Creating Cohesion in Complexity Under Pressure

Creating a shared language that connected people, platforms, and products around a common vision for the future.

As TurboTax modernized its platform architecture, I helped establish the design system foundation and shared UI language that enabled teams to build with greater consistency across user experiences.

THIS IS THE STORY



THE WEIGHT OF COMPLEXITY

Flying the Plane While Building It

In 2015, TurboTax was undergoing a major enterprise replatforming while continuing to serve 30+ millions of customers during one of the most critical financial moments of the year.

Designers were creating similar patterns in silos. Engineers were rebuilding functionalities. Product teams were focused on delivery. What appeared to be a design challenge was rooted in a deeper organizational problem.

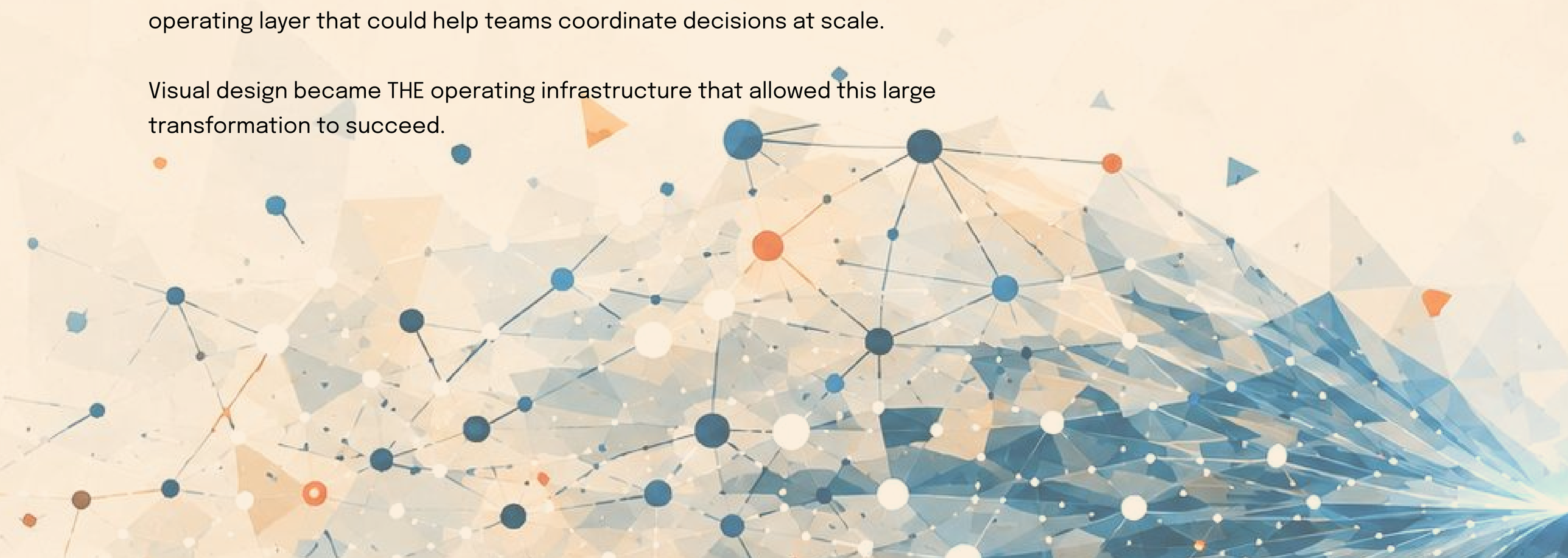
SEEING THE INVISIBLE PROBLEM

The Danger of Fragmentation

The organization had talented designers, engineers, and product leaders. Everyone was flying at an incredible speed. But, without a shared vision, teams risked solving similar problems in different ways.

The challenge wasn't simply building a new platform. We needed a practical operating layer that could help teams coordinate decisions at scale.

