



aims

The aims of this module are to enable you to:

- explore key elements of interior design
- understand the importance of colour as a design component
- explore the role of lighting in interior design
- begin your design notebook and portfolio.

context

What does the work of an interior designer really involve? This module introduces the exciting world of interior design and explores some of the traits that make a great designer. It also introduces some key design concepts and begins to explore the history of style.

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introduction

If you are thrilled when colours blend together perfectly, show a talent for finding just the right fabric or accessory, and have an eye for detail, then a career in interior design might be the ideal choice for you.

As you work through this course you will have the chance to develop a wide range of skills, techniques and abilities. You will also learn more about yourself. Working effectively as a designer involves far more than simply learning a set of techniques and rules - it also requires an eye for line and style, confidence in one's own judgement, an ability to listen to the client, and a sense of what will work best in a particular setting.

You probably already have a pretty good idea of which interior styles you like and which turn you off? It may even be that you are known among your friends as a person with a strong sense of style and a good understanding of design? During the course you will be developing these natural abilities further to achieve a professional and instinctive understanding of good design.

becoming a designer

Developing your skills and understanding as a designer is a lifelong process. This course is only the beginning of a long and we hope very happy journey - we can give you the basic tools and set you on the right course, but there will always be more to discover.



So, training as a designer involves more than simply developing an armoury of skills and techniques - important though that is - you also need to begin developing your instinct for good design. You need to build your knowledge of the work done by past and current designers. How can you do this?

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- Begin to look at the world with a designer's eye - when possible visit homes and public buildings to look at the work of other designers. (There are also some good examples of interior design on the Internet too, as well as some that are not so good!) Study
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their work with a critical eye - which bits work and which bits require more development? Can you see what they were trying to achieve? Do you like the result?

- Learn more about the history of interior design - what did past designers do and why? Do their ideas have any lessons for us today? We shall be looking at the history of interior design throughout the course.
- Talk to other designers. What do they like about interior design today? What do they dislike?
- Talk to friends and acquaintances. What do they look for in a home? What do they want from their interior designer?

The chances are that you already have many skills that will be useful in your work as a designer. The aim of this course is not to teach you how to do something totally new - but how to use the skills you already have in a different and more effective way. It is important to say this at the outset, because there is a great mystique around the art of interior design that many students find daunting. There is a belief that the 'successful designer' is in some way set apart from the rest of the population - a rare and talented creature. The truth is, of course, that successful designers are often not all that different from unsuccessful ones. It is simply that they have taken the time to develop their existing skills and learn techniques that bring their design work into a different category.



It is true that some people have a natural ability with design and a fresh perspective on life that captivates clients. If you are one of these people with a considerable raw talent for design then you are fortunate indeed. Yet much of what passes as 'talent' is actually a craft - and like any other craft the necessary skills and techniques can be taught.

During the next twelve modules your tutor will accompany you on a journey of exploration through your own design abilities. You will learn how to use a range of techniques and develop a variety of skills. You will begin to discover your unique perspective and style as a designer.



Read pages 6 - 7 of *A Handbook for Interior Designers*.

working as an interior designer

An understanding of colour, light and pattern is central to the work of an interior designer, but other aspects of the designer's role are less well-known. These include:

- An ability to map out each room, take accurate measurements for flooring and window treatments, and assess practical restrictions.
 - Excellent listening skills - a designer needs to listen to clients' dreams and turn them into reality, within the bounds of what is practically possible and desirable.
 - An ability to negotiate with clients where their ideas are unrealistic or the designer believes they really will not work.
 - An understanding of client needs and, sometimes, an ability to manage conflict.
 - Expert project management skills.
 - An ability to calculate a realistic budget and work within that.
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- The knowledge and skill to source the right materials and negotiate with suppliers, perhaps only after searching through countless sample books and tramping through many showrooms.
- An up-to-date knowledge of new materials and industry developments that can be applied to samples and client advice.
- An ability to manage subcontractors, such as carpenters, carpet layers and decorators.
- For self-employed designers, marketing skills as well as an understanding of all the elements that come together to create a successful business, including planning, accounts and taxes.

It sounds like hard work, and it can be! Many designers find themselves working long hours and taking few holidays. But they do it because they love it! Nothing quite beats the satisfaction of a beautifully-finished project, brought in on time and in budget, or the pleasure of seeing another satisfied client.



will you make a good designer?



Having learned more about the different aspects of an interior designer's job, what traits do you think it is important to possess (or be willing to develop) in order to be successful?

