





Photos: Jim Bartsch

# Enhance the Peripheral

Allen Construction resurrects a historic home following a natural disaster and upgrades the entire property to modern-day standards.

by Kyle Clapham

**TWO** weeks after moving from the East Coast, the owners of a Montecito, California, home designed in the 1920s by architect George Washington Smith felt overwhelmed. They intended to renovate only a bathroom, laundry room and walk-in closet, but after a mudslide destroyed one-third of the house, their minor remodel plans turned into disaster recovery for the historic home.

“There was a gaping hole in what was then the primary suite; the back bedroom was completely taken out,” says Duncan Brown, superintendent for Allen Construction in Santa Barbara. “There was a tree and a Volkswagen-size boulder in the middle of the bedroom area. There was probably 3 feet of mud that had to be dug out and cleaned up. They retrieved anything that wasn’t too damaged.”

Having previously owned historic homes—ones that were much older than what they found on the West Coast—the clients decided to rebuild and remodel the whole house. They basically kept the same footprint (enclosing a 75-square-foot porch to expand their primary bedroom), but they re-configured it to increase functionality, converting numerous small spaces into larger ones.





Crawlspace was limited between the east and west wings. As a result, new pipes and wires had to be run through the attic above the great room.



### Full of Mud

A substantial wildfire in the local mountains—followed by torrential rains—caused the mudflow and dealt the homeowners a tough hand. Smith designed the original house with plastered walls; a steeply pitched, tile-clad hipped roof with shallow eaves; and deep-set, multilight windows embellished with rustic wood shutters as an example of French Norman Provincial architecture in the 1920s. In 2001 the county of Santa Barbara designated the 5,150-square-foot home a historic landmark.

“Initially, they wanted to keep the one fireplace intact,” recalls Brown, who helped with demoing the areas destroyed by the mudslide. “We carefully demoed around it only to find that it had been displaced and was now angled so the chimney was 5 feet off-center. The architect came out and saw the only thing holding it up was the fact that the fireplace itself was full of mud. It looked like something out of Dr. Seuss, just standing there at an odd angle. We barely touched it, and the whole thing just fell down.”



The remodel updated the kitchen counters, backsplashes and cabinets and refurbished the existing oak floors. A smaller butler's pantry (above) enabled a new laundry room.

## MASTER DESIGN AWARDS 2022 HISTORIC RENOVATION GOLD

### COMPANY INFORMATION

Allen Construction  
Santa Barbara, Calif.  
buildallen.com

### PROJECT INFORMATION

Architect: Two Trees Architects  
Location: Montecito, Calif.  
Square footage: 5,150  
Project cost: \$2.9 million

### PRODUCT INFORMATION

1/2" Starphire shower doors in Natural Brass  
Emtek "Classic Brass" door hardware  
Isokern Magnum Series 36 fireplaces  
Lennox Heating with S30 smart WiFi-enabled thermostats  
Weathermatic irrigation system  
Newport Brass 107/15 Insta hot water dispenser  
Newport Brass 5-036-WH Insta hot tank and heater  
Newport Brass Gavin 3210-5103/15 faucet  
Rohl 6347-00 Allia lavatory sink  
Newport Brass 1200-15 lavatory faucet  
Kohler K-6428-0 toilet  
Kohler K-2210 lavatory sink  
Newport Brass 211/15 shower head  
Kallista P20264-00-0 lavatory sink  
Newport Brass bidet set 1209/15  
Kohler K-4886-0 memoir bidet  
Newport Brass 1200-4283/15 tub/handshower set  
Kohler K-21000-W-0 bathtub  
Strata Gray slate roof  
Pennsylvania Blue Stone patio, stairs and fire pit  
Truth windows  
Solid White Oak Select flooring  
Benjamin Moore paint

"We decided that the foundation was in good enough shape to utilize it," Brown adds. "We had to reconfigure part of it for the expanded [primary bedroom] and then tie it into the existing floor. Leveling the floors was a challenge because they became settled in enough areas that we had to fortify all of it, raise it and level it out just to tie it in enough that it would not be detected."

The disaster recovery entailed removing significant mud, rocks, trees, telephone poles and other debris from within and around the house. This undertaking eliminated the potential for mold and shored up affected areas of the home until the remodel began. Because the mudflow took out the east side of the residence and backyard, the owners opted to change the terrace and install a pool.

One of the most eye-catching parts of the property, the rear yard now includes the pool and a spa, fire pit, lounge seating and a small outdoor kitchen/barbecue. The building team added a reinforced retaining wall to the backyard to prevent future flooding and debris flow from the adjacent creek.

