



You may need an interior designer

By Daine Halley

*An interior designer
combines the creative
and technical for
a maximum makeover*

In my 21 years in the business, I have often explained how an interior designer differs from an interior decorator. A quick distinction is that interior decorators work from the wall surfaces inwards (creative and aesthetic) and an interior designer does that, in addition to where the walls need to go and what is behind them.

When you are planning a home renovation, the interior designer can prepare everything, from the working drawings and specifications for lighting, selection of materials, finishes, space planning, furniture and colour to helping prepare and administer the bids and contracts. The designer also works with other professionals, such as your contractor and architect, in the technical aspects of mechanical and electrical changes and the movement of any walls in the house.

Basically, a trusted interior designer allows you to see the big picture of how the renovation will be put together and how it will look and work with rest of the home when complete.

Interior designers tend to be creative people who dote on the details. Multifaceted, they can be a problem solver, referee, anthropologist, psychologist, mediator, artist, walking encyclopedia, material specialist, antique hunter, art connoisseur,

Extending the room, changing walls, brightening with lighting, paint and art and deciding on floor finishes, furniture and fireplace surrounds was just part of the work done on this North Vancouver project for which Comet Interior Design was named as a 2005 Georgie finalist in two categories with RJR Construction, Vancouver



lighting visionary, creative accountant, technical writer, draftsman and project manager.

Think of your home renovation project and how it all fits together: zoning, space planning, lighting, heating and ventilation, interior and exterior finishes, furnishings, art, safety factors and cost considerations. These are all aspects that the interior designer is involved with.

When to start

It is best hire an interior designer when you start to plan the renovation. Often, and tragically, a designer is brought in at the last minute to fix things that no one else thought of during the process. These may include poor traffic flow, a lack of effective lighting, bad transitions from room to room or perhaps a clash of materials or colours, all of which are much harder to deal with at the late stages of a renovation.

So how do you choose an interior designer? Viewing the designer's portfolio and previous work can assist you in the selection. Some designers have a certain "look" while others have no signature style and simply reflect or interpret the client's own taste. Getting recommendations or referrals is helpful either by a friend or from another industry professional. Performing an online search results in the individuals or companies with a web presence, providing an idea of the kind of work they do with pictures and descriptions. Is there anything there that captures what you are hoping to achieve? Has the designer won industry awards or received recognition?

Locally, interior designers are often members of the Interior Design Institute of B.C. (www.idibc.org) and/or the local chapters of the Canadian Home Builders Association of British Columbia (www.chbabc.org).

Once you have your list of potential designers, interview a few of your favour-


ites. A trusted relationship is key to getting the best possible result. I recommend that you have the designer come to your home to meet with you and see the project. It is a chance for you to outline your ideas and decide if he or she is someone you would like to work with for the next few weeks or longer.

Compensation

Consultation on your project may be billed several different ways, although an hourly rate with expenses is common. Often, on work that will take more than a few hours, a letter of agreement or contract is drafted specifying the project, the design process, scope of work, compensation, out of pocket expenses and terms. It is important to detail the expectations in such a way that everyone is comfortable with what needs to be completed and by when.

Some renovation companies have an in-house design team or they may opt to contract an interior designer to work with their clients on a specific project. An architect may also work with an interior

designer to compliment their skills or the interior designer may need to partner with an architect to perform work they are not allowed to do, as stated in the B.C. Building Code (such as residences over 600 square metres or multi-family complexes). How the team fits together may depend on the project and perhaps the lead professional on the team.

There is not necessarily one way to design and complete your home renovation. However, choosing an interior designer early can make a positive impact on the whole process, adding insight and improvements that you may never have considered. 

Daine Halley is owner of Comet Interior Design, Vancouver. Her varied experience includes luxury private residences, condominiums and display suites. She is a member of the Greater Vancouver Home

Builders Association and Professional Organizers in Canada. Contact Daine at www.cometinteriordesign.com. Phone 604-240-0230.



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