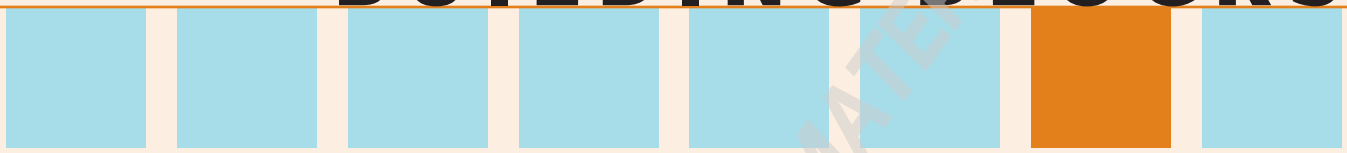
PART I
BUILDING BLOCKS



ONE
INTRODUCTION

The following quotes sum up key points in this book:

Design—*whether graphic, industrial, interior or architecture—is the process of taking unrelated parts and putting them together in an organized unit.* ■

—Alexander White, *The Elements of Graphic Design: Space, Unity, Page Architecture, and Type* (2002)

And:

Work your plan and plan your work. ■

This book is intended as an aid in taking what are often seemingly unrelated elements and putting them together in an organized unit—and not being overwhelmed by the process (that's where having a plan worth working comes in).

Many students, graduates, and job seekers feel overwhelmed by the thought of putting together a portfolio: in representing your entire body of work, the portfolio can symbolize your fears about graduation, employment—even about a successful future. (No small issue there!) However, by breaking down the elements of portfolio development, you can, in fact, develop a plan that yields excellent results.

One key is to stay focused on the tasks at hand and not become overwhelmed by the future or by fear. Instead, focus on working through the process in a step-by-step manner as described in the following pages and symbolized in Figure 1-1.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JIM TAFF.

FIGURE 1-1 Imagining the job search and portfolio development process as a series of small and manageable steps will keep you from becoming overwhelmed. ■

The following chapters convey the ways in which the components of an interior designer's education, experience, and personal narrative can be put together in an organized manner. Additional information about the process and materials required for finding employment for interior designers is also included.

This book has a somewhat unusual organizational structure. The first section is devoted to the basic information required for the job search and for preparing the portfolio; the second section is devoted to examples. Much like a portfolio, the written components of this book are as succinct as possible, with the focus on the work and images.

OVERVIEW OF THE JOB SEARCH

For those of you who have not searched for and obtained a professional, full-time job previously, a bit of background about the process is included here. Put very briefly, the process can be seen as consisting of three phases:

STANDARD FULL-TIME JOB SEARCH PROCESS PHASES*

Phase 1: Preparation

Self-assessment and development of a portfolio, resume, cover letter, and corollary items.

Phase 2: Research and Distribution

Researching potential employers and opportunities; the systematic distribution of the items prepared in phase one.

Phase 3: The Interview and Offer

Preparing for the interview, the interview and follow-up, receiving and accepting the offer.

*Due to ongoing economic uncertainty, many first jobs are not full-time.

The process is, however, more complex than a short list might indicate, and there are many books devoted entirely to each phase mentioned. At specific times in your life, it may be worthwhile to do a serious study of any one of these items or phases. For example, self-assessment is incredibly important as you contemplate moving from one profession to another, or from one specialty area to another. Richard Nelson Bolles's *What Color Is Your Parachute* (2009) is an excellent resource for those involved in a job search, and it has quite a bit of content devoted to self-assessment for those considering career changes.

Remember the quote about working your plan and planning your work? Success with that concept starts right here. By working through the three phases listed above, you will be developing a plan that you can follow through on. Going through the first steps thoroughly will enable you to develop a clear understanding of what type of job you want or where you want to live; then you will have a plan worth working.

PHASE 1: PREPARATION

A serious self-assessment will help you identify your strengths and weaknesses, as well as the tasks that you find most enjoyable. Most readers of this book, however, have already made the decision to go into design after a previous period of assessment—as well as a huge investment of time and money. Rather than focusing on the type of personal assessment required as you contemplate career choices, this chapter will therefore consider ways of assessing your work, experience, and life story as you begin to prepare a portfolio and other job-search tools.

