



# Professional Practice FOR Interior Designers

FIFTH EDITION

Christine M. Piotrowski, FASID, IIDA



PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE FOR

# Interior Designers



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**Interior Designers**

**Fifth Edition**

**Christine M Piotrowski, FASID, IIDA**

**WILEY**

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*For my parents, Martha and Casmer:  
I am sorry you are not here to share this with me.*



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Part of the education of an interior designer consists of learning about the business practices of the profession. Students cannot assume that a business's success results solely from the innate creativity of the designers who own or work for a firm. It also comes from the quality of the professional practices of those involved in the business.

Regardless of the size of firm or design specialty, professional interior designers must understand and conduct themselves as businesspeople. Clients expect interior designers to be responsible for their decisions and practice. They expect excellence not only in creative work but in business conduct as well. This naturally results in an interior designer's ever-increasing need for comprehensive knowledge of business.

As a design professional, manager, educator, and business owner, I have long believed in the importance of effective business practices for this profession. I have seen where good business practices have led to success. I have seen where poor business practices have led to frustration for business owners. My interests in trying to help students and professionals become better in their business led to the publication of the first edition of this book.

I have consistently updated this book to offer a comprehensive resource that provides a solid background in business practices for students. Educators should not feel that they must try to cover everything, and students should not feel overwhelmed by the contents. Educators can easily tailor their classes around the contents to meet the instructor's desired focus and an institution's priorities.

Its comprehensive content also makes it a practical choice for practitioners wanting to start or grow their own business. There are many chapters that are generally of greater concern to a business owner than a student, just as there are some chapters that will be of greater interest to students than professionals. For both professionals and students, *Professional Practice for Interior Designers* remains one of the primary references for the NCIDQ examination concerning many aspects of business practice.

The profession of interior design continues to be transformed. Concerns for legal and ethical business operations, sustainable design practice, the impact of technology, new ways of collaborating with industry cohorts, and generational changes in the client marketplace have all had an impact on business practice. These issues and others of importance are included in this new edition.

Changes in the outline of chapters, and content additions and deletions, were undertaken after receiving input from a variety of educators and professionals. Current information on business in general and interior design business in particular was also obtained by a review of relevant literature to gauge impact on practice. An extensive review and revision of all the text and examples was undertaken to update content. The material in the chapters was

carefully reviewed to eliminate duplication of material, and this has, in some cases, led to a reorganization of topics.

Distinctive features of the fifth edition include the following:

1. Based on recommendations by educators, the material most applicable to what is commonly covered in a business practices class is grouped together at the beginning of the book.
2. The exception to this is that all the career chapters are grouped together at the end of the book.
3. New topics important to practice in the 21st century have been included throughout the book so that it continues to be a comprehensive text on interior design business practices. Those new sections are highlighted later in this preface.
4. Chapters most applicable to organizing and managing a practice now appear together. They follow a logical sequence of topics, from developing the business idea, to business plan and structure, to finances, marketing, and employee issues.
5. Each chapter begins with a list of critical issues to help the student study for exams; instructors can use these for class discussion or written assignments.
6. A box titled “NCIDQ Component” indicates the chapters or parts of chapters covering material that might be part of the examination.
7. Additional “What Would You Do?” scenarios have been added at the end of the chapter.
8. Important terms have been listed at the end of each chapter.
9. A list of Web sites relevant to the chapter content has been added at the end of each chapter.
10. The text remains easy to read, with many bulleted lists highlighting key points.
11. Icons are placed in the margins, showing where related content appears on the companion Web site, [www.wiley.com/go/ppid](http://www.wiley.com/go/ppid).



So that readers can see where new sections and topics have been added, those items are italicized in the following discussion about the changes in the text.

Chapters 1 and 2 provide a comprehensive overview of the profession. Topics include why the study of business practices is important, the definition of a profession, the NCIDQ examination, professional association requirements, and the importance of licensing. *A new section in Chapter 1 provides an overview of the business of interior design and how that relates to students and the study of professional practice. New sections have been added to discuss professional responsibility in a changing world, the value of interior design, and social responsibility.*

Chapters 3 and 4 remain at the beginning of the book to highlight the importance of ethical and legal practice. The “What Would You Do?” discussion items at the end of Chapter 3 have been expanded. *Information on cyber law and copyright now appears in Chapter 4.*

Based on recommendations by educators, Chapter 5 provides a presentation of how and where designers work. This was done to give an overview of the “working world” of the design practitioner. *A new section called “Expectations” discusses what the employer views as keys to what it will be looking for in a new employee.*

The next four chapters cover critical information concerning how design firms earn revenue. Chapter 6 covers fees and project compensation methods;

