

## Ep #263: AI and Interior Design



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**Tobi Fairley**

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## Ep #263: AI and Interior Design

You are listening to *The Design You Podcast* with Tobi Fairley, episode number 263.

Welcome to *The Design You Podcast*. A show where interior designers and creatives learn to say no to busy and say yes to more health, wealth and joy, here's your host, Tobi Fairley.

Hey, friends, I hope you're well. Today my brain is getting techy. Yeah, I'm not even spending time in the intro, no welcome to April like I did last week, no fun story about my new ecommerce shop, none of that. We're going straight to tech, let's go. I'm thinking about AI, artificial intelligence. And I'm moving into my typical nerd-dom, and this time it's nerd-dom about AI and what impact it's going to have on the interior design creative industries and really the impact it's going to have on our world and larger existence. So I want to talk to you about that today.

I did a little live about it recently and I want to talk about it here too because I think it's really important that we start thinking about this now. So here's what I know for sure. What I know for sure as Oprah would say is that we have no idea how AI is going to really change the world ultimately. I mean really imagine trying to understand ahead of time the impact that the internet was going to have on our whole world, on our whole existence, on our industries. The technological advances that we've seen over the last 20 years have been mind boggling.

When I started my business in 99, a little over 20 years ago, we had one computer at the front of our retail store that we had at the time, my whole staff shared it. We almost never needed it. There was no social media. It was 10 years before I started even blogging. There was no Alexa. There was no asking your computer or your phone to answer every question you had. We certainly weren't walking around with a tiny computer in our hand at all times that was able to do really everything you need to run a whole business with people across the world from your fingertips.

So just imagine what we also don't know about AI. I suspect the possibilities for AI are much bigger than what they were or are for the

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internet. And it's not just me thinking that. I think that once I read a lot about it, but so many thought leaders are saying that they believe that as well. One of the people that I've listened a lot to talk about AI is billionaire, Mark Cuban. And he definitely thinks that AI is going to change the world more than the internet ever did or will. So that can be scary to think about, but with any change there is also opportunity.

So I want to dig into this conversation today and get us focused on thinking about, even though we won't know all the answers, thinking about what the future may hold for us and our business. Because many of us will wait until AI creates a catastrophic situation in our business or has almost put us out of business before we really think about it and before we try to do something about it. And usually when you're at that point, the ability to adapt is often just about too late. So I don't want you waiting to start thinking about this, even if it's sort of scary to face change like this head on.

So some of you may already be thinking about it. Some of you maybe are playing around with some of the technology. If you're not, that's totally okay. That's why I'm doing this episode, but I know a lot of you have been hearing about it, have been reading about it, even testing out and playing with some of the AI software and sites that are popping up.

So some of you are checking out the AI sites that are more about creating written content, sites like ChatGPT where you can type in a command like 'write me a blog post on how to choose paint color'. And it'll generate that content for you probably better than you could write it yourself and a million times faster.

And then some of you are playing around with the other sites that are more about visuals like, I don't even know how to say this, DALL-E2, I think. They have weird names but I guess because they're robots basically. But that one, and there's some others similar to it, they can create realistic images and art from a written description. So like 'show me a mid-century room with green walls, velvet curtains and pink chairs with an eight foot high ceiling'. And it can create that and the images rival a lot of our portfolio images, you all, it is incredible and we're at the beginning.

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Only imagine what's going to be possible in the future. So your brain may be thinking, yeah, Tobi, it creates a pretty picture of a room, but that's not the same thing as working with an interior designer. And to you who are thinking that, I say, not yet, but it's only a matter of time and not even that much time before AI can do a lot of things that interior designers can do, especially the way it will be able to generate that room, that picture and then also put with it, a shopping list that basically replaces eDesign offers. And some of the sites can already do some of these things.

Most of them don't have clickable links, but it can tell you the site or a place. One of the articles I was reading was showing how to get a certain room that it created for 10,000, 30,000 and 100,000. And it showed you which brands of product would hit each one of those price points. So when there's a clickable link added, which I'm sure will be happening sooner than later, then that is basically going to replace every eDesign offer out there.

Because it's either going to be free or super cheap to create both the room and the shopping list. And it will definitely be a million times faster than waiting for a human designer like one of us to select all those items, compile them, make a mood board, make all the clickable links and then send it over to you, which can take weeks. So humans cannot compete with the speed of robots. And AI has the advantage of searching the entire internet which is unimaginably large. All the sources on the internet, it can search quickly and match the request that you put in, in lightning speed.

