

Kinstone Chapel: Signs & Symbols
by Kristine Beck

Have you ever been out driving or cycling in the countryside and stumbled upon an unexpectedly delightful scene? This may happen to any who venture around the farm country on the river bluffs of Buffalo County, Wisconsin. When driving up Cole Bluff Lane you suddenly find yourself in what seems to be another world. A world with huge megaliths in circular or linear patterns, a pond with tall stones sticking out of the water, a curvaceous, dry-stack stone sculpture with contours mimicking the flow of the surrounding bluffs, a fantastic thatched building with a spire pointing heavenward and more, everywhere you look. All of this is nestled in a place of supreme natural beauty with lush fields, woodlands, gardens and scenic views sweeping down valleys to the Mississippi River that seems just a stone's-throw away. You have found Kinstone.



The Kinstone Cordwood Chapel sits like a beacon of hope on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River in Southwestern Wisconsin.

Kinstone, set on 4th generation family farmland, is home to a contemplative megalithic garden and permaculture school. On this 30-acre working permaculture site, the Kinstone family produces good food for the body and the soul. There are many gardens, food forest plantations and natural buildings as well as two stone circles (or seven, if you count creatively), a megalithic dolmen, many standing stones, a dry-stack stone sculpture, a stone serpent, a 7-circuit classical labyrinth and many other fascinating features. That unusual and intriguing thatched building you saw when you first came around the bend is built with cordwood and local stone. It is the Kinstone Chapel and it is the heart of Kinstone. Here we tell tales of signs, symbols and stories embedded in its walls. The cordwood construction of this building has its own story. With the help of Richard and Becky Flatau of Cordwood Construction, we have written more details about that in another article entitled “Kinstone Chapel: Cordwood, Stone and Thatch”. (That article can be found on both the www.cordwoodconstruction.org and www.kinstonecircle.com websites).

Chapel Overview

The Kinstone Chapel is a place for personal solitude and quiet time and can be rented for weddings, reunions, celebrations, etc. The two handmade wooden doors weigh 260 pounds apiece. There are over 1,000 bundles of reeds in the thatched roof; mostly harvested just 10 miles down the road in the Mississippi backwaters. Over 450 bottles, vases, bowls and jars create a design in the walls entirely based on the beauty of the earth. Some highlights include the sun, moon, flowers, birds, a tree, a dragonfly, fireflies, a river, mighty winds, clouds, fire, starry night skies, the Eternal Flame and a rogue doorknob into the unknown. An exquisite wood carving graces the doorway showing Native American motifs from tribes that wandered this land before the first of the 4 generations of my family settled here. The specially designed and crafted stained glass windows are elegantly simple allowing in plenty of sunlight, but not distracting the eye. Come with me now on a virtual visit to this wondrous sanctuary.

The Journey Begins

Approaching the chapel, you notice the hexagonal shape and the beautiful dark stone stem wall. Your eyes take in the variety of cordwood rounds, splits, ram's horns and even some tiny cordwood we have dubbed "confetti". Wandering the perimeter you notice areas that look as if the wall is full of large bubbles. These are the external part of large concentrations of bottle-ends forming more colorful designs on the interior. Among other things, you can discern the flow of a glass river, an amethyst encrusted heart, the glow of a blazing fire, the whirling of wind, the iridescent blue wings of a dragon fly and even the boot of a small child who is said to be climbing the tree in the south corner. As you stand before the archway of the double doors you see they are flanked by fist-sized stones on each side. Above them a sunburst made of thin cordwood wedges draws your eye upward. You realize the roof is made of thousands upon thousands of reeds that have been thatched evenly and steeply. The peak is crowned with a copper roof cap and spire directing your eyes ever upward to the heavens. The ash doors are solid and heavy, hand-wrought by a Wisconsin Amish door maker. They hang on four heavy-duty hinges; the distinctive doorknobs beckon your hands to open them and enter.



Above: The river of glass as seen from outside.
Below: The stained glass effect inside is stunning.

