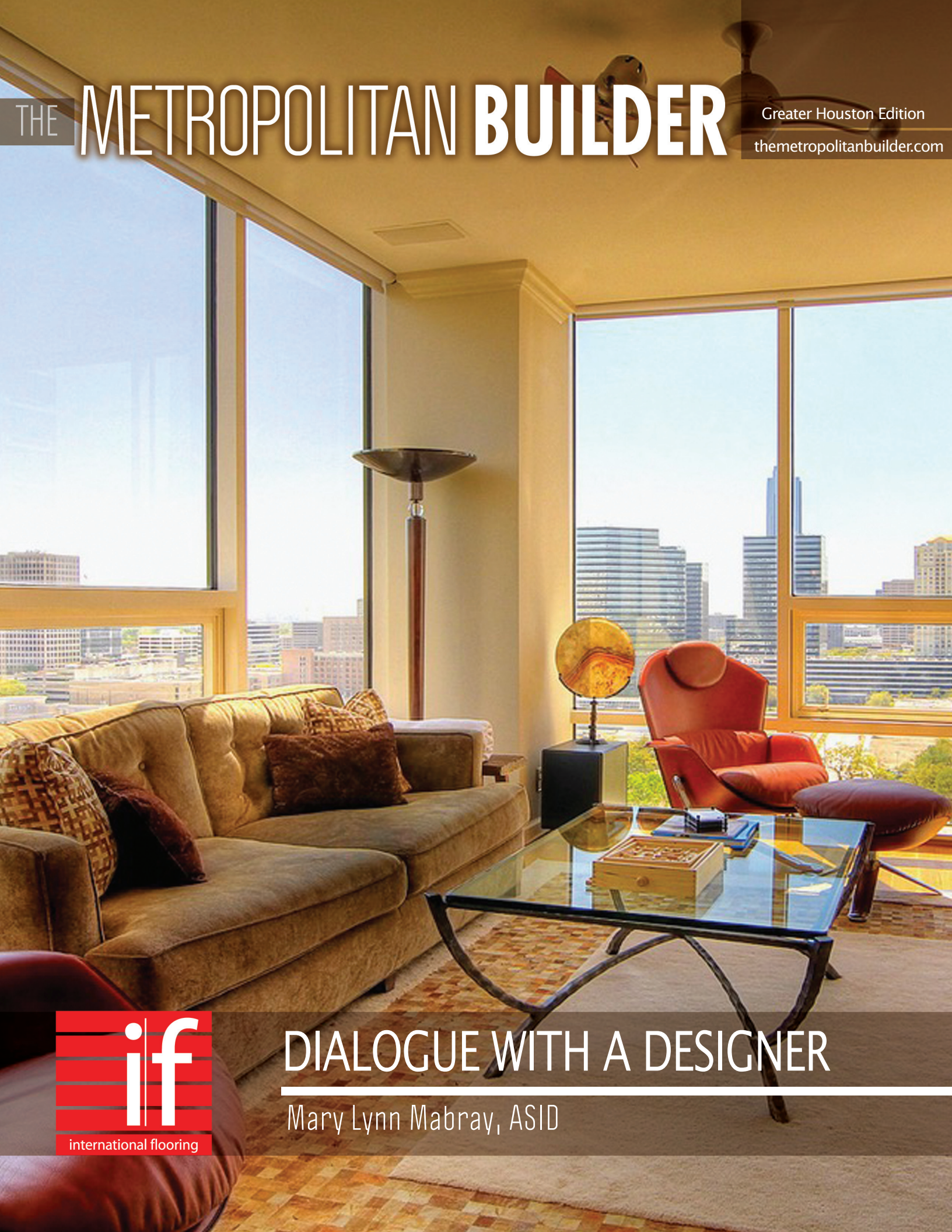


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DIALOGUE WITH A DESIGNER

Mary Lynn Mabray, ASID



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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 Mary Lynn Mabray, ASID.

*Mary Lynn Mabray was raised in the Texas Panhandle, the daughter of a rancher/farmer and a housewife. She has written a cookbook based on her mother's storied recipes, entitled *Mama's Made in Texas Desserts and Mama's Treasured Recipes* on Facebook. Mary Lynn graduated from the Art Institute of Houston in interior design and from the University of California Los Angeles's professional program in screenwriting. She ascribes to her own design theory that "less is more but 'more' certainly doesn't hurt unless it's in poor taste." She has one daughter, an accomplished acupuncturist, a wonderful son-in-law and two hilarious grandsons that make her life and that of her sister's, a true joy.*

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

Mary Lynn Mabray: My mother was a very talented

woman. She was the Martha Stewart of our farming and ranching town in the Texas Panhandle. My love of interior design came from her admiration and study of beautiful yet simple things. There was literally nothing she couldn't do –

from designing two still-timeless homes to gardening and cooking. She was an amazing woman that I greatly admired and wanted to follow in her footsteps. She made people happy. I wanted to do the same.

