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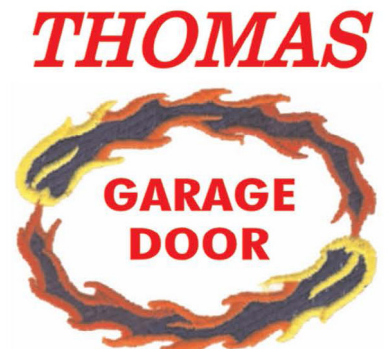
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THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

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Feature Builder Story

04 Whitestone Builders Construct Unique Luxury Homes in The Heights

By Kathy Bowen Stolz

07 Dialogue with a Designer Mickey Bufalini, Collaborative Design Group, Architecture & Interiors

10 International Flooring Wants to Be Part of Builder's Team

By Kathy Bowen Stolz

16 Design Trends Evolving in 2018

By Kathy Anderson, Eklektik Interiors

17 55+ Housing Market Ends Fourth Quarter on Record High

18 GHBA January Forecast Luncheon 2018

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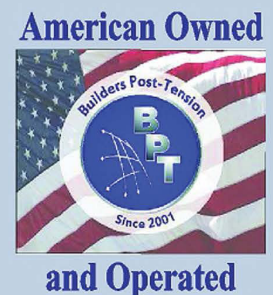
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Whitestone Builders Construct Unique Luxury Homes in The Heights

By Kathy Bowen Stolz

Houston homebuyers looking for a unique luxury home in The Heights often seek out Whitestone Builders for its trademark subtle, upscale elegance, according to David Gordon, president. An example is an eclectic “modern farmhouse” under construction that blends modern touches of large windows and stacked ledgerstone blended with rustic elements, such as wooden beams.

To achieve that special look, Gordon said he is able to tweak and/or guide the designs his build team of an architects and interior designers. “I never knew I had any creative ability until we started this company in 2004.”

David enjoyed exploring his creativity with the company’s early speculative homes, and he said he still gets his

greatest satisfaction as a builder from seeing his team’s design ideas take shape. He admitted that he still loves walking through Whitestone’s homes after their completion.

Quality matches creativity in Whitestone’s houses. The Greater Houston Builders Association (GHBA) has recognized Whitestone Builders with multiple first-place Prism awards for outstanding custom bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchens, specialty rooms, design and elevation. The company also received the 2012 Custom Builder of the Year award from the GHBA.

David himself is active in the GHBA, serving as a Custom Builders Council Member from 2009 to 2018 and as the



council's chair in 2010 and 2017.

But before becoming a builder, he spent 12 years working in the computer/technology field during and after college, despite earning a degree in construction management from the University of Houston in 1989. Why? Because he loved technology as well as construction.

His knowledge of technology is evident in the homes Whitestone builds (and also the home he owns). They are all WiFi-certified and are wired as smart homes with a high level of home automation. David said that geofencing allows the homeowners to use their smart phones' applications to automate some of their daily processes, such as arming/disarming the alarm system when arriving at home. Technological advances will soon allow homeowners to be able to automatically adjust the HVAC systems, lighting and music as they pull up to the house.

Whitestone Builders typically constructs 10-12 luxury homes each year in the \$1.5- \$2.5 million price range with an average of 4,200 sq. ft. One or two of them are always spec homes. The company started its career building one successful spec home, then grew from there. "We will always do spec houses because we really enjoy doing them, but also because they are our best advertising; well-done

Continued on page 14



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Dialogue with a Designer

Mickey Bufalini, Collaborative Design Group, Architecture & Interiors

International Flooring knows that dreams, reality and inspiration make a house a home. It also knows that an interior designer or interior design firm often becomes an integral part of this process. As a National Wood Flooring Association (NWFA)-certified company, International Flooring takes great pride in working with some of the finest professionals in the Houston market, providing the best quality wood flooring and carpets available and superb customer service. International Flooring offers their clients a private showroom full of exotic wood floors not found in retail showrooms.

This month International Flooring speaks with Mickey Bufalini, principal, Collaborative Design Group, Architecture & Interiors, LLC. It is an architecture and interior design firm that employs 15 staff members, including seven interior designers, four architects, two administrators, one warehouse manager and one social media director.

As a founding partner of Collaborative Design Group, Mickey Bufalini is dedicated to forming personal relationships with every one of her clients and giving each projects her personal attention. Her goal is to prioritize her client's own preferences for style and color over her own, thereby creating unique, comfortable and timeless designs.