Once inside you are struck by the wonder of the six cordwood walls and the stained-glass feel of the bottle-end designs. Your eyes move from wall to wall, alternating between lingering stares and fleeting glances. As you turn full circle, you face the doorway with its awe inspiring clear glass arch and array of detailed symbols. Looking up, the straight stems of the thatch neatly cross the purlins in the ceiling. A black metal ring, seemingly hanging in mid-air, floats between you and the top peak of the roof, its six spokes radiating out to the corners. You realize that standing next to you there is a gorgeous, magnificent piece of petrified wood held in place with flame-like prongs. It sits in the center of the room on a black metal pedestal with six triangular tabs at the floor, pointing to the walls. Light is streaming in through the stained glass windows; a bold red circle at the peak punctuates their simple, subtle design. “Wow,” is all you can whisper as you survey the scene and rub your arms where goose bumps have popped up, unbidden.

The Canticle of Brother Sun and Sister Moon

The interior design of the chapel is based on a 12th century mystical poem, *The Canticle of Brother Sun and Sister Moon*, written by St. Francis of Assisi. This poem is a song of praise to God for all the things of the earth, which the author claims as siblings – as *kin*. Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Sister Mother Earth, Sister Water, Brother Wind, Brother Fire and Sister Death are all represented in the poem and the walls. With hundreds of stones and stuff from all over the world hidden in plain sight throughout, there is no end to the stories forever written into these walls, just waiting to be discovered. The hexagonal shape of the building led us to design the walls as six separate panels with a common theme. Each wall is unique, yet connected to all.

Six Wall Panels

As you enter, to your left is wall #1, the “Sunrise Wall”. This wall showcases our Sister Mother Earth. Here you meet Brother Sun, a stained glass window framed with stout cedar rays. The golden, textured glass pulsates with the burning light of the real sun shining through it. Below is a meadow alive with flowers and a dragonfly. The grasses are narrow log-ends called slabs, the



The “Sunrise Wall” with Brother Sun & Sister Mother Earth.

flowers are colorful bottles, vases and bowls, and the dragonfly is a mix of an elongated bottle body and four thin wooden wings. Do you see the big shade tree? The trunk is a vertical row of brown bottles placed along the corner post; branches and twigs go out from there. All around is a plethora of green glass leaves of many hues. Take notice of the orange bottle-end to the right of the sun. Follow it to yellow bottles shooting down through the tree and into the next wall. This ray of sunshine makes its way all the way to the river!

