



UX CASE STUDY

thenooks.ca

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This case study has helped me to promote my capabilities and advance my education specifically in the area relating to user experience (UX) research and includes my personal opinions, satire, criticism and review. I believe this constitutes a 'fair use/dealing' of any such copyrighted material.

INTRODUCTION

The Nooks is a growing Canadian company that has stores in British Columbia and Ontario. Their mission is to empower Canadian artisans, or “makers” to grow their small businesses of handmade goods by starting small; hence the company provides “nooks” for makers to sell their products. The Nooks specialize in curating Canadian-made artisanal goods in their physical stores, as well as on their website which ships purchases Canada-wide.

As a customer of The Nooks, I discovered it by chance when I was in North Vancouver one day. What caught my attention with The Nooks is that the store sold various artwork, jewelry, candles, soap bars, and other accessories that I haven't seen before in other stores. The store felt cozy and comfortable with a rustic feel. However, when I visit the website, it doesn't reflect my experience at the store. It did not feel special or welcoming. It was hard to find specific makers' products intuitively, and the website looks disorganized in general with no clear hierarchy on the homepage.

CHALLENGE

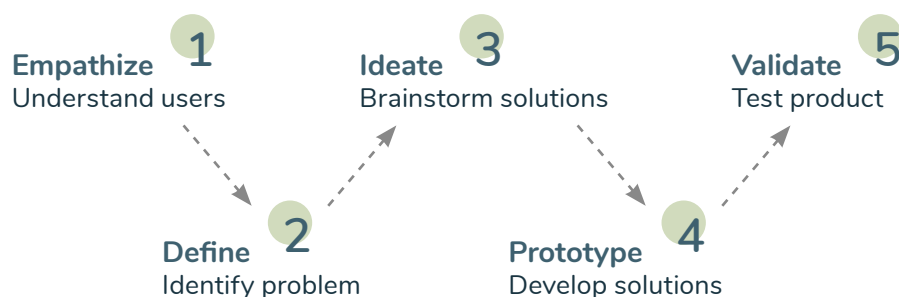
To showcase all of the makers' products and to improve their sales, it is important that their products can be found quickly and easily on the website. The Nooks prides themselves in providing “Canadian makers a national storefront”, so their website should reflect that goal. My challenge is to improve The Nooks website's user experience in their main high-traffic pages to increase sales, and improve exposure of the artisans that sell at The Nooks.

GOAL

My goal is to research The Nooks website using the 5-Step Design Thinking Process to uncover and identify areas that can be improved upon.

PROCESS

I will follow the 5-Step Design Thinking Process:





1 Empathize

As a shopper at The Nooks, I took a deep dive into the website to discover possible audiences, use cases, and the experience of completing certain tasks. This helps me better understand The Nooks' website functions and shopping experience.

I found out that the website has a link for vendors to log in, and also a "Maker Dashboard", therefore aside from customers, makers who sell their products at The Nooks also use the website to manage their business.

Target audience of The Nooks website include the following:

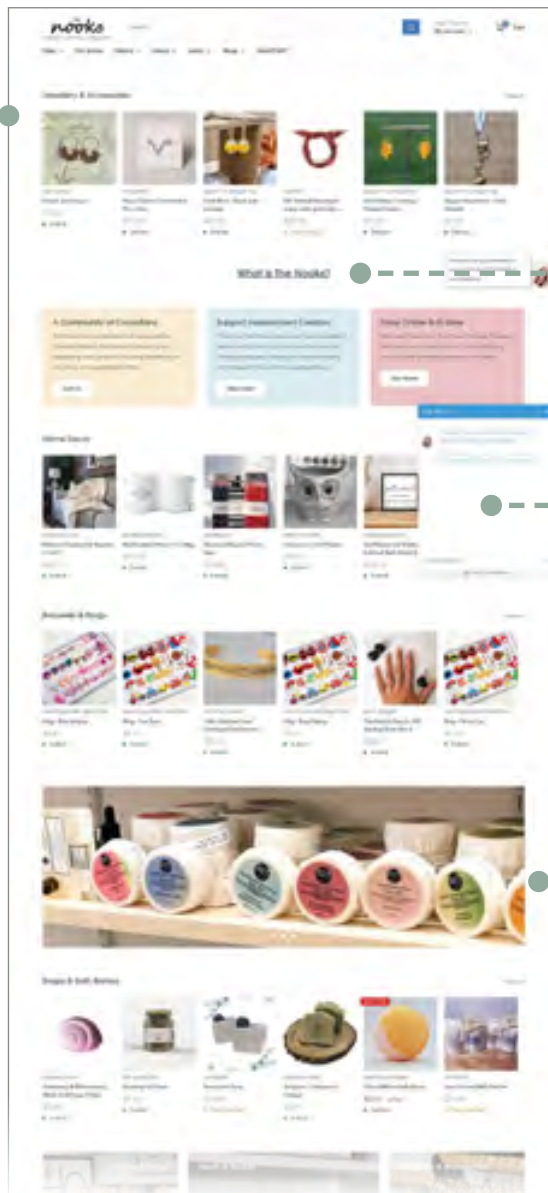
- Home decor enthusiasts
- Returning customers
- Gift shoppers
- Supporters of local businesses
- Local artisans

Homepage Analysis

Users landing on the homepage might find it confusing that the first section of the page, right under the navigation is the Jewellery & Accessories section because that is not the only product The Nooks sell. There was no context or entry point that eased me into the Jewellery & Accessories section on the homepage.

There is no microcopy introducing this section.

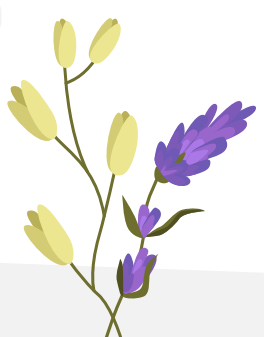
Users can't tell right away what product categories The Nooks sell without hovering over "Shop" in the global navigation, and yet users immediately see the "Jewellery & Accessories" section. This gives users the impression that The Nooks sells jewellery and accessories only, or that this category of products is the most important.



"What is The Nooks?" section seem less important on a homepage because users can find that in an about page. Selling products and showcasing artisans/makers' is a more important goal of this website and business.

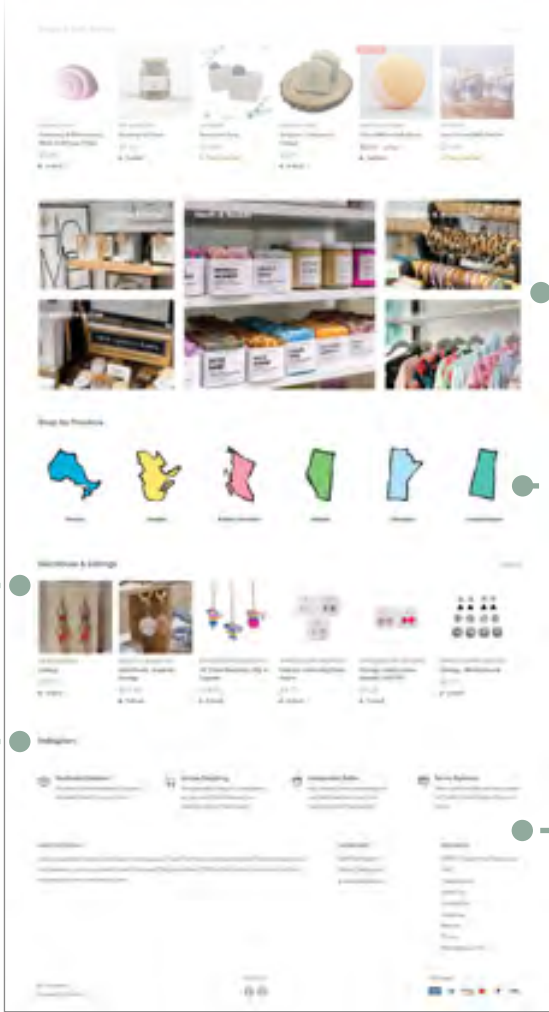
This chat bot has two options: "I'm interested in selling", and "Just browsing". When users choose they are interested in selling, they are provided with a couple links with more information. When users choose they are browsing, it provides a link to a product category that is on sale. The main purpose of this chat bot is to promote selling on The Nooks' platform, however users can find out about that elsewhere. Having a chat box is more useful when it's a live chat.

Not sure what purpose this image carousel serves in the middle of the homepage. It doesn't have any overlay text on it to give users more information as to what it is featuring.





Having a “Necklaces & Earrings” section is redundant because it is a subcategory within “Jewellery & Accessories”. This section would be useful if it’s a popular product category, however it is placed at the very bottom of the homepage.



