

Carmel Valley Company Showcases the Sea



Photo: Juan Ayora Photography

Projects like the Dive Bar in Sacramento (above), an enormous aquarium allowing "mermaids" to swim through, are only a sampling of the amazing undersea environments Carmel Valley based Tenji, Inc. create. The founders are former employees of the Monterey Bay Aquarium.

The popularity of the Monterey Bay Aquarium (MBA) has contributed to a growing interest in marine life. And many have found, installing an aquarium or aquatic display lends a relaxing, peaceful ambience to any home, business or office.

The wizards of Carmel Valley-based Tenji, Inc. have mastered the art of creating mini-ecosystems that mimic the undersea world.

"An aquarium is not just a plastic box filled with water and pretty fish," principal and co-founder Andy Case explains. "People don't see behind the scenes. There's a lot of machinery, tubing and pipes back there." Case, along with co-founders Mark Faulkner and Edward Seidel, honed their skills in the world's finest training ground: they were all aquarists at MBA before forming Tenji. There, the partners had a hand in creating some of the facility's most popular displays.

"Simply put, the word *tenji* translates from the Japanese to exhibit or display," says Case. He and Faulkner operate the business from a jam-packed shop in a surprisingly industrial enclave near Carmel Valley Village.

Seidel works from Damariscotta, Maine. While most components are manufactured elsewhere, some smaller-scale installations are assembled locally before being shipped to their final destinations.

The idea for Tenji came about while all three were employed at MBA. Small side projects to build displays for residences came to the men through their work there.

"At first it was just an evening here and there," recalls Faulkner. "Before long it was every night and weekend." Tenji is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year. The company has spearheaded dozens of high-profile projects, including the revamping of San Francisco's Steinhart Aquarium. Another dramatic installation is the massive, overhead tank at The Dive Bar in Sacramento, large enough for living "mermaids" to swim through.

Tenji also creates public aquarium quality displays for private clients. For more information, go to www.tenji.com or call 831/401-9551.

—Michael Chatfield

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Architects: (Left) Larry Kahle, Metropolis Architecture (Right) Robert Littell / Photo: Rick Pharaoh

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