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American Society
of Interior Designers



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ASID

American Society
of Interior Designers

RECRUITING AND RETAINING

QUALIFIED EMPLOYEES —
BY DESIGN

Sponsored by:

American Society of
Interior Designers

Carpet and Rug Institute

Haworth, Inc.

USG Interiors, Inc.

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President's Message



Today's tight job market has company executives searching for ways to find qualified people to fill jobs. Increased pay and benefits may seem the most likely way to lure workers. However, independent research has found the physical workplace environment can influence a company's ability to recruit and retain talented workers.

To get to the bottom of this, the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) commissioned independent research designed to determine the impact of design on recruiting and retaining qualified employees. On behalf of ASID, L.C. Williams & Associates, Inc., an independent research firm, posed questions to employees currently employed or seeking full-time jobs in office environments, as well as human resource executives and executive recruiters. For example:

- How much does the physical environment impact decisions to accept or leave jobs?
- Can job satisfaction be influenced by the physical environment?
- What do employees like and dislike about their current physical environment?
- What do job seekers look for in the physical environment at prospective workplaces?
- Do age, income or other factors impact employee views of the workplace?

The findings show clear and convincing evidence that the physical workplace environment is key in the decisions employees reach about accepting or leaving jobs. For example, after compensation, employees cited their physical environment to be one of the most important factors influencing their decisions to accept or leave jobs, tying for second with benefits. However, the research also shows human resource executives and executive recruiters may not be “connecting” with employees on this issue. Unlike employees, those two groups tended to emphasize other factors instead of the physical environment.

In this paper, you'll find hands-on practical tools to help designers and managers identify employee needs concerning the physical environment and work together to meet them. We also have provided a “walk-through guide” to help job seekers and recruiters identify key aspects of the physical environment that reflect who the company is and where it is headed.

Clearly, there is much to be gained when designers work closely with human resource executives and other management representatives to ensure the physical environment meets the needs of current and prospective employees. This research reaffirms the benefits of a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary approach to design and facility planning. Working together, designers, administration, facilities management and employees can create functional workplace environments where employees are comfortable, productive and efficient.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rosalyn Cama". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Rosalyn Cama, FASID

National President
American Society of Interior Designers

Research Overview

The challenge of recruiting and retaining qualified employees in a tight labor market is becoming increasingly difficult. A recent study by McKinsey & Co., a leading management consulting firm, found that 75 percent of companies surveyed don't have enough talented employees or are chronically short.

One strategy gaining popularity as a tool to help attract and keep top talent is to redesign or create new offices where people enjoy working. Following are some examples:

- **Nortel Networks'** new Brampton Centre facility (Brampton, Canada) is a horizontal, self-contained "city" housing 3,000 employees. Color-coded "neighborhoods" for various departments and "streets" lined with plazas, cafes and convenience services such as banks and dry cleaning encourage interaction and create a sense of community. Surveys show that 75 percent of employees are very satisfied with the new facility, and almost 50 percent say their job satisfaction has increased since moving there. **TBWA/Chiat/Day** used a similar concept for its new Los Angeles office.
- **Owens Corning** (Toledo, Ohio) converted to open offices for its corporate headquarters as part of a cultural transformation. Surveys show that 60 percent of employees believe productivity has improved, and 80 percent say the new office environment has helped them focus more on customer needs.
- **Sears, Roebuck & Company** (Hoffman Estates, Ill.) is breaking away from traditional office design by using curved walls and bold colors. The strategy is to create a distinctive, progressive appearance to differentiate the company.
- Companies such as **3Com Corporation** (Rolling Meadows, Ill.), **Andersen Consulting LLP** (Northbrook, Ill.), **UNITEDhealthcare** (Eden Prairie, Minn.) and **Pitney Bowes Financial Services** (Shelton, Conn.) combine comfortable and attractive offices with on-site amenities to lure and keep workers.
- **Lipschultz, Levin & Gray, Certified Public Accountants** (Northbrook, Ill.) eliminated private offices, walls, cubicles and stationary desks when it moved and replaced them with movable furniture in a totally open, and much smaller, space. The new design supported a cultural transformation and attracted "top-notch" hires.

To take a closer look at the impact of the physical environment in attracting and keeping qualified employees, this paper includes a review of ASID's recent research involving interviews with employees and job seekers, human resource executives and executive recruiters. The paper also includes a case study on Monster.com showing how the company is using the physical environment in its new headquarters to strengthen recruiting and retaining efforts. Finally, there is a section with hands-on tools to help designers and management create offices where people want to work. The tools also include a "walk-through guide" giving job seekers and recruiters suggestions on what types of things to look for in the physical environment when visiting a prospective employer for the first time.

Research Methodology

The American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) commissioned an independent research study to investigate the hypothesis that the quality of a company's interior design, the physical workplace environment, is one of the key factors in its ability to recruit and retain qualified workers.



ASID was joined in this research initiative by three of its industry partners: the Carpet and Rug Institute, Haworth, Inc. and USG Interiors, Inc.

This project involved two components. The first was a national quantitative omnibus study that involved telephone interviews with 663 adults who are employed full time or actively looking for full-time employment in an office environment. The second was a qualitative survey that involved interviews with 12 human resource executives and 15 executive recruiters.

Facilitated by using Opinion Research Corporation's Caravan, the employee study was conducted among a national probability sample of 1,000 adults. The questions were asked for two consecutive weeks (October 8–October 18, 1998). Of the 2,020 adults 18 or older who were contacted, respondents were qualified as follows:

- Currently employed full time outside the home in a position that places them in an office-like environment at least 50 percent of the time they are at work, or
- Currently employed full time outside the home but looking for a position that places them in an office-like environment at least 50 percent of the time they are at work, or
- Not currently employed full time outside the home but looking for a position that places them in an office-like environment at least 50 percent of the time they are at work.

A total of 663 respondents were qualified, broken out as follows:

- 546 who are currently employed full time outside the home in a position that places them in an office-like environment at least 50 percent of the time they are at work.
- 117 looking for a position that places them in an office-like environment at least 50 percent of the time they are at work.
- Margin of error is +/- 6 percent.

