Building Trust in the Rental Housing Market

PROJECT   MSc in UX and Service Design

ROLE   Lead Researcher & Designer

DURATION   Sep 2025 – Present

Contents

Introduction

Project context

Introduction

Theme

Building Trust in the Rental Housing Market

Process

- Understanding the ecosystem (Stakeholders, As-Is Blueprint)
- Understanding users (Interviews insights)
- Selecting the focus (Priority Matrix)
- Designing the solution (Persona/Journey, Flows, Redesign Proposal)

Outcome

A redesigned solution for trust-building at the listing stage

Stakeholder Map

Understanding the service ecosystem

# Stakeholder Map

Primary

Tenants, Landlords

Secondary

Online rental platforms, Real estate agents, Building management

Tertiary

Roommates, Friends, Family
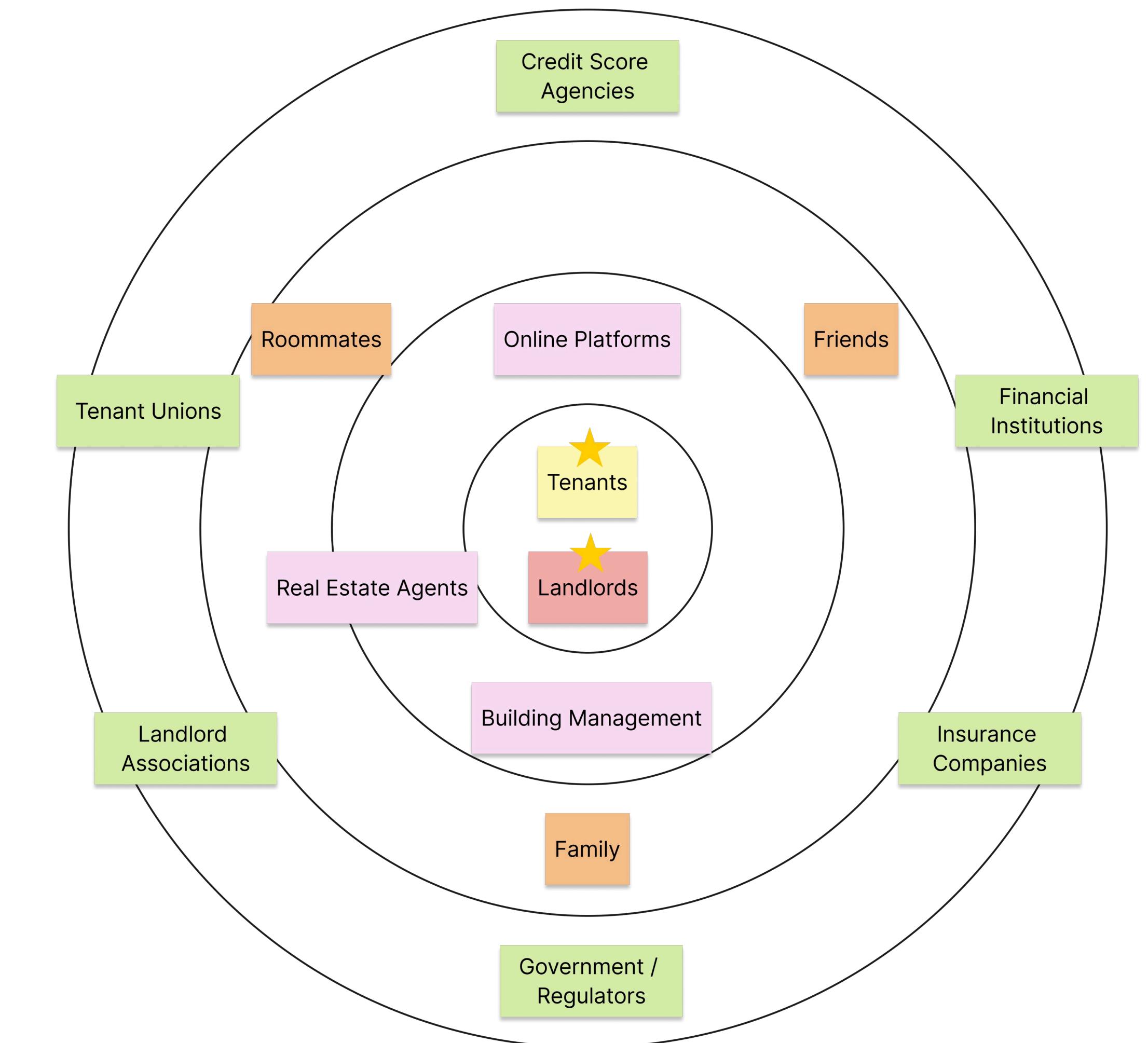
As-Is Service Blueprint

Current journey, pain points, and critical moments

As-Is Service Blueprint

What this blueprint shows

- The end-to-end rental journey
- Visible vs. hidden system processes
- Key touchpoints for tenants and landlords
- Critical moments where trust drops
- Opportunities for redesign

Offering name: Current Rental Experience
Scenario name: Tenant–Landlord Communication Across the Rental Journey

