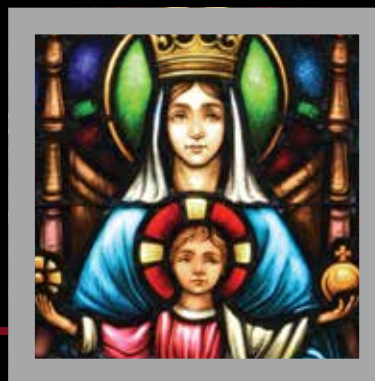
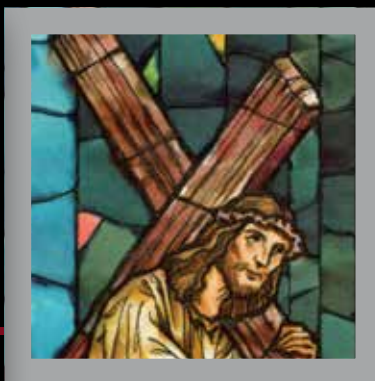
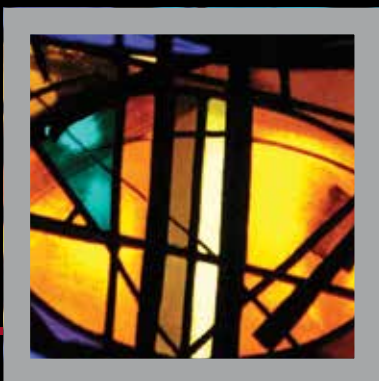
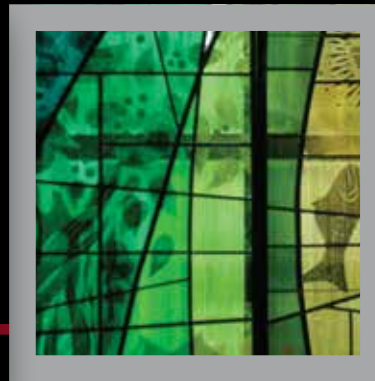
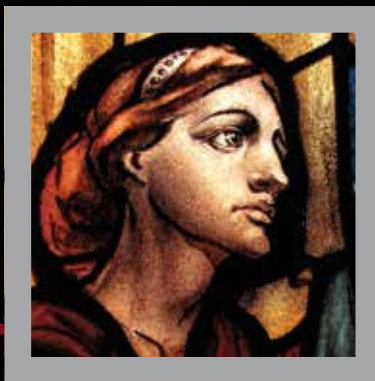
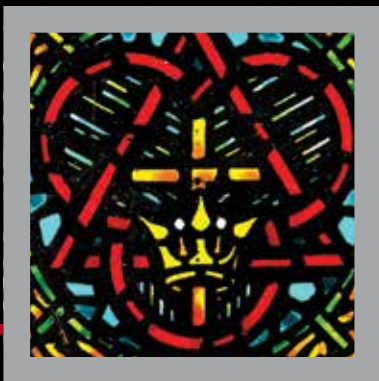


The background image is a photograph of the interior of a large Gothic cathedral, likely Westminster Abbey. It features a high, vaulted wooden ceiling with a complex grid of beams and decorative elements. The walls are made of light-colored stone with tall, narrow windows and arches. In the distance, an altar area is visible with a large stained-glass window. Several people are walking through the nave, some looking up at the architecture. The lighting is warm and comes from wall-mounted fixtures.

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The nave of Yale's Sterling Library, recently restored by Helpern Architects (article begins on page 6).

Photo: Brian Rose

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Designing and  
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# ARCHITECTURE'S HOUR OF POWER PATRON

EDITOR'S PAGE ★ MICHAEL J. CROSBIE

THIS SPRING RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE LOST one of its high-profile patrons, Dr. Robert H. Schuller, who for years headed the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California. Schuller was an innovative minister in the Reformed Church in America. Sixty years ago he arrived in Southern California looking for a place to plant his church. He ended up redefining what a religious building could be. He bought an old drive-in movie theater in Garden Grove and started a "drive-in" church where his congregants sat in their cars as he preached from the roof of the refreshment stand.

The makeshift drive-in church idea was given concrete form by Richard Neutra, whom Schuller commissioned in 1959 to design a house of worship that could serve congregants in pews as well as bucket seats. Neutra's design included a 20-foot-high glass wall that rolled back to reveal a pulpit/balcony from which Schuller could preach simultaneously to those inside the church as well as those in lawn chairs and cars. The doctor's walk-in/drive-in church was consummated.

Schuller truly understood the power of architecture in the service of ministry. As his congregation grew, Schuller envisioned a larger church that would serve as a spectacular backdrop for his "Hour of Power" live television program, which started in 1970. Schuller hired Philip Johnson to design the stage set. Johnson created the Crystal Cathedral—a glazed space-frame with seats for more than 2,700 worshippers that was completed in 1981 (and is now being transformed into a Catholic cathedral, as described in an article starting on page 11). The Crystal Cathedral was the original "shard"—a big glass tent, star-shaped in plan, with 90-foot-high

hinged glass walls that swing open to the parking lot beyond—allowing car-bound congregants to see Schuller in his pulpit inside. A more perfect marriage of architecture and ministry is hard to imagine.

Schuller never faltered in carrying his torch for architecture. He later commissioned Johnson to design a bell tower, and in 1990 Richard Meier completed a welcome center for the Garden Grove campus (a little clunky). Schuller served as a Public Member of the AIA Board of Directors and in 2003 was made an honorary member.

Schuller was proud of his architectural patronage, and felt slighted when *Faith & Form* failed to mention him as a megachurch pioneer when we did a special issue in 2005 on the genre. When Thomas Fisher wrote a postscript to the issue, "Megachurch Madness," and overlooked Schuller's role, it was just too much for the preacher. He contacted Fisher and myself, inviting us to Garden Grove to set the record straight. While in Los Angeles for the 2006 AIA Convention, Tom and I drove out to the church, pulled into an empty parking lot, and headed toward the Tower of Hope—the Neutra-designed administration building. As we approached the reception desk an elevator cab opened and the man inside it asked us by name to step in. We were whisked to the top floor and stepped out into Schuller's private, glass-encased office, which occupied the entire story. Schuller greeted us and took us on an extended tour of his office, festooned with mementos. At some point we noticed Schuller was wearing a George W. Bush Presidential tie bar. Sensing our displeasure, he fixed us with a smile, removed the clip, reached into his pocket, and replaced it with a Bill Clinton Presidential tie bar.

Like all great architectural patrons, Schuller knew that God is in the details. 



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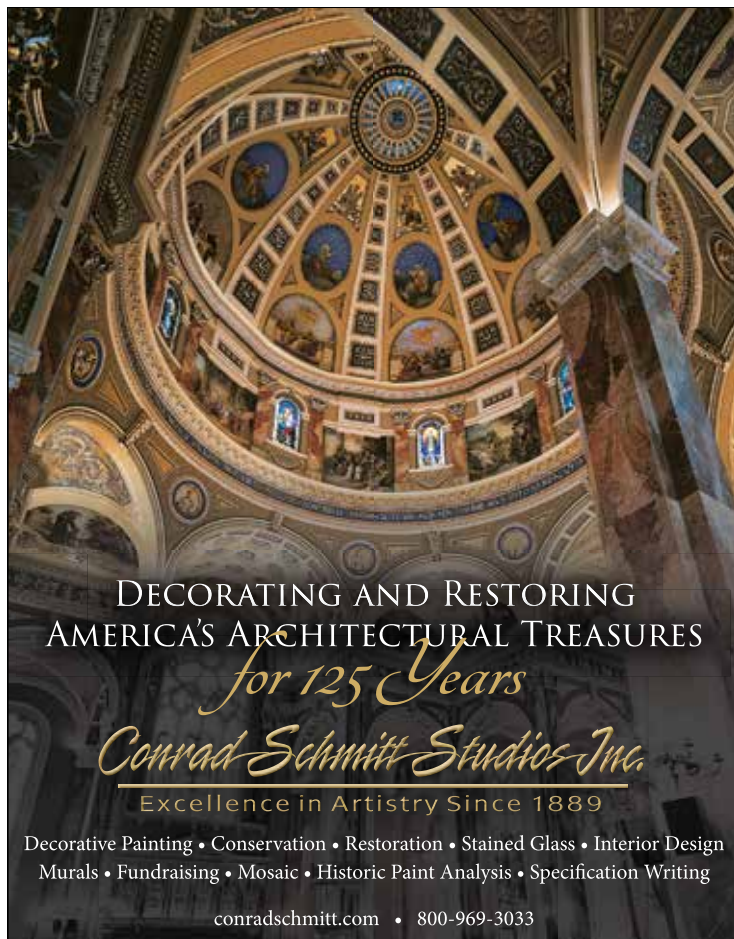


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# A STERLING RESTORATION

By Michael J. Crosbie • Photographs ©Brian Rose





The term “sacred-secular” refers to environments that convey a sense of spirituality for purposes that are otherwise not connected to an organized religion or recognized faith tradition. For example, over the past half-century modern art museums have often been hailed as the sacred-secular buildings of our time. Architects often describe these ascetic settings as designed to sanctify modern art in late-20<sup>th</sup> century culture: objects of transcendence, reflection, questioning. The architectural language of modern museums has been compared to that of contemporary religious buildings, which often rely on the subtle manipulation of light and space to create a place removed from the cacophony of profane commercialism just outside the confines of the gallery or the worship space.

It could be argued that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was the library that was the preeminent sacred-secular building of its time. This was a product of the Enlightenment, the expansion of scientific knowledge, and the veneration of the book as the sacred object that could offer salvation from the ignorance of mankind. In her recent history of university chapels, *White Elephants on Campus*, historian Margaret Grubiak argues that as the influence of organized religion on society in general and on universities in particular waned as the 20<sup>th</sup> century dawned, some institutions of higher learning transferred the status of the college chapel to other academic buildings, most prominently libraries. One such institution was Yale University.

At a moment in history when you might have thought the library itself was no longer relevant in a digital, virtual world, Yale has invested in its past to burnish with new luster one of the most sacred-secular spaces in North America: the nave of Sterling Memorial Library. An example of the Collegiate Gothic style in the U.S. (which first appeared in buildings at Kenyon and Knox colleges in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century), Sterling is without peer. Designed by James Gamble Rogers in the late 1920s, it revels in what had been proper academic architectural regalia for relatively young, New World institutions (for instance Yale, Chicago, Penn, Fordham) yearning for the trappings of collegiate pedigree found at such Old World places as Oxford and Cambridge.

Rogers draped the neo-Gothic mantle on several buildings throughout the Yale campus,

*The ‘nave’ of Yale’s Sterling Memorial Library takes the notion of ‘sacred-secular’ architecture to its extreme, conceived by its architect as a ‘cathedral of learning.’*



*To enter Sterling Library, designed in Collegiate Gothic style and completed in 1931, one first must pass through the portal into the nave.*

but Sterling is perhaps his greatest achievement in this style. According to Grubiak, Sterling Memorial Library was somewhat of a stand-in for the university chapel that Rogers really wanted to build, but time and style were not on his side. Yale ended compulsory chapel attendance for students in 1926 and without it the need for a large, central religious building on campus evaporated. The architect instead conceived the entry hall of the library as a “cathedral of learning” and carried that metaphor quite far.

