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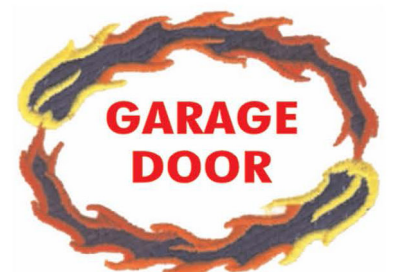


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THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Giselle Bernard
Publisher

“Your reputation is more important than your paycheck, and your integrity is worth more than your career.”

— Ryan Freitas

Organizations looking to build business through building an impeccable reputation may benefit tremendously and in doing so, also set the preference in differentiating themselves from their competitors. According to an article in the August 13, 2018 Business Focus Magazine, written by Leon Bracey on “The Importance of Business Reputation;” there are several factors that one must adhere to in order to establish a good business reputation,

Establish trust – It is of the utmost importance to be a “man of his (or her) word” no matter what! Fulfilling commitments solidifies and builds credibility with all those you do business with.

Be responsive – When communicating with your customers, let them know you’ll return calls and answer emails promptly, striving to always keep the communication open and flowing.

Resolve errors and mistakes immediately – Always be accountable for mistakes or errors made in doing business, and make an effort to resolve the error as quickly as possible. An irate customer can put a dent in your reputation or become your biggest ally depending on the way mistakes are handled.

Create memorable moments – Go out of your way to pay special attention to loyal customers by finding ways to award and/or acknowledge them for their loyalty. Create memorable ways of showing them you appreciate their business.

Protect sensitive financial information – Protecting your customer’s financial information and warding off the chances of identity theft is of the utmost importance.

Keep up with technology – Demonstrating a proficiency in technology yields to a company’s credibility as competency in running your business. It is imperative that you keep up with social media, websites, software, apps, computers, etc.

Become a skilled communicator – Communicate effectively and with transparency. Correspondence should be direct, to the point, and grammatically correct.

A professional website is a must! – A website is an extension of a company’s business card and is a big component in branding. Therefore, having a polished, up-to-date, professional website is vital to doing business.

Charitable services – Participating in philanthropic initiatives is an important part of an organization’s culture. It helps employees feel good about themselves, and it builds a strong reputation within the community. Socially responsible customers prefer doing business with socially responsible companies.

“Integrity, choosing your thoughts and actions based on values rather than personal gain.”

While an impeccable company reputation is a major component in building a credible and profitable business, an even more important component in building a profitable business is the principle of integrity. It demands truthfulness and honesty at all costs, regardless if the truth may be ugly.

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Sierra Classic's Performance Built on Process, People

By Kathy Bowen Stolz

Ron Chamberlain, president of Sierra Classic Custom Homes, can readily identify why his company is successful. “What really makes a difference from builder to builder is their process and their people.”

Sierra Classic, a design-build firm, uses an eight-step building process to make the process smoother for everyone, according to Chamberlain. “Building a custom home can feel like an overwhelming, complicated process – but it doesn’t have to be.”

From the initial meeting to discuss ideas, through the site evaluation to the construction and completion phases, the Sierra Classic staff focuses on the buyer’s comfort, making sure there are no unknowns to surprise or overwhelm the buyer. “We try to keep the process simple and transparent.”

But the company’s success is also about the synergy and teamwork found in its staff of 26. “We have an amazing group of people, and everyone at Sierra works together to get the job done,” stated Chamberlain.

Offering a full turn-key operation, the staff includes four employees who handle administrative duties, including accounting, permitting, homeowner associations, review boards, utilities and all other bureaucracies. They also support the nine builders in the field, each of whom typically manages the construction of five to eight houses. Sierra Classics also has a design coordinator to assist clients through the design of their new home blueprints.

Additionally, eight sales consultants work from model homes in five locations. Those sales consultants really drive the process and “hold the buyers’ hand” throughout the construction process, Ron said. Rounding out the staff is a management team which includes Kip Miller, chief executive officer; Joanie Ramser, vice president and co-owner; David Ellison, vice president of sales; and Chamberlain.

