

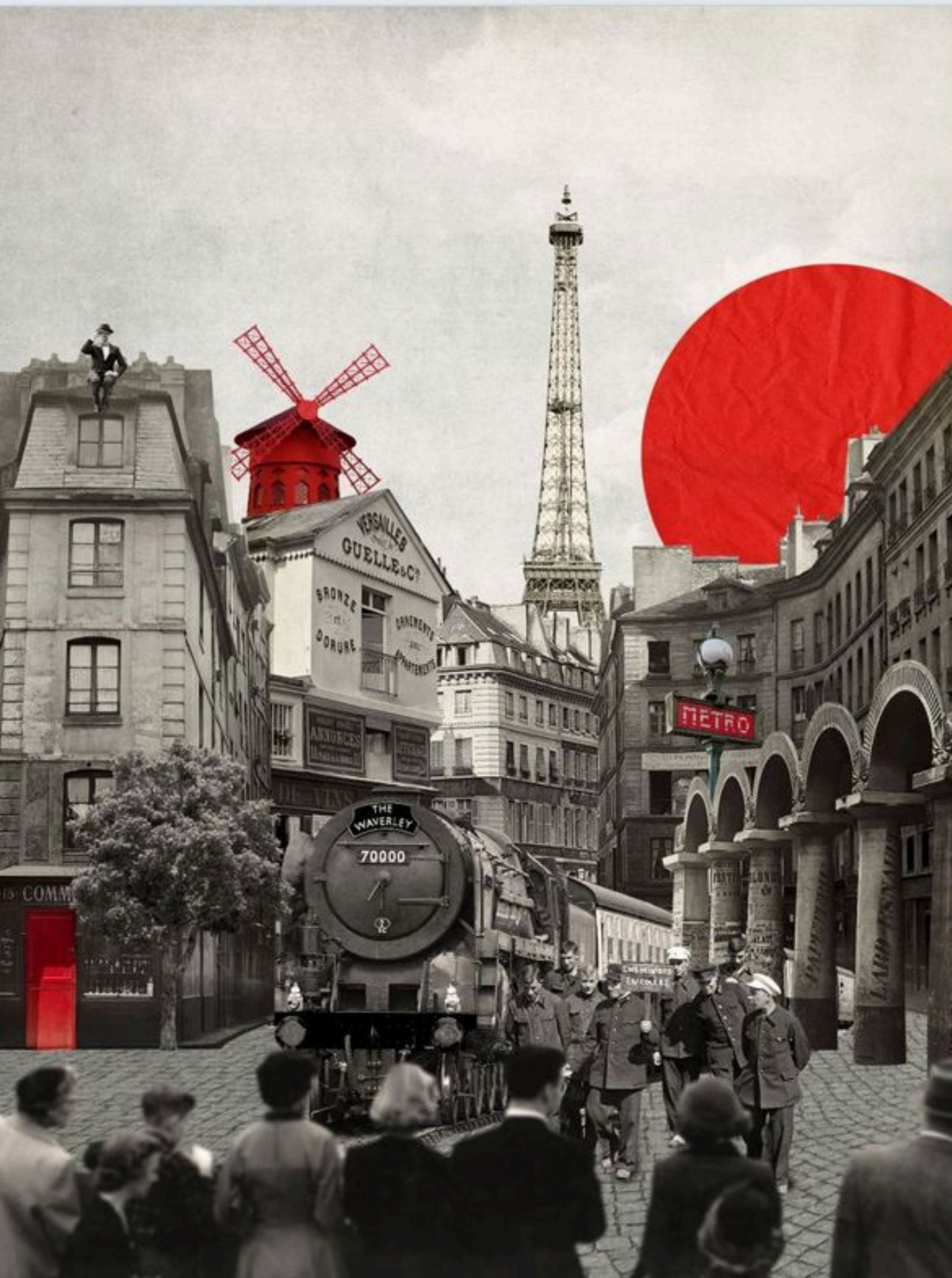
MY RESEARCH
FOCUSING ON
LOCATIVE MEDIA &
GEOLOCATED
NARRATIVES, AND
MOBILE APP DESIGN
FOR LOCATION-BASED
EXPERIENCE

Murray (2023) explores the potential of locative narratives, which combine GPS-enabled mobile devices with multimodal storytelling elements such as audio, imagery, and text. The concept of “narrative archaeology” is introduced to describe how audiences uncover layers of story by physically moving through a location, allowing each place to reveal part of the plot. This approach shifts narrative control from a fixed linear path to one that is spatially driven, where the story exists in fragments distributed across different sites. By positioning the audience within real-world settings, locative narratives blur the line between fiction and lived experience, creating a heightened sense of immersion.

Berry (2017) examines how **sensory and cultural cues** in a location can significantly influence the audience's connection to a story. In several case studies, Berry observed that audiences not only remembered the narrative more vividly when it referenced specific environmental details, but they also **attached personal meaning to the location**. For example, the sound of trams in a Melbourne laneway or the scent of food drifting from a nearby market stall can become narrative triggers that deepen the emotional impact of the scene. This demonstrates the value of designing location-based narratives that pay attention to the full sensory environment, rather than relying solely on visual cues.



