

Ep #77: PR for Interior Designers: The What, Why, and How with Molly Schoneveld



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Desi Creswell

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Hey designer, you're listening to episode 77. We are going to be diving into all things PR for your interior design firm. I'm talking with my friend and colleague Molly Schoneveld, founder and CEO of The Storied Group, which is a luxury PR firm specializing in designers and creative entrepreneurs.

We cover so much ground in this episode from what type of PR is best for your interior design business to the nuts and bolts of getting your work published. And as always, we're going to have that mix of strategy paired with mindset so that as you work to get your design projects published and visible, you're feeling fully supported. I can't wait to dive in.

Welcome to *The Interior Design Business CEO*, the only show for designers who are ready to confidently run and grow their businesses without the stress and anxiety. If you're ready to develop a bigger vision for your interior design business, free up your time, and streamline your days for productivity and profit, you're in the right place. I'm Desi Creswell, an award-winning interior designer and certified life and business coach. I help interior designers just like you stop feeling overwhelmed so they can build profitable businesses they love to run. Are you ready to confidently lead your business, clients, and projects? Let's go.

Desi: Hello, designer. Welcome back to the podcast. Today I have a very special guest for you, Molly Schoneveld. Now, Molly, I was trying to think about this. We met quite a while ago now, actually at this point.

Molly: I know. Was it during the pandemic? Because I think that was like my first virtual summit that we did together.

Desi: Yes. I remember it was the Designers on Social Summit.

Molly: Yeah.

Desi: And yeah, I was brand new to online summits.

Molly: Me too. I think we all were.

Desi: And I remember thinking about it, being like what is this? Is this legit?

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Molly: I know.

Desi: But it sounds good. So we were in – And I think Rachel Moriarty was on our squares as well.

Molly: Yes.

Desi: So it was such a fun group.

Molly: It was.

Desi: I can't even remember exactly what we talked about.

Molly: I know. I should go back and look at my slides. That took ages to make because it was the first time I'd ever had to make slides for a presentation, you know? So yeah.

Desi: Yeah. So, yeah, so we've been in touch ever since. I had the opportunity to coach you a little bit. I've worked with a few of your clients and I just love following all the things that you share for designers because you are really a true expert in the field of PR, especially when it comes to the brand strategy, media relations, communications for designers, hotels, creative entrepreneurs, all the people who really need support with this.

So I'm so glad to have you here. I've of course given a little introduction, but it's always nice to hear in your own words what you do and how you do it.

Molly: Yeah, so I own a PR firm called The Storied Group, and we now mostly represent interior designers. Although I do represent The Golden Door Wellness Resort, which just won best spa in the world, or in North and South America this past weekend in London at a big event, which was super fun. But yeah, my background is entertainment PR, so I really approach interior design PR in kind of the same way.

I mean, I think there's a lot of similarities to artists that design and then artists who act. So we have very much a personal PR approach to how we do things. So yeah, we have designers all over the country.

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Desi: And can you just give a little framing on how you support your clients too, just for a little more context?

Molly: Oh my gosh, I mean, in so many ways and it's just changing every day, I feel like. And publicists have always said that because I think people are a little confused about what PR even is, we get roped into all the things. So whether it's, you know, I literally walked through one of my clients, my retainer clients through her scouting shots to talk about like, how is this best to style for this photo shoot? Because we have high hopes for this project to get a really amazing placement. So we helped her find a stylist. We told her which photographer to hire. We literally went through the scouting shots and just talked about that.

I mean, right now we're in talks with a major brand for the same client to be like an expert for them, which I mean, the money is significant for that. I mean, we're helping with how to present something on social media. We have a branding leg to our company. We're helping designers too like, in terms of just owning their voice and the thought leadership piece. So whether that's giving a quote to a magazine and how to kind of approach that or getting them on panels. I mean, we're doing a lot of stuff.

We're helping clients get book deals. So whether that's getting a literary agent or actually getting a publisher interested, we're doing a lot.

Desi: Yes, it sounds like you're touching every facet of the business, which I think is really great because I mean, it's not just getting your work in a magazine, right? Like there's the pitching of it, but there's all the things that go into that. There's the piece of, do you want to be more of a personality? Or I mean, I don't know if I love that word. I don't know, maybe you have a better word for it, but be known for a particular thing in your field.

So I think that it really is helpful to just have an idea of the wide breadth of the ways that you support clients and really help them be visible in the way that they want to be visible.

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And one of the things that I really wanted to bring you on here, just the timing felt perfect, for I've been having so many conversations with designers, whether that's my own clients or just offline, whatever it may be, about bringing back marketing into their fold. I mentioned this in a previous episode with Mark Williams, and I can link to that in the show notes too. It's a little bit of a tangent, but somewhat related.

