

## Did the prime suspect in '47 Black Dahlia slaying bury another victim at his Hollywood home?

*A celebrated forensic anthropologist finds evidence that human remains might be buried in or near the historic Hollywood Sowden Mansion, former home of key murder suspect Dr. George Hill Hodel*

HOLLYWOOD, Calif. — Soil samples around the former Hollywood home of a suspect in America's greatest murder mystery suggest there might be a corpse buried there.



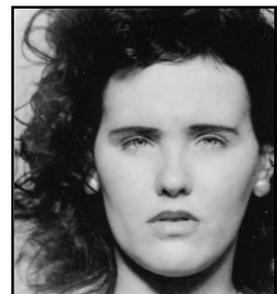
Dr. Arpad Vass, a renowned forensic anthropologist, has concluded that human remains are or were near the historic Sowden House, occupied from 1945-1950 by Dr. George Hill Hodel, who became the prime suspect in Los Angeles' sensational 1947 Black Dahlia slaying—still America's most fascinating unsolved murder.

On September 11, 2013, Dr. Vass accompanied former Mammoth Police Sgt. Paul Dostie and his certified police cadaver dog, Buster (*at left*), to an area adjacent to the Sowden House. After Buster "alerted" to the scent of human decomposition, Vass collected soil samples and performed scientific tests. He has now concluded:

*"Chemical analysis of the irrigation box soil showed numerous markers for a decompositional event. These markers were human specific and indicates that human remains were, or are, present in the vicinity of where the soil was collected."*

Dr. Vass, one of the world's leading authorities on human decomposition who testified in the recent Casey Anthony murder trial, believes the potential clandestine human burial site and "decompositional event" could be coming from a hillside location, directly behind the former Hodel home, which in 1947 was a vacant lot. Based on the presence of certain chemicals, Dr. Vass believes "human remains have likely been present at the location in excess of forty-years."

In December, 1949, Dr. Hodel became the prime suspect in ten Los Angeles slayings that became known as the *Lone Woman Murders*, all of which quickly followed the sadistic torture-murder of 22-year-old Elizabeth Short (*at right*) on January 15, 1947. Short's abduction and grotesque dismemberment made sensational headlines in Los Angeles and across the nation. Short was soon dubbed "The Black Dahlia."



On March 27, 1950, just days before his expected arrest, Dr. Hodel fled the country and remained abroad for the next forty years. He returned to the United States and died in 1999 at age 91 without ever being charged with any of the murders.

During the 2013 examination at Sowden House, Buster alerted at the base of an uphill slope, directly behind the home. Based on their experience examining chemical distribution and “plume flows,” both Dr. Vass and Sgt. Dostie believe the most likely area for finding human remains would be an area adjacent to the Sowden House lot. (Soil samples from a separate 2012 test at the Sowden House itself are still pending.)

In a Hollywood twist, that property is now owned by actress Laura Prepon, best known for her roles in the television series, *That '70s Show* and *Orange Is the New Black*. Ms. Prepon’s attorneys have so far denied any access to the property and declined a request that Buster and Sgt. Dostie be permitted to perform a non-invasive search of the grounds.

The case against Dr. Hodel (*at right*) was explored in a 2003 NYT bestseller, *Black Dahlia Avenger*, by an unlikely author: Hodel’s own son, Steve. Steve Hodel, a former LAPD homicide detective who spent some of his childhood in the Sowden House, uncovered evidence that his father was a prolific serial killer whose victims included the Black Dahlia and many more. His ongoing investigation into his father’s exploits led to the soil testing at the Sowden House. It will be part of an updated new book about the Black Dahlia and the Lone Woman Murders, *Black Dahlia Avenger II*.



### **Soil Analysis Reports Forwarded to LAPD**

Dr. Vass’ complete *Sowden House Investigation-Soil Headspace Analysis* report containing his detailed analysis, results and conclusions has been forwarded to Detectives Mitzi Roberts and Tim Macia, members of LAPD’s Cold Case Unit who now handle the Black Dahlia case.

