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Highlights From Kohler Design Affair 2016

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By Allie Weiss



The table setting for dinner at Kohler's Beacon building. Photography by Brad Allen.

For the second annual Kohler Design Affair, prestigious designers traveled from around the world to Kohler, Wisconsin, for a three-day summit hosted by *Interior Design* and Kohler. *Interior Design* editor in chief Cindy Allen set the tone for the event in her introduction on Wednesday night: “This is about how we can move forward as an industry—together.” Featuring thought-provoking speakers and inspiring settings, the event sparked stimulating conversations about how we can work together to propel the design industry into uncharted territories.

That notion of innovation has been a fundamental part of the Kohler company history, a fact that became clear as president and CEO David Kohler gave an introduction on the first day. With his father and predecessor, Herbert Kohler Jr., sitting in the front row, Kohler spoke to the entrepreneurial spirit that has allowed the company to grow so significantly since the early days, back when a Kohler bathtub was sold for the price of one cow and 14 chickens. The village of Kohler itself is a testament to the 143-year-old company's success, hosting five-star hotel, spa, and golf facilities owned by the brand.

The speakers throughout the event encouraged attendees to expand their boundaries and think outside the box. Amber Case, a cyborg anthropologist and Harvard fellow, spoke about how we can avoid technological overload, while Dominic Wilcox, artist and inventor, delighted the audience with a presentation of his outlandish ideas.



Jeffrey Beers of Jeffrey Beers International spoke about his glassblowing artistry with Cindy Allen.
Photography by Spencer Imhoff.

On day two, Cindy Allen presented a roundup of industry trends, noting the importance of branding for today's top companies. "Even Coca-Cola knows their message has to run through the entire company," she said. Branding has been fundamental to Kohler's success, explained the next speaker Elizabeth Brady. Brady, the the SVP of global brand management at Kohler, shared some of the company's iconic advertisements and creative marketing campaigns. Leading designers Jordan Mozer and Jeffrey Beers took the stage to provide insight into their respective creative processes, while artist Phil Hansen spoke about his rule-bending artistic approach. 

Opportunities for guests to socialize and take in the scenic setting punctuated the program. On the first night, guests were treated to a cozy dinner at the Riverbend club and a surprise fireworks display outside. The day two lunch at the log cabin–style River Wildlife Sporting Club was followed by a choice of afternoon activities, from exploring the famed Whistling Straits golf course to making Kohler original-recipe chocolates. To wrap up the second day, guests enjoyed dinner at a super long table that stretched through the [Beacon](#), a Kohler communications building designed by Gensler and previously featured by *Interior Design*.

Speaker Phil Hansen said in his presentation, "We need to first be limited to become limitless." Despite the host of challenges that the attendees face running their practices in Singapore, Peru, the U.S., and other countries, the pervading theme of the event was how designers can tap into creativity at all stages of the design process. In fact, that ingenuity has become a requirement in the industry. As Allen put it: "The unexpected is now expected from you." With its inspiring conversations and rock-star designer attendees, the second Kohler Design Affair surely unleashed some of that creative thinking.



Interior Design editor in chief Cindy Allen kicks things off at Kohler Design Affair. Photography by Brad Allen.



Herb Kohler and Cindy Allen.
Photography by Brad Allen.



Dominic Wilcox, a day-one speaker.
Photography by Brad Allen.



David Kohler, president and CEO of Kohler, and Cindy Allen.
Photography by Brad Allen.



Gregory de Swarte of Kohler, Amber Case, and Scott Edmunds of Kohler.
Photography by Brad Allen.



Debra Cummings and Susan Cregg of SANDdesign, Matthew Goodrich of AvroKO, and Danielle Fox of Rodrigo Vargas Design. Photography by Brad Allen.



Gina Deary and Lisa Simeone of Simeone Deary Design Group.
Photography by Brad Allen.



Nestor Santa-Cruz of Gensler, Nina Grondin of Curioso, and Bridget Bedard of The Design Agency.
Photography by Brad Allen.



