

20

22

koukuey design initiative



00. table of contents

||||||| **01. intro**
page 05

≡ **02. looking back**
page 11

▭ **03. program highlights**
page 17

■ **04. out + about**
page 33

||||||| **05. looking ahead**
page 37

≡ **05. team**
page 41

01. intro

dear friends,

As an idealistic graduate student dreaming up how to use design to work on our generation's most pressing issues. I was always dreaming big. But if there's one thing 2022 proved, it was that KDI, despite the everyday highs and lows, has exceeded anything I could have ever imagined.

In April 2022, I received a call that I couldn't have dreamed of receiving. It was from Cooper Hewitt, letting me know that I had not returned their phone call (I'm working on that in 2023) and that they had some important news to share, so could I please answer the next time they called? I did and they shared that KDI had won the National Design Award in Landscape Architecture.

When such venerable institutions honor nontraditional firms, like ours, it sends a powerful message that the field recognizes design as not only a tool of beauty and ecology, but of justice and equity, too.

This award is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our entire team, as well as the many community partners, clients, and stakeholders who have supported our work over the years. With great power comes great responsibility, which is why we are committed to aligning our internal operations with our organizational values and to teaching and mentoring the next generation of justice-driven designers.

To those who took a chance on KDI and believed in us from the beginning—the leap of faith was worth it. Thank you.

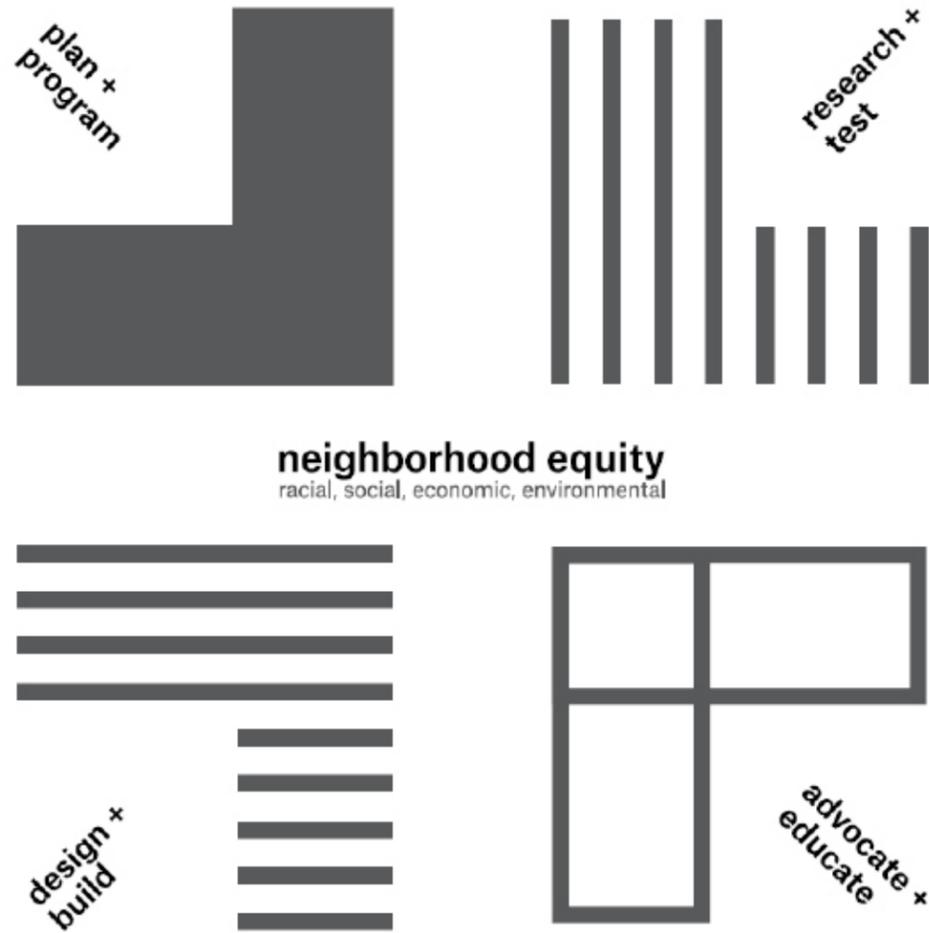
Now, let's take a look back at all the other wonderful things that happened in 2022.

Sincerely,

Chelina Odbert
CEO + Founding Principal



Chelina playing with local children in Nairobi during the board retreat. KDI 2022.



1.1 kdi global



Members of both US and Kenya Boards gathered together in Nairobi. KDI 2022

Kounkuey (pronounced "kun-coo-ee") Design Initiative (KDI) is a global design and planning non-profit working to build a more just public realm. Since 2006, KDI has worked in disinvested places around the world, collaborating with low-income communities of color that have been excluded, harmed, or otherwise marginalized by traditional design and planning practices.

