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The Past Is The Future

Dialogue with a Designer
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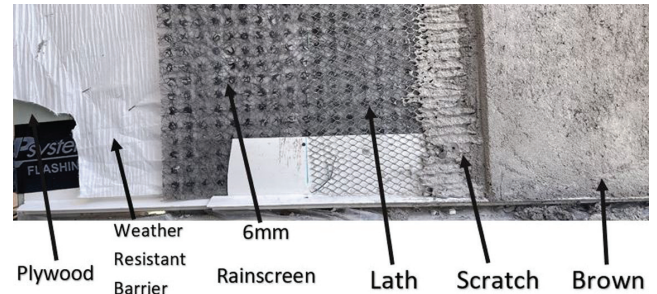
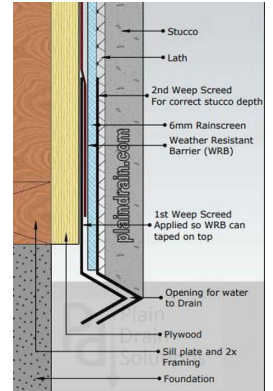
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PUBLISHER'S *note*



Giselle Bernard,
Publisher

In this issue, we are proud to spotlight three standout professionals who are each making a powerful impact in Houston's homebuilding and design community.

Spencer Sledge of Sledge Custom Homes exemplifies the modern-day builder: communicative, transparent, and deeply committed to client satisfaction. With a hands-on approach, Spencer ensures every project—whether a custom build or cosmetic remodel—runs with clarity, honesty, and attention to detail.

Michael Wimberly of Framestead brings a dynamic vision for the future by returning to his roots. As he expands into the Bryan-College Station market, Michael combines custom building with

development and property management, all while staying rooted in the craftsmanship and community care that define his company.

Melanie Ballard, founder of Ballard Design Studio, rounds out this issue with a refined, client-centered approach to residential interiors. Her blend of creativity and discipline has resulted in spaces that not only elevate aesthetics but also transform the way clients live and feel in their homes.

Together, these professionals are shaping more than spaces—they're shaping experiences. We hope their stories inspire you as much as they've inspired us.

—The Metropolitan Builder Team

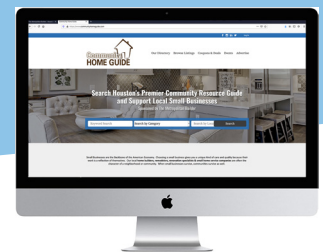
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THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

Let's Talk: Communication Makes Building Process Transparent to Sledge Custom Home Clients



By Kathy Bowen Stolz

Spencer Sledge is not just a builder but also a communicator. As owner of Sledge Custom Homes, he makes 40 to 50 phone calls and sends or receives 150 text messages daily to keep his clients informed of the progress on their homes. That's in addition to visiting each job site in the morning and end of the day to connect with his construction manager and subcontractors.

Why? Communication is important when creating trusting relationships with his clients, he said. He wants them to be tuned in to each step of the construction process to help manage their expectations of staying on schedule and on budget. He prefers to build under a cost + contract model because he thinks it provides the most bang for the client's

buck. And because he dislikes change orders, he prefers to create an all-encompassing budget at the beginning of a project.

"I want the client to be comfortable with the project, to be as much a part of the project as they want to be." For some clients, they need full-service design while others are comfortable making their own selections. He enjoys working with different families to meet their needs because each family is different. He also enjoys getting to know the clients as people.

Almost all of his clients gravitate to him through referrals because they're attracted to the company's "personality," he explained.



He describes the company's personality as honest with integrity, refusing to sacrifice quality while building lasting relationships. The company's personality is Sledge's personality, it's safe to say. "I don't have anything except my reputation," he stated.

After three years in business, most of Sledge Custom Homes' work is in Oak Forest, where Spencer and his family live, and the Heights, with the surrounding neighborhoods of West University, Memorial and Spring Branch being frequent job sites. However, Sledge said he is willing to work anywhere in Houston if it's the right project.

Much of the work is for new homeowners who are buying an existing home and want to have it fully updated before they move in. With a majority of these homes built between 2000 and 2015, Sledge finds the mechanicals are up to code and the house's "bones" are in good condition. He is frequently hired to do cosmetics work, such as new cabinetry, new flooring and new paint.

"We've thrived in doing really quick turnarounds for major cosmetic remodels, while being able to stay within the original budget," he explained.

