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Consumer Action

10 Things Your Interior Designer Won't Tell You

By Erika Rasmusson

1. "My qualifications? Well . . . my friends say I have good taste."
2. "I'll decorate in my style, not yours."
3. "I'll redesign your budget."

4. "You have no idea how much that sofa really costs."

When you pick out new furniture with a designer, chances are that he or she will order it from a trade showroom at a discounted, "to-the-trade" price — in between wholesale and retail — and add a markup for her time and service. Some designers have been known to charge up to 100% commissions over that base price, says Elizabeth Franklin, creator of The Franklin Report, which lists and rates designers in the New York City area, Los Angeles and Chicago (see www.franklinreport.com). But you might not know you're being charged that much, since bills often just list one lump price.

While most designers charge commissions of between 33 and 50%, Franklin says, "ask your decorator where he or she falls." If you shop with your designer, be sure to ask what pieces in the showroom cost, says Celeste Cooper, creative director of the design studio and furniture store Repertoire. "Any designer not willing to quote net [another name for "to-the-trade"] to you," Cooper says, "is not a professional."

5. "My hourly rate will make you see red."
6. "Shop at the right stores and you'll pay less for designers."
7. "My contractors will cost you."
8. "You and I have different perceptions of time."
9. "Custom-made can make a big mess."
10. "If I botch your project, good luck getting reparations."