



ASK the designer...

Q&A

What are the advantages for a homeowner in regard to using an Interior Decorator?

A good decorator can save his client both time and money. In this age of busy schedules (with time being a persons most valuable resource) a decorator knows exactly where to find the right elements for the homeowner's project. That means the client doesn't have to spend their free time running from store to store to find just the right pieces. As a decorator, I am out shopping every single day, therefore I know where to find things quickly for a particular job. The professional decorator also brings with him a full stable of sources for everything from carpenters to upholsterers to drapery workrooms.

What should we look for when selecting a decorator?

First and foremost, in my opinion, is a personality match. You are going to be spending a great deal of time with this person and your styles should mesh. When interviewing potential decorators, I would make certain that we communicated well and that they fully understood exactly what it is I was trying to accomplish.

Care to elaborate on that?

Well, I think sometimes decorators get into trouble because they simply don't listen to what the client is trying to relate to them. I believe the decorators primary responsibility is to listen to the client, discern what it is the homeowner wants to achieve, interpret those ideas, and finally implement them in a timely fashion within the clients budget.

What are some of the frustrations you have heard from those who may have had a less

than pleasant experience when working with a designer?

Hands down, the number one complaint has been a failure to listen on the part of the decorator. It seems many in my field are intent on implementing "their look" regardless of what the client wants. It is a major disservice, not only to the client, but also to those of us in this field.

What should one expect to pay for a decorator's services?

There are probably as many different billing practices as there are decorators. Having said that, most of us derive our income from a combination of fees and/or discounts and commis-



Photo by Woody Woodliff

sions negotiated with vendors and services. Much of an interior decorators compensation comes from those suppliers and not directly from the client. Billing methods vary from decorator to decorator and job to job. I employ a

project/retainer fee for the creative part of the process and rely on the discount/commission structure for any goods and services. I have found this practice doesn't penalize my clients for using my services. There are a fair number of professionals who employ an hourly fee and/or a cost-plus payment arrangement. This means they charge 20-50% above the actual cost of goods or services. I just don't want to have my customers "watching the clock" and wondering about unnecessary billing.

What criteria should a homeowner use when selecting a decorator?

Probably the best criterion is referral. Find someone whose work you know or have seen.



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These days many decorators have web sites and you can see extensive portfolios of their projects. Make certain the designer has done similar projects in scale and budget to yours. Get references. And I cannot stress this enough: find someone who listens and who will implement your style.

Now, to reverse things a bit. What are some frustrations decorators have with clients?



Photo by Woody Woodliff

Oh boy Are you trying to trap me? (laughs) A decorator's nightmare is an indecisive client. Someone frozen by fear of making a mistake. Look, when all is said and done, this is JUST decorating...

not a life-threatening situation. (laughs) The client, at some point MUST make decisions or the projects grinds to a halt. And this costs everyone time and money. The bottom line is that once you have hired a decorator, you need to put your trust in them and their ability. I once had a surgeon for a client and we had a very difficult time keeping his project on schedule because he was so wishy-washy. I finally explained to him that, just as his patients trusted him when they were on his operating table, the time had come for him to put that same trust in me as a professional in my field. He did and his project turned out wonderfully. It was a "leap of faith", but it was a good decision.

What areas of expertise could we expect

to find from a decorator?

I'm sure that varies from person to person.

However, most of us are proficient in color and fabric selections (and how they relate to each other... creating "flow"). Perception of space and its utilization; selection and compatibility of furniture styles, specialized painting and finishing techniques, direction for selecting flooring, counter top materials and cabinetry and the selection and fabrication of custom bedding and window treatments. I personally do a lot of bath and kitchen updating, but I've also bought bed linens, towels, dishes and flatware for clients. We try to do whatever the client wants done. Lately, a big part of my business is assisting homeowners who are building custom homes with the hundreds of decisions they are going to be required make.

Any closing words of wisdom?

At the end of the day, a good interior decorator should be able to take your HOUSE and make it your HOME. Personally, I try to be straightforward, direct, plainspoken, unpretentious and opinionated. After all, isn't that what it boils down to? The client is paying for a decorator's professional opinion. I believe it is my job to learn the customers needs and desires and make them a reality.

NOTE: Jackie Glisson is a nationally-acclaimed Interior Decorator who has appeared on HGTV'S "DESIGNERS' CHALLENGE". He has been in business since 1996 and is based in Memphis, TN. He has clients in New York, Florida, California, Arizona, Nevada, Illinois and Tennessee. You may see his portfolio at www.justadecorator.com.