

# THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

Greater Houston Edition  
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## Ellis Custom Homes: Known for Custom Detailing

Remodel Specialists Focuses on  
Kitchen & Bathroom Remodels

Dialogue with a Designer: Tami Owen,  
The Owen Group Design Firm



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# THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

**Giselle Bernard**  
*Publisher*



As always, Greg Tomlinson, President of Builders Post Tension (BPT), was kind enough to submit a summary of bullet points taken from the GHBA Forecast Luncheon, held on February 1st, 2022. An overview of the presentation given by Economist Dr. Joe Tracy with the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas follows:

- Omicron variant is highly contagious but with much lower severity of sickness than previous strains of COVID-19.
- Our economic activity is now more resilient to COVID infections than in the past two years.
- The pandemic has generated adverse supply shocks that are driving up pricing and availability of materials, labor, and services.
- Texas growth and economic activity has outperformed the national economy in 2021 and is poised to do the same thing in 2022.
- An aggressive fiscal and monetary policy response to the pandemic has exacerbated the supply/demand imbalance.
- It has also led to higher inflation as constrained markets use higher pricing to equate limited supply with the increased demand.
- The Federal Reserve has a dual mandate from Congress of maintaining stable prices (low inflation) and supporting maximum sustainable employment.
- Business closures were used early on to “flatten the curve” to prevent our health care systems from being overwhelmed.
- This caused supply chains to be disrupted causing delays and shortages of inputs (computer chips for the automobile industry as an example).
- Omicron wave has created staffing issues with such a high infection rate.
- Fiscal policy response on COVID was more aggressive than following the financial crisis (The Great Recession).
- Majority of that policy was supporting aggregate demand by supporting incomes or reducing required expenditures (Examples: extended unemployment insurance,



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- stimulus checks, also mortgage, rent and student loan forbearance).
  - The PPP was an exception in that it supported aggregate supply.
  - Monetary policy followed a similar “all in” approach as it did following the Great Recession. Just on a larger scale for COVID pandemic.
  - Higher prices were initially in sectors directly impacted by high demand, like Autos and Housing. But price pressures are now spreading out through the entire economy.
  - Employment is still not back to pre-COVID levels. However, labor markets were tight in 2019 before the pandemic.
  - Labor markets are still tight and wage growth is picking up dramatically. Good for the workers and economy.
  - Net migration to Texas is allowing Texas to lead the Country in new employment opportunities.
  - Projecting interest rates percent will increase in 2022 three to four times.
  - But our strong demand for housing and limited supply should keep the housing markets strong in 2022 and beyond despite the higher % rate increases. Even if they move up 2 full points, the % rate to buy a house will be historically low.
  - Especially in Texas, where people are moving to Houston at number record’s and job opportunities are plentiful. Not to mention Oil hitting \$90.00 a barrel which always leads to more jobs. They will need a house to live in.
- OVERALL - Stay Calm and Keep Building!**





# Ellis Custom Homes: Known for Custom Detailing

By Kathy Bowen Stolz

With more than 30 years of experience in custom home building, Keith Ellis, president and owner, brings his own in-depth knowledge and expertise, along with his handpicked team of highly qualified craftspeople, to every Ellis Custom Home project. Eye-catching exteriors that cause passing traffic to slow to a crawl, and expansive interiors so perfect that there's no room for improvement, are the hallmark of every Ellis Custom Home.

“We are set up well for people who want quality and high-end details. In fact, the more custom details and necessary expertise, the better fit we are,” said Ellis. “We specialize in customization. We have an impeccable track record, with the proper staff and expertise to give customers a lot of options and opportunities for custom detailing.”

Keith employs true project managers. Because





communication from customer and staff flows through that person, they assure that there are no misinterpretations and are better able to maintain satisfaction and quality.

“Our staff of seven comprises a lot of expertise; that number really allows us to have some flexibility to go beyond [our home base of Bryan],” Ellis added. “Custom homes take so much supervision, so much time, that whenever I have found quality employees who had the same desire to keep the highest quality standards, I added them to my staff.”

Ellis Custom Homes builds in the Brazos Valley area – including College Station, Bryan and Brenham – and in all counties south to Houston. Keith Ellis started his company in Houston in 1990, but he returned to his hometown of College Station five years later. “I’ve been building

between the two markets ever since.” He’s happy to have a strong combination of architects, designers, vendors and tradespeople that allows him to cover such a wide swath of Texas.

