

0093 Designing Your Office with Hillary Holmes

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Welcome back to the Abundance Practice podcast. I'm your host, Allison Puryear and I'm here with someone I'm super excited to introduce you guys to. This is Hillary Holmes. You can say hey, Hillary.

Hillary: Hey.

Allison: And Hillary is actually, she started off as a friend of a friend who happens to be a decorator and designer. And when moved into this big office space that I moved into, which is a 600 square foot rectangle, I was concerned about how in the world I was going to set this up without it feeling like a warehouse kind of thing. And I happen to be networking with Hillary because she loves to design therapists' offices, and boom, it was love at first site. Hillary designed my office, there are pictures of it on her website which is hillytreedesign.com and that's going to be in the show notes. And then, I loved my office so much more than my house, which is, if you know me, is not a good dynamic. Because I need to not work more. So, then we had her do our living room, and there are several other projects we have on the docket for her in the future. So, you'll also probably see pictures of my living room on her website, maybe? Do we have those?

Hillary: you know what? We don't! Good point. We're waiting...

Allison: That's right, we were waiting for the molding, crown molding.

Hillary: Yes.

Allison: So eventually they will be there. But we were having this great conversation, well its been an ongoing conversation. We've been having this ongoing conversation about what makes a great therapist's office. And I was so in love with Hillary and her work, and so I was telling everybody and their mother about her. And she ended up doing several therapist offices here, including Laura Long, who you guys probably know from Your Badass Therapy Practice. She did her office, because she is about an hour

away. So, she's done a lot of therapist's office, y'all. And she is here to tell us how to make yours not suck. Where should people start?

Hillary: Here's the thing. It can be a little intimidating because it's just a little different than if you were doing your own house. Because not only are you thinking about what is you and what your tastes are, which can already throw people off a little. You are also thinking about your ideal client and what they want to feel like in the room. So, I say start pretty simple. Look in your own closet for maybe hints of what colors you wear. Look in your artwork at home. If you have a painting in your bedroom or over your mantel and it's really soothing to you, or it makes you feel safe, or it makes you feel alive. But, somehow in a calm way, then look to that. And I know your child and your partner might not like this, but even take it into the office and maybe steal it for awhile, and you can choose paint colors from that. You could just get an overall sense of, okay, I'm going to go from this one piece as an anchor. And then, let the rest guide me. One side note. So, when I say you also want to think of your ideal client, obviously you want the room to be you. And it can be vibrant and alive. But you're really thinking of who am I seeing? Who am I marketing to? And what do they feel comfortable and safe in? So, a good indicator of that is, let's say if you know you are seeing an age group of 30-50 of just women. If that's what your practice sees. And then, you might write down some details about them. Or, what do the clients you already see like? What do they dress like? Where do they eat? Is there a coffee shop they go to that has a really cozy environment and something stands out about it? You're basically just trying to align your details about you and some details about them and see if you can find that sweet middle balance.

Allison: Yeah. I love that. And I think sometimes I would say probably like 80% of the time, when I'm working with therapists on their niche, it is a younger version of themselves, right? It might be them 15 years ago or 5 years ago but it's often their presenting concern is something that they have worked through or conquered or whatever, and they want to be able to give back, because they get it so deeply. And I see how, in design, if this is a younger version of yourself, that's kind of a smooth and easy transition, in terms of what you like and what your ideal clients might like. Are there exceptions to that? Are there times when maybe something that I might really enjoy should not go in my office?

Hillary: There are. That's a really good point you brought up. So, for example, I was actually at a meet and greet recently with some therapists. And I heard one of them saying, you know, I love my therapist, but her office has a lot of masks. I don't know what country the masks were from, or what, you know. And she said, I like it. But I don't think a lot of her clients feel super comfortable with it. So, it's not that I'm going to say, hey, no masks. Or no really strong modern art pieces. But you just want to think about, if anything feels a little jarring or uncomfortable, if you could kind of step back for a second and say, hm, this isn't 100%, then maybe leave that at home, if that makes sense.

Allison: Yeah. I like that. One of the party members at one point said, it is, she sees it as our job as therapists to disrupt. And I thought that was awesome and fascinating. And, let's do that in session and not with our décor.

Hillary: Exactly. That's good.

Allison: I think, too, it's not necessarily a décor thing, but it is about the space. I saw a therapist once who had stacks of books all over the floor around her desk. And lots of papers on her desk. There's just stuff everywhere. And as somebody who struggles with anxiety, it was really overwhelming for me. I should say anxiety with some OC features. So, there was this part of me that found it hard to not clean up after her. Or stay focused on myself. So, I think that's another thing to bear in mind when you are

thinking about your space and your ideal client, is if you work with artists, and that's your ideal client, then you can probably be a little more wild or scattered, things like that. But if you're specializing in obsessive compulsive disorder, it probably needs to be a little chill in there. Visually.

