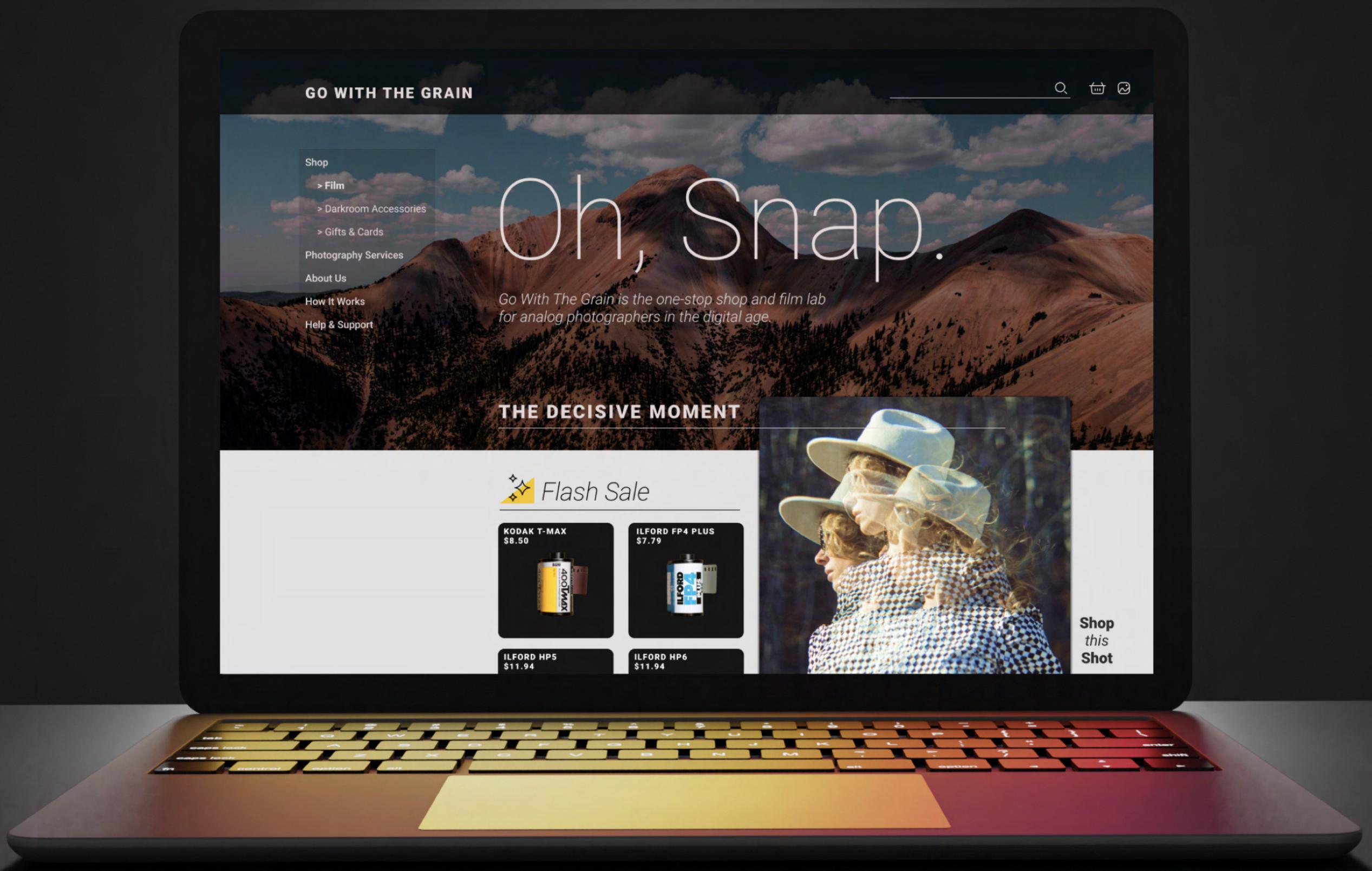


UX CASE STUDY

GO WITH THE GRAIN



PROJECT E-commerce Concept Design

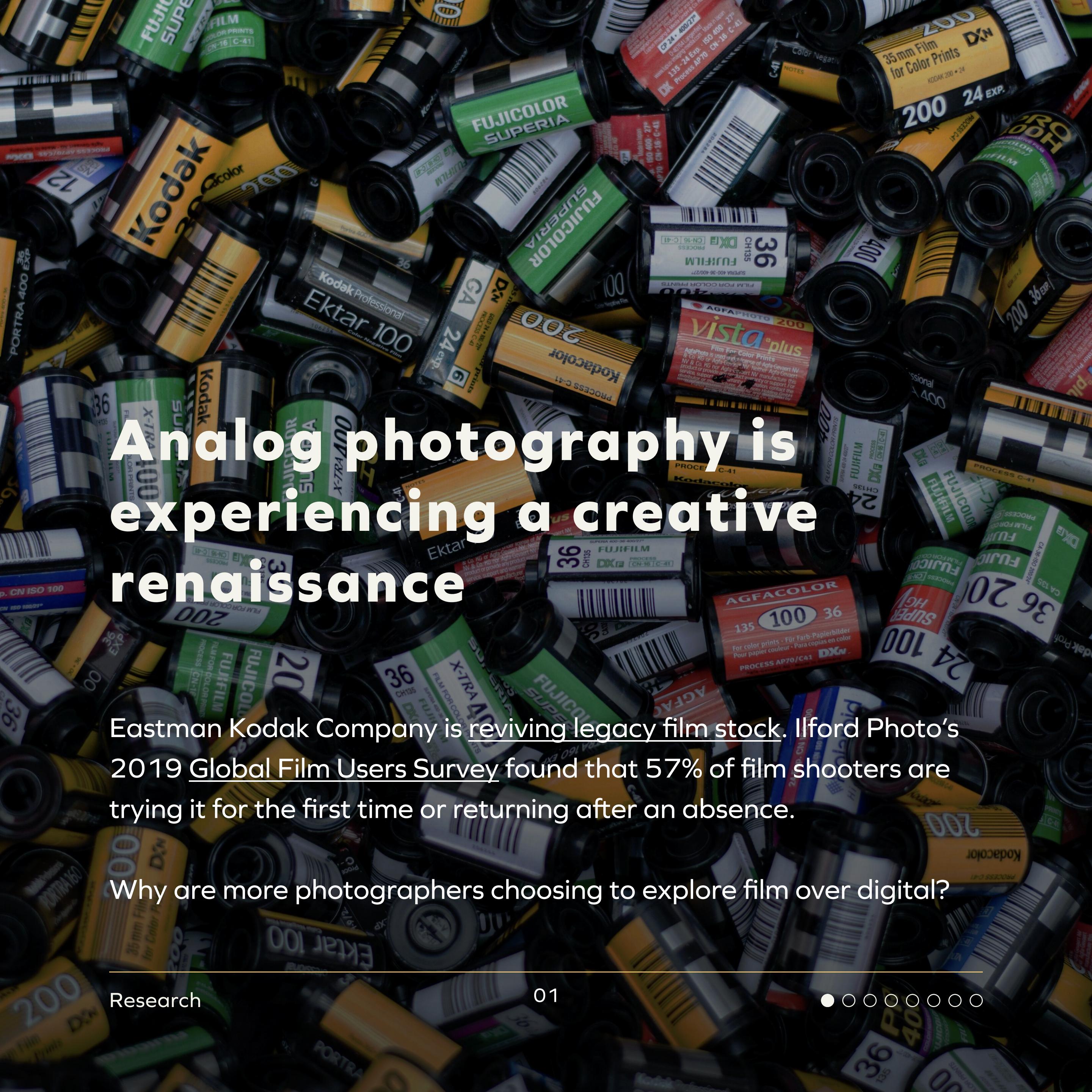
CLIENT School of Visual Concepts

TIMELINE June 2021 — December 2021

MY ROLE UX Designer + Researcher

'Go With The Grain' (GWTG) is a fictional online store for everything but the camera: analog film, chemistry, and darkroom equipment. The business will also offer services for mail-away film development, digital scans, and photo printing.

I selected this product line for my SVC capstone project because my professional background is in photography. It was my first job, and I still shoot film for fun. Turns out I'm not alone!



Analog photography is experiencing a creative renaissance

Eastman Kodak Company is reviving legacy film stock. Ilford Photo's 2019 Global Film Users Survey found that 57% of film shooters are trying it for the first time or returning after an absence.

Why are more photographers choosing to explore film over digital?

Research method: survey of 38 film enthusiasts

30% NOVICE

0-1 years
experience

Strong interest in
learning

20% HOBBYIST

1+ years
experience

Working toward
proficiency

50% PRO

5+ years
experience

Knowledgeable and
discerning



Research



02



● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Modern film shooters share a common motivation, regardless of skill level

Most respondents cited aesthetic appeal in response to the question “What (or who) inspires you to shoot film?”:

- 16/25** visual characteristics
- 06/25** tangible darkroom processes
- 03/25** unpredictable results / the surprise

“Visual characteristics” was shared across skill groups, even for novices who haven’t yet experienced film processes / results.

“Film pics have an interesting look that activates emotions in ways digital pics can’t.”

HOBBYIST PHOTOGRAPHER

