



VENVAL



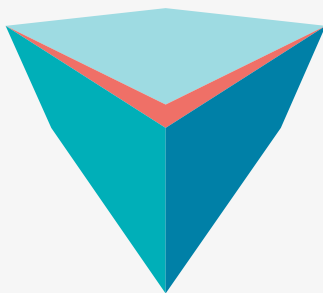
There is something precious inside.

How CoastLine became Venval, phase by phase:
a place where makers prove a product before they mass-produce it.

[VENVALHQ.COM](https://venvalhq.com)

[VENVALHQ.COM/DEMO](https://venvalhq.com/demo)

Fifteen phases, from a problem to a platform.



OPENING

- 03 What Verval is
- 04 The journey, mapped

PHASE 01 · DISCOVERY

- 05 Two things that kill small makers
- 06 Ask real makers first 07 Phase decisions

PHASE 02 · CONCEPT

- 08 The first idea: CoastLine
- 09 The four first screens 10 Phase decisions

PHASE 03 · COASTLINE IDENTITY

- 11 The wave mark
- 12 Trying different voices 13 Phase decisions

PHASE 04 · WIREFRAMES

- 14 The whole app, drawn cheap
- 15 Joining
- 16 The maker's journey
- 17 The tester's journey
- 18 Suppliers & investors
- 19 Each journey, one line 20 Phase decisions

PHASE 05 · PLATFORM BUILD

- 21 From drawings to a platform
- 22 Every screen, one map
- 23 The map, as screens
- 24 Wireframe → real screen
- 25 The two honest mechanics 26 Phase decisions

PHASE 06 · INFRASTRUCTURE

- 27 Making email work
- 28 When it broke 29 Phase decisions

PHASE 07 · EXPERT AUDITS

- 30 Three expert audits
- 31 What they changed 32 Phase decisions

PHASE 08 · DESIGN SYSTEM

- 33 Sixty-one buttons
- 34 Five parts replace them all 35 Phase decisions

PHASE 09 · USABILITY TESTING I

- 36 The sessions
- 37 Three of three
- 38 Before → after
- 39 Words nobody understood 40 Phase decisions

PHASE 10 · NAMING

- 41 The critique that started it
- 42 The name kept moving
- 43 Five candidates, one test 44 Phase decisions

PHASE 11 · VENVAL IDENTITY

- 45 Light through film
- 46 Shaping the mark
- 47 Four roles, one vessel
- 48 One mark, every situation
- 49 The type
- 50 The icons 51 Phase decisions

PHASE 12 · VISUAL REFINEMENT

- 52 Ten looks tried, none won
- 53 Three small fixes
- 54 The background, fixed 55 Phase decisions

PHASE 13 · INTERFACE DETAIL

- 56 Bands, not boxes
- 57 Big enough to tap
- 58 Testing the tests 59 Phase decisions

PHASE 14 · USABILITY TESTING II

- 60 The destination, moved up
- 61 A professional walks through
- 62 The payment surprise
- 63 The missing spinner
- 64 The unmoderated test 65 Phase decisions

PHASE 15 · EXHIBITION

- 66 A demo for strangers
- 67 Poster & screen loop
- 68 The mistake that hurt 69 Phase decisions

AFTER THE SHOW

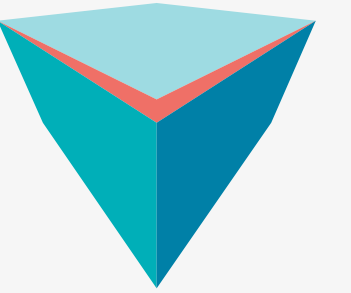
- 70 Two-track validation
- 71 Mode indication
- 72 The integrity audit
- 73 The recorded review
- 74 The sceptic's list
- 75 The review day
- 76 Five reviewers, one pattern

CLOSING

- 77 Where it stands
- 78 Why it's different
- 79 Boundaries
- 80 What I'd do differently
- 81 Working with an AI agent
- 82 What carries forward
- 83 What happens next

BUSINESS PLAN

- 84 Two faces
- 85 How it earns
- 86 What has to be true
- 87 References
- 88 List of illustrations
- 89 Colophon



Prove your product before you make a hundred of them.

Ventral is a testing ground for physical products. A creator lists an early product at what it costs to make, with no profit. Real strangers buy it at that cost, live with it, and score it honestly. The creator learns what to fix before spending savings on a big production run.

TESTING GROUND, NOT A SHOP

COST PRICE, NOT RETAIL

EVIDENCE, NOT STAR RATINGS

Investors only appear at the very end: after the evidence exists, and only if the creator invites them.
Money arrives after the proof, never before it.

- **Creator** lists a product before mass production
- **Tester** pays cost price, scores it honestly
- **Supplier** offers better or cheaper materials
- **Investor** reads the proof, only when invited

Four kinds of people, one loop, live at ventralhq.com

6

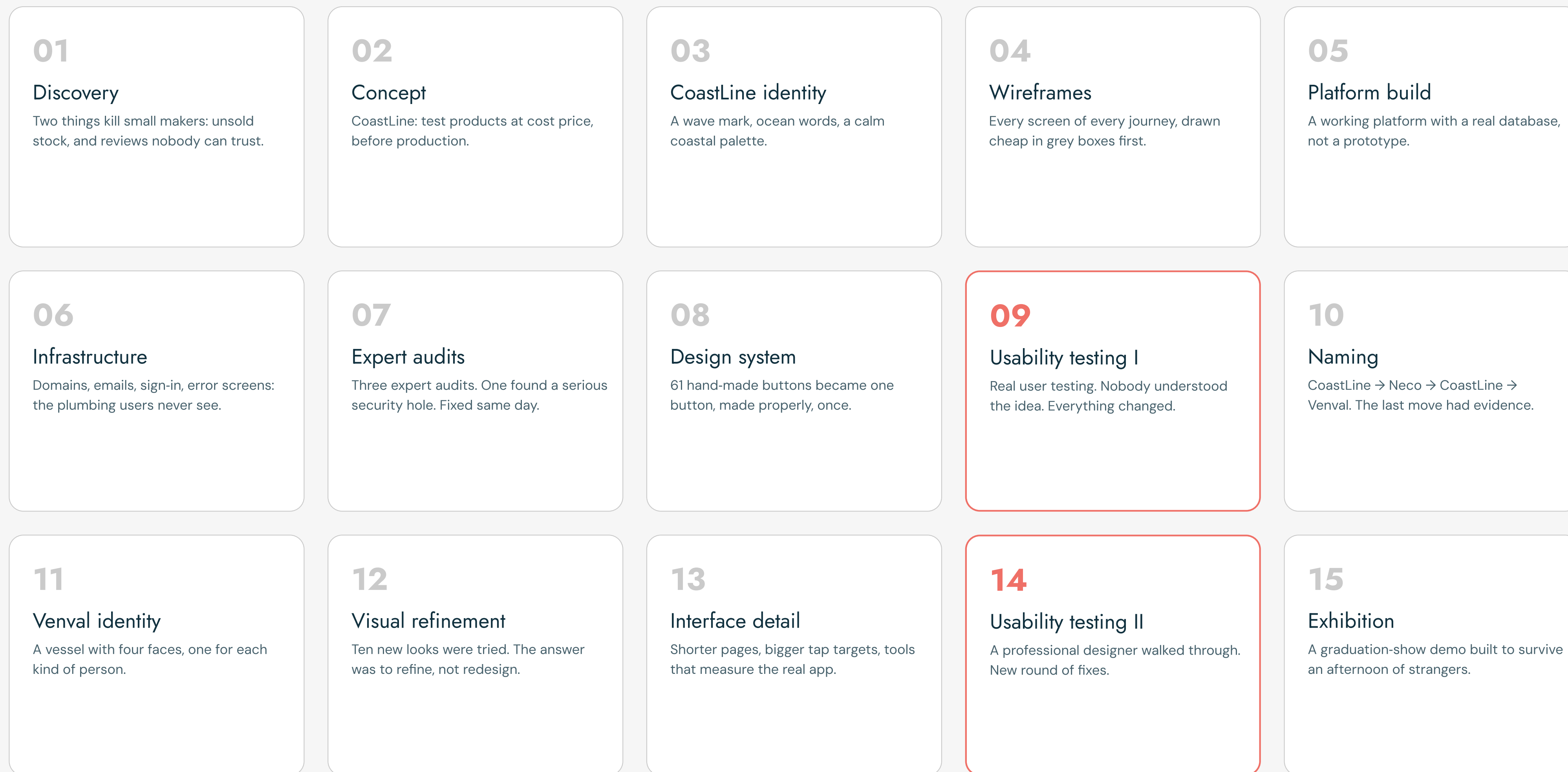
SCORES PER TEST, GIVEN BLIND

£0

PROFIT WHILE TESTING

OPENING

The whole journey, in fifteen phases.

**505**

CODE CHANGES

102

DATABASE UPDATES

91

DECISIONS WRITTEN DOWN

2

ROUNDS OF USER TESTING

3

EXPERT AUDITS

4

NAMES, ONE SURVIVOR

Two things quietly kill small makers.



Dead stock

A maker spends their savings on a big production run, **before anyone has told them the truth about the product.** The feedback that would have saved them arrives as boxes that never sell.



Proof you cannot trust

Online reviews don't reflect product quality. They reflect **who was given a free unit, or who was loud.** So even good feedback can't be believed, by makers or by buyers.

The project's one goal: give a maker without financial backing an honest answer, before the money is spent.

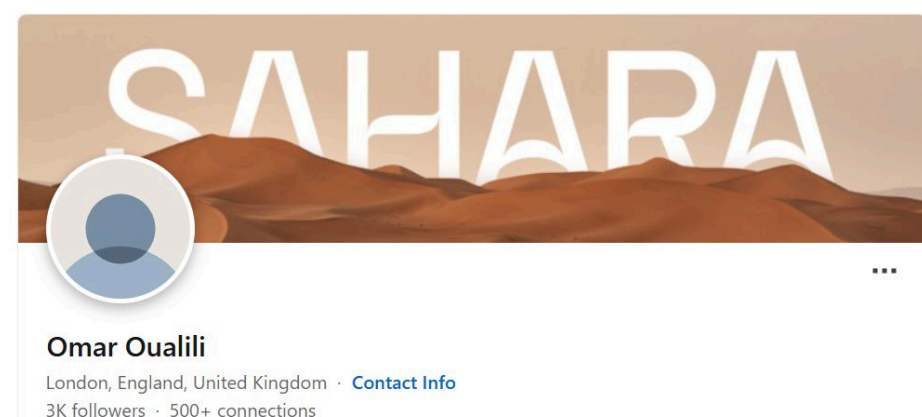
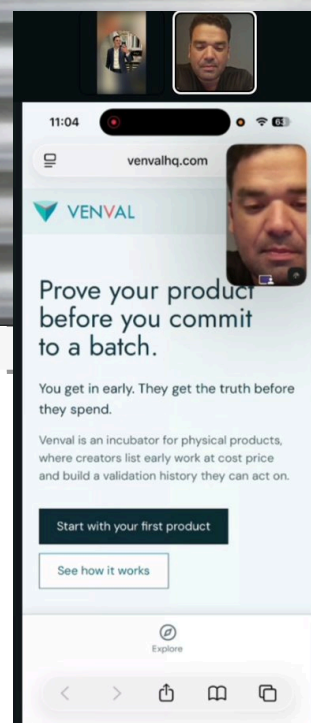
PHASE 01

DISCOVERY · RESEARCH

Ask real makers before building anything.

Interviews with independent UK makers, found through Instagram outreach and in person at Canterbury maker markets, with a dedicated question guide for each of the four kinds of user.

Interview recording · Omar Oualili, founder of Sahara



THE INTERVIEW THAT MATTERED MOST

Omar spent three years developing a spirit brand with no way to test it. He held one tasting event before committing to production, and hoped. His story is exactly the gap this platform fills. One line from him changed the design:

"Buyers want the story, not the recipe."

So the platform shows **full detail to the people improving a product**, and **the story alone to the people deciding whether to buy it**. Different depth for different people.

And he came back. On the finished platform, Omar returned as a real user and listed the first draft of his own drink.

4

INTERVIEW GUIDES, ONE PER
ROLE

2

PROBLEMS CONFIRMED
BEFORE BUILDING

4_s

OF SILENCE HELD AFTER
HARD QUESTIONS

Method note: research and building ran side by side, as one loop: findings changed the design in the same week they were gathered.

Building second.

Research and building were one loop, not two stages.

The obvious way to start was to build something and show it to people. I went the other way, and the reason was the problem itself.

A maker with no financial backing cannot afford to be wrong about their product. It would have been strange to ask them to trust a platform built on my own assumptions about what they needed.

So the first work was talking. Independent UK makers, found through Instagram outreach and in person at the Canterbury maker markets. Four separate question guides, one for each kind of user the platform would eventually have, because a supplier and a tester do not have the same problem and a single guide would have flattened them into one.

The interview that mattered most was Omar's. He had spent three years on a spirit brand with no way to test it, held one tasting event, and committed to production hoping. One sentence of his changed the structure of the product: buyers want the story, not the recipe. That became the two-tier disclosure the platform still runs on.

This was important. It was one person. I acted on it because it explained something the other interviews had circled without naming, and because it was cheap to reverse if it turned out wrong. It did not turn out wrong. Omar later came back and listed his own drink on the finished platform, which is the closest thing to a verdict a research participant can give. (Omar was reminded that it's a student platform and food and drinks have to go through checks and licences that are later in the roadmap.

The other decision was to stop treating research and building as two stages. They ran as one loop, and findings changed the design in the same week they were gathered.

The first idea: CoastLine.

Test products by the sea, so to speak: everything on the platform spoke the language of the coast. Products moved at cost price, feedback came back scored and blind, and every role had an ocean name.

THE OCEAN WORDS

Maker	the person listing a product
Diver	the tester: goes down for a close look
Chandler	the supplier: a real ship-trade word
Tide	points earned by contributing
Pearl	an award for feedback that truly helped

Remember these five words. In Phase 09, real users meet them, and that goes badly.



The wave-based C

A wave curling onto a line. A mark that can only ever letter a **C**, a fact that later decides a rename's fate.

THE COASTAL PALETTE



Morning blue



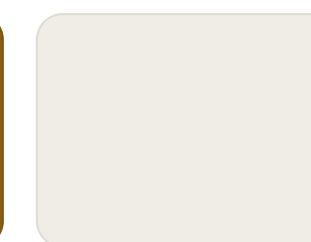
Night water



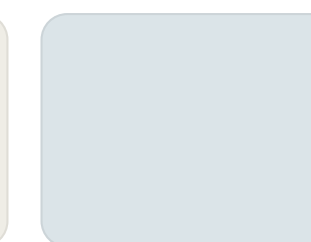
Tide



Gold



Sand



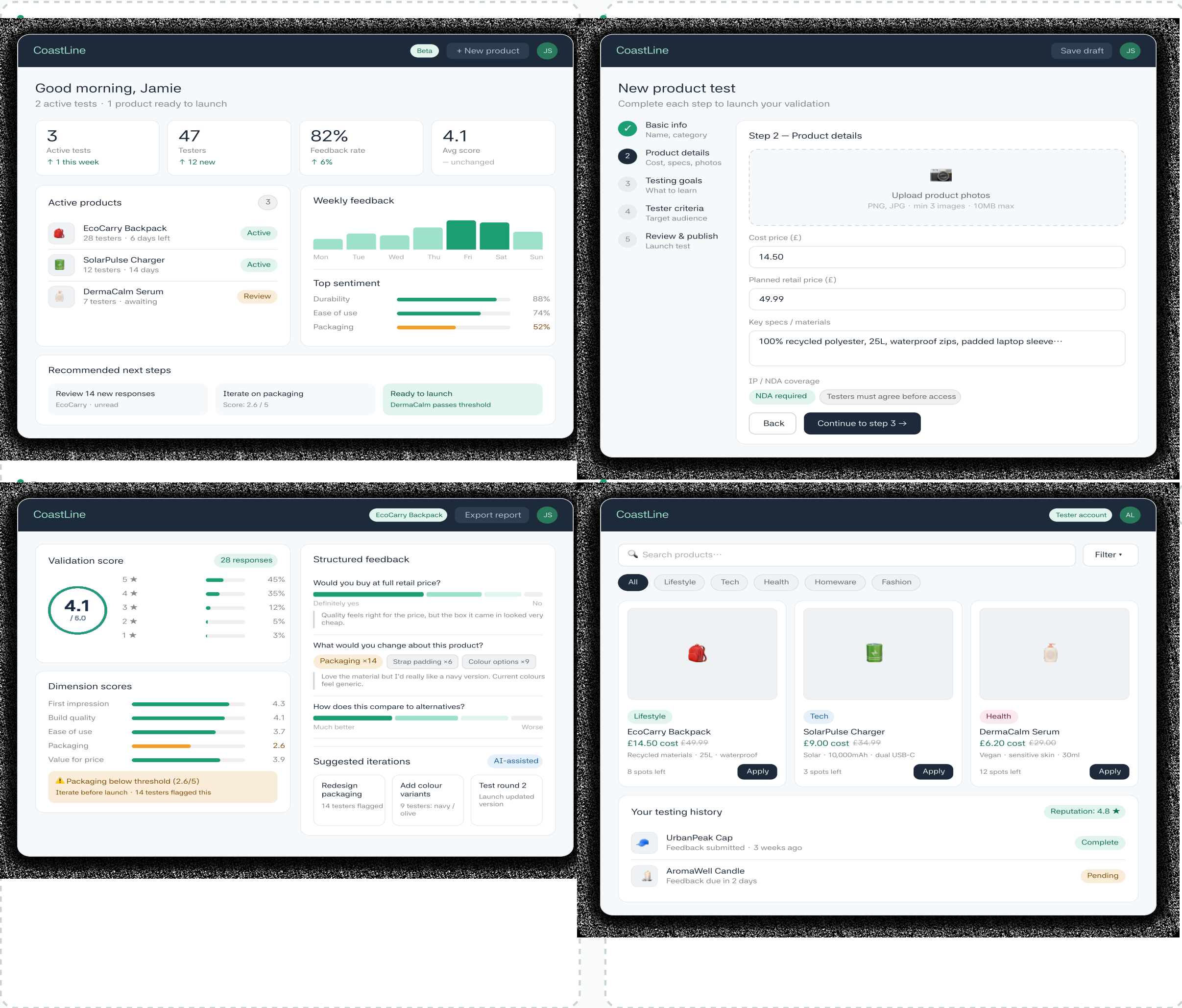
Mist

"You are standing at the coastline. The horizon is clear. Nothing is committed yet."

THE FIRST POSTER

Four screens, fully imagined. And untested.

The idea's first visual form: a board of four detailed screen designs. Everything on them was a guess: a well-reasoned guess, but no real person had touched any of it yet.



WHAT THESE SCREENS ALREADY BELIEVED

Scores, not stars. The feedback screen rated five separate qualities and flagged the failing one: "Packaging 2.6 out of 5: fix before launch."

The honest price on every card. £14.50 to make vs £49.99 in shops: that gap was the whole pitch.

Reputation for testers: good testing should build a track record.

What they couldn't know: whether anyone else would understand any of this. Everything from here on is what happened when the idea met reality, phase by phase.



The mechanics survived. The words did not.

The mechanics came from the problem. The words came from a metaphor.

Before anyone had touched it, I had built a whole world: a vocabulary, a palette, a mark, and four screens designed down to the last label.

Looking back, the four screens already believed the right things. Scores instead of stars, because a single number hides which part failed. The honest price on every card, because the gap between what a thing costs to make and what it sells for was the entire argument. A track record for testers, because feedback with no consequence attracts people who do not mean it.

Every one of those survived to the finished platform. Not one of them was changed by a user.

The vocabulary did not survive at all. Diver, Chandler, Tide, Pearl. Each had a reason and each was defensible, and in Phase 09 not one person could decode any of them.

The difference is worth naming, because it is the most useful thing this phase taught me. The mechanics were reasoned from the problem. The words were reasoned from a metaphor. A metaphor is a decision about how something should feel, and feelings are exactly the thing you cannot check by thinking harder on your own.

So the lesson is not that I should have tested sooner in general. It is that I should have known which half of this work was testable and which half I had merely convinced myself about.

PHASE 03

COASTLINE IDENTITY

The wave curls, settles, and becomes the coastline.



Sand · primary



Bone · blue allowed



Night water · sand reverse

DON'T



loud gradients

DON'T



low contrast

DON'T



multi-colour, effects

Space Grotesk

the platform's voice: headings, buttons, numbers

Work Sans

the people's voice: body text, forms, captions

One colour, always. Ink on light backgrounds, sand on dark ones.
Never two colours at once, never rotated, never over a busy photo.
Below 32 pixels the wave closes up, so small sizes get the mark
alone, never the full name.

PHASE 03

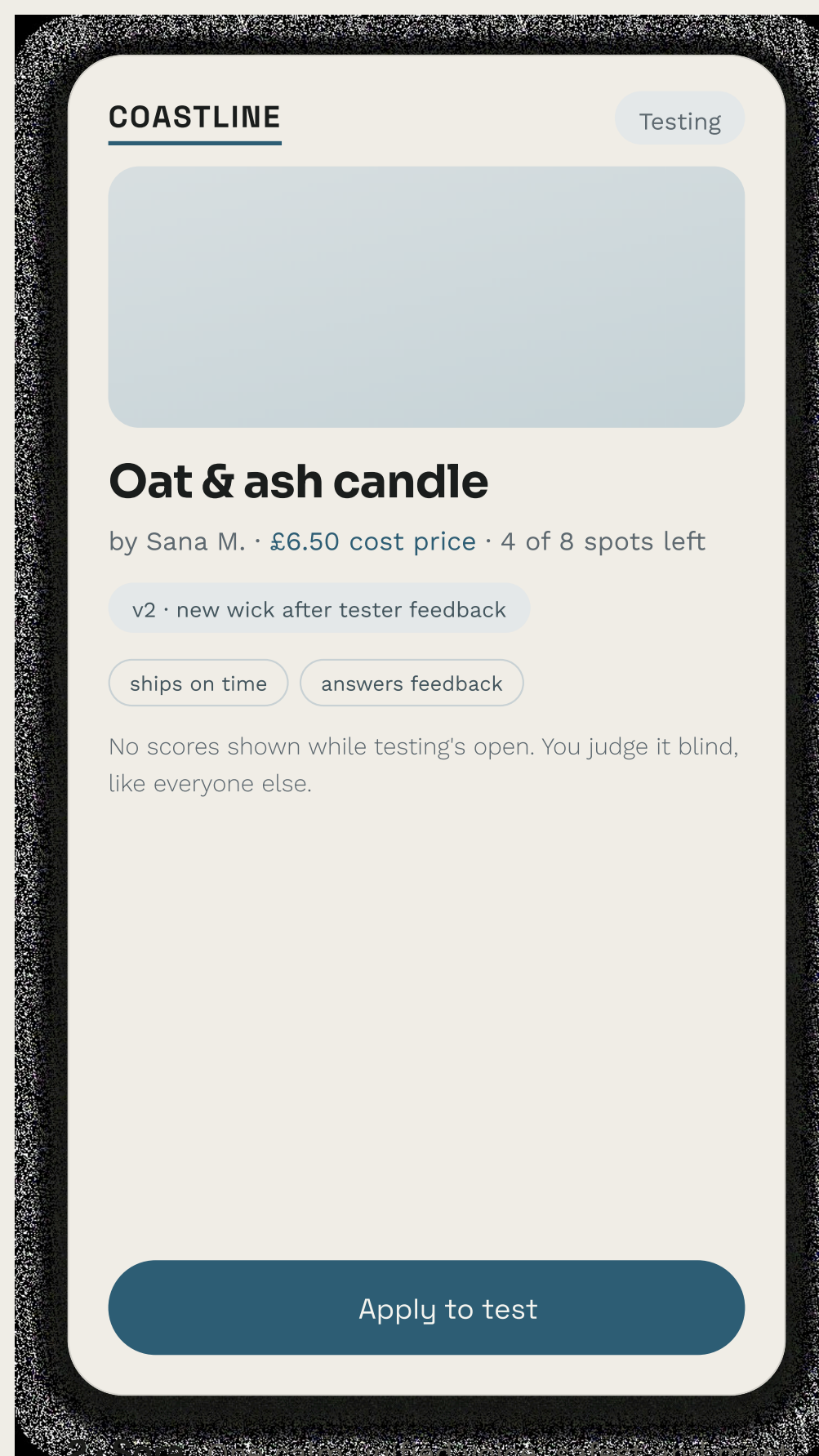
COASTLINE IDENTITY · TYPE TESTS

Same screen, three voices: choosing how a product should speak.

