CHICAGO AR CHITECTURE CENTER

ELEVATING THE MISSION

2024 ANNUAL REPORT





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FROM OUR CEO & PRESIDENT



2024 marked a powerful step forward for the Chicago Architecture Center, focusing on deepening our impact through the things we do best. We listened to our audiences, doubled down on our core strengths, and expanded our reach in meaningful, mission-aligned ways.

Architecture isn't just about buildings – it's about people, place and possibility. In a time when cities across the country are being reimagined, Chicago is uniquely positioned to lead. We've worked to inspire both the public and professionals to help shape the future of our city – through thought-provoking exhibitions, robust public programs, and new initiatives that empower residents to take part in civic change.

We also celebrated the power of architecture to connect across disciplines and communities. Through partnerships with local artists, podcasters, photographers and performers, we've served as a stage for Chicago's creative and design communities to ensure that Chicago's story is told by those who know it best and love it most. The CAC continues to amplify voices that move design forward while honoring those who paved the way.

Perhaps most importantly, we accelerated the growth of our core offerings – those programs that have long defined the CAC's identity. From the record-setting return of our CAC River Cruise aboard First Lady, to new momentum around our walking tours, to the tremendous growth of our youth education programs, we saw the power of architectural storytelling at every level and for every age.

Passion, care and strategic clarity defined our work in 2024. Thank you for being part of building a more connected and curious Chicago.

With gratitude,

ELEANOR ESSER GORSKI, AIA

Elianor Esser Yorshi

CEO and President

Chicago Architecture Center

FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR



As I reflect on my first year as Chair of the Board of Trustees, I'm inspired by the clarity of purpose and passion that define the Chicago Architecture Center. 2024 was a year grounded in mission, fueled by creativity, and guided by a deep belief in the power of design to shape a better city for all.

This report captures a year of meaningful work: exhibitions that challenged us to reimagine the future of our downtown and neighborhoods; programs that opened the doors of architecture to new voices and generations; and experiences from our iconic River Cruise to a record-setting Open House Chicago, that reaffirmed our role as storytellers and thought leaders for the built environment in Chicago and beyond.

Our Board is proud to support an organization that doesn't just reflect on architecture's past, but actively catalyzes its future. Under the leadership of Eleanor Gorski and the exceptional CAC staff, the Center has remained steadfast in its commitment to equity, education and public engagement, bringing design into dialogue with the issues that matter most.

It is an honor to serve during this dynamic time and to help elevate the mission of the CAC. I am grateful to my fellow trustees, our devoted volunteers and docents who believe in this work, and to every donor, member, program attendee and tour guest who have supported us with their participation this year.

With appreciation,

JENNY NIEMANN

Juful Niemm

Chair, Board of Trustees Chicago Architecture Center

2024 MILESTONES

JAN 31 - FEB 4

The Architecture and Design Film Festival saw nearly 2,000 guests experience 20 film screenings.



FEB 19

CAC kicks off a public information campaign to save the GSA buildings on State St. Pg8»



MAR 17

River Cruise season kicks off with a class of 33 newly minted docents. Pg 14 »



MAY 9 CAC partners with the Pritzker Prize to host the 2025 Laureate Lecture with winner Riken Yamamoto.



MAY 23

Local artist Ryan Chester launches his book at the CAC. Chicago Reflected: A Skyline Drawing From the Chicago River is a hand-drawn Chicago River landscape, on an elevenfoot-long foldout.



JAN

FEB

MAR

APR

MAY



Highrises exhibition opens, showcasing photographs from artist Chris Hytha's collection of nearly 200 skyscrapers from across the U.S.

JUN



JUN 22

Trustee Graham Grady's piece in the Chicago Tribune heralds the importance of volunteerism while celebrating our docent corps.



FEB 24

50 engineering and design firms greet more than 1,300 future professionals at a record breaking Engineering Fest at Willis Tower. Pa 14 »



APR 24

Loop as Lab: Reshaping Downtowns opens, inviting public input on the future of Chicago's Loop. Pq8»

JUL

The Educator Advisory Committee is established; working with 15 Chicagoland teachers on curriculum development for youth design education.



JUL

AUG

The Design Matters video series launches, highlighting architects and their projects in Chicago communities.



AUG



AUG 9

Summer camp participants share their work at a showcase with new Girls Build! partner, Mobile Makers. Pg 15 »

SEP 24

The all-new architecture.org website launches, the first redesign in nearly 8 years.



SEP



SEP 9

The Disrupters exhibition opens, celebrating 50 years of Chicago women in architecture. Pg 10 »

OCT 2

CAC's annual
Designing Futures
gala celebrates a
revived Ramova
Theatre in
Bridgeport.



OCT 9

Winners of CAC's Missing Middle Housing Competition are announced.



