

THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

Greater Houston Edition
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Dialogue with a Designer

Specializing in
turn-key design
and styling
services

R J Clifton
DESIGNS



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MWG INNOVATIONS - With a passion for designing and working with glass, Esvin Tista founded MWG Innovations in 2018 on the idea that offering custom bath glass and mirrors for new construction and remodeling projects should fall in the line of an exquisite art job. Esvin takes great pride in creating unique pieces of art designed to bring life to the ideas given to him by the builders, designers, and trades he partners with. His work includes intricate designs of fabricated unique custom metal, wood, and glass pieces for shower doors, vanities, mirrors, handrails, and more. MWG Innovations is committed to providing all clients with high-quality products and services in which yield outstanding customer satisfaction.

This month MWG INNOVATIONS speaks with Rhonnika Clifton owner of R J Clifton Designs, LLC - your ultimate partner for all design needs, offering comprehensive services in architecture, engineering, design, construction, procurement, and final installation, all handled in-house while respecting your budget and timeline. We serve homeowners, real estate investors, builders, small business owners, and retailers, providing full-service interior design solutions from concept to completion. As an award-winning firm based in Houston, we specialize in turn-key design and styling services for residential, boutique commercial,

and real estate development properties. Our experienced team works closely with clients, architects, and builders to create cohesive designs and renovations that align with their vision and budget. We manage every aspect of the process with exceptional customer service. Our portfolio includes luxurious residential homes and high-end boutique commercial spaces. With a reputation for solving complex design problems and delivering quality workmanship, our work has led to countless referrals and satisfied clients.

WG INNOVATIONS: *What motivated you to enter interior design?*

RHONNIKA CLIFTON: *Three things motivated me to enter interior design...my love of helping people, fashion, and my oldest sister. I studied healthcare throughout high school and the first part of college with the aspiration of becoming a nurse. After transitioning into the workforce, I started working in the plus-sized fashion retail industry, celebrating my love of fashion...something I revered from watching my grandmother's and mother's fashion choices. These two passions made it very easy to enter and navigate the world of interior decorating & design. My oldest sister is the first person who related my love of fashion to a potential career in interior decorating. It was her encouragement and guidance, as a serial entrepreneur, that*



led me to begin a decorating company which, subsequently, led me to my career in interior design.

MWG INNOVATIONS: *How has the field of interior design changed since you graduated?*

RHONNIKA CLIFTON: Since graduating from The Art Institute in 2013, I've seen the industry change immensely. Areas such as technology, cultural design appreciation, and the growth of the nation's Black interior designers are just a few of the ways the industry has flourished. When I began researching the industry in 2006, the nation recorded approximately 500 Black Interior Design Professionals. Today, 2 percent of interior designers in the U.S. are Black, according to data from the job search company Zippia. Additionally, social media and the Covid-19 pandemic have had a huge impact on how we use technology. There are tons of software programs available now to streamline the old-school techniques of hand-drafting, block-and-balanced boards, and floorplans.

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

RHONNIKA CLIFTON: As an experienced interior designer, my 9+ years of expertise can be a game-changer

for custom home builders and remodeling contractors. Whether registered or graduates of an accredited institution, we bring a keen eye for detail and a knack for creating cohesive, functional spaces that align with the client's vision. By streamlining the selection of materials and finishes, our services save both parties (builder/contractor & homeowner) time and reduce stress. An experienced designer can also ensure that the design not only looks great but is also functional, practical, and efficient, helping to avoid costly mistakes and rework. Together, we can transform a project from ordinary to extraordinary, making the entire process smoother and more enjoyable for everyone involved.

MWG INNOVATIONS: *What sets you apart from other designers?*

RHONNIKA CLIFTON: This is a question I get often, and probably my least favorite to answer because it feels so weird to talk about myself, lol! I have been decorating, designing, and organizing residential spaces for local and nationwide clients for close to 18 years. My passion and knowledge of space planning, color theory, and textures are the basis of RJCD's bold, unique designs. Additionally, aside from being an Interior Designer, I also divide my time as a mentor, coach, and former adjunct professor to students



and aspiring and emerging interior design professionals.

