

FREE GUIDE - 2026 EDITION

Starting Design Today *in the Age of* **AI**

What to learn, which tools matter, and why your
creative skills are worth more now than ever.



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CHAPTER 01

Design is not dying. It is becoming rare.

Every other day, someone on social media announces that design is dead. The design process is over. Web designers are finished. AI will replace everyone.

Here is what they are missing.

When you tell an AI to "build me a fitness app," it produces something clean, functional, and **identical to every other AI-generated fitness app**. It pulls from existing patterns, existing data, existing templates. The output is always a convergence toward the average.

Now imagine millions of people doing the exact same thing. The result? An infinite sea of products, websites, and apps that all look and feel the same. You can already see this happening - trending YouTube videos showing "amazing AI-built websites" where every single one follows the same layout, the same aesthetic, the same patterns.

The core of design is differentiation. Standing out. Telling a unique story. Communicating something that only you can communicate. AI does not solve that problem - it creates the opposite. It makes everything converge.

This has happened before in design history. When Photoshop made drop shadows trivially easy, every designer used them. Within a few years, drop shadows became a cheap, lazy effect. Flat design emerged because people wanted to move away from what was overused and easy.

The same pendulum is swinging right now with AI-generated content.



"Whatever is easy becomes less valuable. Whatever is hard becomes the prize."

If creating things with AI is easy, that output loses value. **The value lives where things are actually difficult** - in creative vision, taste, art direction, and the ability to make something that does not look like everything else on the internet.

Most people gravitate toward the easy path. That is human nature. But if you lean into the hard things - the fundamentals, the craft, the thinking - you position yourself exactly where the market will pay a premium.

Design is not going anywhere. Creativity is not going anywhere. But **the designers who only know how to push buttons in software** - without understanding why they are making the choices they make - those are the ones who should be worried.

You are reading this guide because you want to start right. Good. Let us talk about what you actually need to learn.



CHAPTER 02

What you need to learn to survive

Before you open any software, before you watch any tutorial, you need to understand the things that make design actually work. These are the skills that transfer across every tool, every trend, and every wave of technology - including AI.

The design eye

This is the ability to look at something and instinctively know whether it works or not. It comes from studying great design, paying attention to the world around you, and developing a sense for what feels right. No prompt gives you this. No AI generates it. You build it over time by immersing yourself in good work and creating your own.

Design fundamentals

These are the building blocks. Without them, you are decorating. With them, you are designing.

- **Typography** - How type communicates mood, hierarchy, and personality. Why one font choice makes something feel premium and another makes it feel amateur.
- **Color theory** - How colors interact, create contrast, evoke emotions, and guide attention. Not just "pick a nice palette" but understanding the why behind color decisions.
- **Layout and composition** - How to organize visual elements so they guide the viewer's eye naturally. Grid systems, whitespace, balance, and visual flow.
- **Visual hierarchy** - Making the important things feel important. If everything is bold, nothing is bold. If everything is big, nothing stands out.



Design thinking

Understanding the problem before jumping to solutions. Who is the audience? What do they need? What is the context? Design thinking is the difference between someone who uses design tools and someone who is actually a designer. It is strategy, not decoration.

Art direction and taste

Knowing what looks good is not enough. You need to know what looks *right for the specific context*. A luxury brand and a streetwear label both need great design, but the direction is completely different. This judgment - this taste - is what separates creators from operators.

The bottom line: AI can execute. AI can iterate. AI can produce variations at speed. But AI cannot set a creative direction based on human intuition, cultural context, and original vision. That is your job. Learn the fundamentals so deeply that you can direct any tool - including AI - to create something that actually matters.



CHAPTER 03

The tools that matter in 2026

Once you have the fundamentals, you need tools. Not every tool - the right tools. Here is the stack that will make you versatile, efficient, and future-proof.

Core design tools - learn these first



VECTOR & ILLUSTRATION

Adobe Illustrator

The industry standard for logos, icons, branding, and vector graphics. Its built-in AI features like Generative Recolor and Text to Vector Graphic let you iterate faster while keeping full creative control over the output.



PHOTO & COMPOSITION

Adobe Photoshop

Essential for photo editing, compositing, and raster work. Generative Fill and Generative Expand are powerful for rapid asset creation and concept exploration - but you still need taste to direct them well.



UI & PRODUCT DESIGN

Figma

The go-to platform for UI/UX, web design, and collaborative projects. Figma's AI features help with prototyping and layout generation, making it a complete design-to-handoff tool. If you want to design interfaces, you need Figma.



WEB DESIGN & PROTOTYPING

Framer

A powerful design tool that also publishes real websites. Its Workshop AI feature helps you create and iterate on layouts, components, and content - bridging the gap between design and live output.



AI-powered creative tools - add these to your workflow



AI APP & WEBSITE BUILDER

Lovable

Describe your vision and Lovable builds functional apps and websites. Perfect for designers who want to bring ideas to life without deep coding. Think of it as your development partner that speaks plain language.



AI ART & DESIGN

LovArt

An AI creative tool for generating and iterating on design concepts, illustrations, and visual assets. Use it for exploration, mood boards, and creative direction - then refine with your own design skills.

The rule with AI tools: Use them for speed, not for vision. Let AI handle the execution grunt work. You bring the creative direction, the taste, and the differentiation that makes work actually stand out. The designer who knows fundamentals AND can leverage AI tools will outperform everyone.



CHAPTER 04

Your action plan

Starting design in 2026 is not about choosing between traditional skills and AI. It is about combining both in a way that makes you irreplaceable. Here is your roadmap.

1

Master the fundamentals first

Spend your first weeks studying typography, color theory, layout, and composition. Look at design work you admire and ask yourself *why* it works. Start seeing design everywhere - in signs, packaging, apps, posters. Train your eye before your hands.

2

Pick your core tool and go deep

Start with Adobe Illustrator or Figma depending on your interest (illustration vs. digital/UI). Do not spread yourself thin across five tools. Get genuinely good at one first, then expand.

3

Build projects, not tutorials

A portfolio of 5 real projects beats 50 completed tutorials. Redesign a local business brand. Design an app concept. Create a poster series. Real work teaches you things no tutorial ever will.

4

Add AI tools to accelerate

Once you understand the fundamentals, AI tools become multipliers. Use Photoshop's Generative Fill for rapid iteration. Use Lovable to prototype ideas. Use LovArt for visual exploration. The fundamentals give you the judgment to direct these tools well.

5

Develop your taste and point of view

Follow designers you admire. Study different eras and styles. Form opinions about what works and what does not. The designers who thrive are the ones with a distinct perspective - not the ones who follow every trend.



The bottom line

AI has made building things easier than ever. That means the value has shifted from execution to vision. The designers who understand *why* they are making choices - not just *how* to use tools - will be the ones who thrive.

The fundamentals are still core. Creativity is still irreplaceable. And your ability to do the hard things - the things AI cannot do - is exactly what makes you valuable.

It is a great time to start designing. Start right.

Ready to learn design the right way?

Join 80,000+ students learning from structured,
practical courses built by a working designer.

Master Adobe Illustrator in 30 Days

Every single tool covered. 12 parts, 18 hours. 78,000+ students.
4.8 stars.

Procreate Dreams - Master iPad Animation

10 modules. 16 hours. From zero to professional 2D animation. 4.9
stars.

Figure Drawing & Anatomy

25 hours. Every bone, every muscle. The CBSF method. 1,200+
students. 4.9 stars.

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