This section showing all the product categories should be higher up on this long homepage so users can find out sooner what products the website sells then start browsing. This section could also be removed entirely because users can find this in the global navigation.

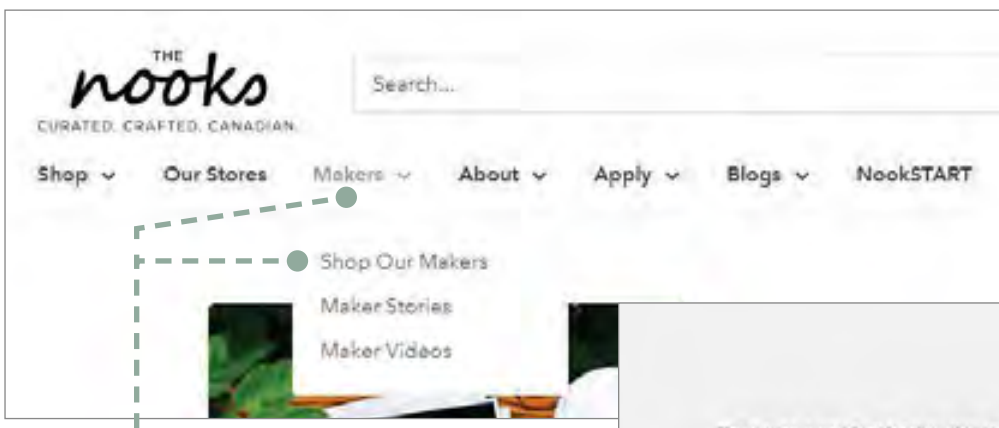
It looks like there are only six provinces to choose from, until you hover over it then an arrow appears on the edge for users to see more provinces.

The title “Shop by Province” doesn’t make it clear that if users click on a province then they’re actually shopping through products sold by artisans/makers located in that province. Instead, it sounds like you are shopping for products available in that province.

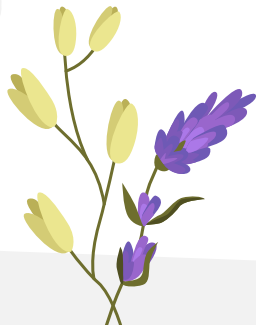
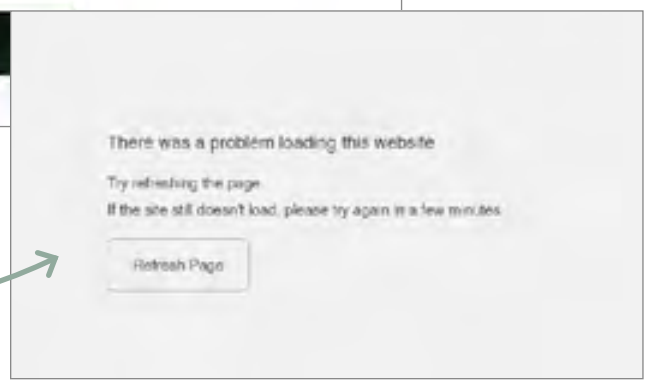
There’s a heading that says “Instagram”, but no Instagram posts are displayed under it.

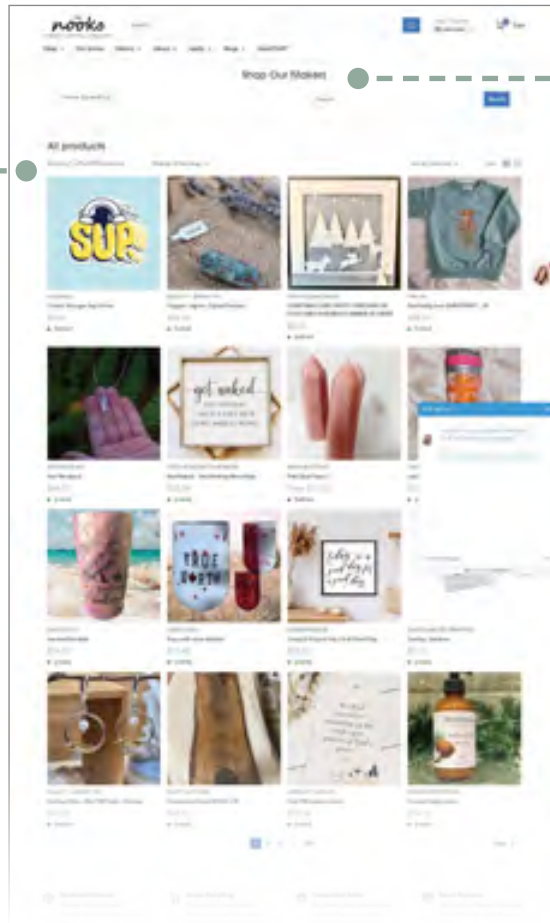
There isn’t a clear divide between the footer and the content above it. The footer background colour is the same colour as the rest of the page. There isn’t a line separating it from the rest of the page, either.

“Makers” and “Shop Our Makers” Page Analyses



Clicking on either the global navigation heading “Makers”, or “Shop Our Makers” lead to a page that takes a long time to load. Sometimes it doesn’t even load.

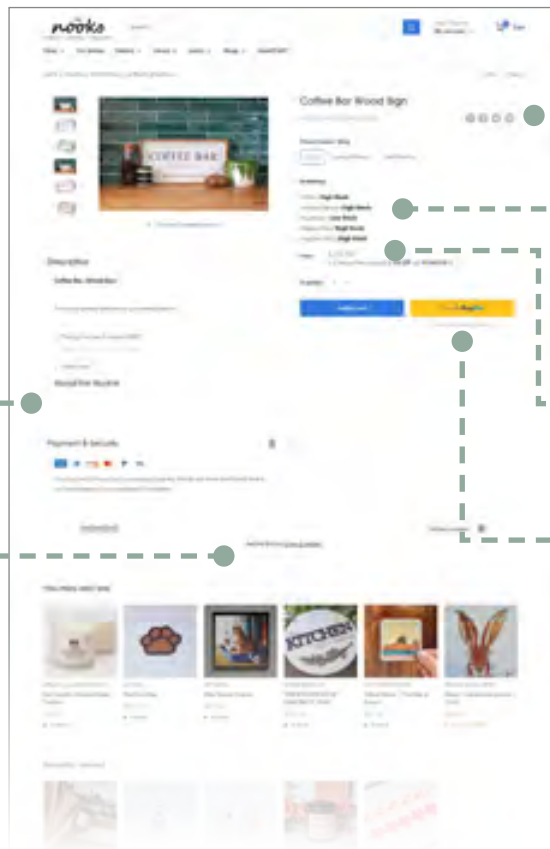




This page presumably should be displaying a list of all the makers that sell on The Nooks, but instead it lists out all products, which belongs under "Shop".

When the "Shop Our Makers" or "Makers" pages do load, they lead to the same page with a search bar. The search function on this page doesn't work because when I search for something, it leads to a browser error page.

Product Page Analyses



Under the heading "About this Nookie", there is no information about the maker selling this product.

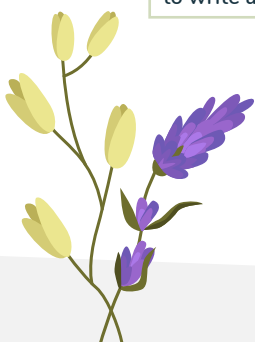
The reviews section isn't obvious enough. There is no heading letting users know this is the reviews section. It doesn't feel encouraging for users to write a review.

Displaying all four different sharing options take up space. Instead this can just be a sharing icon.

Not a good use of space to display inventory information in a way that looks like it is manually updated.

The price is not obvious enough when displayed in grey text.

What if the user doesn't have PayPal? There isn't another button that allows users to purchase immediately without using PayPal.



