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Q: Jason, what sets you apart in the mortgage industry?

A: With over seven years in the business and closings across multiple states, I bring a wide range of lending knowledge to the table. Whether I'm working with a first-time buyer or a seasoned investor, my focus is always on finding the right solution that aligns with their financial goals.

Q: Real estate agents are busy—what can they expect when working with you?

A: Clear communication and proactive updates. I make sure every client fully understands the process, from start to finish. That means no surprises, just well-managed expectations and smooth transactions.

Q: What types of clients do you work with most?

A: Everyone—from families purchasing their very first home to investors building their portfolios. I've worked with a variety of loan programs, so I can tailor solutions no matter the situation.

Q: How does your personal background shape the way you work?

A: Having spent most of my life in New York and now splitting time in Florida, I understand the needs of clients in diverse markets. Outside of work, I've been married for over 25 years, have kids from teens to adults, and stay active in my community. I believe the discipline I put into staying mentally and physically strong also translates into how I serve my clients and partners.

Q: Why should agents connect with you?

A: Because I make their clients' success my top priority. Agents can trust me to keep deals moving forward and clients informed every step of the way. That partnership makes all the difference.



Jason Schneider

Loan Officer, NMLS ID# 1849287

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4350 W Cypress St, Ste 630, Tampa, FL 33607 | Branch NMLS# 1788480





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COVER STORY

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If you are interested in contributing or nominating REALTORS® for feature stories, please e-mail us at joni@n2co.com.

Thank you to the Sarasota & Manatee Real Producers team for featuring Artisan Pool & Design in this month's Partner Spotlight story.

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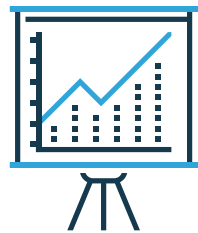
\$10,420,371,000

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Walter SPIKES

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The Best Marketing Plan? Treat People Like Family

Treat people right, and the money will follow.

When Walter Spikes closed over \$2 million in real estate deals from a single word-of-mouth referral, nobody was surprised, except perhaps the agents who had previously turned those same clients away. While others saw a language barrier, Walter saw family.

Walter built his stellar work ethic through 25 years in the cutthroat automotive industry in Sarasota. Today, as a force to be reckoned with at Coldwell Banker, Walter approaches every deal the same. “Whether the home is \$200,000 or \$2 million, clients deserve the same level of customer service,” he says. “I treat every client like family.”

Launching Into Real Estate

Before transitioning into real estate, Walter managed operations for Advance Auto Parts and then owned a “Buy Here, Pay Here” dealership and service shop. What was the secret to his success? “You have to be an expert in your field,” he shares. He learned how to cater to his clients with his people skills, compassion, and consideration.



While running his dealership, Walter and his wife, Shawn, raised four children. When three of them decided to join competitive rowing, Walter jumped in to support them. He started by volunteering with the food trailer, was asked to serve on the board, and became vice president.

“Whether the home is \$200,000 or \$2 million, clients deserve the same level of customer service. I treat every client like family.”





During his time on the rowing board, Walter met Robert Stettler, a mortgage lender who saw his work ethic at the car lot and offered life-changing advice: “You should consider getting your real estate license.”

“Your job will replace you tomorrow if something happens, but your family can’t. You always have to put God and your family first.”

Walter listened, joining Barry Bright Realty and balancing real estate part-time while continuing to operate the dealership. Working nights and

weekends, he closed eight to 10 transactions a year. His broker noticed. He told him, “Walt, what you’re doing part-time, a lot of agents would like to do full-time.”

That comment stuck. Then came the month when Walter realized his real estate income was paying the bills for the dealership instead of the other way around. “It was time to let one go,” he reflects. He chose real estate. The first year he committed full-time, he more than doubled his production. He hasn’t looked back since. Later, Walter joined Coldwell Banker for its national brand and marketing resources.

White-Glove Service

Having bought and sold properties himself before entering the industry, Walter remembers being shocked by the lack of professionalism and poor communication he received from agents. Coming from the car industry, he vowed to do things differently, providing all clients white-glove service. “If they

are young, I treat them like my own kids,” he explains. “If they are older, I treat them like my mom and dad.”

