

**Get paid to decorate!**

FabJob Guide to  
**Become an  
Interior  
Decorator**



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## 1. Introduction

*“A great decorator doesn’t just ‘decorate.’ A great decorator has to be a true Artist of Life. They must create a home for the client that is a place they feel they can go to retreat from the world, a place they can live comfortably, and safely, a haven closest to heaven.”*

- Susan Mielke,  
Susan J. Mielke Designs, Minneapolis

As an interior decorator you will have an exciting and rewarding career that lets you use your creativity to enhance people’s lives.

Years ago, a famous psychologist named Abraham Maslow published a book titled *Motivation and Personality* which explains what humans need to have healthy and full lives. According to Maslow’s “Hierarchy

of Needs,” once our basic needs for physical and emotional well-being are fulfilled (for example, once we have food, water, and security), we become concerned with “higher” needs. Among these higher needs are “aesthetic needs” — an appreciation and desire for beauty and order.

As an interior decorator, you will help people to achieve this important need. You will bring beauty, comfort and order into people’s lives. You will discover how to get started and succeed in this fabulous career in the *FabJob Guide to Become an Interior Decorator*.

This chapter lays the foundation for the rest of the guide. In the pages that follow, you will learn some significant differences between interior decorating and interior design (and why interior decorating is the best career choice if you want to get started as quickly and easily as possible), read about the many benefits of the career, and discover the steps you will need to take to get started.

## 1.1 Interior Decorating vs. Interior Design

If you have been searching for information about interior decorating as a career, you have almost certainly come across the term *interior design*. While there are some similarities between the two careers, there are also some significant differences. It is important to know these differences because they have a direct impact on the types of jobs you can apply for. Here is a basic overview of the two careers:

### Interior Decorator

Just as the job title says, an interior decorator decorates (or redecorates) interiors of buildings, with the aim of making rooms more attractive, comfortable and functional. Most interior decorators are hired to decorate homes, but they may also be hired to decorate the interiors of businesses such as boutiques, restaurants, and offices. They may work on the entire interior of a building or just a single room.

An interior decorator’s work may involve a variety of design and room elements, including:

- space planning or “layout”

- color schemes
- furniture
- paint and wallpaper
- window coverings
- fabrics
- flooring and carpeting
- lighting
- art objects
- hardware fixtures
- accessories (e.g. vases, cushions, bookends)
- plants

A decorating job may be as simple as rearranging furniture yourself, or it may involve hiring and supervising contractors. As an interior decorator your tasks may include:

- meeting with clients to determine their wants and needs
- reviewing and taking measurements of the space you will be decorating
- preparing proposed room layouts
- obtaining cost estimates
- showing samples (e.g. colors, fabrics, tiles) to clients
- scheduling the work to be done
- arranging and overseeing painting, wallpapering, flooring, etc.
- shopping for and placing orders for furnishings and other items
- coordinating deliveries
- ensuring the decorating plan is put into action and runs smoothly until completion.

There are no formal educational requirements to enter this career. You can start calling yourself an interior decorator as soon as you start doing interior decorating.

This guide will tell you how to get started and succeed as an interior decorator. You will find resources to teach yourself any parts of the job you are not familiar with, information on how to get hired for a full-time job, and advice on how to start your own interior decorating business.

## Interior Designer

While anyone can become an interior decorator, it is considerably more difficult to become a certified interior designer. Professional standards for the interior design profession are set by organizations such as the American Society of Interior Designers or the Interior Designers of Canada.

In both the U.S. and Canada, interior designers are certified through the National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ) after passing an examination. To be eligible to write the examination, you must have an acceptable combination of full-time work experience and two to five years of post-secondary education in interior design. More information can be found at [www.ncidq.org](http://www.ncidq.org), or by calling NCIDQ at 202-721-0220 (Washington, D.C.).

While some people who call themselves interior designers are not certified, it is illegal in 18 states to call yourself an interior designer unless you are licensed.

You are probably wondering why it is so much more difficult to become an interior designer than an interior decorator. The reason is because interior design involves much more than decorating.

According to the official definition endorsed by the NCIDQ and the Council for Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA), "the interior design process follows a systematic and coordinated methodology, including research, analysis and integration of knowledge into the creative process." As a result of their education and experience, interior designers are qualified to "protect and enhance the life, health, safety and welfare

of the public.” Obviously this goes well beyond making an interior look more attractive!

Interior designers may work on a wide variety of interiors, such as office buildings, airport terminals, hospitals, manufacturing plants, government institutions, and many other types of buildings.