Hillary: Absolutely. I was reading a great article about healing and design. And with exception to the thing about artists, I think most people, they want a sense of warmth, or most clients I should say, want a sense of warmth and coziness. Almost like a sense of protection. But they definitely also want cleanliness and clear lines. I don't mean it needs to be modern and glass everywhere. But I mean, if they can see your desk from their chair and there's a computer open with tabs and papers stacked up, its not like, we're all human, but it is distracting. Just like you said when you saw all those books. I've had a similar experience, myself in an office. Yeah.

Allison: Yeah. So, where might people start if they are wanting to upgrade their office?

Hillary: So, two things. I will say, its very useful to consider hiring an interior designer or decorator for something like this. Because if you think about it, and I know I do this, especially, most of us offer at least initial consults. So, those consults can be anywhere from an hour to two hours. And really help lead you to information about yourself. Now, I know therapist, I have a lot of therapist friends, and I know them to be very self-aware and very in touch with a lot of things. But it doesn't mean you know what paint colors you love. So, I see it as valuable to say, just as I might hire an architect for two hours to say, hey, which walls can I knock down? It's the same thing having initial consultation, because you can learn about the words you want to feel when you walk in that room. Or how you want the client to feel. Special and arrangement ideas. Where's the flow in the room? Where do you not want to face the couch, versus where you want to face it? Things like that? I would say if someone is not really ready to hire a decorator or even have that initial consult, then it's kind of more goes back to what we were talking about in the beginning where maybe just interview yourself. Sit down and take some notes. Look at Pinterest pages. I know, Allison, you and I had been talking earlier and I have on my Pinterest page I send people to, just a direct board that has some tips for therapists on how to decorate.

Allison: And we'll put that in the show notes, y'all, so you can access it easily. So, and I want to clarify for people. So often in therapy, our initial consultations are free. So, I want to clarify that its not necessarily going to be free for a decorator or designer. In some ways, that makes me more likely to just maybe start there, is I would feel like a jerk, honestly, if you came and you gave me a free consultation and I took all your ideas and didn't use you. So, to look at it like you are paying them for their time, and there's no obligation to continue if you don't want to continue. But just know you are paying for that. Are there some reasons you would suggest, I mean I've got some I'm going to add to this, why would it be a great idea to hire a designer or a decorator?

Hillary: The first thing, off the top of my head, and also just from experience, is that you know what you are confident in, so if there are areas, let's say design is not an area you are confident in, why stress yourself out and put all your eggs into a basket that you don't really spend any time on? Instead just have somebody lead you into that zone. It's kind of like, I wanted a website, I had to hire somebody to do my website. Its not efficient for me to try and take on everything as a solo entrepreneur. So that would be the main reason. Is to just help lead you into an area you're not comfortable with. And basically, do it with you and for you.

Allison: yeah. And I can say, I mean, I have, you know me and my husband. And we have opinions about how things should look. It was really interesting going from Hillary decorating my office and me being

able to say in all of it all by myself to our living room. And I know there are some people out there who really don't care, neither my husband nor I are people who don't care how a space feels and looks. So, there was some compromise in a way that worked. Because I think you were able to really mesh our styles. But I enjoy design. I frequently read design blogs and listen to design podcasts. It's part of what I've always really appreciated. And I knew I was going to be over my head in this space. And had been living in our living room for a while, I think another reason it would be really good is it can save you a lot of money in the long run. The ill-fated couch purchase that Joel and I bought these two love-seats. They were awful. We felt very adult with these custom-made couches. And I was like, oh, look at how adult we are with our fancy couches. And then, they came in, and we were like what are these awful stubby looking things doing in our house? They are terrible. And it was so expensive. It was more than I've ever spent on any furniture ever by a long shot. And it was just wasted. And now one of them is in his waiting room and the other is in our playroom. Because they don't need to be out and about. So, when you were able to say, this is a couch. I've seen it in client's homes before. It looks like this. Its good quality. It's not going to break the bank. Like, having somebody who, this is their job, makes it go a lot faster and saves you money.]

Hillary: Yeah. And also, there's nothing more disheartening than having a go at it on your own, like because most of us have an eye or we're drawn to some type of creativity. Usually. And so, when you have a go at it on your own, and you get that couch and you spend all the budget on that, there's nothing more disheartening than saying wow, this didn't actually work. Whereas somebody who shops all the time is going to say, hey, let's really talk out some of these things. You know? So, yeah. You and your husband were so open. And I have to say, I've had, as a side, many people call me a marriage therapist. Which I'm not. But I do know, I am pretty good at observing the room and saying hm, here's where I should be quiet, and here's where I should step in. So.