RESEARCH

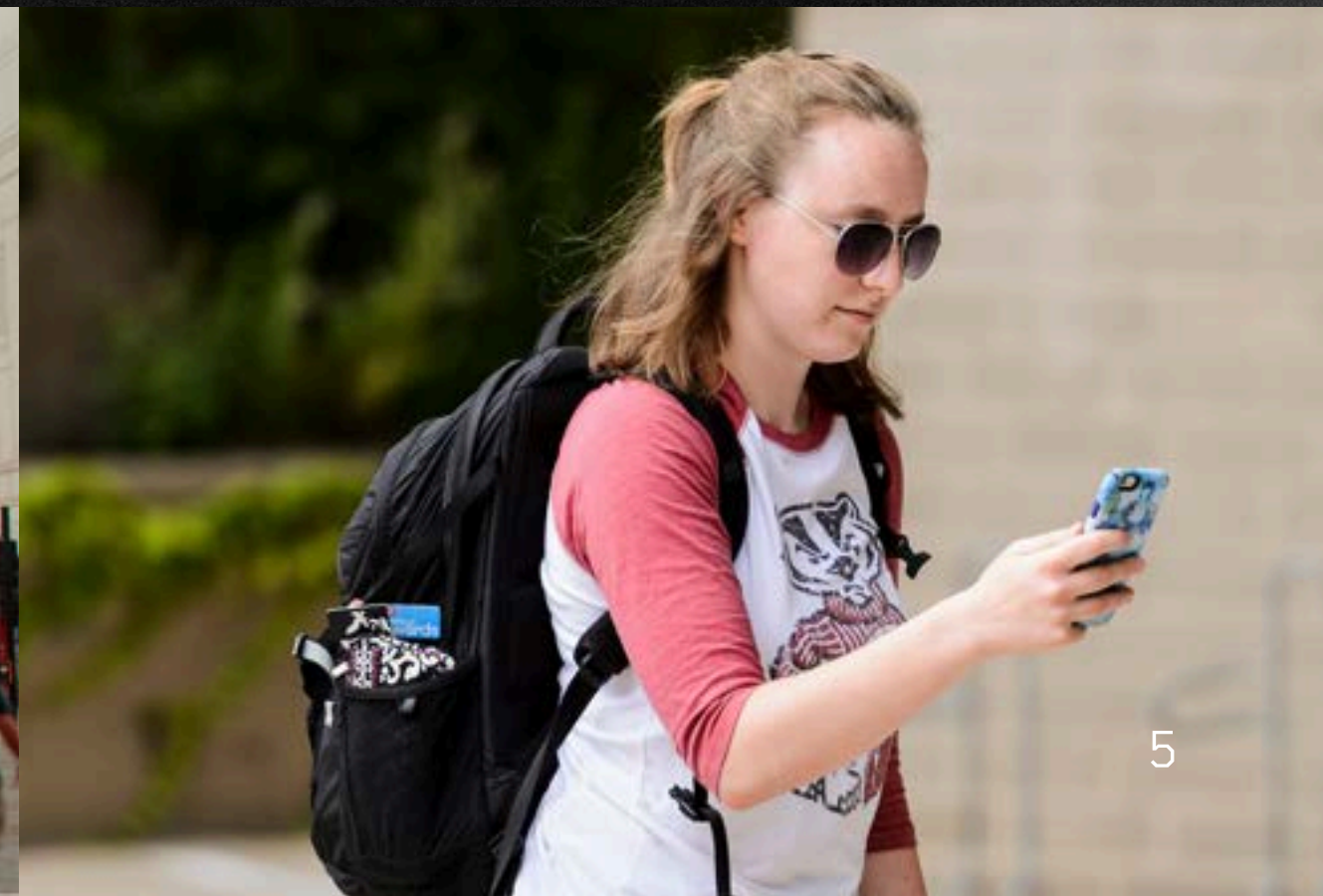


A 2022 authoring study on locative narratives further highlights the importance of aligning story events with the characteristics of the location in which they are experienced. *The researchers found that when plot points are tied directly to the history, architecture, or atmosphere of a place, audiences perceive the story as more authentic and memorable.*

Conversely, when locations were chosen arbitrarily without thematic or sensory relevance, users experienced a disconnect between the story and the environment. This finding reinforces the principle that place selection and narrative content must be carefully interwoven for locative storytelling to succeed.

MOBILE APP DESIGN FOR LOCATION-BASED EXPERIENCES

Nikolarakis and Koutsabasis (2024) conducted a systematic review of mobile augmented reality storytelling within cultural heritage contexts, identifying sixteen recurring design patterns. These patterns cover a range of interaction and navigation strategies, including progressive disclosure of content, location-based unlocking of story events, and visual or audio augmentation of physical spaces. The study emphasises that **the interface must remain simple and responsive to prevent distraction from the physical environment**. Another key insight is the necessity of designing for the specific context of use, which can include cultural norms, physical accessibility, and environmental conditions such as lighting. In projects that take place outdoors at night, for example, visibility and navigation cues become crucial to sustaining immersion and usability.





