This area is named for FRANK ROZZELLE, the Nelson family’s friend and legal counselor who became so interested in their project that he, too, left funds for the museum. A plaque commemorating his generosity is set into the wall at the north-west corner of the court, and his name is over the Kirkwood Hall entrance.

COURTYARD: Over 75 years ago J.C.Nichols (one of the museum’s first three trustees and the most active one) said that a place for relaxation and rest was necessary for the fatigued museum visitor. The courtyard with plants and running water, at that time unroofed, was necessary. It would help prevent the “unwelcomed disease” he called “museum fatigue” and “museum syndrome...a real and well defined affliction.” He told a KC STAR reporter that this came from too much museum exposure when the mind was “worked up to a high pitch by one thrill after another.” [Churchman, Michael, “High Ideals and Aspirations,: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 1933,” NAMA, KCMO, 1991.] “In cities of Europe and in New York where they have large museums, people become worn out...their minds are bewildered and depressed. They go home, go to bed, and are sick for days.”

The museum architects Wight & Wight (two Canadian brothers) designed this outdoor courtyard in the style of an Italian Renaissance palace. [No particular one.] As would be found in the designs of that period, the lower columns have Doric capitals, and the upper capitals are Ionic, following Classical Order. There are two stories of columns and walls which are made of buff colored Mankato limestone (from Mankato, Minnesota. The floor is paved with Crab Orchard limestone from Tennessee in variegated colors.

Kansas City’s weather limited the utility of the court. In 1979, thanks to the Hall Family Foundation it was roofed over for use in any season, and serves as the museum’s restaurant.

SOME SCULPTURES OF INTEREST
As one frequently finds in Italian Renaissance palace courtyards, the walls are ornamented with interesting fragments of sculpture. Since their acquisition, practically none of these have been researched, and it is hoped a project for the future. It is known that a number of them were purchased in the 1940’s from William Randolph Hearst’s collection. He was feeling financial pressure, and put on the market some of his art formerly destined for his estate San Simeon. [Also purchased from Hearst were the museum’s 14th century French cloister and some of the Renaissance armor. Registrar’s Office information. Hearst was the colorful media and publishing tycoon, political manipulator, and omnivorous art collector portrayed by Orson Welles in “Citizen Kane,” generally considered one of the ten best films ever made.]

The museum acquired other wall fragments through its European art consultant, Harold Woodbury Parsons, who ably built up the European holdings before the building opened in 1933, and for 22 years served in this capacity.

COAT OF ARMS OF POPE URBAN VIII, Italian, marble, 17th century between 1623 and 1644. (On the south wall near the south-east corner.) As a result of the Counter-Reformation, Rome in the 17th century was undergoing a building boom in the exuberant Baroque style. This architectural fragment shows the coat of arms of Maffeo Barberini as Pope Urban VIII, a major builder and art patron during his pontificate. (Elected 1623, died 1644)

At least since the 12th century until 1978 the beehive shaped triple crown (or tiara) was a major feature of papal coats of arms. So were the two huge keys of St. Peter with a cord (often tasseled) strung through the holes in their handles, and their use is continued today. The shape of the shield and the images on it were determined by each pope.
This one bears the images of bees, emblems of the Barberini family. If the shield had been painted, the bees would be gold on a field of blue. As Pope Urban’s family rose to power in the Renaissance they had changed the original insects on their shield from black horses to three bees. [Wilson, Bee, “The Hive: The Story of the Honeybee and Us”, St. Martin’s Press, NY 2004, p. 130.]

Urban VIII and his family were “the chief patrons of Baroque art in 17th century Rome.” [Osborne, Harold, “The Oxford Companion to Art,” Oxford University, 1970, p. 106.] It has been said that Urban covered Rome with the Barberini bees. “He commissioned swarms of the golden creature all over the city to ensure a permanent legacy of his realm. Gianlorenzo Bernini became adept at sculpturing the fat symmetrical bees on the papal coat of arms. “ [Wilson, op. cit.] The brilliant Bernini was the principal artist of Urban’s court and of Italy at this time. He was painter, poet, writer, theatrical producer, city planner, architect, and a dazzling sculptor. It is tempting to think he may have had a hand in this particular work, but that remains unknown. Other artists also made coats of arms for Pope Urban VIII. [Papal coats of arms by Bernini and other artists may be seen on the web at http://members.tripod.com/romenartlover/ Juv.html] In 1711 Juvara published an unusual book of papal coats-of-arms and the artists. This web site illustrates the prints alongside modern photos for comparison.

PLAQUE WITH BUILDING TOOLS, 1st or 2nd century CE, ancient Roman marble (small, on the east wall in the beverage buffet area) This small relief is “extremely rare.” [Curator Robert Cohon docent lecture.] The images represent ancient tools of a profession. From left to right: ruler, compass, carpenter’s square and spool of a line that is weighted, a level with plumb line, pencil case with a belt clip, and a bundle of scrolls.

The majority of such plaques are funereal. Some have been found attached to other reliefs which depict the deceased and/or have memorial inscriptions. They suggest a technical profession for the deceased, such as architect, engineer, builder, carpenter, or surveyor. Some 20 of these tool representations survive. [Cuomo, S., “Technology and Culture in Greek and Roman Antiquity,” Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 85-99.]

