



Interior Redesign Industry Specialists

*International organization supports the expanding specialties
of interior redesign and home staging* by James Askew

The Philosophy of Interior Redesign

We've all done it before, at one time or another—anyone, that is, who has had a space to call their own, even if it was just a small room—move the sofa here, the chair over there, and take down that tired, old print and replace it with something finer. Whether you call it an interior redesign, rearranging, repurposing, flipping a room, or simply moving furniture, the intent remains the same: give a room fresh, new look using only what you have on hand.

For those in the business, it is known as an interior redesign, and together with the art of home staging, the two are the fastest-growing specialties in the interior-design profession. Redesign, by definition, is using what is in the home to create that room's fresh look. Home staging, on the other hand, is doing the same, only the intent is somewhat different: home staging is the art of sprucing up a home for resale. "Staging is somewhat different from redesign, because it is the flipside," explains Pam Faulkner, owner of Faulkner House Interior Redesign in Oak Hill, Virginia. "Redesign is personalizing the home and showcasing the owner's style, while with staging you want to showcase the house, not the client's style."

Though the two differ in ways, Faulkner notes that it is what they share in common that's important. At the core of each specialty is an overarching philosophy of reuse, repurposing, and conservation, and in these tight times of renewed frugality, their appeal can't be beat—aesthetics, style, and a touch of the green, all tied up in one.

Eight years ago, when Faulkner was handed an article to read and told by a friend, "This is what you do," Faulkner says that she was pleasantly surprised by what she learned. "Oh," I said, "This is what I do," Faulkner recounts with a laugh. "I had been doing it for years, and I didn't even know there was a name for it." The article Faulkner read was about the Interior Redesign Industry Specialists (IRIS), a recently founded, professional organization dedicated solely to the advancement of interior redesign and home staging. "And I didn't know there was an association that did this," Faulkner adds.

IRIS was founded in 1999, by 25 interior designers and decorators working throughout the country. The organization's expressed mission is "to establish and maintain high industry standards, promote public awareness, and expand the fields of redesign and staging." Today, IRIS boasts more than 800 members in eight chapters spread out across the United States and lower parts of Canada.

Anna Jacoby, the executive director of IRIS and the owner of Anna Jacoby Interiors in Fremont, California, also joined IRIS in 2002, and she is now in her fifth year on the IRIS board of directors. She spent two years as secretary, two more as vice director, and became executive director in January 2010. Describing the formation of IRIS, Jacoby explains, "A lot of the founders were trained by the same trainers, and so they all got together just to have some camaraderie and friendship. Then they decided that it needed to be bigger than just the few of them, and so they created IRIS."

As redesign specialists, we do not approach the clients with the idea that their furnishings are inadequate and that new items need to be purchased. Rather, our job is to make the most of what they have, making their existing furnishings look fantastic in a pulled-together, cohesive design. We utilize design principles such as color, texture, theme, harmony, balance, and scale to give our clients beautiful, comfortable rooms that reflect their taste and lifestyle.

—From the IRIS redesign manual

At the core of IRIS's mission, Jacoby says, is the recognition that both interior redesign and home staging are no longer just subsets of the interior-design profession, but rather highly skilled and creative professions entirely on their own. "Ten years ago, staging on the residential level, and redesign as whole, were almost entirely unheard of," Jacoby says, noting that in 2009, Career-BUILDER.com rated home staging as the number-one emerging career for the coming years, solidifying the growth of this profession.

Faulkner, now the president of the IRIS Washington, DC-area chapter called National Capital Area, says that her discovery of IRIS was the catalyst to a career change. She had spent the early part of her working life as a visual merchandiser and retail designer for big-name retailers such as the Original Christmas Tree Store, Williams-Sonoma, Pottery Barn, and Hold Everything. It was during this experience that her interest in residential interior design began to grow. Oftentimes, she says, she would be up a ladder or arranging a store display and customers would ask her advice. "I could see people needed help," Faulkner says, "and I think the impression was that interior design was going to cost a lot more than they were willing to spend."

Faulkner read the article on IRIS in 2001, and by the end of 2002, she had taken the IRIS certification course, joined as a member, and opened her own business. She says that IRIS not only put a name to something she'd been doing—and loving—for years, but it also gave her the confidence to turn a part-time passion into a full-time endeavor, now eight years old and growing. Faulkner began organizing the DC-area members in 2005, and National Capital Area became an official IRIS chapter in 2009.

Rather than Faulkner being a rarity in the profession, coming to it later in life, Jacoby says that a majority of IRIS members share a story similar to Faulkner's. However, she notes, most don't come to the profession with

Staging Success

There are few places in North America that have been spared the housing bubble burst, even with those that were least affected seeing a flood of sales dry to little more than a drip, and the supply of homes for sale reach record levels. In Vancouver, BC, the impact of the collapse was far less than places in the United States, but there was an impact just the same.

