

SLATEWORKS



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Features



UK focus
University of Bristol: random width, diminishing course restoration



UK focus
Shere, Surrey: new, luxury village homes



International focus
Oslo, Norway: designer town house refurbishment



Welcome to the second edition of Slateworks, our ‘born-again’ quarterly newsletter. Having recently returned from a trip to our quarry in far-off Argentina, I’d like to dedicate this issue to my new-found colleagues there; to say “thanks!” for making my visit such an experience!

By Zoë Williams, Group Marketing Manager

It’s easy to forget that roofing slate, unlike so many building products, isn’t something that’s just churned out in a factory. However, roofing slates are made of slate, a natural material that’s quarried, cut into blocks and then painstakingly split and dressed by hand. SSQ has its own quarry in the La Florida area of central Argentina which, as it’s the source of two of our most popular product ranges – SSQ Riverstone® roofing slate and SSQ Riverstone® architectural stone – meant the arduous, 20-hour journey was a price well worth paying.

Riverstone roofing slate and architectural stone are actually phyllite, a rock very closely related to slate. Phyllite has exactly the same characteristics as slate but generally exceeds its qualities: it looks like slate, feels like slate and performs like slate – but it’s stronger, less absorbent and more resilient. It’s a great building material and one that’s been quarried and used in the region for thousands of years.

First stop was our office and factory complex in Juana Koslay, set in a picturesque part of San Luis, about 750 km west of Buenos Aires. It’s here that the blocks of rock are brought to be cut into architectural stone or split into roofing slates, dressed, quality-checked and palletised for dispatch to our customers around the world. It’s a fascinating process – especially the speed at which the blocks are split, by hand, into roofing slates of equal thickness. It’s a process that hasn’t changed over the millennia: it needs a craftsman’s ‘eye’ and a deft hand to aim a precise blow and ‘tchack’, a new roofing slate is born.

The forty-minute drive into the foothills of the Sierra de San Luis laid rest my preconceived ideas of where one of Mother Nature’s oldest and toughest materials would come from. My thoughts of a harsh, bleak landscape – slate-quarry rugged, central-continent dry and arid – were replaced by the reality being quite the opposite: lush pampas grass, beautiful lakes, wild horses...

And then the quarry. If the factory was impressive, La Florida quarry was truly awesome! Just as standing at the edge of the ‘steps’ looking down into the quarry was breathtaking; being there, in its heart, was an unforgettable experience that left my senses reeling. The heat and noise reflected by the quarry’s cliff-like walls only heightened the assault on reality: super-size machinery sawing car-size blocks of rock; trucks of epic proportions growling fiercely as they climbed out of the quarry and off to have their precious, 650-million-year cargo split into roofing slates – the first few yards in a journey that’ll eventually see them becoming a roof over some lucky person’s head!

Reflections? Firstly: I’ve lots of great colleagues there – and they’re doing a great job to provide us with a product whose production we often don’t give a thought about. Secondly: a strange reassurance. If that’s what it takes to produce it, then it’s got to be a pretty incredible building material! (PS: And the steak definitely lives up to its reputation, too!)



**Uncover the source,
discover the pedigree**





UK focus

University of Bristol – a towering success

The medieval grandeur of its spectacular turreted and castellated tower suggests the University of Bristol's HH Wills Physics Laboratory has been with us for centuries, not just a mere eighty years. Opened on 21 October 1927, the building is a tribute to HO Wills, head of the Wills tobacco empire, founder of the university and its first chancellor. The building, designed by (Sir) George Oatley, stands in the gardens of the Royal Fort, the tower being one of six planned to crown the hill.

A recently completed restoration project has rejuvenated the exterior of the grade II-listed building – Iain Martin, Director of Architecture at Capita Architecture outlines the challenge provided by the roof:

"It's a mansard roof with dormer windows interrupting the lower pitches, the slate covering being laid in an attractive 'random width, diminishing course' pattern. Two different slates had been used – most were very old, possibly reclaimed, Cornish Delabole and were in very poor condition with up to three-quarters of them being 'blown' from water damage, and there was also a small, more recent section, of an unidentifiable, but possibly Cumbrian, slate."

Project: The HH Wills Physics Laboratory, University of Bristol

Location: Bristol, Avon

Architect: Capita Architecture, Bristol

Product: SSQ Ultra Riverstone® Grey Random roofing slate

The condition of the slates led to four possible solutions being explored including reclaiming what could be saved and supplementing them with new slates, to replacing the entire roof. Kevin O'Flaherty, the university's Capital Projects Officer takes up the story:

"The project team discussed the options with the conservation officer overseeing the project and it was decided to re-roof with new slates. We considered three premium-quality slates – Delabole, Burlington and Riverstone – but chose Riverstone as it was the most similar in colour to the original Delabole slates used, was within our budget and was readily available. With the decision made, Camilleri, the roofing contractor involved with the project, stripped the roof back to the frame, replaced the battens and underlay and faithfully recreated the random, diminishing course effect of the original. We're all delighted with the result."



