

Gualala: Grating and Creating: Thoughts on the Art of Collaboration (part 2)

Sean Adcock, Photos © the author unless stated

2013 saw a sea change in the way Peter planned things, he had purchased new land and was keen to press on with a number of projects and so a dozen or more stone workers descended on Gualala.

The bridge needed finishing, however we soon realised that pressing on the year before by using the original footprint was not the best conceived plan. It had subsequently been decided that the bridge should have parapets and we had found some nice slabs to cap these in a stone yard en route from San Francisco, before it had dawned on us that the barrel was not wide enough for a path of a sensible width and parapets. So instead of being ahead of the game we had to start with our usual umming and ahing.

How to widen it? We did not want to hide the hard won sandstone voussoirs—described by those who had worked them as something akin to chiselling rubber. Completely dismantling it was unthinkable. As ever there was plenty of material on site, amongst which was a considerable quantity of sawn travertine blocks, (more than enough) for another project. Somehow we... I cannot remember how, but maybe that ransom geometric telepathy again... hit upon forming second arches set at the level of the extrados (outer rim) of the sandstone arch.



Fig.1 The bridge as we had left it in 2013



Fig. 2 Patrick and John finesse the arch form

Narrow forms were built either side, employing Patricks stone and cement skim method once again, the new arches formed. I set to work building the parapets on top of the travertine. I am hazy on the details of how this developed mostly it was experiment, do a bit discuss it agree, move on, very much 'adapted as it progressed', sounds better than 'made it up as we went along'. It was all very much a "fuzzy picture" and technical as it had been decided it needed to be symmetrical and so every step (physical and metaphorical) affected the next step along and on the opposite parapet. There was little scope for more than 1 or 2 working on it and so it ended up with me, perhaps, commandeering it.

In order to be a bridge there needs to be a way on and off. Following the purchase of the adjacent land and subsequent to the start of the build a track had been put in, which meant a ramp or steps could not run in line with the bridge as they would have protruded too far into it. Umm... ahhh... curved steps could fit, running them towards/from the direction of the house made sense, entering the bridge from the downstream side and not affecting the most visible facade... that looking downstream (the side as seen in Fig.1.) However we now had a symmetry issue, on the other side if they mirrored this we'd end up in a tree(s). Umm... ahhh. Ummmmm. Plenty of time, can do the house side first and worry about the other side later. We have some blockier step like bits of Sydney Peak, no other use for them but they have to be cut (over to David) and sawn ends are exposed. Enter John DiBona, (JohnDB not John SR) at this point I am unaware of his stone dressing skills and he is set to futilely oiling the end of the stone to try and reduce the clean cut look. Suiseki oil (look it up, Suiseki is one of Pete Mullens stone related passions) brings out the colour in stones, it does nothing for sawn Sydney Peak, as we discover after a day or two. Sorry John DB.

One lot of steps complete. Ummmm. I suggest we settle with one set and I wall around the other end, creating not so much a bridge as a low viewing platform. A statement - after all you could more or less step across the small stream which is dry for 11 months of most years and doesn't really need in excess of 5 tonnes of stone to get over it. Make a pointless bridge really pointless, yeh! Everyone thinks I'm joking (I wasn't).

Patrick suggests a spiral staircase ahhh, well he's joking 'too', obviously. Apparently not, arghhh. Design and build my... a lot of designers and one poor put upon builder. A technical challenge and lots more umming and ahing to settle on dimensions that were usable, doable and of course looked right. A fine opportunity to grump. It turns out I was indeed just the man for the job.

All that's left are the parapets more umming about ends, there's some pallets of regular light stone cant remember what it was, its not earmarked for anything else. It can do the insides of the parapets but Sidney Peak will look better on the outside. I press on.

I get one end part finished, its not looking right. John! A brief discussion, we agree it looks wrong, its too busy, too rustic. John suggest the Romero sandstone should carry on up.. we have a couple of bits. They are so big how can I build the back of the parapet around them? Are there enough for 4 ends. Ummmm ahhh grate.



Fig.3. Patrick Astaire on his/my/our spiral steps

how can I build the back of the parapet around them? Are there enough for 4 ends. Ummmm ahhh grate.