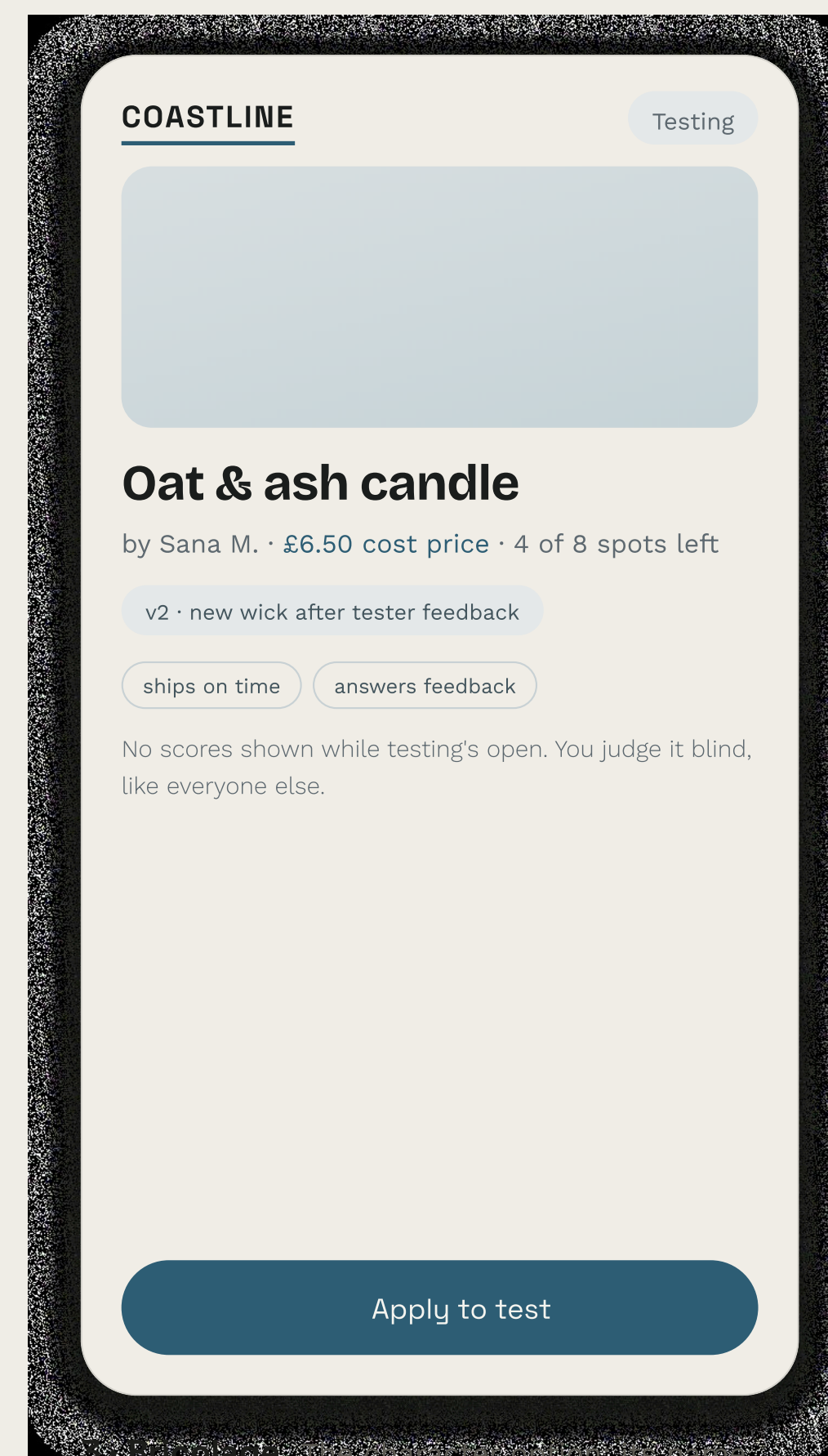
Everything holds still: logo, colours, buttons. Only the product title changes, because that's the type doing the selling.



the platform speaks grotesk, the craft speaks serif. Clearest hierarchy.



app-like, but the products get no voice of their own.



means "making things from what's at hand." Also the trendiest, so the fastest to age.

One variable at a time.

An identity decision is also a constraint on decisions not yet made.

The type test on the facing page is the part of this phase I would defend hardest, and it is not because of the typefaces.

Everything on the three cards is held still. Same logo, same colours, same buttons, same words, same product. Only the product title changes. That makes it an experiment rather than a mood board, and it means the answer can be attributed to one cause.

I did not have users to run it past at this stage (fellow students said they liked it), so it stayed a designer's judgement. But structuring it that way meant that when users did arrive, the question was already isolated and ready to ask.

The other decision here turned out to matter far more than it looked at the time. The wave mark can only ever letter a C.

That was a strength while the platform was called CoastLine, and it read as a mark that knew exactly what it was. It became a constraint the moment the name came under pressure. In Phase 10 a candidate name was struck in a single day because the logo could not become an N.

I would not undo it. A mark that commits to a letter is stronger than one that does not. But I know now that identity decisions are also constraints on decisions that have not been made yet, and that the cost of a constraint appears later than the benefit does.

Draw the whole app cheap, before building any of it expensive.

Every journey, end to end, as low-fi phone screens: grey boxes stand in for pictures, but **all the words are real**, because the words are what would later be tested. Each journey has its own colour.

- Blue · shared screens joining, profile, switching role
- Green · the maker list, choose testers, read feedback, iterate
- Teal · the tester find, apply, live with it, tell the truth
- Amber · the supplier verify the business, quote on materials
- Purple · the investor evidence first, story second

40+

SCREENS DRAWN

6

JOURNEYS, END TO END

Why draw first?

A wireframe costs minutes to change. A built screen costs hours. Drawing every flow first meant the big arguments (what a tester sees before applying, where the hidden cost line goes, when money is mentioned) were had **on paper, where arguing is cheap**.

The next four pages show the key frames of each journey, shown here exactly as they were planned.

One account for everyone. Roles are switches, not accounts.

1 · Sign up

COASTLINE

Real products, tested honestly, before the world sees them.

Email

Password

What do you want to do here? (one or both)

✓ Create

✓ Test

Changed your mind later? Turn the other one on in settings.

☐ I agree to the NDA: everything listed here stays the creator's own idea, not mine to copy

Create account

2 · One question only

Nearly in

One question for now. The rest can wait.

What brings you to testing?

Quality products at fair prices

Helping makers build better things

Both, honestly

3 · The role switch

COASTLINE

Creating Testing

The whole app swaps with the switch; logo, bell and avatar stay put.

DashboardMy productsApplications

4 · Profile & points

COASTLINE

Priya H

29Tide2Pearls

Roles

TestingOn

CreatingOn

SupplyingSet up →

Points stay quiet until they matter: no leaderboards, no streaks.

DiscoverApplicationsProfile

The decisions hiding in these grey boxes: the promise-not-to-copy is signed once, at the door · one question at sign-up, everything else later · switching role never signs you out.

List it, choose your testers, learn the truth.

1 · The cost tree

What it costs

Break it into parts. Lock a line to hide its name: the price still counts, so the total always adds up.

Bottle	£1.40
Juice	£2.60
Hidden ingredient	£0.90
Box	£1.20
Total · what testers pay	£5.20

Back

Next

2 · Applications arrive

Applications

Sea salt perfume · 3 waiting. You choose who tests.

Priya H

3 tested · 1 pearl

"I wear scent daily and I'll tell you exactly how it sits at hour four."

Pass

Approve

Marcus T

Also supplies glass here

Pass

Approve

Dashboard

Products

Applications

3 · The read

Sea salt perfume · the read

4 testers in. Bars sit against "as expected."

Packaging

Material

Function

Price

They'd pay **£19 on average**. Your target is £18.

Priya on longevity

"Gorgeous open, gone by hour three. The base doesn't hold."

This one's a pearl

4 · Fix it, retest it

Sea salt perfume · versions

v1

Longevity flagged by 3 testers

v2

New fixative · back in testing with 5

A fix isn't real until the new version goes back to the testers: the retest is what proves it.

Start v3

The decisions: the total is computed from the parts: a maker cannot type a price that disagrees with their own breakdown · feedback that changes the product earns an award · improving means testing again.

Find it, unlock it, live with it, tell the truth.

1 • Locked product

Sea salt perfume

by Jamie O. · £5.20 cost price · 7 of 10 spots left

v2 · new fixative after feedback

ships on time

answers feedback

No scores shown while testing's open. You judge it blind, like everyone else.

🔒 Story, materials and costs unlock when you apply

Apply to test

2 • This product's promise

Before it opens

This recipe and unreleased branding are Jamie's. The promise covers this product only.

What you see beyond this point (materials, method, imagery) stays here. Talk about your experience once it launches; don't share what made it...

☐ I agree to keep this product's details between me and the maker

Agree & continue

3 • Scoring, one at a time

Material quality

Does it feel like what was promised?

fell short

wouldn't change it

One thing that could be better here

Back

Next

4 • The reveal (after)

Your read vs the pool

Now that yours is in, here's everyone else's.

Packaging	you +42 · pool +48
Material	you -25 · pool -20
Function	you +60 · pool +60
Price	you +30 · pool +35

Numbers appear here only, after you submit, never before. That's the blind rule.

+8 points · your level's rising

Done

The decisions: scores stay hidden until yours is in, so nobody copies the crowd · one question per screen, so scoring feels like thinking, not form-filling · agreeing to secrecy happens per product, at the moment it matters.

The two roles that must earn their way in.

Supplier 1 · Prove it’s really you

Prove it's really you

Companies House number

✓ Found: Colby Glass Supplies Ltd · active

Work email at your company's domain

We'll send a link there. A Gmail won't work for this bit.

Verify

Supplier 2 · Quote on a part

Sea salt perfume · by Jamie O.

Glass bottle

£1.40

Cap

£0.35

Hidden ingredient

£0.90

Box

£1.20

You see what testers see. Locked lines open only by the maker's invitation, and one hat per product: quote on it and you can't test it.

Quote on the bottle

Investor 1 · Evidence first

Sea salt perfume · Jamie O.

Scores, all testers

v1 → v3 improvement

What testers said they'd pay

Supplier & unit costs

Then Jamie's part: the story, and the plan for the money.

Request an intro

Investor 2 · The maker decides

Introduction requested

Jamie decides. If she says yes, you're connected directly: the deal happens between you two, off the platform.

The platform doesn't broker, doesn't take a cut of the round, doesn't sit in the middle. It sold you the evidence, not the deal.

Waiting on the maker

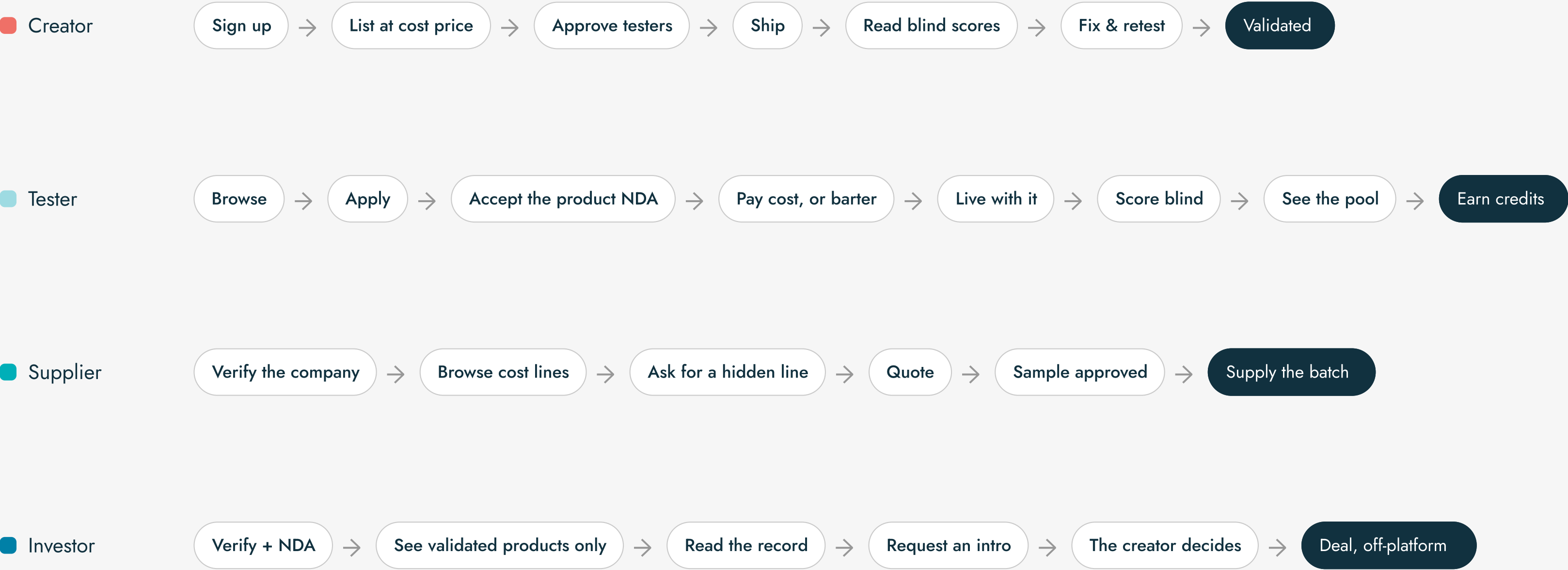
The decisions: suppliers are verified against the official company register before they can ask for anything · investors see a product only after it's validated, and only if the maker opts in · nobody browses anonymously at that layer.

PHASE 04

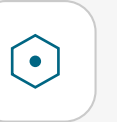
WIREFRAMES · THE FLOWS

Each role's whole journey, in one line.

Everything the wireframes planned, reduced to arrows. Four journeys, one loop: each ends by feeding the next.



THE LOOP **Creator's product** → tested by **Testers** → improved with **Suppliers** → proven to **Investors** → and the money arrives **only after the proof** .



Scores, not stars, and not a verdict.

A verdict is the one thing a creator cannot act on.

Forty screens and six journeys, drawn in grey boxes before a line of the real thing existed. The rule was that the pictures could be fake and the words had to be real, because the words are what a tester reads before trusting a stranger with their money.

The reason to draw first was cost. A wireframe takes minutes to change and a built screen takes hours, so the expensive arguments moved to the cheap place deliberately.

The biggest of them was how feedback gets given at all. The wireframes settled it as a scale across six separate qualities, scored one at a time, before a tester sees anyone else's answer. Not stars.



A star rating is a verdict on the whole thing, and a verdict is the one thing a creator cannot act on. Tell someone their product is 4.2 and they know they are mildly disappointing and nothing about what to change. Show them that packaging sits well below the other five qualities and they know what to fix before committing to a production run.

The number itself does not work either. People scoring each other's work cluster in a narrow band near the top, which is leniency bias and is documented well beyond this project. The absolute figure is the half that says least. Almost everything useful sits in the gaps between the qualities rather than in the total.

At wireframe stage this was reasoning rather than evidence. What confirmed it arrived much later, with real scores to read, when an average with no spread behind it turned out unable to tell reliable mediocrity apart from a room that disagreed. The decision was right before I could prove it, which was not comfortable at the time.

Not a prototype. A working platform.

The wireframes became a real product on real infrastructure: a live database, real accounts, real listings, real messages. Every flow from the drawings (listing, applying, shipping, scoring blind, quoting, validating) works end to end.

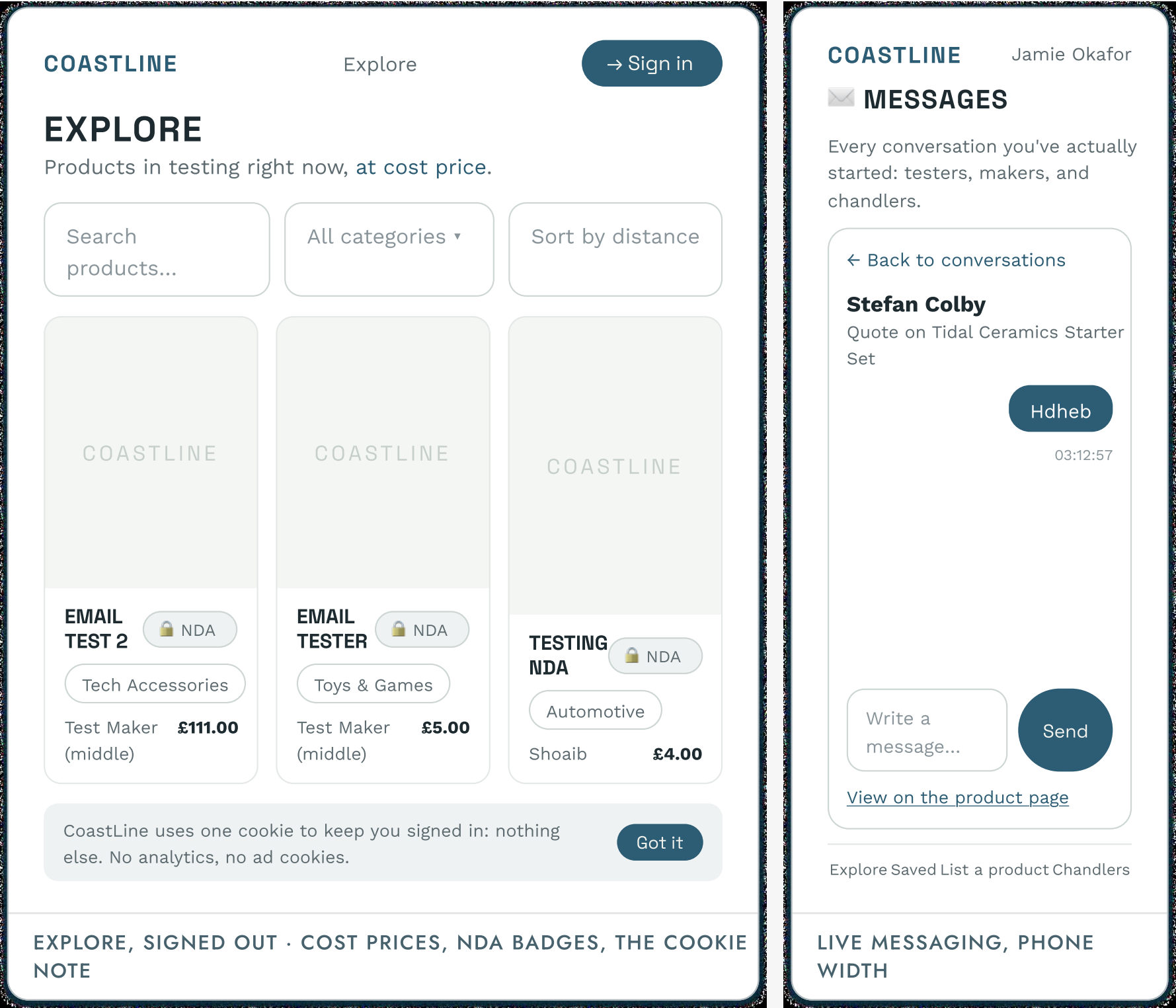
BUILT WITH

A modern web stack (Next.js + a Postgres database), with row-level security so the database itself enforces who may see what.

ONE HONEST GAP

Real payments couldn't be switched on under a student visa, so payment runs in demo mode behind a clean seam, ready to swap for the real thing. **Stated openly, not hidden.**

Why build so much? Because every later step needed something real: you can't security-audit a sketch, user-test a picture, or exhibit a slideshow. The platform is the research instrument.



34

DATABASE TABLES

53

PAGES

4

ROLES, LIVE

PHASE 05

PLATFORM BUILD · THE MAP

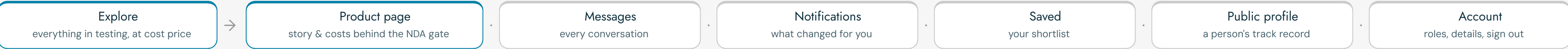
Every screen, one map.

The whole platform from the front door in: one door, a set of shared rooms, and five corridors, one per kind of person.

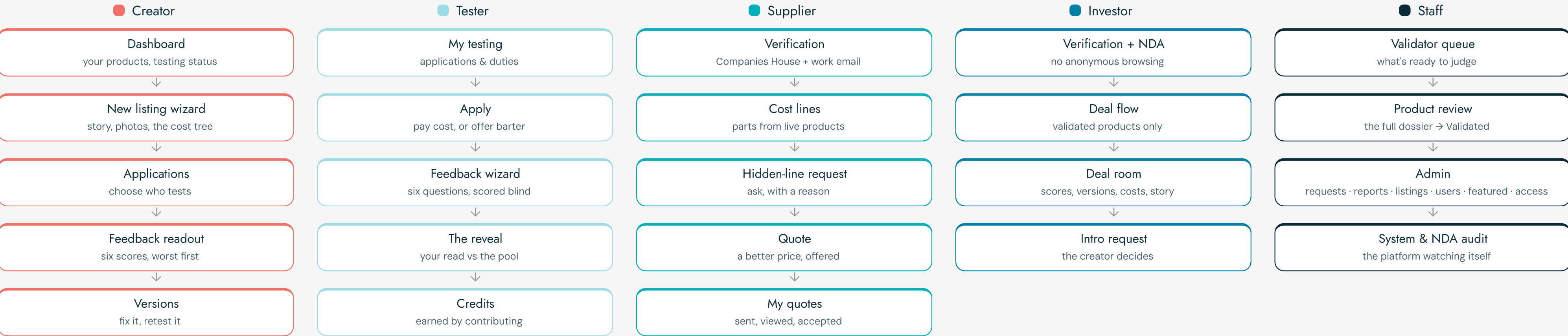
1 THE FRONT DOOR · one way in, for everyone



2 SHARED ROOMS · reachable from anywhere, once you're in



3 FIVE CORRIDORS · one per role, top to bottom



53

SCREENS IN TOTAL

1

FRONT DOOR

7

SHARED ROOMS

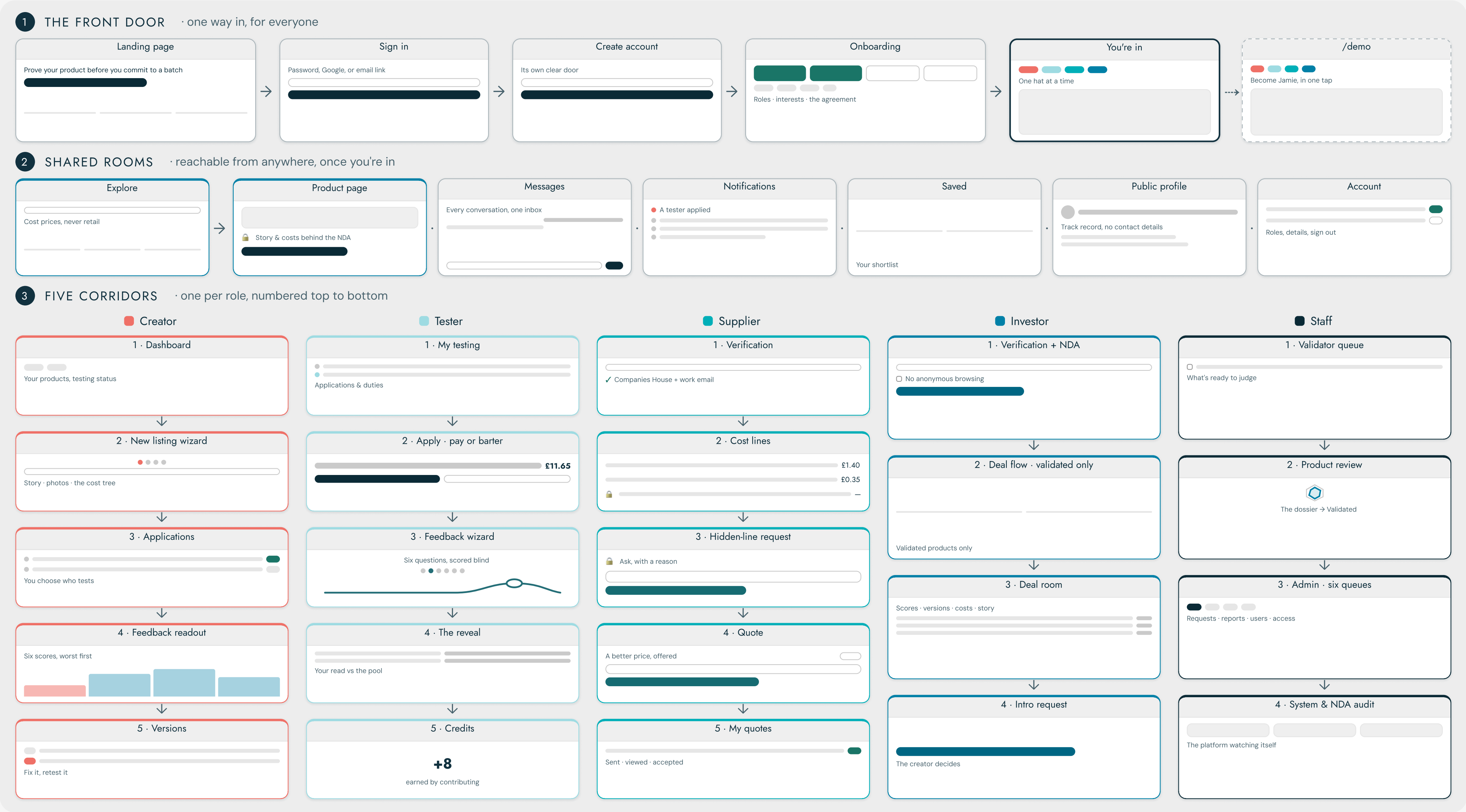
5

CORRIDORS, ONE PER ROLE

Every screen on this map is reachable from the landing page, and was checked to be: the two "404" reports in user testing were closed by tracing all 94 links against this exact map.

