**SmithGroup Forecasts Trends for Design in the 2020s**

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DETROIT, December 20, 2019 – As the oldest continually operating architecture and engineering firm in the country, SmithGroup has seen many changes in the world of design. The firm is always focused on its mission to Design a Better Future, so at the dawn of the 2020s they are anticipating what the coming decade will bring to the design industry and profession. As designers, SmithGroup believes that they can be more than advocates and advisors – they believe that they can be lobbyists and leaders for monumental changes that will have a broad impact on our communities and society.

In order to get a broad perspective on what our future might look like, the firm recognized that there was no better resource to tap than their team of 1,300 design professionals whose expertise stretches across a wide breadth of disciplines. Insights came from entry level designers to the firm’s most senior leaders and everyone in between, leading to a vision that anticipates four major drivers for design in the decade ahead:

**Design & Technology**

Like most professions, technology has had a major impact on design. This will increase at a more rapid pace in the decade ahead and will affect every stage of the design process.

At the early stages of design, “visualization tools will become more realistic and immersive, leading to a future where collaboration between the owner, contractor and designers will be far more integrated,” predicts [Wayne Barger](https://www.smithgroup.com/people/wayne-barger), health practice director.

As automation and the Internet of Things (IoT) continue to grow, designers are looking at how they can enable the experience that people have in the built environment and find ways to make buildings more responsive to occupants. “The connected environment along with personal technologies will provide ever-increasing customization for occupants,” says chief information officer [Derek White](https://www.smithgroup.com/people/derek-white).

All of this technology leaves designers with tremendous amounts of data, yet most firms are just beginning to figure out what to do with it. “Those firms that can identify the most creative ways to visualize and simplify increasingly inordinate amounts of diverse data down to its most essential insights will be the ones to emerge as leaders within this new decade,” says [Lauren Leighty](https://www.smithgroup.com/people/lauren-leighty), a landscape architect and campus studio leader in the firm’s Ann Arbor office.

Read more about SmithGroup’s predictions for how [technology](https://www.smithgroup.com/perspectives/2019/the-decade-ahead-design-technology-in-2020-and-beyond) will impact design in the next ten years.

**Design & Climate**

While technology holds a high degree of promise for the design industry, the issue of climate change presents a tremendous risk in the decade ahead. “All designers will need to become more adept at understanding challenges that are not only faced by our individual discipline, but that touch multiple disciplines and require a truly integrated approach,” says Jessica Janzen, an architect in Dallas.

The way that energy resources are used needs to continue to evolve – practices that are the exception will become the norm. “Everything we design in 2020 and beyond should be net-zero energy or net-zero energy capable, achieving the maximum energy efficiency possible while being designed to accommodate future renewable systems,” says [Greg Mella](https://www.smithgroup.com/people/greg-mella), corporate director of sustainability.

“Buildings will have to be self-sustaining, regenerative and adaptable to human needs while still harmonious with the natural environment and the changes it brings with it,” asserts [Sven Shockey](https://www.smithgroup.com/people/sven-shockey), corporate design director in the Washington, DC office.

The good news is that thoughtful design can make a difference. “The challenge for the industry is to not just design spaces that prevent impacts of disasters, but understand what new design environments may be,” says [Laura Holman](https://www.smithgroup.com/people/laura-holman), an architect in Chicago.

Read more about how the [climate](https://www.smithgroup.com/perspectives/2019/the-decade-ahead-design-climate-in-2020-and-beyond) crisis will influence the design industry in the 2020s.

**Design & Cities**

Advancements in technology and climate changes will also have a significant impact in the shape of cities in the decade ahead. Urban systems must be prepared for these changes. “Cities, institutions and communities will turn their attention away from building-scale sustainability to focus on adaptation and implementation of more equitable support structures within communities. We’ll be designing for massive adaptation strategies at all scales,” claims urban systems strategist [Steven Baumgartner](https://www.smithgroup.com/people/steven-baumgartner) in SmithGroup’s Pittsburgh office.

The impact of technology on transportation, will cause a major disruption in the way we cities are designed. Urban design co-director [Michael Johnson](https://www.smithgroup.com/people/michael-johnson) agrees, “As new technologies and innovative business models pave the way for more resilient transportation solutions, alternative multimodal transit systems will become more popular.”

Read more about the firm’s forecast for the impact of [cities](https://www.smithgroup.com/perspectives/2019/the-decade-ahead-design-cities-in-2020-and-beyond) in the next decade.

**Design & Social Change**

While technology, climate and cities are all changing, the people will need to change too. The 2020s will be an era of challenging systemic inequalities and prejudices and accepting the richness of experience our diverse society presents. The firm anticipates seeing, “inclusive design for buildings and sites that will challenge long-held, but veiled, attitudes toward historically marginalized and at-risk identities,” says [Lori Singleton](https://www.smithgroup.com/people/lori-singleton), corporate design director in Ann Arbor.

Designers will grapple with how spaces either promote or obstruct equity and will need to incorporate critical race theory, intersectionality and other social theories to decode existing spatial inequities and create more inclusive places. “Design will address gender and racial equity in the built environment,” says [Merrill St. Leger](https://www.smithgroup.com/people/merrill-st-leger), urban designer for SmithGroup in Washington, DC.

As designers who are influencing the built environment for years to come, it will be critical to ensure that all voices are heard. “Our industry must widen the net of inclusion. Design affects all of us, and must be made by all of us,” says [John Moorhead](https://www.smithgroup.com/people/john-moorhead), architect in the firm’s Boston office.

Read more about how design will respond to [social change](https://www.smithgroup.com/perspectives/2019/the-decade-ahead-design-social-change-in-2020-and-beyond) in the 2020s.

In the days and weeks ahead, SmithGroup will be publishing more in-depth content about their vision for the 2020s in the Collections section of smithgroup.com. Be sure to check back and learn more about their thoughts on what it will take to Design a Better Future in the 2020s. https://www.smithgroup.com/the-decade-ahead-design-in-2020-and-beyond

**SmithGroup** (www.smithgroup.com) is one of the world’s preeminent integrated design firms. Working across a network of 15 offices in the U.S. and China, a team of 1,300 experts is committed to excellence in strategy, design, and delivery. The scale of the firm’s thinking and organization produces partnerships with forward-looking clients that maximize opportunities, minimize risk and solve their most complex problems. SmithGroup creates exceptional design solutions for healthcare, science and technology organizations, higher education and cultural institutions, urban environments, diverse workplaces, mixed-use and waterfront developments, and parks and open spaces.

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