

THE COLORS & TEXTURES OF FRESHWATER STONE

BRINGING OUT THE BEST QUALITIES IN LOCAL MAINE STONE

SO

MANY TIMES BEING AT THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME HAS EVERYTHING TO DO WITH ACHIEVEMENT, AND WHEN COMBINED WITH A SCOOP OF HARD WORK, A PINCH OF SACRIFICE AND A DASH OF COMMITMENT—VOILÀ—YOU HAVE A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS.

For Jeff and Candy Gammelin, the place was central Maine, and the time 1973. The couple, after graduating from Syracuse University, wanted to settle down, build a house and then build a family, and with resolve and focus, and an ‘If we don’t do it ourselves, it won’t get done’ attitude, Jeff and Candy built their dream home in the woods, out of local sticks and stones.

“My wife and I graduated from college together and didn’t know exactly what we wanted to do,” explained Jeff Gammelin, Owner of Freshwater Stone, Orland, Maine. “We both had teaching degrees and knew how to teach, but we really wanted to build a house and make a life for ourselves. So we bought a piece of land, where we still live, and built a small house out of stones and logs and whatever else we could find and started a family. We also built a fireplace in the house, and someone saw it and asked me to build one for them, and that’s how we started.

“Back then there was very little stone construction information, so it was a lot of trial and error to learn what worked and what



by Peter J. Marcucci

SHOP PHOTOS BY PETER J. MARCUCCI
ADDITIONAL PROJECT PHOTOS
COURTESY FRESHWATER STONE

Form meets function & utilitarian art is the result in this fireplace built from several varieties of local stone in Deer Isle, Maine. Superbly designed and constructed fireplaces using large, weathered quarried stone is just one of Freshwater Stone’s specialties.

Below: Built on 20 acres in Orland, Maine, Freshwater Stone is one of the largest employers and tax payers in the area. It is also one of the most efficient large stone processing facilities in New England, currently employing 47 people.



IN THIS ISSUE

... Peter J. Marcucci visits Freshwater Stone and relates their 35-year successful journey from a husband-and-wife start-up to a company with 47 employees, producing inspiring, award-winning work

... Stacy Williams explores the stories behind the work of Holy Land Stone; Peter talks with Maine Sculptress Lise Becu; Joel Davis presents a few of the notable restoration projects completed by Wiley’s Marble Restorations; and guest writer Nancy Dunlap explores the West Rutland, VT Art Park

... Good advice and reviews written by fabricators, installers and our industry pros

didn’t. My wife tended for me until she got pregnant. She would mix the mud and climb the ladder and it remained a small operation for a few years. There weren’t a lot of opportunities for doing stonework back then, but a lot of the people that hired me were very supportive.”

By 1976, Jeff, now an experienced mason, had developed a distinct genre of fireplace stonework, and a keen ability to envision what is possible, and the skills to communicate that

vision to his ever growing list of clientele, becoming the talk of the town—or should I say—coastline.

“David Rockefeller Jr. was one of my first customers, and it was a big break for me to do his fireplace in Seal Harbor. He came out to our house, and we still didn’t have electricity or running water, and it was a nice experience. Back then you actually got to know your customers, whereas now, very rarely do people

like that actually try to get to know me. These days, they’ll have their project managers or people visit us, and it’s not the same.”

Fast forward to October 2013, when I showed up at the bustling Freshwater Stone showroom on an

Autumn morning blooming with color. The 20-acre site full of slabs, blocks and outcroppings was also in full bloom, having been saturated by a morning of early fall rain. Walking into the simple but charming 800-square foot showroom, camera in hand, I was impressed by the rustic and contemporary vignettes thoughtfully assembled to evoke a sensory response from the daily visitors, and get the contract inked. *Cont. on Page 2*

FRESHWATER STONE

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A spa work of art that sits on the coast of Maine, built using two 50,000 pound blocks of Freshwater Pearl Granite. “We are known for using rather large stones but they are getting hard to find these days,” said Jeff Gammelin, Owner, Freshwater Stone, “so what we do is take the weathered faces of the quarry ledges and blocks we cut and saw them off at 6 to 8 inches thick and most times end up with a beautiful 5-inch to 8-inch thick piece of granite with moss and lichen on it and use them in our residential and commercial work.”

Within moments, I was greeted by Receptionist Anne Dentino; Onsite Safety and Environmental Inspector Dexter Johnson; and Construction Manager Shane Ginn, and stood welcomed by their smiles, handshakes and hospitality.

