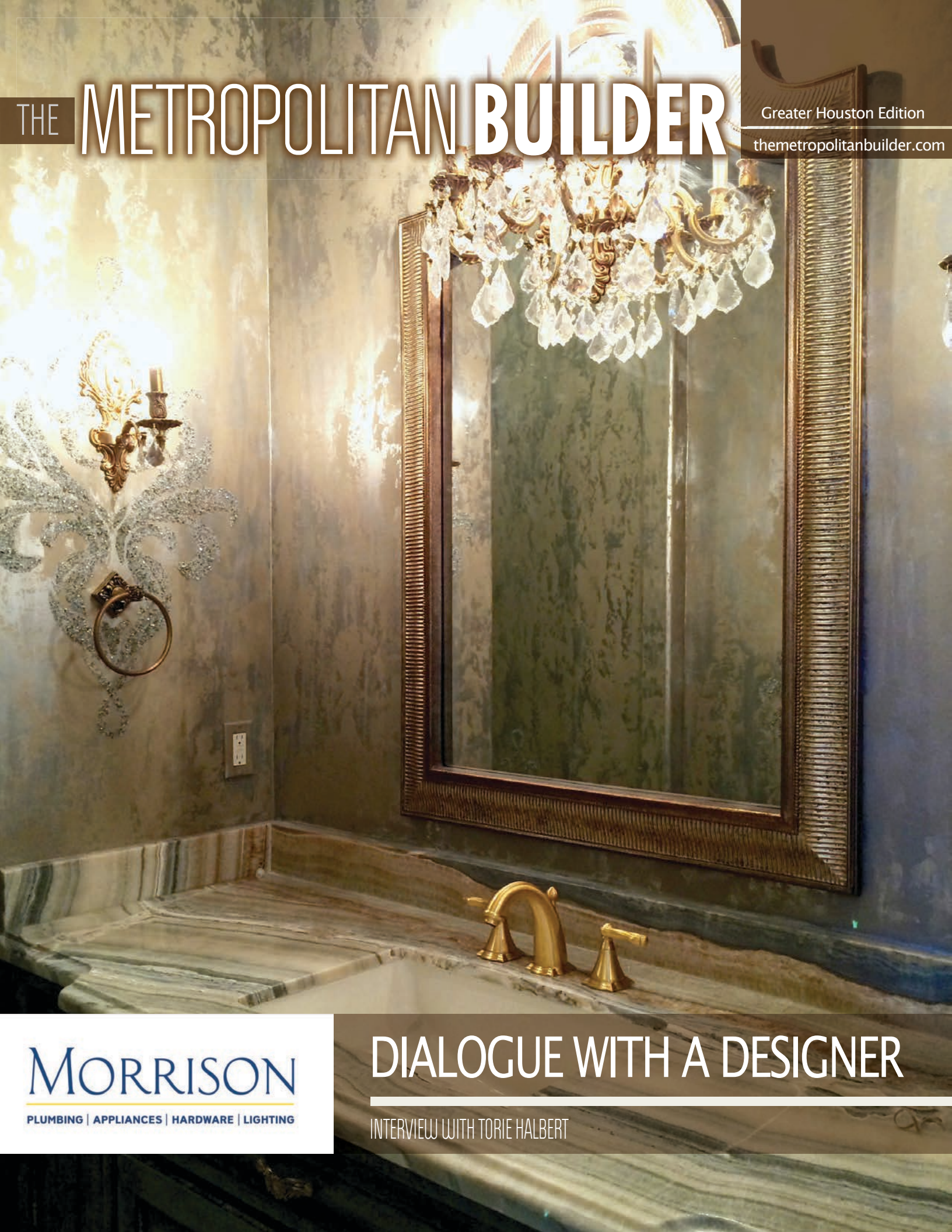


THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

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DIALOGUE WITH A DESIGNER

INTERVIEW WITH TORIE HALBERT



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Morrison knows that dreams, reality and inspiration make a house a home. They also know that an interior designer or interior design firm often become an intricate part of this process. Design professionals should be committed to creating individualized and functional designs to meet the lifestyles of their clients' families. Morrison Showrooms works to inspire these ideas and is conveniently located in the heart of Houston. Morrison offers many brands and designs, all exhibited in unique settings with interactive displays. Whether it's appliances, plumbing, hardware, or lighting, they have brand to fit every budget and a style to fit every design. Contact Joann Ontiveros for more details. 713-861-2343.

This month Morrison dialogs with renowned Houston Designer Torie Halbert, Owner of To The T Interiors, transforming and recreating ideas that you may have about your dream living space and making them a reality. Focusing on residential and small commercial spaces, To The T Interiors offers a wide range of design services to those in need with a personal approach built off of trust.

Morrison: What motivated you to go into the interior

design field?

