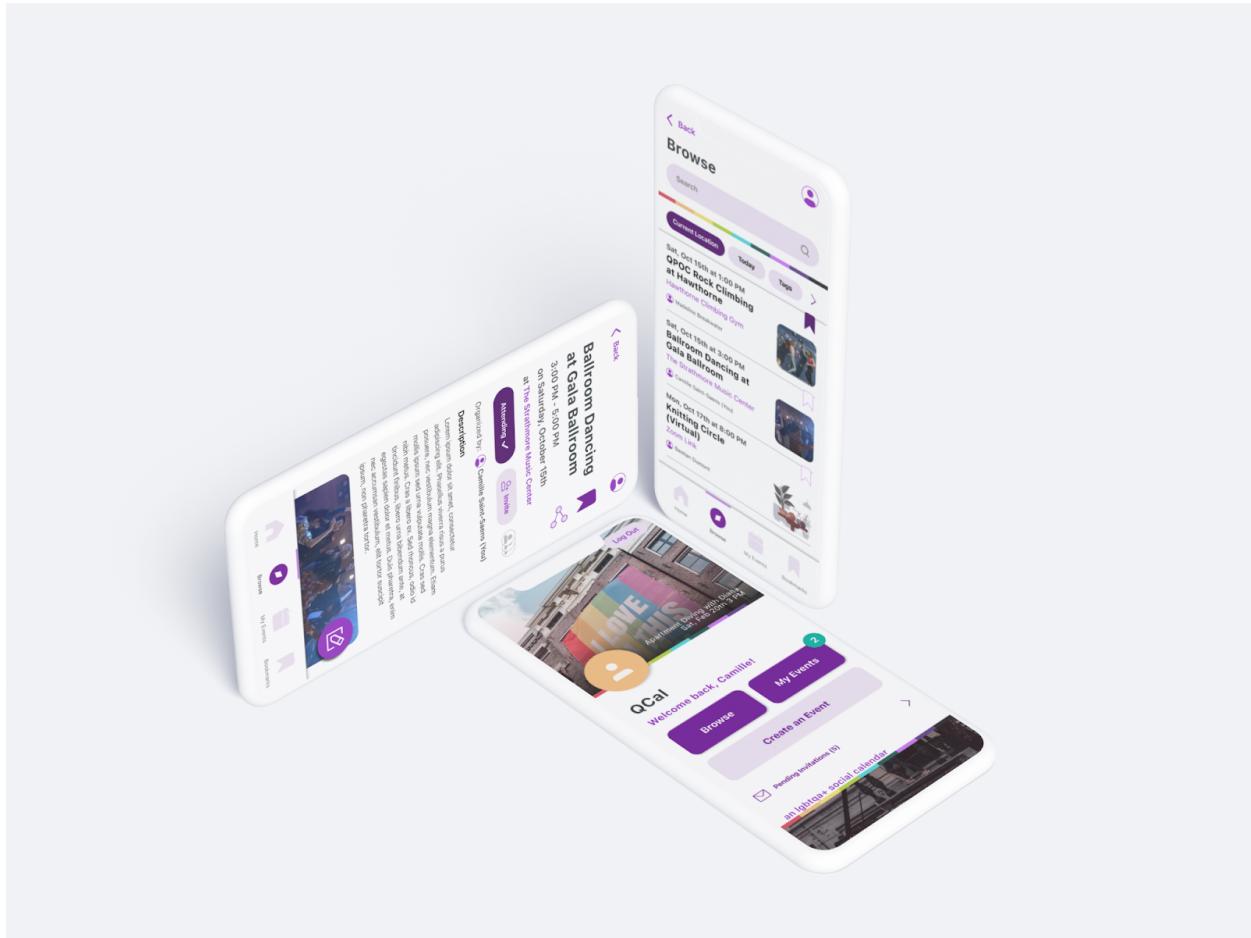


QCal

a social events app for LGBTQA+ communities

by Joie Chang



Introduction

Background

As a marginalized group, the LGBTQA+ community has historically been denied safe spaces and have built their own community spaces. Along with the decline of gay boroughs in urban centers and the changing landscape of socializing in the wake of the pandemic, I wanted to take a look at how the queer community could continue to socialize and create inclusive spaces.

Problem

The idea for QCal came from talking to fellow queer young adults who were uninterested in bar culture or alcohol but still wanted to be able to meet new queer people local to their area. With the pandemic having widespread negative impacts on small, local queer businesses and the traditional gay bar experience not always providing an inclusive environment, it would be good to have social activities and spaces that are geared towards non-alcoholic activities and help foster community especially in a post-pandemic world.

“How might we help people find queer communities to participate in?”

Solution

Our goal was to create a tool that would help people in the lgbtq+ community connect and socialize, through scheduling, organizing, and discovering events.

I proposed a social calendar design that would allow users to create their own events, browse existing local events, and invite their friends to these events.

By creating a platform to host user-generated events, I wanted to empower people with the ability to discover and organize all different types of events, relevant to their interests, and that reflected the broad diversity of the community.

Role

As the primary designer, I was responsible for the user research, the visual design, and the user experience design for this case study.

Research

Preliminary Research

My objective was to find members of the LGBTQ+ community that would be interested in non-alcoholic social spaces and ways to connect people within that community. I wanted to understand better what people look for, when they are trying to make friends and meet fellow members of their community. My research questions were, as follow:

1. How do members of the LGBTQ+ community connect and meet today?

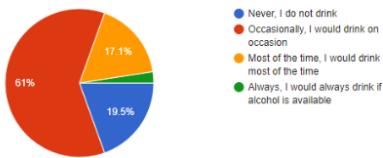
2. Are people interested in non-alcoholic spaces or events? Why?
3. What do people need from a community and what do they expect the community or connections to provide in return?
4. What makes someone want to return to a community or space?

Methodology

To find my participants, I sent out screener survey to the Trans, Non-Binary, Women's Alumni Network for my college as well as posting the survey on a queer social media network.

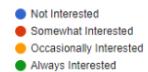
When going out for social purposes or attending a social event, how often would you expect to consume alcohol?

