

2011 Convention Interior Architecture Workshop 5/13/11

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Past experience has taught our IAKC/AG that each year's Convention Workshop attracts participants whose concerns are reflective of the concerns and expectations of the market at large.

The audience of about thirty included three past Interiors Committee Chairs -- Jaime Canaves FAIA, Florida International University and juror for the AIA Interior Architecture Awards; Gordon Brooks II FAIA, Dean of the College of the Arts, University of Louisiana; and Robert Steinmetz AIA, Principal, Steinmetz & Associates, New Orleans. The group also included prominent contributors such as Guy Geier, Managing Partner of FX Fowle as well as educators, manufacturers and interior designers discussing a host of matters of interest to the Interior Architecture Community.

Echoing the conclusions of last year's KC survey -- "What is interior architecture design and how can it be applied/integrated into a wide variety of practice settings to the benefit of design and designers?" -- the conversation focused on basic principles:

*Interior Architecture in all its variety is design that engages the inside of buildings; and that collaboration at every point in the process is critical, with a clear understanding of the pivotal role of interiors in shaping design at every level, and the value of an integrated, inclusive effort in balancing design from the inside out with design from the outside in.*

The participants felt that the knowledge base and expertise particular to Interior Architecture can foster such cooperative efforts, especially in today's challenging economic conditions, with sustainability and workplace solutions leading the way. However, benefitting from change can also mean a shift in practice models and expanding services to achieve an advantage: One firm reported that they have blended their interiors studio into their overall architectural practice, since they now do few stand-alone interiors projects, while another firm described their efforts to leverage their knowledge in vertically integrating their practice to cover design, construction and procurement, ultimately reducing risk for themselves and their clients -- who better to build their work than their own forces?

Discussion also touched on a parallel shift in the education of future practitioners similar to the shift being experienced in the marketplace as a whole. While design will remain the core of the architectural/interiors curriculum, educational institutions recognize the need to prepare students for practice in a competitive environment which will require broad knowledge as well as task-specific expertise, delivered in a time critical context. Some academic programs promote collaboration by having all design disciplines -- interiors/landscape/architecture -- take the same courses for the first and second years, while others initiate student competitions that include architecture, interiors and industrial designers. Still others try to ensure their students success by in the market by exposure to a menu of design-support related offerings like design management, construction and estimating, taught by a diverse faculty, giving students a more comprehensive view of practice and its alternative forms.

So how do we move forward as an Interiors Community? Response from the participants was clear: cooperation, exchange of knowledge and best practices. Strong communication -- through website interviews, postings, blogs, list serves -- overcomes siloing of information and fosters strengthening of respect for the particular skills that Interior Architects bring to the process.

So tell us -- how can we serve you?