
British Institute
of Interior Design

A Client's Guide To Working With An Interior Designer



This short guide is designed to highlight the advantages of working with an interior designer and to outline the process of appointing one.

How to appoint an interior designer

An interior designer will help you get the best result from your project by accurately analysing your requirements and producing functional and creative solutions to meet them.

An interior designer will provide the invaluable and detailed knowledge of ergonomics, spatial planning and the creative arts needed to execute any good design.

A qualified interior designer will open your eyes to ideas and possibilities you might not have thought of, making the design process inspirational, educational and rewarding.

By working closely with your interior designer, you should benefit from their experience and creativity, allowing you to understand the complexity of what is involved and to make informed decisions about all aspects of your project.

What do interior designers do?

Interior designers strive to improve the environments where people live, work, relax and socialise. Well designed spaces function effortlessly, enhance the well-being of the user and are visually appealing.

Interior designers are trained to understand and respond to the emotional and physical needs and aspirations of the people they design for.

Good design is often not obvious but its presence will allow the users to enjoy the best possible experience from their space.

Interior designers often work as part of a collaborative professional team involved in the construction and/or remodelling and repurposing of buildings, small and large, historic and contemporary. Your designer will work with any constraints presented by the building fabric and help you to ensure that all statutory regulations are complied with. They will advise on the budget, co-ordinate the work and monitor progress against the time, cost and quality benchmarks for the project that are essential for a good outcome.

An interior designer will use their design skills to realise the potential in a new or existing property and advise on the most beneficial layout and organisation of the space.

Interior designers are skilled in pulling together decorative schemes and have access to an exhaustive list of suppliers.

Put simply, an experienced interior designer will make your space work.



How does the relationship work?

Successful projects are the result of effective collaboration between you and your designer, so the working relationship you establish with them is important – you want to enjoy the journey as well the destination!

Before contacting an interior designer, you should draw up a project brief or wish-list. Consider carefully what you want to achieve, make notes of all your requirements, any problems that need solving and your overall budget.

A designer will discuss the brief with you and using their skill and experience turn your ideas and concepts into a realistic workable framework for the project, without imposing their own tastes, and taking into account your budget and time constraints.

They will be able to tell you whether your plans are realistic and should prevent you making expensive mistakes.

They will recommend other specialist consultants where necessary and explain how the execution of the project will work.

They will also inform you about any permissions you might need to obtain before you start the work.

They should set out clear terms and conditions that define your working relationship with them for the duration of the project - what the responsibilities of each of you are and when payments need to be made.

Scale plans and elevations should be drawn up or commissioned by the designer to enable them to carry out accurate spatial planning and co-ordinate all elements of the interior space. All furniture, lighting, audio visual requirements and built-in elements will be planned to ensure that they are practical, buildable and maintainable.

These drawing also will ensure that all structural and decorative elements of the building are carefully considered and detailed as part of the overall design.

Once finalised, these drawings become the basis of the tender documentation for the contractor to price.

Getting started

— In the UK, the use of the title 'interior designer' is not protected, unlike the title 'architect' which is subject to government regulation. This means that anyone can call themselves an interior designer.

However, all BIID Registered Interior Designers have been assessed based on their education, experience, skills and professional competence, prior to being accepted for registration.

In addition, BIID Registered Interior Designers are required to hold professional indemnity (PI) insurance, adhere to the BIID Code of Conduct and to undertake a yearly programme of Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

They are required to have a written contract with their clients to reflect the best interests of both parties.

Not all interior designers have the same areas of expertise and it is important for you, the client, to appoint the most appropriate person or design practice for your project.

Some designers specialise in particular types of projects such as hotel, retail, workspace, education, museum, exhibition, health care, yacht, aircraft or residential. They may also have a particular specialism such as designing for heritage buildings and/or for those with disabilities.

Choose carefully – ask them how they approach their design work, how they charge, how long they have been in practice and ask yourself whether you feel you could collaborate with them on what can be a lengthy, expensive and sometimes stressful undertaking.

Before talking to your shortlist of designers, be clear about what you wish to achieve, what your budget is and any important information on timeframe or other special project requirements.

The answers to these questions form the basis of the brief, which once defined, will become the basis for the contractual agreement between you and your designer.

Once appointed, your interior designer will help you to further develop the details of the brief for your project.

The clearer and more detailed the brief at the outset; the better will be the finished result.

Be open to new ideas and solutions – you are paying for them after all.

Who is the client?

It is important to be clear from the outset whether you are commissioning the work as an individual or as a company or trust, who is to be the point of contact between client and design team on a day to day basis and, most importantly, who can issue instructions on your behalf.

