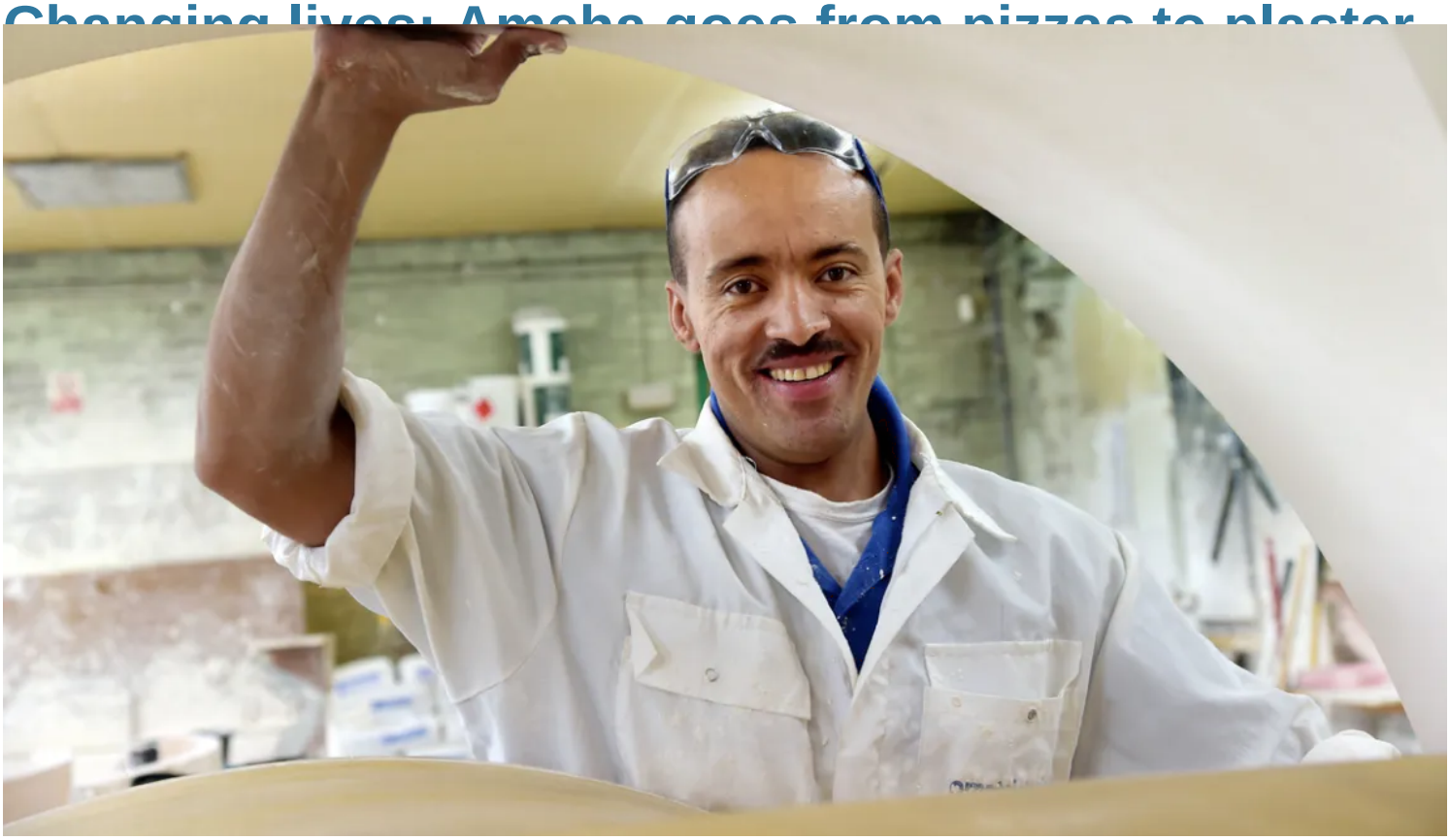
Changing lives: Ameha goes from pizzas to plaster



Thanks to a National Lottery-supported heritage construction programme, Ameha has swapped odd jobs for learning new skills, helping to restore historic buildings - and winning a coveted award.

In the workshop of Ornate Interiors, a heritage plastering specialist in Leeds, Ameha Shewaye is making a running mould for an ornamental cornice. It seems a haphazard process, with the spray and drips from the wet plaster creating what looks like a monochrome Jackson Pollock ‘floor painting’ all around him. But this is intricate work that uses traditional skills and materials to restore the plaster mouldings in historic buildings.

Ameha’s talent for plasterwork was spotted last year by a National Lottery Heritage Fund-supported scheme, Re-Making Leeds. Getting a paid placement at Ornate Interiors made him feel like the luckiest man in the country, he says. "I’ve found gold and diamonds," he laughs. "Coming to Leeds and Ornate Interiors has opened a big gate for me."

Thanks to an innovative heritage construction skills programme supported by National Lottery players, Ameha, who is originally from Ethiopia but grew up in Italy, is benefiting from a year’s placement at Ornate Interiors.

"It’s all thanks to people across the country who buy Lottery tickets," says Ronnie Clifford, managing director of Ornate Interiors.

