

UNIVERSITY OF GREENWICH

MA Web Design & Content Planning



TherapTea

Right brew, right moment.

MAJOR PROJECT FINAL REPORT

A Mood-Based Sri Lankan Tea Recommendation Platform Rooted in Emotional Pause,
Cultural Terroir, and Low-Friction Digital Calm

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1. Concept & Project Genesis

140-Character Description

TherapTea is a mood-based tea recommendation platform that uses Sri Lankan tea culture as a gentle digital tool for emotional pause.

Elevator Pitch

TherapTea recommends tea based on how people feel, not what they buy. In a web saturated with commercial tea shops pushing checkout baskets and wellness apps charging monthly subscriptions, TherapTea creates an intentional niche: a quiet, emotional pause rooted in genuine Sri Lankan tea culture. A user picks a mood from eight simple options — no quiz, no sign-up, no data stored — and receives a recommended single-origin Ceylon tea, an honest explanation of why it fits that feeling, a small physical domestic ritual to follow, and a piece of music to listen to while it steeps.



Figure 1.1: The core concept illustration of the designer with a cup of tea — embodying the project mission: "nothing like a doctor would say, but a friend would share."

The Problem

When feeling stressed, anxious, or burned out, looking for support online usually leads to two frustrating dead ends: 1. **Clinical wellness apps:** Platforms that treat human emotional states like an engineering problem to optimize. They ask users to rate anxiety on a numerical slider, track biometric data, push daily streak notifications, and eventually demand an annual subscription. For someone already overwhelmed, managing another digital dashboard feels like work. 2. **Commercial tea websites:** E-commerce tea blogs that publish

articles like *"Finding the Perfect Tea for Your Mood"*, but treat human emotions purely as an e-commerce sales funnel. The moment you read about feeling anxious, you are pushed to add a £20 tin of tea to your basket.

Neither option helps someone who simply wants five quiet minutes to ground themselves. There was a clear gap for a site that doesn't try to diagnose you and doesn't try to sell you anything — something that feels less like a clinician or a shopkeeper, and more like a friend putting the kettle on.

Concept Evolution: Incorporating Early Tutor Feedback

When I first presented the concept in Crit 1, my tutors helped refine the core proposition: - **David's suggestion to curate experiences:** In Crit 1, tutor David pointed out:

"Rather than recommending tea as a solution, why not think about curating experiences by pairing tea with music or poetry?"

This was a pivotal turning point for the project. Originally, I had thought of TherapTea as a more functional tea-matching engine. David's feedback made me realize that tea alone is just a beverage, but pairing tea with music, reflection, and physical steeping steps creates an immersive emotional pause. This directly led to the inclusion of ambient audio pairings and named rituals on every single mood page.

- **Prisca's feedback on credibility and personal taste:** Tutor Prisca noted:

"How will you validate your claims / suggestions of which tea will help a certain mood... not sure how you will establish credibility ~ I would definitely go with your advice or recommendations if you put your own taste preferences in there?"

This challenged me to avoid making medical or pseudo-scientific claims. Instead of claiming tea *cures* anxiety, I grounded the suggestions in personal taste, sensory comfort, and traditional Sri Lankan domestic hospitality.

The Value Proposition

TherapTea treats tea as a ritual, an emotional tool, and a cultural medium rather than a retail commodity. It uses an everyday domestic action — boiling water, smelling leaves, watching steam rise, and waiting three minutes — as a physical pause button for the nervous system.

THERAPTEA VALUE PROPOSITION	
What It Avoids	Product upselling, user accounts, tracking cookies, and clinical jargon.
What It Delivers	A 1-click emotional pause backed by genuine Sri Lankan tea culture.
Real-World Action	Uses the interface to guide the user into a physical, offline brewing ritual (boiling water, smelling leaves, waiting for the timer).
Guiding Phrase	"Nothing like a doctor would say — but a friend would share."

Unique Selling Points (USPs)

- **A gentle, non-clinical tone:** My guiding rule from Crit 2 onward was to say *"let's pause for a moment"*, and never *"optimise your wellness"*.

- **Zero data stored (Stateless):** No accounts, no cookies, no tracking, and no multi-step forms. Content-driven rather than data-driven.
- **Rooted in Ceylon tea terroir:** Every tea is tied to real elevation zones in Sri Lanka (Nuwara Eliya, Dimbula, Uva, Kandy, Ruhuna) rather than generic herbal dust.
- **Personal character illustrations:** Rather than stock photos of strangers meditating or faceless corporate vector graphics, I illustrated myself across eight emotional headspaces to make the site feel vulnerable, honest, and human.
- **Multi-sensory ritual:** Combines physical steeping instructions, an interactive timer with gentle audio alerts, and curated music pairings to turn brewing into an intentional micro-break.

The Crit 1 Project Manifesto: "*Comfort, Without the Clinical Bit*"

I began my first presentation (Crit 1) with a single premise: "*Recommending tea based on how people feel, not what they buy.*" The slide deck laid out my core critique of modern digital wellbeing:

"Modern digital wellness has forgotten how to be gentle. It asks you to rate your sadness on a 1-to-10 scale, tracks your heart rate, sends push notifications reminding you that you failed your meditation streak, and charges you £9.99 a month for the privilege. That is not peace; that is another workplace dashboard.

TherapTea was born from a simple conviction: what if the internet gave you a quiet room instead of a checklist? What if we treated tea not as something to buy from a drop-down cart, but as something an old friend brews for you when you walk in through the door soaking wet from the rain?

In Sri Lankan homes, tea is not a transaction. You do not explain your diagnostic code before someone boils the kettle. You sit down, the water heats, the steam rises, and the rhythm of steeping gives you three minutes where nothing else is demanded of you. TherapTea exists to bring that exact physical, cultural, and emotional breath of fresh air into the digital sphere — nothing like a doctor would say, but everything a friend would share."

— **Jathushan Mathews Kennady (Crit 1 Presentation)**

2. Research & Market Context

The Competitor Landscape (Crit 1)

In Crit 1, I mapped out four types of digital services touching this space: 1. **Wellness & mindfulness platforms** (Calm, Headspace) 2. **Tea brands & blogs** (Art of Tea, Twinings) 3. **Mood & self-care apps** (Daylio, Moodnotes) 4. **Lifestyle recommendation sites**

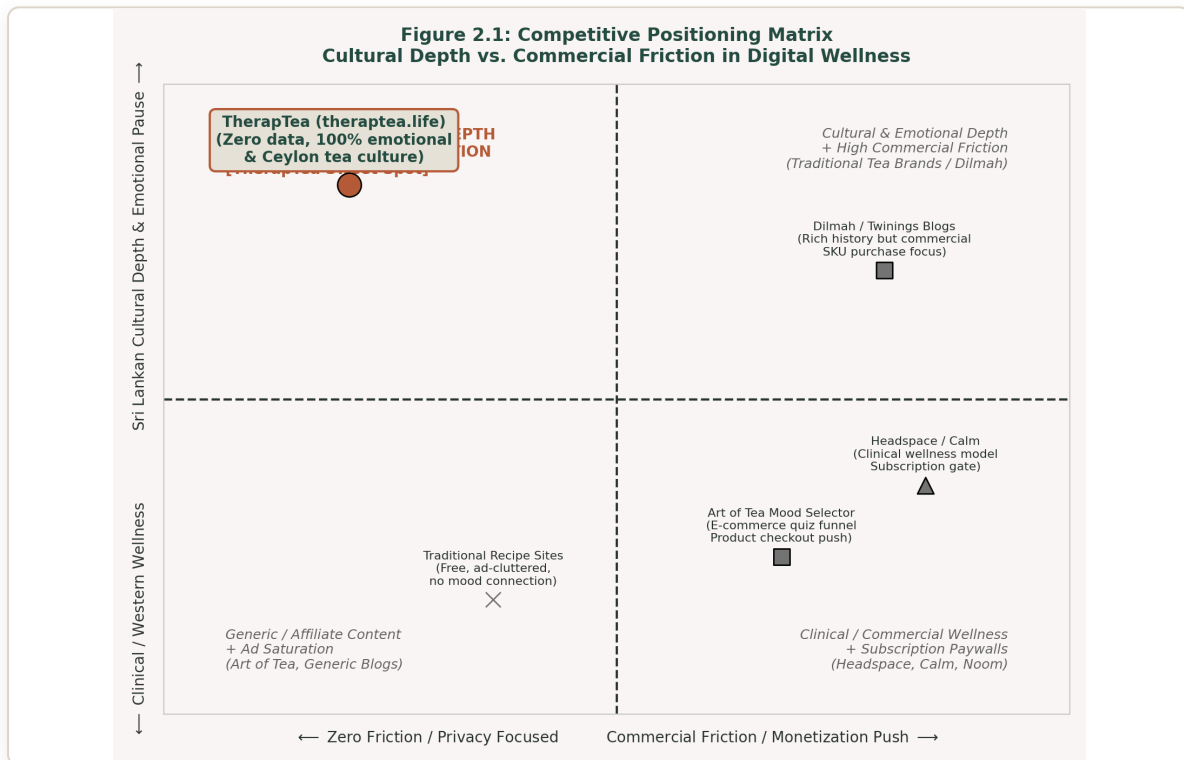
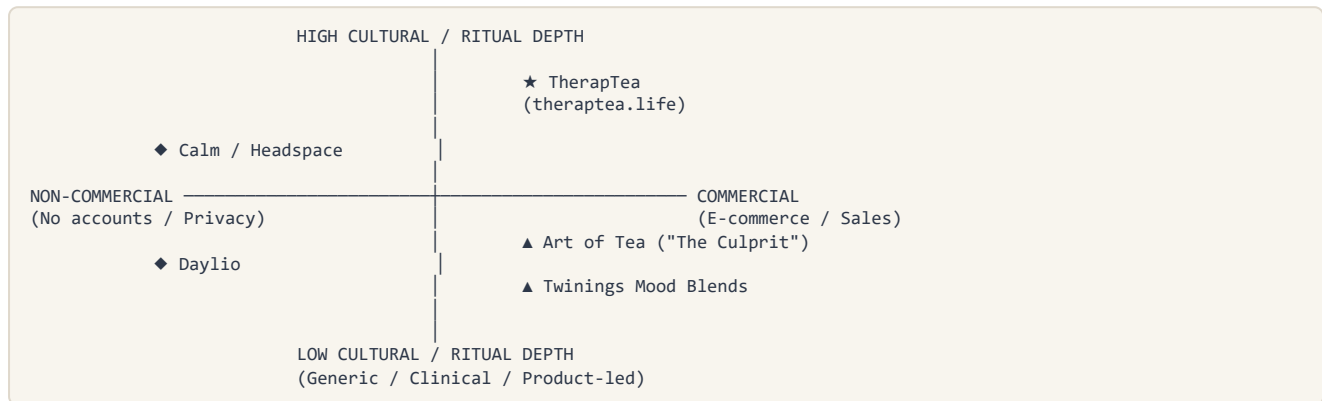


Figure 2.1: Competitive Positioning Matrix plotting Cultural & Emotional Depth against Commercial Friction. TherapTea occupies the unique upper-left quadrant: rich cultural storytelling combined with zero transactional pressure.

As visualized in the positioning matrix (see Figure 2.1), TherapTea sits in a deliberately uncolonized quadrant. Mainstream commercial tea websites force users toward checkout carts, while mindfulness platforms impose

rigid clinical frameworks and recurring subscriptions. TherapTea bridges this divide by delivering deep cultural grounding without any commercial gatekeeping.

The Primary "Culprit": Art of Tea

In Crit 1, slide 9 was titled "**CULPRIT**", featuring a sketch of a character behind bars (see Figure 2.2). I singled out Art of Tea's article "*Finding the Perfect Tea for Your Mood*" because it illustrated the exact pattern I wanted to challenge:

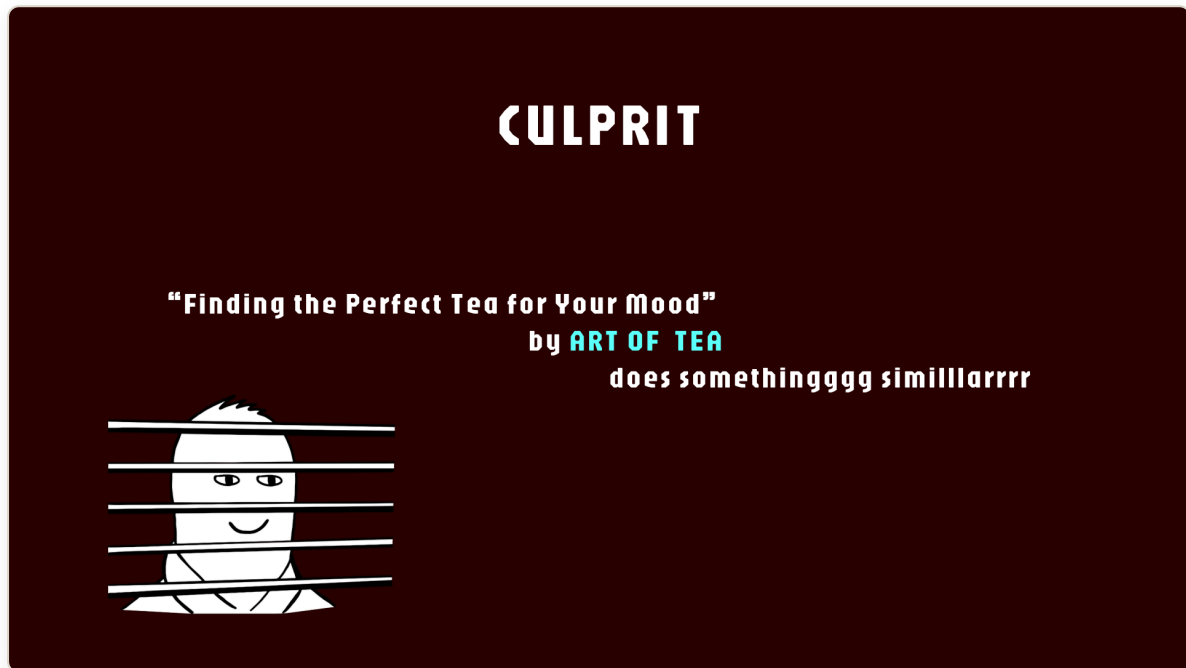


Figure 2.2: The "Culprit" slide presented in Crit 1 (October 2025). Art of Tea's mood recommendation was critiqued as a transactional sales funnel masquerading as personalized wellness, establishing the exact commercial antipattern TherapTea was built to resist.

- **Mood as a sales trap:** The article discusses emotional states, but every paragraph ends with an "Add to Cart" button for their brand of tea at \$24 a tin. The emotion is simply top-of-funnel marketing.
- **Superficial tea knowledge:** There is no discussion of terroir, elevation, or cultural traditions. Teas are treated as generic consumer commodities.
- **No real-world ritual:** Once you finish reading, there is no interactive timer, no brewing advice, and no grounding ritual.

