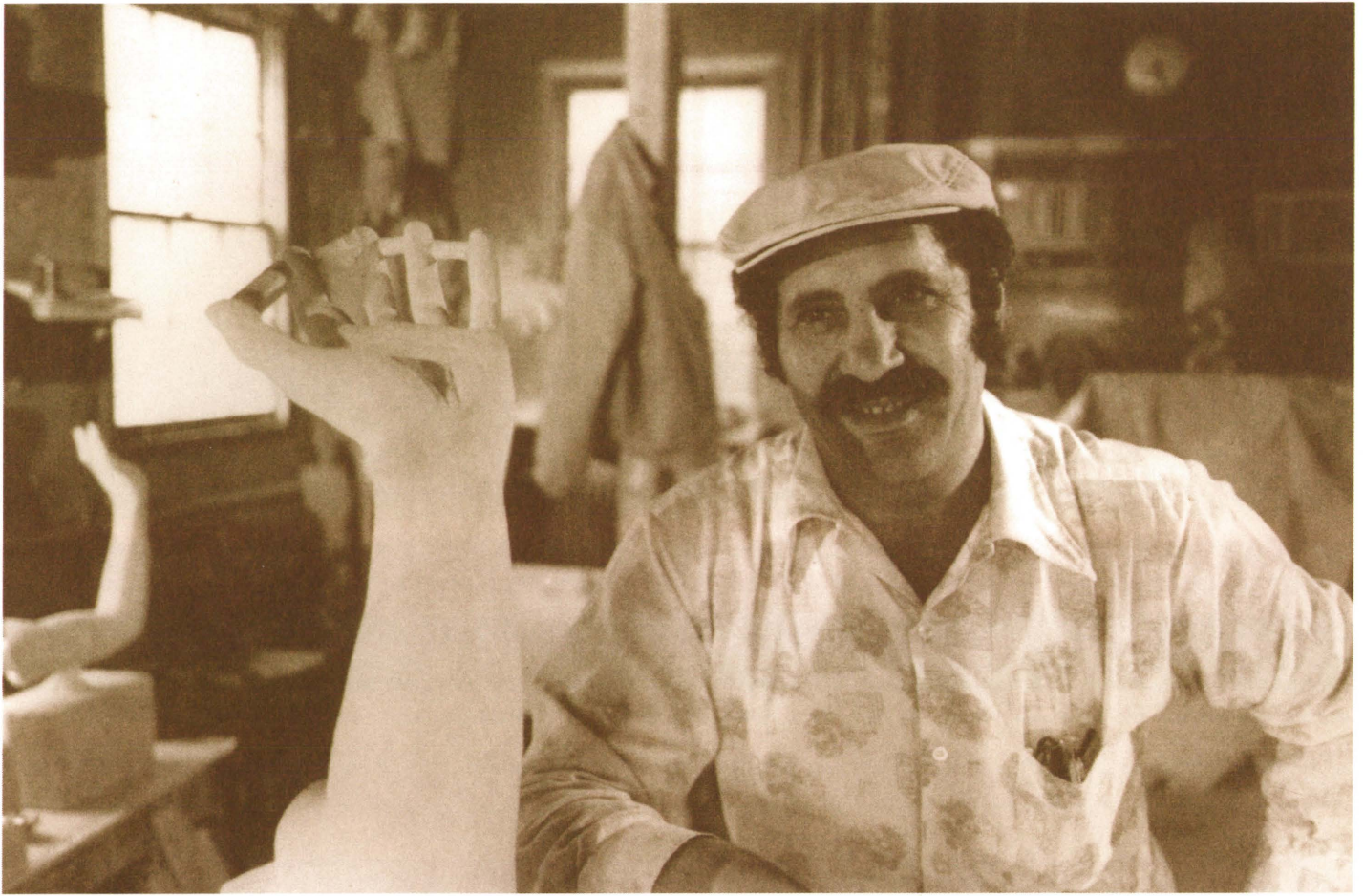




Masters *of the* Building Arts

From the soaring skyscrapers of New York City to the adobe churches of New Mexico, from the sturdy stone walls of New England to the majestic monuments of the nation's capital, master craftworkers in the building arts have brought enduring beauty to our built environment. Working in wood, stone, brick, and metal, in plaster, paint, glass, and clay, they transform designs on paper into three-dimensional works of art. Much depends on their workmanship and skill: on their deep understanding of raw materials, their careful selection and use of tools, their mastery of technique. The final product is the result not only of their knowledge and abilities, but also their creativity and care — their will to excellence.

by Marjorie Hunt



Masters of the Building Arts is dedicated to the memory of stone carver Vincent Palumbo
1936-2000

Artisans in the building trades share a deep appreciation for the aesthetic value and expressive power of technical perfection. They delight in skill and find meaning and pleasure in the poetic qualities of workmanship — in their ability to craft objects of beauty and strength through their special touch. Their great pride and creative spirit, their love for their work, and their commitment to excellence are manifested in a lasting legacy of architectural achievement left behind for generations to come.

