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► Goodnoe plans to attend the 2007 ICCFA Convention, where he will be an exhibitor.



C O L U M B A R I U M D E S I G N

How do you create a cremation garden that families will love? Don't simply find an empty spot where you can plop down some niches. Follow these guidelines for a better columbarium development.



The strength and appeal of this columbarium garden at The Woodlands, Texas, comes from the well defined entrance and feeling that it creates of passing into a private and protected location, from the graceful curve of the wall that follows the shape of the land and from the rich quality of the construction and landscape materials.

Photo courtesy of Eickhof Columbaria Inc.

Developing a garden columbarium

Garden columbariums satisfy an important and rapidly growing market preference as the cremation rate continues to rise. These buyers are not necessarily choosing cremation for economic reasons; the decision may be a philosophical one. It can be based upon a commitment to reducing the impact of one's burial on the land, but more important, it often reflects a desire to be at rest in the natural beauty of an open air, garden setting.

As the demand for columbariums and the number of options available to buyers increase, customers will seek out facilities that provide the sense of protection, refuge and solace that a well-designed garden setting offers. To accomplish this, however, the columbarium must be situated in a true garden environment.

All too often, garden columbariums appear to be an afterthought. They can appear lost and lonely in the cemetery landscape when thought of as an inexpensive option to offer to a "secondary" market and

treated accordingly.

Successful garden columbariums need to be designed and built with the same richness, quality, permanence and dignity of traditional burial facilities. The niche walls and the landscape treatments of the garden columbarium must be designed to create their own sense of place and identity within the cemetery.

The result must be an environment that shelters, comforts and inspires; a protective place that offers solitude and respite and that is conducive to reflection and restoration.

Choosing a location for a garden columbarium

Small or "leftover" land areas

Garden columbariums have the great advantage of being a suitable form of new inventory development in areas that are small, awkwardly shaped or adjacent to roads, property lines or protected natural areas.

These small parcels of land are often located in highly visible areas but have remained undeveloped because they are too small to accommodate traditional ground burial or mausoleum structures.

Lawn areas around mausoleums, low traffic roadway islands and unsold land near the public roads surrounding the cemetery all provide opportunities to “showcase” this new development while accomplishing the separation and privacy required through the use of well designed walls, grade changes and landscape development.

Sloping land

A niche wall can effectively be used to retain earth and form terraces for a columbarium garden. Landscaped terraces are an effective way to create the important combination of privacy and views, and the cost of building the retaining walls and creating the terraces can be incorporated into the sale price of the niche.

Proper grading and subdrainage are critical to ensure proper drainage behind walls and in pedestrian areas.

Features and focal points

In open lawn settings, garden columbariums can serve as features and meditation areas within a section. This not only enhances the section but also generates significant revenue for a small piece of land.

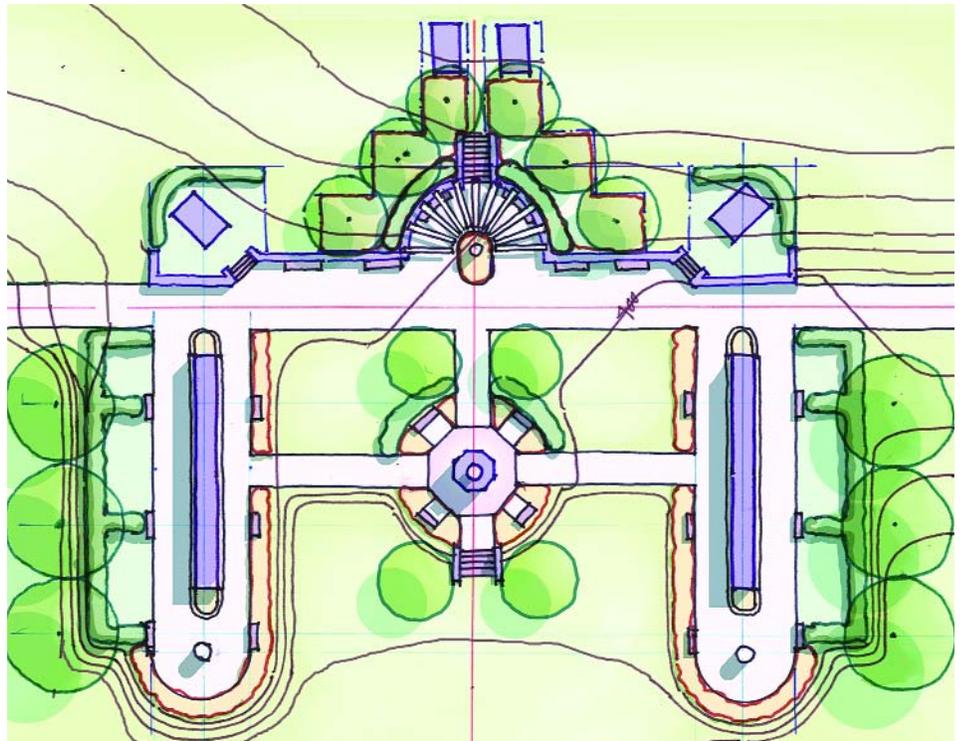
The landscape characteristics and the geometry of the surrounding facilities, along with important sight lines, should be coordinated with the placement, configuration and design of the garden columbarium.

