

Designers

(0*NET 27-1021.00, 27-1022.00, 27-1023.00, 27-1024.00, 27-1025.00, 27-1026.00, 27-1027.01, 27-1027.02)

Significant Points

- Nearly one-third of designers were self-employed—almost five times the proportion for all professional and related occupations.
- Creativity is crucial in all design occupations; most designers need a bachelor's degree, and candidates with a master's degree hold an advantage.
- Keen competition is expected for most jobs, despite average projected employment growth, because many talented individuals are attracted to careers as designers.

Nature of the Work

Designers are people with a desire to create. They combine practical knowledge with artistic ability to turn abstract ideas into formal designs for the merchandise we buy, the clothes we wear, the Web sites we use, the publications we read, and the living and office space we inhabit. Designers usually specialize in a particular area of design, such as automobiles, industrial or medical equipment, home appliances, clothing and textiles, floral arrangements, publications, Web sites, logos, signage, movie or TV credits, interiors of homes or office buildings, merchandise displays, or movie, television, and theater sets.

The first step in developing a new design or altering an existing one is to determine the needs of the client, the ultimate function for which the design is intended, and its appeal to customers or users. When creating a design, designers often begin by researching the desired design characteristics, such as size, shape, weight, color, materials used, cost, ease of use, fit, and safety.

Designers then prepare sketches or diagrams—by hand or with the aid of a computer—to illustrate the vision for the design. After consulting with the client, a creative director, or a product development team, designers create detailed designs, using drawings, a structural model, computer simulations, or a full-scale prototype. Many designers use computer-aided design (CAD) tools to create and better visualize the final product. Computer models allow ease and flexibility in exploring a greater number of design alternatives, thus reducing design costs and cutting the time it takes to deliver a product to market. Industrial designers use computer-aided industrial design (CAID) tools to create designs and machine-readable instructions that communicate with automated production tools.

Designers sometimes supervise assistants who carry out their creations. Designers who run their own businesses also may devote a considerable amount of time to developing new business contacts, examining equipment and space needs, and performing administrative tasks, such as reviewing catalogues and ordering samples. The need for up-to-date computer and communications equipment is an ongoing consideration for many designers, especially those in industrial and graphic design.

Design encompasses a number of different fields. Many designers specialize in a particular area of design, whereas others work in more than one area.

Commercial and industrial designers develop countless manufactured products, including airplanes; cars; children's

toys; computer equipment; furniture; home appliances; and medical, office, and recreational equipment. They combine artistic talent with research on the use of a product, on customer needs, and on marketing, materials, and production methods to create the most functional and appealing design that will be competitive with others in the marketplace. Industrial designers typically concentrate in a subspecialty such as kitchen appliances, auto interiors, or plastic-molding machinery.

Fashion designers design clothing and accessories. Some high-fashion designers are self-employed and design for individual clients. Other high-fashion designers cater to specialty stores or high-fashion department stores. These designers create original garments, as well as clothing that follows established fashion trends. Most fashion designers, however, work for apparel manufacturers, creating designs of men's, women's, and children's fashions for the mass market.

Floral designers cut and arrange live, dried, or artificial flowers and foliage into designs, according to the customer's order. They design arrangements by trimming flowers and arranging bouquets, sprays, wreaths, dish gardens, and terrariums. They may either meet with customers to discuss the arrangement or work from a written order. Floral designers make note of the occasion, the customer's preference with regard to the color and type of flower involved, the price of the completed order, the time at which the floral arrangement or plant is to be ready, and



Interior designers refer to swatches from sample books to plan the space and furnish the interiors of buildings.

the place to which it is to be delivered. The variety of duties performed by floral designers depends on the size of the shop and the number of designers employed. In a small operation, floral designers may own their shops and do almost everything, from growing and purchasing flowers to keeping financial records.

Graphic designers plan, analyze, and create visual solutions to communications problems. They use a variety of print, electronic, and film media and technologies to execute a design that meet clients' communication needs. They consider cognitive, cultural, physical, and social factors in planning and executing designs appropriate for a given context. Graphic designers use computer software to develop the overall layout and production design of magazines, newspapers, journals, corporate reports, and other publications. They also produce promotional displays and marketing brochures for products and services, design distinctive logos for products and businesses, and develop signs and signage systems—called environmental graphics—for business and government. An increasing number of graphic designers are developing material for Internet Web pages, computer interfaces, and multimedia projects. Graphic designers also produce the credits that appear before and after television programs and movies.

