color because light always hits it in a way that makes it into a gradient.

So let's go unrealistic, because our interfaces are virtual things after all. Bold, colorful punchy elements, clean and clear typography.

That's the way to go.

An interface with just solid colors is a little bit easier to process, especially when it's not too colorful. That also can help with contrast and accessibility.

But of course it doesn't mean you should abandon gradients forever - there are many product categories or specific projects that would benefit from the use of gradients. They're just not a part of this particular style.

"

Our interfaces are purely virtual anyway - no need for realism! "

12.
Deep Glass

Deep Glass

Deep Glass is my exploration of other types of translucent materials that can be used both in 2d and 3d, spatial experiences. I don't suggest you use this style in excess, but it can work great for both graphic design, or one or two UI elements that you want to catch more attention.

I'm currently experimenting with using it as buttons and filter boxes, floating on top of other, more contrasting panels. More of these explorations will be coming to my free YouTube tutorials this year - including mixing this material with traditional, textured skeuomorphism.

This style works best when it's used on just one or two UI elements. "

Linear Gradient
Opacity: **60%**

1 **#2A3237**
Alpha: 78%

2 **#BEBEBE**
Alpha: 82%
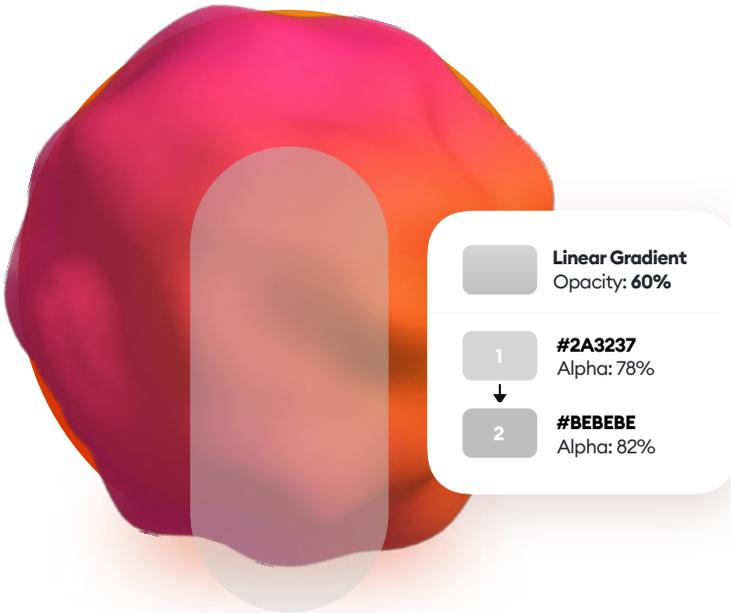
Create a nice vibrant background. I picked a 3d, distorted meteor with a gradient fill that I generated in Spline just for this tutorial. The best backgrounds are ones where there's some contrast shifts and visible lines and the effect looks great when it overlaps a shape - like in this case it sticks a little towards the bottom.

Start with a simple vertical pill shape and fill it with a linear gradient with slightly reduced opacity on each end.

