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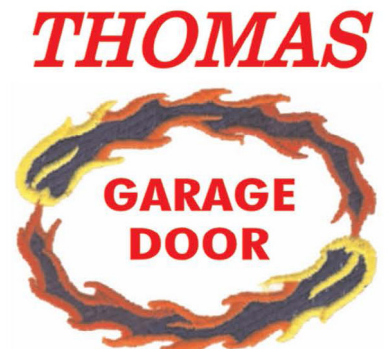
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THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

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For Local Information Contact:
themetropolitanbuilder@yahoo.com
832-317-4505
www.themetropolitanbuilder.com

5161 San Felipe St. #320
Houston, Texas 77056
832-317-4505

Owner/Publisher
Giselle Bernard

Editor
Kathy Stolz

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Pamela Larson

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Giselle Bernard
Publisher

With a web presence, you're never closed!

Today, more than ever, web sites are being used as a virtual business card, inviting readers to find out more about a company, its history and expertise. They are used to tantalize and educate the prospective customer.

It's not uncommon to find a prospective customer who is looking to build, buy or remodel doing research before ever contacting a builder, remodeler, supplier or contractor. As you all know, social media has become an integral part of the marketing process. Social media web sites like LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and Houzz offer businesses a means to virtual networking. Word-of-mouth endorsements are often electronic these days.

The first impression that a prospective customer often receives, when searching for products and/or services, is from a company's web site these days. Prospective customers gauge a company's credibility by its web site.



Not having a web site diminishes a company's credibility in the market.

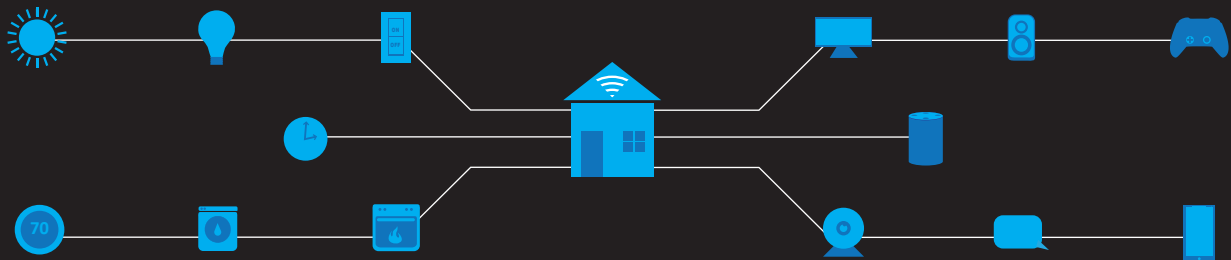
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Bicycle Bungalows Renovates the Heights

By Kathy Bowen Stolz

Most people don't picture bicycles when they're picking a builder, but for people in the Houston Heights, it's a natural connection.

Bill Riley, who has lived in the Heights since 1991, purchased a bungalow to renovate as a speculative project on Key Street in 2008. Bill typically jumped on his bicycle to check on progress at the work site. When Bill was looking for a name for his new company, he simply had to look out the window.

His company, Bicycle Bungalows, restores, remodels and builds new homes in the Heights, usually tripling the size of the typical bungalow from 1,200 sq. ft. to as much as 3,800 sq. ft. by adding two-story additions to the original one-story entry.

However, Riley said restrictions from the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission now tend to limit the size of the additions for a total of about 3,000 sq. ft. Other restrictions require homeowners to keep the original windows, siding, trim and front door to maintain the historic

ambiance of the neighborhood.

However, the prices these bungalows command isn't rooted in history. Riley noted that the cost of a lot in the Heights is now about \$450,000. With remodeling costs ranging from \$400,000 to \$600,000, purchasing and renovating a house in the Heights can easily cost \$1 million and take anywhere from six to 11 months to complete.

"I love seeing the transformation, especially with old houses, during a building project. I get a lot of satisfaction from being able to turn a project into a thing of beauty," Bill noted.

According to Riley the demographics in the neighborhood have really changed since he and his wife Cathie and their 10-month-old daughter moved into a fixer-upper of their own in 1991. During the 1990s and early 2000s, most of their neighbors were retirees, and he and Cathie had to transport their kids across town for good schools and for play dates. During those years many houses in the Heights were demolished and replaced by bigger, newly constructed



Before



After

These before and after photo show dramatic changes while staying within the historical restrictio guidelines.

homes to meet the demands of modern families.

Nowadays most of their new neighbors are young professionals, such as doctors, attorneys and engineers, moving into their second homes.

