Every design process involves discussion among the designer, client, and others concerned with the outcome. These participants typically talk about the design while they also make drawings to show what they mean. The Design Amanuensis is a memory aid that helps in reviewing the discussion. The Amanuensis records a design conversation and makes it available for replay and analysis. It links the spoken parts of the conversation with the drawing marks that people make as they talk about the design. Later, the conversation can be replayed or searched for particular graphical or verbal events.

The spoken parts of the conversation are transcribed to text using a commercial speech-to-text recognizer. The drawing parts of the conversation are captured by our graphical recognizer program, the Electronic Cocktail Napkin. Then the text, audio, and graphical components are linked. A designer can search for a phrase - “the evening sun” - in the transcript, and highlight the corresponding part of the drawing, or point to a part of the drawing and listen to the corresponding audio.