



European
Council of
Interior
Architects



ECO- RESPONSIBILITY IN INTERIOR SPACE CONCEPTION (1/3)

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INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the European Commission has released a **Circular Economy Action Plan**¹, which emphasizes sustainability as a core principle in transitioning towards a more resource-efficient and environmentally friendly economy. The plan points out to the fundamental role that the built environment plays on a European, national, and local scales, accounting for about 50% of all extracted material. In addition to this, it acknowledges that the material extraction is contributing greatly to greenhouse emissions, is using incredible amounts of resources, and is producing huge amounts of waste. Hence, it comes as no surprise, that the built environment professionals are urged to react and to respond with practically applicable steps. This would allow for the reduction of negative environmental impact of their respective practices.

In 2021, the **New European Bauhaus**² has placed a strong emphasis on the quality, inclusivity, and aesthetics of architecture. Once more, the importance of eco-responsible design in architecture was highlighted, with a focus on reimagining, reusing, readapting the existing built environments and materials, and finding innovative solutions to create living and working spaces that are not only beautiful, but also sustainable in a long term. The NEB initiative, however, has identified other types of socio-economic issues that the built environment sectors are invited to respond to: the housing crisis and the need to decrease the segregation between the rural and urban areas.

This position paper is a response to the existing EU policy trends aimed at promoting sustainable actions and circular economy values across all European Union and all sectors. This paper is our effort to outline and explain how interior architects and designers, as a unique profession, mastering a specific discipline of the architectural design family, can effectively integrate policy requirements into their everyday work practice, apply their knowledge to new uses in the spaces they conceive, and thus, promote the shared values of eco-responsibility and sustainable practices.

¹ [A New Circular Economy Action Plan 2020 \(europa.eu\)](https://ecia.net)

² [New European Bauhaus, 2021 \(europa.eu\)](https://ecia.net)

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1. Role of the Interior Architect

Interior architects and designers play a crucial role in shaping the built environment, influencing not only the aesthetics but also the functionality, safety, and durability of interior spaces. As professionals, we are tasked with designing, constructing, renovating, and maintaining new or already existing built environments. The whole range of interiors, from public (hospitals, administrations, museums), commercial (offices, stores, restaurants, hotels) and educational (schools, universities) to private spaces (houses, apartments), are within the domain of the interior architecture.

To conceive, improve or reimagine the interiors, one must possess a vast range of skills and competences. Appropriate technical knowledge, understanding of the structure and function of buildings and spaces is required, since the aim is to equip the space in such a way that it satisfies the needs for comfort and functionality. The requirements for energy efficiency and health safety, budgetary restrictions must also be taken into consideration, meaning that expertise in construction and building materials and knowledge of waste management is necessary. Finally, interior architects and designers shape spaces for individuals and for his or her daily use. A large majority of people spend a vast amount of time, 85-90% on average, indoors, learning, working, socializing, or exercising³. The high standard and aesthetic dimension of this interior space is imperative.

Ability to understand the individual and collective relationships between people, spaces, buildings, and their environment, in relation to the human scale and the sustainability of the planet, is at the core of our profession. The sustainability question is an integral part of the architectural design, and we have an opportunity but also a social responsibility to contribute to eco-responsible awareness and promote environmental protection in the following ways.

³ [ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/Indoor Air Pollution_03_1278](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/Indoor_Air_Pollution_03_1278)

2. Collecting Best Practice Examples

One of the ways in which interior architects and designers can contribute to the promotion of sustainability is by mapping out, collecting, and implementing best practice examples in the field⁴. This involves keeping abreast of sustainable design principles, materials, and technologies that are available in the market. However, this does not stop there and through continuously researching, learning, and exchanging knowledge on innovative approaches of eco-friendly design, interior architects and designers can integrate these practices into their projects and promote sustainable living.

⁴ [Making the Renovation Wave a Cultural Project, 2021 \(ace-cae.eu\)](https://ecia.net)

3. Assisting Clients with Interior Space Conception

Interior architects and designers have a unique opportunity to assist a variety of different clients and help them make informed choices that prioritize sustainability. Therefore, interior professionals should be part of the planning-team from the initial stages. By engaging in meaningful dialogue about the environmental impact of their design decisions, from space conception through to material choices, interior architects and designers can guide clients to suppliers that provide CO2 neutral, locally sourced, non-toxic, planet-friendly materials, fixtures, and finishes. This may involve, for example, recommending energy-efficient lighting solutions, low VOC paints, or advising on efficient methods and strategies to use existing infrastructure⁵, among other eco-friendly alternatives.

⁵ [Green Ideas | Building and Construction Authority \(BCA\)](#)

4. Implementation of Sustainable Projects

Beyond the creation of design concepts, interior professionals oversee the implementation of interior projects. This includes collaborating with contractors, suppliers, and other stakeholders to ensure the implementation practices are integrated into every stage of the project. From selecting materials to managing waste and promoting energy efficiency, interior architects and designers play a vital role in implementing sustainable design ideas.

5. Expertise about Sustainable Materials

Through the practice interior architects and designers acquire an expertise about the life cycle of the different materials. This includes understanding about sourcing, production, use, and disposal. Interior professionals can make informed decisions that minimize environmental harm. This may involve specifying materials with recycled content, selecting renewable resources and prioritizing products with third-party certifications⁶ such as Cradle to Cradle, Green Guard or Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

⁶ [2022 Factsheet Third-Party Certifications and Eco-Labels.pdf \(ecocenter.org\)](https://ecocenter.org/2022-Factsheet-Third-Party-Certifications-and-Eco-Labels.pdf)

6. Promoting Reuse and Recycling

In addition to selecting sustainable materials, interior architects and designers can opt to avoid short production cycles and promote recycling wherever possible. By advocating for durable and long-lasting products, we can reduce the need for frequent replacements and minimize waste generation. Furthermore, integrating recycled materials into interior designs can help close the loop and contribute to a circular economy.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, eco-responsibility in interior space conception is a fundamental principle that must be embraced. By collecting best existing practice examples, assisting clients with interior space conception, designing new uses for interiors, offering expertise about sustainable materials, and promoting reuse, recycling and repurposing, interior architects can play a significant role in advancing environmental protection within the built environment. It is imperative that interior professionals prioritize sustainability in their practice to create healthier, more resilient, and environmentally friendly interior spaces for present and future generations.