Most of the houses that Bicycle Bungalows have renovated have been speculative projects. The mix is now about 80 percent remodeling vs. 20 percent new construction, he said. Bicycle Bungalows usually has four projects underway at any given time.



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Dialogue with a Designer

Selena Mackay, Principal Designer

International Flooring knows that dreams, reality and inspiration make a house a home. It also knows that an interior designer or interior design firm often becomes an integral part of this process. As a National Wood Flooring Association (NWFA)-certified company, International Flooring takes great pride in working with some of the finest professionals in the Houston market, providing the best quality wood flooring and carpets available and superb customer service. International Flooring offers their clients a private showroom full of exotic wood floors not found in retail showrooms.

This month International Flooring speaks with Selena Mackay, principal designer at Studio Mackay in Houston. Helmed by Mackay, her daughter Larissa Pineda and associate Amanda Holliday, Studio Mackay is an award-winning, full-service interior design firm committed to enhancing the human experience by bringing to life the possibilities in each interior and for each client. The team at Studio Mackay is a passionate about listening to the client and creating a space that is tailored to the way the client lives but curated with Mackay's expertise.

With 32 years of combined experience, Studio Mackay helps residential and commercial clients manage architectural and construction aspects of their projects by providing a full range of services, including construction specification, interior design, custom furniture design, manufacturing and fine art selection.

Studio Mackay is dedicated to excellence in design

and service. The staff researches constantly in order to keep abreast of the latest trends, the latest materials and technology. Its attention to detail, high quality and originality is the foundation of this great team.

International Flooring: What motivated you to go into the interior design field?

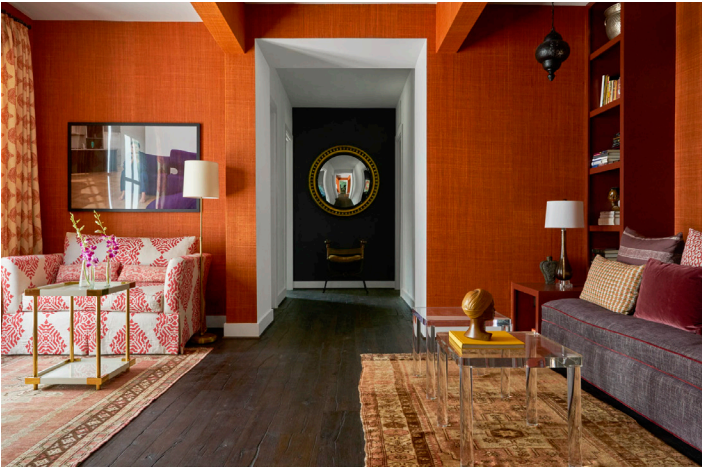
Selena Mackay: I am a fashion designer by education but have always been passionate about interior architecture and decoration. I grew up amongst beautiful interiors and fabrics, as my mother was a fashion designer as well. I know that a well done interior improves the quality of life of its occupants.

International Flooring: How has the field of interior design changed since you graduated?

Selena Mackay: Interior design used to be a service that was only available to a select few who could afford an interior designer. Now, good design is everywhere. We have HGTV, which has put home decorating on everybody's "to do list." We have social media platforms, such as Pinterest and Instagram, which are vehicles of inspiration from all around the world for all of us. In addition to design awareness, the drafting is now done on a computer. Computer-aided design (CAD) is a staple in every design office. It is an integral part in the process of showing the client what the finished product will be.

International Flooring: How can an experienced interior designer help custom home builders or remodeling

Continued on page 8



the homeowner make decisions where to spend more and where it is wise to cut back on costs.

International Flooring: What sets you apart from other designers?

Selena Mackay: I have 18 years of construction-specification experience and have built houses myself. I love the smell of new construction and get energized when I walk into a new build! I also spend many hours researching new products, not only furniture but construction finishes. My projects are always cutting edge in style. I am always ahead of the curve with finishes, fabrics and colors. These factors make the house remain in good style longer.

International Flooring: What has been your most challenging project and why?

Selena Mackay: We had a client whose communication skills were very poor. Decisions were made, and two days later we had to cancel orders and revisit the selections; a very bad case of indecisiveness. In the end, the client paid more for the hours running around, ordering and cancelling than what she should have.

International Flooring: How do you begin the materials selection process when working with builders' and remodelers' clients?

Selena Mackay: I begin with an evaluation of the clients' needs, their intended use of the property and the budget that I will be working with. We look at challenges that may present themselves and try to anticipate solutions to complications before these happen. Then I do a full redline of the plans to make sure that everything is drawn properly and that the spaces are accurate.

