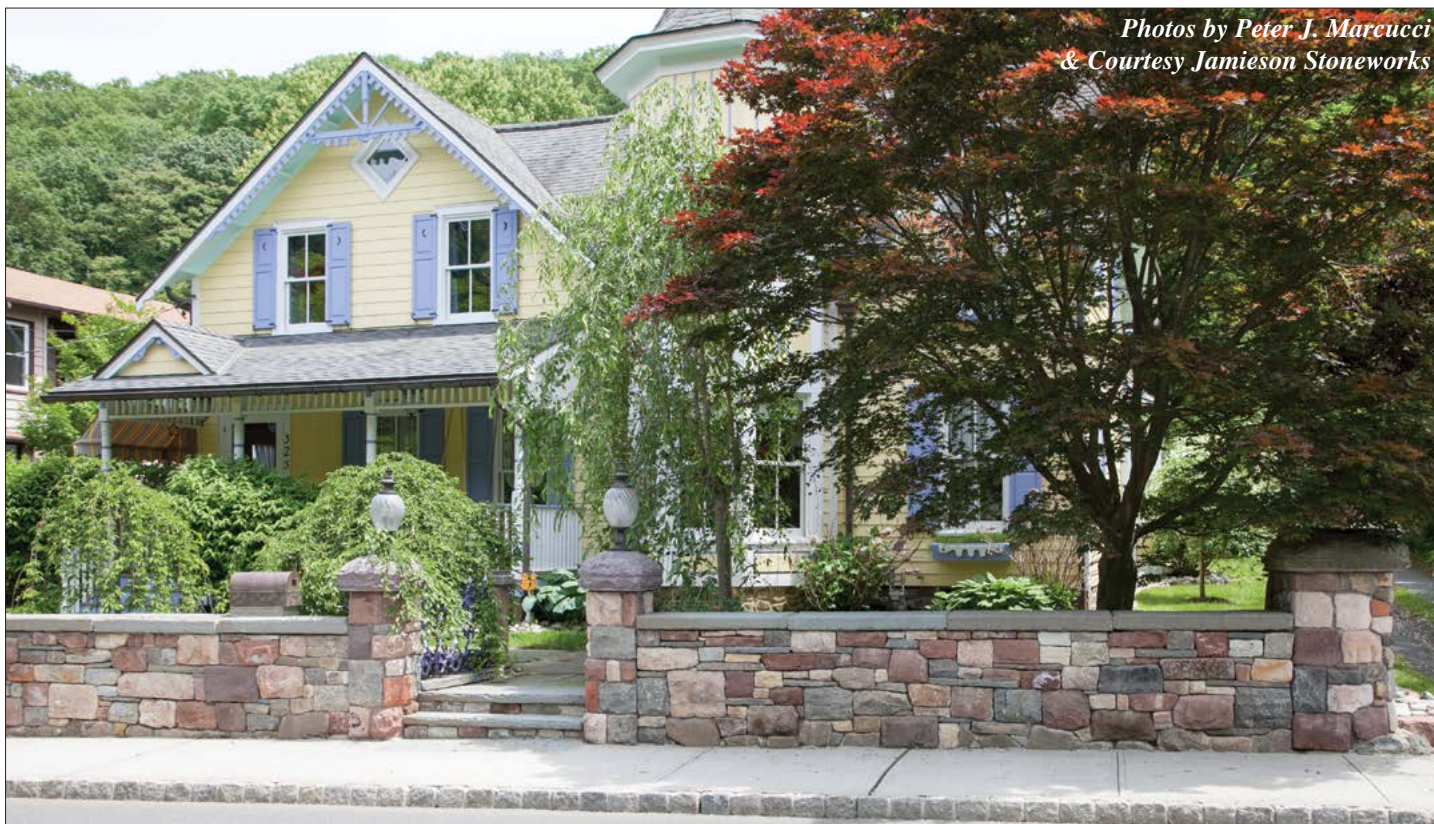


JAMIESON STONWORKS, LLC

A Three Decades Tradition of Intimate Stonework

Peter J. Marcucci
Special Contributor

NESTLED BETWEEN NEW YORK CITY AND THE CATSKILL MOUNTAINS LIES SLOATSBURG, NEW YORK, A BEDROOM COMMUNITY REMOTE ENOUGH TO BE RURAL AND CLOSE ENOUGH TO BE NEAR EVERYTHING.