Years ago, Walter worked with a couple from Bulgaria who spoke with thick accents and had been rejected by other agents. Walter welcomed them, found them a \$200,000 home in North Port, and helped them navigate every step of the process. That single relationship led to referrals for a \$400,000 townhome, a \$650,000 family home, and additional investor properties, resulting in over \$2 million in real estate deals from one initial connection. Since then, he has built a loyal network of clients across Ukrainian and Russian communities.

Faith, Family, and Finding Balance

While real estate keeps him busy, Walter maintains a clear set of priorities. “Your job will replace you tomorrow if something happens, but your family can’t,” Walter comments. “You always have to put God and your family first.”

Walter credits much of his strength to his wife, whom he calls the backbone of his success. Together, they are extraordinarily proud of their four adult children, all of whom are blazing their own trails. Walter jokes that if he could somehow add “real estate attorney” to the family résumé, he’d have everything covered.

Walter and Shawn’s oldest daughter, Kimia (29), was a competitive rower at Jacksonville University and now works as a retirement initiatives specialist for The Zenith Group on Harbour Island in Tampa. She helps clients manage the retirement process while also building her own portfolio as a real estate investor. Twin sons Jason (27) and Joshua (27) have taken very different career paths. Jason graduated from St. John’s University in Queens, New York, and works for a Manhattan law firm specializing in real estate eviction law. Joshua chose to serve his country and is now in his eighth year with the United States Marine Corps, stationed in San Diego. Their youngest daughter, Winter (25), earned her associate degree before joining the U.S. Army. She recently returned from a nine-month deployment in Poland and is preparing to attend leadership academy as she advances her military career.

When he’s not working, Walter enjoys playing golf, spending time with family, or heading to the drag strip. An enthusiast of eighth-mile grudge racing and “no time” events, he loves traveling to races and helping friends work on race cars. His favorite annual event is “No Guts No Glory,” a big year-end grudge race in Orlando that he attends with his dad every year. After 25 years in the car business, horsepower is still in his DNA.

What’s Next?

With a consistent average of 50 or more transactions every year, Walter stays grounded, works hard, and treats people right. “Live to fight another day, don’t get overwhelmed, and focus on what truly matters,” he notes. “I love what I do, and I wouldn’t trade it for the world.”



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MONICA & MURRAY HALL ARTISAN POOL & DESIGN

Every basket Monica Hall delivers to a client when a project is complete includes a card. It reads, “Breaking Bread Over Water,” inspired by Acts 2:47—a reminder that sharing a meal builds fellowship, gratitude, and community.

Monica thoughtfully assembles each basket and includes a fresh loaf of sourdough bread, premium olive oil, a bottle of wine, handcrafted herb blends, and artisan cookies featuring the company logo, baked by a local baker. That’s how Artisan Pool & Design closes every project.

For Monica and Murray Hall, completing a pool may be the end of a construction job, but it’s also the beginning of a relationship worth celebrating. Rather than simply handing over the keys, they gather around bread, wine, and conversation, a tradition

that reflects their commitment to hospitality, gratitude, and treating every client like family.

Ironically, Monica came into the pool industry the way many people stumble into the things that ultimately define them—sideways and completely by accident. She has held a Florida real estate license for more than 40 years. She kept it active, completed the required education, and always assumed real estate would be part of her life. It just never became her passion.

Then she built her own pool. She watched the construction from start to finish, fascinated by the process. When it was complete, she called the builder—a friend—and asked if she could sell pools for him. She shares, “I remember thinking, ‘I saw mine be built. It can’t be that hard.’”

That simple thought launched a career.

More than 30 years later, Monica and her husband, Murray, have built Artisan Pool & Design around two distinct divisions. Their Standard division serves homeowners with smaller lots and practical designs, while their Timeless division lets creativity run free. As Monica likes to say, “Whatever you can imagine, we can build.”

Murray’s journey through the industry has been just as diverse. He began installing child safety fencing and screen enclosures before moving into weekly pool service. From there, he worked for a pool builder, earned his contractor’s license, started his own company, sold it, and eventually spent time in

corporate America. Monica did the same.

