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**Campus color: Alumni demonstrate industry leadership at Design Wisconsin event at UW-Stout**

**Pros from Sherwin-Williams, Red Wing Shoe among presenters at fourth annual conference**

Written by Tom Giffey, University of Wisconsin–Stout

More than 200 design professionals – many of them alumni working at prominent firms around the Upper Midwest – came to the University of Wisconsin–Stout campus recently for the fourth annual [Design Wisconsin](https://www.uwstout.edu/academics/colleges-schools/college-arts-human-sciences/school-art-design/design-wisconsin) event.

UW-Stout – which has the only industrial design program in Universities of Wisconsin and is home to one of the largest public art schools in the Midwest – created Design Wisconsin to celebrate the impact of industrial design and fashion design on Wisconsin’s culture, commerce, community and brand.

Even though UW-Stout is Design Wisconsin’s founding organization, May 16-18 was the first time the event was brought to campus. Past hosts include [Milwaukee Tool](https://www.milwaukeetool.com/) in Milwaukee, [Trek](https://www.trekbikes.com/us/en_US/) in Waterloo, and [DELVE](https://www.delve.com/) in Madison. Bringing the event to Menomonie this year provided an opportunity to highlight the UW-Stout campus as well as showcase more student work, said **Professor Jennifer Astwood**, [B.F.A. industrial and product design](https://www.uwstout.edu/programs/bfa-industrial-product-design) program director.

In addition to keynote presentations by numerous professionals, most of them UW-Stout alumni, Design Wisconsin included student portfolio review sessions, product showcases, panel discussions, networking opportunities and workshops.

Design Wisconsin benefits both students and professionals, Astwood said. “To me it was important that people not just hear about the companies, but also about some meaningful topics that speak to the industry at large,” she said. For example, one presentation from Matthew Gueller of Milwaukee Tool and Gregor Mittersinker of [Loft Design](https://www.loft.design/) focused on the use of artificial intelligence in the design process.

Also new this year was a panel discussion featuring talent from several companies – including Trek, [Polaris](https://www.polaris.com/en-us/) and [Ashley Furniture Industries](https://www.ashleyfurniture.com/) – which focused on navigating the industry.

Next year, Design Wisconsin will once again be held off-campus: It’s slated for Saturday, May 30, 2026, at [Oshkosh Corp.](https://www.oshkoshcorp.com/) in Oshkosh.

**Exploring Color, Material, Finish**

Several Design Wisconsin sessions focused on an area of industrial design known as CMF – color, material and finish – a cross-disciplinary approach that addresses the visual and tactile nature of products.

Among the CMF presenters was 2002 UW-stout alumnus**Kiki Redhead, global CMF and trend manager for**[**Sherwin-Williams**](https://www.sherwin-williams.com/). She described CMF as crossing boundaries between industrial design, graphic design, interior design, textile design and more. Design Wisconsin allowed UW-Stout students to network with professionals who work in the field, she noted.

“The students had an opportunity to find out what it really means to have a job where you actually develop color every day or develop different materials or create new finishes from scratch,” said Redhead, who leads Sherwin-Williams’ DesignHouse, a collaborative space in Minneapolis for the company and its industrial clients.

Before she was a leader in the industry, Redhead was a UW-Stout undergraduate who gained invaluable skills as an apprentice interior designer for a commercial construction company. “That really gave me a lot of real-world experience, and it was where I really started to apply color to projects and seeing them come to fruition,” she said.

As a professional, Redhead developed and trademarked her own trend methodology, and for a decade operated her own global trend agency, creating colors for everything from cars to cabinetry to cosmetics packaging to clothing. In 2018, she took her current job with Sherwin-Williams, where she combines qualitative and quantitative data to create eye-popping colors and finishes for customers.

**Developing a ‘manufacturing mindset’**

Among Redhead’s DesignHouse colleagues and fellow Design Wisconsin speakers is **Brynn Wildenauer**, a 2018 B.F.A. industrial design graduate who is now a senior architectural color designer for [Sherwin-Williams Coil Coatings](https://industrial.sherwin-williams.com/na/us/en/coil-extrusion/products-by-industry/all-products.html). That division creates coatings used on appliances, metal building materials and other architectural products. In practice, this means that Wildenauer develops colorful coatings for everything from agricultural buildings to skyscrapers to sports stadiums: One of her most notable projects was working on a color-shifting effect pigment that gives a pearlescent sheen to the exterior of the [Kai Tak Sports Park](https://www.discoverhongkong.com/us/place-to-go/attractions/kai-tak-sports-park.html), a massive $4 billion complex that opened this year in Hong Kong.

Wildenauer said her UW-Stout education, which included an internship at Ashley Furniture Industries where she saw her designs prototyped, prepared her well for her career. “I really liked having that hands-on approach, and that helped me develop a manufacturing mindset,” she said.

In particular, Wildenauer recalls developing a keen interest in CMF after **Professor Erik Evensen** wrote that her “color sense seemed promising” on a mid-program review. “I really leaned into that, diving down into the materials that are chosen and why,” she said.

“I find that there are so many opportunities to make a statement with color, textures, finishes, etc.,” she continued. “When color is used in an intentional way, it can increase brand recognition by 80%, which demonstrates the impact of color.”

Wildenauer said she enjoyed returning to campus, something she does periodically as a member of the Program Advisory Committee for the industrial design program. “It’s really cool to see how important this event is to all the students and those who have graduated from Stout or are heavily involved in Stout’s programs,” she said. Bridging the gap between design fields

Noah Anderson, a 2013 industrial and product design alum and a senior footwear designer at [Red Wing Shoe Company](https://www.redwingshoes.com/), was one of three alumni working at Red Wing who spoke at the conference. The trio, which included product developer Sarah Noll and pattern engineer Gina Thurk, delivered a keynote about the synergy between footwear and apparel at the Minnesota-based company. Designing shoes bridges the gap between industrial design and apparel design, as well as between what retailers term “soft goods” and “hard goods,” Anderson said.

Anderson said he was impressed to see how UW-Stout’s design programs are preparing students for such collaborations in the professional world. “I felt encouraged to see specifically how apparel and industrial design were sharing a little bit more of a presentation at Senior Show,” he said. “It was really awesome to interact with students and to see the way that they are interacting with trends in the digital world as well.”

Anderson said he was well-served by his UW-Stout education when he began work at Red Wing Shoes in 2014. “I felt very prepared to present ideas, to be in front of the product team and embrace critique,” he said. “Going through the process of design was something I was really familiar with by the time I finished the industrial design program.”

In his career at Red Wing Shoes, Anderson has designed products for several of the historic Minnesota-based company’s brands.

“It’s always a new challenge,” Anderson said. “Every project includes new research, new trends and learning about new materials, which I feel like is really the source of what’s interesting about designing for industry in general.”