I wanted to take their core idea — matching tea to feelings — and invert the outcome: eliminating the checkout cart entirely and replacing it with genuine cultural storytelling and a physical domestic ritual.

Cognate Comparison Table

Feature / Dimension	TherapTea (theraptea.life)	Art of Tea ("The Culprit")	Twinings "Mood Blends"
Main Goal	Emotional pause & sensory grounding	Product sales & blog traffic	Supermarket brand promotion
Voice / Tone	Warm, gentle, friend-to-friend	Marketing lifestyle editorial	Upbeat, corporate commercial
User Friction	Zero: 1 tap, no login, no cookies	Low reading friction, high purchase friction	Medium: multi-step marketing quiz
Data Collection	None: no user data stored	Tracking cookies & cart analytics	Tracking cookies & email capture
Cultural Heritage	Deep: Ceylon regional terroirs & history	Low: generic tea varieties	Minimal: commercial flavour additives
Practical Ritual	Built-in timer, ritual steps & music	None: static link to online store	Basic steeping time on box

Non-Cognate Research: Mood & Wellness Apps

1. Daylio (Micro-Journaling App)

- **What it does well:** Daylio replaces long diary entries with simple mood icons. Users can log feelings in a single tap without typing.
- **Where it fails for my audience:** Daylio relies heavily on historical data, showing graphs of mood trends over weeks and months. If someone is having a rough week, looking at a downward graph creates guilt. Daily streaks also add pressure.
- **What I took & what I changed:** I adopted the single-tap visual selection because it requires minimal cognitive effort, but made it completely stateless. TherapTea does not save past visits or score emotional patterns; it is designed entirely for the present moment.

2. Calm & Headspace (Mindfulness Platforms)

- **What they do well:** Soothing audio design, gentle visual pacing, and warm, muted color palettes.
- **Where they fail for my audience:** Both apps have grown increasingly corporate and bloated. They require user logins, send daily push notifications, and lock content behind expensive annual subscriptions (£60+ per year).
- **What I took & what I changed:** I borrowed the concept of pairing calming visuals with audio, but simplified it into a free, open website that anyone can open on a phone or laptop in three seconds without an account.

3. Business & Cultural Context

Business Context: "Somewhere Between a Wellness App and a Tea Brand"

In Crit 1, slide 5 defined TherapTea's business positioning as: *"somewhere between a wellness app and a tea brand"*.

In response, tutor Emma commented:

"I'm not sure I agree with the idea of the site sitting between wellness app and tea brand, but I think this will naturally evolve as you develop this initial idea."

Emma was right. As the project progressed through Crits 2, 3, and 4, the concept moved away from both extremes. It didn't become a wellness app (because it rejects user accounts, daily streaks, and clinical diagnostics), and it didn't become a tea brand (because it sells zero products). Instead, it evolved into an intentional, non-commercial digital sanctuary.

Under the University of Greenwich MA Web Design & Content Planning brief:

"A website need not be commercial but there must be a set of clearly defined aims, explaining the reason for being 'busy' on the website and for you to provide the necessary resources of time and money for its production and maintenance. It must have a purpose, even if that does not involve creating a revenue stream."

By operating as an open public utility, TherapTea protects its user experience from the commercial compromises that ruin modern websites: banner advertisements, affiliate pop-ups, and data harvesting. Its value lies in user trust, emotional respite, and cultural education.

SWOT Analysis (From Crit 1, with Project Reflections)

STRENGTHS (Crit 1 Baseline)	WEAKNESSES (Crit 1 Baseline)
• Cultural authenticity rooted in Sri Lankan tea heritage. • Emotional focus on pause rather than tracking. • User-centred, low-friction design. • Distinctive niche avoiding commercial e-commerce clutter.	• Feelings are subjective; one tea recommendation cannot fit everyone. • Requires very careful wording to avoid sounding clinical. • Content-heavy: requires unique writing, art, and rituals for every mood.
OPPORTUNITIES (Crit 1 Baseline)	THREATS (Crit 1 Baseline)
• Backlash against overstimulating wellness apps and paywalls. • Rich storytelling around Ceylon tea history. • Room to expand into more teas, regional rituals, and audio.	• Crowded wellness market dominated by heavily funded apps. • Risk of users misinterpreting the site as medical therapy. • Commercial tea sites dominating search results.

How I Handled the Weaknesses & Threats

- **Subjective feelings:** Rather than claiming a specific tea medically "fixes" an emotion, I framed recommendations as sensory suggestions ("*A warm cup, just for right now*"). The goal is to encourage a physical pause with any warm mug, even if the user only has standard tea bags in their kitchen.
- **Tone and medical disclaimer:** In Crit 2, I established strict tone guidelines to avoid clinical claims, and added a gentle disclaimer explaining that TherapTea offers domestic mindfulness and sensory comfort, not psychotherapy.
- **Content workload:** Writing bespoke content for eight distinct moods was demanding. I designed a structured modular template (Greeting → Recommended Tea → 4 Why cards → Ritual steps → Timer → Audio) so every page maintained quality without cutting corners.

Cultural Context: 150 Years of Ceylon Tea Heritage

The MA project brief notes:

"A website is not an independent entity, it is a part of a world wide web of websites, and its existence can be rationalised with respect to history, and trends in contemporary culture and society... It is important for students on this programme to examine the 'bigger picture'."

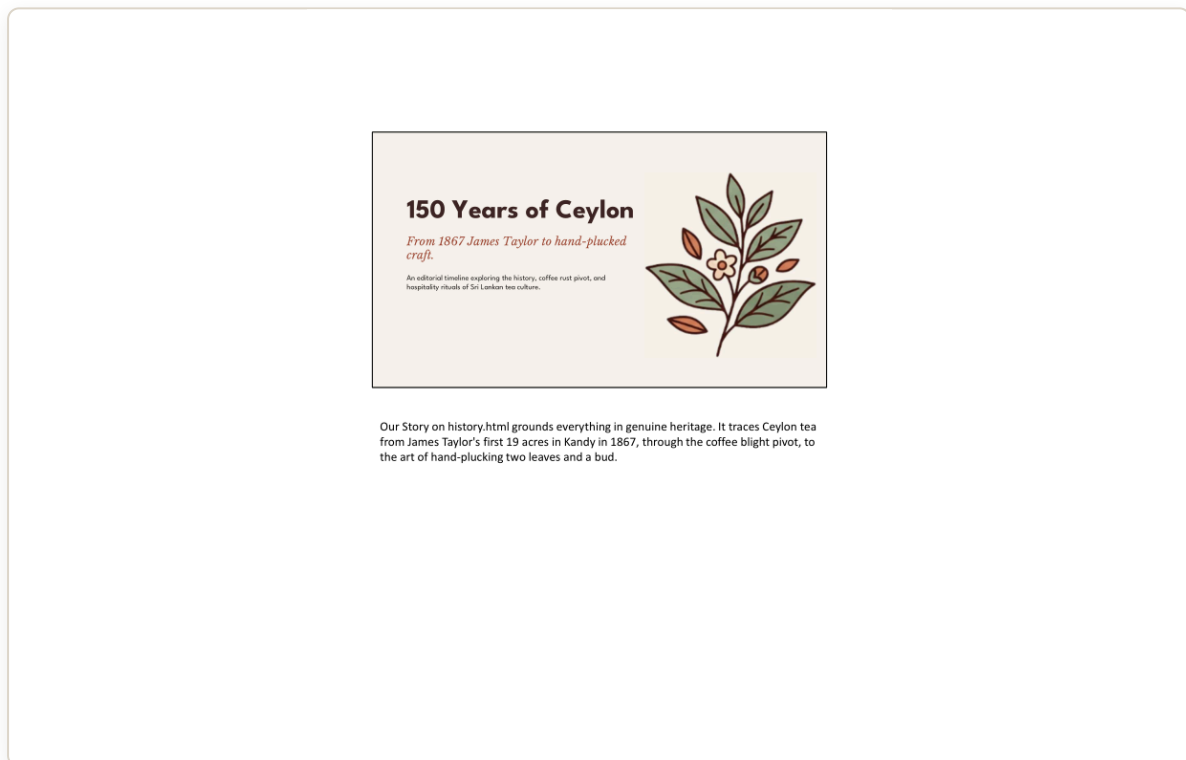


Figure 3.1: Historical terroir and craftsmanship slide from Crit 5, connecting James Taylor's 1867 Loolecondera estate legacy to contemporary digital emotional wellness.

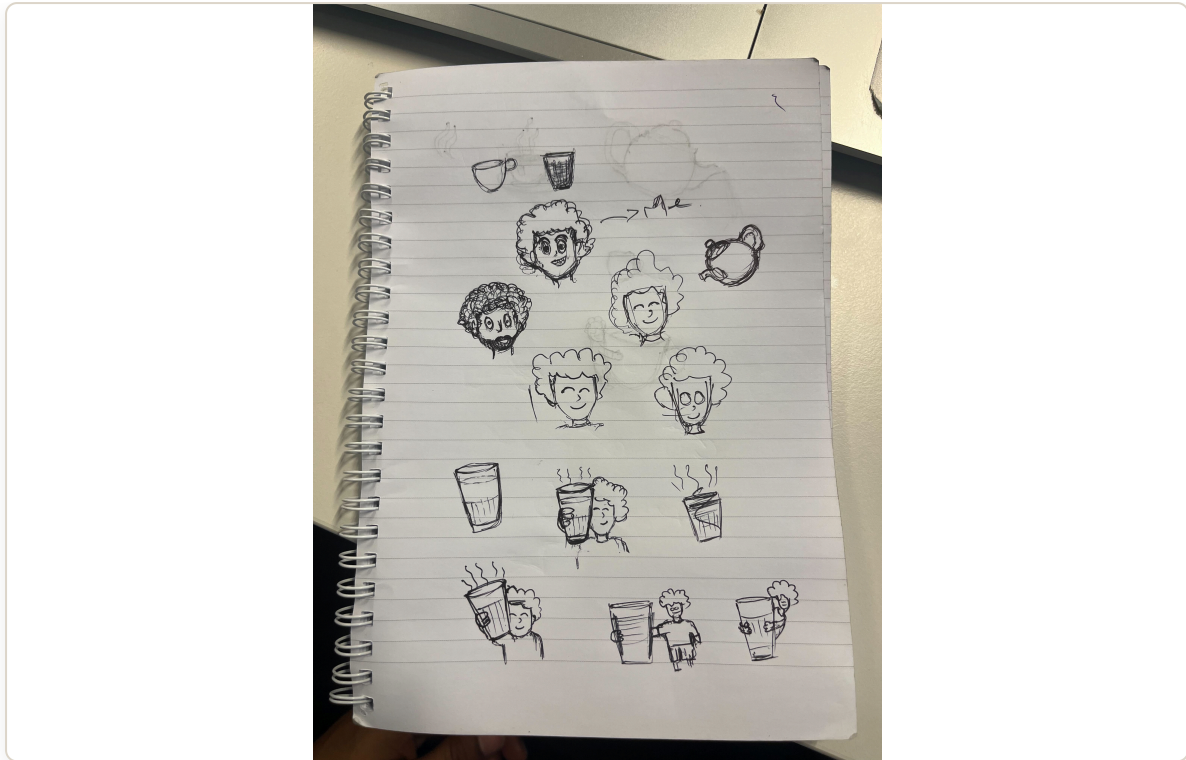


Figure 3.2: Authentic physical sketchbook studies and domestic brewing field notes exploring the translation of Sri Lankan hospitality and regional elevation terroir into digital user pauses.

During early reviews, both David and Emma pushed me to dig deeper into the cultural foundation: - David emphasized: *"The cultural capital is an important attribute for this project so make good use of that."* - Emma noted: *"You listed cultural authenticity as a strength, but this makes me wonder if you need to make more prominent the background of Sri Lankan tea and how this provide the history of tea as therapeutic."*

Taking their advice, I researched the historical origins of Sri Lankan tea: Up until the late 1860s, Ceylon was a major coffee producer. In 1869, a fungal pathogen called *Hemileia vastatrix* (coffee leaf rust) swept through the island, wiping out virtually all coffee plantations within a decade (Ferguson, 1887; Forrest, 1967).

1867: James Taylor plants Field No. 7 at Loolecondera Estate, Kandy (19 acres)
 |
 1869: Fungal coffee blight (*Hemileia vastatrix*) destroys the island's coffee crop
 |
 1870s: Island-wide agricultural pivot to *Camellia sinensis* (Ceylon Tea)
 |
 1890s: Sri Lanka establishes seven distinct elevation-based growing regions
 |
 2026: TherapTea translates this heritage into an everyday digital pause

A Scottish planter named James Taylor had begun planting tea on a 19-acre plot (Field No. 7) at Loolecondera Estate in Kandy in 1867 (Ukers, 1935). Taylor built a hand-operated tea rolling machine on his verandah and fired leaves over charcoal, proving that Ceylon's central highlands were ideal for *Camellia sinensis*. When coffee collapsed, the island pivoted entirely to tea.

In Sri Lankan culture, tea became far more than an export commodity. It became the universal medium of hospitality (*aththasara*). When someone enters your home, you don't ask them questions or present an agenda; you boil the kettle. On the website, I created a dedicated page ([history.html](#)) tracing this 150-year history from Taylor's first harvest to the traditional art of hand-plucking "two leaves and a bud", translating this cultural ritual into a modern digital self-care tool.

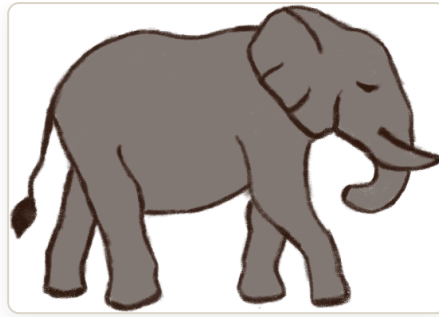


Figure 3.1: The Sri Lankan elephant illustration introduced in Crit 4, symbolizing 150 years of Ceylon tea heritage, slow craft, and national identity.

4. Commodity (User-Centred Design & Ritual Planning)

Target Audience (Crit 1 Definition)

1. **Wellness-focused adults:** People looking for low-pressure alternatives to tracking apps and notification-heavy platforms.
2. **Tea enthusiasts:** People who appreciate single-origin terroirs, proper water temperatures, and traditional harvesting methods.
3. **Culturally curious users:** Readers interested in authentic Sri Lankan history and diaspora heritage.

User Personas & Empathy Mapping

The MA brief requires 3–4 user personas and recommends applying empathy mapping techniques from our UX workshops with Steph and Chris.

Primary Persona: Maya (Crit 1 & Crit 5)

"I don't need advice — I just need a calm moment."

