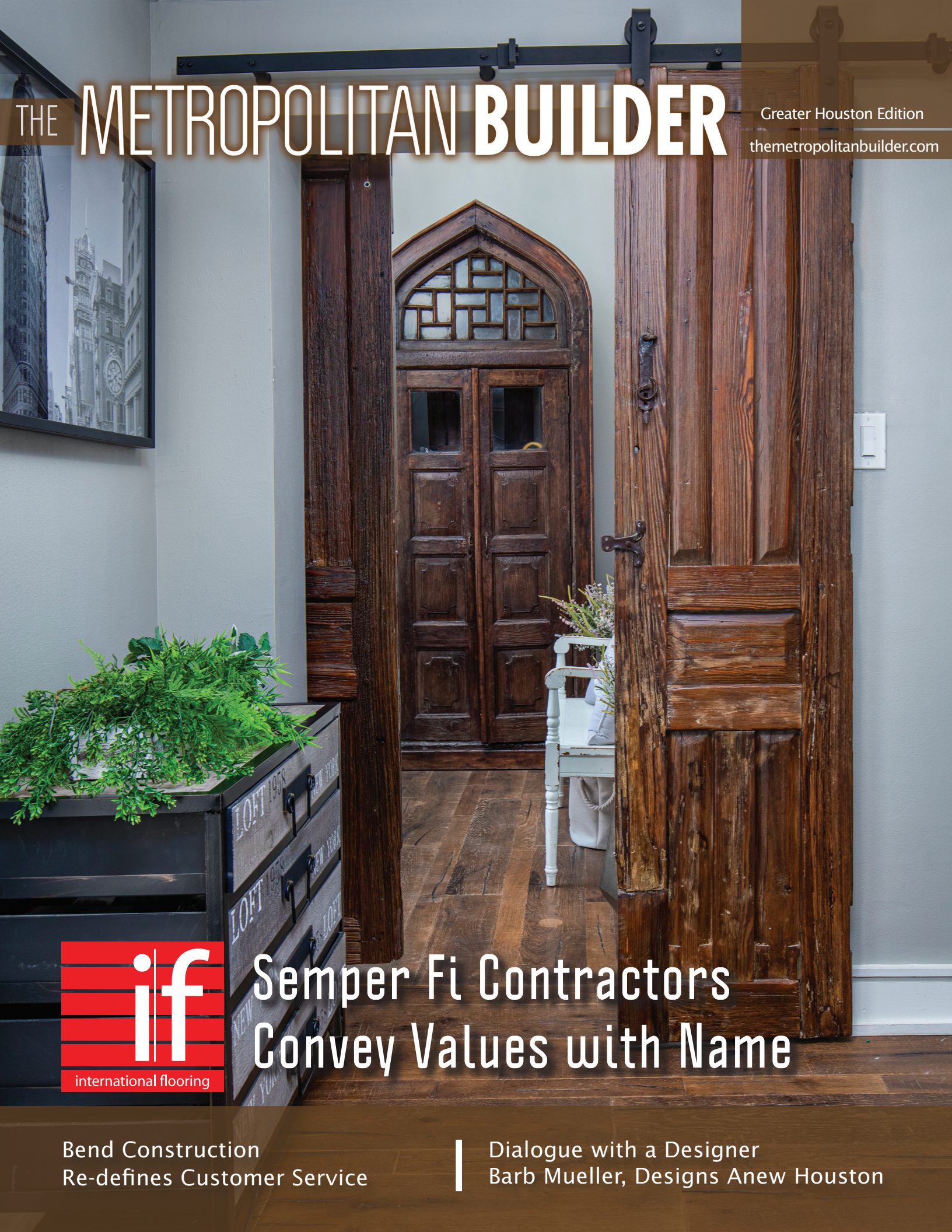


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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Giselle Bernard
Publisher/Owner

In today's business climate, I've run across several companies still struggling to grasp the full impact of a well-designed, updated and functioning website. Your business card in truly an extension of your website. The first thing a prospective customer will do after meeting with you will be to check out your credentials and reviews.

