



# DESIGNERS' JOURNAL

## THE BEAUTIFUL BASICS

The mere thought of decorating sends some people into a tail-spin. One room or an entire house; city, suburb or beach — it doesn't seem to matter. With so many issues to address, the ordinary mortal has every reason to find it overwhelming. One way to avoid the angst is to hire a trained, experienced, professional interior designer who has the knowledge, resources and ability to guide you from beginning to end. But before you start asking friends for recommendations, hear what three top designers — Angela Grande, Benjamin Huntington and Doug Wilson — have to say. Known for the beautiful residences they've done for clients throughout the country, each has provided highlights of different aspects of the design process. Use their insights as a guide, and you'll be on your way to the home you've always wanted.

*Photo courtesy of Peter Margonelli*



## ANGELA GRANDE

Angela Grande, principal of Angela Grande Design Inc., has worked her magic on suburban houses, townhouses and beachfront mansions. Her projects include a 1940s-inspired residence, a glass-walled contemporary, a ski-in-ski-out villa, and cottages in high-end golf club communities from Long Island to Florida to Utah.

"The most important thing a client should know," says Grande, "is that the design process is a journey, not always smooth and clear-cut. The best way to make it successful is with frequent communication and feedback."

"My start-up process," she explains, "is directed to making sure the client and I are on the same page from the get-go." These range from big-picture considerations, such as budget and timeframe, to small details like types of faucets. To do this, she asks a broad range of questions, from clients' ideas about color, style and degree of formality to their stage of life, allergies and regional weather conditions. "Getting all this down and knowing their concerns can focus that angst and begin to ease the process for many people about to embark on the decorating journey," she says.

Once the scope of the project is defined, Grande creates a presentation of well-researched images of design elements, color and fabric swatches, and timing and budget outlines on poster board. Then comes the crucial back-and-forth with the client to finalize the plan: things might be added or subtracted, a spouse might suggest new ideas, there could be a change in color.

As to sourcing and selecting new acquisitions, some clients want to leave it all up to the designer; others want to be glued to their hip. Grande suggests a middle ground. She says designers see the latest in the marketplace, so allow them to narrow down the possibilities and present the best choices. "We want you to touch and test before purchasing so that you like the feel of a cushion, the height of a counter, the shine of a finish," she says.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR SUBURBAN HOMES

- Create a mudroom out of a small, unused space; turn a garage's second story into a guest suite or office; add an outdoor dining area or pool cabana.
- Personalize with his-and-her master baths; a wine cellar; even a putting green.
- Maximize large rooms by multi-purposing: use the dining room as a library; establish work and entertaining areas in the kitchen; organize a homework area for the kids in the living room.



## BENJAMIN HUNTINGTON

Benjamin Huntington, ASID, and partner Shari Markberiter, operate MH Studio LLC. A designer for over 25 years, and *feng shui* professional, he specializes in high-end residences — city brownstones to lofts to country houses. In October, he begins his tenure as president of the American Society of Interior Designers' New York Metro Chapter.

"Think of your relationship with the designer as a



Courtesy of Angela Grande Design, Inc.

marriage," he says. "Pick one you are comfortable talking with, and for whom you have a good gut feeling." He adds you should call their references, and not only listen to the happy stories, but ask what the designer's weakest point was, and how he resolved problems.

A good way to envision how your project will be handled is to visit one of the designer's sites in progress. There you will see if it is neat, how he interacts with workers and the thoroughness of his progress reports. Says Huntington, "this is especially useful for the client who hasn't worked on a large design project before."

Cost, time and quality are the key factors that Huntington considers in developing the design. Different combinations of the three are possible — for instance, low budget, slow turnaround, high quality — depending on the client's priorities. "It's up to me to balance them," he says.

"Personally tell your neighbors what you plan to do if it might bother them, especially within the close confines of the city," he says. To ensure good relations, in addition to the Neighbor Notification form used

in many buildings, he advises you to photograph the interiors of the apartments above, below and on either side of yours. This will preempt any misunderstandings generated by the construction.

