



LOCAL CUSTOM



Stone Poems *by Philip Alvarez*

STONEMASON CARMINE LUPPINO

Mt. Kisco-based stonemason Carmine Luppino estimates he's built "miles of [stone] walls throughout Westchester and Fairfield counties, to New York City and back again," he says. But walls happen to be the least of it.

Consider one client's property, which showcases the full array of his art. Stone here is transformed into an olympic-size indoor riding rink, paths and terraced formal gardens, guesthouses and gazebos, pools and pergolas. There's even a grotto, with an elephant-form water element flanked by a pair of curved stairs rising to a balustraded belvedere overlooking the impressive grounds.

For the renovation of a 19th century smokehouse, Luppino matched the original hand-cut stones. It's because of this that his work integrates seamlessly with the extensive landscape design; it looks as if it's always been there. At another location, glacier-sized 18-inch-thick pavers and boulders give the place an ancient Celtic feel and look as if a giant had scattered them as he walked.

"I started working at 10 and learned from a father who was a great teacher," says Luppino. "He was old-school Italian. If you didn't get it the first time you got a kick in the ass. He'd pull me off the little league field to work. By 13 I could handle any project like an adult." Not surprisingly, Luppino started his own company at 18.

On any given day Luppino is working on six or more projects simultaneously. He oversees approximately 35 masons trained under his auspices and about the same number of crew. These skilled craftsmen imbue the

material with a life of its own. Individual stones are first bench-worked, meaning faces and edges are chiseled by hand, a process that gives every stone a contoured profile. "There's a lot of work that goes into the stone before it goes up on the wall," Luppino says. This process gives each stone the presence, dimension and detail found on ancient structures in places such as Tuscany, Provence or the Cotswolds.

Luppino prides himself on "a very high level of custom work," all of it accomplished without the use of saws, which can never replicate the character of hand-chiseling. Exact standards and attention to detail—from mortar depth to pattern variation, or the ratio between vertical and horizontal joints insures a unique creation every time. Bluestone, limestone, granite, fieldstone, cobble, brick...there's no material Carmine hasn't mastered. His projects range from stone paths and patios (set in every conceivable fashion from herringbone to mosaic to flag) to building veneers, whole structures and, yes, walls. "You name it, we've done it," says Luppino. It's poetry in stone.

To say his clients are discriminating is an understatement. Projects can cost from \$50,000 to several million, involving major landscaping, specialized stones and master carvers jetted in from far reaches. His client list, which he won't reveal in print, reads like a Who's Who of Westchester and Fairfield County society. Chances are if the resident of the estate whose gates you see from the road is famous, it was Luppino who did the stonework. **LUPPINO LANDSCAPING & MASONRY, LLC, MT. KISCO, 914-666-7028, LUPLANDMASONRY@HOTMAIL.COM.**



Get Wet | The ornate belvedere from a frog's eye view (TOP LEFT). **Sitting Pretty** | A garden cherub (TOP RIGHT) perches on a Luppino stone wall. **Form Shifter** | Steps, posts and walls (ABOVE) sculpt the land. **Stone Sage** | The artisan surrounded by a world of his making.

