



2025

ANNUAL REPORT

DESIGN CORE DETROIT



LETTER FROM THE DIRECTORS

MOMENTS LIKE THESE ARE INDICATORS OF A SYSTEM AT WORK

Design Core's 2025 could be summed up in two words: full circle.

In our 15th year and 10th year as a UNESCO City of Design, we saw clear evidence of what sustained investment in people, place, and creative infrastructure makes possible.

The outcomes are tangible. We reconnected with Jay Norman, Global Director of Creative Strategy at Spotify and co-founder of the creative agency Verse and Hook, which he moved to Detroit. Jay was one of the earliest participants in our original Creative Ventures program in 2010—an example of how early support can grow into lasting creative leadership and reinvestment in the city.

We attended the book launch of designer, educator, and now author Meaghan Barry, whose company, Unsold, was one of the first businesses to participate in our incubator program. The book, *Designing for Local Communities*, reflects the same values that have guided Design Core from the start: that locally-rooted design can generate far-reaching local and regional outcomes.

Moments like these are indicators of a system at work. Former CCS students are now hiring, mentoring, and investing in the next generation. Familiar faces reappear at Month of Design events citywide, presenting opportunities for growth and collaboration. Over time, individual interactions become enduring connections, pilot programs evolve into creative ecosystems, and events grow into economic and cultural engines.



Year after year, Month of Design drives people (and their spending power) into neighborhoods they might not otherwise visit, strengthening local businesses and reinforcing design's role in the regional economy. Detroit's legacy as a design powerhouse is increasingly matched by the infrastructure needed to sustain careers, attract new talent, and welcome creatives back home.

In 2025, this momentum translated into funding, partnership, and visibility. We hosted leaders from 10 UNESCO Creative Cities at the North American Creative Cities Convening, deepening relationships and showcasing Detroit as a model for creative-led development. We

expanded partnerships with institutions like the Detroit Historical Society and Visit Detroit, and secured a multi-year award from the Knight Foundation—affirmations of trust that enable long-term planning and scaled impact.

From chance meetings to global recognition, the lesson is clear: design doesn't scale in spite of being personal, but because it's personal. It helps communities adapt, powers what comes next, and remains one of the most powerful tools we have for building an equitable and resilient future.

- Kiana Wenzell & Bonnie Fahome

ABOUT DESIGN CORE DETROIT



Design Core Detroit champions design-driven businesses and their role in strengthening Detroit's economy. It offers services to strengthen, grow and attract design businesses to the region and increase market demand for design services.

As the steward of Detroit's UNESCO City of Design designation, Design Core leads the effort to shape and advance Detroit's design story locally and globally. Design Core is part of the College for Creative Studies.

DESIGNCORE.ORG

[#DETROITMONTHOFDESIGN](https://twitter.com/DESIGNCOREDET)

[@DESIGNCOREDET](https://twitter.com/DESIGNCOREDET)

[#DETROITCITYOFDESIGN](https://twitter.com/DESIGNCOREDET)



DRIVING DETROIT'S DESIGN ECONOMY



Our Work

We connect Detroit's designers, businesses, and communities through impactful programs, high-profile events, and global partnerships that strengthen our city's designation as a UNESCO City of Design.



Stewardship of Detroit's UNESCO City of Design

We manage international cooperation, facilitate global exchange programs and tell Detroit's Design and innovation stories to the world.



Globally-recognized events, for the community

From local networking events like Drinks x Design to our global, annual Detroit Month of Design festival, we produce events that showcase Detroit as an international creative leader.



Innovative & Inclusive Programming

We provide business education, accelerator programs, a Design Network & other support for creative businesses of all sizes

DETROIT MONTH OF DESIGN

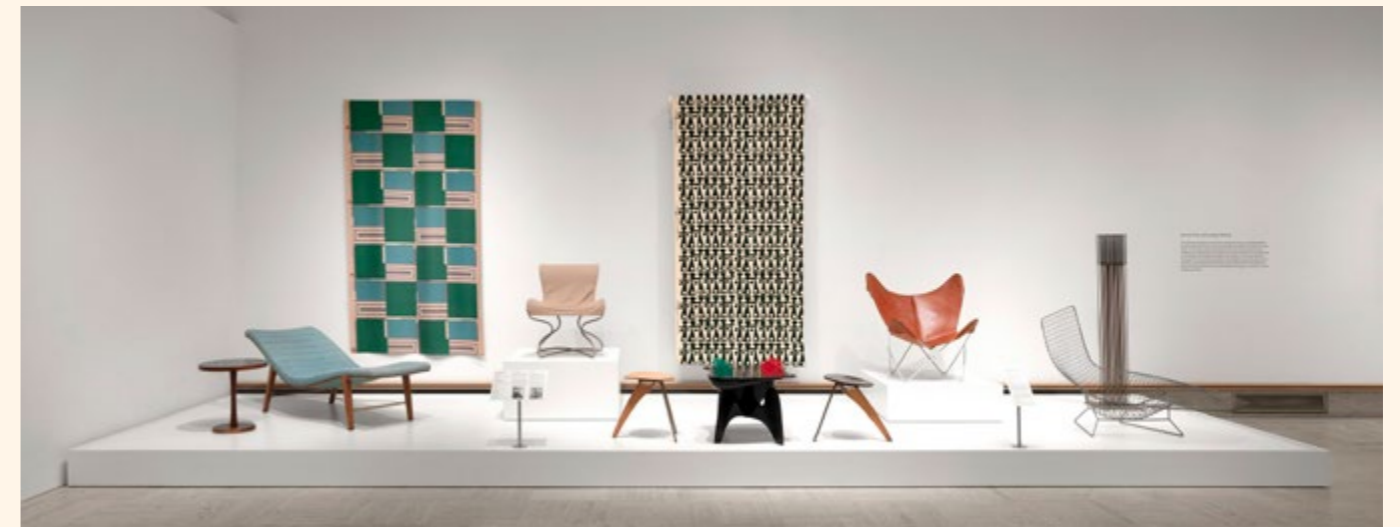
ABOUT THE FESTIVAL

The Detroit Month of Design is a citywide collaboration of creativity that gathers designers and the greater community to celebrate Detroit's role as a national and global design capital.

Every September, partners across Detroit—from emerging studios to established companies and educational institutions—come together to show off their latest works and ideas. These cross-disciplinary events take place in all corners of the city, highlighting the talent and innovation that makes Detroit a UNESCO City of Design.



2025 THEME: CITY OF DESIGN



Celebrating 10 Years as the First and Only
UNESCO City of Design in the United States.

