Thyme

A space to preserve the stories we taste.

CHRISTIN JOHNSON | MUXD 5300.02 | DECEMBER 2025

Project Overview

What is Thyme?

Thyme is a recipe preservation app designed to hold onto meaningful dishes and the stories behind them.

Users can capture memories through text, audio, or photos, follow a gentle step-by-step Cook Mode, and curate a personal collection that reflects their history.

The app keeps important recipes within reach— and the moments behind them even closer.

Responsibilities

Phase one

Research & Discovery

Led user interviews, competitive analysis, and affinity mapping to understand how people store and preserve meaningful recipes.

Phase two

Information Architecture

Mapped user journeys, defined app structure, and created user flows that centered memory preservation and simplicity.

Phase three

Design Exploration

Developed low- to mid-fidelity wireframes, early concepts, and interactive prototypes that shaped key app behaviors. data point, line of description flows here.

Phase four

UI Design & Iteration

Built the visual design system, designed high-fidelity screens, and refined the experience through usability testing.

Problem Statement

Understanding the Gap

People who value food traditions and meaningful memories lack a simple, resonant way to preserve and share passed-down recipes. As a result, these dishes — and the stories tied to them — often become scattered, forgotten, or lost across notebooks, conversations, and digital platforms. A more intentional, emotionally centered way to document recipes can help protect heritage, strengthen personal connection, and make food traditions easier to revisit and share across time and distance.

Market Insights & Data

SOURCES: PEW RESEARCH (2022), TECHCRUNCH (2022), SOUTHERN FOOD & BEVERAGE MUSEUM, MANUSCRIPT COOKBOOKS (2023), NIH CULTURAL FOODWAYS (2021), USER INTERVIEWS

61%

Disconnection From Food Traditions

61% of U.S. adults live more than an hour from extended family, making it harder to share traditions in person.

Most

Recipe Apps Prioritize Discovery

Popular apps focus on finding new dishes, leaving passed-down recipes scattered across notes, texts, and screenshots.

High Risk

Meaningful Recipes Are Lost During Major Life Events

Moves, natural disasters, and the loss of a recipe-holder are the moments when traditions disappear—and often cannot be recreated.

User Interview Highlights

1 Screener

5 Interviews

35 Responses

Voices From Interviews

Fragmentation

“Recipes are everywhere — some in drawers, some saved on Instagram.”

Lisa

Vulnerability

“When my mom passed, we realized her recipe was never written down.”

Tina

Identity

“I can almost hear their voice when I see their handwriting.”

Kiana

Stakeholder Outcomes

Stakeholders benefit from a solution that preserves meaning, reduces loss, and opens pathways for long-term value.

Users

A simple, meaningful way to preserve recipes and stories in one place — reducing loss, strengthening connection, and making traditions easier to share.

Designer

An opportunity to build a calm, inclusive experience that respects emotion, reduces overwhelm, and solves a real problem around memory organization.

Future Stakeholders

A foundation for sustainable value through premium features such as shared memory collections, collaborative cookbooks, or long-term digital archiving.

Is it worth it to build?

1

Meaningful Recipes Are Being Lost

Scattered storage — screenshots, notes, handwritten cards — leads to traditions being forgotten or lost during major life events.

2

No Tool Prioritizes Memory Preservation

Existing recipe apps focus on discovery or meal-planning, leaving a gap for people who want to keep stories, context, and legacy in one place.

3

Cultural & Emotional Value Is High

Food traditions strengthen identity and belonging, especially as many people live far from loved ones and rely on digital spaces to stay connected.

4

Opportunities for Meaningful Future Growth

Premium features like collaborative cookbooks, shared memory collections, and long-term archiving create pathways for monetization and continued use.

To understand how people preserve meaningful recipes — and why current tools fall short — I used several complementary research methods.

User Interviews

To uncover emotional needs, habits, and pain points around storing passed-down recipes.

Competitive Analysis

To evaluate existing recipe apps and identify gaps around memory preservation.

Contextual Inquiry

Observing how people currently save recipes across screenshots, notes, paper cards, and digital platforms.

Behavioral Pattern Analysis

Identifying themes in how people search, save, recall, and share meaningful recipes.

Affinity Mapping

Synthesizing qualitative findings into themes that shaped the problem definition.

Key Insights from Research

Insight 1

Recipes Carry Deep Emotional Meaning

Food is tied to memory, identity, and connection.

Participants described recipes as heirlooms linked to specific people or moments.

“I can almost hear their voice when I see their handwriting.”

Insight 2

Storage Is Scattered and Fragile

Meaningful recipes are scattered everywhere — and easy to lose.

Participants described frustration with searching, losing, and re-saving recipes across multiple places.

“Recipes are everywhere — drawers, notes apps, Instagram.”

Insight 3

Traditions Disappear During Life Transitions

When recipes aren’t written down or digitized, they can disappear permanently.

Participants described moments when moves, disasters, or the loss of a loved one made meaningful recipes impossible to recreate.

“When my mom passed, we realized her recipe was never written down.”

Insight 4

People Want a Personal Way to Preserve Recipes

Existing tools don’t capture the warmth, story, or personal history behind recipes.

Users want something that feels as heartfelt and lasting as a recipe card, but as shareable and organized as a digital tool.

“The story behind it matters just as much as the recipe.”

Competitor Analysis

What tools people use today — and where they fall short

People rely on a mix of apps and screenshots to save meaningful recipes, but none offer a way to preserve the stories, voices, or memories attached to them.

1

Notes Apps

Strengths:
- Always accessible
- Easy to paste or type a recipe

Gaps:
- No memory capture (voice, photos tied to steps)
- Poor organization over time
- No tagging, categories, or consistent formatting
- Not built for cooking or preserving meaning

2

Pinterest

Strengths:
- Great for recipe discovery
- Visual inspiration

Gaps:
- Not built for preserving passed-down recipes
- Pins link out to external sites, often lost or broken
- No place for memories, voice notes, or personal context
- Not reliable for long-term storage

What tools people use today — and where they fall short

People rely on a mix of apps and screenshots to save meaningful recipes, but none offer a way to preserve the stories, voices, or memories attached to them.

3

NYT Cooking

Strengths:
• High-quality recipes
• Cooking Mode exists (step-by-step)

Gaps:
• No way to upload personal recipes
• No memory features
• No audio, handwriting preservation, or photo memories
• Locked into a subscription model not oriented around heirlooms

4

Screenshot + Camera Roll Storage

Strengths:
• Fast
• Captures real handwritten cards or grandma’s texts

Gaps:
• No organization
• Easy to lose
• Impossible to search
• No place to attach memories or context

Archetype Overview

Who We’re Designing For

Three archetypes emerged from user interviews and behavioral patterns.

The Healer

Food as comfort, care, and connection.

For the Healer, recipes are a form of emotional nourishment. They gravitate toward dishes that soothe, restore, or bring people together — especially during moments of transition or loss. They often carry the role of “memory keeper,” holding onto foods passed down through love and adversity.

The Preserver

Keeping traditions alive — one recipe at a time.

The Preserver sees every recipe as a piece of personal history. They value handwritten notes, voice memories, and the rituals tied to food. Their greatest fear is losing the only copy of a meaningful dish. They want an organized, lasting home for recipes — something that feels as genuine and tactile as a card box, but easier to manage across life’s moves.

