

Crafting Interiors That Truly Serve People

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BY MARINA TAPTUGYAN

In an era dominated by showroom aesthetics and fleeting trends, this article explores the fundamental distinction between superficial decoration and authentic interior design. By championing a Human-Centered Design approach, Marina T. examines how purposeful spaces must prioritize functionality, adaptability, and the evolving needs of their occupants. From ergonomic home offices to sustainable, multi-generational living environments, this article serves as a call to action for designers and clients alike to shift the focus from visual impact to long-term livability and meaningful human experience.

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Imagine walking into a breathtaking showroom where every element is meticulously arranged, every surface gleams under perfect lighting. It's an impressive sight, but would it truly work for your everyday life? Too often, interior design is mistaken for aesthetics alone, with spaces curated for visual impact rather than real-life functionality.

Consequently, interior designers frequently face a challenge when clients approach them with expectations shaped by trendy showroom interiors and mass-market visual merchandising. The widespread misconception that design is purely about aesthetics often leads to homes and workspaces that prioritize trends over long-term usability. For example, an open-concept living room with minimal furniture and high-gloss surfaces may look stunning in a showroom but prove impractical in a household with children, pets, or frequent guests. Similarly, a trend-driven kitchen with open shelving and limited storage may seem stylish but quickly becomes cluttered and difficult to maintain.

Beyond compromising functionality, this mindset creates significant value engineering issues, where design decisions favor short-term visual appeal over long-term practicality and comfort. It also raises sustainability concerns, as homeowners often remodel or replace elements prematurely due to impractical design choices, leading to unnecessary waste and environmental impact.

Properly addressing this issue starts with recognizing that different design professionals have distinct objectives. Interior designers focus on Human-Centered Design, crafting spaces tailored to the specific needs of their occupants, much like a bespoke suit designed for a perfect fit. This approach ensures that the final design is not only aesthetically pleasing but also deeply personal and functional. In contrast, decorators, visual merchandisers, and stagers prioritize aesthetic appeal, often treating interior design as an art form rather than a practical living environment. While these roles are valuable, their primary focus differs from the holistic, user-centric approach of an interior designer. While refined aesthetics are an essential aspect of design, they should never come at the expense of livability and efficiency.

As previously established, authentic interior design places people at the center, with every element thoughtfully crafted around their needs. This embodies the essence of Human-Centered Design - an approach that prioritizes functionality, adaptability, and emotional connection. It moves beyond superficial trends to create environments that truly support and enhance human activity. At its core, Human-Centered Design recognizes that everything humans create, from architecture to everyday objects, is designed for people and stems from a range of human needs. When design neglects these needs, it loses its purpose.

A great example of Human-Centered Design is a home that adapts to different life stages and evolving needs, maintaining a seamless balance of comfort, functionality, and aesthetics. Such a home is designed with foresight, anticipating future requirements. A home office, for instance, should go beyond sleek, minimalist trends, incorporating ergonomic furniture, proper lighting, and efficient workspace organization to enhance productivity and well-being. Likewise, a family-friendly living room benefits from durable materials, flexible seating, and hidden storage, ensuring the space remains both inviting and practical for everyday life. Furthermore, residential interiors should be designed to evolve with their occupants' changing needs. By incorporating child-friendly features for young families and aging-in-place solutions for older adults, homes can remain functional, adaptable, and accommodating throughout different life stages.

To shift the focus from aesthetic-driven trends to purposeful, user-centered design, interior designers must take an active role in educating clients, as many people don't realize the impact of poor design choices until they experience them firsthand.

This educational role is crucial for fostering a deeper understanding of true design value. This shift in public mindset will drive demand for skilled, user-focused designers, reinforcing the value of professional expertise in creating thoughtful, experience-driven spaces. Moreover, it will empower clients to evaluate designers before entering a contract, ensuring they understand the approach behind the design process rather than just its aesthetic appeal.

This transparency builds trust and leads to more successful design outcomes. As Human-Centered Design takes hold, we move toward a future where homes and workplaces are not only visually compelling but also deeply functional, sustainable, and aligned with real human needs.

Ultimately, great interior design is about creating spaces that evolve with their occupants, shaping experiences that inspire, adapt, and resonate on a deeper level.