

The AI Design System File Playbook

Save one DESIGN.md file as a skill so Claude and ChatGPT build every site with your typography, spacing, and colors already loaded.

Why I built this

I kept asking Claude and ChatGPT to make a site look premium, and I kept getting the same polite, forgettable page back. Gray text, a safe sans-serif, even spacing everywhere. The model was not the problem. It just had nothing concrete to follow, so it reached for the default.

The fix is one file. A design system file, usually named DESIGN.md, that spells out the typography, spacing, color palette, and components of a look you already like. Once the AI can read that, it stops guessing and starts following.

This guide is the full setup. Where to find a style worth copying, what goes in the file, how to save it as a reusable skill in Claude or ChatGPT, and the exact prompts I run so a client build looks intentional instead of generic.

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How it actually works

1. You find a website whose look you want and capture its design system as a single markdown file. Refero.design is a library of real product screens, so you browse until something matches your direction, then pull the DESIGN.md for it.
2. You save that file as a skill. In Claude Code it lives in a small folder under your skills directory. In ChatGPT you load it into a Codex project so it rides along on every chat.
3. You activate the skill and build. The AI already knows your fonts, spacing, and colors, so your prompt can be about the page you want, not a re-explanation of your brand every time.

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The one thing almost everyone gets wrong

People pick a reference site that looks amazing but has nothing to do with their brand, then spend the whole build fighting it.

WATCH OUT

Choose a style that already sits close to your brand direction. If your brand is warm and editorial, do not load a cold, techy dashboard system and then wrestle it back toward warm. The file is a starting point you edit, not a costume you force on. Pick a near match and the small tweaks feel easy.

The files

A skill is two files in one folder: the DESIGN.md that holds the visual rules, and a short SKILL.md that tells the AI what the skill is and when to use it. Here is a SKILL.md you can copy and rename.

SKILL.MD

```
---
name: design-system
description: Load this whenever building or restyling a website or landing page. It holds the typography, spacing, color, and component rules to follow for every visual decision.
---

# Design System

When this skill is active, follow DESIGN.md for every visual choice: fonts, sizes, spacing, colors, buttons, cards, and layout. Do not invent new styles. If something is not covered in DESIGN.md, match the closest rule that is.
```

And here is the shape of a DESIGN.md. Fill each section with the real values from the reference you picked (or your own brand). The more exact the numbers, the closer the output lands.

DESIGN.MD

```
# Design System

## Colors
- Background: #FFF8E7
- Text: #111111
- Primary accent: #F5C018
- Muted text: #6B6B6B
- Border: #E5E0D5

## Typography
- Heading font: [font name], weight 700
- Body font: [font name], weight 400
- Scale: h1 48px, h2 32px, h3 22px, body 16px, small 14px
- Line height: headings 1.1, body 1.6

## Spacing
- Base unit: 8px
- Section padding: 96px top and bottom
- Gap between elements: 24px

## Components
- Buttons: solid accent fill, 12px radius, 16px by 28px padding, bold label
- Cards: white surface, 16px radius, soft shadow, 24px padding
- Inputs: 1px border, 10px radius, 12px padding
- Nav: sticky top, logo left, links right

## Design language
Minimal and editorial. Generous whitespace. One accent color used sparingly. Left-aligned text, no center-everything layouts.
```

SITES SHOWN IN THE VIDEO

- Refero.design (UI and UX inspiration library)
<https://refero.design/>

Set it up in Claude Code or Codex

1. In Claude Code, make a folder for the skill at `~/claude/skills/design-system/`. The folder name has to match the name: field in SKILL.md, or Claude will not load it. So the folder is design-system and the name: line reads design-system.
2. Put both files inside that folder: SKILL.md and DESIGN.md. Paste in the templates above, then edit DESIGN.md with the real colors, fonts, and spacing from your reference.
3. Start a new Claude Code session in your project and activate the skill. Ask Claude to list its skills if you want to confirm design-system shows up.
4. In ChatGPT, the browser path is Codex: open your project, add DESIGN.md as a file the project can read, and reference it in your prompt. Same file, no folder rules.
5. Run one small test build (see the commands below) and check that the fonts, spacing, and accent color match the file. If they do, the skill is wired correctly.

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The commands I actually run

KICK OFF A BUILD

Build a [PAGE TYPE, e.g. personal portfolio] using the loaded design system. Match its typography, spacing, color palette, and components exactly. Follow DESIGN.md for every visual decision. Start with just the hero section.

GO SECTION BY SECTION

Now add the [SECTION, e.g. about] section. Keep the same fonts, spacing rhythm, and accent color from DESIGN.md. Do not introduce new styles.

MAKE THE STYLE MINE

In DESIGN.md, change the primary accent to [YOUR HEX] and the heading font to [YOUR FONT]. Keep everything else. Then restyle the page to match the updated file.

CHECK IT FOLLOWED THE RULES

List every place this page differs from DESIGN.md: fonts, sizes, spacing, colors, or components. Fix each one to match the file.

REUSE ON THE NEXT PROJECT

Load the design-system skill and build a [NEW PAGE] with it. Same design language, new content.

When it breaks

PROBLEM	FIX
Claude does not load the skill	The folder name and the name: field in SKILL.md disagree. Make them exactly the same, then start a fresh session.
Output still looks generic	DESIGN.md is too vague. Add real hex codes, font names, and pixel sizes instead of words like modern or clean.
The build drifts halfway through	You built too much at once. Go section by section and ask it to recheck against DESIGN.md after each one.
Colors are close but not exact	The AI approximated a named color. Give it the hex value in DESIGN.md and tell it to use that exact value.
The reference feels wrong on your brand	You picked a style too far from your direction. Swap the accent and fonts in DESIGN.md, or start from a closer reference on Refero.
ChatGPT forgets the file mid-chat	Re-reference DESIGN.md in the prompt, or keep it loaded in the Codex project so it stays available across messages.

Ready to go deeper?

This playbook is the short version. Inside the hub you get the full build walkthroughs, the prompt library, and the systems I use to ship this in a weekend.

Join the Build →

<https://hub.digicuratoragency.com/join>