Developer Handoff

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Prepared for Albemarle Excellence

Project Albemarle Excellence App

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Contents

Introduction 3
Design Phase Deliverables 3
What Has Been Built 6
What Matters Most 8
Known Constraints & Decisions 11
System Copy Requirements 15
Acceptance Criteria 20
- Emotional criteria 20
- Brand criteria 21
- Interaction criteria 22
- Copy criteria 23
- Performance criteria 24

Pre-Launch Emotional Review 25
- What it covers 25
- Who is involved 26
- What it produces 27
- The sign-off process 27
- Post-launch review framework 28

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Introduction

This document exists because the gap between a design decision and a built product is where the most important things get lost. Not through carelessness, but through the entirely reasonable process of a development team solving local problems with the information available to them. The purpose of what follows is to make the right information available, in the right form, before those decisions are made rather than after.

What you are reading is not a functional specification. It does not contain user stories, technical architecture, sprint plans, or a component inventory. Those documents exist elsewhere and serve a different purpose. This document captures what sits between them and the design phase: the emotional intent behind decisions that might otherwise look arbitrary, the principles that cannot be traded away under time pressure, the constraints that were arrived at deliberately and should not be reopened without returning to the reasoning that produced them, and the criteria by which the build will ultimately be judged. A product that books appointments correctly but greets a client of eight years as a stranger has not succeeded. This document is how the team stays calibrated to what success actually means here.

It should be read by every member of the build team before work begins, and returned to whenever something unexpected comes up during development. Frontend and backend developers, QA, anyone responsible for integrating copy or configuring messaging logic, and anyone making decisions about interaction patterns or screen hierarchy should treat it as a live reference rather than a document reviewed once at the start. The design phase produced a body of work, strategy, voice, emotional journey mapping, visual systems, technical specifications, and that work is summarised in the deliverables section that follows. This document is the thread that runs through all of it, holding the intent intact as the product moves from something designed to something built.

Design Phase Deliverables

The design phase produced eleven documents. Each one emerged from a distinct part of the process, and each one answers a different question about what the product needs to be. Individually, they are research outputs, brand frameworks, voice guidelines, and design specifications. Together, they form a single argument: that Albemarle's digital product must work the way a good host works, recognising people before it asks anything of them, using what it knows quietly, and never speaking in a way that no real person would.

Developers should read this section as an orientation, not an index. The documents do not sit in parallel. Strategy shaped brand, brand shaped voice, voice shaped interaction, and interaction shaped specification. Reading them in that order, even briefly, will give the build team a clearer picture of why decisions were made than any single summary can.

Where to start

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Before anything else, read the Brand and Experience documents. The Design Principles, the Voice and Tone Guidelines, and the Emotional Journey Map are where the intent behind every design decision lives. Developers who understand those three documents will make better local decisions throughout the build, and will be far less likely to solve a problem in a way that makes technical sense but quietly contradicts the product's reason for existing. The Research and Strategy documents provide the evidence base. The Technical documents provide the specifications. But the Brand and Experience documents are the ones that answer the question "why does it work this way?"

Research and Strategy

Document	Category	Primary Audience	Summary
Emotional Journey Map	Research and Strategy	Product, Design, Development	Maps eleven stages of the client journey from the first nudge through to belonging, identifying where the emotional experience peaks, where it drops, and where it currently stops altogether. Establishes the emotional arc that every screen and interaction must support.
Aspiration Gap Analysis	Research and Strategy	Product, Design, Development	Documents the gap between how clients feel when they open the product today and how they should feel. Identifies the critical moments of first realisation and turning point, the structural and emotional reasons the gap was allowed to form, and the risks that could prevent it from closing.
Heartbreak Scale	Research and Strategy	Product, Design, QA	Rates the current product across five dimensions: trust, delight, anxiety, confusion, and pride. Identifies specific triggers in each dimension and what would move each score. Provides a baseline against which the built product can be evaluated.
Anti-Principles	Research and Strategy	Product, Design, Development	Documents the worst possible version of the product in precise detail, derives the design principles that bad product would follow, and inverts each one. The December Saturday scenario, the core test of the authorship principle, is fully articulated here.

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Brand and Experience

Document	Category	Primary Audience	Summary
Design Principles	Brand and Experience	All	Five principles that govern every product decision: show care, don't claim it; real people write as themselves; we already know you; only get in touch to help; their information, their choice. Each principle includes measurable signals, practical examples, and the Helen test, the Sophie test, the quiet test, the motive test, the control test, and the ten o'clock test as a living design checklist.
Voice and Tone Guidelines	Brand and Experience	Development, QA, Content	Defines the brand's register, banned phrases, permitted constructions, and word-level guidance drawn from the Voice Sort and the Dinner Party exercises. Includes annotated copy examples showing what is right, what is wrong, and what is close but not quite there. The authorship rules are established here and should be read alongside the authorship section of this document.
Emotional Experience Framework	Brand and Experience	Product, Design, Development	Establishes the three identity shifts the product must produce: from stranger to expected, from anonymous booking to known guest, from managing hair as a task to having it simply taken care of. Documents the design decisions required at each stage and the rationale behind each one.
The Dinner Party and Funeral Speech	Brand and Experience	Product, Design, Content	Two complementary exercises that establish the brand's character and long-term legacy in vivid, specific terms. The Dinner Party describes how Albemarle would behave as a person. The Funeral Speech describes what clients would remember, what the industry would credit, and what the product must never do. Both are reference documents for content and tone decisions throughout build.
Rejection Letter and Brand Boundaries	Brand and Experience	Product, Design, QA	Documents what Albemarle will never be, do, or say, grounded in a detailed portrait of the brand it is not. Establishes the five boundary categories, rationed warmth, ranked loyalty, hidden information, owned client data, and exclusive positioning, and explains why each one matters to the product's long-term integrity.

