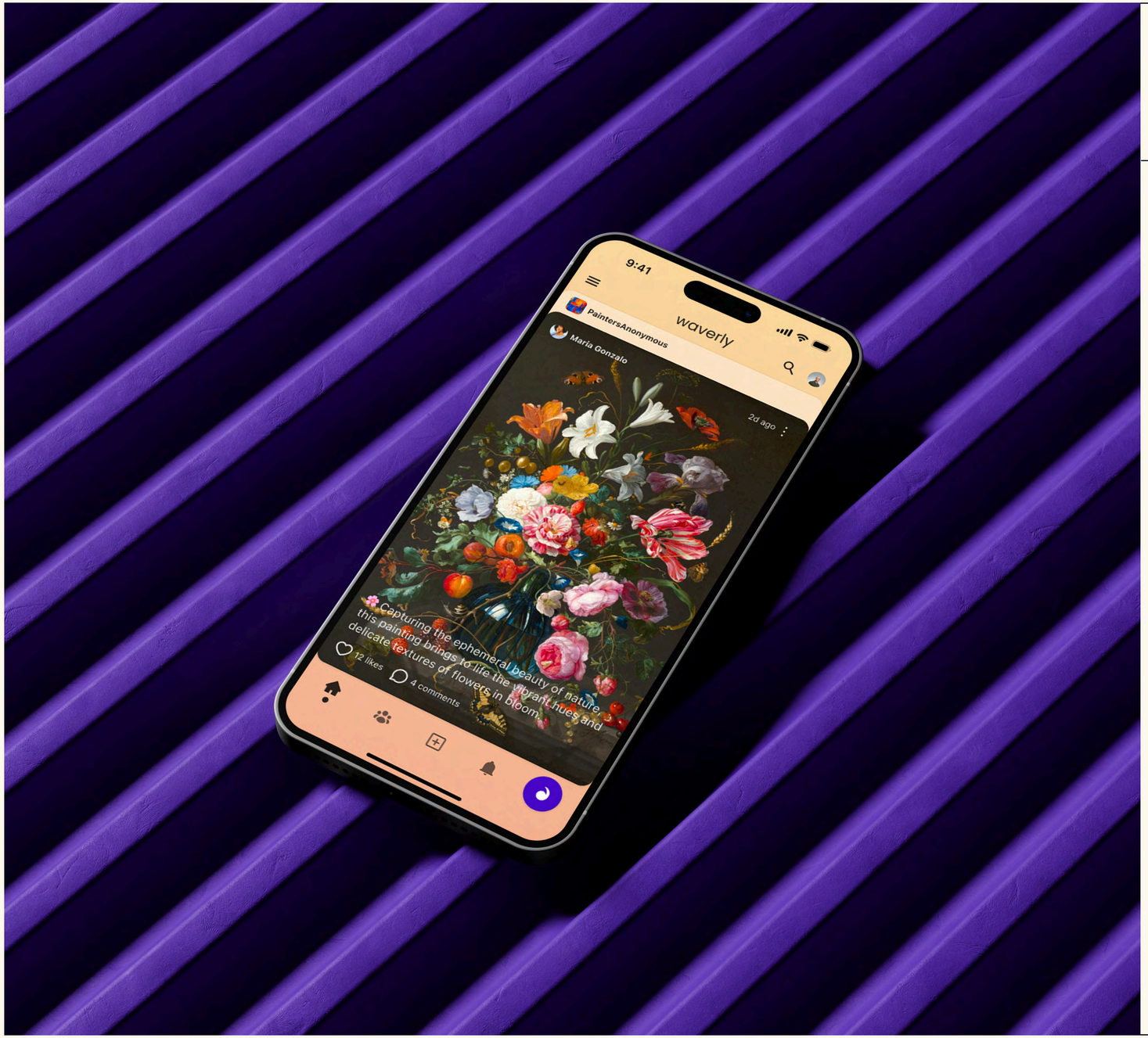

WAVERLY

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Philippe Beaudoin is a former Google engineer and co-founder of Element AI, and he started Waverly out of a pretty specific frustration with the current state of algorithmic feeds built by people focused on engagement metrics deciding what he saw and why, with zero visibility into any of it. The idea behind Waverly was to flip that. What if you could see your own algorithm in plain language, and actually shape it, instead of just being shaped by it?

