

STILLWATER RUNS DEEP

STILLWATER STONework PRODUCES STONE FURNISHINGS AS SCULPTURE



WATER IS A PROMINENT ELEMENT IN THE WORK OF STONE ARTIST STEVE HITMAN. EVEN THOUGH HIS CURRENT HOME OF LAS VEGAS, NEVADA, ISN'T KNOWN MUCH FOR ITS WATER, HITMAN GREW UP ON THE EAST COAST NEAR THE OCEAN AND HAS SPENT MUCH OF HIS LIFE AROUND WATER. THE ESSENCE OF THAT FLOWING NATURAL ELEMENT PLAYS PROMINENTLY IN THE FUNCTIONAL ARTWORK HE CREATES FROM STONE.

Stillwater Stonework is the name Hitman has given to his business of creating unique, free-standing stone furnishings for homes and offices, as well as floor inlays, wall reliefs and inserts, fireplace surrounds, and kitchen and bathroom design work. Usually working alone, he has created tables, corner pieces, pedestals, candleholders, centerpieces, and many more items designed to fit the personality of the owner.

"My pieces are literally one of a kind – no mass production, for individuals," he said. "You look at my work and compare it to anything that's out there, you'll see it's unique."

When Hitman sets out to create a work of functional art – "jewelry for the home or office" he calls it – many elements converge. It's helpful for him to understand the personality of the person who wants the piece, see where it is going to be placed, and look at the other elements that will surround it. He considers the geometry of the placement, the

by *Liz McGeachy*

Photos Courtesy Nicole Purcell Moonlighting Photography



Above: The dramatic outline shape of Fishbone, one of Hitman's large marble pedestal tables. Fishbone uses a masterful splice of Sahara Sunset and Emperador Light marbles for a one-of-kind table.

Inset & Below: Angel Falls table lamp is a functional piece of art, much like the art deco masters of design created common, everyday objects of elegant functionality.



emotion the piece should convey, and how the natural world will become a part of the design – from the flow of water to the strength of earth and stone to the vibrancy of fire. This convergence of elements takes time and thought, but the outcome is a work of art, not just any old coffee table.

"You look at most tables or other pieces of furniture and you see they display absence of thought," he said. "Most are either a square or rectangle. And that's just the top. The bases are either square or rectangular too. I shape things. I use geometry, color, and texture to express emotive content."

One example is the "Fish Bone" table he made from Sahara Sunset and Emperador Light marbles. Instead of straight edges, the lines on the tabletop are scalloped, and the pedestal base is made up of several curved pieces. Similarly, the fluid movements in the formed edges and natural veins of his "T-Jetty" pedestal table make it a striking feature of the entryway where it resides. "T-Jetty" is made from Rojo Alicante and Opal Creme marbles.

"These materials are warm in color, satin-like in surface texture, and soft, when force is applied to them when shaping," Hitman said. "The majority of marble has those characteristics, though there are a multitude of exceptions. Surely those are some of the reasons I'm attracted to that type of stone."

Hitman grew up in Elberon, NJ, where he spent a lot of time in the ocean, learning to surf at an early age. He thought a lot about weather and about the movement of water, and that background shows up in his work.

He intended to go into law and did study political science at Fairleigh Dickinson University and Monmouth University, but he became disillusioned with the profession. Instead he ended up working as a helper for master stone craftsman Antonio Campanelli in Ocean, NJ. It was meant to be a temporary job, but he stayed nine years, learning the philosophy and techniques of working with natural stone from Campanelli, who was originally from the Abruzzo region of Italy.

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Hitman's distinctive pedestal tables are one-of-a-kind pieces, but they share some common attributes: superb styling, construction, finishing, and attention to details. Top, left: Fishbone, top view and detail of the scalloped top edge, showing the Emperor/Sahara Sunset splice.

At bottom left: Top view and detail of Hitman's Coral Cloud table.

Right: Stella Maris doubles as a display column pedestal and a classic sculptural statement.



Hitman later moved to West Palm Beach, Florida where he worked with Spanish stone artist Luis Montoya, who helped Hitman hone his craft of transforming blocks of stone into furnishings for the home and office.

Now located in Las Vegas, Hitman continues his craft, doing jobs throughout the country. With the use of a quiet, portable generator, he's able to move wherever he's needed using "whatever tools I can get my hands on" – hand power tools, all types of grinders, pneumatic chisels, and others. He works with several kinds of stone – marble, granite, jade, onyx, and others – "but my particular favorite is marble. Marble has a lot of distinctive character. I've got this thing for marble, its colors. And it's difficult to work with. I like that challenge. You need to be challenged all the time. That's the only way you progress."

Hitman likes working directly with the people for whom he's creating his designs. It's important for him to make a personal connection.

"You can be technically the greatest artist in the world but if you can't connect with people, well ... This business is personal," he said. "A lot of the time, you're working in someone's home in their kitchens and bathrooms. How much more intimate can you get than that?"

Creating this personal connection helps Hitman see what is "in their mind's eye" and understand what his clients want in a piece. His goal is to create the kind of piece his clients want and that portrays a strong emotional and sensory experience. He says four components come into this development of a dynamic piece: logic, mathematics, science, and rhythm. All these components are found in the natural world, which brings us back to his focus on water.

"Surfers understand this," he said. "They watch the ebb and flow of the waves, feeling the power of the water under that placid surface, knowing that a wave will be born from that placid surface, a wave that's unique, that will break unlike the one before it or the one after it. That's why art is an extension of nature – it's a natural

rhythm you can't ignore. That's why stone – be it marble, granite, onyx, even jade – is just like water. It all flows."

Hitman likes to believe that his work accomplishes this goal, whether it's by portraying power and strength with an executive's table or peacefulness with a curving, fluid centerpiece design. If it expresses an emotion, he's succeeded.

"It's a passion for me," he said. "Sure I'd like to make a million dollars, but that's not what comes first. That's about third or fourth. The art-

work comes first."

At one time, Hitman wanted to go into law to help people. Now he feels like he's helping people through his designs.

"It's that old cliché: A person's home is his castle. It's their only sanctuary. If I'm making someone's home more personal to them, I'm making a difference in their lives – a place where they can be themselves."

To see more examples of Hitman's work and more about his philosophy of design and working with stone, visit www.stillwaterstonework.com.



Above: Two views of Hitman's T-Jetty, a pedestal hall table crafted from a contrasting blend of Rojo Alicante and Opal Creme marbles.