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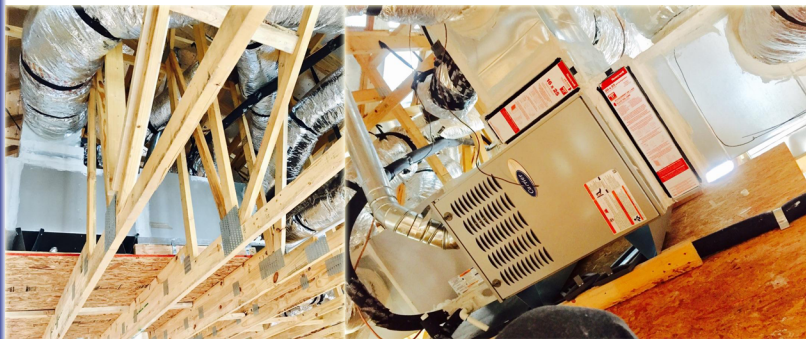
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# THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

**Giselle Bernard**  
*Publisher/Owner*

As I sit here trying to decide what to write as my Publisher's Note this month, I try to contain my anger and disappointment as to all that is going on in our country today. I'm sure you will agree with me when I say that we are being torn apart as a nation.

I know that we are not supposed to discuss political beliefs because it could be detrimental to our businesses. I'm not going to do that. I'm just going to say that it saddens me that there are a vast number of small businesses struggling to stay afloat in the mist of all this chaos. It pulls at my heart strings.

These are troubling times, and we all need to do what we can to see that we survive as a cohesive group within an awesome industry. We need to support our local businesses as well. Never assume! Always reach out to those within your business and personal network and ask how they are doing. Ask if there is anything you can do to assist them in growing business. I promise you, rarely does a good deed go undone.

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# Hallmark Renovations' Success Rooted in Details

by Kathy Bowen Stolz

One thing that Hank White understands is details. And the many clients his Hallmark Renovations & Custom Homes are glad he does!

For White, who has a degree in business administration and marketing from North Texas University, dotting Is and crossing Ts come naturally. He admits to being “very good with budgets and numbers,” which is an essential skill for the “guy who does it all” as the sole Hallmark employee.

“It’s just me. I like to be the guy who makes the decisions. And nobody cares about clients’ needs and wants more than me. I’m very accessible by phone. If I don’t know an answer, I can get the answer.”

But this Houston native is also a “people person” who also focuses on making sure his clients get what they want. “We’re a very custom company, aspiring to make our clients’ dreams become reality. We want them to know that our ability to create what they want is not restricted,” he said.

Most of Hallmark Renovations’ projects are remodels,

ranging from “jewel box”-type kitchens and baths to include whole-home renovations from the West Houston to Inner-Loop neighborhoods, such as West University, Rice and Southampton. White usually runs about 4-5 projects at a time, completing 8-10 whole home renovations annually in addition to constructing one or two new homes.

Hank’s willing to tackle anything except swimming pools, which he readily leaves to others in the construction field. But painting? Check! Skylights? Check! Outdoor kitchens? Check!

A specialty area for Hallmark Renovations & Custom Homes is cabinetry, thanks to the knowledge Hank gained from his three years of owning Hallmark Kitchens, a design/build cabinet shop, between 2004 and 2007.

Although he didn’t have a background in cabinetry or woodworking before buying that business from a family friend who was retiring, he was tired of traveling around the world as a consultant in finance and telecommunications after college. He and his wife Amy wanted to settle into a lifestyle that was conducive to





raising their daughter (who is now 19). He didn't want to miss his daughter's growing up during his 12-week travel stints. (The Whites now have three teenagers.)

After three years, he sold the high-end cabinet showroom to a national cabinet manufacturer that wanted a Houston presence, although he didn't know what he was going to do as his next venture. Telling Hank they didn't trust anyone else to handle their whole-home renovations, two of his cabinet clients set him on his next path, he said.

From that start, he's built Hallmark Renovations & Custom Homes by relying on word-of-mouth referrals, primarily from previous clients and residential architects with whom he's worked. He's even received referrals from commercial builders! In fact, he counts several among his clientele, but he's not intimidated by them. "They're no more challenging than anyone else," he stated.