Through landscape architecture, planning, design, and advocacy, we create places that promote public health, bolster resilience, and expand equitable access to income-earning opportunities, education, housing, and transportation.



story

Kounkuey Design Initiative was founded in 2006 by six students at Harvard Graduate School of Design. Despite hailing from various countries and training in diverse disciplines, they were all asking one question. How could they harness their skills to combat issues such as poverty, environmental degradation, and social isolation?

This question led them to Nairobi, where Kenyan co-founder Arthur Adeya is from. There, they began working with residents of an informal settlement called Kibera. Though their education focused on the designer as the sole author, the students knew that their skills would only be helpful if those living in Kibera actively guided them. And so, it became their goal to deconstruct the traditional designer-client relationship and introduce new voices into the design process.

They sketched out a model of practice that followed a simple pattern: ask, listen, collaborate, and repeat. Thai co-founder Kotch Voraakhom found the perfect name to capture the significance of this approach: Kounkuey.

kounkuey [koun.ku.ey]
verb
to get to know something intimately

An international, interdisciplinary firm, KDI combines:

- the pragmatism of engineering
- the environmental attunement of landscape architecture
- the persistence of community organizing
- the formal beauty of architecture
- and the political savvy of urban planning

to create physical, social, and economic infrastructures that provide the basis for equitable communities.



Flipping the narrative: community members as the designers of their own neighborhoods.

SUN Center at KSP04 undergoes a site renovation. KDI 2022.



02. looking back



2.1 kdi global

in 2022

KDI has four offices across the globe:

- Los Angeles, California, USA
- Coachella, California, USA
- Nairobi, Kenya
- Stockholm, Sweden

Our projects span the globe as well and include public parks and spaces, climate resilience studies, pop-up community events and programming, neighborhood and transportation plans, youth initiatives, and more. Our work differs by region, but all work is brought together by the common themes of making the public realm more complete, inclusive, and resilient.

Though united by the same mission and values to work with local residents to create healthy, vibrant and prosperous communities, KDI in the US and KDI in Kenya operate as two separate entities with different governance and bylaws. KDI in the US is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. KDI in Kenya is a registered Kenya Non-Governmental Organization (NGO).

50
active projects

in
3
countries

\$4.2
mil
USD
annual budget



A local resident shares feedback at a Vamos Nomar engagement in Wichita. KDI 2022.

since 2006...

219
completed +
active projects

in
8
countries



2.2 where in the world is kdi?



