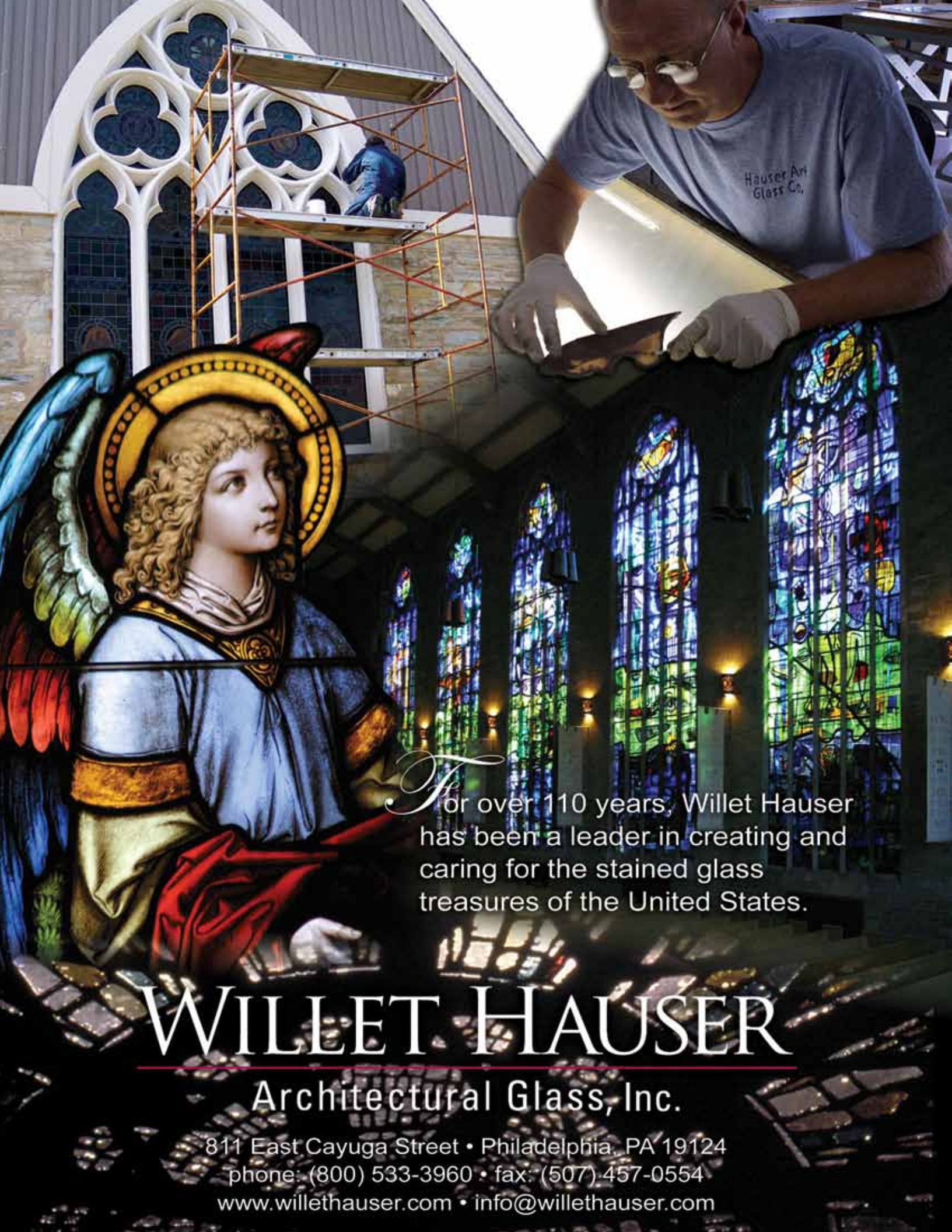




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RELIGION, ART AND ARCHITECTURE
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on Sacred Landscape.



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Photo: © schuffphoto.com

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MIXED MESSAGES


EDITOR'S PAGE * MICHAEL J. CROSBIE

THE NAME OF THIS JOURNAL suggests that there is a strong connection between faith and form, that the environments we create for religious purposes—the art and the architecture of where we meet to worship or to celebrate our belief—always reflect belief. This does not, however, imply consistency. The fascinating thing about religious art and architecture is that they send mixed messages. The different messages are open to various interpretations, and those interpretations change over time. Often our interpretations of what a work of art or architecture “says” tells more about us the interpreters than about the work in question. This question of interpretation, the meaning of the religious spaces we create, runs through each of this issue’s feature articles.

The cover story on the St. Thomas Aquinas College chapel is particularly provocative. The architecture of the chapel speaks volumes about the values of the college that built it and the architect who designed it. For some architects, the style of this building is difficult to swallow. Shouldn’t architecture always reflect the spirit of the age? (In fact, how can it not reflect that spirit?) What does it say about our own time, or about our technology? If you’re a modernist, Aquinas chapel is heresy in stone—a lie about the way we build today. Beyond architectural style, the chapel expresses a spatial hierarchy of celebrant and congregation that is a throwback to the way Roman Catholic churches were designed before the Second Vatican Council. Here is a church that appears to be out of step with both time and belief.

How might one assess a church whose spatial configuration brought the congregants and celebrants together in a stronger sense of community, yet was completely faithful to the tradition of Italian Renaissance architecture? And what about a church that was overtly modern in its architectural design, yet fairly conservative in its spatial arrangement of celebrants and congregants—such as Richard Meier’s Millennium Church in Rome, or SOM’s Oakland Cathedral? Or even the Ave Maria Oratory in Florida (page 12), a building that has drawn fire from both traditionalists (for its contemporary style) and from progressives (who see its position of altar and pews as pre-Vatican II)?

Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown considered such issues in their design of a school chapel and a synagogue, both in Pennsylvania (page 18). These projects seem comfortable in their architectural expression of “both/and, either/or,” as Venturi wrote in his 1966 treatise, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*. The architecture of Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates has never been shy about having it both ways, or many ways, simultaneously. In these two religious buildings architectural tradition has its role to play, in support of spaces that seem to bring the congregants and the celebrants together in community—in light-filled volumes that lift the spirit. There is affirmation that the most interesting art and architecture, like human beings, often contain ideas in conflict with each other.

This brings us back to the parallels between faith and form. A mature faith always has the capacity for doubt and for inquiry. The most satisfying religious art and architecture always make room for the same. 

MICHAEL J. CROSBIE IS THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF *FAITH & FORM* AND CAN BE REACHED BY EMAIL AT MCROSBIE@FAITHANDFORM.COM



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Style as Substance

What does the Thomas Aquinas College chapel mean?

By George C. Knight, AIA

TRADITIONAL BUILDINGS, ones that follow traditional patterns of assembly and organization and are made from traditional materials, even ones that are extremely well designed and constructed, are rarely acclaimed on architectural grounds these days. With much critical and popular attention currently focused on architectural innovation, bedazzlement, and authorship, traditional buildings, when not overlooked or slighted, are often considered, at least cursorily, on the basis of their “shock value” to prevailing design culture. In fact, they are often so anomalous that thoughtful recognition of their inherent qualities and characteristics becomes a footnote if they are recognized at all.

When one considers a traditional building that happens to be a Roman Catholic church the phenomenon is all the more extreme. Liturgical reform following the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s has led many in the Catholic Church to reconsider or even upend the traditions of church building established over centuries; clerics, congregants, architects, building committees, and the liturgical consultants who serve them have strived, in both the renovation of existing churches and the construction of new ones, to create meaningful, devotional spaces that often overtly dismiss familiar symbolic patterns, formal relationships, and functional organizations. In this context, new churches that critically, self-consciously, and uncompromisingly invoke the traditions of Catholic architecture stir not only architectural but theological consternation and are considered by most of the progressive-minded as, at best, outliers and, at worst, retrograde and liturgically incorrect. Occasionally there emerges a project, however, that because of its quality and character and because of what possibilities it reveals, demands a more careful assessment. One such example is Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel, by Duncan G. Stroik Architects.

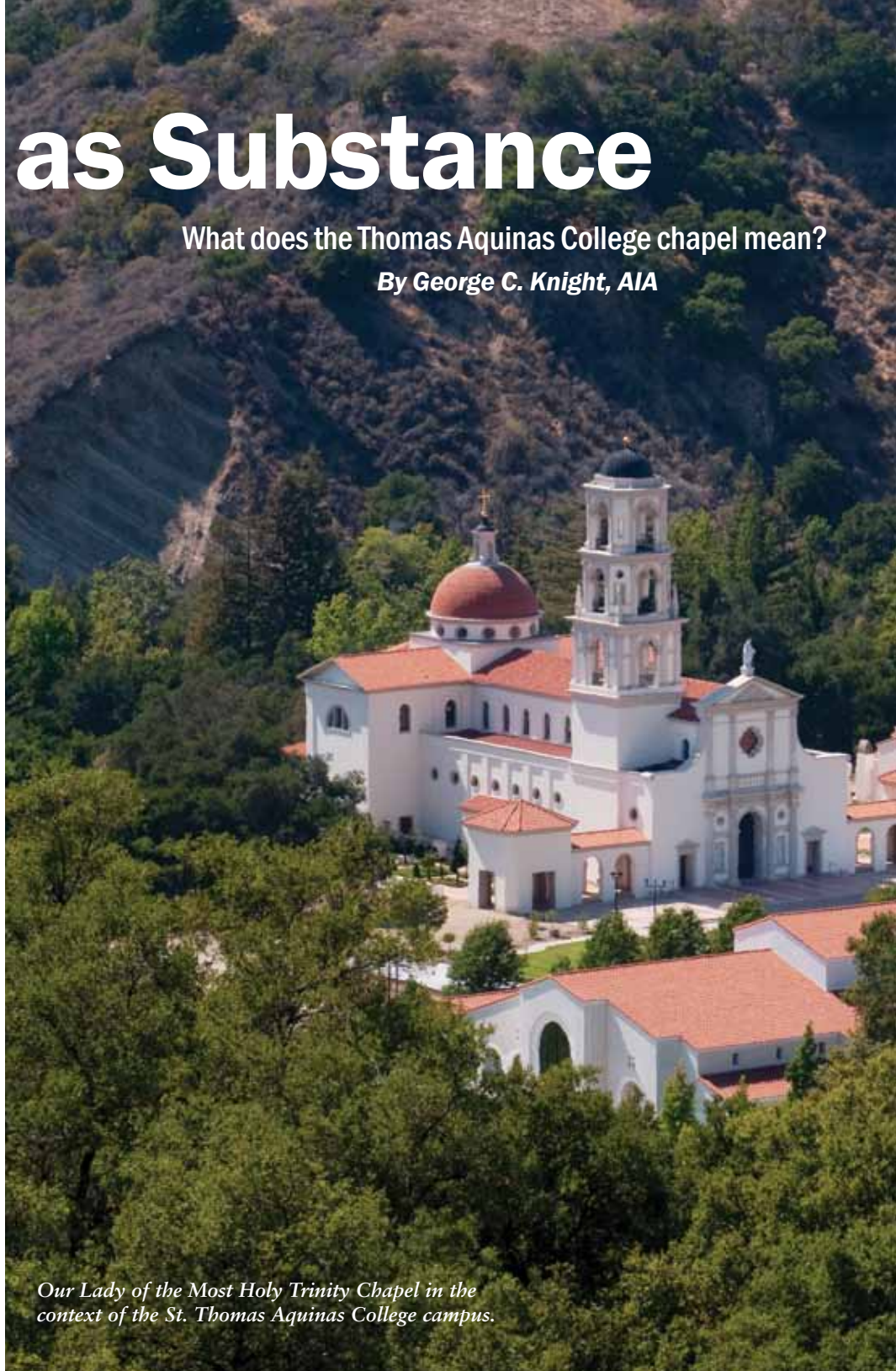
THE CHAPEL'S INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Sited at the terminus of a verdant, fledgling central quadrangle of the Thomas Aquinas College in Santa Paula, California, Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel is the centerpiece of the young Catholic college's growing campus. Founded in 1971 in response to what it deemed was the growing secularism within Catholic higher education and the general

erosion of liberal education, Thomas Aquinas College is a self-described “Catholic liberal arts college with a fully integrated curriculum composed exclusively of the Great Books.” Though similar to other “great books” curricula such as those of St. John's Colleges in Annapolis and in Santa Fe, Thomas Aquinas College conceives of itself as being an institution where “students perfect their intellects under the light of the truths revealed by God through the Catholic Church.” It is this institutional synthesis of its academic and religious mission for its 350

undergraduate students that prompted Dr. Thomas E. Dillon, the college's long-standing and influential president (who died shortly following the Chapel's dedication), to commit in 2001 to creating a structure that would be not only a defining institutional building but would also be a central instrument of intellectual and spiritual growth.

Given the college's history, its academic focus on the foundational texts of Western culture (especially those of its namesake), and its critique of the secular drift in Catholic



Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel in the context of the St. Thomas Aquinas College campus.



Photo: © schaffphoto.com

educational life in America, particularly in the decades following the Second Vatican Council, it comes as no surprise that the college sought inspiration for its new chapel in the tradition of Catholic architecture in Europe. After a lengthy search, the college commissioned Duncan Stroik, principal of Duncan G. Stroik Architects and one of the founding instructors in the classical architecture curriculum (unique in the country) of the University of Notre Dame's School of Architecture. An outspoken advocate for a resurgence of traditional

ecclesiastical architecture, Stroik immersed himself in the college's quest and traveled with Dr. Dillon throughout Europe and the Americas to critically study and cultivate ideas for the chapel. The result was ultimately a cruciform basilica crowned with a pendentive dome and lantern and replete with a campanile reminiscent of an Italian renaissance church.