International Flooring: *What motivated you to go into the*

interior design field?

Mickey Bufalini: *It harkens back to my grandparents who were all painters or artists in one form or another. My mother will tell you that it was apparent when I was very small, that my Barbie was only a means to an end, a reason to build homes for them and furnishing their spaces!*

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

Mickey Bufalini: *Interior design is a constantly changing field, creating and following the aesthetic trends of our clients. The significant change in the field since I graduated is in the technology aspect of the business. When I was in school the emphasis was on hand drawn renderings, boards with materials pasted on them, and those presentations were both clunky, hard to maneuver and carry. They also posed a problem with storage, how many color boards and renderings can one keep on a long-term basis. Now we are doing all of those things digitally, and presentations are created on our computers in a format that can be emailed and stored easily!*

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

Continued on page 8



Continued from page 7

Mickey Bufalini: We provide a level of professionalism that decorator centers and individual vendors can't begin to touch. Vendors that supply one component of a project have no way to know what the rest of the project members are providing. As an interior design firm that specializes in construction specifications, we pride ourselves in our ability to coordinate every aspect of the selection process.

By knowing what the final design needs to look like, we can help you avoid costly mistakes that will not only help you save money, but we will also help to increase the value of your home, by creating a better aesthetic appeal to the home. The interior designer looks at the entire project and how every decision affects the next, we can easily detect if there is something wrong or right with a space. Having that immediate access is a major advantage with making decisions. Without a process of getting to know the client, their needs and understanding their lifestyle, how can you possibly design the best home for them? When builders use decorative centers or individual vendors to work with their clients, that person is clueless of all the other pieces and parts of the project, therefore, they are picking out their items in a vacuum with perhaps an upgrade or a latest trend in mind.

International Flooring: What sets you apart from other designers?

Mickey Bufalini: We don't subscribe to one signature design style such as modern, transitional, or traditional as many other designers do. We aren't limited by a lack of education on design styles, so as experienced and creative professionals, we enjoy working on a variety of project styles. And we often find ourselves educating the client as well through the process. I can't tell you how many times a client comes to us with their new home plans and they really have no clue what the architect has in mind for the ceilings, or what doorways are arched, and which are not, etc. Many times, homeowners are unclear or do not understand what is drawn on paper, they must trust that the architect heard them and interpreted everything they wanted into the construction documents. As design professionals we break the construction and specification process down into small bites so that the client can follow along and not become overwhelmed.

For over 30-years we have worked as a team with our clients to create unique homes that are infused with innovative, unique styling that meets their individual and particular needs and design styles. We help them to bring their dreams to life and to create the space of their dreams. We strive to produce a home that uses every element of design that serves a purpose. Using the latest technology, our team works meticulously to provide the client with an exceptional and sustainable design. We always keep the

clients' vision in mind and we are mindful of their budget, objectives, and timeline.

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

Mickey Bufalini: We begin with the exterior and work toward the interiors. With new construction we start ground up and specify all exterior portions with our clients, including body of the house materials, roofing, windows, trim, paint, chimney details, walkway materials, all exterior doors etc. With the interiors, we select flooring, plumbing, appliances, review the architect's cabinetry to be sure the appliances and plumbing will work, we select the counters, tile and then the lighting and hardware. For remodel work it is often pieces and parts of the above, but we do use the same process of selection. We have a proprietary set of schedules and spreadsheets that facilitate the collection and assimilation of all the information. We are always complimented on the thoroughness of our documentation and drawings by the builders and vendors that we work with.

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

Mickey Bufalini: Communication and unrealistic assumptions about budget, timeline, or level of involvement between them. Allowances are a guarantee of project overages, not knowing how much each component of the project will cost. Because the biggest impact for your money will be in the final stages of construction, if you don't plan accordingly they will not have the money for

those impact items. We believe in creating a menu of costs in the beginning so that the client can make informed decisions. It is like going into a restaurant, the menu allows you to see how much you will spend on dinner and allows you to decide to skip the salad so that you can afford the soufflé for dessert. If you don't know the cost of all the menu items, you may not be able to afford dessert at the end of the meal. Even when a builder is conscientious and explains and reviews the costs along the way, the homeowner gets caught up in the world of upgrades and/or changing their mind along the way, and the budget and allowance numbers creep. Job scope creep is the hardest to reign in and to overcome. The biggest cause of this is the lack of planning. Our methods allow for making all of those decisions with a greater knowledge of the real costs before you sign with a builder.



