Building Trust in the Rental Housing Market

PROJECT	MSc in UX and Service Design
ROLE	Lead Researcher & Designer
DURATION	Sep 2025 – Present

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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

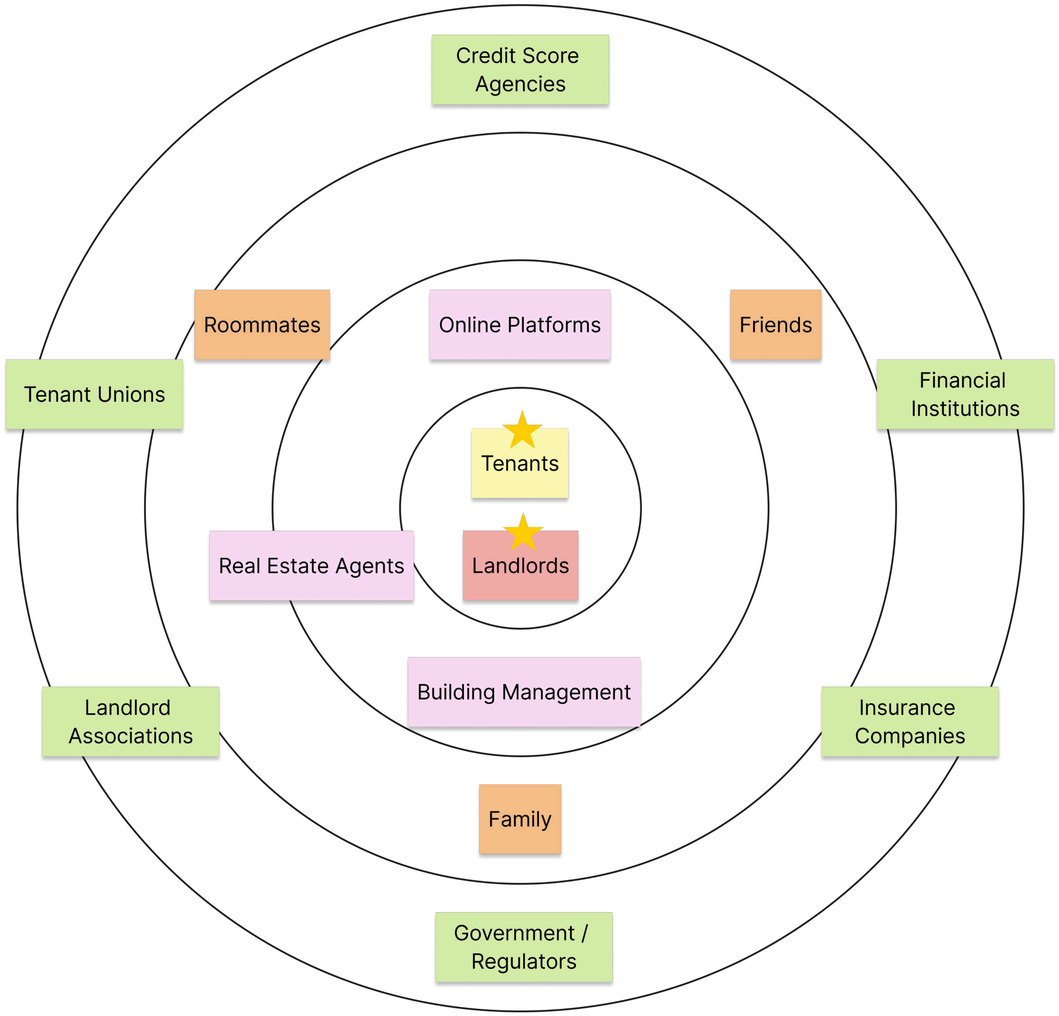
Tenants, Landlords

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

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	-	-	-	-	-	-

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

Interviews Key Findings

Core insights that shape the redesign direction

Affinity Mapping

Verification & Authenticity

- Inability to verify listing accuracy
- Reliance on unverified text
- Desire for official proof

Personal & Behavioral Trust Signals

- Lack of profile signals
- Missing personal cues
- Trust signals in response patterns

