

OLLI @ CSUMB
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Interior Design: The Beginning of Architecture
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Syllabus

Space is a physical continuum, albeit perceived as a sequence of discreet experiences. Interior and exterior, however, are deeply entrenched categories of thought both in architectural education and within the design professions. This conceptual separation has historical roots worth examining to understand the current peculiar nature of the built environment around the globe. What are the concerns of architects focused on interior spaces? How do they engage with such concepts as interior, exterior, enclosure, precinct, and roof termination? How do they relate to architects in the more conventional sense? From the macro to the micro, in this course, we will look at contemporary and historical case studies to provide answers to these and related questions.

Lesson 1. WHAT IS AN INTERIOR?

Nature is the basis of design. It has always been and always will be. The primordial encounters of humans with an interior occurred through the occupation of caves to find refuge from the elements. These protected spaces, a by-product of natural processes resulting from earth movement, provided the first conception of the inside in juxtaposition to the ubiquitous outside under the open sky. Those formative experiences gave rise to the first mental models underpinning the culture of architecture to this day. Its cornerstone is that interiors are synonymous with inhabitation. This opening lecture surveys the various manifestations of the discovery of the interior around western and non-western traditions.

Lesson 2. THE BIRTH OF THE INTERIOR DESIGNER

Over time, the architect has relinquished portions of his/her knowledge domain to a variety of professionals, who claimed specific slices of the design pie, so to speak. Any built architectural statement constitutes the merging of dozens of designers, whose intent and design expression require considerable managerial effort to coordinate. While the notion of teamwork gained traction in the 20th century, when did the figure of the interior designer come into being in the history of modernity? Under what circumstances a need for a separate design mind was held as necessary for the realization of a project? This will be the object of the second lecture.

Lesson 3. ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY AND INTERIOR DESIGNERS

Architectural historians have been reluctant to include interior designers in their surveys. Compared to the architects, their cultural capital is of decisive less impact on the design field in their historiography. Yet, some movements both within the avant-garde and in later years found their most convincing expression in their interiors. The material palette of interior designers progressively acquired increasing prominence in the 20th century. Color, textile, lighting, finishes, to name a few, became critical concerns to establish mood, ambiance, and character to the exterior shell the architects provide. This third lecture will look at a few interior designers whose work gained the respect of the larger community and provided clarity on the scope of interior architecture.

Lesson 4. EMERGING TALENTS AND NEW MODES OF INTERIOR DESIGN

Unsurprisingly, the coming into being of digital design has prompted countless new forms and spatial experiences. While some sectors of the marketplace, such as hospitality, restoration, retail, and health care, are firmly established for interior designers, others, such as institutions, museums, and educations, are intermittently reclaimed by the architects. In this ongoing saga of sphere of competences, this final lecture will illustrate the emerging figures in the field, the new directions they are pointing to, some of the most convincing examples as well as the most dubious ones. A few practical considerations on a working language to deal with interior designers will be presented in the closing remarks,