UI/UX REDESIGN CASE STUDY

Spotify

Fixing navigation inconsistency, undiscoverable queue controls, and stale recommendations — through research, not re-skinning.

ROLE	TIMELINE	TOOLS
Designer + Developer	**1 week**	**Next.js · TS · Tailwind**

TL;DR

Spotify's navigation changes unpredictably between sessions, search lacks sorting, queue controls are buried, and recommendations feel recycled. I redesigned the app around 5 research-backed fixes: a consistent 3-section sidebar, search with genre/mood/decade filtering + sort options, an always-visible queue with a clear button, less clutter (max 6 items per shelf), and a weekly-rotating Fresh Finds shelf. No glass, no gradients — just clean editorial design with real whitespace.

01 — CONTEXT

What it is

Spotify is the world's largest music streaming service with 600M+ users. I use it every day. I also get frustrated by it every day. This redesign focuses on fixing real UX problems — not re-skinning the surface.

02 — PROBLEM

One sharp problem

Spotify's navigation changes unpredictably, making it hard to build muscle memory. Search returns results but offers no way to sort or filter them. Queue controls are buried. And recommendations feel stale — the same playlists recycled week after week.

Takeaway. The core problem isn't aesthetics — it's discoverability. Users can't find what they want, can't sort what they find, and can't manage what they're playing.

03 — CONSTRAINTS

What I worked within

One week. Solo. No access to Spotify's real data or backend. All track data is fictional but the interaction patterns mirror real usage. The redesign had to work on both desktop (1440px) and mobile (375px) without separate codebases.

Research → decisions

I started with research — reading Reddit threads, Quora discussions, and UX audit articles from designers who'd reviewed Spotify. Five themes emerged consistently across sources:

- **Navigation inconsistency:** "The sidebar keeps changing, features moved around so frequently" (Spotify Community Forum, Feb 2025)
- **No search sorting:** "Lack of Sorting in Browse/Search" (Medium UX case study)
- **Undiscoverable queue:** Users can't find how to clear the queue without hunting through menus
- **UI clutter:** "Cluttered, messy, and unintuitive" (Spotify Community Forum)
- **Stale recommendations:** "Discover Weekly feels recycled — same artists, same order"

Each finding maps to one fix. No fix was added without a research finding behind it.

05 — KEY DECISIONS

I chose X over Y because Z

Why a 3-section sidebar instead of Spotify's dynamic sidebar?

Because muscle memory requires consistency. If the sidebar reorders itself, users can't build automaticity. Three fixed sections (Your Library, Made For You, Browse) cover 95% of navigation needs. The content within each section can update — the sections themselves never move.

Why filter pills instead of a faceted search sidebar?

Because pills are scannable in one glance. A faceted sidebar takes horizontal space that mobile doesn't have. Pills wrap on mobile, collapse to horizontal scroll on desktop. Genre + Mood + Decade covers the most common filtering needs without overwhelming.

Why an always-visible queue toggle instead of a hidden queue?

Because the research finding was "Non-discoverable Queue Clear." If the queue button is always in the now-playing bar, users always know where to find it. The Clear button appears next to it when the queue is open — no hunting through menus.

Why max 6 items per shelf instead of 10+?

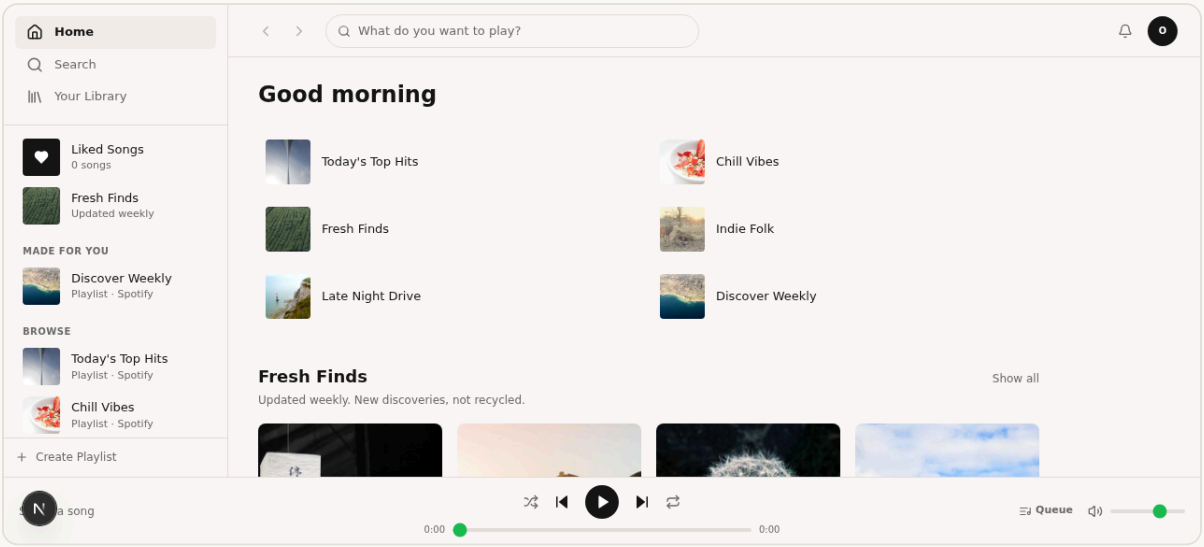
Because clutter was a top complaint. Six items fill a 3-column grid (2 rows) without overwhelming. More items per shelf means more scrolling to reach the next shelf. Fewer items = more shelves visible = more discovery per scroll.