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Technical

Document	Category	Primary Audience	Summary
Design System and Component Library	Technical	Development, QA	The complete visual specification: colour palette, type scale, spacing system, component states, photography guidelines, and iconography. Includes usage rules for the brass accent, the serif and sans pairing, and the whitespace standards that express the product's emotional register at a visual level.
Interaction and Flow Specifications	Technical	Development, QA	Screen-by-screen documentation of every flow in the primary product: onboarding, home screen states, booking, host messaging, the Albemarle story, the "what we remember about you" view, and the post-visit note system. Includes annotated decision points, edge cases, and the specific sequencing rules that govern returning versus new client experiences.
Messaging System Specification	Technical	Development, QA, Content	Specifies the authorship and routing logic for every outgoing message type: post-visit notes, pre-visit reminders, suggested appointment prompts, lapsed client contact, cancellation replies, and system notifications. Establishes the approval workflow for stylist and host-signed messages, the holding message protocol for the December Saturday scenario, and the complete message taxonomy with tone classification for each type.

What Has Been Built

Albemarle Excellence is a luxury hair and grooming house whose defining quality is not the work, though the work is exceptional, but the way clients are looked after before, during, and after it. The brand's character is warm without being familiar, assured without being boastful, and personal in a way that scales only if it is designed to. If Albemarle were a person, they would be the host at the best dinner party you have ever attended: effortlessly organised, genuinely interested in everyone in the room, and somehow making each guest feel like the reason the evening was happening. The digital product must carry that character into every screen, every message, and every moment of silence between visits.

Who the user is

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carrying a low-level hope that this will feel as good as they remember. What they value most is being known, not recognised in the superficial sense, but genuinely remembered: their colour formula, their usual time, the fact that they wear their hair up for work and prefer the ends kept soft. What they fear, rarely consciously, is being made to feel like a stranger by the very place that knows them best. Success, for them, looks like handing something over and trusting completely that someone else is holding it.

The emotional arc

- At first contact, a new client arrives carrying borrowed enthusiasm from a friend's recommendation and a quiet uncertainty about whether they belong. They expect to be asked for a password before they have been shown anything worth staying for. The product must dissolve that uncertainty before it asks for anything in return: a named host, a face, one easy question. For a returning client, the first second is either recognition or its absence. The home screen either shows them their usual, already waiting, or tells them in that same second that they are still a stranger.
- During the journey, the emotional experience should track steadily from effort to ease. Each return visit should require slightly less explanation than the last. Questions that were asked at the first booking should not be asked at the second. The app should feel, over time, like a relationship that is quietly learning, rather than a system being consulted from scratch.
- After sustained use, the client should experience something that is harder to name but unmistakable when it is present: the feeling that this is simply taken care of. Not that they have found a good salon, but that there is somewhere, and someone, who already knows what they need and is quietly attending to it. Their Albemarle story is a record they return to for pleasure, not administration. Their host is someone they message without thinking twice. The product has stopped feeling like software and started feeling like belonging.

Critical moments

- The first second of opening the app. For a returning client, this is Helen's moment, the one that reveals whether the product knows them or is about to treat them as a stranger. It must be recognition: a host's face, a name, a suggested appointment, one tap. Everything that follows either builds on that first second or tries to recover from it.
- The first contact for a new client. Before an account, before a menu, before a password, they must meet a person. A short note from the host who will look after them, one open question about what they are hoping for. This is the moment nervousness either begins to ease or is confirmed. It cannot be a login screen.
- The post-visit note, on a busy evening. This is where the authorship principle is tested under real pressure. A stylist who has seen nine clients and is exhausted, six notes still unsent, and a system that could fill the gap perfectly and invisibly. The note that goes out must either be the stylist's own, or it must be a plain, honest holding message from Albemarle. There is no third option. This moment, repeated across every studio, every Saturday, is where the product's integrity either holds or quietly begins to hollow.

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- The return visit after a long gap. A client who has been away for months, whatever the reason, opens the app and finds either that their history is waiting for them, unchanged, ready, or that the product has forgotten them too. The warmth of a return must arrive before it is asked for. No guilt, no pressure, no "we've missed you." Simply the door, still open, and their usual ready when they want it.
- The moment a client reads "what we remember about you." This is the trust signal the whole data approach rests on. If a client opens this view and finds their information written in language that sounds like a file kept about them, the system feels like surveillance. If they find it written to them, in plain words they would recognise, with an easy path to change or remove anything, it feels like care they are in charge of. That distinction is not a copy choice. It is structural, and it determines whether being known ever feels safe.

Design principles

- Show care, don't claim it. Use what is known quietly, to save the client effort. Never surface it as proof of how well the product knows them. "Your usual with Daniel, Thursday at ten?" shows memory. "It's been 47 days since your last visit" announces it. Only one of those is care.
- Real people write as themselves. A message signed by a person is written or explicitly approved by that person. Anything generated by the system comes plainly from Albemarle. This is not a tone guideline. It is the central logic of the entire communication system, and it cannot be waived under time pressure or operational convenience.
- We already know you. Every returning client is recognised on every screen, at every studio, every time. The number of occasions a returning client is asked for information the product already holds should trend, without exception, towards zero.
- Only get in touch to help. Every message the product sends must be useful or genuinely kind, and nothing else. No promotional intent, no rebooking pressure, no guilt. Where there is nothing useful or kind to say, the product says nothing.
- Their information, their choice. Everything the product holds about a client is visible to them, written in language they would recognise as their own, and editable or removable at any time. Nothing is shared or surfaced beyond what the client has chosen. Privacy is the default, always.

What Matters Most

The items in this section are not preferences. They are not aspirational targets or quality improvements to be prioritised if time allows. They are the load-bearing elements of the design. Remove or compromise any one of them and the product that ships will be a different product from the one that was designed, one that may function correctly but will fail at the thing that matters most: making a client feel, in the first second and every second after, that they are known.

Each item below states what it is, why it carries the weight it does, and what breaks if it is not held.