Background blur ✔

Blur: **16**
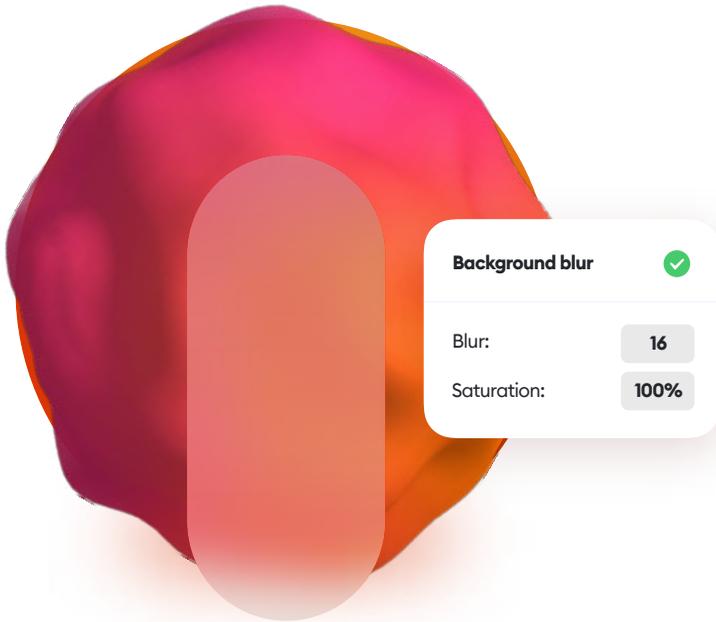
Saturation: **100%**

Add a background blur with background saturation set to 100%.
At the moment only Sketch has the Saturation option, so if you're using another tool, duplicate the entire shape (without a background blur) and fully white (no gradient) and set the blending mode to Overlay.

Then move that shape underneath the one with the background blur effect to achieve a similar result.
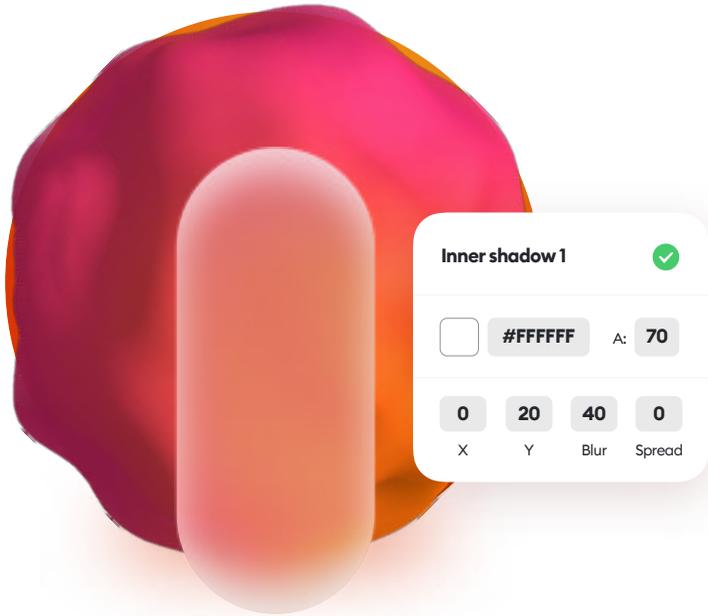
Add the first inner shadow to create a little depth. the order of shadows matters.

This inner shadow serves as a base of the effect and makes the edges of our pill a little less transparent.

Inner shadow 2

#000000   A: 50

0	4	4	0
X	Y	Blur	Spread

Blending mode: **Overlay**
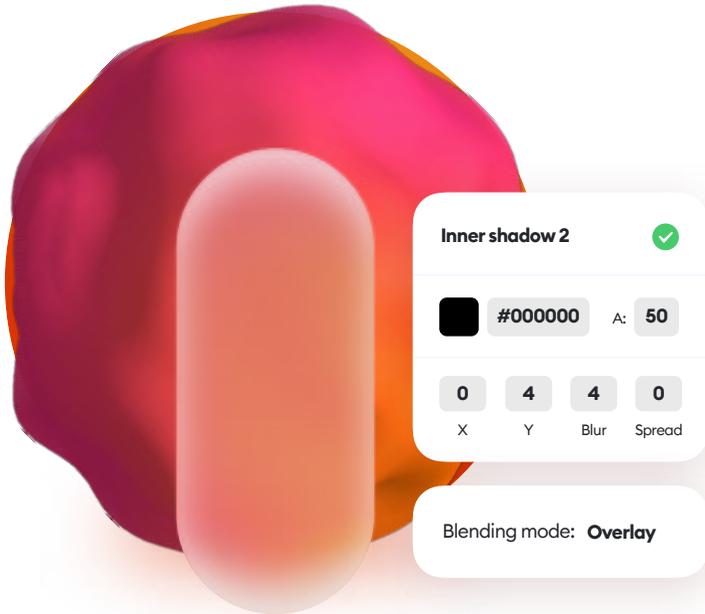
The second, thin and dark inner shadow helps the object stand out from the background. It adds that barely perceptible extra depth that makes it look more natural.

Note: The Shadow blending mode is only available in Sketch. To do this in Figma create a separate object with ONLY that inner shadow (no fill or outline) and add the blending mode to the entire shape.