The same map, drawn as screens.

Same layout as the map opposite, and every box now says its one key thing in words. Read it the way the platform is used: in through the top row, the shared rooms under it, then each colour-coded column top to bottom. Dark pills are buttons, and the coloured frame says whose screen it is.



The grey boxes became real screens.

PAIR 1 · THE PRODUCT PAGE WITH ITS PROMISE GATE

WIREFRAME

Sea salt perfume

£5.20 cost price · 7 of 10 left

🔒 Story, materials and costs unlock when you apply

Keep this product's details between you and the maker...

☐ I agree

Apply to test

BUILT

[← Back to explore](#)

EMAIL TESTER

VERSION 1

Listed by Test Maker (middle) · **£5.00 cost price**

🔒 The full product story is behind this product's NDA. Accept it to keep reading and to apply as a tester.

NDA · email tester

COASTLINE-PRODUCT-NDA · Version 1.0~demo

1. WHAT THIS COVERS

This agreement covers the non-public information about "email tester" that isn't visible until you accept it: the full product story, the cost breakdown (including hidden lines), photos, and iteration notes.

2. WHY IT'S PROTECTED

The maker is sharing this ahead of bringing it fully to market...

☐ I've read and agree to the NDA above for "email tester".

🔒 Accept product NDA

The real gate, built exactly as the wireframe planned

The idea survived intact: a tester agrees to keep the creator's secrets **before** the details open.

PAIR 2 · THE HONEST COST BREAKDOWN

WIREFRAME

What it costs

Bottle

£1.40

Juice

£2.60

🔒 Hidden ingredient

£0.90

Box

£1.20

Total · what testers pay

£5.20

BUILT

2 What one unit costs you [🔗 Where the number comes from](#)

Testers pay exactly this. Venva takes no commission out of it. You make no profit while testing, that's the deal.

cap

1.33

👁 HIDE

You bought

5

unit... ▾

which makes

30

units

and cost you £

40

for the batch, so £1.33 a unit, filled in above

+ Add cost line

What one unit costs you

£1.33

The built editor, with the batch maths that arrived later, so nobody has to divide

Also intact, with one honesty upgrade found while building: if only **one** line is hidden, anyone could work it out by subtraction. So a single hidden line shows its number anyway. A lock that pretends is worse than no lock.

PHASE 05

PLATFORM BUILD · THE HEART OF IT

Two mechanics carry the whole idea.

1 · THE OPEN RECEIPT

Stoneware clay	£4.10
Glaze	£1.85
Kiln firing	£3.40
🔒 Hidden ingredient	—
Packaging & delivery	£2.30
Cost price · what you pay, nothing on top	£11.65

The creator shows what the product really costs to make, and a tester pays exactly that. Up to **two** lines may stay secret, to protect a recipe. A supplier can ask to see a hidden line and offer a better price for it.

2 · BLIND SCORING



Six qualities, scored before you see anyone else's score. Nobody can copy the crowd: that's the whole argument against star ratings, built as a form.

The creator reads it back two ways: the shape for the overview, and a **worst-first list** for "what do I fix first."

Why testers stay honest: nobody profits from anybody at this stage. A tester who paid the making cost has a stake in saying what the thing is actually like, unlike someone given a freebie.



The platform is the instrument.

The platform is not the outcome of the research. It is the instrument.

The obvious question about this phase is why I built so much. A portfolio does not need a live database, real accounts and row-level security.

The answer is that everything after this point needed something real to act on. You cannot security-audit a sketch. You cannot user-test a picture, because a picture cannot refuse you or take four seconds to respond. You cannot exhibit a slideshow to strangers and learn whether the idea survives contact with them.

The platform is not the outcome of the research. It is the instrument the research is done with, and that is why it had to work rather than merely look like it worked.

The decision I am most careful about here is the payment gap. Real payments could not be switched on under a student visa, so payment runs in demo mode behind a clean seam.

It sits on the page instead, stated plainly, because a portfolio that quietly implies money has moved is making a claim it cannot support, and the whole platform is an argument about not making claims you cannot support.

The seam is real engineering rather than a caption. The demo provider sits behind the same interface a live one would, so swapping it is a change of one module. That is the difference between an honest gap and an excuse, and I wanted this one to be the first.

Before an email arrives, the internet has to believe you sent it.

A platform that emails sign-in links and notifications needs its own domain, verified. This is the plumbing users never see, shown here because it was real work, learned the hard way.

DNS Records · Domain verification

⚠ Invalid DKIM: the record value is incorrect. Update it to the value shown in the table.

TYPE	NAME	CONTENT	STATUS
TXT	resend._domainkey	p=MIGfMA0G...DAQAB	Failed
MX	send	feedback-smtp...	Verified

1 · THE PROOF FAILS · ONE VALUE WRONG, STATUS RED

Custom records

CANCEL

SAVE

TXT ▾

resend._domainkey

4 hrs ▾

p=MIGfMA0GCSqGS1b3DQEBAQUA...

TXT	@	v=spf1 include:_spf.google...
CNAME	www	...vercel-dns-017.com
TXT	send	v=spf1 include:amazonses...

2 · FIXING THE RECORDS, CHARACTER BY CHARACTER

htechilc.com

Verified

✓ Domain verified: your domain is ready to send emails.

Domain added

2:49 AM

DNS verified

3:25 AM

Domain verified

3:29 AM

3 · VERIFIED · FORTY MINUTES, START TO FINISH

DKIM is a signature that proves an email really came from your domain. One wrong character in a DNS record, and every email is treated as suspicious.

The fix lives in the domain's **DNS records**: the internet's address book. Copy the value exactly, wait for the world to notice.

Forty minutes from adding the domain to verified. From here, sign-in links and notifications come from the platform's own address.

ALSO TUNED

Rate limits (how many sign-ins and emails per hour the platform allows) set deliberately, after hitting the defaults during testing.

Rate Limits

✓ Rate limits successfully updated

Sending emails

100 / h

Sign-ups and sign-ins

30 / 5 min

It broke. Every break taught one lesson.

Done

htechilc.com

→ Sign in

COASTLINE

No password: we'll email you a link that signs you in.

⚠ That sign-in link didn't work: PKCE code verifier not found in storage.
This can happen if the auth flow was initiated in a different browser or device.
Request a new one below. Links only work once, and only in the browser that requested them.

Email

you@example.com

THE SIGN-IN LINK THAT ONLY WORKED ONCE, ON A PHONE

+ CREATE AN ACCOUNT

Set your own email and password.

Email

shoaib@htechilc.com

Password

.....

At least 8 characters.

✗ email rate limit exceeded

+ Create account

"EMAIL RATE LIMIT EXCEEDED," MID-TESTING

Console Error

Server

Admin (System tab) data fetch error: {}

116 | for (const err of [deletionFeedbackError,
117 | activityLogError, profilesError, ...]) {
> 118 | if (err) console.error("... fetch error:", err);
119 | }

Call Stack · AdminSystemTabPage — app\admin\system\page.tsx (118:22)

A DEVELOPER ERROR, CAUGHT BEFORE ANY USER SAW IT

Lesson: email sign-in links only work in the browser that asked for them. Opening the link in a different app broke it silently. The error message was rewritten to say so in plain words, and a password option was added.

Lesson: the email service allows only so many sends per hour, and testing burned through them. Limits were raised deliberately (previous page), and the app stopped depending on email for every single step.

Lesson: the admin panel grew a System tab that watches the platform's own health (which settings are missing, which database updates have run), so problems announce themselves instead of hiding.

Error screens are part of the design. A user who hits a wall deserves a sentence they can act on, not a code.

The plumbing changed the words.

The failure was technical. The fix was editorial.

This is the least glamorous phase in the document and I kept it in on purpose.

Verifying a domain, fixing a signature record, discovering that a sign-in link only works in the browser that asked for it. None of it is design in the sense a portfolio usually means. All of it was real work, and I could not have handed the platform to a stranger without doing it.

Including it is a claim about what designing a working product actually involves.

What makes it belong here rather than in an appendix is that every one of these failures came back out as an interface decision.

The sign-in link that died silently when opened in another app became a rewritten error message that says so in plain words, and a password option added beside it. The rate limit that blocked account creation became a visible state rather than a dead button. The failures were technical and the fixes were editorial.

That is the pattern I would carry forward. When infrastructure breaks, the user does not experience a broken record. They experience a sentence that does not explain itself. Fixing the record is necessary and fixing the sentence is the design work, and it is easy to stop after the first one.

Three experts were asked to be unkind.

Before real users ever touched it, the platform was handed to critical reviewers, each with a different job.

AUDIT 1 · THE PRODUCT

Does the business make sense?

Strategy, user experience, marketplace economics and code, reviewed with full access. Its sharpest point, in plain words:

"You're asking makers to go first." A creator's first act here is showing their real costs to strangers, before the platform has proven it deserves that trust. That worry shapes everything later.

AUDIT 2 · THE EXPERIENCE

Reviewed cold, on purpose

A second reviewer saw only the live site: no code, no explanations, phone-sized screen. What they logged one complaint at a time (a plain dropdown here, a silent button there) turned out to be **one problem in many costumes: there was no design system.**

That single insight becomes Phase 08.

AUDIT 3 · SECURITY

The one that really mattered

Every way a user could write to the database, traced by hand. The worst find, in plain words: **any signed-in person could quietly make themselves an administrator.** The database rule said "you may edit your own row", but your row includes the field that says whether you're an admin.

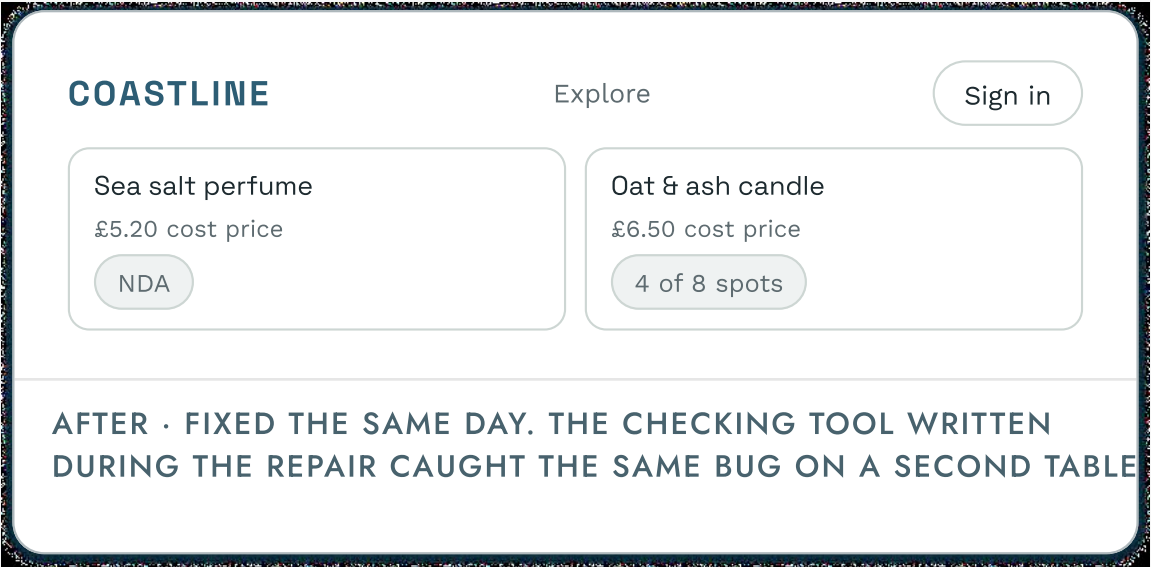
14 FINDINGS

WORST 5 FIXED THE SAME DAY

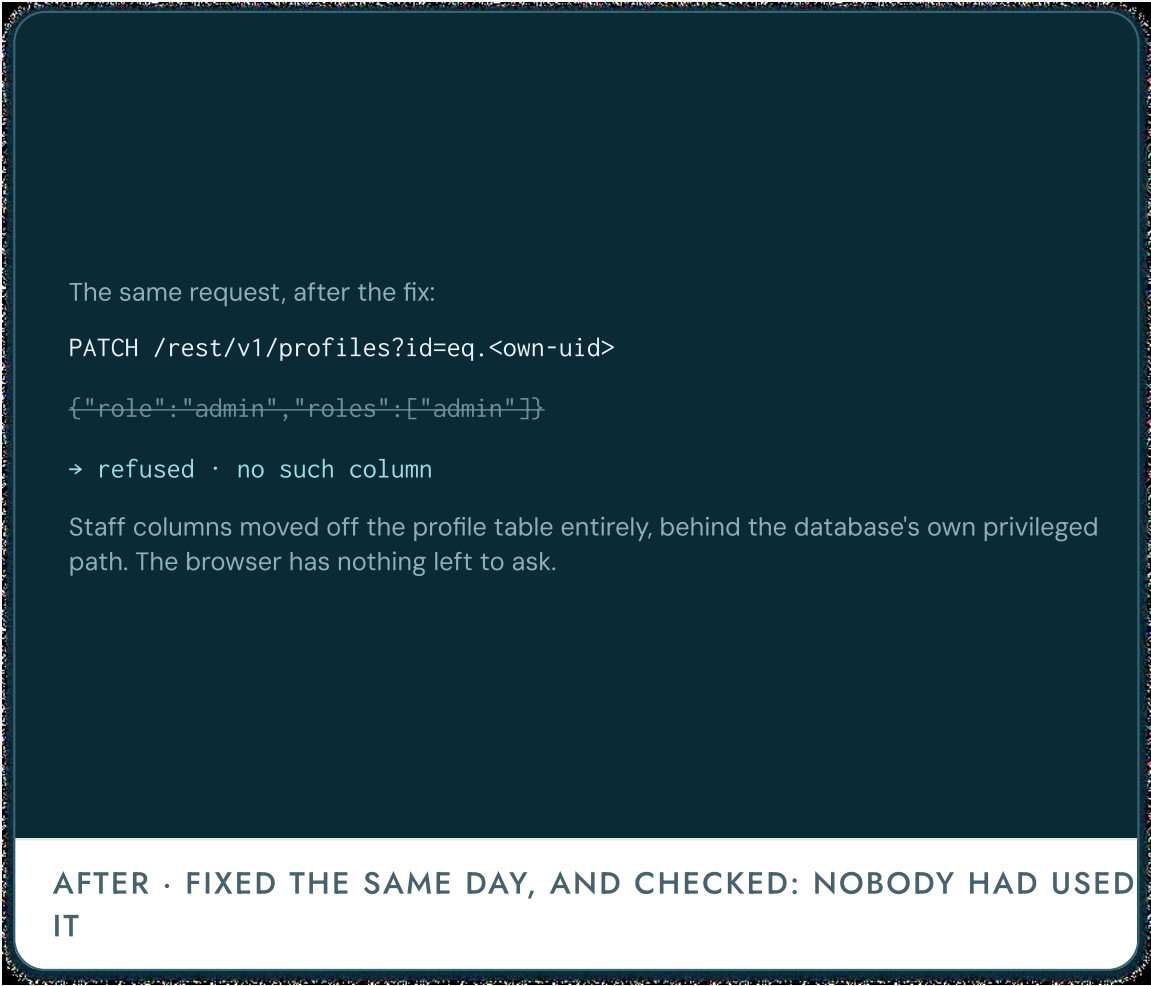
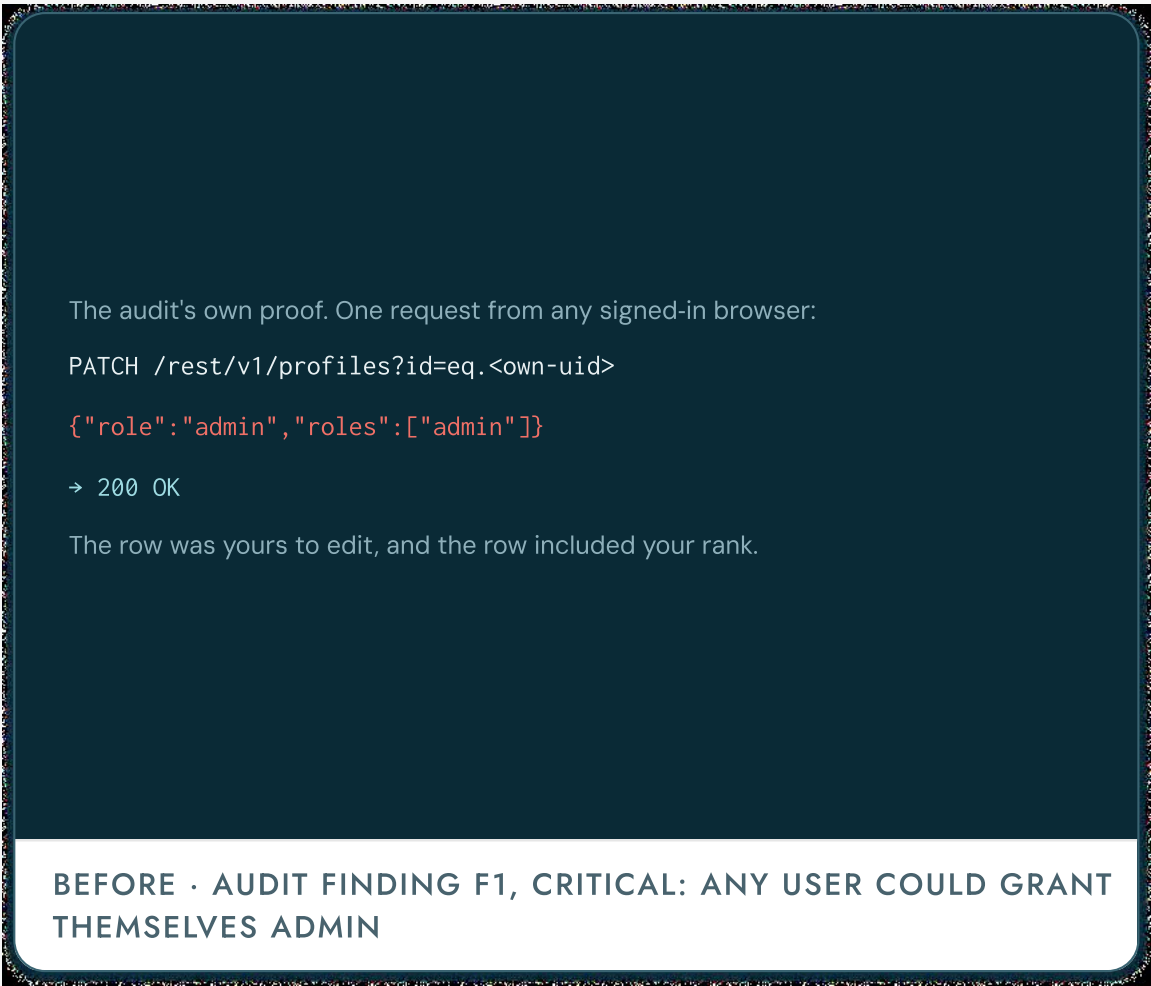
NOBODY HAD EXPLOITED IT · CHECKED

What the audits changed, shown before and after.

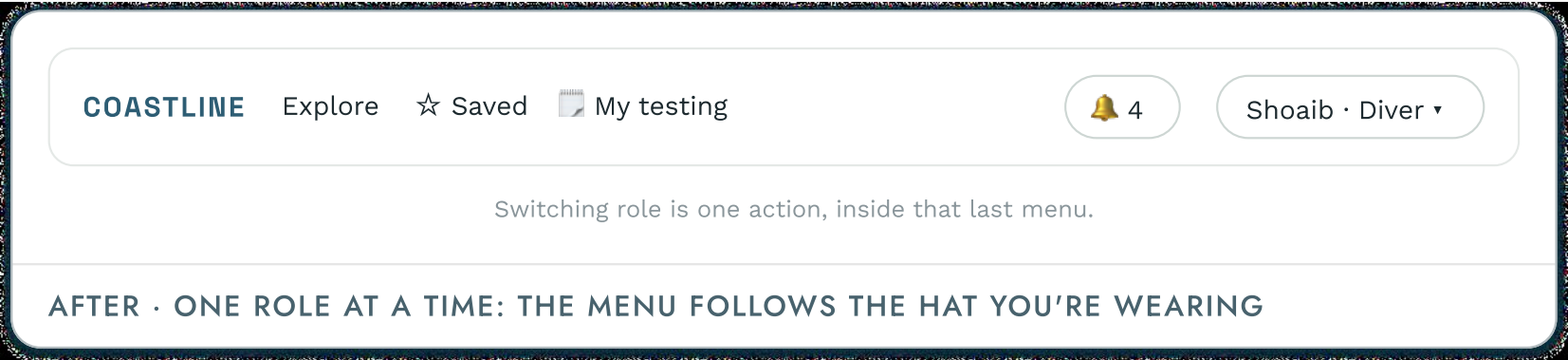
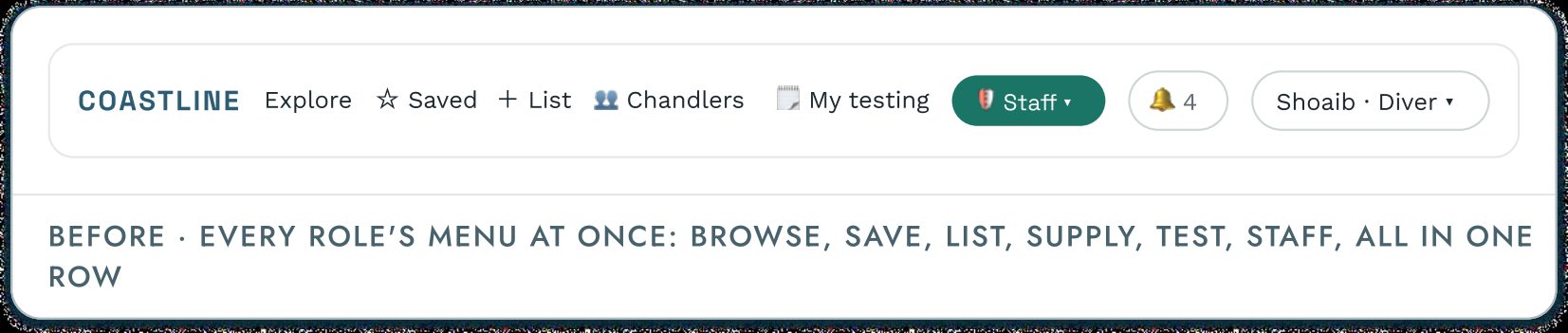
FINDING 1 · THE BROKEN FRONT DOOR



FINDING 2 · THE SELF-MADE ADMIN



FINDING 3 · THE OVERLOADED HEADER



REFUSED, WITH REASONS WRITTEN DOWN

"Add a pop-up to that silent button." Refused: a pop-up fixes one button. A proper button that shows its own busy state fixes every button, for less work. It arrives in Phase 08.



Asking to be told it was wrong.

I reasoned about who owns a row, never about who owns a column.

Three reviewers were given the platform with instructions to be unkind, before a single ordinary user saw it. That sequencing was deliberate and I would repeat it.

An expert can tell you that something is structurally wrong. A user can only tell you that something felt wrong to them. Both are necessary, and the expert one is cheaper to act on because it arrives with a diagnosis attached.

The second reviewer's method is the one worth stealing. They saw only the live site on a phone, with no code and no explanation from me, which is the closest a briefed expert can get to arriving cold.

The sharpest finding was not technical. It was that a creator's first act on this platform is showing their real costs to strangers, before the platform has earned that.

It helps suppliers to quote against, verify the cost price and shows the trust a creator has on the users. It shapes every trust decision that follows, and it is still the hardest question anyone can ask about the idea.

The security finding was the more humbling one. Any signed-in person could grant themselves administrator rights, because the row was theirs to edit and the row included their rank. I had reasoned carefully about who owns a row and not at all about who owns a column inside it. That distinction now runs through the whole database, and I only have it because I asked somebody to look for what I could not see.

PHASE 08

DESIGN SYSTEM

61

HAND-MADE PRIMARY BUTTONS,
EACH SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT

36

HAND-MADE OUTLINE BUTTONS

101

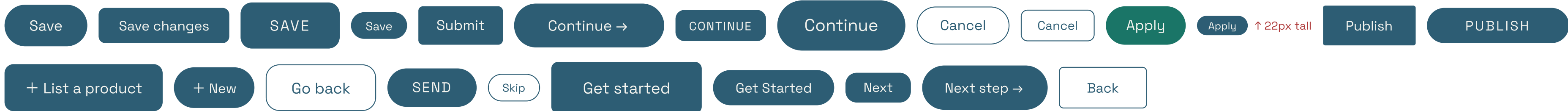
HAND-MADE BOXES

1

SHARED, REUSABLE STYLE
IN THE WHOLE APP

Building fast had a hidden cost: every button was invented fresh, on the spot. Counting them made the problem visible, and countable problems get fixed.