41 responses



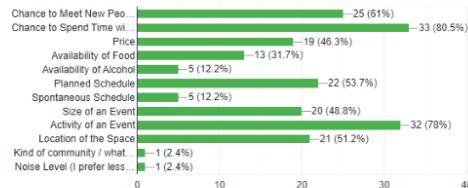
Are you interested in meeting other members of the LGBTQ+ community?

41 responses



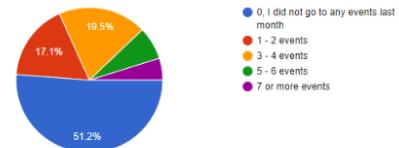
When going to socialize, which of the following are the most important to you? Select all that apply.

41 responses



Do you participate in any organized events (i.e. book clubs, meditation groups, meetups, volunteer organizations, recreational sports etc.)? If yes, how many events (including virtual meetings) have you gone to in the last month?

41 responses



Screener Survey Results

I was able to recruit five participants from the screener surveys to conduct more in-depth semi-structured user interviews. I chose participants that had fulfilled the criteria of being at least "somewhat interested" in meeting other members of the LGBTQ+ community and were open to being interviewed.

Because I was looking at how community gets created and why people decide to join community, our interviews touched on many different queer experiences of the participants, from meeting trans elders at a day of remembrance to organizing political activities within their college campus. Participants expressed difficulties in

meeting new people, lacking platforms and places to do so, and how existing friends provided networks to new friendships.

Below are assorted selections of quotes.

"[Alcohol] has definitely impacted if I want to stay... if I'm at this event and it's all dudes I don't know, the presence of alcohol makes me more uncomfortable than the lack of alcohol... but in a place with people I already know and feel safe, ...I might stay longer because I've had a drink."

"...Once it's safer, I would try to go out and visit new places that are LGBT-friendly...besides Yelp, that has that function to go towards that, there isn't a big way to look or find other people."

"My dad was an alcoholic, so I have predisposed issues with that... If I drink, I drink a sip of something on my birthday... but I really don't like the taste of alcohol...I've only been to one or two parties on campus, if I drink, I drink with my friends. And I'm very responsible, because I have a lot of anxiety about a lot of things."

"Community spaces... can give you advice... like the trans community thing... so many of the people were so nice...in their 40s and 50s and had been transitioned for years. Hearing about what they went through, their struggles and their positives, what it's like when you're down that far. Helps you figure it out."

"[As a nb queer]...when none of those people are [at the rock climbing gym], it feels like one of those nights the cis gays have shown up and I enjoy the community more when it's not just the cis gay men."

"The group I'm in, we've had a lot of success with it. What people have told us over and over... it's a safe space to make mistakes...So the value people are getting out of it is a way to learn new skills and the mentorship and safety of more experienced women and non-binary people in tech and it's not widely available..."

Selected Quotes from Semi-Structured Interviews

While everyone had different interests as to what kind of activities they might pursue, from rock climbing to art to coding mentorships, all the participants had at least one story of how important queer presence and community had been for them in their lives. Safety came up more than once, as well as how existing friend circles provided the stepping stones for finding more friends.

Synthesizing Research

Through affinity mapping of these user insights, I was able to derive several major themes that would subsequently be used to inform my future design.

Safe spaces	Gaps of existing social apps
Introductions through word-of-mouth	Place to return to
Queer-adjacent hobbies	Difficulties in deeper connections
Personal benefit provided (i.e. career, mentorship, etc.)	Alcohol enjoyed socially
Existing friend group as social vehicle	Cannot drink/don't care if others do No alcohol at all/family history with it

Based on the interviews, I created an empathy map to synthesize and visualize different user behaviors of a LGBTQ+ adult looking to connect with other members in the community.



Goal: As an LGBTQ+ adult, find spaces and connect with other LGBTQ+ communities.

Existing Resources

I also did a competitor analysis of other comparable socializing platforms. I chose Meetup, Facebook, and LEX, ranking them on their visibility of system status, recognition instead of recall, and user control and freedom. Difficulties in filtering for results and in top level navigation hampered Facebook's Event joining flow while a platform like LEX left most of the coordination in the hands of individual DMs between users.

From these platforms, I realized the key to a successful user-generated event platform includes clear filtering and well-organized information.

Platform	Visibility of System Status	Recognition rather than Recall	User Control and Freedom
Meetup	4/5	3/5	5/5
Facebook	3/5	2/5	4/5
LEX	4/5	2/5	3/5

[QCAL Competitor Analysis](#)

Define

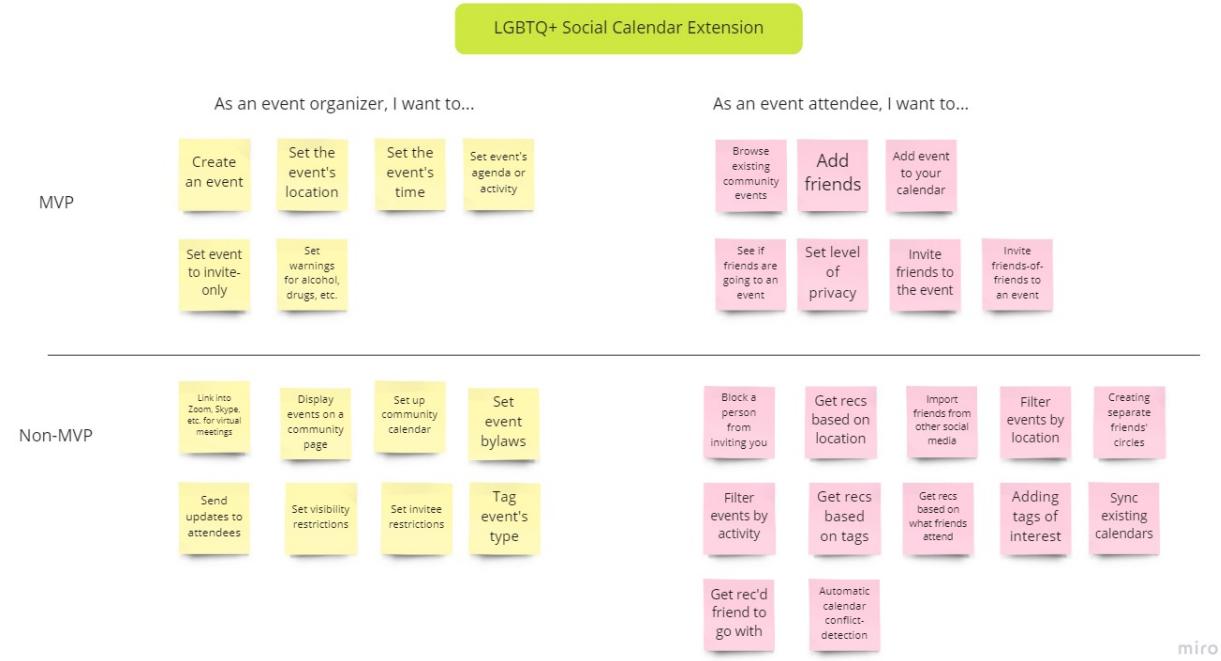
I picked the social calendar app idea to develop further, with the objective to create a platform that would enable the LGBTQ+ community to socialize through creating and participating in events.