Anyways, so many designers are like, oh yeah, I've got to market. I've got to actually put some effort into this. And I think with the pandemic and the really big growth that happened in the design industry, marketing and intentionally getting out in front of your ideal client and attracting those clients into your world so that you can serve them has kind of fallen by the wayside.

And so I know that marketing is a huge piece of what designers are focusing on right now or want to be focusing on right now. And a lot of them see press or PR as a component of that marketing strategy. And that was a huge part of why I reached out to say we need to have this conversation now, because often designers will consider bringing PR into the fold and like you said, they don't know exactly what it is. They're just like, I hear I should be doing PR. I'm not sure what that is.

Molly: I hear that a lot too.

Desi: Or there's lots of how-to questions or what are the best practices? And then there's all the mindset stuff that comes up too, about being seen and taking up space and fear of rejection, all that stuff. So I just thought, you know, let's dive into it all today. Are you up for it?

Molly: Oh yeah, let's talk about it. I'm excited.

Desi: All right. So you've talked a little bit about this, but I think just to recap, how would you define PR? And like, what are the different types of PR that you suggest for designers specifically?

Molly: Okay. So PR is all about building your reputation. It's about building trust and credibility, and even more importantly, building awareness for the people

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that you're trying to reach. So there's a lot of facets now to PR that maybe I didn't have when I started my career back in the 1900s when we were faxing press. No joke.

But now I think marketing and PR are really going hand in hand even more than ever before. I mean, even Emily in Paris, I was re-watching that show last night for the 25th time, and she was just like, the lines between PR and marketing are more blurred than ever. And it's so true, because I think you have digital marketing, which is really also kind of digital PR.

So essentially, if you're talking about traditional PR, that means you are looking at coverage through stories in the media. And a lot of times that is timed through announcing news. So whether that's you have a store opening, you have a book launch, you have some kind of partnership or something that you're launching, or it could simply mean that you have a new project that you want to debut to the media.

It doesn't always have to be news driven, and especially what we're doing is trying to keep interior designers relevant in between projects as well. But essentially, it's all about influencing behavior by cultivating a positive reputation. And I've always said that it's way more powerful when someone else is saying great things about you than it is if you are just speaking to your same audience over and over.

So being published in the media opens up doors to other people finding you. So the thing to know, though, is that PR is just one spoke on the marketing wheel. And I think the biggest mistake that I see anyone making, I mean, not just designers, but when people are looking to hire PR is that they haven't done any of the other work in terms of marketing.

So whether that's branding or having a clear message or really having their website in a place that they would be proud for an editor to land on it. All of those things have to go hand in hand with PR because PR is really the long game. It's not something where you can hire a publicist for a three month stint and expect your life to change.

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You mentioned this, but we have a lot of ways that we work with designers. So one is full service PR. And so that's a monthly retainer and really we're looking for clients that understand that it is a long-term investment. So a lot of our clients, like for example, I represent Drew Michael Scott of Lone Fox. And Drew is yes, I mean, he is considered an influencer, but he also has a very successful online presence.

So we're doing lots of partnerships with him, whether it's with Architectural Digest or with brands. I mean, he has a manager that we work with as well. But I mean, Drew has been on with us for at least, I think we're going on three years now.

So a lot of our clients, I mean, it is an ongoing relationship where we are an extension of the team. So whether that is your in-house, you know, your design assistant, and maybe that's all you have on your team or it's a manager or it's other lead designers on your team. I mean, we're working hand in hand with all of those people in order to build your reputation.

And every design firm has a different goal in mind. So we really take that into account when we think about like, okay, what are you best suited for? So some of our other services that we offer, ways that we work with designers are we have a project placement service.

So if you're like, I'm not quite ready to make that long-term commitment, or we don't have a large enough portfolio or whatever it is, we will work with you on just a project basis. Meaning you have a full home that's been professionally photographed and it's never gotten press and you're ready to have that make its debut. And that's a lot of times how we end up working with designers in a larger capacity.

One of our clients that was a client for, I mean, I think she was a client for at least two years. But she hired us for a project. We got it in House Beautiful. And then she was like – We actually got her three pieces of press from that one project, which is a little unheard of, but she was like, I want more of this. And so we just kept going.

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But I just recently launched a new membership because I was seeing that there was just a need for, whether it's a designer starting out, or even if it's someone who's been in business for a while and has just not put a lot of energy into their marketing yet. It's called Library Card and it's essentially partnering you with trend stories, like editors and writers that are writing trend stories and roundup pieces. And it's a very reasonable amount of money.

So the feedback that we're getting is so amazing. And people are saying like, this is just like the best way for me to dip my toe into the world of PR without feeling like, oh my gosh, this is a really large investment, or this is such a long-term commitment, and they've never had PR before. And so we're getting designers regularly quoted in the media and their project photos included. And I mean, big roundup pieces for lots of different publications.

So there's a lot of ways that you can work with us without having to feel like, oh my gosh, this is very overwhelming, or it's expensive or whatever.

