



ROCALIA
NATURAL STONE EXHIBITION

PROMOTION OF TRADES, ATTRACTIVENESS, AND THE ENVIRONMENT: TODAY'S CHALLENGES IN THE NATURAL STONE SECTOR

Working to the rhythm of natural materials: that's the goal of more and more young students and career changers. The natural stone sector provides such an opening. Dynamic and in the full sway of change, it nowadays offers a wide variety of trades directly inspired by environmental issues.

From 5th-7th December, 2023, the Rocalia trade show for professionals will be where natural stone stakeholders converge to shed light on the sector's development and innovation prospects.



A SECTOR THAT ATTRACTS YOUNG STUDENTS AND CAREER-CHANGING ADULTS ALIKE

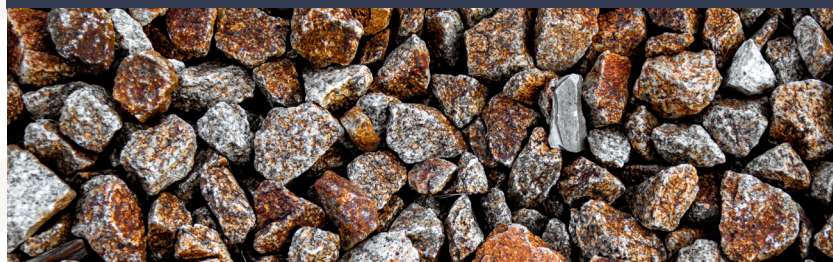
Being manual in nature, the natural stone crafts can be learnt immediately on school-leaving. There are two solutions for progressing in this sector: college courses and apprenticeships which are quite common in this field. According to Yann Le Bihan, who manages the Higher Institute of Research and Training in the Stone Trades, a branch of France's renowned Compagnons du Devoir apprenticeship guild; the trade may well attract a very different kind of professional in the future: *"There's a place for everybody: those who don't like dwelling on details can flourish in structural stonework, whereas those who like to work meticulously, with many different kind of finish, will find joy in the marblework trades."*



It's not only youths who are attracted by the sector. Year after year, adults are leaving their office jobs to take up natural stonework. There are lots of different reasons for their motivation: they want a job that's more manual, more tangible, or more creative, they want to work in contact with natural materials, they feel affinity with heritage-related trades, etc. When it comes to choosing candidates, training centres and colleges ensure they are ready to work outdoors in teams, to sharpen their aesthetic senses, and to take on board ancestral know-how as well as the necessary digital tools. All that leads to multiple employment prospects in a passionate sector which is forever on the rise and progressing.

COURSES IN SEARCH OF VISIBILITY

To attract young people and career-changing adults, the sector is vigorously developing its training schemes. Training centres, colleges, and institutes are doubling down on creativity, with open days 2.0, featuring augmented reality for experiencing the stonecutter's motor skills, demonstrations in public places, partnerships with museums, etc. The sector's companies are also proactive in getting themselves known and opening up paths for young people by participating, for instance, in insertion projects or in the European Craft Days.



FROM EXTRACTION TO REALIZATION, A MULTITUDE OF POSSIBLE TRADES

Stonecutter, wall builder, quarryman, project manager, rural architect, marbleworker, engraver, NC machine operator, heritage restorer—the natural stone sector is brimming with trades of all kinds. *“Once they enter the stone universe, young people often share an invariable impression with us: it’s massively more varied than they imagined at the outset. They are spoilt for choice, as much in the level of trades they can practice as in the companies they can join,”* reveals Yann Le Bihan. Among the companies recruiting apprentices or graduates, there are as many self-employed professionals as there are SMBs and micro-enterprises with strong local roots, or indeed major construction

contractors. Although cities and regions famous for their buildings and monuments are where most job prospects lie, a stonework professional can just as easily find work anywhere in France.

A SECTOR THAT CROSSES THE BRIDGE FROM TRADITIONAL TO DIGITAL

The stonework trades are usually associated with a rich heritage of constructional traditions. But that doesn’t stop the sector connecting to and getting the best out of digital tools. 2D/3D design software, scanners, drones, and NC machine tools are an integral feature of many natural stone professionals’ everyday work.

Those who are less at ease with the digital world can find a more balanced footing in the trade of waller. *“In our approach,”* says Martin Muriot, chairman of the French Federation of Dry Stone Professionals, *“we keep the working of the stone itself to a minimum while making the most of its natural shapes. We handle and assemble stones by the constantly application of our cognitive functions. The head does as much work as the hands. This balance between body and mind attracts a lot of people to the dry-stone sector.”*



ATTRACTIVENESS BOOSTED BY TODAY'S ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND A NEED TO RECONNECT WITH NATURE

Sensitive to protecting the environment, younger generations are turning more and more to trades that have positive consequences and take sustainable development issues into consideration. Parallel to this, a 2022 survey conducted by Opinionway on behalf of Anact showed that 43% of active workers contemplate leaving their jobs for one that carries more meaning. It's a favourable context for the development and outreach of the stone sector, which nowadays aligns perfectly with the aspirations of young people and career changers.

At everyday level, stonework professionals must juggle their building expertise to adapt to the context of today's building energy performance issues. The circular economy is also an ever-present factor in this sector. Yann Le Bihan goes on to explain *"When speaking of responsible construction, stone always rears its head, being a natural material with very low carbon impact. It's one of the only materials that can never be waste since it can't be anything other than reusable: dismantled stones are reworked to go into new constructions, crushed marble becomes new earth, stone dust is used in agriculture, and so on."*

This interest in a return to nature is also growing among customers. More and more of them are aligning their orders with this trend. *"Stone's the only thing we use, local whenever possible in a logic of homegrown architecture. Dry stone walls, with all their crevices, are harbours of biodiversity. They enable multiple interaction with fauna, flora, and water, an aspect that is winning over more and more customers,"* says Martin Muriot.



The changing desires of consumers also represent a real opportunity for transforming the stone sector. To continue offering the products and constructions in tune with the times, professionals must innovate, adapt their techniques, and promote the integration of environmental issues in their work.

ROCALIA, A TRADE SHOW AT THE CROSSROADS OF PROFESSIONAL PATHS IN THE STONE SECTOR

Being scattered all over France, stone experts don't very often get the chance to engage in collective thought on the issues of promotion, attractiveness, and transformation of the sector. Every two years, the Rocalia trade show provides these professionals as well as students and career changers with an opportunity to meet up and trade thoughts between enthusiasts of the stone material.

Inside the Trades and Skills area, visitors can meet the Higher Institute of Research and Training in the Stone Trades, a branch of France's renowned Compagnons du Devoir apprenticeship guild, or the French Federation of Dry Stone Professionals, or many other institutions. It's the perfect occasion for these stakeholders to showcase training courses, trades, and recruitment prospects in this dynamic, natural stone sector in front of a captive audience.

The trade show is also a privileged gathering for passionate and curious professionals who want to share ideas with fellow practitioners who work in specialist or rare trades. A full cycle of conferences, interactive workshops, and demonstrations will give rise to dialogue on the sector's core subjects, like employment and training dynamics, as well as on stone news from France and worldwide.

COLLECTIVE POWER IN THE NATURAL STONE SECTOR

Over the years, the stone sector has naturally developed in strength through collective effort and mutual aid. Professionals trained at the Compagnons guild pass their know-how on to new generations by taking them into their company as apprentices or by becoming trainers themselves. Self-employed workers, often more specialized and exacting, often work hand-in-hand with major construction firms on large scale projects.



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