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18

STICKY SITUATIONS

Design professionals share best practices for navigating the ethical and political aspects of running a successful business.

BY ROBERT NIEMINEN

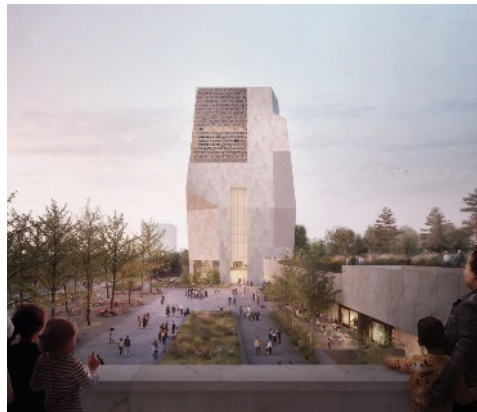


Image: The Obama Foundation

34

LICENSE TO PRACTICE

Regulatory issues affect interior designers across North America, and organizations are at work to uphold and defend the rights of practitioners.

BY BRIAN J. BARTH



Image: Luca Bravo/Unsplash

26

POLITICAL DESIGNS

Commissions for government and political buildings and interiors come with unique challenges, but these designers say the reward is worth the risk.

BY BRIAN LIBBY

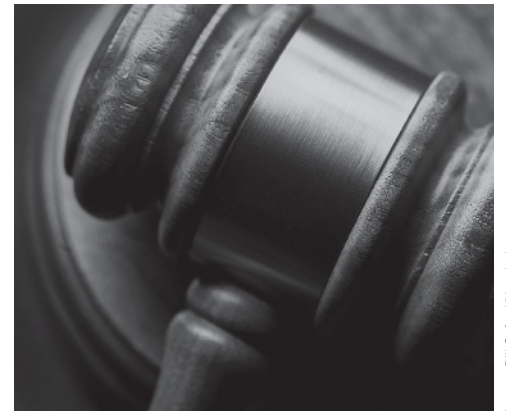


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42

THE MAKING OF A MOVEMENT

Throughout history, architecture and interior design have been direct reflections of the political regimes of the time.

BY CARA GIBBS

40

ICONIC PROFILE: DEBORAH LLOYD FORREST

Designing spaces that are memorable and sustainable is the mission of this driven designer, who has made sophisticated comfort a primary focus.

BY AMBROSE CLANCY



Image: Anthony J. Rayburn

Departments

- 12 An Inside View
- 14 Design Pulse
- 16 Materials
- 24 Design by the Numbers
- 25 Contributors
- 47 Resources and Advertisers
- 50 Up Next

ON THE COVER

Temporary needs, extraordinary design. EVOQ Architecture created a glass-ceilinged voting chamber in the Parliament Hill complex in Ottawa, Ontario, to accommodate the House of Commons during construction.



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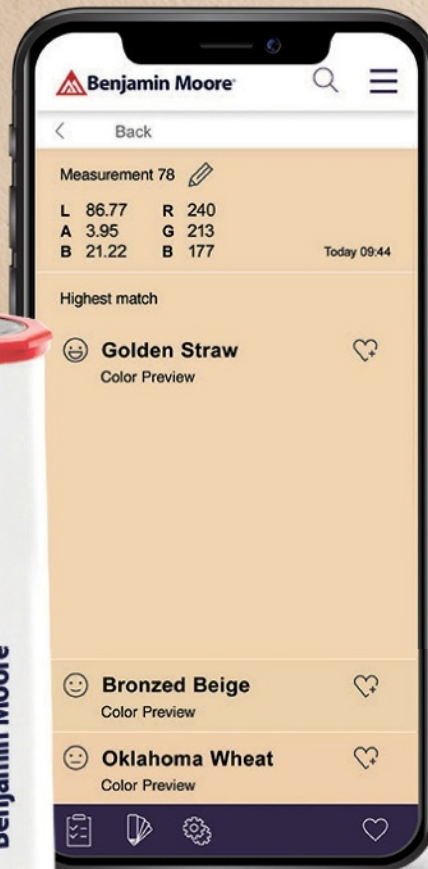
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GETTING POLITICAL

Randy Fiser,
CEO, ASID, and
Tony Brenders,
CEO, IDC
(Image: Lindsay
Cephas)



As this issue went to press, the United States was in the early throes of what promises to be a heated election year, articles of impeachment had been filed against the current U.S. president, and The Duke of Sussex had officially given up his title and removed himself from his royal duties. Suffice it to say, politics were keeping conversations going the world over, and that goes for the design world as well. Whether it's your current design commission or your daily business operations, politics are most certainly a part of every design professional's life.

As this new decade kicks off, *i+D* takes a look at the countless ways design and politics are intertwined—from the design of the buildings that house our politicians to the legislation that dictates a designer's practice rights. We dive into your daily business and how ethics and personal politics play a role in client interaction and project decisions ("Sticky Situations," p. 18), and we go deeper still into the legislation that determines your rights as a practitioner and who legally gets to call themselves an interior designer ("License to Practice," p. 34). We also speak with the designers behind some of the most prominent political commissions in the Americas ("Political Designs," p. 26) and take a step back in history to examine the ways in which prominent design movements have reflected the regimes of their time ("The Making of a Movement," p. 42).

Throughout our built history, the politics of a particular time and place have been memorialized in architecture and interior design—places that go on to become historic houses, museums, and structures, and which serve to offer future generations a glimpse into history and power, and how they have been expressed through design. As designers today navigate the daily politics of operating a successful business, the longevity of creative work always should remain top of mind. For history has proven time and again that regimes will change, but design endures. ●


Randy W. Fiser
ASID CEO





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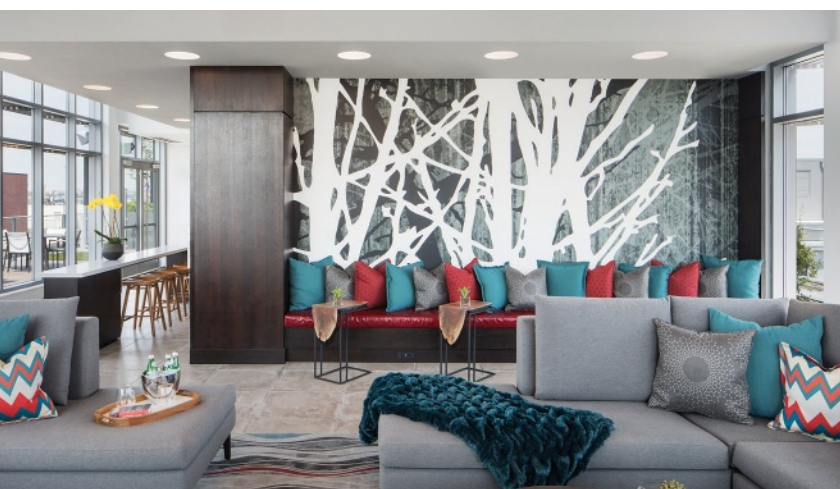
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Natural light floods a modern lounge where biophilic ideas are delivered via a nature-inspired feature wall.
(Image: Andrew Ruggie, courtesy of Perkins Eastman)

HISTORIC FUTURE

IN WASHINGTON, D.C., FORRESTPERKINS STEPPED IN TO CREATE A NEW FUTURE FOR THE LURGAN, AN HISTORIC ROWHOUSE WITH INDUSTRIAL OVERTONES THAT REFLECTS THE STYLE AND ENERGY OF ITS SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOODS—THE HIP AND EDGY SHAW DISTRICT AND THE MORE EASY-GOING MOUNT VERNON TRIANGLE.



Multiple outdoor spaces allow this city property to offer a connection to nature as well. (Image: Andrew Rugge, courtesy of Perkins Eastman)

Key to the new design—that includes a new residential tower connected to the rowhouse via a glass-enclosed atrium—is the visual connection to the outdoors and the major sustainable effort behind the project. Previously an apartment building, the original façade of the rowhouse, as well as certain interior historic elements, were saved. Examples of the preservation achievements can be found in the old metal beams still visible in the corridors and the original brick left intact in some of the unit interiors. The marble steps in the entrance of The Lurgan and existing stairwell with metal railing were also preserved. Energy savings are in play here as well, courtesy of the natural light that floods the property via the atrium and abundant use of glass throughout.

Common spaces at The Lurgan offer opportunities to unwind and connect. (Image: Andrew Rugge, courtesy of Perkins Eastman)



The design of the new building, as well as spaces and amenities throughout the property, also speak to tenants in search of a home with healthy living in mind. A fresh-air rooftop, complete with pool, demonstration kitchen, and grilling areas offers an escape from the fast-paced city life at ground level; an outdoor garden courtyard offers swings, a fire pit, and water feature for accessible relaxation; and an indoor/outdoor fitness center reinforces a focus on wellness, including a private yoga studio and outdoor yoga deck.

