

# interior architecture in australia and canada

part one: a comparative study of a developing profession

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## **Introduction**

This paper is the first in a series. The series will compare development in Interior Design/Interior Architecture in two commonwealth countries—Australia and Canada. These countries are of a similar population, size, language, mother country and age in terms of western development. The countries therefore share, in terms of design development, some of the same opportunities and barriers.

Little documented research exists concerning the recent developments in Interior Architecture in Australia and Canada. Thus this paper was written to provide an anecdotal overview of the profession in the two countries over the period described. It is acknowledged that this is by no means an exhaustive piece of research of this period, but rather an overview and starting point for more in-depth research.



*Photographer: Chris Geoghegan*

*Figure 1: Australia 'The Lucky Country' is an ancient continent with an infant Interior Architecture community. The country is rich in aboriginal history, cultural diversity, color and materials to draw on for design context.*

The purpose of this first paper is to establish the professions' history as a base—to compare parallels and differences for the purpose of gaining an insight into development. From this base discussions are possible on future directions.

The paper focuses on the past twenty years from the seventies to the nineties. Interior Architecture is placed in context with the economic events underpinning both countries. It focuses on Australia and Canada from 1977 to 1999, and provides a background on the influences of time, place and economic factors on the Interior Design profession. A number of these influences are global in scope, thereby putting the developments into an international context. The paper concludes with possibilities suggested by the current state of the profession and recommendations for further research.

The main centres of Interior Design practice in Australia include Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth. Each city went through periods of intense building activity, downturns and leveling out between 1977 and 1999. Australia's population grew from 14 to 18 million between those years.<sup>1</sup> Refer to Figure 1. for a map.

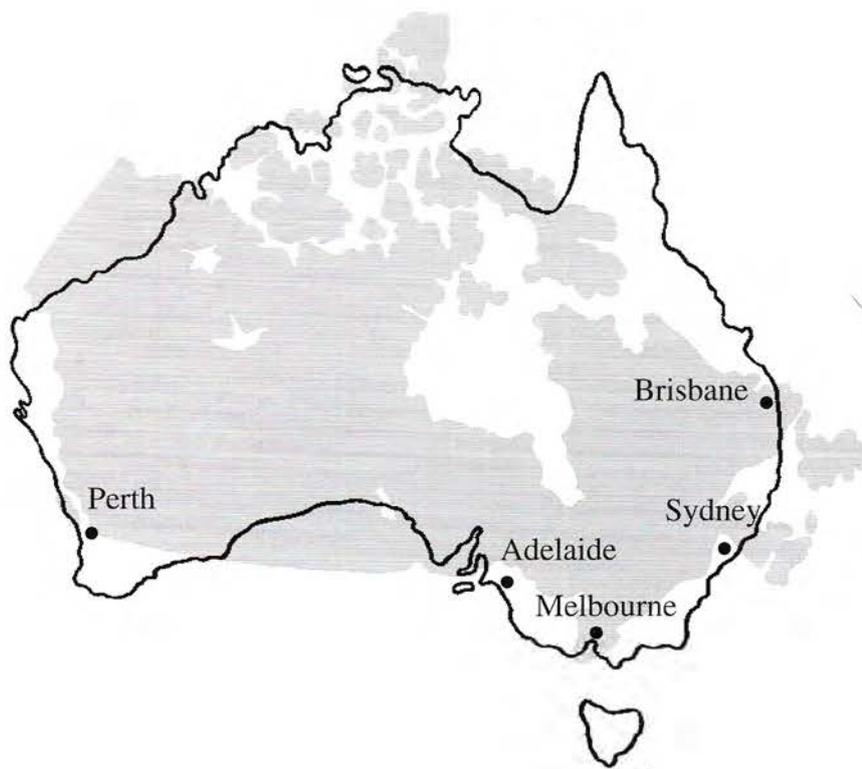
1. Census estimates from 1976-77 *Canadian Yearbook of the Commonwealth and 1998 World Almanac.*

Henderson believed that during the 1970s the profession of Interior Design came into its own.<sup>2</sup> Firms found they were successfully tendering for larger interior fit-out projects, particularly in specialist areas such as shopping center and office tenancy projects. With their strengthening role in the industry, Interior Designers became confident in taking on larger commissions, at times usurping the role of the architect, particularly in building renovations. An upsurge in the economy during 1984-85 saw an increase in the number of Interior Design practices.

