

Bang A Stone

by Jacqueline M. Duda

Beallsville resident David Therriault wrestles with the question of whether to call himself an artist. “People say to me, ‘Oh, you’re a sculptor.’ But I don’t know. I make things out of stone, but it’s still a stone,” says Therriault.

With no formal training in art, Therriault picked up his inspiration and skills two decades ago, working with a Japanese architect at a Potomac garden center. It was then that he learned about lines and balance, and the beauty and soul of stone.

InSight: *What do you mean when you say that stone has soul?*

Therriault: It’s how the weight and the strength in a garden work—the strength of the stone. It’s unchangeable. You can cut the stone, but it still retains a part of itself. Like boulders sitting in a creek, it’s how they sit in nature. Even when a rock isn’t that big, you have a sense that it’s been there for a long time and hasn’t changed. It’s stone; the way it always was. My carvings retain the shape of the stone. In some of the sculptures I make, I try to bring that out, whether it’s with metal or glass as accents.

InSight: *Do you envision a specific design when you look at a particular stone?*

Therriault: I’m not absolutely sure



David Therriault

how I get inspired. Usually, when I’m making something, I have a couple of stones just sitting around that I walk by for a while. I see the possibilities, the weights and the lines. And they just turn into what they turn into from that. I might look for a particular stone for an upright birdbath, because I need a certain shape for that. Otherwise, I don’t design the sculptures before I start. I think about them for a while, maybe sketch little pictures on a piece of paper. It takes a while. I usually have a few different sculptures going at the same time.

InSight: *What do you mean by the “weights and lines”?*

Therriault: The weight and lines show depth, and balance the piece. A lot of times, people don’t know that they’re looking at things. Your eye will move; you can train it to move in certain directions by opening up areas and closing others—by stretching a line lengthwise, for instance. The lines I carve into a piece are to give it balance, or fool the eye. Some lines stretch the length of a stone, while others, symmetrical lines, balance the piece. Vertical lines give the view I

Artists Among Us

want you to see. Horizontal lines hold the structure together. It's very consistent in my pieces. Some sculptors work toward a focal point in their pieces. I work the other way around. The lines are my finishing touch. I guess you could call it a Native American/Asian/"Zenny" influence. That's what the lines are all about: the Japanese influence. Like Feng Shui:

They have a calming influence.

InSight: *Is it intimidating to work with such a large medium?*

Therriault: Not really. I use electric diamond blades to carve and grind the stone. Hoisting them is a matter of leverage. I use bars and levers; move them little by little. I have a tractor, too. And I always have some stones

lying around here to work with when I come up with an idea. I have a friend who does finishing work on stone and I buy his leftovers. Or I buy them—limestone, granite—from retail stores, too. Not all my sculptures are large. Some are small, anything from coasters to lamps, picture frames and mirrors. Lots of different pieces of all shapes and sizes.

InSight: *When and how did you start selling your pieces?*

Therriault: I opened the retail garden shop in 1989. The garden shop and the plants and my sculpture are a whole package, really. My wife was my inspiration. She kept saying, "You're pretty good at this, you should keep doing it." People saw my work and they liked it. I started taking it out of the closet. About four years ago, I joined the Countryside Artisans Studio Tour. It was helpful to show people my work. It gets a reaction, so I know the effect my sculptures have on people. It helps to make something, and not hide it anymore. People like it, and you make more.

InSight: *What does designing stone do for you?*

Therriault: It gives me the same thing that some people get from their iPods. It takes me away. It's something that I can concentrate on, and it makes the time go fast. Takes me away from everyday reality. The garden center has been open for 18 years now. It's a great place to visit and it makes people happy. It's not going to make me rich, but it's enough. I'm home for my kids. I don't have to put on a suit. I like this a whole lot. It's a good thing: to be by myself and bang on rocks.



David Therriault sells his stone sculptures at his charming store, Alden Farms, in Beallsville.

David Therriault's sculptures are featured at Alden Farms in upper Montgomery County at 19215 Beallsville Road in Beallsville. To view additional photos of his work, go online to: www.aldenfarms.net. Therriault can be reached by calling 1-301-972-7183.