

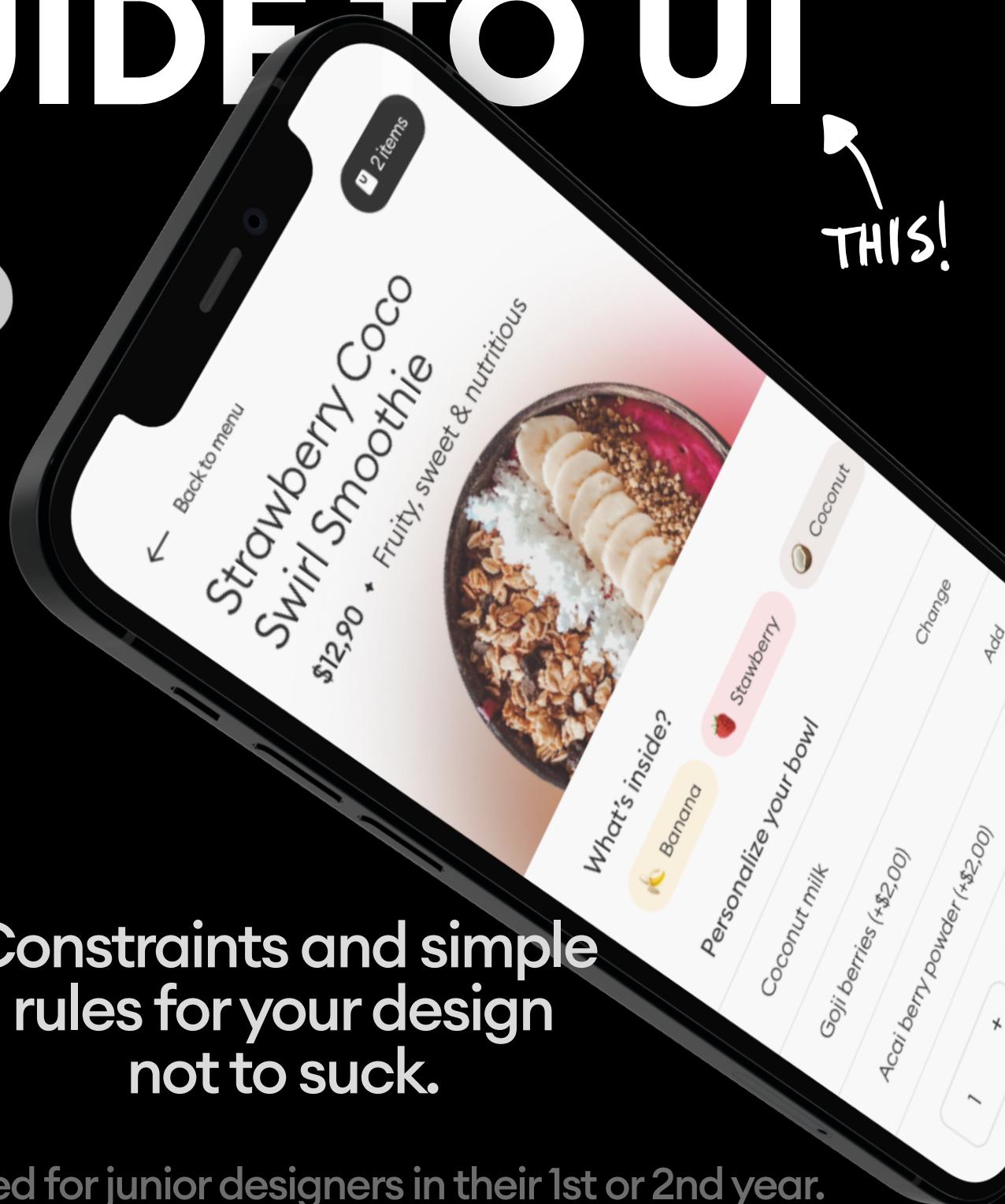
Michał Malewicz's



# DUCKING DESIGNERS ? GUIDE TO UI



Constraints and simple  
rules for your design  
not to suck.



Recommended for junior designers in their 1st or 2nd year.

# REASON THIS BOOK EXISTS



Hi! I'm Michal Malewicz and I've been a designer for over 25 years. I worked and still work with some of the world's largest brands and nearly 60,000 people learn from my books and courses.

This book is something else though. Consider it the anti-tips and constraints for junior designers in their first or second year of learning. Basically safe rules to follow.



# What's inside?



This is by no means a large book. It doesn't have to be. I value both my time and yours. My goal is to precisely cover the main aspects of UI design from a perspective of constraints - mostly LIMITING your design freedom.

**Trust me, it's good for you.**

Here's what we'll cover:

✓	Colors	6
✓	Fonts	15
✓	Icons	20
✓	Spacing	25
✓	Next Steps	31

If you follow these simple rules, you'll progress a lot faster and without unnecessary filler.

# FIRST

## THINGS FIRST



I share a lot of free techniques and methods on my social channels. Including new ideas to learn faster and better. Don't miss out and follow me on all of these:

[youtube](#)

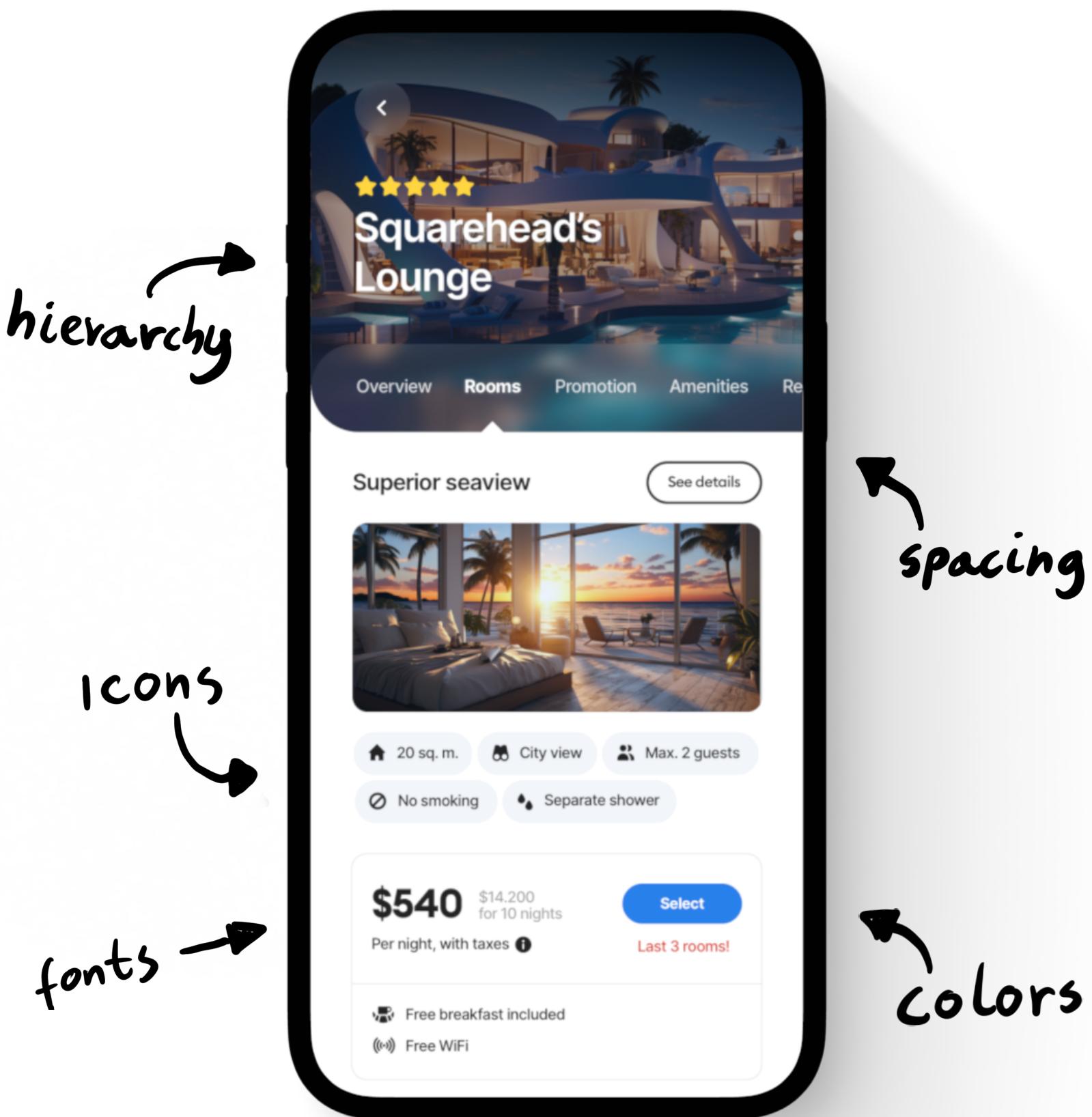
[instagram](#)

[twitter/x](#)

[medium](#)

# Methodology

To make it clear and easy for you, I will use a very simple mobile app design as an example of the changes and constraints we will be using. That way we keep the learning process 100% consistent.