FESTIVAL NUMBERS AT A GLANCE

220+

submissions

1000+

participating
designers

100

events

65,000+

unique event
attendees

86%

of funds distributed
through the festival
platform went to
BIPOC-led businesses

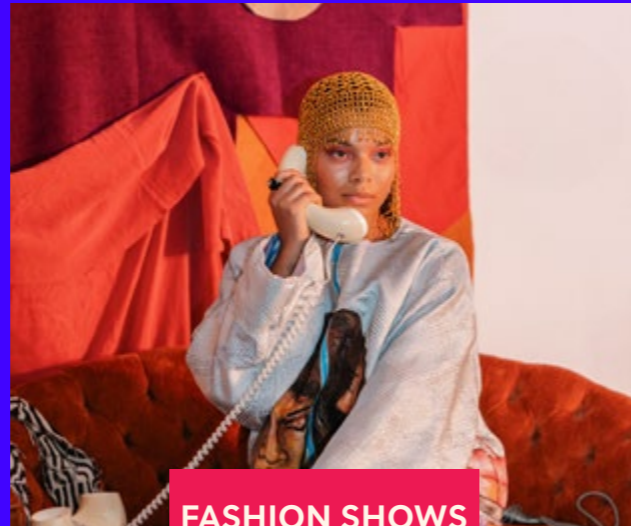
\$203,628

circulated locally
via stipends, honorariums,
and vendor contracts

FESTIVAL EVENTS



INSTALLATIONS



FASHION SHOWS



GALLERY EXHIBITIONS



WORKSHOPS



COMMUNITY-LED EVENTS



TALKS + TOURS

FESTIVAL REACH

IN THE PRESS

71+

articles published

189,632,372

coverage reach
(circulation + UVM)

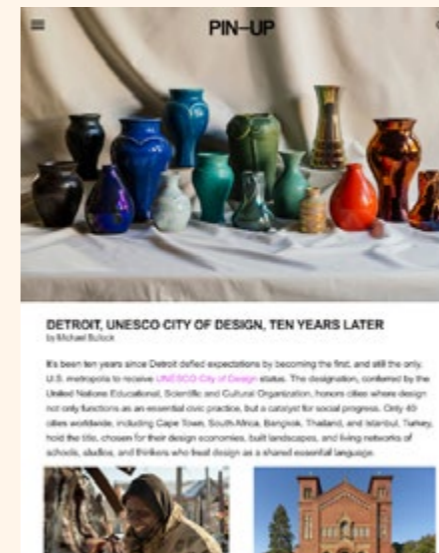
LOCAL IMPACT

2.4 M

visitors to public art
& retail partnerships

Detroit named Wallpaper City of the Year following the 2025 Month of Design press tour visit from returning journalist Adrian Madler

HIGHLIGHTS



DETROIT, UNESCO CITY OF DESIGN, TEN YEARS LATER
by Michael Busch

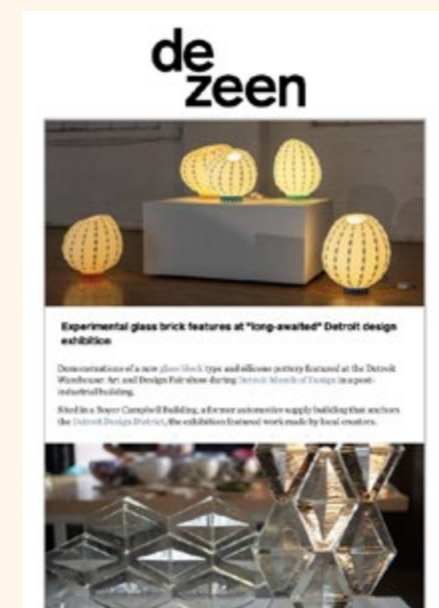
It's been ten years since Detroit defied expectations by becoming the first, and all the only, U.S. metropolis to receive UNESCO City of Design status. The designation, conferred by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, honors cities where design not only functions as an essential civic practice, but a catalyst for social progress. Only 40 cities worldwide, including Cape Town, South Africa; Bangkok, Thailand; and Seoul, Korea, hold the title, chosen for their design economies, built landscapes, and living networks of artists, studios, and thinkers who build design as a shared essential language.



Wallpaper*

TRAVEL
Wallpaper* Design Awards: Detroit is City of the Year 2026

“The city’s status as a UNESCO City of Design and events such as Detroit Month of Design are further securing the Motor City’s status as one of the *most exciting places to be right now.*”



de:zeen

Experimental glass brick features at "long-awaited" Detroit design exhibition

Documentation of a new glass brick type and diffuse gallery featured at the Detroit Warehouse Arts and Design Fair show during Detroit Month of Design (a recent industrial building).

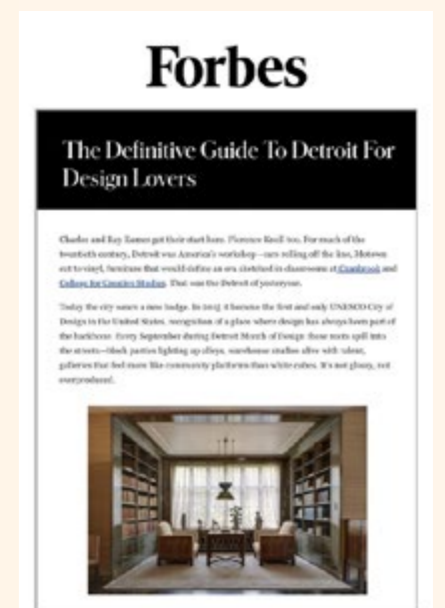
Headline: Super Campbell Building, a five-story residential supply building that anchors the Detroit Design District, the exhibition featured work made by local creators.



The Architect's Newspaper

An exhibition at Cranbrook Museum of Art spotlights overlooked perspectives from the midcentury modern movement

With its iconic objects and household names, midcentury modernism was a movement helmed by design giants whose influence continues to shape the field nearly a century later. *Essentially Everything Concrete: Mid-Century Modern Design in the U.S.*, on view at Cranbrook Art Museum, returns to the birthplace of midcentury modern design, spotlighting the designers and histories that formed the movement. The show was a highlight of Detroit Month of Design, which celebrated its 15th anniversary this September.



Forbes

The Definitive Guide To Detroit For Design Lovers

Charles and Ray Korman got their start here. Florence Knoll too. For much of the twentieth century, Detroit was America's workshop—cars rolling off the line, Motown set to vinyl, hardware that would define an era clustered in showrooms at *Cranbrook and Fisher, the Smothers Studios*. That was the Detroit of yesterday.

Today the city wears a new badge. In 2015, it became the first and only UNESCO City of Design in the United States, recognition of a place where design has always been part of the backbone. Every September during Detroit Month of Design, these roots spill into the streets—think poster lighting up offices, warehouse studios alive with talent, galleries that feel more like community platforms than white cubes. It's not glossy, not overhyped.