User Scenarios

Using the insights and major themes derived from my user interviews, I began to map out the needs of a user in user stories.

For example, the ability to invite friends came from the conversations I had with interviewees who mentioned how it was easier to attend new events when going with an existing friend.

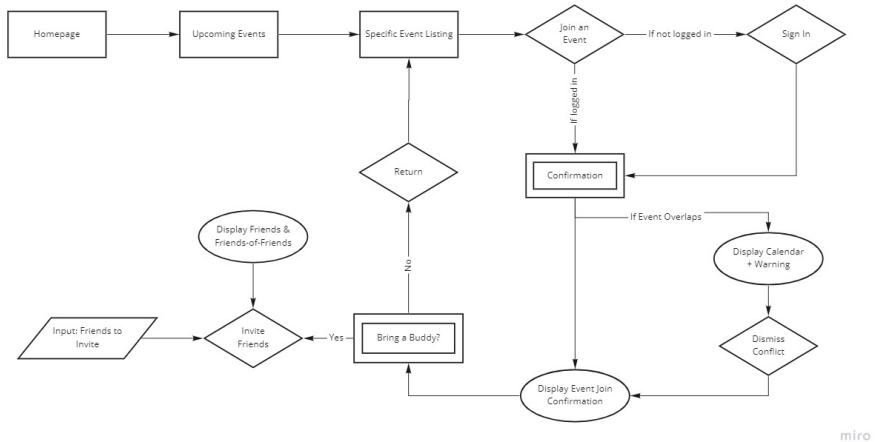
I had to take into account two perspectives, the event organizer and the event attendee. Once all the user stories were created, I separated them into two categories, MVP and non-MVP, and used those MVP stories as the basis for the key red routes.



User Stories for the LGBTQ+ Social Calendar Extension

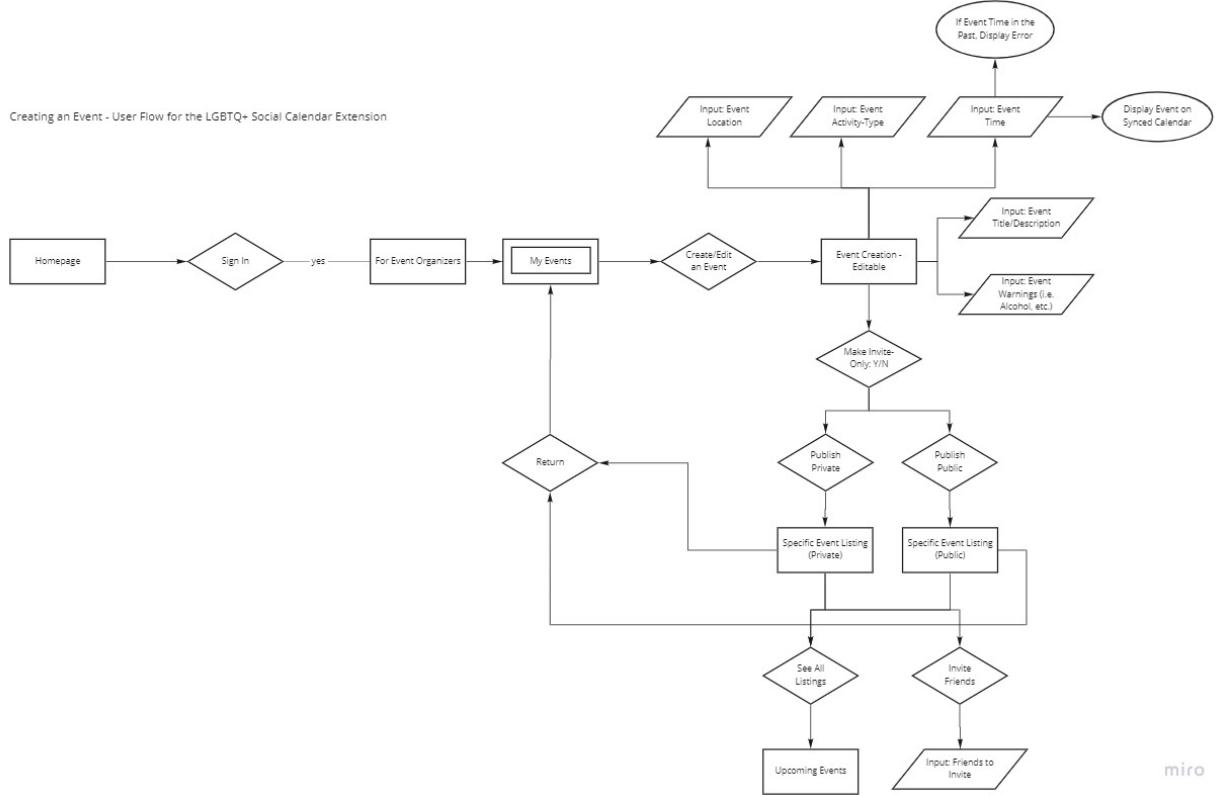
From there, I created two different red routes depending on the type of user. Some key features included the ability to invite existing friends, which makes people more likely to attend events, and the ability to inform users of event conflicts in their schedule. I was also extremely concerned with a user's sense of safety and comfort, so I added the ability to set warnings for alcohol and other warnings on an event.

