

# Cleveland: the Milan of the Midwest.



That's the premise behind the District of Design Project spearheaded by Cleveland State University and the Cleveland Institute of Art. But the focus is product design, not fashion.

The proposed district would be a concentrated area of downtown Cleveland with wholesale consumer product showrooms, design studios and the infrastructure to support world-class design and product development.

Northeast Ohio possesses many of the key ingredients to be a leader in design and innovation, says Edward (Ned) Hill, Cleveland State vice president for economic development.

The region is home to more than 40 consumer product brands, some recognized nationally like InterDesign, Saeco, Moen, Step2 and Royal Appliance. The downtown district already has more than 100 design-related businesses employing more than 1,400 people, as well as available live/work spaces and warehouses.

The industrial design program at the Cleveland Institute of Art (CIA) is considered one of the best in the nation, training some of the most sought-after talent in the industry. However, most graduates accept jobs outside Northeast Ohio.



And nearly half of all industrial design programs in the nation are within a 300-mile radius of Cleveland.

“Northeast Ohio lacks a vibrant design culture that enables companies to attract and retain top talent,” says Dr. Hill. “By fostering a design culture, drawing on regional assets and capitalizing on increasing design awareness, the region can position itself as a long-term leader in design and innovation, resulting in top-line revenue growth that will strengthen the regional economy.”

As envisioned, the District of Design would run from East 12th to East 36th streets and Prospect to St. Clair avenues. Its hub would be Euclid Avenue from Playhouse Square to Cleveland State, where national showrooms would be located and a related cluster of consumer product makers, designers, marketers and researchers would spin off jobs and innovation.

The district would leverage the region's enormous expertise in consumer product design, research and

development, marketing, manufacturing, sales and distribution, and create synergy among these sectors.

“The district would create a high-end experience for wholesale and retail buyers who could peruse consumer products, stay nearby, and enjoy downtown entertainment and dining,” says Dan Cuffaro, chair and associate professor at CIA. “It would allow one-stop shopping for next year's product line. Unlike the Merchandise Mart, a foreboding building in Chicago, the district would be open and accessible to consumers who could be tapped for product testing and market research.

“The district would be a neighborhood of design-related businesses that is walkable, connected and promotes synergy,” he adds.

Key to making the Design District a reality are consumer product companies willing to invest \$100,000 to \$200,000 in downtown showrooms and storefronts, and property owners willing to rent



prime space to them. The city of Cleveland has compiled an inventory of available properties and talks with realtors are underway.

Reaction to the Design District has been favorable — from city and county officials, consumer product manufacturers, venture capitalists, and others. The Civic Innovation Lab, an affiliate of the Cleveland Foundation, has provided a \$30,000 seed grant. Forest City Enterprises Inc. has expressed interest in the Halle Building serving as the district’s epicenter. And at the nearby Idea Center, ASM International (formerly the American Society of Metals) has established a satellite office that offers educational materials to product designers as well as room for a materials showroom.

The goal is to launch the district with six to 10 companies as initial partners.

“Design districts are nothing new; there are eight across the nation but they focus on fashion, furniture and interior design,” notes Dr. Hill. “This is an opportunity to establish Cleveland and Northeast Ohio as the capital of consumer product design in the nation.” ◆

As a professor at the Cleveland Institute of Art, **Viktor Schreckengost** founded the first industrial design program in the nation.

Schreckengost, age 100, recently received the National Medal of Arts from President Bush.

Work by this “American da Vinci” is credited with having a \$250 billion impact on the U.S. economy. His designs include the first mass-produced dinnerware and the cab-over-engine truck.

His Viktor Schreckengost Studios has expressed interest in the District of Design as a possible home for his vast archives. ◆



2006 National Medal of Arts recipient and industrial designer Viktor Schreckengost accepts his award from President and Mrs. Bush in an Oval Office ceremony on November 9, 2006. Schreckengost's citation reads, "His fusion of elegance and practicality in industrial design led to remarkable innovations that have helped improve American life in countless ways." *White House photo by Paul Morse*

## BUILDING AN ECONOMY AROUND DESIGN.