GTWTG should be friendly and welcoming to novices, exceptionally detailed for pros

Given this widely held motivation, it made sense to bias toward novices as the primary customer. 2-3 advanced photographers were included at every stage of user research, to represent the spectrum.

Novices need the most help: A design that meets their baseline needs will also be usable by more experienced customers

Novices eventually become hobbyists: The business is well positioned to earn trust early in their analog journey

“...a good [photo] lab should be about all different kinds of work. You don’t want to repel anybody just because they don’t see themselves represented.”

PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER

Novices: “I want to buy film so my photos will look unique”

Also novices: “I don’t know what to buy”

The initial research survey was unmoderated, so I leveraged my subject matter expertise in this field to develop insights as to why novices reported feeling stuck:

Overwhelming options: First encounters with photography supply stores lead to cognitive overload and choice paralysis

Technical language: Product descriptions are full of jargon and metadata useful only to knowledgeable shoppers

Gatekeeping: Intentional or not, the idioms and shorthand used by photographers can make novices feel excluded in community forums

Population paradox: Film stats are “helpful” to all groups, but represent a pain point for novices

Most survey respondents placed “technical stats” in their top 3 most helpful product details:

- 83%** technical stats (ISO/film speed, processing, color balance)
- 66%** results and examples (samples made with the particular film)
- 25%** customer reviews

This was true across skill levels — indicating novices don’t find the presence of technical language troubling. They consider stats helpful detail to have. (Answering in theory, on a survey...)