Research Methodology

In order to ensure that the sample is representative of the population 18 years of age or older, the final sample is weighted by:

- Age
- Gender
- Geographic region
- Ethnicity

The specific objectives of the research were as follows:

- Reveal which factors are important when employees consider accepting or leaving jobs.
- Determine if the physical workplace environment impacts employee decisions to accept or leave jobs.
- Compare the impact of the physical workplace environment with other factors, such as compensation, benefits and day-to-day activities on job satisfaction and employee retention.
- Uncover specific aspects of the physical workplace environment that impact job satisfaction and employee retention.
- Identify what job seekers look for when they see a physical workplace environment for the first time.
- Measure differences on these issues between segments of the working population, such as Baby Boomers vs. Generation Xers or low income vs. high income.



ASID commissioned an independent research project to determine the impact of the physical workplace environment in helping companies recruit and retain qualified workers. ASID was joined by three of its industry partners: the Carpet and Rug Institute, Haworth, Inc. and USG Interiors, Inc.

Omnibus Employee Survey Sample Profile

		Total Sample	Currently work 50% of time in an office	Looking for a job involving 50% of time in office
	(Base)	(663)	(546)	(117)
Gender	Male	50%	49%	58%
	Female	50%	51%	43%
Age	18-24	16%	11%	39%
	25-34	27%	27%	26%
	35-44	27%	29%	18%
	45-54	21%	23%	12%
	55-64	8%	8%	6%
	65+	1%	1%	0%
Region	Northeast	21%	21%	20%
	North Central/Midwest	21%	22%	15%
	South	34%	32%	44%
	West	25%	25%	21%
Ethnicity	White	79%	82%	62%
	Black	15%	12%	29%
	Hispanic	10%	10%	15%
Annual Household Income	Less than \$15k	7%	4%	24%
	\$15k to \$25k	9%	7%	18%
	\$25k to \$35k	16%	16%	15%
	\$35k to \$50k	19%	19%	16%
	\$50k or more	38%	43%	17%
Household Size	One	15%	16%	13%
	Two	30%	29%	35%
	Three or more	54%	54%	52%
Education	Some High School	5%	3%	16%
	High School Graduate	26%	23%	42%
	Some College	22%	23%	19%
	College Graduate	43%	49%	21%

Notes to the Reader

In reviewing the report of the omnibus results, the reader should note the following:

- Text that highlights differences between populations or segments means that the difference is statistically significant at a 95 percent confidence interval.
- Throughout the survey, respondents were asked to use a 5-point rating scale to indicate their satisfaction with a variety of attributes as follows:
 - 5=extremely satisfied, 1=extremely dissatisfied.
 - A rating of 4 or 5 is considered “satisfied” and a rating of 1, 2 or 3 is considered “not satisfied.”
- Respondents were asked to use a 5-point rating scale to indicate their likelihood to change jobs in the next year as follows:
 - 5=extremely likely to change jobs, 1=not at all likely to change jobs.
 - A rating of 1 or 2 represented “not likely to change jobs” and a rating of 3, 4 or 5 represented “likely to change jobs.”
- “Top-of-mind” responses are answers that respondents gave to an open-ended question.
 - Responses given were analyzed and put into groupings based on the theme of the response or what was being conveyed.

In reviewing the qualitative results the reader should note that the findings are not projectable to the audiences being interviewed. They are merely the attitudes and opinions of a select group of respondents and should be regarded in that context.

Findings

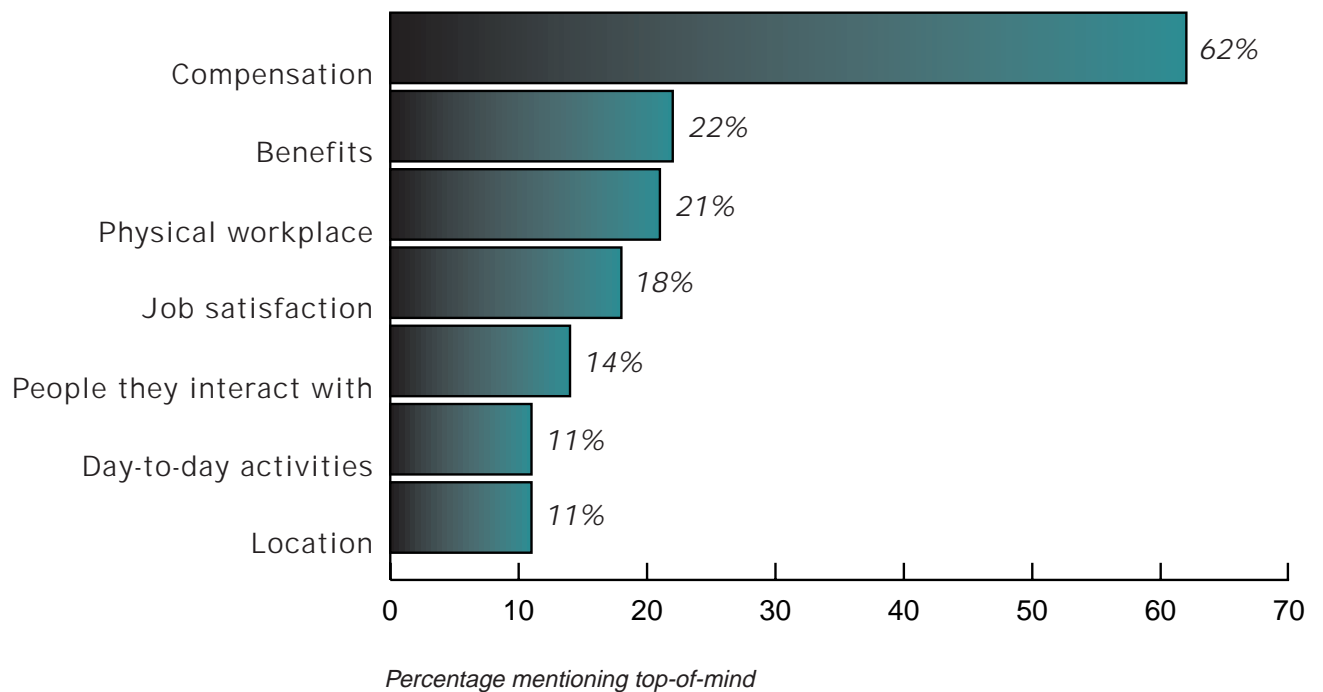
The Physical Workplace Environment Is Important

The physical workplace environment can play an important role in decisions about accepting or leaving jobs. The physical workplace impacts employee comfort, access to people and equipment, privacy and flexibility.

The physical workplace was one of the top three factors employees said top-of-mind have influence on their decisions to accept or leave jobs. Compensation was the number one factor, cited by 62 percent of respondents. Benefits and the physical workplace, cited by 22 percent and 21 percent respectively, were essentially tied for second.

