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Greater Houston Edition

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Before

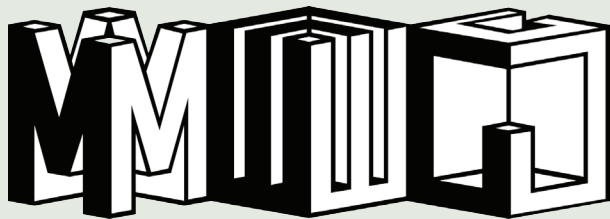


## Park Lane Builders Depends on Teamwork

After

White Oak Homes Formed  
After Personal Experience

Dialogue with a Designer  
Mariana De La Garza



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# THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

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# PUBLISHER'S *note*



**Giselle Bernard,**  
*Publisher*

## **Trust: The Cornerstone of Successful Networking**

Trust is the foundation upon which successful professional relationships are built. In the world of networking, trust acts as the glue that holds connections together, fostering collaboration, loyalty, and mutual respect. Building and maintaining trust is not just a one-time effort but an ongoing process that requires authenticity, consistency, and communication. Here are some key strategies to help you establish and nurture trust in your professional relationships.

### **Be Authentic**

Authenticity is the bedrock of trust. When interacting with colleagues, clients, or potential business partners, it is crucial to be genuine. People can sense insincerity, and it can quickly erode trust. Share your true self, including your values, goals, and even vulnerabilities. This transparency can make others feel more comfortable and willing to open up, creating a solid foundation for a trustworthy relationship.

### **Demonstrate Consistency**

Consistency in your actions and behavior reinforces reliability. Whether it's meeting deadlines, keeping promises, or maintaining a positive attitude, being dependable is essential. When people see that you are consistent, they are more likely to trust that

you will continue to deliver on your commitments. Consistency also involves being present and engaged in your relationships over time, not just when you need something.

### **Communicate Effectively**

Clear and honest communication is vital in building trust. This means not only speaking clearly and honestly but also listening actively. When you listen to others, you show that you value their opinions and concerns. Open communication helps to avoid misunderstandings and resolve conflicts quickly, reinforcing a sense of trust. It's also important to keep others informed about any changes or developments that might affect them.

### **Show Empathy**

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. In professional settings, showing empathy means recognizing and respecting the emotions and perspectives of your colleagues and partners. This can be as simple as acknowledging someone's hard work or offering support during challenging times. Empathy fosters a supportive environment where trust can flourish.

*Continued on page 4*



# GHBA Midyear Forecast Luncheon Summary - June 18th, 2024



Builders Post-Tension

By Greg N Tomlinson, President BPT • 281-932-3744 • gtomlinson@builderspt.com • www.builderspt.com

The GHBA Midyear Forecast Luncheon on June 18th, 2024, featured insights from the renowned Bowtie Economist, Elliot F. Eisenberg, Ph.D. Below are the key takeaways his presentation:

## Economic Resilience

Dr. Eisenberg highlighted the remarkable resilience of the U.S. economy. Despite numerous challenges, real personal consumption expenditures continue to fuel economic growth. However, the household savings rate has significantly dropped post-COVID, indicating potential future concerns.

## Oil Prices and Loan Standards

Oil prices remain stable at \$80 per barrel, a favorable condition for Texas. On the lending front, loan officers are tightening their standards, which could impact borrowing and investment.

## Federal Reserve Actions and Recession

Historically, Federal Reserve tightening has preceded every U.S. recession. However, Dr. Eisenberg suggests that this pattern might not hold this time. Typically, Fed rate hikes and recessions occur together, with a recession following within 11 to 80 months, averaging around two years. Yet, he remains cautiously optimistic, predicting that if a recession does occur, it will be mild and brief, particularly in Texas.

## Employment and Wages

The unemployment rate stands low at 4% but is gradually rising. Wage growth, though declining, remains relatively high at 4.1%. Quit rates, which peaked in 2022, are now falling rapidly as fewer workers are leaving their jobs.

## Workforce and Productivity

The percentage of foreign-born workers in the U.S. civilian workforce is nearing 20%, a positive trend given the need for more labor. Additionally, labor productivity growth has seen significant improvement over the past two years.

## Inflation and Interest Rates

Inflation has moderated from the highs of 2022 but still remains above desired levels. Dr. Eisenberg anticipates that the Federal Reserve may lower interest rates once or twice later this year, by a quarter percent each time. He projects



interest rates to fall between 5-6% by the end of 2025.

