

CHICAGO SUKKAH DESIGN FESTIVAL



The Chicago Sukkah Design Festival, based in Chicago's North Lawndale neighborhood, convenes community organizations and architectural designers to create *sukkahs*—outdoor structures inspired by a Jewish architectural custom. The festival celebrates how these usually temporary structures can be repurposed to build community in new contexts by initiating long-term creative collaborations among the participating organizations and designers, as well as an interconnected coalition of neighbors, faculty, students, program partners, and other engaged citizens.

The co-created sukkahs initiate solidarity and collaboration, particularly among the Jewish community that historically lived in the neighborhood and the predominantly Black community currently residing there now. Throughout the festival, North Lawndale comes alive with dynamic public programming that welcomes and engages all. Afterward, the sukkahs are relocated to permanent sites within the community, where they continue to serve as vibrant centers for education, cultural events, and social services, transforming each sukkah into a valuable and ongoing community asset and contributing to broader community development efforts already underway in the neighborhood.

NEIGHBORHOOD PORTRAIT

The North Lawndale neighborhood has a rich Jewish history and served as the center of Chicagoland's Jewish population from 1910–1950. While few Jews live there today, the Festival aspires to engage the neighborhood's multicultural history, build interfaith and interracial solidarity, and celebrate the role of design in the current struggle to build an anti-racist city. The Festival contributes as part of a broader community-led effort organized by the North Lawndale Community Coordinating Council to enact ongoing quality of life improvements throughout the neighborhood.

The Festival's 2023 edition featured 7 sukkahs, illustrated here. The map identifies the locations of each sukkah's permanent re-installation after the conclusion of the public festival.

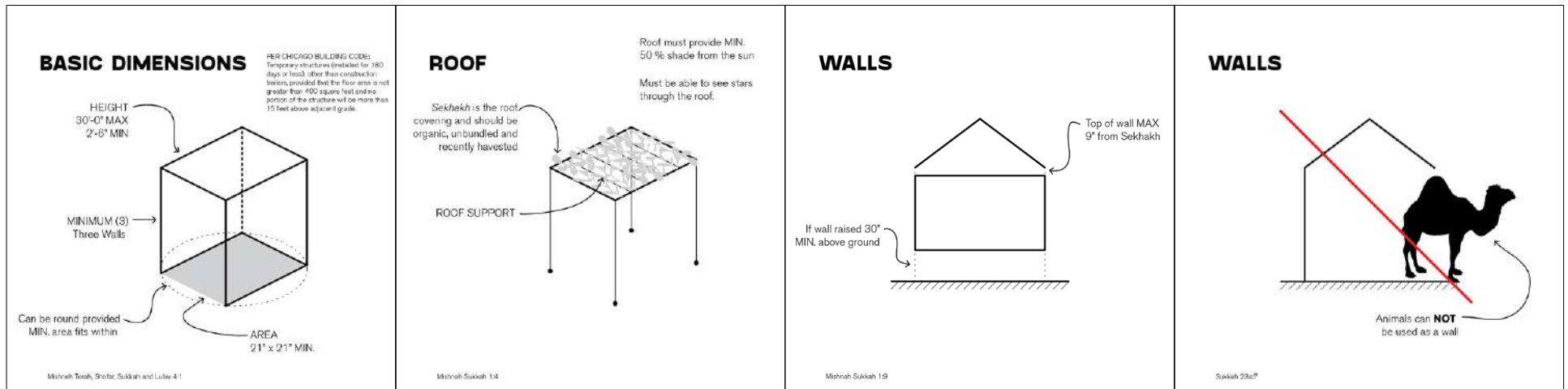




WHAT'S A SUKKAH?

Traditionally, Jewish families build sukkahs in their backyards during the fall holiday of Sukkot and invite guests from diverse communities to break bread together within the sukkah's temporary walls. It's a ritual that temporarily transforms private property into welcoming public spaces for neighbors to share meals, conversation, and ideas. The Chicago Sukkah Design Festival borrows this cultural custom and transforms it into a broader public platform for collaboration, interfaith exchange, interracial dialogue, and community building.