Under the careful guidance of Dexter Johnson (who admitted to loving to give tours of the facility), I slowly made my way around the 23,000 square foot shop making a list of the many sawing and shaping assets employed by the company to facilitate the production demands of Freshwater Stone’s clientele. Machines of all sizes were in full production with their operators close by setting up for the next stage of production.

“When I started the company, there was a tradition of nice stonework on Mount Desert Island,” Jeff explained, noting that there are a lot of old estates there, and people try to, if not replicate the existing architecture, use it as a reference for the architecture that they want in their house. “There really is a fair amount of stonework going on in this area that’s mostly residential. So when we started the company, we knew that what we needed in order to grow was to diversify and create good relationships with area architects and designers. They liked what we were doing and saw it as different and innovative in terms of design.

“We were introducing a sense of composition into stonework and a feeling that you have a canvas in front of you and you can create something artistic. It had to do with the colors of the stone, the masses of the stone and the joints and groupings of the stone. All these different elements could be manipulated to create something

very interesting. So that’s how our stonework started, and by working with residential architects we could see that they were interested in doing things differently.”

Many of Freshwater Stone’s projects are created using the granites supplied by the company’s own quarries, one of which is very popular, according to Jeff. “We have three quarries. The one we own, our Freshwater Pearl quarry, has nice formations, so we can get huge blocks. It is not a monochromatic or uniform gray and has a little bit of movement to it and different shading. It is our most popular granite so far.

“We also have a long-term lease on a small operation known as our Hall Quarry where we pull out a granite called Acadia. It’s an orange-tan and is the historical stone for Mount Dessert Island, Bar Harbor, Seal Harbor and all of Acadia National Park. This quarry is very important because there are a lot of restoration projects that involve the National Parks and Department of Transportation.

“All of the carriage trails and bridges that are in Acadia National Park are built using this granite as well as a lot of the old estates and famous places, so when the need comes up, it’s great that we are able to supply this stone. If this quarry weren’t there or closed down, you would have to import other colors of granite, and it would not match and would cheapen the landscape of the area. So historically, it’s very important to keep this quarry open.

“Our third quarry is in down east Maine, and is one we are currently developing. It yields a multicolored stone that we don’t have a large market for yet. It’s name is Cherry Field and it is pink, green and cream-colored and quite



Above: A rustic cascade of local stone steps get a final fitting by Sculptor Russ Kaufman. “Russ is an independent contractor and sculptor that does marvelous things as well as invent machines to do this type of work,” said Jeff Gammelin. “He’s here almost all the time and he can build from architect plans or sometimes just draw it out and produce it.”

unusual. It’s not a great quarry, and it is a constant battle to get stone out. The formations are not good and we are constantly battling horizontal and diagonal seams that go through the whole area. Every once in a while we do get some nice stone, but there’s a lot of waste to get to the good stuff. I’ve dealt with a lot of stone over the years, and this stone is beautiful, but for some reason hasn’t caught on. Part of the reason is that many people don’t know about it yet.”

The Cornerstone of the Company: Craftsmen and Their Tools

The company’s cache of machinery to cut local quarried stone as well as the many tons of stone imported yearly are five bridge saws

consisting of a Zambon Rover 35, GMM Axia 38, GMM Diana 40, a GMM Egil and a GMM Litox. For cutting blocks, Freshwater Stone also has three diamond wire saws consisting of a Pellegrini PM, Candiani Atilio Superior 4000 and a Gaspari Menotti GSW Series Single Strand wire saw (two more to be installed this year), while a Prussiani Oceana CNC, a Thibaut T 102 Radial Arm Polisher, and a Park Industries Hydra Split round out the list.

To facilitate the safe movement of all work in progress, the company employs six 3 axis overhead cranes and six jib cranes as well as a myriad of clamps and vacuum lifters to safely move any weight and dimension stone.

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Freshwater Stone sawyer Mike Gervasi setting up the GMM Litox for his next cut. During my visit I had an excellent conversation with Mike about stone, cutting techniques and the company, “We have some really great people, and Freshwater Stone’s success is indeed due to their dedication and performance.”



Peter J. Marcucci (2)

Below: A signature Freshwater spa uses Freshwater Pearl granite from the Mosquito Mountain Quarry in Frankfort, Maine. "There was a spa that we did just last year in the winter that was laid out in our shop. It consisted of natural stone shapes full of lichen that we pulled out of our quarry, with the largest piece weighing in at over 25,000 pounds. It was 40 feet by 60 feet and was a knockout, with a wow factor of 10 on the Richter scale."