Re-Making Leeds was developed by Leeds City Council with partners Leeds College of Building and York College to train talented young people in specialist crafts, and give Ameha, and so many other people in Yorkshire, the opportunity to progress. "It’s so rewarding to see someone with as much talent and potential as Ameha being given a chance to develop exceptional skills and restore the most amazing buildings," says Ronnie.

The plaster Ameha is using is made from a lime and sand mortar reinforced with horsehair. "When I first started here," he says, "I couldn’t believe that they used horse and goat hair in the plaster. I’ve had to learn many new techniques and principles."

"The mortar has to be the right consistency and mix so you can bring out the decorative details," he adds. "Often they’ve been damaged or painted over many times and you have to match them to the original mouldings."

From Italy to Leeds

Ameha had worked as a plasterer in Italy until the global recession closed down the company he worked for. He came to the UK three years ago to find work, leaving his wife Netsenet and three children behind in Terni, in central Italy. They have since been able to join him in Leeds.

When he found that his Italian construction industry qualifications were not recognised here, he got a job in a bakery, then as a pizza delivery worker, while studying for a UK plastering certificate.

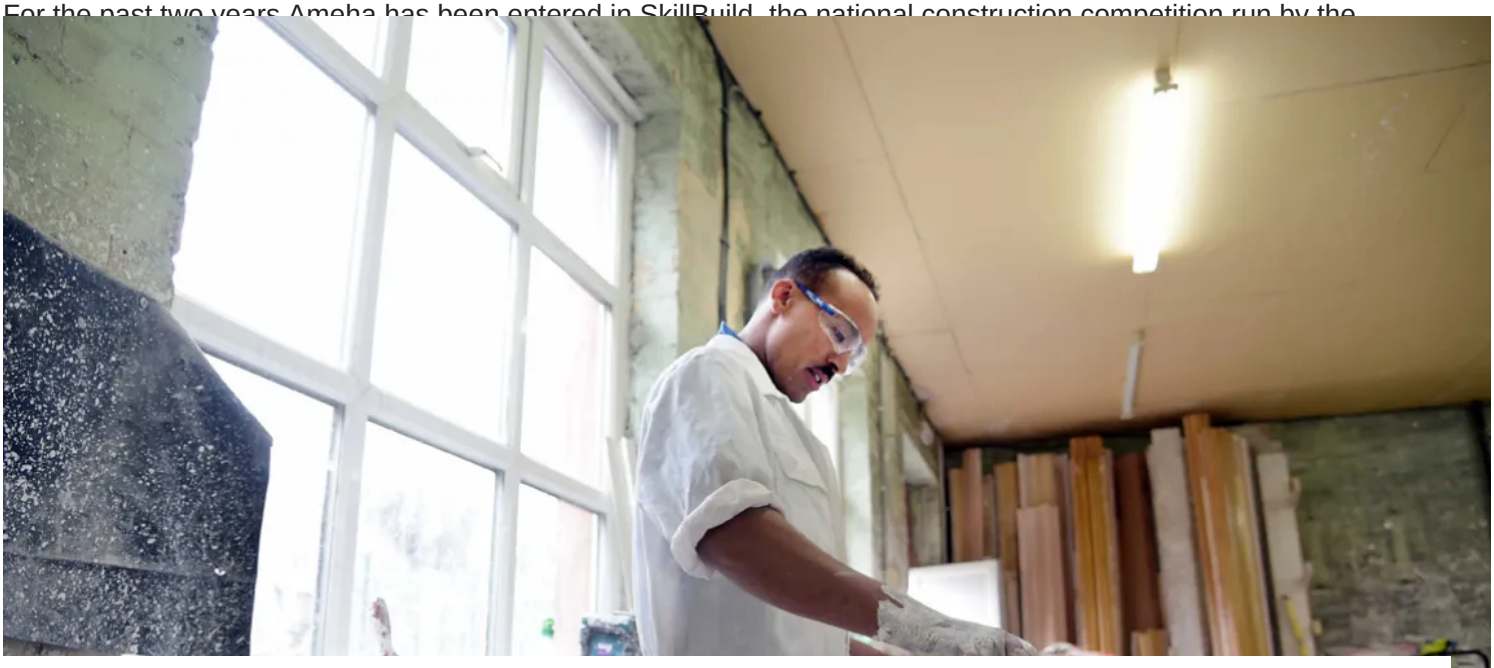
“It can be tricky but once you’ve finished a job you feel proud. It’s like a work of art.”

Ameha never rests on his laurels. There is always something new to learn, especially on site, he says. "I’ve learnt to secure the dropped mouldings in old buildings. The weight of the plaster causes them to sag and drop over time. Sometimes it’s impossible to recreate the old castings in the workshop so we have to work in situ. I find this fascinating and love being in the old houses and buildings."

Going for gold

He has worked on restoration projects at Oldham Town Hall and York Theatre Royal. "It can be tricky but once you’ve finished a job you feel proud. It’s like a work of art," he says. He calls it the "king of skills".

For the past two years Ameha has been entered in SkillBuild, the national construction competition run by the









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