

Maine Man Copies Old Greek Urns

BY PATRICIA PEDDER

When 86-year-old Eric Soderholtz was a young man he wanted to grow flowers in the front yard of his West Gouldsboro seaside home. But the yard was solid ledge.

He planted the flowers, though. And grew himself a new career.

He turned out some king-size flower pots to hold the plants. With concrete and authentic molds he copied the pointed, graceful shapes of ancient Grecian urns.

Friends saw the urns and wanted duplicates. More folks saw the duplicates and the orders kept snowballing.

That was in 1904. And that was the time when Soderholtz, then a noted 34-year-old architectural photographer put away his camera and became equally famed as an artist in concrete.

In the 50 years since, he's produced concrete pieces that span a wide choice of design. They range from delicate bird baths to huge ornamental gate posts.

His largest order created a winter's work for himself and five West Gouldsboro men. The urns, statues, concrete garden fencing and ornamental gates weighed 52 tons and were shipped to a Newport, R. I. estate by schooner. A great deal of his work was sold to summer residents of Mt. Desert Island.

When 13 years of age in East Boston Soderholtz assisted his father in the photography business. For a few years he also studied architecture. He chose photography as his life work and went into business in Boston.

He soon was photographing art objects for Boston museums and doing considerable architectural photography. In 1901 he sold his business and with his wife travelled to Southern Europe on assignment as a photographer of ancient architectural structures there.

"We used 18 by 22 inch glass plates for our work there. Sometimes three men were needed to carry the glass filmplates for me," he relates. Two years later he returned to Boston with a unique and priceless collection of photographs; this collection he still has.

When he was fashioning concrete molds he often referred to the photos to duplicate the classic designs as closely as possible.

During World War I Mr. Soderholtz developed a concrete underwater mine. "I covered oval molds with cement," he



Artist In Concrete

Photo by Joy

Eric E. Soderholtz shows some of the delicate concrete garden decorations he designed and produced at his South Gouldsboro home. A veteran architectural photographer, he copied some of his items from classic European designs.

explained. Then I coated the affair with asphalt and varnish. One mine I partially filled with 200 pounds of junk iron, sealed it up and let it float in the bay."

"After I was sure it would work," he continued, "I wrote the government about it. I was referred to several offices and, after much letter writing, I was interviewed by government officials in Cambridge, Mass. The officials doubted that cement would float at all, and after a long conference I put on my hat and went back to West Gouldsboro to forget all about the making of mines.

"Two years later, I got a telephone call from a friend of mine in South Gouldsboro who

told me that one of my mines had floated ashore there. I told him to 'Just leave her there'."

The Chicago Cement Association, however, for a good many years has had on display one of Soderholtz' mines in its office, as well as several of his garden pottery pieces.

In the past few years, Mr. Soderholtz has not been able to create many of his art pieces as the work is heavy and help is difficult to get. He now designs copper decorative trays, lamps and ornaments.

Soderholtz has received formal recognition for his artistry. He most prizes an award of the Chicago Art Institute in 1913 for an exhibit of several large Grecian type urns.