

# The Title Interior Designer Should Evolve into Interior Architect

## Introduction

Interior design should be formally retitled interior architecture because the profession's current scope, regulatory responsibility, and technical competency are architectural in nature and no longer accurately represented by its historical name. The title interior design reflects origins in early twentieth century decoration rather than the contemporary reality of building code compliance, construction documentation, and responsibility for occupant health, safety, and welfare. The competencies required of interior designers substantially overlap with those of architects, demonstrating that the distinction between the two professions lies primarily in scale of intervention rather than foundational knowledge. The continued use of a historically limited title weakens professional credibility, creates public confusion between decorators and regulated practitioners, and undermines the economic and legal recognition of the field. Although concerns regarding regulatory conflict and professional hierarchy complicate the transition, the long-term benefits of accurate classification outweigh these challenges. This paper argues that renaming interior design to interior architecture is necessary to align professional identity with professional responsibility.

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## Historical Misalignment of the Title

*Argument 1: The title "interior design" reflects a decorative origin that no longer represents the technical and regulatory scope of the profession, which justifies its evolution into interior architecture.*

Interior design should be retitled interior architecture because its current responsibilities extend far beyond the decorative origins reflected in its name. The profession emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries during industrialization, when mass manufacturing increased the availability of furniture and decorative goods to the growing middle class (Pile, 2014). This expansion of consumer goods created demand for professionals who could guide aesthetic decisions rather than oversee structural or technical building systems (Gura, 2012). Early practitioners such as Elsie de Wolfe professionalized interior decoration by offering services focused on taste, furnishings, and stylistic cohesion, not architectural construction or code compliance (Britannica, 2023). The original scope of practice therefore centered on aesthetic coordination rather than responsibility for health, safety, and welfare within the built environment.

Contemporary interior designers, however, are educated and regulated under standards that prioritize technical competency and occupant protection. The Council for Interior Design Accreditation requires accredited programs to include building systems, life safety, construction documentation, accessibility, environmental systems, and professional ethics within their curricula (CIDA, 2022). In Ontario, the Association of Registered Interior Designers of Ontario mandates that registered professionals meet competency standards that include building code compliance, barrier free design, contract documentation, and coordination with consultants (ARIDO, 2023). Furthermore, the NCIDQ examination, which is required for registration in many jurisdictions, evaluates knowledge of health, safety, and welfare standards rather

than aesthetic preference (CIDQ, 2023). These regulatory requirements demonstrate that the profession now operates within a framework aligned with architectural responsibility rather than decorative service.

Despite this evolution, the title interior design continues to communicate a limited association with styling and surface treatment. Public perception research consistently indicates that interior design is frequently misunderstood as decoration rather than as a technical discipline grounded in building science and safety regulation (Martin & Guerin, 2005). This misunderstanding contributes to the belief that untrained individuals can perform the work of interior designers; a perception rarely applied to architecture. When a professional title fails to convey the complexity and accountability of the role, it diminishes both credibility and public trust. Because the profession's scope now encompasses architectural-level responsibility for interior spatial environments, its title must evolve to interior architecture in order to accurately communicate its function, protect public understanding, and align historical terminology with contemporary practice.

### **Competency Overlap with Architecture**

*Argument 2: Interior design should be retitled interior architecture because the competencies, technical requirements, and professional responsibilities of interior designers substantially overlap with those of architects, differing primarily in scope rather than foundational knowledge.*

Interior design functions as a specialized form of architectural practice, which supports renaming the profession interior architecture. Architecture is formally defined as the art and science of designing buildings and structures with responsibility for health, safety, and welfare of the public (RAIC, 2023). Architects in Toronto job postings are routinely required to demonstrate proficiency in Building Information Modeling software such as Revit, AutoCAD, construction documentation, Ontario Building Code knowledge, consultant coordination, and technical detailing (Indeed Canada, 2024; LinkedIn Jobs, 2024). Interior designer job postings in the same region require proficiency in Revit and AutoCAD, preparation of construction drawing packages, detailed millwork and partition plans, Ontario Building Code compliance, accessibility standards, and coordination with mechanical and electrical consultants (Indeed Canada, 2024; ARIDO, 2023). The technical software platforms required for both professions are identical, indicating shared digital production methodologies rather than separate design processes. Both architects and interior designers are required to interpret and apply the Ontario Building Code to ensure occupant safety and regulatory compliance (Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2023). Both professions prepare contract documents and coordinate with engineers and contractors during construction phases, demonstrating overlapping responsibility in project delivery (RAIC, 2023; ARIDO, 2023).

The distinction between the two professions lies primarily in scale of intervention rather than in technical competency. Architects assume responsibility for the entire building envelope and structural systems, while interior designers focus on interior spatial planning, human experience, and interior construction assemblies (CIDA, 2022). This differentiation reflects specialization within a shared body of architectural knowledge rather than a separation into unrelated disciplines. In several European countries, universities use the term interior architecture to describe programs that integrate spatial design, construction technology, and human centered research, acknowledging the architectural nature of interior work

(European Council of Interior Architects, 2022). The presence of the title interior architecture internationally demonstrates that interior spatial practice is already recognized as an architectural specialization in other regulatory contexts. When two professions share foundational competencies, regulatory obligations, software systems, and construction responsibilities, yet differ only in focus of application, the distinction becomes one of specialization rather than hierarchy. Because interior designers operate within architectural frameworks and technical systems, the profession should adopt the title interior architecture to accurately reflect its alignment with architectural practice and to ensure educational and professional equivalency across jurisdictions.

