

Pair Designing

Q2 2021

What is Pair Designing?

You're may already be familiar with the concept of pair programming but **pairing isn't just for programmers.**

Design pairing is when two designers work together with the express aim of helping each other to become better designers.

This could involve any part of the product design lifecycle - from framing the problem, to delivering designs to engineering/PM's for implementation and beyond.



Ways of Pair Designing

Online you can find a wide [range of methodologies](#) and [approaches](#) to design or dev pairing, but I'd like us to focus on **cross-disciplinary pairing** rather than just collaborating.

This means that you'll be paired with a colleague with whom you have contrasting or complementary skills e.g. Greater UI experience than UX, or Research than Dev-Handover. I've defined working pairs later in this document, and you'll be taking it in turns to guide and support one another.

The focus is on providing your colleagues with insight into your preferred ways of working on, and thinking about, specific areas of design. For argument's sake, I've called the two approaches we're taking: **Leading By Example**, and **Supporting & Steering**.

...Ways of Pair Designing Continued

Leading By Example

In this methodology the lead role is effectively working as they normally would, but with the partner there as an observer.

The lead narrates their decisions, explaining how they're thinking, why choices are being made, and providing extra info or context as they go. The lead does not seek advice from the partner.

The other participant is primarily observing, but they can also ask questions for gain greater insight into what the lead is doing.

Supporting & Steering

In this instance, the lead role will set the agenda for the session, choosing a task they have the lead proficiency in. This time however, the other participant will be performing the work.

The one performing the work will again narrate what they are doing, but the lead is there to help. This could be on request e.g. they are asked for advice about how to resolve a particular issue, but also interventional or instructional i.e. the lead role steering the partner towards better decision making, or declaring which task should be performed next.

Why are we doing this?

- We have a lot of talented people, with some clear individual strengths in different areas of the design process, we should be sharing our knowledge.
- Most team members have expressed a preference for learning from/with others ‘in practice’ rather than only via online learning exercises or programmes (though those are great, and popular too).
- Most team members want opportunities to mentor others, and one of the best ways to create those opportunities is to skillshare within the team.
- Pairing will make everyone better designers, helping us to build trust and form better collaborative relationships.
- Things like narrating automatic actions, voicing small decisions you’ve made etc can really help foster greater understanding of yourself as a designer.

There’s so many other good reasons, it will be fun and valuable I promise!

Pairs

Who's Paired Up Together?

I've managed to catch up with everyone individually to confirm the pairs you can see below. The primary focus is on skills and knowledge sharing, and these pairs offer a great opportunity in that respect. I've also highlighted the design area that people's skills are more heavily weighted...we're quite a talented bunch though so naturally we all have skills across the board 😊

UX & Service Design

Alice

Jason

Jules



Product & UI Design

Robin

Jonathon

Max

What are you going to work on?

I don't want to be too prescriptive, so I will leave it to pairs themselves to determine what they work on. Here are a few helpful tips though:

- Agree on topics or projects beforehand that you're both confident provide to right learning opportunities.
- Live projects are great, but if there are no obvious options then you can work on an exploratory project or internal initiatives we're looking at within the design team.
- Writing, planning, researching, interviewing, presenting, brainstorming etc are all work too! You don't have to be pairing on Figma designs.
- If you have no ideas then it's better to meet for the pairing session and figure it out as you go, rather than skipping it entirely.

Example pairing projects: *Drafting a research plan, documenting interview outcomes, UI design, Dev handover documentation.*

When are you pairing?

The aim is to complete 4 sessions by the end of the quarter. Please complete both session with one lead role before switching so that the other partner is in the lead role. Spacing the session out probably makes sense, but do whatever works best for the two of you. Example plan:

May

(Max as lead role)

Session 1: **Max** *Leading By Example* with **Jules**

Session 2: **Max** *Supporting & Steering* with **Jules**

June

(Jules as lead role)

Session 3: **Jules** *Leading By Example* with **Max**

Session 4: **Jules** *Supporting & Steering* with **Max**

What next?

We will evaluate the pairing exercise as a group, and individually, at the end of the quarter. If there are people who found it especially enjoyable or beneficial then we will look to make it a normal part of working practice at Bynder, rather than tied to a quarterly goal. Likewise, those that don't find it beneficial will be under no obligation to continue the initiative.

Good luck!