Interior Designers

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Significant Points

- Keen competition is expected for jobs because many talented individuals are attracted to this occupation.

- About 26 percent are self-employed.

- Postsecondary education—especially a bachelor's degree—is recommended for entry-level positions; some States license interior designers.

Nature of the Work

Interior designers draw upon many disciplines to enhance the function, safety, and aesthetics of interior spaces. Their main concerns are with how different colors, textures, furniture, lighting, and space work together to meet the needs of a building's occupants. Designers plan interior spaces of almost every type of building, including offices, airport terminals, theaters, shopping malls, restaurants, hotels, schools, hospitals, and private residences. Good design can boost office productivity, increase sales, attract a more affluent clientele, provide a more relaxing hospital stay, or increase a building's market value.

Traditionally, most interior designers focused on decorating—choosing a style and color palette and then selecting appropriate furniture, floor and window coverings, artwork, and lighting. However, an increasing number of designers are becoming involved in architectural detailing, such as crown molding and built-in bookshelves, and in planning layouts of buildings undergoing renovation, including helping to determine the location of windows, stairways, escalators, and walkways.

Interior designers must be able to read blueprints, understand building and fire codes, and know how to make space accessible to people who are disabled. Designers frequently collaborate with architects, electricians, and building contractors to ensure that designs are safe and meet construction requirements.

Whatever space they are working on, almost all designers follow the same process. The first step, known as programming, is to determine the client's needs and wishes. The designer usually meets face-to-face with the client to find out how the space will be used and to get an idea of the client's preferences and budget. For example, the designer might inquire about a family's cooking habits if the family is remodeling a kitchen or ask about a store or restaurant's target customer in order to pick an appropriate motif. The designer also will visit the space to take inventory of existing furniture and equipment and identify positive attributes of the space and potential problems.

Then, the designer formulates a design plan and estimates costs. Today, designs often are created with the use of computer-aided design (CAD), which provides more detail and easier corrections than sketches made by hand. Once the designer completes the proposed design, he or she will present it to the client and make revisions based on the client's input.

When the design concept is decided upon, the designer will begin specifying the materials, finishes, and furnishings required, such as furniture, lighting, flooring, wall covering, and artwork. Depending on the complexity of the project, the designer also might submit drawings for approval by a construc-

tion inspector to ensure that the design meets building codes. If a project requires structural work, the designer works with an architect or engineer for that part of the project. Most designs also require the hiring of contractors to do technical work, such as lighting, plumbing, or electrical wiring. Often designers choose contractors and write work contracts.

Finally, the designer develops a timeline for the project, coordinates contractor work schedules, and makes sure work is completed on time. The designer oversees the installation of the design elements, and after the project is complete, the designer, together with the client, pay follow-up visits to the building site to ensure that the client is satisfied. If the client is not satisfied, the designer makes corrections.

Designers who work for furniture or home and garden stores sell merchandise in addition to offering design services. In-store designers provide services, such as selecting a style and color scheme that fits the client's needs or finding suitable accessories and lighting, similar to those offered by other interior designers. However, in-store designers rarely visit clients' spaces and use only a particular store's products or catalogs.

Interior designers sometimes supervise assistants who carry out their plans and perform administrative tasks, such as reviewing catalogues and ordering samples. Designers who run their own businesses also may devote considerable time to developing new business contacts, examining equipment and space needs, and attending to business matters.

Although most interior designers do many kinds of projects, some specialize in one area of interior design. Some specialize in the type of building space—usually residential or commercial—while others specialize in a certain design element or type of client, such as health care facilities. The most common specialties of this kind are lighting, kitchen and bath, and closet designs. However, designers can specialize in almost any area of design, including acoustics and noise abatement, security, electronics and home theaters, home spas, and indoor gardens.

Three areas of design that are becoming increasingly popular are ergonomic design, elder design, and environmental—or green—design. Ergonomic design involves designing work spaces and furniture that emphasize good posture and minimize muscle strain on the body. Elder design involves planning interior space to aid in the movement of people who are elderly and disabled. Green design involves selecting furniture and carpets that are free of chemicals and hypoallergenic and selecting construction materials that are energy efficient or are made from renewable resources

Work environment. Working conditions and places of employment vary. Interior designers employed by large corporations or design firms generally work regular hours in well-lighted and comfortable settings. Designers in smaller design consulting firms or those who freelance generally work on a contract, or job, basis. They frequently adjust their workday to suit their clients' schedules and deadlines, meeting with clients during evening or weekend hours when necessary. Consultants and self-employed designers tend to work longer hours and in smaller, more congested environments.

