

THE CLIENT

"Who is an ideal client? Who is a bad client? Enumerate and describe the different types of clients".

It is highly unlikely that such questions will ever be set for an examination in design, but answers to these are necessary as they will enable a would-be interior designer to tackle his clientele in the big bad world outside.

An Ideal Client

An ideal client is one who approaches an interior designer in whom he has complete trust and full confidence, is aware of his requirements and presents them succinctly to the designer, has at least average taste and aesthetic sensibility and accepts and affords the budget for the project. He appreciates the work put in by the designer, the cost of whimsical alterations and gives a valid reason for anything he wants to add, amend or alter.

Reasons for the existence of Bad Clients

There might be many reasons behind the behaviour of a client that make him "bad". We shall enumerate them as such:

1 Human Inadequacy

There are basic human malicious traits like ignorance, arrogance, greed, non-tolerance that make a person a bad client. He does not appreciate the concept of a plan, thinks his ideas are the best, does not want to pay at all, or pay a fraction of the design fee, spurns the suggestion

given by the designer.

2 Ignorance of Professional Practice

As the field of interior design has been in vogue for the last 20 years only, many clients are not aware of the factors of managing such projects.

3 Financial Difficulties

The enthusiasm of a client turns sour when he faces financial difficulties.

Types of Bad Clients

The bad clients come in different hues and shapes. We describe them here to forewarn and fore-arm you against them.

1 Copy Cats

First category of bad clients can be termed Copy Cats, and they can be divided into four types.

i The Catalogue-Struck

These people borrow/collect/buy all the available catalogues of furniture, summon their carpenter and order him to faithfully copy the desired items. After the job is done, the result in most cases is not satisfactory. They exclaim, "In the photograph, it looked so good". To this the reply is: "Well, photograph your things, they might look great".

ii The Carpenter-Struck

For them, the carpenter is the Big Boss. They take him to the flats of their friends and tell him to copy whatever their fancy demands. Now the quality of workmanship obtained would be as

good as the carpenter's and the standard of design as good as that of client's. The result, usually, is hotch-potch.

iii The Showroom-Struck

Instead of going to their friends' flats, they go to all the known and unknown furniture showrooms with their carpenter, and tell him to copy the items of furniture they like. The result if not hotch-potch, is surely hodge-podge.

iv The Designer-Struck

These gentlemen filch the designs of a good designer, assemble the contractors who worked on the original project, and entreat them to replicate the original. The wrong setting and non-supervision results in something not intended.

2 The Designer Dupers

They either have the impression that designers are fools or if not they would like to fool them, which upsets the designer's profession very much. They come in many varieties.

i Examinees

As soon as you shake hands with this gentleman, he starts asking questions. First you are startled, then you start answering questions, because if you don't answer, you would be termed an idiot. When you pass your "examination" you are lucky if you are rewarded some tiny project. The client will go on questioning you till the project is completed. The result: instead of working on the project, you will be answering, and he will learn

all the ropes of the trade/profession.

To get rid of such a client, very politely point out to him that you cannot answer anything unless you work on the project and are paid the advance fee. Keep your *Conditions of Contract* ready.

ii Self-Styled Executors

This gentleman gives you VIP treatment, calls on site, many times, till he picks up every kind of know-how from you after taking you into full confidence regarding the job. Once he gets the idea, he forgets you, paying nothing for your work/efforts. He gets the work done from any contractor under his own supervision. Absence of designer results in many drawbacks. Poor workmanship and finishing, wastage due to absence of working drawing. Sometimes such clients fall prey to contractors who cheat them. Ultimately, the client has to accept 'the dish' as served by the contractor. No mediation is possible in such cases as the game goes on without an umpire.

The designer should politely tell such a client that unless he sits on the drawing board and thinks about the plan, he will not be able to suggest anything perfect.

iii Interfering Client

Though he realizes the importance of an interior designer, does not understand the concept and functions of design. In the beginning he accepts and okayes the plan and perspective but interferes at a later stage after the work is taken in hand. He starts giving his own views and suggestions and makes the designer odd/alter here and there without knowledge of the technical aspects of the design. This confuses both the designer and the contractor. This interference not only increases the estimated cost of the project (which he hesitates to pay), but the result also differs from the original ideas.

iv Unwilling Client

A helpless person has been dragged to you by relatives, who hates to spend his money for decoration and designer both. You will not be accepted by him at any time, that is why your work also will not be appreciated at any stage. He wants only to complete the work in least time and money, and also to get rid of you. The time will come when you will feel that you have victimised him.