Behavior History & Fairness

- 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

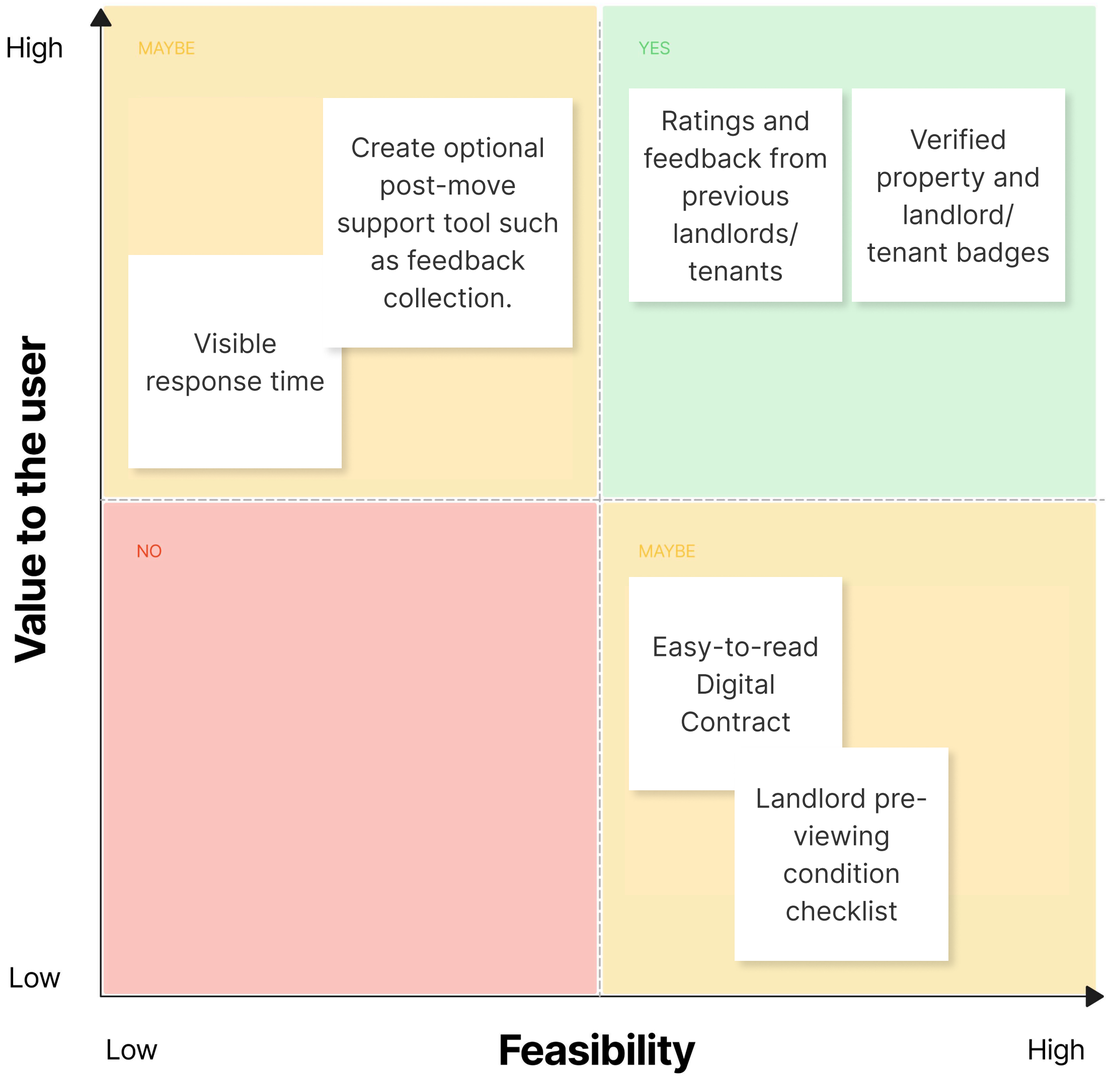
Verification badges, ratings

Priority 2

Reply rate & post-move support

Priority 3

Digital contract & condition checklist



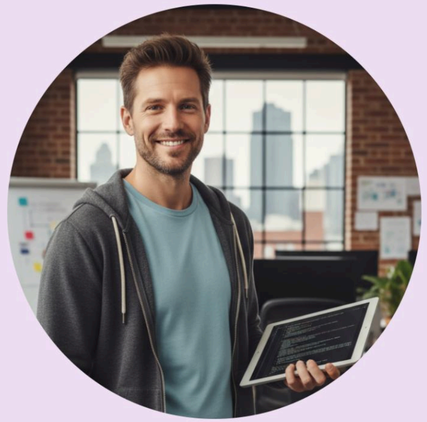
Touchpoints for Redesign

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.

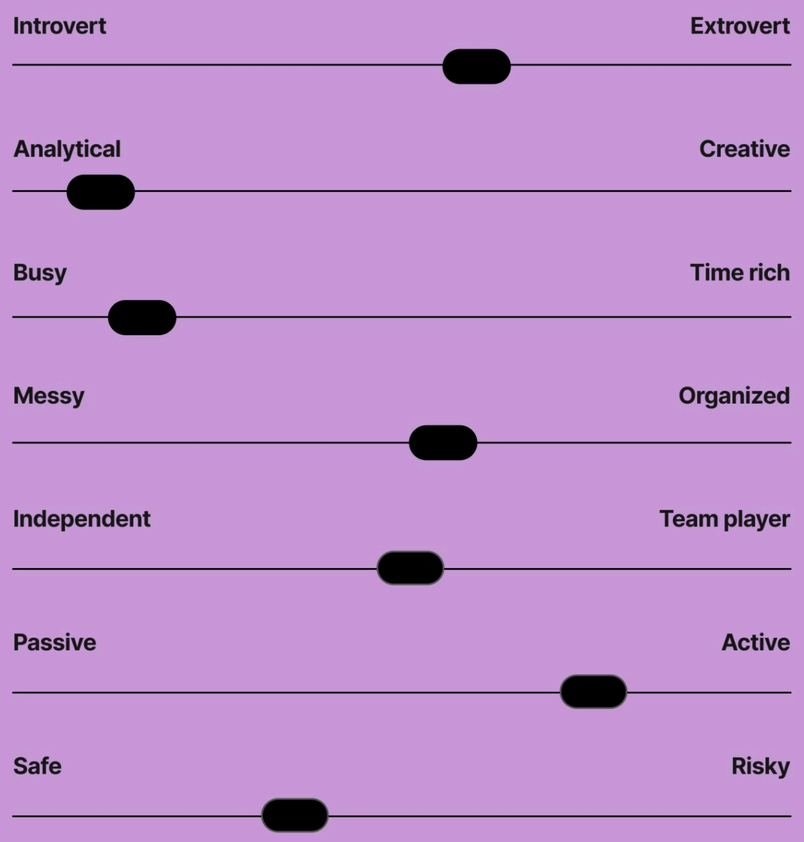
Pain points

- 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



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

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.

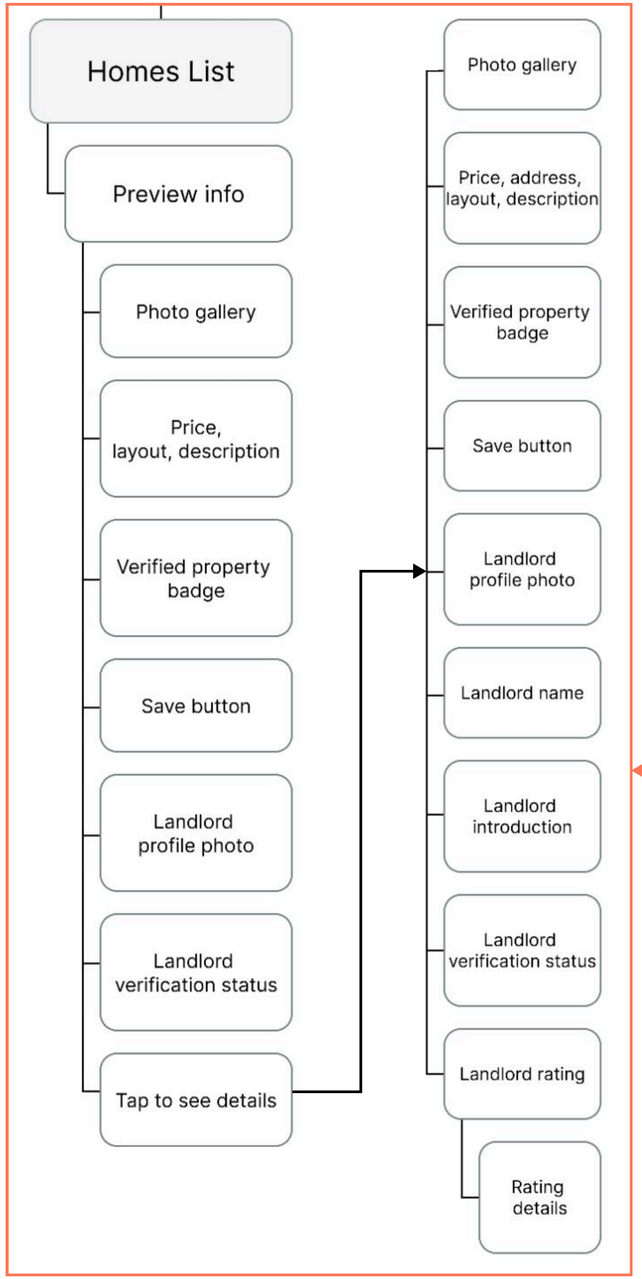
Please zoom in to see the details

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?*	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.* 😃 🙂 😐 ☹️ 😡	"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?*	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?*	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	Messaging apps Email Calendar Property platform	Messaging apps Email Calendar Property platform

Site Map

App

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



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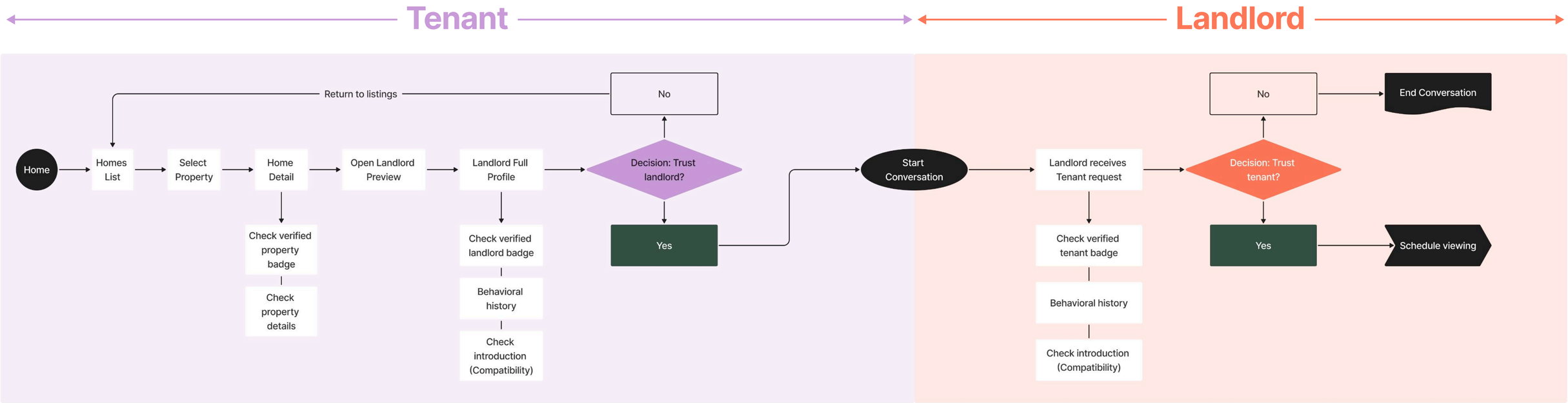
Please zoom in to see the details

