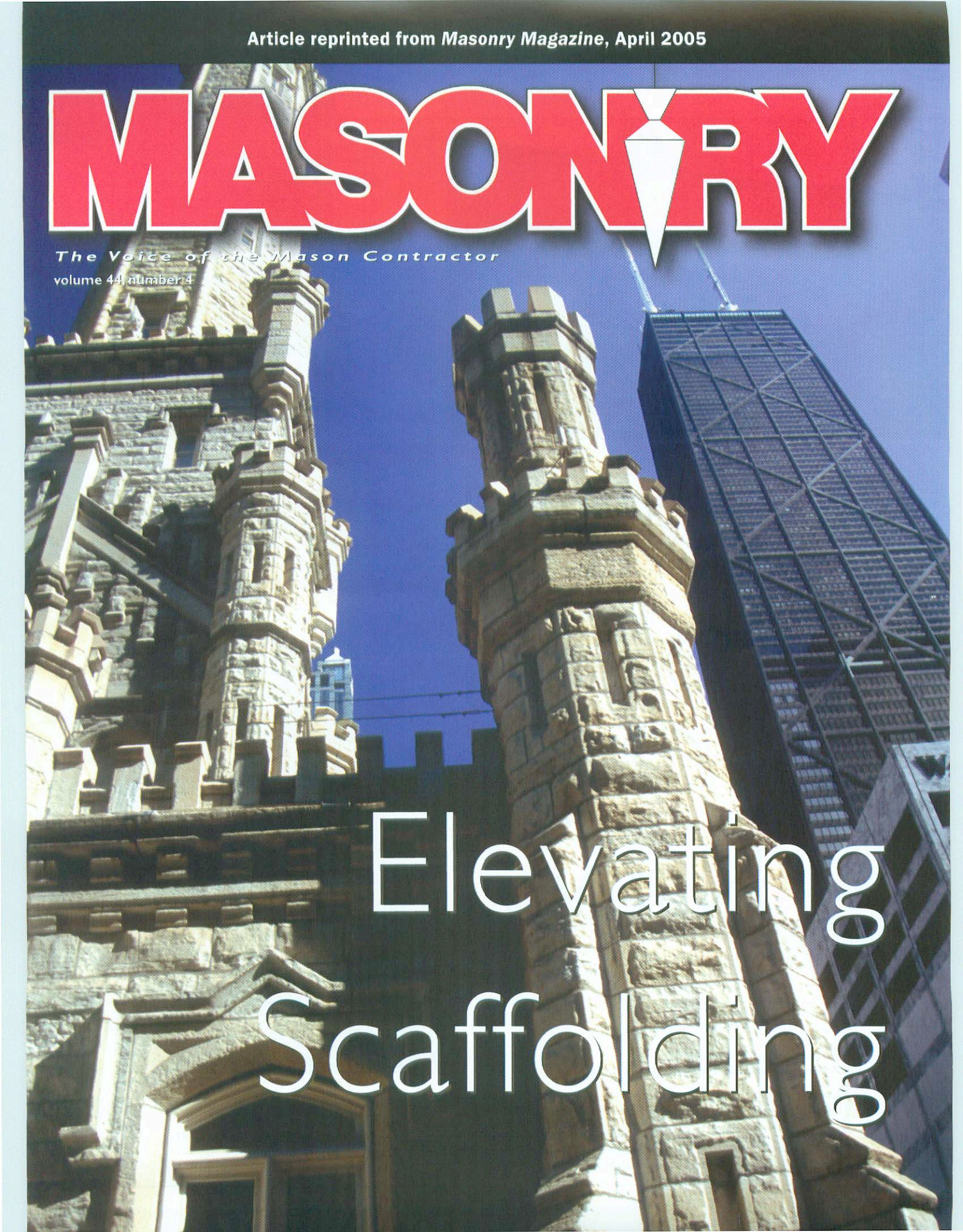


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Elevating
Scaffolding



A Scaffold by Any Other Name...



All photos courtesy of Non-Stop Scaffolding

Photos clockwise from top left:

The safety rails stay in place as the platform climbs the tower.

Adjustable scaffolding towers can be amazingly strong, as shown in this 1988 photo. Towers made of high-strength alloy steel allow this system to be safely built up to 552 feet high.

