



Discover Detroit's Hidden Gems

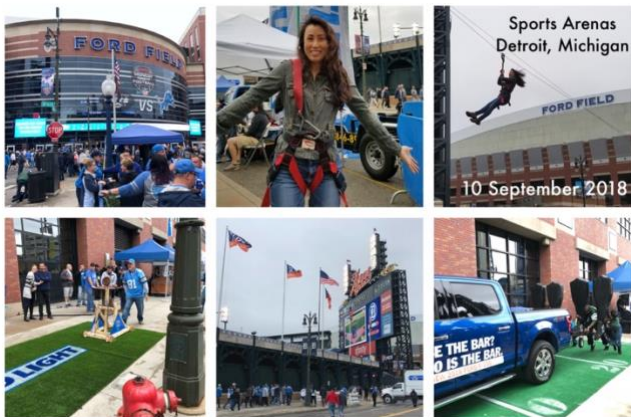


Alina Waring has been an emergency physician for 26 years and is currently on staff at Hedrick Medical Center in Chillicothe, Missouri. She lives in Alpharetta, Georgia. Alina was a guest and participant at the 2018 design:retail Forum in Detroit, a conference bringing together 175+ "thought leaders" from the retail, supplier, and consultant segments. The following are some of her thoughts and observations after her trip to Detroit. We're pleased to share her recollections and favorite images from her visit.

The 2018 design:retail Forum was held in Detroit, and as in past years the locations were always carefully curated by a committee such that the group would meet in "happening" places. However, not everyone I'd told of my Detroit destination was as convinced. I was alone for parts of my stay, and by particular request, was required to send signs-of-life messages to friends periodically when I was roaming around, just so they knew I was alive and well. As it happened, on my first foray from the hotel, I'd chosen a path leaving the Westin Book Cadillac heading toward the MGM Casino.



It was cloudy and drizzly, and the street going past the bus station didn't seem quite intended to welcome tourists. I was a little intimidated and promptly started heading back from whence I came.



But on the way back I started to see crowds of people and gravitated toward the group, feeling safety in numbers. Many were wearing Lions jerseys. I'd remembered that Monday Night Football would be in town that night, along with the Tigers across the street. I started seeing the lights of the baseball park as well, so I followed those welcoming beacons to an alley crowded with both baseball and football (mostly football) fans. There I found the pregame festivities in full swing with games, music, and food. A gentleman outside the private party for the Detroit Athletic Club noticed me observing the

ziplining that was happening overhead, and encouraged me to try it, as it was free. I didn't need a second offer, and promptly shucked my purse to have my first zipline experience. The nice man who had suggested it to me even volunteered to take some photos and email them to me. Further down the

street, I saw all sorts of other games and contests happening, and tried them all (okay, nearly all—I didn't do the one where you had to push a pick-up truck across the goal line). Venturing back toward the Detroit Athletic Club party, a couple of friendly faces invited me to crash the party for a while until they left for the game. I generally had about as much fun as one could possibly have without actually having a ticket to either game!

The next day, still traveling alone, I decided to check out the Detroit Historical Museum. Since admission was limited to just donations, I didn't have really high expectations, but I was intrigued by the description of the re-creation of old downtown Detroit. Friends strongly encouraged me to take the Q Line to the museum. Remembering how I'd felt walking to the MGM, I thought it was good advice. I took a quick peek in the Detroit Institute of Arts since it was right across the street and beautiful, then spent several hours at the Historical Museum. I could easily have stayed longer, having learned that I had seriously underestimated what a fantastic museum it was. I was really glad to have started there because I learned a lot about Detroit. The lower level replica of old Detroit was beautifully done, and I also discovered that there was a program welcoming senior citizens to the museum with boxed lunches, along with movies about the history of Detroit. I briefly joined one of the free tours offered in the museum, and I loved the music room describing the birth of Motown Records, which celebrated the life of Aretha Franklin after her recent passing.



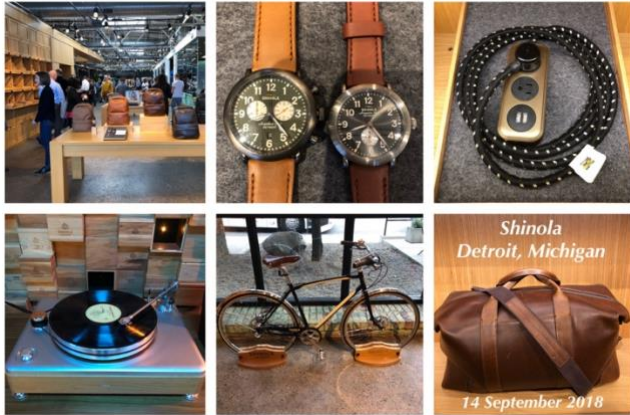
On returning to the Westin, I decided that I felt enough like a native of Detroit that I would start to walk back, promising friends that I would hop back on the Q Line the moment that I felt uneasy with my surroundings, but it never happened. I passed the Museum of Contemporary Arts, the Whitney, the hockey arena, and the baseball and football fields, then realized that I was back on old familiar territory by that time.