Above: Seen at right in the foreground, Freshwater Stone's Thibaut T-102 radial arm polisher. At left in the background is a Prussiani CNC, which handles much of the shaping and polishing of the company's slab work.

Below: A GMM Axia 38 step cuts in the background while one of Freshwater Stone's finest does the finish trimming. A safe and orderly work environment is paramount and strictly adhered to. Using process methods and technology that are as sustainable as possible are also a priority. Most employees are cross-trained and can perform all aspects of the craft from cutting to installation according to Jeff Gammel.



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Four Load-Alls with extendable booms and three Caterpillar 988's are also at the disposal of the many craftsmen—and it is those craftsmen that have helped make the company into what it is today, according to Jeff, noting that it's been the employees' willingness to pull together over the last few years that has kept the company in the black.

"We have some really great people, and Freshwater Stone's success is indeed due to their dedication and performance. You can't do it all yourself, and good employees are key to success. At the same time, you look and you see so many people, with so much talent, and you think, why aren't we doing more. With the economy slipping these last few years, it is frustrating to see business slide a little bit, but that's business. I think the last few years has taught us a lot. Nothing is a given, and it's been a good lesson for both the employer and the employees—we see new value in our jobs."

Sales and Marketing

Freshwater Stone, by reputation, is one of the most progressive and dynamic natural stone companies anywhere. Quarries, slab fabrication, landscape, veneer, driveways, architectural elements, spas, pools and lightweight boat interiors—you name it—and they will build and install it. According to Jeff, Freshwater Stone's market is mostly the upscale demographic within New England with most being in Maine. He said, however, that it is not uncommon for the company to service the entire Eastern Seaboard and beyond.

"Most of our work is in New England, but we've worked as far away as Hawaii and a few

years ago completed a three-year job in South Carolina, as well as a large job in Texas that won us the MIA 2008 Pinnacle award for the restoration of the Dallas Old Red Courthouse.

Kitchen countertops are about 25 percent of our work, but we also do a lot of bathroom vanities and showers. The other 75 percent is architectural and cut to size work. We're also cutting materials for other people to install, and that is a part of the business that we hope to grow, and it seems to be where our growth will lie because we can service such a large area."

Other large scale jobs of late include a fairly large project at Maine General Hospital in Augusta, Maine as well as a job in Saurat, France where Freshwater Stone supplied and fabricated the granite for a new Chapel. The company is also beginning a large, new residence in North East Harbor, Maine and bidding on two several year residential projects close by that they hope to be involved in. Jeff and company also produced a large local job that everyone in the company was extra proud to be part of.

"Martha Stuart came to our shop unannounced at 7 am one morning, and she was just as nice as could be. She has a beautiful home on Mount Dessert Island that is all stone and is the original Edsel Ford estate built in 1928 by Jens Jensen who was a landscape architect. Jensen had also designed the landscape, but there were several elements that were never built, including a fire pit area. Just a few years ago, those old plans were discovered and redesigned, and we cut and installed it using our Acadia Granite. It was a very nice project for us. Over the years we have also done a few other projects for her."

Other Ingredients of Success: Designs, Relationships & Process

Stone is stone, but it's how you slice it that separates the men from the boys, and in this case what sets Freshwater Stone apart from its competition explained Jeff. "We are a very creative company, and I think what makes us unique is our vision of stonework, our design sense and our communication skills with designers.