Sister Water and Brother Wind

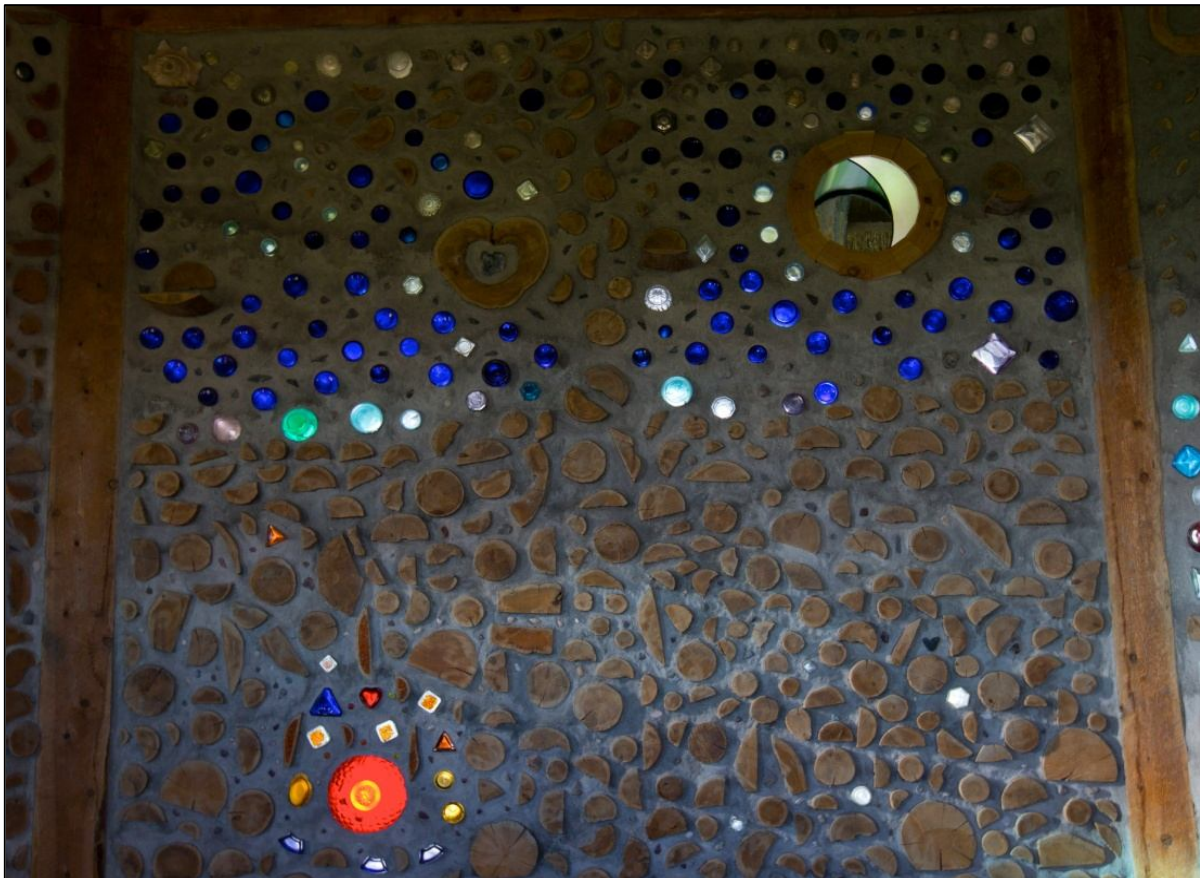
As you move around to walls #2 & #3 you find Sister Water and Brother Wind. The waterway starts with a pile of river rocks incorporated right into the wall. It gently wends its way, below the windows, in an ever-increasing slope across the two walls. Above this blue and green (and purple) river, playing above and around the windows, you see many curving lines of clear and light colored bottle-ends illustrating breezes and wind. Special pieces of cordwood represent a bird, the bluffs along the river, and a wave. A cloud of white quartz stones and milky bottle-ends is defined by a series of curved “ram’s horn” cordwood log-ends, giving it a realistic cloud-like appearance. At sunset during certain seasons the wind and cloud in wall #3 glow softly orange. Amazing!



A cloud of stone, glass and wood.

The Wind and The Heralds of Midnight

Moving to wall #4, you see the very last drop of the river. The rest of the wall is simply random cordwood with a large spiraling wind between the peaks of the windows...perhaps it is a tornado or other whirling wind. Despite this windy apparition, this wall imparts great calm in most visitors. In the far upper right corner you see three deep blue bottles sweeping upwards to the edge; these midnight heralds introduce you to wall #5, the “Night Wall”.



The Night Wall (a.k.a. the Fire Wall), Sister Moon, Brother Fire and The Heart of the Night

Moonlight, Star bright

In wall #5 you see the majestic Sister Moon. This elegant stained glass silvery crescent moon window presides over 160 blue and white bottles representing the starry night sky. Look closely and you will see a row of lighter colored bottles that portrays that thin, lighter portion of the sky often seen at the horizon at night. There is a conch shell in the upper left corner. This shell is a galaxy, perhaps Andromeda. Isn't it amazing that spirals show up in every level of our existence? From the galaxies

beyond us, to the way hurricanes form and the way water drains, fern fronds, shells and even in our own DNA strands we find the ubiquitous spiral! Add some movement to a spiral and, "voilà!" we have a vortex, the greatest energy generator of them all. Below the shell is my favorite constellation, Pleiades; it is only discernible with a generous amount of imagination so don't be upset if you don't readily see it. Here you may notice several cordwood pieces sticking out from the wall. These are ready-made shelves. There are three in the Night Wall, three in the Sunrise Wall and two more above the river in wall #3. Since no candles are allowed in the chapel due to the flammable nature of the thatch, what will go on these shelves? You may guess statues, flowers or figurines; but no, my answer is simple and obvious - it will be stones!



