Mike MacDonald

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Summary

Principal product designer and design engineer with 20+ years building web and mobile products. Founding designer four times over. Designs AI products directly in code. Solo founder of a bootstrapped AI-native startup live on web, iOS, and Android.

Experience

Principal Product Designer / Contio

Mar 2025 – Nov 2026

- Founding and sole product designer for Contio, an AI platform that builds institutional knowledge from meetings. Owned product design, UX, user flows, branding, and feature prioritization from zero to launch; partnered with the founding AI engineer on agent behavior and human-in-the-loop (HITL) flows. Platform grew to thousands of users and tens of thousands of captured meetings.
- Designed Contio's agent surfaces end to end: multi-turn agent chat, HITL review and approval, agentic document and collateral generation, meeting capture with live waveform visualization, and automated notes and action items. AI elements woven into the surrounding UI (cards, actions, suggestions), not raw chat output.
- Led the company's shift from Figma handoffs to designing in code, increasing engineering team output by 20%. Shipped 70+ PRs across web, desktop, iOS, and Android. Replaced the Figma library with Storybook as the design-system source of truth.
- Designed and co-built every view and interaction in Contio's iOS and Android apps, live in both app stores.

Founder / Herding Cats

Apr 2026 – Present

- Founded and solo-built Herding Cats using frontier AI tooling: a 0-to-1 agentic operating system for touring dance competitions and dance camps that brings staffing, flights, hotels, equipment, merch, and finance into a single system. Live on web, iOS, and Android. 15 production companies signed up, 5 active design partners.
- Tight design-partner loop: bugs, feedback, and feature requests are triaged, prioritized, designed, built, and shipped within days or even hours. Currently piloting registration, show-day, and judge-scoring modules.
- LLM-powered onboarding: users drop in their existing working docs, spreadsheets, PDFs, emails, contracts, and notes, and the system configures the company automatically, populating settings, tour events, rosters, venues, hotels, and staff profiles.
- AI staffing populates rosters across multiple events from company staff and event criteria, optimizing for travel costs, lodging logistics, staff availability, and preferences. A proactive agent flags missing values and nudges users to complete records.
- Integrated Google APIs (geolocation), SerpAPI (flight pricing and history), and HotelPlanner so travel coordinators can book flights, hotels, and rental cars without leaving the app, with costs rolled up into a comprehensive financial reporting module.

Senior UI/UX Designer / Markmonitor

Jan 2024 – Mar 2025

- Led the ground-up redesign of an enterprise domain-management and brand-protection platform used by 70% of the world's 50 most-trafficked websites, including Google, Amazon, Netflix, Verizon, Boeing, and Disney.
- Ran discovery with enterprise customers and domain strategists; redesigned the portfolio, brand-protection, and reporting portals with new UX and improved information architecture.
- Built the portal's component library and interaction patterns in Figma; embedded with the engineering team through delivery.

Product Designer and Product Owner / Ventive

Feb 2022 – Mar 2023

- Product owner in a high-volume design and development agency; worked directly with client stakeholders to assess needs and prioritize roadmaps for web and mobile applications. Managed $1.3M in concurrent annual client budgets.
- Led discovery for a roofing-shingle identification company across shipping intake, warehouse operations, and identification workflows; delivered a bespoke web app that cut order-processing time and labor by ~20% and increased capacity.

Earlier Experience

- **Director of User Experience** / Kribbz: founding designer; designed, built, and launched an online real estate platform.
- **Head of UX and Design** / gap intelligence: gap's first designer; web app overhaul saved analysts ~500 hours a year; surveyed enterprise customers including Apple and Samsung; rebuilt the company website solo and mentored three front-end engineers.
- **UX Manager** / MD Revolution: led a large-scale user research campaign; designed the first version of the RevUp iOS app.
- **Product Designer** / MyTotalHealth: brand revamp, web and iOS redesign; +35-point NPS lift; six-figure Nestlé investment.
- **Lead UX Designer and UX Coach** / App'd Mobile: sole UX designer and mentor for 24 participants' iOS and Android apps.
- **Founder** / EmpireNine (2002–present): design and development studio; web, UX/UI, CRO, SEO, branding for dozens of clients.

Skills

0-to-1 product design, AI-native and agent UX, conversational and generative UI, human-in-the-loop (HITL) design, designing for probabilistic systems, design engineering, prototyping in code, design systems, interaction design, information architecture, user research and usability testing, accessibility, B2B SaaS and enterprise, mobile (iOS and Android), branding, CRO, product ownership, design leadership and mentoring, cross-functional partnership with product and engineering

Tools

Figma, Storybook, Lottie, HTML and CSS, React, TypeScript, Node.js, Swift, Xcode, Tailwind, SCSS, Git and GitHub, REST APIs, WordPress, Remotion, Kling, Claude Code, Claude Design, Grok, Grok Bot, Cursor, Codex, MCP and tool-calling agents