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REAL ESTATE | DESIGN

Interior Designers Share Their Weirdest Client Requests

From incorporating a life-size gorilla statue to building secret rooms, here are 12 client directives that had design pros pulling out their hair



PHOTO: GWENDA KACZOR

“I decorated both ‘Sex and the City’ films and I’ve had numerous requests to recreate Carrie Bradshaw’s entire apartment. They want everything from the blue paint color of her walls to the smallest details, like the orange flip clock next to her bed.”

— *Lydia Marks, Marks & Frantz, New York*

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“One couple who’d seemed entirely pleasant on the phone had a life-size statue of a silverback gorilla in their smallish formal living room, and they insisted he remain central to the design. The ceilings were 8 feet high, and his head was a half-inch from touching it. I tried to figure out how to make him look interesting or like he was an important work of art. But by the end of the meeting, after having this gorilla stare menacingly at me from across the room, I knew I couldn’t make it work. I didn’t take the project.”

— *Rachel Cannon Lewis, Baton Rouge, La.*

“A pro baseball player wanted to wallpaper the inside of his large garage with a mural that reflected his professional life, and we were provided shots of him in different scenarios. Every version we sent featured only images with this guy in them, yet we were told it didn’t focus enough on him, with zero additional feedback. We could never please him.”

— *Jon Sherman, Flavor Paper, Brooklyn, N.Y.*

“I was asked to design a room for a couple’s teenage son, who enjoyed looking at himself. The room was covered in mirrors so he could flex his muscles and see from all angles.”

— *Erica Broberg Smith, East Hampton, N.Y.*

“A very successful businessman asked that his Tribeca penthouse be Batman-themed. He was very literal about it, but we focused on black, charcoal grays, grays and whites, with pops of yellow in the art and accessories. I interpreted the shape of bat wings architecturally and included this in a coffee table. We used lots of sleek textures and amped up the tech aspect of the apartment and built secret doors leading to different rooms and exits.”

— *Nicole Fuller, Los Angeles*

“My meeting with the client began with his chanting ‘Nants ingonyama!’ His concept for his new law-firm offices was a combination of Animal Kingdom in Disney World and ‘The Lion King.’ I used all earth tones, from the carpet to the paint colors, placed masks and baskets on the conference walls, and used various textures of wood for art pieces.”

— *Jody Myers-Fierz, Color Concept Theory, Westport, Conn.*

“A client wanted a dirt floor in the dining room of her ranch. We negotiated for a while, and what she really wanted was a floor that was cool and different from anything else that she had seen. So I created a floor made from old cowboy belts.”

— *Mark Cutler, Los Angeles*

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“For an Upper West Side apartment, the client asked for a design based on the Balenciaga Hybrid Derby Pump, a shoe that’s a modern twist on the traditional oxford heel. So we mixed classic and modern elements. The shoe’s colors are navy and black, which translated to similarly subtle color differences in the design.”

— *Adam Rolston, INC Architecture and Design, New York*

“For a young screenwriter, I was challenged to take a theme, the Barbie Dreamhouse, and transform it into something stylish yet functional for her Soho apartment. I mixed a lot of antiques from the 1970s and 18th-century France to elevate the Barbie theme yet keep it fun with bright, happy, girly fabrics.”

— *Sasha Bikoff, New York*

“A client wanted his office conference rooms themed in very outrageous and disparate ways—a Barbarella-inspired space, a Moroccan-themed den, Superman-influenced phone booths where employees could make calls with more privacy than the open plan offered. Couple this with a 1950s-style bar and a larger conference room resembling a forest, with a painted tiger circling the ceiling ductwork. We gave continuity to elements where we could—doors with the same faux-painting technique, two- and three-dimensional curvilinear transition elements that connected the spaces.”

— *Lee Melahn, Pleasant Living, LLC, New York*

“One of my clients asked me to create a secret room for his wife, without telling her about it. The home wasn’t big, so finding the space without the wife’s knowing was a challenge. Oddly enough, about a month later, the wife comes to me and asks to create a separate room for the husband, also to be a surprise. I managed to create the first room behind a staircase, and the second behind a wall that opens at the touch of a button.”

— *Thomas A. Kligerman, Ike Kligerman Barkley, New York*

“We had to fully accommodate a bird into the redesign of a couple’s Manhattan apartment. The bird was allowed to fly around the entire apartment and had a perch in the kitchen with drop pads all around. The redesign had to consider fabrics and finishes that would allow the bird’s droppings to be easily cleaned. And the bird obviously got a new cage as part of the redesign as well.”

— *Virginia Toledo, id 810 design group, Englewood, N.J*
