

# Reclaiming history—one brick at a time



Experienced Brick & Stone supplied the materials for this Medina sandstone driveway (above) and this bench made from sandstone curbing (below), both found at homes in Williamsville.

*about* five years ago, Scott Smith was building an arts-and-crafts-style house when a mason working on the project suggested he use reclaimed street bricks to give the driveway a unique, historic touch appropriate to the architecture. Smith purchased truckloads of bricks, but with the project soon mired in delays, he eventually sold them to a passerby who inquired about buying them. Smith bought more, but received another inquiry and sold them again. In the end, the house was never finished—but Smith's new company was born.

Founded in late 2010, Experienced Brick & Stone reclaims street bricks, cobblestones, curbing, and other paving and architectural materials. Smith says those two sales, made without any advertising, showed him there was definitely a market for these products. The company also fit in with his values; in addition to recycling and driving a fuel-efficient car, Smith—as founder and general manager of Wendel Energy Services—had worked in energy efficiency for many years before retirement.

“These things are being dumped in landfills, and that didn't seem to make



sense,” he says. “Even with as much as we can reclaim, probably ninety percent or better of this material ends up in landfill. So you have these beautiful [materi-



als] that are perfectly fine and usable for another hundred years or better, and they're landfilling them. That's a big issue."

Experienced Brick & Stone reclaims materials from across the Northeast and sells them nationwide to homeowners and contractors. Smith says only about five percent of the business is local—something he'd like to change. "We would honestly love to sell more of this material here because, in a lot of ways, we're shipping our history to Boston, Florida, and the West Coast," he says. "We would rather see people build projects with it here, so people in Western New York get to enjoy the materials that are a part of their history."

The history of these materials has been the most unexpectedly fascinating part of this new venture, Smith says. For instance, many of the granite cobblestones used for roads in this country came from Europe as ballast to weigh ships down. Once they arrived, the stones were offloaded in port towns and used for paving. Similarly, granite cobblestones were also used to weigh down canal boats in the US and unloaded in port cities like Buffalo, where they were used for municipal projects.

"The more we get into this, the more we talk with people about the history of the materials and how they were made, where they were used, how they got installed, the politics associated with it—it's all very interesting," Smith says.

Currently in the company's ever-rotating inventory, customers will find antique cobblestones and bricks in various shades and sizes, sandstone sidewalks, and stone and granite curbing, as well as steps, lintels, windowsills, and other architectural elements reclaimed from historic build-



Circa 1875-1920 Jamestown rustic brick pavers form a patio in East Aurora.



Above, Olean red brick pavers at a Rochester home. Below, Medina sandstone slabs create a Buffalo patio.



ings before demolition. The company's monthly e-newsletter advertises unique finds, like a sandstone barn foundation recovered recently in Ohio. If desired, customers can not only learn the exact street and era their materials come from, but can also receive a plaque to display with that information.

For clients, these aged materials breathe new life into their driveways and patios. Smith says customers often find creative ways to reuse materials, like turning curbing into retaining walls, benches, or even birdbaths. One particularly enterprising customer, the Brazilian cosmetics company Natura, turned antique cobblestones into high-end perfume containers.

Eric Page, president of Woodstream Nurseries, a family-owned landscaping company and garden center in Clarence Center, has worked with Experienced Bricks since its launch to source materials for his landscaping clients. Before the company began, Page says it was difficult to find historically appropriate materials to rejuvenate an older home's patio or driveway.

"With these big, beautiful, old homes, people come in looking to redo them and want to restore them back to [their original look,] and part of that is the outdoors: the driveway, patio, and walkways," says Page. "All of the new manufactured stuff just doesn't have the same quality, textures, and finishes as the old-style bricks do. They don't compare."

For more information, visit [experiencedbricks.com](http://experiencedbricks.com). ■

*Matthew Biddle writes Going Green and other features for Spree Home.*