	1. Listing	2. Interest Expression	3. Inquiry & Communication	4. Viewing	5. Decision & Agreement	6. Post-Move Relationship
Step (Visible)	The landlord registers a property for rent.	The tenant searches using filters and clicks the inquiry button.	The tenant and landlord exchange messages.	Visit scheduled or video meeting conducted.	Contract signing, deposit transfer, and key handover. (in person)	Tenants and landlords communicate directly for maintenance, issues, or renewal.
Step (Hidden)	The platform uploads the property to the database and determines its visibility ranking.	The system sends notifications and creates a message queue.	The system stores messages and tracks response time.	Schedule sync	-	-
Touchpoints	Real estate platform / text / email	"Contact" button on platform, text message / email	In-app chat / email / text	On-site visit / video call / calendar	in-person meeting / platform message or text for coordination	Phone calls, text messages, in-person visits
Roles	Landlord	Tenant / landlord	Tenant / landlord	Tenant / landlord	Tenant / landlord	Tenant / landlord
Process	The landlord enters property details (price, terms, and photos) and posts the listing.	The tenant filters listings, and expresses interest.	Exchange of details, Q&A, and schedule coordination.	Both sides meet to confirm details and assess mutual fit before agreement.	Users finalize the agreement offline, sign physical documents, and transfer deposit through bank or cash	Handle maintenance requests, discuss payments or renewals
Technology	Property database, search algorithm	Messaging system, notification API	Chat server, file transfer, response log	Chat server, file transfer, calendar	text, phone, bank transfer systems	phone, messenger, email, conversation in person
Policy	Listing guidelines, anti-fraud policy	Privacy policy, hidden contact information	No identity verification, no communication guide	Scheduling and attendance policy	offline documentation	offline documentation
Critical Moments	Trust begins with the first impression (photos, price, and description)	First contact (response speed & tone) determines trust.	Response speed & tone determines trust	First impression of the property, first real interaction	Trust has already been formed before this stage; signing is a procedural confirmation.	How issues are resolved determines whether trust continues or breaks down.
Opportunities	Verified property and landlord/tenant badges, Ratings and feedback from previous landlords/tenants	Visible reply rate	Visible reply rate	Landlord pre-viewing condition checklist	Easy-to-read Digital Contract	Create optional post-move support tool such as feedback collection.
Metrics	Click-through rate on verified badges	Number of inquiries, average reply time	Average reply time	mutual satisfaction after viewing, cancellation/no show rate,	-	Maintenance request resolution time, renewal rate, post-stay satisfaction.
Questions	How might property and landlord verification be automated?	Why do some users drop off after expressing interest?	How can trust and emotion be measured during conversations?	How can the system help both sides evaluate compatibility and make fair, confident decisions during viewing?	How can platforms better support transparency and reliability during offline contract processes?	How can the service extend trust and communication beyond the contract?
Notes	-	-	-	-	-	-

Interviews Key Findings

Core insights that shape the redesign direction

Affinity Mapping

Verification & Authenticity	Personal & Behavioral Trust Signals	Behavior History & Fairness

Inability to verify listing accuracy	Reliance on unverified text	Desire for official proof	Lack of profile signals	Missing personal cues	Trust signals in response patterns	Need for past-behavior visibility	Lack of tenant/ landlord references	Invisible responsibility history

Findings

Users cannot verify the authenticity of listings or ownership.

The lack of official verification creates uncertainty, forcing tenants and landlords to rely on unverified text and assumptions.

Trust is shaped by small personal and communication cues that are currently missing.

Users depend on profile details and communication patterns to assess trust, but these signals are inconsistent or unavailable.

Past behavior is the strongest indicator of trust, yet invisible on current platforms.

Tenants and landlords want visibility into rental history, responsibility, and references to make informed decisions.

Priority Matrix

Identifying high-impact opportunities

Priority Matrix

Priority 1

Verification badges, ratings

Priority 2

Reply rate & post-move support

Priority 3

Digital contract & condition checklist

Value to the user

High

MAYBE

Create optional post-move support tool such as feedback collection.

Visible response time

YES

Ratings and feedback from previous landlords/ tenants

Verified property and landlord/ tenant badges

NO

MAYBE

Easy-to-read Digital Contract

Landlord pre- viewing condition checklist

Low

Low **Feasibility** High
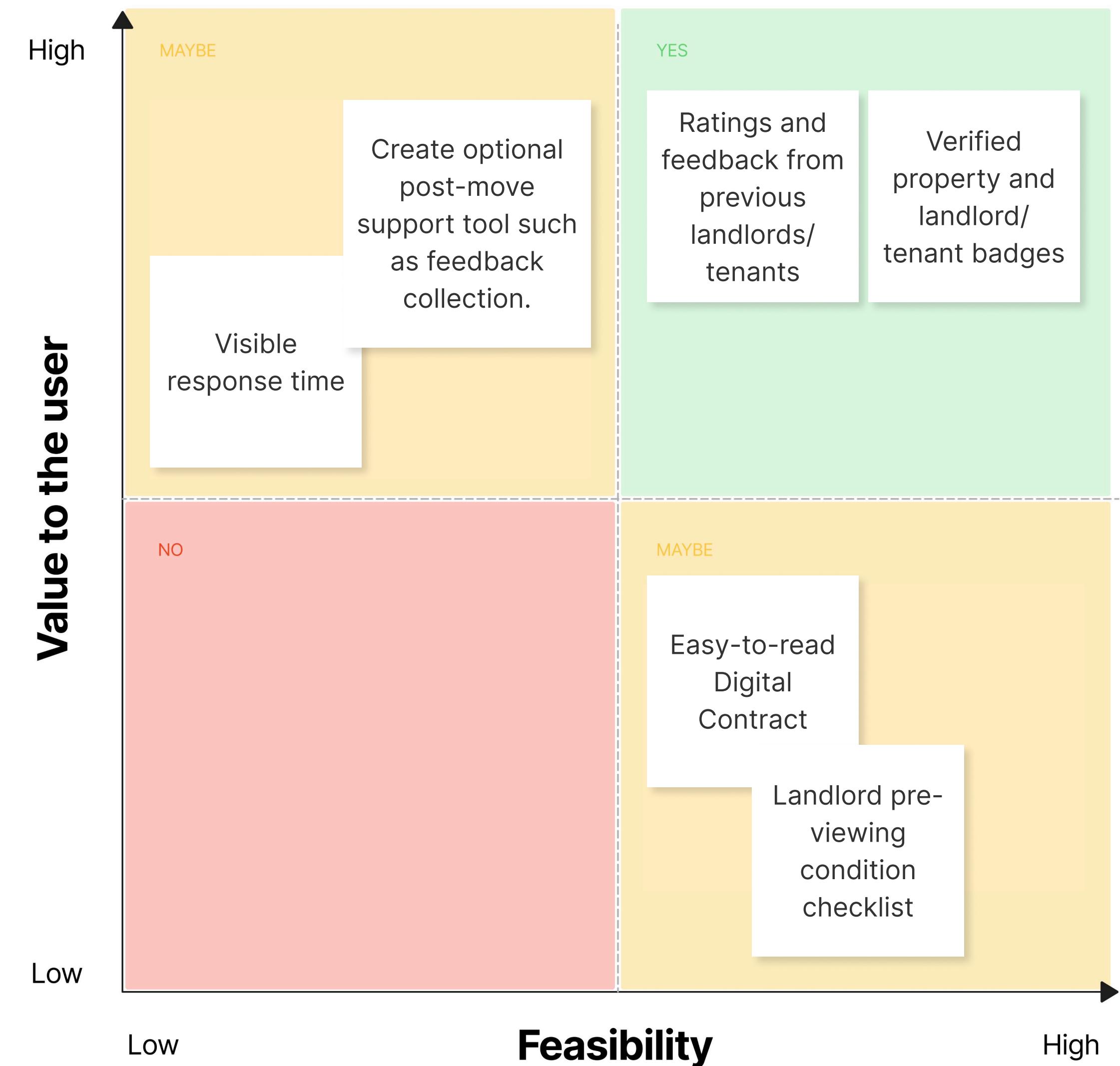
Touchpoints for Redesign

