



We tapped architect Julie Fisher—who designed the inventive staircase-slide hybrid in our March 2014 issue—for her expert opinion on how to shop for furniture. Along with Rachel Crawl, Fisher of fcStudio Inc. crafts interiors that are elegant, expressive, and functional. Here are her tips and tricks for two of the toughest spaces to stock: living and dining rooms.

When designing a dining room or dining area, what pieces of furniture do you look for and why?

I think the way people entertain has changed, and flexibility and comfort is key. I always go for clean and minimal tables that can expand and let the food and table settings take center stage. As far as chairs and lighting are concerned, I like to pick one of them as the focal point in a dining room. If there is a framed view into the dining area, a dramatic light fixture can make a statement. If it is an open space, chairs with a pop of color could be interesting. If the room is small, the window treatments can be what draws attention to the perimeter of the room, leaving the table and room feeling more open—different tricks for different spaces!

What type of lighting do you recommend for dining rooms?

Regardless of the scale of the dining area, I love lighting that has a glow. It can really set the ambiance of the space.



In the dining room, Fisher opted for a Cross Extension table and Profile chairs from Design Within Reach and a custom bench by JJ Woodwork. The Spillray pendants are by Axolight.

Photo: Katrina Wittkamp

When shopping for living room furniture, what's the first thing you buy and why?

I always start with the sofa. It is usually one of the most costly items, takes up the most space, and usually has very specific requirements from the clients. I almost always start furniture layouts with options based on different sofa locations and configurations.

When shopping for a sofa, what attributes should people be looking for?

The clients need to be specific about the use of the sofa. If it's really for living in, then comfort and durability is a key. I keep it neutral, and let pillows and throws create the pop of color or accent. If it is a show piece that looks great when you walk into the home, then you need to establish if the sofa itself as an art piece, or let the upholstery and details take center stage.

Any useful furniture buying advice you've personally received over the years?

Check warranties on any custom furniture orders. These orders are usually the most costly and have the longest lead times. Get any return policies in writing, including how shipping is handled if there are any issues with the item or if unsatisfactory merchandise arrives. This is clearly stated and common sense for larger furniture companies, but not so clear with smaller companies or European companies.

Anything else you'd like to add?

I really think there are a lot of good-looking products that are comfortable and functional. I think it is important not to let our design sensibilities get in the way of function, comfort and durability in the end. Finding objects that satisfy all three elements make me feel like I am a successful designer—that is, if the clients are happy in the end as well!

For more furniture coverage, pick up a copy of our June 2014 issue.



In the George Street Residence, architect Julie Fisher designed a custom walnut staircase. She selected a Honeycomb rug from One King's Lane and a Bensen Edward sofa from ID Chicago to outfit the living room.

Photo: Katrina Wittkamp