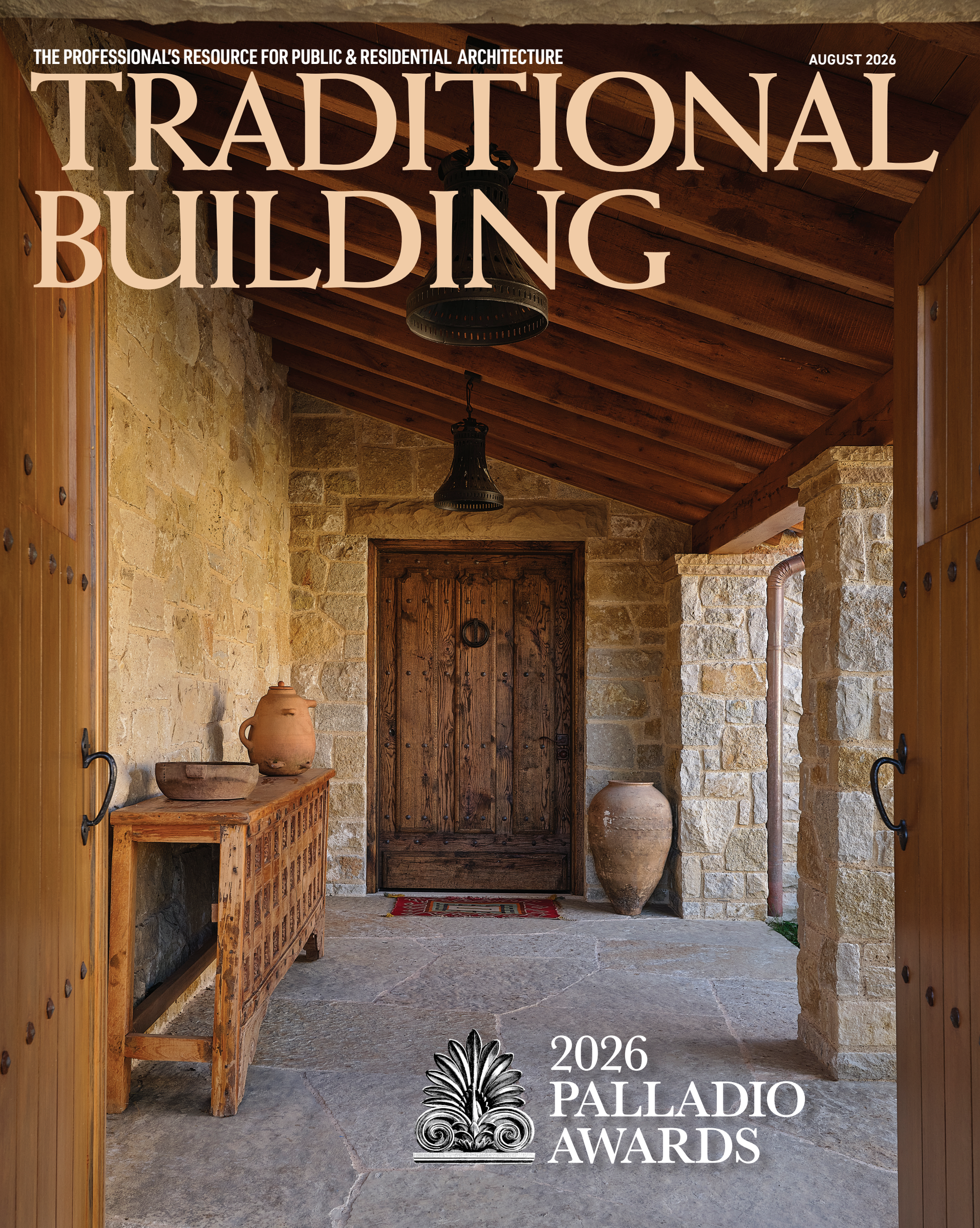


THE PROFESSIONAL'S RESOURCE FOR PUBLIC & RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE

AUGUST 2026

TRADITIONAL BUILDING



2026
PALLADIO
AWARDS



BASILICA OF THE SACRED HEART RELIQUARY CHAPEL

Duncan G. Stroik Architect, LLC

Key Suppliers

ARCHITECT

Duncan G. Stroik
Architect

GENERAL

CONTRACTOR,
DECORATIVE PAINT
AND GILDING
Conrad Schmitt
Studios

LIGHTING DESIGNER

Chris Stroik, LAM
partners

RELIQUARY

CABINETS, SHRINE
TOWER, PRIE DIEU,
PODIUM AND
FLOWER STANDS
Scott Richter,
wood carver

CHANDELIER

RETROFIT
Litelab Corp.

MARBLE INSTALLER

ZStone

FLOORING

INSTALLER

Art Mosaic and Tile
Co.

