

# Valley of the Moon

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Sonoma Valley

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VALLEY VOICES SPEAK  
OUT ON TRUMP

A CITY  
COUNCIL COUP?

EXOTIC PETS  
YOU CAN'T OWN



The list is almost endless. As deep as Dave Allen's fertile imagination and as wide as his global travels.

Consider these:

A track of rusting wrought-iron crosses removed from an Italian cemetery. Wall-sized clock faces from buildings all over the world.

Piles of 4-inch-thick hawser rope suitable for towing a ship or draping on something very large.

Buddhas of every size, shape, substance and configuration.

Bar stools made from industrial springs.

Ornately carved doors from India, Indonesia and Argentina.

Piles of rusting chairs.

A single slab of heart redwood 17 feet long, 5 feet wide and 4 inches thick.

Industrial drill bits repurposed as paperweights or desktop sculptures.

Pillars and columns of every size and composition.

Entire marble gateways.

A life-size, cast-iron Jesus hanging on the cross.

Chandeliers made from silverware.

Five-foot-long stone penises from Thailand.

Stone tubs weighing more than a ton.

An enormous French sunflower press that looks like a medieval torture device.

Silver-plated bronze skulls from Java.

An antique kendo sparring suit.

Gleaming white Cayman skulls.

Balls and bowls of every size and substance.

One wall is the corrugated metal roof from a 1920s auto shop.

Various Belgian castle parts.

And that's just skimming the surface.

So who is Dave Allen, where does he get all this stuff, and why?

It all began in 1997 when Allen had an epiphany leading to the realization that he was never going to be CEO of the Silicon Valley company he worked for because, "I just couldn't buy in as much as you needed to."

So he walked in, cashed out his 401K, rented a 24-foot box truck and drove east filling it with architectural antiques. When

Story **DAVID BOLLING**  
Photos **STEVEN KRAUSE**

# ARTEFACT DESIGN & SALVAGE



**THE GROUNDS AND INTERIOR**  
of Artefact Design & Salvage cover almost an acre and enclose objects of every conceivable description.

truck and drove east filling it with architectural antiques. When he came back to Menlo Park, 3,400 miles later, he held his first by-invitation yard sale. Everything sold, so he did it again. Thirty times. Allen discovered he could take in \$100,000 in a weekend, even though that sometimes meant, “racing home ahead of all the checks I had written to buy the stuff.”

He built a following by sending out bizarre and silly postcards he created on the road.

Eventually he rented a big warehouse in San Jose and branched out to Europe. The first time he ventured abroad he met someone who invited him and arranged introductions to dealers and sources of interesting stuff.

“A network developed,” he says. “The trick is finding the people who have the level of taste you’re interested in.”

Dave Allen’s level of taste runs toward authentic, industrial, rustic. He can be inspired by a rusting steel girder or a thousand-year-old door. In Europe he began collecting what he refers to as “castle bits and stuff.” A friend in Italy

walked around cemeteries to find the iron crosses removed from graves where the fees had gone unpaid.

“I’ve learned over the years always to trust my instincts, not to be money-driven, always to be art-driven. As odd as the things I would buy were, there was always a market for them.” Well, almost always. Of the 1,200-year-old Thai stone penises he took in on consignment, only one of five has sold—“to a couple that were urologists.” Ask him about his weirdest acquisitions and he admits he just “passed on an autopsy table. I wanted to get it but finally decided maybe not.”

In 2003 Allen had the opportunity to move into a new showroom at Cornerstone Gardens at the southern gateway to Sonoma, and thus Artefact Design & Salvage (with a curious misspelling) came to Wine Country. His invasion of Europe proceeded apace, and expanded beyond Italian cemeteries and French antiques as his business grew.

After “mining Europe,” Allen reached the conclusion that a lot of the stuff he was buying was actually from some-



where else. "I was never really satisfied with getting things secondhand," he says, so he decided to go to the source. Since some of the most interesting artifacts he found in Europe originally came from Asia, that's where he went. First to Bali, and then he branched out to India, China, Borneo, Java, Malaysia and the Philippines, filling shipping containers with hand-carved stone bowls, temple relics, giant tree-fern stalks and other endlessly exotic discoveries.

"If it appeals to me, it works," became Allen's motto. And apparently it does, although he ruefully admits that "there's a point when you can have too many Buddhas."