Last year, however, LAPD Chief Charlie Beck wrote to Hodel that further investigation of his department’s most infamous unsolved murder is unlikely:

*“...Given the fiscal constraints facing the City, and the impact on investigations assigned to my command, I do not believe it prudent that we pursue the Black Dahlia investigation at this time,” Beck said last year. “I believe that Robbery-Homicide Division Detectives should expend their valuable skills on more contemporary investigations.”*

Steve Hodel’s investigation continues.

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*Any press requests for additional information, graphics, and documents, including Dr. Vass’ new report. Please contact Steve Hodel -t [steve@stevhodel.com](mailto:steve@stevhodel.com).*

## About Dr. Arpad Vass

**Arpad Alexander Vass** (born August 30, 1959) is a research scientist and forensic anthropologist formerly based at the Life Sciences Division of Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL), in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. He is also adjunct associate professor of Forensic Anthropology, a program of the University of Tennessee's Law Enforcement Innovation Center.

Vass is the son of a Hungarian immigrant. He grew up in Arlington, Virginia, where he graduated from Yorktown High School in 1977. He is married to Victoria Ann Longo and they have two sons.



In 1980, Vass obtained the Antarctic Exploration certification from Scripps Institution of Oceanography. The following year, he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology from Virginia Tech. In 1984, Vass earned a Medical Technology degree from Fairfax Hospital. He earned a Masters of Science degree in Forensic Science from Virginia Commonwealth University in 1989, and he obtained his PhD from the University of Tennessee in anthropology.

Vass is developing a forensic science technique called "decomposition odor analysis," or "DOA," which he claims will help to identify the over 400 body vapors which emanate from a decaying and decomposing human body. A database of such vapors would in theory enable the Federal Bureau of Investigation's search teams and cadaver dogs (Human Remains Detection dogs) to detect the location of remains of human beings. The database is a part of the University of Tennessee Anthropological Research Facility. These dogs train in the same method as narcotic dogs can sniff out graves of buried human remains.

Vass has also put forward a proposal to search out human remains with the use of a fly with a tracking chip.

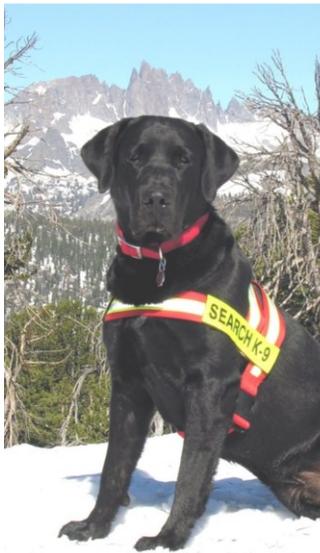
Vass is developing a forensic tool to help detect and uncover forensic cases. The Forensic Anthropology Facility, behind the UT Medical Center in Knoxville, founded by his mentor, famed forensic anthropologist Dr. Bill Bass, affords scientists with bodies that have been willed to the study of forensic science and research. The molecular signature of body decomposition odor may be detected by analytical equipment or electronic body sniffer which is being researched by Vass.

## About Buster

“Buster is not just any old canine. He gained his experience the hard way, practicing at old cemeteries in Nevada. As his owner, retired cop Paul Dostie explains, decomposing bones give off a distinctive chemical mark that rises up through the soil, and Buster’s big sweaty nose can smell it even after decades have passed.

“Because of his acute sniffing skills, Buster has twice gone on missions to the tiny Japanese island of Tarawa to help point out the locations of U.S. Marines buried there after a 1943 battle. He has searched Belgium for Americans shot down in the Battle of the Bulge. He has scoured the land around the Barker Ranch, where Charles Manson and his cult hid after the murders of Sharon Tate and Rosemary LaBianca, searching for more buried victims. Just last month, Buster was flown to Key West, Florida, to search for remains in a 200-year-old pirate grave as well as an 1860 ship carrying 294 African slaves.”

—*Excerpted from The Daily Beast*



Buster- Police Cadaver Dog



Sowden-Hodel Residence

Possible burial site of human remains believed to be in area north of rear alley on adjacent property owned by actress Laura Prepon. (*Orange is the new Black*)

