



Interior Designer or Decorator: Is There Really a Difference?

Should you hire a Designer or a Decorator. That largely depends on the nature of your project, your goals and understanding the differences between the two professions. "Are they difference? Aren't they the same, like potato/pataato, tomato/tomaato?" "Aren't the terms interchangeable?"

The answer to this is critical, especially to the caribbean consumer since both titles have been grossly misused and blatantly misrepresented. To illustrate, a school that teaches drapery making is not a school of Interior Design. Being a skilled upholsterer does not qualify one as an Interior Decorator. Even skilled, contractors, architects and furniture designers are not Interior Professionals. The vast majority of qualified Designers and Decorators cannot cut drapery or are they skilled at handling a sewing machine, or even a hammer for that matter. So who really are Interior Designers and Decorators, and how are they different? Well lets look at each and then lets differentiate between the two.

The Interior Designer.

The American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) describes an interior designer as one who *"is professionally trained to create a functional and quality interior environment. Qualified through education, experience and examination, a professional designer can identify, research and creatively resolve issues and lead to a healthy, safe and comfortable physical environment."* In other words, at it's core, interior design is both the art and science of understanding human behavior in order to create functional spaces within the structures architects design.

The interior designer's responsibilities are many and far reaching. They may include planning interior wall placements, room layouts, traffic flows, plumbing points, lighting design and other interior architectural details. Designing for compliance with local building and safety codes, supervision of construction and installation of the design is often a part of the designers duties. Designers may even design for appropriate acoustic and sound

transmission. In addition designers specify equipment, fittings, fixtures, materials, finishes and color - it must however be noted this is a small part of the designer's job.



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In many places Interior Designers are required to be licensed professionals in order to practice. For example in many US States, designers after meeting set requirements of education and experience, must pass the NCIDQ (National Certificate of Interior Design Qualifications) state exams to qualify to practice.

The Interior Decorator.

The interior decorator is concerned mainly with surface adornments. *Decorating is often defined as furnishing or adorning a space with appropriate, often fashionable items.*



Hence the decorator beautifies with fabrics, color, lighting fixtures, furniture and accessories. “But don't designers do that too?” Yes, but with a greater focus on function and human behavior. While making these decisions the designer brings to bear a number of other factors. For example, when selecting floor coverings, an interior decorator will probably be responsible for choosing the type, color, texture, and pattern. The interior designer's selection, on the other hand, while satisfying the above criteria, will place additional emphasis on other factors. These will include the appropriateness of type, usage, sound transference, acoustic properties, off-gassing properties, static electricity requirements, its coefficient of friction and flammability.

Further, although there are some schools of interior decorating, offering training in color combinations, window treatment and furniture styles, and decorating dos and don'ts; a decorating education or licensing is not required for practice. Many successful decorators are people with exceptional taste, an eye for quality and a knack for combining finishings that stimulate and please the eyes.

Distinguishing between the two:

Crudely put, we can say that *while Designers decorate; Decorators, do not design.* Undeniably, decoration is an integral element in creating an aesthetically pleasing interior. It however, does not have at its core the understanding or human interaction or human behavior,



or is it its aim; function. True, while Designers and Decorators both provide input on the aesthetics of your space, the designer goes beyond in order to provide additional input and expertise on functionality, efficiency, sustainability, maintenance, building code compliance and safety.

By knowing and appreciating the differences you are in a better position to honor both professions. Start by realizing that both offer invaluable services; give each professional their proper title. Further based on your project needs and goals, you can make an informed decision as to whom to hire, and make the best of their skills in creating personal environments that reflect your soul.

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