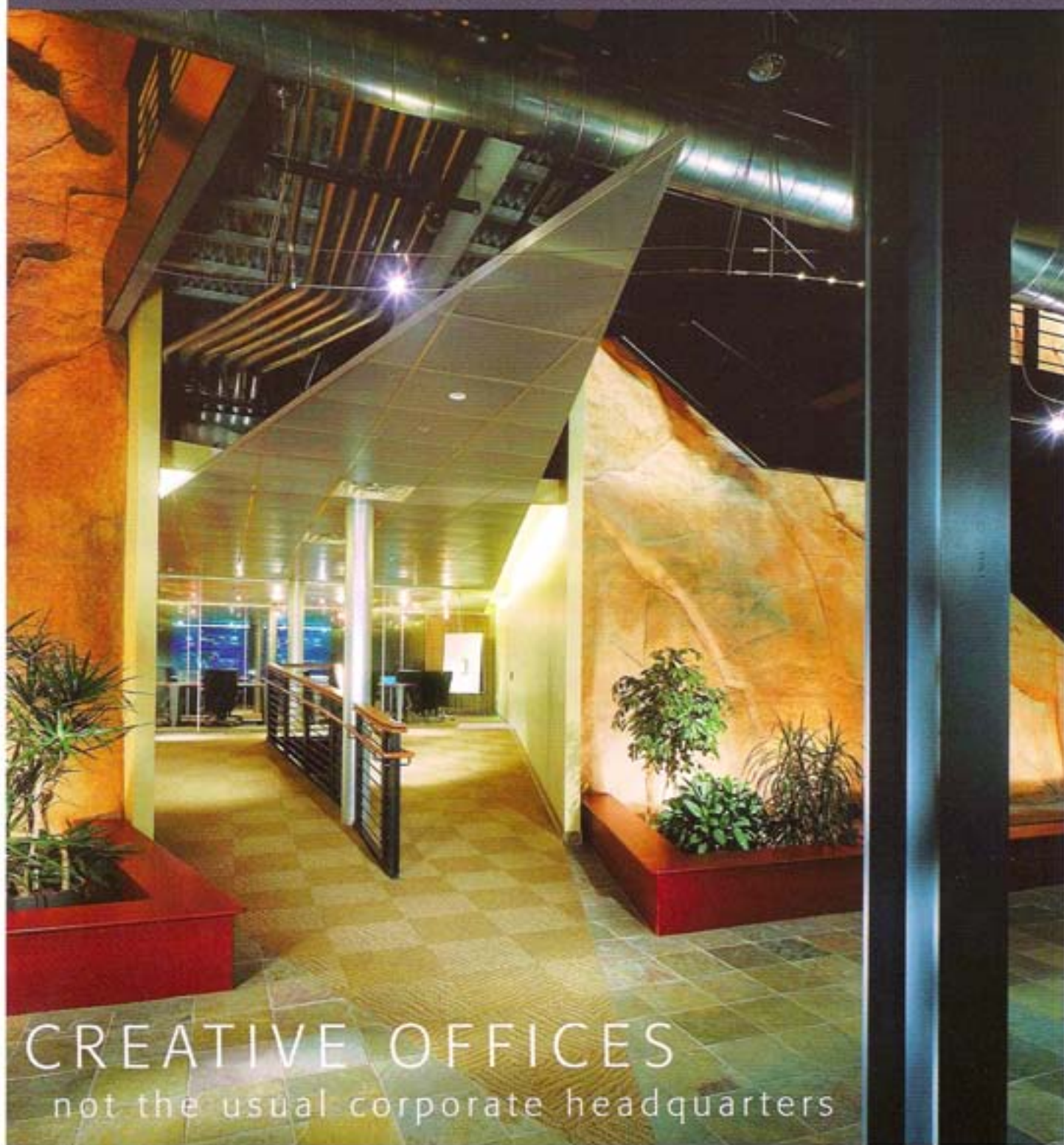


SOURCES & DESIGN

THE TRADE MAGAZINE FOR INTERIOR DESIGNERS, ARCHITECTS AND CUSTOM HOME BUILDERS IN THE WEST SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2007



CREATIVE OFFICES

not the usual corporate headquarters

>>> **Bill Tonnesen**



VISIT BILL TONNESEN'S STUDIO in Tempe, Arizona, and it soon becomes apparent that he forgot to heed the advice to color within the lines. The colonnade leading to the studio door is lined with benches, artfully filled with everyday objects and tools. The fence for the lap pool, which runs the length of the colonnade, is made of everything from sliding glass panels to rusted mesh grating. And the studio door itself is "shaded" by a canopy made of welded pick heads.