Fig.4. Parapets attempt 1

There are not enough. The ones we have will make it technically complicated. Much hand wringing, stomping and sulking on my part. Two blocks are cut and placed on either side... I need a rest. I need to think....The white stone could still make reasonable good corners with a bit of work and could be used for the whole of the inside...I then

realise that the Romero blocks reach into the parapet by about the same amount as the width of the steps... serendipity strikes again! The light colour can be used for all of the inside and to form the ends of the shorter downhill parapet. The Romero will make a clean finish looking downhill but I can start the inside of the upstream parapet to mirror the ends of the downstream wall... Simple!! I'll worry about getting around the Romero later, that will be a trivial matter I am sure (I wish). This problem did actually have a relatively simple solution when I eventually hit on the idea of using a couple of bits of the square profile, oblong red granite 'posts' left over from edging the paths of the Pyro-Mid's mosaic floor (see part 1). Relatively simple from my point of view, John DB who was tasked with getting them to exactly



Fig.5. Parapets mark 2 and one set of steps



Fig.6. JSR and David setting a capstone with the help of the Gradall (and Peter of course)

a little so that the caps mirror whilst accommodating the window. A size for the window is finally settled upon, I can finish the parapets leaving a space for the window. There are some thin sets on site perfect for the pathway over the barrel.



Fig.7. The Grand Reveal... removing the stone former

It should be clear I prefer the technical and directed, John says he prefers more spontaneous projects, and his summation of our working relationship in this respect seems to in turn be exemplified by the bridge. He thinks his preference for the spontaneous *"might help explain the apparent haphazard progress of our projects, even when they are actually reasonably well thought out they all have their spontaneous moments."* For any project we only have the material at hand and it has to be used up and so it *"presses us mentally and physically and never fails to get the creative juices flowing. Often the most spontaneous response to the task and the material at hand create the best solution."* Exploiting a window of opportunity? Ahhh I remember, worrying about windows.

Fig.8. (Right) Measure six times, measure some more cut once...

Patrick and the top of his window

Beyond installing the window I am Done! To this point the form is still in place under the travertine. Would the proportions look right once we removed it. I amuse David who has not heard of the saying "a camel is a horse designed by a committee".

Removed. Wow! Slightly to my surprise it's not too bad and the red/white voussours work. I had been worried throughout that this was 'a bridge too far', too made up on the hoof, bits and pieces bolted together. Well done John SR for holding onto and guiding the aesthetics. I might actually grow to like it, but there's still that window, yet another bit to be bolted on.



the right height (dear old serendipity ensures they were more or less exactly the right thickness) probably has a slightly different perspective.

Caps are measured re-measured and a pattern evolves to step over the hump back of the barrel whilst allowing for a reflection on the downstream side (eg the first step mirrors the width of the steps).

Getting the stone on the insides to the correct level and managing the corners is a pain. John DB comes into his element chiselling with nigh on millimetre perfection.

That should have been it but somewhere in the process Patrick decides a window would be a good idea and sets about carving one. I think he was bored and I think it's mad. I have to rethink the top

False alarm, the window is amazing, Patrick is a highly skilled craftsman. He cuts each of the 5 stones. His design is a single opening on the inside framed by the sill, lintel and two jambs. A central mullion on the outside will add to the look. He also incorporates a 'sheela na gig' under the lintel behind the mullion. In effect hidden unless you are looking for it, apparently this is the norm with these grotesque carvings which ward off evil spirits in and around openings- doors, windows. Apparently they are sometimes fertility symbols. It also helps the underside of the lintel transform from the two tight arches of the outside, to the much shallower single arch on the inside. The final act of the whole build was to set this, with wooden dowels set into the top and bottom of the mullions to hold everything in place. It fits it's even in the right proportion to the bridge. Patrick's brilliance, probably, or are we lucky again - as it's a least partly determined by the size of the available stone. We've finished.