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Non-negotiable	Why it matters	What happens if it is compromised
The home screen opens on the client's named host and their suggested appointment, before any other action is available	This is the Helen moment. It is the precise point at which the product either closes the gap between the studio and the digital experience or confirms it. Recognition before request is not a design preference. It is the product's central argument. Everything else in the experience rests on this first second being right.	A generic home screen, a service menu, a "Book now" button, a promotional banner, any of these in that first position tells a client of eight years that they are still a stranger. That is not a minor UX failure. It is the product contradicting its own reason for existing, before the client has done anything at all.
No message signed by a stylist or host may be sent without that person having written or explicitly approved it	The authorship principle was tested against a precise real-world scenario: a tired stylist on a Saturday evening in December, six notes unsent, and a system capable of filling the gap invisibly. The principle does not bend under operational pressure. If a person's name is on a message, that person wrote it or approved it. If they did not, the message comes plainly from Albemarle. These are the only two options.	A single generated message sent under Daniel's name that Daniel did not write is the product's most consequential failure mode. One client noticing, as Claire does in the Anti-Principles exercise, that the warmth was not what it claimed to be retroactively poisons every genuine message that came before it. Inside the studio, stylists who discover their name can be used without them stop writing honest notes in the chair. The post-visit note system collapses from the inside.
New clients must meet a named host before they are asked to create an account	The login wall was identified as the earliest emotional break in the client journey, the moment borrowed enthusiasm from a friend's recommendation meets the cold reality of a password prompt. The sequence is non-negotiable: host introduction, one open question, service suggestion, appointment selection, and only then, at the point of commitment, an account request. The warmth must arrive before the ask.	A new client who meets a login screen before they have experienced anything of value learns, in that first action, that the product is not what they were told it was. For clients who already wondered whether Albemarle was for someone like them, that moment confirms the doubt. The nervousness that the design was built to dissolve is instead confirmed. Many of them close the app without booking.

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Non-negotiable	Why it matters	What happens if it is compromised
Every piece of client-facing copy must pass the Voice and Tone review before it ships, with no exceptions for error messages, empty states, or component defaults	Error states, empty states, and loading screens are the moments of highest uncertainty in any product. They are also the moments most likely to be filled with placeholder copy, component defaults, or system language that was never designed to meet a client. In this product, those moments carry the same hospitality obligation as every other screen. A client whose booking fails is in exactly the state where the brand's warmth is most needed.	"Something went wrong" is not an acceptable finished string in a product whose promise is that someone is always working on the client's behalf. Component library defaults and placeholder copy that ships becomes the client's experience of the brand. Each instance of system language that reaches a client contradicts the register the rest of the product works to establish, and the cumulative effect is a product that sounds like two different companies depending on which screen it is showing.
The "what we remember about you" view must be reachable in two taps, written to the client rather than about them, and must propagate name and pronoun changes to all studios immediately	The control principle is not a data compliance feature. It is what makes being known feel safe rather than surveilling. Clients who can see, correct, and remove what the product holds about them are in charge of the relationship. That sense of control is precisely what allows them to share more, and sharing more is what makes the care more accurate over time. Name and pronoun changes are a safeguarding matter, not a sync preference.	A client who opens this view and finds internal field names, stylist shorthand, or language written about them rather than to them experiences being known as exposure rather than care. A client who updates their name and is then greeted by an old one at any studio has not experienced a data latency issue. They have experienced a harm. Either outcome damages trust in a way that is very difficult to recover, because the trust being damaged is specifically in the product's claim to hold people's information with care.

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Known Constraints & Decisions

The decisions documented in this section were made during a design phase that involved structured research, workshop exercises, and sustained conversation with the Albemarle Excellence team. Each one arrived through a process, not a preference. They reflect tradeoffs that were considered carefully, often revised, and in several cases tested against specific failure scenarios before being settled. Reopening them without returning to that context risks not just changing a decision but undermining the coherence of the experience those decisions were built to create. If something in this list appears to conflict with a technical constraint or a sprint priority, the right response is to surface that conflict for discussion, not to resolve it locally. The design decisions below are not suggestions.

Decision	Rationale	What Not To Do
The home screen opens on the client's named host, their photograph, and a suggested appointment. No other element takes visual or hierarchical priority on this screen.	This is the Helen moment. It is the precise point at which the product either closes the gap between the studio experience and the digital one, or confirms it. Recognition before request is the product's central argument, and the home screen is where that argument is made in the first second. Everything that follows either builds on this or tries to recover from it.	Do not place a logo, promotional banner, navigation menu, service grid, or "Book now" button above or before the host panel. Do not reduce the host panel to a small avatar or header element in order to surface other content. Do not default to a generic home state for returning clients on the basis that personalised data may load slowly. If the data is not yet available, the screen should hold rather than show a stranger's view.
The full service menu is never the starting point. It sits one step back from the initial suggestion.	A list of forty services, written in internal language, is the first thing the current product asks clients to understand. It was identified as the single most confusing element in the product and the source of most downstream anxiety. The designed flow offers a suggestion first, based on what the product already knows, and makes the full menu available one tap further in for clients who want something different.	Do not surface the full service menu on the home screen, the booking entry point, or any screen a returning client reaches before seeing their suggested appointment. Do not restructure the booking flow to lead with service selection on the grounds that it is the most common first action. That reasoning is correct for a generic booking product. It is incorrect for this one.

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Decision	Rationale	What Not To Do
New clients meet a named host and answer one open question before they are asked to create an account. The account creation step is presented at the point of confirming a booking, not at the point of arrival.	Asking for a password before offering anything of value tells a new client that the product is protecting itself rather than welcoming them. The sequence is: host introduction, one question, service suggestion, appointment selection, account creation. Warmth before ask. The account serves the client's continuity, not the product's data model, and it should be presented in those terms, at the moment it makes sense.	Do not gate any part of the discovery or consideration flow behind account creation. Do not present account creation as a prerequisite for browsing services, meeting a host, or receiving a suggestion. Do not add social login shortcuts to the opening screen in a way that makes the first action a credential prompt. The first action is a human introduction.
Every message signed by a named stylist or host must have been written or explicitly approved by that person. Automated messages come plainly from Albemarle. These are the only two options, and neither bends under operational pressure.	The post-visit note scenario, a tired stylist on a December Saturday with six notes unsent and a system capable of filling the gap invisibly, was worked through in detail during the design phase. The conclusion was clear: a generated message sent under Daniel's name, however accurate and warm, is a lie. One client who notices, as the Anti-Principles exercise made precise, retroactively poisons every genuine message that came before it. Inside the studio, stylists who discover their name can be used without them stop writing honest notes. The post-visit note system collapses from the inside.	Do not build a pathway that allows a generated or templated message to be sent under a stylist's or host's name without individual review and approval of that specific message. Do not treat approval as a bulk action. Do not design the approval flow in a way that makes rubber-stamping the generated version faster and easier than writing or editing a real one. The correct fallback, when a person cannot write their note in time, is a plain holding message from Albemarle, not a simulation of that person.

