

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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RURAL SONOMA COUNTY GALLERY OFFERS VISITORS UNEXPECTED SOPHISTICATION

“Nature’s beauty, transformed” sums up aesthetic and approach of two artists

Valley Ford, CA— For the past year, the Sonoma County hamlet of Valley Ford has quietly offered a center of artistic sophistication at West County Design to those who chance upon it. These days, gallery owners Patrick Miller, Craig Collins and Sharon Eager are finding an increasing number of customers who come specifically to collaborate with artists Miller and Collins on custom pieces for their homes and offices.

West County Design features Collins’ fine furniture and Miller’s unique concrete work, as well as home accessories such as handcrafted mirrors, blown glass vases and copper lamps. The gallery is located at 14390 Highway One, an easy drive from San Francisco, Marin and Sonoma Counties.

Collins has been a maker of custom and limited edition wood furniture for 17 years, and won the 1997 NICHE award in Niche Magazine’s national design competition. His current focus is creating custom-made tables, with an elegant simplicity revealing craftsman, Asian, and art deco influences.

Miller, the innovative concrete artist and owner of Bohemian Stoneworks, has developed a unique approach to creating one-of-a-kind concrete pieces, often combining concrete with fine metals and woods.

The two artists share a similar process: first, they listen to their clients’ own vision, and then they expand and improve upon the clients’ original ideas. Both Miller and Collins, like most of the artists on display at the gallery, do limited edition as well as custom work.

Collins and Eager, who are married, joined with Miller in 2006 when all three were already living and working amongst the peaceful rolling hills 90 minutes north of San Francisco. They came together first, to create a showcase for Collins’ and Miller’s unique artistry, and second, to house a design center that would feature functional art and decorative work by exceptional artisans.

Many of these artists, including Collins and Miller, work with natural elements—wood, stone, river aggregate, and minerals such as copper. This has led them to describe the works at West County Design “nature’s beauty, transformed.”

Collaboration is a strong theme at West County Design. In addition to being business partners, Miller and Collins have collaborated on unusual pieces. Their Asian bath vanity features a rust-colored concrete console atop a gracefully arched yellow cedar base. Their 10-foot-long concrete wet bar and sink sits atop an elegant bamboo base. The combination of minimalist design, warmth and practicality is a striking quality of both men’s works.

Other examples of collaboration include Miller’s collection of sensuous bathroom consoles, which feature wavy sinks created by metal artist Stephen Fitz-Gerald. These pieces demonstrate the malleable nature of concrete, as well as its effective combination with other natural elements.

Both Collins and Miller are knowledgeable about green products. “Currently I use a lot of woods that are grown and processed locally. These steps take care of a lot of the green issues,” said Collins. He often uses Forestry Stewardship Council-certified wood, a certification that requires consideration of where the wood came from and how it’s harvested.

Among Miller’s green techniques are using aggregate (the stones that help make his pieces unique) from Austin Creek, sustainably harvested by award-winning mining company Bohan and Canelis. He also recycles water used during the concrete production process. A new designer series of mixes contains artistically placed cut glass bottles, large slice river rocks and shells embedded in concrete, demonstrating that green techniques can be elegant, unusual and environmentally friendly.

Collins also likes to combine natural elements in surprising ways. He often uses hardwoods and veneers alongside metals, stone and glass. Collins’ art and techniques are strongly influenced by his years working and sailing on fine yachts. Other influences include a stint working for custom furniture manufacturer Thomas Fetherston, and Collins’ personal love of the Asian aesthetic. His work has garnered praise from critics such as Casey Ellis of the *San Francisco Chronicle*: “beautiful pieces that blend form with functionality.”

Miller’s concrete work has been influenced by his father, an engineer who specialized in concrete and earthquake safety. Together, they created a proprietary concrete formula and reinforcing technique for the son’s designs. The younger Miller previously worked in computer-aided design on video games and movie special effects in such movies as “The Matrix” (2 and 3) and “Shrek.”

West County Design artists currently on display in the gallery are:

Gerry Arrington, Arrington Design

Wheel thrown and altered stoneware

Hugh Buttrum, Woodturner
Textural vessels from found wood

Deborah Childress, Blind Spot Mirrors
Handcrafted mirrors from whimsical to elegant

Jerry Dodrill Photography
Spectacular color images of Northern California coastline

Innes Copper Lighting
Delightful freestanding, copper table and floor lamps

Janis Kobe, Sonoma Gourd Art
Uniquely illustrated, decorated and carved gourds

Jerry and Deborah Kermode Artistic Woodturning
Distinctive turned vessels from recycled wood

Laurence Glassworks
Fused glass in rich designs and vivid colors

John O'Hare, Metal Artist
Sculptural furniture in hand-forged iron

Nichibei Potters
Innovative hand-made pottery

Jean Salatino and Steven Gandolfo Glass
Unique hand-crafted glass vessels

West County Design is open Thursday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and by appointment. For further information about West County Design, visit their web site at westcountydesign.com, or contact Sharon Eager, Gallery Manager, at (707) 876-1963 or seager@westcountydesign.com.