Desi: Yeah, when you sent me, when you were getting ready to launch the Library Card piece, I was like, oh my gosh, this is genius.

Molly: Thank you.

Desi: Everyone needs to take you up on that.

Molly: Well, it's crazy because we beta tested it for a year, I think I told you. Because I wanted to make sure that, okay, we're able to deliver on what we're promising, that we could get feedback from designers to say like, okay, we love this, we don't love this, like, this is what we would want to see more of.

And one of the things that everybody wanted, of course, was a one on one with me. And I thought, well, there's just no way that I can offer every single person in Library Card a one on one consultation, but what I can do is office hours. And so we had our first Zoom office hours last week. And I was like, no one's going to show up. Oh my gosh, so many people showed up, they stayed for the entire hour. And we just dove into everything that they wanted to talk about.

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I also started a newsletter to support Library Card and I'm giving tips and little secret tidbits from the media that I'm not sharing anywhere else. So it's not just that, but it's going really well. And we're really excited about it.

Desi: Yeah, I'm really excited to see where that takes you. And I think even at the accessible price point that you're offering the Library Card, because I really do feel like it's an incredible value. We want to remember too, I think that it is the long game there as well, right?

Molly: Right. Yeah.

Desi: It's not, oh, we're going to get quoted once and then everything's going to change. I think, you know, I did an episode a while ago on playing the long game in your business, but I think it's so important that you bring that up and think about things like, how is PR a part of the long game in my business of what I am building towards?

And I also really love that you brought up every design firm is going to have different goals for PR. And I think whenever we're taking action in our business, we're bringing in support, like the Storied Group, we want to think about what are we aiming at? What is the goal of the PR? Kind of going back to that idea that I had said earlier of like, I think I need PR. I should have PR, but like, why do you want PR?

And so I'm sure that's a huge part of your process too. And I think it'd be helpful to just speak a little bit to, you know, what could some of those goals be for a design firm who's interested in layering in PR or increasing the amount of PR that they do?

Molly: Well, I think that most every design firm has the goal that they want more than they currently have. So whether that's –

Desi: Any business owner.

Molly: Right. So whether that's bigger clients or better clients, or whatever it is. I mean as an example, like we're always trying to talk to designers too, about the

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fact that national media sometimes may not be the best end goal for you. I mean, sure, it's really great for bragging rights and credibility and being able to say you were featured in Domino or whatever it is.

But we had a project come out over the weekend that was so exciting to me because this designer, it was the first designer that I worked with in Raleigh. So I moved, my business is still based in LA and most of my team is on the West coast. Actually, my whole team is on the West coast and I am now in Raleigh, North Carolina. And randomly a designer reached out to me, not even knowing that I was in Raleigh.

And she really wanted something like a Domino for this particular project. And the styling was very specific. She had hired a florist to really deck out this mid-century modern house. And so the florals on the table, which ended up being the hero image, looked kind of like an event. Like it looked almost like she was doing a tablescape. And then the kitchen had like this beautiful cake and like all these flowers.

And the feedback that we kept getting from editors is like, this is such a pretty project, but unfortunately the styling is just not working for what we want today, which we're going to talk about styling later on, I think. I hope, because it's such a hot topic right now.

But anyway, we ended up getting it placed in one of the best publications in Raleigh and she made the cover and it is so spectacular. And I'm so proud of that because I'm like, she wants more clients like this particular one. Like it was such a dream project for her. And Domino would never have given her that.

But the fact that she's on the cover of Midtown, which is literally distributed everywhere in town, I'm like, she's probably going to get a lot of eyeballs on that. And there's probably going to be direct ROI.

So I think that sometimes you have to think about the reality of what it is that you really want and how are you going to reach those people? Because it could have gone very differently. You know, Domino is online and it's like it would run

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and she could put it on her Instagram and put it on her website and all of that. But then people move on to the next story.

And Midtown is going to be out for two months. I mean, it's a March/April issue. So for the next two months, you will see that all over where she lives.

Desi: Yes. Oh my gosh, I agree 100%. And I'm just like, yes, it is in podcast form, documented, Molly said it herself. Sometimes national publication is not the goal.

Molly: Right.

Desi: I mean, I've definitely recommended that to clients where I've been working with them around marketing and that kind of thing, because yeah, if you want to be working locally, get in front of the local people. And it's not to say that the national publications, again, don't have a place and can be a part of your plan. But I'm so glad that you put that there because I think for a lot of designers, they kind of dismiss some of the local publications and they can be a really powerful visibility source.

Molly: For sure. I mean, I also think that your goal, I'm not saying don't have big goals because I have big goals and I love people that have big goals. Our clients all have big goals. I hear so many designers say that they want to have projects all over. They're so excited to have, you know, oh, we want to market to other states.