This is usually clear on commercial projects but confusion can often occur in domestic projects. If, for example, couples are involved, can the designer take instruction from both or just one? This seemingly trivial point has caused conflict on many projects and is best established at the outset.

Fees — There are no standard ways of charging for interior design services, but many designers do so in one or a combination of the following ways:

1. Hourly rate, where the designer charges according to an agreed hourly rate for themselves and their staff. This will vary according to experience and specialist skills.
2. A fixed sum for the whole project.
3. A percentage of the cost of the completed works.
4. A fee for the design work plus a handling charge for procuring the furniture, fixtures and equipment required on behalf of the client.
5. A fee for the design work and a percentage of the cost of supplying goods and furnishings.
6. A variation on any of the previous five.

Whatever you agree, make sure that you understand exactly how your designer will charge you and that the process is open and transparent.

If you are quoted an hourly rate, be sure to agree an estimate or "ceiling" up front.

You cannot be too clear on this, as misunderstandings over charging are the number one source of discord between designers and clients.

Discuss in detail how goods and services will be procured and on what basis, and how any building work will be tendered for.

Generally building works are done under a separate contract between the client and the contractor but some designers offer a 'design and build' or 'turnkey' service where they take on the responsibility for the whole project.

Many clients are reluctant to disclose their budget but designers cannot make informed recommendations if this is left unstated. In these circumstances, you risk getting a nasty surprise when the costs are too high and the design work has to be redone involving you in additional fees.

The process — All projects are unique – no client or site is the same, but although budgets and expectations vary hugely, there are some fairly standard elements to all projects.

Once you have decided on which practice or designer you wish to appoint, ask for their Terms and Conditions.

These should set out:

- the name of the client and project
- what they will undertake to do based on the brief
- the scope of services to be provided
- how the designer will charge
- when they will submit invoices
- details of confidentiality, copyright, insurances and dispute resolution

These Terms and Conditions will form the basis of your agreement.

If you do not understand the terms used do not be afraid to ask the designer to talk you through them. It's critical that both parties make every effort to iron out any lack of clarity or confusion at the start.

The key to a successful outcome is good, clear communication and a little patience on both sides.

The BIID has two standard forms of Client Agreement, both published by RIBA Publishing. These are suitable for most projects, although both client and/or designer may wish to use a bespoke version.

However small the project, it is in the interests of both client and designer to have a formal written contract in place and it is also a requirement of membership of the BIID to do so.

There are a number of tasks that need to be carried out before the design work can begin. Usually a measured survey will be required which may be carried out by a surveyor, or for simple projects the designers may take the measurements themselves, as well as photographic records of walls, windows, doors and other elements of the building.

Concept drawings can then be produced and accurate plans drawn up to show the position of furniture, joinery, electrical sockets, lighting and other services.

Once the concept and plans have been approved, technical or working drawings can be produced to enable accurate costs to be obtained.



The more detail established at this stage, the more control will be achieved throughout the project. Changes once the work has started tend to be expensive and time consuming, and will have knock on effect in other areas, so try to avoid these wherever possible.

Weather, strike action by others, illness, product availability, or unforeseen discoveries once work has started on site may affect the project and it is important to be understanding and patient should these types of delays occur.

Many designers work with or directly employ, a team of workmen they know and trust. Others will draw up a list of suitable tenderers depending on the scale and nature of the project..

It is usual have a contingency sum in your budget (often a percentage of the total cost of the project) to cover any unforeseen problems which may arise. This is particularly relevant to projects in existing buildings where problems such as damp, rot, antiquated electrical wiring or defective drains may be discovered during the work.

With luck, the contingency sum is never called on but if it is included in the budget then it mitigates any financial shock should the need arise.

The interior designer will advise on how the work is to be tendered for or carried out and will monitor the progress of the work to ensure their design is being faithfully implemented.



Client's responsibilities

As a client, you will have a statutory duty to ensure the designers and contractors appointed to work on the project have the skills, knowledge and experience to carry out the work in a way that secures the health and safety of the public and everyone else involved.

You will need to allocate sufficient time to make decisions and have sufficient funds to pay for the works. If you have information about the property such as measured drawings, information about possible asbestos in the building etc, it is your duty to provide this information to your team.

Insurance

You should inform your insurers that work is to be started on your property and the extent and length of time it will take.

Members of the BIID are required to hold professional indemnity (PI) and public liability (PL) insurance and should ensure that contractors working on the project are fully insured and reputable.

If in doubt, ask your designer for proof of their insurances.