In the interiors, ForrestPerkins complemented bold architectural materials that play off the original industrial vibe with a warm color palette and rich use of texture and pattern to create an environment that feels both modern and comfortable. Paired with the connection to the outdoors and abundant natural light, the property offers a unique environment that simultaneously feeds demands for city living, a connection to nature, modern design, and a respect for the past.

For a conversation with ForrestPerkins' founder and president, Deborah Lloyd Forrest, see "ICONic Profile," p. 40. ●

—Jennifer Quail

SPECIAL EFFECTS

If there's one common thread among all boutique hotels, it's the desire to provide guests with an experience that is decidedly more unique and personal than they might find anywhere else, even among other boutique hotels. And, with today's 24-hour social media cycle, what property wouldn't want the design of its interiors to be that next viral Instagram post? Bringing such a memorable experience to life is, of course, a task that falls to the interior designers who need to not only seek out products that bring beauty, luxury, and comfort to a property but also must make sure those products are workhorses that meet all levels of safety requirements and are durable enough to survive the wear-and-tear that comes with a consistent turnover of guests.

Luckily for the designers of the interiors, the designers and manufacturers of the products are only getting more creative, offering options to take design and customization to new levels, while keeping all the requirements of a hospitality setting in mind. At the recent BDNY trade show in New York, product designers showed decorative throws that are machine-washable, levels of texture and color woven into carpet to give a more lush and luxurious feel, temporary wallcoverings that can be customized to create truly unique settings, and more. These options are designed to make guests feel more at home, to incorporate thematic hues in a subtle manner, and to create an experience visitors won't soon forget. ●

—Jennifer Quail

1. SHAW CONTRACT. Desert Lights is a new carpet and rug collection that marks Shaw Contract's sixth collaboration with Rockwell Group. Inspired by the plants, animals, and geography of the American Southwest, as well as the light and color transitions of the desert from dawn to dusk, the patterning and colorization of the collection is intended to bring a soothing vibe to hospitality spaces. There are two different construction methods in play here that together allow for pile height customization and plush, sculpted surfaces, as well as advanced dye injection technology to maximize color clarity.

2. TEMPAPER. Tempaper has made a name for itself in the residential market for its user- and wall-friendly removable wallpaper, and the company has now expanded into the hospitality and contract segments. One of the bonuses the company notes for the hospitality market is its product's ability to simply peel off the wall in the event of a redesign, with no damage and consequential repair work to the wall itself. This allows a boutique property to stay fresh and update its look more often for lesser cost. The non-toxic product has particular appeal for high-traffic areas because a damaged panel can simply be peeled off and replaced, and also its vinyl makeup allows for scuffs to be wiped off with a damp cloth.

3. ETHNICRAFT. Traditionally known for its contemporary wooden furniture, Ethnicraft has launched its first textiles line: Refined Layers. Pillows and throws for the collection were designed by artist Dawn Sweitzer and are inspired by her travels and love of nature. Her vision came to life via color, texture, and materials, in her studio in High Point, North Carolina, where she wove the first designs on her artisanal loom. A warm color palette and natural yarn material come together in minimal and abstract patterns. The collection includes a range of 19 pillows, in two sizes, and five throw styles.

4. WALLACE SEWELL. Following up on successful collaborations with DesignTex, West Elm, Anthropologie, and the Transport for London—for which they designed custom seating upholstery for the London Underground—Emma Sewell and Harriet Wallace-Jones have expanded the scope of their namesake company to include machine-washable throws, ideal for a boutique hotel that wants a custom look and feel but also needs to keep concerns of cleanliness top of mind. The pure cotton collection offers a variety of designs that can be tailored to a particular project or client.

Image 1: Shaw Contract/Image 2: Tempaper
Image 3: Ethnicraft/Image 4: Wallace Sewell




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STICKY SITUATIONS

BY ROBERT NIEMINEN

Ethical and political dilemmas should give designers pause—and, ideally, a plan of action

AT THE TIME THIS ARTICLE WENT TO PRESS, JUST OVER A MONTH HAD PASSED SINCE THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES APPROVED ARTICLES OF IMPEACHMENT FOR THE 45TH PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, DONALD TRUMP. THE POLITICAL DRAMA WOULD CONTINUE IN THE PRESS (AND ON TWITTER) AS THE TRIAL MOVED TO THE SENATE AND, AMONG THE CLAMOR, ONE THING REMAINED CLEAR: THE COUNTRY IS EMBROILED IN SCANDAL.

Although most design professionals reading this will never experience the kind of controversy playing out across today's headlines, the industry isn't insulated from politics or questionable business practices. Ethical dilemmas show no partiality, and most designers will likely face situations during their careers that will challenge their ideals and perhaps test their integrity.

How they respond matters because designers have a responsibility to the public and to the profession to conduct themselves in an ethical manner. Failure to do so reflects poorly not only on themselves, but also on the industry as a whole. It's part of the reason the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) publishes and enforces its Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, requiring its members "to conduct their professional practice in a manner that will inspire the respect of clients, suppliers of goods and services to the profession and fellow professional designers, as well as the general public." Similarly, the Interior Designers of Canada (IDC) publishes a Code of Conduct for its annual Design Symposium and for members of its Board of Management as well.

While such guidelines are instructive, they aren't exhaustive. Situations will arise in which designers must make a choice to uphold or compromise their personal and professional values. That's why *i+D* recently spoke with several seasoned practitioners to help offer insights into the often murky political and ethical waters.

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Balancing Beliefs and Business

Pop quiz: Your firm is approached about doing a high-paying project for the National Rifle Association (NRA), but you personally support strict gun-control legislation. Do you shelve your personal beliefs for the economic benefit of a paycheck? Or perhaps you are hired for a project that is or becomes controversial in nature. Does your firm defend its position as to why it has accepted the job?

Sometimes the answers are obvious. At other times, it may depend on the exact nature of the project or client and whether it aligns with your firm's objectives. "It's not necessarily about personal beliefs; it's about, 'What's the mission of your company? What does your company stand for?'" says Kia Weatherspoon, president of Washington, D.C.-based Determined by Design.

With projects that involve firearms, she says designers need to look at the issue holistically rather than allowing personal politics to interfere with their decision making. For instance, police stations house firearms in secure locations to help protect the community. Likewise, Weatherspoon says her firm is working with The American Legion, the nation's largest wartime veterans service organization, on a project that features a secure storage facility for guns. "The thing here is not to put personal beliefs against any particular organization and/or entity. If it doesn't feel right for your firm and its mission, then definitely don't put profit first."

Christine Wozney, principal and owner of two degrees INTERIORS Inc., in Winnipeg, Manitoba, suggests it is a disservice to clients to work on a project if a designer has personal conflicts or does not support or believe in an entity or what they represent. "It is important to maintain your personal integrity in any situation, as your integrity reflects who you are as a person, your brand, and your firm. If your personal beliefs are misaligned with your client's, then it becomes difficult to provide your best work. There are always opportunities for work, and your best work reflects who you are and who your clients are."

Case in point: Jane Rohde, principal and founder of JSR Associates, Inc., in Catonsville, Maryland, finds that in the senior living market ethical considerations aren't frequent, "unless it's somebody who is trying to warehouse older adults." Rohde recalls turning down a client who planned to house 90 seniors in a facility when her team felt 32 would better serve the end users.



Christine Wozney,
two degrees
INTERIORS Inc.



Jane Rohde, JSR
Associates, Inc.

*"It is important to maintain your personal integrity
in any situation, as your integrity reflects who you are
as a person, your brand, and your firm."*

—CHRISTINE WOZNEY





Kia Weatherspoon,
Determined by Design

On another occasion, Rohde felt compelled to discreetly report one of her clients to an ombudsman “because there was a woman who was being seriously neglected in a facility that I walked through.” In this case, it wasn’t the owner or developer of the project who was at fault, but because of Rohde’s actions, an administrator at the facility was removed. “You have to be observant and know that sometimes if things aren’t right, you have to do the right thing,” she advises.

Similarly, Weatherspoon says most of her firm’s work involves affordable housing projects, which can be considered controversial in some areas where developers and clients face an uphill battle getting affordable and mixed-income housing approved near affluent communities.

“We have to defend our work on behalf of our client, especially when it comes to NIMBYism [Not in My Backyard],” she explains. “If your mission calls for standing up for and with your clients to make sure that something happens for the betterment of most people, then you absolutely defend your firm, its work, and why they are involved in such a project. As long as it’s advantageous to the community, then I think you have to defend your work.”