This program celebrates the extraordinary artistry of craftspeople in the building arts and explores the many challenges they face today as they work to preserve our nation's past and build for the future. The following pages feature just a few of the many master artisans — stone carvers, masons, carpenters, terra cotta artisans, plasterers, blacksmiths, stained glass artisans, and adobe builders — who have enriched our world with the work of their hands.

Vincent Palumbo

STONE CARVER

WASHINGTON NATIONAL CATHEDRAL, WASHINGTON, D.C.

"I come from generations. My father was a stone carver. My grandfather was a stonecutter. So practically there was no apprenticeship for me. I was growing in the trade."

A craftsman of exceptional artistry and skill, master carver Vincent Palumbo worked at Washington National Cathedral from 1961 until his death in 2000, carving hundreds of sculptures and decorations – from whimsical gargoyles and grotesques to free-standing statues and bas relief carvings. Born in Molfetta, Italy, he was heir to the accumulated knowledge and technical mastery of generations of stoneworkers in his family and community. The spirit of creativity and excellence that infused his work lives on in a monumental legacy in stone and in the hearts and hands of the many young carvers he trained.

Photo by Paul Wagner

Konstantinos Pilarinos

BYZANTINE-STYLE WOODCARVER

BYZANTION WOODWORKING COMPANY, ASTORIA, NEW YORK

"You have to be able to find the design in the wood from your mind. And then you have to learn how to control the tools. You have to have a steady hand."

Konstantinos Pilarinos is one of the world's great masters of the Byzantine style of woodcarving, a tradition that dates to the 4th century. With skill and patience, a steady hand and artist's touch, he transforms wood into sacred art, carving intricate altar screens, bishops' thrones, pulpits, and chanters' pews for Greek Orthodox churches throughout the United States. "I like people to see my work," he says. "I enjoy contributing to the Greek community so that they can see what they have left behind. Even in Greece, this is something special. There are only a few who practice this art."

Photo courtesy Konstantinos Pilarinos



Joe Alonso

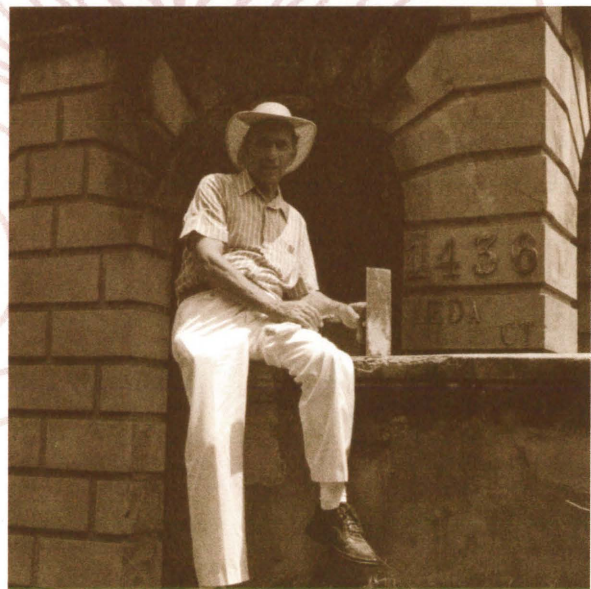
STONEMASON

WASHINGTON NATIONAL CATHEDRAL,
WASHINGTON, D.C.

"I never thought that as a mason I would be building Gothic arches, setting tracery, setting gargoyles. It's just incredible to think that I could do that type of work in today's modern world."

Joe Alonso has worked at Washington National Cathedral for 16 years, first as a stonemason helping to construct this 14th-century-Gothic-style structure and now as the mason foreman in charge of maintaining and restoring the Cathedral's monumental stonework, preserving the beautiful craftsmanship of the generations of masons and carvers who built the Cathedral over the course of nearly a century. "To be the caretaker of all this masonry – of all the skill that went into producing the Cathedral – it's quite awesome," he says.

Photo by Matthew Girard



Earl A. Barthé

PLASTERER

EARL A. BARTHÉ & ASSOCIATES, NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

"You cannot do this work if you don't appreciate it. It's some precious work. It's like a diamond, like a jewel, and it's for you to preserve it."

Earl Barthé is a fifth-generation plasterer from New Orleans, Louisiana. His 150-year-old family company specializes in preserving old plaster walls and ornamental cornices for historic buildings. "When I was a boy, my dream was to be like my father," he says. "I couldn't wait to get a job with plaster." Mr. Barthé takes great pride in the lasting mark his family has left on the city of New Orleans. "I take my grandchildren riding and I say, 'See that building? We did that.' We've had a hand in a lot of places."