Huntington says rules, regulations and standards have changed greatly over the years for all types of buildings. The issues are as disparate as door widths and floor sealers. Huntington recommends that you rely on your designer to liaise directly with the building management and figure out solutions.

### LOFTY IDEAS

- Arrange area rugs to define dining, conversation, office and play zones.
- Determine best wall colors by painting choices on 2' by 2' poster boards. Affix to the wall one at a time, not side by side where they will affect each other. View day and night to decide.
- Understand that large loft windows require something — drapes, window seat, a sculpture — to anchor the eye. "If left unadorned you'll be living in the view, not the apartment."



Courtesy of MH Studio



Courtesy of Peter Margonelli



## KITCHENS, BATHROOMS, APPLIANCES, ONE CAB RIDE



"BEST SHOWROOM AWARD" - SUB ZERO



212-995-0500 | www.mckb.com

29 E 19th St. New York, NY 10003 • A & D Building 150 E. 58th St. 5th Floor, New York, NY 10155



### DOUGLAS WILSON

Residential designer Doug Wilson is well known as a star of The Learning Channel's television series *Trading Spaces* and current host of the network's *Moving Up*. His contemporary American style is inspired by everything from Art Deco icon Jean-Michel Frank to mirrors found at Jack's 99¢ Store.

Wilson recommends that you ask your building's management company for the alteration agreement even before hiring a designer. This document lists the rules and regulations for every type of job. It includes hours work can be done, type of plumbing allowed and window guard requirements, among other items.

Wilson then suggests talking to neighbors about problems they encountered when they remodeled or decorated. If they don't know, their contractors will. Slow-moving elevators (and operators), for example, can increase workers' time, resulting in higher bills. Solve problems before work begins to avoid headaches.

Most designers send out bids to three to five contractors that might include clients' suggestions. But, Wilson says, "we usually know the best [contractor] for a given project because our relationships with them have proved who to trust, who will do the job correctly, and who will hire the subs — plumbers, plasterers, painters, tile installers, AV experts, electricians — that will perform 100 percent." He adds that it is the designer who acts as "ringleader," a calming thought for clients who worry they might have to be in command.

Just as designers' fee structures vary (e.g., per hour, per room, per project, and fee-plus commission) so do the ways they have clients make purchases. Ask your designer to explain his system, including such details as deposits, signing off on purchase orders, and line items.

Having a small space often stops people from calling a designer, but Wilson says it's worth trying. "We sometimes take on such projects because we relish the challenge." As for renters, "it's always good to give your home your personal stamp. Paint, curtains in a great fabric and a few pops of color can give any place new life."

#### ADVICE FOR CITY DWELLERS

- Lessen fading of artwork, rugs and fabric with nearly undetectable window film. It reduces strength of UVA and UVB rays.
- Remove door saddles and put carpeting throughout to create a nice visual flow, and keep noise down for you and your neighbors.
- To help eliminate dirt, install double windows. Having dark, low-pile carpet and deep-toned or faux-bois painted window sills also make it less noticeable.

#### TRENDS AND STYLES

Interior design has rarely been as exciting as it is today. Colors are bold, but there's room for neutrals. Patterns are large, and small ones are appearing on the horizon. Furniture is curvy, both classic and contemporary. And eco-friendly is nearly mainstream, touching every room of the house. Ask your decorator which of these might be right for you.

**Marston & Langinger** offers luxurious products for every decorating need. If it's more space you want, look into their custom timber-metal-and-glass buildings — conservatories, greenhouses, and pool houses — while for extra light in your home's interior, try a lantern roof. Freshening rooms with a bright color from the nontoxic Premium Paints line or adding pretty pieces from the English Willow wicker collection can do wonders, too. Then keep your new look beautiful with Pinoleum blinds. Because they filter out 70 percent of sunlight, excessive heat and fading are kept at bay.



Courtesy of Peter Margonelli

*“dinner at eight”*



## THE DEVON SHOP®

Makers of Fine Hand-Carved Furniture Since 1929

Only at Devon, will you find Master Carvers, Cabinet Makers, Upholsterers and Finishers on staff in Our Own Custom Workshop who make Fine Handmade Furniture sized, finished and upholstered to your specifications for your Living Room, Bedroom and Dining Room.

