After a century in business, wall and ceiling contractor Minuti-Ogle looks back on its simple, artistic origins and how time, innovation—and a lot of colorful personalities—have helped it evolve into the full-service business it is today.

In 1903, Italian-born artists Adolfo Minuti and Carlos Brioschi were decorating some of the most ornate and magnificent structures of their adopted city—New York. They were sculptors, called
upon to create plaster-cast objects to adorn the interior and exterior walls of such structures as Grand Central Station, the J.P. Morgan Library and even the Roosevelt Mansion at Oyster Bay.

The century had just turned, and the United States was yet to face the decades marked by war, economic turmoil and unending innovation in the building industry. At the same time, however, the efforts of Brioschi and Minuti were laying the foundation for what is today Minuti-Ogle, a Twin Cities-based wall and ceiling contractor whose evolution reads more like architectural history than a corporate chronicle.

With a lot of intuition—and a little luck—Minuti-Ogle’s generations of leadership were able to succeed through global disturbance, social revolution and
ever-changing building styles to create a modern enterprise that offers clients a full list of the latest building technologies. Its impressive portfolio includes the internationally recognized Mall of America, as well as hundreds of regional landmarks.

“Our history has always been important to us, but it was not until we hit the 100-year mark that we began talking to the Minuti and Brioschi families, and researching historical archives,” says Thomas Panek, president and CEO, Minuti-Ogle. “That’s when we realized what a colorful history we had.”

The Immigrants’ Journey Never Ends

Panek discovered that after Minuti and Brioschi established their reputation in New York, a St. Paul architectural firm,
Reed and Stem, that had worked on Grand Central Station invited both sculptors to Minnesota to work on the Midwest’s first luxury hotel, The St. Paul Hotel, and give it their signature European style. The St. Paul Hotel project brought demand for their work by more Twin Cities businesses, churches and wealthy homeowners. Realizing they had stumbled upon their next land of opportunity, Minuti and Brioschi created a business partnership—Brioschi-Minuti Company—and made the Twin Cities their home.

Their business thrives, but changes brought by the Great Depression and World War II created profound realignment of the Brioschi-Minuti business. In 1931, Adolfo Minuti died, leaving his portion of the business to his three sons. Wary of the nation’s reduced investment in new buildings as well as labor and material shortages, the Minuti sons chose to focus on what they saw as a new trend, plain plaster, and formed the Minuti Brothers Company—the predecessor to today’s Minuti-Ogle, while the Brioschis chose to continue their decorative sculpture business.

A Time of Renewal

The post-war years brought domestic investment, invention and invigoration of the Minuti Brothers Company, which was busy plastering homes, apartments and smaller office buildings
and employing new construction materials such as synthetics, premixed plaster and accelerators. By the 1960s the Minuti Brothers business remained a humble family-business consisting of one truck, one superintendent and an accounting system of receivables written on recipe cards.

Two Minuti brothers, Lawrence and T.J., were scaling back their role in the business due to age, leaving third brother, August “Augie,” to run it alone. Dick Ogle, a tradesman and entrepreneur, stepped into a business partnership with Augie in 1966 with an eye toward growing the business in ways never imagined by the Minuti family. Soon renamed Minuti-Ogle, Ogle quickly capitalized on the company’s word-of-mouth reputation by first capturing a large nursing home project, then, at the same time, a large hotel in the Twin Cities suburbs and—in a move that would transform the family-owned business into a world-class venture—the 57-story IDS Center in Minneapolis, the tallest structure
Promising to be the largest shopping mall in the world, Minuti-Ogle had to first convince its general contractor that one firm could handle the expansive drywall project. When it did, Minuti-Ogle went on to employ 160 workers and strategically deploy three-and-a-half miles of scaffolding, 900 miles of steel studs and enough drywall to form a 3,000-foot high pile of drywall to complete the massive structure.

Ogle chose to retire after the completion of the Mall of America, and Panek stepped in as the new Minuti-Ogle leader. At the same time, a renewed interest in historical architecture returned Minuti-Ogle to its artistic roots. The Orpheum Theatre between Chicago and the West Coast.

**Increasing Scale, Size and Speed**

Augie, the last member of the founding family, retired from the business in the early 1970s, yet Ogle, the sole proprietor, retained the Minuti name to honor the company’s long history and strong reputation. By the 1980s, Ogle had marshaled completion of the Metrodome, home to the Minnesota Vikings and Minnesota Twins. By the early 1980s, Thomas Panek joined the firm as vice president in preparation for another leadership transition.

Ogle and Panek went on to capture the firm’s largest and most prestigious project, the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minn.
Minuti-Ogle did all the drywall—enough to form a 3,000-foot high pile—on the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minn.

ater in Minneapolis—originally built in the 1920 with help from, among others, Brioschi-Minuti—had been modernized and adapted beyond recognition by the late 1980s. Charged with essentially recreating the past, members of the Minuti-Ogle restoration team pored over a 1931 photo of the interior with a magnifying glass. They acted as artisans with extensive renovation of the Orpheum Theater in the 1990s, with yards of ornamental plaster needing to be recreated from a 1931 photo. Later, with a magnifying glass and eight months and 2,300 pieces of cast plaster, the Minuti-Ogle artisans completed the project to critical acclaim. The project was completed in eight months.

The Mall of America and the Orpheum Theatre projects stand in contrast to each other but illustrate the diversity of Minuti-Ogle’s talents and services. Today it is not unusual to find modern Minuti-Ogle masters adding the finishing touches to historic landmark restoration—as it recently did with the renovation of the 1917-built St. Paul Library in 2002—while another Minuti-Ogle team is engaged in the fireproofing of a modern office building.

Any tour of the Twin Cities—and even regions beyond—make clear the expansive reach of Minuti-Ogle and its predecessor companies. So expansive, so historical and so significant, in fact, that the
company is putting together a 100-page book of facts, stories and photographs to commemorate its first century of existence. It plans to unveil the book at a large anniversary party that will be held this May.

“This industry is not known for its longevity of companies,” says Panek. “So we thought we would bring all of the people who helped build this company—even the descendants of the founders—and celebrate. Not only will we be looking back at 100 years, but hopefully kicking off the next 100, too.”

About the Author
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