

Beauty in the brick



Jordan Scott, owner of 4GM Brick & Stone.

There are masons who merely slap mortar and brick onto their projects; then there are those who really care for their profession.

Jordan Scott is the latter. He describes himself as “very meticulous, obsessive.” He should be - he’s the fourth generation mason in his family.

Scott didn’t always love it, however. “As a kid, it’s not fun to have your dad be a bricklayer,” he said. That meant that during every break from school, he was working for his father, doing the hard work of a mason.

“I was resentful at first,” he said, “but now I’m just so grateful that I have this trade, this skillset that not many people have.”

Scott says his father learned more from his grandfather (Scott’s great-grandfather) than he did his own dad (Scott’s grandfather). “He was really good at his job,” he said.

Scott’s family has plied their trade all over Texas - north Texas, Dallas, Houston. Scott has been in Austin since 2007, working to get established. He started his own business - **4GM Brick & Stone** - around 2010. “4GM” stands for fourth generation mason.

Scott does about 80/20, repairs over new construction. He said he’s “geared up more towards repairs. I like it more. It’s more of a challenge.”

Scott can match the old brick as well as the old mortar, saying it takes time and experience to know what the mortar will look like once it dries.

Speaking of mortar, today we can just buy it pre-mixed in a bag. When his grandfather started out, he was the designated mortar mixer for other masons. That’s all he did for years.

When Scott repairs an old building (the oldest one he’s worked on was built in the 1890s), he likens it to a dentist who takes care of a filling. Properly done, the dentist has to remove all the decay in the tooth. He doesn’t just apply topical or cosmetic stuff on top of the filling. Similarly, Scott has to carefully remove the decayed mortar as he replaces the bricks. Some masons, he said, would just cut

corners and fill in the cracks at the surface level.

Much of his repair work is done, frankly, because of the poor job the original mason did. “People don’t even know how to spread their mortar anymore,” he said. This can be true in new construction, as all too often, too much mortar is applied, building up behind the wall, which prevents the structure from having the ability to move properly due to weather conditions. Repairing someone bad work “is almost painful,” he said.

And don’t get him started when it comes to going either with painting the brick or staining it. “I just really don’t like painted brick,” he said. “The great thing about staining is that it’s not a paint. It’s transparent liquid. When you apply it to the brick, all those subtle tones, all those different colors in the brick, they shine through. You can keep the beauty of the brick.” Scott uses a company from the U.K. for his stain.

Scott is a real connoisseur of bricks. “I have a mini-brick yard on my property,” from collecting bricks over the years. He never knows when he can find just the right brick for a restoration job.

Scott “advertised pretty heavily when I first started. Now, I have the reputation and the reviews.”

When it comes to perhaps having a 5GM succeeding him in the family, Scott isn’t sure, for one thing, he doesn’t have any children yet. But, passing on his legacy is something he wants to do. “It’s definitely a trade that I would want to share. It’s kind of a dying trade. Not very many people are interested in it. Not many people see it as the craftsmanship that it is. It’s a very ancient, ancient trade.”

The ancient trade of bricklaying has found its home in the Scott family. Unfortunately, there is no way of adding up how many buildings in Texas this family has done. Whatever that number is, there is beauty in the brick.

4GM Brick & Stone is a masonry business in Austin. -dsz