

# THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

Greater Houston Edition  
themetropolitanbuilder.com

## Dialogue with a Designer



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

Mickey Bufalini

Collaborative Design Group Architecture & Interiors



# Dialogue with a Designer

Mickey Bufalini - Collaborative Design Group Architecture & Interiors

*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 Mickey Bufalini, Principal and Partner of Collaborative Design Group Architecture & Interiors, LLC. As a founding partner of and lead interior designer for Collaborative Design Group, Mickey Bufalini has built a formidable enterprise by encouraging creativity among her team of professionals who are consistently furthering their education in construction detail, interior design, and interior specification. With over 30 years of experience in the architectural world, she has developed a unique combination for an Interior Designer, one with a love of texture, colors, furniture, and history, along with the ability to tie it to the architectural finishes and details required of both the exterior and interiors of a home. When viewing her*

*work you won't find a design that looks like another, instead you will find a variety of design styles, all executed expertly with a sensitivity to her client's needs and expectations.*

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

**Mickey Bufalini:** I attended St. Agnes Academy High School here in Houston, and one of the electives offered was Interior Design. The teacher entered all our projects into a "Finger Furniture contest" where we had to redesign our own bedroom and build a model, select finishes. I loved it and took 3rd place in the city. My teacher encouraged me to study Interior Design in college and it has been a satisfying career for me!

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

**Mickey Bufalini:** Everything is faster, technology has made it easier on the presentation side to the client, we are able to create our color boards and inspiration boards more seamlessly and send them via the internet to an out of state client, making it much easier to communicate long distance. Technology is also driving our architectural specifications division, assisting clients with the home building selection process.



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

**Mickey Bufalini:** We are fortunate in that we have an Architecture arm of the company and can help our builders navigate the often-complicated process of blending the construction side with the aesthetic side of the project. We pride ourselves in meticulous specifications that accompany our construction documents including all exterior finishes, appliances, plumbing selections, doors, windows, flooring, ceilings, trim, fireboxes, lighting, wall finishes, counters, hardware and much more. This leaves no room for delay of the project and gives the contractor the ability to pre-order all materials needed on the jobsite. Given the current climate of backlogged materials, this gives our clients the opportunity to order materials way in advance and not wait for owners to make selections as they go.

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

**Mickey Bufalini:** We don't subscribe to one signature design style such as modern, transitional, or traditional as many other designers do. We aren't limited by a lack of education on design styles, so as experienced and creative professionals, we enjoy working on a variety of project styles. And we often find ourselves educating the client as well through the process. I can't tell you how many times a client comes to us with their new home plans, and they really have no clue what the architect has in mind for the ceilings, or what doorways are arched, and which are not, etc. Many times, homeowners are unclear or do not understand what is drawn on paper, they must trust that the architect heard them and interpreted everything

they wanted into the construction documents. As design professionals, we break the construction and specification process down into small bites so that the client can follow along and not become overwhelmed.

For over 30-years we have worked as a team with our clients to create unique homes that are infused with innovative, unique styling that meets their individual needs and design styles. We help them to bring their dreams to life and to create the spaces they imagined. We strive to produce a home that uses every element of design that serves a purpose. Using the latest technology, our team works meticulously to provide the client with an exceptional and sustainable design. We always keep the clients' vision in mind, and we are mindful of their budget, objectives, and timeline.

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

**Mickey Bufalini:** A home for a client whose primary residence is in Carmel California. We had limited time with the homeowner as she would fly in for two-day meetings, where we would make selections, and finalize finishes, furniture etc. The homeowners wanted to move in with literally their toothbrush, so all details had to be completely ready for move in. This included dishware, linens, furniture, accessories, cookware, literally everything. To top it off the home was not in Houston, it was in College Station, Texas, so the builder was not local. We had to have all documents completely detailed for ease of construction. We installed a camera on the property so that the homeowner could watch the progress of the Architecture, as well as our Architects. We do out of town



projects all the time, this one happened to be 27,000 square feet with advanced control systems, and we used 85% recycled and repurposed materials on the project, which had to be sourced up to two years in advance.

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

**Mickey Bufalini:** We begin with the exterior and work toward the interiors. With new construction we start ground up and specify all exterior portions with our clients, including body of the house materials, roofing, windows, trim, paint, chimney details, walkway materials, all exterior doors etc. With the interiors, plumbing and appliances come first (it seems this would be early but it is so pivotal to the cabinetry drawings, and the spaces needed for these pieces (if wall hung toilets, or faucets, affect construction, do we need gas connections, etc.), We then select flooring, review the architect’s cabinetry to be sure the appliances and plumbing will work, we select the counters, tile and then the lighting and hardware. For remodel work it is often pieces and parts of the above, but we do use the same process of selection. We have a proprietary set of schedules and spreadsheets that facilitate the collection and assimilation of all the information. We are always complimented on the thoroughness of our documentation and drawings by the builders and vendors that we work with.

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

**Mickey Bufalini:** Communication and unrealistic

assumptions about budget, timeline, or level of involvement between them. Allowances are a guarantee of project overages, not knowing how much each component of the project will cost. Because the biggest impact for your money will be in the final stages of construction, if you don’t plan accordingly, they will not have the money for those impact items. We believe in creating a menu of costs in the beginning so that the client can make informed decisions along the way. It is like going into a restaurant, the menu allows you to see how much you will spend on dinner and allows you to decide to skip the salad so that you can afford the soufflé for dessert. If you don’t know the cost of all the menu items, you may not be able to afford dessert at the end of the meal. Even when a builder is conscientious and explains and reviews the costs along the way, the homeowner gets caught up in the world of upgrades and/or changing their mind along the way, and the budget and allowance numbers creep. Job scope creep is the hardest to reign in and to overcome. The biggest cause of this is the lack of planning. Our methods allow for making all those decisions with a greater knowledge of the real costs before you sign with a builder.



**For more information contact:**  
**Mickey Bufalini**  
 Partner & Principal Designer Collaborative Design Group  
 Phone: (713) 263-8311  
 Email: [info@cdgai.com](mailto:info@cdgai.com)  
 Website: [www.cdgai.com](http://www.cdgai.com)  
 2501 Central Pkwy, Houston, TX 77092



**713.572.2284**  
**bathsofamerica.com**  
 APPLIANCES ■ PLUMBING  
 HARDWARE ■ CABINETS