

Creative Living

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Stone cutter to sculptor—a fine line

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

Francesco Acitelli of Detroit is frequently described as a stone cutter and carver. That's an extremely modest description for an outstanding sculptor who works in stone, metal and wood.

His work is on display at the AmeriCenters building, 7 West Square Lake, Bloomfield Hills. The opening reception is 4-7 p.m. Friday, Sept. 8. The works will continue to be on display there through Nov. 17.

The building, completed in March 1988, is an attractive setting for these 18 works of art. Several handsome outdoor pieces are in the ground level garden patio, opening off the lobby. Others are in the lobby and in two rooms, specially set aside, down the hall.

ACITELLI, SON of Italian immigrant parents, learned stonecutting from his father.

"I worked summers when I was a kid," he said, "I grew up with the tools."

But, this self-taught artist has taken his work far beyond that traditionally associated with skilled stonecutters, although he still does that on commission for residences and commercial buildings.

HE DOES functional and non-functional pieces, but he disagreed on the term non-functional.

"It all functions," he said, "it fills an emotional need."

Then, with a kind of half-smile, he said, "The making of art is about as arrogant a job as a person can have. You can't eat it, you can't make a garden with it, but, it fills a very deep need."

As he spoke of how he laminates marble in particular the carefully cut and stepped, curved red marble base of a glass-topped table, he said, "One of the things I try to do

in designing is to design stuff no one else can do."

The red marble spiral base is hollow, he said, otherwise it would be too heavy to deal with. As it is, it weighs approximately 85 pounds.

HIS PARTICULAR satisfaction or challenge, he said, "is to defy the limits of the materials." He can make marble look as light and pliable as putty. He can stretch and pull metal so it has the same almost weightless look (until lifted).

Many of the handsome marble pedestal pieces in the exhibit arise from his interest in the helix form that he sees in nature. Two examples he cited were chromosomes and the inside of a conch shell.

"Sometimes the simplest things in nature are the most beautiful."

ONE THAT looks different from the helix and helix forms in the same room is "Equal Volumes." Acitelli referred to it as "a little intellectual exercise." It is a pedestal piece in black marble with a tilted tetrahedron (a solid figure with four triangular faces) beside a sphere.

"It is the juxtaposition of the two that makes it interesting," he said. "The sphere has the least surface for the mass; the tetrahedron has the most, yet they weigh the same."

Acitelli is a master craftsman, but he is also a philosopher, a keen observer of nature and people and a fine artist. He was selected by the Smithsonian Institution of Washington, D.C., to demonstrate the art of stone carving at the Festival of Michigan Folk Life in East Lansing this August.

His furniture pieces have been shown at Bill Born Ltd., Michigan Design Center of Troy. His sculpture is in galleries in Florida and Chicago. He is represented locally by Agnes Derbin.

AmeriCenters is open during regular business hours.



Francesco Acitelli checks the surface of "Mobius IV" in the courtyard of the AmeriCenters building at the corner of Square Lake and Lahser, Bloomfield Hills. It and "Windsong," in the background, are limestone.

staff photos by Jerry Zolynsky



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

Vance Hanna said that attention must always be given to watering the bonsai plants. They have shallow roots and dry out quickly.

Bonsai, study in patience

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

Winning the lottery could hardly have pleased Vance Hanna of Birmingham any more than his first prize at the Mid-American Bonsai Exhibition in Chicago last month.

His Juniperus Virginiana, which he collected in Waterford Township about 10 years ago when it was 20 feet tall, got the first place ribbon. His grove planting of larch won third.

Gordon Holzman of Bloomfield Hills, a fellow bonsai enthusiast, won two firsts and a third place award at the exhibition. He won special recog-

nition and first for his Ponderosa Pine, styled and shown in a pot he made himself. His other first was for a large Scots Pine and his third was for a boxwood he grew from a seedling.

Other Michigan residents who won awards at the prestigious show which draws thousands of people each year were Jack Wikle of Tecumseh, editor of Bonsai Journal of The American Bonsai Society, and Bruce Baker and Jerry Mesliffe of Ann Arbor.

Hanna, who also wins national prizes for jewelry, said, "I've been working seriously at bonsai for 13 years and fooling around with it for

almost 20. I joined the Four Seasons Bonsai Club in 1975 and that has been a big boon for bonsai."

HE SAID HE BECAME interested in the activity when he was at Stanford University. His wife Linda smiled at the mention of Stanford. "When we were students we used to go to the Japanese garden because we thought it was so lovely."

He described the practice of bonsai as "kind of like doing art — it's the process."

She added, "He's the bonsai expert. I'm the support system." He said that while these miniature trees do not take a lot of work daily, they will die quickly if they are neglected

for very long because they have shallow root systems. Hanna said the whole process of cultivating and nurturing these trees "is an investment in time."

Yet, he appears to relish that process. He described how before the cold weather comes, he buries each pot in a bed of pea gravel behind his garage with only the plant showing. The tree itself is above the gravel and like its full size counterparts lives through the ice and snow of the cold winter. If the late fall is dry, Hanna sees that they are watered.

When spring comes the pots are dug

Art fairs keep potter working

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

The big art shows such as Ann Arbor, Meadow Brook and Art in the Park, coming this weekend in Birmingham, provide good exposure for potter Kaiser Suidan of Birmingham.

His large pots and platters, have been selling well.

Suidan's work is easy to spot because he works in several shades of teal, a color, few if any others are using. Often he combines it with shades of smoky gray with a dull

finish to create a timeless, southwestern look. He also does pots with lots of colors arranged in geometric patterns. Some of his detailing such as handles and trim has an architectural art deco look to it, others are pure classic shapes. He works in both raku and porcelain. And while his raku pieces, large and small, are impressive, and he likes the medium, he said, "Raku is so unreliable, it breaks all the time." So at best, it's chancey and the artist must be mentally prepared to accept losses.

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DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Kaiser Suidan holds one of his favorite pieces, clear glaze raku with the geometric detailing which has become one of his signature designs.

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