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The company additionally does a lot of bathroom and kitchen remodels, starting in the \$10,000 range. Sledge is also building a \$1.8 million speculative home, with eight projects ongoing at this time.

He thinks a key to his success is being available for a wide range of projects, which also include remodels, renovations and additions. He finds it necessary to work with a large group of contractors to stay flexible with the variety of projects he handles. “I like building a team of contractors who know how to work together.”

He said he enjoys being a problem solver who works really

well under pressure. And “it’s almost guaranteed there’s a new problem every day! I look at it as a challenge, not a problem. I’ve learned that if I put off a problem, it’s compounds itself very quickly.”

When he started in building, his plan was to construct four custom and three speculative homes each year, but he said the current higher interest rates are causing families to remodel instead of build. He’s okay with this adjustment to his business plan, although he anticipates expanding to the \$1.7 - \$3.5 million price point of custom and spec homes in the next few years, if only because the neighborhoods where he works have that price point.



All the “moving parts” of building appeal to him—the constant problem-solving, coordination, and progress. He enjoys traveling to job sites across Houston and values the flexibility that comes with running his own business, especially now that he has a growing family. His wife, a former teacher, has transitioned into a dual role as a mortgage loan officer and real estate agent. Together, they are raising three children.

As owner, Spencer handles sales and client relations in addition to helping with scheduling. A contracted construction manager hires the subcontractors and works with scheduling. His office manager deals with permitting, payroll and material ordering. He plans to add a job site

manager in the next year to allow him more time to grow the business, but in the long term he hopes to build a bigger team of 10 employees who can manage 20 custom projects at a time.

For more information about Sledge Custom Homes

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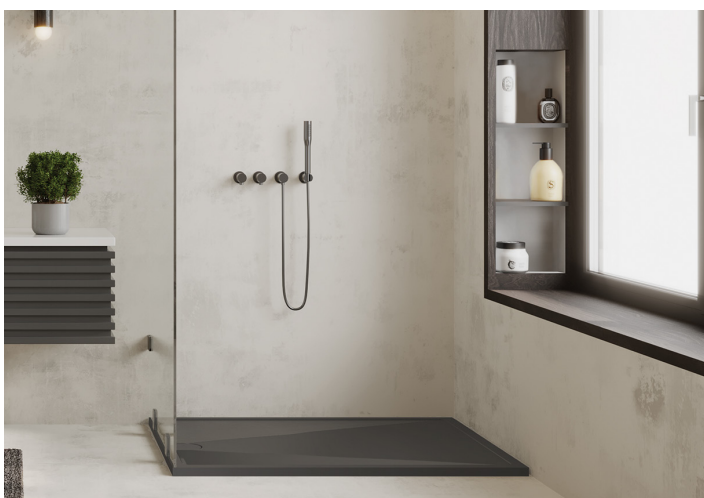
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Builder-Inspired Shower Bases Are A Leading Product Solution For Today's Demanding Baths

By Linda Jennings

Affordable and high-quality products are the most sought-after amenities for builders and remodelers in today's homes. Products crafted from durable materials that not only provide a functional foundation for the kitchen and bath but add a touch of style to the spaces. From seamless zone shower bases to sinks that glisten in

gold, here are the most exciting new products designed specifically for the luxury metropolitan builder market. Whether renovating an existing dwelling or for new construction build, these products are wonderfully modern, functional and will become the wow fixture of your project.



The Lado Shower Base from MTI Bath's Acquabella Collection

Innovative Alternative To Tile

Mineral Composite Shower Bases from MTI Bath's Acquabella Collection are an innovative shower solution for the builder market. Affordable, high quality, ready to ship and easier to maintain than tile and grout. The Lado Shower Bases, shown here feature a unique crescent-shaped drain, and are offered in four sizes, ensuring that there's a perfect fit for every bathroom. They are made exclusively in mineral composite and feature the brand's Lastra 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. Thanks to their one-piece solid construction, the Lado Shower Bases are like one large slab of tile. The non-porous, shock-resistant surface is UV and stain-resistant, ensuring durability and low maintenance. The low-profile, multiple-threshold design allows for the installation of glass enclosures on up

to three sides, and these bases can be recessed into the floor for a seamless, zero-barrier installation, making entrance and exit easier.

Seamless Sink For A Modern Aesthetic

The new Orion countertop sink from Quare Design offers a distinctive elegant style that creates a modern aesthetic. Featuring a unique triangular drain cover with rounded corners, the Orion collection products are made in QUARE's exclusive mineral composite material, offering every possible color, and products in made-to-measure sizes, with large dimensions available.

