What is Interior Design?

Interior Design is a multi-faceted profession in which creative and technical solutions are applied within a structure to achieve a built interior environment. These solutions are functional, enhance the quality of life and culture of the occupants, and are aesthetically attractive. Designs are created in response to and coordinated with the building shell, and acknowledge the physical location and social context of the project. Designs must adhere to code and regulatory requirements, and encourage the principles of environmental sustainability. The Interior Design process follows a systematic and coordinated methodology, including research, analysis and integration of knowledge into the creative process, whereby the needs and resources of the client are satisfied to produce an interior space that fulfills the project goals.  

According to the Department of Labor, Interior Design is the only design field subject to federal regulations and governmental law.  

What is the service/practice of Interior Design?

The practice of Interior Design utilizes the performance of services for a fee or other compensation, in connection with the completed design, utilization, and furnishing/fabrication of elements in interior spaces in buildings, homes and related structures. These services include, but are not limited to: programming the functional requirements for interior spaces, planning interior spaces, preparing analyses of user needs for interior spaces, preparing construction drawings, designs and specifications for selection, use, location, color and finishes of interior walls, materials, equipment, furnishings, furniture or personal property; administering contracts for fabrication, procurement, or installation in connection with reflected ceiling plans, space utilization, and the fabrication of non-structural elements within and surrounding interior spaces of buildings.

What is the difference between a Certified/Registered Interior Designer, a Residential Planner/Specialist and a Residential Decorator?

**Residential Decorators** are artistically talented persons without formal training. Some practicing Residential Decorators may have certificates for specialized training in artistic applications for paint, fabrics, carpets, and other materials utilized in interior décor for aesthetically pleasing residential/private dwellings. Decorators may be self-employed as faux finishers, upholstery seamstresses, or employees of retail establishments providing “Residential Decorator Services” in the furtherance of a retail sale.

**Residential Planners** are individuals with a minimum two-year associates degree in a “Residential Planning” focusing specifically on the space planning of residential/private dwellings. This definition also includes Kitchen and Bath Specialists. The field of Residential planning incorporates “trade” or affiliated organizations specific testing for competency in specialty areas. Residential Planners are not required to obtain certificates of registration to perform planning and “Residential Decorator Services”. Residential Planners may be employees of retail establishments providing “Residential Decorator Services” on the premises of the retail establishment or in the furtherance of a retail sale.

**Registered/Licensed Interior Designers** are individuals with professional degrees attaining a minimum of 2 years postgraduate full-time work experience within the field of Interior Design under the supervision of a registered architect or NCIDQ Certificate Holder. They must also pass the NCIDQ minimum competency qualifications examination upon which individuals are “qualified” and may “register” to practice in the jurisdictions where the regulating board monitors and upholds the ethical practice of the profession. Registered Interior Designers may specialize in commercial and/or residential design markets.

What are “Residential Decorator Services”?

These services include the placement and selection assistance of surface materials, window treatments, wallcoverings, paint, floor covering, surface-mounted lighting, surface-mounted fixtures, and loose furnishings not subject to regulation under applicable building codes.

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What sets Registered Interior Designers apart?

Education
Eligibility requirements to sit for the National Council for Interior Design Qualifications (NCIDQ) examination states applicants must have at least 6 years of combined education and experience in Interior Design, of which a minimum 4 year baccalaureate constitutes postsecondary education in Interior Design. The Council for Interior Design Accreditation (formerly known as FIDER) is an organization that accredits college and university Interior Design program’s of study assessing the teaching of professional values, design fundamentals, interior design practice, communications, building systems and interior materials, regulation and codes, business and marketing and professional practice. Interior Design programs that are CIDA accredited provide optimal educational experience for students. There are currently 5 CIDA accredited programs. Other schools will be added to this list pending accreditation visits.

Experience
Although NCIDQ does not require attending a college or university that is CIDA accredited at this time, NCIDQ offers the Interior Design Experience Program (IDEP) to directly assess inadequacies in non-accredited schools. Graduates of four-year Interior Design programs can apply for IDEP in which the Interior Design graduate must acquire 3,520 learning hours under the supervision of an NCIDQ Certificate Holder or Architect attaining at least two years of documented full-time practice experience. When IDEP (experience) requirements are fulfilled, Interior Design interns may apply to sit for the NCIDQ examination.

Examination
The National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ) is the nationally recognized interior design testing agency. It is the only national Interior Design exam developed and administered in the United States by an agency that is independent from other Interior Design organizations. The NCIDQ is also the only examination that tests minimum competence of the full body of Interior Design knowledge specifically testing competency for federally regulated codes, ethical design practice, contract administration, construction documents, programming, budget planning, specifications and take-off calculations, sustainability and functional space planning.

Application
Upon completing and passing the NCIDQ exam an Interior Designer is “qualified” and may apply for registration with the regulating jurisdiction in order to become registered to practice the full services of Interior Design. Registration is required by the state regulatory board (typically) on a bi-annual basis. The regulatory board may additionally require Continuing Education Units or CEU’s.

Registered Interior Designers are professionals’ set apart by education, examination, experience and application protecting the health, safety, and welfare of the public through the design of code compliant, functional and aesthetically pleasing interior environments.
Why should Interior Designers be licensed?

1. **Public Perception – creating a knowledge based practice**
   
   Receiving a degree in Interior Design requires skill competence in many cross-disciplinary fields. The public is vastly unaware that Interior Designers may receive a four-year CIDA accredited degree in Interior Design and become registered in many jurisdictions by passing the NCIDQ examination that tests minimum standards for professional Interior Design practice. Thus, the skills and responsibilities of Interior Designers and the working functions of the profession are gravely misunderstood and expressively misrepresented to the public and incoming Interior Design students through popular “reality-designing-interiors” TV shows like “Trading Spaces” and “Design Star.”

