

Continuing a legacy of stone in San Diego

As owner of Minicci Stone in San Diego, CA, Paul Hyde is the fourth generation of his family to work in the stone trade

by Michael Reis



Located in San Diego, CA, Minicci Stone processes stone for high-end residential clients as well as the commercial sector, and it operates a bridge saw and edge processor from Park Industries.

For Paul Hyde of Minicci Stone in San Diego, CA, working in the stone industry is the continuation of a family history in the trade that dates back to the 1800s. Covering a broad region in Southern California, the shop serves a steady flow of high-

end residential clients as well as the commercial sector.

"I am the fourth generation of my family to work in the stone industry," Hyde said. "In 1887, my great grandfather Cosmo Minisci emigrated from Calabria, Italy, to Bedford, IN, to work

in the limestone quarries. Most of his kids worked in the stone industry, including his daughter Angie, who managed the Heltonville Limestone Quarry for 47 years, and his son Joe, who started Meno Stone, which still operates today on 22 acres out-



Operated by fourth-generation stone craftsman Paul Hyde, Minicci Stone has been in San Diego since 2004.



The company has a total of 12 workers, including two in the office.

side of Chicago. His daughter, Rose, my grandmother, married Lester Hyde, who owned Indianapolis Cut Stone. Lester also worked for Indiana Limestone Co., where he designed many stone features, including some of the stone facades at Northwestern University. My father, Jay Hyde, worked at his father's shop and in the local quarries."

Hyde started in the business nearly 25 years ago, and he started his operation in San Diego in 2004. "In 1988, I got into the stone industry after graduating from UC-Berkeley," he explained. "I took a little break during the 1991 recession to learn Spanish in Costa Rica. Now, like Italian in the late 1800s, speaking Spanish is very valuable."

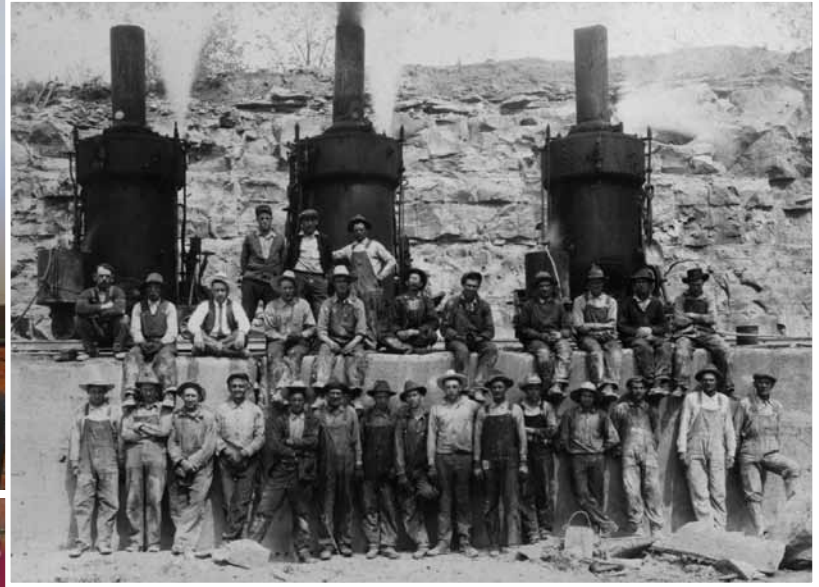
While the stone industry has pro-

vided his life's work, Hyde did not set out to enter the craft. "My family always exposed me to stoneworking, but I did not plan to work in the trades until I graduated from college, and a contractor offered me a job. I later worked into becoming a business partner with him.

"I didn't know I would go into this; I thought I would be an inter-



As a reminder of his family's history in the stone industry, Hyde keeps a model of a stone bench made by his father over 60 years ago, before he made two full-scale benches at his father's fabrication shop — Indianapolis Cut Stone.