Inner shadow 3 ✓

| | #FFFFFF | A: | 40 |

| 0 | 16 | 8 | 0 |
| X | Y | Blur | Spread |
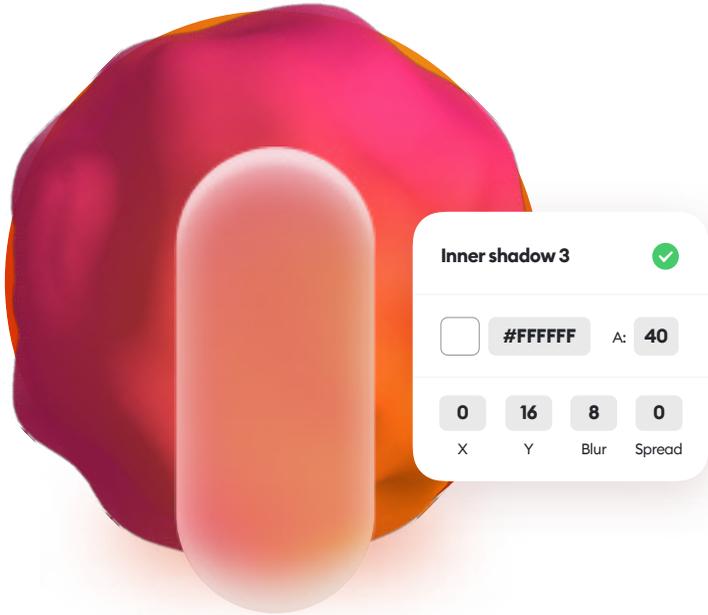
Then add another white inner-shadow with the above properties. This will help defining the shape even more.

Multi-layering of inner shadows can create interesting effect that would otherwise be impossible to do with just one shadow.

And we want the shape to come alive and feel three dimensional :)

Inner shadow 4 ✓

#FFFFFF   A: 70

0	1	8	0
X	Y	Blur	Spread
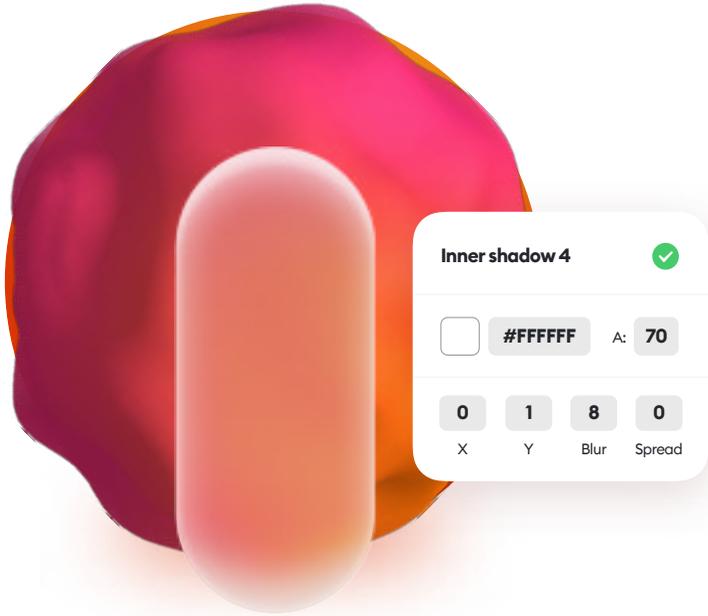
And the last inner shadow is here to outline the edges of our shape even more strongly. Notice how pretty high opacity and little blur helps with achieving that effect.

It's a helpful concept to also try on regular, non-transparent buttons and shapes in other design styles.