2. Henderson, J., 'Design Education, This Year's Hottest Topic.' *Interiors*, September 1985, pp. 182-189

In Australia, following the stock market collapse of 1987 and the resulting recession, Interior Design practices suffered. Fees dropped, many practices reduced their staff to a core group or closed their doors. International practices suffering the same fate, looked overseas for potential work. The emerging Asian 'tiger' market became their target. Branch offices sprang up in Hong Kong, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta. Australian design firms had to share this market with their European and North American counterparts.

In the 1970s and 80s, Interior Design practices within Australia competed statewide or nationally, with the exception of a handful of international practices who developed branches in the Australasian region. Local Interior Design practices were aware of their competitors and able to compete based on their knowledge and experience gained within their specific area of expertise. They knew their market and therefore could be competitive on fees. Today, practices find they compete on a larger scale with unknown competitors, and their clients encourage



*Source: Authors/Glow Studio*

*Figure 2: The map indicates the five main Australian centres where Interior Architecture is practised. The majority of the population resides around the perimeter of the continent, with the greatest population in the eastern states. Although the continent is similar in size to Canada, the population of Australia is only 18 million as compared to 29 million in Canada.*



Source: Authors/Glow Studio

*Figure 3: The map indicates the five main Canadian centres where Interior Architecture is practised. The majority of Canada's 29 million residents reside within 500 kilometres of the Canadian/United States border. Similar to Australia the greatest population is in the eastern provinces of Ontario and Quebec. Canadian Interior Architecture is heavily influenced by the United States—due to proximity and that the majority of building product, fixtures and furniture come from the United States. The majority of design publications in North America are produced in the States.*

competition between practices nationally and internationally. Clients are more sophisticated and informed in Interior Design practice, and are demanding greater service for lower fees. Clients in large corporations “[...] look for skilled and experienced design practices that show them how strategic use of design enhances their business units and corporate strategies”.<sup>3</sup>

3. Zaccai, G., and Badler, G., 'New Directions for Design', *Design Management Journal*, 1996, pp. 54-59

As businesses are also competing more often on an international level, their practice is developing and changing at a faster pace. These changes impact on our social, physical and spiritual well being, influencing the way we live work and play and therefore affecting our physical environments. Clients need to be satisfied that the interior designer is up to date with these changes, understanding the trends within the business, social and political environment, and has the knowledge and skills to address these issues and implement appropriate design specific solutions.

In 1998 the Australian economy took a beating with the fall of markets in Asia. This decline has affected Australian design firms with branches in Asia. Additionally, Australian design/development was affected as the investment in building by Asians dropped dramatically. The bright area for design has come from Sydney, where development of facilities to house the *2000 Summer Olympic games* are keeping designers busy.

Major Canadian centres where Interior Design is practiced include Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary and Vancouver. As in Australia, each city underwent periods of intense building activity, downturns and leveling out between 1977 and 1999, while the population expanded from 23 to 29 million<sup>4</sup>. Refer to figure 3.

4. *Yearbook and World Almanac*, *ibid*.

5. Much of the following background comes from personal correspondence (1988) with Donna Cummings, CEO of *Marshall Cummings*, a leading Interior Design firm established in Toronto in 1975 (now with branches in New York and London). She has practiced since 1969 and is considered a leader and expert in the profession.

Up until the mid-1960s, corporate or institutional owner-occupiers primarily built buildings.<sup>5</sup> Architects designed the buildings and the interiors in terms of partitioning and millwork. In many cases, architects specified finishes, and furniture dealers provided interior layouts and furniture. At this time, furniture and product dealers were the primary players, offering planning and interior design services to help sell their products across Canada. High-rise architecture began in eastern Canada in the mid-1960s. Expo 67 brought about a major change in the Interior Design industry. The World Exposition in Montreal brought architects, Interior Designers and industrial designers to Canada from around the world. With these built environment designers came an expanded knowledge of international products, including furniture and textiles

In 1969, several interior design firms in Toronto pioneered office planning independent of furniture dealers. Sloan Branton and AD Pollard were two of the first, although the largest firms were still the dealers such as POI and J.C. Preston, both representing Steelcase Furniture. Other stationery/copier suppliers such as Grand and Toy also represented furniture manufacturers and started offering design services. Large department stores such as Eatons and Simpsons opened departments across Canada offering office planning as an extension of their residential, hotel and retail design business. In Toronto, Nienkamper started representing European and international furniture lines, eventually manufacturing furniture such as Knoll under license. Teak furniture and Mary Meiko type fabrics were available to the domestic market, which was part of the German and Swedish influence initiated at Expo 67.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, developers such as Cadillac Fairview and Olympia and York built speculative high-rises. Banks, law firms, accounting and insurance companies were all expanding and looking for space across Canada. This created a boom for Interior Designers with expertise in the area, very similar to the situation in Australia. In the US, architectural firms like Gwathamy Seigal, SOM and Gensler were growing in parallel, developing strong Interior Design arms. High-rise buildings in New York and Chicago such as the Hancock building, the Sears tower, and campus buildings for Weyerhaeuser and IBM were being built.