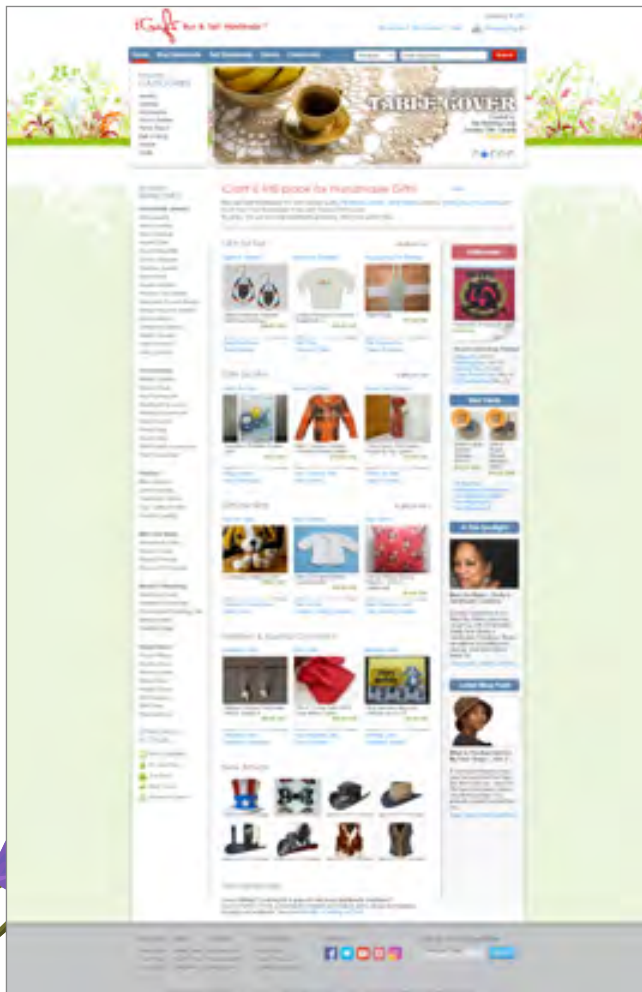


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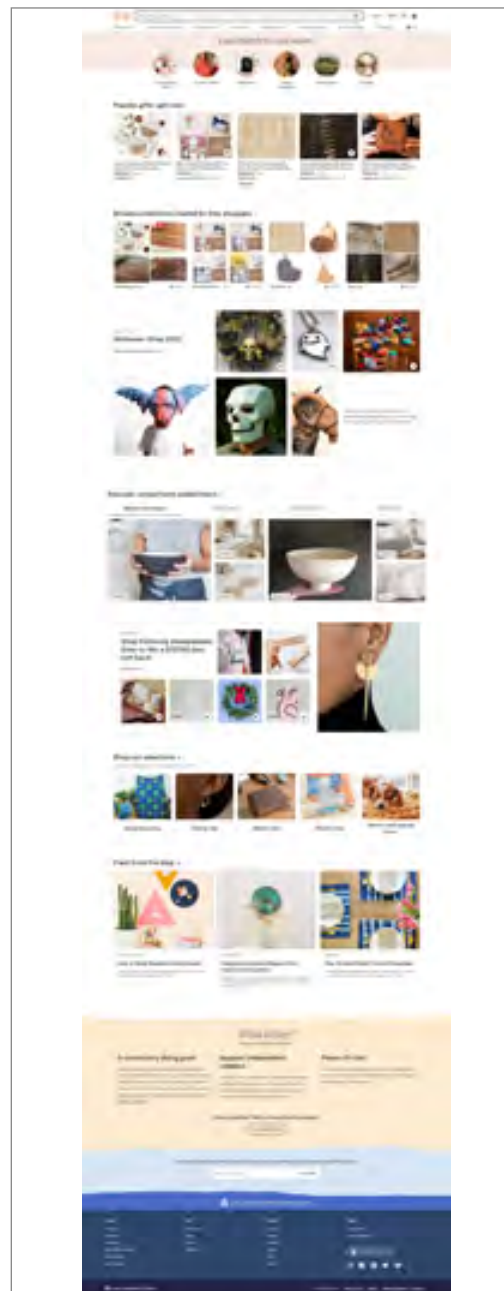
Competitive Analysis

The Nooks has a huge competitor, and that is Etsy. What makes The Nooks stand out is that they only sell Canadian products. Another lesser-known competitor is iCraft, which sells handmade goods.

ICRAFTGIFTS.COM



ETSY.COM



ETSY.COM

Pros

- The first section at the top, "Fresh finds fit for cosy season" is seasonal content relevant to shoppers at that moment.
- Each section has valuable and relevant curated products that are interesting and timely. For example "Halloween Shop 2022" is perfect for this month.
- Sections aren't just Etsy's product categories, instead they are collections that are dynamically created, or updated periodically.
- Good quality photos.
- Colourful footer that makes a boring footer more fun to look at.

Cons

- Section headings can be slightly more obvious.
- More white space can make the page less overwhelming.
- A scroll-up anchor arrow would be helpful for users to scroll up right away to the global navigation
- Has a deep sitemap making it hard to discover content and products.

ICRAFTGIFTS.COM

Pros

- Having a carousel on top is a nice way to promote products.
- If the purpose of the user visiting this website is to sell their own products, they can find information on this right away at the top blue navigation bar.
- On the right sidebar, there's an "In the Spotlight" module featuring a maker where you can find out about the maker and their products.
- The footer is practical with extra information like contests and giveaways, advertising, and newsletter sign-ups.

Cons

- According to Hick's Law, the time it takes to make a decision increases with the number of choices, so the navigation should be shortened.
- The design of the website is very dated.
- Some of the icons used are too detailed and is hard to tell what it is symbolizing.
- Too much text on the page and most of it are links.





2 Define

I created a user persona for a fictional user named Charlotte Lee. She is a home decor enthusiast who needs to purchase candles from her favourite candle maker from The Nooks because she likes to have a nicely decorated home that she can enjoy while working from home every day. My goal is that the redesign of The Nooks' main pages will allow for greater visibility of the makers selling on the website, which will in turn increase sales by giving customers an improved navigation that allows them to find the products they need efficiently and effectively.

From my research, I've created a user persona and journey map of a home decor enthusiast.

Home Decor Enthusiast

Goals

- Decorate home with unique decor items
- Want friends and family to enjoy a cozy home when she hosts parties
- Want a home that reflects her personality and style

Frustrations

- All franchised stores sell basically the same things with very similar styles
- Struggling to find one-of-a-kind decor items
- Expensive mass-produced, generic products that are poor quality

Motivation

Price	80%
Style	90%
Quality	70%
Convenience	60%
Credibility	50%

Brands Affiliations

Etsy, HOMESENSE, Aēsop., alo yoga, BED BATH & BEYOND

Personality

Introvert: 10%, Extrovert: 90%
Thinking: 10%, Feeling: 90%
Sensing: 10%, Intuition: 90%
Judging: 10%, Perceiving: 90%

Sociable, Adventurous, Ambitious, Openistic

Bio

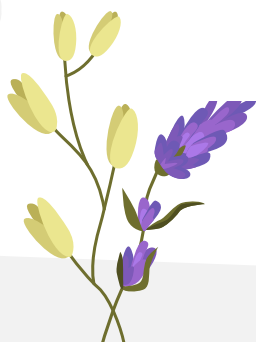
Charlotte is a busy work-from-home mortgage broker who works on her own schedule. She loves shopping at stores that sell a variety of curated products. She especially enjoys stores that sell unique home decor items, such as candles that she can use to freshen up her home.

One day when she went out for lunch with a client in North Vancouver, she stumbled upon The Nooks store and immediately fell in love with the unique locally made artwork, candles, soaps, and accessories. She immediately bought candles and soaps there with scents she's never heard of or smelled before, and became a fan.

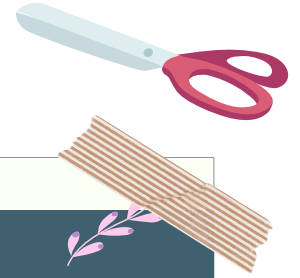
Ever since, Charlotte would visit The Nooks' website whenever she runs out of soap bars, essential oils, or scented candles. Occasionally, she would find new wall art from the website to decorate her home with. Every time she shops, she would filter products by price to find the best deals. She would also check the candle makers' names from the candles she bought previously then find their names on the website to see if they have any candles in stock. When she finds something she wants to purchase, she prefers to pick it up in store to save on shipping costs, unless it's only available online.

Preferred Channels

Traditional Ads	10%
Instagram	80%
TikTok	70%
Referrals	60%

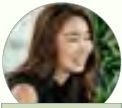


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JOURNEY MAP

thenooks.ca



Wellness & Lifestyle Enthusiast

Charlotte is a busy work-from-home mortgage broker living in Vancouver, Canada. She loves shopping at stores that sell a variety of curated products. She especially enjoys stores that sell unique home decor items, such as wall art and candles that she can use to freshen up her home. That's why she shops at The Nooks, which sells curated locally-made artisanal goods.