Chapter 7 details design contracts specifically related to design services; Chapter 8 details product pricing of goods; and Chapter 9 outlines important information about sales law and warranties related to selling merchandise. *New information has been added concerning proper signatures on contracts, strategies for avoiding contract disputes, and using small claims courts.*

The chapters concerning business project management begin with a discussion of trade sources in Chapter 10. The business side of project management is detailed in Chapter 11 with *new material added concerning research—especially evidence-based design—as a project benefit, project delivery methods, selecting project teams, integrated design, and building information modeling.* After careful review and updating, *a new section discussing sustainable product specifications and an explanation of construction agreements were added to Chapter 12.* Chapters 13 and 14 have been updated and revised.

Chapter 15 and the next five chapters focus on the development and management of a design practice. After thoroughly reviewing and updating existing material, a few chapters have been reorganized for clarity and new information added sparingly. However, *important discussions on the triple bottom line, benchmarking, and green office management have been added.*

The former two chapters on accounting were combined into Chapter 21. Material has been reorganized to better delineate the flow of the accounting process for interior designers. In particular, the first part of the chapter should make it easier for students to understand the importance of the forms and processes necessary to manage the firm's finances.

Chapters 22 through 26 form a group on marketing and selling. It is hoped that the reorganization of topics in the first three chapters will not only be conducive to a better understanding of the importance of marketing for the continued health of a design firm, but also act as a discussion of strategies and tools to make that happen. *New material has been added concerning specializing in green design, the changing demographics of clients, social media marketing, and the buyer decision-making process.* A revision of the previous discussions on etiquette is included, as professionals still deem it a necessary topic.

Chapter 27 combines the previous edition's two chapters on employee management. This reorganization and revision is expected to make this information more logically sequenced. Although brand new material was not deemed necessary, the chapter was thoroughly reviewed and modified for current practices.

As previously mentioned, the last three chapters group the information concerning career decisions and the job search. This was done because many educators report that these chapters are often covered together. Materials in all the chapters were carefully reviewed and revised based on current practice. Emphasis was placed on the digital job search and tools. Chapter 30 highlights the job interview and the transition from student to professional. *It also includes a new section concerning on-the-job strategies to assist emerging professionals and practitioners make the best of their current job situation.*

There is an extensive and updated list of references covering the topics in this book. Additional updated references to articles and other resources (including Web sites of organizations and sources of information useful to the reader) appear again in this edition.

Ancillary materials, including business forms, brief articles, and additional references, is available on this book's companion Web site ([www.wiley.com/go/ppid](http://www.wiley.com/go/ppid)) whether readers purchase an electronic version or printed version of the text. The forms are PDFs so that they can be used in class.

A revised Instructor's Manual—available only to educators—can be obtained online by contacting the publisher. The Instructor's Manual includes

a detailed table of contents that will help an instructor transition from the fourth to the fifth edition. As with previous Instructor's Manuals, a test bank and discussion items are provided for each chapter. A series of Power Point slides are available to instructors for the first time as a teaching resource.

Since its first publication in 1990, this book has become the leading choice of educators for use in teaching an interior design business practices class in colleges and universities throughout the world. Educators often cite it for its clear writing style and content based on realistic practice situations. I am very proud and humbled by the extent of its adoption and practical use.

**Visit the companion Web site:  
[www.wiley.com/go/ppid](http://www.wiley.com/go/ppid)  
for additional learning resources**

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe a great measure of gratitude to the many designers, organizations, and educators that have contributed to this and previous editions of this book. Their unselfish sharing of information, business forms, and editorial comment has helped continue to enrich this book.

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Numerous educators have provided insights and comments that have helped in the revision of this book. They are too numerous to mention, but I want specifically to thank Liz Thompson of the Art Institute of Pittsburg; Robert Krikac from Washington State University; Cindy Stedman from the Art Institute of Phoenix; Carl Clark from Northern Arizona University; Dr. Carol Morrow from the Art Institute of Phoenix; Robin Wagner from Marymount University; Christine Kennedy of the Art Institute of Michigan; Tom Witt from Arizona State University; and Renee Hern of the International Academy of Design and Technology in Nashville, TN.

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Lastly, I want to thank the readers who have continued to find this book an important resource for the operation of their businesses and as a learning tool for students. Your continued support and praise has been humbling and inspiring.