International Flooring: What are some common mistakes

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contractors with their building or remodeling projects?

Selena Mackay: An experienced interior designer is CRUCIAL in remodeling or building projects. First, interior designers will work closely with the architect to make sure the placement of the features of the home will accommodate the proposed furniture plan before the project breaks ground, minimizing mistakes and surprises. For example, the placement of the windows may not be right for the furniture layout; there may not be enough balanced lighting in a particular room.

Second, a designer will select all of the finishes to be coherent so that the interior and the exterior of the house speak the same language.

Third, the designer helps with the communication between the homeowner and the builder so that the builder uses his/her time more efficiently in the tasks that are pertinent to him/her.

Finally, a designer will keep the budget in mind, helping



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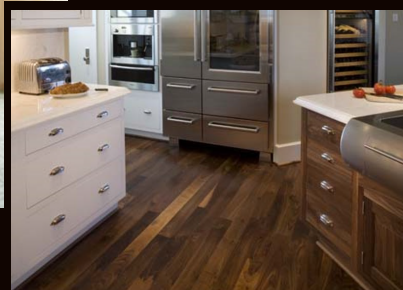
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If You Had To Fire One Person...

By Burk Moreland

If you had to choose one person in your organization to fire right now, who would it be?

The answer to that question is very telling to me as I work with my clients' organizations. How easily do they come up with the name? Is there more than one that comes to mind? What position does that person hold?

I ask, not because I want to fire anyone, but because I want to see which team members are not performing as well as others. Your job as a manager is to either move that person up the performance list from the bottom or remove them from the list entirely. Move 'em up or move 'em out!

The first choice is always to move them up. The cost of recruiting and training a new person coupled with lost knowledge and the cost of the "unknown" is astronomical. You have invested thousands and thousands of dollars into this person. Unless they are doing something immoral, illegal, or unethical making them better is always priority number one.

But how do you do that?

First off, set expectations. Get very clear on what actions you would like the person to take to improve. You must separate any emotion from this line of thinking. It isn't just "I want them to get better..." It has to be "I want them to improve their sales by making 100 more phone calls per day." Or "I want them to focus on their duties more by eliminating distractions during the day, such as their personal phone." These actions can be monitored as to whether they are happening or not. This approach is critical when you are setting new expectations for someone under your charge.

Most failures come from a poor job in setting specific enough expectations. As some people might say, "Make it idiot proof." They must almost purposely try not to do it. It becomes about effort versus knowledge. It is our job as the manager to give them the knowledge. It is their job to put forth the effort.

The second part of this is consistency. Too often we tell someone what to do and then just leave them with that. Most of your people are not at your level yet; that is why you are the manager. Don't expect them to perform at your level on day one. You have to inspect their performance on a regular basis. What checkpoints can you put into place so

that they can't get too far off the path?

There is no reality, only everyone's perception of it. If they believe they are doing what you asked, they will continue to do it. If you aren't inspecting often enough, neither of you will be very happy when you find out they have been doing it wrong. At that point, you as the manager will be the one that has the majority of the pain involved in fixing it.

The final part is to close the loop. Feedback on inspection must be given regardless of performance. Most of us are very good at commenting when something isn't done correctly, but telling others they are on the right track is just as important. Giving people honest feedback allows them to continue to focus and perform without worry of mistakes. It can remove anxiety about one of the top reasons people leave a job: I didn't know what was expected of me.

Scheduling your feedback at regular intervals will help accomplish consistency as well. If you really want someone to improve, and you really don't want to fire them, more feedback is better. Take time out of your schedule to push them to improve and understand what you expect versus using that time on recruiting, interviewing and hiring a replacement. Employee surveys show that people are actually more satisfied when they are pushed and growing versus staying stagnant. What are you doing to push employees?

Now that you have got that team member off of the bottom of the performance list, you have a new problem. Someone else had to move down for the other one to move up. The job of managers is to constantly develop their people to be better every day. What lengths will you go to in order to make sure your team keeps moving up the list? Where will you invest the time and money to ensure your success?

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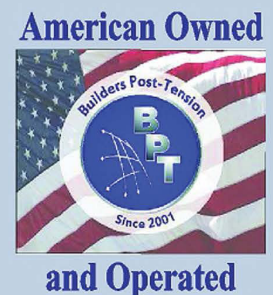
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of my knowledge.” By taking many courses offered by the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) at the Greater Houston Builders Association, Bill is now credentialed as Graduate Master Builder, Certified Graduate Builder, Certified Graduate Remodeler and Certified Green Professional through the NAHB.