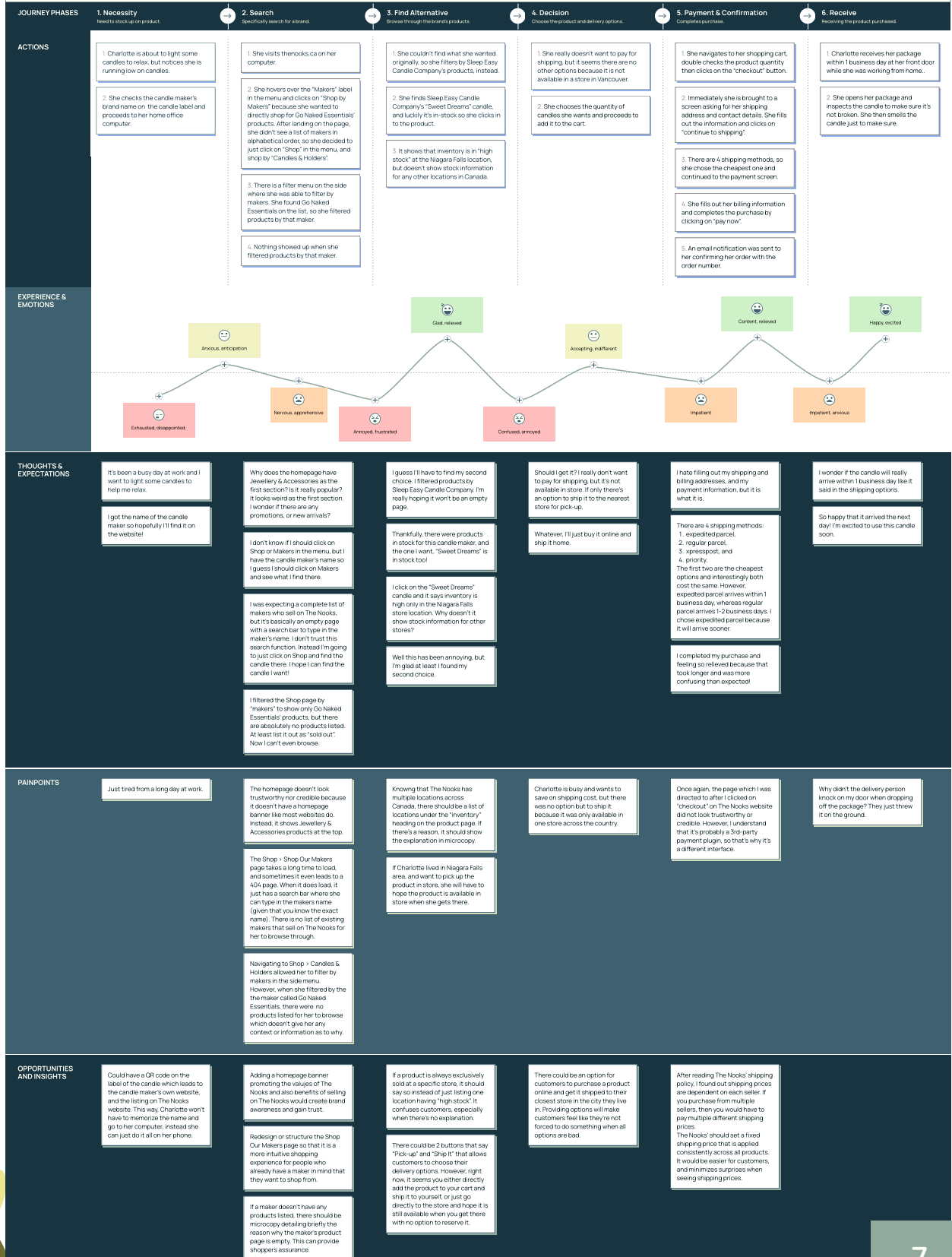
CHARLOTTE LEE

GOALS

- Find a specific artisanal in-stock scented candles
- Easily choose to ship the product or pick it up in store
- Ship purchase using the cheapest shipping option

SCENARIO

Charlotte used up all her candles and need to stock up from The Nooks. She's really busy so she needs to buy the candle online then pick it up in store on the weekend when she goes grocery shopping. She ran out of the Go Naked Essentials candle with "Hobnob Sargol" scent so she wants to buy the same one again. If that's sold out, she also likes the "Sweet Dreams" scent from Sleep Easy Candle Company. She doesn't want to waste money on shipping, but if the candle's not available for pick-up, she'll ship it to her home using the cheapest shipping option.





Journey mapping helped me understand the holistic journey of the ideal user, why they came to use this interface, what they wanted to see, and how it seemed to work. It flushed out pain points, helped me discover touch points and suggested opportunities to fix possible issues that could be current or future state fixes. I discovered that if a user already knows which maker they want to shop from, it's impossible to find the storefront of the maker by typing it in the search bar. Navigating to the "Shop Our Makers" page doesn't help either because it doesn't display a catalogue of all makers. In the journey map, Charlotte wanted to search for the maker Go Naked Essentials so she went to the "Shop Our Makers" page, which had a search bar that didn't work. When the full name of a maker is entered on this page's search bar, it redirects to another error page that says "The thenooks.ca page can't be found." Sometimes the "Shop Our Makers" page doesn't load, and displays an error page that says "There was a problem loading this website."

When on a product page, Charlotte wanted to pick up the product in-store, but there's no way of pre-purchasing an item online, then picking it up at the nearest location. Inventory information for Ontario stores was displayed but not for stores in British Columbia, and vice versa for some other products. Even if the inventory is zero, it should display that to give users a clear picture of what the inventory status is.

Overall, Charlotte's experience and emotions have been more negative than positive which shows that it is not easy shopping online at The Nooks.

3 Ideate

Based on my research on thenooks.ca and competitive analysis on etsy.com and icroftgifts.com, I found that The Nooks took inspiration from these websites. The Nooks uses the word "maker" just like iCraft does when referring to their sellers. Some product category labels that The Nooks has is the same as Etsy's, for example "Jewellery & Accessories" and "Home & Living" — iCraft's product category labels are different from both of them.

With the information learned from the competitive analysis, I decided to display all product categories on the navigation bar, just like iCraft and Etsy's websites do because according to Jakob's Law, users spend more time on other sites so they expect yours to work similarly. Showing all product categories can minimize clicks because users won't have to click on "Shop" in the navigation in order to see the categories. Also, this shows users at a glance what the website is about by judging the labels in the navigation.

Pain Points

1. HOMEPAGE

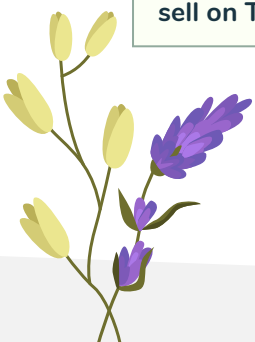
The homepage does not look credible or trustworthy because it abruptly leads users to a section of Jewellery & Accessories section with no preamble. The hierarchy of the sections on the homepage don't seem logical because the Jewellery & Accessories section comes first, while What is The Nooks? comes second, but What is The Nooks? seems more important. Then following the What is The Nooks? section are sections of other product categories again.

My goal is to redesign the homepage with an improved hierarchy and layout.

2. SHOP OUR MAKERS

This page sometimes loads, and sometimes doesn't. When it does load, there is a dysfunctional search bar on the page.

My goal is to redesign the Shop Our Makers page so that it displays a list of makers. That way users can easily find the storefront of each maker, and the page can act as an index of all the makers that sell on The Nooks.





3. PRODUCT PAGES

The product page has a section displaying in-store inventory information, but the method of measurement of inventory information is not in specific quantities, but displayed with labels like “High Stock”, “Medium Stock”, and “Low Stock”. This information is ambiguous and pointless because the website only offers the option to purchase the product and get it shipped. If a user wants to pick up the product at the nearest store, there is no option for that. This option would be useful if a user sees a product available at nearby store and wants to pick it up after work, but there’s only 1 left in-stock so they want to pre-pay for it on the website first.

My goal is to redesign the product page for the capability to prepay a product for pick-up at the nearest store by typing in a postal code or by detecting the user’s GPS location.

Wireframes

HOMEPAGE



This image could act as an advertisement for sales, and special events. Currently, it is promoting makers’ stories. It would link to the new Blogs page.

Instead of the Jewellery & Accessories product category, I created a New Arrivals section to gain shoppers interest.

A mid-page carousel to promote The Nooks’ supplementary stream of revenue from their program called nookSTART where they teach people how to build a handmade business.

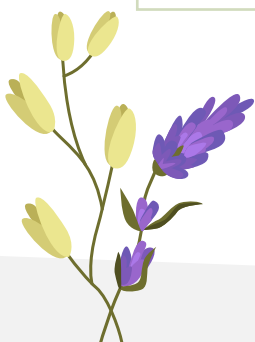
These sections give people trust and make the website look credible, especially testimonials.

! The following wireframes were created using Mockplus.