The physical workplace also ranked in the top three when examining factors that serve as contributors to job satisfaction. Employees who were pleased with their physical workplaces were 31 percent more likely to say they were satisfied with their jobs than to say they were not satisfied with their jobs. The only factors rated higher were daily activities (54 percent) and compensation (46 percent).

Physical workplace impacts decisions to accept or leave jobs.



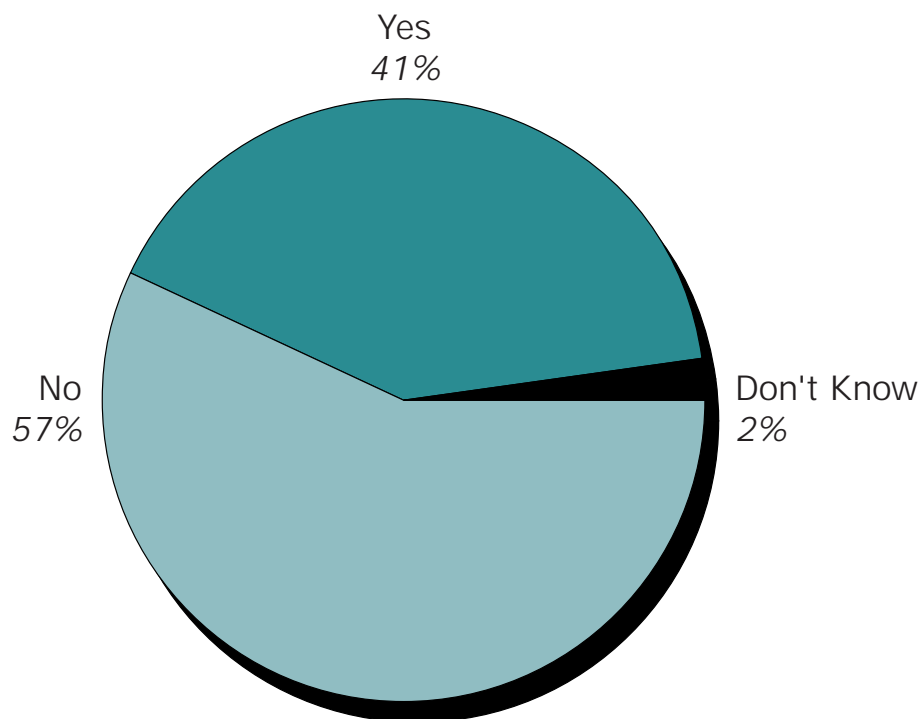
The Physical Workplace Impacts Accepting a Position

When asked specifically if the physical workplace would impact their decision to accept a position, 41 percent of employees and job seekers said it would.

Employees who are least satisfied with their jobs and those likely to change jobs soon are much more likely to cite the physical workplace as an important factor in their decisions to accept a position. This suggests an unsatisfactory physical workplace is one of the factors that contributes to employee dissatisfaction and affects employee retention.

- Those not satisfied with their current jobs are much more likely to say this would be a factor compared to those who are satisfied in their current positions (51 percent versus 34 percent).
- Employees likely to change jobs in the next year mention this as a factor more than those not likely to change jobs (50 percent versus 34 percent).

Physical workplace influences taking a new job.



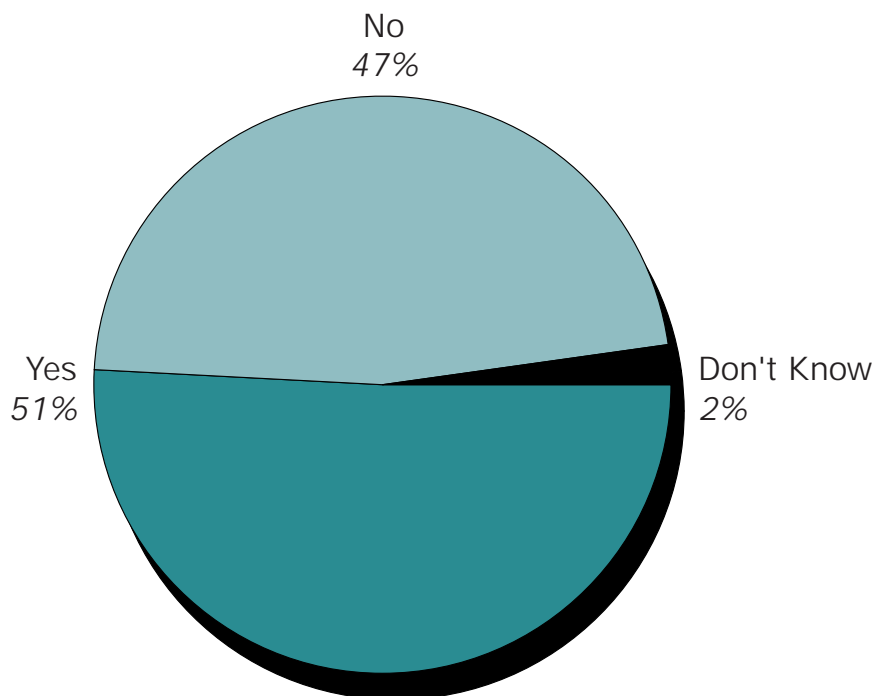
The Physical Workplace Impacts Leaving a Position

On the other hand, when asked specifically if the physical workplace would impact their decision to leave a position, 51 percent of employees and job seekers said it would.

Employees who are least satisfied with their jobs and those likely to change jobs soon are much more likely to cite the physical workplace as an important factor in their decision to leave a position. This again suggests an unsatisfactory physical workplace is one of the factors contributing to employee dissatisfaction.

- Those not satisfied with their current jobs are much more likely to say this would be a factor compared to those who are happy in their current positions (55 percent versus 44 percent).
- Employees likely to change jobs in the next year mention this as a factor more than those not likely to change jobs (55 percent versus 46 percent).

Physical workplace influences staying in a job.



