

International Design Institutes

Charles L. Owen

Published in part previously in:

CIDI. An International Design Institute for Chicago

Charles L. Owen. Chicago: Institute of Design,
Illinois Institute of Technology, 2004.

Keywords: design institute, design center, design thinking, design
communication, design recognition

Abstract

Design is the future. Around the world, countries and communities, institutions and industries are discovering the value of design: the enabling difference in a world of truly accessible products, communications, services, experiences and ideas.

What is design?

–good design?

–design research?

How do you do design?

–judge design?

–manage design?

–use design?

The public need for answers is evidenced by a wave of design centers now appearing in countries worldwide. But the challenge is significantly greater than what these efforts are currently addressing—in breadth and depth.

*The problems of the 21st century are difficult and immediate. The best minds of all fields will be needed. Design, as a field, has particular strengths that will be essential. To exploit them fully, the value of these strengths must be communicated and their reach extended. Erected for this purpose in regionally important major cities, **international design institutes** will be a significant force in a movement of research, education and communication.*

Introduction

Our present century will be eventful by any previous standard. Population growth, the deep underlying force, will peak at somewhere near 10 billion from a figure less than two-thirds of that now; nearly all the additional population will be from developing countries. The resources necessary to bring them to acceptable standards of living, along with the billions already living in substandard conditions, will put unprecedented stress on energy and water supplies, to mention just two of our strained natural resources.

Complicating this will be global warming, brought on by the needs of the growing billions. Expenditures to adapt to climate change and recover from the excesses of extreme climate and weather events will sap governments' ability to deal with fundamental problems.

New ways will have to be found to live and work. The challenge will be to live well with less—to bring new technologies into service that can directly address energy production and water purification; to create sustainable tools, equipment, structures and cities that ask less of the environment; and to do all this without sacrificing the quality of life that has been achieved in the developed countries.

The many disciplines of design will have their work cut out. To achieve success and public acceptance, the value of their work will need to be communicated widely. And the image of design as either an esoteric technical process layers below common understanding or an inspired art form shaping the ephemeral fashions of the moment will have to be changed. Design thinking will have to be explained for what it is: a way of thinking about issues, problems and possibilities with its own full range of goals, values, processes and measures. Most importantly, the value of design thinking in consort with other forms of thinking must be communicated. Beyond traditional political, economic and business advice, public policy makers will need all the advice they can get—certainly science advice, and given the need for ideas, invention and vision for reshaping the built environment—design.

Concept

An International Design Institute is an information-age, multi-channel institution proposed to meet global demands for research, education, information and communication about design. It has a place, usually a major regional or national city, but it is international in intent, scope and operation. It is also multidisciplinary: drawing on the arts, humanities, technologies and sciences, and cross-communicating knowledge among all fields of design.

The building housing an institute as well as the institute's operation—and the operations of the educational, research and communication programs within it—are living demonstrations of what good design can contribute to business, society and environment. From its first exterior impressions, it communicates thoughtful, advanced design thinking. Its sustainable design features are examples for how to build with minimal environmental impact. Throughout, its adaptive systems show how infrastructure

can be tailored and retailored to changing needs with minimal new demands on resources. Its advanced information technologies demonstrate effective and efficient ways to maximize productivity across a wide variety of creative activities. The synergistic interplay of its many component elements demonstrate the systemic advantages to be gained from an organization planned for interaction.

Elements in Summary

- **Hall of Recognition** (regional, national and international design awards)
- **Design Museum** (historically good design in context)
- **Graduate Design-education Facility** (anchoring research and educational activity)
- **Design Research Facility** (research visibly in progress)
- **Design Communication Center** (public communication of design with value)
- **Conference Facilities** (a professional and public gathering center)
- **Design Library** (collecting design-related information from all disciplines)
- **Design Bookstore** (a market for design-related information from all disciplines)
- **Design Store/s** (a source for well-designed products)
- **Offices for Design Associations** (a design professional center)
- **Corporate Design Showrooms** (companies noted for good design)
- **Design Consultancies** (offices of leading professional consultants)
- **Apartments/Condominiums** (residences rented or sold to friends of design)
- **Guest Room Hostel** (minimal short-term, low cost residence)
- **Restaurants** (imaginative food and environment)
- **Computer Utility** (servers, systems and support for networked communications and IDI operations)

Elements in Detail

The elements of an international design institute (IDI) each supply a special portion of the design resource. Integrated, they form a complete, working design culture openly available as a resource locally and accessible worldwide through a growing network of similar institutions.

Hall of Recognition

Individuals prominent for their contributions to design practice, theory and education are honored here. Design Awards carry with them significant prizes equivalent to those awarded for major achievements in any field. Separate awards are given in each of the major design disciplines, including engineering design, design planning, product (industrial) design, environmental design, communications (graphic) design, architecture, interior design and other forms of design as appropriate for the activities of the region. Awardees receive the recognition accorded winners of highly regarded national and regional prizes, with the intention that youth will be inspired to emulate the accomplishments of these leaders in design.

