

BUSINESS OF HOME

BOH

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AT THE
**Finish
Line**

The paint is dry. The curtains are up.
The client is happy. What's next?
We show you how to turn one great
project into five more.

1 Going the Distance

A happy client. The perfect images for your portfolio. A feature in a magazine. Photos that ricochet around Instagram and Pinterest, garnering a flurry of likes. The phone ringing off the hook from amazing would-be clients who want the same magical experience with your firm. That's the dream, right?

From the photographer you hire to the stylist you bring in to make those photos sparkle, the way you document your work and share it with the world has the potential to capture the imagination of the next, even greater client. (And yes, we'll explain why a stylist should be nonnegotiable.) It's not only how you set up each shot—that you do with those photos matters too, from where you pitch them to how they help you tell the story of your firm and the transformative power of your design.

Good work begets more work—that, we know, is true. But it doesn't hurt to help things along a little. As a job winds down, it's the perfect time to lay the groundwork for future projects. In addition to documenting a job well done, that also means taking extra-special care of your clients and leaving them with a feel-good impression that primes them to share your name with everyone they know (and call you again). For example, instead of kicking them out during your install days, send them to a spa. Or dazzle them with a custom cocktail as they walk in the door for the first time—a final reminder that you've been listening to their likes and dislikes all along. Better yet, change the way you charge so that when you leave the job, you're not only handing over a completely reimagined home, but also a check. (We're not kidding.) In these pages, designers share some of the most thoughtful ways to say goodbye—which hopefully means you're only saying, "Goodbye for now."



2 The Big Day

Throughout the design process, the designer is the composer, putting notes on the page to create a beautiful song. But on install day, they're the conductor—making sure everything (and everyone) is in the right place at the right time, sometimes in eight hours or less. What does it take to cross the finish line? We asked six designers who they bring with them on the big day, how they kick out their clients, and how they set themselves up to solve the problems that inevitably arise.

AS TOLD TO KAITLIN PETERSEN



PHOTOGRAPHY: HARIS KENJAR (INTERIOR); PORTRAITS: COURTESY OF DESIGNERS. PAGES 44-45; JORGE GERA.

Conventional wisdom is that you do the installation when the clients aren't home to see the process unfold. How do you convince them to stay away—and how long do you ask for?

ANTHONY DUNNING: I convince my clients to stay away by getting them to agree to do so at our initial meetings. I find that if I set the expectation at the beginning of the process, there is much less confusion about what is expected on installation day. We request that pets remain away as well.

TAMU RASHEBA GREEN: I absolutely prefer my clients to be away on install day. Even a magical transformation can lose its mystique if the client sees all the

Tim Pfeiffer wanted to give this 1930s home a modern feel while still nodding to the Mexican design influence imparted by the original architect. After an install like this one, the designer likes to leave the client fresh flowers throughout the house as a welcome-home gift.



MA Allen
RALEIGH, NC



Lindsey Borchard
LINDSEY BROOKE DESIGN
WESTLAKE VILLAGE, CA



Anthony Dunning
TRADERS HAVEN DESIGN
NEW YORK



Tamu Rasheba Green
LUX PAD INTERIORS
ATLANTA & NEW YORK



Benjamin Johnston
HOUSTON



Tim Pfeiffer
HOEDEMAKER PFEIFFER
SEATTLE

tricks of the trade! I promise my clients a design-show-style reveal if they can stay away long enough—typically one or two days. They love the idea of experiencing a jaw-dropping reveal like they've seen on their favorite home improvement shows.

BENJAMIN JOHNSTON: We generally request that the client give us a few days to install everything down to the final details, including the draperies, furnishings, lighting and artwork. This might require two to three days—or three to five, if we're having the project professionally photographed. Most clients really look forward to the experience of walking into a fully completed home, so we rarely face resistance when we ask that they be patient through this final stage of the design process. If we do get push-back, we remind them that this turnkey service is why they hired our team. It's far more exciting to have a grand reveal than to stand around watching what's going on behind the scenes!

TIM PFEIFFER: You don't ask an artist to see the canvas midway! With an honest concern for the client's comfort and a healthy forewarning of the invasive nature of installing their home, we nearly always get their buy-in. Many of our projects are destination homes that give us greater flexibility than with clients in residence.