This type of limited self-assessment requires a careful evaluation of your education, the school or professional projects you've completed, your life experiences, as well as what brings meaning to your life. Think of it as a twofold process. You are assessing your strengths and experiences so that you can state them clearly in your resume and portfolio. And you are exploring what you like to do and what your goals are (project management? retail design? living in an urban setting?). The idea is to assess both what you can do well that makes you happy as well as how you can best demonstrate this to a potential employer.

FIGURE 1-2 **Part of self-assessment leads to an understanding what type of living environment—rural or urban, for example—appeals to you. (This is a photograph of Chicago viewed from the Chicago River.)** ■

FIGURE 1-3 **Self-assessment also requires you to identify strengths, weaknesses, and things you enjoy doing.** ■

The basic checklists that follow will help you with both types of assessments.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: PREFERENCES AND INTERESTS LIST

List at least three types of design you enjoyed in school or in a previous job.

What are your geographic preferences? Are you drawn to a particular region, city, or state? Do you prefer an urban, suburban, or rural setting?

What is your firm size preference? Small firms tend to provide broader experience; large firms offer focused entry-level experience.

Consider stability: is financial or job security more important to you than working on exciting projects?

How much travel is acceptable to you?

How much money do you require? How little can you live on?

Consider time commitments: is a good deal of overtime acceptable or desired, or do you prefer more time off?

Where do you want to be in two years? In five years?

Experienced designers should consider what aspects of work they enjoyed or were successful with: project management, design, specification, client interaction, and so on. (List a minimum of five).

List five additional things that you want or that are not acceptable.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: STRENGTHS AND PROOF OF TALENTS, SKILLS, AND EXPERIENCE

How do I prove that I am worth hiring? (What must I include in the portfolio and resume?)

Best projects (see chapter 2, The Portfolio Inventory).

Best results on specific projects or experiences.

Job-related skills: software, programming, project management, specification writing, and so on. List at least ten.

Personal or self-management skills such as reliability, tolerance, and flexibility (these are part of who you are). List at least five.

Transferable skills (from seemingly unrelated work that might be used in design, such as the ability to lead meetings, work with clients, etc.). List five, if possible.

Specialized areas of knowledge (foreign languages, metric system use, building construction, etc.).

Specialized certifications such as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), National Council of Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ), state certification or registration, and so on.

Unusual experiences that would set you apart in a positive way.

Specialized education such as a Council for Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA) accredited program, international study, or a minor or specialization in an allied field.

Organizational leadership experience (with a design association, as dorm management staff, or even as a camp counselor).

SELF-ASSESSMENT: DEAL BREAKERS

These are things that you are not willing to do or are not interested in. While these are worth identifying, do not be too quick to judge things that you have not experienced.

Project specialty/type of work: what type of project would you refuse to work on?

Values: what do you value that you are unwilling to compromise?

Type of firm or company (in-house designer, furniture dealership, etc.).

Are you able to work overtime and on weekends?

Are you able to travel?

Are you willing to relocate?

Where are you unwilling to live?

What is your absolute bottom line as far as salary?

These lists can be a start toward targeting your thoughts and focusing on your needs and desires. Understanding the answers to the questions in these lists will help you develop your resume and portfolio (phase 1, or preparation) and also aid with phase 2—research into your ideal firms and employers and how to contact them. Detailed information on resume writing and development, including help with skill identification, is provided in chapter 5; what is listed here is merely a beginning, meant to provide a jump start.

Portfolio development—the focus of this book—is another significant part of phase 1. The actual information for the planning and development of the portfolio can be found in the following chapter; that content has been treated separately for the sake of clarity—not because it should be seen as a separate phase.