FESTIVAL REACH

SOCIAL MEDIA METRICS

PRIMARY PLATFORM: INSTAGRAM (SEPT. 2025 METRICS)

102 M

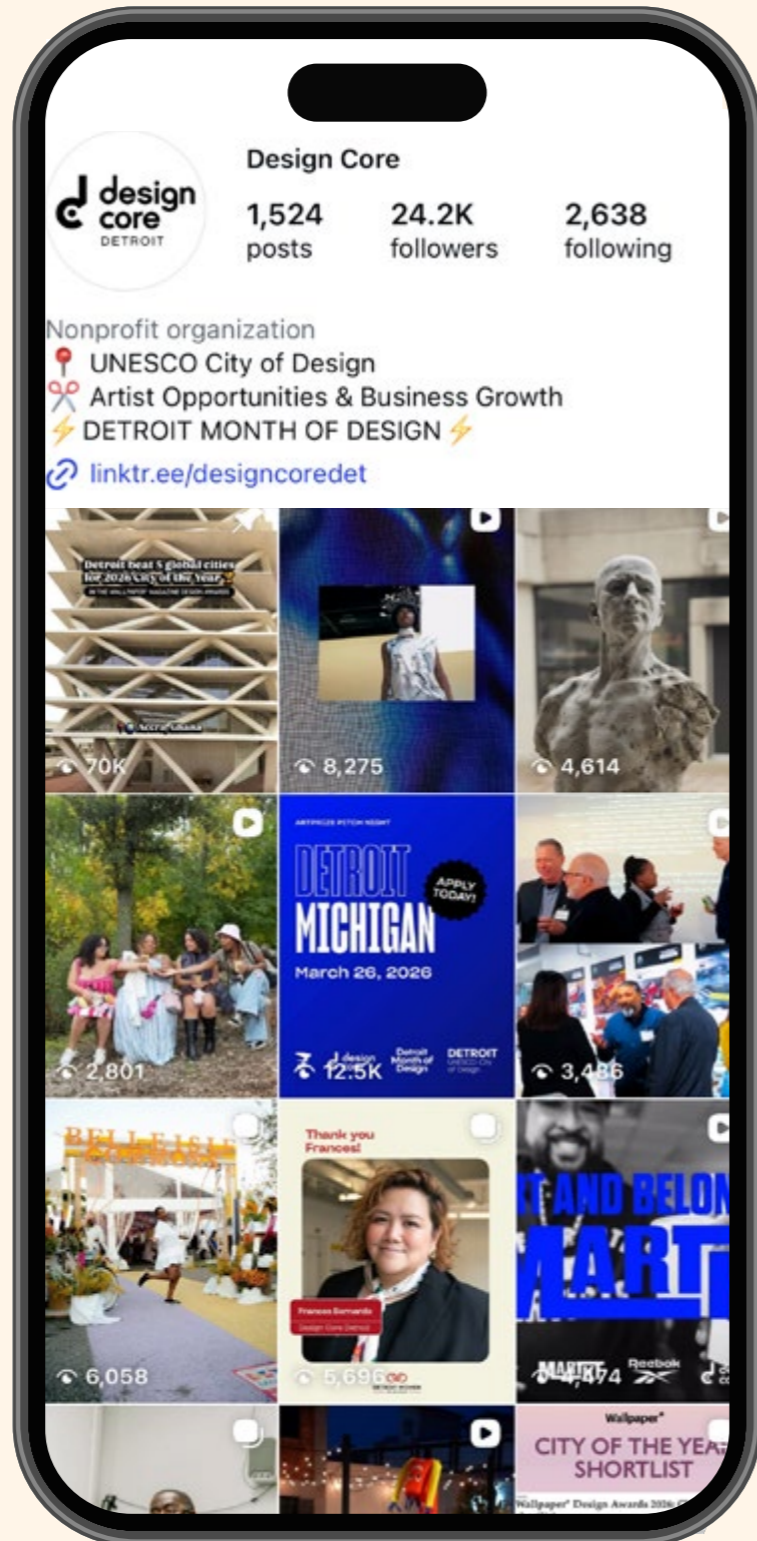
organic reach

504,000

post interactions

25,000

followers



Collaborative posts with local and global brands organically reached over 500,000 impressions.

Interactions & shares increased by over 150%.

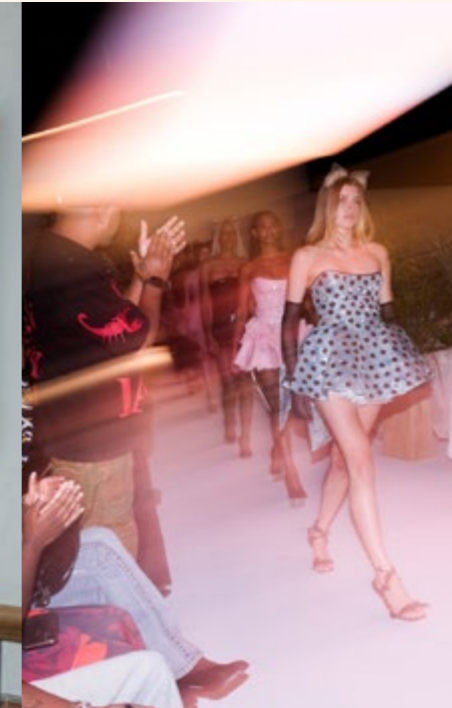
Design Core social media accounts averaged 128 new follows per day in September 2025.

STANDOUT EVENTS



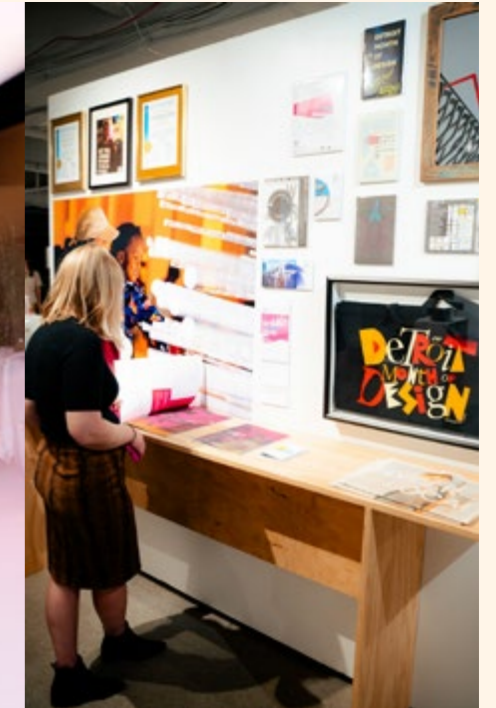
DETROIT WAREHOUSE: DESIGN FAIR

Inaugural event featuring work from over 200 local & international designers. 4000+ visitors over three days.



FOR THE LOVE OF FASHION SHOWCASE

Runway presentation showcasing six Detroit-based designers held at Detroit's historic Cadieux Stage.



DESIGNING DETROIT EXHIBITION

Exhibition celebrating 10 Years of Detroit as a UNESCO City of Design, produced by Design Core in partnership with the Detroit Historical Society.