Wozney agrees. “If required, and we felt our involvement supported a greater need or cause that some deemed controversial, then we would defend our involvement,” she says. “Again, it is really important to believe in what you are working on.”



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It can be difficult to avoid politics
when the type of work being done is
by nature controversial.

When to Fire a Client

Despite a designer's efforts to remain ethical and professional, there are times when severing the client relationship is the proper course of action. The question is, how do you know when it's best to fire a client rather than trying to salvage the relationship? Ultimately, there's no clear-cut answer, as each client is unique and must be judged on a case-by-case basis. However, there are lines that should not be crossed, and protections should be established in contract paperwork ahead of time.

"You should fire a client if they are treating your team members poorly, and I think you need to do that in two steps," Weatherspoon explains. First, she suggests designers should communicate verbally and explain why they feel it's not in the best interest of the client to continue the relationship or work on a project. Likely, the client will agree it's the best course of action, Weatherspoon notes. If not, however, she says it's important to maintain a level of respect and to remain calm throughout the exchange.

"The second step is following up that verbal conversation with an email and legally documenting that the project needs to come to a close or that the arrangement isn't working," she explains.

Rohde says her firm includes a clause in its proposals and contracts that allows for the commencement or continuation of work to stop if either party needs to terminate. Most often, they can work through problems that arise and will use mediation if necessary. But she says sometimes the best course of action is simply to bow out gracefully. "You get to a point when you do a certain amount of work and realize that you probably shouldn't pursue any additional work or even complete a contract. We just don't bill for that; and they go away and we go away, and we go on from there."

Not every client will be as gracious, however. Some may retaliate by publicly maligning a designer or firm on social media, for example. And there's no way to guarantee a disgruntled client won't lash out in some form or fashion.

"Unfortunately, in today's climate there is no way to avoid every type of retaliation, whether it be on social media, Yelp, or Google. That's just the culture we live in," Weatherspoon observes. However, she notes that those scenarios are more common if clients feel like their concerns go unheard. As a result, she says it's important to listen to your clients and handle the situation with the utmost respect and integrity. Because if a situation escalates to social media, she says, "Nothing you say or don't say to that client at that point is going to change their view or mindset."

The Prudence of Planning

Perhaps the best way to mitigate ethical or political issues from surfacing is simply to plan accordingly. That begins with understanding who clients are and whether their mission and values align with yours.

"We're very selective about the clients we choose to work with," Rohde says. If a client or potential client is unprofessional in their demeanor or starts yelling at team members, for example, those are red flags that usually prompt her to say, "I think we're too busy to take on this project."

Before it ever gets that far, however, Rohde says JSR will research a potential client—either online or through word-of-mouth referrals—to determine if an organization is a good fit. "When we did our strategic planning in August, we confirmed what our mission was and what's important to us as a group, as a company, as an entity. And a lot of times the people that we attract are the people who understand that mission. We do a little bit of investigative evaluation before we sign a proposal with anyone these days because you just don't know, so I'm careful about that."

Nevertheless, it can be difficult to avoid politics when the type of work being done is by nature controversial, as it can be with affordable housing. In those instances, it's important to stay on mission and stand behind the value of design services being performed.

"A lot of times you just let the work speak for itself, and you advocate where necessary," Weatherspoon says. "In some instances, we do have to testify at city hearings and councils, but at that point, our job then is just to assist, to show how our design can and will enhance a community. It makes it about the design and not my personal politics or feelings, but about how what we're doing is for the betterment of the greater good of more people involved."

Working with many unique clients over the years, Wozney says encountering different dynamics, personalities, politics, and opinions is inevitable. As such, she says, "We know it is more important for us to be inclusive and listen; when we listen, we gain valuable insight that allows us to develop creative solutions." ●

ROBERT NIEMINEN

is a freelance writer and regular contributor to retrofit and Retail Environments magazine, as well as the editor-at-large of interiors+sources.

To Specify or Not to Specify?



Ethical considerations aren't limited to the nature of a project. They extend to product specification and the impact it has on occupants and the environment as well. Due diligence is critical when making those decisions.

Take the vinyl debate, for instance. Many designers today have pledged to never use vinyl products in any project because polyvinyl chloride (PVC) has been demonstrated as being harmful to occupants. But is avoiding vinyl always the best decision?

Jane Rohde, principal and founder of JSR Associates, argues that it's not always so clear cut when all the facts are taken into consideration. Having toured several vinyl manufacturing plants and looked at the science behind the way it's made, she's determined in terms of drinking water quality, for example, inert, plasticizer-free PVC pipes are healthier than cast iron pipes that corrode and carry sediment and other contaminants into the water supply.

And her position has come at a price. "I have had people attack me verbally because of my supporting views on vinyl," she recalls. Rohde says she does her best to follow the science and tends to not take claims about certain Red List materials at face value because the alternatives can lead to costly (and unsustainable) product failures.

"In healthcare right now, we're experiencing millions and millions of dollars in failures because of what designers thought was a more sustainable choice for upholstery," she explains. "Products that should have lasted for 15 years, or at least seven years at a minimum, I've seen how most of them are failing between 18 months or two years. So, that was devastating to me to figure out"—not only because of the cost, but because replacing those products increases their environmental footprint.

Similarly, many designers avoid products with embodied carbon, which is a single-attribute method of evaluating a material—an approach Rohde suggests is risky and carries unintended consequences. In choosing between two insulation products, for example, one with lower embodied carbon than the other, is the former product always the better choice? What if the insulation with higher embodied carbon reduces a building's energy load, thereby reducing its total carbon emission levels? "You could actually have a tradeoff," Rohde explains.

Likewise, by specifying a product based solely on recycled content or one without titanium dioxide in it, "you could actually be choosing something that has a worse environmental footprint" when all the multi-attribute data is considered, Rohde says.

"For me, when looking at things in context and evaluating if I'm going to work with [a product], I want to make sure that there is a scientific basis for it and that I have access to technical resources that I can evaluate for myself," she concludes.

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NCIDQ RISING

In 2019, CIDQ completed a Practice Analysis with the goal of identifying the knowledge and skills that a competent interior design professional needs to know to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public. The survey is conducted every five years, and this iteration polled nearly 700 NCIDQ certificate holders. Results from the survey, which includes a comprehensive list of knowledge areas and tasks, will help to create blueprints for exam development and ensure the test itself is aligned with current practices. Content modifications are scheduled to go into effect with the October 2020 exams and will include the elimination of overlap within the test blueprints, the addition of more examples for each knowledge statement, a better alignment of knowledge areas to domains, and a focus on life safety and universal design.

The number of NCIDQ certificate holders continues to grow, illustrating support for and belief in the importance of NCIDQ certification. In the period from 2014 to 2019, the number of certificate holders increased by nearly 4,500. In 2019, California, Texas, and Florida took the three top spots for number of NCIDQ certificate holders, with each coming in at more than 2,500. Georgia, Illinois, New York, Ontario, and Virginia each surpassed the 1,000 mark.

For more on CIDQ, see “License to Practice,” p. 34. ●

NCIDQ Certificate Highlights – 2019

33,439

Total Number of NCIDQ
Certificate Holders

581

Number of New Certifications
Awarded: Spring 2019

1,147

Number of Approved
Applications: Fall 2019

3,100

Number of Exam
Registrations: Fall 2019



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Total NCIDQ Certificate Holders by Year

28,965
2014

29,601
2015

30,474
2016

31,640
2017

32,857
2018

33,439
2019



Contributors

In an appropriate political nod to 2020, the year’s first issue of *i+D* spotlights ethics, the design of government buildings, and the many ways politics and design intersect. Our authors provide their perspectives about their professional experiences on these topics, plus their specific assignments, as well as a glimpse of their professional and personal activities. —Linda K. Monroe

1. Cara Gibbs, *The Making of a Movement*

By her own admission, Cara is “quality-obsessed” and “big picture-minded,” and she lives by the notion that “you should always do the right thing the first time.” She says, “I thrive working in team environments and championing my colleagues through all creative pursuits. I’m definitely a two-heads-are-better-than-one kind of person.” A co-founder of the maker-minded marketplace, In The Pursuit, Cara defines its intent as to “give a narrative to bespoke makers and brands that is realized through an online shop, virtual magazine, and thoughtful pop-up collectives.” All of which made her the perfect writer for “The Making of a Movement” (p. 42), which examines historic design movements and the reasons certain styles prevailed at certain times. When asked to reflect on a personal experience centered around this issue’s focus on politics and design, Cara cites a recent visit to the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C. “The exterior is nothing short of extraordinary,” she says. “This is a must-see museum.”