Unmet need: “I don’t know what to buy, because... I can’t visualize the results”

Skilled photographers use film stats and camera settings to predict image characteristics — much like musicians who can read sheet music and hear the melody in their head.



Novices have not developed this skill yet. As shoppers, they’re at a serious disadvantage because results and examples are not offered by most film retail sites.

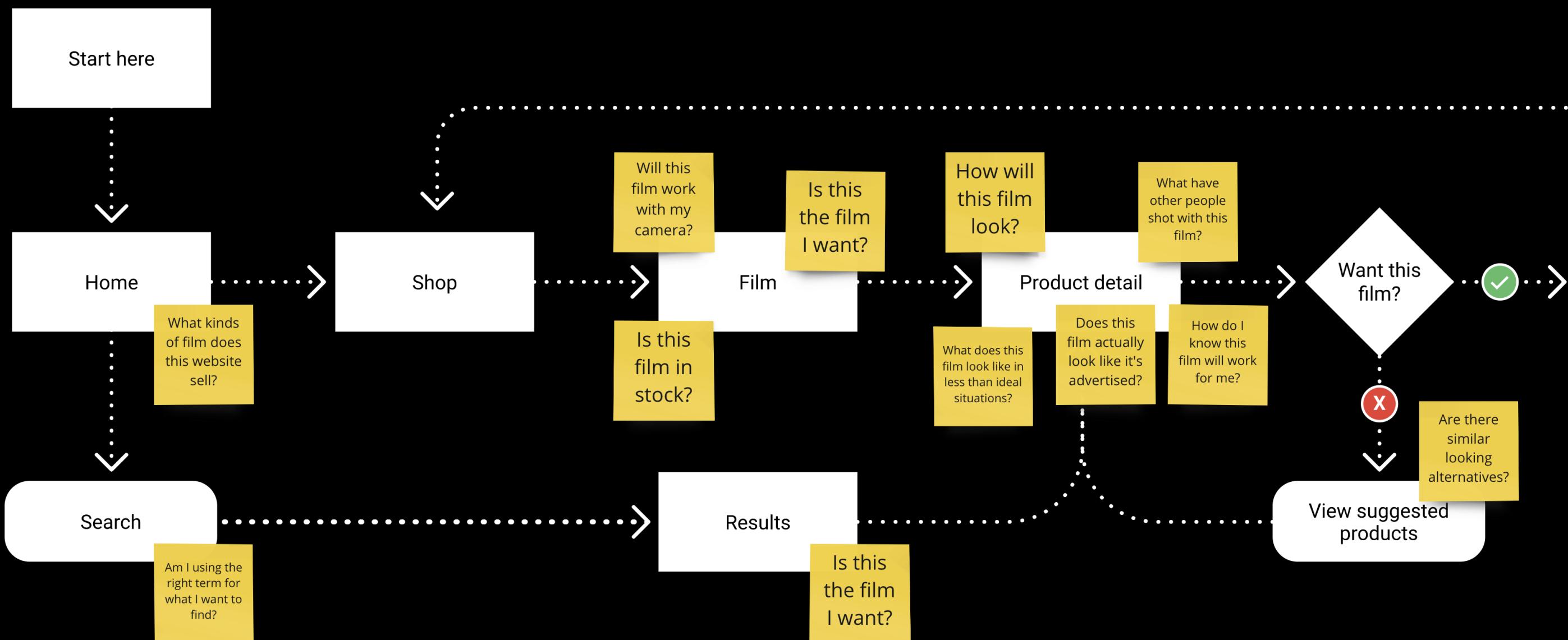
How might we help beginners pre-visualize their photos?

Film-specific sample images would both help novices to achieve their goal (take unique looking photos) and ease the frustration of interpreting technical stats without visual aids.

In addition to helping all customers preview film stock, sample imagery represents a major differentiator for the business. Providing examples will both showcase each film's personality, and prevent customers from leaving the site to search for examples elsewhere.

Film-specific sample images along the purchase flow

For the remainder of the project, I scoped down to prioritize the purchase decision processes. GWTG's checkout flow will be standard and familiar to users, once they've added an item to the cart.



I created lo-fi wireframes for desktop and mobile versions of the site simultaneously — to ensure sure the proposed interactions would provide an equally good experience across devices.

Due to time constraints, I could only prototype and test one version of the site. I chose desktop first because it seemed the more likely context of use for customers who want to view image details.