During the years Riley worked as a marine engineer, “all the ships I worked on were older than me and needed a lot of work. I was used to dealing with old ships and making them work. Comparatively, houses are a piece of cake and fun to work on.”

A graduate of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, Bill took a job after college where he worked on a cruise ships sailing around Hawaii. Later he worked on an oil tanker. When sailing, he worked 72 days onboard, then 72 days off. He noted that he did a lot of construction projects during his down time. He earned his chief engineer license but decided to quit sailing after five years because he couldn’t advance any higher and didn’t want to make a career of going to sea.

He then entered the University of Texas MBA program, where he met his wife. He then worked for a couple of energy companies in their marine departments, achieving increasing levels of responsibility.

But he couldn’t shake his innate desire to build a house; “the interest has always been there.” He and Cathie bought a 1902 house in the Heights to renovate. It had been in the same family for 90 years and needed a lot of work. But Bill said he enjoyed the process.

In 2004, his employer sold off its petroleum assets, with Bill staying around long enough for the last asset to disappear. At that time he knew he didn’t want to continue in a corporate career. He tried starting an asphalt shipping and terminal company with some friends, but fortunately that endeavor didn’t work out. During the economic downturn in 2007, he bought that first house in the Heights as a spec project, more as hobby than a business, and made a bit of money on it. He started buying more houses, and his projects evolved into a business.

Continued from page 5

“But we’re not going to buy any more spec houses in historic districts. The future is too uncertain [with constantly changing restrictions]. We’re pushing more for new construction projects in the fringes just outside of the historic districts.”

He gets frustrated by some of the historic restrictions because they don’t allow energy-efficient replacement windows, for example. And he’s learned that blowing insulation between the original section of a bungalow and the new section lets condensation build up, to the detriment of the house. “There’s building science involved. It’s generally better to leave the old part alone to let it breathe.

“We prefer to gut houses, but I have no problem tearing down houses without any charm. Our goal is to find more lots with houses appropriate to tear down. It’s almost more cost-effective to replumb and rewire houses than to work with the original,” Bill said.

“We focus on sustainable materials and energy efficiency in all of our projects to create beautiful, comfortable, livable homes for the long run,” Riley stated.

Bill piggybacked his training as a marine engineer with his lifelong interest in building. “When I first started building seriously, I tried to find courses that would fill in the gaps



Now, 11 years later, the company has a second-generation Riley involved. His son Jacob joined Bicycle Bungalows as a project manager in January after six years of working in New York City as a fashion model. He's learning the business from his dad and deciding if he wants to refocus his career from art to building. He says he's gone from Fashion Model to Remodeler. (His sister and brother are both engineers.)

Despite his years on the sea, Bill Riley doesn't miss it. He doesn't even go boating to relax. Instead, he spends his time reading, taking advantage of his Kindle Unlimited membership.

"I love doing this [building]. I feel it's something I can do 'way past retirement age.'" In the meantime his wife Cathie is ready to redo their house once again. Bill may not be able to read as much as he'd like.

For more information about Bicycle Bungalows, contact Bill Riley at 832-786-1609 or bill@bicyclebungalows.com or by visiting www.bicyclebungalows.com.

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Real Estate Economist Declares 'Clear Sailing Ahead' at GHBA Mid-Year Luncheon



Mark Dotzour, Ph.D., a real estate economist who specializes in making complex economic issues easily understandable, forecast positive growth for Houston's and the country's economy at the Greater Houston Builders Association Mid-Year Forecast Luncheon on May 23 at the Hilton Americas Hotel in Houston.

Dotzour focused on synthesizing global, social and economic trends to help attendees make good investments and big decisions.

Overall, Dotzour said the economy has rebounded from the Great Recession and is quite strong in 2017. Home building is very bullish at the moment, but the automobile industry, which has been on a run since the Great Recession, is now running out of gas. (Pun intended.) A stock market crash will not destroy our economy; Black Monday of 1987 is proof of this, he explained.

Dotzour stated that the election of Donald Trump as President has been a positive influence on the country's business community. He said that Trump's rollback of regulations across the board will spur economic activity. He also expects that the President is likely to get some kind of tax cuts passed through Congress that will also spur the economy.

He noted that the business community is the sector that creates jobs, and Trump's focus on deregulation and tax cuts will spur the business community to invest in more jobs.

