



FELICIA CHAVEZ, IIDA, NCIDQ, WELL AP
Interior Designer at Shepley Bulfinch

Felicia is a seasoned certified interior designer with a wide range of experience that includes adaptive re-use, higher education, multi-family, workplace, and hospitality projects. She believes in a nimble and comprehensive design approach that encourages interior designers to think beyond and challenge the status quo. Her strength lies in bringing multi-disciplinary experience to weave together thoughtful, sustainable, human-centric design solutions that elevate and inspire the human experience.

She is an active member of the interior design community in Phoenix, and currently serves as Immediate Past President for the IIDA Southwest Chapter. She also contributes her time to the Council for Interior Design Qualification (CIDQ), Arizona State University's Design School, and the National Organization of Minority Architects, Arizona Chapter (NOMA Arizona). In her spare time, she is either tending to a restaurant that she co-owns in Tucson, tackling a new renovation project, or cheering on her kids at their soccer games.

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

A: I focus on leading the urban development (multi-family housing) and higher education interiors projects at Shepley Bulfinch in our Phoenix, AZ office. I'm used to wearing many hats so that I can contribute as effectively as possible to every team I'm on.

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

A: I took the exams 4 years into my career as a designer. I decided to take the slow-and-steady approach to balance the studying with my full-time workload. I focused on one exam at a time, beginning with the FX, PX, and ending with the Practicum.

Q: Did you fail any exams/retake any?

A: No.

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

A: I dedicated at least 8 weeks to each exam and developed a study schedule from the beginning to help me stay on track. As far as study resources, I used everything I could get my hands on! I referenced the books from CIDQ's Exam

Reference Materials list, took practice exams, and formed small study groups with Phoenix designers also going through the certification journey. I used QPractice too, which was a really helpful platform.

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

A: A lot of people perceive interior design as a fun, superficial career that's based primarily on aesthetics. While it does involve aesthetics, that's really a small fraction of what interior design encompasses. As I gained more experience in my career, I realized how profound and fulfilling interior design really is. We are shaping spaces, creating physical/emotional/neurological experiences and connections, celebrating equity/diversity/inclusion, and ultimately elevating the human experience all through the built environment.

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

A: It's OK not to have all the answers — none of us do. But we learn **more** of those answers by asking questions, staying curious, and pushing boundaries. Lean in and stay committed to the work.

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

A: I practice in a state that has no legislation and permitting privileges, so essentially anyone can call themselves an interior designer. As an advocate for setting a high standard for anything I pursue, I believe that NCIDQ Certification does that for our industry — it establishes a baseline of fundamental knowledge that should be expected of practicing interior design professionals. Setting this standard also helps to raise the value, recognition, and respect that the profession deserves, and helps ensure that a high level of quality is maintained.

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

A: Many bigger firms comprehend the value that NCIDQ interior designers bring to a team, so it exposed me to career opportunities that I wouldn't have been eligible for otherwise. From a broader perspective, it's also become an educational tool for me. I've come across students, professionals, and community members that aren't familiar with NCIDQ Certification, and I use the encounters as opportunities to grow people's knowledge about the importance of what we do, and why certification is beneficial to our profession.

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 am also WELL AP certified.

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

A: Teach kids about the interior design profession from a younger age; I'm talking elementary school age. The sooner we expose children to the profession as a viable career path, the earlier we can plant the seed and get them interested/excited in an interior design career.

Also, I think we need to engage with leadership of firms and get them to commit to some sort of measurable DEI goals that support the advancement of BIPOC people

in our industry. People of color are grossly underrepresented in the field of interior design and one way to have significant change is when we have support from leaders at the top.

Lastly, we need to be thinking about how we can support small interior design businesses—particularly those owned by Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC). More of a grassroots effort approach, but I think this, paired with the suggestion above, will really create a comprehensive strategy to increasing diversity in the profession.

Q: What are common misconceptions people have? How can we combat these misconceptions and communicate more effectively?

A: The biggest misconception I come across is that our line of work is limited to what people see on HGTV. In reality, interior design is about process and evolution, understanding human behavior and spatial interaction, sensory exploration, sustainability, and promoting life safety/well-being in all aspects. I believe in the importance of educating the larger community about the responsibilities we hold, along with the profound societal impact we have, is the best way to combat these generalizations.