INTRODUCTION

Cindy Coleman, Editor-in-Chief

THIS BOOK HAS THE ANSWER. WHAT IS THE QUESTION?

Designers know how to give advice. They are also skilled at asking questions. According to our training and the tradition of our profession, our questions focus on our clients: Who is the client? What does the client want? Toward the end of the twentieth century, as information technology insinuated itself into the office, the home, and the space and time between the two, interior designers began to appreciate the importance of framing the question another way: What does the client need? No one argues that interior designers are skilled at asking the right questions and producing effective answers. But that's only half of the story, and it's the end of the story. The first half of the story, the point where it should begin, is with interior designers themselves. What do interior designers need? That is the question this book was designed to answer.

WHAT DO DESIGNERS NEED? KNOWLEDGE.

The next iterations of that question move the discussion in three principal directions. What kinds of knowledge do interior designers need to do their work? What knowledge does the interior design profession require to remain viable now and not merely relevant in the future, but a powerful force for social change? Ultimately, how can design practitioners and educators create a body of knowledge that is unique to interior design? How can this body of knowledge put us on a level playing field with other professions, sustain our profession over the long term, and give designers opportunities to influence new thinking in our industry, the academy, and society?

WHAT IS THE PROOF THAT IGNORANCE IS BLISS?

The impetus for this book comes from designers themselves. Many have come to realize, through powerful anecdotal and first- or second-hand experience, that the interior design profession as we have traditionally known it is at a crossroads. Crossroads, in fact, may be too mild a term for our situation. Some go so far as to compare the interior design profession to the population of spotted owls—beautiful and useful contributors who have come perilously close to extinction. Cultural and economic circumstances have helped bring us to this point, to be sure. But do we know how, and to what extent, we ourselves are responsible for our situation?

It is time, now, to stop and step back, take the long view of the present and make intelligent decisions about our future. What future is there for interior designers? What is the future of our profession? If we want to create our own future, on our own terms, we must be willing to take the steps necessary to make sure that we do, in fact, have a future.

How often, in the context of a design assignment, have we felt it our responsibility to say to the client, "If you don't take the time and resources to do it right, when will you take the time and resources to do it over?" But now we're not asking the question of a client. We're asking the question of our profession and ourselves.

WHY THIS QUESTION AND THIS ANSWER, AND WHY NOW?

This book was developed as if it were a design assignment. First, we defined our mission: To give interior designers the knowledge and tools they need to shape and sustain our profession and the environment where human beings live and work.

Having chosen to accept this ambitious assignment, we gathered a team of six advisors: Frank Duffy, Neil Frankel, Ed Friedrichs, Linda Keane, Eva Maddox, and Mayer Rus. The insights of this group give the book a perspective that is as broad as it is deep, encompassing design theory and education, global professional practice and the experiences of design firms large and small. The group's members are professionals whose work includes seminal accomplishments in the recent history of design. Who better than they to show us our way to the future? These respected experts led us to others— the authors whose contributions make up this book.

WHERE DO WE BEGIN?

Just as we all periodically take an inventory of our work, living spaces, and lives, this book begins with a look at designers themselves. We assess who we are as a group and where we are in the history of our profession, which is roughly 100 years old. We also compare interior designers with other professionals. Do designers have an education that matches their ambition? Do they have the legal and regulatory support they require to do their work? Do the quality of their work and the ethical standards of their profession give them that coveted intangible that can drive a career—respect?

During the last decade of the twentieth century, social and economic changes were swift, profound, and permanent. Many designers succumbed to the tyranny of speed, only to discover that, in their haste, they had spent time and