

PERCEPTIONS OF ARCHITECTS WHO CHOOSE TO PRACTICE INTERIOR DESIGN

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Very little has been published on the perceptions of architects who choose to practice interior design. That is, architects simply assume that they should engage in interior-design work. When asked why an architect practices interior design, a common reply is that architecture includes interior as well as exterior design or that being an architect implies one has the training and ability to design an entire building — inside and out. However, the advent of educational programs, representative organizations, and qualifying exams unique to interior design has introduced a more defined distinction between architecture and interior design. Only recently has the field of interior design reached a point of sophistication where some are beginning to question the traditional view of architects practicing interior design (Weigand, 2013a). This paper is a descriptive study that seeks to quantify the author's anecdotal understanding of how the two professions see each other from the viewpoint of architects. It specifically intends to shed light on the more elusive perceptual components surrounding architecture and interior design — passive elements of opinion, understanding, and expectation — and to look at the differences and commonalities between the two professions, potentially lending further context to their identities and adding to the growing discussion in the research on this issue that investigates both professional practice and academic instruction. The research findings aim to support the rich discussions and current bodies of knowledge that have been instrumental in informing educators, students, and professionals with regard to reinforcing educational design fundamentals, devising instructional techniques, and supporting industry implementation.

INTRODUCTION

The practices of architecture and interior design have evolved considerably in the last half century. Distinctions between the two professions have been established, but traditional roles in how they are performed continue to undergo constant re-definition and clarification. The purpose of this study is to explore and report on the perceptions of architects who choose to practice interior design, providing insight into these individuals' broad perceptions and rich, individual perspectives, which may affect both the architecture and interior-design professions. It looks at the differences and commonalities between the two professions with an aim to lend further context to their identities and add to the growing discussion in the research on this issue that investigates both professional practice and academic instruction.

What is it about an architect that compels him or her to provide services typically associated with an interior designer — components outside traditional architectural planning and building core-and-shell detailing? Is it a component of their education, or is it just “in their blood,” an innate desire to control all design matters rather than specialize in any one specific area? Perhaps it is simply a matter of economics or a contractual necessity to keep all design services under one roof. Maybe, as illustrated below, one's license to practice architecture inherently includes interior design. Whatever the rationale, there are likely and persuasive reasons underlying this mode of professional practice that have compelled it to occur but which are still either inadequately defined or poorly understood.

Over the last four decades, interior design has matured into a profession in its own right, with its own educational preparation, accrediting authorities, and professional organizations, and has gained industry respect accordingly (Hildebrandt, 2011). Admirable strides have been made in spite of a seemingly constant defense against external challenges, including the value of interior design, media (mis)representations, occupational status, and workplace identity, among others (White, 2009). For architects to slow or otherwise interfere with this considerable growth by appropriating interior-design services is of note to many interior designers given that most in the architectural community relinquished interior design completely in the late 1950s (McVarish, 2008). As such, what are the consequences of architects reengaging the practice of interior design relative to fracturing an already ill-defined relationship with interior designers? Equally important, what do architects believe interior designers think about architects practicing interior design? Although architects practicing interior design has been a long-standing practice, it has not been examined through research methods. It would be helpful to know how frequently this practice occurs and to potentially clarify perceived or implied design-practice boundaries. If research can identify commonalities in practice behaviors, whether through particular project types, scopes of work, bodies of expertise, and/or scale of design services, among others, then designers, architects, and clients should be able to address these issues prior to assigning areas of responsibility and engaging in integrated design services. Clear expectations based on informed understandings at the outset of a project could reduce or eliminate a degree of mistrust or misunderstanding that may compromise effective design collaboration.

At the time of this study's survey, a topical review of the top 10 design firms in *Interior Design's* survey “Up to the Challenge: 2009 Top 100 Giants” revealed many firms preferred market architecture services first and foremost (Davidsen, 2009). The rankings showed that only one firm in the top 10, HBA/Hirsch Bedner Associates, clearly indicated from the start of its webpage content that it provided interior-design services. The remaining firms were majority architecture or engineering firms that provided interior design under the umbrella of architectural services. Unlike HBA/Hirsch Bedner Associates, the top three firms in the *Interior Design* survey made little specific mention of interior design in their descriptions of themselves on their websites:

- #1 Gensler (2009) claimed, “As architects, designers, planners and consultants, we partner with our clients on some 3,000 projects every year.”
- #2 HOK (2009) defined itself as “a global provider of planning, design and delivery solutions for the built environment.”
- #3 HDR (2009) said it “is an employee-owned architectural, engineering and consulting firm that helps clients manage complex projects and make sound decisions.”
- #8 HBA/Hirsch Bedner Associates (2009) said it “creates inspired, brand-strengthening design experiences that evoke a distinct sense of place, while delighting the world’s most discriminating travelers. Around the globe, HBA design consultants consistently set new standards for luxury, comfort and innovation in hospitality interior design.”

