

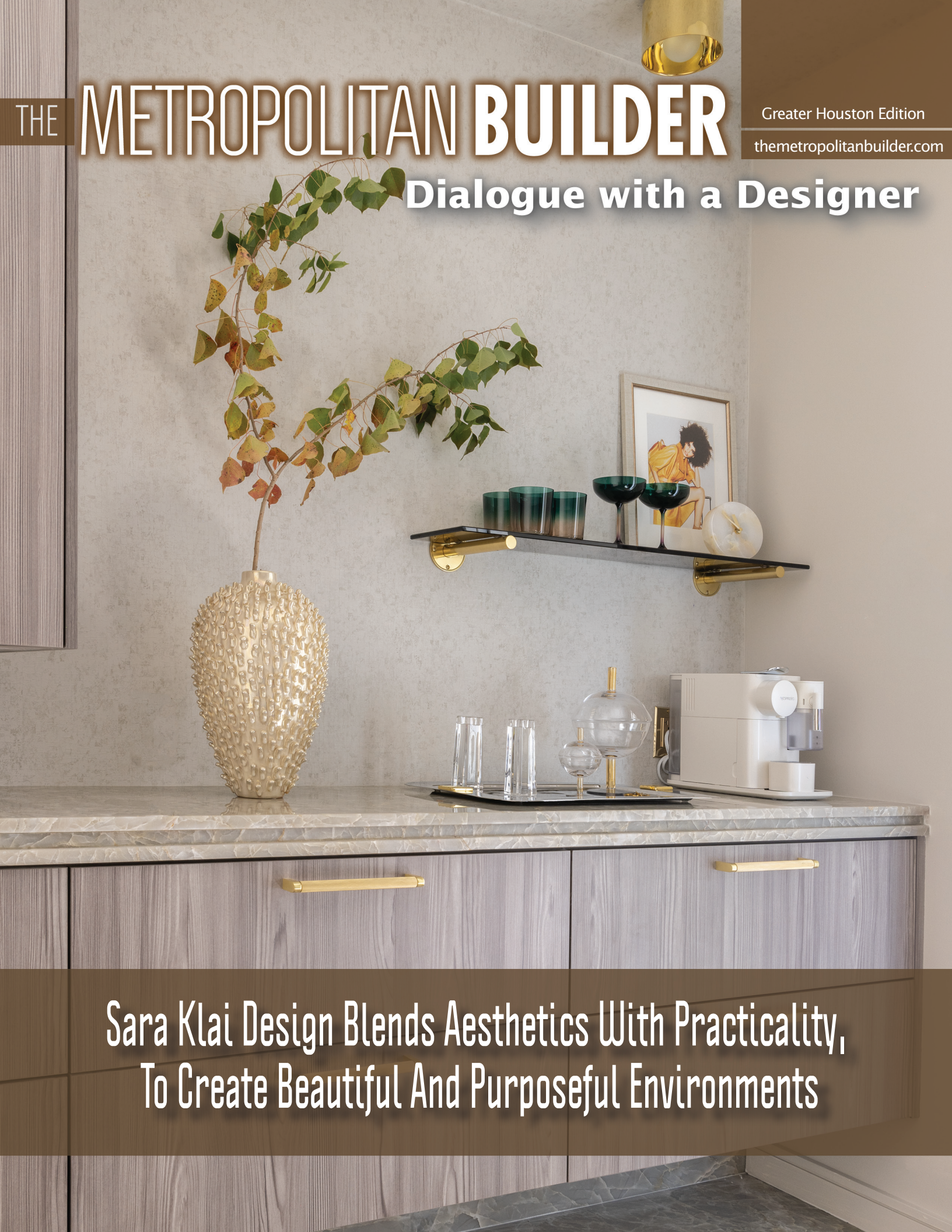
THE

# METROPOLITAN BUILDER

Greater Houston Edition

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## Dialogue with a Designer



Sara Klai Design Blends Aesthetics With Practicality,  
To Create Beautiful And Purposeful Environments





# Dialogue with a Designer

## Sara Klai

*Welcome to The Metropolitan Builder, Houston's premier trade publication, dedicated to showcasing the finest building professionals in the industry. Each professional featured has been personally referred by trusted vendors and subcontractors who collaborate with them, selected for their unmatched talent and unwavering integrity.*

*As Houston's leading resource for consumers looking to build, buy, or remodel, we provide a window into the exceptional craftsmanship, innovative designs, and unparalleled quality that define our city's top builders. Let The Metropolitan Builder inspire your next home or renovation project and connect you with the experts who can make your vision a reality.*

