



I AM BLOOMING

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. In African and African-American cultures, these gatherings have been a central aspect of community life, where participants arrange themselves in circular formations to foster a sense of unity and togetherness through rituals of ring shouts, drumming circles, rap cyphers, and healing circles.

In parallel, the Jewish holiday of Sukkot embraces impermanence both in the realm of time and the built environment by commemorating the seasonal harvest, and encouraging a deep connection with nature and community, cycles of growth, and the transitory nature of materiality and the human experience.

By acknowledging the cyclical rhythms of life, I AM BLOOMING creates a unique space for grounding, reflection, and mindfulness. After the Design Festival, the sukkah will serve as a meditative pavilion open to all members of the North Lawndale Community.

Commissioned by the Chicago Sukkah Design Festival

Design Leads:

Akima Brackeen of University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign + Vincent Calabro of University of Illinois Chicago

Collaborators:

Community Organization: I AM ABLE

Fabrication: Emily Duong + Michael Graham

Project Partners:

Artistic Direction: Joseph Altshuler + Zack Morrison of Could Be Design

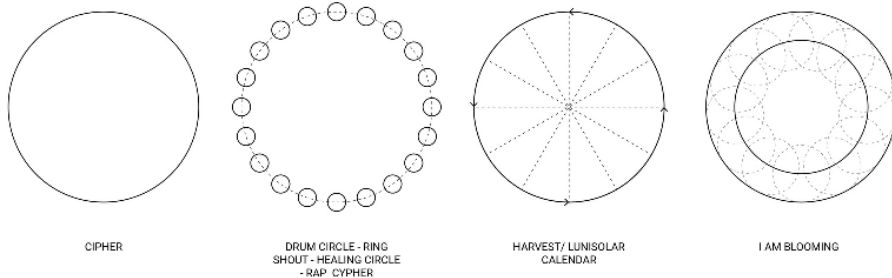
Landscape Design + Graphics: Nekita Thomas of JoyJects

Community Engagement: Jonathan Kelly of Lawndale Pop-Up

Programming and Partnerships: Craig Stevenson of Open Architecture Collaborative Chicago

Landscape/ Plant Consulting: Annamaria Leon of Homan Grown

Photography: Brian Griffin + Tom Harris



Initial concept diagram showing the translation of cultural formations, cycles and proposed design.



A series of co-design workshops introduced staff and youth interns to the design process and created opportunities to gather feedback from members of the community.

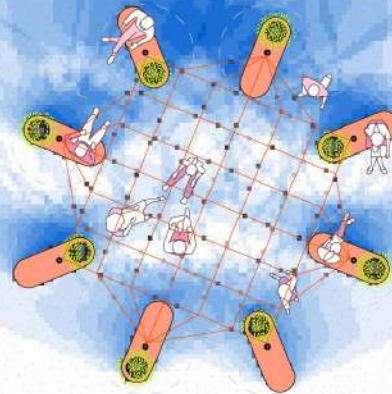
*(Top Left) Co-Design Workshop #1: Site Visit with community engagement leader and facilities management team*

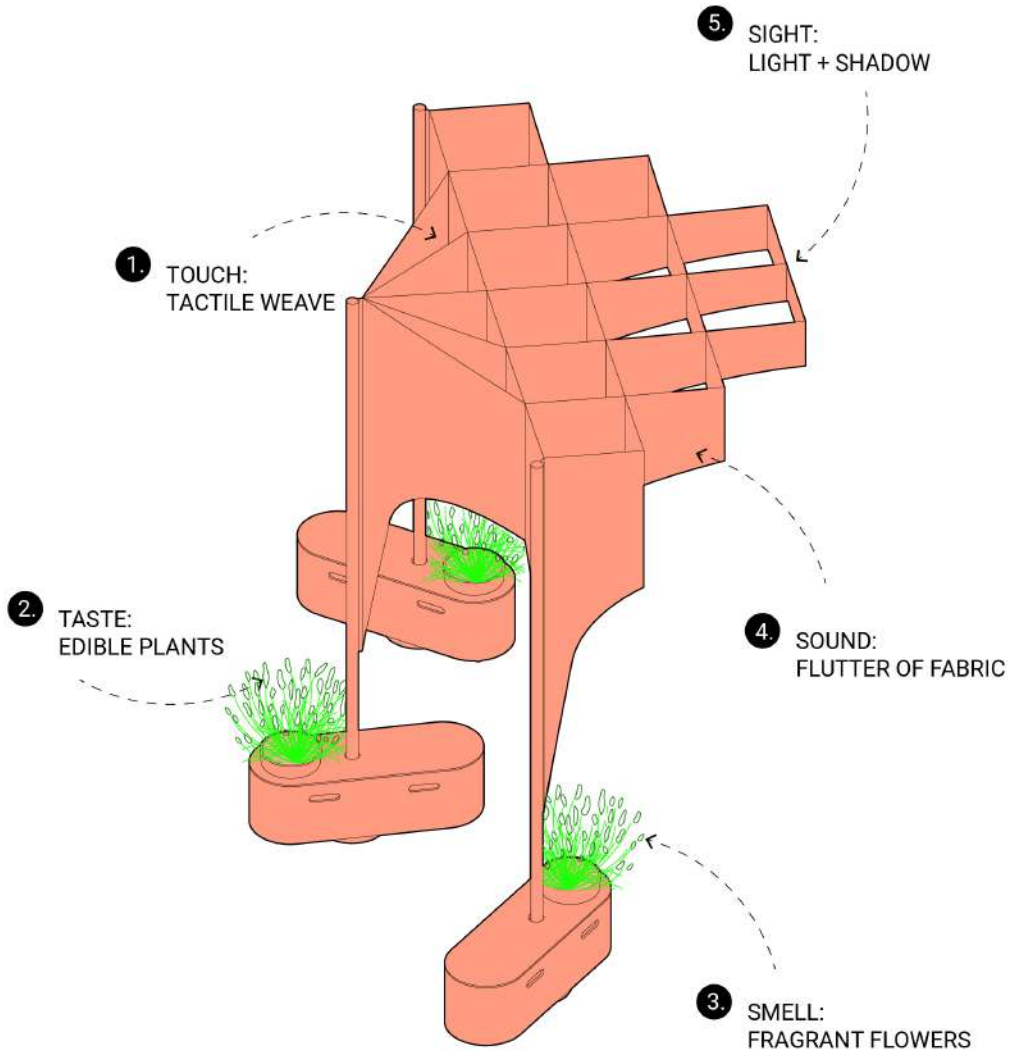
*(Top Right) Co-Design Workshop #2: "Community Visioning and Design Charrette" with staff and mental health practitioners.*