This was the time of 'space-planning' selling space for developers and realtors. The industrial designers were also busy. Steelcase, Sunar, Hauserman and many other American furniture suppliers were reinventing office furniture. During this time Herman Miller developed the Ao2 Open Office System, and Westinghouse produced a similar open-plan system, with the use of vertical space that the user could adjust to their liking. Seated and standing surfaces were used with a honeycomb-like layout with shared panels that used space efficiently. Hans Niewerth brought the philosophy of the German Quikbourner team to Canada, opening offices across the land. This was the era of 'open landscape' planning with plants, desks and fabric landscape screens proliferating. Meanwhile, Steelcase was selling a ton of its moveable wall system and developing new systems furniture. The state of technology was still in word processing areas and mainframe computer rooms with card punching areas for data entry. Donna Cummings expresses Marshall Cummings's experience which appears indicative of other practices:

By 1975 we were in an era of the corporate office reflecting the company image. More attention and money was spent on interior architectural

6. A number of provinces now license interior designers. Through licensing, interior designers become recognised as building design professionals, as experts in the application of the code. Their signatures and stamps on drawings submitted for building permit approval have official status. This gives them a status similar to that of an architect, for the purposes of signing off on relevant drawings, which must be approved under building code provisions.

7. Cummings, D., *Canadian Interior Design History*, 1960-present.

details and finishes. Suddenly experience in programming and space-planning became a very saleable commodity. Knowledge of furniture and how to interpret work needs into functional office environments was needed. We probably have always learned from the large furniture companies as they did the research for their products and taught us. At this time schools were still teaching what—color, some design problem solving and history?<sup>6</sup>

A shopping mall disaster (roof collapse in Surrey, BC) in the 80s created waves with regard to liabilities. Plan examiners found inconsistencies in the drawings. An engineer was found to have stamped the drawings without having checked them. He lost his business and his license. This experience underscores the need for culpability of building design professionals and fast-forwarded the need for Interior Design licensing/registration in matters of public health and safety issues. Cummings (1998) continues their story:

By 1980, image became a big thing. Our experience in period furniture and style became the saleable thing. The corporation with the most marble, the thickest carpet, matching paneling and largest art collection won the prize. Knowledge of products gave us the edge, as well as space-planning and decorative finishing, both contemporary and traditional. By the 1990s, some client companies were losing ground. The Canada/US Free Trade Agreement (CUSTA) was implemented in 1989, with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to follow in 1994. This increased competition for Canadian firms in Canada, but also allowed expansion into the US. The Federal Government implemented a Goods and Services Tax (GST), which came into effect in the late 1980s, creating a tax burden and an enormous administrative load.<sup>7</sup>

The excesses of the 1980s, a slowing economy, the boom of technology and global competition forced clients to look at their bottom line. To reduce overheads, the first and easiest thing was to reduce people and space. The period was economically driven: the designer who could reduce space and use it more efficiently per 'profit producing person' was 'king.' The focus of interiors shifted to acoustics, technology, environmentally friendly approaches and ergonomics, with much less emphasis on image and style. People worked harder for less and designers tried to create environments that were more attractive, bright, colorful and warm, using few unnecessary details.

From 1995 on technology ruled. Flexibility became the most requested design element. Work processes changed and companies couldn't keep up with training and reorganising, which became constant. Effectiveness was the issue. Technology and flexibility were the drivers. Access to information leveled out hierarchical structures within client organizations and physical space planning and environments had to change to reflect and enable this changed way of working.

Donna Cummings represented the corporate office design field on a panel of four design experts at IDEX/NEOCON in October 1998, discussing change and how the design industry can be a leader of change. Her views are summarized below, with questions put forward to the panel:

In the corporate world in the late 1990s, culture and behaviour are the hot topics. People and brains are the assets. Ways of working range from different work settings for different tasks, less owned space and more shared space, with planning concepts such as *teaming*, *caves and commons*, and *neighborhoods*. Mobility is provided through *plug and play* or *wireless* allowing freedom to work anywhere. Coming together with others may be to learn, be mentored or have formal or informal training. Perks (provided by client companies) are used to recruit and retain good people. Food service still tops the wish list, followed by fitness facilities, daycare and other amenities. In contrast, as little as two years ago the wish list was still for technology, workspace, right to light and ergonomics.

