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Upholding standards



Vanessa Brady, president of the Society of British Interior Design (SBID) explains why she created this organisation and why she continues to lobby for change.

From top:
SBID Award Winner Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands(LDS); Vanessa Brady; Interior Design Services Ltd

Opposite page, clockwise from top left:
Vi-Spring; Jeffrey's Interiors; HBA Design



Vanessa Brady's background couldn't have prepared her better for her role as president of the SBID. She runs her own design practice and construction company and employs around twenty people. "I started to think about who would take over from me one day when I retired and decided to float the business on the stock market or find a buyer. After a very quick search, I discovered that through a decade of growth in property in Britain, no interior design companies were listed. Although I tend to work solo, I was shocked at the bigger industry and realised there was a problem," she says. In the end Brady decided to create a profit-share with her staff. "Obviously, they would need direction and so I looked to the industry for standards, and discovered that in every other area of industry and profession, standards were quite... well 'standard' but in interior design it seemed to be a dirty word. So I tried to create a roadmap for standards for the industry, which was rejected. I couldn't understand why, then it occurred to me that the standards being created would divide the industry into those that could and those that could not meet them."

Four months later, after receiving many letters and emails congratulating her on her efforts, and further attempts to standardise procedures in practice, she decided to start SBID. "In our constitutional document, my term is for six years in order to establish the business and protect the investment. I will then hand over to a elected designer who, as with all future presidents, will become the figurehead for two years," she says.

SBID's remit is simple; to set the industry standard for education and competence in Britain, along with the standard for dispute resolution as well as performance in practice. "It had not been created previously and Britain was therefore not represented in Europe as all other European countries with industry standards were. The standard of practice competence provides the consumer with a level of assurance that separates hobbyists from professionals. This is the case for all industries be it medicine, finance, and so on. Every industry lays down prerequisite criteria of knowledge, experience and monitoring as well as a destination for reconciliation when issues arise. Without such standards an industry cannot grow," she explains.

Of course this proved to be the answer to the missing listings of designers on the stock exchange, the reason the financial sector had not invested in a single company in interior design for investment opportunity. "If financial houses did not think the industry was a sound investment, then whatever we may think, the answer is, its not. I work with several banking institutions including representing interior design at the Bank of England with many



other industries. We now have a British standard, we have copyright protection and trademark protection issues being addressed at government level and we have created a footprint for the industry to follow which finally brings the design profession to a unilateral standard with the leading countries in the world," she says.

Another key aspect of SBID is its support of education. "I believe that education is the key to life. Those in third world countries will walk miles in a day in blazing sunshine just to have a chance at any education or better life, this thirst for improvement puts us to shame. We take advantage of what we have because we didn't have to fight for the right to obtain it. I think it's fantastic that everyone can design his or her own space using software, why not? Buy a software pack, or download a free trial to design your home or office but let us not confuse that with a design professional that sells advice and concepts. How can you claim to be an expert if you have not been monitored and tested by a third party? I then look at who is teaching, is the teaching establishment monitored, and who by, what was the procedure, what took place to achieve endorsement? Whatever is being taught must be monitored by an independent party," says Brady.

Not surprisingly in an industry plagued by dilettantes, this hasn't always gone down well. "Of course when you create change you will find disagreement but that's part of what change does, it makes people look at doing things differently. It doesn't matter to me who shouts victory, we know we are hitting the right buttons as the industry is adopting our policies, so this is fantastic, it's demonstrating that SBID is providing industry policy change and that comes from our business structure. Change is exactly what we want to achieve, and every important sector that impacts on our profession is watching the conduct of our industry from our advisory board and from our expert panels. The design profession is an important cash stream and catalyst to industry growth for property."



SBID isn't afraid of taking on the government either. Controversially, Brady wants interns to be paid and set a policy out two years ago. Currently the government position is that paying an intern is employment and so SBID would like this addressed to remove this barrier by setting out guidelines for measured supply-and-learn exchange. SBID also lobbies for the right to enforce ownership by the creator of an idea to remain the owner and benefactor for profit of that idea. This is wholly supported by SBID ambassador Robin Gibb of the Bee Gees, who is also President of the global intellectual property protection organisation CISAC. SBID itself has been monitored as a case study to see how much, if at all, copying or stealing intellectual property affects the bottom line of everyone in business. There's also lobbying for VAT

reduction to help kick-start the industry and for draconian laws such as tendering costs and business development within the EU to be revisited.

Moving on to 2012, Brady's research shows Britain's best growth opportunities are in hospitality (due to Olympics and tourism) but this will soon dry up and unless the UK kick starts its

construction industry we will hit the double dip recession. This leaves international business as an alternative. Luckily there are also signs that SBID is garnering respect internationally: recent SBID awards, held in Paris this September, attracted entries from professionals from 22 countries and covered many disciplines. The awards were so successful SBID has since been invited by four countries to host them next year.

Brady is rightly proud of creating the accredited continued professional development programme in conjunction with the Building Centre as this ensures that those in practice keep up with technology and can give accurate advice. This has taken over a year to complete but independent accreditation is the only way to provide this facility. "I'm also very proud of the awards, and in particular Lavinia Engelman who created them. Then there's the fact that in just under three years in the world's worst recession we have exceeded our goals and are ahead of development targets. She adds "SBID is not about me, I'm merely the driver, it's purely because I have never accepted an injustice and I have never chosen the easy route. If I had, I would be retired and sunning myself on a tropical island with a big hat, a book and a paintbrush by now. But I would have regretted not giving it my best shot, and that's what life is about, not taking the easy route, taking the right route," she says. ■

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www.sbid.org

