

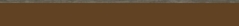
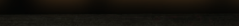
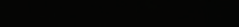
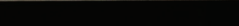
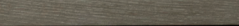
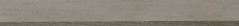
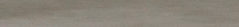
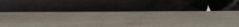
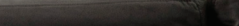
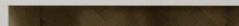
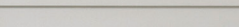
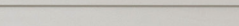
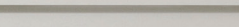
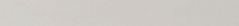
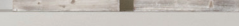
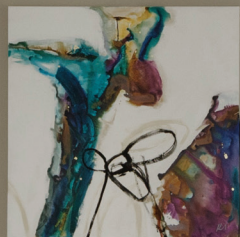
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Dialogue with a Designer
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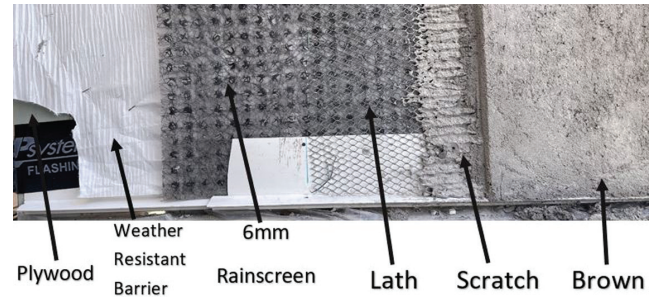
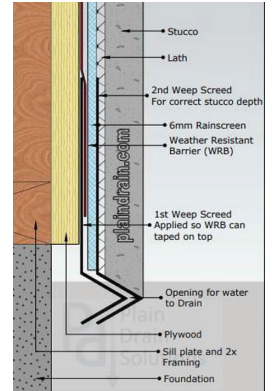
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www.themetropolitanbuilder.com

Printed in the USA
by Seaway Printing

The Metropolitan Builder is a local trade publication published monthly in an informative and positive manner. Copies are mailed, free of charge, to building professionals throughout the greater Houston area. The opinions and facts expressed in The Metropolitan Builder magazine are those of the authors or columnist and do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher, nor do they constitute an endorsement of products or services herein. The Metropolitan Builder strives to ensure the accuracy of the magazine's contents. However, should inaccuracies or omissions occur, we do not assume responsibility. The Metropolitan Builder reserves the right to refuse any advertisement. This publication may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, without the expressed prior written permission of the publisher.

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PUBLISHER'S *note*



Giselle Bernard,
Publisher

In this issue of The Metropolitan Builder, we are proud to spotlight three exceptional professionals whose dedication to craft, client, and community continues to shape Houston's custom homebuilding and design landscape.

First, we feature Trent Elliott Homes, where quality isn't just a talking point—it's a legacy built one home at a time. With roots in construction that go back decades, Trent Elliott brings a hands-on understanding of how structure and design work in harmony. From his early days on a framing crew to the leadership of his namesake company, Trent has built a reputation for strength, beauty, and unwavering integrity in every project.

Next, we turn our attention to Morning Star Builders, led by Blake Cummins and Wes Christian, whose unique approach to relationship-building is redefining the path to custom home success. Whether on the golf course, over dinner,

or during shared outdoor adventures, their personal investment in their clients leads to more than beautiful homes—it leads to lasting partnerships. Their client-first mindset and attention to personality fit make each homebuilding journey as enjoyable as it is rewarding.

Finally, we highlight Kirby and Z Interior Design, where creativity meets purpose. Founded by a mother with a dream to balance passion and parenthood, the firm brings warmth, personalization, and practicality to every space. Her story is one of heart, vision, and empowerment testament to the beauty that comes from designing a life and a business on your own terms.

These professionals each bring something rare to the table—authenticity, excellence, and a commitment to delivering more than just results. They deliver experiences.

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THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER



Relationships Matter to Morning Star Builders

By Kathy Bowen Stolz

Success for the Morning Star Builders team boils down to one thing – relationships.

One type of relationships is those that Blake Cummins, CEO, and Wes Christian, COO, develop with members of several country clubs that often lead to custom home contracts on the northwest side of Houston (Tomball, The Woodlands, Chapel Hill and Cypress).

“We have networked our way up with many members of country clubs. About 65 percent of our clients are golfers, while the others are hunters. We take clients out to dinner, as well as on fishing and hunting trips to build those relationships,” Cummins said.