Christine M. Piotrowski

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE FOR

# Interior Designers



# Interior Design as a Profession

*After completing this chapter you should be able to:*

- Discuss why the study of professional practices is important to any entry-level designer.
- Explain how interior design is different from decorating as if you were talking to a client.
- Identify the characteristics of a profession.
- Explain how these characteristics relate to the practice of interior design.
- Understand the history of the profession in order to learn about the professional practice of interior design.
- Explain how the Great Depression of 1929 affected the interior design professional.
- Name the organizations that became the American Society of Interior Designers and International Interior Design Association.
- Identify key changes that led to the increasing professionalism of interior design.
- Compare the practices of residential interior design and commercial interior design.
- Explain how the section on the business of interior design affects your understanding of the profession as a whole.
- Discuss how interior design provides value to a residential client and a small business owner.

The stereotype of the interior design profession has been of someone who understands how to use color and can rearrange furniture. This is, as you already know, not the full story of what an interior design professional is or does.

Interior design is a complex process and it requires learning much more than the color wheel. The body of knowledge and skills needed by professionals is extensive, and the work of the interior designer—regardless of specialty—is demanding as well as exciting. The professional interior designer's solutions have to meet functional needs of the client, as well as result in a pleasing environment. The individuals who design interiors must be sure that their designs meet building, fire safety, and accessibility codes. Interior design solutions must also meet sustainable design criteria required by the owners.

A professional interior designer must be willing to accept the legal and ethical consequences of his or her actions. Those actions impact the general public, clients, and other practitioners. Local laws (including professional regulation, where it exists) can impact the work of the professional interior designer. The profession of interior design is also a business. The management and efficient operation of a business are critical to the successful ongoing life of an interior design practice.

Society tends to grant professionals higher status, money, and respect, yet these do not come automatically upon attaining the educational criteria required of the profession. They come to the individual who has the attitude of service, commitment, and knowledge that is expected of the professional. This is no less true for an interior design professional than any of the “traditional” professions.

This chapter, to use a design metaphor, is a foundation of information important to the overall study of the profession and how it functions as a business. The professional practice of interior design requires attention to the business procedures, strategies, and protocols that any business must use for the business to be successful, profitable, and long lasting. Designing interiors is not only an enjoyable way to make a living, but also an awesome responsibility.

## **WHY STUDY PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE?**

The profession of interior design is incredibly fascinating. Practitioners have the opportunity to design the interiors of multimillion-dollar houses or help a family have a more pleasing and nurturing home environment. Practitioners also have the opportunity to help a small business or huge corporation provide an interior environment that positively influences their clients and employees and helps the business achieve greater functionality and success.

The profession of interior design is also a business, so knowledge and application of business practice concepts are essential. A designer who is bad at business subconsciously hints to clients that they can take advantage of the designer by arguing and second-guessing the designer’s decisions. Furthermore, if the firm is not successful as a business, if it does not sustain profitability, it makes no difference how creative the practitioners might be: The poorly run business is likely to fail.

Interior design is much more than a way to express creativity. It is an endeavor that must recognize the importance of ethical conduct. It is about being socially responsible and realizing that, in today’s world, the interior design profession has a global reach. It’s not just about “us” in the United States, it’s about all of “us” on this planet. It is not a hobby; it is not the quick, do-it-yourself situation portrayed on cable TV.

An interior design firm must make a profit—or at least hopes to consistently make a profit. Studying and applying business practices to the management of the firm helps the owner have a greater chance of achieving a profit. If the business owner is to allow his or her company to grow to the extent that he or she would like it to grow, the owner must understand all the aspects of professional practice.

As an employee, you will be held accountable for the ongoing success of an interior design firm. You have a responsibility to work productively and bill those hours, or otherwise professionally and effectively complete your job tasks. You need to have some awareness of the expense it takes to operate a practice so that you do not waste company resources.

Students must master a basic understanding of business practices. Although a business practices class may come late in the curriculum, that placement does not make it any less important. I believe it is one of the two most important classes in a student's curriculum, even if it's not the most important to you individually. Without an understanding of the professional practice of interior design, as a student, emerging professional, or employee, your success will be limited.

Finally, many topics in this book are topics important to the National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ) examination. Business topics are also common parts of other certification or licensing programs, as they are expected to be within curriculums accredited by the Council for Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA). If business were not important to the profession, these groups would not include business practices topics in their certification/accreditation requirements.

An interior design firm owner once told me that he wants to hire individuals who want his job. That doesn't happen without knowing how to run a business.

## DEFINING THE PROFESSION

Compared to many other professions, such as teaching and medicine, interior design is a relatively young. The use of the term *interior design* did not appear in general usage until after World War II, and the profession defined by any term did not really exist much before the 1900s. Individuals and organizations involved in the interior design profession work tirelessly to help the profession gain recognition in the minds of the public, as well as among practitioners and allied professionals.

