



MASTER CRAFTSMAN

MASTER CRAFTSMAN RICHARD COHEN AND JIM KUTZ, ROCKWATER LTD.

From Stonehenge to the Great Pyramids, and all the wonders that followed, the ability to move and shape rocks represents both the human struggle to overpower nature and our embrace of its most primeval materials. Today, in a world of sharp edges and manufactured comfort, the greatest masters create works that appear delivered by a force as old as the earth itself.

Richard Cohen and Jim Kutz of Rockwater Ltd. have spent the last 35 years honing their talent for building custom rock and water features, running the gamut between perfectly formed stone walls and pools to boulder arrangements with little trace of human intervention. The men share an independent spirit revealed in one-of-a-kind creations as unique as the stones from which they're built.

"We've worked really hard; we're a two-man operation," Cohen says, flipping through a portfolio of projects in the kitchen of his Amagansett home of 40 years, which also serves as Rockwater headquarters. "Everything you see is done by two guys."

Even a cursory look at Cohen and Kutz's many completed projects reveals the breadth of their achievement. Together, the duo has seemingly defied

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nature and bent it to their will, often while making their work look beautifully endemic to the land or water around it.

In a particularly impressive show of prowess, Rockwater installed a one-acre pond, 12 feet deep, on an eight-acre property. They used the dug-out earth to shape and grade the surrounding landscape until the finished pond looked as if it has always been there.

Kutz and Cohen's biggest job to date was a huge stone and watercourse between two ponds at Merrill Lynch headquarters in Hopewell, New Jersey. But the business started much, much smaller.

"We built a little pond in the backyard—that was the beginning," Cohen says, explaining how he and Kutz went from forging a friendship on the Jersey Shore to building a successful business in the Hamptons. "I moved out here and he came out to visit," Cohen adds, noting that earlier, "I didn't know what to do to make a living out here."

Kutz was creating perennial gardens at the time, and after building the pond at Cohen's home, the men realized they could make more. Soon, Kutz was staying with Cohen in Amagansett for six months at a time, completing jobs for various clients. The men continued learning and working until they had developed a vast pool of knowledge and experience. Cohen, who spent much of his youth seeing the world, even traveled to Kyoto, Japan, to visit the famous rock gardens and further his understanding of his craft.

A self-described "maniac" for rocks, Cohen loves what he does and surrounds himself with rocks of all kinds. Modest and somewhat reserved in his demeanor, the artisan speaks enthusiastically about sacred Shiva Lingam stones from rivers in India, petrified wood and the treasures he finds during annual trips to the Tucson Gem & Mineral Show. Cohen lights up when

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A stunning natural style rock-edged pool.

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recognizing others' appreciation for the lichen- and moss-covered granite boulders many would pass without a second glance.

The men have a real fondness for natural rocks and projects that highlight their prehistoric pulchritude. "We love the lichen and moss on them," Cohen says. "We don't want them to look new."

Despite this inclination, Rockwater will also happily build impeccable stacked-rock walls with perfectly square corners and fine edges. Even natural-style boulders and stones will be honed to sit straight and permanent wherever they rest. "We try to make everything as precise as we can, so it fits great," Cohen says.

He and Kutz, who now resides in Allentown, Pennsylvania, could spend months searching for just the right stone to complete a job, whether it's a naturally flat piece of bluestone for a custom eight-foot round barbecue area or a craggy promontory to top off a natural waterfall. "We network our way through quarries," Cohen says, explaining that they've made great friends who regularly call them after digging particularly interesting rocks out of the ground.

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—*Oliver Peterson*

