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Jason Lorimer

Strategist; Entrepreneur

6 Things I Love About Detroit... So Far

Sitting on an airplane midway through one of about a dozen trips between Philadelphia and Detroit in the last few months, I opened my laptop to wrap up some legal ease for an exciting [new venture](#). Despite feeling exhausted in the terminal waiting area as I waited to board my flight, I suddenly felt invigorated. It occurred to me that I was excited to get back to Detroit, where I have made my second home as part of an [experiment](#) in entrepreneurship. Now mind you, I travel often and visit different, cool cities all the time. Chicago, New York and San Francisco have become regular stops with a few others like Vegas and Denver peppered in more for recreational purposes. Detroit is not exactly considered a destination city, but I absolutely adore the place and I find myself spreading the Motor City gospel to friends and colleagues in Philly and beyond on a regular basis.

Inevitably, people ask me what in the world I find so charming about a city that's almost universally portrayed in the global media as one of poetic ruin. Struggling to put the city's one-of-a-kind spirit (or vibe, if you will) into words, I revert to saying, "You just have to be there on the ground to understand it." Recently, I have expanded on that thought to say, "Detroit may have lost a significant chunk of its population, but many of the people who are left are doing something. That concentration of creators and doers creates an energy so powerful that it seems to settle in and rest on your shoulders."

My friends, reasonably frustrated with that lack of a direct answer, have pressed me to elaborate. As a result, I've been thinking about specifics. I thought I would share some of them with all of you, a sampling of the little things that endear me so very much to Detroit:

Typography

I'm admittedly a bit of a design snob, and the use of fonts on store signage, party posters and even alleyway graffiti in Detroit is remarkably well done. Be it the menus at the new Hudson Café on Woodward, the murals in the North End or the stickers that adorn the walls of the men's room at the Cass Café, Detroiters know a good font when they see one and it shows alphabetically, adding to the gritty, textured feel of the cityscape.

Hamtramck

While technically a tiny city inside Detroit originally built around a massive GM plant, this neighborhood, a few minutes driving time from downtown, is, to me, an industrial Everytown, USA. It's tightly packed

row homes and Polish restaurants and bakeries that speak to its past moniker of "Poletown." It reminds me of the neighborhood in which I grew up in Philadelphia. Except in Hamtramck, the formerly Polish population has transformed as layers of new Asian, East Indian, and Eastern European immigrants have created a corner of the city that is truly a unique cultural experience.

From halal pizzas to paczkis, quaint little shops, bakeries and restaurants offer ethnic cuisine from a rainbow assortment of residents' homelands and look as though they've been neatly tucked in a time machine of culinary awesomeness for a half a century. The grocers and fish markets stock every product you could ever want piled high on the shelves along with dozens of foods you've likely never heard of. The town is clean and seemingly efficient and while it has certainly seen the effects of the housing crisis and off-shoring of manufacturing jobs, it has a kind of pride that shows through any cracks in the foundation.

The Madison Building

When Josh Linkner, the managing director of [Detroit Venture Partners](#) and among those integral in getting me to Detroit, walked me through the remarkable renovation of the old Madison Theatre, it was as if someone had reached deep into the left side of my brain, designed a workspace and then made it twice as cool as I ever could. The space on Broadway at Madison, just across from the Detroit Opera House, which includes a state-of-the-art theatre that seats 100 and a fully outfitted roof kitchen overlooking Comerica Park's baseball diamond among its many amenities is, as I have come to explain in a word: ridiculous. I have been to all the entrepreneurial centers of cool in the U.S.: Facebook, Google, Pixar, and the like, and while those campuses certainly have a scale that would be hard to compete with, Detroit's Madison Building is uniquely urban, fresh and flat-out inspiring.

Live Music

I am an almost automatic wing-man for any of my concert-going friends when they are taking in a show. A music enthusiast, I have eclectic taste and very much enjoy the energy that often permeates live shows. My experience with live music so far in Detroit has not disappointed and I love the venues the city has to offer. The bigger theatres like the Fox boast incredible acoustics and jaw-droppingly ornate interiors, but for me it is the smaller, more intimate venues that delight. The Majestic is just that, and Nancy Whiskeys is my favorite so far for the way that the little boxed-in stage forces the band to play outward to the crowd. There are about a half-dozen more I've liked and I have not even begun to take in all the out-of-the-way spots that have been delighting music-goers in Detroit for decades.

The Avalon Bakery

If the Avalon were a woman, I would marry her tomorrow. If they would take over the stores next door, I would move in and never leave. The sights, sounds and particularly smells of the Avalon Bakery set a scene even Norman Rockwell would aspire to. From the elder gentlemen who sit in the far corner and talk art all day to the goodies being battered, breaded and baked before your eyes just over the counter to the best cup of coffee I have found in town so far, this culinary jewel has charmed me into a looming-plus-one-waist line. So much so that I am going to stop there on my way from the airport. Don't judge me.

Hope

Yes, that's right -- hope. Despite what you may read in the news, Detroit is a hopeful place with people who bask in that light. I am not delusional nor are the people with whom I discuss the Motor City's past,

present and future. They are the first to point out the inherent flaws and gaping voids both in the political sphere and in the sections of the city where widespread poverty still has a tight grip, but they are informed about the city's history and the cyclical nature of economic fortitude. Most of the people I meet understand that the future of Detroit is not built on the backs of industrial giants.

Instead, to succeed, the Motor City must emerge anew by becoming a model for the sustainable, post-industrial city where sharing economies and locally sourced goods drive commerce. I imagine the pervasive optimism comes from a long history of reinvention. Detroit is ground zero for what an American city can look like as America adjusts, in the coming decades, to no longer being the world's dominant economic power. And guess what? If that future contains the experimental culture and fervent entrepreneurial efforts that are currently shaping Detroit, then we'll be just fine.