



Photographs by Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

Robert Carpenter, a carver for the Petrillo Stone Corporation, laboring over stone as part of the effort to repair the Verizon building, a ground zero landmark.

A Landmark Under the Knife (Actually, the Chisel)

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Artisans in Stone and Bronze Remake a Building Scarred on 9/11

By GLENN COLLINS

In the inexorable rebirth of ground zero, it is at last the season for the masters of bronze and stone.

And so, in a century-old former tin-ceiling plant in Brooklyn under the penumbra of the Manhattan Bridge, Milton Osborne, a 67-year-old foundryman, is pouring a molten orange river of bronze, casting a pair of shiny, soaring pelican wings.

At the same moment, in an echoing stoneworking shed in Mount Vernon, N.Y., Robert Carpenter, a 57-year-old carver, is pounding a fine carbide chisel, deepening the intricate Art Deco pattern in a 2,000-pound block of Indiana limestone.

Their mission is to heal the gaping wounds in the Verizon building, at 140 West Street, which was battered by not one, but three, of its neighbors at ground zero: the north and south towers of the World Trade Center and 7 World Trade Center, which collapsed next door.

At the Excalibur Bronze Foundry, Mr. Osborne is helping to recreate a fantastical original bronze bas-relief of whales, pelicans and sea horses, replacing the tortured remnants of a blasted 72-foot ornamental entrance on Washington Street.

And at the Petrillo Stone Corporation, Mr. Carpenter and other master carvers are chiseling away at 5,000 cubic feet of limestone and granite for the 32-story Verizon building.

Mr. Carpenter, whose name belies three decades in the

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Brasswork at the Verizon building was damaged on Sept. 11, 2001. Now, Bill Gold, president of Excalibur Brass Foundry, at right, has artisans like Herbert Wu working to recreate the intricate artistic flourishes at the Art Deco building, once home to the New York Telephone Company.

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service of stone, was laboriously carving a bell (as in Ma) for the 1926 Art Deco building, a landmark at the corner of Vesey Street and once the headquarters of the New York Telephone Company.

Most of the new stonework will bridge the damage to Verizon's south- and east-facing walls. Granite and limestone will join 1,800 replacement windows, 520,000 facade bricks, 22,500 cinder blocks and 93 tons of structural steel in the inventory of reconstruction.

For weeks, a dozen Petrillo workers have methodically confronted stone after stone. Although they are using digital photography to generate new cutting blueprints and computer technology to pre-gouge the blocks for hand carving, Mr. Carpenter said the artisans were working in a way "that hasn't much changed since the age of the Egyptians."

"It's pretty simple," he said. "You use tools to pulverize the stone, removing more and more until the true form is revealed."

Michael Orekunrin, who learned wood carving in Nigeria and worked stone for three years at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, is among those chiseling with Mr. Carpenter. So is Celine Cannon, who was born into a family of carvers in Dublin.

Parts of the \$140 million restoration of the Verizon building, such as the polished grayish-pink Stony Creek granite from Connecticut, will look new. But the decorative limestone will get the opposite treatment. It will be intentionally weathered, blasted with gritty black silicon carbide in a 10-foot-tall sand-blasting booth.

"To make the new stone match, we have to age it a bit," said Frank R. Petrillo, the third-generation president of the 96-year-old company, which crafted the original travertine for Lincoln Center as well as replacement marble for Tiffany & Company on Fifth Avenue.

If the builders of the pyramids might be at home with these stone carvers, they might also find familiar rituals at the Excalibur foundry, which is using a 5,000-year-old casting procedure — the lost-wax method — to painstakingly restore the Verizon building's intricate bronzework.

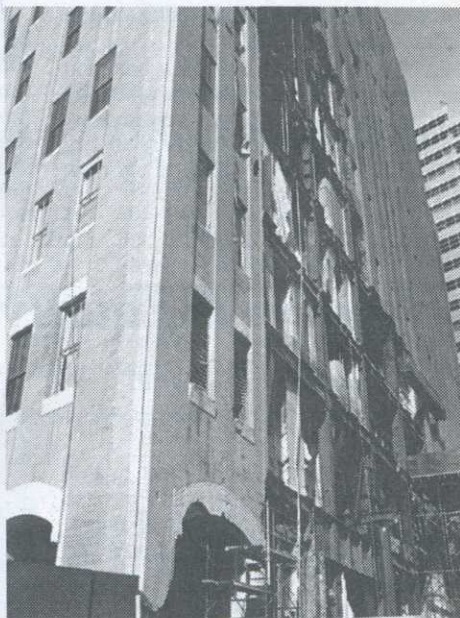
On a recent afternoon, the roar of a 2,300-degree gas furnace marked the melting of 200 pounds of bronze for the pour. Mr. Osborne and two colleagues, Winel Najac and Martin Kirkland, skimmed the slag from the

crust of the bronze within the two-foot-high crucible, then poured the 2,050-degree metal into the molds.

"The mold is now hot enough to light cigarettes," said Bill Gold, 67, the president of Excalibur, which also restored the bronzework in landmarks including the main reading room of the New York Public Library.

Mr. Osborne, the foundryman, still cannot bring himself to visit ground zero. "But I'm taking it in small steps," he said. "Right now, I'm sending my good thoughts into the ether." He is eager, however, to visit his craftsmanship when the Verizon building has been rebuilt, he said.

The team at Petrillo will install more than 400 pieces of decorative stone by September, affixing each fitted block into the Verizon exterior walls with stainless steel anchors.



Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

The Verizon building, seen in 2002, was damaged when its neighbors fell.

"The fact that it's for ground zero gives us the incentive to make it all perfect," said Fred Clayton, 51, a stone planer who has worked for Petrillo for a quarter-century. "We feel that all eyes are on our work — but we're doing this for us."

The craftsmen who created the New York Telephone Company's flagship in the 1920's felt the same way. Following Sept. 11, Mr. Carpenter said, when he had to clamber up the ruined facade to make measurements for the replacement stone, he discovered "little birds' nests created by the original carvers" high over the entranceway, invisible to passers-by for nearly eight decades.

"It was gorgeous work," he said, "even though these were details that no one would ever see. They had respect for what they did — just as we do."