AGAINST THE GRAIN

While the decision to build a traditional church might have been an inevitable one

for the college, it was largely out of step with the prevailing thinking about Catholic architecture. In the early 1990s Seattle University had commissioned Steven Holl to design their Chapel of Saint Ignatius, which was noted for its eccentric and sculptural massing, its use of colorful indirect lighting to identify programmatic elements, its serene and abstract water court, and its inventive formal interiors. Similarly, while the Thomas Aquinas College chapel was being planned, one of America's most important new churches, the Cathedral

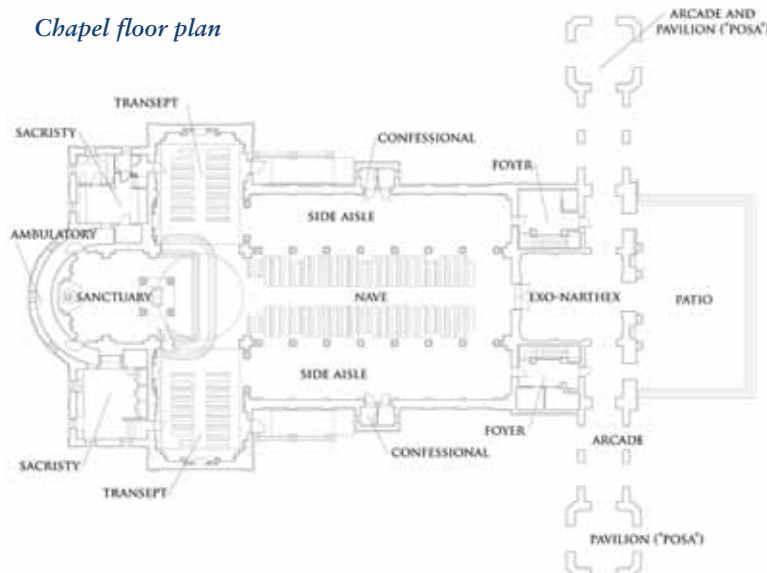
The chapel as it faces the college lawn.



Site plan



Chapel floor plan



of Our Lady of the Angels (*Faith & Form*, Vol. 37, No. 3, 2004, p. 18) in nearby Los Angeles, was beginning construction. Designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Rafael Moneo, the cathedral, with its angular, asymmetrical massing, disposition of liturgical elements, and voluminous interior, is a celebrated departure from, rather than an embrace of, traditional form. Another example, designed concurrently by Richard Meier, also a Pritzker laureate; the Church Dio Padre Misericordioso in Rome (*Faith & Form*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 2004, p. 6) features three concentric sail-like roofs, panel cladding, large expanses of glazing, and an elegantly spare interior. Perhaps an even more diametric example is the more recently completed Cathedral of Christ the Light in Oakland (*Faith & Form*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 2009, p. 6) by Skidmore Owings & Merrill, which is distinguished by its plan-form of intersecting arcs, centralized altar, wood ribbed structure, and glazed curtain wall envelope.

The above examples are the most conspicuous and celebrated of those illustrating the trends in Catholic architecture to embody what are understood to be liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council as promulgated in the United States by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy's 1978 statement, *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship* and updated in 2000 as *Built of Living Stones*. Equally influential are the tenets of post-war modernist architecture whose roots lie in the work of such influential architects and church builders as Le Corbusier, Alvar Aalto, and Mies van der Rohe, among others. These buildings represent the sentiments of many liturgical "progressives" who argue that, to fulfill the reforms of the *Sacrosanctum Consilium*, the constitution emanating from the Second Vatican Council dealing with liturgy, church builders need to reconsider such fundamental decisions as the location of the tabernacle, the position of the altar relative to the congregation, the configuration of the nave or "worship space," and the orientation of pews.

While this position is broadly supported by many clerics and congregants alike, there is an equally committed sentiment that many such reforms undermine the principle of the church as the *Domus Dei*, or House of God. The increasingly loudly voiced displeasure with progressivism is evidenced in such recent texts as Michael Rose's 2001 book, *Ugly As Sin: Why They Changed Our Churches from Sacred Places to Meeting Spaces and How We Can Change Them Back Again*. One needs only to scan the Internet to find scores of vitriolic blogs to gauge the popular, ecclesiastic, and academic dissent. Indeed, as the editor of

Sacred Architecture: The Journal of the Institute for Sacred Architecture, Stroik himself has been an outspoken critic of what he has consistently argued is a misreading of the Second Vatican Council confused by the influence of modernist architectural theory. These positions were well framed in the pages of this journal titled, "But, is it Catholic?" The debate on Catholic design" (*Faith & Form*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 2003).

To pretend that the Thomas Aquinas College chapel does not have a stake in the ongoing disagreement between liturgical conservatives and progressives would be coy. With its uncharacteristically American obedience to the Vatican, its embrace of traditional liturgy (including the frequent celebration of the Latin mass), the use of a communion rail, and the exalted position of the tabernacle beneath a baldachin, the chapel exemplifies the spirit of resurgence of the traditional liturgy. In light of the above debate, one might be tempted to acknowledge the significance of this chapel, simply, as a salvo on behalf of conservatism. However, to let the chapel stand simply as a polemic against many of the common liturgical reforms prevalent in contemporary Catholicism is to miss its greatest importance. Let us rather assess the virtues of the chapel building.

TYPOLGY AS LANGUAGE

Legibility in architecture, the opportunity for a person to recognize forms, functions, and their meanings within a structure, is often first achieved by the building's organizational make-up. This organizational make-up is often categorized as typology, or a building's or a place's order reduced to its most elemental state. Nowhere is this more evident than in the siting of the chapel itself. Like Jefferson's Rotunda at the University of Virginia (ironically, a decidedly secular library), the Thomas Aquinas chapel is set at the head of a collection of academic and administrative buildings. While each of these buildings maintains a familial relationship to the chapel and to one another, the chapel's primacy is immediately evident by virtue of its massing, its higher order of material, its size, and its siting. Rising out of the lush valley as one approaches the campus by road, the three-story bell tower announces the chapel and the campus from much farther afield. This simple but effective strategy of using familiar, intelligible form continues as one enters the chapel itself. By using a cruciform, basilical plan as the organizing template for the chapel, the architecture reveals liturgical action to the congregant. For example, one is immediately aware of where to



View from the entrance, down the nave toward the altar.

enter the building (through the large central doorway), how one is to orient oneself when within it (along the primary, longitudinal axis), where the Eucharist is reserved (at the crossing beneath the dome), how one is to approach the Eucharist (at the communion rail), where the music is created (in the choir loft), etc.

One might equate the strategy of employing strong, easily understood typological formations with being formulaic, or unresponsive to site and program, or even tiresome. This is often the case, and indeed a great deal of contemporary architecture seems determined to suppress these familiar associations. And yet the chapel, by employing quietly innovative design strategies, illustrates the contrary. For example, in order to interconnect with the existing system of arcades linking the college's academic and administrative buildings, the chapel's design deploys polygonal, flanking pavilions inspired by *posas* (processional chapels found in Mexican architecture). Similarly, set behind the magnificent neo-baroque façade of the chapel's entrance, Stroik created a generous exo-narthex or outdoor foyer. The unexpected space provides a delightfully generous opportunity to gather on the way in or out of the building, protected from rain and the southern California sun. With the apse of the chapel emerging from grade almost a full story below the façade, Stroik addressed the sloping ground by designing an elevated plaza at the north flank of the chapel to serve as a vestibule for those entering the campus from the lower, central parking lot. As public a space as this is, Stroik designed the chapel's opposite flank as a serene meditation garden

with magnificent views of the scenic Santa Paula hills.

With the college's belief that religious and academic development are intertwined, the chapel's ornamental and sculptural program seems to be the most overtly legible, even educational, aspect of the design. Marble statues of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine, the great Doctors of the Church, are set in niches framed by dazzling Ionic columns flanking the chapel's doorway. They are but the beginning of a series of impressively executed statuary throughout the chapel that includes shrines, angels, stations of the cross, a bronze baldachin reminiscent of Bernini's iconic design in St. Peter's, and exquisite plaster Corinthian capitals with an image of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, all of which are meant to enlighten the minds and souls of worshippers.

Notwithstanding the examples of "progressive" ecclesiastic architecture mentioned previously, there is no shortage of traditional architecture, or at least what aspires to look like traditional architecture, in contemporary church building. For many, years of disappointment with "progressive" ecclesiastical architecture, often in the form of unsuccessful renovations of older buildings, has spawned a yearning for more familiar forms.

And yet, it is rare to see traditional design executed with such finesse and capability. Throughout the chapel one sees examples of an architectural language commanded by a designer who can satisfy its rigor while offering delightful and meaningful spaces for its users. Whether at the juncture of varied scales of vaulting; the intersection of column capitals; the integration of varied orders; or the profiles of entablatures,



Overview of the nave from the pulpit.



Looking from the north transept toward the altar and dome.


bases, and balusters, the Thomas Aquinas College chapel evidences competency and resolution that are rare. An additional example: upon entering, one is immediately struck by the chapel's luminosity. In much contemporary architecture expansive glazing, with its reflexive association with transparency and light, is used to excess, sometimes even recklessly. The Thomas Aquinas Chapel is refreshingly solid, but thanks to the discerning use of clerestory windows, lanterns, vaulting, and luminous materials, it is surprisingly light-filled.

A CLASSICAL HEIR

All of the above leads on to the conclusion that one must see the Thomas Aquinas College chapel as a seminal achievement in the ever-nascent classical revival of the past few decades promulgated by such institutions as the Institute of Classical Architecture and Classical America and Strok's own University of Notre Dame School of Architecture. What is perhaps more intriguing is the testimony it provides to the idea that classical architecture is vibrant, relevant, and (most surprisingly) achievable. One of the common explanations provided to those who had resisted admonitions that our culture should not re-adopt traditional building was that it was beyond the reach of possibility; that its trades, designers, and craftsmen were all but gone; that, even if they were available, they would be financially impossible for any client to afford. It is here that one has to credit the determination and clarity of conviction of Thomas Aquinas College to have sustained

their vision for the chapel through to its completion (according to the architect, the chapel's total project cost, including a new road and other infrastructure, was \$23 million).

The year 2008 was the 500th anniversary of the birth of the hugely influential Andrea Palladio, the great Renaissance architect and church builder. This event occasioned numerous symposia, lectures, and exhibits to commemorate and celebrate his work and influence. Typically understated among these celebrations was the point that this endlessly innovative architect's work was, in fact, highly derivative of the ruined classical precedents that he studied, documented, and published alongside his own designs. Chronologically three times closer to our age than to the precedents that inspired it, Palladio's work remains a brilliant example of the persistence, adaptability, and versatility of the classical language and its perennial applicability to ecclesiastical architecture.

Along with an increasingly sophisticated and adroit movement of classical and traditional architecture, the Thomas Aquinas College chapel is an heir to this example. One trusts that its quality will heighten the expectations of the faithful for profound and beautiful places of worship. 

GEORGE KNIGHT, AIA, IS A FOUNDING PRINCIPAL OF KNIGHT ARCHITECTURE LLC. FORMERLY A SENIOR ASSOCIATE WITH CESAR PELLI & ASSOCIATES, HE IS A CRITIC AT THE YALE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE.

A Town Around A Ch



THE DESIGN PROCESS for Ave Maria University and town in Florida was unique in realizing the vision of the projects' founder and prime benefactor, Thomas S. Monaghan. With a project of such enormous scale and complexity, including the entire necessary infrastructure, both physical and operational, the number of stakeholders

and interested parties was vast, comprising future occupants, staff, and students. Monaghan established the vision for the design, especially its centerpiece, the oratory. His vision led to a strong partnership with our architectural team at Cannon Design. It is rare that such a monumental project finds a single person's vision influencing the enterprise. At Ave Maria,

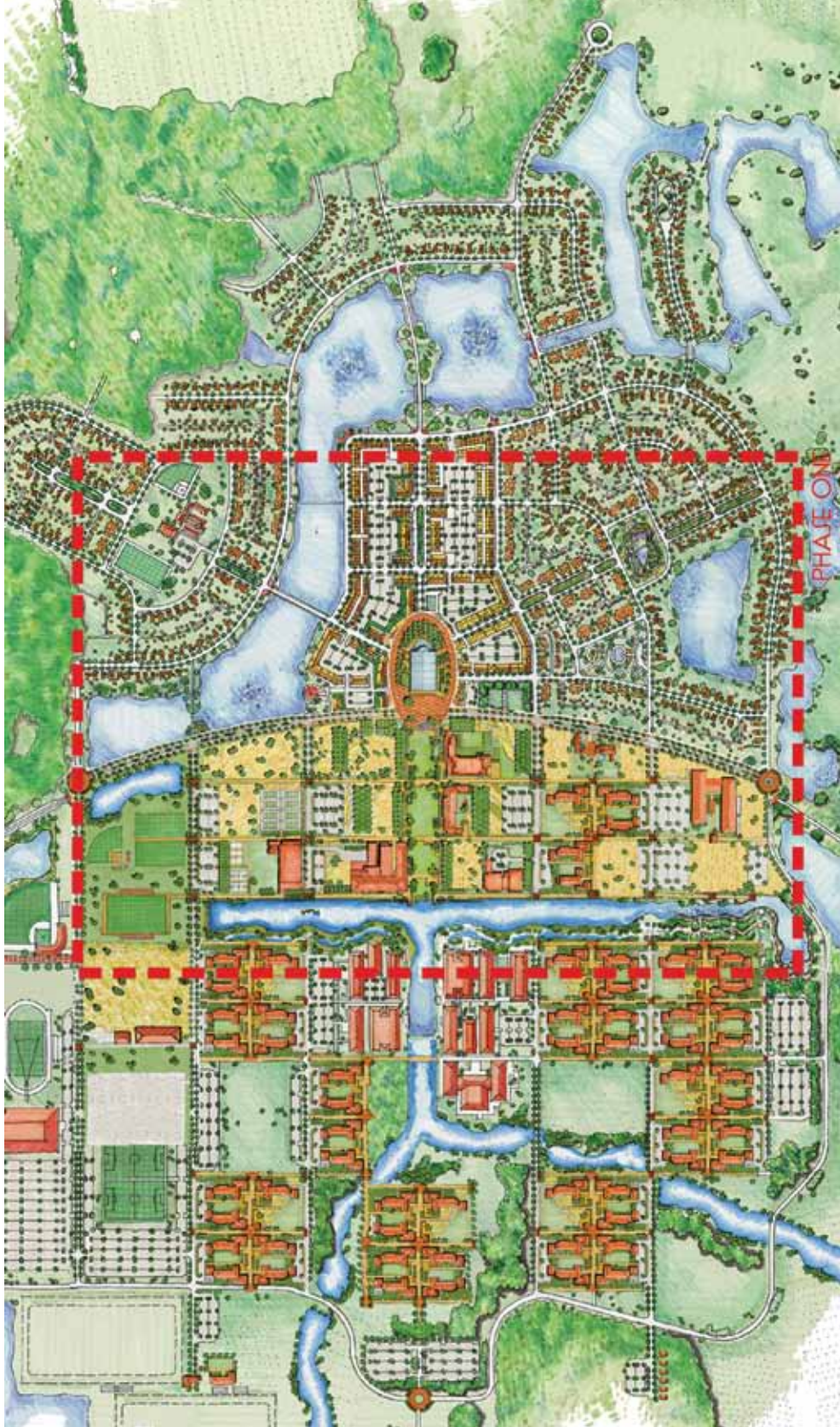
Monaghan's active involvement clearly resulted in the successful, unified vision of planning and architecture. A project succeeds when ideas coalesce in an uncompromised way. The master plan was based on a geometric order of grids and dimensions underlying everything from roadways to doorways. Monaghan's love of the ideas of Frank Lloyd Wright is reflected here

urch

By HARRY L. WARREN, AIA



Aerial perspective of Phase 1 development.