And that's great. If you already have a thriving business where you are and you feel like you've reached that pinnacle and you're just like, okay, the only way now to grow is to go outside of our area. But if you haven't yet mastered that, then you need to do that first. And then you can take that next step.

Desi: Yeah, I think that's such sound advice.

Now, when you were talking a little bit before about the types of projects that maybe you do with the placement service, you had talked about whole home projects. And I'm curious, I'm sure everyone listening is wondering too, do you

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have to have an entire home to get placed somewhere? Where does beautiful photography and storytelling have a place for maybe a single room or a few rooms? Can you speak to that?

Molly: Yes. So, generally speaking, for our project placement service, it needs to be a full home. Now I have made exceptions. In fact, the House Beautiful piece that I mentioned to you, where I got that in like three publications and she became a retainer client after that, that was a kitchen. And normally I would have said no, but I just knew we could find an amazing place for it.

And so you have to understand that our project placement service is really, it's very structured and we've been doing it for a long time. And I do feel like we've perfected it. So you're paying a deposit upfront. And so you pay 50% upfront, and then if we place your project, you pay the rest. And so I have to be so confident that I can place your project.

And, obviously, we cannot determine how long it takes? Like the Midtown feature that just came out this weekend, I looked back yesterday, she reached out to me a year ago and like, we did the rounds of the national. And I was like, I really think we have to go local. And then because it was so spring, like it was styled so spring/summer, we had to wait. So it took a long time.

So we do, obviously with our retainer clients, we are pitching their one rooms all the time. We're always looking at their portfolios to say like, okay, what month are we in? What are editors working on? Like we know this editor's working on this. What do we have that could possibly work? And we're pitching one room.

But it's very hard for us to take one room for project placement because so much of it is timing and we don't want to get in a situation where, you know, eight months later we still haven't been able to place the one room because there just hasn't been a place for it.

So I would say that nine times out of 10, I'm going to pass on a one room, taking that on just for project placement. But there's always exceptions. I mean I think I've taken two kitchens.

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I would say, if you have a kitchen, that's just like knock your socks off, we would consider that. But we wouldn't take like a bedroom or a living room or something. It also gets really hard with like only three rooms. So if it's like the living room, the bedroom and like a powder bath or something like that, it's just, there's just not enough of a story for that service, you know?

Desi: For that service, yeah. I can see that.

What do you think about, let's say for a designer who has maybe a powder room or something like that, where they want to start dipping their toe into PR or pitching, would you suggest that they try and pitch that on their own? Or would you say it's better to wait till you've got more of that full home project?

Molly: I think it just depends how well versed you are and how media works, because I think that what gets hard with pitching yourself is just maybe not quite understanding exactly how editors work. And, I mean, that's where I think that we've been doing this for so long and we kind of know how to make sure that you stay in these editors' good graces. And like, we know how to pitch and position a project.

And, of course, there's nothing wrong with trying yourself. But I think you would just have to be very well versed on what that publication is currently publishing. And I think I've talked about this recently, where I feel like there's certain magazines that just get by on their reputation of just being around forever and ever. But then a lot of designers I see haven't even looked at those publications.

So they may say, like, I think this is right for Domino. And I'm thinking like, oh, my gosh, like, have you looked at Domino lately? They're not publishing anything like this. Do you know what I mean? So I think it just requires you doing a lot of research and homework. And if you're willing to do that, then certainly, I mean, I would never –

I mean that'd be like a designer, saying, well, should I design my powder room, because I can't afford to have my designer finish the project? I mean, you have to look at it kind of in the same way. Like, what would your advice be? You know what I mean?

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Desi: Yes. Yes. That's a great analogy, I love that.

Now, you mentioned some of the editors, keeping the editors happy, what they're looking for, you want to shed a little light on that? Like, what's the inside scoop? What does an editor look for? What makes a good project pitch for them? Obviously, like aligning with the magazine's aesthetic, but what else?

Molly: That's the thing, yeah. Well, and I think it's our job as your publicist to make sure that if you tell us we want to be in Veranda in print, it's our job to tell you whether or not we think that's realistic, because you would never want to send an editor something so far off that they then would not trust you, because that's where we build our reputation.

So if we're sending projects to editors and writers that they love, they're going to be more likely to immediately look at our next submission and get back to us right away because they're like, oh my gosh, she sent us this amazing project last time, what does she have now, kind of a thing.

So that, it's also timeliness. Getting back to an editor or writer pretty much immediately. Like I do not let those emails sit in my inbox for days unanswered. And I think that with our designers, they're obviously super busy and not sitting in front of their computer all the time, and so we keep them on track with deadlines so that we're not missing deadlines and having to go back to the writers.

And so I think when you have someone liaisoning on your behalf, you just have someone that's kind of holding you accountable and just figuring out like, okay, if you need more time, that's okay, but don't wait until the day of the deadline to ask for that. You know what I mean?

Desi: For sure.

Molly: Yeah. So it's really just, I think those are the biggest.