Visual design became THE operating infrastructure that allowed this large transformation to succeed.





Fragmented Teams **No Shared Language** **Backend Transformation**

“The point in history at which we stand is full of **promise and danger**.

The world will either move forward toward **unity** and widely shared prosperity — or it will move **apart**.”

– Franklin D. Roosevelt

A PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO ALIGNMENT

Cohesion Before Optimization

It’s late September 2014, teams were already under pressure to ship new features towards the next tax year.

Introducing new standards, component governance, and platform thinking required careful collaboration.

THE TIPPING POINT

From Design Artifact to Operational Framework

The breakthrough was not launching the design system. The breakthrough was adoption.

It happened when teams stopped viewing the system as a design deliverable and started viewing it as shared language and infrastructure.

The design system became a mechanism for alignment.

The conversation moved from:
“How do we build this feature?”
to
“How do we contribute this onto the new platform?”



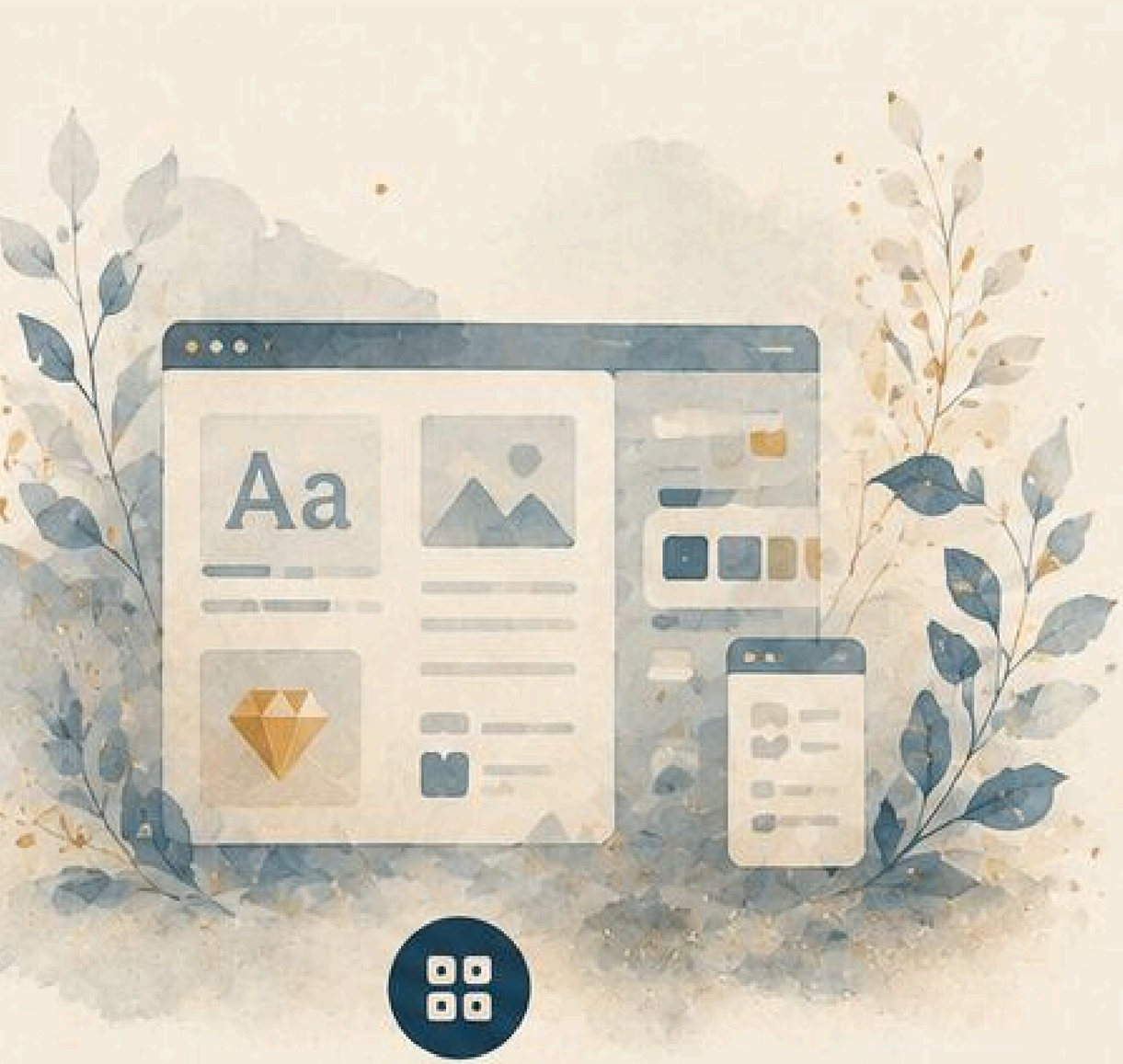
BUILDING OPERATIONAL COHESION

Creating a Shared Language

Adoption required helping teams understand how a shared system could make their work easier, faster, and more consistent while creating a stronger foundation for the evolving platform.

The objective was not standardization.
The objective was building human confidence.

When people understand how to move forward, they can focus their energy on solving meaningful problems.



BUILDING SHARED BELIEF

Creating Alignment Through Design Systems