Master plan of the town of Ave Maria illustrating Phase 1 development area.

in low-rise horizontal buildings with extensive overhangs and lush landscaping.

While the master plan, oratory, and university design were the work of Cannon Design, others undertook the architecture of the surrounding commercial, retail, and residential buildings. The oratory is the focal element of the town and university development that

is built on 4,000 acres of former agricultural land. Surrounding the town, several thousand additional acres are designated to support an eventual total of 40,000 residents (600 in Phase 1).

TRADITIONAL AND MODERN PRECEDENTS

The architecture of the 30,000-square-foot,

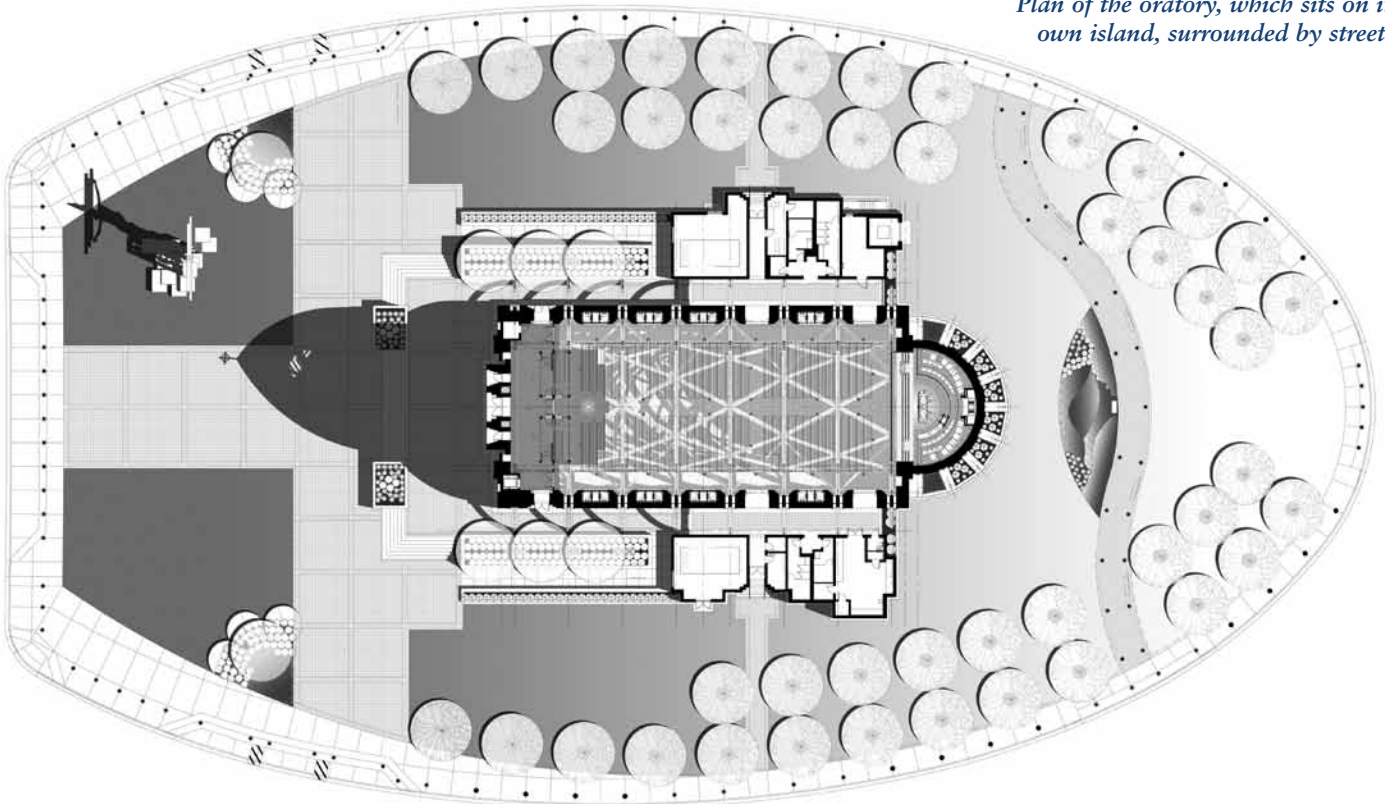
1,100-seat oratory is a blend of traditional and modern precedents. Elevated on a stone plinth signifying “sacred” space and setting it apart from its surroundings, the oratory is the community’s spiritual and physical center. Located at the eastern-most end of a 1,000-foot-long campus green, within an oval pedestrian plaza defining the town center, the oratory is

The oratory at night.



Photo: New York Focus

Plan of the oratory, which sits on its own island, surrounded by streets.



Drawing courtesy of Cannon Design

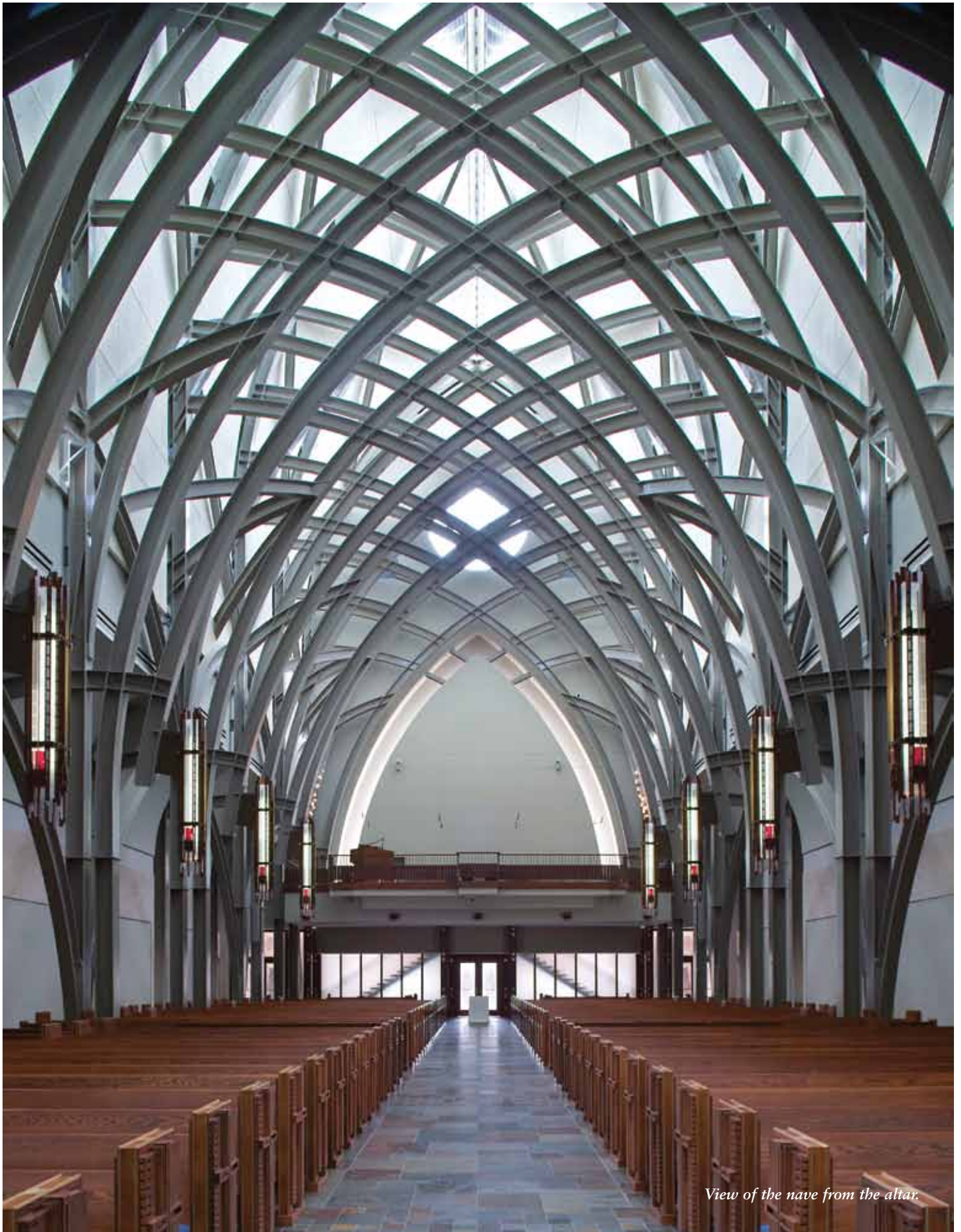


Photo: Creative Sources

View of the nave from the altar.



Detail of steel structure, vaulting, and lighting as seen in the side aisles.

Photo: Creative Sources

at the hub of the major roadways and pedestrian paths uniting the residential and university communities. The plaza's oval shape, with all major roadways serving the town radiating from it, reinforces the focal quality of the oratory and the underlying centrality of faith in the community's founding.

The traditional notion of designing a town around a religious structure is not often seen today. For inspiration, we looked at historical precedents of town planning where faith is the center of community life. Monaghan had a specific image in mind for the development, whether seen from eye-level or from the air. The notion of "roofscapes and landscapes," a touchstone phrase of the project, inspires its balance of built forms and natural landscapes. Ave Maria is based on New Urbanism ideas and on the concept of a community where people interact on a regular basis and where the use of motor vehicles is secondary to walking. Fulfilling the desire for a walkable community, pedestrian paths woven into the fabric of the master plan allow residents and students to walk from the town to the oratory, the university, and housing.

Physical integration is expressed at Ave Maria as "town and gown," meaning here an environment placing religious, institutional, and commercial/retail entertainment venues within the town's core, each entity benefiting from the close presence of the other.


Ave Maria is bordered by wetlands and beautiful natural landscapes; sensitivity to and stewardship of the natural environment are key to the life of the community. Maintenance of the wetlands is part of the community's charter. Governance of the community, including police, fire, emergency medical services, and maintenance of the infrastructure, is handled by Collier County. Using guidelines and zoning documents created by Cannon Design, the county also reviewed and monitored the project. Governance of the university is separate from the town.

DESIGN OF THE ORATORY

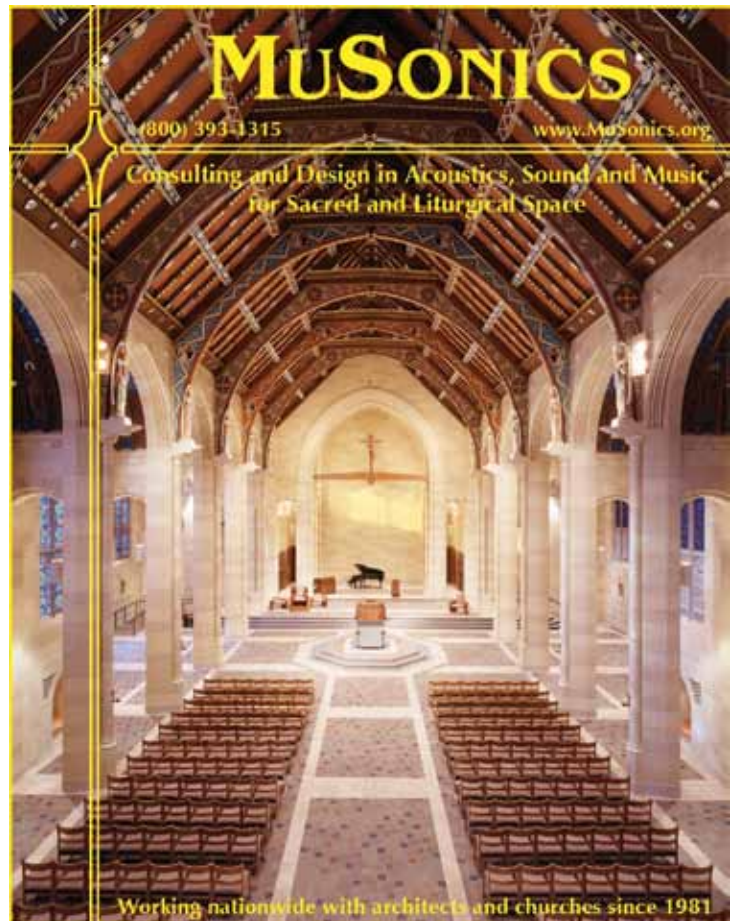
The focal point and landmark structure of the town and university, the oratory is a visual proclamation of Monaghan's values and beliefs. When one first sees the profile of the 120-foot-tall structure on the horizon, images and thoughts of traditional "cathedrals" come to mind. As one moves closer to the oratory, the contemporary structure of glass, steel, and stone is revealed in greater detail.

