

## One Way – or the Other?

*With careful consideration, designers & clients can both have a say in the selection process*

SOME CLIENTS THESE DAYS want to be totally hands off during their kitchen or bathroom renovations, and others want to be much more involved. Of course, a designer needs to ensure they are providing the right space for their needs. So in that sense, the client and pro are heavily interactive – but what about when the products and materials selection comes into play?

Do designers let the client have some say in that process? Or is it best to leave that up to the pro entirely? *KBB* spoke to several industry experts to get more guidance when it comes to this potentially ambiguous topic.

### LEARNING THE CLIENT'S LIFESTYLE

Lauren Clement, owner and principal designer of Charlotte, N.C.-based Lauren Nicole Designs, says she asks a lot of questions and reviews a handful of her clients' inspiration photos so she can get inside their heads as much as possible.

"Based on these photos and conversations, I create a base of what they are looking for but also introduce some new elements that may push their envelope but still remain in their comfort zone," she added.

Designer Michael Kaestner of Philadelphia-based Kaestner Designs says his process is transparent. He begins by discussing his clients' lifestyles and feelings about their current space – asking the right questions up front.

"I am able to streamline the process so their minds can rest, and we can move toward design development," he added. "Many others show samples initially, but I feel this can inhibit the natural design process. By sharing my concepts of how I believe the space should look and feel, I open up the dialogue with my clients and encourage feedback."

Nina Green of Churchville, Pa.-based NGD Interiors, says she asks specific questions about what her clients want, including the overall style they are trying to achieve, their budget and how often the product will be used. Then she gets started on the sourcing part of the project.

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MOLLY SWITZER, MOLLY N SWITZER DESIGNS, LLC

### A PERFECT BALANCE

As far as extremes, there are risks involved if the product sourcing is entirely left up to the homeowner or the professional. Some client involvement is crucial, so the designer is choosing what works best for their lifestyle. It's helpful for both parties to listen to requests and share concerns.

If a client wants to source everything, they may not know what the latest offerings are on the market, they can't always speak to the brand or product performance, and they won't have knowledge on lead times, potential upcharges or how much is needed.

"I think of sourcing as a collaborative effort with my clients based on learning their needs, finding out from their contractor where they prefer to do business and making sure that the products will functionally work with the home," said Molly Switzer of Portland, Ore.-based Molly N Switzer Designs LLC. "And of course, I try to always bring new, exciting products and ideas that they wouldn't have thought about but meet the needs of the project in a creative and functional way."

There are some clients who want the designer to make all the decisions; they trust their professional expertise and hire them for a reason.

"Most of our clients approve our recommendations as-is, based on our extensive experience and reputation," said Randy Godeau of Webster, Texas-based Bay Area Kitchens. "We source products we've proven over time and can confidently stand behind. Of course, we allow our clients to make minor changes, typically aesthetic, if they do not compromise the integrity of the project."

Some clients leave it all up to the design team because they find it highly overwhelming to make decisions with all the choices available. This is one of the main reasons Green says she is brought onto a project.

"For the client who really wants to be involved, I will do specialty shopping trips, which also help if after several meetings the client is still at a standstill," she explained. "Having the products sourced before construction bidding helps everyone realize the total price. Many upcharges happen on the contractor side when a product is not picked ahead of time, and there may be more specialty work involved with installing it than what was expected."

Some professionals choose certain selections for their clients and let them be more hands on with others, although this too has its drawbacks.

"We typically select plumbing fixtures and appliances for our clients, as that is part of our service," said Ariana Lovato, AKBD, of Pismo

By CHELSIE BUTLER

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