key

- office location
- project location

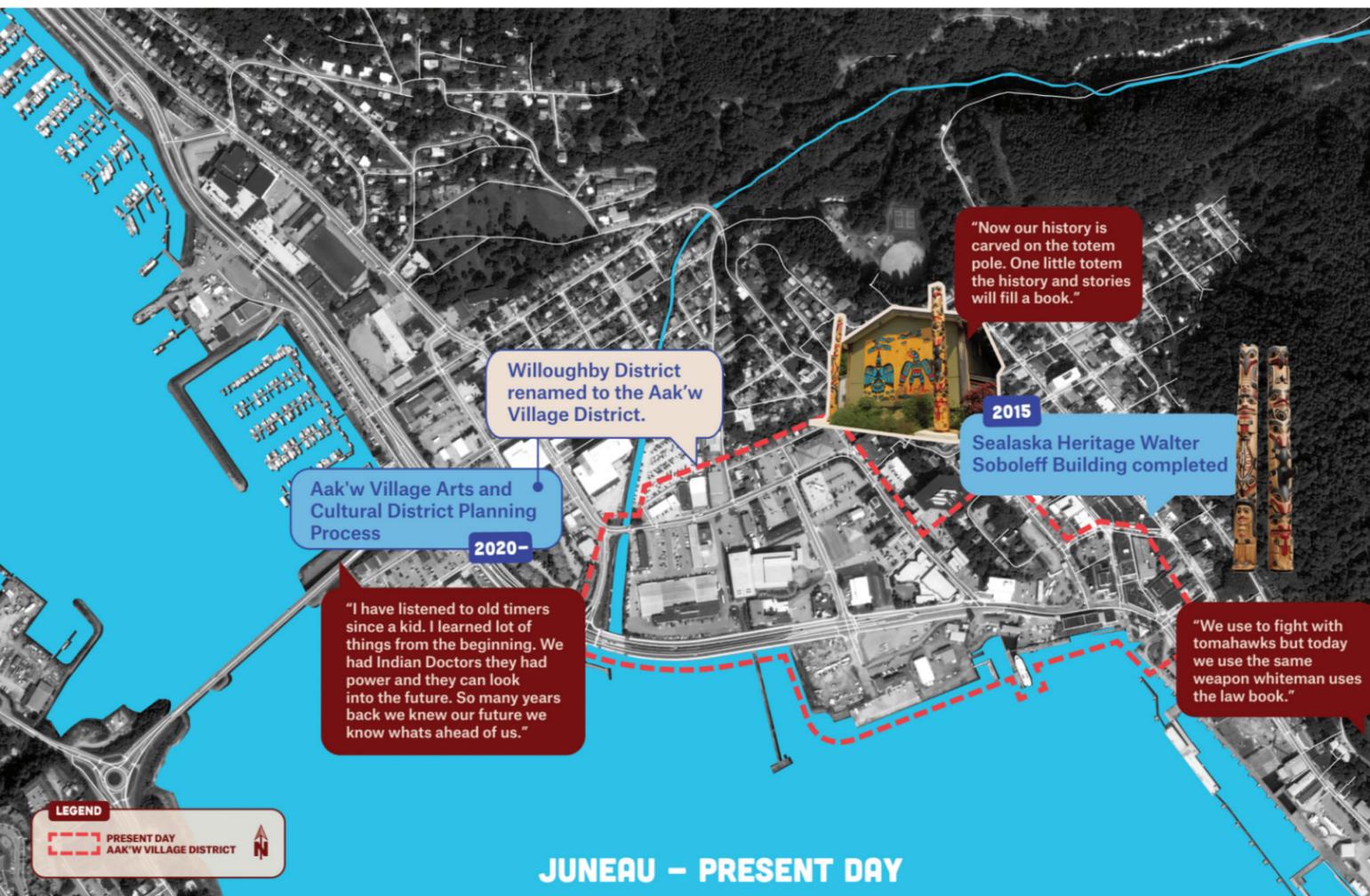


03. program highlights



Above: A rendering of the Pacoima Wash in Pacoima, CA

Below: Aak'w Village Arts + Culture District in Juneau, AK



3.1 los angeles office

KDI Los Angeles returned to our Downtown office in March of 2022. Since then, we've prioritized reconnecting with each other, on rollerskates, over fajitas, through karaoke, and alongside our community partners.

We poured this renewed energy into a compelling slate of new projects that respond to the many challenges exacerbated by the pandemic. Our 28 active projects across Southern California in 2022 reflected our deepening commitment to our unhoused neighbors and indigenous tribes and a continued focus on issues of systemic racism in the built environment and neighborhood resilience.

At the same time, we moved several long-term design projects, like the Vare Recreation Center in Philadelphia and Villa Verde Affordable Housing in the City of Coachella, into the construction phase. Some of our most beloved and long-standing pilot projects, like Play Streets and Adopt-A-Lot, are closer to becoming permanent City of Los Angeles programs with expanded reach and budgets. Our project with The California Endowment marked our return to in-person engagements and reminded us of the power of the participatory design process.



Jackie Robinson Park Zine
Sun Village, CA



design + build

- Safe Place For Youth Garden Stage, Venice, CA
- Pacoima Wash Greenway + Gateway, Pacoima, CA
- Miller Ave Park, Los Angeles, CA
- Crenshaw Affordable Housing, Crenshaw, CA
- Vare Recreation Center, Philadelphia, PA
- Mar Vista Gardens-Ballona Creek Community

plan + program

- Vamos Nomar, Wichita, KS
- Jackie Robinson Commemorative Art Project, Sun Village, CA
- Leon Washington Park Engagements, Los Angeles, CA
- Aak'w Village Arts and Culture Neighborhood Plan, Juneau, AK
- Adopt-A-Lot, South LA, CA
- Our Resilient Rio, Bell Gardens, CA
- Hope Village, Los Angeles, CA
- Neighborhood Planning, Hartford, CT
- Play Streets, Los Angeles, CA