To give makers more exposure, I added a “Featured Makers” concept for The Nooks to feature three makers every week for shoppers to discover. This is similar to icroftgifts.com’s “In the Spotlight” module which allows users to learn more about a maker.

In the existing website’s global navigation, under Shop, there is a subcategory called Province where you can shop by province. Instead of taking up space in the global navigation, I created a section for this on the homepage with microcopy under the heading to give users context on what the list of provinces mean.

Since users of The Nooks’ website include people who are shopping for gifts, this is a useful section to add on the homepage. A similar section is visible on the Etsy website as the first section on the homepage called “Popular gifts right now”.





Wireframes

SHOP OUR MAKERS

Aside from a search bar allowing users to search for makers' names, they also have the option to see all makers all at once.

If users don't know the specific name of makers, they can sort the list of makers by the product category they belong in.

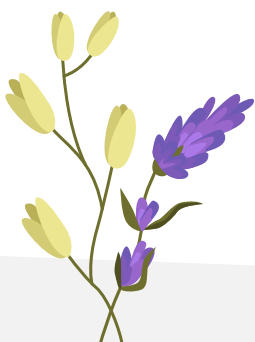
After users sort makers by product category, they can choose to display the list by alphabet group. This way users won't be overwhelmed by a really long list.

If users logged in to their account, they can click on the heart icon to favourite the maker.

If displaying the list by alphabet group isn't filtered enough, users can sort the list by popularity, and stock-up date.

Users can also sort the list by store size. This is based on the amount of products available by the maker.

If users want to reset their filter parameters, they can click on "clear filters".





Wireframes

PRODUCT PAGES



Under the maker's name, Sleep Easy Candle Company, I also included a tag that shows the province in which the maker is based in. This can be used as metadata.

I added a star rating scale to show the maker's average rating and the amount of ratings. A share button is added for users to share the product page.

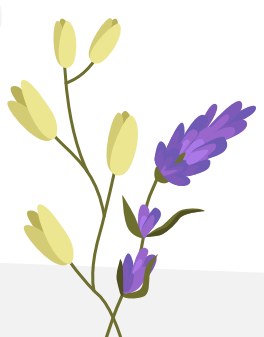
Price tag is displayed in larger font size.



This About Maker section is called About this Nookie on the existing page, which is empty on most product pages, so I filled this out with the maker's information.

In the review section, not only can users choose to see reviews for this product, but also reviews for this maker selling the product.

I added a product pick-up feature so that users can find a location nearest them for pick-up. Now you can toggle between "Ship" and "Pick Up".





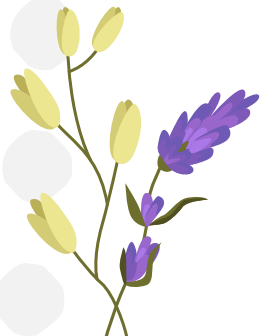
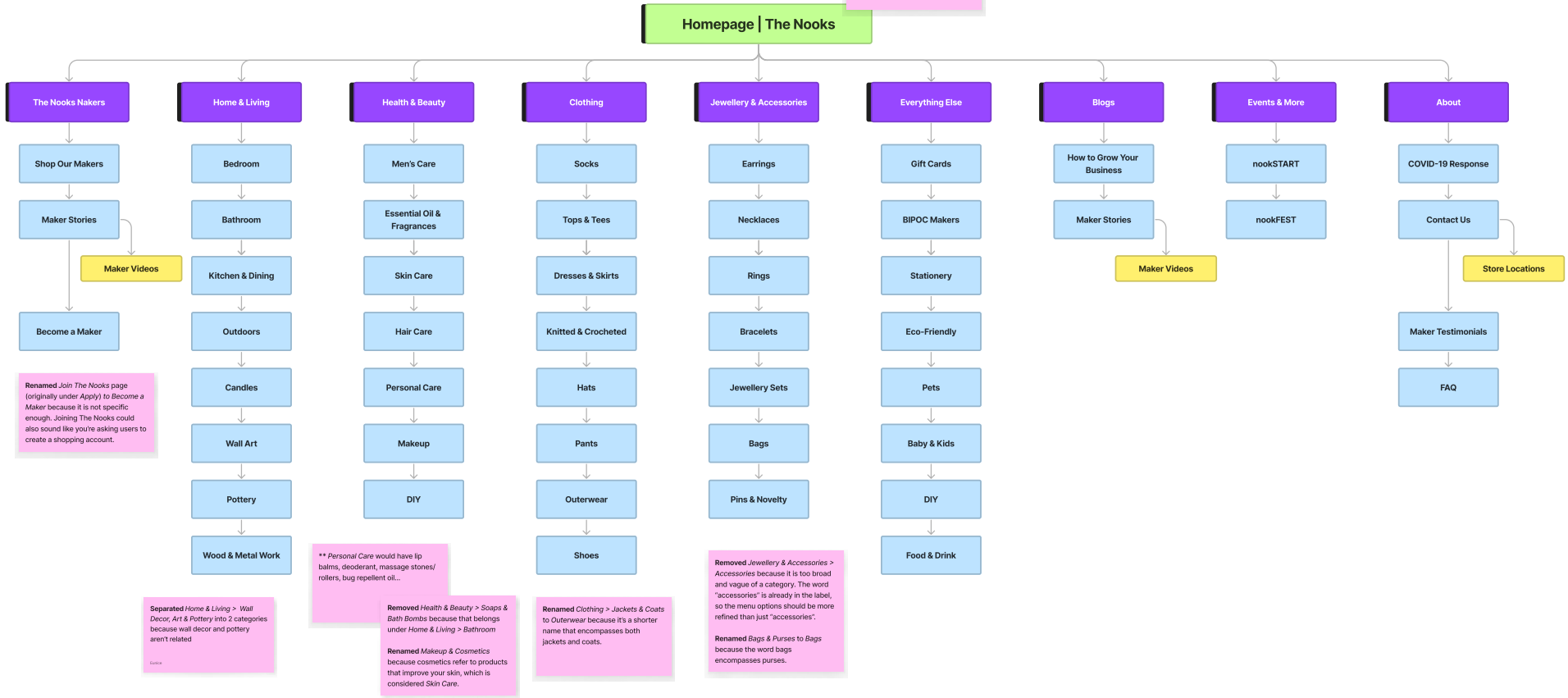
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Sitemap

The sitemap shows the global navigation with nine navigation items. According to Miller's Law, humans can only keep seven (plus or minus two) items in their working memory, therefore I chose nine. Also, Etsy's website has the same amount of links in its global navigation.

! The following sitemap was created using Figma.

Order of items are ideally organized by business needs of which category needs to be promoted more, or which category is most popular.

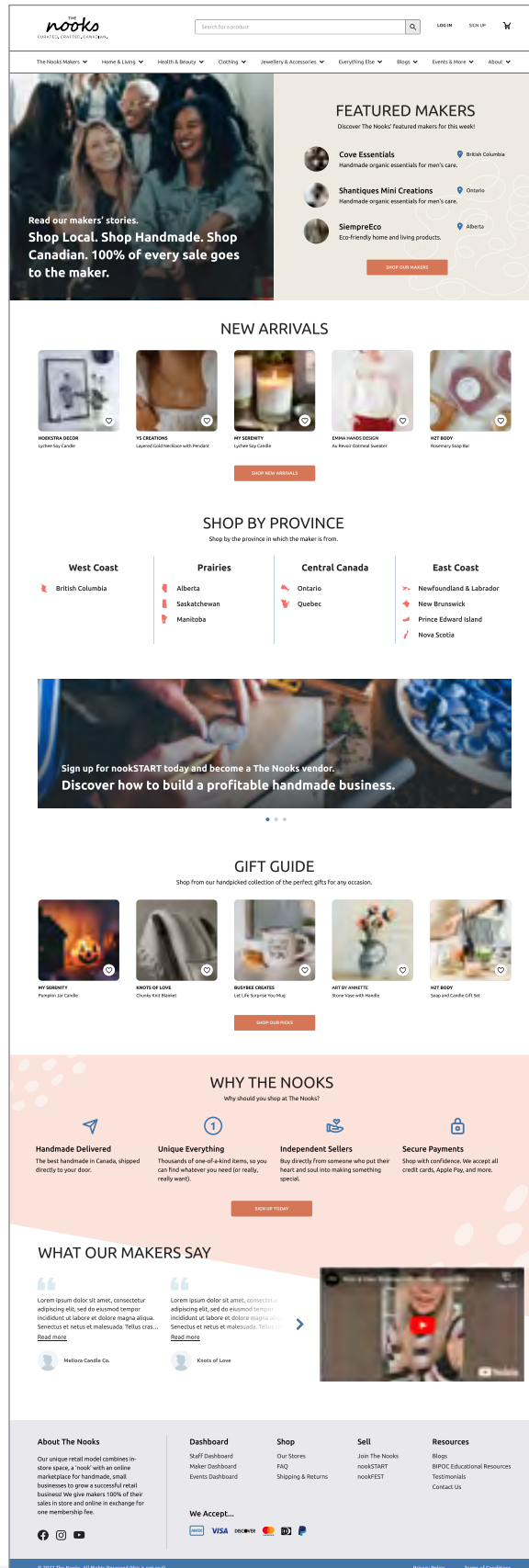




4 Prototype

I created high-fidelity mockups from my wireframes. The redesign provides solutions to pain points like hierarchy on the homepage, searchability of the search bar on the Shop Our Makers page, and the lack of delivery options on the product page.

