New Discoveries
Uncovering the mysteries of the original Rotunda construction

National Spotlight
National Park Service declares U.Va. a must-see destination

A New Vision
Reimagining the courtyards and north terrace
U.Va. Crews Repair Water Damage in Academical Village

The Rotunda is not the only part of the original Academical Village that is undergoing renovation. As with any historically significant property, necessary upkeep means that work crews are on constant call to perform sensitive, and sometimes extensive, repairs.

The Academical Village has nearly $125 million in repair and renovation needs. The colonnades that flank the Lawn are as iconic in their own way as the Rotunda. In recent weeks, work crews have repaired or replaced water-damaged beams in the colonnade between Pavilion VIII and Pavilion X. Ryan Taylor, the Central Grounds zone maintenance manager for Facilities Management, said water had seeped into the wood from the roof over the colonnade.

“It’s a metal roof with a low pitch and is used as a walking surface by some of the deans and their guests,” explained James Zehmer, historic project manager for Facilities Management. “This opens up pin holes that let the water seep in.” A rubber membrane will be applied to the roof to close the holes and protect the new wood, he said.

Taylor said one of the workers noticed water dripping from a soffit in that area following a heavy rainstorm and saw that the paint on the soffit was peeling. Workers then removed the fascia boards to examine the extent of the damage. “We had to see how much wood had to be replaced and how much could be repaired,” he said. “Some of this wood is 15 years old, from when Facilities Management carpenters replaced it around 1999, and some of the sections are original.”

He said the carpenters cut out the sections that were bad and fit in new sections, holding them in place with epoxy and screws. In the places where the damaged beam had to be replaced, they used 6-by-6-inch pressure-treated beams, carriage-bolted to a pressure-treated 4-by-6-inch beam, with a spacer in between. “We wanted to keep as much of the original material as possible,” Taylor said.

Taylor said his crews are working on a similar problem at Pavilion VIII, where they have removed some of the decorative trim to expose the wood, and are looking at other sections of the Academical Village that are in need of these kinds of repairs.

National Park Service Features U.Va.

The University of Virginia and Monticello are now must-see stops on the National Park Service’s newest online travel itinerary, which highlights the 22 U.S. World Heritage Sites, ranging from the Statue of Liberty to Grand Canyon National Park.

Thomas Jefferson’s masterpieces are part of this series that supports historic preservation, promotes public awareness of history and encourages people to visit historic places throughout the country. The website, at tinyurl.com/udkl94c, features essays, maps and information for visitors interested in traveling to these cultural and natural treasures.

The Grounds are open to the public every day free of charge. Tours are available from the University of Virginia Guide Service. Visit uvaguides.org for more information.

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A New Vision for the Rotunda Landscape

“Landscapes are the settings of our lives,” said Laurie Olin, the landscape architect whose vision for the Rotunda’s courtyards and north terrace will transform these spaces into friendly, welcoming areas for the 21st century.

For Olin, landscapes aren’t mere accessories to the built world. They are central to humans’ lived experience and memory.

“We have memories from every stage of our lives—childhood, adolescence and adulthood—of the plants and landscapes that surround us,” he explained. “We are emotional about plants because they form our home and environment.”

A luminary in his field, Olin received the ASLA Gold Medal, the highest honor given by the American Society of Landscape Architects. OLIN, his Philadelphia-based landscape architecture and urban design firm, has also garnered many awards. No stranger to the University, OLIN’s firm designed the landscape for the Betsy and John Casteen Arts Grounds and in 2013 received the Thomas Jefferson Foundation Medal in Architecture.

What Would Jefferson Think?

When Thomas Jefferson designed the Rotunda in 1819, the east and west courtyards and the north terrace did not figure prominently in his plans. He situated the Rotunda’s main entrance on the south side, with a sweeping view of the Lawn and distant mountains. University Landscape Architect Mary Hughes said that in Jefferson’s time the Rotunda’s north side—the terrace where graduates gather each May before Final Exercises—had a steep slope adjoining it and thus saw minimal traffic. The courtyards had wooden roofs and served as outdoor exercise spaces.

During his 1898 Rotunda reconstruction, famed architect Stanford White included landscape plans as part of his larger design. But when funds for the project dried up, the courtyards never received their due. Ironically, amid this richly historic area of the Grounds, the Rotunda’s courtyards and north terrace have never truly had what Hughes called “a moment of historic significance prior to the present day.”

In reimagining these outdoor spaces, Olin said he worried less about contemporary opinions of his designs and more about how Jefferson and White might regard them. “Jefferson is the hero of American architecture. To do work in conjunction with his architecture is challenging. He was my ghost critic.”

Olin’s courtyard designs will create spaces suitable for gatherings as well as for quiet contemplation.

Olin opted for a simple approach that balanced the past, present and future. “I wanted to give the spaces a character sympathetic to Thomas Jefferson’s design and deferential to the Rotunda itself. But I didn’t want to do fake history,” he said.

“I wanted to create social spaces with the right scale for the building.”

Olin described the east courtyard as an ideal spot to “sit quietly and have coffee in the morning sun.” His design calls for a new fountain to replace the existing one and benches and flowering beds to enhance the space’s intimate feel. His west courtyard design builds on that space’s suitability for events later in the day by adding a paved space where tables and chairs can be set up easily.

The north terrace currently sits empty except for two flagpoles and the Jefferson statue that gazes toward University Avenue. Olin’s design divides the terrace into three “subspaces” to lend greater visual definition and a welcoming feel while retaining ample space for crowds to gather. Benches and small flowering Virginia fringe trees will add softness to the space without overwhelming it.