# COLORS

“I have 16 MILLION colors and  
I’m not afraid to use them”

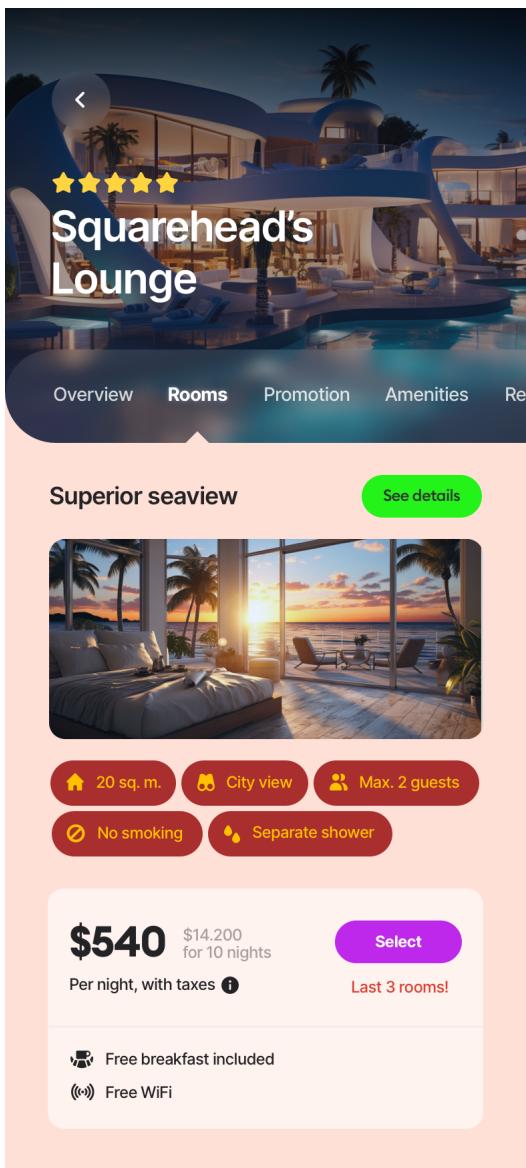


– A clueless designer



# Colors

I know it's tempting to try and use all the possible colors out there! After all, why would they give us millions of them if they didn't want us to use it.



It's tempting to use a "Salmon-Pink" for a background, make some buttons red, purple and green.

It's so lively now, right?

Well... no.

The example on the left doesn't make sense because the colors don't match, and create a feel of sensory overload. There's just too much sh\*t going on all at once!

There are ways to make a design like this work with a "Salmon-Pink" background, but they're difficult and NOT something you should be doing in your first one or two years of learning.

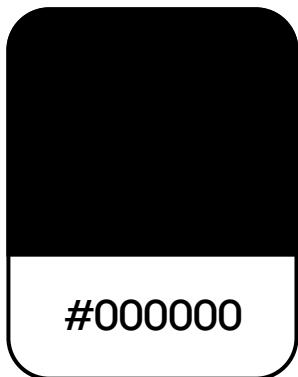
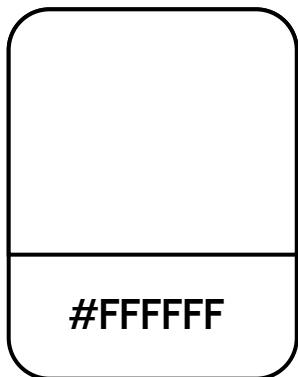
# Rule 1 - Background

Here's your first rule. Your backgrounds should be BLACK or WHITE, with two potential “off” colors outlined below if you want to use lighter cards on top of that background.

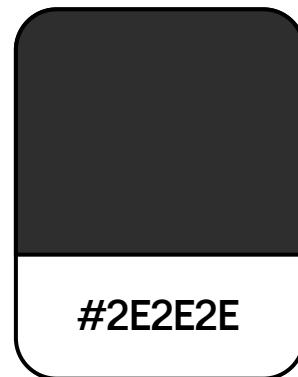
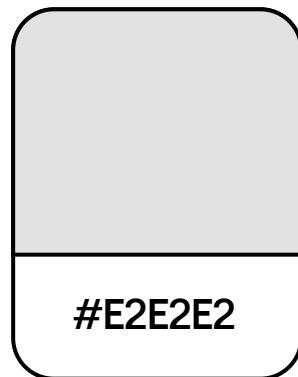


Use only these colors for the background until you get comfortable with matching colors well.

## Allowed bg colors



## Extra alternatives



# Rule 2 - Text

If you picked a white background, you need to use a dark color for text.

We won't go with fully black though because that's too much contrast.

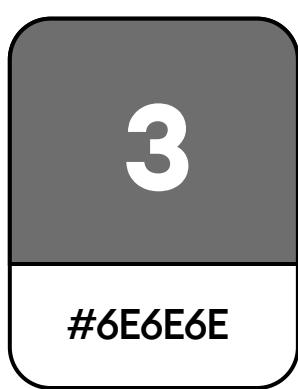
I'll get to fonts in a minute, but here's a heading, label and some body copy. I used a BAD, funny font here on purpose so you don't focus on typography just yet - just text colors.

Heading ← 1

some longer paragraph text copy ← 2

label ← 3

## Allowed text colors on light backgrounds



# Rule 2 - Text

On a dark background we go with a similar scheme, but the colors are of course much lighter.

The progression is a little steeper here (more difference between the lightness levels) than in the light mode version, but trust me - it works great.

Using a fully white color on a fully black background can be too much contrast, and thus not a great choice.

