

existing 766-square-foot cottage the couple had used as a second home when away from Los Angeles.

It's rare for someone who has just built a home to say that would do it again, but Paula Tipton called the process of working with Thodos a "joy," adding while many people complain about their architects and building process, she and her husband came away totally satisfied.

"It was a small property and John did absolutely genius work, and I don't use the word 'genius' lightly," Paula Tipton said. "His design concept was totally unique to the property. You can see the sky and the stars, the sunset and moonrise at the same time. Something was created that was more than we ever expected."

This is the weird thing: had Greece not undergone a military coup in 1967, Thodos might never have come to Carmel in the first place.

Born in Chicago and raised in Portland, Thodos had been an architect with giant Skidmore, Owings and Merrill — and owner of what was Portland's first wine bar in the 1960s — when he decided to move to Greece for a few months and work from there to "try to stop being a classic workaholic." But a friend in the State Department called him the night of the coup and said, "Stay home. The generals just took over and if things get rough here, they will draft you."

JOHN THODOS

Age: 72

Born: Chicago

Education: University of Oregon, bachelor of architecture

Experience: A decade with Skidmore, Owings and Merrill in Portland before starting his own practice in 1969.

Residence: Carmel

Family: wife, Judy

Essential business philosophy: You cannot do a fine project without a fine client. They have to be honest about their needs, budget and fears.

Best business decision: I think the best business decision I made was to make up my mind early to remain a small firm rather than become a large firm. That way I can keep the most control by not having a partner.

Toughest business decision: I don't remember a difficult business decision. I just don't take on all the clients that come to me, but that wasn't a difficult decision for me to make.

In 1974, Thodos decided to try the move again. The night before he was to leave, Turkey invaded Cyprus and his friend, once again, told him to stay home.

"I said, 'Ok. I'm going to bed and I told my brain, 'tomorrow morning I want another idea.' The brain said, 'You're going to Carmel

and buy a small house and work there one week a month.'" Thodos says. "I had never been to Carmel, but I said 'what the hell is wrong with trusting intuition?'"

A few years later, after he and Judy restarted their relationship with a seven-year courtship that led to their marriage, Thodos, at age 55, decided a more permanent change of scenery was in order. He told Judy, "I want to change where I work. Let's move to Athens or Paris and we could also do Carmel."

Judy said: "I don't know Greek, I don't know French, but I do speak English. Let's go to Carmel."

Thodos still spends time and does work in Portland, where Judy's children and grandchildren live. His five-member firm, on the same block as the Carmel Plaza mall, operates efficiently whether John and Judy are physically there or not, and the couple manages to spend a month each year in Greece.

"I get criticism from friends who ask why I don't do more commercial work, and I tell them I just don't have the time.

"I design for myself and for clients. I have time to paint and time with Judy," he said. "I'm not apart from her more than eight minutes a day and that's only when she's in the bathroom because we're very proper people."

And even that cheeky comment is said with a signature glint in his eye.

Mary Duan is a freelance writer based in Salinas.