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Decision	Rationale	What Not To Do
Photography in the product uses natural light only. No studio photography with artificial lighting, flash, or heavily processed finishes may be used in the product.	The moodboard work produced a clear pattern. Images that felt right shared warmth, texture, and a sense of a real room rather than a set. The images that were rejected were clinical, overlit, or stylised in a way that suggested editorial production rather than a beautiful London drawing room. The photography standard is not a visual preference. It is part of how the product tells a client, before they have read a word, what kind of place this is.	Do not substitute or supplement the approved photography with stock images, before-and-after promotional photography, or any image that has been processed beyond basic colour correction. Do not use artificial lighting in any new photography commissioned during the build phase. Do not compress or resize images in a way that removes the warmth and texture that makes them work. If approved photography is unavailable for a particular screen state, hold the space rather than fill it with an unsuitable image.
Whitespace is a design element, not unused space. The spacing system, type scale, and layout grid are non-negotiable. No secondary content, additional CTAs, or component additions may be inserted into screen areas that the design holds empty.	The product's visual calm is its emotional register made visible. Generous whitespace, a restrained type scale, and a layout that presents one clear thing at a time were validated against the specific emotional context of this product: a client who is tired, often opening the app late at night, and whose patience for anything fiddly is very low. A screen that feels cluttered feels like a different brand. The visual system is not separable from the hospitality.	Do not add promotional banners, secondary CTAs, feature discovery prompts, or cross-sell modules to screens that were designed around a single action. Do not reduce spacing to fit more content onto a screen. Do not override the type scale to accommodate longer strings. If copy does not fit in the designed space at the designed size, the copy should be shortened, not the space reduced or the type scaled down.

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Decision	Rationale	What Not To Do
The product voice is personal and specific, never generic or templated in ways that reach the client. Every client-facing string is reviewed against the voice and tone guidelines before it ships, including error messages, empty states, loading screens, and confirmation copy. There are no exempt categories.	The Voice Sort and copy exercises produced a precise distinction: warmth without specifics sounds polite, warmth with specifics sounds like someone who was actually paying attention. Generic copy, however warm in intention, reads as a system speaking. The post-visit note example in the design phase showed exactly what this costs: a note that used the client's name and said the right things but was not written to her, not about what she actually said, and signed by nobody real. It was close and completely wrong.	Do not ship any client-facing string without voice and tone review on the basis that it is a minor component, a default state, or unlikely to be seen. Do not use component library defaults for empty states, error messages, or confirmation copy. Do not allow strings to remain at placeholder until post-launch. In this product, every string is part of the hospitality, and hospitality that arrives broken is not hospitality that arrived late.
Notifications may only be sent when there is something useful or genuinely kind to communicate. No notification may include a promotional offer, a rebook prompt, guilt language, or any suggestion that the client is overdue. The opt-out from notifications must be easy, prominent, and permanent until the client chooses to change it.	The motive test, one of the six design checklist tests established during the design phase, asks a single question of every communication: does this leave the client with something useful or kind, and nothing else? Notifications that fail that test do not need to be more sensitively written. They need not to be sent. The clients most likely to be hurt by ill-timed contact, those carrying something difficult, an illness, a loss, a relationship that has changed, are also the ones least likely to have told us. The product must assume that silence from a client may mean something, and respond with nothing rather than pressure.	Do not add push notification prompts that trigger on inactivity thresholds. Do not add "complete your booking" or "you haven't visited recently" notification types at any point, regardless of how they are worded. Do not make notification opt-out harder to reach than notification opt-in. Do not build a notification frequency system that escalates contact when a client does not respond. Silence is a valid client state and should be treated as such.

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Decision	Rationale	What Not To Do
Pricing is presented in plain language with an honest range before the booking is confirmed. The cancellation policy is visible from the point of service selection, written as a host would explain it, not as a legal notice. No pricing information is withheld until the final confirmation step.	Pricing anxiety was identified as a specific trigger in the Heartbreak Scale work. Clients, particularly new clients who may be stretching to visit, carry a low-level worry about the final bill throughout the appointment if they were not given a clear and honest figure before they arrived. That worry sits in the chair with them and quietly undermines the most relaxing hour we can offer. Transparent pricing is not a commercial risk. Concealed pricing is.	Do not display "from" prices without an accompanying explanation of what affects the final cost and a plain upper estimate. Do not hold full pricing back until the payment step. Do not present the cancellation policy in small print at the point of confirmation. If the cancellation policy cannot be surfaced earlier in the flow without technical changes to the booking component, that is a constraint to surface for design review, not to resolve by leaving the policy at the final step.

System Copy Requirements

Every category of system copy in this product carries the same hospitality obligation as the screens that were designed with the most care. Error messages, loading states, empty states, confirmation copy: these are the moments clients are most uncertain, most aware that something is either working or not working on their behalf. They are also the moments most likely to be filled with component defaults, placeholder strings, or language written by a framework rather than a person. In this product, that is not acceptable. A client whose booking fails mid-flow is in exactly the state where the brand's warmth is most needed. "Something went wrong" is not a finished string.

The table below identifies every category of system copy that requires voice and tone review before shipping, with specific guidance on how the brand register applies to each. No category is exempt on the grounds that it is minor, rarely seen, or a default state inherited from a component library.