Approvals

In the UK there are a number of statutory approvals needed depending on the nature and extent of the project.

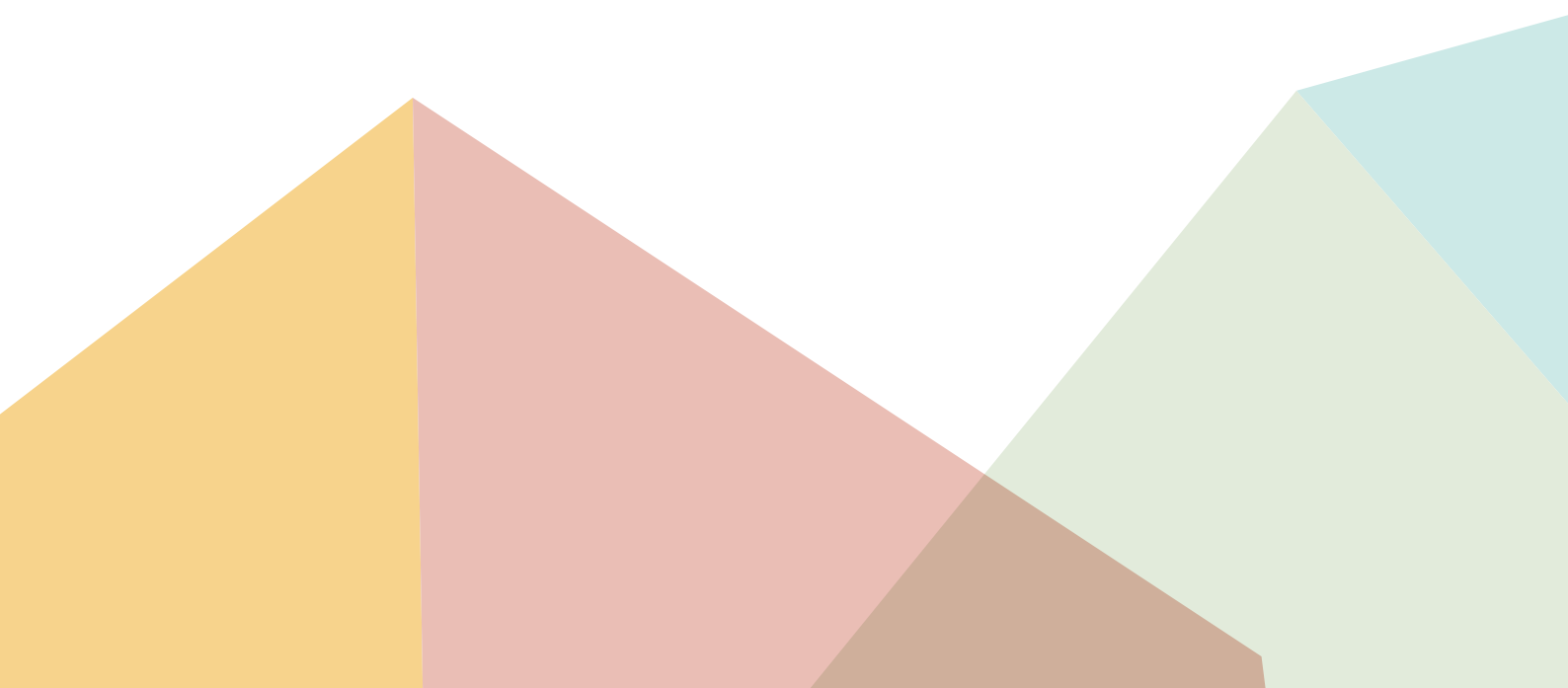
These could include:

- Listed Building consent
- Planning approval
- Building regulations approval
- Landlord's approval/license to alter
- Party wall approval
- Asbestos surveys (where demolition works are necessary to buildings built or refurbished before the year 2000)
- Health and Safety requirements related to the Construction Design & Management Regulations (CDM 2015)

The designer will advise on obtaining these consents and discuss whether other specialist consultants are needed.

Obtaining these consents can take time, and this needs to be taken into account if time is an important factor. The speed at which consents are obtainable is largely beyond the control of the interior designer.

There may have to be changes to the design as a result of approvals and this will need to be factored in to the timescale as well.



In conclusion — The above information is only intended to give a brief outline of what working with an interior designer entails.

Projects vary a great deal and no two are the same.

The key to a successful outcome lies in finding an interior designer or design practice that you feel has the appropriate experience, competence, sympathy with your vision and rigorous working practices to suit you and your aspirations.

Enjoy the journey. Enjoy the destination.

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