

# The Cathedral of Junk

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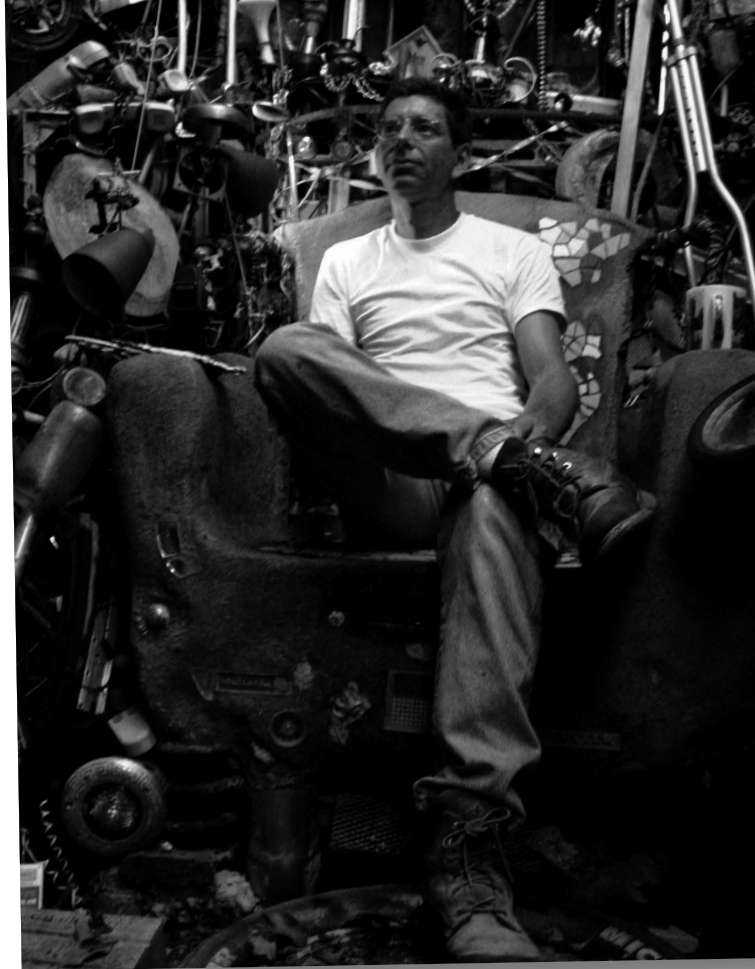
Chapter One

# Sculptor Vince Hannemann

Many in Austin, Texas, follow the slogan, “Keep Austin Weird.” That is, keep Austin the center of Texas’s unique arts and culture. One such **attraction** that keeps Austin weird is the **enormous** sculpture garden known as the Cathedral of Junk.

Its creator, sculptor Vince Hannemann, is the ultimate recycler. He turns people’s discarded junk into art. He started building the Cathedral in 1988, adding to it over time. He believes there are about 60 tons of junk built into the sculpture.

Hannemann didn’t create the sculpture for fame. Instead, he thought it would be a fun thing to do. Most of the junk he uses in the sculpture is brought to him, but he says he is picky about what he accepts. A lot of stuff just doesn’t fit in with his overall vision for the Cathedral. The Cathedral of Junk has become a cultural **landmark** to the city of Austin. It is a popular location for weddings and parties and is a favorite field-trip spot for school kids and senior citizens.



*Vince Hannemann and his Cathedral of Junk*



Chapter Two

## One Man's Junk Is Another Man's Cathedral

Hannemann's backyard is small, but if you were to stand in the Cathedral of Junk, it would seem large and expansive inside. There are stairways and several different levels. A high vaulted ceiling makes the Cathedral feel big inside. The many observational **platforms** allow visitors to have a bird's-eye view of the sculpture. Hannemann has created a framework of supports which are then wired with all manner of junk.

Everything imaginable can be found in the Cathedral. There are car and bicycle parts, cables, bottles, cans, computer parts, furniture, and sports equipment. The origins of many of the objects are no longer identifiable. A lot of electrical junk still works. There are illuminated signs and clocks that are wired through a web of cables and hidden electrical outlets. Hannemann also includes living trees and plants in the overall design of his backyard, like the evergreen tree decorated in shiny silver CDs that looks like a space-age Christmas tree.

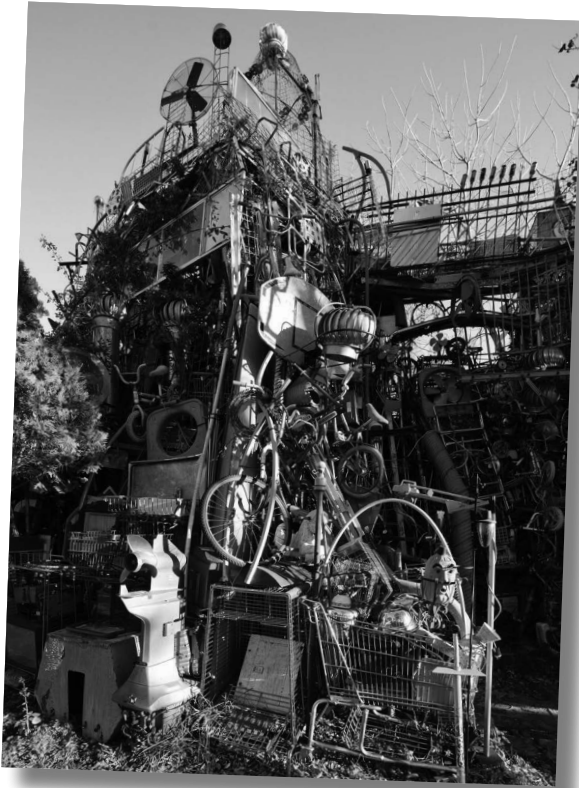


*Cathedral  
of Junk sign*



*The "junk" of the Cathedral of Junk*





## Chapter Three **Is It Safe?**

Many Austin residents are quite fond of the Cathedral of Junk. However, some of Hannemann's neighbors want to see the attraction disappear. Some of them called the local authorities to complain about it. Civil **engineers** tested it for structural integrity. The sculpture was deemed structurally sound. Hannemann says it's built to stand up to Texas storms.