User Flow



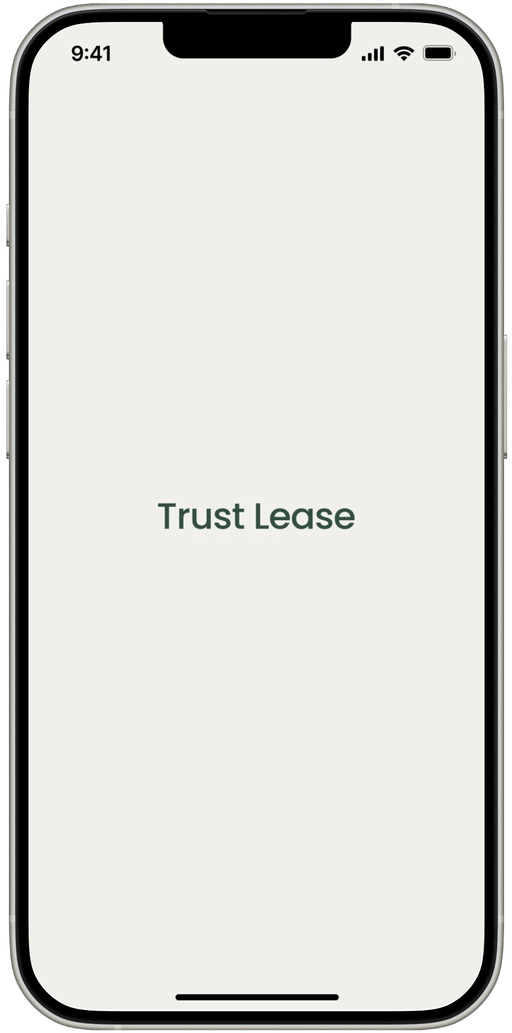
Redesigned Touchpoint Presentation

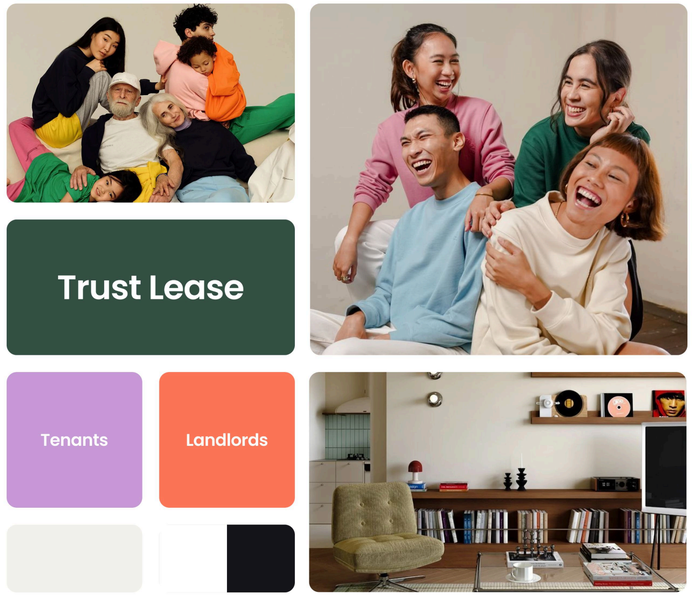
Proposed solution

Service Name

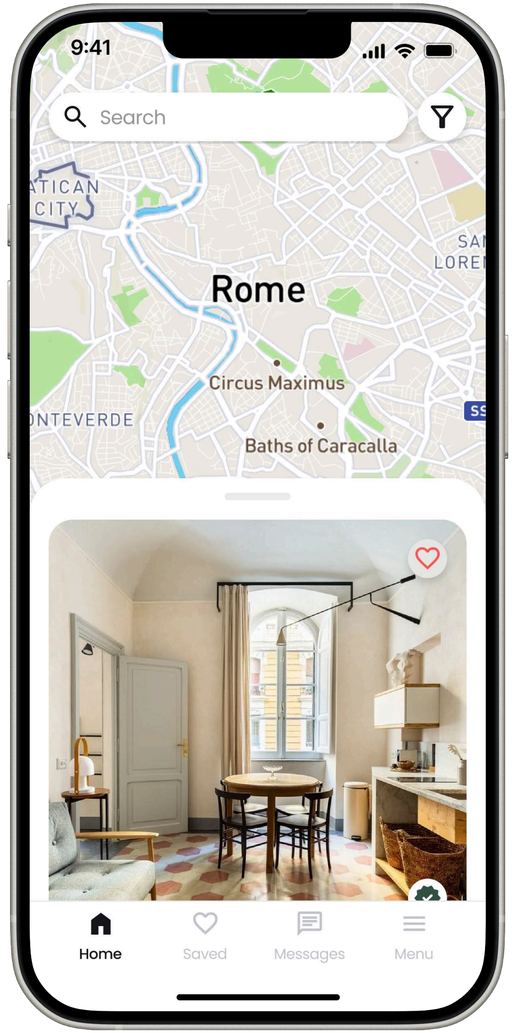
Trust Lease

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





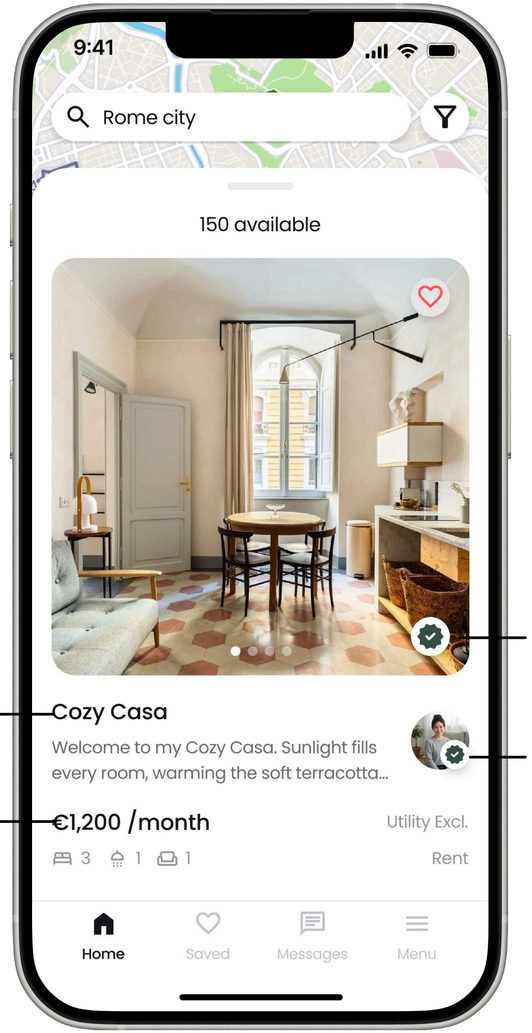
Home > Listing



Home (Default)

