

accompanied by loud drumming. Yet Esalen's role in the history of psychedelics did not end with their prohibition. It became the place where people hoping to bring these molecules back into the culture, whether as an adjunct to therapy or a means of spiritual development, met to plot their campaigns.

In January 1994, Bob Jesse managed to get himself invited to one such meeting at Esalen. While helping out with the dishes after a Friday night dinner at the Shulgins', Jesse learned that a group of therapists and scientists would be gathering in Big Sur to discuss the prospects for reviving psychedelic research. There were signs that the door Washington, D.C., had slammed shut on research in the late 1960s might be opening, if only a crack: Curtis Wright, a new administrator at the FDA (and, as it happens, a former student of Roland Griffiths's at Hopkins), had signaled that research protocols for psychedelics would be treated like any other—judged on their merits. Testing this new receptivity, a psychiatrist at the University of New Mexico named Rick Strassman had sought and received approval to study the physiological effects of DMT, a powerful psychedelic compound found in many plants. This small trial marked the first federally sanctioned experiment with a psychedelic compound since the 1970s—in retrospect, a watershed event.

Around the same time, Rick Doblin and Charles Grob, a psychiatrist at UCLA, had succeeded in persuading the government to approve the first human trial of MDMA. (Grob is one of the first psychiatrists to advocate for the return of psychedelics to psychotherapy; he later conducted the first modern trial of psilocybin for cancer patients.) The year before the Esalen gathering (which Grob and Doblin both attended), David Nichols, a Purdue University chemist and pharmacologist, launched the Heffter Research Institute (named for the German chemist who first identified the mescaline compound in 1897) with the then improbable ambition of funding serious psychedelic science. (Heffter has since helped fund many of the modern trials of psilocybin.) So there were scattered hopeful signs in the early 1990s that conditions were ripening for a revival of psychedelic research. The tiny community that had sustained such a dream through the dark ages began, tentatively, quietly, to organize.

Even though Jesse was new to this community, and neither a scientist nor a therapist, he asked if he could attend the Esalen meeting and offered to make himself useful, refilling water glasses if that's what it