

2012 GOVERNOR'S HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARDS

Santa Barbara Courthouse – Spirit of the Ocean Fountain



(Left) Photo of the original sculpture in 1928



(Right) Photo of the replica sculpture 2011

The Santa Barbara Courthouse was built following a devastating earthquake in 1925 that destroyed a majority of the downtown buildings in Santa Barbara. Included in the Spanish-Revival design of the replacement courthouse complex is a large sculpted fountain executed by Venetian master carver Ettore Cadorin. Comprised of a male and female figure embracing a fish with a water feature at its base, it represents the strong historic connection of Santa Barbara with the Pacific Ocean, hence the name, Spirit of the Ocean.

Since the 1970s, the all-volunteer Courthouse Docent Council cared for the fountain. Sadly, damage to the piece continued, culminating with the application of a waterproofing material to try to stop the intrusion of water, an application that did not change the fact that the piece was failing from the inside, until a major chunk of the fish head fell off into the water. The first phase of a Historic Structures Report (HSR) was underway and when the fish head failure happened, the Santa Barbara Courthouse Legacy Foundation shifted the focus to the fountain. The Foundation hired an image scanning company to produce a 3D electronic image of the entire piece and reconstruct the head electronically. The electronic model was sent to a foam fabricator.

Next, they needed a world-class carving team, which they located finishing a project on a Santa Barbara estate. The team of five, headed by Nick Blanter, was hired to recreate the Spirit of the Ocean fountain from the foam replica, historic photographs and the surviving piece. Because the foam replica was of the statue in its decomposed state, the carvers used molding clay and plaster to correct defects, and add lost details and muscular tone to the foam model. Using chisels with tips custom shaped to match the original chisels, the carvers employed an archaic technique called "Pointing." To give the community the chance to see the carvers at work, they set up a tented workshop on the front lawn of the courthouse.

With the help of local stone experts, five blocks of Santa Barbara Coldwater Sandstone weighing 190 tons were cut from boulders located in nearby foothills and donated by the owner of Slipper Rock Ranch, Law & Order creator Dick Wolf. Installation of the finished carved blocks was also a complex task that took three days. The eight-month project was a collaboration of the public and private sectors,

along with individuals in the community. City and County government provided \$200,000 of the \$731,000 needed. A private foundation and major donors added \$300,000 and the remaining \$231,000 came in the form of in-kind resources.

Learn more about the Santa Barbara Courthouse Spirit of the Ocean Fountain:

<http://www.courthouselegacyfoundation.org/projects/spirit-ocean-fountain>