

CUSTOM AUTO SERVICE

Packard Service Art Deco Style

Arumble seat, antique park light, and barber pole lend the showroom's vintage feel in a vintage building.



Robert has a host of automobilia, like these auto club shields from around the globe.

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Custom Auto Service feels more club than business. Dedicated to the restoration and preservation of Packards, CAS's owner, Robert Escalante, lends an air more toward friend than businessman. He's a gentleman of the truest sense, and when you spend time with him, you'll enjoy some great conversation about cars, politics, Hollywood, food, or any number of subjects. The conversation will be as lively and interesting as the place in which he works, and therefore, quite comfortable.

While the core of any business is about people, Escalante and the crew at CAS, known as Team Packard, or The Boys, turn it into an art form. Even the folks that just swing in to chat are something of an amazing ring of people. It's a true circle of auto enthusiasts, historians, and people just looking for a good conversation and those conversations will lead you to believe that you've known

these folks all your life. Even if you've only just met. The Boys, are comprised of Robert's father, Al, and brothers, Sandy, David, and Toby, and longtime employee and friend, Cal Soest, who was with Custom Auto Service even before Robert took a job there.

Beyond that, there's the building, with a heart and soul all its own. There's a formal casualness about the building that's tough to replicate, especially the way it's been decorated it with so many items from yesteryear including newspapers and televisions. But, despite the amazing nature of the ensemble, in the company of all-things vintage you're constantly wondering if Rod Serling pulled a fast one on you and pummeled you into the Twilight Zone. You're pretty convinced that at any moment, Humphrey Bogart is going to be standing in a corner, watching you, wondering just what you're doing.



Then and...then, a late 1930's Packard shares floor with a '53 Packard Caribbean convertible amid many other beautiful cars and a well-stocked shop replete with wall decor everywhere.

And that's about when it hits you. The showroom is such that you think you've not only been teleported to another time, but are actually outside even though you distinctly recall walking through a door to the inside.

The black epoxy flooring features sprinkles of grey and white strewn about, emulating road asphalt. Sidewalks line the showroom, and are home to display cases showing off items from years gone by, including newspapers, jewelry, televisions, political memorabilia, and of course, automobilia. Robert has even taken the liberty of placing a few original styled streetlamps to add to the outdoor on the inside feel. A barber's pole clings to the wall outside of Robert's very vintage office, and an actual curb and wooden phone booth further the 1930's cityscape feel within the vintage building. And it is a vintage building, although it hasn't always been quite so well decorated. There was a time when simulated wood paneling acted as walls and room dividers, and strange carpets lay on the floors. Thankfully, Robert has a taste

for the eclectic.

Situated in Santa Ana, California, the building CAS calls home is from the early part of the last century and is certainly one of the historical gems the city has to offer, with a conservative art deco approach to its design. It also complements the business of Packard resurrected perfectly. In its early days, the building served as a Baker Electric dealer and a GMC Truck outlet. In 1953, Packard enthusiast Bill Lauer, along with some friends and a master mechanic Cal Soest, started CAS in the building, continuing its automotive history. Cal still works at CAS. The idea was a gem; specialize in Packard automobiles. Only eight years after the company discontinued business. The parts, knowledge, and a larger client base were readily available, for the most part. And, as the years spanned on, and the parts and knowledge concerning Packards dwindled, Bill offered devotees a unique place to trust their prized vehicles.

Specializing in Packards takes a lot of expert

connections, respect, and trust among those who own them. As such, the beautiful outdoor-indoor showroom branches out to a boardroom where Packards International hosts its' meetings, and a gaggle of Packard and Club history are kept. Bill was one of the founding members of the Club, giving him an edge on the trust, connections, and respect circuit. Out back, a large shop was established where everything from a basic tune up to a complete restoration could be performed.

Today, an enormous amount of cars are in various stages of service and restoration, and throughout it all, like so many vintage garage buffs, the walls are absolutely chock full of eye candy. Packard advertising art, vintage carpets, musicians and actors' images, car show art, and on and on the overwhelming scene goes. Is it too much? Nope, it's just right. It's the style that Robert and his clientele seem to gravitate to, lending it a commonality among friends, furthering the camaraderie between them.