I've had builders, remodelers as well as some of the small, family-owned businesses, tell me that they most of their business is received from referrals and word of mouth; hence, an updated website or a website at all, is irrelevant. They have all the business they need.

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In today's market, driving traffic to your website is essential. You can use both SEO and Social Media marketing to promote your website content. Online marketing is now considered an essential sales tool and an extension of a highly effective sales team. A well-designed website totally maximizes a business' potential. For customers to find a company's website, it is crucial to make sure the website functions to the best of its ability.

Business owners need to carefully research marketing firms/web design firms before employing one to design this intricate tool. If their websites aren't designed properly, it's like investing in a beautiful company brochure but not distributing it and wondering why sales aren't up.

Information to ponder.....



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Semper Fi Contractors Convey Values with Name

By Kathy Bowen Stolz

If you expect a company named Semper Fi Contractors to be owned by a former Marine, you'd be correct. But you might be slightly surprised to learn the company's values are "Excellence, Honor, Humility" rather than "Honor, Courage, Commitment."

Scott Cubbler started Semper Fi Contractors in 2014, relying on its name to convey a common set of values associated with the Marines. The company name means he is responsible to everyone who's ever been a Marine. "I don't want to besmirch the name of the Corps."

Although Semper Fi's owner started his professional career with the Big Five accounting firm Arthur Andersen, LLP, Scott Cubbler defines his life by the 10 years he spent in the U.S. Marine Corps as an infantry officer during the Bosnian Conflict and as a general's aide de camp before becoming

the Marines' director of public affairs for the New York City area for five years. (You might have seen him on the morning television shows talking about preparations for the Navy's Fleet Week if you were in New York City at the time.)

A medical discharge six weeks after the 9/11 terrorist attacks led to Cubbler's becoming New York State's director of counter-terrorism training in New York City and then to his filling a similar role protecting the nation's critical infrastructure and cyber security for the federal government in Homeland Security for the eastern half of the United States for seven years.

When Scott retired after 20 years in government service, his wife Denise urged him to return to Houston where he had family and friends.



But it was during the renovation of his own 1971 Houston home that he found his next career. Serving as his own general contractor, he realized that renovation and remodeling of a home can really improve the quality of people’s lives while utilizing his planning and production skills.

Licensed as a mold remediation contractor, Cubbler is also a Certified Aging in Place Specialist (CAPS). In his own home’s renovation he considered his own aging parents and made the home ADA-accessible.

Just as he had in his own home, Cubbler focuses on making all spaces in a home he’s remodeling functional for every phase of life. He has repeated in clients’ homes the “collapsible wall” of moveable floor-to-ceiling bookshelves that he put in his own home. “I truly am helping people. A lot of people have a challenge they’re trying to deal with.”

He’s finding that people forced to work from home in these COVID-19 pandemic days now want the open design of their homes closed off into separate spaces. The “collapsible wall” is a good fit for that need, according to this native of Philadelphia who grew up in Oklahoma City.

“No one really knows how the pandemic will affect homeowners in two or three years. Right now people want a modified work space that isn’t just a bedroom without doing a lot of structural work.” He’s been able to help

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some homeowners improve their homes' functionality by suggesting a 5-foot by 5-foot rather than a 3-foot by 6-foot table in their breakfast nook. For others it is converting a sitting room into an office.

Semper Fi Contractors focus on projects between \$50,000 and \$250,000 in the greater Houston area. "We're not a handyman service or looking to do two-day jobs. Other contractors are a better fit for those projects," Cubbler said. Semper Fi typically does 12-15 remodeling projects each year, although this spring is different. "The Freeze is not dissimilar to Hurricane Harvey. We're doing a ton of work at a lower price point trying to get people back into their houses," he said.

He's comfortable allowing clients to stay in their homes during remodeling. "It depends on the nature of the house and the environment. It's their personal choice." Because of his mold remediation certification, he has two air scrubbers that can suck the air and dust out of the house during remodeling, he noted.