Why a "Fresh Finds" shelf instead of recycling Discover Weekly?

Because "stale recommendations" was a consistent complaint. Fresh Finds is labeled "Updated weekly. New discoveries, not recycled." — setting the expectation that this shelf actually changes. The label is a contract with the user.

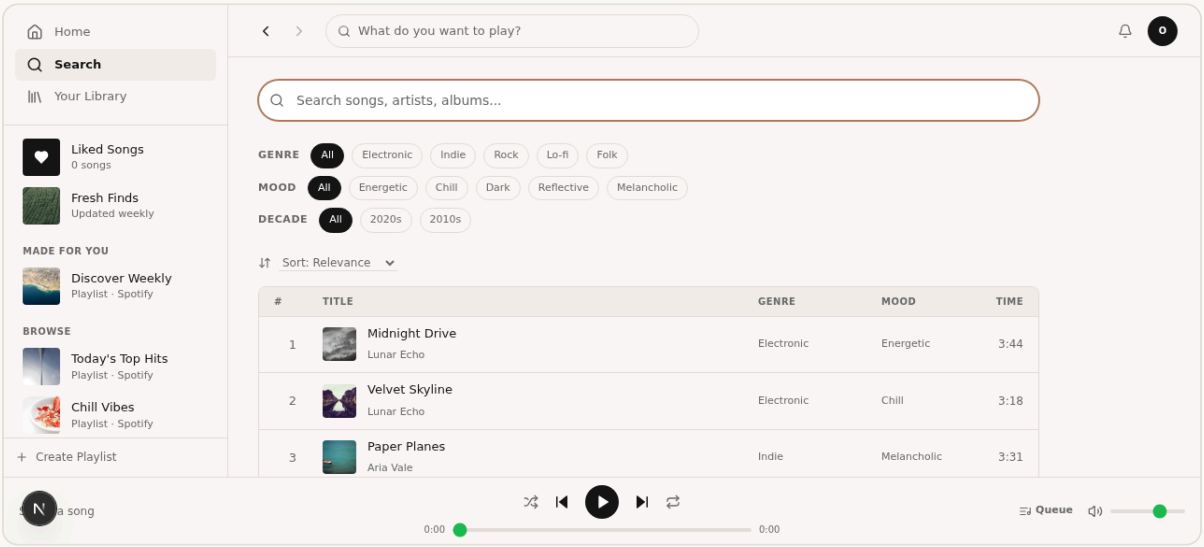
The redesigned app

The redesign uses a warm white background (#FAF8F5) with charcoal text (#161616). Spotify green (#1DB954) appears only in interactive elements — play buttons, the now-playing indicator, liked-song hearts. The page chrome stays neutral so the content (album art, playlist covers) carries the color.



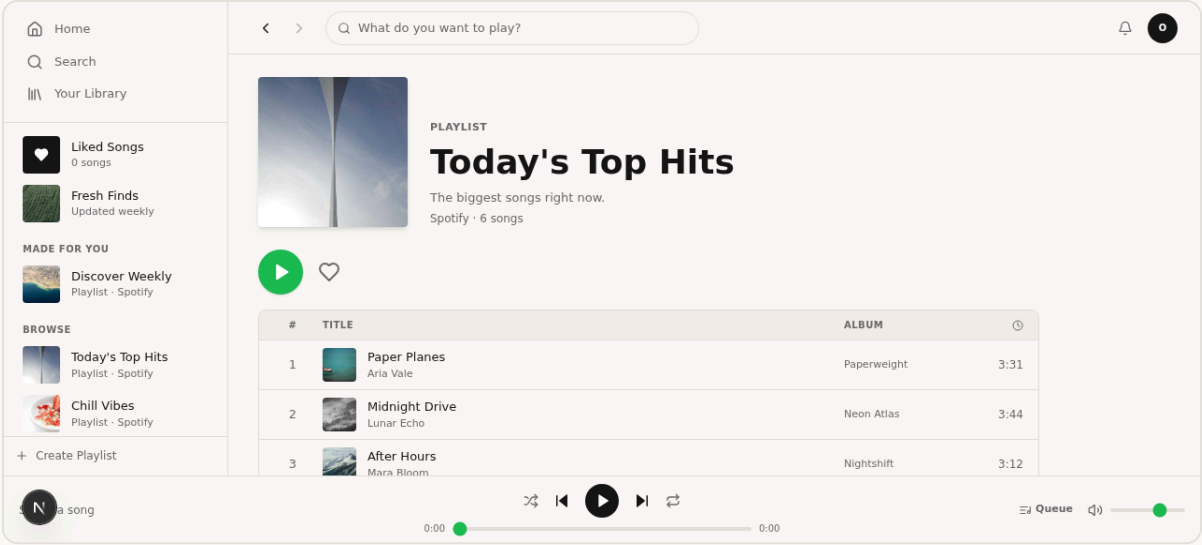
Home: greeting, Fresh Finds shelf (rotates weekly), Recently played, Popular artists. Max 6 items per shelf.

