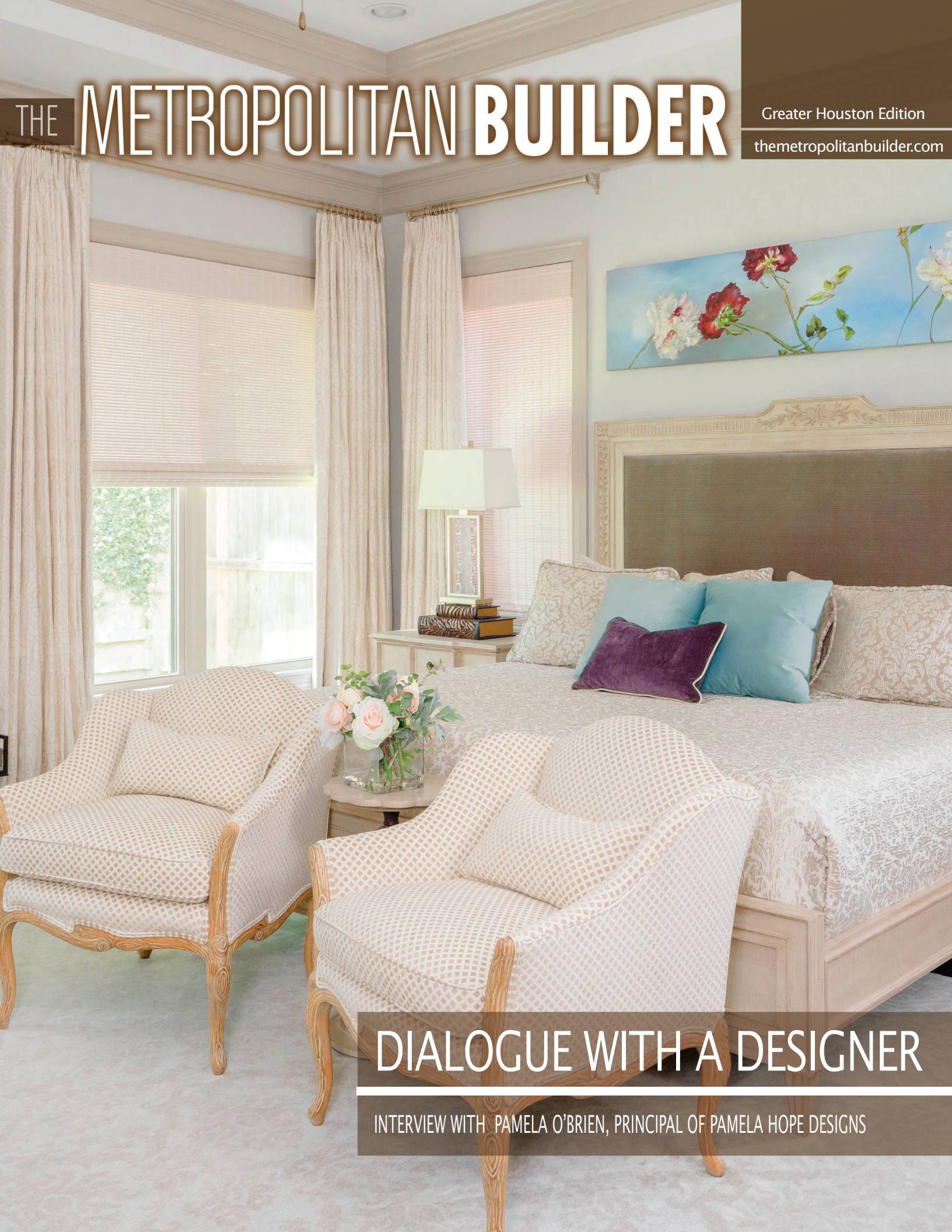


# THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

Greater Houston Edition

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## DIALOGUE WITH A DESIGNER

INTERVIEW WITH PAMELA O'BRIEN, PRINCIPAL OF PAMELA HOPE DESIGNS





# Dialogue with a Designer

Pamela O'Brien, Principal of Pamela Hope Designs

This month The Metropolitan Builders speaks with Pamela O'Brien with Pamela Hope Designs.

As the principal designer of Pamela Hope Designs, Pamela O'Brien provides creative solutions to a variety of residential and commercial clients. She has completed hundreds of projects throughout the greater Houston area as well as in Dallas, Fort Worth and the Texas Hill Country. In addition, she has worked with clients coast to coast, from Kennebunkport, Maine, to Ketchikan, Alaska.

Pamela Hope Designs' commercial work includes many local and national companies, including Bellows Construction, Tradition (now Prosperity) Bank, Allergy and Asthma Associates, Cricket Communications, Dean & Draper Insurance Agency and Jansen International. Tradition Bank Plaza, the adaptive reuse of the former Plaza Hotel, won a Good Brick Award from Preservation Houston. Most recently, the design firm has helped transform the historic former Houston Star Soda bottling factory into a wealth-management office and leasing space.

