

STONE SECTOR EVOLVING INTO PILLAR INDUSTRY

Officials say quality of output, design, increasingly attracting international interest and demand for products, seen going from strength to strength, **Li Fusheng** reports.



The already-heavyweight stone sector is rising fast as a pillar industry in Guizhou province, with its growth rate averaging 25 percent in recent years.

Officials said the rapid development is thanks to a combination of a variety of elements, including its rich resources, favorable policies, geographical position and the growing market demand.

Data from prospecting indicate that stone reserves in the southwestern province stand at about 10 billion cubic meters.

Of that, marble accounts for some 3.6 billion cu m, or around 20 percent of China's total stone resources.

"We not only have huge stone reserves, but they are widely distributed," said Wu Qiang, director of the province's Economic and Information Technology Commission.

"A total of 75 types of stone in six big categories — including marble, granite and basalt — are found in 80 percent of the counties under Guizhou's jurisdiction."

According to Guizhou Daily, the province's main newspaper, local stone dealers' exhibits at a stone expo held earlier this year in Xiamen, Fujian province, soon became the envy of other exhibitors from around the world.

The Guizhou authorities are also giving a boost to the sector with policy support.

In a June 2015 document, the provincial government made it a goal to build the stone sector into one of Guizhou's advantaged industries, to stimulate its development.

The government promulgated a series of favorable policies, aimed at accelerating an upgrade of the sector and improving its competitiveness.

Wu said the annual stone fair held at Anshun, Guizhou province, is one example of the government's measures to boost the sector.

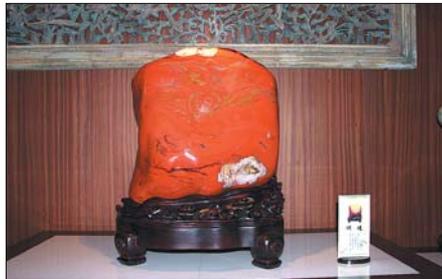
Last year, more than 200,000 people visited the fair, which attracted over 300 exhibitors, with more than



An ancient tower, made of local stone, is a popular landmark in Anshun, Guizhou province. YANG JUN / CHINA DAILY



Unusual stones featuring intense colors, on display at a museum in Anshun. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



20 of them coming from abroad.

In March, a business delegation led by Zhang Benqiang, vice-mayor of Anshun, made a trip to three European countries — Italy, the Czech Republic and Poland — to promote the fair.

Interested in the event and Guizhou's stone sector as a whole, an Italian stone association in Verona signed a memorandum with its Anshun counterpart to facilitate mutual investment.

Czech businessmen expressed

their desire to visit Anshun to learn more about its stone business, and Poland's MMG said it would like to import stone products from the city and become a long-term partner of the fair.

Zeng Yongtao, Anshun's Party

chief, has called for efforts to ensure that all work linked to the fair goes smoothly.

Anshun's stone output reached 8.25 million square meters in the first half of 2017, a year-on-year rise of 15 percent.

In the same period, the city's industrial output value of stone and related sectors amounted to 1.15 billion yuan (\$172.54 million).

Guizhou's geological position and transport facilities are helping to promote its stone business as well.

It connects Southwest China with East China and South China. By the end of 2015, all counties in Guizhou had access to expressways, and nine cities had their own airports.

Four major railways run through the province and its river networks enable local ships to reach the Yangtze River and the Pearl River.

"In a word, we have built a comprehensive transport system composed of flights, railways, roads and rivers," said the provincial economic and information technology commission's Wu Qiang.

Wu expects the demand for stone products to grow steadily, driving the sector's development.

China is one of the world's biggest stone consumers, using about 1 billion sq m of stone products annually, and the urbanization drive in the country will generate further demand, especially in the western region, Wu added.

To seize the opportunity, Guizhou is also improving its local infrastructure. One example is the emerging China (Anshun) Stone City, a new 7 billion yuan project.

With a planned area of just over 363 hectares, it is the biggest stone trade and expo center in China. It will also feature stone processing, logistics, product development, and other relevant functions. Phase one of the project, covering 102 hectares, has been finished.

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Masters to carve zodiac roosters live at show

By CHEN MEILING
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Twenty-five masters from around the country will perform stone carving in front of an audience in late August, at the third National Stone Carving and Design Competition held in Anshun in southwestern Guizhou province.