Nevertheless, the complaints increased and began to have an effect on the Cathedral. In March 2011, Austin's Code **Compliance** department ruled that the Cathedral was a building. As such, it needed to follow building rules and restrictions. They wanted Hannemann to get a building permit and a certificate of occupancy or remove his 33-foot-tall sculpture. A representative from the Code Compliance department said that the main concern was safety. Although no one had ever been hurt at the Cathedral, they didn't want to take any chances.





#### Chapter Four

## Tied Up in Red Tape

Building codes weren't the city's only concern. The Cathedral of Junk had become such a popular attraction that it brought too much activity to Hannemann's residential area. His backyard was not **zoned** to host the many events and field trips that regularly took place. The Cathedral had become disruptive to the quiet suburban neighborhood.

Not all Austin citizens felt that the Cathedral of Junk had to be dismantled. In fact, many rallied around Hannemann and his creation. They helped him bring the **structure** to code. He said that the fate of the sculpture was in the people's hands. He could not do it alone. Many people joined in to save this unique Austin cultural landmark, and volunteers cleared away 1,800 pounds of scrap metal. This helped the sculpture meet the city **ordinances**. If the Cathedral hadn't passed inspection, it would have been dismantled and bulldozed.



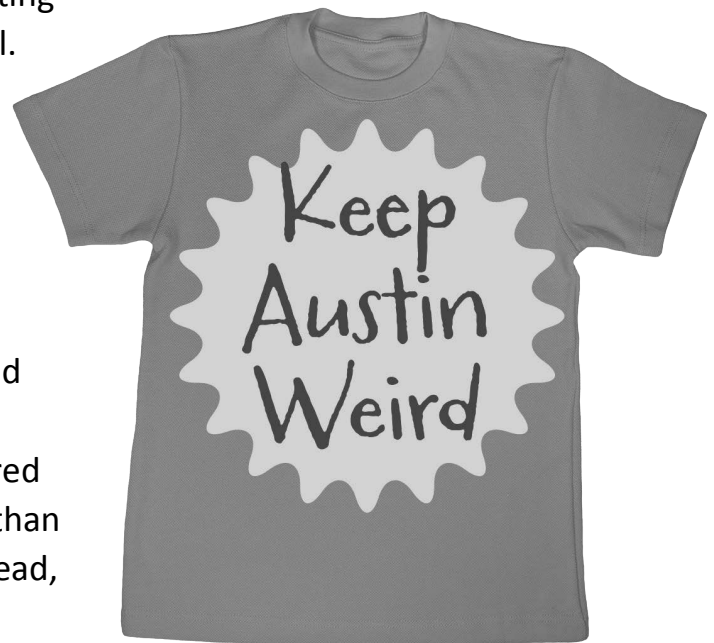
At one point Hannemann nearly gave up. He removed close to 40 percent of the Cathedral. Then he grew discouraged with the changes that were made to the sculpture to bring it to code. He was tired of struggling with the city's **bureaucracy** and confusing red tape. He decided that perhaps dismantling the Cathedral of Junk would be the only way to end the conflict.

## A Community's Mission

City officials, such as Austin's mayor and a former senator, heard that Hannemann was planning on tearing down the Cathedral of Junk. They too joined the effort to save the city's landmark. With officials on his side, Hannemann was able to work with the City of Austin Code Compliance department to save the Cathedral of Junk.

Fortunately, the combined efforts of Hannemann, volunteers, and sympathetic city officials paid off. As of late June 2011, the Cathedral was saved. The city of Austin decided the Cathedral of Junk could remain standing. However, Hannemann needed a structural engineer to write a letter saying that the cathedral was safe. Hannemann also had to acquire a building permit for his enormous backyard sculpture. He had to cease operating the Cathedral of Junk as a business, as well. He could no longer post hours of operation for the exhibit. Visitors to the Cathedral now have to make an appointment, as if they were visiting a private home.

Hannemann's story shows how one artist's ultimate recycling project became a beloved cultural city landmark. When that artistic endeavor was threatened by bureaucratic red tape, the Cathedral of Junk became more than one man's efforts to save his artwork. Instead, it became a community's mission to preserve its cultural uniqueness.



# Glossary

**attraction:** (noun) place, such as a historic or cultural site, that people, especially tourists, like to visit.

**bureaucracy:** (noun) complex rules and regulations applied rigidly.

**compliance:** (noun) act of agreeing to or obeying rules, laws, or standards.

**engineer:** (noun) person who designs and builds large structures, such as buildings and bridges.

**enormous:** (adjective) very large in size.

**landmark:** (noun) well-known structure or geographic feature that identifies a location.

**ordinance:** (noun) law or rule made by an authority, such as a city government.

**platform:** (noun) raised surface or area built to hold people or objects.

**structure:** (noun) something that is built, such as a building or a bridge.

**zone:** (verb) to declare officially that an area is to be used for a particular purpose or to be developed in a particular way.