Design skills require imagination, communication, investigative skills, innovation, collaboration with other disciplines [...] sensitivity to human behavior and to color, texture, shape and light.

At the [Toronto IDEX/NEOCON] seminar, we were all asked what the design world would be like in our various areas, in 2010. The retail design representative thought everything would be virtual; all shopping, dining and other experiences achieved through technology. The hotel designer agreed with the virtual experience for travel and sensations, but thought some 'real' luxury experiences would be in demand. The facility manager thought technology and the 'work anywhere' idea would result in a virtual office. I thought that technology would give us the choice to work virtually, something workers of the future will take for granted as we do the telephone, but humans will want to interact with others for warmth and sharing as well as intellectual growth.

In writing this, it is obvious the furniture manufacturing industry became the teacher of commercial designers. This is even more evident today. Is

# COLD AND THE METRIC WRONG

*by Max Fraser*



*Photographer: Bako/Beck*

*Figure 4: Canada, 'The Great White North', is a 'new continent' by comparison to Australia. It is rich in natural resources and low in population. In parallel to Australia the Interior Design community is young, in adolescence compared to Australia's infancy. Like Australia, there is much to draw on in terms of a national design context: 'First Nations' cultural history, European settlement, and the natural and cultural environment. Canada's design challenge is to not be overtaken by Americanism.*

this because designers cannot afford research and development? Or because in most cases we use manufactured products rather than one-of-a-kind designs? Fortunately, some manufacturers share not only their product research, but also their behavioral, ergonomic, and other scientific studies. A good career link is industrial and product design with the sales and marketing of products. Architects were traditionally trained to research and be more investigative. Is this happening today?

Canadian Interior Design is influenced by the United States as the majority of design publications and product manufacturing comes from there. A pooling of resources has resulted in strengthened education and practice, however the down side is that Canadian design has not developed a unique Canadian identity. In summary, design management in Interior Design firms is a big issue in Canada, differing from Australia. Australia tends to follow the British tradition of project management, where quantity surveyors act as middlemen in interior design and architectural projects.<sup>8</sup>

8. Quantity surveyors estimate costs of building construction through the counting of building elements, then estimate the amount of each element through measurement of drawings.

Australian Interior Design is influenced by British design in aesthetics and professional development. Australian interior designers have struggled to create their own identity separate from architecture. The region does not share borders with adjoining countries as in the European Community and North America where interior designers have joined forces and pooled resources. Fortunately, this situation is changing rapidly in the nineties. Communications, increased building activity in southeast Asia and Africa, and a stronger design organisation are giving strength to much needed changes in education and public views of the profession in Australia.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research**

The last 20 years have heralded an immense change in the profession internationally, touching all areas of the developing world. Economic downturns and changes in working/retail patterns have reduced the need for new buildings, slowing down the architectural business. However, swift changes in building occupancy, reengineering of businesses, and changes in life-working patterns have made Interior Design a more active area with a need for better-educated specialists in interior building design. Due to increased work in the area, the profession has gained momentum and influence. Communications has allowed the international development of a profession that is relatively small in each country. The smaller numbers and relative newness of the profession have allowed for greater flexibility to maneuver the dramatic changes brought about by the information age.

There are a lot of similarities between the two countries in terms of professional development, such as: population growth, building booms and busts, and a cultural and social basis as British Commonwealth countries. Differences of note are: Australia offers a more innovative national design identity and a strong multicultural design base relating to their work in, and immigration from, Southeast Asia.

