

## **Delivering in a crisis: On managing risk in the global design supply chain**

*Katie Glaister & Henry Miller-Robinson explain how they are dealing with the challenges facing interior designers, craftspeople, artisans and other small businesses as they attempt to complete projects under the current circumstances...*

• By PrimeResi • 22nd May 2020

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The prospect of a design project grinding to a halt because of the Covid-19 outbreak may appear to be very much a first-world problem. But it is not just the wealthy with their beautiful homes who are impacted – the small businesses, craftsmen and artisans who painstakingly produce the furniture, fixtures and fittings for these projects are seeing their livelihoods threatened. Given the global nature of our line of work, this impact is being felt across the globe.

As an interior design consultancy, our job is to produce stunning designs but also to protect our clients' interests and the livelihood of the artisans we work with. The past few weeks have been challenging as we have worked to stabilise and progress our live projects and work on new projects designed to keep craftsmen and artisans active – many of whom work on their own from their workshops, where social distancing is not an issue.

When referring one of your clients to an interior design consultancy, how often do you consider how well-equipped they are to talk about risk, process, programme and budget – always important topics but now so more than ever? Covid-19 means that our job is about so much more than design than ever before. Our backgrounds (in property development, quantity surveying, cost management and marketing) enable us to undertake thorough risk analysis audits for our clients, while actively and regularly engaging with global suppliers to keep up to date with their ever-changing situations. We work hard to understand how their staff are working (or not) and what external materials are required and cannot be controlled, so may therefore affect the programme.

There are many examples of projects that have needed adapting. We were due to install the furniture, fixtures and equipment (FF&E) in a Chelsea penthouse on 26th March, which turned out to be one of the more uncertain days leading up to the lockdown. The majority of items are stored in a warehouse awaiting installation, having been wrapped, quality checked

and re-wrapped. Other items are coming direct from the supplier - the curtain maker, the upholsterer, the weaver. Lockdown means that installation has been postponed indefinitely, raising all sorts of issues for the client. All the items have been purchased but will these suppliers still be 'open for business' when installation is permitted? We took care to arrange for vesting certificates to be raised to protect the ownership of each item.

When lockdown struck, we were also on site on a project in Hong Kong. To complicate matters, 80% of the FF&E and specialist finishes, panels and built-in joinery are being designed and made in the UK. The kitchen is being made in a factory in Poland, with the parts coming from different countries. We are in regular contact with every supplier and craftsman and have set up more frequent payment systems to protect both parties. Social distancing work practices are being respected and the three stage shipment and installation programme are on schedule for a Q3 completion.

*Another client had grand plans for the finishes...But the pandemic has changed the way she feels and she wants to take a humbler approach*

Another client, an Australian, owns a beautiful apartment in Eaton Square. She originally imagined using this very regularly and had grand plans for the finishes and the FF&E. But the pandemic has changed the way she feels and she wants to take a humbler approach to reflect that. We have taken this on board and have been working carefully with her to re-design the FF&E to a lower budget and to re-address design elements of the choice and use of stone, joinery and kitchen. We are confident that we can retain the look and maintain a standard of work commensurate with this address, while ironing out any 'unnecessary' extras.

We always consider the consequences of our design proposals in terms of feasibility, budget and programme but cost is more important than ever with so many people hit hard financially. We are looking at payment terms to see what can be re-structured to keep production active, while reducing client exposure and risk.

Being forced to spend so much time at home during lockdown will result in many of us thinking about the design of our homes and what we would like to change. Choosing a design practice which is thorough and knowledgeable, challenges the brief and budget, sources fabulous finishes and knows artisans around the world who love designing unique furniture items, will result in a fun, beautiful home in which our clients really want to live.