MWG INNOVATIONS: *What has been your most challenging project and why?*

RHONNIKA CLIFTON: My most challenging project began during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. We took on a full home renovation in the Royal Oaks subdivision, which included exterior and interior painting, new lighting, A/V, flooring, custom window coverings, furnishings, and landscaping. Dissatisfied with my general contractor, I sought referrals from a colleague and chose a mid-range option. Initially, the GC and his team performed well, but issues soon arose with the project manager's availability, understanding of high-end materials, and the quality of subcontractors' work. Despite voicing my concerns and the GC's promises to improve, the problems worsened. The client eventually confronted the GC, who admitted to overselling his capabilities. Nearing the project's end, the client decided to finish with the GC but remained unhappy, especially with high-end materials in two spaces. Ultimately, I completed the project with custom furnishings and accessories, but due to the client's frustrations, we couldn't photograph the finished work.

MWG INNOVATIONS: *What are some common mistakes*

builders and homeowners make?

RHONNIKA CLIFTON: Since starting my design career in 2015, I've seen some common mistakes builders and homeowners make. One big one is underestimating the budget. It's easy to overlook hidden costs that add up quickly. Another mistake is skipping the planning phase and jumping straight into construction, which can lead to design and functionality issues down the road. Lastly, not considering the long-term needs of the space often results in a beautiful but impractical home. Taking the time to plan thoroughly and think ahead can save a lot of headaches.

MWG INNOVATIONS: *How would you characterize your style?*

RHONNIKA CLIFTON: Although each of my designs offers a unique vision for every homeowner, they all share a common appeal that draws clients to us: boldness. Our clients come to us with the hope of creating a space that matches the vision in their heads but have been afraid to execute on their own. Whether the style is transitional, classic traditional, or modern, all our designs feature bold, expressive colors, textures, and patterns.

MWG INNOVATIONS: *Speaking about staying current, how do you keep yourself up to date with all the design*



trends happening in the industry today?

RHONNIKA CLIFTON: You may have heard other designers say this before, but trends are something that I try to stay away from when designing for my clients. When I was in fashion retail, I was always aware of the trends (which often related to what was ahead for the interior design industry), and that knowledge is what made me want to stay away from trends when I got into the design industry. I saw firsthand how quickly styles were in one minute and out the next and that never appealed to me. I view fashion and interiors as fine art; curated to function and appeal for many years. I design spaces that border the lines of modernity and eclecticism while offering a timeless appeal that is uniquely designed for each home and client. This approach might include a trendy piece or two, but the design will never be fully executed based on the latest trends.

MWG INNOVATIONS: What fascinates you, and how have you incorporated that into your designs?

RHONNIKA CLIFTON: I am fascinated by the science of interior design. As a former Biology major, I have a keen awareness of how problems are solved through research, dissection, and thorough studying. Much like anatomy, interiors require a set of problem-solving factors

that result in a functional and aesthetically pleasing space when executed properly. I approach each project with the same meticulous attention to detail, ensuring every element works harmoniously. This methodical approach allows me to create spaces that are not only beautiful but also practical and tailored to each client's needs.

MWG INNOVATIONS: How do you begin the materials selection process when working with builders' and remodelers' clients?

RHONNIKA CLIFTON: When beginning the F, F, & E process, I like to hold a comprehensive Trades Day meeting with all parties to discuss the most crucial elements of a project...function, aesthetics, and budget. This meeting is an opportunity for all parties to get on the same page by allowing the very different roles and perspectives to align. Additionally, it's an opportunity for the homeowner to introduce inspirational photos, for me to bring sample options, and for the builder/remodeler to offer budget and lead time support, all important for a successful project outcome. From this meeting, I'm able to begin the design process by pulling together one to three mood board options based on style, fabrics, lighting options, furnishings, paint colors, etc.



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Design Outside The Lines

www.rjcliftondesigns.com • rjcliftondesigns@yahoo.com

(713) 962-2954