Nilsson et al. (2016) introduce the idea of “**seamful design**” in mobile applications that rely on location tracking. Instead of attempting to hide technical imperfections such as GPS drift or fluctuating signal strength, they argue that these irregularities can be incorporated into the design itself. In their museum-based study, occasional inaccuracy in beacon-triggered events was reframed as part of the narrative challenge, **encouraging users to explore the physical space more actively**. This approach reframes technology limitations as opportunities for engagement, rather than flaws to be eliminated.

Ciuffoletti (2025) presents a structured framework for creating geotourism applications, beginning with the development of detailed user personas and the identification of essential functional requirements. The process emphasises iterative testing and refinement, ensuring that the final product meets both practical needs and user expectations. This framework supports the creation of experiences that are contextually aware and user-centred, balancing the demands of content delivery with navigational clarity and aesthetic appeal. By combining storytelling with practical usability considerations, designers can create applications that are both engaging and functional in real-world settings.

SYNTHESIS AND DESIGN IMPLICATIONS

The literature shows that embedding narrative meaningfully into location, revealing it progressively, and supporting self-paced exploration are proven methods for engaging users. Mobile design patterns such as hidden triggers and sequential progression are effective for guiding players through real-world environments while keeping them immersed in the story. Technical limitations like GPS accuracy can be reframed as part of the experience rather than obstacles.

Most of the research focuses on cultural heritage, museums, or tourism, which differ from an urban nightlife setting. There is limited guidance on designing location-based narratives specifically for night-time use or for intimate, relationship-driven storytelling. This creates an opportunity for my project to contribute by applying these principles to Melbourne's night culture and by designing for atmospheric, emotionally engaging exploration.

REFLECTION AND GAPS



Embedding narrative into location transforms it into a meaningful “story place”

Locations tied closely to plot, history, or atmosphere feel authentic and are remembered more vividly.

Users often prefer a self-paced, exploratory journey

Non-linear progression keeps engagement high and encourages discovery.

Physical, cultural, and sensory details of place strengthen narrative immersion.

Sounds, scents, and textures can anchor scenes in memory and deepen emotional impact.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Progressive narrative reveals and contextual triggers sustain curiosity

Unlocking clues only at the correct location maintains suspense and flow.

Consider environmental conditions such as lighting at night and variable GPS accuracy.

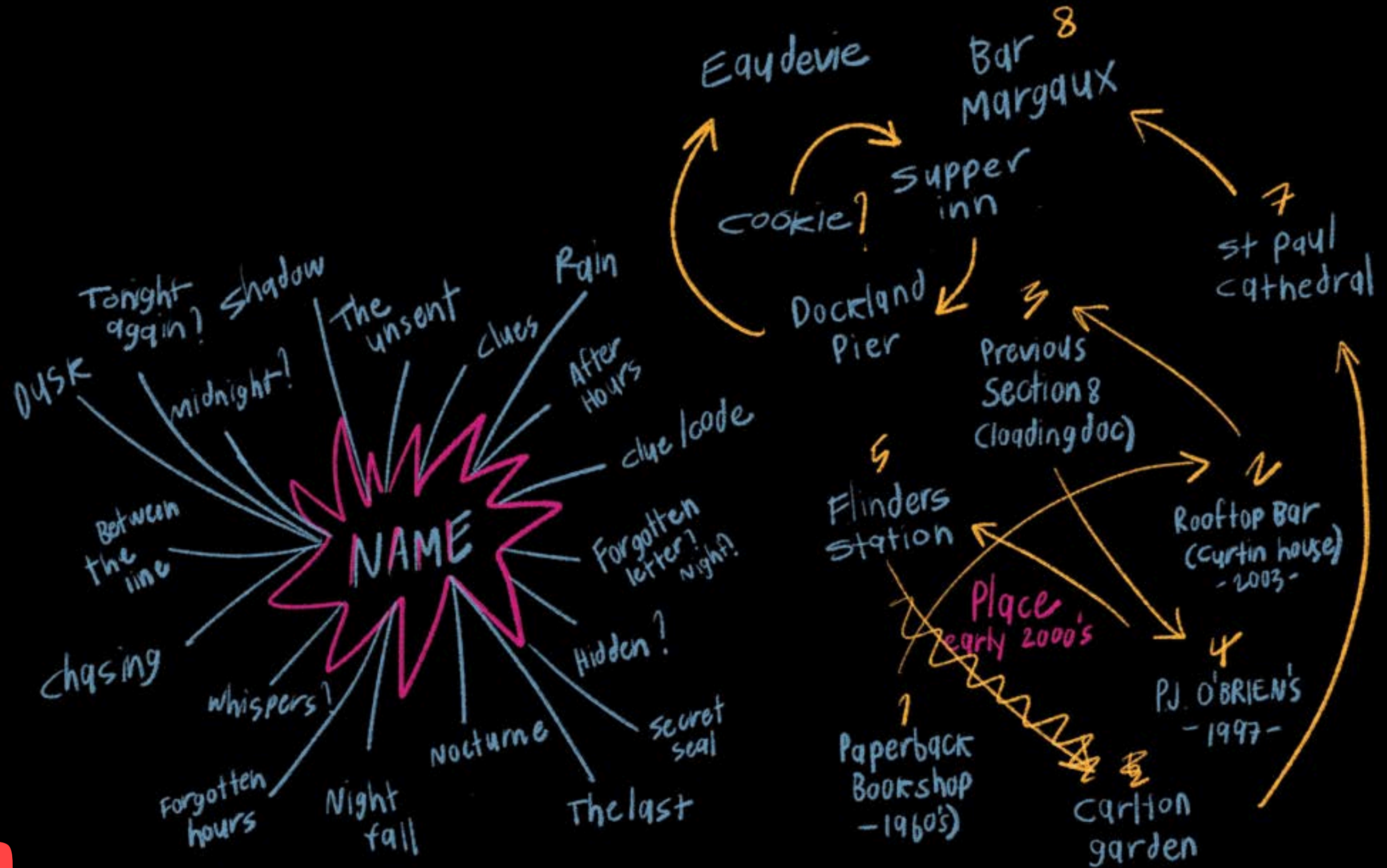
Ground design in real user needs and validate through testing