Pictured is Hyde's great grandfather, Cosmo Minisci, among the workers in an Indiana limestone quarry in 1905.



Among the company's commercial projects, Minicci Stone fabricated and installed Silestone counters for a Sushi RA restaurant in Southern California.

Work such as integrated sinks have become a company specialty, such as this Vetrazzo project, which was completed for a plumbing supply showroom.



national executive," Hyde continued. "My dad had worked in the business, but he had gotten out of it. His father had been in it his whole life. When I would go back to Indiana, I always had an interest in stone."

Current operations

Minicci Stone processes both residential and commercial work in Southern California. "Right now, the

majority of our work is high-end custom, but we also have in production a hotel, a restaurant and apartments," Hyde said. "Lately, I have increased my custom homes, and decreased my tract home work. For the custom home, we are doing everything you can imagine. We did a 3,000-pound pedestal sink carved out of a block of stone, fireplaces, stair treads, outdoor barbecues."

Hyde credits his workers for being

able to provide a wide range of slab work. "Luckily, the core employees I have already had that experience," he said. "We all worked at another larger company that downsized, and they did all of the custom work there, so they had all of that experience. If we need additional labor, we can train someone."

Machinery in the shop includes a Cougar bridge saw and a Pro Edge III automated edger, both from Park



Following the current design fashion, the company is processing more white marble these days. "White marble is a trend, but you need to have the right mentality," Hyde said. "[When it develops a patina], Americans say a stone is 'wearing out,' but in Europe, they say it is 'wearing in.'"

Industries. Edgework is also processed using two Ghines Sector routers.

"My main machinery is from Park, and it was based on their reputation for repair and parts," Hyde explained. "We use the Sectors for radius work, but a lot of designs are going modern and contemporary, so everything is straight and mitered. The purchase of the ProEdge really decreased our polishing costs and increased our production."

Finishing work is done using Makita grinders, and the company purchases tooling from GraniteK, GranQuartz, Infinity Diamond, Columbia and Braxton Bragg.

Minicci Stone's most recent investment has been a Fiac screw compressor. "I purchased it to be ready to expand in the future, in case I get more machinery, and because it has a drier included. However, it has increased my electrical bill \$200 per month and my service bills about \$500 per year, so if I don't

add more machinery, I may go back to a less expensive compressor. If I want to increase, I definitely have the capability to do it."

The company is doing hard templates, using 1/8-inch-thick Luan in 4-inch strips, which are purchased from GranQuartz. According to Hyde, only a portion of the projects require the customer to be present to physically lay out the templates on the slabs. "If the customer requests it, we do it," Hyde said. "Also, if I feel like it is necessary, I will recommend it, but it is really only 10% of the clients. You don't charge for it up front, but it takes a lot of time."

The production rate at Minicci Stone varies, depending on the type of work being processed. "Depending on the difficulty of the fabrication, we have processed up to 730 square feet per day, but we usually average about 750 square feet per week," Hyde said.

Employee relations

Minicci Stone's workforce has changed in size as its production shifted. "We used to have 24 employees just dedicated to making samples for Vetrazzo and 12 fabricators and installers," Hyde said. "They really had a penchant for quality, and we did that for two years. But since they moved out of state, we have shrunk down to an average staff of 12 employees. Two employees are office staff, and the remainder fabricate and install. All employees can template, fabricate and install, but not all employees can operate the machines.

"I have worked together with a trusted group of expert fabricators and installers for over 12 years," Hyde continued. "They understand the different stones and the clients' expectations. They are capable of doing exterior cladding, integral sinks and any edge detail you can imagine. They are incredibly



Another trend in Minicci Stone's market is straight, contemporary slab work.



difficult projects, I call Chuck Muhlbauer at the Marble Institute of America," he said. "I also speak with Gray LaFortune [at the Ceramic Tile Institute of America]. When I went to the seminars at StonExpo, I met Scott Lardner [of Rocky Mountain Stone], and he was always helpful. I could even call the MIA President, and he would send me spreadsheets on how to set up my accounting, how to job-cost, shop drawing templates, etc. Tony Malisani [of Malisani, Inc.] shared quotation forms with me."

