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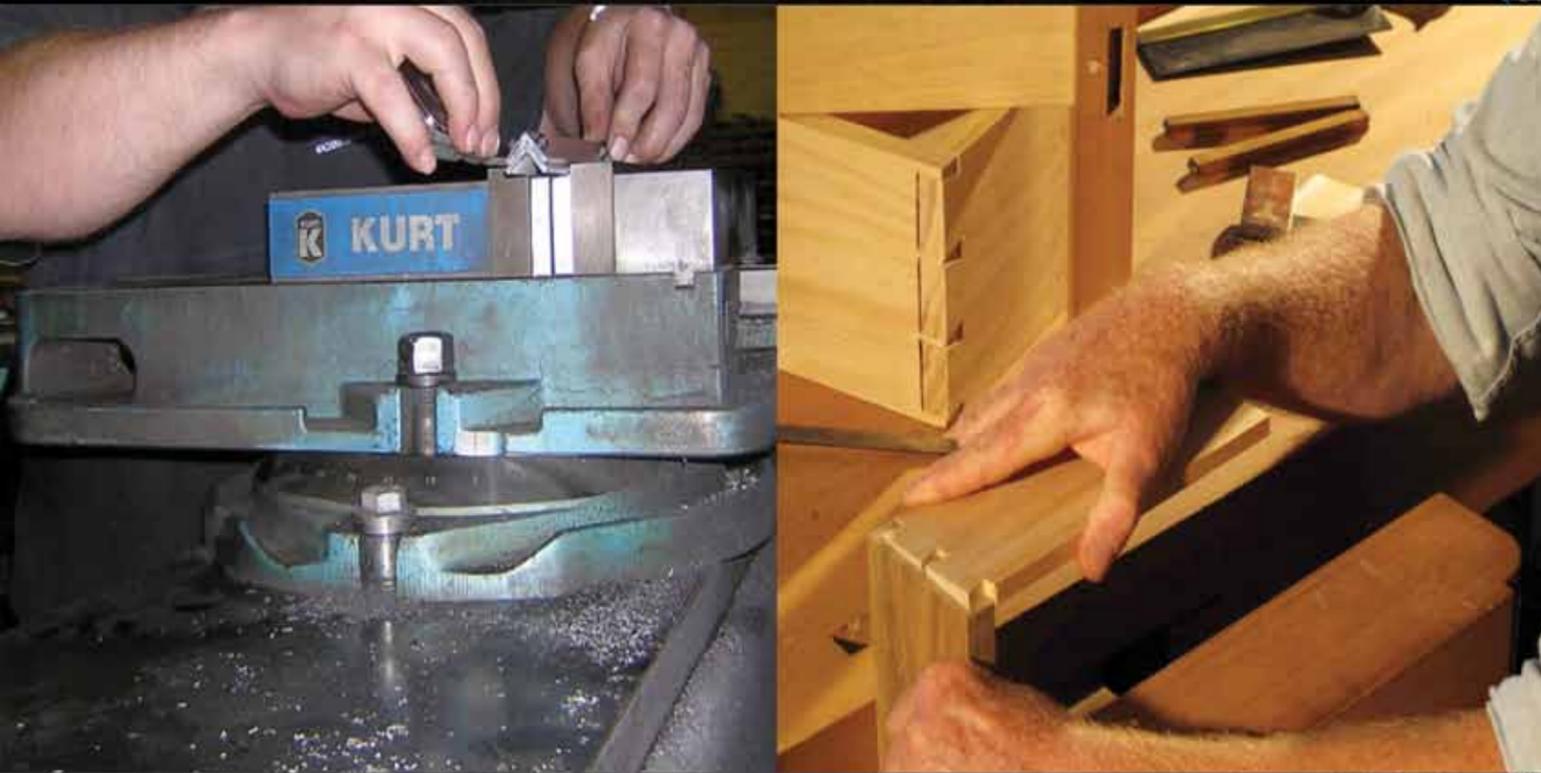
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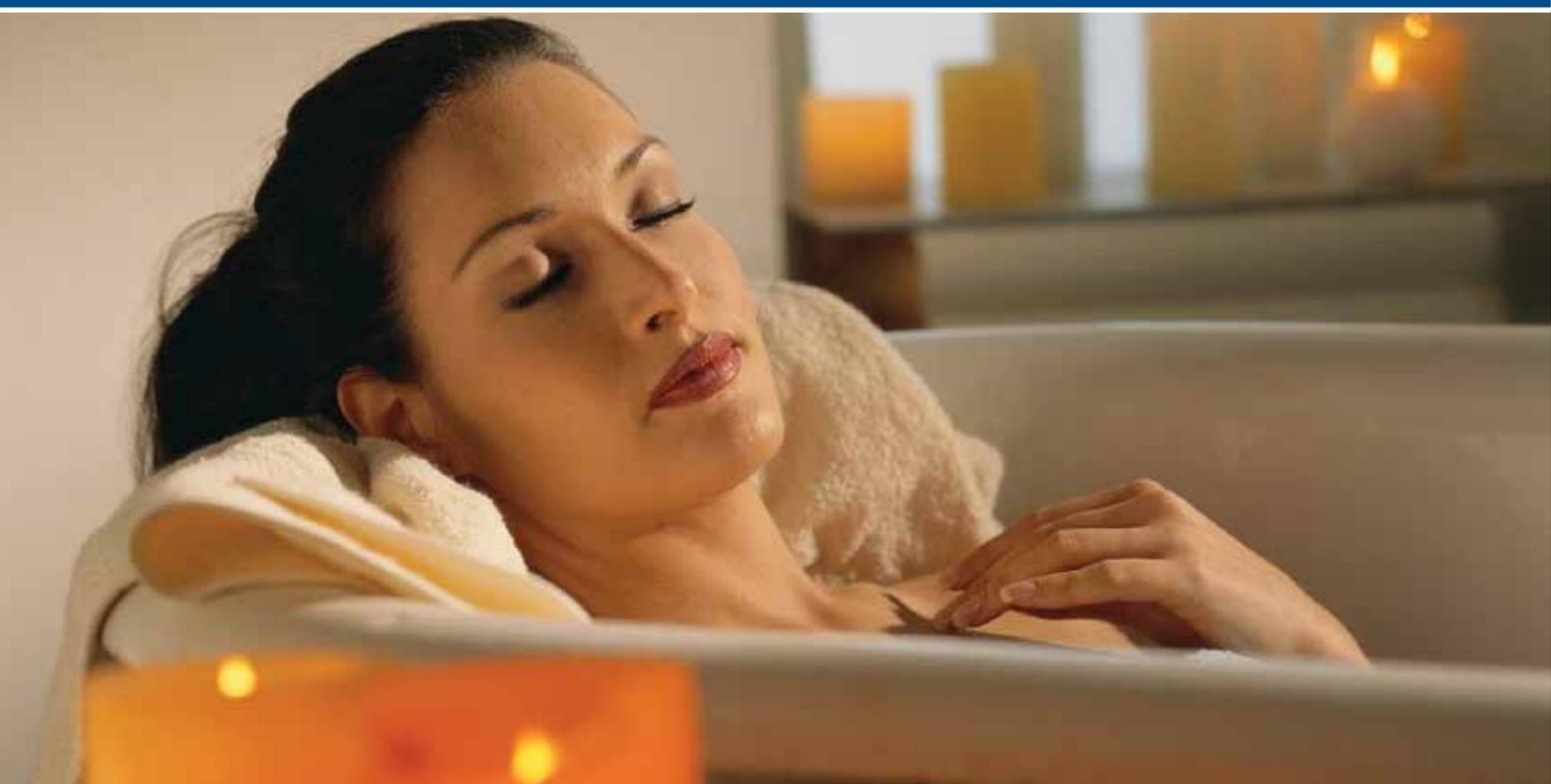
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With more than 400,000 readers per year, First Impressions Home Improvement Guide can provide advertisers access to a broad customer base while offering readers a great selection of high quality products and services in the home and home improvement areas.

