

Interior Design

A working relationship – In the first of a series of articles, Susan Llewellyn looks at the role of interior designers and how they can work to make clients' dreams come true



A Glamour Dining Room for a couple in London. Designed by Susan Llewellyn Associates.

I am thrilled to be writing my first article for you and in this issue I will be looking at the relationship between a client and the designer as well as antique dealers

First of all, let's start by dispelling some of the myths about interior designers. The biggest myths are as follows:

1. Using an interior designer will cost money. Wrong. A professional designer will help a client spend more wisely, working with the client's budget and knowing where to source products accordingly.
2. The designer makes all of the decisions. Wrong. The interior designer just narrows down the infinite choices and the client makes the final decisions.
3. Interior designers are impractical, with fancy ideas. Wrong. A good designer helps the client to avoid costly mistakes.
4. Interior designers throw out everything. Wrong. Good designers always work around what you have in your home, as it is part of you and your history.

So much for the myths, but what can you expect from your designer? For those of you who have never worked with an interior designer, I would like to offer some simple guidelines.

The first thing to do is to choose your interior designer. When you have made your decision you must open up and tell them what it is that you aspire to. This is important because, when using one, you are hoping to get inspirational advice within your given spend. One of the important skills a professional interior designer has is the

ability to make something look expensive even if it is not.

Your hopes and desires should be communicated clearly and you must think of what your possible budget might be. Also, you must ask yourself whether it is realistic. Go into a large store, price things up and see if what you are expecting is achievable with the money you have to spend.

The next important thing is to describe your lifestyle as it exists and how you might like it to change. It is important that all members of your household are consulted as to what they need as well – it is their home too. Let me give you an example: say that you have an elderly relative living with you. You and your husband are young and you want a soft sofa with cushions you can sink into, but your elderly relative needs an upright chair to make it easy to get into and out of. It is therefore important to explain to your designer who lives with you or visits you on a regular basis, when coming up with furniture decisions. Another thing that is important to take into consideration are children as well as animals; are you going to be constantly a bundle of nerves having selected your dream home? Will you be concerned that your children and animals will not have the same respect or concern for your design? Ergonomics will be taken into account by your designer.



The interior designer needs to work with you not as a dictator, but as someone who feeds off what you want. Working as a team, you will enjoy the way the creative process is stimulated by each others' imagination and ideas.

Most people would do well to employ the services of an interior designer when there is a major change in their life. The change can be for the better, or the change can be through necessity, but when a change takes place it is extremely comforting and helpful to have someone who is professional and objective working with you. Having just moved myself, I found it a good exercise to see what changes were prompted by the move. You may decide to move for many reasons. It may be that you are moving because you are financially better off and are growing in your life, you may be moving because of bereavement, separation, ►



Mirrored entrance hall, West London. Designed by Susan Llewellyn Associates.



West London Arts and Crafts Dining Room designed by Susan Llewellyn Associates.



Marbled Plinths for a Museum in London designed by Susan Llewellyn Associates.

divorce, children fleeing the nest, promotion, demotion, retirement or any other life-changing scenario.

Communication is vital when giving your brief to the interior designer. A client who will not give a budget really is wasting their own time as well as the interior designer's time, since it is both unkind and silly to show people things that they cannot afford. Having said that it is important, as we have found in our practice, that what we recommend to a client is not just a fad or trend at the moment that will date, but something that will last and improve with age. Do show the designer those particular pieces of furniture, paintings and objects that you are especially fond of and ask their opinion of where they should go in the house. Often a new eye will look upon something and recognise that just moving it from one position to another will make a great improvement.

