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As the International Interior Design Association celebrates its 10-year anniversary, leading global designers contemplate the future of the design profession.

BY ADRIENNE J. REWI

FUTURE

SCAPE

If the design profession is willing to revisit its sociological and anthropological role in a truly respectful and collaborative way, its future will be extraordinary. Through this lens, an interior designer could even become the Secretary General of the United Nations.

However, temper that vision with the more sobering present reality – that the design industry still lacks an integrated education program and the ability to break down fences between disciplines and organizations. Despite the phenomenal progress made in the last decade, unless change speeds up, today’s designers risk becoming tomorrow’s blacksmiths.

At a time in which the design community has the greatest opportunities since the Industrial Revolution, it also seems to have just as many challenges. Certainly, training and education will be big issues in the future of the design profession – not just technical or design training, but training in interpretation, facilitation and communication skills and an appreciation for design as a celebration of human values instead of technology.

Ten years from now, designers will need to employ a more holistic “social science” approach to problem-solving, says Laurie Aznavoorian, Leader, Geyer Future Environments, Sydney, the strategic arm of Geyer Corporate Environments, one of Australia’s preeminent commercial design practices.

“As designers, we will not be able to create solutions based on aesthetics alone,” Aznavoorian predicts. “We’ll need to understand business, brand, culture, religion, age. Our approach to problem solving will need to engage different disciplines on our project teams – psychologists and sociologists, for instance – the richer our solutions will become. I believe that choice will be a prime driver of where the profession ends up 10 years from now.”

San Francisco-based Richard Pollack, FIIDA, FAIA, of Richard Pollack & Associates, points to an increased level of professionalism within the interior design profession, easily tracked to the increased influence and focus of IIDA. Concomitant efforts directed toward interior design licensure supported by IIDA and other organizations, whether title or practice acts, also are changing the reality and perception of the profession, he says.

“If the Association continues and improves – its focus on educating students about the business of interior design – new practitioners will aid in raising the prominence of interior design,” he says. “That should include continued growth in working with the American Institute of Architects (AIA) to enable improved connections between architects and interior designers, again improving the practice of interior design.”

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education (including global geopolitical issues) and focused communication skills all are imperative in shaping the design profession. “Pedagogy, critique and analysis will be the path to our salvation,” he says.

Pollack also is a strong advocate for the notion of multidisciplinary design. “If you look at how a car is produced, it involves engineers, industrial designers, colorists, model makers – that’s not the approach I see happening in the interior design profession. We’re still battling turf wars, and I think it will be the youth of tomorrow – the new graduates more accustomed to collaborative thought processes – that force that change.”

Pollack delights in the idea that 10 years from now, interior designers could be equal to architects in the eyes of the design and business communities. He would like all U.S. jurisdictions to have practice acts for interior designers, and he would like interior designers to be educated to the same high level as architects. In his eyes, interior designers should be prime consultants on projects, at times with architects as sub-consultants.

LEADERSHIP PROMINENCE

Joanne Cys, Programme Director of Interior Architecture at the University of South Australia, Adelaide, and South Australia President of the Design Institute of Australia, would love to see a future that includes an interior designer in government.

“We struggle continually to get government recognition or even an understanding of design,” she says. “It falls through the gaps all the time, neither coming under the arts umbrella, nor that of urban planning. Someone with a design background in a decision-making position would be wonderful.”

Cys also is eager to see design education move away from a stylistic, historical-chronological theory base and into learning more grounded in philosophy and contemporary theory. “I think there is also a need for interior designers to talk more and publish critique and analysis in the manner already well-established by architects,” she says. “The profession needs to continue to establish its areas of expertise or it is in danger of

IN THE BEGINNING

The 1994 merging of the Institute of Business Designers (IBD), the Council of Federal Interior Designers (CFID) and the International Society of Interior Designers (ISID) brought together a team of world-class professionals and set the stage for major advances in the design profession.

It began an evolution toward business partnerships and bridge-building between disparate professions, government agencies and associations, and quickly became the connection from the busy designer to the future of the profession, with the primary motive of measuring, quantifying and qualifying the value of good design.

As an association responding to and influencing trends, IIDA has structured a flexible and accessible path for industry and practitioners to interface with interior designers.

Just three years after its inception, IIDA membership had increased by 46 percent and revenue was up a remarkable 76 percent, providing an outstanding foundation and infrastructure for the Association’s continued growth and acceptance. Today, it has more than 10,000 Members.

Richard Pollack believes IIDA will continue to grow as a leader of the profession, although he would like to see IIDA consider how to further partner with other professional societies to increase market share and leadership. “The most powerful milestone was creating the organization 10 years ago,” he says. “That initiative demonstrated that interior designers understand the dynamic of strength in numbers, and that collaboration trumps individual agendas. Let’s take that attitude and use it for continued improvement — less incremental than monumental. The big goals are only achieved by bold initiatives. This organization has the talent and passion to take big steps.”



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being eaten away by competing professions. The critical factor will be how the profession does that in a positive rather than a reactionary way.”

Internationally recognized architect and furniture designer Ron Arad, Professor of Industrial & Furniture Design at the Royal College of Art London and founder of Ron Arad Studio, also is a big fan of originality. In a design world that will continue to be shaped by major technological developments “in both the way things are conceived and produced” – in a world where possibilities are growing all the time – he believes the most interesting advances will come from designers who don’t join the trends and latest bandwagons.

“For years, British architecture has been dominated by steel and glass, but we were not interested in joining that debate,” he says. “It’s good to have discourse and debate, but somehow it’s a straightjacket that brings about sameness.”

TECHNO BEAT

The process of design has been irrevocably changed by the introduction of computers, and one man who has perhaps gone further than anyone in striving to create extreme concept buildings informed by new technologies is revolutionary Tokyo-based Toyo Ito. His sleek, ephemeral buildings – prime among them the Sendai Mediatheque, 2001 – have been developed for our electronic, image-oriented culture.

“The 20th century was an era of design based on pure geometries,” Ito says. “People were fond of the abstract beauty of circles and cubes, created in opposition to nature. The previous century’s taste for abstract aesthetics still deeply penetrates the bodies of we who live in the 21st century. On the other hand, the development of computer and digital technologies has enabled us to express more complex and diverse geometric forms that are organic, fluid and close to natural phenomena. At the moment, finding ways to integrate contemporary non-linear geometries with the pure geometries cultivated in the last century is one of my goals.”

The continued integration of technology to create flexible, dynamic spaces will have a major impact in shaping the future of the design profession, and designers must continually stay abreast of new technological developments, new environmental solutions and the ever-changing needs of clients, says Samantha Shiel, Senior Designer at Geyer Corporate Environments in Sydney.

Aznavoorian agrees: “Designers must never lose sight of the fact that space influences human behavior, therefore the role we play in shaping society is great. We must accentuate our ability to think at higher levels or run the risk of being eliminated by companies that quite frankly have the money and power to out-market the best of us. We have to think critically or strategically to survive.” 