FROM THE EDITOR

I encourage you to submit your thoughts and responses to the Perspective below in the Letters section of the next issue of the *Journal of Interior Design*.

Interior Design's Social Compact: Key to the Quest for Professional Status

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Introduction

Interior design professionals have been working to define interior design as a distinct and valued profession for more than fifty years. Continuing efforts to gain professional recognition include academic accreditation, apprenticeship, examination, licensure, and self-regulation through professional associations. There is, however, an essential aspect of professionalism unaddressed by interior designers: the social compact to do good.

In William M. Sullivan's Work and Integrity: The Crisis and Promise of Professionalism in America (2005), he describes the history of professions in America and the crisis of public confidence in the ability of professionals to act professionally. He explains how professions developed as a way to identify specially trained and skilled experts. Historically, society entrusted the professions with the right to define their body of knowledge and systems for education, apprenticeship, and licensure. In exchange for this autonomy, professions were to provide self-regulation of their members so that they would act ethically and provide a public good. Sullivan describes the current crisis of public confidence in the professions and clearly places the blame for this crisis on the fact that the professions have not attended to their obligation to act ethically and provide a public good.

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Sullivan is also clear about the higher meaning of professionalism. He states:

> By taking responsibility through one's work for ends of social importance, an individual's skills and aspirations acquire value for others. Professionalism thereby forms a crucial link between the individual's struggle for freedom in a fulfilling existence and the needs of the larger society, so that individual opportunity can serve the demands of interdependence. (Sullivan, 2005, 30-31)

If a profession's obligation is to provide services of social importance that meet the demands of interdependence, what is the interior design profession's obligation to society? We propose that the primary social value of, and the basis for a social compact for the interior design profession, is designing physiologically and psychologically supportive interior environments that enhance quality of life. We assert that interior designers will attain professional status only when it is understood by the public that their work is of value to society and that interior designers serve the demands of interdependence by designing and creating supportive interior environments that enhance quality of life. Professional status will come when all interior designers take seriously their obligation to society and, as a result, come to be recognized for their meaningful contributions to the common good. This will take time. A public education campaign intent on recasting the image of interior design will not suffice. Interior designers need to transform the culture of the profession to embrace and act on this social compact. This transformation must start in two places: with forward-thinking interior design practitioners and within interior design education.

Context

Sullivan's characterization of a profession, which follows, provides a context for discussion of this issue for interior design educators.

> A profession is typically described as an occupation characterized by three features: specialized training in a field of codified knowledge usually acquired by formal education and apprenticeship, public recognition of a certain autonomy on the part of the community of practitioners to regulate their own standards of practice, and a commitment to provide service to the public that goes beyond the economic welfare of the practitioner. (Sullivan, 2005, 36)

By this definition, is interior design a true profession? We believe that interior design does not yet meet Sullivan's description of a profession. The full answer to this question has several facets. There is no doubt that interior design demonstrates some of the characteristics of a profession. Interior designers are addressing self-regulation of practice standards in several ways. The Council for Interior Design Accreditation provides a measure of the adequacy of interior design education through accreditation of worthy academic programs. The National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ) administers professional examinations that measure baseline competencies for practitioners. The NCIDQ has recently instituted a formalized internship process for entry-level designers, thus extending interior design education beyond the formal academic setting. However, it remains problematic for interior design that an accredited education and certification are not universally required for legitimate professional status.

Another example of self-regulation in interior design is the adoption of codes of ethics by professional organizations. Members must comply with these codes to maintain the benefits of professional membership. However, professional codes of ethics principally address business ethics that contribute to sustaining a fair playing field for professionals (and clients) within a capitalistic market economy. The adoption of codes of

PERSPECTIVE

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ethics that address business practices was an important step for interior designers; however, these codes do not address the interior design profession's social responsibilities—the side of the compact between professions and society involving public good.

The current effort to define the body of knowledge for interior design is aimed at drawing a distinction between interior design and other design disciplines based on codified knowledge. According to Sullivan (2005), since the mid-twentieth century the trend has been for professions to focus on their differentiated expertise as the basis for their autonomy. Unfortunately, in many ways doing so is responsible for the declining focus of the professions on their responsibility to society. The end result is that the professions have lost status in society (59). Interior designers have had unfortunate timing, attempting to gain recognition as a profession at the very time that the professions were focused on expertise rather than their social compact. Interior designers naturally followed the trend of the time, and that has left them without the grounding of a social compact. Given this point of view, more critical than defining interior design's body of knowledge would be an immediate effort to define the unique and valuable role that interior design plays in society, and then a subsequent effort to apply that role universally.