These days Hallmark is known for its cabinetry in kitchens, bathrooms and libraries, according to Hank, who co-owns the business with his wife Amy, who works outside the business as a teacher. Cabinets are an expensive part of most of Hallmark's remodeling projects, so Hank's expertise in cabinet design pays off. "Our design focus is on function and beauty while using only the highest quality products."

Unlike many builders who prefer new construction, Hank White claimed, "I'm more of the remodel guy. And I use

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*Continued from page 5*

architects who do more remodeling projects.” He gravitates to remodeling because he likes working with people and building their homes. He especially likes the variety that comes with remodeling projects.

Remodeling can also provide surprises and challenges. “We discover hodge-podge and illegal work in homes that have been previously remodeled. We don’t hide it or ignore it; we bring it to the client’s attention.” He mentioned that it’s not unusual to find as many as three types of trim in a home. He lets the homeowners decide whether to replace all the trim for consistency.

He uses a cost-plus business model and doesn’t penalize clients for changes other than those costs that arise as part of the changes. “We follow plans to a T, but at the same time, it’s the client’s home. If they want to deviate from the plan, we allow that to happen.

“We are always upfront with our clients on costs and time-frames to help them build the home of their dreams while staying within their budgets.”

Clients may also stay in their houses during the remodeling project when possible. One client, whose house was damaged by Hurricane Harvey, continued to live in the upstairs of their house while Hallmark’s crews worked in the downstairs.

To avoid inconveniencing his clients and to use his tradespeople most effectively, Hank will postpone starting projects when he’s busy. He said a whole-home renovation

typically takes 6-9 months, while a kitchen or bath projects lasts about 9-12 weeks.

White uses only trades who are “very, very courteous and conscientious. My guys seem to care more [than other tradespeople] because they work with folks in their homes. In new homes they don’t see the clients.” He uses a small team of tradespeople, many of whom have known him since he began Hallmark Renovations.

Noting that the majority of his clients are women, he finds that listening carefully to their wants and needs is a key to success. “Women are more emotionally involved than men. By listening, I can gauge what’s really important to them on a project.” For example, if a client talks in detail about her preferred oven hood, he knows that creating the hood she envisions is essential to the client’s happiness.

Client happiness comes in many forms. One couple was so pleased with their kitchen remodeling that the husband is now cooking for the first time!

“It’s a great feeling of accomplishment to see people enjoy their homes. I love seeing the progress toward the finished product,” Hank noted.

***To contact Hallmark Renovations & Custom Homes,  
visit [www.hallmarkrenovation.com](http://www.hallmarkrenovation.com),  
email [hank@hallmarkrenovations.com](mailto:hank@hallmarkrenovations.com)  
or call 832-865-3230.***





# Trent Elliott Homes Ready to Grow

by Kathy Bowen Stolz

After almost 25 years as a builder, Trent Elliott is ready to grow his business.

More than two decades after his 1996 start may seem late for Elliott to push toward growth, but he waited until his three children – all of whom are athletes – were finished with their sports careers. He wanted to be available to coach their teams and watch their meets/games. But now that the youngest has graduated from high school and will no longer be participating in sports, Trent is ready to kick up his business a notch or two.

Previously he was doing business as Reinhardt Homes by Trent Elliott, but “the name got so confusing with everybody. They didn’t know how to spell it or understand that Reinhardt Homes was a DBA under our legal name of Trent Elliott Homes, Inc. We just decided to drop the DBA,” he explained. He named the homebuilding division of his company Reinhardt Homes to honor his grandfather, Paul Reinhardt Stichler.

“And in the last six months to a year, we’re not relying so much on referrals. We’re more focused on growth. We’ve expanded our office space, although we’re in the same location, to allow for a bigger conference room and reception area and more staff.” He’s already started hiring office help and expects to hire his first field superintendent or two within a few years.