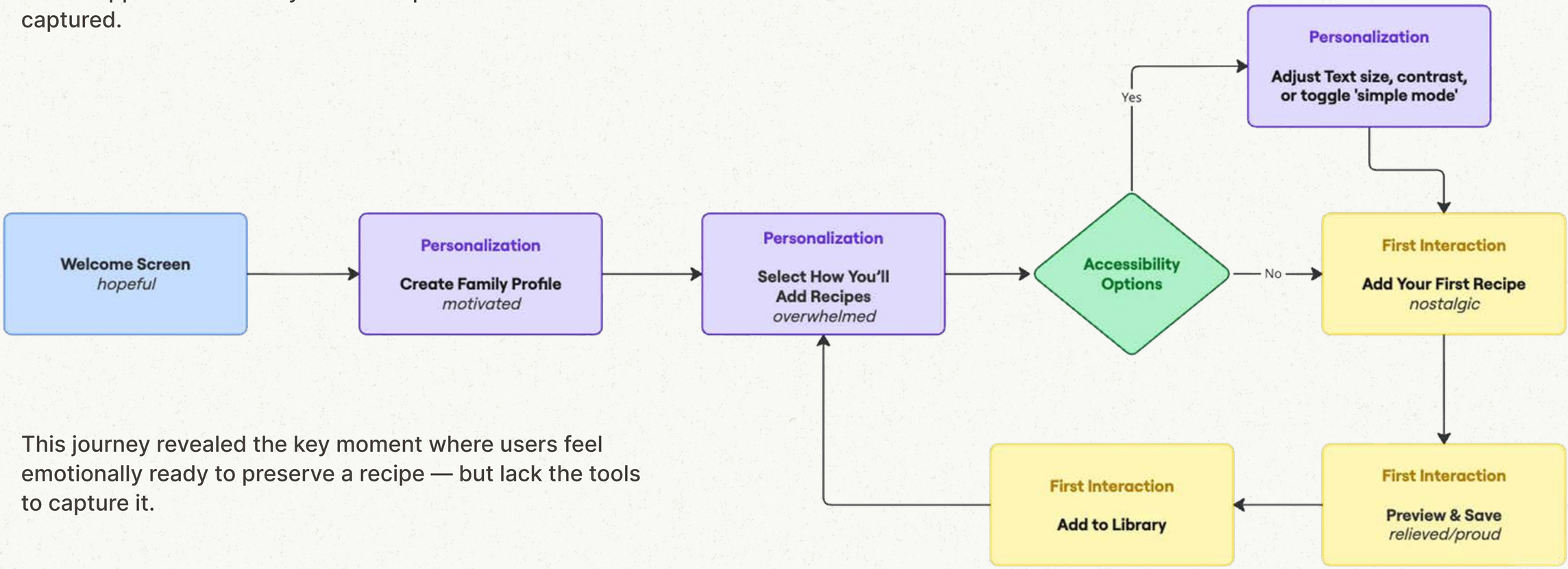
The Connector

Using food to bridge distance, generations, and identity.

For the Connector, food has deep symbolic meaning. They rely on recipes to feel close to people they may no longer live near or who have passed away. They want simple ways to share dishes, preserve stories, and keep traditions alive across physical distance. Their challenge: fragmented tools that lose the context and emotion behind each recipe.

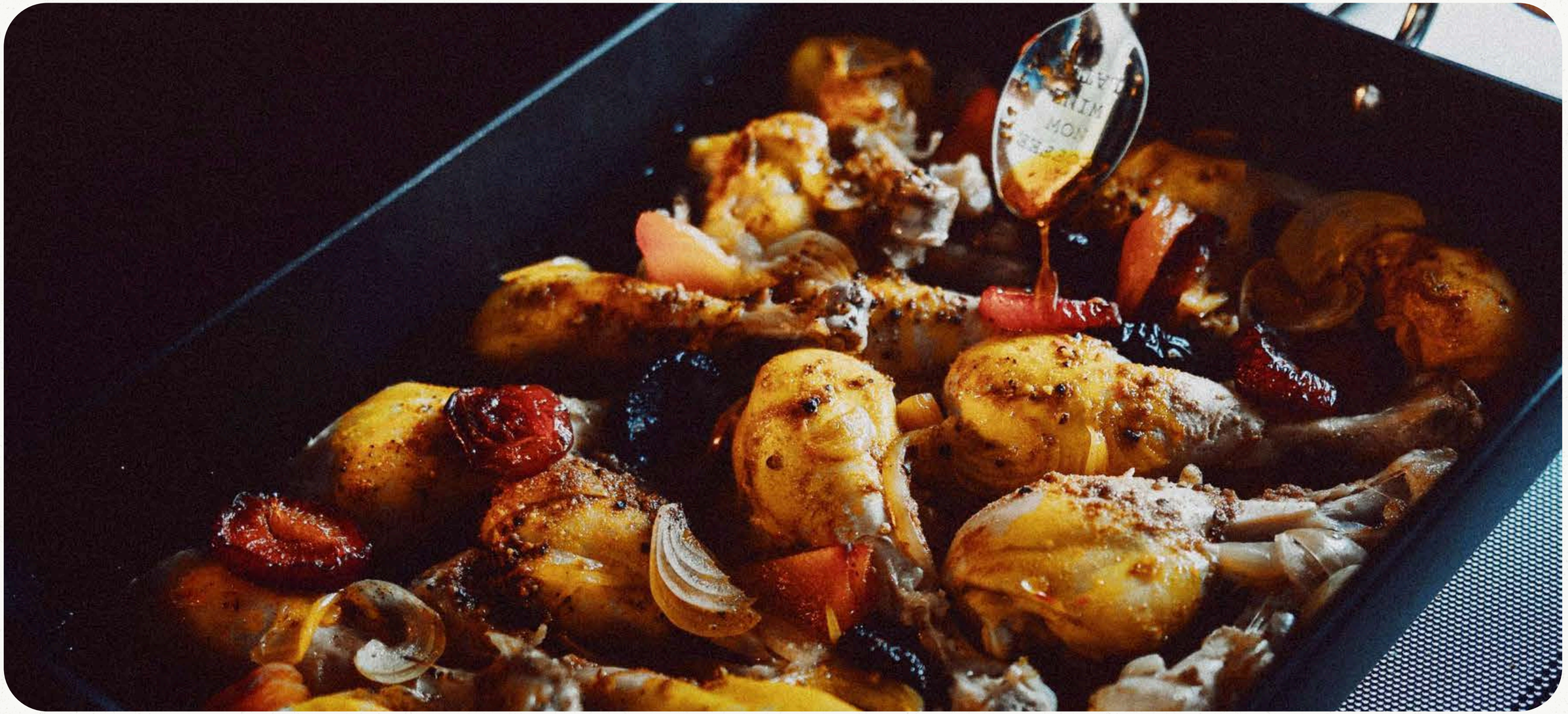
A User Journey Map

Users take several steps before they can preserve their first recipe — but the emotional moment of remembering a story often happens before they reach the point where it can be captured.



This journey revealed the key moment where users feel emotionally ready to preserve a recipe — but lack the tools to capture it.

Key Insights



People want one meaningful home for recipes and memories.