So what does that mean for full service interior design? Well, who knows. We won't actually know what happens until it happens, it all remains to be seen. But one article I was reading recently from, I think The Business of Home that referenced part of this was suggesting that AI would be able to replace the creative piece for designers and decorators, selecting all the items like we just talked about.

But that designers would still be a need for the service component that can't be done by computers or robots. Meaning managing the job and coordinating the contractors and sub-contractors and making sure they showed up on time and that they stayed on schedule and on budget and

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dealing with supply chain issues and those broken sofa legs and all the damages. And here's what I think about that. Basically the list that this article was saying designers would still be needed for is what I would call all the shit I hate.

So great news, people, the fun creative part can be done by a robot or a computer and all the 'shit I hate' would be the stuff that's left for me to do. So honestly, for me that's a no. That's a no for the future, that's what it looks like. Being able to do the creative work is the thing that bolsters me to be willing to deal with all the headaches of the managing of the job. And honestly I have a team in place to help with a lot of those issues so that I'm not specifically the person dealing with all of them.

So, of course I'm not fully convinced that all creative work, not yet anyway, because we haven't seen enough, that all creative work will be replaced by robots. But I can easily see that if your work is mostly just putting together decor selections based on a lot of product that is already available out on the market and is influenced by a lot of design ideas that already exist in the marketplace or that we've seen in books or been inspired by other people. The internet can find all of that information too.

And so if your work is not a lot about custom pieces and custom design, you're going to be the easiest to replace. Now on the flipside, I read a different article and this one I can't remember exactly where it came from. I'll try to find it and share it on my social media. But it was about architects and their work. And it was talking about how AI definitely is going to benefit architects in so many ways and it'll benefit us designers too.

But that for architects in particular who are going to be coming up with the new creative ideas, not just sourcing product or something like that, that it's going to make their job so much easier and faster, because imagine being able to use AI to create the 3D walkthroughs and all the other visuals that right now are being done by a human using a piece of software. But even though it's a lot faster than if you drew it yourself and the technology is so amazing that we could never do with hand drawn assets. It's going to be

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able to happen super quickly and way cheaper which will move projects along and help the end user have such a better experience.

So yes, I feel confident that there are definitely similar benefits to interior design, but regardless, most of us, if not all of us in design, are going to have to adapt in really big ways to position ourselves to even benefit from those types of opportunities instead of being put out of business by them. So one source that I found was speculating that if design schools, and this might be The Business of Home article, and I'm sorry to not have all of these sources because this is one of the problems, I'll tell you in a second about AI, that won't, also won't necessarily name all their sources.

I'm going to be doing some more research and I'll be bringing you more on this. I'm going to tell you a few articles here in a minute towards the end of this that you go can go take a look at. But I'm going to be sharing more of this on social media and I'll probably come back and do another episode on it probably pretty soon. But it was talking about how design schools hopefully will and some are starting to teach AI in school because that will prepare the next generations of designers that come behind us into the workplace to already be positioned to work with AI instead of being replaced by it.

But the rest of us that are already here that are going to be freaked out by it and not know how to adapt necessarily could easily become dinosaurs depending on whether we are willing to innovate and adapt and learn to partner with AI instead of trying to compete with it. So that's going to be really important. Design isn't the only industry that's going to face this situation, most industries will.

One other example that's easy to imagine because it goes with the other example I gave earlier of ChatGPT where you can just type in, 'write me a blog post about how to select paint colors'. That's going to really impact the writing and copywriting and editing fields because AI can already write remarkably good content for you with a few simple commands.

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And one of the fears that people have, and you do have to be careful with, and this could definitely be true for interior design as well is the fear and the problem of plagiarism because if you're going to ask AI to write you an article or a blog post or even a book on a topic. AI is going to go do that by searching all the web information that's currently out there and compiling it into your content, but likely without crediting the original sources like a writer, or hopefully if you were a writer with integrity you would give credit to.

And that's why I was making fun of myself for not knowing all the sources of these articles. But AI is going to not always tell you or maybe never tell you that it compiled this blog post by looking at all those other content out on the internet. And so there's a huge issue with plagiarism. So that's going to be a huge piece of the future of our content, you all.

Now, just yesterday I did read a post that my friend, Jill, who's a designer, shared with me because we're both having this conversation and sharing some articles back and forth about this. And so she had read a post by Julie Chenell, who is a business coach that I've followed for a while. She's the creator of some software called Funnel Gorgeous.