You may contact Mickey Bufalini by calling 713-263-8311 or by emailing mickey@cdgai.com or by visiting www.cdgai.com.

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International Flooring Wants to Be Part of Builder's Team

By Kathy Bowen Stolz

You've heard that saying, it takes one to know one? Well, Richard Arnold, co-owner of International Hardwood Flooring, LLC, is living proof of the truth behind the saying.

You see, Richard is a former builder, and he knows from experience what builders want and need in a flooring supplier. He and his partner Luis Hernandez make sure they fulfill those needs. "We understand the situation, the needs, the budget, the timing and the scheduling. We understand about holding trades accountable. We do our best to keep our schedules. We hold our suppliers to a very high quality.

"We are not just a flooring company. We look out for our builders. We want to be a team with our builders. They are our partners." One of the things that allows International Flooring (IF) staff to have a strong relationship with its customers is that the staff sees themselves as partners, not customers, he added.

International Flooring is a business-to-business company, Arnold continued. He and Hernandez prefer to deal with like-minded, professional builders. "We spend time with our customers. We're able to focus and do really, really good work for them. We get to do really nice stuff, work in some of the most beautiful homes in Houston and get to meet great people."

He said that their clients are typically custom builders who construct three to six houses a year with a lot of square footage. He said IF as about 35 builders for whom it does all of their flooring projects. "Our customers match our dedication to quality, attention to detail and excellent value for the buyer."

Arnold said the company offers a great service to builders. They will email him a .pdf of their plans and/or specs and ask, "What can you do at this price?" Because he knows what buyers and designers want, he will help the builder choose the best flooring to produce a Wow! factor that people will want to buy.

The flooring industry in Houston is very competitive and the building industry has its ups and downs, according to Arnold. "International Flooring has grown and grown because of our constant desire to keep doing better for our customers by offering better products, service, reliability, quality and prices. Always learning, always improving, it's what we are all about."

Builders, interior designers and homebuyers meet with Richard or Luis by appointment in International Flooring's private showroom. "One of our services, one of our strengths is our 15 years of experience. Clients can see



products we've been working with for years. We ask a lot of questions, such as is it a glue-down or a nail-down or a floating floor? And we answer all of their questions, educating them and allowing them to feel very comfortable about their choice of flooring. We help manage the buyers' expectations about the flooring. Expectations lead to the biggest conflicts between buyers and builders," he added.

"I respect builders. It really takes a thick skin to put up with all of the issues that buyers have. Our job is to help the homebuyer feel confident and comfortable with their flooring decision and help make the homebuilding process a little easier for our builder clients."

For example, IF replaced a floor after a complaint from the homeowner whose installed floor was markedly different than the showroom sample. Richard said the supplier had changed the product after producing the sample.

International Flooring's primary products are solid wood and engineered wood flooring, but it also sells wood countertops and reclaimed antique beams, carpet and tile. The company technicians also refurbish, refinish and restain old or damaged floors. They serve both residential and commercial clients of all budgets.

Continued on page 13



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Continued from page 11

Richard's role with the company is sales and marketing, and Luis' role is finance and sales. The company also employs an accounting clerk, an office project assistant, a field manager, two back-shop workers and installation teams. Its installers follow the quality standards set by IF and use IF's products and installation methods, Richard noted.

In the next few years the company plans to grow its business by expanding its showroom and reaching out more to the designers in the great Houston community, Arnold added.

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Continued from page 5

spec houses will help sell our houses all day long.”

One place that prospective homebuyers may visit one of Whitestone’s spec houses is on the horizon in 2018. Gordon is working with other builders to revitalize the Showcase of Homes in The Heights after a nine-year absence; the Showcase will feature one of his spec homes.

Unfortunately finding a place to build is increasingly difficult. All of Whitestone’s homes are constructed on infill sites after tearing down the original property because empty lots in The Heights are no longer available. To grow its business Whitestone is planning on expanding to the Memorial area of town where it will be able to increase the number of projects to 20 each year.



He said the company will be able to double its production because the staff of seven employees has been fine-tuning its internal processes for the past few years. That staff includes a vice president of operations, who oversees the purchasing and selections staff and three field superintendents. David as president is in charge of sales and oversees a sales and marketing manager. “It’s all about the processes. We are constantly improving and tweaking them.”

To increase its production, Whitestone will offer semi-customized luxury homes on the homebuyers’ lots with a sets of plans available to choose from (plans which can be altered) and pre-packaged selections to ease their buyers’ selection process. Gordon said Whitestone started offering the pre-packaged selections a number of years ago because the staff watched many buyers suffer from “selection fatigue” from having so many decisions to make and therefore becoming frustrated.

