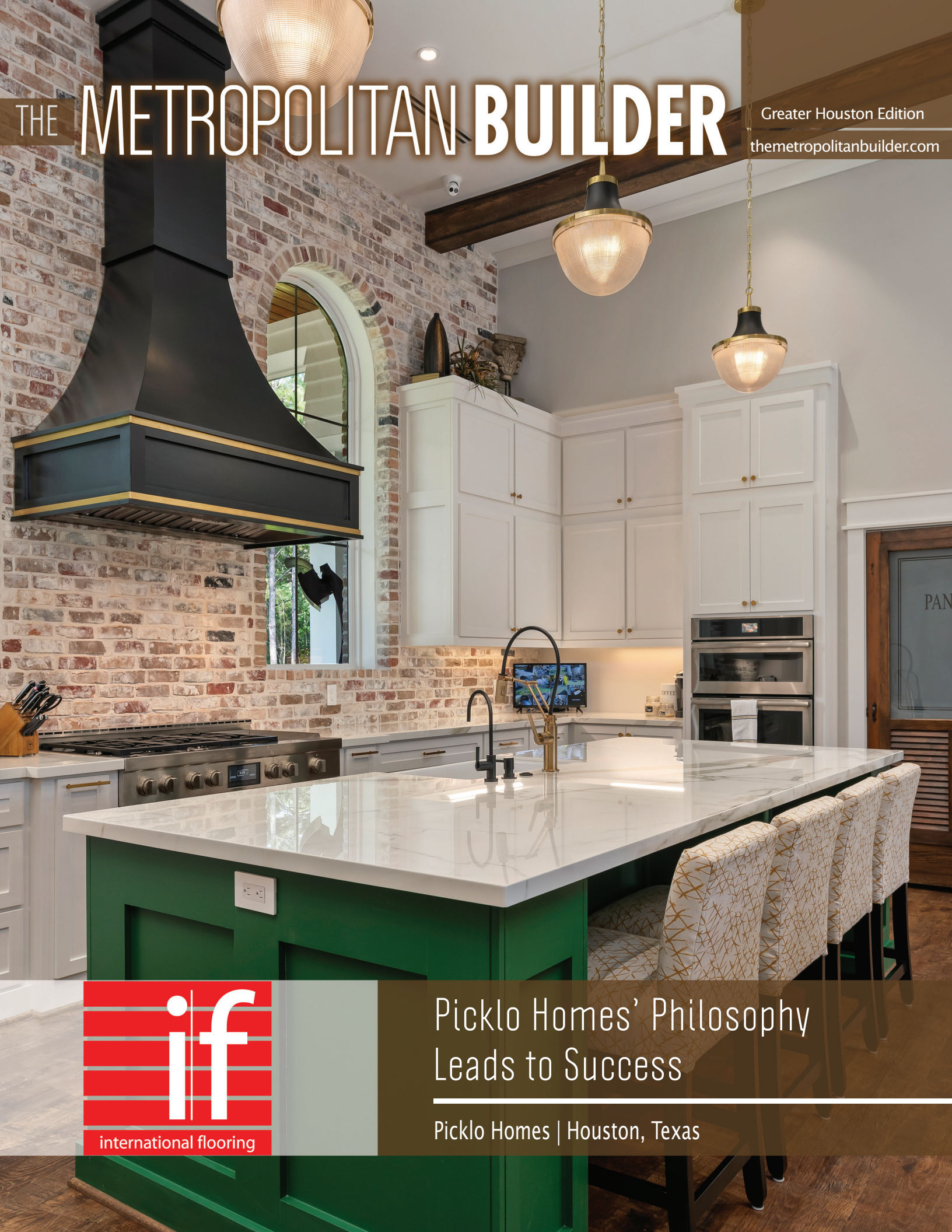


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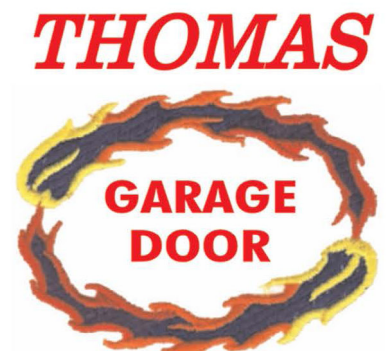
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When a Vendor Relationship Ends, Let Us Help

As a builder, you have your list of preferred vendors, those individuals and companies that allow you to provide your customers with a high level of quality while saving you both time and money. Because you benefit from that preferred vendor's product and abilities firsthand, you trust them to be consistent, to produce the same work, time after time, job after job.