2. **Delineation and Recognition - establishing designer awareness**

   Pennsylvania does not define the occupation of an Interior Designer clearly delineating professional “Interior Designers” from individuals' void of educationally acquired credentials practicing under the ambiguous umbrella of “Interior Designer.” Regulation would require Registered/Licensed Interior Design professionals to have education and training in order to profess the title of “Registered” or “Licensed Interior Designer.” When contracting a Registered/Licensed Interior Designer, the public would be assured that the state recognizes the professional has been comprehensively tested in ADA and other federal and local code requirements, construction methods, energy conservation requirements, finish material specification, ergonomic/functional space planning design, ethical practice and all encompassing aspects of Interior Design, exceeding minimum standards for the safe practice of Interior Design.

3. **Commercial and Residential Code Compliance - defining clear practice standards**

   Codes are systematized bodies of law adopted by federal, state, and local jurisdictions to insure public safety. The International Building Code (IBC) and the International Residential Code (IRC) developed by the International Code Council (ICC) are accepted as the major building code models utilized throughout the world. Although the codebooks incorporate laws for many trades, a Registered/Licensed Interior Designer by practice must adhere to the following codes as they directly impact the safety of interior space design; use/occupancy requirements and classifications, construction types, fire resistant material and construction, interior finish specifications, means of egress, and accessibility as regulated by the ICC.

4. **“Captive Consumers”- providing public safety initiatives**

   A “captive consumer” is a person or persons using offices and public spaces such as hospitals, stores, airports, and other non-live-in institution space and student or public housing in which finishes and furnishing are pre-selected and installed without consumer participation. They are considered “captive” because they have not been directly involved in the selection of the interior materials, furniture, and furnishings they are forced to use. Interior spaces designed improperly by uneducated persons practicing Interior Design can contribute to lost revenue, liability lawsuits, increased insurance costs, illness/hospitalization, injury/disability, and even death. Interior Designers study to ensure public protection and welfare directly relate to the relationships of people and the buildings/homes they occupy. It is important that Interior Designers make educated assessments of client’s age; abilities, allergies and any potential design limitations or specialized project requirements in order to plan spaces that comprehensively aid in the function and code compliance of the interior environment.

5. **Liability and Public Safety- enforcing the ethical practice of Interior Design**

   The establishment of an Interior Design Regulatory Board in Pennsylvania would proactively monitor Interior Design practices maintaining liability for any ensuing malpractice negatively affecting the public. To legally practice under state regulation, a Registered/Licensed Interior Designer must demonstrate competency in the entire scope of Interior Design knowledge. In addition to setting minimum competency standards of practice, the board would address all aspects of professional negligence; implied warranty or misrepresentation, implied fitness warranty, breach of contract, joint and several liability, and liability without fault for design defects. Individuals practicing code enforced services of Interior Design and in violation of any of the above would be subjected to fines, penalties, or suspension imposed by the governing board. Regulation would raise the expertise skill level of Interior Designers strengthening the quality, safety, and ethical Interior Design practice further encouraging the competitive bidding of design services provided to the public.

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Why do I matter, what can I do?
As Interior Designers, you work hard to build your practice through experience, education and in many cases passing the NCIDQ. Right now you have the opportunity to let your clients know you take your profession seriously.

NUMBERS
There are over 2,000 practicing Interior Designers in Pennsylvania. Over 600 are NCIDQ Certificate Holders. Additionally there are over 1,250 students enrolled in Pennsylvania-based Interior Design degree programs. We have the numbers but they mean NOTHING to legislators because these numbers do not specifically indicate support for interior design licensing. Legislators look at the number of members supporting the coalition for licensing. We have approximately 800 members...which almost 1/3 of the potential “design community” support. We would like to have 2,000 members supporting interior design! Please become a member and send IDLCPA a letter of support today!

FIND YOUR LEGISLATOR
Legislators do not want to hear from IDLCPA. They want to hear that licensing is important coming from one of their constituents. Please visit http://www.legis.state.pa.us and type in your zip code in the upper right hand corner to find your legislators in the House of Representatives and the Senate. While you are at the site, see what committees your legislator serves on. Please contact IDLCPA immediately if you are a constituent of a member of the Professional Licensure Committee in either the House or the Senate. These legislators determine whether or not our cause ever hits the floor for their respective assemblies. If we are going to gain our right to practice, this is the first place we must be successful in acquiring legislative support.

GET INVOLVED IN GRASSROOTS
IDLCPA will be hosting informational meetings and PAC parties once legislation is introduced in the House and Senate. The meetings will discuss how to talk to your legislator and procedures for contacting your legislator to ask them for their support of Interior Design licensing in Pennsylvania. If you cannot physically visit your legislator we will discuss how to write or e-mail your legislator. If legislators do not hear from you they will NOT believe that this is important and our efforts will either be prolonged for an indefinite period of time or will fail. The squeaky wheel gets oiled!

GIVE TO THE PAC
In order for representatives of IDLCPA to visit and speak our issues to legislators we need to attend fundraisers for legislators. When you give to the Interior Designers Political Action Contribution (PAC) account you enable our voice to be heard and our presence to be a reminder to our legislators of our dedication to the support of this profession and cause of interior design regulation. Our lobbyist has told us we need 30,000 in PAC monies for the 2010-2011 legislative session! Please contribute to the Interior Designers’ PAC. You can contribute to the PAC through PAYPAL on the website at www.idlcpa.org or by writing a check made out to the Interior Designers’ PAC and mailing it to IDLCPA at P.O. Box 44144 Pittsburgh, PA 15205.

Stand up for your profession!
Join the Interior Design Legislative Coalition of Pennsylvania
You are the Key to advancing the Interior Design Profession