Eight different sizes of the "same" button. Some too small to tap on a phone. No single piece was wrong. **The absence of a system was wrong.** The fix: build each part properly, once, and reuse it everywhere.

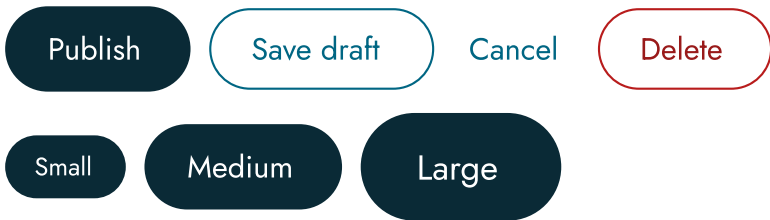


A SAMPLE OF THE SIXTY-ONE, AT THEIR TRUE RELATIVE SIZES: SAME JOB, TWENTY COSTUMES. THE FIX IS THE NEXT PAGE: ONE BUTTON, BUILT ONCE.

Five parts, made once, used everywhere.

The button

Four looks, three sizes. Even the smallest fits a thumb. Choosing a look is now required.



The submit button

Knows when the app is busy and shows it. Every action that saves something uses this one. (One screen skipped it. That story is Phase 14.)



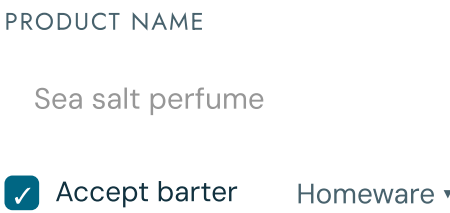
The card

The box, drawn once. The long fight was getting 90-odd hand-made boxes to switch over.



Form fields

Inputs, checkboxes and dropdowns with matching labels: the plain grey default can't come back.



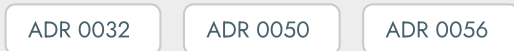
Numbers & badges

Stats and status labels with fixed ranks. House rule: if everything is a badge, nothing is.



Written down

Each part's rules live in a decision log, so the next person (or the next AI session) reuses instead of reinventing.



List a product

WHAT ARE YOU TESTING?

Tidal Ceramics Starter Set

Home & Living ▾ £11.65

Cost breakdown

Stoneware clay	£4.10
🔒 Hidden ingredient	—

☒ Accept barter Publish

THE PARTS IN USE · ONE FORM, BUILT ENTIRELY FROM THE FIVE

The honest lesson: the system is good, and it arrived after the mess, not before it. The right moment was the third screen, when the repetition first became visible and fixing it was still an afternoon's work.

Countable problems get fixed.

No single button was wrong. The absence of a system was.

Sixty-one primary buttons, thirty-six outline buttons, a hundred and one boxes, and one shared style in the entire application.

I did not know those numbers until I counted, and the counting is the part of this phase that mattered. Before it, the problem was a feeling that the interface was slightly untidy. After it, the problem was a number, and a number can be argued with, tracked and closed.

No single button was wrong. Eight sizes of the same button, some too small for a thumb, and each one defensible on the day it was written. The absence of a system was the defect, and no individual review of any individual screen would ever have found it.

The route to it is the part I want to remember. The second auditor did not report a missing design system. They reported a plain dropdown here, a silent button there, a control that did not look pressable.

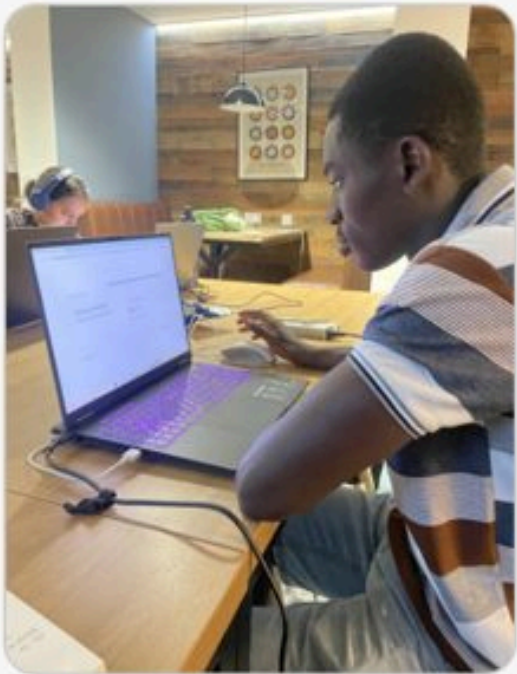
Reading those as separate complaints would have produced a list of small fixes and no change. Reading them as one problem wearing many costumes produced this phase.

That is a skill I did not have at the start of the project and do have now: treating a scatter of small symptoms as evidence of one cause, and resisting the urge to close them one at a time because closing them feels like progress.

PHASE 09

USABILITY TESTING I

Four people who'd never seen it, one live build, no pitch, no help.



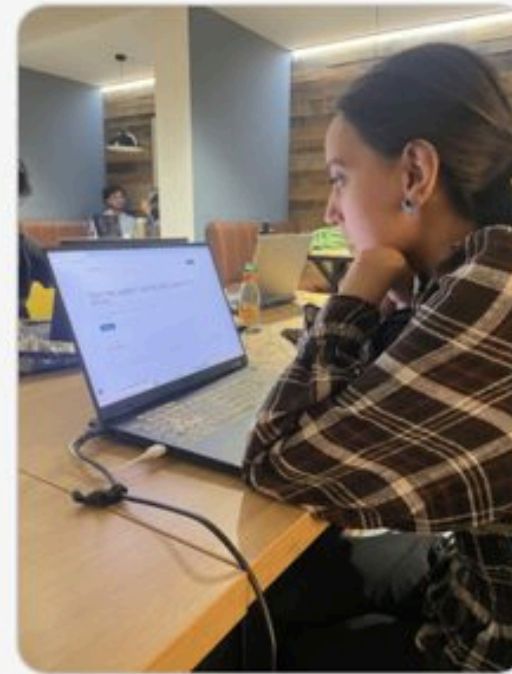
Session · P1

MA Product Design student · listed graphic-design work in "Other"



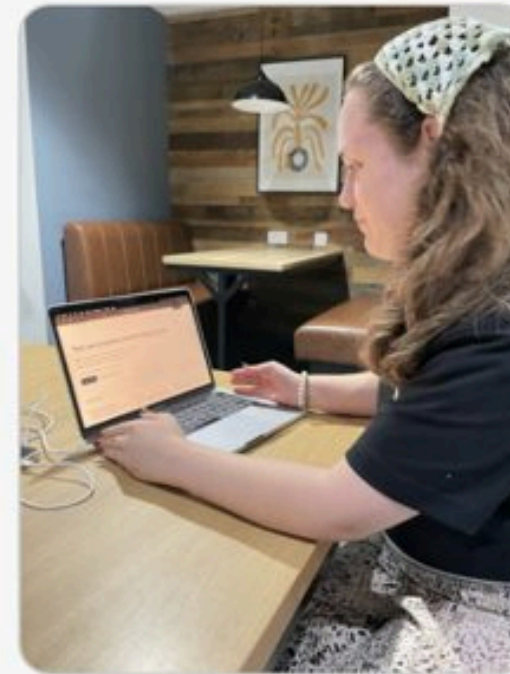
Session · P2

MA Architecture student · walked both sides of the loop



Session · P3

MA Interior Design student · pressed Enter and the onboarding mis-submitted



Session · P4

MA student · the location test

HOW IT WAS RUN, HONESTLY

In person, watching them use the live platform. Everyone started signed out, knowing nothing.

Flaws in the setup were written down too: one interruption came from the test laptop itself, and the notes say "don't 'fix' this; it's not a product fault."

Every moment the moderator helped is marked in the notes, because helping changes what you learn.

The keyboard bug nobody scripted: one tester pressed Enter after typing her name, and the single-form onboarding submitted half-finished and threw an error. Enter now means "next" on every step but the last.

The testers in the photographs: Haris, Jaweria, Ben Holdbrook and Teagan, named with their consent.

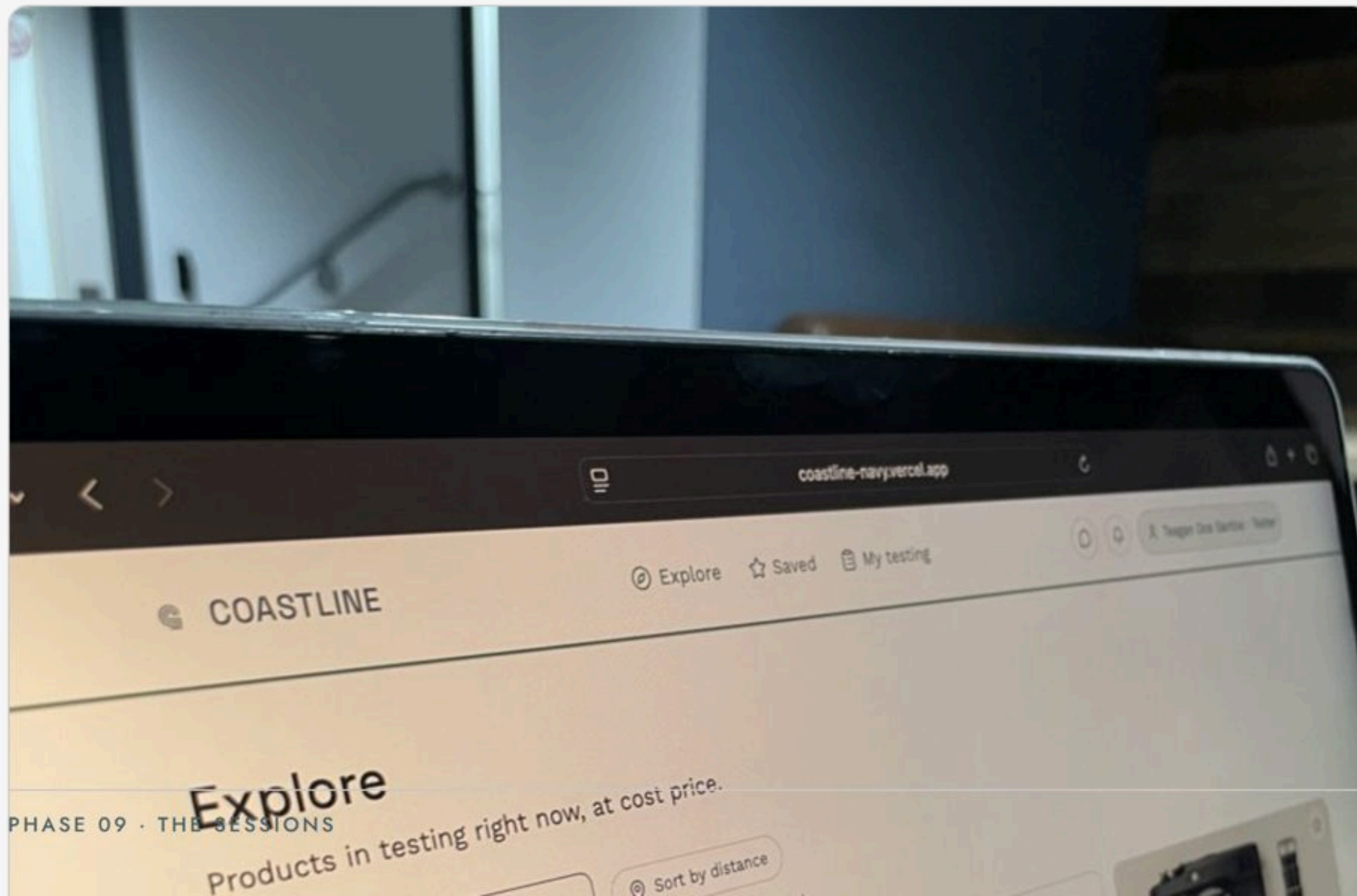
4

SESSIONS

21

PROBLEMS LOGGED

5

BUGS BAD ENOUGH
TO BLOCK FURTHER
TESTING

Three problems showed up in every single session.

3/4

COULDN'T FIND SIGN-UP

The big button said "Get started", and led to a page titled "Sign in." Two of three needed to be rescued. The very first action on the site was failing everyone.

4/4

DIDN'T UNDERSTAND THE IDEA

Nobody realised this was a **testing ground**: everyone read it as a shop. Two makers thought "cost price" was the selling price, and one listed graphic-design work under "Other", a service the platform doesn't take yet, now logged for the roadmap. The site never explained itself in plain words before asking people to act.

3/4

SKIPPED THE READING

All three said a version of "there's too much here and I didn't want to read it." Dangerous, because skimming past today's harmless text trains people to skim past tomorrow's real agreement.

THE RESPONSE

All 21 logged problems were fixed in five focused work sessions, and the fixes are the next page, shown before → after with real screenshots.

AND ONE OF ONE

One tester read the palette as clinical, like a hospital. One comment is not a pattern, so nothing was redesigned. Instead the question went into the script for every remaining session, with a decision threshold agreed in advance. **A pattern changes the design. A single comment changes the protocol.** Status: held, measuring.

The fixes, shown on the real screens.

SIGNING IN

BEFORE

SIGN IN

No password: we'll email you a link that signs you in.

Continue with Google

Continue with LinkedIn

or with email

Email

you@example.com

Send sign-in link

Prefer a password? [Sign in with a password](#) or [create an account](#).

AFTER

SIGN IN

⚠️ That sign-in link didn't work. Request a new one below

Continue with Google

Create an account

or sign in with a password

Email

you@example.com

Password

Sign in

What changed and why: email-only links kept failing on phones (a link opened in the wrong browser dies). Passwords came back, account creation became its own clear button, and the error message now explains itself in one sentence.

CHOOSING YOUR ROLES

BEFORE

Your name

Jamie Okafor

I'm here as a...

Maker

I'm listing a product to test before I commit to production.

Diver

I want to test products and give feedback.

Chandler

I supply materials and want to quote on products.

Investor

I want evidence-led access to validated products.

One solid card, three quiet ones: it reads as "pick one." Nothing says you can pick several.

AFTER

I'm here as a... Pick as many as apply.

✓ Maker

I'm listing a product to test before I commit to production.

✓ Diver

I want to test products and give feedback.

✓ Chandler

I supply materials and want to quote.

Needs a quick verification step: you'll go there next.

✓ Investor

I want evidence-led access.

Needs admin approval: you'll request access next.

Before you continue

Coastline Platform Agreement

COASTLINE-PLATFORM · Version 1.0-demo · scroll to the end to accept

What changed and why: people didn't realise they could pick more than one role: the cards looked like an either/or choice. Ticks made multi-choice visible before clicking. And the roles that need approval now say so in words, with a lock and a tick when chosen, because one symbol was doing two jobs.

PHASE 09 · BEFORE → AFTER

38

Nobody understood the ocean words.

Remember Tide, Pearls, Diver, Chandler from Phase 02? Each was clever, each had a reason, and not one of the three test users could work out what any of them meant. So they all went.

Tide
credits

Pearl
insight

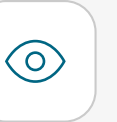
Diver
Tester

Chandler
Supplier

"A name that only its author can read is decoration, whatever it is attached to."

PROJECT NOTES

The app itself had already voted: the menu said "Diver," but **about ninety-six sentences of everyday copy said "tester"**, because whenever writing got hard, the invented word got dropped. And "Chandler" is a real trade word. That was true every time it was said. It just wasn't the point: a role nobody can name is a role nobody picks.



The app had already voted.

Signed and Sealed

Three people, and the same three failures in every session. Nobody could find sign-up, nobody understood what the place was for, and everybody skipped the reading.

The vocabulary is the part that stings. Diver, Chandler, Tide, Pearl were mine, they were reasoned, and not one participant could decode a single one. I had spent a phase building a world and the world was unreadable.

What made the decision easy in the end was not the sessions. It was noticing that the application had already voted. The menu said Diver and about ninety-six sentences of ordinary copy said tester, because every time the writing got difficult the invented word quietly got dropped.

That is the finding I would take to any project. When a team keeps working around its own convention, the convention has already lost, and the record of that is sitting in the work rather than in anyone's opinion.

I also want to defend how the sessions were recorded. Every moment I helped somebody is marked in the notes, because helping changes what you learn and hiding it would have made the results look better than they were. One interruption came from the test laptop, and the notes say plainly that this is not a product fault and should not be fixed.

Writing down the flaws in your own method is uncomfortable and it is the only thing that makes the rest of the notes worth reading. Three participants is a small number. Being precise about what happened is how a small number stays honest.

PHASE 10

NAMING · THE TRIGGER

An expert tested it, and rejected the way it looked.

Deb Jayaprakash ran technical operations in a working chocolate factory: Artisan du Chocolat, in Ashford. He tested the platform in its CoastLine form. The mechanics held up. The interface did not.

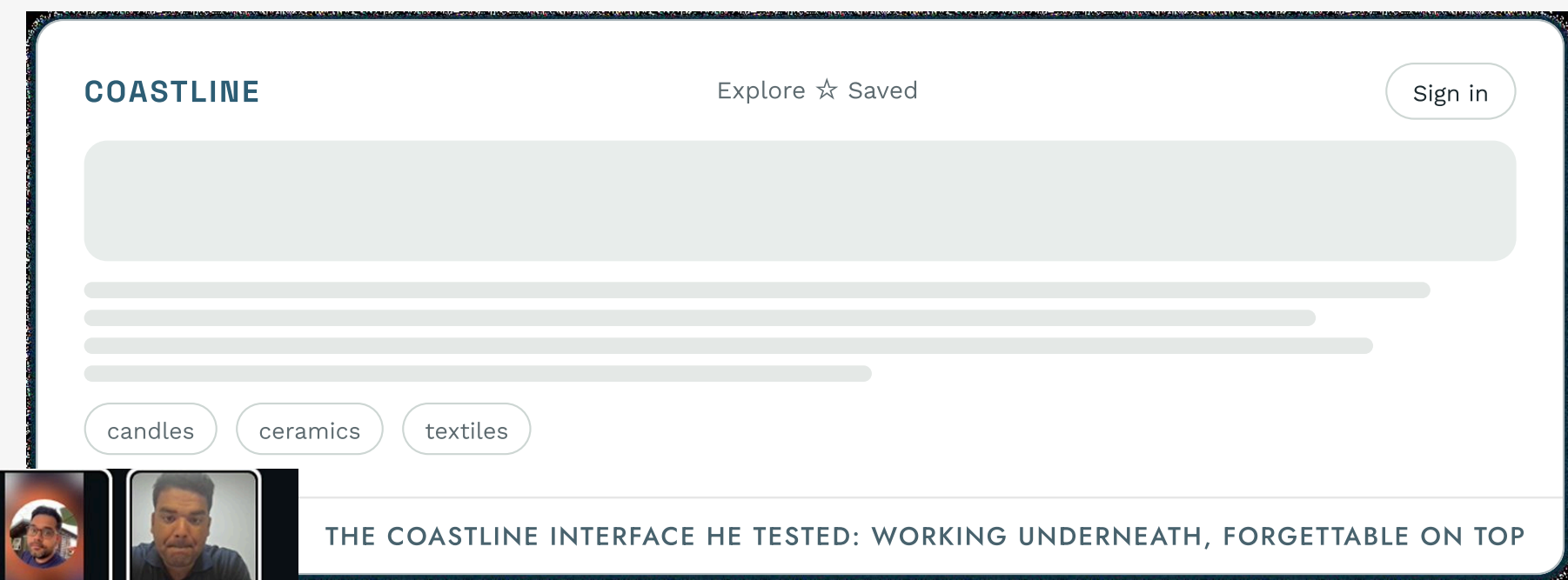
"Zero impression."

HIS DIAGNOSIS OF THE COASTLINE INTERFACE, FROM THE PROJECT RECORD

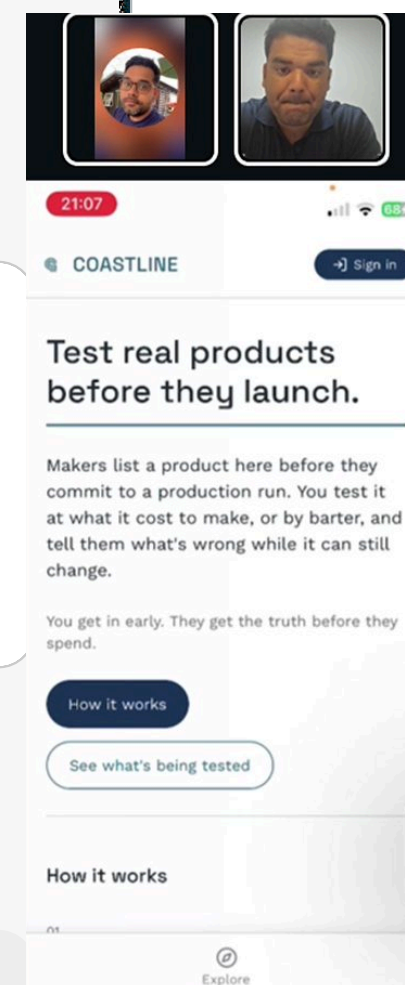
WHAT THAT ONE CRITIQUE SET OFF

This is the documented trigger for the entire rebrand. The incubator positioning, the calmer interface and the Venval identity all trace back to one expert's honest feedback, taken seriously. The next three steps of this document are the response.

The platform's thesis, enacted on the platform. Venval exists so honest expert feedback can change a product while it can still change. Here the product was the platform itself, the expert owed it nothing, and the product changed.

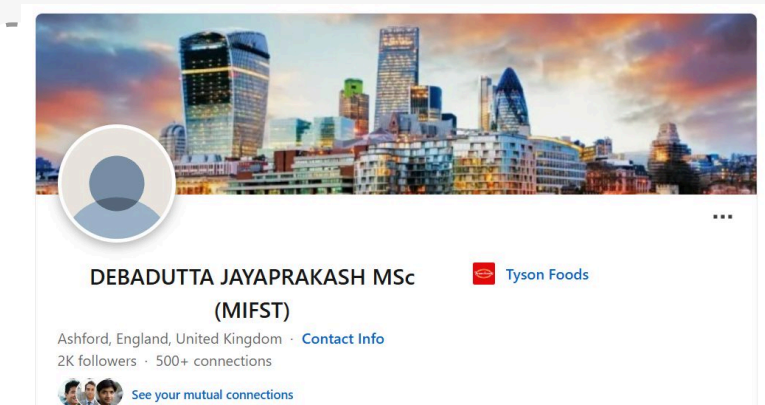


THE COASTLINE INTERFACE HE TESTED: WORKING UNDERNEATH, FORGETTABLE ON TOP



Deb's session · the platform on his own phone

A frame from the recorded call



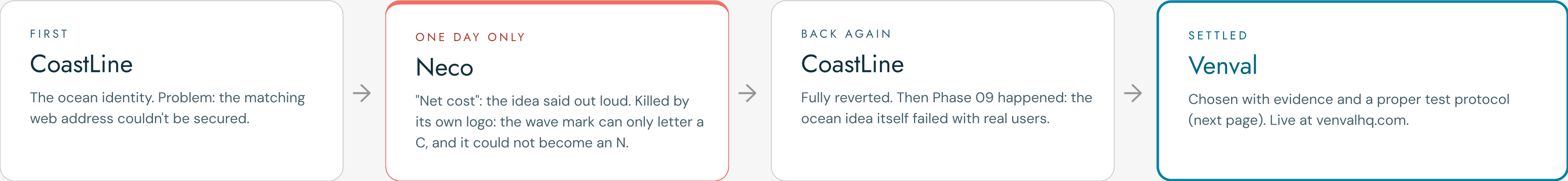
Deb Jayaprakash · LinkedIn bio

Profile screenshot, for reviewer context

THE QUESTION HIS TRADE OPENED

A factory technical manager thinks in consumables, and consumables drag in safety rules, allergens and shelf life. Whether food products belong on the platform at all is held as an **open category decision**: written down, deliberately not guessed at.

