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California Council for Interior Design Certification
Public Protection Through Examination and Certification

Building Official Q & A on Certified Interior Designers



On January 1, 1991, Section 5800 of the California Business & Professions Code changed to provide for the Certification of Interior Designers.

This guide has been developed for California Building Officials to answer the most commonly asked questions about Certified Interior Designers.

1. WHAT IS A CERTIFIED INTERIOR DESIGNER? (B&P Code Section 5800)

A Certified Interior Designer is a competent design professional who may prepare and submit nonstructural, nonseismic construction documents and specifications to local building departments for the purposes of plan check

Under the provisions of Chapter 3.9 of the Business & Professions Code, commencing with section 5800, Certified Interior Designers have demonstrated through

education, experience and examination their knowledge of the Uniform Building Code as it relates to space planning, life safety, flammability and disabled access code issues.

2. WHAT ARE THE QUALIFICATIONS OF CERTIFIED INTERIOR DESIGNERS? (B&P Code Section 5801)

A Certified Interior Designer must have graduated from:

- a. A four or five year accredited interior design program and have a minimum of two years experience, or
- b. A three year accredited interior design program and have a minimum of three years experience, or

c. Have a combination of interior design education and experience for a minimum total of eight years.

They must pass one of three approved national interior design examinations and the California Codes and Regulations Exam (CCRE).

3. WHO MAY REFER TO HIMSELF OR HERSELF AS A CERTIFIED DESIGNER? (B&P Code Section 5801.1)

Only persons who have met the education, experience and examination requirements and have been certified by the California Council for Interior Design Certification (CCIDC) may refer to themselves as a Certified Interior Designer.

4. HOW WILL THE CERTIFIED INTERIOR DESIGNER BE IDENTIFIED? (B&P Code Section 5802)

Each Certified Interior Designer will affix a stamp and a wet signature to all drawings, specifications or documents prepared for submissions, as specified in Section 5801. All documents shall be identified as interior design documents, which are not architectural nor engineering documents.

5. ARE LICENSED ARCHITECTS AND ENGINEERS THE ONLY DESIGN PROFESSIONALS WHO CAN SUBMIT CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS FOR PLAN REVIEW? (B&P Code Section 5801.1)

No. The building official is authorized to recognize the Certified Interior Designer's drawings and documents. For plan check and acceptance, the building official shall reference the Uniform Building Code.

6. MAY A CERTIFIED INTERIOR DESIGNER ACT AS A GENERAL CONTRACTOR AND HIRE SUBCONTRACTORS FOR PROJECTS? (B&P Code Section 5803)

No. The Certified Interior Designer would have to hold a valid general contractors license in order to hire subcontractors and/or perform contracting work. Certified Interior Designers design systems for work to be performed by licensed general contractors.

7. ARE CERTIFIED INTERIOR DESIGNERS STATE CERTIFIED? (B&P Code Section 5800 (b) and Section 5538)

No. The California Council for Interior Design Certification (CCIDC) is a private nonprofit corporation and is responsible for certifying interior designers. The certification process in California is a public private "partnership", as directed by the Business and Professions Code Section 5800.

8. DOES THE INTERIOR DESIGN CERTIFICATION LAW PRECLUDE ANYONE FROM CALLING THEMSELVES AN "INTERIOR DESIGNER"? (B&P Code Section 5800 and Section 5538)

DESIGNER : (B&P Code Section 5800 and Section 5538)

Anyone may use the term "interior designer". However, their qualifications for professional practice are unknown. If they are not a Certified Interior Designer they may not have the ability to protect health, safety and welfare of the public.

9. WHAT MAY A CERTIFIED INTERIOR DESIGNER DESIGN? (B&P Code Section 5800 and Section 5538)

A Certified Interior Designer may design any type of nonstructural or nonseismic interior spaces consistent with Section 5800 and Section 5538. They may engage in the programming, planning, designing and documenting the construction and installation of nonstructural or non-seismic elements, within the interior spaces of a building.

10. WHAT ARE THE MEANING OF THE TERMS "NONSTRUCTURAL" AND "NONSEISMIC"?

"Nonstructural" means interior elements that are non-load bearing. It excludes the structural grid system supporting a building. "Nonseismic" means interior elements that do not assist in the seismic bracing of a building's structural system. Common nonstructural items include ceiling and partition systems. These components employ normal and typical bracing conventions and do not assist in the structural integrity of a building.

11. CAN A CERTIFIED INTERIOR DESIGNER DESIGN, PLAN OR PREPARE INSTRUMENTS OF SERVICE FOR STOREFRONTS OR INTERIOR ALTERATIONS? (B&P Code Sections 6745 and 5538)

Yes. Section 6745 allows anyone to perform these services "...provided such alterations do not affect the structural safety of the building". Section 5538 was amended in 1990 to reflect similar intent.

12. WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHANGE IN LANGUAGE REGARDING SECTION 5538, AND HOW DOES IT RELATE TO SECTION 5805 OR CERTIFIED INTERIOR DESIGNERS?

The language "...including but not limited to structural or seismic components" as elements of building safety in Section 5538 was removed. Certified Interior Designers are only restricted by seismic and structural considerations when planning interior alterations. Section 5805 affirms the legislative intent of opening the plan check process to qualified individuals and refers to compliance with the Uniform Building Code as the approval criteria.

13. MAY CERTIFIED INTERIOR DESIGNERS DESIGN HANDICAP ACCESS SYSTEMS?

Yes. Certified Interior Designers are required to pass a building and barrier free codes exam to demonstrate proficiency in handicap access requirements. They are recognized by Section 5800(a) to have "...demonstrated by means of education,

experience and examination the competency to protect and enhance the health, safety and welfare of the public".

14. MAY CERTIFIED INTERIOR DESIGNER PLANS INCLUDE HORIZONTAL EXITING SYSTEMS?

Yes. Certified Interior Designers are the only professionals in the construction industry who have been specifically tested on building and barrier free codes. They also have education and experience to work with occupancy, exiting and life safety requirements for interior spaces.

15. MAY CERTIFIED INTERIOR DESIGNER PLANS INCLUDE STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS SUCH AS AN INTERCONNECTING STAIR?

Yes, if the structural elements have been prepared and stamped by a licensed structural engineer or architect.

16. MAY CERTIFIED INTERIOR DESIGNER PLANS INCLUDE MECHANICAL OR ELECTRICAL DRAWINGS?

Yes, if the mechanical and electrical elements have been prepared and stamped by a licensed mechanical or electrical engineer or architect.

17. HOW CAN THE BUILDING DEPARTMENT CHECK VALID CERTIFICATES?

Upon written request, the CCIDC will provide each building department with a list of current Certified Interior Designers for their use. CCIDC can be reached at the San Marcos, California office at (760)761-4734

18. HOW WILL THE CERTIFIED INTERIOR DESIGNER PROVIDE THEIR IDENTIFICATION NUMBER TO BUILDING DEPARTMENTS?

Their number will be written on the Plan Application in the space that requests a designer "license" number. Their certification number is also included within the stamp.

19. WHAT DOES THE STAMP LOOK LIKE?

