

# UC Berkeley

## Places

### Title

Carrara Quarry [Portfolio]

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9kn6r6xg>

### Journal

Places, 6(2)

### ISSN

0731-0455

### Author

Leivick, Joel

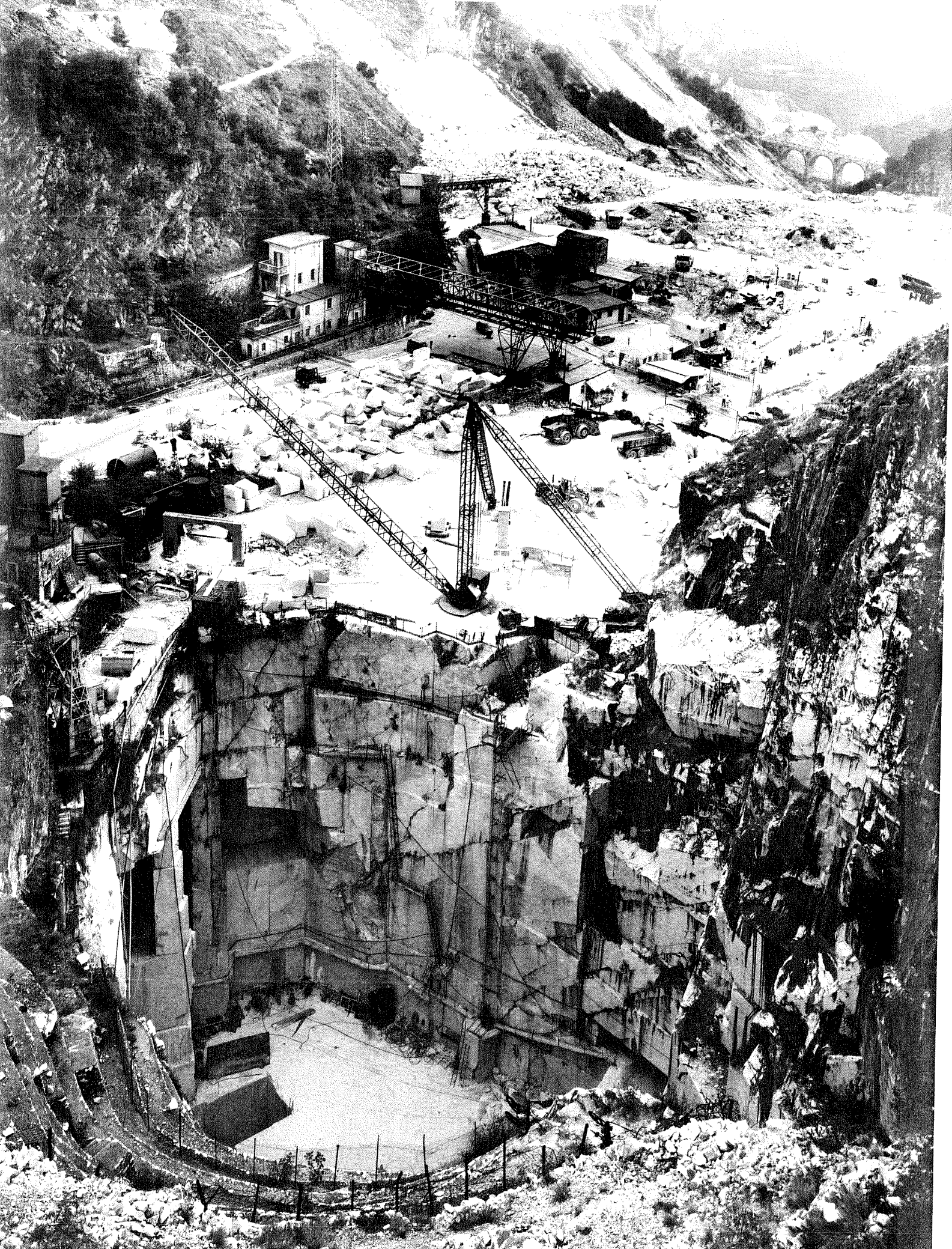
### Publication Date

1990-01-15

Peer reviewed

*Joel Leivick*

**CARRARA QUARRY**



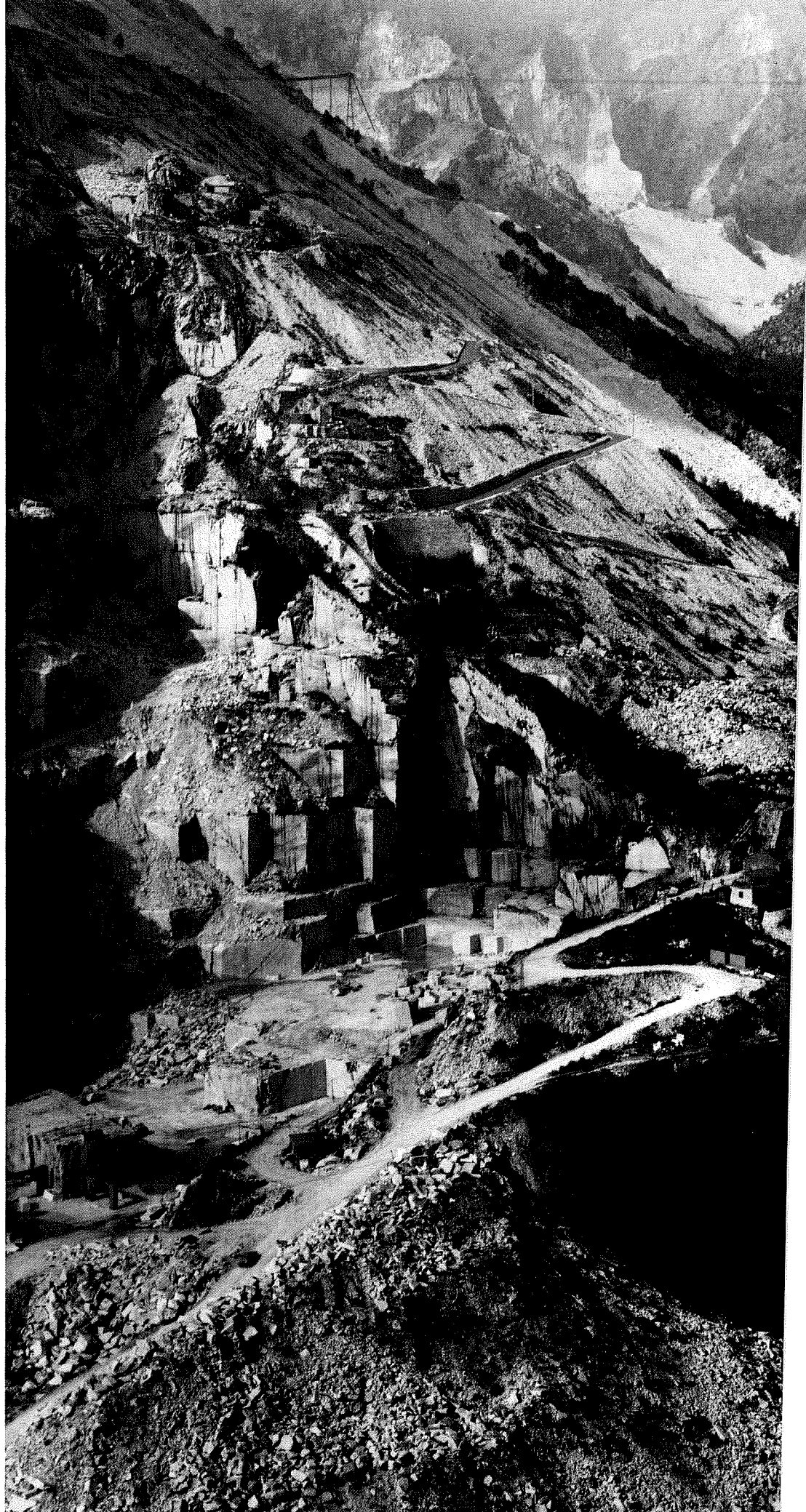
Previous page:

Deep pit quarry at Fantiscritti.

View of Colonnata.