Heading ← 1

some longer paragraph text copy ← 2

label ← 3

**Allowed text colors on dark backgrounds**

1

#E2E2E2

2

#C2C2C2

3

#A2A2A2

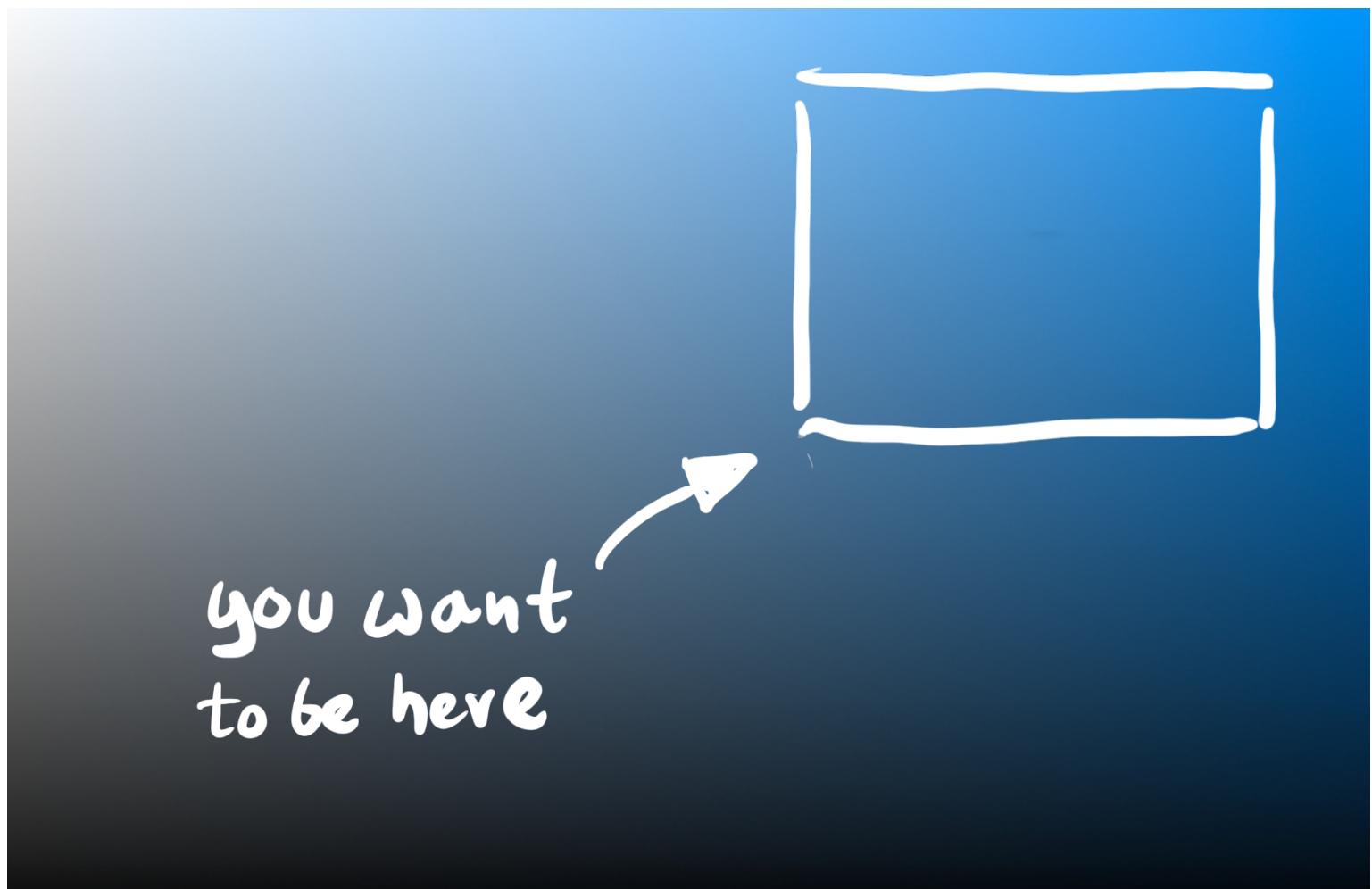
# Accent

Accent color is the more colorful, lively part added to our just created monochrome hues. As a junior it's best to set very strict rules for your accent colors.

**They are:**

Saturation: Between **60** and **90**

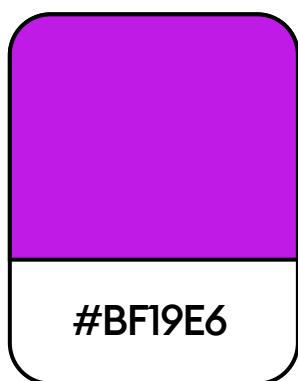
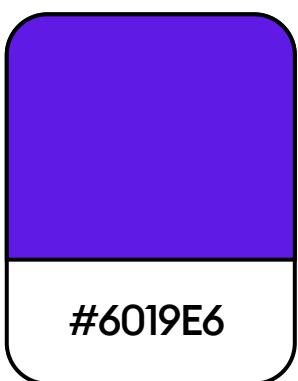
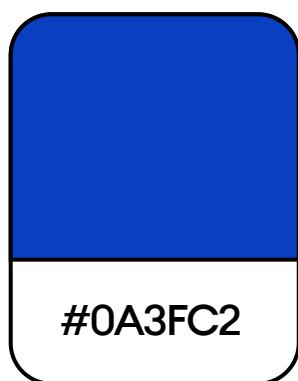
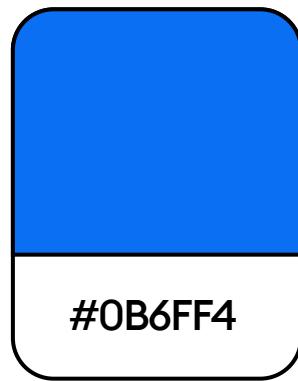
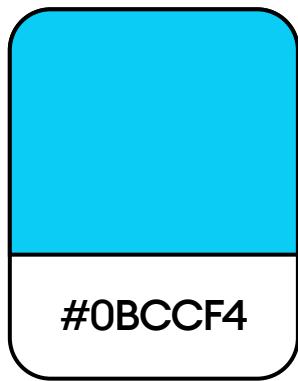
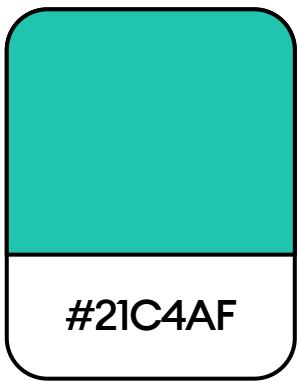
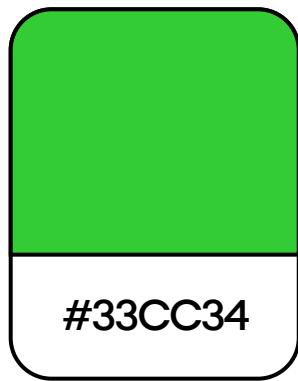
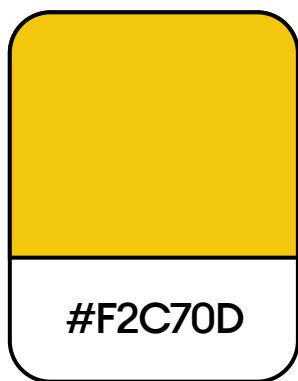
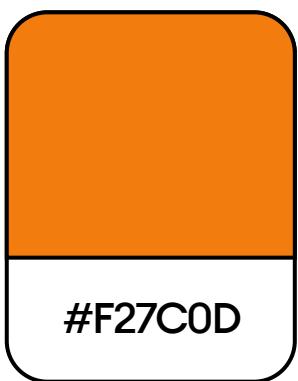
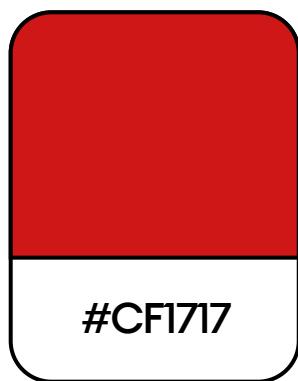
Lightness: Between **40** and **50**



Which means picking your color from this little white rectangle above. Then drag the hue slider to select a different base color with the same properties.

# Accent

But don't worry, I created a handy guide for the most popular accent colors you can start with. You can slightly modify the values, but remember to keep within the box. There will be time for out of the box colors later.



