



Now You See It

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By Stacey Freed

About 10 years ago, Jay Riordan, owner of Dream Design Builders in San Diego, realized that while developing a design, he wasted a lot of time going back and forth between a client's home and the office. On one particularly difficult project with a slew of adjustments, he says, "We finally sat down in front of the clients and started sketching ideas. It was like magic, and I realized we were onto something." A new system was born.

Now, Riordan visits a client's home, measures, and makes an as-is plan. Then he and independent designer Scott Hall sketch ideas at the home with the client present. "Sometimes we'll walk around the house and help clients envision how things will look. It helps them get their arms around it," Riordan says.

The process also lets clients see which ideas don't work right away and what hits the drawing-room floor. And, Riordan says, "If we get five minutes into a design that I'm falling in love with but that the clients hate, they can stop me right there and I'm not too invested in it." Blueprints and a more complete presentation are done later.

Riordan charges a flat design fee and maintains possession of the design if clients decide not to pursue the project, which is rare.

The process, which takes about 3½ hours, has been a cost-saver, Riordan says. Clients feel satisfied that they have been listened to, and a bond develops early on between them and Riordan. "They love it," he says. "I've gotten strong referrals from clients before I've even started building the project because they've been through our design process."



Floor Plan: Jay Riordan