Drop shadow

#8C4E12   A: 24

0	22	44	0
X	Y	Blur	Spread
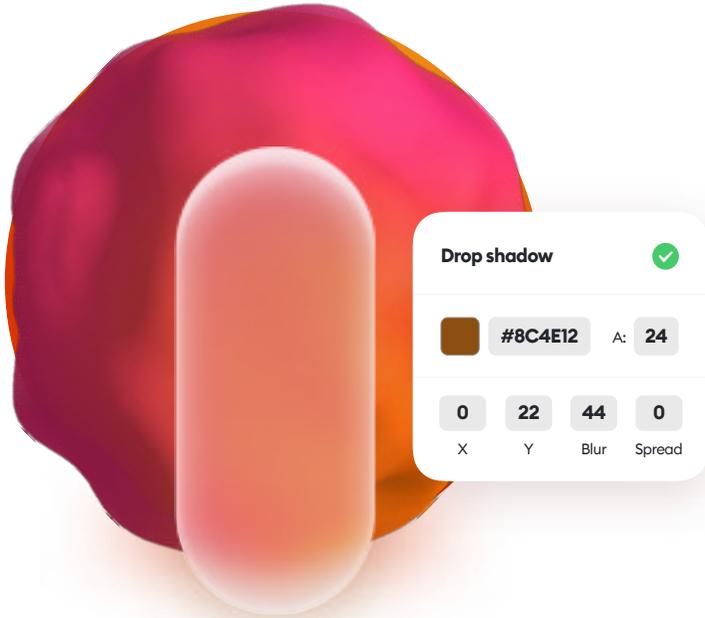
The last part to ground our shape in reality is adding a drop shadow. For the most realistic effect pick a color that's underneath our object - in our case orange from the meteor, and then make it darker until it matches.

When making orange darker it naturally becomes more of a brown hue. Then tweak the Y and the Blur so it's a soft, natural looking shadow.

I went with pretty low opacity for it not to distract from the shape and effect itself.

And we're done! A nice, deep glass effect with just a couple of properties. Of course you can then experiment with colors and even make one that's in dark mode - just change the gradient inside, no need to modify the inner shadows at all.

There's a lot of room to experiment here so do it! Have fun :)

And if you want to learn more about the effect including a full step by step tutorial, check out the video above!

13.
Spatial
Design

All image credits in this chapter: Apple's Marketing Materials

Let's talk about Apple Vision Pro from the User Interface perspective!
it's a mixed reality headset - mostly focused on Augmented Reality
Experiences. They introduced a spatial operating system for it, UI Kits and
some guidelines on how to design for 3d space.

While we have seen some of the patterns before - like Meta Quest
explorations of UI's, here it's taking many of those concepts to a whole
new level of fidelity, quality and ease of use.

As I predicted in my analysis last month - Apple is revolutionizing a
category - they don't need to be first to it when they're the best
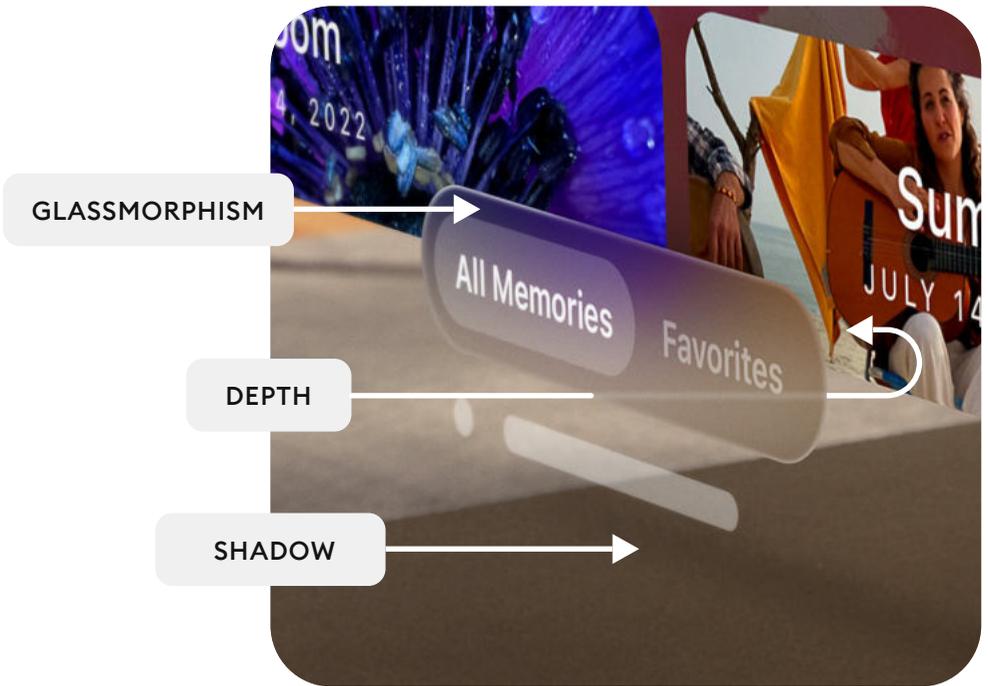
FLAT GLASSMORPHISM

The style of the spatial UI is something resembling a flat glassmorphism.