To support adoption, I led and participated in more than 10 internal presentations, tutorials, demos, workshops, and cross-functional knowledge-sharing sessions with designers, engineers, product managers, and architects.

These efforts helped:

- Explain the vision behind the system
- Demonstrate reusable component patterns
- Align implementation approaches
- Build trust across teams to increase engineering & design participation and adoption
- Translate design-system concepts into practical implementation guidance

COMPASSION

Reducing Friction for Builders

Large-scale systems work is ultimately about helping people thrive, doing their best work.

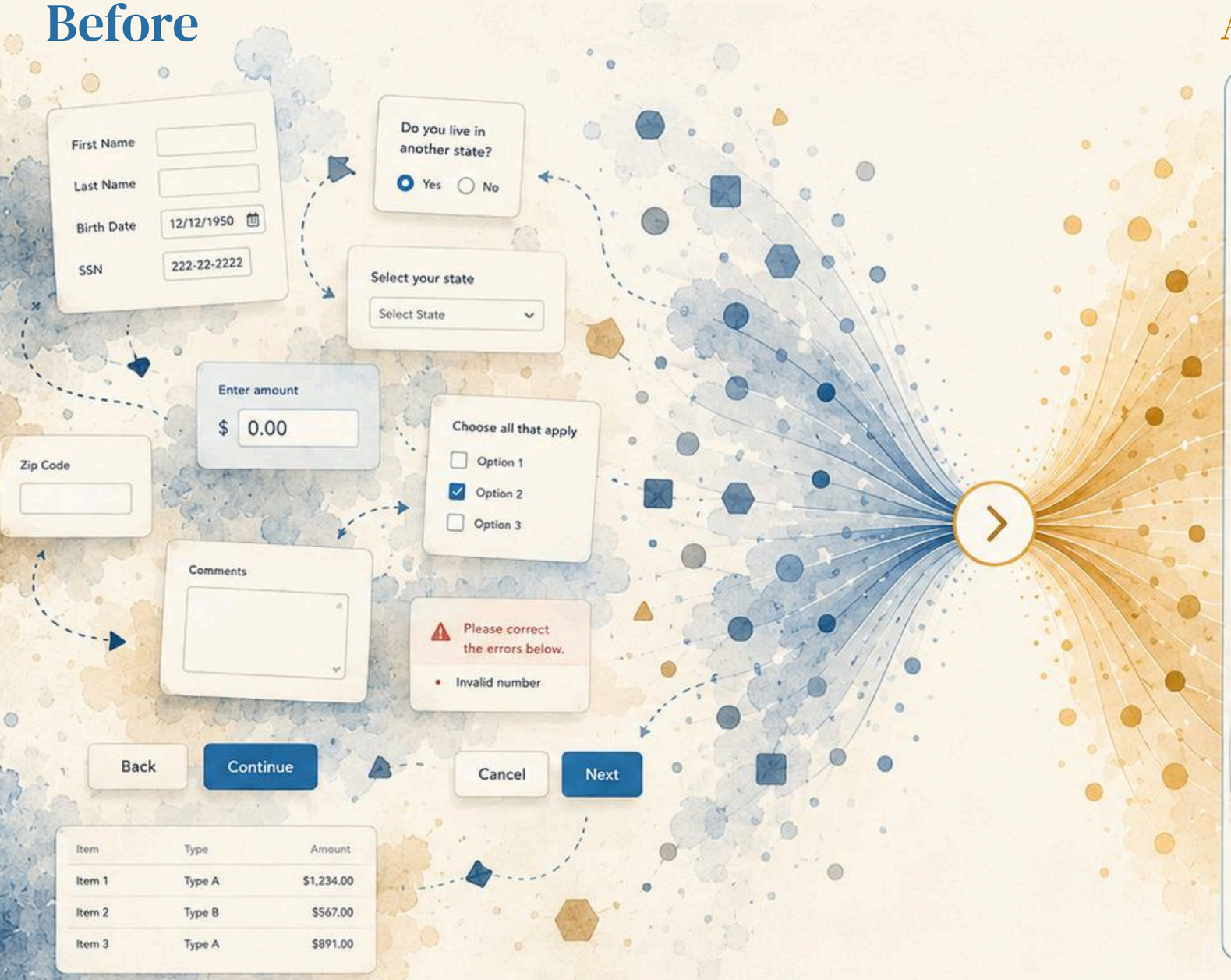
The result was more than a collection of reusable components. The design system became a shared language that reduced ambiguity, minimized duplicate work, improved handoffs, and helped teams collaborate with greater confidence.

