

“Developing and Selling a Special Design”

(the Wilbur F. Young, Esq., Monument)

By Robert L. Cook

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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,
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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 un-

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ORIGINAL DESIGN FINALLY DEVELOPED

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Even an elementary knowledge of the attempting to improve upon the perfection attained by the architects of Greece and Rome, and the opportunity to copy and adapt those proportions is eagerly grasped by the student.

To be sure the opportunity seldom offers to carry out in full detail even a replica of the simpler forms of the Greek stele or the sarcophagus of Scipio, and so the designer's problem becomes one of simplifi-

cation 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 monu-

ment different from any other, but it is possible to avoid duplication of design in the same cemetery or at least to avoid duplication in proximity. Duplication suggests quantity of production,—ten dollars each or one hundred dollars per dozen,—so to speak. It expresses cheapness of production and poverty of thought, even in expensive work. It makes a monument look like a "Ford."

Within the year the writer was temporarily re-engaged in the monumental business as a result of war conditions and was able to view it from different angles than had ever occurred to him before. The designing and sale of the memorial to the Young family was an interesting and grati-

tying 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



STYLE OF MONUMENT CUSTOMER WANTED

about one hundred yards from the lot where the Young family monument would be erected. For the reasons above set forth I was unwilling to spoil both monuments and yet I was loath to allow a possible sale go by the board, and so I asked for time to work out something.

Our client had seen somewhere a monument with a vase or urn in which fresh flowers might be placed and that idea appealed to her. That would serve as a detail, but to make the memorials otherwise alike would be more plagiarism. So I started to work at the drawing board and threw up a half elevation following the exact detail of the Wight design, simply

(photo caption) "Original desing finally developed" & "Style of monument customer wanted." (the Young and Wight monuments.)

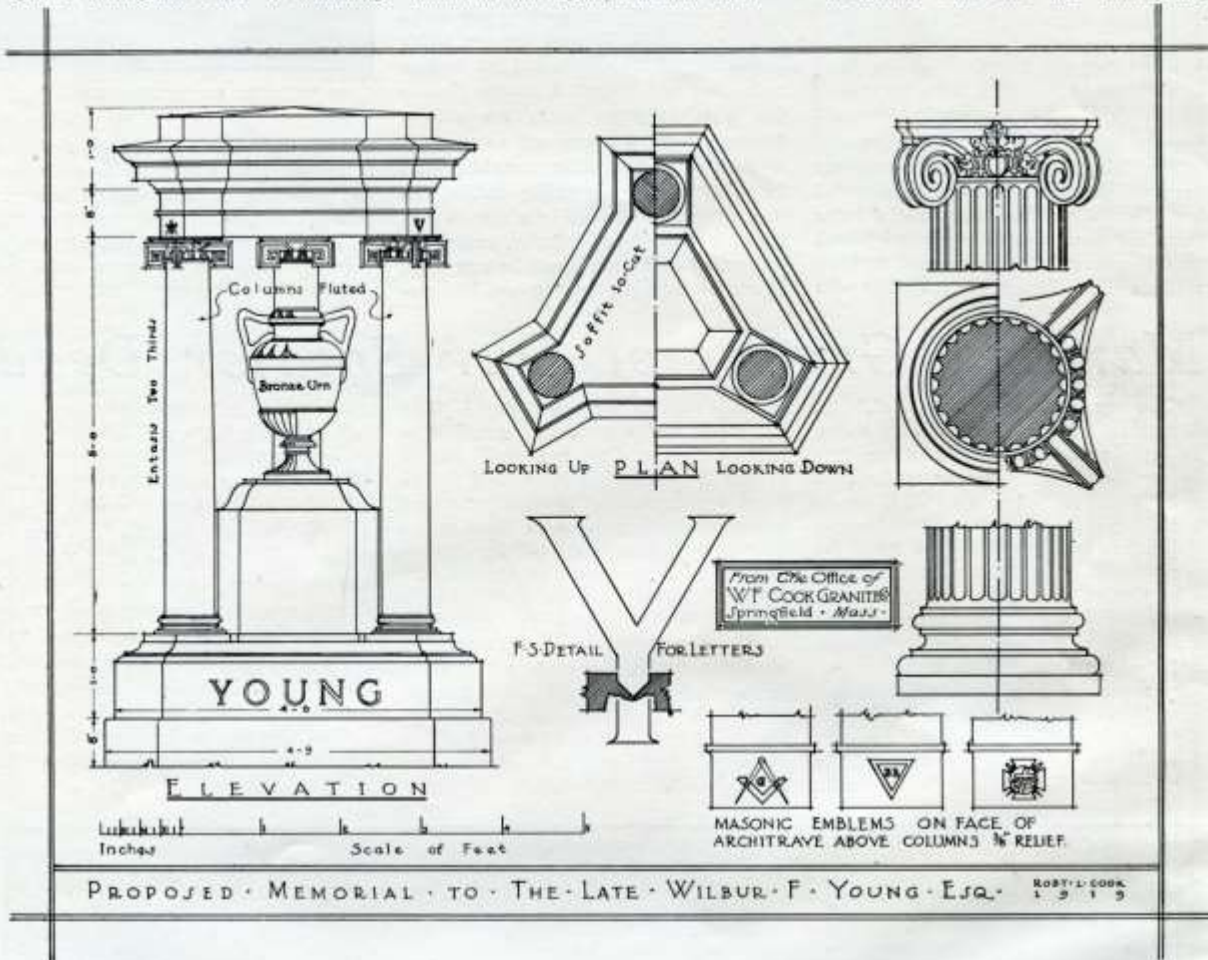
to have something to work on, perhaps to tear to pieces.

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 note books, a design for a magazine cover or something

elevation of what I wished to avoid and did not intend to use. Then I started to "study" it. Suppose I used that elevation and changed my plan to a square instead of employing the rectangular plan of the Wight monument? Still too much similarity and not only that but the design would not be as good. Then a circular plan suggested itself, but a little geometry convinced me that the column spacing would require at least two additional columns and the expense held me back.

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



in the limited time of fifteen minutes. After about five minutes he walked about among us glancing over our shoulders and then returned to the platform, our time being nearly up. His remarks were substantially as follows:

"As I walked about I observed that not over one in ten of you had even drawn a line on his paper. Now when you have a design to make, or any other problem, draw a line! It may not be the line you want, but you will have made progress in having eliminated something that is undesirable and that wrong line will assist you in getting one that is right."

It was good advice, and so I "drew my line," which in this case consisted of a half

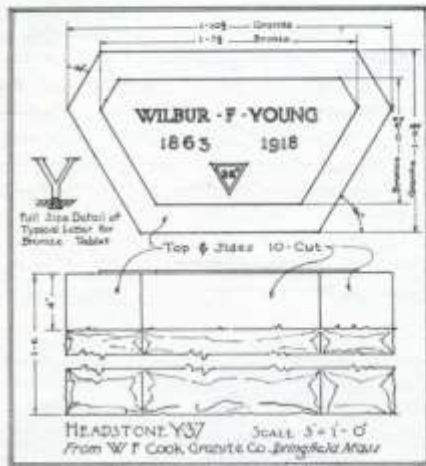
My next thought was a triangular plan, and recalling unpleasant impressions of three-sided monuments which appeared to "lean" to the right and then to the left as one walked past or around them, I was for dismissing the idea when it occurred to me that the man for whom the monument was to be erected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

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.

(photo caption) "Proposed memorial to the late Wilbur F. Young, Esq."



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 that 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 pre-

sented 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



LOW MARKER OF ATTRACTIVE DESIGN

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.