PHASE 2: RESEARCH AND DISTRIBUTION

Research: Types and Sources

The purpose of this research is to develop a list of potential employers to which job-search materials can be distributed and to gain information about the type of work and projects potential employers are engaged in. Research therefore leads to both knowledge about possible job openings as well as background information about potential employers. The latter is important because it allows you to create customized cover letters and offers insight into a company's corporate culture.

There are two broad categories of resume distribution. The first is *targeted.* This means you find the exact firm—or type of firm—you wish to work for, and *target* your cover letter (and perhaps your resume as well) to each firm. Targeted distribution should also include some form of mini-portfolio or well-designed examples of your work. In some cases, the portfolio will also be edited to include specific projects targeted to an employer.

Broadcasting is another form of distribution in which cover letters, resumes, and samples of work are sent to a *broad* swath of employers. In such cases, less individualized editing is done to the resumes and cover letters. Broadcast resumes by nature are more generic; they are being cast wide, like a large net, in the hope of catching an employer. Nonetheless, a minimal amount of research should still be done about the firms to which broadcast resumes are sent so a project or type of work can be mentioned. (See chapter 5: Resumes and Related Correspondence.)

The decision about whether to broadcast or target resumes comes from answers to the questions in the individual self-assessment. When it is absolutely clear that a defined need creates a target, then research about that specific area should be conducted. For example, if the most important issue in a search is working near Denver, then research should be focused on appropriate employers in that area.

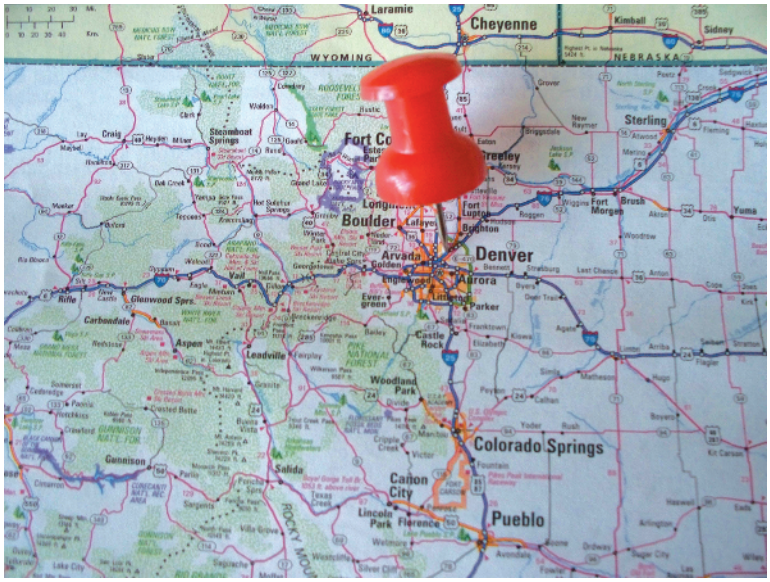


FIGURE 1-4 **Self-assessment may identify a particular location or region as the focus of a job search.** ■

Continuing with this example, you could pinpoint Denver and then research all of the potential employers within a 50-mile radius. If you are not planning to own an automobile, then you would target your research to employers in areas served by public transportation.

In some cases, the self-assessment will show that a design specialty—library design, for example—should be the focus of the research. Firms specializing in this type of work are uncommon, and specific periodicals and research into recently completed libraries will aid in this type of fact-finding.

While specific situations will vary, in most cases research will lead you to find out what kind of work potential employers do, where they are located, how they can be contacted, and perhaps even where to obtain more information about them. This information is not only helpful in providing the job seeker with a target but is also useful in creating cover letters with accurate references to the work of a specific potential employer. (See chapter 5 for information on cover letters.)

The research necessary for each job will vary greatly with the individual. Remember that research is not simply finding job openings; good research often involves finding out which firms do certain types of work or projects and then targeting those companies with targeted cover letters. In other words, research involves finding out who is doing what where and with whom. The following lists of sources for this type of research are just a starting point.

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PUBLICATIONS

While not design specific, these publications can contain information about national and regional design-related business.

