

Thilko Limbeck

Staff Product Designer | Design Systems

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PROFILE

I lead design systems from strategy through implementation, adoption and governance. In 2020, I co-founded sipgate's design system and grew it into the shared foundation for 10 product teams: one Figma library, one React codebase and 500+ design tokens powering web, desktop, Android and iOS. Adoption was never mandated, so I lead without formal authority: about 10,000 component inserts a week, earned by enabling and coaching designers, engineers and product teams to adopt and contribute. I embed accessibility in the foundations with automated checks and the lint rules I wrote. I'm now making the system machine-readable so AI agents can build to the same standards as our teams.

CORE SKILLS

Design systems: Design Systems, Design Tokens, Component Libraries, Patterns & Guidelines, Design Governance (Linting & Tooling), Accessibility (WCAG AA, Barrierefreiheit), Inclusive Design, Theming & Dark Mode, Cross-Platform Design Tokens (Web, Desktop, Android, iOS)

Tooling & code: Figma, Figma Plugin API, Figma Variables, Tokens Studio, Style Dictionary, Front-End Frameworks (React, MUI), TypeScript, CSS Modules, HTML, Storybook, Chromatic, ESLint / Stylelint, Design Tooling (Figma Plugins, Linting), GitHub, Webflow, MCP (Model Context Protocol), VS Code Extensions

Leadership: Design Leadership, Mentoring & Coaching, Knowledge Sharing, University Teaching, Facilitation & Workshops, Stakeholder Management, Cross-Functional Leadership, Change Management, Enablement & Adoption, Emerging Technologies (AI Agents, MCP), Hiring & Interviewing

Design: Interaction Design, Visual Design, Systems Design, Systems Thinking, Wireframing & Prototyping, User Research & Testing, Technical Documentation

EXPERIENCE

Staff Product Designer | Design Systems

sipgate

Nov 2018 – Present | Düsseldorf, Germany · Hybrid | Full-time

- Shape the system's direction, priorities and contribution model with design, engineering and product leadership, and own what it ships: components, tokens, patterns and usage guidelines. Styling moved from Tailwind to CSS Modules so any CSS-fluent developer can contribute. 33 components, 300+ Storybook stories, 1,100+ Figma variants, public docs at pandaUI.de.
- Built a WCAG AA contrast checker over every color token pair and the lint rules that enforce accessibility conventions. Contribute production code alongside the engineers: 1,100+ commits to the web app, fourth of about 130 contributors.
- Defined the primitive → semantic → component token architecture and naming convention, then set up the pipeline on Tokens Studio and Style Dictionary with the team.
- Ran the change management for a company-wide rebrand through the token layer: the new brand and dark mode shipped through tokens alone. Kept the legacy palette alongside the new one for a controlled migration, and facilitated a three-session rollout with the web, mobile and desktop teams.
- Govern through tooling, not decree: hardcoded colors fail the ESLint and Stylelint rules I wrote, so system code carries only semantic tokens. Built and rolled out a Figma plugin that syncs tokens to GitHub in four clicks, down from twelve manual steps across three tools; it keeps sipgate on Figma's Organization plan and avoids an Enterprise upgrade, about \$35k a year. Led sipgate onto Figma in 2020 and own the vendor relationship as org admin, negotiating and signing every contract since 2022.
- Lead the system's AI-readiness: defined an agent-evaluation harness that scores real product prompts against our standards, scoped a Storybook MCP server for coding agents, and built three VS Code extensions with coding agents. Tested Figma MCP integrations, and a first wave of design system work shipped AI-assisted in 2026.
- Led the responsive, keyboard-accessible navigation redesign end to end, defined the interaction model, drove the move to a virtualized data grid for long tables, and documented the Figma components for editing settings in place.

- Cut design debt with evidence: a 600-screen interface inventory, library adoption analytics, icons consolidated 456 to 159, and a Chromatic suite cut from 893 snapshots a build to 311 by consolidating 467 stories into 104, so coverage per story went up as the count came down. Material UI stays a deliberate exception for the licensed data grid; every other component in the system is ours.
- Mentor and coach: two designers onboarded over six months each, an apprentice coached over three years into a permanent role. Run design system critiques and serve on design hiring panels as a decision-maker. Took over for the design-system team's product manager during their sabbatical.
- Champion inclusive design beyond the code: co-founded IDEA, sipgate's Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility newsletter, now past 20 issues, and initiated the company Pride group, which I have led at Cologne Pride for six consecutive years.

University Lecturer and Certified Tutor

DIPLOMA University of Applied Sciences

Apr 2024 – Present | Remote | Freelance

- Teach interface design, usability and web development as live online seminars, run workshop-style from Figma design to a site built in Webflow: about 90 students across four semesters, with individual written feedback on every submission.
- Review, develop and co-author the course book for the usability module.
- Supervise bachelor theses as both advisor and examiner.

Design Mentor

ADPList

Apr 2025 – Present | Remote | Volunteer

- Mentor design students and working product designers one-on-one across 20 sessions, on design systems first and portfolio and CV reviews alongside.
- Coach on real work: critique the deliverable in front of us, talk through the trade-offs behind it, and help mentees decide their next step.

Freelance Designer

Neithenor & Co.

Jan 2017 – Nov 2018 | Cologne, Germany

- Ran my own studio for branding, identity and web work: logos, typography, print and websites for local businesses and artists.
- Built the studio's own identity as a system: a bespoke typeface I drew, a multi-format logo system, templated stationery and a documented naming convention. Systems thinking before I had the title for it.

EDUCATION

Master of European Studies in Design — Köln International School of Design

2016–2017 | Cologne, Germany

Master's Exchange Year — Konstfack · University of Arts, Crafts and Design

2015–2016 | Stockholm, Sweden

Bachelor's Exchange Year — ENSCI · Les Ateliers

2014–2015 | Paris, France

Bachelor of Arts, European Studies in Design — Köln International School of Design

2011–2013 | Cologne, Germany

Exchange Year during High-School — North Butler High School

2007–2008 | Iowa, USA

High-School Diploma / Abitur — Gesamtschule Veenhusen

1997–2010 | Veenhusen, Germany

CERTIFICATIONS & TRAINING

- Design Token and UI Component Architecture · Nathan Curtis, Converge · 2024

- Design Tokens · Lukas Oppermann, Hatch Conference · 2024
- Design Systems Masterclass · Brad Frost, Hatch Conference · 2023
- Accessibility · Manuel Matuzović, in-house at sipgate · 2021
- User-Centered Design & UX Research · Userlutions, in-house at sipgate · 2020
- Advanced Certified Scrum Product Owner · agile42, Copenhagen · 2019
- NN/g UX Certification · Interaction Design specialty, London · 2019
- Design Sprint Training · Strive Studio, Cologne · 2019

LANGUAGES

German · native | English · fluent | French · basic