



An Introduction to Interior Design

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit you will be able to:

- ✓ Explain what a professional interior designer does.
- ✓ Understand the divisions of the interior design profession.
- ✓ Discuss the role of an interior designer as a professional.

An Introduction to Interior Design

What is an Interior Designer?

An Interior Designer is a person with the education and experience necessary to improve the function and aesthetic quality of an interior space. An interior designer works for improving the quality of life, increasing productivity, and for protecting health and safety and welfare of the people.

The professional interior designer:

- Analyses client's needs, goals and life safety requirements.
- Formulates preliminary design concepts, that are functional, aesthetic, appropriate and are in accordance with the codes and standards.
- Develops and presents final design proposals by following appropriate presentation media,
- Prepares drawings and specifications for interior construction i.e. Ceiling plans, space detailing, space planning, materials, finishes, lighting, furnishings, fixtures and equipment in compliance with universal accessibility guidelines and all applicable codes.
- Works in a team of other licensed practitioners in the areas of electrical, mechanical and architectural, as required for regulatory approval.
- Prepares and administers bids and contract documents as a client's agent.
- Reviews and evaluates design solutions during implementation and at the time of completion.

Interior Design as a Profession

We spend over 90 per cent of our day in interior spaces. Despite this most of us take interiors for granted, we seldom notice the furniture, colours, textures, and other elements of a room. But sometimes the design of an interior does catch our attention, maybe it is the rich panelling of an expensive restaurant, the soothing background of a religious building, or the charms of a show home, designed by a professional interior designer.

Interior design professionals provide the owners of homes and businesses with functionally successful and aesthetically attractive interior spaces. An interior designer, whether working for domestic or commercial interiors, benefits society by focusing on how a space and an interior environment should look and function, by planning the arrangements of interior walls, considering how the design affects the health, safety and welfare of its occupants, selecting appropriate furniture, and specifying aesthetic embellishments for space. It could be said that a designer brings life to an interior. Through their work the client's functional and aesthetic requirements become reality.

The interior design profession is much more than just selecting colours and fabrics and rearranging furniture. The professional interior designer must consider the building and life safety codes, understand environmental issues and the basic construction and mechanical systems of buildings.

An interior designer can communicate the design concepts effectively through precisely scaled drawings and other documents used in the industry. A professional interior designer makes plans for the rooms considering the furniture and other items that go into them, and knows what the space will be used for. They manage all of the tasks and makes sure that the project is completed by its allocated time.

The practice of interior design demands a high level of interpersonal skills. Interior designers strive to be good listeners, so they can better understand the spoken and unspoken needs of their clients. A professional interior designer is also a good observer and seeks to understand how an existing space is currently working and how can it be improved. They can visualize a space that does not exist yet.

The Development of Interior Design as a Profession

Throughout the history, there has always been people who were especially concerned with the quality of interior spaces. At various times architects, artists, craftsmen, and merchants have designed and furnished interiors. Trade routes and markets have developed over centuries to supply homes and public building carpets, textiles and other furnishings. Glass, ceramics, metal and woodworks of exceptional qualities were produced by experienced craftsmen of those times. Traditionally an architect developed the structure of a building, and the interior was usually designed by the artisans and craftsmen. Through the nineteenth century, advice on interior arrangement was the province of upholsterers, cabinet makers, or retailers.

By the beginning of twentieth century, the department stores promoted accessories and furnishings to their consumers, this greatly helped to set design trends and people started looking for a help in the design of their homes and workplaces. Historically interior design was regarded as a branch of fashion, subject to the ever-changing whims of style. Interior decoration was considered an activity purely suitable for women, whose daily lives focused on minding the homes and the servants. The interest in interior decoration as a career was developed after the publication of *The Decoration of Houses* by Ogden Codman in 1897. During the twentieth century the publications focused on designing and living in good taste. Good taste was developed by studying past styles. The earliest prominent interior decorators were usually self-taught. By the late twentieth century educational programmes were developed to train decorators in period styles and the arrangement of furnishings. Trade magazines and digests further developed tastes and styles and interior decoration was emerged as a full-time career. By the 1940s interior design was developed as a separate profession. Commercial areas were then targeted for interior decoration.

Divisions of the Profession

Interior designers rarely work in every field. It is common for them to pick one specific area and enhance their skills in that particular field. Sometimes designers choose to specialise in residential areas and or commercial properties. Some even narrow their field and choose to work on certain types of homes and businesses. It is also quite common for the designers to refuse to pick any specific field at all, they are versatile designers and firms that do many kinds of work. This makes the field even wider for them.

The most important division is between residential and non-residential interior design. Though many designers do both, it is never the less true that specialisation in one or the other implies important differences in temperament, working habit and business conduct.

Residential Design

Residential interior design is for private places. Residential interior work may encompass a whole residence or only a part of one. It may entail all the functions involved in creating the specific area, or only one or some. The job may include:

- 1) Planning, designing, executing and furnishing:**
 - A complete private house or apartment.
 - Only specified rooms or parts of the rooms.
- 2) Consultation to technical service on:**
 - Painting and wall covering schedules.
 - Colour coordination.
 - Specifications for specially built units.
 - Developing layouts or floor plans.
 - Consultation with architects and craftsmen.
 - Producing other presentations and drawings.

Most designers prefer this type of work because it is less stressful, and the deadlines are usually a little more relaxed. When the designer can create something that pleases both the designer and the client the feeling is much better.