v Donor Client

A new personality, who wants to decorate a premises to offer someone as a gift. He asks and allows you to use any ordinary material for any quality of work. He just wants it to look nice and royal, without the expenditure. This type of client might make you indulge in unethical practices which is against the norms and code of conduct in any profession.

vi Client with Low Taste

This gentleman proclaims himself as sophisticated and exclusive. Generally anything you may suggest will be below his level. He claims to hail from such a high level that everything seems to him 'goudy'. There he will show you his choice as a model work (which itself may be goudy) and ask you to work on such a style. By the time the project gets over, you will forget what you had learnt and knew about the design and shall come down to the taste of this gentleman.

vii Unsettled Client

You will be given liberty to design with no consideration of budget at initial stage by this gentleman. But later, due to some reason, he will suggest the use of very ordinary material (during the execution of project). Your design, concept and ideas will remain only on paper and you may find a totally different thing in front of you when

the project is complete.

viii Great-Poser Client

You will be so delighted to work for a well-known personality for whom many designers may have worked. You will feel cheap to talk about the 'terms and conditions' and also for the payment. You will be confident, and having trust in him, will keep silent for payments while working. After the project is over, you will realise your mistake.

ix Assurance—Giving Client

You will be pressured for a cut in normal fee and estimated cost for the present project promising you many projects in future. This personality will talk to you a lot about his great relatives and large friend circle, assure, you lot of jobs in future and when you start thinking from business point of view, rather than like a professional, the design goes away. Slowly your designs shall express the business.

3 Clients Adopting for Labour Contract

Generally people are under the impression that it is economical to give a job on labour contract. The same feeling also prevails in case of this profession. Although it seems money-saving, you are put in much trouble by agreeing to this system. You have to accompany the client every now and then for purchase of petty articles/materials from shop to shop in the market. To save a few paise, you spend a rupee. Valuable time of yours as well his is wasted in shopping. Wastage of time is also a loss to him in terms of money which he could have earned in business.

Since the material belongs to the client, the contractor is least bothered about the wastage of various materials. Ultimately, the labour contract works out to be costlier as compared to the usual

contract. A designer must charge extra while agreeing to supervise labour contract.

4 Prestige Hunting Clients

This gentleman is exactly opposite to the one we met earlier. He will only search for big names in the profession, approach any such personality and entrust the work to him; and will not interfere during the project. The reason behind such an appointment is merely to proclaim in the society that Mr X, one of the leading designers in the country has worked for him. It is his ego behind going for big names in the profession. No doubt, job executed by such prominent persons happens to be a masterpiece (advantage of no interference), the concept and idea of the design is far from his reach. In simple words we can say that he consumes things which he cannot digest. So he pretends to be happy by the work of Mr X but is not satisfied since his taste is different. You realise this and feel sorry for such half-hearted appreciation in case you happen to be the big name commissioned by him.

SEARCHING FOR A CLIENT

Hunting a client is like shooting with a camera. You do not hurt anyone but preserve the "victim" forever, gratified. After you finish your education, and with the idea of being on your own, the foremost question in your mind would be "From where and how do I get a client". In fact there are some designers who have not found a worthwhile client even after a practice of 25 years. So silver jubilee or no silver jubilee, the search for the illusive ideal client continues.

Somebody would suggest "How about advertising?". Very well. But as you know, professional are prohibited to advertise by the *Code of Professional Ethics* and, it is expensive. But do not be dismayed. Here are a few rays of light.

1 Take up a Job

Take up a job, not for the sake of forsaking your ambition, but to gain valuable practical experience of work and contacts. When you leave your job after a few years, these contacts might turn out to be your early clients.

2 Ask the People you know

You have your relations, friends, acquaintances, neighbours, etc. Ask them if they or any of their acquaintances required designing. Someone might. Ask your foe also. Who knows he might turn out to be a friend after seeing your good design.

3 Ask the known Designers

Many known designers do not undertake small

projects as they are occupied with large projects. On approaching them and assuring them of good design and quality, you may get quite a few clients.

4 Ask the Contractor/Carpenters

Many contractors/carpenters tackle tiny jobs on their own. But sometimes they get some prestigious contracts, and to impress and please their client, they search for a full-fledged designer.

5 Join a Club/Society

A club or society has a particular circle of people. When you become a member of a society, you are introduced to other members. During conversation, the topic of discussion might become your profession, and here is an opportunity giving you a prospective client.

6 Take a Chance

You can not be sure when Dame Luck would smile on you. So be prepared. When you are travelling, by train, bus or any other mode of transport, keep your ears open. When you hear something about interior design/decoration, discreetly offer your suggestions. The discussion might lead to your appointment as the designer.