We thought of the following:

- An understanding of space, colour, light and pattern, and how they work together to create an effective design. This is something we shall be looking at in depth as the course progresses.
- Organisational ability. Good project management takes careful planning and organisation. As you work through the course you will have the opportunity to practice your own organisational skills on various practical projects. If you are not the best organised person in the world, your tutor can help you to develop techniques that will keep your design projects on track.
- Great interpersonal skills. You need to be a good listener if you are to truly understand your client's requirements. But you also need to be a tactful and effective negotiator, as sometimes client's expectations are unrealistic and you may need to guide them in a different direction. You will also need to be able to negotiate with suppliers and subcontractors - both to get the best price for your client and to ensure that supplies arrive on time and jobs are completed when they should be. It follows that it helps if you enjoy daily contact with people - even when they are indecisive or awkward! We will be taking a quick look at negotiating skills in Module 2, and you will find the techniques we suggest useful in many different situations, but again this is something that improves with practice, so don't worry if this is not a strength at present.

- Confidence and leadership ability. Both clients and subcontractors will look to you for direction. Clients may sometimes be nervous about your work, especially if they have never employed a designer before. Other clients may try to push the design in directions that you just know will not work. It is essential to display confidence in your abilities and the design. Similarly, you need to be able to give clear directions to subcontractors and suppliers. You also need the authority to ensure that work is done to the standard you have specified and within the time frame you require.



What skills do you already possess that you can bring to your work as a designer?

What skills do you still want to develop? List ways of doing this.

some key principles

Principles might be described as rules, formulas, and evaluations about interior design that are unchanging. We shall be meeting a number of key principles during the first half of the course. For now, here are some terms that will be used in many different situations:

balance

Balance is often found in nature, and is also a central aspect of effective interior design. Balance may be found by the use of contrasting or complementing colours, or by the use of several different elements, such as pattern, layout or texture.

Symmetrical balance is achieved when one side of the design is a mirror image of the other side. There is a distinct dividing line between the two sides. Equal lines, forms, textures or colours can be found on each side of a symmetrical design.

Asymmetrical balance uses different forms, colours and textures to obtain a balance of visual attraction. These opposing compositions on either side of the central axis create equal attraction. For example, mass may be opposed by colour or linear dimension by height.

Sometimes a deliberate lack of balance can be used to suggest spontaneity or to create visual impact.



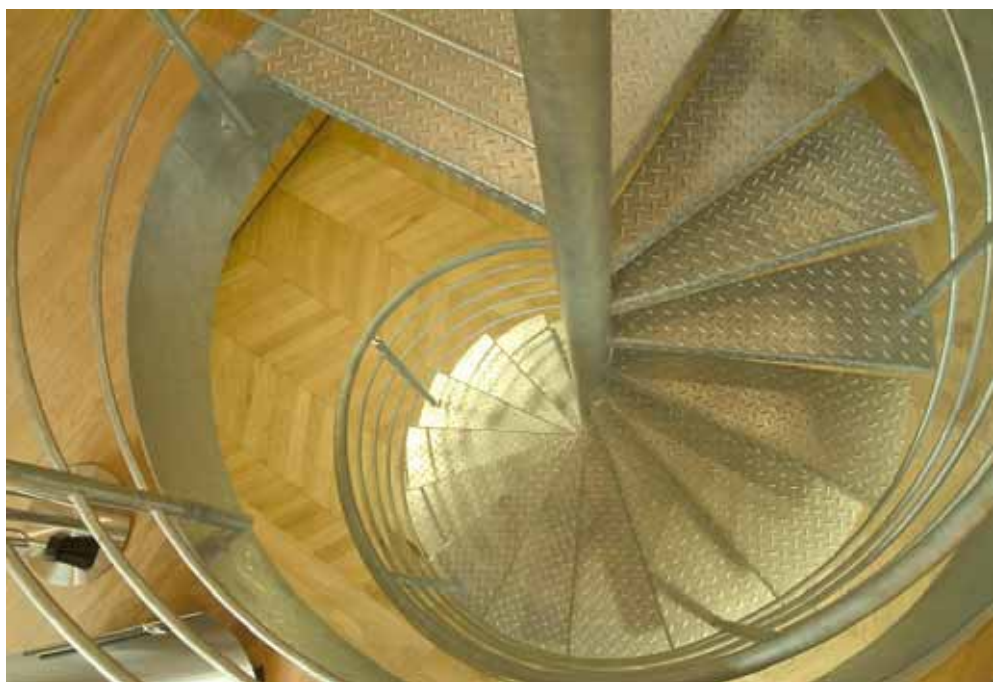
Perfect symmetry, above, and an example of asymmetrical balance below.



focus

This refers to the direction in which the eye travels and dwells when it first sees a room. This can be affected by a number of aspects, including the visual weight, colour, proximity, line, and layout of the space. In the photograph right, for instance, a pattern of straight lines on the floor leads the eye along this hotel hallway. This is a good illustration of how the viewer's eye is compelled to follow such strong lines to a focal point.

