FOSTERING A DESIGN/BUILD REVOLUTION FOR HEALTHY, CLIMATE RESILIENT PLACES

YESTERMORROW’S STRATEGIC PLAN 2017-2020

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Grow Yestermorrow’s Online Curriculum

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Host Gatherings of Leading Practitioners to Advance the Field of Public Interest Architecture
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WHY YESTERMORROW IS REVOLUTIONIZING DESIGN/BUILD EDUCATION

People shape - and are shaped by - the places in which they live. The design of our built environments - our homes, public spaces, roads, etc. - have a profound influence on our sense of self and our communities. At Yestermorrow, we believe that everyone can be empowered to create healthy places, through good design and the hands-on act of making. For 37 years, we’ve pursued that goal with joy and rigor, inspiring building professionals, do-it-yourselfers, and community change-makers to create a better, more sustainable world by teaching design and craft as a single, interactive process.

We teach that good design doesn’t end at the drafting table - it continues throughout the build process. Or, as longtime instructor John Ringel says, “the build process is full of design feedback.”

Yestermorrow is a “think-make-do tank”, and a hub for students of all ages and skillsets who want to experience this design/build approach in a supportive learning environment.

Our campus, nestled in Vermont’s Mad River Valley is a living laboratory for design/build, from our high-performance studio and woodshop to our grounds, our sustainably managed forest, and our natural building demonstration projects. We’re a destination for a renowned faculty of artisans, craftspeople, and design/builders who have a passion for working with students and convening with peers. At Yestermorrow, students acquire deep technical skills while experiencing the transformative potential of applied design/build. They establish lifelong friendships and professional networks, and become part of a community of makers who share the confidence to create a better, more inspired world.

Yestermorrow’s influence on the design/build community has been far reaching. But the current moment demands that we advance and accelerate our work to create a healthier, more socially just and climate-resilient built environment. We will expand our efforts to develop tangible, replicable, and scalable community-based design/build projects that address climate change and social justice. And we will work in service with historically oppressed people - low income people, People of Color, women, and LGBTQ people - to co-develop courses that are relevant to their needs.

Yestermorrow is a primarily white organization. We - Yestermorrow’s staff, instructors, students, donors and friends - have benefited from the privilege afforded to us through a history of racism and inequality. We work in the field of the built environment, which has and continues to create the conditions for social exclusion and racial segregation, central determinants of racial inequality. We acknowledge this fact as a starting point in our commitment to dismantle racism in all its forms. We believe in the empowerment afforded by a quality design/build education, and we are passionate about creating inspired, healthy and inclusive communities. We therefore actively challenge the reigning dynamics of power and privilege that limit opportunities for people of color and historically marginalized communities.

This three-year strategic plan is ambitious, yet do-able. We’re excited for this new chapter at Yestermorrow: the time is now for a revolution in design/build education.

Mike Crowley, President

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“It’s abundantly clear that we will not build the power necessary to win unless we embed justice—particularly racial but also gender and economic justice—at the center of our low-carbon policies.”

- Naomi Klein
IN THE SUMMER AND FALL OF 2016, WE HOSTED SEVERAL GATHERINGS WITH MEMBERS OF THE YESTERMORROW COMMUNITY - ALUMNI, INSTRUCTORS, BOARD MEMBERS, STAFF, DONORS, AND FRIENDS - TO DISCUSS THE FUTURE DIRECTION OF OUR SCHOOL. TOGETHER, WE DEVELOPED FOUR KEY THEMES THAT REFLECT YESTERMORROW’S CORE VALUES AND EXPERTISE.

These themes, outlined to the right, are the foundation of this three-year strategic plan. Under each theme we outline specific objectives that we’ll pursue over the next three years. In some cases, these objectives build on existing programs and areas of focus. In others, they entail launching new initiatives that are nonetheless grounded in our core values and mission.

TEACH

EDUCATE AND EMPOWER STUDENTS TO ‘THINK WITH THEIR HANDS’ AND SHAPE THEIR PLACES.

Yestermorrow will develop, refine, and expand its course offerings to better align with the needs of our students and society.