Photos by Peter J. Marcucci & Courtesy Jamieson Stoneworks

This wide shot of a 1860s residence in Piermont, New York is a good representation of Michael Jamieson's mastery of masonry. Mike built the walls, piers, steps, paths and patio, using local materials.

In past years, I must have driven through Sloatsburg a hundred times. This time, however, I came to visit Jamieson Stoneworks, LLC, a dynamic company specializing in stone veneer, fireplaces, walls, patios and sculpture.

On my arrival, owner Michael Jamieson greeted me. "Great to finally meet you. Let's walk—I'll show you my shop," he said, and I was led off. After a few minutes of focus, it was clear what had kept the tall man so strong. There was no bridge saw for cutting, no radial arm for surfacing and no overhead crane for convenience—only an array of benches and hand tools, surrounded by a mix of slabs, blocks and boulders.

"So what got you into the stone business?" I asked. Michael pointed to his latest work-of-art: a local quarried boulder destined to become an heirloom bench.

"In order to carve boulders, you need ones that haven't been sitting above ground for fifteen thousand years. Due to freeze and thaw, they'll fall apart when you're carving them. If they've only been out of the ground for the last fifty years or so, such as this one, they are still usable."

Michael's portfolio began in the 1980s while crafting stonework for area locals and additionally by attending Brockport University of New York for sculpture. During that time, Michael was also laying the groundwork for his future stone shop on newly purchased property.

The acreage looked like the perfect place to build but, unbeknownst to him, waiting silently below the surface stood a very hard band of glacial stone extending north from the George Washington Bridge to the Catskill Mountains.

"It's solid rock under our feet, and it took me three years of drilling, splitting, picking, and pulling just to get the driveway and septic system into the hillside," he explained. "During that time one thing led to the next, and I wound up buying a backhoe, small loader, rock drill, splitter and compressor. So, things really got started with that rock removal, while I continued to get better at working with stone."

At this point, Michael, now firmly dug in and imagination abound with ideas, continued building walls, patios and kitchens, while simultaneously pushing the limits of hammer and chisel in a quest to create cutting edge statuary. Simply put, most of Michael's impetus during this time came primarily through his love of working with local stone, while he was fascinated to simply unearth the sublime colors, both hard and soft, and create utilitarian art and sculpture.

"At the time I was using blue chisels, you know, like you buy at the hardware store, that do nothing except get dull. Then one day I bought a pitching tool with a carbide tip. We called it the magic chisel, because it magically broke the stone. It was amazing!

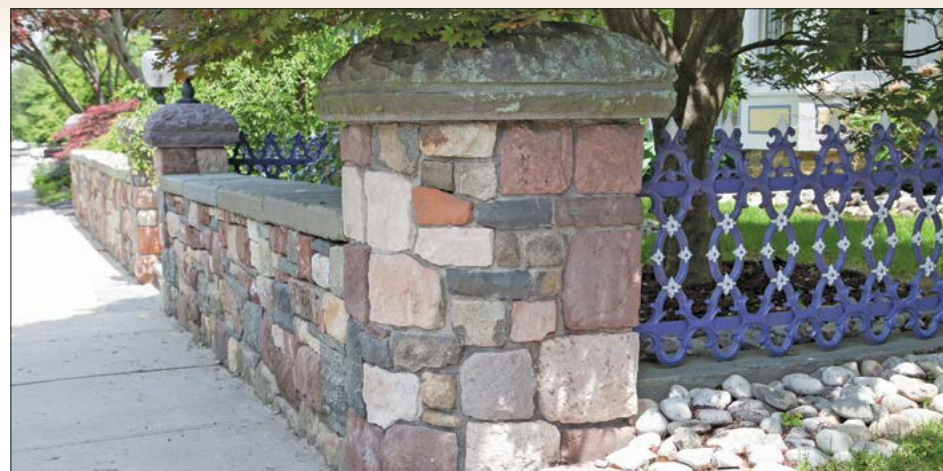
"Still, I was also eager for more information, and I would go to restoration conventions. One convention was in Boston in the late 1990s where Fred Hueston spoke. He was the first guy I had heard of that knew about stone.