## Housing Market

The housing market presents mixed signals. While housing inventory has risen slightly, it remains painfully low. Existing home sales are subdued as homeowners are reluctant to trade their 3% mortgage rates for new ones at 7%. Consequently, refinancing activity has plummeted, and remodeling activity is also down. The average age of occupied housing stock is now 40 years.

## New Home Construction

Single-family home starts are strong, whereas multi-family starts have declined. New home prices are stable, with homes becoming smaller to meet affordability challenges. The primary buyers of new homes include millennials, move-up buyers, and boomers. Construction unemployment is at its lowest level in 20 years, indicating robust activity in the sector. Mobile homes are in high demand, often being the only affordable housing option available.

## Texas Housing Market

Texas stands out as the best housing market in the U.S., with significant pent-up demand for new housing both nationally and locally. Dr. Eisenberg's advice to builders: "Stay Calm and Keep Building!"

This luncheon provided valuable insights and a positive outlook for the housing market, particularly in Texas. As the market navigates through various economic challenges, the overall message remains optimistic and forward-looking.

# Plain Drain Solutions

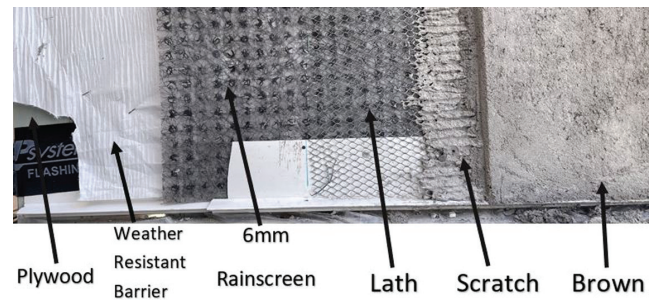
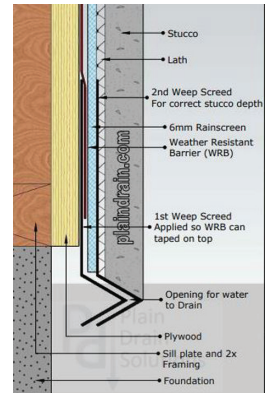
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Photography by Divya Pande

# Park Lane Builders Depends on Teamwork

By Kathy Bowen Stolz

Steven Deutser of Houston’s Park Lane Builders claims one of his “superpowers” is intuition, the ability to extract the information from his clients that allows him to build a team to help the clients reach their goals, whether it is remodeling or new construction.

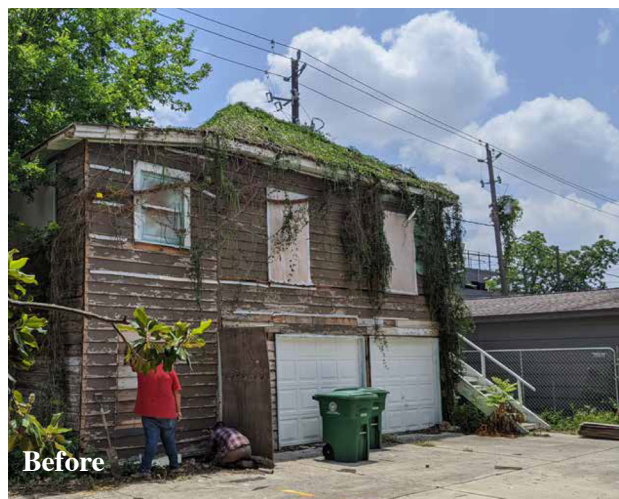
“We spent years pulling in the right personnel to create proven processes. We can really pick the right people tailored to the clients’ personality or project. We create synergy to ensure everything flows seamlessly,” he explained.

“Our trusted partnerships with professionals in critical fields (architecture, building performance experts, design, civil and structural engineering) is an important part of our difference. We consider each of these businesses an equal part of the Park Lane Team. We rely on their expertise and commitment to our building experience. We, with our partners, spend a lot of time educating

the clients on the process and helping them make good choices.”

In addition, Deutser noted that Park Lane Builders implemented BuilderTrend, a web-based software, that allows clients to track every detail of their home construction, including the status of their finances, and to communicate with the builder easily.

Deutser is proud to have long-tenured staff and subcontractors as part of his team and acknowledges that they are the reason for the company’s success. He cites the loyalty of his superintendents, whose connections to







Park Lane extend up to 30 years, in addition to a project coordinator of 4 years, a project manager of 9 years and a bookkeeper with 15 years' employment.