One enters a 150-foot-long, 45-foot-high “nave” on axis with the circulation desk as the “high altar” at the far end, crowned with a “reredos” mural by Eugene Francis Savage of “Alma Mater,” which personifies Yale as a Marian figure. This “chancel” is partially separated from the nave by a “rood screen” of wood, behind which one finds staff areas. In the “side aisle” to the left of the nave is the card catalogue; to the right are more staff accouterments. Above the nave one finds





*The restoration shortened the original column-to-column circulation desk to permit access to a self-service copy center and to the stacks. New, warm LED lighting has also transformed the 'Alma Mater' mural by Eugene Francis Savage, also restored.*



*Cleared of display cases, desks, and card catalogues, the now-empty nave at dusk is especially lovely, even welcoming. The lighting is now pronounced, revealing especially the stained American oak coffered ceiling and the re-discovered colors of the ceiling in the 'crossing.'*

leaded, stained-glass windows created by G. Owen Bonawit depicting the history of Yale and the City of New Haven, Connecticut. Throughout there are carvings of academic saints, patrons, and figures related to the library, its history, and the greater world of books and knowledge. It is a veritable temple to words, if not The Word.

When the library was dedicated in April 1931, then-university president James Rowland Angell praised the architect and his collaborators, who had “conjured up a dream of surpassing majesty and then translated it into innumerable ingenious and gracious forms. Here is incarnate the intellectual and spiritual life of Yale.” Some were inspired; others found the religious imagery over the top, to the point of sacrilege, hubris, or just wishful thinking. But it is hard to visit here and not feel that you are in a place of reverence for the

enterprise of learning. Borrowing an architectural language from the history of religious buildings makes that connection viscerally.

Some 80 years after its “consecration” as a sanctuary of knowledge, Sterling was looking a little worse for wear. The limestone and sandstone interior had grown dark, mottled, and moisture-stained; lighting was gloomy; card catalogue cabinets bulged in the side aisle; the infrastructure for a functioning, contemporary library needed serious upgrading. According to architect David Helpert, FAIA, of Helpert Architects in New York, which led the restoration/renovation efforts, “Yale mandated us to restore the nave to its original splendor, accommodate and anticipate continuing rapid changes in library use, and make the old and new indistinguishable.” The hardest part of such a charge, of course, is to make sure that what you do remains to

a large extent invisible, or at least as if it had always been there. Helpert and the myriad consultants who worked on Sterling achieved a remarkable result with a deft touch, without leaving fingerprints.

One of the greatest challenges was to accommodate new technology within the nave’s original fabric in ways undetectable. This was particularly tricky because the 13,000-square-foot nave is essentially an independent building from the rest of the library, which covers some 442,000 square feet in total. The nave’s structure is load-bearing,

*The ‘crossing’ leads to the corridor overlooking the garden on the nave’s north side. Note the abundant carvings on the stone walls, vaults, and bosses. The sandstone, which had appeared to be gray, was restored or replaced throughout, including the Mankato-Kasota stone floor.*

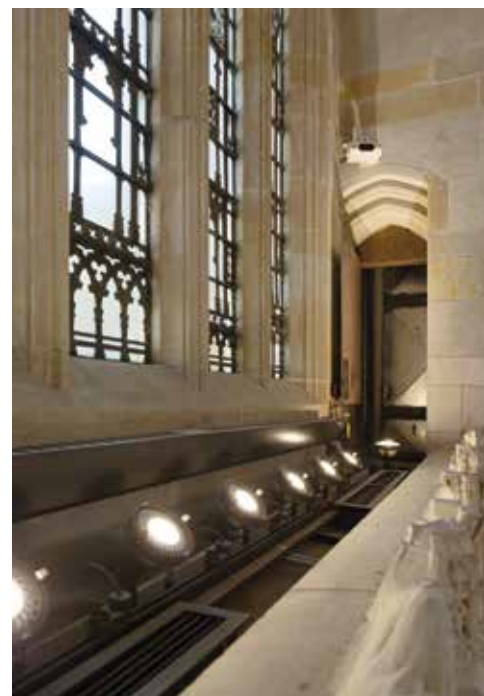








*The stained glass in the 25-foot-high windows by G. Owen Bonawit is actually a pale yellow. The unsigned stone frieze depicts the library's history. This view into the reconceived and now carpeted and furnished south aisle shows the built-in wall of card catalogues.*




*Lighting is set on an astronomical clock to rise and fall subtly during the day and across the seasons. Hidden on the relatively inaccessible balcony are both air-conditioning and lighting equipment.*

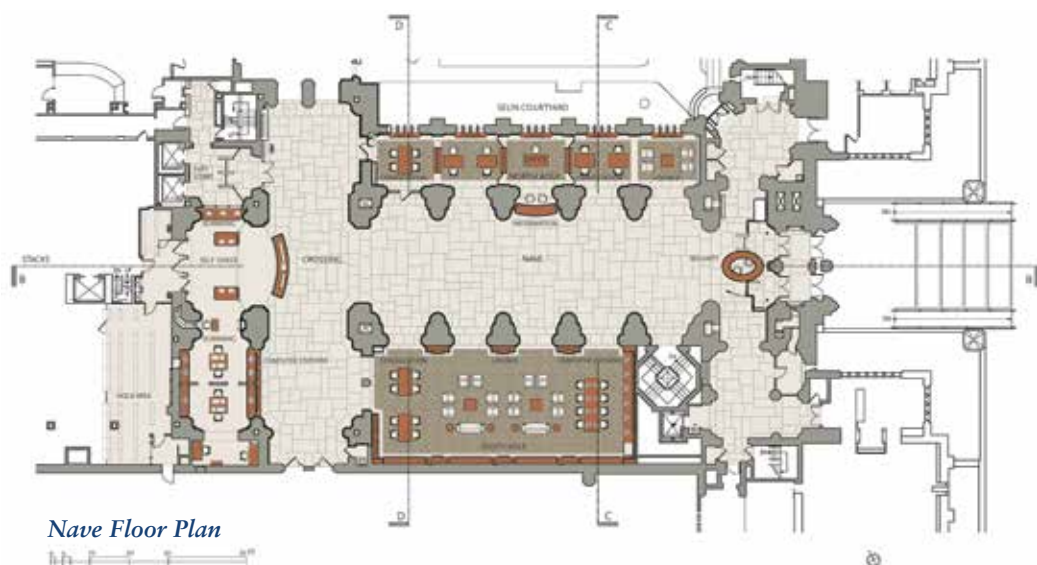
stone-on-stone construction without steel, which leaves precious little space within its walls and columns for threading cables, pipes, wires, ducts, and other modern improvements. Unoccupied space above the gabled ceiling and below the Mankato-Kasota stone floor helped achieve a seamless upgrade to heating and cooling equipment and in particular new LED lighting, which now reveals the coffered oak ceiling's gilding, stenciling, and carved bosses in ways never seen before. Secreted within the narrow balconies on either side of the nave are new light fixtures, HVAC ducts, cables, and fin-tube radiators whose convection currents wash the

single-pane leaded glass windows above them to mitigate condensation.

A vivid makeover is the old card catalogue space, which before the renovation was crammed with cabinets holding cards for the library's collection. The catalogue itself is now digital, accessed through a bank of computer monitors at one end of this space. With the cabinets gone (except for a long row retained and refinished, with empty drawers, as a remembrance of what once was there) the space is now repurposed as a comfortable lounge with easy chairs and library tables, now a popular reading spot. Where cabinets had extended from the piers, Helpert created new wooden

panels replicating original carved details, which now enclose closets that house new air-handling units (sound insulation dampens equipment noise). Similarly inventive design is found at the "high altar" of the former circulation desk. It had stretched from column to column, but has been shortened on each end to allow access to the stacks beyond and a self-service area (it looks as if it had always been like this). Other recycled and recreated woodwork was used to create new staff desks along the north side-aisle. Here and there one finds new ventilation grilles and hardware whose design is modeled on the nave's existing ironwork by the legendary metal artisan Samuel Yellin. Meanwhile, old telephone booths now conceal the fire alarm command center.


Most dramatic is the thoroughly cleaned Indiana limestone and Ohio sandstone throughout, missing and damaged pieces of which have been replaced flawlessly. New lighting carefully concealed at the tops of stone columns and in little nooks and crannies throughout the nave lift James Gamble Rogers' rib vaults, carved bosses, and polychrome webbing into a heavenly fugue. This revelatory illumination makes it seem as if this space is breathing, expanding its stone lungs with the oxygen of millions of words, its capillaries carrying accumulated wisdom to a new generation of students, who just might notice, if they raise their eyes from the sacramental radiance of their hand-held screens. 



*Nave Floor Plan*



# From Crystal to Christ

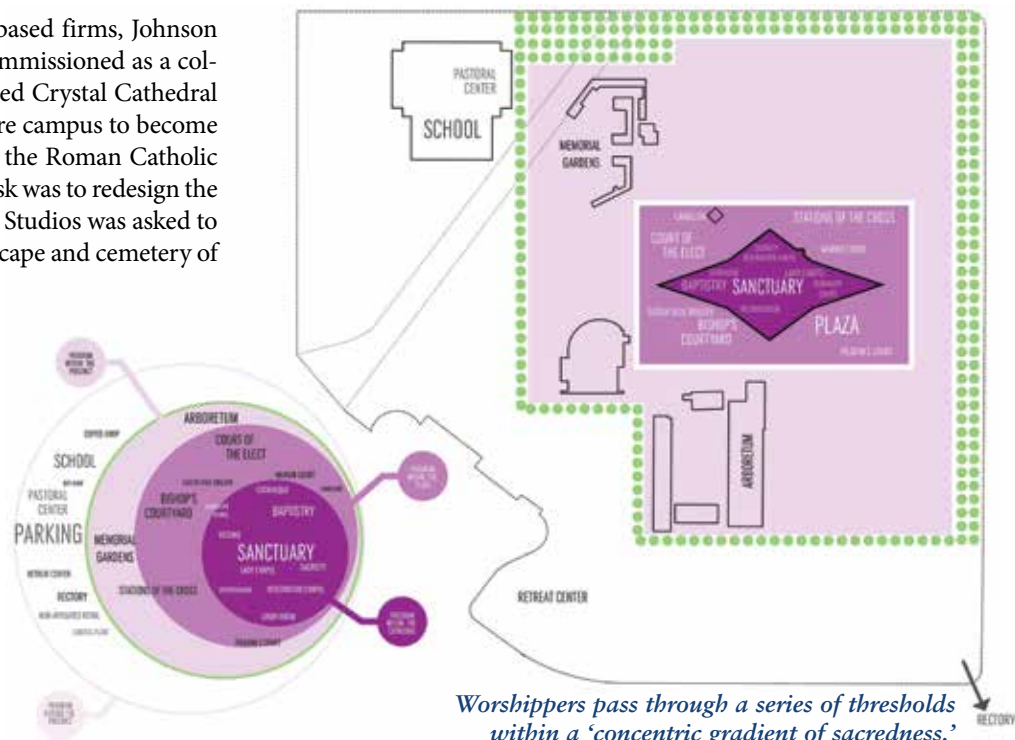


By Scott Johnson, FAIA, and Frank Clementi, AIA, AIGA  
 Renderings by Shimahara courtesy Johnson Fain and Rios Clementi Hale Studios

