Chapter 1

Designing Interiors:
A Guide for Contemporary Interior Landscape Design

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ABSTRACT

The following is a theoretical reflection about the re-development of existing spaces. First, various changes in the way we live worldwide are considered, especially in industrialised countries. Then a process that spans from research to design is proposed to identify those actions required to reach an innovative response to the problem at hand. The second part of chapter illustrates a series of possible design strategies collected from the interior design work of past masters and contemporary designers. The goal is to offer a possible reading of certain important examples, providing an inventory, by definition an incomplete one, of design approaches, ways of thinking, and practices. Sometimes there is a common thread, sometimes not.

INTRODUCTION

There are many different ways that a space can be designed to meet the living needs of contemporary life. Here, "living" is used in the most general and fullest sense i.e., the activity based on the relationship between humans and their built environment, be it residence, work, study, or culture, etc. The following is a theoretical reflection about the re-development of existing spaces. First, various changes in the way we live worldwide are considered, especially in industrialised countries. Then a process that spans from research to design is proposed, to identify those actions required to reach an innovative response to the problem at hand (without being naive).

The second part of chapter illustrates a series of possible design strategies collected from the interior design work of past masters and contemporary designers. The goal is to offer a possible reading of certain important examples, providing an inventory, by definition an incomplete one, of design approaches, ways of thinking, and practices. Sometimes there is a common thread, sometimes not. A few belong to

the more distant past of architectural and design history, yet nonetheless remain masterful and of great use to the present day. The intent is to focus on examples that share certain ideas and that can therefore contribute innovative solutions to the practice of interior design in the contemporary world, providing some coordinates by which to navigate.

BACKGROUND

Studies that deal with interior design generally treat the topic in one of the following ways: from a historical perspective (Sparke, 2008; Ottolini, 2015, Irace, 2015), by documenting interior projects and examples (Brooker, Stone, 2010) and through the history of certain types of environments (Forino). There are also manuals (Canepa, Vaudetti, 2010; Vaudetti, Canepa, Musso, 2014) that are intended to provide interior designers or exhibition designers with guidance regarding the sizing of spaces, use of materials and technology, and the relevant codes and regulations.

A recent book (Brooker, Harris, Walker, 2019) explore the prospects and the future of interiors from a different angle: responding to a framework of questions and scenarios, the consequences of pervasive, emergent, and often disruptive behaviours, technologies, materials, and actors are followed through to imaginative conclusions, forcing a departure from the comfort of any one disciplinary position.

The ideas covered in this chapter serve an entirely different purpose. They outline the underlying approaches to the interior design process, including research, needs analysis, innovative responses, and verification through their application to actual sites. The possible outcome of this exercise is the adoption of an installation-like approach that does not sacrifice in-depth research, meaning and identity, but rather embraces them as a priority.

FROM THEME TO DESIGN CONCEPT

In principle, there is always a *theme* that exists even before the site. A *theme* refers to one of the infinite interior design issues so frequently found when working on residential, work-related, cultural, free-time, and micro-urban spaces, as well as on more rarefied spaces. Each *theme* presents its own uniqueness and complexity. In each case, the *theme* is not limited to a single function or functions. It always has a broader quality that has to be cultivated and interpreted. Designing a home, for example, does not just mean organising the rooms for each activity (eating, sleeping, meeting, socialising, bathing, etc.). It also means providing a response to a remote and deeply rooted need (and one that changes over time) related to the fundamental rituals and practices of human life. So, when addressing a *theme*, the first step has to be trying to understand its deeper meaning and then translate it into an initial idea that has a programmatic value. It is important to understand the underlying nature of an issue and attempt a preliminary speculation prior to forming a physical response.

Translating a theme into a programmatic idea that can lead to a *telos* has the purpose to make the preliminary work become crucial, and requires research; research has to be carried out like scientists or detectives do, gathering evidence, examples, stories that either validate the initial speculation/programmatic idea or reveal its inadequacy and therefore lead to other ideas. Case study research, that is already an integral part of the design process, is fundamental. As Bruno Munari emphasised in his book, *Da cosa nasce cosa* (One Thing leads to Another) (Munari, 1981), others have certainly worked on the same

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