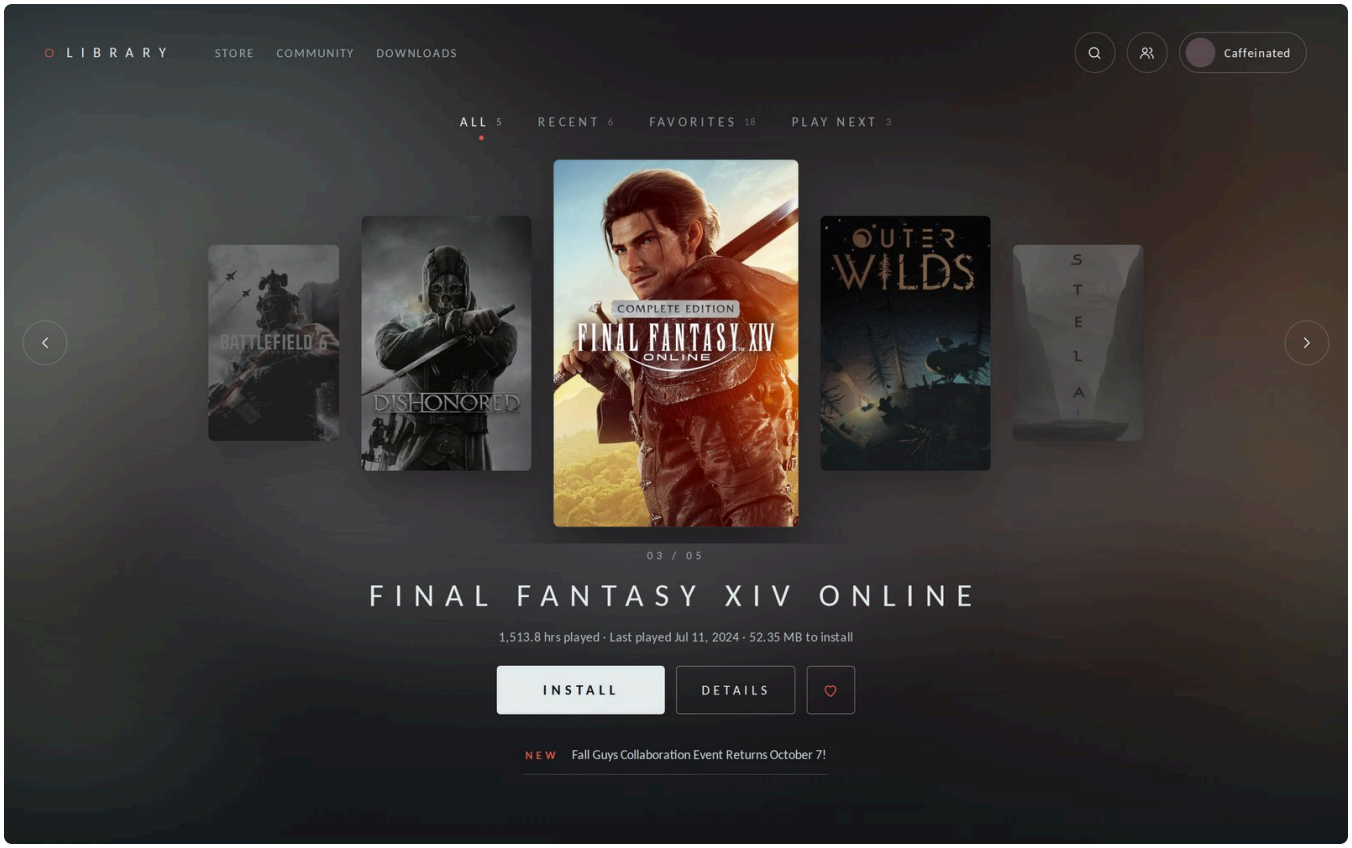
Steam Library Redesign

An unofficial redesign of the Steam desktop library that replaces crowded shelves and a 103-game sidebar with a single cover carousel, built around one question: what do I want to play right now?



01. Executive summary

The Steam library is where PC players launch, install and manage the games they own, and over the years it has filled up: news rows, shelves, a long list of every game, and a bar for downloads and friends. This self-initiated concept rebuilds the library around one cover carousel, with details, search, downloads and friends each one step away instead of always on screen. It started as a redesign in 2019 and was rethought from the ground up in 2026, ending in six connected, clickable screens.

Role	UX/UI designer
Responsibilities	Audit of the current library, information architecture, interaction and visual design, interactive prototype

Team	Solo, with Claude as a design partner in 2026
Timeline	First version 2019; redesign September 2026
Project type	Self-initiated, unofficial concept
Outcome	Six connected screens: library carousel, Details panel, full game page, search, downloads, and friends

02. The problem

It's Friday night and Marcus has two free hours. He opens Steam, and before he can play anything, he has to read: a row of news tiles, two shelves of games labeled by month, a sidebar listing 103 titles, and a bar along the bottom. Twenty minutes later he's still scrolling. By the time he picks something, half his evening is gone.

Meet Marcus and Priya

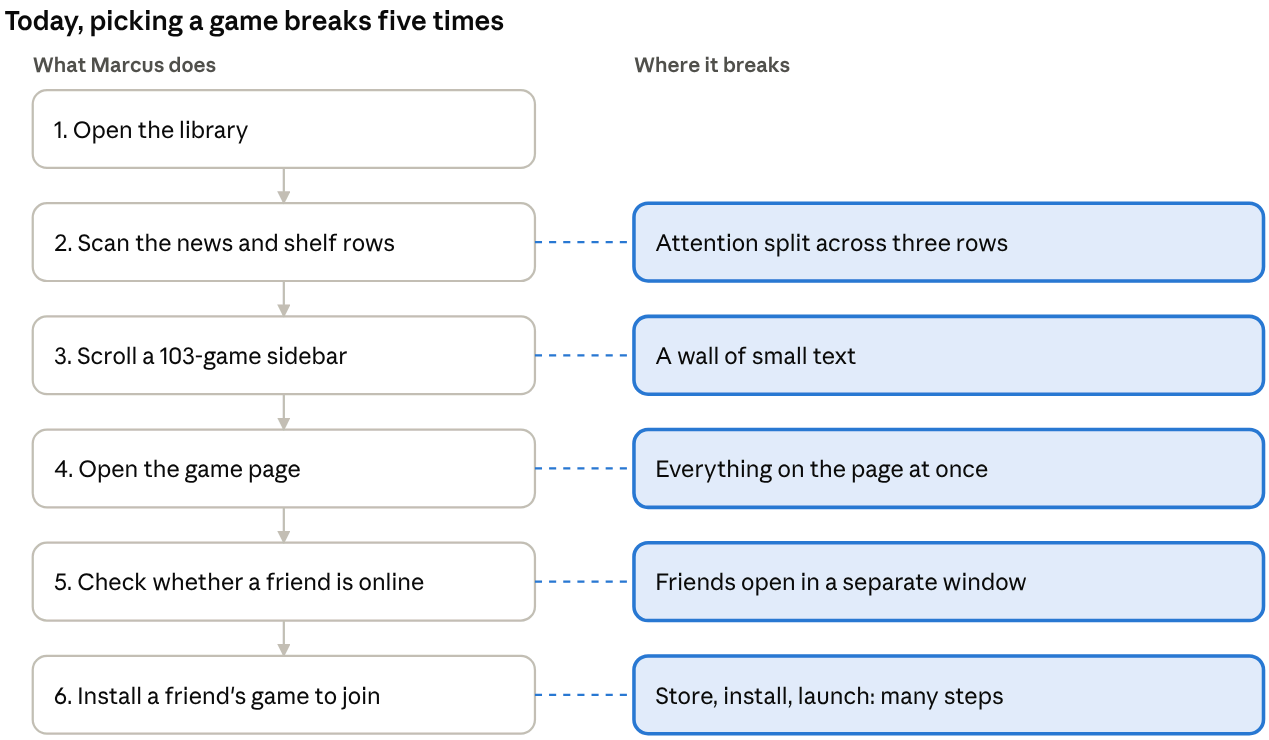
I built two personas from my own library and the players around me. Neither is a real person; each is a composite.