Design Services • Finest Fabric Houses • Custom Sizes

Mon.-Fri. 10-6, (Thurs. 10-8) • Sat.-Sun. 11-5  
111 East 27 Street, NY, NY • 212.686.1760 • [www.devonshop.com](http://www.devonshop.com)

© The Devon Shop

“The Devon Shop’s new Chateau Collection reflects the trend to the grand and stately,” says owner Charlotte Barbakow. Handcrafted on site, the antique reproduction furniture in Louis XV and XVI styles includes a four-door armoire she calls “almost as big as another room” and down-cushioned sofas and chairs with hand-tied coil springs. Anything can be made to your specifications, so shop here for every size home.

Comfortable, contemporary designs from Italian firm **Flexform** work with many architectural styles. For a minimalist loft, consider pieces like the marble, metal and wood Vito table, or the Emily armchair with leather armrests to add texture and interest. If you’ve downsized, multifunctional items like the Oltre sectional sofa with bookshelves at either end will help you achieve a more spacious feel. Take time for a good look. The variety of materials, shapes and sizes is endless.

Every home needs some sizzle, and Ankasa’s pillows and bedding with embroidery, beadwork and one-of-a-kind finishes can provide it. Elements as diverse as stainless steel and sequins add chic to its color palettes, which range from sky blue to espresso to coral. The new fall collections — inspired by nature, city and ocean — look beautiful within many décors, and are available with a select group of furniture at the new Manhattan store.

Most city apartments have small kitchens, says John Lauruska, senior designer at **Manhattan Center for Kitchen + Bath**, and multi-purpose items are the best way to maximize them, visually and physically. One of the most practical is the “microhood,” which combines microwave, exhaust fan and convection oven. For kitchens and baths of every size, go for eco-friendly products. Two countertops you’ll love are Rich Lite, made of recycled paper, and Ice Stone, made from cement and recycled glass. Containing no harmful chemicals, the latter is ideal even for the allergy afflicted. Full-service MCKB carries everything from cabinets to tubs and offers installation, too.

Add pow to your classic six or glass-walled aerie with a cutting-edge design from **B&B Italia**. Perhaps most exciting of the offerings, which include tables, chairs and decorative accessories, is the Moon System sofa/ottoman available in January. Designed by architect Zaha Hadid, it is sculptural yet exceedingly comfortable. At the uptown store now is the modular Luis sectional sofa — with 60 different components, a most flexible piece. More conventional are items like the “floating” Siena bed (available this fall) that fuses beechwood with metal. And don’t forget to view the fabric collection (also in the SoHo store). In addition to new cottons, linens and wools in many colors, is a blend that’s 53 percent bamboo. ■

### DESIGN RESOURCES

**ANGELA GRANDE**  
10 East 40th St.  
NYC 10016  
(212) 683-5631

**DOUGLAS WILSON**  
130 East 57th St.  
NYC 10022  
(212) 832-9360

**B&B ITALIA**  
138 Greene St.  
NYC 10012  
(212) 966-3514  
[www.bebitalia.it.com](http://www.bebitalia.it.com)

**FLEXFORM**  
150 East 58th St.  
NYC 10155  
(866) FLEX-SOFA (353-9763)  
(212) 421-1220  
[www.flexformusa.com](http://www.flexformusa.com)

**BENJAMIN HUNTINGTON**  
166 East 63rd St.  
NYC 10065  
(212) 644-8585

**MARSTON & LANGINGER**  
117 Mercer St.  
NYC 10012  
(212) 965-0434  
[www.marston-and-langinger.com](http://www.marston-and-langinger.com)

**DEVON SHOP**  
111 East 27th St.  
NYC 10016  
(212) 686-1760  
[www.devonshop.com](http://www.devonshop.com)

**MCKB**  
29 East 19th St.  
NYC 10003  
(212) 995-0500  
[www.mckb.com](http://www.mckb.com)