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History of the Profession

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Interior designers can trace their profession to many who preceded them, from the cave painters at Lascaux to the creators of the frescoed interiors at Pompeii, to the holistic architecture, interiors, and furnishings of Robert Adam and Thomas Jefferson in the eighteenth century, and to Frank Lloyd Wright in the twentieth.

In the mid-nineteenth century, during the Industrial Revolution, the farm economy, though still robust, was gradually supplanted by a new industrial economy centered in or near the great, developing American cities of New York, Boston, and Chicago. The transition from farm to industry allowed Americans to see their houses as more than shelter and a place to sleep when work outdoors was done. Industrial workers' days were not necessarily shorter than those of farmers. However, for industrial workers and city dwellers in particular, home became a refuge that provided physical comfort and even aesthetic pleasure in contrast to the noisy, gritty, and physically exhausting atmosphere of the factory.

As women had more time to spend on the comforts of home, the large department stores of England and America developed and included sections devoted to drapery and upholstery. Specialty retailers included Liberty of London for fabrics and Tiffany and Affiliated Artists in New York, which produced lamps, vases, and other finely crafted decorative items.

At the end of the nineteenth century in England and America, the Arts and Crafts movement developed as a direct response to the Industrial Revolution. Its members, including William Morris, Charles Voysey, and Gustav Stickley, celebrated handcraft and deplored the social conditions, as well as the machine-made designs, the Industrial Revolution had created. The Arts and Crafts movement initiated small workshops devoted to woodworking, pottery, and weaving, and brought together artists and architects to study the interiors as well as the exteriors of buildings. Design integrity within the contemporary cultural and social context was the concern not only of the Arts and Crafts movement, but of other groups including the Wiener Werkstratte and the Bauhaus, which developed and flourished in the twentieth century.