He said he’s expanded the company’s territory into northern Montgomery and southern Walker counties. Trent Elliott Homes also is building its first speculative home in at least seven years in the Texas Grand Ranch development in the Huntsville/New Waverly area. The modern farmhouse is serving as a model home to the homebuyers checking out the 2,500-acre development, which is an easy 30-minute drive to The Woodlands. “Homeowners have marveled at the many extras that we have included in the spec house and the attention to detail that Trent Elliott Homes displays throughout the home,” Trent said.





Elliott finds the Texas Grand Ranch to be an exciting opportunity. “Customers are wanting to go further out in the country. It’s quiet and peaceful in the middle of the piney woods, and this development backs up to a state park. The lots are a minimum of two acres. These lots sell quickly when a new section opens up. I’m getting a lot of interest from potential homeowners.”

His company will build 15 houses this year, but his goal is to increase that number to 20-30 a year in less than five years. The average size of the homes he builds is 3,500 – 4,000 sq. ft., but one under construction is 6,000 sq. ft. of living space. “Half of what I do is a house with a barn-dominium. Most are on 1-2 acres, but some are on 15-30 acres.”

Shannon Elliott, vice president and partner, works with all of the clients to tweak or create floor plans before a build. She turns to an architect when designs get very intricate or elaborate, but she finds the Chief Architect software to fit

most clients’ design needs. Shannon also works with clients on selecting interior fixtures.

“Everybody wants a modern farmhouse, even if it’s just on the outside with board and batten siding and a big porch,” Trent noted.

“Shannon is a lot more active in the company [than in the early days]. She’s handling sales and design, especially on upfront specifications. I used to do it all myself,” her husband Trent stated.

He admits that he will have to redefine his role as the do-it-all owner as he doubles production. He expects to continue to be in charge of overall management and construction, no matter how many houses Trent Elliott Homes builds.

“I enjoy working with the homeowners. I enjoy working

*Continued on page 14*



# Luca Sannino – a Nature-inspired Artist

By Mary Lynn Mabray, ASID

Luca Sannino, who has worked with minerals his entire adult life at the family business of Elen Importing, Inc., brings that knowledge into his work as a remarkable, creative artist and furniture maker.

He likes nothing better than working with interior designers to create unique pieces for their clients' residences or office spaces. Like Luca himself, his work is well thought-out, exceptional and distinctive.

Just as it takes a sculptor to see the David or the Venus de Milo in a single block of pristine white marble, it also takes a keen eye and talent to bring to life unique pieces of furniture that are virtually one-of-a-kind pieces with that wow! factor.

Luca describes himself as “nature-inspired, nature-required lover of everything from the natural world.” He has traveled the world in search of the finest minerals to craft into pieces of art and forms of function. His journeys have taken him to the Bahia in search of beautiful sodalite, to the Sahara Desert for fossilized marble, to Brazil for quartz and deep purple amethyst with crystalline structures and even to Arizona to find the rare rainbow petrified (agatized) wood.

He spends his life going through jungles, deserts, forests, caves and mountains in search of minerals that will soon become exceptional cocktail tables, side tables, sculptures, sinks, countertops, trivets, lazy Susans, unique accessories and amazing bathtubs.

The more common minerals include quartz, feldspar, amethyst, mica, amphibola, olivine and calcite. No two pieces of quartz or amethyst or angel turquoise or any other mineral is ever alike because the conditions deep inside the earth have never been alike and because mineral deposits are naturally inorganic without an orderly internal structure to produce a characteristic chemical composition, crystal form and physical properties.







These minerals are different than rocks, which are an aggregate of one or more minerals with their own unique uses. Common rocks include granite, basalt, limestone and sandstone, which, when quarried, become polished countertops, buildings, floors, patios and details in swimming pools, office building and homes.

Luca Sannino may be reached at Elen Importing, Inc., by calling 908-463-2798, by visiting [www.elenhunting.com](http://www.elenhunting.com) or by emailing [elenhunting1@comcast.net](mailto:elenhunting1@comcast.net).

#### About the Author

Mary Lynn Mabray, ASID, is an interior designer with 25 years of expertise. She may be contacted at 713-203-4047 or at [www.MaryLynnInteriorDesign.com](http://www.MaryLynnInteriorDesign.com).