Home Introduction

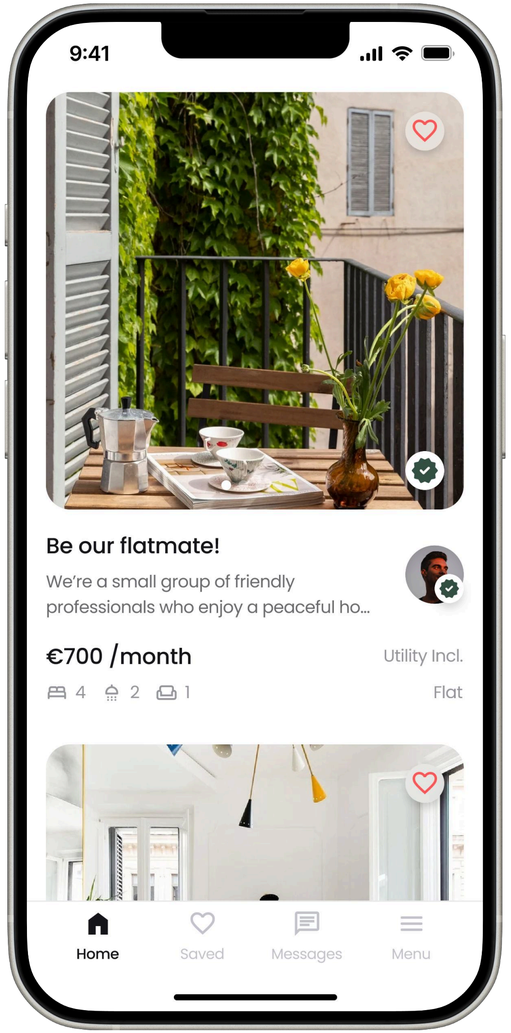
Brief Facts



Verification Badge (Home)

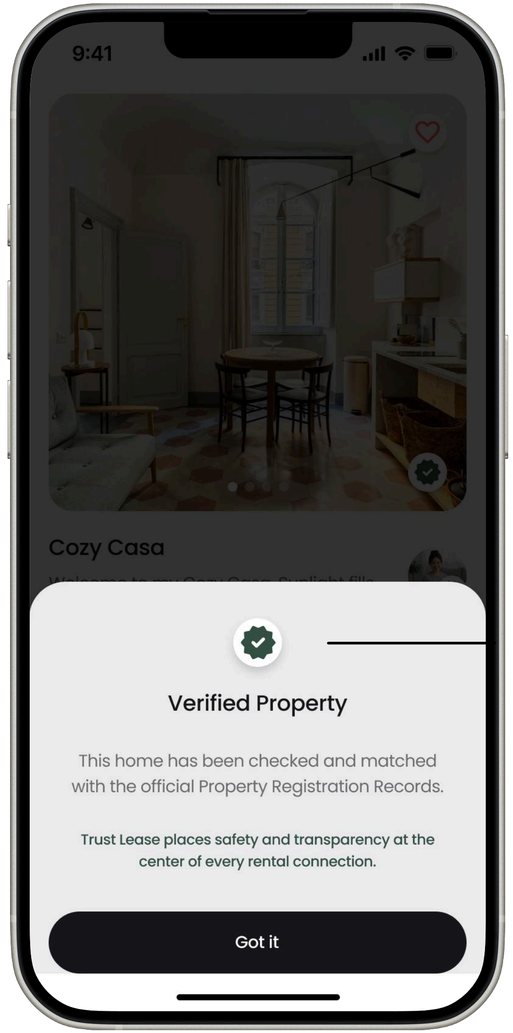
Verification Badge (Landlord)

Home > Search



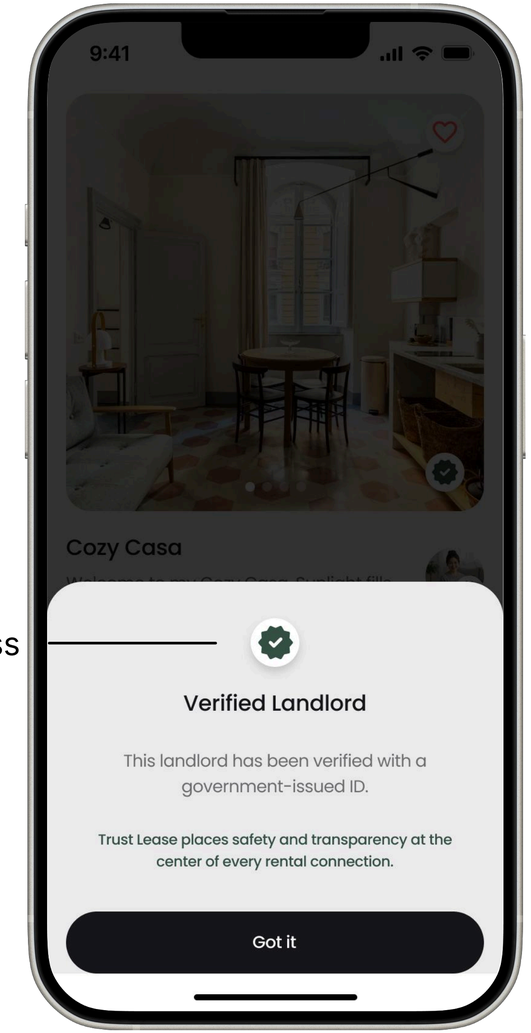
Home > Listing > Scroll

Verification Badges (Home & Landlord)

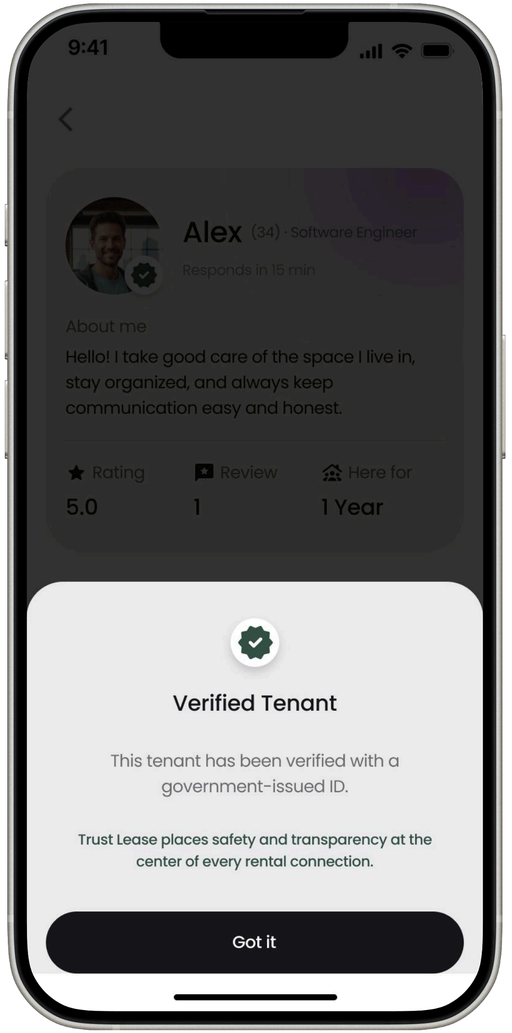


Verification Badge (Home)

Popup describing the verification process for the badge



Verification Badge (Landlord)

