

# THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

Greater Houston Edition  
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## Alair Homes Houston Focuses on Relationships First

Homer Allan Haile's Lone Star Farm  
Art Reflects Upbringing

Dialogue with a Designer  
Lori Touns-Fenton, Sweetlake Interior Design, LLC

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# THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

**Giselle Bernard**  
*Publisher/Owner*

It's been little over a year since our government shut down business across the nation due to the Covid-19 pandemic. So many of our small businesses have found themselves having to shut down or are struggling to survive. I've talked to several family-owned businesses who are struggling to hold onto what they've spend years building. These are fairly small, family-owned businesses that have been in business for years. It just breaks my heart.

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# Alair Homes Houston Focuses on Relationships First

By Kathy Bowen Stolz

Chris Bolio of Alair Homes Houston is a man passionate about his work.

But his passion isn't driving nails. His passion is creating life-changing experiences for his clients, his trade partners and his employees. "Our business is not about the homes we build. It's about the service we provide, and the experiences we share. We work to create an environment that improves the lives of all the people we touch," Bolio stated.

"We spend time to create a relationship with our clients. That relationship is at the core of everything. If clients have a bad experience, you're not going to be successful as a builder.

"We don't choose projects; we choose clients."

He continued, "Homes are the manifestation of how we see our lives. They reflect our economic status, our jobs, our family life. They are a projection of what we see as

our future. They are the backdrop of our lives. They are where we watch our kids grow up and where we create our memories. Homes are such an emotional purchase, such an emotional commitment. As humans we have always searched for a place where we feel safe, where we feel secure, where we call home base. They are also one of our most expensive purchases.

"So the stakes are very, very high. Emotions can get high. Things can go very, very well or very, very poorly. No builder sets out to disappoint a client. Every single house is as individual as the people we are serving."

Alair Homes Houston can complete a small renovation for as little as \$50,000 or build custom homes for as much as \$5 million and above – and anything in between. The client's need is the determining factor. "Every client gets exactly what they want, balancing their desires with their budget," Chris explained.

He noted that the best builders and renovators use a



two-step process. The first step is aligning the clients' expectations with the builders' expectations. The second is weighing those expectations against the budget and educating the clients about what the costs are to meet those expectations. "Expectations of cost can vary wildly. We set budget and project expectation goals, then work towards a balance of the two, no matter what that may be."

"We work to create alignment of values with the client and tradespeople. What does the client need? How is the client best served?" Chris, who has been building homes since 2002 and custom homes since 2005, said, "The goal is to use our experience to best help our clients. Our clients get exactly what they want at exactly the price they want to pay."

However, "we're not for everybody. We have a very rigorous pre-selection process [to ensure alignment with the client]. We will turn away a client if we can't reach alignment. If we're not a good fit, I would prefer to say no to a big job than to be miserable building it."

According to this Houston native, Alair engages architects and interior designers to help meet the clients' needs when

*Continued on page 6*





*Continued from page 5*

appropriate. Not married to any one architect, he uses a half dozen on and off. “We’re always looking for great partners who are aligned with our goals and can help us achieve that client’s dreams.”

Bolio recommends that a homebuyer should select a builder based on the builder’s ability to connect with the client rather than on the nebulous, projected cost. “Our industry, in general, operates where ‘guessing’ is okay on an incredibly intricate product; homebuyers will get three different bids or ‘guesses’ on costs. We believe that homeowners shouldn’t settle for guess work to select a builder to work with.

“The home is personal to you, so picking a builder should be personal too! Get to know your potential builder. Do you want to have them over for dinner? We believe that connection and trust earned early in the process is extremely important,” he continued.

When he joined the international company in 2017, Bolio rebranded his self-named construction company as Alair Homes Houston; he partners with Nick Spector in their local company. Chris handled sales and development, and Nick oversees operations. They employ two project managers and expect to hire more project managers and a dedicated salesperson in the future.

Despite his being fluent in Spanish, Bolio said their company has no typical customer. “We’ve chosen not to serve a certain market. We serve all kinds of clients, with a huge range of clientele.” They will build all over the Houston market, but when they meet with potential clients, they consider if they can get to the job site every day “to surprise and delight the client.”

They complete 8-12 projects each year, with sales in 2021 projected to be \$6-8 million, split equally between new, custom homes and renovation projects.

Bolio and Spector’s Alair Homes Houston is one of 111 individual homebuilding companies in Canada and the





United States under the Alair Homes North America brand. Headquartered in British Columbia, Alair has the largest footprint of any premium custom home building and large-scale renovation/remodeling brand in the world, according to its website. The core purpose of Alair is to bring together the leading custom builders and remodelers across North America under one brand, one team and one vision.