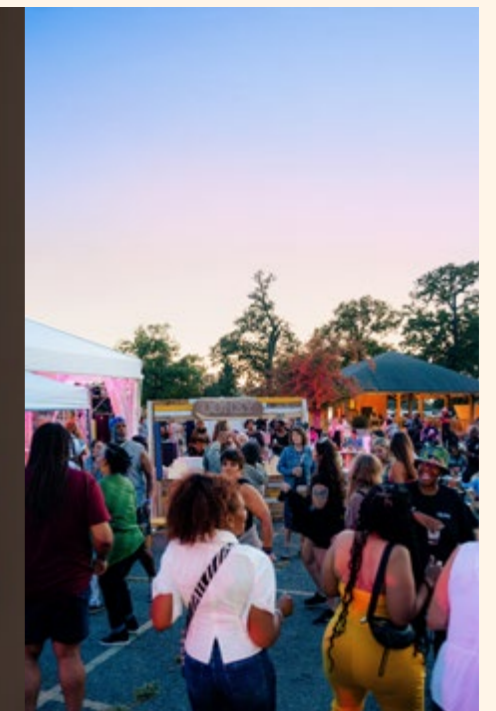
EVENTUALLY EVERYTHING CONNECTS

Exhibition at Cranbrook Art Museum featuring the work of Florence Knoll, Charles + Ray Eames, Herman Miller, Harry Bertoia and other legendary furniture designers.



CURE NAILHOUSE DESIGN TOUR

Design tour and panel with the founders of CURE Nailhouse, featured in Wallpaper*, SURFACE, and Dezeen.



THE BELLE ISLE COMMONS

Interactive event produced by Belle Isle Conservancy in partnership with Gehl Architects, featuring storytelling, art, sound, and design to celebrate Belle Isle's past, present, and future.

TESTIMONIAL

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION: DESIGN JOURNEY HOME

In collaboration with two other UNESCO Cities of Design - Wuhan and Chongqing - the exhibition, "Beauty of Design," showcased work created by students based in China, current College of Creative Studies (CCS) students, and CCS alumni with connections to China.

"Design Journey Home created a meaningful platform to celebrate CCS alumni through storytelling, exhibition, and community connection. The visibility and support provided through Detroit Month of Design helped extend the event's impact beyond opening night."

**- JIE, ORGANIZER
DESIGN JOURNEY HOME**



Detroit designers Dos Jefes upcycled past festival tote bags into one-of-a-kind chore coats, which were auctioned off at the close of the festival.

TESTIMONIAL

VENUE HOST: HUNT STREET STATION

Many designers have bold, innovative concepts but require a physical "home" to bring them to life.

Venues offer their spaces as an in-kind host, they play a vital role in Detroit's creative ecosystem and gain visibility as a featured festival destination.

"We love the Detroit Month of Design! We look forward to September every single year. It is amazing seeing our space activated in various ways as a venue host and also getting to host our own event and introduce new faces to who we are and what we do at Hunt Street Station. We have gained bookings, members, and have seen our community grow through the festival, and love what it means to the city!"

**- CARLITO SMITH
OWNER, HUNT STREET STATION**





Keiba Jacob-Motley, CEO of Trinidad's carnival festival speaks with US Editor of Dezeen Magazine, Ben Drieth at Michigan Central



Simon David, Principal at Office of Strategy + Design speaks on a City of Design panel at the Siren Hotel

"Each partnership with Design Core deepens our shared commitment to design as a catalyst for cultural exchange, civic imagination, and the future of Detroit's creative industries."

**- KELLY KIVLAND
DIRECTOR | MICHIGAN CENTRAL ART**

TESTIMONIAL

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS: CITY OF DESIGN TALK SERIES

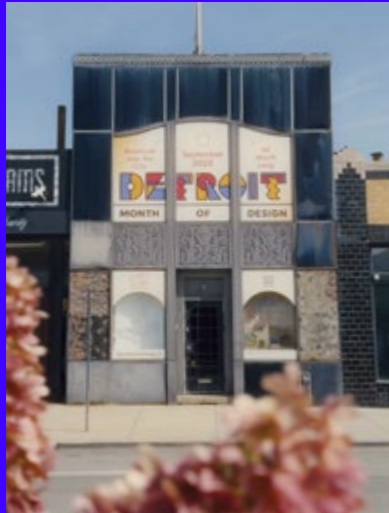
Design Core Detroit and Dezeen Magazine joined forces to present special edition programming as part of the City of Design Talks Series, including "Adaptive Reuse as a Catalyst for Sustainable Cities" at the Siren Hotel and "Designing Detroit" part of the Futures & Formations summit at Michigan Central.

"Design Core Detroit's Month of Design has become an invaluable platform for celebrating Detroit's creative community and the spirit of innovation that defines this city. Michigan Central Art is proud to contribute to that vision, from hosting the 2024 Closing Event and supporting emerging designers through the Invest Detroit Microgrant, to our 2025 collaboration on Futures in Formation: Designing the Imaginative City."

**- KELLY KIVLAND
DIRECTOR | MICHIGAN CENTRAL ART**



ARTIST COLLABORATIONS



CITY OF DESIGN COLLECTION

Design Core tapped 6 Detroit-based designers to contribute one or more products to the City of Design Capsule Collection, showcasing their work at events, partnerships, displays & retail pop-ups.



ARTIST FEATURES
Design Core paired brands with Detroit-based artists through platforms like the Shop + See retail partnership in Downtown Detroit and the Benjamin Moore live painting experience at the Siren Hotel.



DOS JEFES X CITY OF DESIGN
Sustainable fashion designer team Dos Jefes worked with Design Core marketing team to reimagine past festival merchandise into new garments and accessories.



FESTIVAL MERCHANDISE
The festival merchandise collection continued to expand to include collaborations with Detroit designers KaceyKal, Tommey Walker, Factual Graphics and Dos Jefes.



<p>TAYLOR CHILDS STUDIOS</p> <p>Wearable Archives</p>		<p>SIMON ANTON ThingThing</p> <p>ThingThing Clock</p>		<p>SHAYLA JOHNSON Scarlet Crane</p> <p>Detroit Tea Towel</p>		<p>BILGE NUR SALTIK FormCreek</p> <p>Frosting Vase</p>	
<p>TAYLOR CHILDS</p>		<p>SIMON ANTON</p>		<p>SHAYLA JOHNSON</p>		<p>BILGE NUR SALTIK</p>	
<p>RACHEL NELSON</p>		<p>2025</p>		<p>KACEYKAL</p>			

CELEBRATING THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CITY OF DESIGN DESIGNATION

Detroit City of Design Collection

EASTERN MARKET AFTER DARK

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER SINCE 2012

Eastern Market After Dark has grown to be a highly anticipated part of our yearly programming. This signature event of the Detroit Month of Design draws over 33,000 attendees annually and highlights a range of emerging and established designers.

Visitors are treated to a district-wide night market featuring galleries, retailers, brand activations, open-studios and live music.

