

THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

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Dialogue with a Designer



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

Pamela O'Brien

Pamela Hope Designs | Houston, TX



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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 provides door and cabinet hardware, major appliances, cabinetry, and countertops. It has become 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 Pamela O'Brien, an award-winning luxury interior designer, writer, and speaker. She's been celebrated in the press (House Beautiful, Houston Chronicle, Houston Modern Luxury, and Wall Street Journal, to name a few) for mastering the art and science of designing custom spaces that put the client first. For 20+ years, Pamela has been known for building robust partnerships with her clients, who become friends and collaborators.

BATHS OF AMERICA: *What motivated you to enter interior design?*

Pamela O'Brien: I have always loved houses. I was raised in a real estate-oriented family, and homes were essential

to our lives. The women in my family were all lovely hostesses and took pride in their homes. No matter their circumstances or means, they strived to make their homes beautiful, comfortable, and inviting.

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

Pamela O'Brien: I studied languages and business in college and trained in design afterward. Design has changed a lot since I started in the early 2000s when we were right on the cusp of the Do-It-Yourself trend and the advent of the internet for everyday use. I embraced the fact that some people like to be involved in the design work and that they had many new tools available. I think most design relationships are more interactive now, with clients gathering ideas, brainstorming, and collaborating with us more than ever before.

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

Pamela O'Brien: Some of my best projects are referrals from builders or remodelers. I like to sit with the client and the builder or contractor as soon as possible. I think from the outside in when designing a house. I think about

how the clients will live in and use the home, not just what the house will look like and what materials will be used. I concentrate on their daily activities. For example, is the pantry easy to access while cooking, or is it around the corner or down the hall? Can people come and go without disturbing the whole household? Is there enough privacy for the master suite? We can help create a home that supports the clients' lifestyle and make their lives easier and more comfortable. We love working with builders and contractors. They appreciate that we are organized and help keep the project on track. Sometimes it is overwhelming for clients to do it alone. A large project can almost be a full-time job. We can help streamline the process, make it a lot easier and less stressful for everyone and create beautiful results.

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

Pamela O'Brien: There are a lot of designers in Houston. I am proud of that and admire my colleagues. Some of our strengths are that my team and I are professional, organized, and excellent communicators. We are also very good about respecting a budget. I think we excel at that. We keep it in mind every step of the way and discuss it with the client frequently. Plus, we are genuinely nice people and are a lot of fun! We want the client and the rest of the team to really enjoy designing with us and look forward to our meetings. We forge deep relationships with our clients, builders, contractors, and vendors. We are good team players and are easy to work with. We pride ourselves on being flexible. Clients can be as involved as they like or leave the details to us. We don't have to be control freaks. We want everything to be under control.

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

Pamela O'Brien: This is a hard one... I think that all design projects have their challenges.

We remodeled a historic soda bottling factory in downtown Houston. It was a weird, dark, quirky labyrinth of tiny rooms. As you can imagine, with a turn-of-the-century building, there were many unknowns. We had to make all the selections months before the project started to get precise bids. Of course, many changes popped up along the way. We had great architects on the job, and worked as a team to solve problems efficiently. It turned out so well that the architects decided to lease the unused office space area and are currently building it to suit their needs. I am proud that we gave an old building new life. That project also won a Paper City Design Award for Commercial Historical Restoration/Preservation!

BATHS OF AMERICA: When working with builders' and remodelers' clients, how do you begin the materials selection process?





Pamela O'Brien: I like to meet with the client and the builder early in the process to get an overall feeling of the style and design of the house. We brainstorm and collaborate to learn preferences and must-haves. We talk about the budget and allowances immediately to help guide the client. I like to have a conversation about splurging and saving because that is bound to occur at some point during

construction. Today's easy access to photographs and great design photos allow us to learn the client's taste quickly. Our studio's first showroom visit or "show and tell" session is always an exciting meeting.

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

Pamela O'Brien: Not being upfront about costs and budget can cause a lot of stress in a project. It is worth sitting down for a few hours to review the contract line by line so everyone is clear on what is expected, how long it could take, and what it will cost. Everyone also needs to understand that few things go exactly as planned. Many problems are the result of a lack of communication. Clear communication can prevent many issues and help solve others.

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?

Pamela O'Brien: Houston has a vibrant design community, and we have constant sources of inspiration. New ideas are everywhere, from the outstanding showrooms and TWO design centers to the industry reps around town. One of the "high points" of the year for me is the Furniture Market in High Point, NC. It's inspiring to see the creative things people are doing. I also love to travel, and not surprisingly, I focus mainly on the design, art, and architecture of the places I visit.

BATHS OF AMERICA: Any last thoughts, or comments?

Pamela O'Brien: At Pamela Hope Designs, we believe that good design is a great pleasure. We want our clients, vendors, builders, and contractors to enjoy the design experience and the results.



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