

F I R E B R E A T H I N G D R A G O N

Even though Palos enjoys international recognition as a pioneer in the restoration business, he most enjoys assignments where he's creating original designs. Perhaps the most striking and memorable piece in the Palos portfolio is the Limestone Dragon fireplace he designed and carved for actor Nicholas Cage's

Pacific Heights home in 1993. Flipping through albums of photographs, Palos fondly recalls the entire process, "It was a pleasure every minute. I really loved it."

Borrowing inspiration from a children's book about dragons, Palos sketched the design that features a huge dragon that reaches from the floor to the ceiling (thirteen-feet-tall-by-ten-feet-wide) with the mouth of the dragon as the opening of the fireplace. Palos points out a photograph that shows a child hiding in the dragon's mouth, "I'm still excited to talk about this project." In order to obtain enough black limestone for the project, Palos moved his studio to Mexico, where he

labored over the sculpture for nearly five months. After matching and assembling thirteen pieces of stone, Palos chiseled the twists and bends of the beast, using pneumatic tools to finish the scales that coat its sinewy coils. "If any part of the face broke, I would have to start over." With the completed sculpture loaded on a truck, Palos drove it back to San Francisco himself.

In the mean time, the foundation and the walls of Cage's Victorian home were reinforced to hold the weight of the four-and-a-half ton dragon fireplace. The three week installation involved using a crane to hoist pieces of the fireplace from the street to the house. Palos and four assistants reassembled it using a special system of scaffolds and pulleys, securing the pieces with stainless steel pins and epoxy. "Most people figure that carving the dragon was the most demanding part of the project. It turned out that installing it was much more work than carving it," he added, shaking his head.