Iterative feedback ensures the experience remains engaging and practical.

BRAIN STORMING



BRAIN STORMING



THEME & AUDIENCE



Romance is the theme I selected to pair with Melbourne's night-time culture. when the city feels quieter, more mysterious, and encounters take on a heightened intensity. In this atmosphere, romance carries a sense of secrecy and fragility, revealed only through hidden clues rather than direct instructions. Research into location-based narratives supports this approach, showing that stories are most engaging when they connect with the cultural and sensory qualities of a place. A narrative that adds atmosphere and emotional depth makes the journey feel meaningful, not just a sequence of mapped locations.

Young adult

Couples

Small group of friend

Who are seeking alternative night-time activities. This group is socially active, curious, and open to experiences that feel immersive and memorable. Recent studies also highlight that younger demographics are increasingly looking for cultural or creative activities that go beyond dining or drinking, particularly in urban night settings (Herald Sun, 2024). They value experiences that feel unique, playful, and personal.

IDEATION

LETTER IN THE RAIN

Past | Butterfly | Historical base

Player collects old love letters hidden at venues before they're redeveloped. Uncover the hidden story behind the building, from different point of view from people in the past that used to live in those building

IN ANOTHER LIFE

Future | Jigsaw

Each stop reveals a "piece" of a possible life together that could happen if different choices have been made.

CHASING SHADOWS

Present | Domino

Player's choices at each stop subtly change the next location's memory fragment.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Present | Jigsaw

Fragments of poems are hidden at each stop. Players arrange them to reveal the secret story between two people, with the correct sequence to unlock the last hidden location.

TONIGHT AGAIN

Past | Treasure hunt | Night

Player uncovers a secret relationship that had to remain hidden in 2000s, through stories using puzzles from each location to reveal next location figuring out which place lead them to an end.

NIGHT FALL ARCHIVES

Past | Butterfly

Each location holds a physical memento, a matchbox, a ticket stub, a pressed flower which together form an "archive" of a love that was never meant to be public.