Discussion

Do interior designers, as a whole, provide a public service that contributes to social interdependence and thus has value beyond the economic welfare of the practitioner? We believe interior designers have the potential to do so and that there are socially responsible practitioners who have personally adopted this ethic. We believe the basis of the interior design profession's social compact should be that interior designers above all else design physiologically and psychologically supportive interior environments that enhance quality of life. It is possible that not all interior designers are interested in embracing this social compact.

Interior design is a varied—some might say fractured—discipline. Some interior designers advocate for more specialization and for levels of certification to provide greater clarity regarding which individual interior designers are qualified for each type of work. We believe that once interior designers understand and embody their social compact, the identity of subgroups and areas of specific expertise will be less important than it appears to be at this time. After interior designers embrace their social compact, the defining and unifying characteristic of the interior design profession will be the significant value of its contribution to social interdependence. Our hope is that when interior designers focus on the unique value of their work in society they will find greater meaning and purpose in that work.

In professional journals, there are prolific and earnest appeals on the topic of attaining professional status for interior designers. Yet the arguments being made are inadequate because they do not address the issue of interior design's social compact. Some of these articles, such as Robert Wright's "Defining our Profession" (2006), call for clarity and consistency in defining interior design. Wright focuses on the confusion caused by borrowing terms from architecture, such as "interior architect" and "interior architecture." It seems to us that those who wish to define design that has continuity with, or responds to, the architectural context as interior architecture are missing the point (Hildebrandt, 2004). Good interior design is contextually responsive. Interior design that is not contextual is not good design.

The conflict over terms borrowed from architecture is a consequence of the issue that is hardest to address within the field of interior design: the inferior status of interior design to architecture. This status is largely because of the fact that interior design is a female-dominated profession (Havenhand, 2004) and to the

fact that interior design involves a wide range of activities, including the much-maligned act of decoration. Although the articles in the professional literature on defining the profession of interior design are honest attempts to move forward, they do not define what is unique about the work of interior designers within the framework of the profession's ethical obligation to society, and thus they have failed to bring interior design to full professional stature.

Most of the literature on professional ethics for the built environment frames these ethical concerns as they relate to the architectural profession. This is likely because of the relative maturity of the architectural profession and to the fact that some individuals in the discipline of architecture are willing to take an introspective view of architecture's ethical responsibilities. Although architecture has a reasonably large body of literature on ethics, the architectural profession has not united around the concept of any specific societal good it provides (Glasser, 2000; Kelbaugh, 2004). Kelbaugh (2004) states his disappointment this way: "We've backslid on our professional obligation to do no harm and on our public trust to contribute to the joy and dignity of humanity" (67). Glasser (2000) says architects and architectural educators "...view individual buildings as unique works of art and demonstrations of self-expression, rather than as contributions to the larger civic environment" (252). With regard to the profession's ethical obligation to contribute meaningfully to societal interdependence, architecture is not a model for emulation by interior designers.

Publications that focus on interior design and professional ethics typically address the ethics of business practices. Deborah Long's Ethics and the Design Professions (2000), which was commissioned by the NCIDQ as part of their Continuing Education Monograph Series, is an impressive discourse on business ethics for interior design and their philosophical underpinnings. Just a few articles (mostly in professional journals) address professional ethics beyond business practices for interior designers. They tend to focus on sustainability, wise use of resources, health and well-being, design for the disadvantaged, and the like. What we read into the fact that these articles have been written and published is that there are interior design practitioners looking for greater meaning and purpose in their work. We hope they will join us in embracing the social compact we propose.

There is a strong body of literature on professionalism and ethics, on teaching ethics across the curriculum in higher education, and on teaching ethics at all educational levels as a foundation for moral development. Interior design is seldom mentioned in these books and articles. This could be because interior design is not considered a profession by the authors. Yet another explanation could be interior design's comparatively low status within all professions, where medicine (doctoring) and law reign supreme and professions that have traditionally been the domain of females—like teaching, nursing, and interior design—are considered of lesser prestige. It is interesting to note that nursing consistently ranks highest in the Gallup Organization's annual public opinion poll of the most honest and ethical professions (Saad, 2006). Why shouldn't interior design, like nursing, be understood as an honest, ethical, compassionate, and socially valuable profession?

Defining Interior Design's Ethical Obligations to Society

The primary argument interior designers have used with mixed success regarding their primary professional obligations and value to society has been their role in the protection of health, safety, and welfare. In combination with other factors, this obligation has been the primary basis for state interior design title and license legislation in the United States. The problem with tying the interior design profession's social compact to health, safety, and welfare is that all environmental design fields—and particularly architecture—can also

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legitimately make this claim. We believe everyone who works to design, build, or manage the built environment shares an obligation to, and should be held accountable for, their specific role in protecting health, safety, and welfare. The basis for interior design's social compact must be found in a societal role that is exclusive to the interior design profession.