Fig.9. Looking up at the Sheela na gig



Fig.10. (above) & 11 (below). Finished! Looking Downstream and upstream respectively

As time passes I look on the bridge more fondly, in the right light and from the right angle it works, (I am trying to resist adding, most things do not look out of place when you are sat just over 5000 miles away), although I do feel the downstream side is a little unbalanced and 'busy'. As a pure folly it probably is quite good, almost but not quite a camel, and certainly no cart horse. I like to think that we didn't go too far and somehow our approach worked again, even if at times I still feel it has an air of having just been dropped in from outer space. Whilst the bulk of the visible build was carried out by me, if not the bulk of the work which lies in the barrel and arches. I still do not look at it and think 'I built that' it's mine, no everyone contributed, and Patrick's window will never let any one person think it's theirs!



As already mentioned the bridge was not the only project under way. Peter had also bought a plot of land on the opposite side of the road to his original property and here JohnSR, David and a cast of thousands (well 3 or 4 others) were building the "wing wall".

I was not much involved in this project, the numbers involved and the actual build did not fill me with enthusiasm. The set up was a slightly different matter. John had a design but getting it to work in situ is a little more exacting than a

general design.

Nearer the time I wrote the following: *"I'm not sure how much any of it was to do with me, although the design did feel as if it was a very collaborative effort. I have an inkling that after [JohnSR's] initial design most of the ideas seemed to come to 2 or 3 of us almost simultaneously. As with all these things we seem to know instinctively that the end result will look right. It is perfectly proportioned for the space, and that is something you cannot possible know, yet have to know from the outset. It could not be changed or amended half way through. We had an idea of what we wanted, had to work out how to fit it in, proportion it and then go with it. It was not entirely straightforward but really we came up with the ideal 'solutions' very quickly. The number of bays is right; they curve in every direction by the right amount. ..."*



Fig 12. The completed wing wall

I concluded by adding “.. we [seem to be] good but exactly why is perhaps a little indefinable. Had any one of us not been there, the wing wall would have worked, it would have been good, maybe great, I doubt that it would have been as good as it is. This wall and our collaboration is far greater than the sum of its parts”²

Beyond the setting of the boulders and suggesting that the curves were defined by flatwork before attempting to curve the vertical stonework I only contributed a few stones towards the end of the wall and the back. As to the build, well it seemed to me that a group dynamic, was needed, the individuals would from my perspective just be adding to ‘too many variables, with curves and the like, it was difficult to see myself within this dynamic. Beyond the wing wall itself, there was just too much going on and just too many people. It was so busy at night I needed to get away during the day to relax, I needed to get my teeth into something, I retreated to the bridge. Grating. I needed to focus.



Fig.13. One bay of the wing wall

I was followed a day or two later by Patrick who took to his window carving.

Once the bridge was completed I did return to help with the finishing of the wing wall. It was built so that the face was good, but with a very rough back which was to have soil piled up against it. There were trees quite close to the wall which would need to be protected from the soil and I was designated the task of building a small wall along the length to protect the trees and further define the extent of the build, plus go over a drain pipe. This, in keeping with much else, I made up as I went along. It too could not be uniform so as it wound around the trees I employed subtle variations on the type of coping, and even the stonework with one herringbone section and corners and curves, plus more of Peter’s surplus boulders.



Fig.14. Back of the Wing wall (1)



Fig.15. Back of the Wing wall (2)

With so many people and so many projects the 'original' workforce had somewhat fragmented. Beyond Patrick and myself, young Sean was already working on a project just up the track from the bridge. Patrick had sketched a pediment arch, something to use up the last of the red sandstone sticks and Sean had fallen in with Kyle Schlagenhauf in the construction of this

It is best I leave it to him to describe how this played out. *"This was my first time working with Kyle. It felt like a true collaboration, different than my role in other projects on the site. Kyle had grumbled a little on the first day because he wasn't working on the bridge rebuild or alongside the others. However after the first day he and I hit it off. In order to have collaboration there needs to be skill, varied, in all parties coupled with the ability to work together. Kyle and I struck that balance and worked well together. I learned much from him in those couple of weeks."*

Kyle explains the project thus..