research + test

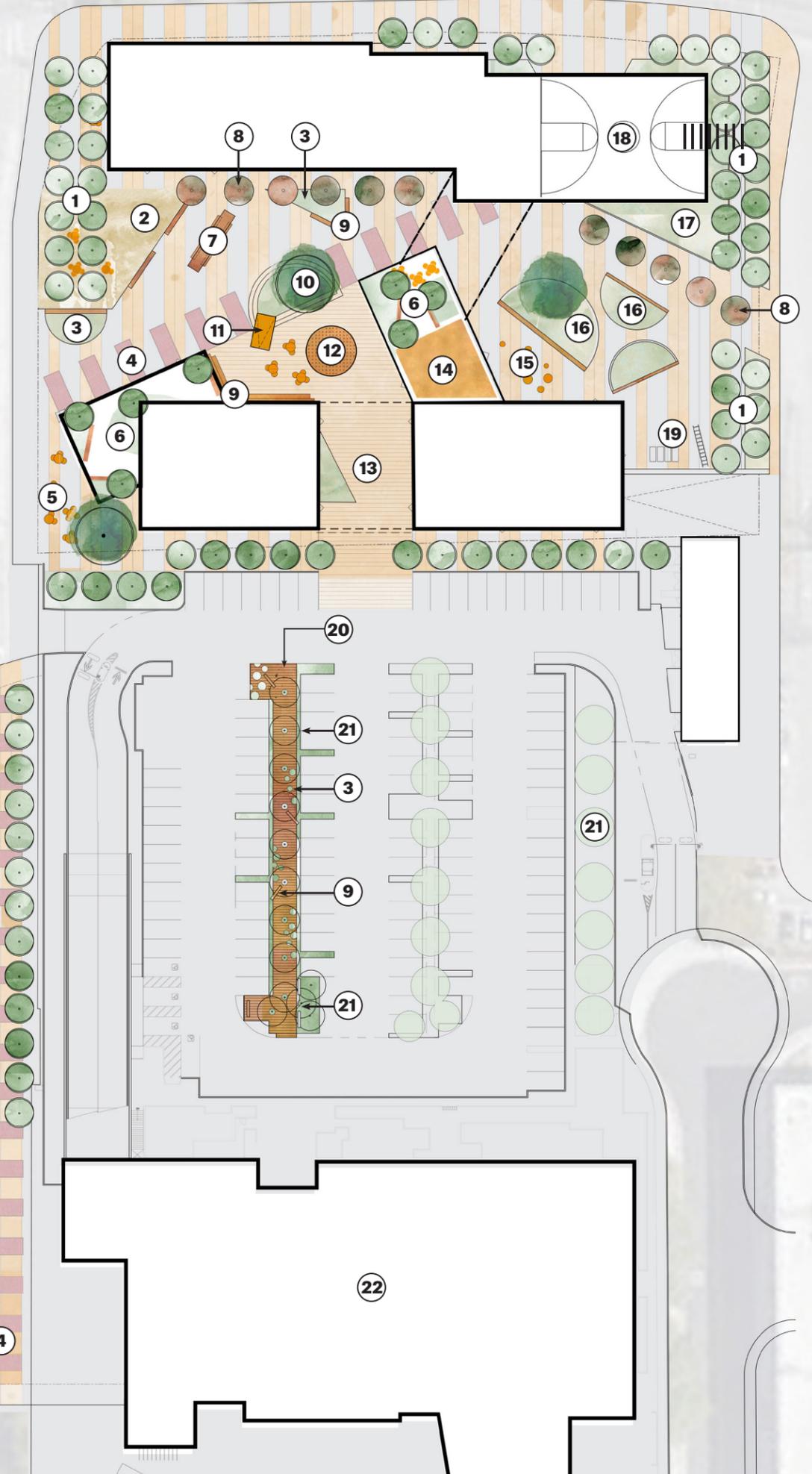
- Next Stop: Gender Equity Action Plan, Los Angeles, CA
- Antidisplacement Study, Los Angeles, CA

advocate + educate

- Studio Classes at University of California Los Angeles + University of Southern California
- Living School Yards, Los Angeles, CA

site amenities

1. tree allee
2. community garden
3. planting
4. art paving
5. cafe seating
6. roof deck
7. community table
8. orchard
9. bench
10. shade tree
11. slide
12. stage / water feature
13. lighting feature
14. shade structure
15. family play
16. meditation garden
17. wellness center garden
18. basketball court (roof)
19. outdoor fitness area
20. elevated boardwalk
21. existing tree
22. the california endowment



hope village

The California Endowment (TCE), the largest private health foundation in the state, sits in a part of Downtown Los Angeles marred with historical trauma and suffering. This jarring juxtaposition between the beautiful Endowment campus, gentrifying Chinatown, and the Men's County Jail was not lost on Dr. Bob Ross, outgoing CEO of the Endowment. Already deeply involved in championing alternatives to incarceration, Dr. Ross committed a long-vacant parcel on TCE's campus to demonstrate what those alternatives could look like.

KDI responded to TCE's call for planners, organizers, and designers to reimagine the space and assembled a team with nonprofit architecture firm Designing Justice + Designing Space and the community organization Southeast Asian Community Alliance (SEACA). Our challenge was to envision a space that would meet the needs of the formerly unhoused, low-income Chinatown residents, and formerly incarcerated, with the latter being the main focus.

We worked with our partners to create a design process that was accessible to all of the communities impacted by this campus. The team spent three months with formerly incarcerated and unhoused folks, the TCE staff, and Chinatown residents conducting surveys and interviews, facilitating design workshops, and hosting an art activation.

Though the communities involved in the process differed in many ways, we found that their needs intersected more often than not. They envisioned a campus filled with amenities to meet daily needs, build life skills, and uplift their minds, bodies, and spirits.

Taking all that we learned from our partners and residents, our final concept design weaves play elements and healing gardens throughout 100 housing units that sit above a state-of-the-art culinary training facility, multipurpose gathering spaces, and a mail and storage room. This final amenity, the mail room, will provide community members with a permanent address needed to access housing, jobs, and government identification.