Progressive initiatives to improve or reform the profession through better educational practices and additional professional examination standards have been consistent themes for interior design. One of the most obvious of these current initiatives is the drive toward sustainability or ecological responsibility in interior design. Warwick Fox (2000) is insightful in his statement that "achieving a sustainable way of living is not just a technical issue (although it is often discussed as if it were), but also (and fundamentally) an ethical one" (6-7). We believe the design professions are not addressing the ethical issues adequately and that interior designers have the opportunity through their social compact to be leaders within the environmental design disciplines.

The emphasis on sustainability in all areas of environmental design is evidenced in part within the interior design discipline by the adoption of the following resolution at the International Interior Design Educators Council (IDEC) meeting in 2005, "Be it resolved that IDEC supports the concepts of socially responsible design including the cradle to cradle paradigm as an integral part of interior design education" (IDEC 2005 Annual Report, 2). The emphasis on sustainability in interior design education is also evidenced in the recent revisions to the Professional Standards in The Council for Interior Design Accreditation Manual 2006 (http://accredit-id.org/accredmanual.pdf). The Council now requires accredited programs to teach environmental ethics as part of the teaching of professional values. In the revised standards, effective January 1, 2006, the expectation is that students in accredited programs will learn "environmental ethics and the role of sustainability in the practice of interior design" (II-9). The Council provides the following definition of environmental ethics: "A value system supporting adoption of ecologically responsible behaviors and practices" (X-11).

The Council wants educators to teach and students to learn/adopt a value system that includes ecologically responsible behaviors and design practices. Thus, we must know what ecologically responsible design is. Ecology is the study of living organisms and their relationship to their environment. Ecological design, in the words of Sim Van der Ryn and Stewart Cowan, is "any form of design that minimizes environmentally destructive impacts by integrating itself with living processes" (1996, x,18).

We agree with IDEC and the Council that ecologically responsible design is one of the obligations of interior designers within society. However, as with health, safety, and welfare, interior design does not have an exclusive obligation or claim to the provision of ecologically responsible design services. We believe interior designers should meet their obligations to society to design for health, safety, welfare and ecological-responsibility. We believe interior design's unique obligation to provide for human well-being and quality of life through responsiveness to the physiological and psychological needs of humans in interior environments is a subset of ecologically-responsible design. Interior designers hold the primary obligation to design interiors that meet ecological aims because no other design discipline is educated to work at the intimate scale of interiors (Gürel & Potthoff, 2006).

We don't want to quibble over terms, but it is important to consider language as we define our social compact. What do we mean by the terms we use to describe activities or aims associated with the social compact? There is no doubt the specific meaning of the terms we use will drive our understanding of the social compact. There is an important distinction to make between environmentally ethical (used in the Council's standard statement)

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and ecologically responsible design (used in the Council's definition of environmental ethics). Environmentally ethical design assumes a point of view that is not human-centered. That is, the rights and needs of humans are not assumed superior to the rights of the non-human world. This philosophical position is not dominant in the mainstream sustainability literature for interior design or architecture and appears not to be the focus of sustainable interior design. Most environmental designers appear to ascribe to a conservation ethic—that is, preserving the natural world so that it will continue to support human life indefinitely. With the evident bias in the design professions toward a human-centered ethic of ecology, it may be most appropriate for interior designers to ascribe a point of view based in human ecology. We particularly like the definition of human ecology provided by the Centre for Human Ecology.

> Human Ecology is about uncovering and understanding the connections between personal action, social systems and the ecology of the planet of which we are part. The challenge is to critically examine the way things are and to ask why and how they could be different; to find new and better ways of arranging our lives, our businesses and our societies, ways that reduce poverty and inequality, reduce the amount of resources we use, restore the environment and improve quality of life for all now and for generations to come. (Pioneers of Change, Centre for Human Ecology, n.d.)

As articulated by Kaup, Anderson, Honey (2007),

> The three primary issues of importance to human ecologists addressed by interior designers are : a) sustainability through environmentally ethical[or better yet, rejuvenating] design, construction, and management of the built environment, b) improving quality of life through design that applies knowledge of environment and behavior, and c) fulfilling human needs through support of individuals, families, and communities in their access to suitable goods, services, employment, education, recreation, and housing (46).

Lucinda K. Havenhand's (2004) description of the interior design profession's "focus on the intimate movements, needs, and emotional concerns of the users of interior space, as individuals and in connection with others" (40) corresponds to our proposal for interior design's compact with society.

It is possible that a human-ecological point of view for interior designers would help to meet the challenge of societal transformation that must occur in addition to ecologically responsible design for the long-term preservation of human life on earth. David W. Orr (2002) provides a compelling viewpoint concerning the limitations of ecologically responsible design.

