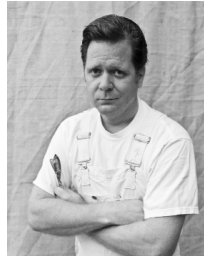


ARTISTIC PROCESS



ACBA PLASTER WORK: FROM BLANK SLATE TO GOTHIC MASTERPIECE

words: Maggie Bacon

Michael Lauer, plaster worker and recent graduate of the American College of the Building Arts, can transform a space from ordinary to extraordinary with his intricate and skillfully crafted designs. The only school of its kind in the country, the ACBA teaches techniques of days gone by: architectural stone, carpentry, forged architectural ironwork, plaster working, preservation masonry, and timber framing. The school's main campus is now at The Old City Jail (such a cool place to take classes!).



Lauer's senior thesis is now part of the permanent décor in what he refers to as a "living laboratory" for ACBA students. He transformed the bead-board third-floor ceiling of the main building into an elaborate Gothic-styled, strapwork ceiling. He let us in on his process.

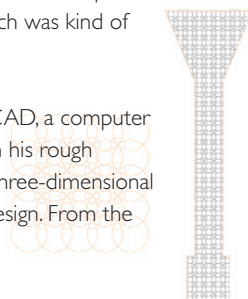
After establishing the ceiling as the location for his project, Lauer made a rough sketch of the design. He turned to his surroundings for

inspiration and to create something that worked with the existing structures. "I tried to find ornamental or decorative pieces throughout the jail, which was kind of a challenge."

Lauer then used AutoCAD, a computer design program, to turn his rough sketch into a detailed, three-dimensional representation of his design. From the



76



detailed drawing, he made polyurethane moulds to produce perfect replicas of various design elements.

To create the strapwork portion of the design, Lauer used PVC pipe to mold the underside of the plaster. For the contoured edges on the outside of the plaster he used a horse – an arched wooden device with a zinc blade in the center that, when slid across the plaster, cuts away pieces to form the desired shape. For the decorative border, Lauer made a mould combining four of the tri-foils (the individual circular pieces) to form a linear arrangement.

After creating multiple replicas using his moulds, Lauer began installation. A horse was again used to create the shape of the cornice. After recreating the layout of the design, he scored the ceiling to ensure adequate adhesion. Lauer then began installing each piece of the strapwork and cornice enrichment. Slowly but surely, each piece came together to form the Gothic masterpiece that now inhabits the Old City Jail.

The Old City Jail is usually open, and visitors can come and check out the school and see Michael's and other students' work. If you want your very own decorative plaster ceiling, Michael Lauer now owns and operates his own plaster-working business here in Charleston.

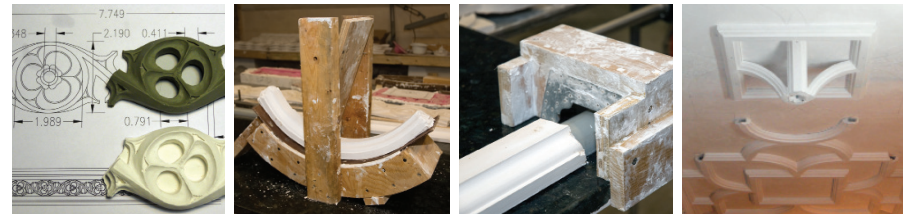
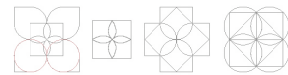


ACBA PLASTER WORK

843-801-3588

info@michaellauerstudios.com

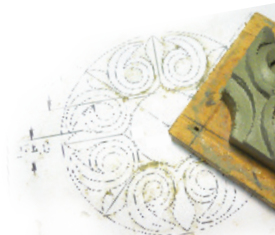
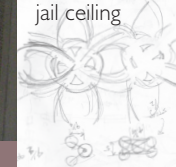
www.michaellauer.com



THE PROCESS: **1.** Three-dimensional moulds out of plasteline clay. **2.** Michael developed to form the arched shape of the straps **3.** The horse is run along the cornice to form the final shape. **4.** Transferring design to jail ceiling



Former ACBA plasterwork student
Cody Donahue at work.



77