

Client Relations

16 Sticky Client Situations, Solved

Top designers weigh in on the field's trickiest client dilemmas, from awkward asks to out-of-line demands

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Interior design is an unusually personal business, often creating complicated client situations out of previously relaxed relationships. As legendary designer Angelo Donghia noted in a 1981 talk, maintaining professional boundaries is crucial; he famously treated his work as a business arrangement rather than a social one, asserting, “You would not go out and have cocktails with your doctor.”

Fast-forward to the present day: Not only has technology brought an unprecedented level of accessibility and transparency to design, but designers and clients follow each other on social media, creating a heightened feeling of familiarity that leaves boundaries fuzzy. Here, designers weigh in on how to navigate the stickiest client situations.

Navigating couple dynamics

The Clients Are a Couple Who Cannot Agree on What They Want

“The key is to address problems early and focus on solutions rather than blame. It’s the designer’s job to help find common ground. Ask for the clients’ nonnegotiables and come up with a way to blend both requests. For instance, if a husband insists on comfort and *must* have a recliner, while the wife finds recliners bulky and unsightly, it’s the designer’s challenge to find a solution, like offering an attractive, streamlined version. Or maybe one partner insists on a ceiling fan in the bedroom, while the other wants a chandelier—there are ways to compromise there, such as placing a fan in the corners of the room and still having a central chandelier, or putting in the ceiling fan but adding beautiful lamp lighting. You want to protect the relationship while also protecting the project.” —Jenna Miller, Robin Rains Interior Design