Employees Aren't Satisfied With Their Physical Workplaces

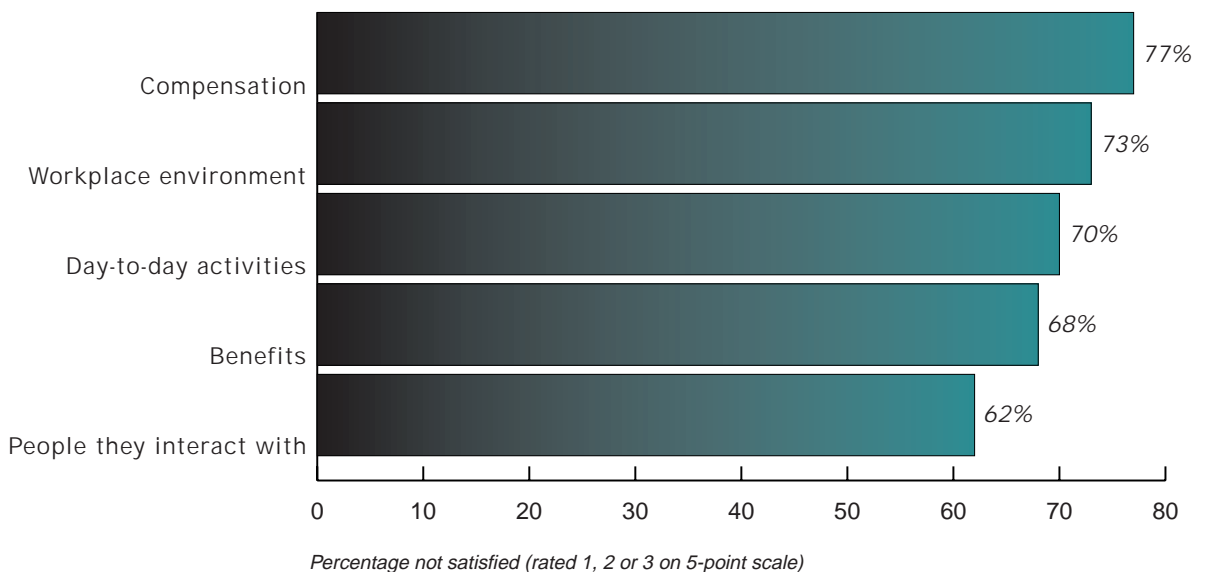
The research clearly shows employees want improvements in their physical workplaces. Nearly three-quarters, 73 percent, said they are not satisfied with the physical workplace at their current job. Compensation was the only aspect of their jobs people found less satisfactory than the physical workplace.

In addition, half of respondents who said they are not satisfied in their current jobs or are likely to change jobs in the next year said the physical workplace would be a factor in their decision to accept or leave a job.

When asked why the physical workplace is important, the following were top responses:

- 22 percent said it affects their ability to be happy and comfortable at work
- 13 percent said the physical workplace is important because they spend a lot of time at work
- 9 percent said they feel they will be more productive in a good environment

Compensation and workplace environment need improvement.



What People Look for in the Physical Workplace

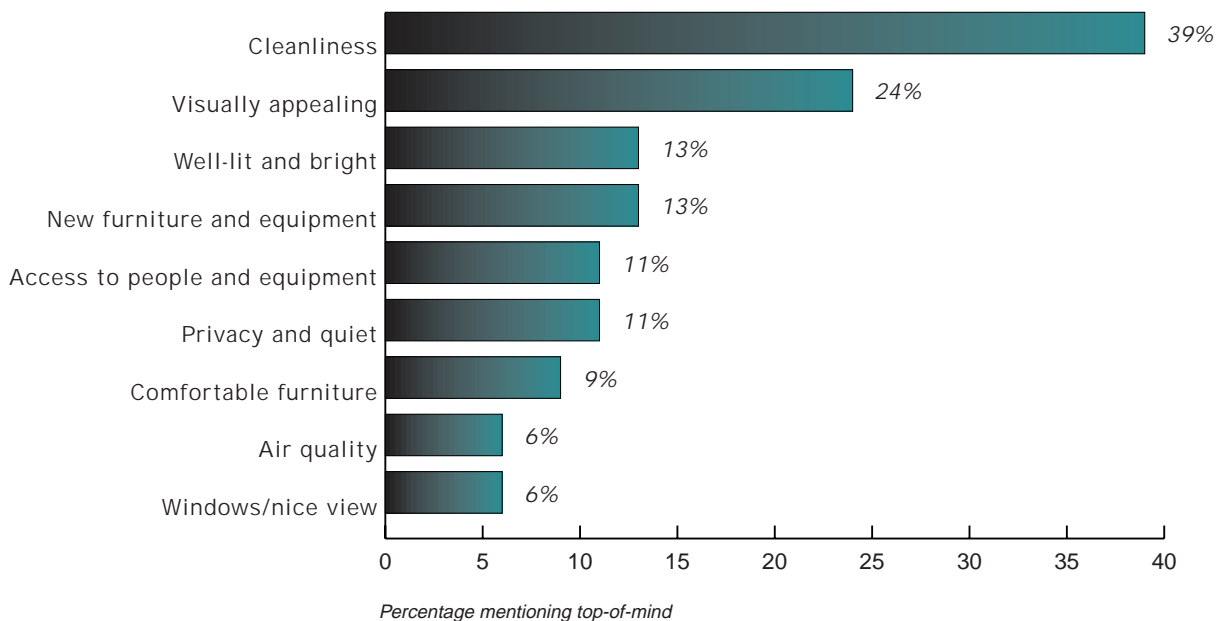
First impressions count when people visit prospective employers. A neat and clean workplace is the characteristic most people look for when they see a workplace environment for the first time. The second most mentioned characteristic is a workplace that is visually appealing or pleasant looking.

Other characteristics mentioned by at least 10 percent of employees and job seekers are:

- A well-lit and bright environment
- New furniture and equipment
- A private and quiet workspace
- A workplace that provides easy access to people and equipment

People who are not satisfied in their current position are much more likely to focus on easy access to people and equipment when seeing a workplace for the first time. This may suggest access is an important issue in their current workplace environment.

People want neat and good-looking offices.