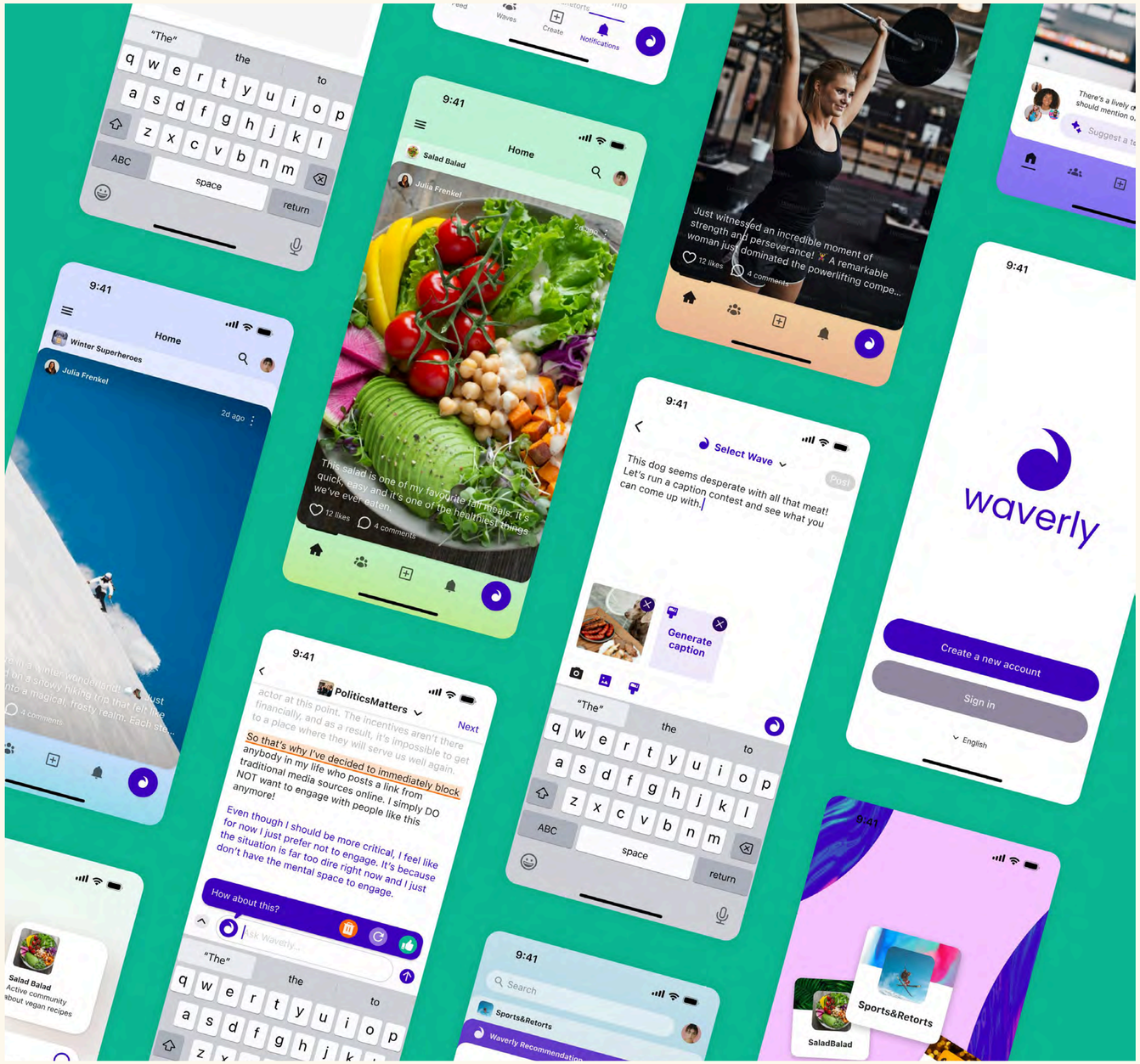
Mission

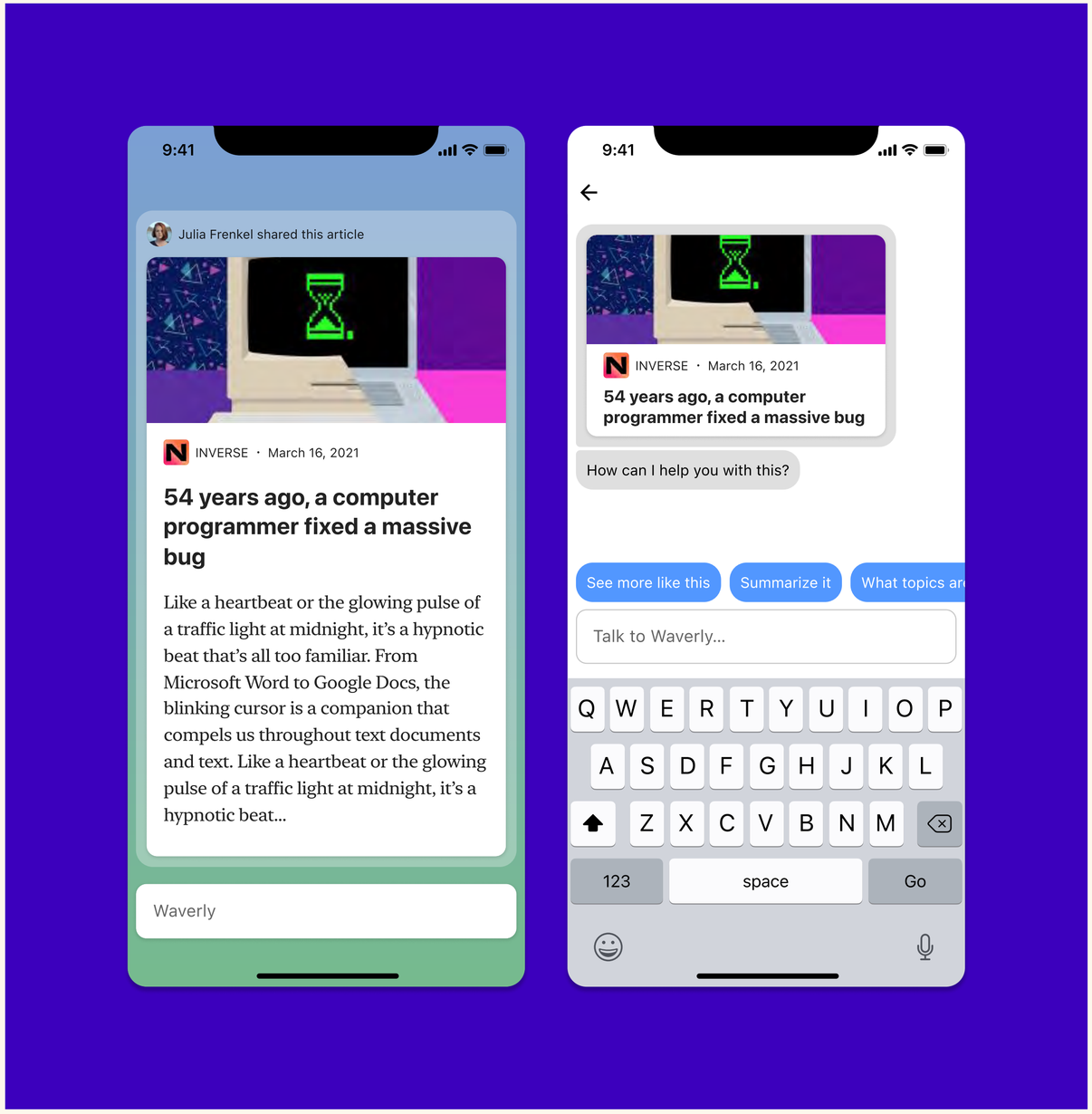
That big question shaped everything about how we worked, and how much freedom to explore we had. There was no existing playbook for AI-native social platforms in 2023, so we weren't retrofitting patterns from Twitter or Instagram, we were making them up as we went. Philippe gave the team real room to play, and we had a small group of beta testers we could put half-formed ideas in front of constantly to learn how our experiments we're landing.

