



MILESTONE MOMENTS

with Caren S. Martin, NCIDQ No. 2216

Connecting our past to our future 1974–2024

50
YEARS
STRONG

Q: How long have you been involved with CIDQ?

A: Since April 1979 when I took the NCIDQ Examination — and passed! Eight interior designers joined together and studied for the exam for about six months — five of us passed! More formally, as the Delegate from the state of Minnesota (2000–2008) and subsequent involvement on the CIDQ Board have added up to many, many years. Also, as an educator at the University of Minnesota’s CIDA-accredited interior design program (1995–2017), I engaged in informing students about the exam and promoting its importance.

Q: How did you first get involved?

A: When I moved to Minnesota, there was an ASID chapter here, but no Institute of Business Designers (IBD) chapter. As I was a non-residential interior designer (working on commercial and institutional buildings), IBD seemed to be a good fit for me (though for many years I have/had been a member of both). We needed 20 professional members to have an IBD chapter. To do that, we needed interior designers to pass the NCIDQ Examination. It took us until 1982 to have those 20 members. As one of the founding trustees of our chapter, I worked very hard to educate interior designers and the public alike about the NCIDQ Examination. Subsequently, when Minnesota’s interior designers gained certification in 1995 and joined the AELSLAGID Board, the NCIDQ Examination was routinized as a cornerstone of legal recognition for the interior design profession along with the other six allied professions and our collective responsibility to protect the public’s health, safety, and welfare.

Q: In CIDQ’s 50-year history, from your perspective,

what would you say is CIDQ’s/NCIDQ’s biggest accomplishment?

A: The most critical contribution has been the development and operationalization of a robust and psychometrically sound qualification examination for the profession of interior design. The NCIDQ Examination is the ‘gold standard’ for measuring interior design professionals’ knowledge in the United States and Canada (and other jurisdictions). Moreover, in its nearly 50 years there have been ongoing modifications of the examination (content and delivery) that have kept it that way. There have been too many other benefits to name that have come from CIDQ and the NCIDQ Examination, key among them is legal recognition and how we are perceived by allied design organizations, regulatory boards in the U.S. and Canada, and code and life safety entities —and the public, not the least among them.

Another accomplishment that has been very important has been the establishment of the Definition of Interior Design, developed and updated by CIDQ. As an interior design practitioner, educator, and researcher, I know well the myriad of information and misinformation ‘out there’ about interior design and the persistence of confusion about the profession that remains. Having a clearly articulated definition of interior design that is used in textbooks, by professional interior design member organizations and some of the profession’s allied organizations, and educational accreditation bodies is very important. It creates clarity where at times there seems little.

Also, it is important to note that CIDQ has taken a holistic view of qualification. The NCIDQ Examination is the culminating event once accredited education and verified work experience

have been confirmed. I am very proud that CIDQ's 'three-legged stool' has been improved, clarified, and instituted to ensure that NCIDQ Certified interior designers can competently perform their professional responsibilities.

Q: What role did NCIDQ play in your career?

A: Through NCIDQ Certification, I gained focus about my career and identified a path to pursue it that was essential and rewarding. The NCIDQ credential elevated my professionalism in both my eyes and those of my employers — even if for many years of practice, I had to first inform employers, allied professional colleagues, and clients what NCIDQ was! Not kidding. When I was in the position to hire interior designers for the firms where I worked, the NCIDQ appellation was important in terms of candidates we interviewed — and those who had not yet passed the exam but were passionate about doing so. Passage of the examination in 1979 allowed me to become a Professional member of design organizations and most importantly allowed me to apply to be a CID in Minnesota right after the bill was signed into law in 1995.

On a professional service level, working with jurisdictional Delegates from around the U.S. and Canada for eight years and then serving on the CIDQ Board (2015–2021) and various committees and task forces, beginning in 2002, has enriched my knowledge and network tremendously. Serving CIDQ has been very meaningful to me.

Q: What are the key issues you see CIDQ addressing in the future?

A: CIDQ must continue to embrace its role as the 'keeper' of the professional examination and the credential of professional interior design and to advance legal recognition of the profession. CIDQ builds critical bridges with allied and emerging related professions and supports and informs the code and life safety agencies'/entities' work. CIDQ has an important role in preparing professional interior designers to be able to protect people's well-being and protecting/preserving the natural environment and the built environment's negative impact on it.

Q: What do you think the next 50 years will look like for the profession?

A: Who knows — really?! Lately I have been thinking

of AI and how it will influence the creative professions — interior design among them. I know from speaking to educators still in the classroom that images and design solutions "out there" are finding their way into students' design solutions and the line between original work versus resourced work by others is becoming harder to discern. I am also concerned about the lasting impact of remote design studios on creativity, community/collaboration, and interpersonal communication skills resulting from the COVID-19 years. Interior designers of the future will need to become even more engaged in sustainability and green design well beyond what is being accomplished today. I am positive that creative thinking combined with research (from scientific studies) will result in ever-evolving, improved design solutions from the work of qualified interior designers in the future.

Q: Describe what NCIDQ (or CIDQ) means to you, on a personal level, in 15 words or less.

A: Professional growth, enrichment, pride, supportive design community, the mark of an interior design professional.

Q: What is one of your best memories of CIDQ?

A: With my intimate, enduring work with CIDQ, my best memory might seem silly, but here goes. I had moved to Minnesota after graduating from Virginia Commonwealth University and was the only interior designer in a small architectural firm. One day in late-May 1979, I received notification that I had passed the NCIDQ Examination. I burst into my boss' office and blurted out, "I passed, I passed!" My boss, an architect and firm owner, was having a meeting with three city officials about a new retail/office development. He patiently responded, "congratulations dear, let's talk about this later." Not sure if I was more thrilled that I had passed the first time around or that the firm would now reimburse me the \$100.00 NCIDQ Examination fee I had paid! Receiving NCIDQ Certificate number 2216 was a key milestone of my professional path.