#### ***Recommendations for further research***

*We offer the following as possibilities for further research:*

- *Interior Designers have worked through the most rapid advancement of the profession ever, and will work through another 20 years of immense change. Changes point to the concept of a world-wide economic dependency with the current (1988) failing of Russia, and the 'Asian flu' sending ripples across the world. We must consider how we are connected to others globally. The impact and opportunities posed by this reality for interior architects would be a valuable area for further research;*
- *In-depth research on the development of the profession in the two countries;*
- *Research the potential strengths of Australian Interior Architecture in the context to 'multi cultural design' vis a vis the growing migration from, and work in South East Asia;*
- *Research the relationships between the several fields of professional design activity, especially between Architecture and Interior Architecture; and*
- *Compare the development of the commercial office area of Interior Architecture in North America and Australia. Comparing the difference, if any, of Canadians having the influence/benefit of the research of large North America manufactures, and Australia with less of this direct influence.*

# interior architecture in australia and canada

part two: a comparative study of the development of university  
education for interior designers/architects

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## **Introduction**

This paper is the second in a series of comparative studies between education and practice in Interior Design/Interior Architecture between Canada and Australia. This paper discusses the similarities in the educational structure at universities within Australia and between Australia and Canada causing concern as we find ourselves in a global competitive market place. It is paramount that interior design education directs industry, and not be dictated by short-term industry demands. For this to occur, national educational bodies need to examine their existing programs in respect to one another, develop a distinctive approach in what they teach, and develop better communications with industry in order to ensure the sharing of valuable knowledge gained through project work. This paper is written to provide an anecdotal overview of the professional education in these two countries over the past twenty years. It is acknowledged that this is



*Figure 1: Indicates the four degree programs operational in Canada. Canada annually graduates 130 interior design/architecture students. When comparing Canada's four-degree programs with Australia's nine, it is interesting to note the similarities in the size of both countries, population and number of annual graduates in interior design/architecture. When the Canada/US free trade agreement was established in the 1980s, it became easier for Canadians to work in the US. Consequently, many top graduates either seek work in America or are head hunted by American design firms.*

by no means an exhaustive piece of research of this period, but rather an overview and starting point for more in-depth research.

The first paper established the professions' history as a base, comparing parallels and differences for the purpose of gaining an insight into the development of the profession. It is hoped that from this series discussions will follow on the future directions in both areas as little documented research exists concerning recent developments in interior design/architecture education and practice in Australia and Canada.

### Canadian Undergraduate/Graduate Education Courses

Canada and the United States share the credit for the maturation of formal education, CPD and standards for *Professional Interior Design Status*. According to Smith. (1987), the New York School of Fine and Applied Arts in 1904 offered the first Interior Decorating course; its name was changed to the Parsons School of Design in 1940. Other private schools followed suit soon after. The first university interiors program was established in the mid-1920s at the University of Washington in Seattle. In Canada, the University of Manitoba established the first Interior Decoration Diploma in 1938, and changed it to a four-year degree in 1945. However, it was;

'[...] not until the 1960s and 70s, a time of rapid expansion in higher education, that both graduate and undergraduate Interior Design programs became more common in [...] universities throughout North America. One of the earliest doctoral programs with an Interior Design focus was offered in the mid-1960s at Florida State University. The University of Missouri graduated its first doctoral candidate in 1972. The University of Tennessee established its multi-disciplinary doctoral program with an emphasis on environmental factors in the early 1970s'<sup>1</sup>.

The University of Manitoba offered the first Canadian post-graduate program in 1994. They offer a Masters of Interior Design, a Masters of Facility Management by distance, and an interdisciplinary Ph.D. program. The faculty is currently developing a program in teaching, research and service for planning and design of sustainable human environments, involving the resources of all five programs in the faculty and other units in the university, in collaboration with the municipal government. Their research activities involve The Canadian Institute of Built Environment Design and their Partners Program. *Table 1.* outlines undergraduate/graduate degrees operational in Canada in 1998. Currently four degree programs in Interior Design exist, with approximately 130 graduates annually.



*Figure 2: Indicates where degree programs are operational in Australia. Australia annually graduates 265 Interior Design/Architecture students. However, a number of these graduates are international students, who generally return to their homeland at the completion of their studies in Australia. The majority of international students are from SE Asia—Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan.*

*Table 1: Canadian Undergraduate/Graduate Interior Design Programs*  
 This table shows when and where Canadian programs were established. It indicates the number of annual undergraduates completing degrees and graduates enrolled. There is a notable difference between number of programs offered in Canada and Australia.