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### **Credibility, Legal Clarity, and Professional Value**

*Argument 3: Interior design should be retitled interior architecture because accurate professional labeling increases public credibility, clarifies legal accountability, and reinforces the economic and ethical value of the profession.*

Professional titles shape public perception of authority and expertise, and misaligned titles weaken professional credibility (Abbott, 1988). Research on professional identity demonstrates that occupations gain legitimacy when their titles clearly communicate jurisdiction over specialized knowledge and regulated responsibility (Freidson, 2001). The title interior design fails to communicate that registered practitioners are legally accountable for health, safety, and welfare within interior environments. In Ontario, only Registered Interior Designers who meet ARIDO requirements and pass the NCIDQ examination may use the protected title and practice within regulated scope (ARIDO, 2023; CIDQ, 2023). These professionals are required to demonstrate competence in Ontario Building Code compliance, barrier free design under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, contract administration, and coordination with licensed consultants (Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2023; Government of Ontario, 2023). Decorators are not held to these regulatory or legal standards and are not qualified to prepare code compliant construction documentation. The shared use of the word design to describe both regulated professionals and unregulated decorators creates confusion about responsibility and liability.

This confusion diminishes the perceived necessity of interior designers and contributes to the misconception that their services are optional aesthetic enhancements rather than essential spatial interventions. Studies in environmental psychology demonstrate that interior spatial conditions directly affect occupant wellbeing, productivity, and health outcomes, reinforcing the ethical responsibility of those who design interior environments (Ulrich et al., 2008). When the public undervalues a profession due to unclear terminology, compensation and authority are also affected because clients struggle to differentiate specialized expertise from informal service (Abbott, 1988). Interior designers primarily sell intellectual capital in the form of spatial strategies, technical documentation, and regulatory coordination rather than tangible products, which makes professional credibility essential for economic sustainability. Adopting the title interior architecture would clearly distinguish regulated practitioners from decorators, communicate architectural level responsibility, and align the profession's public identity with its legal obligations. When a title accurately reflects jurisdiction, education, and accountability, it strengthens public trust and allows

professionals to focus on design excellence rather than defending their legitimacy. Therefore, renaming the profession interior architecture is necessary to secure credibility, clarify legal distinction, and reinforce the profession's essential contribution to occupant wellbeing.

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## Counterarguments and Rebuttal

*Counterargument and Rebuttal: Although renaming interior design to interior architecture presents regulatory, financial, and cultural challenges, these concerns can be mitigated and do not outweigh the long term professional and public benefits of accurate classification.*

Opponents argue that renaming the profession would create regulatory conflict with architecture under provincial legislation and generate confusion regarding protected titles. In Ontario, the Architects Act protects the title architect and restricts its use to licensed members of the Ontario Association of Architects (OAA, 2023). This raises concern that adopting the title interior architecture could be perceived as infringing upon architectural jurisdiction. However, several jurisdictions internationally recognize interior architecture as a distinct but related discipline without undermining the authority of architects. The European Council of Interior Architects represents interior architects across multiple European countries where the title exists alongside architecture as a regulated specialization rather than as a replacement (ECIA, 2022). This precedent demonstrates that clear legislative language can distinguish interior architectural scope from full building architectural licensure.

Critics also argue that rebranding would impose financial and administrative costs on regulatory bodies such as ARIDO through legislative amendments, public education campaigns, and credential adjustments. Professional reclassification does require investment in regulatory restructuring and communication (Abbott, 1988). However, long term professional legitimacy strengthens jurisdictional clarity and economic value, which historically outweigh transitional costs when professions formalize their scope (Freidson, 2001). Clearer titles reduce public misunderstanding, increase market differentiation, and reinforce professional authority, which supports long term sustainability.

Another concern is that architects may view the title interior architecture as encroachment, potentially intensifying professional hierarchy disputes rather than resolving them. Research on interdisciplinary collaboration in design practice indicates that clearly defined but complementary roles improve team performance and reduce conflict driven by ambiguous jurisdiction (Dorst, 2011). When specialization is formally acknowledged rather than informally practiced, collaboration shifts from hierarchical dominance to expertise based contribution. Recognizing interior architecture as a specialization would clarify that architects retain responsibility for structural systems and building envelopes, while interior architects assume responsibility for interior spatial systems and human experience. Specialization does not diminish architecture; it refines professional boundaries and strengthens interdisciplinary respect.

Some argue that retaining the current title preserves historical identity and avoids public confusion. However, professional evolution routinely requires terminological adjustment when scope expands beyond

original definitions. Fields such as industrial design, landscape architecture, and urban planning have undergone definitional shifts to reflect expanded regulatory and technical responsibility (Abbott, 1988). Maintaining a title that reflects outdated responsibilities perpetuates confusion rather than preventing it. Because international precedent, professional sociology, and interdisciplinary research all demonstrate that specialization enhances clarity rather than erodes authority, the transitional challenges of renaming are outweighed by the long-term gains in credibility, collaboration, and public protection. Therefore, while resistance to change is predictable, the evidence supports the evolution of interior design into interior architecture as a necessary and defensible progression.

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## **Conclusion**

Interior design should be renamed interior architecture because its responsibilities extend beyond the decorative origins reflected in its title. It should be renamed because the competencies of interior designers substantially overlap with those of architects, differing primarily in scope rather than foundational knowledge. It should also be renamed because accurate professional labeling strengthens credibility, clarifies legal accountability, and distinguishes regulated practitioners from decorators. Although concerns about regulation and professional hierarchy exist, these challenges do not outweigh the need for terminology that reflects contemporary practice. The profession's evolution requires a corresponding evolution in its name.

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## AI Use Disclosure

AI tools were used to assist in drafting and organizing this research paper. All ideas, thoughts, and academic arguments are my own. AI was not used to generate ideas for the students work.