

# HOME

ISSUE TWENTY

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IN EVERY ENDEAVOR, there is a jumping off point: the moment the decision to go forward is made, the contract is signed, the boat is christened, the first word in your Wordle game is typed in. You may have put hours of time and capital into research and preparation for whatever venture you face, readying yourself for every possible outcome while also taking steps to mitigate problems that may crop up once you're fully committed.

## BOLDLY BUILD!

Major ventures are not for the faint of heart, and reality is that many folks hold back from forging ahead for fear of failure. But when that next adventure is as important as building your dream home, we've found that confidence can be obtained through finding a guide with not only a strong base of knowledge but also the experience and wisdom of knowing what to do with it.

People have been at this construction thing for a long time, building shelters since the cave real estate market became overburdened by the growing population. In the intervening millennia between then and today, we've determined a lot of building practices that didn't work and a few that did. Along the way we also added unique design and architectural flairs to those

building practices in an effort to create built structures that reflected us as individuals. True success is achieved when the individual or group that commissioned the project not only connects emotionally with the aesthetics of the building, but the builder also constructs the space with all the important details in mind—with an interior that is

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*Building Peace of Mind.*

**BOLDLY BUILD!** *continued from previous page*



cool or warm when it needs to be, a structure able to withstand the impacts of environmental forces, and one that keeps rain and runoff on the right side of the building envelope. Coordinating all the details to get to this “true success” is where that

experienced guide can make all the difference.

Giffin & Crane hasn't been building and remodeling homes in Santa Barbara and neighboring areas since humanity moved out of caves, but we have been doing it for quite a while—

creeping up on 40 years. With a vast team of knowledgeable builders, talented craftsmen, subcontractors and a dedicated labor force, we have amassed a substantial amount of experience in how to provide our clients the guidance they need to create the home of their dreams. On some of those projects we are part of the initial brainstorming phase, working with the homeowners to translate emotional statements and hand gestures into something tangible by sharing our own ideas and connecting clients with incredible design teams. In other cases, clients have already spent significant time with their architect, fine tuning the design before we are brought into the equation. Whatever the case, we are always eager to apply our experience, from the preconstruction and pricing phase on through the construction journey, and for years after the project is completed, ensuring along the way



that our client's investment is always well looked after.

So, if you're standing at that precipice, readying yourself to move forward on your next or, perhaps, first, construction project in Santa Barbara, know that you have a humble and experienced guide in our company. Bruce Giffin and Geoff Crane founded Giffin & Crane in 1986 out of a desire to build the best in and for our community, a desire that has only grown stronger since Derek Shue and I became principles in 2018. We look forward to joining you on your next adventure.

—Eric Carlstedt

*Left: Old-growth redwood is revitalized in a reimagined living space at this midcentury home. Below, left to right: Stone, steel, glass and elegant fixtures are the components of a unique primary shower; dreams do have views; design that takes advantage of indoor/outdoor spaces is the perfect fit for the Santa Barbara climate.*



## DEFENSIBLE SPACE: KEY HOME PROTECTION AGAINST WILDFIRE

This past winter brought lots of much-needed rain to Santa Barbara, feeding prolific growth throughout our communities, from mountainside chaparral to the tall weeds along neighborhood streets.

While the new greenery marked a nice reprieve from years of drought, our arid landscapes tend to dry out quickly, especially during the heatwaves of summer and fall. That's when our local firefighting teams become extra vigilant to keep us—and our homes—safe from Santa Barbara's most common natural disaster: wildfire.

You can help maintain community resilience by preparing your property for a wildfire emergency.

Start by maintaining what's called defensible space around your home and outbuildings. This involves removing dead and overgrown vegetation to create a roomy buffer around your home from which firefighters can defend against approaching embers and flames. Landscaping with fire-resistant plants and replacing vegetation with hardscaping can also be beneficial. Focus your efforts within 100 feet of structures and roadways.

It's also important to properly maintain trees and hedges along driveways so that emergency vehicles have unobstructed access.

