

Jon Stuefloten prepares for Serra canonization

Tom Leyde 9:28 a.m. PDT June 6, 2015



(Photo: Tom Leyde/For The Salinas Californian)

On the altar where he was baptized nearly 75 years ago Jon Stuefloten is restoring the lettering on the concrete slab that marks the grave of Blessed Junipero Serra.

The restoration painter's work at the Carmel Mission is in anticipation of the canonization of Serra, founder of California's chain of missions, later this year by Pope Francis.

Stuefloten's company, Jon Stuefloten Restoration Painting, has done work at the mission before. He and his team restored the interior and exterior of the mission's Crespi Hall five years ago.

The Carmel Valley resident and mission parish member has been doing restoration painting since the late 1970s when he formed his company. He is a master at his craft and is the only Central California painter certified by Fine Painters of Europe.

Stuefloten can make a wall look like grained wood or marble with delicate brush strokes that he has perfected and trained his employees to create.

"I'm one of the few guys that knows those in the area, that I know of," Stuefloten said.

These and other decorative techniques were handed down over the centuries by Old World crafts people.

In Crespi Hall, Stuefloten used lime wash paint created from lime obtained from a 500-year-old quarry in Italy. He chose the wall colors, created beautiful painted frame-like designs around the windows, whitewashed the original ceiling and rafters and applied colored waxes on the hall's woodwork.

Some of the company's other restoration work includes, the lighthouse keeper's house at Point Sur and the copper roof on the light's housing as well as the Hart House in Pacific Grove and the Castro House in Aptos.

"We have a long experience in this, that's why we get to do these jobs," Stuefloten said.

At the Mission, Stuefloten and his employees are also redoing the lettering on the graves of Fr. Fermin Francisco de Lasuen, Fr. Juan Crespi and Fr. Julian Lopez — the three priests who walked from San Diego to Carmel with Fr. Serra to establish Mission de San Carlos Boroméo del Rio Carmelo.

First, the restorers cleaned the markers then they applied a gold sizing. They will then apply a copper material to make the letters stand out.

Fr. Serra is expected to be canonized in September during Pope Francis' first visit to the United States. When that occurs, Stuefloten said, the mission "will be the shrine of the apostle of California."

Restoration painting isn't the only thing the company does. "Regular painting's always been our bread and butter, and it still is today, and it gets salt and peppered with these other jobs," Stuefloten said. "The more (restoration jobs) we do the more we get invited to do."

A member of the mission chapter of Knights of Columbus, Stuefloten grew up in the trades. His father was a builder who worked for Hugh W. Comstock, the man behind the famed Comstock cottages of Carmel.

When Stuefloten was young he apprenticed with two different craftsmen. He learned to do gold roping, wood graining and gilding the Old World way.

After marrying, Stuefloten lived in Massachusetts for six years then returned to Monterey County, where he started his own business in the late 1970s. He trained six young men his skills. They are all still with the company today.

Last year, he attended a seminar in Woodstock, Vermont, put on by The Paints of Europe, a firm that imports European paints. Afterward, he was certified by the company as a professional restorative painter. He marvels at the paints made in Europe.

"They have a sheen called 'Brilliant' and it's just like a mirror," he said.

While working on buildings you sometimes run into surprises, Stuefloten said. That was the case while he and his crew were restoring the exterior of Crespi Hall. A shed roof on the west side of the hall contained a 15-foot-tall beehive. "You never know what you'll find after you open up an old building," he said.

Stuefloten called in a specialist to vacuum up the bees and release them and remove the honeycomb. Later, the man brought him some honey. "We called it holy honey," he said.

Stuefloten, who will turn 75 on Nov. 19, has no plans to retire. "I'm still going strong and I've got no reason to slow down," he said. "I love what I do and I can see no reason not to be doing it."

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