And she was talking about how angry AI and all the articles about AI are making her, when it comes in particular to writing. And how writing is going to be replaced in large parts by AI because writing is one of her favorite forms of communication and also where and how she developed so many of her best ideas by developing written articles and blog posts and captions. And I really feel the same way. I love to write. I do a lot of writing. I write out my podcasts before I record them.

So she went to speculate in this post that those of us who still want to write and want to connect human to human will likely find each other at some point in this process and band together as we move into the new age of AI. But in some ways even that will be tricky because how will we even be able to tell if someone's content is being written by them, the old fashioned long form way or if it's being written by AI with their name just on it, it just

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happens to be on their blog as them as the author but they were using AI. We're not going to be able to tell.

The same thing with a lot of the interior design, we're not going to be able to tell. And a lot of articles that I've been reading including a lot of the articles that were in The Business of Home, one is on [businessofhome.com](http://businessofhome.com). And then it links to some other articles. They were talking about the same scenario really about how Julie was saying it's going to be important for us to band together those of us that still want human to human connection.

This article was talking about how it's going to be more important than ever for creatives and designers to show up on video content and with their faces and in podcasts and things just like this where it is your voice and your personality and your face. And I agree with them so much because it can create static or still images that look just as good as our portfolio images and be on a site like Instagram that rivals or even outperforms our images.

It's going to be more important than ever for us to show up on video and show our face and talk about our work and share our ideas and our experiences and give our audience a connection point through video content as opposed to hiding behind those static portfolio images that we've loved hiding behind for years. So yes, at some point AI probably even replaces videos. I've seen situations where on a podcast or on a customer service call, or even potentially on a video where you can't tell the difference if it's a real human or not.

But one of the things that we can do in the short run is continue to use video and podcasts and our voices and show up and be our very authentic self. Because we will then attract a group of people that want to engage with us specifically and hear our ideas and connect with us in a way that they can't just connect with our static images. So for all of you that hate reels and hate TikTok, whether it gets banned or not, reels won't get banned or at least not at the moment.



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And if you hate those and you've been hoping and praying that Instagram really does prioritize those still images again, those photos again, you might want to think twice about that. Because you may just be wishing for Instagram to create the perfect opportunity for AI to replace us all over the app with ease with their static images that those AI produced static images that look just as good as our work. And yes, I get that we humans don't like to change and we're always wishing for things to 'go back to the way they were before'.

But my experience is that there is almost never really going back to anything because the world has moved on. And we may not have moved on but the world definitely has. And so when we don't move with it we're getting left behind while we sit there and wish for the past. So I don't want to pretend in this podcast I have all the answers or even any answers. I have none yet. All I've done is been a knowledge broker for you right now, shared with you things that I've read from other people and other sources and other thought leaders.

I'm still developing my own opinion on this. I don't even know what I think yet. I know what I agree with, that some of these people have said today. But I'm along for this ride just like you are right now. And I am a creative, not a tech guru. But I'm paying attention and I'm watching and I'm listening and I'm learning and that futuristic part of me, you may have heard me say before that when I take the StrengthsFinder 2.0 test, my number three strength is futuristic.

And that part of me that's always looking to what's coming next and what's happening in the future and what should I be planning for and how can I be nimble and adaptive and weather changes that come and not just weather them but excel in them. That part of me is on high alert right now and it's really interested in what's happening. So I hope I'm inspiring you to also become aware and start paying attention and start reading about this. Google is your friend right now as it often is for things like this.

Start doing some research on Google about how AI is going to impact your industry, if that's the design industry or a different industry, how AI is going

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to impact the world and start listening to thought leaders on AI. Ironically one of the articles I read was talking about how AI will even replace the leadership in the future because it will be AI that is going out and gathering information from things that already exist on the internet and putting those out as those thought pieces, can you imagine?

It's so fascinating of what is going to happen and what the possibilities are. If it replaces a lot of manual labor, if it replaces writing and drafting and technology, if it replaces creativity in many ways. I mean what's it going to be like to be living in a world run by robots and computers a million times more than our current world is? It's really interesting. It feels like and sounds like a sci-fi movie, but a lot of it is on its way. And it's not all bad. We don't have to just be terrified. It can be scary and there's scary parts of it as there always are with change. But there's also opportunity and possibility.

So what we do know is that it'll be different, we can guarantee that. There will be change, but we don't know what parts of it are going to be good and what parts of it are going to be bad. So it's really important to just be open, to be open, to be willing to learn and grow and adapt. Now, some of the articles that may interest you that I've mentioned, parts and pieces from today, there's one called The Room That Designed Itself, it was written back in February by Elle Décor which is really interesting. You can Google that.

