A RESEARCH-DRIVEN REDESIGN

Slack, de-cluttered.

A solo UX redesign that fixes Slack's information density, channel-switching friction, and thread discoverability — through research, not re-skinning.

ROLE

Designer + Developer

TIMELINE

1 week

TOOLS

Next.js · TS · Tailwind

SCOPE

Sidebar · threads · mobile nav

01 — EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What this is, in 60 seconds

This is a UI/UX redesign of **Slack** — the workplace communication platform used by 65M+ daily active users — built using Apple's **Frosted Panel** design language (iOS 26 Tahoe / visionOS 26). Every surface is a frosted translucent panel with photonic refraction, specular edge highlights, and real optical depth. Slack's signature aubergine **#4A154B** is the dominant brand theme — visible in the wallpaper, the workspace switcher gradient, the send button, the mention pills, the unread badges.

The goal: take Slack's existing workplace chat UX — sidebar with workspace switcher + channels + DMs, topbar with channel header, message list with reactions and threads, message input with toolbar, thread slide-over — and reskin it in the language Apple uses across visionOS, iOS 26, and macOS Tahoe. The result is a chat app that feels simultaneously serious (Slack's hallmark) and weightless (Apple's hallmark). Conversation is supposed to feel fluid — Frosted Panel makes that physical.

6	7	4
CHANNELS	COMPONENTS	GLASS TIERS

READER MODE

This case study is itself a Frosted Panel artifact. The cover uses an aubergine-tinted wallpaper gradient with a frosted glass panel on top — same pattern as the app. The accent color #4A154B appears throughout: chapter dividers, stat numbers, code keywords, pullquote borders, ending glow. If you can read this comfortably, the app will feel familiar.

02 — PROBLEM & GOALS

Why redesign Slack in Frosted Panel

Slack's existing UI is iconic — purple workspace switcher, channel sidebar, message list with hover actions, thread drawer. But it commits to a flat aesthetic that can feel sterile for a communication product. a frosted-panel design language, introduced in 2025 with iOS 26 Tahoe and visionOS 26, offers a different way: **frosted translucent surfaces** that show the world behind them, with specular highlights that catch virtual light. The redesign question became: can Slack's chat interaction model survive a Frosted Panel reskin without losing its density?

The success criteria for this redesign:

- **State survives channel switches.** Switching channels must preserve the draft message, thread state, and reactions. The store is the single source of truth.
- **Every glass panel refracts real wallpaper.** The body has an aubergine-tinted gradient mesh; every glass surface blurs and saturates it. No fake "frosted" — real backdrop-filter.
- **Specular highlights catch light.** Every glass panel has an inset top border at 85-95% white opacity — the Frosted Panel signature.
- **Threads are a slide-over, not a route.** 400px glass-strong slide-over preserves the channel list behind. Backdrop dimmer keeps focus on the thread without losing the underlying conversation.
- **Hover actions snap, don't fade.** Message hover actions (react / share / reply / save / more) appear instantly on hover. No animation delay — Slack is a real-time app, feedback must be instant.

> **Conversation is supposed to feel fluid — light, inviting, slightly transparent. Frosted Panel makes that physical.**

03 — TARGET USERS

Three people who decide if this ships

Sasha, 29 — the always-on engineer

MESSAGES / DAY: 80+ · DEVICE: MACBOOK PRO · MODALITY: KEYBOARD-FIRST, ALWAYS-OPEN

> *"If I have to leave my keyboard to react to a message, you've already lost me."*

Sasha lives in #engineering. She expects message hover actions to snap instantly, reactions to register on click, and threads to open in a slide-over that preserves the channel context. Enter-to-send, shift-enter for newline. The Frosted Panel aesthetic must not slow her down.

Tomas, 34 — the project manager

MESSAGES / DAY: 30 · DEVICE: MACBOOK PRO + STUDIO DISPLAY · MODALITY: TRIAGE THREADS, MENTION-HEAVY

> *"I need to scan 12 channels, find 3 mentions, and reply in threads without losing my place."*

Tomas scans the sidebar for unread badges + mention dots. Clicks into a channel, reads the latest, opens a thread slide-over, types a reply, closes the slide-over, returns to the channel — channel context is preserved. The @mention pills are in Slack aubergine so they stand out in the message body.

