

A blacksmith, Jon Sarriguarte, is shown in profile, focused on adjusting a large, multi-tiered chandelier. The chandelier consists of several horizontal metal rings, each with several lit Edison-style light bulbs. The workshop background is industrial, with a large metal lathe visible on the left and a brick wall behind him. The lighting is warm, primarily from the glowing bulbs of the chandelier.

JON SARRIUGARTE

THE
Embracing the blue-collar intersection of art, science, electricity and petrol, blacksmith Jon Sarriguarte has forged a career by taking the castoffs of the last century and reinventing them for use today.

**OILPUNK
OF OAKLAND**

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WORDS // WALTER THOMAS

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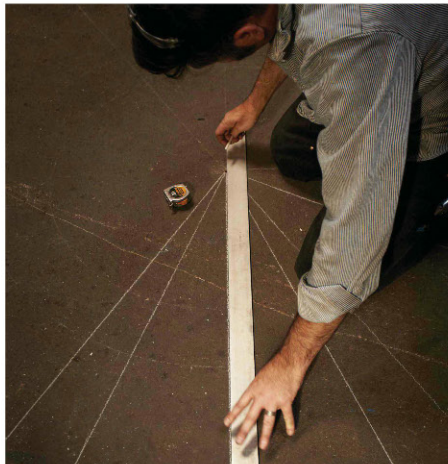
JON THE BLACKSMITH MOVES METAL WITH HIS MIND. HE HARNESSSES BRAIN POWER TO SHIFT THE SHAPE OF STEEL. RATHER THAN POUND HIS MEDIUM INTO SUBMISSION, HE OUTWITS IT. IT'S A GAME OF STRATEGY: WHERE BRAIN TRUMPS BRAWN - YOU DEFINITELY NEED INTELLIGENCE TO MOVE METAL," SAYS JON SARRIUGARTE "USING BRUTE FORCE JUST BEATS YOU APART."

For Jon, metal holds mystery - and it spoke to him at an early age. As a kid growing up in Boise, Idaho, his path crossed with a local blacksmith, and his introduction to the trade took the form of not burning himself when he touched a still hot and glowing link of iron chain. It was like shaking hands with his destiny. He spent his youth in metal shops, cutting and welding, bending and grinding, sparks flying, every day a Fourth of July.

When the time came to test his mettle, he packed his belongings and headed west, eventually staking claim in Oakland, California. Soon after, he fell in with a group of metal artisans, card-carrying members of the California Blacksmithing Association - fellows that remain in his crew to this day. Knowledge passed between them, techniques were shared, and a next generation of the art was insured.

Jon's talent - forged over decades - is literally in his hands. "I can turn metal into clay with heat and shape it into any form I want," he says without boast. "If I don't like how it turns out, I can weld it shut or grind it off." His mastery of his materials only amplifies the mystery of the art. His lighting, for instance, is often large and obviously heavy. And yet it seems to float, to defy gravity.

When describing one of his latest pieces, the Camino Chandelier, his eyes twinkle. "It has a big presence, and lots of sparkle. But it's hard to tell what's holding it up. Everything is kept clean and simple. But at the same time, there are lots of tasty details. The tips of the connections are pointed and curled. Instead of drilling holes, we actually piece the metal with a punch and stretch out an opening that rises up as a little bump. You can see hammer depressions. And burn marks where fire cooked the piece. You clearly see that a hand has touched the thing, that it's not just another cut and assembled piece from a factory somewhere."



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— Jon Sarriguarte

CLOCKWISE, LEFT TO RIGHT: JON AT THE HORIZONTAL MILL, MACHINING A TEXTURE DIE FOR THE LITTLE GIANT POWER HAMMER, JON WITH HIS WIFE, KYRSTEN MATE, AND DAUGHTER, ZOLIE MAE, SITTING IN KALINGGA, THE RAINBOW SERPENT, BENDING THE INNER ANGLE, RISE-ING OF THE CAMINO CHANDELIER WITH A RING HOLDER, WHICH HOLDS THE WIRES THAT POWER EACH SOCKET, SIGNIFYING A NEW LIGHT ON THE CHAIRBOARD-FLOORING SOAPSTONE - EACH LINE REPRESENTS THE PLACEMENT OF A LIGHT SOCKET.

"I CALL MYSELF AN OILPUNK. I LIKE MACHINES, CARS AND GASOLINE. OLD EQUIPMENT, DEPRESSION-ERA AMERICA STUFF. NEWSBOY HATS AND HIGH-TOP LEATHER LACE-UPS."

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As for factories, in 1990 Jon established his in the then desolate flats of West Oakland, where he's been ever since. A natural-born entrepreneur, he took over the Kraft Building, a 44,000-square-foot behemoth from the 1920s, and filled the space with artists, metal workers, even knife smiths. Outfitted with museum-grade tools, like his century-old 100-lb. Little Giant Power Hammer, a one-ton apparatus that renders iron helpless, the place fits his sensibility to a tee. "I call myself an oilpunk," he explains. "I like machines, cars and gasoline. Old equipment, Depression-era America stuff. Newsboy hats and high-top leather lace-ups. I'm all about a blue collar, working-class aesthetic. Bringing elements of that industrial-era look into the home attracts me."

Jon's punk aesthetic also attracted the attention of Survival Research Laboratories. "I immersed myself in the whole machine art culture and fell in with the group at SRL." This renegade art collective achieved international cult status by staging often illegal performances starring remote-controlled robots that attack one another in parking lots, night clubs and experimental art galleries. Built from junkyard, industrial and military cast-offs, their menagerie of machines is legendary.

As a decorated field marshal of the outlaw art circuit, Jon inevitably found himself in Black Rock Desert, Nevada, as a co-conspirator of Burning Man, the outsider art and guerilla theatre festival. Mutant car builders had been a vital part of Burning Man from its beginning, and over the years Jon designed several vehicles for the festival. Among his most celebrated current entries is The Serpent Twins, two 50-foot-long metal mythological dragon gods. One dark and filled with fire; the second, driven by his co-conspirator wife Kyrsten Mate, is white and filled with light produced by thousands of LEDs. Working together as Yin and Yang, they combine equal parts ancient Viking and Art Deco aesthetics. (As an equal opportunist, Zolie Mae, Jon and Kyrsten's daughter, also contributes as an iron maiden in the shop.)

As Jon moves forward he continues to look backward. "My period for everything from clothing to cars is the 1860s to the 1930s. It was an especially exciting era for lighting because it spans the crossover between gas and electric. The level of inventiveness and discovery was amazing."



Jon's determination to maintain the organic feel of his inventions is evidenced by his muse of choice, a German biologist and artist who died nearly a century ago. "Ernst Haeckel discovered thousands of new species and cataloged them in his book of illustrations, *Art Forms of Nature*. The drawings are gorgeous." Haeckel's renderings of microscopic sea creatures, whose asymmetry is a response to environmental forces, is the inspiration for an upcoming series of lighting fixtures. "What attracts me to these creatures is that they strive for perfection. Their shape is altered in the most beautiful and interesting ways as they grow around things like a microscopic mineral deposit. Nature strives for symmetry, but it's our imperfections that make us who we are. When you look at my lighting, it appears to be perfectly made and perfectly symmetrical. But as you get closer you realize it's not. Modern computer-generated design has removed the natural element - it's taken organic out of the equation." But don't worry, Jon Sarriguarte is putting it back in.