NOV

OCT



OCT 19-20

The 14th Annual Open House Chicago sees a 38% increase in attendance over previous year, across 192 sites and 23 neighborhoods. *Pg 12* »

DEC 7

Applications open for the pilot cohort of the Chicago Community Planning Academy, to be held in 2025. Pg 8 »



DEC



NOV 23

Framed Views, featuring photographs from Open House visitors, opens at a membersonly preview. Pg 12 »



DESIGNING A CHICAGO WE ALL WANT AND DESERVE

In 2024, the CAC deepened our commitment to shaping Chicago's future through inclusive design and public engagement.

The landmark exhibition *Loop as Lab: Reshaping Downtowns* invited visitors to reimagine the city's core not just as a business district, but as a space that serves communities. It became a hub for civic dialogue, with programs that welcomed input from residents, professionals and leaders alike.

Beyond our walls, CAC amplified key civic issues. In February, we joined public discourse around a proposed White Sox stadium in The 78, highlighting the opportunity for a development that benefits surrounding neighborhoods. In October, we echoed this call for inclusive planning in a *Sun-Times* op-ed on the proposed Bears lakefront stadium – paired with a CAC-hosted panel of leading stadium architects exploring community-driven design.

These conversations about who shapes the city, and how, were amplified during the **Night of Ideas** on February 28. Sponsored by Villa Albertine, this evening brought together architects, artists, activists and community members to explore the theme "Outside the Lines: Shaping Narratives and Urban Futures." Topics ranged from food deserts and urban agriculture to Great Lakes sustainability and housing justice, underscoring that urban development is interwoven with equity, ecology and everyday life.

The CAC also spotlighted visions for the future of North Michigan Avenue. The pop-up exhibition *The New Magnificent* featured proposals from Lamar Johnson Collaborative and Gensler, sparking public imagination about what's next for this iconic corridor.

In February, the CAC joined forces with several preservation organizations to launch a public information campaign supporting the **adaptive reuse of the Century and Consumers Buildings** (GSA Buildings) on State Street. This included a series of social infographics and videos that interpreted the issue and its economic and environmental impacts for the public, which were met with rousing support, and the publication of a CAC-authored op-ed in *Crain's Chicago Business*.

Looking to 2025, our next investment in community-driven design is the **Chicago Community Planning Academy**, which opened for applications in December 2024 in partnership with the Center for Neighborhood Technology. This pilot program is designed to equip residents with the tools and networks to lead change in their own neighborhoods. It's a natural extension of our belief that sustainable and equitable urban futures begin with empowering people at the grassroots level.











66

The variety of topics covered and opportunities for audience participation made this a stand-out event for me."

- NIGHT OF IDEAS ATTENDEE



From thought leadership to immersive exhibitions, the CAC reaffirmed its role as a catalyst for bold ideas – and a champion for designing with, not just for, the people of Chicago.



CREATING SPACE FOR DESIGN DIALOGUE

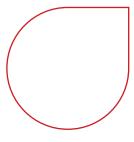
The CAC served as a platform for architects, designers and enthusiasts to explore key issues shaping the profession – advancing equity, honoring legacy and inspiring innovation through curated programs and dialogue.

Architects are not just designers of buildings, but agents of social transformation. This was exemplified in May when we partnered to present the 2024 Laureate Lecture with Riken Yamamoto, winner of the prestigious Pritzker Architecture Prize. Held at S. R. Crown Hall at the Illinois Institute of Technology, Yamamoto's lecture, titled "Community: The Architect as a Catalyst for Change," was a deeply personal exploration of how built environments can foster human connection, civic responsibility and resilience. His words echoed long after the event, sparking conversations across Chicago's design community about the ethical responsibilities of practice.

As the case study client for the **Illinois Institute of Technology's School of Design's Service Design Workshop** during the spring semester, the CAC partnered with graduate students to explore innovative ways to engage the public with architecture throughout Chicago. Through a mix of digital and real-world experience design, students proposed forward-thinking concepts for broadening access to architectural knowledge and participation. The students tested their ideas in our center with real CAC audiences and presented approachable ideas, reinforcing the value of academic collaboration.

Celebrating the trailblazers who have shaped this field was a central theme in our fall exhibition, *DISRUPTERS: 50 Years of Chicago Women in Architecture*, which opened in September to mark the 50th anniversary of the Chicago Women in Architecture (CWA). This compelling exhibition honored the women who, in 1974, formed CWA – often quite literally from the ground up, lacking a physical space and gathering on the floor of borrowed offices to carve out their place in a male-dominated profession. *DISRUPTERS* chronicled CWA's half-century of progress and the broader movement it inspired. For younger architects and students, it served as both a tribute and a call to action.

