



INTERIOR MOTIVES

Jenny Gibbs, president of the British Institute of Interior Design, believes hiring an interior designer for even the smallest of revamps is money well spent. Here's her guide to calling in the experts

1 Many people think that hiring an interior designer is only for those with superstar budgets. In fact, you can call in an expert for much smaller projects. Don't be shy about asking them to revamp just one room, such as a bathroom.

2 The idea that all interior designers do is plump up cushions and bring you armloads of chintzy fabrics is outdated. They should be able to work with you to create an overall vision for how you want your home to look, down to every last surface finish and door knob.

3 Do your research before taking someone on – it's not enough that your neighbour is raving about the hottest person in town. Look at their portfolio and choose someone who shares your taste. It sounds obvious, but if you love bright colours, it's probably best to steer clear of someone whose stock in trade is slate and chrome.

4 This isn't just another business relationship – your home is a highly emotive space and it needs to work for you. Choose an interior designer that you not only get on with and respect, but whom you feel comfortable discussing the details of your everyday life with.

5 A good interiors specialist can help you navigate through current design trends and work out which ones would work in your space. Dark wood floors, for example, can look wonderful, but they need to be balanced with softer touches. Wooden floors can also cause problems with acoustics, creating weird echoes and distorting your television's sound quality.

6 A decent interior designer should be able to source all sorts of original materials and finishes that you wouldn't normally have access to, and at competitive rates. They can also offer advice on how you can best make use of those materials when it comes to durability, safety and aesthetics.

7 One of the biggest advantages of working with a professional is that they can coordinate the different tradespeople. It's notoriously difficult to know at what stage to bring in electricians, for example, and usually you need them to do a first and second 'fix' – once before the place is full of plaster dust, and again when there's no risk of damage to your beautiful new light fittings.

8 Calling in a professional also means you can leave all the annoying logistics to them – from finding an ingenious place to put that mahogany heirloom you can't throw out, to dealing with large items that won't fit through your front door.

9 Keep a close eye on the work as it's in progress. If you really don't like the way a colour looks once you've seen it used over a large area of your living space, speak up as soon as possible, because it's far easier to do something about it then than when the job is finished.

10 Before hiring someone, always read the fine print in their contract – and pay particular attention to how they handle disputes about the finished work. Also make sure they have professional indemnity insurance; if they don't, and something gets damaged, you'll be stuck with the bill.

British Institute of Interior Design (biid.org.uk)