BRAND ACTIVATIONS & COMMUNITY FEATURES

The Love Building
Detroit Opera House
Tito's Handmade Vodka
Teal Media
Detroit Hives
Someday Detroit

12th & Viv
The Coloring Museum
Detroit Balloon Store
Blight Hernandez
Detroit Heals Detroit
Doghouse x All Motion

Lions & Rabbits
Haus of Imagination
& Gardens
The Liquor Basket
David Vintage
MEDC

Design Think Tank
Miller Knoll
Arab American Museum
Jam & Joy
IDSA Student Showcase
4D Candles

DESIGNERS SHOWCASED

Dos Jefes
Hey Me First
Olivia Eshe
The Duey Dealer
Scott Berels
Noah Hudson-Peralta
Ijania Cortez
Robinson Textiles
Factual Graphics

Jimmy Ward
Detroit Originals
Daisy Doodles
Leah Hessler
Jennifer Maples
Naye-Taye Visuals
Seamstress Bee
Elonte Davis
Hiatus Detroit

Sean Hages
Loves You
Callie Clark Lin
Haus of Raya
Ernesi 1978
LIVAQ
Taylor Childs
Nudena

Olewa Luxe
Amy Nielander
Doug Jones
Godnii
GCulle Brand
Mila Lynn
Raymond Majweski
Delicious Gold
Leah Ely





"Eastern Market After Dark demonstrated the power of Detroit as a UNESCO City of Design, driving meaningful community engagement and direct support for pollinator conservation in Detroit."

- DETROIT HIVES | FEATURED BRAND



COMMUNITY & BRAND PARTNERSHIPS

COMMUNITY-LED DESIGN PROJECTS

The Gilbert Family Foundation aims to foster economic growth in Detroit by supporting programs and partnerships that ensure universal access to arts and culture experiences for its residents.

In 2025, the foundation worked with Design Core Detroit to support an inaugural cohort and stipend program. This initiative is dedicated to promoting hyper-local design events and financially supporting eight Community-Led Design Events, which showcased happenings around Detroit.



GILBERT FAMILY FOUNDATION COHORT EVENTS

DESIGNING LEGACY: BUILDING AN EQUITABLE ARTS FUTURE IN SOUTHWEST DETROIT
Southwest Detroit | Garage Cultural

THE ART OF AIR
Bethune Community | Detroit Balloon Store

SUSTAIN - A - CITY: A VISION FOR A THRIVING, RESILIENT DETROIT A CITYWIDE
Downtown Detroit | Norwest Gallery

THE FREE MARKET OF DETROIT FASHION SWAP + UPCYCLING WORKSHOPS
The North End | The Free Market of Detroit

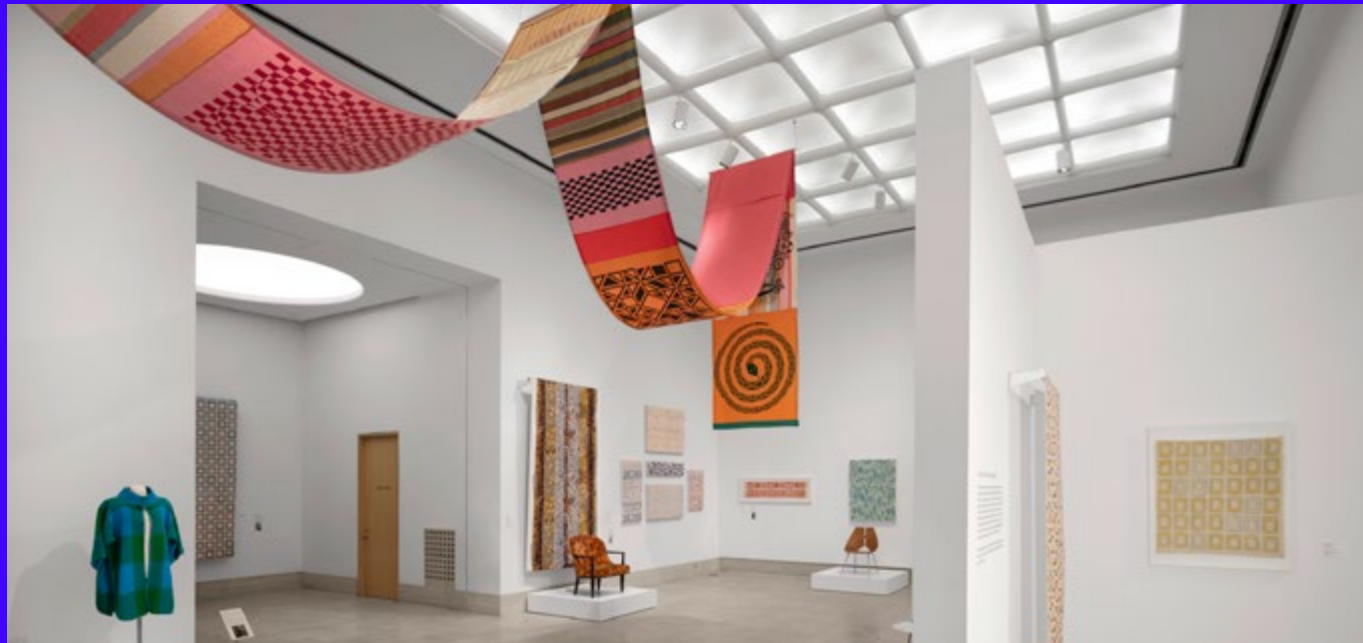
FREE CONTEMPORARY ARTIST PRINTS AT THE LANTERN
Little Village | PASC x Signal Return

E. WARRENFEST
East Warren | East Warren Development Co

6 MILE STREET FESTIVAL
Bagley x University District | Live6 x UDM

THE FUTURE OF FARWELL
Farwell | Urban Development Corporation

EDUCATIONAL & CULTURAL EXHIBITORS



CRANBROOK: EVENTUALLY EVERYTHING CONNECTS

This large-scale survey of the persistence and significance of Mid-Century Design in the United States highlighted Cranbrook's pivotal role in the movement's development and the contributions of women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and designers of color during this period.



CCS: TOYOTA LECTURE SERIES WITH MICHAEL FORD, THE "HIP-HOP ARCHITECT"

Michael Ford has dedicated his career to increasing diversity in architecture through culturally relevant education. This lecture provided insight into his two decades of work exploring the intersection of hip-hop culture and design.



DETROIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY: DESIGNING DETROIT

Design Core partnered with the Detroit Historical Society to produce Designing Detroit, an exhibition highlighting Detroit's design contributions over the past 200+ years. The exhibition was a triumphant celebration of Detroit's 10 Year UNESCO City of Design Anniversary.

CORPORATE PARTNERS

SHOP + SEE: BEDROCK

This partnership between Design Core and Bedrock paired local designers with downtown shops to showcase their work and drive foot traffic to retail corridors.

DESIGNED BY DETROIT: SHINOLA

The initiative celebrated local creativity through a paid artist collaboration with KaceyKal, whose custom tote design was adapted to a water bottle that came as a gift with every purchase. The initiative drove more than 475 redemptions and \$60,000 in tenant sales, with strong participation from partners including Nike, H&M, The Lip Bar, and Shinola.



PRESS TRIP SPONSORS

GM CADILLAC

SIREN HOTEL

BANNER SIGN CO

SAN MORELLO

CITY OF DESIGN COLLECTION PARTNERS

EUGENIE

HANDCAR CO

EIGHTFOLD STUDIO

CREATIVE MORNINGS





"Volunteering with Design Core during the Month of Design was an incredibly rewarding experience... It was inspiring to see how Design Core's efforts helped elevate local creatives, providing them with a platform to showcase their work and connect with a broader audience."