2. Brian Libby, *Political Designs*

As his photo suggests, Brian is about to start recording the second season of his podcast, “In Search of Portland,” while also working on a book manuscript of the same name. Fortunately, he wasn’t too busy to pen a well-rounded examination of political projects in this issue (p. 26). He explains that his favorite project to learn and write about was the design of Ottawa, Ontario’s temporary House of Commons in what had been a courtyard, while the traditional one is being refurbished. Concerning other government buildings, one of Brian’s most vivid memories is a four-months-long internship in the U.S. House of Representatives in the 1990s. “I may have been the lowest on the totem pole, but it was a heck of a place to come to work!”

he recalls. As with his chosen profession, Brian holds himself (as well as others) to the highest standard: “In journalism,” he says, “maintaining ethics and integrity is huge because it’s what separates the professionals from the amateurs. In today’s world, that matters more than ever.”

3. Robert Nieminen, *Sticky Situations*

“With respect to his article on politics and ethics in daily design practice (p. 18), Robert says, “I don’t think of design as a field that is riddled with ethical challenges, so I was particularly struck by the real-life examples of ethical dilemmas my sources faced in their design practices and how they handled them. In both cases, it was obvious that integrity and ethical behavior are critical because they’re not just personal; they can impact lives and communities for better or worse—and it was inspiring to hear how these designers wielded their convictions for good.” Presently, Robert also is involved in researching how culture will impact the future of the design professional for ASID’s upcoming 2020 *Outlook and State of Interior Design* report. Of particular note, he finds it compelling how technology has broadened society’s exposure to culture, thereby providing access to diverse ways of looking at the world and “how design can bring so many perspectives together into a cohesive sense of place.”

3. Brian J. Barth, *License to Practice*

A fan of some of his province’s stunning government buildings, Brian considers the Parliament buildings in Ottawa, Ontario, “an under-rated piece of architecture.” He says, “They feel like part of a 17th century European capitol.” When researching and conducting interviews for his article on the topic of design legislation and advocacy (p. 34), Brian reveals, “I had no idea the laws governing

interior design were so complicated—or so hotly contested! I was relieved to know [what] advocacy groups like ASID are doing to ensure a fair business environment for practitioners, as well as public safety in the spaces they design.” On a more personal note, Brian enthuses that he just returned from a trip to Cumberland Island, off the coast of Georgia, “where wild horses roam amongst ancient oaks draped in Spanish moss. I stayed at an early 19th century inn run by descendants of the Carnegie family—they owned most of the island before donating it to the National Park Service.”

4. Ambrose Clancy, *ICONic Profile: Deborah Lloyd Forrest*

For *i+D*, Ambrose always unveils fascinating particulars about each professional highlighted in the “ICONic Profile” series. In this issue, he asserts, “Deborah Lloyd Forrest [of ForrestPerkins (p. 40)] is a fascinating woman, who is an intellectual of the best kind—warm, engaging, and without pretensions.” In addition to his work for *i+D*, Ambrose has served as a reporter for a variety of newspapers, including his current stint as editor of the *Shelter Island Reporter*, a weekly newspaper that’s highly acclaimed by the New York Press Association. Not surprisingly, ethics is an ever-present topic of interest in the subjects featured in each edition, as well as in the newsroom environment. Ambrose received some sage advice from one of his early mentors: “There are only two rules: Hit your deadlines, and don’t make stuff up,” he remembers. “I found out there are more than two rules, but the not-making-stuff-up directive covers a basis for ethics in the profession. If you start from there, you’ll be okay.” ●

The Obama Presidential Center is made up of a group of buildings that nestle into the landscape and integrate with Jackson Park.
(Image: The Obama Foundation)

By Brian Libby

Political

Even in today's divisive political climate, commissions for governments and political figures bring the opportunity to create and preserve society's most important landmarks.

Throughout history, a special prestige has accompanied commissions to design our most prominent government and political buildings. From national capitols to embassies, presidential libraries to exclusive guest houses, these projects remain massive career opportunities.

But they are not for the faint of heart. High-profile government and political commissions may involve many stakeholders, take years to construct, and be subject to a host of limitations. How they are received may have as much to do with perceptions of the leaders inhabiting these buildings as with design. And, let's face it: It's hard to make a security checkpoint look good.

Yet, for the following designers—who are working on some of North America's most prominent government and political architecture—the reward is still greater than the risk, for these are buildings that bring people together over generations. No matter how high-profile, these landmarks are not about their designers' egos. They're about a greater good.



Designs

Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects: Values and Landscape

Since founding their namesake firm in 1986, the husband-and-wife architects and partners Tod Williams and Billie Tsien have established themselves by designing exclusively for institutions: museums, schools, and nonprofit organizations. Winners of the National Medal of the Arts in 2013 and a host of other awards for projects like the Barnes Foundation art museum in Philadelphia, the firm has now taken on two of its highest-profile commissions yet, each with a unique set of architectural challenges and political sensitivities: the Barack Obama Presidential Center in Chicago and the new U.S. Embassy in Mexico City.

For all commissions, Williams and Tsien begin by talking about ideas. “We never start by drawing,” Williams explains. “What are the values the client has, and what can we do to push those values forward?” The architects talked with the former president and first lady about how the Obama Presidential Center could be more of a community center than previous presidential libraries, embracing its Jackson Park locale with a sense of giving back that also expressed President Obama’s roots as a community organizer. The design breaks down the multifaceted program into a group of buildings that mostly nestle into the landscape, integrating with the park. But there is also a tower that acts “as a beacon of hope and light,” Williams says.

The Obama Presidential Center gained city approval in 2018 after a judge dismissed a lawsuit from a nonprofit environmental group seeking to preserve Jackson Park as is, but groundbreaking still has been subject to delays, largely due to an ongoing federal review triggered by its location, which was the site of the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 and designed by legendary landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted with Calvert Vaux. The design has also evolved over time. But the architects say that for a prominent urban project, these constraints are part of the process, and they defer to President Obama’s measured tone. “He’s in a way a very wise client, both respectful of others and other voices but knows that he wants this thing to be an upbeat, exciting representation of his presidency,” Williams explains.



A sense of welcome and the shared values of Mexico and the U.S. were crucial to the design of the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City. (Image: Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects | Partners)

High-profile government and political commissions may involve many stakeholders, take years to construct, and be subject to a host of limitations.



Outdoor spaces at the Obama Presidential Center serve to connect the separate structures and to connect visitors to nature as well. (Image: The Obama Foundation)



At the embassy, for example, the architects soften the barrier of the necessarily protective hard perimeter walls with vegetation. They also pay homage to Mexico City's landmark National Museum of Anthropology by employing a similar hovering canopy over the embassy's central courtyard. Despite the constraints of security, the design embraces the indoor-outdoor nature of life in this warm climate.

Both the Obama Center and the embassy also make use of subterranean spaces, not simply as windowless basements but as a kind of new topography exposed to sunlight. "You are safe inside the complex and below the ground plane, but actually able to look out at and enter gardens," Williams says. "At the embassy there are a lot of gardens set behind the wall. And the different buildings of the Obama Presidential Center are connected below ground by a series of patios or courtyards."

While buildings by Tsien and Williams are unmistakably contemporary, they are not afraid of historical references. For the Obama Center they chose a domestically quarried granite that recalls the monuments of Washington, and for the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City blocks of polychrome stone that evoke the southwest landscape of both countries and the vernacular architecture of its native people. In both cases, they rejected steel and glass for masonry that recalls traditional architecture of the past without resorting to caricature. "History is not a style. History *is*," Tsien explains. "It's moving forward with an understanding of what has gone before."

The tower at the Obama Presidential Center was imagined as a beacon of hope and light for all who visit.
(Image: The Obama Foundation)

For the U.S. Embassy, which was designed in collaboration with Davis Brody Bond, the setting was different but the design approach was similar: a discussion about Mexico and America. The architects started by noting that this was a flagship American building yet one on Mexican soil. Says Williams: "We asked ourselves, 'How can we have the embassy seem to share the values of both countries and both places?'"

Though major institutional buildings such as presidential libraries or art museums may often represent a kind of trophy architecture, Williams and Tsien believe it's important to think of their designs from the inside out. "Tod and I really began with interior design work," Tsien explains. "We believe that's where the heart of every project lies." This notion was important for both the Obama Presidential Center and the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City because each had to be highly secure from the outside, which can create a barrier in both a physical and psychological sense. "What's interesting about the embassy and the Obama Presidential Center is that it's very important there be a sense of welcome," she continues.



EVOQ Architecture: Where Past Meets Present

If a new embassy or a presidential library is about presenting a contemporary interpretation of history, restoring the massive Parliament Hill complex in Ottawa might seem like a more straightforward if lengthy challenge. The multibuilding Parliament complex, first constructed in the lead-up to Canada's independence from Great Britain in 1867, is being restored one building at a time in a more than decade-long construction process.

