

The interior designer will see you now

A jump in remote consultations over the last year has brought expert stylists directly into our homes, writes Olivia Lidbury

Once the preserve of the super-rich or famous, now everyone can tap into the expertise and good taste of an interior designer – and it's largely thanks to the pandemic.

Over the past year, a host of accessible services have mushroomed, from video calls to remote consultations, all demystifying a close-knit trade.

London-based Rebecca Wakefield, founder of Studio Fortnum (studiofortnum.com), estimates she has undertaken more than 300 e-design consultations (more on those below) since last March.

"Demand has been crazy," she says. "I think it's a combination of people being stuck at home and wanting to upgrade their surroundings, along with having the disposable income that they'd usually spend on holidays or going out. And for once, getting homeowners together to make decisions isn't an issue."

Ah... decision-making. No simple feat in the Instagram and Pinterest era. The breadth of choice is so crippling that it can feel impossible to define exactly what your taste is. And while an underwhelming shade of paint can be quickly rectified, it's not so easy when you've tiled an entire bathroom in a style that will date quickly. "I give all my clients, no matter the service they've signed up for, the same attention to detail," says Charmaine White of The White House (thewhitehouseinteriors.com).

That means honed guidance to help you avoid costly mistakes in the long run. So in a climate of inspiration overload, here are the savvy services that will help you make informed and timeless choices that you'll love.

VIDEO CONSULTATIONS

The premise for The Expert (theexpert.com) is so simple, it's a wonder no one thought of it before. Born out of lockdown, it was launched in February by Jake Arnold – a British interior designer based in Los Angeles who has created homes for celebrities including Chrissy Teigen and Sophia Bush. It offers one-to-one video calls with renowned interior designers. You can pick anyone whose aesthetic you like, and the fact they might be based in California or New York is all part of its appeal. Slots last 55 minutes and a consultation with Martin Brudnizki Studio, for example (the creative wizard behind the Instagrammable decor at Annabel's in London), will set you back £719. But there are lower prices: slots with Wakefield of Studio Fortnum are £350.

Beth Dadswell of London-based Imperfect Interiors (imperfectinteriors.co.uk) had always been sceptical of offering her services remotely but has just joined the platform. "I'm finding that people want reassurance. Often with a kitchen, architects aren't always thinking about if the island is too close to the window or where the dining table is going to go. And when it comes to lighting, builders will happily put in lots of spotlights because it's cheap and easy for them to do, whereas I'll think about using light sources to create zones."

A designer can't re-fashion your entire home in less than an hour, but presented with the right information, they can collaborate with you to make the best use of your space. When the call is up, though, that's it – you can't follow up without paying for a new session.

Maximalist Abigail Ahern has partnered with Komi (komiapp.co) to offer advice through video calls too (£68.31 for 15 minutes). "It's amazing how much advice you can impart in that time," says Ahern. "In one slot, we managed to consult on colours for all the rooms, soft furnishings in a living room and lighting for the bedroom."

E-DESIGN

An umbrella term to describe remote interior design, e-design is hands-off and very much the opposite of a traditional, face-to-face service where your designer is available at the drop of a text message. But then the price isn't comparable; rather than charging in the thousands, services with companies specialising in e-design such as Topology (topologyinteriors.com) start from £299 a room and, with Project Home (projecthome.uk), from £350. The

RUKMINI PATEL



Having fulfilled her desire to be an interior designer after 10 years in banking, Patel is known for her use of colour and texture in high-end projects.



EMILY RICKARD



The creative vision behind many beautiful ad campaigns, Rickard offers tips for transforming interiors on a budget with Pimp Your Rental.

process typically involves a questionnaire and sometimes a call to discuss the space and your tastes, then a floor plan is created along with a "shopping list" of items specially curated to work within the space.

Charmaine White says the service has been popular in the US for some time, but it took Covid and remote working to get going here. "I've done it for a long time. People didn't really understand it before, but now it's really taken off."

It's worth scouring Instagram for an interior designer whose aesthetic you like. Many design practices, such as London-based House Nine (housenine.co.uk), from £325) turned to e-design when their usual projects, such as decorating luxury resorts in the Maldives, were halted because of Covid. "We really enjoy the process," says founder Jojo Barr.

Northamptonshire-based Rukmini Patel has noticed demand for shades of green with her e-design clients. "A lot of people are wanting that connection to the outdoors. And they've realised that a beige wall just isn't cutting it – good design is suddenly so important and they want something more colourful."