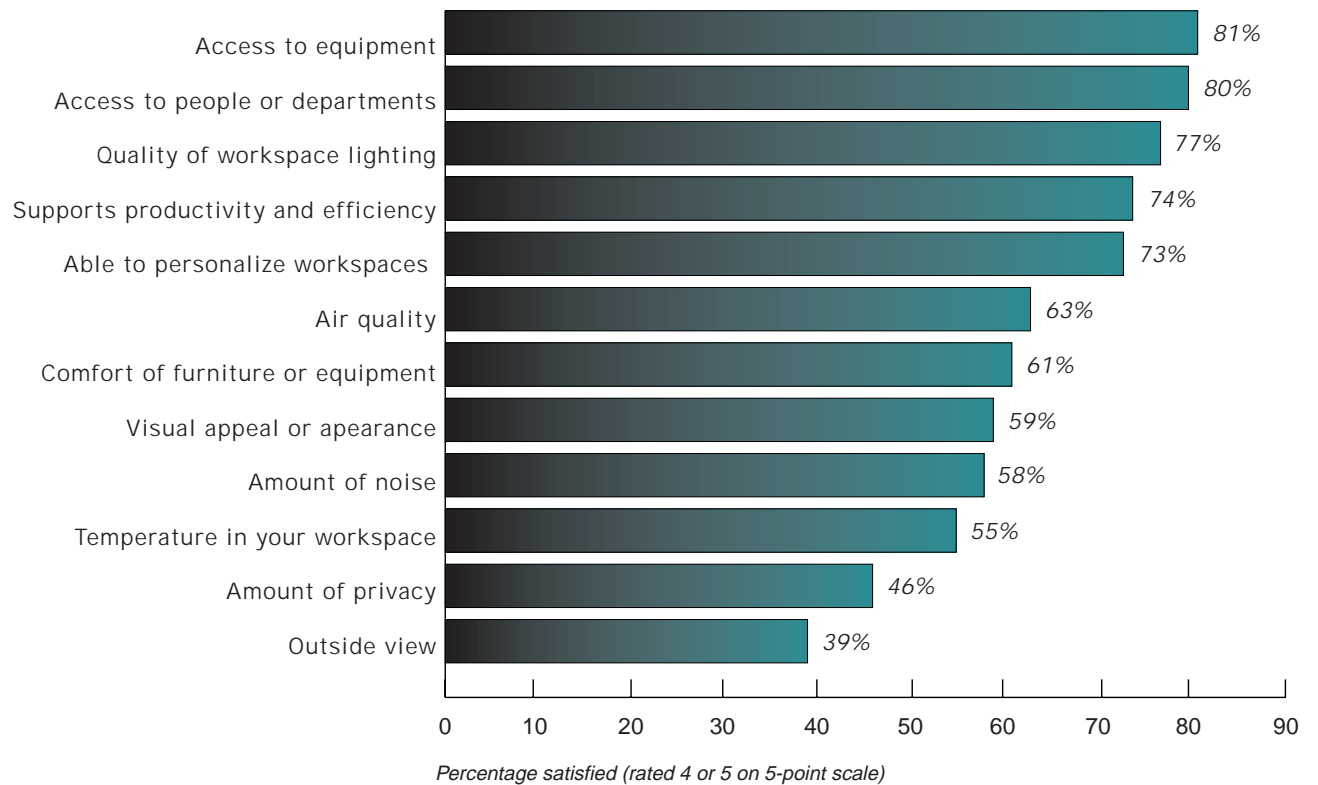
Aspects of the Physical Workplace That Please Employees

Focusing only on aspects of the physical workplace, people are most satisfied with the ease of access to people and equipment. About 80 percent say they are satisfied with these aspects of the physical workplace.

Other physical aspects of the workplace that received the highest satisfaction ratings include:

- Quality of workspace lighting
- Supports productivity and efficiency
- Able to personalize workspaces

Employees say access and lighting are satisfactory.



Specific Design Factors That Impact Job Satisfaction

Employees rated the ability of their workspace to enable them to be productive and efficient as the design factor that is the strongest contributor to job satisfaction.

Taking a closer look, employee ratings for specific aspects of the workplace environment were compared to reveal the degree to which they contributed to job satisfaction. Of employees who were pleased with the way their workspace supports productivity and efficiency, the number who said they were satisfied with their jobs was 32 percent more than the number of employees who said they were not satisfied with their jobs. The following design factors were the next strongest contributors to job satisfaction:

- Privacy (30 percent)
- Comfort of furniture or equipment (27 percent)
- Visual appeal (25 percent)

Other design factors included:

- Air quality (23 percent)
- Able to personalize workspaces (22 percent)
- Temperature (20 percent)
- Access to people and equipment (16 percent)
- Amount of noise (15 percent)
- Outside view (13 percent)
- Quality of workspace lighting (9 percent)



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Employees rated the ability of their workspace to enable them to be productive and efficient as the design factor that is the strongest contributor to job satisfaction.

Aspects of the Physical Workplace That Frustrate Employees

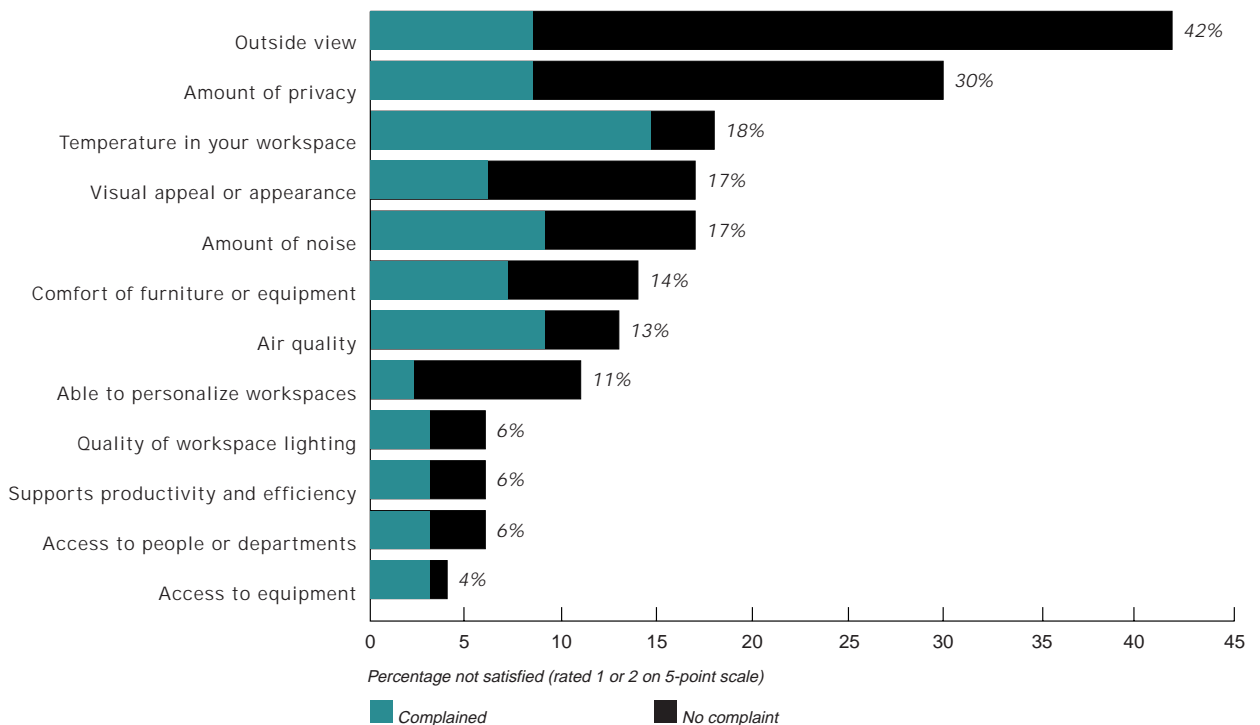
When asked to rate their satisfaction with aspects of the physical workplace, workers are most dissatisfied with the view they have from their workspace. About 40 percent said they were not satisfied with this aspect of the physical workplace.