Key service moments selected for improvement

Personas

Tenant & Landlord

Developed directly from the target users and their interview insights, representing the core needs, behaviors, and trust-related challenges of each side.
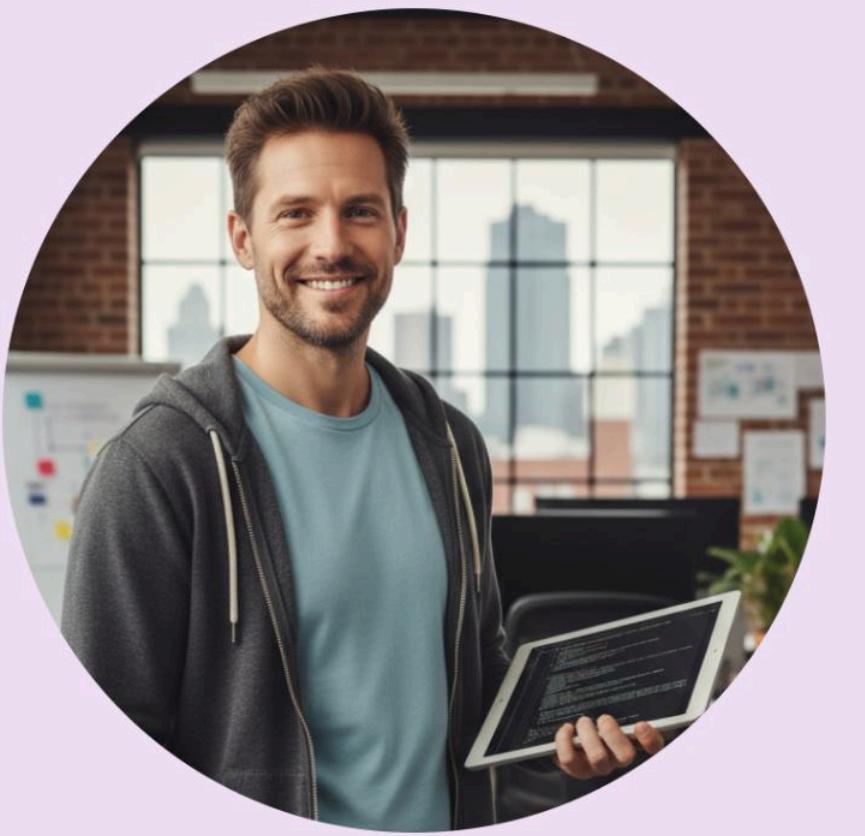
Alex (Tenant)

"I wish there was a way to know if I can trust the landlord and what he says about the house."'

- Age : 34
- Occupation : Young professional in a tech-related field
- Location : Lives in a large European city

Has rented several apartments through typical online platforms. Often faced unreliable communication and hidden property issues discovered only after moving in.

Goals

- To find a home and a landlord he can genuinely trust.
- To make rental decisions based on transparency and mutual respect, not guesswork.
- To feel secure before signing a lease.

Pain points

- To find a home and a landlord he can genuinely trust.
- To make rental decisions based on transparency and mutual respect, not guesswork.
- To feel secure before signing a lease.

Needs/Motivations

- Accurate, verifiable property information
- Clear digital trust signals
- Emotional safety and reduced uncertainty