With three full-time project managers on staff, Scott's role in the company is to handle client engagement, sales, estimating, scheduling, logistics and the daily bookkeeping -- not a big stretch for someone who majored in accounting, finance and computer science at Trinity University. He visits every job site daily to put an additional set of eyes on the projects and provide direction on how to approach



solutions to any problems that may arise.

“I’m proud of my guys. I’m proud of what they do. They’ve embraced the company values.” He said those values are the following:

1. Excellence: The work will be done right the first time.
2. Honor: The company will do the right thing for the right reason, even if it costs the company money.
3. Humility: It is a privilege to be in people’s homes. The house is not a job site. It is somebody’s home and should be treated with respect.

“Baby Boomers want to stay in their houses. It’s a quality of life issue. Isn’t remodeling for aging in place worth it to avoid going into a nursing home where you have only one or two rooms at \$50,000 or \$60,000 a year?”

Cubler, a member of the Greater Houston Builders Association (GHBA) Remodelers’ Council, said he is not in competition with his peers. Instead, he relies on their good will to expand his building knowledge. “We work together to help each other out. GHBA allows us to get together and talk. We need each other.”

Within five years Cubler expects to expand his business to flipping houses, but not just to make a quick profit. He’s planning to change the very nature of how flipping is done by completely gutting a house and rebuilding it so



that the homebuyer receives a two-year warranty, knowing that everything is new and top quality. They can expect a Semper Fi house to be “always faithful” to high quality standards.

**To contact Semper Fi Contractors,
email scott.cubler@semperficontractors.com
or call 713-797-2161
or visit www.semperficontractors.com.**

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P.O. Box 10245, Houston, TX 77043.**

Big Style For Small Spaces On A Budget!

By Linda Jennings

When space is tight, these builder upgrades offer a sleek solution! From compact luxury tubs to mini sinks and vanities - these fixtures make smart use of limited

quarters without sacrificing style or functionality. Let's take a look at some versatile kitchen and bath products that easily fit into any compact space.



Ruvati 23" Fiamma Fireclay Farmhouse Sink

FARMHOUSE STYLE FOR SMALL SPACES

Often overlooked when it comes to home interiors, the laundry room gets some farmhouse appeal with the Fiamma Fireclay apron sink. Ruvati has reimagined the traditional ho-hum laundry sink into something pretty spectacular. Their new Fiamma Fireclay 23-inch farmhouse sink offers a stylish apron front design and compact dimensions perfect for small spaces. It's also a smart choice for large kitchens with the need for a secondary sink. The new Fiamma sink measures 23" wide by 18" front-to-back, with a 9" deep basin, and is handcrafted in Italy with a fused enamel surface that is impervious to chips, cracks, and scratches.

COMPACT AND CONTEMPORARY

The 24" freestanding Contemporary Vanity from Lenova is the perfect choice for a powder room or small alcove in a master bath. Its clean, transitional style with frosted glass door inserts compliments almost any design, and the price-point is surprisingly modest for a quality vanity made in the USA. Lenova combines hardwoods with furniture-grade plywood to make a thicker case that is guaranteed to stand up to the toughest bathroom environment without warping or splitting and all the stained and painted surfaces have



Contemporary Vanity from Lenova

a catalyzed baked finish. Blum hinges and drawer slides offer soft close action and years of trouble free use. The Contemporary is offered in sizes ranging from 24" to 48" and a variety of finishes.

SPA WORTHY FOR TIGHT SPACES

MTI Baths answers the small space movement with new elegant tub designs that fit impressive style into smaller spaces. These tubs make smart use of limited quarters and even offer an infusion of therapies to create the ultimate spa-worthy experience right at home.

As part of MTI's Designer Collection, the Andrea 15 with Sculpted Finish is a modern rectangle tub with a straightforward design. Available as a freestanding model or finished on 1, 2 or 3 sides for various installation applications it measures 60" x 30" x 21.75" and is handcrafted in the USA. It is offered as a soaker, air bath, or with Microbubbles technology - all featuring ergonomic interiors for sublime comfort and indulgent options to soothe the senses such as chromatherapy and thermal therapy. The tub is made of thermoformed cross-linked cast acrylic that has been reinforced with a fiberglass/resin/

titanium backing for superior strength and insulation. The non-porous surface is highly resistant to scratches and stains and is easy to clean and maintain.