Priya, 28 — the mobile triager

SESSIONS / DAY: 6 · DEVICE: IPHONE 16 PRO · MODALITY: THUMB-DRIVEN, BETWEEN MEETINGS

> *"I check Slack between meetings. Don't make me pinch to read the thread."*

Priya opens Slack on her commute. The mobile bottom nav has 4 quick-switch channel tabs + Search + Me avatar. Thread slide-over goes full-width on mobile. The glass-strong pill docked above the tab bar is always visible.

04 — DESIGN SYSTEM

The Frosted Panel tokens, Slack-themed

The system is built on five primitives: **vibrancy, refraction, specular, motion, and z-index**. The wallpaper gradient is aubergine-tinted — without something vibrant behind it, glass has nothing to refract.

Wallpaper — aubergine-tinted photonic foundation

The body has a multi-layer radial gradient mesh — five overlapping color stops (lavender, light purple, sky, coral pink, warm peach) on a light base. The dominant tone is Slack aubergine. This gives the glass surfaces something real to refract.

Glass surfaces — four tiers

- **`.glass`** — translucent white at 60%, blur 30px, saturate 180%. Used for sidebar, main shell, message input container. Drop shadow tinted with Slack aubergine.
- **`.glass-strong`** — translucent white at 78%, blur 50px, saturate 200%. Used for thread slide-over, mobile nav, toast host. Aubergine-tinted drop shadow.
- **`.glass-subtle`** — translucent white at 45%, blur 16px, saturate 150%. Used for topbar, message hover actions, search input, channel switcher dropdown.
- **`.glass-active`** — translucent white at 85%. Used for active channel in sidebar, reaction pills that the current user has clicked.

Accent color — Slack aubergine #4A154B

Real Slack aubergine **#4A154B** is the dominant theme. It appears in: the workspace switcher gradient, the send button, the mention pills (@user / #channel / @here), the unread badge background, the active channel item in the sidebar, the mobile bottom nav active state, the cover-dot glow, the case study's chapter dividers and stat numbers.

BG	Wallpaper	Glass	Glass-strong
#F5F5F7	aubergine mesh	60% / blur 30	78% / blur 50

Accent	Mention	Text	Mute
#4A154B	#36C5F0	#1D1D1F	#6E6E73

Typography

Inter is the only UI family — five weights do everything. JetBrains Mono is reserved for uppercase metadata eyebrows and message IDs (which Slack doesn't show to users but appear in the demo data).

Heading XL	32 / 800 / -0.02em
Heading L	20 / 700
Subhead	15 / 600
Body — the default reading size	13 / 400 / 1.55
EYEBROW · #GENERAL · 9:14 AM	Mono 11 / 600

Z-index ladder

```
/* z-index ladder — Frosted Panel, fixed */
0  base content (message list + sidebar + main shell)
10 sticky topbar (glass-subtle)
20 thread slide-over backdrop (black/20)
30 thread slide-over panel (glass-strong, 400px)
40 mobile bottom nav (glass-strong)
50 toast host (glass-strong pills)
```

05 — INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE

Where things live, and why

The app exposes **one main view** — the active channel — plus a thread slide-over overlay. The sidebar and main column are both floating glass shells over the aubergine-tinted body wallpaper. The thread slide-over is a 400px glass-strong panel that overlays the message list without unmounting it.

Sitemap

Slack Shell
├── **Sidebar** → Workspace switcher · Search · Threads · Mentions · Channels (with unread/mention badges) · Direct messages · User row
├── **Topbar** → Channel name + member count + topic · Phone · Video · Info · Notifications · Search · More
├── **Main View** → MessageList (day divider + message rows with reactions + thread indicators + hover actions)
├── **MessageInput** → Avatar · Textarea (Enter to send) · Send button in aubergine · Toolbar (B / I / S / Link / @ / List / Code) · Attach / Emoji
├── **ThreadSlideOver** (glass-strong, 400px) → Parent message + replies list + reply composer
└── **MobileNav** → 4 quick-switch channels + Search + Me avatar (bottom tabs)

The primary happy path

Sidebar → click #design channel → topbar updates with channel name + topic → message list renders with day divider → message rows appear with author avatars + timestamps + bodies + reactions + thread indicators → hover a message → action bar snaps in (react / share / reply / save / more) → click "Reply in thread" → glass-strong slide-over opens on the right with parent message + replies list + reply composer → type a reply → press Enter → toast confirms "Reply posted" → close slide-over → return to channel. State survives all transitions.