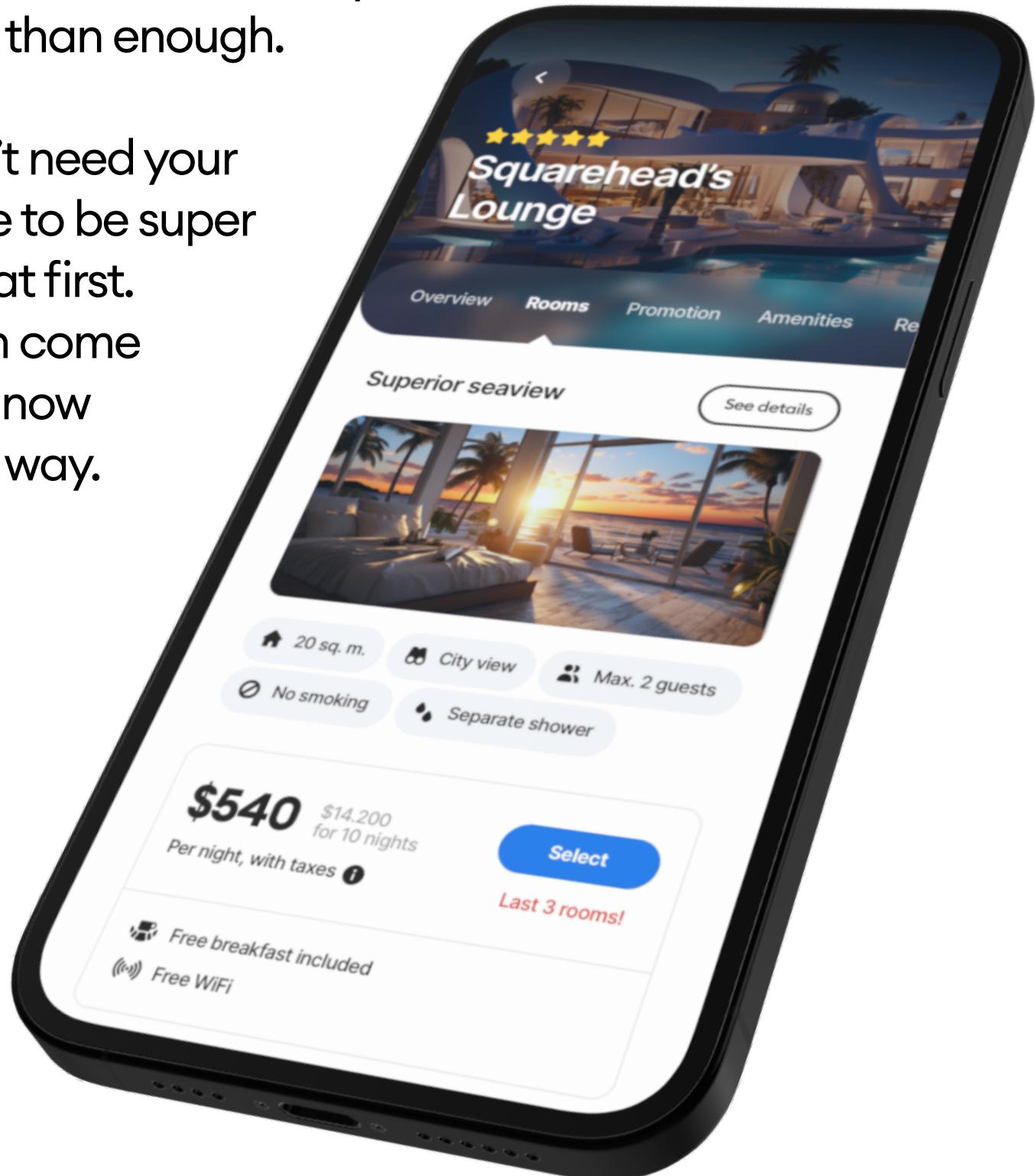
# Accent

Just check how close the accent color on the main (Select) button is to one of our pre-selected hues.

The other thing you shout notice here is how little of that blue is actually in the design. There can be a tiny bit more - when necessary, but generally if just the main action is accented visually it's more than enough.

You don't need your interface to be super colorful at first.

That can come later, for now do it this way.



# Accent vs buttons

What if you have two buttons on the screen? Can they all be the accent color? Please, NO!



Never use the exact same color for two buttons. Here's what to do. First, figure out whether one of the buttons is MORE important than the other. In our case the first button is likely the main one. Then, use an outline button (or a text link) for the other option. Like this:



In some rare cases the two buttons may actually be just as important. Then use the darker text-fill color for the button background.





# FONTS



“I found this cool font that  
looks like from a Sci-Fi Movie!”



– A clueless designer



# Typography

We already established the colors for your fonts, so now let's talk typefaces. There's a million choices and you constantly see social media posts saying:



If you're a graphic designer - that can be good. But if you're doing UI design (and if you're reading this chances are that's exactly your path) then you ...

**... need to ignore those posts.**

Typography is very difficult. The more different typefaces you have, the more decision paralysis and there's a BIG chance you'll pick something that simply doesn't work well with UI.

Let's take a step back and use a method many of my students have been practicing for years now.

I will show you a list of typefaces - pick JUST 4 from them and ONLY use these 4 in your projects, but only ONE of them per project. Four will give you enough variety between projects and it will be safe to use.

# List of typefaces

These are safe to use and look good for most interfaces. The list COULD be much bigger, but it doesn't have to be. You don't NEED your designs to be unique when you first start - you need them to be good. Once again - get good first, then experiment.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
|  Plus Jakarta Sans |  Figtree           |
|  Inter            |  Lato             |
|  Satoshi          |  Muli (or Mulish) |
|  Poppins          |  Open Sans        |
|  Ubuntu           |  PT Sans          |
|  Fira Sans        |  Source Sans Pro  |

There are also Native fonts for iOS and Android mobile operating systems. If you're working on Apps that use many standardized components, you can also add those two fonts to your selection.

 **SF Pro (iOS)**

 **Roboto (Android)**

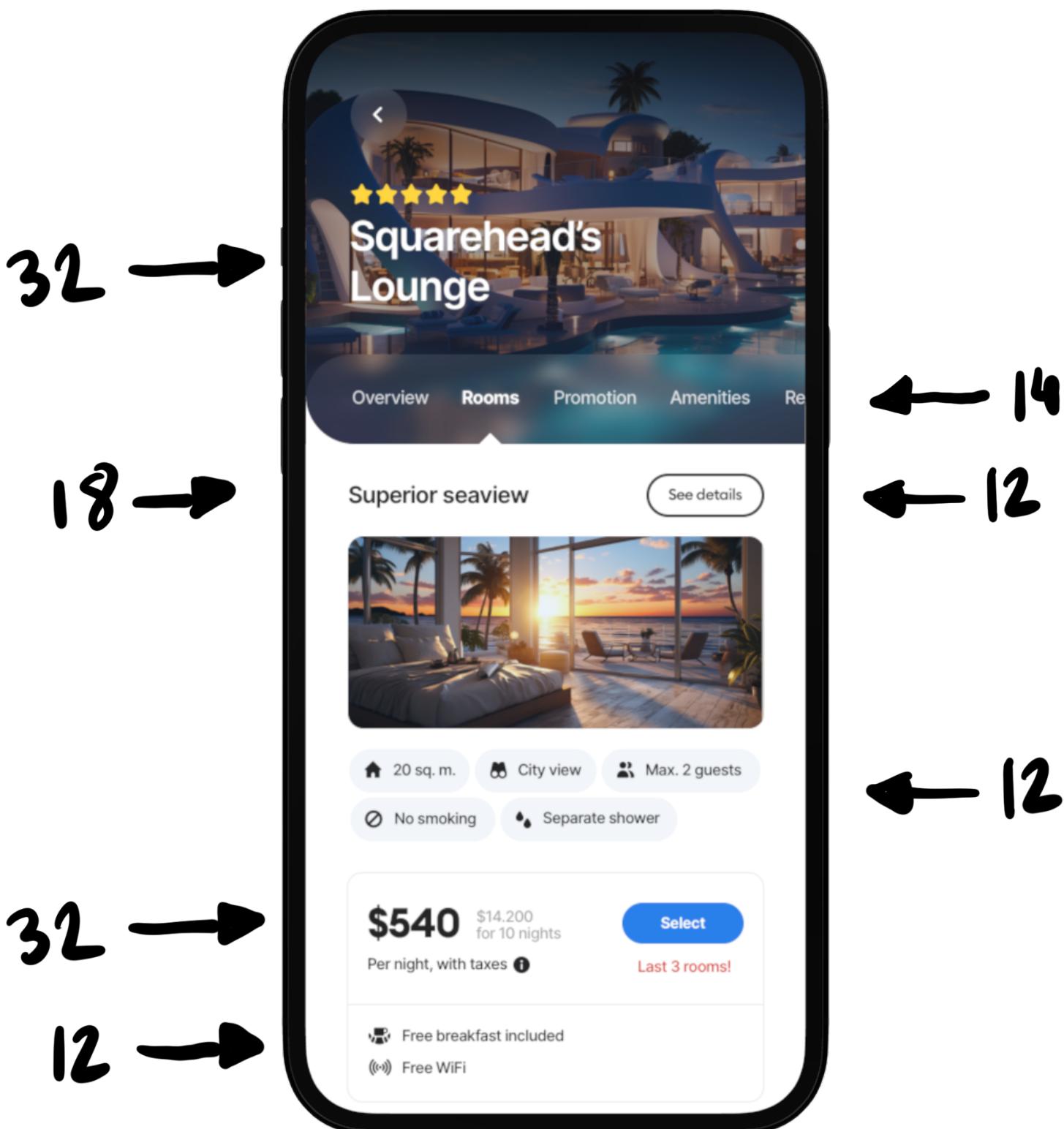
Or, if you want to play it SUPER safe, just use those two, depending on which platform you're designing for.

# Sizes

Here's a guide for app design, using our example app.

There are just 4 sizes on this screen: 12, 14, 18 and 32.