Ideal for smaller spaces, the Lydia is ergonomically designed with comfort in mind. Measuring a compact 56.25" x 32" x 21.5"/22.5" it can easily fit into an existing 60" alcove and its asymmetrical design offers a luxurious angle of recline. As part of MTI's popular Boutique

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MTI Bath's Lydia



Andrea 15 from MTI Baths

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Bend Construction Re-defines Customer Service

By Kathy Bowen Stolz

Customer service: (n) the assistance and advice provided by a company to those people who buy or use its products or services. (www.languages.oup.com)

But for their clients in greater Houston, Bend Construction defines customer service.

Co-owners Drew Hollowell and Josh Lynn cite customer service as the most important value for their four-year-old company located in Magnolia. "Customer service is a term that's used loosely," Hollowell said. "We pride ourselves on our customer service. Pleasing our customers is our ultimate goal, but customer service is also how you handle yourself."

Hollowell's approach to customer service was instilled during the first 10 years of his professional work life when

he worked in the oil fields responding to phone calls, entering purchase orders, handling customer service issues and doing sales. Even though he got laid off from that job in 2015, "when you work for a company that emphasizes customer service, it becomes part of you."

Unexpectedly unemployed, Drew used his sales skills for a couple of buddies who had their own regional restoration company. Drew brought Josh on board with the company because, as cousins, they grew up around construction. In fact, Josh's father had had a business building outdoor kitchens.

Repairing storm-damaged homes around the southeast, Drew said he learned a lot about insurance and how it impacts restoration. Two years later that regional restoration business when the owners decided to part ways.

Unemployed again after two years of learning what they did and didn't want to do as contractors, Drew and Josh decided to open their own company in March 2017, taking the company name from Hollowell's father's one-time 9-hole golf course, The Bend.

Then, with only two jobs under their belts, Hurricane Harvey hit Houston. Using the knowledge gained from working for that defunct restoration company, "We've been rockin' and rollin' ever since," depending on referrals for customers, Hollowell said.

"We love the freedom of owning our own business, and we enjoy the different stuff we get to do. We love to see somebody happy at the end of a job after we've ripped their house down to the studs. It's a fun job, even with the headaches and stress," he added.

About 75 percent of their work is remodeling; they have built just two houses from the ground-up for far. New construction projects are usually done for other general contractors who want to use their employees' skills for millwork.

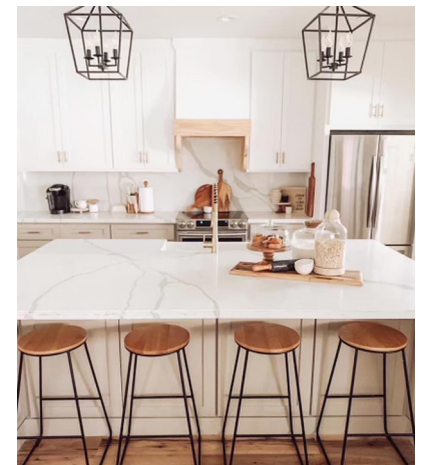
In addition to the two owners, Bend Construction employs three tradesmen who are skilled in hanging sheetrock, painting interiors/exteriors and cabinetry millwork. The owners share responsibilities for sales and project management. Drew and Josh are on the job sites about 70 percent of their time.

The company finishes about 35-40 middle-to-large projects a year, according to Hollowell. Their projects' start at about \$5,000 and are often bathroom and kitchen remodels or exterior patio builds. "We try to work with customers' budgets, no matter what they are. We will do almost any type of interior or exterior work, but we don't do landscaping at this point," he added.

Because most of their remodeling projects take three or four weeks, Hollowell said he's learned that homeowners start getting antsy by the second week of their lives' being disrupted by contractors on the premises. "We want to make people feel like they're getting what they want before we step in their house. We take their criticism, which usually only lasts a day, and move on. After all, the customer is always right."

