



ELEVATE

Interior Design through **Advocacy**

Issue 02 - Winter 2020



ELEVATE

LEGALIZING EMPOWERMENT: One Tool for Inclusion Nobody's Talking About

Like every other industry today, architecture & design are having serious, soul-searching conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion. But we may be missing a straightforward legal adjustment that could change the inner workings of the industry in profound and positive ways.

Our industry has focused for a long time on the overwhelming whiteness of the designer/architect pipeline. We have centered our diversity and inclusivity action plans on outreach to incoming generations of BIPOC (Black, Indigianity, and people of color) college, high school, even elementary students who've historically not been exposed to or recruited by our industry. Programs like Architects in the Schools, Hip Hop Architecture, and Citizen Schools, among others, have all made great strides in beginning to close that talent gap. And for those who love our craft, sharing it with BIPOC students may naturally be the most attractive and sustainable form of activism.

In our industry, female designers, queer designers, black and brown designers are often still working for straight, white, male architects.

But the emphasis on industry pipeline ignores the barriers to professional advancement young BIPOC designers face once they've joined the profession. In spite of decades of efforts public and private, in our industry, female designers, queer designers, black and brown designers are often still working for straight, white, male architects.

The current demographic makeup of the industry—and the undeniably different makeup of its leadership—is not just due to the discriminatory practices of individuals or companies. It is the inescapable result of regulatory laws that have failed to evolve with the industry and have resultantly granted disproportionate power to one class and professional category over all others. Despite years of diversification of design specialties, architects—who are overwhelmingly white and male—remain the legally designated authorities over our entire industry.

The history of commercial interior design explains this. Our discipline

emerged from the practice of architecture in the last half of the 20th century due to the increased complexity of interior spaces and a new demand for thoughtfully designed interiors. Whereas interiors used to be just the accidental result of external architecture, in the 1960s and 70s both clients and designers began to see the potential for interiors to function as spaces that would help employees work more efficiently, students learn more effectively, patients heal more quickly. Interiors could, more generally, improve the quality of life for everyone who moved through and occupied them. This awareness created a new focus and need for a professional perspective independent from that of traditional architecture. Thus the commercial interior designer was born.

In addition to those personal and workplace challenges, the state has erected a legal barrier to professional advancement for non-architects. Commercial interior designers are not included in the California State

Civil Code's definition of Design Professionals, and they typically cannot submit drawings for permit without the stamp and signature of an architect. An ambitious commercial interior designer thus faces a professional impasse, and can find they have no pathway to ownership at all, since achieving this legal authority is often a requirement.

Is it ethical to encourage young students to get a degree in a field which doesn't allow them access to the hallmarks of power in the industry? Do students know their choice of interior design over architecture may mean they never get the opportunity to submit drawings for acceptance at a building department all on their own, and may prevent them from ever achieving a position of ownership?

The practice of the law, itself, proves its antiquity. Architects aren't generating all these drawings themselves; they are often stamping the work of commercial interior designers which includes details and specifications unfamiliar to them. These specifications, of course, represent the daily work and core competency of commercial interior design. It's clear that the state needs to establish a new tier of recognition for qualified commercial interior designers that acknowledges and respects the specialized training and knowledge of commercial interior designers, who ensure that all citizens have safe, accessible, useful spaces to move through.

The idea of creating a new and particularly rigorous requirement for full participation in the industry might seem wrong-headed in terms of increasing diversity and equity. But as sociologist Beth Redbird's research has found, "licensure... creates a set of institutional mechanisms that enhance entry into the occupation, particularly for historically disadvantaged groups."

In other words, providing a clear path to advancement allows people to pursue and achieve it equally, without such exclusionary considerations as personal connections and subjective assessments of style that in the past have served to suppress greater diversity among practitioners.

In Redbird's sample of 300 occupations over 30 years, the creation of occupational licensure increased the proportion of Black workers by more than 3%. Given the current demographics of our industry, 3% would be a significant improvement.

Importantly, associating real professional benefits like the ability to stamp and sign drawings with occupational licensure would not just increase the proportion of historically marginalized populations in the profession.

Bestowing legal authority on interior designers through certification would qualify them for entry into partnerships and other senior leadership positions, from which they are now often technically excluded. In the short-to-mid-term, this would inevitably elevate a more diverse population into positions of ownership within the architecture and design world overall.

If we want BIPOC individuals to join, enrich, and diversify our profession—and we do, far beyond simply responding to the social pressure of this moment—we owe them a future that presents unfettered potential for leadership, ownership, influence, respect, and impact. Licensure of commercial interior designers is a critical change we can make right now to help level the playing field and open up those opportunities.



Laura Taylor
VP of Advocacy
IIDA Northern California

ELEVATE

IIDA California's survey results

We wanted to hear about your involvement with the interior design profession in California - 240 people responded over the course of 6 months. Here are some of the biggest takeaways from the survey. Your responses help us advocate for more inclusive legislation in the state.

The winners of the Heath Ceramics gift certificates were Jennifer Campbell (Northern CA) and Alexis Brunkow (Southern CA).

Thank you to everyone who responded!

