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INTERIOR DESIGNER  
CARLA ASTON REVEALS...

# HOW TO CUT COSTS ON YOUR INTERIOR DESIGN PROJECT

*3 Priceless Cost-Cutting  
Strategies for the  
Budget-Conscious*

BY CARLA ASTON

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*How to Cut Costs on Your Interior Design Project*

*How to Cut Costs on Your Interior Design Project -  
3 Priceless Cost-Cutting Strategies for the  
Budget-Conscious*

By Carla Aston - Interior Designer

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# Table Of Contents

4	<u><a href="#">About the Author: Carla Aston</a></u>
5	<u><a href="#">The Problem With Wishy-Washy Wishlists</a></u>
8	<u><a href="#">How to Cut Costs on Your Interior Design Project</a></u>
12	<u><a href="#">You're Gonna Love It!</a></u>
13	<u><a href="#">Also Available From <i>The Carla Aston Collection</i></a></u>

## ABOUT CARLA ASTON

A passion for blending beauty with function led me into the field of interior design.

After graduating with my design degree, I spent nine years in the Dallas area employed in architectural and design firms working on all types of corporate, hospitality, and high-end residential projects. After having my children, I followed my husband's work and lived overseas in Australia and Norway. I was so lucky to be able to travel and enjoyed observing different cultures, architecture, and styles of living which broadened my perspective on design.

I've had my own business, Aston Design Studio, LLC in The Woodlands, Texas since 2001, designing all types of residential interiors for clients, helping them create meaningful, beautiful, functional spaces to nurture their lives and loved ones.

Writing my design blog, [DESIGNED w/Carla Aston](#), has become my most passionate hobby. It is where I share my love of good design with others. It's popularity blossomed into reaching many more homeowners with varied budgets. I now offer smaller bites of design services in addition to full-service design: an easy [email Q&A service](#) and a simple [one-time in-person design consultation](#) for local homeowners.

I've also written a library of ebook guides—[available here on my website](#)—that consist of some of the most common design dilemmas I have seen and consulted on through the years, with their solutions.

## Wishy-washy wishlists

So you've made your grand remodeling wishlist and WOW your place is going to look great!

But then you get to thinking...

*I wonder if I should add wallpaper to the walls in this room. Oh, and on second thought... I think I do want to go ahead and redo the mantel at the fireplace.*

*But UGH... Should I though? This project is already costing me an arm and a leg. Maybe I shouldn't.*

*But, then again... Maybe I should! Surely it won't cost much more to make those things happen with my contractor. After having spent so much money on this job, maybe my contractor will give me a discount on this additional work.*

*But will they though? Do you really think you'll get that discount? Will the contractor really want to work for free?*

*Hoping for generous discounts on products and labor isn't a good way to manage expenses; and it certainly isn't how you should go about motivating your contractor to do their best work so you'll receive those WOW-worthy results you've been dreaming of.*

## I'll never forget it...

I'll never forget what a carpenter I frequently work with—a guy who works for high-end designers and builders all over Houston—once said to me...

“Carla... I love working with you.”

"Why's that?" I asked.

## How to Cut Costs on Your Interior Design Project

“Because you don’t negotiate the price. You accept the pricing I offer and we move forward. You don’t try to persuade me to lower my rates or ask for favors.”

Sure, some would say I’m not looking out for the best interests of my clients by not asking for lower rates; that I’m not getting them the best deal possible. And to that I say...

No. I’m not letting down my clients. If anything, I’m building them up—and by “building” I mean their WOW-worthy interior they hired me to design.

What I’m doing is I’m getting respected, honest workers to agree to work on my clients’ projects and to perform at the best of their abilities.

By paying these people what they're worth you're investing in peace of mind—peace of mind that they are going to take good care of you; that if something goes wrong they'll be eager to make things right; and, most importantly, that they are going to do their absolute best work in an effort to *exceed* your expectations.

Most of the jobs I work on are fully designed and specified, thinking through all the details to assure a well-designed and thoughtful outcome. I don't want the contractor to cut corners; instead, I want them to have enough money in the job to do everything as specified.

Because we’ve put so much detail and care into the design of the job, I'm rarely able to get them extra discounts, extra favors, or any other type of extraordinary care after a project is already underway. And, honestly, when a client asks for me to make such a request, I'm left feeling very uncomfortable. Why? Because what I'm essentially doing is squeezing the contractor and making them feel very uncomfortable too.

Do you want the contractor who’s working on your design project to feel uncomfortable, to feel like they’re being squeezed?

I know I wouldn’t.

## How to Cut Costs on Your Interior Design Project

How you can get everything you want out of your design project in a budget-friendly manner using the same cost-cutting techniques I use on behalf of my clients.

Before I reveal what you *should* do, let me take a moment to reiterate what I strongly encourage you *shouldn't* do...

### **Resist shopping around and getting multiple bids.**

Sure, I understand it makes you feel like you're getting exactly what you want for less money. However, because labor is such a critical part of any job, *hiring teams who've decided to take less money than they feel comfortable accepting will inevitably backfire*. The management, the warranty, and—yes—the overall look of the project will suffer.

That's why project pricing is something I generally don't haggle over. Instead, I choose to respect the pricing the contractor has offered and go from there. I want these guys to want to work on my projects for many years to come; and, trust me, you do too because having good people who are eager to work with you and are only a phone call away is a priceless perk to have.

# How to cut costs on your interior design project

Now that you know what I suggest you don't do, here's how I recommend you go about reducing your project's costs while also ensuring you part ways with your design team feeling proud of its end results.

## 1. Reduce the scope.

If I need to cut way back on a project for budget purposes, the absolute best way to do so is to cut the size of the project.