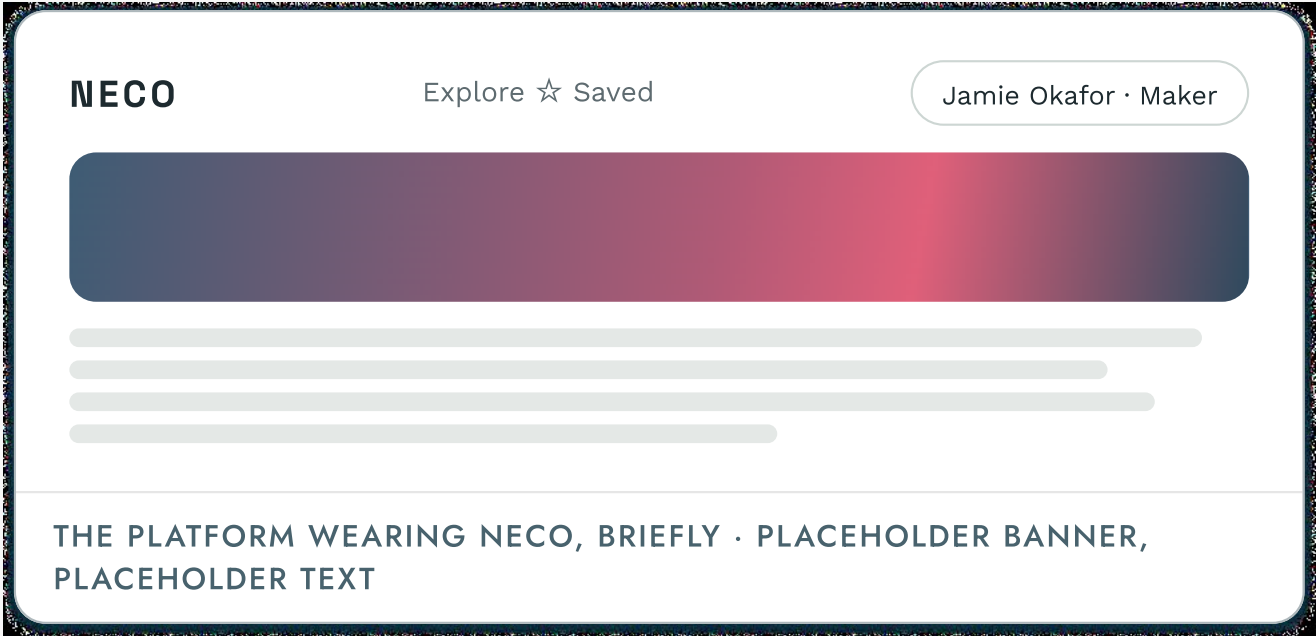
The name moved three times. Only the last move had evidence.



"Names should be the output of watching people use the thing, not an input."

THE LESSON, FROM THE PROJECT'S OWN RETROSPECTIVE

What renaming really costs: a name lives in the logo, the web address, the database, and hundreds of sentences. One useful thing survived the Neco day: it exposed "Test Dive" as a silly label, and "Apply to test" outlived the name that found it.



PHASE 10

NAMING · THE PROTOCOL

Five candidates. One test. Four Strikes.

Every candidate ran the same gauntlet: say it aloud and spell it from hearing · search the UK trade mark register · search Companies House · check the domain. Taste never decided. The protocol did.

Vendtor

Reads as a typo of "vendor." Fails the spelling test.

Ventor

Great sound, already taken. Live companies, crowded register.

Ventore

Unsayable, unspellable, and it contains an orc.

Venvalid

One glance from "invalid": the worst word a validation platform could echo.

Venval

Two syllables, one spelling, empty register, empty search page. Survived every check.

VENVAL

Ven

venture, invention: the people who make things and take risks on them

Val

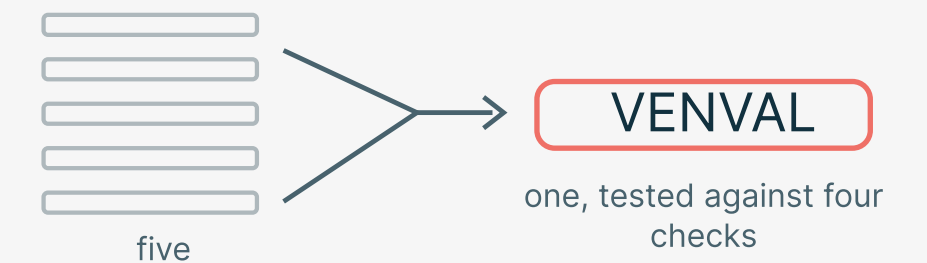
validation, value: the thing this platform exists to produce

34 near-matches reviewed on the UK trade mark register: none confusingly similar in the platform's categories. Trading name: Venval Incubator.



The thesis, turned on itself.

A name should come out of watching people, not go in before them.



An expert tested the platform and rejected the way it looked. Zero impression, in his words. Everything in the three phases that follow traces back to that sentence.

The uncomfortable thing is that this is exactly what the platform claims to do for other people. Venval exists so honest expert feedback can change a product while it can still change. Here the product was the platform, the expert was a chocolate factory's technical operations lead, and the feedback was unwelcome and correct.

I could have defended the identity. It was coherent, it was mine, and it had a whole phase of reasoning behind it. Taking the criticism seriously instead is the single decision this project turned on.

The naming that followed is where I tried hardest not to trust myself. Five candidates, and every one of them ran the same gauntlet: say it aloud and spell it back, search the trade mark register, search Companies House, check the domain.

Four died on the protocol rather than on taste. One reads as a typo of vendor. One is already taken. One is unsayable. One sits a single glance from the word invalid, which is the worst thing a validation platform could echo.

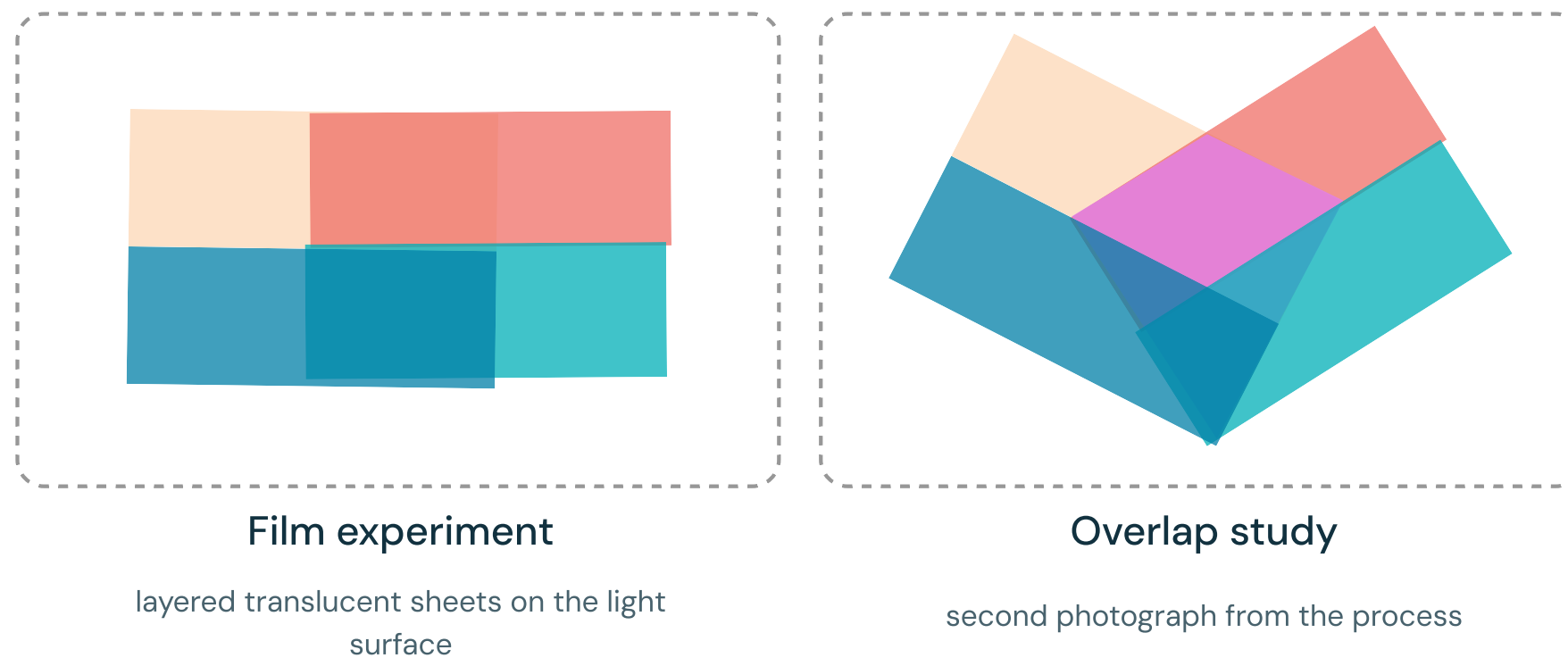
The name had moved three times before this and only the last move had evidence behind it. That is the lesson written into the phase and I would put it more plainly here: a name should be the output of watching people use the thing, not an input you commit to before anyone has.

PHASE 11

VENVAL IDENTITY

The new mark began as light through film.

It wasn't drawn on a screen first. Sheets of translucent coloured film were layered on a light surface and photographed as they overlapped. The discovery underneath the whole identity: **the deepest colour always appears where everything overlaps.** The most valuable thing isn't any single shape: it's what forms where the shapes meet.



PHASE 11

VENVAL IDENTITY · SHAPING IT

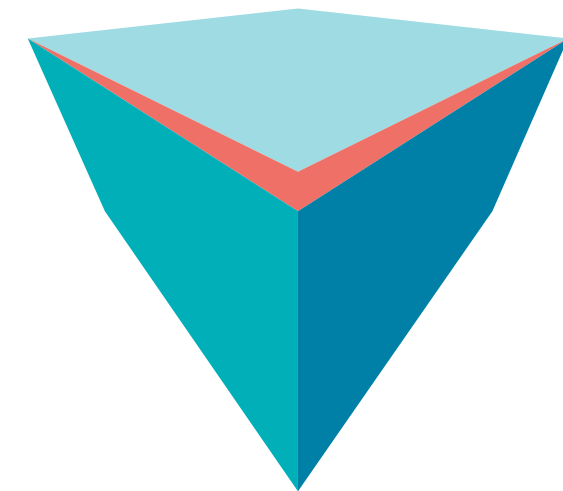
Every rejected shape taught the next one something.



Try 1: converging triangles. Right idea: everything drives to one point. Wrong silhouette: squinted, it grew ears.



Try 2: the open vessel. The lid lifted, the inside exposed. Too unstable as a logo, but kept, and later promoted to the official "open" icon.

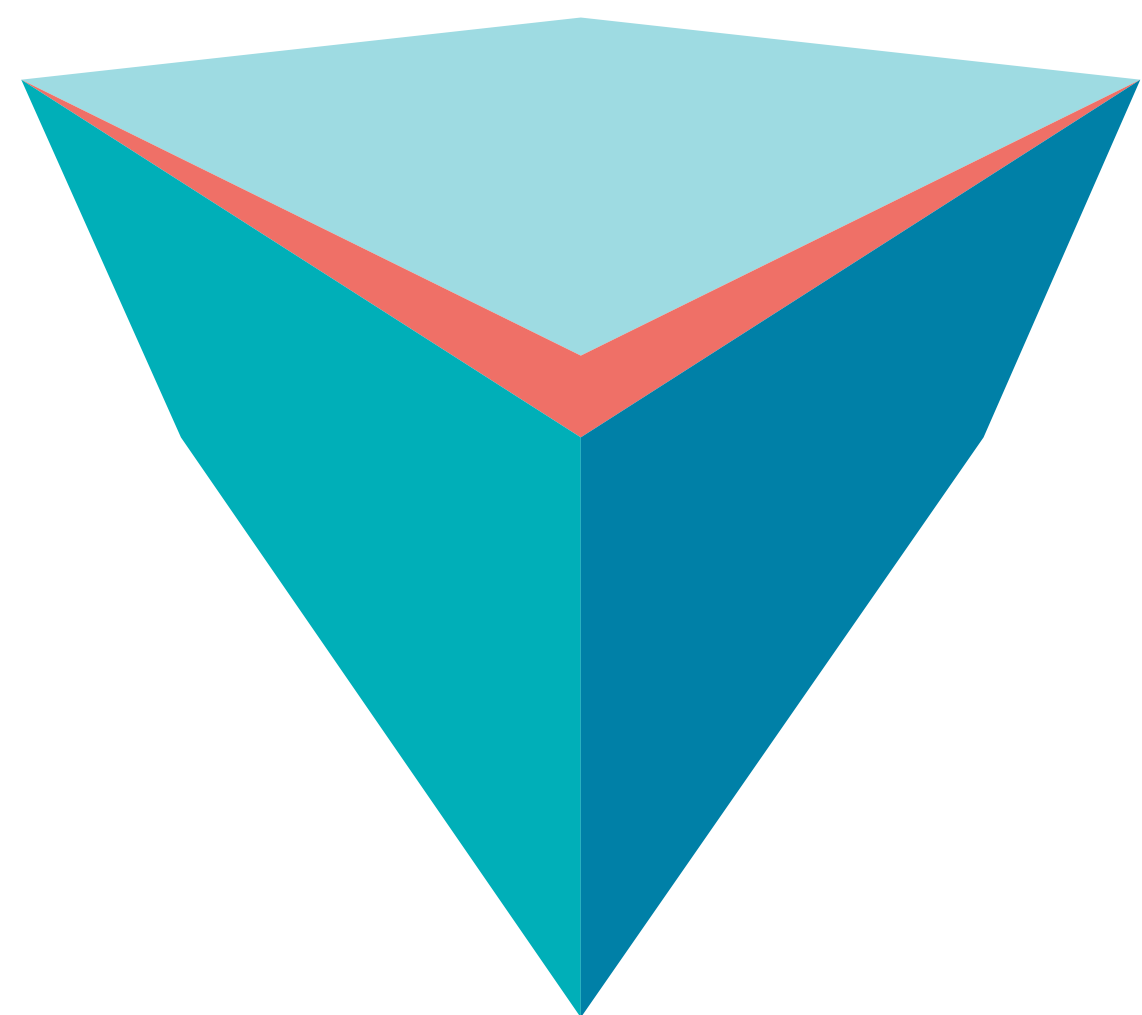


The vessel. Solid, closed, one seam of light escaping. The overlap idea from the film experiments, kept, and made permanent.

Sketch three was rejected and still improved sketch two. The rejections are the process.

PHASE 11

VENVAL IDENTITY · THE MARK



VENVAL

Four roles, one vessel.

The mark is a map of the platform. Each face is one of the four kinds of people, and they only make a vessel together.

-  The lid · Tester · lets the light in
-  The seam · Creator, and trust
-  The left wall · Supplier
-  The right wall · Investor

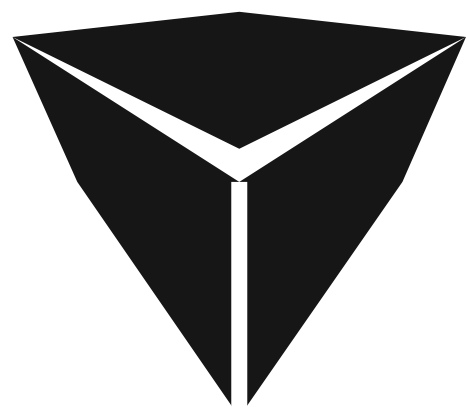
The coral V is the whole idea. The seam of the mark is also the second V of the name: the same shape twice. That's what makes logo and word read as one object. And in one line, for when someone asks: a vessel with something precious inside.

On screen it assembles like a story: the coral seam appears first and never moves; the walls slide in to meet it; the lid closes last. About 2.5 seconds, once.

PHASE 11

VENVAL IDENTITY · RULES & COLOUR

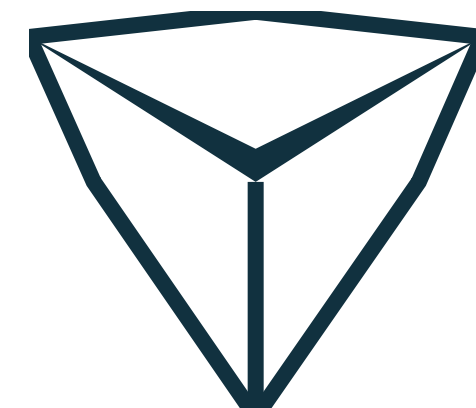
One mark, every situation, and a palette taken from the mark itself.



One colour on light: the seam is **cut out**, never filled over. A silhouette missing the seam is not the mark.



Same two elements on dark, inverted.



The smallest reduction: outline, seam, structure. Three elements, full meaning.

EVERY COLOUR ON SCREEN IS THE MARK, DILUTED OR DEEPENED



Rule one: nothing is written on a brand colour. None of the four accents is dark enough to carry readable text, in either direction. Words get darkened text versions, each checked against every background they sit on.

Rule two: a role colour never means "click me." Selected, hovered and linked things get their own colour, outside the four. Otherwise every highlight would look like a claim about a person.

Rule three: a silhouette missing the seam or the centre edge is not the mark. None of these rules was written in advance. Each was written after a violation was caught in review, and neutrals derive from the mark, not from habit.

Three tiers of type, and the top one is not a font.

1 · THE NAME

VENVAL

VENVAL is never typed. It's drawn. The letters exist only as outlines, so the name can never render in the wrong font. (Earlier, the menu typed the name in a lookalike font: the site was showing an approximation of its own logo.)

2 · HEADINGS

Jost
for headings, labels, numbers

From the same geometric family tree as the logo letters, so a heading and the logo sound like **one voice**.

3 · READING

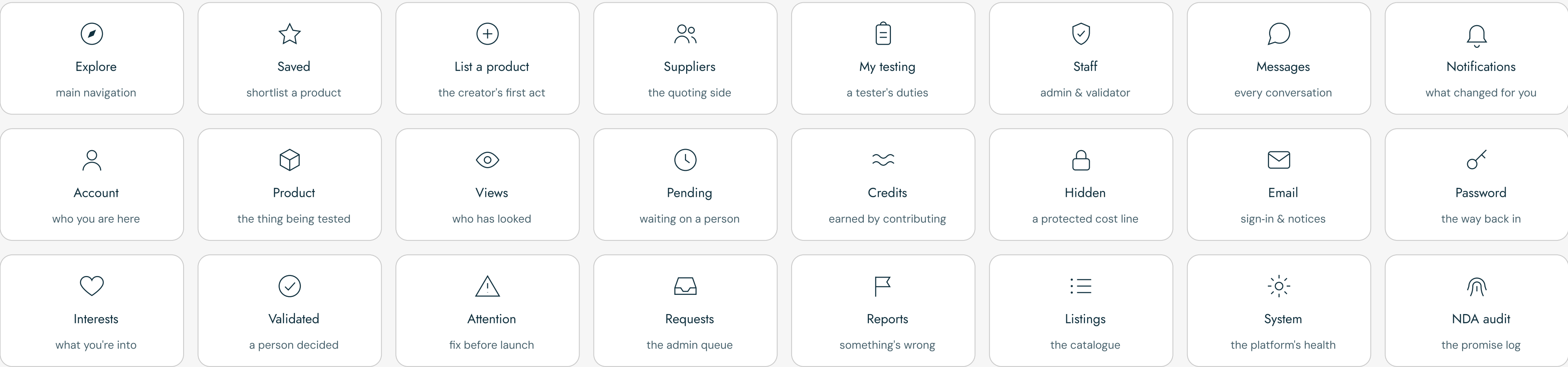
DM Sans
for everything you actually read

Calm and easy at small sizes. The one face that survived every rebrand untouched.

Two logo sizes, two jobs: the big mark-dominant version belongs on covers and posters; the menu gets its own smaller balance. Shrinking the big one down gives a mark that shouts and a word that vanishes.

Every icon in the platform, and none of them works alone.

One consistent line-icon set, one weight, no fills. The rule came straight from user testing: an icon never appears without its word: a brand-new product gives people no icon vocabulary to guess from.



Three rules: one stroke weight, everywhere · an icon always sits beside its word, never instead of it · the exception that proves it: a lock with no label is allowed only after its meaning was taught with words first.

It started on a light table.

The rejections are where the next thing came from.

The mark was not drawn on a screen. Sheets of translucent coloured film were layered on a lit surface and photographed where they overlapped.

I did that because I had just watched an identity fail, and I did not trust myself to draw my way out of it. Working with translucent material meant the process could produce something I had not already decided on.

It did. The discovery underneath the whole identity is that the deepest colour always appears where everything overlaps. The most valuable thing is not any single shape. It is what forms where the shapes meet, and that is a description of the platform as much as of an image.

The shaping is worth reading as a sequence rather than a result. The first attempt was converging triangles, right in idea and wrong in silhouette, because squinted at it grew ears. The second was an open vessel, too unstable to be a logo and later promoted to the official open icon.

The third is the mark. A rejection that could not be used as a logo became a permanent part of the icon set, so the rejections are not waste, they are where the next thing comes from.

The part I am proudest of is that the mark is a map of the platform. Four faces, four kinds of person, and they only make a vessel together. The coral seam is the second V of the name, so the logo and the word are the same shape twice. That is the identity carrying an argument rather than decorating one.

PHASE 12

VISUAL REFINEMENT

Ten complete looks were designed.
The winner was none of them.

The Record

A listing as a filed document, on warm paper.

SUPERSEDED

Open Water

Soft pastel washes per role.

"SAFE, LOOKS LIKE EVERY APP"

Night Swell

Dark, one electric mint.

"SHOUTS PLASTIC"

Signal Flag

Harbour noticeboard, one orange.

"SOLD SHOPPING"

Drawing Office

Engineering sheet, checker's red.

REJECTED

Soundings

The listing as the creator's open question.

IDEA KEPT

The Brief

Confidential papers, pink tape.

IDEA KEPT

The Forecast

Shipping-forecast terseness.

"INVENTED NUMBERS"

Open Studio

Work does the talking; masking-tape accent.

"BORING"

First Crew

"You don't need big backing. You need ten honest people."

FINAL CANDIDATE

The verdict, after all ten: the live app was already the right foundation. What it needed wasn't a new skin: it was three small fixes. They're the next page. One test every direction had to pass: look right with **one** listing on screen, not twelve, because a young platform is mostly empty.

PHASE 12

VISUAL REFINEMENT · THREE SMALL FIXES

Not a redesign. Three fixes.

1 · THE CARD STOPS SHOUTING

BEFORE

No photo yet

TOOLSET MAGNETIC BELT

All your handy tools in one place, you wont lose that 10mm now!

Haris Khalid

° Canterbury, Kent

£25.00

COST PRICE

Automotive

Barter OK

Eight elements. A title in capitals: five of these per screen reads as shouting.

AFTER

Photo to follow

Toolset magnetic belt

Haris Khalid · Canterbury

£25

its making cost

5 places left

Five elements, sentence case. The detail moved one tap deeper, where detail belongs.

2 · SWITCHING ROLE BECOMES AN EVENT

BEFORE

SWITCH ROLE

Creator

Diver

Account

Sign out

Changing who you are: filed between "Account" and "Sign out."

AFTER

Switching role

Creator

Diver

Now

Its own sheet: each role a big card with its colour, word, and one line of purpose.

3 · PARAGRAPHS BECOME A LINE + A HINT

BEFORE

✓ VALIDATED ON COASTLINE

Products that came through testing and carry a validation history: who tested them, what changed, and why. No longer at cost price, and not looking for testers.

AFTER

Validated

Came through testing. Not at cost price, not taking testers.

i

What a validation history holds

The rule: anything you must know to avoid a mistake stays visible. Everything else waits behind a labelled hint.

PHASE 12

VISUAL REFINEMENT · THE BACKGROUND

The background looked lovely and was quietly hurting the text.

The first Venval pages sat on a pale blue-tinted paper, derived beautifully from the logo's own colours. The problem: the ink is also blue. Blue text on blue-ish paper loses some of its colour contrast, and standard accessibility checkers cannot see it, because they only measure light-vs-dark, not colour-vs-colour.

Aa

Try 1: warm sand. Inherited, felt like beige template. Retired.

Aa

Try 2: blue-tinted. Beautiful logic, weakened the ink.

Aa

Final: pure grey. Same brightness, zero tint. The ink keeps all its colour.

HOW THE FIX WAS MADE SAFE

Each grey was matched to its predecessor's exact **brightness**, so every existing contrast measurement stayed valid, and only the tint changed. Then 305 colour pairings across the app were re-measured. **Zero got worse.**

The catch, found honestly: the blue tint had also been quietly separating cards from the page. Removing it made edges weaker, so real borders were drawn first, then the paper changed. Order mattered.

The tools all said the page was fine. The eyes said it wasn't. The eyes were right, and then the numbers proved why.



Ten looks to prove one.

A page can pass every test and still be tiring to read.

Ten complete visual directions were designed, and the winner was none of them.

That reads like wasted effort and I do not think it was. The exploration is what produced the verdict: the live application was already the right foundation, and what it needed was not a new skin. There is no way to arrive at that conclusion with confidence without doing the work, and a conclusion reached by exploring is worth more than the same conclusion reached by not bothering.

Several of the directions left something behind. Two ideas were kept, and the rest ruled out territory, which is a real output even when nothing ships.

The background is the finding that has stayed with me longest, and it is directly about eye strain.