Radiant Sister Moon

The Heart of the Night

Right up there among the stars, you see a lovely heart-shaped hollow log-end and it sparkles with a beautiful, sky-blue celestite crystal. Celestite is said to be an angelic stone; it has a strong vibration that helps us connect with the angels and access Divine healing. If you go outside and look at the opposite end of this singular cordwood piece you will see there is a nice chunk of



Kristine and Becky with the amethyst heart.

amethyst shining there. Amethyst is said to be a meditative and calming stone; it is a stone of protection, providing calm, balance, patience, and peace. When this heart-shaped wood presented itself during construction, it called (loudly!) for something special to adorn it. I literally ran to my crystal collection to select something that would combine with the wood to promote a healing and divine experience for every visitor. Both of these stones felt *perfect* for this chapel! Just as the chapel itself is the heart of Kinstone, so this piece is the "heart of the night".

The Fire Wall

Extending our stargazing session further, we begin to see why this wall is also known as the Fire Wall. Glowing bright red in the lower left portion of the wall is one of the most celebrated pieces in the chapel – Brother Fire. This medley of bottle-ends is a brilliant splash of red, amber, orange and blue representing a fire in the night. Some of the glass and even some of the log-ends have

been texturized with tumbled glass pieces and beads that add a feeling of glowing embers. The fire feature is anchored by an extraordinary red bowl. This red bowl belonged to my mother, Angeline, and before that to my grandmother, Anna. Red glass is rare. This is due to the fact that *gold* is a required ingredient to make true red glass. Needless to say, not many red, orange or yellow glass pieces were found. When my mother heard of the search for the elusive ruby colored bottles, she called me to her side and presented me with this bowl as a gift for the chapel. I asked, “Do you mean that you want this bowl to sit on a shelf in the chapel?” and she answered, “No! Put in in the wall!” I did not argue and thanked her profusely. A clear bowl was needed to pair with this “bowl-end”, so I raided my own kitchen cupboard for a cut glass bowl that would fit. It took a lot of finesse and patient handling to get these two pieces to hold together, but we did it! This bottle-end glows so fiercely, even in the lowest light conditions and in all seasons that I am certain my grandmother’s radiant spirit is present there, bestowing upon us the gift of unwavering warm light through this family heirloom that is now her legacy.



Brother Fire

Doorway of Distinction and Ram's Horns

Finally you turn and study the doorway with its stunning arches of wood and light. This wall #6, the “Doorway”, was the final wall we worked on. The doors themselves make this an impressive wall, but so much symbolism is embedded around the doors that it saturates the soul. This wall was the most difficult to design; the final element of the poem that still had to be incorporated was Sister Bodily Death. How does one design a representation of death? For me, I understand death to be just a doorway into another existence that we cannot comprehend while here on earth. So, the entire wall is a symbolization of this transition. The arched doors are framed by a series of corresponding arches. First an arch of rectangular cordwood pieces, each one specifically cut to this shape. Between the doors is a fabulous carving featuring local Native American motifs, specifically the Dakota Sioux, who hunted this land before my family arrived here four generations ago. The central motif is a buffalo, sacred to the native people. It is particularly auspicious for us as Kinstone sits on *Buffalo Ridge* in *Buffalo Township* in *Buffalo County*, Wisconsin! There’s that three again!



The Sacred Buffalo

On either side of the doors there is a column of bottle-ends of various colors, ending in a red one on each side. These are two of just four red glass pieces in the chapel. These are Depression Era red dessert bowls that were cracked and given to me by my brother-in-law. Just above the red bottle-ends on each side are three aqua bottle-ends made from old mason jars. Above the cordwood arch is an arch of blue bottles and above that is an arch of clear bottles. At the apex of the clear arch there are two pieces of quartz crystal that form what looks like a sailboat floating on three small cordwood pieces shaped like waves. To the left is a mandala made of 19 clear quartz points surrounding 9 quartz points. To the right is a doorknob taken over 40 years ago from the house I grew up in, before it was demolished. Above all of this is a row of wooden “ram’s horns;” these may depict wind, but one of my kin fittingly suggested that they are fetus shapes; a true symbol of new life and transformation. The thinnest ram’s horn is a piece of chestnut cut from my father’s favorite chestnut tree that died shortly after he did in 1994.