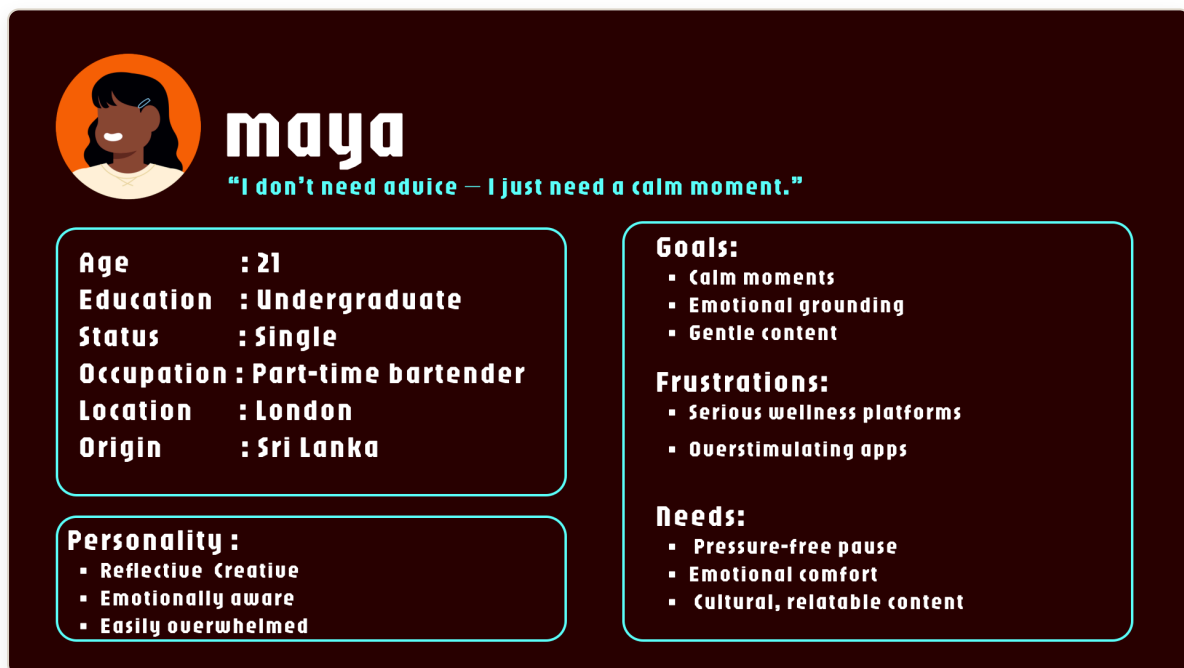


Figure 4.1: The primary persona sheet for "Maya — The Overloaded Student", presented in Crit 1 (October 2025). The empathy map directly informed TherapTea's zero-input, non-judgmental user flow.

- **Demographics:** Age 21, Final-year BA Graphic Design student and part-time bartender, living in New Cross, South London (Sri Lankan heritage).
- **Personality:** Creative, reflective, emotionally aware, easily overwhelmed.

- **Goals:** Find quick, low-effort moments of calm between shifts and university deadlines; avoid demanding platforms; reconnect with familiar cultural comforts.
- **Frustrations:** Clinical wellness platforms; apps with streaks and popups; commercial sites demanding an email sign-up immediately.
- **Needs:** A pressure-free pause, emotional comfort, and simple, relatable content.

EMPATHY MAP: MAYA (FROM CRIT 1)	
SAYS • "I need a break." • "I don't want to think too much." • "Everything feels like too much." • "I just want a quiet moment."	THINKS • "I feel overwhelmed most days." • "I don't want to fix anything right now." • "I just need something simple." • "Why does every app need my email address?"
DOES • Mindlessly scrolls through social media. • Leaves websites that demand too much attention. • Makes a quick cup of tea to take a breath. • Avoids heavy, clinical health articles.	FEELS • Mentally tired. • Slightly anxious and scattered. • Emotionally drained from work and study. • Comforted by familiar domestic routines.

Secondary Personas

Secondary Persona 2: Arthur (The Tea & Science Enthusiast)

- **Demographics:** Age 34, Senior Software Engineer, Bristol.
- **Needs:** Values the biochemical synergy of L-theanine and caffeine. Wants accurate water temperatures, exact steeping times, and authentic single-origin terroir information rather than vague lifestyle marketing.

Secondary Persona 3: Devinda (The Diaspora Cultural Explorer)

- **Demographics:** Age 48, Architect and father of two, Manchester (Second-generation British-Sri Lankan).
- **Needs:** Wants to share authentic Sri Lankan traditions with his children. Appreciates stories about regional tea history without superficial Western wellness trends.

Planning the Ritual Logic & Content Forms

In Crit 1, tutor Prisca noted:

"Your forms of content are good ideas - I think those should be your starting point ~ if you consider your personas and their needs, and then look at your idea again and see how you can come up with user journeys which will lead to good sections."

Following Prisca's advice, I organized the content into five consistent forms: 1. **Mood recommendations:** Matching an emotional state to a tea. 2. **Tea profiles:** Explaining the origin, terroir, and elevation of the tea. 3. **Brewing guides:** Step-by-step physical steeping instructions. 4. **Visuals:** Hand-drawn character art and custom tea icons. 5. **Cultural snippets:** Short historical and botanical notes.

Later in the term, Emma A remarked:

"Good to hear you took the recommendation to add the ritual in terms of personalising the content of the tea recommendations."

This confirmed that anchoring recommendations in a physical ritual made the content personal and actionable (see Figure 4.2).

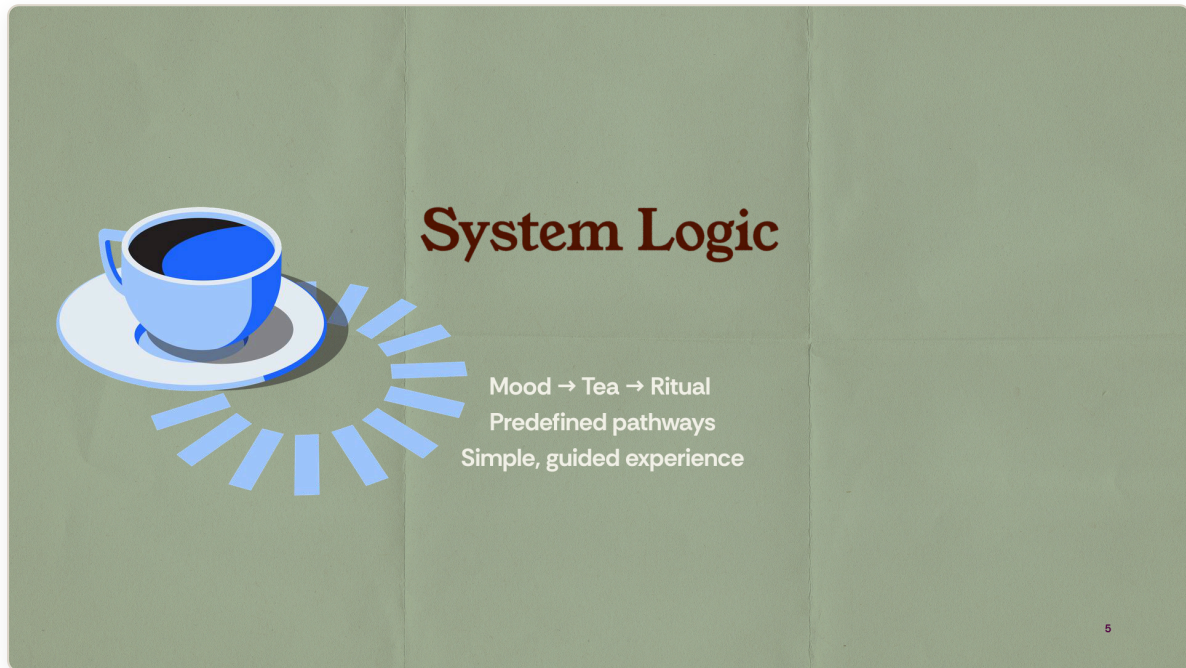


Figure 4.2: Content-driven rule pathways presented in Crit 3, mapping emotional states directly to Ceylon tea terroirs and domestic rituals without algorithmic profiling or database queries.

```
[ USER PICKS MOOD ] → [ DEDICATED MOOD PAGE ]
├── 1. Empathetic Greeting (e.g., "feeling Lonely huh?")
├── 2. Recommended Ceylon Tea (Region, Elevation, Flavour)
├── 3. Four "Why?" Sensory Cards
└── 4. Daily Ritual ("Your Ritual Today" + Live Timer & Music)
```

THE MOOD-TO-TEA & RITUAL MAPPING TABLE				
Mood State	Ceylon Tea Region & Variety	Elevation Zone & Climate	Sensory & Flavour Rationale	Named Ritual & Steeping Practice
Stressed	Nuwara Eliya (The Champagne)	High Grown (>6,000 ft) Cool, misty hills	Light, floral, gentle amber; clears mental clutter without heaviness	The Window Pause (3 Mins): Sit near natural light, hold cup, follow 4-4-6 breathing while leaves settle.
Anxious	Dimbula Seasonal Flush	High Grown (3,500-5,000 ft) Monsoon winds	Crisp, golden, with pleasant aroma to calm nervous physical energy	Grounding Steam (3 Mins): Inhale the warm woody steam three times before taking your first slow sip.
Tired	Kandy Traditional BOP	Mid Grown (2,000-4,000 ft) Rich valley soil	Full-bodied, malty, robust; gives steady reviving warmth	The Mid-Day Reset (4 Mins): Step away from the screen, watch colour deepen, take three unhurried sips.
Sad	Ruhuna Low-Grown Orthodox	Low Grown (Sea level-2,000) Warm sub-tropics	Thick, sweet caramel notes; feels like a warm, comforting hug	The Cloud Moment (5 Mins): Wrap both hands around the ceramic mug, let your thoughts wander without judging.
Happy	Uva Highlands Flush	High Grown (3,000-5,000 ft) Dry mountain winds	Exotic, wintergreen character; lively and refreshing on tongue	The Celebratory Steep (3 Mins): Notice the golden ring in the liquor, take a moment to appreciate the day.
Focused	Silver Tips White Tea Micro-lot	Nuwara Eliya Velvet tips (6,500 ft peaks)	Pure hand-plucked buds; high L-theanine, calm concentration	The Clarity Ritual (4 Mins): Watch needles rise and fall in hot water; sit up straight and clear your desk.
Relaxed	Lemongrass-Spiced Ceylon Herbal Blend	Uva Organic Valley gardens Native herbs	Herbal, caffeine-free, naturally calming for muscles and digestion	The Evening Unwind (5 Mins): Dim your screen to Moon Mode, drop your shoulders, and sip before bed.
Energised	Sabaragamuwa High-Grown BOPF	Low Grown Plains Fast leaf growth Mineral-rich soil	Bold, dark caramel, brisk kick to awaken circulation & body	The Morning Spark (3 Mins): Pour boiling water to awaken the leaves, stretch while the timer runs, drink fresh

Tactile Domestic Ritual Steps (Storyboard)



Figure 4.1: The tactile domestic ritual sequence — sitting near light, wrapping hands around the warm ceramic mug, and taking three slow breaths during the steeping countdown.

The Four "Why?" Cards Structure

Every mood recommendation page shares a four-card layout explaining the sensory benefits (see Figure 4.3):

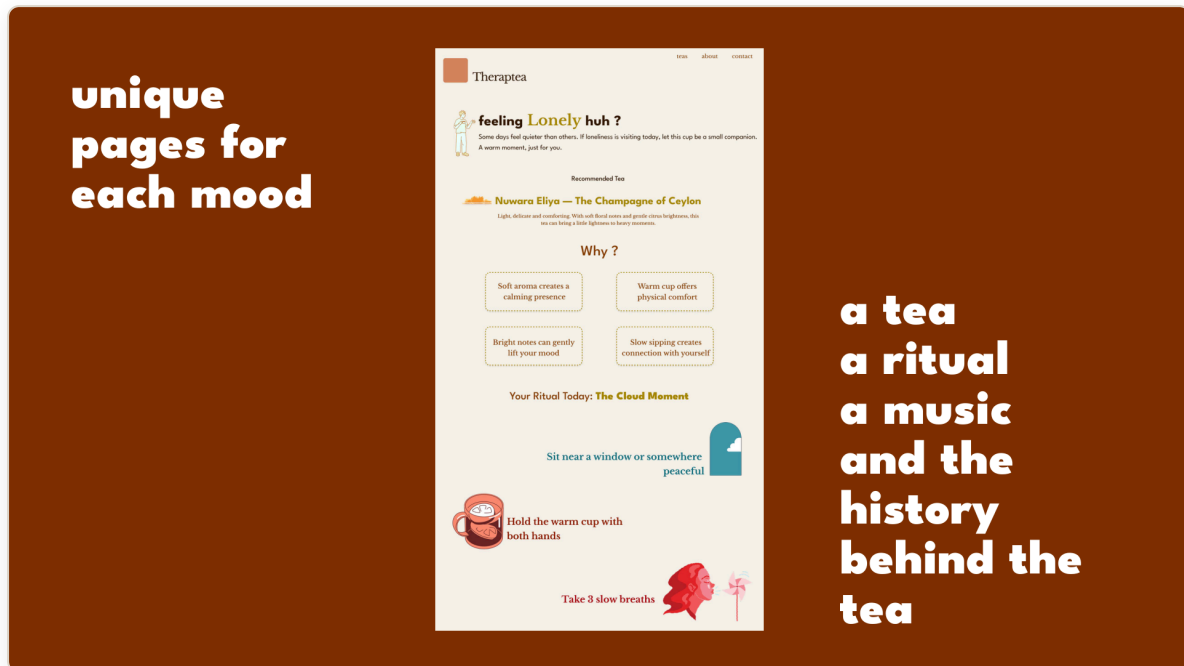


Figure 4.3: Recommendation page mockup from Crit 4 ("Lonely / Nuwara Eliya"), displaying the structured four-card explanation ("Why this tea?", "The science behind it", "The ritual to follow", "The cloud moment") before the interactive audio player.

1. **Aroma:** How the initial scent grounds your breathing.
2. **Warmth:** The physical feeling of holding a warm cup.
3. **Flavour:** How the taste notes interact with your mood.
4. **Mindful Sipping:** The habit of taking slow sips instead of gulping while multitasking.

User Journey: The 1-Tap Experience

To support Maya's need for an effortless pause, the user flow was stripped of all unnecessary steps: 1.

Homepage: User lands on `theraptea.life`. Zero pop-ups, zero cookie banners, zero logins. 2. **Pick a Mood:** The user sees the illustrated wooden shelf with eight teapots and clicks how they feel right now. 3. **Immersive Pause:** The dedicated mood page opens immediately, showing the recommended Ceylon tea, the four sensory cards, the steeping steps, and an interactive timer. 4. **Offline Action:** The user starts the timer, puts their device down, boils the kettle, and brews their tea in the kitchen.