“I think the reason people want to work with us is because our demeanor and mindset are focused on our client’s vision. Because we build in such tight circles, it’s important that we have a match of personalities with our clients. Do they want to be in the room with us? Do we want to be in the room with them? After all, it may be two or three years, give or take, from contract to completion.”

“As for operations, we have a great system of processes and amazing attention to detail. Referrals are what help our business grow. Simply put, we want happy clients,” according to Wes.

Most of their clients are established professionals and have the resources to do whatever they want when building a



luxury custom home. They want a seamless experience. “They have high expectations. They hire us so they don’t have to think about every step of the way,” Blake noted. “Exceeding client expectations over a three-year period is the hard part. Quality is the minimum expectation.”

Wes added, “We want our clients to have a wonderful experience. There are a lot of moving parts in building a custom home.”

The process begins by asking a lot of questions when the prospective client meets with Morning Star’s partners. “We try to ask really good questions that the clients may have not even thought of. Our sole focus is on that client. We listen very intently, asking clarifying questions. We then match the client to the architect and designer. All of our clients are unique as are all of our homes,” Blake said.

“Our clients have been surrounded by a lot of ‘yes people’ as they built their businesses. Wes does a great job of directing our clients to a realistic expectation of their

vision. We believe clients deserve the truth, even when it’s not easy to hear. That’s what earns long-term trust. The right client appreciates that,” Blake explained.

Communication is paramount to a successful project. The partners meet with their clients on a regular basis as well as use BuilderTrend software to keep them updated.

Blake said, “We tailor our communications to best serve our clients – texting, email, etc. We believe in thorough documentation when it comes to capturing the details. Our typical client is a high performer in their realm, and over-communication is expected. Our job is to stay ahead of our clients throughout the process and not be reactionary.”

The “sweet spot” for Morning Star Builders is a home in the \$4-8 million range plus the lot, although most of its clients already have purchased the land. The partners have built on lots as well as family estate properties of more than 100 acres. They manage 4-7 projects each year with

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the help of their three project managers and bookkeeper/office manager.

“Our projects start with a client that has a big vision. It’s our role to think outside the box,” stated Blake. Combined, he and Wes have more than 30 years’ experience in custom home building.

The relationship between Blake Cummins and Wes Christian as co-owners is also important to the company’s success; they finalized purchase of the company from Blake’s parents in January. “Wes and I handle different things based on our backgrounds and experience. I manage key areas of the business, including sales, marketing and finance, while Wes manages construction operations, budgets and financial oversight. We figured out how to work together and have fun doing so,” Blake commented.

Finally, the relationship with their trade partners is key

to the company’s success. “We’ve built strong, long-term relationships with trusted skilled trades, which is a direct result of the quality we consistently deliver,” Wes said.

Wes and Blake agree that Morning Star Builders’ success lies not only in their relationships but also in their dedication to delivering the highest quality service, paired with professionalism and execution, for clients who settle for nothing less than excellence.

**To contact Morning Star Builders
call 832-304-2310
or visit www.homesbymorningstar.com
Email for Blake Cummins – blake@msbcustom.com
Email for Wes Christian – wes@msbcustom.com**

**The office is located at
640 Baker Dr., Suite C, Tomball TX 77375.**

STYLE UP!

Builder Trends For Kitchen And Bath Spaces

Easy Design Updates For The Builder Market

By Linda Jennings

Trends come and go, but here are new product solutions that are sure to add timeless charm and lasting quality to your home design space. From zero-threshold shower bases to fabulous faucets, these minimalist touches and finely designed products prove that an investment in a

signature fitting or fixture will offer years of enjoyment. These products create a sense of well-being by adding the finishing touch that makes the most of your space - breathing new life into the existing home.



The Covered Bridge Cabinetry's Jefferson Collection

Custom Cabinet Solutions

Modern style meets farmhouse charm in this stunning and functional Covered Bridge Cabinetry kitchen. Featuring the Jefferson full-overlay Door Style with 3" rails and an 08 Edge detail, it is built with ultimate construction. Finished in Fresh Snow, it offers a crisp and timeless appeal, while the island showcases a unique design with X panels on the ends and shiplap wrapping three sides. The island, along with the shelves and hood moldings, is elegantly finished in Willow-stained Rustic Alder, which adds warmth and character. Designed with beauty and function in mind, the kitchen includes a fully equipped scullery, complete with a full-size sink, dishwasher, microwave, and abundant storage, keeping the main kitchen organized and clutter-free. The scullery complements on the island's Willow-stained Alder accents, tie the entire space together

for a sleek, sophisticated design. Discover the Jefferson collection of fine cabinetry at coveredbridgecabinetry.com.



