

**INSIDE:**  
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GOING TO GRACELAND 32

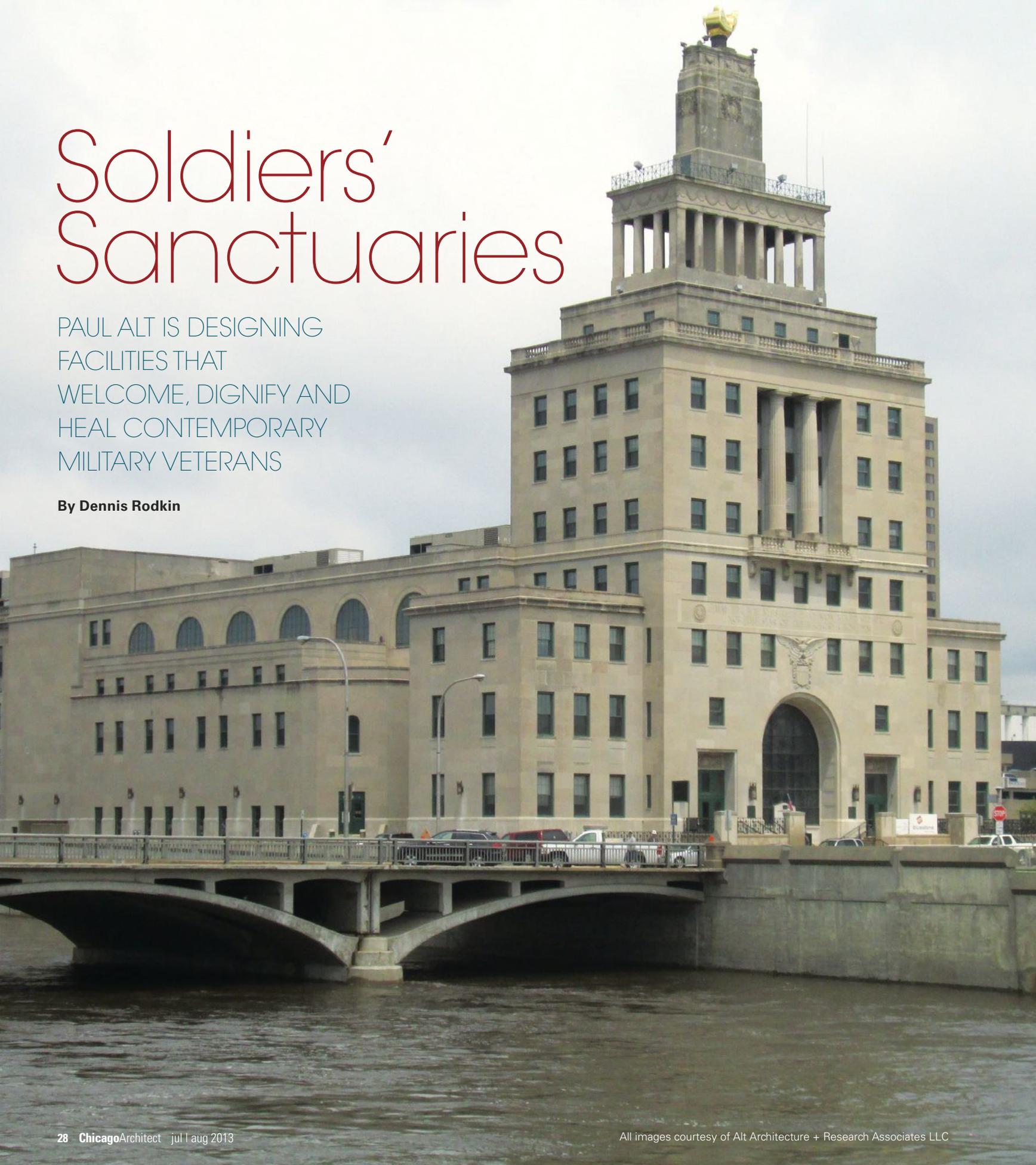
## SMART STARTS

RESOURCE-SIPPING CONCEPTS AT EVERY SCALE

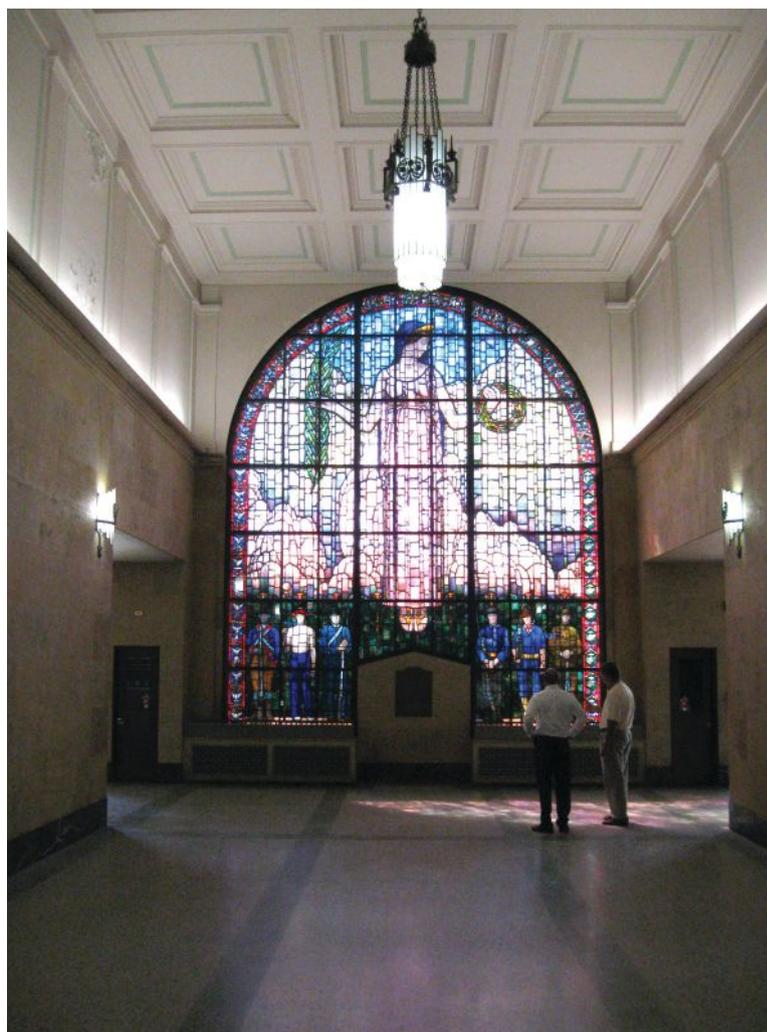
# Soldiers' Sanctuaries

PAUL ALT IS DESIGNING FACILITIES THAT WELCOME, DIGNIFY AND HEAL CONTEMPORARY MILITARY VETERANS

By Dennis Rodkin



A monumental work of stained glass (right) by the artist Grant Wood, who lived and worked in Cedar Rapids, sets a tone of nobility for the city's veteran's memorial building (left), which was built on an island in the downtown center and later filled up with municipal offices.



**J**UST AS WARFARE IS VERY DIFFERENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY THAN IT WAS DURING THE WARS OF THE 20TH CENTURY, the veterans who return from modern wars have vastly different scars and needs than their predecessors who fought in those earlier conflicts.