In addition to winning design awards on national and local levels, Pamela Hope Designs has received extensive media coverage. Its work has been featured in many publications, including the Houston Chronicle, House Beautiful, Houston House & Home, and Bayou City Magazine. Pamela has also enjoyed many television and radio appearances as well

as co-hosted the popular Home Improvement Hotline with Tom Tynan.

She is active in the local design and construction community, with memberships in the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID), the Greater Houston Builders Association and the National Speakers Association.

In between design projects, she enjoys speaking on a variety of design-related topics, including decorating, color and Feng Shui.

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

**Pamela O'Brien:** I have always loved houses. I was raised in a real estate-oriented family, and homes were an important part of our culture. My mother, grandmothers and aunts were all very good hostesses and took pride in their homes. No matter what their circumstances or means, they always strived to make their homes beautiful, comfortable and inviting.

**TMB:** *How has the field of interior design changed since you received your training in design?*

**Pamela O'Brien:** I actually studied languages and business in college and trained in design afterwards. Design has changed a lot since I started in the early 2000s. That was



right on the cusp of the Do-It-Yourself trend and the advent of the internet for everyday use. I embraced the fact that some people really like to be involved in the design work and that they had many tools available. I think most design relationships are more interactive now with clients gathering ideas, brainstorming and collaborating with us designers more than ever before.

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

**Pamela O'Brien:** Some of my best projects have been referrals from builders or large remodelers. I like to sit down with the client and the builder or contractor at the very beginning. I think from the outside in when designing a house. I think about how the client will live in and use the home, not just what the house will look like and what materials will be used. I concentrate on lifestyle details. For example, is the pantry easy to access while cooking? Can people come and go without disturbing the whole household? Is there enough privacy for the master suite? We can help create a home that supports the lifestyle of the client and make their lives easier and more comfortable. We love working with builders and contractors. I think they appreciate that we are organized and help keep the project on track. Sometimes it is overwhelming for clients to do it alone, and a large project can be almost a full-time job. We can help streamline the process, make it a lot more peaceful for the client and create beautiful results.

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

**Pamela O'Brien:** Well, there is an awful lot of good design in Houston. I am really proud of that and admire many of my colleagues. My team and I are professional, organized and excellent communicators. We are also very good about respecting a budget. We are also nice people and are a lot of fun! We want the client and the builder to really enjoy the design experience with us. We want them to look forward to our meetings. We forge deep relationships with our clients, builders, contractors and vendors. We are good

team players and are easy to work with. We also are very flexible in the way that we work with our clients. They can be as involved as they like or leave the details up to us. We don't have to be control freaks, we just like everything to be under control.

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

**Pamela O'Brien:** We recently remodeled an historic soda bottling factory in downtown Houston. It was a weird, dark, quirky labyrinth of tiny rooms. As you can imagine, with a turn-of-the-century building, there were lots of unknowns. We had to make all of the selections months before the project started in order to get precise bids. Of course, there were many changes that popped up along the way. Luckily, we had great architects on the job, and we worked as a team to solve problems efficiently. In fact, it turned out so well that the architects decided to lease the unused office space







area and are currently building it out to suit their needs. I am proud that we gave an old building new life.

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

**Pamela O'Brien:** I like to meet with the client and the builder early in the process to get an overall feeling of the style and design of the house. We brainstorm and collaborate to learn preferences and must-haves. We talk about the budget and allowances right away so we can help guide the client. I like to have a conversation about splurging and saving because that is bound to occur at some point during construction. Today's easy access to photographs and great design photos allow us to learn the client's taste fairly quickly. Our first showroom visit or "show and tell" session in our studio is always an exciting meeting.

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

**Pamela O'Brien:** Not being upfront about costs and budget can cause a lot of stress in a project. It is worth sitting down for a few hours to review the contract line by line so everyone is clear on what is expected, how long it could take and what it will cost. Everyone also needs to understand that few things go exactly as planned. Many problems are the result of lack of communication. Clear communication can prevent many issues and help solve others.

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

**Pamela O'Brien:** As a designer, I am lucky to have design

ideas circling around me endlessly. From the internet to magazines, books and events, there are constant sources of new trends. The trick is working through the vast number of options and finding the trends that will stick. Houston has a vibrant design community, and we have constant sources of inspiration. From the outstanding showrooms and TWO design centers to the industry reps around town, new ideas are everywhere. One of the "high points" of the year for me is the fall Furniture Market in High Point, N.C. It's inspiring to see the creative things people are doing. I also love to travel, and, not surprisingly, I focus mainly on the design, art and architecture of the places I visit.

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

**Pamela O'Brien:** In my heart I am a classicist, and I appreciate design that is timeless. However, I believe in growth and progress, so I like to mix numerous periods and designs that work together to create a whole new style.

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

**Pamela O'Brien:** Creativity fascinates me. Seeing new designs, new ideas and new styles allows me to take inspiration from those creations and, in turn, create new designs of my own. I also love color and lighting. They do so much for a room or a space. They also change every day. I find that fascinating, fun and a great design challenge.

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

**Pamela O'Brien:** I believe good design is a great pleasure. We want our clients, their builders and contractors and everyone who works with us to enjoy the design experience as well as the results.



For more information contact  
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