In October, the CAC hosted **Architects on Housing Solutions**, a timely panel discussion on how to confront the housing crisis in ways that prioritize social equity. Featuring architects, developers and policy thinkers, the panel unpacked how design can go beyond aesthetics to shape just, inclusive urban environments.





Architecture's connection to labor and local history was explored in another standout program, Photographing the Salt Shed: The Intersection of Art and Labor, held in November. This conversation brought together photographer Sandra Steinbrecher and a panel of experts – including plumbing foreman Daniel John Majerowicz – who worked on the transformation of the Morton Salt complex into one of Chicago's most distinctive new cultural venues. The discussion revealed how spaces can honor their industrial pasts while evolving for new uses, and how photography can serve as a powerful medium for documenting the labor that underpins every architectural project.

Beyond these marquee events, the CAC offered year-round professional development and networking opportunities. Practitioners deepened their knowledge, built community and explored the evolving role of design - reconnecting with why this work matters and who it serves.







AMPLIFYING THE VOICES **AND TALENTS** OF CHICAGO'S DESIGN COMMUNITY

In 2024, the CAC showcased Chicago's diverse creative voices - artists, designers and storytellers whose work reflects the city's culture and connects communities to the built environment.

This year's Loop as Lab: Reshaping Downtowns exhibition provided a fresh opportunity to collaborate with local voices. CAC worked closely with Dario Durham and Sara Faddah, hosts of the beloved "77 Flavors of Chicago" podcast, to create video content that added humor, insight and heart to the experience. Their on-camera segments brought Chicago's layered history to life, making the exhibition more accessible and relatable for audiences of all backgrounds.

In the fall, the CAC's most widely attended event - Open House Chicago took on new visual life thanks to a collaboration with Jen Farrell of Starshaped Press. A longtime supporter of the festival and celebrated letterpress artist, Jen created the official artwork for the 2024 event. Her bold, type-driven design became a symbol of this year's celebration, featured on volunteer t-shirts, marketing materials and limited-edition prints sold in the CAC Design Store.

Also new this year was the launch of the Open House Chicago Photography **Competition**, an open call for visitors to share how they saw the city through their own lens during the festival weekend. More than 1,400 images were submitted, from casual smartphone shots to professional compositions. In November, 45 standout photographs were featured in *Framed Views*, a new exhibition at the CAC. Opening on the same day as the Magnificent Mile Lights Parade, the event was marked by a private reception for CAC members featuring dancers from A&A Ballet's Art Deco Nutcracker – a stunning performance that blended movement, music, and architectural storytelling.



Dancers from the A&A Art Deco Nutcracker

Open House Chicago weekend also saw more than 45 live activations across participating sites. These included cooking demos, dance performances and sketching workshops, each highlighting the vibrancy and talent within our city. Supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, the events gave local performers and artisans a well-deserved spotlight. 66

"I was surprised how many people came for the Free Salsa Class we offered as a part of OHC. It was great! People loved it."

- OHC SITE HOST

The CAC Design Store continued to be a key part of our mission to support Chicago's creative economy. In 2024, the store's offerings grew to feature more than 76 local artists, designers and makers – representing 60% of all products sold. From posters and stickers to jewelry and housewares, the store's curated selection contributed revenue while garnering attention as one of the city's best shopping destinations.

In every medium, the CAC has worked to elevate the many voices that tell Chicago's story. These collaborations enrich our programs and remind us of architecture's connection to culture and community.



Skyscraper Playing Cards featuring drawings by Phillip Thompson of Wonder City Studio









DOUBLING DOWN ON WHAT WE DO BEST

The CAC strengthened our core programs to deepen impact, connect with new audiences and lay the groundwork for sustainable growth – all while staying true to our mission and values.

Our world-renowned **CAC River Cruise aboard Chicago's First Lady** remains the gold standard for architectural interpretation – and in 2024, we started the season earlier than ever before. Launching on March 17 with a new class of 33 expertly trained volunteer docents, the expanded schedule allowed for 3,010 total departures and over 395,000 guests aboard throughout the season, reaffirming the cruise's role as both a key revenue generator and a vital platform for public education.

At street level, we re-invested in our **Walking Tour strategy**, working closely with our docent corps to identify new opportunities to highlight Chicago's neighborhoods. Expanded marketing and communications around these tours invited residents and visitors alike to explore the city beyond the Loop. From Bronzeville to Pilsen, our walking tours helped demystify the built environment for more than 25,000 guests.

We reimagined one of our signature annual events, **Engineering Fest**, by moving it off-site to Willis Tower in February 2024. This strategic shift allowed us to host nearly 50 of Chicago's leading architecture, engineering and design firms and welcome more than 1,300 participants, mostly families with youth aged 8–12. With the theme "Building Tall," this year's Fest provided a hands-on learning experience that encouraged young minds to think big – literally and figuratively.



