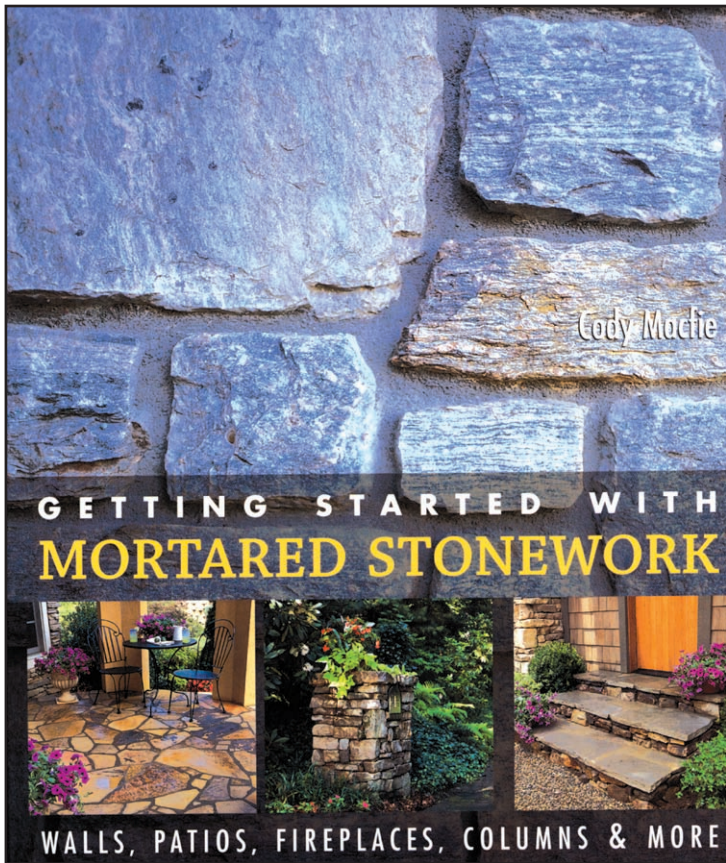


A New Book Set In Stone Lays Out The Basics



A book signing for "Getting Started with Mortared Stonework" will be held Saturday, July 8, at 11 a.m. at Highland Books in College Plaza.

Cody Macfie is the owner of both French Broad Stone Supply, pictured here, and Steep Creek Stoneworks, which does both commercial and residential stone masonry work throughout the region. (Times photo by Sean Trapp)

By Sean Trapp
Staff Writer

Do-it-yourselfers are usually willing to tackle any project, whether it's building a set of bookshelves, renovating a bathroom, or adding new deck. But when it comes to stonework, your average handyman will hang up his tools call in a professional.

Brevard native Cody Macfie may change that with his first book, "Getting Started with Mortared Stonework."

A second-generation stonemason and a freelance writer, the 29-year-old Macfie has created a book that leads readers from the basics of stonemasonry through projects such as columns, walls, fireplaces, walkways and steps.

"I think, with a little bit of hard work, anybody can accomplish these projects," said Macfie.

"Of course, it'll take a little

bit of hard work, sweat and patience," he said, noting that some of the projects only require a wheelbarrow full of stone, while others require a truckload.

"I think rock work is not something that you can go at in one afternoon and make it look good. But if you're willing to put in that time and effort, then the end result can be very satisfying."

Macfie said he also hoped the book would serve as a resource for contractors, architects and homeowners who planned on hiring someone else to do their stonework.

"It's not just intended for the average do-it-yourselfer," he said.

"One of my goals was to make people more familiar with stonemasonry, so that if you're paying someone to do that work, you'll be familiar with what's going on, and what to look out for."

Macfie first got the idea for

the book about three years ago. He had just gone out on his own as a stonemason, and was looking for books to get inspiration and see samples of different styles. He realized there wasn't much out there.

Having worked as a writer for Fine Homebuilding magazine and The Transylvania Times, Macfie decided he would write his own book. He made an outline and contacted Lark Books in Asheville.

"It was good timing," said Macfie.

"This was a niche they were trying to fill; they knew there was a need for this type of book. I just happened to take the idea to them at the right time."

From start to finish, the book project took about two years to finish. At times, it became difficult for Macfie to balance the book with his stonemasonry business, Steep

Creek Stoneworks.

"The business grew rapidly as I got involved with the book," he said.

"So my day job, writing the book, slowly turned into a night job."

In fact, Macfie's business has grown so much that he has opened a second company, French Broad Stone Supply, to provide stone, masonry supplies and tools for his crews and other masons and homeowners.

Although Macfie has only been running his own business for three years, he's been around stonemasonry his entire life. Both his father, John Macfie, and his uncle, Jim Macfie, are masons.

"My dad's been a stone mason as long as I've been alive," he said.

"I grew up playing on the rock piles in summer when I wasn't in school. I remember

my dad coming home in winter and wiping the cement dust off his jacket.

"I didn't always want to become a stone mason, but even growing up, I appreciated what they did. I always heard people saying, 'Those Macfie boys are really great stone masons.'"

Macfie didn't start working in the family trade until five years ago.

"I didn't want to become a stone mason until I traveled all summer, spent all my money, and came back and needed a job," said Macfie, laughing.

He began working as a laborer with his uncle Jim, learning the fundamentals, such as chiseling, stacking and shaping.

The longer he worked with stone, the more he became aware of the relationships between the stones he worked

with, and he began to really appreciate the artistry of stonework.

"You kind of develop a relationship between stones for yourself," he said.