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

Mary Lynn Mabray: Technology and the advent of the internet has changed design. In many ways, it has elevated the profession, giving us thousands of options, and in other ways it has made it impersonal to the point that many people with little training and a modicum of taste or exposure now call themselves designers.

I'm "old school." I still work with a T-square and drafting board. I find that "old school" approach causes one to really think about the project, the flow of traffic in the residence and, most especially, the actual function of the home. When one is using a drafting pencil, one is forced to actually use one's imagination. A residence comes alive for me when I have a drafting pencil in hand.

International Flooring: *How can an experienced interior designer help a custom home builders or remodeling contractors with their building or remodeling projects?*

Mary Lynn Mabray: It's always my intention to bring light, life and happiness into a project and help the builder's clients see their space in a new and inviting way. I love to create the unexpected. That's what makes a project truly special. I enjoy being part of a team whose mission it is to make the client's life easier.

I recently had a "Harvey" client tell me that she and her husband were so happy with the renovation of their home after such a devastating disaster that they never wanted to leave. They were truly happy. I think that was one of the nicest compliments I've ever received as a designer. It made my efforts, and that of a talented builder, worthwhile.

International Flooring: *What sets you apart from other designers?*

Mary Lynn Mabray: I listen to the clients' hopes and dreams. Really listen. I study how they interact with their family or lifestyle. I give them what they want...not what I think they need. I don't ascribe to a particular style for that very reason because every person is different and doesn't deserve to live in a "cookie cutter" environment. They deserve to live their life in an environment that makes them happy, gives them joy and peace. In my view, that's what interior design is all about, creating peace and happiness.

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

Mary Lynn Mabray: Many years ago, it was my privilege to be the designer to a very young widow and her children and help them recover from the loss of the most important man in their lives, her husband and their father. I helped guide them through the grieving process by involving the entire family in the selection of materials, fabric and furnishings as we rebuilt their lives during the building process of a 7,500-sq.-ft. house near Kemah. The house was an Old South, Louisiana-style home. I listened to each of their preferences and chose color, practicality and comfort as my allies. I wanted the house to feel relaxed and safe, but most importantly, I wanted that house to be a place of sanctuary and hope.

There are many times, throughout the course of a project, that a designer becomes a friend, a psychologist and a surrogate parent. The residence took almost a year to build, and in that time it was wonderful to see spirits lifted and laughter return. The most exciting moment came when I installed a custom portrait with the entire family, including the deceased husband and father that had been painstakingly drawn and created by renowned artist and sculptor Willy Wang. This was a very special charcoal drawing as the family didn't have a formal memory of the man they loved so much. There wasn't a dry eye in the house when the portrait was hung over the fireplace. Happiness reigned high on the agenda that day.



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

Mary Lynn Mabray: I listen to the clients. I listen to the builder, and only then, after I am certain I understand all their needs, do I begin the process of creating their dream.

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

Mary Lynn Mabray: The single most common mistake is misunderstanding history and rushing the process. I've been a designer for almost 30 years. Design has changed a lot during that time frame; but what has not changed is the history of architecture, good taste, timelessness and the marriage of the three. It is possible to mix styles. It is not practical to not understand how and why styles go together...what works and what doesn't. I see that particular element or lack thereof in many new homes. Builders and or architects don't take history into account.

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

Mary Lynn Mabray: I love to watch HGTV and see how a particular designer might deal with a design problem and think about ways I might have met the same challenge. In the end, though, I always go back to history and books about design. In those pages, there is true wisdom. The older books are the best. I do my best to stay away from trendy styles because they don't last. They aren't timeless and they won't be standing in another 100 years.

International Flooring: What is your favorite design style?



Mary Lynn Mabray: My favorite style is an eclectic mixture of French Country, Italian, English, American Indian, Texas Primitives, Modern and Funk – things that are unexpected in an interior. They are timeless in nature and rooted in history.

International Flooring: How would you characterize your personal style?

Mary Lynn Mabray: Comfort mixed with beauty.

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