Users aren’t looking for another discovery app — they want a place to preserve what matters.

Emotional context is as important as the recipe itself.

Voice notes, handwriting, and photos deepen connection far more than typed text.

Recipe storage is scattered and fragile.

Screenshots, notes apps, paper cards, and social media make searching stressful and inconsistent.

Memory moments happen when hands and attention are busy.

During cooking or gatherings, users can’t pause to write things down — creating missed opportunities.

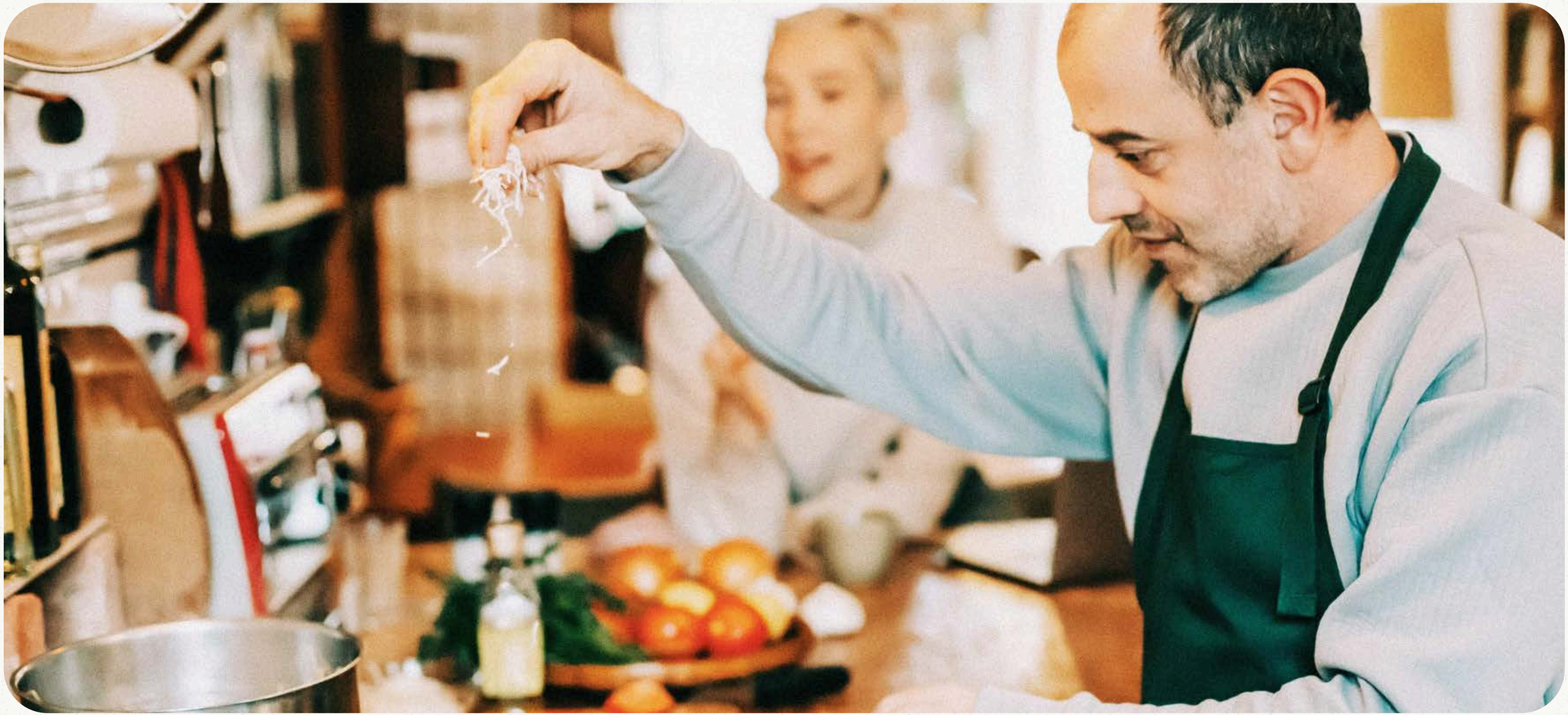
A calm, simple interface builds trust and reduces overwhelm.

Users want a gentle experience that mirrors the warmth of a recipe card, not the noise of a typical cooking app.

People want to preserve traditions across distance and time.

With many living far from loved ones, sharing recipes isn’t just practical — it’s a way to stay connected.

Early Concepts



Concept 1

Memory Timeline

A visual timeline where users could record food-related memories, stories, and milestones — with recipes as optional attachments.

Why It Didn’t Move Forward:

The timeline became overwhelming and too abstract. Users said they think in recipes first, not in chronological memories, and the emotional warmth got lost in the structure.

Concept 2

Recipe-Only App

A simplified app focused purely on digitizing, organizing, and saving recipes — with an emphasis on clarity and searchability.

Why It Didn’t Move Forward:

Users said this felt similar to tools they already use (Notes, Pinterest, NYT Cooking). It didn’t solve the emotional gap around preserving stories, voices, and handwriting that make recipes meaningful.

Concept 3

Journaling-First Approach

A reflective cooking journal where users could write or speak memories tied to meals, gatherings, and loved ones.

Why It Didn’t Move Forward:

This direction prioritized storytelling but didn’t provide enough structure around recipes themselves. Users needed a balance — a tool that preserves both the dish and the story, not one at the expense of the other.

Pivot Moment

Because good design isn’t linear — it’s layered.

I realized that recipes and memories couldn’t live separately.

Every interview led back to the same truth: people weren’t just saving ingredients — they were trying to hold onto voices, moments, and identities.

A recipe-only app wasn’t enough.
A memory journal wasn’t enough.

The solution had to honor both.