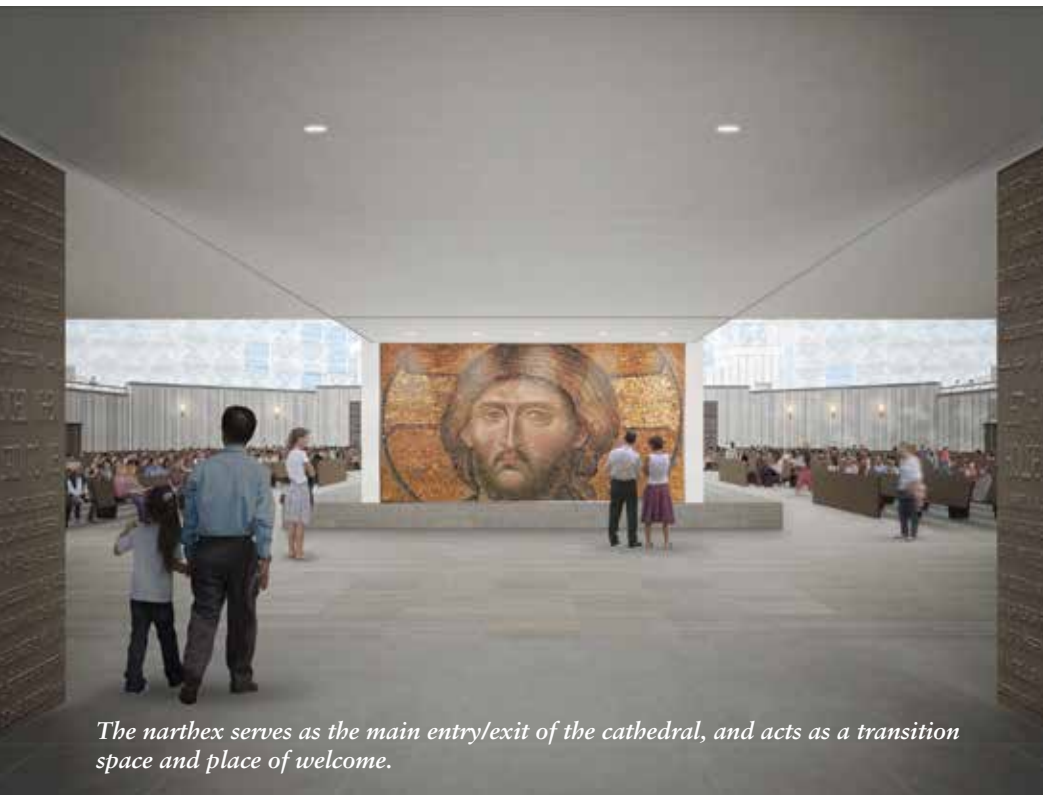
*The new design recognizes the unique spiritual and physical heritage of the campus while creating a new center for Catholic worship.*

In the late summer of 2013, our Los Angeles-based firms, Johnson Fain and Rios Clementi Hale Studios, were commissioned as a collaborative team to redesign the world-renowned Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California, and re-plan its 34-acre campus to become the home for Christ Cathedral, the new center of the Roman Catholic Church in the Diocese of Orange. Johnson Fain's task was to redesign the Cathedral's architecture, while Rios Clementi Hale Studios was asked to plan the layout of the campus and design the landscape and cemetery of the multifaceted site.

SCOTT JOHNSON DIRECTS ARCHITECTURE AND INTERIOR DESIGN AT LOS ANGELES-BASED JOHNSON FAIN, WHICH HE CO-FOUNDED IN 1987 WITH WILLIAM FAIN, FAIA. PRIOR TO THIS, JOHNSON WORKED WITH ARCHITECT PHILIP JOHNSON (NO RELATION). FRANK CLEMENTI, AIA, AIGA, IS PARTNER AT RIOS CLEMENTI HALE STUDIOS, A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY DESIGN FIRM IN LOS ANGELES. HE IS A MEMBER OF THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES MAYOR'S DESIGN ADVISORY COMMITTEE.







*The narthex serves as the main entry/exit of the cathedral, and acts as a transition space and place of welcome.*

30 years was the home for Reverend Robert Schuller's evangelical Crystal Cathedral Ministries, is a disparate collection of significant buildings (by architects including Richard Neutra and Richard Meier & Partners) that lack a clear relation to each other.

#### QUESTIONS OF TRANSCENDENCE

We focused on how the essence and detail of the original building could be honored and the new cathedral and its practices be fully realized, while embracing each other in their common Christian faith. How could the campus become a cohesive site that welcomes the diverse communities and cultures that comprise the Diocese of Orange? What types of gardens and plazas could connect the landscape to the liturgy? These questions were in our minds as we began our work, and our goal was to respect the unique spiritual and physical heritage of the campus while creating an inspiring environment for Catholic worship, a center for arts and culture, and a place for community outreach, especially to the poor



*The predella is raised approximately 18 inches above the primary worship level to enhance the sight lines to the altar, ambo, and cathedra.*



and marginalized. The Diocese Architectural and Restoration Committee worked closely with our team to develop a design that honors the essence and strength of the site's renowned architecture, while accommodating the rich traditions and liturgy of the Catholic Church.

The Crystal Cathedral has been widely recognized for its dramatic exterior, but we soon realized that the building itself required significant modification to fulfill the role of a Catholic cathedral. Our charge is to convert an open, all-glass Evangelical church into a great Catholic cathedral to serve its centuries-old sacraments and ritual processions, and to reinforce the centrality of the Eucharist. Reverend Schuller, as we know, inaugurated one of the first and most successful world-wide televangelical ministries. Accordingly, the design of the original building had affinities to a broadcasting studio: tall ceilings, multiple camera angles, a broad stage that provided flexible programming, and generous natural light. Contrarily, our sense of the historic Catholic cathedrals led us to cherish controlled lighting, long and dramatic processional routes, antiphonal choir music, and the centrality of the altar over which floats the baldachin and below which lies the undercroft and columbarium. Our response is to create a virtually new building within the existing building shell. This effort represents our attempt to honor the gift and Christian legacy of the original building, while thoroughly renewing it.

#### A CATHOLIC WORSHIP SPACE

To accommodate Catholic processional events where clergy file into the church through a portal and up a center aisle into the sanctuary, the interior is reshaped into a cruciform plan. Fundamental to this approach is the need to rethink and reorganize the three principal entries. We began at the main entrance with the addition of two bronze pivot doors, creating a modern version of a historic "Bishop's Door" through which processions enter. These two large panels, in material and message, recall Ghiberti's doors in Florence's Baptistry of San Giovanni, yet pivot to open up the narthex to the plaza and Southern California landscape. The other extremities of the cruciform plan are the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament to the north, the Baptistry to the west and, on the east, the Pilgrims' Entry and rotunda stair leading to the undercroft below the sanctuary floor. The Chapel of St. Callistus, Cathedral offices, a bride's room, vesting, and support functions reside on this lower level.

At the center of the cruciform plan is the altar, sitting atop the predella in full view of all 2,000 seats. A large, platinum-leafed



*The baldachin is a horizontal 'canopy' that floats about 30 feet above the altar. A large carved crucifix hangs from the open center of the structure.*



*The Pilgrim's Entry on the east is circular and features a rotunda stair leading to the undercroft and the Chapel of St. Callistus.*





baldachin and carved crucifix are suspended above the altar, the heart of the cathedral, adjacent to the bishop's chair, or cathedra. Paving and interior walls are composed primarily of silver travertine and limestone with inlays of complementary stones and select sections of dark walnut paneling to match the material of the pews.

The cathedral is home to the Hazel Wright Organ—the world's fourth-largest church-based pipe organ—well known for its combination of sound quality and technology. The mezzanine level showcases the organ, which is currently undergoing a complete restoration in Italy. This upper-level space is also being reconfigured to accommodate antiphonal music in multiple configurations.

One of the most complex design elements of the new cathedral is the interior treatment of the building shell, currently an expansive steel space frame that supports more than 10,000 individual glass panes. We have spent the past year designing a highly engineered interior system that will resurface this space frame and is at the heart of resolving the many symbolic, aesthetic, environmental, and technical challenges the existing building presents. In our effort to create this new layer, we are attempting to address issues of

acoustics, day-lighting, artificial light, solar heat transmission, ventilation, visibility, and environmental comfort. Today's standards for comfort are much more advanced than those of three decades ago; fortunately, the digital technologies allowing us to achieve that comfort have kept pace. In the end, as the new stone floor and the lower walls recall the earth, so the glass vault overhead recalls the heavens. Resolving these many challenges must be both comprehensive and intuitive.

To devise the optimal solution, the team digitally mapped the sun's path of travel across the building exterior over every hour and every day of the year and studied acoustic reverberation within the building's volume. Using this data, we proposed an innovative ceiling system designed as an algorithmically complex series of triangular metal sails that are in variously open or closed positions based upon their solar orientation. This system of "petals" on the inside surface of the space frame modulates natural light throughout the day, reduces glare, and creates rich translucent patterns that define the interior shell by day and by night.

#### GROUNDSCAPE VISION

While Christ Cathedral is the heart of the campus, the surrounding grounds are central

*Pilgrim's Court arrival plaza is a lively space featuring an interactive water feature.*

to Catholic life. A new landscape has to honor the history of the site, its architecture, and its worshippers, while also enabling its renewed life as a cathedral. One of the master planning principles we developed is to focus on people rather than cars. We are more intent on moving worshippers from the street toward the altar in a procession that transcends them from the mundane secular city to sacred spaces within the church, that is, from the edge of the site at Chapman and Lewis, through the building, to the altar.

Churches conventionally have frontal approaches, with plazas that accommodate assembly and procession in front of the building. Our approach is omnidirectional, and while we couldn't actually move the church, we could re-center it by surrounding it with celebratory space. Locating the cathedral on the plaza, not just in the plaza, suggests that the glass structure is of the sky, with the ground extending throughout.

The approach to the building comprises a series of thresholds that worshippers pass through within a "concentric gradient of





*The Walk of Faith marbles and other original sculptures are located in the memorial garden created in honor of the faithful witness and stewardship of the Crystal Cathedral Ministries.*

sacredness.” This progression starts in the outside world of the city that surrounds the site, and moves closer, through the green space between the outside world and the parking, then the parking, then the filter space of the grove of trees surrounding the plaza, then the plaza, then the outside of the cathedral, on through to the seating to the altar.

While the geometric formal clarity and legibility of the rectangular plaza serves to support the primacy of the cathedral building, this strident simplicity is reinforced but also mitigated by a humanizing margin of 250 trees around the perimeter. This garden margin forms a liminal condition, a habitable threshold separating the sacred plaza supporting the cathedral from the mundane context of streets, parking lots, and the secular city.

