

A diamond in the rough

R.E.D. Graniti, a world leader in stone production, realized the potential of the Colorado Yule marble quarry in Marble, CO, and committed to investing to make it a successful operation

by Jennifer Adams



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In November 2011, R.E.D. Graniti, a leading stone producer based in Massa-Carrara, Italy, purchased the Colorado Yule marble quarry in Marble, CO, and operates it under the name of Colorado Stone Quarries (CSQ). The company has made significant investments in technology as well as the quarry site, which has led to the production of quality material.

Perched high in the Rocky Mountains is the Colorado Yule marble quarry, which is operated by Colorado Stone Quarries (CSQ) and owned by its parent company, R.E.D. Graniti S.p.A, a leading stone producer based in the

province of Massa-Carrara, Italy. Founded more than 140 years ago in Marble, CO, the quarry has a storied past. Since the beginning, it has gone through several ownerships. In the last few decades none of the owners have experienced the level of success

necessary to maintain the kind of operations that a marble, with such historical connotations, requires. With nearly 50 years of experience in the stone industry, R.E.D. Graniti was confident in its expertise and purchased 60% of the Colorado Yule



During its assessment of the quarry, R.E.D. Graniti experts determined that an area located in a level higher than the old quarry was rich in high-quality marble, exactly where a year later the “Lincoln Gallery” has been opened.



marble quarry in November 2011 and then the remaining 40% in April 2013. In a little over a year, the company has made significant investments in technology as well as the quarry site, which has led to the production of very high-quality material, proving that the purchase was a prosperous endeavor.

Geologist Sylvester Richardson discovered Yule marble in the Crystal River Valley in the spring of 1873. George Yule, for whom the marble was later named, was the prospector who “rediscovered” the marble in 1874. Little interest was shown in the marble until 10 years later. At this time, prospectors were digging into Whitehouse Mountain for silver and gold when they encountered the Treasure Mountain Dome and a thick marble vein. This time a transition began that shifted the economy of the town away from silver and gold mining to one of quarrying marble. Because of this transition, the town of Marble was able to survive, while nearby towns such as Crystal and Schofield were vacated. The town was still a one-industry economy and its future followed that of the marble quarry operation.

Through the years, the quarry has been under various ownerships which all failed — for a variety of reasons — to understand the real potential of the marble deposit. Aware of the site’s history, R.E.D. Graniti knew that it possessed the knowledge and resources to take the necessary steps needed to produce high-quality blocks that the market would demand. It also saw the huge potential

At the time of *Stone World’s* visit, CSQ was quarrying in “Hall 5” and “Hall 6” where the deposit of top-quality marble covers an area of about 10,000 square meters and has a vertical thickness of more than 100 meters below that surface.



In total, CSQ produces about 1,000 metric tons of high-quality material on a monthly basis.



“In the future, we will continue to make the necessary investments to assure that we produce large, consistent blocks for the market,” said Fabrizio Ponzanelli, CEO of R.E.D. Graniti.

Colorado Yule marble is available in five grades: Calacatta Lincoln, which is the company’s most supreme marble (shown), Calacatta Golden Extra, Calacatta Golden Classic, Statuario Colorado and Aspen Gray.



of the white marble market because of the success of white Danby marble produced by CSQ sister company, Vermont Quarries Corp. in Danby, VT. For these reasons, R.E.D. Graniti made the decision to seize the opportunity and take over the operations 100%.

“The demand for white marble continues to grow, and the opportunity came up for us to look at the Colorado quarry, so it was important to look and understand the potential,” said Fabrizio Ponzanelli, CEO of R.E.D. Graniti. “Both in the U.S. market, as well as globally, we knew that this quarry had possibilities.

“We based our decision solely on our own research and due diligence,” Ponzanelli went on to say. “The his-

tory or the stories of previous owners did not factor into our decision to move forward. We made our own discoveries about the potential, and this was the only factor in our decision.”

Making an investment

To start, the quarry needed management with the capabilities and knowledge to lead CSQ in the right direction. As a result, R.E.D. Graniti relocated Daniele Treves, General Manager from Virginia Mist, (one of R.E.D.’s other U.S.-based stone quarries), who has gained a very broad spectrum of experience as a Quarry Manager in various other countries to lead the company, which includes a total of 38 workers, in the new direction.

Moreover, the success of CSQ is also due to the skilled consultancy of Stefano Mazzucchelli, who has about 28 years of experience in marble quarries and plays the role of Quarry Master for Vermont Quarries Corp. since 2006.

