**Top manufacturers tell us how designers are chosen to develop product lines**

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The term interior design can sometimes seem like a misnomer—in addition to crafting interior spaces, achieving a desired look often involves all kinds of other design, including the creation of custom furniture, one-off rugs, and other distinctive products. For some interior designers, this knack for furniture and product design can eventually lead to the creation of signature collections with manufacturers. To get the inside scoop on how these collaborations work, we spoke with four top companies—[Kohler Interiors](http://www.kohlerinteriors.com/index.jsp), [Schumacher](http://www.fschumacher.com/), [The Rug Company](http://www.therugcompany.info/index.htm), and [Tufenkian](http://www.tufenkiancarpets.com/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)—about how they select designers, and develop products from start to finish.

**Why they like designer collections**

"A lot of the best design ideas come from people who are out there actually doing the interiors," says John Hart, chief creative officer of Kohler Interiors, which includes Baker, McGuire, Ann Sacks, and Kallista. His roster of designers includes Barbara Barry, Michael S Smith, and Bill Sofield. "The best product designs are developed in the context of an overall environment, and who better to understand that than some of the leading practitioners in the field?"

"With fabric and wallpaper, designers are coming from the perspective of 'What kinds of things have I been dreaming about that I can't find in the marketplace,'" says Susan North, creative director of Schumacher, who counts Jamie Drake, Matthew Patrick Smyth, and Celerie Kemble among her collaborators. "They have a very specific vision for how to use the product."

"Working with different designers gives us a variety we could never achieve just by working with in-house designers," says Amanda Price, the US managing director of The Rug Company, which has partnered with designers such as David Rockwell, Alexandra Champalimaud, and Kelly Wearstler. "We have all of these different talents bringing their own aesthetics to the same medium."

"A big advantage of working with designers is tapping into their unique creative vision and sense of what is needed in the market," says James Tufenkian, who founded Tufenkian carpets, and has worked with Laura Kirar, Vicente Wolf, and Clodagh, among others. "That sense is coming out of the experience of an interior designer actually shopping for great interiors."

**What they look for in collaborators**

"It's important that a designer has a good book of work," says Kohler's Hart. "They have a practice where they have, for example, designed furniture for their own projects. We like them to be advanced enough and recognized enough in their career that there's marketing value to collaborating with them."

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"We always look for people who we feel are on the ascent of becoming a very high-profile designer, in terms of their look, point of view, and presence," says Schumacher's North. "We're looking for someone who has national and international presence. We also look for designers who have a message that's in sync with the Schumacher brand."

"We try to pick people who aren't just a big name," says The Rug Company's Price. "We don't choose people just because they're press-worthy. We're looking for somebody who's going to bring something different to the table, and add to our collection."

"We look for a design vision that seems to add to our own, and which will take our rug collections in new and exciting directions," says James Tufenkian. "They need to strike me as good collaborators—good personal chemistry with me, and naturally inclined to collaborate, rather than to dominate."

**How it works**

"We actually discourage people from submitting unsolicited collection ideas, because we do a lot of product design and would hate to have somebody down the line think that something might be their idea," says Kohler's Hart. But, he adds, "Once we have them, they really are relationships that require a lot of attention, because they're ongoing. It's all royalty based—we do that very purposefully, because we like designers to have skin in the game."

"It's extremely collaborative," says Schumacher's North. "I always ask the designer to send me a handful of things—images, textiles, or antiques—objects that they absolutely love. We really get their point of view from that, and then we start to design things together. We make sure that their voice comes through loud and clear, but we add a great deal to it with our knowhow in terms of the technical aspects."

"We never cap people's creativity," says The Rug Company's Price. "We say 'If we can produce it, then we'll make it.' The designers really start with a blank canvas, after we've explained the process of making a rug and what's possible." However, she explains, "There's an exclusivity clause—they can't work in flooring for another company."

"It's usually my job to guide the execution of the design vision into choices of materials and techniques that will result in the most exciting products, and ones that best realize the designer's vision," says James Tufenkian. The company decides which designs to produce "by vetting among our internal design staff, salespeople, and key dealers. My personal inclination, based on where I think the market is going, plays a big part, as does the designer's own level of excitement about the finished product."