LINDSEY BORCHARD: I agree. We are typically installing full homes, so it's a little easier to ask that of our clients than if we were installing one or two rooms.

We try to plan it [to align] with a vacation; even if they have to stay with family, we always tell them it will be easier and faster for us to have the run of the place. During the day, there are too many people moving furniture, placing tools, ladders and more, and it's just not ideal, or safe, to have them there. We typically want them out between two and five days.

MA ALLEN: While we desire to present the completed scope to our clients as a "big reveal," COVID-19 has certainly redefined what this experience looks like for our clients and our project teams. Due to monumental lead times, we have restructured installs into two or three parts, depending on estimated arrival dates. This allows the clients to experience some gratification sooner than if we were to wait until all items are received, while also reducing their overall storage fees. We typically coordinate installs when our clients are away for work or travel, which allows the team to maneuver freely through the space. Breaking up installs does present one unique problem: The installed items can appear completely out of place. My layered design style is achieved with a variety of colors and patterns, a mix of design styles, and antiques as well new pieces, so sometimes the balance can appear off until the very last item is in place.

Have you ever had a client insist on being around? If so, how did it go?

GREEN: I haven't had a client insist on being around—thank God! By the time we make it to the installation, my client



and I have built trust and they are excited to experience a big reveal.

DUNNING: I have, on occasion, had clients who insist on being present for the installation process—and in each instance, those clients jumped in and joined the install. I often work with design enthusiasts, and if they are passionate about being involved, I'm flexible and happy to oblige.

JOHNSTON: We've definitely had clients insist on being home, always promising to stay out of the way. In practice, that has worked to varying degrees. We've found that once homeowners realize how many things happen at once during an install—and how many people descend upon their home—they begin to feel overwhelmed and choose to retreat to an empty part of the home while we get the job done.

ALLEN: The bigger issue is when a client is adamant about overseeing the install themselves. We set out from the beginning with a line item in our contract stating our team will be on-site for all installations. However, there is the occasional project that excludes this scope, against our wishes. This usually leads to misplaced items and a lot of frustration for everyone involved. Our involvement at install is integral, not only for putting furniture in its correct place, but also at the micro level. From rug and furniture pads to staging shelves, a designer's eye is needed to bring the space full circle.

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Layering accessories, like those in this office by Benjamin Johnston, is a key part of install day. His team comes to the job site armed with documents that detail precise measurements for each room, outlining where rugs, furniture and artwork should be positioned.

BORCHARD: Especially during COVID times, we try our best to accommodate clients. If they can hang out in another part of the house, that is helpful. But we put our foot down with children. They are not allowed in the house while we install—that is for safety, and I do not budge on that.

When you arrive for the install, what's already done and what's on your to-do list for a typical project?

ALLEN: Hopefully, the build is complete (hello, COVID delays!), but we have definitely been required to share space with contractors at the time of the install. This process is usually pretty linear, with the walls and windows being treated first, then rugs positioned to accommodate the furniture placement. From a project management perspective, it's important to ensure that invoice payments are received prior to installation, which protects not only your team but also the partners involved in creating these components. Keeping a clear record of items received, inspected and delivered and ensuring their quality has been maintained throughout the process also protects the client. Project closeout is not the time to be hands off—it requires a great deal of attention by the designer, project manager and accounting team.

DUNNING: Our installs are conducted post-construction and deep clean. On occasion, we may have to paint an accent color or hang a wallcovering, but for the

most part, we are focused on inserting all of the furniture, art, decor and accessories. When I arrive for an install, my team has taken an inventory to make sure that we have received all necessary items and that everything has arrived to us in good condition.

PFEIFFER: Drapery and wallcoverings have been installed along with all decorative lighting prior to furniture. A packing and delivery list has been formatted to prioritize room delivery for the installation team serving both movers and the design team. Without fail, protection goes in first—weather shields, walk-off materials and edge guards are put in place. If we have sound system access, music goes on. Rugs go first in any room, and then the sequencing continues. Furniture follows, floor and table lighting come next, and mirrors and art are hung last. Linens and accessory pieces are final touches, followed by flowers as a simple welcome-home nod.

How many people do you have to help you, and what are they responsible for?

PFEIFFER: From the office, it's myself, my lead project designer, and one or two design assistants. I leave scheduling and production to my lead, and then the assistant or junior designer ensures we have everything necessary for an efficient install. The moving team usually has four staff members there from start to finish, and an art hanger will often join us, depending on the level of need.

PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHNSTON, JULIE SOEFER; ALLEN, STACEY VAN BERKEL; DUNNING, YOSHIO ITAGAKI.



DUNNING: My design assistant helps me make sure that everything goes smoothly and is responsible for placing diagrams and renderings so that everyone knows where every item is supposed to go. The handyman is there to assist with any remaining duties, including hanging art, mounting various items, installing drapery rods and paint touch-ups. A moving coordinator ensures that the moving team gets everything unwrapped and installed without damage to the property and that all excess trash is removed from the premises. A cleaner is there to assist the team with post-install cleaning needs. And depending on the demand of the install, we have additional install assistants who can reinforce us, run any last-minute errands, and assist me with placement and styling so that I can stand back and see the bigger picture.

GREEN: I usually show up to installs with dozens of shopping bags from a week of sourcing accessories and occasional furniture at local stores. I'll typically be accompanied by my assistant, Briana,

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LEFT: Pink flowers in patinated bud vases are a finishing flourish in a bathroom by MA Allen, whose install-day kit includes essentials like Downy Wrinkle Releaser spray and furniture pads in every size possible.
RIGHT: A casually draped blanket captures the devil-may-care attitude in a bold bedroom by Anthony Dunning, who sometimes allows eager clients to participate in a project's installation.



and two handymen who will assemble and move furniture, install window treatments and hardware, and mount art. Briana and I unpack the accessories and place them in a designated staging area before sectioning them off into their respective rooms. Then we make flower arrangements and stage the rooms.

ALLEN: Our installs always include myself along with the senior or junior designer on the project team. It's also important to have the project manager on site, as they are heavily involved in the procurement process and have the most insight on delays, damages and deliveries. Because we are a small yet mighty team, we always work closely with local universities that have design, textiles or business programs with students interested in fashion, interior design and marketing. Having their support on projects and installs is crucial, especially when the team is all hands on deck coordinating and staging. Each of our team members has a certain thing we excel at, whether it's dressing beds or styling shelves, and we always play to those strengths to ensure an efficient and effective install for our clients.

JOHNSTON: We ensure every detail is carefully considered prior to the big day so that surprises are limited, but it's important to have a strong team on site

throughout the install to be sure everything progresses smoothly. We have documents with precise measurements for each room that outline where rugs should be positioned, where every piece of furniture should be placed, and where significant pieces of art should be hung. The homes we design generally range from 8,000 to 25,000 square feet, so if we're installing an entire home, we may have five or six members of our team along with six to eight movers and two art installers.

In general, my team gets the installation organized and underway, and I arrive midday to start making refinements. As each room is installed, we begin weaving in the final layer of accessories, which I oversee. At the start of the day, my team creates a staging area, often in the garage or pantry, where they place a variety of decor options that I previously approved for the project. This allows us the opportunity to play with different configurations when the time comes to finalize accessories.

BORCHARD: We usually have anywhere from three to seven people, depending on the size of the project: myself, the lead designer, our procurement manager and then extra hands to help out. The lead designer and procurement manager lead the install and coordinate with our



receiving team, then work closely with our handyman for things like art placement. Our extra hands usually unpack accessories, clean up and run errands. I tend to walk around and take videos for behind-the-scenes social media content and pretend to be useful. Just kidding! I'm overseeing everyone and making sure they all have what they need to do their jobs well.

How do you keep organized and make sure everything gets done?

BORCHARD: Having a smooth install will really come down to the work you do pre-install. Our operations manager and the lead designer on the project put together FF&E [furniture, fixtures and equipment] and make sure our warehouse has the full list of items. They also make lists for the handyman and make sure our binders are organized and our install kit is stocked and ready to go.

JOHNSTON: Everyone involved has a detailed packet of information for each room that includes floor plans, style sheets, and information on each and every product being installed. The project leader runs the checklist, and then different people are on point for specific rooms.

PFEIFFER: Room-by-room item lists and a prioritized delivery sequence are vital, but flexibility works wonders, too, as changes occur and we shift focus to move forward. We have talked through the installation's particular challenges, so everyone has shared understanding of what needs to take place.

