



PETE AGNEW, NCIDQ, LEED GREEN ASSOCIATE, IIDA, EDAC
Senior Interior Designer at HGA Architects & Engineers

- A persistent advocate for humans in the built environment
- An experienced & pragmatic project designer with a focus on human health & healthcare environments
- A problem seeker and solver
- A builder of foundational & long-lasting relationships, both external and internal
- A leader, mentor & doer

Patients and family members at their most vulnerable times, experience some of the most sacred moments of their lives while in healthcare facilities. Similarly, staff spend many stressful hours working in often outdated, inefficient and awkward spaces. As a healthcare interior designer, it is my duty to create comfortable, familiar and bright spaces that connect patients to nature (as much as possible) and to a more familiar, less institutional place. It is through perseverance, education and tenacity that we can deliver projects that disrupt the norm, are beautiful, efficient, loved by users (both patients and staff), are healthy for all occupants (by choosing healthy and appropriate materials for healing) and are gentle on our environment. We, as interior designers, are positioned to facilitate conversations that can lead to a healthy, resilient and sustainable future. To be a part of this small but passionate industry is an honor.

I offer a broad range of skills that encompass project management, people management, mentorship as well as Pre-Planning, Schematic Design through to Construction Administration and all the phases in between. I am adept at client interviewing and presentations and building and maintaining a solid relationship with clients and industry colleagues through the full design process.

My colleagues would describe me as a driven, resourceful and friendly individual who projects a positive, proactive attitude when faced with challenges.

Designing spaces that are innovative in layout and aesthetic, overlap with hospitality ideals of connection and experience and serve the user populations in ways that surprise and delight are pillars of how I approach my work. Thus, I am particularly interested in designing the entire interior experience from patient and staff journey mapping, user group meetings and medical equipment planning, schematic design and full, comprehensive construction documentation.

Working with passionate, caring and thoughtful designers who share design ideas and aspirations is what I would call an ideal workspace.

**Q: Brief intro/What type of work do you do/
where do you work?**

A: I work at HGA Architects & Engineers, in our San Francisco studio. I focus mainly on Healthcare and S&T projects.

**Q: When did you decide to take the NCIDQ Exam?
How did you decide what order to take them in?**

A: After graduation, taking the NCIDQ Exams were the next logical step for me. I was a career changer, and elevating my skills, qualifications

and experience was enhanced when using the NCIDQ appellation. It shows you are serious about the profession, enough to immerse yourself in all of the study and challenge yourself. It was always an “all in” approach for me. I decided I wanted to get my NCIDQ Certification, and just went for all the exams at once.

Q: Did you fail any exams/retake any? How did you stay motivated through that process?

A: I surprised myself that I was able to pass all three, within four weeks of each other — but that was not without some sacrifice! I totally focused on study for about 6–8 months before taking them. Weekends were all about NCIDQ, as I was unable to study after my long workdays during the work week, as I was too tired and was unable to focus.

Q: How long did you study for the exams? What did you use to study?

A: Approx. 6–8 months before taking the exams.

Q: Has the practice of interior design lived up to your expectations that you had as a student? Any surprises or disappointments?

A: Yes and no — it is a vast industry and once you start working in it, you realize just how many different pathways one can take. It is so important to not settle for just any job. Make sure you align yourself with the right firm, who are going to invest time in mentoring you and providing you with options on the type of work you want to do. There are parts of projects that are more challenging than others. For me, the challenging parts are what makes a project interesting — digging in deep to find solutions to design problems. Going out on a limb, going above and beyond, showing others what we can do!

Q: What advice would you give to current students that you wished you had received?

A: Now, more than ever, is the time to find your place. Do not waste time in a job that gives nothing back to you in way of experience, mentorship, opportunities and happiness. Some leaders show interest in you and your development, whereas others are just

happy to leave you to it. Also, get your NCIDQ Certification as soon as you can — it is easy to get into a job and find every reason why it is not the right time to get it.

Q: Why did you become NCIDQ Certified/why was it important to you?

A: As I mentioned, as a career changer, it was important that I elevated my skills qualifications and experience as quickly as I could, post-graduation. Obtaining your NCIDQ Certification is no small feat — it shows commitment of profession and determination to future employers.

Q: How has having an NCIDQ Certificate benefited you and your career?

A: I cannot say I gained an immediate pay raise or promotion because of it, however when seeking new opportunities, it becomes apparent that having the NCIDQ Certification gives you the edge over another candidate who may not have it. For some commercial interior design jobs in some of the larger firms, it has become a pre-requisite in your application, so jump on it!

Q: Have you/are you interested in pursuing any other credentials/certifications or licensure/registration/certification in a jurisdiction? If so, please provide those details.

A: I have obtained my EDAC certification and LEED Green Associate. This year, I am planning to obtain my CHID from American Society of Healthcare Interior Designers, WELL and LEED ID+C (that is my plan, anyways).

Q: What could the industry do to overcome obstacles from diverse individuals being represented and having equal opportunity?

A: This would likely be best addressed at an early stage of one’s career. Having exposure to the design world and potential opportunities within it can inspire young people and help them gear the decisions they make to put themselves ahead. Reach-out programs and having networking groups within the industry geared toward diversity and equal opportunity could serve this need. I hope to see more design initiatives exclusively offered to these groups.

Q: Anything else you'd like to share?

A: If anyone reading this is looking for work, we are hiring lol. Please reach out. Also, am very happy to discuss any aspect of the process of obtaining my NCIDQ Certification with anyone seeking to obtain theirs. It's challenging, but very rewarding.