



## **Why you need your certification now more than ever!**

In these tough economic times, now is not the time to abandon your certification. The question often asked is "why should I keep my certification as I don't use it, and I don't pull permits, my contractor does?" Actually you do use it, more than you think, and perhaps you're just not aware of it, as you should be. We also get the question "No one ever asks me if I'm certified or not, so why should I keep it?"

Here are some answers and food for thought.

### **1. You are not a member, you are more than that!**

Many "Certified Interior Designers" refer to themselves as members of CCIDC. You are not "members"; you are "Certified Interior Designers" as defined by law, specifically Section 5800 of the California Business and Professions Code. You are defined just like architects, engineers, doctors and lawyers are defined, each in their own way. Membership is reserved for "clubs" and CCIDC is not a club, it is a non-profit (private) certification board modeled after the licensing boards administered by the State of California. The CCIDC board reports, as required by law, to the California legislature through the Senate Business, Professions and Economic Development Committee. Professional interior design organizations like ASID, IIDA, IDS, NKBA, etc., are "clubs", just like the AIA is a club for architects, and do not report to anyone, sometimes not even to their members.

### **2. The only legally recognized title in California!**

The title "Certified Interior Designer" is the only legally recognized title for interior designers in California, it is what you are, and what you have earned as required by law in order to use that title. No one else can use that title unless they have earned it like you. It is a misdemeanor under the "Unfair Business Practices Act" to use the title illegally. This is why every Certified Interior Designer in California has a specific and unique certification number, I.D. card and stamp.

### **3. I don't pull permits! I do pull permits!**

You don't pull permits, the owner of the property does. You may act as the "agent" for the owner when submitting plans, but the permit is always issued against the property, not the designer, not the architect and not the contractor. Some building departments require architect's or engineer's stamps on the plans because the risk and nature of the work being permitted requires it. This is always at the discretion of the building official, normally through a policy issued through the building department. If they feel the work on the plans exceeds that of the competency of the person who prepared the plans they

can demand the plans be stamped by a more competent professional. That is their prerogative. For example if a licensed architect submits plans that the building official deems requires the stamp of a Civil Engineer they can demand it. There is nothing in law, or the building codes, that guarantees a licensed architect the right to submit plans to any and every jurisdiction for permitting purposes. The same applies to building designers, contractors, owner builders and interior designers.

So why do some building departments demand stamps and some don't? It all depends on the level of the work contained on the plans, and the individual policies of the building department. The stamp is an indication of the level of expertise of the individual who had the responsibility of preparing the plans. A "Certified Interior Designer" stamp on the plans assures the building official that the non-structural, non-seismic interior design plans have been prepared by someone who knows what they are doing, just like that of an engineer or architect. It is a sign of professionalism, even if you don't actually submit the plans, it conveys to everyone who touches and reads those plans that they have been prepared by a professional. You should stamp all your plans, whether you submit them for permits or not.

#### **4. No one ever asks!**

No one ever asks me if I'm "Certified" or not, so why should I keep my certification? The reason they don't is because they don't know to ask. So what's the point of being "Certified" if they don't ask? The point is it's up to you to educate them. Why, because most consumers of interior design services would rather work with a professional with documented and verified credentials who has committed to abide by a written Code of Ethics and Conduct (you do this when you sign your application) and is overseen by a board that they can go to in the event something goes wrong or if there is a dispute. The alternative leaves a lot to be desired and when educated, most consumers prefer "Certified Interior Designers". How do we know this? When we get complaints against non-certified interior designers from the public, they nearly always wished they had worked with one who was certified. Often, if they are no longer working with the non-certified interior designer, they ask for the names of "Certified Interior Designers" in their area so they can finish their projects with peace of mind.

Do consumers ask about ASID, IIDA membership, or if a person has passed the NCIDQ examination? Most Certified Interior Designers we speak to on this topic all say "no". The general consensus amongst consumers is that interior designers are qualified at what they do, or otherwise why would they call themselves such, just like doctors and lawyers, and assume they are regulated in some way or another. When was the last time you asked your doctor for a copy of his or her license and what exams they had taken, and where they had practiced? It is becoming more common, but most of us assume and don't ask.

#### **5. Why should I educate the public, isn't that CCIDC's job?**

Yes it is, which is why we have the leading Web site for interior designers in California, we send out press releases, and we have CID's writing magazine articles. However,

there are 37 million people in California and we have no way of finding out when any of them are in the market for interior design services unless they call or E-mail us.

