



Tim Hootman at his Houston law office, which features several metal sculptures he created. [timhootman.com](http://timhootman.com)  
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF BEN GLASS

## PLAYING WITH STEEL

*How a Houston appellate attorney designs and builds massive metal sculptures.*

**WHEN HOUSTON APPELLATE ATTORNEY TIM HOOTMAN GETS BOGGED DOWN WITH A HEAVY CASELOAD,** he opens the door of his office, located in a Pullman heavyweight passenger railroad car; strolls down a lawn lined with huge works of metal art; and walks across the street to his shop full of cutting torches, pry bars, welding equipment, and thousands of pounds of steel.

It is here where Hootman creates the metal sculptures found at his eclectic office on the outskirts of downtown Houston, which also is known for its brightly painted train cars that serve as work spaces and graffiti murals crafted by local artists. His office is quite popular around the Houston area. It has been a stop on the Houston Folk Art Tour, written

up by the *Huffington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *RoadsideAmerica.com*, and was chosen as the city's best law office in 2011 by the *Houston Press*.

"My whole life, I've studied art," said Hootman. "And I studied architecture when I was in college. So I've always liked art, especially steel art. That's what I work with—heavy steel. One piece I built was 12,500 pounds. Another was 10,000. It's my favorite stuff to work with. There's a lot of labor that goes into these pieces."

Hootman first sketches the design for a sculpture and then searches for pieces of metal in scrapyards or spots random objects while driving (like the gears of an old 80,000-pound crane in Freeport that he spent two months dismantling). Once the parts are in his shop, he positions and "tacks" the scraps together according to the design, often using a crane to suspend the pieces in the air. After they are positioned correctly—and if the design is turning out like Hootman wants—his assistant welds the metal permanently into place. When a new piece is complete, Hootman has it transported by crane to his home or across the street to what possibly could be the most unique law office in Texas.

"Metal is flexible in the sense that you can do a lot with it," said Hootman. "And it's just fun to work with. When it's actually done, you get something not only visually appealing but also solid—and it feels like it's there forever."

Although his artwork attracts curious tourists and impressed passersby, Hootman is quick to note that he is "by no means a professional artist." Still, to see his sculptures and to hear him talk about the process, this might be a point of disagreement.

"I'm always looking," he said. "I go to museums. I buy a whole lot of art books. And you see Euclidean forms everywhere when you start actually looking at them. So as you look at the world from an artistic point of view, and also think, 'Oh I could maybe make something,' you start seeing stuff and it starts just coming to you. It's really not concrete at all; it's just something that you feel."

Hootman says some fellow lawyers have indicated to him that he has enlivened his office to attract new business, but because Hootman practices appellate law, he said that persons driving by usually are not potential clients.

"[Creating metal sculptures is] my down time," said Hootman. "And I don't sell my pieces; I keep them for myself. I actually spend a lot of money. One piece, the one with all the gears, I sunk \$12,000 into that piece. Not to mention all my time. But basically, I do it when I'm burnt out working. Sometimes it gets out of hand. Because when I get going on a piece, I'm a little obsessed." *LINDSAY STAFFORD MADER*

To see a slide show of Hootman's artwork, go to [texasbar.com/hootman](http://texasbar.com/hootman).

# From Grape to Glass

*How a Texas attorney is making his mark on the wine scene.*

**MOST DAYS, YOU'LL CATCH ATTORNEY ROBERT FRITZ IN HIS HOUSTON OR AUSTIN OFFICE,** working on a litigation case. Other days, you'll find him working in the fields.

In the early 2000s, searching for balance from his law practice, Fritz found the solution in a Hill Country estate with Germanic roots. Tucked away amid the rolling hills of Dripping Springs, with rich soil and terraced terrain, it is a land he has transformed into Solaro Estate Winery, a boutique business that has quickly gained attention in the wine world.

In preparation for Solaro Estate's launch, Fritz toured European wineries, researching what would work best on his Texas property. Back home, he planted the first plot of vines in 2006, with additional groups in 2007 and 2008. Successful harvests led to the winery's first vintage in 2009, which won international recognition in 2010. And the awards haven't stopped. Solaro has claimed more than 30 honors among four vintages, including double gold, best of class, gold, and silver placements at the 2013 International Women's Wine Competition in Sonoma County, Calif.

"It's been a challenge, but it's also been fun," Fritz said of getting Solaro Estate on the global wine radar. "I think we were probably some of the first people on the scene internationally that made people take notice and

say, 'Wow. Texas is making some wine that is rivaling the best wines in the world.'"

For Fritz, winemaking runs in the family; he says his mother's side has been crafting the libation for more than 260 years near the town of Solaro, Italy. It was this personal history that inspired the estate's name—and its old-world style of production.

"The best wines are made with small lots and done slowly and correctly with extremely fine equipment," said Fritz. Still, Solaro Estate remains distinctively Texan.

"We try to be as local as we can," he said. "Almost everything that we use has been custom manufactured here in the state. One hundred percent Texas grapes, and almost all Texas equipment."

Solaro Estate also hosts an Austin music series, offering shows by area musicians nearly every weekend of the year. In August, the vineyard welcomed guests who were eager to pick, haul, and press the harvest.

"Literally, people from all over the state came in this year to harvest and crush," said Fritz. "It was like 1960s Napa."

With business quickly expanding, Solaro Estate now employs 15 people, and an offshoot, Solaro Houston Urban Winery, is scheduled to open in the first quarter of 2014.

Ultimately, Fritz has a goal of continuing to produce award-winning wines—and to have fun doing it.

"In the world of litigation, it is necessarily all about a fight," said Fritz. "In this world, it is all about the joy. When people come here and when people enjoy the wine lifestyle, they come happy." *HANNAH KIDDOO*

To read about Fritz's top wine pairings, go to [texasbar.com/fritz](http://texasbar.com/fritz).



## TEXAS PEOPLE



**William "Bill" M. Crook**  
Weingarten Realty Investors,  
Houston

Appointed to the board of trustees of Austin College, his undergraduate alma mater.



**Elizabeth Miller**  
Baylor Law School, Waco

Received the 2013 Martin I. Lubaroff Award from the ABA Business Law Section for her leadership, scholarship, and service.



**Judge Carlos Cortez**  
44th State Civil District Court,  
Dallas

Received the Mongolian government's Medal of Friendship for helping stop the sale of a smuggled Tyrannosaurus.



**Angela Downes**  
Angela Downes, Irving

Reappointed to the Texas State Board of Examiners of Psychologists, which regulates the practice of psychology in Texas.