

## F. CAREY HOWLETT

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To Whom it May Concern:

Agrell Architectural Carving contributed greatly to the success of one of my most challenging projects -- the recovery from fire damage at the Hermitage Foundation Museum in Norfolk, Virginia. Throughout the project I was truly impressed by the outstanding quality of the firm's work and by Ian Agrell's enthusiasm, personable manner, and professional commitment to the project.

In 2003 the Hermitage Foundation Museum suffered a serious fire, irreparably damaging elaborate Gothic revival woodwork in the museum's music room. As project manager and chief conservator for the fire recovery, I was faced with the challenge of returning the room to its appearance before the fire. One of the most daunting tasks was the reproduction of a great quantity of Gothic-style carving, most of it ornamenting a remarkable rood screen at one end of the room. The rood screen features a comprehensive vocabulary of carved Gothic elements: pierced tracery, blind tracery, carved columns and capitals, sculptural figures, meandering foliage and a pierced gallery.

Upon seeing numerous examples of excellent work by Agrell Architectural Carving -- work reflecting a breadth of period styles beautifully executed with great attention to historic nuance -- I knew I had found the firm most capable of producing a faithful reproduction of the rood screen carving. I was not disappointed.

Indeed, it is not hyperbole to state that Agrell Architectural Carving provided more than a faithful reproduction of the Hermitage Foundation's rood screen: Ian Agrell and his staff truly captured the spirit of the original woodcarving. Where lesser carvers often tend to introduce personal style into reproduction work by "improving upon" or adapting designs to suit their own preferences, Ian Agrell and his carvers obviously took pains to study and reproduce the techniques, the tooling, and, to the extent possible, the mindset of the original carvers. Where the original work was refined, as in the sculpted carvings of saints and angels, Agrell and his carvers masterfully captured the artistic nuance of every detail. Where elements were originally executed in a more workmanlike manner, such as the meandering foliage on the horizontal beam of the screen, Agrell Architectural Carving perfectly reproduced the gouge-cut surfaces.

Possibly the best testimony to the success of the Hermitage Foundation project was the response of long-time supporters of the museum, who have been unanimously pleased with the outcome of the fire recovery project, which was completed in 2005. I credit the outstanding work of Ian Agrell and his artisans for much of the success of the project, and I am pleased to recommend Agrell Architectural Carving for any similar undertakings.

Sincerely yours,



F. Carey Howlett