“Jefferson is the hero of American architecture. To do work in conjunction with his architecture is challenging. He was my ghost critic.” —Laurie Olin

The University and the Commonwealth of Virginia have approved Olin’s designs. The University now seeks funding for the installation and appropriate care of the courtyards and north terrace in the future.

Connect With JGI

Please contact Amy Yancey for more information about how to support the Jeffersonian Grounds Initiative: 434-243-4026 or ayancey@virginia.edu.

Turning Vision Into Reality

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(Opposite left) Rendering of the approved plan by OLIN for the Rotunda courtyards and north terrace.
Made in Italy, Living on the Lawn

Early in 2015, the Rotunda will receive the promise of a new beginning courtesy of Old World craftsmanship.

For almost a year, teams of master stone carvers based in the Pedrini Studio in Carrara, Italy, have worked to turn blocks of marble into replicas of Thomas Jefferson’s original Carrara marble capitals for the Rotunda. Now, 10 pristine capitals, each weighing 10,000 pounds, will be custom-crated and shipped to Hampton Roads then trucked to Charlottesville. They will be installed on the portico columns on the south side of the Rotunda, a task estimated to take about a month. Workers must first remove the existing crumbling capitals, which were installed as part of the McKim, Mead & White re-envisioning of the Rotunda following the 1895 fire.

The installation process itself is a worthy engineering feat. The Rotunda’s south portico roof is supported by a complicated structural shoring system that is similar in appearance to heavy-duty scaffolding. A matrix of steel beams will take the load from the portico roof off the columns to allow for removal of the existing capitals. For additional bracing, steel guywires known as “deadmen” will tie the shoring system to 3-foot concrete cubes placed at strategic locations around the construction site.

Before replacing the capitals, the construction team will remove the steel I-beams in the architrave. Temporary “needle beams” will be inserted above the steel to be replaced, and will support the portico roof during the process. Once the steel beams and the existing capitals are removed, a crane will carefully lift each capital onto a cart that will convey it to where it will be installed.

“The installation will be a slow, meticulous process,” said Jody Lahendro, the supervisory historic preservation architect on the Rotunda project. “The capitals will be placed according to a sequencing system that takes into account the capitals with the highest-quality veining in the marble.” The capitals with the most attractive veining will be placed on the corner columns.

“Although we can’t guarantee it at this point, we hope that the southwest capital will be one of the earlier ones to be placed,” said Brian Hogg, U.Va.’s senior preservation planner. “We have a reliable record that Jefferson witnessed the original southwest capital installation during his last visit down the mountain from Monticello.”

Keep up with the latest progress by bookmarking the Rotunda live webcam found at virginia.edu/jgi.

New Work, New Discoveries

The arrival of the Carrara capitals isn’t the only news coming out of the Rotunda. Work continues on interior and exterior upgrades that will bring the Rotunda back to the center of University life. And each day brings new discoveries.

“Before we began work, we asked the archaeologists to monitor the demolition of the floors on the lowest level in case there was anything interesting,” said Brian Hogg. At the same time, Diana Waite of Mount Ida Press, a researcher preparing a study of the chemical hearth in the Lower East Oval Room, discovered references in University records that indicated the presence of columns.

“This was something we had never heard of, or even considered, so we were primed before demolition began to look for some indication of the columns,” said Hogg. “The footings provided physical confirmation of the textual reference. Together they tell us something entirely new about how the original Rotunda was constructed.”

The installation process itself is a complex, detail-oriented process. Its success is due to a trans-Atlantic team whose expertise and spirit of camaraderie has always remained focused on a common goal. Key groups involved include the following:

- U.Va. Facilities Planning & Construction Department
- Office of the Architect for the University
- John G. Waite Associates, Architects
- The Whiting-Turner Contracting Co.
- Hugo Stone, LLC
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After removing the concrete subfloors in the lower East and West Oval Rooms, work revealed pairs of brick column footings in the middle of the rooms. University records indicated that there were columns on the lower level, but it was unclear if the footings were still present beneath the concrete. Now there is physical evidence that columns existed in these rooms, and their location and size can be determined.

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We’re closing in on our funding goal for the Rotunda renovations, but we still have more to raise. Currently, we need $5 million to reach our $50.6 million fundraising goal. Major gift initiatives such as the U200 have brought in some $15 million, but we need gifts of all sizes—they are what we depend on to put us over the top.

Grassroots giving makes a difference. Just look at what we’ve accomplished:

• Last year, members of the UVaClub of San Francisco held the first Rotunda Ball west of the Mississippi to benefit the Rotunda project and honor their memories of their time on Grounds. Now in its second year, the event raised $24,430. San Francisco modeled its ball after the Restoration Ball held annually at the University of Virginia since 1963, sponsored by the Jefferson Literary and Debating Society, the University Guide Service and other organizations. Last March’s event on Grounds, the 51st annual Restoration Ball, raised more than $7,000 for the Rotunda.

• A dedicated team of students has organized an online auction of historic items and unique U.Va. experiences to support the Rotunda renovation. Look for updates announcing a big auction planned for the spring semester.

• Jefferson’s Circle is an association of donors who make annual, unrestricted gifts of $1,000 or more to advance the University’s historic preservation effort. The members’ gifts also support educational programs for both the University community and the general public. Contributions may be made in the form of cash, securities, planned gifts or other appreciated assets. Matching gifts from an employer are credited to the donor and count toward membership. In the last fiscal year, 111 Jefferson’s Circle Members raised $633,696.

• Jefferson’s Circle of Merchants is a similar association that recognizes the organizations and businesses that support JGI through philanthropy and services.

For more information on how to support the Rotunda and Jeffersonian Grounds, contact

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