Objectives:
• Expand programs and courses related to design/build for healthy, inclusive communities.
• Expand programs and courses related to climate resilience.
• Develop a Yestermorrow Fellowship Studio (evolved from the internship program).
• Develop introductory, intermediate & Pro-Series learning tracks tailored to students’ needs.
• Grow Yestermorrow’s online presence and outreach.
• Make the Yestermorrow experience available in more places and formats.

CONVENE

BRING PEOPLE FROM DIVERSE FIELDS AND BACKGROUNDS AROUND THE TABLE.

Yestermorrow will expand its role as a hub for conversations across disciplines and boundaries.

Objectives:
• Invite folks from historically marginalized communities to co-create the YM experience through active recruitment of students, faculty, and organizational partners.
• Host gatherings of leading practitioners to advance the field of public-interest architecture.
• Serve as a learning hub for sustainability, climate justice, and climate resilience design/build professionals.
• Make Yestermorrow programs more affordable.
• Expand and deliver online curriculum.

EXPERIMENT

BECOME A LIVING LABORATORY FOR SUSTAINABLE DESIGN/BUILD.

Yestermorrow will demonstrate and showcase the latest best practices for net-zero, regenerative design, and resource-efficient fabrication.

Objectives:
• Develop and deliver curriculum around the campus Master Plan build-out.
• Adopt green building standards and use cutting-edge sustainable technologies.
• Launch curriculum around digital fabrication.

IMPACT

ENSURE OUR PROGRAMS HAVE POSITIVE, MEASURABLE IMPACT FOR INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES.

Yestermorrow will expand its programs to support the aspirations of students, staff, alumni and instructors, and our community partners.

Objectives:
• Provide livable wages to all Yestermorrow staff and instructors.
• Launch the Yestermorrow Community Design Studio.
• Develop a career placement support program for students.
• Sponsor Yestermorrow alumni networking activities.
FOR 37 YEARS, YESTERMORROW HAS BEEN A HUB FOR THOSE ON THE FRONTIER OF ECOLOGICAL DESIGN AND BUILDING.

We recognize climate change, rapid urbanization, and social justice are some of the defining challenges of our age - and that these three issues are profoundly interconnected. Much of today’s built environment is the legacy of an era and set of practices that gave short shrift to environmental and social consequences. The practitioners and students at Yestermorrow recognize that a shift toward systems thinking and social justice-based design still isn’t mainstream, but urgently needs to become standard practice.

The world is experiencing unprecedented rates of urbanization; by the year 2030, we will add 150 percent more urban areas to accommodate another 1.35 billion urban dwellers. Without a massive shift in design thinking, our built environments will become increasingly vulnerable to climate change. And the most vulnerable are the world’s poorest and disenfranchised who are least responsible for the causes of climate change.

Climate change, urbanization, and social justice together constitute a wicked problem. To address it, we’re calling for a revolution in design/build education. We believe that everyone - from professional designers to change-makers, to do-it-yourselfers - can be empowered to create better, healthier, and thriving communities.

At Yestermorrow, we teach the integration of systems thinking and design in a hands-on, “can-do” approach to making. We define healthy communities in terms of the systems in which they are enmeshed: they’re supported by abundant, regenerative natural environments, based in social justice, and shaped by meaningful relationships. Healthy communities are human-scaled, powered by renewable, non-toxic materials and resources, and their economies are place-sourced. We believe that when these aspects come together a community can express the inherent beauty and resiliency of its place and people.

Healthy places can’t be achieved by solving problems in isolation. Ignoring the larger, system-wide context of a single problem can lead to unintended consequences. A building with a net zero goal may be only accessible by car, or uncomfortable for occupants. A community center could also be an energy hog, and pollute a nearby river. A local, organic farm may be unaffordable for low-income families.

Systems thinking examines problems in the context of relationships. Good design is the practice of applying systems thinking for holistic solutions. For example, viewing stormwater in the context of healthy watersheds may lead to less expensive, more beautiful rain gardens instead of conventional underground storm pipes. Or examining affordable housing in the context of access to jobs and ending segregation may lead to transit-oriented, rather than car-oriented, design.

