

The Chat

It's important that you understand the main goals of "The Chat":

1. To establish yourself as a professional.
2. To prevent potential clients from taking advantage of you and your time.
3. To convey like any other professional, your time is valuable and you expect to be compensated for it.
4. You expect to stay on schedule, and keep the project moving forward. They must be willing to stay on track and make decisions in a timely fashion.
5. Designing a home or building can be more expensive than people think. They need to be educated on the potential investment they're about to make and be willing to make a real commitment to finishing the project.
6. They need to understand that in our industry, nothing is set in stone. Pieces become discontinued, back-ordered, and simply impossible to find. This is a fact and completely out of your control.
7. It's important that you don't get emotionally attached to any one piece due to the fluid and rapidly changing environment of the design world.
8. There is no such thing as the, "perfect" design. You are working to create a beautiful space that your client loves, and that fulfills all of their requirements and needs.
9. Designing a space takes an incredible amount of behind the scenes effort. You are going to convey a small sample of this fact through the chat. They need to understand what takes up most of your time. They shouldn't be surprised by your hourly bill (if that's the way you charge) or how long you expect the project to take. Just because you're not at their house, doesn't mean you're not working.
10. You are going to put your heart and soul into their project. They need to have a clear understanding of the care and consideration you have for them, and repay you with the same level of respect.

Having an understanding of these basic concepts will make the difference between a dream client and a nightmare. If you can use all of these points in a conversation with your potential client at the first house call; and while you're collecting a retainer or "commitment fee", you will be amazed at how smoothly your projects proceed. This is how you create a loyal following of happy clients who refer you to their friends over and over again.

The following paragraphs illustrate a conversation I typically have with my clients on the first house call...

"Ok, now for the fun part...the business and paperwork. I want to explain how the process will work. I'm going to take all of the information that I've gathered today, along with your measurements and pictures and start to create a wonderful design for your space.

We'll set an appointment for one week from now to touch base and make sure that we're on the right track. I want to show you the color palate, the key upholstery pieces, and the main focal points. If we're not on the right path, then we will correct our course and meet again at least one more time.

Then a week later, we will get together for your final presentation. This is the fun part where I've pulled together an amazing design for you based on everything that we've discussed. I'll have all of the samples and specs on the pieces, the final floor plans, and some pictures of exactly what you can expect from our finished project. Now I need a commitment from you.

I'm going to be eating, drinking and sleeping your project for the next few weeks. When I start to create your design, I'll check to make sure that everything I select is available, and fits within your budget. In this industry, pieces often become back-ordered or discontinued, and it's important that I get as many pieces locked in as fast as possible. If I wait too long for a decision or to put down a deposit, we could lose the perfect piece forever.

For the next two weeks I need you to be dedicated to the project, and I need your undivided attention when it comes to making decisions. I'll be calling you when I have questions, and we may need to schedule additional time if I need you to see something in person, or to sit on a piece of furniture.

I'll take a commitment deposit today to get started. If we continue to work together and finish the project, I will credit part of that deposit towards your final payment and the other portion will be used for my design fee. At the final presentation when all of our decisions are made, I will collect a deposit for 50% of the project which will be used to purchase all of our items.

Then the real work begins. I'll do all of the boring behind-the-scenes labor like ordering, purchasing, and tracking your project. It's like a conductor leading an orchestra. It takes a lot of work, and a lot of people to make a job happen smoothly. There are many details to be considered, and it's my job to pull everything together seamlessly. You don't have to worry about anything. It's my goal to make the whole process look easy.

I've found that clients really enjoy this experience and love their space even more when it's installed in its entirety, as it was designed, rather than piece by piece. With this in mind, there will be times when a piece comes in ahead of the rest, and I may have to collect the remaining balance owed to the store. The final payment will be collected the week of the installation.

When everything is ready, I'll kick you out for the day; or days, and my team and I will install everything included in your design. All you have to do is come home and enjoy your beautiful new space. So now it's time for one of my least favorite parts, the paperwork. This is my letter of agreement (contract, commitment paper). Please go over everything and make sure it's everything we've discussed. Then I'll collect our deposit and get started creating the space of your dreams.