



**Nien Siao, Dean JS Institute of Design  
in conversation with  
Ar.Kritika Juneja, Editor Interior Exterior**

**KJ: So, to begin with, could you tell us about your early brush with design? How has your background and upbringing influenced your design principles?**

NS: Let me start by saying thanks for coming. Kritika, it is really nice to get the chance to meet you. I am sure we will be able to open up a lot more face to face. Initially, I was not really trained as an interior designer. Instead I trained as a textile designer from NID many years ago, when interior design was a rarity, fashion design was almost nonexistent, and there were only a few fields available to study in design, such as product design, textile design, etc. Following my education, I worked in home furnishings for many years, with some of these companies, like ITC Exports, Tara Development, Indian Cornucopia, Anokhi, and a number of these companies with which I worked for many years before I started working for Good Earth. I was able to gain a sense of that interior space is something that really has its own kind of market through working with them. However, even that time, architects were handling it, and it just seemed to me that maybe they would be the ones in charge. In the course of time, we realized that designers needed some soft skills, to be able to design, so that a certain personality of the person implementing that space, and the comfort factor in that space begins to take on a much bigger meaning. However, I started working in the field of education quite early on, maybe a few years after my work in the industry. In my early days, I worked in textiles and fashion, and that's what I focused on, but in the last few years I have mostly been involved with education management.

My opinion is that education needs to be managed, designed, implemented, and developed by designers, not just educators. As a journalist, if you have a background in design, architecture, whatever, you are going to have a much deeper understanding, and that expression will come out in the writings that all designers, or younger designers, should follow. Likewise, I felt education needed people with a real core background, and that's where I spent the last 15 to 17 years of my life. Further, I also manage and teach

# Bridging a systemic gap in education

in some areas of digital design, such as digital product design, game design, and visual communication. By working with different specialists, specialisms, we can expand the way we learn to teach as well.

**KJ: How has your journey been with JS Institute of Design so far?**

NS: My early 10-12 years were primarily dedicated to practice and a small bit of education. So I have a lot of experience in both education and practice. I have worked in education for the last two decades, and my experience led me to JS Institute of Design with the aim of influencing and contributing not only to the field of design but also to a number of other areas that are currently covered by me. The first thing I want to do is to ensure that education is the focus of all attention. We will have happier, wiser, better designers with better ambitions to be on the market if we train teachers well and if they start figuring out their methods of teaching. Additionally, education should not be viewed as merely preparing people for a future career. Careers are very limited. We need to think of education as something that will build lives, communities, and people.

**KJ: Considering 1000-years old heritage backing us, it is important to find a balance between modernisation and our traditional cultural values. How in your opinion can we bring technology, art, and cultural context together in a progressive yet balanced way?**

NS: As a designer, I believe that every student who attends design courses should learn design in context, including the people for whom you are going to design. My philosophy is that children should be exposed to both culture, technology, and society. Being human-centered is one of the principals of design. This means you have to understand society. Understanding the cultural background of the person you are designing for is crucial. Aside from that, you can't ignore technology. Technology is taking us forward in many ways, and we have to keep up with it, or maybe even get ahead of it. That's the only way we can discover technology that works for us and not get awed by something like AI, which is troubling many people. It's because we feel we can't control technology. Humans cannot always divert all development to what they can control.

**KJ: Being an architect and a writer, I understand the importance of clear communication and self-presentation. How in your opinion should communication be incorporated into every curriculum?**

NS: Communication is all about giving voice to your students, about them having an opinion and being able to express it. Though our curriculum is delivered in English, we want every student to be able to speak, articulate, explain, so we encourage them to learn a universal language like English when they come in, but if they have another base language, like Hindi, we start them off with that expression, because it's more important that they express themselves than learn a language. Each module or project has presentations where students present, and they become better and better as time goes on. Initially, yes, there is nervousness. And then as they start learning to present, they learn to express their opinions. They start giving views on how things should be and how they would do it as an individual.

**KJ: I understand you have some programs. How do you think this global exposure helps the child grow as an individual?**

NS: As I mentioned, we have exchange programs with interior design, but on the other hand, we also have game design, digital product design, and visual communication. These are an affiliation with a French design college named École Intuit Lab. It has seven other centres worldwide and Delhi is one of them. So our students have the opportunity to undergo an exchange experience after a while, after they've been here for a while, and they are given the choice of where they want to go, whether it is a national centre, or an international one. In my opinion, going into a different culture, a different group of people, learning to adapt, and working together is a great experience.