Further, award-winning interior-design projects are frequently completed by architects. At the time this research was initiated, the most recent “Best of Year Awards” issue from *Interior Design* (Allen, 2008) revealed that the majority of the 28 winning projects profiled architects or architecture-based firms as the lead interior designer. For example, the winner for “Best of Year Freestanding Residence (Interiors)” was Shelton, Mindel & Associates (Tamarin, 2008), “an architectural firm, established in 1978, providing complete architectural, interiors and product design services for corporate, cultural, academic, retail, recreational, hospitality and residential clients” (Shelton, Mindel & Associates Inc., 2009). Notably, the project’s design principal was Lee Mindel, an architect.

Framework of Inquiry for the Study

The design industry is replete with examples of architects practicing interior design (White and Dickson, 1993), but little research has been devoted to exploring the reasons why this is so. This study intends to examine how frequently architects practice interior design, the real or perceived expertise they possess, the effect this practice has had on the relationship between architects and interior designers, and whether this phenomenon is perceived to be a fundamental change in the direction of how design services are provided or just a “turf battle” between professionals.

For this study, perception is defined as the simple notion of “a way of regarding, understanding, or interpreting something” (Oxford University Press, 2013). It is evaluated here in terms of “occupation-environment relationships” wherein “occupations change to reflect and determine important social trends in [the] larger society” (Grimm and Kronus, 1973:68). Architectural history illustrates the ability of architects to adapt their services to engage the society that observes, participates in, and evaluates their work. The perception of architects as masterbuilders, those “responsible for the design and construction of the built environment,” has been around for thousands of years (Dinsmore, 2008). Regardless of the modern-day practice of separating the complex components of designing and building, architects are often still perceived in this light. To that end, this study explores the effect perception has had on the reality of architects practicing interior design.

Literature Review and Definitions

The definition and practice of architecture and interior design in the United States is regulated at the state level and therefore varies from state to state. This study addresses a participant pool located in the state of Georgia and uses the applicable definitions from that state. “Practice of architecture” is defined as

the rendering of or offer to render the following services in connection with the design, construction, enlargement, or alteration of a building or group of buildings and the space within and surrounding such buildings, which may have human occupancy or habitation: planning; providing preliminary studies, designs, drawings, specifications, and other technical submissions; the architectural administering of construction contracts; and coordinating elements of technical submissions prepared by others including, as appropriate and

without limitation, consulting engineers, registered interior designers, and landscape architects.

(Georgia General Assembly, 2013:43-4-1[11])

“Interior design” is defined as “the rendering of or the offering to render designs, consultations, studies, planning, drawings, specifications, contract documents, or other technical submissions and the administration of interior construction and contracts relating to non-structural interior construction of a building by a registered interior designer” (Georgia General Assembly, 2013:43-4-1[9][A]). Interestingly, Georgia law does not prohibit an architect from providing interior-design services as long as they do not use the title “registered interior designer” (Georgia General Assembly, 2013:43-4-34[b]). However, interior designers (regardless of whether they are registered as an interior designer) are not allowed to practice architecture.

It is apparent that legal definitions of architecture may differ from how architects themselves define their profession. Some call upon a more quixotic picture of the architect and define their role in terms of being the quintessential designer. Richmond Shreve (1930:771), chief architect of the Empire State Building, when discussing the organization and coordination of a team that will design and construct a building, said this of the architect:

Once in those high and far off times when all women were beautiful and the brave deserved the fair, even the boldest of knights hesitated to challenge the ukase of one who called himself an architect. Truly the architect walked among the great, and none held his head higher. All wisdom was his. Omniscience sat upon his brow; omnipotence dwelt in the sweep of his hand. ... He exacted an unquestioning obedience, for he was the architect, and in him were all wisdom and authority.

