

HOME

ISSUE EIGHTEEN

WINTER 2020

HOW DID TWO YOUNG GUYS named Bruce Giffin and Geoff Crane — armed with not much more than street smarts, hammers and saws, a bit of craft knowledge, and zero capital, but with a simple desire to be the best custom homebuilders and remodelers in Santa Barbara — succeed in business from 1985 through today?

PROUDLY PASSING THE TORCH

First, after six months of weekly discussions over coffee, prior to going into business and without really knowing it, we defined our core values:

- 1 Always do your best work.
- 2 Know your numbers.
- 3 Own your mistakes.

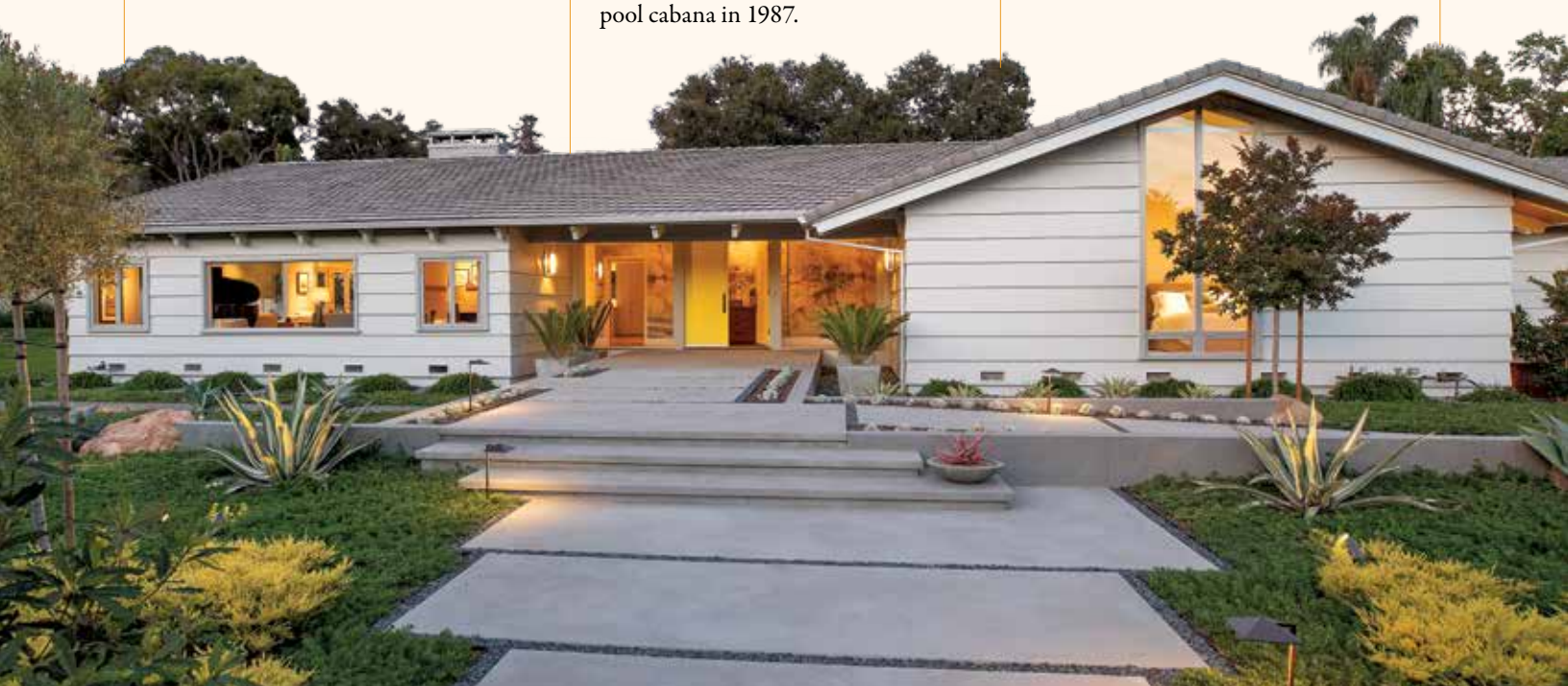
Then we set out to make every one of our clients feel important, regardless of the size of the project.