To save time and money, take advantage of your neighborhood chipping program, which will chip or haul away the branches and other dry vegetation that you've cleared from your property.

Reach out to the experts. Many local landscaping companies are familiar with the best practices for our region, and fire departments across Santa Barbara County offer free consultations on wildfire preparedness.

Last but certainly not least: Our emergency professionals highly recommend that you review your evacuation plan—if you don't have one, make one—and never hesitate to get out of harm's way.

For more information, visit [montecitofire.com/fire-prevention](https://montecitofire.com/fire-prevention) ▲



## FEATURED HOME:

## Horses and History

*Equine Therapy Meets a Classic Hacienda*

As soon as Jane and Michael Nicolais settled in at their new Hope Ranch home, Jane set to work creating a special facility for her five horses and donkey. These big grazers needed plenty of pasture and room to roam as a herd, plus a safe and comfortable barn and round pen. She wanted the very best for them; after all, as an equus-certified coach, Jane relies on these highly sensitive and responsive 1,000-pound animals to help clients work through life challenges.

With architect Britt Jewett, Jane poured over antique books filled with examples of building practices and styles of the 1920s. Jane appreciated Jewett's "attention to detail," she says, and his historic restoration of the Santa Barbara Courthouse, a building from the same era as her Johnson hacienda.

"Jane had a strong hand in things," Jewett says. "She knew where we were going, understood that aesthetic language, and trusted

For the facility's round pen, they went with a contemporary take on the traditional octagon shape. With a clear span of 65 feet in diameter and a clerestory in the roof above, it was a fun challenge to build, says company cofounder Bruce Giffin, now retired. He added that the finish work and architectural detailing of the exposed beams took the structure to the next level.

"The round pen is both a standalone piece and a bridge to historical architecture," Giffin said. "I was really pleased with the performance of all the trades on this project. What we built really lives up to the timelessness of the property's original hacienda."

The project also served as Giffin's swansong. "It was a great project for wonderful clients," he said. "What a way to wrap up my career as a builder."

Reflecting on the feedback she gets from friends and clients, Jane appreciates everybody's effort to create a space that melds seamlessly with the nearly 100-year-old main residence. "The new structures feel like they have been here from the very beginning," she says. "And the horses and the donkey really like it, too." ▲

*Above left: For this legacy equestrian project, designers and builders focused on staying true to the original home's century-old Reginald Johnson aesthetic while including modern amenities. Facing page, clockwise from top left: One of the facility's five horse stalls; exposed structural architecture and custom saddle racks; the brick-floored barn is situated to channel the prevailing breeze; furnished tack room; viewing arbor adjacent the round pen and arena.*



Turns out, providing that level of care to her clients and their four-legged therapists would produce a project far greater than the sum of its many parts.

For cues on design, Jane started with the property's original residence, a classic hacienda—foursided, with a courtyard in the middle—built in 1929 by famed Pasadena-based architect Reginald Johnson, who also designed the Biltmore, Music Academy, Cate School, Rancho San Carlos, and the Santa Barbara Post Office, among many other commercial and residential projects in Southern California.

us to execute it. We really wanted it to be a legacy project."

Calling Johnson's original work "an example of sacred geometry," Jewett praised the attention to proportion, from the dimensions of the rooms and corresponding volume to the size of the windows, among other details that informed the design of the barn and its five stalls. The barn also features a furnished tack room, storage loft, and custom saddle racks, and was situated to channel prevailing breezes and take in the ocean view.



## THE TEAM

**Bruce Giffin**  
*Principal*

**Nick Pendleton**  
*Senior Project Manager*

**Britt Jewett, Studio 7**  
*Architecture & Allied Arts*  
*Architect*

**Danette Ott,**  
**OEC Interior Design**  
*Interiors*

**Amy Blakemore,**  
**Greens Landscape Design**  
*Landscape Architect*



## BIBI TAYLOR, SENIOR PROJECT MANAGER

### IN PRAISE OF PARENTAL GUIDANCE AND THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Planetwide, you'll likely find nobody better suited than Bibi Taylor to harmonize the seemingly disparate worlds of wild-river fly fishing and high-end construction management. She's got both in her blood.