Chosen Concept

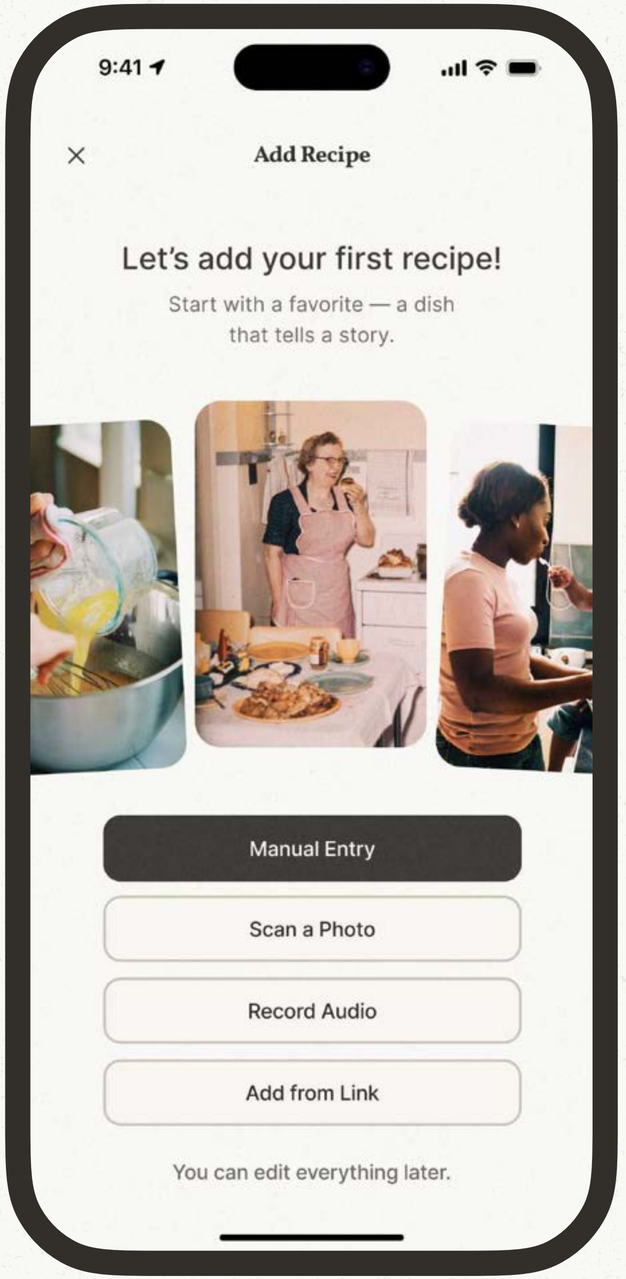
The Chosen Concept

A Recipe + Memory Hybrid

A calm, minimalist space where users can save meaningful recipes and attach voice notes, photos, handwriting, and stories — all in one place.

Why This Concept Was Selected

- Users think in recipes first, but their emotions come from the memories behind them.
- No existing tool bridges both, leaving a gap between utility and meaning.
- Interviews showed strong desire for preserving voices, handwriting, and stories alongside ingredients and instructions.
- Balances structure and emotion: enough organization to be useful, but enough warmth to feel personal and lasting.



Architecture & Flow

How the Product Works at a System Level

The architecture brings recipes and memories together through a simple, intuitive flow. Users can move from capturing, organizing, and reliving memories without friction.

Core Navigation Structure

Home / Library

A single place to browse all saved recipes and attached memories.

Discover

Capture

Add Recipe

Guided steps to add ingredients, instructions, and attach memories (voice, photos, handwriting).

Memories

A dedicated space where stories, audio notes, and images can be viewed or revisited independently.

Relive

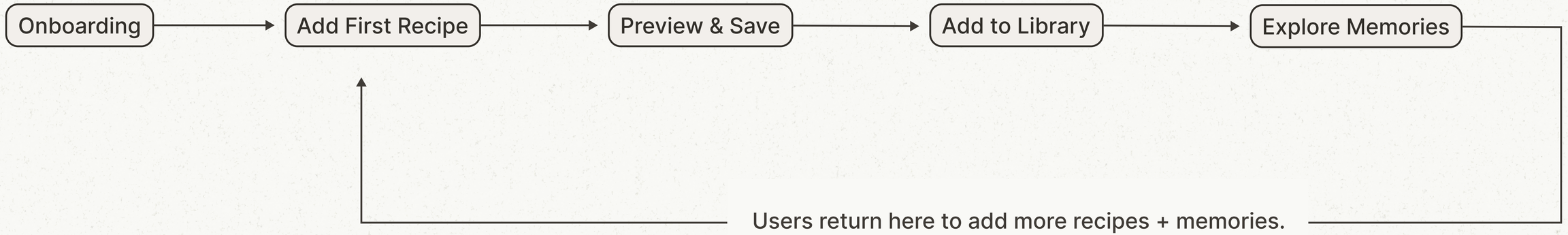
Customize

Profile / Settings

Customization for accessibility, family cookbook name, sharing, and preferences.

Primary User Flow

The core path users take as they capture their first meaningful recipe and memory.



Core Features Identified

1

Recipe Preservation

A structured way to save ingredients, instructions, and variations — keeping meaningful recipes organized and accessible.

2

Memory Recording

Capture the heart behind the recipe through voice notes, photos, and handwriting uploads — preserving stories alongside the dish.

3

Cook Mode

A hands-free, step-by-step cooking experience featuring large text, audio playback, and guided navigation for ease in the kitchen.

4

Photo Attachments

Add images of dishes, gatherings, handwritten notes, or historical moments — enriching the recipe with visual context and memory.

Low-Fidelity Exploration

I explored several low-fidelity layouts to understand how users might browse, save, and revisit meaningful recipes.

Recipe Upload Screen

Explored a simple, central upload interaction with space for memory-adding options below.

Recipe Detail Screen

Tested hierarchy for the title, description, attached memories, and recipe steps.

Recipe Collection Grid

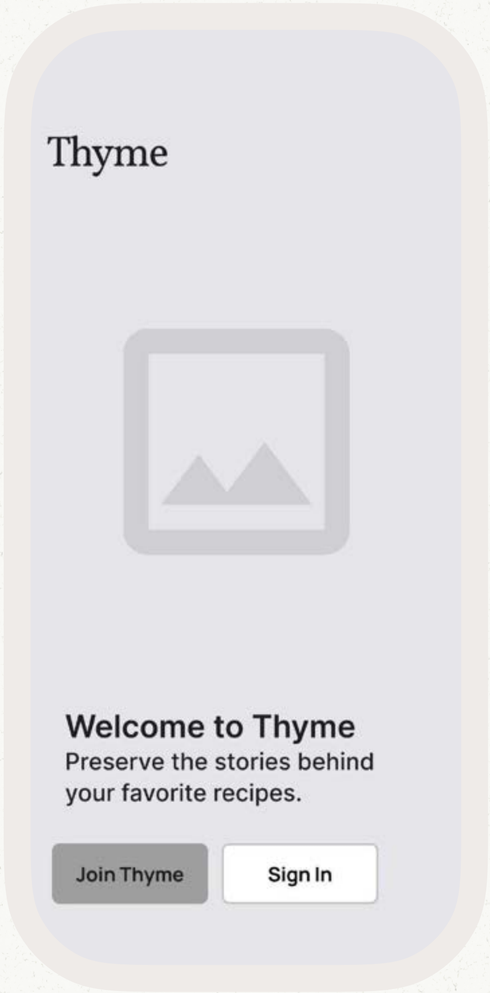
Experimented with a visual-first layout for browsing saved recipes.

Category / Folder List

Explored how users might group recipes into personal collections or traditions.

Mid-Fidelity Exploration

Refining structure, hierarchy, and early interaction patterns.



Welcome Screen

Established tone, hierarchy, and a gentle entry into the app.

Create Profile

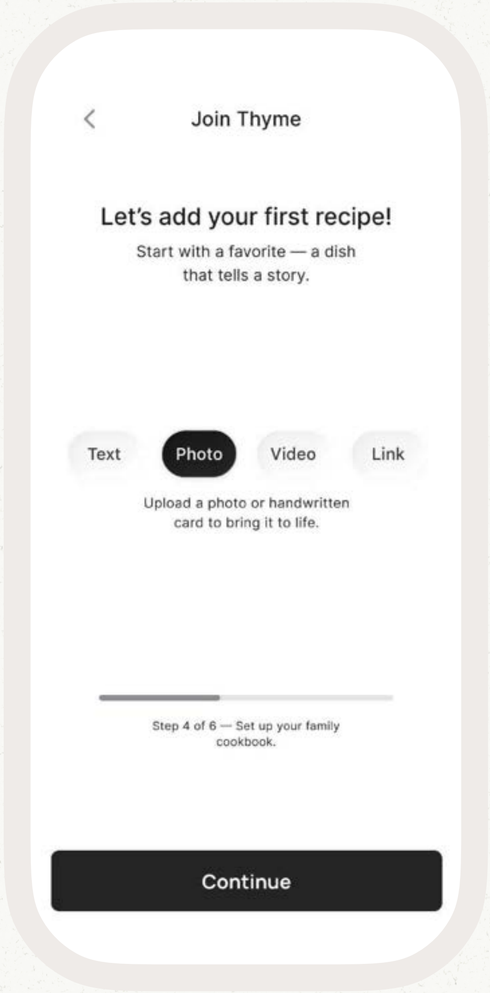
Refined early onboarding flow, testing clarity, form hierarchy, and step-by-step guidance.