*(Bottom) Co-Design Workshop #3: "Marking out the Footprint on-site" with Summer Interns allowed the team to mark out (2) possible location for the sukkah once it was installed in it's permanent location in the community garden. After the installation, it was left up for weeks so that staff and community members could vote on which location they preferred.*

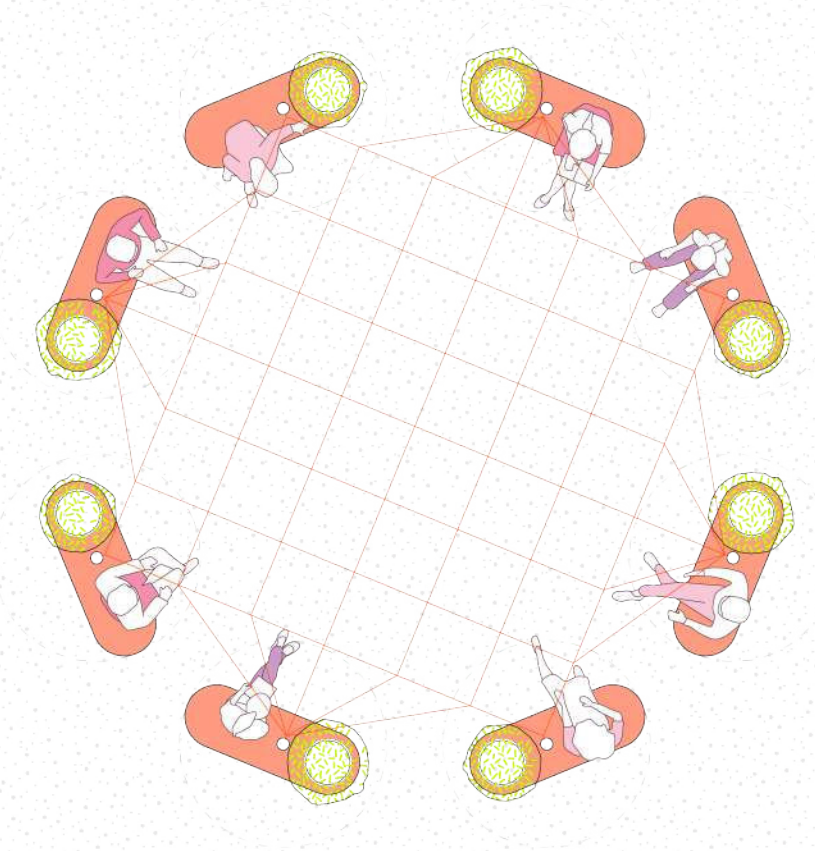


The canopy structure acknowledges ongoing initiatives to improve public health on the West Side of Chicago by planting trees in predominantly Black and Brown neighborhoods. North Lawndale has about 10% of tree canopy coverage, which puts it in the 74% surface percent percentile. Much like a tree canopy, the sukkah's canopy offers protection from heat while allowing views to the sky.