Interior designers enhance the function, safety, and quality of interior spaces of private homes, public buildings, and business or institutional facilities, such as offices, restaurants, retail establishments, hospitals, hotels, and theaters. They also plan the interiors of existing structures that are undergoing renovation or expansion. Most interior designers specialize. For example, some may concentrate on residential design, while others focus on business design. Still others may specialize further by focusing on particular rooms, such as kitchens or baths. With a client's tastes, needs, and budget in mind, interior designers prepare drawings and specifications for non-load-bearing interior construction, furnishings, lighting, and finishes. Increasingly, designers are using computers to plan layouts, because computers make it easy to change plans to include ideas received from the client. Interior designers also design lighting and architectural details—such as crown molding, built-in bookshelves, or cabinets—coordinate colors, and select furniture, floor coverings, and window treatments. Interior designers must design space to conform to Federal, State, and local laws, including building codes. Designs for public areas also must meet accessibility standards for the disabled and the elderly.

Merchandise displayers and window dressers, or visual merchandisers, plan and erect commercial displays, such as those in windows and interiors of retail stores or at trade exhibitions. Those who work on building exteriors erect major store decorations, including building and window displays and lights. Those who design store interiors outfit store departments, arrange table displays, and dress mannequins. In large retail chains, store layouts typically are designed corporately, through a central design department. To retain the chain's visual identity and ensure that a particular image or theme is promoted in each store, designs are distributed to individual stores by e-mail, downloaded to computers equipped with the appropriate design software, and adapted to meet the size and dimension requirements of each individual store.

Set and exhibit designers create sets for movie, television, and theater productions and design special exhibition displays. Set designers study scripts, confer with directors and other designers, and conduct research to determine the historical period,

fashion, and architectural styles appropriate for the production on which they work. They then produce sketches or scale models to guide in the construction of the actual sets or exhibit spaces. Exhibit designers work with curators, art and museum directors, and trade-show sponsors to determine the most effective use of available space.

Working Conditions

Working conditions and places of employment vary. Designers employed by manufacturing establishments, large corporations, or design firms generally work regular hours in well-lit and comfortable settings. Designers in smaller design consulting firms, or those who freelance, generally work on a contract, or job, basis. They frequently adjust their workday to suit their clients' schedules and deadlines, meeting with the clients during evening or weekend hours when necessary. Consultants and self-employed designers tend to work longer hours and in smaller, more congested, environments.

Designers may transact business in their own offices or studios or in clients' homes or offices. They also may travel to other locations, such as showrooms, design centers, clients' exhibit sites, and manufacturing facilities. Designers who are paid by the assignment are under pressure to please clients and to find new ones in order to maintain a steady income. All designers sometimes face frustration when their designs are rejected or when their work is not as creative as they wish. With the increased speed and sophistication of computers and advanced communications networks, designers may form international design teams, serve a geographically more dispersed clientele, research design alternatives by using information on the Internet, and purchase supplies electronically, all with the aid of a computer in their workplace or studio.

Occasionally, industrial designers may work additional hours to meet deadlines. Similarly, graphic designers usually work regular hours, but may work evenings or weekends to meet production schedules. In contrast, set and exhibit designers work long and irregular hours; often, they are under pressure to make rapid changes. Merchandise displayers and window trimmers may spend much of their time designing displays in their office or studio, but those who also construct and install the displays may have to move lumber and heavy materials and perform some carpentry and painting. Fashion designers may work long hours to meet production deadlines or prepare for fashion shows. In addition, fashion designers may be required to travel to production sites across the United States and overseas. Interior designers generally work under deadlines and may put in extra hours to finish a job. Also, they typically carry heavy, bulky sample books to meetings with clients. Floral designers generally work regular hours in a pleasant work environment, but holiday, wedding, and funeral orders often require overtime.

Employment

Designers held about 532,000 jobs in 2002. Approximately one-third were self-employed. Employment was distributed as follows:

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| Graphic designers | 212,000 |
| Floral designers | 104,000 |
| Merchandise displayers and window trimmers | 77,000 |
| Interior designers | 60,000 |
| Commercial and industrial designers | 52,000 |
| Fashion designers | 15,000 |
| Set and exhibit designers | 12,000 |

Salaried designers worked in a number of different industries, depending on their design specialty. Graphic designers, for example, worked primarily in specialized design services; newspaper, periodical, book, and directory publishers; and advertising and related services. Floral designers were concentrated in retail florists or floral departments of grocery stores. Merchandise displayers and window trimmers were dispersed across a variety of retailers and wholesalers. Interior designers generally worked in specialized design services or in retail furniture stores. Most commercial and industrial designers were employed in manufacturing or architectural, engineering, and related services. Fashion designers generally worked in apparel manufacturing or wholesale distribution of apparel, piece goods, and notions. Set and exhibit designers worked primarily for performing arts companies, movie and video industries, and radio and television broadcasting.