“We have a great company culture. We’re a family. Their loyalty and commitment allow us to create stable processes and consistent execution. I wanted to build an infrastructure so that when I talk to clients and when I’m with them, I’m really with them. I’m not somebody who cuts a deal, shakes a hand and turns the project over to a junior project manager. I spend a percentage of the day in the field with our superintendents and/or the clients and with the design team in our weekly construction meetings.”

Park Lane specializes in new construction, renovations, additions, historical preservation, maintenance and repairs.

The company is known for its focus on creating healthy, sustainable houses.

His own health concerns led Steven to focus on creating healthy houses. Back in 2006, he started to cough on his job sites and have skin irritations, which led him to investigate building sciences and develop a core expertise in healthy structures.

“We have invested our time and resources to stay up with the best materials and techniques for building in this climate and region. We’re making sure you get a healthy structure that is not only sustainable but healthy for families,” he stated. Realizing that a house can trap

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*Continued from page 7*

moisture, chemicals and toxins when it's not allowed to breathe, Park Lane ensures clients' homes will perform and be a healthy environment for the homeowner and their families, Deutser added.

Consequently, Park Lane Builders transitioned into doing forensic repairs; it has the necessary specialists for mold remediation, fire restoration and flood and hurricane repairs. Forensic repairs comprise about 15-20 percent of the company's business.

About half of the 5-15 projects that Park Lane typically juggles are new construction, with the other half remodels. "Our projects come from referrals by our architects, designers and clients," Steven noted. "We've done approximately 1,000 projects and have happy clients." He added that he is very proud of the relationships and friendships created through the years with his clients, trade

partners and subs.

He said that the company began remodeling projects during the recession of 2007-08 as a way to balance the business' portfolio. However, remodeling, including historic renovations, became a core expertise and passion for him and his staff. Park Lane was part of a team that received a 2024 Good Brick Award from Preservation Houston.

The company focuses on River Oaks, Afton Oaks, Shadyside, West University, Piney Point, Hunters Creek, Memorial, Tanglewood, Braes Heights and the Heights. "We don't build far out so we can always control the processes and relationships," the Houston native said. "We recognize the importance of and how personal it is in building a family's home. We go above and beyond to ensure families have a great experience through all phases of construction. We are always focused on doing a great job."



Before



After

Steven grew up on job sites working for his dad, who started the company in 1989 after developing apartments. He purchased the company from his father in 2008. Besides remodeling, he expanded Park Lane to include a home maintenance component a few years ago.

“We added the maintenance because we felt like we were delivering really good homes, but they were being neglected. By being proactive, the homeowner can prevent a lot of bad things from happening. We do

quarterly inspections of the interior and exterior and make recommendations, as well as schedule routine maintenance repairs,” he explained.

*To contact Park Lane Builders  
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# Timeless Beauty

## *The best of both old world and new design worlds*

By Linda Jennings

Take pleasure in choosing fixtures and fittings to create a decor that melds modern with vintage styling. Your house should tell your own story and provide meaningful spaces to enjoy and live life. These new products for kitchen and bath design are a builder's dream amenities.

From vibrant high gloss gold embellished sinks to dramatic Italian vanity designs the look is classic to last a lifetime. Transform your dwelling home into something wonderful - a space that delights and inspires.



The London Basin Company's Carmel basin

### Modern Brocade Detailing

With a high gloss porcelain, the Carmel basin features a delicate modern brocade design set on a sumptuous sky-blue background. Its broad gold rim and base matches the Agnes basin, allowing them to be used together. Founded in 2015 by interior designer Anna Callis and her daughter Nathalie, London Basin Company makes richly decorated porcelain basins, reinventing a classic art form for contemporary bathrooms. Every basin is a one-off, hand-finished using a variety of techniques. The patterns are applied in two main ways 'under the glaze' and 'over the glaze'. With 'under the glaze' decorating, the pattern is applied to the porcelain, then the basins are glazed and fired. In the 'over the glaze' technique, the basins are glazed and fired, then the pattern is applied and the basins are fired twice again to ensure paint durability.