That decade in commercial aquatics—working with Disney, cruise lines, and municipalities—shaped what would become Artisan’s two signature differentiators. The first is their custom-designed spa seating. Most spas position bathers nearly upright. Artisan designs its spa seating more like Adirondack chairs. The back reclines naturally, the legs extend comfortably, and the seat is customized to the individual using it. Each person receives two adjustable therapy jets positioned at the mid-back, while seat heights are tailored so people of different statures enjoy the same comfortable waterline. A husband who is 6-foot-8 and his wife who is 5-foot-5 don’t share identical seating. “We customize every spa to fit the client,” Monica says.

The second differentiator is Artisan’s commercial-grade recycled glass filtration system. Adapted from filtration systems used in commercial aquatic facilities, the system filters water down to one micron, producing exceptionally clear water. Monica spent 10 years specializing in water chemistry, teaching service technicians how to properly test, balance, and maintain pool water. She explains filtration in terms almost anyone can understand. “Think of the filter as your kidneys,” she explains. “Think of water chemistry as what you eat.” She laughs when she calls herself “a water snob.” Her clients usually describe it differently. “Your water feels like I just took a shower,” one homeowner told her.

Artisan isn’t a production builder. They don’t rely on large developments or tract-home communities to generate business. They earn every project one relationship at a time. Every client matters. Every pool has a story.

Faith has guided that journey as much as business planning.

When Artisan moved into its new design center, the numbers didn’t completely make sense. Monica remembers walking through the space asking God why the contracts weren’t coming and wondering if they had stepped out too soon. Still, they kept moving forward in faith. She began praying for just one new customer each week. Then one signed. Then another. Then another. Today, she says, they’re witnessing the harvest of those prayers.

Faith has shaped Monica in more personal ways, too. She has lived with alopecia since 2011. When her hair begins to fall out, she chooses to shave it rather than endure the emotional toll of watching it disappear strand by strand. The first time she walked out into the world without hair became one of the defining moments of her life. “I realized my hair didn’t define me,” she stresses. “I was still me in here.” That authenticity naturally comes through in conversations with clients. She shares stories about faith. About difficult seasons. About trusting God when the path isn’t clear. Those conversations often happen while sitting around a table with fresh bread, olive oil, wine, and cookies, which brings everything back to the basket.

Breaking bread is about connection. “We get to pour into people,” Monica shares. “And people pour back into us.” That philosophy has become the foundation of Artisan Pool & Design.

Based in Manatee County, Florida, the company was recently nominated for Small Business of the Year by the Manatee Chamber of Commerce. Their Australian Labradoodle, Miss Harlie, also shared the spotlight, appearing alongside Monica and Murray on



the cover of our August 2026 Dog Days of Summer issue.

For Monica Hall, pools have always been about people. And every project ends the same way—with gratitude, fellowship, and the simple act of breaking bread over water. 🍷



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Another Fantastic Real Producers Event

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Bringing the best of the best together always makes for a memorable evening, and our latest *Sarasota & Manatee Real Producers* event delivered exactly that.

Hosted by the incredible team at **Florida Design Works**, the evening brought together some of the market's top real estate agents for an opportunity to step away from the phones, listings, and closings and spend time with the people who understand the business best.

And what's a *Real Producers* event without great food? A huge thank you goes to **Buddy's Bagels** for catering the gathering. Their spread was nothing short of amazing. From the presentation to the variety to the delicious food, Buddy's Bagels absolutely knocked it out

of the park. If you haven't experienced their catering yet, consider this your sign to give them a call. They helped make the night remarkable, one bite at a time.

Of course, the real stars were the agents who took the time to join us. Collectively, those in the room represented **more than half a BILLION dollars in real estate sales in the last year**, reflecting an incredible amount of experience, success, and market knowledge under one roof.

***Real Producers* events are private and invitation-only, reserved exclusively for the Top 500 agents in Sarasota & Manatee Counties and our vetted preferred business partners.** We do not have open invitations, general admission, or rooms filled with vendors looking for leads. Our business partners have been recommended by top agents, and we carefully vet them. The result? A room of people who belong there.

