FURNITURE DESIGN MARQUETRY VENEERING CARVING MILLWORK

WOOD FORUM

Newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association

Volume 36, Issue 6 June 2016

Woodworking in the Japanese Traditon

by Art Hofmann

Len Brackett is a woodworker and designer from Grass Valley. He works in the Japanese tradition. In the 1970's Len Brackett, head of East Wind, spent seven years in Japan, five of them training as a temple carpenter apprentice in Kyoto. Upon his return to America in 1976, he began a thirty-year career of adapting traditional Japanese houses for American clients. His company, East Wind (Higashi Kaze), works with clients to design and build traditional Japanese houses, guest houses, additions, barns, bridges, and gates, i.e. projects small and large. Len is the author of a book, ***Building the Japanese House Today*** (2005) that shows how a classic Japanese house can be built in an American setting. He is legendary for his skills in using hand tools. He promises to bring some Port Orford Cedar to plane and cut.

When: Tuesday, June 7th at 7 pm

Where: Michael Cullen Design, 500 Rohde Lane, Petaluma, CA 94952 (707)-486-2380

Directions: Take 101 to Petaluma and take the Washington Ave. exit. Head west on Washington for approximately 5 miles. Washington will become Bodega Avenue as you head out of town. You will pass by Thompson Lane on your right and approximately 1/2 mile past Thompson you will make a right on to Rohde Lane. There will be an "end 45 mile/hr." sign just before you make the right hand turn. Drive down Rohde Lane to 500 (there will be a group of mail boxes at this point) and turn left into the property. If you are on gravel, you have missed the turn and have gone too far. Drive around the house and find parking. (Please be considerate of others when parking).

This is a BYOC event (Bring your own chair).

A Note from the Chairman

Bill Taft

Skateboards, public art, tree houses, furniture and much more; Scott Constable sure has produced a wonderful variety of work, most of it for everyone to enjoy. One of the things that I like about our meetings is that not only do you get to see all this great creative work, you get to learn a lot more about it. Thank you, Scott, for your interesting presentation. Our June meeting presentation will be Woodworking in the Japanese Tradition, featuring Len Brackett. I'm told that he is legendary for his skills in using hand tools. I am looking forward to it.

During my opening remarks at last month's meeting I tried to solicit some ideas for presentations at the museum during the ***Artistry in Wood*** Show this fall. I don't feel that I was able to get the message across, so I'm repeating it here. Every year we are asked to participate in providing presentations at the museum on topics associated with the Show. These presentations are for the museum members and the general public. Attendance at past presentations has been less than robust. This year we would like to improve on that by having presentations that would appeal to a larger audience. I am asking you for ideas, so please send them to me.

This years ***Artistry in Wood*** Show opens in September. The schedule and all of the information about entering work is on our website. Time to get to work on that project; entry day is only three short months away.

Once again, my goal is to bring more members into sharing the duties of running the Association. If you are interested in finding out what is involved, please contact me.

Wings by Fabrice Landa

Wolf by William Taft

Bowl with Hips by Kalia Kliban

Artistry in Wood *photos by Tyler Chartier*

Architect and Artisan: Scott Constable

by Art Hofmann

Our Board President, Bill Taft, opened the May 3 meeting shortly after 7 pm. Bill said that he enjoyed the meeting at Garry Knox Bennett's studio, and thanked Art Hofmann and Joe Scannell for the last issue of the ***Wood Forum***. Bill, it must be said, contributed a column of his own, which is a nice addition. Bill then asked for new members and at least three introduced themselves, in addition to several guests.

Bill went on to talk about ***Artistry in Wood***, the dates for which have been announced as September 17 tthrough October 9. The date for entering pieces is September 8, and Judgment Day is September 14. He called for volunteers to help out in setting up the show, saying that this is the way that he became involved in the organization. The museum then became a topic of discussion, as Bill delineated the tango that SCWA dances with them. What it comes down to is that each year they expect us to donate a sum of money from our budget for the privilege of producing the Show. The pressure is on every year, and seems to increase as time passes and everything seems to be more and more about money.

Mike Wallace objected: the gist of his argument was that SCWA got very little in return from the museum.

