



**LEONARDO CAION-DEMAESTRI, NCIDQ, IIDA, WELL AP, ASID, NOMA**  
Senior Associate Interior Designer at Gensler

Born and raised in São Paulo, Brazil, Leonardo moved to the United States in 2000 to further his education and career. Upon graduating from the University of Michigan with a Bachelor's of Science in Architecture, a minor in Environmental Science and receiving design awards and recognition, Leonardo worked in highly-acclaimed design firms throughout the United States and gathered a wide project experience base.

Highly recommended, Leonardo moved to San Diego where he started his Gensler career while pursuing an MBA with Management Concentration. His practice focus has been in technology, professional services and creative media corporate clients, as well as education, retail and hospitality projects, creating a well-rounded approach to all types of spaces and creative demands. He has demonstrated high design innovation and sensibility, great client relationships, and dedication to the company. He was transferred to São Paulo, Brazil to help establish the local office and work in high-visibility projects for global corporate accounts and the World Cup and Olympics, acting as the Regional Technology Workplace Practice Area Leader and Regional Design Synergy Leader.

Currently in New York, Leonardo is an NCIDQ Certified, award-winning Senior Interior Designer, acting as lead designer in several workplace accounts. Outside of the office, Leonardo is the Co-Vice President of Communications for the IIDA NY Chapter, as well as a member of the NCIDQ PRAC Writing Committee.

In 2021, Leonardo was awarded the ASID Ones to Watch Award for his body of work.

Leonardo knows five languages and is a WELL Accredited Professional, as well as a member of professional organizations such as IIDA, ASID, AIA, and NOMA.

**Q: Brief intro/What type of work do you do/ where do you work?**

A: My work is focused primarily in corporate interiors — technology, professional service firms and creative media companies. In addition, I have experience with educational institutions, retail and hospitality brands and stadiums. In March 2022, I completed 12 years with Gensler.

**Q: When did you decide to take the NCIDQ Exam? How did you decide what order to take them in?**

A: I decided to take the NCIDQ Exam as the next step in my professional growth and leadership opportunities. I signed up for an IIDA NCIDQ Prep Course which was very valuable in preparing for the exams. I prioritized the theoretical knowledge first by taking IDFX and one week later the

IDPX. The following week I took the PRAC exam. This order felt appropriate and allowed for any final studying to take place between exams, considering my busy work schedule.

**Q: Did you fail any exams/retake any? How did you stay motivated through that process?**

A: I passed all exams on my first try, which was wonderful. The studying process was an interesting one. Having finished grad school over 10 years ago, the traditional form of studying and memorizing to be tested on was a process to get adapted to again. By creating a routine and sticking to it was an important effort that took months and paid off with passing all the exams on my first try.

**Q: How long did you study for the exams? What did you use to study?**

A: I studied for about 3 months. Alongside the IIDA NCIDQ Prep course, I read the exam book and used a variety of practice exams and exercises to test my knowledge and familiarize myself with the test and question style.

**Q: Has the practice of interior design lived up to your expectations that you had as a student? Any surprises or disappointments?**

A: It certainly has. It is interesting to see the shift of fully conceptual spaces to actually solving clients' challenges and goals. I truly enjoy the partnerships I have built with my clients and the importance of a knowledgeable advisor role that I play in my key accounts.

**Q: What advice would you give to current students that you wished you had received?**

A: Understand the entire process of a project. Expose yourself to internships as much as possible. Try out different project types to help you understand what you feel connected to, which in turn will help guide your career in a more focused way.

**Q: Why did you become NCIDQ Certified/why was it important to you?**

A: Having worked for 10 continuous years — in multiple cities and countries — becoming NCIDQ Certified was the natural next step in my career. In addition, as a leader in the office and industry, part of my advancement internally within my company, being an NCIDQ Certified interior designer would open a variety of new doors that I wanted to explore.

**Q: How has having an NCIDQ Certificate benefited you and your career?**

A: Having an NCIDQ Certificate has allowed me higher roles of leadership within professional organizations, as well as a recent promotion at work. It has also opened doors to be involved with CIDQ as part of the PRAC Writing Committee, two years in a row now.

**Q: Have you/are you interested in pursuing any other credentials/certifications or licensure/registration/certification in a jurisdiction? If so, please provide those details.**

A: Besides my recent WELL AP Certification, I am pursuing my LEED AP Certification.

**Q: What could the industry do to overcome obstacles from diverse individuals being represented and having equal opportunity?**

A: Representation is always very important. Being a minority leader myself, we are always looking at opportunities to provide a platform for minorities to have a voice in the industry. Companies are even more invested in recent times to ensure all communities are represented within our employee composition.

**Q: What are common misconceptions people have? How can we combat these misconceptions and communicate more effectively?**

A: One big misconception is that people still think of interior designers as decorators. This is an ongoing battle in having people understand the complexities and the vast nuances that compose the roles and responsibilities of interior designers.

**Q: Anything else you'd like to share?**

A: Thank you for the opportunity to spotlight me.