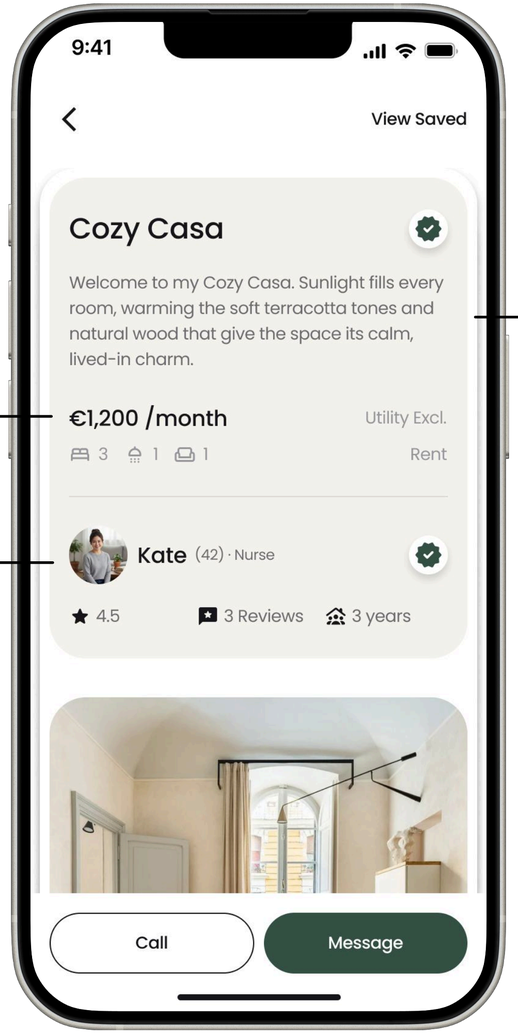


Verification Badge (Tenant)

