

# The Boot Stitch Installation

By Julie Richey

In February 2020, I was selected from a short list of local artists to design an art installation for the new Antonio Catalan Marriott Hotel in downtown Fort Worth, TX. The client, development company Jackson Shaw, requested a “contemporary design with a Western flair.” My inspiration for the project was the local bootmaker, M.L. Leddy, which is located in the historic Ft. Worth Stockyards. The kind folks at Leddy’s allowed me to photograph several

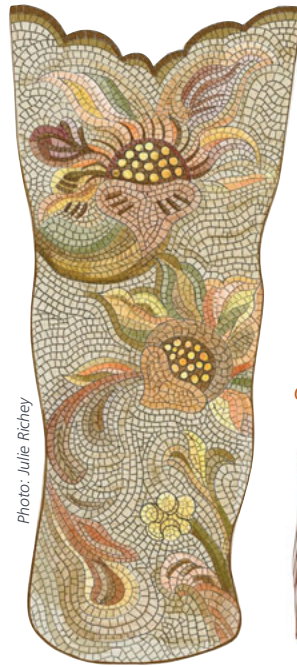


Photo: Julie Richey

custom boot designs. The Pamplona Rose Column is inspired by Spanish rose-themed leatherwork and sunburst stitch on the custom boots. Polaina is the Spanish term for the leather gaiter legging (see inset) often worn by riders to take the place of a full boot when wearing short riding boots. Left center is my design for that column. Each mosaic installation at a large commercial site brings its own challenges and takeaways. Here are lessons from the most recent project.



## PHASE 1: Creating and Installing the Bootstitch Pavement



In order to ensure the right size and scale of the mosaic pavement and the polaina column to be set in the middle, we printed a full-sized paper pattern and cut a Coreplast template to mock up the footprint and height of the center column. The Jackson Shaw staff and architects from Merriman and Austin Industries assisted and weighed in. Once approved, the tricky work of turning my 20-inch-tall maquette into an 8-foot-tall column with a welded armature and fiberglass skin could begin. *Photo: Julie Richey*



Once fabrication started, I packed up the materials and relocated to my summer studio in Taos, NM, where we laid out the Boot Stitch template. The ‘stitches’ are 1- by 2-inch unglazed Natural Hues porcelain and they form the borders for the large \*NEOLITH® ceramic pieces. It was face-taped with clear mosaic mounting tape and labelled for the installers. Once the mosaic was set, the tape was removed for grouting. *Photo: Julie Richey*



It’s always wise to test the layout before delivery. This is the first time Enso Fabrication’s waterjet pieces of Neolith ceramic met my mosaic boot stitches. A good fit! Thanks to Jade and Nicki Synhorst and the crew at Enso for a perfect template and cuts. We used the masonite template, cut by the waterjet, to build our mosaic to a very accurate dimension.

Photo: Julie Richey

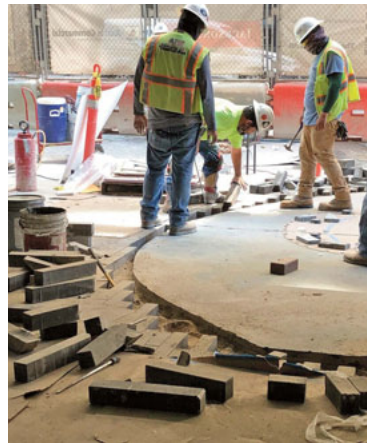
\*NEOLITH® is a high performance, large format, slim porcelain slab.



**It's really happening!**

Installers set the template in the hotel entryway, filling the recess with sand-set Pavestone Pavers. A Schluter metal edge was installed to contain the mosaic pavement.

Photo: Julie Richey



**Sometimes you have to go backwards to go forward.**

Because of the thickness of the hotel entry pavers (seen here in mid-removal), the bed for my mosaic had to be a separate pour of about five

inches of concrete. The pavers ideally should have been added *after* the mosaic and metal Schluter edge were installed, but because the crew was up against a deadline, they filled in the custom-cut pavers around the raised bed. They didn't quite meet the shape I was installing so, out they came, each carefully beveled paver and all those tricky cuts discarded. I considered them a hazard to my crew, so I gradually moved them to a stack on the street.

Photo: Julie Richey



**Any raised object, from a five-gallon bucket to a pile of pavers, can become a work surface**

for a hurried dude with an angle grinder. I had no sooner stacked these pavers, when a guy with a strip of metal threshold needed a place to brace his cuts. I've always been wary of this tool, but it's ubiquitous on a construction site. We couldn't have done our job without it.