"After a tutorial from Patrick and assessing the material available, I designed the project with these parameters:

- 1. Classic Roman Arch with 2 complete complete circles fitting from the top of the intrados to the ground.*
- 2. An odd number of voussoirs.(including keystone)*
- 3 Imposts would have corbels*
- 4 The entire project would be built out of Romero red sandstone.*
- 5 All stones bedding planes would be on the same main axis*
- 6 The voussoirs bedding planes would all point to the center of the circle.*
- 7 The front of the project would be completely natural patina (no tool marks or fresh splits. We did not quite pull this off as the keystone face had to be pitched!*
- 8 The back of the project would show off all of our plug and feather work.*
- 9 Erect the entire structure with aluminium tripod and chain hoist"*

Kyle points out that it is not a true pediment as it has gaps above the extrados, having run out if time and materials to complete it. This has remained as built, making a statement in its own right

Kyle adds *"It was a pleasure working with Sean(Jr)and Matt Harvey, who helped extensively with the more laborious/tedious chores which he takes on with unique integrity!"*



**Figs.16. (above) and 17 (below)
Setting and working
on the keystone
Photos © SeanMyth**





Fig.18. The 'completed' pediment arch

Kyle has worked on many large projects usually as a team leader often with "scratch teams", so I asked him for his perspective on grating and creating. He suggests that he initially assigns menial tasks to those he doesn't know, evaluates their performance and attitude. Then puts them to work with something they can enjoy, learn and excel at, even if he would like to take on that task myself. He concludes *"If they are not up to the challenge I have become better at replacing them diplomatically! Leadership is something I enjoy, constantly learn from and am challenged by. Service with humility and no compromise"*

This seems a good point for me to pause and reflect that working at Peter's has been much more than just grating and creating, It has been about learning too, It is actually about far more than what we have been building. Developing as individuals as well as honing stone skills. Young Sean in this and part 1 has already reflected on the experiences he has gained. Dave Claman says *"I've always been the least experienced of the wallers there and have thought of it as a great apprenticeship. Every time I go back, I learn from the some of the best in the craft."* Only as I write this do I realise the impact it has had on myself as well as others I think we have all learned and developed. It is much more than just the work, as Dave continues *"We are all part of a continuing tradition on Peter's land. Matt Driscoll and Doug Bryant had*

worked there years prior along with a few others. When I first went there in 2010, it was only John and me. Dean McClellan had been there the year before working with John on the first part of the Stagecoach house."

So many have contributed, in so many ways, it is now something that has become greater than the sum of its parts.

There have been many contributions beyond what I was involved in, as well as the Bridge Wing wall and Pediment Arch, 2014 saw much more work going on, Just below the bridge (as seen in Fig.10. and right. Another can just be seen in the back centre of fig.12). Paul Lindhard was using the travertine to build one of this trademark cairns. Paul is a sculptor, and carries out installations involving stone. He is also the driving force behind Art City (<http://www.artcitystudios.com/>) in Ventura as mentioned in *"Stonechat 20"* where there was also passing reference to his cairns in the form of a photo of one in Art City.



Fig.19. Paul Lindhard constructs one of his cairns, near the bridge

Paul was to install 4 of these cairns around the site, sometimes he epoxy resins the stones, but these as several others he has done were to be dry. Why not build something 15 feet or more high by standing stones on edge, running them along the line rather than length in and deliberately make sure they are no touching those stones alongside them, and most definitely no hearding whatsoever...

I think Paul's cairns perfectly illustrate that if you went purely by the rules the world would be a poorer place and at times we need to push the envelope and risk failure in order to achieve.

Fig.20. Below: Paul and Rafael install the carved finial to the 'bridge cairn'.

Right: Another of the completed cairns.
Photo© Kevin Carman
www.flickr.com/photos/megaburbian/1238743024



I frequently point out that you rarely get everything right with each stone you place; individual faults need not necessarily matter. It is the compounding of errors and badly breaking rules that ultimately causes failures. In fact you can often do things supposedly very wrong if you get most things very right, corbelled roofs being the exemplar of this. After all we are supposed to batter things not overhang them above everyone's heads. Paul's cairns might push dry stone work to its limits, but they work because he works with a high degree of precision. The stones are carefully sorted for course size (in Gualala by his assistant Raphael), even though sawn you cannot be sure that they are all the same, so he makes sure, sitting them on a level flat surface and running a level over them to ensure they are not slowly creeping up say 6 inches at one end of a row and 6¼ 10 stones later. Consequently he keeps the stones and his coursing very level, and of course being sawn there is very good contact below and so they all sit well. He told me that occasionally he's used a dime(10c) or a penny (1c) to ensure the stones are level. Whatever method employed they are always set accurately and level.