Password Creation

Explored lightweight, minimal input patterns to keep onboarding simple and approachable.

Cookbook Name

Introduced an emotional personalization moment by allowing users to name their shared cookbook.



Select Memory Format

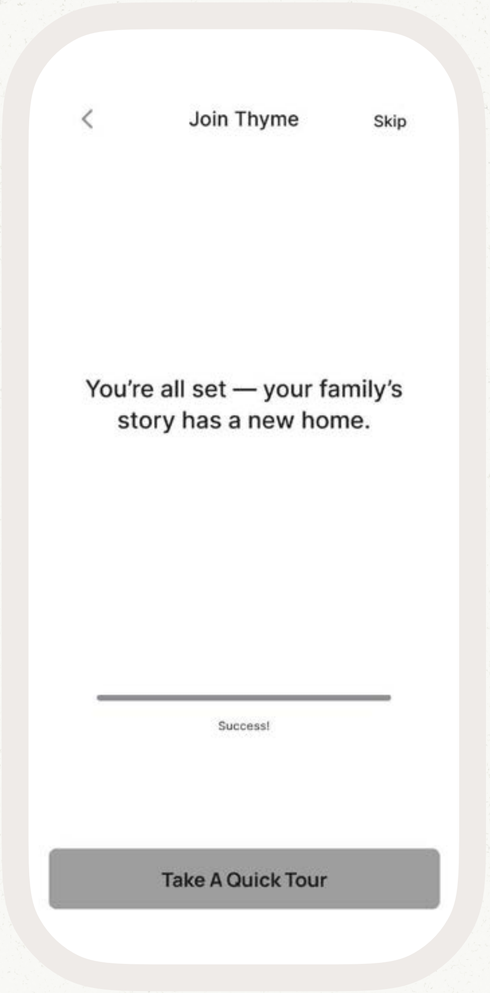
Explored how users choose the type of memory they want to attach — text, photo, voice, or link.

Add Recipe Photo

Tested a simple upload flow to help users attach a visual anchor to a dish.

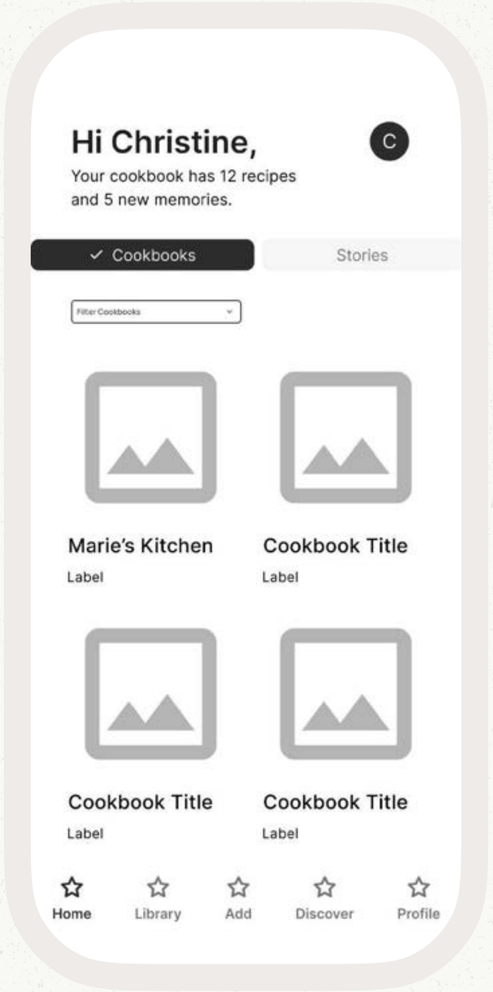
Add a Memory

Designed a lightweight prompt to help users capture the story or context behind a recipe.



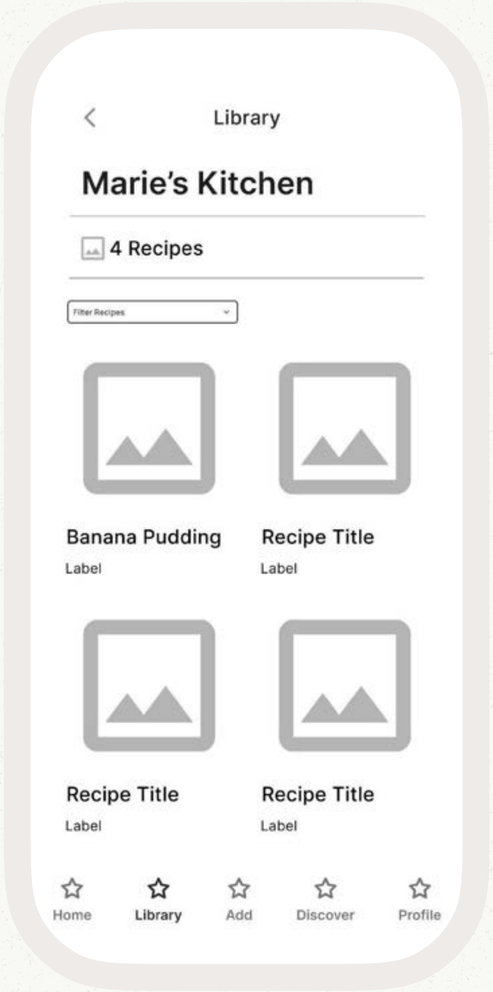
Completion Screen

Introduced a celebratory moment confirming the user has begun preserving their family's recipes.



Cookbook Dashboard

Explored a welcoming home screen where users access cookbooks, recipes, and recent memories.



Recipe Library

Refined how users browse and scan recipes within a selected cookbook.

Recipe Detail View

Designed a clear layout for ingredients, steps, and attached memories.

Typography

HEADING

Aa

Vollkorn

SUBTITLE / BODY TEXT

Aa

Inter

TERTIARY

Aa

Adobe Handwriting

	font-size	font-weight	line-height	letter-spacing
Heading 1	40px	SemiBold	120px	-4
Heading 2	24px	Medium	28px	0
Heading 3	20px	Medium	24px	0
Body / Large	16px	Medium	24px	0
Body / Regular	14px	Medium	20px	0
Buttons	16px	Medium	20px	0
Labels	14px	Medium	14px	0
Tertiary	24px	Regular	24px	0

Color Palette

PRIMARY

Color variation for a primary color. It's mostly used for buttons or specific background colors.

50 100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800 900

PRIMARY - A11Y COLOR VALIDATION

The current colors used in the design. The letter ‘A’ on the right and bottom side indicates if the color contrast meets accessibility standards.