Glassmorphism helps ground the UI in the real world. Natural looking shadows add to the immersion. You can use depth to show hierarchy of elements and have toggles, filters or menus closer to you for easier access.

Despite many tries, there are no rounded, wraparound windows in this style, to avoid straining your eyes when trying to read fonts displayed on a curved surface.

This actually makes it easier to design for too!

AMAZING OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE

There are issues and some concerns about the technology too, but from a purely technological and UI standpoint this is an amazing area to explore for new designers.

Until Jakob's law takes effect here we are free to experiment and create completely new types of interactions - something nobody has done yet. Of course after a while the dust will settle and a set of established rules will take over even this area of design.

That's why I believe it's especially important to try and work on these spatial interfaces right now! Who knows, maybe you'll create something that will shape the entire industry!

We don't often get opportunities like that!

FIVE PRINCIPLES OF SPATIAL DESIGN

Let's explore Apple's spatial design principles, but with the jargon and hard to understand language.

Apple designers are some of the best in the world, but their developer portal materials are aimed at mid-level designers and developers.

That means a lot of juniors feel a little left out of the conversation.

No worries, I'm here and I'll take you through the five spatial design princples explained as simply as possible.

"

There are FIVE main principles of good spatial design. "

FAMILIAR EXPERIENCE

The interface should be familiar. It's the same flat UI you know from other platforms, but displayed in 3d space with depth used for hierarchy.

Think of it like an iPad app, but 3d.

That allows new users understand the interface from their first interaction with it. The windows look the same, the touch targets, buttons, icons.

The way you enlarge a window by grabbing its corner also works similar to the patterns we know from other platforms. Don't reinvent the wheel - make it familiar!
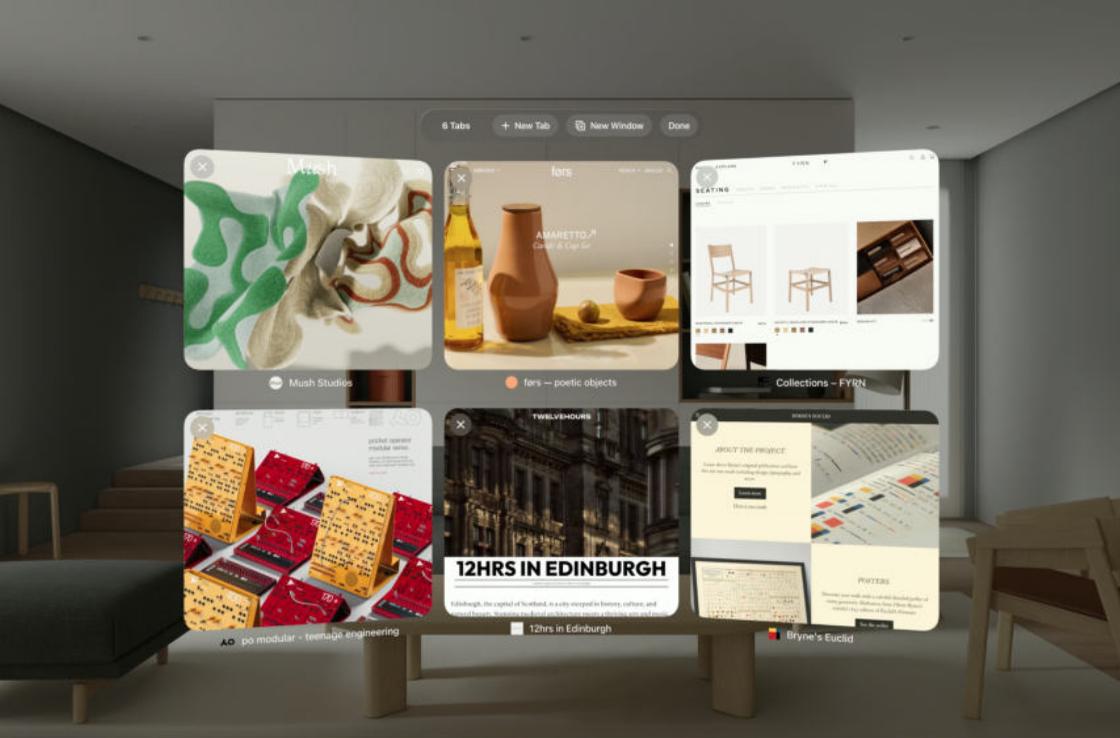
HUMAN CENTERED