STOLLEN HOUR

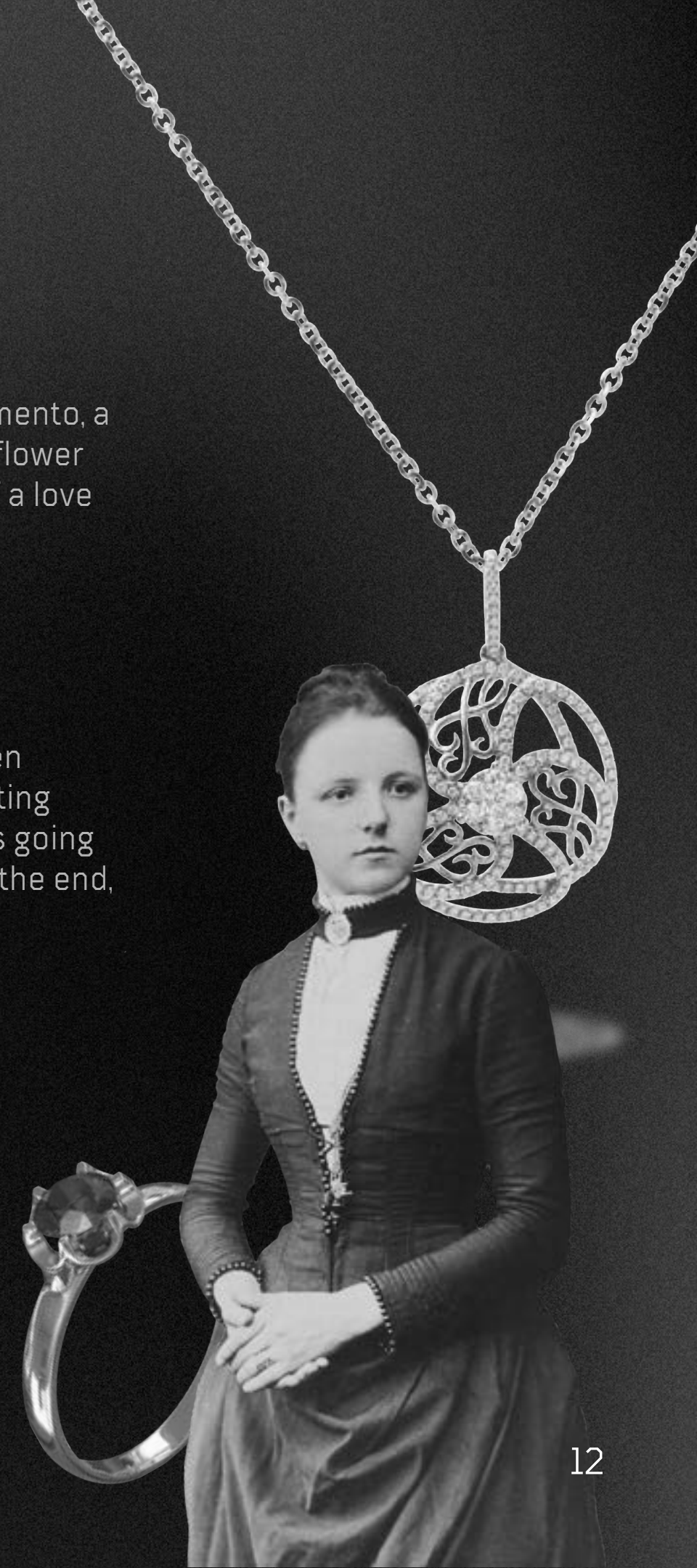
Present | Domino | Night

Players relive nights stolen between obligations, with each choice affecting whether the lovers' time together is going which way, whether it would get to the end, extended or cut short.

THE LAST TRAM

Present | Treasure Hunt

Players follow a route based on tram stops from an old love note, each stop holding a clue to the next. The last tram ride leads to the final meeting place.



COLLECTING BUTTERFLY
TIME FRAME: PAST
HISTORICAL

01

STORY FLOW

Old love letters tied to 10 historical buildings before they were redeveloped. Each stop reveals a different generation's love perspective, connected to real historical situations in real places. It would use AR to bring back buildings that once existed.

Letter in the rain

USER
JOURNEY

Open first map marker → travel to site → scan hidden marker → reveal letter fragment → make small choices → story tone shifts → archive unlocks at final stop.

INTERACTION
DESIGN

Clues unlocked by scanning murals, plaques, or street names. Letters are revealed as short text passages.

Innovation: Blends real urban history with fictional romance. Creates reflection on the city's transformation.

LOCATION

Historical buildings, redeveloped sites (The Palace Theatre, old arcades, demolished bars, etc..)

- 😊 educational + poetic blend
- ⚠️ history-heavy spots might feel less exciting for some audiences.

TREASURE HUNT
TIME FRAME: PAST
- NIGHT -

02

STORY FLOW

A hidden romance drifts through the night in early 2000s'. A diary-like memory left in shadows. Players follow poetic riddles, unlocking locations one by one, each stop holding a trace of what was left unsaid, unforgotten.

Tonight again

USER JOURNEY

Open first clue → solve poetic puzzle for the first location → travel to site → collect story scene → small quest → story reveals what happens next → hint inside the scene points to the next stop → following through

INTERACTION DESIGN

Word puzzles + short narrative scenes (like pages from a diary). The player feels they're piecing together a secret relationship.

Innovation: Combines geolocation with puzzle-solving for narrative progression.

LOCATION

Places that open late at night, not only bars but rooftops, bookshops and hidden corners that give different moods through the journey.

- 😊 mood and immersion
- ⚠️ puzzles need to be simple enough not to frustrate, but still meaningful.

Real but unfinished romance
cut short, lingers

JIGSAW PUZZLE
TIME FRAME: FUTURE
TWIST ENDING

03

STORY FLOW

A romance gathered piece by piece. Each location holds a scene of an ideal life together. Morning train, balcony dinner, a coffee, an outdoor cinema. The puzzle builds across the city, but when the ending arrives, something refuses to fall into place.

Platform nine

USER
JOURNEY

Start with a clue → travel to a site → gather a memory → drift through places in any order → the archive fills with scenes of an ideal life → the ending twists: none of these ideal scenes ever happened, only the longing of a man haunted by a choice that only cause emptiness. Players are walking through his imagination of "what if."

INTERACTION
DESIGN

Puzzle pieces slot together as the player collects scenes. Each adds text fragments and small visuals, slowly building an imagined life.

Innovation: Turns incompleteness into design, the absence itself becomes the story.

LOCATION

Present-day everyday places (cafés, train station, cinemas) reimagined as a life lived together.

😊 Strong narrative twist, emotional depth romance
⚠️ Needs clear UI to show puzzle progress, otherwise users might get confused.

part real, part fantasy {the sweetest parts were only imagine}

A man in a dark suit and hat is shown in profile, looking downwards. He is standing in a room with patterned wallpaper and a staircase railing is visible in the background. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows.

TREASURE HUNT

TONIGHT AGAIN

MYSTERY
ROMANCE

WHAT WAS LEFT UNSAID STAYS HIDDEN, BUT LINGERS. A FORBIDDEN LOVE OF THE 2000S', TRACED THROUGH HISTORICAL PLACES, ONE THAT NEVER FOUND ITS END.