Home > Listing > Detail

Brief Facts

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

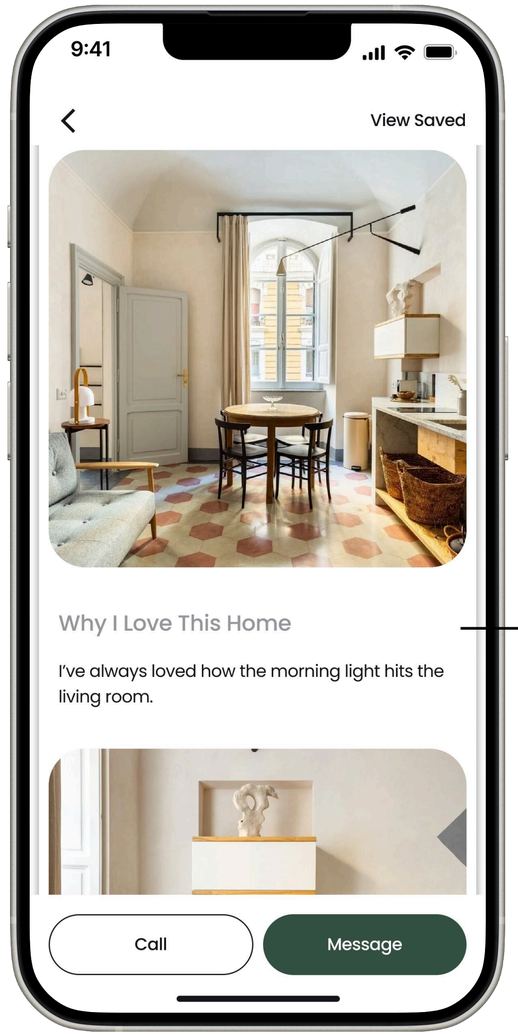


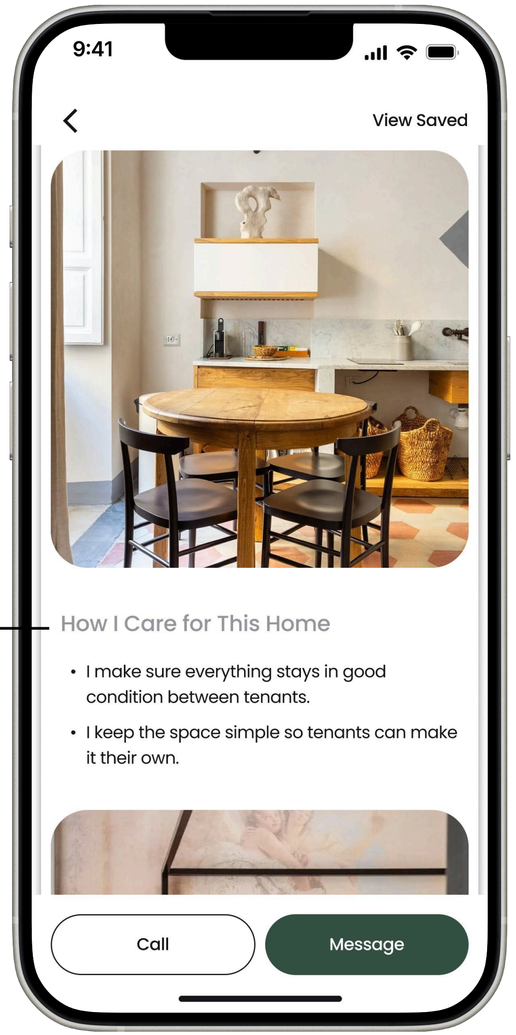
Home Introduction

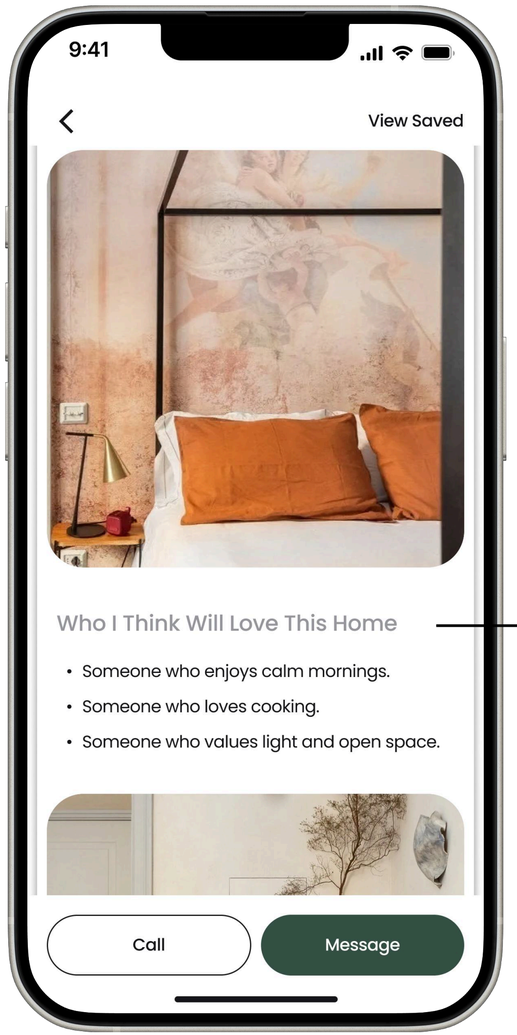
Home > Listing > Detail

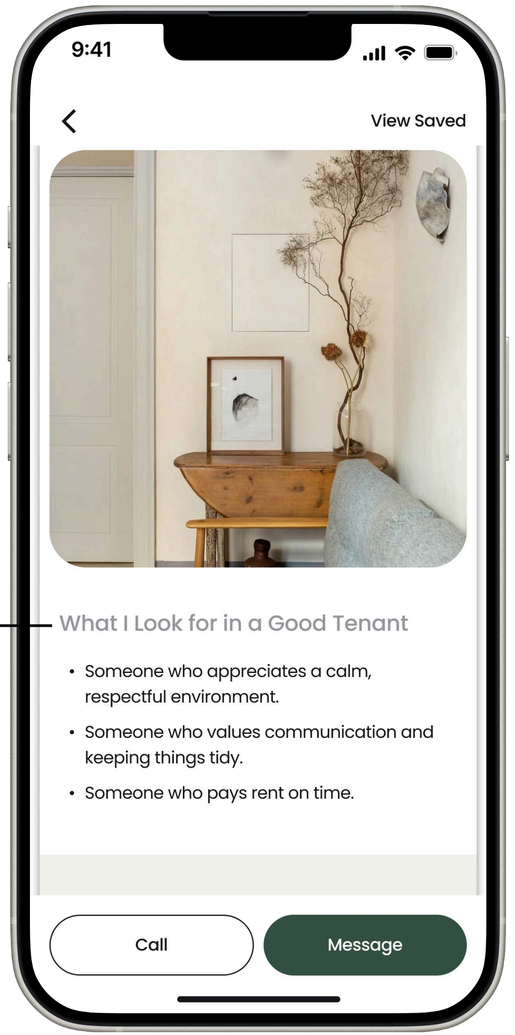
Home > Listing > Detail

Trust-building micro stories





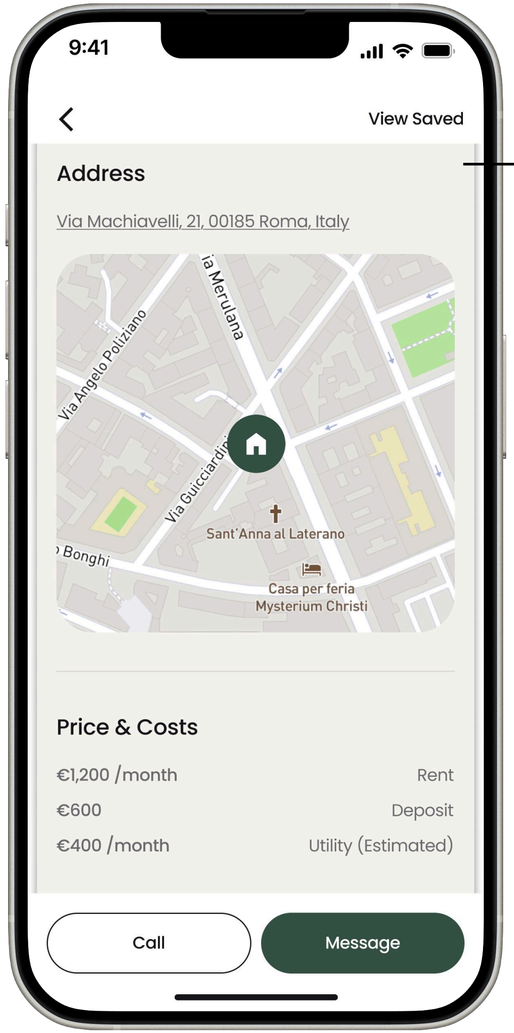


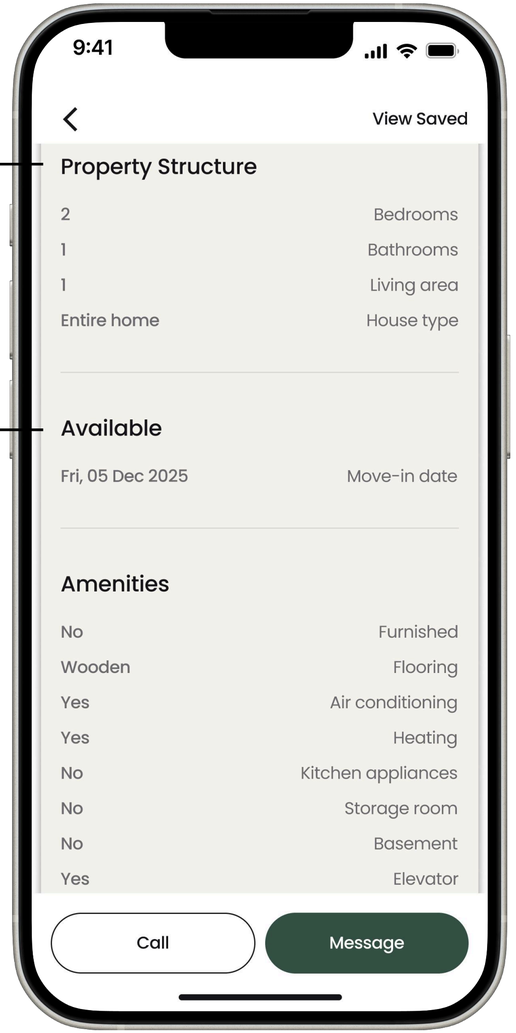


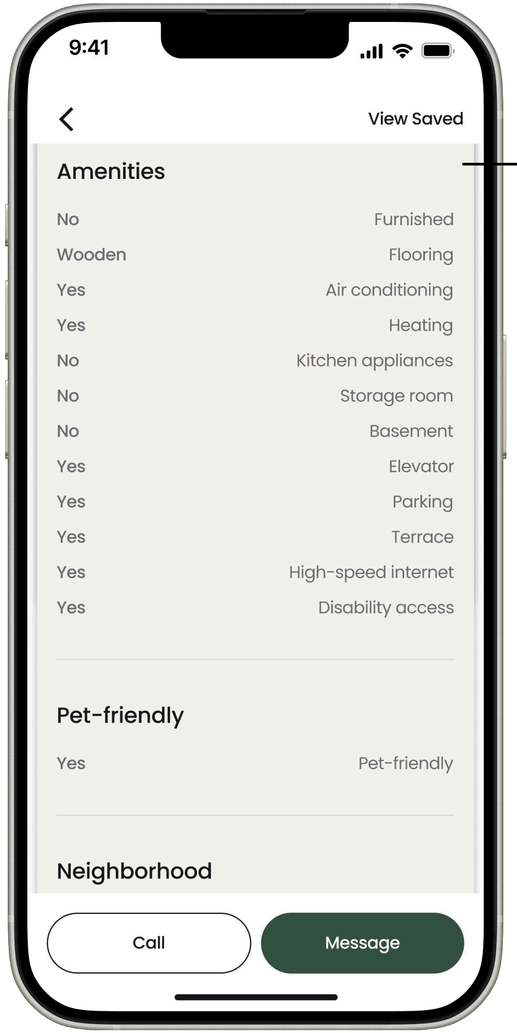