Marcus, the player with too many games. Marcus is 31 and works in logistics. He plays a couple of evenings a week and has bought more games in sales than he'll ever finish, so his library has passed 100. His pain points: too many things on screen at once, cover art too small to recognize at a glance, and a list too long to scan. *"I spend half my free time deciding what to play. By the time I pick something, I'm too tired to play it."*

Priya, the co-op player. Priya is 26, a graduate student who mostly plays with friends online. Her pain points: friends open in a separate window, and joining a friend's game means finding the invite, going to the game, installing it and launching it. *"By the time I've installed the game and found the invite again, my friends have already started without me."*

Marcus and Priya stand for the people this concept is for: PC players with large libraries who open Steam to do one thing, pick a game and play it, often with friends.

Today's broken workflow



Marcus's evening today · five places where choosing and joining a game breaks

Marcus's evening breaks five times before he plays anything. The home screen splits his attention across a news row and two shelves. The sidebar is a wall of small text, 18 Favorites and 85 Uncategorized, taking about a quarter of the screen whether or not he's looking for something. Opening a game page shows him everything at once (banner, install bar, links, activity, news, friends, notes and DLC) when he usually wants one thing. And for Priya, checking on a friend opens a separate window, and joining their game takes several more steps through the store, the install and the launch.

Why it matters

Every extra choice on screen costs time. Hick's law, one of the oldest principles in interface design, says the time it takes to make a decision grows with the number of options in front of you. Today's library puts roughly 50 things in front of Marcus at once: four news tiles, nine games across two shelves, about 33 names visible in the sidebar, and three buttons in the bottom bar. The cover art, the thing players actually recognize games by, is the smallest and most cropped part of the screen.

What players are saying

Steam's players have been vocal about its interface, and their complaints fall into a few patterns:

- **Too much scrolling, too much art.** After Steam's April 2026 store update added higher-resolution art and a wider home page, one player on Reddit said they were scrolling far more because massive cover art filled the whole screen, and others complained that recommendations were based on games they'd refunded and reviewed badly (GamingBible, 2026).
- **Hard to scan a big library.** Players have long missed the old List View, a spreadsheet-like view with high information density and easy sorting (Steam Community discussion, 2022). When the 2019 library update removed it, one player with over 900 games said their library had become impossible to manage (Steam Client Beta group, 2019).
- **Slow and cluttered.** In a thread titled "New UI slow, laggy, cluttered and lost functionality," players complained about lag even on strong computers and about the What's New section greeting them every time they opened the library: "I just want to see my library, not What's new" (Steam Community, 2019). Beta testers that year also described the new library as sluggish to scroll (Steam Client Beta group, 2019).
- **Bland and boxy.** Players have called the modern design generic and minimal, made of boxes, and said the old design was far more pleasing (Steam Community, 2023). Another called the current interface soulless, with flat colors (Steam Labs group).
- **Repainting instead of rethinking.** After the 2023 update, one player put it bluntly: it was "just a new coat of paint on the old UI" (Steam Community, 2023), the same trap my own first three passes fell into.

These complaints span years, from the 2019 library redesign to the 2026 store update. They're not proof that every player feels this way, but they point to the same thing Marcus feels: the interface makes players work harder than it should. They also cut both ways for this concept, which leans on cover art. Players don't hate big art; they hate *scrolling through* big art to find information, and they miss being able to scan a big library quickly. That's why the redesign keeps covers to a single row instead of an endless feed, and why dense scanning moves to a dedicated search grid. Whether that's enough for players with very large libraries is one of the things testing needs to answer.

The core problem

Players with large libraries have to scan a crowded screen of rows, lists and panels just to choose a game, and social features live outside the library, so the simple act of picking something to play, alone or with friends, takes far more effort than it should.

Constraints

This is an unofficial concept, so there was no access to Valve's data or users. Every screen is built on my own library and screenshots, and the redesign had to keep every job the library does today, just moved to where it's needed.

03. Research and discovery

How I researched

I audited the current library screen by screen, compared it with two earlier versions (Steam before 2019, and my own 2019 remake), and looked at how other game launchers handle the same job. I also gathered visual references for mood.

Three versions of the same library

	Old Steam (before 2019)	My 2019 remake	Steam today
Home	Game page only	Game page with large hero art	What's New row, Recent Games, Play Next
Finding games	Long sidebar list	Sidebar with a filter dropdown	Sidebar: 18 Favorites, 85 Uncategorized
Game page	Dense, with workshop and activity	Hero art, Play, DLC table, news, links	Banner, install bar, links, activity, news, friends, notes, DLC
Downloads and friends	Bottom bar, separate window	Bottom bar, separate window	Bottom bar, separate screen and window

Valve's own 2019 library update moved in a direction very similar to my first remake. That confirmed the problems were real, and showed that a second pass needed to change the structure, not just the surface.

What Marcus and Priya need

User need	What I found
Recognize games at a glance	Cover art, what players know games by, is the smallest thing on screen
Decide quickly	About 50 things compete for attention on the home screen
Find any game without a permanent list	The 103-game sidebar is always on, though it only matters when searching
Quick checks	Most visits are for one thing (is a friend on, what did the patch change), but the game page shows everything
Friends inside the library	Friends and chat open in a separate window
Joining in one step	Joining a friend means store, install, then launch
A calm space where the art leads	Interface chrome and color compete with the covers

The competitive landscape

Launcher	How its library works	User need left unmet
Steam today	News row, shelves, a sidebar list and a bottom bar	Decide quickly, recognize at a glance, a calm space
PlayStation 5 home	A row of recent games with the selected game's art filling the screen	Find any game: the full library is a separate screen
Xbox app on PC	A filterable grid library, with friends in a side panel	Decide quickly: every game gets equal weight in the grid

Launcher	How its library works	User need left unmet
Epic Games Launcher	A grid of covers with filters, and a friends panel	Decide quickly; quick checks
GOG Galaxy 2.0	One library across stores, with grid and list views and many filters	Decide quickly, a calm space
Playnite	A free, highly customizable launcher with a cover-focused fullscreen mode	A calm space without setup; friends inside the library

Based on each launcher's own descriptions as of November 2026.

The console homes show that a single row with big art feels calm and lets the game lead, but they push the full library somewhere else. The PC launchers show everything, but at the cost of calm. None combines a focused home, fast search across a large library, and friends in the same place.

The opportunity

A library home that feels like a console's, one game in focus with its art leading, while keeping a PC library's power: any game findable in seconds, with friends and downloads one step away.

Design requirements

The library must…	Need it serves	How the redesign does it
Put covers first, large and uncropped	Recognize at a glance	A cover carousel with the selected game in full color
Show one decision at a time	Decide quickly	One game in focus, with one Play or Install button
Find any game without a permanent list	Find any game	Four collection tabs, plus full-screen search that filters as you type
Separate quick checks from full detail	Quick checks	A Details panel over the carousel, and a full game page

The library must…	Need it serves	How the redesign does it
Keep friends in the library	Friends inside the library	A Friends panel over the carousel
Turn joining into one step	Joining in one step	Install & Join on game invites
Stay calm so the art leads	A calm space	Fog tones, thin type and one red accent

Player complaints added one more requirement: **the library must still offer a dense way to scan a large collection on demand.** Today that's the A to Z search grid; a compact list view, for players who think in titles rather than art, is a planned addition to test.

04. Strategy and design direction

The guiding question

How might we help players pick what to play right now, without making them scan everything at once?

Three design goals

One decision at a time: the screen helps Marcus pick a game, then gets out of the way.
Your art leads: players recognize covers faster than names, so covers come first.
Everything else, one step away: details, search, downloads and friends are a click away, not always on screen.