*Можно, кто-то и скажет,
какой у нас старик,
Вашко, что все для себя
задумал!*



...ay searching
...d he meta this



1 THE PAPERBACK BOOKSHOP
(SINCE 1960S)

A small independent bookshop that has been part of Melbourne for decades. Its quiet, intimate atmosphere makes it a fitting place for a first encounter.

2 CURTIN HOUSE ROOFTOP BAR
(SINCE 2003)

Well known for its rooftop views and social energy. It captures the feeling of a city night out and sets the scene for a chance meeting.

3 SECTION 8 (BEFORE ITS TRANSFORMATION)

Originally a raw laneway space made from shipping containers. It reflects Melbourne's hidden culture and the excitement of finding something unexpected.

4 PJ O'BRIEN'S (SINCE 1997)

A long-standing Irish pub with music and noise spilling out the door. It represents the busy, social side of the city's nightlife.

5 FLINDERS STREET STATION

A central landmark and meeting point in Melbourne. It symbolises crossings, waiting, and moments where paths almost meet.

6 SUPPER INN (SINCE 1977)

A late-night Cantonese restaurant tucked upstairs in Chinatown. Its hidden location makes it ideal for a more private, low-key moment in the story.

7 DOCKLANDS PIER

A wide-open space by the water with a clear view of the city. It offers a pause from the crowded streets and a moment of reflection.

8 ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL

provides a strong contrast to the busy street. Its presence brings a sense of stillness and create weight to the story.

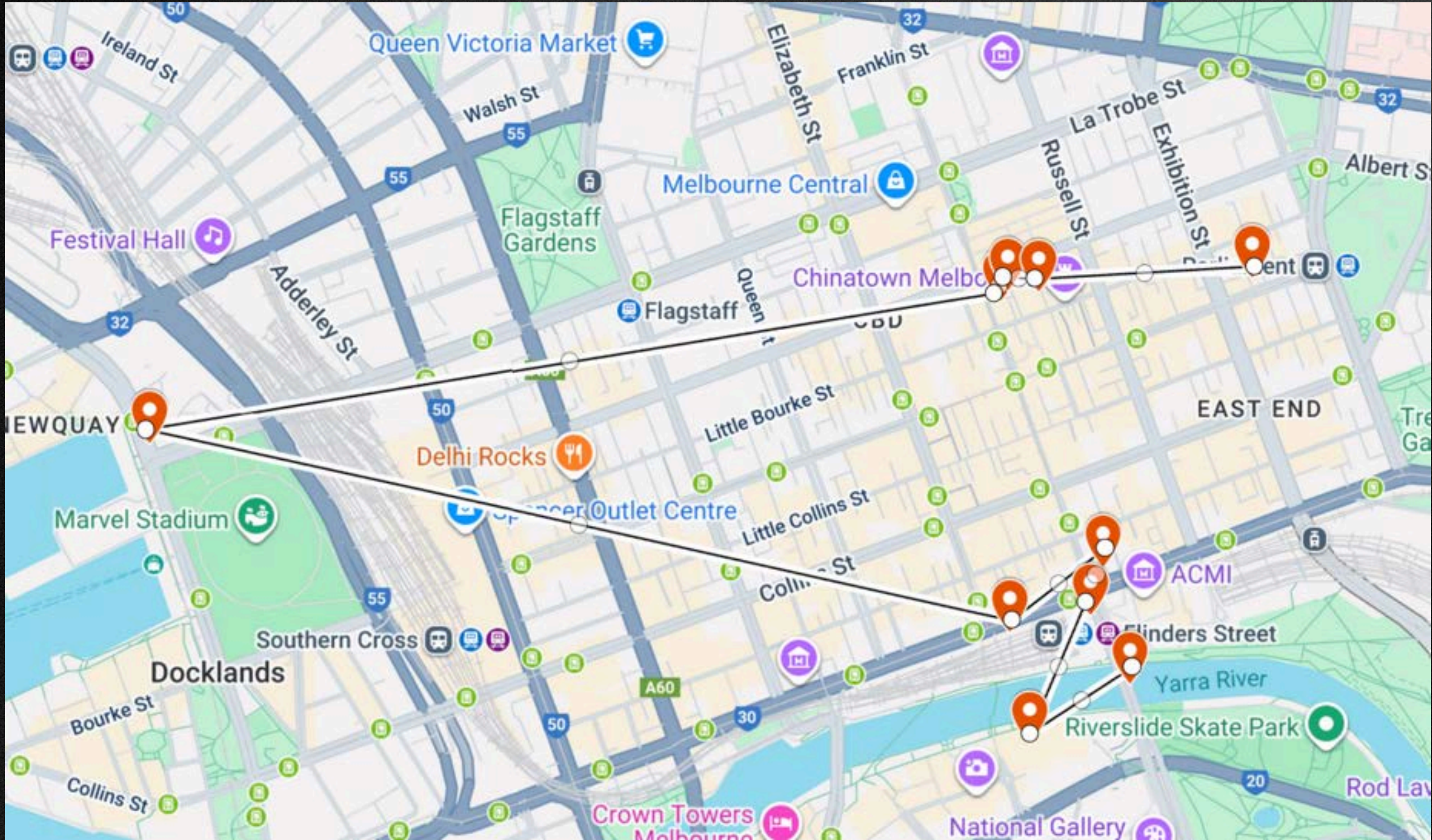
9 FLINDERS STREET PHOTO BOOTH
(SINCE 1961)

A tucked-away booth where couples capture memories in strips of photos. It embodies the intimate, playful side of romance and ties strongly to the pre-smartphone era.