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Forrest Place – sheer delight!



Forrest Place is located near the centre of Shere, a picturesque Surrey village that lies within the Shere Conservation Area, the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and an area classified as being of Great Landscape Value.

Although the development of eight, luxury village homes replaced old commercial premises, its location in such an aesthetically sensitive area meant the design, material and workmanship had to be, to quote builder JG Brooks of Guildford, "Absolutely top-notch." And, as Ben Hunt from project managers Total Project Integration in Weybridge explains, the roof was no exception...

"With so many 'interested parties' the local planners set their minds on a natural slate roof at a very early stage of the project and, from this starting point, we needed something that would satisfy a number of technical and aesthetic requirements. Technically, the slate had to meet client Brancaster Estates' high-quality specification and be suitable for use on several low roof-pitches. Aesthetically, it had to complement the local 'Shere Green' colour and its appearance had to help unite the development with its 'deepest-darkest' Surrey setting.



Project: Forrest Place – luxury village homes

Location: Shere, Surrey

Architect: OSP Architecture, West Byfleet

Product: SSQ First Domiz® Blue-grey roofing slate

Julian Bohling, of OSP Architecture, suggested using one of SSQ's slates: the quality and strength were there, the colour was similar to indigenous Welsh slate and its 'traditional' look was in keeping with the surrounding community. He was quite confident about this; in fact he'd actually used the same slate on his own Edwardian house – what better a recommendation!

So we were all quite happy to use SSQ Domiz® Blue-grey roofing slate. It's an elegant solution and everyone's happy with the finished result – including the planners and residents of the village."



Uncover the source,
discover the pedigree



Bubble bath, candlelight and Riverstone – luxury at its finest!

Project: Town house – designer-styled refurbishment

Location: Oslo, Norway

Architect: K Jarmund Architects, Oslo

Product: SSQ Riverstone® architectural stone

Set in a leafy, residential suburb of Oslo, the interior of this listed, two-storey town house has been transformed during a refurbishment that's made much use of natural materials to provide an ultra-modern look that's as practical as it is stunning

The property benefited from a large, deep basement: converting this into a sumptuous living room allowed the building's internal layout to be drastically reconfigured to make use of its new-found spaciousness.

Just over 144m² of SSQ Riverstone architectural stone from the Natural Split and Honed ranges were used in the project. Each piece was individually cut to meet a detailed cutting list; the order being ready for dispatch within just three weeks of it being received. Once in place the stone creates a number of head-turning features including a wide stairway with an integral, stepped seating area on one side that cascades into the basement living room bringing with it light and space. In each of the three bathrooms, subtle lighting highlights the rich colours and natural beauty of the floor and wall tiles.

To quote the architect: *"I've specified Riverstone architectural stone on previous occasions so have no doubts about the 'wow-factor' it offers. The colour and texture of the stone complements the other natural materials perfectly. It's a beautiful stone to work with and I'll definitely use it again on future projects."*



SSQ Ultra Heavy Riverstone® Grey



SSQ Sarria® Blue

New arrivals

It's good to be able to tell you that we've recently launched two new products: SSQ Ultra Heavy Riverstone® Grey roofing slate and SSQ Sarria® Blue roofing slate.

As I'm sure you know, Riverstone Grey has become one of the most popular, premium-quality roofing slates in the UK. Although quarried in Argentina (see page 1), its colour, texture and quality have delighted designers and contractors – sentiments matched by many of the UK's conservation agencies who have readily approved its use as an alternative for less readily available, more expensive indigenous slate. The new, heavyweight version of the slate is an obvious addition to the range and comes in response to numerous requests from designers and roofing contractors asking for a 'heavy' Riverstone Grey slate for use in exposed conditions or on roofs with very low pitches.

The second new arrival is SSQ Sarria Blue roofing slate, a strong slate quarried in the Orense region of western Spain. The slate is a deep blue-black colour with a distinct blue tinge in sunlight and is unique in our range in that it's attractively speckled with visible mineral inclusions. These have been petrographically examined and are totally stable; subsequent testing has resulted in the slate being awarded a T1 classification. Another feature is that the rock splits very cleanly, the consistently flat surface of the cleave offering a smooth appearance across a roof's surface.

We'd be delighted to send you samples and further information about either SSQ Ultra Heavy Riverstone® Grey roofing slate or SSQ Sarria® Blue roofing slate – please contact me on either 0208 961 7725 or at zoe@ssq.co.uk

We hope you've enjoyed *Slateworks* and found it inspiring. If you have anything you would like to contribute to future issues, or would like us to send you, or your colleagues, additional copies, please contact Zoë Williams on:

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Samples and literature

A full range of product guides, slate samples and geological test documents are available on request from:

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