

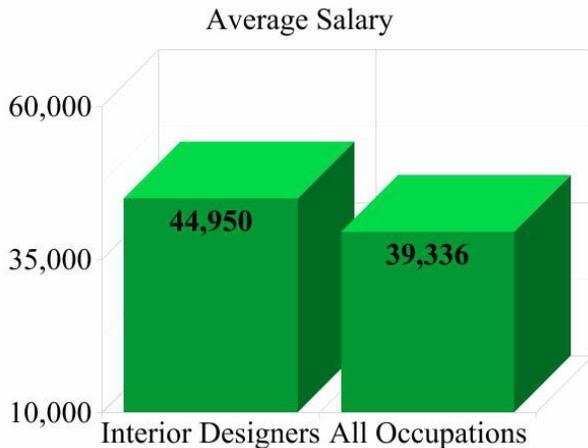
Interior Designers

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WHAT THEY DO

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

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



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

Whatever space they are working on, almost all designers follow the same process. The first step, known as programming, is to determine the client's needs and wishes. The designer usually meets face-to-face with the client to find out how the space will be used and to get an idea of the client's preferences and budget.

For example, the designer might inquire about a family's cooking habits if the family is remodeling a kitchen or ask about a store or restaurant's target customer to pick an appropriate motif. The designer also will visit the space to take inventory of existing furniture and equipment and identify positive attributes of the space and potential problems.

After collecting this information, the designer formulates a design plan and estimates costs. Today, designs often are created with the use of computer-aided design (CAD) software, which provides more detail and easier corrections than sketches made by hand. Upon completing the design plan, the designer will present it to the client and make revisions based on the client's input.

When the design concept is finalized, the designer will begin specifying the materials, finishes, and furnishings required, such as furniture, lighting, flooring, wall covering, and artwork. Depending on the complexity of the project, the designer also might submit drawings for approval by a construction inspector to ensure that the design meets building codes. If a project requires structural work, the designer works with an architect or engineer for that part of the project. Most designs also require the hiring of contractors to do technical work, such as lighting, plumbing, and electrical wiring. Often designers choose contractors and write work contracts.

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

EDUCATION REQUIRED

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

The National Association of Schools of Art and Design accredits approximately 300 postsecondary institutions with programs in art and design. Most of these schools award a degree in interior design. Applicants may be required to submit sketches and other examples of their artistic ability. Basic coursework includes CAD, drawing, perspective, spatial planning, color and fabrics, furniture design, architecture, ergonomics, ethics, and psychology.

The Council for Interior Design Accreditation also accredits interior design programs that lead to a bachelor's or master's degree. In 2008, there were over 150 accredited programs in interior design in the United States.

Interior Designers - Continued

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OTHER USEFUL SKILLS

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

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

HOW TO ADVANCE

Optional certifications in residential kitchen and bath design are available from the National Kitchen and Bath Association. The association offers several different levels of certification for kitchen and bath designers, each achieved through training seminars and certification exams.

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

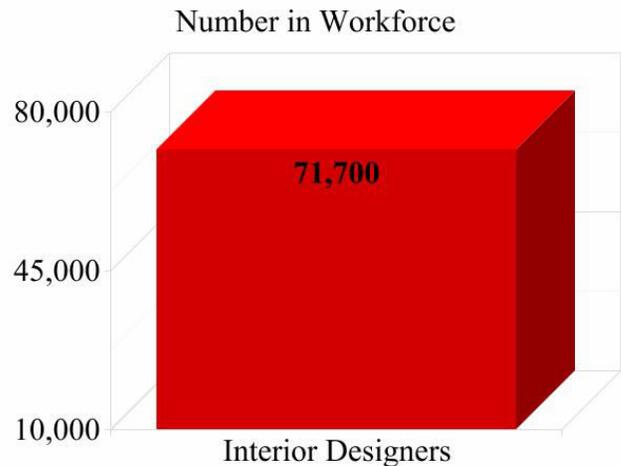
WORK ENVIRONMENT

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

JOB GROWTH

Employment of interior designers is expected to grow 19 percent from 2008 to 2018, faster than the average for all occupations. An increasing interest in interior design and awareness of its benefits will increase demand for designers. As businesses realize the improvements that can be made to worker and customer satisfaction through good design, they will use interior designers to redesign their offices and stores.

Homeowners are increasingly using the services of interior designers when they plan new additions, remodel aging kitchens and bathrooms, and update the general décor of their home. Many homeowners also have requested design help in creating year-round outdoor living spaces and home theater systems.



Demand for interior design services from the healthcare industry is expected to be high because of an anticipated increase in demand for facilities that will accommodate the aging population. Designers will be needed to make these facilities as comfortable and homelike as possible for patients. There will also be demand from businesses in the hospitality industry—hotels, resorts, and restaurants—where good design work can help attract more business.

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