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How to hire an interior designer

by Nick Lee, Former Head of Marketing & PR of the British Interior Design Association & Director of Niche PR, the UK's only PR consultancy exclusively for interior designers.

Hiring a designer means you won't have any of the stress usually associated when dealing with tradesmen and suppliers. A designer will not only save you time and effort, but money too, avoiding costly mistakes and passing on trade discounts where possible. Remember that you are not just using the skills of the designer, but also their trusted team of tradespeople and suppliers.

So how do you go about selecting the right designer? The best place to start is the British Institute of Interior Design (BIID) www.biid.org.uk - you can explore their members throughout the country and worldwide - with each having the necessary insurances, qualifications and experience, and where you can see images of their style and type of work. I would recommend that you see three or four designers, you not only need to like a designer's style but you need to get on with them too. Another online source is www.interiordesigners.net or any of Niche PR's 10 mostly award winning interior designer clients.

It is vital that you give your designer as much information as possible about your lifestyle and tastes - gather interior images from magazines, collect paint or fabric swatches and styles you like. It is also important to be receptive to your designer's ideas. 3D CAD visuals or freehand drawings are sometimes used and presented to a client to convey an original concept, which allows for amendments as the client wishes or as the design evolves.

It is important to discuss your budget from the start. The way designers charge for their services vary on the size of the project. Overall there are four main ways of charging...

- **A set fee is often used when the job involves complex structural renovations as well as decorating the interiors. In these cases the designer may agree a percentage of the contract as their fee, which can be around 15% for projects up to £250,000.**
- **Mark ups are usually adopted for smaller or pure decorating jobs. All designers can buy materials at trade prices and may charge the retail price and take their fee from the mark-up.**
- **Hourly rate - most designers offer a service whereby they will produce room schemes but leave the client to carry out or oversee the work themselves. This consultation is charged at an hourly rate, varying tremendously according to expertise and experience and could be anything from £75 an hour upwards. Some designers offer a free first consultation.**
- **Combination - for example a designer may charge an hourly rate for producing schemes and then charge retail prices and materials, or they may take a 5% design fee and then take a percentage of the mark-up on materials.**

Every job and price is different, it is recommended that you put aside around 15% as a contingency to allow for any unforeseen issues that arise or any changes to the scheme.

So, whether you have a blank canvas or just want to refresh what you already have, hiring a designer will open the door to a realm of possibilities, through which you can wander at leisure while someone else does all the hard work. ■