



**EXPERIENCE
DESIGN EVOLVED**

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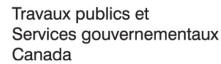
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About DEXD

Who We Are

Where Every Space Tells a Story

DEXD is a human-centered design firm at the forefront of merging architecture, art, and customer experience design, all dedicated to the art of purposeful placemaking. Our mission is to uncover and realize life-centered design opportunities that meet human needs and enrich the spirit. Founded by our partners, Gelare and Karen, both OAA licensed architects with over twenty years of experience, we excel in designing spaces that foster human interaction and inclusivity.

Our expertise covers a broad spectrum of sectors, such as airports, transit facilities, healthcare, academia, residential areas, and more complex environments. We particularly emphasize wayfinding, digital components, art, and environmental graphics within these spaces.

Whether it's shaping built environments for living, working, and enjoyment or developing wayfinding systems for urban navigation, our focus remains steadfast on the individuals interacting within these spaces. Our deep understanding of the end-users, together with the stories we aim to tell through our designs, guides our approach. This

synergy results in environments that are not only visually appealing but also fully inhabitable and easily navigable.



What We Do

Macro Examination:

Our expertise covers a diverse range of sectors including transit, healthcare, higher education, commercial, and public spaces. We delve into:

Customer Journey Mapping / Human Experience Design

We map out the pathways that customers traverse, focusing on creating seamless and enriching experiences.

Design Standards

Setting benchmarks for excellence in design, ensuring every project meets the highest quality and innovation standards.

Inclusive Design Consulting

Advocating for accessible spaces that welcome all, reflecting the diversity and inclusivity at the heart of our society.

Strategic Plan Visioning

Crafting visionary plans that outline the trajectory for future developments, embodying ambition and foresight.

Concept/Feasibility Development

Evaluating the potential of ideas, turning concepts into feasible projects ready for realization.

Programming

Orchestrating the functional and spatial requirements of projects to align with the envisioned outcome.

Micro Examination:

We believe in the profound impact of architecture and customer experience design as representations of life and culture, engaging with communities to design spaces that truly resonate.

Architecture & Customer Experience Design

Moving beyond the traditional architect's role, we co-create with communities, embodying the values and cultures of the people we design for.

Wayfinding and Signage Programming & Design

Our approach to wayfinding and environmental signage is grounded in our philosophy of people moving, considering the diverse backgrounds and needs of each individual.

Integrated Art & Feature Design

We integrate art and design to surprise, delight, and inspire, making spaces memorable and meaningful through placemaking and identity.

Public Art Consulting

Enhancing cities with engaging public art, we guide the process from concept to implementation, fulfilling community benefit agreements.

Environmental Graphic Design

Beyond branding, we craft stories that resonate with both clients and users, marketing places and projects with depth and authenticity.

Social Impact through Human Experience

Our unique outreach combines physical workshops with online tools, engaging communities in the design process, and transforming challenges into support through storytelling and interactive engagement.

At DEXD, our commitment is to transform spaces into places of connection, creativity, and community. Through a meticulous blend of macro and micro examinations, we ensure every project not only meets but exceeds the aspirations of our clients and the communities they serve.

The Team



Gelare Danaie

Founder and President

Member

Royal Architectural Institute of Canada

Ontario Association of Architects

Order architecture du Québec

Urban Land Institute

As an Architect with 20+ years' experience, Gelare has been actively engaged in leading projects primarily in the public sector including, infrastructure and transit related developments. She brings her knowledge and experience of designing complex transportation systems and facilities along with her passion for Human Centered Design (HCD) to every project.

Gelare's focus is dedicated to leading a multidisciplinary collective and leading by example, working collaboratively in a creative and transparent environment. She has worked with multifaceted organizations including Metrolinx and various aviation authorities in North America and understands the value of stakeholder engagement and insight. As a businesswoman who manages her own international architectural practice, Gelare has developed a portfolio of award-winning projects across the Far East, Middle East, Europe, and North America. Prior to founding DEXD, she was a Design Manager and Associate with Stantec Architecture and client manager for many North American airport clients and related transportation projects.

Passionate about understanding the process of co-creating positive human experiences together through the built environment, her strength lies in her innate ability to explore the relationship between various stakeholder goals and agenda, discovering solutions that meet all end user's needs, while maintaining the client's vision, delivering human centric experiences with people.