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Category	Examples	Tone Guidance	Review Required
Error messages	Booking failed, payment declined, message not sent, session expired, connection lost	The brand never announces a problem without immediately offering a way forward. Lead with what can be done, not what went wrong. Use plain language, name the action if possible, and ensure the client knows someone is available to help. Never use passive constructions that obscure responsibility. "Your booking didn't go through" is acceptable. "An error has occurred" is not. No apology language that over-dramatises a small technical moment, but a genuine, brief acknowledgement when something genuinely went wrong. The host message button must remain accessible from every error state.	Required before any error string ships. No component default may remain in production. Reviewed by content lead against the Voice and Tone Guidelines and signed off by design before the first build release that includes the relevant flow.
Empty states	No upcoming appointments, no messages yet, Albemarle story with one or zero entries, no availability for selected stylist	An empty state in this product is an early-relationship moment, not a failure state. For a new client seeing their Albemarle story with a single entry, the copy should plant the idea that this is the first page of something. It should never feel like a blank profile waiting to be filled. For no appointments, offer the suggested appointment rather than prompting the client to browse the service menu. For no availability, say when the stylist is next free, offer the cancellation list, and suggest a colleague in the stylist's own words. Never use the phrase "nothing here yet" or any equivalent.	Required before any empty state ships. Reviewed by content lead and design. Each empty state should be treated as a designed moment, not a gap to be filled with a placeholder.

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Category	Examples	Tone Guidance	Review Required
Loading states	Booking loading, host profile loading, Albemarle story loading, memory view loading	Loading states should be calm and brief. No progress bars or countdown language that creates urgency. If a load takes longer than expected, the holding copy should read as patience rather than apology. The brand is unhurried, and that quality must extend to the moments when the product is working. Never use "hang tight", "almost there", "just a sec", or any phrase that belongs to a consumer app rather than a considered hospitality product. Where loading relates to client history or host information, the copy should suggest that something worth waiting for is on its way, without overpromising.	Reviewed by content lead before any loading state ships. Particular attention to states that load client-specific data, where the copy must hold the register of the host panel and memory view rather than defaulting to a generic system message.
Confirmation messages	Booking confirmed, message sent, appointment changed, profile updated, name or pronoun change saved	Confirmation is a moment of ease, not a receipt. The copy should sound like a host confirming arrangements, not a system acknowledging a transaction. Use real details: the stylist's name, the day, the time. "Your hour with Daniel, Thursday at ten, is confirmed. Sophie will be in touch the day before" is a confirmation. "Booking reference AE-04821 confirmed" is not. For name and pronoun changes, the confirmation must state plainly that the update has reached all studios, in that session, immediately. That is a safeguarding matter and the copy must be unambiguous.	Required before any confirmation string ships. Reviewed by content lead and design. Confirmation copy for name and pronoun changes reviewed additionally by the Albemarle Excellence client team before the relevant feature ships.

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Category	Examples	Tone Guidance	Review Required
Onboarding copy	Welcome screen for new clients, host introduction, the single open question, account creation prompt, first visit explanation	Onboarding is the moment the product either earns the client's trust or confirms the doubt they arrived with. The first screen is a named host and a human voice, not a brand statement. The open question, "what are you hoping for?", must be written as a person would ask it, not as a form field. Account creation copy must explain why the account serves the client, specifically and plainly, not why it serves the product. The word "journey" may not appear anywhere in onboarding. Neither may "experience", "bespoke", "curated", or "luxury". The register is warm, specific, and brief. Every line should feel as though it could be spoken by Sophie at the front desk.	All onboarding copy reviewed by content lead and design before the onboarding flow enters QA. The host introduction copy and open question copy reviewed additionally by the Albemarle Excellence client team, as these represent the brand's first spoken voice to new clients.
Notification copy	Pre-visit reminder, suggested appointment prompt, post-visit note notification, host message received, Albemarle story update	Notifications may only be sent when there is something useful or genuinely kind to say. The copy for each notification type must pass the motive test before it ships: does this leave the client with something useful or kind, and nothing else? Pre-visit reminders must sound like a host confirming arrangements, not a calendar alert. Suggested appointment prompts must offer, never nudge. Post-visit note notifications must name the stylist. No notification copy may include promotional language, rebook pressure, or any phrase that implies the client is overdue. "We've missed you" is a banned phrase. So is "you're overdue", "don't forget", and any variant of urgency language.	All notification copy reviewed by content lead against the banned phrase list in the Voice and Tone Guidelines before any notification type is enabled. Notification copy is reviewed again if the triggering logic changes, because the same words carry different emotional weight depending on when they arrive.

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Category	Examples	Tone Guidance	Review Required
Success states	Booking complete, message delivered, story entry saved, photo added, preference updated	Success states should feel like a small, warm confirmation, not a congratulation. The product never congratulates clients for completing a task. It simply confirms, with warmth, that something is taken care of. Where the success state follows a client adding to their own Albemarle story, the copy should acknowledge that it is theirs and that it is kept. Where it follows a booking, it should immediately orient the client toward what happens next, naming the host and when they will be in touch. Never use "great", "awesome", "perfect" or any enthusiastic affirmation. One clear, warm confirmation is enough.	Reviewed by content lead before any success state ships. Success states in the booking flow and the memory view are priority review items, as these follow the highest-stakes moments in the client journey.
Help and support text	FAQ copy, in-app guidance, host message prompts, stylist note guidance for the stylist-facing side of the product, cancellation policy display	Help copy in this product must sound like a host explaining something, not a support centre answering a ticket. The cancellation policy must appear early in the booking flow, written as a person would say it: "If you need to move your appointment, just let Sophie know at least 48 hours before and there's no charge." The legal substance stays. The register changes. In-app guidance must assume intelligence and not over-explain. The host message prompt, the text that appears in the message input when empty, must invite rather than instruct. Never use "type your message here". The stylist-facing note guidance must reflect the authorship principle: notes are written to the client, in language the client would recognise, because the client can read them.	Help and support copy reviewed by content lead before any help surface ships. Cancellation policy copy reviewed additionally by the Albemarle Excellence client team and legal representative to confirm that the register change does not alter the legal substance. Stylist-facing guidance reviewed by the Albemarle Excellence operations lead.

