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**AMERICAN
BUILDERS
QUARTERLY**

What's Old is **New Again**

AFTER



BEFORE



The lessons that Kelley Nichols' father instilled in him when he was a boy still ring true in Kelbuilds Construction & Remodeling's renovation of a 108-year-old beach cottage

BY MAURA KELLER

KELLEY NICHOLS, OWNER OF SAN JOSE, California-based Kelbuilds Construction & Remodeling, wasn't born on a ladder with a paintbrush in his hand, but he learned from an early age the nuances of the construction and building industry.

Having a father as a professional painting contractor meant that Nichols and his three brothers were taught to use a paintbrush and wake up in the early morning to help their father in his work. Although the young Nichols might not have had the freedom to enjoy leisurely summer days, he developed his father's strong work ethic, a solid understanding of the construction trades, and a key understanding of what it takes to do a job right the first time.

Fast forward 40 years and Nichols still follows the adage that his father worked hard to instill in his sons: "Do the job right the first time, do whatever it takes to please your client, treat others like you want to be treated, and build the house like you are going to own it one day." The words ring in his ears constantly.

"Needless to say, it molded me into the man and businessman I am today," he says. "This is the foundation of Kelbuilds—hard work, done correctly the first time, period. Or I might as well just fold up and go home. I can't do it any other way."

After years of helping his father in the painting industry, Nichols realized his true passion was construction and general con-

tracting. After founding a construction and remodeling company in Dallas, Texas, Nichols moved back to California after the death of his wife and began Nichols Construction & Remodeling in San Jose. Although his company grew, business slowed significantly during the recession, which began in 2007. Surviving that period, Nichols renamed his company Kelbuilds Construction & Remodeling in 2011.

"I've fought the good fight, I've stayed committed to serving people and making their remodeling dreams come true because now I'm a well polished rock," Nichols says. "At the young

▼ Interior painting included blues and greens to reflect ocean colors and create a sense of tranquility.

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Kelley Nichols, Owner



Photo: Allison Baerin

INSIDE THE BEACH HOME

Kelley Nichols and his team, along with his clients, brought back to life a coastal home reflecting a cozy cottage-bungalow style both on the exterior and interior of the home.

The exterior new stucco surface was added to create a smoother contemporary finish for the walls, and the creative “wave” cedar shingles were added on the gables so that the detail would be unique and emulate the waves from the neighboring ocean.

When living so close to the ocean and having a beautiful view from the living spaces, the team wanted to focus on the idea of bringing the “outside in” when thinking about the interior colors, materials, and furniture.

Interior paint colors of ocean blues and greens provide a tranquil environment. Carefully planned color accents in each room bring a pop of color and contrast for the shell mirrors and custom art within the home.

Vetrazzo kitchen countertops sparkle in the kitchen, providing glimpses of natural seashells and sea glass. A mixture of green and gray subway glass tiles dance in a vertical pattern at the backsplash to complement the countertop below.

Natural materials that bring a layer of texture and reflections of the sea are found in the choices of gray oak colors within the wood floors, sea glass materials in the lamp bases and mirrors. Sisal weave, wicker, and burlap textures were sourced for the lampshades, headboards and rugs. Subtle patterns in the rug, pillows, and even the detail of the kitchen cabinet hardware are reminiscent of waves, kelp, and sea life. Cottage-style fans and furniture round out the mix.

It also was important that there be a wide use of recycled products used within the home that are environmentally friendly, such as the Vetrazzo and quartz countertops, low-flow toilets, energy-efficient lighting, and low-VOC paint.



age of 53, I’ve got nearly 35 years of experience in my field. It’s now my time to show how years of hard work can really pay off.”

After following the principles that he was taught, 2015 found Nichols facing the biggest job of his career—renovating a 108-year-old beach cottage.

Located on the coast of Santa Cruz, the 1908 house faced a \$300,000 remodel that required Nichols to turn the old shack into a beautiful home that could take its place among the neighboring \$2 to \$4 million homes.

Before Nichols signed the contract on this job, he crawled under the house and looked around to see if it was even worth remodeling.

“If the foundation is bad, anything I do above it won’t last,” Nichols says. “Amazingly enough, the foundation was still in decent shape. Besides a few humps and dips in the floor, everything else was salvageable. So I put together a proposal for the owners and off we went with our sledgehammers, crowbars, and nail pullers.”