Made from a single piece of the brand's signature QUAREX material, it is offered in smooth texture. A coordinating Orion shower base offered in a Street texture,



Orion Countertop Sink by Quare Design

combines aesthetics and safety thanks to its anti-slip and anti-bacterial properties, is also available. Discover more at quaredesign.us.

Industrial Chic Hardware

Hapny Hardware introduced a ninth hardware collection aptly named Knurled. This pull features an elegant cylindrical bar with a diamond knurled detail around the bottom third of the stems that is as smooth to the touch as it is easy on the eyes.

The complementary knob features a flat round face and cylindrical stem with matching diamond knurled detailing. The Knurled collection has a cabinet knob, three cabinet pull sizes, and two appliance pull sizes across four finishes - Polished Nickel, Satin Brass, Satin Nickel, and our new Graphite finish. An Aged Brass finish will be coming later this year. See the entire color collection of modern hardware at hapnyhardware.com.



The Knurled Hardware Collection from Hapny Hardware

Two Toned Kitchen Faucet

Lenova recently unveiled a luxurious new edition to their



Lenova's new K224 Kitchen Faucet

New Design Edition Kitchen Faucet Collection with the launch of K224. Offered in a Matte Black finish combined with the warm allure of Brushed Bronze, it creates a stunning and glamorous look that is ideal for today's upscale kitchens. Lenova combines form and function to create the new K224, a focal-point faucet that is as beautiful as it is efficient, with a two-function spray head and a magnetic docking system providing effortless use. Crafted of the finest type 304 stainless steel with zero lead content for maximum durability and manufactured with

Continued on page 10

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superior ceramic cartridges for drip-free performance. Lenova incorporates proprietary PVD processing into its manufacturing system to create a matte finish that is amazingly durable and easy to maintain. Explore lenovagroup.com for more information on the new faucet collection.



Bello USA's Gatsby Vanity

Lavish Looking Vanity

The new Gatsby collection of vanities from Bello invites you to indulge in the elegance and charm reminiscent of

the Great Gatsby himself, while embodying the clean, sophisticated lines celebrated in mid century modern design. Crafted with meticulous attention to detail, the gold accents adding a touch of opulence to every bathroom setting Gatsby captivates with its bold juxtaposition of either black or white hues. This harmonious blend creates a timeless elegance that complements any interior style from classic to contemporary. It comes fully assembled and includes an engineered marble top with pre-drilled holes for a faucet, cUPC certified ceramic sink, drawer knobs, and removable drawer organizer. Discover the Gatsby Vanity collection at bellousa.com.



The Calypso in Gold by London Basin Company

Echoes Of The Ocean

The new Calypso from London Basin Company is an undermount basin inspired by the undulating texture found on seashells and the wave-sculpted ripples in the sand. Available in two contrasting styles, classic White and glittering Gold, the Calypso can add a subtle level of detail and texture or make a bold, glamorous statement. Each basin is crafted from the finest porcelain and inspected by hand, ensuring they deliver beauty that lasts. The Calypso is designed to fit London Basin Company's undermount vanities for a complete and personalised bathroom setup. Shown is the gleaming Calypso Gold featuring a shimmering gold finish that exudes glamour and sophistication. Visit londonbasincompany.com to see more of the new collection.

*To find out more about the brands featured here
visit their websites at:*

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The Power of Builder-Designer Partnerships:

How Teaming Up Enhances Value and Streamlines the Process

In custom home construction, one of the most effective yet often underutilized strategies for success is the collaboration between builders and interior designers. When these two professionals work as a cohesive team from the start of a project, the results speak for themselves: smoother workflows, fewer costly mistakes, and homes that exceed client expectations in both form and function.

This partnership goes far beyond aesthetics. It brings added value to the construction process by minimizing delays, reducing client overwhelm, and delivering a higher-quality product. Here's how builder-designer partnerships elevate every stage of the build—and how to visually capture that synergy for marketing impact.



1. Unified Vision = Cohesive Design

When builders and designers align early in the planning process, they create a shared vision that informs every decision—from spatial layout to lighting placement and final finishes. Instead of scrambling to fit design concepts into a completed structure, the design is woven into the build itself. The result is a more intentional, seamless home that feels balanced and thoughtfully curated.

2. Fewer Delays and Change Orders

Designers are skilled at helping clients make confident choices upfront. This guidance drastically reduces last-minute changes, which are a common cause of budget overages and construction delays. Builders benefit by staying on schedule, while clients enjoy a more predictable and stress-free process.

