

Interior Designer interview questions

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What to expect

Interior design interviews mix portfolio review with practical questions about how you handle briefs, budgets and the messier parts of a project once it hits the construction site. Expect the panel to probe both your design judgement and your ability to keep a project on schedule and on budget.

- **Portfolio and process:** Walk-throughs of past projects, from brief to finished space, focusing on decisions made along the way.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of handling client conflict, budget pressure or coordination breakdowns with contractors.
- **Scenario / judgement:** Hypothetical situations testing how you'd balance client wishes against budget, timeline or building constraints.
- **Technical / software:** Questions on which design software you use and how you apply it to floor plans, visualisations and documentation.
- **Client-facing:** How you manage expectations, present concepts and handle disagreement over design direction.

Most interviews open with a portfolio walk-through, move into behavioural and scenario questions about project delivery, then close with practical questions on software tools and availability. Panels for commercial or hospitality roles may add a second-round presentation task.

1. Talk me through a project in your portfolio, from the initial brief to the finished space.

Why they ask

This is the core question for any design role. It tests whether you can explain your thinking, not just show pretty renders.

How to structure your answer

Walk through it chronologically: brief and constraints, concept development, key decisions and trade-offs, and the final outcome.

Example answer

"One project started with a client brief for a small apartment that needed to feel larger without a full renovation budget. I developed two concept directions using mood boards, then built the preferred option out in SketchUp so the client could see the space before committing. We settled on a lighter colour palette and built-in joinery to free up floor space. I sourced furnishings that fit both the aesthetic and the budget, and coordinated with the contractor on the joinery specs so the final fit-out matched the visualisation almost exactly."

2. Tell me about a time a client wanted something that didn't fit their budget or the practical constraints of the space.

Why they ask

Client management and diplomatic pushback come up constantly in this job, and panels want to see you handle it without losing the relationship.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: situation, task, action, result, with emphasis on how you communicated the constraint to the client.

Example answer

"A client wanted full custom joinery throughout a living area, but the budget only stretched to a mix of custom and off-the-shelf pieces. I put together a comparison showing where custom joinery added the most visible value, like a feature wall unit, and where a well-chosen off-the-shelf piece would look almost identical for less cost. The client agreed to the mixed approach, and the project came in within budget without a noticeable drop in the finished look."

3. A contractor tells you mid-fit-out that a material you specified isn't available and the project is due to finish in two weeks. What do you do?

Why they ask

This tests judgement under time pressure and your ability to problem-solve without derailing the design intent or the schedule.

How to structure your answer

Frame it as a judgement call: assess the constraint, weigh options against design intent and deadline, and explain how you'd communicate the decision to the client.

Example answer

"I'd first ask the contractor for close alternatives in stock or available quickly, since matching the original finish as closely as possible protects the design intent. I'd present two or three substitute options to the client with a clear explanation of the timeline reason, rather than making the swap without telling them. If nothing close was available in time, I'd look at whether the schedule could absorb a short delay for the original material, and let the client choose between waiting or switching."

4. Which design software do you use day to day, and how do they fit together in your workflow?

Why they ask

Technical fluency across the software stack is a genuine requirement, since floor plans, visualisations and presentation materials all rely on different tools.

How to structure your answer

Answer tool by tool, explaining the purpose of each and how they connect in a typical project.

Example answer

"I use AutoCAD for accurate floor plans and technical drawings, then bring those into SketchUp or 3ds Max to build 3D visualisations clients can actually picture themselves in. For any project needing detailed construction documentation I'll work in Revit alongside the architect's files. Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop come in for finishing presentation boards and mood boards, since clients respond better to a polished visual than a raw model."

5. How do you manage a project timeline when you're running more than one job at once?

Why they ask

Project management across concurrent jobs is a daily reality in this role, and panels want evidence of a real system, not just a claim of being organised.

How to structure your answer

Describe your process directly: how you plan, track and re-prioritise across projects.

Example answer

"I keep a running timeline for each project with key milestones like concept sign-off, material selection and site handover, and I check them against each other weekly so I can see clashes coming before they happen. If two projects hit a critical stage in the same week, I look at which client is more time-sensitive, usually based on contractor availability, and shift my own admin work rather than delaying either project's milestone."

6. What would you do if you disagreed with a client's design direction but they were set on it?

Why they ask

This probes how you balance professional judgement with client autonomy, which matters in a client-facing advisory role.

How to structure your answer

Explain your reasoning process and where you draw the line between advising and deferring.

Example answer

"I'll always say my concern once, clearly, with a practical reason attached, whether that's a functional issue or a budget consequence. If the client still wants to go ahead after hearing that, it's their space and their decision, so I'll deliver it as well as I can and make sure the practical issue I raised is documented so there's no confusion later about who decided what."