Torie Halbert: My obsession with fabric, trim, ribbon, rhinestones – literally anything decorative – began very early. I would always rather someone would take me to the fabric store to make something decorative than to buy toys or play outside.

By the age of seven, I was begging my Mom to teach me how to sew by hand, and I began sewing pillows and doll clothes. By nine years old, I was sewing on her Singer machine. I learned quickly to make clothes by patterns. By middle school I was designing and selling outfits to my friends. I loved making decorative custom pillows for gifts and still do for clients.

My love for textiles – all of the beautiful patterns, colors and textures are a huge part of why I truly wanted to go into the design field. The other part was my constant desire to rearrange furniture in all areas of our home on a regular basis and to redecorate.

There was no question what field I would go into upon high school graduation.

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

Torie Halbert: Many aspects of the interior design field have changed, mostly due to the fact that as I was finishing my degree, the World Wide Web was really just getting started. Literally, all through college, design selections were made from huge books and catalogues. Now you can just look anything and everything up online. We designers all still have our catalogues, especially when selecting lighting and accessories when they can be beneficial. But for the most part, it seems much faster just to “google it.”

Of course the design styles have changed drastically as well. Right out of college, we were still in the days of

very traditional styles, darker colors, with lots of detail. Now it’s clean, simple, bright, open, and shades of greys and whites reign.

Morrison: How can an experienced interior designer help a custom home builder or a remodeling contractor with his/her building or remodeling projects?

Torie Halbert: There is no substitute for an experienced designer when it comes to making selections for a new home or remodel project. The amount of experience, know-how, taste and, most importantly, the level of trust that you gain with your designer will keep you from making expensive mistakes.

As the homeowner, you will sleep better knowing you have someone leading you through it all that does this on a daily process. Experienced designers make solid decisions that they do not second guess. They have been through it all, and they know what works and what does not work. Most builders or remodeling contractors have an idea on choices but do not exude the level of experience or taste that a designer does. I know this is why my builder, Bryan Phillips at Cason Grayes homes uses my skills. He has excellent taste but leaves the designing to me.

The selections that are being made are costly investments, including the finishing elements of furniture, window treatments and accessories. With proper guidance from me, they are making wise selections that are not trendy or will become dated quickly but are timeless and classic on all levels.

Morrison: What sets you apart from other designers?

Torie Halbert: As a custom home interior designer, I often have the ability to design on a “dream level.” Many of my clients are able to use some of the most beautiful stone countertops, lighting and finishes there are to offer. I have designed hundreds of custom homes in some of the most amazing neighborhoods in the Houston area, including Riverstone, Sienna Plantation, Carlton Woods, West University, River Oaks and Bellaire.

But on the other hand, I have clients that hire me that do not have those same options and budgets are limited. I have the ability, they eye and the taste to make those clients just as satisfied by knowing where to go and what



to do. I also have the experience of giving them the same polished, completed look, even on a limited budget, and that is what sets me apart. As an experienced designer, I “sell” my designs, ideas and overall vision by truly gaining my clients trust, getting to really know what each client is striving their home or project to emulate and then overseeing it to come together beautifully, layer by layer.

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

Torie Halbert: In my opinion, one of the biggest mistakes made is choosing the wrong window and exterior color selections. Sometimes builders do not realize just how much of an impact a window frame color can make and how much richer and more attractive the perfect combination of exterior finishes enhance a home’s curb appeal if it is all pulled together by a designer. Other mistakes include stair railing choices and occasionally trendy backsplash/tile designs.

Morrison: What are other special things you have achieved as an interior designer?

Torie Halbert: Aside from constant growth with each and every client, home and projects? While working over the years for different custom home builders, we have won many PRISM awards, Parade of Homes awards, Houston’s Best Awards and Showcase Home Tour awards. As the designer for Cason Graye homes in Bellaire, we won three first place awards including Best Design, Best Kitchen and Best Master Suite on the 2014 Fall Bellaire Showcase tour.

I have traveled across the U.S. in conjunction with American Home Fashions Carpet and taught other designers how to upsell high-end carpet to their buyers. I also became a reality TV contestant on Season Four of HGTV’s “Design Star,” where I made it all the way to the Final Four on the show. From there, I became the national spokesperson for Nature’s Carpet (wool carpet out of New Zealand), the spokesperson for a fabric store and became the Design Expert on Great Day Houston for nearly two years. In a collaboration between GDH and Ashley Furniture, each month I would surprise a winning, deserving family and make over their space with a \$10,000 makeover. This was one of the most rewarding parts of my career.

I also started my own line of western belts and upscale



rustic furniture called Strom Rinzen. I have also been featured in many design magazines, morning shows and judge design competitions and speak at Home & Garden shows across the U.S. I have also appeared on “Extreme Makeover: Home Edition” several times as a guest designer.



Photo by Amanda White

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