The image displays four wireframe prototypes for a product website, arranged side-by-side. Each prototype is labeled with its respective context:

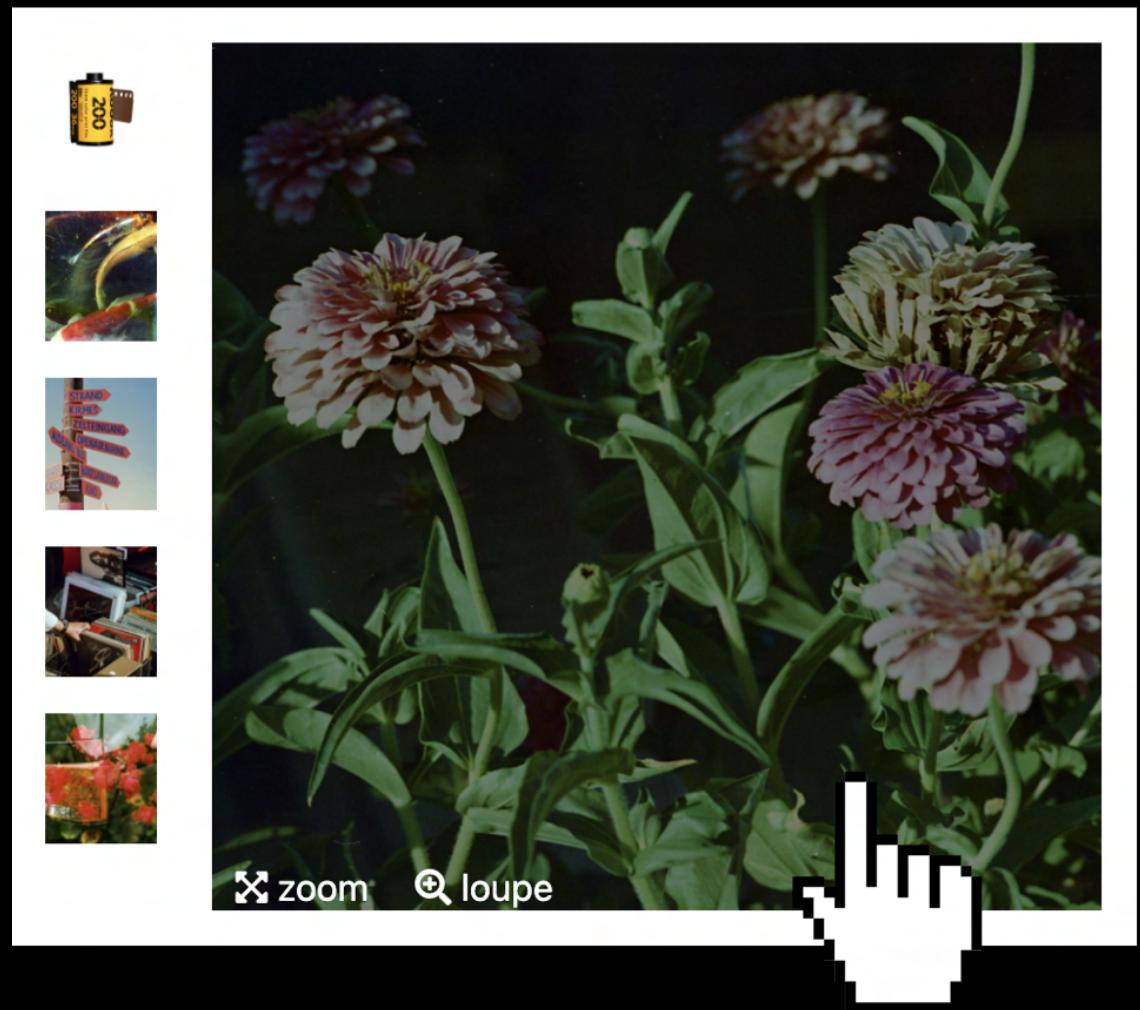
- product detail, desktop**: Shows a detailed view of a product page for "Kodak Tri-X 400, 35mm, Black & White Film (36 Exposures)". It includes a sidebar menu for "Shop" categories like Film, Color Film, and Black & White Film, and sections for Related Products and Recently Viewed items.
- product results, mobile**: Shows a mobile product search results page for "Film". It displays two items: "Kodak Portra, 35mm, color, 24..." and "Ilford HP5, 120, black and white, ...". Each item has a thumbnail, name, price (\$10.00), and a "Show More" button.
- filter sheet, mobile**: A modal dialog titled "filter sheet, mobile" titled "filter sheet, mobile". It allows filtering results by Type (Color (C-41), Black & White, Lomography), Format, and Brand. Buttons for "Clear All" and "Apply Filters" are at the bottom.
- filters applied, mobile**: Shows the mobile product search results page again, but with two "active filter" buttons visible in the sidebar, indicating specific filters have been applied.