A second Alair Homes Houston, owned by Peter Lopez, shares office space with Bolio and Spector's business. Chris said the brand will expand to include many other local builders because sharing higher standards, business philosophy and best practices makes each business better.

Following a franchise model, each local company is individually owned, but the owners of each "have aligned together to create a reliable, repeatable experience for their clients," according to Bolio, who earned a degree in business from Texas A&M University. "These builders improve each other's business models by sharing their experiences and expertise, creating best practices, much like a Builder 20 group on steroids. We each have our own business, but we work together for each other's success. We have to be sure we're aligned as an organization."



The company's ethos is to measure success by customer satisfaction and referrals, Bolio shared. No Alair partnership builds speculative homes. However, they will build for investors and those investors' needs.

*For more information, contact Chris Bolio through the website [www.alairhomes.com/houston](http://www.alairhomes.com/houston) or call 713-597-8910.*

*The Alair Homes Houston office is located at 9440 Bamboo Road, Houston, TX 77041.*

# Hit Refresh - New Building Products Add Instant Updates

By Linda Jennings

Dress up your home's decor with these timeless kitchen, bath and hardware products destined to make a great first impression.

Each is a luxury upgrade that will revamp your decor and

provide a space for wellness and renewal. From copper kitchen sinks to glimmering metal vanities -the look is all about textures and finishes to create a wow factor.



**Metro Tub from MTI Baths**

## FLAWLESS FINISH

The new Metro with Sculpted Finish from MTI Baths is flawless from any angle. Produced in three generous sizes with lengths of either 60", 66", or 72" the tub is notable for its larger extended deck on one side that provides a safe ledge for entering or exiting. Available as a soaker, air bath, with Microbubbles, or as a combination of the two, the Metro provides an impressively comfortable bathing experience with a sloped backrest and ergonomic design for a blissfully relaxing soak. Created from high-gloss cross-linked cast acrylic, Metro tubs are made with pride in the USA.

## CONCEALED CONTROL

Barber Wilsons' Mastercraft Concealed Thermostatic Shower Control is ideal for multigenerational households. This system offers precision control so the user can safely set and regulate water flow and temperature. It is a great safety feature to prevent accidental scalding, especially



**Barber Wilsons Mastercraft Concealed Thermostatic Shower Control**

with children or seniors in the house. The Mastercraft system includes a lever handle, two-way diverter, and a coordinating cross handle. All are crafted from the brand's signature solid brass and offered in an array of finishes, including the newest options of brushed gold, satin copper, brushed copper, polished copper, matte black, matte bronze, and weathered bronze.

## EASY UPGRADE

Viaggio Hardware makes it easy to define spaces with extraordinary designs offering plenty of custom options. Their new Motivo Collection of door hardware is particularly appealing with textured finishes that introduce a tactile element to the décor. Choose from an embossed Linen look that is elegant and sophisticated, a distinctive Hammered finish for a chic industrial vibe, or



**Viaggio Circolo Hammered Rosette With Rebar Lever**

a cool Leather option that is clean, modern and decidedly luxurious. All Viaggio products are crafted in Europe from solid brass and then precision polished and coated with a protective lacquer for long-lasting good looks.



**LENOVA CT-100 Copper Kitchen Sink**

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Lenova offers a gorgeous Copper Kitchen Collection with beautiful sinks that will add warmth and style to any kitchen. Crafted of premium 15-gauge copper and completely free of lead and mercury, these lovely sinks are naturally hypoallergenic, recyclable and resistant to corrosion. Each sink is hammered by hand and meticulously finished by a Lenova artist. The living finish will age beautifully over time, resulting in a sink that is truly unique. The collection includes sinks in a variety of sizes and configurations and includes rubber pads to provide extra sound-deadening insulation.

## STANDOUT VANITY

Glimmering metal accents make the Edwin Vanity by The Furniture Guild a glamorous focal point in any luxury-minded bathroom. With four generous drawers and a simple rectangular profile, this transitional vanity is a practical and beautiful addition to the bath. The Edwin is available in a variety of custom sizes and configurations. The company builds heirloom-quality pieces with meticulous attention to detail and nearly endless customization options. Shown here in Granite Walnut with Polished Nickel, the Edwin is available in a wide array of finishes and options for the metal trim.



**Edwin vanity by The Furniture Guild**

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# Alair Homes Is Changing Building in North America

By Kathy Bowen Stolz

When you think of a franchise, you probably think of a McDonald's or a Subway restaurant. But if you're a custom builder, you should also be thinking of Alair Homes.

Thanks to its first-of-its-kind franchise model, Alair is bringing together leading custom builders and remodelers across North America under one brand, one team and one vision, according to the company website. Alair now has the largest footprint of any premium custom home building and large-scale renovation/remodeling brand in the world.