Mockups HOMEPAGE

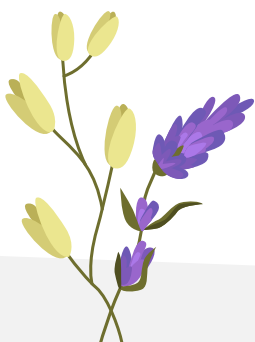


The following mockups were created using Figma.

The homepage now has more colour instead of mostly black and white. The hierarchy is improved and the page has increased variety of dynamically updated products, such as products under “New Arrivals”.

This new layout gives The Nooks’ makers more exposure because there is now a “Featured Makers” section. This helps The Nooks stay in-line with their mission which is to empower Canadian artisans to grow their small businesses of handmade goods.

Having a testimonial section at the bottom of the page helps the business gain credibility. Especially when there is an embedded video of a maker giving her testimonial of selling with The Nooks gives the website an extra layer of trust.



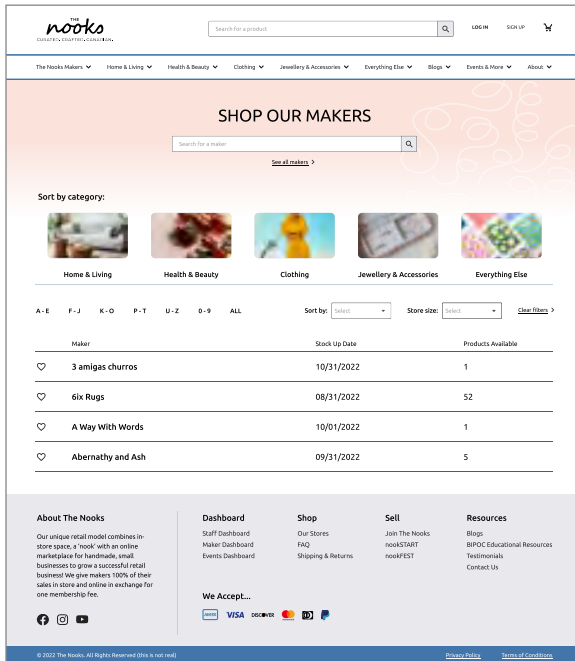


Mockups

SHOP OUR MAKERS

Step 1

User lands on Shop Our Makers page.



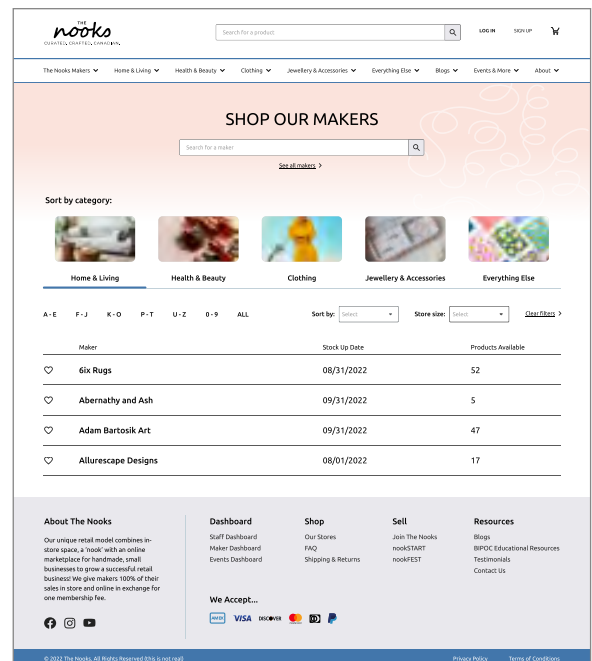
The Shop Our Makers page now has more colour and shows a list of The Nooks' makers instead of a list of all products.

The search bar is still there with the sole function of searching for makers' names only. Once a makers' name is entered, the maker's listing will appear in the list at the bottom. Under the search bar, there is a button that allows users to see all makers in case they want to reset all their filters and just see a list of all makers.

Other than alphabetical order, the filtering system allows for users to sort by stock-up date, which is not a current feature on the website. There's also a filter that allows users to filter makers by popularity which will show from ascending or descending order. Popularity will be based on which store has the most sales for that month. This is also not a feature on the current website.

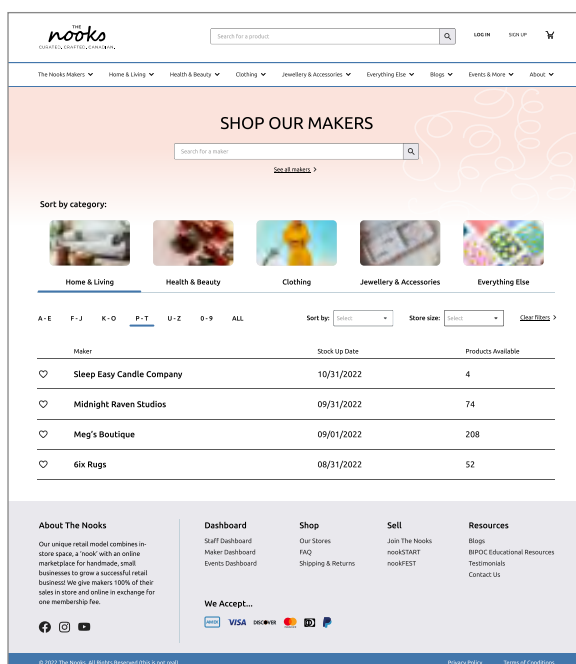
Step 2

User chooses the product category.



