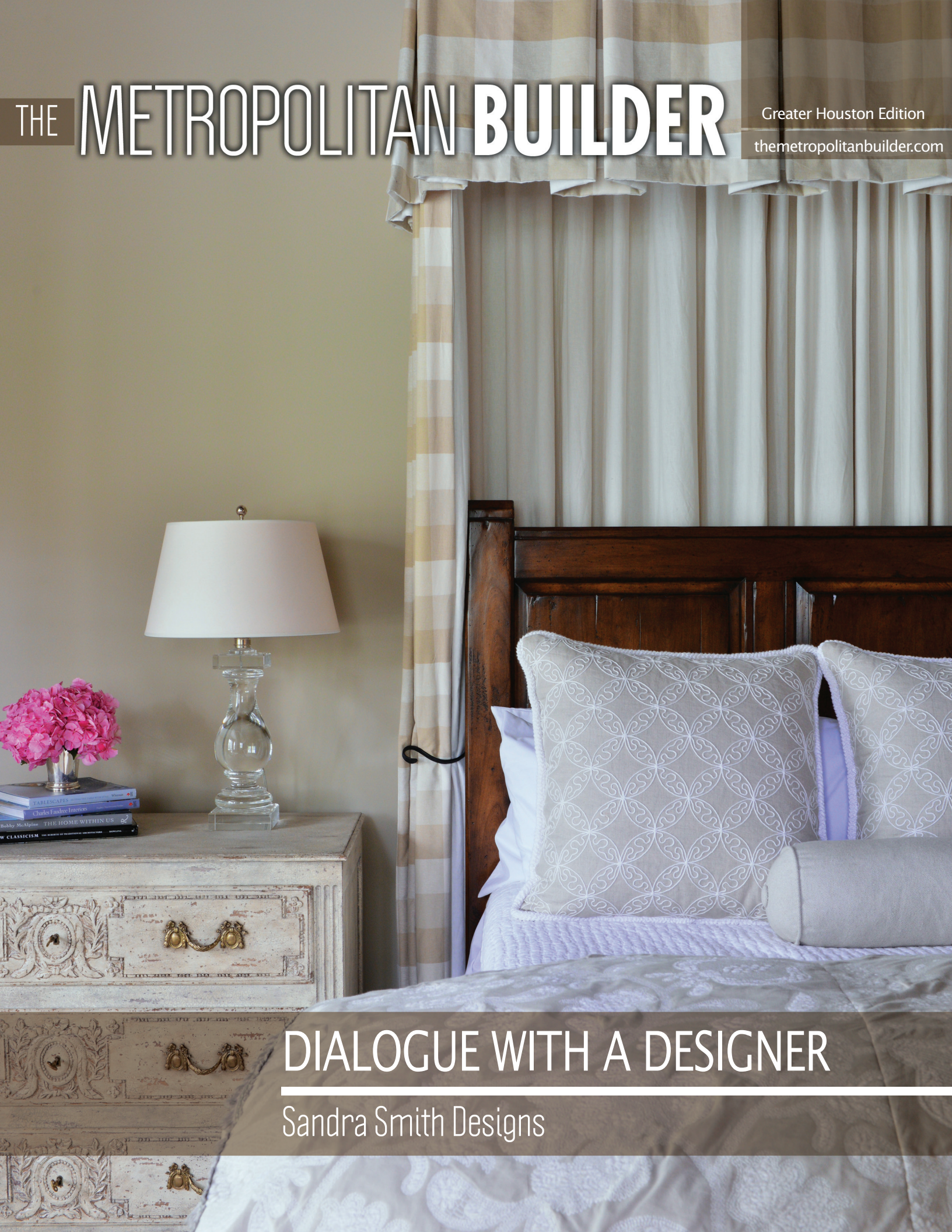


THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

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DIALOGUE WITH A DESIGNER

Sandra Smith Designs



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An Interior Designer or Interior Design Firm should be committed to creating individualized and functional designs to meet the lifestyles of their clients' families. They should exemplify an unwavering dedication to open communication, reliable service, and to building a collaborative design partnership with all of their clients. This month The Metropolitan Builder is proud to dialog with Sandra Smith of SANDRA SMITH DESIGNS or SANDRA KAY STUDIO

With over a decade of experience in interior design and the arts, Sandra Kay has built and shaped her business into the award-winning, innovative design company it is today. From interior design to custom, commissioned art pieces, Sandra Kay is ever-evolving and constantly creating evocative works and aesthetically entrancing designs that have defined her distinct style and ushered her name around the city of Houston and state of Texas. Published in Southern Home, Perspectives on Design Southwest and a winner of the Robert Allen Design Vision Color Competition, Sandra's essence can be experienced in both her designs and art that adorns residential and commercial properties across Houston and the state at large.

