Experiential Design – Rethinking relations between people, objects and environments

• Paper / Proposal Title:

Interior design is a verb: spatial voice in student housing

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• Abstract (300 words):

Interior design is a verb, not a noun. As design professionals we often consider the interior to be a static object; a noun like ‘building’, ‘chair’, or ‘hat’. This paper proposes that interior design is an action, an occupation in the physical sense, a taking up of space - a verb. It is further posited that interior design is like speaking or arguing in that it is to have a voice in a space and a conversation with the wider world. This is based in the premise that we don’t just exist in an environment as a passive object within another object, rather we do design to show that we exist, and how we want the world to be. This has significance for the design of spaces that accommodate people from diverse geographic and cultural backgrounds, such as student housing. When students feel their voices are not heard and that their identities are not recognized this can result in feelings of isolation, loneliness and cultural alienation, this in turn impacts academic engagement and retention. This paper gives background to student housing design trends in Australia with reference to wider global context. It presents a major finding from recent PhD research into the spatial experiences of belonging in boarding school for Indigenous students in Western Australia; that interior architecture should facilitate a spatial voice for occupants in order to increase a sense of belonging for all. The impacts of a spatial voice
are described along with consequences of it’s absence, and finally components of a strategy for allowing a spatial voice in architecture are outlined.

• **Author(s) Biography (200 words each):**

Insert 200 biography here – Century Gothic Font only / Justified both sides

Emma is a graduate of interior architecture at Curtin University, where she is now a PhD candidate and sessional academic. Her PhD investigates how interior architecture can increase a sense of belonging for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young women attending boarding schools in Western Australia. She is interested in high density student accommodation and the ways in which it can be designed to reduce social isolation and increase a sense of belonging for students while away from home. She has previously worked as an interior designer, in student accommodation, and in youth work and draws on personal experience moving from a small rural town to university in Perth. Emma has also contributed to research projects relating to sustainable construction, digital storytelling, and models for higher education based on an Indigenous worldview.