Chicago architect Paul Alt, AIA, has been on the front lines of the effort to create spaces that meet these needs, with a series of projects around the country whose aim is to welcome and support people who often feel unwelcome and unsupported in civilian society.

He calls the projects Healing Sanctuaries. "We're creating military-embracing environments for the healing of post-traumatic stress disorder, brain injury and major depression," says Alt, principal of Alt Architecture + Research Associates. In a facility that might combine educational and vocational support, counseling, historical exhibits about warriors' service and other activities that promote veterans' better integration into their communities, "architecture is a tool for creating a narrative that interlinks the parts," he says.

The firm has projects in various stages of completion, planning and negotiation. Two in particular, in Iowa and Texas, demonstrate

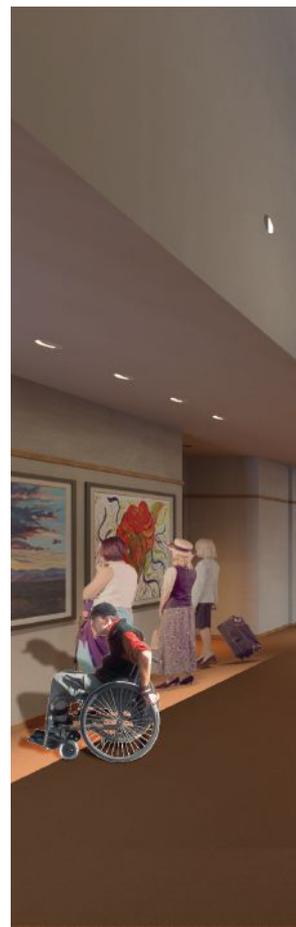
how a past era's sometimes alienating narrative about veterans is being displaced by a more restorative contemporary approach.