City business journals. Major metropolitan areas are served by Business Journals (main site: HTTP://WWW.BIZJOURNALS.COM). These tend to cover all businesses within an area, with construction, architecture, and design mentioned often and in special issues. Going back to the previous example, one could check the *Denver Business Journal* (HTTP://DENVER.BIZJOURNALS.COM/DENVER).

Local papers for cities and regions. Much like business journals, local papers cover construction, architecture, and design in special issues, and in sections on the home and business. The *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Los Angeles Times* tend to feature international and national design stories.

White pages and yellow pages. Online yellow pages (HTTP://YELLOWPAGES.AOL.COM) for each city are available. Searching for architecture, interior design, commercial interior design, and office furniture dealerships can prove helpful.

DESIGN ASSOCIATIONS

The following have helpful Web sites, magazines, and (in some cases) regional newsletters. It is worth looking at competition winners in addition to feature articles to find information on firms and specialties.

American Academy of Healthcare Interior Designers
HTTP://WWW.AAHID.ORG

American Society of Interior Designers (ASID)
The national magazine is ASID *Icon*
HTTP://WWW.ASID.ORG
HTTP://WWW.ASID.ORG/BCDEVELOPMENT/JOBS/BANK/DEFAULT.HTM

British Interior Design Association
HTTP://WWW.BIDA.ORG

The Center for Healthcare Design
HTTP://WWW.HEALTHDESIGN.ORG/BLOG

Chartered Society of Designers (CSD) (UK)
HTTP://WWW.CSD.ORG.UK

Design Council (UK)
HTTP://WWW.DESIGNCOUNCIL.ORG.UK/EN

Design Institute of Australia
HTTP://WWW.DIA.ORG.AU

The Hospitality Industry Network (NEWH)
NEWH Magazine
HTTP://WWW.NEWH.ORG

Interior Design Association Hong Kong
HTTP://WWW.HKIDA.COM

International Interior Design Association (IIDA)
The national magazine is *IIDA Perspective*
HTTP://WWW.IIDA.ORG
HTTP://WWW.IIDA.ORG/CONTENT.CFM/CAREERS

National Kitchen and Bath Association
HTTP://WWW.NKBA.ORG

Retail Design Institute (for chapter information, awards, etc.)
HTTP://WWW.RETAILDESIGNINSTITUTE.ORG
HTTP://WWW.RETAILDESIGNINSTITUTE.ORG/JOBS.PHP

DESIGN INDUSTRY PUBLICATIONS AND WEB SITES

American Institute of Architects (AIA) state and regional design magazines: State and regional chapters produce informative magazines that include articles on firms and often have lists of companies doing specialized work. To continue with the example given, *Architect Colorado*, AIA Colorado's quarterly magazine, would be the choice for research about design in Denver (HTTP://AIACOLORADO.ORG).

These publications and Web sites feature articles on projects and firms as well as annual design awards.

Contract magazine
HTTP://WWW.CONTRACTMAGAZINE.COM

Dezignaré
HTTP://WWW.DEZIGNARE.COM

HealthcareDesign magazine
HTTP://WWW.HEALTHCAREDESIGNMAGAZINE.COM

Hospitality Design magazine
HTTP://WWW.HOSPITALITYDESIGN.COM

ID magazine
HTTP://WWW.ID-MAG.COM
The focus of this magazine is industrial design, but the annual design review includes environmental and furniture design categories.

Interior Design magazine
HTTP://WWW.INTERIORDESIGN.NET
Lists the top one hundred interior design giants and contains project and billing information about those firms.

Interior & Sources magazine.
HTTP://WWW.INTERIORSANDSOURCES.COM

International Facility Management Association (IFMA)
HTTP://WWW.IFMA.ORG

Metropolis magazine
HTTP://WWW.METROPOLISMAG.COM

ASSOCIATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS FOR ALLIED PROFESSIONS

The following publications and Web sites are not devoted specifically to design, but they occasionally run design-related articles and features.