Bill then asked Art Hofmann to announce next month's meeting. Art told us that it will feature Len Brackett, a woodworker known for building in the Japanese style, almost legendary for his planing abilities. He also has written a book, ***Building the Japanese Home Today*** (2005) which is an indispensable resource for those interested in adopting the Japanese style. He builds entire houses in Nevada City, disassembles them, and reassembles them on permanent sites.

At this point Scott Constable was introduced and he gave an overview of his career as an architect-artist and craftsman. What was obvious by evening's end was that he has succeeded in making a niche for himself by combining considerable skills derived from his architecture and art education with his love of wood and other materials.

Scott began by telling us that he works across a broad range of disciplines and materials, but the core of all his efforts is wood. He has a company called Wowhaus, a partnership with his wife and a small team. They do projects together, focused on public art, and produce a blog called Deep Craft, which is focused on the philosophy of Wowhaus. Scott sees wood as his first language, developing an interest in trees as a young person in northern Philadelphia, a very woody place. He showed us a drawing he had made as a boy, a Scotch tape repaired drawing of a tree. Scott credits his grandfather as an influence. He was an aeronautical engineer who designed zeppelins after the WWI.

Photos in this article are courtesy of Scott Constable

Granddad was grounded in woodwork, and taught young Scott how to sharpen. Scott had lots of photos of some of the structural items he had worked on in his shop on the Connecticut shore. Looking even further back, Scott's great-grandfather was a patternmaker for Stanley, and is credited with designing a core box plane for which he held a patent. Scott grew up near Wharton Esherick's home and visited there regularly, a place that was even then becoming a shrine of American woodwork. He saw a fullness there, not so much in the furniture, but in the whole package: the site, the house, the shop, and what was made there. He also went to the Nakashima compound regularly with a family friend, who commissioned furniture there from time to time. The shop was humble, but the stacks of woods were very impressive. His grandfather made knock-offs, Scott told us, of Hayward-Wakefield furniture, a maker of high end mid-century furnishings. He also visited the Shaker sphere in eastern New York and western Massachusetts with his family and was very impressed by the pilgrimages there.

As a young man, he set off to learn architecture. Rhode Island School of Design was geared at that time to the New York City world of post-modern architecture, which did not speak to Scott. He remembers this as a difficult time. He left after a few years and went to the Art Institute in Chicago, where he studied sculpture as part of a multi-discipline arts education. He recalls that he enjoyed making things. After this he went to work with a house building outfit in New England, that built houses based on resources available on the site itself, or mills in the immediate area. They looked at the local architecture, too, and let a design emerge from these parameters. We saw slides of what Scott described as "very handmade houses" where

many of the components were made on site for homes that were based on the building history and materials of the area. He sees this period of house construction as his grad school. He built boats as well, starting small at first.

Scott met his wife around this time, and together, they set off on the next phase of their lives, to Africa with the Peace Corps, as Appropriate Technology Agents, a fine if dubious title. The idea was to see if technology could be applied in terms of conserving water and forest resources in the work of local artisans. It was an inspirational time. They learned a local language, plus French. After the stint in Africa they moved to California. The first product inspired by the African era was a refined version of a chief's chair, that began with the single cantilevered lock joint where the sitter supplies the gravity that holds it all together. A series of these chairs followed, where the joint dictates the structure of the chair. Scott says his interest in wood is mostly structural. Scott showed us a cantilevered rocker. Sometimes he worked in aluminum, always trying to minimize the structure. Such chairs were complicated to make, and Scott credits metal fabricator Walter Mork of Berkeley for their construction. But his efforts in wood led to exhibitions, and sometimes to commissions for runs of up to thirty chairs. He was always trying to make things durable, reduce elements, the number of joints. Scott showed yet more chairs. One was based on a sliding dovetail joint. The seat was minimalist, a ¼" ply with ¼" inch very dense memory foam, skinned with leather. All very thin.

Scott was involved with Alice Waters' Edible Schoolyard in Berkeley, a "school within a garden" where students grow their own food and that becomes the curriculum. He made their barn first, which led to a furniture commission, where Wowhaus was hired to design and construct the interior and the furnishings for a new dining facility. Scott made 120 stacking stools and 75 tables. Evan Shively was getting underway with his sawmill business about then, and having been a chef himself, knew Alice Waters. He gave the school a good deal on green bay laurel, which Scott stickered and dried himself. Other native woods were involved and their names were stamped in English and Latin onto the tables, another educational component pointing to the bio-diversity of the area. A third of the chairs gave way under the stress put on them by the middle schoolers; the rest were finally sold as a fund raiser for the school.