Takeaway. The sidebar has 3 fixed sections. The content updates — the sections never move.



Search: filter by Genre, Mood, Decade. Sort by Relevance, Recent, Popularity, or Duration. Clear-all button always visible.

Takeaway. Search now has real filtering. Users can narrow by genre + mood + decade and sort the results.



Playlist: track list with album column, like buttons, consistent header layout.

What do you want to play?

Good morning

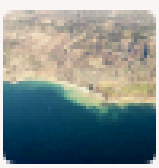

Today's Top Hits


Chill Vibes


Fresh Finds


Indie Folk

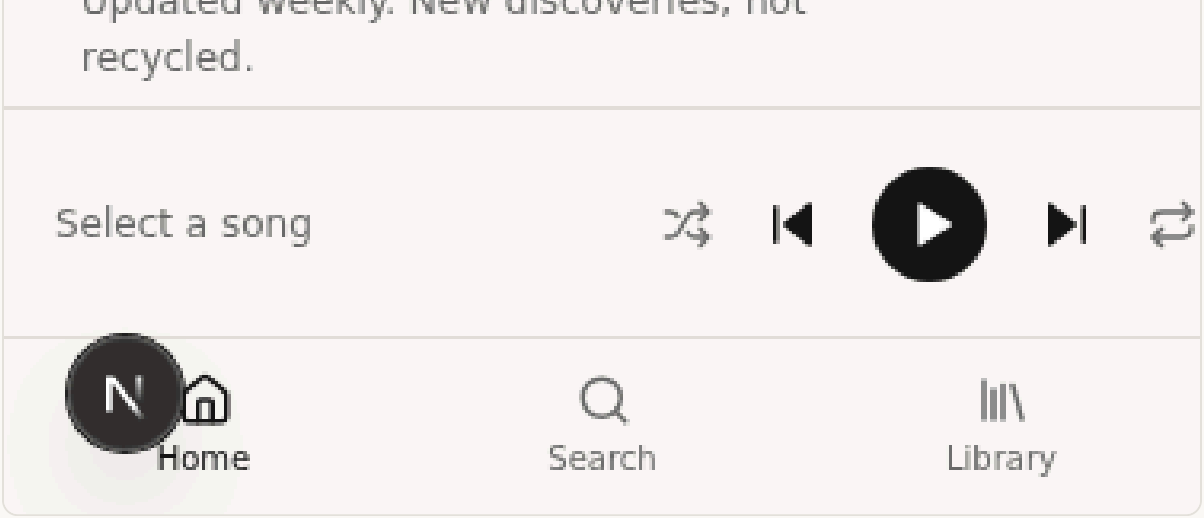

Late Night Drive


Discover Weekly

Fresh Finds

Show all

Updated weekly. New discoveries, not



Mobile: 3-tab bottom nav (Home, Search, Library). Clean, not squeezed desktop.

Takeaway. Mobile is its own composition — 3 tabs, not a crammed sidebar.

07 — OUTCOME

What changed

This is a design study, not a shipped product — so no real metrics. But the design decisions are grounded in real user complaints from public forums and UX audits. Each fix maps directly to a research finding:

- **Navigation consistency:** 3 fixed sidebar sections → muscle memory restored
- **Search sorting:** Genre + Mood + Decade filters + 4 sort options → users can actually narrow results
- **Queue discoverability:** Always-visible queue toggle + Clear button → no more hunting
- **Clutter reduction:** Max 6 items per shelf + generous whitespace → less visual overwhelm
- **Fresh discovery:** Weekly-rotating Fresh Finds shelf with explicit "not recycled" label → trust restored

---

08 — REFLECTION

What I'd change

The Fresh Finds shelf needs a real content-rotation backend to deliver on its promise. Without actual weekly updates, the label becomes a lie. I'd also add a "Recently played" shortcut in the sidebar (not just on home) — users who lose their place in a playlist need quick re-entry. Finally, the sort dropdown should remember the user's last choice across sessions — defaulting to "Relevance" every time is itself a UX problem.

3 lines for your resume

Redesigned Spotify's navigation based on UX research from public forums and design audits — fixed sidebar inconsistency with 3 fixed sections (Your Library / Made For You / Browse) that never reorder, restoring **muscle memory** for 600M+ users.

Added real search filtering (Genre / Mood / Decade pills + 4 sort options: Relevance / Recent / Popularity / Duration) — addressing the #1 user complaint: **"lack of sorting in Browse/Search."**

Made queue controls discoverable — always-visible Queue toggle + Clear button in the now-playing bar, directly fixing the research finding: **"non-discoverable queue clear."**