Karen Zwart Hielema

Partner

Member

Ontario Association of Architects

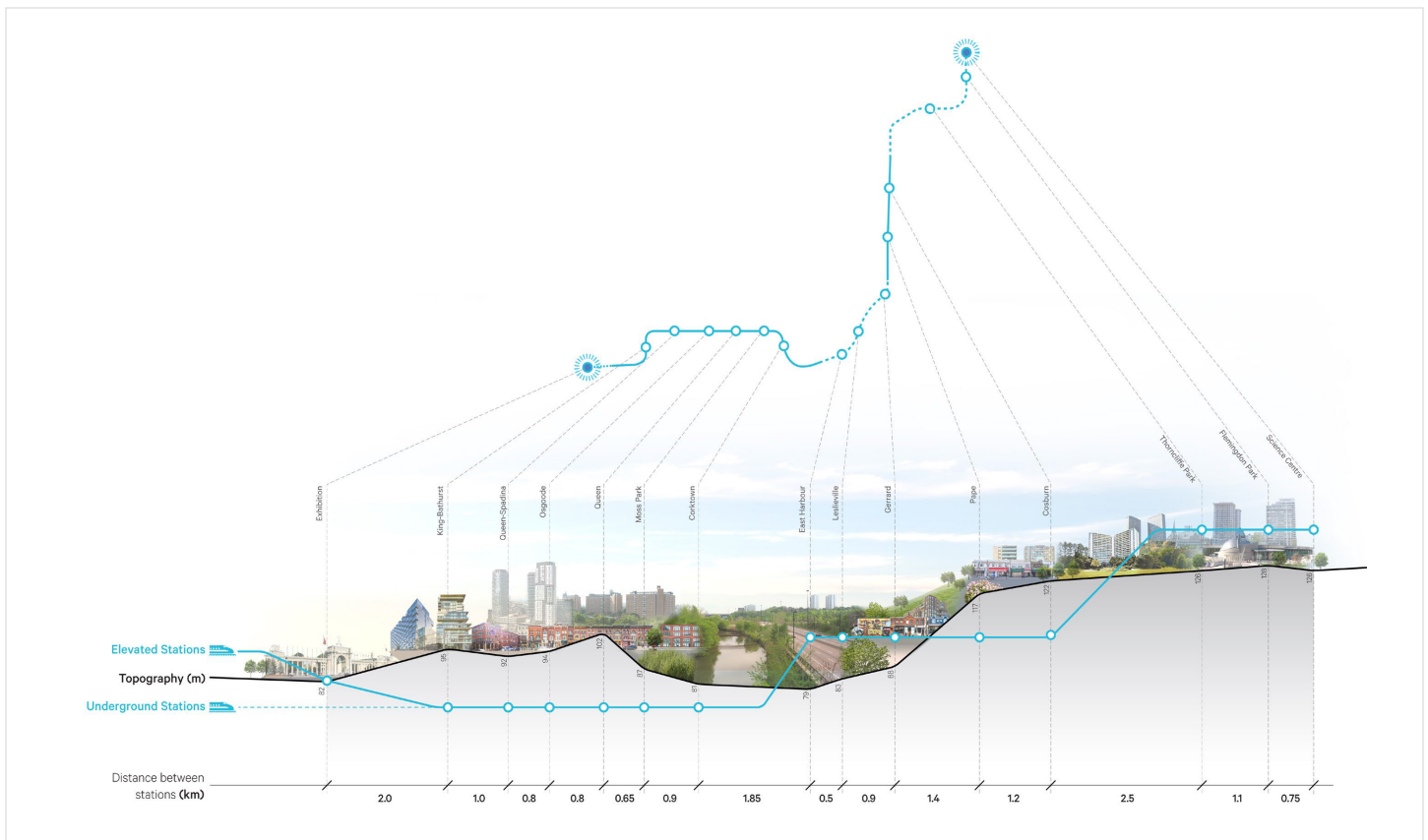
Karen graduated from the University of Toronto School of Architecture and Landscape Design with the AIA Henry Adams Medal, Certificate of Merit, and RAIC Honour Roll (2004). She has been working since 2003 (20+ years) in the field of architecture. Karen has a diversity of skills from working on public building projects of varying occupancy, scale and program type, including Transit, Healthcare, Airports & Aviation, Commercial/Retail Development, Warehouse/Light Industrial, Arts/Exhibit Design. She has experience in Design-Bid-Build, Alternative Finance and Procurement (AFP), and Construction Management project models. A focus on collaborative art and design installations, wayfinding and environmental graphics enriches her design process and understanding of the key role that these experiences can bring to public spaces. Throughout her career she has gravitated towards team leadership roles and seeks out opportunities to work with people from diverse skill sets and backgrounds and is a firm believer in the cross-disciplinary approach to working. Karen also sits as a volunteer member of the Toronto Public Art Commission.