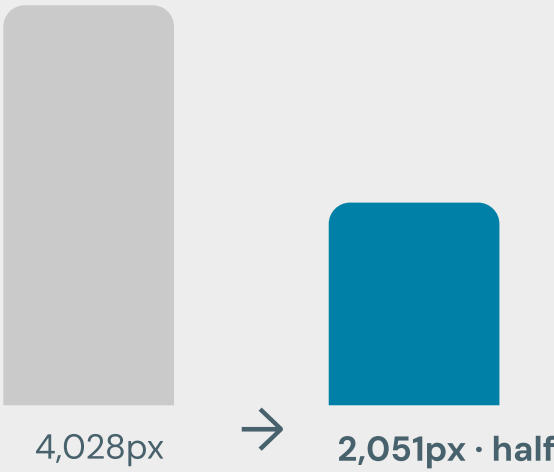
The first Venval pages sat on a pale blue-tinted paper derived from the logo's own colours. The logic was beautiful and the result was harmful, because the ink is also blue. Blue text on blue-ish paper loses colour contrast, and the standard automated checkers cannot see it, because they measure light against dark and not colour against colour.

So a page can pass every accessibility test available and still be tiring to read. The fix was pure grey at exactly the same brightness as the tint it replaced, which meant every existing contrast measurement stayed valid and only the tint changed. Three hundred and five colour pairings were then re-checked. Automated checking is necessary and it is not sufficient, and knowing the shape of what your instruments cannot see is part of using them.

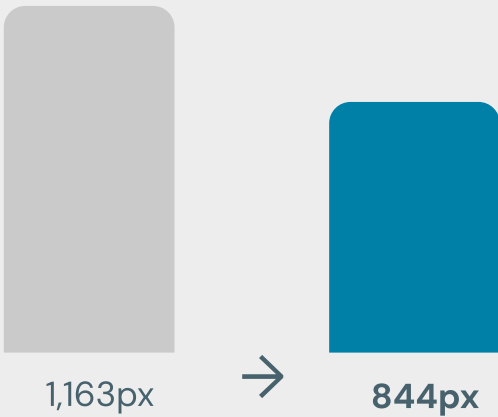
The homepage felt designed. The inside felt dull. The colours were identical.

The difference wasn't colour. It was **structure**. The homepage grouped things with open bands and dividing lines. The inside pages put a four-sided box around everything: **91 boxes** on one flat page. The fix was structural: fewer boxes, more breathing room, and the important thing first.

PRODUCT PAGE HEIGHT

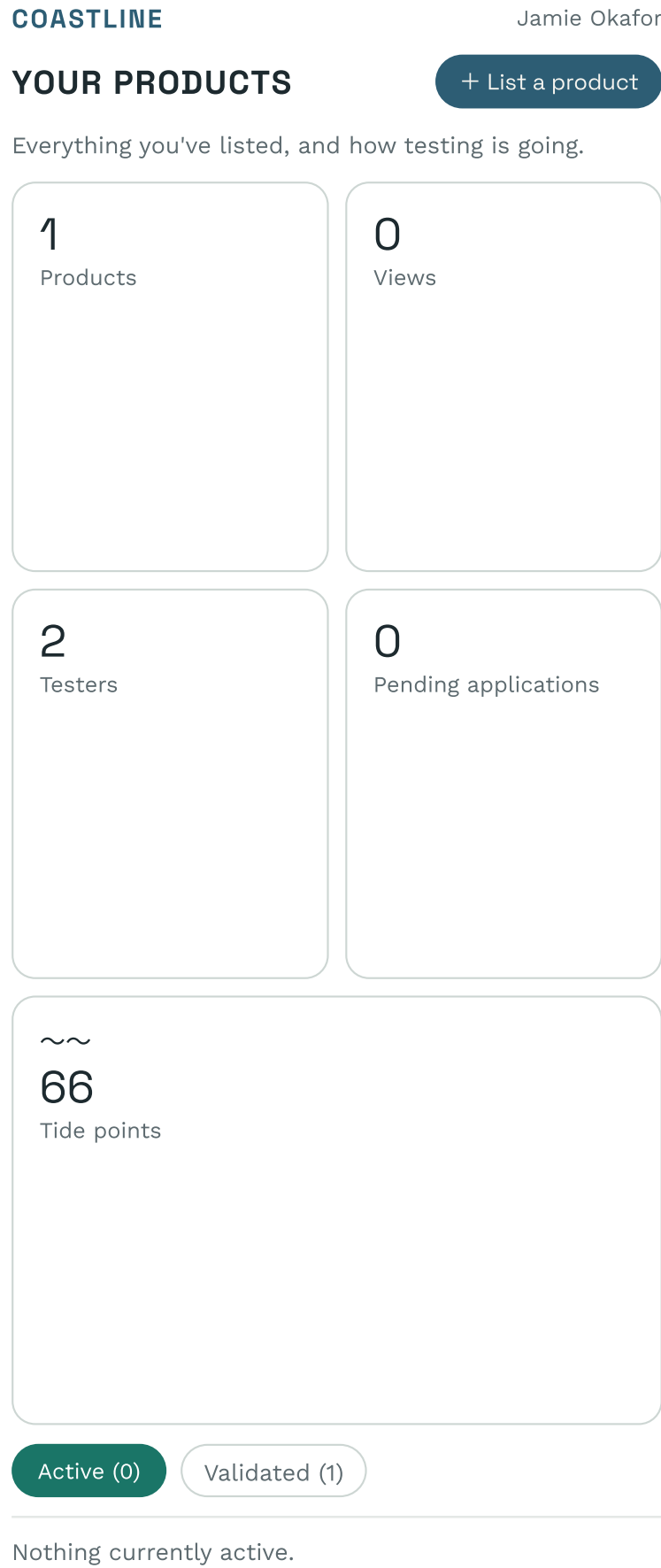


CREATOR DASHBOARD, PHONE



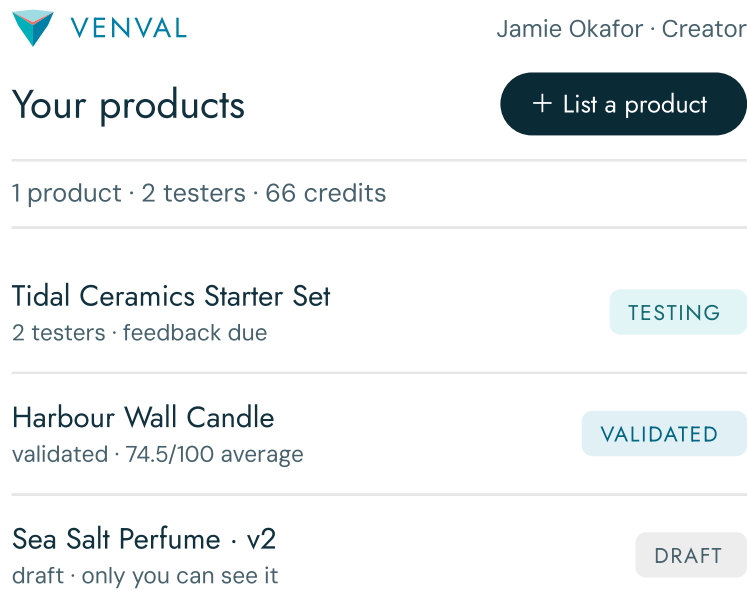
The stat tiles died here too. Your phone screenshot shows the before: five big number tiles, then the actual products below the fold. Now the products come first. A page titled "Your products" that opened with zero products visible was the sentence that killed the tiles.

BEFORE



A full phone screen of tiles · the products below the fold

AFTER



Products first, one quiet stat line · bands and dividers instead of boxes

Everything a thumb can press became big enough for a thumb.

131

CONTROLS TOO SMALL, BEFORE

0

AFTER · EVERY SCREEN
RE-MEASURED

THE TRICK THAT KEPT WORKING

Most small buttons weren't missing space: the space was **next to them**, as padding on the row around them. Move the padding onto the button itself and it grows to a full fingertip size **while the page looks exactly the same**.

"The space was already there. It was just in the wrong element."

And the opposite bug: two text links secretly stretched the full width of the page: a tap in empty space, far from the words, triggered them. Too big is also a defect: it turns a missed tap into a wrong tap.

THE RULE, DRAWN

24px tall

too easy to miss

44px tall

a fingertip fits

44 pixels is roughly a fingertip. Every pressable thing on every page now reaches it, checked by a tool, not by promise: 48 page visits, 1,157 targets measured.

The app is checked by little robots. The robots had to be checked too.

Thirteen small scripts measure the real, rendered app: contrast, tap sizes, broken states. The humbling discovery: a checker can happily report "all clear" about pages it never actually saw.

3

CHECKERS MEASURING THE WRONG PAGE

Pages behind a sign-in redirected the robots to the login screen, which they then measured, for weeks, reporting a reassuring zero.

43 · 53 · 70

THREE COUNTS OF THE SAME THING

A counting script silently skipped 76 files because of one wrong character in a search pattern. A miss and a clean result look identical.

51/51 ✓

PROUDLY GREEN, AND WRONG

The System panel reported all clear, while its checklist had quietly stopped growing. It was answering a question it had stopped asking.

NECO

System · System health

51/51

Migrations applied

0

RLS gaps

4

Emails sent (30d)

BEFORE · "51/51 APPLIED," ALL GREEN, CHECKLIST FROZEN

VENVAL

System · System health

79/99

Migrations applied
20 the schema cannot answer ·
checked by hand

0

RLS gaps

9

Email failures (30d)

AFTER · THE PANEL LEARNED TO ADMIT WHAT IT CAN'T SEE

The only way to trust a checker: break something on purpose, and see whether it notices.



The instruments needed checking too.

A miss and a clean result look identical.

The homepage felt designed and the inside pages felt dull, and the colours on both were identical. The difference was structure.

The homepage grouped things with open bands and dividing lines. The inside pages put a four-sided box around everything, ninety-one boxes on a single flat page. Once I could see it as a structural difference rather than a styling one, the fix was subtraction: fewer boxes, more air, and the important thing first.

The product page went from four thousand pixels tall to two thousand. The creator dashboard lost a third of its height. Nothing was deleted that anyone needed.



The stat tiles are the decision I would defend to anyone. Five large number tiles sat at the top of a page titled Your products, which meant the page opened with no products visible. A page that does not show the thing it is named after has failed regardless of how good the tiles look.

The harder lesson in this phase is about the checking scripts. Thirteen of them measure the real rendered application, and three had been measuring the sign-in screen for weeks, because the pages they wanted were behind a redirect. They reported a reassuring zero the entire time.

A miss and a clean result look identical. I now treat a green check as a claim that itself needs evidence, which is an uncomfortable habit and the correct one.

PHASE 14

USABILITY TESTING II · THE DESTINATION

The destination was at the bottom of the page.

The sessions with Greg Daines went deep: an hour on the creator flow alone, on a recorded call, building a real listing as he went. His sharpest catch was about the first screen anyone sees. The Validated badge, the point of the whole platform, appeared exactly once on the landing page. At the bottom.

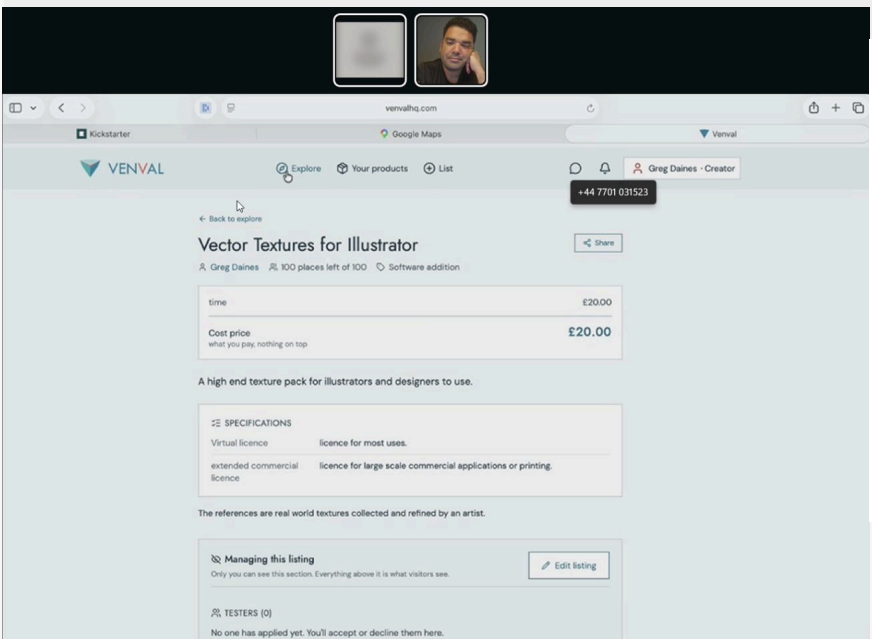
THE CATCH

A first-time visitor could read the headline, weigh the pitch and leave, without ever meeting the thing every product here is working towards. **The story led with the journey and buried the destination.**

THE FIX: THE HERO BADGE CHIP

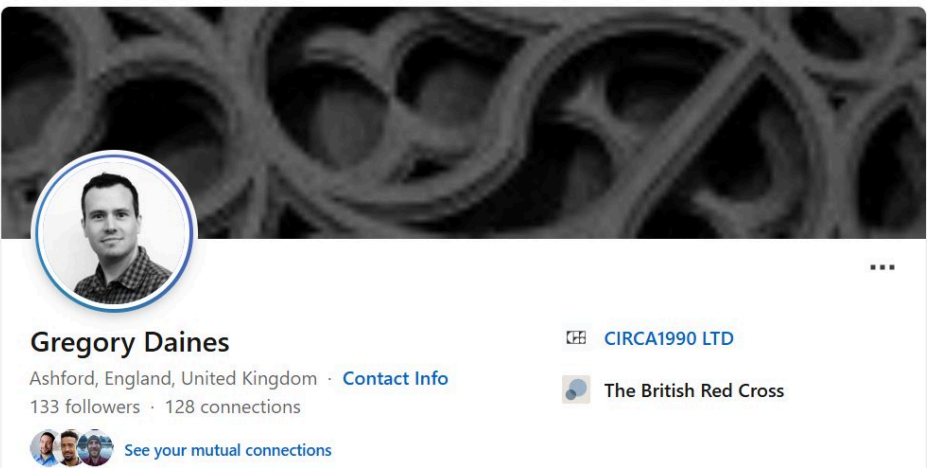
A quiet chip now sits above the headline: the outline vessel with a solid coral seam, and the words "where every product here is heading." The wording is goal-framed on purpose. No product holds the badge yet, so the chip states a destination, not a claim. Stage accuracy, kept even in six words of marketing.

The same lesson, twice, independently. An external review day taught it about presentations in the same season: lead with the destination. Two sources, one rule. That story is a few pages ahead.



Greg's session · building a listing live

A frame from the recorded call



Greg Daines · LinkedIn bio

Profile screenshot

BEFORE

Prove your product before you commit to a batch

Start with your first product

See how it works

VALIDATED · THE GOAL

The badge icon is the mark doing its own job: the outline vessel with the coral seam reads as the vessel and as a tick at once. The later appearances of the badge stay where they were. Destination shown early, explained late, is the intended redundancy.

AFTER

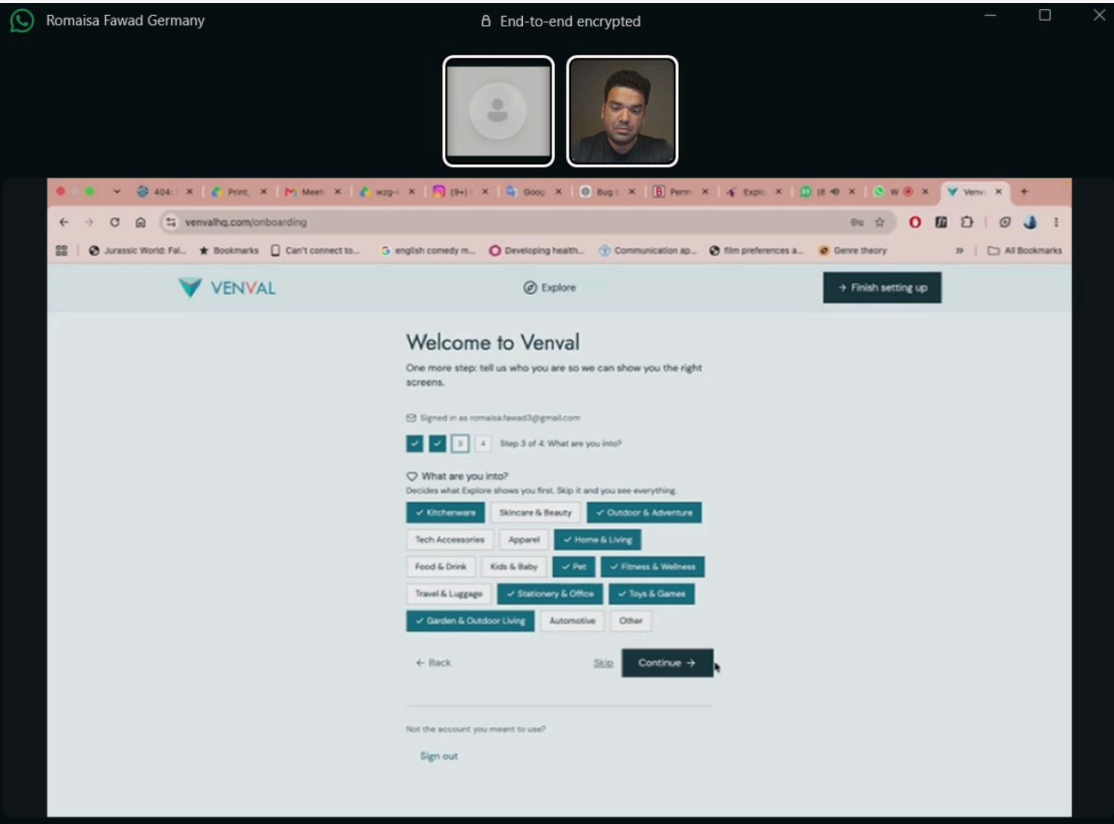
VALIDATED · where every product here is heading

Prove your product before you commit to a batch

Start with your first product

See how it works

A professional designer walks through, and the homepage "sets riddles."



The walkthrough · Romaisa Fawad
Professional UI/UX designer, ~10 years' experience · a frame from her recorded session

```
404: NOT_FOUND
Code: "DEPLOYMENT_NOT_FOUND"
ID: "1hr1:h5hmj-1787081932377-bf58d4603fcf"

This deployment cannot be found. For more information and troubleshooting, see our documentation.
```

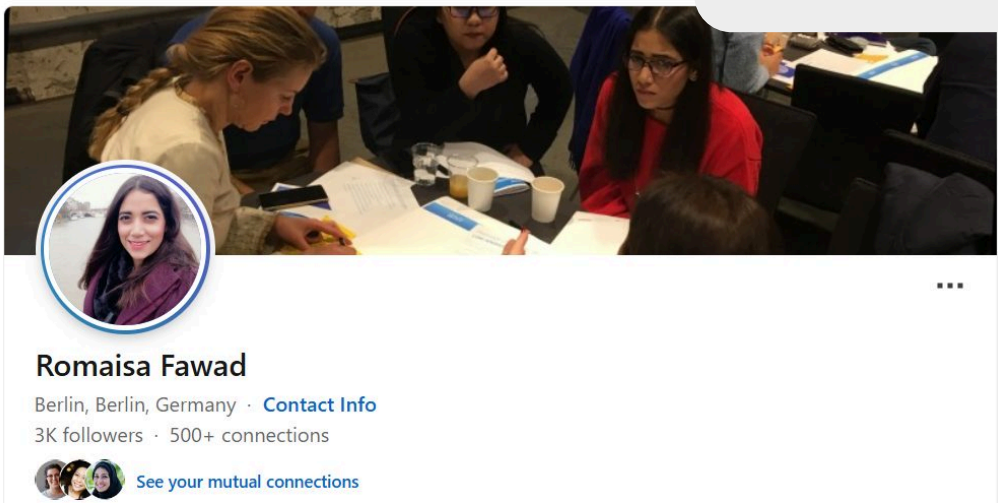
THE FINDING BEHIND THE FINDINGS

This was the **second** time the homepage failed to explain itself, after a rebuild meant to fix exactly that. The first version left no impression; the new one stopped people and then didn't pay off. Different failure, same lesson: the words were treated, the understanding wasn't.

THE SAME MISTAKE, ONE LEVEL UP

"Nobody wears the same hat" had survived the great word-purge because it's an English idiom, not an invented word, **and it failed exactly the same way**. New rule: no invented words, and no idioms either. If a first-time reader can't decode a sentence, it goes.

Checked before fixed: three of her notes looked like missing features and weren't: e.g. picking several roles already worked, it just looked single-choice. Looking first changed what the right fix was, every time.



Romaisa Fawad · LinkedIn bio
Profile screenshot

HER NOTES, WORD FOR WORD

- "The homepage sets riddles"
- "Nobody wears the same hat? What does it mean?"
- "Tester blindsided by... paying"
- "Takes time loading after clicking"

"Blindsided by having to pay": the app told the story with the money missing.

STEP 1 · DECIDING

"Apply to test"

Says nothing about money.

STEP 2 · JUST APPLIED

"Testing starts once the creator hands you the product."

Tells you what happens next, and payment isn't in it. Not silence: a wrong story.

STEP 3 · ACCEPTED

"Accepted. Pay cost price to have it sent."

The first mention of money, after you've committed.



THE FIX: SAY THE NUMBER AT THE MOMENT OF DECIDING

"If the creator accepts, you pay £11.65 : what this costs them to make, with nothing on top."

And the "what happens next" line now includes the paying. A story about your money must never skip the part where you pay.

"Takes time loading": a missing spinner was corrupting a legal record.

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED

On the final step of joining, she clicked **four times** over fifteen seconds, because the button showed nothing while it worked. Each click quietly queued another submission. Result: the log that legally records "this person accepted the agreement" recorded it **four times**.

"The log that exists to be legal evidence was being corrupted by a missing spinner."

THEN THE BUG MEASURED ITSELF

The duplicate entries have timestamps, so they revealed each submission takes about **one second**. The fifteen-second wait wasn't slowness. It was a queue of clicks that should never have existed. The proper busy-showing button (built in Phase 08!) was simply never applied to this one screen: the one screen **every single new user** passes through.

18

SCREENS ALREADY USING THE PROPER BUTTON

49

PLAIN BUTTONS THAT NEVER GOT IT

1

OF THEM WAS THE FRONT DOOR

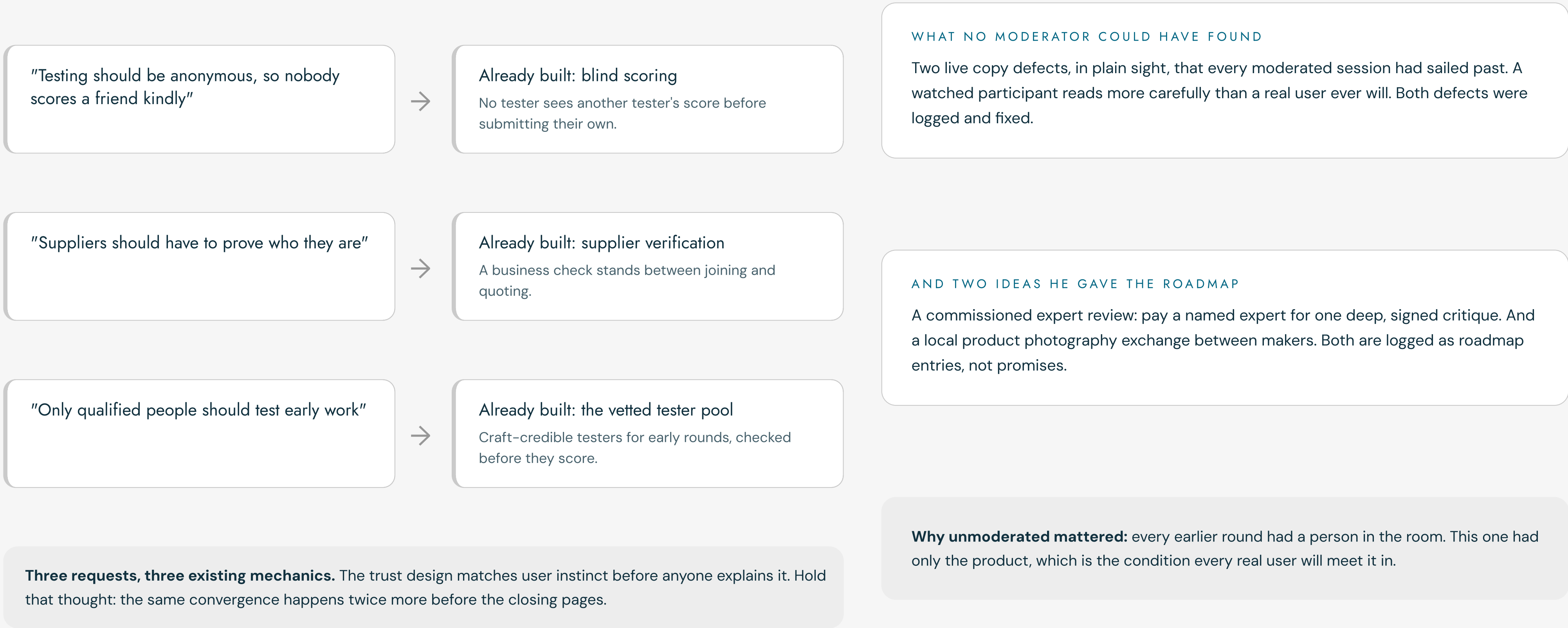
"The defect was the instrument for measuring the defect."