ALLEN: Our team utilizes a comprehensive procurement tracking document that is regularly updated with production and delivery status. Once we have a pretty firm install date set, the team meets with me a month beforehand to strategize, procure staging items, and determine any outstanding solutions that would help bring the space together.

GREEN: I keep a running list of what is to be completed, typically on the Todoist app, and I check off tasks as we complete them. I use that same app to make sure we get all we need on those inevitable install-day shopping excursions.

What's in your bag of tricks on install day? What do you always bring with you, just in case?

DUNNING: I always bring light bulbs; furniture felt pads and floor protection; extra frames and extension cords; cleaning supplies and garbage bags; Magic Erasers; screws, nails, and mounting hardware; a laser level. Also important: a Bluetooth speaker for music and sangria or the client's favorite celebratory beverage.

JOHNSTON: We have a massive installation kit that contains all of the tools we need for install day. It's a big rolling suitcase, and my team makes sure that it is always stocked and ready. We also have snacks and drinks on hand for the entire team so that everyone stays energized and focused. One of my trade secrets is Downy Wrinkle Releaser Spray. A few light sprays on new bedding or sheets makes it look like they were just pressed.

⊕
 Earthy accents like wooden-topped canisters and bar stools upholstered in a natural fiber nestle perfectly in an inviting kitchen by Lindsey Borchard. The designer learned the hard way to always supervise the installation of big items personally.

It comes in handy for so many things! Last but not least, I always have extra picture hangers, light bulbs, tape measures, and of course, felt pads for every single accessory in the house.

ALLEN: I use that Downy spray, too! We keep an install kit stocked at all times, which includes an iron, steamer, zip ties (I'm nuts about cords!), blue tape, beeswax furniture polish, and furniture pads of every color and size.

GREEN: I'll have an install bag with miscellaneous tools, touch-up pens, zip ties, a box cutter, and other tidbits that can come in handy on an install, and I always bring felt furniture pads and extra mounting hardware, just in case. Fresh flowers and dried sage bundles are on hand, too. I always wear a head-wrap on install day—I feel like it helps me focus.

PFEIFFER: Water and energy bars! We also have a major install kit that includes a steamer; iron and board; Dustbuster; lint brush and cleaning supplies; paper towels and garbage bags; a drill and full tool kit, an assortment of felt and cork pads; plastic glides; picture-hanging equipment; a step ladder; at least a dozen box-cutters; and my favorite tool, a 2-foot plastic ruler level.

BORCHARD: Pre-organization is hands-down our best trick—that, and lots of coffee! I make sure everyone is fed and has water, snacks and good music to keep morale up.

What are some of the problems you're solving during an average install?

PFEIFFER: Ensuring everything stays clean and dry—winter, spring and fall have *all* the weather here in the Pacific Northwest. I'm also noting any damage or irregularity with accepted goods, and keeping the team and myself focused and happy. On an install day, the texts never stop coming.

BORCHARD: Something always comes in either a little damaged or wrong—no matter how good your warehouse team is, sometimes things go under the radar. We need to act fast and get those things fixed. Otherwise, it can mean money out of our pockets.

JOHNSTON: We never want clients to discover that something is missing before we have the opportunity to share a plan for correcting the issue. With that in mind, we check off every single item against a master list at the start of the day so that we know what's missing and can send the movers back to the warehouse for any items that may have been left behind. It's natural for pieces to become damaged during transit—or even during installation—and it is essential that we correct those issues as quickly as possible so that we can present solutions and limit any stress.

DUNNING: My biggest concern is always getting everything placed properly without damage to the property and all of the beautiful construction work we have done. I want to ensure that everything is secured to walls for longevity, and that the property is turnkey. Every once in a while, we have an item that breaks in the excitement of the install, and usually we work to remedy it quickly before the reveal. However, I also always let the client know that it is to be expected that there might be a missing item or two.

GREEN: I'm grateful that the problems I experience on install days are minimal and can typically be easily overcome. Something may break or not arrive on time, but ultimately, we pull it together. The biggest problem is usually a lack of time. In these cases, I roll up my sleeves and do what needs to be done, whether that's picture hanging or trash removal.

Designers always talk about problem solving on the spot—but have you had install days that truly went awry?

PFEIFFER: Wet dogs that have been let in the house and go straight for the new sectional are *always* helpful. I wasn't joking about the weather here!

