

# FEES OF AN INTERIOR DESIGNER

In recent years, there has been a great spurt in demand for the services of interior designers. With this, however, a problem has arisen which concerns the non-payment or delayed payment of the designer's fee. As a result of this, quite a few talented designers have quit the profession, others have opened furniture showrooms, and most designers have opted for kick-backs from contractors and material suppliers.

## Attitude of Clients and Designers

At the root of the problem are the clients, who, in general, are businessmen and more often than not, are the *nouveaux riches* (new rich). Basically they possess immature thinking and feel that by paying part of an interior designer's fee, he becomes their paid servant. This thinking lies in the client's failure to differentiate between a profession and a business, and considers it as a part of his business strategy to reduce the interior designer's fee. The greatest irony of this situation is that the clients demand honest designers and end up by being dishonest with them.

However, it is not always the clients who are to blame. Many of designers are also at fault by reducing their fee and bringing disrepute to the profession and thereby encouraging other clients to resort to underhand dealing with the interior designers.

## Typical Behaviour of the Client

Here we describe the ethos of a run-of-the-mill client:

- 1 He does not directly approach the designer, but through some old client of his, and asks the client to send the designer to him.
- 2 At the meeting, all matters are discussed except the fee. Request for the fee is countered by telling the designer to start his work; and discussion of the fee is postponed.
- 3 If fee is discussed by the designer to avoid misunderstanding later, the client feels insulted.
- 4 If at all the client discusses the fee, it is only to haggle as if the designer was vending vegetables, rather than his talent and expertise.
- 5 He takes a perverted pleasure in making the designer literally beg for his instalments of payments.
- 6 When the job is executed and the client no longer requires the services of the designer, the final payment is cut whimsically and no reason assigned.

## Overcoming These Problems

Here are a few guidelines to beat this professional tangle:

- 1 Sign a contract, agreeable to both parties. Refer forms shown in **Conditions of Contract Terms of Business** in the chapter **PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE**. No honest client will find fault with such an arrangement.
- 2 Never reduce the fee. The designer is wasting a lot of his time making full use of his experience to create something artistic and the final responsibility is his. Besides, reducing the fee lowers the image of the profession as a whole.
- 3 Never agree on a prefixed amount known as

lumpsum fee, since the client may initially present a low budget and increase it as the work progresses.

- 4 Avoid labour contracts. However, if a labour contract is unavoidable, all material bills must be seen by the designer from time to time. If the work extends beyond the scheduled date of completion including a period of grace of 15 days, the designer should charge a specified amount for every visit.
- 5 Usually, after seeing the politeness and goodness of the client together with prompt payment of instalments in the beginning, the designer makes a judgement that he must be a good man and he becomes careless, as far as his fee is concerned. He feels he will demand the remaining fee at the end of the job which usually he does not receive, even after the client is satisfied with his creation. Never pass judgement on any client until you get your final payment.
- 6 The designer should insist on his final payment being made at the same time as that of the contractor. Since contractors by and large are outspoken people, clients normally do not like to get involved and this is the best time for the designer to claim his fee. Secondly, the client at this stage is favourably inclined towards the designer, because this is the time when the contractor's bill is finalised by him.

## Understanding between Client and Designer

A designer is as much a professional in his chosen field as any doctor or lawyer, but clients do not argue about their fees since they face these professionals mainly when they are in distress. The client should realise that as a result of the

designer's talent, experience, or whatever, the client enjoys a certain reputation as a man of taste, his business improves due to comfortable and impressive interiors and that his tensions are reduced by the creation of systematic and pleasant atmosphere. He should realise that the designer gives more value than the money paid to him. All interior designers should realise that it is not only they who need a job, but the clients also need designers. Both are needy, dependent on each other, and both have equal status.

### **Considerations other than fees**

We have seen the moral obligation of a designer (see RESPONSIBILITY OF AN INTERIOR DESIGNER) towards his profession. But nowadays, when everything, including religion, has become a sort of business, it is likely that you would be tempted by some unscrupulous people with their unfair and unethical business practices. Sometimes you have to answer your conscience for a few things.

### **Acceptance of Kickbacks**

Some material/service suppliers increase the total billing of an order by some percentage, and offer this increased amount to the designer to tempt and keep their custom. Americans call this kickback, and this unfair practice has been fairly common here. In this deal, the supplier does not lose anything, and the designer gains something but at the cost of his reputation, and the client is the loser all the way. It is needless to say that you must not accept kickbacks. If any supplier insists on this, please sever relations with him.

### **Receiving of Additional Discounts**

Some suppliers occasionally offer a token discount of upto 15% to the designer. This is usually given from the suppliers' profit beyond the quoted discount for prompt payments, or for introducing a new product, or for turning over a larger volume of

a product. This is acceptable, provided it is passed on to the client.

### **Cost of Installations**

The cost of installation of items like wardrobe or wall-to-wall carpeting is usually included in the original price estimate, so the designer should not bill it again.

### **Packing/Freight/Delivery Costs**

Packing, freight and delivery costs are never included in the quotation because no transporter is aware beforehand of the time and labour involved in packing, freighting and delivery of goods. So see to it that you emphasise this point to the client and get it included in the estimate by the contractor. It should not happen that the contractor includes freight charges in his estimate, and above that, makes the client pay the official bill from the transporter or the supplier.

### **Out-of-Pocket Expenses**

An interior designer is sometimes surprised that his earnings are not as much as he had supposed it to be. The cause for that is the non-inclusion of out-of-pocket expenses in the bill.

It is highly advisable that the designer keep a note book entering in it all the expenses related to a client's project and bill them to him. There should be a clause to this effect in his agreement letter with the client. The expenses involved are basically for conveyance, delivery and phone calls.

### **Cost of a Major Disaster**

Considering the times in which we live, it is essential that the site of a project be insured against fire, theft, burglary, vandalism and other disasters. This ensures you of continued work without any hazards and hassles for you. This type of insurance is available everywhere.

But there is another type of insurance against the

errors and omissions committed by the contractor. For example, if a cabinet gets dismantled, or a chandelier falls down, creating loss of property and even of life. The insurance against such major disasters is available on the Continent and the USA, but not here in India. Even there, it took a long time for the insurance companies to come to terms with the realities of the profession. Hopefully, we will have such insurance here in near future which would reduce the designer's responsibility.

### **Ethics of the Designer towards Non-Payment of Fees on Materials**

When purchasing a material, the designer should ask the trader for some discount/commission on his behalf, and pass it on to the client. Also when some discount/commission is offered to the designer, he should pass it on to the client: the reasons for this are very simple:

- 1 The designer has already accepted fees on material and labour from the client, so why should he accept this extra amount.
- 2 As we have seen (RESPONSIBILITY OF AN INTERIOR DESIGNER), the designer is not a commission agent or broker, so he is not entitled to it.
- 3 If he indulges in accepting money in form of discounts/commissions from the material/labour/service suppliers or the contractors, he would be partial to them resulting in his approving inferior quality of materials/labour/services.
- 4 Gradually, this want of discounts/commissions turns into an obsession as the result of which the designer concentrates more on that and less on the creative aspect of design.
- 5 In case, the client comes to know of this arrangement of his with the material/labour/service suppliers and contractors, he will consider this as bribery, and the trust in the designer would end which is the basis of sound work-relationship, and would ultimately create a bad name for the profession.