Interior designers may work under stress to meet deadlines, stay on budget, and please clients. Self-employed designers also are under pressure to find new clients to maintain a steady income.

Designers may work in their own offices or studios or in clients' homes or offices. They also may travel to other locations,

such as showrooms, design centers, clients' exhibit sites, and manufacturing facilities. With the increased speed and sophistication of computers and advanced communications networks, designers may form international design teams, serve a more geographically dispersed clientele, research design alternatives by using information on the Internet, and purchase supplies electronically.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Postsecondary education, especially a bachelor's degree, is recommended for entry-level positions in interior design. Two-year and 3-year programs also are available. Some States license interior designers.

Education and training. Postsecondary education, especially a bachelor's degree, is recommended for entry-level positions in interior design. Training programs are available from professional design schools or from colleges and universities and usually take 2 to 4 years to complete. Graduates of 2-year or 3-year programs are awarded certificates or associate degrees in interior design and normally qualify as assistants to interior designers upon graduation. Graduates with a bachelor's degree usually qualify for a formal design apprenticeship program.

The National Association of Schools of Art and Design accredits approximately 250 postsecondary institutions with pro-

Interior designers often review a large number of samples in order to choose an appropriate design for interior spaces.

grams in art and design. Most of these schools award a degree in interior design. Applicants may be required to submit sketches and other examples of their artistic ability. Basic coursework includes computer-aided design (CAD), drawing, perspective, spatial planning, color and fabrics, furniture design, architecture, ergonomics, ethics, and psychology.

The National Council for Interior Design Accreditation also accredits interior design programs that lead to a bachelor's degree. In 2007, there were 145 accredited bachelor's degree programs in interior design in the United States; most are part of schools or departments of art, architecture, and home economics.

After the completion of formal training, interior designers will enter a 1-year to 3-year apprenticeship to gain experience before taking a licensing exam. Most apprentices work in design or architecture firms under the supervision of an experienced designer. Apprentices also may choose to gain experience working as an in-store designer in furniture stores. The National Council of Interior Design offers the Interior Design Experience Program, which helps entry-level interior designers gain valuable work experience by supervising work experience and offering mentoring services and workshops to new designers.

Licensure. Twenty-three States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico register or license interior designers. The National Council administers the licensing exam for Interior Design Qualification. To be eligible to take the exam, applicants must have at least 6 years of combined education and experience in interior design, of which at least 2 years must be postsecondary education in design.

Once candidates have passed the qualifying exam, they are granted the title of Certified, Registered, or Licensed Interior Designer, depending on the State. Continuing education is required to maintain licensure.

Other qualifications. Membership in a professional association is one indication of an interior designer's qualifications and professional standing. The American Society of Interior Designers is the largest professional association for interior designers in the United States. Interior designers can qualify for membership with at least a 2-year degree and work experience.

Employers increasingly prefer interior designers who are familiar with computer-aided design software and the basics of architecture and engineering to ensure that their designs meet building safety codes.

In addition to possessing technical knowledge, interior designers must be creative, imaginative, and persistent and must be able to communicate their ideas visually, verbally, and in writing. Because tastes in style can change quickly, designers need to be well read, open to new ideas and influences, and quick to react to changing trends. Problem-solving skills and the ability to work independently and under pressure are additional important traits. People in this field need self-discipline to start projects on their own, to budget their time, and to meet deadlines and production schedules. Good business sense and sales ability also are important, especially for those who freelance or run their own business.

Certification and advancement. Optional certifications in kitchen and bath design are available from the National Kitchen

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-2016	
				Number	Percent
Interior designers	27-1025	72,000	86,000	14,000	19

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

and Bath Association. The association offers three different levels of certification for kitchen and bath designers, each achieved through training seminars and certification exams.

Beginning interior designers receive on-the-job training and normally need 1 to 3 years of training before they can advance to higher level positions. Experienced designers in large firms may advance to chief designer, design department head, or some other supervisory position. Some experienced designers open their own firms or decide to specialize in one aspect of interior design. Other designers leave the occupation to become teachers in schools of design or in colleges and universities. Many faculty members continue to consult privately or operate small design studios to complement their classroom activities.

Employment

Interior designers held about 72,000 jobs in 2006. Approximately 26 percent were self-employed. About 26 percent of interior designers worked in specialized design services. The rest of the interior designers provided design services in architectural and landscape architectural services, furniture and home-furnishing stores, building material and supplies dealers, and residential building construction companies. Many interior designers also performed freelance work in addition to holding a salaried job in interior design or another occupation.

Job Outlook

Employment of interior designers is expected to be faster than average; however, keen competition for jobs is expected.