The core experience is human centered and realistic. Use depth of field, ergonomics, and point of views to make the interface intuitive.

Avoid cognitive overload - don't shower the user with dozens of windows at different depths and heights. The most focus falls in the middle of the field of view, so the most important parts of the UI should be situated there.

Anchor the windows in real space, so they don't move as the user moves their head. Make sure everything is readable and the fonts are big enough so they're easy to read an all kinds of backgrounds.
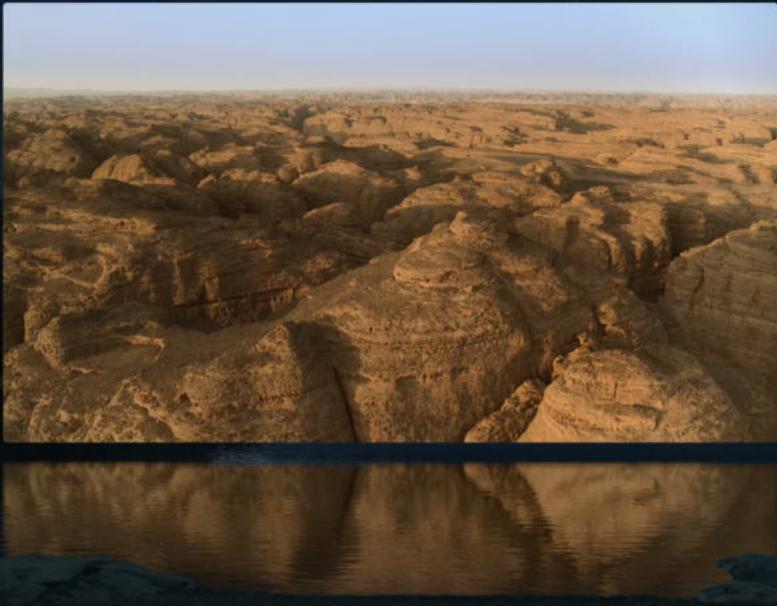
DIMENSIONAL

Use space, depth, & scale so the app can work in any size room. Keep in mind that the further away from you an app is, the larger it becomes. When you bring it closer it becomes smaller. The analogy would be a big-screen TV on the wall in front of you vs a laptop screen right in front of you.

Objects emit light and cast shadows in the real space. That, combined with the realistic glass material helps ground them in the real space.

Use subtle depth - all windows should be close together in space. If you need to display a popup, keep it close to the main window - simply move it subtly back a little.

IMMERSIVE

Immersion is a spectrum - meaning you can just be in your room watching a flat app floating in front of you, or you can go into full surround VR experience - and everything in between.

Use full immersion and dim the room when you want the user to focus on something specific.

In most other cases allow users to clearly see their surroundings. A good rule of thumb is to use regular window displays for things like browsing movies or photos, and then using a more immersive, dimmed environment for watching full-screen photos or movies.