Joining an Event - User Flow for the LGBTQ+ Social Calendar Extension



miro

Joining an Event User Flow



miro

Creating an Event User Flow

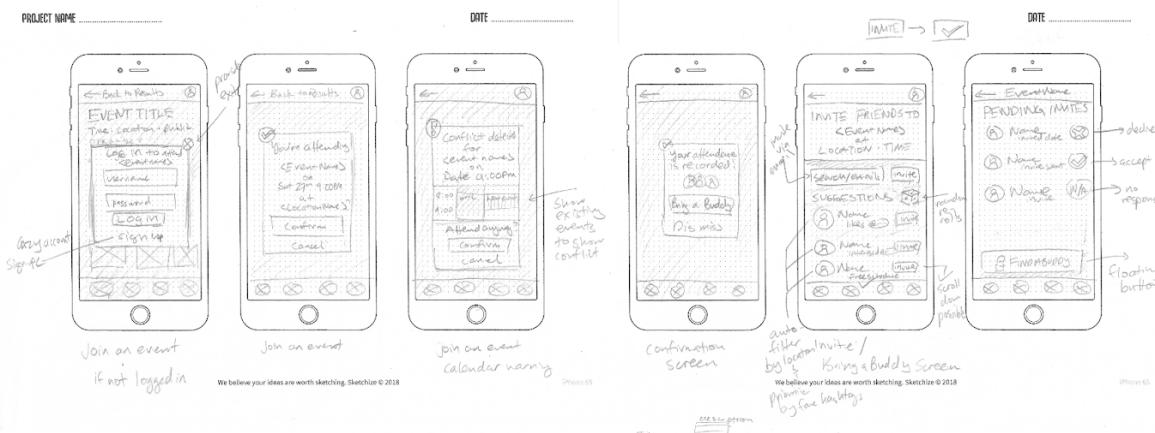
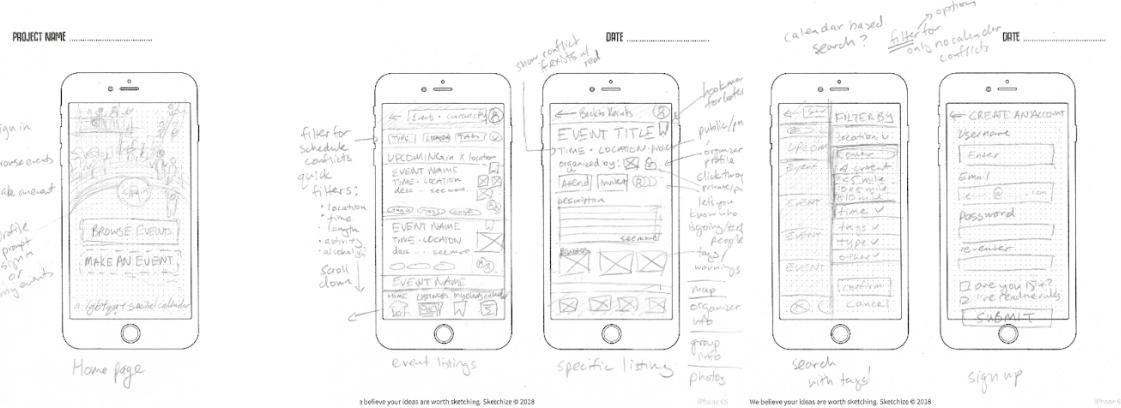
Design & Prototype

Thanks to mapping out how our user needs would be fulfilled in the critical red-routes, I now had the key touchpoints for designing the social calendar app. QCAL would focus on three main features:

1. Creating and Organizing an Event
2. Finding and Joining an Event
3. Inviting Friends

Sketches

Early on during the sketches, I made the important realization that the event organizers and the event attendees were the same user base, just with different actions. Any user should be allowed to both create their own events and attend other people's events. Therefore, dividing the functionality in the app into different homepages only restricted the access for people to create their own events.



First Iteration Sketches

Using the sketches, I was able to create a POP prototype to do some initial guerilla testing. The tests revealed:

- The user found the “Join an Event” intuitive and streamlined. They particularly enjoyed the bookmark functionality, to mark events to return to later.
- The user expected to be able to invite multiple friends from a single screen, rather than inviting friends one-by-one.
- The user wasn’t sure where the drafts of events they created went and they couldn’t find their My Events tab once returning to the homepage.