The oratory's architecture creates a spatial experience that intimates mystery through the use of both natural and artificial light. The lobby's low ceiling intensifies one's perception of the 100-foot height of the nave, which is revealed and dramatically seems to expand upward as you enter the nave proper. The light penetrating the lattice of steel above increases the sense of mystery. As the sun passes, the play of light through the lattice structure creates an awareness of movement and life and of one's deep-rooted connection to the passing of time and season.

All the interior elements are custom designed. Multi-planar linear compositions form light fixtures, handrails, confessionals, Stations of the Cross, and the light screens lining the nave's side aisles. Acoustic panels rise up with the upper nave volume to diffuse and reflect sound, creating a careful balance between reverberation time and the variability of spoken words and music.

Ave Maria's architecture, planning, and strong vision together define the way people live and experience their community and faith. This creation of a new university and town on a green-field site is an opportunity to influence people's lives in a profound way and is, therefore, an endeavor of responsibility and restraint as much as it is a creation of form. 

HARRY WARREN, AIA, IS AN INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED, AWARD-WINNING ARCHITECT WHOSE WORK HAS BEEN PUBLISHED IN MORE THAN 25 BOOKS AND PROFESSIONAL JOURNALS WORLDWIDE. HE IS A DESIGN PRINCIPAL AT CANNON DESIGN.



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DevOut Of The Ordinary

BY JEREMY ERIC TENENBAUM, WITH DENISE SCOTT BROWN

THE CHAPEL SOARS, its steeple rising above layers of clerestory windows and striped masonry. The synagogue is low and brick, distinguished by a decorative arcade and a canted roof light rising from within. The chapel overlooks the central green of a prestigious preparatory school on Philadelphia's Main Line. The synagogue is situated along a Victorian road in a quiet Pennsylvania town, by a fork in the Susquehanna River. But these two buildings relate more than they may seem

to on the surface. Both are at the heart of their communities. Both are iconic, multicultural, and rich with subtle details. And both were designed by Philadelphia architects and planners Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates.

In 2004, the firm was approached by The Episcopal Academy to design a chapel for its new campus in Newtown Square. By coincidence, Robert Venturi, FAIA, VSBA principal and an academy alum, chose the school's chapel as the subject for his 1950

Master's thesis at Princeton. When VSBA was named architect, Venturi's Class of 1944 agreed to raise \$8.5 million to pay for the project. Another coincidence: at nearly the same time, the Congregation Beth El of Sunbury, Pennsylvania, approached VSBA to design a new synagogue. The \$2 million project was funded in large part through contributions by members of the congregation.

Before these two religious projects, VSBA had renovated St. Francis de Sales Church in West Philadelphia and St. Malachy in North Philadelphia, and had designed chapels at Lehigh Valley Hospital and Stuart Country Day School in Princeton, but had never built a church or a synagogue. Now here came two significant religious buildings to be designed in tandem. How would architects known for embracing the "messy vitality" of the everyday go about creating these houses of worship?

THE CHAPEL

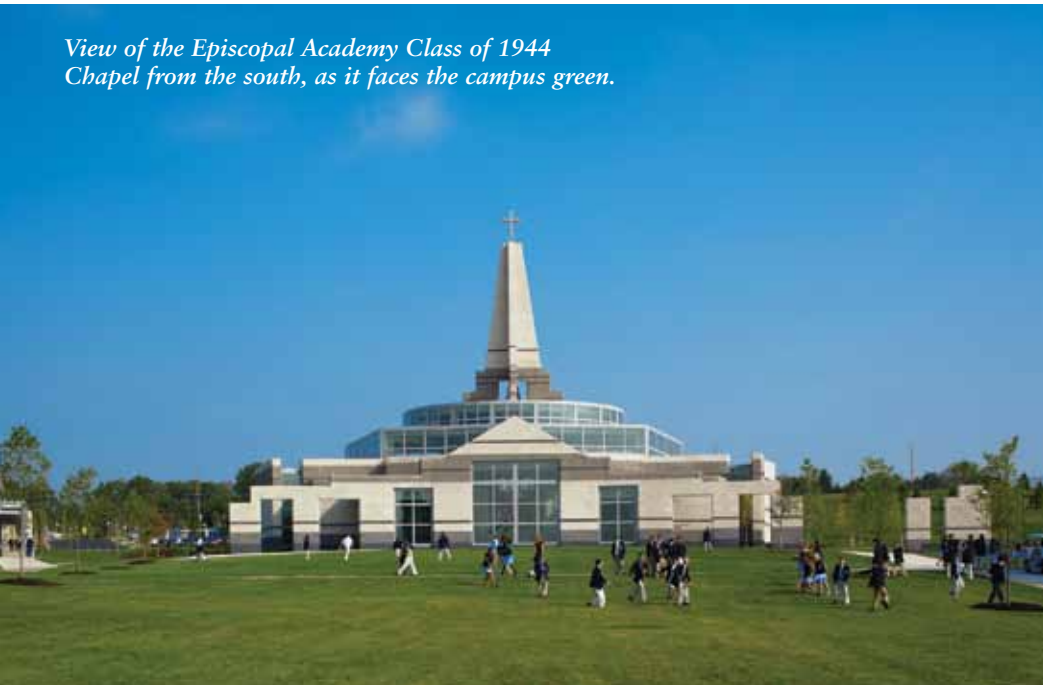
The Episcopal Academy was founded in Philadelphia in 1795, and expanded with campuses in the suburban towns of Merion and Devon. In 2001, 123 acres of woods, wetlands, and disused farmland were acquired in Newtown Square, with the aim of replacing two campuses with one. Around a central common, three historic buildings were renovated and seven new ones added.

At the head of the common stands the new chapel, the physical and symbolic heart of the school. Slightly elevated and visible across campus and from the highway, it's an iconic landmark topped by an abstracted spire. A detached arcade across the front, pointed in the middle and extending in arcs to either side, hints at Gothic symbolism; it serves to embrace the "school village" and beckon to the region beyond.

Chapel is an important part of the academy's daily life. Upper- and middle-school students attend chapel every other day, lower-school students every six days. The service celebrates the school's Episcopalian heritage yet welcomes students of all faiths. The building is both a religious facility and a social nexus, a place where students and faculty come for grand occasions and daily prayer, celebration, and mourning; it's a spiritual home meant to feel communal, comfortable, and personal.

In translating these aims into design, VSBA took its cues from the client. A preference for worshipers to face each other as well as the altar inspired the design's fan-shaped floor plan,

View of the Episcopal Academy Class of 1944 Chapel from the south, as it faces the campus green.

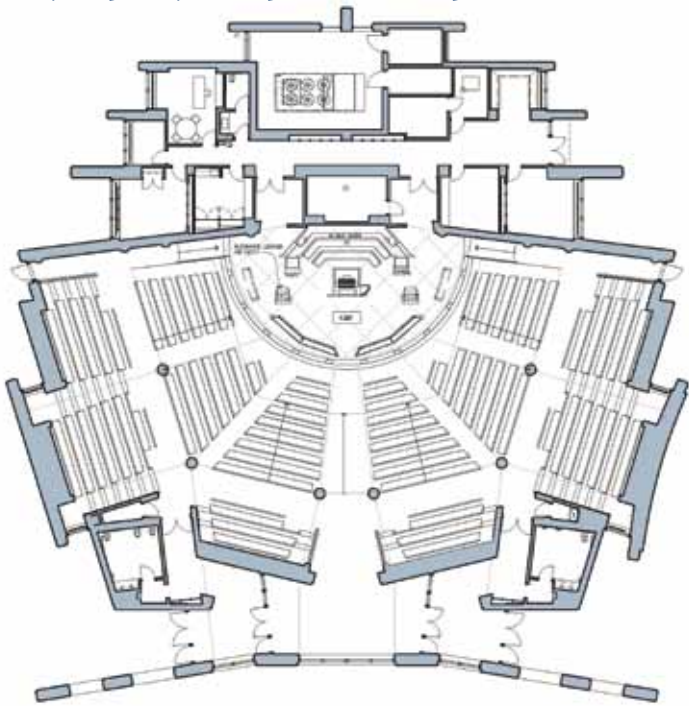


The chapel from the east, with the school's crest carved into the wall.



Photos: Matt Wargo for Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, Inc.

First floor plan of the chapel (north is at top).



The chapel arrangement draws congregants around the altar.



Photo: Matt Wargo for Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, Inc.

which sets the congregation around the altar and allows a greater sense of inclusion and community than a traditional basilica church plan.

The interior depends greatly for its effect on the control of light. Rays descend from clerestory windows and slip in between layered masonry walls. Venturi explains that "light enters through spaces between walls rather than through windows that are holes in walls." This creates a gentle, indirect aura.

Early in the design, the east wall behind the altar lacked windows. Venturi worried that worshipers at morning prayer could face uncomfortable, distracting sunlight. The client, however, felt strongly that the chapel needed many windows to give a sense of soaring, suffusive light. After much discussion, the windows were included, but placed high above the altar and fitted with movable blinds to minimize glare and allow flexibility.

Another challenge was the roof. The client initially wanted a sloping roof like the one at their Merion campus chapel. VSBA instead recommended ascending flat roofs with clerestory windows between them. Given the plan shape, they felt this would conjure a better sense of soaring, while respecting limits of budget and zoning. This time the design stayed as the architect envisioned and the desired effect was achieved.

An unexpected bonus: structural beams fanning across the ceiling subtly hint at Gothic church rafters and create their own aura.

Inga Saffron, architecture critic for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, wrote: "The little chapel sits proudly at the crest of the school green...Like the famous library rotunda at Jefferson's University of Virginia...the chapel is the physical and symbolic heart of the campus. Every detail of its placement and composition is intended to communicate the value Episcopal places on students' spiritual development."

The chapel is a 15,000-square-foot building containing a 900-seat sanctuary, the chaplain's office, the vestry room, and support spaces. The stunning chapel organ behind the altar was constructed over a period of four years by R. J. Brunner & Co. of Silver Spring, Pennsylvania. The chapel design received the Pennsylvania Council Society of American Registered Architects' 2009 Design Award of Honor.

THE SYNAGOGUE

The chapel helps to define a new context; the Congregation Beth El synagogue fits gently into its existing environs. Sunbury is a town of about 10,000 people along the Susquehanna River, a town of turreted Victorian houses, covered bridges, red brick civic buildings, and an historic courthouse beside the square. But it's also a post-industrial town on the edge of the Rust Belt, with an aging populace and distressed economy; its 19th-century gingerbreads are set among warehouses and empty storefronts.

For more than 80 years, Congregation Beth El met in a converted church, but time finally caught up with the aging structure. By 2004, the congregation was ready to create a new home. Early in the project, VSBA asked client representatives a lot of questions to help guide the programming and design. Some were broad:

"Looking ahead five to ten years, how might trends, demographics, and evolving thoughts impact worship, learning, and teaching, and other activities?"

"What are some activities that were inhibited and limited by past facilities?"

"What security concerns do you have?"

"What accessibility challenges might exist?"

Other questions were more focused:

"Share your preferences for building materials and building features, such as wood, stone, metal..."

The new synagogue (*plan and photos on page 21*) was built on a tree-lined side street close by a disused railway line. Its neighbors are private residences, small businesses, and civic buildings. The synagogue is an 8,500-square-foot, one-story red brick structure that aligns with the street and fills most of the site. Responding to the composition and scale of the neighborhood, it is squarish in form, with a flat roof and relatively modest façades. It might suggest a supermarket as much as a synagogue, except for two intriguing elements: an arcade and a slanted roof element above the sanctuary.

As at the chapel, an arcade layer extends across the front of the building. Made of limestone and Jerusalem stone, its profile lends a hint of Byzantine symbolism, while the central circular ornament harks back to the domes that have often in the recent past been a part of American synagogue design. The arcade is an extension of the building and is also a semi-independent layer; the rhythm of red and white bricks along the façade opens up into pillars through which you pass to the entry. The many points of entry connote plurality and welcome. (An early design carried windows across the entire building front, but concerns for safety and a desire to balance community and privacy prompted a shift to brick.)

Appearing above and through the arcade, a large, lean-to roof marks the bimah within and provides clerestory lighting. By day, the elevated roof slope is a dramatic yet half-hidden gesture; at night, the glowing lantern communicates the synagogue's civic importance. At the heart of the building is the sanctuary, a lofty, light-filled, double-height space serving ceremonial, sacred, and civic functions; an open courtyard is visible beyond it. The sanctuary, the most sacred area in the synagogue, is defined by its loftiness, lighting, and its relation to the ark and court, a space that, during Succoth, has high ceremonial purposes. The building also houses a large social hall, classrooms, a library, and a kitchen.

The synagogue's communal and social spaces are wide and relatively low. But the entry area, while serving for circulation, is designed as a *civic* place, an internal main street defined by its diagonal wall and its view to the courtyard. In a way, the building's plan is introverted: the interior street, the courtyard, and the sanctuary are the foci of the building's openness.

