



LAKESWOOD GARDEN MAUSOLEUM





LAKEWOOD MAUSOLEUM





BUILT INTO A HILLSIDE IN ONE OF MINNEAPOLIS'S MOST HISTORIC CEMETERIES, HGA'S IMPECCABLY DETAILED GLASS-AND-GRANITE STRUCTURE FUSES WITH THE LANDSCAPE IN A RESPECTFUL, YET UNCONVENTIONAL, TAKE ON THE MOST PERMANENT OF ALL BUILDING TYPES.

Text by **Katie Gerfen**  
Photos by **Paul Crosby**

**WHEN LAKEWOOD CEMETERY'S** existing Memorial Mausoleum began to run out of space, there was no option to expand, remodel, or tear down and start anew. Each wall represented so much more than an assemblage of load-bearing beams; every nook and cranny represented someone's final resting place. Lakewood's approach to a new, second, mausoleum building was different than most other U.S. cemeteries. Instead of pursuing a cost-effective design/build structure, the 141-year-old Minneapolis institution held a design competition, seeking a structure that would meet basic needs and fulfill the long-standing desire of the board of trustees for

beautiful buildings—as far back as 1908, they demolished a chapel because they felt it “did not fit with the beauty of the cemetery,” says Lakewood president Ronald A. Gjerde Jr.

So the stakes were high for Joan Soranno, FAIA, and her team at HGA to take on a historic setting and an unfamiliar typology. “Contemporary architecture today is very edgy and it wants to provoke ... [but] when you come to a cemetery and you're sad, and heartbroken, and grieving, you don't want to be provoked,” Soranno says. The design process “was always under the lens of: Is it timeless? Is it serene?”

The Lakewood board was won over by Soranno's passion—she admits to reading nearly 20 books on the subject before the interview—so much so that they readily agreed to an

unconventional resiting. Initially, the board assumed that the new structure would be entirely above-grade—one reason that mausoleums have become popular, Gjerde says, is because “some people just don't like the idea of being buried in the ground.” But HGA posed a radical alternative: Embed the bulk of the building into an existing hillside, “because the true power of this place is its landscape,” Soranno says.

The result is that the new 24,500-square-foot Garden Mausoleum, by intention, largely fades from view. From the street, all that can be seen is a 5,500-square-foot granite pavilion that sits amid a verdant landscape. The pavilion is clad with hand-laid courses of dark-hued, split-faced granite block. The texture of the stone was critical, Soranno says, because “touch is such an





**Previous spread:** The entrance to the Lakewood Cemetery Garden Mausoleum is surrounded by curving walls covered in a mosaic made from Carrera marble and Mexican glass tile from RBC Tile & Stone. The pattern is carried through to detailing in the entry doors by Ellison Bronze. **This image:** The building is clad in two varieties of split-face, hand-laid stone from Cold Spring Granite. The green roof is dotted with skylights, lined in bronze collars by MG McGrath, which admit natural light into the crypt and columbarium rooms below.

important part of commemorative architecture; we wanted materials that were very tactile.”

To the side of the pavilion is a green roof (which reads from this level as a lawn) marked by a row of carefully graded berms, each of which culminates in a bronze-collared skylight. These glazed openings are either rectangular or circular in form; each shape denotes crypt or columbarium rooms below, respectively.

Surrounding the bronze entry doors that lead into the rigidly orthogonal pavilion are a series of soft curving planes covered in a marble and glass mosaic. Project team member Nick Potts, AIA, oversaw 20 iterations of patterning before the team found one that struck the appropriate balance between geometric and organic forms. Installation took nearly two years to complete because of the freeze-thaw cycles of Minneapolis winters.

Inside the pavilion, hand-rubbed plaster ceilings and white marble floors of the foyer

give way to a multipurpose reception space with plaster and warm mahogany walls. The attention to detail is impressive: Even the letters in the exit signs are carefully outlined in plaster so as not to interrupt the surface of the wall.

But it is down a flight of marble stairs to the lower level that the bulk of the program lies. Beneath the pavilion are a committal chapel, a grieving room, and a mechanical space. To the east is the long corridor off of which the columbarium and crypt rooms are situated. Clad in marble, wood, and stone, and filled with filtered daylight (either from the skylights or through windows that look out onto manicured gardens), the rooms are a suite of subtle permutations on the same theme.

It is important to remember that there is a retail component in play, and not an inexpensive one. Single crypts at Lakewood Cemetery range from \$7,500 to \$25,810, and single niches can cost more than \$8,500. With 879 crypts (which hold

coffins) and 4,620 niches (for cremated remains), the new Garden Mausoleum “can extend our economic life by 75 to 100 years,” Gjerde says. More than that, the decision of where one is buried is, well, rather permanent. If all the floors were green, it could discourage someone who didn’t like that color from choosing the facility. As a result, there are crypt and columbarium rooms with skylight views or garden views, with floors in green-, pink-, or honey-colored onyx, and with wood or plaster ceilings.

This level of careful consideration of every detail made the Garden Mausoleum an all-consuming project—but it was also a personal one: Lakewood is in Soranno’s neighborhood and she and project architect John Cook, FAIA, married in the cemetery’s 1910 chapel. Soranno still visits the new building, where she and Cook have purchased space, every weekend. “I pull weeds. I straighten,” she says. “This is our eternal resting place. It has to be pristine.”