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

SS: The love of how things are made. For as long as I can

remember, I just loved how homes, workplaces, and rooms came together with their own distinct themes and the way décor really conveyed the personality and values of both people and businesses.

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

SS: When I graduated in 2002, we did not have the internet as we know it today. The endless choices and digital storefronts can sometimes be overwhelming for clients. So, as a designer, part of my job is staying current with trends while also noting where to source high-quality décor for my clients. Of course, as with anything in life, key to excelling in any field is providing the best customer service possible so that the design experience is enjoyable and has the necessary human element you need when designing a space to reflect that client's personality and soul. Naturally, the benefit of the digital age as we know it is that trade professionals have so much information on installation requirements for new products, as well as what trends are on the rise, fading out, and what products have not lived up to their reputation.

The access to global information, fellow designers across the world and connectivity with clients is truly amazing. Since I originally entered, the field I've stepped into offering



digital consultations, and I couldn't have imagined that as a truly useful resource for myself and clients when I initially began.

TMB: *How can an experienced interior designer help a custom home builder or a remodeling contractor with their building or remodeling projects?*

SS: It's always a good idea to hire the interior designer at the beginning stages of the project. It will save the homeowner money by staying within budget, and it helps the builder or remodeler stay on schedule. In my work, I can guide them to showrooms that the builder prefers to work with or my own sources so that in the end the client gets the dream home they've longed for.

Along with this, as a designer I can keep up to date with the construction schedule so that items get ordered and delivered to the job site on time, minimizing work for the homeowner and contractors. Of course, things will get backordered and re-selections do occur, but as a designer, we stay a step ahead, so the builder or remodeler does not get surprised at the last minute and have to delay the process. Team work!

TMB: *What sets you apart from other designers?*

SS: For me, the client always comes first. I believe customer service and communication are critical to design experience and progress. In my view, the client is building or remodeling their dream home, and I want them to trust that I will be there to guide them through the details and have their best interest at heart. I do not pre-emptively create a specific "style," or "Designer Look." I love and work to create something that truly represents the client's authentic style and needs.

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

SS: I think all projects are challenging, and I mean in a good way. It's like putting a puzzle together. I learn something new especially with custom designed pieces that are specific to the project.

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

SS: I actually like to work in strategic steps to streamline the process for both the builders and homeowners. Before I begin, I like to:

- 1) Have a meeting to discuss the budget
- 2) Get the schedule of when the materials are due on the job site
- 3) Review the construction drawings and understand the appropriate materials
- 4) Analyze and review the design concept "style" of the project
- 5) Understand who the preferred vendors are, if they're already selected, or propose a list of vendors
- 6) Know who will be paying for the materials.

As with everything, each job is different and sometimes requires a different approach. Some clients prefer that I search on my own and bring back 3 schemes for them to choose from, and other clients prefer to go shopping with me which is always fantastic because you really get to understand and know them on a personal level.

TMB: *What are some common mistakes made by builders and homeowners?*

SS: I think one of the most common, and detrimental, mistakes to the experience is decision-making and actions that occur in a vacuum. Whether it's personal or professional, communication is key for success and it helps facilitate understanding so that everyone can efficiently



work as a team for the same desired outcome—a great final project!

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

SS: Truth be told, it can sometimes be difficult even in the information age, but thankfully there are so many resources and communities to rely on and pull from. As an Allied Member of ASID (American Society of Interior Designers), I am required to fulfill continuing education requirements which are incredibly helpful in kickstarting yourself to stay abreast of everything developing. Along with that, I’m a member of the Houston and San Antonio Builders Associations, so thankfully I have access to a broad resource base. Naturally, I regularly attend trade events, and I’m currently taking art classes on an ongoing basis at The Glassell School of Art as I pursue my passion for painting!

TMB: *What is your favorite design style?*

SS: At the moment, I’m embracing anything with color! Though style, as I see it, has a cycle and always comes back around. That said, I prefer a classic Georgian-style and mid-century buildings that allow us to stay true to the past, while adding fresh ideas and inspirations!

TMB: *What fascinates you and how have you incorporated that into your designs.*

SS: I am incredibly excited about the bustling art scene in

Houston and around the world right now! As a painter and art lover, I believe everyone should have the opportunity to afford original art of some kind, even if you begin with a few small pieces. Original art is a treasure that you can take with you throughout your lifetime!

TMB: *How would you characterize your personal style?*

SS: I think my personal style could best be described as a classic casual, a kind of refined leisure.

TMB: *What would be your recommendation for “what to do first” in a decorating project when working with the builders and/or homeowners?*

SS: My absolute first recommendation is for homeowners and builders to really develop a concept and space layout first. From there, we can experiment however the homeowner likes!

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