Insights

The hardest design problem on this project wasn't technical, it was about ownership. If AI helps you write a post, at what point does it stop feeling like your post? We ran that question across a real spectrum, from posts that were close to 100% AI-authored down to closer to 20%, watching for the moment people started to disengage or feel like the content wasn't theirs anymore.

Too much AI and people feel like spectators to their own voice, too little and you lose the point of building an AI-native platform in the first place. A lot of the work was finding where that line actually sits, which isn't something you can answer in the abstract, you have to build it and watch people use it.





Explorations

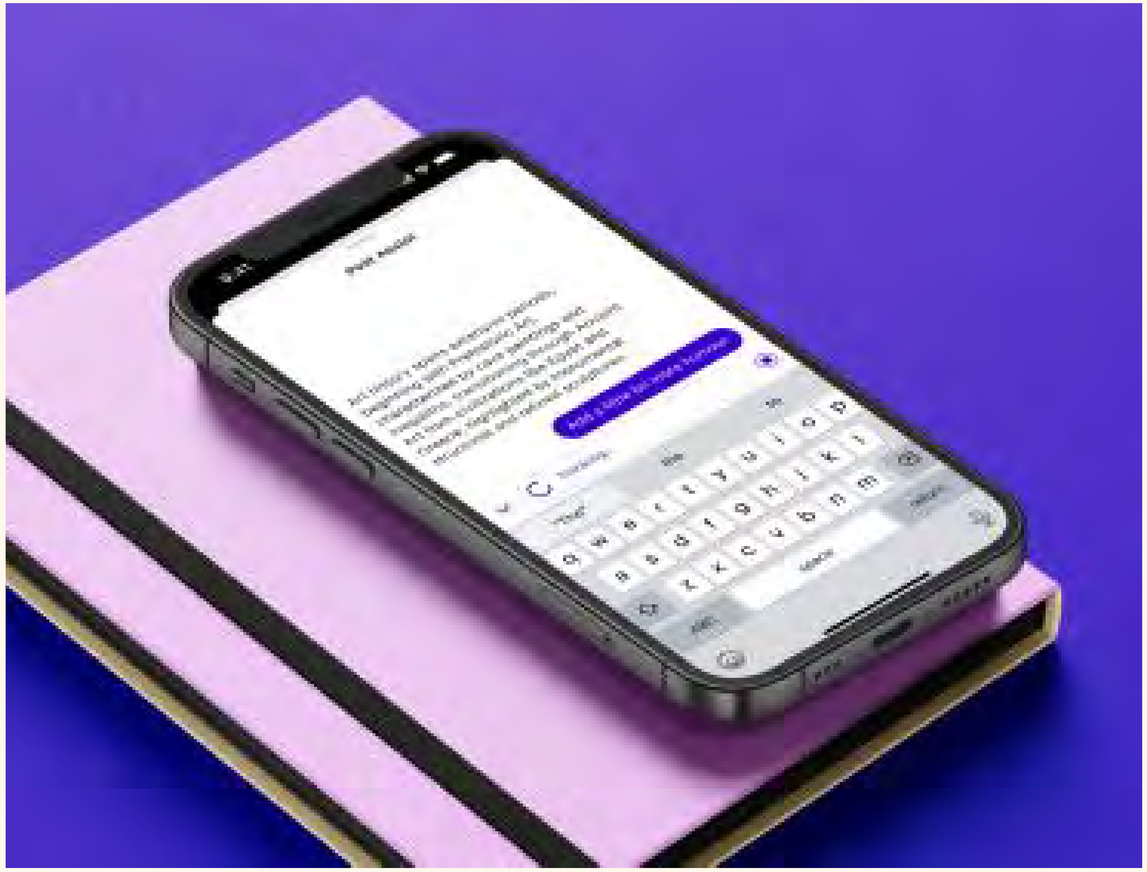
We essentially made a list of key features that create online communities within social media platforms and started to strategies ways in which AI could enhance connection and exploration.