PROJECT NOTES

A phone, no moderator, and three ideas the platform already had.

A classmate took the platform onto a personal phone, alone, with nobody watching. No moderator means no rescue and no politeness. It found things the watched sessions could not.

WHAT HE ASKED FOR, UNPROMPTED





I treated the words, not the understanding.

words have consequences

A professional designer walked through the platform and said the homepage sets riddles. That was the second time the homepage had failed to explain itself, after a rebuild meant to fix exactly that.

The first version left no impression. The new one stopped people and then did not pay off. Different failure, same root: I had treated the words and not the understanding. Rewriting sentences is not the same as making a stranger understand what a place is for, and I had been measuring the first thing while believing I was fixing the second.

One phrase had even survived the great word-purge because it is ordinary English. Nobody wears the same hat is perfectly readable and still meant nothing to anyone.

The payment surprise is the worst thing this document contains and it belongs here. A tester could apply, be told what happens next, and only meet the price after committing. The application was not silent about money, which would have been better. It told a story with the money missing.

The best bug is the opposite kind. A missing spinner on one screen let four clicks queue up over fifteen seconds, and each one wrote another entry into the log that legally records agreement to the terms. A visual omission was corrupting a legal record.

Then the bug measured itself. The duplicate entries carry timestamps, which showed each submission took about a second, so the fifteen-second wait was never slowness. The busy-state button that would have prevented all of it had been built six phases earlier and simply never applied to that one screen.

A demo built to survive an afternoon of strangers. (some celebrities)



The stand · visitors on the demo
Graduation show photo: hands on the screen

THE BRIEF, ONE SENTENCE

"Enterable in one tap, understandable without anyone explaining, and able to survive an afternoon of strangers."

YOU BECOME A PERSON, NOT A ROLE

Tap "Supplier" and you **are** Stefan, with real quotes and real conversations. Four ready-made people, looking at **each other's** work, because the platform is a loop between four kinds of people, and empty dashboards would have taught strangers "nothing here works" in ten seconds.

THE DISCLAIMER IS THE INVITATION

A bar reads "nothing here is real · resets every few minutes." A warning, and also the sentence that gives a stranger **permission to press every button**. Everything they break, a timer undoes.

VENVAL

TESTER

Try new products early and at cost, or by barter. Honest structured feedback is what you trade.

venvalhq.com/demo

Try it on your own phone. No account needed.

VENVAL

WHAT A COST PRICE IS

You publish what it costs you to make.

Stoneware clay£4.10

Glaze£1.85

Kiln firing£3.40

Hidden ingredient—

Packaging£1.15

Labour, 2.5 h£12.50

Delivery£2.00

Cost price£25.00

a tester pays this, and nothing on top

A supplier can ask to see a hidden line, and quote against it.

venvalhq.com/demo

Try it on your own phone. No account needed.

VENVAL

WHAT COMES BACK

Blind, across six dimensions.

Experience

Packaging

Material quality

Functionality

Price fairness

Convenience

Functionality **WEAKEST**

Price fairness

Packaging

Convenience

Material quality

Experience

Weakest: Functionality. That is what v2 changes.

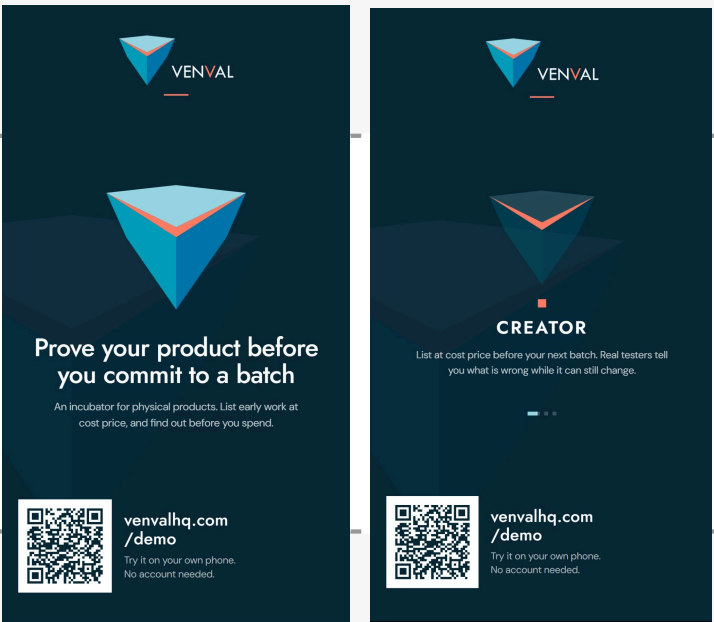
venvalhq.com/demo

Try it on your own phone. No account needed.

Seed test accounts Test accounts seeded.

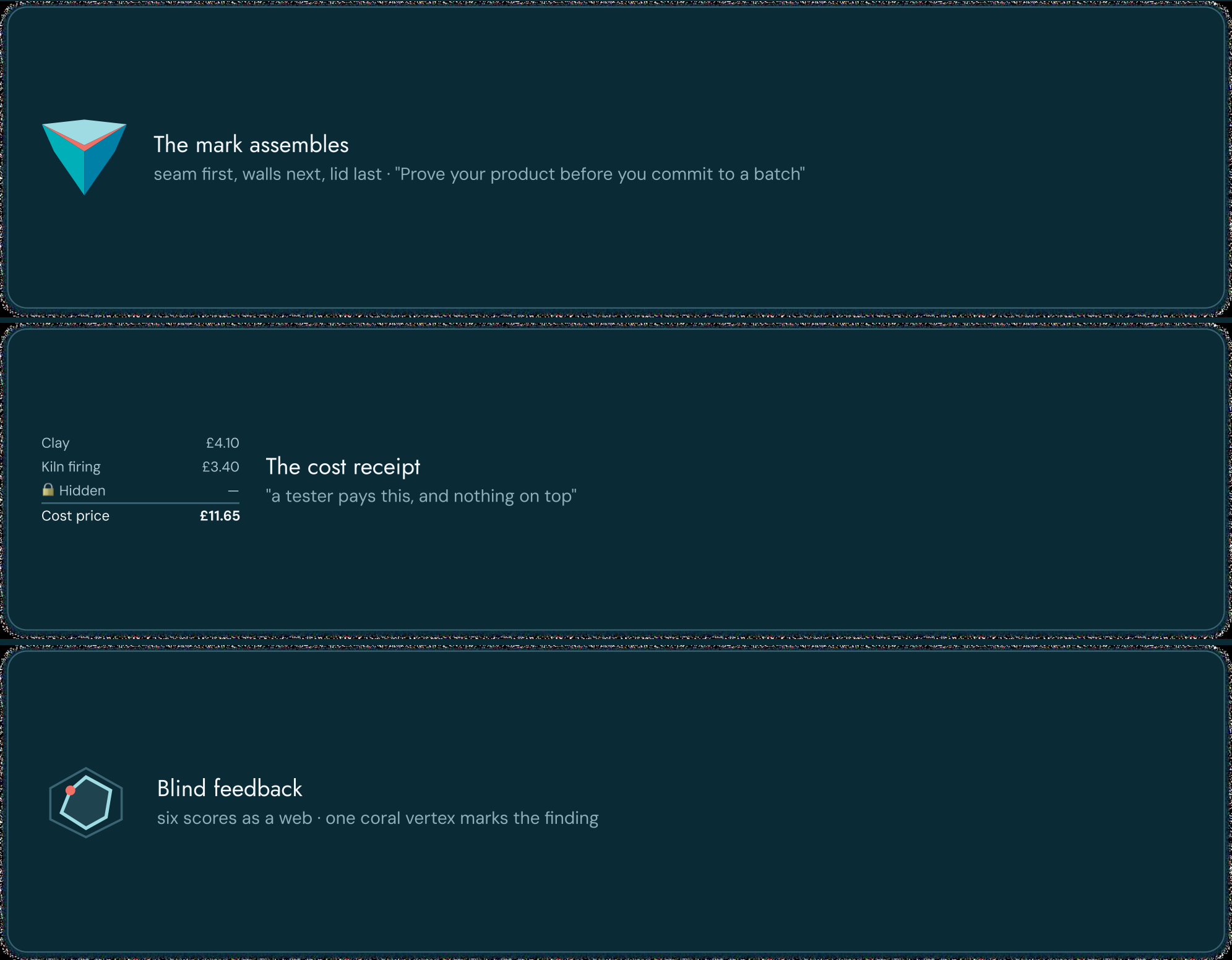
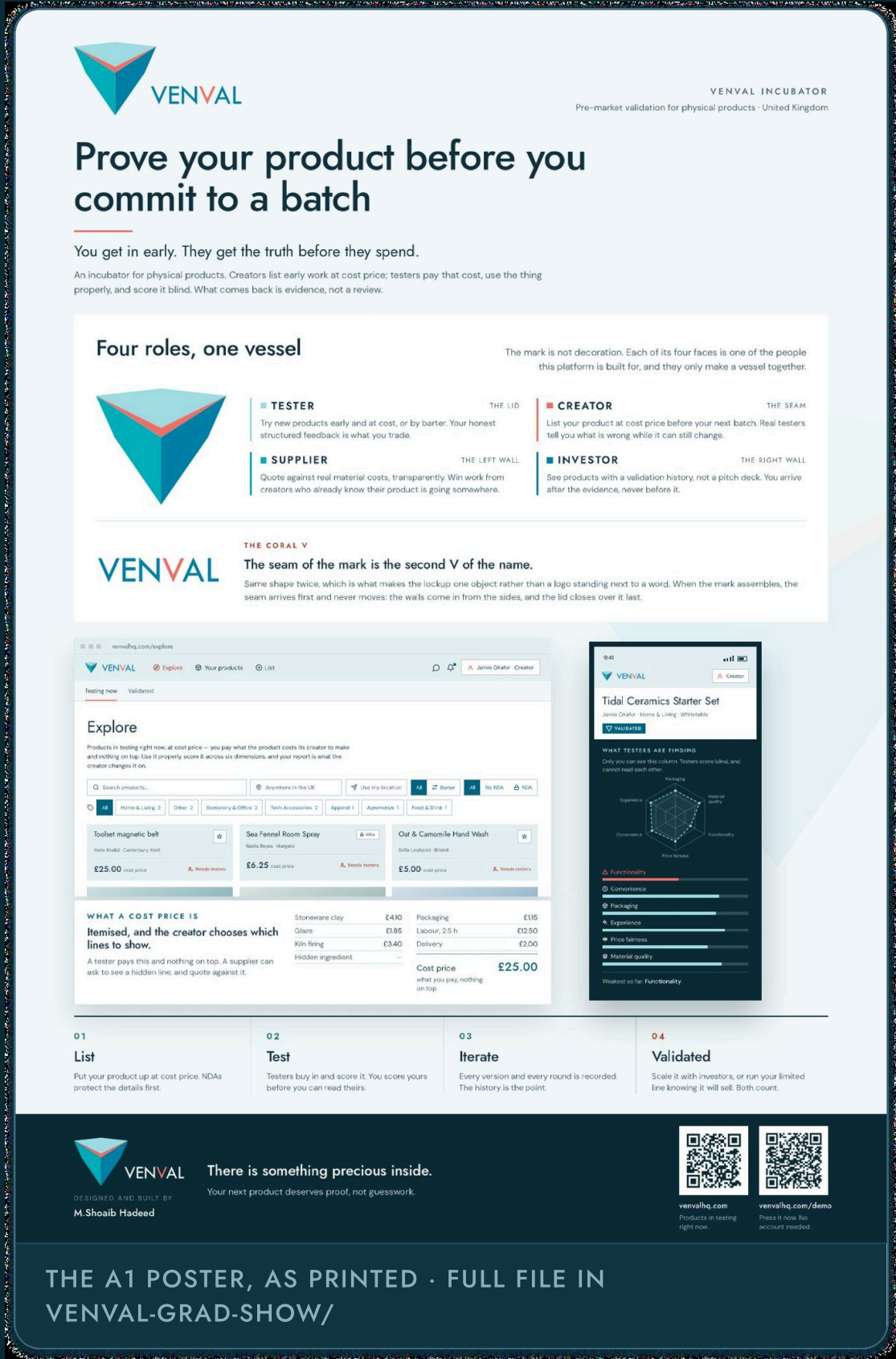
Name	Email	Signs in as
Jamie Okafor	jamie.okafor@coastline.test	maker
Priya Hennessy	priya.hennessy@coastline.test	diver
Naomi Abara	naomi.abara@coastline.test	diver
Stefan Colby	stefan.colby@coastline.test	chandler

TWELVE DEMO PEOPLE, SEEDIED WITH CROSS-LINKED WORK



show photos · loop running, poster + QR

Light poster, dark screen.
Same brand, opposite ends.



Stills · the full 78-second MP4 lives in Venval-grad-show/

Why the poster is light: the logo's letters are the deep blue: on a dark ground they'd almost vanish. And every app screen on the poster is **drawn from the design system, not screenshotted**, so it stays razor sharp at print size and can never disagree with the real colours.

The screen loop is built for someone arriving halfway. Nobody sees the start of a loop at a show, so the logo and the QR never leave the screen, and every scene is a complete statement on its own. The closing line: "Looking for the first hundred creators and testers": a target, not a fake count, because that's the strongest thing that could be said honestly.

The demo's reset button deleted real research data.

WHAT HAPPENED, PLAINLY

The demo resets itself by deleting demo listings. But real test participants had applied to test those demo listings, and when a listing is deleted, **its applications are deleted with it**. Six real applications from the user-testing sessions, gone. Unrecoverable without losing days of other work.

The cruel part: it was caused by an earlier good decision. Demo accounts had been given human names so the demo would feel real. It worked, so well that real people and demo people became impossible to tell apart by eye.

WHAT CHANGED FOREVER

→ **Every deleting operation now rehearses first:** it prints what it would delete, before it's allowed to actually delete. "That costs an hour and it is always worth it."

→ A before/after snapshot tool now exists that would have caught it. The notes admit, in writing: **it was built after the loss**.

→ Rule: judge an account by what it did, never by what it looks like.

WHY THIS PAGE IS IN A PORTFOLIO

Because the project's record keeps its failures visible instead of papering over them: corrections sit next to the mistakes they correct. An honest process document without its worst day would be neither honest nor a process document.



A good decision caused it.

| no harm no foul

The demo had one brief: enterable in one tap, understandable with nobody explaining it, and able to survive an afternoon of strangers. Designing for a visitor who gives you ninety seconds and no goodwill is a genuinely different problem from designing for a user who has chosen to be there.

The answer was to hand people a life rather than a role. Tap Supplier and you are Stefan, with real quotes and real conversations already attached, looking at work the other three demo people made. An empty dashboard would have taught a stranger in ten seconds that none of the buttons do anything.

It held up for an afternoon, which was the whole test.

The mistake is the reason this phase has a third page. The demo resets by deleting demo listings, and real research participants had applied to test those listings. Deleting a listing deletes its applications. Six real applications from the user-testing sessions were destroyed and could not be recovered.

The cruel part is that it was caused by an earlier good decision. Demo accounts were given human names so the demo would feel real. It worked so well that real people and demo people stopped being distinguishable by eye, including to me.

Every deleting operation now rehearses first. It prints exactly what it would remove before it is allowed to remove anything. That costs an hour to build and it is always worth it, and I would rather this page existed than have a portfolio with no mistakes in it.

Two questions had been sharing one number.

Pitch preparation kept snagging on a blur: "is it good" and "will it sell" are different experiments. Mixing them is exactly how false proof happens, and false proof is the thing this platform exists to strike out. So the engine was split into two round types. One engine, one extra field. That field decides who tests, what they see, what they are asked, and where the results surface.

DEVELOPMENT ROUNDS · THE CONTAINED TRACK

Verified, craft-credible testers. Full detail under the product's NDA. Blind, structured critique. The output is improvement: what changed between versions, and how fast. That speed is itself a signal an investor reads later. This creator ships fixes.

MARKET ROUNDS · THE OPEN TRACK

Buyer-representative testers who see only what a buyer would see: the story, the photos, the price. The questions measure intent. Would you buy it, at what price, would you preorder. The output is the dataset investors actually want: honest demand evidence.

THE CONTROL

The buyer view is the Omar finding from Phase 01 turned into an experimental control. "Buyers want the story, not the recipe." Showing market testers the internals would contaminate the demand signal, because a real customer never sees the recipe.

LENS	THE QUESTION THAT LENS ASKS	WHAT IT READS IN THE EVIDENCE RECORD
Creator	Is it good, and is it getting better?	Category scores, the delta between rounds, iteration speed
Tester	Is my judgment worth something?	Credited insights and a track record that follows them
Supplier	Is this order real?	Intent counts at price points, and room left for material cost
Investor	Is the whole picture fundable?	Demand evidence with sample sizes, price bands, iteration speed

The badge does not say the product is good. It says the evidence record is complete enough for every lens to read.

WHAT VALIDATED CERTIFIES, FROM THE DECISION RECORD

Stage-accurate scope: the round-type field and the development instrument exist and run. The market instrument is specified, not built. The first real market round is the next milestone, not a claim.

Hue answers who. Structure answers where.

Two round types means two rooms, and a user must always know which room they are standing in. The obvious answer was a colour. The obvious answer was rejected twice.

REJECTED: RED AND GREEN

Three ways. Red reads as error, and would paint the platform's most productive phase as a problem state. Green crowns market as the only good outcome, the same scale bias removed elsewhere. And red with green is the exact pair colourblind users cannot separate.

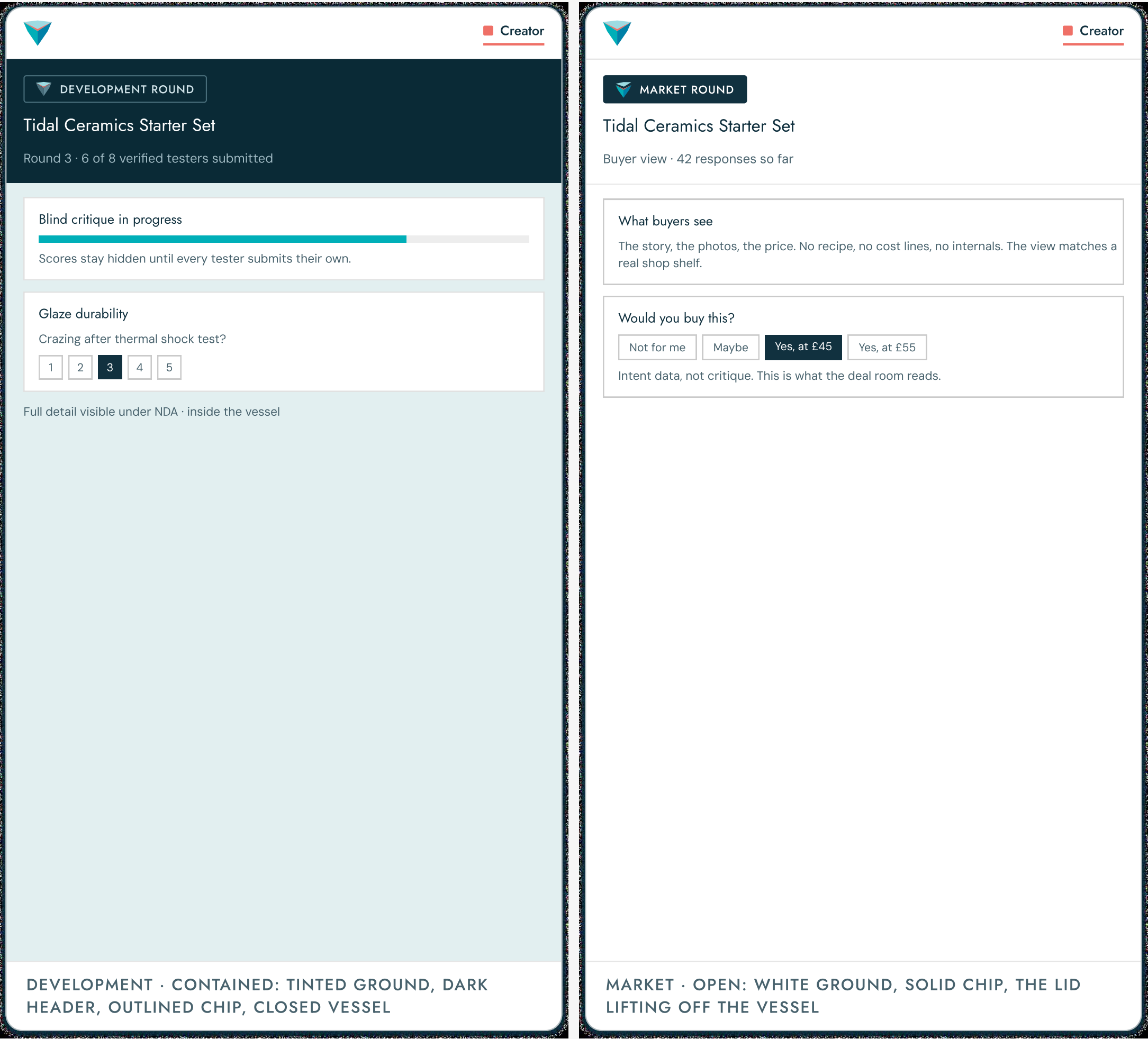
REJECTED: REUSING THE BRAND HUES

All four hues already mean a role: coral creator, sky tester, teal supplier, deep investor. A hue cannot mean two things.

THE CHANNEL RULE

One meaning per channel. Role colours never change with mode, and mode is never carried by a colour. Mode is indicated four ways at once: **surface depth · chip style · icon state · a plain label**. Four redundant signals, and colour is not one of them, so the standing rule that colour is never the only signal is satisfied by construction.

The open vessel is new, and now official. The lid tilted off the body, seam exposed: the mark performing its own seam moment. Promoted to a brand micro-asset alongside the closed vessel. Geometry untouched except the lid transform. The seam is always present.



The proof is in the pair: the creator's coral accent is identical in both screens. Who never changes. Where changes everything else.

An audit written against the platform's own evidence.

The whole promise is that the evidence record can be trusted. So a self-audit asked the hostile question: what could a determined writer put into that record? Two answers came back.

FINDING ONE

A feedback submission carrying **no scores at all** could be written through the interface underneath the app, and it would still count toward a product's validation floor. Validation is the one number the platform stakes its name on.

FINDING TWO

A submission written in two separate steps could fail between them, and the half-written state would leave that tester **permanently unable to submit**. A trap door, not an error message.

What this page leaves out is deliberate. The reasoning and the sequence are the portfolio material. The recipe is not.

THE FIX, IN A CHOSEN ORDER

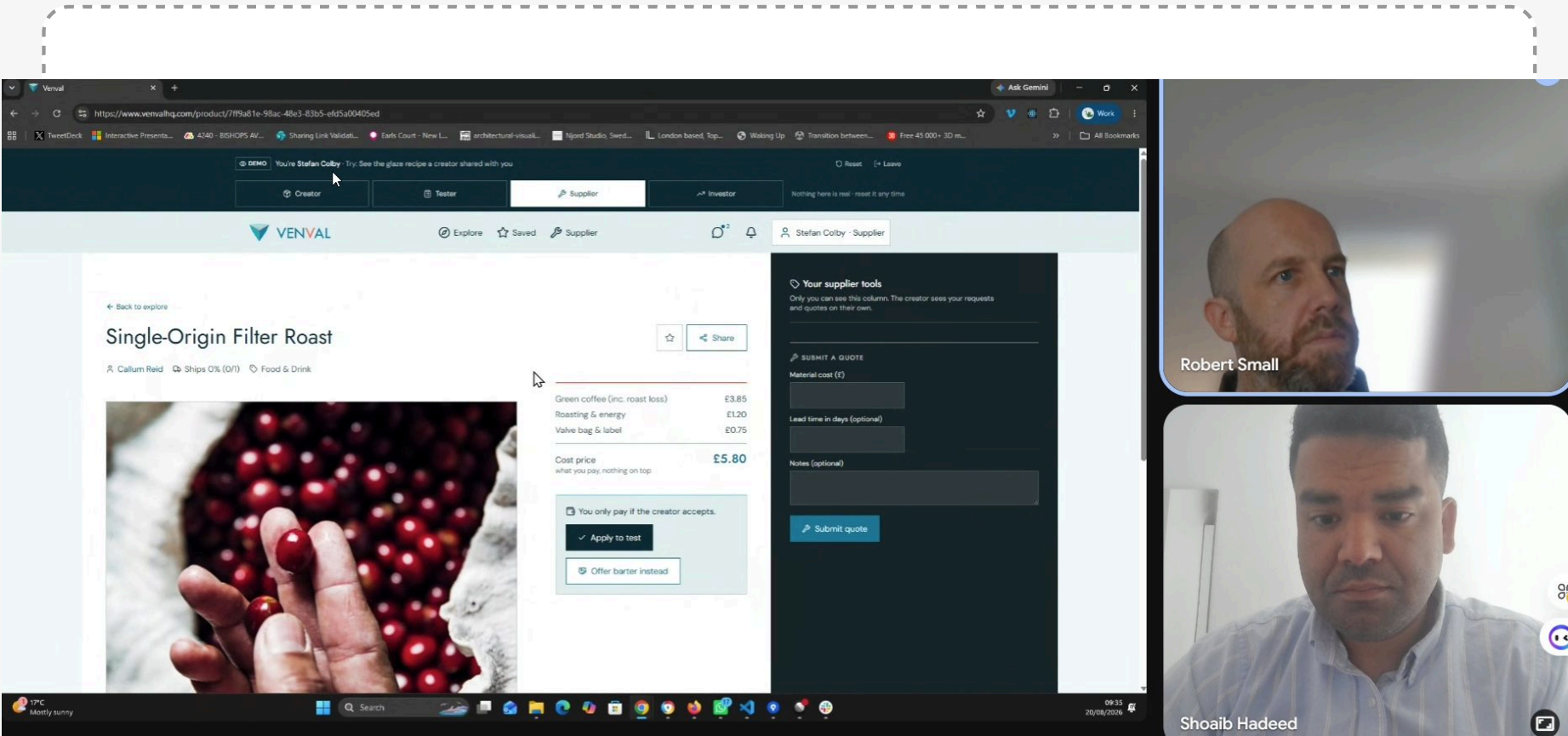
- 1 **Consequence first.** The validation floor now counts only fully scored submissions. Even if a bad record got in, it would no longer matter.
- 2 **Enforcement second.** One privileged, all-or-nothing write path. A submission now exists completely or not at all, so the trap door cannot form.
- 3 **Revocation last.** Only then were the older, looser write permissions withdrawn.