*Normal Text is failed for AA

ACCENT

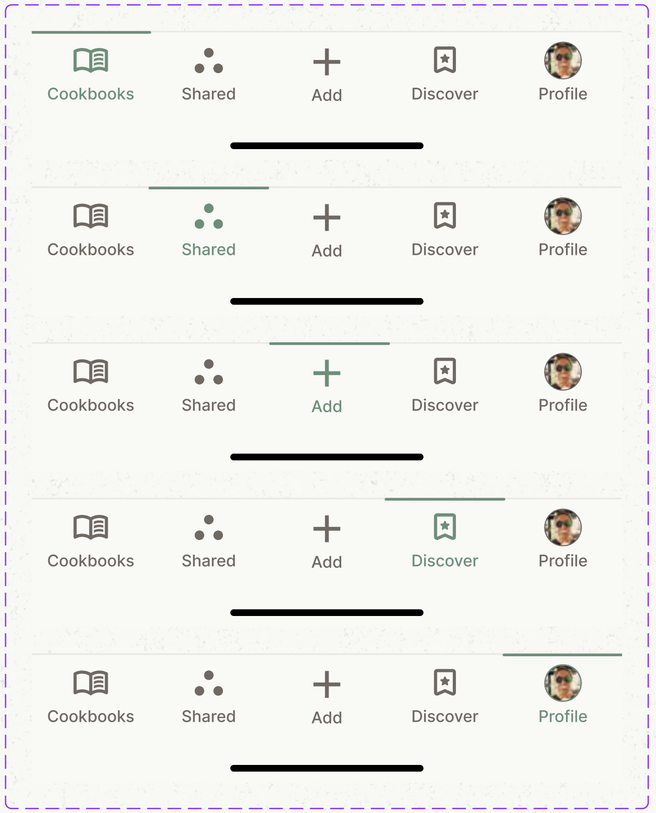
Color variation for an accent color. It's mostly used for buttons or specific background colors.

50 100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800 900

ACCENT - A11Y COLOR VALIDATION

The current colors used in the design. The letter ‘A’ on the right and bottom side indicates if the color contrast meets accessibility standards.

Core Components



Grill Time

Recipes from Summer Evenings

Grill | 4 Recipes

Save Text Size Share Voice Memory

Continue with Apple

Continue with Email

Added to Notes! View Now

Page Title

Back

Back

Page Title Inline

Page Title

Page Title Inline

Family Classics

Family Classics

Family Only

Shared

Just for You

Friends

Audio Memory

Banana Pudding

The recipe everyone asks for on their birthday

Banana Pudding

The recipe everyone asks for on their birthday

Icons / Texture

Usability Testing Approach

How I evaluated the prototype’s clarity, emotional tone, and points of friction to ensure the experience felt intuitive and meaningful.

- Friction Points
- Emotional Resonance
- Flow Validation

Testing Plan

4 Participants

Friends, classmates, and family members who regularly cook or save recipes

Tasks
- Set up Profile
- Add a Recipe
- Attach a Memory

Goals
- Validate flow clarity
- Assess emotional resonance
- Identify friction points

Testing focused on clarity, emotional tone, and ease of use — not speed or completion time.

Usability Findings

What participants struggled with — and what it revealed

Overall, participants responded positively to the concept but needed clearer pacing, lighter visual cues, and reassurance that memories could be added gradually.

1

Onboarding Felt Emotionally Heavy at First

Finding: Participants felt unsure where early emotional questions “lived” and whether they were committing too much too soon.

Insight: Users wanted a gentle entry before being asked to reflect deeply.

2

Memory Placement Was Unclear

Finding: Several participants weren’t sure when or where memories would be attached during recipe creation.

Insight: Memory capture needed clearer framing as optional and additive, not required.

3

Visual Density Created Pressure

Finding: Primary buttons and long forms made early screens feel dense and directive.

Insight: Reducing visual weight helped users feel more in control and less rushed.

4

Recipe Creation Felt Clear Once Started

Finding: Once users began adding a recipe, the flow felt intuitive and familiar.

Insight: Anchoring the experience in recipes first aligned with users’ mental models.

