

Coffee With A Designer



Most likely, when asked if you like your designer, or even your hair dresser, jeweler, real estate agent, or doctor, your answer will be “yes, of course”. Maybe you initially hired these people to provide their service based on reputation, professionalism and their ability to provide personal attention and customized solutions to your needs. In reality, your choice of who you hire may be a product of how well you like them.

The truth is that we humans simply prefer working with people that we personally like. Most of the time we rely on our gut instincts in determining our service providers’ likeability factor. If we’re to examine this more closely however, you could ask the following four questions of your designer. Do they communicate in a friendly and warm manner? Do they truly understand my lifestyle and connect with my interests, needs and wants? Do they show genuine empathy for my feelings? Are their intentions real and authentic?

What we want as consumers more than anything is a credible, amiable professional that engenders trust and confidence and establishes a lasting relationship. Someone who has our best interests at heart. Someone to provide creative ideas that we would not have thought of on our own. The following narrative was written by a real client to a real designer and is an example of how a trusting relationship can result in beautifully completed projects and a satisfied consumer.

I will start this letter with a statement about myself. Having lived in many different kinds of homes in Asia,

Europe and the U.S., I find myself very aware in middle age of how the nature of these spaces affected the way our family lived over the years. Bigger spaces invited more “stuff”. While we noticed that smaller homes encouraged us to use only what we loved the most. My husband and I have come to recognize that living simply in pared down urban space suits us best, especially when design and function work seamlessly to convey a sense of peace and endless possibility.

With my husband’s retirement from international business, the moving to which we had grown so accustomed has now found expression in changes we make every few years to the condo in uptown Charlotte that we’ve owned over the last decade. Our designer has been our inspiration and guide, drawing us outward with his visions for new conceptions of space that we are able to create with the walls of our home.

It started with the master bathroom. In this case, the bathroom was moderately small in size and concrete construction meant that the drain pipe couldn’t be moved. Yet the designer was able to completely transform the space in ways we could not have imagined. By building a tower in the middle of the floor and directing the water outward he created a zero entry shower without walls. The opposing wall acts as a backdrop for suspended vanity cabinets that likewise erase boundaries. The effect was elegantly open and Zen. Taking a shower here lends us a feeling of being outside, though the room has no windows at all. This magic made us wonder what he could do with the rest of the rooms in our home.

Over time, our designer has led us to bamboo flooring and gray walls that provide a welcoming, fresh feeling like the bathroom, are unexpected yet click with a rightness that makes us say, OF COURSE! Taking on the fireplace in the living room, he removed the traditional painted mantle, opting instead for a niched wall of big, linen textured tiles and a single beam of rich, old barn wood. The wabi-sabi of the old wood against the expanse of luminous tile achieved just the balance of history and lit-from-within potential we celebrate in our lives.

Now we’re working with the designer on an outdoor planter and bench composition for our fourth floor patio that is unlike any we’ve ever seen. When he’s finished, we’ll be able to sip our coffee in the morning, looking through Japanese maples and Hinoki Falsecypress. Again, he has brought us to the totally unexpected. The next project will be the kitchen where he has already filled my head with a vision uniquely conceived of rich, warm walnut and bamboo, opaque glass and shoji. I can’t wait to get started.

My husband and I are at a point in our lives when we embrace a limited footprint that allows us to turn the key and leave for extended vacations. More than ever, we appreciate making the choice to surround ourselves with only what inspires us. Our designer will continue to be in our lives in a relationship that is based on a unique and honoring bond. He reflects back to us how we know ourselves, yet more than that, he tells us who we can be.