We are incredibly grateful to every agent who joined us, every business partner who continues to support the *Real Producers* mission, and especially Florida Design Works for opening their doors and helping us create such a fantastic gathering.

If you missed this one, make sure you're watching your inbox. Our next get-together is taking the party to the rooftop at Aster & Links, and we have a feeling you won't want to miss it.

Top 500 agents: Keep an eye out for your invitation via text and email. We'll see you on the rooftop.

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FEATURED AGENT

Cheri Mazan Castro

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She Never Learned to Take No for an Answer

The deck was stacked against her. At 17, Cheri Mazan Castro was living on her own, supporting herself and wondering what came next. On paper, that story wasn't supposed to lead here: a college degree, thriving businesses, an award-winning restaurant, and a place among the top-producing real estate agents in her market.

STORY BY ELIZABETH MCCABE
PHOTOS BY JOHN IGRAS, AXIS 360 MEDIA

Cheri became the first in her family to graduate from high school and college. Then she built a career spanning advertising, marketing, real estate development, television, and top-producing real estate.

Ask Cheri how she accomplished everything, and she'll simply shrug and say she has never been very good at accepting the word no. "I've overcome a lot of adversity," she says. Cheri learned early that if she wanted something, she would have to find a way forward.

New York Roots

Cheri grew up in Queens, New York, before relocating to Florida in 1991. By 17, she was supporting herself and

focused on survival long before college felt like a realistic possibility.

Around age 22, she decided to enroll in college. At 23, her life changed forever when she became a mother to her daughter, Arianna. While working full-time and raising her daughter, Cheri graduated from college, earning a degree in mass communications with a concentration in public relations from the University of South Florida. "My first love was actually marketing," she shares.

Her professional career began with a media group, where she worked in multimedia and advertising. She later moved to Denver, Colorado, becoming director of marketing for a law firm.

After returning to Florida, Cheri transitioned into multifamily real estate development, helping guide new-construction communities from pre-lease through stabilization. She worked with advertising agencies on brand development, managed sales teams, and helped shape social media, events, websites, resident programs, community outreach, and inbound and outbound marketing. Once a project stabilized and sold, the process began again—often with a new project, city, demographic, and marketing plan.

Those experiences would later become one of her greatest competitive advantages in real estate.



has helped propel her into the top ranks of her profession, although she admits she doesn't spend much time thinking about rankings. "I just work," she stresses.

Marketing, however, remains her superpower. Long before short-form video became fashionable, Cheri embraced social media as a relationship-building tool. She connects with people through direct messages, birthday videos, and authentic conversations. She laughs that if she isn't posting online, they'll probably find her singing "Happy Birthday" inside someone's DMs. That creativity caught the attention of producers at *American Dream TV*, an Emmy-nominated television show, where she now serves as a host showcasing local businesses, communities, and the people behind them.

Family Matters

Outside of work, she treasures time with Gary, her favorite adventure partner, and Arianna. She and Gary love playing tourists in nearby cities, discovering restaurants, traveling to Puerto Rico, and spending time with family. They also own an energetic Australian shepherd named Mad Max, who, according to Cheri, has a personality almost as big as hers.

What's next? Cheri has no intention of slowing down. She enjoys helping newer agents and sharing what she has learned, but her next ambition reaches back to her development roots. This time, she wants to be involved on the front end: sourcing and evaluating land; analyzing numbers, value, and demographics; positioning projects; and helping shape them from acquisition through development and sale.

It would bring her career full circle, but perhaps that's fitting for someone whose path has never followed a straight line. Cheri doesn't take no for an answer, and she's perpetually curious about what might be on the other side of yes. "It doesn't matter where you start," she says. "You create your own story in life." ▀

Eventually, Cheri and her partner, Gary, returned to Sarasota. When Gary talked about someday opening his

own restaurant, Cheri had a simple response: "Then let's do it." What began as a conversation over chicken wings and beer quickly became something much bigger. She had him write his dream on a napkin. That napkin evolved into a business plan the couple developed together. Gary shaped the culinary vision and direction, while Cheri brought her marketing and business background to its structure, demographic research,

financial estimates, and investor presentation. After years of planning, they secured commercial property during the pandemic and designed much of the restaurant themselves. Along the way, they married.

