
NEOCON

Glimpse all that is
interior design in
a three-day show.

BY SHAILA WILLIAMS

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NeoCon® has evolved many times over its 36 years of existence, from a convention of 750 exhibitors in 1969 to its modern incarnation as North America's largest interior design trade show. One thing remains constant: its role as a barometer of design trends.

With 1,000 exhibitors, nine floors and 1 million square feet of products, people and presentations, NeoCon is the essence of interior design. Attendees are getting the most complete picture of the industry at that particular moment in time — and an early indication of what's to come.

In the months leading up to the show, IIDA's Forum Advisors research the major trends in their individual sectors and then present their findings at a NeoCon cross-Forum panel. Here is a sneak peek at the trends that will define NeoCon 2005.



EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

Education and Research Advisor Giselle Newman Young, IIDA, Co-Principal

of Nashville's Environments in Life Inc., summarizes her Forum's *force de jour* in three words: technology, technology, technology.

Its presence is felt literally – via advances in spatial mapping and digital interactive environments – and indirectly, in terms of how interior design reacts to those advancements. “It is ever-changing,” Young says. “And facilities are having to be versatile enough to adapt to those changes.”

Adaptation can include everything from anticipating (and making room for) future wiring systems to embracing multiple uses in a single space.

Visitors to NeoCon will detect technology's strong presence in its seminars, such as Office Furniture Dealers Alliance (OFDA)'s introduction of new standards for product-

ordering technology, and in its products and exhibits. Speaker Hani Rashid will explore his theory on the way in which technology is reshaping the world of design, while IIDA's Allsteel-sponsored keynote speaker, Bruce Mau, positions technology as not just a design influence but a defining characteristic.

Even the exhibit booths will not escape technology's influence. “Exhibits are straddling the line,” Young says. “They want to be both cutting edge – adaptable to any environment – yet familiar.”



SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

The buzz of NeoCon 2005 will undoubtedly be the November 2004 launch of

LEED for Commercial Interiors (LEED-CI). “I believe it will have the biggest effect on new products at NeoCon,” says IIDA Sustainable Design Forum Advisor Ken Wilson, IIDA, Principal of Envision Design in Washington, D.C.

“A lot of interesting lines with extraordinary shapes will be seen in furniture, furnishings and upholstery fabrics.”

—Maria Mendoza, IIDA, Hospitality Forum Advisor

Wilson’s sentiments are supported by the fact the accreditation is taking center stage not just in his Forum, but in all areas of design. “Everybody is talking about sustainability and green design right now,” says Hamilton Lowder, IIDA, IIDA’s Government Forum Advisor and Lead Interior Designer with the Southwest Division Naval Facilities Engineering Command in San Diego. “Even furniture reps are LEED-certified now. And anyone in the industry who isn’t certified is most likely heading in that direction.”

The standards are fairly stringent, requiring 50 percent of a furnishing manufacturer’s budget be dedicated to salvaged, refurbished or used materials. Leading the charge will be those products and manufacturers that already have earned the new moniker, from non-vinyl window shading materials to furniture made from Forest Stewardship Council certified wood. The “Green Guide to NeoCon” highlights these products while also pointing attendees to LEED-CI applications and a tour of a new, environmentally sustainable Chicago public school. All

are geared toward inspiring others to follow suit.



HEALTHCARE

Healthcare’s role as a big business has been recognized for quite some time.

Only recently, however, has it manifested in design. Many hospital rooms and products are coming to look less like the sterile environments of the past and more like luxurious spas. Pedestal sinks, attractive tile and stylish lighting are replacing their purely utilitarian counterparts.

“Those areas are being designed with competition in mind,” says IIDA Healthcare Forum Advisor Judy Klich, IIDA, Associate with Nashville’s Gresham Smith and Partners. “Hospitals are competing for the patient as well as staff.”

