The article begins:

“Perhaps the most common claim made by the average monumental dealer (next to selling at the lowest prices) is that his designs are ‘original.’ Occasionally…this claim to originality is substantiated with the resulting monumental freaks which deface our cemeteries. There is nothing new under the sun and the new or original in memorial design is rarely attempted by any but those whose education along those lines is so limited that they fail to realize the fallacy of their effort….”

This article, which begins on the next page, is presented on the Stone Quarries and Beyond web site.

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Developing and Selling a Special Design
By Robert L. Cook

Perhaps the most common claim made by the average monumental dealer (next to selling at the lowest prices) is that his designs are "original." Occasionally—and to the detriment of the craft—this claim to originality is substantiated with the resulting monumental freaks which deface our cemeteries. There is nothing new unification of detail and the strictest possible adherence to correct proportion, which, after all, is the foundation of things beautiful.

If not originality, there is another quality which a monument may and should possess, that of distinctiveness. In practice it is hardly possible to make each monumental experience in avoiding duplication.

Our prospective client was very favorably impressed with the Wight memorial, which is illustrated and which I had designed a few years before. Other photographs were of only passing interest and our client always reverted to this Wight design, which unfortunately stood only

(photocaption) "Original design finally developed" & "Style of monument customer wanted." (the Young and Wight monuments.)
to have something to work on, perhaps to tear to pieces.

Incidentally there is a splendid motto to govern one in starting a design, i.e., "Draw a line." It was several years ago when I was studying design and architecture at Boston that I heard that advice. Vesper George was conducting the first of a course of lectures in applied design, and he had given us a class room problem to "visualize" in our notebooks, a design for a magazine cover or something.

My next thought was a triangular plan, and recalling unpleasant impressions of three-sided monuments which appeared to "lean" to the right and then to the left as one walked past or around them, I was for dismissing the idea when it occurred to me that the man for whom the monument was to be erected had taken a keen and active interest in Freemasonry, and the triangle had a distinct Masonic significance.

Then an analysis of the peculiar illusions which had become associated with monuments of triangular plan demonstrated that the apparent "lop-sidedness" occurred only where the sides were tapered or rested upon circular bases.

So with a definite motif the designing resolved itself into a proper proportion to give a satisfactory spacing of the columns and the elimination of the "die" and the substitution of a vase or urn. Markers were desired and thus the "die" could well be dispensed with, the inscriptions appearing on bronze plates attached to the headstones.

At first it was our idea to use a vase of the same material as the rest of the monument, but this was subsequently changed to bronze which harmonized nicely with the tablets on the markers. These markers and the lower base of the monument are of red Westerly granite and above the lower base the monument is of silver gray Georgia marble. The markers are triangular in plan, suggesting the scheme of the larger memorial, and are very low and unobtrusive.

Dimensions are indicated in the working drawing as are also the details for the columns, Masonic emblems, etc. In addition to these details full-size drawings were prepared for all moldings and a full-size model in plaster furnished for the column capitals.
The finished work not only does not suggest duplication of the Wight memorial but offers a pleasing contrast—the latter being cut from pink Westerly stock—and thus there are two monuments standing within a short distance of each other with the Ionic order of Scamozzi as their common motif, but each distinct and distinctive. So much so that it would never occur to one that their details were even similar, and yet their details are identical.

For neither of them can there be any claim for originality of design. They are as old as Classic architecture and the details are carried out as faithfully as was possible, bearing in mind, the scale of the design, the materials employed and the money to be spent.

After succeeding in working out a design along similar lines to the one which had interested my client, and yet making it different and distinct it became obvious that it might prove to be too wide a departure from the one and thereby fail to satisfy. But a little thought solved the problem from the selling end, in this way. The two designs in elevation presented a very close similarity, except for the urn, which I knew would be acceptable. Hence the working drawing was first presented and it was explained that the chief difference was in that the one was triangular while the other was rectangular in plan, also that the die had been eliminated and the urn substituted. Thus the mind of my prospective customer was prepared for something different and it was not until all doubts had been cleared up that I ventured to produce the perspective drawing. This was the second call I had made and I was given the order.