

# I'LL TAKE THAT LIVING ROOM WITH SOME FENG SHUI, PLEASE!

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Julie Schuster, Cert. Interior Designer, Cert. Red Ribbon Feng Shui Practitioner, CLIPP Certified

This month we interviewed Julie Schuster, President of the New York City chapter of the Interior Design Society and founder of [Julie Schuster Design Studio](#). Julie informs us on a host of matters from the importance of transparent pricing when working with clients to the difference that Feng Shui makes.

## **Rosenberg: What do homeowners not want?**

**Schuster:** Homeowners are fearful of the process. They worry that they're not going to be aware of the charges and that there won't be transparency. Their worst fear is that numbers will come from out of the sky and that they'll lose control of their budget. That's the #1 thing that I encounter with new clients.

Another thing is conflict of interest. If they think that the designer made a backdoor deal and got a kick back of some sort that could really create bad blood between the designer and client.

So, I try to be sensitive about this. Most of the projects I do, I do on a fixed fee. I do try to be very specific about the design fees and scope of work before the project begins.

There is always transparency when it comes to what exactly I'm doing and how much it's going to cost.

## **Rosenberg: What are the top 3 things that homeowners find perplexing when you're working on a project with them?**

**Schuster:** People usually come to an interior designer with an idea of what they think they might want, but they don't have any idea how to get there.

For example, if they're remodeling a bathroom, they know what color tile they want to see in the end, but they have absolutely no idea how to get from demo to finished product at all. That's the #1 thing that people are stymied by. They start looking for faucets before they've even looked for a contractor.

Understanding this perspective, as a designer, is where you can really make a big impact. That's why I believe it's the interior designer's job to add a system to the process that makes everything unfold logically and comfortably for the client.

## **Rosenberg: What's the best example of a time you added immense value to a project?**

**Schuster:** I was brought into a project several years ago by a contractor. They had a client situation that was a bit disjointed. They were looking for a cohesiveness on the project that they couldn't seem to achieve.

They asked me to create a concept and turn it over to them. While I was gone for vacation, the project blew up. The budget they anticipated went over by 3 times! So, I receive an email from the client while in Europe. They fired the contractor and didn't know what to do at that point.

So, I ended up project managing the entire renovation which was a much bigger job than I had ever done at that point. In the end, the apartment turned out amazing and came in just slightly over budget.

## **Rosenberg: What do clients have the most to learn about?**

**Schuster:** My [feng shui](#) services. Most people have heard of it and are curious, but no one understands it. Weaving it into the process mystifies them the most.

I incorporate the impact that a space has on people's subconscious. So, I'm able to create a space that truly harmonizes with their being and makes them happier and more comfortable in their home.

## **Rosenberg: What is overlooked most often in the process, in your experience?**

**Schuster:** I find that the architects are very interested in the beauty of how something looks, but not in the usability or functionality of things. To me, I think that sometimes gets lost.

I've always believed that houses should be built from the inside out. Build a room you love and put a shell around it.

## **Rosenberg: How do you ease stress when something does not go as planned?**

**Schuster:** By appearing competent. Problems are going to happen, but if you're confident that the right result is within your grasp and you can resolve the issue as painlessly and quickly as possible, the client will be comfortable. It's always a bit stressful when problems come up, but if your client knows you're not blowing smoke, things usually turn out ok.

## **Rosenberg: What are the biggest challenges you face with finishes like window treatments?**

**Schuster:** Accessories and small things, like art, window treatments or decorative items for the coffee table—these things tend to get lost in the wash.

When you're doing a large renovation, like a kitchen, there are so many details to keep track of that the smaller things get set aside until later. And at the end of a project, there's usually a lot of fatigue and people sort of lose interest in the little things.

That's where a great partner makes all the difference. A window treatment company that is diligent about ensuring that the window treatments are not left to be a last-minute surprise is greatly valued. Often, I don't have time to pay attention to this during the process, so I rely on my trusted partners to make sure it gets done. That way the client isn't blindsided by and overwhelmed with a sudden need to add window treatments on at the end.

## **Rosenberg: What do you look for in a vendor?**

**Schuster:** I must feel comfortable with them. I like to get to know people. And that's the advantage of being a part of the [Interior Design Society](#). I meet people, I get to know them and THEN I choose to work with them.

The #1 thing, after quality, is how they feel about their business and how they're going to stand behind their work. I want to feel confident that I'm spending my client's money on someone I can depend on.