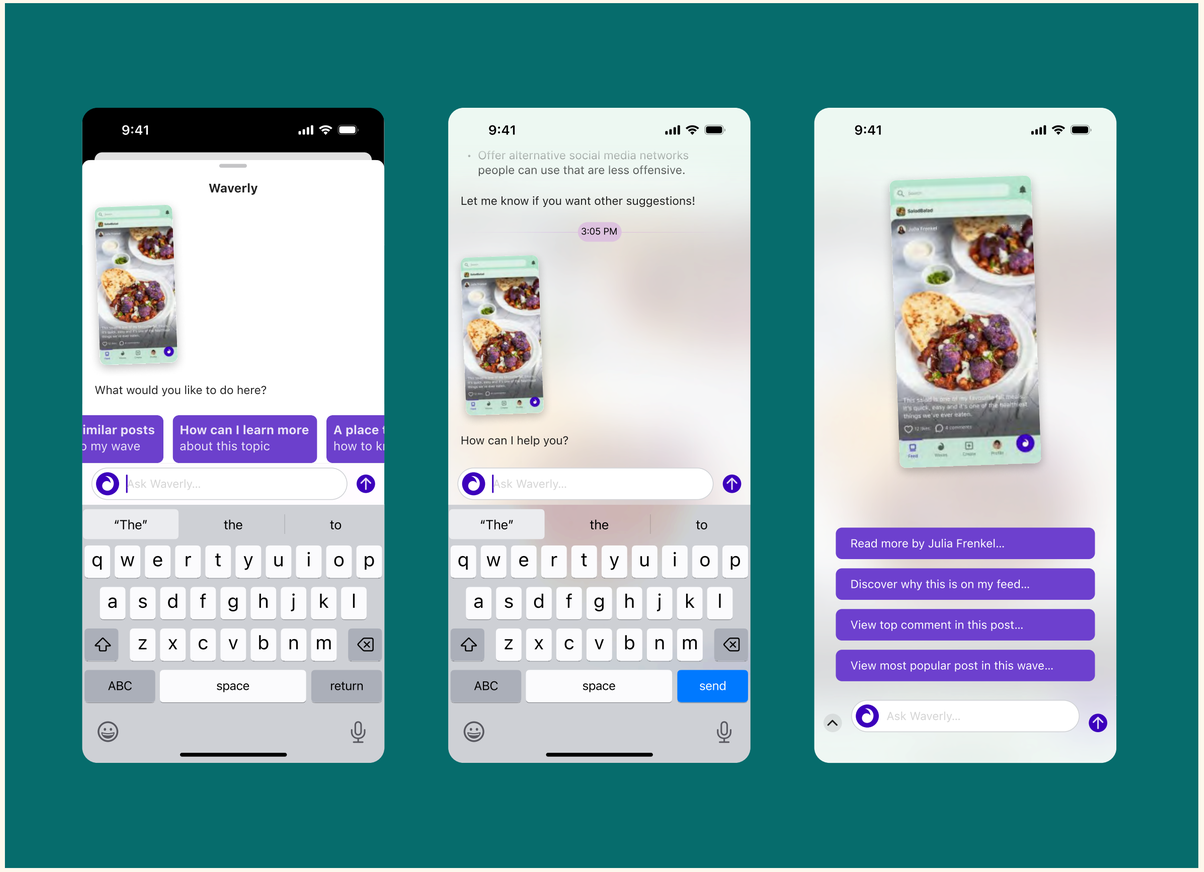
Ask Waverly was the most straightforward of the experiments, an assistant living inside the feed that could explain why something was showing up, generate comment ideas, or pull you down a rabbit hole on a topic. It was the clearest expression of "your algorithm, visible and editable," giving people a direct hand into the system instead of a black box.

