



UNDERSTANDING DESIGN

Six professional tips to make “enlightened choices” so your home will be not only a place you love — but the dream you envision.

The downside of being an interior designer is that no one wants to have me to their place. “I could never have you over to my house! You’re an interior designer! I’m afraid you’ll judge me.” Of course I’ll judge you – for about 5 seconds. Everybody judges everybody, whether it’s the car you drive, your choice of dog companion (we have a Chihuahua), a body that stops traffic, a cute outfit, great hair, or even my personal weakness — shoes!

Look, I don’t do what you do. Whether you’re a bartender or an attorney, what you do isn’t my calling. Interior design is my calling and my passion. It’s all I do every day and I’ve been blessed to do it for many years. I appreciate that your interests lie elsewhere, and that you may be intimidated by the process. After all, it’s unreasonable to be expected to be fabulous in every aspect of life!

As a designer, my job is to teach clients about design and guide them on how to make the wisest choices while considering everything from lifestyle and architecture to budget. The ultimate goal is to create that intangible feeling of delight we have as we enjoy our homes and have a place that we love. And more importantly, to create a home that we would be proud to share with anyone.

The fastest way to get into trouble when designing a place is by not knowing what you want. Aside from the wealth of choices that make our heads spin, we may be unaware of the solution right in front of our faces. This lack of knowledge slows us down and usually means mistakes and a project that is far over budget. The best way to avoid this is by doing a little homework. The more we know, the better the choices we make. With that in mind, here is a primer on how to get started creating a game plan:

DECIDE WHAT APPEALS TO YOU

I grew up with a household that had lots of stuff. We weren’t hoarders, but clutter tended to rule in most rooms. As a result, I like stuff. I am my mother’s son, and my partner and I have knocked heads about all the knick knacks. He was a minimalist until he met me and is now reformed. So, start by asking yourself, “What grabs me?” Is it spare and modern? Traditional and refined? Casual and worn? Colorful? Neutral? How do you live now? Are you tidy and put away or do you like a more rumpled lived-in place? While the questions may seem endless, don’t get discouraged if the answer doesn’t appear right away. Design is an evolutionary process, and the more you know the better your choices will be.

START LOOKING AROUND

The best place to begin is with magazines. Tear out pictures that have an emotional appeal to you. (If you’re at your doctor’s office and the receptionist is watching like a hawk, I would avoid this tactic and simply take a camera shot of the page and download it later. It can avoid an awkward moment – trust me!) Create a design file that includes images of everything from cabinet knobs and paint colors to furniture, window treatments, or even display ideas. Most designers use this technique when working on a project to convey an idea to a client. One of the benefits of creating a design file is that it can clear your home of the multitude of

magazines that collect over time. The greatest benefit is that it narrows down the many options that attract you to a few that are now easily accessed.

DON’T PAY ATTENTION TO PRICE

Focus solely on what draws you in regardless of cost and appropriateness. Even if something is outside your budget now, there is often a way to get the look you want for less. A modern chair at Design Within Reach may have a knockoff online. Trust me; the good stuff always gets reinterpreted. For inspiration, there are a multitude of publications that focus on home design and décor. The national publications I recommend are *Elle Décor*, *House Beautiful*, *Better Homes And Garden*, *Traditional Home* and *Dwell* magazines. Local oriented publications I like are *Oregon Home*, *Portland Monthly*, *Gray*, and *Sunset* magazines. Use them to find what makes your heart sing, and set to work. Be sure to look at the “resources” section. Often, manufacturers are listed so you can track down a specific item. It is better to pull more ideas and narrow your focus once you’ve become more informed. By the way, this technique is one I ask my clients to do. Often they have no idea of what they want so I make them show me pictures. One of my favorite things is when they go overboard and give me a three ring binder with plastic sleeves, sorted by subject!

GO SHOPPING

I know this sounds horrible to some. Personally I have a shopping addiction, so if someone gave me this assignment I would do a happy dance. If you aren’t so inclined, be smart when you plan a shopping trip. Set out with a specific time limit and a goal. Or you can be more casual and find a store here, a shop there – or do a power shop and hit every store within a certain radius. When you’re shopping, do the same thing as when you