> Finally, the potential for ecologically smarter design in all of its manifestations in architecture, landscape design, community design, the management of agricultural and forest lands, manufacturing, and technology does not amount to a fix for all that ails us. Reducing the amount of damage we do to the world per capita will only buy us a few decades, perhaps a century if we are lucky. If we squander that reprieve, we will have succeeded only in delaying the eventual collision between unfettered human desires and the limits of the earth. The default setting of our civilization needs to be reset to ensure that we build a sustainable world that is also spiritually sustaining. This is not a battle between left and right or haves and have-nots as it is often described. At a deeper level the issue has to do with art and beauty. In the largest sense, what we must do to ensure human tenure on the earth is to cultivate a new standard that defines beauty as that which causes no ugliness somewhere else or at some later time (134).

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The Role of Higher Education in Transforming Interior Design

We believe interior design will be transformed when the focus of professional legitimization moves away from proving expertise and toward embracing the unique ethical obligation we have to society—that of creating interior spaces that physiologically and psychologically support and enhance the quality of life. There is no doubt that the social compact between professions and society is an issue of professional ethics. Sullivan (2005) clearly articulates the role of the academy in establishing a clear ethical compact for each profession.

> To establish a meaningful grounding for practice, schools need to enable students to come to terms with the social and ethical significance of their future work.... The word ethics comes from the Greek, meaning "custom." It refers to the daily habits and behaviors through which the spirit of a particular community is expressed and lived out.... It means far more than a code of rules or even a set of principles, though ethics can include that. Rather, ethics in a professional curriculum ought to be a way in which students and faculty alike can grasp and discuss, as well as practice, the core commitments that define the profession. ...the subject matter of ethics ranges from theory to practice. Ethics rightly includes not just individual identity and behavior but, importantly, the social contexts and cultural expectations that shape the practice and career of the... practitioner (215).

In addition to Sullivan (2005), Berry (1999), Edwards (2005), and Lisman (1996) make compelling arguments that place squarely on the shoulders of the professorate the obligation to teach the values of public engagement and the ethical and social responsibility of the professions. The academy plays a primary role in establishing each field's obligation to society for the greater good and in preparing students to become professionals willing and able to fulfill the compact between the professions and society (Sullivan 2005, 195-226). Sullivan is clear that professional schools must "serve as a rallying point for professional renewal" (226).

Summary

The expectation that all interior design professionals will embrace and embody this social compact in the near future is idealistic but not unrealistic. There are many interior designers and interior design educators for whom this proposed social compact will be reaffirming because they already embody this ethic in their work. We believe the transformation of the profession will happen both within the academy and within the profession itself. Interior design educators will play a significant role in causing the necessary shift away from arguing professional expertise toward embracing the social importance and value of our work. When all interior designers value and act with good faith to enhance the quality of life through their work, society will bestow professional status on interior designers because they will deserve it. Interior design educators must redefine the profession's role in society by educating new interior designers to understand and value the profession's obligation to providing a unique and meaningful service to society, one that contributes to interdependence and thus has value beyond the economic welfare of the practitioner and client. Interior designers can be full participants in the efforts to advance humanity toward maturity (Elgin 2001); in what Edwards (2005) calls the "sustainability revolution"; and in what Berry (1999) calls "the great work." Interior designers are poised to take full advantage of the opportunities presented by the "conceptual age" that Daniel Pink (2005) says will reward those who focus "on meeting the aesthetic, emotional, and spiritual demands of a prosperous time" (246).

Soon after interior design accepts its social compact as the guiding force for all that it does, we believe the interior design profession's self-image—and eventually its public image—will be transformed. Educators must take the lead in communicating the profession's potential to support the common good. When practitioners and

P E R S P E C T I V E

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educators come together to embrace and embody the profession's social compact we will begin to understand the whole range of work that now falls under the umbrella of interior design in a new and inclusive way. When the interior design profession as a whole finds significance and meaning in its work and is committed to fulfilling a unique and valuable role in society, then our common commitment to a significant purpose will bind us together into a confident, recognized, and valued profession.

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P E R S P E C T I V E

Notes

[1] Decoration is held in low esteem because of its association with fashion, taste, and flair. The general perception is that a decorator's work is based on artistic talents rather than the more respected rational decision making drawn from empirical knowledge. We suspect in this time when individuals are searching for greater meaning within the context of a life of material abundance, interior decoration (even interior design as a whole) is misunderstood as shallow materialism. There is no doubt that decoration is often motivated by shallow and materialistic values. Yet, when well executed, decoration plays an important role in the psychological well-being of human beings and thus is a significant aspect of the soial compact we propose.

[2] Gürel & Potthoff (2006) provide evidence that while a majority of architects continue to provide interior design services they are not educated to do so.