Design Museum

A permanent collection of the world's best design in each of the areas recognized is maintained here. Study collections, available to local and international scholars, trace the evolution of design in many fields. Permanent and temporary exhibits not only present the best of new design thinking, but take those new to design thinking step by step through the thought process of the designers and the impact of their designs. Traveling shows are assembled and sent out regionally and worldwide from the Design Museum. The Hall of Recognition is a prominent exhibit in the museum.

Graduate Design Education Facility

The graduate program of a major locally situated university or a Center uniting elements of the graduate programs of cooperating local universities is located permanently here as the anchoring activity. The vitality of a facility always alive with activity affects all aspects of an IDI's behavior. Students, faculty, visiting scholars and researchers enrich activities—forming a working population that energizes the institute and sets an exciting pace for casual visitors as well as participants on site for professional purposes.

Design Research Facility

High level resources and capabilities underpin research programs at an IDI. Guided in principle by human-centered focus and environment-centered concern, programs funded by government, foundations, institutions and industry explore better ways to provide services, systems, environments and artifacts for a changing world.

Development of better methods, theory and processes of design goes hand in hand with application of them to sustainable, resource-conservative design. An IDI's programs form regional nuclei and examples for research efforts in local institutions and universities. Design processes, methods and tools developed here are introduced to local design consultancies and corporate design departments as part of a technology diffusion program for continuing education and development.

Design Communications Center

A Design Communications Channel uses the Internet to connect design professionals, educators and researchers locally and worldwide in an information network tailored to the needs of planning and design. Through its Design Communication Center, an IDI is a node on that network, acting as a supplier as well as receiver of information. As receiver, it provides access to worldwide cultural information as it is reflected in the local designs of many countries. With its information bases and multi-media communications, it is also a cultural supplier of knowledge about design and design history locally, and it is a window to the latest methods and theory of design as well as the computerized tools of design technology. As a local supplier, it offers a host of design information services for schools (primary, secondary and tertiary), the public, and the professional community.

Conference Facilities

In consonance with its role as a major center for design knowledge, an IDI has conference halls and specialized meeting facilities with technological support for multi-lingual, local, national and international conferences on design. These, with the institute's educational and research facilities and the city's own exhibition and conference facilities, make city-wide—even metropolitan—extendible exhibits possible as well as combined-sponsor, shared exhibits, conferences and events optimized to the interests of a wide range of potential sponsors, conferees and attendees.

Design Library

Design is a category not found often in libraries because its content is spread among many categories. An IDI's Design Library brings together all that can be assembled about design, reversing traditional notions of categorization and juxtaposing

content from all fields as it pertains to categories of design interest. Media of all forms are respected, and—as permissible legally—important documents from one medium may be converted to others to maximize the usability of the information. Through the network maintained by the Design Communication Center, libraries in other IDI's have access to many materials as easily as do local users, and local users, in return, have similar access to distant resources.

Design Bookstore

Just as the design category is missing in the library, it is missing, too, in most bookstores. The Design Bookstore is the commercial mirror of the Library, assembling representatives of all that can be purchased in new and used design books and other media products from around the world. Browsing through the Internet is possible, and orders can be taken for shipment worldwide. As does any bookstore, the Design Bookstore communicates to the public, in this case with an unparalleled concentration of the ideas of design.

Design Store/s

Besides books and other communications, an International Design Institute will be expected to be a source for the latest and "best" products of design. Design Stores within the IDI fill that need. A number of countries now annually award "Good Design" status to selected products. In conjunction with the design professional societies and as part of its own recognition activities, an IDI may also participate in this recognition process. Making the products thus singled out available to the public are the specialized Design Stores. Because well-designed products are not always the global products of multinational companies, they may be difficult to obtain locally; IDI Design Stores frequently may be the only local source.

Offices for Design Associations

National offices for professional design associations logically are located at an IDI where they can have direct access to the research, communications and professional resources they need, as well as a public interested in design. Provided space at low rental rates, they, in turn, open channels to the thousands of professionals and educators, students and friends of their individual disciplines.

Corporate Design Showrooms

Design, in its most traditional role, serves commercial purposes. The products of design are often for sale, and can benefit significantly from being recognized as "good design". An IDI provides a venue for industries highly regarded for their design to help show off their wares. Corporate showrooms are discreetly rented to those corporations most identified with good design. The attainment of a showroom at an IDI may be regarded as a reward in itself for good design. For the IDI, a subtle benefit is the commercial evidence that good design pays off, and the public learns also that products they like, they may like for a reason.

Design Consultancies

A strong addition to the "working environment" ambiance of an IDI is the presence of the offices of highly regarded design consultants. A select group of design consultants representing a variety of design disciplines is permitted to rent space in the IDI complex. Design consultancies typically work with a variety of projects covering a wide range of topics. The interaction of consultant staff with design educators and researchers continually opens new vistas for all.

