



Vanessa Hutchinson specialises in space planning. This interior also features a bespoke table by Long Compton-based Hutchinson Furniture



working with an interior designer

While a house's exterior helps to set the tone, it is the interior layout and design that make you feel 'it's good to be home'. Here, we highlight some of the area's favourite interior designers and outline our top tips for a successful collaboration...

We all aspire to beautiful interiors, but how many of us ever quite achieve our vision? This might have nothing to do with matters of taste. Some of us simply don't have as much time as we would like

to devote to a project (whilst others of us wouldn't know where to begin!). Or some may set out inspired but become lost halfway through or exceed the budget – and so give up 'just for now'. ▶

Since interior design is probably the factor that most influences how comfortable we feel at home, half-finished projects are far from ideal! Rather than going it alone, the alternative is to enlist the help of a professional. Interior design services range from the architectural through to the purely decorative.

At the former end of the scale, 'space planners' can provide invaluable advice on core design issues such as layout, flow and storage. At the other end of the scale, 'interior decorators' advise primarily on colours and fabrics, etc. The all-encompassing term 'interior designer' tends to cover many areas of this spectrum.

In this country, many of those who have worked with an interior designer have done so because they have a love of fine design, or because they have fallen in love with the designer's past work which they might have seen in a magazine or at a friend's house. That's to say, it is as much a decision of the heart as of the head.

By contrast, if you were living in America you would find that most home owners think differently. There, your interior designer is as essential as your architect. It is an attitude that is beginning to gain a foothold here in Britain, although it is still not mainstream.

One thing that holds some of us back is the feeling that our modest proposal is not worthy of an interior designer. But in fact many of those designers who are accustomed to stripping back a house to its bones and starting from scratch also offer smaller scale services.

Unless you have used a designer before, the fact that they can also help you save money is probably not the first thing that springs to mind. Those designers who have many years of experience have built up numerous contacts within the business. This means that on top of knowing what they should be paying for materials, they may be able to negotiate supplier discounts on their clients' behalf.

In addition, a designer can stop you from making costly mistakes. This is something which designer Robert Ashby of Robert Ashby Designs emphasises. His advice is to use the skills of your designer to maximise the impact of your ideas. Sometimes, those of us who do embark on a job become distracted from what we originally had in mind: we try to incorporate items which don't fit the overall concept. Not only does this lessen the impact of the design but we've also not made the most of our budget. Robert says, "One of

the most important and useful abilities I find is to be able to have a photographic mental image of the end result when planning a scheme. It is something I used to think everyone had, but have discovered is actually quite rare!"

Robert von Hawrylak of Felbrigg Design explains how he often starts with a particular fabric. He says, "The idea is to select the fundamental of the scheme, even if it's not the major player. I believe in what I call "layering". With fabrics, for example, we would pick one fabric for a drawing room and then another ten that would develop and accent the main choice. I don't like anything too contrived or obvious. Playing safe doesn't give good schemes."

One of the first jobs of a designer is to discuss the scope of the work required. Designers tend to offer their services in a range of stages. These might include concept design, detailed design, building project co-ordination and furnishing and it is often possible to choose from one stage to the next whether you would like to continue using the company's services.



A project completed by Robert Ashby Designs

The first stage, concept design, includes sketch designs showing space planning and lighting as well as presentation boards illustrating ambience and samples. A piece of advice at this point would be to ensure that your designer gives you a breakdown of the estimated budget, which will give you an idea of how your money is being spent and help both parties to monitor the costs from the start.

Detailed designs and applications to the Local Authority Building Regulations and Planning consultations can follow once you have approved the brief. At this stage, the designer can hand over and you may choose to use your own contractors to carry out the work.

However, one of the characteristics of managing your own project is that it can be extremely stressful to co-ordinate the many different trades. Anyone who has taken on a large-scale refurbishment will be able to confirm this! Interior designers have invaluable experience in this area and some offer a full project management service. The other great

benefit of this service is flexibility: if anyone needs to wait for a carpenter or electrician to arrive (or not), it can be someone from your designer's team and not you. It is often the case that designers are themselves able to supply fabrics, wallpaper and even furniture too.

Having an interior designer to oversee project management by no means implies that you are surrendering control. In some cases, a client will leave the look of a space completely to the designer, but even here they will have established a brief which covers factors such as budget, time-scale and how the room will be used. However, you will get the most out of the experience if you can at least show your designer tearsheets from magazines of projects that you like.