One key goal was to accommodate a variety of uses and group sizes throughout the building. The synagogue hosts both formal and casual events; the sanctuary had to welcome large crowds on high holy days while serving Hebrew School functions one day and a *bat mitzvah* the next. Every space had to feel lively both with small groups and with

full assemblies. The solution came through designing for flexibility and adaptability. All spaces were planned to serve multiple functions. The wall separating the sanctuary and the social hall opens to accommodate large crowds. Furnishings are moveable; circulation spaces are generously sized. As with the exterior, materials and finishes are modest but handsome and durable.

VSBA, known for our celebration of symbols and signage, had to exert some self-control (as at the chapel). Appropriate to the design of a synagogue, Congregation Beth El almost entirely lacks iconographic expression, with two important exceptions: the arcade evokes historical associations, and passages from the torah are inscribed in Hebrew and English across surfaces in the sanctuary. **FSF**

JEREMY ERIC TENENBAUM IS MARKETING COORDINATOR FOR VENTURI, SCOTT BROWN AND ASSOCIATES, INC. DENISE SCOTT BROWN IS ONE OF THE FIRM'S FOUNDING PRINCIPALS. SINCE 1958, VSBA HAS HELPED SHAPE THE COURSE OF CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING. THE FIRM'S WORK HAS BEEN RECOGNIZED WITH MORE THAN 140 MAJOR DESIGN AWARDS, INCLUDING NINE AIA NATIONAL HONOR AWARDS AND THE AIA'S HIGHEST CORPORATE HONOR, THE ARCHITECTURAL FIRM AWARD, FOR "HAVING SO PROFOUNDLY INFLUENCED THE DIRECTION OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE."

BOB AND DENISE TALK ABOUT RELIGION, DESIGN, AND RELIGIOUS DESIGN

BOB: I had this funny background: Every weekday I went to the Episcopal service at the Episcopal Academy and on Sunday I went to the Quaker Friends meetings, and I liked that kind of combination.

DENISE: I grew up in South Africa in a Jewish family. But I'm really part-way-out, part-way-in, and Bob and I are both what I call "marginal figures." If you look at the story of many artists and leaders, they are in fact marginal to their communities and marginal to other communities, too, and they are agents for change. Only much later in my life did I realize that's an honorable role.

BOB: I was always interested in architecture, and an awful lot of the significant architectural tradition was the architecture of churches. That was the kind of architecture that could involve symbolism. The idea of mosaics, and in the Byzantine era the stained glass windows, in the Gothic era the murals, in the Renaissance era, all of these; what I love very much is the employment of these symbols. We look at these mosaics, we look at these stained glass windows, we look at these murals as "art," but they really weren't designed as "art." The people who designed them weren't "artists," they were people who were designing signage, who were using the appropriate technology for giving out information. And so when you see stained glass and those other things, you should look at it as essentially communicative architecture.

BOB: When I go to Geneva, I enjoy going to what I call my "Quaker meeting" in a French Gothic cathedral. And I go there and I love sitting there for an hour and have a kind of religious experience.

DENISE: You look at the mathematical combinations, and it's not something people associate with you. But you seem to like the mathematics of it as a spiritual experience. All the rest of the time you're talking about symbolism, and here you're talking about its mathematical beauty.

DENISE: As an urbanist, I think about not only how light affects emotion, and how *soaring* goes with the individual, but how *meeting* goes with the group. The Episcopal Academy wanted both *soaring* and *meeting* – and we designed both for the Congregation Beth El as well. I've studied the social sciences and tried to understand the relation between individual and community, in an institution and in a religious setting. In the chapel, part of the community comes towards the altar, helped by the light, and the circular quality means that everyone can see each other



Photo: Matt Wargo for Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, Inc.

there as they would in the synagogue *and* look toward the altar *and* look past up the altar up to the light. In the synagogue, the notion of community means that the arrangement has something to do with the Quaker meeting. We've managed to do a meld of those but we've also expressed these themes differently. And all of these are interpretations based on Judaism and Christianity.

DENISE: In the work that we've done for the Episcopal chapel and for other churches, the people who have been involved have been as ecumenical as we, as thrilled to have a Jewish person involved and doing the work. At the Episcopal chapel in particular, parents were very concerned about *spirituality* and though it's an *Episcopal* chapel, they also wanted everyone to feel welcome. That's a mixed message, which ties very well with our notions of complexity.

DENISE: *Sacralizing* the everyday is saying: don't think of the everyday as not having elements of God, or of not being God-worthy. That's very much a Japanese sentiment, that whatever you design you make sacred in a way, even when you design its imperfections carefully. It's to say: our everyday is not to be disrespected, and it has sacred connotations.



The synagogue floor plan places the sanctuary next to a courtyard.



North elevation of the Congregation Beth El Synagogue.



The sanctuary interior is flooded with natural light.

Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, Inc.

Photos: Matt Wargo for Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, Inc.

2010 for Call Entries

The Jury Panel

Chair / Trey Trahan,
Trahan Architects,
Baton Rouge, LA

Architect / Roberto Chiotti,
Larkin Architect Ltd.,
Toronto, ON

Liturgical Consultant /
Mark Joseph Costello,
Liturgical Consulting

and Design
Chicago, IL

Clergy /
The Reverend Canon Cindy
Evans Voorhees
Voorhees Design, Inc.
Huntington Beach, CA

Artist / Chas Fagan,
Chas Fagan Fine Art
Charlotte, NC

Faith & Form/ IFRAA International Awards Program for Religious Art & Architecture

Award Categories

Religious Architecture

New Facilities • Renovation • Restoration
Unbuilt Work (new for 2010!)

Sacred Landscape

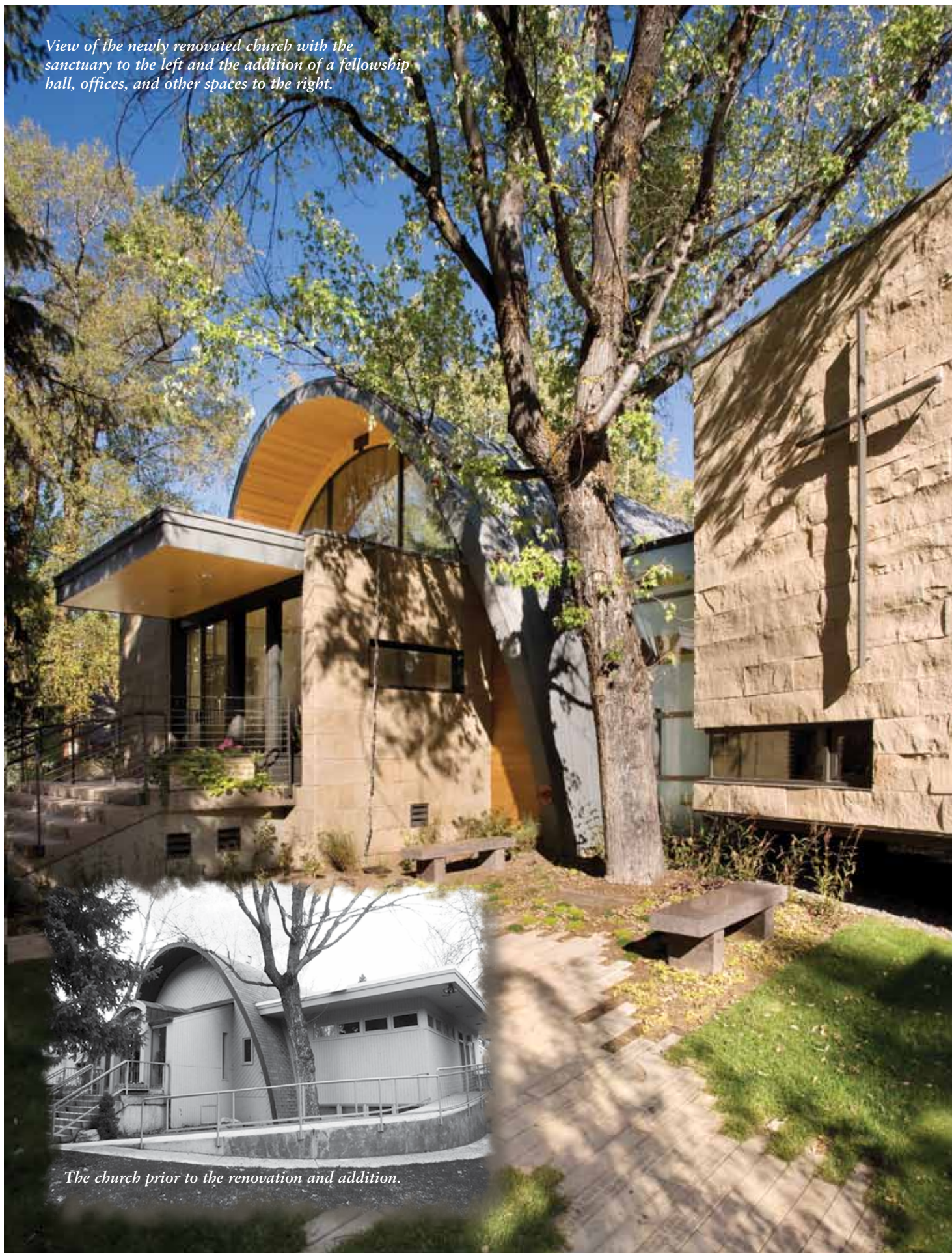
Liturgical/Interior Design

Religious Arts

Visual Arts • Liturgical Furnishings • Ceremonial Objects

Awards website at faithandformawards.com
Submission deadline is June 18, 2010!

View of the newly renovated church with the sanctuary to the left and the addition of a fellowship hall, offices, and other spaces to the right.



The church prior to the renovation and addition.

Inset Photo: courtesy of Studio B Architects / Feature Photo: Kaul J. Garcia

Vaulted Rebirth

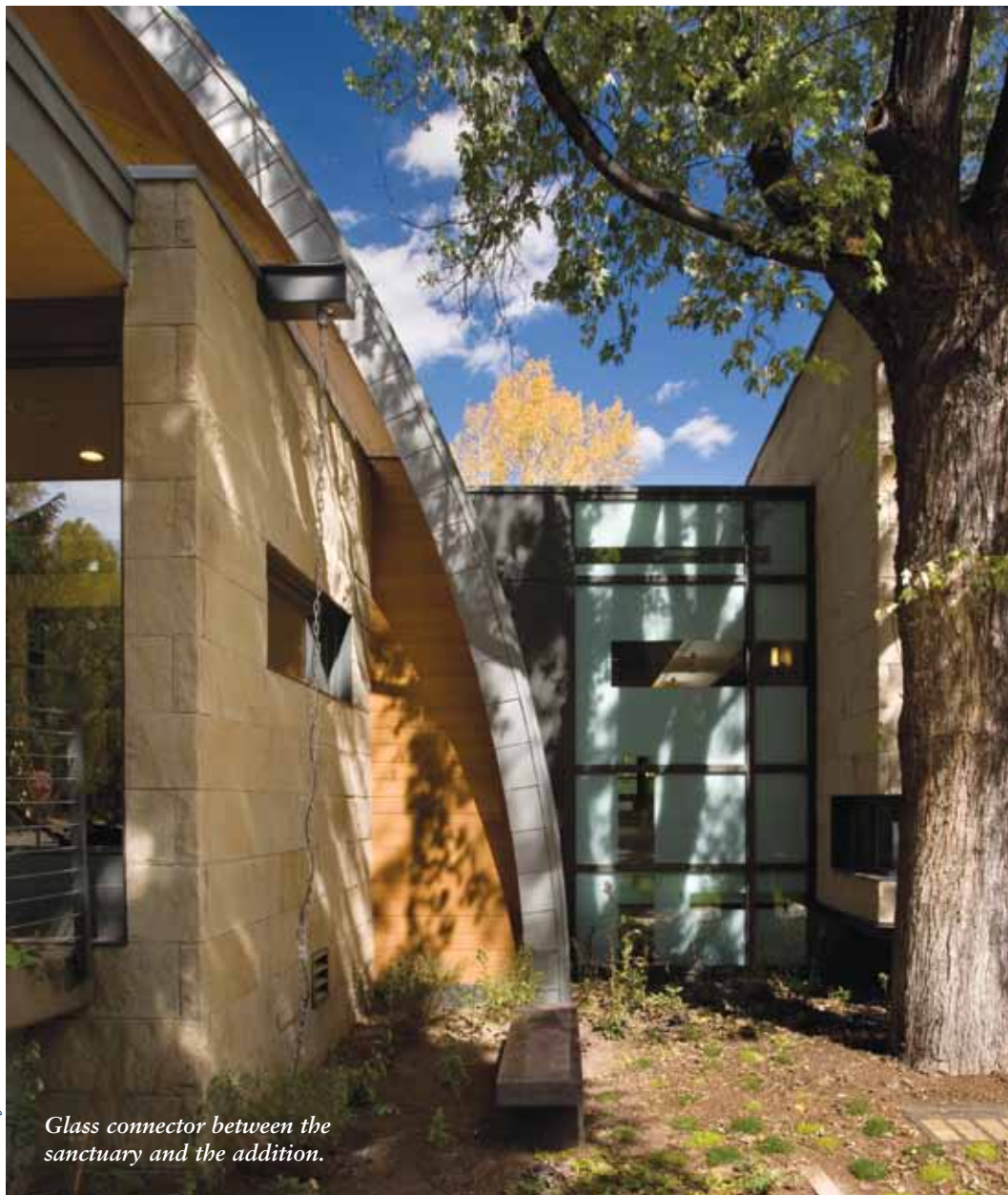
BY GILBERT SANCHEZ, AIA,
AND MICHAEL PICHE, AIA

THE CONGREGATION OF ASPEN'S CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH GATHERED LAST JUNE, for the first time in over a year, in their newly renovated sanctuary. "This church is meant to be a kind of lighthouse for the Lord," the church's rector, Reverend Bruce McNab, told the assembled parishioners seated in the glow of a bright Rocky Mountain Sunday morning. Light and faith were recurring themes in Father Bruce's message that special day. And light and faith are the essential theme of the Christ Church renovation and expansion.