Scott designed an "elder chair" for the school, which they declined. It was meant to be placed at the head of each table and was rather heavy, high enough for a stout person to use comfortably. It was meant for a guest.

Scott says that he has learned his limits: he won't do 120 of something anymore, though possibly 30. Even if he does a one-off, he makes three or four to get his jigging where he wants it. If a chair or other item had to go into production, Scott went to Steve Wigfield quite a bit in the days when Steve's shop was up and running, because Steve was a good at that and at handwork as well. His "elder chair" led to other iterations. Greens Restaurant was remodeling and chose this chair, or rather a modified version of it which was less expensive but still incorporated the sense of a framed window with four panes and some heft and weight to it, and of course, its comfort. The chairs are still in use there. Scott trimmed costs on this item by going to Fancher Chair near Buffalo, New York, who produced them. Scott recommends this company, a two hundred year old outfit that has resisted the move to overseas.

Simplifying the structure of chairs continued to occupy Scott's mind. He designed one that used lap joints. He liked the idea of using one milled joint throughout. It wound up being adopted and installed at The Shed in Healdsburg. Scott did a lot of consulting for them, and they wound up using much of his furniture. We saw a slide of "The Story Table," a massive table used for changing thematic displays. Its base is composed of four short stacks of stickered green wood. The idea was that once a year, the wood was to be exchanged for a new green pile, while the dried wood found a purpose and life. In actuality, three years went by, but now the short slabs have been put into use at a restaurant in Sebastopol for pizza and bread cutting boards. Scott now likes to find trees and cut them into slabs with the aid of a friend who owns a Woodmizer.

Similarly, Scott designed a Hayride bench that sits on top of a hay bale. It is a stacking bench on a bale. Scott designed and made a 14' harvest table, one table in two parts that rolled on two Amish-made wooden wheels, each part rolling like a big wheel barrow. One person can move each part. It was intended to serve as an occasional table in a large space, a design which is carefully thought through.

Scott was appointed Wornick visiting professor at California College of the Arts, and taught a one semester course called Atelier. It is a junior year requirement in the furniture program, but is open to all students. Scott chose to do a boat building project called Micro Expedition. He wanted students to build something that might serve them if their lives

depended on it. They came up with various boat and boat-like designs, like Sailfish and kayaks. They made the boats, but the expedition was not realized due to rainy weather. Nonetheless, Scott was happy that the students did get into boat building rather deeply.

Wowhaus began in 1997 when Scott was living in Oakland. His daughter was about a year and half - she is now 21 - and wandered in the direction where he was building his tiny studio and exclaimed, "Wow!" and from that point on referred to the studio as the Wowhaus. (It was a not a riff on Bauhaus.) Wowhaus became the family business. Scott has a soft spot to this day for tiny architecture, which is now enjoying a vogue.

Alice Waters commissioned Wowhaus to do the tool barn at the Edible Schoolyard. The budget was tight, and students had to be part of the building process. Furthermore, it had to be demountable. It was all mortise and tenon joinery, and Scott built all the components at his little studio. The 12x24' building is all pinned together with trunnels. The students made the tapered trunnels and pounded them in, an activity at which the troubled kids excelled.

The intense involvement in the school needed an antidote, which Scott found in tree house building. He approached it as kind of a sculpture project, foraging the materials within a two block radius of the site, and using mostly handtools. It became a foray into green woodworking, and Scott spent quite some time at it, taking the idea around the country to sculpture parks and private residences.

Scott took part in a conference on The Role of the Hand in Design at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts on Deer Island in Maine. Scott built a giant raft pinned together with slip joints from fallen saplings and spruce boughs. The raft was built on the tide line, from where it was eventually carried away. He began making portable furniture to support these endeavors, and thus a field desk which folded into a kind of suitcase arrangement was born. Scott traveled the world with this, to England and Italy, sometimes sleeping underneath it when working on a project, a tool box that served these outside works. He also made or had made some peripheral things, such as heavy glasses with a punt in the bottom that would sit well on rough surfaces and not blow away.