Home > Listing > Detail > Scroll

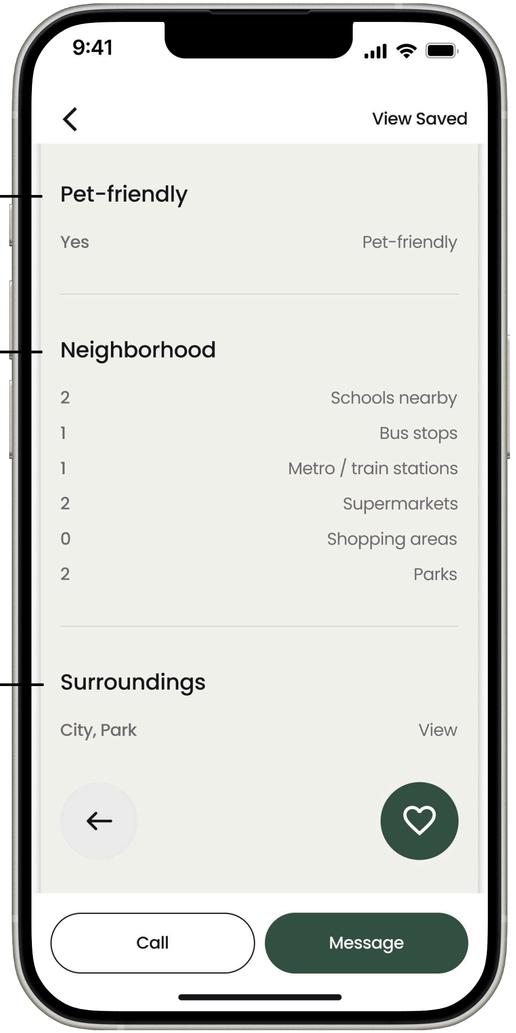
Home > Listing > Detail

Facts, Features



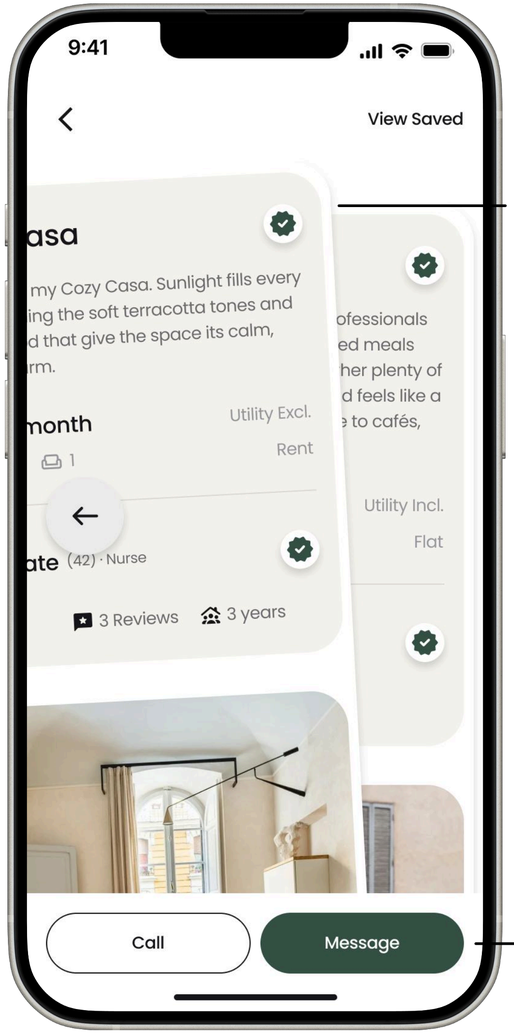






Home > Listing > Detail > Scroll

Home > Listing > Detail

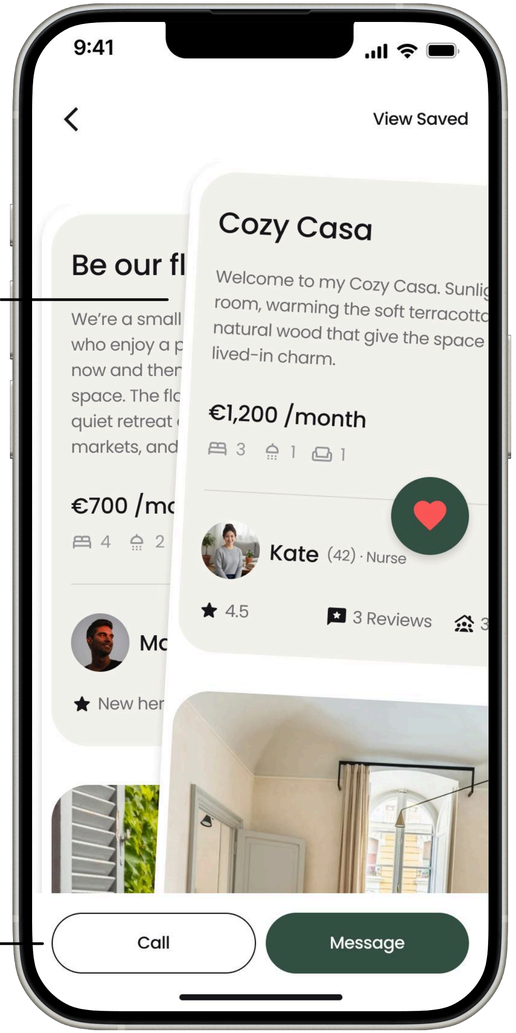


Swipe left

Swipe left to move on

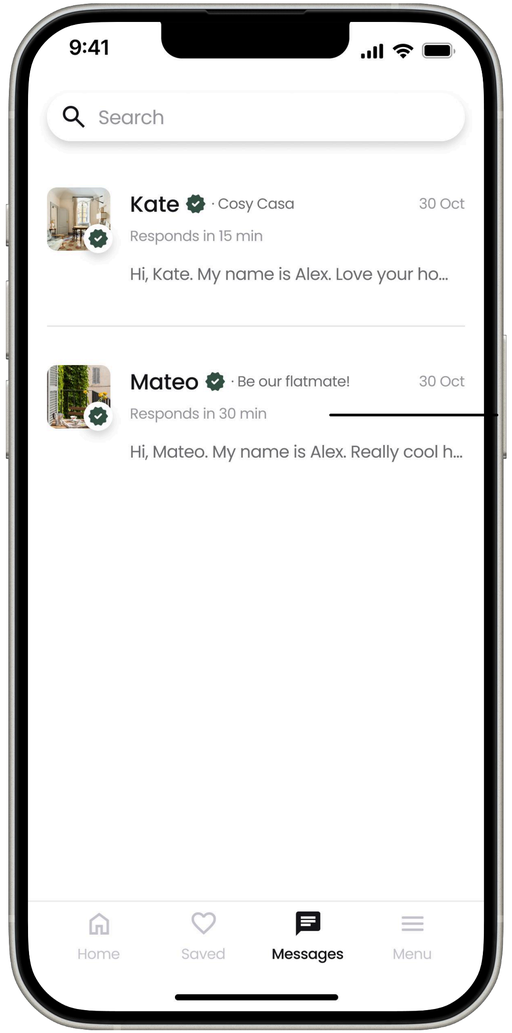
Swipe right to save

Contact the landlord directly



Swipe right

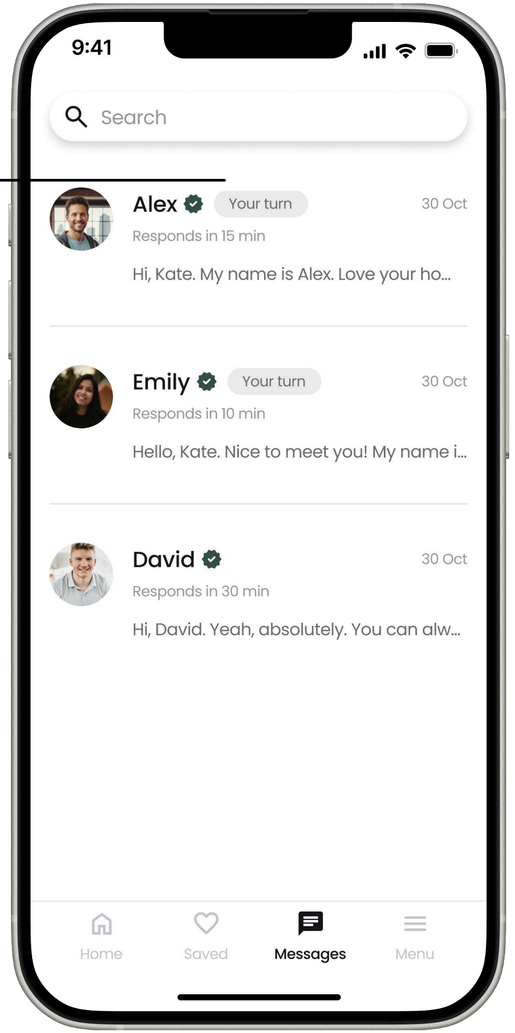
Messages



Messages (Tenant account)

