

Redesign TIME

TIPS ON WORKING WITH AN INTERIOR DESIGNER

By Cindy Brzostowski

If you're considering a home remodeling project, it won't be long before you discover the sheer number of decisions that need to be made—and those can easily become overwhelming. Cue interior designers to the rescue!



Liz MacPhail



Laura Britt



Brittney Williams

With an experienced and knowledgeable interior designer on your side, you can save yourself lots of time and stress. But as they work to transform your space, it's worthwhile to ask yourself what you can do as a client to make it all go more smoothly.

To answer this question, we sought expert advice from three local interior designers: **Liz MacPhail**, founder and principal designer of Liz MacPhail Interiors; **Laura Britt**, founding principal of the Britt Design Group; and **Brittney Williams**, interior designer and co-founder of the BRWN Collective Studio. >>

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DROR BALDINGER



Living Room by Britt Design Group



UNDERSTAND THE DESIGNER'S ROLE

Let's cover the basics first: Interior designers do far more than just make things look "pretty." Understanding exactly what it is they bring to the table (whether it's a coffee table or a 12-seat dining room table) is the first step in developing a fruitful partnership.

When you're engaging with an interior designer, Williams says it's important to remember that you're hiring them (or considering it) not just for their design eye but because they're a professional who has devoted a lot of time perfecting their craft. "It's easy to forget that people go to school for this and spend years working on this craft—learning color theory, space planning, materiality and codes."

In Britt's eyes, a good interior designer serves as your guide, advocate and consultant. "Clients should understand that designers are experienced in design, constructability, detailing, drawings and engaging with consultants," she says. "They are there as that hub that brings everyone together

who's working on a project and to advocate for the client when inevitably things come up that are less than ideal."

MacPhail sees interior designers as problem-solvers and people-pleasers by nature. "We want to find the solutions that will justify the financial commitment as well as solve the design issue or opportunity and balance those commingling, sometimes competing objectives," she explains. "It is this balance that can set a successful project apart."

KNOW THYSELF

So that your interior designer can guide you in the right direction, it's important to have clear ideas about your limits, not just in your budget but also in scheduling. "Think realistically about what you are willing to spend and tolerate," MacPhail says. "Construction is long, noisy and messy. Decorating can disrupt your normal household activities and requires a dedicated financial commitment."

Britt agrees that expectations around quality, timing and



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budget are essential. And these will vary widely, for example, between one client who is hosting a wedding in their brand-new home in a year and a half that changes the dynamic versus another client who is building their sixth home and is not going to be there for a couple of years.

“I think the client sometimes doesn’t understand that we work with people in all different phases of life with all different expectations of what home means to them,” Britt notes. “The more clarity that we can create together about quality and the time it takes to implement that level of quality and the level of investment they’re comfortable making, the more successful we can be.”

Aside from knowing how much you want to spend and what timeline you are willing to accept, Williams says there’s also value in the designer knowing how you work best. For example, if you get overwhelmed when you look at Pinterest, you may feel overwhelmed if your interior designer sends you a bunch of pictures to choose from. In that case, Williams >>

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From top left; deck, outdoor patio, and bathroom by Britt Design Group



recommends telling your interior designer to narrow down what they send so you can more easily and effectively make the necessary decisions.

ESTABLISH AND MEET EXPECTATIONS

So, setting expectations with your interior designer can only benefit both of you. But what else should be acknowledged ahead of time?

Britt says it's worthwhile to know upfront the structure of the team you're hiring and what level of involvement you can expect from each team member, whether it's the principal, the project manager or an assistant. Otherwise, assumptions over roles may cause trouble down the road.

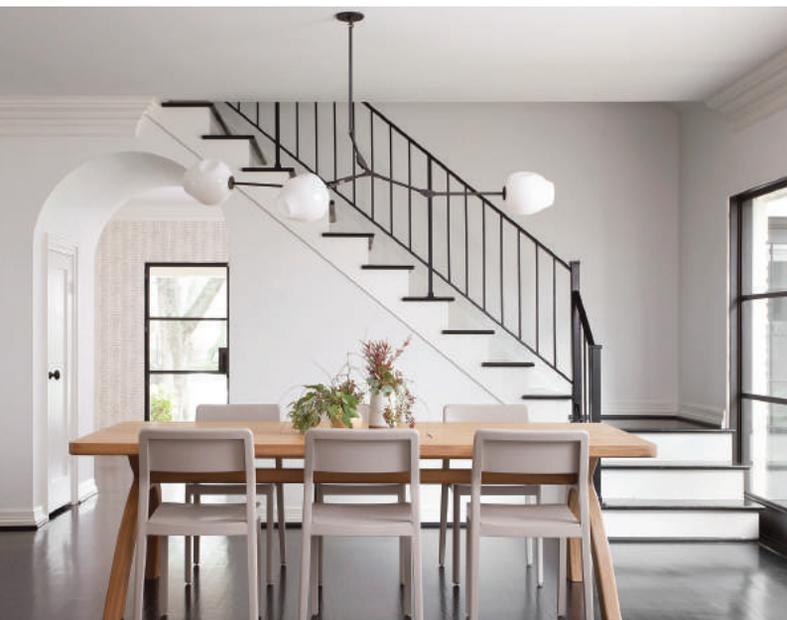
Because communications and payment processes vary among interior designers, clarify those things with your designer before the project begins. "If you've worked with an interior designer before," Williams notes, "don't assume that if you engage another one on a different project that the experience is going to be the same."

As you establish expectations with your interior designer, remember to do your part by upholding the expectations placed on you as a client. That means staying organized and on top of your deadlines. Williams says, "If a designer presents something to you and they've asked that you turn your notes around in a week, do it within a week because the designer is also juggling other projects and they've set that time for you so that it rolls into the larger scheme of their business."

REMEMBER TO TRUST

One final element that's crucial to a productive working relationship with an interior designer is trust. "It is a futile exercise to hire an experienced designer, only to call the shots and second-guess," says MacPhail. "A good designer should listen and respect your needs, wishes and budget, but also bring to the table ideas and solutions based on their experience and expertise that you hadn't considered."

"Time and time again, our best projects are those in which the client is engaged, informed and opinionated," she says, "but ultimately open and trusting of the experts—architect, builder and designer alike—who have chosen to team up on the project."



From top left; Living room, den, breakfast room, and family room vignette by Liz MacPhail Interiors