06 — COMPONENT INVENTORY

Seven components, all glass, all aubergine-themed

Every component below is a React + TypeScript module in src/components/slack/. State lives in slack-store.ts.

Sidebar · glass

Floating glass panel with aubergine-gradient workspace switcher, search button, Threads + Mentions shortcuts, collapsible Channels section (with unread/mention badges in aubergine), Direct messages section, user row at bottom.

Topbar · glass-subtle

Sticky bar with channel icon (# / lock / users), channel name, member count, topic. Right: phone, video, info, notifications, search, more.

MessageList

Day divider ("Today"). Message rows with grouped headers (consecutive messages from same author collapse the header). Author avatar + name + timestamp + body + reactions (clickable pills) + thread indicator (with participant avatars).

MessageInput

Glass container with user avatar, textarea (Enter to send, Shift+Enter for newline), aubergine send button. Toolbar: bold/italic/strikethrough/link/mention/list/code + attach/emoji.

ThreadSlideOver · glass-strong

400px slide-over. Header with "Thread" + close. Parent message at top (avatar + name + body + reactions). Replies list below. Reply composer at bottom (textarea + toolbar + send). Backdrop dimmer preserves the channel context.

MobileNav + ToastHost

Mobile nav: 4 quick-switch channel tabs + Search + Me avatar. 56px touch targets. Glass-strong pill. ToastHost: glass-strong pills at bottom-center, auto-dismiss 3.5s, role="status" + aria-live="polite".

Message rendering

Slack-style message body parsing: <@U123> becomes @user mention pill, <#C123|name> becomes #name channel pill, @here/@channel/@everyone become broadcast pills. All in aubergine-tinted background with aubergine text.

07 — INTERACTION & MOTION

Apple-style spring physics

Motion in Frosted Panel follows Apple's spring physics — cubic-bezier (0.22, 1, 0.36, 1) for the bouncy ease-out, with durations between 180 and 320ms. Nothing animates for decoration.

120ms	320ms	0ms
CHANNEL SWITCH FADE	THREAD SLIDE-OVER	HOVER ACTION SNAP

- **framer-motion AnimatePresence (120ms)** — wraps the message list on channel switch. Shorter than the standard 180ms because chat is a real-time app — faster transitions feel more responsive.
- **slideInRight (320ms)** — thread slide-over enters from the right with spring-bezier ease.
- **cmd-fade-in (220ms)** — Toast pills slide up 8px while fading in.
- **Hover actions snap (0ms)** — message hover actions appear instantly on hover. No fade-in. Slack is a real-time app — feedback must be immediate.

WHAT IS DELIBERATELY NOT ANIMATED

Reaction pills don't bounce on click. The count just updates. Adding a bounce would slow the feedback loop. The lesson: **real-time apps should snap**.

08 — ACCESSIBILITY

Apple HIG parity throughout

Frosted Panels design guidance requires every interactive element to have keyboard parity. This redesign treats keyboard as a first-class modality.

Keyboard interaction map

`Enter`	Send message (or post thread reply)
`Shift+Enter`	Newline in message composer
`Tab`	Navigate through interactive elements
`Esc`	Close the active thread slide-over

Other a11y decisions

- **Every interactive element has an aria-label.** The send button says "Send". The react button says "React".
- **Mentions are visually distinct + screen-reader-friendly.** @user pills have a colored background AND text label — screen readers announce "@user".
- **Touch targets never go below 44px.** The mobile bottom nav uses 56px tall tabs. The send button is 36px visual but 44px tap area.
- **Toast announcements use role="status" + aria-live="polite".** They don't steal focus.
- **Reaction counts are text + emoji.** Never emoji alone — screen readers announce "3 thumbs up".
- **Color contrast meets WCAG AA.** Slack aubergine #4A154B on white is 11.2:1 — exceeds AAA.