Photo by Jean-Paul Rico

David Adams

RESTORATION CARPENTER
ADAMS & ROY PRESERVATION CONTRACTORS, PORTSMOUTH,
NEW HAMPSHIRE

*"I love to get into an old house, take it apart,
and discover how it was made."*

Master carpenter David Adams preserves historic buildings with loving care and consummate skill. Calling himself a "craft historian" and "building archeologist," he reaches back into the past to understand old houses and the people who built them, reading the material evidence left behind in old timbers and chips of paint, searching for the "hand of the craftsman," striving for historical accuracy and authenticity in his work.

Photo by Lynn Martin Graton



Jesus Cardenas

TERRA COTTA MODELER AND MOLDMAKER
GLADDING, McBEAN & COMPANY, LINCOLN, CALIFORNIA

*"I like the creativity and the challenge.
Every piece is different. You have to be able to
improvise — to figure out the best approach."*

With an experienced eye and hand, Jesus Cardenas creates fanciful clay models of gargoyles, cherubs, scrolls, cartouches, and countless other decorative elements used to ornament the facades of buildings across the nation. He carries forward an unbroken tradition of craftsmanship going back more than a century at Gladding, McBean, the oldest continuously operating terra cotta manufacturing firm in the United States.

Photo by Mary Swisher





David "Stoney" Mason

DRY STONE WALL MASON
STARKSBORO, VERMONT

"When you start, Mother Nature tells you where to go with it. I see the stones and where to put them, and it just moves. It just grows."

David Mason has spent 25 years perfecting the art of dry stone wall building. A master of his craft, he delights in his ability to select and place stones so that they fit just perfectly in a wall. "I like to do a good job, the best I can," he says. His passion for his work is reflected in hundreds of strong, beautiful stone walls that grace the landscape near his home in Starksboro, Vermont.

Photo by George Bellerose

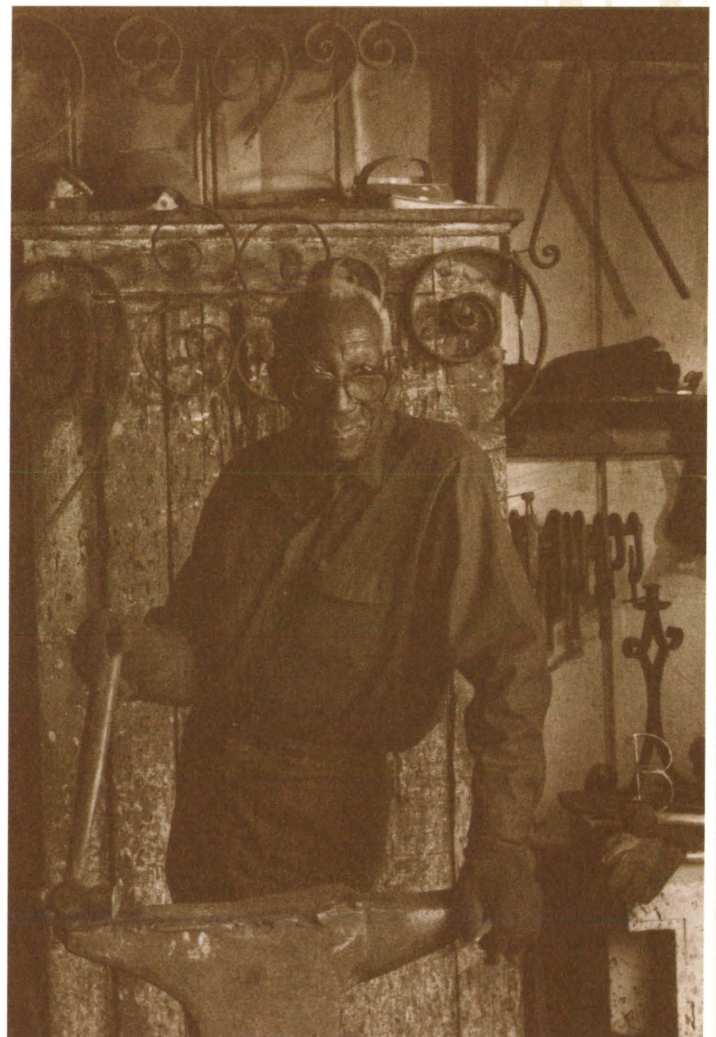
Philip Simmons

BLACKSMITH
CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

"I build a gate, I build it to last two hundred years. If it looks good, you feel good. I build a gate and I just be thinking about two hundred years. If you don't, you're not an honest craftsman."

For 70 years, Philip Simmons has forged metal into beautiful ornamental pieces that bear the mark of his skilled hand and creative spirit. His intricate gates, grilles, and railings decorate the city of Charleston, where he has lived and worked most of his life. At age 88, Mr. Simmons's greatest passion is passing on the skills of his trade to a new generation of blacksmiths. "You got to teach kids while the sap is young, just like you got to beat the iron while it's hot," he says.