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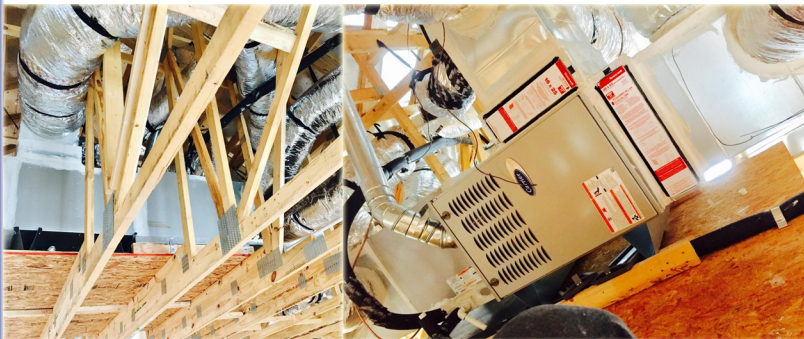
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Picklo Homes' Philosophy Leads to Success

By Kathy Bowen Stolz

For Terry and Nick Picklo of Picklo Homes, their success boils down to four basic concepts:

1. No job is too small;
2. We are happy with all the work we get;
3. We work in a very broad geographical area; and
4. We keep up with industry changes and clients' desires.

Picklo Homes, a two-generation, family-owned company started in 1981, has weathered changes in the economy and the building industry, thanks to its owners' willingness to adapt and to their ability to communicate with their clients.

"We still operate with a strong sense of community, pride, integrity and have maintained a very consistent work ethic," according to the company website, www.picklohomes.com.

In addition, "Our clients have direct access to the owners. They don't get lost in the hubbub of project managers and field superintendents," stated Nick, the 41-year-old vice president who co-owns the company.

"We're a little bit more relaxed (than some other builders)."

Nick explained that he and his father Terry, the 67-year-old president, are more of a "deal-on-a-handshake" type of builders.

As a result, when they encounter problems with clients, they talk it out. "We depend on good communication and the relationship between us and our clients," Nick said.

He added that some of their clients, now of Nick's Generation X, are making Picklo Homes' co-owners reassess their traditional way of doing business. "We have seen changes in the last five or so years. There's a generational change. We've learned that we have to communicate more. We have to understand what they're telling us," he said.

As the next generation is becoming Picklo Homes' primary market, Nick noted they have seen a rise in the popularity of websites such as Houzz and Pinterest. These websites have produced unrealistic expectations for some of their clients' budgets.

"But that's okay," Nick said. "We communicate with clients and set their expectations so there are no surprises."



“Building a home is an unusual situation,” he continued, “because the product is manufactured in front of the client. This means we have to define our scope of work in more detail, because some clients have a lot of assumptions and expect everything for nothing.

‘Setting clients’ expectations early and establishing a line of open and honest communication is the key to minimizing conflicts,” Nick explained.

“We try to focus on making our clients’ homebuilding experience a positive one. We know it’s the largest investment they’ll ever make. We want our clients to be happy and receive the experience they deserve.”

In turn, it’s important that Picklo Homes’ clients understand how Picklo Homes approaches the building process, which Terry and Nick outline on the company website. Overall, the process includes five stages: Lot Walk, Electrical Walk, Security/Media Walk, Trim/Cabinet Walk (including design, cabinet and closet needs) and a Final Walk as the house nears completion.

“Our thorough, step-by-step process allows us to ensure



Continued on page 12

Closets Are Only The Beginning for Those Looking to Transform a Space

By Marilyn Cauthen

Closet Factory. Sound familiar? Their 53 locations can be found everywhere in the Universe—well, almost. The Houston franchise, owned by Donald Yokovich, is definitely a very familiar company name to home owners, and more recently to new home builders in the Greater Houston area from Conroe to Galveston and West to Fulshear, TX.

The Houston Closet Factory was established in 1994. Donald acquired the franchise in 2008. “My career history is that I was a business consultant for a large accounting firm for 10 years and I then went out on my own as an independent business consultant for another 10 years. This required me to do extensive traveling.” Eventually, he decided he wanted a change in his life style—one with less travel time and more time at home. Donald began doing research into companies that were solid, established businesses in growing markets. “I discovered a franchise for a Closet Factory in Houston in 2008 and have now owned my business for 11 years. I came into the field with a family background in construction and design and because of that familiarity with the industry, I knew it would be a good fit for me.”