In February, the TCE board unanimously voted to approve our design, a crucial milestone for this project on the road to the realization of this vision of hope.

partners
Designing Justice + Designing Space
Southeast Asian Community Alliance

funder
The California Endowment

service area
design + build



Above: Rendering from the Salton Sea Recreation Center Vision Plan.

Below: Villa Verde is projected to begin construction in 2023.



3.2 eastern coachella office

2022 was a year of growth for our Coachella office. Welcoming staff back in person for the first time in two years came with an office relocation to the heart of the City of Coachella, a new community coordinator, Martin Gil, and an in-house Registered Landscape Architect. Mario Benito, RLA, now splits his time between the Coachella and LA offices, lending an experienced hand to local design projects and overseeing the construction phase of our built works.

After ten years of work across many scales, agencies, and communities in the Eastern Coachella Valley (ECV), our work has proven to clients and residents alike that we consistently build community power and bring new voices to the design process. These growing relationships ushered in an influx of larger projects in 2022.

From researching desperately needed community amenities to partnering with local college students to build an environmental justice hub, our ECV projects reflect our deepening commitment to climate resilience around the Salton Sea. One highlight of the year, a pilot shade structure, is the culmination of two years of community-driven research on heat mitigation in rural areas in the ECV. Turn the page to read more about this collaborative effort to find tangible ways to mitigate rising temperatures.

9
 active projects

in 2
 counties



design + build

- Oasis Bus Stop Shade Prototype, Oasis, CA
- Villa Verde Affordable Housing, Coachella, CA

plan + program

- Salton Sea Engagements, ECV, CA
- ATP Engagements, ECV, CA
- Coachella Civic Center, Coachella, CA
- Salton Sea Recreation Center, ECV, CA

research + test

- Heat Impacts Study, Oasis, CA

advocate + educate

- Juntos al Aire Libre, Coachella, CA
- Sombra Fest, Oasis del Desierto Park, Oasis, CA





Above: Pilot Bus Stop Shade Structure at night. KDI 2022.

Below: Shade Structure opening with Oasis Leadership Committee. KDI 2022.



shade equity in oasis

Climate change threatens to make extreme heat even more dangerous for residents of Oasis, an unincorporated area in the ECV, where summer temperatures routinely hit 120F. Unlike neighboring high-income communities like Palm Springs, the ECV lacks tree-lined streets, sidewalks, and bus shelters, making basic tasks like waiting for a bus or taking a walk dangerous.

While studying how this shade inequity impacts residents, community members chose a bus stop shade structure as one tangible way to create immediate change. Building shade structures along the existing bus routes could enhance social networks, make jobs more accessible, and promote ridership. So KDI developed a pilot bench and shade structure to demonstrate what this change could look like to residents and transit agencies.

More than 300 residents shared input to determine the structure's location, design, and potential functions beyond providing shade. Solar panel LED lighting increases visibility around the stop at night, while the structure's brightly colored treatment provides visibility during the daytime and welcomes bus riders. The bench and counter-height surface allow for several different seating and standing options, out of direct sunlight.

Our local fabricators built and installed the shade structure at a bus stop in front of a date palm farm in Oasis in early October with phenomenal results. Not only did the community and the media love it, but it has already catalyzed additional shade equity projects for the community.

partners

Sunline Transportation
UCLA Luskin School of Public Policy

funder

Strategic Growth Council

service areas

research + test
design + build



3.3 nairobi office

KDI Kenya had a momentous year in 2022. Our physical space got a big upgrade when we relocated to a new office, and our team continued to grow with the addition of many new faces. In October, we hosted a joint meeting in Nairobi with both the US and Kenya KDI boards. Beyond the usual meetings and site visits, staff and board members came together for songs, food, and stories. We were honored to have Robyn T. Emerson, an esteemed activist and passionate urbanist, join our board.

Our unique approach to slum upgrading continues to be ahead of its time, and now the French Development Agency and Kenyan National Government are catching on. This year we participated in their launch of the Urban Fabric Initiative, which takes cues from our small-scale activations ability to make big impacts.

After 16 years of growing our roots deep in Kibera, we have begun to expand our work to new communities in Nairobi, Kenya, and other East African countries. Read on to hear about our work in an innovative refugee settlement in Northwest Kenya and the playful, youth-focused project that took Kibera by storm.

design + build

- Mukuru Riverfront Public Space, Nairobi, KE
- Kalobeyei Productive Public Space Network, Kalobeyei, KE
- Nairobi Urban Fabric Initiative, Nairobi, KE
- Kibera Green Streets, Nairobi, KE
- Pavilion for Participatory Development Nairobi, KE
- Bringing Bricks to Kibera: Play! Design! Share! Nairobi, KE

plan + program

- Emphasizing Ecosystems, Elevating People, Nairobi, KE
- Usalama Youth Enterprise, Nairobi, KE

research + test

- Urban Greening, Dar es Salaam, TZ
- Infrastructures of Climate Repair, Nairobi, KE
- Living Data Hubs, Nairobi, KE

advocate + educate

- Integrated and Inclusive Infrastructure Framework, KE

12 active projects **in 2** countries

7 new hires



Above: Nairobi River Activation Placemaking Week 2022. KDI 2022.