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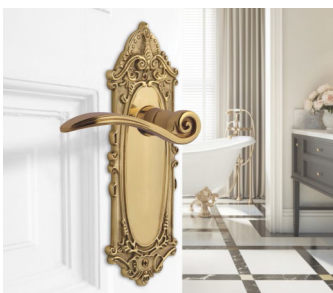



# New Hardware Trends Include Antimicrobial Brass, Urban Simplicity and Sturdy Iron

by Linda Jennings

No longer simply utilitarian, today's door hardware is evolving. As something you touch every day, builders are realizing that hardware is just as integral in a room's theme as the flooring or lighting. But choosing the right hardware might seem a daunting task with so many options. Three brands – Nostalgic Warehouse, Grandeur Hardware and Ageless Iron – offer an extensive array of hardware options that are trending.

Avoiding germs and creating healthy living environments have become increasingly important during the coronavirus pandemic, especially when it comes to points of frequent contact like door handles. Copper and copper alloys like brass and bronze have long been known to have health benefits, including a natural ability to kill certain viruses on contact.



Nostalgic Warehouse now offers an unlacquered finish that unleashes the intrinsic protections of its brass hardware. The absence of a protective layer of lacquer allows the natural antibacterial properties of brass to thrive, helping

to create a more healthful environment by effectively reducing bacteria and germs on the hardware surfaces. The foundation for all of Nostalgic Warehouse's products is high-quality solid forged brass. It is exceedingly durable, suitable for high-traffic areas and easy to install on modern, pre-drilled doors.



Fifth Avenue -- known as one of the most luxurious streets in the world, this New York City thoroughfare is the perfect namesake for Grandeur Hardware's most popular collection. The Fifth Avenue line of knobs and plates was inspired by urbane style and has a simply chic silhouette

with a nearly universal appeal. This brand is known for the exceptional beauty and craftsmanship of its work. Forged from premium solid brass, the collection includes an assortment of back plates and knobs that can be mixed and matched to suit individual needs. The Fifth Avenue Collection includes a variety of configurations for exterior and interior doors, including passage, privacy, single and double dummy sets, tall plates, entrance sets and one-piece handle sets in a palette of finishes.



Another hardware that was built to resist the toll of time and Mother Nature is Ageless Iron. This line of hardware is crafted from hand-poured molten iron and transformed into exceptional knobs,

levers, plates and more that can withstand the elements while keeping its stunning black finish. Ageless Iron is remarkably durable – the company states the final powder coating has been tested to withstand 12 months of exposure to the most demanding climates and is both UV- and salt-resistant. Each piece is sandblasted and deep-cleaned and then zinc-plated twice for superior corrosion resistance. The finished look will literally last for decades while maintaining its original beauty. Each piece comes with a five-year warranty.

Available at fine hardware retailers throughout Texas, these brands may also be purchased online at select websites.

*For more information visit*

[www.nostalgicwarehouse.com](http://www.nostalgicwarehouse.com)

[www.grandeurhardware.com](http://www.grandeurhardware.com)

[www.agelessironhardware.com](http://www.agelessironhardware.com).



# New Home Sales Reach Highest Level Since Great Recession



In a sign that the housing market is leading the economy during the coronavirus outbreak, sales of newly built, single-family homes rose to their highest level since the Great Recession, up 13.8 percent to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 776,000 units in June, according to newly released data by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban

Development and the U.S. Census Bureau. The June rate is 6.9 percent higher than the June 2019 pace.

“While Wall Street may have been expecting a smaller gain, anyone following the NAHB/Wells Fargo Housing Market Index would know these numbers are in line with what we are hearing from builders,” said Chuck Fowke, chairman of the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) and a custom home builder from Tampa, Fla. “Builders are moving to ramp up production to meet growing demand.”

“Along with rising builder sentiment, we are seeing increasing consumer demand in the suburbs, exurbs and rural areas,” said NAHB Chief Economist Robert Dietz. “At the same time, builders are dealing with supply-side concerns such as rising material costs, particularly lumber, which surpassed its 2018 price peak this week. Nonetheless, low inventory levels point to construction gains ahead.”