- For customers, consistency reduced uncertainty.
- For designers, clarity reduced ambiguity.
- For engineers, reusable patterns reduced interpretation.
- For product teams, shared standards reduced decision fatigue.

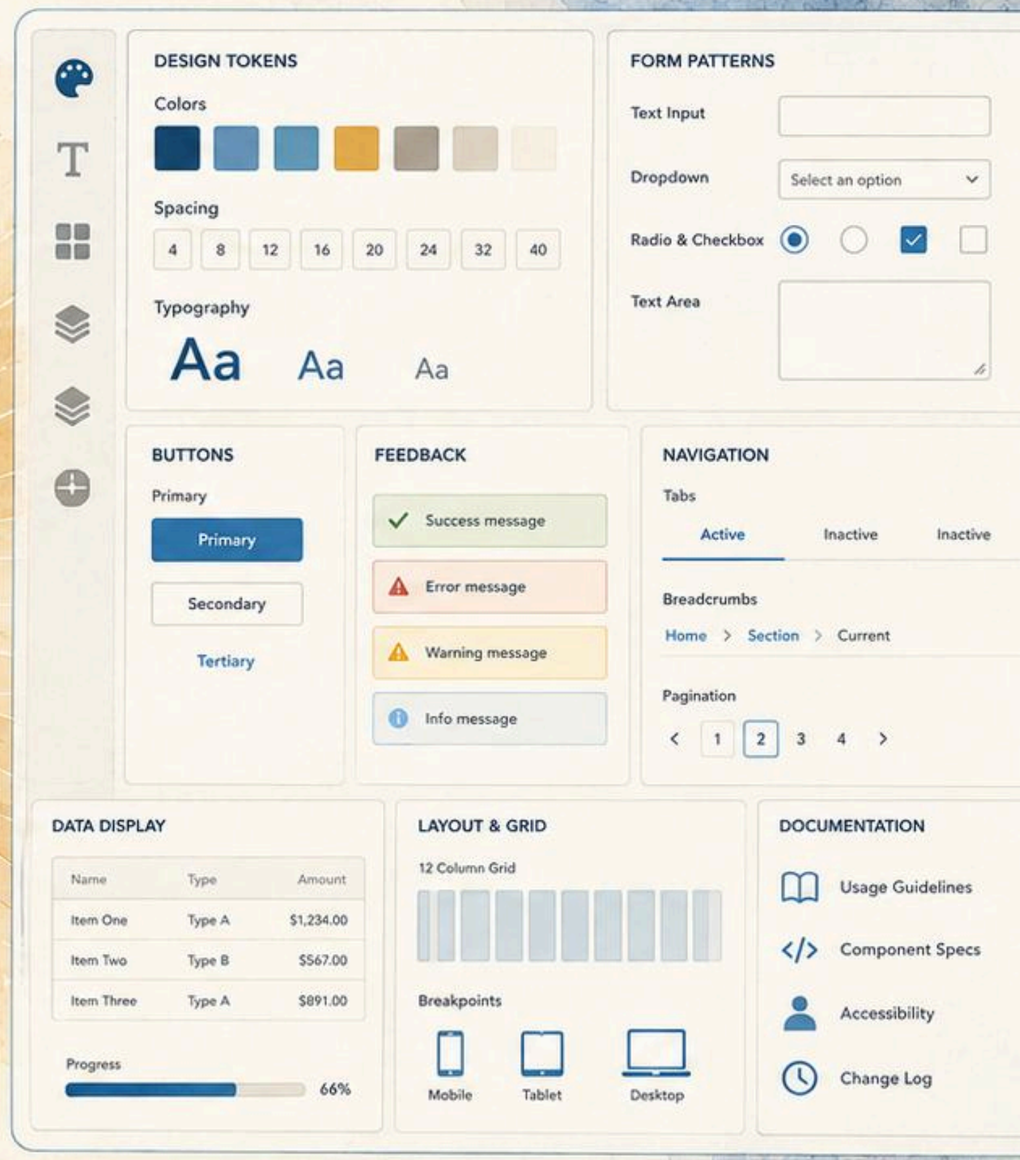


Moving from building a platform, to a practical operating layer that could help teams coordinate decisions at scale. Transitioning the entire organization from a design deliverable to a shared, operational language.

Before



After



Siloed teams
Working in isolation

Custom solutions
Reinventing the same components

High cost
More time to build and maintain

Discover & Analyze
Audit existing patterns, pain points

Define & Align
Establish principles, patterns, templates

Build & Scale
Create reusable components, document & evolve

Consistent experience
Across all products and platforms

Scalable impact
Faster delivery for users and business

UI WIKI DESIGN SPECS

COMPLETE ACHIEVEMENTS OVERVIEW

1. BASIC ASSETS

IMAGE ASSETS

- Sponsor Logo (Primary Info)

TEXT ASSETS

- regular text
- Labeled Text

ACTION ASSETS

- Buttons
- Back Link
- Jump to
- Print PDF

2. FIELD ASSETS

DROPDOWN

Select an option

CHOICE

- (•) Option one
- ( ) Option two
- ( ) Option three
- ( ) None of the above

INLINE ERRORS AND WARNINGS

Error message

Warning message

INPUT FIELDS

Floating Label

Email address

Regular Input

First name

Textbox

AUTOCOMPLETE

Start typing...

California
Colorado
Connecticut

SEARCH AUTOCOMPLETE

Search...

MULTI LINE INPUT

RADIO

- (•) Option one
- ( ) Option two

CHECKBOX

- [x] Option one
- [ ] Option two

LINK UNDER TEXT FIELD

What's this?