During the next few days in Detroit, I learned that although the population had overall declined from its peak, it was being actively rebuilt and reenergized. At the conference, I attended a presentation delivered by Todd Sachse, president of Sachse Construction, who had put up a slide with an excerpt from an Elmore Leonard quote:

“There are cities that get by on their good looks, offer climate and scenery, views of mountains or oceans, rockbound or with palm trees; and there are cities like Detroit that have to work for a living.”

We found that those people who were lifelong residents of Detroit were fiercely proud of that fact too—having worked diligently to contribute to the city's success. The conference program included gorgeous

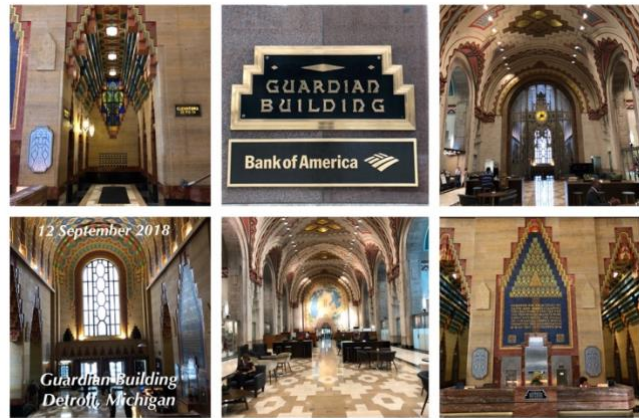
events held at the Ford Piquette Avenue plant, where we spent a cocktail hour mingling amongst beautifully restored cars before dinner, and the Detroit Institute of Arts, which was equally stunning. Our only regret was that we didn't have the opportunity to officially browse the exhibits. But the path from the banquet hall to the restrooms took us past a few displays which we took advantage of, and a few of us may, or may not, have stolen away from the group to glimpse the famed Diego Rivera Murals displayed in the adjoining room.



Our yearly conference typically ends with a walking retail tour, and this one included visits to Shinola—a success story familiar to everyone in our group—and Third Man Records—which was new to us, but the vinyl record pressing room was one of the coolest things we had ever seen. Practically every one of us (including me) had to buy a souvenir from the store. It didn't even matter that I didn't own a turntable to play the vinyl record I had just bought (but I was sure that Shinola would have been more than pleased to rectify that omission). At the store Detroit is the New Black, we all got t-shirts and I

had mine on by that afternoon, primarily because it was hot, and I was tired of business casual. Wearing it around town, I found that it prompted instant recognition with many admirers.

The last night of my stay, I was again free to wander independently, but by that time, I was perfectly happy with having no agenda, knowing that I'd find something interesting and fabulous before the day was over. And I did. I took a tour of the Guardian Building which was stunning, went back to the ballparks to look for souvenirs (I wanted a Christmas ornament to commemorate my visit), and found that those stores were closed but that the parking attendant was very enthusiastic about recommending potential souvenir shops to me.



Along the way, I also got advice from workers standing in front of Fox Theater who recommended that I check the Renaissance Center. Once I arrived there looking completely lost, another complete stranger took it upon himself to offer me some orientation. Though I never did come across a Christmas ornament, I discovered that there was no end to people who were willing to help me look. I continued the day with a stop at the Foundation Hotel, which I'd been told by several people was a "must-see". The restaurant was lovely, and the

hostess promptly offered me a guide to show me a hotel room, the Lincoln Lounge, and the top floor event space, merely for showing an interest. Then my guide cordially invited me to return that evening for a free beer tasting to celebrate Roko, a local artist.

I finished off the evening by taking a spin through Lobsterfest on the Riverfront, and then happened to run across musicians who were setting up on Woodward Avenue to play a pop-up concert featuring an enthusiastic vocalist and dance music which attracted passersby to dance in the square. At the end of the performance, I went up to the group to thank them for providing us with such a pleasant hour and the singer promptly gave me a welcoming hug as if greeting an old friend.

At the end of my visit, I still had to send out the signs-of-life notifications to my friends, but in all honesty, I had felt warmly welcomed during my visit, with stranger after stranger offering me gracious hospitality during those few days. It had been at least 25 years since my last visit to Detroit, but hopefully another 25 years will not pass before my next one!



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