The Veterans Memorial Building in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, is a monumental facility on an island in the Cedar River. Completed in the late 1920s, it was part of a tradition of grand veterans halls: part museum, part social space and crowned with a cenotaph honoring unidentified war dead that can be seen from many corners of the small city. But the facility had become little more than a big, dusty relic by the early years of this century. Some municipal departments had taken space there, and "the only reason most people in town knew about it was they went there to pay their parking tickets," Alt says. The local veterans commission "was operating about 2,000 square feet of meeting space in this 110,000-square-foot building," recalls Mike Jager, executive director of the Veterans Memorial Commission of Cedar Rapids.

In 2008, floodwaters filled the building's lower three floors, setting in motion a process that ultimately returned the entire building to veterans' uses, and a re-thinking of what those should be. "We were at a crossroads," Jager says. "Rather than just moving back in and doing the same old tired thing, we took the opportunity to rediscover the original intent from the 1920s," which



An armory on the mezzanine level, a conference center and a restaurant are components of the repurposed Veterans Memorial Building in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.



was to be a gathering place where the community of veterans and their families and friends “could sort of make sense of their past experiences by their present associations. Give them the opportunity to heal informally and get on with their lives.”

Repurposed, restored at a cost of \$17.5 million and opening this year, the veterans memorial will have a combination of large memorial rooms and smaller spaces where counseling, substance abuse meetings and Great Books discussions can go on. “It becomes a space where you can bring your grandchildren and help them learn what you [fought for],” Alt says. “And you can come to be among people who have had your experiences, who understand what you’ve been through and want to help you go forward.”

Everything from behavioral health counseling to performance pieces designed expressly for an audience with military experience will have space. “Culture and music and counseling and the architecture all become part of the healing,” Alt says.

Jager believes firmly in the ennobling power of such features as intricate terrazzo floors, plaster walls and the stunning stained-glass depiction of an angel accompanying soldiers from various wars—24 feet high and designed by the great Iowa-born artist Grant Wood. “If you walk into the stereotypical American Legion or VFW hall and it’s a dimly lit place with a couple of beer signs and a couple of old pictures on the wall, it’s not really any different from any other corner bar,” he says. “But when you walk into an environment that is uplifting and inspiring and you’ve been [given] a sense of ownership, you will begin to live up to those expectations.”

The facility is supported by a taxing commission—numerous veterans memorial buildings and stadiums are funded that way in Iowa, Jager says—but the aim in repurposing it is to create a revenue stream as well. There’s a kitchen that can serve 500, and an auditorium of that capacity and a 180-person ballroom will both be rentable for events. But there, too, Alt sees a subtle healing effect: Because the rooms are restored to their original grandeur



At Texas A&M University's San Antonio campus, Patriots Casa will contain a mix of spaces for memorial exhibitory, social gatherings, counseling and ceremonies.

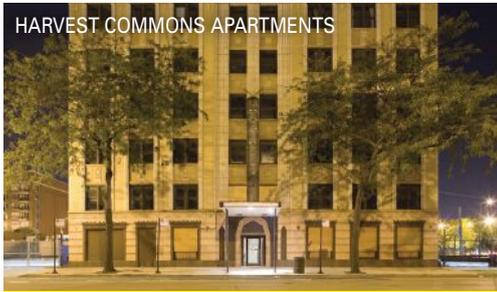
and may contain memorabilia or signage commemorating veterans' service, a veteran who attends, say, a wedding in the building "will feel comfortable surrounded by an empathetic environment, not alienated." In that way, pride of place becomes a subtly therapeutic element: Though the veteran may not be hosting the event, the presence and honor of veterans pervades the space, essentially elevating any of them who are present.

In San Antonio, Alt's firm is collaborating with Kell Muñoz Architects on the nation's first stand-alone academic support building at a university. Rapidly expanding Texas A&M University-San Antonio, where at least one out of 10 students has military veteran status, is building Patriot's Casa, a 20,000-square-foot building where veterans and their families can get help moving from military service into academics, and then out to the civilian workforce.

Envisioned by a retired major general as "a center of support to keep veterans in school," Alt says, the \$5-million Patriot's Casa

pairs ceremonial and pragmatic spaces along the same lines as the Cedar Rapids project. On the ground level, visitors will enter a large lounge or lobby area and proceed into a smaller space that Alt calls a "memory area. It will contain objects that soldiers carried with them, letters and objects of memory." Beyond will be a larger ceremonial space anchored by a fireplace, with doorways out to a large lawn that will be the site of events such as graduation receptions for veterans. The second floor contains spaces for behavioral health, academic support and informal hanging out with fellow veterans.