Tonnesen, a landscape architect/contractor/architectural designer has long made a name for himself by seeking out the unusual solution for his design projects. The phrase "it's never been done before" fires his determination and serves as creative inspiration.

This is particularly true as Tonnesen has added "slash artist" to his professional resume, fast-tracking his way into the world of fine art by creating a body of work and landing a one-man show at a prestigious Scottsdale, Arizona art gallery, all in less than 12 months. He's also

publishing a book about the artwork and his foray into the art world.

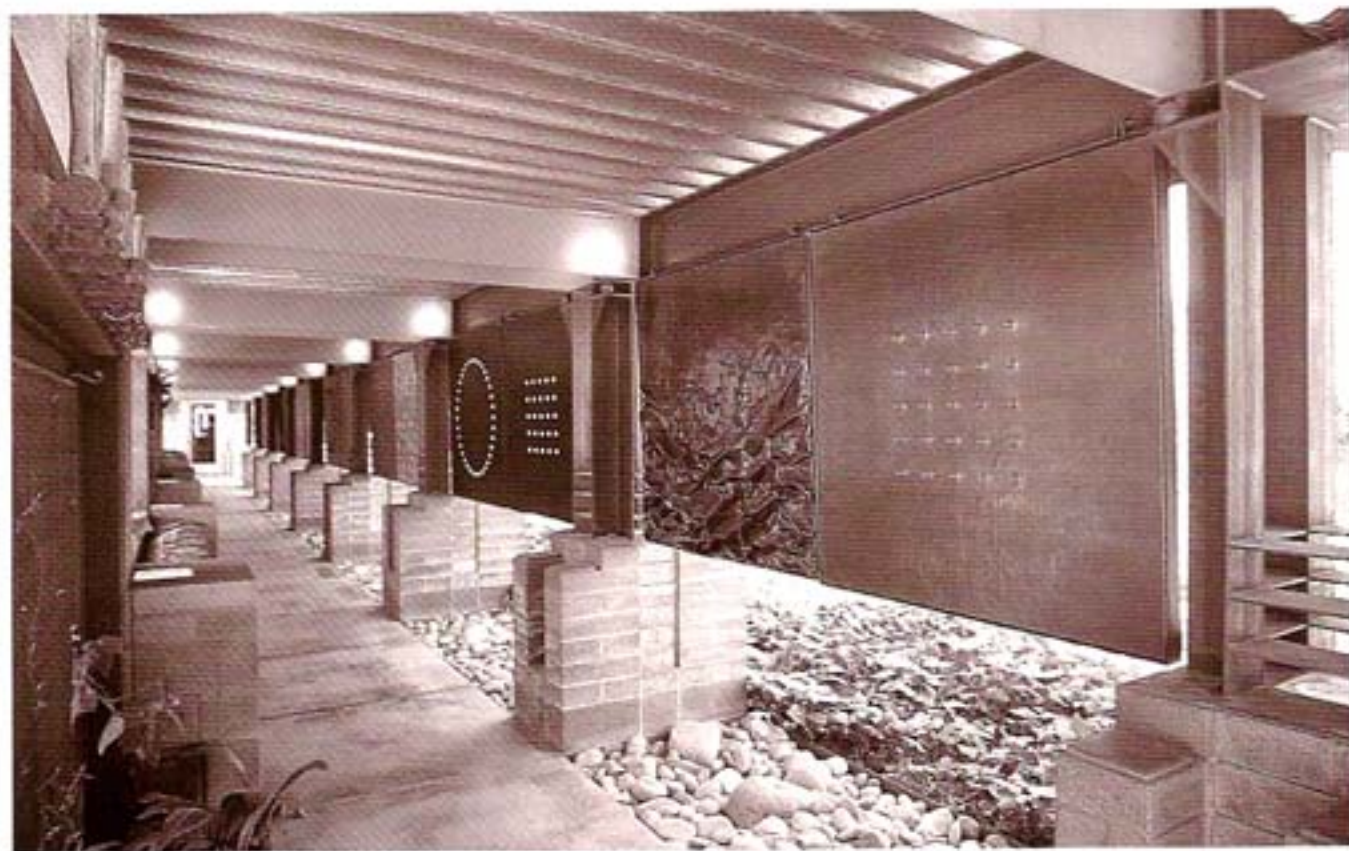
Tonnesen started his artwork in August 2001, led to the project by clients who'd hired him to do their residential landscape. The clients, a couple who are art collectors, were looking for some art for a rooftop garden; Tonnesen suggested doing a mosaic out of construction debris.