Also The Business of Home article that I keep referencing is called What Designers Need to Know about the AI Revolution. And then within that article there are links to several other articles. You can also Google, Mark Cuban and AI, Mark Cuban and AI, put that in the search. Because he's involved in a lot of stuff with the AI field. He has something called AI Bootcamp. It's a non-profit organization that he started that teaches underserved high school students across the US about AI, to help increase AI literacy and their understanding to get them prepared for the future.

But he's often interviewed also and quoted a lot in articles on podcasts. I know he was on Jon Stewart about what he thinks about AI and what it will

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do to change the world. And then also I found some articles where he's really talking about how important it's going to be to be really careful when using it and the problems that are going to potentially arise depending on who controls AI. And he's talked a lot about the danger of AI depending on who controls the models that are being created to run AI and who's in charge of the information that goes into those.

So that's the kind of dark and scary part, how AI could take on a life of its own. So there's definitely a huge moral and ethical component to the advancement of AI. And we've already seen that. I don't know if any of you have watched a lot of those documentaries about Facebook.

And I can't remember the one right now that came out during the pandemic, that kind of blew all of our minds. But it was a lot about what really goes on morally and ethically behind the scenes with social media and the power of social media. And how a lot of the people who were developing a lot of the algorithms wouldn't even let their kids on social media. And so I'm sure it's going to be that times 10,000 or 10 million when it comes to AI and who's developing it and who's programming it and putting the information into it.

So definitely there's potential for some things to be dark, to be ominous, probably to be criminal as in anything that's created in life, but there's also so much possibility. So your minds are going to be blown again in the next few years, I'll put me in there too, our minds. Technology's moving at light speed. We can't keep up with it. We have no idea what's coming.

I mean I was just listening the other night, I didn't watch all of the Oscars, a couple, a few weeks ago. But what I did watch was at the end when the best picture award was given to *Everything Everywhere All At Once*. And one of the Daniel's, one of the creators, they're both named Daniel. One of them said that he was worried about the film industry and about the future of the film industry. Because he was talking about how life moves at the speed of minutes or even seconds like in social media in real time. People are always updating everything.

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And in particular he was talking about storytelling. And if storytelling is happening every second in the world in social media by millions and millions of people, but to create a story through the movies, just one story can take two years to create or more. He said, "How in the world can movies ever keep up with storytelling?" And he was talking about how he's afraid that the art of storytelling could be a lost art if movies can't keep up with this process which is really interesting.

And so I feel like we're going to think that more and more and more than we even already do about a lot of things. How do we keep up when things and technology is moving this fast? And we may not be able to, but we also won't have a choice. We don't get to have a lot of say in the matter of what's happening necessarily unless we're working in tech at some level. But we're going to live through it. We're going to experience it. And we will have to learn to adapt in all sorts of ways.

I'm sure there will be movements that arise to slow things down. We've seen that happen in other parts of the world in the last few years. The slow food movement in response to the fast food movement. And responses to things like fast fashion and disposable home products. And going back to craft in human made content, I'm sure will become a counter movement to AI, but it doesn't mean that it will make a dent in the speed of AI or that it will combat the changes that AI is going to be making in any significant way.

So we may be able to carve out little moments and places and be part of movements that feel better to us than other parts, but either way, we're going to experience some major changes. And whether we like it or not we're going to have to join in at some level or we're going to become obsolete. So remember, don't just be terrified, become aware, remember that beautiful things have come from technological advances. I'm sure we're all glad we have cars and airplanes and aren't still on horseback.

I'm sure we're thrilled for a lot of the technology advancements in medicine, in health. There's so many beautiful things. The internet is amazing for education and learning. There's beautiful things that can happen. So we

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can choose to be open to the change or even optimistic. We can choose to be if we want to be. And I find that personally the way I stay most optimistic and open is to stay informed and to be willing to get really curious and to be willing to envision and dream about the possibilities and to be willing to try things and to adapt.

You've heard me say this before and I'll say it again, I have made changes in my business model that really have become a life philosophy for us and that is making change our business model. And so I practice embracing change even when I'm scared. I decide to embrace it on purpose because for me, excitement about change creates possibility. And when I get fearful about change it moves me into scarcity and it shuts me down. So I'm going to choose excitement over fear. And you may have heard the concept before that excitement or that fear is just excitement without the breath.

So stay in excitement, breathe through this in whatever that means for you, breathe, go for walks, meditate. Take moments when you feel overwhelmed and breathe through it to stay excited about the possibility because fear will shut us down. And one simple example that I'm currently noodling just to show you. The way I get excited is, as I've talked about, I'm opening an ecommerce shop in just a few weeks. And so when I think about AI and how it could replace things like eDesign or even parts of interior design, right now the conversation is not about replacing physical products.