The columbarium garden itself can be a significant landscape and architectural feature within the cemetery if it is treated as landscape “sculpture” using earth form, walls, garden architecture, trees, shrubs and flowers as design tools to create visual interest.

Complimentary additions and inventory combinations

Many existing garden mausoleum structures can benefit from the addition of a garden or courtyard columbarium as a landscape enhancement and amenity for the mausoleum. Unused areas between individual garden mausoleum structures provide excellent opportunities to create meditation spaces in the form of courts or gardens that will make the mausoleum crypts more appealing and increase their value.

Wherever feasible and appropriate, garden columbariums and cremation gardens



To take advantage of this sloping site’s dramatic view to the south, the earth was retained on the north side with niche walls to create a sheltered meditation court. Free standing columbarium walls, hedges, and trees enclose the garden terrace on the east and west sides and serve to further accentuate the views southward. This sense of protection on three sides, in combination with the distant views outward, creates an embracing and comforting environment for grieving and restoration. This design was done for Fairfax Memorial Park, Fairfax, Virginia.

should be combined with other burial options in order to:

- make buyers aware of the various choices available to them within easy and convenient distances from each other and
- use the garden development to add landscape interest and beauty in conjunction with other burial settings.

Views and vista points

Many cemeteries have opportunities to capitalize on both dramatic and intimate views in association with garden columbarium development. They may be sightlines to special landscapes from certain vantage points. They may be views into natural areas or of unique features of the cemetery.

These views may be grand and distant or very close and private. In either case, they provide excellent opportunities for meditation overlooks and seating areas that add great appeal and value to the columbarium garden or court.

Designing the garden columbarium

Every cemetery site is unique and every garden columbarium should be designed to reflect the characteristics of its site, includ-

ing topography, soils and drainage; solar orientation and exposure to the weather; and surrounding facilities and landscape features.

The design of a garden columbarium should also take into account the regionally distinct climatic and cultural differences. These should be reflected in the use of appropriate construction materials and plants that suit the region’s climate, and design styles, forms and symbols that reflect the region’s history and culture.

Privacy, protection and meditation

The functional success and economic value of a garden columbarium are directly proportional to the sense of comfort the buyer and visitor feel when in the garden. Two design characteristics are important in this regard: privacy and relief.

Protected spaces that offer seclusion, security and comfort are needed for quiet reflection and solace. Both views to distant scenes and to close and comforting ones can provide the psychological relief and inspiration necessary in a time of grief. The “protected zone” that is the columbarium garden needs to have a clear sense of boundaries



The use of architecturally styled columbarium walls along with a rich landscape development that includes a simple change in grade, durable paving materials, unified landscape plantings and a special water feature combine to make a columbarium garden that offers respite and inspiration for the city of Lake Forest, Illinois.

Photo courtesy of Eickhof Columbaria Inc.

and defined entrance points.

The design tools for accomplishing these goals are the orientation of the garden to the surrounding elements, the placement of niche structures and configuration of niche walls, grade changes, landscape planting, seating, paving and garden architecture or features.

Prefabricated, stand-alone garden niche units are an easy and economical way to start a garden columbarium. It is essential, however, that they be placed within such a “protected zone.”

These units can serve as the central feature in the garden or as the first module of future expansion. Whether they are the final solution or the beginning of a broader plan, they should be placed within a landscaped setting that includes all of the attributes mentioned above.