Word DJ was further out. It was a conceptual exploration of co-authoring, where you could physically move pieces of content around inside a blog post, and the post would update and adapt to your changes in real time. Less a feature than a question: what does it feel like to write with something instead of asking it to write for you? It leaned hard into play rather than utility, which was intentional, we wanted to see what emerged when we stopped optimizing for a metric and just explored the collaboration itself.

Wave Creations used agents to scroll the web on your behalf, within parameters you set, and surface a stream of content around a topic you wanted to go deeper on. Instead of a feed reacting to your past behavior, it was closer to sending out a research assistant who understood roughly what you cared about.

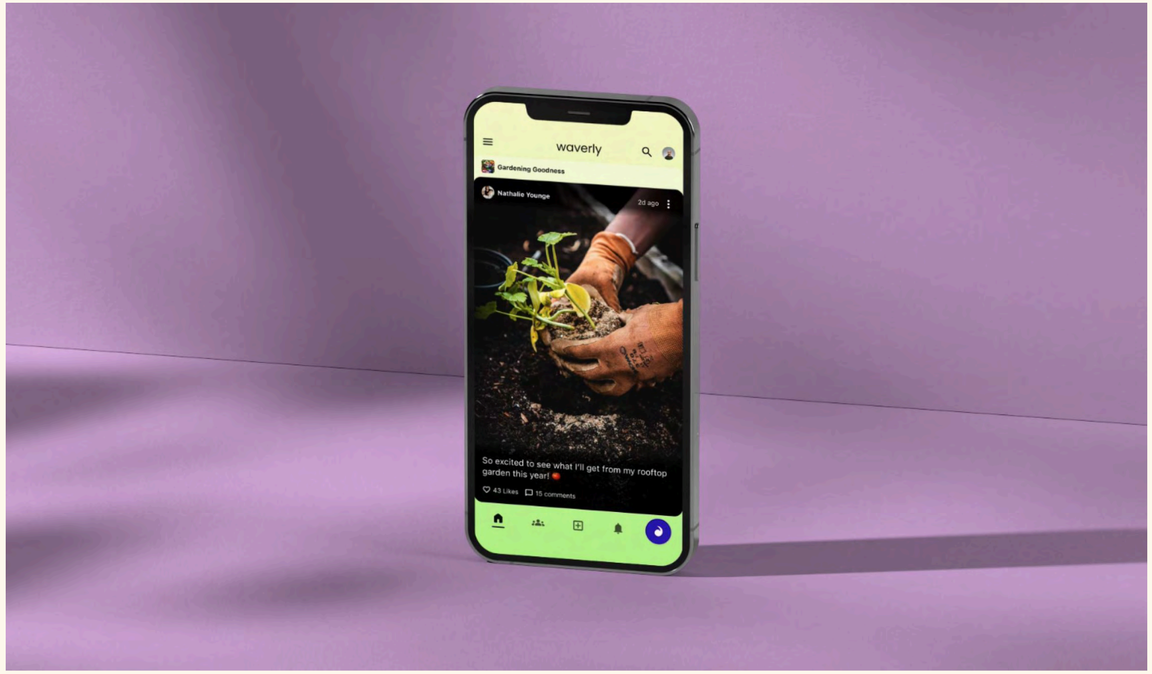
Agentic moderation was the more practical end of the spectrum, giving live feedback as people wrote, nudging content toward community guidelines before it was even posted, rather than moderating after the fact.





Context

Taken together, this was a great opportunity for a design team to run a live research program inside a shipping product, testing where AI genuinely added something to human connection and where it just got in the way. Some of that experimentation, like Ask Waverly and the AI content cards, made it into the core experience. Some of it, like Word DJ, stayed exploratory by design, a way of stress-testing what co-authorship could even mean before anyone tried to productize it.

Conclusion

Waverly launched with a genuinely engaged beta community, hundreds of users actively testing tools most of them had never seen anywhere else. More than the release itself, this project became a real answer to a question a lot of AI products are still trying to answer in my opinion which is “what does it actually feel like when AI and a human are making something together, and how do you protect the human's sense that it's still theirs."