Aspen, Colorado, is unique among historic mining towns for its post-World War II tradition of modern design. The influence of Bauhaus master Herbert Bayer and of local cultural institutions like the Aspen International Design Conference created the context for the original Christ Episcopal Church built in 1962. Designed by Chicago architect Francis Stanton, the building's distinct barrel-vaulted form established a distinctive modern identity for the church and became a recognized landmark in the mostly Victorian-style neighborhood.

In 2007 the church membership found itself with a 45-year-old structure that had undergone numerous alterations and additions, was inefficient and in poor condition, posed several life-safety hazards, and did not provide adequate accessibility. The outdated building also simply was not big enough and did not satisfactorily support the church's evolved mission and expanded activities. It was time to do something, and the congregation considered options that included relocating to a new site, rebuilding on the current site, or renovating the existing facility. The final decision to renovate the original sanctuary and to expand on site was driven by some key objectives: to maintain the historic church identity, to strengthen the church's community and neighborhood ties, and to complete the project within the available budget.

Aspen's strict development requirements posed several challenges for the Christ Church project. The city's Planning and Zoning process required input from the now densely populated surrounding residential neighborhood. Preservation guidelines that protect buildings of the recent past were to be observed. The city forester required that mature trees and vegetation that had grown on the site over the last 45



Glass connector between the sanctuary and the addition.

years be protected and maintained.

The original barrel-vaulted sanctuary consisted of dark-stained arched glu-laminated wood beams, exposed wood decking, and limited natural light that entered through the north-facing altar stained glass window and a yellowed plastic ridge skylight. The effect was heavy, imposing, dark, and dreary.

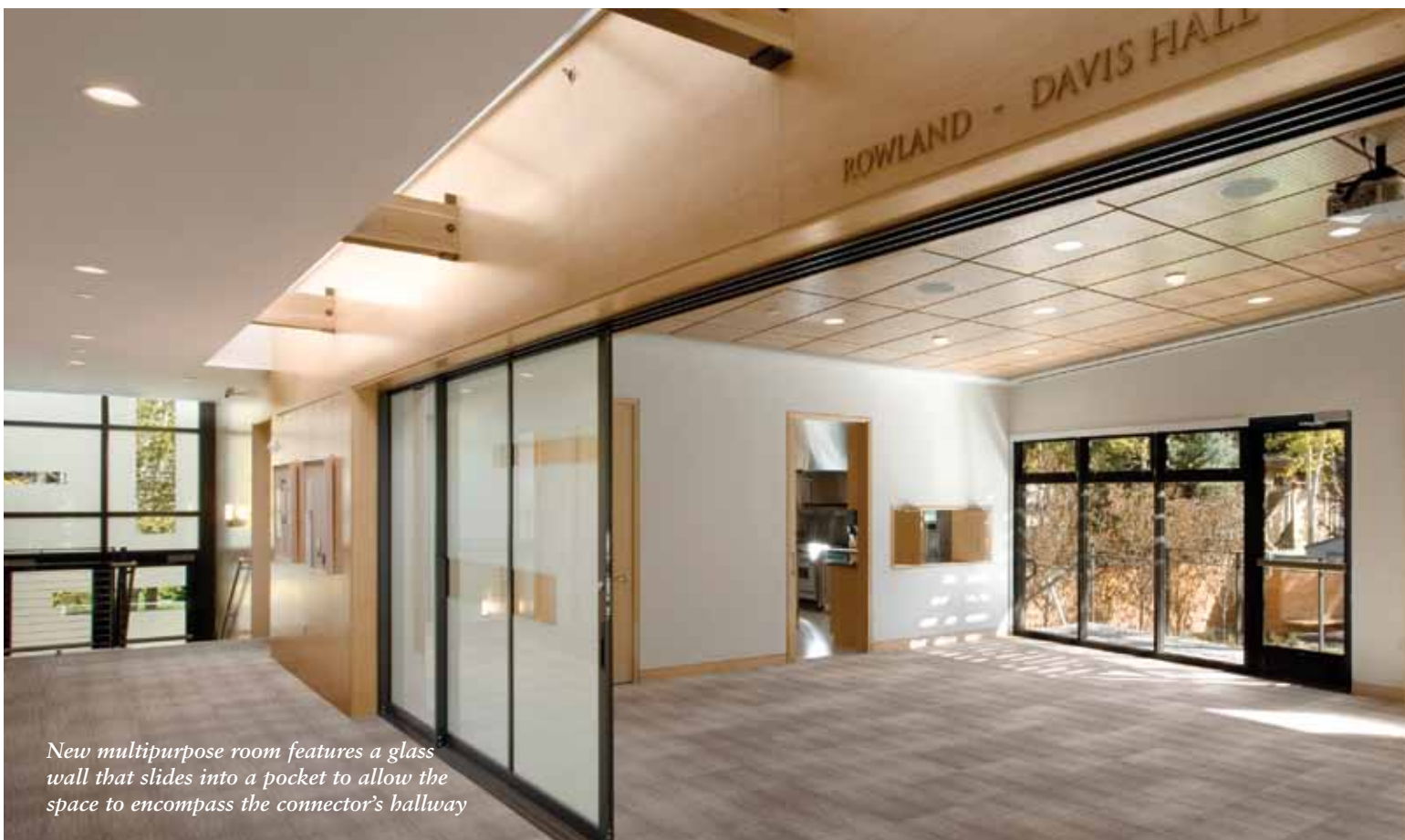
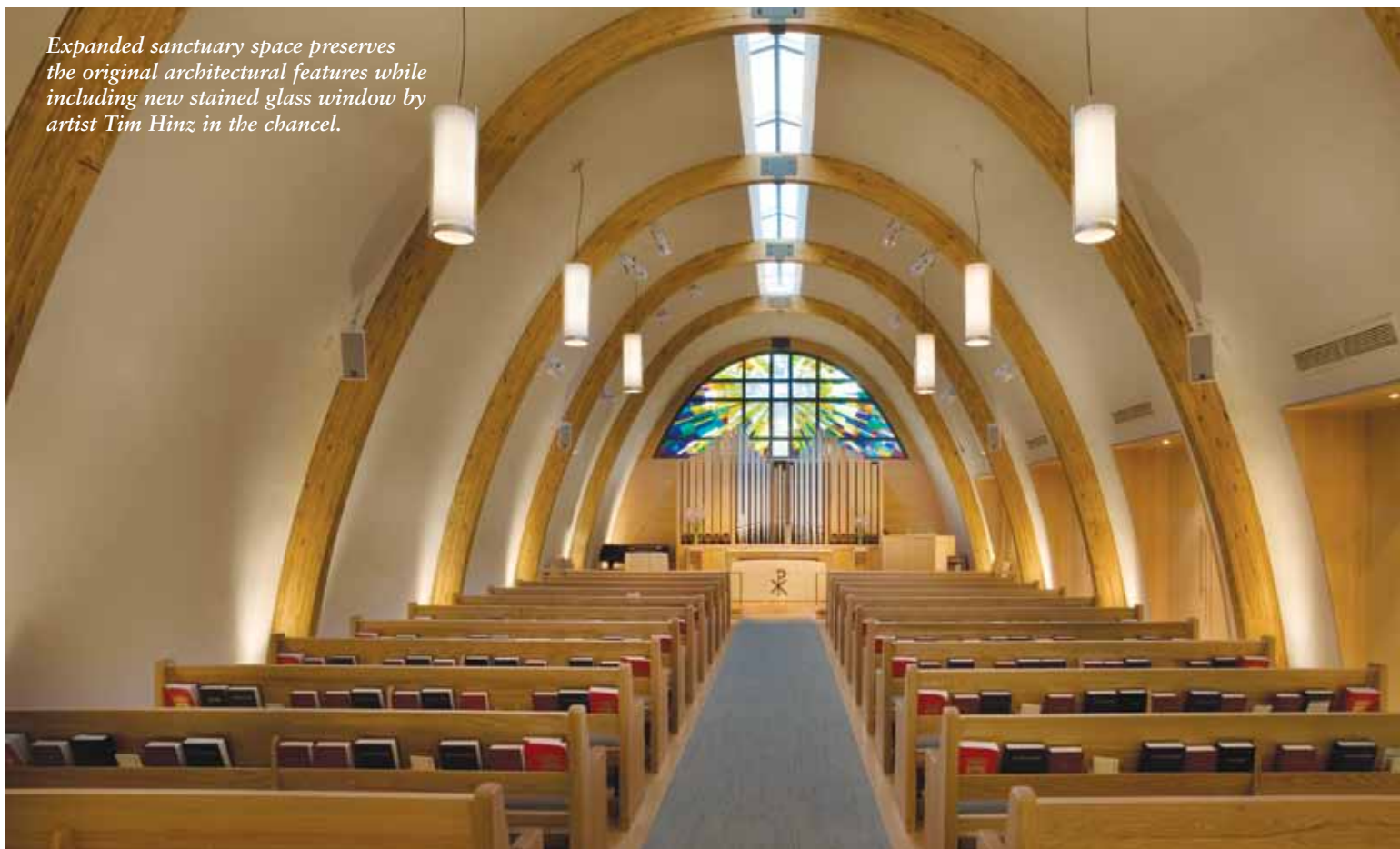
The renovation extends the barrel vault 12 feet to the north to accommodate an expanded chancel, a new pipe organ, and additional seating in the nave. In compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation, this extension is subtly expressed in the pattern of new zinc roofing panels that sheath the exterior. A glass wall separates a new front entrance and entry lobby from the sanctuary, allowing for acoustical privacy and thermal comfort that did not previously exist. The original altar stained glass window is relocated from the north end of the

vault to a new opening in the south end, and it admits abundant filtered sunlight. The skylight is replaced with translucent, insulated glazing. A new plaster finish envelopes the sanctuary to reflect daylight and to improve the room acoustics for speech and music. Artist Tim Hinz's new altar stained glass window best exemplifies the theme of light and faith in the renovated facility. Father Bruce says, "The new altar window has been the most spectacular aesthetic element in the new building. We articulated a new Mission Statement as a part of this project, 'Let your light shine,' and that theme builds on the new window as its icon."

The new addition responds to the modern roots of the original church structure. It differs in form and scale to defer to the historic building and to transition to neighboring residential structures. The existing rhythmic context of the neighborhood created by

text continues on page 26

Expanded sanctuary space preserves the original architectural features while including new stained glass window by artist Tim Hinz in the chancel.



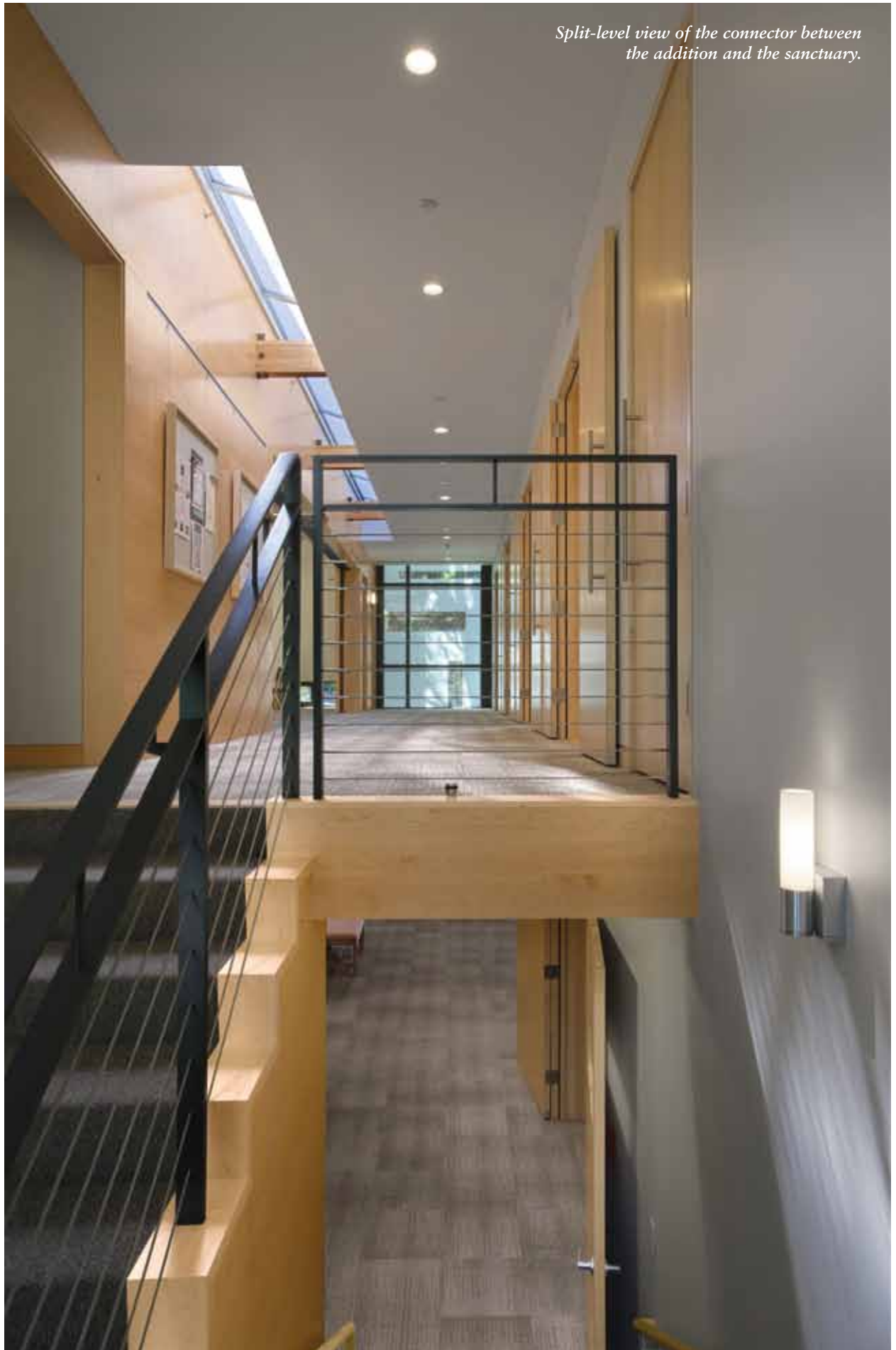
New multipurpose room features a glass wall that slides into a pocket to allow the space to encompass the connector's hallway