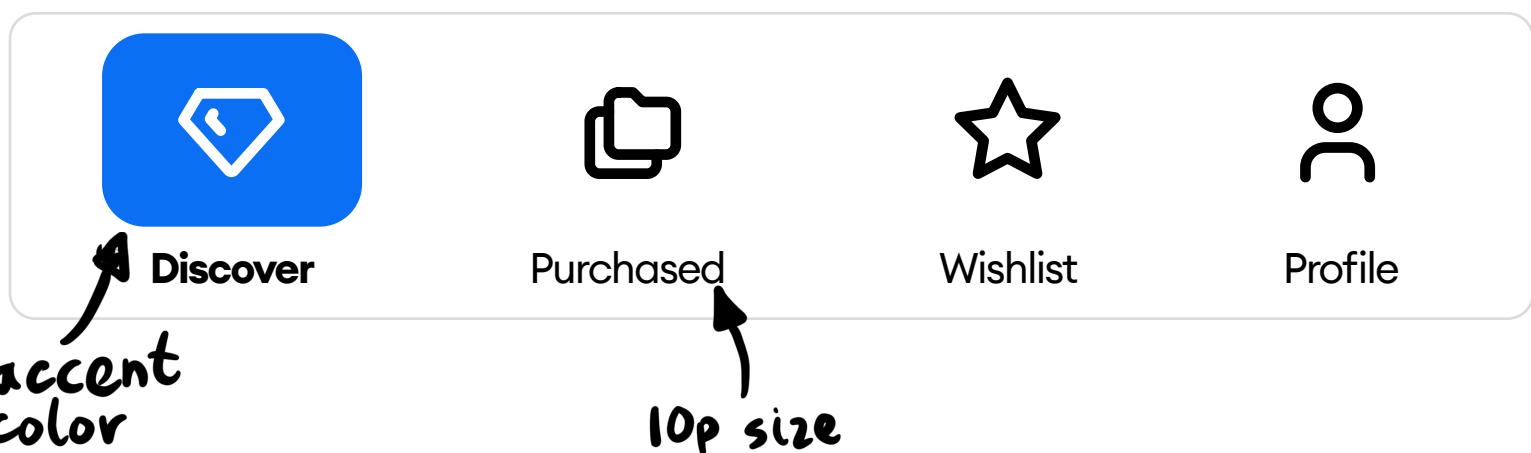
This is a very good set for most mobile apps. If you like precision in numbers you can also go: 12, 16, 20, 24



# Size range

Now let's talk small and big sizes. I picked 12 and 32 in the example design for a reason. The design is made using an 8 point grid (more on that later) and  $12 = 1.5 \times 8$  while  $32 = 4 \times 8$ .

Can we use fonts smaller than 12? I'd recommend NOT. The only exception is a bottom navigation menu with tabs - in that case you can use a 10 for the labels.



As for the large font, in most cases going bigger than a 32 (or even 24) on a mobile app is completely unnecessary.

When working on web projects, you can mostly keep the same scale. When building a landing page however, you can add 4 points to the smaller sizes and even 8 points to the larger one.



# ICONS



“They’re beautiful and full of detail, just like little paintings!”



– A clueless designer



# Icons

Here the rule is even simpler. You need to ONLY use ONE icon set. Don't mix and match between sets because that creates ugly inconsistencies.

You can either go with outline icons, or filled ones.



My favorite, free icon set is called Tabler Icons and has both filled and outlined icons available. One thing to remember is that when you're using outlined icons, the only way to ALSO add a filled icon to them is to signify a selected menu item. Like this:



NEVER mix outlined and filled icons (even from the same set) for elements that have equal status and importance (i.e. none of them are active tabs etc.)



Favorites

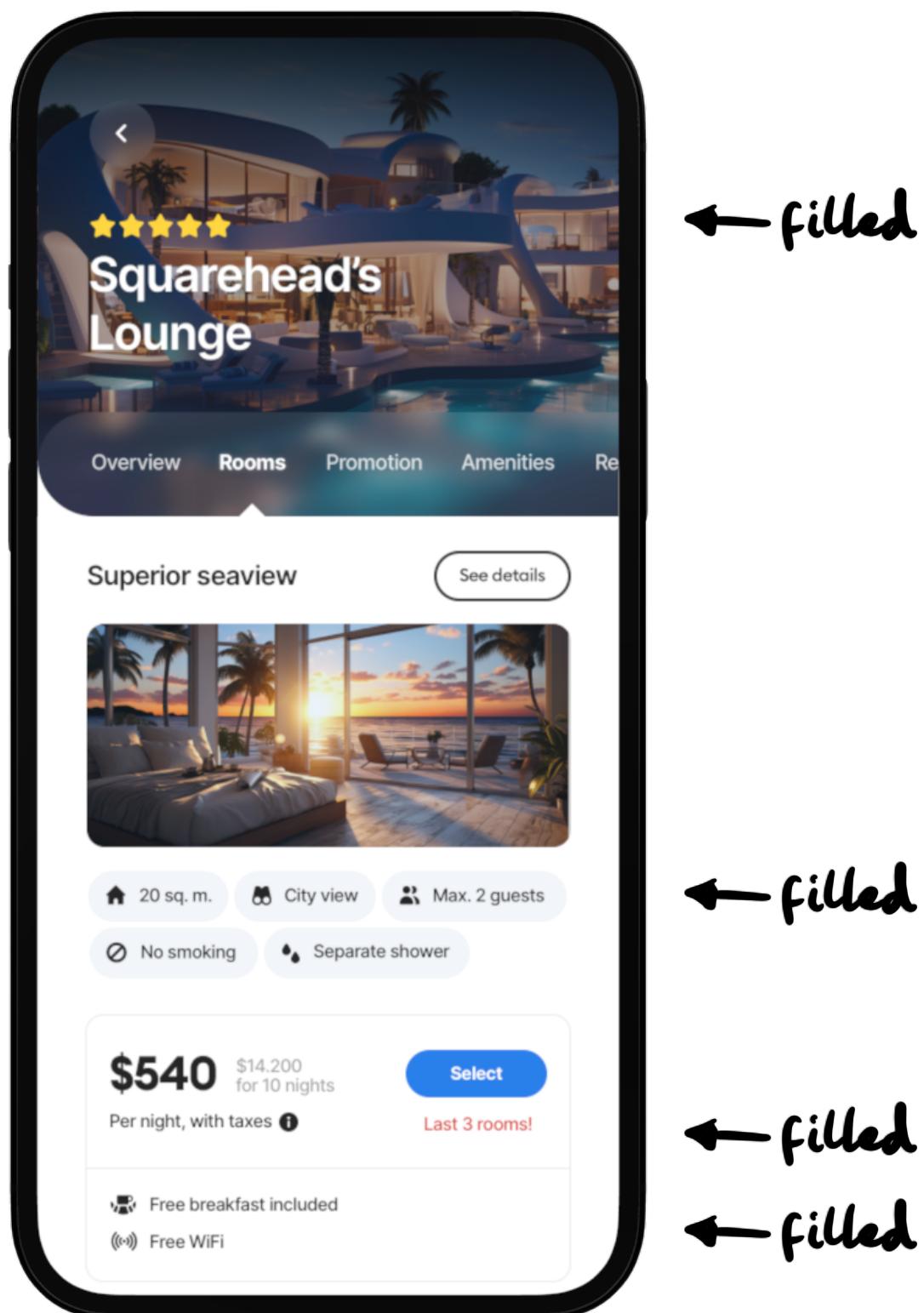


Settings

← *don't do this!*

# Consistency

Take a look at our example screen. We are using filled icons only, with one size (the exception is the hotel stars icons which are 120% bigger). This creates consistency and looks great!



# Icon sets

The first set, that I recommend to everyone is Tabler Icons, but if you want to explore other options here's a couple safe ones.

- ✓ <https://tabler-icons.io>
- ✓ <https://iconoir.com>
- ✓ <https://remixicon.com>
- ✓ <https://phosphoricons.com>
- ✓ <https://www.untitledui.com/icons>
- ✓ <https://iconscout.com/unicons>

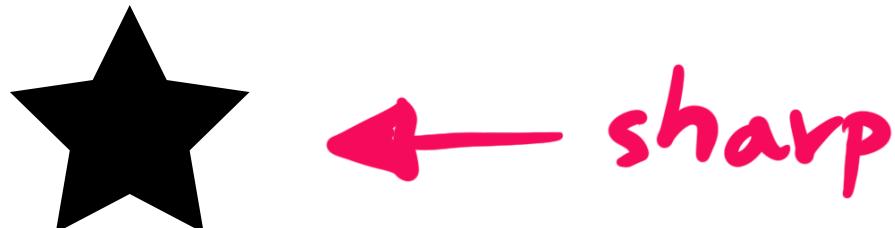
Of course you can try and go beyond that, find some other sets, but there's a chance these sets are not as precise or have inconsistent icons inside and that will result in your design being a little bit worse in the end.