Personality

Introvert ———————————————— Extrovert

Analytical ———————————————— Creative

Busy ———————————————— Time rich

Messy ———————————————— Organized

Independent ———————————————— Team player

Passive ———————————————— Active

Safe ———————————————— Risky
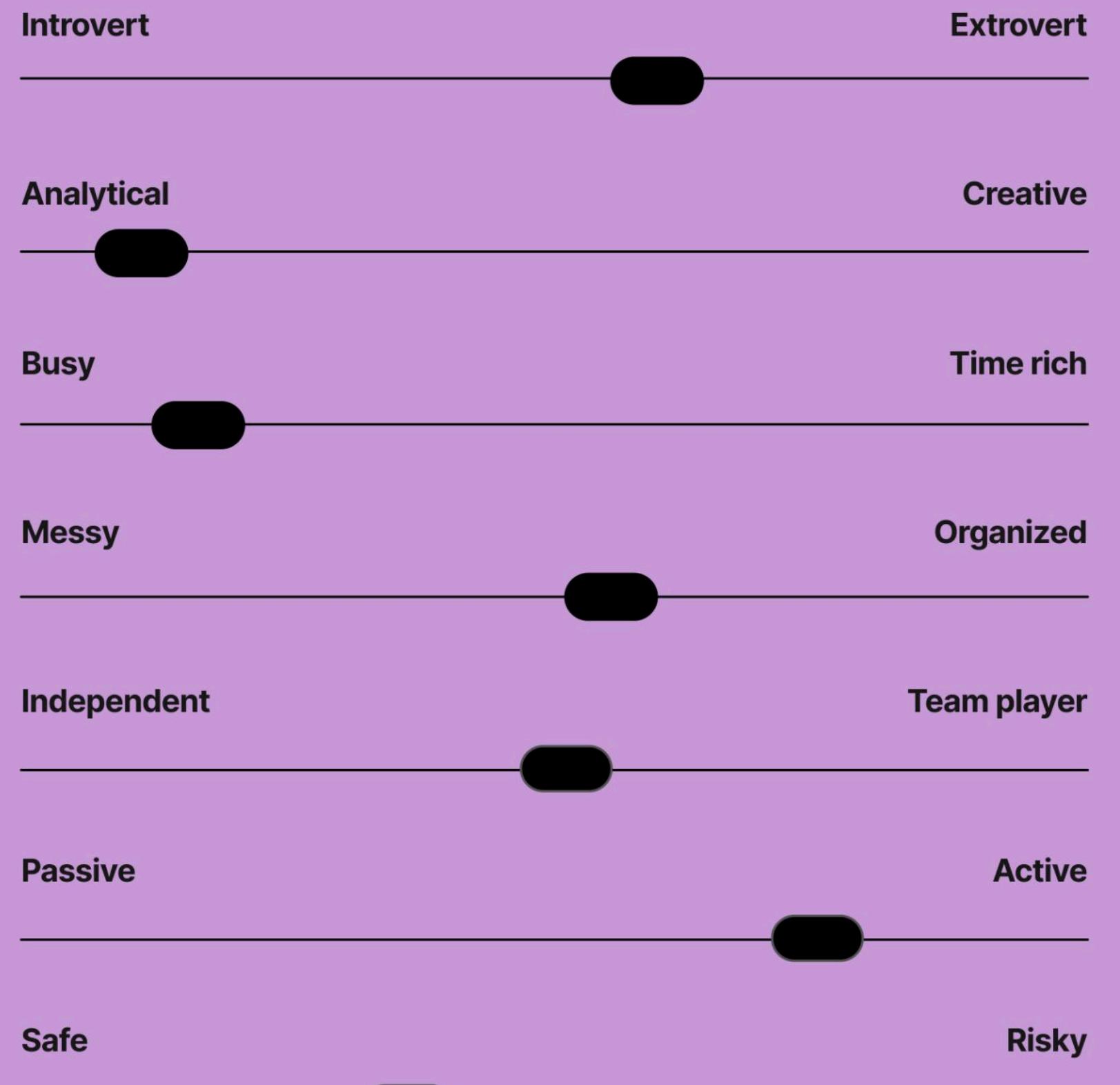
Kate (Landlord)

"I'm renting out my home, not just a house. I just wish I could know who I'm trusting it with."

- Age : 42
- Occupation : Healthcare Professional
- Location : Lives in a mid-sized coastal city

Owns one or two properties. Has faced situations where tenants broke agreements or treated the house carelessly.

Goals

- To find tenants who respect her home and communicate honestly.
- To feel emotionally secure about who she's renting to (not just whether they can pay.)

Pain points

- Hard to tell if potential tenants are genuine or responsible.
(No reliable background or verification process.)
- Text-based interaction makes it difficult to sense attitude or trustworthiness.

Needs/Motivations

- Reliable indicators of tenant responsibility
- Verified and authentic tenant identity
- Clear communication signals beyond text

Personality
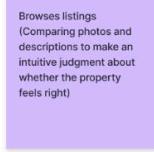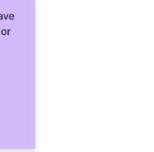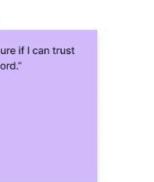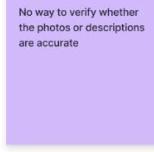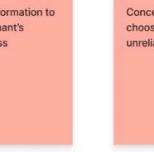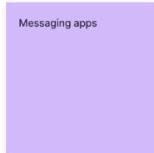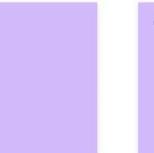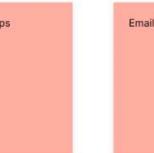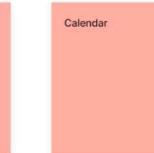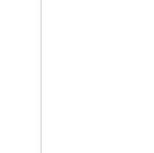
Introvert		Extrovert
Analytical		Creative
Busy		Time rich
Messy		Organized
Independent		Team player
Passive		Active
Safe		Risky

Customer Journey Map

①

Listing

The property is made publicly available on the market.

②

Interest Expression

The first point of contact between both sides.

③

Inquiry & Communication

Exchange of questions, details, and scheduling.

④

Viewing

In-person or virtual viewing of the property.

⑤

Decision & Agreement

Final decision and contract arrangement.

⑥

Post-Move Relationship

After-move interaction and ongoing relationship.

User steps	**1. Listing**
	The property is made publicly available on the market.

Users	Tenant	Landlord

User actions
What action does the user take during each step?

	Tenant	Landlord
	Browses listings (Comparing photos and descriptions to make an intuitive judgment about whether the property feels right) · Checks the landlord's profile · Debates whether to save the listing to favorites or send an inquiry	Uploads the property listing · Tries to anticipate how the listing will appear to potential tenants · Waits for inquiries from interested tenants

Feelings and thoughts
Use the emojis below to help illustrate how the user might be feeling.

	Tenant	Landlord
	"Are these photos real?" · "I'm not sure if I can trust this landlord."	"Am I showing my home accurately?" · "How can I tell if a tenant is genuinely responsible?"

Pain Points
What's not working well? What causes friction?

	Tenant	Landlord
	No way to verify whether the photos or descriptions are accurate · Insufficient information to assess the landlord's trustworthiness · Constant vigilance against scams or fraudulent listings	Insufficient information to assess the tenant's trustworthiness · Concern about the risks of choosing an unsuitable or unreliable tenant

Opportunities
How might we address these pain points?

