

The striking Islamic dome of the world niche borrows from the 12th century Hall of the Ambassadors in Seville, Spain.

ing columns and capitals were cut on the ground. They represent, too, the only additions of stone to the niches. The rest of the work involved shaping the limestone installed 80 years ago.

Archaeologist and cultural historian Lynn H. Holden, who selected the hieroglyphics for the world niche, terms the niche project quite simply "the most important piece of stonework going on in North America. They're making three-dimensional pieces. Some, a foot thick," says the former associate dean of fine arts. Nobody works like that anymore. They work on pieces only a few inches deep."

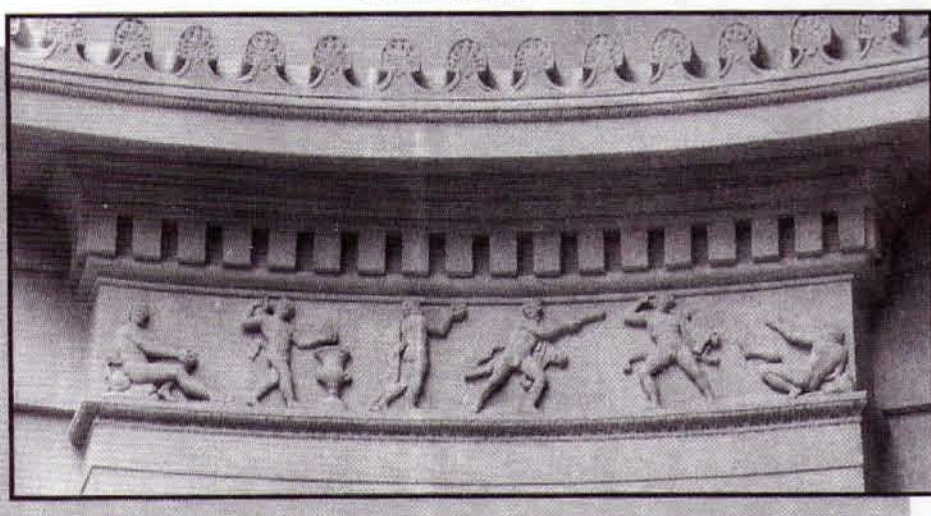
The carvers especially enjoyed the world niche. They seldom have an opportunity to work on non-Western sculpture. Fairplay, too, liked doing the statues for



Mercury, left, fashioned on school photos of donor Verner S. Purnell (A'26), adorns the main entrance. Master carver Nicholas Fairplay, above, works on a medieval statue.

## NICHES

Athletes in the Greek niche display their form on the Corinthian frieze, based on the Monument of Lysicrates, built in Athens in 334 B.C. The monument honors the winners of a song contest and marks the first use of the Corinthian on the outside of a building.



The architects were clearly at a loss with some demands of the project. For example, how do you draw a dome? "Who does domes any more?" Lindsey says with a chuckle. They consulted a 19th century architecture encyclopedia for guidance, since each of the five niches has a dome.

As they became

more familiar with the demands, with what the computers could and could not do, the architects initiated more and more of the work on the computer.

Fairplay feels the computer method works better if a building uses lots of repetitive images. Otherwise, too much time goes into the drawing. "I think a mistake we made was trying to draw everything on the computer. I don't think that's the way to go because when it came time to do the tracery on the panels, the architects had to plot all the curves that you just draw with a compass in five seconds. They had to plot the path of the curve. That's very time consuming."

With a deadline of Oct. 31, 1993, Fairplay did not expect to complete the niches. He will place the Chinese columns, but not carve a huge dragon that curls around one column's counterpart in Tiananmen Square. Fairplay particularly regrets not placing floral ornamentation in the dome of the world niche to add another dimension to that work.

Lindsey sees a completeness in the project, but admits, "There are places in each of the niches where more work can be done, where elaborations can continue and where pieces can be added." He mentions ornamentation between the ribs of

they just don't restore them," he says. "They're too valuable." He basically invented the statues of Solomon and Sheba, based on 12th century models from Chartres, St. Denis and Notre Dame in Paris. The pieces span the transition from Romanesque to Gothic. Fairplay also created the St. John and Mary Magdalene in a 13th century English Gothic style.

While the project architects, Lindsey and Paul Rosenblatt of Bruce Lindsey Paul Rosenblatt Associates, hoped to work entirely from computer-generated drawings for the project, "They ended up moving away from a dream of putting everything on the computer," says Cleary. "There are many, many pieces they never used a computer on. They just did it by hand. That was the fastest means."

"The computers were useful in the production of drawings," says Lindsey. The architects put the free-hand drawings on the computer. They could then work on them and transfer them to heavy Mylar, which provided patterns for the carvers to follow.

A computer lathe also carved out stones for the capitals, columns and statues added to the niches. Carvers, of course, chipped away at the rough cut pieces to form the final product.



Carvers based the bagpiper in the medieval niche on a 14th century Gothic piece in Beverly Minster in England.

## NICHES

the dome and in between the tracery in the medieval niche and designs on the benches to "give those a little bit of shadow and a more finished look."

Cleary agrees that possible later additions might include: a dragon on the Chinese column, detail on the Chinese capitals, design on benches, some decorative carving, an inscription beneath the Doric columns and floral figures in the Islamic dome. The niches, says Cleary, are "not obviously unfinished."

If Cleary regrets anything, it was the decision not to address the question of lighting the niches while in the process of completing them.

Lindsey is looking ahead to lighting. He raises about some suggestions from lighting czar Imero Fiorentino (A'50), who visited the site. Fiorentino heads Imero Fiorentino Associates of New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. The

firm designed all the foreign pavilions at Disney's Epcot Center in Florida.

And to complete the picture, the university expects to restore the plaza in front of the college next summer. That would include bringing back the steps that ran across the front of the building and led directly onto The Cut.

Most folks hope the next move toward final completion of the niches themselves will not take another 80 years. ■

Right, a gargoyle in the medieval niche, based on a 13th century model.



Left, a section of an Islamic mihrab in the world niche; right, the Queen of Sheba by Nicholas Fairplay stands beside figures by Ruben Dario Llano and Emmanuel Fourchet, inspired by carvings at Chartres cathedral. From the top, they depict alchemy, writing, calculation, rhetoric or drama, and knowledge.