Additionally, Sierra Classic partners with two outside design companies whose associates help buyers make their finish selections. Buyers visit Expressions Home Gallery



for appliances and lighting and Flooring Services-Design Gallery for all remaining design finishes.

The company typically builds 50 to 60 houses each year, mostly single story homes of 3,000 to 4,000 sq. ft. on acreage in the Houston, Austin and San Antonio areas. About half of the homes Sierra Classic builds are in the greater Houston area, and the other half are in the San Antonio and Austin areas.

“Our primary focus is building homes on land the buyers own. Although we typically do not have land for sale, we do have resources to assist buyers that need to find land to build their new dream home,” Chamberlain said.

Because Sierra Classic builds almost exclusively on acreage properties, it’s now following the land, expanding north of Houston to College Station and Huntsville, where it has a model home. It’s also building west and south of Austin.



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Keller Williams Opens Fine Touch Living Luxury Division

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Fine Touch Living

The Fine Touch Living brand is best defined by its founder, Andre Vysotskiy and his commitment to the real estate industry:

“Over-delivering our client’s expectations.”

This mission statement is simple, yet it’s what Andre expects from himself as well as everybody on his team. His passion for connecting quality builders with home buyers is why Keller Williams Realty Memorial decided to open a luxury division called Fine Touch Living.

The Fine Touch Living team specializes in marketing and selling of mid- to high-end real estate in the Houston area, primarily Memorial, West University Place, Bellaire, Meyerland, Bunker Hill, Downtown and the Galleria.

Andre stated, “I see the focus on buyers’ faces when the builder is going over blueprints. They get so involved, it’s important for them to ask the right questions. I’m there for

that, and I know which questions to ask. Now, on the flip side, I’m also there to see their eyes fill with joy when we do a sponsored housewarming party and they get to show off their brand-new home to all of their family and friends.”

As a boutique Realtor team within one of the biggest brokers in the world, Fine Touch Living provides to its clients a luxury concierge service in addition to the benefits of the Keller Williams Realty brand name, Andre noted. For instance, its Builder Exposure Program delivers national and international exposure as well as focused local marketing to showcase a property, builder or an entire community. This marketing campaign features video marketing, virtual staging, social media and digital branding – all for a flat 1 percent listing commission!

With an extensive presence in the Houston luxury market, The Fine Touch Living team’s buyer pipeline is constantly replenished with local and relocation buyers. The Buyer Advantage Program insures that its buyers receive a luxury home buying experience while delivering to its buyers a thorough understanding of the building process, product

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Dialogue with a Designer

Sherry Millien, Allied ASID, Terravista Interior Design Group

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 its clients a private showroom full of exotic wood floors not found in retail showrooms. This month International Flooring speaks with Sherry Millien, Allied ASID, Terravista Interior Design Group.

Sherry Millien, one of America's premier Christian-based designers, is known for the one-of-a-kind interiors she creates for prominent clients throughout the metropolitan Houston area. Sherry is expanding her full service luxury interior design business nationwide, but she specializes in serving homeowners in The Woodlands, Bellaire, Kemah, Katy, Cypress, Tanglewood, West University and other area communities. She provides everything from project management and remodeling to space planning and furniture selection.

Sherry, who has 20 years' experience as an interior consultant, helps clients to save time, to update and upgrade their space and to overcome design challenges. Her clients include Fortune 500 executives, oil company representatives, professional athletes, doctors, surgeons, business owners and other successful professionals.

Integrity and extraordinary customer service are hallmarks of her company. The firm donates a portion of its profits to Disability Rights Texas.

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

Sherry Millien: When I was eight years old, my grandfather gave me a book called "How to Draw What You See" and told me that I had a talent that I needed to grow and nurture. I decided that day that I would do something artistic. My sophomore year of high school, we moved and the school offered an interior design alternative to home economics. I decided to try it and fell in love. I realized that a room is my canvas, and interior design is my media.

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

Sherry Millien: I think that the internet and social media have changed the field a lot. They have made design more accessible to more people, which I think also makes design more overwhelming with so many choices at people's fingertips. They have helped to educate consumers that design has more to it than putting pretty fabric on a sofa. Consumers are understanding that there is a lot that happens behind the scenes and how designers do save them time, money and stress.