Photo: Raul J. Garcia

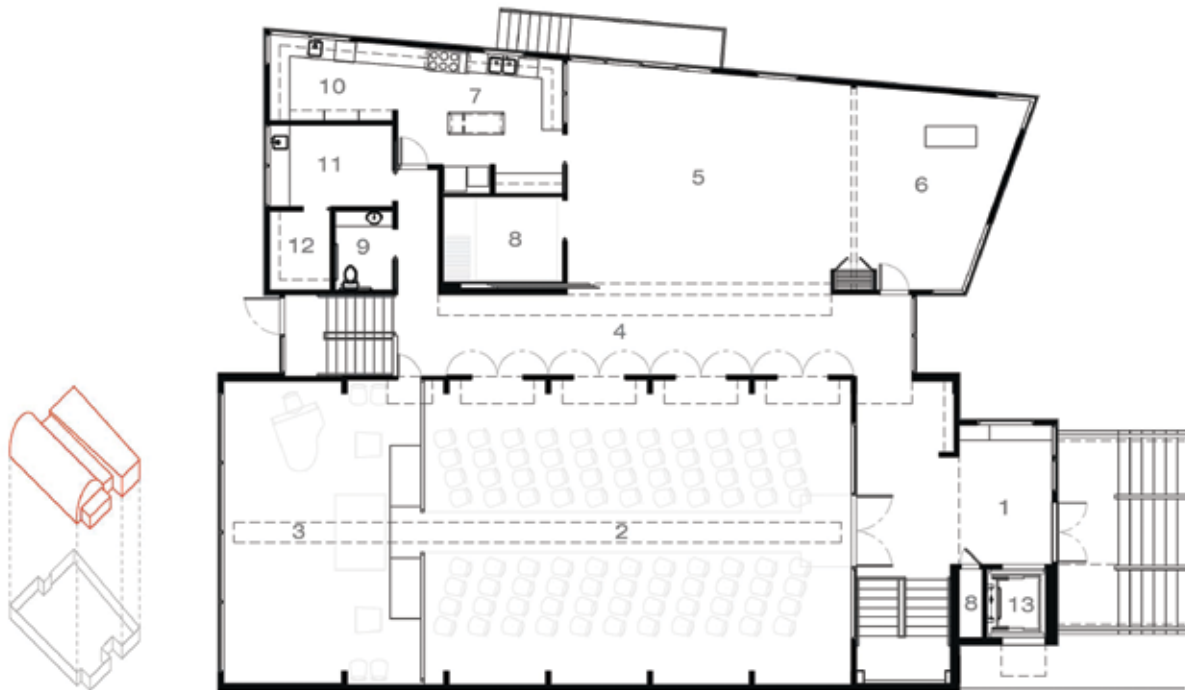


Photo: Raul J. Garcia



Split-level view of the connector between the addition and the sanctuary.

Photo: Raul J. Garcia



main level plan

1_vestibule 2_nave 3_chancel 4_passage / overflow seating 5_hospitality hall 6_chapel 7_kitchen
8_storage 9_ADA bathroom 10_flower room 11_sacristy 12_sacristy closet 13_elevator



lower level plan

1_undercroft 2_mechanical 3_storage 4_administrative office 5_rector's office 6_copy room 7_restrooms
8_music room 9_classroom 10_reception 11_passage 12_library 13_elevator 14_child care 15_kitchenette


long narrow lots is reinforced by separating the building into two distinct volumes: the original barrel and the new expansion wedge. These two masses are joined together by a light glass connector that doubles as the building's main circulation spine. The addition is clad in split-faced Utah sandstone.

Interior spaces are designed to be flexible, multipurpose, and reconfigurable. This adaptability allows for a variety of space configurations and user activities. For example, the hospitality hall, chapel, and central corridor may be joined by opening glazed and acoustical operable partitions. The addition provides space for a commercial kitchen, a new sacristy, a music room, expanded toilet facilities,

storage, and administrative offices. Windows provide views of the surrounding gardens and mountain landscape, and skylights wash the interior with plenty of natural light.

The exterior spaces around the building are intended to fulfill important programmatic needs as well. Landscaping designs created by Elements, Inc. and Edward Stone provide a variety of active and quiet zones. The side-yard garden provides outdoor space for the adjacent hospitality hall activities, and memorial gardens and paved paths have places for remembrance and contemplation.

The renovated and expanded Christ Episcopal Church is effective in communicating the church's sense of mission among its

congregation and to the larger Aspen community. Community use for meetings, youth groups, and the church's popular "Music in the West End" concert series has seen significant increases. A veteran of three previous church building projects, Father Bruce reports, "The people of our congregation and our community have had a more positive affirmative response to this project than to any of the others I have been a part of. It has generated positive energy, enthusiasm, gratitude, and has made the congregation very happy." 

GILBERT SANCHEZ, AIA, IS PRINCIPAL OF, AND MICHAEL PICHÉ, AIA, A PROJECT ARCHITECT AT STUDIO B ARCHITECTS IN ASPEN, COLORADO.

ARCHITECT

Studio B Architects
(Gilbert Sanchez, AIA, principal; Scott Lindenau, AIA, Principal; Michael Piché, AIA, project architect)

CONTRACTOR

William H. Baker Construction

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER

Romeo Structural Engineering

MECHANICAL ENGINEER

Beaudin Ganze Consulting Engineers, Inc.

A/V CONSULTANT

D L Adams Associates

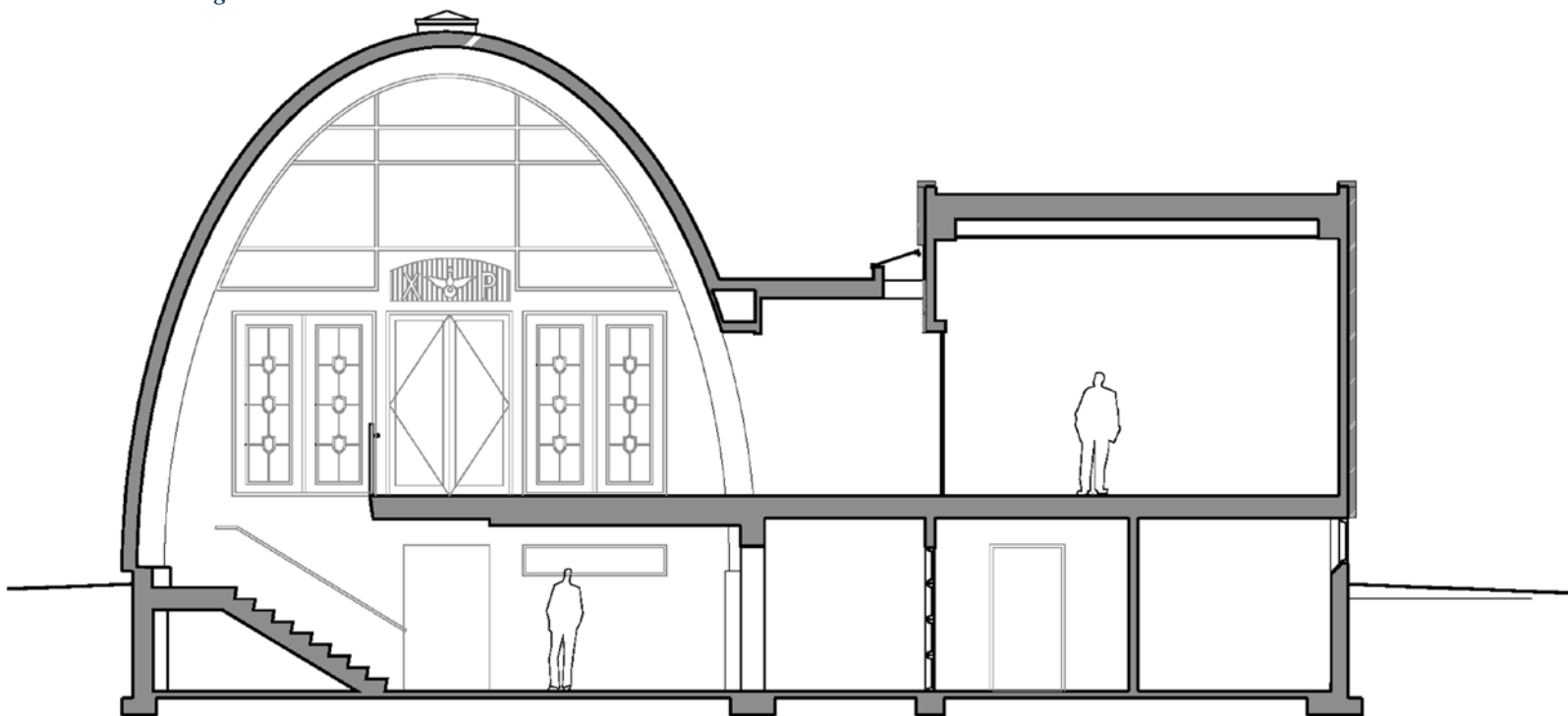
LANDSCAPE DESIGNER

Elements, Inc. & Edward Stone

PHOTOGRAPHER

Raul J. Garcia

Section cut through the narthex.



NOTES & COMMENTS

MANN AND CROSBIE HONORED BY IFRAA

The Reverend W. Joseph Mann, former President of Faith & Form, and Michael J. Crosbie, AIA, Editor-in-Chief of the journal, have each been honored with an award bestowed by the Interfaith Forum on Religion, Art, and Architecture (a knowledge community of the American Institute of Architects).



Mann (photo left) is the recipient of IFRAA's Elbert M. Conover Memorial Award, established in 1953 by the Church Architecture Guild of America. Conover spent 11 years in the ministry and was appointed director of the Bureau of Architecture of the Methodist Church in 1924. He became the first director of the Interdenominational Bureau of Architecture, later titled the Bureau of Church Building and Architecture, National Council of the Churches of Christ of the United States of America. This award is given to non-architects in recognition of their contributions to religious architecture.

Mann became involved with IFRAA in the mid-1980s when he helped coordinate an IFRAA event with Duke Divinity School where he was Director of Continuing Education. In 1990 he became an IFRAA board member and was the regional Director for Southeast (1990–95). He also served as IFRAA Treasurer, Secretary, Vice Chair, and Chair. Until

last year Mann was President of the Faith & Form Board of Directors. Mann served as Director of Continuing Education at Duke Divinity School (1984–1989), Assistant Director (1989) and (1996), and Director of Church Division at The Duke Endowment (1989–2010). He is currently on the faculty of Duke, where he teaches a course on leadership in small membership churches, and another on philanthropy and the church. Mann is Executive Director for Leadership Education at Duke Divinity School, coordinating projects related to Duke's outreach to the United Methodist annual conferences in North Carolina.

Crosbie is the recipient of the Edward S. Frey Memorial Award, established in 1981 by IFRAA after IFRAA became a part of the AIA. The Rev. Dr. Frey dedicated his life to his work as the Executive Director of the Commission on Church Architecture for the Lutheran Church of America. In that role he inspired architects to foster spiritual values in design. Frey was instrumental in fostering the three organizations that eventually melded together to form IFRAA. This award is given to an architect to recognize his or her contributions to religious architecture and support of the allied arts.

*"I like the silent church before the service begins,
better than any preaching."*

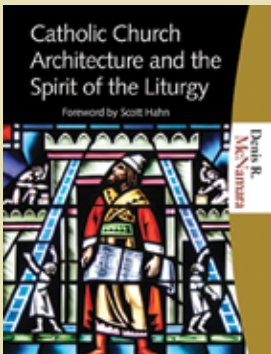
Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

Crosbie was named Assistant Editor of *Faith & Form* in 1999, and became Editor-in-Chief of the award-winning journal in 2001. Crosbie is the author of three books on contemporary religious architecture, published by Images Publishing Group: *Architecture for the Gods* (1999), *Architecture for the Gods, Book II* (2003), and *Houses of God* (2006). Crosbie lectures around the country and abroad on religious art and architecture. He has lectured at the Yale Institute for Sacred Music, where he has also served as a guest design critic. In 2007 Crosbie was named Chair of the Department of Architecture at the University of Hartford.

At press time, IFRAA planned to bestow the awards to Mann and Crosbie at its annual awards presentation at the AIA Convention in Miami, Florida, on June 9.

BOOK REVIEW

Catholic Church Architecture and the Spirit of the Liturgy, Denis R. McNamara, (Hillendbrand Books), \$50. Out of a myriad



of writings on Catholic church architecture over the last half-century, this sensible and scholarly treatise has emerged to offer a firm foundation of facts and a common language

for further discussion. The author has no strong allegiance to the professional prejudices of architects, clergy, or artists, but rather, as an architectural historian and a worshiper he respects the role of each discipline in its interdependent efforts to weave something substantial and sacred out of the details of structure and symbolism, placement and proportion, and--most important--liturgy and beauty. The author's personal preference for traditional building styles is honestly acknowledged as an informed appreciation of the rich history of Catholic architecture, and is tempered by the inclusion of some contemporary design examples (although photo selection does rely heavily on church-

es of Western Europe and the author's own region of America). This ambitious and generously illustrated volume could serve as a textbook in seminaries and in the Catholic colleges of art and architecture where more courses or even workshops on the subject are sorely needed. Until then, it will be a ready reference or useful remedial reading for any priest, designer, or parishioner who takes on a church building or renovation project, providing a vocabulary and a historic basis on which to plan or debate worship spaces for the future.