The plaza’s singular uniform tableau is divided by the central location of the cathedral into four equal quadrants surrounding the building, each with purpose and symbolism:

**Festal Court:** location of the Paschal brazier; serves celebratory and sacred functions with the adjacent cultural center and arboretum; acts as the “formal living room” of the site.

**Pilgrim’s Court:** a lively arrival space with interactive water element; a secular space that recalls the arrival of pilgrims as they prepare to enter the sanctuary.


**Marian Court:** includes a shrine to the Blessed Virgin Mary, patroness in many cultures of the community; an intercessional space open to the public corner and civic lawn.

**Court of the Catechumens:** spiritual gateway for rites of baptism and burial, with connection to the cemetery; represents initiation and commendation of members of the church

The flat, unencumbered flexibility of the surface of the plaza allows for collective uses for large groups of people. Its monolithic nature is sublimated by paving details at a more personal scale. Variegation in the paving pattern is achieved through the encryption of verses from the Gospel of John, which starts: “In the beginning was the Word.” Working from a lectionary provided by Monsignor Arthur Holquin, we transcribed the gospel readings into lines of paving. Each letter of each word is represented as a single stone in the paving,

rendering sections of the plaza as “pages” in a foundational manuscript.

The cemetery is formally linked and overlapped with the Court of the Catechumens, both integrated and discrete. The visitor entry to the existing cemetery is preserved, while a new entry from the Court of the Catechumens will be created for funeral processions from the cathedral. Connecting these entries creates a route that links the cemetery spaces together in a contemplative promenade back to the plaza. The expanded cemetery features a variety of spaces that address the diverse preferences of cultures comprising the Catholic community in Orange County. An added mausoleum building with burial halls links sight lines to the cathedral.

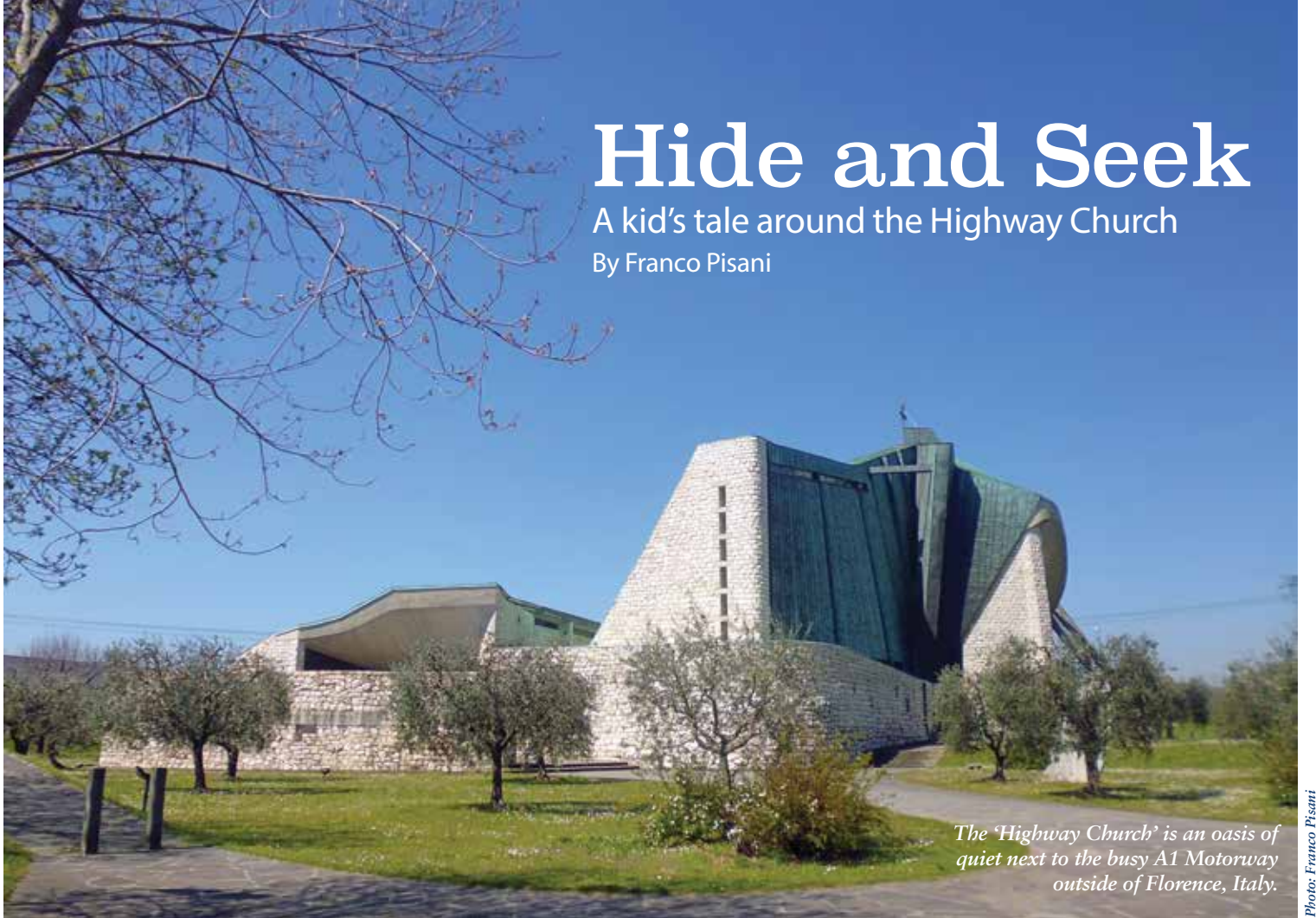
Designing this transformation of the cathedral and grounds has been an extraordinary life experience for all involved. Some of us were raised in Christian faiths, but others not, giving the team a diversity that deepens understanding with the opportunities for educational discussions. Our patrons have been generous with their knowledge and their time, and our goal has always been to fulfill Bishop Kevin Vann’s vision of a cathedral as a unifying presence for all peoples in the heart of one of the most diverse communities in the US. 



# Hide and Seek

A kid's tale around the Highway Church

By Franco Pisani



*The 'Highway Church' is an oasis of quiet next to the busy A1 Motorway outside of Florence, Italy.*

Photo: Franco Pisani

*"What my eyes saw was simultaneous; what I shall write is successive...Something of it, though, I will capture."*

Jorge Luis Borges, *The Aleph*

The Highway Church, *la Chiesa dell'Autostrada*, is the nickname that is commonly used to name the Church of San Giovanni Battista in Campi Bisenzio. The church is located half-way between Milan and Rome next to the A1 Motorway—Milano-Napoli—also called *Autostrada del Sole*, and it was built to honor the memory of the workers who had died during the motorway's construction. Architect Giovanni Michelucci got the commission in 1960; the design and construction phases had a rough and not linear evolution until the consecration in 1964. From the early sketches, it appears as a sacred tent, a pocket of space built

in three materials (stone, reinforced concrete, copper) and organized by light.

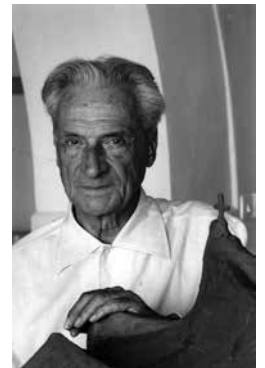
The church, inspired by the idea of the meeting spaces of early nomadic Christians, is offered to the community of travelers to inspire a sense of interaction and hope. Michelucci (whose approach to faith has been controversial), speaking of his churches in an 1987 interview, said: "More than a sense of sacred, I always tried to convey a sense of hope."

San Giovanni Battista is not a parish church; in fact in canonical terms it is a "rettoria." This means that it is not made for a particular community but it is made for the community of the travelling people. Fully in the spirit of the *Concilio Vaticano Secondo* (1962-1965) and inspired by the figure of Pope Giovanni XXIII, the architect conceived a gathering space for travelers, with a door but without an end, so that the building's form itself would allow, suggest and create opportunity for encounters.

Giovanni Michelucci was one of the most important Italian architects of 20th century. Even if his interest for sacred space was broad, in his nearly century-long life (he died on New Year's Eve 1990, just two days before his hundredth birthday) he had the opportunity to design about 25 churches. Seventeen of them have been translated into buildings

among which there are some of the most interesting religious buildings of modern times. Michelucci also loved to confabulate and tell fairytales. He always used to call himself a storyteller. In 1981, when he published the letter with which he left the School of Architecture of Florence, in the book: *La Felicità dell'Architetto*, he quoted in the cover a phrase from Socrates' *Phaedo*: "...The venture is a glorious one, and he ought to comfort himself with words like these, which is the reason why I lengthen out the tale."

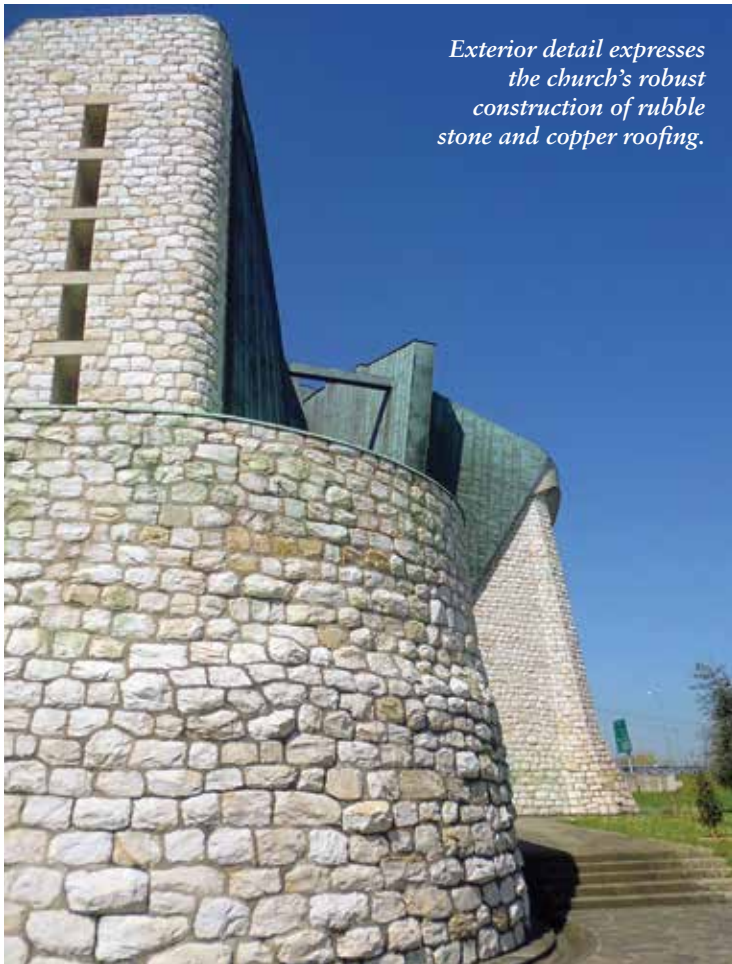
The only time I met Michelucci was in September 1989. He was 98 and I was a shameless second-year student of architecture: How could we possibly have anything to talk about? I remember *un vecchio bellissimo*. He was seated on an armchair, recovering from a broken femur. An enthusiastic child inside a



*Giovanni Michelucci, architect of the Highway Church and about two dozen other houses of worship.*

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*Exterior detail expresses the church's robust construction of rubble stone and copper roofing.*

Photos: Franco Pisani



centenary body, inspiring and enlightening as only the teller of fairytales can be, Michelucci started to talk and ask questions. The storyteller was fading into the fairy-tale, and the student into a whimsical creature. One hour later, while I was leaving his room he said: "We are friends now, we have things to talk about."