How success will be measured

Task	What's measured	Success looks like
Launch a favorite game	Time, clicks	Faster than today's Steam
Find a game that isn't installed	Time, errors	Found through search without help
Check whether a friend is in game	Time, clicks	Answered without leaving the library

Task	What's measured	Success looks like
Join a friend's game you haven't installed	Steps, time	Done from the invite in one step
Check what changed in the latest update	Time	Found without opening the full game page

What the redesign could save

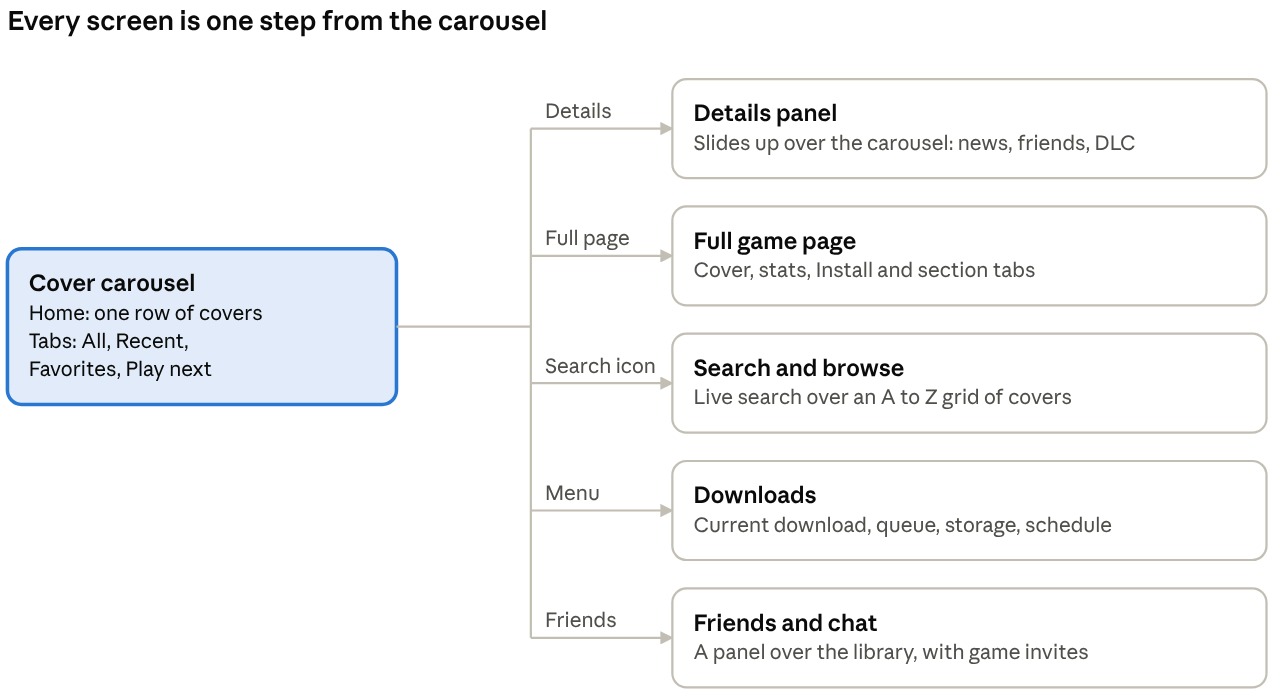
Until the concept is tested, these are projections, not results:

	Marcus today	Marcus in the redesign (projected)
Things competing for attention on the home screen	About 50	About a dozen: a few covers, four tabs, one button, one headline
Steps to join a friend's game he hasn't installed	About 5: open Friends, find the invite, open the game, install, launch	2: open Friends, press Install & Join
Checking one fact about a game	Open the full game page and scan it	Press Details; the carousel stays where it was

If these hold, the home screen asks Marcus to weigh roughly 75% fewer things before he plays. *Projected, not yet validated. Today's counts come from a screenshot of my own library; the redesign's come from the prototype. Testing will replace these with measured times.*

How the library is organized

The carousel is the hub. Every other screen opens from it and returns to it:



Screen map · the carousel and the five screens it opens

The balancing acts

A calm home pulls against finding any game fast, so the sidebar goes and collection tabs and a full-screen search replace it. Quick checks pull against full detail, so details come in two depths: a panel over the carousel, and a full game page. And Steam's brand color pulls against the games' own art, so the main button is a plain pale fog and red appears only as a small accent, leaving the covers as the most colorful thing on screen.

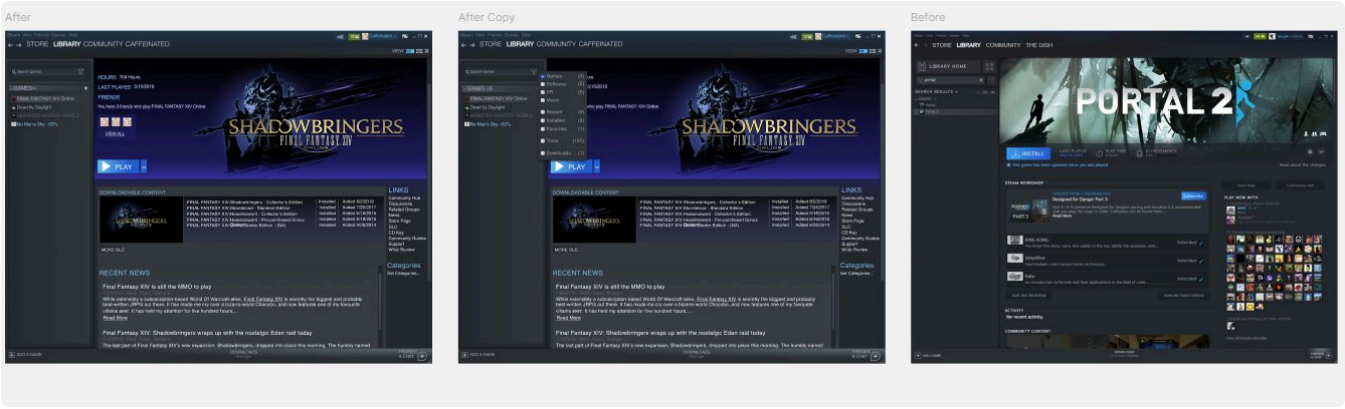
05. Design process and iteration

Where it started

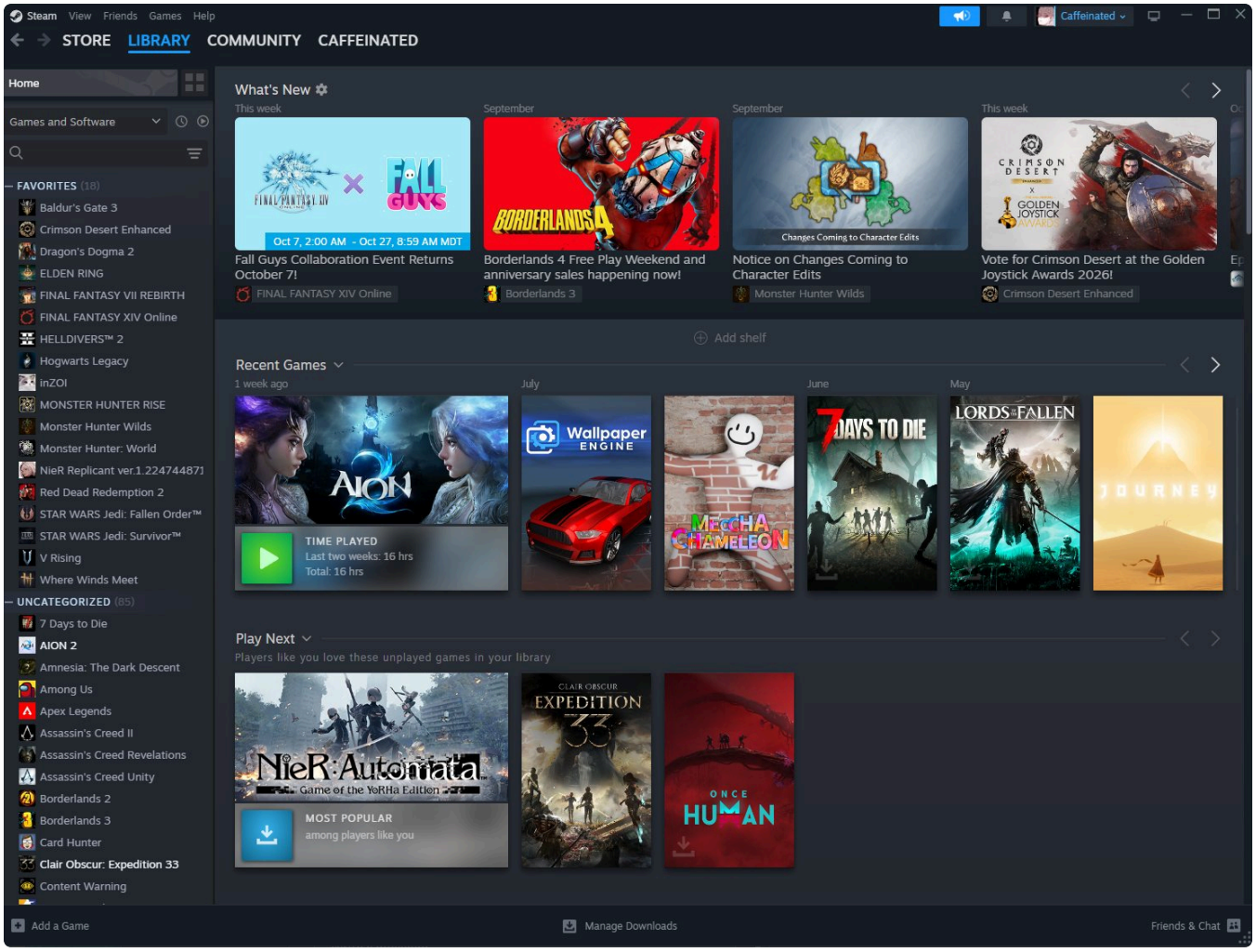
Here's what bothered me about Steam, in my own words:

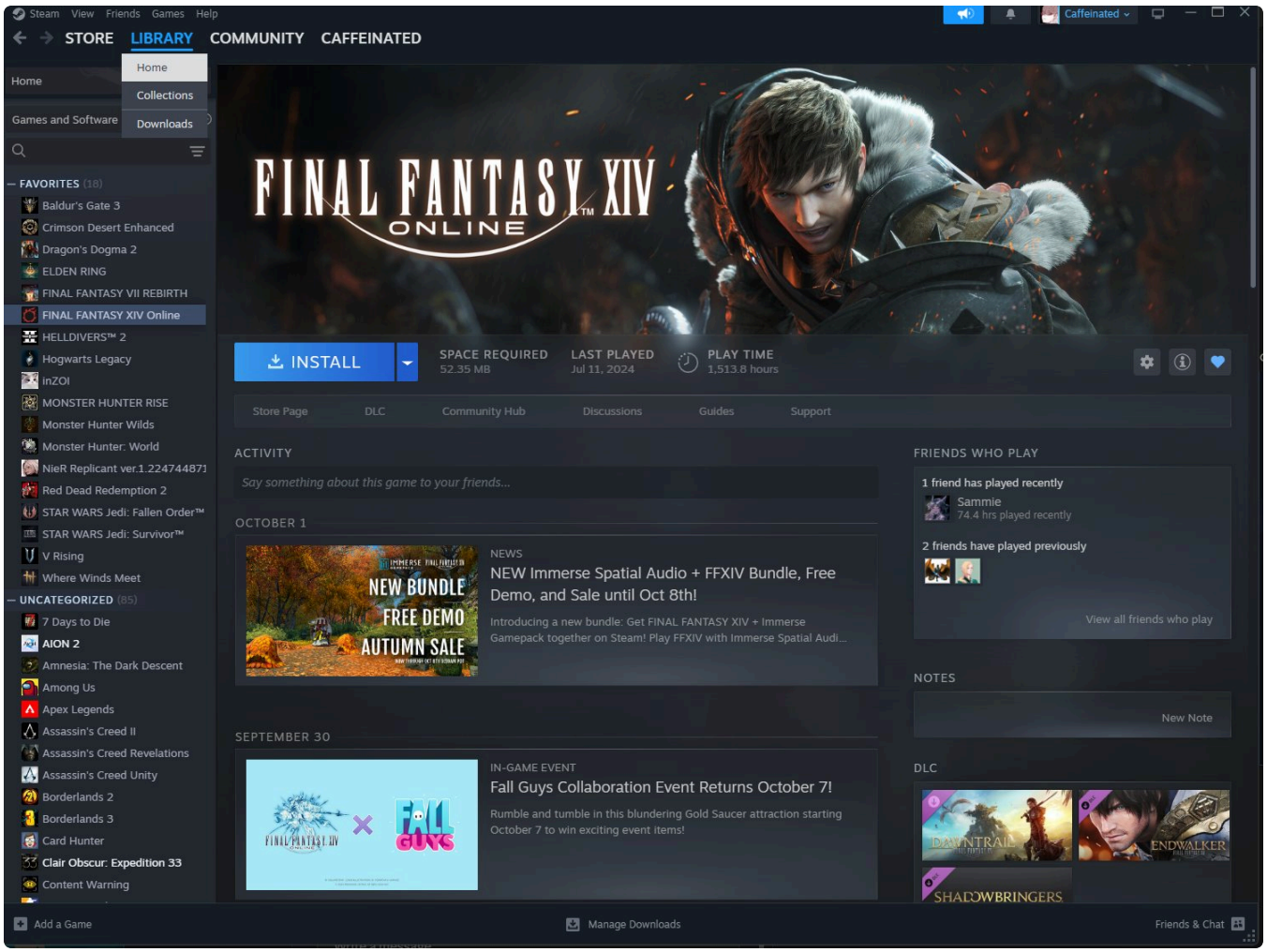
> I didn't like the original setup. It felt clunky and not entirely intuitive. It reminded me of scrolling through a coder's database, not a high-quality game hub.

My first attempt was in 2019. It added large hero art, a clear Play button, and DLC and news on the game page. Later that year, Valve's own update moved in a very similar direction.



When I came back to it in September 2026, this is what the library looked like. It kept the 2019 structure, but it had grown crowded.

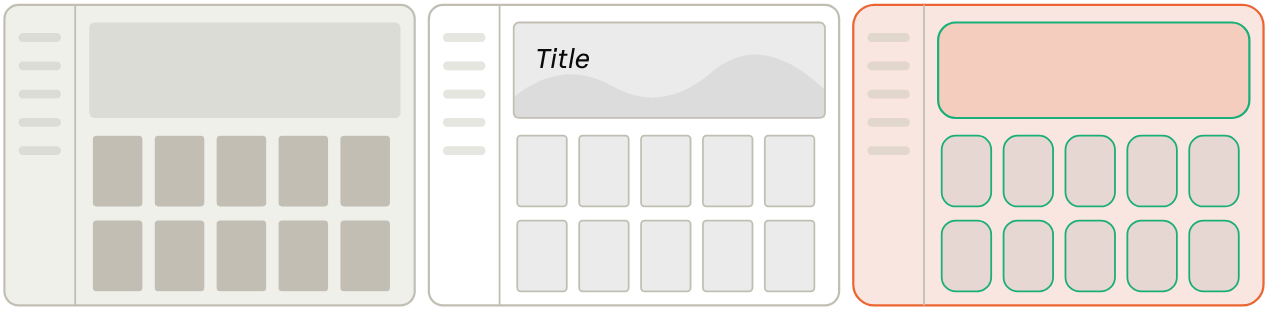




Three new looks, one old skeleton

My first three passes in 2026 were all about surface: a dark graphite dashboard, a cinematic serif look over painted scenery, and frosted navy-and-gold glass. Each was polished, and each failed for the same reason. Underneath, they all kept Steam's skeleton: a sidebar, a banner, and rows of cards. Looking at the three side by side, the pattern was obvious. They were Steam with a new coat of paint. *(These versions weren't saved.)*

Three repaints, one skeleton (reconstructed)



Graphite dashboard
Dark panels, dense stats

Cinematic serif
Serif titles over painted scenery

Navy and gold glass
Frosted panels, gold edges

Reconstruction from memory · the originals weren't saved. Each look kept a sidebar, a banner and rows of cards.

The turning point: structure before style

So I stopped styling and started over with structure. I weighed four ways the library home could work:

Four structures I weighed for the library home



Cover carousel (chosen)
One row, one game in focus

One game, full screen
Big art, a drawer below

Art mosaic
Tiles sized by play time

Search first
Type, then pick from a grid

Concept sketches · the four structures, redrawn for this case study

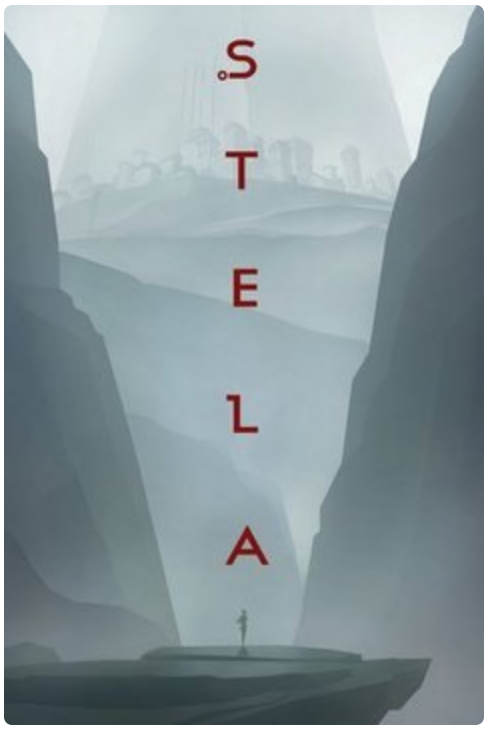
One game full screen was dramatic, but it hid the rest of the library. The art mosaic was beautiful but hard to scan, and sizing by play time buried new games. Search first was fast for players who know what they want, but useless for Marcus, who doesn't. The cover carousel kept several games in view while making the choice obvious, so it won.