Helene Oberman of *Interior Design*, Carl Almeida of P49 Deesign, Kristina Zanic of Kristina Zanic Consultants FZ, and D.B. Kim. Photography by Brad Allen.



Karen Chung of Kohler, Joey Shimoda of Shimoda Design Group, Bill Bouchey of HOK, and Nina and David Kohler. Photography by Brad Allen.



John Cetra of CetraRuddy Architecture, Cindy Allen, and Mark Zeff of Markzeff.
Photography by Brad Allen.



Fireworks at the Riverbend club on night one.
Photography by Brad Allen.



Salil Sadanandan and Larry Yuen of Kohler.
Photography by Brad Allen.



Elizabeth Brady, the SVP of global brand management at Kohler.
Photography by Spencer Imhoff.



Phil Hansen spoke about overcoming limitations as an artist.
Photography by Spencer Imhoff.



For one of the afternoon activities, a group walked the Whistling Straits golf course.
Photography by Brad Allen.



Daniel Brohn, Elizabeth Brady, and Chris Baldwin of Kohler.
Photography by Brad Allen.



Liz Neiswander of BLUR Workshop, Kirk Nix of KNA Design, Amy Zboralski of Kohler, and Betsy Hughes of HBA. Photography by Brad Allen.



Jim Prendergast of Gensler and Meg Prendergast of The Gettys Group, Inc.
Photography by Brad Allen



Adam Horwitz of Kallista, and Mark Bickerstaffe and Lara Graham of Kohler.
Photography by Brad Allen.



Rumao of Kohler, Jon Kastl of Champalimaud, and Sam Li and Austin Wang of Yabu Pushelberg.
Photography by Brad Allen.



Pradeep Sachdeva of Pradeep Sachdeva Design Associates, David Kohler, Sanjay Puri of Sanjay Puri Architects,
and Steve Leung of Steve Leung Designers. Photography by Brad Allen.



Cindy Allen with Erica Holborn, president of Sandow, and Carol Cisco, publisher of *Interior Design*.
Photography by Brad Allen.



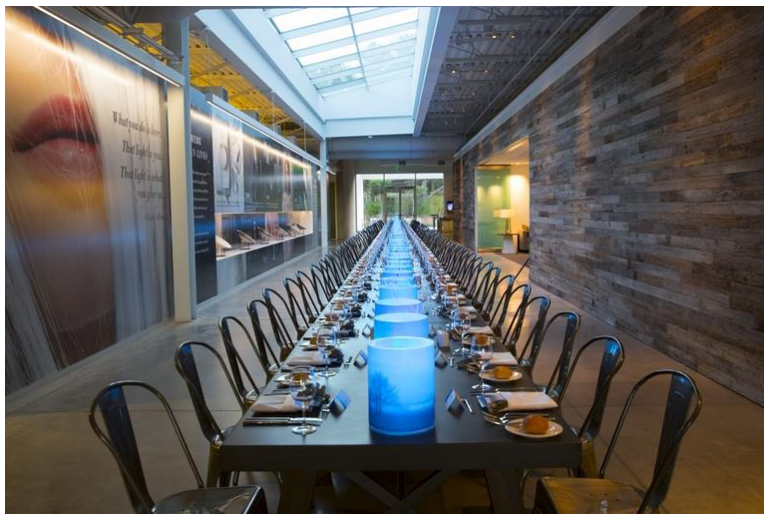
Andy Baines of Robern with John Cetra.
Photography by Brad Allen.



Ted Chappell of Ann Sacks and Mark Zeff.
Photography by Brad Allen.



Larry Yuen, Ed Ng of AB Concept, Clint Nagata of BLINK, and Ariane Steinbeck of RPW Design.
Photography by Brad Allen.



The table setting at the Beacon, a Kohler building designed by Gensler, for the night two dinner.
Photography by Brad Allen.



Cindy Allen and David Kohler toast the success of the second annual Kohler Design Affair.
Photography by Brad Allen.