

LIME WORKS

by Pat McAfee
Using Lime in Traditional and New Buildings

reviewed by Jeff Price

Imagine a world where homeowners, craftsmen, contractors and architects know nothing or next to nothing about the use of lime in the preservation and conservation of historic masonry. This world exists and among its unenlightened inhabitants are individuals who are responsible for maintaining and protecting our architectural heritage.

Patrick McAfee's newest book speaks not only to the people in this lime-less state, but also to those of us, like myself, for whom lime is an integral part of day-to-day business.

Lime Works, commissioned by the Building Limes Forum of Ireland, addresses the use of lime in traditional structures (as well as new buildings) from three separate but related perspectives. In this book the author walks us through the various points of view taken by those with different 'roles' to play in the restoration and preservation of masonry, so that those who act in a single capacity have a more comprehensive understanding of the entire situation.

Often we find works on the preservation of historic masonry that were written for specifiers, tradesmen and others that take a technical approach to a historic masonry material such as lime and present it from a standpoint of the chemistry and processes of manufacture, failing to address the countless questions and concerns that pop up in everyday, on-the-job activities.

Pat, as he is known to his many friends and colleagues, is a craftsman of the highest order, a specifier (in his role as a technical consultant and educator of traditional practices) and one who clearly appreciates

the concerns of the homeowner or client. A second-generation stonemason, he has been familiar with lime since he began his apprenticeship and over the years has garnered considerable experience in transmitting his knowledge of the subject by way of a large number of seminars and workshops. His experience as craftsman and teacher is what informs this book and makes its subject understandable.

Lime Works explores each topic through a series of questions (presumably questions that have been addressed to the Lime Forum or directly to Pat) and informative answers. This format engages the reader much more than a merely technical exposition of the subject would do and leaves him or her, amateur or professional, with a more tangible understanding of the topic.

Part One considers the standpoint of the building owner. The fundamentals of lime, issues dealing with pointing, the whys and why-nots of various building materials are all discussed with clarity—the illustrated lime cycle here is the best I've ever seen.

Part Two addresses historic masonry through the eyes of the craftsman, whether stonemason, brick mason, plasterer, or painter. The overwhelming majority of the information laid out here is universal and there is little that is lost in translation. Turning the page to the brick masonry section though, the reader is quickly transported to the various decorative brick masonry treatments that are common in Ireland, often seen in England and the United Kingdom and occasionally encountered in metropolitan North America but which are rare to non-existent in the rest of the world. I found this exposure delightful and enlightening.

Pat's introductions to lime rendering and plastering (both plain and decorative) are clear and crisp, leaving little to question. The section on lime wash explores the very basics of the practice. A bit of this may be lost on an American reader unfamiliar with the beauty of copperas (ferrous oxide) or other colored lime washes which brighten Ireland's townscapes and countrysides, but the exposure to this and other international practices reminds us how unique our distinct cultural heritages are.

Part Three, written for the specifier, provides the architect, consultant, clerk of works or conservator with the basic understanding of materials and processes. It clearly charts various mortar types, appropriate applications, and mix designs, and answers questions that will occur to 'newbie' specifiers by describing scenarios with which they are likely to be confronted. This is useful, not only to the specifiers, but to those who must work with them.

To an American involved with masonry, particularly restoration masonry, it can seem tiresome to constantly turn to our neighbors across the pond for definitive works on lime and masonry. I have often considered putting my thoughts on the subject to paper, attempting to fill what is, in my opinion, a void in the published material on the subject. After reading a few short chapters in *Lime Works*, however, I put that notion aside. The void has been filled. This is the book I've always wanted to write. ■

Jeff Price is director of sales and marketing for Virginia Lime Works, manufacturers of traditional lime materials.

LIME WORKS is available through Building Limes Forum Ireland at <http://www.buildinglimesforumireland.com>. It will probably find itself on Amazon someday like Pat's other books: Irish Stone Walls and Stone Buildings.