So not to overload your brain, **pick just ONE of these sets and use it for all your projects** in the first year or two of learning design. One less thing to worry about!

# Matching

When you go with a set that's not on the list, check whether the icons within that set are even consistent.

Look at this star icon. What do you see?



Now look at the cog icon. Notice how the corners on that icon are all rounded and friendly? The star and the cog don't match in this configuration.



You can manually edit the star icon by going into the vector editing mode, selecting just the five edges and rounding those corners a little. Like this:





# SPACING

“I need to fill the entire screen  
with stuff, that’s good design!”

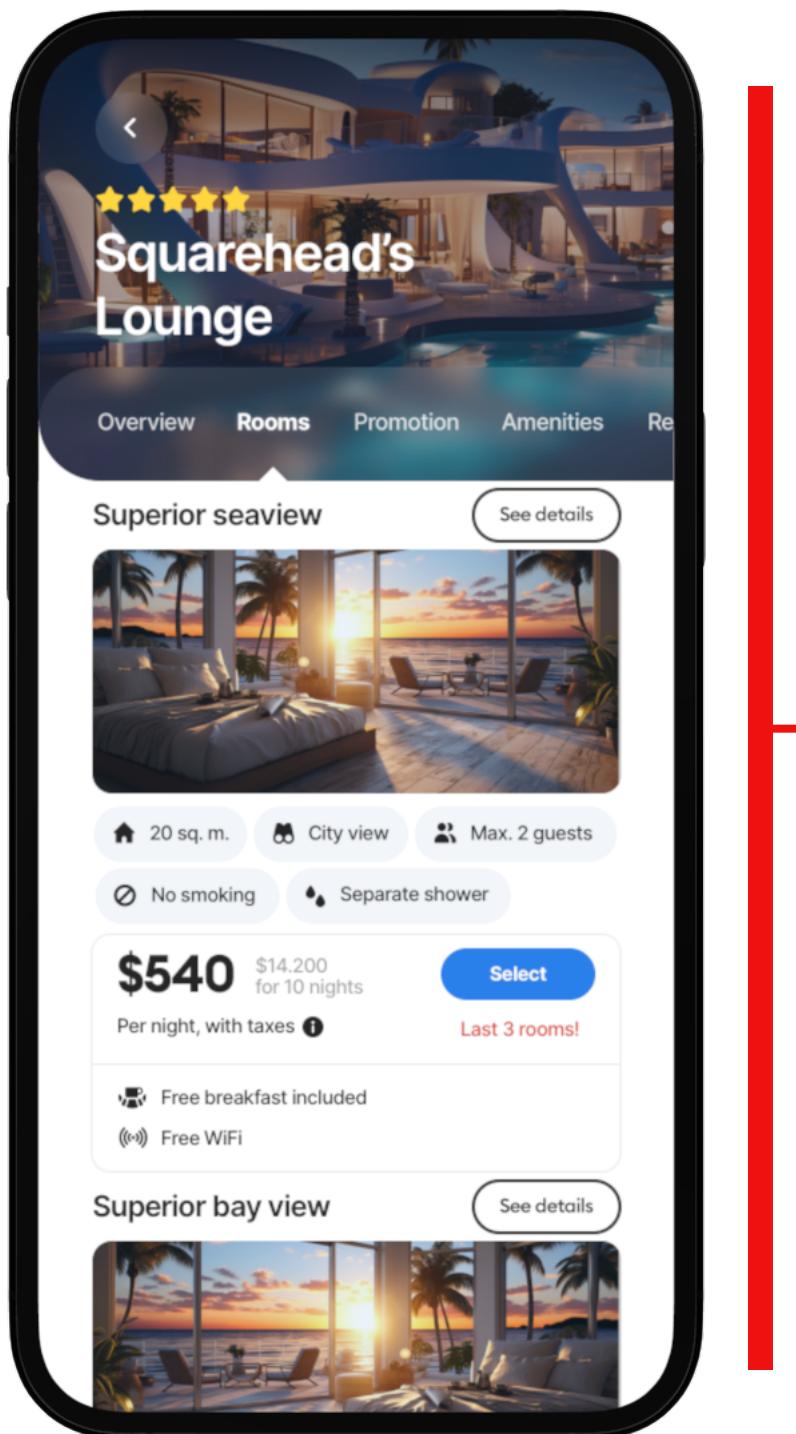


– A clueless designer



# Spacing

Take a look at this screen. The elements look all nice. Good fonts, proper icons, matching photos, some nice glass effect. So what's wrong with it?



Easy. Everything is too close together which makes our brain process the entire screen as one complex group.

# Whitespace

Whitespace is the empty space between elements. It is essential for a good, readable interface. Sadly, most junior designers are afraid of whitespace - they feel like they really must fit as much content as possible on one screen.

## DON'T DO THAT!

People are used to scrolling now - some do it for hours each day on social media. Scrolling is good! You need to let the on-screen elements breathe for them to be easy to understand.

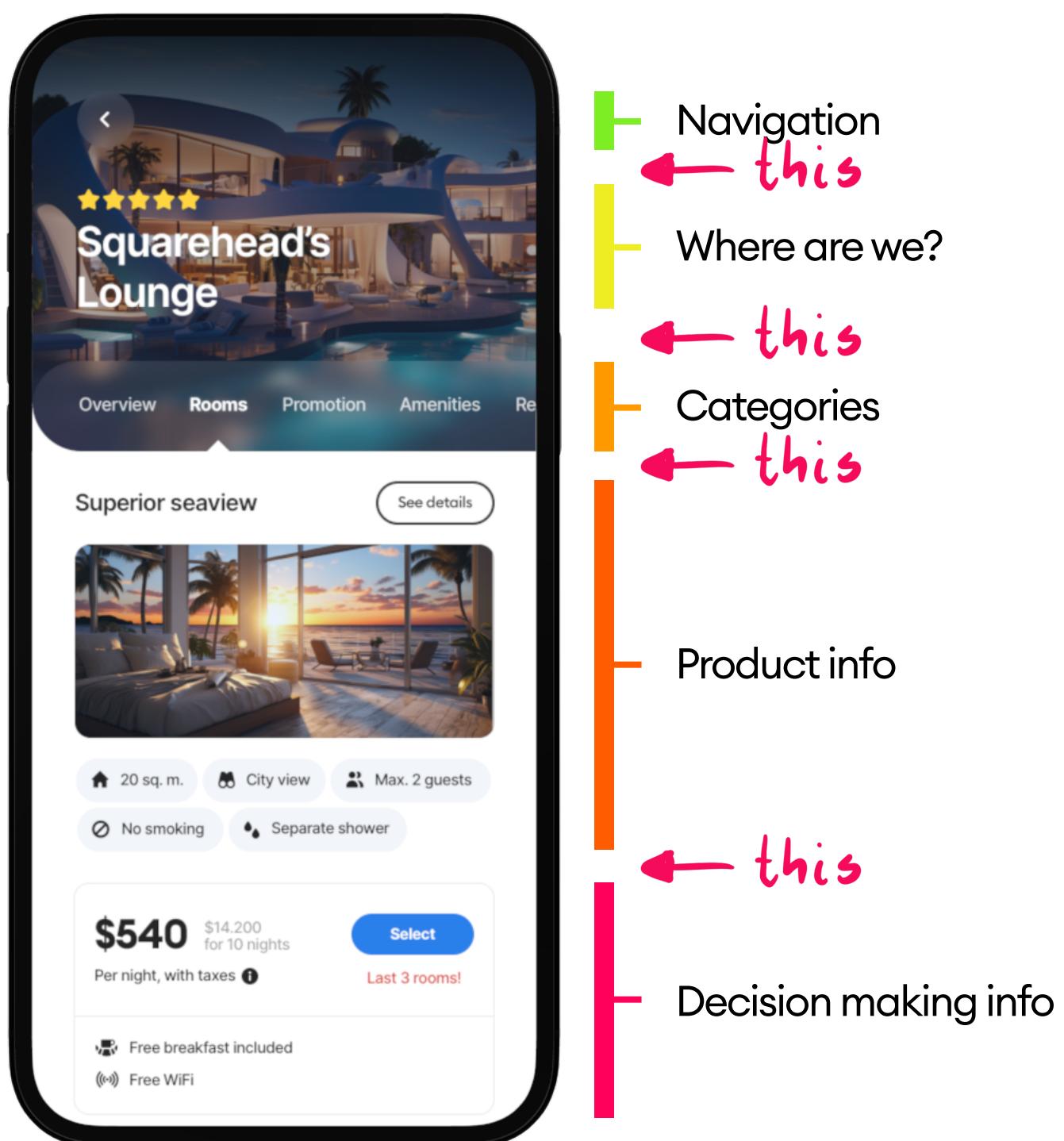
# Hierarchy Strips

I created a method to figure this out called Hierarchy Strips, and you can find out more about it in [\*\*this video\*\*](#).