Below: Saint John's Green School in Nairobi. KDI 2022.



bringing bricks to kibera

Before 2006, there were no intentional, planned public spaces, or designated play areas, for the community of 300,000 in Kibera, Nairobi. The only play spaces were crowded streets and banks of polluted rivers.

When KDI was founded, we set out to change that by co-designing and building a productive public space network with the community, where residents can gather, generate income, and play. We knew from the beginning that a focus on play was fundamental for public spaces, schools, and streets, so we developed a more explicit approach to play. KDI began dreaming up a new, child-focused public space—Playbaze, taking its name from the Nairobi slang “baze” for hangout spots.

With funding from the Nexon Foundation and support from our community partners, we co-designed and built two permanent play hubs that

baze [bayz]
noun
Nairobi slang for hangout spot



Mobile Playbaze deployed in Kibera. KDI 2022.

bringing bricks to kibera

are integrated into the existing infrastructure at Kibera Public Space 1 with the New Nairobi Dam Community group and Kibera Public Space 11 with the Vuma Youth Group. Children were involved in all levels of the design process, from building dream play spaces out of Nexon bricks to making the final product wildly successful and popular in their neighborhoods.

Although we have built 11 public spaces around Kibera, there are still several areas without the infrastructure to support our permanent Playbaze model yet. Taking inspiration from our nimble and temporary LA Play Streets program, the team got to work designing and fabricating a mobile Playbaze. This Playbaze can be wheeled around by car or by hand and easily sets up, bringing colorful and engaging activities wherever it lands. The Playbaze’s popularity with kids in Kibera is unmistakable. When the mobile Playbaze is rolled out, kids swarm to it, clamoring for a turn with the bricks and games.

works and builds on our ever expanding portfolio of kid-focused work, including the 2020 publication Proximity of Care: Early Childhood Design Guide.

partners
New Nairobi Dam Community Group
Vuma Youth Group
Ndovu Women
Gifted Hands
Mobile Playbaze managers

funder
Nexon Foundation

service area
plan + program

PLAYBAZE
PLAY . LEARN . CHILDCARE



Inside the static Playbaze. KDI 2022.



Kibera youth play with Nexon bricks. KDI 2022.

kalobeyei public spaces

Residents gather by the A-frame community module. KDI 2022.



In 2021, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimated that more than 84 million people globally were living as refugees, after having been forcibly displaced due to conflict, violence, and climate change. This number is only growing.

In Northwest Keyna, a region with a long history of cross border movement, the government and UN-Habitat are teaming up to take an innovative approach to this crisis. In the Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement, the local Turkana people live alongside refugees from South Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia. Unlike traditional refugee camps that are designed to be temporary, this pioneering settlement was planned from the outset to permanently support 60,000 residents across three villages. Here, host and refugee communities share equal access to

infrastructure, like solar-powered microgrids and permanent shelters, and social services, including economic opportunities.

However, building a new sustainable, and cohesive community in Kalobeyei's rapidly developing context is challenging, as social and economic inequities and dangerous climate conditions drive conflict between hosts and refugees. In the face of these challenges, public space has emerged as a critical layer of physical, social, and cultural infrastructure in Kalobeyei. Too often, public space is considered a luxury, included at the end of a project if funding or space allows. As we've learned over the years, public spaces are key to inclusion and sustainability.

kalobeyei public spaces

UN-Habitat, a longtime partner of KDI, asked us to join their team to conduct a participatory public space design in Villages 1 and 2 and the Foux Foundation funded our work to design a thirds public space in Village 3. Not only has the process strengthened ties between host and refugee communities, but it has also improved the safety of women and children, mitigated climate risks, and enhanced economic opportunities.

Community members will construct, operate, and maintain their public spaces, ensuring long-term ownership and sustainability. We cannot wait to see how this model for refugee settlements transforms the traditional, makeshift camps into places for all to thrive.

partners
local host and refugee communities

funders
UN-Habitat
Foux Foundation

service areas
design + build
plan + program



Bringing children into the design of their community. KDI 2022.