The interior designer is experienced in asking relevant questions in order to determine the quality of the outcome of your design. They can assess your needs by spoken and unspoken messages that you may not be aware of as you are too close to the situation. Another very important factor is the time scale of when you wish for something to be completed, as a job invariably runs over time. This is often due to the fact that you may require additional things that you hadn't thought of at the beginning. In working with an interior designer, creativity has no rules or fences and it is ongoing. If you do not stretch your limits, you will set your limits. Remember also that having workmen in your home is very intrusive, so ask your designer to plan around your life and think about how various areas of your home are going to be



tackled while you can still continue your life and caring for those within your four walls. Don't forget that the interior designer's foremost role is in problem solving. We believe as a practice it is very important to respect the architecture and period of a building. I have touched on mainly domestic situations, but if commercial work is required it is very important to give the designer information like the company's profile, background and what image they want to present to the world; it may be necessary to renew or update the existing image.

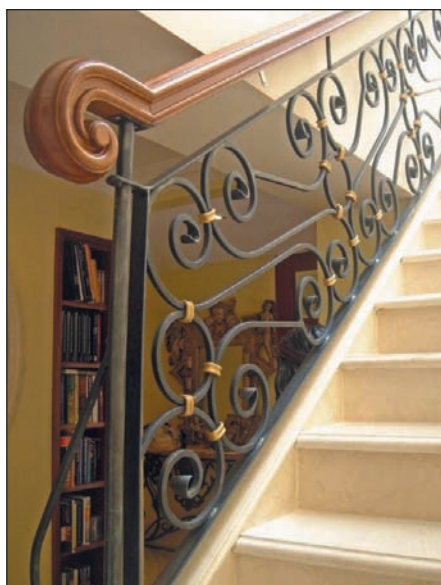
Ever changing technology needs the advice of a specialist; your interior designer will recommend professionals to help with your media stations. Increasingly, we find that health and safety requirements, as well as green issues, play a greater part in our lifestyle. Even if they are costly at present, our clients are asking us to make provision

for the future as the government are creating new building regulations to help the environment within the next ten years.

As far as the antique trade is concerned, I highly recommend that you work with the interior designer to help you source the correct period details and pieces for your design. It is important to remember that clients may want to purchase an investment piece, or they may just want to own something that has character, age and value on its side. But what is important is there are also many decorative and beautiful pieces that have lost their original use but can be incorporated into a contemporary setting with their purpose changed, thus giving character and history to what could be a sterile environment. For example, a small piece of fabric or an old tapestry can be reused as a pole drape or for a cushion rather than having no use or being hidden in a memories box.

Antiques and the environment are friends for the classic contemporary/modern look. By recovering or painting an old piece of furniture, you are creating a new life for a second hand piece and not adding to rubbish tips. On our induction meeting with our clients we always try to salvage existing furniture; this results in saving them money and helping to save our environment.

As your starting point if you are looking for an interior designer, I would recommend the BIDA (British Interior Designer Association). I am a founder member and have followed their progression over the years as they have proved themselves to be an immense help to the profession setting guidelines, high standards and ethical rules. They aim to help both design professionals and members of the public alike.



Bespoke Designed Staircase in High End Kensington Flat, London. Designed by Susan Llewellyn Associates.



*A new build, show home entrance hall.
Designed by Susan Llewellyn Associates*

There is an extremely useful contractual document that has been produced which gives important guidelines and protection to both designer and their client. The BIDA is the only organisation focused solely on the interior design industry. On their website you may choose a designer from two separate lists, Member and Associate members; these separations are based on experience in the industry. Do not assume that the BIDA could not help you with your home abroad – they can, and I know the present Chairman Dean Keyworth and his Vice Chairman / International Director Lori Pinketon-Rolet are anxious to develop international services. You will find that already many of the designers already have international experience.

So, good hunting! I am off to Buenos Aires and I can't wait to tell you all about it on my return. I have a very exciting programme planned for a group interested in interior design and the arts. We will be visiting interior design practices and meeting manufacturers and suppliers; I shall also be exploring the antiques market and will report back to you next month. □



I particularly want my articles to service your needs, so any feedback would be hugely helpful and welcomed so that we can work together in producing what you want to know about interior design and the antiques world. Your suggestions will be greatly appreciated and acknowledged.

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Classic contemporary sitting room in an Edwardian home, London. Designed by Susan Llewellyn Associates



Glamorous modern bedroom in an Edwardian home, London. Designed by Susan Llewellyn Associates.