

HOME

ISSUE FIFTEEN

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OPERATING a general contracting company has many benefits. The work is interesting. No two days are the same. There are a variety of problems to solve as well as various job sites to go to.

IT TAKES A COMMUNITY TO BUILD A COMMUNITY

There are intangible benefits as well. There's the intrinsic satisfaction in building something unique. The sense of competence achieved from successfully taking a design from an idea on paper and turning it into reality. The pleasure found in seeing our clients live in and enjoy their homes.

As time goes on, one of the greatest

intangible benefits is the relationships that are built over the decades of being in business. Not only the relationships with our clients, but perhaps more importantly, the working relationships that develop over the years with our trades and vendors, which, in turn, benefits the client as well.

To create projects similar to the one profiled in this issue, general contractors have to use one of the most powerful tools they have...a large network. Knowing who to call, who's ready to suit up and play, and who's at the top of their game, is one of the most valuable benefits a general contractor can offer to their clients.

Why? Because contracting can involve lengthy agreements, work orders and purchase orders. All done in an effort to provide clarity and accountability. Yet, ultimately it's still an "old-school world" in building.

It comes down to two people, looking each other in the eye, shaking hands and reaching an agreement to provide service and value in exchange for payment. Ironically, if there is a mutual understanding, the work is done, the payments are made, then all that paperwork isn't necessary. It just becomes a matter of trust and responsibility.

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Modern Luxury with a Stunning View

A Santa Barbara Couple Toasts Their Dream Home

After remodeling their midtown cottage three times, Lorraine and Keith Reichel had reached a point where their home no longer fit their evolving desires. Lorraine was interested in a clean, warm and modern home on a single level, roomy but not too big. Keith wanted a bigger garage and, more importantly, a proper wine cellar, where he could grow his hobby and expand his collection. Both of them wanted a grander view. Together they found it all in the foothills above Santa Barbara.

When the real estate market failed to produce the right house in the right spot, the Reichels decided to start from scratch. After pinpointing a homesite razed by 2008's Tea Fire, Keith struck up a conversation with Geoff Crane, who he knew from the gym. Geoff then called architects Bill Harrison and Tony Spann of Harrison Design. As they all walked the one-acre parcel, Keith remembers, "Bill made a few

sketches and said, 'Keith, if you don't buy this property, I will.' That gave us some incentive to go for it."

"We fell in love with the views," adds Lorraine. "The site and those views really told us what to do up here."

They knew the design had to follow the stunning arch of the Santa Barbara Channel, with Point Magu and the Channel Islands far off in the distance, and Sycamore Canyon dominating the foreground. "The trick was to avoid a compartmentalized layout with ill-suited angles. Bill came up with a curved building with a nice flow," Keith remembers.

Then came the heavy lifting: two years of permitting and site preparation, followed by three years of construction, with architects from Harrison's firm, interior architecture by Jane Snyder and Stefan Eder of Mosaic Architects, and interior design by Chris Teasley. "It was a massive creative project," remembers Keith. "It was exciting and stressful, a range

of emotions, of which Geoff was the great modulator. And I doubt this house would have been built to such a high quality standard without [project manager] Steve Potter."

Past an entryway fountain and through the front door—a pivoting walnut monolith measuring about ten feet high and just as wide—the Reichels moved in on Christmas Eve 2015, taking in the view through nearly 15 feet of floor-to-ceiling curved glass. To one side, the spacious kitchen hides behind a maple wall with a pocket door. Their master suite takes up the north end of the bow-shaped home, and a laundry room and guest quarters fill the other. All said, three bedrooms and three and a half bathrooms cover 4,500 square feet; downstairs, there's a four-car garage and Keith's wine cellar, with room for 2,900 bottles.

To celebrate their first night, they toasted with a 2010 Alban "Lorraine," says Keith. "A very special Syrah with a very special name." ▲



A modern kitchen with wood cabinetry and a large window overlooking a landscape. The kitchen features a long island with a dark countertop and a sink. The walls and ceiling are finished with light-colored wood. A large window on the right side provides a view of a landscape with a swimming pool and a white chair. In the background, a living area with a white sofa and a fireplace is visible through an open doorway.