A few months after that, on March 27, 1990, Giovanni Michelucci was invited by the students of the School of Architecture of Florence to open the academic year. It was a late opening because that academic year the school was occupied by protesting students blocking all didactic activities. In front of a large crowd of emotionally involved students, he told us a fairy tale:

*I have dreamt of the simplest thing that a man can dream of. I have dreamt of a hut in the woods, not a beautiful house, but a poor hut with a door recessed deep into its stone wall, a provisional dwelling whose image evoked childhood, ancestral memories, the smells and temper of moss, of freshly baked bread, of cheese. Memories are a reality recoverable only in dreams.*

*As I approached, the hut started to shrink rather than grow. It became so small that it seemed uninhabitable. But the care with which its garden was kept,*

*the freshness of its painted surfaces, and the tidiness of its appearance were signs of a life within. When I reached the hut, I discovered a tiny window, almost too small to light any room. Suddenly, I glimpsed something inside. I saw a wing, a huge wing that must have filled the tiny room.*

*It was an angel's wing.*

*There was an angelic presence. It was an angel who, with the movement of its wings, was creating an atmosphere. Wonderful. An angel can live in such a small space... In the hut there were creatures who lived and found space for all their small things, they create space but they aren't men, they are angels... I think I understood a simple truth: it is not places that must change but their inhabitants. Giotto understood this well when he made the space surrounding his figures too narrow for the action. The wing in the hut was like the angel's wing that crosses the small window in the kiosk of the Annunciation. I think a space is only "poor" when it is an unfit arena for interaction; and it is always "beautiful" when it generates encounters and previously unexpected possibilities.*

I like to evoke this episode while trying to talk about the experience of visiting the *Chiesa dell'Autostrada*, not only because it's a church--and angelic presences, by nature, should be expected inside a church--but because that particular church puts me in a childish mind-set and makes me feel like an angel. Each time that I walk in, I become ageless, a playful kid, and I start seeking hidden angels.

Many difficult words and metaphors have been used in the past, and will continue to be invented, to categorize and criticize this building. And I don't want to proceed in that direction, nor to transform this text into a precise description of the walls or the reinforced concrete tree-shaped structure that hold the roof. It is hard and in a certain sense useless trying to evoke this very church through the description of its components, of its shell. From the very early sketches the church is represented as a series of pathways circling aimlessly around an empty core. The building transcends its form, it is pure space; it is an angel. So I prefer to speak of the experience of the space.

Even if spatial experience is simultaneous, and words (as well as drawings) are successive (as Borges said perfectly in *The Aleph*) something of it, though, I will capture.





*Entry to the narthex is through a welcoming canopy over large metal doors.*



Photos: Franco Pisani

*Linear narthex borders an internal garden and is distinguished with 'Patron Saints' bronzes by Emilio Greco.*



Photo (left): Michael J. Crosbie Photo (right): Franco Pisani

*Over the main altar space looms a billowing concrete ceiling and supporting struts that suggest highway structural elements.*



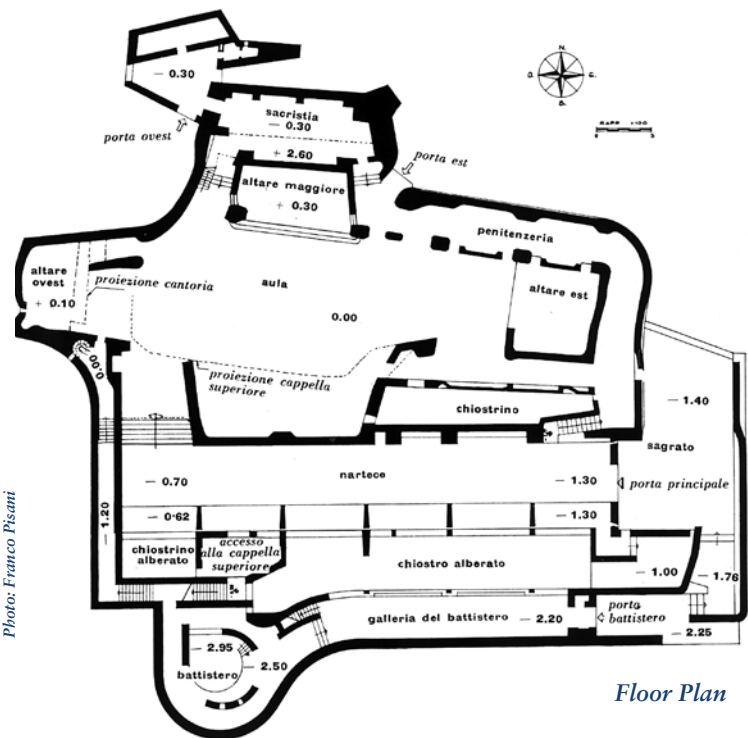
*The East Altar is framed by Michelucci's muscular internal concrete frame.*





Photo: Franco Pisani

Sanctuary interior is a play of light and shadow, overlooked by the Wedding Chapel (at right in the photo).



Floor Plan



Photo: Franco Pisani

Rustic staircase leads to the ramp that encircles the Baptistry, the edge of which is seen at the left of the photo.

What really interests the architect is to take us--it doesn't matter for what reason--into the space; that space that is only poor when it is not inspiring interaction.

This was important for Michelucci: to create a stimulating space for introspection and for understanding man's place in society. In this sense it could be argued that Michelucci's idea of the church was not exactly the house of God, but rather the house of all men, irrespective of their religion. The search to define a space at the same time highly meaningful and dense of symbolic references ended up in a built church that is respectful of the programmatic liturgical instances as well. Even if recomposed in an unconventional way, all the elements required by the program are there: a main church with three altars, a baptistry, a wedding chapel, a *Via Crucis*, some confession boxes, an organ, stained glass, a sacristy, a bell tower, an entrance, and a *sagrato*. Michelucci and his building itself are there to go along with us, to offer us alternatives. Through their gentle guidance, they never impose decisions or preconceived directions. Like angels do.

As a designer the lesson learned is very simple: When trying to define a space, you must help life to enjoy it by showing and sharing it from as many points and direction as possible. From pathways to terraces, from passages to staircases, to floors, to courtyards, to windows and openings, everything must sanctify the spatial experience. Life must be able to enter it, to breath in it, to fly over it, to walk around, to go underneath it, to rest and hide in it, in one word to *inhabit* it.

As an educator, I'm convinced that one of the simplest and best criteria to evaluate the quality of a space, which in reality is not an easy task, is to try to imagine it as a playground for hide and seek. It is a pretty fundamental and timeless game where the players attempt to conceal their location while others try to find them. What do you need to play hide and seek? Hiding and spying skills, a location offering the possibility to disappear, and a few friends. You can't play alone, at least if you don't play with angels. When you play hide and seek you are alone in a space no matter if you are hiding or seeking, but you need others. An entertaining space for hide and seek is a good space, with complexity and a calibrated balance in between the different episodes. It will provide a setting for different moods, mixing intimacy and the explicit, inspiring ways of interaction.





*The expressive concrete beam on the underside of the ceiling over the circular Baptistery.*

*Photo: Michael J. Crosbie*

When you play in the same space after few games, people will remember the good places and will search there first, so you must start to interact with the space, interpreting it, finding its potentiality. It goes without saying that a woods or a piece of a medieval city are wonderful places where you can play. But try to imagine a hide and seek game in Villa Adriana, or at the *Couvent de la Tourette*...wouldn't that be amazing?

Like angels, like winged curious kids looking for a spot to hide, we are invited to experience the space, first entering it from a long *nartece* that has the task of distressing and freeing us from the noise outside. We can take a right to enter the main space or get a bit lost in the meanders that lead to the baptistery. We can feel an attraction for the darkness of the *Via Crucis* around one of the altars, or stay in the midst of the highest peak of the tent that covers

us. We can rest in one of the small niches or feel protected by a cavity offered by the stone wall. When in the gallery that leads to the baptistery, in the silver atmosphere produced by the light filtered by the leaves of the olive trees, we can decide to go downstairs where we find the basin or go up spiraling around it.


After the baptistery, we can go back to where we came or, pushed by curiosity or simply by instinct, we can follow one of the mazelike corridors that will take us (through a spiral staircase or through a terrace overlooking the entrance gallery) to a loft which sits between the main hall and the *nartece*. We are up on the wedding chapel, but most importantly we are flying in the space again. Like angels. Or like kids playing hide and seek.

Once out of the construction, in the garden covered of grass and planted with olive trees that recalls the Gethsemane, we realize again the

presence of the motorway as a noisy backdrop at the summit of an embankment. And then, the game restarts. We discover another pathway, covered in stone and with an undulating profile that embraces the church complex. We are circling up and down around a landscape made of pale pink stones from San Giuliano and green oxidized copper, where between cavities and hills we discover the silhouette of the cross at the top of a Golgotha. Everything makes me want to run, to discover new unexpected views. I won't go home before hugging those stones, which, after a sunny day, exude not only physical heat but the warmth of the passion and the pain of the craftsmen who toiled after them.

A place to play hide and seek. A space to be alone with others. Space and people: that is what Michelucci searched all his life.

All-y all-y in come free!

Who is "it" next? 





