What is Interior Design?

In the past forty years, the profession of interior design has evolved from a focus on residential design to one that now draws upon many disciplines to enhance the function, safety, and aesthetics of all types of interior spaces. Interior designers today are professionally trained in programs accredited by the Council for Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA), and the practice of interior design is regulated in 29 states, including Kentucky, as well as the District of Columbia. The core of the work executed in the practice of interior design focuses on places of work such as offices, airport terminals, theaters, shopping malls, restaurants, hotels, schools and hospitals. The creation of environments that support and sustain human beings psychologically, physically, and emotionally is a core value of the practice of interior design. While form-giving remains an important component of both architecture and interior design, the uniqueness of interior design is that it positions the users of spaces as the central focus of the design. Research has now clearly shown that interior design’s unique focus on users serves to support the corporate objectives of clients and contributes to making companies and institutions more efficient and more successful.

The complexity of today’s buildings has required more specialization in the design disciplines. The design of built environments has evolved into a multi-disciplinary process where architects, interior designers, landscape architects, engineers and other consultants work together to achieve successful solutions to meet a client’s needs. Interior designers bring specialized knowledge to this process and the interiors programming of a building project often becomes the driver of the design in today’s multi-disciplinary design practices. This evolution has occurred because environmental research is demonstrating how well-designed interior spaces can boost office productivity, increase sales, attract a more affluent clientele, serve to attract and maintain the brightest and best employees, contribute to healing in a hospital setting, or even increase a building’s market value.

Issues of Contemporary Interior Design Practice

The interior design profession has evolved simultaneously with the growth of the global economy and with the growing complexity of modern businesses and modern building technology. Forty years ago it was not unusual for an architectural firm to handle limited interior design services such as color and materials selection, or they would address these issues by contracting with outside interior design consultants. As building construction expanded in the 1970’s and 1980’s, these architectural firms began to add interior design professionals to their staffs. The number of Interior design firms specializing in commercial work also began to grow rapidly during this period.

By the end of the 20th century, the complexity of modern design projects led to the growth of multi-disciplinary design firms that began to offer interior design services as a unique and distinct service apart from the architectural and engineering capabilities. The interior designers in these multi-disciplinary projects use their expertise to bring a
sustained emphasis on the physical, psychological and emotional needs of the client, while equally emphasizing how these priorities can support the client's goals and objectives.

Environmental research has clearly shown that, in the new knowledge economy, corporate profitability and growth are enhanced when workplace design issues are given a high priority. These targeted priorities have resulted in the integration of three new areas of emphasis by interior designers that are proving to have a positive economic benefit for the client. These contemporary foci of interior design practice include Evidence-Based Design (EBD), Workplace Innovation, and Branding.

Evidence-Based Design
With the growth of the healthcare industry, there has been increased emphasis on the design of healthcare environments using the principles of evidence-based design (EBD). According to Hamilton and Watkins (2009), “Evidence-based design is the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence from research and practice in making critical decisions.” Research demonstrates that well-designed physical environments can play an important role in making hospitals less stressful and in improving the healing process for patients. Research in the past decade has supported the link between good interior design and patient and staff well-being, and EBD has become an established approach to the design of healthcare environments. Because of this success, EBD is also having an increased presence in the design of other types of environments.

Workplace Innovation
Because interior design education focuses on the interactive relationship between humans and space, interior design practitioners have developed unique programming services for enhancing interior planning. As a result, interior design programming has become a professional service that has moved design practice beyond the realm of material and color specification to a knowledge-based practice that addresses human, physical, and psychological needs in the design deliverable. Stegmeier (2009) demonstrates that interior design programming, resulting in flexible workspaces that stimulate innovation and creativity, is a critical component in connecting human needs, corporate goals, and significantly improving the corporate bottom line. Further, workplace research by Gensler (2009) also has clearly shown that "top-performing companies—those with higher profits, better employee engagement and stronger market and brand position—have significantly higher-performing work environments than average companies". It is the client's corporate objectives filtered through the human-focused lens of interior design professional practice that results in innovative workplaces for the client.

Branding
Branded environments is a concept that extends far beyond that of customer logo recognition. Interior design programming services today address innovations that
reinforce a client’s corporate culture and objectives in every aspect of the firm, including business strategies, product design, customer services, and facilities. Branding assists the corporation in attracting and keeping the best employees by integrating the firm’s values and culture into the design of the physical work environment. Because well-designed facilities give customers a positive physical experience of the brand, branding further adds the advantage of clearly articulating a unique image of corporate values to customers.

**Aspects of Professional Work**

Based on these changes in the contemporary workplace, the extent of the interior designer’s scope has grown. This expansion of the interior designer’s range of services also has occurred because of the nature of today’s work environments that are commonly affected by growth, mergers, acquisitions and disposition of real estate assets. Corporations turn to interior design firms because of their expertise in finding solutions to these types of business challenges.

