

Backfill

Plumber's Worst Nightmare: A Five-Ton Tub



Architects like Roger Hopkins. Carpenters and electricians like him, too. But plumbers? They hate him. It's not that they don't appreciate his stone benches and garden sculpture — but they're the ones who have to install the sinks and tubs he carves from giant boulders.

Hopkins works from an outdoor "studio" in North Palm Springs, Calif. Every so often, trucks come by, delivering huge pieces of stone that Hopkins and his associate, Saori Itose, transform into hot tubs.

The chunk of black granite — actually gabbro — shown here (1) started out as an 18-ton boulder but was cut in half at the quarry with a diamond wire saw. Itose used a pneumatic cutoff saw with a water-cooled diamond blade to score the stone (2) and a chisel to chip out the waste (3). In the two-and-a-half weeks it took to rough out the tub, she removed four tons of material.

Of course, no one wants to pay \$30,000 for a tub that will tear a swimsuit, so once the boulder was hollowed out, Itose smoothed the inside with an angle grinder equipped with successively finer cup wheels. After that, the tub was nearly complete (4).

Two tasks remain — drilling holes for the jets and polishing the surface with a flexible diamond wheel. The completed tub will be installed at a nearby spa. In the meantime, some advice for all you plumbers: Don't get too comfortable. There were two halves to that boulder, and the other five-tonner could be headed your way. — *David Frane*