On the next page I'll show you the strips applied and how they fix all the issues with this design.

# Hierarchy strips

When I apply hierarchy strips to the main groups, I can then decide their importance and based on that define the spaces between the elements.



Those spaces are what matter here. They divide the groups so your brain can jump to read the next one easier and faster.

# 8-point grid

Start with the 8-point grid. Once you get good you can explore a 10-point, or other, more complex ones coming from the golden ratio rules. For now 8-point should be your friend.

Within 8-point grid you have these options:

4

8

12

16

20

24

32

40

In your first, simple designs you can likely stick to these:

8

12

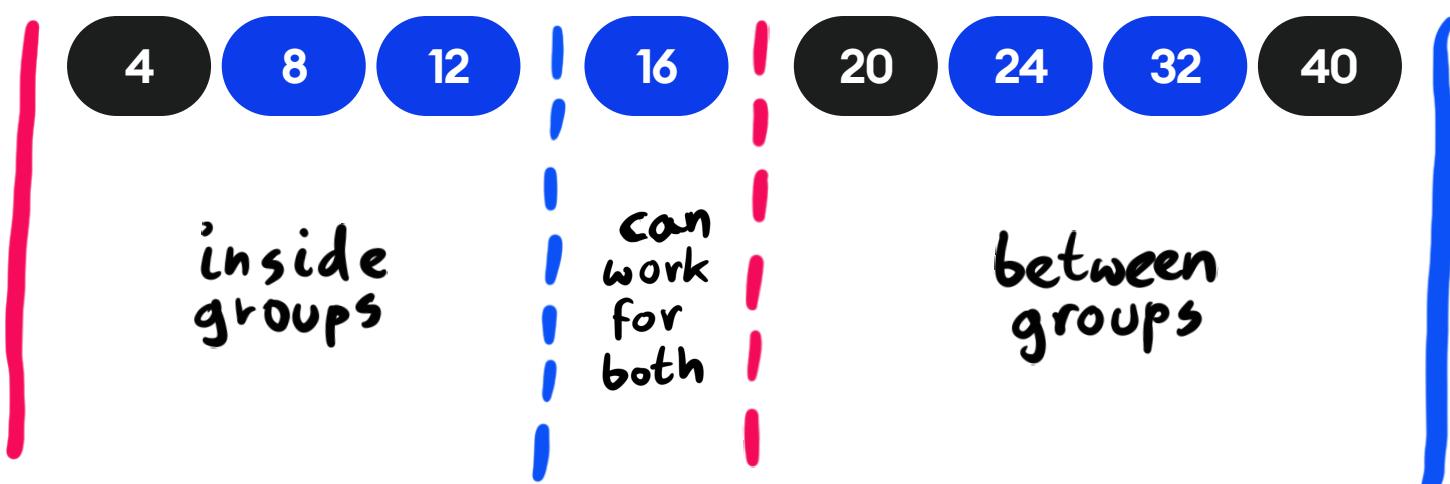
16

24

32

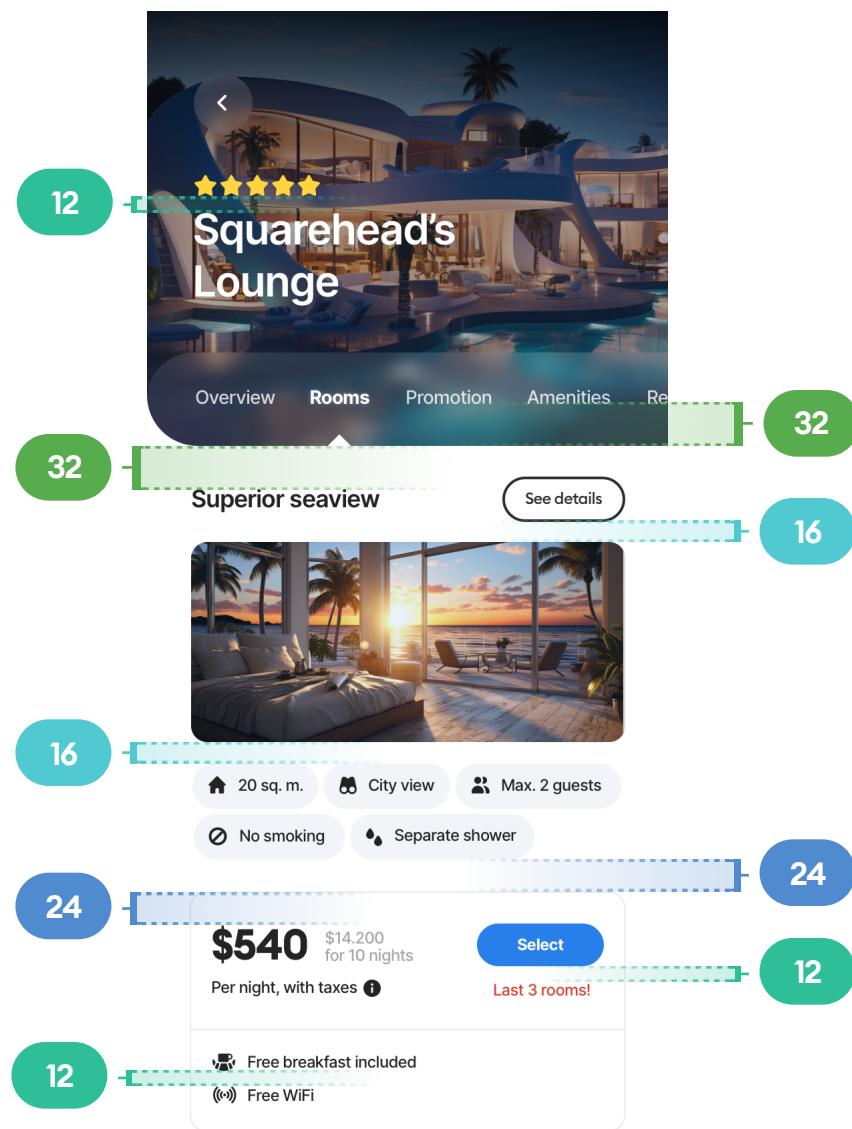
More complex projects may require some of those extra values, but initially just these 5 should be enough.

Now use this rule to decide which ones to use where.



# Spacing example

Here's our screen with defined spacing based on an 8-point grid. (12 is  $8 \times 1.5$ ). As you can see everything follows these rules - almost without exceptions.



Those spaces are what matter here. They divide the groups so your brain can jump to read the next one easier and faster.

Use whitespace this way in ALL your projects.



# NEXT STEPS



“Now I get it!”



– A good designer



# Skip for now

Now let's talk about FOMO, mostly fuelled by Figma's advocates. Now this chapter is going to be controversial so brace yourself.

Here's what NOT to focus on at the beginning of your journey:

## **Figma Animations using Smart Animate**

I know they look cool! I do! But in real work nobody defines production animations this way. The flashy way they're presented can trick you into trying to learn them right now, very fast, but trust me - focus on static design first and get great at it - before trying to animate anything.

## **Auto-Layout**

Another controversial topic. Many job offers list auto-layout as a requirement, everyone is praising how it's the best thing to happen to design. My take is this: learn manual layout first and get great at it. THEN and ONLY THEN learn Auto-Layout. That will give you that "eye for design" where you can spot if a layout works. And yes, auto layout sometimes messes up the alignment so it doesn't AUTOMATICALLY make it great. You need to see when it fails and be able to correct it.

# Skip for now

## Components

This is another thing that really IS worth doing, but not when you're learning. Once your UIs start looking well, by any means make components out of some of them for more consistency and reusability. At first however, when you're still tweaking the elements and learning how they work together it actually is slower to work this way.

