

# EDGE

## interview

### Clodagh



Photo courtesy of Daniel Aubry

Nothing says more about you than the interior of your home. Yet so often, we look at our surroundings and think, *Is this really me?* At moments like these, you may want to consider professional help. A shrink? Probably not. A designer? Most definitely. Indeed, sometimes the task of minding your manor is best left to someone with a keen and objective eye. Enter **Clodagh**, a legend in the design world who has worked in 90 countries and lent her talents to everything from cosmetics packaging to major hotels. Her inspirational and life-enhancing designs feature sustainable materials and embrace Feng Shui, Chromotherapy and Biophilia to create a signature look, structure and flow. **Sarah Rossbach**, a friend and colleague, connected with Clodagh in her Manhattan offices. There she manages the Clodagh Collection—an online showroom of home furnishings and accessories—and Clodagh Design, her design services studio.

**EDGE:** How do you feel about the old saying, *Never make friends with your interior decorator?*

**Clodagh:** It's the absolute opposite. The first large job I got, my client looked me up and down and said, "Come out to dinner." Other designers had told me, "Never go out to dinner with your client!" But my client said, "I will never hire anyone for anything unless I can sit down at the dinner table and have a conversation and communicate well with them." And that was a very wise thing.



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**EDGE:** So what kind of expectations should each person have when they start working with an interior designer?

**Clodagh:** You should expect a designer to work as a travel guide to your own life. Although you may not know it, everybody possesses his or her own innate good taste. The role of a designer is to help you explore how you want to live—how you want to actualize your life in your home, how you want to see your children in a play space, so they can make a mess and have fun doing it. When working with me, you should expect to explore your lifestyle and discuss what you expect in your own home. And when I get those down into what I call a *program*, then I can start to design the project, and get it built and finished. I approach design using the four C's: Contemplate your space; Cleanse your life of unwanted and unused things; Clarify your goals, needs and desires; and Create a space that is yours at the core.

**EDGE:** What is step one when choosing a designer?



Photo courtesy of Daniel Aubry



**Clodagh:** The best thing you can do before interviewing designers is to go to a consultant who represents a lot of designers. That person will recommend a match for you. Or you can look at a lot of design magazines and start pulling out photos of what appeals to you, and then find out who designed them. Never analyze it—just know that something appeals to you. Hold on to this visceral reaction to the space. I think the best thing is to look at yourself, your family, your partner and really figure out how you want to live.

**EDGE:** At what point is the right time to start talking to an interior designer?

**Clodagh:** As soon as you realize you've done enough research yourself and you need some guidance.

**EDGE:** Is it okay to use a designer you find intimidating or overpowering?

**Clodagh:** No. Do not use an interior designer who intimidates you. You should never feel afraid to bring



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something up. Or have to endure a designer flouncing around telling you that you have terrible taste and an object you love “has to go.” At the same time, you do want someone strong, and you need to trust his or her taste. There should be mutual trust. It’s about the conversation. You need to be verbally compatible before you can be visually compatible. Because if you feel any tension, stress or negative reaction, or hidden agenda, it’s not for you. You don’t dictate to them, they don’t dictate to you.

**EDGE:** What happens when a client won’t part with something god-awful?

**Clodagh:** Usually the god-awful thing leaves without me having to do anything at all. If it’s been in storage, the client looks at it in the new environment and says, *Oh, it doesn’t fit that well.*

**EDGE:** You ask your clients a lot of questions before taking a job. What are the best questions a client asks you—the questions that tell you that the relationship is going to work well?

**Clodagh:** “Can you help me to live the way I want to live?” or “How can you guide me to have the sort of environment where I can have peace, balance and live harmoniously?” Really, the best thing a client can do for me is describe their ideal lifestyle, and then ask me how I can achieve it for them. And like any good conversation, I interject and suggest. I’m working with a client now who likes working in a really dark



office. So I have to balance that darkness with enough light that I feel will be comfortable for him, position his desk properly, add the kind of color that will give the room a boost, and then go with it. And I need to temper his love of darkness with his wife's love of light.

**EDGE:** Yin and yang.

**Clodagh:** Exactly. Another good question people ask is, "How can you do my children's room?" I find children's rooms to be over-stuffed and prefabricated in the parents' mind, with little elephants painted on walls, when actually children are the most artistic creatures in the world. I love children and how their minds work. I install in their rooms chalkboards or dry point boards to use their markers on, so they can enjoy their environment. If it's a house, I'll make a room that's specifically for them. It's their room where they can make a mess and leave it if they need to—and not feel they have to clean up because Mommy or Daddy is coming. I get the joy that children feel in the spaces I design. I love that they're empowered.

**EDGE:** What are the questions a client should listen for from a designer?

**Clodagh:** A designer should be asking you, "How can I help you live the way you want to live?"

**EDGE:** That's a very spiritual approach.

**Clodagh:** Yes, there's no such thing as an inanimate object. You're working with people to achieve a spatial, visual and visceral harmony. And harmony is very hard to quantify. I sometimes tell my clients when they are choosing a chair to close their eyes. Sit in it and close your eyes and feel what's the sensation. I find most clients focus on the visual. Susan Sontag said, "Sight is the most promiscuous of all the senses." But in design, our other senses are equally important. So we need to explore all our feelings. For instance, we have a client in Texas who told us she has a very stressed-out life and that soaking every day in a warm tub helped relax her. So we focused a lot of energy and budget on creating an extraordinary bathroom. She brings



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into this beautiful space flowers and candles, and when she steps into her tub that is *her* time, where she releases her emotional and physical toxins. It's a cleanse, where she regains herself.

**EDGE:** What do you get from creating a home that you don't get from a corporate job?

**Clodagh:** With a home, if the family is happy and comfortable, they disappear. If not, you get telephone calls. With a corporate job, years down the road, people still refer to the design. People working in a large music office I designed 20 years ago still tell me how they love working in that space.

**EDGE:** What does a great client bring to the experience so you have a wonderful collaboration?

**Clodagh:** Challenge!

**EDGE:** In terms of interior design, what is the "shelf life" of a Clodagh job?

**Clodagh:** I'm having lunch today with someone whose apartment I designed 23 years ago. She and it are still going strong. Some old clients will call and ask me to freshen up my existing design after many years. They'll invite me to have a look around, and then not allow me to touch anything. Just freshen it up. Maybe new sheets, new drapes, new shades. My feeling is good design should not have a shelf life. I work to create a timeless design. **EDGE**

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