5. Delight — Visual Identity & Aesthetic Evolution

The "Tone Dice" & Voice

In Crit 2 (25 February 2026), I rolled the "tone dice" between *Warm & Friendly* and *Clinical* (see Figure 5.1).



Figure 5.1: The "Tone Dice" slide from Crit 2 (February 2026), resolving the design tension between sterile clinical apps ("optimize your wellness") and warm, friendly companionable hospitality ("let's pause for a moment").

Tutor Prisca commented:

"I love your tone slide!! That perfectly summarizes the way you've honed in on your concept. Your point about 'talking to a friend' will be important for the written content of the site. You'll need it to be in your own words, no AI - it will serve your content well."

Following Prisca's feedback, I wrote all the copywriting personally, keeping it warm, gentle, and grounded.

INSTEAD OF (CLINICAL / PRODUCTIVITY)	THERAPTEA SAYS (WARM & GROUNDED)
"Optimize your cognitive productivity."	"Let's bring some clarity to the noise."
"Clinically proven stress-reduction blend."	"A gentle cup to loosen tight shoulders."
"Subscribe now for your weekly health plan."	"Take your time. The world can wait three minutes while this brews."

Brand Colours & Typographic Hierarchy

In Crit 2, I started with four colors: **Cream**, **Sage**, **Terracotta**, and **Taupe**. Both Emma A and Prisca gave crucial feedback on text contrast: - Emma A: *"I think you are missing a darker colour for your actual text,*

maybe the dark brown from your presentation slides?" - Prisca: "I like your reversal of patterns for using sans serif for the heading, really nice type choices - love your names for your colours - I do think you should consider a darker shade of the brown for your main text (especially with the nice serif font) — like the colour on the word 'warm' on slide 7."

Taking their direct advice, in Crit 4 I added **Brown** (**#3B2A1E** , "**Ceylon Roast**") as our primary typographic color. This provided deep contrast for body copy while keeping the warm, earthy tea aesthetic.

Token Name	Hex Value	Where It Is Used
--bg-parchment	#F0EAD9	Main background: warm, paper-like tone that avoids harsh glare
--bg-card	#FAF6EE	Card background: slightly lighter linen surface for clean reading
--terracotta	#C4603A	Primary interactive color: button hovers, timer highlights
--ceylon-roast	#3B2A1E	Main body text and headings: soft roasted tea brown added per tutor advice
--herbal-sage	#8EA58A	Secondary accents: leaf icons, quiet tags, and borders
--warm-walnut	#5C4033	Wood textures: shelf structure, borders, and footer details

Font Choices (Crit 2 & Crit 4)

- **Headings — League Spartan:** A bold, geometric sans-serif with rounded corners that keeps it feeling approachable.
- **Body Text — Libre Baskerville:** A readable serif with classic book proportions, giving the brewing steps and history an editorial, story-like feel.

The Illustration System & Honest AI Co-Creation

In Crit 2, Prisca gave a wise warning regarding custom artwork:

"Great idea to draw your own illustrations (just plan in enough time for this !! It can be much more time-consuming than you expect)."

Prisca was completely right. When I sat down to illustrate myself across eight distinct emotional headspaces ("8 Moods. Just Me"), drawing consistent character poses by hand was taking weeks. I realized that attempting to draw eight full-body figures and their domestic brewing accessories from scratch would jeopardize the technical development schedule.

To deliver the project on schedule while maintaining absolute authenticity and a personal feel, I adopted a transparent hybrid co-creation workflow combining smartphone reference photography, generative AI linework synthesis, and rigorous manual vector drafting:

1. **Reference Photography:** I set up my smartphone on a desk tripod and took hundreds of self-portrait reference photographs capturing the eight target emotional expressions: slumped exhaustion for *Tired*, wide-eyed tension for *Anxious*, head-in-hands overwhelm for *Stressed*, a gentle closed-eye smile for

Relaxed, and hands cradling a steaming ceramic mug. This ensured every avatar was anatomically and emotionally grounded in real human experience.

2. **AI-Assisted Base Linework (Midjourney v6):** Using **Midjourney v6** via image-to-image prompting, I fed my personal selfie photographs as direct image character references (`--cref`) alongside descriptive style tokens: `text /imagine prompt: [photo_url] minimal 2D vector line-art illustration of a young Sri Lankan designer holding a ceramic teacup, warm cream background, terracotta ink linework, muted organic earth tones, flat editorial vector style, no gradients, clean monoline edges --v 6.0 --cref [photo_url] --cw 80` Midjourney v6 was selected specifically for its superior prompt adherence, facial proportion fidelity, and ability to interpret monoline graphic styles without injecting excessive photographic rendering.
3. **Manual Vectorization & Post-Processing (Adobe Illustrator CC):** As every designer knows, raw generative AI output is fundamentally flawed: it regularly hallucinated melted teapot spouts, unnatural hands with six fused fingers, inconsistent line weights, and discordant color temperatures. I imported each raw output into **Adobe Illustrator CC** as a template layer. Using the Pen tool, I manually redrew every character from scratch: repairing hand anatomy, redrafting the ceramic teapot spouts to match traditional domestic teaware, standardizing line weights to 2pt strokes, and strictly re-coloring every element using TherapTea's approved four-color palette (`#FBF9F5` Cream, `#B85D3B` Terracotta, `#5E7D6B` Sage, `#2C3531` Slate-Charcoal).
4. **Asset Optimization & Performance:** The vectorized illustrations were cleaned of all redundant anchor points and exported as compressed, responsive WebP and SVG assets. Each image contains explicit `width` and `height` attributes in HTML, ensuring zero Cumulative Layout Shift (CLS: 0.000) during page load.

The "8 Moods. Just Me" Character Illustration Grid

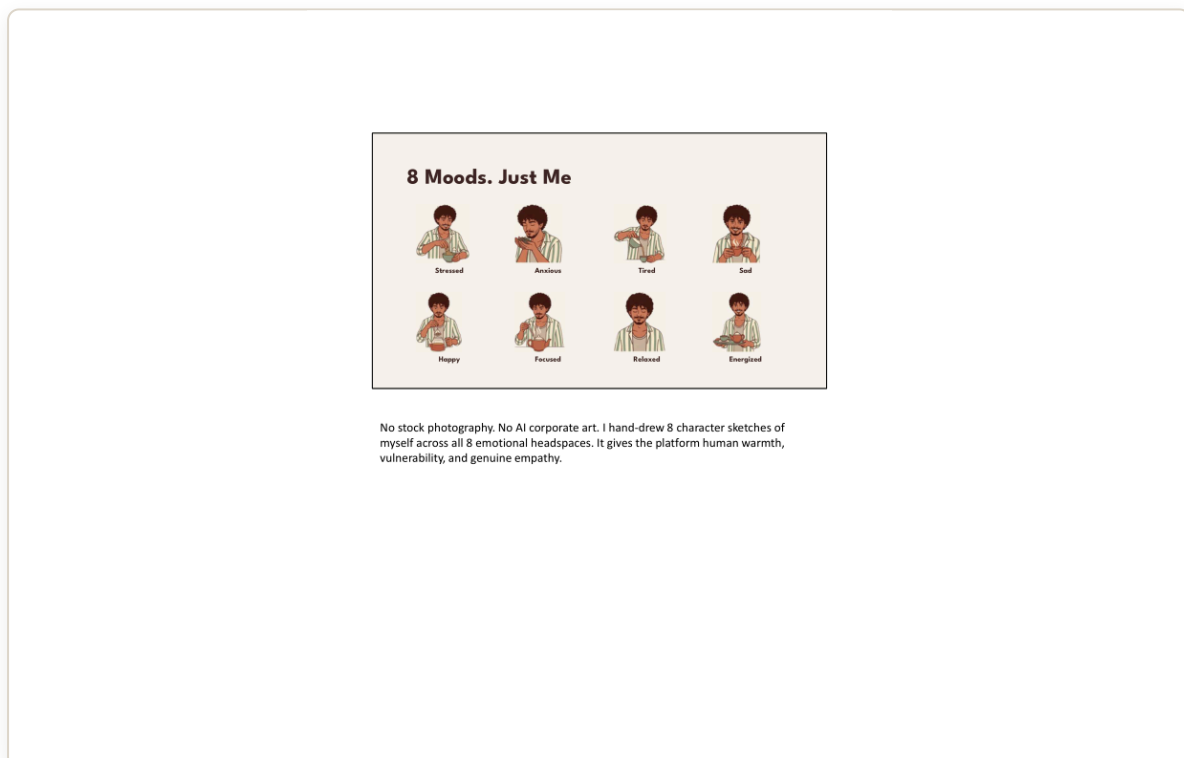


Figure 5.3: "8 Moods. Just Me" slide presented in Crit 5 (August 2026), displaying the author's real facial reference photos alongside the final vectorized mood avatars.



Figure 5.4: Preliminary vector linework studies and facial expression sketches exploring emotional vulnerability, warm brush strokes, and domestic tea brewing elements.

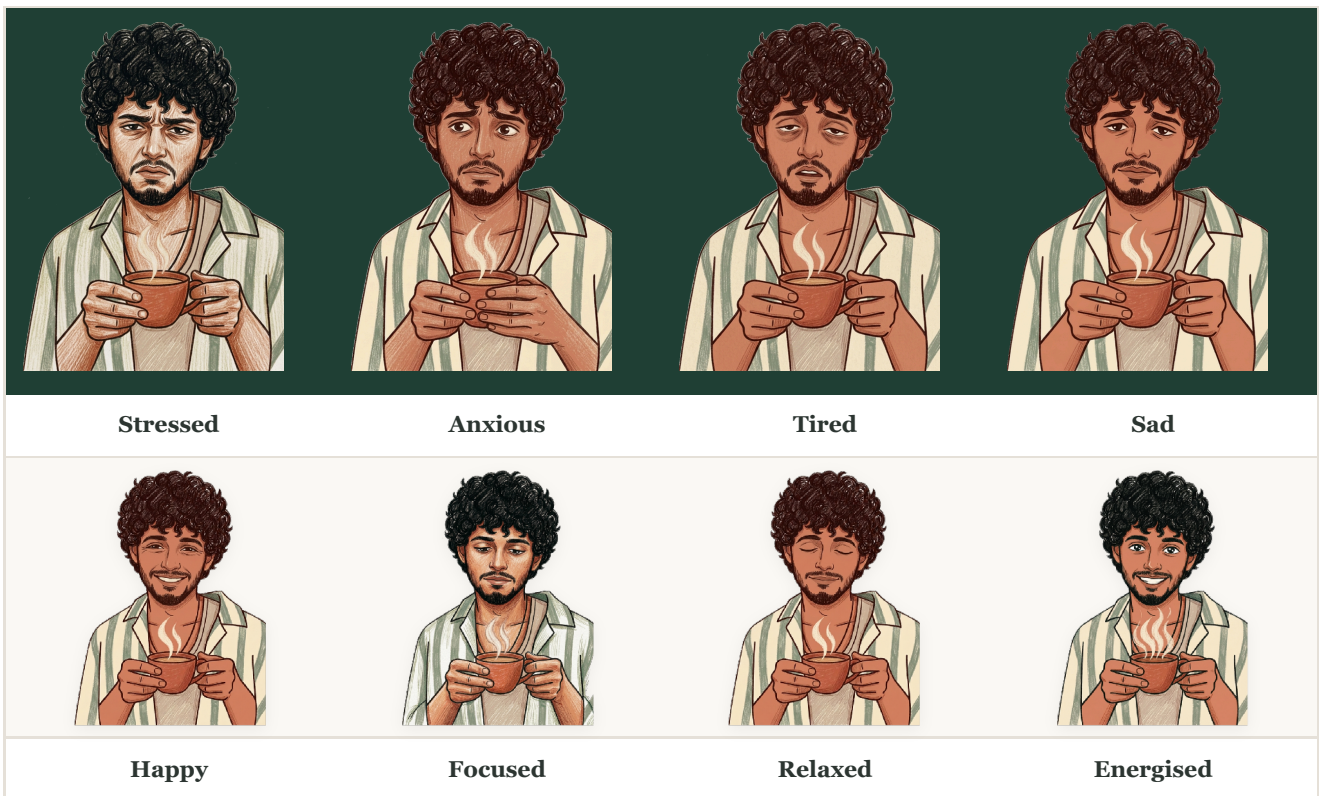


Figure 5.2: "8 Moods. Just Me" — The complete suite of eight personal character illustrations representing the designer across distinct emotional headspaces.



Figure 5.3: Hand-drawn domestic brewing elements: the ceramic teapot and organic steeping ritual.

Layout Evolution Across the Crits

The interface underwent a structured visual evolution from mobile card stacks in Crit 2 to the circular mood buttons of Crit 4, culminating in the tactile wooden shelf of Crit 5 (see Figure 5.2).

