

Designers and Realtors®: A Winning Combination

by

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Professional interior designers excel at turning ordinary houses into dream homes for their clients. Realtors®, on the other hand, show potential properties to interested buyers and qualify their clients to purchase these properties. Combining the creative talents of a designer with the more technical experience and approach of a Realtor® allows the homebuyer to come out ahead.

Whether a Realtor® is dealing with spec, trade, resale, or new properties, partnering with a designer can be a powerful sales tool, contributing to better communication between the real estate agent and potential homebuyers during the search for their dream property. Everyone comes out a winner, because the home buying process becomes more personal, targeted specifically to the client and the client's particular circumstances.

It's a given that every client has specific needs, but some homebuyers may have trouble articulating them to a Realtor®. A qualified designer can help to interpret these needs and advise on whether a property has potential for a particular buyer. It becomes more profitable for the Realtor®—minimizing time spent selecting properties for the client, and increasing the potential for a sale. And it's better for the client, as it takes the fear out of a very intimidating process.

Initially, a designer is going to ask a potential homebuyer some obvious questions:

- Are there children? Do they need play areas?
- How many bedrooms are needed?
- Are there extended family members? Do they have special needs?
- Are there special medical needs? For example, does anyone have allergies?
- Are there pets?
- How much time is spent in each room?
- What is the length of time you plan to stay in this home?
- What are the parking needs, number of vehicles?

- Preferences in aesthetics, views, privacy.
- What colors resonate. What colors don't.
- Kitchen uses.
- Will the house be used for entertaining?
- What kind of home office (s) is/are needed?
- What are the storage requirements?

Knowing the answers to these questions, a designer can envision and interpret possibilities differently than the architect, builder, or Realtor®. Not everyone thinks alike, so a designer's input adds another perspective to the process. A designer can suggest space planning or reconstruction to accommodate clients' needs in a particular house to make it work for them. A designer can show what redesigning a house would be like and make suggestions on using an architect and/or builder. A designer can even educate a realtor into the potential of a house by putting a positive spin on possibly negative aspects of the property.

By working with a designer, a Realtor® can allay potential homebuyers' fears and build confidence in the home buying process. Part of the designer's consultation fee can include creating an interiors master plan and budget to complement a homebuyer's income level and lifestyle.

If a buyer is seriously considering a property for purchase, a designer can help a Realtor® answer questions from the client such as:

- Can I use my existing furniture?
- Do I need to install new carpeting and/or window treatments?
- Can I entertain 40 guests in these rooms?
- Light sources—can they be maximized with light shafts or skylights?
- Can views be maximized?
- Can landscape be redistributed to provide more space?

Working with designers can also pay off in other ways. Many times a designer will be looking for property to purchase on spec. If they have worked on joint projects with a Realtor® and his/her clients in the past, they will be more likely to call on that agent to help them find and purchase their own spec property.

Bill Oxford, a Realtor® with Coldwell Banker in Laguna Beach, California, regularly works with designers in the course of helping clients buy and sell high-end properties in that upscale resort town, and he agrees that the process becomes win-win for all parties. "If I am listing a house that needs some help, I'll bring in a designer to re-stage the property with

accessories and plants," he says. "It's incredible how much more inviting and up-to-date a place can look with just a few designer touches."

Oxford adds, "If one of my clients sees a property that he or she likes, but doesn't know what to do with it, I'll bring in a designer to show off its possibilities. In fact, some of my more savvy buyers show up with their own designers in tow."

Purchasing a home can be a frightening process. By partnering with a designer, a Realtor® helps to eliminate the fear and give confidence back to the homebuyer. When clients feel safe and secure, they can put their attention back into the realty process. The result is a win-win for everyone.

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