Although this is a strictly romanticized image of the architect, historically it was customary for architects to provide complete design services including interiors as part of their professional practice. By the turn of the 20th century, most architects “practiced a multi-disciplinary architecture (or the ‘old way’) [with] the idea of creating products, furniture, and art hand in hand with buildings” (Remling, 2009). With the start of the 20th century, as various art and design movements pervaded architecture, the growth in the sale of home furnishings and more complex commercial interiors gave rise to a specialization in the design of interiors. Designers such as Elsie de Wolfe (residential) and Dorothy Draper (commercial) began to professionalize what some called the homemaking process. However, more complex design work typically fell under the auspices of architects, who oversaw the entire design effort. Interior design was still subservient to architecture, and up-and-coming interior designers continued to play a largely supporting rather than leading role. In a survey analyzing design professionals published in major design periodicals between 1980 and 1990, 17% of the published design projects were carried out by design teams whose members included interior designers and at least one architect, 49% were carried out by teams consisting solely of architects, 14% were completed by teams consisting solely of interior designers, and 20% were completed by others (White and Dickson, 1993). It was not until well into the mid-20th century, with the creation of formalized educational programs to better prepare interior designers, the establishment of organizations representing interior designers, and the development of qualifying examinations such as the National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ), that individual states were prompted to consider the licensing and registration of interior designers (Piotrowski, 2002:7-13).

The issue of architects practicing interior design also exposes a growing contention in some circles between two methods of design practice, each with its own educational pedagogies, professional representation, and regulatory oversight. At the 2009 conference of the Interior Design Educator’s Council (IDEC), President John Turpin requested that the 2009 Fellows Forum consider making a distinction between interior design and interior architecture. Prefacing the discussion, Mr. Turpin recounted historical precedents for the practice of interior design, stating,

Our past is an interesting one. Up until the latter part of the 19th century, a number of individuals participated in the decoration and design of the interior environment. Archi-

fects, upholsterers, cabinetmakers, decorators, domestic engineers, and even artists focused their attention on the interior. During the 20th century, our profession evolved quickly. Decorators created organizations and eventually chose to change their name in the 1960s as a means of communicating to the public the difference between the designer and the decorator However, interior design was not the only profession dealing with the interior environment. Architecture continued to work with interiors.
(White, 2009:xii)

William Pulgram, recounting his observations of the industry in the late 1960s, “held serious reservations about getting involved with interiors because he ‘didn’t want to be a decorator’” (Knoop, 2009). The term “decorator” has been used (and in some instances continues to be used) derisively by architects to minimize or even disparage interior designers. While this behavior is divisive, it is still pervasive in the industry and, in the opinion of this author, likely contributes to the polemic of architects practicing interior design. Compounding issues of identity definition and professional capability is the recognition of accredited academic programs that offer degrees in interior architecture. Historically, these programs and degrees have resided in schools and departments of interior design and their accrediting bodies. The Council for Interior Design Accreditation (2013) and the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (2013) both accredit programs that recognize degrees in interior architecture. Now, however, the move to endorse interior-architecture programs through the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) is gaining traction. For example, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2013) now offers a master’s degree in architecture with an emphasis on interior architecture that is essentially interiors-based. However, NAAB currently only accredits the program relative to three types of degrees: the bachelor of architecture, master of architecture, and doctor of architecture. As perceived by educators like John Weigand (2013b), Professor and Chair of Architecture and Interior Design at Miami University, the accreditation of hybrid design programs by NAAB may open the door to architectural accreditation of essentially interior-design programs. It remains to be seen if this development will resolve or confuse the issues and controversies surrounding identity distinctions between the professions.

Goals and Research Questions

This author’s larger research context explores multiple factors influencing architects who practice interior design. Most of the author’s career has involved working with other architects practicing in the same manner, which has led to an anecdotal understanding of architects who practice interior design. The author reasoned that, by researching this perceived phenomenon, he could uncover compelling and distinctive reasons for the continuation of this form of professional practice. If successful, perhaps the results and ensuing discussion will add a measure of clarity between and within both professions that is not currently being provided by printed data from representative organizations, various definitions published in governmental regulations, and architects’ and interior designers’ own marketing materials.

This study specifically intends to shed light on the more elusive perceptual components surrounding architecture and interior design — passive elements of opinion, understanding, and expectation. It is a descriptive study that seeks to quantify the author’s anecdotal understanding of how the architecture and interior-design professions see each other from the viewpoint of architects. It may permit architects; interior designers; and design clients, educators, and students to better understand the differences between architecture and interior design, how the two are correlated, and where the gaps and overlaps occur. Additionally, the research findings aim to support the rich discussions and current bodies of knowledge that have been instrumental in informing educators, students, and professionals with regard to reinforcing educational design fundamentals, devising instructional techniques, and supporting industry implementation.

