



Master stonemason and sculptor Karin Grobe is proud of her versatile exhibition.

Photos: Richard Watzke

Relying on One's Own Strengths

Karin Grobe relies on innovation and in-house production when it comes to gravestones. In her exhibition in Zossen, Brandenburg, she presents an extensive range. Regional German materials play a large part in this.

Running a successful craft business today requires foresight above all else. Karin Grobe recognized this early on: even during her school years, she was passionate about sculpture.

Starting in the seventh grade, her parents regularly took her to Potsdam after school, where she attended a modeling workshop—a kind of recreational course similar to a community college program. Her search for an apprenticeship, however, began with a rejection: "I initially wanted to become a stonemason in Dresden and later train as a sculptor, but a large company turned me down because they had no sanitary facilities for female apprentices." Today, gender equality is a major topic, but at that time, women were still rejected for such reasons, Karin Grobe recalls.

Since she couldn't find another apprenticeship, she began training with her father, Reiner Grobe. By her second year as an apprentice stonemason, she was already producing sculptural works such as compass point markings

and plastic reliefs. After passing her journeyman's examination, she laid the foundation for her career with a master craftsman's certificate in sculpture in 1993 in Königslutter and fully joined the family business.



From the raw tranche: A large portion of monuments come from in-house production.



Top Left: Hands-On Variety – The extensive exhibition showcases the full spectrum of shapes and materials.

Top Right: The gravestone made of Löbejün Rhyolite is a design by Reiner Grobe.

Photo: Karin Grobe

Left: The entrepreneur and her team. On the left stands customer consultant Thomas Straßner from Burkhardt-Löffler.

Bottom: Sculptural Work – The gravestone was created in collaboration with Böse in Großelnüder.

Photo: Karin Grobe

Investing in Modern Machinery

The company, founded in 1928, has been family-run for three generations. In 2004, the master stonemason and sculptor took over the business from her father. With gravestones accounting for 65% of sales, they remain the company's mainstay, followed by 30% from the construction sector.

A particular strength of the business is its high degree of in-house production: three out of four gravestones or memorial installations come from its own workshop. To ensure maximum creative freedom, Karin Grobe and her two employees work directly from the raw stone. To modernize the entire production process, she

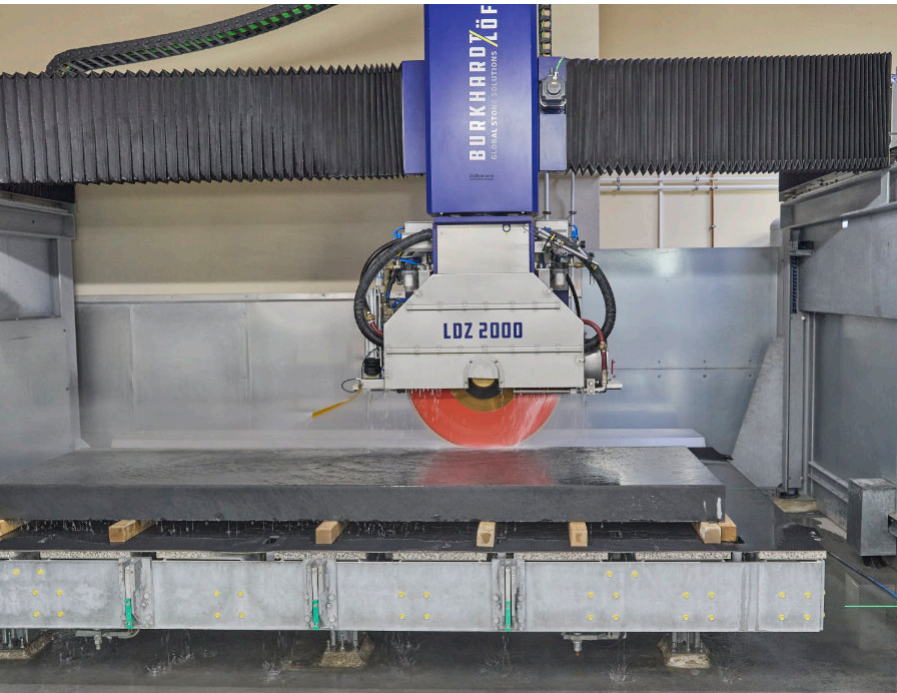
made substantial investments in state-of-the-art machinery from Burkhardt-Löffler.