	Tenant	Landlord
	Verified property photos and descriptions · Verified landlord identity and trust signals · Transparent listing information	Verified tenant identity and background signals · Tenant responsibility indicators (reviews and history)

Touchpoints

	Tenant	Landlord
	Messaging apps · Email · Calendar · Property platform	Messaging apps · Email · Calendar · Property platform

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Site Map

App

- App Entry
- **Home > List**
- Saved
- Messages
- Menu

Homes List

- Preview info
  - Photo gallery
  - Price, layout, description
  - Verified property badge
  - Save button
  - Landlord profile photo
  - Landlord verification status
  - Tap to see details
    - Photo gallery
    - Price, address, layout, description
    - Verified property badge
    - Save button
    - Landlord profile photo
    - Landlord name
    - Landlord introduction
    - Landlord verification status
    - Landlord rating
      - Rating details

Trust Lease

App Entry	Home	Saved	Messages	Menu
Onboarding	Location Search	Homes List	Chat List	Profile
Sign Up/Login	Advanced Filters	Preview info	Chat Room	Personal Profile
Personal Profile Setup	Map View			
Property Profile Setup (Landlord)	Homes List			

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User Flow

Tenant — Landlord

Home → Homes List → Select Property → Home Detail → Open Landlord Preview → Landlord Full Profile → Decision: Trust landlord?

Return to listings → No

Decision: Trust landlord? → Yes

Check verified property badge → Check property details

Check verified landlord badge — Behavioral history — Check introduction (Compatibility)

Yes → Start Conversation → Landlord receives Tenant request → Decision: Trust tenant?

Check verified tenant badge — Behavioral history — Check introduction (Compatibility)

No → End Conversation

Yes → Schedule viewing

Redesigned Touchpoint Presentation

Proposed solution

Service Name

Trust Lease

The core of the rental experience isn't just the property or the contract, but the trust between the people involved.

Trust Lease
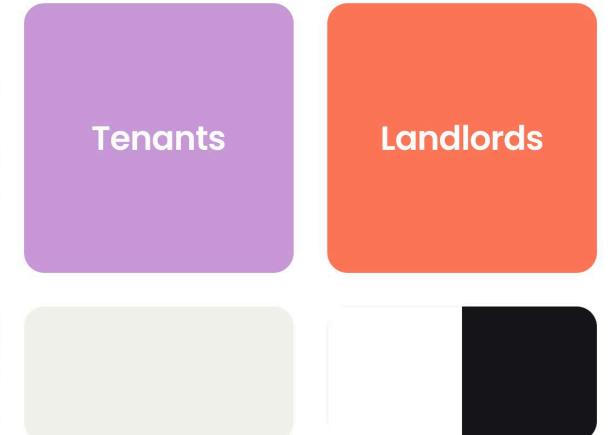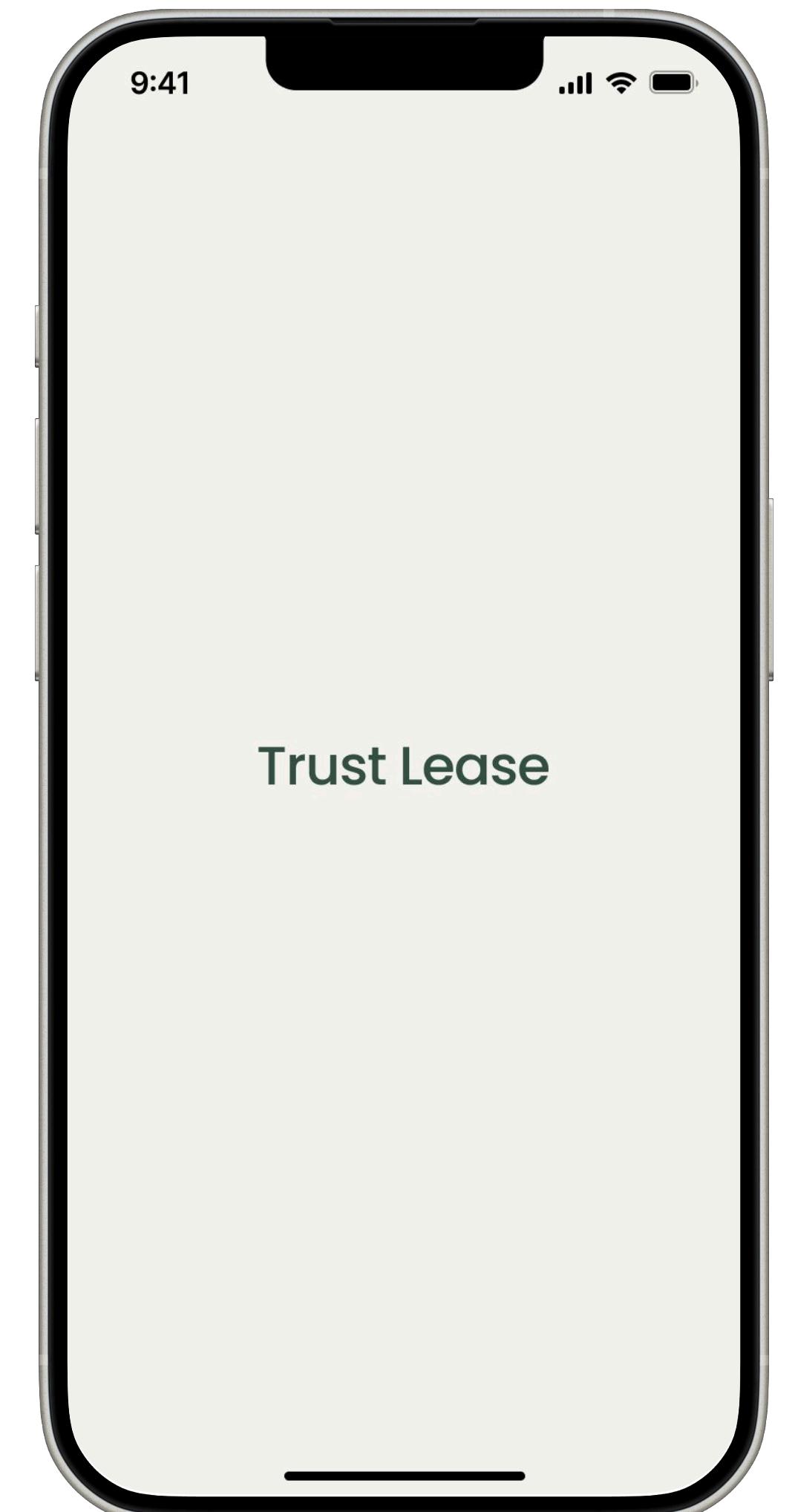
Tenants

Landlords

Home > Listing

Home (Default)

150 available

Cozy Casa

Welcome to my Cozy Casa. Sunlight fills every room, warming the soft terracotta...