Photo: Julie Richey



**The Lipstick Trick**

*(Read the sidebar on page 23 for the origin of this trick.)*

The Neolith wasn't pre-drilled because we weren't sure the recessed floor light sleeves had been installed symmetrically. We had to create an exact template on site, with almost no tolerance for error. I ran to CVS across the street and selected the cheapest, reddest lipstick I could find, coated the protruding pvc sleeves with lipstick, then placed the intended surface against it. Voila! The cutting marks were transferred, creating an exact template of the two center Neolith sections, and marking the seven light sleeve locations on the vinyl in order to core drill them and slide the slabs right over the sleeves (with a little bit of extra grinding).

Photo: Julie Richey



**Carefully drilling the light sleeve holes**

through the Neolith slab. Yes, there's that angle grinder again, this time with a 3-inch core drill bit.

Photo: Julie Richey



**Back buttering the Neolith.**

I held my breath until each of these fragile pieces had been set.

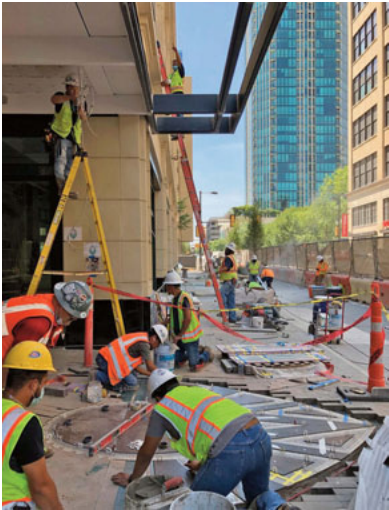
Photo: Julie Richey



## “An accurate depiction of the final days of a project before the preliminary certificate of occupancy inspection?”

It’s not unlike a beehive.”

-Julie Richey



**Hard hats aren’t for show.** An accurate depiction of the final days of a project before the preliminary certificate of occupancy inspection? It’s not unlike a beehive. Power washers, angle grinders, electricians, stone masons cutting granite on site, landscapers and sprinkler installers, elevator and fire alarm testers, metal smiths who cut and install door flashing and thresholds, bricklayers, and, of course, tile setters and their nervous artist. It’s amazing how everyone manages to work around the other trades, and for the most part, everyone is cool and good humored. The fellow inspecting the mosaic on the upper left is Sigma Marble supervisor, Randy Hossikis. His hat reads like a high school varsity quarterback’s letter jacket with stickers from all the big jobs he’s worked.

*Photo: Julie Richey*



**Mind the Gap!** Expansion joints are essential. In this case, we were able to select in advance just where they would interrupt my design. Once we installed the column sculpture, not much of the expansion would show. The concrete under the expansion is reinforced to support the sculpture and extra permits were required. Fort Worth’s rule: “If it casts a shadow, it needs a permit.”

*Photo: Julie Richey*



**Have confidence in your crew!** Sigma sent Luis Garcia, their best installer. It’s always a relief to have your artwork in such capable hands. I was super pleased that the Neolith sections actually looked like burnished leather, as intended.

*Photo: Julie Richey*

## Remember the lessons from your mentors.

In my case, one of my earliest mosaic mentors was the award-winning ceramist and mosaic rock star Eric Rattan. In an effort to teach proper tile setting skills to the next generation of artists, Eric created “hard hat workshops,” during which he taught us invaluable trade skills - like how to measure a room for square, and how not to embarrass yourself by calling a trowel a “spatula.” Break that rule, and you were called a “fruit salad” for the duration.

One of his memorable tips was to always carry a can of hairspray and a tube of lipstick in your tool box. Fashion emergencies aside, he used the hairspray to fix a chalk line in place, and the lipstick to mark protrusions such as ‘j’ boxes (and, in this case, sleeves for the recessed lights).

I miss our dearly departed Eric Rattan, as generous with his knowledge as with his friendship. Read all about him [here](#).



*Photo: Paul Williams*



## PHASE 2: Construction of the Pamplona Rose Polaina

We commissioned the Austin art firm, **Blue Genie**, to transform my maquette into a structure for the smalti-clad, 8-foot-tall ode to the Spanish origins of the Antonio Catalan hotel brand, using a special fiberglass coating that does not expand or contract in extreme temperatures.

It's so nice to have someone else do the things I'm not equipped to handle, like sending 3-D renderings in Rino software to review with the clients prior to fabrication. After Blue Genie scanned my maquette in CAD software, they used a CNC router to carve a full-scale foam version. During a site visit in January, I spent a few days refining the carvings and making a template of the form to utilize in my studio to create the more elaborate mosaic sections prior to receiving the column delivery.