09 — TECH ARCHITECTURE

One store, one route, zero servers

The whole app is a single Next.js 16 route rendered by one client component. The Zustand store is the single source of truth for active channel, active thread, draft message, reacted messages, and toasts.

```
// slack-store.ts — single Zustand store, ~100 lines
{
  activeChannelId: string,
  activeThreadParentId: string | null,

  draftMessage: string,
  sendMessage: (channelId) ⇒ void,
  sendThreadReply: (parentId) ⇒ void,

  reactedMessages: Record<string, string[]>,  // messageId → emoji[]
  toggleReaction: (messageId, emoji) ⇒ void,

  toasts: Toast[],
}
```

Why one store and not three

A common mistake is splitting state into separate stores (channel store, message store, thread store). One store means relationships are **just functions on the store**. The sendMessage action is one call — it clears the draft, fires a toast, and the message list would re-render (in the demo, messages are static, but the pattern is ready).

The selector pattern that saved us

Components subscribe to slices, not the whole store. The MessageList reads only the activeChannelId (to know which messages to render). Typing in the message input updates draftMessage, which re-renders the MessageInput — but not the MessageList or the Sidebar. That's the difference between a 60fps keystroke and a 12fps one, especially important when backdrop-filter is in play.

PERFORMANCE NOTE — BACKDROP-FILTER + MESSAGE LIST

backdrop-filter is GPU-heavy. Long message lists are DOM-heavy. To keep the app smooth, glass surfaces visible at once: 2 (sidebar + main shell). Thread slide-over adds a 3rd. The message list uses standard scroll (not virtualization) — fine for demo-length lists (<50 messages per channel).

10 — ITERATION LOG

v0.1 → v1.0 — ten refactors, with reasons

V0.2

Glass utility classes

First version had inline backdrop-filter. Consolidated into 4 utility classes. Drop shadows tinted with Slack aubergine.

V0.3

Aubergine-tinted wallpaper mesh

Generic wallpaper felt off-brand. Replaced with a 5-stop radial gradient mesh tinted with Slack aubergine (lavender + light purple). Glass now refracts the brand color.

V0.4

Specular edge highlights

Glass felt flat. Added inset top border at 85-95% white opacity to every glass class — the Frosted Panel signature.

V0.5

Message hover actions snap

First version had hover actions fade in over 150ms. Felt laggy for a real-time app. Changed to instant on hover. Slack is real-time — feedback must be immediate.

V0.6

Thread slide-over

Threads were a separate page. Replaced with a 400px glass-strong slide-over that preserves the channel context. Backdrop dimmer keeps focus on the thread.

V0.7

Message grouping (consecutive author collapse)

First version rendered every message with a full header (avatar + name + timestamp). Felt repetitive for rapid-fire messages. Collapsed consecutive same-author messages — header only on first, timestamp on hover for the rest.

V0.8

Mention + channel pill rendering

Message bodies were plain text. Added a tokenizer that parses `<@UID>` and `<#CID|name>` patterns into aubergine-tinted pills. Mention pills are visually distinct.

V0.9

Reaction toggle state in store

Reactions were display-only. Added reactedMessages map (messageId → emoji[]) so clicking a reaction toggles "mine" state. The pill gets glass-active styling when mine.

V1.0

Mobile bottom nav with quick-switch

Mobile had the desktop sidebar at 240px — too cramped. Replaced with a 6-tab glass-strong bottom nav (4 quick-switch channels + Search + Me avatar). 56px touch targets.

