

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 7, 2023

**CONSTRUCTION BEGINS ON
THE FREDERIC CHURCH CENTER FOR ART AND LANDSCAPE
AT OLANA STATE HISTORIC SITE**

*Project provides a new visitor experience that reveals
the genius of Church's work for contemporary audiences*



Courtesy of Architecture Research Office, renderings by SYNOESIS.

Hudson, NY – New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (NYS OPRHP) and The Olana Partnership (TOP) announce that construction has begun for the Frederic Church Center for Art and Landscape at Olana State Historic Site. Designed by New York City-based Architecture Research Office (ARO), the Center will provide visitors with an immersive experience of the landscape, while serving Olana's growing audience with orientation, education, tours, a café and other services. It will also include a multi-purpose room, expanded parking, gender-neutral restrooms, outdoor terraces, and connecting pathways. The new Center is part of an overall master plan to expand access and interpretation at the site that was developed by renowned landscape architecture firm, Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects (NBW), based in Charlottesville VA, New York City, and Houston TX.

Between 1860 and 1900, landscape artist Frederic Church designed and built Olana as a 250-acre designed environment, including a home and studio for himself and his family. The site, which has been called an "American treasure," overlooks the Hudson River and Catskill Mountains. Its views extend over four states and include a 10-acre "artificial" lake, the historic farm complex, open meadows, native woodlands, and more than five miles of carriage roads.

In 2015, TOP and NYS OPRHP engaged NBW to create the Strategic Landscape Design Plan (SLDP), a framework for restoring Olana's environmental and aesthetic integrity, while increasing visitor services. The SLDP targeted three main areas for restoration: the House Environs, the Farm, and the Center. With NBW already in the process of renewing land uses for the House and the Farm, ARO was selected to design the Center.

While previously visitors were greeted next to Church's house, NBW relocated visitor arrival and orientation to the site's entrance. Now, the Frederic Church Center will stand as a gateway to the site's historic core, and give visitors significant views into Olana's landscape upon entry. Using research-informed maps and diagrams that allowed designers to re-establish historic viewsheds, they ensured that the Center and its surrounding landscape were compatible, yet clearly distinct from the greater Olana experience.

New York State Parks Commissioner Erik Kulleseid said, "The more than 200,000 annual visitors to Olana will be greeted by a spectacular and spacious new orientation site before enjoying the grounds where they can walk, hike, picnic, paint, photograph and dream much the way the Church family did centuries ago."

ARO's design of the 4,500-square-foot mass timber structure will feature dark red vertical wood siding with expansive, bird-friendly glazing to provide ample daylighting and views. Designed in reciprocity with the landscape, the Center opens onto a broad outdoor terrace where visitors can take in Olana's idyllic surroundings.

Referencing the purposeful wood buildings of the nearby farm and pump house, ARO utilized mass timber construction to reduce the Center's embodied carbon footprint; materials include glue-laminated wood columns and beams, along with cross-laminated timber (CLT) roof panels, a first for a public building in New York State. All-electric, high-performing HVAC systems demonstrate a commitment to carbon neutrality.

"It is vital for the new Center to be in harmony with the larger Olana site. By building with sustainable, natural materials, we aim for the Center to further Olana's ongoing environmental stewardship," says ARO principal Adam Yarinsky.

"We plan for the Center to be as enduring as the landscape, while serving the broader public with an expanded visitor experience," adds principal Kim Yao.

The building's architectural form and gently sloping roofline work with the landscape, guiding attention to Lake Road, a pleasure drive designed by Church. Following this road to a new terrace, visitors arrive at an outlook over the property, which includes the lake in the foreground, a vast meadow rising in the middle-ground, and Olana's hilltop Persian-inspired house in the background, as well as neighboring hills, valleys and distant mountains beyond the site's historic boundaries..

"Our goal for this project is to show visitors the beauty of Olana as Church intended," says lead landscape architect Thomas Woltz of NBW. "In our landscape designs, we wanted to embody Church's plans for the site, and let guests see the vast mountains and meadows as he did when he visited as a young man. At the same time, we renewed several elements of Olana's environment and updated the site in order to maintain its timelessness."

