

Reflecting the client's identity involves a collaboration; designers should avoid imposing a predetermined "look" on a space in favor of working to manifest the client's particular creative vision.

The Space Is Functional, Not Just a Decorated Shed

A successful project is not only appealing to the eyes and to the senses but supports the movements, operations, circulation, and activities of its occupants. It is not a stage set, but a habitable space suited to the occupants' living and working patterns. It should be comfortable and functional, without contrivances. An open-plan office, for instance, may be a desirable concept in theory, but is inappropriate for a corporate client with strict privacy requirements. If the project at hand is a health-care facility, adequate room for equipment, medical maneuvers, and visitors should be accounted for. It is the designer's role to advocate for the specific functional needs of those who occupy the space—whether or not their input has been formally solicited.

The Environment Has Ambiance and Atmosphere

Looks, function, and contextual appropriateness are key deliverables. But positive user experience also involves creating a welcoming ambiance. Because spatial surroundings are perceived viscerally as well as visually, the psychology of a space is a fundamental attribute of the overall design.

The Project Is Delivered on Time and within the Designated Budget

Completing the project within the prescribed budget and time frame is paramount. Scheduling delays and escalating costs can offset the impact of an otherwise good design. Mastering this concept involves managing expectations—creating a realistic time frame and informing the client about what can and cannot be accomplished within the allotted budget.

Prioritizing aesthetics at the expense of timing and economics benefits neither the client nor the contractors and project managers whose livelihood depends on these deliverables. Contractors, of course, bear much of the burden when it comes to scheduling, and their merit is evaluated primarily by whether they can deliver the project on time. Jana Bailey, managing director of administration and facilities for the multinational bank HVB, has overseen

numerous office renovations, upgrades, and relocations during her tenure. Having construction completed—and employees moved in—“is of utmost importance,” she insists, “a crucial mark of success for upper management.”

Planning and foresight, to say nothing of experience, are instrumental in creating realistic budgets and schedules. Bailey learned on the job; for a recent design of the corporation’s New York headquarters, she scrutinized variables and standards from many previous HVB projects to create an ample budget that would nonetheless be mindful of financial resources. The result? “The budget was never an issue,” remarks Richard Kronick, the project architect. “It was like hitting paydirt,” he claims, to be given a budget and time frame that were based on realistic information.

The Design and Construction Processes Run Smoothly

After five successive and invasive renovations to a single residence over the course of 25 years, seasoned client Ginny Blair built her next home from the ground up. The overwhelming success of her latest endeavor, she claims, was less a matter of meeting schedule and budget (both were overshot), but of “things running smoothly. I am willing to overlook issues of budget and timing only if I think the project is going to be done the right way, and to my high standards.” She is also more likely to embrace progressive ideas when she trusts the design team implicitly. And success, says Mark Oller, “is when a client trusts you.” While delayed delivery assures a disgruntled client, an effortless process, in contrast, generates confidence in the designer’s capabilities.

The Creative Process, and the Resultant Design, Stimulate the Intellect

Although all designers interviewed claimed that making money is a top priority in maintaining a business, profit alone cannot guarantee a project’s success. Designing for the sake of a paycheck is neither rewarding nor conducive to inspired results. “As designers, we need a little more motivation,” says Tony Chi, president of Tony Chi & Associates, who seeks opportunities to flex and engage his intellectual muscles, to implement creative strategies. Although any design effort involves some measure of compromise, even budgetary and scheduling constraints can inspire innovative solutions if the designer has the resources and inspiration to use such limitations to his or her advantage.