

Craftsmanship in rural Valley Ford

by Laura Thomas

It's a little off the beaten track for a design showroom, but Valley Ford in rural Sonoma County was perfect for Sharon Eager and Craig Collins when they moved from Marin County six years ago.

Collins, a Sausalito furniture maker, began to collaborate with concrete craftsman Patrick Miller, a Sonoma County native, in nearby Occidental. The two men, with Eager's help, opened West County Design in 2006. "It's so unexpected," Eager said. "Valley Ford is really an agricultural town."

The gallery is a pleasant spot where visitors can escape foggy nearby Bodega Bay and enjoy the warmth and clean beauty of her husband's woodwork (Collins' oval table in cherry, top right, \$5,200) or admire the precision and finish of Miller's concrete fireplaces, vanities and tables (36-inch bistro table with embedded wine bottle pieces, \$1,200, below).

West County Design exhibits the work of more than a dozen artists, from Arcata (Humboldt County) to San Francisco, who are inspired by the natural beauty of Northern California.

Turned bowls made of downed trees and logs are the signature pieces from Sebastopol artist Jerry Kermode. Valerie Adams of Santa Rosa uses her graphic arts skills to create glass plates from layers of transparent, opaque and iridescent pieces that are accented with sparkles, streamers and other metals (shown at center right, small plates, \$60 each).

River stones are the inspiration for stoneware by Gerald Arrington, a fisherman and ceramics artisan. Small, elegant copper table lamps are the work of Robert Innes of Berkeley.

There are also mirrors by Deborah Childress; paintings by Charles Beck and Sylvia Gonzalez; wood bowls by Hugh Buttrum; photography by Jerry Dodrill; gourd art by Janis Kobe; glass by Laurence Glassworks, Jean Salatino and Steven Gandolfo; ceramics by Peggy Loudon and Nichibei Potters; and metalwork by John O'Hare.