Institution	Interior Design Course Established	Undergraduate Duration 1998	1998 Numbers
Kwantlen University/College Surrey, BC	Diploma est. 1970s Degree est. 1991	four years full-time/equivalent	20
Mount Royal College Calgary, Alberta	Diploma est. 1970s Degree est. 1998	four years full-time/equivalent	35 (est. grads in 2001)
Ryerson Toronto Ontario	Diploma est. 1950s Degree est. mid-1968	four years full-time/equivalent	60
University of Manitoba Winnipeg, Manitoba	Diploma est. 1938 Degree est. mid-1945	five years full-time/equivalent	16 Five enrolled, no graduates
Annual estimated graduating undergraduates: 130			
Total enrolled graduates 1998: five			

Source: Authors

Institution	Interior Design course Established	Undergraduate duration 1998	1998 Numbers
RMIT Melbourne, Victoria	Diploma est. 1942 Degree est. late-1970s Masters est. mid-1990s	4 years full-time/equivalent 1 year full-time/equivalent	45 12 enrolled, 8 graduates
Swinbourne Melbourne, Victoria	Degree est. 1997	4 years full-time/equivalent	30 (est. grads in 2000)
University of Technology Sydney, NSW	Diploma est. 1975 Degree est. 1979	4 years full-time/equivalent	40
University Of New South Wales Sydney, NSW	Degree est. mid-1970s	4 years full-time/equivalent	40 (est. grads in 2001)
Queensland University of Technology Brisbane, Queensland	Degree est. 1987 Grad. Dip. ID est. 1990 MBE (Research)	three years full-time/equivalent One year full-time/equivalent	45
Griffith University Brisbane, Queensland	Associate Diploma est. 1980 Degree est. 1987	three years full-time/equivalent	20
University of South Australia Adelaide, South Australia	Certificate est. 1964 Degree est. 1983. M Arch. and M Design	four years full-time/equivalent	25
Curtin University of Technology Perth, Western Australia	Degree est. 1989 Masters est. 1998	four years full-time/equivalent	20
Northern Territories University Darwin, Northern Territories	Degree est. 1996	three years full-time/equivalent	5 (est. grads in 2001)
Annual estimated graduating Undergraduates 1998: 265			

Source: Authors

*Table 2: Australian Undergraduate/Graduate Interior Design Programs*  
 This table shows when and where Australian programs were established. It indicates the number of annual undergraduates completing degrees and graduates enrolled. The difference between number of programs offered and graduates in Canada and Australia is notable: although the population in Canada is ten million more, they have 170 less graduates than Australia.



*Figure 3: Australian design studio*

### **Australian Undergraduate/Graduate Education Courses**

The first Australia Interior Design program started in 1942 at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in Melbourne. RMIT's and subsequent programs started teaching primarily decorative courses. They were taught in technical colleges, and students were trained in how to apply materials and finishes. The seventies boom in Interior Design practice influenced these programs. Professionals demanded that graduates being employed in Interior Design and Architectural practices had more knowledge of structures, technical skills, and were educated to deal with complex issues in design.

The majority of programs offered remained in technical schools until a government policy in the late-80s transformed a number of technical schools into universities of technology. At this time Interior Design degrees sprang up in most of the states. Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria were each offering two degrees by the late 90s. Australia offers nine undergraduate degrees, big in comparison to Canada's four, considering a ten million person population spread (Canada being the largest). The majority of programs that started as three-year diplomas in the sixties/seventies became

four-year degrees with honors by 1997. This trend supports the international education standards of Interior Design/Architecture. *Table 2.* depicts the undergraduate degrees available in Australia. Annually, Australian universities average 265 Interior Design graduates. RMIT introduced the first Interior Design masters and doctorate in the mid-90s. Subsequently, the University of South Australia and Curtin introduced Interior Design Masters programs [See Table 2].

### **Underpinning of Undergraduate Education**

The North American adoption of the Bauhaus style of design education in the 1940s is explained by Droste<sup>2</sup>. The arrival in the States of Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius in 1937 brought to architectural schools the 'New Bauhaus'. These founders had a pervasive influence on architectural education. Interior Design programs offered in Architecture schools in North America and Australia were strongly influenced by this Bauhaus education model. Many Architectural/Interior Design schools adopted the Bauhaus style of studio-based teaching across North America. The Bauhaus model of studio-based learning, which is still used today, is evident in the programs affiliated with architectural schools. The education philosophy was based on three key areas:

- An understanding of material and developing craft training to express the intrinsic qualities of the materials. Students were encouraged to develop a concern for purity and simplicity of form and appreciate the properties of materials, colour and texture.
- The theoretical exploration of design would be discussed at length in a studio forum; and
- The integration of theory and practice as a fundamental principle.