Close to a third are very dissatisfied with the amount of privacy they have. This is key, given the fact that privacy has a major influence on job satisfaction.

Nine percent actually voiced a complaint about lack of privacy to someone in the company. Of those complaining, 25 percent said their privacy improved or got better as a result.

When it comes to voicing complaints to someone in the company about physical workplace problems, 14 percent of employees said they have complained about the temperature of the workspace. This is followed by 10 percent complaining about the amount of noise and the air quality.

View and privacy need improvement.



Age and Income Affect Reactions to the Physical Workplace

Baby Boomers tend to complain more readily about the physical workplace. Generation Xers won't complain about the physical workplace and are more likely to leave a job than try to correct the situation.



Baby Boomers (ages 35–54) are more likely to:

- Cite *spending a lot of time* at work as the reason why the workplace environment is important.
- Have complained to someone about the *quality of the air*, the *outside view* that they have and the *visual appearance* of their workspace.

Generation Xers (ages 18–34) are more likely to:

- Say they would leave a job due to an unsatisfactory workplace environment.
- Change jobs in the next year.

Similarly, employees at different income levels vary in how they respond to the physical workplace. Employees who currently earn at least \$35,000 a year are more discriminating about the physical workplace and more likely to complain if there is a problem. Employees whose salary is under \$35,000 are more likely to leave if they don't like the physical workplace rather than complain about it.

Those who currently earn at least \$35,000 are more likely to:

- Look for a *clean and neat workplace* when seeing an office for the first time.
- Register a complaint about the *quality of the air* in the workplace.

Those who earn less than \$35,000 are more likely to:

- Say they would accept or leave a job due to an unsatisfactory workplace environment.
- Change jobs in the next year.



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Employees have different responses to the physical workplace based on their age and income.

HR Executives, Recruiters May Not Be In-Synch With Employees

A qualitative sampling of human resource executives and executive recruiters indicates they may be out-of-synch with employee views about the physical environment and its impact on decisions to accept or leave jobs.

Employees said top-of-mind the physical workplace is one of the top three factors that influence their decisions to accept or leave jobs, behind compensation and tied with benefits. While human resource executives and executive recruiters also put compensation and benefits at the top of their lists, they typically did not mention the physical workplace as a top-of-mind response.

Instead, human resource executives and executive recruiters tend to mention other factors top-of-mind, such as company reputation or image, corporate culture, opportunities for growth, and challenging or rewarding work. When asked directly about the impact of the physical workplace, human resource executives tended to say it could “tip the scales,” while executive recruiters tended to say it has “minimal or no impact.”

Employees said the physical workplace environment needs to support productivity and efficiency, while human resource executives and executive recruiters did not mention this factor. Instead, they tended to focus on the physical workplace as a tool to augment other “more important” factors by helping promote a company’s image, culture and leadership position.

In addition, employees said they want the physical workplace to provide privacy. Both human resource executives and executive recruiters tended to favor open environments that maximize flexibility, though executive recruiters were more likely than human resource executives to say that privacy is important.

In Summary

Recruiting and retaining qualified employees remains a major challenge for companies. The latest ASID research shows the physical environment is a tool that can help companies successfully meet this challenge. Employees and job seekers said the physical environment is one of the top three factors that affect their decisions to accept or leave jobs — it was tied for second with benefits, after compensation. The research also shows the physical environment is one of two aspects of their current jobs that need improvement most, after compensation. However, human resource executives and recruiters may be out-of-synch with employee views. Further testing of this indicator may be warranted.

The research shows that job seekers look for clean and neat offices that are visually appealing when they visit a prospective employer for the first time. The research also shows that Baby Boomers and employees earning more than \$35,000 are more likely to complain if they don’t like the physical environment, while Generation Xers and employees earning less than \$35,000 are more likely to leave a job if they don’t like the physical environment, rather than complain about it.

Tools to Help Designers and Companies Connect With Current and Prospective Employees

The materials in this section were developed to help interior designers and management representatives work together to create functional and attractive workplaces that will help companies recruit and retain qualified employees. These materials also are designed to provide ideas for job seekers and executive recruiters on what to look for in the physical environment when visiting a prospective employer for the first time. The materials include:

- Tips for Designers on Working Effectively With Management and Employees
- Suggestions for Management on Working Effectively With Designers
- Physical Environment Survey Topics for Management and Designers
- Workplace Walk-Through Guide for Job Seekers and Executive Recruiters

These materials were developed from a variety of sources, including interviews with interior designers, human resource executives and executive recruiters. In addition, they include concepts obtained through a review of current literature.



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A growing number of companies are using their physical workplace environment as a tool to help attract and keep employees. This flexible office design encourages communication and interaction by providing employees with easy access to other team members and equipment.