"I'm proud to be part of the Alair family. It's not just an organization; it's a family of entrepreneurs who have decided to hitch our wagons to each other to build a better model for our individual companies," stated Chris Bolio, co-owner of Alair Homes Houston.

When Chris started building custom homes in 2005, his goal then and now was to provide clients with a great experience and great homes. He also wanted to provide a good quality of life for his family without limitations and achieve financial freedom. However, he found that there are

a lot of moving parts to custom building and renovation, creating many risks and limitations that come with growing a business to scale. "Without a clear path of growth and scale, I was doing everything I could to figure it out along the way, and ultimately I was scaling chaos," he said.

During his search for a better way to build and operate his business, an Alair Homes representative approached Chris about partnering with the company. "It seemed crazy to me at first, but the more I learned, the more I realized just what I could do with my business as part of this group. I found that the consolidated model and collaborative approach to building our businesses together was the missing link that our industry hadn't found up to that point."

He converted his company, Bolio Custom Homes, to Alair Homes Houston in 2017, seeking a way that he could create a more valuable business that he could sell in the future without diluting the high quality and world class client experience he was known for – all while minimizing his risk and maximizing his profitability.

Alair's franchise model allows its partners – currently at 111 – to work collaboratively to build the highest reward, lowest risk and most valuable construction companies in the world, according to the company website. Each Alair Homes franchisee owns his/her own business, but Alair provides an organization of leadership in addition to marketing, branding, accounting, sales and other facets of building, according to Chris.

“I combine my 20 years of experience with that of other Alair partners. We have a cumulative experience of over 5,000 years! By sharing our experiences with each other, we can create best practices [and standards of excellence]. We have the ability to innovate and test new ideas at a staggering rate. We take those and expand them times 10 or more because of the momentum. By combining and amplifying our efforts, everybody shares in the brand's success,” he added.

Founded in British Columbia in 2007 by Blair McDaniel, a custom builder, Alair started franchising in 2012 – first in Canada and then in the United States – as a way to replicate and share its successful business model. Although franchising was an unorthodox method, it was the most reliable method to create a scalable, repeatable, profitable and valuable model for other builders.

“Alair has an organized method of business and an organized process of business. Joining Alair allowed me to focus on my highest and best use,” Bolio said. He's delighted that he can rely on Alair's “world-class accounting department” to handle his finances for an hourly fee, for example, or share in the cost and excellence of an award-winning marketing department.

“My company is more profitable today, even after paying royalties and branding fees, than ever before.” Bolio added that because of his ability to scale, he has found a new freedom in his quality of life and ability to step away from the daily business.

Chris and his wife Michelle are the regional partners for Alair in southeast Texas. Just as Alair reached out to Chris, he will be reaching out to other builders to determine which ones may be good partners with Alair Homes. Alair seeks the top performing contractors whose values align with the company's values, such as having a growth mindset, a team focus, process and relationship drive, innovation, adaptability, humility, strong family values and a servant leadership mindset, according to the company website.

*To learn more about Alair Homes' franchise model, visit [www.discoveralair.com](http://www.discoveralair.com). The company's headquarters are located at 96 Wallace St., Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada, V9R5CA. The phone is 250-754-5500.*



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# Homer Allan Haile's Lone Star Farm Art Reflects Upbringing

By Mary Lynn Mabray

Homer Allan Haile has been creative for as long as I have known him, which is a very long time...since birth! We grew up in the Texas Panhandle as family friends. Our fathers were both farmers, ran cattle and were old Army buddies.

He has always seen beauty in pieces of steel, plow disks and equipment that most people would think of as simply utilitarian and left out in the elements to rust or gather dust. As a youth, when Allan wasn't doodling, he was creating practical things, like a baker's rack from pieces of farm equipment in his spare time.

Allan knew he was onto something after he made his sister Marian Haile Williams, also a well known Texas and innovative potter, a light for her lake house carport out of a plow disc. He topped it with a Texas star and cut out her last name to personalize it. All it took was a blow torch, a plasma cutter, a fabricated jig, a grinder, an air press to cut out images from a template that Allan created, patience and ingenuity to create a one-of-a-kind piece of art.

And, thus, Lone Star Farm Art of Friona, Texas, was born.

Orders began to pour in, each with a personalized request, making each light fixture different in size and in appearance. Some people wanted to celebrate colleges, such as Texas A&M, University of Texas, Texas Tech, West Texas State, while using these unique light fixtures to flank the entrances to their ranch, farm or home. Others wanted to make sure visitors knew they were in the right place by seeing the person's name beside the door. Whatever the reason, the demand grew.