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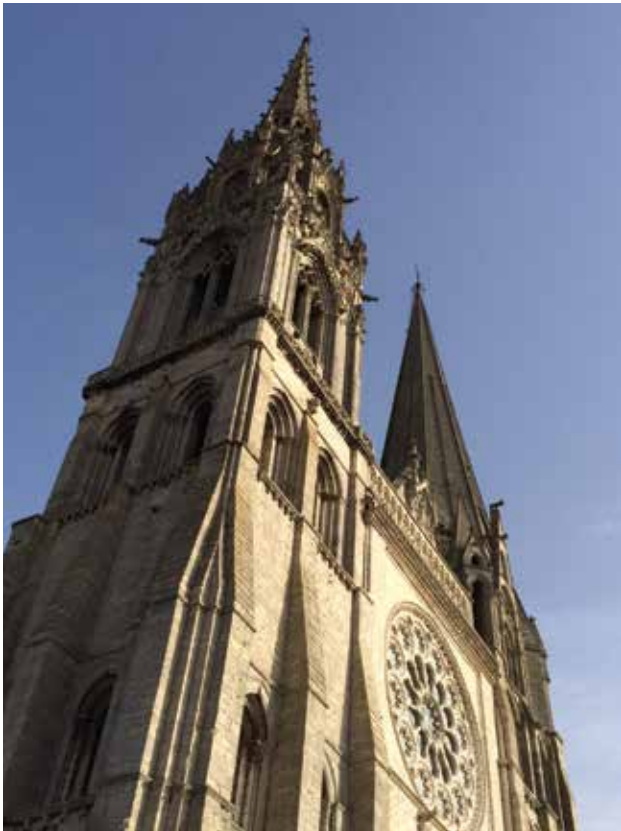
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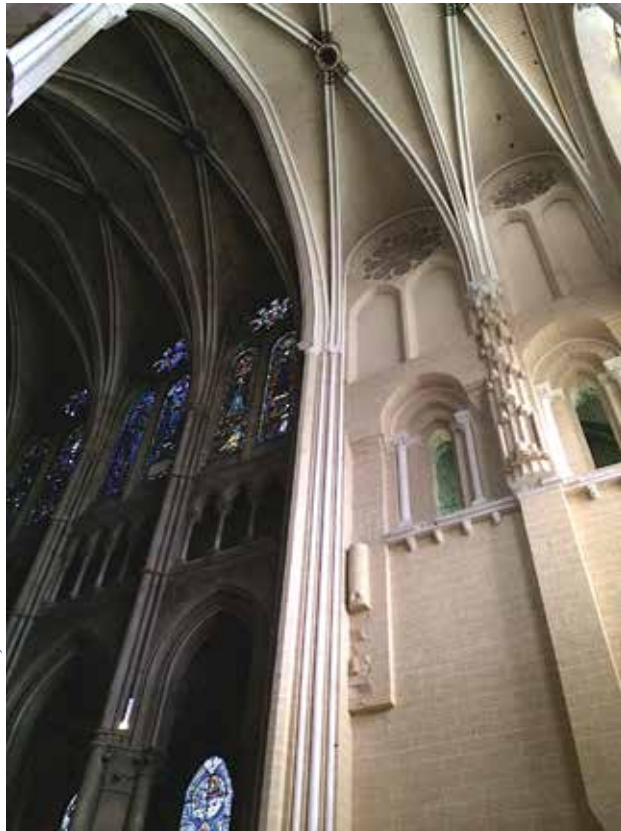
# Can Chartres be Saved?

by Alexander Gorlin, FAIA

Photo: flickr/ Daniel Stockman



Photos: Alexander Gorlin, FAIA



*Left: Behind the west façade of Chartres Cathedral is being perpetrated one of the worst atrocities of 'restoration,' according to the author.*

*Right and above: The contrast between the existing interior of Chartres and the newly painted interior is like night and day.*

Of all the sacred places on earth, certainly the Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Chartres, just southwest of Paris, ranks near or at the very top of the list. Upon entering the dark, cavernous interior, the jeweled light of the 13th-century stained glass transports one to the a realm beyond time, a

recreation of the dream of the heavenly light of the New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation. Among modern architects, Chartres Cathedral holds a special place. Philip Johnson famously said, "I would rather sleep in Chartres Cathedral, with the nearest toilet two blocks away, than in a Harvard house with back-

to-back bathrooms." Much later, Johnson remarked, "I don't see how anybody can go into the nave of Chartres Cathedral and not burst into tears." Frank Gehry agreed, saying in the 2005 documentary, "Sketches of Frank Gehry," "If you go into Chartres, it drops you to your knees."

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*Right: The most jarring disjuncture between existing and 'restored' is seen at the column bases.*

*Far right: A newly painted vault contrasts with the dark and mysterious interior as it has existed for hundreds of years.*



*Photos: Alexander Corlin, FAIA*

However, its interior is in mortal danger of dissolving into a pale, kitsch version of its former sublime self. In the name of a “restoration” to what is claimed to be the original 13th-century interior, the gray stones are literally being painted in white lime wash and beige paint with faux stone joint lines, erasing all traces of the past. This is cultural vandalism of the lowest order, on par with the Taliban’s demolition of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan in 2001.

Chartres was all of one piece, as if carved from a single rock. The floors are ancient stone, out of which grow the massive columns from which the ceiling flows upwards into interlocking curving vaults. Shockingly now, instead of the patina of age that marked and mottled the thick columns and walls, the newly applied white and beige paint looks like a run-down apartment that has been painted for an upcoming real estate sale.

The great lie of this project is revealed when one looks at the juncture between the gently undulating stone floor, uneven from centuries of wear by pilgrims, and the freshly painted columns. The white and beige paint makes the floor and base look filthy and dirty, while the antique floor makes the columns look even more out of place—a total aesthetic disaster. Perhaps at this point they should go all the way and remove the floor and install newly cut limestone paving. Then it would again be all of a piece. After all, one pays top dollar for ancient stone floors cut from old French

houses at high-end decorator shops in New York or London. Imagine what the original stone floors of Chartres Cathedral would fetch!


What has been done so far is exactly what John Ruskin decried in the 19th century: “The sin of restoration - Neither by the public, nor by those who have the care of public monuments, is the true meaning of the word restoration understood. It means the most total destruction which a building can suffer: a destruction out of which no remnants can be gathered: a destruction accompanied with false description of the thing destroyed. Do not let us deceive ourselves in this important matter; it is impossible, as impossible as to raise the dead, to restore anything that has ever been great or beautiful in architecture.”

The idea that the 13th-century interior of Chartres can be recreated is so totally absurd as to be laughable if it were not happening right now. As Martin Filler has observed in the *New York Review of Books*, there are bright electric up-lights at the top of the columns shining on the vaults above. These are not the candles, nor the daylight that filtered through the colored stained glass, changing as the clouds passed in front of the sun, nor day turning to night, but a crude, 21st-century lighting scheme.

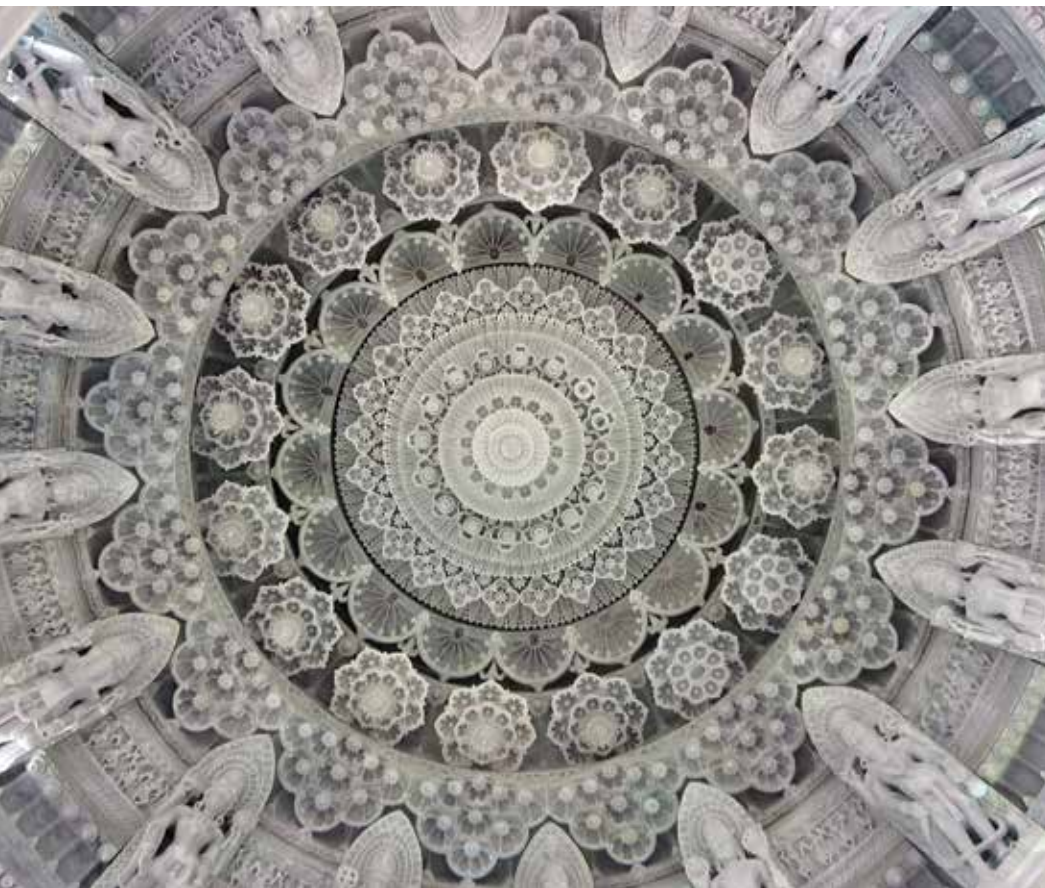
What is being perpetrated is the revenge of the spirit of Le Corbusier in his book *Quand les Cathedrales Etaient Blanches* (*When the Cathedrals Were White*) of 1937. A polemic that was meant entirely as a metaphor, that the rise

of Modern architecture in the contemporary world as a promise of a better life for all, was like the medieval era in France when all society worked together towards a single goal, is taken literally at Chartres. Le Corbusier wrote: “The cathedrals were white because they were new.” Well, clearly Chartres Cathedral is no longer new—it is 800 years old! For the “restorers” who wish to return to the 13th century, shall we bring back the Inquisition and burn heretics at the stake? Along the same line of thinking, should the ancient relic of Chartres, the sacred Tunic of the Virgin Mary, which is looking quite tattered, be rewoven into something more spiffy by Knoll or Scalomandre?

What is required here at Chartres is a step back and a careful reassessment of the entire project in the manner of David Chipperfield and Julian Harrap’s renovation of the Neues Museum in Berlin. Here they have, as Suzanne Stephens wrote, “conserved, rehabilitated, reconstructed and remodeled” in an enormously sensitive way, leaving the past while reimagining a new life for a building that had been in ruins for 70 years.

The present work at Chartres is arrogant and brutal, not done with the humility and sensitivity that this greatest of sacred spaces demands. It is a great dishonor to the cultural patrimony of France. Perhaps at this point only a miracle of divine intervention can save Chartres. 





*Stone-carved main dome interior of the Sri Swaminarayan Mandir, Houston.*

## SACREDNESS, URBANITY, AND SUBURBIA

Throughout history, immigrant communities in the US have devoted considerable resources to sacred architecture. Religious structures are a primary indicator of assimilation, reflecting the continual integration of people and their traditions into a dynamic American context. Most places of worship convey a desire for symbolic permanence and financial stability, while less formal sacred spaces impart an understated and ephemeral relationship with the new land. As the most diverse city in the United States, Houston's multicultural urban landscape is inherently hybridized.<sup>1</sup> Immigration and suburban settlement patterns have resulted in the continual shifting and blurring of social customs, consumer tastes, and vernaculars. Within this environment, the spatial and formal characteristics of recent sacred structures reveal the diversity, complexity, and inherent flux of heterotopias.

Michel Foucault employed the term heterotopia to describe spaces that blend multi-faceted layers of meaning, as well as simultaneity and connectivity to other places. Heterotopias satisfy the basic human desire to mark and redefine space. They are contingent upon compromise, yet they seek to territorialize and provide collective security. As globalization shifts the notion of "territory" from local to global, the contemporary relevance of utopianism has increasingly migrated toward the potential for ersatz-utopias, or heterotopias, within our quotidian world.<sup>2</sup> Heterotopias are exceptions to the dominant city model, existing as a place that blends the stasis of the enclave within a larger armature. Appropriating aspects of remembrance gleaned from the past, heterotopias represent the physical manifestation and approximation of culture among a shared people. In Houston, recent religious architectures illustrate the incremental transformation of homogeneous suburbia into a place of diversity. Asian immigrant communities have increasingly established their own sacred spaces of otherness—on their own terms—intimate heterotopias within a sprawling landscape of subdivisions, strip-malls, and obsolescence.

