

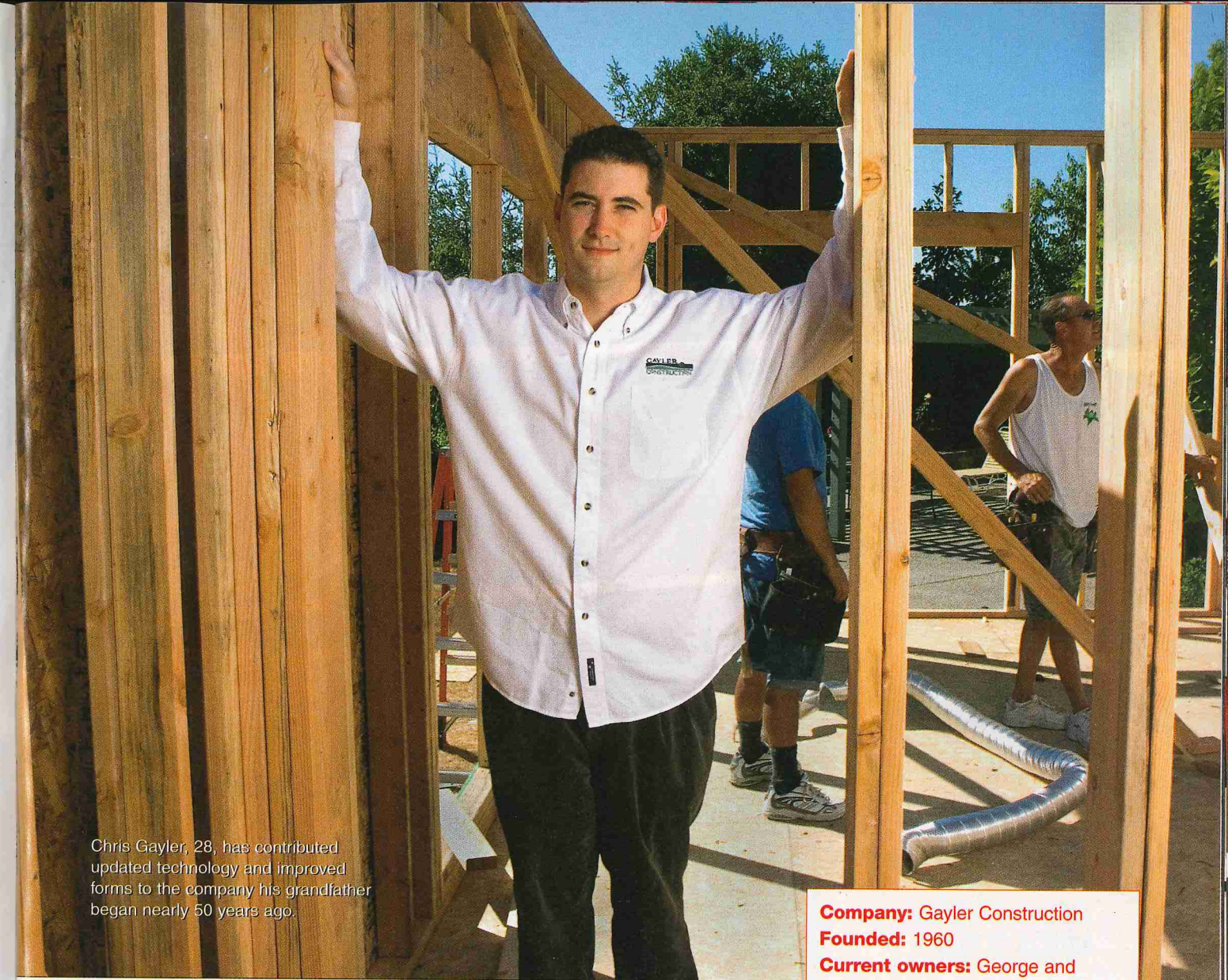
3 To Watch: A New Generation Takes Over

BY KATHY PRICE-ROBINSON

Deeper in the minds of many remodelers, one big question looms: What happens to my company when I retire? A handful of owners will sell their businesses to employees. A few will sell to strangers. Most will sell off their tools, and then simply walk away. But in a number of remodeling companies across the country, the owners are busy grooming their own children to take the reins. This new generation brings energy and innovation to the business, and relief to their hard-working parents. "It's very relaxing to be working with someone in whom you have total trust," says Ed Lane, whose son Edward, 31, will someday take over leadership of Lane Homes & Remodeling in Richmond, Va. "Edward has a fresh, new, untainted view of the business," the elder Lane says, "and is budding with ideas."

The paybacks for the younger generation are equally enticing: a chance to work in a dynamic industry, the opportunity to have a say in how the company is run, and a more-or-less guaranteed career track to the top.

Following are profiles of three companies in which the next generation will eventually take over. Two of these younger folk never expected to end up in the remodeling industry. Only after college and forays into other industries did running a remodeling company become their career of choice.



Chris Gayler, 28, has contributed updated technology and improved forms to the company his grandfather began nearly 50 years ago.

CHRIS GAYLER, GAYLER CONSTRUCTION, DANVILLE, CALIF.

As a teenager, Chris Gayler got an entry-level view of his parents' remodeling company, digging trenches and "doing gopher kind of work," he recalls.

"I think their goal was to make me hate it," Chris, now 28, says of his time in the dirt, figuring it was his parents' way of making sure he went to college. The tactic worked, and he went on to earn a degree in communications from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and then to work in the high-tech industry.