What constitutes interior design has been debated and nurtured for many decades. Much of the public believes that "people who decorate interiors are interior decorators." They often do not understand that there is a difference between decoration and design. The words of an article by Charlotte S. Jensen, FASID, then president of the NCIDQ board, still ring true: "Interior design is not the same as decoration. . . . Decoration is the furnishing or adorning a space with fashionable or beautiful things. Decoration, although a valuable and important element of an interior, is not solely concerned with human interaction or human behavior. Interior design is all about human behavior and human interaction."<sup>1</sup> And much more, many would say.

The most commonly quoted and utilized definition of *interior design* comes from the NCIDQ. This definition, offered in part with the complete version presented in the appendix, has been acknowledged and supported by the interior design professional associations:

Interior design is a multifaceted profession in which creative and technical solutions are applied within a structure to achieve a built interior environment. These solutions are functional, enhance the quality of life and culture of the occupants, and are aesthetically attractive. Designs are created in response to and coordinated with the building shell, and acknowledge the physical location and social context of the project. Designs must adhere to code and regulatory requirements, and encourage the principles of environmental sustainability. The interior design process follows a systematic and coordinated methodology, including research, analysis and integration of knowledge into the creative process, whereby the needs and resources of the client are satisfied to produce an interior space that fulfills the project goals.<sup>2</sup>

Another excellent definition comes from outside the profession. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, interior designers “plan, design and furnish interiors of residential, commercial or industrial buildings. Formulate design which is practical, aesthetic, and conducive to intended purposes, such as raising productivity, selling merchandise, or improving life style.”<sup>3</sup>

As you can see from these, interior design is much more than the stereotypical idea of picking out colors and fabrics. The responsibilities and skills required also go beyond those of the individual who has a flair for decorating.

## WHAT IS A PROFESSION?

A profession is much more than the words in a definition provided by interested groups. According to one dictionary, a *profession* is “a paid occupation, especially one that involves prolonged training and a formal qualification.”<sup>4</sup> Johnson writes, “As defined by sociologists, a profession is an occupation that is based on theoretical and practical knowledge and training in a particular field. . . . Professions tend to be credentialed and regulated in relation to certain standards of performance and ethics, which makes them more autonomous and independent than other occupations.”<sup>5</sup>

Some argue that interior design is not really a profession. This has often occurred when discussions with state legislatures concerning regulation of interior design or use of the title “interior designer” take place. Yet the interior design profession meets the standards set for defining a profession.

The profession of interior design, as we know it today, is guided by all the points noted by both of these authors and as further clarified by the definitions. If the measure of a profession involves the criteria offered by the preceding material, then interior design is a profession that has evolved and continues to evolve. Gordon Marshall writes, “A profession includes some central regulatory body to ensure the standard of performance of individual members; a code of conduct; careful management of knowledge in relation to the expertise which constitutes the basis of the profession’s activities; and lastly, control of number, selection, and training of new entrants.”<sup>6</sup>

A professional does not emerge merely as a consequence of learning the technical principles required in the profession. Becoming a professional also requires an attitude of dedicated commitment to the work one does and to the advancement of the profession. Understanding what it takes to organize and maintain an interior design practice follows an understanding of the roots and contemporary concerns of the profession. In the 21st century, having talent as a designer is not enough to survive the ups and downs of the economic roller coaster.

How would you define the interior design profession?

## PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY IN A CHANGING WORLD

Have you ever had the opportunity to stand below the soaring branches of a sequoia tree? I had a chance to do this when I visited Sequoia National Park in California several years ago. These magnificent redwoods can grow to more than 200 feet tall and live for more than 2000 years! I visited a site within the park where trees had been harvested in the late 1800s. The base of the trunk is huge. You don’t just walk up to the remaining stump and sit down. I walked up stairs to the top of a stump that was more than 10 feet above the ground. The surface size of that stump, as I recall, was about the size of a two-car garage.

It turns out that the wood of the sequoia tree—a species of redwood—although resistant to fire and decay, is very brittle, making it unsuitable for building. The wood was mostly used at the turn of the century for fence posts, grape stakes, and shingles. What a waste of a piece of our magnificent natural world!

Why is this story offered in a book about interior design professional practice?

Our industry uses huge amounts of natural resources in the creation of the products we specify for homes and businesses. The use of these materials has led to the depletion of many resources and threatens others. Construction and remodeling contribute to landfills at alarming levels. According to the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), “commercial construction projects generate up to 2.5 pounds of solid waste per square foot of floor space.”<sup>7</sup> The math means that a 10,000-square-foot building could produce up to 12.5 tons of waste! That is a lot of wasted resources going to the landfill.