Scott built tables at the Sonoma County Museum, enormous picnic tables with bowl-like indentations scooped out of their surfaces. This was about ten years ago, and some members recalled having used them while building bird houses with kids. The Museum wanted them, for free of course, and Scott took them back. The wood is Doug fir. Scott likes the idea of making something out of the drying process. People see it and want something like it. The fir has aged beautifully with a great silvery patina.

Scott built a cart/demonstration item for Copia in Napa, and also a miniature golf course based on the history of Hayes Valley in San Francisco. In effect, it was an effort to model for the City the ability to draw in a lot of people. The golf course has since been dismounted, and the area is now home to food trucks. Scott even made putters out of blocks of eucalyptus and a willow branch. Wowhaus also created a mobile mini-broadcasting studio that sent its AM signal out about a quarter of a mile and was used in San Francisco.

Scott showed some architectural commissions. A tiny house in Berkeley was made out of a the skin of a wine barrel, the vertical redwood kind, really more of tank. A tower in Sonoma County, a free standing building that Scott designed, the skin and the majority of the interior framing was built from redwoods on the property. A 600 sq. ft. cabin on property in Marin County was built from a single deodar cedar. It features large doors made by Steve Wigfield.

Originally made as a experiment in lamination, his first skateboard went to his daughter, and then became a production item. It is made from layered material laminated together at about ten or eleven degrees to each other. Acacia and elm are more flexible; walnut is not. Belly boards are another item, one that involved the surfers themselves.

Another phase of Scott's work was cast bronze sculpture on a rather large scale. We saw an image of a work outside a Denver home, a whooping crane. Scott works in wood to make his forms, then takes them to a foundry where they are made into molds and then cast. He saw that most sculptors work in foam, and the cast off forms wind up in the landfill, where they do not deteriorate. Scott created a whale tail sculpture that found a home in Santa Cruz, where it has become a destination for parents to photograph their children clambering on it at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration visitor center. Scott uses Piero Mussi's Artworks foundry in Berkeley, which he

likes. The life-size humpback whale tail has a stainless steel armature covered by a cast bronze skin about a quarter of an inch thick. This was an $80K project.

Another project that is slated but thus far uncompleted is for an 18 ft. sea monster to be installed at Lake Merritt. It was cast in about eight or nine pieces, and was originally done in pressed cork blocks (*depicted on this page*) carved with rasps. It was like working with wood. The material was reconstituted from wine bottle cork waste. It can be worked quickly and sanded to a fine finish. Waste from his own workings go into his compost pile.

The world's largest music box (*below*)was designed by Wowhaus and installed at a spot in Cincinnati. The songs it plays are tunes that have a connection to history of the neighborhood. Turn a crank and it plays. Finally, something that Wowhaus is working on now, a sort of scaled piece of furniture, we saw an outdoor class room, something that will be made in ferro-cement, for a school in New Jersey.

In response to a question about how Wowhaus gets jobs like those he had been describing, Scott said that Wowhaus winds up in finalist pools, which leads to commissions and contracts. They get three to five such commissions a year, and the projects are in various stages of completion and often overlap. They have a virtual team of craftsmen who come onboard as needed. The hardest part of the business is that every project has to be new. Coming up with the concept is the fun part. The rest is coordination through emails and phone calls and a kind of modern, everyday plugging along and management, at which Scott insists his wife is a master.

Someone commented that these projects take a lot of courage, and that was the main impression that the group was left with at the end of the evening. Scott got a big round of applause.

GEARING UP FOR ARTISTRY IN WOOD 2016

Timeless by Donovan Miller

Jellyfish Stool by Carol Salvin

Lotus by Scott Chilcott

Artistry in Wood photos by Tyler Chartier

George Breck was one of SCWA's founding members, and continued woodworking until his death. On Thursday, May 5th, he was working on a cabinet job in his shop in the company of a friend when he fell and broke his neck. He was taken to Memorial and died at 8 pm on Saturday.

Nan Waters, George's wife

I'm really sad to hear that George Breck has died. This is quite a loss to our woodworking community. In 1981, I attended my first Sonoma County Woodworkers meeting at George's shop in Sebastopol. George had expressed concern that there weren't enough volunteers to keep the organization going, and asked the group what they could do to help.

