

Stamen Design

Founded by Eric Rodenbeck in 2001, Stamen Design is a data visualization and cartography studio based in San Francisco, California with the goal of telling beautiful stories through data. Their work mainly comprises of interactive mapping and geographic data visualizations. The studio is comprised of a tight-knit group of design technologists, product designers and artists that place importance on research as a gateway to understanding, group harmony and enjoying the company of the people you work with. At Stamen, hard work is valued and they acknowledge that good, imaginative ideas can come from anywhere.

Their work perfectly intersects aesthetics and functionality, making complex data accessible, engaging, and often beautiful. The studio has become internationally recognized for blending art, design, and technology to create compelling visual narratives through maps and datasets. Often, aesthetics and utility are viewed as needing to compromise for one another, but Stamen Design believes that they work hand in hand and support one another. Even when working with material as rigid as data and geography, beauty never takes a back seat, and is used to help communicate the message of their work even further.

The studio works with a wide range of clients, from large private companies like Google, Facebook, Nike and Visa to organizations in the public sector such as the World Health Organization. They're also a recipient of the National Design Reward for Interaction Design from the Smithsonian Museum. Their work has been displayed in several museums worldwide such as the Museum of Modern Art, the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian and the Shanghai Power Station of Art. Regardless of the client themselves, Stamen Design's goal remains the same, visualizing data in a way easy to understand, and creating maps that are just as creative as they are informative, embodying the culture, livelihood and movement of the geographical areas represented.

The work titled "Interacting with Plants at the Exploratorium" was an interactive map installation commissioned to Stamen by the Exploratorium in California for their exhibit ¡Plantásticas!. The exhibition was meant to provide a unique exploration of plants and nature in California through a diverse set of perspectives, and Stamen's map, which was displayed on a large touch table for museumgoers to interact with, did just that. This immersive experience was designed for users of all ages to explore California's plant life through data and community experiences.

Using movable magnifiers on the 65 inch digital map, users were able to zoom into different regions and explore the plant communities and histories tied to them. This approach to exploration took into account the diverse target audience by offering playful yet powerful

engagement that was intuitive and easy to navigate. This project consisted of two interactive modes: Story Mode and Explore Mode. Story Mode explored human-centered narratives and stories around plant life and agriculture, meanwhile Explore Mode allowed visitors to dive deeper into the scientific complexities of plant life through a rich dataset of over 200 plant species.

Presenting such a large dataset in an efficient, interactive manner proved to be challenging. To overcome this challenge, Stamen implemented design techniques such as the golden ratio for the colour palette to achieve visual harmony and “geo-fencing” to place stories spatially throughout the map. Stamen also tackled challenges such as remote debugging and employing TeamViewer so that they could access and coordinate with the Exploratorium staff. The team at Stamen didn’t only overcome technical challenges with this project, but artistic and imaginative ones as well as they attempted to bridge art and science. Successfully, they created a piece of work that doubled as an immersive experience made to foster a more informed connection between museum visitors and the extensive plant ecosystems of California. This work encouraged curiosity, discovery, and a deeper understanding of the complex relationships between people, place, and ecology, which perfectly aligns with Stamens vision of sharing visually-pleasing yet complex stories through data.