Tips for Designers on Working Effectively With Management and Employees

1. Research the company

- Review available information
 - Use web sites, company literature, ads, annual reports and news articles
- Learn about competitors and industry trends
- Conduct on-site observation
 - Study work, communication and traffic patterns

2. Get management's perspective

- Translate the vision and personality of the president or CEO into design concepts
- Talk to facility management, human resources and other departments or units
 - Use meetings, interviews and focus groups
 - Discuss business goals, management philosophies, culture and work styles
 - Learn about facilities and information technology strategies
 - Discuss telecommuting and other policies that affect work and communication
- Obtain and analyze employee research information
 - Identify overall job issues as well as physical workplace concerns
- Provide opportunities to tour or see photos of similar design projects

3. Get employee input

- Obtain suggestions from employees in various areas and levels
 - Use strategies such as meetings, focus groups and written surveys
 - Focus on design keys: access, comfort, privacy and flexibility
- Share employee views with management
- Develop a profile of what is important to employees and job seekers

4. Ease the transition

- Help management convey project goals and timing to employees
- Incorporate management and employee suggestions in the design
- Install a sample workstation or work area
- Help train employees to properly use new furniture and equipment
- Do post-occupancy surveys with management and employees

Suggestions for Management on Working Effectively With Designers

1. Start with the big picture

- Be visionary
 - Focus initially on broad objectives rather than day-to-day issues
- Provide background on the company, competitors and your industry
- Discuss the mission, vision and goals of the company
- Describe how the company wants to be viewed by employees and visitors

2. Give a diverse perspective

- Convey the vision and personality of the president or CEO
- Provide input from facility management, human resources and other managers
- Describe current corporate culture and desired changes
- Explain current organizational structure or the new structure to be implemented
- Discuss current employee policies and projected changes
- Share available information on employee attitudes about the workplace
- Support the design team's efforts to gain additional employee input, if needed

3. Discuss how you work and communicate

- Describe working styles for management and departments
- List what activities or tasks need to be accommodated in different areas
- Compare how individuals and teams work now vs. how they want to work
- Look at how people communicate now vs. how they want to communicate
- Discuss what you are doing to support teaming
- Evaluate what you are doing to support individual and group creativity
- Review the nature and extent of technology currently used and future needs
- Examine telecommuting and other policies that impact work and communications

4. Incorporate design into overall recruiting and retaining strategy

- Review overall recruiting and retaining strategy
- Identify factors that impact recruiting, retaining and employee satisfaction
 - Discuss what employees like and dislike about their jobs and the workplace
- Evaluate current and anticipated needs of existing employees
- Consider the type of employees you want to attract and their expectations

Physical Environment Survey

Topics for Management and Designers

Strategic Considerations

- Does the physical workplace convey the vision and personality of the CEO?
- Is the physical workplace aligned with management's vision and business goals?
- How does the physical workplace reflect and support management style?
- What does the physical workplace tell people about the corporate culture?
- Is the physical workplace aligned with corporate policies and practices?
- Does the physical workplace help or hinder recruiting and retaining efforts?

Support for Performance

- What do employees like and dislike about the physical workplace?
- Does the physical workplace support increased performance and efficiency?
- How can the physical workplace be used to support teaming and other work styles?
- Does the physical workplace encourage communication, interaction and creativity?
- Do employees feel their work areas are adequate to support their job functions?
- How can the physical workplace be used to convey that employees are valued?

Visual Appeal

- How does the company want to be viewed by employees and visitors?
- Is the physical workplace clean, neat and well organized?
- How can the physical workplace be made more visually appealing and attractive?
- Are office furniture and equipment attractive and up-to-date?
- Do workspaces and furniture impact or reflect personal identity and job status?

Physical Environment Survey Topics for Management and Designers *(continued)*

Access

- Does the workplace support individual, team and departmental communication?
- Is it easy for people to interact or find space for informal meetings?
- Do employees and teams have adequate access to people and equipment?

Comfort

- Do employees feel they have sufficient control over their personal environment?
- Are furniture and equipment comfortable and adjustable to meet ergonomic needs?
- Is lighting adjustable and sufficient to meet employee needs?
- Do employees feel temperature and air quality levels are comfortable?
- Are employees satisfied with the degree to which they can personalize their spaces?
- Do workspaces have windows or provide access to an outside view?

Privacy

- Do workspaces provide appropriate privacy from auditory and visual distractions?
- Where can employees go for privacy, concentrated work or to “wind down”?

Flexibility

- Can new or different work processes be implemented easily in the workplace?
- Is the physical workplace compatible with current and future technology needs?
- Does the physical workplace support telecommuting and other alternative strategies?



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Companies make it easier for employees to focus on their work when offices are designed to minimize transmission of sound between workstations.

Workplace Walk-Through Guide for Job Seekers and Executive Recruiters

Following are some questions for job seekers and executive recruiters to consider when walking through an office as part of an effort to determine whether a company will be an appropriate “fit” for a prospective employee.

First impressions

- Is the reception area attractive and inviting?
- Are workspaces and the overall office clean, neat and well organized?
- Do furniture and equipment appear well maintained and up-to-date?
- What does the physical workplace say about the corporate culture and work styles?
- Are the company mission statement or awards in plain view?

Access

- Do employees and teams have adequate access to people and equipment?
- Does the workplace support individual, team and departmental communication?
- Are there a variety of spaces for formal and informal meetings?

Comfort

- Do furniture and equipment look comfortable and adjustable?
- Are workspaces bright and well lit?
- Do temperature and air quality levels feel comfortable?
- To what degree can employees personalize their spaces?
- Do workspaces have windows or access to an outside view?

Privacy

- Are there private offices or open cubicles?
- Does the office sound noisy or chaotic?
- Do workspaces provide appropriate privacy or stimulation for tasks done there?
- Will auditory or visual distractions hinder job performance?
- Can employees go somewhere for privacy, concentrated work or to “wind down”?

Flexibility

- Are workspaces permanent or do employees have to reserve space?
- Can workspaces be adapted to individual needs and work styles?
- Are there break areas or other places for interaction and brainstorming?
- Does the physical workplace provide a variety of spaces where people can work?



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Offices that are attractive, functional and comfortable help companies recruit and retain talented employees.

Physical Workplace Environment Case Study: Monster.com

NEWS ALERT Ten-foot-tall green monster captures employees while CEO rejoices.

“Trumpasaurus,” the cyberspace mascot of Monster.com, greets employees and visitors to illustrate the fun, dynamic and offbeat business approach that has made the company the most successful Internet-based career center. The company, formerly known as Monster Board, is part of TMP Worldwide (NASDAQ: TMPW; ASX: TMP). The physical environment inside the company’s new headquarters near Boston reflects a work-hard, play-hard attitude and incorporates innovative and eye-catching design to help recruit and retain top talent.



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The Monster.com mascot greets employees and visitors. This is one of many elements in the company’s physical workplace designed to help “capture” and retain top talent.

“We are not a traditional type of company, so we wanted a non-traditional physical work environment that communicates who we are and how we work,” said Jeffrey Taylor, founder and CEO of Monster.com. “We created an imaginative and interactive environment that helps us achieve our business objectives.”