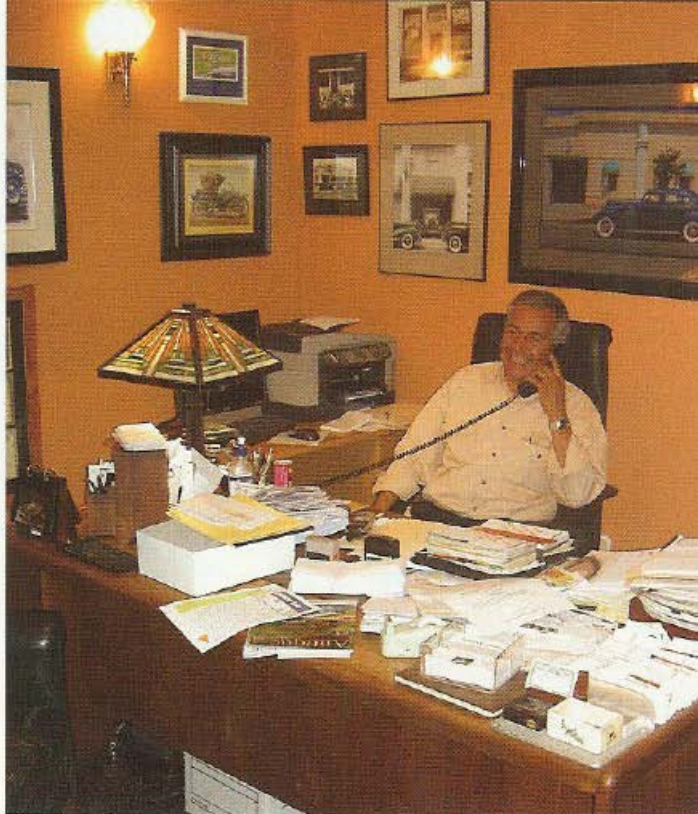
In 2008, CAS turned 42 years old. On the 40th Anniversary, the City of Santa Ana awarded CAS for being the longest running business in the city. At the celebration held in the garage, the mayor, council members, chief of police, and an assortment of friends, family, clients, and fans toasted Robert and his family for keeping CAS running and profitable. Now, the wall in Robert's office is covered in resolutions from the senate, council, and even the chief, who awarded the police department's first resolution.

"I'm very proud of it all, but it wasn't all me who did this," said Robert.

Robert's father, Al was an excellent mentor. With his help, Robert, Sandy, David, and Toby, and with the expertise of Cal on their side, were able to make a success out of the business. As it stands now, Al enjoys watching them work. Robert started working at CAS out of high school when he discovered he needed a taillight lens for his own Packard, and he met Bill, who essentially offered him a job on the spot. Happy to have a job, Robert quickly became "the everything guy."

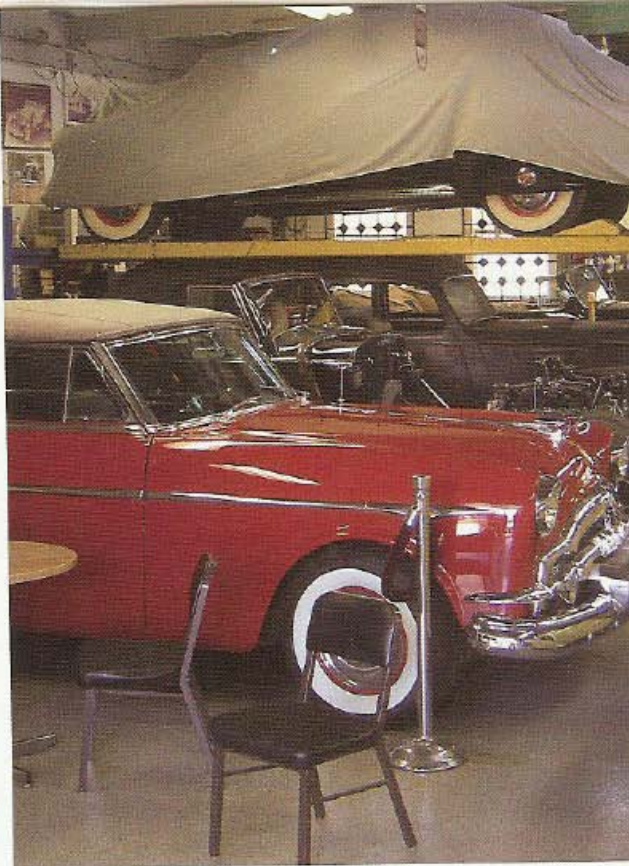
"I did everything no one else wanted to do," he laughs.

Over time, however, Robert learned a lot about business and people, and was soon trusted with a lot of responsibility. In 1983, Bill sold the business to Robert, and the rest, as they say, is history. Thankfully, Robert and his tried and true, trusted posse that makes up Team Packard have managed to continue a legacy of service to a very niche clientele while conducting business out of a historically significant building that boasts only automotive service throughout its lengthy existence. Then again, what would one expect from such an exclusive club? **GSM**



Robert Escalante (above) at the helm of his ultra busy desk with its omnipresent telephone. The flaked and bordered black floor (below) resembles asphalt, while the yellow curb and working streetlights lining the showroom lend to an outdoorsy feel that belongs on a film noir set.





An ultra rare Ghia L6.4 (upper left) hangs out with some of the quiet bosses of the highway - the caliber of the car that visits Custom Auto Service highest level. Take a seat (upper right) but try not to let the covered Cadillac draw too much attention from the Packards.



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