

BIFDA

HISTORY

August 2024 Retired (1995) and, at that time London based, interior and furniture designer Derek Frost initiated the concept of The British Interior and Furniture Designer Archive (BIFDA).

He first shared his ideas with Jacqueline Duncan, formerly Inchbald, founder and still Dean of The Inchbald School of Design and the school's Principal Alan Hughes.

He also shared the idea with his friend interior designer Joanna Wood.

All were enthusiastic. Joanna suggested sharing the idea with the British Institute of Interior Design, BIID.

September 2024 Derek to the Inchbald School of Design and Joanna Wood:

My thinking is that each participating designer develops, as they decide best, their own individual archive as a single digital file and at their own expense.

That the job of the 'design archive' organiser / web designer, is simply to put together and store, clearly laid out as in a good filing system, all individual freely contributed digital files.

That this collection of digital files are made accessible through a new dedicated web site.

My intention is merely to float an idea and to see who bites, who might wish to advance the suggestion and in what form. I am only able to lend advice, encouragement and possible financial support.'

October 2024 Derek to Inchbald School of Design and Joanna Wood:

Might I suggest that you forward the attached together with any additional comments you may wish to make in the form of an invitation to those interior designers who you think might be suitable as originating archive members. That this invitation might also request these designer's view in this matter. Probably you'll think it wise to liaise with each other and agree together who best to approach.

*Please also speak to your contacts at **BIID**.*

You might also want to start considering who might play the role of archive administrator and at what cost, if any, so that an estimate of start up costs might be assessed.

I'm happy to stick an initial £2K in the 'start up pot' as a sign of good faith. Please let me know when this might be needed.

I don't wish to own this initiative or lead it's development. I'm not well placed to do so. I no longer live in the UK. I closed my design business in the mid 1990's. I no longer have a relationship with the current generation of interior designers.

I am however passionate about seeing the project realised and willing to do whatever proves useful, including lending financial support, to advancing the realisation of The Design Archive.

I'm delighted that the ISD team and Joanna Wood have responded so enthusiastically to my proposal for the setting up of a Design Archive. They all believe that many other high calibre designers will feel similarly.

Derek - Ongoing Thoughts

The archive should be exclusively digital, self funding, independent of association and freely available through a web site to whoever wishes to access it.

The archive should be a 'non profit' initiative.

A small core of originating interior and furniture designer members should be selected by invitation. Ideally this originating group should a diverse group of design professionals - commercial / residential / style / age etc..

I would propose, as with a private club, that potential new members of The Archive would need to be proposed and seconded by originating members of The Archive.

By a simple approved process, a small jury of designer members should be charged with accepting / rejecting new designer applicants. The highest standard of designer members must be maintained.

Each participating designer will be responsible for producing their own completed digital design record in their own fashion and at no cost to the archive.

Those designers who have already published books about their work might want to consider having these books scanned and incorporated into their own archive. Alternatively a link could lead visitors to the archive to information about these books and where to purchase them.

Those designers who are still running their design businesses may submit archives to which they will wish to make future updates. With digital records this is easily facilitated.

There might need to be some discussion about limiting the size of each digital record - ideally not. (For the record: the size of my digital design record is 6.76GB)

Each participating designer will be asked to waive copyright claims on the use of visual material contained within their digital record thus allowing visitors to the archive web site free use of all archive material for non commercial purposes. This should not mean that any designers waives copyright on products of their design. It's a nuanced issue. Legal advice should be taken in this matter.

In order to be self funding each participating designer should contribute to the cost of setting up and running the archive. This contribution to be supplemented by donation, legacy funding, etc., from whatever source.

Running costs should be minimal - the salary of a single design archivist and perhaps an assistant, the services of a web designer, the cost of data storage, the annual cost of web site hosting. Retired designers / others may wish to lend volunteer support.

The archive should grow slowly and organically creating it's own energy and building on that energy.

Participating designers will self publicise the growing archive and this alone will attract more and more designers to it, resulting through this growth, with more and more attention being paid to the archive. Unsolicited editorial from designer journals / design organisations (BIID / other?) will assist.

As the archive grows, decade by decade, it will assume an ever greater importance and will become of increasing interest to a larger and larger number of people - design historians, design students, etc..

I don't believe a paid publicist will prove necessary.

A name. I've floated the idea of 'The Inchbald Design Archive'. Originating participants may prefer a more general name - say 'The Design Archive' - a name that is free of any particular association.

I'm proposing that The Archive should be exclusively 'digital'. If 'physical' then the associated costs would be much greater. There is no reason that the archive can't become a hybrid of both.

