

Industrial Designer

Decide what a physical product looks like, feels like and how it works before a factory builds a million of them.

TYPICAL PAY

\$83,910

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$53k to \$140k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

4 to 5 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

**Design studios, model shops,
factories, in-house product teams**

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
Art, shop, physics and any computer drafting class. Build things with your hands and photograph everything you make.
- 2 Portfolio for admission** Final year of high school
Most design programs review a portfolio alongside your grades. Sketches, models and finished objects, not just finished drawings.
- 3 Four-year degree** 4 years
Industrial design or product design. The federal profile lists a bachelor's degree as the usual requirement, plus a portfolio of design projects when you apply for jobs.
- 4 Internship or co-op** Summers or a full semester
One or two placements inside a studio or a manufacturer. This is the single biggest factor in getting hired afterward.
- 5 Junior designer** 2 to 3 years
Sketching options, building models, fixing details on somebody else's project. Two or three years before you lead your own.

Pros and cons

- + You make real objects that end up in people's hands
- + Solid pay for a creative career, with a median near \$84,000
- + A mix of drawing, building and engineering rather than only one
- The federal profile expects average growth and not many openings, so it is a competitive field
- Most of your ideas get killed by cost, tooling or a committee
- Portfolio pressure never really stops

Optional boosts

CAD (computer-aided design) and surface modeling. Prototyping and 3D printing. Design for manufacturing. User research.

Good to know

You can patent how a thing looks

A design patent covers the ornamental appearance of a product, not its function, and lasts 15 years from the date it is granted for applications filed since May 2015. If the shape is dictated purely by h...

The portfolio outranks the diploma

The federal career profile for this job says applicants typically need an electronic portfolio of design projects. Nobody is going to ask for your transcript, and everybody is going to scroll through your work.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Commercial and Industrial Designers (27-1021.00)
Industrial Designers Society of America
National Association of Schools of Art and Design
United States Patent and Trademark Office: design patents

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/industrial-designer>



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