TILE SELECTOR

Home | Business | Rental

WAS THIS HELPFUL

NONE OF THE ABOVE

- [ ] None of the above

3. GROUPING ASSETS

- Moneyball
- Show the Math
- Multiple Copy User Interface (MCUI) - summarycollection
- Carousel
- Import - OCR Instructions
- Guide Me - Replatform
- Explain Why

4. TEMPLATES / VIEW TYPES

- Gateway
- Summary view
- Payoff
- Review (read-only)
- 109x Read only
- W-2 Read-Only
- Bookend
- Info view
- Survey
- Topic Launcher
- Interview
- Transition (transfer screen)

5. ANIMATIONS

- Fallback Animation
- Import - Import Animation
- Loader & Security Loader
- Progress bar

6. STYLE GUIDES

- Designing for Tablet
- Mobile Experience Standards (Playbook)
- Player Assets / View Types Gallery (Kitchen Sink)
- Player Nomenclature
- Spacing and Padding Standards Masthead
- Image sizing guideline
- Typography Style Guide
- Web vs Native Interaction Spec
- XD Sample Wiki Template

ACHIEVEMENTS SUMMARY

BASIC ASSETS — 3 Items

Image Assets	1
Text Assets	2
Action Assets	4

FIELD ASSETS — 14 Items

Dropdown	1
Choice	1
Inline Errors & Warnings	
Input Fields	6
Autocomplete	2
Radio / Checkbox	2
Link under Text	1
Multi Line Input	1
None of the Above	1
Search Autocomplete	1
Tile Selector	1
Was This Helpful	1

GROUPING ASSETS — 8 Items

Moneyball	1
Show the Math	1
MCUI - summarycollection	1
Carosuel	1
Import - OCR Instructions	1
Guide Me - Replatform	1
Explain Why	1

TEMPLATES / VIEW TYPES — 15 Items

Gateway	1
Summary view	1
Payoff	1
Review (read-only)	1
109x Read only	1
W-2 Read-Only	1
Bookend	1
Info view	1
Survey	1
Topic Launcher	1
Interview	1
Transition	1

ANIMATIONS — 4 Items

Fallback Animation	1
Import - Import Animation	1
Loader & Security Loader	1
Progress bar	1

STYLE GUIDES — 10 Items

Designing for Tablet	1
Mobile Experience Standards (Playbook)	1
Player Assets / View Types Gallery (Kitchen Sink)	1
Player Nomenclature	1
Spacing and Padding Standards Masthead	1
Image sizing guideline	1
Typography Style Guide	1
Web vs Native Interaction Spec	1
XD Sample Wiki Template	1

TOTAL ASSETS 54 • Basic Assets 7 • Field Assets 14 • Grouping Assets 8 • Templates / View Types 15 • Animations 4 • Style Guides 10

QUICK STATS (BY ASSET TYPE)

- 54 Total Assets
- 22 Interactive Elements (Inputs, Buttons, Links, Selectors)
- 15 Templates / View Types
- 4 Animations
- 10 Style Guides
- 8 Grouping Assets