People started stepping up and volunteering. I offered my shop in Santa Rosa as a place for the SCWA to meet.

It was a turning point for the SCWA, and here it is thirty five years later, our Sonoma County Woodworkers Association is alive and well.

Thank you, George for your very valuable contribution to keeping our organization going.

Rest in peace, George!

David Marks

So sorry to hear about George's passing. I think George was at the very first meeting of what became the SCWA. I remember him as a guiding light in the early days of the woodworking renaissance of the late '70's. He set a standard for accuracy, precision and craftsmanship, and was very generous in sharing his knowledge with others.

Philip Nereo

George Breck

I recall having a conversation with George Breck in the early 80's at his shop in Sebastopol. He was a refugee from the world of chemical engineering, and happy to have escaped that world for woodwork. He enjoyed solving clients' problems on a daily basis. He had just finished a music stand and some other furniture for a musician. He loved what he did.

Art Hofmann

This is indeed sad news to hear that George has died. Both Susan and I extend our deepest sympathies to Nan and Ferguson.

George was one of our charter members, a gifted fine woodworker who was a major contributor to the world of fine woodworking, and his enthusiasm and energy greatly contributed to our formative years as a professional association.

From the onset, starting back in '77, George's talent, energy and enthusiasm was a huge asset for all those fortunate to know him.

We worked cooperatively on several major projects and many small ones throughout the turn of century. All were made possible through the established ground work that we now know as the SCWA.

I had a great deal of respect for George, his family and his work. He was multifaceted, as he also set a good example of being a notable steward of this planet we call earth.

John Keller

We will be having George's memorial party on Sunday June 26 from 2 pm til 4:30 pm. The memorial will be held at the Sebastopol Community Center Teen Annex on Morris St. in Sebastopol.

There will be one brief reading, then we hope the Swing band that George enjoyed playing in so much will do a few songs, and then we will socialize a while.

Fergus and I are providing beer, water & ice tea. If you want to drink anything different than that, please feel free to bring it. If you would like to bring some finger food snacks to share, that would be great.

Nan Waters

Carbon Fiber Class

by Joe Scannell

SCWA Members who attended the February 2016 meeting (or read about it in the March ***Wood Forum***) will recognize the name Dugan Essick. This guy has many irons in the fire, including welding skills, boatbuilding know-how, a flair for furniture design, and the ability to share those abilities with others. In fact, he operates a woodworking school in his magnificient shop in Grass Valley, California. When I heard he was conducting a class on the use of carbon fiber in furniture making, I knew I had to be there. I was not disappointed.

Dugan has been designing furniture for long time, and as he describes it, he always tries to minimalize the structure of a piece, to give it a light, almost fragile, appearance. In his younger years many of his designs were impractical, structurally impossible (see bottom right photo, page 10). Then he discovered carbon fiber.

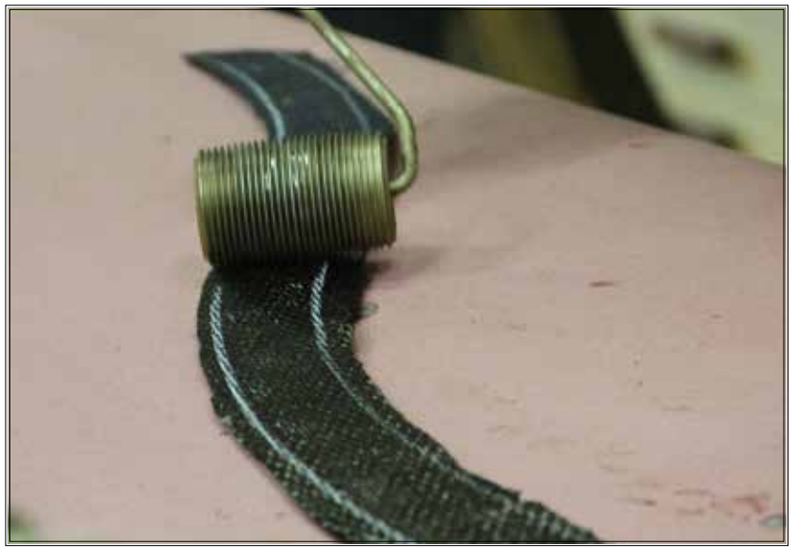
Already adept at fiberglass work, he applied what he knew to this new material and incorporated it into his woodworking, especially in chair making. He was now able to revisit those early, impractical designs, and make them a reality.