Desi: Yeah. And I know a lot of like debate exists around the, can you post your pictures on Instagram? Can you put it on your portfolio, on your website before

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an editor sees it? Is that going to make it so that you can't get it published? What is your take on that?

Molly: I know, I know. And I feel like my take changes like every other month. So a year ago I was telling people, I feel like the rules have changed and I think as long as you don't post hero images on Instagram, and you're just posting vignettes, that's fine. And I think it's fine to put it on your website. Well, honestly, I almost feel like we're reverting back to the days where editors really don't want you to share the projects.

We had an editor recently pass because it was on the designer's website. And that was so disappointing. So my best advice is this, if you feel like you need it in your portfolio on your website, there's two options.

You can either make it have a password so that if you take a new business meeting, you can at least say here's some extra things that you can see and here's the password. Or you can just take it down while it's being pitched. So put it up, and then if you hire us or someone else to pitch it, take it down for a couple months and then share it again.

Because I get it, it's so hard. And it's so hard if it's print, because like I said, you can be waiting, I mean, my gosh, I've had a Better Homes and Gardens story, it took a year and a half to come out. And I mean, the designer is just like, oh my God, like I'm dying to share this.

Desi: Yeah, and I think your website is such a great marketing tool.

Molly: Yeah.

Desi: You want to be showing projects that you want more of. And so it just becomes this real delicate balance, it seems, of putting that work out into the world where your ideal client can look at it and say, yes, I want to work with that designer, versus I'd really love to be in that publication and we're moving at a snail's pace.

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Molly: I know. And so I think you also have to look at your project really with an editor's eye and say okay, is this like AD worthy? Like truly. And if it is, you really can't put it anywhere. I mean, that's just the rule. I mean, and they even embargo images even if they didn't shoot the project. I mean, they'll embargo the images for, I think it's three months after if it's digital. I mean, it's a whole thing.

If it's not and you're like it's regional, generally regional magazines don't care as much if it's on the website or on your Instagram. But again, here's the thing about debuting your images on Instagram. Once you've debuted your hero shots, your audience has seen them. And so when the press comes out, you're going to have a bit of that like wah wah, because it's already, it's like been there done that. You know what I mean?

So I feel like you have to share snippets that aren't, like don't show the kitchen, you know? Like if you've got an incredible bedroom or whatever, the strongest rooms, leave those off as long as you can. And honestly, if you have a publicist and you have a magazine that's interested in publishing, your publicist can ask what the rules are as soon as it's confirmed that they want to publish it. And then you can at least know.

But I just say like, I mean, generally speaking a project, I mean, you hope that it doesn't take longer than a couple months. But there are projects that take longer to find a place for. And so if you just leave it off your website for that length of time, you can put it back up just as soon as possible.

But we do try to explain to editors, and I think with Better Homes and Gardens I did get her, because the piece got bumped. And so I said, okay, at this point, she's really got to put this on her website because this is going to help her get new business. And they were fine with that.

Desi: That's good to know.

Molly: Yeah.

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Desi: Yeah, and I was thinking back to the beginning of our conversation where you're talking about helping one of your current retainer clients with the shot list and scouting out angles. And I was just thinking how important that is to be thinking about if it is something you want to potentially get published. Thinking about what are all the shots I could take while we're doing the big shot so that I can use those little snippets to use on Instagram or wherever else.

Molly: For sure.

Desi: Where I can use that to support my visual content and marketing, but not have it be in competition with any other goals that I have. So I think that's really

Molly: Yeah, and it's why I'm not a fan of hiring a photographer who will only give you like 8 to 10 shots total for your projects. I just feel like there's so many great photographers out there that will give you 25 shots. And so really, it hinders what you can get in the media too, because often 8 to 10 shots is just not enough.

Desi: How many shots do you think are ideal?

Molly: I mean, I want 25 to 30.

Desi: Okay.

Molly: But it depends on the photographer and how great they are. But I'll give you an example. So a project client of mine right now, it's a really big project. They paid \$8,000 for the photo shoot for a well-known photographer. The shots were beautiful, but for some reason, the photographer only got like this very tight shot of the kitchen, like nothing else. And we were just like, oh no.

And also just the way that the shots were, you couldn't really see the flow of the house. And this house was like 6,000 square feet, but it felt like a cottage from the photo. And so they literally, and we pitched it to AD and they literally were like, we need to see more photos because this house is so big, but yeah.

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And so anyway, long story short, the photographer did agree to go back in and do a reshoot to get what we're missing. You know, that's just the thing. It's all about storytelling these days through styling and everything. And so it's so important for you to get the coverage of your house and give them options because one or two photos of the kitchen just rarely cuts it.

Like if I've submitted a project and there's like two photos of the kitchen, the first question I get is, do you have more photos of the kitchen?