Judy Rink, owner of SpaceMagic Interior Redesign and Staging in Vancouver, tells about one project where her work as an interior home stager helped offset that impact. The project was on a high-end home in Vancouver, Rink recounts, designed and built especially for the owner, and decorated with an eclectic, Eastern flare. "The agent called me and said this house has been on the market before and it hadn't sold," Rink recalls, "even though it is wonderful."

Upon visiting the house, Rink knew immediately why the house wouldn't sell. Though beautifully decorated, Rink says, the house was overwhelmed by the owner's tastes and style, which she knew could put-off prospective buyers. Rink says her first move was to clear the place, then downplay the owner's heavy Eastern décor and bring in a few "neutralizing" and "West Coast-friendly" items, such as a leather sofa, a fluffy carpet, and some accessories.

"Although I loved what they had," Rink says, "I took down the house contents by about two-thirds. We just neutralized it and made it more West Coast friendly, and it sold in a matter of weeks."



"I was looking for something that would give me an interesting interaction with people, but also something that made sense to me. And I love the sustainability part of redesign, the idea of using what you have, and making it look good."

JUDY RINK, OWNER OF SPACEMAGIC INTERIOR REDESIGN AND STAGING

Faulkner's level of past design experience. Most IRIS members are women over 40, Jacoby says, who originally took the IRIS training as part of major life or career change.

In addition to providing camaraderie for interior redesigners and home stagers around the continent, IRIS also provides an extensive network of training and continuing-education opportunities. At the center of its training activities are IRIS-approved courses for certification as an interior-redesign specialist and/or an interior-staging specialist. IRIS also conducts regular monthly teleconferences and webinars, often involving guest professionals from outside the organization. Additionally, IRIS hosts its annual International Redesign and Staging Conference and Expo, a fanfare event that involves two and a half days of networking, guest speakers, a professional Q&A, and a variety of vendors catering to the needs of the professions.

At last year's conference, held in Golden, Colorado, nearly 150 guests were treated to the 2010 Color Forecast, presented by Sherwin-Williams, as well as 12 different seminars dealing with such topics as business branding, search-engine optimization, business structure, and marketing. As an IRIS instructor, Jacoby says that attending to the business side of the profession is a crucial part of IRIS training. Most IRIS instructors offer either three-day or five-day training courses, and Jacoby says that during a five-day course, she might dedicate two and a half days just to business.

"One of the biggest challenges that most students face, as do all entrepreneurs, is developing the business part," Jacoby says, "especially if you came from a totally different background that is not at all business related."

Judy Rink is an IRIS member and the owner of SpaceMagic Interior Redesign and Staging in Vancouver, British Columbia, and, like Faulkner, she came to the profession following success in an earlier career. Prior to opening SpaceMagic in 2007, Rink was manager of the Western Division of the Academy of Canadian Cinema, and she says that after 13 years with the Academy, she had met her goals and was ready for something different. "I was looking for something that would give me an interesting interaction with people, but also something that made sense to me," Rink says. "And I love the sustainability part of redesign, the idea of using what you have and making it look good."

And at the end of the day, Faulkner, Rink, and Jacoby agree that the love of making a room look good is really what their business is all about—no matter what you call it. ■

Interior Designers Weigh In

The explosive growth of redesign and staging in recent years leaves one to wonder: How has the interior-design industry been affected?

LHQ asked the experts at the Interior Design Society (IDS) and the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) how redesign and staging has affected their business and industry. This is what they had to say:



“I think we’re a big enough country that there’s room for all three—interior design, staging, and redesign. We all need to respect each other’s levels of expertise and run a professional business. I feel if all professions would work together to create a package that will help our clients with their very different needs, all of our individual businesses would grow. I have no hesitation recommending stagers and redesigners to clients if those services are what the client is looking for.”

MARGI KYLE, NATIONAL PRESIDENT OF THE IDS

“Interior designers, like every other part of the building industry, have had to adapt to the changing economic climate and provide the services that their clients need. Many designers who wouldn’t have considered it three years ago have chosen to add redesign and staging to their offerings. It has forced us to seek out new sources for products which can be delivered and installed quickly and new services that can transform and update existing materials inexpensively.



As a sustainable designer, I see all of this as a positive; reusing what exists is a major tenet of green design. I believe this opportunity to find alternatives to the disposable mindset of both designers and their clients will have a lasting effect as our industry faces the rising costs of landfills and the harmful global effects of shipping.”

MICHELLE BANKS WATT, LEED AP, PRESIDENT-ELECT ASID-IL

Polling the Industry

After polling a sampling interior designers nationwide, a divide became apparent. When asked what effect the industry has felt by the redesign and staging boom, responses were equally split. A third of the respondents said that the redesign and staging boom is making professional interior design more accessible to a wider variety of homeowners. Another third replied saying that the boom is challenging interior designers to expand their services in order to compete with interior-redesign and staging businesses. And yet another third said that the boom is not affecting the interior-design industry at all. The other poll results showed:

67%

of interior designers also offer redesign or staging services

73%

of those that also offer redesign or staging services began offering these services between 2000–2010

92%

of interior designers say that redesign and staging accounts for 20% or less of their business' annual revenue