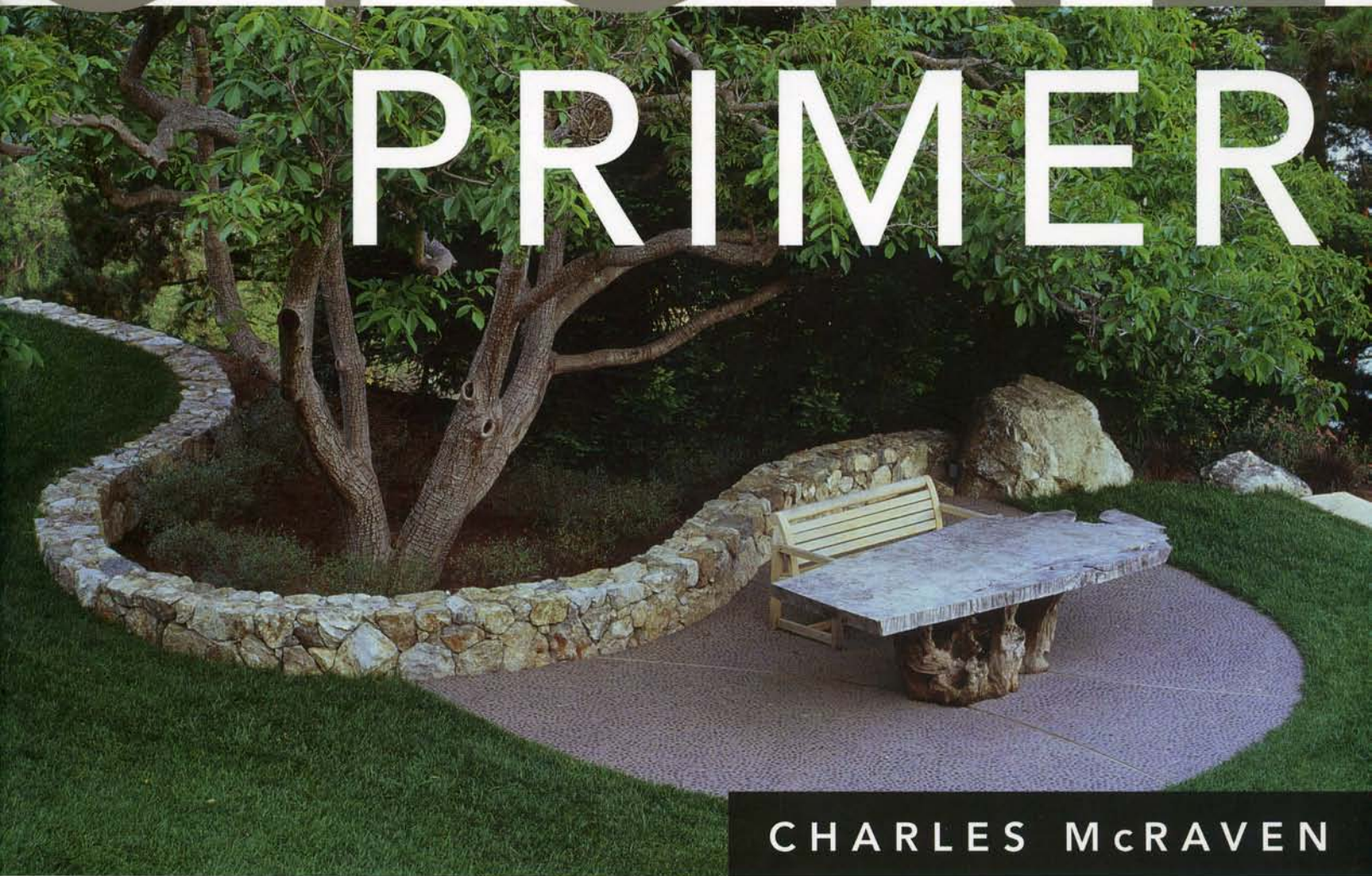


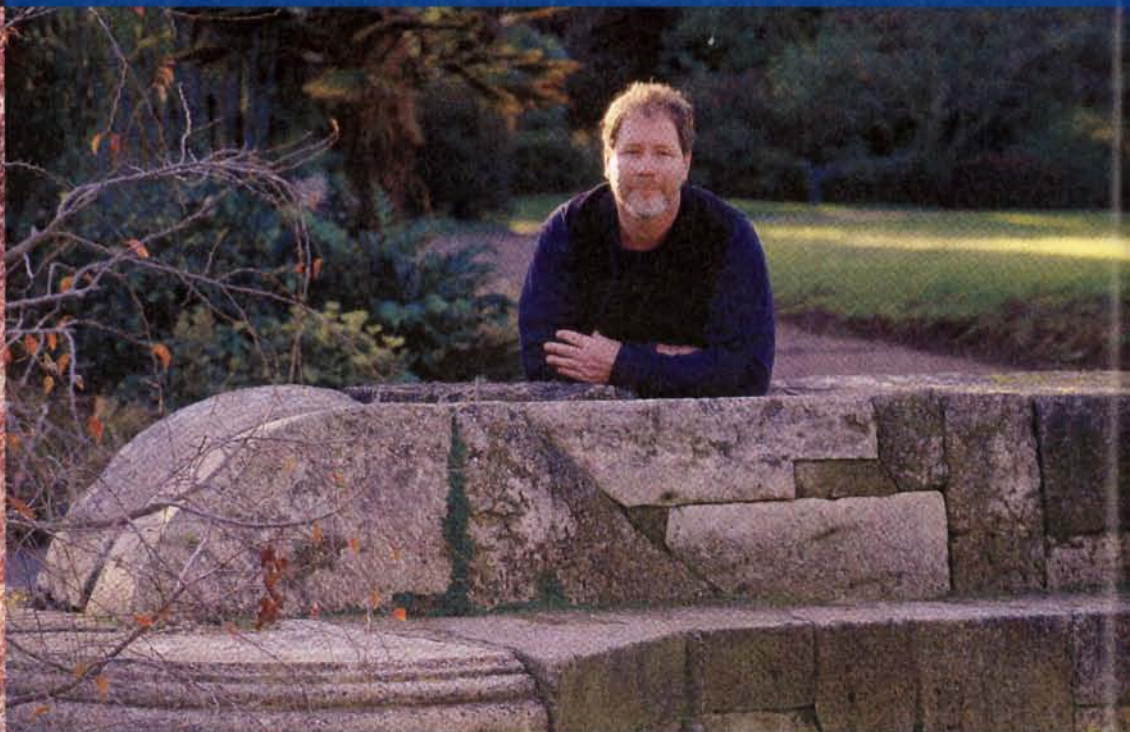
Ideas and Techniques for Incorporating
Stone In and Around Your Home

STONE PRIMER



CHARLES McRAVEN





ABOVE: Edwin Hamilton created this tightly fitted stone wall for the Library Terrace Garden at the San Francisco Botanical Garden at Strybing Arboretum.

OPPOSITE: A freestanding mortared wall accents and protects this mature tree on a client's property.

Edwin Hamilton stepped inside York Minster, one of England's finest cathedrals, and immediately understood why his two mentors (one of whom was Tomas Lipps, of the Stone Foundation) back in Marin County, California, had advised him to come to Europe. "You have no idea how strong the resonance and power of stone craft is until you go see these masterworks for yourself," they told him.

Edwin bought a one-way ticket. After two years he had hitchhiked and labored his way through England, Scotland, France, Italy, North Africa, and beyond, building stone houses and bridges. "It's the same today as in the days of cathedral building," he says. "Masons are nomadic." After two decades, he says he'd still go anywhere for the right project.

Edwin's formidable rites of passage of apprenticeships and travel, which eventually included three "humbling" months exploring the ruins of Peru, shaped his personal aesthetic as stonemason and sculptor. "I have an eye toward the monumental," he says.

This quality of grandeur was first realized in an installation of four granite water vessels at the Queens County Civic Courthouse in New York, a project designed and commissioned by public artist Anna Valentina Murch. It took Edwin eight months just to prepare for this task, from buying a 1944 forklift big enough to haul 27 tons of



granite, to designing and fabricating the sawing equipment, to hunting down a shop space big enough to accommodate the materials (he still works in it). It then took him a year of daily labor to craft the basins.

