

larger goals and strategies, the real starting points of innovation in the design process.

What Makes Interior Design a Profession?

Interior design is a profession in part because of designers' special skills and education, but also because of designers' special relationships with their clients. According to *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, a profession is "a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation."⁴ An art is a "skill acquired by experience, study, or observation, an occupation requiring knowledge and skill, and the conscious use of skill and creative imagination especially in the production of aesthetic objects."⁵ A craft is "an occupation or trade requiring manual dexterity or artistic skill."⁶ These definitions stress a difference in training, suggesting that only professions require university study. That difference does not precisely hold anymore, since both arts and crafts are taught at the university level. Recalling David Maister's definition of a professional as a "technician who cares," we might ask, "Who benefits from the care that interior designers exercise in the course of their practice?" Clearly, the beneficiaries are those who use the settings that they design.

In defining the professional practice of interior design, the Foundation for Interior Design Education and Research (FIDER) provides the following outline of its scope:

- *Analyzing client needs, goals, and life safety requirements*
- *Integrating findings with a knowledge of interior design*
- *Formulating preliminary design concepts that are aesthetic, appropriate, and functional, and in accordance with codes and standards*
- *Developing and presenting final design recommendations through appropriate presentation media*
- *Preparing working drawings and specifications for non-load-bearing interior construction, reflected ceiling plans, lighting, interior detailing, materials, finishes, space planning, furnishings, fixtures, and equipment in compliance with universal accessibility guidelines and all applicable codes*

- *Collaborating with professional services of other licensed practitioners in the technical areas of mechanical, electrical, and load-bearing design as required for regulatory approval*
- *Preparing and administering bids and contract documents as the client's agent*
- *Reviewing and evaluating design solutions during implementation and upon completion⁷*

While it is accurate as far as it goes, this definition misses the heart of the matter. The real subject of interior design is *enclosed space*—that is, the *settings* within buildings that house human activity. First and foremost, interior designers are concerned with how people *experience* these settings and how their design *supports* their different activities. These concerns form the core of the interior design profession's specialized knowledge.

EDUCATING INTERIOR DESIGNERS

Like architecture, interior design is taught through a combination of studio work and coursework—the former a remnant of the old apprenticeship system that once characterized both architecture and the arts and crafts. In addition to studio training in design and visualization, professional interior design programs typically provide a foundation in:

- *Human factors*
- *Materials and systems*
- *Codes and regulations*
- *Contracts and business practices*

Unlike architecture, most interior design programs do not address the engineering side of building construction—e.g., coursework in the static and