Jake Zien

Full-stack product designer with ~15 years' experience across product strategy, interaction design, and frontend-plus dev. Business-minded designer, design-minded engineer.

jakezien.com
jz@jakezien.com
917 854 6226

Experience

Lead Product Designer
at Gecko Robotics
2023–present ⊠ Hardware and software for industrial inspections

Reoriented an unmoored team toward the highest-value thing to build, then led a 3-week sprint across product, design, and dev to transform a rough prototype into a shipped v1, winning a $5M contract and customer raves

Led hiring process to grow design team from 1 to 3; managed & mentored a more junior designer

Led comprehensive jobs-to-be-done analysis of the full industrial asset lifecycle, mapping workflows across user types to define product direction for a major platform redesign

Work across every product team and vertical, from navy to mining to power plants, donning a hard hat to embed with customers on site and rapidly iterate on product direction, design, and code

Prototype in code and contribute production frontend regularly; choose the fastest, best medium for each situation: sketches, wireframes, writing, loom, prototype

First product design hire, reporting directly to Head of Product

Lead Product Designer
at Culdesac
2021–2023 ⊠ Real estate developer building car-free neighborhoods

First full-time design hire; reported to & collaborated directly with cofounders

Owned the digital resident experience for America's first car-free neighborhood, from business strategy to eng-ready design specs and my own commits

Ran strategy, research, and design on marketing & ecommerce websites (e.g. browsing and leasing apartments online)

Expanded design beyond a screen-based practice into a strategic partner of product and leadership

Mentored younger colleagues, who found the design education "taught [them] the most in this job"

Senior Product Designer
at CBRE
2017–2021 ⊠ Fortune 150 real estate company's software innovation team

Led design and co-led product for Site IQ, a web app for broker teams; product strategy was durable enough that it remains in active use & development

Self-initiated CBRE Build, a new brand for tech teams within CBRE: led research, design, and self-initiated projects, presented directly to CEO

In a self-initiated project, presented directly to then-CEO Bob Sulentic;

Implemented the brand across digital and physical spaces in NYC, Seattle, Texas, and India; reviewed positively on *Brand New*

Only design/eng staffer to survive an 80% staff reduction

Founding Designer
at Floored (acquired by CBRE)
2012–2017 ⊠ Eng-driven maker of online 3D tools for real estate teams

First design hire; collaborated directly with founders and founding engineers

Owned UX and UI design for Floored's products, from sketch to delivery with engineers

Created and implemented Floored brand and marketing

Founding Designer
at Stamped (acquired by Yahoo)
2011–2012 ⊠ Social recommendations app

Education

Rhode Island School of Design (RISD)
BA in Graphic Design
2007–2011 ⊠ Providence, RI

Brown University
Minor in Computer Science
2008–2011 ⊠ Providence, RI

Through RISD's cross-registration program with Brown, and summer courses at Carnegie Mellon University (Pittsburgh, PA), I earned credits worth a minor in Computer Science.

Personal Projects

Shutterbug
iOS & macOS photo app
In dev ⊠ Burst-aware, delete-forward gallery for the way we actually shoot

Designed and engineered a native photo management app in Swift (SwiftUI + UIKit/AppKit) with cross-device sync; not just a prototype but a real app approaching TestFlight

Interaction design playground: obsessive iteration on core mechanics to arrive at a lightweight workflow that makes sifting for keepers as easy as idly browsing photos

Used AI as an eng collaborator to go deep on clustering algorithms, building a custom solution to the app's core concept and extending my reach as a designgineer beyond what would be possible for me alone

Learning project to teach myself Swift and platform APIs from SwiftUI to AppKit, Core Data to VisionKit

Loving homage to the juicy, high-production-value apps that inspired me to be a designer

'Inventor' of Pivot Power
at Quirky
2010 ⊠ Crowdsourced invention company's breakout bestseller

With Quirky's help, created Pivot Power, the iconic flexible power strip that defined the company: millions of units sold from Target to the MOMA Store; Red Dot Design Award; included in the Cooper-Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum's permanent collection

Featured in the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Wired*, Engadget, Gizmodo, CNET

Tech

Swift: SwiftUI, AppKit, UIKit, Core Data

React, Node, NextJS, GatsbyJS

Vercel, Netlify, Lambda

Firebase or your favorite DB

Tailwind, styled-components, Stylus, sass, SCSS, and so on, plus real CSS

A bit of Ruby & Python

Figma, Weavy AI, Adobe, Framer, Affinity, Webflow, Shopify, you name it

Claude Code, Cursor, Figma Make, v0, etc. (But I can actually code, not just vibe)

Keyboard shortcut savant

Personal

Native of Milwaukee, WI; have lived in NYC for 15 years

Talented communicator and public speaker

Natural mentor/educator

"Jake is playful in his work, and it's inspiring"

Will probably make you laugh, usually intentionally

Loves animals