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# Bridging the centuries

## Bach Ornamental Steel preserves history



“As people realize we’re throwing away our history, more people are stepping up and saying ‘we don’t want to do that.’”

So says Nels Raynor, owner of Bach Steel, a fabricating company that specializes in historic bridge restoration and relocation, hot metal riveting, and repair and restoration of riveted structures. Bach also fabricates and erects structural steel and creates hand-forged (wrought) iron and steel, ornamental art and furniture, stairs, rails and more. But it’s the bridge restoration that has really taken off in recent years—a little bit to Nels’ surprise.

“We’re kind of swamped and in demand, which is kind of mind-boggling to me,” he says. “It used to be we’d work on one bridge every five years.” But with the renewed interest in preservation and restoration, Bach occupies a special niche: “We’re the only ones in the country doing it.”

And Bach Steel does indeed save bridges all over the country. Just back from Texas at the time he spoke

with *Our Town*, Nels’ next stop was Pennsylvania to meet with Preservation Pennsylvania.

Restoring bridges makes a lot of sense, Nels believes. While a new bridge may be guaranteed for 50 years, he says, “the one it’s replacing may have been standing since 1894.” Nels and his team can restore a bridge to like-new condition—and preserve a piece of history.

Bach Steel has evolved considerably since the ’90s, when its bread and butter was producing structural beams for the housing industry. Then the housing market dried up—and a business that had previously employed eight or nine people was suddenly down to two or three.

But Nels, whose late father was a professor in the MSU art department, seems to have inherited an artist’s eye for looking at things in different ways—and diversifying his company’s capabilities. That’s one of the reasons the company that specializes in keeping things standing is still standing today.

***Bach Steel is at 4140 Keller Road, Holt,  
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