The Associated General Contractors of America
HTTP://WWW.AGC.ORG

Hospitality Net (industry news section)
HTTP://WWW.HOSPITALITYNET.ORG

Library Leadership & Management Association (LLAMA)
HTTP://WWW.ALA.ORG/ALA/MGRPS/DIVS/LLAMA/ABOUT/INDEX.CFM
Part of the American Library Association (http://www.ala.org); cosponsors of yearly design competitions.

National Association of Homebuilders
HTTP://WWW.NAHB.ORG

Nation's Restaurant News
HTTP://WWW.NRN.COM

Retail Traffic magazine
HTTP://RETAILTRAFFICMAG.COM

Networking

Formal networking is the systematic pursuit of new contacts and information. It's organized and planned. Networking is relational. A good networking relationship will be mutually beneficial to both parties. ■

—Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, *Creative Job Search (CJS) Online Guide* (2009)

While the term *networking* has become a bit of a cliché, the concept of creating a network of linked contacts is quite worthwhile. A large percentage of jobs are gained by some form of networked relationship.

What most people seek to gain from networking is a series of contacts—that is, names of design professionals and potential employers. Some of these contacts may be helpful immediately, while others may prove helpful only years later.

Networking should be handled systematically. While your demeanor should be casual, the information you gather should be thoroughly organized. For example, at workshops, professional association meetings, and conferences, it is wise to make notes on the back of business cards you collect. Write down information that will remind you of the initial conversation or situation. The most organized networkers keep lists of contacts with phone numbers and dates and stay in touch by following up frequently (but not too often!).

According to the *CJS*, "Networking isn't begging. In fact, you shouldn't be asking for a job; you should be seeking information that may lead to a job." It is imperative that you look at networking contacts as potential relationships, not as job sources.

Most social situations can be seen as networking opportunities; time at the gym, restaurants, and professional associations can all engender conversations about careers and contacts and may lead to good relationships that form a true career network over time. Some additional opportunities for networking are listed below.

NETWORKING: OPPORTUNITIES

- Design-related classes and workshops
- Job and career fairs
- Meetings of any professional organization (becoming a volunteer or an officer can provide the best opportunities)
- Social organizations (anything from sports teams to local civic groups)
- Trade shows
- Specialized relationships
  - Classmates
  - Professors
  - College alumni associations
- Internet networking resources
  - HTTP://WWW.LINKEDIN.COM
  - HTTP://WWW.NETWORKINGFORPROFESSIONALS.COM
  - HTTP://PIPL.COM/DIRECTORY
  - HTTP://WWW.SPOKE.COM
  - HTTP://WWW.XING.COM
  - HTTP://WWW.ZOOMINFO.COM

Keep a list with information about the people you meet and where you met them. Networking guidebooks often advise you to get in touch with contacts on a regular basis. Checking in with contacts occasionally is a good idea, but don't make a pest of yourself; use the experience to demonstrate your professionalism and levelheadedness.

Informational Interviews

Contacts in your network may lead to *informational interviews,* which are conducted as a means of getting feedback, advice, and guidance, rather than to obtain a specific job. When you contact the potential interviewer, specifically request such an interview, and be clear that you are seeking guidance and feedback rather than a job. Always offer to establish a short time frame (say, 15 to 30 minutes) for such appointments.

Informational interviews generally involve a very quick review of the portfolio as well as a few questions and answers. The interviewee should ask for advice about making improvements to the portfolio or resume and seeking additional design-related contacts. It is generally acceptable to ask to leave a resume—or to send a newly edited version with any suggested improvements at a later date.

Informational interviews straddle the phases between research and distribution. In many ways, you are seeking information for—researching—your job search. Yet it may also be the first time you have the chance to drop off a resume or to ask for additional information for future reference. Therefore, if you are offered an informational interview, go on it! And if your request for an informational interview is denied, don't take it personally; such things are usually a matter of time, and many professionals have little to spare.

Distribution

Distribution occurs when the employers located during the research phase are contacted and resumes and cover letters are distributed. Successful distribution requires a systematic and organized approach. Keeping accurate lists of what was sent, where it was sent, when it was sent, and any follow up that was done is highly recommended.

