

Interior Architecture

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'Naples Balconies' photo by Matt Ziff

How To Do Better Design Work & Be A Better Designer

If you are not satisfied with the overall character and quality of your design work, try these relatively easy things.

First, and perhaps most important, you have to believe in the virtues of doing design: good design makes people's lives, and the world in general, better, period. I believe this, most designers believe this; we live by this.

Second, you have to have an attitude of some excitement, some enthusiasm, for getting into the world of designing; you need to think of yourself as a 'designer', a designing person, and as a designer with cool, interesting, innovative, and high quality things to say about the physical world.

Good designers are interested in furniture, in color, in materials, in geometry,

in looking at objects and places that are well designed. Think of yourself as a designer, with an interest in the physical world.

Look at a leaf, an acorn, a piece of wood, a piece of stone, a sunflower, and see the 'design' character of these common things. There is pattern, color, material, texture, and potential applications of these in your own design thoughts.

1. Sketch with some delicacy, and variety of line weights: light lines, heavy lines, thick lines, thin lines. Sketch with a pencil, creating the skeleton, or framework, including light layout or guide lines of the sketch, and then go over it with heavier pencil, or with ink. Then add some colored pencil, or marker, or water color to create surface character in addition to line character

2. Always sketch (or draw in any medium, like AutoCad, SketchUp, or hand drafted) an idea in **plan view, elevation view, and vertical section view**. Doing a sketch in only one view, such as a plan, will only reveal or explain only one dimension of the object and of the idea. If you draw your idea in plan, section, and elevation you can begin to understand the thing you are designing as a three dimensional element.

3. **Always pick an actual, specific, material** that whatever you are designing is going to be made of. The actual material characteristics will affect what and how you design. And do not just say 'stone', or 'wood', pick a specific type of stone, or species of wood, and a particular size, shape, and color. For example, "I am going to design this wall using 4" x 6"x 9" blocks of black granite." The choice of this size of block, of black granite, will immensely affect, and control, what you can, and cannot do in terms of making a wall. The only way to make a 'beautiful' wall is to get specific with the materials, the shapes, and the construction techniques used, and see how many different ways this particular wall can be made. This is what really good designers do! Do not think in terms of 'style', but rather think in terms of material, color, surface texture, and what it is you are trying to create, functionally and visually, with this material.

4. If you do not think you are a great designer, then **keep your design proposals simple, and elegant**. Use simple clean forms, and clear ordering methods, such as symmetry, to give your work a clear, and understandable quality. Once you have a whole worked out, then to make the design proposal more interesting you need to add details. For example, once you produce a simple, clean, functional wall, add detail conditions, such as a base

condition that visually separates it from the floor plane, and a top condition, that separates it, or makes a transition to the ceiling/overhead plane. This is a simple 'formula' for making reasonable, and perhaps surprisingly appealing interior components and overall environments.

5. **Show your ideas in several different media.** Show an idea for a wall, for example, with some sketches, with a physical model, and with a digital model. Each of these media presents a different 'feel' or quality of what the wall could become.

6. **Train yourself to make the things that you create 'nice': as nice as possible given the constraints at hand.** What I mean by this is, do not allow yourself to make a yucky sketch, a bad model, or a bad poster. Demand of yourself that if you are going to make it, it will be made WELL. Craft alone is a good indicator of someone's level of dedication to the work they are doing. "If it's worth doing, it's worth doing well." Force yourself to make everything that you touch as good as it can be within the constraints at hand, such as time, and money available.

7. **Insist that you have some 'idea' that is driving your work.** An idea can be as simple as 'how many different ways can I use an oak 1 x 3 x 8' board to make a wall', or it can be as grand and universal as " I am going to design a space that reinterprets the concept of democracy". Just sitting there doodling shapes and lines is not sufficient to produce good design work. You have to have at least one reason for doing what you are doing.

Bring the force of your will, your desire, to bear upon the tasks at hand. To design anything, an object like a small table, or a space, like an office, or a set of spaces, like a retail project that contains many spaces that need to function in different ways, and that need to contain varied components, you simply have to bring the force of your will, your desire, to bear upon the tasks at hand. In other words, you have to FORCE things to happen for a project to move forward. You are supposed to design an office? OK, you are going to have to MAKE a decision about what 'your' office will be like, will look like, what it will be made from, what color(s) it will contain, what kinds of light, lighting, will be used, et cetera.

Try these and see if you feel a bit better about your work.