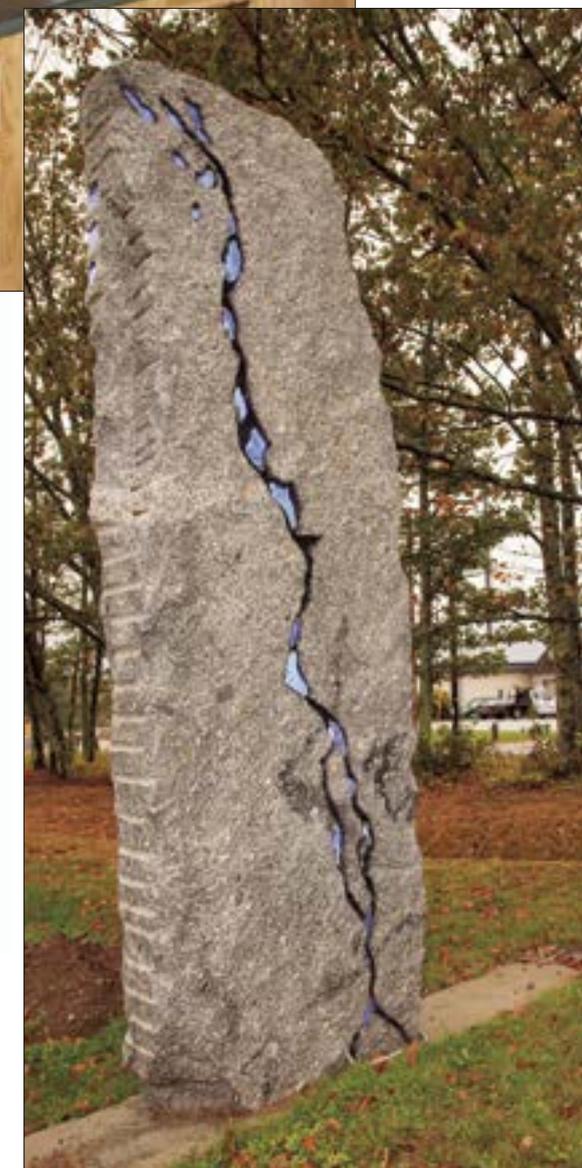
"If you look at our website, and our history, almost everything is unique, and if there is something similar out there, it's because people have used it as a reference and tried to make it look like something we've done. Our large stone and sense of composition is based on very organic shapes like vine tendrils or plants or natural cracks in stone ledges. That is where we get our forms from and they are translated into our stonework.

"When we talk to people or do takeoffs on projects, the designers can talk to us and ask us to specify, and we can say to them, 'We think

this will work' and make suggestions about the best way to do things. We build relationships that way, so it's not just a takeoff bid, and we do the job or we don't. We do have input if we are asked, and we get that relationship going and get the contract. That is probably the most satisfying part of our cut-to-size business.

"That said, we efficiently use anything in our stone yard, and cut and dry fit everything here in our shop and maximize the use of our materials. When we are done, we photograph and reference it, take it apart, and then bring it to the jobsite with a boom truck and assemble it very quickly. We've been doing it this way for twenty years and, knock on wood, it always goes in quickly and perfectly.

When asked about the current business climate in the area, Jeff was quick to respond by saying that the depth of the market just isn't there at the moment, but that he has hired an in-house salesperson and a road salesperson to expand his service and that he is still looking for



a few more good people.

“Volume is down slightly, but local construction is starting to pick up mostly on the higher end, which is fine, but the depth is just not there yet. In the past we might have had ten really nice jobs going at once, and two of those might have been very big, but in the last few years we might have six jobs going on with just one of them being big.

Right now, it is looking like we will be doing a large job that will be engaging many parts of our company, so it is looking better. I also mentioned that we have purchased three new wire saws. One is installed and two are in crates waiting to come over. We just need to do some foundation work for them first. Once installed, we will make one of our old wire saws a quarry saw to do cutoff work on the blocks we are pulling out. So we are banking on a good economy.”

The Future

Lastly, and in closing, I asked Jeff to articulate his sense of the twisty business road ahead. Laughing he responded, “Boy, I wish I knew! One big reason we’ve done so well over the years was due to the support of our customers. They liked our work and they talked about us nicely, and we’ve developed good relationships,

and that went a long way toward developing a solid reputation. We’ve also taken care of all the bottlenecks, have a good business plan, and we are still investing in our future, and that is a strong sign of our intentions and how we want to grow.

“All of what we do, and all of our machinery are there to support our visions and designs and the visions and designs of our clients, and we have the talented people in place that can make it happen. Hopefully the company will require less of me, and more of them as things mature.”

What makes Freshwater Stone different is not just their ability to work on small or grand scale projects, but also the type and quality of work they offer their quality conscious clientele. Like any shop that excels, their difference also stems from their people, who possess intuitive and expressive skill sets and can think outside the box. They also recognize the potential of collaborating with other talented artisans. With those factors in their favor, Freshwater Stone’s market position can only continue to improve.

For more information on Freshwater Stone, visit their website www.freshwaterstone.com or their Facebook page, www.facebook.com/FreshwaterStone, or call (207) 469-6331.

Above: Antique finished 3cm Absolute Black granite countertops were the perfect choice to complement this rustic kitchen in northern Maine.

Inset, Top: A brand spanking’ new Gaspari Menotti GSW Series Single Strand wire saw is just one of three new cutting assets Freshwater Stone has put online to fulfill its many upscale clientele. The other two are in crates in Italy waiting to be shipped.

Right: A monolith marquee with built-in LEDs stands sentinel at the entrance to the Freshwater Stone showroom and fabrication facility. The sign-as-art sculpture is by frequent Freshwater contractor and artist Russ Kaufman.