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

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contractors with their building or remodeling projects?

Sherry Millien: An experienced interior designer can be an important collaborator on the design build team. They can assist the homeowners in understanding that their design goals and objectives are based on how their own family lives, works and plays. They will help to guide the selections and surfaces used based on the lifestyle of the clients and make sure the home has a cohesive flow.

International Flooring: What sets you apart from other designers?

Sherry Millien: My company's core values are God first, client-focused customer experience, integrity, transparency and collaboration. I am very patient and careful in listening to my clients, not only to what they do say, but what they don't say. I am passionate that my clients' homes reflect who they are and how they live. I understand how to use color appropriately to make sure the houses flow as a cohesive unit and are their sanctuaries at the end of a busy day.



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

Sherry Millien: I would not say that I can point to one project as more challenging than another. Every project will have problems that arise. I believe the challenge for any designer on a project is to have the maturity to calmly listen to their clients, vendors and trades involved and not take any problem or situation personally. When you take the time to recognize where someone is coming from and make sure they know they are heard, it becomes much easier to find a solution.

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

Sherry Millien: I start by meeting the clients to make sure they have a clear design plan and ask them to fill out my design questionnaire. I also ask for photos of anything that inspires them. We also need to review the plans to understand the flow of the space and how light will affect it. Then, I start with selections that will have the most impact in a room and drive the rest of the choices.

International Flooring: What are some common mistakes made by builders and homeowners?

Sherry Millien: I wish they would understand the value of having an interior designer from the beginning. We can assist the client with creating their design objectives and ask questions to really drill down to understand how the homeowners need a space to function and why they need or want something. We can help guide them in choosing the right selection so they don't make costly or long-term



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GET COMFORTABLE WITH OUR FAMILY!

Goodman, as an organization, is extremely focused on the residential new home and renovation market and we strive to develop products and programs that result in long-term relationships. Goodman[®] and Amana[®] brand systems feature outstanding limited warranties*, products with legendary performance, offering high-efficiency systems up to 18 SEER. Whether you build two or 200 plus homes per year Goodman has systems and builder programs that can help you grow your business. Builders can qualify for one of two builder programs when using Goodman or Amana brand HVAC systems. And one of the best things is that both Goodman and Amana brand products are proudly designed, engineered and assembled in the United States.

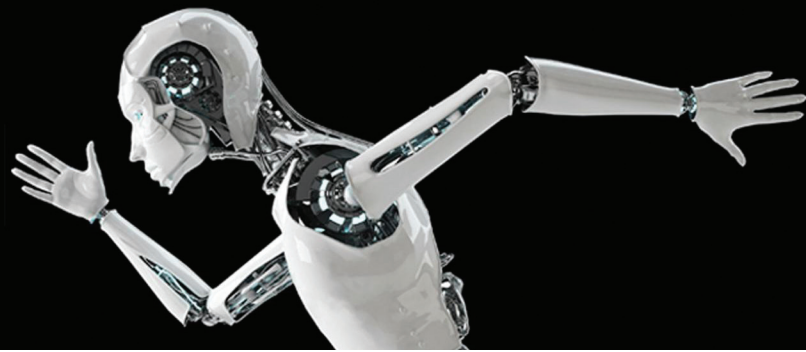


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Who made you?

By Burk Moreland



Anyone who knows me will tell you I am a driven person with a mind for business, a belief in work ethic and a heart to help those around me. The question I often get is, “How did you get there?”

I believe in the theory that all of us is a sum of the people we invest time with, especially those that we look up to and idolize. We even take on their characteristics and mannerisms to the best of our ability. I can remember as a child imitating my favorite baseball player’s batting stance and my favorite basketball player’s free throw ritual. It is what we do.

We see someone that we deem to be successful, and we try to be like that person in any way we can. As long as we pick the right people, imitation is a great way to build ourselves as people! We don’t have to “reinvent the wheel.”

The best people figure out how to take the best of the people around them and create a composite of the great

parts. This concept was introduced to me as I entered the home building world. I was not trained by one person; rather, I was trained by three primarily. I was instructed which part of each person I was to try to incorporate into my “toolbox.”