We practice Integrated Design/Build. Our curriculum prepares students to learn, think, and practice at various scales: in the context of whole ecosystems, neighborhoods, buildings and artifacts. We teach the time-tested art of design/build, wherein the student is both designer and builder. This holistic practice integrates thinking and doing, and better equips practitioners to truly embody systems thinking in order to create healthier, more human-scaled, satisfying places and objects.

We empower people through Collaborative Design. We believe that everyone can be empowered to create their world, and that a place isn’t healthy without an active civil society. Collaborative design means that our neighborhoods embody local ownership and reflect the diversity of their inhabitants. We believe that everyone possesses innate creativity, and anyone can learn the art and practice of design/build, regardless of prior experience.

We help people make Beautiful and Healthy Places. We believe that healthy places reflect the inherent beauty of our communities. Good design promotes health, fosters people’s natural creativity, and compels generations to care for their community spaces.

YESTERMORROW IS ON THE FOREFRONT OF THIS SYSTEMS-THINKING DESIGN/BUILD EDUCATION REVOLUTION IN THREE IMPORTANT WAYS.

We encourage students to explore these principles on their own terms, and to explore how they relate to their personal values and professional goals. To us, the design/build process is fundamentally about problem solving. Whether it’s applied to designing and building homes, revitalizing neighborhoods, or making furniture from sustainable materials, this process makes tangible, vital ideas like healthy communities, climate resilience, and empowerment.
WHAT WE’LL DO
OUR THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

This document outlines Yestermorrow’s Strategic Plan for the years 2017-2020. The plan is the culmination of a community-wide effort: over the course of several months Yestermorrow staff and board engaged a large number of alumni, instructors, current and past board members, donors, friends and neighbors. We collected stories of the ways Yestermorrow affected people’s lives, identified themes describing what makes Yestermorrow special, and solicited advice on the ways that we can improve. Most importantly, we talked about what matters most to the Yestermorrow community, and discussed ways that Yestermorrow can expand our positive impact on society.

The strategies and objectives below seek to align all that we do - from the design of our courses, to the recruitment of our students, to new program priorities that are the natural outgrowth of our mission - so that we can reach more people and transform more lives through design/build.

We’re proud to present the next chapter of Yestermorrow’s 37-year adventure, and we’re excited to pursue this ‘step change’ in design/build education.
Expand Programs and Courses Related to Collaborative Design, Social Justice, and Climate Resilience.

Climate change is the defining challenge of our age. Anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions and the destruction of critical ecosystems have permanently changed global climate systems, with devastating effects. Whether it’s sea level rise, storm surge, heat waves, droughts, or other extreme weather, we are experiencing the first signs of a new climate age.

Climate change is not just an environmental problem – it also exacerbates intersecting social injustices. The United States has a significant climate debt. Communities with the least access to resources are the least responsible for climate pollution, yet they are most vulnerable to their effects.

According to the International Panel on Climate Change, the worst climate change scenarios can be avoided if we reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40 - 70% from 2010 levels by 2050. Over 75% of emissions in the United States are from our buildings and transportation systems. Meanwhile, storms, sea level rise, heatwaves, droughts and other projected impacts of climate change will place intense pressure on our legacy infrastructure and building stock. Adapting to these changes will demand innovative approaches to retrofitting, new construction and generally “climate-proofing” our built environment in ways that also address social divisions. And driving down greenhouse gas emissions will similarly require a heroic transformation of our current, energy-intensive built environment.

With our expertise in applying collaborative design/build concepts to real-world projects, Yestermorrow is uniquely positioned to expand its focus on teaching practical, inclusive ways to create climate resilient, socially just, and healthy places. Our curriculum already covers a wide range of sustainability and climate resilience strategies, from carbon-neutral natural building, to renewable technologies, to net-zero design and building science. We will now make democratic design, social justice, and climate resilience an explicit focus on our curriculum.

ACTION: Yestermorrow will work with all instructors to inventory the ways in which we currently teach collaborative design, social justice, and climate resilience in our curriculum. We will then refine the learning objectives and content of our courses to make explicit how design/build can advance healthy communities and climate resilience.