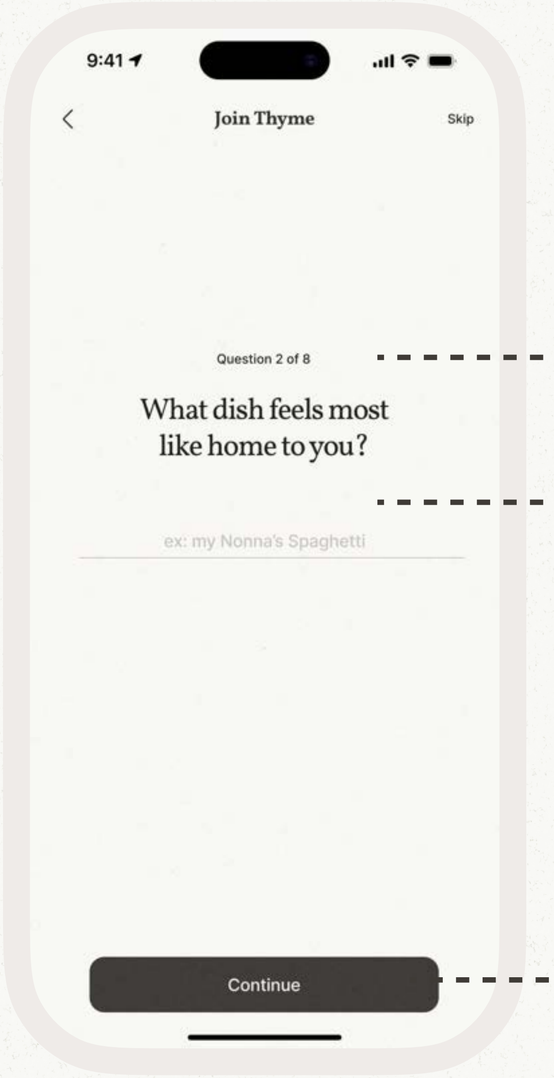
Before & After Iterations

Task:
Onboarding

Feedback:
Emotional prompts
felt too heavy early

Change:
Shortened onboarding
and deferred reflection
until recipe creation

Before



Shortened onboarding to reduce early cognitive load

Reframed prompts to clarify how memories are captured

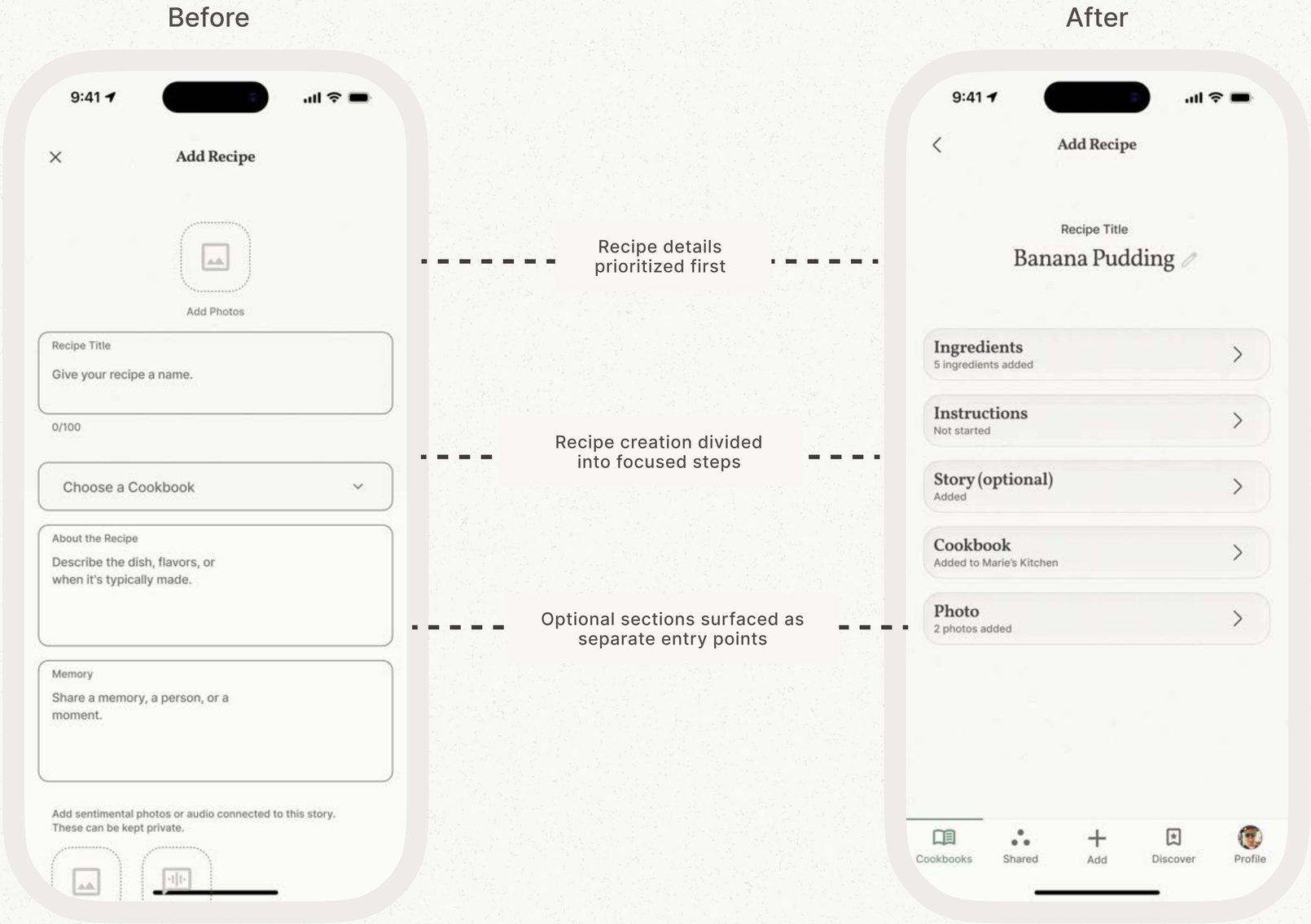
Deferred primary actions until user input to reduce pressure and visual noise

After

Task:
Adding a Recipe

Feedback:
Single long recipe form felt overwhelming.

Change:
Broke recipe creation into guided steps with dedicated section pages.

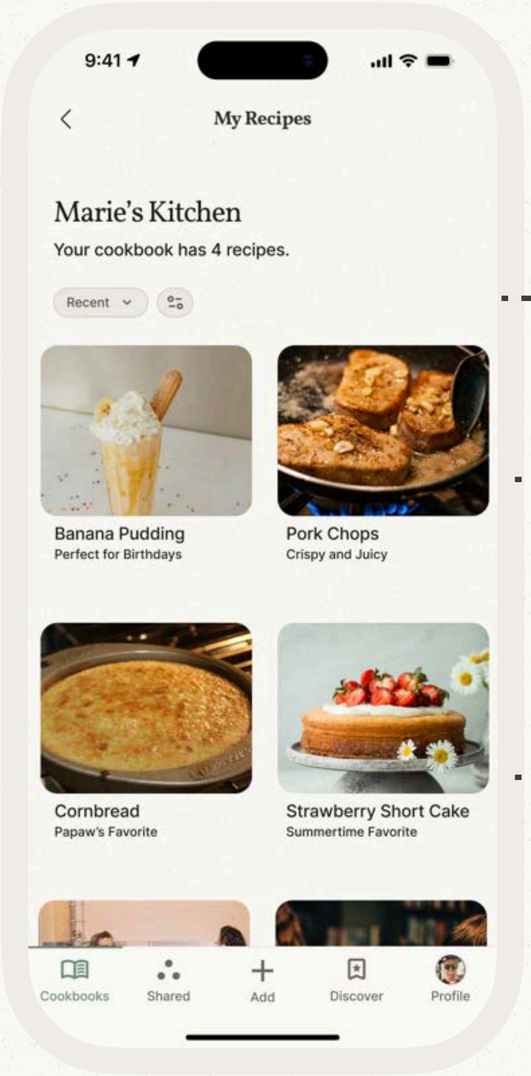


Task:
Finding a saved recipe

Feedback:
Users struggled to quickly locate recipes once their library grew.

Change:
Introduced clearer hierarchy and visual grouping in the recipe library to support faster scanning and recognition

Before

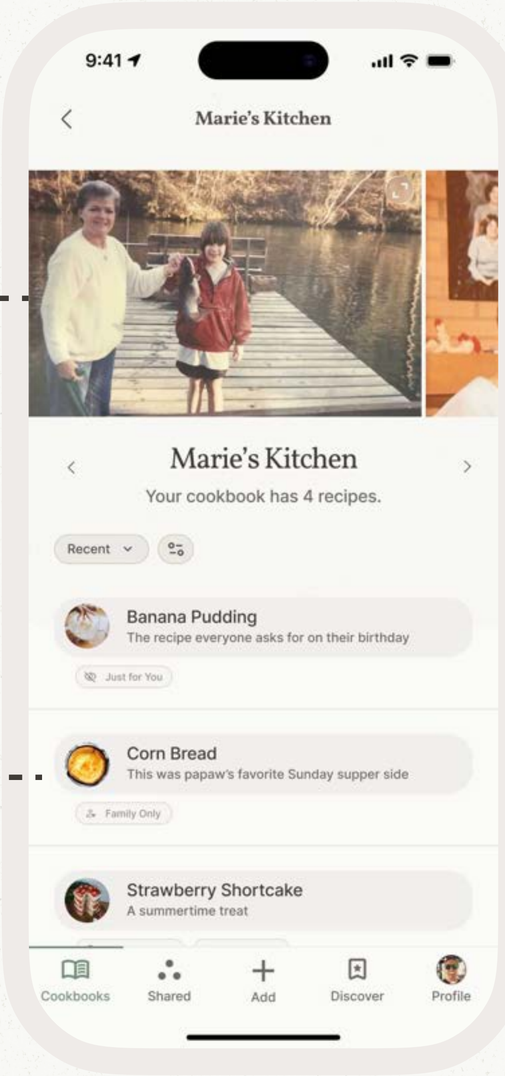


Reduced visual competition between items

Clear cookbook hierarchy surfaced first

List-based layout improves scanability

After



A guided flow that mirrors users' emotional journey — from intention, to reflection, to action.