The building on the left is only nine feet away from the one under construction. Using his elevating scaffolding, the contractor was able to build his 245-foot-long wall in this narrow area. The walls in the open (shown here) were simple by comparison.

By Justin Breithaupt, Jr.
Owner, Non-Stop Scaffolding, Inc.

YOU HEAR IT CALLED ELEVATING SCAFFOLDING, ADJUSTABLE SCAFFOLDING, climbing scaffolding and tower scaffolding, to name just a few. Sometimes it's just called by its trade name, like Morgen or Non-Stop. Different regions of the country have different names for it, but the contractors who use it agree it is a huge improvement over the way they used to scaffold a job.

Considering its popularity with its loyal users, you would think everyone would have adjustable scaffolding by now, but it seems that mason contractors are not quick to change their operation. Some of them were forced into changing by a particular job, some learned to appreciate it while they were bricklayers and bought it when they started their own companies, and some were just looking for a way to cut labor costs. In the end, they all like it and say they are not going back to their old ways.

This article looks at the experience of several mason contractors who made the switch to adjustable scaffolding. It answers the questions: What caused them to try it? How did they make the transition? Are they making more money? And has it been a good move for them?

Impossible Job Site

"WE WERE BACKED IN A CORNER. We had to do something different," recalls Mike Schmerbeck of Speranza Brickwork in New Jersey.

"We had this seven-story building in downtown Camden, N.J., where we had to tear off the old brick veneer and then go back up with new brick. The building was occupied so we couldn't pass materials through the windows. The circumstances were such that we absolutely had to bring the debris down with a crane, no chutes or anything else," Schmerbeck says. "It was the tightest site I've ever seen."

"Now, conventional frames and cranes don't mix, but tower scaffolding gave the crane clear access to the laborers' area where we were stockpiling our debris. It worked great. After we tore off an elevation, we just stocked up with new brick and started back up. That's when we got the biggest surprise of all. We thought that getting 20% more production was just hype — we did that and better."

"Because we were downtown, we only had one day, Sunday, to move 245 feet of scaffolding, seven stories high, from one side of the building to the next. At 7 a.m. we blocked off the streets, got our crane, and started swinging entire towers from one side of the building to the next. We were finished by noon. I was amazed. We made a ton on that job. It paid for the scaffolding."

Fast Relocation

ADJUSTABLE SCAFFOLDING can be moved from wall to wall quickly, without any disassembly, and is immune to

the problems encountered on sloping sites. Contractors who use it report that they can move their towers in a quarter to a fifth of the time they previously spent moving frames.

Sal Monarca, a mason contractor in Connecticut, describes how his workers move scaffolding now: "We pick up a tower with the lift, drop it at the next wall, and go get another one. It couldn't be simpler. Two hours later you've got a couple of hundred feet of scaffolding ready to go again, and it could be four stories high."

High-rise Work

ELEVATING SCAFFOLDING is not just limited to large retail and shopping centers. It's been used in applications over 400 feet high. One brand is rated to go 552 feet high due to the high-grade steel used in its tower sections.

John Cotton, a mason for 35 years, has been a field superintendent with ALL Masonry in Chicago for more than 15 years. "We own maybe 300 or 400 Non-Stop towers and some mast climbers, too. We usually set up our mast climbers mainly for very high work, but we recently had a job where we had to set scaffold on a roof and go up 289 feet with the brick. The point loads were way too high with the mast climbers, so we used our towers. It worked very well. We were also able to stock more material ahead since the load was spread out."

Concerning the difference between tower scaffolding and frames, Cotton says, "It's way faster and better. We use a lot less labor on the towers. Any time you keep a mason at a good working level, you'll get a lot more production. Anything four stories and under, especially if we are in tight quarters, we use the tower scaffolding. Going higher than that, since you're going to be on the wall a while, we start to use our mast-climbers along with towers."

One-time Setup

MONARCA DESCRIBES going from frames to elevating scaffolding: "There's no comparison. You set it up once and forget about it. You're done, all the way up. Instead of raising planks, you're laying brick. You save 20 minutes right there."

"Maybe it's easier to look at what your laborers are not doing on elevating scaffolding," he says. "They're not setting up and tearing down frames, they're not raising planks and outriggers, they're not rehandling materials, and they're not having to worry about resetting guardrails. Their only job now is to tend the bricklayers and crank it up. How could it be any easier?"