As Nichols explains, the home, built entirely out of redwood, predated the building codes and enforcement to which he was required to adhere. For example, the house’s ceiling joists and rafters all were solid 2x4 clear, rough-sawn redwood. They also were overspanned, which Nichols says simply wouldn’t work under modern codes.



Photos: Allison Baerlin

“We basically reframed the entire house without tearing it completely down,” he says. “I doubled up everything, all the rafters and ceiling joists. I added more purlins and collar-ties to the already overspanned 2x4 rafters.”

The house had also been using only 30 amps for the main electrical panel. Today’s houses typically boast 200-amp panels. Nichols and his team ripped out every single piece of electrical wiring and rewired the home to meet modern codes. In addition, the plumbing system was completely overhauled and all-new gas lines were installed.

“I remember after stripping the house down to the studs and joists, my men and I were standing in the attic and the sea wind was blowing a good 20 knots on shore,” Nichols says. “The house began to slightly sway in the wind. I thought to myself, ‘Is the house going to fall down because I stripped off any and all shear wall value that it may have had

from the quarter-inch plywood paneling on the walls and ceilings?" It's kind of frightening how weak the house was originally built. But that's not the case anymore."

Since it is 108 years old, the home offered a wealth of surprises along the way—from shortened door frames, to overly thin studs, to severe termite damage. Bringing it up to code was one thing—making it “blend in” with the neighborhood was another challenge entirely.

“I realized before I began this project that I was going to need help with the interior design aspects like bathroom tile colors, paint colors, and flooring choices,” Nichols says. “I decided to bring a designer on to help make the process go more smoothly.”

The overall result is a new, beach-cottage look and design that Nichols says “turned this small, 1,300-square-foot old beach shack into a gorgeous three-bedroom, two-bath, delightful getaway that overlooks the Pacific Ocean.”

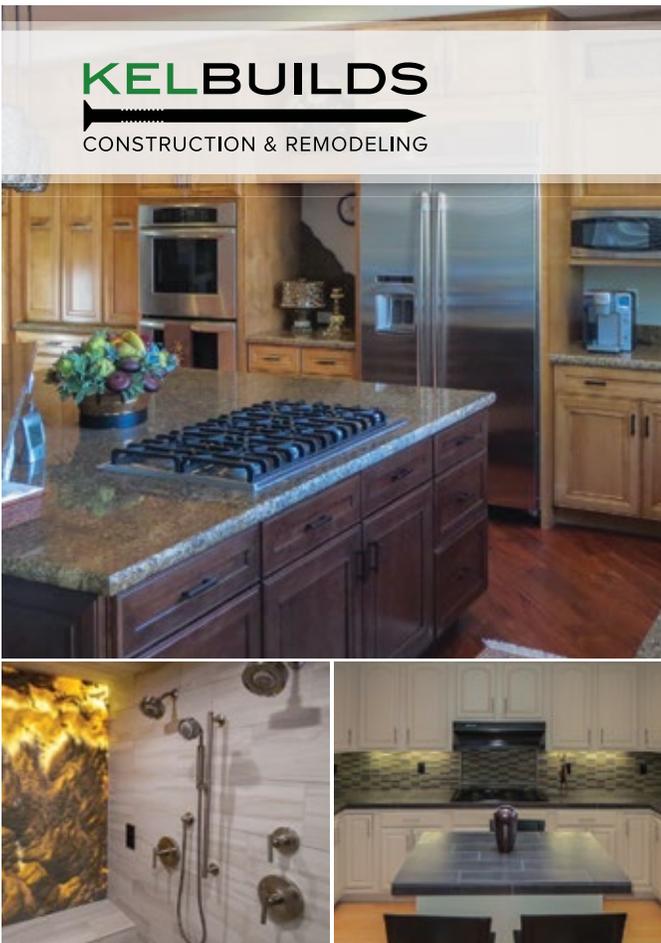
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It was a lot of work to be sure. Throughout the job, building inspectors, laborers, subcontractors, neighbors and passers-by all were impressed by the fact that finally someone was remodeling this relic while preserving its original footprint and feel.

“The remodel has enhanced my life, my

business, and my attitude,” Nichols says. “If my father could have seen me on the job! I woke up each day to this small, but beautiful home, while living on the premises, completing the job. I could stand back at the end of the day and realize that projects like these are what I was born and bred to do.” ■



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