



Building Stories

PLATTE ARCHITECTURE + DESIGN

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It's a beautiful autumn afternoon in Cincinnati and the sun is thinking about setting. Having done their part to illuminate the city and her many stories, rays of light search for something worthy of their last moments as they angle up and away. As they meet and shine through the stained glass windows of the old church, they become a part of an ongoing story that almost wasn't written.

A fire in 2008 that gutted the towers of Old St. George Church was almost the period at the end of its last sentence. But a partnership between Crossroads Church and Platte Architecture + Design turned that period into a comma. Given the foundational philosophy

of Kurt Platte and his talented team of architects and designers, it makes perfect sense why they were chosen to oversee this significant construction. Significant because of all the ways Old St. George has participated in so many personal narratives that have been woven together through the decades to create a broader community narrative.

"Our success, what we are, is about our relationship with other human beings," Platte says. "We get into their stories, we become a part of them. Through this, we become the best choice."

Platte started the firm in 2002, working alone under a single bulb that hung over a drafting table in his basement. With each new project,



ABOVE: A “wainscot” structure was inserted around the perimeter of the sanctuary to consolidate and organize the new mechanical systems, AV equipment, and acoustic control, while celebrating the original distressed cathedral backdrop above.

RIGHT: The original 70’ tall steeples were destroyed by lightning, and new steeples were designed as a contemporary interpretation of the original. A steel frame recreates the original shape and height and is clad with perforated metal that creates a translucent “apparition”, filtering sky and sun by day and internal lighting by night.



each new hire, the capacity and ability to tell bigger and broader stories grew with confidence and experience. Many of the projects the growing company has poured itself into through the years have been interventions of a kind. Buildings destined for destruction have been repurposed, redesigned and rebuilt, offering their occupants and surrounding communities new opportunities for new life. From his perspective, Old St. George Crossroads came at a time when Platte Architecture + Design was perfectly poised to intervene and inspire on a whole new level.

“We came into our maturity, blending new with old, at the exact same time we were handed this super, important piece of architecture,” Platte says. “Our team just executed it beautifully. It’s breathtaking. Taking on the heaviness of what this project represents, because so many people were connected to the church personally, the end project really needed to show how everything was taken into consideration and that it was handled with a level of responsibility. Respecting the magnitude of what it meant.”

Originally designed by Samuel Hannaford, who also designed Music Hall and City Hall, the church was built in 1873 in Clifton Heights. But as the neighborhood declined, so did the chances of the church fulfilling its original destiny. In 2005, it was slated for demolition to make room for a drug store. After the Clifton Heights Community Urban Redevelopment Corporation presented a matching offer that was ultimately accepted, repair began on some of the more glaring issues with the goal of functioning as a church once again. But after the fire and subsequent water damage, the costs threatened to eclipse the cause. Through the combined vision of Crossroads and Platte, the sun is still shining through those storied windows.

The passion that Platte and his team brought to this project is consistent with what they bring to each one they’re privileged to receive. Whether it’s homeowners with a limited budget for a small powder room or a multi-million dollar, multi-stage project, they’re all in every time.

Bringing different materials into a space where the juxtaposition is unexpected is another signature element to their storytelling. If you’re dining at Anchor in Over-the-Rhine, you’ll not only enjoy their seafood fare but Platte’s use of shou sugi ban, an ancient, Japanese technique for charring wood. Stone, wood, light and a myriad of other materials become nouns, adjectives and verbs, placed just so to move along the plots of businesses and homes, churches and bars. Even if your first language isn’t materials, like listening to a soaring Italian opera, you’ll come away knowing you’ve experienced something of beauty.

In their relatively new office that overlooks Findlay Market, Platte and his team enjoy actively listening to an ever-expanding family of new clients’ tales. Clients who will become friends as their dreams intertwine and expand.

As the sun sinks below the skyline, the stained glass windows fade, passing the torch to the church’s twin steeples. On cue, the crystal towers light up, glowing like something out of a fairy tale. You can hear singing and sense new life.

More stories are being written. ❖

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