

# THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

Greater Houston Edition

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## Dialogue with a Designer



 **BATHS  
OF AMERICA**  
FINE BATH & KITCHEN GALLERY

Shabazz Anwerr

Ashton Gray Development | SVAG Construction





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*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 Shahbazz Anwerr, Creative Director for Ashton Gray Development & Director of Operations for SVAG Construction.*

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

**Shahbazz Anwerr:** I was lucky enough to grow up in Dubai when the whole city was being transformed into a manmade marvel. I've always been a visual person and my creativity took over and started working with interior design; and loved the idea of breathing new life into a room. I would give full credit to my mentor Shaun Vembutty for seeing that spark in me and honing it. I

realized this was my passion but overall, it is the whole idea of building a space and collaborating with great mentors, architects and artisans and amazing vendors like Baths of America to create something different that gives us an edge and still be easy on the eyes but functional as well.

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

**Shahbazz Anwerr:** Why since graduation? We can look back as far as the Stone Age to see evidence of early interior design ideas through the instinctive coordination of flora and fauna in prehistoric dwellings. Design is subjective so it keeps evolving and sometimes we revisit the same concepts with a fresher eye to still be with the trends and cater to the visual stimuli we all can have now with all social media platforms focusing more on talking points of any new construction, remodel or commercial space. The transition is not gradual but to keep up with the next trend before it is a trend so the project stands the test of time and not look dated by the time we are completed.

Our focus is always on functionality with aesthetics. I have noticed that past projects would revolve around the aesthetic appeal of a room but we try to work with spaces





with dual functionality. We merge juxtaposed styles, textures, colors and technology to create a well-designed space. The end result is to have a space be styled around experimentation and functionality.

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

**Shahbazz Anwerr:** The answer is very simple. We have the insight and resources. We are constantly looking at this world with an eye for details. Today designers have so much access to infinite styles that allows them to create spaces that will wow the client. I am actively involved in the construction process and making sure the vendors, trades and the client are all in agreement with the vision. A lot of energy management goes in the back to create the right synergy. Construction is booming but the importance of management in this industry is what designers bring to the home while taking the stress away from the client. Any space is emotional and to manage these emotions and keeping the intelligence over emotion to deliver a space within expectation and in budget is what a designer can do. All that glitters is not gold; so, designers can sometimes bring more to the table than just picking up curtains.

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

**Shahbazz Anwerr:** My own role is a hybrid between design and execution of the totality of the project. I am involved from trees to keys with SVAG Construction. Sumi Rengaraj and I make sure we plan everything way ahead of time. We are still in a pandemic. There are supply chain issues but we make sure we plan our projects within a budget and work to accomplish that goal. Personally, my mind works best when I am not at work putting off fires in construction. From the moment I step in the shower in

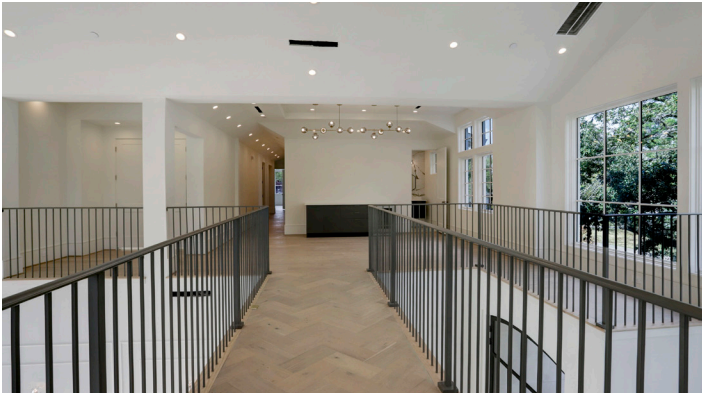
the morning I start planning my day. From the morning meeting with a client to the afternoon meeting with the contractor. I'm always thinking of my next step, project, meeting, or phone call. There are different aspects of design that we are involved in. There's a clubhouse or an active adult community [TAJ Residences] or our sold-out project in Austin that we are breaking ground soon; it is all different yet in the same family of possibility and design. Also, the exposure we have to seeing things constantly as a designer adds to my personal knowledge base daily.

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

**Shahbazz Anwerr:** The latest project we are wrapping up in Piney Point has been the most challenging project because we were finishing this house during the thick of the pandemic and had all kinds of issues in creating a space that was modern but has the glamor that is not cold. We wanted to reinvent the color Gray and not do a white and gray house as most homes were trending then. We moved the lines of design to create an elevated space. We have won awards for our kitchens, bathrooms, overall interior design of projects that all were as challenging but more rewarding.

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

**Shahbazz Anwerr:** As mentioned before; emotions ride high when selecting. I have to make sure I read the emotion and expectation correctly before even picking up my pencil. I always dread selection meetings with Shaun because his mind is so fascinating but to introduce a vision that we have is always a nerve wrecking process. We always start with the idea then evolve it or eliminate it. Somewhere, somehow it always comes together.



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

**Shahbazz Anwerr:** Repetition is a curse. In spec homes, we try to be neutral but give enough design flow space which means; whoever would end up walking the house can visualize their furniture. It is for them to trust that they can make better memories in that space. I have learnt to give breathing room to a space for clients. Also, I've noticed some clients save pictures on social media without understanding the framework or cost that would be involved is another mistake. The cost of wood can discourage over choosing something which won't be as cost prohibitive. I've noticed some designers are people pleasers and cannot say no to a vision. We nix ideas all the time so we can introduce better concepts that do not break the budget and still deliver. The biggest lesson is to push trends aside and design based on your aesthetic to create a space that will let you meet yourself and not the next DIY Instagram designer.

**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?*

**Shahbazz Anwerr:** Baths of America is a great resource to start with on what is trending for plumbing or appliances. Reading up on what other heavyweights are up to, watching a lot of trends or colors in fashion that pop up to know where the subliminal conscious is directed to, we are seeing a lot of mid-century colors coming back. It has been 100 years from the roaring 20s but the fringe textures are coming back. Travel helps us a lot. I love visiting New York or New Orleans before I start a series of new projects to just look at the trends. Houston or Austin as well introducing me to the pulse of what is happening locally. The truth is simple. I am aware that simple is always going to be in style and look timeless.

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