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Point of View

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Q&A: The Future of Design

Georgy Olivieri

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IFI DFIE Declaration Signing, February 19, 2011. Photo Courtesy of IFI, Credit: Dennis Rainaldi Photography. The International Federation of Interior Architects/Designers (IFI) met in February, in New York City, to assess the results of the Design Frontiers: The Interiors Entity (DFIE) Global Survey. Respondents from 75 countries gave the assembled much to talk about. In the end, the group came to a consensus and put together the IFI Declaration which explores the value, relevance, responsibility, culture, business, knowledge, and identity of Interior Architecture/Design. IFI president, Shashi Caan, led the symposium with a hundred global leaders and design experts from 30 nations present. After this ground-breaking dialogue, I sat down with Shashi to discuss the future of our profession. **Georgy Olivieri: To what do you attribute DFIE's success? Shashi Caan:** We were strategic in our selection of attendees for the symposium. We ensured there was a balanced representation from around the world with different generations, specializations and facets of our professional community, including manufacturing, coming together in a cohesive process. The meeting was carefully programmed and designed to be led by the participants, for the participants, and of the participants. They had been previously involved in the earlier phases of the project through the global survey and/or regional think tanks. They were engaged and felt ownership of the outcomes or declarations. After the two-day symposium we found common ground on the seven topics of: value, relevance, responsibility, culture, business, knowledge, and identity.

By the end of the second day, each attendee signed the declaration, securing it as guidelines for our profession. There was a standing ovation and emotional display. It was a milestone event for the interiors profession that is massive and fundamental to our future. **GO: What was the biggest revelation you took away from the outcomes? SC:** Most respondents from the global survey noted that the designer of interiors impacts quality of life and well-being; however, they couldn't describe how these qualities come to fruition. Therefore, it is interesting that the declaration strongly underscores a need for the understanding of the behavioral, perceptual, sensory and experiential. It was exciting to see all the pieces from the survey, think tanks and brainstorming sessions fall together so well. The results firmly support the seven topics in the declaration, which members of our profession have been discussing for several years. **GO: Describe Design Frontiers: The Interiors Entity and the affect it is expected to have on the way interior designers' and architects' view the profession and speak to it with their clientele and the public. SC:** The declaration is in the words of all participants. It expresses the ideas intrinsic to the essence of the fundamentals that were discussed by each of the eight groups. The groups were divided to explore the seven fundamentals (value, relevance, responsibility, etc), with an eighth group designated to explore the criteria and language of the declaration. The resultant language used is simple and strikes a chord with the public and experts. However, it will be the physical manifestation of this declaration that will attest to its success. Ultimately, the general public, client and architect/designer, will need to be able to experience these environments and stamp them as providing the qualities and benefits desired by the declaration. For example in the U.S. we have the Declaration of Independence, which describes the foundations of democracy and the rights of all people. While many agree with the democratic process, it is ultimately in its application and demonstration of the democratic system and benefits that provides results for citizens. Similarly, we, and the interiors discipline, now need to translate the declaration into applied form for its ultimate and intrinsic impact. **GO: How have you gained the alignment of global professional and industry partners and their participation in this initiative? SC:** The interiors expertise is about designing for people. It strictly requires understanding human beings, one by one, and involves a village of people to build the designed solution. We have some of the nicest, smartest, egoless, and most talented individuals within all of the creative disciplines. IFI DFIE was designed to engage, listen and hear, and to comprehensively report back what this community expressed. We sought clarity and consensus. Widespread buy-in and agreement helped us create a single voice. **GO: What challenges did you face during this process? SC:** We encountered practical challenges including funding, naysayers, and people overcoming previous beliefs. As we all know cultural differences, language, and communication can often be a challenge. This proved to be literally so, given the diversity of languages, cultural beliefs, nuanced interpretation of interiors, and the inherent and existing fractured view and perceptions of the discipline. Raising funds was especially challenging. I am personally learning about and developing a structure for global fund raising, which is very different from any localized funding effort. **GO: How will the DFIE's efforts affect the professional design community in the U.S., as well as students of design around the globe? SC:** Given that the symposium took place in New York City, the IFI was fortunate to have large U.S. design and industry leadership participation. I am especially impressed and pleased that the U.S. community rallied around this initiative with such conviction and commitment. Our immediate and next challenge is to translate this declaration into applicable processes for education, research, and the professional practice. In my opinion, all three are equal pillars of the interiors discipline and require equal development. In fact, it is high time that education became the lead for the practice. In this manner we can move beyond a trade to a genuine and future-focused professionalization. The declaration demands this and can help pave the way for this exciting possibility, especially since we have such unified support from organizations such as the Interior Design Educators Association (IDEA), Interior Design Educators Council (IDEC), Interior Educators (IE), National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ), and Council for Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA). **GO: Where and when will the Outcomes Declaration white paper become available? SC:** The declaration was distributed to all IFI members early this month and will be available on our website, www.ifeworld.org, in the President's Update section. Simultaneously, we have started work on a full compilation of the research document leading up to the declaration; this – Phase III – will be made globally available by October 2011. Georgy Olivieri, MBA, LEED AP, is director of architecture and design strategies for Kimball Office.

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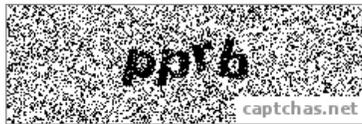
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