



# build it!

*Two words the builder lives for*  
by Bruce Giffin

Everywhere you look people are working. The sound of men shouting directions carries over the whine of skill saws and clattering nail guns. The abrupt tones of air compressors accent the steady thrumming of heavy equipment. Fresh cut sawdust and cement mingle with the occasional whiff of sweat.

A very large home is being built from the ground up. Designed to be impressive and built to outlast the people who will own it over the next century, it is one of those properties that will have a name when it is finished. In the future, it will have an elaborate history of wealth and style, major business dealings and minor tragedies, affairs of the heart and affairs of state, a place of influence and politics, of living large and grand. This home will be a statement of success.

For now though, it is in the hands of the builders. Stone masons use heavy equipment to deftly maneuver two-ton boulders. Laborers apply waterproofing behind terrace walls. A tractor trailer rig pulls into the site with a load of sheetrock. Small Bobcat tractors and four-wheel drive forklifts shuttle back and forth. Carpenters fine-tune rough openings to prepare for the exterior doors and windows. Roofers gingerly clamber over the roof stacking terra cotta roof tiles. Electricians pull wire and mechanics pound metal duct work together. Crews of plumbers

run cast iron piping and sweat copper pipes together. There is a buzz in the air. Driving this forward is the aggressive deadline for this home's already scheduled high society events.

In the center of the courtyard, the superintendent, project manager and the contractor stand together talking. They are industry veterans who understand the effective orchestration of labor and material, the brutality of the business, the rewards for work well done and the harsh economic penalties for anything less.

Today's problems affect all three of them. The sheet metal contractor does not have enough employees to keep up with the pace of the job. He is holding up the roofers and the plasterers. The architect rejected the stone samples for the exterior door thresholds, and replacement stone thresholds are not available for three weeks. Beyond that, there are not enough finish carpenters available locally to install the volume of fine wood working within the given time frame.

The superintendent is responsible for the day to day operation of workers and materials. He is constantly circulating about the site, answering questions and directing people, coordinating the movement of large amounts of material in a tightly organized work area. His domain is what's happening now at this very moment. He's calm and pleasant, not easily ruf-

fled, but underlying that is an impatience to get things done.

The project manager thrives on process, procedure and documentation. He's detail-oriented yet sees the big picture three weeks to three months out. It is a huge responsibility on this project: scheduling and reviewing the planned work; seeing what's missing; formulating the requests for information; asking the questions of the architect and the engineer—followed up by the requests for proposals to the trade contractors. It's his job to ensure there are no gaps in the interfaces between the trades and, most importantly, in the budget.

The contractor has the ultimate responsibility. He has staked his reputation and his word on getting this job done, on time, no matter what. Solidly built, tanned by years in the sun, with sandy colored hair, he's wearing a baseball cap that's emblazoned with the words, "BUILD IT!" He's the one who's assembled the team and who has decisive authority over what does or doesn't happen. He's comfortable with this role of master builder that comes from a lifetime of building, the study of practical knowledge and application of technical expertise combined with financial acumen and awareness of aesthetics.

The three confer. They agree to assist the sheet metal contractor by using another firm to augment his work and still keep the project within the budget. They decide to install the exterior doors in such a manner that the stone thresholds can be installed after the fact. Lastly, they opt to take the architect's offer of importing a large finish carpentry crew from out of the area to knock out the coffered ceilings and interior millwork.

They break up their meeting. All around them, the work continues. Big projects, tight deadlines and large demands...it's what the builder lives for.

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*Bruce Giffin, of Giffin & Crane General Contractors, is a Santa Barbara native who has been building and remodeling homes in Santa Barbara since 1978. He can be reached at [bgiffin@giffinandcrane.com](mailto:bgiffin@giffinandcrane.com)*