2020 ANNUAL REPORT
Design Core Detroit

Photo by Noah Elliott Morrison
Undoubtedly, 2020 posed unprecedented challenges to cities around the world, including Detroit. Design Core Detroit successfully adapted and established new models for serving our design community of small businesses, freelancers, organizations and academic institutions.

We’re proud of the impact we’ve made over the past year and look forward to what’s possible in 2021.
The Design Core team stepped up and responded to the urgent needs of the members in our Detroit Design Network and the greater small business community in Detroit.

We did this by:

**Expanding support for our design network members**

A steadily growing and more diverse member network:
The Detroit Design Network now features 100 total members, 60% of which identify as woman-owned, minority-owned, veteran-owned, or immigrant-owned. Detroit Design Network members work in the following areas: marketing/branding, built environment, content creation, design strategy, digital design, experiential design, fine art and industrial design services.

1-1 Business support & coaching:
We helped members stabilize and grow their businesses by providing over 400 cumulative member benefits this year. This included individualized technical assistance, speaking engagements, promotional opportunities, business education workshops, direct connections to future clients, and more.

COVID-19 relief:
Design Core played an active role in conversations and collaborative efforts to minimize the impact of COVID-19 on small businesses in Detroit and the greater region, including participation in Detroit Means Business, Neighborhood Business Initiative Roundtable, and others. This involved sharing information on grants and loans and advocating for design as a solution for other businesses needing to shift to online or outdoor operations.

**Growing the market for Detroit design**

Design Salon:
The Design Salon, our business matchmaking event, moved online and surprise - it thrived! As a digital design consultation, the salon allows business owners to communicate their needs directly to Detroit Design Network members. As a result, Design Core doubled the number of salons delivered in 2020 and can better identify when network members secured contracts for these projects.

New business opportunities:
In addition to the Design Salon, Design Core shared business opportunities with the Detroit Design Network via RFP postings in its weekly member newsletter and through specific introductions, as requested by interested businesses. Many projects are still unfolding, but so far in 2020, Design Core facilitated at least 13 designer contracts through matchmaking efforts.

Testimonials:
"I found the Design Salon to be very helpful in providing an informal but informative and productive face to face opportunity to meet with various designers. I was able to show them virtually, in real time, around my space to better explain the current design concerns I am seeking to have addressed."

— FOLK, Client

"Yes! The Jefferson East, Inc. project is from the call through Design Core and the Design Salon. Definitely mark that down as a successful match because of you!"

— Synedache Design, Network Member
Launching IGTV

In an effort to connect with and support Detroit’s neighborhood businesses affected by the pandemic, we launched two IGTV series that spoke to the ways design can help their business. The first series launched in June 2020 and featured 7 designers talking about The Ways Design Can Help Businesses. The second series, generously supported by Bank of America, featured 5 designers sharing Tips on Sustaining Business Through Winter and Beyond.

Debuting Season 2 of the Detroit City of Design Podcast

Season 2 of Detroit City of Design Podcast focused on how design can create conditions for better quality of life and economic opportunity for all. Host Olga Stella spoke with nine guests on the value of design to business and society, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and increased calls for racial justice. The Detroit City of Design Podcast has received 12,000 podcast downloads to date. Some episodes included:

— Kacha Azema on How Designers Help Brands Adapt During Times of Uncertainty

— Angela Glover Blackwell Explains Why Designing Equitable Systems Is Imperative To our Growth As A Nation

— Jessica Helfand Encourages Business Leaders to Lean on the Creative Process of Designers to Move the Needle

— Rama Gheerawo on Adding Value to Human Life Through Inclusive Design
Awarding $50,000 to small businesses via Commerce Design Refresh Grant

Given the impact of COVID-19 on our community, the 2020 edition of the Commerce Design Awards transitioned to offer Commerce Design Refresh Grants to past applicants of the program. With generous support from Bank of America, Design Core offered $50,000 in grants to commercial small business owners to hire designers to help their businesses adapt and remain resilient during these challenging times. The winners will work with their chosen design teams to improve the experience, functionality, and safety of their spaces. The three winners were:

— **Avalon International Breads** received $20,000 to work with Marisa Gaggino, Heritage Co. II Architectural Artifacts on improving its outdoor seating experience and adjusting the front-of-house experience for customers.

— **FOLK Detroit** received $20,000 to work with END Studio, RL Concetti, Mona Lisa Development, Donut Shop, and Jessica Janda to pivot from a sit-down cafe to a grab-and-go spot for meals, limited groceries, and a cafe with lunch counter seating.