Her ability to work successfully within a team dynamic, drawing the best ideas from team members to the benefit of each client's unique needs, results in client and human experience focused design solutions. She can lead a team through the full project design process, communicate and consult with the client, key stakeholders, and authorities having jurisdiction. Her conscientious approach to all projects demonstrates attention to detail, and a keen interest in close collaboration with the consultant team to produce a successful design and user experience.

Featured Projects



Artist's Rendering, Image Courtesy of Metrolinx and GHD



Ontario Line South

Location: Toronto, ON

Client: SENER, COWI, AECOM, GHD, and OTG

Role: South Line Wide Wayfinding and Signage Designer

Responsibilities: Programing and Design of Wayfinding and Signage for nine (9) Ontario Line Southern Stations

DEXD is at the forefront of enhancing urban mobility through its specialized signage and wayfinding design for the Ontario Line South, a transformative infrastructure project within Toronto's burgeoning transit landscape. Tasked with the design for the nine southern stations of the Ontario Line, DEXD collaborates closely with renowned architectural firms SENER, COWI, AECOM, and GHD, under the overarching coordination of OTG, the line-wide design and build contractor.

The Ontario Line, a pivotal 15.6-kilometre subway expansion, promises to redefine city commuting, offering a seamless journey from Exhibition Place to the Ontario Science Centre. Envisioned to significantly cut travel times—reducing a current 70-minute transit journey to under 30 minutes—this ambitious project introduces 15 new stations, weaving through the city's core to serve as a backbone for Toronto's transit network. Beyond mere connectivity, the Ontario Line is designed to alleviate congestion across existing lines, interfacing with over 40 travel options, including TTC's Lines 1 and 2, three GO Transit rail lines, and the Eglinton Crosstown LRT, thereby orchestrating a symphony of efficient urban transit.



Abeja District Condominiums

Location: Vaughan, ON

Client: Cortel Group

Role: Wayfinding and Signage Designer

Responsibilities: Programing and Design of Wayfinding and Signage for Five Residential Towers on Phases 2 & 4

The Abeja District Project's goal is to create a holistic sustainable community. The neighborhood development around Jane Street and Rutherford Road, the project site, is planned with a bold vision of creating something different, something beautiful!

We began our work on the Abeja Wayfinding System for Block Four of the development with three towers, by looking at the larger planning context for the development, encompassing both the parcels under Cortel Group control as well as the surrounding city context. By documenting the expected master flow patterns for various types of users, we can better understand how people come to the site though public transportation or private vehicles, on foot or on bike. These flow patterns then help us to identify decision nodes, where different users and/or modes may come together, which would most benefit from having strong directional signage, branded experiences as well as public art.

We looked at the different routes that people would take to go between each of the nodes and how the wayfinding can be further enhanced through the views to nodes or the addition of signage elements. Lastly, we looked at the type of character that will be found in the collective spaces, to see where we can further enhance the character through branded environments that incorporate, architecture, landscape, signage, and public art all together. These places are identified as opportunities for what we are calling "placemaking".



Forum Condo Community

Location: Vaughan, ON

Client: Cortel Group

Role: Wayfinding and Signage Designer

Responsibilities: Programing and Design of Wayfinding and Signage for New Residential Towers

Located north Toronto, the complex is adjacent to a major transit hub and highway so that residents and visitors can enjoy convenience and accessibility. To bring the project vision to life, DEXD team studied how various user types access the site. By understanding their arrival processes, we identified key areas where strategic placement of clear directional signage was required. Drawing inspiration from the building's façade, we focused our design on framing the signs and taking cues from the strong grid structure of the building. The frames are strongly expressed and often offset from the sign face, allowing for a very clean and rectilinear look. Finally, we carefully considered physical signage elements like color, materials, typeface, and iconography, taking inspiration from the brand vision and architectural concept. To achieve a clean aesthetic, we opted for subtle colors that complement the raw and soft exterior concrete. The use of faux wood, inspired by the wood timber beneath the portico, adds warmth and continuity to the design. Typeface and icons were also meticulously selected to show an elegant and sophisticated ambiance, aligning seamlessly with the building's overall identity and brand image.