Examples of mosaic sections prepared in advance *Photo: Julie Richey*



**Blue Genie arrived** with what looked like a brontosaurus bone on a trailer.

*Photo: Julie Richey*



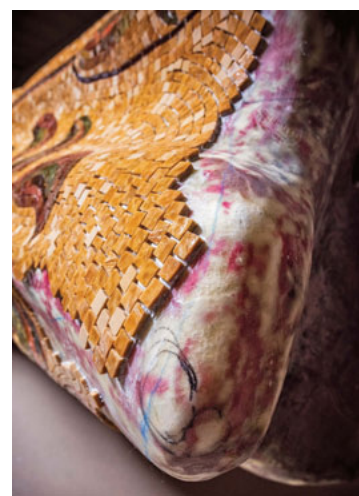
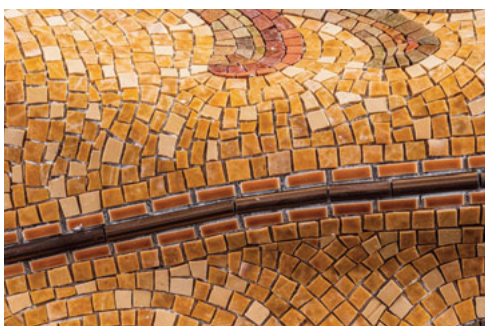
**Blue Genie rigged a clever spindle** through the center (LEFT) so we could rotate the column and work horizontally (BELOW). Four fiberglass "plugs" covered areas where the steel armature is bolted to the pavement. *Photo: Danny Fulgencio*



### Creating the "bootstitch"

An orange cord temporarily marked the gaiter side seams (LEFT, ABOVE). We were lucky to find a bronze-look resin pencil liner at a local flooring store. It was exactly the profile we wanted to simulate a leather cord. Tiny porcelain rectangles from WitsEnd Mosaics were used to mock side stitches (LEFT, BELOW).

*Photo: Danny Fulgencio*



### The column arrived sporting a tie-dyed look.

Apparently, when a fiberglass form is made, each layer of resin is tinted a different color so that you can see where you need to continue applying each successive coat. It looks

"bruised" because they then grind it down to get a totally smooth surface for the mosaics.

*Photo: Danny Fulgencio*





**Adding details with paper patterns** Photo: Danny Fulgencio



**Spreading the Latapoxy to accept mosaic section** Photo: Danny Fulgencio



**Adhering a face-taped mosaic rose detail** Photo: Danny Fulgencio

### Trying a new product and helpful advice from LATICRETE

I originally wanted to use LATICRETE's Glass Tile Adhesive tinted with Permacolor packets, but we were advised by the Technical Services gurus at the LATICRETE Helpline (1-800-243-4788 x1235) that a cement-based adhesive would not adhere to fiberglass/epoxy. Instead, they recommended Latapoxy 300, a three-part epoxy system.

I was nervous about epoxy, but after mixing more than 25 batches, I am sold on this product. We called in my longtime friend and art conservator, Cher Goodson, an expert on all things glue. She walked us through all the technical advice, mixing instructions, and safety considerations. I wore an N-95 mask, gloves, and glasses while measuring, weighing, and mixing the silicate component inside a large, clear plastic bag, which kept the dust contained until the epoxy was fully mixed.

#### Some helpful information learned over the weeks:

- *The instructions say there's a 45-minute work time, but we were able to work with it for about 2.5 hours before it became too sticky to spread.*
- *Spread the adhesive in a larger area than the feature being glued.* Use the excess to make an outline in the background color. We selected a three-row outline, which helped to dictate the overall andamento and elegantly fill empty areas.

- *It's easier to adhere heavier pieces—such as the Quarry Tile border and lid—as the epoxy starts to harden. Right before it flashes, Latapoxy becomes a workable putty.*
- *As epoxy gets stickier, it tends to peel away from the fiberglass while spreading, so we troweled the epoxy in a larger andamento field, then let it get sticky before adhering the tesserae.*
- *Acetone is essential to working cleanly—there are always fingerprints and globs of epoxy to remove. Cleaning up any ooze in the joints is much easier when the epoxy is firmer—before it's taped overnight.*
- *Don't peel the tape too soon.* We had better results when we taped the fresh sections and left them to cure overnight. It's fun to arrive in the morning and reveal a new section.
- *Since many of our feature elements had to be made double-direct on tables, we cut them into manageable sections to facilitate the gluing.*
- *Mark registration lines.* Since the surface of sculpture is undulating, the mosaic-taped sections can be cut apart and adjusted when gluing.
- *If epoxy buckets are allowed to cure overnight, dry epoxy can be pulled out for bucket reuse.*