*This month THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER (TMB) speaks with Sara Klai, Founder / Director of Sara Klai Design an interior architecture practice that services the residential, commercial, hospitality and work-space sectors.*

**TMB:** What motivated you to go into the interior design field?

**SARA KLA:** My motivation to enter the interior design field stems from my deep passion for architecture and

design as a whole. From an early stage, I was fascinated by how spaces influence our emotions, behaviors, and overall experiences. My background in architecture gave me a strong foundation in structure and form, but interior design allowed me to take it a step further—shaping not just the framework of a space but also its atmosphere, functionality, and material expression. The ability to blend aesthetics with practicality, to create environments that are both beautiful and purposeful, is what truly drives me. Seeing a design come to life and knowing that it enhances the way people live, work, and interact makes every project incredibly rewarding.

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

**SARA KLA:** Over the years interior design has increased its priority in sustainability, focusing on using eco-friendly materials. Preferences will continue to change and cycle out styles throughout the years, so while it is important to stay “with the times” I believe the most important thing you can do in designing and remodeling is to maintain a focus on timeless designs that can withstand the trends.

**TMB:** How can an experienced interior designer help a custom home builder or a remodeling contractor with their





building or remodeling projects?

**SARA KLAI:** An experienced interior designer can significantly enhance a custom home builder or remodeling contractor's projects by ensuring a cohesive blend of functionality and aesthetics. By collaborating early in the process, they help refine architectural plans, optimize space planning, and select high-quality materials that align with the project's style and budget. Their expertise streamlines decision-making for clients, reducing delays and costly changes while ensuring design consistency. Interior designers also enhance communication between the builder and homeowner, preventing misinterpretations and design conflicts. Additionally, they assist in coordinating finishes, lighting, and furnishings, ultimately elevating the project's overall appeal and marketability. Their involvement leads to a smoother workflow, a more polished final product, and increased client satisfaction.

**TMB:** What sets you apart from other designers

**SARA KLAI:** What sets me apart from other designers is my deep-rooted European influences, cultivated through my experiences working abroad. This exposure has given me a refined appreciation for timeless elegance, craftsmanship, and the balance between form and function, which I seamlessly integrate into your designs. My background as an architect further distinguishes the approach, allowing me to see beyond surface aesthetics and consider the spatial flow, structural integrity, and technical aspects of a project. This unique combination enables me to create interiors that

are not only visually stunning but also highly functional, harmonious, and deeply rooted in architectural principles. My designs reflect a sophisticated global sensibility, blending innovation with classic European artistry to craft spaces that feel both luxurious and thoughtfully designed.

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

**SARA KLAI:** Every interior design project comes with its own unique challenges, making each job a test of creativity, adaptability, and problem-solving. Budget constraints require careful planning to achieve high-quality results without overspending, while indecisive clients demand patience and strong communication to help them confidently make choices that align with their vision. Time management is equally critical, as balancing deadlines with the coordination of contractors, suppliers, and artisans ensures a smooth workflow. Rather than having a single "most challenging" project, every job presents its own complexities, requiring a tailored approach to overcome obstacles. It's this constant problem-solving and refinement that makes each project both demanding and rewarding.

**TMB:** How do you begin the material selection process when working with builders and remodelers' clients?

**SARA KLAI:** The material selection process begins with understanding the project's overall vision, budget, and functional needs by collaborating closely with the builder, remodeler, and client. I start by reviewing architectural



plans and design concepts to ensure that materials align with the space's structural and aesthetic requirements. Next, I curate a selection of finishes—including flooring, cabinetry, countertops, fixtures, and lighting—that complement the design style while considering durability, maintenance, and budget constraints. I guide clients through the decision-making process, presenting options in an organized manner to prevent overwhelm and ensure cohesive selections. Coordination with builders and remodelers is essential to confirm material availability, lead times, and installation requirements, ensuring a seamless workflow and minimizing delays. This structured approach results in a well-executed design that balances beauty, functionality, and practicality.

**TMB:** What are some common mistakes made by builders and homeowners?

**SARA KLAI:** One common mistake builders and homeowners make is overlooking the importance of early collaboration with an interior designer, leading to design inconsistencies or costly changes later in the process. Homeowners often prioritize aesthetics over functionality, selecting trendy materials without considering durability, maintenance, or practicality for their lifestyle. Budget mismanagement is another frequent issue, whether by underestimating costs, splurging on the wrong elements, or failing to allocate funds for unexpected expenses. Builders, on the other hand, sometimes rush through the finishing details, treating them as secondary rather than integral to the overall design. Poor space planning, inadequate lighting, and ignoring long-term needs can also compromise the final result. The key to avoiding these mistakes is clear communication, thorough planning, and a holistic approach that balances structure, function, and design from the start.