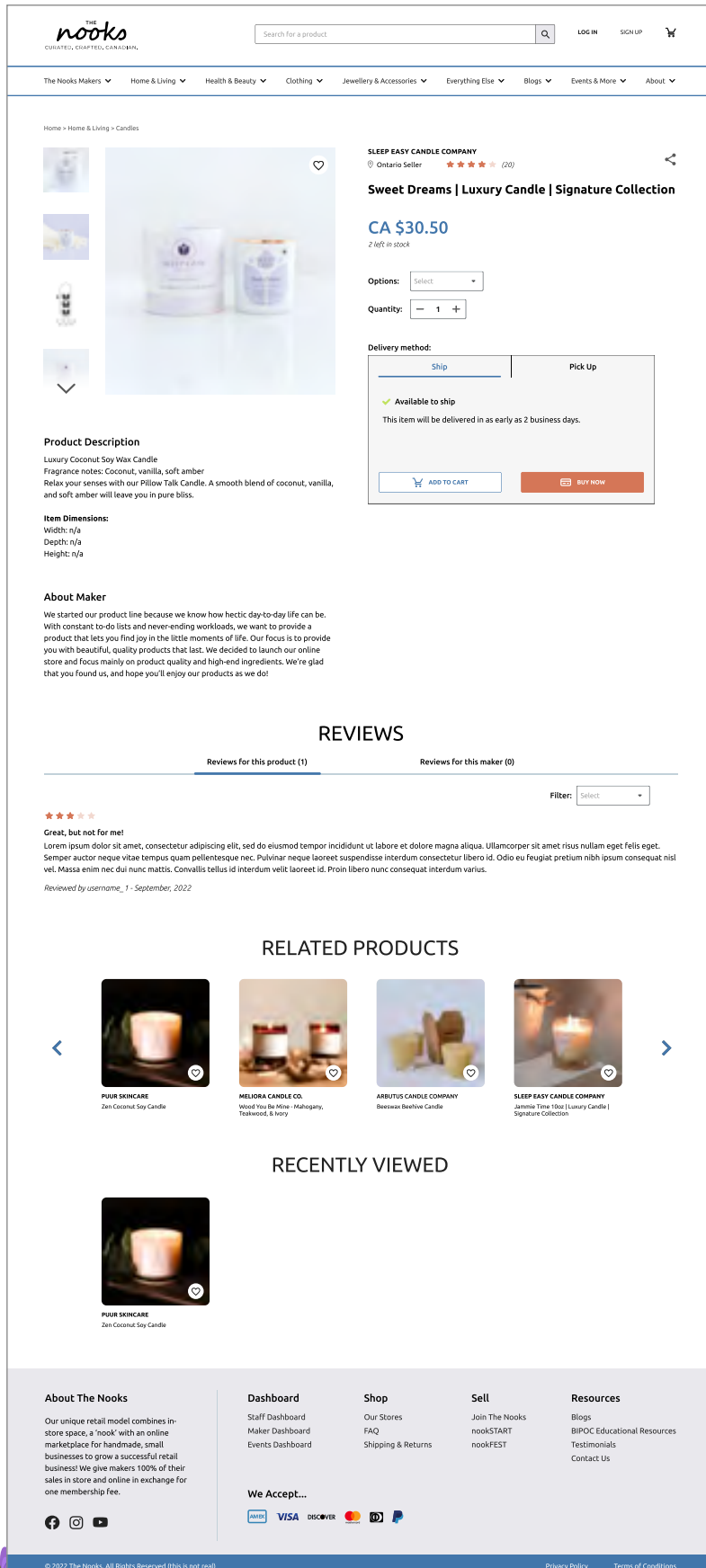
Step 3

User chooses the alphabet group.





Mockups PRODUCT PAGE



I added star reviews beside the makers' name and location with the number of reviews indicated beside the stars. This gives users a sense that the product and the website is constantly being updated and being engaged with by real users and isn't just a stale page.

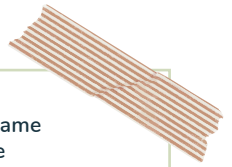
The product page now shows the unit price in larger text. Previously it was not obvious as it was in a light grey colour.

I added a drop down menu for item options in case there are different styles of a product. If there are no other options inputted by the maker then this drop down menu will be greyed out in an inactive state.

For the quantity picker, I added plus/minus signs because previously it was a drop down menu. A drop down menu for a quantity picker isn't practical because the drop down menu doesn't have the flexibility to display all numbers, whereas this updated design allows you to click on the plus/minus signs, and click on the number to type it in manually.

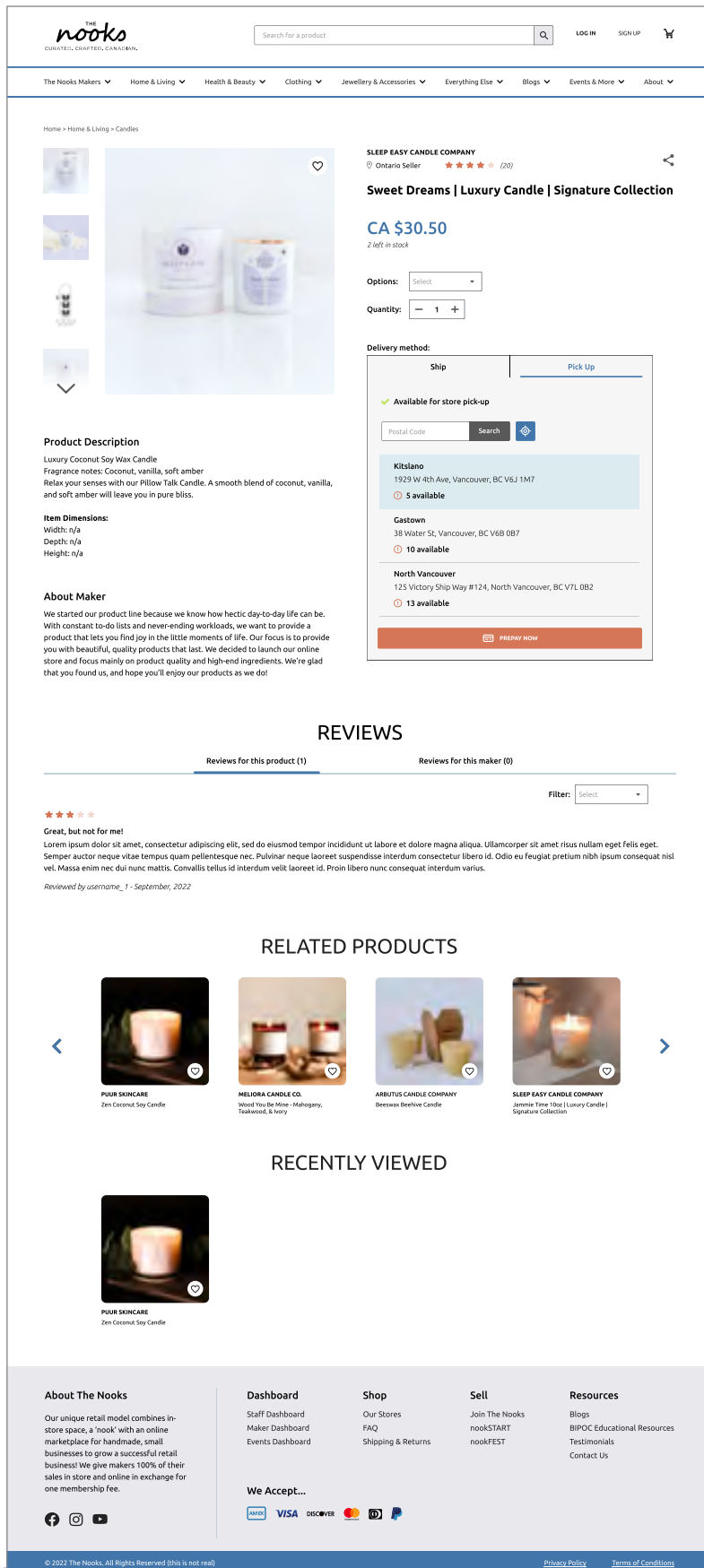
The delivery method shown here includes a new feature, which is a "pick up" option. When toggling to the "ship" delivery method, there is microcopy that reassures users that the product is available, and the time frame in which the product will be delivered. This information gives users trust and an ease of mind.

In the reviews section, other than just providing reviews for the product, users can choose to see reviews for the maker as well. This method eliminates the need to click on the maker's name then navigate through another page to read reviews of the maker.





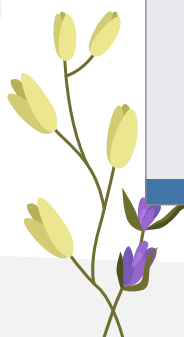
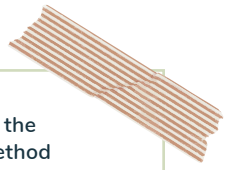
Mockups PRODUCT PAGE



This mockup of the product page shows the “pick up” delivery method module. Users can input their postal code to search for stores nearby, or they can click on the GPS location button to locate them. The list of stores include the address of the store as well as the exact amount of units available at each store.

The orange button at the bottom of the module said “Prepay Now” instead of “Buy Now” because I want to make it clear that users are prepaying first for pick-up later on. The date picker for when to pick-up would be part of the next step after clicking on “Prepay Now”.

The “Prepay Now” button is within the module because according to the Law of Common Region, if elements are within a clearly defined boundary, they will be perceived as a group. Previously the purchasing CTA along with the unit price and quantity picker weren’t spaced out consistently. It looked like a clump of random information, hence I created a solid border for this module to make it stand out.