Carbon fiber is available as close as your neighborhood TAP Plastics store, and is sold most commonly as a woven fabric called bidirectional twill, which means it has fibers running horizontally and vertically. This gives it strength in both directions, and also lends itself to wrapping over curved surfaces. It is sold by the yard. There is another type of carbon fiber product called

unidirectional, in which all the fibers are aligned in one direction. This product comes in a 12" wide roll, and depending on the application, this may be a more economical way to go.

Dugan showed us two different methods of incorporating carbon fiber into woodwork. The simplest is to create a laminated part (e.g. a chair leg) with the required number of carbon fiber layers sandwiched between the wood. He uses a standard boatbuilding epoxy by West System, wetting the first piece of wood, then laying down a layer of the cloth, wetting that with epoxy and squeegeeing away the excess, then repeating to add additional layers of cloth until the desired thickness is achieved, then completing the sandwich with another piece of wood.

Once the carbon fiber/epoxy is fully cured, cutting and shaping is a very difficult task. It destroys sawblades and anything else you try on it, so Dugan emphasized the importance of trimming the piece as soon as the epoxy just begins to harden, when it is still like taffy. At that stage it can be trimmed with a knife or saw. Tomorrow, forget it.



The second method, shown in the photos on this page, is to create what is essentially a steel plate that he inserts into a hidden cavity inside the chair leg. It's not really a steel plate, of course. It's carbon fiber! He

showed me a finished piece that was 1/4" thick and shaped like a chair leg, and invited me to bend it. No way. This stuff is RIGID. Probably stronger than 1/4" steel plate, and definitely lighter. I would guess 20% of the weight of steel.

He starts with a template for the shape of the chair leg. He saws the rough stock to the approximate size of the template, adding some waste. Then he splits the leg into two halves, and routs a cavity inside each half to slightly more than half the thickness of the carbon fiber plate. The idea is that the plate gets glued into the recesses of both half legs when the leg is made whole again. The glue for everything is epoxy, of course.

The way he makes the plate is interesting. He first cuts out a piece of 1/4" MDF in the shape of the recess and small enough to fit into it. To this he applies a layer of carbon fiber/epoxy, as with method #1, squeegeeing away the excess glue, and adding as many layers as needed. As an example, the 1/4" thick plate required 16 plys of carbon fiber cloth. A final pass with a special roller smooths the whole sandwich. Now here's the clever part: once the plate is cured, he runs it through his thickness sander with a course belt, and grinds away the MDF, leaving the carbon fiber plate. Fragments of MDF do no harm; the important thing is that the plate will fit into the cavity when the leg halves are rejoined.

Besides chairs, there are many other applications for this kind of reinforcement. For example, the table pictured at right (an ***Artistry in Wood*** entry last year) is made with very slender and apparently fragile legs with a center ply of carbon fiber. The black carbon fiber looks like a very subtle bit of inlay.

Another example is in the chair splats shown below. Very thin and flexible, easy on the spine, they are made with an inner ply of carbon fiber for strength, and can be made from a wide range of wood species not restricted by strength requirements.

Photos unless otherwise noted are by Jose Cuervo

Shaker Modern *Photo by Tyler Chartier*

Geisha Chair *Photo by Tyler Chartier*

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Wood Forum is the monthly newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association. Please feel free to submit articles and photographs for inclusion in the publication. You can send your submissions to the Wood Forum Editor at SCWAEditor@gmail.com. Advertisements are also accepted with a nominal cost for paid members.

Membership Application

I would like to join the SCWA to meet other people interested in the craft, the art and the business of fine woodworking. Enclosed is my check in the amount of $35 for the annual dues. I understand that this fee entitles me to attend monthly meetings and to receive the Wood Forum newsletter by email or via the SCWA's website.

Name _____ Email _____

Address _____

City, Zip _____ Home Phone _____

Cell Phone _____ Work Phone _____

What can you do to help further the organizational goals of our volunteer-run association? Please tell us how you would like to help:

_____

_____

Please send check and completed application to:

Sonoma County Woodworkers Association, PO Box 4176, Santa Rosa, CA 95402