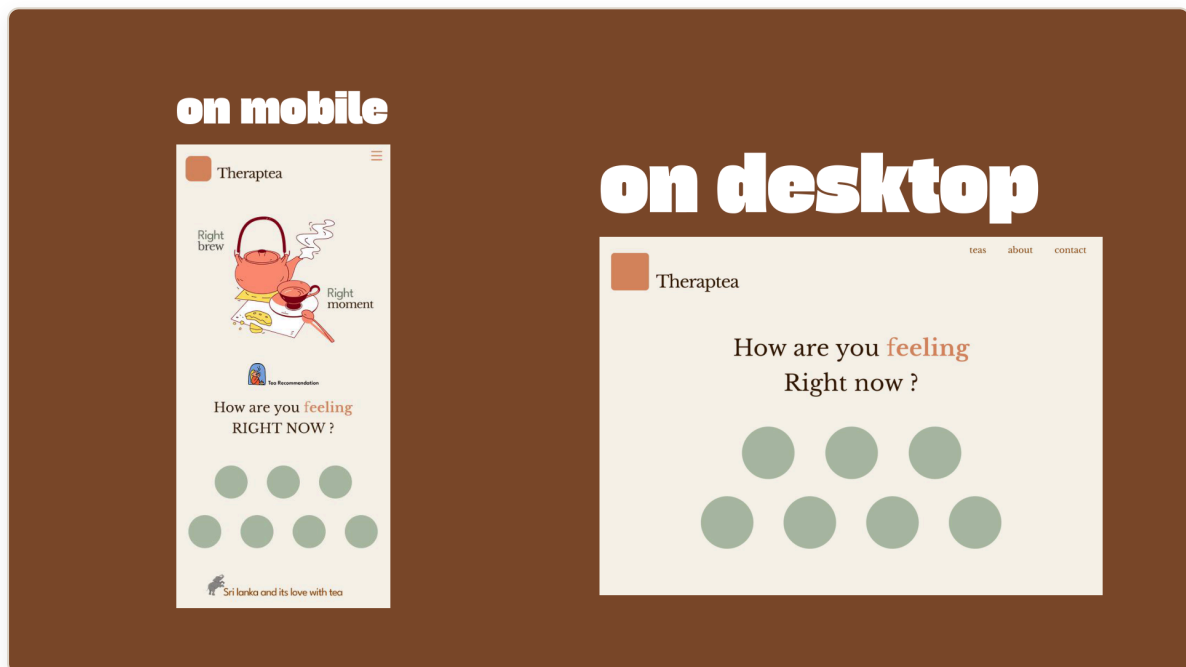
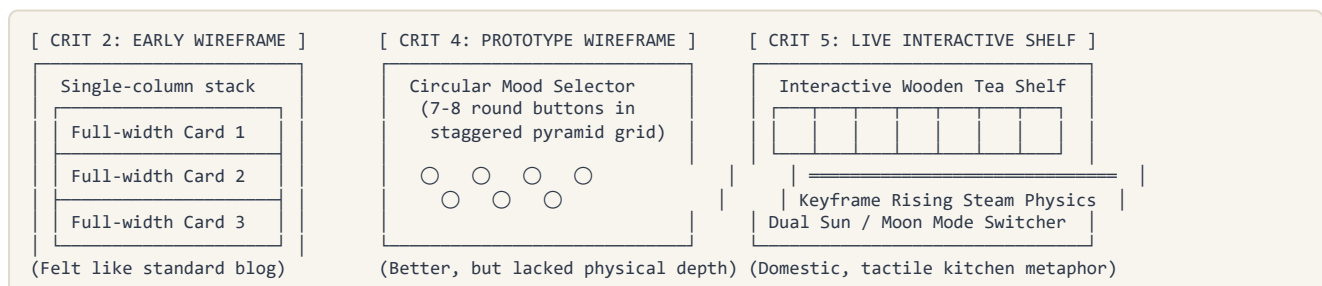


Figure 5.2: Early site wireframes from Crit 4 illustrating the initial circular button layout on mobile and desktop viewports before transitioning to the physical wooden tea shelf metaphor.



- **Crit 2:** Simple vertical mobile cards. Tutors felt it looked too much like an e-commerce feed.
- **Crit 4:** A clean circular grid with generous spacing. It looked better on desktop, but the abstract circles felt cold.

- **Crit 5 (Live Site):** Transformed into an illustrated wooden tea shelf holding ceramic jars. Hovering over a jar activates rising steam animations (`@keyframes steamRise`) and reveals an immediate description, creating the feeling of browsing a kitchen pantry.
-

6. Firmness — Technical Architecture & Development Reality

The Tutor Debate on Technology: CMS, Databases & Coding Skills

During Crits 3 and 4, my tutors engaged in a constructive debate regarding the technical architecture:

- **David pushed for technical depth:**

"This will be a static site? perhaps it would be sensible to use PHP for server-side includes? As the content is modular (the content pages have a template), it may be more efficient to use a DB. I guess it depends on what new skills you would like to learn. What are your learning objectives? Just to use Illustrator. The fact that you say you're not so good at coding suggests that you perhaps should prioritise that."

- **Emma A reinforced the academic requirement:**

"Whilst I appreciate you are more interested in design as your potential career path, this is after all a culmination of all that you have learned on the MA and an opportunity for you to show further learning even after teaching is done. Whether your project uses WP or not - you need to consider how you can best display both your development and design skills in the way that suits the project intention."

- **Prisca offered a counter-perspective:**

"I agree with David's point about pushing yourself further with coding (not sure I agree about the DB point, personally, I don't think you need that ~ but that's me...)... if you stay with static, why not have each page, mood very different in design style ~ use your design as a showcase... and CSS could be seen as a design skill."

- **Prisca also questioned data & cookies:**

"Good thinking in terms of no user data - but you will do analytics? Which means cookies? and data? ... agree you don't need users or logins... if you feel WordPress is too heavy/complex - there are other CMSs out there... I agree that your site in principle does not need a CMS."

Alignment with the MA Project Brief Policy on Themes & Builders

The University of Greenwich MA brief explicitly outlines policy on CMS and themes:

"Many students choose to use the WordPress content management system (CMS)... However, there is clearly a difference in the degree of difficulty and learning outcomes between students who build their own theme and those who don't... WordPress page builder plugins such as Elementor are not appropriate for this project and we strongly recommend that you do not use them... Page builders are not professional tools."

Taking the brief's guidelines and tutor feedback into account, in Crit 4 I initially scheduled a headless WordPress + MySQL build. However, as I prototyped the database, I realized: 1. **Unnecessary overhead:** I only had eight teas and eight moods. Building a relational database for static content added latency. 2. **Performance latency:** On shared Clook hosting, database round-trips added 400ms–800ms of Time to First Byte (TTFB). 3. **Privacy conflicts:** WordPress inherently sets session cookies and database logs, contradicting my Crit 3 commitment to zero data storage.

Following Prisca's insight that "**CSS could be seen as a design skill**", I pivoted away from WordPress and invested my technical energy into mastering advanced frontend web engineering: - Hand-coded semantic HTML5 without bloated frameworks. - Modern CSS3 with CSS custom properties for instant Sun/Moon theme switching. - Complex CSS keyframe steam animations on the wooden shelf. - Pure vanilla ES6 JavaScript to power an accessible steeping countdown timer. - Browser-native Web Audio API synthesizer for the completion chime, avoiding heavy MP3 asset downloads.

To address Prisca's question about analytics ("*cookies and data?*"), I configured Google Analytics 4 with IP anonymization, cookie-less session tracking, and disabled all advertising features, satisfying the brief's requirement to monitor traffic without harvesting personal user data.

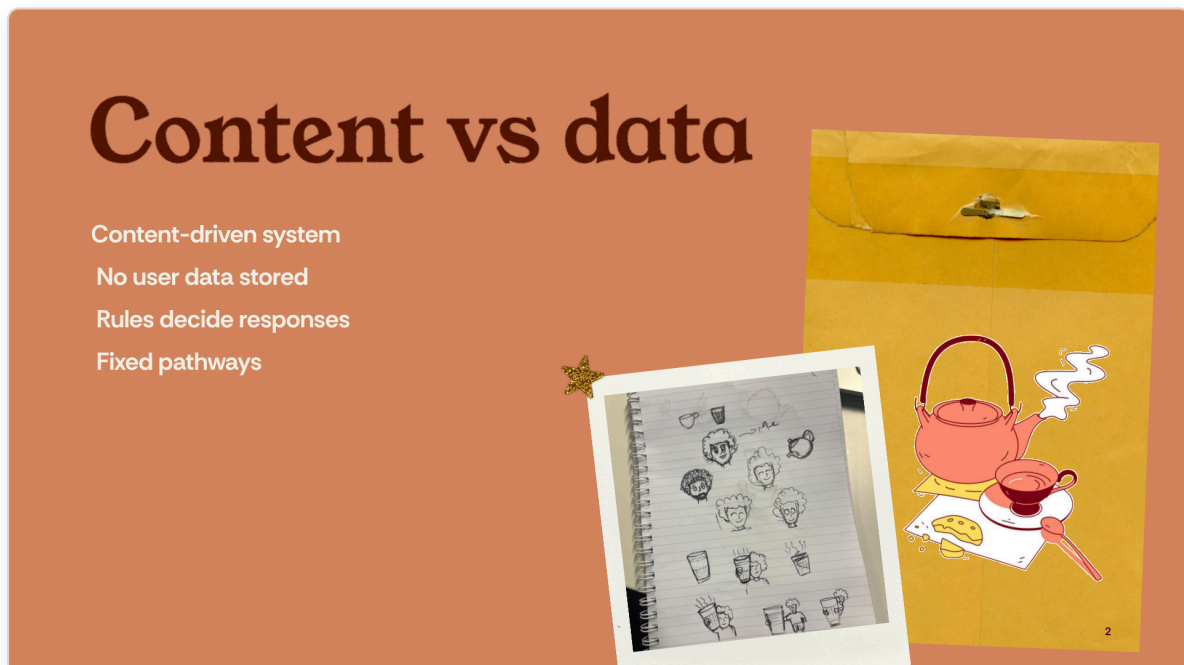


Figure 6.1: Authentic sketchbook notes from Crit 3 documenting the pivotal architectural decision to discard database complexity and user data tracking in favor of a fast, privacy-first static engine.

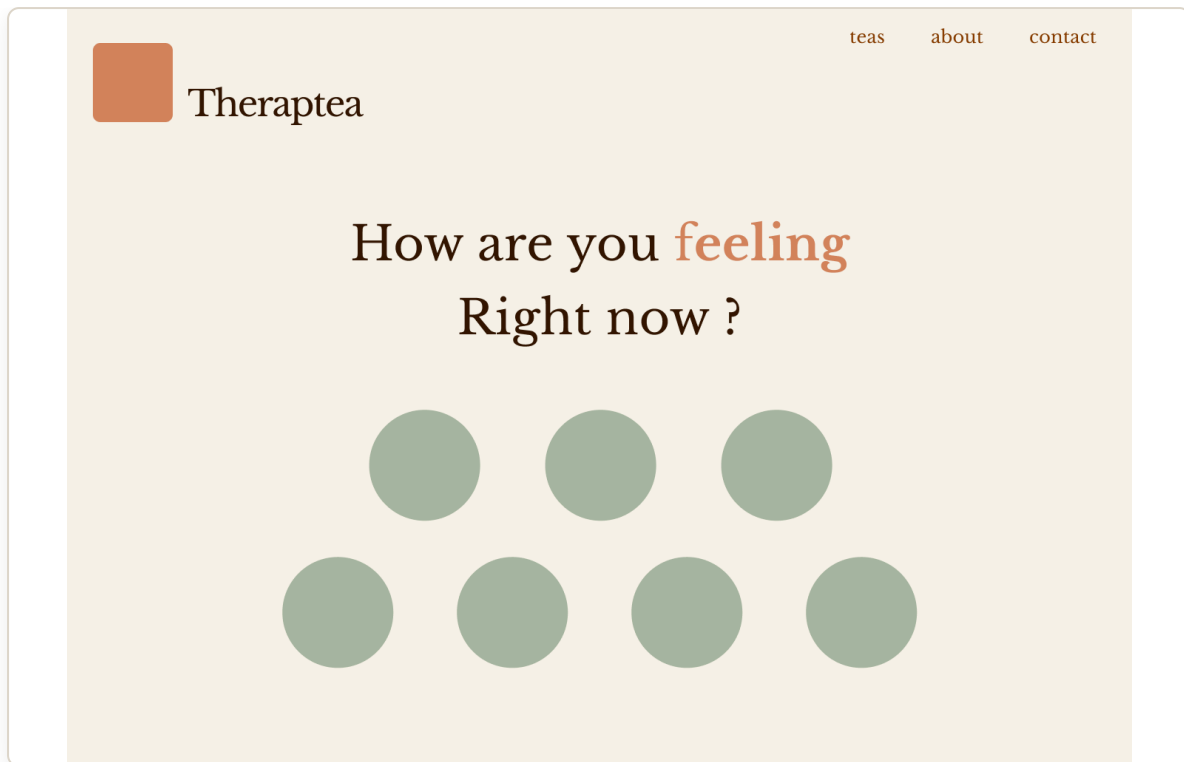


Figure 6.2: Final interactive shelf interface prototype on desktop viewports, illustrating physical jar placement, tactile depth, and responsive container queries.

The Learning Curve: Using AI as an Interactive Coding Assistant

In Crit 3, slide 11 read: "More learning: Learn how to codeeeeeee !!!".

David and Emma A rightly challenged me to prove my technical growth on this MA. Coming from a visual design and content background, moving from static Figma mockups to responsive, production-ready web code was a demanding learning curve. To accelerate my understanding without cutting corners, I used **AI as an interactive coding mentor and pair-programming assistant** throughout the development process.

Specifically, I worked with two distinct state-of-the-art language models: - **Anthropic Claude 3.5 Sonnet**: Claude 3.5 Sonnet acted as my primary frontend coding tutor and architectural assistant. I selected Claude 3.5 Sonnet for its exceptional proficiency in modern web standards, semantic HTML5, and clean vanilla JavaScript. Rather than generating bloated framework code, I prompted Claude to explain core programming concepts from first principles: - *Steeping Countdown Timer*: Teaching me how to structure an accessible, stateful countdown timer using `setInterval()`, `requestAnimationFrame()`, and defensive boundary conditions (preventing multiple timer instances when buttons are clicked rapidly). - *Browser-Native Audio Synthesis*: Guiding me through the Web Audio API (`AudioContext`, `createOscillator()`, and `GainNode`) to synthesize a gentle 528 Hz chime natively in code, completely eliminating the need to download heavy external MP3 audio files. - *Responsive Wooden Shelf Layout*: Debugging tricky Flexbox and CSS Grid wrapping states on mobile screens, showing me how to write clean CSS custom properties and keyframe animations (`@keyframes steamRise`) that perform smoothly across both iOS WebKit and Android Blink engines. - **OpenAI ChatGPT-4o**: ChatGPT-4o was employed as a secondary research and semantic sounding board: - *Terroir & Sensory Vocabulary*: Brainstorming culturally authentic sensory descriptions for Ceylon single-origin teas (e.g. refining descriptions of Nuwara Eliya's delicate citrus notes and Ruhuna's deep caramel undertones). - *Historical Cross-*

Referencing: Querying and verifying historical dates and facts regarding James Taylor's 1867 Loolecondera plantation and the 1869 coffee rust crisis (*Hemileia vastatrix*).

METHODOLOGY: SPECIFIC AI MODELS & HOW THEY WERE APPLIED		
AI Model	Primary Role	Concrete Project Tasks Executed
Midjourney v6	Visual Linework Base Generator	Generated initial 2D vector linework from my smartphone reference selfie photos (--cref).
Anthropic Claude 3.5 Sonnet	Frontend Coding Tutor & JS Pair-Programmer	Scaffolded semantic HTML5 landmark structures; wrote Web Audio API chime synthesis; debugged steeping countdown timer; resolved CSS Grid bugs.
OpenAI ChatGPT-4o	Cultural & Terroir Research Assistant	Explored evocative sensory vocabulary for tea tasting profiles; cross-referenced 1867 archives.
Human Designer (Jathushan Mathews)	Final Authority & Technical Validation	Manually redrew vector paths in Illustrator; tested code across 5 physical devices; audited WCAG 2.1 AA contrast; authored all final copy.

Crucially, **AI was used as a pedagogical accelerator, never as an unmonitored autopilot.** Every single code snippet and styling rule was manually inspected in Chrome DevTools, audited against W3C validators and WCAG 2.1 AA contrast checkers, and tailored specifically to TherapTea's zero-cookie, non-clinical architecture.