Today, Brine has become an award-winning destination.

Launching Into Real Estate

While helping launch the restaurant, Cheri made another life-changing decision. She entered real estate full-time, selling 26 homes during her first year. The funny part? She didn't even realize that number was exceptional. "I was just doing my thing, working, calling, networking, and shaking hands," she notes. She has built her business largely through relationships.

One story perfectly captures her approach. After trying unsuccessfully to reach a prospective client for nearly a year and a half, Cheri changed tactics. Instead of another predictable voicemail, she playfully asked whether everything was okay because she'd been trying to reach him for months. He laughed. That conversation led to multiple transactions, family referrals, and the largest sale of her career.

For Cheri, every relationship matters because she never knows where one conversation might lead. That mindset



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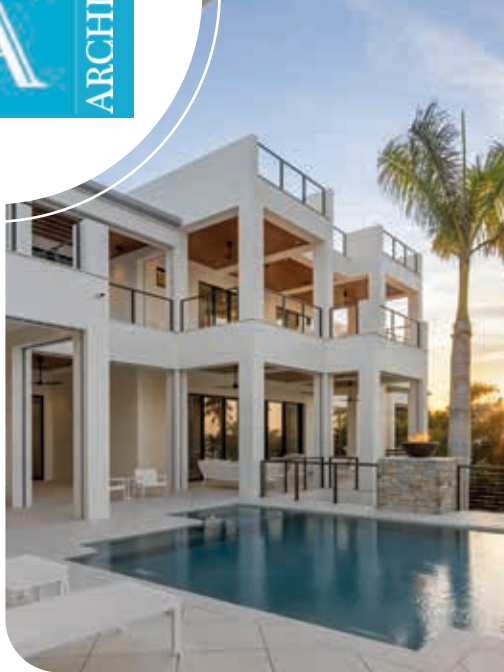
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Protecting Florida's Way of Life Requires Property Tax Relief

BY CHUCK BONFIGLIO JR.,
2026 PRESIDENT FLORIDA REALTORS®



Florida's success has always been rooted in one simple promise: If you work hard, you should have the opportunity to build a life here and own a home. Today, that promise is increasingly at risk.

Since 2019, Florida's property values have surged. According to Florida Department of Revenue data, the state's total value

of real property increased from approximately \$3.8 trillion in 2019 to more than \$6.5 trillion in 2025, representing an increase of roughly 70%. In many communities, individual homeowners have seen values rise dramatically.

But our public services did not suddenly become twice as valuable simply because our homes did. Roads, fire protection, law enforcement, water systems, and other essential services remain fundamentally the same services Floridians rely on every day. At the same time, higher property values can automatically generate substantially more tax revenue for local governments. This is not a sustainable path to affordability.

If we allow property taxes to continue rising alongside property values without meaningful relief, we risk creating a Florida where homeownership is reserved for fewer and fewer people. Young families, retirees, and working Floridians could find themselves priced out not only by the cost of buying a home, but also by the ongoing cost of keeping it, which is why Amendment 3 matters.

In simple terms, Amendment 3 would give homeowners with a qualifying homestead a much larger portion of their home's assessed value that is exempt from certain property taxes. The exemption would increase from the current \$50,000 to \$150,000 in 2027 and \$250,000 in 2028, with the exemption then adjusted for inflation. It would also reduce the annual assessment cap on nonhomestead properties from 10% to 5%. The amendment requires approval from at least 60% of voters.

The need for an updated exemption is straightforward. Florida's standard \$50,000 homestead exemption has been in place for many years, while the cost of homes and virtually everything else has increased substantially. Florida homeowners should not be expected to rely on a tax benefit that has failed to keep pace with the value of the asset it was designed to protect.

Property tax relief does not mean we stop investing in our communities. It means we find a better balance, one that protects essential services while ensuring that Florida remains a place where people can afford to live, work, and own a home.