Annie Dixon

The reviewer has worked on dozens of Catholic church renovation and building projects in her role as project manager for Dixon Studio.

ARTS AWARD FOR 'SCRIBE'

Amanda Dillon from Chapelizod in Co. Dublin, Ireland, was announced as First Prize winner in the adult/third level category of the Boyne Valley Honey Book of Kells National Art Competition. Dillon was recog-

nized for her work, "Homage to an Unknown Scribe," for which she was awarded a limited edition facsimile of the Book of Kells.

According to Dillon, the painting was made as an act of gratitude to those unknown scribes and illuminators, of ages past, who

gave so much of their creativity to the written word and the illuminated, designed page. "We may not know their names or have their memoirs," explains Dillon, "but we do have the gift of their creativity to the world and generations of readers."

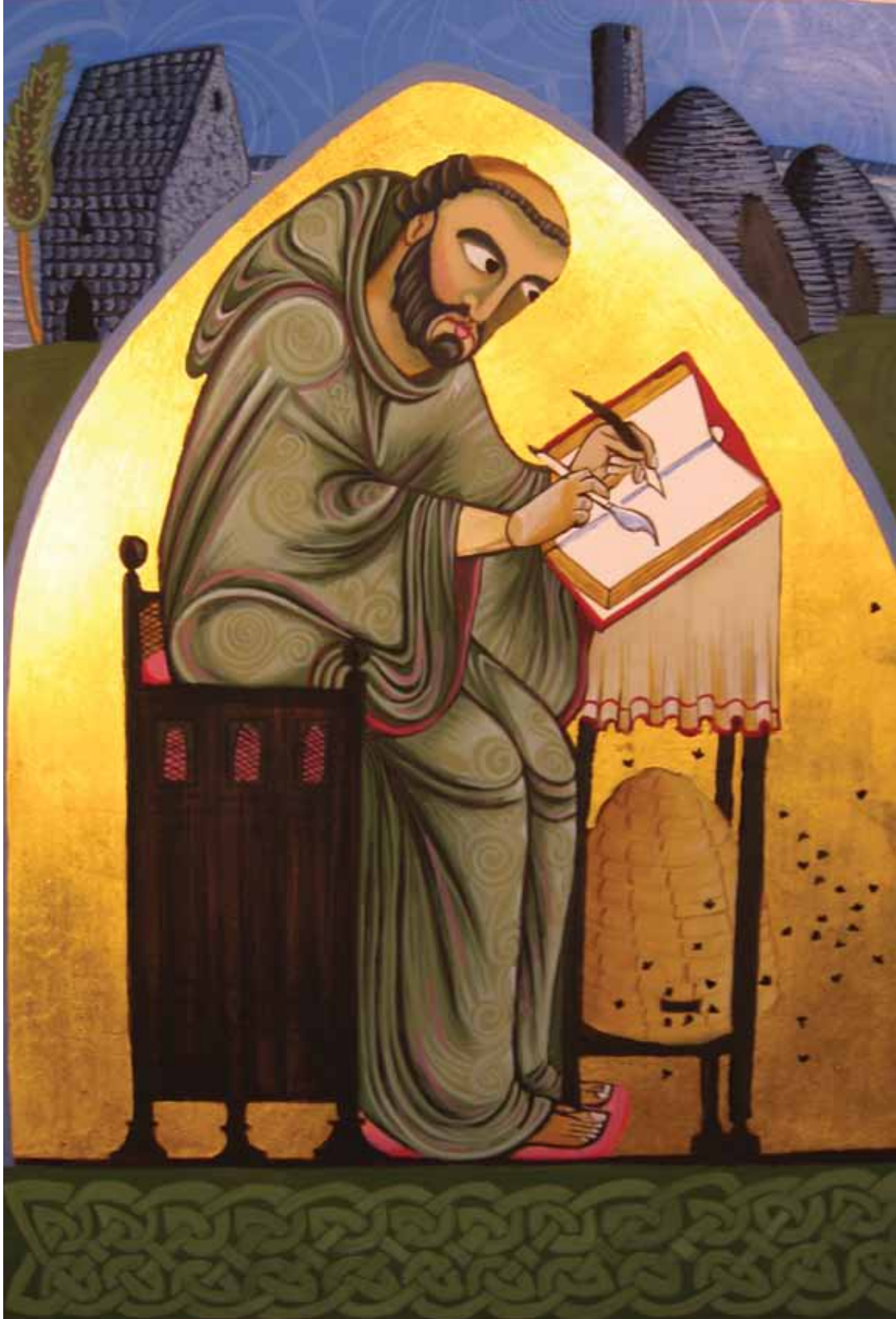
Dillon describes the symbolism and creation of the piece: "The monk is an illuminator and scribe carrying out his dual task with earnest dedication, concentration and great attention to detail. He is also a beekeeper - a wonderful distraction and link to the natural world, which, for this monk, is a numinous cosmos that swirls and spirals with patterns of energy, vitality and life.

"This piece is a conflation of various techniques, sources, inspirations and elements. I have used the materials of iconography, another artistic tradition that runs parallel to illuminated manuscripts; egg tempera, pigment and gold leaf. I have used some of the style such as distorted, incongruous perspective but have also broken some of the rules. Strictly speaking this is not an icon.

"An inspiration for this piece came from an article about a 20th-century mystic, John Bradburne. Seeking out a monastic / hermitic lifestyle that still served people, he spent the last ten years of his life living and working on a 'leprosy colony' in Zimbabwe. He was also a prolific poet and a beekeeper. Legend has it that he kept a beehive under his desk in his hut. I am intrigued by that and loved the image of a hive under a desk where great creativity is taking place.

"My 'model' comes from the Eadwine Psalter - a 12th-century monk and scribe. He faces right - a visual 'nod' to St Luke in the iconographic tradition. (St. Luke is the patron saint of artists, scribes and illuminators.) I like to imagine that Eadwine, who is named and a little known, was inspired by Celtic illuminated manuscripts.

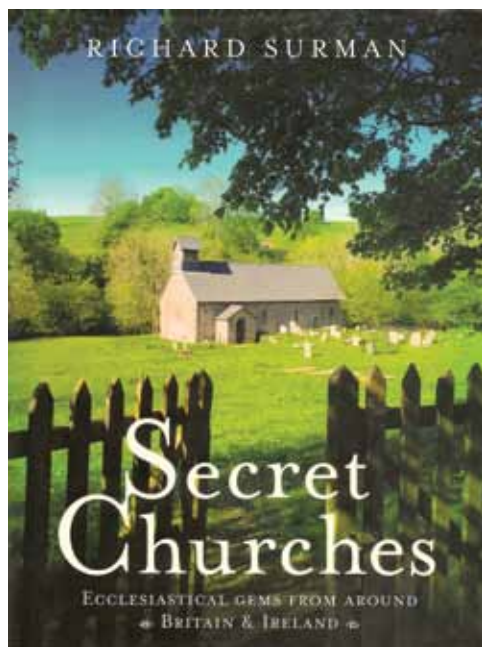
"St. Colmcille's house and the round tower may still be found in the ancient monastic precinct in Kells. The beehive huts are an allusion to the monastic community at Skellig, the Irish monastic tradition and the possibility that the Book of Kells may have been begun on Iona - another island monastery."



NOTES & COMMENTS

BOOK REVIEW

Secret Churches: Ecclesiastical Gems from Around Britain & Ireland, Richard Surman (Collins), \$24.95. In this beautifully illustrated guide to sanctuaries in solitary and out-of-the-way sanctuaries, author Richard Surman (a professional photographer and architecture aficionado) gives us a glimpse into a unique showcase of craftwork, and offers an intriguing view into Christianity through the centuries. Some of Surman's subjects are celebrated landmarks, while others are well hidden. But every church harbors its own stories and secrets, spanning centuries. From the sixth-century Irish monastery of Clonmacnoise in Offaly (*photo right*) to the 1960s Jean Cocteau murals at London's Notre Dame de France, Surman is an erudite tour guide. Other churches form part of a historic landscape, such as the remote Romney Marsh churches, or St. Cwyfan's, perched on its rocky islet on the coast of Anglesey. The book features more than 250 churches in Britain and Ireland, with color photographs of every church, maps showing their location, and an illustrated glossary.



The ruins at the monastery at Clonmacnoise, Ireland.

Photo: Michael J. Crosbie

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MONASTERY GREENEST LEED BUILDING

The U.S. Green Building Council has awarded the Benedictine Women of Madison's Holy Wisdom Monastery a Platinum rating, the highest level of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification available. The monastery earned 63 out of a possible 69 points under LEED-NC version 2.2, the most of any certified building in the U.S. to date.

Located in Middleton, Wisconsin, the monastery is a 30,000-square-foot, two-story structure with a detached, 4,000-square-foot remodeled maintenance building on 130 acres overlooking Lake Mendota. Partnering with Hoffman LLC, a Wisconsin-based planning, design, and construction management firm, the sisters spent two years exploring and defining their vision for the monastery.

Holy Wisdom Monastery offered an opportunity to explore what a 21st-century Benedictine monastery could be. With no prototype to follow, the project team was guided by the sisters' mission of weaving prayer, hospitality, justice, and care for the earth into a shared way of life as an ecumenical Benedictine community. While it was not their original intent to set a LEED record, the sisters were determined to build as sustainably as possible and to encourage others to do so by demonstrating that it could be done affordably.

"For us, sustainability is not a trend," says Sister Joanne Kollasch, "but a commitment to the earth – a 21st-century expression of 1,500 years of Benedictine tradition." Adds Sister Mary David Walgenbach, the monastery's prioress, "It's not the thing to do; it's the right thing to do." Their goal is to expand their photovoltaic system to ultimately provide 100 percent of the monastery's net energy require-



ment from an on-site renewable source. While the sisters had no previous experience with a building project, they have made bold moves before this. Examples include their ecumenical stance, the restoration of 95 acres of farmland to prairie, and the dredging of a glacial lake that had been filled with silt from previous farming practices.

The monastery is "right-sized," providing 50 percent less space than its obsolete predecessor, Benedict House, which was deconstructed responsibly: 99.75 percent of the 60,000-square-foot building was recycled or reused. The new facility provides prayer, concert, conference, dining, reading and administrative spaces.

The monastery has an anticipated 60 percent savings in energy cost and more than 40 percent savings in indoor water usage compared to a LEED baseline building. A geothermal heating and cooling system uses 39 closed-loop wells, each 300 feet deep. When the outdoor temperature is in the 60s to low

70s, the building controls system sends an email to the building occupants inviting them to open their windows, should they wish to adjust the temperature in their space. It is anticipated that the photovoltaic system on the assembly room (chapel) roof will generate 13 percent of the monastery's energy needs. Photovoltaic light fixtures illuminate the parking lot. The parking lot drains to areas of pervious concrete. Four rain barrels collect and store water for plant care, and there are two rain gardens. Five additional acres around the new building will be restored to prairie, and two vegetated roofs over the maintenance building and garage are planted with prairie forbs and grasses. Together, these measures reduce storm water run-off to 13 percent below predevelopment levels.

Holy Wisdom Monastery was completed at a cost of \$246 per square foot, a figure that contains all project-related costs—except for land—including the responsible deconstruction of Benedict House.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR: INSPIRING ATHEISTIC SPACE

I have to say that just about all the churches shown in the last issue (Volume 43, No. 1) appear to be convention halls, places for gathering with little or no genuine spiritual presence. All this elaboration of altars and tabernacles represents not so much faith as they punctuate the idolatrous nature of dogmatic and theological definitions. In contrast to these—yes, abominations—is Anne Beatrice Baker's winning design for atheistic contemplative space. Her construction is a wonder of abstract affirmation of sacred presence sans distraction of fancy decorative elements attempting to enhance specific religious items of faith. Her construction speaks of the minimalist contemplative structures of Cistercian architecture in response to Bernard's ascetical teaching. Coupled with the Bauhaus anthem that "less is more," the atheist's take on spiritual space authenticates what the believer is in need of and sadly deprived of.

—Fr. John Giuliani, *The Benedictine Grange, Redding, CT*

CREDIT CLARIFICATION

The ark and liturgical furnishings at the Beth Abraham Synagogue featured in Vol. 43, No. 1, 2010, p. 14 (bottom) were designed and fabricated by Presentations of Mt. Vernon, NY.

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"REALLY? I CAN'T IMAGINE THAT!"

We often make this response when a friend shares something with us... and then we move on to another subject. It doesn't seem to occur to us that this response is both self-criticism and the loss of an opportunity to expand our imagination. We take it for granted that imagination is limited.

I remember years ago challenging my imagination while looking at an abstract painting that had only numbers for a title. I stood before it for a long time because I sincerely wanted to respond to the imagination of the individual who had created it. I had to use my own imagination to speculate about what was going on in the mind of the artist at work; this was difficult, but it forced me to expand my own "ordinary" imagination.

I now feel more comfortable with abstraction—not just comfortable, but I genuinely enjoy it.

I am sure that my long years of fascination with art and architecture resulted from my desire to enter the imagination of artists and architects. Sometimes I have succeeded, and sometimes not. It is always a pleasure to ask others how their imagination has met a challenge and if their reactions to a work of art are similar to mine. I often notice in museums that some people stand for a long time in front of a work of art that others completely ignore, but I am convinced that this is as it should be. Everyone's imagination is at a different stage of awareness and growth.

Can we make the individual learning process more active and more profound? We can only hope that the teachers in our schools help children expand their imagination in every subject offered. If they succeed, we will never again hear the phrase, "Really? I can't imagine that!"

BETTY H. MEYER IS EDITOR EMERITUS OF *FAITH & FORM* AND CAN BE REACHED BY EMAIL AT BMEYER@FAITHANDFORM.COM

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