Ruvati's Dual-Tier Pro Collection in Matte Gold

Functionally Fabulous

Metal finishes are an excellent way to enhance any kitchen's style. Ruvati's new Dual-Tier Pro workstation sink collection offers two exciting new finishes to amp up the style: a gorgeously refined Matte Gold and a Gunmetal Black that provides an edgy, modern aesthetic. New to the Dual-Tier Pro Collection are rounded interior corners for easy cleaning. The line uses Ruvati's ingenious two-track system with sliding accessories to expand the range of activities performed at the workstation sinks. The Dual-

Tier Pro Workstations are single-bowl designs in 33" and spacious 45" configurations, offering a generous 10" depth and a 1" slope on the basin floor for efficient water drainage. Constructed from durable 16 gauge premium T-304 stainless steel, the new line features a commercial-grade brushed finish that is both easy to clean and resistant to scratches, ensuring it remains stylish and functional for years. Discover more at ruavti.com.

Quick Installation Shower Bases

The Delgada mineral composite shower bases from MTI Baths' Acquabella Collection are an ideal choice for builders, remodelers, and consumers seeking a multi-generational retreat. Affordable, high-quality, ready-to-ship, and easier to maintain than tile and grout. Crafted from high-quality materials, these bases not only provide a functional foundation for the shower but also add accessibility to the space. The Shower Bases create a seamless shower zone in the bathroom. Their shallow threshold height allows them to be recessed in the floor for a zero-barrier installation. This design presents a clean aesthetic while facilitating easier entrance and exit. The Delgada Shower Bases are offered in many sizes with an end drain, ensuring a perfect fit for every bathroom. They are made exclusively in mineral composite and feature the brand's Pizarra Texture, which offers a non-slip surface. Choose from dramatic black and white to elegant shades of



Delgada Zero Threshold Shower Bases from Acquabella

sand, gray and charcoal. Shown is the Delgada shower base in Pizarra texture gray with a center drain. See the entire color collection at mtibaths.com.

Unmistakable English Character

This latest iteration of luxury plumbing fixtures by renowned British manufacturer Barber Wilsons & Company offers a style that is aged to perfection. The new Milne Lever Collection embodies the European approach to design with its subtle elegance, hints of industrial style and a minimalist charm. The new Milne Lever Collection is notable for its sleek lever handles, meticulously hand-

Continued on page 10

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Barber Wilsons' New Milne Lever Faucet

polished in the heart of England, so each part feels more comfortable to the touch and adds to the rich quality of the faucet. With its gracefully arched swan neck spout, the Milne Editions Lever is available in either a “short” 9-5/8” or “tall” 12-3/4” spout and comes with a pop-up waste. It is offered in a wide variety of ‘living’ and ‘established’ finishes, including their lovely Polished Nickel, shown here. Discover the entire Milne collection at barberwilsons.com.



The new compact 36-inch Gatsby Vanity from Bello

A New Era Of Luxury

The Gatsby Collection from Bello channels the timeless spirit of the Art Deco era through sculptural forms, architectural detailing, and fluted accents. Offered in a curated palette of rich Black or luminous White, each accented with brushed gold hardware, the vanity is available in four sizes - including a new, space-conscious

36-inch model - perfectly suited to both expansive and intimate spaces. Crafted from solid wood for lasting integrity and a luxurious tactile experience, it features thoughtfully designed storage with removable drawer organizers and soft-close glides. A composite marble top, paired with a pre-installed cUPC-certified sink, ensures lasting beauty and performance, while an integrated LED light softly illuminates the base, adding an ambient glow. Arriving fully assembled, Gatsby is a seamless fusion of form, function, and elevated design—crafted for those who expect more from the everyday. Explore bellousa.com for more information on the new Gatsby Collection.



