



TALK OF OUR TOWN

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After complaint, interior designer gives up license

Theodore "Ted" Fine, 68, president of Fine Decorators, has agreed to surrender his interior design license after a state board cited him for professional violations, according to documents filed with Florida's Department of Business and Professional Regulation.

On Tuesday, Fine said he's changed his mind, that he's rescinding the signed agreement notarized on March 28. "Another deal is being restructured."

Fine's celeb clientele includes **Burt Reynolds**, **James Caan**, **Whitney Houston** and **Sammy Sosa**. But one client, **Sandra Cauff**, 54, said Fine's work on her \$1.85 million Williams Island penthouse was anything but fine. She sued for fraud, claiming he and former design associate **Arnold Schulman**, 53, billed her nearly \$1 million for a substandard job. An arbitrator awarded \$474,893 in damages.

Cauff's lawyer, **Alan Soven**, filed a complaint with the state against Fine, Fine Decorators and Schulman. A three-member panel of the Board of Architecture and Interior Design found 26 violations. The decorators "overcharged for almost every item" on the Cauff job and "refused to produce invoices from the suppliers," the complaint says. They also failed to provide "proper supervision, resulting in inferior work" — from defective marble to a wrong-colored wall unit.

Other violations: Fine didn't disclose on his '89 license application that he'd ever been sued. And his firm offered architectural design services without an architect's license, the complaint says.

In the proposed settlement, Fine permanently relinquishes his personal license and pays a \$25,000 fine. (He can still decorate, but can not call himself an interior designer — or work on commercial projects. He must have a licensed designer in-house to retain the firm's license.)

Schulman will pay a \$7,500 fine, serve two years probation and take ethics classes. The board is expected to approve both settlements in July.

Rarely do designers lose their licenses, says Tallahassee attorney **David Minacci**, the board's prosecutor. The board's toughest sanction, he says. "Like the death penalty."