**Carefully adding fresh epoxy to fill andamento.** Photo: Danny Fulgencio



**We let the shapes dictate the direction of the background andamento.** Photo: Danny Fulgencio



**This photo angle clearly shows the undulations of the fiberglass form.** Photo: Danny Fulgencio



### PHASE 3: Installation of the Pamplona Rose Polaina

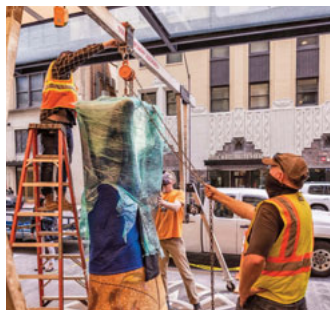


LEFT: Julie deciding where to place the sculpture RIGHT: Drilling Neolith, concrete, and rebar for a 9" bolt. Photos: Danny Fulgencio

Blue Genie used a rented "gantry" to hoist the mosaic into place, which I'm sure was invented by the Greeks or Romans. They'd cleverly designed a bolt attachment in the top of the armature.

When we got to the site, they screwed a hook into the top and used that to raise the sculpture onto the gantry. We placed the template, then marked the site and the bolt holes. After drilling for 9-inch bolts and epoxying said bolts into place, we all took a late lunch break while we waited for the inspector.

The dreaded inspectors are sometimes intimidating. Ours showed up in hiking shorts and a matching shirt, looking more like Steve Irwin than a city official. After obtaining a "cool!" from said inspector, we covered the bolt sites with fiberglass "plugs" capped in Quarry Tile.



ABOVE AND RIGHT: Blue Genie: Chris, Evan, and Kevin planned the armature for this moment. Photos: Danny Fulgencio

After the official unveiling (April 22nd), I aspire to get a manicure and take a nap.



Julie cuts tile to fill the hole left by the spindle. Photo: Danny Fulgencio

#### FUN FACTS:

Column Weight: 600 lbs

Surface Area: 77.8 square feet

Colors: 35+

Mosaic Fabrication/Application:  
600 hours

Number of Tesserae: Who knows?

**But it's everyone's first question!**





**Final installation day photo.**  
**#Relieved**

*Photo: Tammy Whiteman*

*Julie has been creating mosaic art and custom installations for more than 30 years. Her mosaics and sculptures have been exhibited across the United States and in Italy at the biennial Ravenna Mosaico festival and at the Orsoni Smalti Veneziani foundry in Venice as part of the Orsoni Grand Prize for mosaic in 2009. She has been honored with SAMA MAI awards for her Night Shirt and La Corrente mosaic sculptures.*

[www.julierichemosaics.com](http://www.julierichemosaics.com)

When the clients—local developer, Jackson Shaw—and our LATICRETE rep visited the site, they were really curious about the process. They’ve been great team partners, always providing me with the experts needed: lighting consultants, installers, architects, engineers, city permitting, and inspectors, etc. This was truly a team effort!

- Developer:* Jackson Shaw, Dallas
- Architects:* Merriman/Anderson, Dallas
- Contractor:* Austin Industries, Dallas
- Waterjet:* Enso Fabrication, Grand Prairie
- Boot Stitch Installation:* Sigma Marble, Dallas
- Column Fabricator:* Blue Genie Art Industries, Austin
- Adhesives:* LATICRETE International
- Smalti:* Mosaicos Venecianos de México, Cuernavaca
- Neolith:* The Stone Collection, Dallas
- Boot Stitch Natural Hues:* DalTile, Dallas
- Assistants:* Ana Foncerrada and Greg Cox
- Photographer:* Danny Fulgencio, Dallas
- Project Manager, JS:* Tammy Whiteman
- Fort Worth Arts Council Liaison:* Martha Peters

**Anyone who has been a SAMA member knows** that some of the greatest benefits of the group are the friendships formed while attending conferences and workshops. I met Ana Foncerrada in Dallas during my first mosaic class with instructor Sonia King in 2001. We quickly became conference roomies, collaborators and Mosaics in Mexico workshop co-founders. I couldn’t do what I do without Ana. Here’s to a great partnership and a treasured friendship.



**Get a good photographer!**

My friend Danny Fulgencio has been photographing my projects for a few years now. He’ll climb onto a downtown roof to get the perfect shot, if necessary. We scheduled several sessions, some with time lapse and Go-Pro cameras. This takes the pressure off of us to stop and document the process, and his lights, timers, tripods, and multiple lenses get details an iPhone can’t capture.

<https://dannyfulgencio.com/>