

A Cincinnati streetcar named design? Kolar is crafting the logo, uniforms and other features

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CINCINNATI - If you have strolled through Theodore M. Berry International Friendship Park, the Mainstreet District at the University of Cincinnati, or the passenger tunnel or Concourse A at CVG airport, you have experienced Kolar Design's work. (<http://www.kolardesign.net>) It's also in the lobby at P&G headquarters and hospitals within the Mercy Health Network.

In the fall of 2016, you will see Kolar Design's creations when you board the Cincinnati streetcar. The team is developing a logo and brand-identity guidelines for the streetcar system's vehicles, signs, stations, operators' uniforms, website, and printed materials.

As technology transforms how people live, learn, and work, designers help businesses, communities, and organizations adapt to the changes. Good designers are influencing how technology can be used to solve problems and enhance the quality of life for everyone. WCPO takes a closer look at some of the Cincinnati-area designers who are making an impact on our city.

The team at Kolar Design is a leader in the new field of “experiential design.” They strategically blend digital communications technologies with art, graphics signage,

and other elements to help clients from the public, private, and healthcare sectors reinforce their brand mission, vision, and values throughout the built environment. Kolar Design's work affects how employees, visitors, and customers feel about the company or organization that operates the space.

We recently talked to Kelly Kolar and two key members of her design team, Bill Thiemann and Mary Dietrich, to learn more about experiential design and its impact in healthcare and civic projects.

1. What should people know about experiential design?

MD: It's very holistic and includes many different design disciplines. It's really about looking at the goals for the space, the brand strategy, and the intended goals for users of the space. We think about how to leverage every design decision to create the desired experience.

The Apple Store is a wonderful example of how a company has taken its brand essence of easy-to-use technology and extended it into how the store is laid out and operated. There are no barriers between you and the product and staff members come to you. The Apple Stores stretch experiential design beyond the physical design of the space to include the activities within the space.

KK: Experiential design is what makes visiting a building memorable to the user, beyond bricks and mortar. We think about how many wonderful elements and tools can come together to create an overall desired experience that's meaningful.

A user's experience with a brand is affected at multiple touch points, including architecture, interiors, the branded environment, promotional and educational materials, artwork, websites, and apps.

Not many firms focus in experiential design. It's really a cutting edge thing, and we have a great opportunity to help propel this new way of thinking forward.

2. How does experiential design differ from interior design?

BT: The interior designer selects materials, fabrics, finishes, and furniture. We bring together the experience that helps tell the brand story.

MD: We work hand-in-hand with architects, space planners, and interior designers. We do a lot of qualitative and quantitative research to help craft what that ideal experience and story really is. We work collaboratively with other partners to bring it all to life.

3. How and why do you create a branded experience for a hospital?

MD: As healthcare gets more competitive and patients become true consumers of healthcare (and not just recipients), the demands that will be placed on a healthcare community will increase, including the space.

KK: Many healthcare environments are focusing on it because they want people to feel assured that the hospital they choose will be the best place to work, or the best place to bring a child or a parent. We help put the “hospitality” in hospitals, adding touches that make waiting rooms feel more like lounges and rooms that feel more hotel-like.

We consider the many different ways the “place” can affect the patient’s experience, whether it’s through the way information is provided, the attitude of the staff, and the ease with which they can find their way from one department of the hospital to another.

4. Why is art such an important tool in the healing experience?

MD: Research studies have demonstrated that artwork is very valuable in healthcare environments in terms of reducing the amount of pain patients feel and perceive. Art can also reduce anxiety and the average length of stay. But we also found that the creation of art can be equally as valuable and important. The creation of art can provide healing and sense of community. It’s also a way for patients to give back to a space that either helped them or a family member heal.

SEE: Art project Kolar Design led for [Heart Institute at Cincinnati Children’s](#)

[Hospital Medical Center \(http://youtu.be/rAz6fd95QjM\)](http://youtu.be/rAz6fd95QjM)

KK: Since 2009, we have installed more than 1700 pieces of

art in healing environments, and worked with more than 115 artists and 50 arts organizations and community partners.

5. What types of technologies do you incorporate in your work?

MD: The technologies and applications depend on the client and what they're trying to integrate. We're working on everything from personalized experiences with tablets and interactive experiences with gesture-type technology to dynamic content in which the client can continually update the stories and communications they'd like to share.

We are seeing more technology being integrated into many of the environments we're working on. There's a good fit between the communications goals of a space and the ability of technology to be changeable and updateable.

6. What elements was Kolar Design involved with at International Friendship Park?

BT: A lot of people don't realize how design impacts them. But our work in International Friendship Park included "surprise and delight" elements such as the artwork, the footprints in the concrete, and little nuggets of information about the continents and plants. You think you're just going to walk in the park, but then find yourself immersed in learning something along the way. You're more engaged because all of the little elements that have been included to make the experience that much richer.

MD: The civic projects like the park along the Riverfront and International Freedom Park have not only provided wonderful opportunities to impact Cincinnati residents and visitors, but also to have wonderful collaborations with great partners here in the city, including civic partners, landscape architects, architects, and other designers.

7. What type of work will you be doing for the streetcar program?

BT: We're knee-deep in the streetcar process already. What a thrill to have the opportunity to help brand Cincinnati's newest icon. What we're excited about is the connectivity we can provide in bringing together the citizens in determining not only how the brand will be expressed, but also a system will be established so that the transit system can evolve into its next phase.

The discovery phase of our design process included a series of team meetings and focus groups that helped us make sure we have clarity on what the challenge is and what the opportunities area. It has been very collaborative. There has been lots of ideation, both internally and with our external team.

MD: We knew there would be challenges, but we're trying to not only solve today's design challenges, but also to think ahead and be flexible and adaptable to what tomorrow might bring.

8. Have you learned from the streetcar projects that are operating in other cities?

BT: Yes. But Cincinnati is sort of in the middle of this trend in public transportation. Additional streetcar projects will be coming online in other cities in next few years. So while enough projects have been built to provide guidance to us, we will be able to educate others as Cincinnati moves to the forefront.

9. Since you are all graduates of University of Cincinnati's outstanding DAAP program, are you happy to see that "Creative Class" author Richard Florida mentioned Cincinnati in a CityLab blog post. He noted that our city has a higher-than-average concentration of commercial and industrial designers.

KK: Yes. We have a very rich creative class and so much talent in our community for branding, industrial manufacturing, and consumer packaged goods. But we're not just about branding and consumer packaged goods. We're about design, brand

architecture, and art. Our focus is on understanding the user experience and then using design thinking to enhance the user experience, whether it's in healthcare, in a corporate campus or an academic campus. Or downtown.

BLOG: ["America's Leading Design](#)

[Cities"](http://www.citylab.com/design/2014/07/americas-leading-design-cities/373146/) (<http://www.citylab.com/design/2014/07/americas-leading-design-cities/373146/>)

We all live here and have made it our home. We want our creative talents to be part of transforming the community and making a difference. We think there is power in good design. We know design can make a difference.

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