

## Pass It On®...

### Miracle or Magician?

*Whoever created the Loretto stairs in Santa Fe was a master craftsman. To do it in 1878 with nothing but hand tools is awe-inspiring.*

The Loretto Chapel, in the heart of Santa Fe, New Mexico, is built from warm earthen adobe, with a small nave and, above it, a choir loft. But at the beginning, the two weren't connected.

Legend has it that when the unfinished chapel needed a staircase to access the choir loft, the nuns offered a novena — nine days of prayer — to St. Joseph, the patron saint of carpenters. After the nine days, a carpenter arrived on a donkey, carrying a toolbox, and set to work.

When the stairs were completed, the stranger vanished without accepting thanks or payment. Some research indicates that a man named Rochas was paid for wood. But not much else is known about the man, except that he was a member of a French secret society of highly skilled craftsmen and artisans called the Compagnons du Devoir, which had existed since the Middle Ages. Many believe him to have been St. Joseph himself.

The staircase is shaped like a helix and is connected only with wooden pegs. The result is one of the most stunning architectural accomplishments in the New World. The staircase floats upward in a spiral as if to Heaven, with no center support, only a delicate curve of treads that seem to defy gravity, adding to the mystery of how one man could accomplish such a feat of artistry.

"One hundred and fifty years ago, it took a very well-trained, seasoned, experienced master craftsman," says Seattle-based stair design consultant Shawn Christman. "The fact that somebody showed up out of the desert might be a miracle, but he knew exactly what he was doing."

It is such a beautiful work of art and craftsmanship that stair-builders from around the world visit the site dubbed the Miraculous Staircase.

"We all like to think we create creative stair designs and nice curved staircases, but to think how they did it that long ago and still attain the same quality

is breathtaking," says Greg Chamberlain of stair-builders Star South Inc., of Eatonton, Georgia.

Art and craftsmanship are the human way of expressing gratitude for the world we live in, trying to capture that little bit of the divine in each of us. The decades it takes to perfect a craft are a testament to the human drive to express beauty.

While only a few achieve legendary levels of artistry, each of us can find daily ways to make our world more pleasant to look at: a kind act, a simple smile, an expression of gratitude. While many artists are well known, perhaps the ones who make the most impact on our lives are those who remain anonymous, like the mysterious artisan who arrived in a desert town unannounced and slipped away unheralded.

**Create Beauty, Anonymously...** [PassItOn.com](https://passiton.com)

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