

# Plasterer maintains family tradition

By Iain Wilson

Jean-Francois Furieri is carrying on a family tradition. He is the third generation to be a master of the art of decorative plaster. But although his family made its mark in Europe, he has chosen Toronto as his home.

Although he has only been in Canada for nine years, Mr. Furieri has already left his indelible imprint on the city. His company, Iconoplast Designs Inc. was involved in the \$17-million historical restoration of Cineplex-Odeon's Pantages theatre on Yonge Street.

His work on the project included restoring the great dome over the theatre, the entrance foyer, the ceiling under the balcony and two huge grilles on each side of the stage. The grilles are decorated with nymphs and gilded to look like they did when the theatre opened in 1920.

Iconoplast Designs also worked in collaboration with the theatre's architect, David Mesbur, engineer Peter Kofman and interior designer Julia Strutt on the Phantom Suite. The suite, once a room used by the actors waiting to go on stage, is now used by guests.

The suite is styled after a Roman courtyard and bathed in soft recessed lighting. Sculptured haut reliefs by Iconoplast Designs adorn the walls.

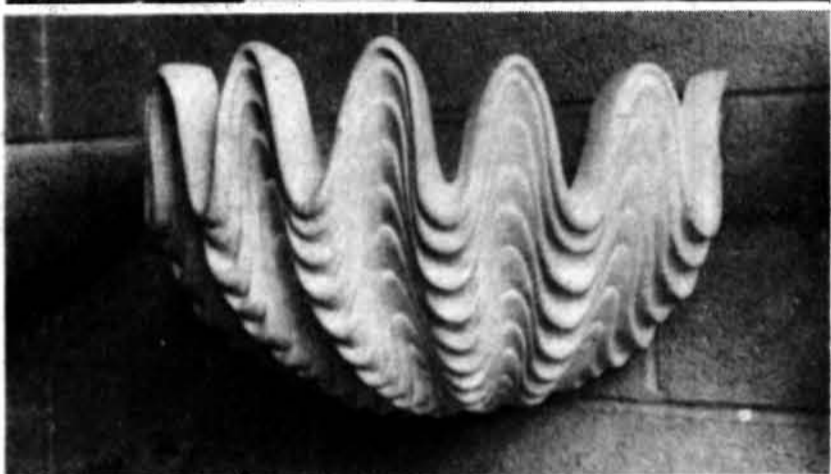
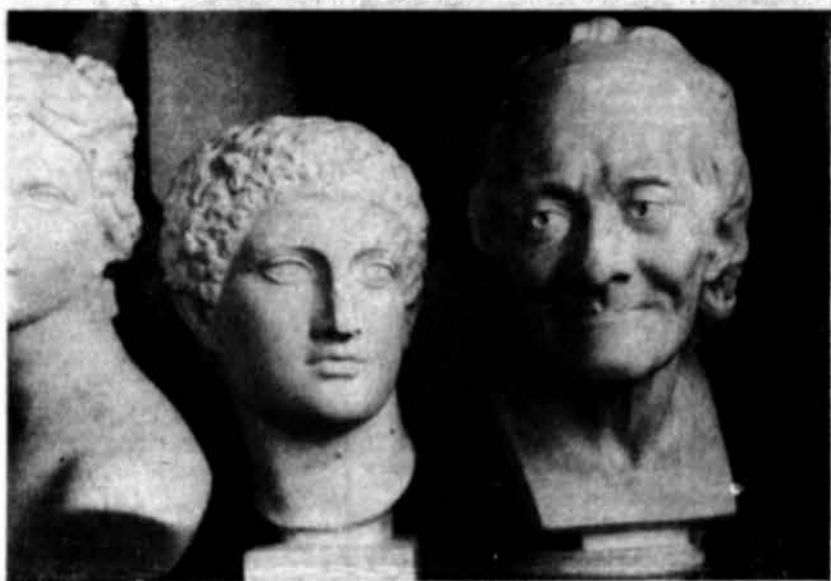
For his work in the Pantages, Mr. Furieri said he worked closely with the designers and architects. They provided him with drawings, blueprints and sketches of what the original plasterwork looked like. From there, Mr. Furieri took over.

"People come to me because all I need from them is a picture. I develop the concept, do the shop drawings and then we do the complete realization."

In some cases all that is needed is a facsimile drawing. In one instance, a square dome was needed for the World Financial Tower in New York City. With only the barest of instructions, Mr. Furieri said he was able to visualize the project and complete it to the customer's satisfaction without even going to the site.

All stages of the plaster restoration are done in Iconoplast's workshop. From shop drawings Mr. Furieri makes a clay mould. A "waste mould" is cast from the clay model and a production mould is in turn cast from the waste mould. Iconoplast will then produce as many plaster pieces as necessary and install them.

The process is different for a sculptor such as Andrew Andrechuck, who restored the



plaster work at the Elgin theatre on Yonge Street.

Mr. Andrechuck is primarily a clay modeller and is not involved in the production or installation of his work.

Materials used in the final plaster castings include fibre glass-reinforced gypsum cement and polymerised gypsum cement to give strength and durability.

Mr. Furieri considers work such as that at the Pantages theatre to be somewhat groundbreaking in North America and is hopeful it will raise the awareness among designers and homeowners who might want to use plaster in the home.

"Basically, it (awareness) will grow by being more acceptable as it is put on view," he said.

Iconoplast Designs does not do just commercial commissions. Mr. Furieri's workshop is filled with cornices, ceiling centres, bas reliefs and busts that could easily be used in the home. In fact, the home is seen as a growing market for plaster work.

"Beautiful interiors give an entirely different look to a home," Mr. Furieri said.

"It's really exciting to see such work being done in Toronto." ●



**Decorative plasterwork easily lends itself to use in the home, says Jean-Francois Furieri, who created plasterwork for the newly restored Pantages theatre.**

Photos by Marc Rochette