For designers, sending a resume and cover letter may not be enough; some type of visual content must be sent as well. (Design is, after all, visual work.) It may be in the form of a mini-portfolio, or a few letter-size sheets with project images on them. (More information on mini and sample portfolios can be found in chapters 2 and 7.)

Every situation is different. When a job opening is posted, you should send a cover letter (that includes a reference to the posting), a resume, and a mini-portfolio or examples of your work. When no job opening is posted, send the same items; however, in such cases, the cover letter must describe why you have a strong interest in working for that employer. (See chapters 5 and 6 for additional information on resumes and cover letters.)

The task of distribution is made easier after successful networking, when contacts can lead to productive information about openings and employers. However, in tight job markets, you may need to take drastic methods and distribute as much information as possible in the hope of gaining interviews. The following list contains information about additional options for distribution, as well as information about job openings.

JOB POSTINGS, LISTS, AND OPPORTUNITIES

On- and off-campus job fairs

Campus placement office

Design associations' job postings (see page 11)

Employment agencies and headhunters

General online job postings:

- HTTP://WWW.AFTERCOLLEGE.COM
- HTTP://WWW.BESTJOBSUSA.COM
- HTTP://WWW.CAREERBUILDER.COM
- HTTP://WWW.COLLEGECENTRAL.COM
- HTTP://WWW.INDEED.COM
- HTTP://WWW.JOB.COM
- HTTP://WWW.JOB-HUNT.ORG
- HTTP://JOBSEARCH.USAJOBS.GOV
- HTTP://WWW.MONSTER.COM
- HTTP://WWW.RILEYGUIDE.COM/JOBS.HTML
- HTTP://WWW.SIMPLYHIRED.COM

Academic postings:

- For interior design positions: http://www.idec.org
- (See employment announcements.)
- General academic positions: http://chronicle.com/jobs

PLACES TO UPLOAD PORTFOLIOS AND IMAGES

HTTP://WWW.CARBONMADE.COM
HTTP://WWW.COROFLOT.COM
HTTP://OTHERPEOPLESPIXELS.COM

PHASE 3: THE INTERVIEW AND OFFER

Being offered an interview is validation of your hard work conducting research and developing your resume and cover letter. Use this validation as a boost to feel positive rather than focusing on feeling nervous. This can be seen as the last part of the "plan your work and work your plan" quote; nothing should be left to chance.

In some situations, the first interview will be conducted by phone. This is often a screening interview conducted by a human resources professional or by a design manager. Questions asked in a phone interview are much like those asked at an in-person interview. If the phone interview goes well, a second interview may be scheduled; most often, these will be done in person. Some tips for interviewing are as follows.

INTERVIEW TIPS

Plan the trip to the interview in advance; know the best route and parking locations.

Arrive a few minutes early.

Dress appropriately.

Bring a notebook, a business card, a copy of your resume, and a leave-behind portfolio. (If you did not send one previously, this is a must do.)

Research: be informed about the type of work the employer does. If possible, familiarize yourself with actual projects.

Rehearse: practice dealing with your portfolio, shaking hands with your portfolio in one hand, and setting it down.

Use a firm handshake and maintain eye contact.

Do not make excuses for issues with any of the work in your portfolio. If a question comes up related to your work, answer it honestly but don't go on about negative aspects of projects or design work.

Provide positive examples to reflect your skills and attributes.

Keep answers to the point and aim for clarity.

Ask questions.

Listen—don't interrupt.

Be enthusiastic about your work and the work of the employer.

Try to relax: you've made it this far!

Thank the interviewer(s) and try to get a business card from each (these are new contacts in your network).

Some commonly asked questions are worth preparing for. One is, "Tell me about yourself." Think of your answer as a brief sales pitch. Prepare a short personal biography related to your professional life you can relate with clarity.

Interview questions about strengths and weaknesses are also common. Talking about strengths is relatively easy and is best done using concrete examples. For example, if organization is a strength, then give examples of times you have served as an organizer or things you have successfully organized.