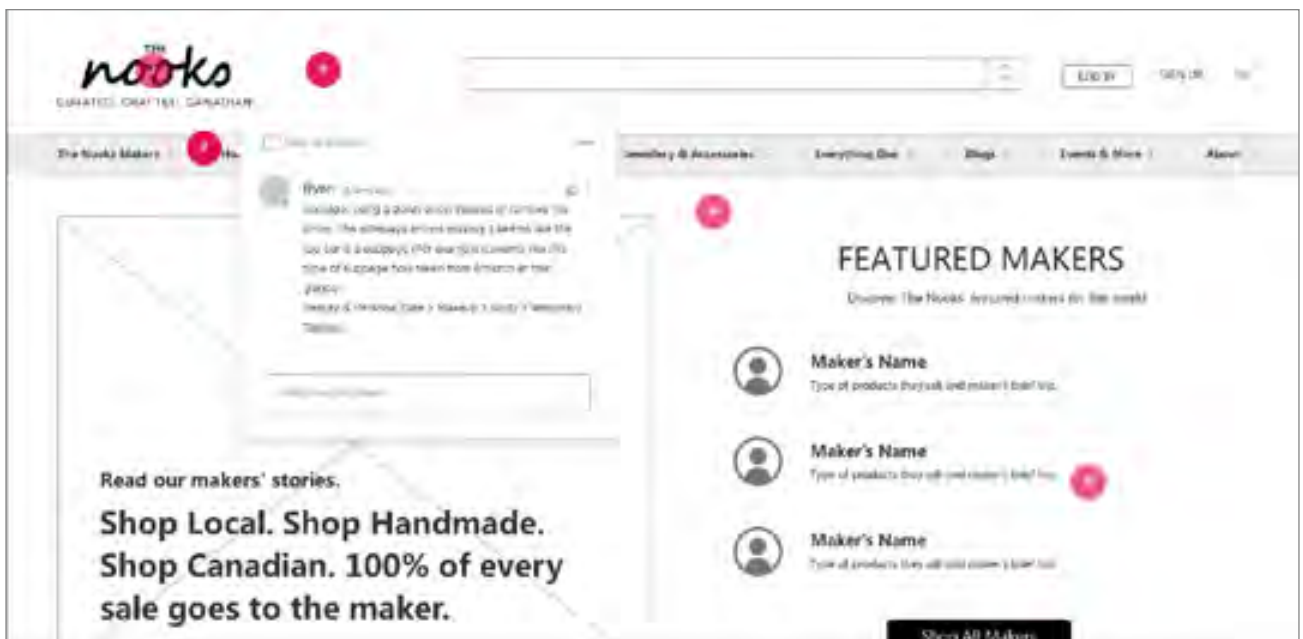
5 Validate

Usability testing is an important part of the design process. I uploaded my wireframes to InVision for peer feedback before creating high-fidelity mockups because I wanted to validate my ideas first before designing. Finding errors earlier on in the process helped me save time and energy because I didn't have to keep editing a functional high-fidelity mockup.

Feedback

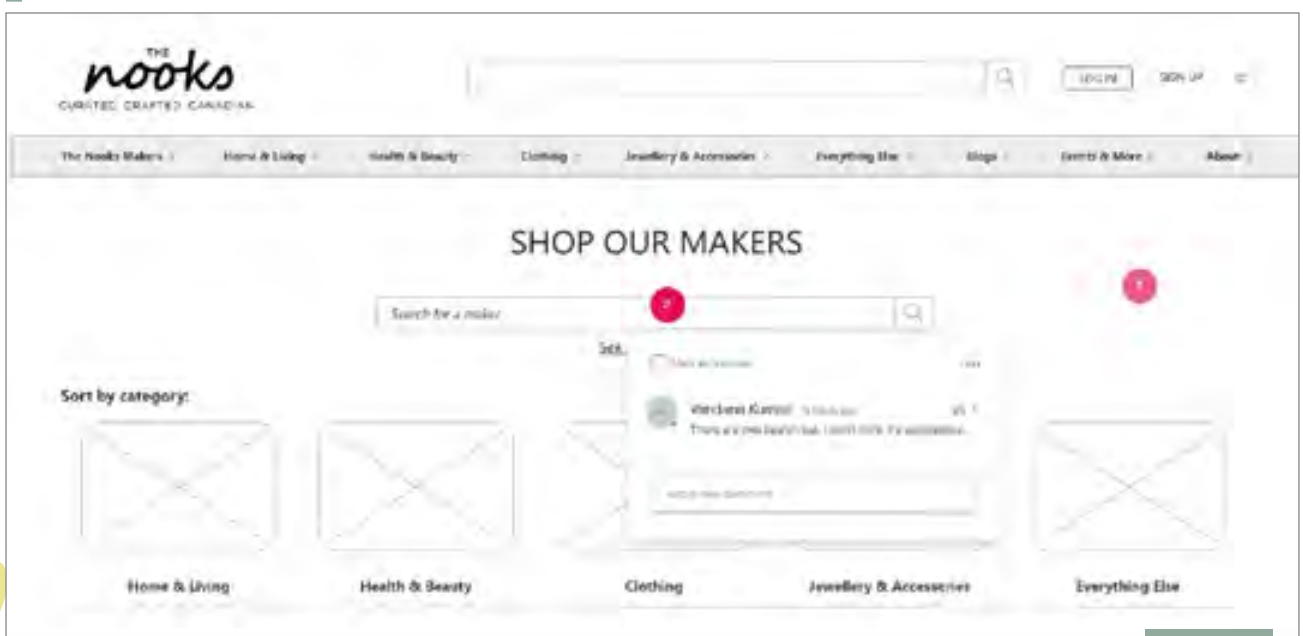
HOMEPAGE

Consider using a down arrow instead or remove the arrow. The sideways arrows making it seem like the top bar is a subpage



SHOP OUR MAKERS PAGE

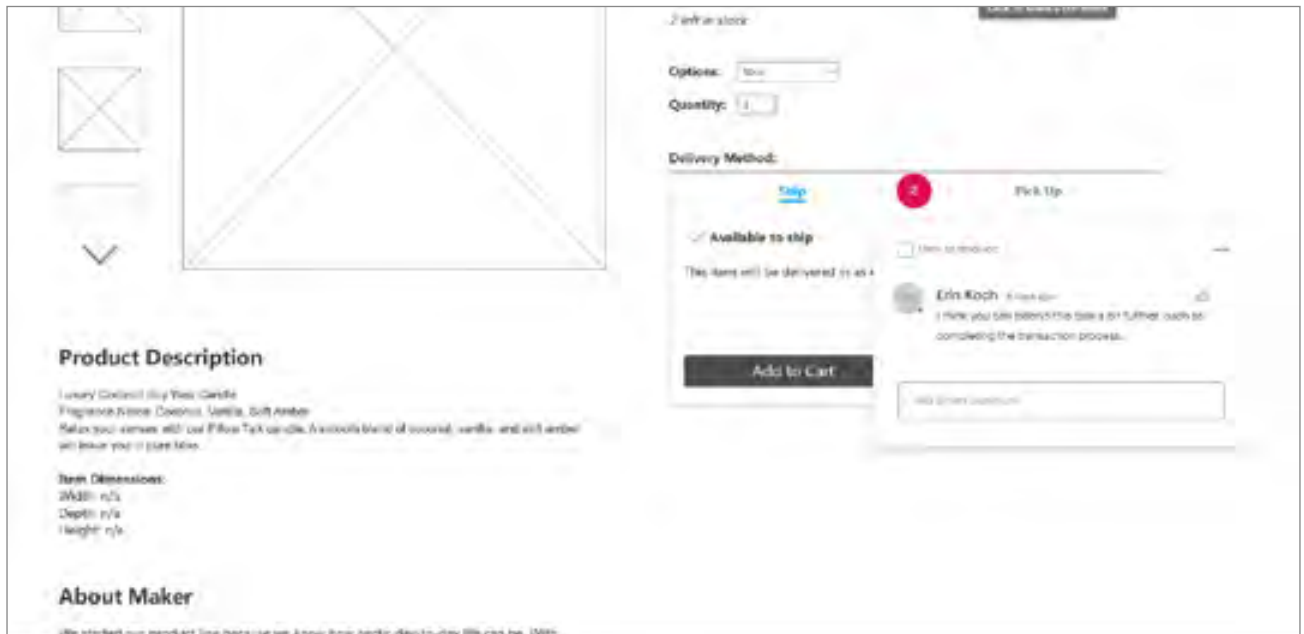
There are two search bar. I don't think it's appropriate.





PRODUCT PAGE

I think you can extend this task a bit further, such as completing the transaction process.



CONCLUSION

The Nooks website was functional and had a clean, simple design. Compared to its competitors like Etsy, their homepage does not attract shoppers to browse because of the layout, hierarchy and categorization of products. Both competitors, Etsy and iCraft had plenty of product categories on the homepage to give shoppers a sense that there's a lot they can shop through, but The Nooks lacked this sense of variety. Applying the solutions recommended could improve on the user experience of The Nooks' ideal users.

Completing this case study allowed me to get a bird's eye view of how a project is done using the 5-Step Design Thinking Process. Using InVision to present my wireframes made me value user feedback, especially during this class project where I get to see comments for everyone else's wireframes and mockups. Sometimes as designers, we make assumptions based on our own experiences, so it's important to be open-minded and seek for other opinions.

When creating the mockups using Figma, I used UI kits and plugins which were very easy to use, especially when Figma's interface is designed in a way that makes these tools super streamlined. What I enjoyed most while completing this case study is creating the site map, and understanding users through the creation of the user persona and journey maps. These deliverables helped focus my designs on the pain points that were discovered through the research phase because I often referenced back to what was identified in the research phase. Without these deliverables and if I didn't follow this 5-Step Design Thinking Process, I definitely would not have arrived at the same design solutions.