To do their job properly, interior designers must be educated in a number of areas. To quote from the official definition, the skills they need include:

- Research and analysis of the client’s goals and requirements
- Development of documents, drawings and diagrams that outline clients’ needs
- Ensuring that preliminary space plans and design concepts are safe, functional, aesthetically appropriate, and meet all public health, safety and welfare requirements, including construction code guidelines
- Coordination and collaboration with other allied design professionals who may be retained to provide consulting services, including but not limited to architects, structural, mechanical and electrical engineers, and various specialty consultants

In addition, their work can include interior decorating tasks such as the selection of furnishings, fixtures, and lighting. You can find the complete definition of an interior designer at the NCIDQ website at [www.ncidq.org/AboutUs/AboutInteriorDesign/DefinitionofInteriorDesign.aspx](http://www.ncidq.org/AboutUs/AboutInteriorDesign/DefinitionofInteriorDesign.aspx).

## Your Career

As you can see, the two careers are similar because they focus on improving interiors. A number of people who become interior designers also do interior decorating (the part of the job some find the most fun and interesting). In case you decide that you would like to become an interior designer, Chapter 2 contains information about interior design educational programs.

However, many people who want a career decorating homes or businesses do not want to become an interior designer. They may have thoughts similar to the following:

“Interior design doesn’t sound like what I want to do. I don’t want to have to spend years studying, worry about things like building codes, and write an examination to be certified. Can’t I just start decorating people’s houses without going through all that?”

The answer, of course, is “yes!” While some jobs clearly require the services of an interior designer (e.g. upgrading the interior of an airport terminal), there are many opportunities open to interior decorators. For example, if you want to start an interior decorating business, you can offer your services to the many people who want their home to be more attractive, but simply do not have the time or the skill to do it themselves.

As you will discover later in this guide, your services can benefit many people. In return, you can enjoy many benefits of this fabulous job.

## **1.2 Benefits of Being an Interior Decorator**

As an interior decorator you will enjoy a career with tremendous benefits, including:

### **Exciting Work**

As an interior decorator you will have an opportunity to do work that is fun and interesting. (Actually, “work” probably isn’t the best term to use. Confucius is reported to have said: “If you enjoy what you do, you will never work another day in your life.”) The career also offers plenty of variety. Chances are, no two jobs you work on will be exactly the same, and each one will give you an opportunity to learn and grow.

### **Personal Fulfillment**

A job as an interior decorator allows you to use your creativity and other talents. This career also allows you to see the results of your efforts and have the satisfaction of making a design vision (yours and your client’s) a reality.

## Opportunities

The decorating business is a multi-billion dollar per year industry experiencing steady growth. According to Faith Popcorn, an expert in consumer trends, "Time is the new money: people would rather spend money than time." Rather than doing it themselves, more people are hiring interior decorators to beautify their homes.

## People

You will likely meet and interact with a variety of interesting and successful people. Many of the people who hire interior decorators are wealthy, so you will spend time in many beautiful homes. Your work may also benefit other busy people who will appreciate your help in making their surroundings more attractive, functional, and comfortable.

## Income

As an interior decorator, you can earn a comfortable living. If you start your own interior decorating business you could earn \$100,000 or more per year. You will also get significant discounts on decorating materials you purchase.

## Freedom

If you start your own interior decorating business, you will enjoy the freedom of being your own boss and choosing your own hours. You can also work on jobs that interest you and turn down work you don't want.

## You Can Start Now

The interior decorating business is one that almost anyone can enter. No special education, experience, or connections are needed to get started and succeed. (As you will see, this guide will show you how to educate yourself, get experience, and make those important career connections.)

If any of these benefits interest you, read on to find out how this guide will help you break into interior decorating.

## 1.3 Inside This Guide

The *FabJob Guide to Become an Interior Decorator* is arranged to take you step-by-step through getting started and succeeding as an interior decorator. These steps, and the chapters they appear in, are as follows:

Chapter 2, *Getting Ready*, covers important preliminary steps to prepare you to become an interior decorator. Here you will discover the skills employers and clients are looking for, what you need to know about decorating, the best resources for learning interior decorating, and how to get decorating experience.

Chapter 3 offers tips on *How To Decorate*. You will learn some tools and tricks of the trade, including design and room elements. This chapter will also offer you step-by-step instructions on decorating and will give you some tips from the experts.

Chapter 4 focuses on *Getting Hired*. If you want the security of a full-time job, this chapter will give you information to help you land that job. You will discover who hires interior decorators, how to find out about job openings, how to prepare a portfolio and resume, and how to do well in an interview.

If you would like to *Start Your Own Business*, you will find some good advice in Chapter 5. You will find practical information on setting up your office. You will also learn how to set your rates, how to attract clients, and how to get discounts on furniture and materials. The information in this chapter alone could save you thousands of dollars.

Chapter 6, *Working With Clients*, will prepare you to do client consultations. You will learn to identify what your clients want, sell your services, and prepare decorating plans, design boards, budgets and contracts.

Included with this guide are many helpful samples, including forms and checklists you can use in your own decorating business. When you're finished with this guide you will know what steps to take next and where to go from there. By applying what you learn here, it's just a matter of time before you'll be where you want to be... in an exciting career as an Interior Decorator!