

THURSDAY CAREERS CHATS

Date of Session: 4/7/2011 Title of Session: Careers in Interior Design

Alumni Presenter: Ali McPhail Class Year: 1993

Title: Interior Designer Employer: Self-Employed

Notes from Session:

Background:

- Fine Arts major at Dickinson
 - o An art background is very helpful, as is a liberal arts education in general. The skills gleaned through a liberal arts education are very helpful in terms of communicating with clients, writing proposals, dealing with the business side of things (financial stuff).
 - Graduated in a bad job market and ended up working for 2 ½ years in retail sales (went through a management training program). Then transitioned to publishing sales and also did some graphic design work. She then interned with a graphic designer, doing work for advertising agencies and ended up getting a job with an advertising agency. After working for the ad agency, she went to work for a Dutch pharmaceutical company in sales, running a territory.
 - o Her background in sales/business has been very helpful for owning her own business (managing the opening of a new branch of the ad agency was particularly helpful) – uses business background all the time.
 - When needing to relocate for her husband's career, she determined this was a good time for switch gears. She missed the creative side of things so she went back to school (a well-rated community college) for an associate's degree in interior design. She took technical and creative classes and essentially learned to build a house from the ground up – architecture, building codes, Computer Aided Drafting (CAD) classes, as well as classes on furniture design, textile design, etc.

Decorator vs. Designer:

- They are very different - designers have extensive training.
- Can take two paths in interior design: residential or commercial. The vast majority take the commercial route, perhaps because there's ample opportunity. She took the residential route.

Owning your own interior design business:

- Owning your own business is a great goal, but work for someone else first, to learn. Being a gopher isn't a bad thing (measuring, finding fabrics, making phone calls – they're all very important for learning the business).
- Keep in mind that you'll spend as much time on the business end as the creative side. (There are many legal/business aspects – contracts, licensing, business taxes, paying bills, purchase orders, etc.)
- Some clients are small projects (window treatments, a carpet, etc.) while others are larger scale (whole house).
- Interviewing the client to determine fit is very important, especially for the larger scale projects as you will end up spending a lot of time with them.
- You need to be adaptable – contemporary vs. traditional, kids vs. no kids, etc. You need to be able to interpret what they want and not project your personality too much.
- After the interview, you write a proposal that outlines the projected time and money involved. Then you work on the design. Sometimes clients can't visualize things, so you need to make a room perspective or design board (you learnt to make them in school). Very few people do these now, so offering this service to clients gives you a leg up. For really big jobs, you might make an actual model of the design concept.
- Typically gets paid 1/3, 1/3, 1/3, but bills monthly for materials.

Recommendations:

- Trying a few classes at a community college is a great way to "test the waters" and confirm if it's the right path for you.
- Internships are very important...any opportunity to shadow or get your feet wet is helpful. Event experience in a furniture store or a fabric showroom is helpful – it's not only relevant experience, you can make contacts with interior designers.
- Joining a professional organization is important for continuing education, to have a resource, for networking, for marketability to clients, etc. Some options are:
 - o American Society of Interior Designers (ASID)
 - o International Interior Design Association (IIDA)
 - o Interior Design Society (IDS)