Research questions for the author's larger study broadly analyzed the three components of motivation, expertise, and perception. Although the author formulated the survey questions used in the study to address each individual component, the questions also allowed for connections between the components to be examined. This paper addresses the study research questions that specifically addressed perception, which included the following:

- What is the frequency and pervasiveness of architects practicing interior design?
- What are architects' perceptions of the expertise that qualifies them to practice interior design? How is "expertise" defined, and by whom?
- What are architects' perceptions of the real and/or implied professional service boundaries with regard to interior designers?
- Is practicing interior design by architects perceived as a global fundamental change in the direction of how design services are provided or just a "turf battle" between professionals?

METHODS

Instrument and Sample

The author prepared a 31-question survey that targeted participants' opinions regarding three large research topics: motivations, expertise, and perceptions of architects who practice interior design. To capture the broadest range of professionals in the most accessible manner relative to the author's location, the author chose to focus on the Atlanta chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA). Atlanta, Georgia, contains a significant pool of architects and interior designers engaged in a dynamic array of professional practices in a relatively large interior-design market. Having practiced as an architect in Atlanta for 12 years, the author was intimately aware of the exposure of architects to interior-design work and vice versa and anticipated the population would render rich data from a diversity of responses.

The digital survey was conducted in late June and July 2010. Review and approval was sought and granted through the author's institutional review board prior to administering the survey. The author sent the survey to approximately 1,450 AIA members, of whom 72 agreed to participate. The survey, which was voluntary, was active online for two months. All of the survey responses were counted, even if the participant did not complete all of the questions. Approximately 80% of the participants completed the entire survey.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The study was undertaken with the underlying assumptions that, by the definitions of architecture and interior-design practice noted earlier, some architects do practice interior design and the professional design community from which this study's participants were collected included such individuals. The author also assumed that utilizing the Atlanta chapter of the AIA would be an accessible and suitable way to engage potential participants. The study population was limited to the design community represented by the Atlanta chapter of the AIA; as a result, generalization to other design communities within the U.S. may not be warranted.

The total response rate of 5% ($n = 72$) was lower than anticipated relative to the Atlanta chapter's roughly 1,450 total members; study replication in this or another geographical area would be helpful to further confirm the conclusions. All of the participants in the study were volunteers and were allowed to exit the survey at any point. As a result, this option at times reduced the participant population desired for analyzing comparisons between survey items. The online nature of the survey naturally lent itself to respondents who could access and were comfortable with digital communication.

The delimitations of the study included, among many other topics, the quality of the outcomes of interior-design projects completed by architects who practice interior design and the economic issues related to design work by this population. Though these topics were outside the scope of the current study, they would be worthy areas of inquiry for future studies. Also, this study of architects' perceptions does not assume generalization to interior designers' perceptions of these topics.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Architects choosing to practice interior design is certainly not a new phenomenon. As noted earlier, historically architects engaged in design services for the interiors of their buildings prior to the development of what is now the business of interior design. One might anticipate that, as interior design has been professionalized, with services performed by educated, trained, certified, and licensed design professionals, architects would forgo interior design and focus more keenly on core-and-shell architecture. However, in many instances, this is not the case. Thus, what compels some architects to provide interior-design services on their own in lieu of allocating such work to professionals who are trained to do it?

Participant Demographics

Seventy-eight percent of participants were male, and 22% were female. Of the 86% of participants who were licensed architects, 12 indicated that they also held an NCIDQ certification and/or another required or optional interior-design registration or license. Of those represented in the participant pool, the majority of individuals and firms that provided architectural services also provided interior-design services, and interior design was the second most commonly provided service. However, interior-design services accounted for one-quarter or less of total business in more than two-thirds (68%) of the firms. With regard to educational background, 63% of participants who had earned an architecture degree indicated they had access to interior-design courses in their core curriculum or non-core independent studies. When asked if they pursued these interior-design courses, 39% stated they did. The majority of answers indicated that interior-design components were generally a fundamental part of their architectural studies.

