

# MICHAEL ERNST

Product & Brand Designer – Pasadena, CA

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## SUMMARY

Product and brand design leader with 20+ years of experience shaping design strategy, building scalable systems, and driving product excellence at early-stage startups and global tech companies. Founding designer at Yelp and veteran of multiple high-growth environments, with expertise spanning UX, systems design, and brand development across mobile, web, and emerging AI platforms. Proven cross-functional track record influencing product direction, mentoring teams, and delivering measurable business impact through design leadership.

## CORE SKILLS

**Leadership** – Product strategy, design vision, cross-functional alignment, design ops, systems thinking, org-level impact

**UX & Research** – End-to-end product design, information architecture, AI prototyping, usability research, journey mapping, affinity mapping

**UI & Visual Design** – Scalable design systems, design tokens, brand identity, illustration, marketing design

**Tools** – Advanced in Figma, Adobe Creative Suite, Claude Code, Nimbalyt, Cursor, Maze, Webflow, Framer, working knowledge of HTML/CSS

## EXPERIENCE

**Senior Lead Designer – Terraformation** January 2024 - Present | Honolulu HI (Remote)

- Spearhead design strategy across core B2B SaaS tools supporting 23 forestry projects, increasing program graduation rate from **50% → 75% (\$12M impact)**.
- Defined end-to-end design for Accelerator Console and Application flow, scaling applications to **200+ per cohort**.
- Partner with PM and engineering leadership to define product roadmaps, establish design principles, and mature design processes.
- Drive continuous improvement of UX and IA across Terraware through qualitative research and data-driven iteration.

**UX Design Consultant – Microsoft** December 2022 - January 2024 | Seattle WA (Remote)

- Led redesign of **Founders Hub (604K users)**, redefining IA, elevating design system standards, and improving accessibility compliance.
- Designed and launched **Copilot AI assistant integration**, boosting AI feature adoption by **38%** and Azure usage by **38%**.
- Reduced average time to Azure spend from **37 → 16 days**, driving **\$163M profit**; collaborated closely with PMs and engineers to align business metrics with user outcomes.

**Senior Product Designer – AtoB** April 2022 - September 2022 | San Francisco CA (Remote)

- Drove design for MVP of **Payroll**, doubling active users (**1K → 2K**) and achieving **200% net dollar retention**.
- Elevated design system scalability and consistency across web and mobile platforms.
- Partnered with marketing to establish brand guidelines, design templates, and web conversion

improvements.

- Lead Designer** – *Daylight* May 2021 - April 2022 | Austin TX (Remote)
- Owned product design for iOS app experience and Web3 community platform.
  - Defined NFT collection and credentialing site UX, blending gamification and brand storytelling.

**Freelancer** January 2017 - December 2020, Los Angeles CA

- Lead UX Designer** – *Fountain* March 2014 - November 2015, San Francisco, CA
- Owned product and brand design for on-demand home repair platform from concept to launch.
  - Developed marketing and SEO strategy, improving acquisition and retention.

**Freelancer** January 2013 - February 2014, San Francisco, CA

- Senior Product Designer** – *Yelp* January 2012 - January 2013, San Francisco, CA
- Led redesign of core mobile/web experience; evolved **Yelp's design system** for Retina and responsive web.
  - Drove visual consistency across consumer product surfaces and marketing channels.

- Lead Designer** – *Giftly* February 2011 - December 2011, San Francisco, CA
- Established product, brand, and growth design foundation for mobile gifting startup.
  - Managed design contractors, product manager and contributed to marketing strategy.

**Freelancer** June 2009 - February 2011

- Lead Designer/Creative Director** – *Yelp* December 2004 - June 2009, San Francisco, CA
- Founding designer responsible for **Yelp's original brand, product design, and system foundations**.
  - Scaled design operations and product to **20M monthly page views, 6M reviews**.
  - Partnered cross-functionally with Product, Marketing, and Sales leadership to drive product vision and growth.

## EDUCATION

**University of Wisconsin** – BS Art/Graphic Design September 1998 - May 2002