Desi: Okay. Yeah, that's really good to know. And so in line with what we were talking about earlier, it's not just about the pitch or the magazine publication. It's about having all those other things pre-thought out. It's not just, like you talked about having the branding, to having your messaging dialed in, but it's also just having that forethought around what are the things that I want to get out of this photography session to really think through.

And it sounds like it's really valuable to have somebody with an outside set of eyes and perspective.

Molly: Yeah, and just being super intentional about who you hire for your project photo shoot, because we're dealing with this right now with one of our retainer clients. They've been shooting with a friend and it's just not cutting it. I mean, she's an interior photographer, but the photos are doing them no justice. And so that's a hard conversation to have, but when it's your business and I mean, everything about interiors is driven by your photos; your marketing, your digital footprint, I mean, everything is photos.

So with the client that I'd mentioned at the beginning of the podcast that we helped walk through, I mean, we were so intentional with the photographer and the stylist that she brought in to make sure that the people, the team that we were bringing in knew how to accomplish what we needed them to accomplish.

And I've seen one, I got a teaser shot and I'm blown away and it totally, I know it's going to pay off. I'm so excited to get the full range of photos.

Desi: Oh, that's so exciting.

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You brought up styling a few times. So tell me, what is it that you want to share about styling?

Molly: Oh my gosh, y'all styling has changed. It has changed so dramatically in the last three years. I mean, the editor of T Magazine put this in the best way that I think it's been said, which is they no longer want the room to look like the decorator just left the room. They are looking for homes that just happen to look good in photographs.

And it's super hard to execute. And especially, I would say, for a new build, and especially if you're bringing in everything. Because editors want layered homes that are telling a story. And so it really is thinking about, okay, who lives in this house? When you're styling it for the photo shoot, it's like, who is the homeowner? What sorts of things would they have? And not just like putting that cliché blanket thrown over the chair or just some random book opened on a table. I mean, it really needs to feel like, okay, I could tell someone just like, it felt like somebody just got up from that chair.

I mean, I even saw in T Magazine recently, it was like a pair of dirty tennis shoes strewn on the floor. And I was like, oh my gosh. But you're seeing this sort of thing more and more and it's less about the perfect flower arrangements and way more about the kind of undone natural elements, whether it's branches, which could even be on the way out, but like bringing in florals that aren't so tightly packed and so perfect.

Desi: Yeah, I think that is kind of the way of visuals that we're just seeing across the board. I don't know if you've noticed that with Instagram even. Because I've seen so many people doing reels where it's just like they're in their sweats or they're like in their car driving or just doing whatever, daily routine. And like that seems to almost be trending.

So I think that's interesting to hear that perspective with even the styling of like, there's a level of detail and precision, but the precision can't be visible almost.

Molly: That's the thing. And that's why it's so hard to get this right, which is why I say it is worth the investment in a stylist if you feel like the project truly has the

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legs to get you something that could be life-changing, like a House Beautiful in print.

I mean, clearly it's expensive. And so you have to discern, you know, what should I spend my money on this month when it comes to your marketing, which obviously the photo shoots are a huge part of your marketing. But it's like you can't really do PR without having really great photos. I mean, that has to come first.

So yeah, I would say that it's just, if you can't hire a stylist, then start really looking at magazines that you want to be in, saving the photos and then pull up some of your past photo shoots and look at them side by side and try to say like, what's not like this one? You know, where is my styling different? What angles are different? Like, is this magazine doing more moody shots or do they like bright and airy? I mean, all of those things come into play.

Desi: Yes, for sure. I think any type of, I'm always talking about evaluation on the podcast and curious evaluation specifically, and looking at like how could I bring that quality into however it is that I express my designs? And thinking about really the storytelling aspect of it too. I think like looking at, you're telling a story with your design, right, of the people who are going to live there.

And then there's another layer of it, of what's the story that we can present to a magazine or publication? And I think designers are so in it with their projects, they start to think more in the very nitty gritty of the design or don't necessarily see the story that could potentially be told. And I think that's a real mindset shift to think about like, this isn't just a pretty space. Like the details are really well executed, but what's the overarching story that this space is telling that would be of interest where someone would really want to delve into that world?

And I'm curious if you have any tips for how to start thinking more like that, because I'm guessing there's a lot of designers who have projects that could be really great fits for like your project placement or retainer or anything like that. But they're not seeing their projects in that light, in the storytelling light and being

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able to see it as something that the public would really want to immerse themselves in versus just looking at a pretty picture.

Molly: Totally. Well, I think it starts with what I had said before about really doing your homework, but it's almost, I'm going to compare this a little bit to digital marketing. So if you're trying to figure out like, what should I have my subject line of my newsletter be to get people interested in opening it? The best way to figure out how to do that is to start paying attention to what you're actually opening in your email.

Like what is actually like resonating with you? And start really paying attention. And you really have to actively say like, okay, today, every time I open it, like I'm going to pay attention and I'm going to either flag this email or I'm going to write it down. And I think the same is true for this sort of thing.

