

# Working with an Interior Designer



Many homeowners opt for decorating on their own, but savvy ones understand that working with a trained professional can cut down on mistakes, save time and money, and usually result in a more creative space. *Gentry Home* discussed the advantages of working with a designer with Martin P. Mitchell, President of Martin Perri Interiors.

**Gentry Home:** When a client is considering hiring an interior designer, what are the most important things he or she should consider?

**Martin P. Mitchell:** Hiring an interior designer is an important decision, and the relationship between the client and the designer is a very personal one. When searching for the right designer, we encourage clients to consider the designer's professional history, talent, and abilities, knowledge and experience, and relationships with vendors, contractors, and industry specialists.

It is also important to consider the scope of the project and the design expertise that will be required to create and implement the new design direction for the project. Creating an extraordinary design has no value if it cannot be successfully implemented within the client's budget. If the project involves new construction, remodeling, or renovation, selecting a designer with strong architectural detailing experience and an understanding of construction and building will be key to the success of the project.

If the scope is updating furnishings and decorative elements, one may want to consider the designer's relative experience. If the project is comprehensive and will require management, ensuring that you hire a professional designer capable of managing the project will also be very critical to its success.

Reviewing the designer's portfolio is very beneficial in gaining understanding of the designer's capabilities and background. Be sure to identify projects that may be of similar scope and ask the designer to share some with you that are relative to your own, so that you can be confident that the designer is the best fit for your project.

Most importantly, clients should feel absolutely at ease with the designer they entrust to direct the design of their new environment. Selecting the right person is the single most important decision to ensure success.

**GH:** What questions should a client ask when interviewing a prospective interior designer?

**MM:** Many experienced designers conduct consultations that are informative, educational, and will inherently answer many of the questions clients have about their project.

Clients should ask how their project fits into the scope of projects



the designer usually engages in. Is it consistent with the designer's other project work? Are there any unique nuances that might make their project unlike any other? How does the designer's experience directly contribute to the scope of the client's project? How does the designer charge for his or her services? What is the design timeline and schedule of other ongoing projects? Is the client's budget consistent and realistic in comparison to projects of similar scope and direction? How does the designer present and deliver design solutions, details, and drawings?

What are the commitments that the designer expects of the client?

**GH:** Some interior designers work with furniture stores and some are independent. What are the advantages of each?

**MM:** The advantages depend on what the client is looking to achieve. One of the great advantages of working with an interior designer is having exclusive access to unlimited furnishings, materials, and resources that are not easily obtainable through general public resources. The independent designer knows how to source and select from multiple manufacturers, suppliers, and custom furniture manufacturers to design an exclusive environment that is unique and personal. Typically, when working with an independent interior designer, personal client budget and style are the only creative limitations that exist.

Designers employed by furniture stores (or "consultants," as they are also described) often provide complimentary design services when purchasing furnishings that are represented in their furniture store. This can be an advantage to those who want basic assistance in coordinating their interior furnishings.

**GH:** Does an interior designer need to be ASID certified to do a good job?

**MM:** Design can be very subjective; however, ASID-certified designers have a proven level of professionalism and certification to be experts in the field of Interior Design. In addition to their in-depth knowledge of products, materials, and finishes, professional designers have the training and expertise to plan, schedule, execute, and manage your project from start to finish. They know and work closely with many vendors, contractors, and other service providers, coordinating and orchestrating the entire design team. Designers also provide specification and purchasing services to procure materials, furniture, accessories, and art, some of which you might not be able to find on your own. ASID-certified designers are required to possess an education and degree in design, work experience, and continuing education credits to retain certification. ■





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