A FUTURE IN
SPATIAL DESIGN
There are as many spaces as there are distinct spatial experiences”
(French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 1977)

Spatial design is the design of human environments. A relatively new discipline, it incorporates aspects of several other professions in the building and construction industries and in the performing and visual arts. Spatial designers study how people move and interact in the spaces in which they live, and design ways to improve these environments. As well as being interested in what these spaces look like, more crucially they look at how we interact with and are affected by space.

WHAT IS SPATIAL DESIGN?

Have you ever wondered why one particular room or space is relaxing to be in, yet another is just plain uncomfortable? Spatial designers can devise strategies to improve the uncomfortable room, but more significantly they can re-think the relationship of that room to the world it is connected with.

Are you fascinated with the places and spaces in which we live, work and play? If you love to experiment, create and plan, if you have an eye for detail and another for exploration, if you care about the built environment we share, spatial design could be the right field for you.
OUTLOOK AND TRENDS

Clients are increasingly looking for designers who can think across a range of disciplines, including:

- Retail interiors with urban public space
- Workspace interiors with business organisation and innovation
- Residential environments with communities, sustainability goals and inventive manufacturing and material usage

For example, within building design companies, there is a trend towards larger, multi-disciplinary teams. Spatial designers fit well here, bridging the boundaries of traditional design disciplines such as architecture, interior design, landscape and urban design and public art.

Due to the effects of the Christchurch rebuild and continuing pressure for housing and commercial space in other major urban centres, the NZ construction industry is strong. Demand for designers and building professionals is increasing accordingly.

An area of future growth is design for digital and virtual environments. As more and more design work and fabrication/manufacture occurs through digital modes, designers skilled in digital techniques will be increasingly valued. For example, 3D visualisation, digital animations of planned spaces, and the embedding of digital information in existing built spaces.

WORK SETTINGS

With spatial design incorporating aspects of several professions and industries, designers find themselves working in a wide range of settings, either in established firms and institutions or in an enterprise they have developed themselves.

Graduates may start with a role as a design assistant or junior designer and progress to senior design or management roles, freelance work or running their own business. There are also opportunities to pursue academic, secondary and tertiary teaching or research pathways.

Many spatial designers are employed in the field of interior architecture, while others pursue work in film and theatre design, performance design, the creation of exhibitions and events, furniture design, urban design, or the crafting of virtual environments.

Work opportunities exist in interior design, urban design or architecture firms; film, theatre, TV, or digital production companies; event design and production businesses; furniture and object design firms.

CAREER ROLE EXAMPLES

**Interior designer**
Meets with clients to analyse their requirements, then creates design ideas for interior and exterior spaces, furniture, fittings and infrastructure. Prepares drawings, samples, models and costings and collaborates with architects and other designers. Provides advice to clients and information on contractors and suppliers and oversees the implementation of the building works.

**Project co-ordinator (Events/Exhibition design)**
Liaises with clients and develops concepts for an event, then designs the built spatial components central to the event, creates plans, documentation and a budget for the event. Locates the venue, sources equipment and supplies, negotiates with contractors and arranges staffing. Organises marketing of the event, and deals with enquiries, funding, sponsorship, and ticketing and oversees the running of the event on the day.

**Set/Stage designer**
Works with the production team, director, author, actors to turn the script or production brief into a built spatial reality. Researches to create scenic environments for the time, location and mood of the production. Creates sketches of possible set designs. Collaborates with the director, props manager and technical/construction staff or contractors.

**Teacher/Teaching assistant (Secondary & Tertiary)**
Engages with and inspires students in their pursuit of design education. Collaborates with colleagues to share ideas, strategies, resources and experiences. Plans schedules of work according to learning objectives. Monitors student progress, provides feedback and maintains accurate records. Assists with research where appropriate.

SPATIAL DESIGN THEMES

- **Design for interior living**
Designing personal, domestic and organisational spaces which relate to human experience and aspirations. These may range from commercial offices, to educational institutions and private homes.

- **Social, urban and environmental design**
Design – including sustainable design – that enhances lives through the spaces, surfaces and objects that surround us. Design is used as a driver of positive change using renewable materials and resources and addressing social and environmental needs.

- **Scenographic design**
Concept development and implementation of projects for permanent and temporary exhibitions, installations, events, theatre and film. These may be in public and private spaces and include live shows, pop ups, museums, galleries, shops, offices, both online and in the street.
**SALARY GUIDE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Salary (per year)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate interior designers</td>
<td>$30,000 - $45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior interior designers with five to 10 years' experience</td>
<td>$55,000 - $80,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial positions or own business</td>
<td>$80,000 +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Co-ordinators</td>
<td>$32,000 - $53,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary teachers (Management units and other allowances may increase this)</td>
<td>$44,000 - $72,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Salaries sources:** Designers Institute of New Zealand, www.payscale.com (NZ) and NZ Ministry of Education.

