

NEWS // STATE

CALIFORNIA

Copper Sky Construction

Copper Sky Construction owner Bruce Smith learned his trade over 22 years while living in and helping to build the temples at Odiyan, a Buddhist retreat outside Berkeley. Before taking that path, Smith worked as a geophysicist with the United States Geological Survey, but he felt his work didn't have meaning.

"For a while I thought I'd found the perfect job [in geophysics] and I loved the research. But it seemed it didn't have that much meaning. When I was young and I was wondering what I wanted to do, I wanted to do something to help others," he says. "The Buddhist group was helping others, and that was part of my path."

Smith spent two decades taking meticulous direction from the monks as he helped build the elaborate structures of the monastery. His company name comes from the copper dome he helped design and build atop one of the temples there. When he left Odiyan five years ago, he planned to return to geophysics, but quickly realized he could make a better living as a remodeling contractor. He admits he sort of fell into the work.

"I was kind of nervous about it, because all my experience was outside of the 'real world' and not in the contracting world," he says.

Still, the experience he gained turned out to be a little more realistic than it seemed.

"A lot of my training at the monastery was that we had to listen very closely to what they wanted, and what I'm finding is that my mind and my hands are just so used to doing so many different things, that it just sort of comes out of me," he says.

Such a meditative approach gives Smith an edge on the competition as well, allowing him to focus deeply on custom jobs.

"On one of my biggest jobs last year, the homeowners had bought a bunch of thin stone for a fireplace," he says, "and they wanted no grout joints in the stonework."

Smith says he spent two months cutting the stone to fit tightly on the 15 x 5-foot fireplace.

"I rarely say no," he says. "Other contractors had turned that job down, but it's those unusual jobs that require creativity that I enjoy."

As Copper Sky grows, Smith keeps a meditative mindset when it comes to the Zen and the art of hiring.

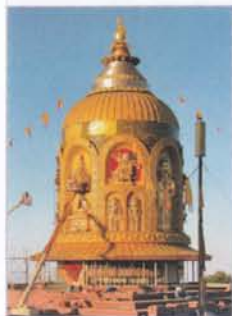
"I just hired my first employee, and I'm helping him to have a fulfilling life," Smith says.

"Part of my practice of compassion is to give people what they want. And there's a really good, warm feeling that comes with that."

Bruce Smith applies his 20 years living and building in a Buddhist monastery to his new path as a custom remodeler.



From L-R at top left: Hobbit fireplace; Fireplace room divider with copper chimney and trim; Granite topped curved kitchen peninsula; Detail fitted stone fireplace; Recycled ribbon redwood countertop; all from Copper Sky Construction.



Helping to build temples like the one pictured gave Smith the discipline to set the stone on this fireplace using no grout at all.

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