10 PRINCES BRIDGE

Overlooking the Yarra with the city skyline in view. It works well as a point of transition or resolution at the end of the journey.

LOCATION



Map interface showing a list of layers and a route.

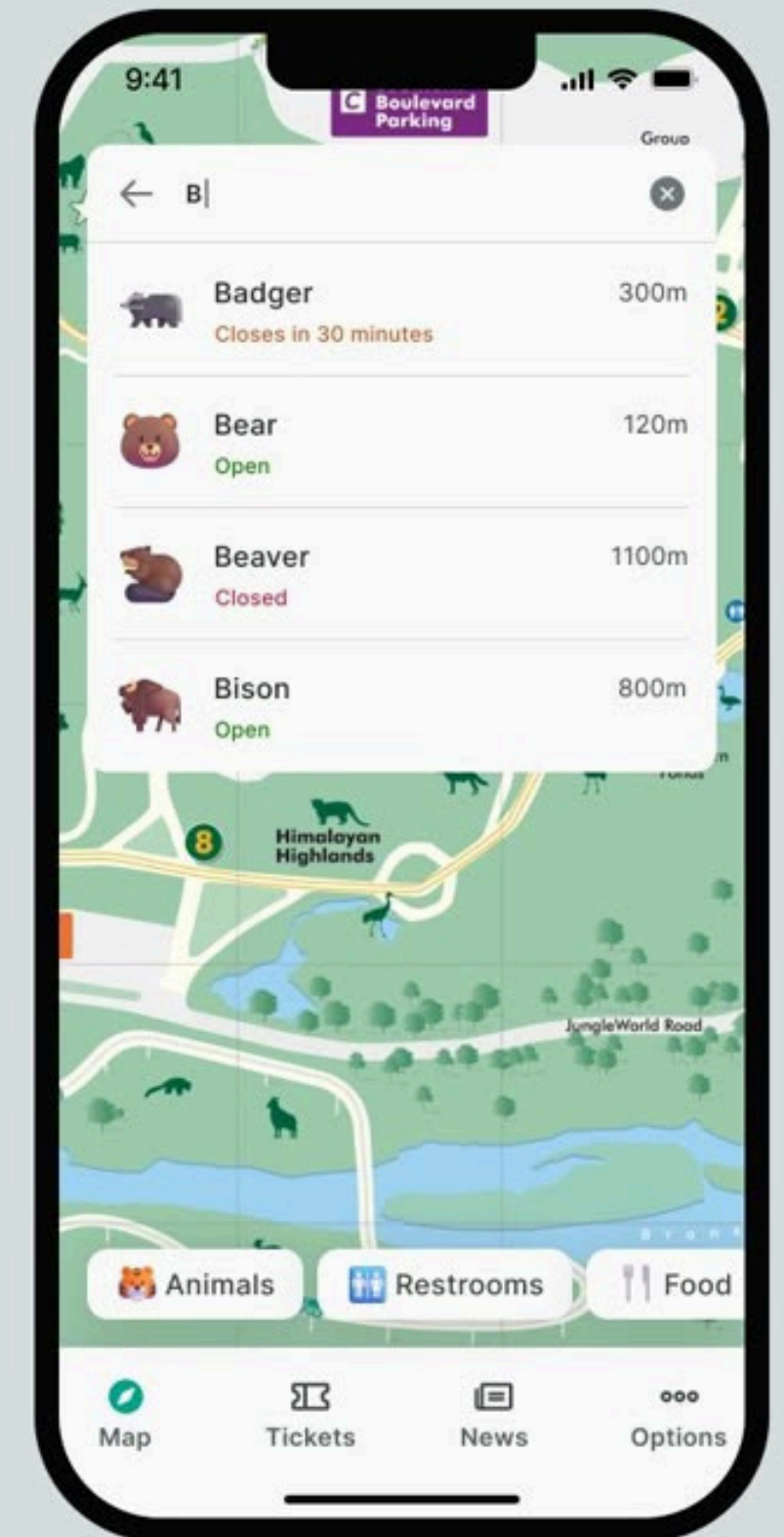
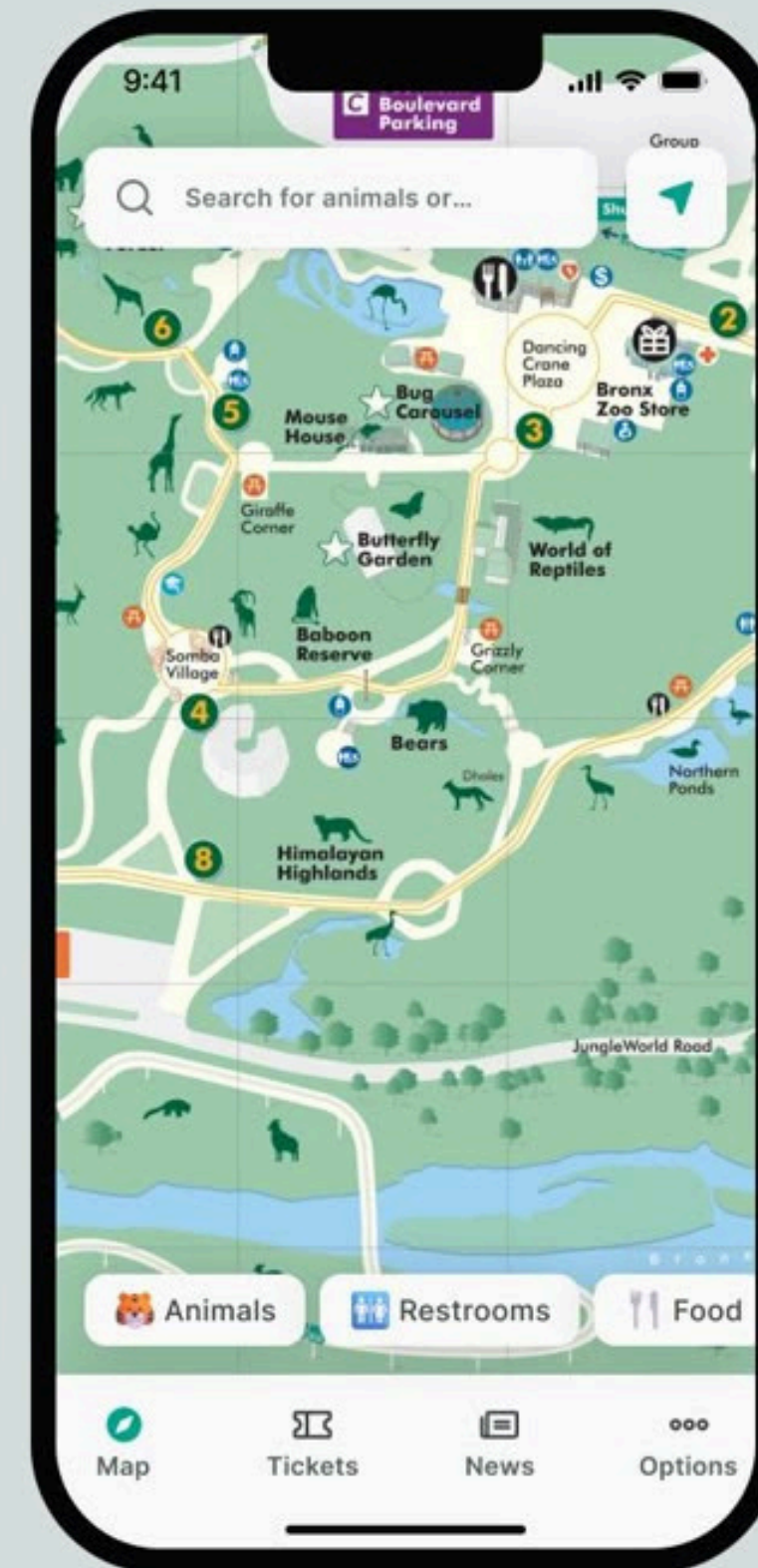
Buttons: Add layer, Share, Preview

