

# SHE'S CARVED OUT A PLACE IN A ROCK-HARD INDUSTRY

BY SARAH FRANCIS  
PROVIDENCE BUSINESS NEWS  
11/10/2023



**A SOLID FOUNDATION:** Angela Conte sits with a selection of granite blocks at Structural Stone LLC that will be used for upcoming projects. Conte's father, a stone carver, built a quarry business after migrating from Portugal. Now she and her husband, Donald, operate their own business, Structural Stone, in North Kingstown. <sup>[P]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

PBN PHOTO/ELIZABETH GRAHAM

Explore many of the cities on the East Coast, and chances are you'll see the work of Angela Conte's North Kingstown company, Structural Stone LLC.

In Providence, it's the polished, star-filled granite sidewalk in front of the Providence Performing Arts Center and the stonework that's part of the Interstate 195 Washington Bridge. In Cambridge, Mass., there's Harvard Law School's sleek interior stone staircase and in Boston, the hardscapes and benches of City Hall Plaza. In New York, there are the stone approaches to the Brooklyn

Bridge and site work such as pavers around the 16-story attraction called The Vessel at Hudson Yards.

“Though stone never changes, everything surrounding it does,” Conte said.

Conte and her husband, Donald, a civil engineer, bought Structural Stone in 2009. Since then, it’s grown to become one of the largest stone fabricators in North America, according to Conte, Structural Stone’s CEO. The company offers stone selection, estimating, drafting, fabrication and delivery, and it specializes in cut-to-size materials. Projects, which feature regional granite, range from commercial and cultural locations to bridges and monuments.

There are many high-quality quarries in the U.S., Conte says. “I get really bothered when foreign stones end up on projects here, especially American monuments, and it happens all the time,” she said.

Conte has never known a life without stone.

“My father moved here from Portugal as a teenager,” she said. “He came with a skill.” Tony Ramos was a stone carver with smarts, talent and drive. Seeing an opportunity, he bought a quarry, then another, eventually becoming one of the biggest stone quarriers in the country.

“He’s the superhero of the story,” Conte said. “I can’t aspire to fill his shoes.”

Maine has been home to many commercial granite quarries since the early 19th century and Conte’s father bought one on Deer Isle in 1980. “It’s lovely up there,” Conte said. “I grew up in Rhode Island, but we’d vacation in Maine. It’s a different life and lifestyle. You develop a love for granite. The fact that stone is very meaningful becomes part of your life.”

Conte worked for her father as a kid, accompanying him when he was out looking at stone and architecture, but she didn’t consider it as a career, at least not at first.

She went to Boston University, earning a degree in business administration and finance. After graduation, she had an internship with a Boston investor. “That changed my mind. I realized I didn’t want to do finance,” she said.

She moved to a buyer training program at a large retail corporation in the Boston area. “It was fun but too corporate,” she said. She moved back to Rhode Island and a job as an assistant buyer at a large retail jewelry company but decided it wasn’t a good fit, either.

Instinctively, she knew she wanted to become part of the family business but on a professional level. Initially she worked for her father in sales, going to trade shows and visiting architects.

“The high point was when I walked into the office of Friedrich St. Florian with samples and it went from there,” Conte said. St. Florian, an influential Rhode Island architect, is best known as the creator of the somber National World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. The design called for the monument to be constructed of granite. Conte emphasizes that after that initial meeting with St. Florian, it took a team effort that was ultimately successful in winning the contract.

“My dad got the WW II project. It was probably his biggest job,” she said.

Years later, in 2009, Conte and her husband struck out on their own, buying an existing company that’s now Structural Stone, a sprawling 80,000-square-foot fabrication plant in the Quonset Business Park. Conte focuses on management and marketing, with a lot of juggling, she says with a laugh.

Ray Cucino, the company’s controller, has worked in the business for 23 years, originally for the previous owner. He’s seen the Contes’ company grow from 15 to 20 employees in the early days to 50 or so now.

“Angela and Don worked 24 hours a day back then,” he said. “I never saw a couple work so relentlessly. She had this huge background and knowledge of the business and that grew the company. She had that drive to be successful. You could see how she grew.”

Many of the employees are long-timers such as Cucino, who points to the company’s family atmosphere and the fact that the owners treat staff with respect, he says. In a competitive environment, that isn’t easy.

“Angela had a rough start in the beginning because of being a woman, but she got the respect she wanted. People admire her. Sometimes success goes to people’s heads. She’s not like that,” Cucino said.

Conte herself is more low-key.

“Is it a male-dominated field? Yes, it is the construction business. However, there are incredibly intelligent women in the stone business, and I have had the good fortune of knowing several,” she said. “There were many hands and minds contributing, including employees and family, and we need to acknowledge them. None of us do it alone.”