



Practice
(and Title)
Makes
Perfect

BY DAVID WHITEMYER

The once grassroots movement for interior design protection acts has found its way to mainstream acceptance.

In July of 2005, Iowa became

the latest in a rapidly growing number of states to grant legal status to the interior design profession as a means to protect the health, welfare and safety of people living and working in their states. The Iowa Interior Design Title Act allows individuals the right to call themselves “Registered Interior Designers” after meeting the required education, experience and examination prerequisites. “We worked on this legislation for years,” says Jennifer Voorhees, IIDA, Lobbyist Chair for the Iowa Interior Design Coalition. “Iowa is surrounded by states where title laws are in place, like Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois and Missouri.”

The licensing and registration of the interior design profession isn’t new, (Puerto Rico was the first to achieve the designation in 1973), but it’s in the last few years that the effort has become especially active. Clearly, Iowa was the interior design success story of 2005, but it wasn’t the only story. IIDA Members were active in the promotion, enactment and implementation of design legislation in 17 states in 2005. This progress has served to bring the issue to the forefront of the industry’s mind and get interior designers everywhere interested and involved.

THE BIG PICTURE

Currently, 25 U.S. states – including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico – and eight Canadian provinces have laws recognizing the interior design profession. Advocates in many states are working toward legislation, and more states are certain to follow. “We need to focus our efforts on educating legislators and the public on the positive aspects of regulation,” Voorhees says.

Those aspects include protecting the health, safety and welfare of the public, defining the profession’s responsibilities and encouraging excellence.

“Technology, sustainable design and many other aspects of this profession are constantly evolving,” says Carl R. Ballinger, IIDA, Vice President of Government & Regulatory Affairs for IIDA’s Pennsylvania/New Jersey/Delaware Chapter and President of the Interior Design Legislative Coalition of Pennsylvania. “That is why regulation is important and why IIDA in its bylaws requires its Members to take continuing education. I think it’s encouraging to see the high percentage of people in IIDA hitting the mark in terms of the number of CEU credits required.”

The bulk of states with interior design laws, including Iowa, have Title Acts. A Title Act is regulated through a board and ensures that only qualified interior designers use the title. However, Title Acts do not prohibit others from engaging in the occupation. “In the Iowa law, we included language noting that our title does not restrict architects, engineers and retail furniture salespeople from providing interior design services,” says Voorhees.

Another group of states, including Nevada, Louisiana, Alabama and Florida, as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, have



Parents and children work together with Relief International to build a school in post-tsunami Sri Lanka. The school's design is based on a design from the Creative Commons Developing Nations License.

What about the Work?

Efforts sprout to protect design philanthropy and intellectual property.

There is no Hippocratic Oath for interior designers; nothing that officially compels its practitioners to work with the good of society in mind. Yet in a world where tsunamis, earthquakes, hurricanes and political conflict ravage cities and disrupt lives, the skills of urban planners, architects and interior designers are desperately needed. "Recent events oblige all of us to pledge that progress, not politics, is the inevitable outcome of disaster," wrote *Architecture Magazine* Editor-in-Chief Emilie Sommerhoff in the publication's October 2005 issue.

This is easier said than done. Currently there are no real laws protecting the intellectual property of architectural design. "This is a huge dilemma for designers," says Cameron Sinclair, co-founder and Executive Director of Architecture for Humanity, an organization that supports design solutions to humanitarian crises and provides design services to communities in need. "Designers want to work in developing nations, but they worry that what they've created will be taken, bastardized or used for profit."

Architecture for Humanity works with designers around the world on projects such as HIV/AIDS outreach facilities in South Africa, housing for those displaced in recent disasters and community and civic buildings in post-tsunami India and Sri Lanka. "In Africa, an architect pulled out of a mobile health clinic project because he got cold feet about copyright protection," Sinclair says. "The project stopped because of this, not because political or community issues."

To fix the problem, Sinclair is working with Creative Commons to develop an alternative type of copyright protection, particularly in developing nations. Instead of "all rights reserved" copyrights, designers would guard work with "some rights reserved." "Designers will choose how detailed their protection will be," Sinclair says. "They'll protect the details down to exact colors and finishes, or they'll allow people to take pieces of their creation and transform it for good use."

