

domestic bliss

## THEBIZ

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HAT COULD A gargantuan public works project in China have to do with American homes? When completed in 2009, the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River will create a lake approximately 360 miles long and up to 600 feet deep. More than 300 townships will be submerged, forcing the relocation of an estimated 1.3 million to 1.9 million people. Granite and limestone are so plentiful in the region that stone has been the chief building material for centuries. Every settlement in the area is a trove of ancient structures — the stone block faces aged to a wonderful warm patina. Enter Rhodes, Ragen, & Smith, a Seattle company formed in 1997 to reclaim and import ancient stone from

**Stone from ancient buildings and roads along the Yangtze is a new status symbol** by Shax Riegler



A worker uses a traditional sling to carry a stone block.



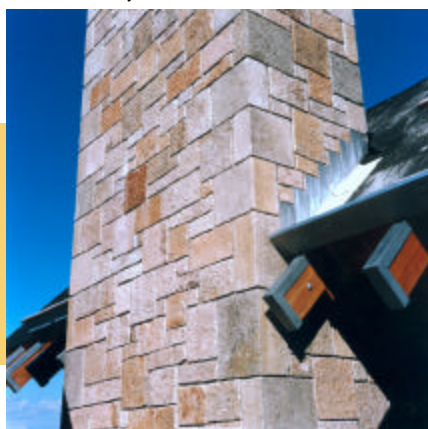
Block faces are sliced off to make veneer, which is kerfed for hanging.



An ancient building prior to dismantling.

Reclaimed stone is shipped downriver and stored until sold. “We have to ‘productize’ it,” says Rhodes, who has 17 years of stoneworking experience. (He was the first non-European to apprentice with the ancient freemasons’ guild of Siena, Italy) “We create a veneer by slicing off the old, patinated face of the blocks, or we cut new blocks or paving stones to computer-generated specifications. Then we ship them to the building sites.” There are many around the world. Landscape designer Stephen Suzman is using 600 to 650 tons in retaining walls, terraces and stairs in the garden of a nineteenth-century house outside San Francisco. “We looked at forty different stones and liked the Chinese for its instant patina” he says. A 900-year-old granite staircase dominates the 24-foot-high entry in a new house outside Seattle designed by architect John Saladino. “This old stone has been worn by literally centuries of use,” he says “It was a wonderful opportunity to buy a fragment of time that would otherwise be lost forever.”

A new chimney is covered with antique granite veneer and quoins.



## stone with soul

Rhodes, Ragen & Smith has five collection points in China, three in India and one in Indonesia, North Africa and France. “We’re going where material—old roads, foundations, structures, whatever—is in danger of being lost to development,” Richard Rhodes says. By using local labor and paying entire villages for ancient property with no clear line of ownership. Rhodes believes he’s honoring the soul of the stone. “The biggest attraction to this material, besides its wonderful patina, is the richness of its history. Our clients want to know that we’re doing this responsibly.”