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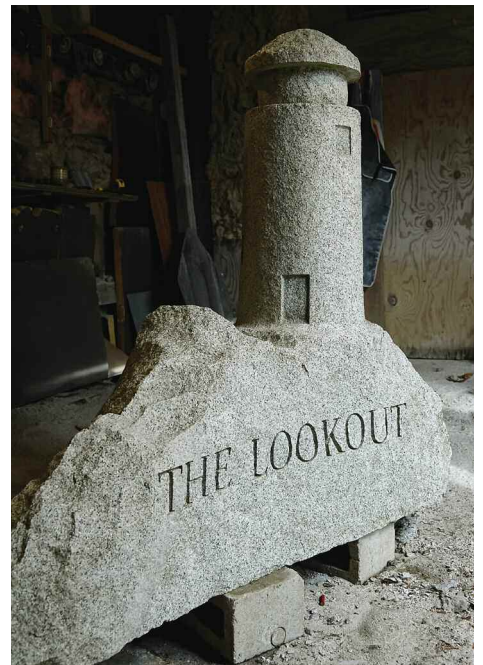
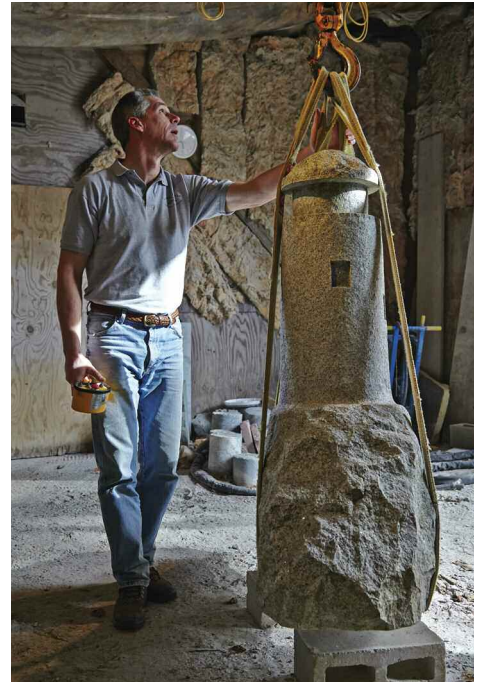
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“And so while dreams are the individual man’s play with reality, the sculptor’s art is (in a broader sense) the play with dreams.”
—Friedrich Nietzsche



Coaxing Art from Stone

THIS NEW HAMPSHIRE ARTIST BENDS GRANITE TO HIS WILL

WRITTEN BY LORI FERGUSON | PHOTOGRAPHED BY GREG WEST



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Referred for a reason.

Lee, New Hampshire-based sculptor Steve Green does not exactly wax poetic when describing his chosen career path. "When people ask me what I do, I tell them, 'I make rocks smaller,'" Green says with a chuckle. Although this stone carver is unduly modest, he does speak the truth. Yet his explanation does not do justice to the magic Green employs when manipulating granite.

"I have no art background," Green says somewhat sheepishly. "I was a business major in college and took one art appreciation course, which I failed . . . the first time." In the next breath, however, Green reveals that he was an avid woodworker in high school, thereby dispelling the idea that he comes to his métier with no artistic tendencies. After going to college and working in the "real world" for a few years, Green concluded that the 9-to-5 drill was not for him. "There was a gentleman from Quincy, Massachusetts, that my parents had bought a number of stone pieces from, and I really liked his work," Green recalls. "He sculpted stone with fire. I was fascinated by the process, so I decided to figure out how he did it." Green spent the next six months educating himself, digging through documents in the University of New Hampshire's patent library and talking to people in the field. "Once I had the process figured out," Green says, "I found a man in western Massachusetts who could make me a tool, and I got to work."

In the years since, Green's craft has led him on a remarkable journey. "Sculpture is a different process from painting," Green observes. "It's reductive rather than cumulative. Rather than building something up, you're removing everything you don't want." And sometimes, Green says with chagrin, you lose a piece that you *did* want and the project takes a completely different path. "Carving can be fun that way," he notes ironically.

Green's creations encompass both artistic and functional pieces. He works primarily in New England granite, most of which is quarried in Milford, New Hampshire, but some stone does come from Maine and Massachusetts. "There's also a quarry in South Dakota that produces a beautiful, deep maroon stone that I use from time to time," he says. Working the stone, Green creates sculpture as well as an assortment of garden art including tables, benches, birdbaths, planters, and fountains.

His Möbius benches, which feature a mind-bending, infinity loop twist, are particularly intriguing—he playfully describes them as freaky. "Möbius is a math thing," Green explains. "It's a surface with only one side and only one boundary component." And according to the artist, creating this object in granite is a nerve-wracking experience. "There are many points in the process of creating a Möbius bench where I think that I've gone horribly wrong. The process of creating the twist, where the switch happens, is very frustrating and scary, but it's exhilarating when it occurs—I'm essentially removing everything that's not a Möbius!" Green has mastered this tightrope walk beautifully; these fluid pieces of stone are among his most compelling creations.



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Previous spread, from left: Artist Steve Green removes extraneous pieces of granite to reveal his vision. | Green created this granite property marker for a family with coastal ties. | This page, clockwise from top left: Green's approach to sculpting is unusual: he carves stone with fire. Here Green is creating a sink. | He transformed a massive block of granite into a water feature. | A flaw in the stone inspired this immense hand. "The block had a crack, and suddenly the idea of fingers jumped out at me, so I started carving," Green says. | Green employs an ancient method of splitting stones; he drills holes, slips in the pins (called feathers), and taps the wedges gently until the stone finally splits.

