

Next generation APID

FOLLOWING THE RECENT ELECTION OF A NEW APID BOARD, *CID* QUESTIONS THE ASSOCIATION'S RELEVANCE TO THE REGION'S INTERIOR DESIGN COMMUNITY

As the region's interior design industry continues to evolve, the need for an association that can represent – and protect – its interests has become ever more acute. The Association of Professional Interior Designers (APID) was established over four years ago, to act as a much-needed industry mouthpiece.

“As the UAE continues to develop, all serious professionals need an association that will represent them and assist their professional growth in the region. APID is the only organisation in the region that has been created to answer this demand,” said Fernando Arteaga, associate director, Hirsch Bedner Associates, and director, APID.

Arteaga is part of a new APID board of directors that came into place following the recent retirement of former president, Kenneth Laidler. Under the leadership of new president, Farida Kamber Al Awadhi, the association is entering a new phase in its evolution.

This ‘changing of the guard’ comes at an important stage in the development of both the association and the industry. Last year's successful hosting of the IFI World Design Congress gave APID an undeniable extra dose of credibility, and exposed it to a larger audience than it has traditionally been used to. At the same time, the current economic climate has reminded design companies of the security that comes with being part of a ‘pack’.

The success of APID ultimately rests on its ability to make itself more relevant to a larger cross-section of the industry. The association must reflect the varied and multi-faceted nature of the sector as a whole. “They need to make themselves more relevant,” Zain Mustafa, managing director of Zain Mustafa Interior Design, reiterated.

“I don't see them organising enough events, activities and seminars – and if I just haven't heard about it, then I

should be informed. That's a step that APID has to take; to find out who is out there, doing what, and to bring us in.

“APID was visible last year during the IFI Design Congress but that's three days out of 365. What happens for the rest of the year? This is something that has to be ongoing,” he said.

Ben Corrigan, managing partner of Bluehaus, has also questioned APID's pertinence in the past, but has decided to join the association this year. “I didn't use to think it was relevant, which is why we haven't joined in the past. We are just about to join now.

“We attended a meeting recently that talked about how the industry can be improved and how we can somehow have a collective voice. That really caught my attention because in the

out there that sell themselves as interior designers when actually they are selling furniture. I think it is misleading to the market. What we'd like to see – which maybe we can eventually get out of APID – is the government being a bit more specific about roles.”

With a new team in place, APID has outlined its key objectives for the next three years. Amongst these, focus will be placed on increasing membership; organising quality events; providing education programmes; creating common documentation; and introducing a festival of interior design.

Beyond this, new blood also means new ideas. “One thing I would like to see happen is that interior designers come together to create a statistical reference database on our projects;

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past I haven't really understood how it could benefit us,” he admitted.

In the current climate, initiatives such as a single, standardised contract, which is top of the APID agenda, are sounding increasingly attractive. “It is a competitive market, especially now,” Corrigan pointed out. “Arguably, some of the companies that have joined APID this year wouldn't have joined during the boom times.”

Like many others in the industry, Corrigan would like to see more regulation on the market, an area that APID has always been keen to address. “There are design companies that set up overnight, without anyone doing any background checks. Or we see companies

including information about contracts, fees, resources and project duration.

This would be a valuable tool that APID members could use to further strengthen their negotiating power,” suggested Christian Merieau, managing director, Middle East, Samuel Creations, and APID executive committee member, responsible for events.

“I will also propose that APID launches an annual membership survey to clearly gauge the needs and interests of members. Most importantly, I will strive to ensure that APID events will help to attract new and young blood to the community, while further focusing APID on availing the knowledge of long-standing local design firms.” 