At the center of Parliament Hill is the Centre Block (which contains Parliament Hill icons like the Peace Tower, the House of Commons, and the Senate), as well as the West Block and East Block to either side (with administrative offices and meeting spaces). But before work could begin on the Centre Block restoration, the government needed an interim chamber in which House of Commons legislators could still convene and debate the issues of the day during construction. That meant a unique design opportunity and challenge for EVOQ Architecture and its team of collaborators: a grand but temporary House chamber in the oval-shaped central courtyard of the West Block.



Historic masonry meets with modern millwork in the glass-enclosed temporary voting chamber at the Parliament Hill complex. (Image: Tom Arban Photography)



Commencing construction in 2011 and recently re-opened, the West Block's temporary chamber is a marvel. Light shines down through the new glass ceiling between the buildings that converts outdoor to indoor space. The transparent roof is held aloft by a group of steel columns that resemble trees, thick and trunk-like at their bases before branching out diagonally in several directions. "Originally, we looked at a number of schemes that were an enclosed box in that courtyard," explains EVOQ founding partner Rosanne Moss. "But eventually we arrived at the concept of an open chamber under a glazed roof, so you could still read the existing building and view the sky while sitting in the House of Commons. The idea was that the members of the House would be able to feel that sense of history and continuity, as they were sitting in the chamber." The design includes green carpeting in the chamber that, in combination with the columns, evokes a Canadian forest setting.

EVOQ also designed a new permanent visitor entry sequence carved into the hill between the Centre and West Blocks, repurposing the north wing of the West Block. "The conundrum was how to come up from below grade and not be completely confused as to where you are," the architect explains. But today, emerging from underground gives one a view into the new temporary House of Commons, providing a sense of arrival.



A foyer in the repurposed North Wing of the Parliament Hill complex provides a sense of power, history, and grandeur. (Image: Tom Arban Photography)



The historic architecture of Parliament Hill envelops the temporary voting chamber EVOQ. Architecture created where a courtyard previously stood. (Image: Tom Arban Photography)

If transforming the West Block courtyard into a new temporary House of Commons with a glass roof and decorative support columns seems like one basic move, it was actually built from hundreds of other design decisions, each of which had to be approved by many stakeholders there. "The House of Commons has something like 30 user groups within its organization," Moss says. "I think the challenge really is to have a firm idea of what you are aiming for [and] what your design is based on philosophically, and in our case, historically. When a design direction is challenged by one of the stakeholders, we need to find a way to accommodate changes but also keep track of the vision that we have for the project and continue to be able to bring it forward. You don't win every battle, but you hopefully win the war."



1.



2.



4.



3.

1. Green carpeting and tree-like support columns evoke a forest-like feeling in the temporary House of Commons chamber.

(Image: Tom Arban Photography)

2. The library and overall Obama Presidential Center are meant as a gathering place for all members of the community.

(Image: The Obama Foundation)

3. One of the largest U.S. embassies in the world, the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City was designed around a large, open-air courtyard.

(Image: Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects | Partners)

4. Below-grade spaces permit views of and connections to upper areas at the Parliament Hill complex in Ottawa, Ontario.

(Image: Tom Arban Photography)

A relaxed, more contemporary palette modernizes a space at Blair House, while the interior architecture and antique furnishings maintain a connection to its history.

(Image: Durston Saylor)



Thomas Pheasant: Transitioning Tradition

Buildings for American presidents or Canadian prime ministers—what could be a more exclusive commission? Well, how about a building in which nearly all the world's other heads of state have spent the night? That would be the President's Guest House in Washington, commonly known as Blair House: a complex of four formerly separate 19th-century buildings near the White House that since the 1940s has been owned by the U.S. government. It's been called the world's most exclusive hotel.

In the 1980s, Blair House underwent a six-year renovation overseen by acclaimed interior designers Mario Buatta and Mark Hampton. But by 2012, it was overdue for a refresh. This time, though, there was an extra degree of difficulty. Instead of closing for years to undergo the renovation, the redesign by Washington, D.C., interior designer Thomas Pheasant was broken down into a series of smaller efforts, each carried out during the one month of the year that Blair House is closed. "Just from an installation and functional issue, that's a big challenge," he says. While major additions such as the library and master suite have been completed, the renovations by Pheasant remain ongoing.

Yet for the designer, the greater challenge was finding the right stylistic balance. Pheasant has urged the nonprofit board running Blair House to accept more contemporary art and furniture, but there are limits. "I'm working inside a building that has a history. There's a sort of romantic quality about it, a sense of tradition that many want to maintain," he explains. "As rooms need to be refurbished, it's deciding what's good, what's worth keeping? While I'm labeled sort of a classically based modernist, this was stepping back into traditional design, which has been a challenge. You walk into a room decorated with heavy prints and stripes and trims and lots of decoration; for me the instinct was to go in and pull that back a bit but maintain that romance."



Interior designer Thomas Pheasant notes one of the challenges to renovating an historic property like Blair House is finding the right stylistic balance. (Image: Durston Saylor)

The Blair House library, one of its signature spaces, is a good example. "I tried to relax the room and simplify the palette without changing the architecture," he says. "We kept the portraits and antique pieces but lightened the spirit. It almost went from looking like you were in a really nice library in a lawyer's office to being in a library in somebody's home. That's the spirit you want your guests to feel. It really is a guest house."

Whether it's one room like the Blair House library, one large space like Canada's temporary House of Commons, or an entire complex of buildings like the Obama Presidential Center or the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, perhaps the basic recipe for success is still the same: Develop a vision born from the client's values and your own, and express that in a way that remembers the past while acknowledging the future. ●



BRIAN LIBBY
is a journalist, photographer, and award-winning filmmaker. His articles have appeared in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Atlantic, and Architectural Digest.



License

The ongoing crusade
to support the interior
design profession in
the regulatory arena

to

By Brian J. Barth

“Interior design” is not a term often uttered from a politician’s soapbox. However, the profession featured prominently in Florida governor Ron DeSantis’ “State of the State” address in early 2019—but not in a good way. The newly elected governor said he was on a mission to cut down on red tape that he felt made it difficult for people to break into a number of occupations, including interior design, a profession he lumps with barbers, auctioneers, and talent agents. “We need reform of our occupational licensing regime,” he said, calling the interior design licensing requirements “absurd” and saying that these and other such occupational requirements “need to be streamlined, rolled back, or eliminated.”

Florida lawmakers soon introduced a bill to repeal all interior design licensing regulations, which would essentially eliminate crucial business rights for the profession and hinder designers’ ability to practice in regulated environments in the state. Proponents of deregulation seem unaware of the public harm that can result in unregulated designers working in public spaces. Their justification is that consumers—and the “free market”—should be the only arbiters of deciding who is qualified to do so. Fortunately, thanks to the efforts of the profession, membership association staff, and understanding legislators, the bill died.

Sarasota interior designer Holly Dennis countered this thinking in an op-ed in her local paper, the *Herald-Tribune*. “It is not difficult to justify the Florida interior design license,” she wrote, noting the “common misconception...that interior designers only pick furniture and choose fabrics and paint colors, like the decorators seen on television.” What the governor did not seem to realize, she added, is that interior designers “safeguard the well-being of the public in high-volume, high-occupancy spaces... Eliminating this license will only harm... the health, safety, and welfare of the public at large.”

Image: Bill Oxford/Unsplash

Practice

The Battle Ahead

Dennis pointed out a further fact that a majority of voters—in any state—are likely unaware of: The profession has already been deregulated in a significant way.

In 2009 the Institute for Justice, which describes itself as a libertarian law firm, sued the Florida Board of Architecture and Interior Design in an effort to overturn the state's licensing law. The case, known as *Locke versus Shore*, was partially successful. "The court said that because interior design is such a broad term—you have decorators, residential designers, commercial designers, interior architects, and more, all with different levels of competence and areas of practice—that the state of Florida cannot restrict that term only to license holders," says Bryan Soukup, the vice president of government and public affairs at the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID). In other words: Anyone can use the term. And, because the case was settled in federal appeals court, it forms a legal precedent, giving credence to other such cases in other states.

But, the court also made a distinction in favor of regulated designers, says Soukup. "They said that for certain aspects of interior design—for example, designing in code-regulated spaces—that qualifiers on the term interior design can be restricted, if reasonably and accurately tailored." Thus, terms like registered interior designer (RID), certified interior designer (CID), and licensed interior designer (LID) are allowed. This helps to ensure that individuals lacking technical knowledge can't stamp construction plans or respond to RFPs for large-scale commercial and government projects.



