

# THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

Greater Houston Edition

[themetropolitanbuilder.com](http://themetropolitanbuilder.com)

## Dialogue with a Designer



H·JAMES DESIGN

Melanie Ballard | H. James Design



# 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 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 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

H. James Design

- Houston, TX
- [melanie.ballard@hjamessdesign.com](mailto:melanie.ballard@hjamessdesign.com)
- [hjamessdesign.com](http://hjamessdesign.com)
- Instagram: @hjamessdesign