Design schools at universities do not promote themselves by their philosophy in design, nor do they differentiate themselves from other similar programs by offering a focus on a specialised field of interior design practice such as tropical or environmental sustainable design. When researching the number of interior design degree programs in Australia, it is interesting to note that not one university commented on an area of specialty. For prospective students to select from the various interior design programs available within Australia, it seems their choice would be influenced primarily by geography. The risk of lowered standards is increased due to competition between Australian universities for international full fee paying students. These universities may be forced to relax their standards in order to remain within the education market, as they find they are competing with international and/or national universities that may be far less rigorous academically than their own. Schools may gain a competitive edge through better national promotion of their approach to interior design education and their particular areas of strengths and specialties.

2. Droste, Magdalena,  
*Bauhaus, 1919-1933*,  
Taschen Verlag  
GmbH, 1990

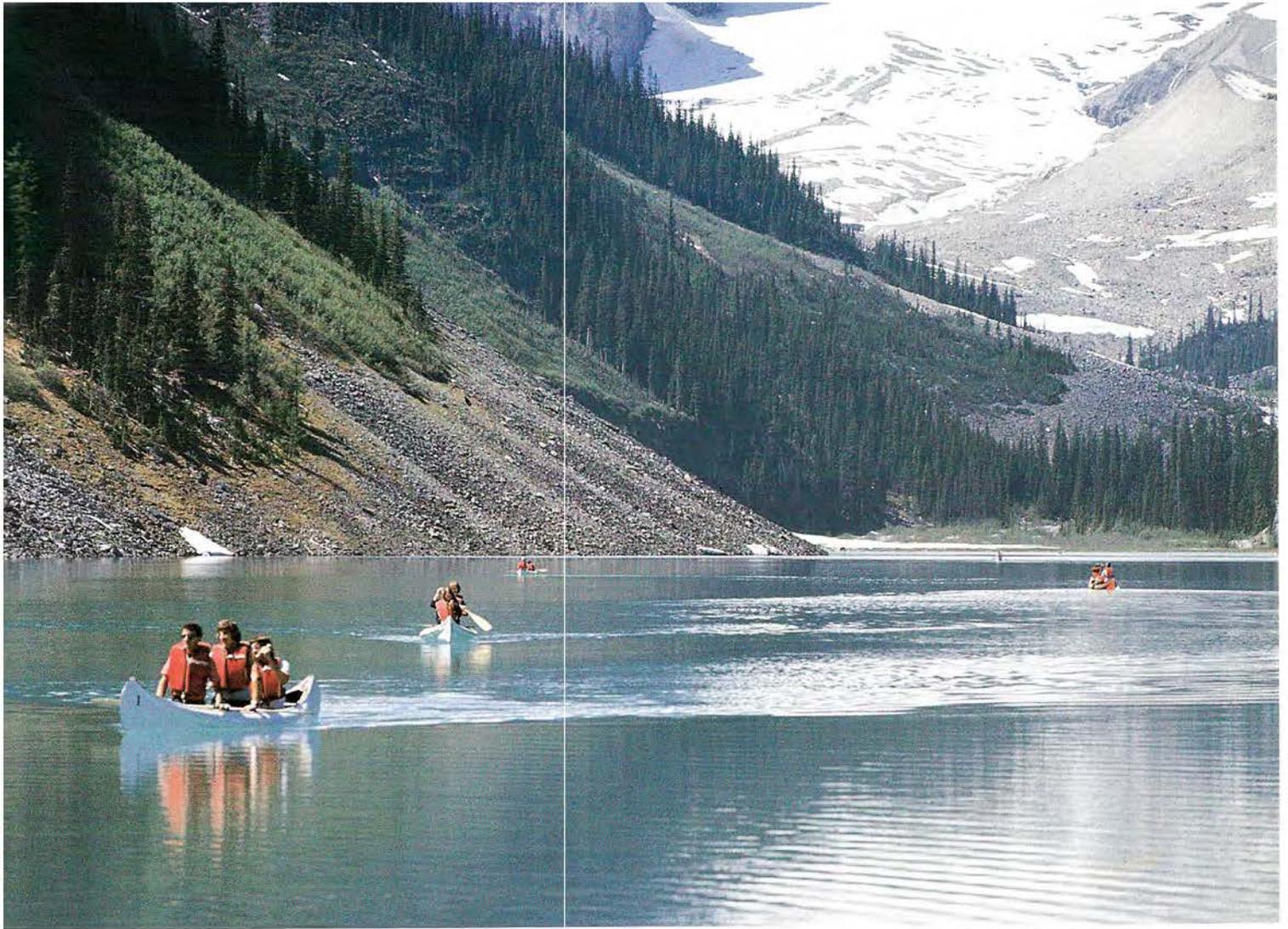


Figure 4: Canadian design studio

3. Schon, D., A., *The Reflective Practitioner—How Professionals Think in Action*, Basic Books, USA, 1988, p.98

4. Henderson, J., 'Design Education, this year's hottest topic', *Interiors*, September 1985, p.183

### Current Debates in Formal Education

There is debate in the industry regarding the university's role in the education of Interior Designers. Through practice demands, the boundaries of design education are becoming narrower, asking the educator to deliver graduates for production—which has a short shelf life. Schon raises an interesting question '[...] can the prevailing concepts of professional education ever yield a curriculum adequate to the complex, unstable, uncertain and conflicting worlds of practice?'<sup>3</sup> Henderson suggests that 'the multiplicity of voices in design education is due to the confusion in the design world in general. Practitioners regularly cross boundaries between disciplines from other fields. As the fight for turf—employment, new projects, etc.—intensifies, the blurring of these boundaries will also intensify. The academy inevitably, becomes another battleground'<sup>4</sup>. The demand by in-

dustry for education institutions to produce graduates that meet their current needs is irresponsible, and assumes education should take on the role of training rather than taking on the role of exploration and challenging current practice by looking at the broader picture.

Current information in the industry is gained primarily through project-based learning. As firms guard this information closely, it is not fed back into education or to other members of the design community. This experience is hidden in order to gain competitive advantage in the industry. What practitioners don't recognise is that this hoarding of information results in everyone reinventing the wheel, and therefore, limits industry advancement of a body of knowledge. In education, without this valuable resource of information, educators can only rely on their own experience and research. The very thing that practitioners want graduates to know—up to date knowledge—is actually being withheld from them. Most professional Interior Designers have little time to publish their material. Schon (1983), recommends collaboration between researchers and practitioners to publish findings on projects, to augment the stylistic information that proliferates the Design industry. It is no wonder that students orient themselves to stylistic approaches to Interior Design, as there is little in the way of published literature of substance. Practitioners must see a way through this competition for the advancement of Interior Design.