In 2002, a large proportion of designers were self-employed and did freelance work—full time or part time—in addition to holding a salaried job in design or in another occupation.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Creativity is crucial in all design occupations. People in this field must have a strong sense of the esthetic—an eye for color and detail, a sense of balance and proportion, and an appreciation for beauty. Designers also need excellent communication and problem-solving skills. Despite the advancement of computer-aided design, sketching ability remains an important advantage in most types of design, especially fashion design. A good portfolio—a collection of examples of a person's best work—often is the deciding factor in getting a job.

A bachelor's degree is required for most entry-level design positions, except for floral design and visual merchandising. Esthetic ability is important in floral design and visual merchandising, but formal preparation typically is not necessary. Many candidates in industrial design pursue a master's degree to increase their chances of selection for open positions.

Interior design is the only design field subject to government regulation. According to the American Society of Interior Designers, 22 States and the District of Columbia register or license interior designers. Passing the National Council for Interior Design Qualification examination is required for registration or licensure in these jurisdictions. To be eligible to take the exam, an applicant must have at least 6 years of combined education and experience in interior design, of which at least 2 years constitute postsecondary education in design. Because registration or licensure is not mandatory in all States, membership in a professional association is an indication of an interior designer's qualifications and professional standing, and can aid in obtaining clients.

In fashion design, employers seek individuals with a 2- or 4-year degree who are knowledgeable in the areas of textiles, fabrics, and ornamentation, and about trends in the fashion world. Set and exhibit designers typically have college degrees in design. A Master of Fine Arts degree from an accredited university program further establishes one's design credentials. For set designers, membership in the United Scenic Artists, Local 829, is recognized nationally as the attainment of professional standing in the field.

Most floral designers learn their skills on the job. When employers hire trainees, they generally look for high school graduates who have a flair for arranging and a desire to learn. The completion of formal design training, however, is an asset for floral designers, particularly those interested in advancing

to chief floral designer or in opening their own businesses. Vocational and technical schools offer programs in floral design, usually lasting less than a year, while 2- and 4-year programs in floriculture, horticulture, floral design, or ornamental horticulture are offered by community and junior colleges, colleges, and universities. The American Institute of Floral Designers offers an accreditation examination to its members as an indication of professional achievement in floral design.

Formal training for some design professions also is available in 2- and 3-year professional schools that award certificates or associate degrees in design. Graduates of 2-year programs normally qualify as assistants to designers, or they may enter a formal bachelor's degree program. The Bachelor of Fine Arts degree is granted at 4-year colleges and universities. The curriculum in these schools includes art and art history, principles of design, designing and sketching, and specialized studies for each of the individual design disciplines, such as garment construction, textiles, mechanical and architectural drawing, computerized design, sculpture, architecture, and basic engineering. A liberal arts education or a program that includes training in business or project management, together with courses in merchandising, marketing, and psychology, along with training in art, is recommended for designers who want to freelance. In addition, persons with training or experience in architecture qualify for some design occupations, particularly interior design.

Employers increasingly expect new designers to be familiar with computer-aided design software as a design tool. For example, industrial designers use computers extensively in the aerospace, automotive, and electronics industries. Interior designers use computers to create numerous versions of interior space designs—images can be inserted, edited, and replaced easily and without added cost—making it possible for a client to see and choose among several designs.

The National Association of Schools of Art and Design accredits more than 200 postsecondary institutions with programs in art and design. Most of these schools award a degree in art, and some award degrees in industrial, interior, textile, graphic, or fashion design. Many schools do not allow formal entry into a bachelor's degree program until a student has successfully finished a year of basic art and design courses. Applicants may be required to submit sketches and other examples of their artistic ability.

The Foundation for Interior Design Education Research also accredits interior design programs that lead to a bachelor's degree. There are about 120 accredited professional programs in the United States, located primarily in schools of art, architecture, and home economics.

Individuals in the design field must be creative, imaginative, and persistent and must be able to communicate their ideas in writing, visually, and verbally. Because tastes in style and fashion can change quickly, designers need to be well read, open to new ideas and influences, and quick to react to changing trends. Problem-solving skills and the ability to work independently and under pressure are important traits. People in this field need self-discipline to start projects on their own, to budget their time, and to meet deadlines and production schedules. Good business sense and sales ability also are important, especially for those who freelance or run their own business.

Beginning designers usually receive on-the-job training and normally need 1 to 3 years of training before they can advance to higher level positions. Experienced designers in large firms may advance to chief designer, design department head, or other

supervisory positions. Some designers leave the occupation to become teachers in design schools or in colleges and universities. Many faculty members continue to consult privately or operate small design studios to complement their classroom activities. Some experienced designers open their own firms.

Job Outlook

Overall employment of designers is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through the year 2012 as the economy expands and consumers, businesses, and manufacturers continue to rely on the services provided by designers. However, designers in most fields—with the exception of floral design—are expected to face keen competition for available positions. Many talented individuals are attracted to careers as designers. Individuals with little or no formal education in design, as well as those who lack creativity and perseverance, will find it very difficult to establish and maintain a career in the occupation.