## Variables

And then the newest craze - variables. First of all, they're free with a lot of limitations, so if you want to truly use them to your advantage you need to pay Figma. The other thing is that they're really NOT necessary to know right now. You're not working on design system just yet, you don't need variables or tokens. What you need is to be able to make ONE mobile app screen that doesn't look like total crap.

There will be time for all of these things later, but in your first year you should focus on nailing the actual UI design with as much MANUAL work as possible to grasp it and be able to *feel* the design by instinct.

# Next steps

## Learn for free

Use this book's guidelines for daily practice of your UI design skills. Remember to also think about problem solving - and WHY each of those UI elements is there. There is a tendency from juniors to just put stuff on a screen because it looks nice. That's not design, that's art and it's not what you need to be doing.

Think about the WHY constantly.



I try to share as much as I can (with lots of examples) on my **YouTube channel**, so make sure you're subscribed and have clicked that notification bell icon!

I also share smaller tips on **Twitter** and **Instagram**.

You can however progress even faster with some of my academy materials. Let me guide you through them.

What I do is a No-BS approach, no jargon, no filler, just the facts - often going against what's officially being said in the industry, based on my experience with a lot of real world projects.

# Books

I have two paid books that have been purchased nearly 10,000 times already and have been used by some of the biggest American universities.



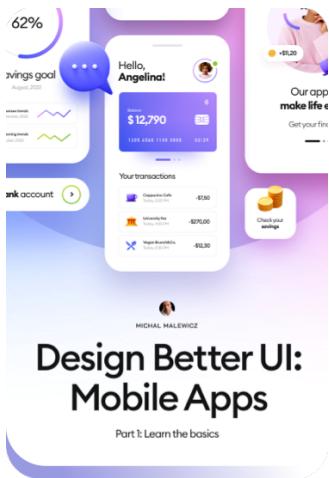
**Designing User Interfaces** is the biggest original book on UI design. By original I mean others copy from this book, and everything that's in there is written by me, directly from my brain and experiences. I of course mention well known methods and laws of design in there, but also some of my unique twists and techniques.



**No BS Guide to UX** is an UX oriented book that's best to be taken AFTER taking a UX course (for example after you finish the Google UX Course). This book, based on my agency experience, outlines which UX process methods are used and which are so rare, you can even skip them. I also try to explain many UX concepts in simple language, without any industry jargon.

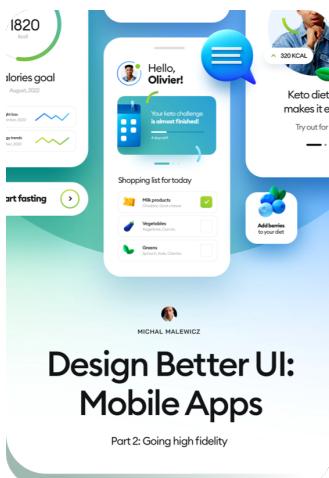
# Courses

My video courses actually do make a difference. Thousands of people are taking them and I get emails saying people finally get jobs after months of not even getting email replies. But if you want to jump into them, it's best to do it in the right order. Here's that order:



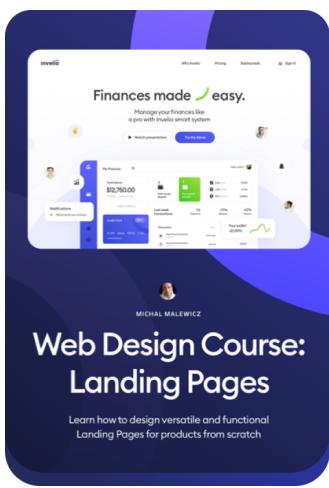
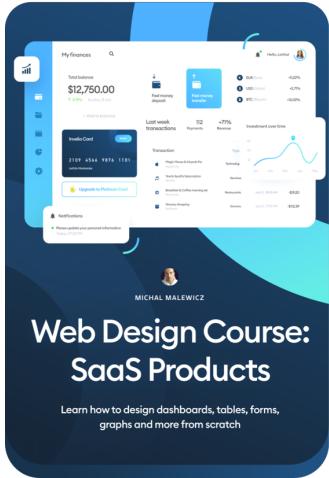
## Mobile App UI part 1

For beginners this is the best place to start, as not only does it cover all you need for mobile app UIs but also handles many fundamentals, complete basics and my very own Red Square Method.



## Mobile App UI part 2

This one is optional if you want to level up the mobile game, but you can learn many of these high fidelity techniques also from my Web Courses.



## Web Design 1 - SaaS Products

Once you grasp the mobile app UI basics it's time to learn design for a bigger canvas. It's surprising how many designers skip web and only learn mobile apps. Great way to stand out!

## Web Design 2 - Landing Pages

Landing pages are a mix of UI and graphic design - very visual, with lots of decorations, it's something very few designers can do well. In this course I share all my techniques and tricks to make awesome LPs, including Typeframing and adjusted RSM.

## Web Design 3 - Responsive Design

Final part of the Web Courses group is all about making your web design responsive. It also answers popular questions - why you shouldn't go “mobile first” and how to do responsive design for both typical web apps and complex landing pages. All of this comes from years of making web projects for some of the largest brands in the world.



## The Boring UI Course

After you learn how to create apps and websites, it's time to take another step towards a more professional design process.

This is my number one course, a total bestseller!

### Why is it “Boring”?

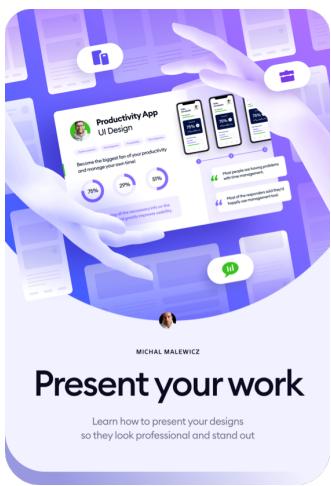
The title reflects how many of the UI elements are pretty well defined already (maybe a little boring, but functional) and how to create a full UI library that you can either use for all your projects (with tweaks) or later, turn into a full on Design System.

I cover the basics of components (in both Figma AND Sketch) and almost all building blocks of a modern UI are dissected and explained in detail.

I also talk about another one of my own methods - Hierarchy Strips - which is essential for you to put together a good interface from those building blocks.

### Boring Part 2

Later this year I am also releasing a second part of the Boring UI Course, that's going to be all about Auto-Layout in both Figma and Penpot.



## UI Case Study

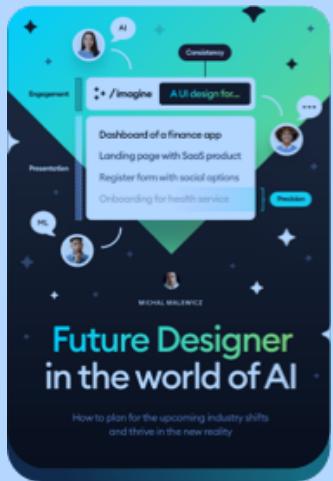
This is one of the most important courses I ever made. It shows you, with examples, how to write a detailed case study, how to do some basic research and how to frame everything so it's interesting to recruiters. Hundreds of people already got a job after this course.

## Present your work

Great design on its own is of course necessary, but how you present it can make a huge difference too. In this course I share some methods to visualise even the boring things like the low-fidelity wireframes, all the way to the final UI.

## Don't be boring

Final part of the portfolio set, it focuses on how to create exploratory case studies, show your problem-solving skills and a true design side. The best way to stand out is to make things that are truly interesting. Case studies that even non designers would find a good read.



## Future Designer + AI

This course is an optional one.

AI is here to stay, but as designers we shouldn't fear it, but instead analyse and find out how it can be used.

The summary: AI is not yet useful!

I made this course as optional (meaning not everyone needs it) to calm the fears of many designers and show them which skills they should focus on to matter in the changing reality.

For now however, if you grasp the mobile and web design, components basics and you can also make a great case study out of it, you should be fine going forward without any AI use.



Michał Malewicz's



# DUCKING DESIGNERS GUIDE TO UI



Written in 2023 by  
Michał Malewicz



All rights reserved. Copying parts of this book without credit will end up with you having a BAD time. Don't do it. Respect copyright and the hard work that went into it. If you want to write books, don't copy content, just write from your own brain :)