*“We fell in love with
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what to do up here.”*



THE TEAM

Harrison Design Associates
Architects

Mosaic Architects
Interior Architects

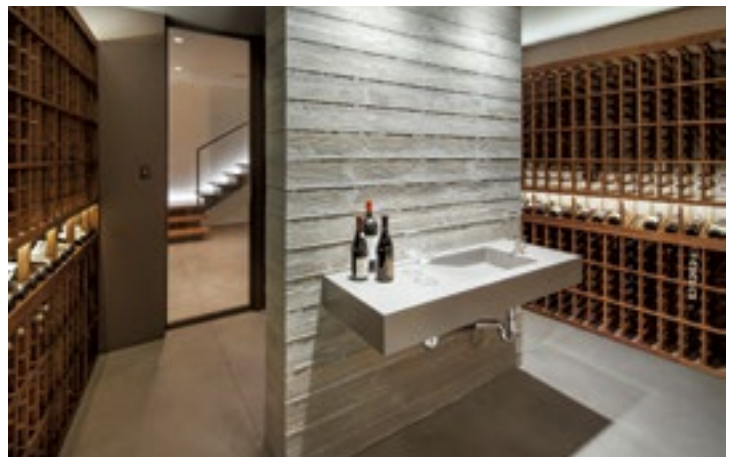
Chris Teasley
Interior Design

Steve Hanson Landscaping
Landscape Design

Geoff Crane
Team Leader

Steve Potter
Project Manager

Chris Renelli
Estimating and Scheduling



VIEWS FROM THE JOB SITE

PROJECT MANAGER STEVE POTTER REFLECTS ON A UNIQUE MODERN HOME



After the Reichel's homesite had been carefully graded and flanked by retaining walls—overseen by Giffin & Crane veteran Dan Formanek—Project Manager Steve Potter stepped in to head up construction. Motivated by the project's singular nature, Potter welcomed the challenge. In the following Q&A, Potter looks back on the Reichel project.

Q What did you think when you first saw the blueprints?

A I saw the project over the shoulder of another project manager at the front table in our office. He was on the page showing steel supports with a huge overhang and a curved facade. I knew I had to be involved.

Q What particular challenges stood out?

A Everything about the house was a challenge. Some portions of the building had flat windows in a curved wall. Some areas had curved windows and doors in a curved wall. It would be one thing if the design allowed for trim pieces to mitigate any differences in the curves of the different materials, but because it was a modern house, we were allowed no masking details—everything had to fit together. The job site itself was also challenging. It was at the back of a long, shared driveway where another house was being built simultaneously.

Q Did the project “stay the course” or evolve?

A The project was continuously evolving. At one point we had poured three samples of the board-form concrete walls and none of them really stood out. Then after a dinner that the owners had at the Boathouse restaurant, Geoff and I received an email with a picture of a board-form wall with lots of texture. We found out who had built that wall and asked exactly

how it was done. It turned out that to get the desired texture, we had to sandblast the form lumber.

Another piece of the building that went through a number of iterations was the stairway. Its initial form was very repetitious and simple but did not fit with the wide-open spaces that the house was built on. I think the design team mapped out more than 20 different concepts. This work paid off; it really turned out amazing.

Q Any aspect of the project that was new territory for you?

A The concept and construction of a curved house was very challenging. I remember first figuring how to substitute degrees, minutes, and seconds for feet and inches. For instance, the center of the house starts at the zero radial and fans outward in both directions, the first steel beam at 15 degrees, 10 minutes off the zero point, and the second steel beam at 45 degrees, 30 minutes, then 75 degrees, 50 minutes. This translated directly in my ability to use a digital theodolite [surveyors tool] to check layouts as the house progressed.