The arched doors of Kinstone Chapel.

The way I explain it is that everything under the cordwood arch represents where we are now, here, on this earth. The red glass is symbolic of stopping; this is where we come to a stop here on this earth and meet what is beyond. On one side, the three aqua bottles each have a “3” in the bottom. Triple threes have spontaneously appeared over and over again at Kinstone. We created this group intentionally. On the other side, the three aqua bottles each have a sideways “8” in the bottom, making what appears to be three infinity symbols. However, a closer inspection reveals that the “8”s are broken. Perhaps this means that our notion of infinity is broken as we move beyond our current comprehension. Perhaps the ever-optimistic Buzz Lightyear in Disney’s animated film *Toy Story* had it right, “To Infinity And Beyond!”

The Quartz Mandala

Continuing with the doorway explanation, there is a blue beyond us like the sky or “the wild blue yonder”. Beyond that we are enveloped in a warm white light. This is often spoken of when people have near-death experiences. We do not know what is beyond the white light. I placed the quartz mandala there – a highly energetic thing – to represent the Eternal Flame, the Source, Love, or however you may think of God. I am a firm believer in God; that there is something



The Eternal Flame

much greater than us that has created us and cares for us. We might think of ourselves on a journey, perhaps to return to God; this is signified by the crystal sailboat. We may think we have no say in our fate as our boats are tossed about by the waves and winds; but in reality, we each have some measure of control as we decide to ease or trim the sails, tack or jibe, change directions, or make adjustments to set a course for ourselves. The chestnut piece is a sea bird, a



A sailboat crests the arch of white light, floating on three cordwood waves in a sea of blue and gray.

sign of hope. Just as Noah found hope of a solid shore when the dove visited his boat with a branch in its beak, so we may hope that there is a safe haven for us as we sail beyond death's door. The black doorknob in the upper right corner is just that - a doorknob, leading to who knows where! Its corresponding door and where it leads are yet hidden. Surrounding all of this, above the cordwood arch and all around we see myriad tiny log-ends. We began to call this "cordwood confetti". It is symbolic of celebration and of rising up. It is simply perfect!

The Flame

Last, but not least, we stop to ponder the centerpiece of the chapel, a gorgeous piece of petrified wood mounted on a custom black metal pedestal. This piece, called The Flame, looks like it is on fire, especially when the sun shines in and casts light and colors from the bottle-ends onto it. This was a gift from my good friend, Bill Cohea, of Columille. He visited Kinstone in 2012 and felt that the center of the chapel would need a good strong stone. Later he sent The Flame via special courier (a friend driving this way) just for this purpose. Its graceful shape and caramel-black color are so alive. It enhances the whole experience.



The Flame is the centerpiece.



Kristine, Wayne, Richard F, Jarad and Becky

The People

All of the symbolism described so far is as nothing compared to the people! The Chapel is a symbol of happiness, friendship, joy, cooperative effort, creative expression, strong spirits, love and perseverance. Its greatest testament is the connection of the people. It will always be the connection. It will always be the people. The photo to the left shows a core group of us who happily poured so much of ourselves into this sanctuary. LOVE!

The Canticle of Brother Sun and Sister Moon
By Saint Francis of Assisi, 12th Century

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
 Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor,
 and all blessing.

To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
 and no man is worthy to mention Your name.

Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures,
 especially through my lord **Brother Sun**,
 who brings the day;
 and you give light through him.
 And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendor!
 Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

Praise be You, my Lord, through **Sister Moon**
 and the stars, in heaven you formed them
 clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through **Brother Wind**,
 and through the air, cloudy and serene,
 and every kind of weather through which
 You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through **Sister Water**,
 which is very useful and humble
 and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through **Brother Fire**,
 through whom you light the night and he is beautiful
 and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord,
 through **Sister Mother Earth**,
 who sustains us and governs us and who produces
 varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

Praised be You, my Lord,
 through those who give pardon for Your love,
 and bear infirmity and tribulation.