Patel charges £500 per room and her clients tend to have high-end budgets of £5,000 to £6,000 to spend on furnishings – but many e-designers will work within high street price brackets.

Also look up: Wandering Interiors; Mariama Jannet Interior Design; The Open Plan Interior Design

LEARNING TO THINK LIKE AN INTERIOR DESIGNER

If you are tackling a full-scale renovation and an interior designer or the services mentioned above are too prohibitive, it's worth educating yourself to think like one.

Rita Konig's *Ultimate Guide to Interior Design* (£127, createacademy.com) distills the revered creative's approach via 36 videos. It's informative – not in the sense of how to paint a wall, but how to communicate effectively with your builder and architect, and then consider soft furnishings.

Eleanor Cording-Booth, a freelance interiors writer and founder of Instagram account [@aconsideredspace](https://www.instagram.com/aconsideredspace), has

REBECCA WAKEFIELD



With over 51,000 Instagram followers the Studio Fortnum founder is making the interiors world more accessible.



JOJO BARR



The founder of House Nine created the interiors at the Gara Rock Hotel in Devon and the Leander Club in Henley-on-Thames.

been surprised at just how useful the course is. "I trust my own taste but I certainly wouldn't know the most sensible order in which to approach things. For example, focusing on layout and furniture first, then choosing paint colours last. It certainly makes designing your home feel less overwhelming." But as with anything, it pays to do your research; Konig is a maximalist and a lover of colour, as Cording-Booth puts it: "If you're a minimalist, then it's probably not for you."

For a guide less taste-specific, Cotswolds-based interior designer Lauren Gilberthorpe is about to launch Home School Interiors (homeschoolinteriors.com). A one-stop set of toolkits costing £99 per room, the aim is to teach people how to oversee a renovation.

"It's a very practical guide, such as when to order materials, what to look for with contractors, how to create floor plans and create budgeting worksheets in Excel," explains Gilberthorpe. Her practice has never been busier than in the past year and she feels such a resource is missing from the industry.

Also look up: *Be Your Own Interior Designer* by Sophie Robinson; Juliettes Interiors Online Design School; Kelly Wearstler Teaches Interior Design on masterclass.com

...NOT FORGETTING RENTERS

Bristol-based interior designer and stylist Emily Rickard founded Pimp Your Rental (pimpyourrental.com) after years of "going over and above" to make homes she previously rented in New York and Australia feel like her own.

An online course (£129) involving a mix of video interviews with experts, PDFs and case studies over five hours, it captures her tricks for making a space that isn't yours feel more personable.

She says: "One of my favourite modules is called 'embracing the ugly and unwanted.' It's about flipping an eyecore to either make it disappear into the background or by making a feature of it."

Rickard advises an hour a week at most in order to try implementing the ideas. And it's not solely for renters: "Anyone who is decorating on a budget can get a lot out of it. If you've just bought somewhere and don't have any money left for renovating, then it's full of cheap and transformative tricks."

Again, not exclusively for renters but for anyone wondering how to style their existing furniture more desirably, stylist Lucy Gough's *How to Style Your Home Like a Magazine* (courses lucygoughstylist.com, £149) does exactly that. "People are finding it's a great creative outlet," says Gough, who styles imagery for John Lewis and Marks & Spencer. "I focus on finding your interiors style, and then the principles that I teach can work in a space regardless of whether you own or rent. Ultimately, you have to be prepared to de-clutter."

HOW TO BUY THE LOOK *Shop from the best designers*



JAPANESE POTTERY BOWL
£45, *Sister by Studio Ashby*; studioashby.com/sister
Don't worry if you can't enlist the talents of Sophie Ashby – scrolling through Sister, her new e-store filled with vintage and off-beat finds, comes a close second.



WILLOW BOUGH CUSHION
£120, *Pentreath & Hall*; pentreath-hall.com
The Cambridges have Ben Pentreath to thank for their interiors at Kensington Palace and in Norfolk. We wonder if they have this cushion?



MARBLEISED TRAY
£75, *Beata Heuman*; shoppea.beataheuman.com
One of the most exciting talents of the moment, Swedish-born Beata Heuman's Shoppea features accessories created for projects that have been put into production.



AVALON BEDSIDE TABLE
£750, *Trove by Studio Duggan*; thetrove.co.uk
For truly unique pieces of furniture, take an online ramble through the veritable trove of delights that have been created by Studio Duggan.