CG Tower

Location: Vaughan, ON

Client: Cortel Group

Role: Public Art Consultant

Responsibilities: Art Strategy Development, Artist Selection and Collaboration, project Management, Stakeholder Engagement, and Cultural and Historical Consideration

The project is located in Vaughan Metropolitan Center, a 20 min drive from the heart of downtown Toronto. A new piece of public art is coming to the heart of the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. Located near the intersection of Highway 7 and Jane Street, this piece will tell a story of transformation and speak to the unique identity and history of the Expo City neighborhood. The artwork will be at CG Tower, the fifth and final element of Expo City by Cortel Group. The site overlooks Edgeley Pond and Park and provides an exceptional opportunity to elevate the public realm at a gateway entrance to the largest urban park for the new downtown. Stay tuned as this story unfolds!

Artist Team Alan Tregebov and Joanne Heinen were selected to provide public artwork for the CG Tower site as part of the City of Vaughan Public Art Program.



Union Station Bus Terminal

Location: Toronto, ON

Client: Metrolinx

Role: Public Art Consultant

Responsibilities: Art Strategy Development, Artist Selection and Collaboration, project Management, Stakeholder Engagement, and Cultural and Historical Consideration

Metrolinx the transit public agency of Ontario, in agreement with Hines/Ivanhoe Cambridge, the developer of CIBC Square at 81 Bay Street, was required to include a piece of Public Art in the Union Station Bus Terminal. DEXD as public art consultant took this project from conception to completion. The goal was to provide a site specific, integrated artwork with a strong conceptual narrative of enduring importance and significance to the site. The design would elevate the value of the passenger experience.

DEXD value add as public art consultants is our experience as architects with a human experience design focus. The USBT is a complex station environment with different opportunities and constraints with respect to integrated art. The architectural design of the station, the requirements of fire and building code, accessibility requirements, signage and wayfinding requirements, and other functional needs are all considered in our approach to defining the public art plan, the approach to the concept design, practical considerations, and technical execution.

The artwork was successfully installed in November 2021 and was featured by Azure magazine as one of 'Three Dynamic Art Installations Animating City Transit Stations.'



Metrolinx Subway Stations Architectural Design Standards

Location: Toronto, ON

Client: Metrolinx

Role:

Responsibilities: Project Management, Research and Analysis, Stakeholder Engagement, Development of Design Standards, and Updating the Standards

With the exponential growth and expansion needed to support the transit needs across the GTA and neighboring regions, a cohesive and consistent transit specific development standard was critical to its long term success. The standard requirements set out a common architectural design language for all subway stations, ensuring a predictable and recognisable customer experience to ensure the customer is able to get to their destination quickly, efficiently and safely. With the variety of different modes of transportation and their various interfaces, user consistency was a key component when evaluating the standards document. The result was the delivery of a robust, measurable, and enforceable design standard customer facing standard that supports a bold, forward-looking transportation plan to transcend borders and foster connections between all our communities.



Eglinton Crosstown and Finch West Light Rail Transit Line Customer Journey Mapping

Location: Toronto, ON

Client: Metrolinx

Role: Customer Experience Designer

Responsibilities: Customer Journey Mapping for The Eglinton Crosstown and Finch West Light Rail Transit lines with 43 stops across 30 Km of rail

The Eglinton Crosstown and Finch West Light Rail Transit (LRT) lines are transformative additions enhancing Toronto's public transportation infrastructure. Representing a significant investment in modern and sustainable transit solutions, these lines aim to meet the needs of both residents and visitors. DEXD was responsible for mapping out the customer journey of these LRT lines, ensuring they offer holistic experiences that go beyond simple transport solutions and prioritize passenger satisfaction. The team conducted site visits, gathered in-studio research, and collected community feedback, which led to the creation of five personas representing future LRT users. These personas helped identify crucial touchpoints, including pain points and moments of delight, and informed strategic decisions such as optimal signage placement to ease station navigation and enhance connectivity with other transport modes. These insights were presented to Metrolinx's LRT teams, offering actionable data to refine the system before and after its launch. This proactive strategy aims to boost the reliability and performance of the LRT lines. Integrating customer journey mapping into the development of the Eglinton Crosstown and Finch West lines signifies a shift towards prioritizing the passenger experience in urban mobility. These projects not only invest in efficient transit but also promote a more inclusive and connected Toronto.



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