A new home sale occurs when a sales contract is signed or a deposit is accepted. The home can be in any stage of construction: not yet started, under construction or completed. In addition to adjusting for seasonal effects, the June reading of 776,000 units is the number of homes that would sell if this pace continued for the next 12 months.

Inventory fell to a 4.7 months’ supply, with 307,000 new single-family homes for sale, 7 percent lower than June 2019. The current months’ supply is the lowest since 2016. Of the inventory total, just 69,000 are completed, ready to occupy. The median sales price was \$329,200. The median price of a new home sale a year earlier was \$311,800.

Regionally, on a year-to-date basis new home sales were up in all four regions: 22 percent in the Northeast, 12.6 percent in the Midwest, 0.2 percent in the South, and 3.1 percent in the West.



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*I have worked in our family business for many years, which includes real estate and construction. Because of that experience, I appreciated Trent's attention to detail. When it came to selections and decorative choices I was comfortable with those decisions. I knew that I could focus on those aspects, trusting that Trent building an energy efficient and high quality home*

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***Jennifer and Todd Nickerson***









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with the trades. I enjoy working with my wife. It's been a good balance of work and family life. I have no regrets over coaching my kids or taking them to church on Wednesday nights," Elliott said.

"But if I could give my younger self some advice, I'd say to be more aggressive with the company's growth."

And good advice is never too late to take, right?

**To contact Trent Elliott Homes,  
 email: [info@trentelliotthomes.com](mailto:info@trentelliotthomes.com),  
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# Remodeling Industry Sees Optimism Despite COVID-19

The National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) released its Remodeling Market Index (RMI) in the second quarter of 2020, posting a reading of 73. This is the second quarter with a new RMI, redesigned to ease respondent burden and improve its ability to interpret and track industry trends. The new series is not seasonally adjusted; therefore, index readings cannot be compared quarter to quarter.

“Many remodelers are busy, even busier than prior to COVID-19. Homeowners are calling for decks, patios, porches and kitchen and bathroom jobs,” said NAHB Remodelers Chair Tom Ashley, Jr., CAPS, CGP, CGR, a remodeler from Denham Springs, La. “Their optimism for a stronger market is evident through their RMI responses.”

The new RMI survey asks remodelers to rate five components of the remodeling market as “good,” “fair” or “poor.” Each question is measured on a scale from 0 to 100, where an index number above 50 indicates that a higher share view conditions as good than poor.

The Current Conditions Index is an average of three of these components: the current market for large remodeling projects, moderately-sized projects and small projects. The Future Indicators Index is an average of the other two components: the current rate at which leads and inquiries are coming in and the current backlog of remodeling projects. The overall RMI is calculated by averaging the Current Conditions Index and the Future Indicator Index. Any number over 50 indicates that more remodelers view remodeling market conditions as good than poor.

In the second quarter, all components and subcomponents of the RMI were well above 50. The Current Conditions Index averaged 77, with large remodeling projects (\$50,000 or more) yielding a reading of 70, moderately-sized remodeling projects



## National Association of Home Builders

(at least \$20,000 but less than \$50,000) at 78 and small remodeling projects (under \$20,000) with a reading of 83.

The Future Indicators Index averaged 70, with the rate at which leads and inquiries are coming in at 72 and the backlog of remodeling jobs at 67.

In an effort to track quarterly trends, the redesigned RMI survey asks remodelers to compare market conditions to three months earlier, using a “better,” “about the same,” “worse” scale. This index posted a reading of 66, indicating that market conditions have improved substantially since the first quarter.

“An RMI of 73 indicates positive remodeler sentiment, and a change index of 66 indicates that business has picked up since the previous quarter as home owners focus on the importance of home for work and life amidst the pandemic,” said NAHB Chief Economist Robert Dietz. “However, rising material prices and ongoing skilled labor access represent ongoing supply-side challenges.”

*For the full RMI tables, please visit [www.nahb.org/rmi](http://www.nahb.org/rmi)*



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