DUNNING: The worst thing that has ever happened to me on an install day had to do with an electrician I hired to hang a 600-pound chandelier made of brass and champagne crystals. For this type of fixture, I always ask the electrician to be sure that they really secure the electrical connections with electrical tape should the chandelier travel up and down while we are trying to hang it. However, in this case, the electrician hung the fixture without the added taped security, resulting in a loose connection that prevented the fixture from illuminating. We had to disassemble the chandelier, which caused some of the pieces to break, then fix the connection and assemble it all over again, which added three hours to the install day and delayed the reveal.

BORCHARD: On our latest install, our warehouse team laid a rug down under a massive four-poster mechanical bed. There were only two guys, and it took them two hours to do it. When we checked it, we realized the rug was the wrong one, wrapped in the correct label. They did all that work for nothing! I felt so bad for our warehouse team and our clients, who ended up keeping the wrong rug because they didn't want to deal with moving the bed again. Lesson learned: Always be there to check and make sure the right item is being installed. We were styling in another room and just didn't catch it in time.

GREEN: Once, I arrived to an install and the handyman my client hired was not

equipped to complete the amount of assembly that was required. The items that should have been assembled prior to the install day were not, and I was not informed. To make matters worse, something came up and the handyman had to leave early. My assistant and I were left assembling furniture for most of the day, and we did not finish the install.

JOHNSTON: On day five of a massive seven-day installation in Mexico, our clients got excited and decided to surprise us by returning home early! The furniture had been moved out of place because the AV team was all over the house installing TVs and security equipment, and by the time we found out, we had only one hour before our clients arrived via private jet. Our install team of 25 scrambled around the house trying to put the house back in some order for their arrival. I was crushed, because our team had been laboring over the project for over two years, and I really wanted them to experience a grand reveal.

Closer to home, things started off great on one of our latest installations—until the movers announced that the trucks were empty around lunchtime. It was clear that two-thirds of the furnishings weren't there. Our receiving warehouse had failed to tell me or my team that their forklifts were not operating, which means that any furniture that had been lifted off the floor for storage was still in the warehouse, and they had no clue when we would be receiving those pieces. Sometimes you just have to laugh, or you'll cry!

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For a San Francisco condo, Tamu Rasheba Green was inspired by the concept of an urban farmhouse. In addition to flowers, the designer likes to bring dried bundles of sage to an installation.



What was your best installation ever, and why was it so great?

DUNNING: My best installation to date was a recent loft project. For the most part, every single item in the loft was customized specifically for the space. I had specified sculpture, fully customized lighting, and rich, interesting finishes and a variety of shapes and forms for the furniture pieces. It was very exciting to see all of the items come together and truly represent the essence of the client. That reveal was an emotional celebration of epic proportions.

PFEIFFER: For me, it's a Wyoming valley ranch that had to wait out the initial wave of the pandemic for a final dusting of items and its install. We had amazing weather, everything arrived and landed beautifully—and with one final day, we went through the galleries and shops in Jackson to find the finishing touches. The client was thrilled that the final layer of art and accessories was sourced locally.

BORCHARD: It was our first full-home furnishings job, which was 6,000 square feet. We did it with five people over five days, and it was so massive and exhausting but one of my favorite weeks of my life. To see such a big project get completed and come to life was so fulfilling.

ALLEN: It's the most gratifying part of this job—the tears, smiles, and all the memories to come. Several years ago, we designed a study for a client that became the husband's favorite space in the house. Following an unexpected terminal illness diagnosis, this room transitioned to house his end-of-life care. Creating a space that can inspire as well as nurture in challenging circumstances was an unanticipated honor of working with this family.

JOHNSTON: Honestly, every installation feels like our best. We grow in knowledge and efficiency with every single one—and no matter what transpires during an installation, there is nothing better than seeing our clients' faces when they walk into their new homes for the first time!