The first few years were tough going. We learned that contracting is different than being craftsmen. Since we were green and hadn't yet developed our reputation, it was difficult to win contracts. We had to compete on price. And being the low bidder — while driven to do the best work — sure made for skinny margins. So we appreciated Marshall and Heidi Rose for awarding us our first "big" contract, giving us the opportunity to build their wonderful pool cabana in 1987.

Yet, we yearned to do even bigger jobs, such as new homes. However, we were only able to land smaller remodeling projects. This turned out to be a blessing as we cut our teeth and began to build our organization.

When we started, we didn't have any systems in place. Heck, we didn't even have a computer. It was definitely learning on the fly. We swung hammers by day, worked on

continued on next page



PROUDLY PASSING THE TORCH *continued from previous page*

estimates by night, and managed to find time for our young families in between. Hunger turns out to be a strong motivating factor.

A big break came our way in 1990 when Jamie and Marcia Constance,

with a strong recommendation by our dear old friend Pat Scott, hired us to build their incredible Tuscan villa in Ennisbrook — an extraordinary home, thoughtfully detailed, and with a two-year build time that we imagined would carry us through the recession of the early '90s.

That recession, forecasted to last two years, turned into five long years. We went from a crew of 50 to two. We went nine months without a new contract. We learned the real value of retained earnings. We learned we never wanted to be in that place again.

To accomplish that, our learning involved being around people older, smarter and wiser than us. People with much more experience, who shared the outcomes of those experiences with us. Learning consisted of going to industry conferences and builder symposiums to soak up knowledge. It meant hanging out with the people who organized these events and who enjoyed giving back to the industry.

Learning included joining peer groups of fellow builders and company owners, seeing what worked and, more importantly, what didn't. Learning came from assuming leadership positions, not only in industry associations, but also on unrelated nonprofit boards, where we learned how other community leaders achieve results.

Learning also came from books, audiotapes, and webcasts. We were always seeking another nugget of wisdom. Certain books were so powerful that they were literally life-changing, such as Michael Gerber's

The E-Myth Revisited, Marcus Buckingham's *First Break All the Rules*, and, of course, *From Good to Great*, by Jim Collins.

Over time, day by day, we applied more and more of the concepts and principles that we learned in building our organization, while holding true to our original core values. And by so doing, we created a flywheel, building on itself, each revolution of the wheel garnering more momentum. On each job, we built well, we kept track of our numbers, we shared what we learned from our mistakes, and we made our best efforts to make every one of our clients feel important.

To set ourselves apart from our competition, we began to market what we stood for. We call it *Building Peace of Mind*. So simple, yet so challenging to attain. Even to this day, we still strive to be your builders for life.

This philosophy is what we design all of our processes around, including:

- Extremely detailed scopes of works and budgets.
- Real people answering all calls at the office.
- Weekly project team meetings — with agendas sent out 48 hours



Above, left: Geoff Crane routing an exposed valley rafter, 1984; Bruce Giffin, roof framing, 1984. *Facing page, above, right:* Left to right: Derek Shue, Bruce Giffin, Geoff Crane, Eric Carlstedt. *Below right:* Riley Giffin and Bruce Giffin setting form boards, 1991; Geoff Crane, on the builder's level, and helper laying out a foundation, late '80s; Bruce Giffin and crew roof framing, 1988.



in advance to our clients and colleagues — to keep communication flowing during the project.

- Daily photos of on-site work and progress posted to Procore's cloud-based project management system, so that our clients can see what's taking place.
- Clarity in our accounting system so that our clients have assurance of where their hard-earned dollars are going.
- Paying our trades and vendors quickly to build trust and responsiveness.
- Standing behind what we build, with calendared post-construction Quality Assurance walkthroughs at three and eleven months after project completion.



