



MONA NAHM, NCIDQ, LFA, LEED AP BD+C, WELL AP
Designer at Y.A. studio

I am a designer at Y.A. studio in San Francisco working on affordable and supportive housing projects. It is a rewarding experience because I have the opportunity to design diverse and inclusive spaces that respond to our current economic and environmental pressures. Most importantly, I engage with a community that shares the same vision of a sustainable, equitable, and just future.

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

A: I am a designer at Y.A. studio in San Francisco. I work closely with clients to ensure that we are meeting their programming requirements. This often involves mediating between architecture, interiors, and building systems. In addition, one of my personal goals is to advocate for a high level of sustainability while navigating the many constraints of building affordable housing.

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

A: While in grad school at New York School of Interior Design, I learned that I could take the IDFX as a student. I joined the IIDA New York Chapter study group and took the IDFX. It was difficult, but I felt that my NYSID education gave me the foundation to pass. Once I had enough work experience, I applied for the IDPX and the Practicum.

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

A: Once I was eligible, I took my IDPX and Practicum together. Unfortunately, I developed a health condition and considered postponing them, but I decided to push through. I took the exams two days apart. I passed the IDPX but was unable to complete the Practicum exam. However, with two down, I was determined to study harder. Having taken the PRAC once before, I was able to strategize better and focus my studies. By the time the next exam period rolled around, my health had improved, and I was able to pass the final exam.

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

A: I studied on and off ever since I took my IDFX in school. Through the IIDA study group, I learned the tools that guided me through my self-study process. I joined the Facebook group and was encouraged by everyone working towards the same goal. In addition to all the recommended books from different sources, I also utilized apps such as Quizlet and joined Q-Practice for short periods of time before the exam date.

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

A: When I was a student, I didn't realize the range of career paths that interior design could encompass. Having worked at several architecture and design firms, I think it's important to seek an environment that values the unique skills and perspective that you bring.

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

A: Use your time at school to explore your professional interests and start to define your career goals early. Take big risks and don't be afraid of failing. Those risks may lead you in directions you never anticipated.

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

A: Although the scope of interior design has been around for centuries, it is only in recent decades that we are becoming more professionally recognized. Becoming NCIDQ Certified communicates that we are committed to and

responsible for providing a high level of design service. Our work can have consequences for health, safety, accessibility, and the environment. We need to look beyond the aesthetics of interior design.

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

A: Studying for the exams expanded and solidified the knowledge that I was exposed to in school. This credential conveys to others that I had the commitment to pursue this level of qualification. More importantly, I am more confident in my work and my engagement with other design professionals.

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

A: The biggest misconception I've heard is, "I don't need this certificate for my job." I think achieving the NCIDQ Certificate creates a standard that elevates the profession and affects us all.

Q: Anything else you'd like to share?

A: As an NCIDQ Certificate holder, I think it is critical to the profession to give back. I've recently volunteered as a mentor to the IIDA New York Chapter that helped me to pass my exams. As the Emerging Professional Affairs Chair for ASID California Peninsula Chapter, I am working to develop a local NCIDQ study group for Bay Area designers.