- Untitled layer
 - Individual styles
 - PJ O'Brien's Irish Pub
 - Central Pier/Harbour Esp (Do...
 - St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne
 - Flinders Street Railway Statio...
 - The Paperback Bookshop
 - Rooftop Bar
 - Section 8
 - Supper Inn
 - Princes Bridge
 - Metro Auto Photo
 - Route1**
- Base map

INTEGRATED ANALYSIS

The literature review highlighted several principles that shaped the development of this project. Research on locative media shows that narratives are most engaging when they are embedded within the cultural and sensory qualities of a place (Murray, 2023; Berry, 2017). This directly informed the decision to focus on Melbourne's night culture, where the atmosphere of quiet streets, hidden venues, and heightened encounters can add emotional depth to the story.

The identified design patterns for location-based mobile experiences also played a role in defining the interaction metaphor. Progressive disclosure and location-triggered events (Nikolarakis & Koutsabasis, 2024) align with the treasure hunt structure, where each scene is unlocked only when the player reaches the correct place. Seamless design principles (Nilsson et al., 2016) encouraged me to accept the natural imperfections of GPS and city navigation, reframing them as part of the mystery rather than technical faults.





FROM THE IDEATION STAGE

several narrative structures were considered, including collection-based storytelling, branching timelines, and letter-based discoveries. While each offered creative potential, the treasure hunt was chosen as the preferred direction because it best combines exploration with atmosphere. It allows players to move at their own pace, searching for clues in the city rather than being guided directly, which creates a stronger sense of discovery.

By pairing the treasure hunt format with a romance theme, the project addresses a gap noted in the literature: the limited focus on emotional, intimate storytelling in locative media, which is often applied to heritage or tourism contexts. In contrast, this project applies established design principles to Melbourne's nightlife, reframing the city as a stage for a hidden love story. This integration of theory and concept positions the app as both innovative and feasible, grounded in research while responding to local culture and user needs.

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