### Powder Room Perfection

The sleek design and thoughtful features of the Contemporary Vanity make it a stunning addition to any modern bathroom. The mirror and metal accessory shelf are backlit to provide a touch of elegance, while the quartz



The Contemporary Vanity by Spectru

countertop with an integrated sink and slot drain offers both style and functionality. The brass faucet adds an elegant touch, and the custom drawer dividers and soft-close drawers enhance the vanity's practicality. With furniture legs embellished with brass caps and solid walnut dovetail drawers, this vanity is built to last a lifetime. The design options are nearly limitless with distinctive finishes and unlimited configurations to offer the finishing touch to a spectacular addition to any luxurious bathroom design. All the Spectrum products are built to exacting heirloom-quality standards. Each piece is made to order, created by craftsmen and hand-finished by exacting artists creating furniture that will last a lifetime.

### Innovative Alternative To Tile

The Delgada Collection of one-piece shower bases from Acquabella was designed to create a beautiful, functional, and accessible shower environment. The Delgada shower bases are offered in a variety of sizes, ranging from a square 36" x 36" to a linear 72" x 42", and with center or end drain configurations, ensuring that there's a perfect fit for every bathroom. They are made exclusively in



The Delgada Shower Base from Acquabella

mineral composite and feature the brand's Pizarra natural stone texture that offers a non-slip surface and feels lovely underfoot. Choose from dramatic black and white to elegant shades of sand, gray and charcoal. The low-profile, multiple-threshold design allows for the installation of glass enclosures on up to three sides, resulting in a modern, streamlined look. Additionally, these bases can be recessed into the floor for a seamless, zero-barrier installation making entrance and exit easier.



Fifth Avenue One-Piece Handleset with S Grip from Grandeur Hardware

### Refined Simplicity

With clean, parallel lines, the Fifth Avenue One-Piece Handleset from Grandeur Hardware offers endless versatility for exterior doors. The beautiful edges and longer plate enhance the glamour and aesthetic of your door without compromising security. This handleset is available with any Grandeur Hardware knob and lever and is ideal for doors that are 84 inches or higher. Offered in the following designer finishes to help mix and match your door

*Continued on page 12*

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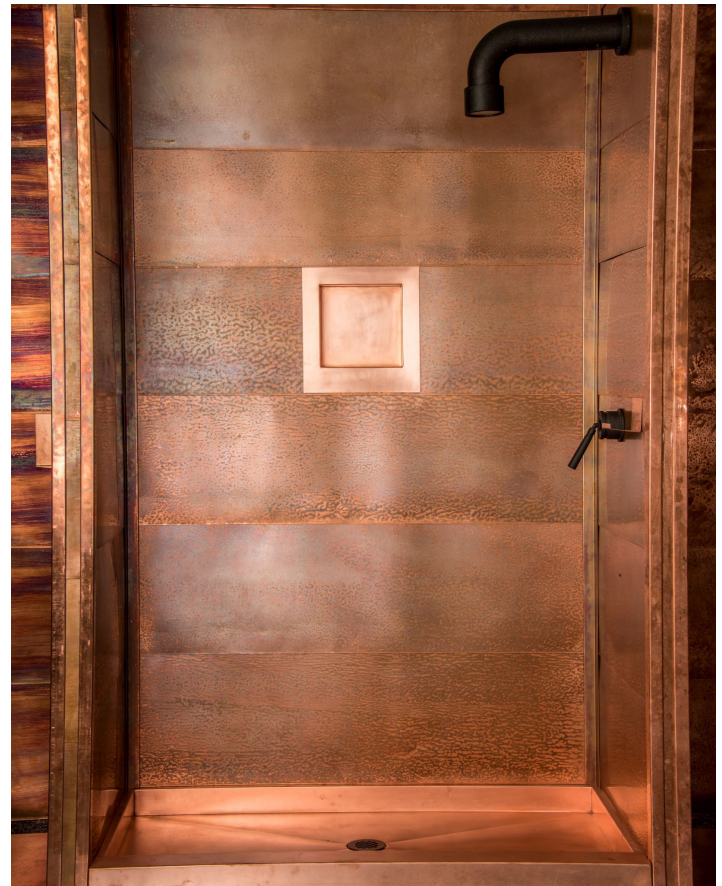
hardware: Vintage Brass, Antique Pewter, Satin Nickel, Timeless Bronze and Lifetime Brass. Made of solid, forged brass for fine detail and long lasting durability. All hardware includes pre-mounted knobs and levers for easy installation and are hand assembled in the USA.