A suite of features to guide novices, visually

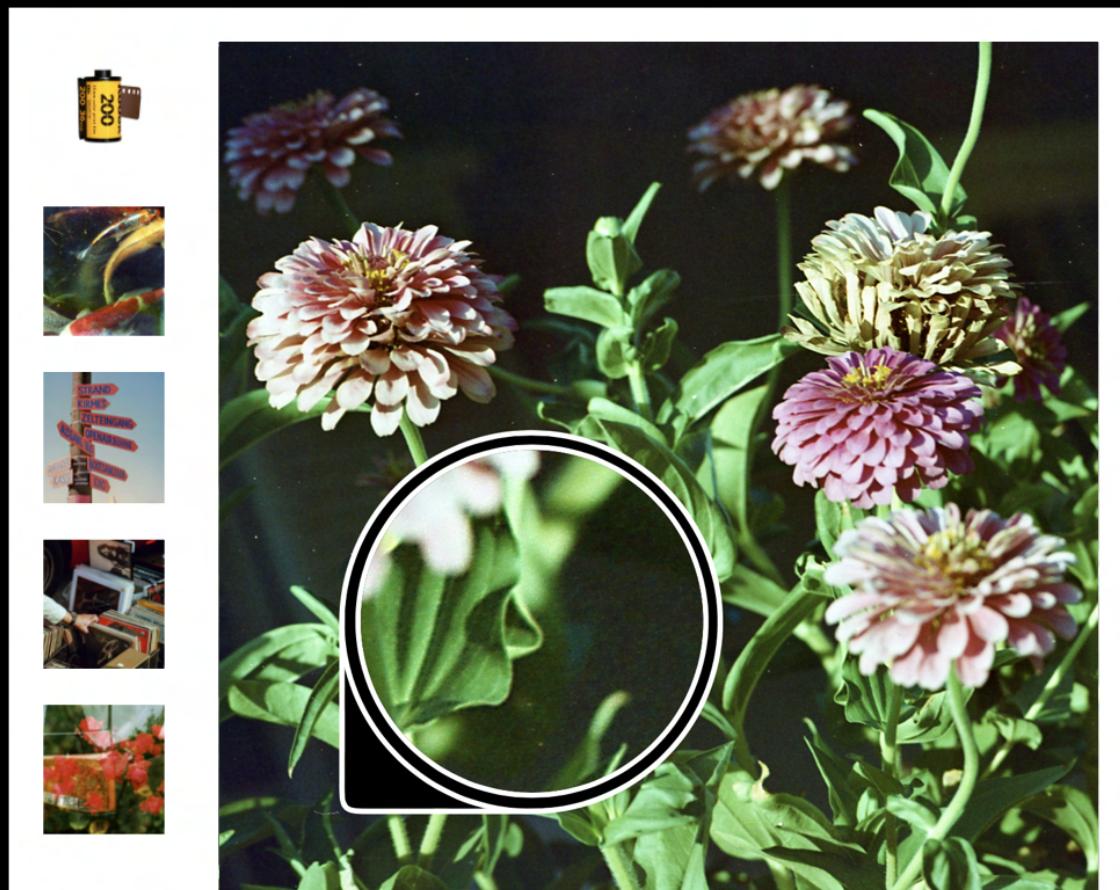
IMAGE GALLERIES

Each product page includes a gallery of film-specific sample images. These samples help customers to preview the film's visual characteristics before making a purchase.

on hover



loupe active



PREVIEW CARDS

Displayed in rows of 4 on product category pages. The product packaging fades to a sample image on hover, to provide customers a preview of the film's visual aesthetic.



default, sale price

Polaroid Originals
Color 600 Instant
Film

★★★★★ \$20.00 \$16.80

8 exposures/pack

Add to Cart

5 in stock - order soon!

IF: film is low stock
THEN: show remainder

on hover

Kodak T-Max Black
and White Film

★★★★★

Out of Stock

35mm, 36 exposure, ISO 400

Notify Me

Available for order 10/31/21

IF: film is OOS
THEN: show restock date

Although it's made a comeback in recent years, analog film is a somewhat volatile market. Preview cards include a shipping status to set customer expectations.

Out of stock items are clearly labeled, and allow the customer to sign up for restock notifications.

CUSTOMER UPLOADS

Customer reviews and images supplement store-provided sample galleries, so first time purchasers can see how the film performs in different scenarios (and less than ideal lighting situations).

customer review, includes images



3 days ago

Your grandpa's B&W film

It's Tri-x. It goes in the Leica. It's a classic. Just get some.



Was this helpful? [YES](#) | [NO](#)

customer review, text only



10/31/2021

It's been around since 1954 for a reason

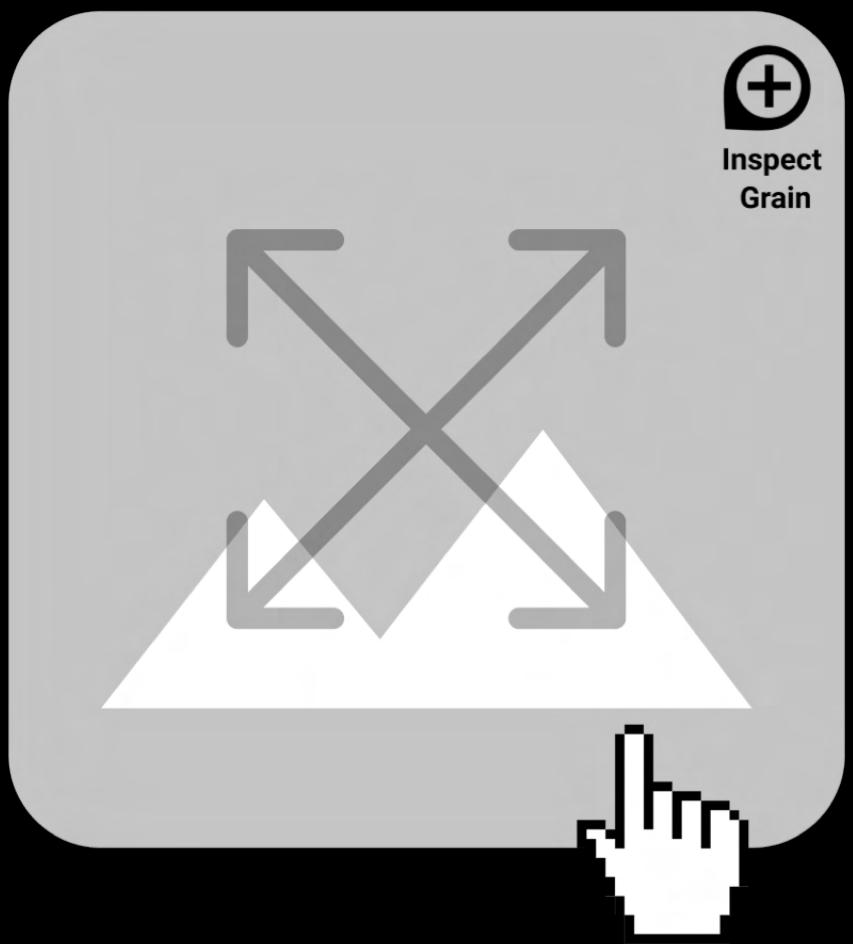
Love this film. High contrast but still shows lots of detail. And images are sharp.

