

# SHOP TALK

❖❖❖ Gardeners, woodworkers, and those with a zealous appreciation for a specialty chisel used by Japanese temple-builders seek out unique, imported handcrafted tools at **Hida Tool & Hardware**. Hida offers items for fine detail carpentry and gardening.

"Many of our tools are hand-made," says store manager Yuka Johnson. "They may be more expensive than what you find in a regular hardware store but you can use them for a long time. In the end, it's cheaper."

Customers can buy quality saws and chisels made by blacksmiths who have passed down their skills from generation to generation. "It's getting harder and harder to find somebody with the traditional knowledge," says employee Sayuri Suzuki. She says most of her customers are either professional carpenters or simply "really into tools." Despite the competition of larger hardware stores, Hida Tools has not compromised quality and tries to keep the tool-making tradition alive.

Hida Tools occasionally offers planing contests and woodworking demonstrations by masters of carpentry. The knowledgeable sales staff are there to help customers unfamiliar with how to use a bamboo splitter or to choose from the dizzying array of chisels, available in prices that range from a few dollars to a handcrafted beauty for \$398.

Many of the store's items are stamped in Japanese lettering and displayed on red velvet fabric, giving the impression of a museum. Also for sale are books on woodworking, building with bamboo, and how to make shoji (paper screens).

*Hida Tool & Hardware Company, 1333 San Pablo Avenue, Berkeley, (510) 524-3700; www.hidatool.com.*

❖❖❖ "Everything in this room was made by a person who lives within five miles of here," says **The Gravity Feed** co-owner James Lane. This sums up the business philosophy behind the unique Berkeley art gallery that also serves as a café with free wireless access and Web hosting services. Where else can you get an organic coffee or juice served in a handblown glass made by a Volkswagen mechanic?

The mechanic is Steve Nechodom, the other owner, who displays his own glass art alongside pieces from local painters, photographers, and glassmakers. Much of the gallery was constructed in exchange for mechanic services.

Lane, who helped build the first internet café in Seattle in 1994, partnered with Nechodom over a year ago to open The Gravity Feed. The two are still battling with the city of Berkeley for permission to become a full-fledged café and offer a broader menu. "I'm hoping the squeaky wheel will be heard someday soon," says a frustrated Lane.

Lane has an MFA in photography and curates much of The Gravity Feed's art shows. He has been curating since 1984 and is dedicated to promoting local artists. He and Nechodom are

looking forward to more art shows like last summer's, which featured over a hundred pieces from local female artists. "It's really a local artist's community space," Lane says. "There's nobody else like us around."

*The Gravity Feed, 1959 Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley, (510) 644-4464; www.gravityfeed.net.*

❖❖❖ If you're tired of buying disposable furniture from a catalog, how about a one-of-a-kind bed or a custom kitchen table made out of a vintage door?

"Anything I can think of, I'll try it," says freewheeling carpenter Mike Metz, who designs and builds unique furniture from re-used materials in his Alameda workshop **Mike Metz Designs**.

Metz mastered his carpentry skills while growing up and working alongside his father, a cabinetmaker. Last year, he started experimenting with making furniture for himself. But when friends and neighbors began requesting custom pieces, Metz decided to turn his love for woodworking into a full-time business.

Metz strives to use as many recycled products as he can. "There's so much high-quality,



Outside the box: Metz furniture.

old-growth lumber available, there's just no excuse not to use it." He says that using recycled materials actually allows him to create higher-quality furniture than what you find in most stores. "There are so many things around right now that only last three to four years and then are thrown away. It makes me mad," he says. "I like to build pieces that will be around for a hundred years."

Metz's kitchen tables, beds, side tables, and coffee tables are detailed with hinges, door plates, and other hardware that give each piece character and individuality. You can see his work at Antiques by the Bay at Alameda Point on Sunday, March 6.

*Mike Metz Designs, Alameda. By appointment only, (510) 814-8127; www.mikemetzdesigns.com.*

❖❖❖ After more than 30 years of selling fully restored vintage and handcrafted furniture, **Rockridge Antiques** is offering something new, or at least "gently used": furniture on consignment.

Customers who have purchased items such as classic Arts and Crafts tables and chairs in the store's early days can now sell them back. This full circle legacy

is a testament to the high quality and durability of the furniture that Rockridge Antiques makes and sells. The store also accepts quality pieces purchased elsewhere, generally of vintage design but occasionally newly made.

"We're almost an institution," says owner John Knight, whose father started the business selling antique and new furniture.

Not all of Rockridge Antiques' furniture is vintage. Twenty skilled furniture makers trained in the Arts and Crafts tradition create new classics every day at a workshop in Oakland.

The consignment section that opened in December offers lower prices for people who want quality furniture such as sleigh beds, highboys, desks, and chairs. Often, customers can save even more money by refinishing the furniture themselves. For example, a trestle desk for sale in January was listed "as found" for \$495, but refinishing the price was \$1,795. "It's less foreboding for people just starting out," says Knight.

*Rockridge Antiques, 5601 College Avenue, Oakland, (510) 652-7115; www.rockridgefurniture.com.*

❖❖❖ During her first week of business, Allison Evans's brand-new skin care boutique and treatment facility was completely booked. Not a bad start for the astute aesthetician who has already been featured in *Lucky* magazine and on the product review Web site *Daily Candy*.

"Ninety percent of the business is from right here in North Berkeley," Evans says. "People are really excited that they don't have to go into the city for the type of treatments and sophisticated brands that I offer."

Located in Berkeley's Northbrae neighborhood, **Supple Integrative SkinCare** offers holistic, raw, and organic creams for women, men, and babies. Carefully choosing products that blend science with nature, Evans also offers hard to find European skin care products such as Dr. Hauschka, Korres, and chemical/synthetic-free Ren, which is only available in two other stores in the U.S. Evans also offers scientifically formulated anti-aging products.

"I offer more of what you can find in Europe at a pharmacy," Evans says. "It's a treatment center and an apothecary."

Three holistic, organic, or customized facial treatments are available in the lush treatment room equipped with a heated bed and down feather comforters.

The freshly scented boutique with apple-green walls, sleek displays, and locally made gifts provide a glimpse into Evans's past career in interior design. Perhaps combining her love of design with healthy skin care was predestined: Her maiden name is Supple.

*Supple Integrative SkinCare, 1543 Hopkins Street, Berkeley, (510) 525-7068; www.suppleintegrative.com.*

—A.M.