## SUBURBAN EXILE

Migration based on economic stress and political motivation fuels a significant flow of immigration to the Houston metropolitan area. As the fourth largest city in the country, Houston is currently its most diverse municipality. How have various immigrant communities found traction, security, and spiritual cohesion in the midst of a vast and amorphous city? Territorialization and

# Sacredness in the Suburbs

Ethno-spiritual architectures and emergent heterotopias in the context of ex-urban sprawl

By Gregory Marinic

PRIOR TO THE 20TH CENTURY, RELIGIOUS buildings were among the largest and most significant structures in cities across the US. Reflecting multiple religious identities, they illustrated the inherently complex ethno-cultural composition of American society. Lewis Mumford contemplated the role of the "spiritual" in the city, believing that a clear distinction existed between the spatial agency of public and sacred realms—and that sacredness undeniably connected religious buildings to the transcendent. Mumford proposed that sacred spaces linked us to something apart from our immediate physical environment and existence—something far beyond ourselves. In this sense, he opened a door to the sacred in architecture that engaged both simultaneity and heterotopia.

This article focuses on emerging ethno-sacred-spatial conditions within the sprawling and globalized metropolis of Houston, Texas. Casting its lens upon migration and spiritual identities, it reveals how ordinary suburban neighborhoods offer new opportunities for a form of city making. It draws attention to several Asian spiritual traditions to celebrate the increasingly multicultural built environment of suburban Houston. Five sacred structures offer examples of architectural strategies that appropriate, adapt, and construct suburban sacred spaces. From modest adaptations to substantial ground-up interventions, immigrant identities and heterotopian spaces of otherness are sampled as they merge and reshape the larger ethno-spiritual landscape of contemporary America.

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*Hanging Altar Incense Coils, Sun Young Taoist Temple, Houston.*

Photos courtesy of G. Marinic



*Resident monks of the Wat Buddhavas Theravada Thai Temple, Houston.*



*Main altar, Sun Young Taoist Temple, Houston.*

Photos courtesy of G. Marinic



*Main portal to the Wat Buddhavas Theravada Thai Temple, Houston.*

re-appropriation of former lives is manifested in vigorously adapted suburban areas. Cultural narratives linked to spiritual activities assert the role of memory in reproducing, retaining, and regaining identities within this unfamiliar built environment.

In early 21st-century America, immigrants are more often than not bypassing cities altogether in favor of the suburbs. The built environments that they encounter in suburbia are far less cohesive, walkable, or architecturally inspired. Suburban religious buildings generally lack the quantitative and qualitative value of those within the historic urban core. In place of downtown grandeur of conventional suburban homogeneity, new spiritual architectures in Houston's periphery—adapted existing buildings as well as autonomous, purpose-built structures—are emerging. These sacred structures, primarily meant for non-Western religious traditions, reflect ethno-spiritual practices, economic prosperity, and the incremental pursuit of building heterotopias. “Exiled” sacred architectures, implanted into an otherwise unassuming and conventional suburban landscape, transmit past memories that are nevertheless subjected to contextual hybridization in American suburbia.

#### APPROPRIATIONS, ADAPTATIONS, AND AUTONOMIES: FIVE SACRED STRUCTURES

Spirituality is a shaper of identity in the growing Asian communities of suburban Houston. While differences in spiritual practice determine spatial distinctions among religious adherents, most recent immigrant groups remain definable, yet open to their larger communities. In Houston, immigrants have developed religious architectures in much the same way that previous waves have

*“Behind the wall of the city, life rested on a common foundation, set as deep as the universe itself. The city was nothing less than the home of a powerful god. The architectural and sculptural symbols that made this fact visible lifted the city far above the village or country town. To be a resident of the city was to have a place in man’s true home, the great cosmos itself.”*

Lewis Mumford





*Exterior view of Sri Swaminarayan Mandir, southwest Houston.*



*Archive Prayer Hall interior of Sri Swaminarayan Mandir, southwest Houston.*



*Temple complex of the Vietnamese Buddhist Center, Sugar Land, Texas.*



*Festival float at the Vietnamese Buddhist Center, Sugar Land, Texas.*

contributed to the American sacred architectural landscape. Through socio-economic advancement, each community has simultaneously carved out greater autonomy and civic engagement. This autonomy has resulted in new approaches to making buildings and landscapes, allowing a broader perspective on spirituality to become visible and assimilated. The following five structures reflect change in the sacred landscape of suburban Houston:

**Sun Young Taoist Temple:** In Asia, Taoist temples are sited within dramatic and remote mountainous landscapes. For urban sites such as the Sun Young Taoist Temple in Houston, natural topographies are translated into informal gardens. Originally called Tien Hou, Sun Young is located in the Second Ward, a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood that figured prominently in the early industrialization of the city. Founded in 1988 by the Sino-Indochinese Association of Texas, it is one of Houston's few shared Chinese-Vietnamese and Taiwanese sacred spaces. The temple represents a compromise of two traditions and is dedicated to the Chinese Goddess of Heaven, Tien Hou. Sun Young conforms to Taoist architectural principles and is adorned with elaborately carved columns and icons. Its plan configuration adopts the traditional Chinese court-garden form, consisting of a main altar, central divine hall, scriptural-mediation room, reception rooms, and a meditation garden. As a contemporary interpretation, Sun Young conveys architectural and interior decoration influences of the Ming and Qing dynasties.<sup>3</sup> It is a negotiated space, reflecting the Vietnamese adaptation of a generally Chinese architectural aesthetic that serves both the Chinese-Vietnamese and Taiwanese communities.

**Wat Buddhavas Theravada Thai Buddhist Temple:** The temple is located just beyond the borders of the Inwood North subdivision in north Houston. Conceived in the late 1970s, Inwood North was built as a developer-master-planned community of substantial, custom brick homes governed by a strict homeowner's association. Wat Buddhavas is located in a densely forested, informal neighborhood called Recreation Farms. Built in 1958, the neighborhood is characterized by modest one-story tract ranches and trailer homes sited on culvert driveways alongside open-ditch streets. Here, the self-conscious suburban formality of Inwood North gives way to the casual rural informality of Recreation Farms. Wat Buddhavas positions itself at the cusp of two very different suburban worlds, within a typical "Houston" seam where the conventional and unexpected converge. Primarily serving the Thai community, as well as Laotians and Cambodians, the temple reaches out to a larger multicultural context. Annual Lunar New Year services and seasonal festivals offer opportunities for non-Buddhists to participate in the spiritual customs of this open and welcoming community. Resident monks take their lunch communally, sharing home-cooked food with those attending daily prayer services. Served in Bangkok street-vendor style, these quintessentially authentic meals feature curries, duck eggs, regional noodle dishes, and fresh papaya salads that are not typically found in local Thai restaurants. An afternoon at Wat Buddhavas is quite like stepping across a temple threshold in Chiang Mai.

**Sri Swaminarayan Mandir:** Mandir is a Sanskrit word that refers to stillness of the mind, as well as a place where the soul floats freely to seek peace, joy, and comfort. In Hinduism, the mandir is a place of worship, prayer, and community. From conception to completion, the Hindu ethos for building a mandir requires that various sacred rites be performed during the construction process. Built in 2004 as the first traditional stone mandir in the US, the design and building process of the Sri Swaminarayan Mandir in southwest Houston conforms to ancient Vedic architectural principles. The Sri Swaminarayan Mandir is based on astronomically derived mathematic computations and geometric configurations that determined its precise proportional relationships. During site selection, soil was tested and prayers were said to seek permission from the earth to disturb its natural state. Once the foundation had been established, a small pot containing sacraments was ceremoniously placed below the garbhagriha—an unlit shrine. Arguably one of the



most substantial buildings in American suburbia, the Sri Swaminarayan Mandir is a load-bearing stone structure without ferrous metal reinforcements. The absence of metal reduces corrosion and extends the temple's lifespan to over 1,000 years. Furthermore, it is believed that metals concentrate magnetic fields and impede meditation.

**Vietnamese Buddhist Center:** In 1989, the Huyền Quang Youth Organization invited Buddhist monk Thích Nguyễn Hạnh to Houston to help establish the Vietnam Buddhist Center (VNBC) on a 12-acre site in Sugar Land.<sup>4</sup> Since that time, Fort Bend County has grown into one of the most diverse communities in the US. The VNBC draws most of its members from the Vietnamese Buddhist community including recent immigrants, as well as second- and third-generation Vietnamese Americans. VNBC is monumental in scale and a large statue of the Buddhist saint Quan Âm figures prominently in plan. Rising above a footbridge that crosses a manmade pond, it is the largest statue of Quan Âm in the Western Hemisphere and an object of curiosity within an otherwise ordinary suburban American context. Veneration of Quan Âm within the Vietnamese community is common, and the Vietnamese Buddhist Center is a main pilgrimage shrine for the faithful. As a bodhisattva, or enlightened individual who aids humanity, she is revered throughout Asia as Guanyin and viewed as a compassionate universal mother who aids those in need.

**Our Lady of Lourdes Vietnamese Roman Catholic Church:** Vietnamese Catholics were closely associated with the South Vietnamese government, leading them to be disproportionally represented among those fleeing Vietnam after the Fall of Saigon in 1975. The first generation of Vietnamese Catholic immigrants joined established Catholic churches within their own neighborhoods. Many Vietnamese Catholics brought a deep sense of devotion to their faith, as well as distinct cultural traditions that set them apart from American Catholics. Originally part of St. Jerome Parish, the Vietnamese Catholic community of northwest Houston eventually grew in size to require an independent parish. At the same time, they began building independent social, financial, and philanthropic support networks to support its construction. Our Lady of Lourdes Church is purpose-built for the Vietnamese community and emblematic of the process by which Vietnamese Catholics have gained greater autonomy. The church's design conveys historically referential postmodernist architecture, blending the French roots of Vietnamese Catholicism with the architectural memory of the Basilica of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception in Saigon. Likewise, it demonstrates a more-than-300-year tradition that cross-pollinates Catholic rituals and architectural conditions with long-standing aspects of Vietnamese culture. Our Lady of Lourdes is among the largest and most elaborate Vietnamese Roman Catholic churches outside of Vietnam.

#### REFLECTING ON THE SACRED IN SUBURBIA

The discussion of the American urban religious landscape in architectural discourse is nothing new. However, translated to a suburban Houston context, recent sacred architectures reflect a similar level of aspiration—one that has been more typically associated with inner city religious structures of the early-20th century. These emerging sacred structures demonstrate alternative approaches that are both highly formalized and substantial. Ritualized and traditional, they attempt to implant carbon-copied physical memories of the past into American suburbia.