Immersion is also about sound. Match the sound source to its position, when a window moves to the left, make sure the sound does too.
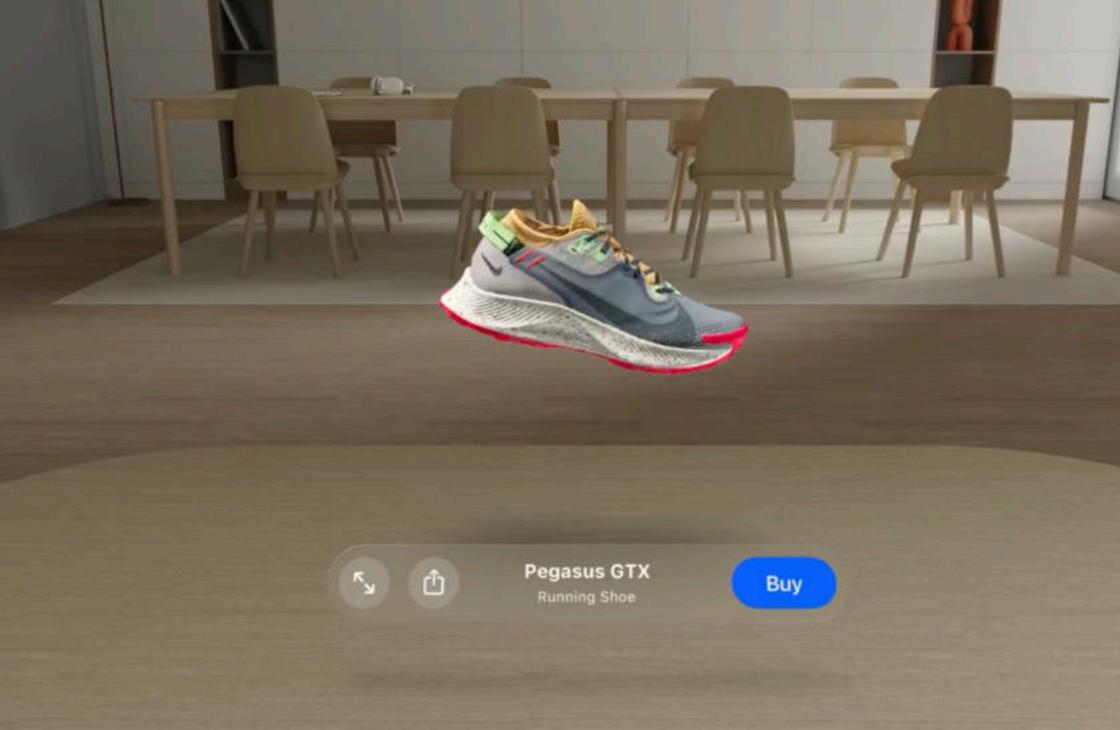
AUTHENTIC

Make your app experience fit the platform. What does it mean?

Main question is: what would make this app experience better when used in a mixed reality setting? Why should the user want to use it?

This is an important starting point, because if there's no benefit to using an app in extender reality, then maybe it's best to just keep it on the iPad?

A good example of an experience that makes sense is a shopping app where you can preview life-size products in your real space before you buy them. Parts like that, which can enrich the experience and make it truly better can be unique, more immersive and fully three-dimensional.

Keep the rest of the interface flat though - familiar and human centered.

14.
Thanks for reading!

Summary

Congratulations!

This is the first 2023 update of the living e-book on UI Design Styles. For now we've covered most of the major UI design styles out there. If anything new comes up, we'll add it to this book.

In the meantime you can also check our YouTube channel for tips and tricks on implementing some of that knowledge in practice. There are detailed breakdowns and tutorials for most of the styles of this book:

youtube.com/MalewiczHype

Don't forget to follow us and let's connect!

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Our company on LinkedIn - www.linkedin.com/company/hype4
Michal on LinkedIn - www.linkedin.com/in/michalmalewicz/
Diana on LinkedIn - www.linkedin.com/in/dianamalewicz/
Michal's Twitter - www.twitter.com/michalmalewicz
Michal on Instagram - www.instagram.com/malewiczhype/
Michal's Medium - www.medium.com/@michalmalewicz
Diana's Medium - www.medium.com/@dianamalewicz

Thanks:

Andy Dent (@AndyDentPerth) for Dark Mode color calculator - good stuff!

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Bestseller!

The most comprehensive and biggest eBook about UI, coming from +25 years of experience from Product Design professionals. Learn UI from scratch!

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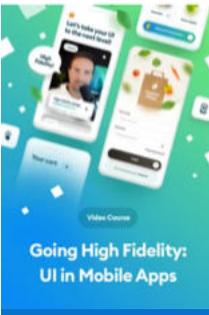
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