Sinclair Masonry in Wichita, Kan., has expanded its use of adjustable scaffolding to include all three of its crews. Says Foreman Alan Hansen, "We use two less laborers to tend eight bricklayers because we aren't raising planks and materials all day and building and tearing down frames. The labor-

ers tend the bricklayers, and that's all. They crank for about three minutes and then tend for about 20 minutes. They just keep doing that until they top out."

Making the Change

MOST MASON CONTRACTORS started out as bricklayers working on the line. Over the years of growing their own businesses, they develop a "way of doing things" based on their own experiences in the field, and most of them began their careers on frames. Switching scaffold systems would seem like a major undertaking. So, how did they do it?

Monarca describes his crew's learning curve. "Working on it is a no-brainer. Everybody loves it. The only new stuff to learn is how to set it at the wall, how to move from wall to wall, and how to move it to the next job. It's easy once you see it done, but my guys had never seen it done. When the factory rep came out and walked us through it all, my guys caught on right away. It's different, but actually better. For instance, setting up in pairs of towers down the wall means you lay it out a little different, but it actually makes it a lot easier to set up scaffold in problem areas and corners. After a week, my guys never looked back."

Ricky Skinner, owner of Skinner Masonry in Dallas, used a novel approach to show his foreman the benefits of change.

"I worked on elevating scaffolding back when I laid brick for another company, and I knew it was the only way to go for my new company. But I had a foreman who was raised on frames, and that's all he wanted to use. You know how some people just don't like change. Well, I went out on his job and ran a crew myself with elevating scaffolding on the other side of the building. That gave him a chance to see how much faster we worked and how easy the scaffolding really was to use. That won him over."

Ricky's brother, Monty Skinner, tells of other benefits elevating scaffolding has brought to their job site operation. "Safety is one of the big things we watch out for. With this scaffold, the safety equipment is always in place and there's nothing to worry about."

Strong Safety Asset

CONTRACTORS OFTEN mention safety as a key consideration for any equipment. The general opinion is that OSHA is much tougher than ever before, and the issue it most often cites is scaffolding deficiencies.

"Our company is extremely safety-oriented," says Sinclair's Hansen. "I think frames are four times the work to keep the safety equipment in place. Now we just start on the ground with all the safety rails in place and go until we top out. Think

about all the hazards in building and tearing down frames. We don't have that anymore. I know the workers feel safer because the platform is so stable. We were up 45 feet high, and it was like walking on a sidewalk."

Tips & Tricks

WHEN ASKED what tricks or tips they would pass on to others just starting out with elevating scaffolding, the contractors came up with quite a few:

Alan Hansen: "Park your blocks near the scaffold, even under the scaffold. You're going to lay a lot more blocks using this scaffold, and that'll save the lift driver a lot of time."

Sal Monarca: "Invest in an enclosure system. A lot of our work is in the winter, just the time we need to make every extra dollar of profit we can. Also, get your foreman to mark the plans with a red pencil where every set of towers is going to land. Moving wall to wall will fly. The lift driver can see just how to set up every wall."


Ricky Skinner: "For some reason new foremen think it's just for long straight walls. As soon as you can, make your workers use it on some walls with lots of corners and jogs and offsets. They'll see for themselves it actually sets up faster and easier than frames in problem areas. Then they'll make you more money everywhere."

Monty Skinner: "Wash the wall as you bring the scaffold down. It takes a little extra time, but you don't have to come back"

Conclusion

Judging from the experience of these contractors and others, it looks like adjustable scaffolding is here to stay. If the transition is handled properly with good training from the scaffolding manufacturer, it can be a painless, permanent improvement to the average contractor's daily operation.

The overall consensus is that the masons love it immediately because they work waist-high all day and go home without a sore back. The laborers' duties are reduced with the net effect being less work, but it seems to take them about a week to get used to the new routine. It takes the foremen about three days to figure out how to efficiently move from wall to wall, and then after that they move along a lot faster than they ever did on frames.

The best part is that all the contractors report higher profits – often doubling the estimated profit on the jobs where they use it. 

Justin Breithaupt, Jr. is the owner of Non-Stop Scaffolding, Inc. and has been involved with elevating scaffolding and the masonry business since 1975, when his father invented a tower scaffolding system for their own masonry business.