The best designers are driven by a passion to please their clients. But whilst they are professionals, they are not mind-readers. They will want to know your ideas and opinions to inform their work. It is for this reason that most projects will include a ▶





A classical interior by Henrietta Spencer-Churchill

pre-planned schedule of meetings. These are an opportunity for the designer to update you on progress and to seek your approval on decisions. The sort of decisions that you want your designer to run by you is something that will need to be established at the start.

The most important factor in getting the best out of an interior designer is finding the right person to suit both you and your project. This requires some research, since there are so many designers to choose from – ranging from traditionalists to modernists – each with a unique approach.

A good place to start the search for a designer is the British Interior Design Association (BIDA)

website which includes a database of members. Warwickshire-based members include Verity Spencer Interior Designer in Ettington and Gramlick Designs in Shipston-on-Stour. For many of the designers featured there, the database lists a website where you can preview their portfolios.

Another option is to visit the site of your prospective designer's past projects, as many will have completed commercial work for local businesses such as hotels.

A designer's signature style is usually apparent from a selection of projects, so if what you see is not to your taste then it is best to leave them off



your shortlist! Once you have narrowed down the options, you can arrange a consultation (which may or may not be charged) with each interior designer. In some cases where a consultation is charged, the cost will be refunded if you choose to go ahead. If you are unsure of your choice, it is always worth speaking to more designers.

There are also those who specialise in specific parts of a redesign project. For example, Vanessa Hutchinson of Hutchinson Furniture provides space planning advice, underpinned by her extraordinary ability to visualise different interior layouts. Having started her career designing the interiors of yachts (with their odd angles and spaces), she now translates these skills to domestic spaces and offices. Primarily, this means advising clients on what structural or positioning options will best suit their individual requirements. Clients in the early stages of setting up a new home often ask her to assess the 'interior architecture' of

their property and re-work it by removing or moving walls if necessary. She also advises on the positioning of furniture. Since rooms such as master bedrooms or bathrooms often incorporate large items of built-in and freestanding furniture, it can be sensible to decide on the positioning of walls and furniture together.

Those who have found 'the one' will testify that using a good interior designer is a very worthwhile investment. Their skills often add considerably to the monetary worth of the property – but just as valuable is the impact that their talent and creativity can have on how much you enjoy your home. ▶

5 tips for working with an interior designer



An office project by Raisbeck & Reason

- 1 Bear in mind that not all interior designers and decorators are equally well qualified – so choose one who is represented by a professional body such as the British Interior Design Association (BIDA). Word of mouth recommendations and references are helpful but don't be led entirely by the opinions of others. Ask to see examples of the designer's work and trust your own eyes.
- 2 Decide on your budget before you begin. You'd be surprised at how many people don't! Then ask your designer to give you a breakdown of the estimate. It helps you to know where your money is being spent and it helps all parties to stay on track.
- 3 Make sure that an official contract is drawn up before work starts and any money changes hands. A contract should outline the proposed plans, time schedule, budget and fees.
- 4 Be as clear as you can about what you want. Lots of designers advise collecting a stock of magazine cuttings of interiors, furniture, colours and even fashion that you admire. It can be just as useful to tell and show your designer what you don't like – this can save them time in coming to a design you're happy with.
- 5 Your relationship with your designer will be close – so find one that you get on with! A good designer will take on board your ideas, but you also need to respect their skills and experience. Don't dismiss any suggestion out of hand just because it's not something you've previously considered.



A country bedroom by Bobbie Middleton

Steven Russell

To discover more, we have been speaking to some of the area's foremost interior designers about their individual styles and other aspects of their work...

Robert Ashby, Robert Ashby Designs

On his style:

"Our style is diverse – covering traditional through to contemporary – although our most regular work tends to be a modern take on classic. More importantly, the style we employ will be closely allied with the architecture and surroundings in which it is set and of course taking into account the likes and dislikes of our clients."

On working with his clients:

"The job of an interior designer is to guide the client and advise – especially when something is simply not going to work. This side of the work can often require some diplomatic skills!"

Helen Bainbridge, Raisbeck and Reason

On her style:

"Above all else we listen to our customers. We design interiors that suit the personality and lifestyle of our clients. Inevitably that means an eclectic approach that combines inherited or treasured pieces, art work and the best of European furniture and textiles"

On working with a designer:

"A good interior designer should inspire, and yet deal with all the mundane details. They should have a fat address book and know how to deal with any eventuality."