- Tracking, measuring, and promoting across the company the number of “happy-client attaboys” we get each month.

After all, we are a customer service company that just happens to build and remodel fine homes. So, dear friends, colleagues, and clients, I thank you. As Giffin & Crane transitions — with the slow baton handoff in the relay race of life —

to the next generation of builders, we believe that what we've created — not only on your properties, but in our own organization, as well — will continue to be of value to our community. So, I thank you for hiring us to create value.

And with that, this will be my final article in *HOME* as CEO of Giffin & Crane. Geoff, Derek, and Eric will continue running the company with the same strong senior executive team that we've had for many years. Additionally, there's a fine group of young people, both in the office and in the field, who are taking up the charge. I know the company is in good hands.

—Bruce Giffin



JAKE LEWIS, SUPERINTENDENT, QUALITY ASSURANCE

NEXT-GENERATION BUILDER WITH AN EYE ON SUSTAINABILITY

When Jake Lewis was a kid growing up on the East Coast, his family had a summer tradition of road-tripping around the country to follow the Boston Red Sox and visit national parks. Along the way, his folks always made a point of stopping to check out “architectural gems,” Jake says. To this he credits his lifelong fascination with how buildings are put together. “Plus,” he adds, “my parents renovated our homes when we were living in Massachusetts and [later in] Texas. I always enjoyed watching tradespeople working on those projects.”

After high school in Texas, Jake studied political science and environmental studies at the University of North Carolina, where he took a course in green architecture “that was really eye-opening,” he remembers. Since then, he’s taken a special interest in sustainable homebuilding.

After graduating from UNC, Jake was interested in trying something different, he says. “Many of my peers were moving to cities for corporate jobs, and I just had a feeling that a move like that was not the right next step for me. So in the fall of 2014, I connected with a friend who

worked in the trades on Nantucket. I moved up there and began as a laborer and carpenter’s assistant, working on homes all over the island.”

As it goes with young men in the trades, one job leads to the next, and after nine months on the island, he moved to Asheville, North Carolina, to join a framing crew for a local general contractor.

“And less than a year later, I moved north to Virginia to build a pole barn on a family friend’s farm, an opportunity that put to use much of what I had learned over the past year and a half,” Jake remembers. “Not only was the barn my first experience in project management, it was also when construction turned from being a job to a possible career.” As an added bonus, that project often included end-of-day beers with a buddy overlooking the Rivanna River.

In October 2016, Jake headed west with his girlfriend, Bryn, who was

born in Santa Barbara. “I knew that I wanted to stay in construction,” he remembers. “My interest in project management motivated me to reply to an online ad, in 2017, for a superintendent position at Giffin & Crane. At the time, I knew very little other than they built high-end homes. The staff’s humility and work-life balance stood out to me as important pillars of the company during the early stages of my interview process.”

In August 2017, Jake came aboard as a superintendent. He also works in quality assurance, a program dedicated to revisiting completed projects after three months, and again after eleven months, reinspecting work and checking in with clients. “We make sure the homeowners are happy,” he says.

As for Jake’s special interest in sustainable homebuilding, he appreciates the prospect of being on the cutting edge of green technology and working for clients who value high-quality, architecturally significant homes.

“I’m working alongside professionals who are among the best at what they do,” he says. “Nobody’s cutting any corners here. I’m really learning the right way to do things.” ▲



JIM VAUGHAN, SUPERINTENDENT

A MONTECITO LOCAL COMES HOME TO HELP

From a Giffin & Crane job site on Pepper Hill, where the view stretches from Montecito Peak to the Channel Islands, Jim Vaughan can see many of the stomping grounds of his youth. Growing up, he hiked the creeks and trails in the nearby mountains, and along the coast, he surfed with friends. In the quiet neighborhoods in-between, he went to school, rode bikes through the hedgerows, and played lots of tennis.