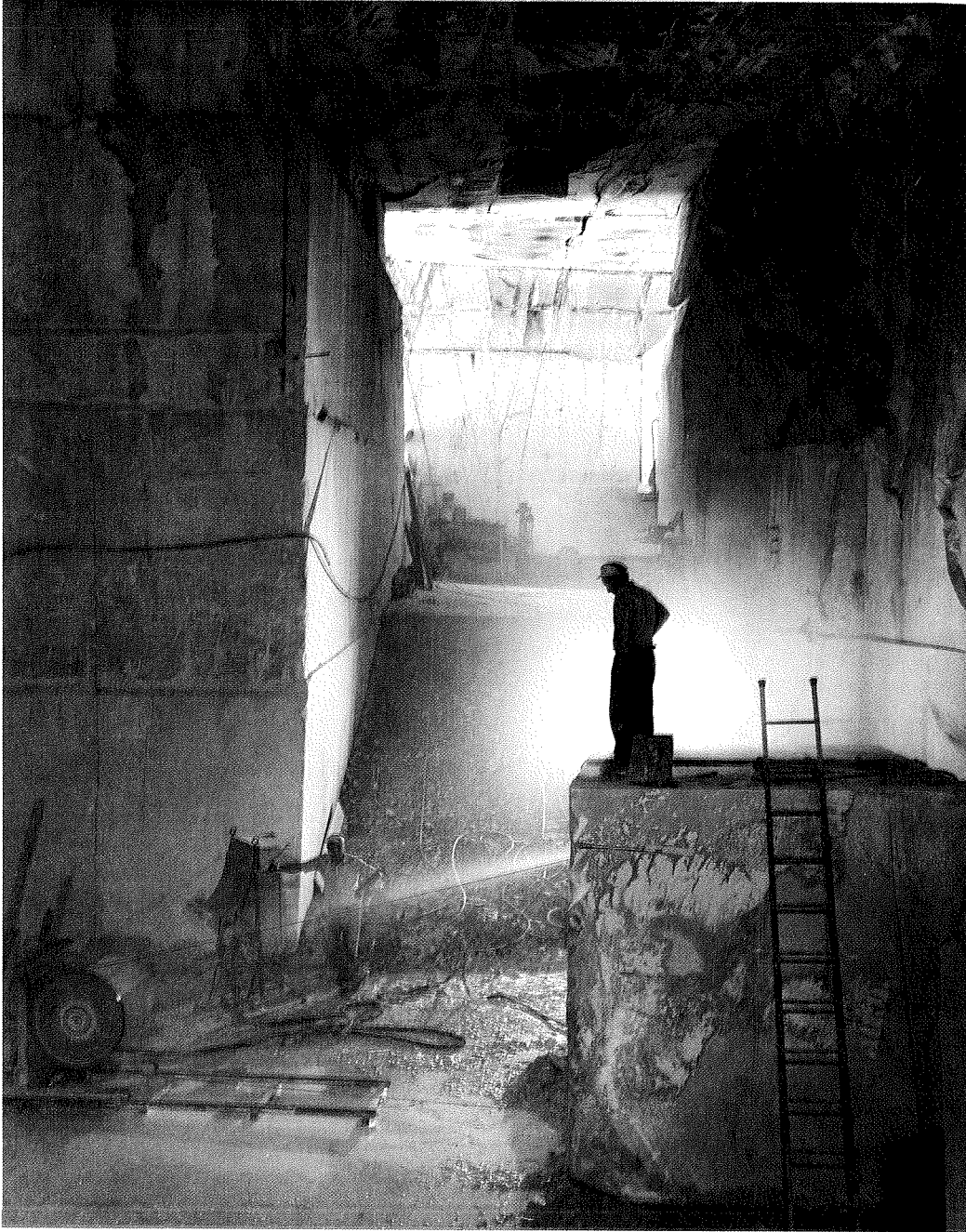
Approached from the sea, the Apuan Alps above Carrara are so like pristine snow-covered peaks that one must remind oneself, more than once, that in the late Tuscan August snow is at most a faint memory. What is really there is a landscape created by 2,000 years of methodical quarrying. These mountains of solid marble have been hewn relentlessly for as long as European history has been recorded. The beauty, the ultimate purity of the scene is surprising. There is whiteness everywhere. Even the river flowing through Carrara, filled with the dust of dozens of small marble sawmills, runs pure white—a river of milk.

I had suspected that Carrara would provide a powerful inspiration for me, but I had no idea of the immensity of proportion that I would encounter. The quarries seem as grand as the Grand Canyon, yet their vastness is the result of steady attrition at the hands of humans. As a landscape photographer, my attention has been focused on the structure of natural things and on the effects of civilization—subtle and salutary or gross and unreasonable—on the natural scheme. Above Carrara the effect of industry is indeed gross, but here civilization also provides a subtle counterpoint





Underground quarry,  
Fantiscritti.



**Marble blocks ready for squaring, Fantiscritti.**



to the authority of nature. A tiny medieval village perfectly sited—its angular forms, its church tower echoed in the excavations nearby—supplies the scene with a profound visual harmony. I found myself stunned by the spectacle.

The methods used by the quarry workers to extract huge blocks of

stone have evolved from the ancient ways of hand-saws, chisels and oxen, to today's methods of electric-powered wire saws, black powder and bulldozers so large they seem imagined. But the place still seems to be operating at some point in the past. There is something resistant to technology in the inertia of a 20-ton block of stone. The quarry foreman relies upon cleverness and experience to devise an elegant and

economical plan to shift the position of a rock the size of a small house. Echoing Archimedes, who claimed to need only a place to stand in order to move the world, the quarryman knows that even the heaviest block on the most precipitous slope will succumb to a clever plan.







The Gioia quarry.

In my photographs I want everything in its place and all parts of the picture to bear a precise and logical relationship to each other. In the editing of a great film each scene follows its predecessor with the airtight inevitability of a dream. As a result the viewer becomes effortlessly engaged in the story. I want something like that from my pictures. I want each picture to show a world that is believable and real, but seen as a glance into the past; a world seen through a faint patina with the freshness and freedom from association that archaeologists need when trying to fit together the puzzles left by ancient civilizations. Carrara, a monumental collaboration of man and nature, provides potent raw material.