Develop a Yestermorrow Fellowship Studio

Since its inception, Yestermorrow’s Internship Program has in many ways defined our campus experience. Interns live on campus, take courses, interact with students, and work on campus design/build projects. The program has been highly successful, but we believe it can be improved, to offer an even more transformative experience. We will elevate the intern program by establishing in its place a Fellowship program with student-centered learning objectives and career goals.

ACTION: We will evolve the internship program by establishing the Yestermorrow Fellowship Studio in its place. Fellows will demonstrate defined career goals and possess a high caliber of skillsets. They will live on campus and develop a customized course of study. They will be required to conduct independent research and produce a project that advances an aspect of the design/build movement. The program will eventually be housed in the Yestermorrow Community Design Studio (see below), where Fellows can apply their research to Studio projects.

Develop Introductory, Intermediate, and Pro-Series Learning Tracks Tailored to Student Needs

Yestermorrow’s courses are available to anyone, regardless of experience. We will continue this tradition, and encourage students of all skill levels to share in the learning experience.

ACTION: We will develop clearly delineated learning tracks to help students identify which classes would be most appropriate for their learning objectives and skills. Every Yestermorrow class will be classified as introductory, intermediate, or Pro-Series.

Introductory classes will focus on fundamental design principles and building skills. Intermediate classes will be for students with a set of prerequisite skills. Pro-Series classes will be for serious hobbyists and professionals interested in continuing education. Learning tracks will build supportive cohorts of student peers intended to last well beyond the classroom.

These learning tracks will also provide a framework to categorize classes for new student groups, such as policy makers, teachers, or activists who would benefit from a sustainable design/build education. Learning tracks will also help us identify and refine our course content, and engage more specialty instructors.

Make Yestermorrow Available in More Places and Formats

We recognize that not everyone can physically make it to the Mad River Valley to take our courses.

ACTION: We will extend our offerings in more places, and in more accessible formats to meet the growing demand for our courses. We will begin offering courses and workshops in conjunction local partners in cities like Burlington, VT, Boston, MA, and NYC. We will expand our online course offerings where appropriate (see next objective below). And we will consider expanding our campus to new locations if the right opportunities arise.

Grow Yestermorrow’s Online Curriculum

Students are increasingly using online platforms for their education. These platforms enable students from more diverse geographies to learn together, and they offer more flexible formats to accommodate busy schedules.

ACTION: Yestermorrow will grow its online course offerings in order to open our course content to more people in more places. We will explore various online models, including hybrid online/on-campus courses, massive online open courses (MOOCs), and collaborative, online platforms. Our guiding principle for online courses will be to maintain the highest quality of instruction and responsiveness to each student’s needs.
Serve as a Learning Hub for Net Zero and Climate Resilience Design/Build Professionals

The professional design community is increasingly committed to reducing our reliance on fossil fuels in the built environment. As a result, dozens of sustainability-focused design standards and curriculums are available. We want to encourage dialog among these various efforts in ways that lead to cooperation, and advance the field as a whole.

**ACTION:** Yestermorrow will be a hub for design professionals interested in advancing the movement for net zero and climate resilient communities. We will teach climate resilience curriculums across all standards and approaches, promote active dialogue on their effectiveness, and foster collaborative learning among their advocates. Yestermorrow will be a place to meet peers dedicated to similar healthy community and climate resilience goals, and to promote learning across methods and design standards.

Host Gatherings of Leading Practitioners to Advance the Field of Public-Interest Architecture

Public-interest architecture - architecture not just for design’s sake, but for the betterment of humanity and the planet - has roots that go back to the American Institute of Architects (AIA) 1968 national convention. The convention was held in the immediate aftermath of Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination and the subsequent riots in cities across the country. National Urban League President and Civil rights leader Whitney Young Jr. delivered the keynote address where he called on the profession to take a moral stance:

“You are not a profession that has distinguished itself by your social and civic contributions, and I’m sure this does not come to you as any shock. You are most distinguished by your thunderous silence and your complete irrelevance.”

Since then, dozens of organizations have emerged to advance architecture that is responsive to the needs of marginalized communities. They’re taking on issues such as affordable housing, gentrification, and inclusive planning. We applaud their work, and we believe that more needs to be done to bring these organizations together to share practices and resources.