Fig.21. Kevin Carmans pebble seascape at base of cairn
Photos© Kevin Carman

Above:

www.flickr.com/photos/megaburbian/12387450354/

Left: www.flickr.com/photos/megaburbian/12387147983/

At the base of one of Paul's Cairns (Fig.20. Right), Kevin Carman, a man of apparently infinite patience, created one of his 3D pebble mosaics to give a wave effect. More example of Kevin's work can be found at www.kevin-carman.com

So 2014 was complete to my mind we had just about pulled it off again, and the sea change was well under way. The whole situation and projects have evolved Dave Claman explains :

"In those early days, Peter's house wasn't completed. There was no indoor shower or kitchen. We showered in the rain at the outdoor shower and went to town for meals. As more people were invited, the facilities improved, and the chefs were hired to handle the growing crowd of stoneworkers and artists. Gradually, the house was packed with workers and tents were scattered over the property"

From my point of view we had reached another version of too many variables, perhaps the biggest variable of all, people. Projects at Gualalala have continued, and grown theres even a Yurt and a greenhouse/shed with a sleeping loft, meanwhile for me it has been back to working by myself.



Another version of too many variables...? too many (great) people
Matt Driscol **Kyle Schlagenhauf**
Richard Burkholder, Matt Harvey, Tomas Lipps, Sean Adcock, Patrick McAfee, David Claman
Raphael Barradas, Alan Ash, Kevin Carman, Peter Mullins, Geri Rothman, John DiBona
Laurie and Paul Lindhard, Amanda Stinson, Sean Smyth, Jerry Shields

the project (which spans several visits over several years). For various reasons Patrick and Kyle had fallen by the wayside before the project could be completed but the rest of us figured out and built a pretty complicated roof system and pulled it off."

I have always found it interesting how egos present during a build seem to seep away as it reaches its conclusion.

I shall leave the final words to John that I feel sum up the flying visits we have made to Gualalala. For me it has been an experience a cherished opportunity. As far as I am concerned they are very much John's projects that I have worked on. I like to think I brought something to them and that they're better than had I not been there, however I am led to believe that these sort of things go on all over the place on a regular basis without me, and some of them are actually quite good anyway.

That's where I bow out but the work has continued with the centre point having been the epic build of a watchtower, replacing a wooden viewing platform, which you can read about elsewhere in this issue.

I think we made a great team, the sum definitely greater than the parts. It was great we created we grated. I am that fantastic a waller that I don't need an ego, likewise John with his designs. It is interesting how egos interplay, rise and fall ultimately sublimated to the greater good. Observing these egos from below so to speak Sean Smyth observes *"working from the bottom, I was happy to be there, working with varied groups ... but I feel much more at home in Gualalala now. We all are used to running the show on our own. Difficulties arise if the wrong ego/attitude causes problems. When talented guys are able to do good work worth doing, together, and get along, it's a beautiful thing. The tower project is a good example of that. Patrick designed it and along with Kyle led*

"Whilst I prefer spontaneity many projects do require forethought and great planning in order to pull off a structure that is unique enough and powerful enough to merit wallers flying in from great distances to try to execute.



'Execute' is a fitting word. While a piece may be 'conceived' and the idea nurtured until the actual building, there is a rather counter intuitive necessity to bring the piece to completion within a reasonable amount of time. Projects that go on too long drawn out by lack of materials or the attitude that the team of artisans have all the time in the world to finish it, tend to lack that dynamic quality necessary to give the installation that punch of power and inevitability. The 'execution' is a positive thing, giving the work finality and launching it swiftly into that mysterious 'other' world. There is a feeling of letting go, especially of the ego or the need to control. The work is dead to us because it has been allowed as swiftly as possible to take on a new life of its own."

The Californian coast is a wonderful playground. John and I create... John balances a stone whilst I capture the moment with more than a little collaboration from nature. Grating and creating and symbiosis

NOTES

1&2 <https://thinking-stoneman.blogspot.co.uk/2014/04/sean-adcock-on-theme-of-art-and.html> Tuesday, April 1, 2014