Allison: How should people find the right decorator for them?

Hillary: That's a good point. I will say there's a ton of us in Asheville. Depends on if you want somebody remote or you're wanting that in-person experience. Let's talk about remote first. So, if you were wanting somebody and they could, online, virtually give you a shopping list, you would basically send them your pictures and your measurements, and things like that. And they would help come up with what you are going to put in the room. And show you layouts of where you are going to put it. There are all kinds of things like that online. But, just keep in mind, they are affordable, but definitely less personable. Doesn't mean they are not good, though. That might be just right for you. That might be just your speed. So, I would say there's virtual design online. And then, how you would go about finding the right decorator is just reading reviews. What I always do is just go on Facebook and just say hey, who knows a website designer that specializes in squarespace. Or you would say, you know, who knows somebody that is just ready to take on some of these smaller projects? Because that's the thing about therapy offices is, I'm not always doing offices that are 2000 square feet. So, my general sense from working with clients is that they are a little bit intimidated by design firms. Because a firm is a whole other ballgame that's usually going to take on larger construction projects. And new builds. And it doesn't mean they wouldn't do a therapy office, but I think what you are looking for is maybe more, as you do a search, you know, interior decorators, maybe the word would be re-designer. Maybe the word would be color consultant. You're looking for somebody who's probably just a smaller operation for you, then read reviews.

Allison: Yeah.

Hillary: I hope that answers that.

Allison: It does. Yeah. And I think about an important piece of how we first started with work, is you were like, what's your budget, in a way that you were totally willing to work with my budget, and I think with a design firm, I would feel some pressure to have a bigger budget than I had. Or, you know?

Hillary: Oh, for sure.

Allison: And I think that that's important before you start the process, is to get really clear about what you can and should afford for your space.

Hillary: Absolutely. And I call it like a comfort budget. And so, I know you and me, Allison, did this. We're basically just sitting down and assessing, hey what do you feel comfortable spending on a couch? Okay, lets go to the next thing. What do you feel comfortable spending on a rug? And it just gives me a sense of what your expectations are versus what those things actually might cost. You know? And I might have to say, hey, well, there's probably not a rug for this price, or yeah, that's great, that's a good place to start. And then, we can put more money towards art. I think without going into that comfort budget, it's just way too vague, and then people often have sticker shock later on. So, I'm glad you brought that up. Yeah.

Allison: Are there specific pieces that you think are most important in a therapist's office?

Hillary: Absolutely. So, I have this saying that the couch is queen. Yeah, queen or king, whatever you want to go with there. Basically, I've been in a lot of therapy offices. Just as a background. Just over life. I've always been a component of therapy. And, or proponent. And, I feel like a chair is not really enough for me or other...it doesn't always feel secure. I think it can work, but just depends on who your client is. Especially if you are seeing couples. So, I say that first piece of furniture is either going to be the small couch or the settee. And that really is where you would put, I don't want to say all of your budget, but a nice piece of it. Because you don't want it to be too stiff. You want it to feel enveloping, but not this really, really high back where you don't feel comfortable. It's just getting those details right. So, I'm always asking people, hey, what would you want a couch to feel like? What would you want a settee to feel like? And then we go from there. And of course, I've helped people order so many, I now have pretty much a list of the ones I like. So that's the main piece. Definitely plants. So, I would say, if there can be light in the room, a really good couch, some plants, the plants do not have to be real. So, all you people who do not have green thumbs, don't worry about it.

Allison: Join my club. Its fine.

Hillary: The black thumb club. They are making really, really good plants. Especially succulents these days. It's kind of amazing, I can't even tell the difference sometimes. And then, I think a lot of times I'll see bookshelves in an office. And I do think bookshelves are important. But I would stray away from filling them with academic books or manuals, reports, things like that. I think it's important, that's one of the areas I focus in on, is finding that balance in your shelving, in making it interesting and meaningful and then also having the self-help or therapeutic books that you want on it at the same time. Those are some of my first thoughts.

Allison: I'm thinking, too, as people are decorating their offices, something that I learned from you, sometimes I would see a chair and a couch together, and I couldn't tell why they didn't work, or maybe they are both mid-century, modern. But for some reason they didn't work. Even though the chair height, seat height seemed about the same. And one of the things you pointed out as we were looking was the arms. And the way that the arms, like if they were curved in any way, or just the style of the arms. So, if you've been trying to figure out whether or not your therapy chair and your client couch, if something feels off about them, check out the arms. Because that blew my mind. I've been looking at this stuff for, I mean I've been into it for decades. And I just, it had never been pointed out to me that that might be the deciding factor.