### **Conclusions and Further Research**

The last 20 years have heralded an immense change in the profession internationally, touching all areas of the developing world. Swift changes in building occupancy, re-engineering of businesses, and changes in life-working patterns have made Interior Design a more active area with a need for better-educated specialists in interior building design. Due to increased work in the area, the profession has gained momentum and influence. With demand steadily increasing for specialists in Interior Architecture. Rapid changes in commercial interiors, be they retail, offices or health-care, give scope for research and practice that has not been there in the past. CPD, graduate education and improved undergraduate education are now available for individuals.

There are a lot of similarities between the two countries in terms of professional development, such as: the underpinning of undergraduate education, population rise, building booms and busts, and cultural and social basis as British Commonwealth countries. Differences of note are: Canada is further ahead in the development of graduate education and research, and has higher standards for gaining and maintaining professional Interior Design status. Australia offers a better individual design identity and a strong multicultural design base with their work in, and immigration from, South-east Asia.

A body of knowledge in the field will empower the profession. In Australia, much

needed research has started in the region, with a handful of educators doing their Ph.D.s in the country in the past five years. Educators and practitioners need to think about how to advance the profession in order to capitalise on the vast opportunities opening in the field of interior design/architecture. Education has started to respond to these changes by providing more flexible programs and distance education, involving CPD and offering post-graduate degrees in partnership with industry. Universities also need to analyse what they teach and identify an area unique to either their region or specialise in an area desperately requiring research within design practice. However, unless practice is willing to 'share' industry experience with education bodies, the information provided at CPD level will remain singularly focussed.

#### **Recommendations for collaborative research between educators and practitioners**

Very few case studies exist within the profession of interior design, and those that do are secreted by individual design practices. The information gained from such studies could greatly benefit the profession and also be used as a valuable resource for students and teachers alike. The areas need not be all encompassing or all revealing, (as so many design firms fear they might), they need in fact only be in specific areas as some of the following examples describe:

- A study of the information gained on each new design project. Are staff encouraged to formalise this information, if so how is it catalogued and accessed. How is the other staff made aware of this information. Is this information built on during each new design project?
- An analysis of the structure of the design team and its effectiveness at all stages of the design project.
- An analysis of future design projections and how this will influence the current university structure.
- Research new teaching strategies for long distance education
- An examination of existing interior design programs in Australia, discussing their similarities and differences and whether these are addressing current design trends both nationally and internationally.

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