€1,200 /month   Utility Excl.

🛏 3   🛁 1   🚪 1   Rent

Home > Search

Home Introduction

Brief Facts

Verification Badge (Home)

Verification Badge (Landlord)

Be our flatmate!

We're a small group of friendly professionals who enjoy a peaceful ho...

€700 /month   Utility Incl.

🛏 4   🛁 2   🚪 1   Flat
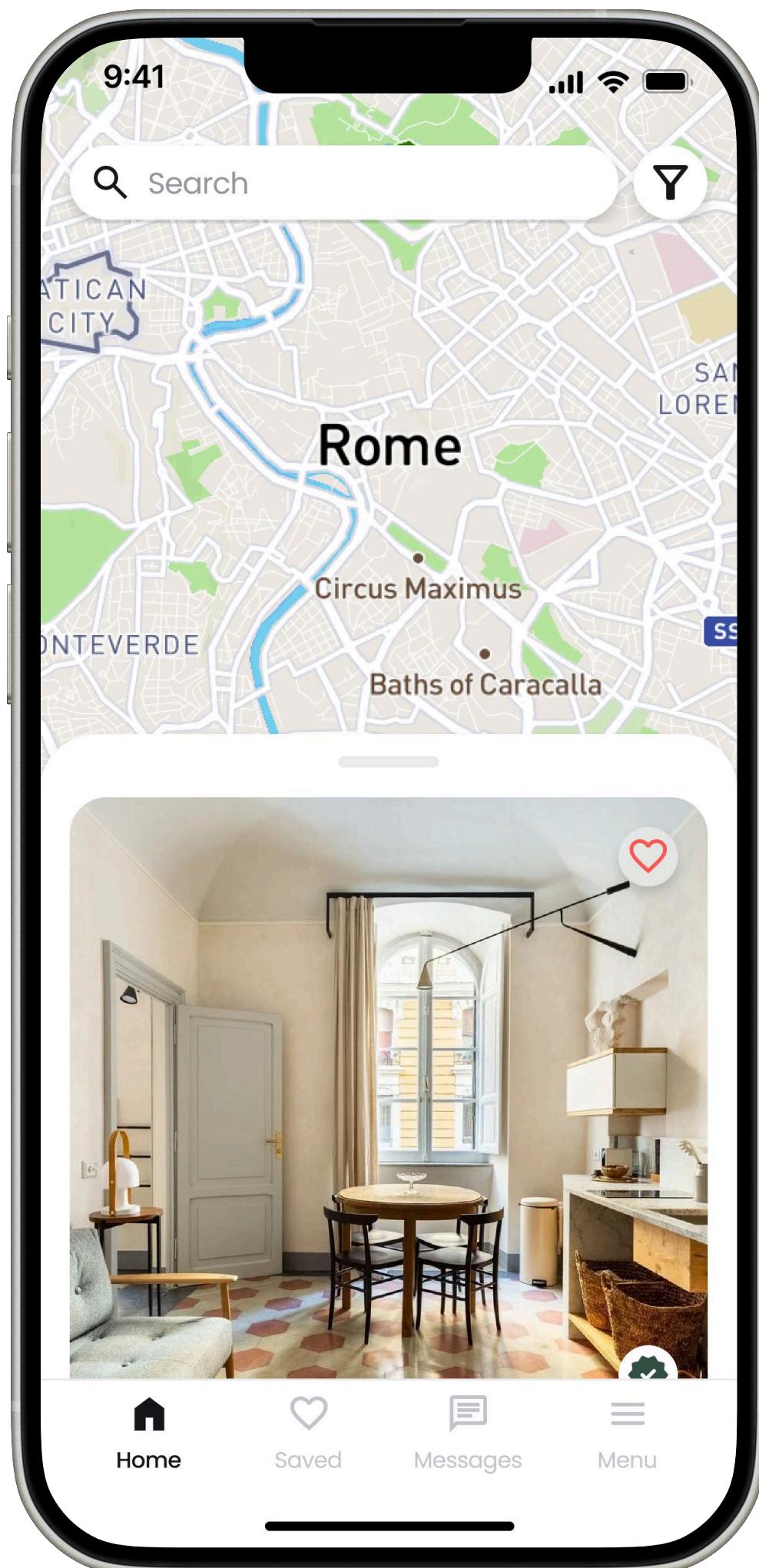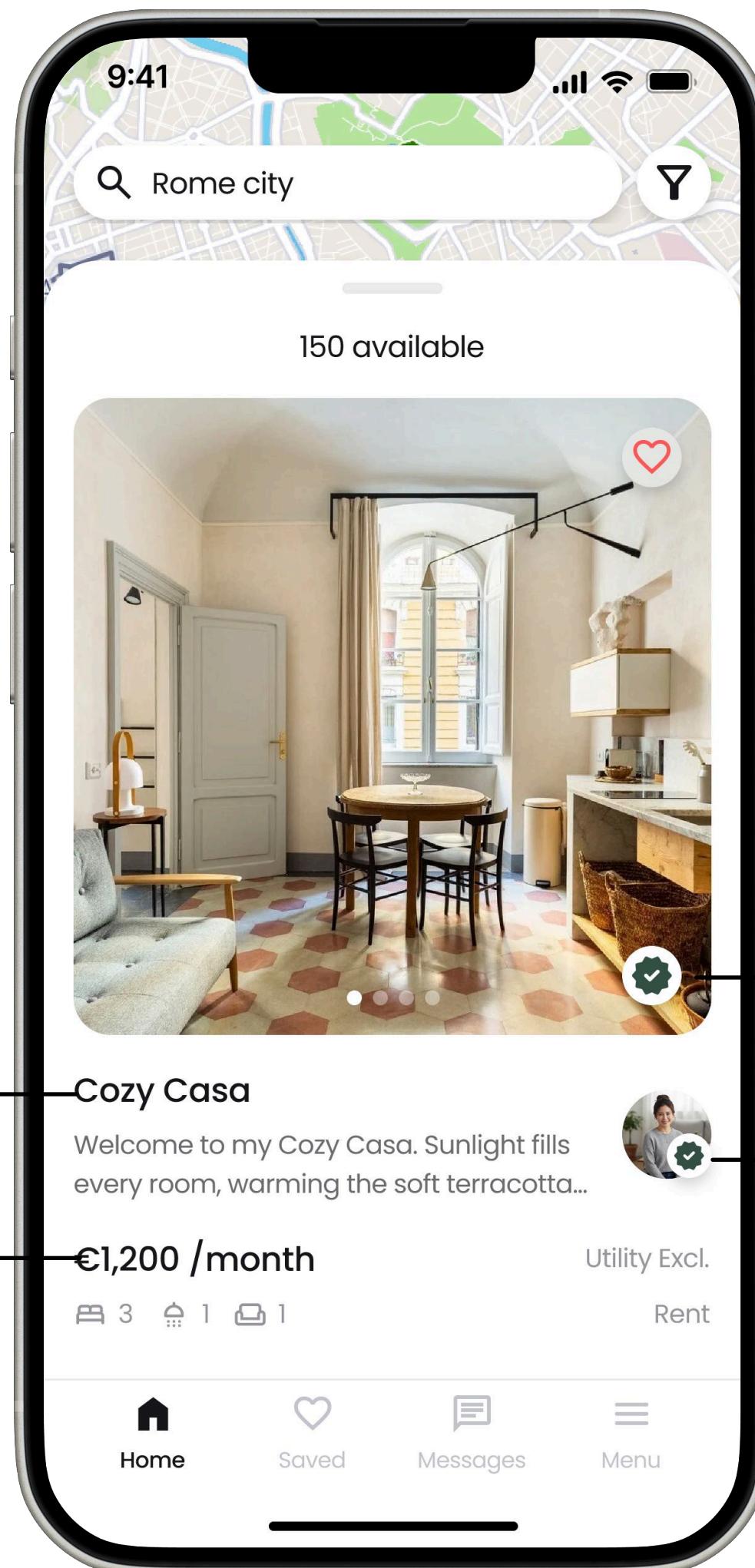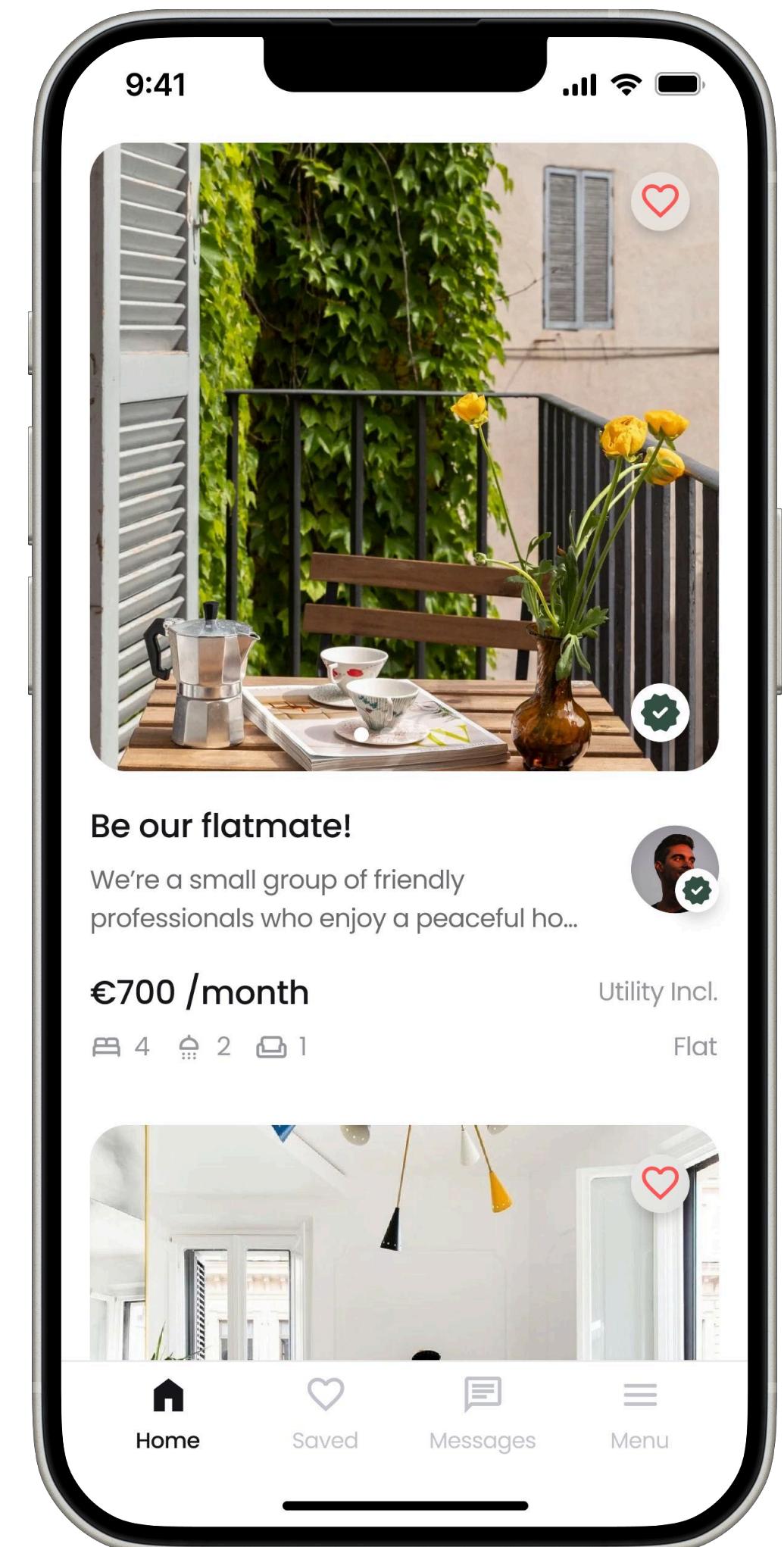
Home > Listing > Scroll

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Verification Badges (Home & Landlord)

Popup describing
the verification process
for the badge

Verification Badge (Home)

Verification Badge (Landlord)

Verification Badge (Tenant)

Home > Listing > Detail

Home
Introduction

Brief
Facts

Landlord's name, age, job,
rating, review count,
years on platform

Within the phone mockup:

9:41

View Saved

Cozy Casa

Welcome to my Cozy Casa. Sunlight fills every room, warming the soft terracotta tones and natural wood that give the space its calm, lived-in charm.