04. out + about

4.1 awards

We were honored to have our work recognized both locally and nationally in 2022. Here are some of our honors from the past year:

- Cooper Hewitt National Design Award: Landscape Architecture
- Harvard Graduate School of Design Alumni Award: Chelina Odbert
- Nairobi Forum Award: Environment
- American Planning Association California Awards: Advancing Diversity and Social Change in Honor of Paul Davidoff Award of Excellence

“Designers have the power and responsibility to undo the many inequities in the built environment that now stand in the way of truly inclusive communities. These awards promise to shine a light on the capacity of design to make places that are more just.”

- Chelina Odbert



From left to right: Joe Mulligan, Lauren Elachi, Chelina Odbert, Christian Rodriguez, Naria Kiani, Claudia Kahn, Tendo Nagenda at the 2022 National Design Awards.

4.2 advocacy

press

From universities to United Nations conferences and local radio shows to professional panels, our team engaged with diverse audiences around the globe this year. These gatherings provided the opportunity to share knowledge and be inspired by others using design as a tool for justice.

lectures

A selection of places where KDI staff gave lectures and presentations in 2022:

- Africa Infrastructure Futures Conference
- Africa Lab Sustainable Conditions Symposium
- American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) Conference
- Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo
- California Land Recycling Conference
- City Hub And Network for Gender Equity (CHANGE) Annual Summit
- European Conference of African Studies
- Greater + Greener Conference
- Landscape Architecture Foundation
- Oberlander Prize Forum
- PennPraxis
- Royal Academy of Engineering Frontiers Symposium
- UN Biodiversity Conference (COP 15)
- University of British Columbia
- University of California, Davis
- University of Florida, Edward D. Stone, Jr. Lecture
- University of Texas, Arlington
- Van Alen Institute
- Washington University
- Woodbury University



Left to right: Grace Ananda (UN-Habitat), Regina Opondo (KDI), and Joe Mulligan (KDI) at the World Urban Forum 11.

KDI staff shares a laugh at the US-Kenya board visit in Nairobi, KDI 2022.



05. looking ahead

5.1 a note from our executive director

KDI's next few years will be exciting and defining. We will work in many new neighborhoods and communities in the US, Kenya, and other countries. Investing time in and learning from those places and new partners is exciting. We're learning to take our experiences and deep engagement processes to new places, even when we can't be in the neighborhood and on the ground as much as we always like.

We're also expanding our reach and solidarity actions further afield through exciting transnational collaborations and projects with like-minded activists and practitioners in Karachi, Dar-es-Salaam, and Solo City - look out for more communications on these in the coming months.

A big part of the leadership focus will be on improving our operations to enable a fulfilling work-life balance and career at KDI. It may sound prosaic, but it's vital to us for everyone to have the tools and support they need to make extraordinary things happen together.

We're also finishing a three-year strategic planning period this year and entering another. So we are planning lots of engagement with colleagues, our boards, and community and project partners of KDI to help set the course for the next three years.

Co-production at all levels!

Best,

Joe Mulligan
Executive Director + Founding Principal



Joe on a research trip to France for the Urban Fabric Initiative. KDI 2022.

5.2 upcoming projects



The Sustainable Design Academy is a 6-month training pilot program hosted by KDI Kenya to bolster the local capacity of Mukuru Kwa Reuben informal settlement. A diverse cohort of young residents will engage with environmentally restorative design solutions for their neighborhood, learning the skills needed to develop user-centric and resilient solutions for their families, communities, and environment.



The Pavilion for Participatory Development Project is a low-input, high-impact structure to support participatory planning and design in Nairobi's informal settlements. The mobile structure and its surrounding space will be used to demonstrate small-scale, replicable sustainable solutions, such as rainwater harvesting and composting.



The Shade Master Plan for Eastern Coachella Valley's unincorporated communities in Riverside County will be the first rural shade plan in the US and will benchmark and develop strategies for shade in predominantly low-income, Spanish-speaking areas experiencing temperatures exceeding 120 degrees. KDI will work with UCLA and the Oasis Leadership Committee to develop a blueprint for investing in new shade infrastructure, adapting to extreme heat, and communicating benefits to residents, agencies, and stakeholders.



The Desert Lake Shore Education Space will be a commemorative, interactive landscape that weaves through several forms of indigenous artifacts found on the shore of ancient Lake Cahuilla. KDI is working with Friends of the Desert Mountains and the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians to provide the tribal community with new places to connect with and preserve their heritage; invite local students, families, and visitors to engage with Cahuilla history; and transfer traditional Cahuilla knowledge on how to sustainably work with the land.

