Sustainability: Environmentally Responsible Interior Design

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A Voice of Sustainability in Interior Design

Do you remember when the discussions on sustainability evolved from cutting household costs through “energy efficiency” and “solar power” to a growing awareness that resource conservation includes social and cultural implications as well as physical and economic impacts? Perhaps it is enough to know that early on interior design educators and practitioners embraced the reality that our responsibility to the planet and its inhabitants included meeting diverse needs and expectations of the people who occupy the environments we design. There is hardly any topic or subject within interior design that doesn’t have a direct relationship with sustainability. More than a responsibility for selecting “green” materials, we now also acknowledge that sustainability in interior design aligns with client values and vision. For interior design, this involves not only space planning for efficiency and productivity, but also embracing a holistic approach to fostering sustainability for both individual workers and aggregate organizations. Sustainable environments include schools that are learning environments and hospitals that are healing environments. Interior design decisions can support and sustain community, culture, family, and individual identity. Designers elevate the most vulnerable when we design for equality and justice. Interior design projects an important voice in the sustainability movement.

While graduate designers entering the profession today have been steeped in the principles and practices of sustainability, they do not always have adequate tools and information necessary for the task. The research presented in this first installment of a special double issue of the Journal of Interior Design 37.1–2 offers unique, cutting-edge perspectives and evidence intended to inform design efforts that enhance the health, well-being, and safety of those who travel the planet with us. Lisa Tucker, Ph.D. introduces this thematic issue with a historical analysis of the influence of the Architects’ Small House Service Bureau (ASHSB), who proposed a small house model for addressing some of the challenges of net zero carbon housing solutions and sustainable houses in the United States which were small, affordable, and also designed well. We next move to Julia Day, M.A., Judy Theodorson, M.Arch, and Kevin Van Den Wymelenberg, M.Arch who examine workers’ ability to control office daylight and its perceived influence on performance. Finally, the special issue concludes with a paper by Young Lee, Ph.D. who presents a case for using building information modeling (BIM) in green simulations during the design process with special implications for interior design.

We believe that it is the responsibility of the Journal of Interior Design to be provocative, to encourage the exchange of ideas, methods, and outcomes. New ideas are rarely born of agreement, but it is more likely that truly new concepts emerge as others question our beliefs and strategies—arguing for alternative points of view. With this in mind this issue of the Journal of Interior Design will offer its readers unique and challenging perspectives on sustainability. It is our intention to encourage and stimulate new ideas informing the practice and pedagogy of interior design.

In this issue, we are honored to include the perspective of Susan Szenasy, who is by any standards, a leader in design. As the editor-in-chief of METROPOLIS and the creator of the Smart Environments Award offered by
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International Interior Design Association, Susan has traveled the world discussing the value of interior design and urging both designers and clients to respect the planet and the many species it supports. No stranger to speaking her mind and advocating for a greater emphasis on designing for sustainability, Susan brings a thoughtful, provocative voice to our focus on Sustainability and Interior Design. From a very personal perspective, she intertwines her life experience with the roots and milestones of the sustainability movement and sets the stage for the three unique, distinctive studies contained in this volume.

The volume of the Journal will follow with the invited perspective of Linda Sorrento, FASID, former Senior Director, Education Partnerships at the U.S. Green Building Council. JID 37.2 will dive deeply into the issue of sustainability by presenting refereed articles examining definitions of comfort and the need for understanding unique cohorts who are impacted by interior design. It is our belief that Linda Sorrento’s and Susan Szenasy’s essays along with the voices of the scholars represented in JID 37.1–2 should ignite much discussion of the meaning and future direction for interior design in the sustainability movement.

Dr. Janetta Mitchell McCoy has published numerous peer-reviewed papers and conference papers. She has 14 years of experience in the private practice of workplace design, and over 20 years in design education and research. Adding to her interest in creative places, Professor McCoy has recently focused on the launch of an action research program of service for small rural, impoverished communities with a goal of using the physical environment to enhance much needed economic development in historic downtown districts. At Washington State University, Professor McCoy’s design studios introduce emerging designers to EB research in support of underserved populations. In addition to her commitment to the Journal of Interior Design as Associate Editor, she is a frequent reviewer for Environment & Behavior and the Journal of Environmental Psychology. She is most proud of IDEC’s recent recognition of her work with the 2011 Community Service Award.