

Staghorn Chapel

The Second Century

Staghorn Chapel's real identity began many years before the grade work and foundation were started in 1999. I have searched worldwide with love and due diligence for the many antique components that now comprise the inspiring Staghorn Chapel, officially opening on Easter Sunday, April 20, 2003, with a sunrise service. On Good Friday, April 18, 2003, Jim Tench, who has built the granite base to hold the dogwood cross, will place the cross in its permanent resting place.

In my planning this chapel, the courtyard can open up many opportunities for Staghorn Chapel – weddings, christenings, sunrise services, and Christmas blessings.

The roadway for Staghorn Chapel has been created out of the same brick pavers that were used for the courtyard, private viewing area, steps to the chapel, and walkways around Staghorn Chapel.

All of the 4 inch x 8 inch and 8 inch x 8 inch brick pavers and granite borders, each 2 inches thick, were salvaged from City Fair in downtown Charlotte.

Basement and Foundation

The foundation for Staghorn Chapel is poured cement walls. This foundation was designed to last in excess of 500 years.

Roof Structure and Design

The slate roof was salvaged from Charlotte's First Presbyterian Church, from part of the church that was founded in 1832 and is now over 175 years old.

I chose a sunburst design over the entrance door that will welcome all visitors to Staghorn Chapel. The end gable facial board with a Fleur de Lys design was again cut out of heavy beams of ponderosa pine from California.

Stacked Stone Exterior

My choice was to use the small Tennessee field stone, much of which had to be hand split and shaped by the stone mason on site as he created the layer of dry stacked stone, many rocks still having the moss that had grown upon them for ages.

Interior Columns

The four granite columns were purchased from Mr. Criss Combis, founder of Charlotte's Superior Tile and Marble. Mr. Combis had removed these columns from the original Belk store in downtown Charlotte in 1987 when the revitalization for Center City was started so as to build the new Nations Bank Building at Trade and Tryon Streets. The Belk store was built in 1895 and was the original flagship store of the Belk Company. These columns were 37 inches across and 12 feet in length, each weighing in excess of 3700 lbs.

Black Walnut Wall Structures

I have always loved the richness of black walnut wood – the strength it represents, the shine in the wood, and the many patterns that the grain may portray. Anthony Bennett, with Bennett Cabinet Manufacturing, assumed the responsibility of purchasing and rejecting any 1 inch and 2 inch rough sewn black walnut boards with a minimum

length of 12 feet. These hand-selected finished walnut boards now cover the walls of the interior of Staghorn Chapel.

Floor Finish

We chose a 1 ½ inch thick pad of polished granite that is 5 feet x 10 feet on which we have placed the altar and prayer bench.

It was my goal to purchase some antique wood from the Holy Land to build the prayer bench which is copied after the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem in order to produce a connection to early Christianity. All of my efforts were unsuccessful. I used the darkest grained black walnut hardwood, featuring the Fleur de Lys at the top with the five point Star of Jacob embossed on the sides, also the wings of angels.

The Altar

On a trip to Rome in 2001, my family visited the ancient church known as San Pietro in Vincoli. I took many pictures of the altar in the sanctuary. The materials used are yellow onyx, black diamond marble, and white marble. The exterior Fleur de Lys frame is again 2 inches of solid black walnut. This altar weighs in excess of 1200 pounds. While in Rome, additionally, a rosary was procured that I left to be blessed by the Vatican priests and now hangs in Staghorn Chapel for visitors of the Catholic faith. Also in Italy, my family visited the town of Amalfi, famous for its handmade paper products. Here I purchased a unique guest registration book made of this exquisite paper.

Trinity Windows

It was a race against time. Many hours were spent trying to remove these windows from the old building at First Presbyterian. I was so afraid the demolition company would just use a wrecking ball and destroy before we could save these windows along with other items of glass. These 3-trinity windows were about 30 feet in the air and I was trying to remove them from a wall about 18 inches thick with cement around them. The trinity windows now stand so proudly as the centerpiece of the sanctuary at Staghorn Chapel. This glass is so old and fragile that it is amazing it has survived for so many years. The pinkish purple tint to these antique windows is caused by manganese in the glass over the past 150 years. I was surprised to find that the glass around the edge was still clear when I removed the window puddy.

Star of David Window

The large stained glass window encased in black walnut on the eastern wall of the chapel is quite special. It was located in the old coal bin on the dirt near the steam boiler that was used many years ago to heat First Presbyterian Church. The window was falling apart and all the wooden frames around the stained glass had rotted away. While re-leading the stained glass, we created the Star of David in the center of this 175-year-old work of art. The window is placed on the eastern wall to be beneficial to the worship of the Jewish faith.

The Chandelier

The chandelier is the centerpiece of the Chapel. It illuminates the area over the prayer bench and the altar. It is the only major item of the Chapel that has no history. It was chosen for its beauty with its French Napoleonic design. The dore gold, with the French green empire style base, adds to the large antique brass fixtures on the old doors.

Doors

All of the doors for Staghorn Chapel were originally salvaged from First Presbyterian Church. The single door I chose as the entrance to the knave of Staghorn Chapel was originally constructed of oak. This door is 3 inches thick with the antique wooden plugs on the inside of the door. I also salvaged the door hinges, locks, and backplates that are solid brass. These items are very old, and I treasure them. I also was able to reuse the original screws in the door hardware.

The 3-inch wooden double doors leading to the courtyard were originally built out of heart pine lumber. We removed many coats of varnish and sealer then we restained the wood to match the black walnut paneling on the walls on Staghorn Chapel.

In the apex of the front entrance over the double doors I have installed a very old piece of stained glass that I used in a private prayer room in my home for many years. It came from an old church in New York City.

I contracted with Tom Clark of Cairn Studio in Davidson, N.C. to reproduce some of his Biblical statues for the front of the sanctuary. The Chapel now has figurines of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Adjoining them in the center is a large solid bronze facial figurine of Jesus with the crown of thorns.

The Cross

Many hours were spent by Augustine Nunez searching over 1500 acres for the perfect dogwood tree to create the cross for Staghorn Chapel. It had to be tall, straight, and in its declining years, as I did not want to cut a beautiful, young dogwood tree. Augustine was successful in finding two trees, one at a home site to be bulldozed and another whose top was dead. One of the dogwood trees measured over 44 inches at the base.

Plantings

It was my goal to search and find trees and plantings with Biblical heritage to use around the chapel. These include sumac, locust, Rose of Sharon, cedar, angel plant, bleeding hearts, peonies, holly, fig, dogwood, olive shrub, sycamore, rosemary, and red buds.

The Mission Statement

Staghorn Chapel is a quiet sanctuary, set apart from the noise of the world, as a place for meditation and prayer. Within its walls, surrounded by beauty and holy calm, are welcomed those who seek the healing power of God's hand, those who seek to grow in grace and goodness, those who have sinned and seek forgiveness, those who are lost and need guidance, those who are burdened and seek peace. May all who come here depart in the power and peace of God, whose Spirit caused this "haven of rest" to be built. May each pilgrim who visits pause to give thanks for the many wondrous blessings God has bestowed.