It's like, you have to go on to your favorite media outlets and pay attention to what just naturally piques your interest and why did it pique your interest? Was it the headline or was it just the pretty photo? Like something obviously is getting you to click. And that's what every media outlet wants these days.

And I always try to remind people that the media industry is a business. And so they're driving content through SEO. So any sort of trend, like we just got five of our retainer clients included in this piece from El Decor that was all about the unexpected red theory that's trending on TikTok. And it was incredible, literally it was the headline for their newsletter. They put it on Instagram, quoted one of my clients, and tagged them all. I mean, it was like such a great – And even though it was like a quote inclusion, it was such a great piece of press for all of them.

But my point is just that magazines, especially when it comes to digital, they're looking for clicks. So we send out a questionnaire to our project clients when we take you on and it's a culmination of several that we've gotten from different magazines, because the goal for us is to get all the information we need up front so that we don't have to keep coming back to you. We can just, you know, when an editor asks us a question, we have it right here in front of us.

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But something that we will ask in the questionnaire is, you know, was there a design challenge that you had? And how did you overcome that? Or what was the overarching goal of your client? And so thinking about challenges that you had, oftentimes will be the driver of the story. So whether it's like this Parisian couple only had 500 square feet to work with and look at the outcome. I mean, you can see that being like a headline, right?

So you have to just start paying attention to what are the headlines of these home tours? And then I think your wheels will get turning because I think it's hard to just create a story from nothing. But if you start paying attention to what's being written about in that way, I think it will spark things for you.

Desi: Yeah, because I think a story is always there. There's always some story in a design project. Of course, there's varying levels of interest, challenge, and obstacles to overcome.

Molly: Totally. But I mean, for example, my house, we moved to Raleigh and we'd worked with a design firm in LA on our townhouse in LA. And so we hired them for this project. They never stepped foot in our house in Raleigh. And I mean, I could totally – If we could have afforded to do the final layer of styling, which we did one layer, but we still don't have drapes, we don't have like some art. And so my house is definitely not media worthy at this stage.

But if we did invest in all that, I do feel like part of the story could really be the fact that the whole thing was done without the designer stepping foot in the house, or the fact that we really incorporated our life in LA, we wanted that to be in our house here. Like we wanted to have memories. So like some of the art that we pulled, for example, is like an LA artist, or it's a kind of abstract photography of Echo Park in LA and things like that. So it's like bringing in just parts of our life that we care so much about.

Desi: Okay, stay tuned is what Molly's saying.

Molly: Right.

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Desi: Get on her newsletter list and then she will send us a captivating subject line to announce the publication being live.

Molly: Exactly.

Desi: I love it. Yeah. You know, what that makes me think of so much is just when you're an expert at something, like you're an expert at PR and you train your brain to think that way. And designers train themselves to think in design solutions, right? And we become so laser focused on that lane and we have that type of thinking, we have that ability to dive into something, dive into that world, create something new that doesn't yet exist. And we just need to kind of train our brain, it's like a tweaking of the perspective of the angle that you're looking at something and you start to then train yourself to see those stories and possibilities.

Molly: For sure.

Desi: And I think that's such a confidence builder too, for designers who are maybe a little bit newer or just newer to having their work be published or publicized in some way and I think could be a really great mindset shift.

Molly: Yeah, I mean, even if you don't have time to read all the magazines, I mean, I know you're scrolling through Instagram, come on, or TikTok, and I mean, it's the same thing there, just paying attention to what makes you stop and read.

Desi: Yeah. Or even just like I'm thinking about a few stores we have locally where you walk by, and there is a presence, there's a story there, just even in the storefront. Some of the local shops where you're intrigued, like you want to see more of what's going on behind that glass. And so I think just as you're out in the world doing your thing, you can start to train that level of thinking.

Molly: Right. Yeah.

Desi: I love that. All right, Molly, well, this has been so amazing. I have one more question that I'd love for you to answer. One of the things a client recently

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brought up to me is they had gotten some great press and just were kind of feeling like, all right, so now we've got this great press, what do we do with it? How do we make the most of what we have here in front of us? Like we did all the things and now what? Do you have any tips for that?

Molly: I do. So I think that it obviously depends on what the press is, but one of my favorite ways to use press is pulling quotes. So I'm thinking of an example right now. So like our client, Drew Michael Scott, Lone Fox, I mentioned to you, we've gotten him endless press. But one of the ways that we actually use his press to help secure other things is by saying Architectural Digest has called him a DIY sensation. House Beautiful has named him the maverick in their first creator class.

And even if it's not at that level, even if it's just something that they said about your work, I mean, you can literally say, I mean, you can put it on your website as a testimonial.

Desi: I love that idea.