- RASHAD BUCKINGHAM
FOUNDER, ART HOUSE
DETROIT MONTH OF DESIGN VOLUNTEER



VOLUNTEERS

Our volunteers are the heart of the Detroit Month of Design, helping to create unforgettable experiences in September and beyond. Volunteer opportunities provide design enthusiasts, creative professionals, and community advocates, a chance to connect, collaborate, and make a real impact.

"Volunteering has given me a clearer understanding of the evolving creative landscape in Detroit, through the events themselves and the people I've met there. Design Core has established a central hub connecting broader design and creative communities. Because of this, I've met people from a variety of industries, interests, and disciplines."

- LISA BRZEZNAK
MULTIDISCIPLINARY DESIGNER & VOLUNTEER

UNESCO CITY OF DESIGN

ABOUT THE UNESCO CREATIVE CITIES NETWORK

This global initiative connects over 400 cities across the globe, united by a shared commitment to creativity as a driver of sustainable development. From literature to gastronomy, music to film, each Creative City leverages its unique cultural assets to foster resilience, growth, and innovation

As stewards of North America's first and only UNESCO City of Design, Design Core takes the lead on amplifying Detroit's creative economy on the world stage.



10TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR

In 2025, as Detroit celebrated its 10th anniversary as a UNESCO City of Design, Design Core reaffirmed its commitment to solidifying Detroit's position as a respected design leader, locally and globally.

KEY OBJECTIVES

CROSS-CULTURAL EXCHANGE

Design Core facilitated opportunities for Detroit designers to take center stage in the global design landscape.



Detroit designer **AMANDA BREZZEL** (Fennigan's Farms) was selected to exhibit her work in the **WONDER FESTIVAL** in **KORTRIJK, BELGIUM** and presented to international leaders in biobased design strategies.



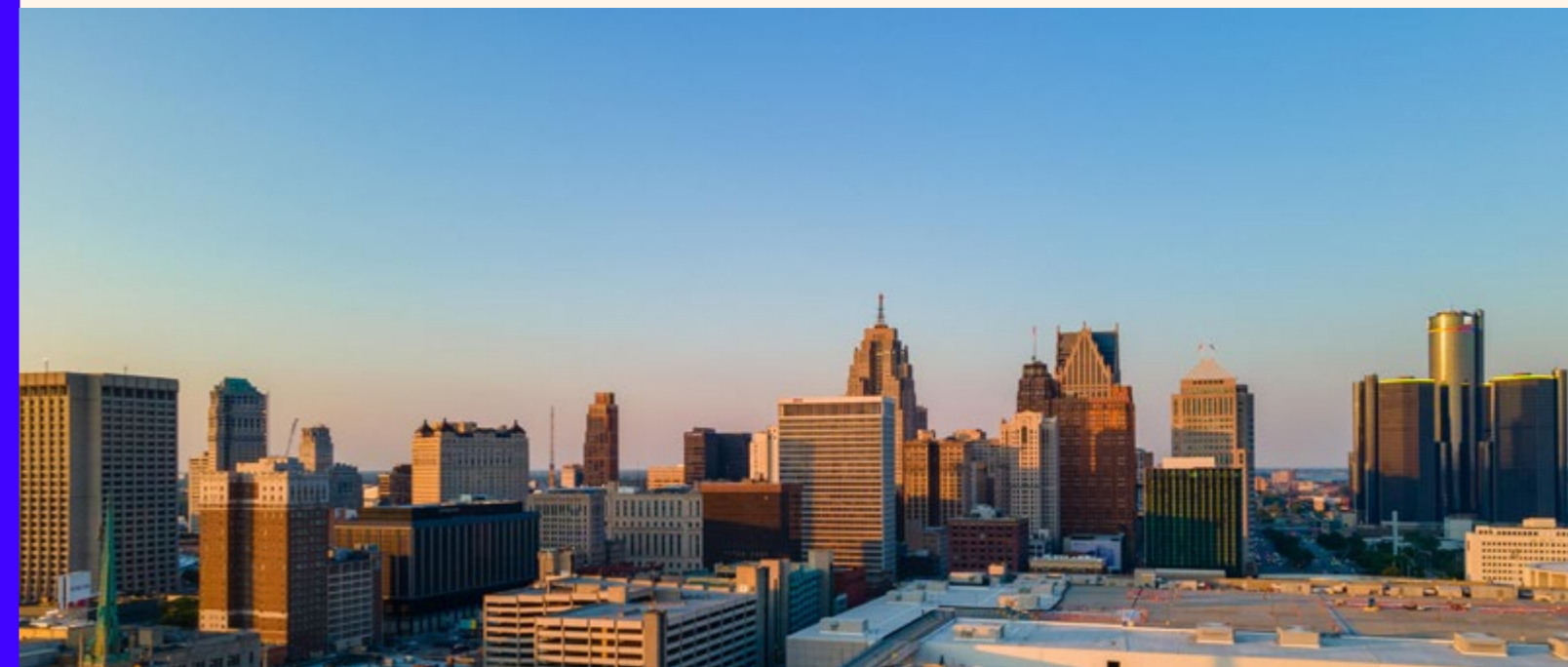
PAULINA PETKOSKI (Playgroup Detroit) represented Detroit at the Inagural Global Art Convention (GAC) organized by the **CENTER FOR STRATEGY & CULTURAL DIPLOMACY**, a three-day gathering in Dubai, City of Design



Design Core sent the work of five artists from **DTREE**, to exhibit in the **COVILHÁ DESIGN TRIENNIAL'S WORLD WIDE THINGS EXHIBITION**.



Design Core facilitated an exhibition of **CCS ALUMNI FROM CHINA** at Detroit Month of Design in collaboration with Cities of Design **CHONGQING** and **WUHAN**.



DEMONSTRATING LEADERSHIP IN INCLUSIVE DESIGN

Design Core facilitated opportunities for Detroit designers to take center stage in the global design landscape.



Showcased Detroit's Creative Cities strategy at a **CREATIVE CITIES CONFERENCE IN TONGYEONG, SOUTH KOREA** (City of Music).



Presented **INCLUSIVE DESIGN IN DETROIT** to a delegation of stakeholders in **KORTRIJK, BELGIUM** (City of Design).

Detroit was selected by **WHANGANUI, NEW ZEALAND** to be a case study for their **UNESCO CREATIVE CITIES ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY**, with plans to present strategies and programs in 2026.

Participated in **CITY OF DESIGN SUBNETWORK MEETINGS**, both online and in-person in St. Etienne, France, to exchange ideas and best practices.

Continued to lead the **INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL DESIGN WORKING GROUP**.

COLLECTING COMMUNITY INPUT

Design Core collected community input to inform a strategic, realistic, and measurable plan for collective City of Design action over the next 3-5 years.



Organized a design **ECOSYSTEM MAPPING WORKSHOP** with 50+ local stakeholders as part of a larger UNESCO Cities of Design research project with **PROF. ANNA WHICHER** (Cardiff Metropolitan University).



The Michigan Economic Growth Corporation contracted Design Core to expand upon research from a half-day **INCLUSIVE DESIGN WORKSHOP**, which hosted 35 diverse stakeholders to prioritize shared goals for the region's design economy.

