

Who's doing what, when, where and how in the New England design business

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CLIENT OF THE YEAR

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PHOTOGRAPH BY WEBB CHAPPELL

There's huge buzz about the second annual New England Design Hall of Fame awards this November. Of course, Trade Secrets is as excited as anyone to celebrate the new inductees as they join our magazine's telegenic homes editor, Stacy Kunstel, on stage. But TS would like to suggest a small change: how about taking nominations for a new Hall of Fame category—for clients? After all, so much of the outcome of any project depends on the homeowners' vision (not to mention their lines of credit). There could even be different subcategories for the Client Hall of Fame. "Best Tyrannical but Enlightened Client" (think Lorenzo de' Medici or Julius II; they did okay for Renaissance Italy). Or "Best Client in Absentia" ("We'll be in Palm Beach for the winter. Please have our Ritz condo ready by spring and send invoices to..."). The grand prize could be a humungous Sub-Zero clad in Baroque panels.

Client Hall of Fame hopefuls will soon be able to prep themselves with a new book by Cambridge, Massachusetts-based architect Leslie Saul, tentatively titled *Good Client/Bad Client*. "It takes a great client to produce a great project and happiness all around," says Saul. "But how exactly should people model their behavior to achieve those great results? We just sent out a survey to about 100 service providers (not just architects and designers) so that we have some data to back up our theories."

Architect David Andreozzi of Barrington, Rhode Island, says he gently turns down 50 percent of the clients he interviews. The best clients have open minds, he says, and embrace the process. That doesn't mean they have to like everything the architect does. "But art and delight is what you are letting an architect create," Andreozzi says. Without art and delight a home can become "developerish" in a hurry, he adds.



Dan Houde

The most dangerous, and ultimately self-sabotaging, clients are the ones who claim to have open minds, but don't. They say, "Oh, do what you want." But when the designer brings in a lamp, it's, "How did you imagine we'd like that lamp? It's got to go...and RIGHT NOW!" Interior designer **Dan Houde** of Natick, Massachusetts, has his Four Day Rule. He'll take anything back, but he asks clients to live with it first for four days. Ninety-nine percent of the time his clients come to realize that, though they might not have found the lamp on their own, in the overall scheme of things, it's the perfect choice. About half of Houde's interiors work involves home staging, designing for clients that have yet to materialize. Deploying hundreds of thousands of dollars in furnishings he keeps on hand for the purpose, Houde finds himself defining both the space and the client (who, we imagine, must be open-minded to a fault).