

# Backfill

## Hull-House Remodel

by Jon Vara

Did someone say “existing nonconforming”? The prints for these Encinitas, Calif., boat houses would never have satisfied a modern plans examiner, but no one worried about that sort of thing in 1928, when the structures were built. The builder, in fact — an eccentric former seaman named Miles Kellogg — apparently didn’t work from plans at all. Kellogg knocked the structures together by eye, using salvaged lumber from a local hotel and a dance hall for the framing and interior finish. The outer “hull” is an inch-thick layer of stucco on redwood lath. According to legend, Kellogg deliberately built both structures slightly out of plumb to give the inhabitants the feeling that they were really on the water.

Despite foundations that can fairly be described as sketchy, the vessels have survived several moderate earthquakes over the years. They’ve endured generations of hard use as rental housing and passed through the hands of a succession of owners. But the years have taken their toll. Originally looking directly out over the ocean, the boats were gradually hemmed in by other structures. The cramped 3-bedroom, 1½-bath units didn’t generate enough income to pay for adequate maintenance.

By 2000, when the boat houses went on the market again, they were in anything but shipshape condition. Local residents feared that the beloved landmarks would be demolished to make room for something more practical. So there was widespread relief when the property went to area designer-builder Mark Whitley, who launched an ambitious project to restore the boat houses to their former glory.

Whitley beefed up the foundations, repaired and repainted the stucco and exterior wood trim, and installed imaginative landscaping. He tore out uncounted layers of interior finish materials to expose the original wood flooring and paneling. (“You wouldn’t believe the amount of green and harvest gold we hauled out of there,” he says.) He installed new plumbing fixtures and brought the wiring up to code. The refurbished *Moonlight* and *Encinitas* should continue to startle tourists for years to come.



These boat-shaped houses have been landmarks in Encinitas, Calif., for three quarters of a century. The names on the bows commemorate the long-vanished Moonlight Dance Hall and Encinitas Hotel, which furnished the salvaged lumber used in their construction.



The ocean lies a block and a half off the bow, but rolling landscaped waves provide an appropriately nautical feel.



The view forward into one of the remodeled kitchens gives a whole new meaning to the term “work triangle.” Until recently, the “portholes” were screened but not glazed; tenants learned to block the wind by wedging old 10-inch record albums into the openings as needed.