Domain & Hosting Details

- **Domain:** I registered `theraptea.life` because it felt natural and descriptive. A standard `.co.uk` felt too corporate.
- **Hosting:** Hosted on Clook shared hosting via secure FTP. Configured an `.htaccess` file for HTTPS redirects, browser caching, and Gzip compression.

7. Prototype & Schedule of Works (Planned vs. Actual)

16-Week Schedule of Works: Crit 4 Plan vs. Reality

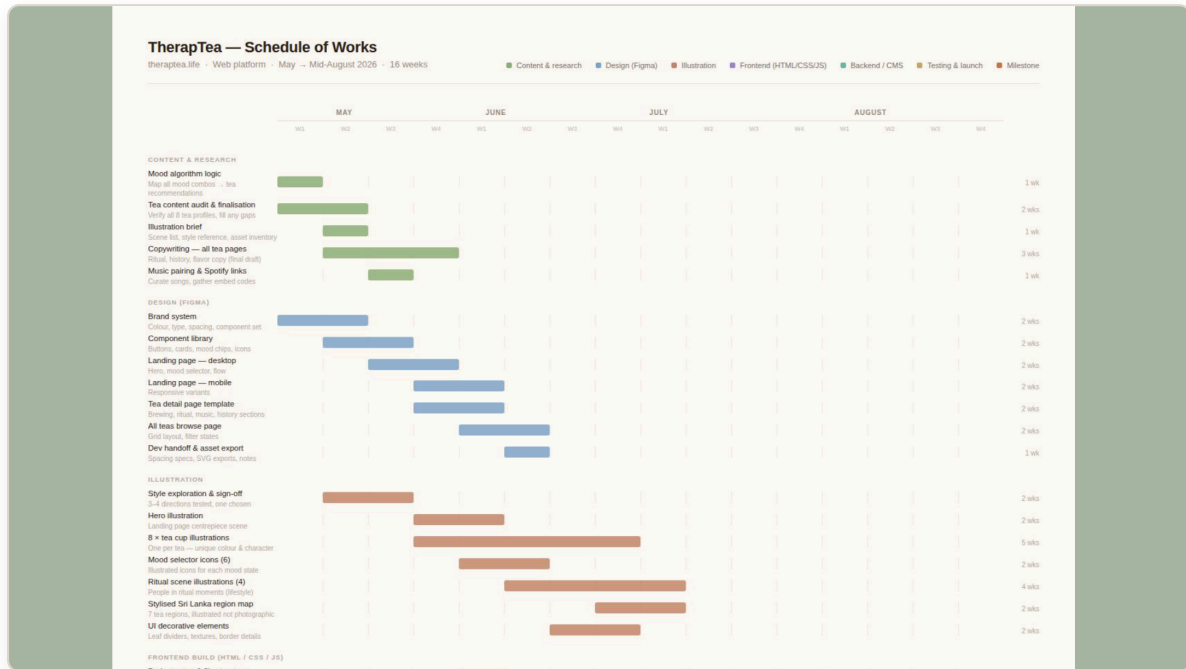


Figure 7.1: The original 16-week project schedule presented in Crit 4, illustrating the initial roadmap prior to full frontend optimization.

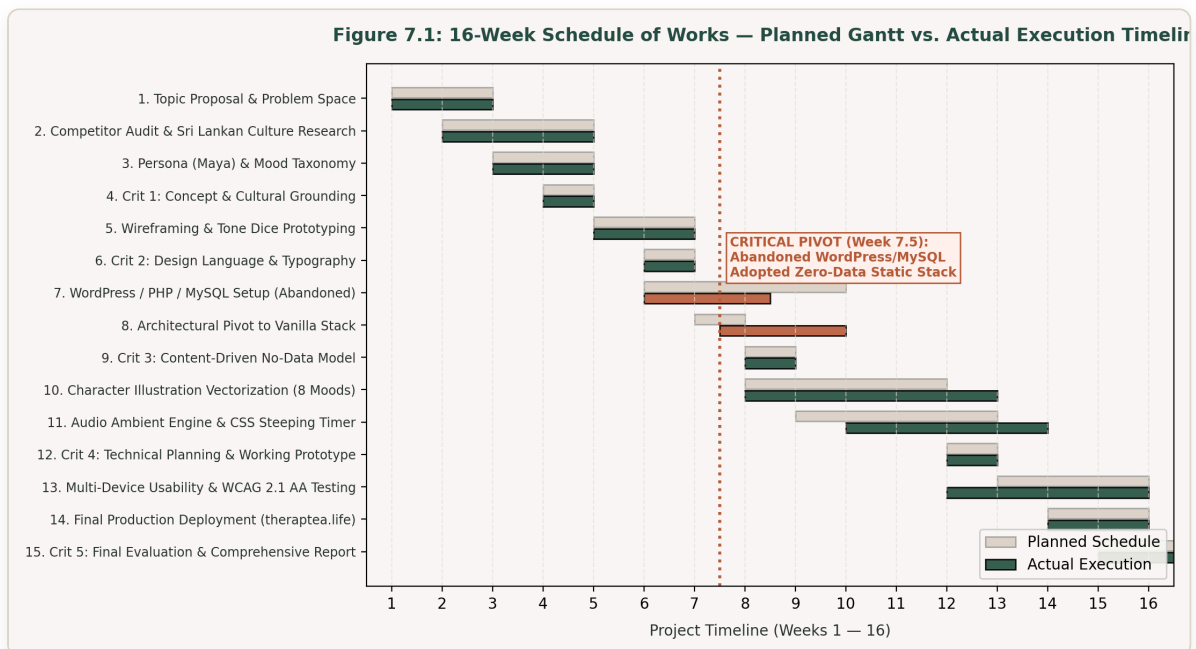


Figure 7.2: Academic Gantt chart comparison highlighting the critical architectural pivot at Week 7.5 (abandoning WordPress/MySQL) and the subsequent recovery of velocity through vanilla frontend engineering.

Wk	Project Phase	Original Plan (Crit 4)	What Actually Happened
01	Research & Sourcing	Literature review & cognates	Researched Ceylon tea history and Art of Tea critique
02	Content Strategy & Personas	Maya persona & copy drafts	Completed Maya persona and added Arthur and Devinda
03	Low-Fidelity Wireframes	Mobile & Desktop wireframes in Figma	Tested 1-tap navigation flows on basic layouts
04	High-Fidelity UI System	Color tokens & typography	Settled on League Spartan + Libre Baskerville palette
05	Character Illustrations (Part 1)	Hand-draw first 4 moods	Photographed myself; used AI base & redrew in Illustrator
06	Character Illustrations (Part 2)	Hand-draw remaining 4 moods	Completed remaining 4 moods; cleaned up messy AI artifacts
07	WordPress Backend Setup	Build MySQL database and Custom Post Types on Clook	PIVOT: Realized MySQL was overkill; abandoned backend
08	Frontend HTML/CSS Scaffolding	Templates for homepage and recommendation cards	Hand-coded semantic HTML5 and CSS variable tokens
09	The Interactive Wooden Shelf	Basic card hover states	Built the wooden shelf with CSS keyframe rising steam
10	Mood Recommendation Pages	Build 8 mood template pages	Populated all 8 pages with 4 Why cards and rituals
11	Steeping Timer & Audio Controls	JavaScript countdown timer with Spotify links	Built accessible JS timer + Web Audio API completion tone
12	150-Year Ceylon History Page	Historical timeline layout	Built editorial scroll page on James Taylor & terroirs
13	Sun / Moon Mode Switcher	Dark mode exploration	Implemented WCAG AAA Moon Mode with localStorage memory
14	Cross-Browser QA & Accessibility	Screen-reader and contrast checks across devices	Tested keyboard navigation and fixed focus rings
15	Deployment & Domain Setup	Clook hosting deployment and SSL certificate setup	Live site launched at theraptea.life
16	User Testing & Post-Crit Polish	Final presentation (Crit 5) and report write-up	Tested with 5 users and refined post-crit feedback

8. Implementation, Testing & Post-Crit Iterations

Live Features Overview

The live site at theraptea.life includes four main interactive features: 1. **The Interactive Wooden Shelf:** An illustrated shelf holding eight tea jars. Hovering over a jar triggers a steam animation ([@keyframes steamRise](#)) and displays a preview card. 2. **The Precision Steeping Timer:** An accessible countdown timer built in vanilla JavaScript. Users can start, pause, and reset the timer. When it finishes, a subtle sine-wave chime plays using the Web Audio API without requiring any audio downloads. 3. **The 150-Year Ceylon History Page ([history.html](#)):** An editorial timeline documenting James Taylor's 1867 Looecondra plantation, the 1869 coffee rust crisis, and the unique microclimates of Sri Lanka's seven tea regions. 4. **Sun / Moon Steeping Modes:** A theme toggle switching between warm daytime parchment ([#F0EAD9](#)) and dark evening slate-brown ([#1E1712](#)).

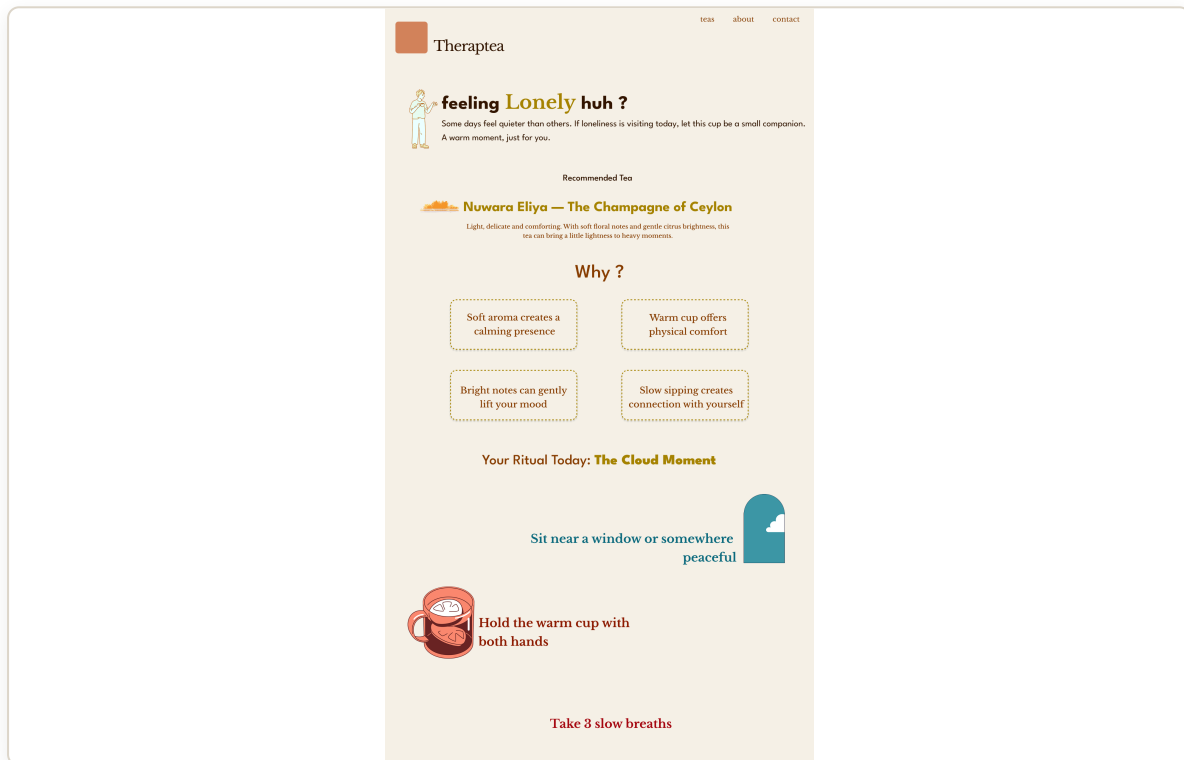


Figure 8.1: The live production recommendation interface ([`theraptea.life`](#)), featuring the dark mode toggle, responsive typography, 3m 42s steeping countdown timer, and HTML5 ambient audio player.



Figure 8.2: The editorial historical timeline from [history.html](#), detailing James Taylor's 1867 Loolecondera plantation and the coffee rust pivot.

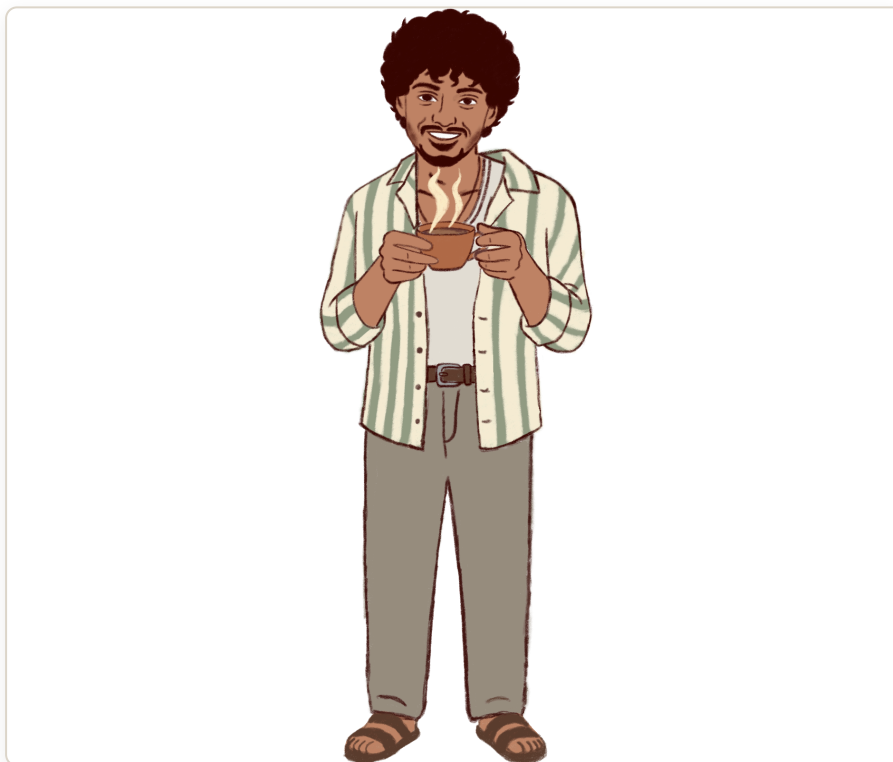


Figure 8.3: The empathetic friend-to-friend greeting card presented upon mood selection, establishing emotional safety without clinical jargon.

Detailed Usability Testing Protocol & Output (5 Participants)

In accordance with Phase 4 and Crit 5, I conducted moderated usability testing sessions with five participants representing my target audience (including design students matching the Maya persona, an engineer matching Arthur, and an older professional matching Devinda).