Participants were asked to reflect on their perceptions of themselves as interior designers, regardless of whether they held an interior-design certification, license, or registration. Ninety-two percent of participants who answered the question, "If you are not a licensed or registered interior designer, do you describe yourself as an interior designer?" indicated "no." When asked why not, participants followed up with statements generally categorized by the author as follows:

- Interior design is part of being an architect (40% of free responses);
- It's not necessary to describe myself as an interior designer, or I don't want to (22% of free responses);
- Because of my official title, license, training, or degree (24% of free responses); or
- The services or specialties I practice do not involve interior design (14% of free responses).

Participant Perceptions: Architect or Interior Designer?

When asked to describe how they viewed their professional identity, 100% of participants said they considered themselves architects. Nine participants who completed the survey were not architecturally licensed. However, all nine still described themselves as architects. When participants were asked whether they considered themselves interior designers, almost half (49%) said yes. With the exception of one recent architecture graduate, all of the participants who said yes were licensed architects. A large portion of the sample (42%) disagreed with the statement, and the remaining 9% indicated they were not sure. Interestingly, three NCIDQ-certified participants said they did not consider themselves interior designers or were not sure.

At this point, it is worth comparing responses from the demographic component of the survey (*i.e.*, *describing* oneself as an interior designer) with the notion of *considering* oneself an interior designer. In an earlier question, the survey asked participants to *describe* themselves as interior designers based on their affiliation (or lack thereof) with the legal qualifications of licensing, registration, and/or certification as an interior designer. When the question changed to asking participants if they *considered* themselves interior designers (without any legal qualifiers), a change was noted in the responses. When the notion of being an interior designer was subject to holding a license, registration, or certification, only five participants described themselves as interior designers. With this requirement out of the way, almost half (49%) of participants indicated they considered themselves interior designers.

Participant Perceptions: Should Architects Practice Interior Design?

If an architect describes him or herself as an interior designer or considers him or herself to be one, does this then imply that the architect should practice interior design? What is the relationship between *being able to practice* interior design and *actually providing* interior-design services? An overwhelming majority (94%) of participants disagreed with the statement that architects should practice architecture only. Twenty-one percent of those participants were either registered as an interior designer or NCIDQ-certified or licensed, and all but one was licensed as an architect. Responses from these participants seemed to indicate that those trained and licensed as architects felt they had a right or perhaps an obligation to practice more than just architecture, responding with statements such as “Interior design is an integral part of architectural practice” and “Interior design is integral to the complete design of a space.” When asked whether they agreed with the next assertion — that architects should practice interior design — 80% said yes. Participants’ open-ended responses addressed the notion of separating interior design from architecture but frequently only as a reason to support its integration. When asked to elaborate on their responses, 40% of participants stated that interior design was a fundamental component of architecture. One participant likened the idea to “trying to separate the outside of the body from the inside of the body,” that a building should “be wholly integrated from the inside all the way to the outside landscape.” Twenty-eight percent of participants indicated that interior design forms an inherent part of the design services generally offered by architects. Moreover, participants noted that interior-design services are essential to the design of building exteriors, with one participant stating, “The services we offer allow us to provide a more complete service to the client.”

Nine percent of participants qualified their responses relative to an architect’s abilities, expertise, or preferences. Replies referenced an architect’s choice to integrate both structural (architecture) and non-structural (interior design) components in order to shape a space. Addressing furniture, furnishings, and finishes, one participant stated, “If the architect feels strongly about these elements in the design of his/her space, then the architect should also participate in this process.” Eight percent of participants referenced education and expertise as qualifiers for practicing interior design. While most stated that an architect’s expertise is a primary consideration, others responded that one’s professional focus and education are key factors. Six percent of participants viewed interior design as more of a specialty service, supportive of but not integral to providing architectural services. In this context, interior design required its own unique level of expertise and education, as illustrated by one participant’s statement: “I see interior design as a specialization within the building design process. Building design at its highest level is no longer a single, renaissance [sic] man practice.”

Generally, the majority of responses and follow-up explanations supported the notion that interior design is an integral part of practicing architecture. In addition, participants generally felt that architects should practice interior design if their abilities supported their choice, their education reinforced it, or they tapped into independent interior-design resources and expertise within or outside their own firm. Hoping to gain further insight into participants’ responses by including their

thoughts on how interior designers perceive architects who practice interior design, the author next explored perceived relationships between architects and interior designers.