This new copyright protection is just as revolutionary as the affordable, durable and attractive structures that designers can create for countries and people in need. And the hope is that it will encourage more designers to do just that.

Practice Acts. While both Title and Practice Acts focus on the health, safety and welfare of the public, Practice Acts require that interior design services be provided by a licensed design professional. They are the most restrictive type of occupational regulation in that they prohibit unlicensed people from providing interior design services.

WHO STANDS WHERE

It's important for design groups supporting the profession to be vocal in the support for the development of the profession through interior design legislation. IIDA's stance, which is clearly documented in its Policies and Procedures, states that legal recognition – whether achieved through licensing, registration and/or certification – safeguards the health, safety and welfare of

the general public, brings uniformity to the profession, defines responsibility, and encourages excellence in the interior design industry.

However, despite the support of many individual architects and firms at the state and local level, the strongest opponent to current efforts has been the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB) and the American Institute of Architects (AIA). The official policy of AIA regarding interior design legislation states that its board recognizes the value of interior designers but doesn't feel there is justification to support changing existing state licensing laws. "The AIA opposes practice or title regulation of individuals or groups other than architects and engineers," states the organization's Architectural Practice and

Title Regulations Policy Statement.

Interior designers are quick to respond to this perspective by pointing out the collaborative nature of the profession. Interior designers frequently work alongside and lead other regulated professionals. It only makes sense for the interior design component to be regulated as well. "In a world where partnering of professional teams abound," Voorhees says, "It's time to embrace the combination of our expertise, to use our collective ideas and energy in providing the best spaces for the public."

"What I find most troublesome about AIA's opposition is its lack of understanding of the profession of interior design," says Stephanie Deshaies, IIDA, Vice President of Government & Regulatory Affairs for the IIDA Northern Pacific

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Why IIDA?



IIDA firmly believes that legal recognition achieved through licensing/registration/certification safeguards the health, safety and welfare of the general public, brings uniformity to the profession, defines responsibility and encourages excellence in the interior design industry. IIDA encourages interior design professionals to seek enforceable legislation conforming to the following minimum standards:

- Minimum design education accredited by FIDER or the equivalent
- Requirement for professional experience
- That the National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ) be the primary and sole vehicle for examination for the interior design profession.
- A code of guidelines for professional practice and ethics
- A schedule for requiring continuing education
- Grandfathering with education, experience and examination criteria
- A clear definition of “interior designer” as developed by NCIDQ
- Sealing privileges to substantiate documentation preparation by a licensed, registered and/or certified interior designer

Look to IIDA as a resource in keeping up-to-date on and compliant with current legislative standards.

For more information on interior design issues in your state — and how you may be able to contribute, visit

www.iida.org or call
888.799.4432.

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—Stephanie Deshaies, IIDA, Vice President of Government & Regulatory Affairs, IIDA Northern Pacific Chapter

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Chapter. Deshaies, a long-time advocate for interior design legislation, spoke last April at international firm NBBJ on the need for legislation. “But why would they understand? They were trained as architects; not interior designers. The interior design profession needs to take responsibility for educating and sharing information with the architecture world.”

MOVING FORWARD

As the public’s awareness of design value increases every day, the climate is right for designers

of all genres to come together and stand up for legislation that protects the public from unqualified practitioners. In the past, it has taken instances of harm, like non-code-compliant buildings or unethical business practices to prompt action. Increasingly, though, it is the positive examples that are bringing the subject to light. “I have come across so many outstanding, passionate professionals in my legislative work,” says Deshaies. “It’s their tireless dedication that is raising the bar for the rest of the profession.”

Interior designers everywhere

are seeking professional recognition and protection for the health, safety and welfare of all citizens, and it’s going to take sustained hard work. Though it’s unclear what jurisdictions will enact interior design legislation next or what changes will occur in existing laws, what is clear is that great progress is being made. “Contact your local coalition, and find out how you can contribute,” Deshaies says. “If you’re fortunate enough to be in a state that has succeeded in achieving legislation, watch and protect those rights.” 📍