Jewish custom specifies design parameters, like minimum dimensions and organic roof materials. It also narrates qualitative properties, for example a design requirement to draw the eye up to the sukkah's open-air roof. Like contemporary building codes, these constraints to form and function generate a range of creative architectural interpretations and artistic outcomes. The Festival positions collaborative teams of designers and community organizations to reinterpret traditional sukkah construction and energize this cultural practice with new architectural imagination through both experimental form (shape, materials, and configuration) and programming (activities and culture).



COLLABORATION MODEL & TIMELINE

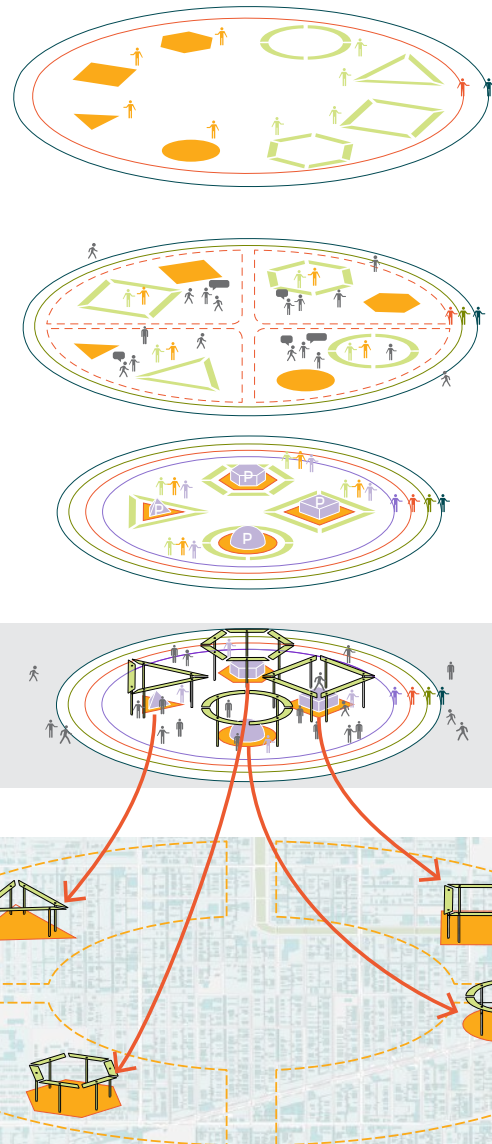
TIMELINE



ORGANIZERS

- ARTISTIC DIRECTOR (FACULTY)
- VENUE DIRECTOR
- COMMUNITY DESIGN DIRECTOR
- PROGRAM DIRECTOR

COLLABORATIVE SPACES



CONTRIBUTORS

- COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION COLLABORATORS
- DESIGN/BUILD CONTRIBUTORS
- STUDENTS
- COMMUNITY
- PROGRAM PARTNER
- PUBLIC

DESIGN LITERACY WORKSHOPS

During the summer leading up to the Festival, each collaborative sukkah team engages in a series of participatory design workshops. The workshops invite participants to develop *design literacy*—the creative life skills necessary to express spatial ideas and to visualize their organization's aspirations. The process culminates in the collaborative design of a sukkah that embodies the mission and identities of its workshop participants.



STORYTELLING SUKKAH

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR:

Stone Temple Baptist Church

DESIGN/BUILD CONTRIBUTOR:

New Office (Steven Karvelius, Annabell Ren, Elliott Riggen)

The Storytelling Sukkah showcases North Lawndale's history & heritage through interactive walls and visual references that point to the neighborhood's storied past & future. The arched architectural forms reference a nearby house of worship that originally housed a Jewish synagogue and that now serves as a Baptist church. The color gradient from blue to purple signifies the neighborhood's broader demographic and cultural changes over the past century. Now post-Festival, the interactive wall panels are re-installed inside the church to provide a museum-like space that tells the story of the building's interfaith history. The sukkah's structural framework remains on site for neighbors to share old stories and envision new futures.