Like many families, the Vaughans moved to Montecito for its reputable schools and semi-rural tranquility. Jim's dad had been a construction superintendent when he returned from the Vietnam War, before shifting to commercial real estate. He eventually transitioned to residential real estate and, in 2008, founded Montecito Village Realty Group.

Jim and his big sister attended Montecito Union and Santa Barbara's secondary schools. All the while, Jim was a competitive tennis player, putting in a lot of court time at Knowlwood Tennis Club and Birnam Wood Golf Club. On a tennis scholarship, he attended Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas.



After graduation, he played professionally for about a year and worked as a tennis pro at the Biltmore resort in Montecito until an injury hampered his athletic career. Fortunately, through his father's background, Jim had a strong connection to the construction and real estate fields. He found a new direction.

"I got into homebuilding through a year-long training program at Toll Brothers, a national firm," Jim says. "I was brought up through management, and the next thing I knew, I had over a hundred homes behind me."

Living in Orange County at the time, his direction again took another turn — this time as the catastrophic debris flow of January 9, 2018 destroyed the neighborhoods of some of his childhood friends.

Santa Barbara County's worst natural disaster made an instant impact on his life, Jim remembers. "It became my clear directive to come home to

see what I could do to help."

Back in his hometown, Jim was introduced to Giffin & Crane through a mutual friend. Jim knew the company by reputation. "Growing up in Montecito, it was pretty hard to miss knowing who Bruce and Geoff were."

"I didn't even know they were hiring," he remembers. "I guess they liked me — I was lucky enough to be brought on in June of 2018 as a superintendent." He started as part of a company strike team in the aftermath of the debris flow, helping longtime clients recover from a range of damages.

Now on the Pepper Hill project — a full rebuild of a four-bedroom, single-family residence on nearly two acres — Jim pauses for a moment to take in the view and give credit to his mentors, past and present.

"Being a commercial and residential broker — and a builder in his past — my father certainly gave me my first taste of real estate development and what makes a good home," he says, before rattling off a substantial list of subsequent influencers, including company co-founders Bruce Giffin and Geoff Crane, plus Executive Vice President, Derek Shue. "They've certainly shaped the way I execute my job and professional stature." 🏡

FEATURED HOME:

Montecito Mid-Century Craftsman

New Arrivals Downshift for Santa Barbara Living

Tucked away near the center of an easy maze of Montecito hedgerows, Andrea and Ron Hein found their dream home. They had recently decided to leave Los Angeles and their 1926 Spanish-style home, searching for a quieter life in a smaller town. Andrea says, “We said our next house is going to be our last house. We knew we wanted a mid-

For the Heins, that perfect garage was high on their wishlist. After all, Ron has a thing for immaculately restored sports cars. With a pair of hydraulic car lifts fitted into the roomy three-car space, there’s plenty of room for his all-original classics: 1963 289 Cobra; 1961 Porsche Roadster; 1957 Alfa Romeo Sprint Veloce; 1965 Shelby GT350; and

As one might expect, Ron’s garage received the same comprehensive attention to detail enjoyed by the rest of the property. Originally built in 1963, the home — situated on a flat half-acre lot — went through “a couple of minor redos over the years,” says Andrea. This time around, it got an “80-percent strip-down,” with new plumbing, electrical, floors, finishes, and improvements to the foundation, just to name a handful of overhauls.

“The house had very good bones and had been well designed by the original builder, but it needed upgrading and renovating,” Andrea says of the nine-month project. “We wanted to stay true to the mid-century modern character without having it look like a museum piece for that time period.”

The Heins were introduced to Giffin & Crane through their real estate agent. “When we met with Bruce, we got the right vibe,” Andrea remembers. “Immediately, he made us feel confident and comfortable. We knew we could work with this guy!”

“And we wanted a first-class company with access to the best subcontractors in Santa Barbara,” added Ron.

continued on back page



century modern — something bright and airy — and something within walking distance to the beach.”