3. Elevated Home Value and Livability

Designers think about how a space will actually be lived in. Their attention to lighting, furniture placement, textures, and color creates homes that not only look beautiful but function beautifully. Builders who embrace design collaboration consistently deliver homes that are more livable, more desirable, and more marketable.

4. A Smoother Client Experience

Custom home projects can be overwhelming for clients,

especially when faced with hundreds of decisions and a sea of unfamiliar terminology. Designers act as interpreters and advisors, helping clients navigate selections while the builder keeps the project on track. This combined support system creates a more enjoyable and confidence-boosting experience for the homeowner.

5. Stronger Brand and Differentiation

Builders who showcase a strong relationship with a talented designer elevate their brand. It signals attention to detail, a client-first approach, and a commitment to delivering complete, high-end results. In a competitive market, this kind of collaboration sets builders apart and attracts more discerning clients.

In Conclusion

Great homes aren't built in silos—they're built through collaboration. Builder-designer partnerships create stronger processes, better client relationships, and superior end results. If you're a builder, bringing a trusted designer into your process could be one of the best business decisions you make. And for designers, partnering with a quality builder ensures your vision is executed exactly as intended.

Together, you don't just build houses—you craft homes that stand out, function beautifully, and leave lasting impressions.



For Framestead, The Past Is The Future

By Kathy Bowen Stolz

For Framestead's Michael Wimberly, his future is in his past.

Wimberly, who graduated from Texas A&M with a B.S. in construction science, is making a return to the Bryan-College Station (B-CS) community. Wimberly's sees B-CS as the best place to grow Framestead, his custom home and remodeling company and build on property acquisition, development and management components.

A Kingwood native, Wimberly returned to his hometown to start Framestead in 2017 after working hands-on for other contractors and then owning and selling other construction businesses. The following year he started Truwin, an exteriors company focusing on replacement windows/doors/siding and roofs. He's expanded both businesses to become a major contractor in the North Houston area.

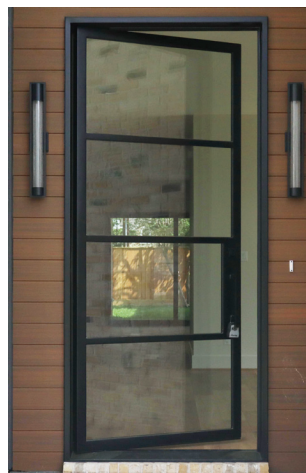
Now, Wimberly has set sights on helping to meet the demand for housing in the booming B-CS market where the population is expected to double in the next 25 years,

thanks to the ever-growing Texas A&M University and business growth from the manufacturing, technology and healthcare sectors. "We see a huge demand for residential and commercial development."

In addition to expanding Framestead's custom home and remodeling services, Wimberly's B-CS focus will be on acquiring and managing a branded portfolio of short-term and long-term rental properties. Furthermore, he sees an opportunity to develop strategic tracks of land that he calls "micro developments," designed for high density student housing and other small developments suited for corporate housing.

Wimberly is offering limited partnerships to international and domestic investors as Framestead builds a portfolio of homes and multi-family units that will be leased as student and executive rentals and also to include property management services. "As a home builder/remodeler, we

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offer our partnership a reduced risk profile and a lower cost structure for property management and maintenance,” said Mike Labbe, a partner in Truwin and general manager in charge of operations and sales for Framestead.

Having recently picked up a large remodeling project and acquired/remodeled/leased of a couple short-term rental properties, Labbe said that “Framestead is successfully applying our construction and management skillsets to add value to the B-CS area.” Wimberly added, “With the right team and partnerships in place we can continue to grow Framestead beyond the B-CS area into greater Texas.”

Nature has had a major impact on Framstead’s growth. Wimberly founded Framestead Enterprises LP in March 2017, well-timed in hindsight when the company was able ultimately to help 35 families in the Kingwood area recover after Hurricane Harvey struck in four months later. That experience with mitigation and restoration came in handy in May 2019 when Kingwood was hit again with flooding. Framestead stepped up and helped the Elm Grove subdivision residents with their recovery. Then again during the Great Freeze of February 2021, Framestead came to the aid of Houston residents to help them rebuild.

Wimberly met his Truwin partner Mike Labbe during

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Jeff Steiner -

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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.

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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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the Hurricane Harvey time period where the two hit it off and Labbe switched his career from the oil and gas industry to construction. Now the two work together to continuously improve the existing construction companies and collaborate on growth strategies.