Hillary: I'm so glad you said that. Because people with anything, we can really look at something for years and years and years and not even know. So, I'm so glad to hear feedback on that. Because it is a big deal. Not only the arms, but also the feet. So, I know some people buy couches that go all the way to the floor. And have basically no air circulating under them, if that makes sense. So, ideally you want feet on your couch. It sounds a little funny. But it just gives a sense that there's some openness. And then, you want the feet to be not too skinny, necessarily. Because you want a feeling of solidness. So, no one wants to feel like they are going to sit on that couch and topple over. But at the same time, you don't want it to look like a brick. So, I would say the arms and the feet are a really good indicator of whether you'll like it.

Allison: Yeah. Are there any mistakes that you've seen in therapist's offices around color? Because I know you are a color consultant and color expert.

Hillary: Yes. So, here's the thing, when I had said earlier that I still want, I want the therapist to put themselves into it, and I want there to be a vibrant energy as well as a calm energy, I think what we have to be careful about is paint colors. So, I'm glad you are asking me this. What's a soft blue to you is not necessarily a soft blue to someone else. Because color is highly subjective. So, I would say be careful about going too bold. For example, if you follow Pinterest at all, or any style bloggers, there's a huge trend in black right now. There's also a huge trend in dark, dark, forest green, or a dark midnight blue, or inky blue. Those are absolutely gorgeous at home, in a dining room, as an accent wall, in a bedroom. But, in an office, when you get into really murky colors, you have to be careful. Because it can bring up connotations if that makes sense? And I would say murky violets can sometimes feel depressing. So, to some people lavender feels good if it's the right lavender. But you've got to find, I would say the level of the paint or the weight of the color if that makes sense. Without getting too heady. Basically, you just don't want to go too saturated or too dark with a color.

Allison: Yeah. And I think, too, something that you helped me with, because I was in that inky blue world. I wanted to paint our bedroom this inky blue. And you brought me into our playroom, which is a medium blue. And you're like, do you see how dark it is in this shadow? That inky blue is going to be even darker. So, I would say, I'm going to make a blanket statement that probably the fluorescent overhead lights should not be on in anybody's office. That finding great lamps that will light your space, so it doesn't feel like an unlit place, but if you're designing and you don't have those lamps yet, just be really careful with the paint color, so the darkness and the shadows are not that kind of, a monster's going to come out of here.

Hillary: Yeah. And ideally, I would stay away from oranges and reds. They can be harsh. They can be a little too active. Like, I don't know if you remember, it was very big in the 80s and 90s to see canvas

paintings where there would be red and blue on the canvas? And those two colors together, they actually make your eyes shake. They literally make your pupils vibrate. And so, I would say, you just want to be careful with strong color.

Allison: Or just use it if you are an EMTR therapist. Just kidding. Just a little addition to your treatment.

Hillary: There you go.

Allison: So is there anything else that you feel like would really help with this idea that therapists have brown corduroy couches and poorly lit fluorescent light offices. Is there anything else you think we should make sure we are paying attention to, so that our spaces are inviting and safe?

Hillary: I do. Basically, you want to think that a great office makes a better therapeutic experience. So, you want to think of it as another tool that you have. So even if you get this nice couch, and you got your good lumbar pillow and a sweet lamp, and you know, your chair is right, and you've got a few plants. I would say, have a friend come in when you feel like you are done with your office. And scan that room. Walk through it. See how they feel. Because you do want a little bit of a sense of it feeling, you want it to feel layered and collected. And we're not always able to do that. We're not always able to just build your therapy office for 5 years. If you're upgrading and you're refreshing it, pay attention that a great office makes a better therapeutic experience. And, if you think of it like a tool, you want to add layers to it that make it feel meaningful and give it depth so that it feels real. So, we do not want it to look like a showroom. So, think about when you go into Havarti's, or even Target. Things can look good and shiny and glossy and fun. But you really don't want everything coming across like that. So, I would say when you think you are done with your therapy office, have a friend come in and just be honest with you about how you feel. Have them walk through it. Have them think about the flow of the space. How the colors affect them. How the art affects them. And it's kind of a good test to do at the end. And just see if its hitting the right buttons.

Allison: Yeah. I like that a lot. Especially if your friend is kind of in your ideal client matrix. Right?

Hillary: Yes. That would be even better. Yes.

Allison: Yeah. Well awesome. Hillary, thank you so much! Not just for the podcast, but I get compliments on the office every time somebody's here. And often, in like my videos and things like that. People will be like, let me see that space. So, we will show it to you. It's on her website, which will be in the show notes. And eventually we'll get my living room in there, too. So that if y'all are nosy like I am, you can check that out. Awesome. So HillyTreeDesign.com.

Hillary: Alright. I've loved talking with you Allison!

Allison: Take good care.

Hillary: Thanks, bye bye.

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