Relationships Between Architects and Interior Designers

Approaching the relationship between architects and interior designers by asking architects how they think interior designers perceive architects who practice interior design, 38% of participants agreed with the statement that most interior designers believe architects should not practice interior design, 18% percent disagreed, and the majority (44%) were unsure. Replies from the survey suggested that architects' and interior designers' understanding of each other's profession is still unclear. Education influences how architects and interior designers define their respective roles within the design profession via course offerings, departmental focus, and instructional background. Additionally, the design professions' representative organizations have made strides in establishing what constitutes an architect or an interior designer. However, clear lines of distinction and even overlap between the two remain somewhat elusive.

To assess participants' views regarding relationships between architects and interior designers, the survey presented a series of four statements. The first two statements — “Architects respect interior designers” and “Interior designers respect architects” — explored the perception of mutual understanding (or misunderstanding) between the two professions (Figures 1-2).

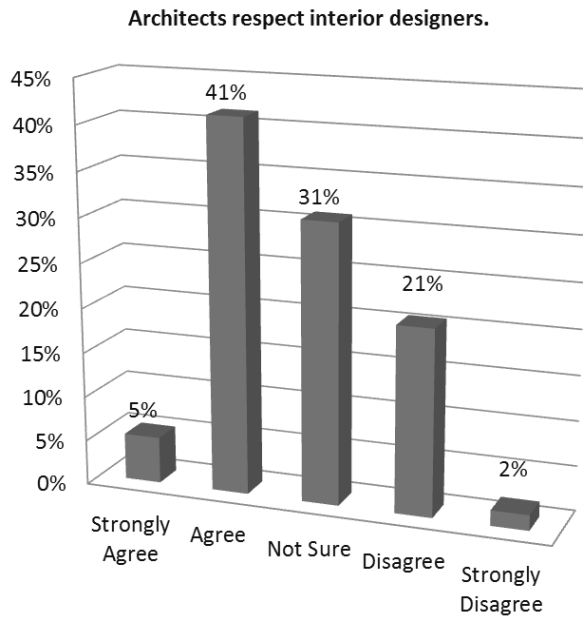


FIGURE 1. Participants' responses to the statement “Architects respect interior designers.”

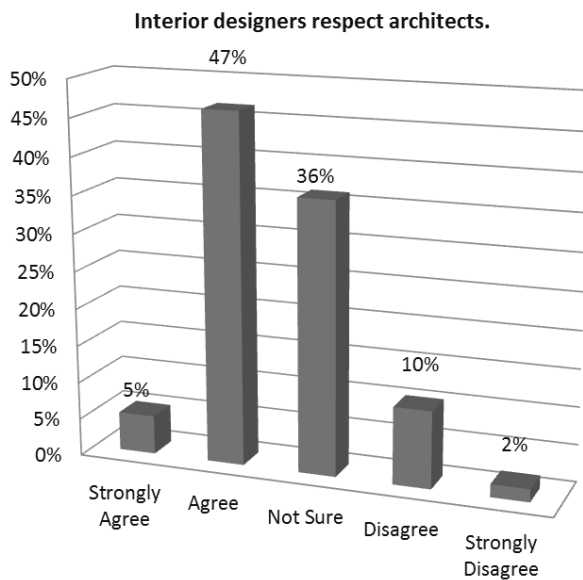


FIGURE 2. Participants' responses to the statement “Interior designers respect architects.”

Based on participants' responses to both statements, almost half of participants saw a roughly equal amount of respect from both sides: architects respecting interior designers and vice versa. However, there was a difference of six percentage points between the “agree” responses, with fewer participants agreeing that architects respect interior designers. The lack of a high percentage of “strongly agree” responses to both statements and healthy numbers of “not sure,” “disagree,”

and “strongly disagree” responses (combined 54% and 48% of responses respectively) suggest an imbalance between the professions, at least from the perspective of the architects who participated in this study. Additionally, the percentages of participants who disagreed with the statements “Architects respect interior designers” (23%) and “Interior designers respect architects” (12%), while slightly different, seem to support this disparity, with architects benefitting from a greater degree of respect *from* interior designers than that offered *to* interior designers.

A majority of participants either agreed (38%) or strongly agreed (3%) with the third statement, “The architecture and interior-design professions have a good relationship.” However, 59% of participants answered either “not sure” or “disagree.” It is encouraging at least to see that none of the participants responded “strongly disagree.” Nevertheless, with 97% of the responses occupying the middle of the Likert scale (neither “strongly agree” nor “strongly disagree”), it appears that there is still a good deal of ambivalence among the participants of this study regarding the relationship between the architecture and interior-design professions. This Likert-scale weighting is similar to the one found for the first two questionnaire statements, with the majority of responses gathered toward the middle values of the scale.

