

# BUSINESS OF HOME

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## How do you handle reference requests?



By Haley Chouinard

For many designers, the bulk of their clients come from referrals. Occasionally, however, clients who find their designer through other means will request references. We asked six designers—**Tori Alexander**, **Kelly Finley**, **Tracy Morris**, **Veronica Sanders**, **Alexa Stevenson** and **Lynne Scalo**—how they handle clients who want references.

### MATCH GAME

“If a potential client wants to speak to a previous client, I consider what the project scope is and what kind of client I think they might be. Then, I play matchmaker. Often, I have clients who have never worked with a designer before, and I can tell from our initial conversation that the interior design process and working with a designer is intimidating—and it can be! A large part of my job is to make them comfortable. I have a small roster of past clients that they’re encouraged to call to get a rundown of how I work and how the process usually goes. The best part is all the wonderful clients who have become my friends after the project is done.” —*Alexa Stevenson, Alexa Stevenson Interior Decoration, Athens, Georgia*



*Alexa Stevenson* Courtesy of Alexa Stevenson



*Kelly Finley* Courtesy of Kelly Finley

### LIST IT OUT

“After every initial call, we provide all prospective clients with a sheet of references. These references represent a broad range of our residential client base, [whose projects varied] from basic decoration to larger renovations. We also include a reference for at least one previous commercial client. We typically ask our most responsive clients if they would be willing to be added to the list to ensure that the prospective clients get a call back in a reasonable amount of time. We also routinely rotate clients off the list so that they are not inundated with calls for years.” —*Kelly Finley, Joy Street Design, Oakland, California*

## BUILD TRUST

“If references are going to help the new client feel more comfortable with the design process, I’m all for it. Early on in my career, I recall being asked for references. But most of my clients are either from a referral or they have seen my work in various publications. I think the best way to handle it is to give the new client three referrals to past clients. Designing is a unique relationship that requires chemistry and trust in order to create design that gets to the next level.” —*Lynne Scalo, Lynne Scalo Design, Greenwich, Connecticut*



*Lynne Scalo* Courtesy of Lynne Scalo

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## GOOD CHARACTER

“When directing clients who want references, I have a select few past clients that I refer them to. These clients are usually ones who I’ve had the best experience with, not only on a design level, but also on a personal level. As designers, we tend to form great friendships with clients. It’s almost bound to happen, given that we are so invested in their personal spaces. The clients I go to are those who can vouch for my character, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, as well as design aesthetic.” —*Veronica Sanders, Design With Veronica Sanders, Dallas*



*Veronica Sanders* Courtesy of Veronica Sanders

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## GREAT MINDS

“When a potential client asks for a reference, I find it best to connect them to a client who had a similar project. The way we work varies so much depending on the scope of the project. The questions someone may have about what it is like to work with us on furnishing a bedroom versus managing a kitchen renovation are entirely different.” —*Tori Alexander, Alexander Interiors, Sacramento, California*



*Tori Alexander* Courtesy of Tori Alexander

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## CONNECT THE DOTS

“If a client wants a reference, I am more than happy to provide them. I have been lucky to form some amazing relationships with clients over the years, who are gracious enough to provide references if needed. I always like to connect them with someone with a similar project scope so they can understand what I offer and how it will directly relate to their project.” —*Tracy Morris, Tracy Morris Design, McLean, Virginia*



*Tracy Morris* Courtesy of Tracy Morris

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