At one point, Donald and his team relocated to a larger,

more centrally located facility, allowing them to create a 2,000 square-foot showroom, within a 12,500 square-foot factory, located 8 miles north of Downtown Houston. “This expansion gifted us with a bigger foot print. We added feature items to the showroom which helps individual customers understand not only what they are buying, but what is possible.” They are backed by a company with 35 years of experience in the custom, residential market place for closet space, entertainment centers, garages and wine rooms. He added, “We do not engage in construction or remodeling spaces. The spaces are prepped for us so that we go in and immediately convert the room. So far, we have completed more than 10,000 projects.”

One important component that seems to set this company apart from others in the industry is their designers. Each one goes through extensive design training, where they learn to cater to the individual client, working together to create the esthetics of a space, adding details like crown & base molding hardware or accessories that fulfill the client’s entire objective and desire for their space or room. “We don’t just take measurements or pre-fab anything; we work with each client so that they are an integral part of the design phase, avoiding unexpected surprises. Clients have told us they appreciate the effort we make in understanding



their wants and needs, getting their input and solving any problems they have with certain spaces.”

There are two projects that Donald described as memorable. The first that came to mind was a woman who needed a more tailored, designated space. “She asked us to transform her dining room into an accessory room. We created an exceptionally beautiful and equally functional space with slanted shelves for her shoes, and shelving with glass doors for her purses.” The highlighted feature in the conversion is a marble island situated in the center of the room which houses hundreds of pairs of shoes. “Our experience has taught us that when a client is willing to invest in clothing and accessories, they acquire the need for a space that equals the value of their items. The end result in this home was a spectacular accessory room.”

The second memorable project was also a very specific request from a woman who had a strong desire to transform her closet into a mini boutique. “For her, it was about creating a space that when she walked into it, it would be an expression of herself and a place where she could feel really good. This was a fun project for the designer.” Donald felt the designer did an exceptional job in creating and delivering the client’s inspiration of a boutique and said it definitely felt and looked exactly like a boutique when it was done.

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All Closet Factories offer a life-time warranty on material and workmanship for each project. “A good design provides both function and fit. We warrant our work for a life time because we want it to last that long and we have total confidence and a proven track record that it does.” Many new clients are referred by current and past clients, along with numerous repeat clients. “It’s an interesting situation when a client has our closet system and they end up having to move to another home. They contact us because they can’t live without their transformed space. They are used to the function and easiness and find it difficult to go to something that is less than what they have.”

It is also becoming more and more common for builders to approach Donald with custom home clients who have asked for more elaborate closet space than what the original design provides. “Sometimes a builder has innate limitations in trim carpentry, etc. We can step in and provide that.” His desire is to expand into more collaboration with custom builders and their clients. “I believe there is a really strong potential fit and a lot of opportunity for the custom home buyer and our company, where they can participate with us in helping them when it comes to home storage organization.” He thinks of his company as one that transforms rooms into something very simple or something spectacular—they do both. The company is somewhat unique in that they are one of the few who can offer paint and stain finishes and wide variety

of design options. “This is really important to clients and leads to their trust and confidence in us and we have the track record to prove it.”

Closet Factory is well on its way to being recognized as the premiere professional closet space company. Donald’s team is comprised of fully capable experts who deliver exactly what each client has envisioned for their space; albeit a closet, a home office, media centers, garages, wine rooms or laundry rooms in a consistent, respectful and professional manner. They do not use contracted employees, but work as one team under the company umbrella in regard to things like liability insurance, scheduling and meeting strict deadlines, so that they are able to control all of a project’s variables, providing optimal service from start to finish. Donald concluded with, “It is important for people to know that I and my team are always professional. We respect our clients’ spaces and a well-respected reputation is important to me as an individual. I think about the values my parents instilled in me, which were to be fair and honest and consistently stepping up to, and fulfilling all of your commitments.”

For more information contact

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Artist Creates Beauty Worth Its Weight in Gold

By Mary Lynn Mabray, ASID

For artists, their love and inspiration for art comes from a place deep inside their souls.

For Nicolee McCowen, that moment of recognition began in Oklahoma in a fifth grade art class. The subject matter was unlikely, yet all too familiar – her tennis shoe!

