ERIC TOMLINSON

Head of Product Design · Director of Design
Player-Coach Design Leadership · Payments · Fintech · Regulated Platforms
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SUMMARY

Player-coach design leader with more than fifteen years in product design and more than twenty-five in design, focused on payments, financial services and commerce: PayPal Consumer Financial Services (10M+ users), Flowbird's global payments platform (6,000+ cities), and 0-to-1 as first design hire at KIRU. Builds and leads distributed teams while personally designing the most complex workflows, turning regulatory, risk and technical constraints into simple, trusted experiences. Works as a product partner to leadership and clients: framing problems, defining requirements, setting priorities and success metrics, and creating shared experience patterns that let teams ship faster. Works AI-native, from evidence-checked discovery through prototyping and delivery.

AI-NATIVE DESIGN PRACTICE

- Built a repeatable method for AI-assisted product discovery that filters for evidence quality over output volume: multi-model adversarial review with human decision authority, validated through a two-round unmoderated study against pre-registered criteria for an unreleased fintech product.
- Designing and building two operations apps solo with AI (Claude Design, Supabase), from data model and design system to prototypes now in testing with staff.
- Designed and built two production websites end to end with AI-assisted tooling in Webflow, including design tokens, structured data for search and AI discoverability, and WCAG accessibility remediation.
- Integrated AI into live commerce operations, producing merchandising copy and video for a weekly-changing catalog so a five-person team keeps pace.

EXPERIENCE

Head of Design | Flowbird Group (acquired by Arrive.com)
Oct 2022 – May 2025 | Austin, TX · Remote
Led product design for a global payments and mobility platform processing parking, transit and EV charging transactions in 6,000+ cities across 80+ countries, spanning consumer mobile, operator SaaS and physical payment terminals.

- Built and led a 10-person design organization across six countries, structured by platform (mobile, SaaS, terminals). Retained 9 of 10 designers through an 18-month acquisition integration and promoted one to Design Lead.
- Stayed hands-on as player-coach: set strategy for the operator SaaS hub, the design system and shared experience patterns spanning all four surfaces, and white-label city apps including Detroit, Chicago and Maui, contributing design directly while coaching the designers who owned each area.
- Replaced a sales-dictated build process with a real product pipeline, partnering with the CPO on scrum cadence and a prioritized backlog so design shaped what got built.
- Rebuilt the design function after a 15-interview stakeholder audit: Figma standards, a shared design system and bi-weekly reviews. Design cycle time fell from 4 weeks to 2.2; OKR attainment rose from 75% to 95%.

- City apps included New York (850K MAU, 3.5M sessions/month, 4.8 stars) and Detroit (200K+ transactions/month, 4.6 stars).

Principal | A Stronger Idea Design, astrongeridea.design
Jun 2022 – Present | Austin, TX · Remote
Independent practice taking fintech, enterprise SaaS and commerce products from the first question to the thing that ships: strategy and discovery, research, product design and design systems, AI-assisted prototyping and low-code delivery, and post-launch measurement. Clients get senior strategy and hands-on making from one person, with no agency layers in between.

Fractional Head of Design | Feathers
Jun 2025 – Present | Austin, TX
Merchant e-commerce, brand and AI operations for a 20-year-old independent retailer with national press including Vogue.
- Grew online sales from 2% to 12% of total revenue by rebuilding the Shopify storefront, merchandising taxonomy and catalog, and instrumenting the first weekly conversion and checkout-funnel measurement across Shopify, Klaviyo and Microsoft Clarity.
- Designing and building two apps solo with AI, a store operations and brand guidelines app and a consignor management app, from data model and design system to prototypes now in testing with staff.

Fractional Head of Design | Euvic, for Alter Domus
Jan 2023 – Feb 2025 | Remote
Mission-critical fund administration platform (CapAssure) supporting 150+ funds with individual AUM from $150M to $20B.
- As player-coach, personally designed the most complex financial workflows for expert users while directing a mid-level designer, presenting to the client and owning design strategy in a compliance-heavy environment.
- Preserved expert context while removing friction through expandable data rows, standardized interaction patterns and reworked hierarchy, improving user satisfaction 45% and cutting time on task 25%.