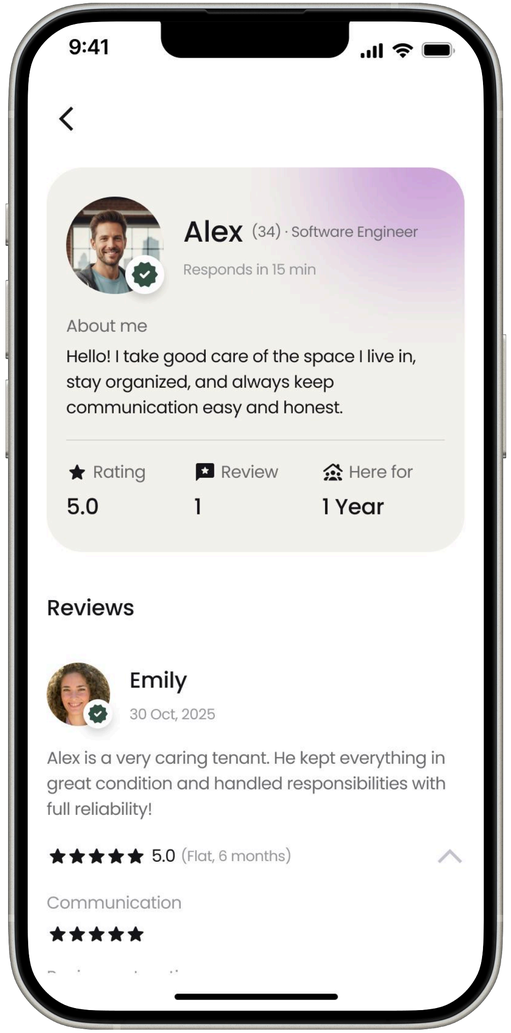
Average response time

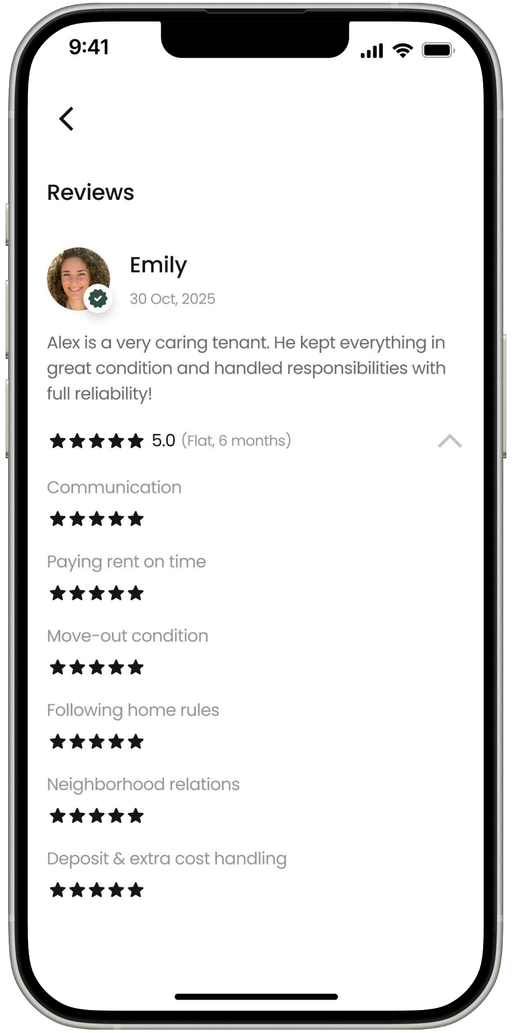
Response reminder label



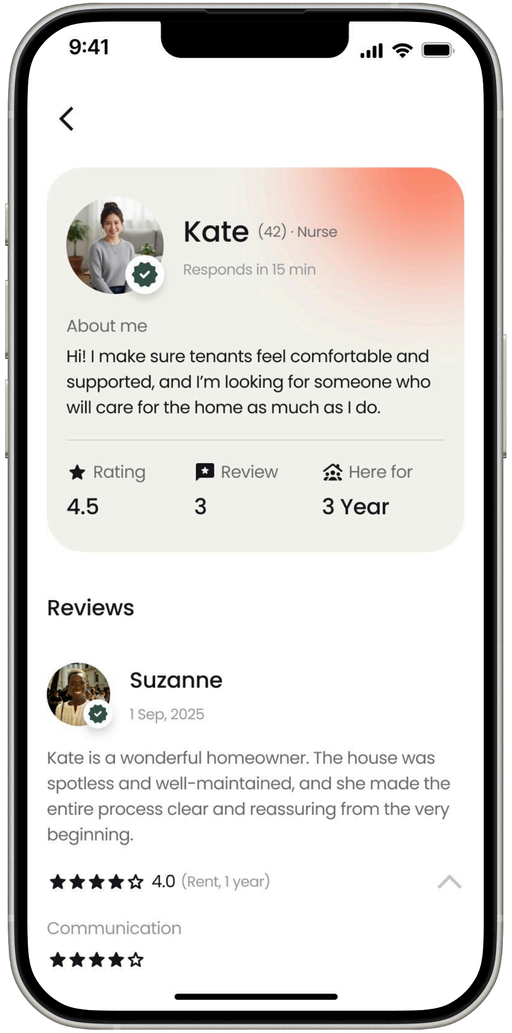
Messages (Landlord account)

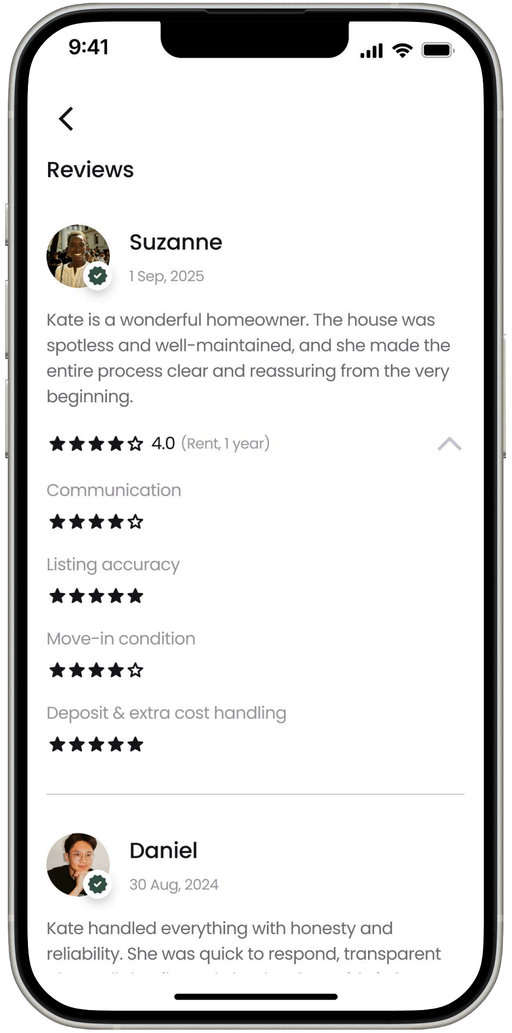
Ratings & Reviews





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