



ASHLEY KIRKLAND, NCIDQ, RID, CID
Director of Interior Architecture at Grizform Design Architects

Born and raised in Columbus, Ohio; attended high school while living in New Jersey and returned to Ohio to study Interior Architecture at Ohio University.

Ashley is responsible for managing hospitality projects through all phases of design. From concept and schematic design, to producing detailed construction documentation, Ashley loves collaborating with her team on design projects to make a client's vision a reality. With a passion for historic preservation, she draws design inspiration from her context of classical elements with modern interventions.

After earning her Bachelors of Science in interior architecture from Ohio University, she moved to Washington, D.C. to live among the cherry blossoms and historical monuments. As an NCIDQ Certificate holder, she is a Registered Interior Designer in the District of Columbia and a Certified Interior Designer in the state of Maryland.

In her free time, Ashley combines her love of travel, exploration, and food by going on an annual pizza bus tour around New York City. When she's not sweating it out in her favorite spin studio, Ashley enjoys spending time at home with family and friends.

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

A: I work at Grizform Design Architects, a boutique design firm located in the historic Naylor Court in Washington, DC. We do hospitality design with an emphasis on dynamic restaurant design. Since joining, I have started to translate our love for hospitality into multi-family amenity projects as well.

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

A: When I was in my sophomore year of college, my professor Matt Ziff told me that NCIDQ was a "true mark of a professional." From that moment on I was pretty unstoppable in my pursuit of being a professional interior designer. As soon as I was eligible, I applied to take the first of the three exams. I took them in order and completed the Practicum last.

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

A: Ahh yes, I had an interesting journey to the completion of my certification. I passed the

multiple-choice exams the first time I took them (now referred to as the IDPX/IDFX). The Practicum (which was hand drafted at the time) took me a few tries. I was often nervous, I'd just sit and study for the Practicum, but after a weekend intensive workshop and support from family and colleagues I was ready to face the Practicum and passed!

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

A: Before each exam I would create a six-week study plan, mapping out each day and what I would read and study. Admittedly working in a busy and time-demanding design firm, I had to get creative with my study approach. I ALWAYS had flash cards on me; the bus, metro, carpool, waiting for files to print — all were opportunities for me to review a flash card and learn a new term or concept for the exam.

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

A: The one thing I thought I was finished with when

I graduated was “pulling an all-nighter.” When I finished my thesis senior year, I thought “well that’s the last time I do that.” For me, interior design is my passion. I am constantly finding inspiration and thinking about special relationships when I enter a room. The passion that fueled me through all-nighters in college, is the same passion that fuels me 15 years later to put that extra touch on a design. It sometimes means that I go to bed later than planned but I love the work that I get to do!

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

A: Trust yourself! I spent many years at my first job scared to speak up with my ideas thinking that “I just got out of school with so much to learn, this is probably a crazy idea.” I stopped myself from sharing only for someone else to say what I had been thinking. I also would say to find a way to balance confidence with an unending appreciation for learning new things. Not one day has gone by in 15 years where I have not learned something new!

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

A: I knew that being NCIDQ Certified was the mark of a professional in the career of interior design. It was important to me to show that my passion and knowledge in design was quantifiable and would allow colleagues and clients to trust the design solutions I provided.

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

A: It’s always a question that gets asked when interviewing for design jobs and it’s nice to be able to check that off the list. It’s also beneficial while working long term in a design firm as it often makes me a part of project proposals by instilling confidence in the potential client that there will be a knowledgeable designer working on their project. I have had a client jokingly say to me “I don’t know what all of those letters mean but I think it means you know what you are doing.”

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: It is great being able to stamp drawings in some jurisdictions like Washington, DC but while I work to have that privilege nationally, I am working towards taking my architectural licensing exam. Maryland allows you to work under a licensed architect to eventually gain the hours but alternatively I have also been looking into graduate programs to speed up the process.

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

A: Outreach programs for young people would be a great place to start. I was 14 when I found out (from many episodes of Trading Spaces of all things) that I could translate my love for art, décor and rearranging my room into a professional paying career. I was lucky! I meet many people now who are changing careers after years of working in other professions because they didn’t realize interior design was something you could go to college for and make a successful living.

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

A: The biggest thing I find myself doing is explaining that my job entails more than helping someone select a sofa. Yes, we as designers do select sofas but there is so much more that we do. If only we had a reality show... even just a character on a show for people to see a day in the life.