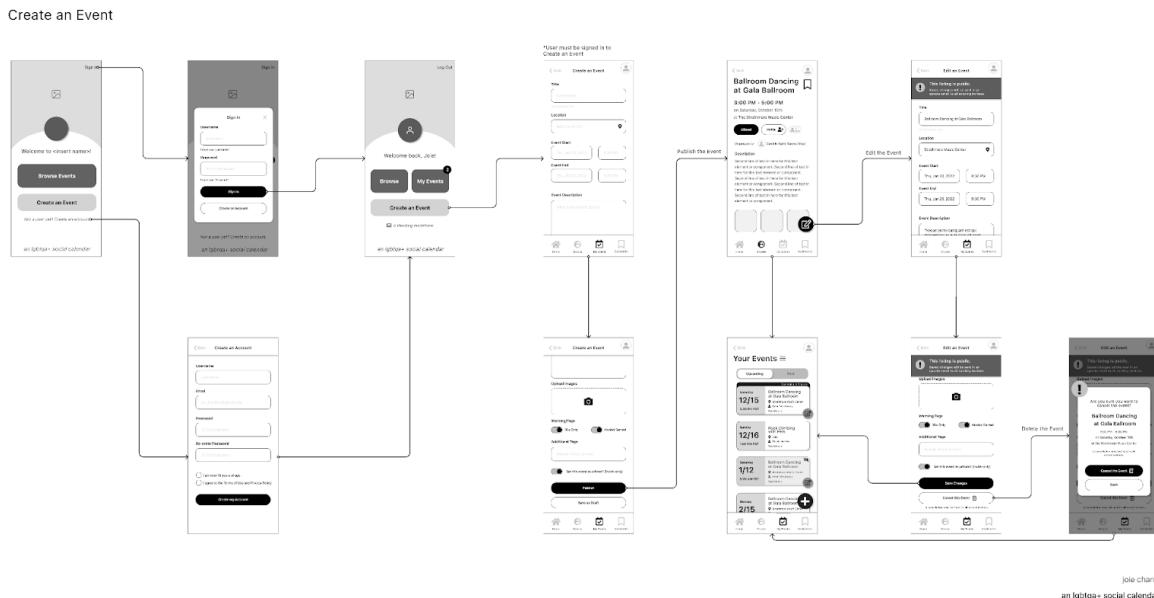
[POP Prototype](#) created in Marvel

Lo-fi Wireframes

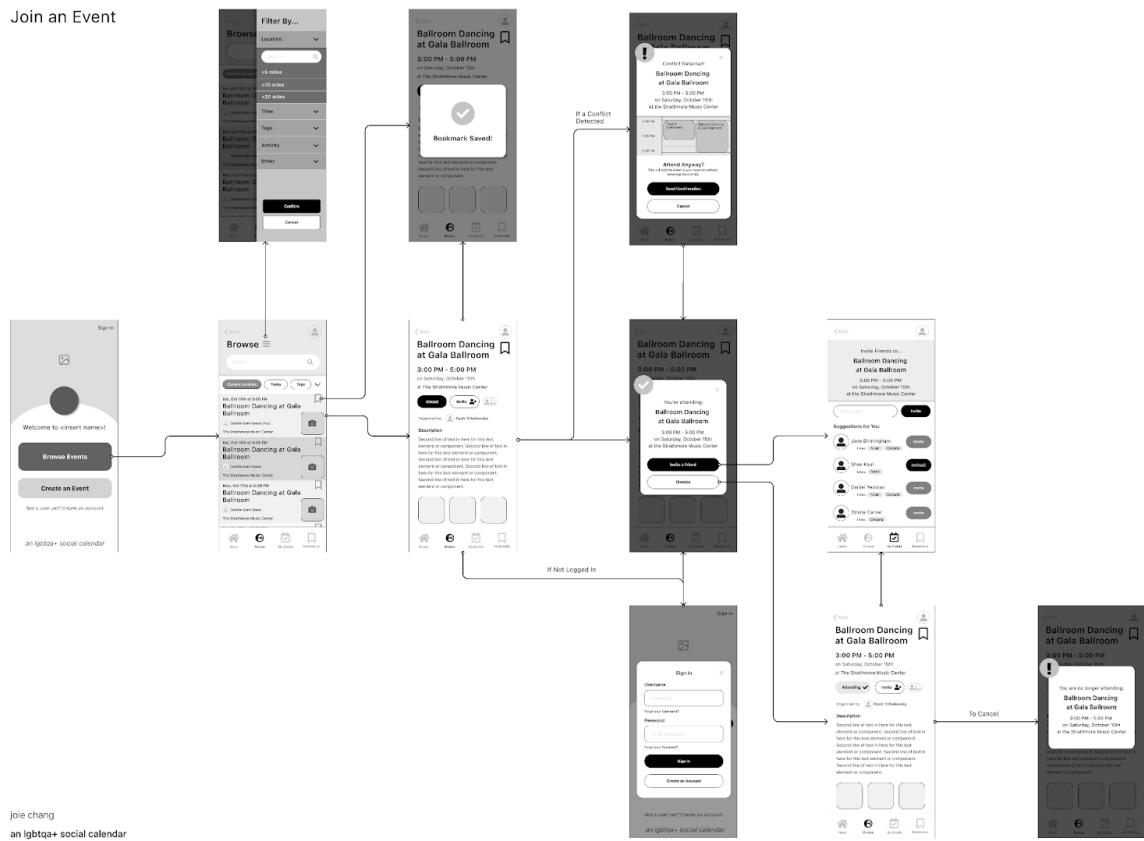
Based on the findings from the guerilla testing, I made several important changes when converting the sketches to wireframes:

- Included a My Events button on the homepage, given most returning users would want to see their upcoming events at once
- Improved the organization of the “Your Events” page by separating out bookmarks and using tabs to delineate “Upcoming” and “Past” events.
- Allowing users to invite multiple friends without navigating them away from the invitation page for a specific event
- Added state changes to buttons to give immediate visual feedback on whether they have joined an event

My wireframes helped solidify the visual hierarchy and layout clearly how the information like the event descriptions would appear.



Create an Event Wireframe Flow



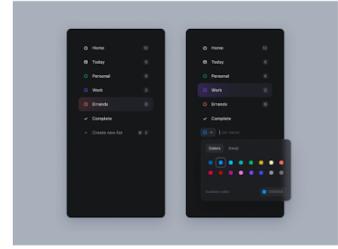
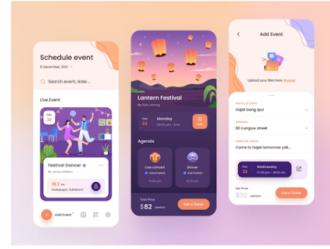
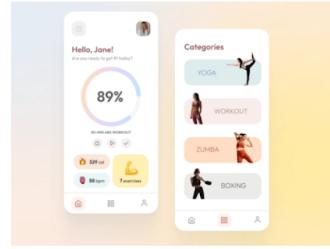
Join an Event Wireframe Flow

Visual Guidelines and Branding

I then established visual guidelines and created style guides for my new app. I also needed a more concise name than “an LGBTQ+ social calendar”.