The design industry has responded with products and furniture that consider aesthetics nearly as important as function. The challenge, according to Klich, will be to keep that marriage delicately balanced. “Hospitals are getting more design savvy, but their first concern will

“Trends don’t disappear. They last and become part of life.”

—Giselle Newman Young, IIDA, Education and Research Forum Advisor, Co-Principal, Environments in Life Inc., Nashville

always be maintenance and infection control,” she says. “Those concerns will always restrict certain manufacturers from claiming their products are appropriate for healthcare.”



FACILITIES PLANNING AND DESIGN

The big trend in Facilities Planning and Design is the emergence of versatile, specialized work spaces. “Employees don’t all work in offices or cubicles anymore,” says Forum Advisor Elise Shapiro, IIDA, Senior Facility Planner at Booz Allen Hamilton in Washington, D.C.

Indeed, they’re working at home, on the road and, due to the growing population, increasingly smaller offices. Employers who want to attract top talent must adjust their environments to meet those specifications with enhanced audio, visual and video conferencing capabilities to ergonomic office products that compensate for tighter work spaces. “Corporate and institutional real estate are being redirected to work smarter and more efficiently,” Shapiro says.

A byproduct of this increasingly mobile, shrinking work space is the slow-but-sure dissolution of teamwork.

URBAN ARTIFACTS

Chicago is a mecca for interior and architectural design. Here is a rundown of a few such living artifacts, each of which will be the focus of various tours taking place throughout the show.

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT’S FREDERICK C. ROBIE HOUSE. This prototype for the Frank Lloyd Wright school of design, which Wright himself called “a cornerstone of modern architecture,” is in the midst of a renaissance, thanks to recent restoration. To-date renovations include the installation of a historically accurate clay roof and repair of exterior masonry and balconies.

TARKINGTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. This local elementary school is the first of Chicago Board of Education’s buildings to earn a LEED certification. Facilities planners and designers will find the building an example of how green building practices can be implemented for more efficient maintenance and cost over the long term.

NORTHWESTERN MEMORIAL HOSPITAL’S FEINBERG AND GALTER PAVILIONS. Northwestern Memorial Hospital was one of the first health-care institutions to recognize design’s role in cultivating patient healing and staff learning. Built in 1999, the hospital’s Feinberg and Galter Pavilions are examples of that enlightenment put to use.

“I would like to think that sustainable design is on its way to being fully integrated.”

—Ken Wilson, IIDA, Sustainable Design Forum Advisor, Principal, Envision Design, Washington, D.C.

More time spent traveling or at home means less time in the office, all of which chips away at time spent collaborating with colleagues. This opens the door for designers and manufacturers to invent the type of communal or technological environments that invite employees to come together.




GOVERNMENT

Of the many issues the Government Forum brings to the table this month, one agenda prevails: getting organized. That's an admirable ambition for any area of business, but it's especially crucial in a world as large and bureaucratic as government.

Top on the list is a push for all government projects to be conducted within the design-build system. This method, in contrast to other more linear methods, corrals the contracting, design and construction phases of a project into one turnkey approach. The U.S. government has actually been utilizing design-build for some time, but NeoCon will serve as

the official call for all projects to follow suit. “We’re a different animal than the private sector,” Lowder says. “We have rules and regulations and lots of bureaucracy to cut through. This integrated approach puts all of the heat on the general contractor to hand us the keys and say, ‘Here you go; It’s all complete and ready for you to move in!’” *For more on design-build, see “All for One,” p. 44.*

Second on the governmental agenda is the unveiling of United Facility Criteria (UFC), a best-practices guide for how all interior designers within the Department of Defense will write contracts, work with outside agencies and procure materials. “This is something we’ve been working on for years,” Lowder says. “It’s in response to our past tendency to march to different drummers. This will make things more efficient and consistent.” 

Hear IIDA's Forum Advisors speak in-depth about the trends shaping their industries at IIDA's NeoCon Association Forum “Design Trends” panel, held from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m., June 13.