

THE BUILDING



Glencairn was the home of Raymond and Mildred Pitcairn, built in the Romanesque style between 1928 and 1939. Prior to this time Raymond Pitcairn, who had no formal training in architecture, had supervised the erection of the acclaimed Bryn Athyn Cathedral, a Gothic and Romanesque style complex (see photo below). Arthur Kingsley Porter, a noted architectural historian, wrote that the Cathedral "alone of modern buildings, is worthy of comparison with the best the Middle Ages produced."



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Both Glencairn and the Cathedral were built using methods unusual for the twentieth century. The design of the buildings evolved gradually, relying on scale and full-sized plaster models instead of predetermined architectural plans. Creative input was sought from the craftsmen themselves, who worked together with designers in the shops and studios that were built for them on the site.



Pitcairn's fondness for medieval architecture inspired him to revive a building process unknown since the Middle Ages:

"Growth of designs that develop with the building is inherent in the creation of living architecture.... Artistic guidance applied continuously, and designers and craftsmen who work side by side, see eye to eye, and strive ever to build better and to produce work more beautiful, are needed for real building. The use of local materials, the study and development of designs by the aid of tridimensional models, the trial of materials in place before their final building in, and a determination to abandon even finished work if this will lead to something better -- all contribute to building in the Gothic way."

Pitcairn carefully introduced refinements of line and proportion in the form of curved and off-center alignments. These departures from symmetry can be large, yet subtle; angles are not always right angles, and what appears to be a straight line may in fact be softly bowed. The curves and asymmetries please the eye without calling undue attention to themselves. Glencairn's massive structure was thereby given the warmth and charm of a home.

Glencairn, above all a home, was also designed to house Pitcairn's outstanding collection of medieval objects, many of which had been purchased as inspirational models for the craftsmen at the Cathedral. Glencairn also became a center where Raymond and Mildred Pitcairn entertained the Bryn Athyn community for musical, civic and social events. Most of these events took place in the Great Hall (see photo below).



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The Pitcairns were lifelong members of the New Church. Raymond died in 1966, and after Mildred's death in 1979 Glencairn was given to the Academy of the New Church. The Academy has preserved the main floor essentially as it was so that it may continue to serve the schools and the community as a center for cultural and social events. The other floors have been converted to museum galleries to house the Pitcairn collection and the former [Academy Museum](#) holdings.

Visitors to Glencairn appreciate its unique design and the superb handling of stone, wood, glass and metal. Creations in sculpture, stained glass, and mosaic are governed by a distinctive symbolism based on the teachings of the New Church.