€1,200 /month   Utility Excl.

🛏 3   🚿 1   🛋 1   Rent

Kate (42) · Nurse

★ 4.5   💬 3 Reviews   🏠 3 years

Call   Message

Home > Listing > Detail

Trust-building micro stories

Why I Love This Home

I've always loved how the morning light hits the living room.

How I Care for This Home

- I make sure everything stays in good condition between tenants.
- I keep the space simple so tenants can make it their own.

Who I Think Will Love This Home

- Someone who enjoys calm mornings.
- Someone who loves cooking.
- Someone who values light and open space.

What I Look for in a Good Tenant

- Someone who appreciates a calm, respectful environment.
- Someone who values communication and keeping things tidy.
- Someone who pays rent on time.

Call   Message

Home > Listing > Detail > Scroll

Home > Listing > Detail

Facts, Features

Screen 1

9:41

< View Saved

Address

Via Machiavelli, 21, 00185 Roma, Italy

Price & Costs

€1,200 /month	Rent
€600	Deposit
€400 /month	Utility (Estimated)

Call | Message

Screen 2

9:41

< View Saved

Property Structure

2	Bedrooms
1	Bathrooms
1	Living area
Entire home	House type

Available

Fri, 05 Dec 2025	Move-in date

Amenities

No	Furnished
Wooden	Flooring
Yes	Air conditioning
Yes	Heating
No	Kitchen appliances
No	Storage room
No	Basement
Yes	Elevator

Call | Message

Screen 3

9:41

< View Saved

Amenities

No	Furnished
Wooden	Flooring
Yes	Air conditioning
Yes	Heating
No	Kitchen appliances
No	Storage room
No	Basement
Yes	Elevator
Yes	Parking
Yes	Terrace
Yes	High-speed internet
Yes	Disability access

Pet-friendly

Yes	Pet-friendly

Neighborhood

Call | Message

Screen 4

9:41

< View Saved

Pet-friendly

Yes	Pet-friendly

Neighborhood

2	Schools nearby
1	Bus stops
1	Metro / train stations
2	Supermarkets
0	Shopping areas
2	Parks

Surroundings

City, Park	View

Call | Message

Home > Listing > Detail

Swipe left to move on

Swipe right to save

Contact the landlord directly

Swipe left

Swipe right

# Messages

Messages (Tenant account)

Response reminder label

Average response time

Messages (Landlord account)

Ratings & Reviews

Screen 1 (Alex profile):

9:41

‹

Alex (34) · Software Engineer
Responds in 15 min

About me
Hello! I take good care of the space I live in, stay organized, and always keep communication easy and honest.

★ Rating	🏆 Review	🏠 Here for
5.0	1	1 Year

Reviews

Emily
30 Oct, 2025

Alex is a very caring tenant. He kept everything in great condition and handled responsibilities with full reliability!

★★★★★ **5.0** (Flat, 6 months)

Communication
★★★★★

Screen 2 (Emily review detail):

9:41

‹

Reviews

Emily
30 Oct, 2025

Alex is a very caring tenant. He kept everything in great condition and handled responsibilities with full reliability!

★★★★★ **5.0** (Flat, 6 months) ⌃

Communication
★★★★★

Paying rent on time
★★★★★

Move-out condition
★★★★★

Following home rules
★★★★★

Neighborhood relations
★★★★★

Deposit & extra cost handling
★★★★★

Screen 3 (Kate profile):

9:41

‹

Kate (42) · Nurse
Responds in 15 min

About me
Hi! I make sure tenants feel comfortable and supported, and I'm looking for someone who will care for the home as much as I do.

★ Rating	🏆 Review	🏠 Here for
4.5	3	3 Year

Reviews

Suzanne
1 Sep, 2025

Kate is a wonderful homeowner. The house was spotless and well-maintained, and she made the entire process clear and reassuring from the very beginning.

★★★★☆ **4.0** (Rent, 1 year) ⌃

Communication
★★★★☆

Screen 4 (Suzanne review detail):

9:41

‹

Reviews

Suzanne
1 Sep, 2025

Kate is a wonderful homeowner. The house was spotless and well-maintained, and she made the entire process clear and reassuring from the very beginning.

★★★★☆ **4.0** (Rent, 1 year) ⌃

Communication
★★★★☆

Listing accuracy
★★★★★

Move-in condition
★★★★☆

Deposit & extra cost handling
★★★★★

Daniel
30 Aug, 2024

Kate handled everything with honesty and reliability. She was quick to respond, transparent

Reviews (Tenant account)

Reviews (Landlord account)

Reflection

Takeaways

Reflection

This project started from a frustration I've personally experienced many times. As I worked through the process, I began to see the rental experience as a whole journey and to understand how trust is actually formed within that journey.

Throughout the project, I had to constantly shift between the big picture of the service and the smaller details. This back-and-forth thinking helped me look beyond surface-level issues and focus on the deeper needs and emotions.

Even though I interviewed only four users, I still gained unexpected insights at moments I didn't anticipate. It showed me how important it is to rely on real user evidence rather than my own assumptions, which is a core principle of design thinking.

Using tools like the blueprint, customer journey map, and priority matrix helped me break down the problem more clearly and understand which touchpoints actually influence trust.

Overall, this project helped me realize that service design is about defining the right problem and understanding users deeply enough to justify every design decision.

Thank You