

THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

Greater Houston Edition
themetropolitanbuilder.com



DIALOGUE WITH A DESIGNER

INTERVIEW WITH KARA WUELLNER – THE DESIGN FIRM



Dialogue with a Designer

Kara Wuellner - The Design Firm

This month The Metropolitan Builder (TMB) speaks with Kara Wuellner of The Design Firm. Kara and Eric Wuellner have been designing many of Houston's most admired homes for more than three decades. Recipients of numerous American Society of Interior Designers and Greater Houston Builder's Association awards, The Design Firm staff prides itself on having the most versatile, professional interior designers in Houston. The high demand for their work has allowed their multi-disciplinary interior design firm to expand to more than 20,000 sq. ft. of warehouse and design studio space.

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

Kara Wuellner: Interior design just filled my cup! It's an incredibly creative outlet for me (and everyone needs an outlet), and it gives me so much joy to know that my clients and friends live in spaces that not only function for them, but bring them balance, peace and comfort.

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

Kara Wuellner: For me it's about the vendors and products we source for our clients. The technology behind our fabric selections and furniture vendors' products is just WILD! Used to, we would use colors like white or cream with some trepidation. Nowadays, whites and light neutrals are "go to" color for us! Fabrics have become more cost effective,

durable, accessible and functional for our clients. I love all the textiles too! It's incredible to think that a photograph can become inspiration for an actual fabric pattern or color. I love personal touches like this, too!

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

Kara Wuellner: In our case we create a detailed communication book that acts as the go-between client and builder. It specs out all the details and leaves no room for error. Once okayed by the client, everything is loaded digitally, and then everyone gets "the book" in hard copy! This way, at any given time, questions can be answered, changes can be made easily and everyone is happy. After all, a new build or a remodel should be FUN!

TMB: What sets you apart from other designers?

Kara Wuellner: We have definitely set the bar high with our detailed design process. We begin with time spent getting to know the client inside and outside of the jobsite. For us it's about building a relationship first. Our team spends hours upon hours procuring furnishings, designing ways to feature architecture in the home and negotiating good pricing. We are known for a "finished" look, and that look takes time and diligence. From our digital illustrators to our rendering

artists, everyone shares an equal passion for interior design.

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

Kara Wuellner: Challenges are everywhere; that's what makes interior design fun! However, I think one of the most challenging projects we completed was one for which we ended up winning several awards. We took a home that was half-way built in a Mediterranean style, which the client did not prefer, and created a gothic-inspired, richly textured, embellished retreat that was fit for a king...and our wonderful clients! It's funny because each spouse had his/her own idea of the style they wanted, and to this day both still say we nailed it for each of them!

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

Kara Wuellner: We begin every project with a detailed list of likes and dislikes. Idea-books are always helpful so that we understand what the client has in mind too. I believe the most important aspect about helping clients with selections is giving them a brief education on the products themselves. Our team takes time to learn about new products on the market, bring in vendors for up-to-date product info and READ about the latest and greatest on the market.

Having a designer in on a new build or remodel project takes an unnecessary weight off the builder and contractor as well. Everyone can solely focus on his or her trade. We can be the sounding board, spec out the proper amount of products needed, double- and triple-check sizes and dimensions and lessen the opportunity for mistakes. Staying on time and in budget are crucial elements for our clients. Designers help clients make sound, efficient, practical decisions that will be timeless and function for everyday life.

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

Kara Wuellner: I think the most common mistake is that

homeowners and builders think about the project from beginning to end, instead of end to beginning. That's where a designer can be so helpful. We look at the project in a way that speaks to the end result and where everything will fit – long before the home is even built. Always looking at a space with a discerning eye is critical.

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

Kara Wuellner: I keep myself up to date by reading! I love to peruse magazines, I read tons of blogs on the web, I stay current by listening to podcasts, and I love to attend Dallas Market to see all my favorite designers and showrooms. I don't just read about design specifically. I read about technology, new gadgets, market growth and changes, new developments in real estate, what other countries are doing in the design industry, etc., etc.





TMB: *What is your favorite design style?*

Kara Wuellner: “Spin-offs” of the core design styles! I personally live in an ultra-modern style home that has lots of different living spaces, white leather seating and art that offers bold pops of color. I love natural light, so my house has tons of beautiful windows!

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

Kara Wuellner: I am fascinated by texture and color in design. There are so many colors and hues and shades, it’s just incredible! We love to play up ceiling heights and to use various textures to add depth in our clients’ homes. And we definitely aren’t afraid of color!

I personally love the beach and draw inspiration from how the ocean is a different color, how the sand has various layers and how the sun always sets a different color each time we go to our beach house.

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

Kara Wuellner: My personal style is clean lines with pops of color! I like to have fun with art and fabric and use them in unique ways. I never shy away from a charismatic piece of furniture either. I like to call them “conversation pieces.”

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

Kara Wuellner: Hire a designer first! Ha! First thing I always tell my clients is to let someone else look at your floor plan, ask questions and give you a little “food for thought.” Sometimes it’s that fresh perspective that can make all the difference. I also suggest taking a

good inventory of what you already have that will be incorporated into your project. Final thought, never leave home without your tape measure!

TMB: *How to you keep yourself up to date with current design trends in the market?*

Kara Wuellner: I love to read any and all design magazines and books. I am an avid collector of coffee table books too. There is never a time that I don’t look through them (after having looked through them hundreds of times before) and say to myself “I can’t believe I didn’t see that before!”

TMB: *Any last thoughts, comments?*

Kara Wuellner: We are super excited to be launching our new website and logo this winter season. We continue to evolve and grow, and this launch is just another step in the right direction. We have some new faces on our marketing and social media team, and they are thinking outside of the box. 2018 is sure to be another fabulous year!

You may contact Kara Wuellner, owner and principal designer of The Design Firm, at kara@thedesignfirm.com or by 281-494-4433. The Design Firm is located at 13013 Southwest Freeway, Houston, TX 77477. Its website is www.thedesignfirm.com






Palm RESTAURANT EST. 1926

Guests Are Family. Steaks Are Prime. Memories Are Made.

LEGENDARY EVENTS SINCE 1926.
Prime Aged Steaks | Jumbo Nova Scotia Lobster | Classic Italian Specialties

THE PALM HOUSTON 6100 Westheimer | 713.977.2544 | thepalm.com/houston
Private Dining Rooms Available