Yestermorrow is known for excellence in design/build education. Many of our classes deliver public-interest projects for real clients, often in the nonprofit or public domain. Over 37 years, we’ve left our mark across Vermont’s landscape and far beyond, from funky bus shelters, to footbridges and tiny homes. With rising levels of inequality, exacerbated by global trends including hyper-urbanization and climate change, we believe that public-interest architecture is needed now more than ever.

**ACTION:** Yestermorrow will expand partnerships with nonprofit and public clients to deliver even more significant public-interest projects. We will share the results of this work widely, and host multi-stakeholder gatherings to share promising practices and strengthen collaboration in the public-interest field. We will contribute to the field by making explicit the link between justice, climate change, urban planning, and architecture.

Make Yestermorrow Programs More Affordable

Everyone should be able to learn the skills to create their world, not just professionals. This is especially true for historically disenfranchised people, including low income people, People of Color, women, and LGBTQ people. A true sustainable design/build revolution values the leadership of - and creates meaningful opportunities for - the advancement of historically oppressed people. The Yestermorrow campus seeks to be a dynamic space where people from many social identities and perspectives mix. To that end, we commit to building an institution and community where racial justice, economic justice, and gender justice are actively pursued in all of our daily practices from an institutional level to a personal one. Yestermorrow believes deeply in increasing diversity in the sustainable design/build field.

**ACTION:** Yestermorrow will expand its scholarship fund to offer full and partial scholarships to a greater number deserving students, and eliminate our scholarship work-trade requirement. To make this possible, we will increase our fundraising efforts for our scholarship program and actively recruit applicants.

Make Yestermorrow Home for People of all Races, Ethnicities, Classes, Genders, and Ages.

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**CONVENE**

**BRING PEOPLE FROM DIVERSE FIELDS AND BACKGROUNDS AROUND THE TABLE.**

Yestermorrow will be a hub for conversations across boundaries.

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**Grow Yestermorrow’s Online Presence**

The Yestermorrow experience is uniquely transformative. We inspire possibilities and empower everyone to create the world they want to live in. Many students discover Yestermorrow online, then discover so much more while on campus. While Yestermorrow is very discoverable through an active website and digital marketing program, we can do even more tell our story and share the Yestermorrow experience online.

**ACTION:** Yestermorrow will develop a digital marketing plan designed to increase our online presence. The plan will include new ways to engage with Yestermorrow online, including videos, free resources, and even an online store.
Develop a Yestermorrow Master Plan Build-Out Curriculum

The Yestermorrow experience is largely tied to the experience of the campus. We want to make that experience world class and transformative. Yestermorrow has successfully developed a master plan for the build out of our campus. The plan, based in regenerative design principles, includes new buildings and infrastructure that will be developed over time.

**ACTION:** The Yestermorrow curriculum will play a vital role in the build out of our Master Plan. This will include the design and construction of new buildings and ecological landscapes, and an energy master plan to reach net-zero.

BECOME A LIVING LABORATORY FOR SUSTAINABLE DESIGN/BUILD.

Yestermorrow will demonstrate and showcase the latest best practices for net-zero, regenerative design and construction, and resource-efficient fabrication.

**EXPERIMENT**

Yestermorrow is in a unique position to demonstrate the viability and promise of a healthy, net zero campus designed and built with regenerative and whole systems principles. Our Waitsfield campus will be a living laboratory for net-zero design, building materials, and technologies.

**Adopt Green Building Standards and Cutting-Edge Sustainable Technologies**

Yestermorrow’s campus is highly efficient, and sources about 85% of its energy from onsite renewables.

**ACTION:** We will build on this progress by sourcing 100% of our energy from onsite renewables, and testing new high performance and net zero technologies. In addition, we will adopt appropriate green building standards in our existing and new buildings and utilize our campus as a testing and teaching laboratory for our classes.

**Launch a Digital Fabrication Curriculum**

Yestermorrow believes in and supports the growing maker movement, and we’re excited about new possibilities from the burgeoning field of digital fabrication.