He’s also happy that the area appeals to those who comprise much of his customer base. “A lot of folks are leaving bigger cities for smaller towns and open spaces. Fifty percent of our builds are ranches, and the other 50 percent are in subdivisions in towns and we have the expertise to handle projects big or small, in any location.”

“Our extensive experience with a wide array of techniques and building materials allows us to speak with firsthand knowledge to help our customers navigate the complex

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aspects of building a completely custom home.”

Keith points out that each Ellis Custom Home is unique in its design, materials and methods of construction with a wide range of styles and sizes befitting the customers’ needs and desires.

The company builds anything between 3,000 sq. ft to 30,000 sq. ft., which results in a build time of eight months to three years. The projects often come in over a million, depending on the customer selections and desires for their projects. The company also engages in some add-on remodeling projects for existing customers if they fit into the schedule and the staff can handle them.

Houzz recognized Ellis Custom Homes with its Best of Houzz Design in 2022, 2021, 2020, 2017, 2016 2015 and 2014, including a service award in 2015. The Texas Association of Builders awarded Ellis Custom Homes with

its 2012 TAB Star Awards for Best Kitchen for a Home of \$2 Million and Over and its Best Architectural Design Award for a Home of \$2 Million and Over. In 2011, it awarded the company its Best Architectural Design for a Home \$1 Million - \$2 Million and its Best Overall Interior Design for a Home Over \$1 Million and Best Kitchen for a Home Over \$1 Million in 2010.

An industry leader, Keith is active in the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) as well as participating in one of its Builder 20 groups for the past 15 years. His “craftsman” group includes non-competing builders across the nation, including Montana, Utah, Florida and Washington, D.C. “We are able to collaborate daily by email or phone on every aspect of home building, such as quality, staffing programs, systems accounting, you name it.” In addition, he is a past president and current builder director of the Bryan/College Station Home Builders Association as well as a life director of the Texas Association of Builders.





When he started his company, Keith was just out of college, and had been working for a production builder in Houston. “I like taking care of folks. I like the smiles on their faces as I help create their dream. It’s very, very rewarding.” When you love your work, you never work a day in your life, as the saying goes.

Ellis worked his way through college, earning a bachelor’s degree in Building Construction at Texas A&M University in 1988. “It was a great leg up,” noting that the well-rounded program gave him a background in architecture, engineering and business. Interestingly, his wife is currently a Senior Lecturer and Associate Department Head of the program, and soon all three of his children will have

graduated from the program. The future of Ellis Custom Homes may be with one of the three, but he requires that his children work for someone else first. He’s waiting to see how it works out.

*To contact Ellis Custom Homes, visit [www.elliscustomhomes.com](http://www.elliscustomhomes.com), email [info@elliscustomhomes.com](mailto:info@elliscustomhomes.com), call 979-695-8394 or fax 979-764-7999*

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# Remodel Specialists Focuses on Kitchen & Bathroom Remodels

**By Kathy Bowen Stolz**

For Jim Godre, communication with his clients is key.

Godre, owner of Remodel Specialists in Spring, makes sure each of his clients receive a “Daily Activity Email” each morning, letting the homeowner know who and what to expect for the day. “We keep our customers up to date with an email every morning” so the homeowner doesn’t walk into a surprise, he said.

As a testament to the company’s processes and products, Angi (formerly Angie’s List) awards the company its highest rating, the Super Service Award, year after year.

This 15-year-old company that focuses on bathroom and kitchen remodeling provides custom-built showers and cabinets. Godre said few competitors in the Houston market follow his business model because Remodel Specialists does 90 percent of its work in-house. Nothing is prefabricated, he noted.

The company employs 20-25 people at any given time, and all are specialists at what they do, he added. Currently the staff includes two cabinet makers, three tile setters, a plumber, an electrician and two professional cabinet finishers. He hopes to replace the two painters who left during the COVID-19 pandemic soon. The company works

within a 15-mile radius of Spring, which includes Cypress, Tomball, The Woodlands and The Heights.

