

THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

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DIALOGUE WITH A DESIGNER

Mickey Bufalini, Collaborative Design Group, Architecture & Interiors





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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?

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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