"Then in one of the stone magazines, I saw a symposium offered in Charlottesville, Virginia. It was sponsored by Charles McRaven, who had written a few books on stone at the time, and Tomas Lipps, a mason who currently heads the Stone Foundation. That was in 2001."

Michael, now a full-fledged craftsman, continued to hone his artistic prowess by participating in an array of sculpture symposiums over the next seven years—the first being in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2001. The next was in Santa Fe, New Mexico in 2003; then Charleston, South Carolina in 2004; Hood River, Oregon in 2006; and Majorca, Spain in 2007 with wife Joanie at his side.

Attending symposiums, while simultaneously paying the bills by doing local stonework, was no easy chore and daunting at the least, but he continued. Barre, Vermont in 2008 was the last on Michael's list, at least for the time being.

"I attended sculpture symposiums to meet other artists. They were all interesting venues. They didn't give me a stipend—I had to pay my own way, and it was well worth it.



"The front wall took about a month to finish. We tried to match what was originally here to give it a local stone look, so all of the material I used is from this area. The sandstone is from the Palisades area where basalt had melted into the red sandstone and bleached it. The others are mostly from Sloatsburg, New York and Hillburn, New York. Some are salvaged and natural cleft. They don't call this Rockland County for nothing."



Jamieson Stoneworks occasionally builds outdoor kitchens, as well. This large example uses local quarried slabs for countertops, made from local three-inch granite and fully shaped, edged and polished (including the surface) with only hand tools.

Photo courtesy Jamieson Stoneworks

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Michael Jamieson is in the middle of beveling and bush hammering newly fabricated stone components to match the antique bench shown in the background. He then carved hand and foot prints of his client's children into the surface of the seat. Most of Mike's work is done with smaller air and electric hand tools.



"This is a new concept where I put carved elements into the wall," explained Mike. "I'm trying to integrate carved elements into stone walls. I see me doing more of it. It's a nice concept."

"Most artists borrow ideas and put their own spin on it, and I was able to see what everyone else was doing. The symposium at the Rock of Ages Quarry in Barre, Vermont is where I met Jessie Salisbury and other notable artists. It was great.

"At another symposium, I met a guy by the name of Richard Rhodes. Richard was one of the few guys in the stone business that had actually made money and gave an interesting talk on the sacred rules of stonework.

"Most of his rules were basic, but an important rule was once you know the rules—you can break them, but I see people doing stonework such as standing stones vertically, to be cute, instead of horizontally, but they're doing it because they don't know the rules.

"Stone has a primal and rustic quality, and if I see a wall that looks too perfect or too cute, I think it loses something. Many times I see bridges and the stone is perfectly square and smooth, and it loses that primal quality.

"That's why I like some of the old buildings

where they rough hewed and pillowed the stones. It gives it a rustic quality, and it looks like the stone is jumping out of the wall. It's random and looks very primal, and it's tough to do right."

A Narrative of Success

Jamieson Stoneworks continued to flourish as the recession gained its momentum into 2008. Much of the company's success at this point was due to team work. Michael and Joanie were friendly, approachable and always humble, no matter the accolades. They never waited to be asked—they simply make the offer, and when you have the talent to back it up, it all came together for the couple, even in the worst of times.

Michael always showed up early and stayed late—and Joanie never hesitated to make that extra phone call or send that extra email. If Mike was not building outdoor kitchens, he was building fireplaces or walls—while Joanie took care of estimates and customer service.



"Made with local gray granite and sandstone, the hearth, surround and mantle were cut and split and from one boulder that a geologist tested and said was 1.2 billion years old," explained Mike. "The arch consists of two bookend split stones with faux mortar joints, and a keystone with a grain that runs consistently through all the stones around the arch. For 'kicks and giggles' I added a hand carved, local sandstone vine of ivy which the customer loved." Photo courtesy Jamieson Stoneworks

"Joanie has a gift—she's a real people person," said Michael. "If the phone rings, she'll answer it and talk to the homeowner, contractor or architect while additionally taking care of the marketing.