Salary range is indicative of the New Zealand job market at the time of publication and should only be used as a guideline.

**SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE**

- Creative capacity to imagine, invent and shape existing or new spaces
- Able to synthesise diverse needs and ideas into a coherent and inspiring whole
- Ability to visualise effective, stimulating spatial possibilities for complex problems/situations
- Capacity to create ingenious designs despite time, resources or other factors presenting barriers
- Ability to communicate convincingly through design ideas, text, personal discussion and verbal presentation
- Experienced in consulting, negotiating and discussing concepts, projects and plans with clients, colleagues, suppliers and industry officials
- Consistently works with accuracy and strong attention to detail
- Most roles require skills with design applications such as Illustrator, Photoshop, InDesign, Rhinosorus and Revit, as well as AutoCAD software.

**PERSONAL QUALITIES**

- Creatively and critically engaged professional
- Collaborative and able to relate well to people from diverse backgrounds
- Able to accept criticism and work positively with it to create successful briefs
- Confident, enthusiastic and able to inspire confidence in others
- Flexible, able to work under pressure and meet deadlines

**PROFESSIONAL REGISTRATION**

While not a legal requirement, professional registration is desirable with bodies such as DINZ (Designers Institute of New Zealand), ADNZ (Architectural Designers New Zealand) and NZAEP (New Zealand Association of Event Professionals).

**THE AUT ADVANTAGE**

Spatial design graduates are skilled in the exploration of design projects through critical, historically-aware, and ideas-driven approaches with an experiential approach to space design.

There are specialisations in innovative interior design, the urban interior and new approaches to material use and development.

**FURTHER STUDY OPTIONS**

Further study in spatial design is available at postgraduate level, including Bachelor of Art and Design (Honours), Postgraduate Diploma in Art and Design, Master of Art and Design, Master of Performance and Media Arts, Master of Design, Master of Philosophy, and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD).

Research areas include:

- Design for public spaces and the built environment
- Interior architecture, including event and exhibition design
- Investigation of cultural space
- Performance, screen and installation
“We take on roles in both commercial and domestic realms. My days can span across concept and developed design, construction documentation, liaising with shop fitters and fabricators, to designing wallpapers, fabrics, a stool, light fitting, or even naming a new restaurant.

The role’s diversity is a wonderful thing. It varies from one extreme to the next, like designing a small wood turned handle to attending a big meeting to discuss a future city precinct.

I’ve been working at Cheshire for almost three years, before which I freelanced for a year jumping from one contract to another. I was determined to taste a little bit of everything in order to gather as much experience and understanding of the options.”

**EMILY PRIEST**
Spatial Designer, Cheshire Architects Ltd
Bachelor of Design in Spatial Design & Bachelor of Art & Design (Honours)

**EMPLOYER COMMENT**

“We are looking for the self-generated passion that will drive a young member of our studio through the pain and hope and myriad challenges of operating in a high-speed, optimistic design practice. Humility is required to enable the empathy and political deftness to thrive in both studio and client worlds.

Emily is a fiercely determined, sensitive and intelligent designer, who fights to ensure she is learning something new every minute, and who we simply had no choice but to employ.

Graduates applying for jobs ought to keep their message simple and sharp. Stop me in my tracks with your most powerful work, use that work to illustrate the breadth and depth of your abilities, and have it over and done in three pages. Design those pages with the care you would a real project.”

Nat Cheshire
Cheshire Architects Ltd
USEFUL WEBSITES

Designers Institute of New Zealand (DINZ)
www.dinz.org.nz

The Big Idea
www.thebigidea.co.nz

The Art Career Project
www.theartcareerproject.com

New Zealand Association of Event Professionals (NZAEP)
www.nzaep.co.nz

For the most up-to-date spatial design information, visit our website:
www.aut.ac.nz/spatial-design

You can also contact the AUT Student Centre team for help and advice:

0800 AUT UNI (0800 288 864)
email: studentcentre@aut.ac.nz

CITY CAMPUS
55 Wellesley Street East, Auckland Central

NORTH SHORE CAMPUS
90 Akoranga Drive, Northcote, Auckland

SOUTH CAMPUS
640 Great South Road, Manukau, Auckland

AUT MILLENNIUM
17 Antares Place, Mairangi Bay, Auckland

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www.aut.ac.nz/social

The information contained in this career sheet was correct at time of print, March 2015