One thing that clearly appeals to Allen is English bulldogs, perhaps because there's a certain quality of persistence and determination required in what he does. He's had two resident bulldogs at Cornerstone—first Uma, and now Axel, who has become a major tourist attraction as he does daily battle with a 5-gallon plastic bucket, pushing it around the exhibit yard and perpetually challenging suckers to a tug of war.

Allen's many trips to Bali brought him in contact with handmade paper

bags assembled from newspapers and twine. He now sells them at Cornerstone and provides them as carryout bags for customers. But ever the entrepreneur, he also organized the Balinese villagers into a bag-making cooperative and, with the help of a local manager, has had as many as 60 women folding bags while the men make the twine. The revenues help support the village.

Meanwhile back in Sonoma, interior designers and architects have discovered Allen's showroom, along with photo stylists and prop people. And having *Sunset* magazine move its show gardens and test kitchen to Cornerstone hasn't hurt Allen's visibility. "Everybody shoots here now," he says. "We endlessly rent stuff out for props, we've done album covers here, and my one personal goal is to get Axel on the cover of *Sunset*."

While all this has been going on, Allen—who has a degree in art history—has been developing a home décor product line with Artefact as the test showroom. His creations include various pieces of home furniture, a cement-topped picnic table and bench set, and a line of display hardware for mounting



#### **STACK ENOUGH WOODEN CHAIRS**

*(opposite page)* and you have a statue (or a bunch of wooden chairs).

You've probably always wondered what to do with all those bottle caps and that giant gourd. Now you know.

decorative items like tree branches, flowers or plants directly to walls.

The proliferation of Buddhas in Allen's acquisition inventory may reflect another side to the man not immediately apparent. He has a longstanding affinity for meditation and the pursuit of inner peace, and that interest seems to have helped create a link to what has now become a major focus of his life. The 1440 Multiversity, a massive development project in Scotts Valley, near Santa Cruz, is on the verge of transforming the old Bethany University campus into an international center for mindfulness and human development. Allen has been hired to direct the interior design of the entire facility's inside space—a total of 150,000 square feet.

Where all this will lead Artefact Design & Salvage is anyone's guess, but Dave Allen—and the ever-present Axel—seem as happily (and temporarily) comfortable in the midst of a modern, \$100 million construction project as they are among the relics and industrial detritus assembled near Sonoma.

As always, Dave Allen is following his own instincts and, so far, that always seems to work. ☾



## Building Dave Allen's Other Life



If Artefact Design & Salvage has been Dave Allen's life, lately his day job has been a 75-acre, former Christian college called "Bethany University" tucked into the redwoods at the edge of Scotts Valley, a few miles north of Santa Cruz.

There, a \$100 million makeover is converting the site to a new educational institution called "1414 Multiversity," founded by former Jupiter Networks CEO Scott Kriens and his wife, Joanie. The school's name refers to the number of minutes in each day "to live more mindful, connected and compassionate lives." To do that it will offer a multitude of courses on the gamut of human development disciplines, from mindfulness and meditation to growth psychology, health and wellness, self-discovery and creative expression, even a culinary school.

Dave Allen's job? Design director for the interior space of virtually every building on campus—which pencils out to 150,000 square feet. "It's a little like an overgrown Esalen Institute," but much, much bigger.

Partnered with Sonoma interior design director Christine Janson ("I knew I couldn't do this alone. Without Christine it wouldn't happen.") Allen embarked on the challenge of his life, imbued with his singular design aesthetic, exemplified by the way he lit the hallways of two residence halls using light fixtures that throw geometric patterns of light from wall-to-floor-to-ceiling. "How else can you make a boring hallway interesting?" he asks.

Bits of inventory from Artefact Design & Salvage show up here and there, like the aquamarine glass pieces he has randomly imbedded in stone walls around the campus. Walls of the central lodge are lined with timbers from famed San Francisco attorney Melvin Belli's law office.

Allen says, "The mandate from Scott and Joanie was, 'Be comfortable, like it's your home.'"

Adds Janson, "The business plan and the philosophy of the foundation is mindful, thoughtful, authentic in a design that is rustic modern. Dave brings a strong influence there. The collected, the real, the authentic."

While he finishes the interior details of an 800-seat auditorium, 23 massage treatment rooms, a fitness center and a cafeteria to seat 250 diners at a time, Dave Allen continues to follow his instincts. And collect more stuff. "I have two containers coming from Indonesia," he announced in mid-December. "And another container from Europe."