



NICOLE ZARR

Nicole Zarr & Associates, Houston

Years in business: 29

Team size: 7

PROJECT MANAGEMENT: About five years ago, Nicole Zarr encountered Studio Designer. “My accountant, who [works with] interior designers, had several other clients that had been using it—and she said, ‘Well, it’s going to change your life.’” It didn’t take long for Zarr, who switched over from a combination of manual tracking and QuickBooks, to become a full-on convert. “I call it the bible,” she says. “It does everything for us.” In the past, the firm’s days were full of busywork: poring over client files, typing up proposals, running to and fro to cross-reference fabric samples. Today, her team can receive a room design from her, then plug in products, and

ABOVE:
Pops of lilac put a playful twist on traditional Southern decor in a bedroom by Houston designer Nicole Zarr.

the software will autopopulate the items in proposals. “There is no wondering, ‘Is this accurate? What did we pay for this versus what are we charging the client?’” she says. “It runs reports for the employee who oversees procurement, and when you do installs, you take the proposals with you and it shows you exactly what we’ve received and when.”

Plus, the platform allows Zarr’s firm to quickly and efficiently search archived projects, helping the team maintain client relationships even after a job has ended. “A year will go by, and if a client calls in and says, ‘Oh, my lamp is broken,’ we are able to put the client’s name in, search ‘bedroom lamp,’ and boom—it shows,” she says. “It’s got such great search engines.”

Some capabilities also deliver peace of mind: For example, if there’s a discrepancy between invoices and client payment, the

software highlights errors handily for Zarr’s accountant. Other features have improved the client experience—the designer says that her clients love that they can access project updates through their own platform portal, approving or rejecting items in a proposal at their own pace. Best of all, it keeps the designer accountable—offering tools for inventory management, for example, when she filled up a container at Round Top and needed a way to track those pieces on her balance sheet while they sat in storage before being placed in client projects.

“My accountant said, ‘Watch, you’re not going to believe how your profits will change because it tracks everything,’” she says. “Everything has to be inputted; you have to be religious about that. But if you do the work on the front side, it’s invaluable on the back side.”