Also, I think using that much concrete and steel was pretty foreign to most of the subcontractors. Luckily we found a steel contractor who had done these sorts of projects in the LA area and worked very closely with us. And for this home, concrete was both the main

structural component and the finished component, which meant that we had to protect the portions that were done first throughout the duration of the project. No one was prepared for that. Usually, there's at least one more layer to cover production blemishes.

Q How did you use technology to help solve problems?

A Using 3D modeling in computer space allowed the designers to confirm the owners' intent. That modeling was used throughout and was especially helpful in the kitchen, stairs, the entryway's water feature, and the guest bedroom bump-out.

Also, the clients' investment in the latest recessed lighting and speaker design really helped keep the visual distraction of the infrastructure at a minimum.

Q What did you come away with?

A I have a much greater appreciation for the construction of a modern home—it's really easy to screw up a clean design. I also think that having a design team engaged throughout the process is too often an overlooked component of bringing a complex idea into reality. The plans that passed through the permitting process would have created a much different, more “sterile” house. This one has *life*, and the owners are reaping that reward. 🏡

PROJECT MANAGER TOM STEFL

A MASTER BUILDER PUTS IN THE MILES

Sure it's easy to get Tom Stefl going about the dozens of projects he's headed up for Giffin & Crane over the years. He likes what he does, and when you walk a job site with him, you can tell he's proud of his achievements. But if you really want to put a smile on his face, ask him about his new road bike.

First of all, he explains, it's custom-sized to match his unusual frame; he's six foot seven, with long legs and a compact torso. Secondly, it's titanium, with carbon-fiber wheels—which means it's light, responsive, and fast—fitted by Santa Barbara's Dave Lettieri, who raced in the 1988 Summer Olympics and later worked as a mechanic for the now-infamous Lance Armstrong.

Stefl has been cycling since high school, and he typically puts in about 100 miles a week. His favorite ride starts at home in Lompoc and heads out to the quiet scenery of Happy Canyon. Since 1989, he's done 45 "centuries," 100-mile group rides. Just for fun.

When he's not on his bike, you can find Stefl running job sites for Giffin & Crane, where he's been a team member for 26 years. He grew up in the San Joaquin Valley where he learned the construction trade while



building dairy barns. Then, scooped up by Oklahoma Baptist University on a basketball scholarship, he earned an art degree which he put to use for seven years in downtown Los Angeles as a line illustrator for a design firm. "I enjoyed it, and I was good at it," he remembers. "But I got tired of sitting at a desk."

He decided to get back into construction, focusing on high-end custom homebuilding. He landed work with an Arroyo Grande-based contractor building an estate home in Santa Barbara. Needless to say, he grew fond of the place. "I really

enjoyed Santa Barbara," he says. "So I decided to find the best builder in town and apply." All paths led to Giffin & Crane.

"Tom sought us out in 1991," remembers Bruce Giffin. "He heard we were the best, and he likes to build that way. Back in the day, we were more hands-on. We framed and finished with our in-house crew, and Tom had a great deal of experience, not only in hands-on construction, but also in design and illustrative work. That appealed to us. To top it off, he had the Central Valley farm-family work ethic ingrained in him by his folks."

Starting out on Giffin & Crane's carpentry crew, Stefl moved up to project management within a year, but he still put on his nail bags regularly to swing a hammer and show the upstarts a few tricks of the trade. "I really enjoyed teaching the younger guys," he says, "and I still do that to some degree."

Giffin appreciates Stefl's influence on the next generation of builders: "Tom likes things done right, and he respects people that work hard."

Stefl turns 65 this year, but shows no signs of riding off into the sunset. He'll keep smiling for as long as he can keep doing what he enjoys—on his bike *and* off. ▲

JULIANNE GILLASPY, ACCOUNTS PAYABLE

LIFE IS A MIX OF PASSIONS

When it comes to the spice of life, Julianne Gillaspay prefers a variety. From jewelry-making and volunteer work, to Korean pop music and religious faith, she commands a range of pursuits to keep her days and nights interesting and fulfilling. And, as the point person at Giffin & Crane's accounts-payable desk, she deploys her professional interests—namely an eye for numbers and a precise attention to detail—to help maintain the company's considerable workflow.

