

The International Interior Design Association (IIDA) has always placed a premium on the first word in its name. We are proud that IIDA members call 58 countries home, and that Cheryl Durst, Hon. FIIDA, LEED AP, executive vice president and CEO, has travelled over 1.2 million miles in 14 years, representing the association at more than 182 national and international speaking engagements annually.



IIS FOR International

As technology spreads trends and breaks down barriers at an ever-faster clip, maintaining an international approach to design has become more important than ever before.

As is evident when working with our members—especially our international members—design has always been a universal language. But with the advent of the internet, trends now spread across borders and break down communication barriers at a lightning pace, allowing the word “international” to take on a new importance in our industry.

We have come to realize that good design is synonymous with global design. International expansion exists because it is a trend that clarifies our diverse, global design communities. While “international” is frequently used as an adjective to describe the trade of products and services between nations, in the design profession, it is more commonly used to describe a point of view—a way of looking at how design solutions can outshine national boundaries and viewpoints. For designers, having an international perspective means remaining sensitive to multiple users of varying backgrounds, regardless of a project’s location.

Of course, an international approach is more than just a mindset for many designers working today. Recent surveys have found that large firms like DiLeonardo International, Wilson Associates and HBA/Hirsch Bedner Associates are doing at least 90 percent of their work abroad. More than 65 percent of the leaders in the interior design field have at least one office abroad, and some firms, like Space Matrix and Bilkey Llinas Design Associates, work exclusively overseas. The level of importance the international community places on design and design advocacy—exemplified by Scandinavia, which has a regulatory agency dedicated to design—is a priority to interior design industry leaders.

The rise of the international practice has made knowledge the new global currency, and it behooves us to amass as much as possible if we are to compete on the world stage. We see the facilitation of collaboration between the interior design and manufacturing communities as essential to the future of design. From manufacturing to distribution, from the composition of project teams to client locations, the shift of business from a local to a global scope has been fast, and therefore requires flexibility.

There are also other, more pragmatic details that need to be sorted out when working on international projects, and today’s industry leaders are working to clarify those as well. For example, standard project plans do not guarantee standards in construction. Often times, a design firm partners with local designers and tradesmen to effectively monitor projects. These relationships take time to build. International manufacturers can be a great resource in these circumstances, often employing customer service representatives who speak multiple languages and can foresee challenges before they arise.

The best way to navigate these rough and often confusing waters is through pooling our knowledge. Design-related forums, festivals, roundtables and inspirational lectures offer valuable opportunities for thought-leaders to dialogue on time-sensitive international topics, including protecting the authenticity of products abroad, distribution channels, partnerships and global design trends. As design goes global, events such as IIDA’s Industry Roundtable work to offer strategic perspectives by bringing together major manufacturers and IIDA members from across the country.

International competitions and new chapters in

different parts of the world also present opportunities for interior designers to reach out to the rest of the international community. We may communicate in different languages, but we also have a collective visual channel of communication. It is exciting and rewarding to learn from educators and peers in different parts of the world, as well as through the different environments we create and experience.

The international Student Sustainable Design Competition, the Best Interiors of Latin America competition, Global Excellence Awards and Healthcare Interior Design Awards are specific examples of international initiatives available to the design community through IIDA. Likewise, several interior design associations offer CEU credits, which inform the community of current sustainable efforts worldwide. These reading materials build global awareness, and serve as a knowledge center in and beyond the education of an interior designer.

International design has long provided opportunities for career development and advancement in the industry, but as a new economic age develops around us, embracing internationalism is more important than ever before. Getting started with international design can be as simple as exploring an online gallery of international project winners or by connecting with other professionals through local chapter events. What we hope you will learn from these engagements is that good design is global design. 

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