Su Kuifeng, from eastern Fujian province, is one of them. He said he felt a little nervous at the prospect of having to finish his work in just two and a half days.

"It generally takes half a month to complete a stone carving," he said. "Live competition is a real test of your ability, because any cheating is impossible."

It is the third time that Su has competed in the event.

His white marble sculpture of the sitting image of Chang'e — the goddess in the moon in Chinese tales — won him a golden award in the first contest back in 2015.

"It's a very good platform to show off your skills and establish potential commercial links," Su said.

Su started learning stone sculpture when he was about 10 years old. Now he is 36 and running his own workshop.

He and about 10 employees earn a living by doing project work for construction companies, including carving patterns on handrails.

Since a lot of people will witness the competition, it could provide a launchpad for new business, he said.

Su said he has won around 10,000 yuan (\$1,500) so far from the awards, an amount not to be sniffed at in stone-carving circles.

Co-organized by the China Stone Material Association and the China Development Strategy Institute for Building Materials Industry, the contest is open to companies, organizations and individuals across the country.

Since 2015, more than 1,100 sculptors from 26 provinces and regions have attended the contest.

"The event seeks to help the further development of the stone arts and nurture the cultural self-confidence of Chinese people," said Geng Pei, director of the 2017 contest's organizing committee office.

Geng said it aims to stimulate their enthusiasm for innovation and to promote the spirit of craftsmanship, so they perform fine work with perseverance.

The design contest of the twelve symbolic animals of the Chinese zodiac was extremely popular with the public in previous contests. This year's subject is the rooster, he added.

Stamps with images of the stone zodiac will be released in the market after the event.

Other themes of the contest included intangible cultural heritage, square sculptures, handicrafts and the region's unique application of stone materials.

Winning works will be displayed and evaluated at the final in Anshun in late August, competing for two golden, 10 silver and 20 bronze awards.

Geng added that the organizing committee would commission some companies to produce and sell prize-winning works.



The China (Anshun) Stone City will host the third National Stone Carving and Design Competition. ZHOU QINGZI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Expo expected to rock on with big rise in foreign exhibitors

By SONG MENGXING
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it will also attract more buyers, as well as domestic exhibitors.

Nearly 250 companies engaged in stone production from other domestic regions, such as Guangdong, Fujian, Jiangsu provinces and the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, will display their work at the expo.

More than 600 professional purchasing companies will attend the event, the organizing committee said.

The expo will cover an area of 100,000 square meters and its exhibition pavilion features the international, Hong Kong and Taiwan area and the Guizhou stone experience hall.

Wu Qiang, director at the Guizhou Economy and Information Technology Commission, said the Guizhou stone experience pavilion is a highlight of this year's expo. Twenty-two stone companies from the province have set up "perpetual experience halls" in the pavilion to exhibit Guizhou's highly regarded stone, Wu said.

The expo will be hosted in a professional stone expo center



An employee works at a plant operated by Guizhou Chenchun Stone Industry Co.

YANG JUN / CHINA DAILY

in Zhenning county in the city of Anshun in Guizhou. The province's government has agreed to make the center the permanent venue for future stone expos.

The decision also aims to build on the experiences from the previous expos, local officials said. Last year's event

welcomed more than 300 exhibition companies and attracted companies from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan and 15 countries including the United Kingdom, Germany and Italy.

Guests and businesspeople from domestic regions including Beijing, Shanghai and

Chongqing, executives from China's top 100 stone companies, scholars and representatives from stone associations also attended the 2016 expo.

Trading projects worth more than 40.08 billion yuan (\$6.01 billion) were signed at the expo and investment projects worth about 28.14 billion

yuan were inked.

The organizing committees of the previous two expos launched activities for selecting and evaluating the high quality varieties and products of Guizhou's stone. They chose 18 stone varieties and 48 products made by more than 20 stone manufacturing companies, including Guizhou Chenchun Stone Industry Co.

A national stone carving and design competition will also be held along with the expo. It aims to increase the expo's influence and encourage experts, master craftsmen and leading companies to support Guizhou and to help its stone and processing businesses to improve the quality of their products and artwork.

This year, some craftsmen will carve on site and receive evaluations of their work. A series of contests will be featured, including a design competition for the Year of the Rooster, a square sculpture design contest and a design contest for Guizhou stone tourism craftwork.