As I have gone through life, I have realized that three other people have been the main contributors to my makeup. My mother taught me how to listen to people and see the real person inside the shell they show the world. My grandfather, who I lost a few years ago, taught me how to live life, surround myself with good people, and believe in myself. Lastly, my father taught me the value of work and solving problems for those around me. I lost my father a few weeks ago, and the world is definitely worse off for it. However, one of his final gifts was one that will continue to change the world.

He was very sick with pulmonary fibrosis and died painfully and slowly. As horrible as his death was, it gave many people the opportunity to come by and express to him how he had impacted their lives. Phone calls came in, friends and family stopped by. Stories were told. The “ripples in the water” from his life and the things he did were felt by so many people.

Some examples of how he lived:

- He was a rescue diver for NASA (where he worked for 42 years) during the Apollo missions of the 60s. His job was to make sure our astronauts were recovered safely from the ocean after a space mission.
- He was in the Navy’s construction battalion (SeaBees), building bridges, roads and buildings so that our troops could do the job they were asked to do.
- He was a volunteer fireman for the town where he lived, fixing and maintaining all the equipment and driving the trucks. He received so many awards for performance and always showing up that they eventually stopped giving him the plaques due to the lack of wall space! I watched a video from no fewer than 50 volunteer firemen who repeatedly expressed their admiration and affection for him. The words “mentor,” “leader,” “teacher” and similar ones were used over and over.
- And finally, he was a huge influence on the lives of his family. Teaching all who wanted to know how to tie, build or fix just about anything. He will leave a lasting



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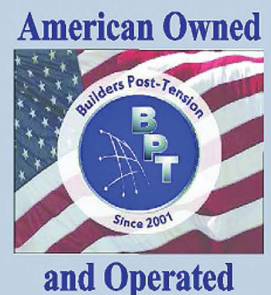
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Many buyers are Baby Boomer empty nesters buying their final homes, according to Chamberlain. “The majority of our Hill Country buyers come from Houston. They buy a nice piece of land for their retirement years.” They no longer have to worry about commuting to the city and are seeking big, open-style floor plans.

“Many people start with our customizable plans to stimulate ideas and visualize their perfect dream home,” Ron said. Most of its buyers choose to customize plans from the company library of more than 100 copyrighted designs, although some buyers bring in their own plans or will use Sierra Classic’s in-house design team to create an original floor plan.

Although most of the house plans have only three bedrooms, about one-fourth of the houses now include a guest house, perhaps because a model homes is set up in that style, prompting more buyers to request it, Ron said.

The majority of the homes fall in the \$450,000 to \$750,000 range, although some are more than \$1 million. Those costs do not include the land or site work, he noted.

To familiarize prospective buyers with the design-build process, Sierra Classic offers a two-hour, multi-media “Build on Your Lot” seminar in each of its markets every

quarter. Its industry panel, led by Chamberlain, discusses construction, financing, site evaluations, design and more.

“We’ve been doing these seminars for more than 10 years. Those attending consistently become buyers. The seminars give them comfort in how the business is run,” the company president stated. A big part of the seminar stresses the importance of choosing a financially stable company to build the buyers’ homes. Sierra has successfully weathered the volatile housing market for over 20 years, due in no small part to its conservative financial practices.

To ensure that they’re meeting the customers’ expectations, Sierra Classic uses a third party – GuildQuality – to gather reviews from its buyers at four times during the process: contract, sheetrock (or halfway through construction), completion (two weeks after move-in) and 12 months later. The staff reviews the results monthly to help them deliver excellent customer satisfaction.

Miller and Ramser began Sierra Classic Custom Homes as a production builder in 1989 in Houston. By 1997 the company had evolved into a build-on-your-lot entity and then expanded to the Hill Country in 2004 by constructing a single model home in Wimberley. Just five years later the production in the Hill Country market was matching the Houston market. The Hill Country market is now expanding south to San Antonio and north to “the South



Austin market,” as Chamberlain termed it.

In the future Ron envisions increasing production to as many as 150 homes a year, but not so many that he’d lose touch with his customers. “We’re the perfect size – big enough to be competitive but small enough to make sure our buyers get the custom home experience.”