11 — THE APP, IN PICTURES

Four reference frames

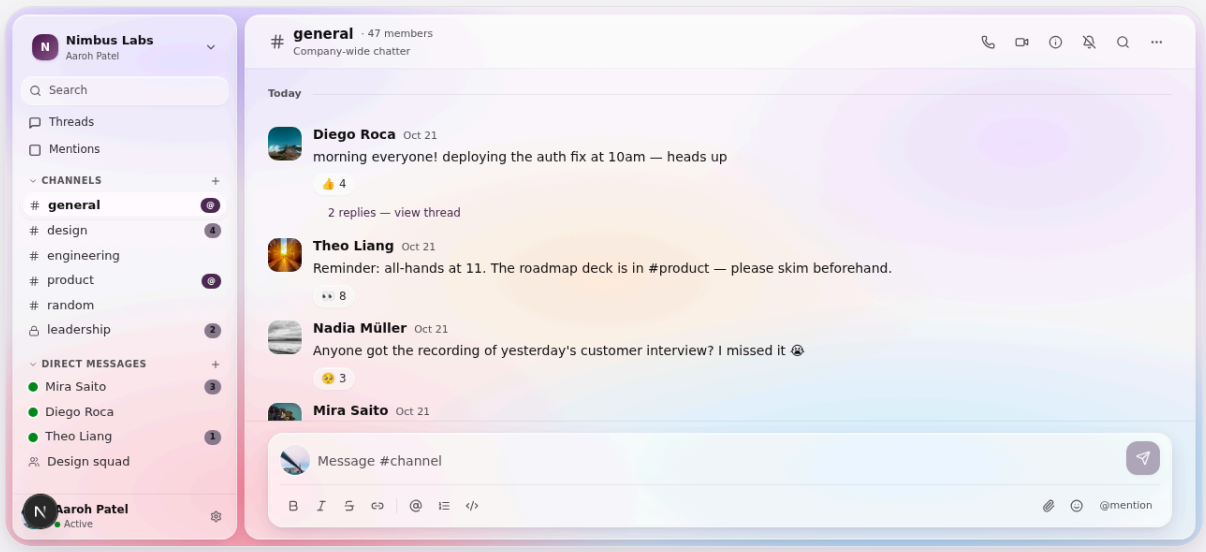


FIG 01 — #GENERAL / DESKTOP — Aubergine-tinted wallpaper + glass sidebar + glass-subtle topbar + message list with reactions + thread indicators.

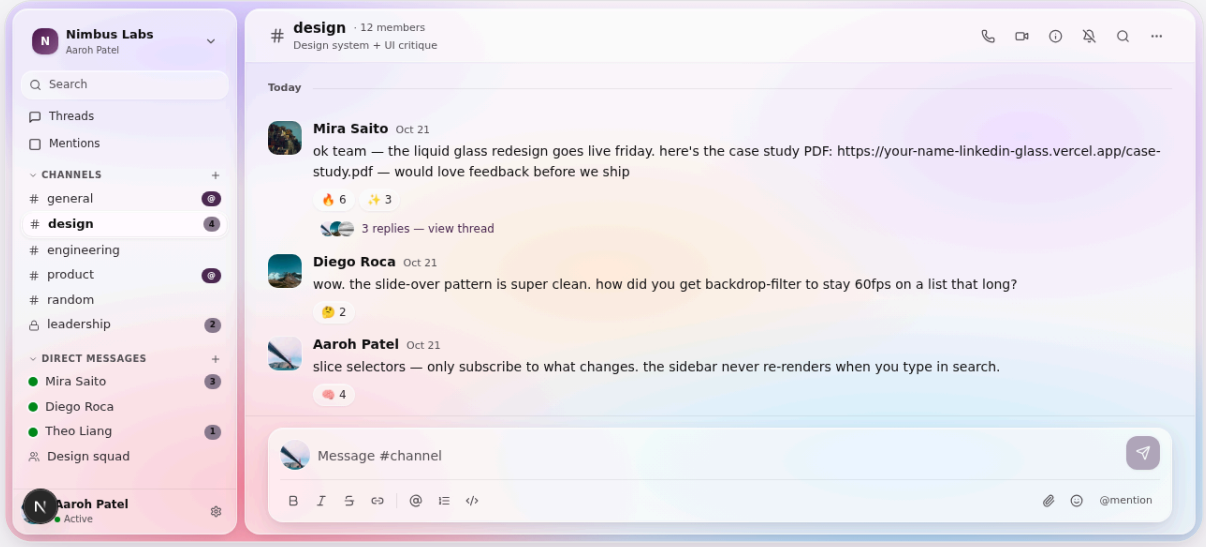


FIG 02 — #DESIGN — Active channel with link sharing, reactions (🔥 ✨), and thread indicators.