Flusso's New Vasco K.1390 Faucet Collection The new compact 36-inch Gatsby Vanity from Bello

Minimalist Vibe

The new Vasco Kitchen Faucet by Flusso embodies a minimalist vibe with a design that is both lively and iconic. The Vasco K.1390 model enhances any kitchen with its elegant, high-arched spout and knurling details on the touch points. This versatile faucet features premium stainless steel construction, single-hole installation, a pull-down spout with an 18-inch dual-function sprayer for easy cleaning, and a matching soap dispenser. The Vasco K.1390 is available in standard finishes of Brushed Gold PVD, Matte Black and Stainless Steel. Flusso also offers 20 colorful finish options of colors that are ceramic-based, oven-cured and finished to perfection for a remarkably durable product highly resistant to corrosion, scratches, and chips. Visit flussofaucets.com to see more of the new Vasco Faucet Collection.

*To find out more about the brands featured here
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Where Integrity Meets Craftsmanship: Inside Trent Elliott Homes



By Lesley Bercegeay

Some builders talk about quality. Trent Elliott Homes proves it—with every nail, every beam, and every home that stands strong decades later.

For nearly ____ years, Trent Elliott has been immersed in the world of construction, working from the ground up—literally. His journey began on a framing crew while attending the University of Texas at Austin, where he also played as a starter for the Texas Longhorns football team. During those long days on job sites, he developed a deep respect for building done right—by hand, with care, and with a clear understanding of how structure supports beauty.

After graduation, Elliott moved quickly through the homebuilding industry, earning multiple awards as a superintendent before taking on the role of division president for a national third-party inspection company. It was there that his technical knowledge deepened, and his passion for doing things the right way—every time—

solidified into a professional ethos.

When he launched his own company, the name Reinhardt Homes by Trent Elliott was chosen to honor his grandfather, Paul Reinhardt Stichler. The name carried personal meaning, but over time, it created confusion. “People didn’t know how to spell it or realize it was a DBA under our legal name, Trent Elliott Homes, Inc.,” Elliott explained. “So we simplified it—and owned who we already were.” That change marked more than just a rebrand. It reflected a company stepping confidently into the next phase of its growth.

For years, Trent Elliott Homes grew through word of mouth alone. Their work spoke for itself. But over the past year, Elliott made a shift—one focused on sustainable growth and expanded impact. “We’re not depending solely on referrals anymore. We’re focused on growing—expanding our reach, our team, and our capacity,” he said.

Continued on page 14



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Continued from page 12

The company recently expanded by extending its service area into northern Montgomery and southern Walker counties, allowing them to bring their high standards of craftsmanship to more clients outside Greater Houston.

While the business evolves, the foundation remains the same. Elliott has built lasting relationships with contractors—many of whom have worked with him for over 20 years. This continuity ensures not just familiarity, but a shared understanding of what defines a Trent Elliott home: consistency, care, and pride in the final product.

Another key differentiator is Elliott’s background as an ICC Certified Inspector. Though he no longer works in inspections, he maintains active certifications in residential building, plumbing, electrical, mechanical, and commercial construction. In an industry where such certifications aren’t required, that level of expertise signals something important: a builder who understands every system behind the walls and beneath the surface. “Most people don’t know what they’re not seeing during construction,” Elliott said. “But we do. And that’s why they trust us.”

Beyond structure, the firm also offers in-house design services, guiding clients through a streamlined and collaborative process that ensures both vision and function

Continued on page 16



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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.

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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.



Continued from page 14

are realized. Whether the goal is a sleek modern build, a timeless traditional, or something entirely original, clients benefit from a process that's as thoughtful as the homes themselves. "It's your home," Elliott said. "We're just here to make it even better than you imagined—and to make sure it's built right."

That guiding philosophy is what makes Trent Elliott Homes stand out. The company doesn't rely on gimmicks or flash. Instead, it offers what so many promise but few deliver: technical expertise, personal accountability, and homes that endure. Clients who choose this team aren't just hiring a builder—they're partnering with professionals who care deeply about the outcome, who understand what's at stake, and who approach every project as if it were their own.

"We want to build homes that last," Elliott said. "Not just physically—but homes that make sense for how people live. Homes that feel solid. That feel right. That feel like home."

In a market filled with options, Trent Elliott Homes continues to earn its reputation by doing what it's always done—building with care, building with honor, and building to last.