Among the design specialties, graphic designers are projected to provide the most new jobs. Demand for graphic designers should increase because of the rapidly expanding market for Web-based information and expansion of the video entertainment market, including television, movies, video, and made-for-Internet outlets.

Rising demand for interior design of private homes, offices, restaurants and other retail establishments, and institutions that care for the rapidly growing elderly population should spur employment growth of interior designers. New jobs for floral designers are expected to stem mostly from the relatively high replacement needs in retail florists that result from comparatively low starting pay and limited opportunities for advancement. The majority of new jobs for merchandise displayers and window trimmers will also result from the need to replace workers who retire, transfer to other occupations, or leave the labor force for other reasons.

Increased demand for industrial designers will stem from continued emphasis on the quality and safety of products, demand for new products that are easy and comfortable to use, and the development of high-technology products in medicine, transportation, and other fields. Demand for fashion designers should remain strong, because many consumers continue to seek new fashions and fresh styles of apparel. Employment growth for fashion designers will be slowed, however, by declines in the apparel manufacturing industries. Despite faster-than-average growth for set and exhibit designers, few job openings will result because the occupation is small.

Earnings

Median annual earnings for commercial and industrial designers were \$52,260 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$39,240 and \$67,430. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$28,820, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$82,130. Median annual earnings were \$61,530 in architectural, engineering, and related services.

Median annual earnings for fashion designers were \$51,290 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$35,550 and \$75,970. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$25,350, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$105,280.

Median annual earnings for floral designers were \$19,480 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$15,880 and \$23,560. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$13,440, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$29,830. Median annual earnings were \$21,610 in grocery stores and \$18,950 in florists.

Median annual earnings for graphic designers were \$36,680 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$28,140 and \$48,820. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$21,860, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$64,160. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of graphic designers were as follows:

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| Advertising and related services | \$39,510 |
| Specialized design services | 38,710 |
| Printing and related support activities | 31,800 |
| Newspaper, periodical, book, and directory publishers | 31,670 |

Median annual earnings for interior designers were \$39,180 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$29,070 and \$53,060. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$21,240, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$69,640. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of interior designers were as follows:

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| Architectural, engineering, and related services | \$41,680 |
| Specialized design services | 39,870 |
| Furniture stores | 36,320 |

Median annual earnings of merchandise displayers and window dressers were \$22,550 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$18,320 and \$29,070. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$15,100, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$40,020. Median annual earnings were \$22,130 in department stores.

Median annual earnings for set and exhibit designers were \$33,870 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$24,780 and \$46,350. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$17,830, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$63,280.

The American Institute of Graphic Arts reported 2002 median annual earnings for graphic designers with increasing levels of responsibility. Staff-level graphic designers earned \$40,000, while senior designers, who may supervise junior staff or have some decisionmaking authority that reflects their knowledge of graphic design, earned \$55,000. Solo designers, who freelanced or worked under contract to another company, reported median earnings of \$55,000. Design directors, the creative heads of design firms or in-house corporate design departments, earned \$85,000. Graphic designers with ownership or partnership interests in a firm or who were principals of the firm in some other capacity earned \$93,000.

Related Occupations

Workers in other occupations who design or arrange objects, materials, or interiors to enhance their appearance and function include artists and related workers; architects, except landscape and naval; engineers; landscape architects; and photographers. Some computer-related occupations, including computer software engineers and desktop publishers, require design skills.

Sources of Additional Information

For general information about art and design and a list of accredited college-level programs, contact:

► National Association of Schools of Art and Design, 11250 Roger Bacon Dr., Suite 21, Reston, VA 20190. Internet: <http://nasad.arts-accredit.org>

For information about graphic, communication, or interaction design careers, contact:

► American Institute of Graphic Arts, 164 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10010. Internet: <http://www.aiga.org>

For information on degree, continuing education, and licensure programs in interior design and interior design research, contact:

► American Society for Interior Designers, 608 Massachusetts Ave. NE., Washington, DC 20002-6006. Internet: **<http://www.asid.org>**

For a list of schools with accredited programs in interior design, contact:

► Foundation for Interior Design Education Research, 146 Monroe Center NW., Suite 1318, Grand Rapids, MI 49503. Internet: **<http://www.fider.org>**

For information on careers, continuing education, and certification programs in the interior design specialty of residential kitchen and bath design, contact:

► National Kitchen and Bath Association, 687 Willow Grove St., Hackettstown, NJ 07840. Internet: **<http://www.nkba.org/student>**

For information about careers in floral design, contact:

► Society of American Florists, 1601 Duke St., Alexandria, VA 22314. Internet: **<http://www.safnow.org>**