Dotzour does not foresee a border adjustment tax or major tax reform passing because there are too many powerful lobbies and interests who do not want to see those changes.

The Federal Reserve wants to raise interest percentage rates and will likely continue to do so at a very cautious rate until they hit 2 percent, according to Dotzour. Dotzour believes 2 percent is the Fed's goal.

However, there is no inflation, so there is no pressing need to raise interest rates now. But the Fed will still want to get rates up to 2 percent so that it can use that rate as a tool to lower it if there is a recession down the road. Dotzour

said the Fed governors like to think they can control the economy, but they actually don't have that much control.

Dotzour says the 10-year treasury rate is much more tied to mortgage rates than the Fed Reserve's percentage because mortgage rates will go up with the 10-year treasury rates. The only thing that will raise the 10-year treasury rate is the expected rise of inflation, he explained. But that threat is non-existent right now.

Consequently, there is no need to fear outlandish mortgage rates anytime soon. The threat and talk of mortgage rates going up does spur demand for buying homes; consequently, the talk of a rate increase might sell a few more homes. However, Dotzour does not anticipate mortgage rates moving much, if at all, in 2017.

Home building, which is up 10 percent so far this year, will fill any voids in the housing market.

He forecast a 5 percent increase from 2016 to 2017 in Houston building.

In addition, Dotzour thinks that the energy sector is coming up right behind housing. It has bottomed out and is on the upswing; it's now lean and mean and ready to roar!

Unlike other economists, Dotzour does not buy into the theory that the Millennial generation will not buy houses. These young adults want the same thing every other generation wants: a good job, a car, a family and a nice house.

He sees the economy being two years into a decade-long boom for demand in single-family housing. Although demand for single-family housing is up, the availability is down because regulations on loans for development and construction are too restrictive. Legislators over-reacted on regulations after the Great Recession/Housing Bust, and they need to reverse this trend in order for the building industry to grow and build the nation's economy. However, the American people and the economy can thrive despite regardless of who is in power.

Dotzour's other positive predictions were that American wages are finally increasing and consumer confidence is way up.



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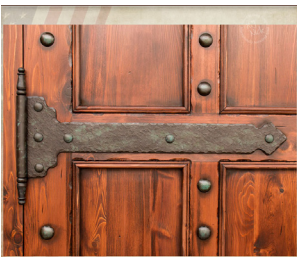
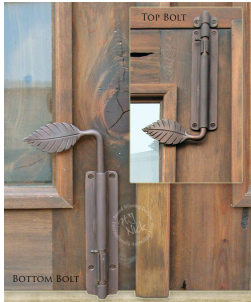


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Continued from page 8

made by builders and homeowners?

Selena Mackay: The number one mistake some builders and homeowners make is to think they don't need a designer!!! People are sometimes frightened of the cost of hiring a professional, but they don't realize the cost of the mistakes and the unrealized potential outweighs the cost of retaining a designer. A good interior designer will know exactly where to find all the materials for a project, a large part of them available only to the trade.

Secondly, including too many styles and trends in one house is a common mistake. One has to be selective and commit to styles that work together so that all facets of the interior, the exterior, the landscape "talk" to each other.

Thirdly, there is a misconception of what things costs. Some homeowners watch HGTV, where most of the materials are donated by the sponsors, and expect to build for the costs represented in those programs. Before a budget can be established for a given project, ALL the materials and finishes have to be specified. This way there are no surprises or unforeseen costs. This is where it is imperative to have a designer that will organize the selections in a spec book with pictures of the materials, the costs and sources. That way, all parties sign off and are aware of the costs before the project begins. This is one of the services Studio Mackay provides: a detailed binder with finishes, costs, sources and applications.

International Flooring: Speaking about staying current, how to you keep yourself up to date with all the design trends happening in the industry today?

Selena Mackay: I read, read, read and read some more! I read everything related to design that appears in my inbox, and I read at least four or five architectural and design magazines front to back, word for word. I have my favorite

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designers. I read their stories, how they manage challenges and solve problems. Magazines show pretty pictures and that is great for inspiration, but the real treasure is in the article content.

I also go to national shows which introduce the new products for the year, and vendors come to our office to give us presentations on their new products and their usage.

International Flooring: Any last thoughts, comments?

Selena Mackay: There is no project that can't be made better by the help of an interior designer. The project goes smoothly, the costs are known from the start, and the

homeowner gets a house that will remain current for many years to come.



To contact Selena Mackay,
call 832-597-2303,
email selena@studiomackey.com
or visit
www.studiomackay.com.

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