Born and raised in the Bay Area, Taylor's simultaneous exposure to the construction industry and fly fishing came early as her artist parents launched a house-painting business primarily so they could suspend operations each summer to take family trips to the trout rivers of Montana.

Those childhood learning experiences in nature — and getting dragged to job sites at a young age—would inform how she performed in the modern-day work world.

"I love being outside, and fly fishing," Taylor says. "It's kind of like meditating—you focus on everything around you at the moment. Same with managing construction projects — things are always changing, requiring attention to the details and creative problem solving."

After her parents split, Taylor's mom took over the painting business. "Being a single mom, she had to make it work," Taylor remembers. "She had a project in Santa Barbara"—painting a 1917 Reginald Johnson villa owned by music and film icon Burl Ives—"and ended up staying."

Over the years, Taylor says, her mom got more into specialty finishing,



including on a few Giffin & Crane projects, and created a niche for herself.

After graduating from UC Santa Cruz in 1990, Taylor moved to Santa Barbara to work with her mom. During summers, she worked with her dad, a licensed outfitter, as a fishing guide in Montana and Wyoming. It's a lifelong craft she still practices today, with her own kid and his friends.

In 2002, Taylor upped her career game with a master's degree in business administration from Pepperdine University. Right away she landed a job in corporate finance. Unfortunately, it wasn't a good fit, she said. "I hated it."

Her real first taste of construction project management was at Lazy Acres on the Mesa as the high-end grocery grew its appeal, she remembers. "I got my foot in the door as a project coordinator alongside one of the owners, who became a mentor."

For several years after, she worked as an independent contractor on large residential projects, finding her own niche. While rewarding, the constant hustle was also challenging.

Wrapping up a large project in 2019, she decided to search for a position with the "best general contractor in Santa Barbara," she says. Giffin & Crane was at the top of the list.

"Giffin & Crane is known for quality workmanship, relationships with top subcontractors, and its longevity and solid reputation," she says. Unsolicited, she mailed a letter to company headquarters. Six months later, she got the call. Taylor came aboard as a project manager in October 2019.

Now as a senior project manager, she looks forward to opportunities to provide guidance to others breaking into the industry. Taylor still draws inspiration from her contractor mom, now retired, who taught her the ropes, and enjoys paying it forward.

"I love this industry," she says. "Being a part of a team that creates something long-lasting for others to enjoy is challenging and so rewarding." 🏡

## AARON “JOHNNY” FOSTER, SENIOR PROJECT MANAGER

### A BUILDER OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE

If Aaron Foster just surfed all the time, the enviable bliss of such lifestyle would also likely leave him without the perks of steady food and shelter. On the other hand, if he dedicated an excessive bulk of his waking hours to work, the elevated payback would never be enough to recover all that lost me-time. Fortunately—in that balancing act of passion and profession—there’s middleground to be had.

Born and raised in Seattle, Foster got turned onto surfing and graphic design shortly after high school. A few years after graduation he moved to sunny San Diego where he caught a chronic case of surf fever while working on a four-year advertising degree at an arts college.

Turns out, advertising wasn’t the best fit, Foster remembers, so he accepted a construction job from a family friend in Santa Barbara, where he explored a new surf scene while learning the basics, from general labor to swinging a hammer. But then the Great Recession hit. His job disappeared, and he moved back home to Seattle with his brother to rehab an old house and pick up off-and-on fix-it work in the foreclosure market.

On the other side of the recession, Foster returned to Santa Barbara to work on a big custom

home in Hope Ranch, where he added masonry and finishwork to his skillset. He enjoyed working and living—and surfing—in Santa Barbara, and he wanted to make it last.

“I had maxed out to a certain extent, and I knew I’d have to get a leg up if I wanted to stay in Santa Barbara,” he remembers. “I wanted to progress in the industry.”