**Planning**

Working in this multi-disciplinary context, the practice of interior design has expanded from a material and product specification focus into services that in the past were not commonly understood to be part of professional work. This work includes pre-design and interior planning and programming, strategic planning, master planning, branding, sustainability, research, post-occupancy evaluations, and post-design facilities management. Interior design programming focuses on identifying the unique physical, social, and psychological needs of the users of the environment. In addition, the interiors program reinforces the project criteria as well as the client’s objectives, values, and goals that need to be addressed in the design response. Master planning includes an analysis of major built-environment influences on corporate endeavors, including real estate portfolio assessment, scenario development, and strategic planning.

**Research**

Due to rapid changes in technology and the ever-changing nature of a globalized economy, businesses are asking for assistance in creating environments that meet these new challenges. As part of the design process, interior designers conduct research on work processes, workplace performance assessment, environmental balance, and human comfort. These research findings become the foundation of the interiors program that results in a design proposal that is evidence-based.

**Design**

Design remains at the heart of what interior designers do. The end products of the interior designer's work are environments that support the client's image and identity, while also benefitting recruiting and retention and promoting the company's financial gain and success. In the design process, the objective of the work is to positively affect the human response to the built environment. Design is where creativity merges with
design thinking to form beautiful and inspiring environments that address programmatic issues.

Management
Interior designers work collaboratively in an ongoing relationship with their clients' facility management teams. In these collaborations the client looks to the interior designer for assistance with the post-occupancy facility planning process. The interior designer can also assist the client in both short- and long-term facility changes that address strategic corporate goals that influence the bottom line.

Economic Impact of Interior Design
The economic impact of interior design practice to the overall economy can be viewed from two perspectives. The first impact results from the intellectual property that interior designers bring to the client for which they are paid fees that sustain the profession. The median annual fee earned for interior design services per employee in 2008 was $221,619. The top 100 multi-disciplinary design firms that offer Interior Design services earned $2,697,678,869 in 2008. As an average, interiors account for 58 percent of these firms' total income. This was an increase of 13 percent over 2007. These figures represent the value of interior design intellectual property and its impact on the overall economy (Interior Design Magazine, January 2010).

In addition to interior design services positively impacting the client's bottom line, the economic impact of these services can also be viewed from the perspective of how the practice of interior design stimulates associated industries such as, furnishings, fixtures and equipment. In 2008 the top 100 firms were responsible for 750,308,533 square feet and $58,375,277,937 in furnishings, fixtures, and construction (Interior Design Magazine, January 2010). The economic impact of interior design practice to the U.S. economy is clearly significant and speaks to the dominant role that interior design practice plays among the design professions.

Job Outlook and Future Directions
Employment of interior designers is expected to grow 19 percent from 2008 to 2018, faster than the average for all occupations. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, interior designers held approximately 71,700 jobs in 2008. This is expected to increase by 13,900 or 19% by 2018. In comparison, architects held 141,200 jobs in 2008 and this is expected to increase by 22,900 or 16% by 2018, while in the same period landscape architects held about 26,700 jobs and this is expected to increase by 5,300 or 20% by 2018.

Salaries of interior designers are comparable to those of other design professions. At the end of 2009 the median expected salary for an interior designer with 10+ years of experience in Louisville, KY was $65,746 while the median for an architect in Louisville with 10+ years of experience was $67,438. For the same period, the median expected salary for an interior designer with 10+ years of experience in New York City was $82,845.
The median for an architect in New York City with 10+ years of experience was $84,976. Other sources show interior designers earning more than architects, but the fact is that both professions earn comparable income. Both are equally rewarded, but each brings separate but distinct value to the design process (www.salaries.com).

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics also predicts that demand for interior design services from the healthcare industry is expected to rise because of an anticipated increase in demand for facilities that will accommodate the aging population. Because of their expertise, it is recognized that the services of interior designers will be essential in the creation of environments that support the health and wellness of various populations. There will also be demand from businesses in the hospitality industry—hotels, resorts, and restaurants—where high-quality interior design can help attract more business. Likewise, the need for expertise in ergonomics and green design is expected to increase the demand for interior designers to support human needs in a global society. Therefore, as businesses are realizing the improvements that can be made to worker and customer satisfaction through good interior design, more businesses will use the services of interior designers.

School of Interior Design at the University of Kentucky
The School of Interior Design at the University of Kentucky is a professional degree program accredited by the Council for Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA) that provides professional training for entry into the practice of interior design and the educational foundation that will allow for professional testing (NCIDQ), certification, or licensure at the individual state level. The program focuses on cultivating graduates with unique design thinking skills and the ability to design utilizing multidisciplinary knowledge in solving complex organizational issues associated with work, place experience, and the relationship to performance. The school's emphasis on coupling corporate objectives and business performance with maximizing human experience as the driver of design innovation results in graduates who are highly desirable. If you are interested in a program that addresses the design of workplaces such as offices, hospitals, restaurants, hotels, or retail, then the School of Interior Design at the University of Kentucky is the place for you!

References


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