Blessed are those who endure in peace
 for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord,
 through our **Sister Bodily Death**,
 from whom no living man can escape...

Praise and bless my Lord, and give Him thanks
 and serve Him with great humility. ~ AMEN

Gratitude

The energy and love that has gone into the creating of this chapel is just overwhelming. It is the end result of the efforts of many. Eternal gratitude goes out to Wayne, Jarad, Richard & Becky, Clare & Richard and more. Wayne Weiseman, my friend and expert Permaculture designer is steadily helping manifest Kinstone; he is the one that first envisioned the combination of stone, cordwood and thatch for this chapel. Jarad Barkeim, my friend and site manager (at the time) used all of his stonemasonry, yoga, art and natural building skills as he put the most time and muscle into completing each component of the chapel from foundation to finishing trim. Richard and Becky Flatau, my friends and fellow stone people, laid the first mortar beads and placed the last log-end in the chapel - sticking with us from start to done. These two have taught all of our cordwood courses and shared much knowledge, but even more, have shared their joy of life with us and brought big loving energy to Kinstone. Clare Schoenfelder and Richard "Big Rich" Kuisle are dedicated to helping Kinstone come to fruition. Clare keeps us well fed and watered. Big Rich, with his multiple mechanical and managerial talents picks up any slack, anywhere, all the time. All workers and volunteers who went the extra mile hold forever my gratitude, love and blessings, especially Rigo Asencio, Mike Fanslau (creator of Brother Fire), Jon Dannehy (astronomer extraordinaire), Greg Zahn, Joerg Kessler, Jerry Cleveland, Kirsten Grohovsky, Mike Bartsch, Jim Barmore and everyone else (all 100+ of you!) that helped in any way, shape or form to create the Kinstone Chapel.

Thank You!

REGENERATE ❖ RELEARN ❖ REVIVE

The name Kinstone is a concatenation of KIN + STONE. This word just resounds with the strength of past, present and future generations of kin connecting through this land and the grounding presence of these limestone bluffs and the granite standing stones recently raised on this property. Kinstone is a meditative holistic landscape and learning center where Permaculture principles guide us in the restoration of the land and rejuvenation of the people that come here. It is home to Kinstone Academy – an education center focused on advanced, applied Permaculture and natural building. As we regenerate the soil we regenerate the soul. As we relearn many of the skills we have forgotten, we revive. It is wonderful to be alive and present, here, now!

Alignments and Invitations

Besides the Chapel, Kinstone has many other features that call us back to our roots, to our connections to the land, soil and stone. Circles abound here. They are reminiscent of the rhythmic, cyclical nature of all things. We witness and acknowledge the perennial passing of the seasons by observing alignments between stones and stars on key dates. At sunrise on Summer Solstice the sun is ushered into the center of the Stone Circle through the Corridor Stones. At sunrise on Winter Solstice the sun



Kristine catches the sun at sunset on Autumn Equinox.
"Ah but I may as well try and catch the wind." -Donovan

aligns with the center of the Stone Circle as it passes through the Chair Stones. The Equinox sunrise is seen through the Equinox Window and aligns with the middle megalith in the wall of The Three Witnesses sculpture. At sunset on Equinox the sun bursts through any number of the 19 perforations in the stone known as The Wise One (a.k.a. Lancelot Marcél) giving us a chance to catch and hold it as it then casts a dotted line of sunlight onto the face of a partner stone, Atlas. A truly enlightening experience! There are more alignments to the cardinal directions. True North is marked by a row of three standing stones that march along a straight line from the center of the Stone Circle, through the North Stone, on to the center stone of the Labyrinth and beyond to the Anchor Stone. The stone features of Kinstone and their alignments with our Sun and the North Star give us tangible, visible events to aid us in honoring and celebrating the great cycles of life. You are hereby invited to experience this for yourself! Come align with us. Come! Be!



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