I landed on the name “QCal”, a short and catchy name that is shortened from “Queer Calendar”. I chose a name that was easily pronounceable, so people could communicate easily about the platform. I wanted to keep the app’s queer nature at the forefront as well.

Brand Personality:
QCal is about giving people space to be their authentic selves and empowering them explore and live their best lives.



Joie Chang
QCal: a lgbtqa+ social calendar

Imagery Inspiration

- The rainbow has become visual shorthand for gay and queer things and thus has been used in the imagery.
- The outdoors will bring a sense of openness and freedom, both things we hope to foster for the community.
- Public spaces that belong to anyone was another important image - people should be allowed space to exist and to gather irregardless of socioeconomic status.

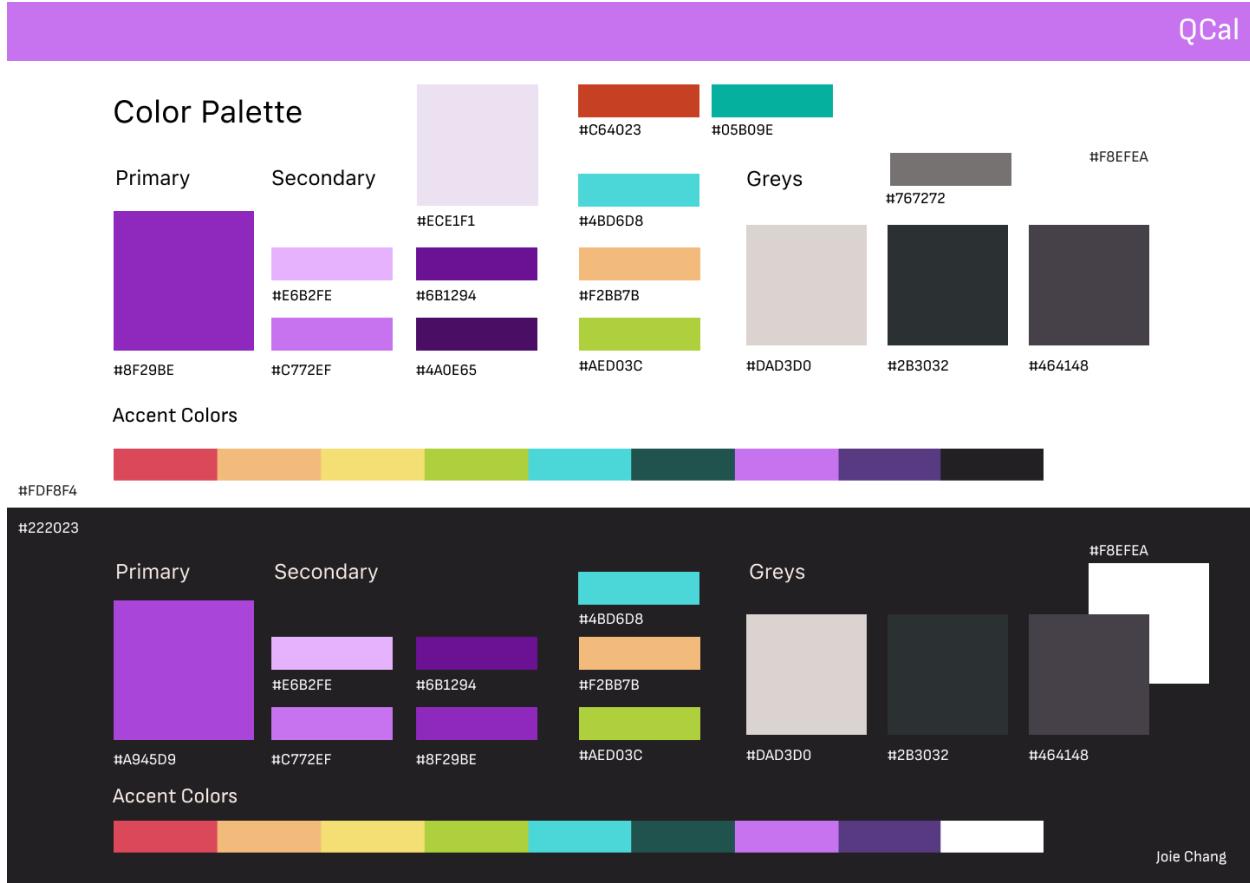
UI Inspiration

- These apps are more heavy on yellow and purple palettes, with colorful rainbow accents. This makes them more playful and fun, to help invite exploration.
- Clean layouts reinforces a sense of trustworthiness and reliability.
- Dark mode should be available as people might be checking the calendars in nightshift mode.
- The usage of good typography, flat illustrations, and text rather than photos is preferred, as the events will be user-generated and high-quality photos might not always be available.

QCal's Branding and Moodboard

Because I wanted to make it easy to browse for different events on QCal, it was important to create a warm and inviting visual design. Information would have to be easily digestible and legible, to avoid users accidentally misreading event times or dates. With the large amount of information to be displayed, I also needed the design to be flexible and attractive, since it would host a broad range of user-generated photos and text.