It's going to send a link to where to go shopping, but it's not going to replace that shop. So when I think about that I'm like, "There's maybe some diminishing opportunities in eDesign, maybe, maybe not, we'll see, but there could be increased opportunity in ecommerce. Maybe I become a person, a company that is doing more work in ecommerce because I'm partnering with AI instead of working against it.

And so the onus is on the ecommerce shop, if you're going to want to really be successful to partner with AI because you've got to have unique products or customized products or things that don't exist in other places. Because guess what, if you just have everything everybody else is

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carrying, AI is just going to go search and tell the customer where it's on sale right now, and it'll be a price comparison. So I can't compete with that model as a tiny store versus a company like Amazon or a huge ecommerce that does huge volume with deep discounts that they can pass on to the consumer.

But what I can do is I can curate or even create unique product that's only sold through my business so that there is no competition for those things. So I'm excited. I don't know what exactly that means for the future. Right now I get to keep selling as normal because AI hasn't taken over eDesign quite yet and it hasn't taken over interior design quite yet. So I get to move ahead as business as usual with both of those things and with the new ecommerce shop. But I also can be imagining if this happens then that, if this, then that.

So if this thing happens with eDesign what does that mean for our ecommerce and how can we use it to grow? So that's just one teeny, tiny example. I don't know if that's actually something that will come to pass. I don't know if any of that will be true. But it's where I let my brain go instead of fear. I get excited and I dream about possibility and I use it to propel myself and the various parts of my business forward for growth instead of shutting down and moving to procrastination.

Okay, so I'm excited about possibilities. I'm curious about where we're headed. And I hope that you will adopt both excitement and curiosity too so that you can get creative about your own business and start to figure out how you can think differently. And how you can dream and how you can believe the ideas enough to bring them to life in ways that will partner with or be enhanced by technology like AI in the future. And that's not the only technology, we'll see. Things are going to keep changing.

So I hope you'll use this as an opportunity to become more adaptable, to maybe even accept change as your business model, one that you practice. So that you can be not only resilient to change but thriving and grow and change in the future.

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Okay, friends, that's what I have for now. I'll be over here continuing to dream big for the future of working with AI, not trying to compete with it. And you know what, I think back, it's really interesting. For those of you, just real quick before we wrap up, that are feeling really scared of this. I remember way back in 2018 which seems like a long time ago now. I did a webinar called, Is This the End of Interior Design? And over 600 people registered for that webinar, more than I'd ever had at any webinar.

And at the time I was talking about changes in the internet and direct consumer sales and the customer becoming our major competition. I wasn't thinking about a pandemic which happened later. I sure wasn't thinking about AI. I wasn't thinking about any of this stuff, but my message was the same back then in 2018, adapt or die. And so many of you did adapt, I'm so proud of you, you adapted during the pandemic. You started doing things virtually.

So I just want to remind you, you have been through change before. You will go through change again and you can stay curious and stay resilient. And you don't have to be afraid of it. Way back then when I taught that webinar, some people were really, really scared. I taught that seminar and I had some people email me that were angry, that were terrified, that said I was fear mongering and they were having panic attacks of what was going to happen in their business, and I get that. You could choose that.

You could read these articles and go into a total panic, but that's not going to help you at all. So stay curious, stay positive, think about the opportunities because you've overcome change before. You can overcome change again. You can work with it. You can grow and it's actually potentially going to be really, really fun.

Okay, so go think about it. Go journal about it. And if you're freaked out or even just excited, DM me. DM me on Instagram @tobifairley. Tell me what scares you. Tell me if you have an idea. Send me any articles that you're loving about this. We can bat around ideas. I'm all for it. Nothing excites me more than living in possibility and imagining what we can do in the future.

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Okay friends, that's what I have for you for now and I'll see you back here next week with another great episode. I think it's an interview if I recall, on *The Design You Podcast*. So I'll see you soon, bye for now.

Thanks for listening to the *Design You Podcast*. And if you're an interior designer or creative looking to up-level your business, I have something for you.

It's my Build a Better Business Guide because burnout, rampant undercharging and the feast and famine cycle are epidemic in the design industry. And there's a better way to run your business. So head to [tobifairley.com/betterbusiness](https://tobifairley.com/betterbusiness) and get my manifesto and guide that will have you on your way to a business with more ease, more joy, and more money. That's [tobifairley.com/betterbusiness](https://tobifairley.com/betterbusiness).