The big freeze in March that caused damage to so many houses with burst pipes pushed them, as well as all contractors in Texas, to work extra hours. "People are in dire need of contractors right now. We normally work six days a week. We enjoy helping people out. Josh and I will personally step in and help with tiling a shower

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or plumbing, even though that’s not our specialty, to help get a project done,” Hollowell noted.

Drew said many of the customers who suffered burst pipes did not want to remodel, unlike Bend Construction’s typical customer, so his workers are focused on keeping those customers happy in the midst of disaster. “It’s a good learning experience for us.”

***To contact Bend Construction,
email drew.hollowell@bendbuild.com
or call 281-806-4907.***

***The office is located at
26232 FM 2978, Magnolia, TX 77354.***

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Collection, the Lydia is offered as a soaker tub or an air bath version with 20 floor-installed jets and a waterproof remote control. It is crafted from MTI's signature SculptureStone, a proprietary material that is 70% organic natural stone combined with high-performance resins. The result is a molded stone look that is solid throughout with a durable finish that is non-porous and easy to maintain. The Lydia is available in white or biscuit with a choice of soft

matte or hand-polished deep gloss finish or customize it with optional exterior colors.

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Dialogue with a Designer

Barb Mueller, Designs Anew Houston

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 Barb Mueller, President/Owner of Designs Anew Houston LLC, a Kitchen and Bath Design firm specializing in Universal Design, Aging in Place, Wellness Design, and Accessible Design. Barb's industry involvement and expertise has earned her numerous national awards as well as interview and writing opportunities for publications like Kitchen and Bath Business, Kitchen and Bath Design News, Metropolitan Builder, Qualified Remodeler, Remodeling Magazine-online and Houston Chronicle. A four-time presenter at KBIS's Voices of the Industry and an international speaker, Barb holds an MFA in Interior

Design and taught as an adjunct professor in the Interior Design departments at several colleges, including the Art Institute of Houston, for over seven years. She has worked in successful collaboration with builders and remodelers for almost 25 years.

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

BARB MUELLER: I have always loved design. I was a painter and glass artist, then decided to get a graduate Interior Design degree in which I could earn a living. I worked in and managed builders' Design Centers for 13 years before opening my own Kitchen and Bath Design firm.

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

BARB MUELLER: It has become a lot more aware of the client's experience; concerned more with their health and welfare through Biophilic Design, Universal Design, Aging in Place Design and Wellness Design.

BATHS OF AMERICA: *How can an experienced interior designer help a custom home builder or a remodeling*



contractor with their building or remodeling projects?

BARB MUELLER: An Interior Designer who has been around builders and remodelers for many years is familiar with the kinds of projects and clients they have. The designer understands the building and remodeling process; the plumbing, mechanical, and electrical systems of a house; and the order in which all the fixtures, finishes and fittings should be selected and ordered.

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

BARB MUELLER: I have over 20 years of experience with builders and remodelers; have won many 1st place awards for my projects; have presented at national and international conferences; taught for 7 years at the college level; and am accredited by the NKBA (National Kitchen and Bath Association) and CAPS (Certified Aging in Place Specialist).

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

BARB MUELLER: I worked with a paraplegic client whose home was flooded during Harvey. She was injured when carried out of her house and was very limited in her movements. We measured every appliance, counter, landing area, fixture, and reach range two and three times to make sure that she could access the edge of the counters, fit under the sink in her battery-operated wheelchair, transfer to the toilet, access the storage pull-outs, and maneuver around the bedroom, bath, and kitchen. I researched accessible fixtures, mechanized pull-downs for closets and

cabinets, and designed many one-of-a-kind solutions for her.

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

BARB MUELLER: We do a lot of talking about their needs, wants and "would-love-to-haves." This preliminary programming determines which path we take for selecting first cabinetry, then countertops and flooring, then plumbing, paint, hardware, and lighting. We make sure that plumbing is determined early enough in the project so that the rough ins are ordered in a timely manner, but ideally, I like to have all finishes and products in the home before start of tear out.

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

BARB MUELLER: Owners many times underestimate the amount of time a project will take, and the designer and builder must therefore set realistic expectations for them about timing, about when subs will be at the project, and about budget or overruns.