Weaknesses are harder to discuss, and some answers to this question have become something of an urban legend over time. One standard response is that one's weaknesses are working too hard and caring too much about work, but such answers will likely be seen as a transparent

attempt to avoid the question. A better option is to mention a weakness and discuss how you overcame it—perhaps you overcame shyness through your success at public speaking or organizational leadership, for example.

A list of additional commonly asked questions follows below.

THE INTERVIEW: COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why did you decide to be an interior designer?

Describe your education.

Describe your most rewarding college experience.

What have you learned from participation in extracurricular activities/ASID/college sports?

Why would you like to work for this company/firm/studio?

Why did you decide to apply for this job?

What is important to you in a job?

Give an example of a difficult decision you have made.

Give an example of how you solved a problem in the past.

Give an example of how you showed leadership in a previous situation.

What are your long-range career goals? What are you doing to achieve them?

Describe a work situation in which you were under a lot of pressure and how you handled it.

What do you anticipate might be your greatest problem with this job?

How do others describe you?

What will you do to be successful in this job?

What is your most memorable accomplishment?

Where do you see yourself in five years?

How are you qualified for this job?

Why should we hire you?

Why did you leave your last job?

You may also occasionally be asked your salary requirements (see page 18).

Your answers to these questions should illustrate your skills, creativity, strengths, and your ability to learn new things and contribute to the organization. Answering questions with polite confidence and enthusiasm will help to convey a good attitude.

The interview is also a time to get to know the firm and to get a sense of what working there would be like. Politely ask for a tour of the facilities and take a good look around to get a feeling for the corporate culture. The following is a list of questions that can be asked of employers in order to get to know more about the job and the company.

QUESTIONS TO ASK EMPLOYERS

What qualities are you looking for in your new hires?

What are the responsibilities associated with this position?

With whom will I be working?

Who will be my supervisor (and what is his or her supervisory style)?

Can you describe typical first-year tasks and job assignments?

Can you describe a typical day on this job?

What is the history of this position?

Is there room for promotion should I exceed expectations?

How and when will my performance be evaluated on this job?

When do you plan to make the hiring decision?

The last step of any interview is writing and sending a thank-you note to those involved in the interview. This should be written immediately and sent as soon as possible. Information on thank-you notes and their content can be found in chapter 5.

If you learn the job has been given to someone else, let the employer know that you remain interested in the job (first choices occasionally do not accept jobs). Politely asking about future openings indicates your continued interest in the employer. If it seems appropriate, asking for feedback on the interview can be helpful at future interviews. While the feedback itself can be very disappointing, don't take it too personally; the fact that you were offered an interview is a huge compliment and something to be proud of.

Appendix 1 contains statements made by professionals that may prove helpful as you prepare for the interview.

The Offer: Salary and Negotiation

Salary is typically not discussed until there is an offer of employment. At the time of an offer there is, in some cases, a bit of negotiation about salary and benefits.

Employers may ask what your salary requirements are or, if you are already employed, what your current salary is. This is always a tricky situation, especially if the job is a good fit and other aspects

of it seem positive. This type of negotiation may force you to play a bit of cat and mouse. You can always try to turn the question around by asking, "What was the previous person's salary?"

One's desire for the job must be balanced against the salary offer and what the job has to offer long term. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for someone to accept a dream job and take a part-time job in addition, just to make ends meet. The following is a list of considerations regarding salary negotiations.

SALARY CONSIDERATIONS

Research the cost of living in the area. Consider rent, parking fees, and other costs specific to this area such as heating, cooling, goceries, and car insurance. Make a decision about what you can reasonably accept.

Try to find the salary range for similar positions (consulting *Interior Design* magazine's Design Giants Lists, and your network connections). The Bureau of Labor statistics may prove helpful in finding this information: [HTTP://WWW.BLS.GOV/OES/CURRENT/OES271025.HTM].

See also Coroflot's salary survey: HTTP://WWW.COROFLOT.COM/DESIGNSALARIES.