Review process

The content lead holds responsibility for voice and tone sign-off across all system copy categories. No string in any of the categories above may move to QA without written sign-off from the content lead confirming it has been reviewed against the Voice and Tone Guidelines and the banned phrase

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The review process has two stages. The first stage is a copy audit at the point each feature enters QA, covering every string that a client will see in that feature under any condition, including error states and edge cases. The second stage is a full product copy audit before any release that touches client-facing strings, checking for regression, component defaults that may have reappeared, and any new strings introduced during the build that have not been through individual review.

The Albemarle Excellence client team is involved in review at three specific points: onboarding copy before the onboarding flow enters QA, name and pronoun change confirmation copy before that feature ships, and cancellation policy copy before the booking flow is released. These are the moments where the brand's voice carries the greatest risk of harm if it is wrong, and they require client team sign-off in addition to the content lead's review.

One rule governs all of it. If a string has not been reviewed, it does not ship.

Acceptance Criteria

Emotional criteria

The build is not complete until the product creates specific feelings at specific moments. These are not aspirational outcomes. They are verifiable through structured testing with real users, and each one maps to a design decision that was made deliberately. QA should treat emotional criteria with the same rigour applied to functional ones.

- A returning client who opens the app for the first time in the built product must report feeling recognised before they have taken any action. The host panel, the host's name and photograph, and the suggested appointment must be visible and legible within one second of the home screen loading. Test with users who have an existing client record. The pass condition is that they describe the first screen as feeling like being expected rather than being processed.
- A new client completing onboarding for the first time must report feeling welcomed before they are asked for anything. The pass condition is that they describe the host introduction and the open question as feeling like a human exchange, and that they do not describe the account creation step as the first thing the product asked them to do.
- A client reading their post-visit note must report feeling heard. The pass condition is that the note reflects language they used in the chair, describes what was done in terms they recognise as their own, and does not prompt them to buy anything or rebook within the note itself.
- A client who opens the "what we remember about you" view must report feeling in control of their own information. The pass condition is that they describe the copy as written to them rather than about them, and that they can locate the edit and remove options without being directed to them.
- A client who messages their host through the app and receives a reply must report feeling looked after rather than processed. The pass condition is that the reply reads as a person, is

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specific to what they asked, and does not contain templated language they recognise as a system response.

- A client booking a return visit must report that the experience required less effort than they expected. The pass condition is that returning clients describe the booking as faster and simpler than their previous experience with any hair booking product, and that at no point did they feel they had to explain something the product should already have known.
- A client encountering an error state must not report feeling abandoned. The pass condition is that they can describe a clear next step and know how to reach a person without leaving the screen they are on.
- A client on the sofa at ten o'clock at night, completing a booking on a mobile device, must report feeling calm rather than pressured. The pass condition is that no screen presented more than two choices simultaneously, that the visual experience felt spacious rather than dense, and that nothing in the flow created urgency.

Brand criteria

The following criteria define what consistency with the design system means in practice. Each one is verifiable through QA review against the delivered assets.

Voice and tone

- No client-facing string contains a word or phrase from the banned list in the Voice and Tone Guidelines. The banned list includes, but is not limited to: excellence, luxury, exclusive, elite, indulge, pamper, treat yourself, journey, transform, customer, slot, select, book now, unlock, rewards, points, tier, VIP, valued client, we've missed you, don't forget, overdue, upgrade, signature, bespoke, curated, world class, seamlessly, holistic, cutting-edge, transformative, premium, and any phrase that announces memory rather than demonstrating it.
- Every message signed by a named stylist or host was written or individually approved by that person. No generated or templated string appears under a person's name without their explicit review of that specific message. This applies to post-visit notes, pre-visit reminders, suggested appointment prompts, and any direct message sent through the host channel.
- Automated messages are plainly attributed to Albemarle, never to a named individual. The sending attribution on automated notifications, holding messages, and system-generated communications reads as the studio or the house, not as Sophie or Daniel.
- Every confirmation string names the stylist, the day, and the time in plain language. No confirmation reads as a booking reference number or a transaction receipt.
- The cancellation policy appears in the booking flow at the point of service selection, written as a host would explain it. The legal substance is intact. The register is a person speaking, not a notice posted.

Visual language

- The type scale matches the design system specification on every screen, at every breakpoint. No string has been scaled down to fit a space that was designed for shorter copy. Where copy

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does not fit, the copy has been shortened.

- Whitespace values match the spacing system specification. No additional content, secondary CTAs, promotional elements, feature discovery prompts, or component additions have been inserted into screen areas that the design holds empty.
- The warm brass accent appears only in the specific applications defined in the design system. It does not appear in button states, focus rings, progress indicators, notification badges, or any interactive element not specified. No new component uses brass without a documented design review.
- All photography in the product uses natural light only. No images with artificial lighting, flash photography, heavily processed finishes, or stock photography appear anywhere in the product. No before-and-after imagery appears in any client-facing context.
- The serif and sans pairing is applied according to the type specification. The serif is used for headlines only. The sans is used for all body copy, labels, and interactive elements.
- The colour palette is restricted to the values defined in the design system. Deep ink, soft ivory, and warm brass are the only palette entries. No additional colours have been introduced during build, including for states, variants, or new components.

Interaction register

- No screen presents more than two choices simultaneously as primary actions. Where additional options exist, they are accessible one step further in, not surfaced alongside the primary action.
- The host message button is accessible from every screen in the product, including error states and empty states.

Interaction criteria

The following interaction patterns must work precisely as designed. Each item describes a specific behaviour that was arrived at through the design process and cannot be approximated.