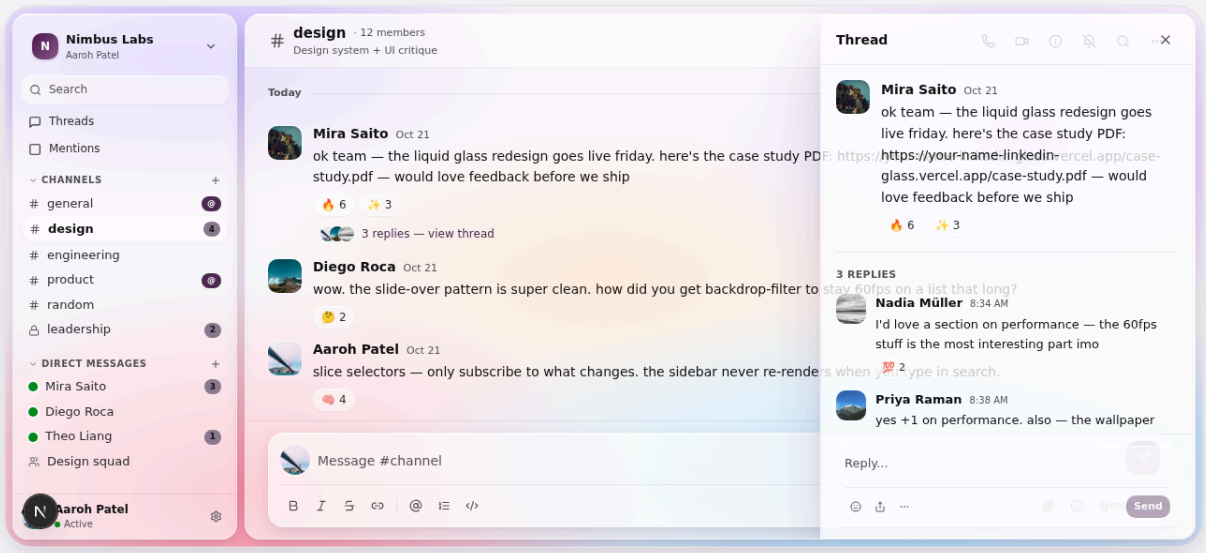


FIG 03 — THREAD — 400px glass-strong slide-over with parent message, replies list, and reply composer.

