

MICHAEL BURNETT

Product Design Manager · AI products, trust surfaces, hands-on craft

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SUMMARY

Product design leader with 15+ years shipping AI, enterprise, and consumer products, including 10+ years managing and mentoring product designers — coaching, feedback, and career development from first portfolio through promotion into management. I stay hands-on: I prototype rapidly in code, use Claude Code as a creative partner in my daily design practice, and invent interaction patterns native to AI — natural-language command interfaces, human-in-the-loop approvals, and the trust surfaces that make AI adoptable. I ship fast in ambiguous, resource-constrained environments while holding the quality bar down to the pixels, the copy, and the edge cases.

SELECTED WORK

After Comprehension (2026) — an interactive prototype of AI trust surfaces — adversarial verification, bounded delegation, outcome trials, priced confidence — designed, written, and built with Claude Code: future.mburnett.app

CORE COMPETENCIES

Design leadership: managing and mentoring product designers · coaching, feedback, and career development · hiring, onboarding, and design team culture · promoting designers into management · design quality standards · design processes, tools, and ways of working

Hands-on design: rapid prototyping in code (HTML/CSS/JS, React) · Figma and modern prototyping tools — led two org-wide Sketch→Figma migrations; adopted Figma AI · Claude Code and AI tools as creative partners · AI-native interaction patterns · natural-language and agentic interfaces · polished UI craftsmanship

Strategy & collaboration: product vision, strategy, and roadmaps with Product and Engineering · advocating for design in leadership discussions · influence without authority · user research and customer advisory boards · executive communication · human-in-the-loop approvals, audit trails, and trust

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Quickbase | Senior Director, UX & AI Product Strategy | May 2023 – Present

Enterprise SaaS workflow, automation, and operations platform.

- Manage and mentor a design organization of 15+ — four managers plus ICs across product design, UX research, content design, and AI product strategy — owning coaching, feedback, career development, hiring, and promotion of designers into management, while modeling the quality bar hands-on.
- Conceived and personally prototyped a natural-language AI assistant and command interface as the home for platform-wide AI — questioning default UI assumptions to invent patterns native to AI: command-driven creation (“/table to track my open orders”), AI-assisted workflow generation, and reusable AI skills.
- Led design for human-in-the-loop approvals and audit trails — the trust surfaces enterprise customers in regulated industries (aviation, pharmaceuticals) required before adopting AI automation; staffed a dedicated governance team under a manager I promoted.
- Proposed, prototyped, and shipped a trial-activation overhaul with no dedicated PM or engineering allocation — influence without authority in a resource-constrained environment — framed as a falsifiable A/B hypothesis: +87% sales-qualified opportunities (98% certainty), +53% discovery calls (97%), and an 89% reduction in time to first app created; a separate intake-form redesign lifted conversion 19%.
- Partner with Product and Engineering leadership to define roadmaps and prioritize design resources; served as de facto PM lead for the AI Command Panel — problem definition, product strategy, prototype validation, executive communication.
- Evolve the team’s processes and tools: built a design-engineering collaboration around Storybook to harden an inherited, incomplete design system — establishing component consistency with no dedicated design technologist — and formally adopted Figma AI into the team’s workflow.

- Keep deep user empathy at the center of the design cycle through an extended research practice and a standing customer advisory board.

Plastiq | Senior Director of Design | Apr 2021 – May 2023

Fintech payments and SMB financial operations platform.

- Built and led a team of 10+ including two managers across product design, design technology, and marketing design — hiring, onboarding, and design team culture from the ground up.
- Established and maintained design quality standards through a reusable two-track review framework — strategic reviews for direction, execution reviews for flows and individual screens — shipping fast without letting craft slip.
- Led the launch of a comprehensive design system: component libraries, governance model, and visual consistency across the platform.
- Directed the repositioning from consumer rewards to SMB financial operations, rearchitecting the web product experience end to end; contributed to growth culminating in a 3x valuation increase.

Credit Sesame | Director of Design | Aug 2019 – Apr 2021

Consumer credit marketplace evolving into a financial wellness and banking platform serving millions.

- Led a design organization of 10+ including two managers; stood up the company's user research function from scratch, launched its first design system, and led the organization's migration from Sketch to Figma.
- Rearchitected the consumer experience around new banking capabilities in close collaboration with the COO; conversion strategies drove a 100% increase in users converting to banking customers.
- Used quantitative conversion data and customer insight to prioritize design work tied directly to adoption and monetization.

IMVU | Director of Design | Jun 2018 – Nov 2019

Avatar-based social and creator platform. Joined via IMVU's acquisition of a product I built at Tango.

- Directly managed and mentored 12 designers across 3D avatar social, mobile, creator tools, and virtual economy systems; led the organization's migration from Sketch to Figma.
- Remained hands-on in early prototyping and product architecture for a next-generation mobile consumer app and creator tools.

Tango | Director of Design (promoted from Principal Designer) | 2014 – 2018

Consumer messaging and live-video platform serving tens of millions of users.

- Proposed and helped lead the pivot to one-to-many live video and creator monetization — designing vertical video broadcasting, digital gifts, and revenue mechanics before TikTok's U.S. release made the patterns mainstream; the transformation contributed to 10x revenue growth in roughly a year.
- Created a real-time VR + mobile 3D social experience later acquired by IMVU.

Earlier & ongoing: Highway 1 / PCH — Designer-in-Residence (0→1 hardware/software UX: robotics, connected health) · Miles — Principal Designer, first hire · Lapspeed (2025–present, side R&D) — invented a distributed vision-system architecture; 2 allowed patents, 35+ provisional filings across AI video and spatial imaging.

EDUCATION

California College of the Arts — MBA + Master of Design Strategy

University of Southern California — BA, School of Cinematic Arts

WRITING & COMMUNITY

Former #1 Design Writer on Medium (medium.com/@dtls) — hundreds of thousands of readers on design, UX, and emerging technology · conference speaker and workshop leader · angel investor and advisor to AI, fintech, and consumer founders.