

# Avila Ornamental Ironworks

From Scrolls to Gate Systems: Octavio Avila's  
40-Year Journey in the Industry

**PAVING THE PATH**  
Encon Customer Success Stories  
& Unique Installations



# From Scrolls to Gate Systems: Octavio Avila's 40-Year Journey in the Industry

## Growing Up in Mexico

Octavio Avila grew up in a small town in Mexico under modest circumstances. His hometown lacked electricity, so at night he navigated the roads guided only by memory and the moonlight. He recalled going without shoes for months at a time, often during the雨iest months. Despite the challenges, Octavio speaks fondly of his childhood, telling stories of how he and his siblings would often visit family in the area.

At that time, the small community in Mexico was his entire world. "I didn't know another language existed, let alone that another country existed," he said.

## Beginning a Career

At just 10 years old, Octavio was introduced to the gate industry. A neighbor asked him and his friends to help build decorative scrolls by hand. Eager to learn something new and contribute to the family income, Octavio jumped at the opportunity. Using only the most basic tools available to him there which included a pre-made mold and a poor-quality manual hand saw, he began shaping the scrolls. He then used various techniques to heat, mold, and finalize each piece.

He picked it up quickly, eventually reaching a point where he could produce several scrolls a day. This experience marked his first step into the world of gate building and would later serve as the foundation for his own custom gate building company.

## Moving to the U.S.

Around the age of 14, Octavio's mother—who was born in the U.S.—decided to return, bringing the family with her to settle in Stockton, California.

Octavio initially struggled in school, especially while learning English. "When I came to Stockton, I was in another world," he said. "I knew I had to learn the language as soon as possible; I also immediately recognized all the opportunities that were available here."

From that moment on, he committed himself to pursuing those opportunities. He worked briefly in the fields, but quickly realized he wanted something more challenging. He then took a part-time job at a drive-in movie theater, where he made snacks and gained customer service experience.

With each new job, Octavio became more eager to learn and grow. "It was wild. When I was in Mexico, my biggest wish was to own a bicycle. When I moved here, I discovered I could have much bigger dreams."

Determined to build a better future, Octavio began signing up for local educational programs. "I signed up for any and every summer program offered in my area," he said. That included welding, insulation, and more. "Whatever program they were offering, I was taking."

## Returning to His Roots

Drawing on his supplemental trade education and early experience building gates, windows, and fences in Mexico, Octavio set up a small shop in his backyard. He started building gates for friends and neighbors, and it wasn't long before he launched Avila Ornamental Ironworks.

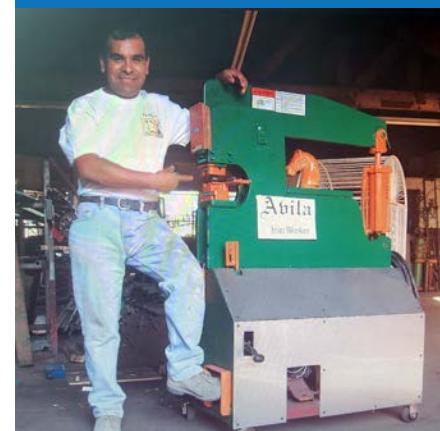
Though he was working solo out of his backyard, Octavio earned a reputation for quality work in the Stockton area. Early in his career, his company was featured in a local newspaper story that spotlighted emerging ironwork businesses in the area.

The article noted, "Octavio Avila is a relative newcomer to Stockton's ornamental ironwork industry, and the only Mexican shop owner who didn't start out working for the Gonzales brothers." The Gonzales brothers ran a well-established and respected



### AVILA IRON WORKER

Shown below: Octavio standing next to an iron worker machine that he built for his company.



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business in the area, so Octavio's ability to break into the market on his own, despite strong competition, was especially noteworthy. In the late 1980s, he set up a shop on Wilson Way in Stockton, just five blocks south of another competitor, Aztlan Ornamental Iron.

Octavio said that one of the early jobs that helped elevate his business came when a local lottery winner selected him to design and build a custom, high-end entry gate for a new home. A photo of the ornate gate at Mr. Morada's residence was included in the same newspaper story, further cementing Octavio's rising reputation in the community.

### Transitioning to Gate Installation

As business expanded, more customers started asking if Octavio also installed gate operators. He thought, I probably could learn! Motivated by the opportunity, Octavio started attending manufacturer training classes, reading operator manuals, and teaching himself with whatever resources he could find.

In 1987, he completed his first gate operator job, installing two Stanley slide gate operators. He still has the original invoice for that job. He admits at the beginning, there were some hiccups. "My first installation job probably took me an entire week," he said. "I could do the same job in a day now."

Octavio explained that much of what he knows came from learning by doing and from learning through mistakes. One time he accidentally applied power to the relay. When he activated it with the radio control, the current went straight to the board and fried it. "Mistakes make you more alert and more focused because you don't want to make the same mistake again."

Octavio also leaned on experienced professionals to help grow the installation side of his business. For the first few years, he worked closely with Danny Klein, who was his gate operator supplier. Then Joe Weber stopped by his shop and he learned about Encon Electronics.

### The Encon Connection

Octavio and Joe quickly connected over their shared passion for engineering and technical problem-solving. During their conversation, Joe told him about Encon's wide selection of inventory. This was particularly exciting news for Octavio.

At the time, many of his customers were requesting Elite gate operators for apartment complexes, but he had never installed that brand before. "I knew that if I learned the Elite brand, it would create more business opportunities for me."