In order for us to reach and educate all consumers of design services it would require millions of dollars in advertising and educational programs. As a private organization we do not have the resources to pay for such an undertaking, which would have to be underwritten by your fees. However, we do print and distribute "free" brochures to Certified Interior Designers so that they can use them to promote "certification" when they interview for prospective interior design projects. These brochures explain everything consumers should know about interior design certification, why they should hire you, instead of someone who isn't certified. Will it get you the job? Perhaps it will, but if not it does give you a competitive edge over a non-certified interior designer.

## **6. Sell your Ethics!**

Another approach is to sell the CCIDC Code of Ethics as your lead-in to the prospective customer. How many non-certified interior designers have signed an enforceable code of ethics? Violate the CCIDC Code of Ethics and you could lose your certification for which you have worked so hard. A non-certified interior designer has nothing to lose when it comes to certification so what would prevent them from being unethical if they were inclined to be so. We have surveyed many consumers on this topic over the phone, and all of them said they would prefer to hire someone who has committed themselves to an enforceable Code of Ethics versus someone who hasn't. Signing and abiding by a Code of Ethics is your promise of professionalism, and being a Certified Interior Designer in good standing with the CCIDC board is also your promise of professionalism.

## **7. What can CCIDC do for me?**

As a Certified Interior Designer, CCIDC is a resource, especially if there are disputes. We can provide expert witness testimony against unscrupulous non-certified interior designers on behalf of consumers, and on behalf of Certified Interior Designers in lawsuits against consumers. In many cases, being certified helps you in legal disputes when you need to establish your professional credentials and show that you are qualified to practice. Remember, certification for interior designers is recognized by law in California, whereas membership in an interior design organization isn't, nor is having passed any specific examination. Certified Interior Designer is the gold standard in California.

## **8. What if I don't pay my Certification fees?**

If you let your certification lapse through non-payment of fees, you can always reactivate it. However, as of December 31st 2009, the CCIDC board will require all "delinquent" Certified Interior Designers (those who've allowed their certification to lapse) to pay all their back fees as well as a \$100.00 administrative fee before they can reactivate. If you allow your certification to be "delinquent" more than four (4) years you will be "expired". This means if you ever want to be certified again you will be required

to re-apply, then pass the IDEX California examination. This will bring the certification payment policy in line with all or most of the state boards in California.

## 9. As a CID, what's my competitive edge?

Another common question about renewal of certification is: "I go to all the trouble of being certified and someone who has no education or experience and is not certified is competing with me, so why should I bother?" Actually, if you think about it you do have a competitive edge, and for many of the reasons stated above. If you were a "licensed" architect for example, the only people you could compete with would be other "licensed" architects, (as it is illegal to practice architecture without a license). As a "licensed" architect you would always be on an equal playing field and therefore, in order to get the job you're going to have to prove your talent, your expertise, your experience, and probably be more competitive with your price. You couldn't just rely on the fact you are licensed to get you the job. This is actually much more difficult than competing as a "Certified Interior Designer" against someone who isn't certified. With your proven credentials, your Code of Ethics and all the other attributes of being certified your clients would be faced with an easy choice. The reality is you will only get as much out of certification as you put into it. Promote your credentials, educate your prospective clients, sell your Code of Ethics, and set yourself apart. This will bring you more business.

## 10. A new path to certification!

For those reading this who are not Certified Interior Designers, now is the perfect time to become one, especially if you are an experienced designer who never attended a design school, and missed out on the "Grand parenting" window from 1992 to 1994. If you missed that opportunity you know that for many years the only way to become certified was to take an expensive national examination (CQRID, NCIDQ, NKBA) and the California Codes and Regulations Examination (CCRE). In some cases the national exams would not allow you to take them without a minimum of formal interior design education and work experience that came after the education and had to be under a specific design professional. This is no longer the case. You can now become a "Certified Interior Designer" by taking one relatively inexpensive examination that has very minimal registration requirements (5 years working experience or 2 years of education) that test you on California codes and Title 24, the very codes and regulations you work with every day. The national examinations do not test candidates on California codes, laws, and regulations. This examination is brand new and is called the IDEX California. The national examinations are interior design examinations; the IDEX California is a "certification" examination. You can read more about it on our web site at [www.ccidc.org](http://www.ccidc.org).