Three years ago, though, with the high-tech industry fizzling out, Chris found himself between jobs. He wasn't particularly excited about repeating that earlier experience

with the remodeling business. "You had no voice within the company," he says. "I didn't like that."

But when Chris' parents, George and Darlene, offered him a job in the family remodeling company, with the idea that he might one day take over, he agreed.

"I had always known I wanted to work for myself," he says. "I could start out on my own, or take over a company that was established." And this company was well established, having been founded by his grandfather nearly half a century ago.

Chris' first position was project coordinator, but his goal was to bring cutting-edge technology into a company that badly needed it. "You'd be surprised how quick my mom can

Company: Gayler Construction
Founded: 1960
Current owners: George and Darlene Gayler
Future owner: Chris Gayler
Date of succession: 2012
Current staff: 5 office, 6 field
Current volume: \$2.5 million

break a computer," he says with a laugh.

His contributions to the company include:

- Updating the computer server to make it easier to use. "I like things organized," Chris says.
- Bringing camera phones into the business to help facilitate communication between the field and the office, and changing carriers to get better reception.
- Continuing to upgrade and create new forms for the business such as marketing, sales, and additional work-order trackers, and a design-to-production checklist.

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■ Getting deeper into the SoftPlan computer program. Though his dad already had it in the office when Chris joined the company, the program wasn't used to its fullest advantage.

For the near future, Chris Gayler is looking into getting a projector to show plans on a big screen. He recently got a Palm Treo, which allows him to respond to e-mail from anywhere, edit files in Microsoft Word, and keep track of his appointments and contacts. "Now my dad wants one," he says.

George Gayler, extremely happy to have his son onboard, is quick to list Chris' qualities: smart, organized, dependable; a fast learner who performs tasks efficiently and quickly, and who has excellent technology skills. And his son "suggests new systems and new ways of doing things," George says. As for the older crew members, Chris says he does not know how they feel about him, but he hopes to earn their respect as a member of the team.

For sales training, Chris went to the Sandler Sales Institute, and the company belongs to a peer review group. "I've learned a lot going to the meetings and speaking with other remodelers within the organization," he says.

Also, he and his father have biweekly sales meetings to discuss sales strategies and to plan for the coming month. He and both parents have meetings approximately every three months to discuss how they are doing and to set goals. Typical goals for Chris include learning a new part of the business, making contacts in the community, and writing a business plan for how he thinks the company should be run.

The younger Gayler is scheduled to take over in 2012, when his dad turns 65. Although both father and son now do sales, the plan is to develop a commission salesforce of two so that George can retire and Chris can focus on running the company. And Chris would like to go back out into the field for a while to get more hands-on experience.

"[Both of my children have] challenged the old 'tried and true' ways of doing things."

—Tom Riggs, Riggs Construction

In the beginning, Chris wasn't sure if he would like running a remodeling company. In his first role as project coordinator, he found himself busy at the beginning stages of jobs, but became bored when things slowed down. As he has learned more about the business and has become more involved with the company's finances, sales, design, and working with the trades, he has become fully engaged. "I don't like to be bored," he says. "Now I'm extremely busy."

AMIE RIGGS, RIGGS CONSTRUCTION, ST. LOUIS

Though Amie Riggs, 31, has risen to vice president and sales manager at her father's construction company — the firm she and her younger brother will one day own — she says that early in her life she was "absolutely not" planning on a career in this industry.

Indeed, after Riggs attended college, she taught early childhood education for three years, and then decided to go into real estate. While studying for her license, she worked part-time at Riggs Construction, where her aunt was office manager. With no office space available, Amie shared a Formica counter with the fax machine, and now refers to her first position with the company as "lobby girl."

Tom Riggs liked his daughter's work and presence so much that he offered her a full-time job, and she accepted. "I was being groomed as the office manager," Amie recalls, "because that's what women do. What else would I do?"

Eventually, Amie began going on sales

calls, with the task of taking notes. "Again," she says, "that's what a woman does."

But something remarkable started happening during those client visits. "We found more times than not, the female homeowners were speaking to me," she recalls.

Amie also became aware of a flaw in the company's system of using allowances for product selections and then sending clients to suppliers to make their choices. "Sometimes we hit and most times we missed," Tom Riggs said of the allowances. "When we missed, the allowances chosen were always well under what the actual costs were, so it left our clients feeling cheated or not listened to."

The clients, Amie says, "needed more guidance." To remedy the situation, she devised a position for herself called "selections coordinator." She created a spreadsheet for each project, took clients shopping, coordinated ordering and deliveries, and went to the site to make sure everything arrived.

Other innovations Amie has brought to the company include:

■ Introducing Nextel phones with walkie-talkie capability into the company. "I got sick of wearing a pager," she says.

■ Computerizing many of the company's processes, which were previously on paper, including putting estimates into spreadsheets.

■ Initiating the use of digital cameras on jobsites, and the practice of videotaping projects.

■ Creating a marketing plan. "We have never, never, never had a marketing plan," she said. "I'm not kidding." That included hiring a public relations firm to help with advertising and graphics, and a new campaign with the twin tags of "Riggs Total Home" and "Yes, I Can."

Over the years, a plan evolved for Amie and her brother Bill to take over the company that was founded by their grandfather in 1959.

Eventually, Amie had to give up her prized selections coordinator position to another employee when Tom Riggs asked his daughter to become the company's sales manager. She