

The Great Tidepool

TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA
by local award-winning author, [Brad Herzog](#)

REPURPOSEFUL



Having cruised through and written about small towns for decades now – and having called PG home for 26 years – I’ve come to realize that the hallmark of an enduring hamlet is occasional reinvention. Savor tradition, but change with the times when necessary. Turn what might seem like a loss – whether it’s business establishments or natural environment or resident population – into a different kind of victory.

It’s why the tents that originally populated Pacific Grove became cottages. It’s why an old bath house on Lovers Point later became the Old Bath House Restaurant (and now Beach House restaurant). It’s why the century-old Holman Building is now a collection of condominiums and the original Bank of Pacific Grove transformed to Sotheby’s International Realty.

There is a natural metaphor for this notion in PG—in the form of three ways in which a nature’s loss was reimagined into a whimsical triumph. In this case, lifeless trees have been turned into lively treasures. Let’s take a walking tour...

We’ll start at **Berwick Park**, along Ocean View Boulevard between 9th Street and Carmel Avenue. There you’ll find a dramatic scene of two humpback whales that are either breaching or dancing, depending on whether you’re feeling scientific or silly. After a January 2016 windstorm turned a couple of the park’s cypress trees into two large and shattered tree trunks, woodcarver Jorge Rodriguez turned those sad reminders into a whale of a creation that brightens my day each time I see it.

From there, it’s a long walk to the 9th hole of the PG Golf Links. On Del Monte Boulevard, you’ll find a front-yard foray into the fanciful. Several years ago, homeowners Matthew and Jessica Denecour commissioned chainsaw artist Griffon Ramsey to turn a dead tree into a whimsical masterpiece—a large and elaborate scene of a monstrous octopus pulling

down a steamer ship. Its title is “**Bad Day on the S.S. Normandie.**” But the first time I spotted it... that was a very good day.

Finally, make your way back toward town—to the corner of Lighthouse Avenue and Wood Street, where you’ll find a tree stump that has been imagined into a fantasyland. Its creator calls it the **Gnome Home** because, well, it’s a little world brimming with the little guys. They’re lounging, meditating, musing about life atop magic mushrooms. It’s a remnant turned into a sort of psychedelic scene.

Baba Van Kirk has owned the property for more than 40 years, but it was only a few years ago that the dying (and thus dangerously hollow) tree was removed. Van Kirk decided it would be nice to give passersby—especially kids—something to smile about, so she started placing her collection of tiny gnomes atop the stump and within its confines. Then visitors began contributing their own pieces. One woman offered a place setting from a dollhouse. Kids left painted stones and little purple dinosaurs. So the Gnome Home, often themed for holidays, became a sort of community art installation.

And that’s the common thread among these repurposed works of art—serving the community. As Van Kirk says about her little fantasy world, “It’s just something to make people happy.” Or as a tiny sign there puts it, “There’s no place like gnome.”

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