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How to Choose an Interior Designer

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Not selecting an interior designer that understands your style and preferences can lead to a décor disaster. Here are tips to hiring the right designer:

Difference between an interior decorator and an interior designer

According to the National Council for Interior Design Qualification, interior designers may decorate, but interior decorators do not do any design. The terms are often used interchangeably, but the jobs are different, so first determine whether a decorator or designer would best be suited for your project.

Interior designers may be called in early in the building process. Designers usually work closely with the architects and builders of a project, but decorators tend to join once the construction process is complete. Designers typically determine the layout of the room and then handle the decorating aspects including lighting, paint, and furnishing.

Have an idea of what you want

Take a few minutes to assess the level at which you plan to be involved in the creative process, and what kind of guidance you need. Are you open to suggestions, or do you have your heart set on something in particular and there is no talking you out of it? Determine the scope of your project

[Homeportfolio.com](#) suggests determining the scope of your project before you choose a designer so you know what kind of credentials and experience to look for.

Ask around

See if your friends and family members have any designer suggestions. You want to find someone who is reliable and has proven that he or she has good work habits.

Martha Burpitt, program coordinator and professor of interior design at Meredith College in Raleigh, N.C., also suggests consulting professional organizations like the American Society for Interior Designers (ASID), the International Interior Design Association (IIDA), and the National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA).

Look at the portfolio

Scrutinizing a designer's profile will give you a feel for his or her style and experience doing projects that are similar to yours. See if you can see your potential designer's work in a showcase or model home. That way, you get an up-close and personal taste of a finished product.

Check out or ask about the designer's education, experience, training and other credentials. Many states require interior designers to be licensed or registered, so make sure the designer's credentials are in line with what the state calls for.



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"Additionally, as most designers/decorators are in actuality commissioned salespeople, the consumer would be wise to address beforehand how limited their selections will be based upon a designer's array of resources," Jernigan says. "If they only carry certain lines of furnishings, for example, that is likely all the client will be shown to choose from."

Find a designer you feel comfortable around

You are going to need to have constant communication with the designer and give your input so that the room ends up the way you envisioned it. You want to feel comfortable asking questions and making suggestions.

"No one should have to arm wrestle their designer to get their way when they are, after all, the one who is going to be living in the space not to mention footing the bill," says S.A. "Sam" Jernigan, an interior designer in Northern California.

Figure out the financial stuff in advanced

See if the designer is going to charge you by the hour or has a flat fee. Read over the contract so the work being done is not compromised by a financial disagreement. If you have determined a budget, don't be afraid to tell your designer that you really need to keep the project under that budget.

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