Was this helpful? [YES](#) | [NO](#)

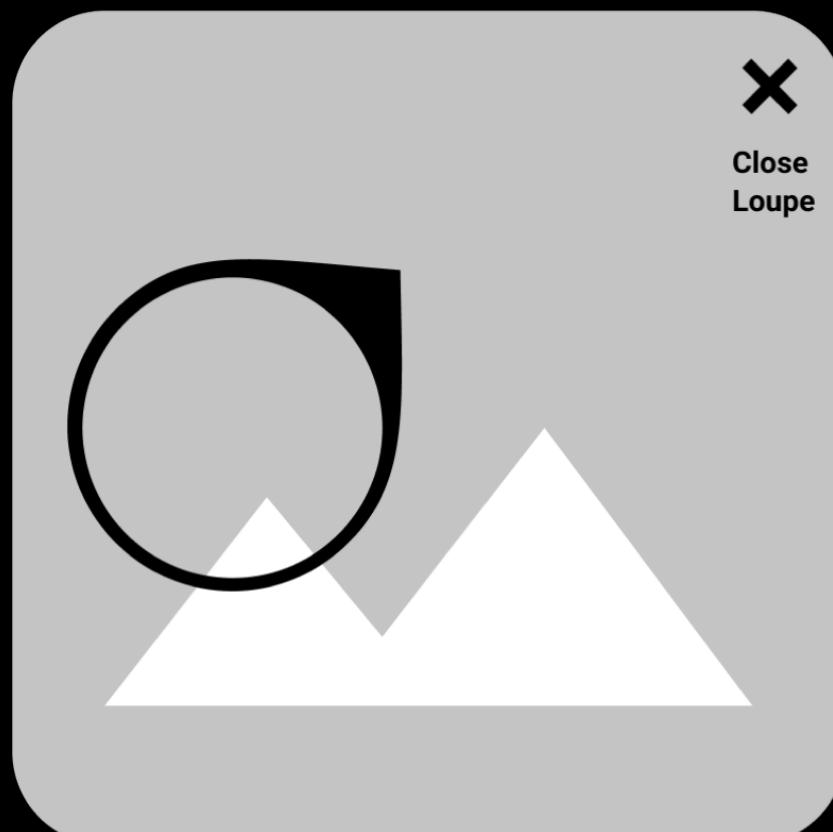
DIGITAL LOUPE

Knowing that pros and hobbyists would crave a higher level of image detail, I designed a digital loupe feature modeled after the common darkroom accessory.

1. on hover



2. loupe active



f /2.8 @ 1/60s, ISO 200

The loupe controls become visible on hover. Once engaged, the user's cursor becomes a virtual loupe — and they can magnify sections of the image down to the film grain.

GRAIN

The random texture created by silver crystals on analog film. Grain is unique across types of film, and adds to their aesthetic "personality"

LOUPE

A high-powered, pocket sized magnifying glass that photographers use to examine fine image details