Technically Achievable
With Existing Tools

This solution is realistic to build because its core features rely on well-established patterns and existing technology:

Memory Capture

Uses standard device APIs: camera, microphone, file upload, text input.
No novel or experimental tech required.

Storage Structure

Recipes + memories saved as linked objects in a database.

Cloud storage (Firebase / AWS) handles media files efficiently.

Audio Processing

Optional speech-to-text uses existing APIs (Apple Speech, Google Speech-to-Text).

Playback is standard media handling.

Component Reuse

Upload cards, memory chips, grid layouts, and the navigation structure repeat across the app, reducing engineering time.

Backend Architecture

Collections:

- Users
- Cookbooks
- Recipes
- Memories (audio, text, photo)
- Tags / Categories

A predictable hierarchy developers can build quickly.

The concept is emotionally rich, but the technical foundation is simple, stable, and achievable.

What Needs to Exist for Thyme to Be Built

The emotional value is high, but the technical lift is grounded and manageable.

Technical Requirements

- Authentication
  Email or social login to secure family cookbooks.
- Cloud Media Storage
  For photos, audio clips, scanned handwriting.
- Database Relations
  Recipes ↔ memories must stay in sync.
- Simple Audio API Integration
  Native recording + optional transcription.
- Responsive UI Components
  Reusable memory cards, recipe cards, and navigation patterns.

Build Complexity

- Phase 1 (MVP):
  Add Recipe → Attach Memory → Save to Library.
  Very doable in 8–10 weeks for a small team.
- Phase 2:
  Shared cookbooks, collaborative editing, more memory types.
- Phase 3:
  Advanced features like AI transcription, auto-tagging, and print exports.

Constraints to Consider

- File size limits for audio & images
- Offline behavior
- Privacy needs around generational family content
- Testing across varying image/ handwriting quality

Challenges

Scope Creep

Balancing recipes, memories, categories, and onboarding without overwhelming users.

Discovery

Emotional Storytelling

Finding the line between meaningful and overly sentimental in the UI.

Ideation

Memory Capture Complexity

Designing for photos, handwriting, text, audio, and stories without clutter.

Design

Time Constraints

Balancing research, design, iteration, and visual polish during a tight semester timeline.

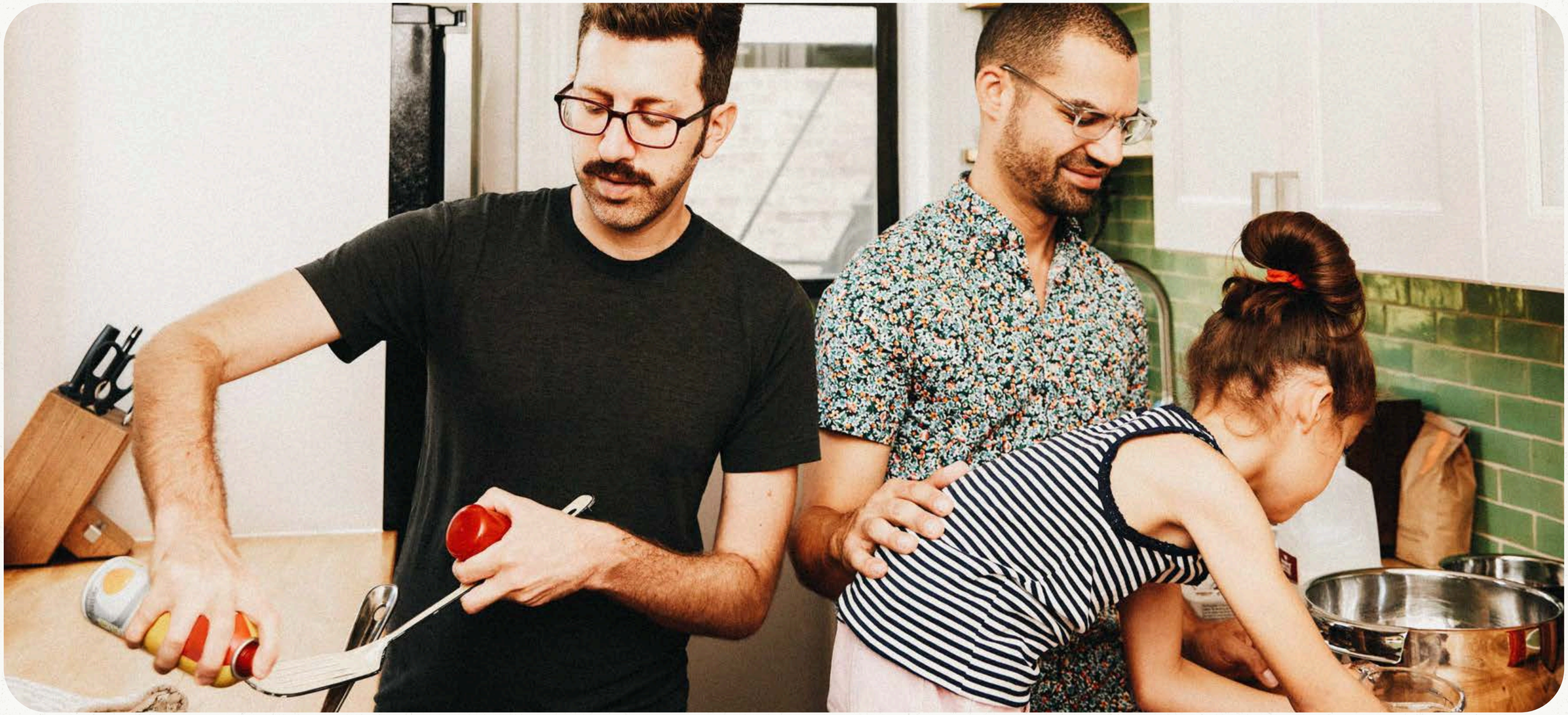
Testing

Prioritization

Letting go of features I loved and focusing on the ones users needed most.

Delivery

What I learned



Research → Clarity

Good insights simplify decisions, not complicate them.

Emotional Design → Restraint

Soft visuals and quiet UI patterns can communicate meaning without decoration.

Prototyping → Iteration

Each version helped reveal friction points I couldn’t see on paper.

Insight-Driven Design

Every feature strengthened once I anchored it back to user emotion and behavior.

Storytelling Matters

The narrative of preservation guided the design more than any single feature.

Next Steps

Expanded Story Capture

Handwriting scanner, video notes, and ingredient tagging to deepen how families preserve their traditions.

Shared Cookbooks

Invite family to contribute stories and recipes together.

AI-Assisted Enhancements

Transcribe voice notes, auto-tag ingredients, suggest categories.

Voice-Driven Cook Mode

Hands-free step navigation for the kitchen.

Accessibility Refinements

Contrast improvements, “simple mode,” larger tap targets.

Export-to-Print Cookbook

Generate a physical keepsake — the emotional pinnacle of the app.

Tools Used

Design & Prototyping

- Figma — UI design, components, prototyping
- Miro — research synthesis, ideation, mapping

Research & Validation

- Google Forms — surveys & usability feedback
- Zoom — user testing

Visual & Storytelling Assets

- Unsplash
- Pexels
- Death to Stock
- VSCO — tone & mood reference
- Photoshop — image refinement

Thank you!

A project built from stories worth keeping.