Edwin calls this the first of two landmark projects in his professional life. The second, a ski lodge in Idaho designed by the renowned architect Thierry Despont, gave him the opportunity to create, among other things, a 42-foot front elevation of sandstone: the architect took “a leap of faith,” Edwin says, in his skill. In tackling the challenge of how to move huge stones 35 feet in the air, Edwin says he was finally able “to think on similar lines as cathedral builders.”

A job he recently completed on a coastal California estate was unique in that it utilized exclusively stone indigenous to the site — in all forms, down to the crushed rock used as seeded aggregate in the concrete driveway and even the sand by-product of the crushing process, which was used for mortar to build a stone wall

(pictured above). That wall wends its way gracefully over a grade change and around a “beautiful tree with a desire for lawn; it just about designed itself,” he says.

The thread running through his many works, both architectural and sculptural, is his promise of intention, a concept he carries from his early days of apprenticeship when he learned to place each stone “with the intention of it being there for 500 years . . . and more.” If you take the time and do it right, he says, “a dialogue happens between the mason and each stone.” He attributes this

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fundamental dialogue as the link between his sculpturally influenced work and even the most traditional masonry. The satisfaction of discovering each new stone’s intention remains the same, be the work carving enormous granite masses for a public plaza or creating a small drystone wall in the woods behind a house.

“Even the most rudimentary stone wall embodies all the principles of good masonry,” he says, “and it’s just incredibly beautiful if it’s built right.”