Real content tells the truth

The first carousel used placeholder boxes, and it looked fine, because placeholders always do. Swapping in real game covers changed everything: some cropped badly, some titles disappeared into busy art, and the fade between covers needed tuning. Real covers showed in minutes what placeholders had hidden for days.

Finding the mood

The carousel needed a mood of its own, not Steam's navy. I found it in the cover of the game *Stela*: pale fog, a valley fading into distance, thin letters spaced down the page, and a single touch of red.



That became the visual system: slate and fog tones, Josefin Sans in thin, widely spaced capitals with Figtree for anything that needs quick reading, tight corners, thin lines instead of boxes, and red used only for small markers like the active collection dot.

Four decisions that shaped the library

1. Shelves become one carousel. Marcus used to scan a news row, two shelves and a list before choosing anything. Now one game is always in focus, and the next step is obvious: Play or Install.

2. Details come in two depths. Most of Marcus's visits are quick checks: did the patch land, is anyone playing? A frosted panel answers those right over the carousel without losing his place, and the full game page is there when he wants everything.

3. The list becomes a search. A list only matters when you're looking for something, so the sidebar became four quiet collection tabs and a full-screen search that narrows as Marcus types.

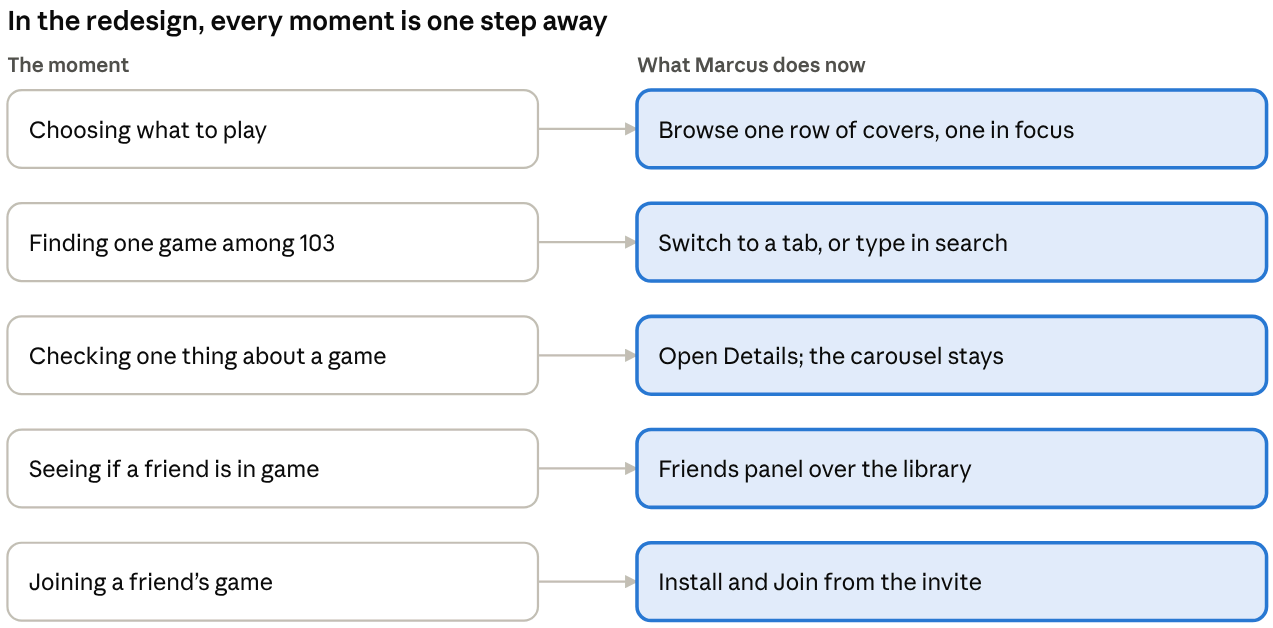
4. Downloads and friends join the library. For Priya, friends now open as a panel over the library instead of a separate window, and an invite's Install & Join button folds three steps (find the game, install it, launch it) into one.

Feedback and challenges

The biggest change came from self-critique across rounds rather than user testing (early reactions from three players came later, and are in chapter 07): realizing the first three passes were repaints, not redesigns. The main challenge was working without Valve's data. Every screen is built on my own library, and some covers were only available at low resolution.

Marcus's evening, redesigned

Here are the same moments that broke Marcus's and Priya's evenings, each now one step from the carousel:

