



PHOTOS PROVIDED

Before and after photos of a house at 545 Riviera St. that contractor Tim Ziegler recently renovated. Ziegler said that when considering the renovation of a historic home, owners need a contractor and architect able to realize the possibilities.

## Restoring historic homes a passion for this contractor



PHOTO PROVIDED BY LARRY HUMES

Contractor Tim Ziegler talks about some of the details involved in historic renovation. He is currently restoring a 1926 bungalow home on Ponce de Leon Street.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This story is part of an ongoing series of the historical areas and structures of Venice and what, if anything, can be done. See page 1A for this week's main story.

By **LARRY R. HUMES**  
FOR THE GONDOLIER

It wouldn't be much of a stretch to say Tim Ziegler has never met a historic home he didn't like.

Although he has constructed all sorts of buildings during his decades-long career, the Venice-based contractor said he has a passion for restoring residences from previous eras.

"Homes that are 1965 and older, the craftsmanship was just better," he said. "The materials they used, it was good quality stuff. Then, when you got into the 70s, it was more about production and making money. The quality sort of went out the window."

Ziegler was born into the business. He and his two brothers learned construction at a



young age from their father, who operated a large company in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"A lot of what we did was restoring older homes," he said. "One of our biggest was a multi-year project restoring the old Cane Plantation house on the island of St. Croix. There was little left but the four walls and some of the concrete stairs. We set up an entire workshop on the property just to do all the millwork. The house was eventually featured in Architectural Digest, and Martha Stewart has been there."

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# HISTORIC

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“Restoring that 18th century house was largely where I got the passion for bringing historical homes back to life,” he added.

After working alongside master craftsmen for many years, Ziegler moved to Roanoke, Virginia where he obtained his general contractor license and began remodeling many of the older homes and structures. Seeing the need for special services in the community, he launched two national franchises, a handyman service and also a home buying/house flipping business.

He oversaw more than 3,000 projects during his time there and gained a lot of troubleshooting experience in the process.

Ziegler moved his family to the Suncoast in 2007 and began Coastal Living Remodelers shortly thereafter. Selling the business in 2015, he returned to buying and renovating homes, many of them historical. When the housing market heated up last year, making the flipping of houses less profitable, he started Gulfside Contractors and focused largely on his first love of renovating historic homes.

One of his more recent projects was the complete renovation of a two-story 1926 house located at 545 Riviera Street in the Venezia Park district.

“When I met with the owner, we walked through the property and I told her, ‘If you do not do the work this year, it’s going to cost you so much money to renovate it correctly, it will be unaffordable.’ There were windows that were wide open to the weather. The ceiling had caved in, the floor was rotted out, and water was pouring

into the house. There were three bees’ nests in the walls that had to be removed.”

A common misconception, Ziegler said, is the belief that restoring an older house is much more expensive than renovating a newer one.

“When you get into the full-scale remodeling of a house built in the 1980s and one built in the 20s, the costs really aren’t all that different. I think what often happens is that people look at the older house as it is and they don’t have a creative enough contractor or architect to realize the possibilities. For them, it’s much easier to demolish the historic house than work with what’s there.

“Also, when you get into matters of depreciation, older homes will hold their value much longer as long as they are maintained,” he added.

When undergoing a restoration project, Ziegler said the first step is to have their architectural designer develop the plans for modernizing the space to meet modern codes and usage while maintaining the historical charm of the residence.

“You take all of the good that is there and you maintain that because so much creativity went into it in the beginning. Like my father used to say, ‘you may not pick up on all of the details, but you feel it.’ Like you feel the quality of the door handle when you go to open the door. Those little details, you subconsciously pick up on those things.”

While restoring 1920s era homes can be challenging, Ziegler said you discover things you wouldn’t find in modern construction. “We find the way they built houses back then is much better than the way they do things now. The

clever things that they did. And even the wood that they used back in the early 1900’s, the termites don’t hardly eat it. The wood has so many oils in it, it lasts much longer than the wood builders use now, which is largely farmed and less than five years old.”

Much of Ziegler’s business is through referrals, he said. Typical clients are those who do not want to live in cookie-cutter mansions.

“They really appreciate the character and the charm, the feel and all of the details of these old houses. We try to retain that as we’re going through a remodel. Even matching the stucco is important so that it blends well.

In much the same way, the historic buildings on the island of Venice are what adds to the city’s overall charm, he said. “When you go down Venice Avenue and you see the KMI building, and you see some of the older buildings that have been here since the 1920s, it’s just that antique charm of the community.

“When you have these homes, each one is architecturally different in some way,” he added. “I have a friend who does a lot of builder homes on the island. They do a good job. They knock down the old house and put up million dollar-plus homes. They look no different than a brand-new subdivision where you have houses side by side, the models and materials are very similar. A lot of faux finishes are made of foam. In my mind, I think it kind of cheapens the home when you try to embellish it too much.”

*Larry Humes writes about local history and can be reached at 1926Venice@gmail.com.*