Bryan Soukup,
American Society
of Interior
Designers (ASID)

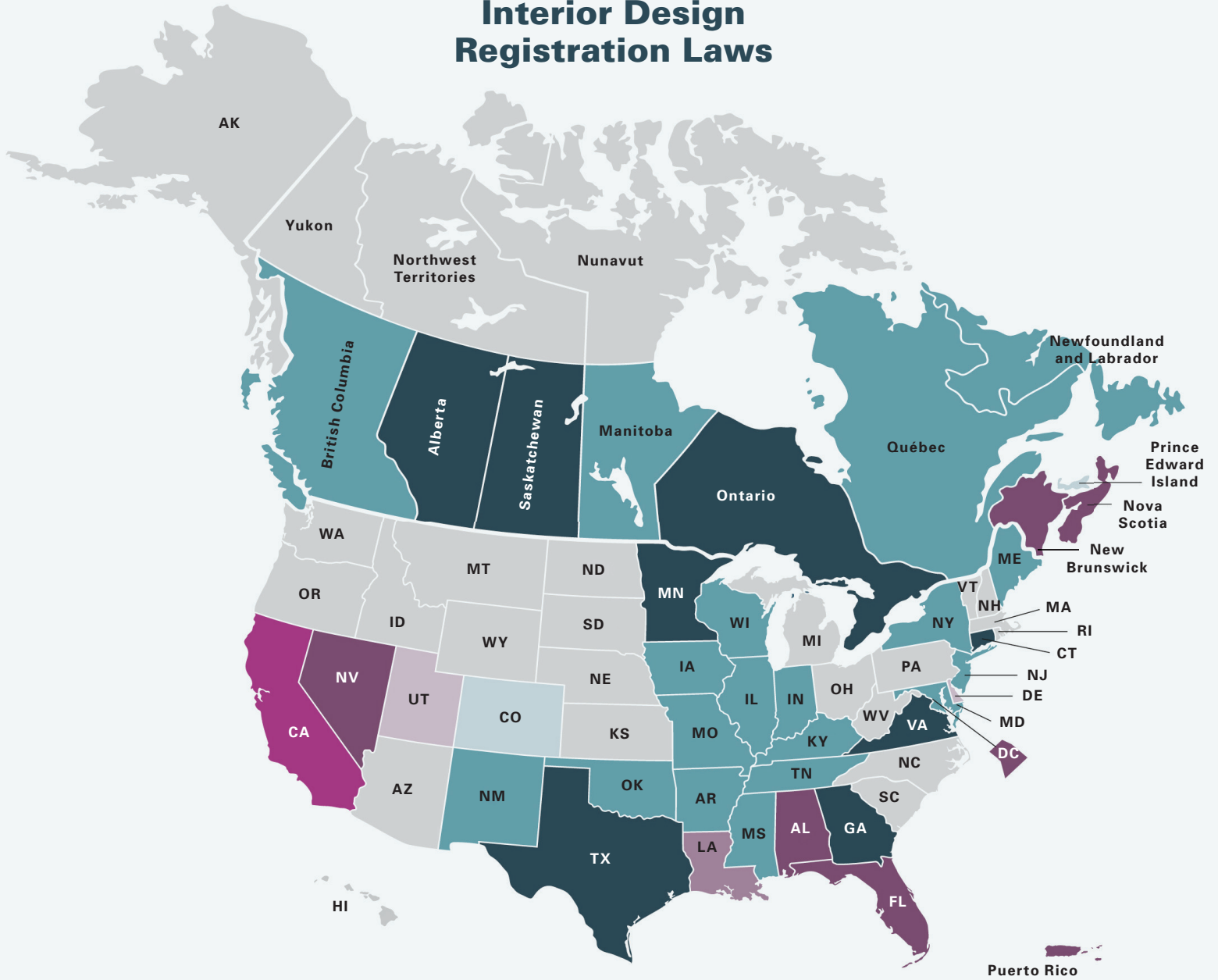
The battle is far from over, however, as similar efforts to deregulate the profession are underway across the country.

At the root of the issue is a profound misunderstanding of the responsibility of qualified interior designers to ensure not just the beauty of interior environments, but also the health, safety, and welfare of their occupants. The Institute for Justice, for example, has referred to ASID as a "cartel" and has pushed out white papers, press releases, and PSA-style videos to advance its cause. This is why ASID not only shows up in courts and at state capitols to advocate for appropriate policy, but it also works aggressively to raise awareness of the profession at large.

The organization, along with others such as CIDQ, have been putting out videos and other promotional materials depicting real-life examples that demonstrate the seriousness of the profession in a way to which the average person can relate.

"Interior designers need to know the fire retardancy of commercial furniture fabrics and the fire ratings of nonloadbearing partition walls," says Soukup. "In medical and assisted-living environments, they make sure that off-gassing from carpets and wallcoverings are not compromising the health of infants or the elderly and that flooring materials don't encourage slips and falls." Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act is another huge area of responsibility that the public may take for granted but would care about deeply if they were more aware. "The majority of fatalities during hurricanes Katrina and Maria were people with some sort of cognitive impairment or physical disability who just weren't able to get out of their nursing homes or their public housing in a safe manner," says Soukup. "Qualified interior designers are the professionals who are most skilled and most knowledgeable about applying those interior accessibility standards."

Interior Design Registration Laws



- Practice Act with permitting privileges
- Practice Act with no permitting privileges
- Commercial Interior Design Certification Practice Act
- Title Act with permitting privileges
- Title Act with no permitting privileges
- Private Certification
- No Legislation with permitting privileges
- No Legislation with no permitting privileges

State of Affairs

Compared to architecture, landscape architecture, and engineering, interior design is a young profession. The other major design professions came of age in a different political environment (in ancient times, in the case of architecture and engineering) and long ago established standards of practice that have become entrenched in law and public consciousness. One finds statutes governing these professions, and protecting their interests and integrity, in all states and Canadian provinces. Importantly, those rules tend to be fairly consistent from one jurisdiction to another. But for interior design, this remains a work in progress.

Currently 27 states (including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico) and eight Canadian provinces have enacted some form of interior design legislation. In less than a dozen of those do interior designers have “permitting privileges,” allowing them to stamp and seal blueprints and other legally binding construction documents. Soukup says the goal is to elevate the profession to the same legal stature as other design modalities—in all 50 states and provinces—despite the headwinds blowing in the opposite direction. He lists other overlooked rights associated with such privileges, including the right to own a majority share in an architectural interiors firm and the right to place a lien on the property of a client who does not pay.

“Interior design really didn’t come into its own and become the complex, building sciences-backed profession that it is today until the last 40 years,” says Soukup. “Simultaneously, starting in the Reagan era, there was a move towards deregulation that has culminated in the environment we have today, where we have a lot of relatively new professions—financial planners, music therapists, etc.—that are looking for the same rights as some of the more established professions but are having trouble achieving state government recognition. This, in turn, hinders their ability to compete in the free market.” While ASID pushes for regulatory uniformity across the land, “we certainly understand the political and regulatory environment that we’re in today,” says Soukup. “We understand that each state will be different based on its political and social norms—unfortunately, the scope of practice of interior design in Alabama won’t be the same as the scope in California.”



Lyn Van Tassel,
LVT Design

“Interior design really didn’t come into its own and become the complex, building sciences-backed profession that it is today until the last 40 years.”

—BRYAN SOUKUP, ASID

The Provincial Situation

Lyn Van Tassel of LVT Design in Saint John, New Brunswick, reports a similar situation north of the border. All Canadian provinces have what's known as a "title act" for interior design, which is intended to ensure that *only* qualified interior designers use the title but does little more than authorize the formation of interior design associations. "It doesn't give us the right to regulate," she says. The next step is the adoption of "practice acts," which gives those associations the power to regulate the use of the term interior design in commerce. In 2004, Nova Scotia became the first province to pass a practice act for the profession, followed by New Brunswick in 2017.

Tassel notes all of the provinces have practice acts in the works, but it is a lengthy process to get them ratified. "It's a very expensive process to go through," she says, "but now we have a template that will cut some of those costs for other provinces."

The Interior Designers of New Brunswick recently began sending letters to businesses and individuals who offer interior design services without the proper credentials. If those entities do not voluntarily retract their language, the association follows up with a letter from their lawyer. "Our goal is not to put anybody out of business," says Tassel. "Our goal is to have people call themselves what they are and not confuse the public." She notes that it is extremely important when working with legislators to emphasize this point. "We lobbied ahead of time to make sure everybody understood what we were doing and why." ●

BRIAN J. BARTH

is a freelance writer with a background in environmental planning and design. He has written for a range of publications, from Landscape Architecture Magazine to NewYorker.com.