Apartments/Condominiums

As space permits, a limited number of apartments and/or condominiums may be constructed in an IDI complex. Their existence and the presence of their inhabitants further strengthen the vitality of the IDI community. Living close to work is growing in desirability, and residence in the IDI with its workplace and amenities is highly desirable for any associated with work activities in the IDI, but also for many who appreciate the special qualities of a well-designed environment.

Guest Room Hostel

Visiting scholars, researchers and students are able to rent rooms in the IDI's minimal, highly functional hostel. Rooms are designed to provide basic sleeping and hygiene facilities at very low cost. For any working traveler, finding reasonable lodgings close to the place of temporary work is usually daunting, often just not possible, especially in the city. An IDI's hostel hotel is a doubly welcome shelter for those who only need a place to sleep and refresh and have little time for commuting.

Restaurants

Completing the response to community needs, restaurants in the IDI both provide convenience for those working or visiting, and dining with a "difference" for lunch and dinner-goers attracted by good design. Restaurateurs are selected for their commitment to the principles of experiment, invention and style expected in an environment concerned with design.

Computer Utility

Linking and supporting all activities in the IDI and supporting the operating environment is a central computing and control utility. Necessary for many functions required by teaching, research and communication, the computing resource is extended as a utility to all facilities in the complex. High-speed, high-bandwidth access to all multi-media information and the services of the Design Channel add significantly to the desirability of using, working in, and living in the institute.

In its role as control utility, the system plays a major role in the management of the IDI's responses to changes in the environment. With a goal of zero environmental impact, constant fine tuning of energy, water and resource control systems is necessary. Sensors and actuators throughout the facility work in harmony for this purpose, and the adaptive construction features of the IDI's structure allow maximum ranges of adjustment.

Background and Additional Reading

This subject and the closely related subject of the value of design thinking have been studied at the Institute of Design since 1990. Some selected papers, projects and reports are listed below. In recent years, electronic versions have been posted in pdf form on the Institute of Design web site: www.id.iit.edu. Where this is the case, the paper or project is marked **.

1. **CIDI: An International Design Institute for Chicago.** Paul Siebert, Karl (Zhe-Ru) Du and Toshimas Yamanaka. Chicago: Institute of Design, Illinois Institute of Technology, 1990.

2. **The International Design Institute: Considering the Future of the Institute of Design.** Jeff Gershune, Sean Gaherty, Brad Nemer and Ameresh Viswanathan, Chicago: Institute of Design, Illinois Institute of Technology, 2003.

3. *CIDI. An International Design Institute for Chicago*. Charles L. Owen. Chicago: Institute of Design, Illinois Institute of Technology, 2004.

4.** *Responsible Design. Achieving Living Excellence: Implications, Warnings and a Call to Action*. Charles L. Owen. In **eDesign2004**. Proceedings of the **International Conference on Environmental Design for Living Excellence: Contemporary Issues and Solutions**, 1-3. Keynote address, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia: Universiti Teknologi MARA, 2004.

5.** *Societal Responsibilities. Growing the Role of Design*. Charles L. Owen. In Proceedings of the **International Conference on Planning and Design. Creativity, Interaction and Sustainable Development**, 1-18. Keynote address, Tainan, Taiwan: National Cheng Kung University, 2005.

6.** *Design Thinking. What It Is. Why It Is Different. Where It Has New Value*. Charles L. Owen. In **The Future of Design Education & Research**. Proceedings of the **2005 KSDS Fall Conference and International Conference on Design Education and Research**. 5-20 (in Korean), 93-112 (in English), Keynote address, Gwangju City, Republic of Korea: Korean Society of Design Science, Gwangju Biennale Foundation, and Chosun University, 2005.

7.** **Design Thinking. Four Projects that Explore How Design Thinking Can Be Extended to New Levels of Service for Institutional and Policy Planning: Education for Policy Design Synthesis**. Sarah Nelson, Steven Babitch, Enric Gili Fort, Yanin Kasemkosolsri and Christine Kim. **A Research Initiative for Policy Design Synthesis**. Derrick Kiker, Clinton Barth, Hyunee Jung, Gil-Ock Lee and Rishabh Singh. **A Campaign for Policy Design Synthesis**. Pam Nyburg, Seungho Chung, Dan Greene, Randy MacDonald and Min Ouyang. **A Natural Systems Institute**. Mark King, Joyce Chen, Henning Fischer, Matthew Lennertz and Waewwan Sittithainchai (the last project demonstrates how design thinking can help in institutional advanced policy planning). Chicago: Institute of Design, Illinois Institute of Technology, 2005.

8.** *Design Thinking: Notes on Its Nature and Use*. Charles L. Owen. **Design Research Quarterly**. 1, No. 2 (December 2006): 17-28.