## An important but *NON-obvious* law of UI

Did you know that light comes from the sky?

AND HAVE YOU THOUGHT OF THE RAMIFICATIONS?

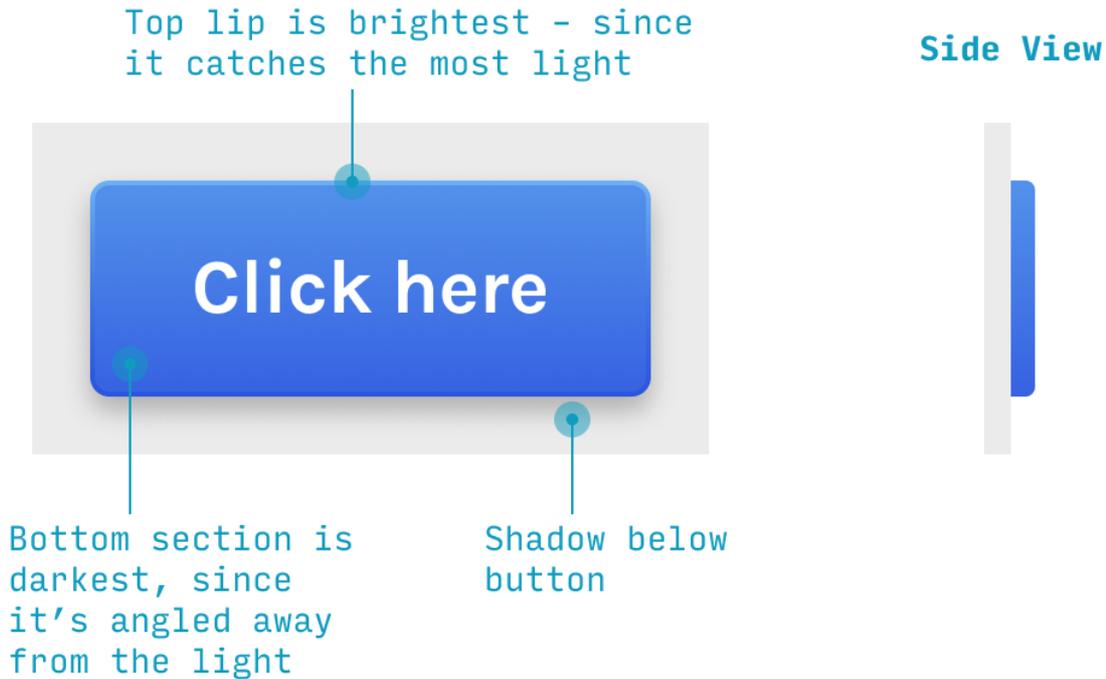I know, I know. I kind of sound like *this guy*:



I'm actually just talking about the sun though

But think about it.

When light comes from the sky, it:

- Casts shadows *below* things
- Makes the *top* of things brighter
- Makes the *undersides* of things darker

Even though our screens are flat, designers invest a great amount of time into making many elements on them *appear* 3-D – *and the above are the rules they use.*

Top lip is brightest - since it catches the most light

Side View

**Click here**

Bottom section is darkest, since it's angled away from the light

Shadow below button

Buttons are *popped out* from the screen – but these rules apply equally to things *pressed into* the screen.

Aoili

Spicy aoili

Eel sauce

Inner shadow cast from edge

Top darker than bottom

And even in a flat design, these rules still apply – *just more subtly*.

For instance, **content cards should always be *lighter* than their backgrounds**. This is because they're *popped out* from the surface of the screen, and therefore catch the sun's rays better ●

Darker cards on lighter background seem subtly "wrong".



(This is a **super common beginner mistake**, since design apps *start* with white frames, and it seems *only natural* to add a gray card on top)

White cards on darker background imitates real-world light.

Really internalizing that *light comes from the sky* was one of the first big breakthroughs I had as a beginning designer. In fact, I wrote about it in 7 Rules for Creating Gorgeous UI – an article that went viral back in 2014, and paved the way for this very newsletter!

It's also one of the many **"soundbite lessons"** I include in Learn UI Design. I strongly believe that if I can leave every student with **practical and memorable short phrases** that apply widely across their design career, they will be better designers *much quicker* than trying to learn via more theoretical approaches.