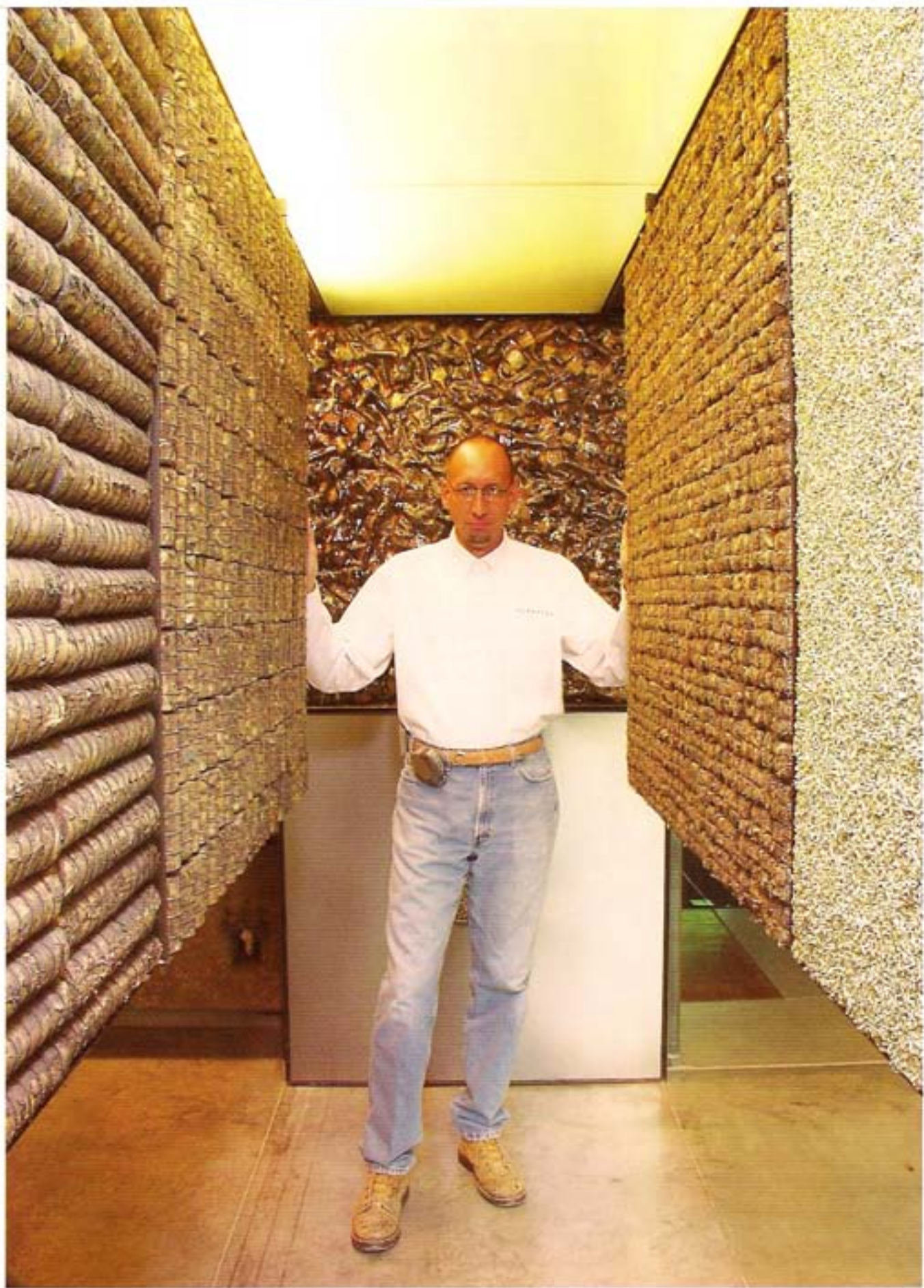
He prepared some samples. "I really wasn't happy with them," Tonnesen admits. "I thought I could just use my design skills to choke the pieces into submission, but it didn't work.