“Most contractors can’t build cabinets and can’t build showers. Our ability is what gets us in the door [to make a bid],” said Godre, who started his career laying carpet at age 17. Three months later he had his own business and has been his own boss ever since.

“The shower is the one thing that most contractors try to avoid. It’s the hardest thing to build in a house. It’s a 3 ft. x 3 ft. space that involves five trades and costs \$10,000. But we have perfected a process that guarantees no leaks and no mold. We’re the best at building a shower, bar none!”

In fact, Godre is so confident in Remodel Specialists’ “Water Tite Shower System” that he offers a 10-year no leak, no mold warranty on them and all the company’s work. “There’s not a whole lot of warranty work when you do it right. Our warranty gives comfort and stability to the homeowner.”

He added, “We’re never going to leave bad quality behind. We are integrity driven.”

Because Remodel Specialists is in high demand, its clients



currently have a three-month wait. “We run eight projects at a time, which we’d like to reduce to six, but we’re struggling to get jobs done because of supply chain issues,” he said.

The owner himself does the estimating. He provides estimates to show line-item detail, with showers producing 20-25 specific line items. “We don’t do lump sum estimates. The estimate turns into the work order if the client accepts the estimate. We don’t believe in hiding anything from people. Everything is up front. We only charge for what we do (no hidden fees).”

Noting that the relationship with the client will last four to six weeks while construction is underway, Godre said it’s important to have the right fit with the clients. “Some people want it as cheap as they can get and want it as fast as they can get it. They’re not our customer.”

Some remodelers want homeowners to leave their houses during construction, but Godre has a different attitude. “We love it when they stay. We want them to see our efficiency, such as the painter making straight lines. We don’t like to hide. We want everybody to know everything.”

In its 5,000-sq. ft. showroom, Remodel Specialists offers 1,300 tile samples, full kitchen and shower displays,



*Continued on page 15*



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# Create A Well-Edited Space!

By Linda Jennings

Well-appointed modern fixtures and fittings can add refinement and sophistication to your home. Making the right design decisions will help create a space that you will enjoy for years to come. And sometimes, what you decide not to include is as significant as what you

choose. A good editor knows less is more, which carries through to home design. So keep it simple and pair back on the clutter and instead invest in just those prized pieces that you really love! Here are some examples of luxury kitchen and bath products that made the cut!



Lenova Shower System

## MULTIFUNCTIONAL SHOWER

Among the most popular trends in bathroom design are those focused on the evolution of the shower. Lenova is leading the way with their Thermostatic Shower System, an all-inclusive design that features multiple body sprayers, a hand-held sprayer and impressive control over water temperature. Lenova brings a new level of luxury and relaxation to the shower, allowing users to customize their own experience. The system can be tailored to each bather in the household, perfect for multigenerational homes with people of different ages and abilities. This exceptional shower uses advanced technology to offer three-in-one

valve control over water temperature, volume and pressure. The system maintains water temperature within 1°F even when the shower and sprayers are used simultaneously. The Thermostatic Shower System is crafted of the highest quality materials for superior performance and durability and is available in Polished Chrome or Brushed Nickel.



Hamat USA's Knob Faucet

## MODERN INDUSTRIAL

Add a cool industrial vibe to the kitchen with the newest faucet line from Hamat USA. The Knob Collection is sleek and sophisticated with dramatic detailing that lends a decidedly modern flair. The linear spout is smartly curved and ends at a right angle against a vertical cylindrical head. The faucets are completely constructed from premium 316 stainless steel and then finished with a unique mix of polishing and brushing techniques. The collection features single- and dual-handle faucet designs with optional side sprayers and spout projections nearly 12" tall. The series also offers a more compact version intended for bar spaces that stands just over 8".

## SENSATIONAL SIMPLICITY

In a world where freestanding tubs are often a centerpiece design feature, the new Cáscara tub from MTI Baths stands out from the ordinary with a bold sculptural beauty





**MTI Baths' Cascara freestanding tub**

and exceptionally sophisticated aesthetic. Functional and beautiful, the asymmetrical design and extended deck allow easy entry and exit. As part of MTI's Boutique Collection, the Cáscara allows bathing connoisseurs to have it all. The tub comes as a soaker or air bath with a full range of therapy options including 20 air jets, a heated air blower, a waterproof remote control and an integrated slotted overflow requiring only a drain installation. It is available in white or biscuit with a matte or high-gloss finish.