SUKKAH COLLABORATION 01 Sukkah as Micro-Museum



THE GIVING SUKKAH

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR:

Young Men's Educational Network
(an after-school youth program)

DESIGN/BUILD CONTRIBUTOR:

Human Scale (Walmer Saavedra, Kasia Pilat)

The Giving Sukkah riffs on the building customs of traditional sukkahs, composed of a three-and-a-half-walled structure and an organic roof made of upside-down planter beds. The sukkah also incorporates handprints of community members, imprinting the collective identities of its inhabitants on its pop-up awning. Now post-Festival, *The Giving Sukkah* provides a farmstand where the community can distribute and exchange produce grown throughout North Lawndale's vibrant network of community gardens.

SUKKAH COLLABORATION 02 Sukkah as Neighborhood Farmstand



IMAGINATION STATION

COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS:

Men Making a Difference (an after-school program) and Open Books (a literacy organization)

DESIGN/BUILD CONTRIBUTOR:

Chicago Design Office (Aneesha Dharwadker) and Made in Englewood (Eric Hotchkiss)

The Imagination Station is a pavilion for multiple forms of literacy: academic, artistic, cultural, and architectural. The structure offers space for children and adults to engage with small-scale multi-media libraries, including fiction and nonfiction, comics, study materials, hair accessories, art materials, and more. The steel frame allows for different materials to infill the facade, creating layers of transparency and visibility. Children can participate in the making process by applying adhesive images of their favorite book and TV characters to acrylic panels that hang along the back of the structure. Now post-Festival, the sukkah offers a long-term space for gathering and learning.

SUKKAH COLLABORATION 03 Sukkah as Community Book Nook



ONE LAWNSDALE GATHERING TREE

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR:

One Lawndale Children's Discovery Center (a local children's museum)

DESIGN/BUILD CONTRIBUTOR:

Studio Becker Xu

One Lawndale Gathering Tree is a space of togetherness that pays homage to the harvest celebration of Sukkot and brings the symbolic Tree of Life to the neighborhood. With a design inspired by a series of workshops with Lawndale youth, the Tree offers both a room for reflection and a place for projection. Like a tree changing through the seasons, the fabric foliage adapts, at times draping to shroud a singular space and other times gathering at the center to shade an open place. After the Festival, the Tree will be replanted at the rooftop garden of the forthcoming children's museum as a beacon of growth and abundance for the neighborhood, with the potential to support different types of programming.

SUKKAH COLLABORATION 04 Sukkah as Playscape Beacon



ONE TO MANY / MANY TO ONE

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR:

North Lawndale Greening Committee + YMEN
(a historic community garden)

DESIGN/BUILD CONTRIBUTOR:

Odile Compagnon Architect + Erik Newman

Slum Busters Garden's *One To Many / Many To One* (O2M/M2O) is an homage to the collective work that trailblazers in North Lawndale put forth to make up for the lack of support and understanding from the authorities administering and planning the city. O2M/M2O is both a political act and an act of love. Each stick and knot that allows the structure to stand represents the North Lawndale people and the engagement they have taken toward one another and toward the land. The historic community garden that partnered on this sukkah is a living museum and the birthplace of the Chicago community garden movement. Now post-Festival, the sukkah is permanently installed and visible from the CTA Pink Line trains passing above. Its brightly colored panels inspire others to join the movement, as the garden's stewards have done for the past 40 years.