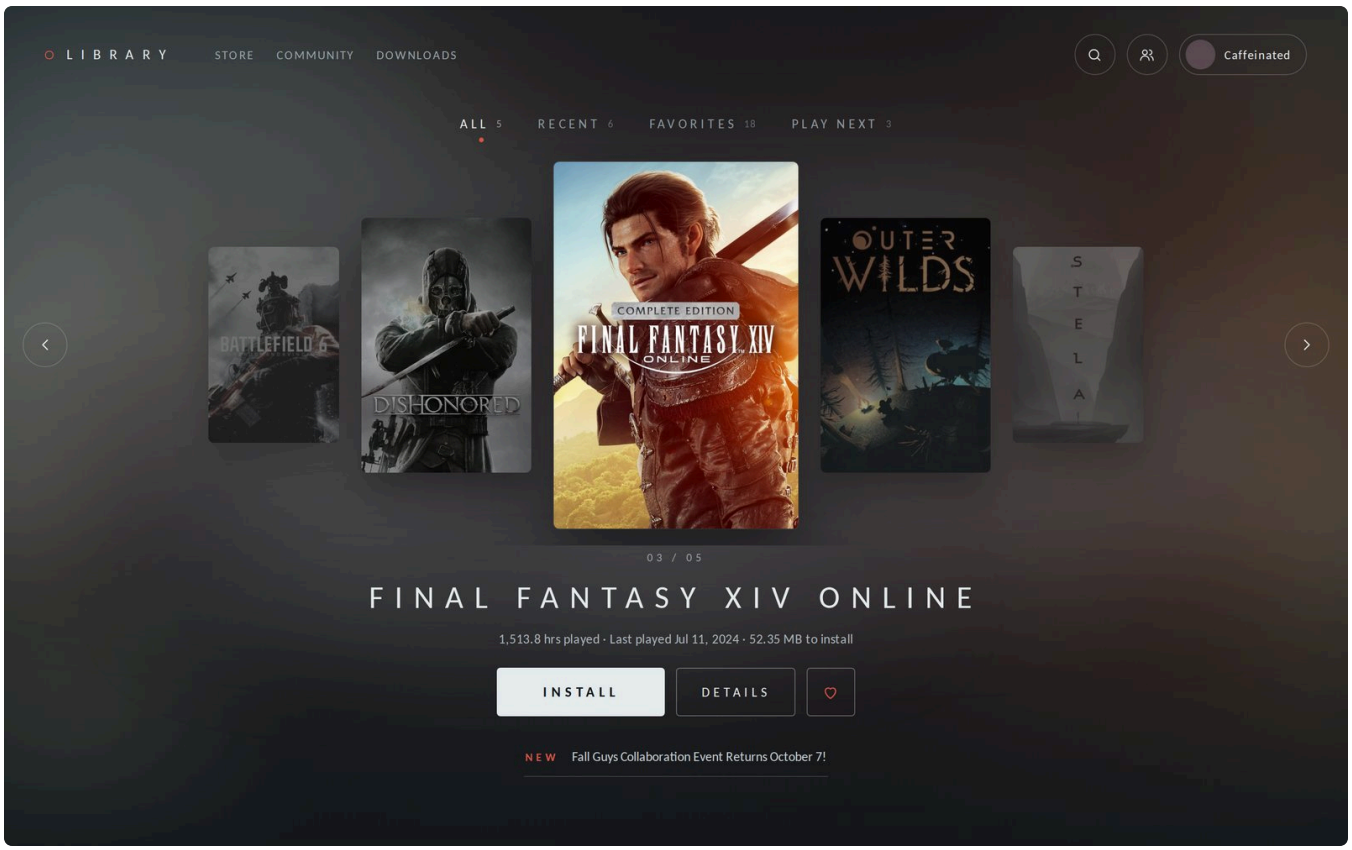


Marcus's evening, redesigned · the same moments, one step from the carousel

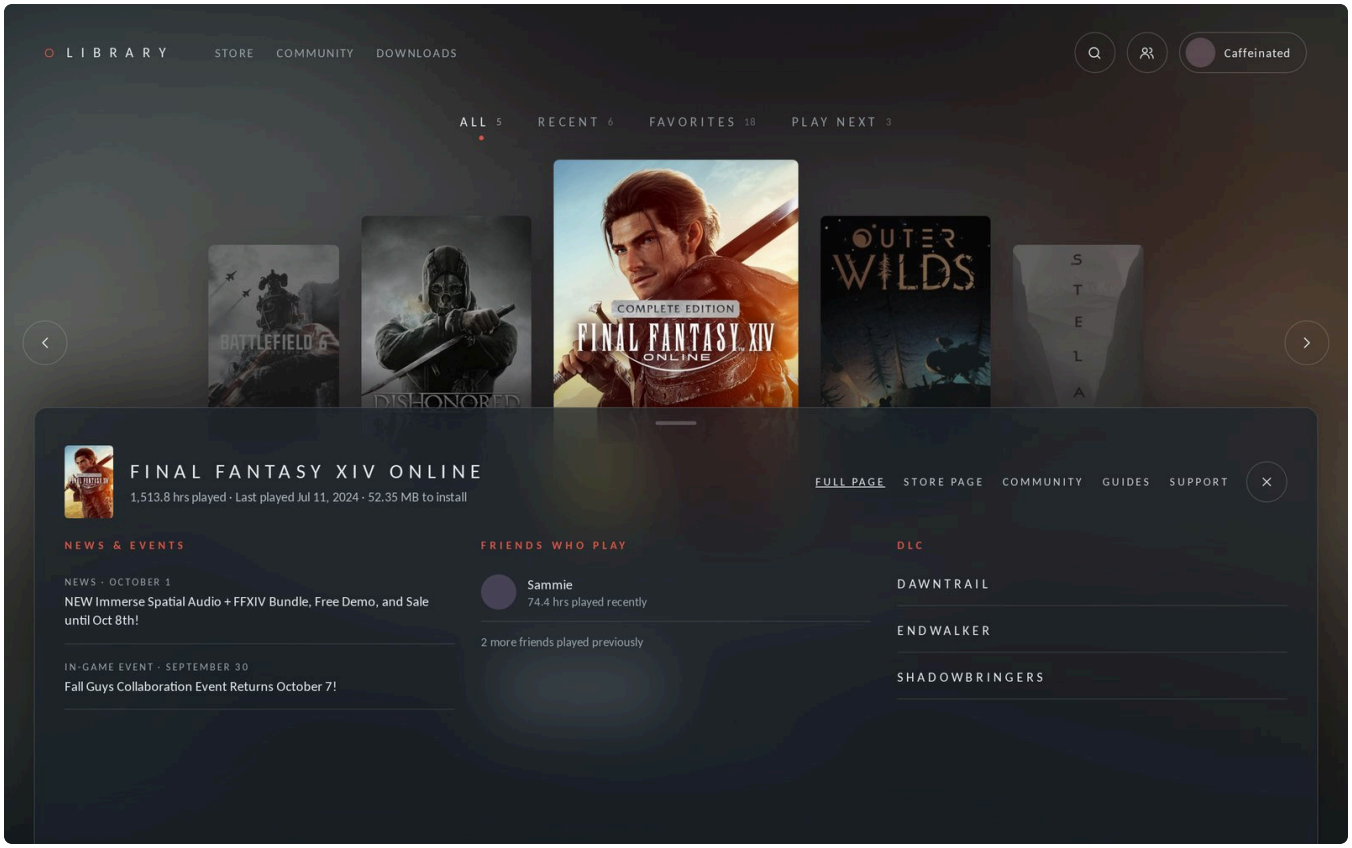
06. Final solution

The final screens

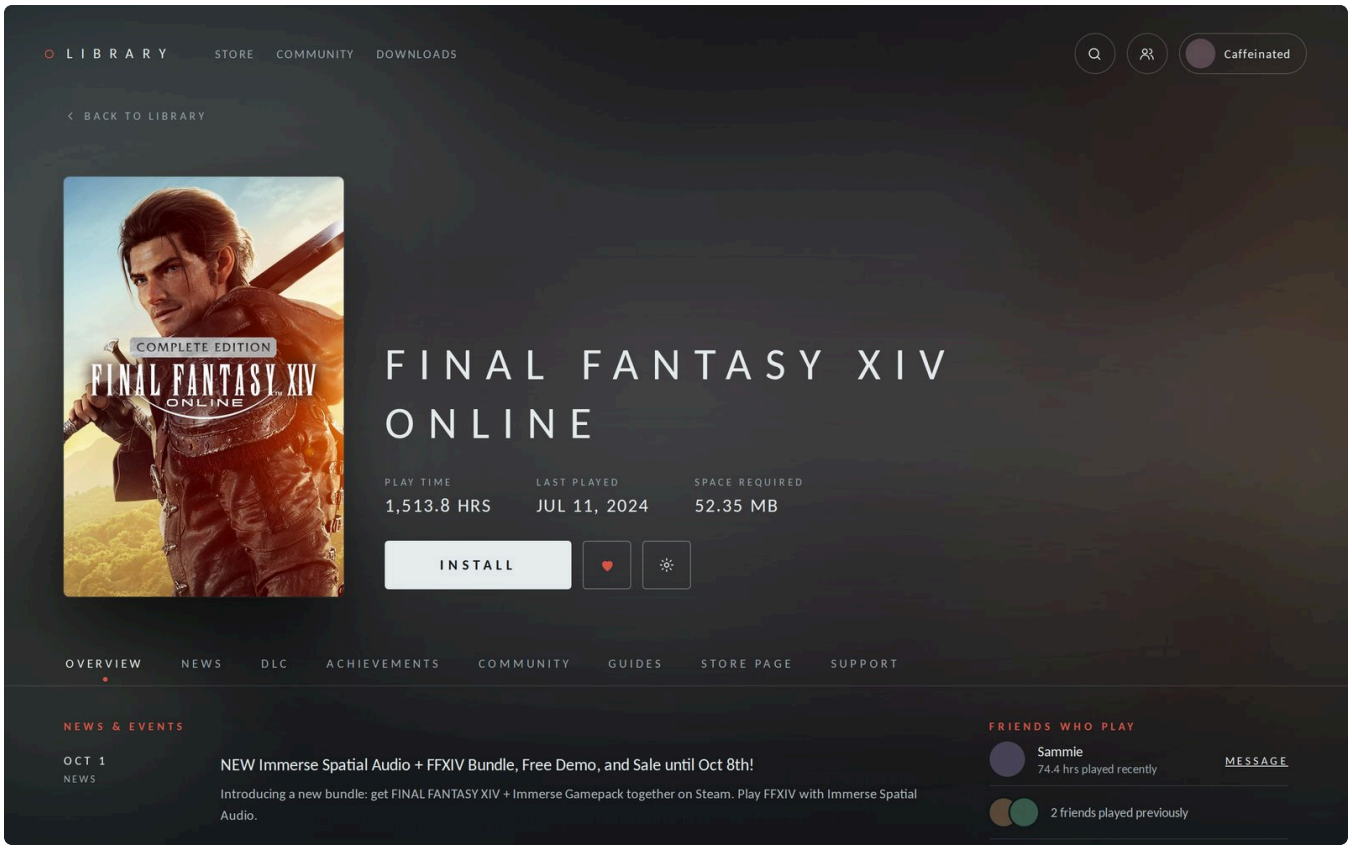
Marcus opens his library to **one row of covers**. The selected game is large and in full color while the rest fade into fog, and the whole background becomes a soft blur of that cover. Under it sit the name, one line of context, one Play or Install button, and a single news headline.