Molly: And I think that is like one of the most powerful ways. An example that's not design, but I love this example so I'm going to bring it up. Golden Door during the pandemic had to build outdoor massage, little like hut things. And they were really pretty. And I pitched it to Vanity Fair. They were doing a story about how spas are basically surviving during the pandemic and what they're doing to keep the doors open.

And so this ran in Vanity Fair. And so rather than the general manager of Golden Door saying, hey, we have built these outdoor spa things where you don't have to have your massage in your room with the person and it's way safer or whatever. She literally put the Vanity Fair piece in the newsletter and quoted what Vanity Fair said.

So it was just so much more powerful that she could say like Vanity Fair had this to say about our new massage setups. And so I just, I love doing that. I mean, I think the obvious one is Instagram. I think if you can do a reel, like if you get a piece of print press, it always performs well if you go to the newsstand and

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actually pick up the magazine and kind of show it that way and use a trending sound and that will get you more eyeballs.

I think, obviously, having a press highlight on your Instagram or TikTok, on Instagram, also putting it on TikTok, but just making sure that it's on your website, like all of your press pieces. But I think the testimonial is the best, if you can pull anything from a story that they did, I love that.

Desi: Great idea. All right, we've covered a lot of ground today, but I want to check in. Is there anything else that you for sure would want to make sure a designer knows about either getting started with PR or leveling up their PR that we haven't covered already?

Molly: Oh my gosh, we've covered so much. I mean, I will just say this, my door is open. I love having conversations with designers. I get a lot of emails just asking me, like, do you think I'm ready? Do you have a recommendation? I'm always happy to have those conversations. I think the biggest thing is that while of course I would love for you to invest in PR, you have to make sure that you have your foundation set first.

So make sure your website looks as good as it possibly could be, because the first thing an editor is going to do when we send them information about you is they're going to either go to Instagram and or they're going to go to your website. And so you want to make sure of that. And there's so many designers that will say, oh, I haven't updated my homepage image. And I'm like, oh my gosh, like that should literally be something that you're looking at every three months. Like quarterly, let's say. Like making sure that like, is this my best foot forward?

Desi: Yes. Oh, I love that. I think that's so important to build in time, of course, I talk to my clients about this all the time of building in time for those regular check-ins with your business, making sure that your messaging, your visuals that you're showing, it's all aligned with the types of people you want to call in and putting that best foot forward for the business.

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Molly: Yeah. Two other quick things. One is your Instagram bio. I can't tell you how many times people have confusing bios. Remember, always clear over clever when it comes to your marketing messaging.

Desi: Yes.

Molly: And so that's such a simple thing you can do right now, is just go and look at your bio and see if someone were landing on your page right now, would they understand what you're about? The second thing is please stop posting other people's work unless you are at the level of like Amber Lewis and she already is known for something, and so she can share other people's work on her Instagram and that's fine. But it just gets very confusing when someone shows up to your Instagram page and none of what you've posted is actually work that you've done.

Desi: Yeah. Yeah.

Molly: So that's it, I'll get off my soapbox.

Desi: All right, you'll step down and move away from the desk.

Molly: I will, I will.

Desi: No, I'm just kidding. All such great information because like you're in it day in, day out. And I think design, I think owning a business in general, you're expected to wear tons of hats. And I think design in particular, you have to know so much about so many things and you cannot be an expert in everything. And so having you here today to share your expertise around PR, I know is just so valuable to everyone who's going to be tuning in. So thank you for being here, Molly.

Molly: Thank you, this was so fun. Thanks for having me.

Desi: Yes. So I know you said anyone can reach out to you, but like, what are some of the best ways to get in touch with you, to follow along, to get all of your expertise?

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Molly: Yeah, so my Instagram is Molly.Schoneveld. You can definitely slide in my DMs. The Storied Group is @TheStoriedGroup. Also my website is TheStoriedGroup.com, and I mean, you can feel free to reach out to me. There's a contact page on our website. So anyway, anyway is fine.

Desi: And if anyone is interested in checking out that Library Card subscription, where is the best place to check that out? And I think you said you even have a special coupon code for listeners.

Molly: I do, yes. So if you go to just TheStoriedGroup.com, we have a top banner right now that says introducing Library Card. So you can just click on that and it'll take you to the page, but I'm offering a hundred dollars off any package. There's three ways that you can pay. You can do a yearly, a quarterly, or just monthly with no like commitment. So any package you choose, it'll give you a hundred dollars off. And that is Desi100.

Desi: All right. What a deal. Thank you. So wonderful. Well, thank you again, Molly. Such a treat to see you here live. And of course we're seeing each other, but the listeners aren't. But they'll go check out your Instagram right away. But thank you so much for sharing your wisdom with us and I can't wait to see what designers take away from this episode.

Molly: Thank you.

Desi: All right, designers. I will talk to you next week. I'll be back on Wednesday with a brand new episode. And as always, I'm wishing you a beautiful week.

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