I realize resisting remodeling areas you've long wanted to address is easier said than done, but if you can force yourself to simply leave a space untouched until your next remodel comes around, you will save so much money on labor, product, and material costs. Why? Because each unique project requires multiple trades be involved, as well as coordination from a good contractor.

Here's an effective way to go about framing the decision you need to make...

Would you rather address all the spaces in your home a little bit?

*Or...*

Would you rather have a few spaces addressed a lot?

For example, this is often a typical project scope in remodeling...

A kitchen remodel with paint throughout... new wood floors throughout most areas... fireplace wall remodel in main open area... and a primary bath remodel.

How do you cut down a scope such as *that*?

# How to Cut Costs on Your Interior Design Project

*Remove the primary bath remodel.*

Why? Well...

1. It's located in a different part of the house.
2. You might even have a back door entrance so, sometime later on down the road, that space could be remodeled while separated off from the rest of the house.
3. Your house will be in a disheveled mess anyway, so save one area for refuge where you can store things or go to privately to get away from your project's ongoing mess.
4. This room's remodel will take a substantial portion out of your budget.
5. All other parts of the overall remodel affect each other. But this one... It's completely separate.

And this is a typical project scope for furnishings...

Main living room and dining room... new furnishings with rug and window treatments needed.

*Just do the living room for now. Save the dining room for another day.*

Why? Well...

1. Many times furnishing items like fabrics and wallpaper can be discontinued, so doing a partial redo and leaving out certain items might create more problems later on if they are unavailable to complete the room as planned.
2. You will feel like one room is complete and you don't have to go back to it to add to it—or possibly redo to update it—later on.

## 2. Reselect the materials.

Yes, we all love marble mosaic floors. *But...*

Just because you've seen the images all over Pinterest and Houzz doesn't mean your budget should be eyeing them too.

## How to Cut Costs on Your Interior Design Project

Who doesn't love that wonderful wall of drapery with a stunning fabric, trim, a unique method of fabrication, and even custom drapery hardware? We all do! Unfortunately, every single piece of this treatment can be costly—especially the fabrics. Going with a pricey fabric on drapery panels, where you need many yards to do the job, is going to add up fast. Material-cost-per-unit matters.

Then there's the labor to consider. Labor will cost the same or even more with higher-end materials. However, cutting **the cost per square foot cost per yard, or cost per unit of materials** can help edge the cost down somewhat.

Here's an example: Finding a less expensive mosaic tile, or perhaps going to a 12 x 12 marble tile (less money per square foot and less labor cost / less tile cutting) would be a way to cut back on material cost.

Is it hard to cut back on these items? Yes. It can be *really hard* when you love what you've selected. Fortunately, this approach can be effective, albeit to a lesser degree than knocking down the overall scope of your project.

### 3. Simplify the details.

I know, I know... Everyone has fabulous Pinterest boards and Houzz Ideabooks they've been saving for a long time and want to put to use. I receive them all the time from clients helping me wrap my head around what they want their end result to be.

What so many of us often fail to remember (myself included) is that most of what's photographed and uploaded to Pinterest and Houzz are professionally photographed images of high-end interiors—which means those details you see and love and desperately want designed into your project cost a lot of money. Most of them are custom designed and fabricated and can blow through a middle-class budget in a heartbeat.

Naturally, people are disappointed when they realize how expensive these looks can cost. It's like collecting images of Ferraris and Lexuses but only having a budget of \$30,000 for your new car.

## How to Cut Costs on Your Interior Design Project

Ads, magazines, HGTV shows... They're all so manipulative with how they seduce us into wanting these highly detailed high-end lifestyles! How's that so? Go watch a single segment of HGTV with the following in mind...

- Those materials they use: they're often donated by brands looking for exposure in front of the show's viewers.
- Their labor costs: they're outrageously undervalued as the trades are —*again*—being compensated with exposure instead of money.
- And don't forget all those "sponsors": they fund a large share of their project's budget.

Here in the real world, though—where it's highly unlikely we'll be kidnapped out of a Home Depot and driven back to our home where a crew of design celebrities and people with hard hats eagerly await our arrival so they can surprise us with a "free" home makeover—we have to come to grips with the realities of budget conscious interior design projects...

Realities such as...

- Fancy edge details on marble or quartzite slabs are expensive, which means a straight countertop edge would be a wiser choice to make.
- Because a custom upholstered dining chair using two fabrics, as well as nailheads custom selected and spaced  $\frac{1}{2}$ " apart along the edge of the back and seat is *expensive*, you could instead opt for a similar looking chair that can be bought out of a catalog.
- Many times expensive materials are more costly to fabricate or install, so your labor charges might even be reduced also.
- That large, feature-quality shampoo niche with marble shelves and a tile back you're just dying to have is more expensive than a shampoo niche created from a standard mold form and covered with the field tile in the shower by the tile, filled in without specs by the tile contractor on the job (in other words, done the way the tile contractor just decides to install it).

If you minimize your project's details and customization and, instead, go with more generic offerings that are already manufactured, your budget is going to go *a lot further*.

## You're gonna love it!

Will minimizing things take some of the “special” out of the job? Yes, of course it will!

But this is the best way to lower your overall cost.

You're still going to love the end results and you will love the price tag a lot more too.

*Also Available From  
The Carla Aston Collection*

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[How to Choose Perfect Flooring for Your Home](#)

[The Top 9 Telltale Signs of a DIY Interior Design Project](#)

[The Bathroom Design Guide Project Checklist](#)

[The Backsplash Bible](#)

[How to Choose Perfect Paint Colors For Your Home](#)

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