**TMB:** Speaking about staying current, how do you keep

yourself up to date with all the design trends happening in the industry today?

**SARA KLAI:** Staying current with design trends is essential, but I also believe in balancing trends with timeless design principles. I keep myself updated by regularly attending industry design expos, and conferences, where I can see firsthand the latest innovations in materials, furnishings, and technology. I also follow top European and global design publications, such as Elle Decor, Architectural Digest, and Dezeen, to gain insight into emerging styles and shifts in consumer preferences. Networking with fellow designers, architects, and artisans allows me to exchange ideas and stay informed about evolving trends. Additionally, I explore international markets and visit showrooms to experience new products in person. While I stay aware of trends, I always approach them with a discerning eye, ensuring that my designs remain sophisticated, functional, and timeless rather than overly trend-driven. I also find inspiration in art and fashion design.

**TMB:** What is your favorite design style?

**SARA KLAI:** My favorite design style is minimalism, both in design and architecture, because of its emphasis on simplicity, functionality, and clean aesthetics. I appreciate how minimalism strips away excess, allowing materials, textures, and spatial relationships to take center stage. Thoughtful use of light, neutral color palettes, and high-quality materials create a sense of harmony and sophistication. In architecture, minimalism promotes open, uncluttered spaces that feel both serene and purposeful, emphasizing the beauty of form and structure. Rather than feeling cold or stark, a well-executed minimalist design exudes warmth and elegance through careful attention to proportion, craftsmanship, and subtle details. For me, minimalism is not just about aesthetics—it's about creating





spaces that enhance well-being and timeless appeal.

**TMB:** What fascinates you and how have you incorporated that into your designs?

**SARA KLAI:** What fascinates me most about design is the power of materiality—allowing materials and textures to speak for themselves without excessive ornamentation. I believe that every material has an inherent beauty, whether it's the natural grain of wood, the raw elegance of stone, or the subtle variations in handmade ceramics. By focusing on high-quality materials and their tactile qualities, I create spaces that feel authentic, timeless, and rich in character. Texture plays a crucial role in adding depth and warmth, making a minimalist design feel inviting rather than stark. Instead of overpowering a space with unnecessary details, I let the materials take center stage, celebrating their natural imperfections and unique qualities. This approach results in interiors that are both visually striking and deeply connected to the senses.

**TMB:** How would you characterize your personal style?

**SARA KLAI:** My personal style is defined by a strong emphasis on space utilization and functionality, ensuring that every element in a design serves a purpose while maintaining aesthetic harmony. I believe that a well-designed space should feel effortless, where form follows function, and nothing is superfluous. I carefully consider flow, proportion, and the relationship between materials to create interiors that are both visually appealing and highly practical. Clean lines, thoughtful layouts, and intentional negative space allow for a sense of openness and clarity, enhancing both comfort and usability. Rather than designing purely for trends, I focus on creating spaces that are timeless, efficient, and adaptable to the way people truly live and interact within them.

**TMB:** What would be your recommendation for “What

to do first” in a decorating project when working with the builders and/or homeowners?

**SARA KLAI:** The first step in any decorating project when working with builders and homeowners is to establish a clear design direction by defining the project's vision, goals, and functional needs. This involves in-depth discussions with the homeowner to understand their lifestyle, aesthetic preferences, and practical requirements, while also collaborating with the builder to assess architectural constraints and construction timelines. Creating a mood board or design concept early on helps set a cohesive style, guiding material selections, color schemes, and furnishings. It's also crucial to align the decorating plan with the overall budget to ensure feasibility. Once the foundational elements—such as flooring, cabinetry, and built-in features—are determined, the focus can shift toward selecting furnishings, lighting, and accessories that complement the space. Starting with a well-defined concept ensures a smooth process and a harmonious final result.

**TMB:** Any last thoughts, comments?

**SARA KLAI:** Architecture, interior design, and design as a whole are more than just a profession for me—they are my true passion. I find immense joy in the creative process, from conceptualizing spaces to selecting materials and refining details that bring a vision to life. The ability to shape environments that enhance people's experiences and well-being is deeply fulfilling. While making a living from what I love is a privilege, the truth is that I would do it purely for the passion of the craft. Design is not just about aesthetics; it's about problem-solving, storytelling, and creating meaningful spaces. Every project is an opportunity to learn, push boundaries, and leave a lasting impact, which is what keeps me inspired every day.



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