The conceptual mix at the all-new Patriot's Casa is similar to what the Cedar Rapids veterans building got in its re-formulation. "It creates a place of hope and possibility and self-realization," Alt says. Veterans will have their space to "network for a job, have fun and entertainment, seek healing, and enjoy life. It's in a safe environment for them, a place where they know other people will understand them and what they've seen." **CA**



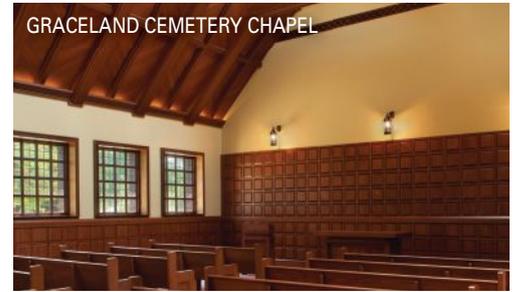
HARVEST COMMONS APARTMENTS

Photo by David Schalliol



CEDAR RAPIDS VETERANS MEMORIAL BUILDING

Photo courtesy of Alt Architecture + Research Associates LLC



GRACELAND CEMETERY CHAPEL

Photo by Barbara Karant, Karant+Associates, Inc.

## GET SMART

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### HARVEST COMMONS APARTMENTS

OWNER, DEVELOPER & PROPERTY MANAGER:

Heartland Housing Inc.

CO-OWNER & CO-DEVELOPER:

First Baptist Congregational Church

ARCHITECT: Landon Bone Baker Architects

GENERAL CONTRACTOR: Linn-Mathes Inc.

MEP ENGINEER: dbHMS

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: Mimi McKay

HISTORIC PRESERVATION CONSULTANT:

McGuire Iglesias Associates

COMMISSIONING AUTHORITY AND GREEN CHARRETTE

MODERATOR: Harley Ellis Devereaux

FARM DESIGN CONSULTANT:

Heartland Human Care Services

CHICKEN CONSULTANT: Jennifer Murtoff

SCULPTOR: Bernard Williams

ARTS-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

ORGANIZATION: architresures

### SMARTHAUS:

HOMEOWNERS: Aaron & Jenny Stash

ARCHITECT: Michael S. Kollman, AIA, LEED AP

CONSTRUCTION MANAGER: SmartHaus Inc.

DECONSTRUCTION: RE-USE Consulting

CIVIL ENGINEER: Infraland Engineering Consultants

LANDSCAPING: Guy Scopelliti Landscape

ELECTRICAL: Principle Electric

CARPENTRY: Bradley Design & Construction

HVAC: Balanced Air Heating & Cooling

UTILITIES AND DEMOLITION: Waseda

MECHANICAL ENGINEER: Build Equinox

GREEN RATERS: eZing Inc.

LEED FOR HOMES PROVIDER: Eco Achievers

SOLAR ENERGY CONSULTANT: Habi-Tek

## SOLDIERS' SANCTUARIES

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### CEDAR RAPIDS VETERANS MEMORIAL BUILDING

CLIENT: Mike Jager, executive director of the Cedar Rapids Veterans Commission

ARCHITECT OF RECORD:

Alt Architecture + Research Associates LLC

CONSTRUCTION MANAGER: Neumann Brothers

STRUCTURAL/CIVIL ENGINEER:

Shoemaker & Haaland

MEP: Bluestone Engineering

THRESHOLD ACOUSTICS: Briggs Elevator Consulting

KITCHEN CONSULTANT: Boelter

### PATRIOT'S CASA, TEXAS A+M AT SAN ANTONIO

CHIEF OF STAFF AND VICE PRESIDENT FOR STRATEGIC INITIATIVES AND MILITARY AFFAIRS:

Maj. Gen. Charles Rodriguez, Ph.D.

ARCHITECT OF RECORD: Kell Muñoz Architects

ASSOCIATE ARCHITECTS:

Alt Architecture + Research Associates LLC

MECHANICAL/PLUMBING: Shah Smith and Associates

ELECTRICAL: CNG Engineering

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: R-S-C-R Inc.

ENGINEERING: Briones Consulting and Engineering Ltd.

## STATE OF GRACELAND

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GENERAL CONTRACTOR: Bulley & Andrews

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: The Structural Shop

MECHANICAL ENGINEER: Hill Mechanical

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: Wolff Landscape Architecture

LANDSCAPE INSTALLATION AND MAINTENANCE:

Mariani Landscape

CUSTOM WINDOWS AND DOORS:

Grabill Windows and Doors

MASONRY RESTORATION: Marion Restoration

MONUMENT FABRICATION: Gast Monuments

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