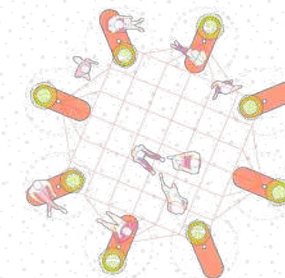
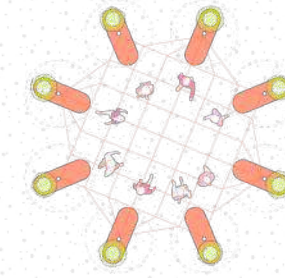
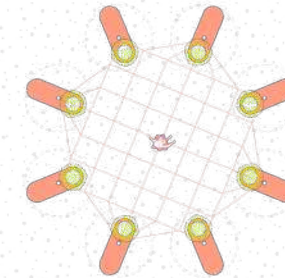
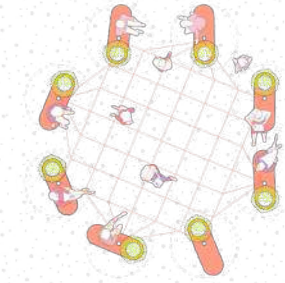




The design of I AM BLOOMING Sukkah, was heavily influenced by the organization's community garden visioning, the intention was to facilitate meditative qualities by engaging the five senses: the interplay of light and shade for sight, the tactile weave of the fabric for touch, the flutter of fabric for sound, fragrant plants for smell, and edible plants for taste. This holistic sensory experience fosters a serene and reflective environment.



*Rotating benches allow for versatile configurations, accommodating group meetings, smaller gatherings, and various events.*

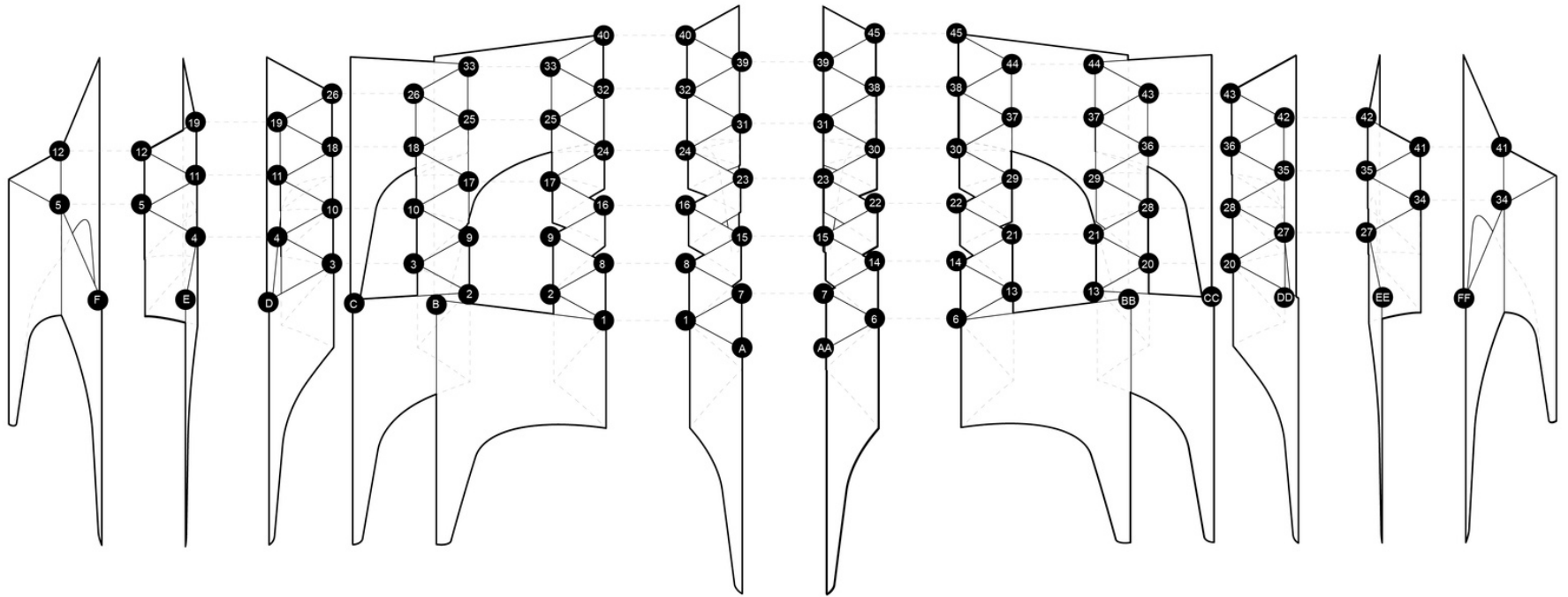




*(Left) 1/4- scale muslin mock-up of canopy. Tension, fabric connections, and wind tests were conducted at the beach.*

*(Right) 1/16- scale paper model studies of the canopy.*





Through a process of prototyping at multiple scales, an intricate labeling and sewing sequence was created and deployed full-scale for the final canopy using standard vinyl mesh fabric. The canopy required two people to handle the fabric rolls and feed the panels through the machine. Diagram illustrates the sewing sequence.