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Happy Hand

Have you ever wished that a magic fairy would materialize out of thin air, ready to hover above your baby's carriage and hold her bottle at just the right angle for her?

Well, now there's a product that will do just that. Baby Happy Hand is a patented hands-free baby bottle holder. At one end, the universal clasp fits all car seats and strollers, and at the other end the holding mechanism adapts to all bottles and sippy cups. No more puddles of milk and screeching babies—and that's more magic than fairyland ever produced!

This is more than just a practical product: it's a story of service. The originator is ordained minister Dr. Veronica Lowery, who calls her business a "marketplace ministry." She and other like-minded business owners "give back the money that we make in one entrepreneurial business to build stronger communities." This includes helping homeless people, prostitutes, and drug addicts create better lives for themselves. Of Baby Happy Hand, Lowery says that "it's a witty invention that God has given us to solve a problem and build lives."

Baby Happy Hand is the new fad in Hollywood: fans include Scott Baio and his daughter Bailey, Kim Fields and her son Sebastian. Additional endorsements come from the Borgnine family and Danny Glover.



In the near future, Happy Hands will be adapted to fit wheelchairs and hospital beds to help new mothers in the pediatrics ward as well as the elderly and the disabled.

To buy a Baby Happy Hand bottle holder, visit the company website at www.babyhappyhand.com.

BABY HAPPY HAND
Veronica Lowery
(510) 316-7238
www.babyhappyhand.com

Avis (Vallejo)

If only Cinderella had just gone to Avis instead of trusting the pumpkin, things would have been much easier for her.

Tenesha Taylor's Avis branch in Vallejo combines all the conveniences of a national franchise with the charms of a local business. Since it's part of a network, it can offer a wide selection of vehicles, low rates, and easy online reservations. And then, since it's a local branch, it also offers superior customer service—what owner Tenesha Taylor calls the "red carpet treatment."

The "red carpet treatment" includes a pick-up service, discounts on longer rentals and GPS units, and cars that are kept impeccably clean and in excellent condition. Most importantly, the "red carpet treatment" means that all customers are greeted with a smile: this is a friendly business, built on long-term, personal relationships with clients.

Although many clients are from out of town, many are locals: Avis - Vallejo networks with the community, providing vehicles for all sorts of community events—for example, minivans for local high schools.

This business is a wonderful success story: Taylor, 27, is a young, ambitious entrepreneur who has great plans for her business. "Our fleet is always increasing," she says, "we're always growing."

Taylor is committed to making renting a car something



special. "It's a great experience and it's always going to be fun. You're always going to get a great rate, and you won't feel like your pockets are empty when you leave."

Avis - Vallejo is open 7 days a week. Drop in or reserve your car at www.avis.com.

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DeLu Insurance

Protecting you, your family and your property is the prime function of DeLu Insurance. Owner Kelly Lu is dedicated to providing the information and plans you need to insure you and protect your most important and valuable assets. Located in San Leandro, Kelly has been in her current location for six years and has over twenty years of experience in the insurance industry.

DeLu Insurance offers a variety of insurance plans that will cover personal property including watercraft, commercial autos and motorcycles. While driving in Mexico, policy owners are protected under these auto plans as these extend beyond the Mexican borders so that this American policy is accepted in Mexico. Kelly Lu will sit down with small business owners and discuss plan options to develop the right one for any small business and in turn small business owners can take comfort in knowing that workers compensation plans are offered here as well making this office a one-stop shop for all insurance needs. Additionally, by providing discounts for preferred customers, DeLu Insurance can save the customer up to 40% when combining both auto and home insurance.