97%
PRINCIPALS & FIRM LEADERSHIP SURVEYED
AGREE
CERTIFIED PROFESSIONALS SHOULD DESIGN CALIFORNIA'S COMMERCIAL SPACES

80%
ARCHITECTS SURVEYED
AGREE
COMMERCIAL INTERIOR DESIGNERS SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN CALIFORNIA CIVIL CODE'S DEFINITION OF DESIGN PROFESSIONAL

97%
INTERIOR DESIGNERS SURVEYED
AGREE
COMMERCIAL INTERIOR DESIGNERS SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN CALIFORNIA CIVIL CODE'S DEFINITION OF DESIGN PROFESSIONAL

ELEVATE

Where we stand in California

CURRENT STATE

What kind of recognition do Commercial Interior Designers in the state of California have now?

Commercial Interior Designers are not included in the definition of “design professionals” as our architect, engineering, and landscape architect colleagues are.

What kind of regulation is in place now in the state of California?

Since 1992, the title Certified Interior Designer has been the only title recognized by the State of California. While the codification of this title is a great start, the qualifying exam, regulating body, and privileges associated with the current CID law are not ideal. Because the interior design industry is ever-evolving, the legislation that regulates the industry must also evolve and IIDA’s advocates are committed to the modernization of past law to reflect the landscape of the profession today.

What is the current qualifying exam a Certified Interior Designer has to pass to achieve certification?

The IDEX exam which is not recognized by the industry at large and is considered a less-rigorous exam than the NCIDQ.

What regulating body oversees the current certification of interior designers (CID)?

An independent, private organization called the California Council for Interior Design Certification (CCIDC). It is very unusual for an occupation to be regulated by a private board. In California, there are only 3 occupations currently overseen by a private board. Nationally, California is the only state in the United States employing a private board to oversee certification of interior designers.

What privileges do current CIDs possess?

While CCIDC issues a stamp to CIDs upon certification, the scope CIDs can practice and the recognition of their stamp is not codified in California state law and CIDs have inconsistent experiences at building departments across California. CCIDC recently introduced a “Commercial” designation to its certification which is also not codified and does not grant additional or expanded privileges to Commercial CIDs when submitting drawings to building departments.

FUTURE STATE

What kind of **recognition** would IIDA like to see for Commercial Interior Designers in the state of California?

Commercial Interior Designers should be included in the definition of “design professionals” as our architect, engineering, and landscape architect colleagues are.

What kind of **regulation** would IIDA like to see for Commercial Interior Designers in the state of California?

A voluntary registration recognizing a title like “Registered Interior Designer” or “Certified Interior Designer”

What kind of **qualifying exam** would IIDA like to see for Commercial Interior Designers in the state of California?

The NCIDQ exam which is the industry’s standard exam for the United States and Canada.

A possible supplemental California-specific exam, following the model of registration for architects in the state of California.

What **regulating body** should oversee the regulation of interior designers?

A state board or department which is typical for occupational licensure

What **privileges** would IIDA like to see interior designers achieve through registration?

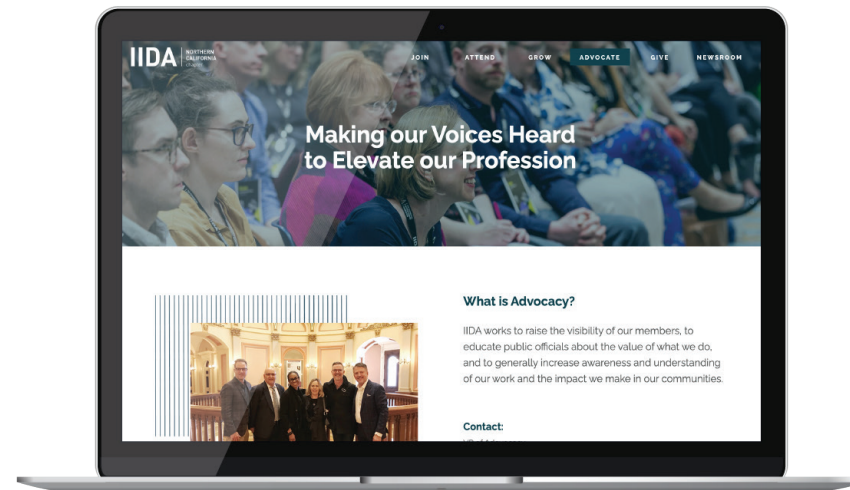
The ability to stamp & seal drawings within a defined scope and for the acceptance of that stamp to be codified in state law to ensure consistent acceptance at building departments throughout California.



ELEVATE

IIDA's Northern California Chapter has a new Website

Visit the new Advocacy page featuring 6 ways to get involved with IIDA's mission to elevate the profession at iidanc.org/advocacy.



ELEVATE

Thank you to our 2020-2021 Advocacy Sponsors



Interested in joining our advocacy efforts in California? Reach out to your local IIDA advocates!

Northern California:
advocacy@iidanc.org

Southern California:
christine.peter@iida-socal.org
jade.li@iida-socal.org

**For the latest
updates on
Commercial
Interior Design
legislation text
Interior Designer
to 52886**

iidanc.org

iida-socal.org

IIDA

The Commercial
Interior Design
Association