— **SpaceLab Detroit** received $10,000 to work with Saundra Little to make its space safer and more functional for members who need access to its design library, equipment, and other resources.
Design Core continued to promote Detroit’s design talent locally and globally. The restrictions set on gatherings and events created an opportunity for design enthusiasts and Detroit residents to experience design in new and more meaningful ways.

We did this by:

**Cultivating new partnership and activations**

Design Core partnered with key organizations and businesses like Bedrock and Co.Act Detroit to activate vacant windows on Woodward Ave. with design installations.

**2020 Design Showcase:**
Co.Act and Design Core recognized that nonprofits are often unable to invest in telling their own story. Through the 2020 Design Showcase, two Southeast Michigan designers explored design as a vehicle for communicating the social impact of two local nonprofits’ work – Just Speak and Alternatives for Girls.

**Holiday Windows:**
Design Core Detroit and Bedrock partnered to work with two designers to transform the windows at 1401 Woodward Ave for the holidays.
Successfully adapting Detroit Month of Design

We celebrated 10 years of Detroit Month of Design with the largest program yet featuring 75 events, 175+ designers and more than 50,000+ attendees. Design Core organized a fun and educational program, featuring both local and international guests, that took place virtually, outdoors and safely in-person.

75 Events

31 Virtual — 8 Indoor — 16 Outdoor

Here are some new ways our community experienced design:

— 14 no-touch installations which included the winner of our Interactive Design Competition, Living Decals by Hook. Hook activated 60 street grips across the city by using AR technology to transform static artwork into 3D animation using Snapchat.

— An increase in multi-day events supplemented with digital components in response to social distancing practices expanded reach and allowed more people to engage.

— A renewed relationship with nature and our exterior environment as more events moved outside.

— Shift to micro and self guided events where attendees were able to experience the festival at their own pace, on their own time or in more intimate settings.

— More creativity in the approach designers and event organizers used to connect with attendees digitally, resulting in new types of events like livestreamed international music shows.

Detroit Month of Design Exposure

54+ Pieces of Coverage — 722K Listenership — 452K Coverage Views — 62.5K Viewership

(CULTURE) “Though much of this year’s programming has pivoted to digital presentations due to COVID-19, the content is as spectacular as ever, further proof that the city deserves its UNESCO designation. Within a roster of global designers, makers and creatives, local talent stands out.”

— ELIZABETH FAZZARE, Cultured

(HYPEBEAST) “In the midst of a global pandemic and widespread protests against racial inequality, design solutions that prioritize inclusivity, adaptability and equity have never been more important. This year’s programming will reflect on and explore design solutions to the myriad of challenges faced by Detroit and the global community since the start of 2020.”

— KEITH ESTILER, Hypebeast
In this year with heightened focus on racial injustice, we doubled down on our commitment to establish Detroit as a global center of inclusive design.

We did this by:

**Advancing the practice of inclusive design**

Keeping with the strategy outlined in the 2018 Detroit City of Design Action Plan, Design Core worked with College for Creative Studies and rootofitwo to develop learning opportunities around inclusive design. These learning opportunities will provide students and professionals with the tools to design more inclusively, both in their own work and through collaborative projects that address unmet needs in cities.

**Implementing Design in the City**

Design Core received a $45,000 grant from the Gucci Changemakers Impact Fund to launch Design in the City, a program that paired 13 fashion and accessories designers, with an emphasis on women and people of color, with commercial spaces to host installations of their work. The winners also received support and technical assistance from an industry advisory council made up of local and global leaders in fashion. These installations push the boundaries of fashion and accessories, while activating unexpected spaces across Detroit during Detroit Month of Design. Design in the City received additional support from Bedrock.

**Releasing the Design Guide: Real Estate Development**

With expertise from more than 100+ industry contributors, Design Core published the Design Guide for Real Estate Development, our second in a series of Design Guide workbooks. This Guide is a practical workbook highlighting how development shapes cities, how designers can help facilitate more inclusive development through each phase of the process, and more. It is designed to inspire successful collaborations between developers, designers, and neighborhood stakeholders — leading to healthier, happier communities in Detroit and beyond.
Design Core remains steadfastly committed to championing Detroit’s design businesses and in positioning Detroit, not just as a global center of creative talent, but also talent that works with the people who most often feel excluded in the design of places, products, services, and systems. In 2021, you can expect us too:

- Launch a Design for Business campaign that promotes the value of design to mid-sized businesses
- Focus on promoting diverse talent and inclusive design practices
- Launch the 2021 Detroit City of Design Challenge
- Create engaging and informative design content all year around and especially during Detroit Month of Design
- Implement technology integrations to streamline internal processes
This year would not have been possible without the innovation and adaptability of Detroit’s design community and the support of the many corporations and funders who believed in the work. We were able to show why design really matters and why Detroit is a UNESCO City of Design.