With so much experience and customer knowledge, Kelly Lu is able to offer a variety of insurance options to her customers even those with bad credit or even no credit. In today's economy the options can be limited however DeLu Insurance is able to offer coverage in the most trying of circumstances, providing peace of mind and uncompromising quality. — *Article by Jan Weiss*



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Electrical Development

Providing service for six years in its current Oakland location, Electrical Development (EDCON) is a full service electrical company focusing on both residential and commercial properties. Owner Andrew Skivnich, a Bay Area native with nearly 20 years of experience in the electrical industry offers service that is professional, reliable, on time and always available. The EDCON team prides themselves on uncompromising customer service, even following up with customers after the job is complete to make sure that the customer is satisfied and that everything is working as it should.

Growing up in the Bay Area and being familiar with the construction of local housing, framing and styles gives this company a leg up on competition because the electrical team can anticipate problems before they begin, knowing how the building was originally constructed. This saves time and money in the long run because having the knowledge before arriving at the job site means that everyone can get to work right away to get the job done right. Homes built in the 30's, 40's and 50's have issues unique to the construction and familiarity with what is behind the walls is a distinct advantage.

Though based in Oakland, EDCON takes jobs all over the Bay Area including San Francisco, Marin and Contra Costa County. In addition to actual electrical work they will also collaborate with the customer to develop lighting schemes. With excellent service come repeat customers, a trademark of EDCON. —

Article by Jan Weiss



ELECTRICAL DEVELOPMENT
Contact: Andrew Skivnich
Skriv11@aol.com

Shirley's Designs

How many of the clothes in your closet look good on you? I mean really good? Not too long, not too tight, not too loose—but just right from cuff to neck to waist to hem?

If your closet is anything like mine, then you'll have several pieces whose whole business seems to be to do nothing other than hang. Maybe they used to fit, but don't anymore. Or maybe they never fit quite right, but they were such great deals and such lovely fabrics that you bought them anyway. If that's the case, then it's time for us to bring these lonely, patient pieces of clothing back into the world.

According to her clients at Shirley's Designs, Veda Ambeau is more of an artist than a seamstress. She can dart, hem, tuck, taper, let out, and transform your wardrobe into something that looks like it cost a million dollars. No matter what your size, whether petite or tall or lavishly endowed, Veda will make sure that your clothes show off your figure to its full advantage.

Having personally tailored clothes seems like a luxury, but in the end it's much more economic than buying more new things that will never really fit you quite right. In our consumerist culture, we seem to have lost touch with the idea of quality, fit, and attention to detail. At Shirley's Designs, you can feel thrifty and self-indulgent at the same time.

Shirley's Designs offers more than mere fabric alteration: Veda's chic sense and experienced know-how can amount to something as grand as allowing you to find an entirely new self-image, which allows you to love how you look in your clothes so much that you hope out of bed and can't wait to get dressed in the morning.

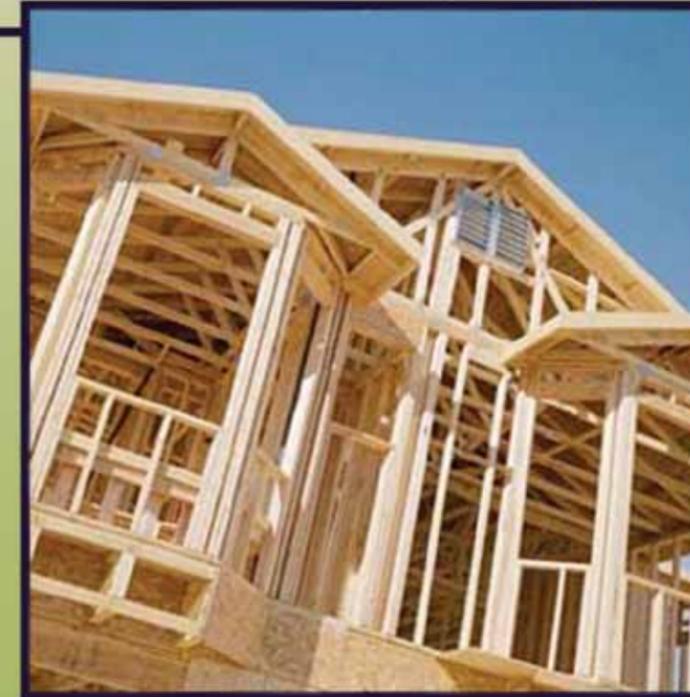
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The Equity and Wealth Planning Group