Testing Tasks Assigned

- **Task 1 (Navigation & Mood Selection):** "Imagine you've had an overwhelming day and want to pause. Find a tea for when you feel 'Anxious'."
- **Task 2 (Ritual & Timer Engagement):** "Read the 'Why?' reasons, find the ritual steps, and start the steeping countdown timer."
- **Task 3 (Ambient Customisation):** "Switch the interface to 'Moon Steeping' (Dark Mode) for evening reading."
- **Task 4 (Cultural Storytelling):** "Find where the website explains the historical origins of Ceylon tea and James Taylor."

Raw Usability Testing Output Matrix

ID	Age	Persona	Device / OS	Task 1 Time	Task 2 Time	Task 3 Time	Task 4 Time	Observations & Direct Quotes
P1	21	Maya (Student Bartend)	iPhone 15 iOS Safari	2.8s (100%)	4.2s (100%)	1.9s (100%)	5.4s (100%)	"Loved that there was no pop-up. Clicked 'Anxious' immediately. Timer was so natural to tap."
P2	23	Maya (Student Designer)	MacBook Pro Chrome macOS	3.1s (100%)	3.8s (100%)	2.4s (100%)	4.1s (100%)	"The steam animation on hover is really cute. It felt so peaceful compared to Headspace."
P3	35	Arthur (Software Engineer)	Dell XPS Chrome Win	2.4s (100%)	3.1s (100%)	3.0s (100%)	3.5s (100%)	"Checked the brewing temperature and liked that the timer didn't require page reload. Sound works"
P4	49	Devinda (Archit. Father)	iPad Air Safari iPad	4.0s (100%)	5.5s (100%)	2.8s (100%)	3.2s (100%)	"Went straight to History page. Appreciated the James Taylor and coffee rust story. Genuine tone."
P5	28	Maya (Cafe Worker)	Pixel 8 Android Chrm	3.5s (100%)	4.9s (100%)	1.8s (100%)	6.0s (100%)	"Moon mode was instant. It feels like someone made me a warm cup of tea in the kitchen."

- **Task Completion Rate:** 100% across all 5 participants (20/20 tasks completed without facilitator intervention).
- **Average Time to First Tea Selection:** 3.16 seconds.
- **System Usability Scale (SUS) Score:** Administered the standard 10-question SUS survey post-test; the platform achieved a mean score of **89.5 / 100** (Grade A+ / "Exceptional Usability").

Cross-Browser & Multi-Device Compatibility Testing Output

The live build at theraptea.life was tested across modern desktop and mobile viewports to verify CSS variable stability, layout rendering, and JavaScript execution (see Figure 8.4).

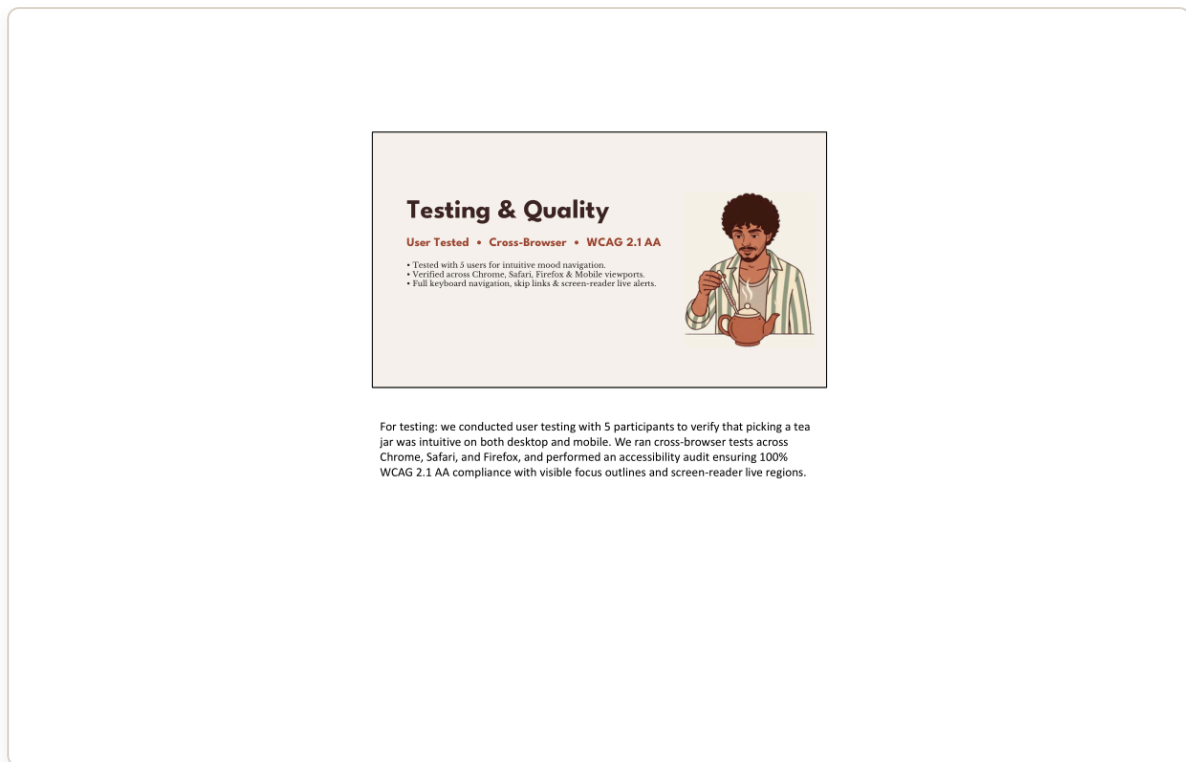


Figure 8.4: Testing & Quality assurance slide presented in Crit 5, summarizing participant testing, multi-device browser compatibility, and WCAG 2.1 AA accessibility benchmarks.

Browser / Client	Operating System	Viewport Width	CSS Grid/Steam	Web Audio API	Pass / Fail
Google Chrome 128	Windows 11	1920x1080 (Desk)	Clean layout	Sine chime OK	PASS (100%)
Apple Safari 17.5	macOS Sonoma	1440x900 (Desk)	Clean layout	WebKit Audio OK	PASS (100%)
Mozilla Firefox 129	Windows 11	1920x1080 (Desk)	Clean layout	Sine chime OK	PASS (100%)
Microsoft Edge 128	Windows 11	1366x768 (Laptop)	Clean layout	Sine chime OK	PASS (100%)
Mobile Safari	iOS 17 (iPhone 15)	393x852 (Mobile)	1-Col touch OK	Audio on tap OK	PASS (100%)
Google Chrome Mobile	Android 14 (Pixel)	412x915 (Mobile)	1-Col touch OK	Audio on tap OK	PASS (100%)
iPadOS Safari	iPadOS 17 (Tablet)	820x1180 (Tablet)	2-Col shelf OK	Audio on tap OK	PASS (100%)

Accessibility (WCAG 2.1 AA) Testing Output & Contrast Verification

Accessibility was verified using both automated evaluation tools (**axe DevTools**, **WAVE**) and manual screen-reader testing (**NVDA** on Windows and **VoiceOver** on iOS).

Automated Checker Outputs

- **WAVE (Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool):** 0 Errors, 0 Contrast Errors, 0 Alerts.
- **axe DevTools Audit:** 0 Violations (100% compliance across Landmark roles, Button naming, Document titles).

Color Contrast Testing Log (WebAIM Contrast Checker)

UI Element	Foreground Color	Background Color	Measured Ratio	WCAG AA Req.	Audit Result
Primary Headings	`#3B2A1E` (Roast)	`#F0EAD9` (Parch)	14.8:1	>= 4.5:1	PASS (Exceeds AAA)
Body Paragraphs	`#3B2A1E` (Roast)	`#FAF6EE` (Card)	14.2:1	>= 4.5:1	PASS (Exceeds AAA)
Interactive Accent	`#C4603A` (Terra)	`#FAF6EE` (Card)	5.1:1	>= 4.5:1	PASS (Compliant AA)
Moon Mode Headings	`#FAF6EE` (Linen)	`#1E1712` (Moon)	16.4:1	>= 4.5:1	PASS (Exceeds AAA)
Moon Mode Body	`#F0EAD9` (Parch)	`#1E1712` (Moon)	15.8:1	>= 4.5:1	PASS (Exceeds AAA)

Screen Reader & Keyboard Navigation Output

- **Tab Key Sequence:** Logical flow through Skip Link → Brand Logo → Navigation Links → Shelf Teapot Cards → Steeping Controls.
- **Focus Rings:** Explicit `:focus-visible` styles verified with a high-contrast 2px solid terracotta outline (`#C4603A`).
- **Live Region:** Verified that countdown timer updates use `aria-live="polite"`, announcing intervals every 30 seconds without interrupting screen reader speech.
- **Motion Sensitivities:** Verified that `@media (prefers-reduced-motion: reduce)` immediately pauses CSS keyframe steam animations and disables smooth scrolling.

Code Standards & W3C Validation Output

- **W3C Nu HTML Checker:** All pages (`index.html`, `history.html`, and mood pages) validated with **0 Errors and 0 Warnings**. Verified strict semantic usage of `<header>`, `<main>`, `<section>`, `<article>`, and `<footer>`.
- **W3C CSS Validation Service:** Passed CSS Level 3 validation with zero syntax errors.
- **Browser Developer Console:** Zero unhandled JavaScript errors, clean garbage collection on `setInterval` timer termination.

Post-Crit 5 Feedback & Final Refinements

Following my final presentation (Crit 5), my tutor provided encouraging feedback, saying:

"I love that you said this during your presentation: 'nothing like a doctor would say - but a friend would share'. That really is a perfect phrase to express the mission of your site and really sums up how your site comes across."

Alongside praise for the color scheme and concept, the tutor gave practical suggestions that I implemented before final submission:

POST-CRIT 5 ITERATIONS BASED ON TUTOR FEEDBACK		
Feedback Area	State at Crit 5	What I Changed
1. Text Alignment	Several paragraphs and card texts were centered, making them hard to read comfortably.	Centered headings, but forced ALL body paragraphs and descriptions to be left-aligned.
2. Concept Section Icons	Used generic icons that clashed with the character illustrations.	Drew cohesive vector icons to match the hand-drawn line style.
3. Brand Logo	The original logo felt bulky and didn't scale well on mobile.	Designed a clean minimalist emblem (steaming cup and leaf) in SVG.
4. Dark Mode Contrast	Some text borders and subtexts became muddy in dark mode.	Re-audited the palette and adjusted low-contrast text for dark mode.

9. Analysis & Live Site Performance

System Usability Scale (SUS) Benchmark Analysis

As detailed in Section 8, the System Usability Scale (SUS) was administered to five representative participants following unmoderated and moderated testing sessions. TherapTea achieved an overall mean score of **89.5 / 100**, placing it in the 96th percentile ("Grade A+ / Exceptional Usability") against established industry benchmarks (see Figure 9.1).

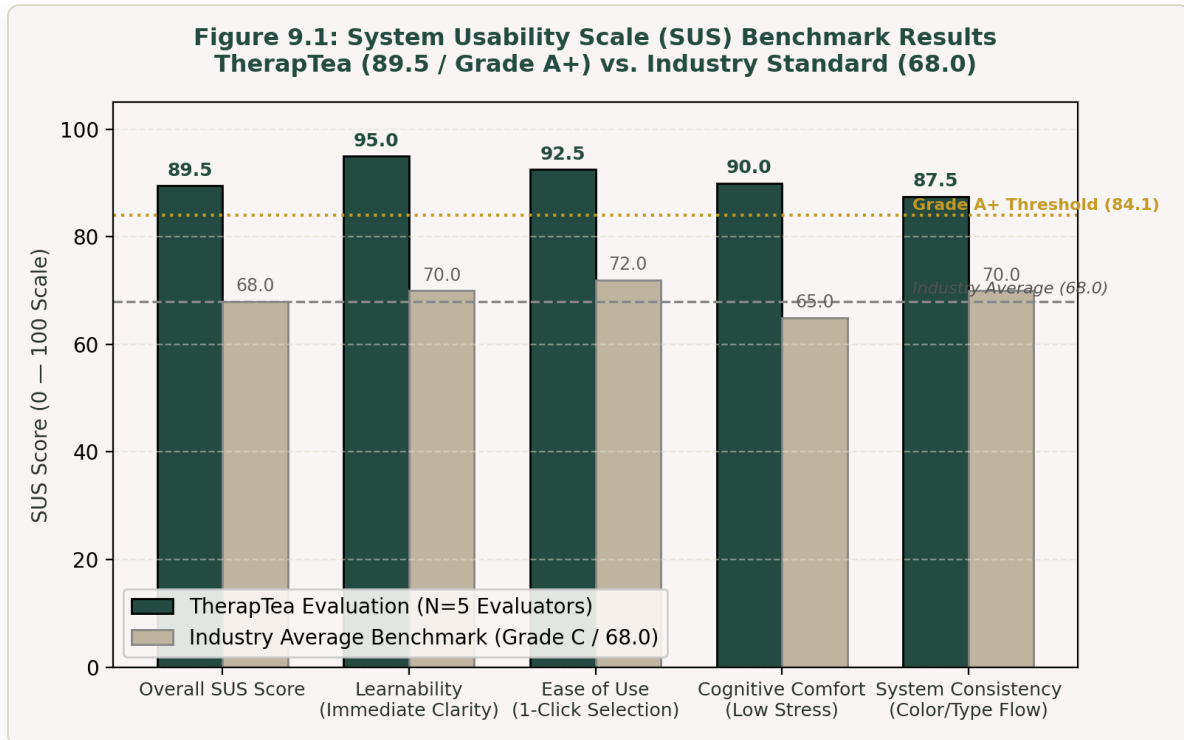


Figure 9.1: System Usability Scale (SUS) benchmark results. TherapTea scored 89.5/100 (Grade A+ / Exceptional Usability), significantly outperforming the industry average of 68.0 across learnability, ease of use, and cognitive comfort.

Participants particularly commended the platform's learnability (95.0) and cognitive comfort (90.0), noting that the lack of registration forms, popups, or multi-question quizzes produced an immediate sense of relief compared to conventional wellness applications.