### Wrapped In The Warmth Of Copper

The Copper Shower Company has created a one-of-a-kind DIY solution that redefines shower design. What sets their shower kits apart is their eco-friendly nature, making them the only “Green” sustainable and recyclable tub/shower enclosure in the market today. The copper used for their kits represents sustainability, stunning aesthetics, and also showcase the fusion of beauty and innovation. With unparalleled versatility and flexibility, it outshines any other tub/shower enclosure product. It is designed to be easily installed, removed, and even relocated. It can seamlessly integrate into any construction project, and in some cases, it can be installed right over existing enclosure products, saving you time and money on demolition. Each kit includes custom copper trim pieces and panels that are specifically designed for quick and hassle-free installation.

### Sublime Soak

The freestanding Adrian features convex ends that are complemented by front and back sides that bow outward



### Copper Shower Kit from The Copper Shower Company

for the ultimate in comfort and relaxation. Measuring 67.5” x 35.5”, it is offered as a soaker or air bath. Each Adrian tub is made to order and hand-crafted from MTI’s signature SculptureStone material, a mostly organic mixture of ground natural minerals and high-performance resins that gives the look and feel of molded stone. It is available in white or biscuit with eight different exterior color options as well as a choice of matte or highly polished gloss finishes. The finished product is seamlessly solid, exceptionally beautiful and amazingly durable with a non-porous surface that is stain-and mildew-resistant and easy to clean and maintain.



MTI Baths’ Adrian tub

To learn more about these luxurious bathtubs visit their websites:

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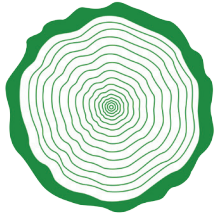
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## Sales Professionals



**Charlie Molloy -**  
*cmolloy@hwp.us*

Charlie has over 30 years of experience in the building material industry, dating from 1992 to the present. He has expert knowledge of most building products, including hardwood lumber, plywood, cabinet hardware, plastic laminate, and custom moldings. In his previous years, he was a manager in the grocery industry for Eagle Discount Supermarkets and Randall's Food markets in the Houston area. His strengths include managing employees, customer service relations, logistics, and outside sales. He has lived in the Houston area since 1968 and spent his childhood in Spring Branch, graduating from Spring Woods High School. He went to the University of Houston where he majored in Music, Hotel and Restaurant Management, and Business management. Hobbies include playing the National Anthem with his trumpet at professional baseball games, hiking in the Big Bend area, and woodworking. Charlie has been married 39 years and has one son, a daughter, and two grandchildren.



**Kenny Francis -**  
*kfrancis@hwp.us*

Kenneth has 32 years of experience in the building industry from 1990 to present. He started at Wilsonart in 1990-2001 in the Houston area. He was employed as the operations manager of over 27 employees. He decided to take his sales knowledge & expertise to Hardwood Products 2001 - present. Kenny enjoys working with companies & building relationships. From commercial millwork shops and remodelers to Custom Builders. Every day is a challenge, from supply & demand to rising costs. Providing innovation & service for the customer is the bottom line. Kenny has lived in Houston his entire life & knows the area well. His hobbies are anything outdoors, from hunting and exercise to sports. He has a wife of 17 years & two beautiful daughters.

## Customer Reviews

**Cullen Franz - Savannah Grace Homes**

"Hardwood Products has gone over and above to source the best quality materials for the best price to help me grow my business. Kenny Francis and the HWP team has provided me with outstanding customer services that leaves other competitors in the dust. I can't say enough about the value that I have received in partnering with HWP. My custom homes have never looked so good !! Thank you Kenny and HWP !!"

**Matt Sneller - Sneller Custom Homes and Remodeling**

"I have known and worked with Kenny/Hardwood Products for over 15 years. We consider them to be one of our most loyal and trusted trade partners. We are a custom builder/remodeler and use them for a lot of our interior and exterior trimwork/materials. Their pricing is fantastic, but even better than that is their customer service. Kenny

is always easy to get a hold of and super responsive to any issue that arises. We would highly recommend using them!"

**Rick Davis - DC Kitchens & Remodeling**

I can't say enough about working with Hardwood Products. I've been in business for about 35 years and have been working with Hardwood products for as long as I can remember. I find their entire staff trustworthy and extremely professional, especially Kenny and Laura. The entire staff has a full understanding of their extensive line of hardwood products. I find that they are extremely dependable, and their customer service is outstanding. They always go out of their way in providing the very best in high-quality materials and for the best price. Not only that, I find them to be very dependable. I can trust that they will always be on top of things. I feel more comfortable working with them than anyone else.