The company moved in the summer of 1998 into its new 75,000-square-foot headquarters. The office was designed by Kahler Slater Architects, Milwaukee, and Patricia S. Algiers, ASID, was design team leader.

“As a high-tech, high-growth company, Monster.com faces a lot of competition in attracting talented staff,” said Algiers. “Our goal was to create the most technologically advanced, interactive and fun

workplace in the country to help them attract and retain the ‘best and brightest’ in the technology and creative fields. While the end result was a space unique to Monster.com, the project has lessons that can be applied to any organization facing similar challenges.”

“We’ve seen that a terrific physical work environment influences candidates’ decisions about accepting a job and supports increased productivity and creativity among current employees,” said Taylor. “Our office design is a perk to clearly differentiate us from other companies.”

“Monstrous” environment delights employees

How can companies tell if their new office design is impacting the bottom line? Management at Monster.com and Kahler Slater were determined to find out, so they worked with Wendy Heintz-Joehnk, an independent consultant in Milwaukee, to develop and conduct a written survey of employees in telesales, the company’s largest business unit. The survey shows the new physical environment is a key factor in helping the company recruit and retain employees as well as achieve other business goals. Survey highlights include:

- 90 percent of employees said the new physical environment improves the company’s competitiveness as an employer in the marketplace
- 68 percent of employees who joined since the move to the new office said the physical environment was an important factor in their decision to accept a position
 - Of this group, 38 percent said it was very important or critical
- 55 percent of employees who have received outside job offers said the new physical environment was important in their decision to stay at Monster.com
- 67 percent said the new physical environment is a motivating factor for their sales activities
 - Of this group, 38 percent said it is very or extremely motivating
- 62 percent said the new physical environment promotes creativity

Jocelyn Talbot, senior vice president of telesales, says the new physical environment has had a positive impact on her and the department. “I’ve been in telesales for 15 years, and



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Monster murals, bright colors and recreational areas convey that Monster.com is a fun and creative place to work. Cafés, teaming areas and conference rooms provide a variety of spaces for meetings and informal gatherings.

this is by far the best environment I have ever worked in,” said Talbot. “We worked closely with the design team to make sure all our needs were met, and I’m very pleased with the results. The design is very creative and dynamic, but also very functional.”

Making a “monstrous” office

The design team worked closely with Taylor, as well as other key staff members, to develop a physical environment that reflects the CEO’s vision and the company culture. Bright colors, monster murals, and recreational areas with ping-pong tables, futbol, video games and exercise equipment convey that this is a fun and highly creative place to work.

“I believe in working hard and playing hard, and I wanted office space that allows us to do both,” said Taylor. “The physical environment supports our work style and reflects our culture. It also provides places where people can hang out to strengthen their bonds with each other and the company.”

Since attracting and retaining key staff was the primary goal of the project, the design appropriately focused on four key design factors: access (to maximize creative interaction among staff), comfort (to create a business/social environment amenable to Generation X staff), privacy (to enhance employees' ability to focus for increased effectiveness), and flexibility (to enable employees to respond quickly and efficiently to their diverse job demands).

Following are some specifics on how this was accomplished:

- Access is improved by combining employees from three different buildings onto one floor in the new headquarters. Monster Den, the main common area, includes a café and a meeting space large enough to accommodate the entire company. There also are 20 other meeting areas throughout the office, including conference rooms and teaming spaces with white boards for informal meetings to brainstorm and share ideas.
- Comfort is enhanced with fully adjustable chairs and desks, keyboard trays with wrist supports, new carpet and other measures customized to meet needs of individual employees. In addition, overhead lighting was carefully positioned to enhance visibility within workstations.
- Privacy and interaction needs are balanced in the telesales area by arranging semi-open workstations in a zigzag pattern. This approach minimizes auditory and visual distractions, yet allows employees to easily communicate with co-workers simply by backing up their chairs. Acoustical materials and sound-masking systems further reduce office noise. The design team also differentiated lighting to subtly express the distinction between private workspaces and interactive social spaces.
- Flexibility is provided by using workstation tables and chairs with wheels so they can be grouped together quickly and easily for team meetings. Overhead troughs distribute electronic data and telecommunications throughout the office. The troughs can be accessed as needed as departments and teams reconfigure and evolve to respond to changing requirements.

Algiers says the keys to success are having the design team work closely with the CEO to understand and express his vision for the organization and involving employees in the design process. "The CEO provided the vision, and we worked with his staff to translate it into design solutions that effectively meet their specific current and future departmental needs," she said.

While response to the new office design has been overwhelmingly positive, Taylor does have one regret: "I'm really disappointed that I came in second during our fusbol tournament."

For Further Reference

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ASID Mission Statement

ASID is the definitive resource for professional education, knowledge sharing, advocacy of interior designers' right-to-practice, and expansion of interior design markets.

About ASID

The American Society of Interior Designers (ASID), headquartered in Washington, D.C., is the oldest and largest professional organization representing both commercial and residential interior designers. With more than 30,500 members, ASID establishes a common identity for professionals and businesses in the field of interior design. ASID provides its members with ongoing support, education and resources.

ASID Professional members must pass rigorous acceptance standards: they must have a combination of accredited design education and/or full-time work experience and pass a two-day accreditation examination administered by the National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ).

Of the Society's 20,000 practicing interior designers, 6,400 practice primarily in the commercial field with 4,000 practicing primarily as residential designers. The remaining 9,600 work in both commercial and residential design. ASID's student membership currently totals over 7,000.

ASID's Industry Partners include more than 3,500 member firms and individual representatives, uniting the professional designer with manufacturers and suppliers of design-related products and services. As part of an ongoing research and education program, ASID is working with Industry Partners to examine the relationship between interior design and workplace performance.

The association has 49 chapters throughout the United States and more than 450 international members. ASID was founded in 1975 with the consolidation of the American Institute of Designers (AID) and the National Society of Interior Designers (NSID). ASID promotes professionalism in interior design services and products for the work, home, learning and commercial environments. The Society's online service at www.asid.org features specialized information, news bulletins, membership information, reports, publications, product options/availability and more.

ASID provides the most current information about appropriate materials, technology, building codes, government regulations, flammability standards, design psychology and product performance. For more information about ASID, to be included on the list for future mailings on office productivity, or to locate an ASID interior designer, please contact or visit us at:

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