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

BARB MUELLER: I attend the Kitchen and Bath Industry Show (KBIS), the International Builders Show (IBS), attend CEU sessions with product vendors to keep abreast

Continued on page 16



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of the new products and trends, and read industry publications and belong to industry discussion groups.

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

BARB MUELLER: I love the Art Deco period style; the furniture and interiors are unique and can always be refreshed when used in contemporary settings. It was a fascinating time in the design world and Art Deco transformed from the French style to the American style over the years influencing our modern styles still today.

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

BARB MUELLER: I am passionate about designing spaces that everyone can use easily (Universal Design), about incorporating this into all my projects along with Biophilic Design and Wellness Design. These three design approaches are the cornerstone of good design in any space. Biophilic Design involves bringing natural light and nature into rooms along with giving green views and using green features. Wellness Design makes sure there is the best Indoor Air Quality, water quality, and non-hazardous products incorporated into the design. In all my remodeling projects, I strive to attain these as much as possible, within space and budget constraints.

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

BARB MUELLER: Personally, I love the Soft Contemporary Style mixed with a little eclectic design. Smooth clean lines, rich wood grains, tactile natural stones are my favorites. Whatever style my client desires and which suits them, is what I design for them; I don't impose my personal style on them. They will be the ones living in the rooms, so they must love it!

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?*

BARB MUELLER: The first step is always the programming: talking with the client (homeowner or builder) about what is the goal of the project; what is the desired style, color palette, who will be the inhabitants and any special needs; any specific fixtures, products, features, equipment, electrical, technology or mechanical specifications; or in other words, their "needs, wants, and would-love-to-have list." Then researching this information to start the specification and ordering process.

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

BARB MUELLER: I attend the industry shows, read online industry magazines, do vendor CEU's and events, and network a lot.

BATHS OF AMERICA: *Any last thoughts, comments?*

BARB MUELLER: After teaching on the college level for 7 years, I was always excited to share my industry experience with students and hopefully inspire future designers to work in the new construction and remodeling field!



Barb Mueller,
Kitchen & Bath Designer
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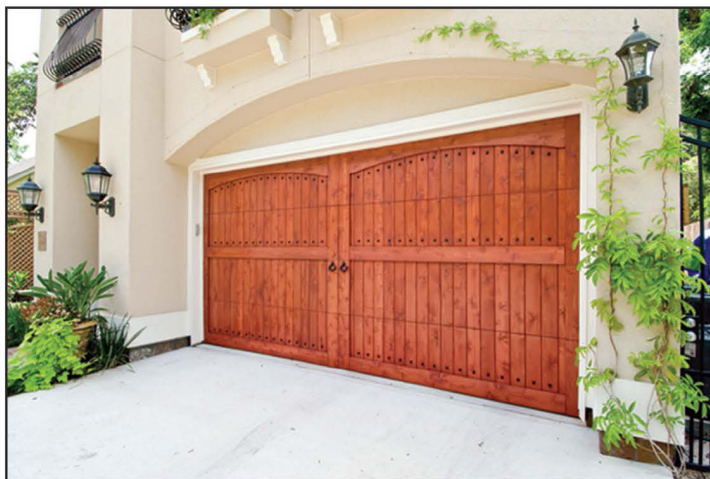
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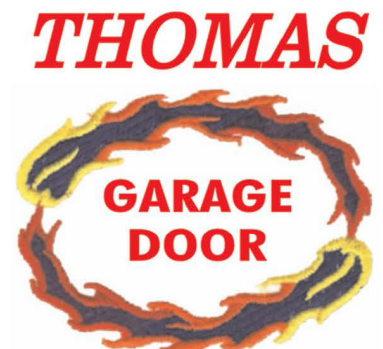
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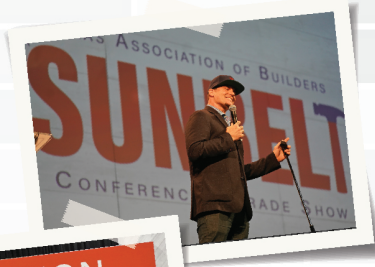


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