Chamberlain joined the company in 2006 as the sales manager after working in sales for a production builder, History Maker Homes, and in auto finance. He moved up the ranks from sales to vice president of operations and ultimately to president.

Ron said he loves the challenges of working in the custom home industry, most notably taking an intangible concept to a finished product. Claiming that he is married to his work, in his spare time he spends a lot of time studying business management and the building industry. He is accredited as a Graduate Master Builder and a Certified Green Builder by the National Association of Home Builders.

For more information contact Sierra Classic Custom Homes by emailing info@sierraclassic.com or visiting the website at www.sierraclassic.com. You may also call the Houston division office at 281-391-1303 or the Hill Country division office at 830-629-6600.

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Porcelain tile has consistently been an ideal choice for flooring throughout the years. This can be attributed to a number of factors, least of which is its overall durability. While this point remains the same, the versatility of porcelain products continues to expand; a feature most notably demonstrated by the 2018 release of Arizona Tile's new R11 Anti-Slip Finish. The R11 Anti-Slip Finish is specifically designed for outdoor, exposed areas, as well as wet applications including shower floors. With R11, flooring installations can be truly seamless; bringing the beauty and design from the interior of a space, to its outdoor living areas.

To be certified as R11 Anti-Slip, a tile must pass an internationally-recognized analysis showing that a barefoot person can maintain balance while standing on the wet tile



at an incline of up to 27 degrees. This advanced technology increases the versatility of porcelain applications, and enables it to be safely used in areas that regular porcelain installations might prove hazardous. The added safety benefits add value to the series that offer R11 Anti-Slip Finish and make it an even more appealing option for residential and commercial installations alike.

Arizona Tile offers R11 Anti-Slip Finish in four series: our wood-look Aequa and More Wood series, and our contemporary Pietra-Italia and Reside series. With several colors available in each series, the R11 Anti-Slip finish has the added flexibility to be safely used in a variety of installations. High traffic, outdoor, exposed, and wet areas can maintain the aesthetic appeal of their indoor counterparts, without compromising design or durability.



Live Seamlessly

With the introduction of wood and concrete-look tiles, porcelain products have continued to rise in popularity. R11 Anti-Slip finish gives a new edge to these already artistic materials giving the added appeal of endless installation applications. Using materials with the R11 Anti-Slip finish, fluid designs are now attainable allowing for truly seamless living.



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Based in California since 2008, its designers travel the world to gather insight and inspiration, keeping up to date with emerging technological innovations and interior design trends. They have created 52 colors in the white, beige, brown, bronze, gray and black palettes.

In addition, Colorquartz® employs more than 20 engineers and research staff and has invested more than \$10 million in quartz technology research and development. Colorquartz®'s core technologies, from silicon-resin infusion techniques to veining-pattern mixing, provide a base for quartz surfaces' engineering. The company's major research and development facilities are located in its Diamond Bar, Calif., headquarters.

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quality and market condition.

Andre Vysotskiy has been with Keller Williams Realty for almost a decade, learning, developing and finally launching this unique real estate experience. Over these years of working with custom home builders and buyers, the Fine Touch Living team has gained extensive insight into what really matters to its clients, according to Andre.

“We have also come to a clear understanding of the top-quality service expected from us. We strive to accomplish this by saving builders time and money while delivering the home of the buyer’s dream.”

Redesigning the buying and selling processes of high-end real estate with an emphasis on a luxury tailored experience is how the Fine Touch Living team delivers its promise, he added.



To contact Andre Vysotskiy and the Fine Touch Living Team, call 832-455-4008 or email andre@hometeamceo.com

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Ratna's Seasonal Art Features Botanical Art on Ceramic Tiles

Looking for a unique ceramic tile to bring nature's beauty into an interior? Check out the botanical design collections from architect and artist Ratna Dalal on Zazzle, an on-line and on-demand marketplace that connects customers with artists' designs, according to the website, www.zazzle.com.

Ratna's Seasonal Art is an online store within Zazzle that she launched in November 2017. Her seven design collections offer more than 250 products, including white ceramic tiles in 10 designs and two sizes: 4.25" square and 6" square. Both are 0.19" thick. The tiles should be used indoors and protect from exposure to direct sunlight, she noted.

