



## Design Trust



Meryl Stern

Many people, if asked the key to interior design, might respond with a notion of color, style, drama, or comfort. But Haworth interior designer Meryl Stern knows the truth, that communication is the foundation for every successful project.

For the first meeting, Stern tells potential clients both parties will interview each other to assess the fit. "Successful jobs begin with a solid, trusting relationship," she says. "We need to be honest about budgets, to be clear about the project's scope and my role in executing it, and to communicate design objectives, even in a nonverbal way through pictures and samples. Clearly communicating at the first meeting paves the way for a smooth, open dialogue throughout the project."

Clients — finding her through referrals and her warm commercial designs such as the Harvest Bistro in Closter — first contact Stern because they appreciate her sophisticated designs and come to value "the feeling that we are partnering on their project." Once she and clients are on the same page, Stern compiles the ingredients of a custom design. Her firm, established in 1994, offers space planning and layout, construction drawings, specifying finishes and building materials for every room, furnishings and custom furniture, wall and floor coverings, and lighting.

"Function is always my top priority. My goal is to understand how the client lives," says Stern, an allied member of the American Society of Interior Designers. She learns about clients' children, pets, careers, and visitors. "From the moment they wake up, what is their routine?" This applied knowledge ensures impeccable function and endears her to male as well as female clients. "Men usually have strong ideas about practical and financial considerations and prefer to choose from a carefully edited selection of schemes rather than seeing everything that's out there," she says.

Stern balances her timeless designs with millennial challenges — remote controls, computer cables, heavyweight components, and huge screens — while meeting clients' other needs, such as bedrooms that age gracefully with their children or living areas that function as smoothly for entertaining corporate clients as for everyday relaxing. "I definitely don't do trendy, flashy looks," she says. "I will work with my clients' color suggestions or request for themes and find inspiration in ways that still have a classic, modern twist ..."

"In terms of furniture, I can't imagine doing a space without mixing in antiques. Even a modern space needs to be grounded with some historical reference or provenance. It's what gives a space character and humanness."

— by Mary Vinnette

MERYL  
STERN  
INTERIORS

**OPPOSITE:** Interior designer Meryl Stern wanted to create a sense of history in the family room/entertaining area of a Bergen County home built in the 1980s. The carved wood statue from an old church, the heirloom harp, and the glazed brick wall assist in the illusion. Stern removed a sauna, shower, and bathroom, then opened the wall before adding the window and bookshelves. **LEFT:** The homeowner prizes comfort and style. Stern used color contrast, texture, and luxurious materials to heighten interest: ebony-stained pine floors, an antique gilt wood mirror, linen and mohair upholstery, an ebony tree-trunk table, and an antique wrought-iron chandelier. The grandeur of the mirror and chandelier make the scale of the 17-foot-high walls seem less imposing.

Photos by Marisa Pellegrini

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