The order is the lesson. The step between two changes is the step nothing checks.

LEARNED THE HARD WAY FROM AN EARLIER PRODUCTION INCIDENT, AND APPLIED HERE ON PURPOSE

Fifty-two minutes with a director who sells certainty about unbuilt things.

Robert Small is Creative and Technical Director of Lucid Environments, a London studio whose interactive property apps help people commit to buildings that do not exist yet. The same thesis as this project, at building scale: make the unbuilt feel certain enough to act on. He gave a recorded review, with consent for portfolio use given on camera.



The recorded review · Robert Small

The Google Meet frame: Robert presenting, driving the demo as Jamie Okafor · consent on camera

HE REBUILT THE MODEL UNPROMPTED

He drove the demo himself on the call, presenting and annotating, and reconstructed the four-role staged model without being told it. Comprehension is the hardest thing to test for, because you can never un-explain. His summary of the whole structure: "I kind of get it all."

THEN HE PRICED IT

Roleplaying a creator, he volunteered a number nobody had asked for: fifty to a hundred pounds for ten honest reviews inside two weeks.

"That's my testing done. Venval's taking it off my hands. That is cool."

"I think you're on to something. Try it."

HIS CLOSING VERDICT, ON THE RECORDING

52

RECORDED MINUTES

£50–
100

THE PRICE HE
VOLUNTEERED,
UNPROMPTED

10

HONEST REVIEWS IN
TWO WEEKS, HIS
FRAMING

The sceptic's list, kept as a list.

His challenges are recorded as he made them, and left open where they are genuinely open. On this platform of all platforms, a review that produced only compliments would be worth nothing.

CHALLENGE 1

Kickstarter. What does this do that a crowdfunding page cannot? The differentiation has to be sayable in one breath.

CHALLENGE 2

First-batch economics. On early batches, cost price can sit above shop retail. Who pays for that honesty?

CHALLENGE 3

Regulation. Certified product categories carry rules a testing platform has to respect, not route around.

CHALLENGE 4

Objectivity. Paid testers self-select, and reciprocity can look conflicted to an investor reading the record.

ADOPTED FROM THE MEETING WITHIN A DAY

Same-tester continuity

The critic who scored version one low, re-scoring version three, is the trend an investor trusts. A stranger's higher score proves nothing. The same sceptic changing their mind proves the product moved.

Curated panels

He reinvented the market round independently in the meeting, then improved it: keep the panel constant across rounds, and let a single unit circulate where a batch would be wasteful.

Watchers & waitlist

A demand layer under every listing: people who are not testing yet, but want to be told. Interest, counted honestly, before anyone claims it means demand.

HIS ADVICE

His closing advice became the plan: twenty testers, five creators, first round run by hand. The final page of this document holds the project to it.

Every hard question already had a drawer.

A cross-programme crit with external jurors. The panel's product designer, who moved from interiors to footwear, spent the slot probing verification and trust.

THE CONVERGENCE

Every question the juror raised was one the platform already answered in its architecture. How are testers verified. Why should a stranger's score be trusted. What stops kindness. A practitioner's instincts and the design's own risk register had arrived at the same worries, independently.

Being asked exactly the questions you built drawers for is not a win. It is evidence the drawers are the right ones.

THE FORMAT LESSON

The hour-deep walkthrough demo fails every real room, because no real room gives you an hour. The presentation was rebuilt in **question order**, trust architecture first, product tour second. The room's first question now decides what comes first, not the product's first screen.

Greg's badge catch taught the same rule on the landing page: lead with the destination.

THE CODA

After the crit, the same juror volunteered, through faculty, to become the platform's first real user.

The sceptic asking to come inside.

WHAT THAT OFFER IS, IN FIVE WORDS

Five reviewers nobody assigned.

None of the five was arranged by the institution. Each arrived through the work itself, and each judged it from a different trade. Those named are named with their consent.

Robert Small

Digital products

A director's recorded review, priced and challenged.

Deb Jayaprakash

Food manufacturing

Rejected the CoastLine interface. Started the rebrand.

The panel juror

Consumer goods

Probed trust for half an hour, then asked to join.

Greg Daines

Depth testing

An hour on one flow. Found the buried badge.

The classmate

Unmoderated mobile

Found what a moderator's presence hides.

THREE OF THEM REINVENTED THE PLATFORM

WHO	WHAT THEY ASKED FOR, UNPROMPTED	WHAT ALREADY EXISTED
The classmate	Anonymous scoring · supplier ID checks · qualified early testers	Blind scoring · supplier verification · the vetted tester pool
The juror	Their whole list of trust and verification questions	The architecture's own risk register, drawer for drawer
Robert Small	A curated, priced panel of buyer-like reviewers	The market round

The design matches instinct before it is explained. That is the strongest recurring evidence pattern in this record.

CONVERGENCE, THREE TIMES, FROM THREE DIRECTIONS

Stated precisely: convergence is not market validation. It is the reason to go and get some.

Where it stands: counted, not claimed.

These numbers come from the live database, not from memory. Roughly half the accounts are demo people; the rest are real recruited testers.

38 ACCOUNTS	20 LISTINGS	24 TEST APPLICATIONS	7 FEEDBACK REPORTS	2 VALIDATED PRODUCTS	2 SUPPLIER QUOTES	0 REAL PAYMENTS
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DONE The problem is validated by research. The platform is live, end to end, with every core flow working. The brand is settled, with evidence behind the name.	FORMING Real recruited testers are on the platform now. Verification tiers for each role are decided on paper, deliberately unbuilt until one outside creator-and-tester pair completes the full loop.	NEXT A first round of twenty testers and five creators, recruited partly from a university product-design cohort, run partly by hand. The honest gap, stated: the central transaction hasn't yet happened between two real strangers.
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FOR THE RECORD	The school gave this project its Masters Award for Innovation, judged across the cohort. Noted here once, precisely: an institutional judgment of the work, not market validation. It moves none of the numbers above.
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One honest sentence of positioning.

WHERE PEOPLE TEST PRODUCTS TODAY	WHAT THE TESTER ACTUALLY WANTS
Free-sample programmes	More free stuff → says nice things
Paid testing panels	Finish the task, get paid → rushes
Crowdfunding	The campaign to succeed → hype first, product later
Venval	Paid the making cost, wants it to be good → honesty

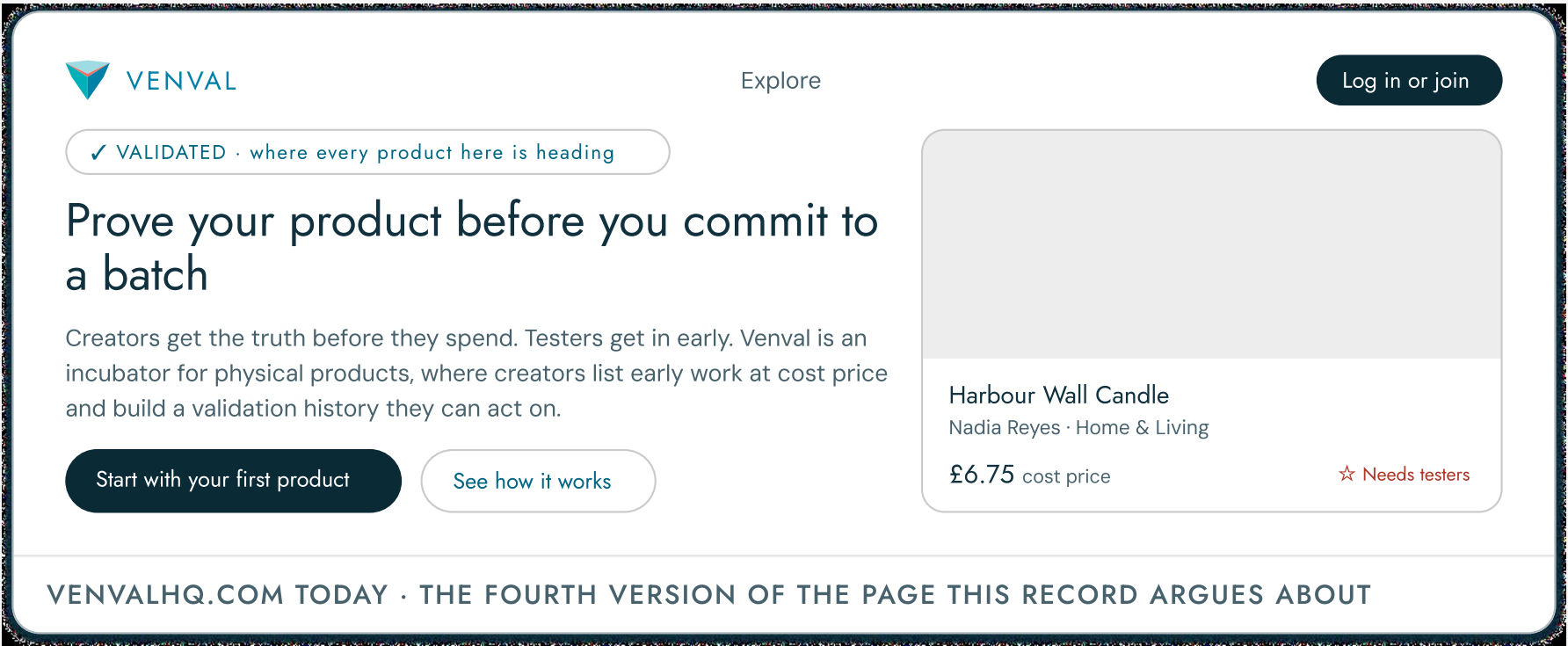
"It is the only platform in the category where the tester's incentive points at honesty."

THE ONE THING IT WINS ON, IN ONE SENTENCE

"It is the only platform in the category where the testers and creators can exchange and barter products services to test out the product."

AND THE DISCIPLINE THAT FOLLOWS

Creators can't invite their own friends to test: friends are exactly the "kind reviews" problem the platform exists to remove. Growing slowly isn't a weakness here. **The slow start is the honesty mechanism.**



Two lines drawn before anyone demanded them.

MONEY · THE FCA BOUNDARY

The platform takes no success fees and never stands in the middle of an investment transaction. Revenue is subscriptions and testing commission only, which keeps it outside regulated financial activity. The boundary was found by the project's own reading, before any regulator or investor asked for it.

OWNERSHIP · VERIFIED AT THE SOURCE

The programme director remembered a royalties clause in the university's policy. The primary source says otherwise: UCA's standard licence is a **royalty-free promotional licence, and students retain all IP**. The policy page is captured as a dated PDF and an independent web-archive snapshot, so the answer can be shown, not just repeated.

THE LICENSING LADDER, STAGED ON PURPOSE

- 1 **Now:** payments held by a regulated third party (Stripe Connect). The platform never touches the money.
- 2 **At growth:** an appointed-representative arrangement under someone else's permissions.
- 3 **At scale:** permissions of its own. Not before.

*Do not act on the remembered version of a document.
Pull the document.*

THE METHOD NOTE THAT OUTLASTS THE ANSWER

The same project, in a different order.

"The project consistently produced the right answer, after the cost of acting on it had gone up."

THE RETROSPECTIVE'S CORE SENTENCE

The design system was excellent, after 61 hand-made buttons. The name was finally right, after four renames. User testing was decisive, after the things it invalidated had shipped. None of the answers were wrong. **They were late, and late is what made them expensive.**

IF THIS PROJECT RAN AGAIN, THE ORDER WOULD BE:

- 1 Placeholder names that can't take root: name things after watching people, not before
- 2 Put a paper version in front of three strangers **before** building the database
- 3 Build the design system at the third screen, when repetition first shows and the fix costs an afternoon
- 4 Make the checking tools early, and prove each one can actually fail
- 5 Then build fast. The speed was never the problem.

"Not a different project. The same project, in a different order."

One designer, AI-assisted execution, human judgment on record.

WHAT THE AI IS BAD AT, PRECISELY

Not wrong code: **missing irritation**. A human hand-writing 61 near-identical buttons would have stopped around number six out of sheer annoyance and built a system. "Irritation is a useful signal, and an agent does not generate it." So consolidation has to be demanded; it never happens by itself.

SO THE LEVERAGE IS THE BRIEF

An agent given a design system uses it. An agent given none invents a plausible new one per file. The most valuable sentences in the project's standing brief turned out to be **prohibitions**: "don't invent words," "that retired colour is a bug if it ever reappears."

"The code is the least durable artifact: it will be rewritten. The decision record is what carries forward."

WHY 91 DECISIONS WERE WRITTEN DOWN, WITH THEIR COSTS

The record is written for someone with no memory of yesterday, which describes both a returning student and a fresh AI session. Warnings come before content; corrections stay visible next to the mistakes they fix; every claim carries its evidence. The writing style is a memory format.

The judgment half, on record: the three catches. The agent drew a mono mark without its seam knockout. It lost the centre wall edge in a simplified silhouette. It warmed the neutrals out of habit. A person caught each one in review, and each catch became a written rule on the mark pages. The agent executes, the record remembers, the designer judges.

"The strongest thing here is not any screen. It is that the reasoning is written down, the corrections are visible, the measurements are real, and the rules check themselves."

Four habits. Most people learn them years into a career. This project learned them in its first end-to-end build: the hard way, and on record.



Write the reasoning down

91 decisions logged with what they cost, because a decision without stated costs is just a preference.

Keep corrections visible

Mistakes stay in the record, crossed out, next to their fixes. The document that hides its errors will repeat them.

Measure, don't estimate

Every colour, every tap target, every claim about "what's built": checked against the real thing, not remembered.

Test the tests

A checker that can't fail is furniture. Break something on purpose; see if anyone notices.

Twenty testers. Five creators. Partly by hand.

The honest state: a substantially complete platform whose central transaction now waits on people, not code. The next chapter is not a feature. It is a first round.

ONE LOOP TO IGNITE

Creators and testers self-pollinate through reciprocity: makers test makers. Suppliers deepen the loop once it turns. Investors are gated last, **by design**. The delay is the product's promise, not a roadmap gap: money arrives after the proof, never before it. The cold start is softened here, not suffered.

THE FIRST ROUND, RUN PARTLY BY HAND

Twenty testers, five creators. Matching, chasing and shepherding done manually wherever the software would have automated it, because the first honest round matters more than the elegance of its plumbing. This was also the recorded reviewer's closing advice, adopted as given.

THE STATUS SENTENCE, EVERYWHERE THE SAME

Problem validated through primary research.
Platform live. First market validation round is the
next milestone.

That sentence is the document's own discipline applied to itself. No page here claims market validation, including the award page. The claim gets made when a real round earns it.

This document ends at a starting line, not at a claim.

Two faces, and only one of them is hard to enter.

Venval has an inside and an outside, and they are governed by opposite rules.

The inside is the incubator. A creator gets in by proving who they are, either through an institution that vouches for them or through a company email address on a domain they own. That friction is deliberate. Everything this platform publishes rests on one claim, that a creator has told the truth about what their product costs to make, and a claim is worth exactly what the claimant is worth.

That claim is not left on trust either. A verified supplier can open a declared cost line and quote the real trade price against it, so the number faces someone who sells that material for a living. The check bites hardest against a cost that is overstated, which is the only version of the lie that hurts a buyer.

The outside is the public market. Once a product is validated, anyone can buy it. No verification, no application, no gate. A buyer asserts nothing and risks only their own money, so friction there costs volume and buys no trust.

The rule underneath both: verify the people making claims, not the people spending their own money.

FACE ONE · THE INCUBATOR

Hard to enter, on purpose.

Who	Creators, and the testers who work with them
Entry	Institutional membership, or a verified company domain
Evidence	Blind scores, six qualities, before anyone sees another score
Money	Subscription. Testing itself is never charged for

FACE TWO · THE PUBLIC MARKET

Open, once the product has earned it.

Who	Anyone. Validated products only
Entry	None
Evidence	Real demand at a real price, and scores from people who paid it
Money	Commission, out of a genuine sale

Three ways in, and one thing never charged for.

WHAT IS BEING PAID FOR

MODEL

PAID BY, AND WHY

The incubator interior. Listing, testing, feedback, iteration.

Subscription

Institutions, through a cohort licence that doubles as creator verification. Suppliers and investors on their own tiers.

The public market for validated products.

Commission

The creator, out of a real sale at a real price. The platform earns only when a creator actually sells.

Testing itself.

Nothing, ever

Cost price is cost price. Creators recover their outlay and the platform takes a slice of that recovery cannot both be true.

The institutional licence leads, because it answers the hardest problem this model has. Taking a percentage of a transaction where nobody profits is a poor business, and the obvious fallback, charging suppliers and investors, is empty until enough creators list. That is a chicken and egg on revenue, not only on liquidity.

A cohort licence sidesteps all of it. Universities and incubators already hold budgets for per-student tooling, so this competes for a line that exists rather than inventing one.

It also supplies the one thing a creator here is not allowed to supply for themselves. Friends produce the kind feedback this platform exists to replace, so the audience has to come from somewhere else. A cohort arrives as creators and testers together, already verified, on a known date.

Status, stated plainly. Pilot conversations only. A free one-term pilot with a product design cohort is the first target and an innovation hub the second. Nothing is agreed, nothing is signed, and the public market is not built.

Five things that could sink it.

A cohort is classmates.

The platform exists because friendly feedback is worthless, and a course cohort testing each other's projects is not a room of strangers. Blind scoring, craft-credible testers and students being assessed on their own rigour all pull against it. None of them dissolves it.

Two kinds of score, one number.

Blind pre-market scores from vetted testers, and post-purchase scores from people who paid full price. Both are honest, for different reasons. Averaged together they would hide which is which, so they stay separate populations, each labelled, each showing how many people it represents.

The platform would wear two hats.

Venval would earn commission on public sales and hold the sales record an investor reads. Ordinary for a marketplace, not ordinary for a custodian of evidence. Whatever ranking or promotion exists on the public side has to be structurally separable from the record shown to an investor.

One line must never be crossed.

A percentage of product sales is ordinary marketplace commission. A percentage of capital raised is a success fee on an investment, and that is regulated. Investors deciding off sales numbers puts those two a short step apart. Venval is paid for the sale and never for the raise.

Verification gets stronger with scale.

The cost claim is not taken on faith. A line states its quantity and yield, a verified supplier can quote the real trade price against it, and a tester who paid and felt the price was wrong has already recorded it. The checks are independent and each sharpens as more suppliers quote and more products list. The honest weakness is timing: the platform is smallest exactly when it most needs to be believed, so early trust still leans on who a creator is.

None of these is fatal on its own. Listing them is not modesty. An examiner or an investor will find every one of them, and a plan that has already named them is worth more than a plan that has not.

The outside sources the method leaned on.

These are the published standards and institutional sources the project's methods were checked against. Each is tied to the phase where it did its work, because a source that changed nothing does not belong in a portfolio.

- 01 World Wide Web Consortium (2018) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 . Available at: <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/> (Accessed: 26 August 2026).
Used for: The contrast measurements and the 44px touch-target floor (Phases 12 and 13).
- 02 Companies House (no date) Find and update company information . Available at: <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk> (Accessed: 26 August 2026).
Used for: Supplier verification, and the availability check in the naming protocol (Phases 10 and 15).
- 03 Intellectual Property Office (no date) Search for a trade mark . Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/search-for-trademark> (Accessed: 26 August 2026).
Used for: The trade-mark clearance step every candidate name was run through (Phase 10).
- 04 Financial Conduct Authority (no date) FCA Handbook . Available at: <https://handbook.fca.org.uk> (Accessed: 26 August 2026).
Used for: The line between marketplace commission and a fee on capital raised (Boundaries).

Every figure, and what it is.

Redrawn app screens and diagrams are the author’s own illustrations; photographs, the printed poster, recorded-call stills and LinkedIn bios are the real evidence they document. Dates are given where the project record fixes them.

Fig. 1	The fifteen-phase journey map Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 16	The two mechanics: open receipt and blind-scoring readout Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 31	The three tiers of type Author’s own illustration, 2026
Fig. 2	Discovery interviews: Omar Oualili (Sahara) and market visit Photographs and video stills, 2026	Fig. 17	Domain verification: records, fix, verified Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 32	The icon set Author’s own illustration, 2026
Fig. 3	The CoastLine wave mark and coastal palette Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 18	When it broke: three error screens Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 33	Ten visual directions Author’s own illustration, 2026
Fig. 4	CoastLine: the four first screens Author’s own design board, 2026	Fig. 19	The audit fixes, before and after Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 34	Three small fixes, before and after Author’s own illustration, 2026
Fig. 5	The wave mark: reproduction and misuse Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 20	The sixty-one hand-made buttons Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 35	The background fix: three grounds Author’s own illustration, 2026
Fig. 6	Three title-voice tests (Fraunces, Sora, Bricolage) Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 21	The five system parts, in use Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 36	Bands, not boxes: the dashboard before and after Author’s own illustration, 2026
Fig. 7	Wireframes: joining Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 22	Usability Testing I: sessions P1–P3 and a mid-task still Photographs, 11 August 2026	Fig. 37	Testing the tests: the System panel before and after Author’s own illustration, 2026
Fig. 8	Wireframes: the creator’s journey Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 23	Before and after: sign-in and role choice Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 38	Greg Daines: the landing before and after, session frame and LinkedIn bio Illustration; recorded-call still and screenshot, 13 August 2026
Fig. 9	Wireframes: the tester’s journey Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 24	Deb Jayaprakash: the CoastLine interface, session frame and LinkedIn bio Illustration; recorded-call still and screenshot, 2026	Fig. 39	Romaisa Fawad’s walkthrough, and LinkedIn bio Photograph and screenshot, 18 August 2026
Fig. 10	Wireframes: suppliers and investors Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 25	The name journey and the platform wearing NECO Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 40	The exhibition demo: stand photographs and seeded accounts Photographs and illustration, 20 August 2026
Fig. 11	The four role flows Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 26	The naming funnel: five candidates, one test Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 41	The A1 poster and screen-loop stills Printed poster and illustration, 18 August 2026
Fig. 12	The built platform: Explore and Messages Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 27	Light through film, and the film experiments Illustration; process photographs, 2026	Fig. 42	Mode indication: development and market rounds Author’s own illustration, 2026
Fig. 13	The platform screen map (labelled) Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 28	Shaping the mark: three attempts Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 43	Robert Small’s recorded review Recorded-call still, 2026
Fig. 14	The screen map as thumbnails Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 29	The vessel: mark and wordmark Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 44	venvalhq.com today (built landing) Author’s own illustration, 2026
Fig. 15	Wireframe to built: the NDA gate and cost editor Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 30	Mark reproduction rules and palette Author’s own illustration, 2026	Fig. 45	The demo QR Placement, venvalhq.com/demo, 2026



Ventral Incubator: prove your product before you commit to a batch.
Live at venvalhq.com



venvalhq.com/demo · "Try it on your own
phone. No account needed."

Fig. 45 · Demo QR

MUHAMMAD SHOAIB HADEED · 2513341

MA PRODUCT DESIGN · UCA · CARD7005

Set in Jost and DM Sans on the Ventral design system; early-chapter pages in Space Grotesk and Work Sans on the retired CoastLine palette. Sources: the project's live decision record (91 entries), 170 process-log entries, audit and user-testing write-ups, wireframe and brand exploration files. Quotations in italics are word-for-word from that record.