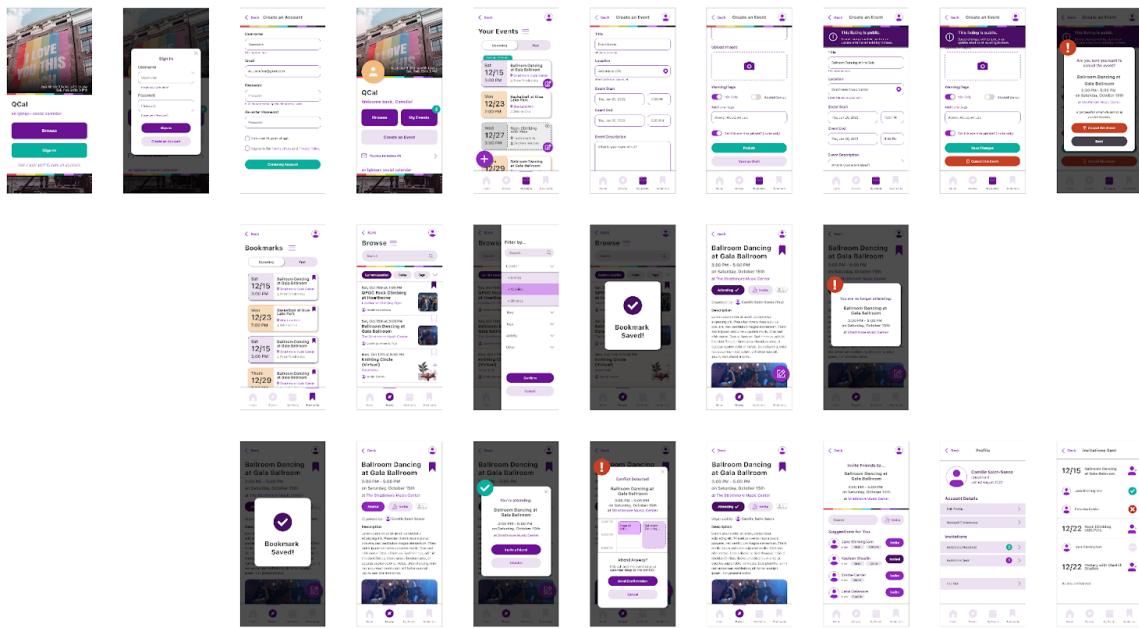
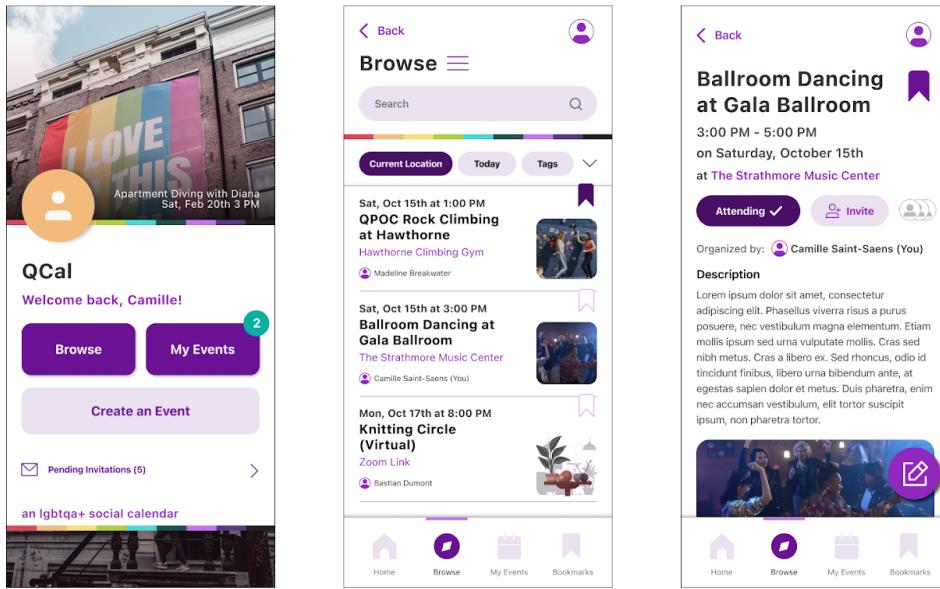
Thus, I chose purple to be the primary color, on a white background. I created a desaturated rainbow motif as a banner motif, as one of the most recognizable LGBTQ+ symbols is the gay Pride rainbow flag, and I wanted to signal immediately to the users that this was, in fact, a queer space.



Style Guide for QCal

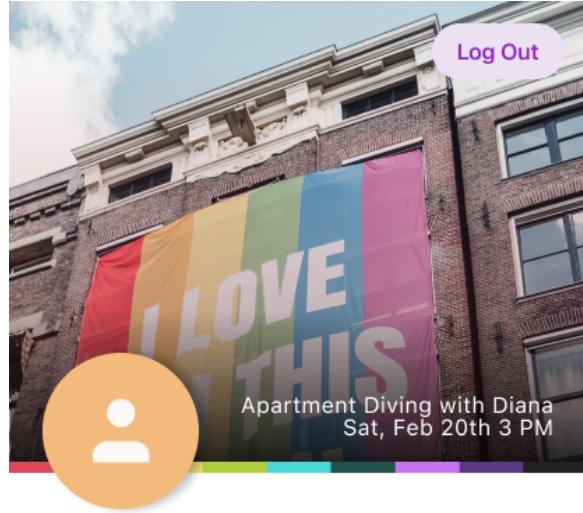
Hi-Fis and Prototype

Using the style guides, I then moved on to create the high-fidelity mockups for QCal. During the design process, I changed the Homepage design to showcase existing events in the background. I also reduced the number of extraneous colors in the Browse pages, to improve legibility and cleanliness of the design.



Hi-Fidelity Mockups for QCal

Job Chang
QCal - An lgbtqa+ social calendar



QCal

Welcome back, Camille!

Browse

My Events

2

Create an Event

Pending Invitations (5)