The born-and-raised Santa Barbaran—with European, Mexican, and Native American roots—came aboard at Giffin & Crane five years ago, after working for California's Employment Development Department for four years right out of San Marcos High School. With the state, she remembers, she occupied much of her work days with data entry, and she also made sure the mail went out on time. That skill set serves her well at Giffin & Crane, where she receives invoices, double-checks the numbers with their respective budgets, and logs the information into Sage, the company's accounting network.

"Julianne is very detail-oriented and exacting, always wanting to get everything absolutely perfect," says co-worker Denise Petrushkin, Giffin & Crane's controller. "This is a huge asset when processing accounts and tracking costs to budgets and

contracts. She also helps get all the paperwork in order for each billing cycle."

"And I'm the one that bugs the guys to make sure their timecards are up to date," Gillaspay adds with a smile. "I like my coworkers and the consistency of the job—and it's drama-free. I love the location, too,

just a couple of blocks from the beach. That's always nice."

Off the clock, Gillaspay's hands-on interests include "all sorts of crafts," she says. "I've done papercrafting and bookbinding but making jewelry is my true passion." Creating earrings out of sterling silver and gold-filled wire "and lots of pearls" are her favorite, she says. Once she's crafted a finished product, she typically hands them out as gifts to her friends.

She also likes to join her friends on southbound road trips to check out weekend shows in Los Angeles' thriving Korean pop, or K-pop, music scene. Talk about variety: the genre, born in South Korea, blends a lot of audiovisual creativity with a spectrum of musical styles, including dance-pop, ballad, R&B, rock, jazz, hip-hop, and classical. It's the sort of cool, foreign mix that also likely explains her interest in the Santa Barbara International Film Festival, where she's volunteered for the past three years.

And when it comes to faith, much of what Gillaspay believes was handed down from her folks, both Jehovah's Witnesses. Gillaspay grew up reading the bible and was baptized to the Christian denomination a decade ago. "I enjoy going out and knocking on doors," she said. "We believe that Jesus is the true god and want to teach people about him. We want to give hope for the future." 🏠



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As each job is only as strong as its weakest link, new trades and vendors have to be carefully vetted. Bringing a new trade into the established fold means there may be kinks in the relationship to work out. A trade may be used to performing work to a certain standard or in a different sequence than the builder is used to accepting. Ongoing communication throughout the job helps to smooth out the bumps. Invariably, the next project is always easier for both parties. The level of trust grows deeper with each successful project.

Over the years, a builder's community of trades and vendors matures. As time passes, much like a long and successful marriage, there are less and less issues to work out. A fondness for working together while delivering results occurs naturally. Life happens, families grow up, kids become adults, recessions are weathered, and through hard work, intention and a bit of good luck, prosperity usually follows.



With that, comes a recognition that we are all in this together. We are not commodities. We are people bringing many disparate parts and pieces together to form a cohesive whole that reflects the design intent of the architects we work with, while meeting the desires of our clients to live in a well-built home.

Being appreciated for that effort and diligence goes a long way. It's amazing how a thank you note, a pat on the back or simple praise makes such a tremendous impact on the trades receiving the compliment. It costs nothing, but reaps huge rewards for the giver.

Geoff and I would like to acknowledge a few of the individuals and companies who have worked with us since the beginning, 31 years ago, and who to this day continue to work with us: Miles Burger, Hoke & Burger Plumbing; Peter Kornbluth,

Construction Plumbing; the Matthews family, Architectural Millwork; the Thomas family, Thomas Drywall; the Borgatello family, Marborg Industries; and the Schwan family, Schwan Bros. Excavating. The longevity of these businesses is remarkable—we *thank them!*


We also wish to thank the rest of our trades and vendors, new and old alike. As these pages will reflect, what these companies are capable of building is truly astonishing. Their work not only enhances our community, it deepens the quality of life for all of us.

— Bruce Giffin



G&C ON THE WEB

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