Thom Banks,
CIDQ

Foundation of Integrity



With the exception of California, all states and provinces with legal recognition of the profession base that recognition on the CIDQ credential. The NCIDQ exam is extremely rigorous when it comes to the technical aspects of the profession. "Nothing in our exam is based on aesthetics," says Thom Banks, CEO of CIDQ. "It's about paths of egress. It's about building codes. It's about life safety. It's all the nuts-and-bolts, behind-the-scenes stuff that impacts the health, safety, and welfare of the public."

While ASID and CIDQ are closely aligned in their mandates and collaborate frequently, it's important to note that each has a distinct mission. ASID's allegiance is to its members—practitioners. "Our allegiance is to the public, not to interior designers, either as a profession or individuals," says Banks. In fact, CIDQ's members are not practitioners but the regulatory boards that oversee the profession (at least in the states and provinces that have them). Banks notes this is part of how CIDQ "maintains the purity of the exam."

Creating the exam questions is a scientific process, one that is constantly updated to ensure cutting-edge relevance. Every five years, CIDQ conducts a survey of certificate holders, says Banks. What are the skill sets people are using? What's the knowledge that they need and in what proportions? That information is analyzed in the context of interior design fundamentals and used to revise the exam. "We work with a professional exam consulting firm, with psychometricians, and with test developers to write the questions," says Banks. "Those are then pre-tested in a live exam to see what sort of performance statistics are generated. There's a science behind evaluating a good or bad question, in terms of the way people respond to it and how much they differentiate between the correct answer and incorrect options."

This, he says, is how CIDQ ensures that its exam is "reliable, fair, valid, and legally defensible." Without this rigor, the profession would not have a leg to stand on.

ICONic Profile



Deborah
Lloyd Forrester

If you've stayed in a sumptuous hotel over the past three or four decades, chances are you've checked into a place influenced by Deborah Lloyd Forrest's striking, ground-breaking work for the hospitality industry. Known for her unerring color sense, Forrest creates simple but ultrasophisticated spaces that achieve comfort and luxury as first principles.

In 1986, Forrest founded Deborah Lloyd Forrest Associates, which she operated for more than a decade before joining with Stephen Perkins to establish their firm, ForrestPerkins, in 1998. ForrestPerkins provides services to hotel and resort owners and operators around the world. Some of Forrest's signature accomplishments are The Empress Hotel in Victoria, British Columbia, for Canadian Pacific Hotels and Resorts (which is now Fairmont Hotels and Resorts); The Royal York in Toronto; The Hotel Vancouver; and designing the branding guide for Waldorf Astoria.

Forrest has served on the Board of Directors of the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) and, in 2000, ASID elected her a fellow of the society. In 2004, ASID named her Designer of Distinction and, that same year, she was elected by Hospitality Design magazine to its Platinum Circle. Four years ago, ForrestPerkins joined forces with Perkins Eastman, with almost 1,000 employees in 17 locations around the globe.

Forrest holds an undergraduate degree from the University of North Texas in English, with a minor in French, and has a master's in English from UNT. A native of Oklahoma City, she has spent most of her life in Dallas, where she lives with her husband, Tom Scott.

i+D: How did a scholar of English end up as an interior designer?

DLF: Well, I don't have a degree in design. I taught high school for several years and then apprenticed with an amazing designer, also an ASID member, Robert Preston Henry. That's how I got started. I worked with him, and when I could qualify, I took the NCIDQ and passed it the first time.

i+D: When you were a little girl, your family took long road trips.

DLF: We'd drive from Oklahoma to Canada and to the East Coast. And then my cousins and I would go to visit my grandparents in California.

i+D: Can you remember your first impression of staying in a hotel or motel?

DLF: My first significant impression was on the trip to Canada when I was, oh, about 7. We went through Dearborn, Michigan. My father worked for Ford Motor Company, which was based there. We stayed in a hotel complex with small suites centered around a beautiful setting. I remember arriving, and there was this big, beautiful fruit basket wrapped in cellophane. The sense of luxury really got me.

i+D: A fruit basket will open the eyes of any 7-year-old.

DLF: Yes, but it was also a suite, with separate bedrooms. We stayed in motels, and this was a far cry from a motel.

i+D: Has the industry changed for women since you started?

DLF: Not for women per se. Interior design has always been a really good path for women. There's a lot more equality, and in residential design, there's probably more women than men. I've never felt any difficulty or discrimination in business.

i+D: In general, how has the industry changed?

DLF: From the perspective of the hotel business, it's changed a lot, not only in the type of design—which is cyclical anyway—but also the role of the designer has changed because of the number of people you have to get to agree to things. When I first started working, it was directly with the heads of the hotel brands. There wasn't a lot of layers of decision-making. Hotel ownership has changed. Now there are third-party operators and asset management companies involved. There are more people—some with experience and some without—and more opinions. It doesn't make it wrong, but it does make it more difficult.

i+D: Do you consider yourself an artist?

DLF: I do.

i+D: Craft can be taught, but art is something else. You're known for your artistic use of color in your work. Where did that come from?

DLF: My mother, and my mother's mother, and my aunt. We were middle class, not wealthy by any means, but they had a sense of style and an understanding of fashion and a knowledge of what was current, an instinct for what they wanted. It seeped into my consciousness.

i+D: Ethical design standards have become an integral part of the industry. Are some designers just talking a good game but in fact cutting corners?

DLF: I wouldn't know about others, but it's important to our firm and our practice. We have a commitment to sustainability. We build it into every project we do. It's important to our young people since they see a strong connection to the environment with responsible design. They know it gives their work purpose.

i+D: They come to you with that?

DLF: Yes. And we expect our vendors to demonstrate that their products are sustainable and documented. We also have to educate our clients that sustainability is important, making the business case for that. For a number of years, it cost more to use sustainable products and processes, so we let our clients know the business benefits in the long term.

i+D: What's your worst hotel experience as a guest?

DLF: Oh, gosh. Conventioneers—in a big hotel. When I was still in high school in Oklahoma, I worked in a florist shop after school, and my boss, who was a woman, took me to Dallas to go to the Market Center. We stayed downtown at the Statler Hilton. While getting on an elevator packed with

conventioneers in their funny hats, one of them had what wasn't a true cattle prod but it was some kind of thing they began poking us with. It was awful. The most horrible experience.

i+D: How often do you travel?

DLF: A lot. Probably 70 percent of the time. We work all over the world. But also, my husband and I travel for pleasure. We still get excited and enjoy the anticipation of travel.

i+D: What are you reading?

DLF: I'm always reading; probably a book a week. Currently, I'm reading *A Great Improvisation* by Stacy Schiff. It's about Benjamin Franklin's time in France when he was trying to get support for the Revolution.

i+D: Paper or screen?

DLF: I have real books, for sure. I have a library here in Dallas and at our home in Santa Fe with tons of books. But I don't always have the opportunity to read print books. When travelling a lot, it's easier with my Kindle. On it I have the complete works of Shakespeare, so I can occasionally read a play. I have the Federalist Papers because, well, it's very necessary right now, as well as the Constitution. It may sound weird, but I do.

i+D: What delights you?

DLF: A beautiful day. Nature. I love being around animals, especially cats.

i+D: What's your sport?

DLF: I'm not a sports person. But I walk three to five miles a day.

i+D: That counts.

DLF: And, oh, I do Pilates.

i+D: How do you balance a sense of coziness with modern design in hotels?

DLF: Our focus primarily is comfort. Guests need to feel they're being drawn into a space that's warm and inviting, no matter the style. I don't like the word "coziness," as it doesn't connote sophisticated design. But at the same time, that sense of comfort, that everything you see and touch intrigues you, something that feels in a way familiar but is something you haven't experienced before, that's our hallmark.

i+D: When you go to a hotel, what do you immediately look for?

DLF: Everything. ●

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By Cara Gibbs

The Making a Mo

“Politics is impossible to separate from architecture,” states Peter Coffman, architectural historian and associate professor at Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario. It’s perhaps not the most obvious of proclamations, but when examining the delicate relationship between design, in all its forms, and political persuasions, the interconnectedness between the two is ripely undisputable. A mere look through centuries of rising empires and falling dynasties offers all the proof one might need—one superpower takes the leadership reigns only to be usurped by a successor—of the fleeting convictions of power. But what’s most often left unexplored and vastly overlooked is the lasting impact of well-executed design and architecture on its behalf.



The Bauhaus embraced the machine and mass production with a goal to make beautiful, modern design available to a wider audience. (Image: Simone Hutsch/Unsplash)

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Experts discuss the deep histories and ever-evolving landscapes of politically-charged design regimes





1.

1. Among Paris' iconic structural landmarks is its 3,000-year-old Egyptian obelisk.
(Image: Vitor Pinto/Unsplash)

2. The ornate San Carlo Quattro Fontane in Rome exemplifies the Catholic Baroque style.
(Image: courtesy of Peter Coffman)

3. The English Whig take on Neoclassicism is evident in the design of Chiswick House in London.
(Image: courtesy of Peter Coffman)



2.