This revised process will decrease the time needed for selections from 40-60 hours to 12 hours in four three-hour meetings. “This is one of the ways to help grow our business.”

Gordon said he and his former partner (who left in 2012 for full-time ministry) founded Whitestone Builders on the values of faith and integrity. As a native of Houston, he feels he has a duty to give back to the community and



to support multiple organizations that help to improve Houston. Through the GHBA, the company participates in HomeAid, a nationwide program to build new lives for the city's homeless. It also donates to the Wounded Warrior Project.

Gordon and his family are also active in their church. Married to Tamara for 21 years, they are the parents of Chloe, 16; Bianca, 14; and Micha, 10.

David Gordon has benefitted from having mentors among realtors and fellow members of the GHBA. He repays the favor by mentoring other builders.

With the experience of being mentored and mentoring others, he considered what he would do over if he could. "What I've realized is everything I've gone through – hardships and good times – have turned me into who I am today. Adversity shapes and builds your character. It's part of living. I wouldn't change anything, because I wouldn't be the same person today without having gone through what I've gone through."

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Design Trends Evolving in 2018

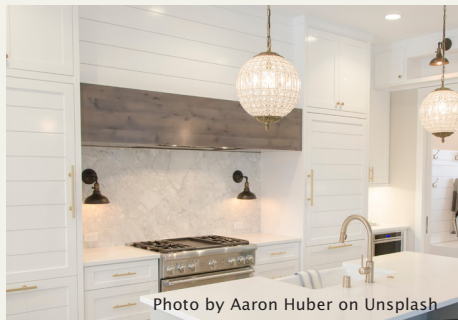
By Kathy Anderson, Eklektik Interiors

With the destruction of Harvey, many homes are being remodeled and refreshed. A new year brings a new look to Houston homes!

What's out for 2018?

- **Shiplap.** What was once “quirky and quaint” now is just over-used. Only if you’re doing an actual farmhouse, then go ahead and use shiplap if it is historically accurate and used in moderation. Also be cautious of using too much reclaimed wood. That look is being phased out as well.

- **White/White Kitchens.** We don’t live in an operating room. White won’t disappear entirely, but white-on-white has passed its prime. Homeowners will see more depth and tones in kitchen through the use of contrasting floors and backsplashes with pop and wow. Natural woods add warmth and an organic feel with white.



- **Six-inch Can Lights.** These lights say “tract home” to me. I recommend they be replaced by four-inch LED lights with a brighter temperature. (3000K is the best). They last a long time and do not create heat. Three-inch cans are nice, too, in more formal areas. You can add a more dramatic lighting effect when using spotlights instead of flood lights.

- **TVs Above Fireplaces.** Why would you take a major focal point and plaster a TV on it? There is ALWAYS an alternative! Not to mention that the angle of the TV in relation to where people are sitting is usually way too high. Place the TV to the side of or on another wall. Or here’s an idea, maybe don’t place a TV in that particular room at all. In a formal area, the TV ruins the entire look of the space. A new trend that is gaining popularity is. TECH-LESS ROOMS. I will discuss that below.

- **Monochromatic Color Schemes.** Color is back, and with it comes life and drama. Who says that you can’t create a calming room with color? You can. But having

everything in the same color is boring and overly coordinated. Think contrast and texture and use the color wheel. Triad color schemes are beautiful and interesting.

- **Barn Doors.** There was a good reason for the barn door craze. Some places just won’t accommodate a swinging door, plus they are cuter than pocket doors. And we all know how much builders and remodelers’ love pocket doors! But barn doors have become over-used and outdated, especially if they look like actual barn doors. If you are insistent on using the sliding mechanism, make sure your door is interesting and not “barn-ish” – unless you are in a barn!!



- **Gray.** Cool, neutral, toned-down gray has been on every wall and color scheme you see. But with the new trend being COLOR, you will see diversity in the color palette – a transition from gray to warmer mochas and taupes. At the last High Point Market, brown was back and looking as rich and luxurious as ever. Who doesn’t love chocolate?!

- **Granite Countertops.** Even though this material is pretty much everywhere, consumers are favoring countertops that are more versatile with lower maintenance, like quartz. Yes, granite is durable, but it lacks the sleekness of quartz and the beauty of marble. Quartz can have the appearance of marble but with very low maintenance. Porcelain slabs for countertops are gaining ground as well. Quartz is basically indestructible and has numerous options for maintenance-free living. Concrete counters are still trending for a more natural, organic and minimalist look.