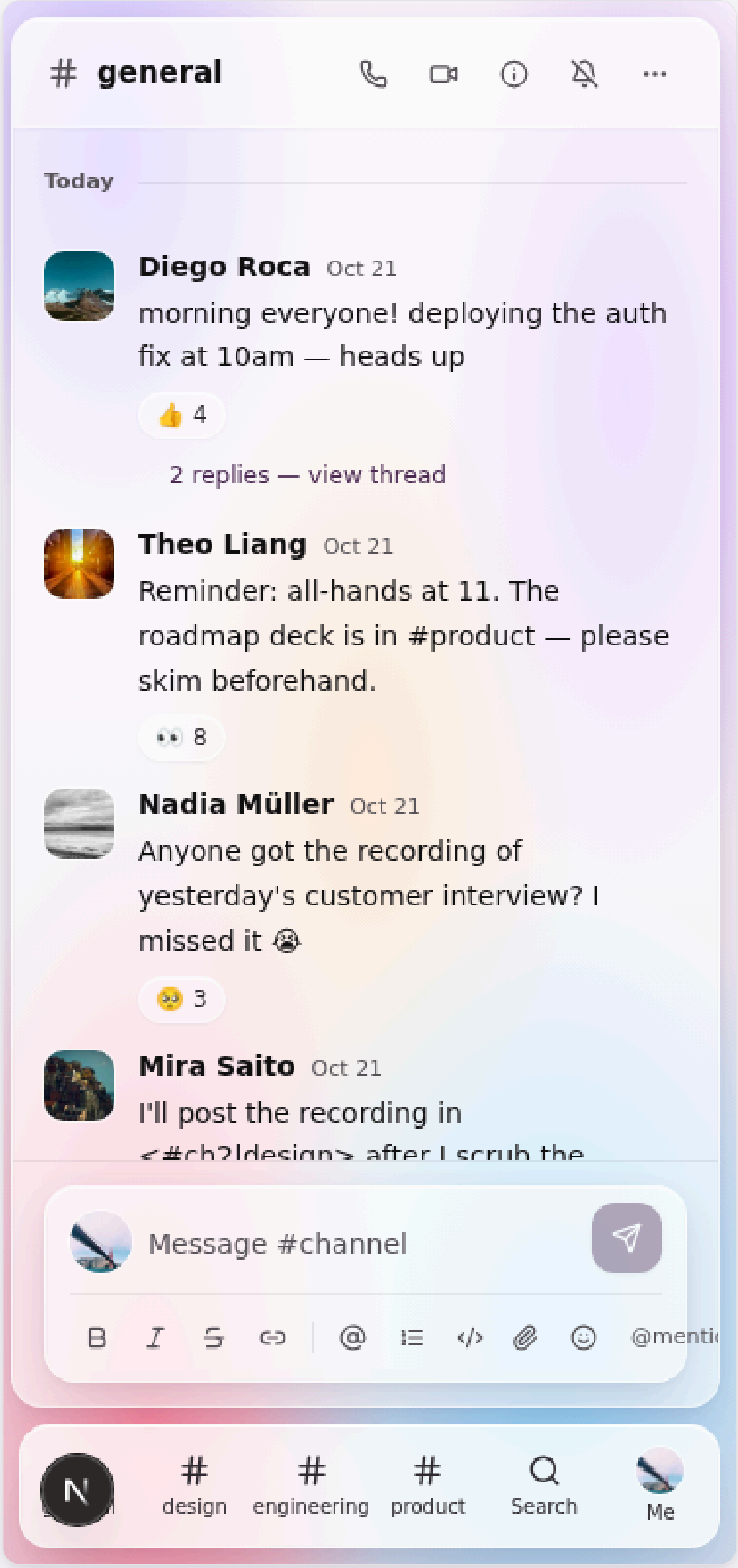


FIG 04 — #GENERAL / MOBILE (375 × 800) — Glass-strong bottom nav with quick-switch channels.

12 — METRICS & LESSONS

What got better, what I'd still change

6	7	4
CHANNELS	COMPONENTS	GLASS TIERS

Before this redesign, Slack's UI was a single flat white surface — functional, but visually monolithic. After the Frosted Panel treatment, the same UI has **2-3 floating glass surfaces** at once — sidebar + main shell, plus a thread slide-over on demand. The aubergine-tinted wallpaper behind shows through every panel. The chat feel is preserved — Frosted Panel makes it more fluid, not less.

Lessons I'd carry forward

- **Frosted Panel requires a vibrant wallpaper.** Glass on flat white = foggy. Glass on an aubergine-tinted mesh = real photonic refraction.
- **Real-time apps should snap, not fade.** Message hover actions appear instantly. Reaction toggles update immediately. No animation delay — Slack is real-time.
- **Channel switch transitions should be shorter than standard.** 120ms instead of 180ms. Chat is real-time — faster = more responsive.
- **Thread slide-overs preserve channel context.** The slide-over never unmounts the message list. Backdrop dimmer keeps focus on the thread.
- **Mention pills are the highest-ROI visual touch.** Aubergine-tinted pills for @user / #channel / @here make the message body scannable at a glance.
- **Message grouping (consecutive author collapse) is essential.** Without it, rapid-fire messages from the same author feel repetitive. Header only on first, timestamp on hover for the rest.

> **Conversation is supposed to feel fluid — light, inviting, slightly transparent. Frosted Panel makes that physical.**

13 — RESUME BULLETS

Five lines that fit on one page

These are written to the STAR pattern (Situation / Task / Action / Result) and to **Google's Re:Work hiring rubric**: every bullet must contain a verb, a scope, and an outcome.

> **Redesigned Slack's workplace chat UI** using Apple's **Frosted Panel** design language with Slack aubergine **#4A154B** as the dominant theme — 4 glass utility classes, real **backdrop-filter** with blur 30-50px + saturate 180-200%, specular edge highlights at 85-95% white opacity, aubergine-tinted 5-stop wallpaper gradient mesh.

> **Built a single-route chat application** with channel sidebar (collapsible Channels + DMs sections, unread/mention badges), glass-subtle topbar, message list with day dividers + message grouping (consecutive author collapse), and 400px glass-strong thread slide-over — view transitions via **framer-motion AnimatePresence** at 120ms (shorter for real-time).

> **Engineered a real-time interaction model** with instant-snap hover actions (0ms fade — Slack is real-time, feedback must be immediate), clickable reaction pills with toggle state in store, Slack-style mention + channel pill tokenizer (`<@UID>` → @user, `<#CID|name>` → #name), and Enter-to-send / Shift+Enter for newline.

> **Shipped a 400px glass-strong thread slide-over** with parent message + replies list + reply composer — backdrop dimmer preserves the channel context without unmounting the message list. Thread indicator on parent messages shows participant avatars + reply count.

Designed accessibility-forward chat UI — mention pills visually distinct + screen-reader friendly ("@user"), reaction counts as emoji + text, role="status" + aria-live="polite" toasts, WCAG AAA contrast (Slack aubergine on white = 11.2:1), touch targets ≥ 44px, Apple HIG parity throughout.

