

Dunstan Orchard

Product Designer • Marin, California

Portfolio • dunstan@gmail.com • 415-694-3925

I've spent the last 24 years designing and building products at companies like Apple, Flickr, Aol, Quora, and Observable. I work across the full surface of a product — from IA and visual systems, to the code, copy, and details that hold it all together.

An editor at heart, I'm an active reader of documents, designs, and products, experiencing them as a user while parsing them as a maker. The same close attention lets me navigate technical problem spaces without owning the implementation — knowing enough to ask the question that unsticks a conversation, to recognize when an explanation has skipped something that matters, and to direct designers, engineers, and AI agents alike towards the right solution.

Tools and AI

The majority of my work is done in Figma, HTML/CSS/JavaScript, and PHP — though these days I often jump straight into Claude Code. At home I've used Claude to build a number of macOS apps for audio analysis, video editing, and file management. At my last job I used AI agents to build interactive data visualizations and maps, and designed our AI-powered canvas and chat products. I was the company's top consumer of AI tokens during my final months, when I worked predominantly in that mode.

Highlights

- Senior UX Designer — Observable
- Designer — Quora
- Director of New Media — Tin Punch Media
- Design Director for AIM Products — Aol
- Principal Designer — Flickr
- Senior UI Engineer — Apple
- Member of [The Web Standards Project](#)

Detailed work experience

Senior UX Designer — Observable (2020 – 2026)

Observable is a JavaScript-based environment for exploring and visualizing data. Founded by Mike Bostock, the company has 350K users, 1.5M community notebooks, and over 500M library downloads.

I joined as Observable's first full-time designer and supported the company through six years and four pivots, touching every part of the product along the way.

By the time I left I'd worked on three major product lines: a reactive JavaScript notebook (which shipped as a web app, a desktop app, and a standalone AI chat), a static site generator for data apps, and a collaborative canvas for data exploration. I helped fold each into the existing architecture, and around them I designed and maintained the connective tissue of the site that bound the whole thing together.

As our priorities changed and our team expanded and contracted, I put myself on the line to retain product quality and integrity. I kept on top of the details (filing 763 bugs over six years), promoted systems-level thinking, documented language to maintain product coherence, and tracked edge cases that could impact the development of new features. I was part of the team's institutional memory and a consistent voice on behalf of the product.

Designer — Quora (2018 – 2019)

Quora had about 325M monthly active users when I joined. I focused on improving product quality, unifying designs across platforms, and launching a new design system. The role also gave me my first experience of designing around the black box of an ML model.

Designer — Layer (2015)

Layer provided a chat SDK (code, infrastructure, and design components) that companies used to add rich messaging to their mobile and web apps. As Layer's only designer I spent my time reverse engineering popular instant messaging apps and

turning those findings into documents and designs to drive product direction. I then designed component libraries and reference apps for Android, iOS, watchOS, and the web.

Designer — The Factory (2014)

The Factory was a short-lived product incubator funded by the *Skype/Rdio* founder Janus Friis. I was the company's second designer and worked on a variety of iOS apps, one of which I shepherded through to launch in the iOS app store.

Director of New Media — Tin Punch Media (2012 – 2013)

Tin Punch Media was a three-person studio co-founded by *Twitter* alum [Biz Stone](#), providing creative services to Hollywood studios. I contributed concepts and handled production work, as well as pitching and building custom web tools for our clients. Our first project was nominated by HBO in two Emmy categories.

Design Director for AIM Products — Aol (2011 – 2012)

In 2011 *Google Reader* alum [Jason Shellen](#) asked me to join him at Aol to re-imagine and relaunch their instant messenger.

The success of my work depended on understanding the public and private history of AIM. To that end I took part in research trips throughout the country, sitting in people's bedrooms and kitchens, listening to stories of how AIM had played important roles in their young lives. I also worked to build trust with our veteran engineering team, many of whom had been on the product for 10+ years and were skeptical of a redesign coming in from California. Earning their confidence let me support them in adopting the modern front-end tools our relaunch called for.

In total I designed four new apps — for Mac, Windows, iPhone, and Android — oversaw the development of a new logo, and contributed to a nationwide advertising campaign including TV spots.

Principal Designer — Flickr (2006 – 2011)

Flickr launched in 2004, and within three years was ranked the 19th most popular site on the internet. In 2006 [Stewart Butterfield](#) brought me on as the team's second designer.

In the years that followed there wasn't a single part of the site I didn't touch, though a few projects stand out: designing the Flickr video experience, designing and partly coding our first iPhone-friendly mobile site, and my year-long skunkworks redesign and rebuild of the main photo page. In fact, as an active member of the engineering team I routinely wrote and pushed production code, including template code that standardized and sped up the creation of new site pages.

I was also heavily involved with our users. Our team had an exceptionally close relationship with them, and I learned that every action we took communicated intent of some kind and ultimately shaped their behavior. Our policies, tolerances, defaults, code, and tone — all were signals that required the same level of care as our visual designs, and all were in service of the kind and authentic community we wanted to grow.

