



Divine union

Stained-glass maker honored for Vina windows

The stained-glass windows were installed at New Clairvaux last summer.
PHOTO BY RON SCHWAGER

Shortly after Elizabeth Devereaux moved to Chico, in 1989, she attended a retreat at the Abbey of New Clairvaux, the Cistercian monastery 25 miles to the north, in Vina. The leader of the retreat was Father Paul Mark Schwan, who since then has become the monastery's abbot.

by
Robert Speer
robertspeer@
newsreview.com

Learn more:
For more about Devereaux Architectural Glass, go to devglas.com. For more on the Abbey of New Clairvaux, including its tour schedule, go to newclairvaux.org.

It was the beginning of a decades-long friendship that has led to Devereaux's creation of a magnificent set of stained-glass windows at New Clairvaux. Earlier this month she journeyed to Las Vegas for the annual convention of the American Institute of Architects, where she garnered a prestigious award for her windows in the category of religious art and architecture.

The windows are the finishing touch on a project more than 25 years in the making—the reconstruction of an 800-year-old monastery using, to a considerable extent, stones from that same long-abandoned Trappist monastery in northern Spain.

The story of how newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst purchased the stones, brought them to San Francisco, decided not to use them and dumped them behind the de Young Museum in Golden Gate Park has been told many times, in this newspaper and elsewhere. The stones—originally part of a chapter house—lay there for more than 40 years, until Father Thomas Davis, a monk then living at a Cistercian (Trappist) monastery in Kentucky, determined to use them in building a new church at the Vina abbey. (Father Thomas later became the monastery's abbot.)

It was a monumental undertaking involving the participation of many people—German stone carvers, British and Spanish historians, American architects and, at the end, the members of Devereaux's art

Elizabeth Devereaux
PHOTO BY MELANIE MACTAVISH



glass team, Owen Gabbert, Kyle Campbell and Chris Tallant, who installed the windows in July 2018. (For more about Devereaux, whose career spans 45 years and includes more than 200 commissions, see "The mysticism of light," in the Nov. 13, 2012, issue of the CN&R.)

The finished windows are marvelous to behold. The church itself is a stunning building, with its trans-vaulted ceiling that seems to soar into space. The addition of subtly placed ambient lighting cast upon the huge stone pillars gives the room even greater depth, but the pièce de résistance is the set of three tall and narrow—and brilliantly colorful—windows on the room's east side, above and behind the abbot's chair.

The windows have symbolic weight, Devereaux says. The bottom section is amber colored, representing the brothers' prayers. As the prayers rise up, the glass begins to clear, such that the top section is completely translucent, representing union with God.

Because the monks—there are now 16 of them, Father Paul said—worship both day and night, Devereaux added reflective 24-karat gold luster to the glass so that the windows glow even when the sun is down. They're also positioned to catch first light in the morning, when the brothers are at prayer.

The church is a meditative space where the emphasis is on silence and prayer. Next to it, on its west side, is the light-filled atrium, which serves as a courtyard of sorts where worshipers can gather for conversation. Floor-to-ceiling windows look out on the fields of walnuts, grapes (for the monastery's signature line of wines) and other income-producing crops.

Altogether, Devereaux created five other windows for the church complex's various rooms.

Thematically they refer back to the three windows in the church proper, but they also are designed to be functional—which means they let in a lot of light.

On a tour of the church with Devereaux and Father Paul, I asked whether he had put the windows project out to bid. "Oh, no," he said. "We always knew it would be Elizabeth." □

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