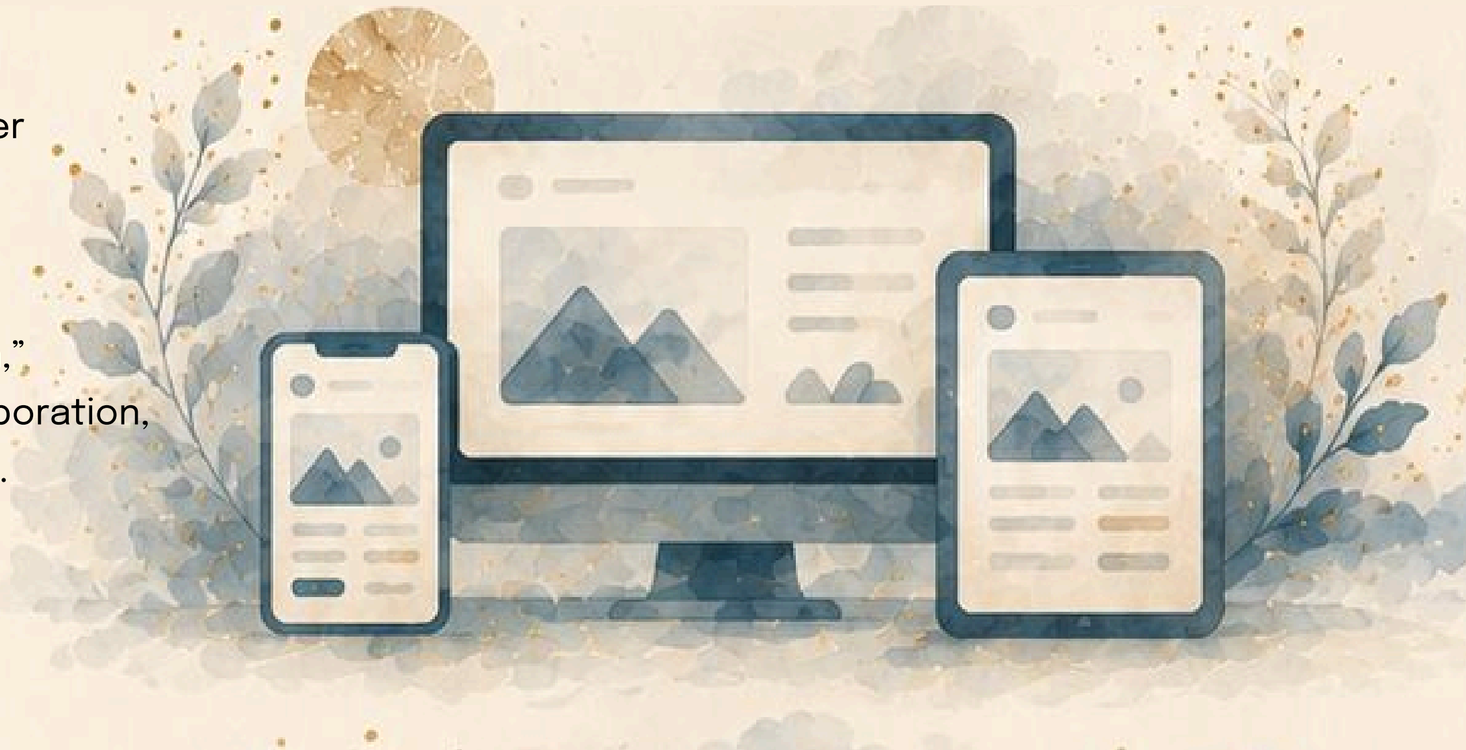
WITH AWE AND HUMILITY

Revealing the Ecosystem

One of the most impactful lessons from this project, I realized the challenge was less about interfaces and technology, and more about organizational alignment.

Awe happens when people see something larger than themselves.

As the design system matured, it shifted our conversation from “My Screen” to “Our Platform,” reinforcing the value of systems thinking, collaboration, and a unified approach to building experiences.