**The Curve Faucet from Isenberg**

**WATERFALL SENSATION**

The Curve faucet from Isenberg is refreshingly simple yet immediately memorable. Its sleek horizontal lines encompass a gracefully arched spout that extends away from the wall and water streams through the curved linear spout to culminate in a beautiful waterfall effect. Created in the Isenberg Design Lab in Dallas under the direction of Prakhar Kumar Jain, the Curve is offered in two variations, one with hands-free sensors and the other with deck-mounted handles. There are even models facing left or right. In addition to traditional finishes like chrome, brushed nickel and matte black, Isenberg offers 20 ceramic-based color options, including navy blue, crimson, bright green and matte gold.

**ERGONOMIC LUXURY**

The Quadrato Leather Rosette with Brezza Lever in Titanium Gray celebrates the dramatic beauty of contrast. The textured leather detail on the rosette brings visual warmth to this extraordinary door hardware line, while the tactile interest of the Brezza Lever gives a perfect ergonomic grip for every turn. Each rosette is equipped with the company's Concealed Screw Mechanism (CSM) for a seamless look without exposed screws. It is shown in the new Titanium Gray finish, which is available on the entire line of luxury door hardware, including interior, and exterior sets, and even coordinating deadbolts.



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# Dialogue with a Designer

## Tami Owen - The Owen Group Design Firm

*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 Tami Owen, founder and Creative Director of The Owen Group Design Firm. After years of designing the homes of friends and family, The Owen Group was officially established in 2003 when Tami was hired as the designer of the Intercontinental Hotel. Over the years, Tami has grown her business from a small one-woman firm into having her daughter join her as her partner, along with 8 interior designers on staff. Tami has offices in Houston, Austin and Florida. Tami works closely with builders, architects, and vendors in all phases in her design process. When she is not designing, she loves to cook, go to the beach and spend time with family and friends.

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

***Tami:*** I've been designing interiors for over 20 years. Even as a young child, I was fascinated by gorgeous hotels, old buildings, beautiful homes, and (timeless) furnishings.

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

***Tami:*** I have seen many changes since starting The Owen Group Design Firm. From my early days of arranging bookshelves to now being a full-service (foundation to furnishings) design firm, technology has created the biggest change in interior design.

Having the internet and the ability to source material or search for ideas with a click of a button has changed how we work today. Thirty years ago, I just had magazines or coffee table books to peruse. With sources such as Instagram, Pinterest, and Houzz, people can find inspiration and share ideas to create almost any space in a home.

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

***Tami:*** Collaboration between our design team, the architect,



and the builder are essential in our projects. Every successful project starts with a great design. Our team of interior designers are experienced in making sure our client's vision is brought to reality. We know what works and what doesn't, especially when the client is operating within a specific budget and timeline. The goal is to make the building process a wonderful, fun experience and keep the job within budget and on time.

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

**Tami:** A talented team, attention to detail, and most importantly, relationships with our clients, builders, and vendors.

We have a very talented team focused on attention to detail. It's the details that will keep a project on schedule and within budget. The biggest factor that sets us apart is the relationships we establish with clients, builders, and vendors. Our clients usually come to us through referrals from previous clients, which means they trust us, and we take that trust very seriously.

We genuinely care about our clients and realize it is a privilege to help them with their home or office.

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

**Tami:** Every project has its unique set of challenges, but I would say the challenge that is consistent in each project is managing the client's vision within the given budget and timeline provided. Covid, for instance, has created considerable challenges in the availability of products, from furniture to paint to fabric. Thankfully, The Owen Group custom designs and builds much of our furniture and, therefore, has managed those shortages more effectively.

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

**Tami:** Everything starts with the client. Our preliminary discussions with our clients focus on their vision. Once we understand what the client wants, we can begin presenting ideas that build a foundation for selections. Because we work with fabrics, tile, flooring, hardware, and so much more on a daily basis, we can develop a plan that correlates with what they are looking for in their home. We have many resources and work with amazing vendors that understand what we are looking for in materials.

