

*It makes sense to me that if we are to realize any of our designs, we need to make the best use of all the wisdom and knowledge and experience of the design team, the client, the contractor, and the fabricators.*

“But it is all original. I don’t care if it looks old; that would be the good news,” I said. “It’s what the client wants and I want. And it’s in the construction documents that way.”

“No, the old hardware won’t work and we can’t be responsible,” the contractor said, knowing that would make me responsible for the choice.

I returned to Rome later that week and, on the construction site there, I mentioned that the contractor was probably going to suggest we toss the hardware and the wood moldings. “Why would we do that?” he said incredulously, “This is all original to the apartment. It will be so easy to remove and scrape everything and rework the mechanisms. Look.” The contractor took a brass door handle out on the balcony and ran a steel brush across it while another worker held the handle with pliers and another used a blow torch on it. “Look how easy this will be and much more beautiful than new ones.”

Designers need to know that as important as it is to make nice space, working with people is just as important. Design professionals could benefit from a course in psychology or how to work with other people and how to communicate. These courses are as obviously missing from the design curriculum as nutrition and the understanding of the entire well-being of the patient are missing from the study of medicine. In the schools where I’ve taught, the study of making presentation drawings is rampant, but this material could be reduced to one lesson. Students could more productively spend that time learning how to present ideas to clients and contractors, how to work with difficult people, how to tell people bad news, and very important, how to get people to do things you need them to do to realize your ideas. Sometimes when a designer has a good idea and the fabricator says some part of the idea can’t be done, then a tactic might be to ask the same question again and again and again with variations until the desired answer is heard: “Yes, it can be done.” Maybe that is not psychology at all, but persistence.

With regard to the client, it is important to portray a real scenario of the construction process. The truth is that the process is a near-impossible orchestration of numerous procedures and elements. Your project may not be the only thing on their mind, so be brief, but do keep the client abreast of everything. Have everything copied to the client in writing, particularly if the client sends a representative, or if the client is a committee. There is a tendency among clients to remember what they wish to have heard.