- The home screen for a returning client loads with the host panel, host photograph, and suggested appointment visible in the first viewport, before any scroll, on the smallest supported device. If client data is not yet available, the screen holds rather than defaulting to a generic state.
- The suggested appointment for a returning client reflects their actual rhythm: their usual stylist, their usual service type, and a proposed time based on their visit history. The suggestion is offered as a single tap to confirm. The full booking flow is available one tap further in for clients who want something different.
- The new client onboarding flow presents the host introduction before the account creation prompt. The account creation step appears at the point of booking confirmation, not at the point of arrival. No element of the discovery or consideration flow is gated behind a credential.
- The open question in onboarding, "what are you hoping for?", is presented as a conversational field, not a dropdown or a category selector. Free text entry is supported. The response informs the service suggestion that follows.

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- The "what we remember about you" view is reachable in exactly two taps from any screen in the product, including during an active booking flow, an open host message thread, and an Albemarle story view.
- Name and pronoun changes made in the "what we remember about you" view propagate to all studios immediately. The confirmation screen explicitly states that the change has reached all studios. This confirmation appears in the same session as the change, without a manual sync step.
- A stylist note in the approval queue presents the draft and the approval action with equal visual weight. The edit action is as prominent as the approve action. The flow does not make approving without reading faster than reviewing and editing.
- When a stylist has unsent notes and cannot complete them in the current session, the system sends a plain holding message from Albemarle, not from the stylist. The holding message does not use the stylist's name. It states when the note will follow and is attributed to the studio.
- When a client's preferred stylist has no availability, the screen does not show an empty calendar. It shows the stylist's next available date, an option to join the cancellation list with a plain explanation of how the list works, and a suggestion of a colleague with a brief description in the stylist's own words.
- The post-visit note notification names the stylist. Tapping the notification opens the note directly, not the app home screen.
- Notification opt-out is reachable in one tap from any notification received. The opt-out is permanent until the client chooses to change it. The confirmation of opt-out does not include a retention message, a question about why the client is opting out, or an offer to reduce notification frequency instead.
- The Albemarle story view is visible from the first visit, even when it contains a single entry. The empty state does not suggest the view is not yet active or that there is nothing there yet.
- Pricing information appears at the point of service selection, not at the point of payment. The displayed price is a plain range with an explanation of what affects the final cost and a statement that the stylist will confirm before starting.
- Every error state includes the host message button at the same visual level as the primary recovery action.

Copy criteria

All client-facing copy must pass voice and tone review before shipping. The following categories and process govern that review.

Categories subject to mandatory review

- Error messages, including payment failure, booking failure, session expiry, connection errors, and message send failures
- Empty states, including no upcoming appointments, no messages, Albemarle story with zero or one entry, and no availability for a selected stylist

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- Loading states for any screen that surfaces client-specific data, including the host panel, Albemarle story, memory view, and booking flow
- Confirmation messages for bookings, profile changes, message sent, story entries saved, and all name or pronoun changes
- All onboarding copy including the welcome screen, host introduction, the open question, account creation prompt, and first visit explanation
- All notification copy across every notification type enabled in the product
- Success states following any client action
- All help, guidance, and in-app support text including the cancellation policy display, host message prompts, and any contextual copy attached to form fields
- All stylist-facing guidance copy, specifically note-writing prompts and approval flow labels, because that copy shapes what clients ultimately read

Process

- The content lead holds sign-off responsibility for all categories above. No string in any category moves to QA without written confirmation from the content lead that it has been reviewed against the Voice and Tone Guidelines and the banned phrase list.
- Component library defaults and inherited strings are not exempt. Every string a client can see under any condition, including edge cases and infrequently triggered states, is subject to review.
- A copy audit is conducted at the point each feature enters QA, covering every string in that feature including error and edge case states.
- A full product copy audit is conducted before any release that touches client-facing strings. This audit checks for regression, for component defaults that may have reappeared, and for any string introduced during build that has not been through individual review.
- The Albemarle Excellence client team reviews and signs off three specific copy categories before the relevant feature ships: all onboarding copy before the onboarding flow enters QA; name and pronoun change confirmation copy before that feature ships; and cancellation policy copy before the booking flow is released.
- Strings that have not completed the review process do not ship. There are no exceptions on the basis of a string being minor, a default state, or unlikely to be seen.

Performance criteria

Performance thresholds in this product are set by their emotional effect, not by generic benchmarks. A loading delay that might be acceptable in a utility app can break the hospitality register in this one. The criteria below reflect that.

- The home screen for a returning client, including the host panel, host photograph, and suggested appointment, loads and is fully interactive within two seconds on a standard 4G connection. If this threshold cannot be met consistently, the host panel loads first with the suggested appointment following, rather than the screen defaulting to a generic state while data loads.

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- The host message thread loads within one second of opening. Delays longer than one second in a messaging interface shift the register from personal to administrative.
- The "what we remember about you" view loads within two seconds. This screen carries a specific trust function. A slow load introduces uncertainty at the moment the product is trying to demonstrate care.
- Post-visit note drafts generated for stylist review are available in the approval queue within fifteen minutes of the visit end time being recorded. Delays that push drafts to the following morning remove the window for the same-evening holding message, which is the correct fallback when a note cannot be completed in time.
- Notification delivery for pre-visit reminders occurs within a five-minute window of the scheduled send time. A reminder that arrives at an unexpected time loses its function as a considerate prompt and reads as a system misfiring.
- Name and pronoun changes propagate to all studio records within the same session. The confirmation screen must not display until propagation is confirmed. There is no acceptable latency window for this criterion. It is not a sync preference; it is a safeguarding requirement.
- The booking flow, from the home screen tap to booking confirmation, completes in under ninety seconds for a returning client booking their usual appointment. Any friction that extends this beyond two minutes risks the product feeling like administration rather than ease, which contradicts the core emotional promise of the home screen.
- The Albemarle story loads the most recent three entries immediately on open, with older entries loading progressively as the client scrolls. The first visible state of the story must never be an empty loading screen. Where entries include photographs, images load progressively without blocking the text content.

Pre-Launch Emotional Review

The pre-launch emotional review takes place after the build is functionally complete and before the product ships to any client. It is not a final QA pass. QA will already have run, and functional issues will already have been resolved. This review asks a different question: does the product, as built, create the feelings it was designed to create? It is the moment at which the emotional intent of the design phase is held up against the working product, in real conditions, by people who understand what was intended and can see clearly where the two have diverged.

