

Special Projects Unveils Aperture: A Design-Driven Approach to Reclaiming Digital Wellbeing

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Design innovation studio Special Projects has announced Aperture, a groundbreaking concept focused on fostering healthier relationships with smartphones. Rather than introducing new devices, Aperture reimagines how users interact with their existing phones through an intelligent combination of AI, physical design, and digital wellbeing principles.

Recognizing the pervasive challenges of digital distraction in today's environment, Special Projects has developed Aperture as a thoughtful intervention. The core of the concept is a specially designed phone case that partially conceals the screen, prompting users to engage more intentionally with their devices.

"Something magical happens when you combine two ordinary objects and create something greater than the sum of its parts," explains Adrian Westaway, Principal and Co-founder of Special Projects. By flipping the phone within the case, users activate a limited screen view and a minimalist, adaptive interface designed to reduce digital noise and encourage presence in the real world.

The tactile element of flipping the case is a deliberate design choice. "The slight difficulty of flipping the case is a key design element," adds Clara Gaggero Westaway, Co-founder and Creative Director. "This deliberate friction discourages frequent flipping, making the action more intentional."

Aperture's interface utilizes AI to intelligently adapt the displayed information based on the user's context and stated intent. By speaking a need, such as a timer or directions, the system filters out non-essential content, presenting only what is relevant. This discreet and helpful AI aims to mediate interaction with technology without adding further complexity.

While currently a concept, Aperture has garnered significant interest, and Special Projects is actively pursuing the development of a working prototype. This public release marks a departure for the studio, known for its confidential collaborations with leading tech companies, and reflects their commitment to sparking conversations and showcasing impactful ideas.

Special Projects' philosophy centers on optimizing the use of existing technology for greater intentionality. Aperture reimagines the everyday phone case as a subtle interface for digital wellbeing, drawing inspiration from familiar formats like smartwatch displays for its simplified functionality. The concept also explores social modes to encourage engagement and interaction when multiple devices are used together.

The design language of Aperture prioritizes approachability and warmth, moving away from traditional sterile tech aesthetics. The name itself, referencing both a camera lens and focused openness, embodies the concept's aim to recalibrate attention.

In a landscape increasingly focused on new AI hardware, Aperture offers a refreshingly pragmatic approach by enhancing the utility of existing devices. This strategy also aligns with sustainability by avoiding the environmental impact of producing new gadgets. "There's immense potential in optimising and extending the functionality of existing technology," notes Gaggero Westaway.

Special Projects has launched a dedicated microsite, focuswithaperture.com, to gather feedback and foster dialogue around the concept. "We intentionally shared our thinking at this stage because the next phase of development will heavily involve listening to people," adds Westaway.

Ultimately, Aperture represents a shift in focus from novelty and acceleration to creating technology that is more human, intentional, and less demanding, potentially marking a radical departure in the tech industry.