

# Warm reception

No better place for a fireside chat than Allerton Mansion

STORY **Scott Richey** PHOTOS **Robin Scholz**

**D**ecorating for the holidays at Allerton Mansion when it was, in fact, the home of Robert Allerton meant relying on what was local: The expansive grounds and gardens at the mansion providing copious raw materials.

That was Anne Carlson's approach when decorating the fireplace in the mansion's Butternut Room: A combination of locally sourced evergreens, boxwood, juniper and holly from right outside the mansion's doors.

"That's kind of reverent to what they would have done when Robert was there when he was actually living in the mansion," said Carlson, who has been supplying designs for a room-by-room renovation at the mansion as a volunteer the past two years.

"I was trying to, a bit, replicate something that felt natural in that space," Carlson continued. "It's a very traditional approach. You used what was local. I also felt it just highlighted some of the beauty of Allerton – the property itself. There's so much there and so much that's available that's natural to the property."

The Butternut Room once served as Allerton's library. When his collection outgrew the space, a larger room was needed, leaving the Butternut Room as more of a retreat. That's why Carlson included a butler's tray and bottle of scotch next to the chair in front of the fireplace as part of her design.

"It would have been a place he would have retreated for conversation or a drink or reading," she said.



Carlson's work in the Butternut Room is an extension of the other renovations already completed at Allerton Mansion. The top floor – three guest bedrooms and accompanying bathrooms – is complete. Approximately \$750,000 in endowments has been secured for the renovation and upkeep of the Butternut Room, the library and what's known as Robert's Room. "It's not a true restoration," Carlson said. "It is a renovation, but we are trying to be reverent to what those rooms were used for and also understand it is now a commercial space. My approach to all of the process in trying to bring the mansion back to life is to be reverent to the architecture."

Beyond utilizing what's at hand on the grounds at Allerton Mansion and some original pieces, Carlson said she is trying to stay as local as possible in the renovations. That has included using Carter's Furniture in Urbana to source different pieces and commissioning local artists to supply the artwork for different rooms.

"Sometimes I don't think people realize what a gem we have in our backyard," Carlson said. "It's so gratifying to see that space really be at its best." 🍷