

THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

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DIALOGUE WITH A DESIGNER

INTERVIEW WITH BARB MUELLER, ALLIED ASID, CAPS



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Morrison knows that dreams, reality and inspiration make a house a home. They also know that an interior designer or interior design firm often become an intricate part of this process. Design professionals should be committed to creating individualized and functional designs to meet the lifestyles of their clients' families. Morrison Showrooms work to inspire these ideas and is conveniently located in the heart of Houston. Morrison offers many brands and designs, all exhibited in unique settings with interactive displays. Whether it's appliances, plumbing, hardware or lighting, they have brand to fit every budget and a style to fit every design. Contact Showroom Manager for more details at 713-861-2343.

This month Morrison speaks with Barb Mueller, president and owner of Designs Anew Houston, LLC (DAH), an interior design firm specializing in kitchen and bath design for remodeling and new construction projects. DAH's main focus is universal design and aging in place design for all ages, abilities and sizes to live independently and safely.

Barb worked in the new construction industry for 13 years as a senior designer before starting her own firm

five years ago. She is active in the Greater Houston Builders Association and the Remodelers Council. She also is the vice president for professional development for the National Kitchen and Bath Association's (NKBA) Texas chapter; in addition, she earned its AKBD accreditation. She is a Certified Aging in Place Specialist (CAPS) through the National Association of Home Builders and is an allied member of the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID). Last year she won first place in the American Institute of Building Designers (AIBD) contest in the accessibility category.

She is a regular attendee at national and international conferences where she has taught many classes on universal design. She has also given a live webinar through the NKBA University program on universal design and bathroom safety. In addition, she holds an MFA in interior design and is an adjunct professor teaching space planning and kitchen and bath design classes at Lone Star College Kingwood.

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

Barb Mueller: *I have always worked in art and design, but I decided to go into a different side of the industry*

and returned to school to earn my master's degree in interior design. Originally intending to go into hospitality design, I found after working in new construction that kitchen and bath design is my passion.

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

Barb Mueller: My main field of interest has immensely changed with the ever-evolving technology of appliances, plumbing and lighting. The emphasis was more on functionality and aesthetics when I started and has since embraced universal design and accessible design, with the health and well-being of the user of much greater

import.

Morrison: *How can an experienced interior designer help custom home builders or remodeling contractors with their building or remodeling projects?*

Barb Mueller: The designer plays an important role by guiding the client through the process of space planning of the kitchen and bath work zones, storage, clearances, traffic flows, quality and safety of products and features and by setting priorities for budgeting. The designer also is well-equipped to responsively "hold the client's hand" throughout the emotional roller-coaster of the remodeling or building process, as well as to handle the "traditional" responsibilities for color scheme, finish selections and style/theme choices, and also to include other finishes for fireplace, flooring, stairway and windows.

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

Barb Mueller: My expertise is in the area of universal design and accessible design for clients of all ages, sizes and abilities. With the advent of the Baby Boomer generation turning 65, these areas have become of prime concern for a much larger percentage of our population. There will be a greater need for homes that the elderly can easily navigate.

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



clients?

Barb Mueller: I always start with looking at the kitchen cabinetry and countertop ideas. I think of them as building blocks; once these main choices are made, then the other choices flow easily – appliances, flooring, backsplash, plumbing and lighting.

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

Barb Mueller: I have found that sometimes builders have given the clients only a limited selection of product or finish choices. I feel that letting the clients have more of a choice will help them feel that their home is more personalized to their style and will give them the “warm and fuzzies” right from the beginning of the process.

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

Barb Mueller: Sit down with them and decide what the style of the home will be first and work your way from the exterior features to the interior, so that there is a flow between the two. Then working on the space planning of the kitchen and baths is the next step because, unfortunately, many architects and builders do not understand the dynamics of kitchen and bath design. Then the selections process can begin.

Morrison: *How do you keep yourself up to date with all the design trends happening in the industry today?*

Barb Mueller: I try to attend conferences whenever possible and have spoken and given classes at them over the last four years. I find that conferences afford the chance to not only learn about the latest trends and advances, but they also offer CEUs for keeping my accreditations up to date for NKBA, ASID and NAHB. I am able to view and talk to manufacturer’s reps about the newest products on the showroom floors.

Besides attending conference classes and showrooms, I read a lot of the industry magazines and have written articles for some of them. I am also a member and past board member of the National Kitchen and Bath Association, Greater Houston Builders Association, the Remodeler’s Council, ASID, and I network with vendors, remodelers and other designers.

Morrison: *What is your favorite design style?*

Barb Mueller: I love the transitional style – it can maintain the contemporary look and feel of the modern



movement, but also not stray into the cold, sparse look that some contemporary spaces can take on. I like the warmth and comfortable feel of slightly edgy spaces that are more interested in the human needs of the client than the overdone “staged” type of traditional spaces so often seen.

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

Barb Mueller: My style is more transitional to eclectic: more contemporary tile finishes and patterns, sleek stone countertops and lots of natural light are notable.

Morrison: *Any last thoughts, comments?*

Barb Mueller: I believe so deeply that universal design should just be considered “good design” that it motivated me to start teaching, so that the up-and-coming designers will appreciate the importance of incorporating design that is easy, convenient, safe and beautiful!

You may contact Barb Mueller by calling 281-546-1089 or emailing bmueller@designsanewhouston.com or visiting www.designsanewhouston.com.



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