

# american craft

## Always Reaching

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Cliff Lee's  
Quest  
for  
Perfection*

**Alain de Botton  
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Lessons of Art**

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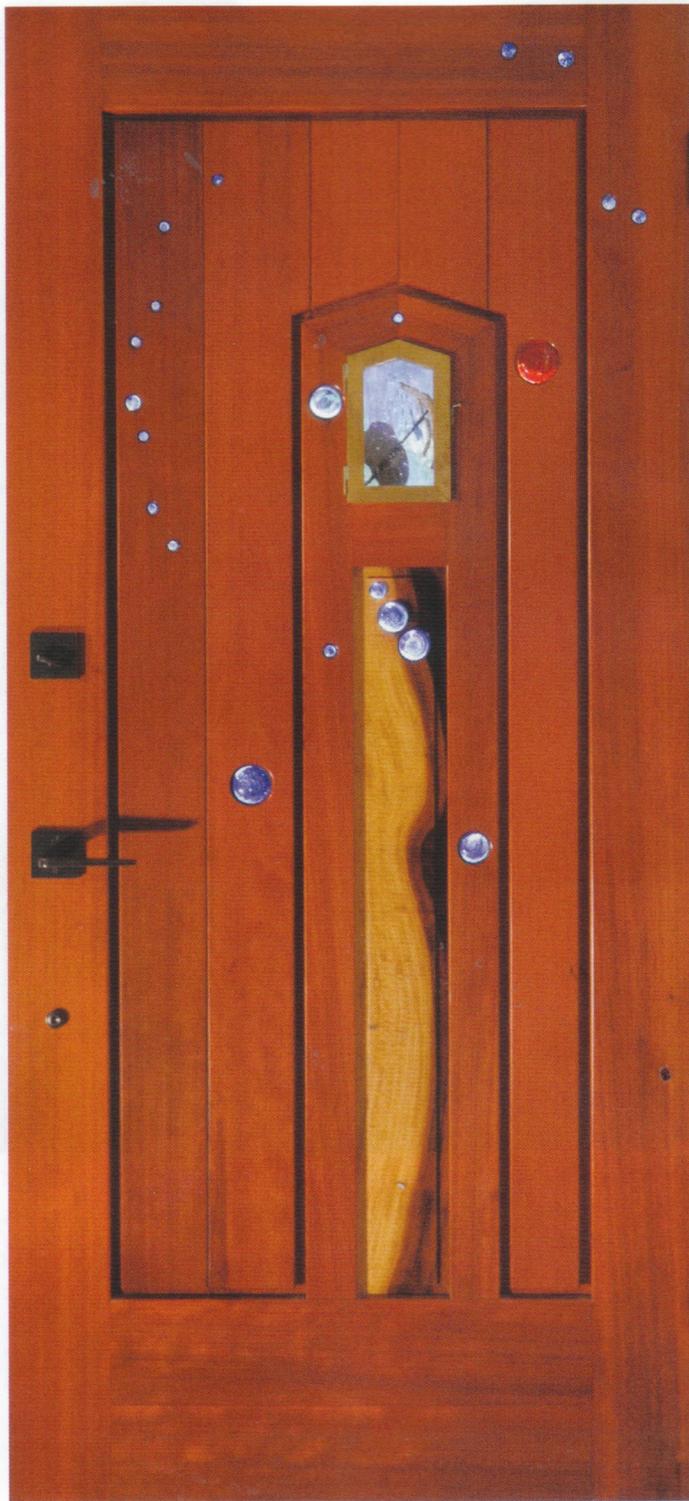
Product Placement  
**Threshold Artist**

"I'M NO LUMBERJACK, BUT I have a very hard time saying no to a beautiful hunk of wood," says Yorgen Quent Kvinsland, who has carved out a niche making one-of-a-kind doors at his ArtStruct studio in Mendocino, a picturesque coastal town three hours north of San Francisco.

Kvinsland grew up amid the redwoods of the Santa Cruz Mountains and was a glassblower before studying ceramics at California College of the Arts, turning to carpentry after graduation. He had dabbled in woodworking since the age of 8, when his first job found him assisting a "cute old man" in the making of (presumably door-less) birdhouses. Longing for more creativity, Kvinsland began making original doors on spec and found there was an audience for his personalized portals.

"Doors are functional furniture, but they are also a canvas where you can make a creative statement and not have to adhere religiously to the architecture," muses Kvinsland. "Plus, they are easy to ship," he adds with a laugh.

Although his product line features several standard styles, such as Puzzle – a quiltwork of wood grain and textures – Kvinsland sees these mostly as



jumping-off points for unleashing the dreams of his clients. But even stock doors, such as Window Box, allow for personal expression, with embedded brass vitrines designed for displaying art.

Kvinsland also invites collaboration with other artists.

The honeycomb pattern on the door he calls *Ben's Heads* is inset with evocative ceramic heads made by Ben Belknap, an old art school chum. "It's a meditation on the hive mentality of our culture," Kvinsland says. Several of the heads, or "drones," peer out from the front, while



ABOVE:  
**Window Box Beyond** includes sinker redwood, rare old-growth logs salvaged from river bottoms.

LEFT:  
 With its translucent glass insets, **Orion in Glass** evokes a starry night sky.

one iconoclast on the back faces inward. Other artistic mashups are posthumous, such as the *Tiffany Collaboration Door*, with a floral design Kvinsland carved in cherry to frame a 220-pound piece of historic stained glass salvaged from a Manhattan chapel. "The fleur-de-lis pattern echoes the border on the glass, but the fact that it pivots makes it feel more contemporary, of our own century."