It is wise to establish a mini-master plan for the garden columbarium development to ensure that it is well coordinated with surrounding cemetery development, both what exists and what is planned for the future.

Garden architecture that will serve as a feature and as a space-defining element can include such structures as trellises, gazebos,

pergolas, colonnades, arcades, decorative fencing and screens and water features. These structures also offer the opportunity for cenotaph memorialization as part of the structure.

Every garden columbarium should provide comfortable and adequate seating. Viewing distances from the seating to the niche face should not be excessive—5 to 10 feet is a good range. Seating, features and overlooks should be located to take full advantage of the site’s natural or created view lines.

Climate and weather

Although a garden columbarium is by definition open to the elements, it is important to create protection from the weather as much as possible. Walls, grading, landscape plantings and garden architecture can be designed to provide shade from the summer sun and channel summer breezes through the garden. Properly oriented and carefully designed garden spaces can create “sun pockets” to capture winter sun radiation and buffer against winter winds.

Walks and paving

Walks and paving give definition to the garden as a separate place within the cemetery and are an important amenity for the user, especially in inclement weather. A dry, even surface for walking and viewing will enhance the garden’s appeal to the buyer, improve user satisfaction and raise the sale value of the columbarium. It must, however, be a stable and durable surface.

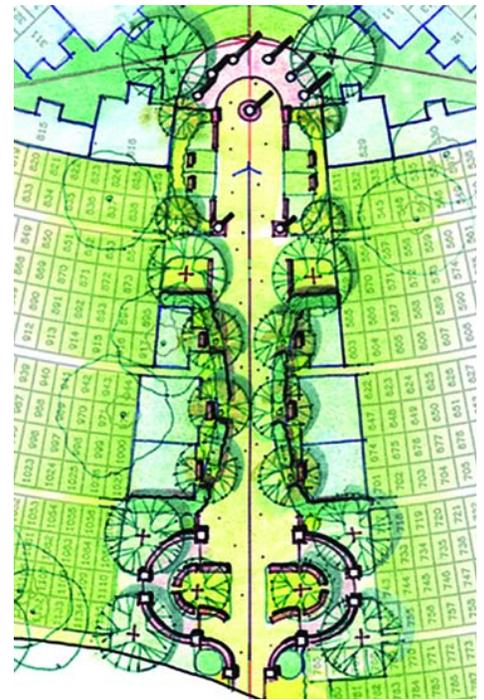
Walking stones or pavers must be set on a well-drained sub-base which will not be affected by frost or saturated or dehydrated soils. Durable and attractive paving is a wise marketing and maintenance investment.

Edging for gardens, in the form of curbs or low walls, gives a feeling of permanence, reduces garden maintenance and can serve as a memorialization surface.

Landscape planting

Adequate landscape planting is critical to a successful and high value garden columbarium. Every garden should include trees as a space defining element. Canopy trees create “walls” and a “ceiling” to the “room” that is the garden columbarium.

Evergreen trees and shrubs can be used to enhance this sense of enclosure and to provide year-round color and interest. Flowers and flowering trees help create an intimate atmosphere and brighten the garden. They provide seasonal interest and



An undeveloped slice of land in an existing lawn section has been used to create a mixed inventory garden development. Niche walls, in-ground urn burial gardens, family estates and a cenotaph colonnade court all work together to create a two-sided development that offers privacy and seclusion for those inside the garden and an attractive landscape feature for the flanking lawn burial areas. This design was done for Lakeview Cemetery, Cleveland, Ohio.

accent, and are very useful at entrances and near seating.

It is important not to use too many varieties of plants (keep it simple) and to consult with your local nursery on durable, low-maintenance species for your site. What works well in another part of the community or even within your cemetery may not tolerate the soil, sun or moisture conditions of your columbarium site.

History, character and style

The cultural history of the cemetery and the ethnic preferences of the population it serves should be reflected in the design of the garden columbarium in its forms, materials, geometry, colors, plant materials and symbolism.

Construction materials

Garden columbariums deserve to be designed and built with the same sense of permanence accorded to traditional forms of full body burial. Because they are often conceived of as naturalistic settings, they are

sometimes not constructed with the same commitment to durable materials and construction procedures.