Curved lines are stronger when curved toward each other than when curved outward, while indirect focalisation is created by lines curved in the same direction.



Many rooms are designed around a focal point or central feature. In a living room this will often be a fireplace and in a bedroom, the bed. The focal point may be a natural result of the way the room is constructed, so it is decided for the designer before he or she even

arrives - an example here would be a huge picture window or a fantastic view.

If a room does not have a natural focal point, the designer will usually introduce one. This might be a fantastic painting or a significant piece of furniture. It is also possible to create a **focal space**, for instance, a large rug over a natural wood floor, that defines where the furniture is positioned. Often the focal point of the room defines its function - for instance, an office desk, dining table or bed.

Other furniture is positioned in relation to the focal point. In social areas, furniture is often also positioned in a way known as **sociopetal** - which means in such a way as to encourage conversation. As a general guide, seating should be placed no more than 8 feet apart in order to facilitate conversation. Seats can either face one another or be at a slight angle to each other (for instance, in an L-shape). In situations where, for some reason, you might wish to create the illusion of privacy or where people might feel uncomfortable with the idea that they have to speak to one another (in a gallery or waiting room, for instance) seats are often placed back to back, or far enough away from each other that people do not feel obliged to talk. This is known as **sociofugal**.



Seats usually require a table within comfortable reach. Coffee tables should be 14 to 16 inches in front of the seating, while end tables should be right next to the arm of the seat. The height of the end table should be as tall as the arm of the chair or sofa.

harmony

When a design is harmonious it means that the different elements are working together to give visual cohesion.

unity

Closely related to the idea of harmony is unity. Unity is achieved when every element of the design works together in harmony to express a consistent style. Unity means that all parts of the design, including the furniture, wallcoverings, soft furnishings and floor coverings, fit together. Nothing jars or seems out of place. A room in unity will seem effortlessly well-presented and in tune. To achieve unity the designer must ensure that every element complements the central style or scheme.

proportion

This refers to the size of parts of the design in relation to each other and to the design as a whole. A large, dramatic sofa may fit beautifully into a sweeping, open-plan living area but would dwarf a small, traditional lounge. Proportion in interior design often relates to people and their activities, as well as to the way in which each feature of the design relates to other features and to the room or building as a whole. **Scale** is also a key aspect of proportion.



rhythm

Rhythm is achieved when elements of a design create a feeling of motion which leads the viewer's eye through or even beyond the designed area. Tools like colour schemes, line and form can be repeated to attain rhythm in interior design.

In a piece of music the underlying rhythm provides a repetitive, solid base for the other layers of melody. Similarly, in a room, rhythm can provide an important 'base line' which holds the room together, creating a sense of continuity or cohesion, and reducing confusion in a complex design. Rhythm may be created by repetition of colour, shape, texture or other design element. Sometimes, however, a lack of rhythm is an important aspect of the design.



in the mind's eye

In order to understand how people interpret a room we need to appreciate something of how the human mind works. We each have a natural tendency to search for order in what we see. This can be seen in our tendency to see faces or figures in random patterns, and for our brains to fill in missing information. For example, when we see a square table with only three chairs, we will instinctively look for the fourth, often seeing it in our mind's eye (and remembering it!) even if it was not there. Our minds have a need for closure, or wholeness, so we try to complete unfinished patterns, and search for patterns and order even in the most disorganised environments.

In addition, we are quite selective about what we take in - for instance, someone who lives near a busy road will eventually block out the sound of traffic; they have selectively decided not to hear it. Similarly, we are selective about what we see, smell and taste:



Close your eyes and spend a few minutes listening carefully to the world around you. As you listen you may become aware of new sounds - they have been there all the time, but you have chosen not to hear them until now - a dripping tap, the faint sound of neighbours chatting, a clock ticking. Now open your eyes and look carefully at the room around you - notice materials, colours and textures. Notice the way each feature of the room is designed - some features will be purely decorative but most serve a function. How has the designer achieved this? Are functional features also aesthetically pleasing?





Select your favourite room - this might be in your own home or in another home you know well. You will need to be able to visit the room now to complete this exercise.

Once you are in the room, make yourself comfortable and answer the following questions:

- What do you like about this room?
- What is your favourite feature?
- What do you dislike?
- What is the function of this room?
- How is 'balance' expressed in this room? (Is there balance? If so, is it asymmetrical or symmetrical?)
- What is the focal point of this room? If so, describe how the rest of the furniture is positioned around this feature.
- Is there unity in the design of this room? Explain your answer.
- Is each feature of this room in proportion - both to other features and the room as a whole?
- Is there rhythm in the design? If so, how is this expressed (e.g. Through repetition, echoes of colour?)

Now complete this exercise again - this time choosing a room that you do not like or do not enjoy spending time in.

Set your answers to one side as you will be asked to submit these as part of Assignment 1.