The plow discs come from farm auctions, junk yards, farmers or architectural warehouses. There are approximately 15 steps to come up with the finished product. After the discs are cleaned, the design and letters





are cut out. Then the discs are cleaned again. A grinder eliminates all rust and takes the disc down to bare, shiny metal. That's when the creative work begins with the actual design of the light fixture. A 15-step coat of impervious paint and clear coat in a school's color or a color of the client's choosing brings the disc to life

A Texas star or a different kind of symbol that a client might request is welded in place. Three one-inch stops are welded in place on the back of the disc to ensure that it hangs properly. Each light fixture is unique. None are exactly alike unless a client wants multiples of the same design. These fixtures cannot be bought in a store or manufactured in mass. They are one-of-a-kind pieces.

Lately, Allan has had fun creating wind mill sculptures of all sizes and shapes. His process is much the same as it is with the light fixtures. The one exception is that the metal must be thin enough to spin safely in the wind and withstand the ever-changing Texas weather.

To contact Homer Allan Haile, call 806-265-7923.

#### 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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# Dialogue with a Designer

Lori Toups-Fenton, Sweetlake Interior Design, LLC

*Baths of America opened its doors in January 2005 when brothers Ali and Zeeshan Sultanali decided to start selling plumbing and tiles to the Houston market. Baths of America focuses on customer service and partners only with brands offering quality products and customer service. In addition to plumbing, Baths of America now offers door and cabinet hardware, major appliances, cabinetry, and countertops. It has turned into a one-stop shop for designers, builders, and architects, offering the latest designs and trends in the market.*

*This month BATHS OF AMERICA speaks with Lori Toups-Fenton, a professional, award-winning and published designer, is an allied member of ASID and 1996 graduate from the University of Houston in interior design. She has been providing some of Houston's most fabulous and elite properties with her unique custom designs since entering the field. Her talent is showcased by her ability to transform homes into elegant spaces and luxurious habitats complemented with 21st-century style and amenities. Lori and her Sweetlake Interior Design LLC (SLID) team specialize in high-end design and build projects with an emphasis on streamlining and modernizing interior spaces for residential and commercial projects throughout Houston and surrounding areas.*

**BATHS OF AMERICA:** *What motivated you to go into the interior design field?*

**Lori Toups-Fenton:** I admired my friend's mom, Paula Courtney, an Interior Designer here in Houston. She had a design studio close to our house growing up. I loved visiting her shop. I was always asking questions. I felt it back then and knew this would be my future. I was going to an Interior Designer.

**BATHS OF AMERICA:** *How has the field of interior design changed since you graduated?*

**Lori Toups-Fenton:** The most significant change is how we render in 3D. The renderings look so realistic people think it is an actual picture. This new technology has helped push our creativity to the next level.

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

**Lori Toups-Fenton:** Providing accurate plans and renderings that reflect the design.

**BATHS OF AMERICA:** *What sets you apart from other designers?*

**Lori Toups-Fenton:** My true compassion for design and creativity.





**BATHS OF AMERICA:** *What has been your most challenging project and why?*

**Lori Toups-Fenton:** My own home because I am constantly incorporating change.

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

**Lori Toups-Fenton:** We usually start by asking the material allowance and work from there.

**BATHS OF AMERICA:** *What are some common mistakes made by builders and homeowners?*

**Lori Toups-Fenton:** Not hiring an Interior Designer on a custom build.

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

**Lori Toups-Fenton:** Staying up to date with ASID and attending trade shows.

**BATHS OF AMERICA:** *What is your favorite design style?*

**Lori Toups-Fenton:** Modern.

**BATHS OF AMERICA:** *What fascinates you and how have you incorporated that into your designs?*

**Lori Toups-Fenton:** I love custom designing furniture and

*Continued on page 16*

Continued from page 15

having it built locally for my clients.

**BATHS OF AMERICA:** How would you characterize your personal style?

**Lori Toups-Fenton:** Glam modern.

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

**Lori Toups-Fenton:** Get a feel for the budget and style they are trying to achieve.

**BATHS OF AMERICA:** How do you keep yourself up to date with current design trends in the market?

**Lori Toups-Fenton:** Reading vendor magazines and visiting trade shows.

Lori Toups-Fenton

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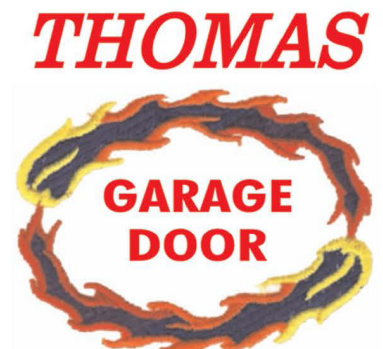
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Safety protocols will be followed.