As fortune would have it, the house they ended up buying was the first one they looked at. “We saw nine mid-century moderns on that first weekend trip up to Santa Barbara,” Andrea remembers, “and we made an offer on this one during the drive back to L.A. We thought, ‘This is the perfect house with the perfect garage.’”

a 1968 Ferrari Dino 206 GT.

Before the move to Montecito, Ron had spent 25 years tackling restoration projects, a hobby that demanded upward of five years on a single vehicle. But now that he has this elite handful — each in near-mint condition — safe and sound in their new home, he prefers to spend less time under the hood, he says, “and more time just driving them and taking walks to the beach with Andrea.”

Facing page, clockwise from top left: The Hein’s entryway introduces visitors to the vaulted ceilings featured throughout the home; big windows surround the living room and fireplace; more tall windows adjacent to the dining area frame the mountains above Montecito; a spacious modern kitchen connects dining and entertaining areas; and the home’s outdoor living space takes advantage of Santa Barbara’s optimal climate.



THE TEAM

Bruce Giffin
Project Lead

**Karen Haroutounian
and Gunther Toth,**
*Hub of The House
Primary Designers*

Britt Jewitt and Dale Pekarek
Architect and Building Designer

Kimberley True,
True Nature
Landscape Architect

Adan Venegas, Blue Agave
Landscaping
Landscape Installation

AJ Precision Concrete
Hardscaping

**Andrea Hein and
Melanie Paykos**
Interiors



FEATURED HOME *continued from previous page*

On approach, a welcoming garden and finely finished hardscaping guides visitors to clean craftsman lines that open up considerably past the front door threshold. Inside, the ceiling vaults, running due north into the living room, where expansive floor-to-ceiling windows showcase Montecito Peak and surrounding canyons.

The adjoining kitchen and dining area connect seamlessly to a quiet and comfortable outdoor living space surrounded by trees and hedges.

The southern end of the home features an office, a guest suite with its own private patio, and a reimagined master bedroom. Originally a somewhat dark space with a standard ceiling, the master was opened up into the unused attic space. Now, with a newly vaulted ceiling and a set of windows aligned with the home's overall design, the bedroom matches the spacious modern feel throughout.

"In terms of layout," Ron says, "there's not one square foot of this house that does not work for us."

"The design evolved into exactly what we had envisioned from the beginning," Andrea adds. "It's a clean, comfortable, Zen-like space we plan to call home for many years to come." 🏡

G&C ON THE WEB

Check out our blog at:
giffinandcrane.com/blog



Like us on Facebook



Follow us on Instagram

OUTSIDE SPACES: FRAMING BEAUTY

When Andrea and Ron Hein first fell in love with their new home in Montecito, its allure wasn't just clean craftsman lines throughout a bright modern layout. They were also attracted to its potential to fulfill a gold standard of Santa Barbara's quality of life: outdoor living. "To us, the exterior was just as important as the interior," Andrea says.

Bruce Giffin introduced the Heins to Kimberly True, whose True Nature landscape architecture and environmental consulting firm is based in Santa Barbara.

"We told Kim that we wanted to entertain outside and just feel comfortable," Andrea remembers with a sweep of outstretched arms. "We just sat down with her and talked through it. She really understood our vision."

"I drew up the concept and pretty much nailed it first try," True says with a smile. "We started with a rough pencil stretch, then worked back into all the details."

Working with a blank canvas — the Heins had removed the old lawn and brick, and had regraded to improve drainage



— True took the style of the home to heart, she remembers. "There's so much glass in the house, it made sense to create scenes outside these big windows."

Surrounded by the pittosporum hedge historic to the neighborhood, True set about setting the outdoor stage to that mountain view out back — complete with a casual dining space — plus a Japanese garden outside the master bedroom. All the while trading ideas and photographs with Andrea to fine-tune the design as it grew from blueprint to reality, including a forward-thinking detail in making the front door easy to access as the Heins move comfortably through and beyond their golden years.

"My favorite part of the project was that they were the codesigners," says True. "It was really fun working with them." 🏡

GIFFIN & CRANE
GENERAL CONTRACTORS, LLC