Even when the process goes awry, the results are beautiful. Green once attempted a Möbius strip for a client and failed. “The result of the mistake was something I was unfamiliar with—a single-sided figure with no edge,” Green says. “My client, who did not want a birdbath because he didn’t like birds, was happy with the piece but couldn’t care less what the proper name for the form was. I recently did a little research, though, and discovered that what I had unwittingly created was an umbilic torus—a single-edged, three-dimensional figure with a lone edge that goes three times around the ring before returning to the starting point.”

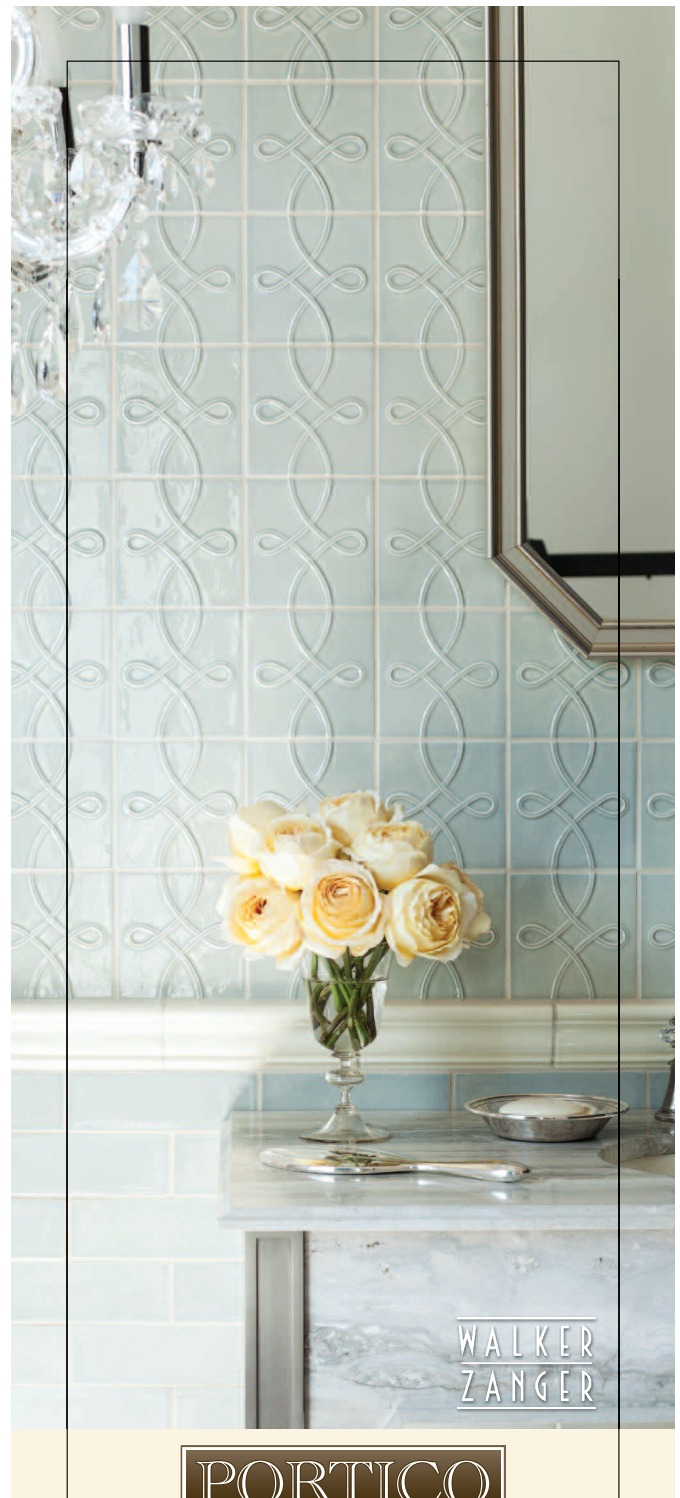
The scientific sphere is not the only realm in which Green finds inspiration. Sometimes he gleans ideas from other visual artists, and other times the stone itself provides the impetus for a creation. “There are many things inside of stones,” the artist says. “Oftentimes the rock will tell you what to do . . . but not always. There are times when the rock doesn’t give you anything, and you can sweat and stress and fume to no avail. That’s when you just have to hit the darn thing because you’re tired of staring at it.”

As often as not, however, it is Green’s clients who bring the inspiration. Individuals who have been introduced to his work by a friend or have seen it at W.S. Goodrich or Rolling Green Nursery, two retailers who feature his designs, commission most of his projects. Much to Green’s delight, many clients buy one piece and become hooked, returning to the artist repeatedly for additional works. The majority of the stone carver’s clients are in New Hampshire, but from time to time he also travels down to the North Shore of Massachusetts or up the coast to Maine. Green also has representatives in Connecticut and Maryland who sell his creations. Up until now, the majority of his projects have been in the private sector for individuals seeking artwork to adorn their home or yard. But in recent years, the artist has increased the number of large-scale corporate and public projects he executes. Green recently completed monuments in Rye Harbor and Exeter and is preparing to install a new one in Newington this spring.

Green is justifiably proud of the relationships he has built with his buyers and works hard to make sure each interaction concludes on a happy note. He does his best to eliminate surprises from the outset, typically holding several meetings with a client: first at his studio, where Green and the client share ideas, look at different stones, and come up with a preliminary plan; then at the site where the piece will be placed; and finally back at the studio where the artist and the client review preliminary sketches illustrating the way Green envisions the piece and its environs coming together.

Despite all this planning there can still be hiccups, but over the years, he has learned to roll with the unexpected. “I never cease to be amazed at how different a client’s vision of a commission can be from my own,” he muses. “We can be 80 percent of the way through a project and still each be seeing the final product as something different, and yet in the end, it always comes together and everyone’s happy.” ■

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