Kvinsland created *Orion in Glass* for a surgeon with an interest in astronomy, and the embedded clear and red glass stars bring color and light to the dark entrance of his home.

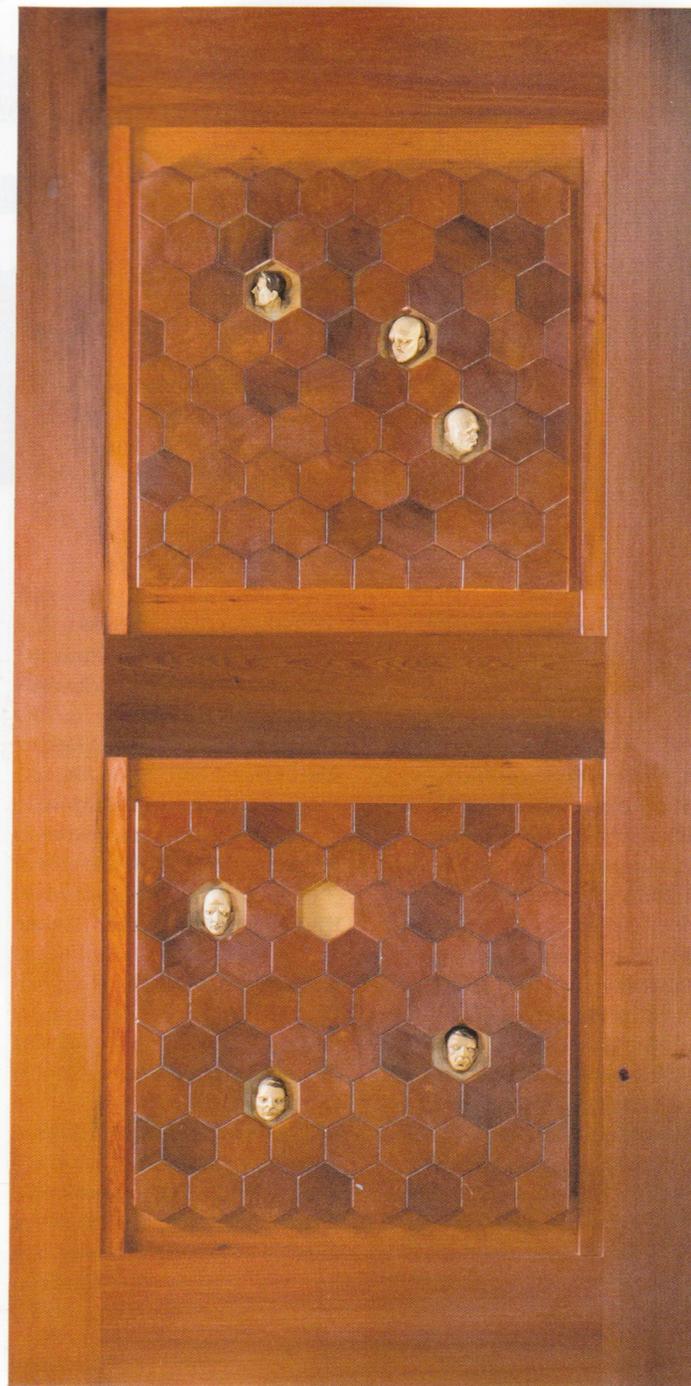
Photos: Courtesy of the artist



A condemned poplar tree on the California State Capitol lawn found new life as **Tulip, Enamel and Etching**.

“When the sun comes up, the sparkle inside is more vibrant than I could have imagined, and the same is true outside at night,” says Kvinsland, who is expanding the composition with a pathway that meanders like a stream bed to the starry door, guiding the way with glowing stones illuminated by fiber optics.

*Orion in Glass* was one of many projects extracted from a huge tulip poplar tree that once stood in front of the California State Capitol. Condemned as dangerous, it was destined for the landfill before Kvinsland intervened and hauled it back to



his family’s property, a repository for all kinds of salvaged wood. Among the most prized specimens are sinker logs – huge old-growth redwood trees that sank before reaching the mill and have been steeping in a brackish bath of minerals and silt that renders the semi-petrified wood spectacularly dense.

“When you cut it open, there’s this gorgeous dark, streaky pattern, rich with

dramatic textures you can’t find anywhere else,” says Kvinsland, almost swooning.

Kvinsland takes special pleasure in melding such 19th-century wood with 21st-century technologies. His *Pushed Perspective Door* was composed on the computer after pencil and paper weren’t up to the task. “My goal was to make a symmetrical shape not symmetrical – nothing is

LEFT: Ceramist Ben Belknap made the seven faces for the **Ben’s Heads** door. Six peer out of the front, while one rebel is on the interior.



RIGHT: Among Kvinsland’s favorite doors to date, **Organic Curves Spiraling** is a serene, meditative design.

straight or square except for the framework. In construction, everything had to adhere religiously to the computer model.” The huge pivoting door (almost 7 feet high and 450 pounds) combines sinker redwood, 3D-printed bronze parts, tempered glass, Heliarc-welded copper, and old-school mortise-and-tenon joinery.

Just as he is comfortable reaching for all kinds of materials, Kvinsland also likes to venture beyond the front and back door. The town of Fort Bragg, California, has commissioned two benches, and he is building a treehouse accessed by a 60-foot suspension bridge for a client down the coast.

And those leftover chunks of wood? They find new life as sculptures. Doors have allowed the artist to strike a balance between commerce and creativity, and Kvinsland’s goal is to push that as far as he can: “Ultimately, I want to move beyond the rectangular door to creating a fully sculptural entrance, and to attract people who are serious about their entryway and excited to go out on a limb.”

—DEBORAH BISHOP

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