



Stone Carving Sensation

Neal Arguello Creates Custom Countertops at StoneWorks

WORDS DONDI TONDRO-SMITH | IMAGE DAVID BOWERS

"I take an artistic approach to doing it right the first time."

- Neal Arguello

There are no weekends when you own your own appointment-based small business. Neal Arguello, sole proprietor of StoneWorks of Jackson Hole, has spent the last 30 years building custom countertops that last a lifetime. With a 1,300 square foot showroom in Wilson and over 200 display slabs of multi-colored stone in his shop off Gregory Lane, Arguello is serious about color selection, quality and the longevity of his work. "A lot of people who aren't tradesmen are used to compromised quality. I don't let people make major mistakes with improper materials for the wrong application," Arguello assured. He emphasizes that he runs a custom shop, not a production shop, and he is dedicated to the artistic nature of his work. "I take an artistic approach to doing it right the first time," Arguello explained. "I don't rush like in a production shop, I take the time to do it right the first time."

So how does one train to see the art inside the stone? At the age of 17, Arguello met a master stone mason and convinced him to impart his trade. Before that, as far back as he can remember, he was always climbing on and collecting rocks in the Black Hills of South Dakota, where he grew up. After 30 years in the trade, he has learned a thing or two about the importance of value as well as being a true tradesman. And he isn't concerned about making the sale as much as ensuring quality and using the right products with the right application. StoneWorks also has something to fit every design preference and budget. "I don't just do high end," he said. "I have a lot of remnants around and I'm all about saving people money."

Arguello has certainly carved his niche. After leaving Telluride, Colorado, he had an opportunity to live in Sun Valley, Idaho, but a friend recommended Jackson instead. He never left. And he's glad he's weathered the storms. Those early years in the valley were challenging. In the end, word of mouth conquered any "newbie" discrimination that he may have faced for not being an established local artisan. Over the years, the feast-or-famine nature of Jackson's seasonal economy has also been a hurdle. "In Jackson, we often have to get our business while we can because we never know when it's coming," Arguello explained.

For over two decades, Arguello has worked at refining his techniques, the very same techniques that help him transform a stone slab into a work of art. He brought the chiseled edge to the valley before it was being done and his unique finishes are more like his very own signature than a simple afterthought. Arguello recalled, "It's an artistic element that wasn't being done when I first got here. Everything had mitered edges and a basic polished finish. I create a polished finish and make honed or brushed finishes that lend a different look. It's quite a process but the result is a unique finish and an original look."

What Arguello has learned about business can also apply to Jackson's pace and lifestyle. he said, "Slow down, just don't rush things. To deal with all the extra stress of life, one needs to pause more often and go slower." At this point in his career, he knows his business well. Having a custom experience, working with an expert with an eye for detail, is certainly the way to maximize customer satisfaction while adding lasting style to any home. ■