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## That's grotesque!

Cathedral's gargoyles are more than just an ugly face

BY SALLY DADISMAN

When you think "gargoyle," you might think: monster, medieval, gothic. You're probably not thinking: hippie, politician, Darth Vader. But the latter is exactly what you'll find at Washington National Cathedral. Most of the 1,130 grotesques and 112 gargoyles on its facade were carved in the 1960s and '70s and serve as a "snapshot of an era," says Joe Alonso, the Cathedral's stonemason.

Among the grotesques are angels, animals and humanoid figures. Some represent people who made donations to be immortalized as a gargoyle, some were inspired by the times in which they were carved, and others are tributes to people close to the cathedral.

While all gargoyles are grotesques, not all grotesques are gargoyles. Both are meant to divert water from the building, but gargoyles act as waterspouts — usually with drainpipes running through their bodies so that water can exit through the mouth — while grotesques deflect the water with their presence alone. "As decorative and incredible as they are, they do serve a vital purpose," Alonso says. "Nothing's worse than water on a building, so they help the building last."

The **crooked politician gargoyle** is a man with horns holding a cigar and a skewed scale of justice with \$100 bills coming out of his pocket.



Each gargoyle was made from a **large limestone block**, the end of which was carved into a figure to be seen on the building's exterior. The rest of the block was then put in place as the cathedral was constructed. On average, gargoyles are 22 inches wide and took two to three weeks to create.

Alonso says the **pacifist and militant grotesques** on the northwest tower were inspired by Cold War tensions. The militant wears an angry expression and holds a missile in one hand while the other hand pushes a button. The pacifist, reacting to the militant, is gripping a gas mask in fear.



The **candid cameraman gargoyle** is a tie-wearing, card-playing duck with a photographer peering out of its mouth. Carver Malcolm Harlow added the camera in a nod to the cathedral's tourists.



"**Darth Vader** is a lot like a demon. He's evil, so I thought he would be a good choice," said then-13-year-old Christopher Rader, whose drawing of the "Star Wars" villain won the Cathedral's 1985 Draw a Grotesque competition.

Artist Constantine Seferlis was instructed to build a gargoyle that symbolized the times in the '70s. Inspired by protesters in the District, he created the **hippie gargoyle**, holding a blank protest sign. Seferlis gave him tattered clothing to show a lack of materialism.



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