As the Voice of Real Estate, Florida Realtors® has a responsibility to advocate on behalf of homeowners while protecting the health of the real estate market. Florida's way of life is worth protecting. And sustainable homeownership must remain at the heart of that effort.

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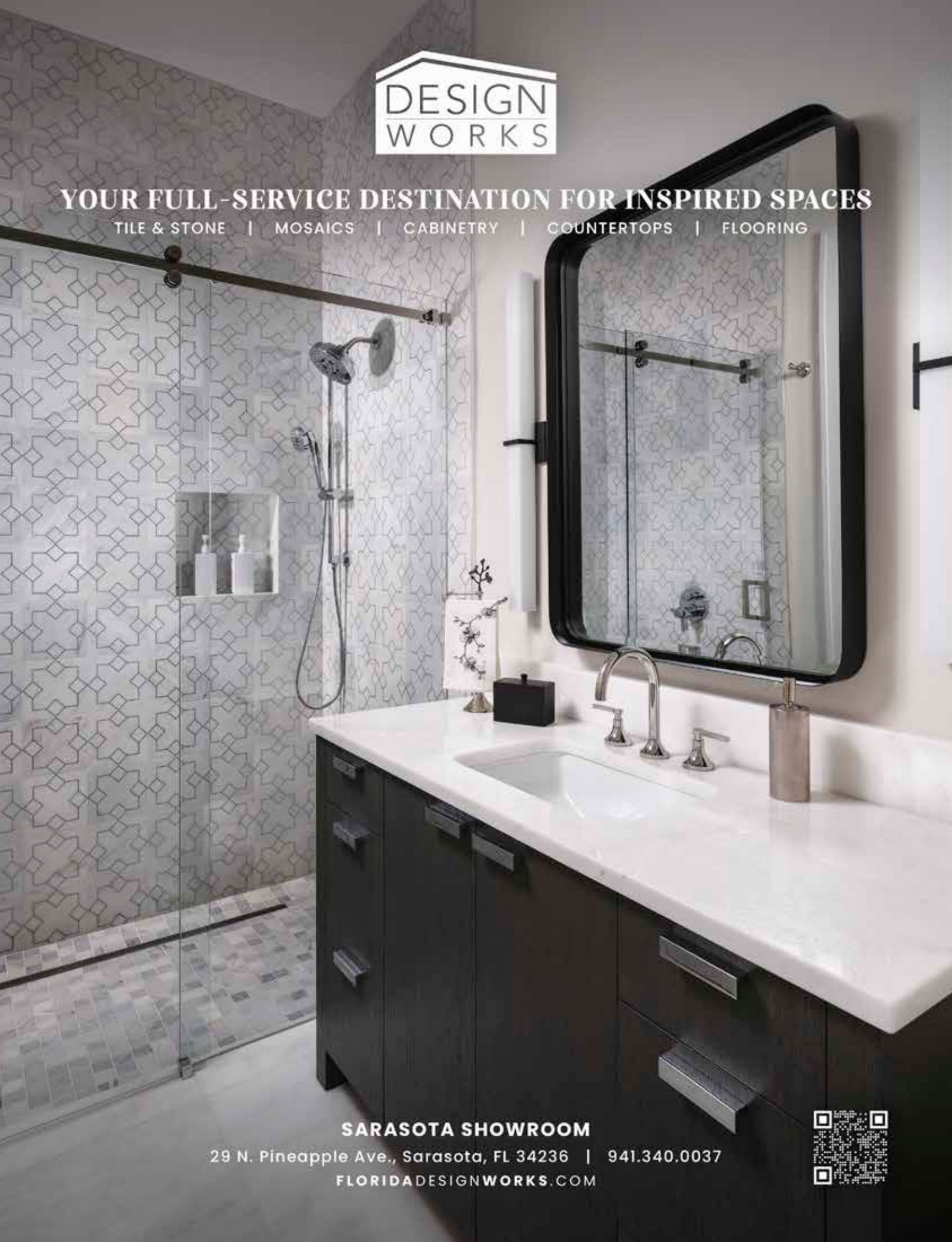
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