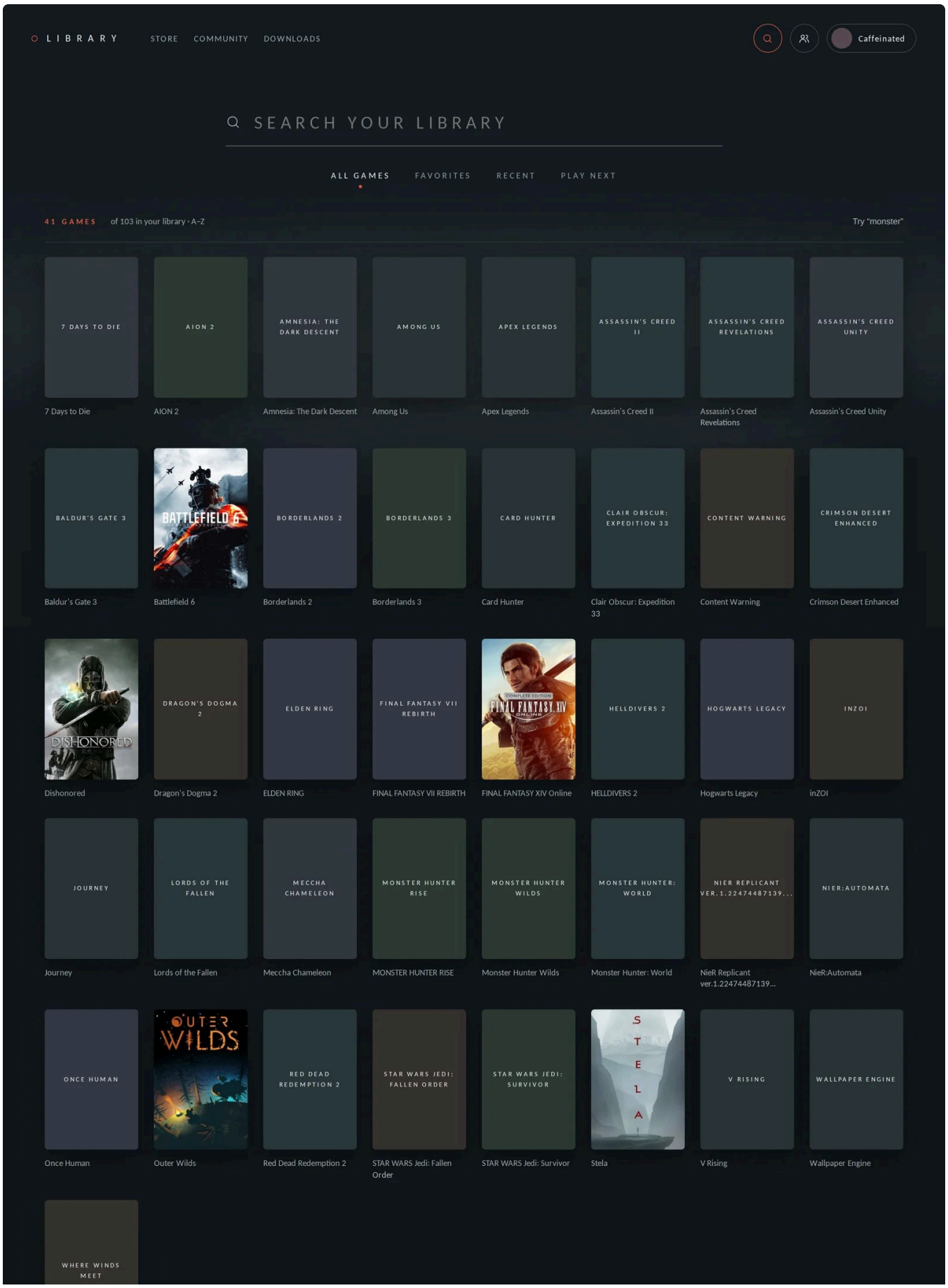
Pressing **Details** slides up a frosted panel with news and events, friends who play, and DLC, without losing his place.



For everything, the **full game page** puts the cover beside the title, with play time, last played and space required, then Install, and one row of section tabs.

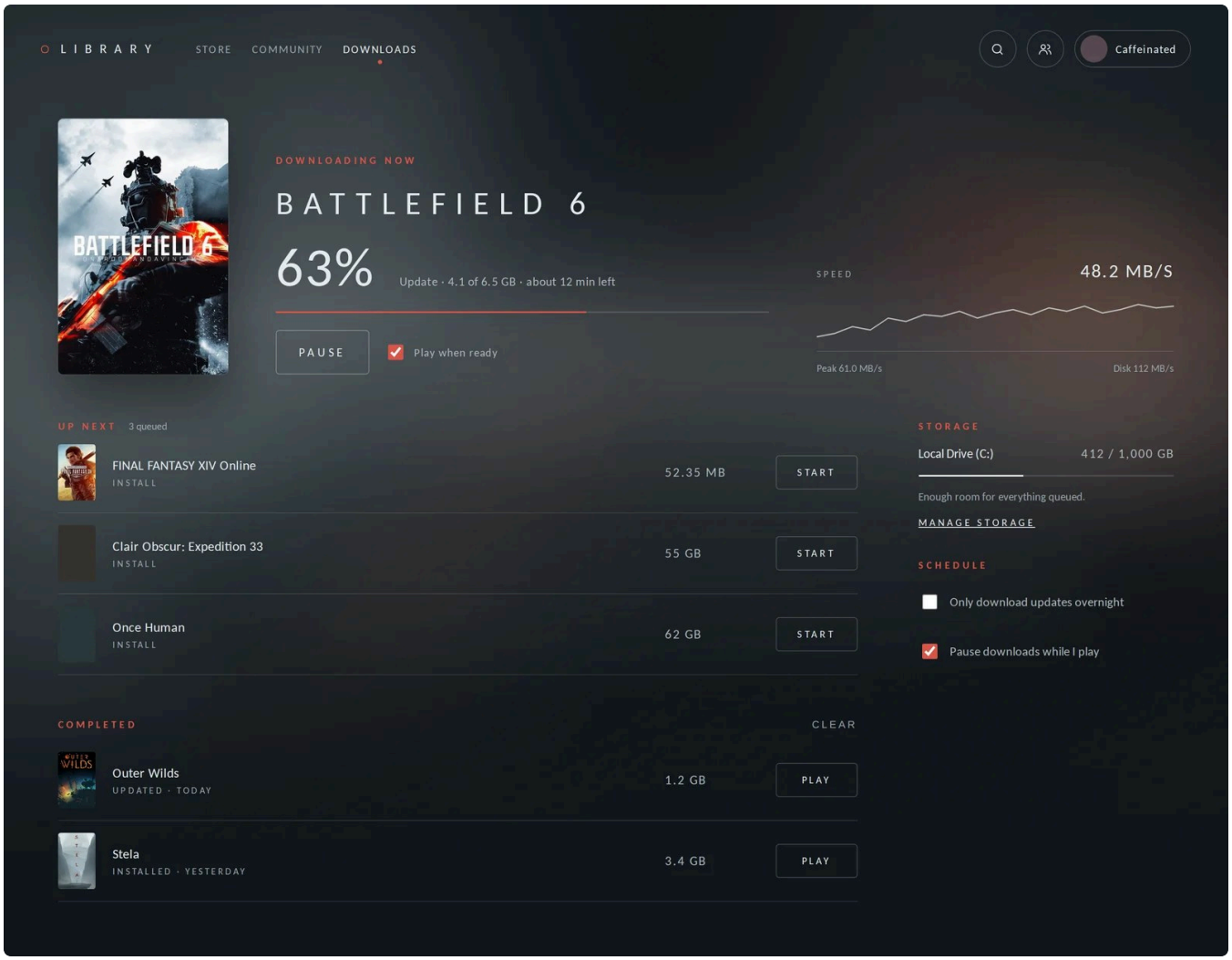


Search opens a full screen with one large search line over an A to Z grid of covers that narrows as he types.