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

**Tami:** I think the most common mistakes made by builders and homeowners is that they don't invest in an interior designer to help with their project. Many try to do it themselves, which costs them more time and money. It

*Continued on page 14*



Photo by Wade Blissard • Builder: Stonehenge Classic Homes

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Photo by Wade Blissard • Builder: Goodchild Custom Homes and Renovations



Photo by Wade Blissard • Builder: Goodchild Custom Homes and Renovations



Photo by Wade Blissard • Builder: Silverwood Custom Homes



Photo by Wade Blissard • Builder: Silverwood Custom Homes

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can be very overwhelming and frustrating without the assistance and guidance of a professional designer.

**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?*

**Tami:** Our team attends several builders shows and most major design markets, including Dallas, Atlanta, High Point, New York, and Las Vegas markets. We are members of ASID and keep up with our continuing education. This keeps us educated and up to date on all the newest items in the industry.

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

**Tami:** I have been asked this a lot. My favorite is the Transitional design style, a mix of old and new furnishings, accompanied by modern art.

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

**Tami:** I like to keep a neutral palette, with a burst of color coming from accessories and art. This style transitions

well when our clients buy and sell other homes. It makes for an easy transition which our clients appreciate.

**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?*

**Tami:** Make a list. Make a list of ideas, inspiration, and particular needs that will help us understand their style and establish the scope of work for the project.

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

**Tami:** I appreciate the opportunity to discuss design and The Owen Group Design Firm with Baths of America. I mentioned earlier that relationships are essential in our business, and I’m proud to say I have been working with the same reps there for almost 20 years.

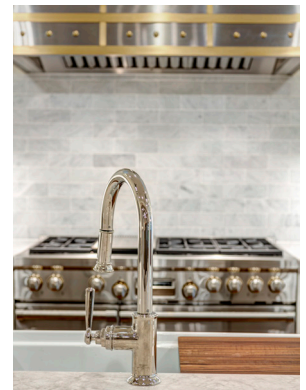


Photo by Wade Blissard • Builder: Richard Price Custom Homes



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*Continued from page 9*

flooring samples and plumbing options. “We supply all products to our clients. If we don’t have it, we can get it,” according to Godre.

Remodel Specialists is truly a family business. “I run ‘the house’ or the operations,” Godre said. His wife Lori manages the finances. Their son Nic serves as project manager, overseeing every project. Their niece Sarah is the office manager and customer contact. And their son-in-law, Trevor is the electrician and assistant manager. “We absolutely love each other. We see each other every day and eat together every Sunday.” Additionally, most of their tradesmen have been with them since the beginning and have also become family.

*To contact Remodel Specialists,  
call 281-651-1651 or  
email sarah@remodelspecialist.net.*

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Brandon Melia  
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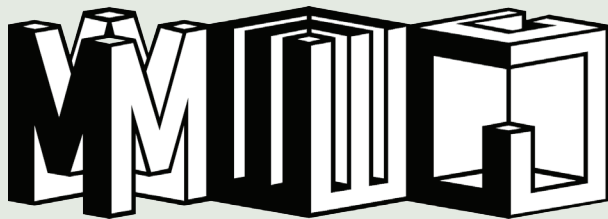
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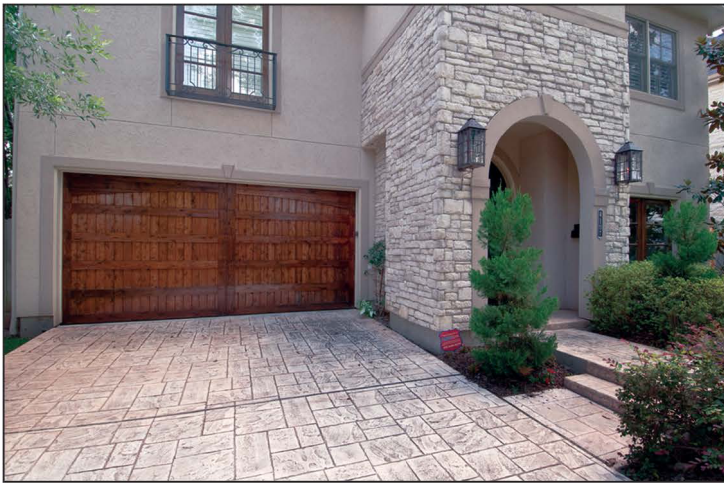




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