an lgbtqa+ social calendar



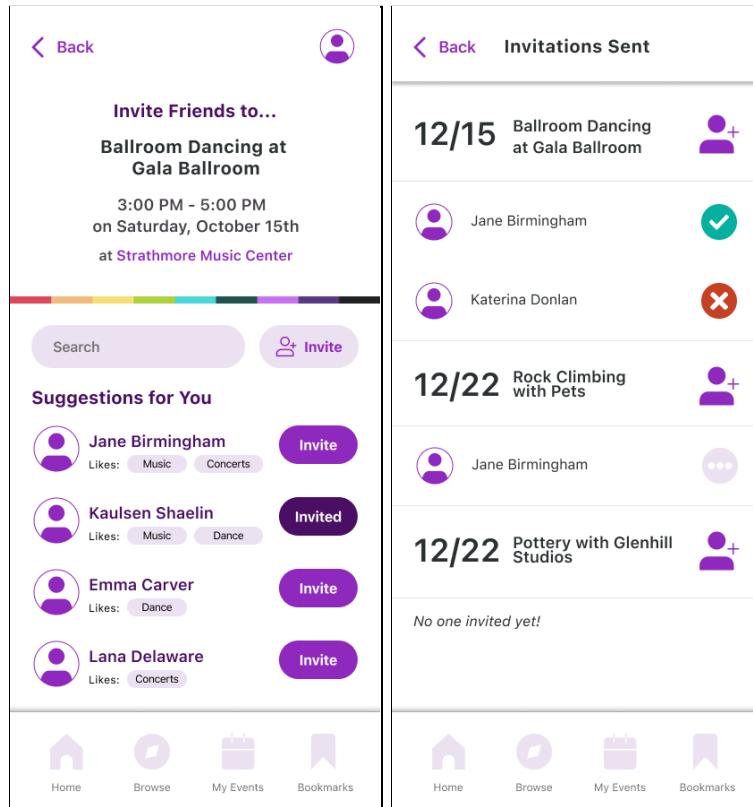
[View the Figma Prototype](#)

Usability Testing and Iteration

I conducted 5 moderated usability tests with my hi fi prototype, to validate if the app was indeed intuitive, easy-to-use, and welcoming. The participants self-identified as part of the lgbtq+ community and the testing was done remotely, through video and screen recording.

The usability tests uncovered the following issues, ordered in priority:

1. Unable to find “Invitations Sent” from the homepage
2. Not sure how to invite people outside the app/unclear on the search on the invite page
3. Mismatch of expectations on Pending Invitations = Invitations Sent
4. Not sure what the Search + Invite button combo should be populated with



Usability Testing Round 1

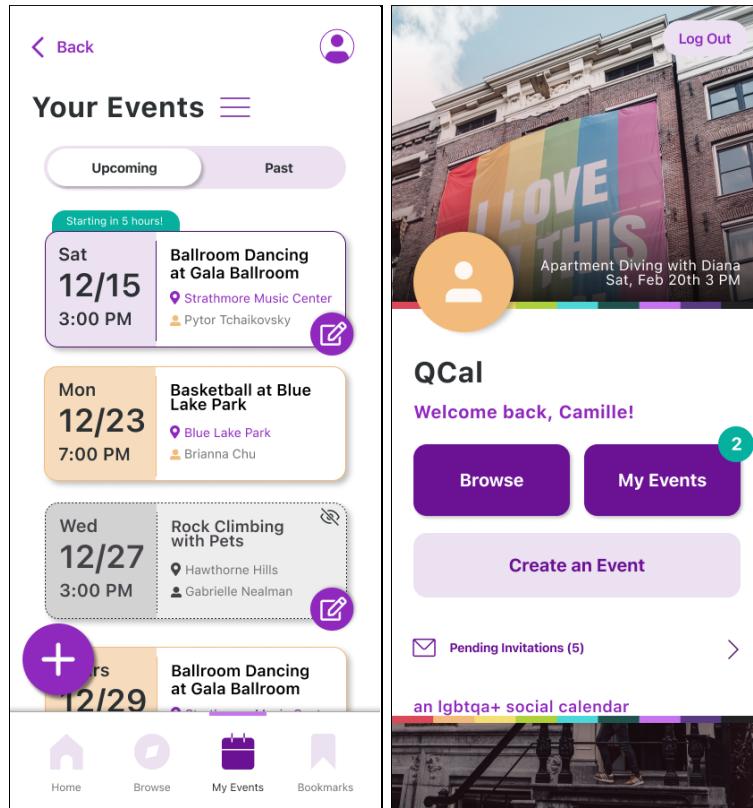
Based on these issues, I made the following recommendations and iterated on the existing design.

1. Add display on Event Listing page for people you invited to an event
2. Add a Share functionality to the Event Listing page
3. New banner for giving notifications on people's responses and switching Pending Invitations to Invitations Received
4. Add format restrictions and information in a caption

[View full Usability Test Report here](#)

After making these changes, I ran another round of usability testing, to validate the changes made in my design. I found that adding the share button and changing the text in the invitation search bar did indeed provide more clarity to the users in the invite flow. However, the participants also discovered a new set of usability issues.

1. Couldn't find the "Invitations Sent" in the profile. Pending Invitations caption on the homepage could be misleading.
2. Confusion over the meanings of the pillbox colors in the "Your Events" page.
3. Confusion over the purple and the orange colors used in My Events



Usability Testing Round 2

I therefore gave the following recommendations, to be added to the next iteration of the design:

1. "Pending Invitations" should be changed to "Invitations Received" to be more explicit.
2. Use a desaturated color rather than a pure gray to represent a draft state event. Keep the dotted lines and see if you can add some labeling.

3. Create a new event card color scheme for canceled events and for private events, through iconography and color choices.

[View full Usability Report here](#)

Reflection and Next Steps

One of the big challenges of this project was keeping the scope constrained and manageable. The broadness of the problem space meant there were many directions I could have taken the design and expanded the scope past my time constraints. So it was the insights from the interviewing process that helped me stay on track and focus on the first iteration of this project.

Many wonderful individuals volunteered their diverse experiences with the queer community for this project. The importance of research and engaging first-hand with the community could not be understated. It was the frank conversations that guided the project into something I hoped would be actually useful.

For next steps, there are many features and functionalities I would like to include in future iterations. My initial style guides included a dark mode that, due to the time and scope of the project, I was unable to implement. I would like to offer a dark mode design, given that users might access the app at night or outside. Usability participants also had a lot of feedback on future features, including integration with existing 3rd party calendars like Google or Apple calendar or creating lists to consistently invite the same groups of people to your events.

In general, while the app functions in its MVP state, there are many other functionalities that could be added into its feature set, which would help make it even easier for people to organize new events. Overall, I knew this tool would be a drop in the bucket in the ways the lgbtq+ community connects today, online and in-person. Still, multiple testers and their friends mentioned they would use an app that would help them locate queer events, a viewpoint reinforced by my research. Any tool must be able to respond to the needs of its community and the research in this project demonstrated how much further we could still go.