BASIN (center of courtyard) Many Renaissance courtyards had fountains. When this stone vessel was considered for the museum by the European art consultant, Harold Woodbury Parsons, claimed the basin would be the perfect “raison d’etre” for Rozelle Court. [Wolferman, Kristie C., “The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art: Culture Comes to Kansas City,” University of Missouri Press, Columbia & London, 19993, p. 126.] Parsons believed that it came from the baths of Emperor Hadrian’s villa at Tivoli east of Rome, and that it dates from the 2nd century CE. [A concept repeated for many years in the docent lectures of Curator Ross Taggart.] More recent opinion is that the source is not known for sure, and also how it was used is not known. [Curator Robert Cohon.] Until drilled to become the courtyard fountain basin, the vessel was solid. Perhaps originally liquids poured into it from one source and then overflowed into another container? [Taggart] The pedestal is not original.

SARCOPHAGUS (center of south wall) Roman, 2nd - 3rd century CE? The lid has been lost, and might have been gabled to represent a house roof since a handsome pseudo-doorway is the major feature of the front relief. In ancient funeral art a partially opened door represents passage into the next existence. On either side of the door are spiral columns, and over it a pediment containing the images of two birds (doves?) on either side of a container. In pagan art and thereafter, two doves, the birds of Venus, may represent conjugal love and fidelity since many doves are monogamous.
Door handles in the form of lion faces with rings in their mouths originated in ancient Greece, appearing on doors for important buildings, temples and tombs. “For hundreds of years in ancient times this type of door hardly changes.” [Walsh, David A., “Doors of the Greek and Roman World,” in “Archaeology”, Jan/Feb 1983, p. 47] They have continued in use through the Middle Ages until today. If you cruise Mission Hills homes or hardware stores, you will find door knockers in the same form.

In antiquity lion images were associated with the man of virtue. They can be used as “the representatives of male ambitions to be courageous, dangerous, intelligent and successful. [Vermeule, Emily, “Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry,” p. 86.] In Homeric literature the lion is the most frequent metaphor or simile for the hero, leader, warrior. [Hurwitt, Jeffrey M., “The Art and Culture of Early Greece,” Cornell U Press, 1985, pp. 72, 117, n. 63] Therefore a number of ancient funeral monuments for men feature lions, lion heads, or lion hunts. [In the Sculpture Hall see the large Hellenistic marble lion from Athens which probably was part of a funeral monument.]

Also on the doors are the protective frontal faces of either Medusa (snake hair) or Apollo (radiant hair). It is hard to tell which here. In Roman times both were used as protective images to ward off evil. Although in early Greek art the Medusa is very ugly, in later antiquity she becomes more like Apollo and is similarly handsome. Protective radiant faces like this were a common image on high ranking Roman armor. [See bust of Emperor Hadrian in the Classical Gallery, and note the Medusa head on his armor.]

The repeated wavy carving on either side of the pseudo-door is called a strigil pattern, named after the curvy instrument used by ancient athletes to scrape off dirt after their exercises. Some historians think its use on sarcophagi represents the waves of the sea, since another metaphor for death was a sea voyage, hopefully to the Isles of the Blessed. [In the Roman collection is a sarcophagus featuring Apollo and the Muses. Look at the left side and you will see a man representing the deceased and wearing a traveling hat. He is making the sea voyage on the back of a Triton, a lesser marine divinity.]

Both side reliefs of the Rozzelle Court sarcophagus depict weapons. The incised execution is not nearly as adept as the front relief. The unseen backside of the coffin would not have been carved, since sarcophagi usually were placed against an interior wall of a mausoleum or underground funeral chamber.

ARCADE CEILINGS BY DANIEL MacMORRIS

INSCRIPTIONS (over the entrance to Kirkwood Hall):

Here now abideth calm and peace secure from pain and worldly strife
Where mind and heart may find surcease in meditation’s inner life
The soul of beauty hath survived time’s crucible through ages past
Man calls it art and in that name finds immortality at last.

Daniel MacMorris 1939 - 1974

Missouri artist Daniel MacMorris was chosen by the architects and trustees to provide painted decorations for the ceilings of the museum’s South Vestibule, Kirkwood Hall, and Rozzelle Court where he also designed the bronze zodiac medallions around the fountain.

Born in Sedalia in 1893, he was educated and raised in Kansas City, graduated from Westport High School in 1913, enrolled part-time at the KCAI, and worked in the art department of the KCSTAR for 6 years. Then he traveled, studying variously with Mucha and Robert
Henri, and was awarded a summer fellowship in New York by Louis Comfort Tiffany. In Europe he studied and worked for 5 years. In those summers he acted as Paris guide and host for Miss Effie Seachrest and her tour groups from Kansas City. [Effie was an art teacher, dealer, and tastemaker in Kansas City. The petition she organized was primarily responsible for the trustees' purchase of Van Gogh's “Olive Grove.”]