Sales and marketing

Minicci Stone's market stretches across a wide area of Southern California. "We did a hospital in Newport Beach, and we do work in Palm Desert," Hyde said. "I have been very fortunate to work with some top-notch builders, architects and designers to create some really incredible homes. These builders have the experience and systems in place to insure their clients get a very well-executed house. Currently, we are working on a project close to the world-renowned Torrey Pines Golf Course overlooking the Pacific Ocean that has over 2,400 square feet of slab work. Earlier this year, we cut over 200 slabs for a Coronado bay-side residence. I surf, so I like beach projects. With two kids and a company, about the only chance I get to surf or exercise is before or after a meeting at a project near the ocean."

The company's production breakdown is 70% natural stone and 30% quartz surfacing. "We work with

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dedicated and will get to a jobsite at 3 a.m., work Sundays, and do whatever it takes to get the job done. Without their expert knowledge and dedication, I could never accomplish any of the complicated projects we undertake. Each of my core group of workers has their own company credit card, so if they need anything on the jobsite, they can get it right away."

When hiring new people, Hyde relies on the level of experience in the

Southern California market. "There is a labor pool of experienced stone workers in San Diego if we need to add additional staff," he said. "Sometimes we do hire new employees. In that case, we start them in a system of working with a master fabricator to train, and we evaluate them after three months."

Hyde was also complimentary of the stone industry members, who were helpful in helping him advance his business. "On some of these dif-



Slab fireplaces are also a company specialty.

pretty much all of them — Cambria, Caesarstone, Silestone, Chroma, Compac.”

Speaking on challenges, Hyde said he is very careful about matching his resources to his production demands. “This is mainly in terms of bidding,” he said. “We are always able to service existing clients, but sometimes we have to bid only the projects where we can excel, and not bid the ones that are so competitive that only the contractor who makes a mistake will get the job.”

Hyde said that Minicci Stone saw an improved business landscape in 2012. “Last year, sales were definitely improving,” he said. “But it was not too long ago that it seemed like every other job was a one-slab kitchen. In San Diego, we had annual new home building permits drop from 18,000 to 2,000. New home permits really drive the remodel market as well. People sell their old home and buy a new one, and chances are that both will be remodeled. But without new home sales, subcontractors really see decreased opportunities. Many stone shops were

closed as a result.

“One of the interesting things we are seeing now is a result of the home foreclosures,” Hyde continued. “Apartments are scarce, and rents are increasing. Before, rents barely justified prefab granite countertops, but recently, we completed three units for an apartment developer that included Group IV Silestone quartz with complicated waterfall edge details from the countertop to the floor. The apartment owners attract a renter that can afford more, and this increases their asset value.”

Looking to the future, Hyde remains optimistic. “I really think that things are cyclical, and we are

through the worst of it,” he said. “My sales are improving a lot. Tons of apartments being remodeled, and developers run them like tract homes. I’m seeing a lot of restaurants, and hotel remodeling with as many as 60 units. The tract guys are building again, but prices are too low. Definitely five years out, it will be improving. There will be a new generation of people ready to spend money. Some of the money on the sidelines will be ready to play. If you compare 2011 to 2012, a lot of neighborhoods in our region had 15% appreciation. Once people see that opportunity, they want to get involved.” □

Minicci Stone San Diego, CA

Type of work: High-end residential slab work and light commercial

Technology: Cougar bridge saw and a Pro Edge III automated edger, both from Park Industries of St. Cloud, MN; two Sector routers from Ghines of Italy; Makita grinders; tooling from GraniteK, GranQuartz, Infinity Diamond, Columbia and Braxton Bragg; Fiac screw compressor

Number of Employees: 12

Production Rate: Average of 750 square feet of slab work per week