Sometimes the work for residential areas can be quite small also. This type of work especially suits designers who love to express their creativity. Usually a residential project follows a sequence of working procedures including:

1. Careful interviewing to establish the client's programme and budget.
2. Developing design concept.
3. Obtaining client's approval for that concept.
4. Making estimates.
5. Making authorised purchases.
6. Supervising and installing.

Commercial Design

Commercial interior design includes: hotels, banks, offices, retail establishments both large and small, hospitals, factories, museums, beauty parlours, gyms theatres and so on. Here, as in residential, the client is not the only person who has to be satisfied. The designer has also to consider who else will use the space, including customers, employees and the public in general.

This speciality requires an ability to estimate the value of the designer's own work, this will be helpful when approving a bid set by a business. A designer will also have to work under specific instructions here, to understand what the client is looking for, good listening skills are therefore very important. This type of speciality can be very important if the designer is successful in establishing a good rapport with the client. Doing a good job will lead to a steady, return client, and will often guarantee more work as the client's word of mouth can lead the other businesses desiring the service.

There are not only these two branches of speciality, but some designers can choose any sub branch to specialise in as well. There are quite a few and all of them are intended for the designer that has a particular forte in the field.

Kitchen and Bath

There are a great many possibilities in this branch because these areas of the house are often in need of dramatic change. The designer dealing in these specific areas is required to have knowledge in cabinetry and plumbing also.

Windows and Draperies

Though it seems a small area to entirely depend on it, but the windows of a house or building play a big role in the overall structure. Basic heating lighting knowledge helps, as well as space management.

Lighting

Often the addition of special lighting can completely change a room's atmosphere. A designer can choose this specific field to work in also.

Designer-Client Relationships

There could be various roles which a designer needs to fill in the designer-client relationship; all depend upon the business structure established. These roles may include: a pure designer, agent, merchant, employee and a contractor.

Pure Designer

In this capacity the interior designer only provides the professional design services; drawings, documents and purchasing specifications for the required interior elements and furnishings. The scope of work often includes the preparation of complete interior plan.

Agent

The designer can act as an agent on the behalf of his client and can place client's orders with the manufacturers and showrooms. Orders and money either go through the designer's firm or under their own name.

Merchant

Most of the design firms sell merchandise also in this regard; the designer becomes a merchant when selling merchandise.

Employee

Some designers are employed by retail stores, where they are usually paid salary plus commission. When the client purchases anything from the store, the designer's service may be included or offered for an extra fee. Sometimes designers work for the companies that manufacture products for interior projects. The designers are then required to assist in design or for selling these products. Usually the products are unusual, a designer's input is therefore required to demonstrate the purpose and relationship of the products to the market of today.

Contractor

A designer can also act as a contractor, by employing workers required to do construction, finish surfaces, and handle drapery and window treatments and so on. Sometimes the craftsmen are employed directly by the design firms or they work on contractual basis or freelance.

A Designer's Basic Considerations for Design a Scheme

There are three basics on which the whole building of a well-planned room stands up, these are:

- Function
- Mood
- Style

Function

The interior designer, when planning a room scheme, allows it to function at its best. This involves deciding how the space can be split into different zones; what should be done about the wiring, lighting, ceiling, floor, walls and windows. In general, what can be improved and how. A complete analysis of this gives the designer a framework on which they can build whatever mood or style is required.

In order to develop clear idea about the function of a room, a designer will have to know the purpose for which the room will be used and is being planned for. They will have to ascertain what it is needed for, how will it be used and who will use it. The function of a room is about practicality, comfort and the detailing required in the room.

Good interior design is as much about practicality, comfort and detailing as it is about the mood and style. However beautiful the window treatments, however original the colour schemes, however splendid the furnishings, no one will appreciate unless the room is comfortable overall and it functions as it should.

Mood

When people think about the effect they want to create in their homes, what they are often considering is the mood or atmosphere: whether a room is to have a sense of being relaxed or formal, stimulating or calming, cool and airy or warm and cosy. Mood relates to how you want to feel when you are in the room. If a space has several functions, such as a living room which includes a play area or a home office that converts to a guest bedroom, when needed, it may be necessary to alter the mood also, according to who is using the room and at what time of the day.

Light and colour have a strong impact on mood. Subdued lights are relaxing and bright lights are stimulating. If you use very bright lights in a room that is meant for relaxing, it will not meet the needs and requirements of the mood wanted. Similarly, soft creams and quiet taupe colours send out very different signals compared to hot reds and rich greens.

Texture is also important. A room decorated with simple cottons and linens is very different in character than one dominated by chenille and velvets. The same is true of the surface materials; a wooden floor provides different atmosphere to a thick wool carpet. Mood also depends upon the function of the room and the climate in which someone wants to live.

Style

The style is mainly about putting a look together whereas mood relates how you want to feel when in the room. Styles can be traditional, modern, American country, oriental, Gothic etc.

The inspiration for interiors can be many and varied. Travel, for example, has a strong influence, as do references from the museums or art galleries. Interior magazines and books on different subjects from decorative tiles to Indian palaces, all offer a wealth of inspiration. Inspiration can come from a single object like an oriental carpet, or a painting can suggest a colour scheme for an entire room. If two people have to share a room and both have different tastes, traditional verses modern for example, you can start by creating a neutral backdrop and can then add elements that will appeal to both the parties.

When choosing a decorative style for a room also consider the architectural style of the room. Look at the features like cornices, skirting boards, fireplaces, dados, doors, and windows, and then decide if all these features are compatible with the style that you want to create.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *A History of Interior Design* (By John Pile)
- ✓ *The Fundamentals of Interior Design* (By Simon Dodsworth)