While in France, MacMorris painted a portrait of French artist Gorguet who was creating and supervising 128 artists painting the largest painting in the world, the “Pantheon de la Guerre” that commemorated the heroes of World War I. [410' long] MacMorris greatly admired this work, and thanks to him 30 years later was able to purchase it. He would supervise the restoration of its fragments and their installation at the WWI Memorial and Museum.

After Europe he went to NY where he had a studio in Carnegie Hall two doors down from his friend Marcel Duchamp. He worked with the WPA program inspecting the many murals being painted throughout the NY area. Back in KC he took on several murals for the World War I Memorial project. The architecture of that building was designed by Wight and Wight.

In 1931 W. D. Wight asked MacMorris to design and paint the ceilings of the South Vestibule, intended to be the primary museum entrance. After careful measurements of the groined ceiling, MacMorris painted the canvases for it in his New York studio, and on installation here they fit perfectly. The imagery and style are much like the ceiling paintings of Raphael and his assistants in the Villa Madama, Rome. The artist was interested in astrology, and figures representing signs of the Zodiac are spread among the vaults, and they also are the subject of his bronze medallions set into the floor of Rozzelle Court.

The ceiling of Kirkwood Hall he painted to resemble ancient Roman coffering.

A major project was taking on the 60 ceiling bays of Rozzelle Court with instructions it should resemble Raphael and his assistants' work in the Vatican Loggia. [See Grotesque Style below.] Another request was that when finished it should look as if it were similarly 400 years old. In preparation MacMorris spent much of 1936 and 37 at the Met, studying Renaissance ornamentation and also the technical problems of painting on a plaster covered cement surface exposed to the elements. Returning to Kansas City, MacMorris began painting directly on the ceilings from scaffolding, a project taking him 18 months. When nearly completed his labor was terminated by preparations for a large garden party in the courtyard. All the scaffolding was removed.

Decades later in the 1970's MacMorris was dining with Docent Margaret Hilmes and her husband Phil. [Margaret was a former pupil who had also assisted him with the restoration of the fragmented “largest painting in the world” at the WWI Memorial.] The elderly artist wistfully stated that because of the garden party, he had never been able to sign his work in Rozzelle Court. Architect Thomas Wight had instructed him to leave space for his inscriptions in the ceiling bay at the court's entrance to Kirkwood Hall. Hearing this Phil Hilmes contacted a friend who was a contractor for the enclosure of Rozzelle Court. [Thanks to a gift from the Hall Family Foundation, the courtyard was being roofed in order to be used as a restaurant.] The obliging contractor erected scaffolding in the bay area at the Kirkwood Hall court entrance. The artist, now in his mid 80's ascended in a “cherry picker.” On the ceiling he installed with lead and varnish four inscriptions painted on thin linen the same color as the ceiling. [See above.]

Until his death in 1981 at the age of 89 MacMorris kept working. His murals and portraits are scattered around the US. He painted over 400 portrait subjects including Marcel Duchamp, Margaret Truman Daniel, and Phog Allen.
Bibliography for MacMorris:
Hilmes, Margaret, [Docent] interview.
MacMorris Obituary, KCTimes, August 27, 1981 [Museum archives]
Moss, Ruth [Docent], interview.

THE RENAISSANCE “GROTESQUE” STYLE OF THE CEILINGS
Raphael and other Renaissance artists had decorated the loggia (porch) of the Vatican in a way that resembled some of the ancient Roman wall paintings discovered when Emperor Nero’s Golden House was excavated. The pope had put Raphael in charge of Rome’s ancient excavations, and this first century palace was then buried under many feet of earth and debris. To see it one had to descend underground as if into a “grotto” [Italian for cave]. This decorative style of ancient painting was therefore named “grotesque,” and it spread through much of Europe during the 16th century. Grotesque style may feature complex unrelated images in arrangements of plant life with festoons, masks, and fantastical human-animal composites. There is little concern for scale and perspective. Some modern historians have looked for allegorical meanings in some Renaissance uses of these images. However in Roman times the architect Vitruvius criticized this fashion to “decorate walls with monstrous forms...such things...never existed...” as “senseless.” [“On Architecture,” Book VII, c. 15BCE; from Oxford Art Online, “grotesque.”] The poet Horace warned against excessive artistic license that led to the creation of the wild fantasies, and rhetorically queried “Could you restrain your laughter, my friends?” [“Ars Poetica,” cited on Oxford Art Online, “grotesque.”]

This revived ancient style spread rapidly through Renaissance Europe appearing in prints, tapestry borders, ceramics, metal, furniture, jewelry, and as wall and ceiling decorations in palaces and even churches. Towards the end of the period its popularity and strange images attracted the suspicions of the Church. After the Council of Trent [1545-1563] an important Counter-Reformation writer and prince of the Church attacked it. [“Discurso Interno alle Imagini Sacra e Profane,” Bologna 1882.] Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti “argued that the style had actually been invented as an aid to subterranean devil worship.” [Bull, Malcolm, “The Mirror of the Gods,” Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 81, and n. 23.] Enthusiasm for grotesque imagery diminished but again the style was revived after the 18th century discoveries of ancient paintings in Pompeii and Herculaneum, and the growing interest in the Neoclassical Revival.