INSIGHT & REFLECTION

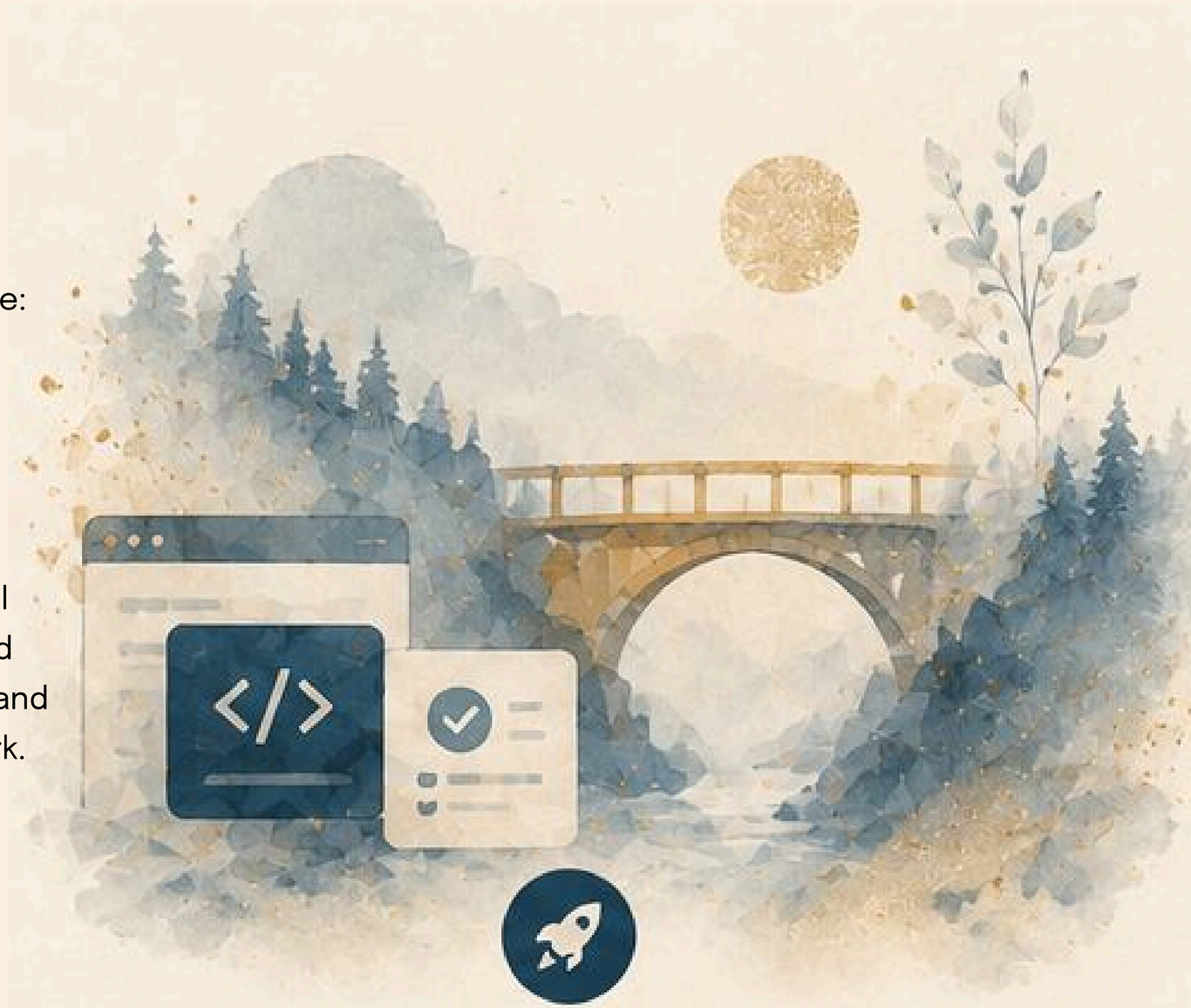
Designing Conditions for Others to Thrive

Looking back, the most meaningful part of the work was not any single component or artifact.

It was contributing to a framework that helped people:

- Collaborate more effectively
- Move faster with confidence
- Build consistently at scale
- Continue evolving the platform over time

That experience reinforced my belief that meaningful design leadership is less about owning outcomes and more about creating the systems, shared language, and conditions that empower others to do their best work.



A DECADE LATER

A Living System

A decade later, in September 2025, I returned to TurboTax to support the next generation of AI-powered experiences.

What I Observed:

- The platform is still thriving
- Cross-functional collaboration became its operational mech.
- The foundation continued to evolve
- Teams were still building on same common principles
- New system teams are formed to support the platform

