


Poetry in Stone

 **WHEN HE WAS JUST A KID**, Matt Goddard found peace in the natural world, running around in the woods south of Portland. At 22, the loftiest goal he could imagine was to build himself a house out of stone. This youthful fantasy led him on a quest for the necessary skills, and now, with 13 years of masonry under his belt, Goddard is well on his way to mastering the medium. With dark hair caked in stone dust, hands cracked and bleeding, and a bushy goatee sprouting from his chin, he is slightly bashful but entirely serious when he describes his metaphysical connection to his work. “I resonate with it,” he explains in a gentle baritone. “Some guys are just drawn to the essence of the material. And I get to combine my creative talents with my propensity for breaking things.”

At 24, Goddard called every stonemason he could find, finally landing an apprenticeship at Spiger’s Stonework & Masonry in Aloha, Oregon. He spent four and a half years there, soaking up all the knowledge he could, and then struck out to launch his own custom stonemasonry business, Poetry in Stone. He has since discovered a thriving network of stone craftspeople in Portland, and he’s made it his personal mission to galvanize that network, breathing new life into the trade. And because every job requires an abundance of muscle, he often collaborates on projects with other like-minded masons in the area, like Eric Contey, Jarrod Lawson, and Shawn Kelley. Last summer, Goddard organized the first annual Neander-Games—a stoneworkers’ picnic at Rocky Butte Park in Northeast Portland where contenders smash, roll, stack, and throw stones—to “nourish Paleolithic undercurrents and practice arts of brutal finesse.”

By no means a purist, Goddard’s style is admittedly heavy-handed. He approaches stone as a medium, however unbending, and he’s not afraid to manipulate it in order to express himself. “It’s a holy anarchy of sorts,” he says, “and you bring order to this anarchy.” But there’s also a strikingly whimsical essence to Goddard’s work—an emphatic embrace of color, texture, and shape. “If a stone has a lot of character, I like to accentuate that and play with it,” he says. “Sometimes I encourage it; sometimes I dominate it.”

Goddard focuses on residential walls, patios, and veneers, and although he’s a true Oregonian with an engrained love for the harsh, gray, Northwestern basalt he often uses to build walls, he also has a weakness for exotic stone from Brazil and India. (“The colors would blow you away—it’s like the aurora borealis,” he muses).

For his own fantasy stone house, he’s dreaming of something soft, like Australian red sandstone. “I could really go for something nice and workable, rich with color,” he says. His pile of drawings call for a simple, one-level, octagonal structure; now all he needs is a piece of stone-laden property.

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