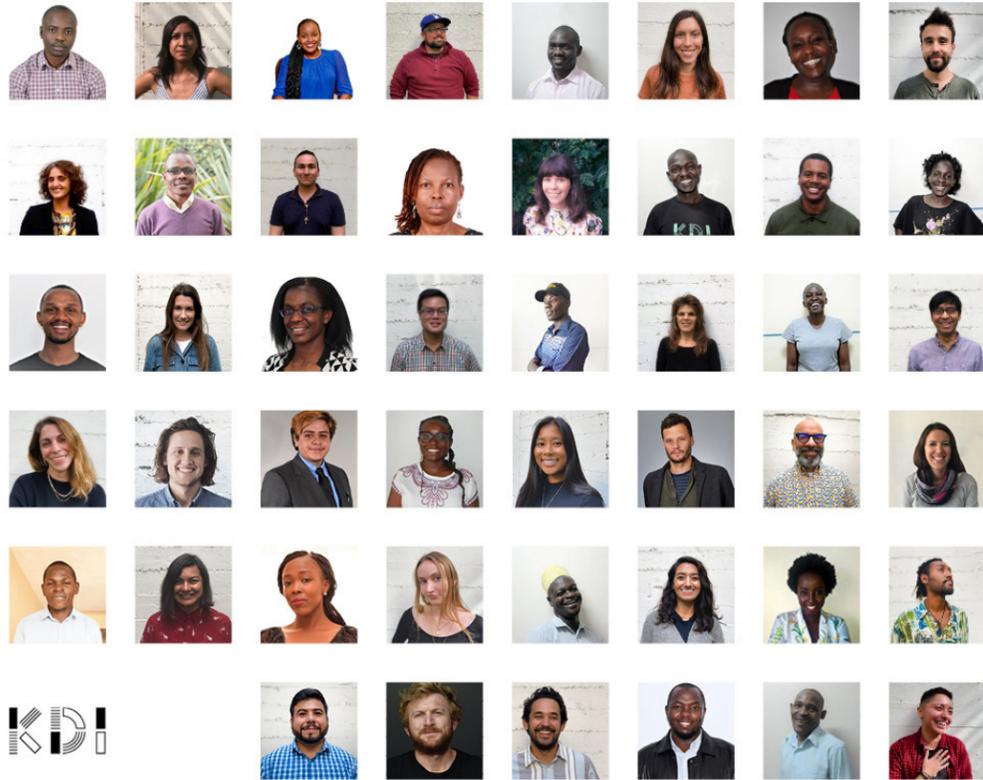


06. team

5.1 staff

We are a team of diverse urbanists—architects, landscape architects, urban planners, community organizers, and engineers—united by our shared commitment to building equity, justice, and resilience in communities through design.

In 2022, our BIPOC and woman-led firm employed 48 professionals working from four offices: Los Angeles, Eastern Coachella Valley, Nairobi, and Stockholm.



global leadership

Chelina Odbert, CEO + Founding Principal
 Joe Mulligan, Executive Director + Founding Principal
 Ian Leong, Managing Operations + Finance Director

planning

Jerome Chou, Senior Principal
 Naria Kiani, Senior Principal
 Jessie Heneghan, Principal
 Sabrina Ohler, Principal
 Bosibori Barake, Associate
 Pascal Mukanga, Associate
 Eric Riley, Associate
 Carolyn Angius, Senior Coordinator
 Shance Bagos Taylor, Coordinator
 Jorge Cáñez, Coordinator
 Roxy Rivas, Coordinator

design

Mario Benito, Senior Principal
 Jack Campbell-Clause, Senior Principal
 Lauren Elachi, Senior Principal
 Melissa Guerrero, Senior Principal
 Franklin Kirimi, Senior Associate
 Adriana Carias, Associate
 Shirley Chebet, Associate
 Ellen Epley, Senior Coordinator
 Gloria Tanui, Senior Coordinator
 Martha Akinyi, Coordinator
 Lo Cubacub, Coordinator
 Daniel Dominguez, Coordinator
 Robert Douglass, Coordinator

community

Regina Opondo, Senior Principal
 Christine Wandera, Senior Associate
 Pascal Kipkemboi, Associate
 Ibrahim Maina, Associate
 Kenzia Ojal, Associate
 Prisca Okila, Associate
 Christian Rodriguez, Associate
 Daniel Garcia, Coordinator
 Martin Gil, Coordinator
 Evans Muchiri, Coordinator

research

Allen Ouko K'oyoo, Associate
 Amos Wandera, Associate
 Manshur Talib, Consultant

construction

Teresia Wanjira, Associate
 Wambua Nzioka, Coordinator

development + comms

Clemencia Osa, Director
 Annelyn Oranga, Associate
 Nora Healy, Coordinator

operations

Monica Waga, Senior Director
 Jackie Shimba, Senior Associate
 Jesus Payan, Coordinator

5.2 board



Joint US-Kenya board meeting in October. KDI 2022.

**thank you
gracias
asante
tack**

kenya board

Arthur Adeya
Robyn T. Emerson
Rose Muema

Joe Mulligan
Carol Owala
Caroline Ray

us board

Anthony Foux
Kevin Heneghan
Claudia Kahn

Steve Malkenson
Chelina Odbert
Tendo Nagenda

**for being a part
of our journey.**