***For more information about Trent Elliott Homes
call 936-788-3738
email info@trentelliotthomes.com***

***The office is located at
15001 Walden Road, Ste. 102
Montgomery, TX 77356***

Dialogue with a Designer

Lilly Powell | Kirby and Z Interior 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, meet Lilly Powell, founder and principal designer of Kirby and Z Interior Design. Lilly has nearly a decade of experience designing homes and offices across Houston and Dallas. Known for her ability to manage projects from demolition plans to final furnishings, Lilly brings a thoughtful and personal touch to every space she

creates.

As a past-president of the National Kitchen and Bath Association's Gulf Coast Chapter and former member of ASID's Texas Gulf Coast Chapter, Lilly is as committed to the industry as she is to her clients. Outside of work, she enjoys family life with her husband and their 13-year-old daughter.

We sat down with Lilly to learn more about her design philosophy, client relationships, and what inspires her most.

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

LILLY POWELL: I've always had a passion for decorating. As a child, I would constantly rearrange my mom's living room. That creative spark never left me. As an adult, what truly motivated me to start Kirby and Z Interior Design was motherhood. I wanted to build a career

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that allowed me to prioritize being a mom. Creating my own business gave me the freedom to design my schedule around my daughter's life. I wanted to be a mom first—and being my own boss gave me the flexibility to do both.

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

LILLY POWELL: Since I graduated in 2011, the design world has changed dramatically. Technology has really advanced the field. I can now create realistic 3D renderings, which help clients actually see the potential of their space before any work begins. It's an amazing tool that brings ideas to life and gives clients confidence in the design process.

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

LILLY POWELL: What sets me apart is that I design with my clients in mind—not myself. I take the time to listen and really understand what they want and need. Once I have that, I combine their vision with my eye for design to create a space that's not only beautiful, but also functional and personal to them.

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

LILLY POWELL: I always start in the client's current home. Seeing how they live gives me valuable insight. I ask questions like: Do you entertain often? Where do you gather? Do you have pets or kids? Understanding their lifestyle helps me select materials that are both beautiful



and practical for the way they live.

TMB: *Speaking about staying current, how do you keep yourself up to date with all the design trends happening in the industry today?*

LILLY POWELL: I stay current by attending industry events like KBIS, reading anything design-related I can get my hands on, and listening to my clients. Sometimes, clients come with fresh perspectives or ideas that spark new inspiration for me.

TMB: *What is your favorite design style?*

LILLY POWELL: For my personal home, my favorite style is comfort. I want guests to walk in and feel completely at ease—like they're at home. And they always come back! For clients, it's never about me—it's about them. I always say, "This is your home, not mine. I want you to love living here after I'm gone."

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

LILLY POWELL: What fascinates me is how something as simple as paint can completely transform a space. People are often afraid of color, but I remind them: "If you don't like it, we can repaint." I've been in business for ten years and haven't had to repaint a wall yet!

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

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LILLY POWELL: I'd describe my personal style as bright, fun, and comfortable. With a teenager, a dog, and a cat in the house, everything has to be functional—but that doesn't mean it can't also be beautiful. I want a home that's lived in, loved, and still looks great.

TMB: *What would be your recommendation for “what to do first” in a decorating project when working with the builders and/or homeowners?*

LILLY POWELL: The first thing I recommend is hiring an interior designer. Many clients tell me, “I don't know if I can afford you,” and I always say, “You can't afford not to.” Something as simple as scale can be a costly mistake. Furniture that looks great in a retail showroom might be too big or too small for your actual space. That's where we come in—we measure and design based on your home's dimensions, making sure everything fits and functions perfectly.

TMB: *Any last thoughts, comments?*

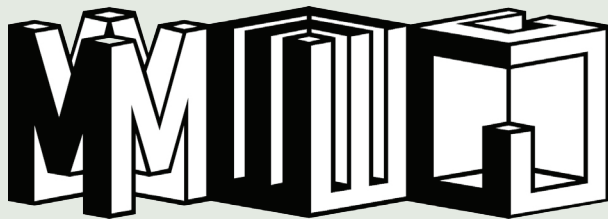
LILLY POWELL: My ultimate goal is for clients to love where they live. Whether they're starting a family, aging in place, or downsizing as empty nesters, I want to be a

resource. Everyone's in a different chapter of life—and I'm here to help make their home reflect that journey.

Lilly Powell,
founder & principal designer
Kirby and Z Interior Design

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