With a combined experience of 25 years in the industry, Paul and David Valencia, from The Equity & Wealth Planning Group have seen a lot, from risks and rewards to misperceptions in the industry, enabling them to focus their practice on three *high priority areas* that they believe are at the forefront of American's minds.

1. How to reduce or eliminate the excessive taxation on contemporary retirement programs including 401k's, IRA's, 403b's or any type of Qualified Plan.
2. Dispelling the long held and false belief that the only investment choice for superb growth is the stock market and that only with risk can you obtain significant reward.
3. How to cut off and stop our reliance on banks and their loans.

"We are definitely looking for the individual who wants a relationship that is; mutually beneficial; more than just a transaction and long term in scope," says Paul Valencia.

Every plan they recommend comes from listening to a client's goal and aspirations as well as concerns or fears. They have a process that includes multiple visits and discussions, the

thoughts and input of two advisors and recommendations that keep a client focused on the big picture. In addition to the one on one approach, the Valencia's offer other ways to get to know their clients including a monthly open house and a small group seminar providing an informal and relaxing way to discuss financial investments. This approach to a high level customer satisfaction has served them well with satisfied and long-term clients. Conrad Zanatto, owner of Zanatto Family Markets of San Jose says, "These guys have brought two things to me and my family; peace of mind and results." — *Article by Jan Weiss*

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The Right Spot

Some people are simply born with mechanical talent. The Right Spot owner Jabu Miller took his natural ability and honed it with years of schooling and experience. He takes pride in providing the very best work and customer service.

The Right Spot is unique because it's not only a small shop: it's a small shop that can take care of all the mechanical requirements of your car from bumper to bumper. Miller—the Auto Doc—specializes in engine rebuild and repair, transmission rebuild and repair, steering and suspension, brakes, driveline and drive train service, heating and air conditioning, engine maintenance and drivability, smog certification, electrical, as well as stereo and video repair. For other services (such as bodywork), he can contract out the work to ensure that you have only one stop for all your car's needs.

Miller also strives to provide the best customer service. This includes making sure that his clients are satisfied, that they trust him with their cars, and that all jobs are completed in a timely manner. For each car, he offers "impeccable quality work so the vehicle doesn't have to come back."

Miller developed his natural mechanical talent as a young man, when he found himself in the position of taking care of his family following the death of his father. The ability, he says modestly, is like athletic talent: "it has to be encoded in some way." After earning a degree at Wyotech and working as the sole employee of



an auto repair shop, it occurred to him: "I can do this for myself."

The Right Spot is the product of one man's talent and ambition. Miller's motto says it best: When your vehicle is sick, the Autodoc is here to fix.

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Michelle has been investing in Real Estate and Land since 1988. She is now sharing her knowledge and

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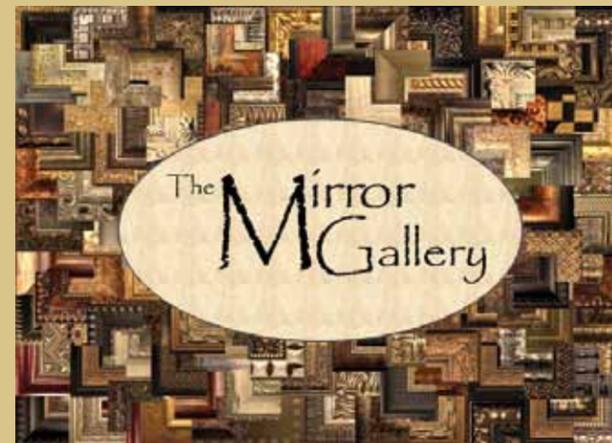
Public Art and Welded Steel Sculpture
by Vickie Jo Sowell

Communities seek a sense of their own identity, rooted in time and space. My work often keys on this need, dynamically uniting the sense of the place with its regional role, a metaphor that fuses the vision of past history with our vision of where we're going.

