

# Preface



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What do we commonly mean by the expression Graphic Design?

Graphic design is the art of selecting and displaying on a given support visual elements – as like typographic texts, images, colours and symbols – aiming to communicate a message to an audience which is often previously ideally selected and singled out as the preferential addressee of the same message.

It may be considered, by just title, as a language made not only of fonts, photographs and drawings, but also of plays on words, hints, symbols, allusions, cultural references and perceptive deductions involving both our intelligence and sight, and “those who speak such language, graphic designers – as Adrian Shaughnessy says – usually are rather brilliant peoples or, at least, are peoples used to ask themselves questions, culturally conscious and gifted with quite perceptive minds, as for as signs are concerned”. An important part of these peoples’ task consists of combining verbal and visual elements with the aim of forming a tidy and efficaciously communicative whole. Graphic Design is actually a, so to say, collaborative discipline: writers write texts and headlines, illustrators and photographers create images, and graphic designers skilfully assemble their works together in order to create a complete visual communication. They normally don’t consider themselves as artists, but usually are very much concerned with art.

What do we mean, on the other side, by Interior Design?

Should I reduce the definition of such discipline to lowest terms I would say that it is a practice which has to do with whatever can be part of an interior space – lights, doors, finishings, partitions, technical systems, furnitures – and even with its same wrapper, should it be masonry or anything else.

Spite of this descriptive simplification the interior designer’s work is a rather complex practice, implying the knowledge of architecture, product design, technology of different materials, environmental psychology...; and, though the two expressions Interior Design and Interior Decoration are often used to indicate a same discipline, each of them is actually characterized by a different range of action: while the first one, in fact, implies the management and handling of spatial elements and factors, the second is rather oriented towards defining and organizing the movable and ornamental parts of the architectural interior space, as like furniture, finishings, accessories and proper decoration.

The product of Interior Design, as well as the one of Graphic Design, is something that – consciously or not – people deal with every day but, funny enough, they seldom spend their time considering the (positive or negative) impact it has on their lifestyle.

Now, can these two disciplines contaminate each other, or even be practiced on a same project?

They certainly can, and the present book supplies us with a vast inventory of what such contamination may produce. Graphic art may be applied to Interior Design in many different ways, starting from signs’ systems to end up with scene and set designing, passing through a whole series of intermediate and

extremely various alternatives. Most peoples would tend to think that, when resorting to graphics in order to integrate an interior design project, graphic designers cannot help stopping on the threshold of mere decorativism, not being able to trespass it and so contribute, for example, to define the spatial factors of a private or public interior. This, although mostly deliberate, is often true; in such cases we face works where the two mentioned disciplines cohabit expressing themselves on parallel levels, superimposing somehow to each other, but never fully permeating one another.

Although such method, when consciously and skilfully practiced, may give results of great efficacy, there are other cases – and they are the ones I find more interesting – where graphic signs transmute into shape and space or even (like in the extraordinary Oki Stato/Nendo’s project Alice’s Tea Party, to which the cover of this book is devoted), thanks to artifices which are typical of scene design and drawing techniques, attains to visually alter physical dimensions of interiors. When visiting spaces treated this way our senses are somehow destabilized by the illusory distortions generated by such geometries, and this induces us to perceive the surrounding environment in a different way. Optical illusions conceived by designers leave then room to alternative interpretations, thus stimulating us to go deeper down into the space where we are and try to understand how it can influence our behaviours.

Some other projects, as like “Branch in Changchun” and, even more “Romanticism2 in Hangzhou”, by Sako Architects, show us like, though moving away from pure graphics, yet resorting to a strong mark clearly derived from them, one can originate three-dimensional elements that may strongly characterize an interior – a commercial one, in these cases – giving it an outstanding personality.

The superb project “Blue Frog Acoustic Lounge and Studios” by Series Architects – just to cut short a list that could be much longer – is a clear and excellent example of how one of the most typical and even trite grids of graphic design’s repertory, when converted into a three-dimensional element, may rise to the quality of a space organizer element and even attain to define the interior architecture of our environments.