SUKKAH COLLABORATION 05 Sukkah as Living Museum



I AM BLOOMING

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR:

I AM ABLE Center for Family Development
(a trauma-informed mental health agency)

DESIGN/BUILD CONTRIBUTOR:

Akima Brackeen + Vincent Calabro

I AM BLOOMING weaves together the rich traditions of African, African-American, and Jewish cultures, celebrating their shared values of communal gathering and the cyclical nature of life, including rituals of ring shouts, drumming circles, rap cyphers, healing circles, and seasonal harvest commemorations. By acknowledging the cyclical rhythms of life, *I AM BLOOMING* creates a unique space for grounding, reflection, and mindfulness. Visitors are invited to rotate the built-in benches/ planters, to reconfigure the space for different types of gatherings and to make the space their own. Now post-Festival, the sukkah serves as an outdoor meditation and healing pavilion at a trauma-informed care agency.

SUKKAH COLLABORATION 06 Sukkah as Meditation Pavilion



SUKKAH OF CONNECTEDNESS

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR:

BBF | Building Brighter Futures Center for the Arts
(a youth services organization)

DESIGN/BUILD CONTRIBUTOR:

Antwane Lee

The Sukkah Of Connectedness manifests the role of a prominent youth services organization in the lives of the residents of North Lawndale. The sukkah exemplifies the interrelatedness and connectedness of the Jewish and African-American cultures and struggles. The Sukkah of Connectedness is built to symbolize the cross-cultural connections of community and a oneness among all generations and peoples and represents a thirst to transcend, uplift, and grow through adversity. The co-design team engaged in a series of oral history workshops, led by a local history museum. Visitors can listen to recordings of these intergenerational stories. Now post-Festival, the sukkah is re-installed in the central courtyard of the youth services organization's headquarters where it serves as a historical maker of co-generational creativity.

SUKKAH COLLABORATION 07 Sukkah as Historical Marker



A SEASON IS SET FOR EVERYTHING

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR:

Mishkan Chicago + Lawndale Christian Community Church +
Lawndale Christian Legal Center (a restorative justice organization)

DESIGN/BUILD CONTRIBUTOR:

Architecture for Public Benefit + Trent Fredrickson Architecture

A Season Is Set For Everything reflects the interfaith collaboration and intertwined histories of the Jewish and Christian communities that participated in its design. During the Festival, the sukkah serves as a space for shared worship and learning. Now post-Festival, the sukkah is re-installed at a restorative justice organization's headquarters where it serves as a memorial honoring the lives of young community members that have been lost to violence. The walls of the structure act as storage vessels and provide moments of connection, storytelling, and remembrance. Visitors are invited to discover the individual perspectives of each community member that contributes an artifact to the walls, to add an artifact reflecting their own experience, and to celebrate life's varied and ever-changing seasons.

SUKKAH COLLABORATION 08 Sukkah as Community Memorial



IT'S A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD TOOLSHED

SUKKAH COLLABORATION 09 Sukkah as Tool Library Demo Station

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR:

Chicago Tool Library
(A lending library-of-things)

DESIGN/BUILD CONTRIBUTOR:

Could Be Design

It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood Toolshed is a sukkah for displaying, retrieving, and animating a collection of loanable equipment from a non-profit lending library-of-things based in Chicago's West Side that provides equitable access to tools, equipment, and information, allowing all Chicagoans to learn, share, and create. The installation consists of a crisscrossing pattern of marine plywood ribs, shaped into a cocoon-like, welcoming enclosure. Colorful, reconfigurable shelves snap into the installation to create shapely nooks and crannies for storing tools and artifacts. Now post-Festival, the sukkah is re-installed at the library-of-thing's headquarters, where it facilitates a permanent tool demonstration station and scenic backdrop for instructional YouTube videos that feature items from the lending library's inventory.





