



nerej

Shawmut Design and Construction completes \$15 million renovation to Mount Auburn's Bigelow Chapel

August 02, 2019 - Owners Developers & Managers



Watertown, MA Shawmut Design and Construction has completed a \$15 million renovation of Mount Auburn's Bigelow Chapel. The National Historic Landmark, reopened in December 2018 following enhancements to the 19th century building.

Shawmut, together with William Rawn Associates and CSL, worked to enhance and preserve Bigelow Chapel's façade and interior, which was originally constructed in 1845 out of Quincy granite. The team installed a new, floor-to-ceiling glass addition that complements the original Gothic Revival design by Dr. Jacob Bigelow and connects visitors within the space to the meditative landscape outside. Overlooking Asa Gray Garden, the new structure serves as a space for public gatherings, memorial services, receptions, and educational programs.

“We are honored to be part of the transformation and restoration of such a significant and historic cultural institution,” said Kevin Sullivan, vice president at Shawmut. “Our vast expertise working on historic landmarks allowed us to update the building with modern amenities while honoring and preserving its history for all visitors now and into the future.”

The Shawmut team conducted a complete renovation of Bigelow Chapel while improving overall accessibility, including adding a new ADA entrance, creating larger gathering spaces for events, and improving lighting and acoustics in the chapel. Other highlights include the restoration of the Great Rose Window, located above the chapel entrance. Commissioned as part of the chapel’s original design and imported from Scotland, the fragile glass panels were meticulously removed from the window’s original cast-iron frame, then repaired, restored, and reinstalled.

In addition to upgrading select architectural features, the team installed a crematory within the chapel’s new addition, replacing the existing facility from 1970. The facility now offers faster cremation times and improved fuel efficiency, while greatly improving quality of services and supporting the institution’s commitment to environmental stewardship. Furthermore, the modern space includes a glass-enclosed viewing room and private garden where families can participate in the cremation and memorial process.

The new addition now allows for a view of the Asa Gray Garden, Mount Auburn’s public space and a horticultural showpiece. Landscape architecture firm Halvorson Design Partnership transformed the garden to provide visitors with year-round color, texture, and interest through strategically positioned seating and enlarged central fountain. The redesign also incorporated important historic design concepts to complement Bigelow Chapel, including a horticultural display that serves as a visual hub at the entrance.

To share this architectural treasure with the public, Mount Auburn hosts talks and discussion groups, readings, and musical performances in the updated chapel. Regular open houses of the space are available, granting casual visitors access to the historic building and new addition. Shawmut’s renovation and preservation of Mount Auburn’s Bigelow Chapel resulted in the project winning the 2019 Preservation Massachusetts Frederick Law Olmstead Award.

Mount Auburn Bigelow Chapel represents the latest in Shawmut’s portfolio of high profile cultural and historic projects, including The First Church of Christ, Scientist and Trinity Church in Boston, and The Grolier Club and Times Square Theater in New York.