Nicolee's interpretation was unlike any of her classmate's rudimentary attempts. Her drawing actually looked exactly like her tennis shoe. The teacher was astounded, Nicolee was elated, and she hasn't stopped painting or drawing since!

To some, Nicolee might be known as a decorative artist, a transitional artist or photo-realist artist, for she is those as well, creating life-sized and over-scale murals that surprise and inspire viewers. Her art brings beauty and happiness to this world, and that is worth its weight in gold.

She has always been intrigued with one of the greatest artists who ever lived, Michelangelo. She traveled to Italy to study his craft and walked where he walked, painted and lived. She immersed herself in his work and felt what he must have felt, as only a true artist can, when he completed the Sistine Chapel – sheer joy and the wonder of it all. She returned to the U.S., certain that she was on the right path to be known as a fine artist and not just a painter of life, she said.

Nicolee has been a professional artist for 20 years, following her instincts to paint bigger and better micro and macrocosms of nature.



Her latest endeavors involve the study of flowers.

In the back of the mind, where inspiration lives, Nicolee said she had been thinking about painting an over-scale purple bearded iris for 10 years. Once she began, the awe-inspiring flower came to life in two weeks. She's since won several awards with just that one painting.

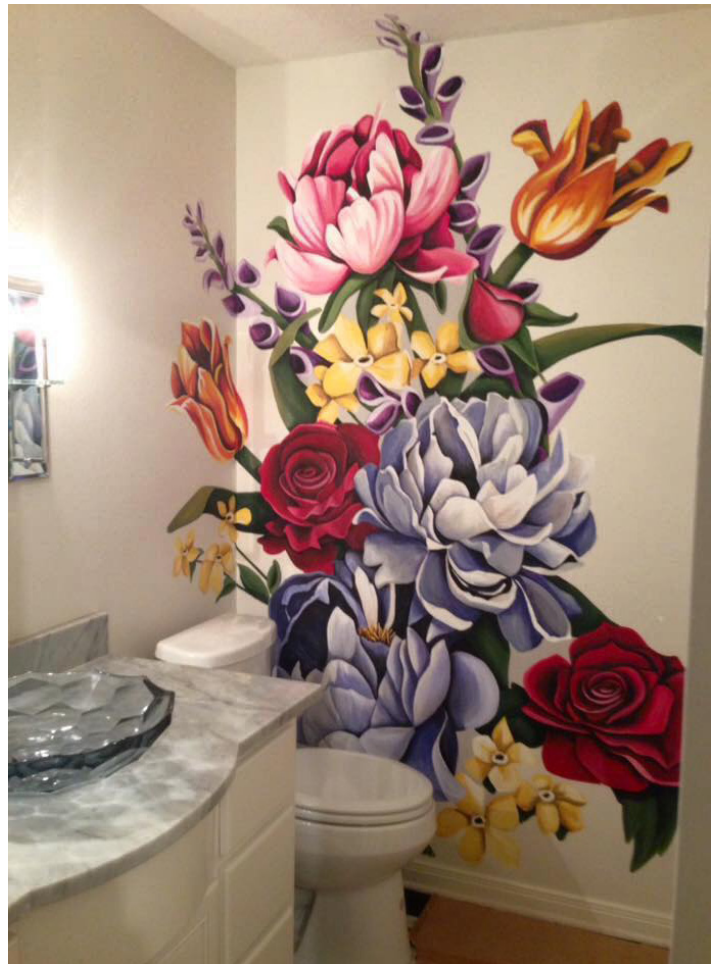
Nicolee is one of those gifted artists, though they be few and far between, who can literally paint any subject matter with ease and grace, from print medium to larger-than-life-sized studies of nature.

Her works are appropriate for both contract and residential décor, and she said she loves the challenge of commissioned art pieces for architects and interior designers. Her greatest joy is to see her client's dreams come to fruition.

When she isn't painting, Nicolee shares carpooling duties as the mother of two teenagers, a boy and a girl, who she is rearing with her husband, a nurse working in downtown Houston in the federal prison system. She earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Central Oklahoma. Anecdotally, she is the niece of Garlaine Kelly, an interior designer in Conroe.

In her spare time, which isn't a lot, Nicolee is involved in

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Continued from page 5

that our clients are not settling on anything and that their investment will be everything they imagined. No matter what their vision, style or budget, we have the diversity of experience to achieve their dream home with the highest standard of quality and value,” they state on their website.