JAMES STONE FREEDOM SQUARE

James Stone Freedom Square is a new public plaza in Chicago's North Lawndale neighborhood that also serves as the dedicated outdoor venue and festival grounds for the Chicago Sukkah Design Festival. While the sukkah pavilions are moved from this plaza and re-installed in the permanent homes of participating community partner organizations after each annual Festival, James Stone Freedom Square features permanent site amenities, including an accessible pathway, signage and branding components, outdoor seating, and community-stewarded plantings that contribute to an ongoing creative placemaking effort to expand the neighborhood's outdoor public program spaces. James Stone Freedom Square is also the central hub of a nearby church's extended neighborhood campus. In partnership with local cultural organizers, the church activates the plaza with year-round community programming, including a healthy food distribution program, a farmers' market, movies in the park, and a kite-flying festival.







COLLABORATIVE PUBLIC PROGRAMS

During the Festival, the landscape of unique sukkah structures is activated with cross-cultural public programming that brings together intersectional partnerships of neighborhood groups. During these weeks, hundreds of visitors gathered in and around the multiple sukkahs to explore their unique architectures, share community meals, participate in art-making workshops, and engage in open discussions.

OPENING CELEBRATION

Sunday, October 1, 1:00–6:00pm



Visitors experienced the multiple unique sukkahs for the first time and learned more about the collaborative design process of each sukkah team. Visitors enjoyed food, music, art-making activities, a make-your-own local lulav workshop, interfaith rituals, a communal Afrofuturist dance experience, and more.

SUSTENANCE FOR THE SOUL

Monday, October 2, 1:00–3:00pm



“Sustenance for the Soul” is a beloved weekly event in the North Lawndale neighborhood focused on community building and fighting food insecurity. Every Monday, dozens of community members gather at the site among the sukkahs for free cooked meals, fresh produce, and connection with neighbors.

INTERFAITH DINNER

Thursday, October 5, 6:00–8:00pm



This dinner, co-hosted by a pastor and a rabbi, invited members of all faiths and cultural backgrounds to come together to break bread and create shared memories in the sukkahs. The local history museum led a discussion about religious identity and the adaptive reuses of sacred spaces.



DESIGN FOR LIBERATION

Monday, October 9, 12:00–2:00pm



Two youth organizations co-hosted a youth-led facilitated discussion about the shared struggles of combating anti-Blackness and antisemitism as well as the collective cultivation of identity, dignity, place, and belonging. This program brought together a cohort of Jewish and Black teens and college-aged young adults.

COLLECTIVE MEMORY PERFORMANCE

Saturday, October 14, 3:00–4:30pm



Visiting artists guided participants on new practices for collecting and preserving people's voices, stories, memories, and artifacts—practices for preserving undervalued and invisible histories as well as for generating new models for bottom-up museums.

ARCHITECTS' ROUNDTABLE

Sunday, October 15, 3:00–4:30pm



This panel discussion brought together all of the Festival's architectural design/build contributors for an intimate conversation about their participatory design process for co-creating sukkahs in partnership with community organizations. The panel also invited reflections, future speculations, and questions from the audience.

CHICAGO SUKKAH DESIGN FESTIVAL: PROJECT CREDITS

LABOR ATTRIBUTION

THERE ARE NO VOLUNTEERS!

The Chicago Sukkah Design Festival is committed to ethical compensation for *everyone* involved in its enactment, including design/build contributors, community collaborators, public program partners, and fabricators.

- 9 design/build contributors were paid an honorarium for their time to facilitate 3 summer co-design workshops leading up to the Festival. They were also paid a production budget for materials and fabrication services to produce the sukkah installations.
- 12 community organizations were compensated in-kind via design, fabrication, and installation services that resulted in the opening of a new program space in their permanent facilities.
- 20 program partners were paid hourly for their work helping to facilitate public programs.
- A local fabricator was paid market rate to produce the exhibition signage/identity components and outdoor furnishings.