If exclusively digital only server space would be needed to house The Archive. If, in part physical, then physical space would be needed to house it. (The size of the physical design archive I personally would like to store is contained in 8 files - overall size 730mm wide x 340mm high x 300mm deep.)

*The Archive should be free to operate by its own rules but its long term interests would best be served by associating itself, in some form or other, with a highly regard professional association. RIBA was discussed but the current consensus is that the **BIID** (<https://biid.org.uk>) who be preferable. Both Alan Hughes and Joanna Wood have good contacts within the BIID and plan to discuss The Archive proposal with them.*

Should participating designers be only UK trained, UK based, UK nationals/ other? Clearly the design fraternity is international and The Archive should reflect this.

The archive might also contain a bibliography of published Interior Design Books approved by the Archive Administrators.

October 2024 from Tim Knox, Director, Royal Collection Trust:

*It might surprise you to learn that I am not keen on a museum dedicated to Designer history. I don't think it would work, just as (in my view) Theatre and Football museums don't really work - **there is definitely a need for some sort of archive to preserve records of designer history etc**, but an actual museum, would not, I feel, have much public appeal and would almost immediately look out of touch or out of date! This is, I think the problem that has dogged the Theatre Museum, or so many sporting museums, they become out of date almost as soon as they're set up, and theatre goes, or football fans, often aren't particularly interested in seeing museum displays about the art or sport they love!*

***Of course we need to preserve records, ephemera, voices, film etc, but that can be done by a library or archive, which can put on exhibitions, actual or virtual.** There are too many museums anyway and I don't think we*

need another permanent one dedicated to Designer history. That's my view anyway.

October 2024 Derek to Joanna Wood and Inchbald School of Design:

My thinking is that most if not all of the originating designers we decide to approach, even those already retired, won't as yet have drawn up their own archive. It took me many years before I made mine!!

No time pressure. It's a VERY long term project we're embarking on. One that will hopefully have good strong legs long after ours have ceased charging around!

November 2024 Derek Frost to Joanna Wood and Inchbald School of Design:

It's important to ensure 'originating designers' / subsequent designers come from as wide a 'church' of top quality designers as proves possible.

November 2024 Alan Hughes to Derek Frost:

I have managed, at last, to have a very useful talk with Katherine Elworthy at the BIID.

In short, and as expected, the BIID would be only too happy to announce / promote / support the establishment of the archive but that would be the limit of their involvement.

I feel this is a good result as the control of the archive would then remain with yourselves, the senior designers, rather than taking a broader intake over which you would have no control.

November 2024 Joanna Wood, still in business and based in London, shared the BIFDA concept with a small number (10) other designers who all appeared to her equally enthusiastic.

Joanna discussed the concept with the British Design Museum hoping to win their support. The Museum expressed interest but no more.

Joanna, believing it essential that giving successful birth and gifting long term life to the concept would need the support of a recognised design organisation, also spoke to the British Institute of Interior Design, the Design Centre Chelsea Harbour, House & Garden Magazine and The Inchbald School of Design. All were enthusiastic.

Joanna assembled a strong group of individuals interested in moving the initiative forward to be called 'The Steering Group' - SG

August 2025 Joanna Wood made a presentation to the Design Museum hoping for their support. Their response, July 2026, still o/s.

August 2025 Derek sent his proposal to 56 designers:

PROPOSAL - THE BRITISH INTERIOR AND FURNITURE DESIGNER ARCHIVE

I trained with David Hicks and Mary Fox Linton. From 1981 I headed Mary's Design Studio and from 1983 ran my own design business - Derek Frost Associates (DFA). In 1995, circumstances unfortunately caused me to close my design business sooner than I might otherwise have wished.

In 2021, post the publication of my memoir *'Living and Loving in the age of Aids'*, my husband Jeremy and I started assembling our personal archive <https://jndflife.com/> which contains within it my design archive - <https://jndflife.com/derek-frost-associates-2/>.

Assembling my design archive has lead me to conclude there is great value in building an archive in which multiple designer's digital archives are stored, an archive that might be called THE BRITISH INTERIOR AND FURNITURE DESIGNER ARCHIVE (BIFDA)?

To be clear - what I'm proposing is a 'archive', meaning a collection of historical documents or records' - not a 'design directory'; a record which I propose starts from the early 1980's (few of us were working in the 1970's?) and that continues decade by decade into the future.

Retired designers, such as myself, have the benefit of elapsed time to allow a more objective look at their completed body of work and, perhaps, the available time to allow the preparation, should the inclination present, to assemble their own design archive.

Those designers who remain 'in harness' without retiring should also be included in the archive. Hopefully these designers will find it possible to

assemble similar archives towards the end of their design careers.