GREEN: The install day on my first major renovation was one to remember. It went off without a hitch, and my vision was realized right before my eyes. I left feeling a sense of accomplishment that was new and invigorating. Later, when I was hired by that client's parents to advise on their renovation, they shared that they called because they had seen my crew and [me] leaving the install. "You guys looked so happy that we knew it had to be good!" they exclaimed. They were right. ■

Grand Finale

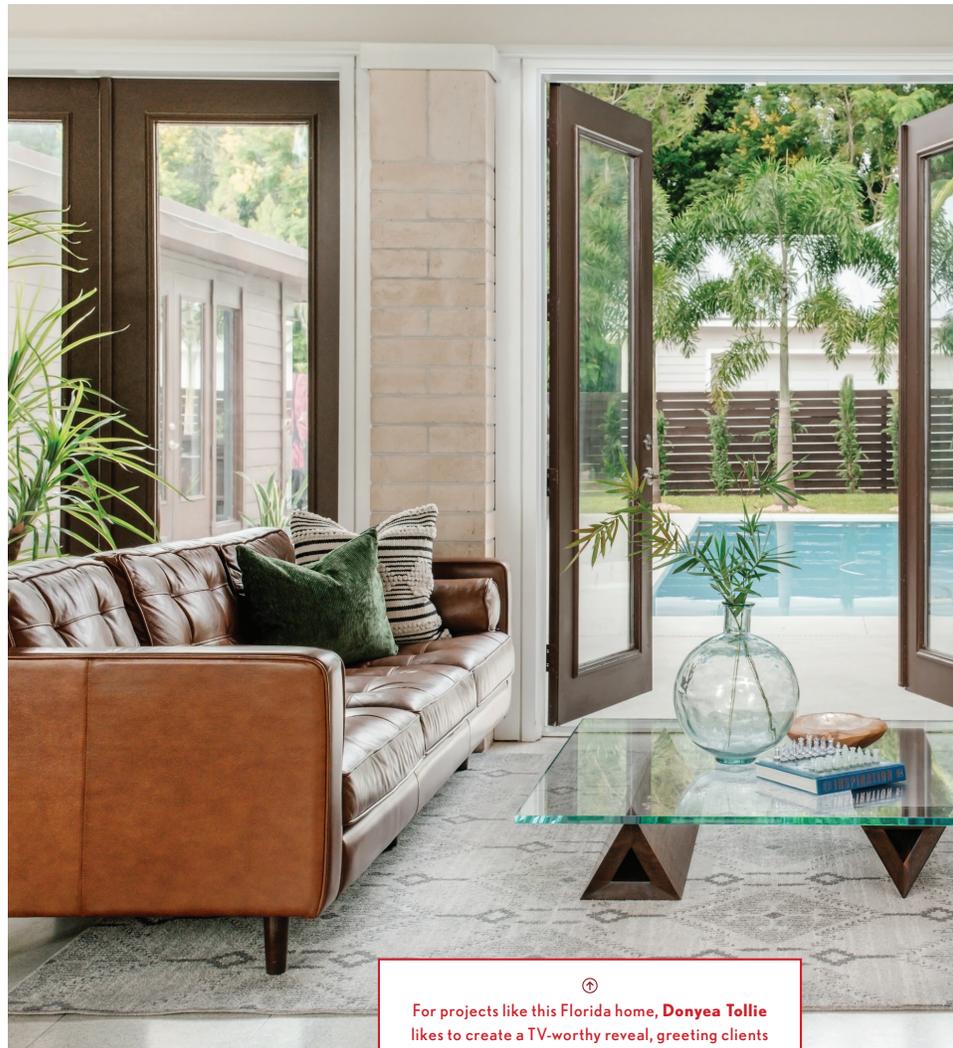
After months (or years) of hard work, it's finally the moment you and your clients have been waiting for: They get to see their new home. The design process inevitably has ups and downs, but a moving reveal can be the memory that sticks.

BY CAROLINE BOURQUE

On the show *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, there's a climactic scene in each episode where the family waits behind an enormous bus as the show's host—Ty Pennington in the original, or Jesse Tyler Ferguson in the reboot—builds anticipation in the gathered crowd before unveiling the newly remodeled home. That's exactly the level of excitement Bartow, Florida-based designer Doneya Tollie is striving for

with each and every reveal—and she says that delivering a climactic "Move that bus!" experience is everything her clients are hoping for.

"They watch HGTV and interior design shows, and that's what it's all about," she says. "They've done all the hard work [and made] the hard decisions. It's all come to this moment, and now they actually get to enjoy it. I've never done it any other way."



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For projects like this Florida home, **Doneya Tollie** likes to create a TV-worthy reveal, greeting clients with champagne in hand for an emotional tour of their new space.