Consider long-term career benefits. Top-ranked firms and famous designers do not always pay top salaries, but experience at such places can be a resume builder.

Consider benefits such as medical and dental insurance and profit sharing; these can be worth a great deal of money.

If this is the job you want but not at the salary you need, be honest about that.

Review what you found in self-assessment and see how the offer relates to your findings.

Make a list of pros and cons regarding accepting the job at the salary offered. Discuss this with someone whose opinion you value.

Reasonable requests for increased benefits, educational support, time off, and paid parking may be considered in lieu of more money.

It is best to take some time to consider the offer rather than to accept it on the spot. Ask for at least twenty-four hours to think things over and take time to ask questions and follow up before accepting.

If the offer is less than you expected, discuss that fact—but not your feelings about it—with your potential employer.

Being offered the same salary more than once may indicate that it is the top salary available. It is reasonable to ask when a salary review might be possible if you accept a starting wage lower than what you expected.

Saying no to a salary offer means saying no to the job: it is typically not a continuation of the negotiation. This should be done in the most positive manner possible, as the employer may eventually become a member of your network.

Internships, Contract, and Part-Time Positions

The terms *independent contractor, contractor,* and *contract position* refer to providing services for an employer without being an actual employee of that business. This type of position is technically self-employment and is also referred to as *consulting.* Firms often offer such positions when they are unable to commit to full-time employment or when they require services performed on an as-needed, rather than an ongoing, basis. The benefit to the employer is that there is no commitment to ongoing employment, and no benefits are provided.

In lean economic times, contracting employment is common, and such positions are often offered to entry-level designers as well as those with significant experience. Such offers have more to do with the state of the economy than with the individual. In some cases employers will offer design positions as contract-to-employee, meaning that after serving in a contract capacity for a stated period, the employees will move into full-time employment if they perform well.

Because independent contractors are self-employed, they are responsible for withholding their own taxes and paying self-employment (Social Security) and Medicare taxes. In the United States, the term *independent contractor* is a legal and tax-related term, requiring both the employer and the contractor to file specific income tax forms. There are also special legal requirements for contract work that should be reviewed by anyone considering such employment.

In most cases, independent contractors are not eligible for unemployment insurance, sick leave, or workers' compensation insurance. As a result, a great deal of responsibility falls on the contractor—and very little falls on the employer. Sometimes, however, employment agencies and temporary firms hire design professionals to serve as contract employees within other businesses; in such cases, benefits may be provided by the employment agency.

Contract positions can be sought in the same manner as full-time positions; the same steps of resume distribution and interviewing are involved. Because of the tax and benefit situation, contract employees should be well compensated: a contractor's wages should be at least two to three times higher than those of an hourly or salaried employee.

Part-time work is also offered to both entry-level and experienced designers. Often specialized projects, a tight economy, or the need to replace someone on medical leave will result in the need for part-time designers. This type of job is worth considering if you have other sources of income, you're motivated to work for the employer, or you need to work less than full time. The process for obtaining part-time work is much like the process described for seeking full-time employment.

Internship, cooperative education, practicum: these words can describe either volunteer or paid positions used to gain experience in your chosen field. Various colleges and universities use these terms to describe the concept of a student or recent graduate undergoing practical training within the profession.

Some universities require a paid internship, while others simply encourage them. In addition, some universities have highly engaged placement centers that aid in students obtaining internships, while others do little more than provide internship postings. Check with your school's placement or career center to determine what your current educational program has to offer.

The Interior Design Experience Program (IDEP) "is a monitored, documented experience program administered by the National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ)," according to the NCIDQ Web site. Not a traditional internship per se, IDEP provides a structure for the transition between formal education and professional practice. IDEP also requires you to complete a specific number of hours under the supervision of an NCIDQ-qualified designer and to work with an outside mentor. Interested individuals can discuss the IDEP program with potential employers.

The information in this chapter has provided you with an overview of a manageable, step-by-step approach to the job search. The following chapters focus on the visual elements used by interior designers in that search: the portfolio, resume, cover letter, and related items.

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