WEAK GRAIN

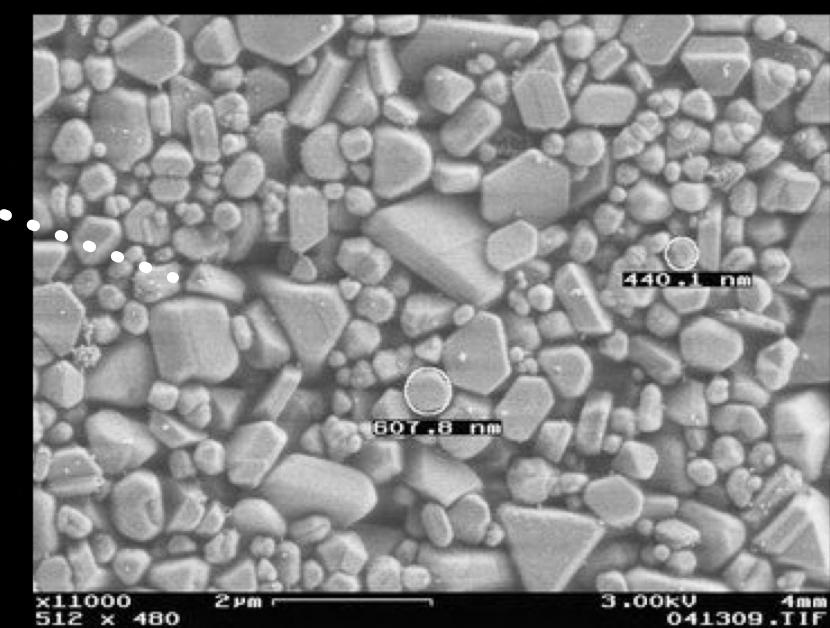


NO GRAIN



STRONG GRAIN

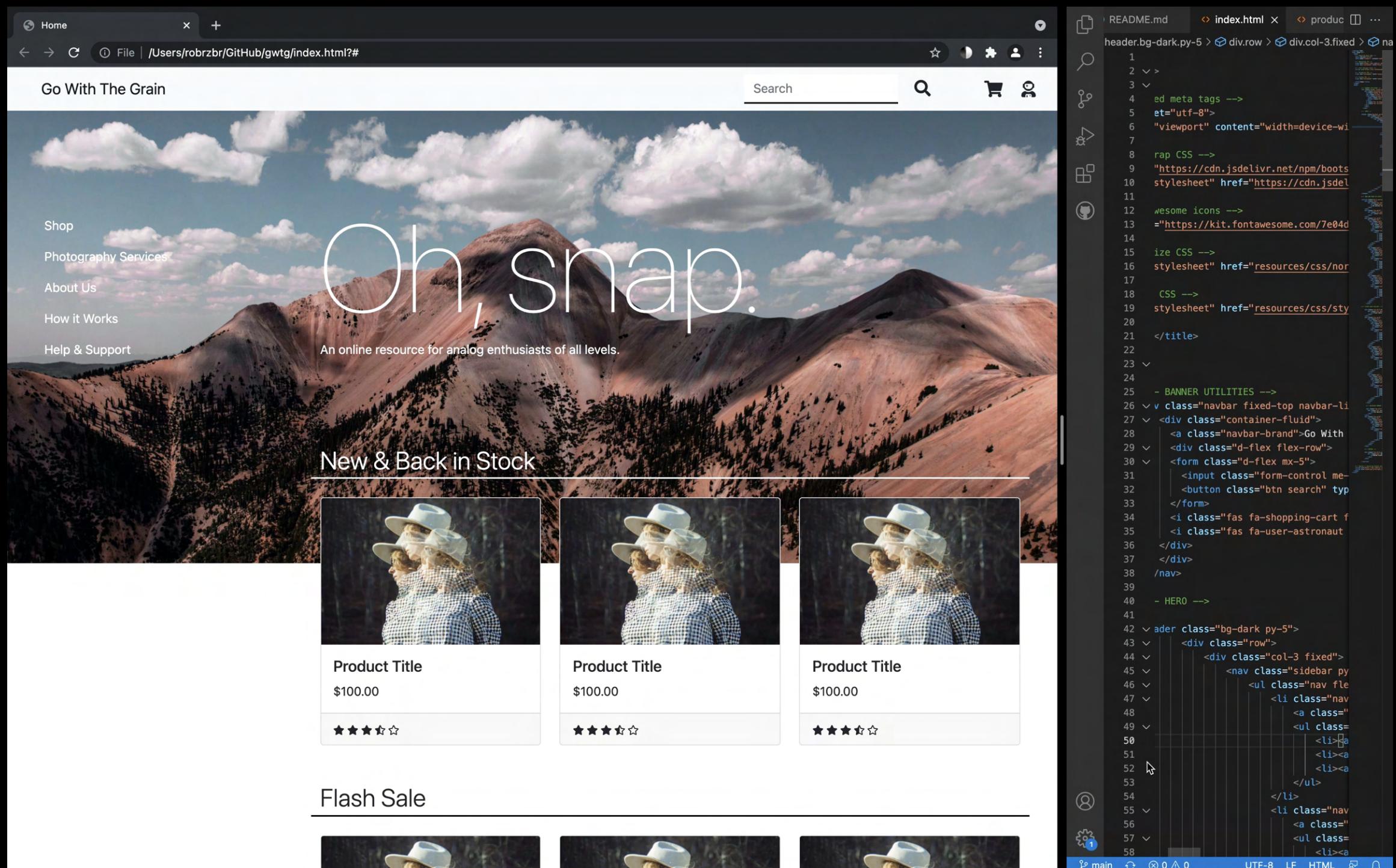
Got grain?



Prototype demo

The functional loupe was a must-have for usability tests. I built a mid-fidelity prototype using Bootstrap for speed/efficiency.

[Click here to watch the demo video](#)