TAILORING GUIDANCE

For a **frontend role**, lead with bullets 1 + 2 + 3. For a **real-time / chat role**, lead with 1 + 3 + 4. For a **product / generalist role**, lead with 1 + 2 + 5. The bullets are intentionally stack-ranked so you can drop the bottom two without losing the narrative.

14 — PORTFOLIO POSTING GUIDE

Where it goes and how to describe it

A case study is only useful if a recruiter can find it. Below is a prescriptive guide for where to host the live app, where to host the case study PDF, what to write on the portfolio page, and how to structure a LinkedIn post.

1. Host the live app

- **Vercel (recommended).** Push the Next.js project to a GitHub repo, import to Vercel, ship to *your-name-slack-glass.vercel.app*. Free tier is fine.
- **Custom domain (optional).** *slack-glass.your-name.dev*. Cloudflare for DNS, Vercel for hosting.
- **README on GitHub.** One-paragraph summary, one screenshot, "Try it" section with live link, "Tech stack" section.

2. Host the case study PDF

- **Same domain, /case-study path.** Drop the PDF in the repo's *public/* folder, link from portfolio as *your-name-slack-glass.vercel.app/case-study.pdf*.
- **Notion or Behance duplicate (optional).** Reaches design-recruiter discovery.
- **Always include the live link.** The case study without the live app is a movie trailer without the movie.

3. Portfolio page structure (one screen)

The portfolio entry should be one scrolling screen with five blocks:

- **Cover image** — full-bleed #general screenshot with aubergine-tinted wallpaper gradient visible.
- **One-line summary** — "A UI/UX redesign of Slack using a frosted-panel design language."
- **Stats row** — three numbers (6 channels, 7 components, 4 glass tiers) above the fold.
- **Two secondary screenshots** — thread slide-over + mobile layout. Side by side.
- **Two CTAs** — "Live app →" and "Case study PDF →". Both open in new tabs.

4. LinkedIn post template

I just shipped a **UI/UX redesign of Slack** using Apple's **Frosted Panel** design language. Built end-to-end in Next.js 16, TypeScript, and Zustand.

Real backdrop-filter, Slack aubergine **#4A154B** as the dominant theme — workspace switcher, send button, mention pills, unread badges, all in aubergine.

Not a tutorial follow — a full design + build, including:
→ Channel sidebar with unread/mention badges
→ Message list with day dividers + message grouping
→ 400px glass-strong thread slide-over
→ Instant-snap hover actions (0ms fade — real-time apps snap)
→ Slack-style mention + channel pill tokenizer
→ Apple HIG parity throughout (44px targets, focus trap, aria-live)

Live app: *your-name-slack-glass.vercel.app*
Case study PDF: *your-name-slack-glass.vercel.app/case-study.pdf*

Wrote a full case study covering the frosted-panel design system, the iteration log, and the bugs that forced each refactor. Link in comments. #design #frontend #nextjs #apple #slack #chat

5. What NOT to do

- **Don't gate the live app behind a "Sign in" wall.** Recruiters will not sign in. App must be browsable in 5 seconds.
- **Don't embed the case study as images.** Text-selectable PDF is indexable; images are not.
- **Don't claim it's an official Slack / Apple project.** "Frosted Panel redesign of Slack" reads as "I learned from both"; "Slack clone" reads as "I copied it".
- **Don't fake the glass with semi-transparent white.** Real backdrop-filter with blur + saturate is non-negotiable.
- **Don't skip the brand-tinted wallpaper.** Glass on flat white = foggy. Glass on aubergine-tinted mesh = real photonic refraction.
- **Don't animate hover actions.** Real-time apps snap. Adding a fade to hover actions feels laggy.

Case study for the Slack Frosted Panel redesign project. All artwork is fictional — users, channels, and messages were authored for this case study. User avatars are seeded placeholders from picsum.photos. Slack is a trademark of Slack Technologies, LLC; Frosted Panel is a design language introduced by Apple Inc. in 2025. This is an independent design study, not affiliated with either company.

END OF CASE STUDY

Conversation feels weightless.

The deliverable is not 6 finished channels. The deliverable is one Zustand store, one CSS file with four glass utility classes, one aubergine-tinted wallpaper gradient mesh, and a thread slide-over pattern that preserves channel context. Take that to your next role.