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Thank you very much for this wonderful and educational free event. This was our second time at Engineering Fest and the fact that the theme was Building Tall and it was hosted at the Willis Tower made this year very memorable."

- ENGINEERING FEST PARENT PARTICIPANT





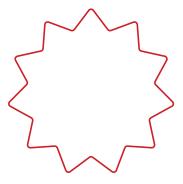
AIA President Kimberly Dowdell addresses Girls Build! Day attendees

Our education programs saw tremendous growth in 2024, particularly through a significant expansion of our Field Trip offerings. By developing age-specific programming from Pre-K through 12th grade, we reached a broader audience of students. Whether using LEGO® bricks to explore design thinking or incorporating STEAM concepts through studio activities, we demonstrated that architecture is a gateway to critical thinking.

In 2024, while our Girls Build! Festival stayed on site with guest speaker and AIA President Kimberly Dowdell, several of our Girls Build! camps and workshops were moved off-site and into neighborhood libraries and park district facilities, making them more accessible to the communities they were designed to serve. The enthusiastic response was a clear signal that the demand for these experiences is present and growing.

Overall, our Youth Education programs reached 9,130 participants in 2024, a powerful milestone that not only reflects our expanding reach, but also led to a new five-year grant from The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation. Announced in December 2024, this funding will support the continuation and evolution of our mission-centric youth programs under the name The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Youth Learning Programs.

The success of 2024 wasn't about reinventing the wheel – it was about making it roll faster, farther and more effectively. By investing in quality and accessibility and staying grounded in our mission, the CAC accelerated growth while reaching new heights in impact.



2024 BY THE NUMBERS



9,130

YOUTH ATTENDED **FREE DESIGN EDUCATION PROGRAMS**



7/6

LOCAL ARTISTS WERE FEATURED IN THE CAC DESIGN STORE



442

VOLUNTEERS DONATED 21K+ HOURS OF THEIR TIME



6,792

ADULTS ATTENDED DESIGN PROGRAMMING



36,141

OPEN HOUSE CHICAGO VISITORS EXPLORED 192 SITES ACROSS 23 NEIGHBORHOODS



395,169

GUESTS LEARNED ABOUT ARCHITECTURE BY BOAT, AND 25,181 LEARNED BY FOOT, ON 3,909 WALKING TOURS **COVERING 80 THEMES**

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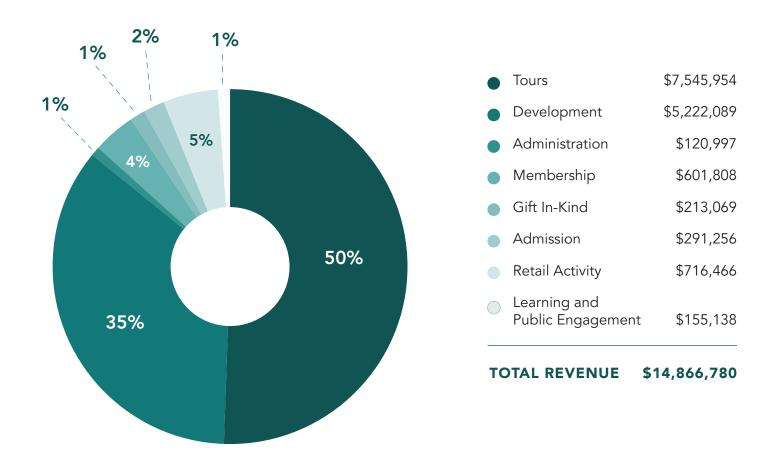
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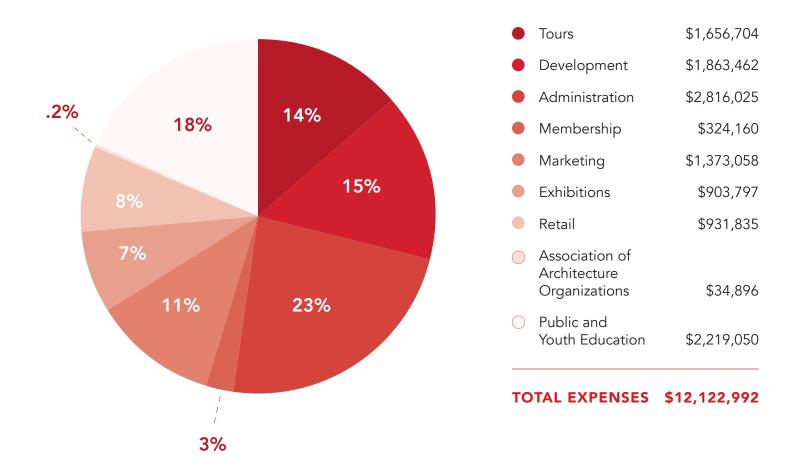
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