Working with a team of **UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN STUDENTS** to improve data collection and reporting processes, to create a 3-5 year **STRATEGIC PLAN** to guide Design Core's priorities moving forward.

CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATIONS



STREET DESIGN CHALLENGE

Design Core continued to host the UNESCO Street Design Challenge, an international competition for university students focused on the design of urban landscapes. In 2025, Design Core provided the global theme—"Community Tech Futures"—and supported the registration of over 300 participants from 25 universities across eight countries. For the second year in a row, a US team hosted by Design Core received an honorable mention for their concept.



NORTH AMERICAN UNESCO CREATIVE CITIES CONVENING

This year, Detroit fulfilled one of its responsibilities as a member of the Creative Cities network by hosting a convening of all North American UNESCO Creative Cities. This opportunity to share ideas, best practices, and efforts to advance creative economies fostered cross-city collaboration and underscored Detroit's role as a design leader.

48

hours

10

North American Creative Cities

12

events, meetings & tours

500+

local participants

KEY OBJECTIVES

- Strengthen ties with other North American UNESCO creative cities.
- Identify opportunities across all disciplines for Detroit creatives.
- Demonstrate our collaboration to the UNESCO organization.
- Showcase the best of Detroit's creative talent and businesses. to a national and international audience.
- Educate more Michigan partners on the work and value of the UNESCO network.
- Inspire collective action and fundraising around the Detroit City of Design designation.

FINANCIAL AND IN-KIND SUPPORTERS INCLUDED:

VISIT DETROIT	CITY OF DETROIT ACE OFFICE	DOWNTOWN DETROIT PARTNERSHIP	DETROIT CULTURAL CENTER ASSOCIATION
COLLEGE FOR CREATIVE STUDIES	DETROIT DESIGN DISTRICT	CREATIVE MORNINGS DETROIT	SCARAB CLUB
DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS	MICHIGAN CENTRAL	ERIC WOLFE	DAVE SMITH STATE FARM



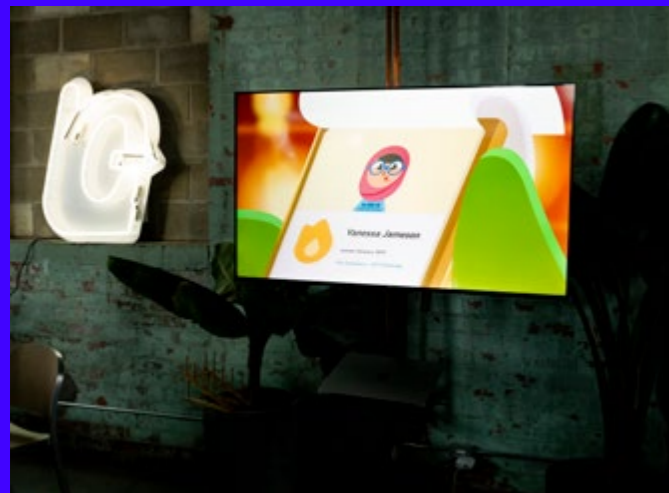
MOBILITY & ADVANCED TECH

In 2025, Design Core successfully completed its third year of partnership with the Global Epicenter of Mobility, a broad coalition funded by the US Economic Development Administration, to grow Southeast Michigan's competitiveness as a center for mobility innovation.

Mobility encompasses technologies that enable the movement of people, goods and information. Michigan's strong community of automotive companies and fast-growing landscape of technology startups all require access to design capabilities to thrive.

KEY OBJECTIVES

- **Supported over 56 organizations through 1:1 assistance** in design needs diagnostics, talent search, resource navigation and business match-making, exceeding our annual goal for coverage.
- **Continued collaboration** with TechTown at Wayne State University, the State of Michigan, and other coalition partners to successfully grow our engagement with Michigan's startup community.
- **Facilitated an educational partnership** between Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) Office of Future Mobility and Electrification and the transportation design program at College for Creative Studies.
- **Grew partnerships** in the digital design & advanced tech space by collaborating on events like the **Duo Lingo** Drinks X Design, **Black Tech Saturdays** Design Summit & **Michael Ford's Remix the Palette** workshop.
- **Design Core began planning partnerships** with **Detroit-based technology firms** to focus on data and analytics upgrades to improve client experiences.



INDUSTRIAL DESIGNERS SOCIETY OF AMERICA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

- Design Core hosted the **Industrial Designers Society of America annual conference, drawing over 600 industry attendees** and creating visibility for the Detroit region's design and innovation community. Design leaders from businesses including General Motors and Stellantis presented.
- Design Core facilitates first ever Michigan Industrial Design Student Showcase at Eastern Market After Dark featuring the work of students from **Western Michigan, LTU, CCS, University of Michigan, Kendall College of Art & Design and Pensole Lewis.**

The student displays brought industrial design to the community in an accessible way, while creating access and visibility to the career path for people in Detroit.



INCLUSIVE DESIGN

DESIGN JAM

Design Jam is a two-day innovation event focusing on inclusive design and adaptive outdoor recreation products for people with disabilities. Eighty participants, representing the disabled community, makers, entrepreneurs, students, and educators, collaborated in teams to explore solutions for improving mobility and quality of life in outdoor settings.

Student delegations from Northern and Central Michigan Universities travelled to Detroit to participate in the jam. The program, supported by Ford Motor Company, State Farm, ANew Life Prosthetics, National Endowment for the Arts, Reimagine Life Foundation, and Alden B. Dow Home & Studio, demonstrates **Design Core's ability to convene diverse stakeholders and create impactful educational opportunities.**

Visit vimeo.com/designcore to check out the official 2025 Design Jam video & learn more!



DESIGN GUIDES

PRODUCT DESIGN GUIDE

In 2025, Design Core published the fourth edition of our Design Guide series, a practical guide for entrepreneurs designing and developing artisan, craftbased and manufactured products. The Product Design Guide was developed in partnership with Detroit Design Network members and Centrepolis Accelerator, to assist designers through the early stages of product development and market entry.



INCLUSIVE DESIGN WORKSHOPS

MARKET READINESS

Design Core hosted an interactive workshop, funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, teaching participants to refine new product concepts while aligning with market needs, reducing risk and improving market readiness.

TRAINING THE TRAINER

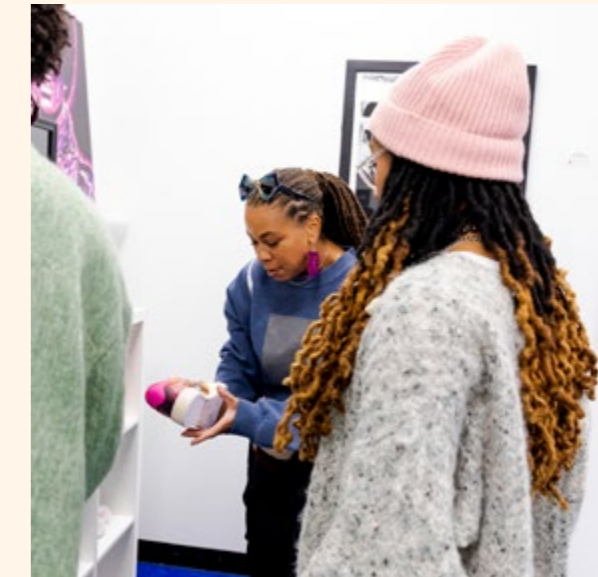
In partnership with Mechanism, Design Core delivered two virtual Train-the-Trainer programs, teaching other educators and program developers how to host their own inclusive product development programs. This work advances Design Core's mission to increase access to Inclusive Design Principles across industries and design disciplines.

PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATIONS

ROBIN GIVHAN

Design Core Co-Executive Director **Kiana Wenzell** was tapped by **Penguin Random House Publishing** to host a conversation on fashion, power & **the legacy of Virgil Abloh** with pulitzer-prize winning author Robin Givhan. The event included a private meet and greet, public talk held at CCS and book signing events at Source Booksellers, a black-owned book store in Detroit.

Givhan, a pulitzer-prize winning fashion writer, is a Detroit native and graduate of Renaissance High School. Her latest book, *Make It Ours: Crashing the Gate of Culture with Virgil Abloh* is a professional biography of groundbreaking designer **Virgil Abloh**.



ART ON SNEAKERS WITH REEBOK

Design Core partnered with **Reebok** and local creative agency MARTK'D to run the "Art on Sneaker" invitational design competition.

The **24-hour design competition** featured **six Detroit-based designers**, each competing to have their design produced by Reebok and sold at a local sneaker boutique.

Participants were mentored by Reebok's Head of Partnerships, Carmen Hardaway, legendary streetware designer April Walker, CEO of Carnival Keiba Jacob-Mottley and Design Core Head of Marketing, Lizz Cardwell. The event was lively, with many eager onlookers, including proud family members, passionate sneakerheads, and discerning judges.

All sneaker designs are slated to be **exhibited at the 2026 Detroit Month of Design**.

BUSINESS PROGRAMS

ABOUT OUR BUSINESS EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Design Core was founded on the principle that investing in designers fuels economic growth. Our business education programs equip creatives with the tools they need to thrive, from classes and workshops to networking and recruitment opportunities and real-time support.

CLIENT SERVICES BOOTCAMP

Our comprehensive boot camp series covers everything from contracts and IP to pricing and time tracking, proposals and client briefs, and business structure fundamentals.

Through workbooks, templates, and discovery worksheets, we equip designers with conceptual frameworks and practical tools to bridge the gap between creative practice and professional business operations.

This year, Design Core expanded the Client Services Bootcamp program with the support of the Gilbert Family Foundation.



" The client services boot camp tightened a lot of the loose screws in my business's vehicle.

It really helps you answer the questions that linger, and for so many of us who were not born into this knowledge, it gives language to things we have struggled to name. "

**- BRITTINI WARD, EYE N EYE LLC
2025 CLIENT SERVICES BOOTCAMP GRAD**





"Design Core Detroit has been instrumental in helping Octane Design secure new business through the Design Salons and networking events over the years.

The membership and resources are worth every penny. The new connections and friendships we've made within the community are priceless.

I can't thank them enough!"

**- BILL BOWEN, OCTANE DESIGN
DETROIT DESIGN NETWORK MEMBER**



DETROIT DESIGN NETWORK

The Detroit Design Network is a collaborative network of interdisciplinary designers and agencies founded to connect design talent with Michigan's business community.

Launched by Design Core in 2015, the Network operates as a design trade association, providing members with exclusive business development opportunities, educational workshops, community events, and mentor engagement.

Members span firms, agencies and freelancers wide spectrum of design services. From emerging talent to established studios, the Network provides meaningful support for businesses and creatives at every stage and skill level.

DRINKS X DESIGN

The Drinks x Design program is a series of monthly creative industries networking events taking place April through July. Each event offers an opportunity for a Detroit business to open their doors and share their work with the public so attendees can meet new people, promote their creative endeavors, and learn about other projects in their community.

In 2025, we worked to expand Drinks x Design to advance our mission of promoting Detroit as a global hub for creative talent, strengthen Detroit's design-driven businesses, and expand market opportunities.

Drinks x Design is supported by The New Economy Initiative with support from Duo Lingo, Tito's Handmade Vodka, Ford Design, and The Detroit Design Network.

DRINKS X DESIGN PROGRAM GROWTH NUMBERS AT A GLANCE

2025 DRINKS X DESIGN

242

featured Designers,
Businesses &
Organizations

4200+

attendees

2024 DRINKS X DESIGN

142

featured Designers,
Businesses &
Organizations

3500

attendees

2023 DRINKS X DESIGN

86

featured Designers,
Businesses &
Organizations

1875

attendees

Visit vimeo.com/designcore to check out recap videos from the 2025 Drinks x Design series



DESIGN IN MOTION AT DUO LINGO

April 2025



FABRICATION & FUNCTIONAL DESIGN AT GANAS MFG

May 2025



CITIES OF DESIGN AT THE DETROIT HISTORICAL MUSEUM

June 2025



DESIGN COLLECTIVES & CREATIVE COLLABORATIONS @ THE RIVERSIDE

July 2025



LOOKING AHEAD

Design Core's mission to strengthen the city's creative economy by empowering designers - is transforming Detroit.

Creative businesses are thriving, Month of Design programming and attendance continues to grow, and tourism is rising, and more people are investing in Detroit as a place to live and work.

Looking ahead, we aim to pair this tangible impact with data that tells the full story of design as a cultural and economic driver. Expanding data collection will allow us to trace connections between individuals, businesses, institutions, and neighborhoods, giving us a deeper understanding of this ecosystem, in Detroit and the wider region.

We're also focused on building a more resilient financial foundation by strengthening our earned revenue models. Our team of talented creatives are available for hire, creating new opportunities for our community while generating income. Alongside new connections and first-time investments, we'll ensure our mission is sustainable now and for the future.

As our partnerships deepen, so does our reach.

Expanding out from our epicenter in Detroit, collaborations with groups like the Michigan Economic Development Corporation amplify our reach, proving that design is a driver of economic development, policy influence, and investment across Michigan and the wider region.

The future of Design Core is about nurturing the seeds we've planted over the last 15 years—giving creatives the tools, structure, and support they need to continue to flourish locally, regionally, and beyond.

design powerhouse is increasingly matched by the infrastructure needed to sustain careers, attract new talent, and welcome creatives back home.

In 2025, this momentum translated into funding, partnership, and visibility. We hosted leaders from 10 UNESCO Creative Cities at the North American Creative Cities Convening, deepening relationships and showcasing Detroit as a model for creative-led development. We expanded partnerships with institutions like the Detroit Historical Society and Visit Detroit, and secured a multi-year award from the Knight Foundation—affirmations of trust that enable long-term planning and scaled impact.

From chance meetings to global recognition, the lesson is clear: design doesn't scale in spite of being personal, but because it's personal. It helps communities adapt, powers what comes next, and remains one of the most powerful tools we have for building an equitable and resilient future.