# White Oak Homes Formed After Personal Experience

By Kathy Bowen Stolz

Sometimes you learn as much when things go wrong as when they go right. For Doug Sykes of White Oak Homes Houston, it was his hands-on experience with building his own home in the Heights that gave him a “doctorate” in building after previously flipping a house.

“I learned my lessons from my builder on how exactly you don’t do it. I basically learned from my builder’s mistakes. I thought I could do it better and became a general contractor on my own house.”

Always wanting to own a business, Doug used those experiences to catapult himself into the building industry, which led several years later to the incorporation of White Oak Homes in 2019.

Sykes laughs that although he has a degree in business marketing from Texas State University, he doesn’t do marketing for his company, relying on word-of-mouth referrals instead. “My customers are ‘real’ people who work and who are interested in investing in their homes.”

After working for years as a manufacturer’s representative selling electronics for military applications, he started his contracting career with a spec home building site that the original builder had abandoned; he bulldozed the foundation and frame because it had not been touched for two years before starting over with the original plans.

“I always wanted to build spec homes – I build one or two a year – but the other side of my business – remodeling –





really took off when my wife Stephanie Sykes left teaching and got into real estate. Her business created a natural funnel for my business because people selling houses need to fix things, usually minor stuff. But people buying houses want a new kitchen, a new bathroom. They want to spend money on the new house!”

Sykes said he grew his business organically, which has taken time. He accepts smaller paint jobs because they can turn into a large kitchen remodel, for example. “I guarantee those clients will call me later. I don’t leave on bad terms with anybody.”

He lives and works primarily in Houston’s Heights neighborhood. “I’ve got a niche as a local Heights builder. You can find me in Google under ‘local builder.’ I don’t do cookie-cutter stuff. There’s not a lot of competition for what I do.”

He noted that the Heights’ walkability makes it a small community within a big city. “All of my neighbors see the White Oak Homes sign in my office window as they walk by. On one side of the street there are historic restrictions. My side is not. I’ve worked on six homes across the street. There are a lot of bungalow additions. I try to steer toward the ones that maintain the one-story look of the bungalow.”

However, Doug said he accepts work within a one-



hour radius of the Heights, primarily in Katy and The Woodlands.

Juggling three to seven jobs at any given time is his sweet spot. He hires general contractors but can be a micro manager for his spec homes. “If I’m building a spec home from the ground up, I’ll start my day there. I’m always around, but I’m not at each job site every day.”

His projects range from \$25,000 to \$1 million. He noted that his projects have grown beyond the smallest jobs. In the early days, about 75 percent of his work was on spec homes and 25 percent on renovations. Nowadays, it’s

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*Continued from page 15*

about 33 percent on custom spec homes and 67 percent on remodeling. He observed that banks aren't lending on ground-up construction currently, but they will "loan all day on remodels."

Current projects include converting a garage into an apartment, converting an attic into a bedroom and building a garage in an historic area with its restrictions.

Sykes carefully selects his architects and subcontractors. He fired 22 painters before he found the ones with the skill set he wanted, for example. Now he can send trusted painters, carpenters and tilers to a job site without direct supervision. "I know what guys are good at what. One floor guy is good at matching stains on hardwood between new and old construction. Another specializes in engineered flooring.

"Carpentry is what makes my houses stand out. If there's unused space in there, I'm building it out. That space can become a mud room or closet or butler's pantry that wasn't in the plans. I hate for space to go to waste."

Sykes unabashedly values his trades people. "My guys are very loyal to me. I respect them, and they respect me. I appreciate them. They're what make my business grow."

*For more information about  
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## Customer Reviews

### **Matt Sneller -**

*Sneller Custom Homes*

We are a custom builder/remodeler and have been working with Esvin/MWG for about 4 years now. They are one of our best trade partners that we have. Esvin is extremely creative and great around our clients, but he also does what he says he's going to do and is great about staying in communication. He has done everything from simple framed glass shower doors to very detailed shower enclosures to custom cabinet doors to a custom metal and wood table for our new conference room. I would highly recommend working with MWG!