"Joanie remembers everything a customer tells her and befriends them. Moreover, a job that I tell her I can do in three days, she knows that it will really take me a week, so I'll do the estimate and give her the numbers. She'll then make it realistic. She also visits jobsites with me to see the final product. I guess you can call that team work."

"I could write a book, but I think what is most profound is that everything is relative," now explained Joanie Jamieson. "We've never changed. In past years, most stone masons raised their prices and marketed to the highest of clientele and made a fortune—yet, they weren't stone masons; they were landscapers that decided to do stone work because it was very lucrative. Sadly, they are no longer here. With the recession and new laws they lost everything.

"During that time Michael just stayed true to his love of stone, and I know that sounds corny but it's true. During the worst of times (post

2008) we did go on holiday, but didn't go out to dinner—we just made the best of the situation. Today, all the largest and best of clients are calling us because of Michael's passion for his work."

A Tradition of Process and Strength

The type of residential work Jamieson Stoneworks is doing these days is practical and is used every day, and not just an add-on, noted Mike. "It's stonework that works for a living and not just sitting there looking pretty. It has to have a purpose.

"Right now we are doing a patio and reworking a whole backyard including steps. The walls are built with boulders which can be done quickly and still have a nice appeal to them. You plan them out and they look beautiful.

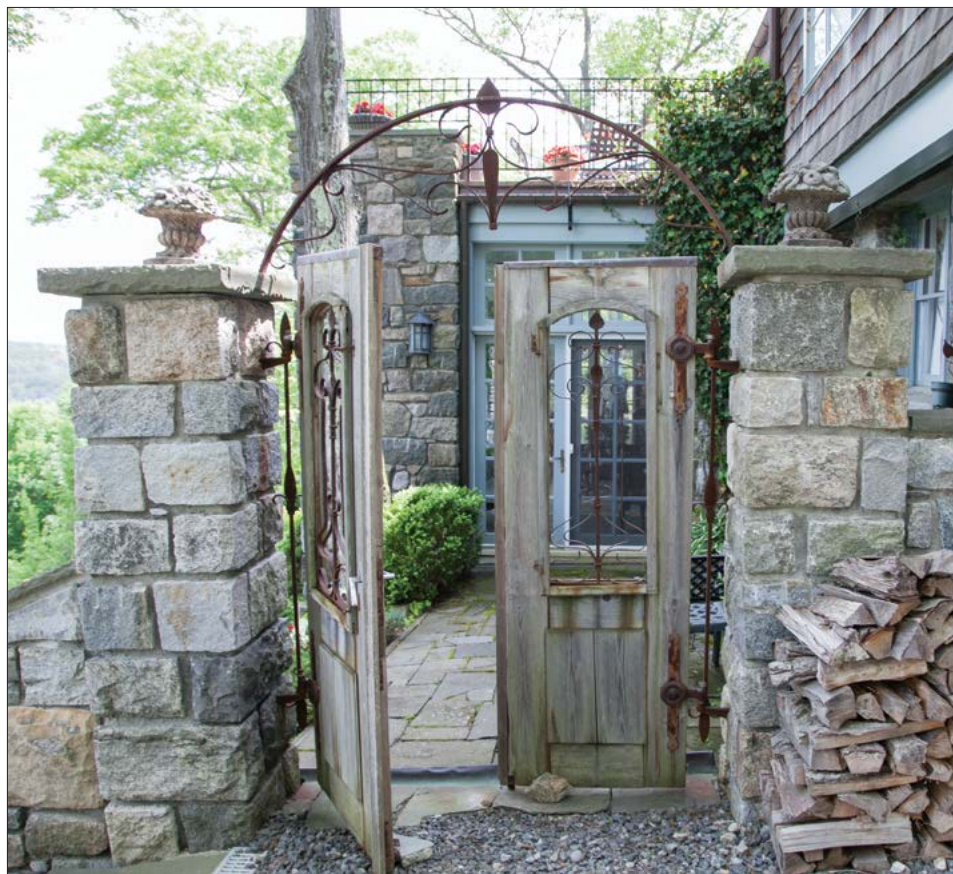
"I'm also doing a patio, and we are including pieces of quartzite to lighten it up. Patios, especially bluestone, can get very hot in the summer. Many people use bluestone around their pools, but most only do it once because they wind up having to quickly run into the water due to the stone being so hot.