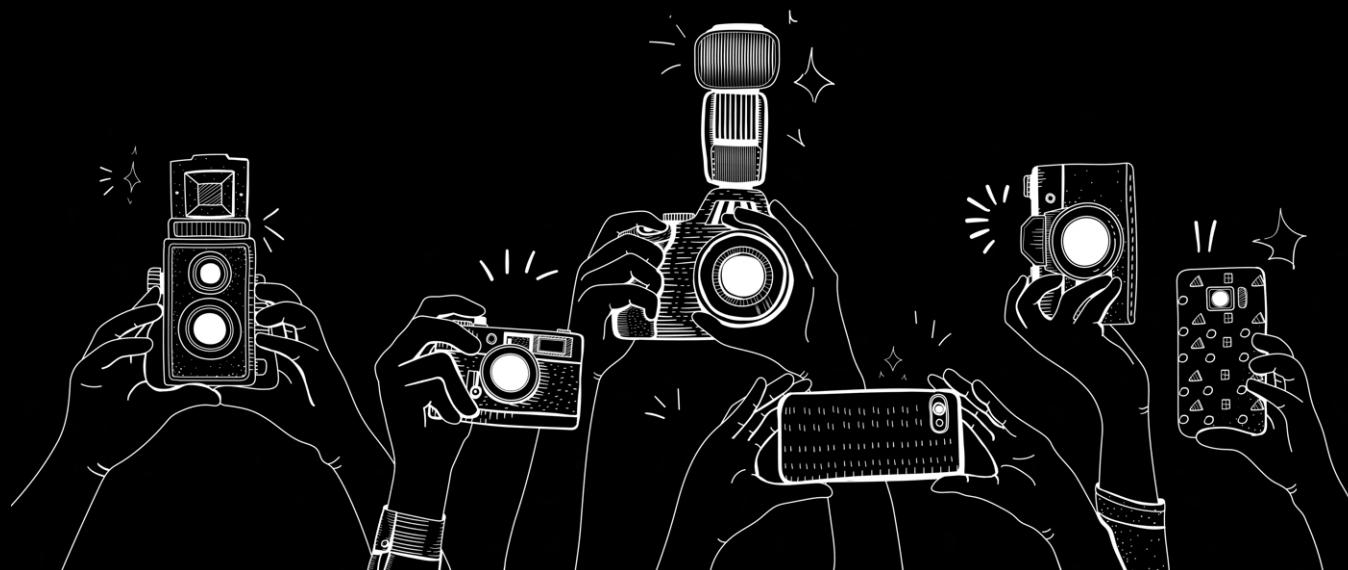


Research method: usability scavenger hunts with 5 novices, 3 pros

Test participants were asked to find and purchase a roll of film within the prototype, based on a mix of technical and subjective criteria.

OBJECTIVES

- Observe how participants comparison shop
- Identify major obstacles finding/filtering product results
- Stress test usability of image galleries and loupe/zoom features



Task A

Imagine you are shopping for a new type of film — something you've never used before. In this scenario, you own a medium format camera and you want to shoot color photos.

Find a film that matches the above criteria, and be prepared to answer these questions:

1. How saturated are the film's colors?
2. How sharp is the film?

METRICS TO CAPTURE

- Confidence during shopping trip
- Satisfaction with final purchase
- Perceived ease of use

TASK SUCCESS

Participant selects film that matches the technical criteria (format, color), and is able to answer follow up questions

1 Pros want to be shown, novices want to be told

Less experienced participants bypassed image galleries and instead looked for written confirmation of visual characteristics in the product description. (Either the correlation was not obvious to them, or they didn't feel qualified to judge the images on their own merit.)

Experienced participants used image galleries to investigate and compare visual characteristics for themselves.

RECOMMENDATION

Explicit connections should be drawn between written (technical) content and sample images.

2

Numbers make novices feel unequipped to shop for film

Participants who had never shot film before were perturbed by numerals in search filters, tags, titles, and product descriptions. Novices also expected to see subjective criteria (e.g. “good in low light”) among the search filters.

"I feel like I need to take a class. Is this something I'm supposed to already know? I guess I'm an idiot."

P2, NOVICE

RECOMMENDATION

Newcomers will need subjective labels and descriptions that map better to their emerging interest in film (e.g. “best for portraits” or “vintage colors”)

3

Sample images speed the search

Both groups of participants quickly learned to hover over product cards to reveal sample images, allowing them to assess film type at a glance instead of reading titles.

This was a novel use for sample imagery I hadn't anticipated — I expected both groups would use the samples to inform their final purchase decision.

RECOMMENDATION

Lean into it. Find more ways to leverage this behavior in the design.

Next Steps

QUICK WINS // LOW HANGING FRUIT

Functional improvements to image gallery + digital loupe UI

1. Auto magnify on hover to improve discoverability, reduce effort
2. Visual indicator in thumbnail list to provide context for which image is currently on view

Additional novice-friendly search filters

1. Recommended subject matter (portraits, landscapes, products)
2. Vernacular visual terms (vintage, low fi, monochrome, etc)

UX ROADMAP ADDITIONS

High priority: content strategy for novices

1. First person interviews to get crisp on novice plans/aspirations
2. Card sort exercise to inform product descriptions/search filters

Medium priority: direct comparison tools for pros

1. Competitor analysis of camera gear/film comparison features
2. Explore side-by-side image comparison for sample galleries

Retrospective

Image assessment is a learned skill, not an innate ability

Novices ignored the digital loupe during usability tests. Why?

During subsequent tests with advanced photographers it clicked: my prior experience in film photography had biased the feature design.

Pros used the loupe intuitively, but novices will likely need to “grow into it” as they develop a critical eye for photographs.

Next time: conduct moderated tests with competitor sites

Mapping the current film shopping experience during my initial research would have surfaced the obvious content issues I encountered later in testing. It also would have revealed a surprisingly common use case: shoppers who don’t own a camera yet.

Since both “scavenger hunt” tasks were tied to a scenario some participants hadn’t encountered before — shopping by camera format — I missed an opportunity to learn more about this group.

Thanks for
reading!

robrzbr@amazon.com

brittanyroberts.design

in/brittanyrobertsdesign