Chief Product Designer, Fractional | Estate Guru
Aug 2022 – Apr 2025 | Remote
Estate planning fintech managing 1.2M+ legal documents.
- A UX audit and phased redesign improved task completion 35% and reduced user errors 50%.
- Ran the research program (15+ stakeholder interviews, prototype testing, behavioral surveys) that informed the roadmap, partnered with the CEO and CPO on product strategy, and built the Figma design system from scratch.

Head of Design | KIRU
Jun 2020 – Jul 2022 | Remote · USA, Colombia, Poland
Multi-sided payroll platform serving corporate clients and their employees in Costa Rica and Colombia.
- As first design hire (employee #7), built the product and design function from zero, owning discovery, definition and prioritization. Scaled to 400 corporate clients and 9,000+ users in 24 months, with NPS 80 and CSAT 83%.
- Built and led a five-person design team across Colombia and Poland, with shared critique, async process and quality standards across three time zones.
- Built a 200+ component design system with tokens and documentation, improving onboarding completion 20% and reducing support tickets 15%.

Product Design Lead | PayPal
Nov 2016 – Jun 2020 | San Jose, CA
Led product design for consumer payments and financial services serving 10M+ active users on web, iOS and Android.

- Consumer Financial Services: designed Virtual Card, Direct Deposit, Unified Card Servicing, wallet and spend controls, Bill Pay, and Early Wage Access with Paychex and PayActiv.
- The Unified Card System redesign increased feature adoption 40% and reduced customer service contacts for card loss and replacement 20%.
- Led design through the post-eBay platform modernization, moving legacy experiences onto shared pattern libraries across global navigation, settings, transaction activity, multi-currency, identity verification (FinCEN CIP) and GDPR.
- Diagnosed a settings architecture failure, with 75% of traffic landing on a page holding 25% of features, and redesigned navigation globally to address the avoidable support volume it drove.
- Partnered on hiring as the team grew from 8 to 15, with every recommended candidate hired. Mentored 3 designers, all promoted within 18 months, and restructured the team from platform-specific to cross-platform feature ownership.

Product Design Lead | Appleton Talent (RoleCall)
Jun 2015 – Oct 2016 | Contract · Remote
K-12 workforce platform for absence, substitute matching and time tracking across three user roles. Districts reached a 97% fill rate, and Appleton made the Inc. 5000 in 2016.

Co-Founder & Lead Designer | Visualize Wealth (Viziphi)
2013 – Nov 2015 | New York, NY
Wealth analytics for advisors; led all product design and branding. Accepted into Startupbootcamp's 2016 FinTech Accelerator; covered by American Banker.

Design Director | Moxie Interactive (Publicis Groupe)
Apr 2011 – Jul 2014 | New York, NY
UX/UI strategy for Verizon, L'Oréal Paris, Google/YouTube, BBC America and Maybelline.

Art and Creative Direction | Agencies and direct clients
1999 – 2011

SKILLS

Leadership: player-coach leadership, team building, distributed teams, design operations, hiring, executive and client communication, cross-functional partnership with Product, Engineering and Compliance.
Product: discovery and problem framing, requirements definition, roadmap prioritization, success metrics, funnel and conversion analysis, experimentation and A/B testing.
Design craft: payments and financial services UX, design systems and shared experience patterns, data-dense interfaces, user research, usability testing, WCAG accessibility, compliance-driven design.
AI and tools: Claude, Claude Code, Claude Design, ChatGPT, Cursor, Supabase, Figma, Webflow, Notion, HTML/CSS, Jira.

EDUCATION & WRITING

Georgia State University | BA, English · Graduate coursework, Computer Information Systems
Published at erictomlinson.com/perspectives and astrongeridea.design/insights