### **Michael Pelletier**

*President/Owner Fairmont Custom Homes*

We have been working with Esvin Tista and MWG Innovations for over 5 years. Esvin is our go to for shower glass and mirror work. I am proud to say that we have been able to set market trends with the help of MWG Innovations and his excellent customer service. Rarely, do I find an individual that is as reliable as Esvin in our world of building custom homes. Esvin has been a great partner for Fairmont Custom Homes bringing excellent value to our customers and helping us become the number one builder in Fulshear, TX. We look forward to our continued relationship with MWG Innovations.

### **Double L Interiors -**

Double L Interiors has worked with Metal, Wood, Glass Innovations (Esvin) on a several jobs. The process has been nothing but short of perfection. Interior design process can be trying. However, the right vendors make all the difference! MWG is one of those vendors you can rely on to make your idea come to life. Esvin "gets design!" He understands and appreciates the details that go into every space. Keep up the excellence Esvin!

## Sales Professionals



**Esvin Tista -** *Esvin@mwginnovations.com*

In his 12 years of experience in the glass industry, Esvin found himself wanting to do more than install glass. As a true Texan, he believes everything is bigger in Texas and decided to open his own business in 2018. Esvin is talented and has the passion and vision for designing and fabricating unique pieces of art for

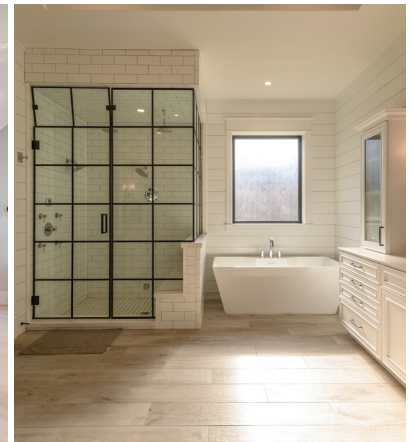
metal, wood, and glass consisting of shower doors, vanities, mirrors, handrails, and more. He credits his passion to his loving family and success to his professional team. When his not working, you will find Esvin enjoying the beautiful Houston weather fishing, hoping to catch more than a cold breeze on a sunny, rainy day, all in one trip to the bay!



**Lilian Tista -** *ltista@mwginnovations.com*

Lilian is experienced in management accounting. In search of a better balance between work and family time, she joined Metal Wood Glass Innovations LLC in 2021. Her commitment is to provide excellent service, helping the corporation to create and build a better business.

She enjoys the opportunity to serve customers on a personal level and the originality behind each project. She spends her free time with her son. She loves to run, and occasionally you will find her running marathons and obstacle course races.





# Dialogue with a Designer

## Mariana De La Garza

*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 Mariana De La Garza, an award-winning interior designer. As the Creative Director of Coton House, her focus is on being 'design-centric' and creatively defining the perfect combination of selections and finishes that reflect each client's personality and lifestyle. Her creativity isn't limited to a specific design style but accentuates her clients' style. She earned a B.A. in Interior Design and a minor in General Business Administration from Sam Houston State University. Her work has been recognized by The American Society of Interior Design (ASID)-Texas Gulf Coast Chapter with multiple Ruby Awards and by The National Kitchen and Bath Association (NKBA)- Texas Gulf Coast Chapter with various leadership awards. NKBA selected

her for their 2023 Thirty Under 30 class.

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

**Mariana De La Garza:** Interior design has always been a passion of mine. I've had strong opinions about it from a young age, including how a space should function, feel, and look. My journey in this field began with an Interior Design degree from Sam Houston State University. I continue to enhance my knowledge through classes, always striving to stay at the forefront of the industry.

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

**Mariana De La Garza:** The field of interior design has seen a significant shift since my graduation, mainly due to the influence of social media. For our team, it's all about educating the client and ensuring they have the correct information to make the most educated decisions for their 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?

**Mariana De La Garza:** What sets Coton House apart is our real estate and interior design expertise. This dual



questions, starting at the initial consultation and throughout the design process. Our goal at Cotton House is to advocate for the client and work as part of the team with builders, remodelers, architects, and any other specialties that a project may require.

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

**Mariana De La Garza:** It was a challenge for me to learn if our design team is a good fit for the client. Sometimes, we turn projects away because we know our team is not a fit to fulfill the client’s needs. We like to educate clients to help them make an informed decision, including determining a budget.

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

**Mariana De La Garza:** We always ask the client for inspiration photos. Our team wants to know what they’ve seen and what they like about it. From there, we ask questions to learn what they like and dislike, what they need, how they want their space to function, etc. We can typically finalize all finishes within three design presentations.

