

Reading Weekend Post, Friday 21 October '08

What is your business about?

Interiormotive provides friendly and personal consultation and design services for clients to talk through the ideas and aspirations they have for their home interiors - in their own homes.

It is about giving people value for money, advice and direction, and helping them to achieve the highest potential for their property. This can mean creating an environment to reflect their own taste and lifestyle, or in the case of clients wishing to market their house for sale or rental, - reflecting what a potential buyer or tenant will be looking for. This sound direction and advice, makes the whole process quicker, less stressful, and maximises the financial benefits to the homeowner.

When and how did you start the business?

It was fully launched earlier this year though has been something I had wanted to start for many years, combining all of my interests and experience into something that brings up different opportunities every day. My inspiration really came from my love of fabrics and colour, and my early training in theatre design where visions can become reality.

To complement my previous training and bring everything together I underwent a training course run by Ann Maurice the 'Housedoctor' and devised services that would work for anyone looking to improve their home environment, even for those on a smaller budget. This style of working was pioneered for 'Staging' homes for sale or rental, but also works really well for those wanting to update without paying a 'designer price tag'. Great value in these times of penny watching, and also better for the environment.

What services do you offer?

The business offers an affordable re-design service, giving an objective opinion on what you can use, alter or add to in your home. How colour can be used cleverly, changing the whole feel of a space and how accessories, pictures and furniture can be re-arranged or changed to work in a more stylish or co-ordinated way. You can bring the most eclectic things together and make them work with the right accessories. Most people have some real gems of potential that are just not recognised, so often a re-styling session is all that is needed to improve the look of a room. Sometimes only minor changes to the décor and furniture can transform a room into something completely different.

When a more comprehensive approach is needed, Interiormotive has a large range of suppliers and samples at hand to draw from and select with the client, and many links with local trades to make it all happen. There are a varied range of services that are accessible to everyone that can be customised depending on the needs of each client. In addition to consultations and design work, we offer soft furnishing services including curtain and blind making, and re-upholstery.

What projects have you worked on?

I have worked with one couple who wanted a favourable valuation to enable them to secure a loan for further improvements on their house such as replacing the windows. In the meantime of course they have been enjoying a smart new layout, colour scheme and furnishings throughout. They now have a living room they can relax and entertain in, and a study was created from a junk room. The bathroom has a whole new look with just a few cosmetic alterations. Another client wanted to change the use of several rooms that had not been re-decorated for many years including the kitchen. I have also worked on renovating a rental flat. This was very successful in adding to the rental value and securing a high calibre tenant.

How did you train to become a designer?

I did a two year art and design foundation course followed by a degree in spatial design. I have always continued to add to and update my skills with different courses and voluntary work alongside my work in various design disciplines. Things are constantly evolving, and there are always new products, and manufacturers out there to discover.

Who are your customers?

I cater to a wide spectrum of people who would like some one to one assistance with many aspects of improving their own interior environment. They may want a whole room or house re- designed and decorated. They may just want help to choose the right fabric for some new curtains and blinds.

Others will want to de-clutter, market their home for sale or rental due to life changes or as an investment, or feel like a fresh start after a split from a partner. Some men may find that their home environment is not attracting the ladies! I can help by restoring a balance to not only reflect their personality but also to be appealing to a potential partner. Some would love a new look but simply do not have the time it takes to research and bring a look together let alone to project manage the work.

What is popular in interior design at the moment?

Though I take a keen interest with the looks and colours that are current and trendy, I find that everyone, as with fashion, has a style that they are comfortable with and that suits them and the way they live.

A lot of my work consists of removing and changing something that 'looks dated' as it was installed when it was trendy, or working with peoples own sense of style and giving it a fresh twist. The house itself will often dictate what look will be appropriate for it, so it does not always feel right to put the trendiest colours or furnishings into a scheme. People often want a 'timeless' contemporary look, of which there are many styles and colour palettes to choose from.

Working on show flats though usually requires an up to the minute look, though this again needs to be geared towards the most likely type and generation of buyers. There was a trend for mirrored furniture, glitz and crystal or beaded lights but this has made way for more emphasis on subtle and unusual colour and fabric combinations.

What sets you apart from the rest in this highly-competitive industry?

An honest and down to earth approach as well as creative problem solving. It is really about getting to the root of what someone wants to achieve and working out a plan for them. Helping them to see the potential that is there and where their money is best spent.

Has your business been affected by the credit crunch, or can you help people create a quality look on DIY budget?

I think now is the perfect time for people to use services like mine. Even wealthy clients are prudent with their money and appreciate that paying for a good service can actually save them money in other ways. A little bit of expertise can go a long way.

Sometimes I will produce a report with photographs for a client who may want to do some of the work themselves. They are happy to use my guide on colours and what to buy and where to position things. I will then come and do a final styling session to bring it all together for them. This is much cheaper in the long run than going ahead without a co-ordinated plan, or not really knowing if the things they buy will work together. It also means that they know exactly what style, colour and size of item they are looking for and can take advantage of that bargain when they see it instead of making costly mistakes.

What's it like working from home?

It has its challenges, but it is a very flexible solution. You definitely need self discipline, focus and motivation. There can be some practical problems particularly when it gets really busy or there is a lot of travelling involved, but there is always a solution, it just take a bit more planning. The overheads are generally smaller of course so it is a good way to start and expand from.

What gives you most satisfaction in the job?

Seeing the end results and the happy faces of my clients especially when it enables them to relax and enjoy a room to entertain friends in that was once a junk room, or helps them to find a serious buyer for their home because it “felt right” and was so appealing that they loved it instantly. Getting those spaces to “feel right” is what I do, creating a first – and lasting impression. It’s quite a personal thing and a privilege to be invited to work with someone in their sacred space.

My clients have been delighted and amazed at what results can be achieved by making just a few changes and spending very little money relative to the value of their home or the budget they had available at the time. It has changed their lives in some very positive ways, and that is really what they are paying for.

What are your plans for the future?

I will soon be an accredited member of the Housedoctor network, which is an inspiring and very supportive organisation, so I will look forward to a deeper involvement with them. I have many more links with other businesses to explore as well as expanding the type of clients I work with and the services I offer. I am also enjoying getting more involved in bathroom designing and have some ideas for products I would like to produce at a later date with a sculptor. I have recently set up an alliance to commission original artworks set to a budget from a group of UK artists and photographers and so will look forward to developing this too so watch this space!