

How To Choose an Interior Designer

By Mike Dunn

For a task as important as redecorating your home, it might be wise to enlist some professional help. After all, this is your home and you will have to live with the results for potentially a long time.

So how do you go about hiring an interior designer?

The obvious choice is to look in the paper to review the qualifications and type of work they have done in the past. Another way is to seek out business owners, friends and family members who have hired an interior designer in the past. Ask them for a referral, especially if they had a positive experience, and also for any tips they might have to offer. If you don't have anyone to request referrals from, that's not a problem. Go to different showrooms and ask who is responsible for a design that you particularly like. You could get referrals that way. Another great resource is the American Society of Interior Decorators (ASID). Local designers will be listed online and can be found by visiting www.asid.org.

This next issue is important. Decide how you want the redecorating to go before talking to a designer. Be open to suggestions, but determine in your mind the direction you want to go. How can you be sure of what direction you want the project to go? You first have to know what you like. Take some time to look at pictures in magazines, advertisements and furniture showrooms. This will give you an idea of the style you prefer. This will help both you and the designer to launch ahead with some plans and ideas and it will also help to keep the two of you on the same page.

Anticipate ahead of time what the designer will need and be prepared. Designers will ask things like who the space is being designed for and what activities will go on there, and they will want a time frame and a budget as well. The more information you can provide, the more successful your designer will be in meeting your expectations.

Talk to at least three designers and get their input and cost estimates. You will be working closely with this person, so take personality into consideration along with other factors. Stay away from designers who seem to have their own agenda. They have their opinion about what would look good, but this is your home and your project. A good way to determine if a designer will work for you and with you is to ask how much you can be personally involved in the project. If the designer

objects you may want to consider someone else. The right designer for you is the one who will make your ideas come alive.

When interviewing, always ask to see a portfolio. Every designer worth hiring will have a portfolio of past projects along with professional credentials and client references. Don't be afraid to check out the information that is provided. One mark of a good designer is the ability to adapt to a variety of styles while working within the price range of his or her client. You want someone who not only reflects your style, but also does it within your budget.

Also, make sure they are a qualified interior designer. Many states require a person to have training and licensed to be an interior designer. Remember that interior decorators are not the same as interior designers. A designer has more comprehensive training and is able to handle all aspects of your project, including such things as scheduling subcontractors.

After the interviewing process is done, compare estimates but remember that the cheapest estimate might not come from the best designer to hire. Keep in mind that differences in each proposal reflect variables such as level of service and quality.

Perhaps Kelly Gale Amen said it best. "People have to be aware of what the designer really does. If you just want merchandised goods, there are many people who can do that. But if you want a home that provides a cocoon for your emotions -- from joyful amusement to solace and serenity, then you have to choose the designer who is right for you." Choosing the right designer can mean all the difference to your project.