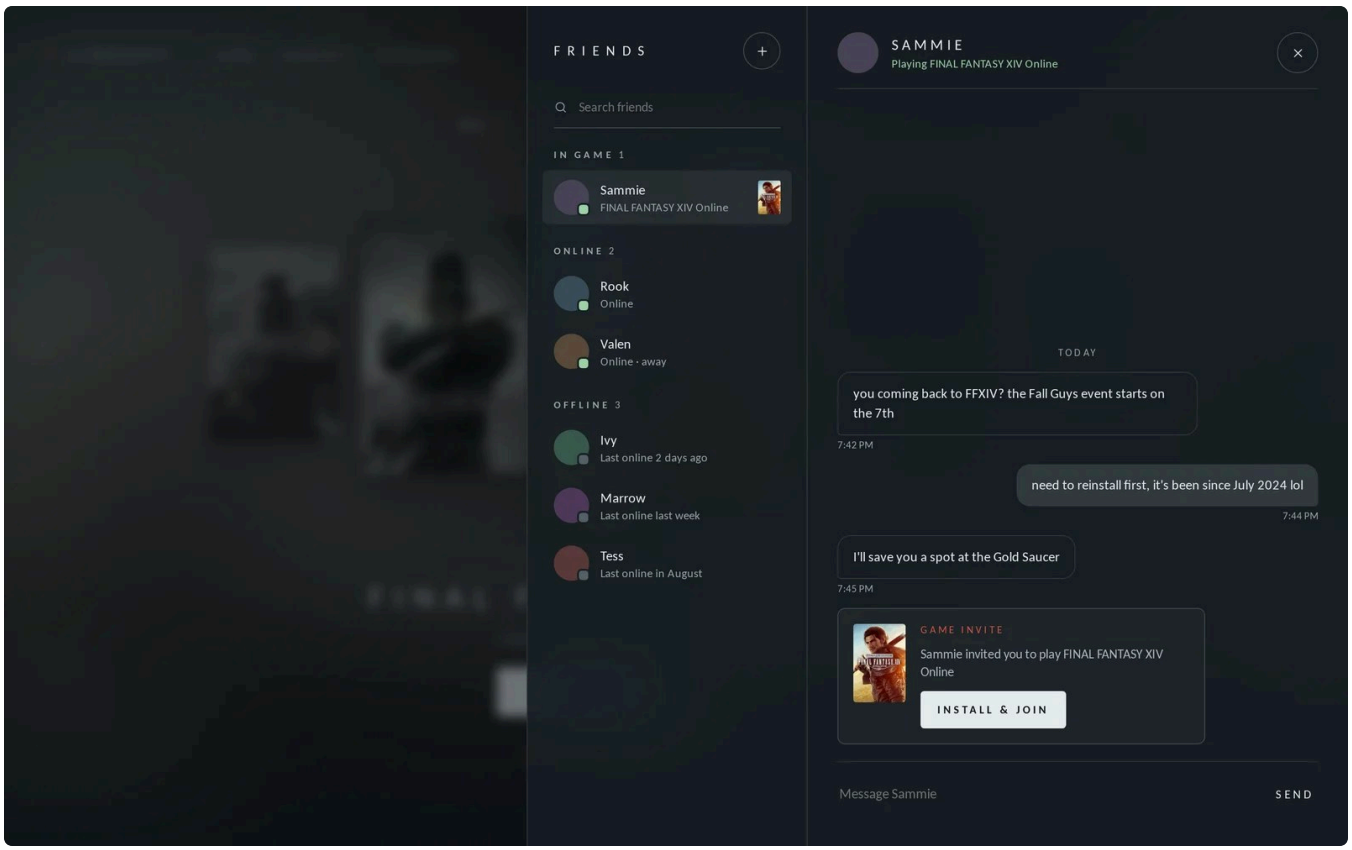

LIBRARY
STORE
COMMUNITY
DOWNLOADS
Caffeinated
SEARCH YOUR LIBRARY
ALL GAMES
FAVORITES
RECENT
PLAY NEXT
41 GAMES
of 103 in your library · A–Z
Try “monster”
7 Days to Die
AION 2
Amnesia: The Dark Descent
Among Us
Apex Legends
Assassin's Creed II
Assassin's Creed Revelations
Assassin's Creed Unity
Baldur's Gate 3
Battlefield 6
Borderlands 2
Borderlands 3
Card Hunter
Clair Obscur: Expedition 33
Content Warning
Crimson Desert Enhanced
Dishonored
Dragon's Dogma 2
ELDEN RING
FINAL FANTASY VII REBIRTH
FINAL FANTASY XIV Online
HELLDIVERS 2
Hogwarts Legacy
inZOI
Journey
Lords of the Fallen
Mecca Chameleon
MONSTER HUNTER RISE
Monster Hunter Wilds
Monster Hunter: World
NieR Replicant ver.1.22474487139...
NieR:Automata
Once Human
Outer Wilds
Red Dead Redemption 2
STAR WARS Jedi: Fallen Order
STAR WARS Jedi: Survivor
Stela
V Rising
Wallpaper Engine
WHERE WINDS MEET



Downloads puts the current download in the hero spot, with the queue, finished games, storage and two scheduling switches.



And for Priya, **Friends** opens as a panel over the library, grouped by who's in game, online or offline, with invites that install and join in one step.



Download sizes, speeds, storage figures, friend names other than Sammie, and chat messages are placeholder data.

Built to be readable

Text sits in light colors on dark slate for strong contrast, and the layouts reflow for narrower windows.

Back to Marcus's evening

Every job the library does is still there, moved to where it's needed: one carousel instead of shelves, tabs and search instead of a sidebar, and details on demand. Marcus picks a game in seconds, and Priya joins her friends before they start without her.

07. Current status, feedback and validation plan

This is a concept with a clickable prototype. Three people have reacted to it informally; nothing has been measured yet, so here's what they said and how I'll check the rest.

Early reactions

I showed the prototype to three people, from a game master to a casual player. These were informal reactions, not timed tests.

Holden Grimes, who plays and runs games, said: “Steam usually reminds me of like, analog systems for whatever reason. The layout and shape of everything gave me that early retro vibe, which can be nice, but this is just modern for 2026 and clean. Easy to get through and I think that will appeal to new users as well. It won't overwhelm them.”

Kendra Jensen, who only plays now and then, said: “I'm not a huge gamer, so navigating Steam sometimes annoys me. I just always wanted the layout to be a bit cleaner and more visually appealing. I think this version does that. Everything has its own way of being at the center so you're not overwhelmed by everything else around it.”

Abigail Lasalla Young said: “I really like how clean this is. It reminds me of what you'd expect from some of the big gaming companies, but it's Steam.” She added that the frosted-glass style felt current, a sign that the people behind it are paying attention to up-to-date design.

Three things stood out. All three described today's Steam the way I did, as dated and harder to get through than it should be, which matches my own “coder's database” frustration. Two of them, independently, said the redesign wouldn't overwhelm people, which is exactly what “one decision at a time” was meant to do. And Kendra's view as a casual player suggests the concept may help newcomers most, not just players with huge libraries. What none of them tested yet is the hardest case: finding one game fast in a very large library.

What might trip people up

Task	Likely snag	Fix
Launch a game from a large collection	The arrows move one game at a time, which gets slow with 18 or more	Add typing or letter jump from the carousel
Find a game that isn't installed	Search sits behind an unlabeled icon	Add a tooltip and a keyboard shortcut
See whether a friend is in game	Nothing on the carousel shows it until the panel opens	Show an online count on the friends icon

Task	Likely snag	Fix
Read small buttons	Thin, widely spaced capitals are harder to read small	Keep thin type for headings; use a sturdier weight for buttons

What's delivered, and what's still unproven

The concept is an interactive prototype with six connected screens, exported screens, and this case study. Changing the structure rather than the surface is what made it feel new. What's still unproven is whether players really launch games faster, and whether players with very large libraries miss the always-on list.

How I'll find out

Over about four weeks, I'll recruit five or six PC players with at least 50 games. In week 1, I'll time them doing the five success-criteria tasks in today's Steam, as a baseline. In weeks 2 and 3, they'll do the same tasks in the prototype in moderated sessions of about 30 minutes, thinking aloud, while I measure time, clicks and errors. In week 4, I'll fix the top issues, starting with the likely snags above, and update this case study with real results.

08. Reflection and next steps

What I learned

Structure comes before style: three polished versions failed for the same reason, the same layout underneath. Real content tells the truth faster than placeholders ever will. And borrowing a mood rather than a layout, from one game cover, gave the design an identity without copying anyone's screens.

What I'd do differently

I'd sketch several structures before styling any of them, and get the concept in front of players sooner.

What's next

I want to see how the carousel scales to libraries of a thousand or more games, and how it works with a controller on a TV or a Steam Deck. I also want to test a compact list view alongside the carousel, since players have been clear that art-heavy layouts make big libraries harder to scan.