What it covers

The review is structured as a walkthrough of the full client experience, following the emotional arc established in the journey mapping work: from the first second of opening the app, through onboarding, booking, host contact, the post-visit note, the Albemarle story, the memory view, and the return visit. At each stage, the reviewer assesses the product against the Feel Factor layers that were established during the design phase.

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The walkthrough covers both client types. A returning client with a full history is used to test recognition, suggestion logic, host panel accuracy, and the memory view. A new client profile, with no prior visits, is used to test onboarding, the host introduction, the open question, account creation sequencing, and first impressions of the booking flow. Edge case states are included: a stylist with no availability, an error state in the booking flow, a cancellation, a name change, and the holding message scenario.

The review is not a heuristic evaluation. It does not produce a list of usability findings. It produces a verdict on each critical moment: whether the emotional intent has been met, whether something needs adjustment before launch, or whether something blocks launch entirely.

The critical moments assessed are the ones identified during the design phase as carrying the highest emotional weight.

- The home screen first second, the Helen moment. Does the host panel load in time? Does a returning client see recognition before they are asked for anything?
- New client onboarding. Does the product introduce a person before it asks for a credential?
- The post-visit note, in the approval flow as experienced by a stylist. Does the flow make doing the right thing as easy as doing the wrong thing?
- The memory view. Does the copy read as written to the client, not about them? Can edit and remove be found without being directed to them?
- An error state. Is the host message button present? Is there a clear next step?
- A return visit after a gap. Does the product feel like an open door or a prompt to explain yourself again?

System copy is reviewed in full during this session, against the banned phrase list and the Voice and Tone Guidelines. This is a final check for regression, not the primary copy review, which will already have been completed by the content lead at the feature level. If banned phrases have reappeared in component defaults or new strings introduced during build, they are flagged here.

Who is involved

The review involves four groups.

The design lead and at least one senior designer from We Are Affective, who hold the emotional intent of the design phase and can speak to why specific decisions were made. They conduct the walkthrough and produce the findings.

The development lead and a representative from QA, who are present to understand findings in context, to clarify whether something is a build decision or a configuration issue, and to receive the action list directly rather than through a document that arrives later.

A representative from the Albemarle Excellence client team, present for the full session. This is not a presentation of findings. It is a live review in which the client team can see the product operating

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against the experience they were promised. Their presence at this stage matters because some findings will require a conversation about whether a gap reflects a build issue, a scope issue, or a question that was not fully resolved during the design phase. That conversation is better held together, before launch, than after.

A senior representative from We Are Affective strategy, present to hold the broader brief and to make final calls on categorisation where the design lead and client team do not immediately agree.

What it produces

The review produces a single sign-off document, completed on the day of the session, with findings recorded under three headings.

Working as intended covers every critical moment and system state that the review confirms is meeting its emotional intent. These items are recorded briefly and without elaboration. They do not require further action.

Needs adjustment covers items where the emotional intent is partially present but something is not right: a copy string that has drifted from the Voice and Tone Guidelines, a loading delay that is within technical tolerance but breaks the hospitality register, a component default that reappeared during build, a spacing value that was compressed, an interaction that works functionally but presents more choices than the design intended. Items in this category are assigned to a named owner, given a resolution deadline, and must be resolved and re-reviewed before launch.

Blocks launch covers items where the product, in its current state, would contradict a non-negotiable from the design phase or create a harm. The threshold for this category is high and specific. A generated message shipping under a stylist's name without approval blocks launch. A name change that does not propagate immediately blocks launch. A new client meeting a login screen before a host introduction blocks launch. The host panel failing to load for returning clients on the home screen blocks launch. These are not negotiable on the basis of a sprint deadline. If a blocking item cannot be resolved before the planned launch date, the launch date moves.

The sign-off process

Sign-off requires agreement from three parties: the design lead, the We Are Affective strategy representative, and the Albemarle Excellence client representative. All three must confirm in writing, within the sign-off document, that there are no unresolved blocking items and that all adjustment items have either been resolved or have a confirmed resolution date within the first post-launch patch window.

If any party withholds sign-off, the reason is documented and a resolution path is agreed in the same session. The product does not launch on provisional sign-off.

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The sign-off document is dated, retained by We Are Affective and shared with the Albemarle Excellence client team. It forms part of the project record and is the reference point for the first post-launch review.

Post-launch review framework

Three reviews follow launch, each one assessing the product against the same emotional and brand criteria used in the pre-launch review, supplemented by real usage data as it becomes available.

The thirty-day review checks whether the product is behaving as intended at scale. It focuses on the authorship workflow under real operational pressure, particularly whether the December Saturday scenario is being handled correctly, whether holding messages are being sent as designed or whether workarounds have appeared. It also checks whether any notification type has produced a client opt-out rate that suggests the contact is not welcome, and whether the host panel is loading within the required time threshold across all studios.

The ninety-day review introduces client feedback for the first time. Where client sentiment data is available, it is mapped against the emotional arc from the journey mapping work. The review focuses on whether the drift stage is being handled, whether lapsed clients are being contacted correctly, and whether the Albemarle story is being used by clients as a record they return to voluntarily rather than a view they access only to check information.

The six-month review assesses the product against the measurable signals defined in the Design Principles document: the number of times a returning client is asked for information the product already holds, the proportion of clients adding voluntarily to their own profile, the share of clients who mute notifications, and the reply rate to host messages. These signals are reported per studio, and any studio where signals are moving in the wrong direction triggers a targeted review of that studio's configuration and host workflow.

Each review produces a brief written summary shared with the Albemarle Excellence client team. The first review at six months is the point at which the product is assessed against its stated purpose, not just its specifications. If clients are still introducing themselves, if the drift stage is still producing the same silence it always did, if the warmth has thinned as the client base has grown, those findings are named clearly and addressed. The product that ships is not the product that is finished.

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