Through San Diego State University, Foster completed an online two-year certificate course in construction management in 12 months. That investment propelled Foster from finish carpenter to superintendent. And in April of 2019 he interviewed with Giffin & Crane; he came aboard a month later.

“It was exactly what I was looking for,” Foster remembers. “Giffin & Crane is unlike any other construction company I’ve worked for. It’s the level of organization. The philosophy of doing things right. Of owning your mistakes and learning from them. Custom homebuilding is tough. But with our range of experience, we learn from each other to really refine our problem-solving skills.”

Around that time—in one of those rare moments where business meets bliss—a surf buddy turned Foster onto an opportunity to resurrect an obscure but innovative wave-riding bodyboard developed locally in the mid-1980s by the late Dennis Shanelec, who had shelved the company to focus on his career as a dental surgeon.

Before he passed in 2019, Shanelec, and later his widow, Suzanne, were pleased to reignite the brand and pass the torch. Ahi Wave Sleds, manufactured domestically from 100% curbside recyclable material, hit the Santa Barbara market earlier this year.

The entrepreneurial effort honors Shanelec’s original aim to maximize pure fun, something Foster keeps in mind as he continues to navigate the life dance between passion and profession. 🏠



## TOP 5 TECH: CONSTRUCTION TECHNOLOGY FOR CUSTOM HOMEBUILDERS

*In the multifaceted world of custom homebuilding and remodeling, the efficient flow of accurate information is key to any successful project, big or small. Less than a generation ago, the daily paperwork involved in tracking, sorting, distributing, and revising inherently complicated projects often bogged down creative workflow and problem solving. But with leaps-and-bounds advancements in technology—including the examples detailed below—all that is changing. Here are five of our favorites.*

**BLUEBEAM:** To help us compile accurate estimates, this PDF software precisely counts and measures linear and square footages of built space. It also allows us to produce drawings to confirm details with design teams and clients.

**PROCORE:** Headquartered in Carpinteria, this construction management technology provides “a centralized database of all the information about a project,” says Giffin & Crane principal and partner Eric Carlstedt. “It saves us time in uploading and accessing details about a project and getting the most up-to-date design information to our subs as quickly as possible. It also tracks payroll and site visits, and all the principals get end-of-day project reports for review. Overall, it really raises the level of accountability and makes us all more efficient.”

Importantly, Procore helps homeowners stay very much in the loop, with notifications about weekly meeting agendas and follow-up summaries, plus photo updates, notes, logs, reports, drawings, and documents — all of it keyword searchable and accessible via

smartphone, tablet, and desktop, says Carlstedt. “That involvement really brings peace of mind to our clients, especially those who are physically not in town for days or weeks at a time.”

**MATTERPORT:** To help compile a thorough project archive, this advanced camera system uses 360-degree photography, syncing pictures with precise coordinates and measurements to render editable and shareable three-dimensional imagery.

“We have always heavily photographed our projects every step of the way and the shots were always organized so that we could go back to see what’s behind the finishes,” Carlstedt says. “In the past, that process was painstaking. But with Matterport, the images create a 3-D model you can view through your computer or mobile device from anywhere.”

**FLIR:** These handheld thermal cameras read tiny temperature differences on material surfaces, useful for a number of applications. Most frequently, we use them to pinpoint where insulation is missing and to locate potential


leaks. This minimizes investigatory demolition—opening a wall, for example—that may otherwise be required to solve these and other similar issues.

**DOCUSIGN:** Utilizing e-signatures to management agreements, DocuSign simplifies and speeds up the contract approval process with clients and subcontractors. It also streamlines our annual subcontractor agreements and insurance certifications.

“Information is everything,” Carlstedt says. “By using these technologies, we’re able to gather, save and share a massive amount of useful information in a short amount of time. I think technology is at its best when it both improves your final product while also increasing efficiency and ease of process.” ▲

### G&C ON THE WEB

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