- **Xs in the Wine Rooms.** There are so many interesting ways to display wine and cost effective as well. Just stop with the Xs!

Design Trends What's In - Next Issue

55+ Housing Market Ends Fourth Quarter on Record High

Builder confidence in the single-family 55+ housing market remained strong in the fourth quarter of 2017 with a reading of 71, up 12 points from the



previous quarter, according to the National Association of Home Builders' (NAHB) 55+ Housing Market Index (HMI) released Feb. 1. This is the highest reading since the inception of the index in 2008.

"Builders and developers in the 55+ housing market are reporting strong demand across the country," said Chuck Ellison, chairman of NAHB's 55+ Housing Industry Council and Vice President-Land of Miller & Smith in McLean, Va. "However, regulations in some parts of the country can make it challenging to meet the demand."

There are separate 55+ HMIs for two segments of the 55+ housing market: single-family homes and multifamily condominiums. Each 55+ HMI measures builder sentiment based on a survey that asks if current sales, prospective buyer traffic and anticipated six-month sales for that market are good, fair or poor (high, average or low for traffic).

All three index components of the 55+ single-family HMI posted increases from the previous quarter. Present sales posted a record high, increasing 14 points to 79, while expected sales for the next six months jumped 10 points to 73 and traffic of prospective buyers rose seven points to 51.

The 55+ multifamily condo HMI posted a gain of three points to 54. The index component for present sales increased four points to 59, expected sales for the next

Continued on page 20



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GHBA January Forecast Luncheon 2018



Builders Post-Tension

This year's panelists were: Robert Dietz, Ph.D. NAHB and Ted C. Jones, Ph.D. STEWART

- Builders will benefit from Houston's bright, long-term future need for more housing.
- Recently passed Tax Law will help Home Builders and Individuals.
- GDP Growth up to 2.3 % in 2017 expected to go to 2.6% in 2018.
- Only 10 % chance of a Recession in 2018!
- Dealing with a very tight labor Market. 4% Unemployment Rate coupled with a 10% Job Openings.
- Wage Growth up 2.5%.
- % rates 1.1% in 2017. Targeted 1.9% in 2018 and 2.6% in 2019.
- 30 Year Fixed Rate Mortgage currently 4 %.
- Housing Affordability declining with rising material costs.
- Nearly 2 decade High for Builder Confidence Index.
- Approx. 30,000 SF starts in Greater Houston Area in 2017.
- MF Starts have been down but look to rebound post Harvey.
- Post Hurricane Immediate Impact is loss of jobs and declining Home Sales.
- But.....6-12 Months post Hurricane we will have Strong Job Growth and Rising Home Sales.
- January 2018 1st Time Applicants for Unemployment Benefits a measly 220,000.
- 90% of workers should see an increase in wages post Tax Reform Law.
- 13 % of US population aged 25-34 years of age account for 30% of Home Buyers.
- Greater Houston Area created 45,500 new jobs in past 12 months! Healthy, Solid #.
- Record number of Home Sales in Greater Houston in 2017.
- Energy Industry has reduced days to Drill and Fracture from 40 days 3 years ago to 19 days today!
- George Mitchell (founder of the The Woodlands) is the Godfather of Fracking and has changed the Energy Industry dramatically from the 1990's to today.
- Rig counts are down, but that is no longer an accurate barometer of the business as they can do much more drilling from one Rig than in the past.
- Lots of places and opportunities to explore and extract Oil. Good for HTown for many years to come.
- Material Prices are going up and we are dealing with a Labor Shortage.
- But we MUCH to be Hopeful for in Houston and Texas and the entire Country.
- Stay Calm and Keep Building!!!

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Continued from page 17

six months rose five points to 60 and traffic of prospective buyers remained even at 40.

Two of the four components of the 55+ multifamily rental market went up from the third quarter. Present production increased three points to 62 and expected future production rose four points to 61, while present demand for existing units fell four points to 71 and future expected demand dropped nine points to 67.

“The strong performance of the 55+ HMI at the end of 2017 is consistent with recent increases in broader measures of the housing market, including the NAHB/ Wells Fargo HMI,” said NAHB Chief Economist Robert Dietz. “We expect continued growth in the market for new 55+ housing in 2018 due to favorable demographics, rising home owner wealth and the current tight supply of existing homes on the market.”

For the full 55+ HMI tables, visit nahb.org/55hmi.

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