**Opposite:** In the foyer, white marble floors from Grazzini Brothers & Co. and a white Venetian plaster ceiling from Armourcoat flow past a stair into a reception space that offers landscape views out through Viracon glazing. **Above:** Underneath the reception space is the commitment chapel. The curve of the wall was designed to capture the raking light on the Venetian plaster walls and rift-sawn white oak floors. The mahogany lecturn, table, and urn stand were designed by HGA to complement the space. **Left:** Crypt and columbarium rooms—which feature preassembled columbaria from Eickhof Columbaria behind custom granite or marble niche covers—are situated off a double-loaded marble and granite-lined corridor.



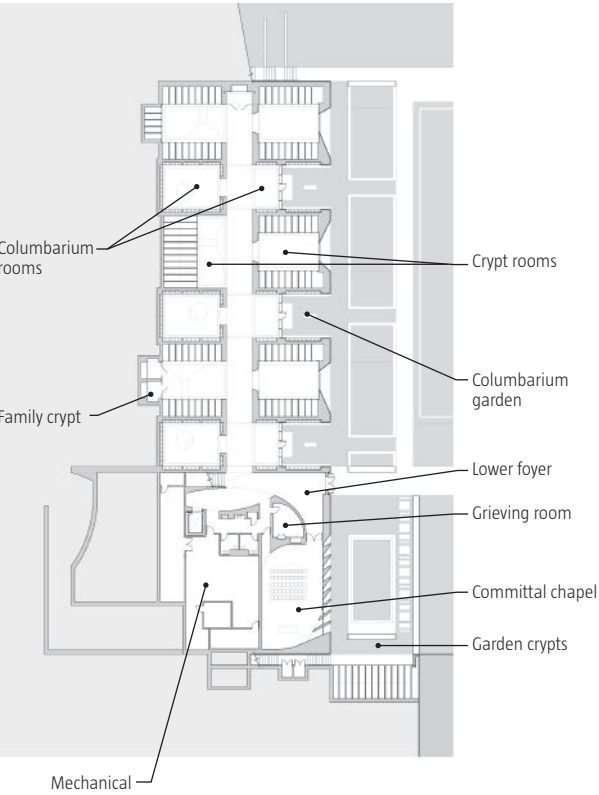


**This image:** Crypt rooms inset into the hillside are lit by rectangular skylights. The admitted daylight plays off of the white marble crypt covers and onyx floor tiles from Grazzini Brothers & Co.

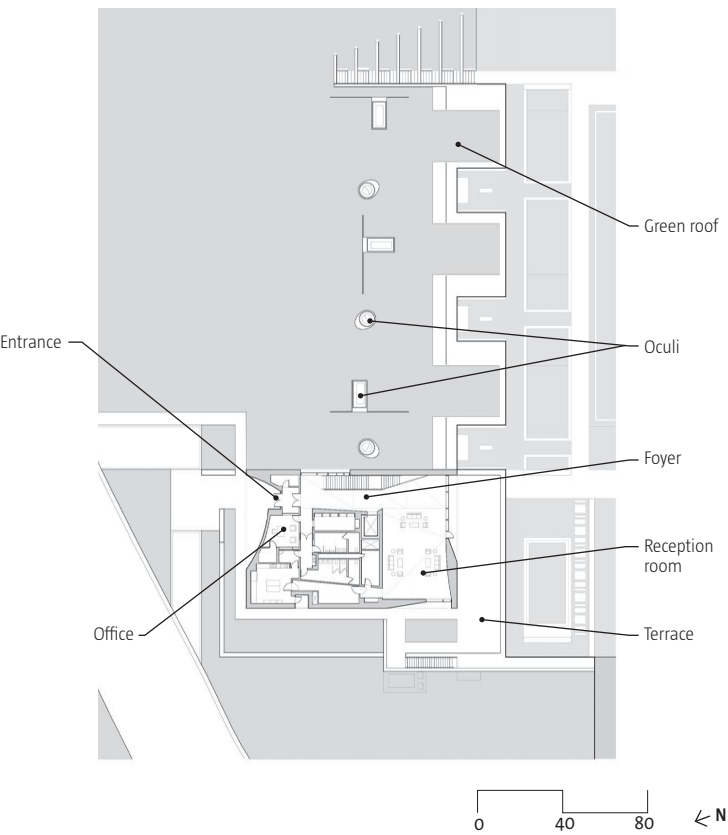
**Opposite:** Because it is important to present people with options when they are selecting their final resting places, each room has a slightly different combination of materials and finishes. Here, a granite-clad crypt room with a mahogany ceiling overlooks the garden through a 9-foot-square picture window. The onyx floor is green instead of honey.



**Garden-Level Plan**



**Street-Level Plan**







From the garden, the full massing of the mausoleum structure is revealed. The mosaic motif from the entrance, installed by CD Tile & Stone, is continued around the windows of the committal chapel and crypt rooms. Columbarium gardens between the crypt rooms accommodate exterior niches for those who prefer interment in the garden setting.

### West-East Section