The last statement surveying relationships between architects and interior designers asserted, “Architects that practice interior design work more effectively and efficiently with interior designers.” The notion here was that architects who practice interior design might better understand the scope of work; processes; client proclivities; and integration of furniture, fixtures, and equipment into the complete design than architects who do not practice interior design. Seventy-eight percent of participants agreed with the statement, supporting the notion that by practicing interior design, architects are better able to work with interior designers. The responses support the idea that having education, experience, and/or expertise in matters related to interior design allows architects to better interpret interior-design processes and products at a knowledge-base level corresponding to their own architectural aptitude. Perhaps participants felt that architects engaging in interior-design work are more likely to be well received, respected, and valued by interior designers when working together if they take measures to qualify themselves to practice interior design.

The Prevalence of Architects Practicing Interior Design

Having considered how an architect defines him or herself relative to practicing design, whether they should practice interior design, and the relationship between architects and interior designers, the survey queried participants on how much and how often they engaged in interior-design services. Given the historical context of architects delivering design services, as well as participants’ replies to the survey, one could assume that architects do engage in interior-design work, but how does this play out in actual practice? To address this question, participants were first asked to respond to the statement, “Architects practicing interior design is widespread in the design industry.” As a follow up, participants were presented with a related statement, “Clients today are more likely to ask architects for interior-design services than five years ago,” a span of time in the U.S. that saw major upheavals in the economy affecting both architects and interior designers.

Both statements were aimed at determining whether the slumping economy had a bearing on the perception of architects who practice interior design. The author hypothesized that a major negative shift in the U.S. economy would influence architects’ decisions to add interior design to their services. Participants replied to both statements with varying levels of uncertainty. While a majority (63%) of participants agreed with the view that architects practicing interior design is widespread in the design industry, only 36% agreed that, at the time of the survey in 2010, clients were more likely to ask architects for interior-design services than they were five years prior. However, this was more than twice the number of participants who answered in the negative. Countering the author’s hypothesis, the data did not reveal a marked relation between providing interior-design

services and the effect of declining economic conditions. This topic would be worthy of further study.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The data obtained from the study survey shed light on a variety of perceptions surrounding architects who practice interior design. However, they did not reveal or suggest any new or modified definitions that would provide clearer distinctions between architects and interior designers. Regarding the goal of providing a better understanding of the differences between architecture and interior design, perhaps the “better” understanding, unfortunately, is that architecture and interior design are still hamstrung by a lack of clarity concerning their design services. This indicates there is still a great deal of uncertainty surrounding how architects perceive their role in interior design (or as interior designers). This observation is supported by the fact that, although participants’ responses to the survey statements varied somewhat, roughly one-third of participants responded “not sure” in a large number of categories. Although the author anticipated participants would generate more unique, distinctive, and compelling data, the results indicated that a broader range of diverse perceptions characterizes why some architects choose to practice interior design.

Research also seems to support anecdotal evidence regarding a separate but important topic — that perceptions surrounding architects who practice interior design can have the effect of confusing the general public, perhaps even “producing a disparity of clearly defined roles and services for the comprehensive design of an interior environment; a complexity of space, human experiences, and comfort” (Hildebrandt, 2004). Most would agree that this lack of clarity is unintentional and that more clearly defined professional roles will only strengthen the practices of architecture and interior design. Indeed, when reality television tacitly suggests that “anyone can be an interior designer” (Martin, 2004:161), it is in the interest of architects, perhaps even their obligation, to make clear their choice to practice interior design. Clearly defined roles could assist architects and interior designers in preparing service-specific agreements; delineating professional responsibilities; and assisting potential clients in selecting the most appropriate architect, designer, or design team. To these ends, both the architecture and interior-design professions (as well as the general public) would benefit from clearly identified and published bodies of knowledge that distinguish one profession from the other.