Once complete, the Center will become a new part of Olana's rich history. Following the death of its last inhabitant in 1964, Olana was the focus of an impassioned preservation effort that saw notable figures such as Jackie Kennedy, James Biddle, and Nelson Rockefeller call for the protection of its enduring beauty. This helped launch a public-private partnership between the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (NYS OPRHP) and Olana's non-profit support organization, The Olana Partnership (TOP). These groups have worked for over five decades to develop and expand extensive restoration projects and

educational offerings, which have helped Olana's attendance grow to more than 200,000 visitors annually.

Dr. Sean Sawyer, Washburn & Susan Oberwager President of The Olana Partnership, said, "Fifty-six years ago private citizens and New York State joined together to save Olana from destruction. In the succeeding decades, Olana's public-private partnership has become a national exemplar for the stewardship of public places. Today, The Olana Partnership is thrilled to mark the next, brilliant chapter in Olana's story, one in which the commitment of our board and supporters has been joined by New York State to make the fullness of Frederic Church's vision apparent for new generations."

The Frederic Church Center is set to open in 2024 to coincide with the Centennial Celebration of the New York State Parks system. The completion of the Center will also precede 2026, the 200th anniversary of Frederic Church's birth. A national celebration of Frederic Church is being planned by Olana for 2026, and museums across the United States are expected to participate.

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About Olana and The Olana Partnership

Olana is the greatest masterwork of Frederic Edwin Church (1826-1900), the preeminent American artist of the mid-19th century, and the most important artist's home, studio, and designed landscape in the United States. Church designed Olana as a holistic environment integrating his advanced ideas about art, architecture, landscape design, and environmental conservation. Olana's 250-acre artist-designed landscape with five miles of carriage roads and a Persian-inspired house at its summit embraces unrivaled panoramic views of the Hudson Valley and Catskill Mountains and welcomes more than 170,000 visitors annually. The landscape is open for guided touring, and reservations are highly recommended. The landscape is open daily 8 AM-sunset.

The Olana Partnership is the 501(c)(3) not-for-profit cooperative partner of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation at Olana State Historic Site. Olana State Historic Site, administered and operated by New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, is a designated National Historic Landmark and one of the most visited sites in the state. The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation oversees more than 250 parks, historic sites, recreational trails, golf courses, boat launches and more, which are visited by more than 78 million people annually. For more information on any of these recreation areas, visit www.parks.ny.gov, download the free NY State Parks Explorer mobile app or call 518.474.0456. Also, connect on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

About Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects

Nelson Byrd Woltz (NBW) is an internationally recognized landscape architecture firm with studios in New York City, Charlottesville VA, and Houston, TX. The firm has been instrumental in steering landscape architecture towards integrated, ecologically performative design, relying on science-based methodology and collaboration with a wide range of systems-experts. NBW has dramatically expanded the traditional role of landscape architecture into the areas of restoration ecology, urban planning, civil engineering, and agriculture. NBW has been entrusted with the design of significant public parks and cultural institutions in the United States, Canada, and New Zealand, placing 20 years of construction and design innovation in greater service to the public realm. The firm has worked in 25 states and 11 countries and garnered over 100 awards within the past 15 years, including the prestigious Amanda Burden Public Open Space Award for Citygarden in St. Louis MO. Current projects include Cornwall Park in Auckland New

Zealand, Memorial Park in Houston, and Forsyth Park in Savannah. The work of the firm has been featured in numerous national and international publications including the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* and is the subject of a monograph published by Princeton Architectural Press. www.nbwla.com.

About Architecture Research Office

Architecture Research Office (ARO) is the New York City firm led by Stephen Cassell, Kim Yao, and Adam Yarinsky. ARO is a diverse collective united by their collaborative process, commitment to accountable action, and social and environmental responsibility. Research gives their work purpose and intention. Their architecture unites beauty and form with strategy and intelligence. Their office designs spaces that inspire people, further institutional missions, and advance equity and resilience. This philosophy has earned the firm over one hundred design awards including the 2020 AIA Architecture Firm Award, the AIA New York State Firm of the Year Award, and the Smithsonian Cooper-Hewitt National Design Award for Architecture. For more information on Architecture Research Office, please visit www.aro.net.

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