



NICOLE TIESSEN

Principal Interior Designer at aodbt architecture + interior design

Nicole Tiessen received her Bachelor of Interior Design degree from Kwantlen Polytechnic University in Richmond, British Columbia in 2005. During her undergraduate studies, Nicole was also granted the opportunity to attend West Virginia University (WVU) in Morgantown, West Virginia as part of an international design exchange program in 2003. While studying at WVU, Nicole was awarded the Presidential Award for Academic Excellence. Nicole joined aodbt in the spring of 2006 and became a Partner in 2010.

As a principal interior designer in aodbt's Saskatoon office, Nicole is a senior interior designer with extensive experience in managing a diverse range of project types and scales, including institutional, mixed-use, corporate commercial, residential, educational and recreation projects. Nicole's engaging communication style, passion, and dedication to her work assure clients that she is always focused on creating exceptional environments that deliver on their objectives.

Nicole plays a key role in all phases of the interior design process; her experience includes programming, space planning, client & community engagement, development of innovative design concepts, selection and specification of finish and material palettes and selection and procurement of furniture.

Nicole leads aodbt's team of interior designers and brings a high level of design excellence and detail to all aodbt projects. One of the most important aspects of Nicole's role is managing multiple projects while maintaining consistency with the client group from introductions through to completion. She works closely with clients to ensure a positive design experience and paves the way for project success with excellent communication and project management skills.

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

A: I live and work in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. We are centrally located in the prairie region of western Canada. I joined aodbt architecture + interior design in 2006 and became a partner in the firm in 2010. We are Saskatchewan's largest independent architectural firm with 50+ staff with two office locations in Saskatoon and Prince Albert. Our team of architects, interior designers, technologists and contract administrators do work all across the province and in other locations in western Canada. Our firm does a wide variety of projects ranging from healthcare, education, corporate office, senior living, multi-family residential, institutional and retail. The great thing about practicing in a small centre is that you are

exposed to many different project types and get to work with a wide range of clients.

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

A: Throughout my 4 years doing my Bachelor of Interior Design degree at Kwantlen Polytechnic University and West Virginia University, it was always positively encouraged by the faculties. From the first year all the way through to graduation we were told that prepping for our NCIDQ Exams was the next step in our career path and the true mark of a professional interior designer. I never really thought of it as "optional" but rather just the next step in my chosen career. I had some great mentors throughout school that encouraged this and supported it. Upon graduation I moved back to Saskatchewan and

was very motivated to get my hours as soon as possible so I could start that process. In Saskatchewan, we had a titles act protecting the title “Interior Designer” and as a new graduate I was very motivated to be able to use the title I had worked so hard towards in University. When I wrote in 2009 very few people did the exams in separate sections — the majority did all three in one sitting and that is what I chose to do as well.

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

A: I wrote and passed all three exams on the first try and remember feeling that sense of relief when I received my exam results that spring. I chose to write in spring as I felt it would be easier to stay focused during the winter months. I treated the process very similar to how I tackled school. I tried to utilize more public study spaces such as our local public and college libraries and my companies’ boardrooms on weekends to remove distractions. There were several study groups organized by our provincial association which I found helpful as well.

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

A: I started studying in early January for the April exams — so in total I studied 12–14 weeks pretty consistently. I tried to set aside several evenings a week and time on the weekends. I primarily used the David Ballast study book and flashcards and the Practicum practice exams

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

A: I would say that in many ways my career has surpassed my expectations. I have had the opportunity to work on a wide range of projects and work with some fantastic team members, consultants and clients. I don’t think I anticipated the wide breadth of exposure I would see in my career. I have had the opportunity to grow personally from learning about different cultures in designing spaces and that has been incredibly rewarding.

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

A: Through my years in University, I didn’t take the traditional path of looking for internships and design related work experience in summers. I took the space I needed to do something different in summers and to meet a wide variety of people. I needed that mental break from the rigors of design school and to give myself the space to come back each fall feeling energized. Years later, many of my colleagues, clients and industry contacts are people I met working at a golf course — not at a design firm. You have the rest of your life to work in a firm — try to experience different opportunities during your university years! It can sometimes bring unexpected opportunities years down the road.

Also don’t worry too much about the “first job” and putting the pressure on yourself to find a perfect fit. My first job out of university wasn’t a good fit for me, but I learned a lot in those 6 months that I believe made me a better leader years later. Sometimes working in a not-so-great environment at first makes you appreciate your future workplace all the more!

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

A: I invested a lot in getting into a design program and then working my way through a 4-year degree and for me this was the next step — I never questioned that. I was very motivated to further my career and be seen as a registered professional in my jurisdiction. In Saskatchewan we have a titles act protecting the title “Interior Designer” and I was very motivated to add that to my business card. I believe the NCIDQ Exams are the final step in the process as a professional, and while difficult, they are incredibly important as our careers do deal with the health, safety and welfare of the public. Having more NCIDQ Certificate holders strengthens our profession and our industry across the board.

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

A: I started out my career in a large firm with three other interior designers, but I was the only

designer in our Saskatoon office. I had to be very self-motivated and organized in my early years to balance a high workload. While I was given lots of opportunity early on, I still knew that being NCIDQ Certified was critical to my career growth, both in the firm and in the larger industry in Saskatchewan. I became a partner within a couple years of joining the firm and have enjoyed leading our interiors team and supporting them through their own paths with NCIDQ.

From 2014 to 2021, I had the opportunity to serve CIDQ as the delegate representing Saskatchewan. Through this role I met lots of great people from across North America and also was able to support our jurisdiction interns who were prepping for exams. I enjoyed watching them succeed and become NCIDQ Certified and to gain confidence in their chosen career. Being involved with CIDQ as a delegate and now on the NCIDQ Exam Committee, I have been able to give back but also grow professionally and personally.