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Have you ever dreamed of getting out of a hot shower on a cold morning and putting your foot down on—gasp!—warm tile?

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Always on the cutting edge of technology, especially earth-friendly technology, Albert Nahman Plumbing is proud to be a member of the Green Plumbers Association. Nahman's employees have additional certifications and are committed to pursuing their educations.

At the same time, they can take care of basic heating installation services and basic plumbing services such as repairs, fixture installations, drain cleaning service, sewer diagnostics, and trenchless sewer replacements.

Although the business has a global consciousness, it's a family business that prides itself on flourishing from word-of-mouth references. "We're very aware that this is a service-oriented business," says Amelia Nahman, "our customers come first no matter what."

For up-to-the-minute technologies, solid, speedy work, and great customer care, go to Albert Nahman Plumbing and Heating.

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The Mirror Gallery

A creatively placed mirror adds style, space and individuality to any home or business. There are so many options that finding the right style and fit for your bedroom, bathroom, living room or office might begin to be an overwhelming task. The Mirror Gallery in Walnut Creek California is a valuable resource when making the decision to upgrade your space with a functional and attractive mirror.

Featuring over 1500 frame samples and hard to find round and oval mirrors, The Mirror Gallery and it's staff are one of the Bay Area's leaders in home design. This family owned and run establishment is run by Julie and Luke Holland who in hand serve as a kitchen and bathroom redesign team. Providing a full scale service including custom made or semi-custom made cabinetry, consultation, design, referrals for construction and installation.

Having this much experience at one location gives The Mirror Gallery's clients a real advantage and takes away the stresses that can be associated with remodeling. In addition to the mirrors and cabinetry, they are the go-to location for shower doors, roman shades, wood flooring and tile. Quartz, Granite, Marble and a variety of textures and colors of counter tops are also available and Julie Holland's background and spectacular eye for design will help you bring the proper elements together to create the attractive living space you desire.



Taking over an existing location in 2008 this establishment, with its deep family roots, expanded by providing full design services. Using her residential design experience to "equate her client's personalities, needs and desires into a beautiful designed space of their dreams" Julie leaves each client feeling like they have received the personal touch missing from warehouse or department store designers. The average client may come in with a picture in their head or even magazine cut outs but might not be sure how to apply those ideas to their actual living space. Julie Holland has the ability carry that vision through to a finished living space by tying décor, flooring and cabinetry together.

If you are beginning to research your next bathroom or kitchen remodel visit the website at WWW.mirrorgallerywc.com to fill out a kitchen planning questionnaire or bathroom planning questionnaire. The Mirror Gallery and LB Cabinetry teams find this information valuable in guiding you toward determining the style and types of materials that will work best for your space, and lifestyle in terms of style, maintenance and long term beauty. For a view of the portfolio of LB Cabinetry, also owned by Luke Holland in partnership with family, visit WWW.LBCabinetry.com. This rare combination of product, consultation, design and construction for bathroom and kitchen remodeling sits right in our back yards, virtually tucked away in a house full of exquisite mirrors.

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Vickie Jo Sowell Studios



Her pet project is Bid Daddy's Complete Rejuvenating Community Garden located at 3601 Peralta Boulevard in Emeryville that she and community members cultivated out of Big Daddy Green's gas station that burned down. This garden houses a sampling of Sowell's sculpture, vibrantly hued flowers as well as edible produce for the Oakland/Emeryville community.