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

perspective allows us to make informed decisions about the products and finishes that should go into a house, considering factors such as price point, local expectations, and resale value. With a vast network of wholesale accounts, we can assist builders and remodelers in helping their clients articulate their vision for their homes, allowing them to focus on the construction or remodeling process.

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

**Mariana De La Garza:** I listen to my clients and ask

*Continued on page 20*



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**Mariana De La Garza:** Not all finishes and materials must be specified, ordered, delivered, and checked before starting the project. The project will go much smoother if finishes are readily available and help keep it on schedule.

**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?**

**Mariana De La Garza:** Product training, networking,

conferences, and social media all help one stay current with the latest trends and products.

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

**Mariana De La Garza:** If I had to pick one, it would be mid-century modern, but I believe in combining elements from all styles to create a perfect design for the client.

**BATHS OF AMERICA: What fascinates you, and how have you incorporated that into your designs?**

**Mariana De La Garza:** Color and pattern! I love working with both, but I also enjoy projects where clients want an “all-white” space, and then I can play with textures and shapes to add interest to the space.

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

**Mariana De La Garza:** Our design team wants you to enjoy your home and for it to feel like you. We curate the perfect pieces for your space to make it feel warm, sophisticated, and dynamic. We want your new design to be a reflection of you.

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

**Mariana De La Garza:** We listen to our clients, but the client needs to remember during the process that they hired their team for a reason. Every person on the team brings something different to the project. The projects with the best outcome, both financially and aesthetically, are those with clients who trust the process and their team.



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**Mariana De La Garza**  
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## Sales Professionals



**Jeff Steiner -**  
*jsteiner@bathsofamerica.com*

Jeff has always enjoyed working with people and being able to offer them his exceptional services. No matter the size of the job, Jeff makes sure that the customer is satisfied and that the job he started gets his full attention until completion. After sales, Jeff also follows up with clients to ensure they are aware of the functions of the products they have purchased and if he can assist in any product demo in person. Jeff, along with his assistant, Hillary Ratliff, started the appliance builder sales division at Baths of America. He has been in the appliance industry for 30 years now and has led Baths of America to one of the largest appliance dealers in Houston, TX.



**Hillary Ratliff -**  
*hratliff@bathsofamerica.com*

Hillary has been in appliance builder sales for the past four years and has no plans to go to another industry. Assisting Jeff with his builders, Hillary makes sure that products are ordered, scheduled for installation and the logistics of jobs are handled sufficiently. Hillary enjoys the appliance category as it is a very niche, and the relationships that she's made in this industry. Helping builders and meeting new clients and industry partners has become a reason why Hillary plans to keep continuing her plans to grow in the appliance industry.



**Chadney Alvarez-**  
*chadney@bathsofamerica.com*

Chadney has been in plumbing and hardware sales for 25 years now. Starting as a bookkeeper at EXPO Design Center at age 18, she has developed herself into one of the leading salespersons in the plumbing and hardware industry. Developing customer relationships is very important to Chadney and a key reason why she's been very successful in maintaining her business. Starting from the beginning, when plans are just on paper, making selections, and seeing the final projects come to fruition a year or so later makes me love what I do.

## Customer Reviews

**Brian Phillips - Cayson Graye/Alair Homes**

As a custom home builder, we have specific needs when it comes to appliances for our projects. Jeff and his team offer not only the selection we need for our clients, but also the expertise, competitive pricing and professional installs. Baths of America is a vendor with whom we are very proud to partner.

**Rosenberg + Gibson Designs**

After having a horrible experience at another appliance dealer, we Baths of America has been Rosenberg + Gibson Design's go to bath and kitchen gallery since 2018. They offer an extensive range of top-tier products, all conveniently available under one roof, which makes the purchasing process seamless. But their best asset is the exceptional customer service experience. Their entire team is knowledgeable and friendly. It's always a pleasure to work together on design projects and we are grateful to have them as an industry partner.

**Missy Stewart Designs**

Baths of America is a key partner for sourcing plumbing, appliances, and hardware for my interior design company. Working with Baths of America has been an advantageous experience, thanks to their exquisite showroom and a team of knowledgeable staff dedicated to providing top-notch service. The showroom at Baths of America is nothing short of inspiring, showcasing a diverse range of high-quality products that align perfectly with my projects' aesthetic and functional requirements. The variety and sophistication of their offerings have significantly contributed to the success of my interior design ventures, allowing me to curate spaces that exceed my client's expectations.

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