"But then I decided to limit myself to paper and wire," he continues. "The pieces didn't work for the clients' roof garden, but I was happy with them."

A light bulb of went off in Tonnesen's head. He decided to pursue the art, full steam ahead. He began working on a series of three-dimensional, four-foot by four-foot panels, filling them with everyday objects, ranging from bundled newspapers and rusted wire to

Bill Tonnesen's artwork, above and below, displayed along a walkway to his studio. Right: Bill Tonnesen in his studio. Photograph by Scott Sandler.





Art and Chicken Forums Dates and Times

Tucson First Tuesdays	602-256-3521
Tucson—Pima Public Library (101 N. Stone)	
Tuesday, Oct. 1, 7pm	
Phoenix First Mondays	602-256-3521
Burton Barr Library (Central & McDowell)	
Monday, Oct. 7, 7pm (cookies 6:30pm)	
Spirit of the Sonoran/Shomer Art Center	602-906-0091
Phoenix (5005 E. Camelback)	
Wednesday, Oct. 2, 7pm	
Changing Hands	480-730-0205
Tempe (McClintock & Guadalupe)	
Saturday, Oct. 19, 2pm	
Barnes & Noble	480-391-0486
Scottsdale (Pima & Shea)	
Sunday, Oct. 20, 2pm	
Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art	480-874-4666
Scottsdale (Civic Center Mall)	
Thursday, Oct. 24, 7pm	
Borders Books	
Tempe (7th & Mill Ave)	
Saturday, Oct. 5, 7pm	
480-971-8638	
Phoenix (Biltmore Fashion Park)	
Saturday, Oct. 12, 7pm	
602-957-6660	
Tucson, Park Place (Broadway & Wilcox)	
Sunday, Oct. 13, 2pm	
520-584-0111	
Tucson, Oracle (North Oracle & Westmore)	
Sunday, Oct. 13, 7pm	
520-292-1331	
Mesa, (east of Fiesta Mall)	
Saturday, Oct. 19, 7pm	
480-833-2244	
Paradise Valley (Cactus & Tatum)	
Saturday, Oct. 26, 7pm	
602-953-9699	



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baby bottle nipples, sugar cubes, teaspoons, bullets and twigs. The panels are compelling, graphic statements.

"I have no formal art background," explains Tonnesen. "But to me, art is a complementary design skill. I think to do art, you have to have an intensity and passion, and be able to move forward despite mistakes. It's easy for me to see pictures inside my head of what I want to do—I can see what something's going to look like."

Simultaneously with creating the panels, Tonnesen immersed himself in the world of modern art. He read every book he could get his hands on, and took two trips to check out New York's art scene. "I was all over the map at first," he admits. "I had too much inspiration." Eventually, he narrowed down his work, and, most recently, has been working with panels that feature drapery made of lead, beeswax and other materials, as well as sculpture.

His landscape and building business went on smoothly, Tonnesen notes, with the help of his three colleagues, architect John Ball, who handled field operations, Luis Mejia, who works as the field superintendent, and Kim Wentzel, his office manager. "I was, of course, in extreme work mode on the art," he says.

Tonnesen has completed almost 100 pieces, and he's also on the home stretch of the book that accompanies the work. Entitled *Tonnesen: 12 Months To Fame and Fortune In The Art World*, the book documents both the art pieces and the full-speed-ahead story of how the art happened. In spring, Tonnesen worked out



Top: Tonnesen uses fire to create a piece.
Above: Sugar cubes, coffee cups and spoons in the art.

the details of a one-man show at the new Chiaroscuro Gallery in Scottsdale, opening in October.

Is Tonnesen ready to give up his landscape and designing career for a loft in New York's art district? No, he says. "I'm in the business of building things, and I see my art as an extension of that. I can see the art attracting a certain kind of clientele who would appreciate cutting-edge design, so it all works together." ■

The Bill Tonnesen exhibition opens October 3 at Chiaroscuro Gallery, 7160 E. Main St. Scottsdale, AZ; (480) 429-0711.

Tonnesen will be presenting a series of 12, free public lectures on art in October titled the Art and Chicken Forums.

Topics Include:

- Understanding Art
- Abstract Art
- Conceptual Art
- Money and Art
- A Career Change to Art