



NATASHA BRINSMEAD is *Homebuilding and Renovating's* Associate Editor. She's just finished renovating and extending an old cottage

Do you need an interior designer?

Still consider interior designers the reserve of commercial projects or for those with bottomless project budgets? Think again...

While the majority of commercial housebuilders and developers routinely hire interior designers to tailor their homes and businesses to their clients' exacting needs, self-builders and renovators are far more likely to take on the job of planning, furnishing and decorating their interiors themselves.

This works out just fine for some design-savvy DIYers and homeowners out there. However, all too often the end result of months or years of hard building work are not shown off to their full potential due to an interior

design scheme which just doesn't suit the house.

In some cases, the additional cost of an interior designer just isn't something that can be squeezed out of a build budget and, understandably, an entirely new interior scheme isn't always financially feasible. However, the level of involvement an interior designer has in a project is decided by the client, rather than being a fixed factor — meaning no surprise bills and hidden costs.

What does an interior designer do?

"The level of involvement a designer has varies with each project so most will offer a flexible design service to accommodate these needs," begins Fiona Duke of Essex-based Fiona Duke Interiors and one of the founding members of Interior Design Collective (www.interiordesigncollective.co.uk), a community of 27 independent designers all out to make interior design more accessible, along with Karen Knox, of Making Spaces. "Some people may simply need a little assistance

A BEDROOM TRANSFORMED In this scheme, by Fiona Duke Interiors (www.fionadukeinteriors.com), the aim was to bring the room in keeping with the rest

of the home. It had been stripped of its original features (below), so those that remained were highlighted. Shutters at the windows were replaced and a bold wallpaper introduced.

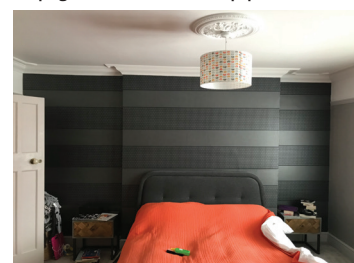


IMAGE: ANNA STATHAKI; INTERIOR DESIGN BY FIONA DUKE INTERIORS (WWW.FIONADUKEINTERIORS.COM)

or guidance regarding a small redecoration project, while others may need a far more complex package which will involve managing a project from design to completion.

“Some clients may be looking for more of an ‘advisory service’ which could focus on anything from reviewing initial architect plans to giving a few helpful pointers on how to make a room work better in terms of layout and design,” explains Fiona. “These discussions will help the client take their first steps to developing a concept design which will provide the starting foundations for the overall vision of a scheme.

“Once a concept design is chosen, clients often hire an interior designer to develop this into a complete design – design detailing, sourcing and final specification – providing them with all the information to start their project. This could include measured drawings such as room layouts, floorplans and elevations, detailed visuals, finishes and samples for presentation, detailed itemisations of sourced items and design of any bespoke items needed for the project.

“From this point, clients can facilitate and implement the designs themselves, or they hire the interior designer to manage this for them,” Fiona adds.

“The client can hire the interior designer to coordinate the implementation of the design and manage the project to help it run smoothly. This requires regular site visits and meetings with the chosen contractor and other specialists.”

How much does an interior designer cost?

Unfortunately there is no fixed

How do I find an interior designer?

There are several factors to take into consideration when selecting an interior designer for your project. As with most things, nothing beats a trusted personal recommendation — particularly if you are able to visit completed projects. However, if the recommendation comes from someone with wildly different tastes to you, it may be best to think twice — although a good interior designer should be able to tailor their designs depending on their clients’ wishes. Ask to see their portfolio of work if you cannot visit their projects in person.

You should also bear in mind location — if you can find a local interior designer who ticks all the boxes all the better. Not only will they be easily on hand should you need them in a hurry, but it is likely they will have built up a wealth of local suppliers and contacts to call on or recommend, and will understand the market in your area.

Finally, meet with several designers and see which one you have most of a rapport with before making your final decision. An initial consultation should give you a clear idea of how they work, how they view your budget and whether you are generally on the same wavelength.

answer to this as individual designers will have their own set of fees. Some will work for no less than a set amount, while others are happy to tailor their services.

A set fee may be offered, but if a project overruns, you may still be charged extra. Hourly fees are useful if you just plan on asking a designer for a couple of hours’ of advice or consultation or if you want to monitor the spend on a project as this can be invoiced more regularly than set fees where payment or partial payment is often required upfront.