“We made sure we had the proper personnel in place so we could use their experience in operating the quarry in a way that would provide the very best material,” explained Ponzanelli. “We made, and continue to make, large investments in equipment and infrastructure so that the quarry can produce marble that is the best we have ever seen.”

In addition to the quarry acquisition cost, the company invested approxi-



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mately \$7 million to turn the Colorado Yule marble site into a profitable operation. There is a 4-mile county road — 3 miles from the load out to the quarry — which has to be maintained at all times. A total of 80 truckloads of road base were needed to make for safe conditions. Additionally, Mag Chlorite — used for dust control — was put down on the road. It was also necessary to build a road to allow access to a new section of the quarry, named the “Lincoln Gallery,” where viable marble was discovered.

Other areas of the investment that required attention included:

- a new power line that linked the entire quarry — old and new
- a new office at the load out area in the town of Marble
- securing the quarry with rock fall stabilization and bolted pillars, and where needed, sensors were installed for monitoring the stability of all the old and new quarry galleries. The new sensors are controlled over the internet by engineers in both Italy and the U.S.
- outside the quarry, the company reclaimed one of the old dump areas by planting trees and hydro seeds.

Moreover, a significant investment was made in quarrying equipment that allows CSQ to produce large blocks of first quality. **“We have some of the most modern equipment for quarrying marble,”** said Treves. **“It works with the cleanest energy. We are investing in the environment.”**

Treves also explained that a reclamation project was started last September.

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Stefano Mazzucchelli, quarry master, explained that two 9-meter horizontal cuts can be made in a day. **“In one week, we can have nine full-size blocks of top-quality Calacatta cut, which is about 200 tons,”** he said.



Aware of the site's history, R.E.D. Graniti knew that it possessed the knowledge and resources to take the necessary steps needed to produce high-quality blocks that the market would demand.

"It has exceeded even our expectations," said Ponzanelli, when talking about the success of the quarry. **"The blocks we are producing on a regular basis rival the best white marble in the world. We are quarrying and opening new areas where we know the marble is clean, hard and consistent."**



"Before, it used to be a dump," he said. "When we are done, it will be refilled with good soil, and we will plant seeds in that area for regrowth of vegetation. We also have a huge system for recycling water. We never have water run off."

Another matter that CSQ takes seriously is the risk of avalanches. "We have one person who monitors for avalanches," said Treves. "That is the only time we close the quarry. We work in conjunction with the local fire department in Marble. We have a radio in case of an emergency. Last year, we lost two weeks of work because of four avalanches. We keep a week of food and

water supply for our workers at the quarry just in case."

The Lincoln Gallery

During its assessment of the quarry, Mazzucchelli determined that an area located in a level higher than the old quarry was rich in high-quality marble. It took approximately two to three months to start extracting material from the above mentioned area, "Lincoln Gallery," named after the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, which is carved from Yule marble.

"The new material is harder," he said. "It is like a brand new quarry."

The experts who examined the area realized the potential of the Lincoln Gallery, which was opened on June 12, 2012. "We saw the material on top, and we knew it was good," said Mazzucchelli. "Give us three years, and we will be the best. It is unbelievable."

Colorado Yule marble is available in five grades: Calacatta Lincoln, which is the company's most supreme marble, Calacatta Golden Extra, Calacatta Golden Classic, Statuario Colorado and Aspen Gray. In total, CSQ produces about 1,000 metric tons of high-quality material on a monthly basis. Mazzucchelli explained that two



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At the time of *Stone World's* visit, CSQ was quarrying in "Hall 5" and "Hall 6," where the deposit of top-quality marble covers an area of about 10,000 square meters and has a vertical thickness of more than 100 meters below that surface. "We are confident that we will find good quality material until "Hall 11," said Mazzucchelli. "Every two years, we will open one or two more halls."

The company's tentative plan is to close the old quarry in the next few years. The space will be used for water and block storage.

Future plans

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On average, blocks are between 300 to 330 cm in length x 160 to 175 cm in height and 130 to 150 cm in depth. "The blocks have a certain size because trucks can only carry a certain amount of weight," said Treves. "Once we use the railway, we can produce bigger blocks."

The slab market in the U.S. is supplied by R.E.D. Graniti clients. Additionally, Colorado Yule marble

slabs are available to the entire U.S. through distribution.

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"In the future, we will continue to make the necessary investments to assure that we produce large, consistent blocks for the market," he went on to say. "Equipment, exploration and a new block yard nearby are all things that are continuous and taking place currently." □