- **Year Completed:** 2022–2023
- **Role of Nominee (in the project):** The faculty nominee is the cofounder, lead organizer, and curator of the Chicago Sukkah Design Festival, serving formally as the Artistic Director. The faculty member also led the co-design process for 1 of the 9 sukkah installations, and collaborated with community partners to create the exhibition and landscape design for James Stone Freedom Square.
- **Funding Sources Expenses:** Funding is made possible, in part, by research support from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Illinois School of Architecture Ding Faculty Award. 2022–2023 sponsors include the Driehaus Foundation; Crown Family Philanthropies; Innovation 80; Chicago Jewish Teen Foundation; Chicago Architecture Biennial; and the Illinois Arts Council Agency.
- **Student Compensation:** 3 students were paid hourly at the university's standard research assistantship rate to provide 40 hours (each) of design and installation assistance.



ORGANIZERS & STEWARDS

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR AND CO-HOST

Could Be Design is a Chicago-based design practice directed by Joseph Altshuler & Zack Morrison that creates seriously playful spaces that initiate participation, companionship, and solidarity among multiple communities. Joseph and Zack provide curatorial leadership and architectural design support to the contributing sukkah design teams.
www.couldbe.design

VENUE DIRECTOR AND CO-HOST

Lawndale Pop-Up Spot (LPUS) is a community museum in a shipping container, co-founded by Chelsea Ridley and Jonathan Kelley. LPUS is a space for exhibits featuring art, history, social issues, and more, by and for the community of North Lawndale. LPUS's goal is to help reimagine how museums serve communities, while contributing to ongoing revitalization efforts by the North Lawndale neighborhood. Jonathan and Chelsea coordinate the Chicago Sukkah Design Festival's on-site activities, partnerships, and public programming.
www.lawndalepopupspot.org

FESTIVAL LOT STEWARDS

Pastor Reshorna Fitzpatrick
Annamaria Leon

LANDSCAPE DESIGN & CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

Joseph Altshuler
Nekita Thomas
Zack Morrison

SIGNAGE FABRICATION

Stolatis Fabrication

OUTREACH ASSISTANT

Phil Kaplan

FISCAL AGENT

Design Museum of Chicago

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Craig Stevenson |
Open Architecture Chicago

GRAPHIC IDENTITY

Matthew Harlan

WEB DESIGN

Studio Itzi

PHOTOGRAPHY

Brian Griffin

EVENT PHOTOGRAPHY

Norvell Tolbert

DESIGN SUPPORT

Amir Zarei

CONTRIBUTORS & COLLABORATORS

DESIGN/BUILD CONTRIBUTORS (2022–2023)

Human Scale	Akima Brackeen
New Office	Vincent Calabro
Chicago Design Office	Antwane Lee
Made in Englewood	Architecture for Public Benefit
Studio Becker Xu	Trent Fredrickson
Odile Compagnon + Erik Newman	Could Be Design

COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS (2022–2023)

Stone Temple Baptist Church
Men Making a Difference
Open Books | North Lawndale Reads campaign
One Lawndale Children's Discovery Center
Young Men's Educational Network
North Lawndale Greening Committee
I Am Able Center For Family Development
BBF | Building Brighter Futures Center For The Arts
Mishkan Chicago
Lawndale Christian Community Church
Lawndale Christian Legal Center
Chicago Tool Library

SUPERGRAPHIC LANDSCAPES CONTRIBUTORS (2023)

Outpost Office
Norman Teague Design Studios

PROGRAM PARTNERS

Stone Temple Baptist Church	Flava Food for the Soul
Terrain Biennial	Diaspora Dinners
DJ Shannon Harris	Chicago History Museum
Ytasha Womack	Jewish Community Relations Council
Courtney Gipson The Antidote	NLCCC GROWSS Committee
Rachel Ellison Bat Sarah Press	Metro Chicago Hillel
Cody Norman	Jewish Council on Urban Affairs
Charles Roderick	Haman Cross Freedom House
Windy City Mushroom	Mohamed Fariji & Eugénie Forno
Yvon Gonzalez-Bergner	Open House Chicago