Yestermorrow’s DNA is the art of design/build. We believe that design/builders should master fundamental manual skills such as hand drafting and hand tools before taking on new technologies like computer aided design or digital fabrication. We also believe that new technologies—when used with the right skill sets and for the right purposes—are critical to advancing sustainable design/build practices. We’ll seek out partnerships with technology companies to test and teach the latest products, and integrate the best tools into our curriculum.

**ACTION:** Yestermorrow will begin offering courses in digital fabrication to serve the burgeoning “maker” community. We will explore partnerships with local maker spaces that use digital fabrication technologies (such as CNC routers), and we will look for opportunities to bring digital fabrication tools to campus.
ENSURE OUR PROGRAMS HAVE POSITIVE, MEASURABLE IMPACT FOR INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES.

Yestermorrow will expand its programs to support the aspirations of students, staff, alumni and instructors, and our community partners.

Provide Livable Wages to all Yestermorrow Staff and Instructors

Yestermorrow is fortunate to have talented and dedicated staff and instructors. People work at Yestermorrow because they believe in our mission, and they value being part of a fun-loving, creative and dedicated team.

ACTION: To recruit and retain top talent, and respect our current employees, we will strive to provide more livable wages and benefits for all Yestermorrow staff and instructors.

Launch the Yestermorrow Community Design Studio

We are committed to increasing positive community impacts from our work.

ACTION: Yestermorrow will launch a new Community Design/Build Studio dedicated to advancing sustainable, public-interest architecture in Vermont and beyond. The Studio will take on projects with clear community benefit that make tangible principles of democratic design, social justice, and climate resilience. All projects will have research value that will inform the curriculum of ongoing classes and include replicable practices that advance the public-interest architecture movement as a whole.

The Studio will grow to support additional, non-class-bound projects, such as net-zero affordable and transitional housing, tactical urbanism (small-scale interventions to improve the livability of cities), or green infrastructure projects. The Studio will work with community-based partners such as municipalities, economic development authorities, or neighborhood associations, and will seek funding through grants and/or investments from local governments or developers.

Eventually the Studio will grow to house a staff of design/builders who will be considered research faculty at Yestermorrow. The staff will publish results of their work and integrate classes into their projects on a regular basis.

Develop a Yestermorrow Career Program

Yestermorrow is a launching pad for makers and doers, whether they’re pursuing a career in sustainable design/build, advancing their existing professional practice, or deepening their design/build hobbies. We will support the success of all Yestermorrow alumni by connecting them to each other, experts in the field, and sustainable design/build movements where they live.

ACTION: Many students come to Yestermorrow to explore new careers in sustainable architecture and design/build. Yestermorrow will help classmates connect with and support each other through the following series of networking activities:

YESTERMORROW PARTIES. Yestermorrow will sponsor parties in cities where there are large concentrations of alumni. The parties will provide a chance to meet like-minded sustainable design/builders face to face, share stories of life after Yestermorrow, and advance local sustainable design/build movements. Parties will offer a platform for shared learning to advance the sustainable design/build field of practice, a venue for alumni to build relationships to advance their work, and an opportunity to learn from and recruit new students. Yestermorrow will host parties anywhere, from local bars to community centers, to people’s living rooms.

Sponsor Yestermorrow Networking Activities

Yestermorrow has thousands of alumni around the world who are doing amazing things, and who represent a revolution in design/build.

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Yestermorrow is a launching pad for makers and doers, whether they’re pursuing a career in sustainable design/build, advancing their existing professional practice, or deepening their design/build hobbies. We will support the success of all Yestermorrow alumni by connecting them to each other, experts in the field, and sustainable design/build movements where they live.

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YESTERMORROW PARTIES. Yestermorrow will sponsor parties in cities where there are large concentrations of alumni. The parties will provide a chance to meet like-minded sustainable design/builders face to face, share stories of life after Yestermorrow, and advance local sustainable design/build movements. Parties will offer a platform for shared learning to advance the sustainable design/build field of practice, a venue for alumni to build relationships to advance their work, and an opportunity to learn from and recruit new students. Yestermorrow will host parties anywhere, from local bars to community centers, to people’s living rooms.

Sponsor Yestermorrow Networking Activities

Yestermorrow has thousands of alumni around the world who are doing amazing things, and who represent a revolution in design/build.

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