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PROFILE | MAINE COAST STONE SYMPOSIUM

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Stone sculptor Dan Ucci takes a break from working on *Pink Lady*, the piece he created during the Maine Coast Stone Symposium (MCSS), held in August at the Boothbay Railway Village.

Sculptor Dick Alden polishes *Mercury* (opposite), which he carved during the symposium.

Art & Craft

THE MAINE COAST STONE SYMPOSIUM HONORS
SCULPTORS, BUILDERS, AND HISTORY



Long before Maine became famous for its lobster and blueberries, it was renowned for another abundant natural resource: stone. When the glaciers melted after the last ice age, they left behind not only Maine's mountains and dramatic coastline but also vast deposits of granite, limestone, and slate. In 1829, Maine's first granite quarry opened on the island of Vinalhaven. By 1890 the state led the country in granite production, with many quarries clustered around Penobscot Bay, as well as farther west and downeast. Maine granite was used to construct prominent buildings and landmarks across the country, including the Washington Monument and the Treasury Building in Washington, D.C. In New York City, Mount Waldo gray granite from Frankfort holds up the Brooklyn Bridge, and pink granite quarried in Jay

built the Tiffany store. Today, concrete and steel have largely replaced granite as a commercial building material, but Maine stone continues to be a prominent feature in the construction of custom homes throughout the state. Much of the work is performed by a small group of stonemasons, many of whom are also sculptors. In August, their art was celebrated at the Maine Coast Stone Symposium, a month-long event that featured ten days of live stone sculpting in addition to a historical exhibit and a series of talks, all at the Boothbay Railway Village in Boothbay.

The idea for a stone symposium in the Boothbay area was floated several years ago by a few stonemasons who were working together on Paul Coulombe's estate on Pratt Island, a project managed by the design-build firm Knickerbocker Group. Knickerbocker's projects often incorporate



Maine stone, from granite steps and fireplaces to slate countertops and limestone pavers used in landscaping. “Our clients want stone,” says owner Steve Malcom. “They think of Maine, and the ocean, and how the ledge outcroppings blend in with the old cottages. Sometimes that’s not there, so we have to create it.”

After the first stone contractor he hired for the Coulombe project didn’t work out, Malcom called on Dan Ucci. A stonemason from East Pittston, Ucci recruited a crew of fellow stone artisans to work on the project, which became a four-year-long build including a massive outdoor fireplace and other significant stone features. Much of it was created with material from J.C. Stone, a stone fabricator and operator of eight quarries based in Jefferson. “Dan has an incredible design aesthetic with stone,” says Malcom. “All of these guys are stone sculptors, but they also have to make a living.” They discussed organizing a symposium in Boothbay, Malcom says, but nothing materialized until 2015, when East Boothbay banker-turned-sculptor Dick Alden, who is also treasurer of the Maine Stone Workers Guild, and Margaret Hoffman, executive director of the railway village, approached Malcom with a plan, and he agreed to be a major sponsor of the Maine Coast Stone Symposium. “What we’re all about is craft,” Malcom says. “Stone is such an integral part of that; these guys are steeped in tradition. The stone symposium was a chance for them to celebrate what they can do and put it out in the public—people always want to know how it’s done—and

hopefully, from an economic development standpoint, it’s another way to bring people into Boothbay.”

The story of stone symposia in Maine began in 2004, when sculptor Jesse Salisbury started what would become the Schoodic International Sculpture Symposium. This ambitious public art project drew stone sculptors from as far away as Japan and the Republic of Georgia, who over ten years created 34 permanent pieces of art that now compose the Maine Sculpture Trail. In 2010 a smaller scale symposium was launched at J.C. Stone. It featured nine artists, including Ucci and Alden. Alden has helped to spearhead subsequent symposia, which bring these otherwise solitary artists together annually. “You’re covered up with a mask and goggles and ear protectors and gloves and everything else most of the time,” he says. “So people don’t necessarily want to be around you that close.” In 2014 the event was moved to the Viles Arboretum in Augusta, with J.C. Stone continuing to supply the stone for the artists to carve over the course of two weeks into sculptures to remain at the arboretum.

Ucci, who has been a mason for more than 30 years, didn’t start making art with stone until he met the late Don Meserve, a legendary sculptor and historic preservationist from Round Pond who worked on the renovation of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, among other prestigious projects. “He mentored so many people,” says Ucci. Like Alden, Ucci welcomes the opportunity that a symposium gives him to forge connections, both with



Japanese sculptor Kamu Nagasawa (above, left), visiting Maine for the symposium, works on his piece.



Sam Betts (above, right), MCSS intern and a first-time stone carver, polishes his teardrop-shaped sculpture, *Unity*.

Visitors watch as Bill Royall uses a torch to thermal the stone for his massive piece, *Mountain Lake* (opposite). The thermaling process causes the crystals to expand and pop off the surface, removing carving marks for a more natural texture. His clothing protects him from flying molten-hot chips of stone.

fellow artists and with the public. "People are interested in what you're doing," he says. "When someone starts relating to you on that level, it's not an ego thing, but you want to show them how these pieces take shape." Meserve's legacy continued at the Boothbay event; two of his smaller sculptures were raffled off to benefit future symposia.

After Alden went to Hoffman suggesting the railway village as a venue for the symposium, it took two years to plan and prepare. "I didn't say yes right away because we're a history museum," says Hoffman. "A bunch of artists carving stone, as great as that is, isn't really what we do. We started having conversations around how important the stone industry has been here in Maine, and not just granite, but also limestone and slate. All three of those industries really drove transportation development, which is one key aspect of the parts of history that we cover here." Hoffman and her team collected materials for a historical exhibit, including tools used by celebrated Maine stone sculptor Cabot Lyford, whose daughter, Julia Lyford Lane, gave a talk as part of the symposium.

In 2018 the Maine Coast Stone Symposium will return to the Viles Arboretum, and in 2019 it will again take place at the Boothbay Railway Village, with Knickerbocker playing a significant role. "I have huge, deep respect for what these guys do, and any time that we can support them, we will," says Malcom. "They are people who love to practice their craft, and that's what Maine is all about. It's why people love to come here, and I think it's why people love to build and create here." **MH+D**



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