Although based in Magnolia, Nick points out that Picklo Homes builds throughout greater Houston. They use the same subcontractors no matter where they’re building to keep a consistent product. The Picklos don’t compromise on materials or tradesmen, Nick said. “We use the same framer on a bathroom remodel as we do on a \$2 million house. We don’t switch a trade or vendor because of location, price or product. This helps maintain a consistent product and a consistent level of quality through all of our projects.

Picklo Homes’ trades are willing to travel further out because “we pay on time and keep them busy.” Consequently, many of the company’s trades have been with them for many years. Some of them, such as their framer and mason, “have worked with us since the start of the business almost 39 years ago,” Nick said.

After building a few speculative homes in the early 1980s, Picklo Homes transitioned to contract-only projects. And for the past 39 years, they have not only built custom



homes but have completed many remodels, renovations and light commercial projects.

“Our ability to complete remodels and renovations pulled us through in the down economic years of 2010 and 2011. When new construction slows down, remodels and renovations pick up. Remodels have been our saving grace,” Nick noted.

“Something I brought into the company is swimming pool construction,” Nick said. “We added pools so our clients have just one place to go when they’re doing construction projects. Now, they don’t have to hire someone else for the pool.”

During 2019, the company will have added a dozen remodeling projects, seven houses and six pools to its repertoire. Currently, it is also building an office condo complex in downtown Tomball.

According to Nick, who handles the company’s marketing efforts, most of Picklo Homes’ clients come through word-of-mouth referrals. “Most of our clients are not going to do a Google search to find a builder. Instead, the first thing they’re going to do is ask friends and family.”

Although Nick makes sure the company has a social media presence, especially on Facebook, he knows clients must have a connection through at least one person who knows

their work before they will contact the Picklos.

Other client referrals come through Terry’s extensive community involvement. Nowadays, Terry spends a little more time traveling, but he’ll never retire, his son Nick said. “When Dad is in town, he likes to be in the field as a project manager. It suits his personality. Not only does Dad like to run things, he likes to stay busy.”

Furthermore, Nick handles all the bookkeeping, financials and legal aspects of the business, much of it learned from his mother, Terry Ann.

Nick also works with the in-house design. “I enjoy creating things. I enjoy seeing something raw become finished. I enjoy seeing what our team did and saying ‘look what we put together,’” he said.

Building is in his blood. “If I wasn’t a builder, I don’t know what I would do.”

***For more information, contact
Picklo Homes
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***The company mailing address is
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Simplistic Elegance And Industrial Vibes Are Trending In Today's Kitchens And Baths

By Linda Jennings



The most coveted looks for kitchens and baths have two themes – simplistic elegance and industrial flair.

Grand Ambitions

Isenberg Faucets brings the industrial look to the kitchen with its trendy new Tanz faucet. This stainless faucet design has a simple yet chic vibe inspired by plumbing mechanics. Its sleek lines and soft curves create a sculptural silhouette that looks at home in contemporary or traditional settings.

A rotating projection spout and side sprayer offer plenty of practicality to tackle the toughest kitchen tasks. Its eco-friendly design includes a 1.8 GPM flow rate and a spout projection of 8½ inches.

In addition to traditional metallic finishes, Isenberg offers 20 ceramic-based color finishes that include glossy white and black as well as soft shades of gray, brown and green plus bolder options such as crimson and navy blue.



Isenberg is unique in the industry as its products are designed and prototyped in the company's Texas-based Design Lab. Its team of design engineers is recognized for their keen ability to create original faucets that are the perfect combination of style and substance.

Slip into Luxury

MTI Baths perfected the art of the slipper tub by creating its newest addition – the Mallory. Reclined at both ends for an eminently satisfying soaking experience, this elegant tub is part of MTI's Boutique Collection.

Measuring 65¾ x 35½ x 25½ inches, the Mallory tub is generously sized to accommodate up to two bathers. It is constructed of MTI's signature SculptureStone, a proprietary material that is 75 percent organic natural stone combined with high-performance resins. The result is a molded stone look that is a smooth glossy white, as well as being non-porous and incredibly resistant to stains, mold and mildew.



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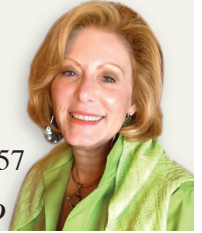
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philanthropy with the Cypress Woodlands Junior Forum, the Conroe Art League and the national Charity League where Nicolee and her daughter share their love of helping others.

For more information, visit her website at www.Nicoleeart.com.

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