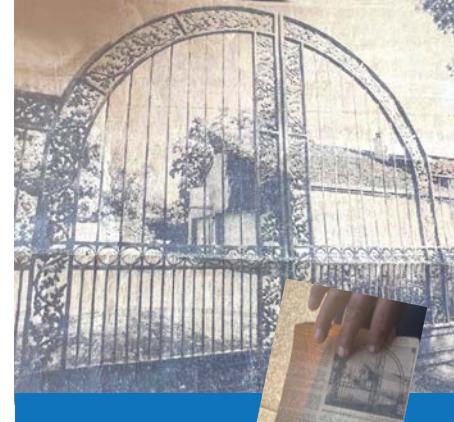
He made a trip to Encon's demo room in Hayward to get familiar not only with Elite products but with the full range of gate operators that Encon carried. "I learned that all operators are engineered similarly; they just have different boards."

### The Secret to Success

Some installers prefer to stick with one product line, either because it's what they're comfortable with or because they are hesitant to branch out. Octavio takes the opposite approach.

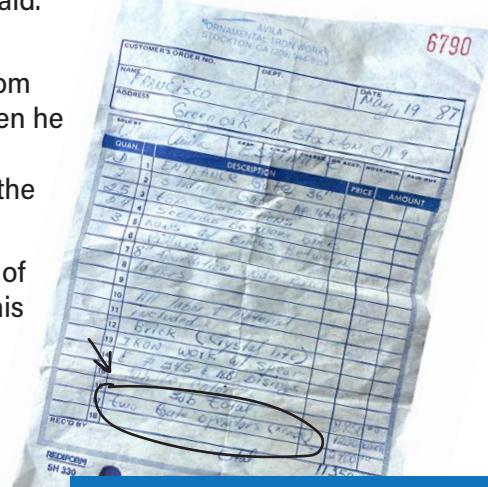
"I educate myself about all the products that are available so if a customer asks for that particular gate operator, I know I can do the job." While he will make product recommendations when asked, his priority is always to meet the customer's needs. He believes that flexibility has played a big role in the growth of his business.

Octavio is not your average technician. Not everyone who sets out to master multiple product lines succeeds. As a self-taught gate builder and operator installer, he depends on manufacturer manuals, his technical knowledge, and real-world experience to get the job done. And more often than not, he figures it out.



### EARLY DAYS

The image above features a custom gate that was designed and built by Octavio for a Stockton lottery winner years ago. It was featured in a local newspaper



### FIRST GATE OPERATOR SALE

Octavio kept the invoice from his first gate operator installation job completed circa May 1987.



### ONGOING EDUCATION

Octavio with his go-to tech person David Aldave, during one of Encon's NorCal Trade Shows.

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## WINNER

Octavio celebrating winning a TV from an Encon promotion. Lawrence Bourke made the delivery.

### Grateful for the Guidance

Octavio gives Encon a lot of credit for his success. "I would not be where I am today without Encon's help throughout the years," he said. "I remember calling David Aldave all the time. He would patiently troubleshoot with me while I was on job sites." The fact that David spoke Spanish made the technical content easier to understand and helped Octavio gain even more installation expertise.

Octavio typically goes into the Encon Hayward or Sacramento offices when he needs to pick up product because, "I always have questions, and I really like to talk to everybody there." He said that Encon has provided him with a lot of support over the years. "It's one thing to have a book or manual to look at but having a person to talk to is even better! All the Encon salespeople are extremely knowledgeable and whenever I have a question, they always have an answer."

### Installing and Thriving

After over 40 years serving the industry, Octavio shows no signs of slowing down. In addition to the many jobs he receives through referrals and recommendations, he also has been working closely with a company in Roseville. Alex Iron Works has been distributing work to Octavio for over 30 years, which offers a steady flow of gate installation jobs.

In 2020, Octavio stopped building custom gates to focus entirely on all the operator installation business. While he misses the creative attributes of gate building, he truly enjoys the technical aspects involved with learning new gate operator products. "I love learning about the new technology and innovations incorporated into today's gate operator products."

Unlike some veterans in the industry, Octavio is not intimidated by new technology. On the contrary, he thrives on learning about it and incorporating it into future jobs. "I know that customers today want the latest technology, so it's my responsibility to know what products are available and how to use them." Providing customers with the products they want has been Octavio's mission from the beginning, and he maintains that philosophy today.

### Finding Your Calling

Octavio is grateful that he found a career that he's passionate about and obviously excels at. He has no immediate plans to retire. "I really enjoy the work, and I feel like I am helping people so why would I stop working?"

It's obvious how much Octavio loves the work when he talks about "impossible" installations. When a customer asks, "Are you sure it can be done?" he is always up for the challenge. "I don't mind making custom gadgets and products to fulfill a customer's needs and wants." So far, he's been able to find or create a solution to overcome any application obstacle.

As far as advice for newcomers to the industry, he says, "This industry is not for the faint of heart. If you want to be successful, you have to do the work, train, and learn by experience. The best way to learn is to just do it."

Octavio also continues to be an excellent role model for his three children. All of whom have graduated from the University of Santa Cruz with astrophysics degrees. It appears technical engineering runs in the family.

He told his kids, "We have so many opportunities. There are no limits. Study hard and become something." The words carry extra meaning when you look at how he grew his company and lives his life. Octavio Avila embraced opportunities, educated himself, and has thrived in the gate industry for over 40 years. In his words, "Life is good if you treat it right." By all accounts, he's been treating it right.

*THE END.*

### WORDS OF ADVICE

"Life is good if you treat it right.