She has also designed beautifully functional and artistic gates that were privately commissioned by the Temescal Co-Housing collective, a commission entitled "Sprazzo di Sole" (sunburst) for a private residence in Orinda and a full suite of pieces for the Sweidy-Stata family's pool house in Atherton which included three gates, two railings, a large window treatment, and over 50 feet of ornamental fence.

This awesome and rare art form adds character, individuality and beauty to any location. Having just finished a garden fence for a lovely retired couple in Napa, who rave that they love the color and are happy when they look at the gate, Sowell has opened the arena for exciting new residential projects.

The un-duplicatable beauty and property value that an original Sowell sculpture creates has Condominium complexes and private residents in upscale areas like Orinda, Oakland, Emeryville and Napa are eager to take advantage of the opportunity. This artist's creations often key in on "need, dynamically uniting the sense of the place with it's regional role." From that concept natural, purposeful, organic sculptures are born that almost seems organic to the location. Bringing this same element to residential projects allows home owners the opportunity to have custom ornamental fencing and gates created by this local talent.

Learn more about this artist's public sculptures, upcoming projects, pictures of public and privately commissioned works and for contact information, visit her website at www.unrulyimages.com. You can also find out more about Big Daddy's Complete Rejuvenating Garden you can check them out on Facebook.

VICKIE JO SOWELL STUDIOS

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The name Vickie Jo Sowell might not ring immediately familiar but you've almost certainly seen the artist's dynamic and recognizable urban sculpture. This community minded artist is inspired by the honor and obligation to contribute back to her community. If you haven't been lucky enough to catch one of her many art exhibitions, you have certainly walked by and admired her sculptures during your daily treks throughout the bay area.

Sowell's public artworks include the 600 feet of colorful water cut steel gates along Marina Way near the transit center in Richmond California. The intricately designed fence panels depicts the people, the times and the rhythm of this bay area city. She is also the creative mind behind the eye catching palette and paint brush sculpture in front of the Michael's Art store in Emeryville and the portal gates at the Frutivale Transit plaza on International Boulevard in Oakland. The adornment above four columns at the entry way of the transit plaza was commissioned by the city of Oakland and displays almost ethereal fruit and branch fabrications to reflect the lesser known orchard heritage of the Fruitvale area.

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Inner City Renovations



It has been said that most families tend to gather in the kitchen and that the best memories have been made around a warm stove. When we visit a home whose kitchen has a unique personality, it is inviting, warm and memorable. Home owners who wish to create that atmosphere in their homes know they have to step away from the cold and impersonal experience of big name home improvement warehouses.

Christine Soden, Director of Inner City Renovations and Designs, brings out that unique personality in each kitchen renovation project. Her background in drafting and architecture combined with her passion for design provides for a dynamic remodel experience. The team at Inner City Renovations leaves each client feeling very impressed with the superb quality of work, dedication to the client's vision and outstanding customer service.

Christine Soden has been a prominent name in the industry since the 1980's in New York, tackling projects including bathrooms, kitchens, and upscale beauty shops. She also spent time in the fabrication arena, providing in depth knowledge of product quality and industry trends. Now her talents are available to home and business owners in the Bay Area. Inner City Renovations brings the keen and solid know-how of the construction industry and the creative perspective of a Kitchen designer's eye to make each project as individual as the home owner.

Providing a full scope services, they also provide semi-custom cabinetry to other's in the renovations field. This has built a solid network of industry experts and wealth of referrals for a job that might be beyond their scope. Their team understands that when people choose to renovate a space in their home or business, they are looking for a noticeable change that will reflect their personal style while raising the value of their investment. Open minded, educated, honest and experienced guidance from Inner City Innovations is an invaluable key to achieving those goals.

Whether you are looking for a radical change in structure and space or just a change of focus with color and décor, you will feel confident and comfortable letting Inner City Renovations guide you through the process. For more information on the innovative Kitchen and Bathroom renovation services of Inner City Renovations, you can contact them at (510) 435-4626 or via email at innercityrenovations@gmail.com.