The choices we make when we specify goods and design solutions for the client can have profound future effects. Removing and disposing of carpeting that still has some useful life is a poor choice if there is a place in your community that can utilize this material. Exotic woods like rosewood are beautiful—yet rosewood forests are being depleted, and should you choose to specify this exotic wood, you must be sure it is coming from a legal source. Consider the specification of paints made with volatile organic compounds that harm users of the space as well as the contractors doing the work. I know of a painter who worked in the construction industry for more than 30 years. He told me he now has only one lung, in large part because of the volatile materials he breathed those many years.

Of course, the interest in sustainable design and the willingness of clients and designers to embrace this concept in interiors varies widely. Often at issue is the assumed versus actual additional cost of specifying environmentally friendly or green products. A client who has serious allergies or respiratory problems suffers allergic reactions to the chemicals in many floor coverings, furniture products, and various textiles. Naturally, this type of client easily sees the benefits of green products. Commercial clients may see that the benefits of “going green” are worth an additional cost, but many are still reluctant to spend the extra money. However, design projects using green products and designing a project using the USGBC’s LEED<sup>®</sup> guidelines continue to gain momentum.

What we do as professionals—the specification of interior spaces and products—affects both the environment and the users of spaces. It behooves interior designers to learn more about sustainable design and how to mitigate environmental damage and support users’ health. Interior designers who wish to market or encourage the use of green design concepts must become thoroughly educated on the benefits to clients of using green products.

Another important issue for interior designers relates to the aging population—or should I say the aging of our client base? Baby boomers—those born between 1946 and 1964—began turning 60 in 2006. The group called “matures,” who were born between 1901 and 1945, represent another large proportion of our population of consumers. The issues of designing a home environment, as well as almost all types of commercial spaces, that are friendly to the senior user are critical.

As an interior designer, you need to realize an important fact about these older age groups: Most do not think of themselves as “old,” nor do they like being treated as old. It is not the interior designer’s responsibility to think of consumers in the older age groups either as being “old” or being less able to take care of themselves. It is, however, the interior designer’s responsibility

to help create a home or working environment that is satisfying, safe, and functional for the users.

Interior designers have a professional responsibility to learn about and apply design concepts that can make a home or business environment safe for all ages and abilities. Universal design concepts come to us as second nature now, as many no doubt like the extra size of an accessible toilet facility or the ease of using a ramp instead of stairs. Designers who are young themselves must learn about the older client and also the diplomacy involved in specifying products that will enhance the environment of their older adult clients.

You no doubt have heard of the term “aging in place.” In relation to the interior design of the home, this refers to a concept of designing or remodeling a residence so that the occupants can remain in their private residence rather than moving to some sort of senior living facility or apartment. Many changes to a residence that will help support or accommodate the inevitable physical changes to residents can be easily incorporated, whether by client choice or simple design specifications.

The concepts of safe and accessible interior design apply to both residential and commercial interiors, and thus should be part of the practice of all interior designers. In a commercial facility, we are guided by accessibility codes that require certain things to be designed into the space to make sure the space is accessible to all users. In a home—especially with younger home owners—many accessibility and safety issues might not be acknowledged until someone breaks a leg skiing and must cope with designs that are incompatible with someone on crutches or must use a wheelchair.

These issues also have become a business choice for many. Some designers have chosen to increase work with clients in senior care and assisted-living facilities. Just as we realize we must abide by accessibility codes in a commercial space, so too should interior designers now look toward simply deciding to meet client needs and demands for the design of LEED®-certified buildings and aging-in-place products and planning concepts.

Sustainable design, universal design, and design for an aging population are as much a way of thinking and a professional responsibility as design specialties. “If not now, when?” was asked about other important topics years ago. It is also asked now: When will you learn more about topics that affect the profession and interior design practice and lead to professional responsibility in a changing world?

The practice of interior design is a continually growing and changing profession. Interior designers must continually keep informed and up to date on critical issues that will likely affect their business in the present or the near future. Our professional responsibility in a changing world will likely take the interior design professional to places he or she never envisioned.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

History classes cover important material on furniture and architecture, but many do not discuss how the interior design profession arose and evolved. This brief section provides some context for that history.

Before the 20th century, interior decoration was the responsibility of artisans, craftsmen, painters, sculptors, and early architects. Shopkeepers were called *ensembliers* or *ateliers* in Europe. According to John Pile, Charles Percier (1764–1838) and Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine (1762–1853) are thought by many to be the first professional interior designers. “Percier and Fontaine conceived of interior spaces developed under their full control in the manner of modern interior designers.”<sup>8</sup>