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This solidly-built gate with stone pillars is located in Tuxedo Park, NY. Mike chose to leave in the drill marks, for a rugged texture. "Drill marks are like red wine; you have to acquire a taste," he explained. "The guys that did the railings were the same guys from Orange County Choppers before they began building custom bikes. They were iron workers before they got into choppers." According to Mike, the stone pillars he builds are always made of solid stone and never filled with block or concrete.

"Quartzites are cooler. I also prefer using concrete during construction, instead of mortar, because I feel the joints hold up to freeze and thaw better. I've seen a lot of patios fail that were built using mortar. Concrete, however, lasts forever.

"I also use pebbles in my mix for strength, so even when the concrete joints are bigger, they are strong and durable. After the patio is acid washed, those pebbles simply add to the beauty. It also reduces the cost to the customer. The trick is to give the residential customer the most they can get for their money. As a business owner you do that anyway so that you can remain competitive."

On the commercial side, Michael and Joanie have several bids pending that include a large historical restoration in Bear Mount State Park, NY; a renovation in Sterling Forest Park, NY; and a restoration at the Jay Estate Gardens in Rye, NY.

At the time of this interview Mike had just one apprentice: Mark Ribaud. "He's young, he's good, and he just graduated from Boston University as a sculptor major," said Mike, noting that on bigger jobs he does have stone-masons that he subcontracts when needed, adding that before the recession he had four employees. Michael is also certified by Jahn Restoration Mortars and is a devoted member of the Stone Foundation.

The Tradition Endures

"I think what makes us different is that I really love working with stone. I like building from nothing and love new challenges. Each job is like a puzzle that needs to be solved, plus, it gives me a sense of immortality knowing that after I am gone, my art and masonry work will still be there.

"Our low point was five years ago, but it's been steadily getting better, knock on wood. Stone is my passion, and I love what I do and the freedom to do what I want—when I want. I see me doing it until I can't lift anymore and I start cursing the stone.

"My wife is my biggest fan, and you know that a happy wife is a happy life! I also plan on attending more symposiums and definitely want to make it to the next one. It recharges your batteries, and the older you get the more recharging you need.

Visit www.jamiesonstoneworks.com for more information on Mike's work, and see the June issue of *Slippery Rock Gazette*, page 22, for a story on Tuxedo Park, NY.

Peter J. Marcucci has over 25 years of fabrication experience in the stone industry. Send your comments to our Contacts page on the SRG website, www.slipperyrockgazette.net.



A view from the gate side of the Tuxedo Park home shows Mike's Jamieson's rustic style. Mike did every bit of stonework you see including granite steps, which he rolled in on broom handles to set. "The owner wanted a Bruce Price look that blends into the hillside." Bruce Price was an American architect and the innovator of the Shingle Style. His unique designs, used during the construction of cottages in Tuxedo Park, New York greatly influenced some of the finest architects of the twentieth century, including Frank Lloyd Wright and Robert Venturi. Emily Post was Bruce Price's daughter and was the famed author who wrote the book Etiquette.



Above and below: In 2002, Mike built a memorial (left) to honor the 78 local victims who died in the 9/11 World Trade Center attack. "It's a local eleven-ton boulder with an eagle (modeled from the old Penn Station in New York City) and a flag carved on the back and a plaque in front. It pretty much follows the way the stone was. It had been dug up at a local construction site, and I used the more pristine side for the plaque. It is called Hornblende granite, and it is a glacial erratic. It's dated at 1.2 billion years old and was part of the Appalachians." In 2012 Mike was commissioned to build the memorial on the right.