Photo © Milton Morris



Nick Benson

STONE CARVER AND LETTERER
THE JOHN STEVENS SHOP, NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

"My style is a combination of my father's and my grandfather's, and it's constantly evolving. That development is what keeps the passion alive."

A third-generation stone carver and letterer, Nick Benson specializes in hand-carved gravestones and elegant architectural lettering for public buildings, memorials, and monuments across the country. He learned his craft at the age of 15 from his father John Benson, a renowned letter carver who left his mark on such national treasures as the John F. Kennedy Memorial, the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial, and the National Gallery of Art. A master in his own right, Nick Benson has received the commission to design and carve the inscriptions for the planned World War II Memorial.

Photo by Winnie Lambrecht, © Smithsonian Institution



Frank Baiocchi

MARBLE MASON
MT. AIRY, MARYLAND

"I fell in love with the permanence of the trade. It's a great feeling to know that you've done something that will be here for a long time — that will last even after you're gone."

A marble mason for 40 years, Frank Baiocchi's love for his craft and his dedication to excellence are manifested in finely crafted buildings throughout the Washington, D.C., area, including the elaborate marble floors of Washington National Cathedral. A long-time member of the International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers, he takes great pride in the precision, speed, and care he brings to his work. "An expert marble mason, all he sees are joints," says Mr. Baiocchi. "We're looking beyond the colors and the design. We're looking at the setting of it — the mechanics of it. The challenge is getting everything to fit."

Photo by Charles Weber, © Smithsonian Institution



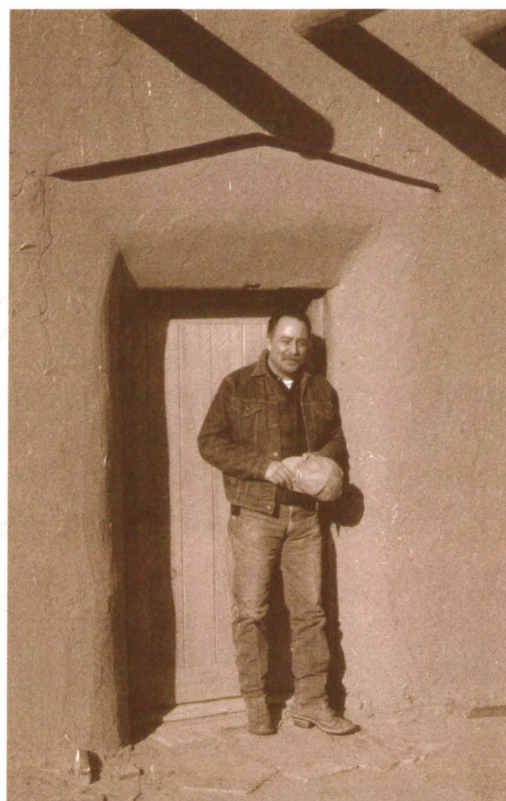
Dieter Goldkuhle

STAINED GLASS ARTISAN
RESTON, VIRGINIA

"You're always learning, always refining your skills. You never stop accumulating a more intimate understanding of your craft."

Born into a family of glass tradesmen in northern Germany, Dieter Goldkuhle has been making and restoring stained glass windows for over 40 years. A master of his trade, he has devoted his life to perfecting his art. His lovingly crafted work includes the magnificent rose window, designed by Rowan LeCompte, on the west facade of Washington National Cathedral. "To cut into a beautiful sheet of colored glass – to make something that did not exist before – there's a tremendously satisfying reward coming from that," he says of his work.

Photo by Donovan Marks, courtesy Washington National Cathedral



Albert Parra

ADOBE BUILDER
ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

"It's a journey, a lesson in life. Every day you're making adobe, it's with a purpose. You put some soul into it. It's a soul building for me – there's a whole philosophy of life."

Albert Parra has been working with adobe since he was nine years old. Raised by his great-grandmother in Old Town Albuquerque, he learned the trade from an old-time master craftsman, Don Gaspar Garcia. "He took me under his wing, and life was never the same again," he says. For Albert Parra, building with adobe is a way of connecting to his family, his community, and his cultural heritage through a rich tradition of craftsmanship going back more than a thousand years in his local region. "Heritage, family, work – it's all cohesive," he says. "One becomes a catalyst for the next."

Photo by Elaine Thatcher, © Smithsonian Institution

Marjorie Hunt is a folklorist and education specialist with the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. She received her Ph.D. in folklore and folklife from the University of Pennsylvania in 1995. Her extensive work in the area of occupational culture and the building arts includes her recent book The Stone Carvers, published by Smithsonian Institution Press. Dr. Hunt is the curator of the Masters of the Building Arts program.