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PETER WALTER

Walter’s home and garden are a testament to more than 20 years of his gratifying handiwork. He built the magnificent cherry wood floor-to-ceiling bookshelves in his home office, for example, complete with a sliding section that reveals a secret storage room. (For now, filled with books and extra equipment.) In his garden, water flows down an eight-foot-tall pane of glass, giving the lush green foliage behind it an impressionistic cast. Water also bubbles over the smooth surface of a 1,000-pound ball of polished black granite, the centerpiece of a second fountain.

Walter also creates quirky gifts for members of his lab, including one sculptural piece with a vise crushing a kitchen clock poised above a bottle marked “Time: Freshly Squeezed.” The sentiment is close to Walter’s heart. “We don’t have time for art. We have to make the time,” he says.

Creating art can inspire more creative science, Walter believes. Hoping to do just that, he provided acrylic paints and a stretched canvas to each member of his lab during their annual retreat, asking them to interpret their research project. “We are all so self-conscious as adults, so it was fun to see everyone’s childhood come back to them,” Walter says. The artistically diverse results adorn the lab today. “It worked wonderfully,” he says.
—Camille Mojica Rey

A Fountain of Creativity

In a low-ceilinged San Francisco garage, a seven-foot work in progress named *La Monique* hangs in a sling of blue and green nylon ropes. The copper fountain resembles a square-edged column that has been twisted and bent over near the top, like a cane. The column’s end gapes to reveal a hollow interior that appears to be vascularized, its web of veins seemingly pulsing with life.

“I like how the geometry of the outside reveals an organic interior,” says *La Monique*’s creator, HHMI investigator Peter Walter. Though Walter admits to sometimes going weeks without working on *La Monique*, he credits his many artistic hobbies with providing balance in his busy life and enriching his

career as a cell biologist at the University of California, San Francisco.

The balance, Walter says, comes from working with his hands. “The funny thing about science is that as you move up and your lab grows, you spend most of your time in front of a computer and less time actually doing experiments.” He says his hobbies—which also include woodworking and photography—provide him with the immediate gratification not always found in his lab, where he studies protein sorting and folding as well as cellular quality control. “You can work on something in science for quite some time before making an exciting, new discovery,” he says.