In this author’s opinion, designing from a common point of reference (based on distinct bodies of knowledge described, accepted, issued, and made publicly available) may help lessen the tendency of architects and interior designers to engage in “turf battles” relative to profession-specific design practice. In separate but complimentary articles examining the gaps between architecture and interior design, authors Henry Hildebrandt and James Cramer suggested that much of the turf mentality stems from “being both boundary-tied by professional legislation as well as seeing themselves as offering specialized service roles” (Hildebrandt, 2004) and a condition in which “the unfortunate squabbling between the architecture and interior design associations would seem to pit these professions against one another” (Cramer, 2004). Cramer (2004) further described how “much of this behavior is anti-strategic to the future of the design professions — a flawed power struggle, often based on insecurities of turf rather than ‘value building’ in the client’s and public’s best interests.” Perhaps the apparent disconnect between representative organizations and design-service providers has created a stumbling block in resolving the relationship between architects and interior designers. This in turn may feed into the question of how prevalent the practice of interior design by architects is. Is the practice more common than generally understood, or is it a perception fueled by misunderstanding and/or implied division? Published position papers and other research that cites attempts by professional organizations to clarify their profession’s scope and types of design services indicate that such clarity is still a work in progress, and common ground remains elusive (AIA, 2011; NCIDQ, 2004; Whitney, 2008).

Regulatory issues governing architecture and interior-design practice and the legal definitions of their service responsibilities continue to cloud the relationship between architects and interior designers. In certain states, architects are allowed to practice interior design if they possess an architecture license. In this study's sample location (Atlanta, Georgia), practicing architecture requires a license under which services such as interior design are included. It would seem that, by virtue of professional examination, architects have a perceived advantage in the practice of interior design. Calling oneself an architect requires licensing and/or registration, but the same requirement does not exist for calling oneself an interior designer, a situation that needs and deserves a more critical exploration that is outside the scope of this study. Follow-up studies addressing what constitutes an architect or interior designer via legal definitions, professional organizations' descriptions, and the general public's understanding of the professions may help to establish a more solid baseline for comparisons.

In the course of data analysis, the author noted a number of other factors and influences that might inform an architect's choice to practice interior design, which could guide the structure of future studies. For instance, the research would benefit from conducting the survey using a pool of interior designers in the same geographic region as this study. Their experiences with and perceptions of architects practicing interior design would provide a valuable stakeholder view of this issue. It would also be beneficial to follow up on the questions regarding the economy's effect on architects' perceptions. Since the current U.S. economy continues to demand quicker and sharper responses by its suppliers, investigating additional five-year periods of time may provide insight into the roles architects and interior designers will have to play in service to their clients.

Additionally, a larger participant pool that would permit statistical testing of various demographic groups' perceptions (e.g., by age or academic training) would lend further, more specific conclusions to future studies. By extension, examining academic training would afford opportunities to explore the gaps between academic instruction and professional practice. While similarities and differences between the two professions could be clarified within professional practice, one might anticipate that the foundations of those understandings at the professional level could be established at the educational level. Data resulting from further study of the role of education in defining architects' and interior designers' responsibilities, authority, and accountability could inform perceptions of architects who choose to practice interior design.

Finally, females represented only 22% of the survey participants. Although the author is aware of gender issues as they relate to perceived stature and expertise surrounding the practice of architecture and interior design (see Havenhand, 2004; Königk, 2010; McVarish, 2008), this study did not target gender issues, and no survey questions were constructed to analyze the phenomenon of gender identity and interior design relative to what Lucinda Havenhand (2004) described as its "supplemental position" to architecture. Havenhand (2004:35) posited that "as long as interior design tries to gain legitimacy by comparing itself to and emulating architecture, it inadvertently supports the system that ensures its supplemental position," and the perception continues to exist wherein "interior design is inferior to architecture." Consequently, this situation may work in favor of architects who choose to practice interior design, as a perceived professional superiority, whether based on education, experience, or expertise, may bias public opinion. Further examination of perceived bias with regard to providing design services would be revealing.

In an article for *ArchitectureBoston*, Robert Cowherd (2010) provided some insight that helps evaluate this study's findings. In his examination contrasting the rise of modernism with what he called a "second modernization," he reflected that "Modernism's cult of function was rooted in this social imperative to do the most good, with the least resources, for the most people" (Cowherd, 2010:21). One of modernism's original guiding principles was to solve world problems through architectural considerations. Cowherd (*ibid.*) elaborated, "The last decade has seen a surge of work reasserting what we have always known to be true: architecture needs to do more than just *look* good, it needs to *do* good." The notion that architecture (and architects) should do more for

the greater good, perhaps by providing more comprehensive services in a surging culture of social responsibility, will likely continue to influence the perceptions of architects who practice interior design.

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