Employment change. Employment of interior designers is expected to grow 19 percent from 2006 to 2016, faster than the average for all occupations. Economic expansion, growing homeowner wealth, and an increasing interest in interior design will increase demand for designers.

Recent increases in homeowner wealth and the growing popularity of home improvement television programs have increased demand for residential design services. Homeowners have been using the equity in their homes to finance new additions, remodel aging kitchens and bathrooms, and update the general décor of the home. Many homeowners also have requested design help in creating year-round outdoor living spaces.

However, this same growth in home improvement television programs and discount furniture stores has spurred a trend in do-it-yourself design, which could hamper employment growth of designers. Nevertheless, some clients will still hire designers for initial consultations.

Demand from businesses in the hospitality industry—hotels, resorts, and restaurants—is expected to be high because of an expected increase in tourism. Demand for interior design services from the health care industry also is expected to be high because of an anticipated increase in demand for facilities that will accommodate the aging population. Designers will be needed to make these facilities as comfortable and homelike as possible for patients.

Some interior designers choose to specialize in one design element to create a niche for themselves in an increasingly competitive market. The demand for kitchen and bath design is growing in response to the growing demand for home remodeling. Designs using the latest technology in, for example, home theaters, state-of-the-art conference facilities, and security systems are expected to be especially popular. In addition, demand for home spas, indoor gardens, and outdoor living space should continue to increase.

Extensive knowledge of ergonomics and green design are expected to be in demand. Ergonomic design has gained in popularity with the growth in the elderly population and workplace safety requirements. The public's growing awareness of environmental quality and the growing number of individuals with allergies and asthma are expected to increase the demand for green design.

Job prospects. Interior designers are expected to face keen competition for available positions because many talented individuals are attracted to this profession. Individuals with little or no formal training in interior design, as well as those lacking creativity and perseverance, will find it very difficult to establish and maintain a career in this occupation.

As the economy grows, more private businesses and consumers will request the services of interior designers. However, design services are considered a luxury expense and may be subject to fluctuations in the economy. For example, decreases in consumer and business income and spending caused by a slow economy can have a detrimental effect on employment of interior designers.

Earnings

Median annual earnings for wage and salary interior designers were $42,260 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between $31,830 and $57,230. The lowest 10 percent earned less than $24,270, and the highest 10 percent earned more than $78,760. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of interior designers in May 2006 were:

Architectural, engineering, and related services $46,750
Architectural services...46,750
Specialized design services...43,250
Furniture stores 38,980
Building material and supplies dealers 36,650

Interior design salaries vary widely with the specialty, type of employer, number of years of experience, and reputation of the individuals. Among salaried interior designers, those in large specialized design and architectural firms tend to earn higher

and more stable salaries. Interior designers working in retail stores usually earn a commission, which can be irregular.

For residential design projects, self-employed interior designers and those working in smaller firms usually earn a per-hour consulting fee, plus a percentage of the total cost of furniture, lighting, artwork, and other design elements. For commercial projects, they might charge a per-hour consulting fee, charge by the square footage, or charge a flat fee for the whole project. Also, designers who use specialty contractors usually earn a percentage of the contractor's earnings on the project in return for hiring the contractor. Self-employed designers must provide their own benefits.

Related Occupations

Workers in other occupations who design or arrange objects to enhance their appearance and function include architects, except landscape and naval; artists and related workers; commercial and industrial designers; fashion designers; floral designers; graphic designers; and landscape architects.

Sources of Additional Information

For information on degrees, continuing education, and licensure programs in interior design and interior design research, contact:

➤ American Society of Interior Designers, 608 Massachusetts Ave. NE., Washington, DC 20002.
Internet: **http://www.asid.org**

For a list of schools with accredited bachelor's degree programs in interior design, contact:
➤ Foundation for Interior Design Education Research, 146 Monroe Center NW., Suite 1318, Grand Rapids, MI 49503.
Internet: **http://www.fider.org**

For general information about art and design and a list of accredited college-level programs, contact:
➤ National Association of Schools of Art and Design, 11250 Roger Bacon Dr., Suite 21, Reston, VA 20190.
Internet: **http://nasad.arts-accredit.org**

For information on State licensing requirements and exams, and the Interior Design Experience Program, contact:
➤ National Council for Interior Design Qualification, 1200 18th St.NW., Suite 1001, Washington, DC 20036-2506.
Internet: **http://www.ncidq.org**

For information on careers, continuing education, and certification programs in the interior design specialty of residential kitchen and bath design, contact:
➤ National Kitchen and Bath Association, 687 Willow Grove St., Hackettstown, NJ 07840.
Internet: **http://www.nkba.org/student**