Framestead handles about 15-20 projects at a time, with about 90 percent of them as remodeling projects that typically range from \$100,00-\$150,000. The remaining 10 percent are new custom home construction projects. “We are a remodeler first that builds custom homes, not the other way around,” Wimberly noted. Most of their new construction projects are a result of client referrals from previous remodeling work.

“We’ve grown and improved by listening to our clients – delivering what they want and more. Every project starts with pen, paper and a vision. We ask how they live. We consider how the project will improve their lives. Every space is thought through with the client in mind,” Labbe said. “We recommend but don’t push product lines with our selections. And we’re very transparent with our pricing. Details matter. We also provide online project tracking to ensure a five-star customer experience.”

Framestead produces 3-D renderings with construction ready elevations and an accompanying selection packet that the clients must approve before a project begins. “Our process, details and transparency are big differentiators from our competitors,” Labbe stated. “We use high-grade construction materials, best practices, and we treat every build/remodel as if it were our own home.”

Both men said that it’s been a goal to create a Framestead ‘brand’ of a high level of customization and quality that is known for attention to detail and a full turnkey operation. Labbe and Wimberly say they’re reaching that branding goal because some realtors and homeowners are listing their properties as Framestead built or Framestead remodeled. Now they’re excited to take the Framestead brand to B-CS and beyond.



To contact Framestead,
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Dialogue with a Designer

Melanie Ballard | H. James Design



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
speaks with Melanie Ballard

Melanie Ballard, known professionally as Mel Ballard, is the founder and principal designer of H. James Design, a Houston-based studio known for creating timeless,

livable interiors that balance elegance with everyday function. After nearly a decade in real estate and project management, Melanie pursued her passion for design, earning her CIDA-accredited degree in Interior Design. Her background gives her a unique advantage—combining creative vision with an innate understanding of construction and workflow. Specializing in high-end residential new builds and full-home renovations, Melanie collaborates closely with homeowners and builders to deliver designs that are both refined and remarkably personal. Her work is rooted in collaboration, thoughtful detail, and a deep respect for craftsmanship.

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

I bring structure to the chaos, but it's not just me—it's the process we've built. At H. James Design Co., we guide

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clients through selections efficiently, make decisions stick, and translate every design choice into clean, builder-ready documentation. Fewer delays, fewer change orders, happier clients. That's our lane, and we run it tight.

Q: What sets you apart from other designers?

I bring both vision and execution. My background in real estate and project management gives me a unique understanding of how design impacts the build. But it's not just about me—it's about how we deliver. Our process is clear, decisive, and built to support both the client and the contractor from start to finish.

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

I start with a structured process. We break the home down by room, then organize selections by trade, aligned with the construction timeline. It keeps decisions focused and timely, avoids backtracking, and gives the builder clear documentation to move forward with confidence. Behind the scenes, I manage it all through a detailed internal system—so nothing slips, and no one is left guessing.

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

One of the biggest mistakes is waiting too long to bring in a designer. By the time we're called, key decisions have already been made—or missed—which can lead to costly revisions, delays, and a disjointed design. At H. James, we're brought in early to align the vision, guide selections, and ensure every decision supports both the build and the client. It's not just about aesthetics—it's about creating clarity and momentum from the start.

Q: What would be your recommendation for "what to do first" in a decorating project when working with builders and/or homeowners?

Start with clarity. Before selecting a single item, we work

Continued on page 20



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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.





Continued from page 19

with the client to define the vision—how they want the space to feel, function, and flow. That clarity becomes the filter for every decision that follows. It keeps the process focused, avoids design fatigue, and ensures the final result feels intentional and cohesive.

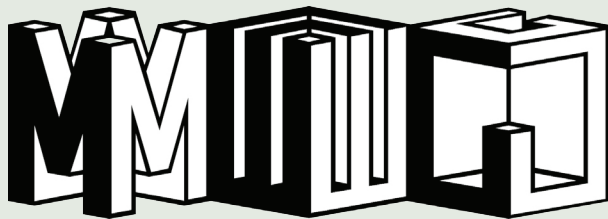
Q: How has the field of interior design changed since you graduated?

I graduated in late 2019—right before the world changed. The shift that followed pushed design to the forefront of how people live and build. Clients started prioritizing function, flow, and long-term livability. Builders began leaning more on designers as strategic partners, not just finish selectors. I embraced that shift early, building a process focused on clarity, collaboration, and high-level design throughout the construction timeline.

Mel Ballard | Founder & Principal
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