

# MAN OF STONE

OLIVIER DUMONT CARVES STONE IN THE CLASSIC METHOD

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The romantic quest to become a stone carver may seem like pie in the sky to us Americans. But in France, where many of the finest limestones can be found, the study path is quite widely established. Hence, Olivier Dumont tossed aside his schoolbook study of art in his hometown near Dijon for a more hands-on approach. After carving school and then two years of *compagnons*, or apprenticeships, in various regions of France—each with its unique traditional technique for its indigenous stones and architectural style—he packed his things and headed off to the Windy City, where he'd been a house guest of a local family during a high school exchange years earlier.

Nine years later, the choice has served him well. At Chicago's Atelier Jouvence (named for the street where Dumont lived in France), Dumont and his wife, Sonia, have built a thriving business of their custom and ready-to-go limestone and marble fireplaces, gargoyles and other architectural flourishes, serving the public as well as architects and designers. Dumont doesn't consider himself a sculptor, or even an artist. He humbly prefers the designation of "craftsman." But one look at his medallions, leaf carvings or remarkable griffins, and it is clear that he is an artist at heart. "I prefer the classic Baroque style of Louis XIV," he says, but he also takes inspiration from the Provencale, Gothic and Regency traditions. So Dumont spends much of his prep time poring over art books, pictorial histories of old chateaus and master carvers for inspiration.

Inside the shop, however, is where the mythical work takes place. "Carvers are trained not to make mistakes," explains Dumont. The enormity and discipline of such a task informs the process—a concentrated, intense effort, involving any number of rasps for sanding and special chisels manipulated with specific angles and degrees of force applied via a ball-topped hammer. The delicacy required for such work combines with an ongoing, tug-of-war balance with the hefty, powerful manipulation of stone slabs and the need to throw just the right muscle into the job. The enormous effort involved in this *pas de deux* results in sought-after creations evolved through a process that has withstood the test of time.

