



STAFF PHOTO BY RYAN CORRELL

Master mason: John Shell, owner of Creative Stone in Springfield Township, stands in front of old stonework in Clarkston's Lakeview Cemetery, for which he does repairs.

The Stone Age

Demand for mason's work rock solid

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The fruits of John Shell's labor hearken back to bygone days. To days when a home's beauty took precedence over the cost of building it.

To days when the smallest of details — carvings on mantles and doorway arches — were never overlooked.

As a stone mason, the day-to-day labor that Shell performs even conjures up images of another period in time.

"It's like plowing the land," said Shell, who has owned Creative Stone, a stone masonry and fabrication business, in Springfield Township since the 1980s.

Stone masonry "is still very physically demanding," he said. "We're consistently lifting over 100 pounds every day."

But a piece of the past is

exactly what Shell and his customers are seeking, the 41-year-old Davisburg stone mason said.

"Personally ... I don't like doing a lot of paperwork ... sitting behind a computer all day doesn't do it for me. Doing it the old-fashioned way makes me feel good."

Likewise, Shell's customers appreciate his work — intricate fieldstone walls and hand-carved, stone mantle pieces, to name a few examples — for the same reason.

"It's the fact that someone ... is taking a step back in time and doing it the old-fashioned way. I mean, why aren't we using a laser gun?" said Shell.

Shell also sees a connection between society's advancement and people's desire to incorporate elements from simpler times into today's lifestyle.

"I just think that the more technological we become as people, the more people appreciate natural and high quality materi-

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Simply beautiful: Old-style ornateness can remind homeowners of simpler days.



Down-to-earth design: Shell says the more technologically-oriented society becomes, the more people want their homes to reflect the hand-crafted, natural beauty of bygone eras.

als in their homes," he said.

"People come back down to earth when they come home."

Although the nature of Shell's work has evolved over the years, he and his crew still spend many hours lugging heavy materials, chiseling away at rock and splitting gigantic boulders.

Stone is being used less often as a structural building material and more often as a decorative veneer, which also makes stone work more affordable, Shell said.

The trend also allows Shell and other stone masons to focus on craftsmanship and details, he said.

masonry, in general ... but it's become crafted a little bit more," because of the increasing popularity of veneer work, he said.

Not only does Creative Stone, one of a handful of stone masonry businesses in southeast Michigan, continue to do projects like restoring the walls and pillars at Lakeview Cemetery in downtown Clarkston, but also to create new stone structures for residential developments and wealthy homeowners throughout Oakland County.

Shell is currently doing work on the Bridge Valley develop-

ment in Davisburg.

Although stone is particularly well-suited to the Clarkston area for historical reasons — many of the area's older structures were built with stone, an abundant resource in North Oakland County — the material "is everywhere, now," Shell said.

But the trend — like a resurgent interest in older cultures and the cities of stone created by the Mayas, Incas, Greeks and Romans — ultimately has to do with human nature, Shell said.