Poor quality or non-professional construction techniques will have negative long-term effects on the value, maintenance costs and user satisfaction associated with the facility.

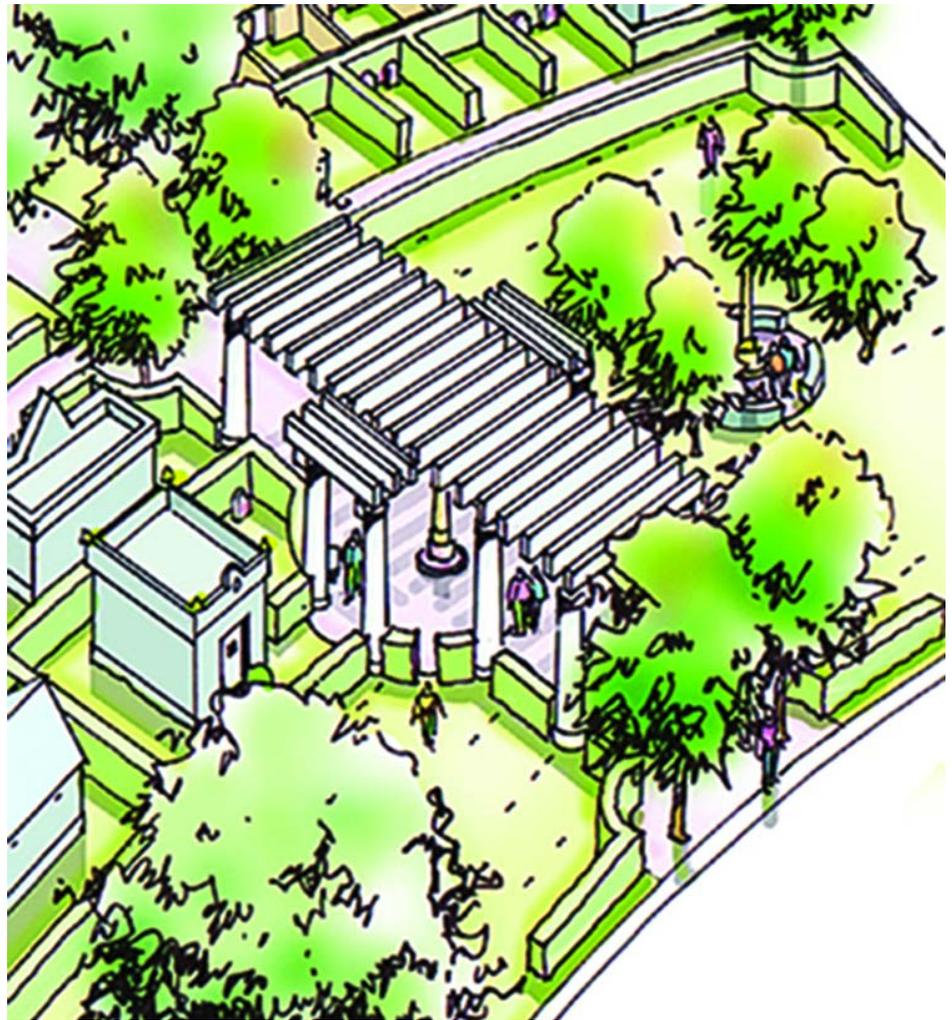
Phasing

The design of a garden columbarium should allow for the facility to be developed in phases. It is sometimes prudent to start by developing one portion of a larger plan in order to generate revenue for successive phases.

It is very important, however, that the facility be designed to feel and appear complete at any phase of its development. This is achievable by establishing a master plan for the garden columbarium which will determine the project limits, the circulation and view patterns and a unified strategy for grading and landscape development.

In this case it is wise to rough grade and seed the entire site in order to establish final drainage patterns and to minimize earth-work disruptions with the development of future phases. It is also best to plant all of the major trees in phase 1 to define the entire garden area and for visual continuity when the project is complete.

Your garden columbarium should be as unique as your site and the market you serve. It should be as durable and permanent as a mausoleum. And it should be as warm and comforting as a private garden. □



This columbarium court and memorial trellis serve as the central feature and committal area for a high-density development of mixed inventory. The garden architecture and landscape plantings help to buffer winter winds and provide summer shade. This design was done for Chapel of the Chimes, Hayward, California.