

House Beautiful

How Your Interior Designer Will Charge You for Their Services (and What It Means)

There's a reason nearly every designer has a different fee structure.



Most people (probably) wouldn't fix their own deeply troubled toilet or perform a DIY root canal, because we recognize hiring a professional is well worth it. So why do many people still balk at the idea of bringing in a professional to design their homes? The answer may be that there's often a major lack of clarity when it comes to what designers charge, so you can feel like you're authorizing a major splurge before even being able to glance at the price tag. The truth is, when it comes to interior design, there's no *one* way of calculating the bill—some designers charge hourly, some a flat fee, some a markup on items they purchase for you (often using special, trade-only discounts). That said, there are several factors that come into play—considerations that can help you better understand just what hiring a professional might entail.

Flat Fees

As with hourly rates, flat fees range widely from project to project. One designer says her minimum fee for full construction and furnishings is \$40,000 with her average (taking into consideration a range from 4,000 square feet to 20,000 square feet) clocking in at around \$140,000 in total fees. That said, location can play a big factor in fees too: While home services marketplace Thumbtack, for example, cites \$99 as the "average" hourly price for a designer, those in larger (read: more expensive) cities will almost always cost more than that, as will designers with name recognition and industry credibility.

Interestingly, Los Angeles firm JDP Interiors uses a flat fee plus purchasing fee model for furniture-only projects, but transitions to hourly plus purchasing fee when the project involves construction. **“Construction is always hourly because you never know what you are going to find when you open up walls,”** says the firm's founder Joyce Downing Pickens. “Once, we were on a quick remodel and when the contractor opened up the walls we realized the house was practically sliding down the mountain, and had to be reinforced so we were on that job much longer than we anticipated.”

On the opposite end of the spectrum, hourly *didn't* work for Dallas based interiors and architecture firm Maestri Studio. “We used to have an hourly rate system for all projects, but I think it creates tension and sometimes even distrust with a client worrying about unknowns and surprise invoices,” says the firm's creative director and owner, architect Eddie Maestri.