Robert von Hawrylak, Felbrigg Design

On his style:

"We would call ourselves "classic contemporary", although I think descriptions can be dangerous as they're subjective. We've metamorphosed over the years from being traditionally trained to contemporary design. I think the very best schemes are a mix of good antiques, contemporary art and classic and modern fabrics. This is the new British classic look – miles away from the country house chintz look of the Eighties."

On working with a designer:

"I think initial designs should be provided free of charge and it is only when design is agreed and the full costing given including interior design fees that the client should proceed. Designers should keep within fixed costs and time scales unless the scope changes. People should expect designers to be both artistic and efficient."

Laura Holland, Nest Design

On her style:

"Practical contemporary. As a designer you become very aware that every client is different and ultimately it is my job to work according to his or her own specific requirements. Some jobs mean I am working entirely on my own, in which case I take into consideration the brief, the client themselves and their own personal style. Ultimately, I work closely with them as a guide to create their vision, and although I have my own definition of style I always act as an advisor ▶



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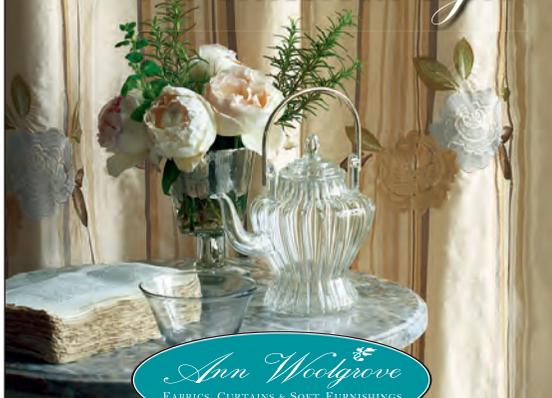


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to arrange a consultation

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Robin Furlong
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who directs as opposed to a director who overtakes the clients' goals."

On her inspiration:

"My influences arrive from extensive travelling throughout Europe, the Far East and America. I am particularly inspired by Provençal style, interior design and all that encompasses French lifestyle. My great uncle was an architect, and as a child I was especially drawn to country house architectural concepts and interiors found in the many books he gave me."

Bobbie Middleton, Bobbie Middleton Interior Design

On her style:

"With a background in antiques and conservation, we like to keep schemes simple, revealing any interesting architectural features, then introducing some modern elements such as lighting or artworks. We are always client led, but our general philosophy is that less is more."

On her current project, a three storey Jacobean townhouse mentioned in Pevsner's book on historic buildings:

"It has taken three years to carefully bring the building from a shell to a comfortable and unusual family home. The project has included the redesign of all the rooms, including the kitchen, sourcing most of the furniture (antique and modern), all the soft furnishings, flooring, lighting, plus old stone decorative features and furniture for the garden. The scheme for the drawing room, for example, was inspired by a stunning early 19th century lacquer screen, decorated with exotic birds."

Henrietta Spencer-Churchill, Woodstock Designs

On her style:

"My style is Classical (not Traditional) but I like to think



An elegant staircase hall by Nest Design

I don't have a definitive 'stamp' to my work. Each project is unique and the style and period of each house is very different, so you have to adapt your style to the house and the client's individual needs."

On her inspiration:

"It comes from many sources, depending on whether it is architecturally related or for the decoration. It could be the architecture of the house and existing features or even the setting. It may be a rug or a piece of artwork or furniture." P

Featured interior designers and design projects:

Bobbie Middleton: 07774 192660 / bobbiemiddleton.com

Felbrigg Design: 01249 720076 / felbriggdesign.com

Gramlick Designs: 01608 664573 / gramlickdesigns.co.uk

Hutchinson Furniture: 01608 684455 / hutchinsonfurniture.com

Nest Design: 01235 851169 / nest-design.co.uk

Raisbeck & Reason: 01386 570450 / randrinteriors.com

Robert Ashby: 01451 832488

Vanessa Hutchinson: 01608 684455 / vanessahutchinson.co.uk

Verity Spencer Interior Design: 01789 740152 /

vs-interiordesign.co.uk

Woodstock Designs: 01993 811887 / spencerchurchilldesigns.com



A project by Nest Design