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Tile Style



There really isn't anything more satisfying than taking on a home project and being able to show off the project with pride and the sense of satisfaction. The DIY craze is non-stop and home improvement stores such as Home Depot make these projects easier than ever. Be rational and realistic; it's important to look at the whole endeavor, consider the time and money involved and whether this is something you want to do or delegate to professionals. For this article we are going to focus on one weekend project; installing a tile floor.

Let's begin with bathroom remodeling. With these kinds of remodels, homeowners will often hire plumbers for moving around any pipes and installing faucets and toilets. However a floor installation can be a DIY project as long as the right tools and accessories are there. Home Depot offers several DIY books on tiling as well as seminars and workshops that you can sign up for.

Now that you have decided to replace the floor, you will need to decide on flooring. The choices range from tile to hardwood and linoleum. Ceramic and porcelain tile is consistently a smart choice for bathrooms; it holds up well to dampness in a bathroom, comes in an array of patterns and colors and is cost effective. The downside is that installation is time consuming but not impossible. Tile is purchased by either square feet or by individual tile price ranging from \$.99 per square foot for Marazzi Island Sand 16x16 inch glazed ceramic tile or as much as \$9.95 per tile for Marazzi Montagna Belluno, a 12x12 mosaic glazed porcelain tile. Don't hesitate to speak with a Home Depot customer service members about the different tiles and their characteristics. With so many to choose from sometimes it's best to get a second opinion on the type to use. Once you have decided on the tile you will need to purchase backer board, which is a water and mold resistant board that protects the wood substrate that actually makes up the base of your floor. Ceramic tile backer board is sold in sheets of 3"x5' and has a basic cost of \$10.00 per sheet for Custom Building Products Wonderboard Concrete Backer Board. You will need thin set mortar, which will run around \$15 a bag for the Versa Bond Fortified Thin-Set Mortar at Home Depot to as much as \$40.00 for 3.5 gallon container of PreMixed Stone, Porcelain and Ceramic Tile Thin-Set Mortar. Thin set is what glues the tile to the backerboard. Grout, the hard sandy material that fills



space between tiles, should contrast well with the tile color. PolyBlend A comes in a 25 pound bag for \$13.27 and is available in 48 colors. This grout mixes with water and is ready to go. Additional items to complete this project are a tile saw which can be rented, a floor trowel, used to scrap thin set onto the backs of the tile and the backerboard, a grouting sponge and spacers that are placed between each tile piece as it is installed to create a uniform design. Home Depot offers a kit of tools for tile installation from QEP which includes a trowel, spacers, sponge and gloves in addition to several other items for just \$17.77. To keep costs down you might consider purchasing a tile cutter; this item by Workforce is a 20" tile cutter, retailing for \$29.97 and will score and snap tile and can be used on both ceramic and porcelain. You must have a level which can be purchased for around \$16.00 for a 48" inch Empire Tradesman Aluminum Level.

To begin, tear out any old linoleum or tiles and let the room air out overnight. The next morning place the backer board over the wood flooring substrate and nail in place. Once this is done you may now apply the thin set at one end. Begin at the back and move backwards out the door so that

you don't get trapped in a corner of the room. Apply a layer of thin set with your floor trowel and place a row of tile on the thin set, inserting spacers between each tile. As you add each row of tile be sure that the new row is level with the previous row. There is nothing worse than finishing your floor and discovering that the floor is not level. Once the floor tile is installed and level, let it dry for the rest of the day. The next day you will mix the grout and apply with a trowel over the tile, pressing into spaces between tiles. Use a wet grouting sponge to smooth the grout again into the spaces and wipe off any excess into a bucket of water you will keep by your side. Do not let chunks of grout dry on the tiles. Wipe down the tile several times as it dries because grout has a sandy consistency and when it dries it will appear as a dull layer on the tile. Keep wiping the tile till it feels smooth and all grout is clear from the tile surface. Let this dry overnight and the next day you have a new floor strong enough to walk on. — Article by Jan Weiss

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