The original backyard consisted of a lower terrace adjacent to the existing house and an upper lawn, which were separated by a retaining wall with a central stairway between the two levels. The building team recommended a plan to regrade the yard into one level and make the pool, surrounding deck and planting beds the focal point. A wall of French doors on the refurbished sunroom offers spectacular views of the pool, garden with antique yellow roses, and the mountains beyond.

### Enough Alike

The clients took the cards they had been dealt and capitalized on the opportunity to upgrade and enhance their historic home. They reconfigured the east wing, flipping the original primary suite (complete with sitting room and two separate baths with walk-in closets) to the rear of the home and replaced the former suite with a new media room, larger guest bedroom and two bathrooms.

"The most interesting thing when you are working in a historical structure is bringing everything up to code. [Building] codes change; the challenge



The project added new wood floors in the sunroom (near left) and east wing and refurbished the wall of French doors that open to the new pool, the garden and the mountains beyond them.



The building team raised the height of the windows in a small hallway between the relocated guest bedroom and media room (above) to allow for window benches. Built-in shelves adhere to Smith's original design.

here was maintaining the look of the historic windows and details while getting the functionality of what's required by Title 24 [energy-efficiency standards]," Brown says.

"The home was built with 2 feet of airspace between the inner and outer wall construction that served as an insulator. Since we were super-insulating the exterior, that airspace became unnecessary. Once we opened it up, we decided to take advantage of the space," he adds. "So, we built into those areas and were able to add built-in bookcases, benches and other features."

Adhering to the interior design elements prescribed by Smith dictated the built-in shelving—and

window benches—rather than freestanding ones. The team also raised the height of the windows in a small hallway between the relocated guest bedroom and media room to allow for window benches. Built-in shelves were added to the new primary bedroom and guest room wing.

"Construction back when the house was originally built was a little different; it wasn't quite as uniform," Brown notes. "The biggest challenge was retrofitting all the seismic requirements and hold-downs and doing shear walls without disrupting the look while doing as little demo as possible."

Brown and the engineer agreed to shear the inside and not the outside, so they could maintain the stucco on the exterior and not change out as many windows. All the original windows were kept on the front of the house, and the ones that were replaced were adjacent but not on the same plane; therefore, someone looking from the front could not see all of them at the same time.

"As you saw it from one view, you were looking at all new windows," he explains. "And from another viewpoint, you were looking at all original windows. Thankfully, the slate roof had just been replaced about five years prior to them owning it, so it was easy to match and tie in areas that needed new roofing. The fireplaces were a little more challenging due to ventilation requirements. They look a little different because we couldn't construct the chimneys in the same way."

### Lots of Gains

Upgrading all the plumbing and electrical lines proved to be a challenge because access to the crawlspace was limited between the east and west wings. What had looked to be a 3- or 4-foot opening became less than 18 inches below the living room on the other side of the house, Brown says.



The team flipped the original primary suite (complete with sitting room and two separate baths with walk-in closets) to the back of the home.





“Luckily, we had a vaulted ceiling, which is a scissor ceiling, so we were able to get above it and utilize [that space] as mechanical chases.”

Adding the window seats and the storage below them, as well as the built-in bookcases in the media room and other areas, ended up being a great solution to take advantage of unused space. “All we did was enhance the peripheral,” he notes. “Everything was well-designed in keeping with the integrity of the house and also in keeping with the functionality the homeowners wanted.”

In fact, the clients had not intended on re-grading the backyard and would have installed the pool on the upper lawn, Brown adds. “We said, ‘Why don’t you drop it down, so you can actually see your pool? If it’s up there, you won’t be able to see it. Not only that, you’d have to go up a flight of stairs to get to it.’”

Cleaning out the home after the mudslide took about three months, he says. “We constructed a heavily reinforced wall [toward the rear of the property] to mitigate that happening again. In other words, the mudflow would’ve stayed outside had that barrier been there. And if it ever happens

again, the flow will have to be more than 6 feet to get over that wall and into their home.

“Consequently, because of that they were able to rewrite the flood zone they were in and get it around their property. So, there were lots of gains to that. Insurance did take a while, so start to finish from when they were evacuated to when they moved [back] in was just under two years.”

The homeowners have wonderful things to say about the building team, Brown notes, including how they were guided through the disaster recovery process and—during the renovation—how much attention the building team gave to even the smallest detail.

With the ample guest accommodations and backyard, their daughter says she feels like she is staying at a “country club” whenever she visits, which is often. “When we were talking about adding the window seats, I said, ‘This would be a perfect place to read and look out at the mountains,’” Brown recalls. “And on his daughter’s first visit, she read a book on that bench and said, ‘This is such a great place to read.’” **QR**

When a new pool was proposed, the building team recommended a plan to regrade the yard into one level (above), moving the retaining wall toward the rear of the property.