Some of our most successful designers may feel that their work is already adequately recorded in publications specifically about them or in which their work is included. Hopefully these designers will not decide this sufficient reason to withhold adding their record to the proposed archive. If the archive is to be a 'complete' historical record then the most eminent designers amongst us, generation after generation, must please be included.

My thinking is that an archive of this sort, maintaining only the highest standards and built slowly and carefully, decade after decade, by the ongoing addition of future designer's personal archives, will assume ever greater importance and value as a historical record and academic resource.

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Each individual archive should be digital only.

Each participating designer should create a digital archive of their own making and at their own cost.

Each individual archive can be as extensive, or not, as each designer chooses and free from any imposed template.

Each designer should tell their own design story in their own voice.

Originating designers will be selected by invitation.

Future additional designers will be welcome to apply for inclusion. A selection committee of participating designers will determine who to accept.

Our proposed archive should be freely viewable through its own website.

The architecture of the web site and digital storage system would need designing and might follow, as an example <https://www.cambridgeigbt.com/>.

Costs associated with setting up our archive web site plus organising future additions to it should be minimal - most likely only the cost of the selected web designer and digital storage.

Overseeing this work should be the role of one or more of the participating designers, hopefully working as volunteers and thus obviating the need to employ a professional archivist.

No office or base of operations would be necessary.

Costs should be shared by all participating designers.

Our archive should remain financially and in all other senses independent of control from other organisations; should not become of 'sideshow' significance within a larger organisation.

The participation of highly regarded designers will quickly awake support from design associations.

Prestige design magazines will be keen to report on our archive and will find it of increasing historic and academic importance and a valuable resource when writing about the evolution of British Interior and Furniture Design and about its contributors.

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Thank you for considering this proposal.

Kindly let me know your view in this matter and if you'd be interested in participating.

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Only 7 of the 56 designers contacted by Derek responded to receipt of his proposal.

All 7 supported the birth of the initiative. Only 1, designer, Todhunter Earle, offered to match Derek's £2K funding.

October 2025 Joanna formed a Steering Group (SG). Members: Designers: **Joanna Wood, Tim Gosling, Lavinia Dargie** and **Derek Frost** (retired) plus **Liz Bell** - President - British Institute of Interior Design (BIID) and **Patsy Baker** - Member External Affairs Committee - The Design Museum. **Claire German** - CEO - The Design Centre Chelsea Harbour, also a member, had hoped to attend but sent apologies.

All SG members are contributing their time and expertise on a 'pro bono' basis.

September 2025 Derek Frost preparing a BIFDA draft web site for sharing at SG1.

October 2025 first Steering Group meeting called SG1.

Derek promoted the notion that a 'complete' record of participating designers should include what he described as decorator/interior and furniture designers as well as commercial/retail focused interior and furniture designers. A majority of the SG disagreed and felt strongly that only the sort of designers served by the BIID and the Design Centre Chelsea Harbour should be included. All strongly resisted the term 'decorator' to describe to sort of design professional they hoped the BIFDA record would represent.

Derek presented the initial draft BIFDA web site prepared by him together with Cape Town based web designers Web Factory.

Derek was persuaded that the first priority should be forging an alliance / obtaining the working support of the BIID. Liz Bell agreed to take this proposal to the BIID Council which she did at two meetings held December 2025 and February 2026.

November 2025 DF shared BIFDA web site video tour with SG.

November 2025 Liz Bell- details the creation of a British Archive of Interior Design- and the BIID's possible role in its creation/ ongoing maintenance- for review by the BIID Council

Designers Derek Frost (retired) and Joanna Wood approached me regarding the BIID's support and possible involvement in the creation of a British Archive of Interior Design. Joanna and Derek have gathered the support of a growing number of eminent British designers would like to propose the creation of the: BRITISH INTERIOR AND FURNITURE DESIGNER ARCHIVE

What is proposed is an 'archive', meaning a collection of historical documents or records' - not a 'design directory'; but a 'collective' archive. The archive will preserve, in perpetuity, the work of each featured designer and their contribution within the ever-lengthening spiral of our collective designer DNA.

Only those designers whose work makes a notable and meaningful contribution to the quality and innovation of British interior and furniture design should be included. By maintaining the highest standards and by building slowly and carefully, with the ongoing addition of future distinguished designer's archives, the proposed BIFDA will assume ever greater importance and value as a historical record and academic resource, fostering both education and scholarship.

Both RIBA (<https://www.riba.org/search/?query=Archive>), the Architectural Association (<https://www.aaschool.ac.uk/resources/aa-archives>) hold and develop their own archives. Many other important arts based institutions including the Design Museum (<https://designmuseum.org/search?q=archive>) and The Royal College of Art (<https://www.rca.ac.uk/search/?q=Archive>) do the same.