Philosophy of Design

Persevering long after the forces that aided in their establishment, design and architecture often serve as barometers for the current and incumbent political climates. South Florida designer Laetitia Laurent, principal and lead designer at Laure Nell Interiors, waxed philosophical on the matter. "Aristotle was the first philosopher to introduce the idea that cities were to be shaped with the political regime of the time in mind," she notes. "Paris, where I grew up, reflects this concept like no other city in the world. A straight line connects the Place de la Concorde and its 3,000-year-old Egyptian obelisk to the Arc de Triomphe, which stands to commemorate those who died for France during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, to the city's major business district, La Défense."

Coffman echoes the famed Greek philosopher's stance, musing, "What we build always reflects the ideas, aspirations, means, technology, and values of those with the power and capacity to build. That doesn't change; what does shift to some degree is who has that power and capacity." In the Middle Ages, it was the church and the aristocracy. In the 19th century the British Empire adopted Gothic as its signature style and used it to imprint an image of Englishness across the empire. Mussolini used a stripped-down, harsh version of classical architecture to frame his fascist regime as the 20th-century heir to the Roman Empire. "Particularly in imperial contexts, architecture has always been a powerful tool of mass communication," says Coffman.

"What we build always reflects the ideas, aspirations, means, technology, and values of those with the power and capacity to build."

—PETER COFFMAN, CARLETON UNIVERSITY



3.

Powerful Expressions

In the spirit of open dialogue from one politically driven style to another, the transition from Baroque to Rococo must be mentioned. It began as an era shrouded in deep, dark woods; heavy finishes; and imposing materials. It was ecclesiastical and, above all else, dictated by the king. The highly ornate Baroque influence thrived rampantly under the reign of Louis XIV at the Palace of Versailles, where court life was designed to reflect the king's every whim and began and ended inside the palace.

"In the 16th and 17th centuries, Baroque arose partly to re-inject spiritual vitality into Catholicism in the wake of the Reformation, and partly to assert the glory of absolute monarchies," expounds Coffman. "Eighteenth-century Neoclassicism in England was very much the architecture of the Whigs, whereas Baroque was seen as the architecture of the Tories," the country's two political parties at the time. When political sensibilities shifted and Rococo flourished into existence, there was no shortage of theatrical cues and ornamental whimsy left by way of a distinctly Baroque aesthetic, but what abounded was an unprecedented freedom through design and architecture. Through lighter materials and softer tones met with sweeping romantic gestures, an element of personal preference came to light. Suddenly individualism had a voice, a perspective, a position that begged to be expressed.

In search of carving out space both on a political forum and on a smaller, homebound scale, more and more pivotal design-driven movements began to take shape and ultimately form popular thought of the day. For instance, the Arts and Crafts movement grew out of a dissatisfaction with industrial production and a firm belief that an object's value resided, in large part, in the human labor, time, and ingenuity that went into it. Thus, a perfect, mass-produced ornament is inferior to an imperfect, handmade one.

"It's a noble idea," Coffman states, "but the world voted with its wallet. The Bauhaus shared the Arts and Crafts' conviction that everyday life should be beautiful but, unlike William Morris and his colleagues, embraced the machine and mass production. The tradeoff sacrificed the veneration of the individual craftsman for the benefit of making beautifully designed objects cheaper, and thus available to far more people."

Laurent points out that after Germany's defeat in World War I, those in society sought to radically express themselves, as they had previously been suppressed by the old regime. A rise in modernism, simplified forms, and an absence of ornamentation followed, and the Bauhaus school flourished until the Nazis shut it down in 1933. "With the school closed," Laurent notes, "the professors began emigrating and disseminating Bauhaus modernist principles where they next called home." Before we knew it, for example, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe set up shop in Chicago.



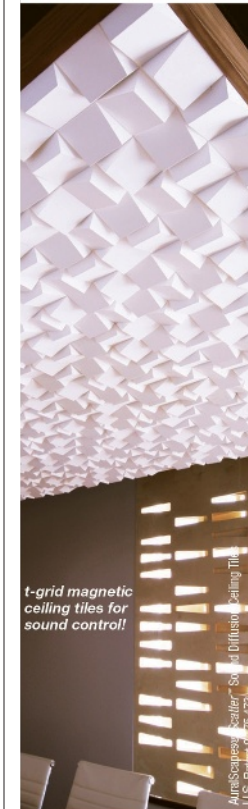
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Modern Ideas

But perhaps one of the most influential movements of the 20th century might just be Cubism. Laurent ruminates on the thought-provoking period that represented a perpetual look toward the future: “The movement focused on depicting a world that had been changed and was largely expressed by aggregating geometric shapes and constructing an object through several varying viewpoints,” she says.

It began first with art—think Picasso’s disparate figures and Paul Cézanne’s three-dimensional paintings—and it was Le Corbusier who turned Cubism on its head with the birth of the more minimalist-minded Purism era along with Amédée Ozenfant. When Le Corbusier opened an architecture studio in Paris with his cousin Pierre Jeanneret, the two translated this minimalist approach to architecture. “After the war, Jeanneret started experimenting with minimalist design, which led to his iconic chair, foregoing fasteners,” Laurent says. “In later years, he collaborated with Jean Prouvé, known for his mastery of industrial metals and their use in furniture design. The style is set apart from the Bauhaus steel furniture of the time, more rigid in form.”

“Aristotle was the first philosopher to introduce the idea that cities were to be shaped with the political regime of the time in mind.”

—LAETITIA LAURENT, LAURE NELL INTERIORS

A present-day example of Cubist design in a Florida home designed by Laetitia Laurent. (Image: Anthony J. Rayburn)



Coffman illuminates the arousal of Modernism, explaining its connection to democracy. “Louis Sullivan—one of the seminal Modernist thinkers, writers, and architects—saw Modernism as an emancipation from servility and an expression of democracy,” Coffman states. “Sullivan believed that fulfillment and expression of function was what architecture was about, and that the function latent in American architecture was democracy. So, Sullivan, like many architectural thinkers before him, attached a very specific and urgent political meaning to the style of architecture that he used. Such claims make for pretty grand reading, but they don’t always stand the test of time—to this day, there’s no real consensus on what a ‘democratic’ building should look like.”

There’s certainly no deficit of powerplays from one design movement to the next, but perhaps the lasting imprint has trickled into our most personal of realms. Perhaps *home* is the most impactful ground for a strong political statement—the structures we dwell in and the interiors that support them. Coffman put it simply and concisely: “Every species has its way of marking territory,” he says, “and humans tend to do it with design.” ●

CARA GIBBS

is a freelance design and lifestyle writer, editor, and stylist residing in Manhattan.

Formerly the principal style editor at Luxe Interiors + Design, she now is a regular contributor to Architectural Digest, Apartment Therapy, House Beautiful, Wallpaper, and The Wall Street Journal, among other publications.

She also is the co-founder of the artisan marketplace, In The Pursuit, a platform that aims to marry content with commerce through a lifestyle lens.

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Section — Page

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Contributors — 25

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Political Designs — 26

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Waldorf Astoria
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The Making of a Movement — 42

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Laure Nell Interiors
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Up Next: Sustainable Solutions — 50

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couverturecovers.com 24

Crate and Barrel
crateandbarrel.com CV4

Datacolor
datacolor.com 11

Design Within Reach
dwr.com/trade 7

IDC
idcanada.org CV3

Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams
mgbwhome.com/to-the-trade 19

modularArts
modulararts.com 45

Resource Furniture
ResourceFurniture.com 9

Richard Frinier Design Studio
richardfrinier.com 10

Surya
surya.com 4-5

The Container Store
containerstore.com/trade-program 13

The Insurance Exchange
ASIDinsurance.org 21

The Shade Store
theshadestore.com/trade CV2-3

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Thom Banks, CAE, FASID
Council for Interior Design Qualification (CIDQ)

Mario Buatta
Interior designer

Peter Coffman, PhD
Carleton University

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Holly Dennis Interiors

Ron DeSantis
Governor of Florida

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Mark Hampton by Alexa Hampton
alexahampton.com/interiors

Robert Preston Henry, ASID
RPH Interior Design

Laetitia Laurent, Associate ASID
Laure Nell Interiors

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Wallace Sewell

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Presented by Cosentino

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Taking its name from a popular lake area in north central Minnesota, the Nisswa collection of outdoor furniture from Loll Designs features a frame crafted of 100 percent recycled plastic that is paired with durable Sunbrella fabric on the cushions. Options include a sofa, lounge chair, and ottoman that are available in any combination of nine recycled plastic colors for the frame and three Sunbrella cushion fabrics.

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