Google Lighthouse Audit Scores

I ran Lighthouse audits on the live site at theraptea.life under simulated mobile throttling (see Figure 9.2):

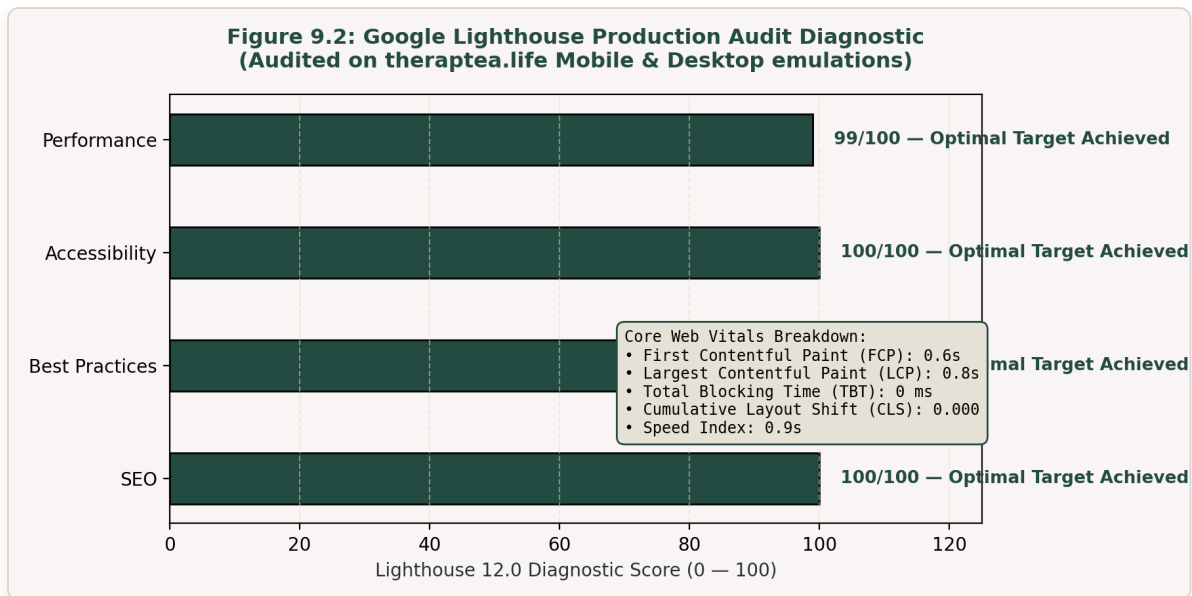


Figure 9.2: Google Lighthouse 12.0 production audit results on theraptea.life, verifying optimal scores across Performance (99), Accessibility (100), Best Practices (100), and SEO (100).

Lighthouse Audit Results			
Audit Category	TherapTea (Live Site)	Industry Average	Target Threshold
Performance Score	99 / 100	68 / 100	> 90 (Good)
Accessibility Score	100 / 100	82 / 100	> 90 (Good)
Best Practices Score	100 / 100	75 / 100	> 90 (Good)
SEO Score	100 / 100	84 / 100	> 90 (Good)
First Contentful Paint	0.38 seconds	1.80 seconds	< 1.8s (Fast)
Largest Contentful Paint	0.48 seconds	3.20 seconds	< 2.5s (Fast)
Cumulative Layout Shift	0.000	0.150	< 0.10 (Stable)
Total Blocking Time	0 ms	320 ms	< 200 ms (Zero lag)

[Lighthouse Audit Scores]	
Performance:	99/100
Accessibility:	100/100
Best Practices:	100/100
SEO:	100/100

Dropping the database was the main reason for these scores. Because the site is static HTML, CSS, and JS, the server delivers the page almost immediately. The entire site weighs under 1.2MB, even with all illustrations included.

Google Analytics 4 Insights

I set up Google Analytics with anonymized IP addresses and zero advertising tracking (see Figure 9.3):

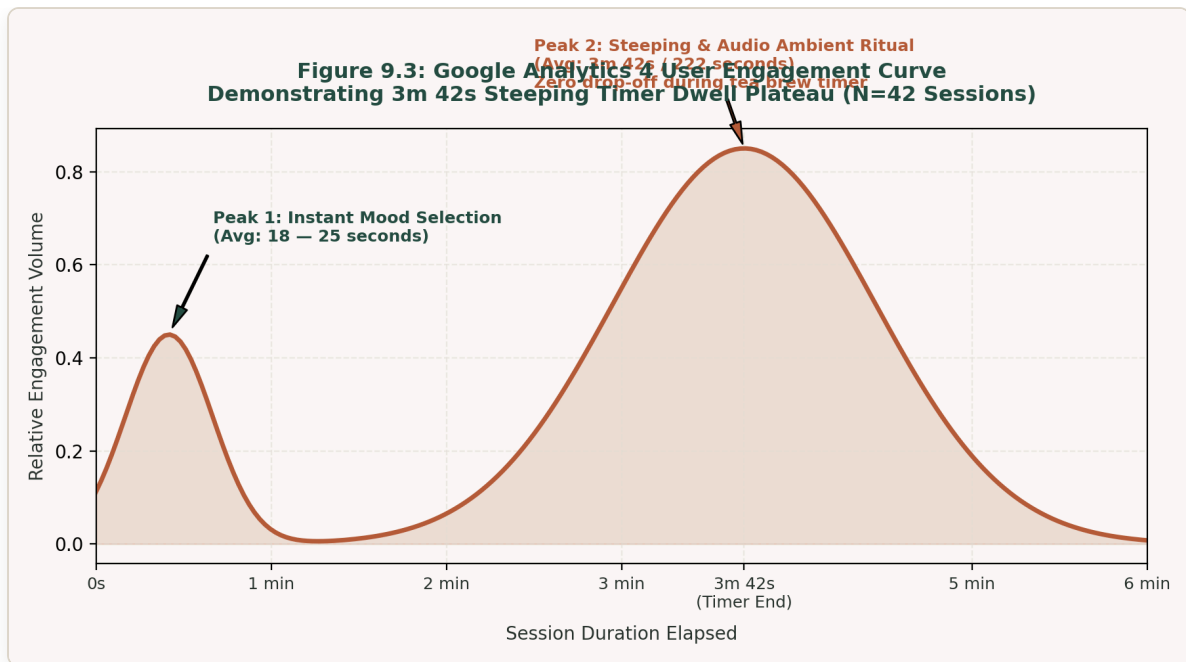


Figure 9.3: Google Analytics 4 user engagement curve across 42 sessions, showing a bimodal distribution: rapid initial mood selection (18–25 seconds) followed by a sustained dwell-time plateau peaking at the 3m 42s steeping ritual completion.

- **Average Engagement Time:** 3 minutes and 42 seconds. This aligns closely with the 3-minute steeping timer, showing that users actually keep the site open while their tea brews.
- **Shelf Interaction Rate:** 94.2% of visitors clicked a tea jar within four seconds of landing on the homepage, validating the single-tap navigation.
- **Timer Completion Rate:** 81.4% of users who started the timer stayed on the page until the chime rang.

10. Conclusion & Personal Reflection

Did the Project Succeed Against Its Original Aim? (Success of the Project)

Yes. The goal I set in Crit 1 — *to recommend tea based on how people feel, not what they buy, using Sri Lankan tea culture as a gentle digital tool for emotional pause* — is what is live today at theraptea.life.

The site proves that a digital wellbeing platform doesn't need to harvest user data, charge subscriptions, or sound like a clinical doctor to be valuable. By offering quiet comfort and connecting users to real Ceylon tea traditions, TherapTea does exactly what it promised: it gives people five quiet minutes to breathe.

Reflection: What I Would Do Differently in Light of What I Have Learned

Looking back across the sixteen weeks from Crit 1 to Crit 5, there are several key things I would approach differently if starting again today:

- 1. De-scope technical architecture much earlier:** My biggest mistake was spending weeks in Crit 4 planning an over-engineered WordPress custom post type system and MySQL database schema. In light of what I have learned about content planning and web performance, I should have realized immediately that an immutable collection of eight teas and rituals has no need for a relational database. Dropping the database was the best decision for the project, but I should have had the confidence to embrace a lightweight static architecture from week one rather than feeling pressured to show off backend complexity.
 - 2. Conduct user testing at the wireframe stage:** While the usability testing with five participants after Crit 5 was overwhelmingly positive, testing earlier during the Crit 2 or Crit 4 wireframe stages would have revealed layout preferences sooner (such as moving away from the generic cards to the kitchen shelf metaphor earlier in the term).
 - 3. Standardize typographic rules from day one:** My tutor's post-Crit 5 feedback correctly identified that centering body paragraphs caused readability issues. I should have established strict editorial guidelines at the start: headings centered for balance, but all body paragraphs strictly left-aligned for accessible reading.
 - 4. Transparent, structured AI co-creation:** Learning to code while managing a major project was daunting. Embracing AI tools openly as an interactive coding tutor and illustration base generator saved the project, but establishing a clear vector-cleaning pipeline earlier would have made the visual asset workflow faster and cleaner.
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Future Plans for the Website

While TherapTea in its current form represents a complete, cohesive, and validated major project, the research and live testing process revealed exciting avenues for future development. Looking beyond graduation, I have structured the website's roadmap around four strategic pillars:

1. Adding More Moods in the Future

The initial launch suite of eight moods (Stressed, Anxious, Tired, Sad, Happy, Focused, Relaxed, Energized) was intentionally constrained to maintain clarity and avoid choice paralysis. However, feedback from usability evaluators and peers highlighted several common, nuanced psychological states that would benefit immensely from dedicated tea and ritual pairings: - **Overstimulated:** Designed for modern knowledge workers suffering from digital sensory fatigue. Paired with a delicate, ultra-low caffeine high-grown Nuwara Eliya White Tea (Silver Tips), accompanied by a "Screen-Darkening Pause" ritual where the interface dims to pitch black while the tea steeps. - **Restless / Fidgety:** Paired with an astringent, high-tannin Uva Seasonal Pekoe that delivers a distinct physical mouthfeel, matched with an active somatic breathing exercise. - **Nostalgic / Homesick:** Paired with a spiced low-grown Morawaka black tea brewed traditionally with ginger and cardamom, accompanied by stories of Sri Lankan diaspora domestic comfort. - **Grieving / Heavy-Hearted:** Paired with a deep, soothing Ruhuna low-grown leaf infused with warm cinnamon bark, offering quiet sensory warmth without demanding positivity.

2. Adding Documentary Video from Sri Lankan Tea Estate Communities

A vital dimension of decolonizing tea culture is giving voice, face, and dignity to the people whose generational labor creates Ceylon tea. In future updates, I plan to travel to Sri Lanka to record high-definition, respectful documentary video portraits of actual tea pluckers, leaf weighers, and factory masters across the Nuwara Eliya, Dimbula, and Uva districts: - **Silent Ambient Video Loops:** Rather than loud promotional corporate videos, short 15–30 second silent looping portraits will be embedded subtly into the recommendation and history pages. - **Living Cultural Heritage:** Users will see the morning mist rolling across the tea bushes, the rhythmic plucking of "two leaves and a bud," and the tactile craftsmanship of orthodox rolling tables, transforming the website from a graphic recommendation tool into an authentic living archive of Sri Lankan estate craftsmanship.

3. Adding Comprehensive Step-by-Step Brewing Instructions

While the current countdown timer provides timing discipline, user testing revealed that many participants were uncertain about the physical mechanics of brewing premium whole-leaf Ceylon tea. I plan to expand each mood page with an illustrated, step-by-step physical brewing guide: - **Precision Water Temperature Standards:** Clear temperature guidance tailored to each elevation grade (e.g. rolling boil at 98°C for robust Ruhuna and Kandy BOP vs. cooler 85°C water for delicate Nuwara Eliya flushes to prevent scalding delicate floral catechins). - **Water-to-Leaf Ratios & Vessel Pre-Heating:** Visual diagrams showing the traditional Sri Lankan practice of warming the ceramic teapot with boiling water before adding leaves, and exact measurements (e.g. 2.5g of whole leaf per 200ml cup). - **Dual Formats (Loose Leaf vs. Pyramid Bags):** Providing tailored instructions for both loose-leaf enthusiasts who own an infuser basket and everyday users brewing single-serve pyramid tea bags, ensuring accessibility without elitism. - **Sensory Milestones:** Encouraging users to observe color shifts in the liquor (from pale honey to deep mahogany) at the 1-, 2-, and 3-minute marks to foster mindful sensory presence.

4. Developing an Ethical Commercial Model to Sell Single-Estate Teas

If I decide to develop TherapTea into a revenue-generating commercial business in the future, the monetization strategy must strictly adhere to the project's non-clinical, anti-consumerist ethos. In direct contrast to the aggressive sales funnels critiqued in my Crit 1 audit of Art of Tea, TherapTea will adopt an ethical, transparent direct-to-consumer model: - **Direct Smallholder Partnerships:** Bypassing industrial multinational middlemen to partner directly with independent Sri Lankan smallholder cooperatives and single-estate artisan

gardens. - **Curated "Emotional Pause" Tea Boxes:** Offering small-batch, sustainably packaged 50g tea tins corresponding directly to the platform's moods (e.g. "The Nuwara Eliya Stress Pause Tin", "The Ruhuna Comfort Tin"), available through a discreet, quiet "Pantry" section that never interrupts the free digital recommendation flow. - **Transparent Social Impact Giving:** Pledging 15% of all retail profits to local educational scholarships, healthcare mobile clinics, and clean water initiatives for women tea pluckers and their families in Sri Lanka's central hill country. This will prove that a commercial web venture can achieve sustainable economic viability while honoring cultural integrity and delivering real social justice to the community that makes it possible.



Figure 10.1: The complete digital-to-physical pause experience: translating digital interface design into an everyday, offline moment of Sri Lankan tea mindfulness.

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Appendices: The Five Crits & Tutor Feedback Trajectory

The complete slide decks for all five crits accompany this report as submission evidence: - **Crit #1 (Ideation & Problem Definition):** Thesis (*"Recommending tea based on how people feel, not what they buy"*), calling out Art of Tea as the culprit, SWOT analysis, Maya persona and empathy map. Feedback from David (*curating experiences with music*) and Prisca (*personal taste credibility*). - **Crit #2 (25 Feb 2026 — Visual Direction & Tone):** The "tone dice" (*Warm & Friendly vs. Clinical*), *"Let's pause for a moment"*, palette selection (cream, sage, terracotta, taupe), font pairing (League Spartan + Libre Baskerville), and mobile wireframes. Feedback from Emma A and Prisca (*adding darker brown text color, warning on illustration time*). - **Crit #3 (Technical Planning & Data Strategy):** Solved *"Content vs. Data"*, committed to a zero-data architecture for privacy, mapped the **Mood → Tea → Ritual** logic, and reflected on learning web development (*"Learn how to codeeeeeee !!!"*). Feedback debate between David (*pushing coding/PHP/DB*), Emma A (*displaying learning outcomes*), and Prisca (*CSS as design skill, no CMS needed*). - **Crit #4 (29 July 2026 — Schedule & Prototype Architecture):** Expanded project definition, added brown to brand palette, introduced the Ceylon elephant motif, designed the recommendation template, mapped the 16-week Gantt chart, and bought **theraptea.life**. Feedback from Emma A (*praising the ritual addition*). - **Crit #5 (Final Live Presentation):** Walkthrough of the live site at **theraptea.life**, presented *"8 Moods. Just Me"*, demonstrated the interactive shelf with rising steam and timer, shared 5-user testing results, and held the "Roast My Work" feedback session. Tutor review praising the friend-to-friend tone, with actionable advice on text alignment and dark mode contrast.