



## UNIT 01      An Introduction to the Interior Design Profession

### Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

- ✓ Explain what the professional interior designer does,
- ✓ Understand the various aspects of the interior design profession,
- ✓ Discuss the role of an interior designer as a professional,
- ✓ Describe the most important considerations for a design scheme.

## Unit 1

# An Introduction to the Interior Design Profession

## What is an Interior Designer?

An interior designer is a person with the knowledge and experience necessary to improve the functionality and aesthetic quality of an interior space. An interior designer seeks to improve quality of life, increase productivity, and protect the health and safety of the people they work for.

The professional interior designer:

- analyzes clients' needs, goals and safety requirements,
- formulates preliminary design concepts that are functional, aesthetic, appropriate and comply with relevant codes and standards,
- develops and presents final design proposals by following appropriate presentation media,
- prepares drawings and specifications for interior construction i.e. ceiling plans, space detailing, space planning, materials, finishes, lighting, furnishes, fixtures and equipment, in compliance with guidelines and applicable codes,
- works in a team with other experts in other areas (electrical, mechanical and architectural), as required for regulatory approval,
- prepares and administers bids and contract documents as a client's agent,
- reviews and evaluates design solutions during implementation and at the time of completion,

## Interior Design as a Profession

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

Interior design professionals provide the owners of homes and businesses with functionally practical and aesthetically attractive interior spaces. An interior designer, whether working for domestic or commercial clients, benefits society by focusing on how an interior environment should look and function. By planning the arrangements of interior walls, considering how the design affects the health and safety, selecting appropriate furniture, choose aesthetic embellishments and so on, the designer brings life to an interior space. As a result, the client's functional and aesthetic vision becomes a reality.

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

An interior designer is able to communicate the design concepts through precisely scaled drawings and other documents used in the industry. The professional interior designer makes space plans for rooms considering the furniture and everything else that goes into them. Their primary responsibility is managing all the tasks in the process, in order to make sure that the project is completed in its allocated time.

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

## The Development of Interior Design as a Profession

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

By the beginning of twentieth century, department stores began promoting accessories and furnishings to the everyday consumer. This greatly helped the establishment of design trends, and people started looking for help in the design of their homes and workplaces. Historically, interior design was regarded as a branch of fashion, subject to the ever-changing whims of style. Interior decoration was considered an activity suitable for women only, whose daily lives focused on minding their homes. The interest in interior decoration as a career was developed after the publication of “The Decoration of Houses” by Ogden Codman in 1897. During the twentieth century, more publications focused on designing and living in good taste – the concept of ‘good taste’ being developed by studying past styles. The earliest prominent interior decorators were usually self-taught. By the late twentieth century, educational programmes were developed to train decorators in period styles and the arrangement of furnishings. Trade magazines and digests further developed tastes and styles, and interior decoration emerged as a full-time career. By the 1940s, interior design was developed as a separate profession. The commercial sector was then targeted for the improvement of interior spaces.

## Divisions of the Profession

Interior designers rarely work in every field. It is common for them to pick one specific area and enhance their skills in that particular field. Sometimes, designers choose to specialise in residential areas, and sometimes they choose to specialise in commercial properties. Some narrow their field

even further and choose to work for certain *types* of homes and businesses. It is also quite common for designers to refuse to pick any specific field at all. There are versatile designers and firms that do many kinds of work. This makes the field even wider for them.

The most important division is between residential and non-residential interior design. Though many designers do both, specialisation in one or the other implies important differences in experience, working habits and business acumen.

## Residential Design

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

- 1) Planning, designing, executing and furnishing;
  - a) a complete private house or apartment
  - b) specified rooms or parts of the rooms
- 2) Consultations and advice on:
  - a) painting and wall covering schedules
  - b) colour coordination
  - c) specifications for specially built units
  - d) developing layouts or floor plans
  - e) consultation with architects and craftsmen
  - f) producing presentations and drawings

Most designers prefer this type of work because it is less stressful, and the deadlines are usually a little more relaxed. When the designer is able to create something that pleases both the designer, and the client, the project is considered a success.

Sometimes, work on residential areas can be quite limited. This type of work especially suits designers who love to express their creativity. Usually, a residential project follows a sequence of working procedures as:

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

## Commercial Design

Commercial interior design includes hotels, banks, offices, retail establishments large and small,

hospitals, factories, museums, beauty parlours, gyms, theatres and so on. Here, as with residential, the client is not the only person that has to be satisfied. The designer also has to consider the client's clients, customers, employees and the public in general.

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

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

### **Kitchen and Bathroom**

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

### **Windows and Draperies**

Though it seems a small area to focus on, the windows of a house or building play a big role in its overall structure. They are a source of energy and efficiency in every home, and they are often changed on yearly basis. Basic heating and lighting knowledge helps, as well as space management.

### **Lighting**

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

### **Designer- Client Relationships**

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

### **Pure Designer**

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

## **Agent**

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

## **Merchant**

Most design firms also sell merchandise. In this regard, the designer becomes a merchant when selling merchandise.

## **Employee**

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

## **Contractor**

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

## **A Designer's Basic Considerations for Design a Scheme**

There are three basics consideration on which the entire design of a well-planned room is based, which are:

- Function
- Mood
- Style

### **Function**

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

In order to develop clear idea about the function of a room, a designer will have to know the purpose

for which the room will be used and who it is being planned for. They will have to ascertain what it is needed for, how it will be used and who will use it. The function of a room is all about practicality, comfort and the conveniences required in the room.

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

## **Mood**

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

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

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

## **Style**

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

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

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

### Further Reading:

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