MARBLE SUPPLY

Stone Consulting
di Roberto Pagliari
& Co.

BRONZE

OSTENSORIA

Granda Liturgical
Arts

IMAGE

DESCRIPTIONS

Notre Dame
Reliquary Chapel
Renovation



A new decorative paint pattern was stenciled on the walls of the chapel. The custom carved prie dieu and kneelers invite visitors to be close to the relics.

Photos by
Matt Cashore

The Basilica of the Sacred Heart's newly renovated Reliquary Chapel at Notre Dame University provides a spiritually uplifting setting for one of America's larger collections of relics, promoting not only knowledge about the saints but also the heritage of architectural styles.

When a patron proposed the idea of a makeover that would not only exhibit the artifacts but also impart knowledge about the lives of the hundreds of saints, Architect Duncan G. Stroik was enlisted to make what some call "the most beautiful little chapel at Notre Dame."

It was a challenging task because of the chapel's truncated octagonal shape that Stroik likens to a half bay window.

"My prime goal was to make this pleasant but oddly shaped side chapel feel symmetrical, balanced, and purposeful," he says.

The 340-square-foot chapel showcases more than 1,400 sacred fragments related to saints or their belongings that were collected by founder

Father Edward Sorin CSC more than a century and a half ago.

Stroik designed 10 custom-carved mahogany display cases arranged to bring symmetry and order to the irregular space.

Each case has an upper cabinet with a pointed arch framed by floral colonnettes and a lower cabinet with a quatrefoil opening bordered by inverted tapered pilasters.

"My prime goal was to make this pleasant but oddly shaped side chapel feel symmetrical, balanced, and purposeful."



Clockwise from above left, the upper and lower cases display relics from the University's collection of over 1,400. Relics, or fragments of holy objects or of the bodies of saints, are seen in the Catholic Church as a visible connection with the communion of saints.

Concealed lighting within the cases and museum quality glass were utilized to make the relics easily visible for devotion.

Gilded inscriptions around the curved entablature show the names of the twelve apostles whose relics are in the niches below.

The main arch of the tempietto frames a custom bronze ostensorium for a special relic.

The Gothic colonnettes provide a conscious connection to the college's namesake, the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris, and the capitals were inspired by Viollette-le-Duc's drawings at the triforium level of the choir.

By judiciously laying out the cabinets, including nestling one against a 45-degree angle wall without interfering with the design, Stroik balanced the space.

Because the centerline of the doorway to the chapel was not aligned with the centerline of the room, Stroik designed the cases on the south wall to be 2.5 inches deeper than those on the north wall.

They are centered around a tempietto tower that houses relics of the 12 apostles, each in a custom bronze reliquary crowned with a lantern of carved

volute, a shallow conical roof and a gilded cross.

Below, a large opening displays a relic of the True Cross. At the base of the shrine, a screened sepulchre houses an effigy of an early Christian martyr, St. Severa, whose bones are contained below.

The tight dimensions of the space called for innovative illumination solutions. The historic chandelier in the center was retrofitted with wall-wash fixtures, and the height of the iron stem was adjusted. Each reliquary is lighted with micro-spotlights.

The new cases were placed over the existing mechanical return grilles in the floor, so Stroik made the lower cabinets of the three cases above them a plenum return and hid a return duct and grille in the corner of the cases.

The plaster walls and ceiling were restored, and



Clockwise from left, the central templetto shrine houses relics of the Twelve Apostles beneath a lantern crowned with a gilded cross; the main arch frames a custom bronze ostensorium displaying a special relic; and one of the custom-carved mahogany reliquary cabinets showcases relics from the university's collection against a crimson backdrop.



a new decorative pattern featuring fleur-de-lis, a lily symbolizing sainthood and the French origins of the university, was stenciled on the walls.

Stroik's design combines the Gothic style with his more Renaissance sensibilities.

"It brings these cousin styles together," he says. "Roman Classicism is the mother of Gothic, and Gothic is the mother of Renaissance. I was interested in showing that bloodline in a space that references the history of saints. I want people to feel that the new chapel harmonizes with the neo-Gothic architecture and 19th-century art of the church."

The project, he adds, is a testament to craftsmanship.

"It's a very highly crafted chapel," he says. "In fact, someone said that it's the most highly crafted project at Notre Dame in 60 years. It feels like a little museum because of the beautiful mahogany and glass cases."

The newly decorated chapel was unveiled during football season, when a lot of out-of-towners and alumni visit the university.

"You can see it from the Lady Chapel, which is at the back of the church," Stroik says, adding that many visitors notice it and comment on it. "Even though there has been a reliquary chapel there since 1888, it made less of an impression on visitors and worshippers. Now it's a bit of a draw, which is what architecture should do for us. To draw us in. People feel it is a beautiful space, which inspires devotion to the saints in a famous college chapel. **TB**