Ratna creates designs – such as Budding Peonies, Pansy Party, Lily of the Nile, Merry Maples or Fiery Tulips – that are digitally recreated on tiles and other products.

“Architecture and art complement each other very well. After using mostly computers in architecture, when I switch to paints, brushes and water, it is very refreshing for my senses! I started making botanical paintings about 30 years back to unwind from the highly computerized world of architecture, as it leaves me hungry for color and curvilinear forms.

“Also, as an architect, my eyes see black and white straight lines, but, as an artist, I switch to bright colors, petals and leaves that are totally devoid of straight lines! These are inspired by the beauty of the four seasons in the Northeast and are in the medium of mostly watercolors.”

Ratna added, “What began as a hobby has evolved into my becoming an artist as my paintings have adorned many exhibitions walls in New York, plus book covers, book pages, e-magazines, etc. “

She said she's attracted to drawing botanical images because climate change, global warming and rapid urbanization are slowly overtaking the natural world. “Some scientists estimate that one flowering plant species dies out every day. Recently Time magazine quoted that 60 percent of plants in the world's richest forests are at a risk of extinction. This will create and is already creating an immense hunger for green pastures and the sight of delightful plants.

“All of these factors, combined with advancing technology, are making the human race lose touch with nature. In response to all this I have started making products for daily life with botanical art made by me, to infuse human lives with nature's



beauty,” she stated.

Some other products on Zazzle that feature her botanical designs are t-shirts, leggings, mouse pads, mugs, iPhone cases, bowls and linens.

*You may view
Ratna's Seasonal Art
at
www.zazzle.com
or
www.instagram.com/ratnadalal.*



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mistakes with color because undertones are tricky.

International Flooring: How do you keep yourself up to date with all the design trends happening in the industry today?

Sherry Millien: I love to attend yearly markets as well as the continuing education classes offered by ASID and affiliated vendors. I also listen to podcasts that teach designers about the best business practices and how to keep the company up to date by working more professionally and efficiently.

International Flooring: What is your favorite design style?

Sherry Millien: I don't like to pin myself down to one style. I believe the most interesting rooms are a blending of more than one design style.

International Flooring: What fascinates you and how have you incorporated that into your designs?

Sherry Millien: I adore antiques. I believe that adding an antique to a room instantly gives the room a sense of history and depth of texture that other pieces cannot achieve.

International Flooring: How would you characterize your personal style?

Sherry Millien: Eclectic and timeless.

International Flooring: What would be your recommendation for "what to do first" in a decorating project when working with the builders and/or homeowners?

Sherry Millien: It is important for the homeowners to have a very clear vision and understanding of their design goals for their home and how the final product show be. The project cannot be a success if the roadmap is not clear from the beginning.

International Flooring: Any last thoughts, comments?

Sherry Millien: At the end of the day, the homeowners must be in love with their home. It should be the place they cannot wait to get back to the end of the day. In order to achieve this goal, they must stay true to themselves throughout the process and make sure the people on their team help them do that.

To contact Sherry Millien, Allied ASID, of Terravista Interior Design Group, call 832-264-6081 or email info@terravistaidg.com or visit www.terravistaidg.com. The office is located at 18010 Norwood Oaks Dr., Spring, TX 77379.



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legacy on all of the lives he touched.

What are you made of? Who are your influencers? How do you want to be remembered?

If you are unclear about these questions, take some time to examine them. Sit with a friend, a family member or, better yet, a coach and discuss it.

Who are the people that you want to fashion your decisions after? Invest time with them soon and often. They won't be here forever. No one is perfect, but take the parts of them you want to emulate and try and incorporate the ideas and behaviors consciously into your day.

Before jumping to a big decision, consult your mentors while you can. Once they are gone, try to see the problem through their eyes so they can still help you arrive at your answer.

If you have no one that fits these molds, my advice is to change the circles you spend time in. You are truly the sum of those around you. Choose wisely.

Be a rainmaker for your team today. If you need help pushing your team and maybe yourself to new heights, contact us today at burk@burkmoreland.com or call (832) 356-4585.

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