The first major upgrades began in 2021 with a 5-axis CNC bridge saw LDZ 2000, featuring automatic tool changes and vacuum lifting, as well as an edge grinding machine KSL 80. In 2024, the latest addition followed: a surface grinding machine FSA 561.

The decision to partner with Burkhardt-Löffler was not made overnight but was based on a long-standing collaboration. The predecessor of the current edge grinding machine was also a KSL 80—at that time still produced by Löffler—which the engineers from



Langenaltheim custom-fitted into the workshop in 1998. Positive experiences with service and spare parts supply—even overnight when needed—made the decision to invest in further Burkhardt-Löffler machines an easy one, Grobe explains.



Above: The saw becomes a milling machine – machining of a curved cover plate.

Left: The LDZ 2000 is extensively equipped, including tool changing and digital raw plate detection.

Overcoming External Obstacles

While working with powerful machines is now a great advantage, things were far more difficult for Karin Grobe's parents. In the days of East Germany (GDR), success required not only diligence but also a great deal of ingenuity, especially when it came to obtaining materials. "Often, we only received small stone pieces. Large, high-quality stone blocks were primarily exported to the West. Material was allocated to businesses and was never sufficient," she recalls. Facing chronic shortages, Reiner Grobe turned necessity into an

opportunity: he purchased old gravestones and repurposed them into new memorials using a self-modified 1936 Hensel saw (now Burkhardt-Löffler) with an automatic lowering mechanism, along with pneumatic tools and hand grinders.

Relief and lead lettering expanded the workshop's repertoire, and participation in an arts and crafts training course helped push creative boundaries. These steps enabled the company to remain privately owned and avoid nationalization. After the reunification of Germany, raw materials in all sizes and variations became readily available

for gravestone production, and the company quickly invested in new machinery.

Versatility Instead of Mass Production

Through her combination of passion for the craft, experience, and creativity, Karin Grobe successfully navigates the challenging social and economic environment. She has built a strong reputation among clients through dedication and personal commitment. Competing not on price but on quality, she holds her ground against imported gravestones from other European countries.



Thanks to vacuum separation, the saw saves valuable working time.



The surface grinding machine FSA 561 provides independence from material deliveries and offers many processing options.

COMPANY INFORMATION

Burkhardt-Löffler is a globally leading manufacturer of automated production systems for stone processing.

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Above: Like the other machines, the approximately 10-meter-long KSL 80 was precisely fitted into the hall.

Right: Quality work down to the last detail – edge processing of urn plates.



She dedicates great care and attention to her showroom, where she presents innovative gravestone designs and unique materials. While catalog and online presentations may seem practical and cost-effective, they are less convincing in day-to-day consultations. Clients want to see the stones in person and feel the surface finishes firsthand. To facilitate this, Grobe collaborates with granite suppliers such as Destag, Just, Böse, and J. Petasch. She carefully selects models that fit her own product range and showcases them on her company premises. Traditional German stones are increasingly represented in her selection.

Rochlitz porphyry, Beucha rhyolite, and other domestic materials are currently experiencing a renaissance, with many customers consciously opting for unique designs made from these stones. This demand reaffirms Karin Grobe's belief that regional stones have a place in the market. She encourages fellow stonemasons to have more confidence in using German materials.

Richard Watzke

MACHINE SPECIFICATIONS

LDZ 2000: 5-axis CNC bridge saw with rotating and tilting saw support, remote diagnostics and remote maintenance.

User interface: Galileo Master for direct data entry at the machine.
Cutting depth: 280 mm, Motor: 24 kW,
Working area: approx. 4 x 2.4 m.
Automatic slab thickness measurement,
Digital slab detection system,
Vacuum manipulator.
Automatic tool change with 20 positions in the magazine,
2 saw blade mounts, automatic tool measurement,

KSL 80: Table edge grinding machine for material thicknesses from 10 to 80 mm. 8 front surface supports, 3 motor-adjustable top chamfer supports, 3 bottom chamfer supports, Chamfer scanning device, Pneumatic chamfer clamping for consistent chamfers.
Grinding length: 3.5 m

FSA 561: Surface grinding machine with up to 50 separate workpiece positions. Programming via teach-in function, Maximum workpiece size: 3.5 x 2.1 m

In Zossen, the machine processes workpiece thicknesses between 20 and 270 mm but can be adapted for other thicknesses upon request.

Richard Watzke is a specialist journalist and industry expert. During his on-site visit in Zossen, he was impressed by the



extensive and well-maintained gravestone exhibition and how individually the machines were integrated into the existing hall by the mechanical engineers.