



COURTESY BUILDING SHELTER

Ben Kelley's Building Shelter team restored a vintage circular porch off Lambert's Cove Road in Vineyard Haven.

Builder Ben Kelley of Building Shelter in Vineyard Haven

Were you destined to become a builder?

Tonka trucks, Legos, and the Erector Set were my favorite toys. My family worked with their hands and they were business owners. As kids, my siblings and I were expected to work hard. We helped to renovate some of the houses we lived in. I worked with my dad laying carpet, vinyl, tile, and wood flooring. During summer breaks, I worked at my grandpa's big-rig truck shop, treading tires, learning body work, welding. In college, I continued to work in the trades, doing a little bit of everything: sheet rock, foundations, framing, finish work, floors, painting.

You've had your company, Building Shelter, for about seven years. What does the name mean to you?

Building Shelter is about building relationships. My grandfather said having good relationships is the most important thing we

do in life. Putting some wood together that eventually looks like a house is not the end in itself – nor is the final payment. Building is a service, affording protection, comfort, and refuge. Building is also a service to our community and our environment.

How would you describe your aesthetic?

I'm passionate about space: How can you make limited space do more than you think? I designed and built a settee that folds into a chair or out into a bed, and if you remove the cushions, it becomes a table. It's a fun puzzle. My outdoor movie theater is a design that came out of a mess: A neighbor complained about a shed I'd begun to construct, and a friend suggested I take this bad situation and do something creative with it – to rise like a phoenix from the mud. I moved the shed, built a wall and overhang, and had an electrician wire it, and the Phoenix Theater was born.

What do you see as your role in the design process?

To successfully enable the [architect's] design in a way that will make the home more

durable, comfortable, and efficient, to make it a high-performance home. Sustainable design is not all about tree-hugging. It can lower maintenance and operating costs, increase interior comfort and long-term durability, and make a home a healthier place to be.

What projects are you most excited by?

I'm always excited about whatever our current project is. I enjoy the challenges of small spaces or creative use of space. I'm working on a garage that will combine a studio and a fifteen-by-thirty-foot apartment. My team and I really enjoyed the recent porch renovation we did. The client wanted to stay true to the heritage and history of her house. This amazing circular porch hadn't been cared for and maintained by the previous owners – it was falling apart. We were inspired by the funky, intricate scrollwork around the porch. We salvaged pieces, took them back to the studio, and re-created them to preserve the look and maintain the integrity. That was a fun project because it was so detailed and challenging. ♦