According to www.designforme.com, a website that offers a service matching homeowners to architects and designers based on their projects and budgets, interior designers’ fees are commonly calculated as a percentage of your overall project budget — usually 10%. This will vary depending on the level of service you require for your

project, where in the country you are and the experience and size of the design practice.

“This is always a tricky one to answer and always a hot topic of discussion,” adds Fiona Duke. “People have carried out various research on this subject and still don’t have all the answers.

“Each designer has their own way of costing for a project so it is up to the client to discuss this with them at the very early stages.

“Most designers, however, will always stress that this is an ‘estimated’ fee. This is because projects can often overrun or the scope of a project can change mid-way through so the designer may be involved in a project for a longer period than was initially agreed and work levels may therefore increase.

“Sometimes a client may not know how much their proposed works are going to cost or have a clear idea regarding the scope of the project. Therefore it is very

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Design & Materials

difficult to work out a set fee at this early stage.”

When should you bring in an interior designer?

It is often (wrongly) assumed that an interior designer will not be needed until the latter stages, once the building work is complete and all that is left is for the final flourishes to be made. But by this stage it is often too late.

“I actively encourage those about to undertake a project to hire an interior designer before the build begins,” explains Karen Knox of Making Spaces. “I’ve not been involved in one project yet where I’ve not tweaked the architect’s plans a little in order to enhance and improve the internal layout. Every time I’ve been asked to offer interior design advice or a full concept design service after the build, we’ve needed to undo several aspects of works in order to achieve the best possible design. More often than not, the TV aerial is in the wrong place, radiators are on the wrong wall, a door opens into the room in such a way that ruins the flow.”

A good interior designer will ensure spaces are designed in such a way that everything from natural light and ceiling heights, to furniture and electrics are planned to perfection — therefore early involvement is crucial.

“If you’re spending £100k on a build but don’t see spending at least 1% of that on an interior design consultation, that’s absolutely fine, but that £1,000 might save you another £5,000 in the long run. It’s not about cost, it’s about value,” explains Karen. “Clients I’ve worked with often comment on how much money I’ve saved them in the long run by not having to undo mistakes.

“Another really good reason to speak to an interior designer before undertaking a big build is that you might not actually need to do that build after all. A lot of people already have the space they need to get their dream home — it’s just poorly laid out. Re-jigging an existing internal layout could save you thousands.”

How do you get the most from an interior designer?

It is one thing deciding to hire an interior designer but quite another to ensure that you are both on the same page. Be clear about your budget, your brief and how you want the partnership to work from the outset.

“I’m often asked by clients in initial consultations ‘what would you do in here?’ And I can answer that of course, but that’s not the right question,” begins Karen Knox. “My job is to answer a different question: ‘What could we do in here?’ It’s then for the designer to tease and find out exactly what they think you want.

“I like to see all of a person’s home so I can ensure the new project is in keeping. Encouraging clients to incorporate pieces of their existing furniture, lighting, artwork, etc., into a new scheme can make a room feel authentic. Rooms where everything is new, completely ‘box fresh’ often have an air of show-home about them, something I like to avoid.

“The interior designer is there to take all the information presented to them, verbally and non verbally (body language, family dynamic, lifestyle) and present back a cohesive scheme that solves design problems whilst encompassing the loves of the client and interiors expertise of the designer.



“The initial concept is sometimes agreed upon after the initial presentation, but there’s normally a second phase where small tweaks and changes are made based on the client’s feedback. Reaching the final design concept is a process the client and designer work through together — it’s all about clear communication and compromise, but it also needs to include an aspect of challenge. The designer is there to gently push the client towards something more than they would normally go for. It’s our job to ensure your spaces reflect you and your family, while stretching the boundaries of what you thought was achievable.

“Great design doesn’t just come from a single decision, it comes from a series of smaller, often seemingly ‘unimportant’ decisions; each and every one impacts on how successful a project is. Success should be based on both the function and form of a completed space,” Karen Knox concludes. **H**

OUTSIDE THE BOX
Interior Designer
Karen Knox of Leeds-based Making Spaces (www.making-spaces.net), chose to sacrifice a box room in her own project in order to create her dream staircase up to the newly converted second floor. Doing this has meant she was able to create a light, bright office space on the landing.