Senior UI Engineer — Apple (2004 – 2006)

At Apple I brought new JavaScript and CSS techniques to a more traditional design team. I designed and coded innovative UIs for both the online store and the apple.com homepage, including a complete redesign of the online store.

I built credibility with an engineering team whose priorities differed from my department's — a relationship that mattered most on launch days, when millions of customers hit the pages I'd built and there was zero margin for error.

Testimonials

For my work at Observable

Cobus Theunissen — former Head of Customer Success

I worked alongside Dunstan for five years at Observable, and his ability to hold the full complexity of a system in his mind is genuinely rare. Whether untangling a tricky workflow, or refining a new idea, he has a knack for taking fresh concepts and weaving them naturally into an existing design system so everything stays consistent and cohesive.

He brings sharp strategic thinking, strong visual craft, and real user empathy to his work, and has a way of pushing the people around him to think more carefully and aim higher. Ideating with him was always one of the highlights of my week, and any team would be lucky to have him.

Will Chase — former Senior Product Designer

I joined Observable with a lot of industry-specific experience, but without much traditional product design background — Dunstan's mentoring in this area helped me to grow greatly as a designer and was crucial to my success.

Dunstan has an uncanny ability to see when something doesn't feel right about a design, and to pull at that thread until the work goes from decent, to great. He has impeccable taste and a wealth of experience that allows him to analyze and critique a design from the broadest level down to the smallest details.

Most importantly, his feedback is incisive, but delivered in such a kind and thoughtful way that I'd come back from every working session with a clear idea of what to do next, having learned something important about design, and feeling immensely good about myself and my work. He's easily the most thoughtful designer I've worked with and the best mentor I've ever had.

Toph Tucker — current Staff Software Developer

I joined Observable shortly before Dunstan did, at the very start of 2020. I worked with him for six years, and it was always a joy. He was a designer who made my job easier, because he'd grapple with the insanely esoteric subtleties of our rather technical product. He learnt what he could from every new technical constraint, every new perspective on the problem.

Dunstan managed to maintain perennially fresh eyes about things he'd been looking at for six years straight, which made him a tireless advocate for the user. He was never desensitized to how weird it was to find “Databases” under “Settings,” which is why, years later, he could seize the opportunity to put such workspace resources in a better place. He produced flowcharts of every sign-up and sign-in and invitation path; he wrote a “*How will it work with...*” document cataloguing a hundred edge cases, like which notebook edits propagate live over the socket vs. only on page reload; and many other such bits of wisdom that have been invaluable after his departure. He could design so effectively because he was acutely attuned to the difference between how our system actually worked and how we said it worked.

A few times I watched him take over a thorny project that had stymied others and was looking ever more complicated, expensive, and delayed. I was relieved as soon as he was assigned to it, because I knew what would happen. He would size up the problem in relation to the whole product and deliver a precise and detailed design that was better, faster, and simpler than what we'd come up with so far. It would compose more elegantly with the other existing primitives of our system; it would introduce fewer alien concepts into the interface.

After the Notifications project, I wrote to our boss that Dunstan had anticipated a dozen things we hadn't thought about, saving us from customer frustration. After the Information Architecture project, I marveled how he'd resolved years of pent-up decoherence in our navigation, both accommodating future work and tidying up crucial but forgotten old features. It was almost a joke how often he'd be first to identify some bug or edge case. He had a simple rule for giving feedback on any blog post or newsletter before it went out — CLICK EVERY LINK — and it was shocking how often he caught a broken one. As we started doing more AI work, he'd be first to

hit every context window or usage limit, and became a sharp psychoanalyst of the agent's misbehavior.

But I was always most struck by how he operated in the corporate cultural context. In one meeting, he asked an incisive question about a management decision that didn't make sense and hadn't been explained — *"I was out the other day and must have missed something..."*. In fact he hadn't missed anything; everyone was wondering the same thing; he was just the one to speak up. This was typical. He asked hard questions with courage and tact, without pointing fingers or introducing antagonism. He has time-tested startup business instincts combined with a gentle manner that lets him diagnose problems in a way that brings a team closer together.

He advised me through a hundred of my own professional struggles. He comforted me for hours in the depths of a terrible panic attack. When he heard my dad had died after a long slow decline, he gave me the best and kindest hug I can remember. I'm so sad to no longer get to work with him.

For my work at Flickr

"Maybe the best iPhone-optimized web site I've seen anywhere." — John Gruber (Daring Fireball)

"Flickr video cleverly extends the value proposition of Flickr and does so in a highly appropriate yet pleasantly lighthearted fashion." — Lane Becker (President of Wikimedia)

For the design of my early 2000s blog

"...simply one of the best designed blogs on the planet. It combines amazing visual sensibilities with just the right amount of robust programming to make one of the best blog interfaces around." — Andrei Michael Herasimchuk (previously Lead Designer on Photoshop, Director of Design at Twitter)

"...extreme attention to detail and apparently limitless creativity... spend some time and prepare for awe." — Michael Lopp (previously at Apple, Palantir, Pinterest, and Slack)

"Excellent and extraordinarily clever redesign... The attention to detail is staggering. I can't say enough good things about the design of this site." — John Gruber (Daring Fireball)