The BIFDA steering group would be very pleased, if the BIID Council were to take the lead in advancing the birth of the proposed archive and by holding and maintaining the archive into the future.

If the BIID 'hold' the archive, it will help promote the BIID and all the other worthy causes and work the institute does in support of our industry.

BIFDA will:

- Substantially enhance BIID's reputation and stature within the design community and industry*
- Strengthen the importance of the interior design profession by setting down its rich history, its evolving story and the essential contribution it makes, at all levels, to the cultural wealth of our nation*
- BIFDA could be a future source of revenue to the Institute.*

Subject to the BIID's decision on their involvement, it is proposed that the BIID have representation if not the chair/ the majority vote on the BIFDA steering group.

November 2025 Derek shared with the SG a video tour he had prepared of the draft BIFDA web site.



December 2025 Liz Bell (BIID President and SG Member) makes presentation 1 to BIID Council.

February 2026 - SG2. **Lucia van der Post** - Founding Editor - Financial Times 'How to Spend It' and doyen of the Fashion / Design world - now an additional member of the Steering Group attended.

March 2026 BIID response:

The BIFDA initiative was discussed and council unanimously agreed that it is an excellent and worthwhile venture which the BIID is very interested in. We appreciate the question regarding the wording of the BIID's involvement at this early stage (Derek had proposed: 'Developed in Association with the BIID' or 'in Association with the BIID'). Whilst we wish for Liz to remain involved and for the BIID to potentially be involved in the future- at this stage it was felt that the proposal was not clear enough for the BIID to support the formal wording suggested.

For the purposes of building the initiative and getting other designers involved- the BIID are very happy that Liz Bell, President of the BIID, is on the steering group and continuing discussions about advancing this initiative with the BIID.

March 2026 Derek's to Liz Bell:

Thank you BIID for your ongoing support. Your current position is absolutely understandable.

The BIID response and still no response from the Design Museum made it clear that giving birth to the BIFDA initiative would initially need to be advanced independently of formal association with existing Design organisations.

March 2026 SG3 Virtual Meet. **Susie Rumbold** - Past President - British Institute of Interior Design, now became an additional member of the SG.

April 2026 SG4

May 2026 Joanna Wood, the eternal optimist and great enthusiast, described securing designer participation as 'an easy sell'.

February 2026 SG2

February 2026 Liz Bell makes presentation 2 to BIID Council.

Subsequently from Liz Bell: *I get the impression that some council members (not unexpectedly/ unreasonably) are cautious about the BIID formalising*

their involvement without a clear understanding of the long-term implications. Given the whole of council think it is a great idea, I think BIFDA should continue to formalise the project by engaging a few designers to submit entries, get legal advice on the copyright issues and better define the framework for inclusion to the archive. The BIID would very much like to be kept updated on the project.

March 2026 SG3

April 2026 Liz Bell expressed concerns about DF's proposed methodology.

April 2026 Liz Bell and Derek discussed methodology. LB gave her 'reserved' approval.

April 2026 Following more detailed exchanges with Web Factory DF substantially amended proposed methodology and issued to SG. No response received from SG.

May 2026 Derek is still the only designer to have his self compiled archive on the BIFDA site - <https://bifda.org/>. No other self compiled archives have been presented for inclusion.

May 2026 SG4

June 2026 Derek reached the different conclusion (JW 'an easy sell') that the most senior designers and those who had multiple publications to their names would initially be unlikely to see value to themselves in generating their own self compiled archives for the BIFDA record.

April 2026 Derek concluded that with only his own archive currently housed in the BIFDA record that other designers might decide the same; that designers still in mid career would be more focused on running their businesses and not ready to consider compiling their own archives by reflecting back on their career as designers.

It became clear to him that the BIFDA record needed to house multiple archives, to create a tipping point after which selected designers would see more clearly the potential importance of the record and would start, in increasing numbers, to wish to set down and contribute their own archives to it.

Derek therefore embarked on the task of writing a number of third party designer archives to which these designers would subsequently be asked to add further contribution should they wish.

June 2026 Architect and interior designer **Michael Schienke**, a BIID Director, has agreed to join the Steering Committee on a 'pro bono' basis and to assist Derek in his role as BIFDA Administrator.

Derek is developing the view that selected designers are best approached to develop their individual archives at the end of their careers and not prior.

June 2026 Derek has decided to add an important extra page to the web site called **CONTEXT**. His idea is that this page should contain a growing number of pieces on the subject of The Developing History of British Interior and Furniture Design and Designers - written by design historians, commentators and journalists.

