

home improvements

Kings of the castle

Board Lords: Phil Requist, Pukester, Belt, Kid, Shandor, Steve Edwards, Maniac, Perlin, Hondo, and Bob Banks of Goleta, Southern California.

The scene: The Castle is a neighborhood house on a quiet street. The backyard has a large swimming pool that collects infrequent rain and is home to a shoal of mutant goldfish who survive on broken lightbulbs, old couches, and vomit.

You can tell this is a climbing household by the mess of gear and the 40-foot-long, 16-foot-high wooden construction that overlooks the pool. Some residents have progressed from climbing here to big walls and 5.14s, while others rarely venture beyond the block. "Why go any further?" wonders Belt. "After all, campusing is the purest form of climbing."

The Castle has become a flophouse for visiting climbers. The only exception to

their climbers-only guest list was an Austrian family who arrived uninvited, pitched their tents in the backyard, stayed for three months, and then vanished with Steve Edwards' van. "They sent me some money later," shrugs Steve.

The landlords never visit. "You should have seen this place before we moved in," says Phil Requist. "It was a mess. You couldn't even stand in the front yard it stank so bad. Nothing we've done to the place since — the holes in the walls and roof and stuff — can't be fixed."

Design: The 40-foot-long wall starts with a short, intro traverse into abutting 30- and 45-degree sections, a concept that seems to work well for all kinds of climbing. Kevin Thaw practiced nailing here before making the second ascent of the *Reticient Wall* (A5) on El Capitan. "I'm not sure what Kevin had in mind when he started campusing with his ice tools, though," says Steve.

In the garage lurk two overhanging walls and a couple of pick-marked campus boards. Below the walls, inside and out, fester several tons of carpet scraps and mattresses procured from students. "They throw the mattresses out when school's done," explains Phil. "We just walk down the street and clean up."

Favorite holds: "Anything that passes the pencil test is OK," explains Bob. "If it holds a pencil it's no good."

Most holds are hand-made from hardwood, so slickness is a common theme: "We avoided removing the varnish from the ping-pong-paddle handle," says Phil. "It was so popular that we contemplated varnishing all the holds."

Dislikes: Belgium's Jean-Paul Finné spent three weeks at the Castle before making the third ascent of *Just Do It* (5.14c) and his only complaint was that the footholds weren't small enough. Phil agreed, and corrected the problem by adding a few shallow dents in the plywood. "I bashed them in using a hammer," he explains.

Since the sad day British on-sight master Ian Vickers flashed all of the Castle's longer problems, the huge open-air wall with its plethora of good incuts has gone out of favor with some house members: "What wall?" asks Pukester when you mention the structure by the pool. "He means The Stairmaster," says Belt derisively.

Likes: Anything that makes Joe Brooks look weak. "He got spanked on most of our problems," admits Phil guiltily, "but he wants to come back."

Phil demonstrates on the 45-degree wall by pulling down on a sloping half-inch edge and moving into an inverted gaston that would tear the shoulders off a 500-pound gorilla. Still, these are easy moves: Pukester hasn't managed to get both feet off the ground on his latest project — a problem he's been working for weeks.

Bob Banks says: "Do Pukester's none-move wonders help his climbing? I would have to say... No."

— Wills Young



Photo: Wills Young

Burn baby, burn: Maniac works up a sweat on The Stairmaster as Pukester trims the couch.