"The more you work with stones, the more you start to notice and observe other stonework."

"With any kind of artwork, it varies from individual to individual. Everyone has different styles. Standing back, you may not notice, but up close, every stone mason's work is unique. It's a beautiful art form."

Macfie will hold a book signing at Highland Books in Brevard on Saturday at 11 a.m. Copies of his book are currently available at Highland Books, as well as at French Broad Stone Supply on the Old Hendersonville Highway and at Barnes & Noble book stores.

Local Band Plays Historic Ryman Auditorium

By Carleigh Kate Knight
Staff Writer

The Steep Canyon Rangers' fresh and vibrant bluegrass sound recently echoed through the historic and prestigious Ryman Auditorium, once home to the famous Grand Ole Opry.

A packed audience gave the Transylvania County bluegrass band a standing ovation, signaling to mandolin player Mike Guggino that the band is really soaring.

The band opened for Old Crow Medicine Show on June 22.

"Nothing's compared to the Grand Ole Opry," said Guggino.

"To play in that environment and be well received [and] knowing the history and everyone who's played there, it was surreal — a career defining moment for sure."

The Ryman Auditorium housed the Opry during its heyday between 1943 and 1974, when many of country music's legends, including Hank Williams, performed on its boards.

The Steep Canyon Rangers, who began in Chapel Hill seven years ago, has reason to feel dreamlike.

Its latest CD release, "One Dime at a Time," hit number two on the national bluegrass charts, and the title track song is currently spending time in the number one spot on the bluegrass charts.

Beginnings

As natural as bluegrass sounds coming from the 20s-something quintet, the genre didn't appeal to any of them



The Steep Canyon Rangers (above) perform at the famous Ryman Auditorium. (Courtesy photo)

until college.

Woody Platt (guitarist), Graham Sharp (banjo), Charles Humphrey (bass) and Lizzie Hamilton (fiddle) were all UNC-Chapel Hill students who stumbled across bluegrass when its popularity began to rise in the late 90s.

At the same time, Platt's childhood friend Guggino started playing mandolin and experimenting with bluegrass after two years of classical guitar training at Brevard College.

While all the band members loved Rock'n'Roll, old Country and even reggae, the native North Carolinians never paid much attention to bluegrass.

"Here we are from the biggest bluegrass state but

didn't have an interest for all those years, but we all discovered it in college," said Guggino, who eventually transferred to UNC-Asheville to study history.

"We were just playing in bars for fun and we did it for a couple of years, and it started to go really well," he said.

Around 2000 and 2001, the band members all graduated from college, and while they never expected it, realized they could have a career in music.

"Nobody was really on a career path after college... We were all 'liberal artists' and it seemed natural to just keep playing," said Guggino.

But the 'liberal artists' didn't just keep making music, they got down to the details of

becoming professional musicians.

They started playing more and more music festivals, organizing their gigs and focusing on the business.

And it paid off, but not without a huge stumbling block.

In 2004, Hamilton, the only female, left the group on good terms to pursue her personal life. And a lot changed.

"Overall, the sound just became more male," said Guggino.

"Even traveling with a girl is different. Our interactions were different, and we developed a more aggressive style."

After several failed attempts of female fill-ins, a friend of the band hooked them up with Nicky Sanders, a

fiddle player who was studying at Berklee College of Music in Boston.

Soon after Hamilton left, the band signed with the Rebel Records music label, which boasts the likes of Doc Watson, Ralph Stanley, and the Del McCourey Band.

"To be associated with them has been a good foot in the door for us and has distributed our music worldwide," said Guggino.

Guggino said it was important from the beginning of their careers to play original bluegrass. They write the arrangements, lyrics, chords and melodies.

The Steep Canyon Rangers will occasionally cover a song. In fact, their number one song, "One Dime at a Time," is a cover.

"If we cover a song, it has to be so good and pretty obscure," Platt said.

Most of the time, they write their own songs.

"We consider ourselves traditional bluegrass musicians, so we have to stay in boundaries to be in that style," said Guggino.

"But we have to continue to write and create original music to add something to the genre, so it evolves."

"It would be so flattering if someone down the road thought a Steep Canyon song was an 'old standard.'"

With satellite radio and public radio stations across the country supporting and playing The Steep Canyon Rangers' songs, perhaps it's a reasonable thought.

The band has already had the honor of playing with some bluegrass greats.

"Meeting and playing with Gillian Welch and David Rawlings was amazing. To be sandwiched in between your heroes, people you've admired for years can be intimidating. But it makes us step up to the plate," said Guggino.

"And they can be very complimentary and appreciative of what we're trying to do."

While the band isn't touring around, Guggino and Platt live in Brevard, while the rest of the guys live in Asheville.

"I like the small town and the musical community here. You can walk down the street in Brevard and see someone playing the guitar on the street," said Guggino.

Playing in Brevard and western North Carolina has a special charm and pressure for The Steep Canyon Rangers.

"In the Northeast and out West, people are starved for good bluegrass so we're well received outside of the south-east. We are more of a novelty," he said.

"But there is a lot of good bluegrass musicians here, and people who know what it sounds like, so there is a lot of pressure. But when they show us a strong appreciation, we know we are doing it right."

The Steep Canyon Rangers will also perform at the Mountain Song Festival at the Brevard Music Center on Sept. 16 with Doc Watson, and local band The Biscuit Burners among others.

The band is also performing at Bele Chere in Asheville during the last weekend of July.

For more information about Steep Canyon Rangers, go to www.steepcanyon.com.