As Foucault proposed in *Of Other Spaces* (1967), these historical reproductions, set within their autonomous compounds, juxtapose within a single actual place the memory of several places and contradictions. Furthermore, their role not only reflects on spirituality, but creates a space of illusion—a heterotopia—confirming the cultural



Photo courtesy of Diego Delso

*Basilica of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception Roman Catholic Church, central Saigon.*


and political resilience of displaced communities. Much like previous waves of immigrants that passed through Ellis Island during the early-20th century, many recent immigrant groups have similarly fled poverty, political upheaval, and religious persecution. In this regard, the newly emerging heterotopias of Houston are collectively building a multicultural diasporic landscape of nuances, hybridizations, and cross-pollinations. These “architectures” are shaped not only by architects, but through the collective memory and participation of an entire community building several heterotopias—at once—in America. 



Photo courtesy of Our Lady of Lourdes archive

*Our Lady of Lourdes Roman Catholic Church grotto and garden, northwest Houston.*

1. “From Houston Region Grows More Racially/Ethnically Diverse, With Small Declines in Segregation.” *A Joint Report Analyzing Census Data from 1990, 2000, and 2010*. A report of the Kinder Institute for Urban Research & the Hobby Center for the Study of Texas. Authored by Michael O. Emerson, Jenifer Bratter, Junia Howell, P. Wilner Jeanty, and Mike Cline, Rice University, Houston, 2012.
2. Michel Foucault. *Of Other Spaces* (1967), “Heterotopias.” This text, entitled “Des Espace Autres,” and published by the French journal *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité* in October, 1984. The text was the basis for a lecture given by Foucault in March 1967. Although not reviewed for publication by the author and thus not part of the official corpus of his work, the manuscript was released into the public domain for an exhibition in Berlin shortly before Foucault's death. It was translated from French by Jay Miskowicz.
3. Tien Hou Temple Archive at the Sun Young Taoist Temple, Houston.
4. Vietnamese Buddhist Center of Houston Archive, [www.vnbc.org](http://www.vnbc.org), Retrieved 2013-03-12.



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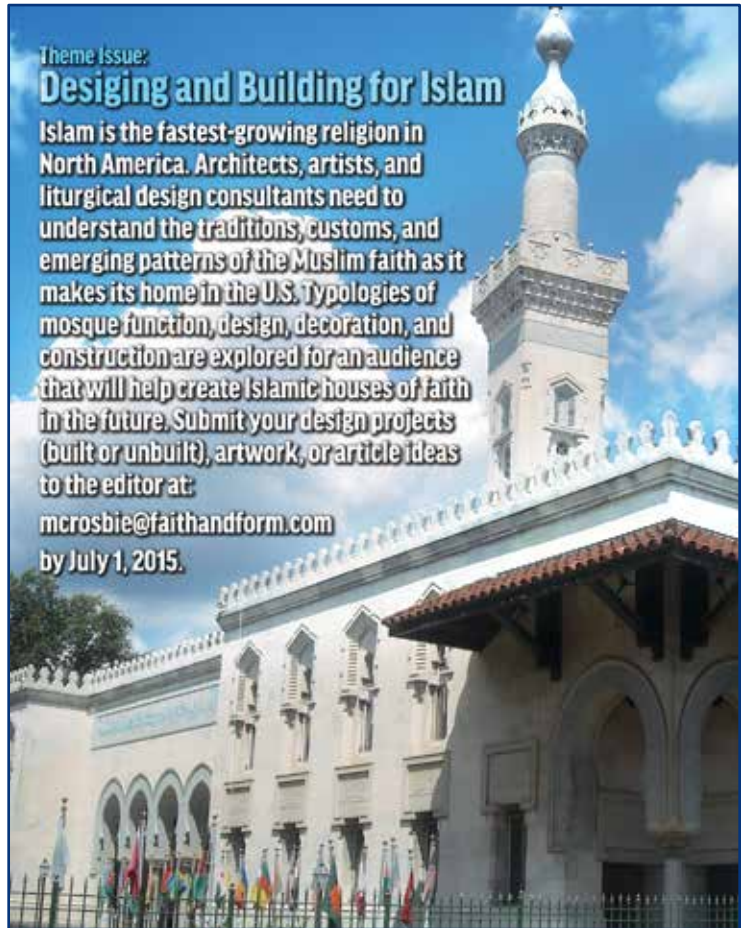
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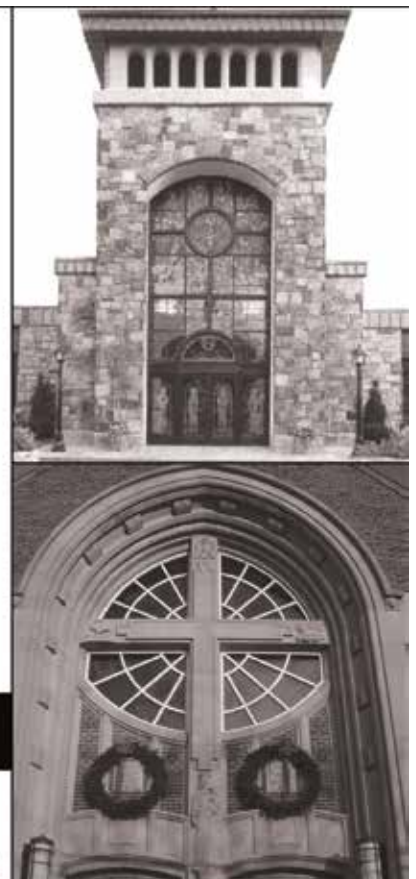
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# NOTES & COMMENTS

## DUKE DISCUSSION: WHAT IS SACRED SPACE?

Last January, officials at Duke University officials cited security reasons for reversing a decision to allow the Muslim call to prayer (the *adhan*) to be played from the Duke Chapel bell tower. Instead the prayer was broadcast from a public address system on the steps of the chapel. The plan to use the chapel tower drew very public criticism from evangelist Franklin Graham. Duke Divinity School Dean Richard Hays also indicated he had heard messages from inside and outside the Divinity School “expressing concern and dismay” about the plan. Hays also argued that the chapel’s “architecture and iconography identify it unmistakably as a Christian place to worship.”

As a result of the fallout over the chapel incident, Duke recently held a public discussion on the topic: “What is sacred space?” In announcing a university discussion on the question, Chapel Dean Luke Powery, said: “Discovering and identifying sacred spaces has a long tradition in many faiths. How we understand and negotiate those claims among different faiths is as important as ever at this time and in this place. Sacred space is central in the practices of many faith traditions.”

A Duke Chapel “Bridge Panel” explored the topic with Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders. The panelists included: Dr. Ellen Davis, Amos Ragan Kearns Distinguished Professor of Bible and Practical Theology at the Duke Divinity School; Dr. Omid Safi, director of the Duke Islamic Studies Center; Dr. Christy Lohr Sapp, associate dean for religious life at Duke Chapel; and Rebecca Simons, director for Jewish Life at Duke.

Powery led the discussion. He noted that the chapel is an icon of Duke University, a



space for Christian worship, and a sanctuary of hospitality and care for a wide variety of religious groups. Powery then asked each panelist to comment on what they saw as sacred space. Davis noted that the notion of sacred space is inherently ambiguous. It is space with a history and is passionately regarded. It is space that is almost always contested, although she noted that until the recent events there had been very little controversy about the varied uses of the chapel. Safi noted that Duke Chapel was the space where he was welcomed as an undergraduate at Duke, where he has heard lectures and concerts, and where he was married. He argued that in Islam all the earth is sacred, and that sanctity is brought to a place when a community invokes the presence of God. Simons recalled the Tabernacle narrative in Judaism and said that people need sacred space to connect with God and God dwells

within people. Sacredness is made by the people, not the space itself. All panelists agreed that the chapel is a public space with a Christian heritage but now serving a varied and culturally complex community.

Asked if mosques, temples, and churches had a history of sharing spaces, all panelists recalled significant times when faith communities shared their space with another religion. Powery asked that the Duke community continue the discussion of how to understand each other and how to be hospitable. He ended the program with a quotation of Martin Luther King, Jr.: “One can affirm the existence of God with his or her lips, but deny God’s existence with their lives.”

—The Reverend W. Joseph Mann

THE AUTHOR IS AN ADJUNCT PROFESSOR AT THE DUKE DIVINITY SCHOOL AND IS A PAST CHAIR OF THE INTERFAITH FORUM ON RELIGION, ART & ARCHITECTURE.

## Quote of Note

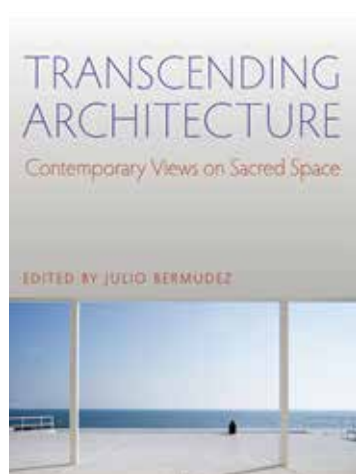
*“Prayer is the key of the morning and the bolt of the evening.”*

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)

## Send Your News to *Faith & Form*

The editors of *Faith & Form* want to bring its readers the latest news of those involved in the fields of religion, art, and architecture. Send press releases and materials to the attention of Michael J. Crosbie, Editor, *Faith & Form*, 47 Grandview Terrace, Essex, CT 06426; email: [mcrosbie@faithandform.com](mailto:mcrosbie@faithandform.com).





*Transcending Architecture: Contemporary Views on Sacred Space.* Julio Bermudez, editor. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press 2015.

In the context of a still cautiously blooming but solidly evolving discourse about the sacred in space and built place, this book takes the reader to a threshold. Passing over it, an arched hall opens where voices and instruments from some for this "concert's" most skilled players in North America are tuned up. Compared with other contributed books, this work offers

an unusually well merged union of reflections from inside and outside of architecture, theology, philosophy, art history, and cultural studies.

Advancing chapter by chapter, what I would call "the sacred within" appears increasingly clearer and more differentiated. The intertwining of the beautiful and the good in a progressing "aesth/ethics," and the deep interchange of religion with architecture, design, and urban planning become visible in all its depth, manifold, and challenge.

The aspiration is for a profound integration of the spatial and the spiritual, the aesthetical and the ethical challenges of architects, planners, and decision makers. Both are demanded to rise to the challenges of an increasing social (and spatial) injustice, economic destruction, and dramatic environmental-and-climatic change. Architecture needs to contribute creatively and carefully with built environments to our common just and sustainable future.

In 19 chapters practicing architects, designers, and scholars in different disciplines enter an exciting dialogue about what we might call the deeper spiritual driving forces in architecture and those who inhabit it. Prominent writers with substantive contributions to the field such as Juhani Pallasmaa, Karsten Harries, and Kevin Seasoltz meet new voices and perspectives. Landscape architect Rebecca Krinke, for example,

makes us aware of the healing and ethically awakening dimension of experiencing nature and suffering. Theologian Mark Wedig calls not just for sacred space but sacred rituals in the non-space of prayer, where powerlessness is enabling. Social work scholar Michael Sheridan argues for an architecture that advances social justice, and designer Richard Vosko envisions a servant architecture where buildings help the sick, the less fortunate, and the environment.

The authors produce a rich and diverse agenda of themes where notions such as silence, aura, home, and incarnation are explored from different points of departure and with different methods. Nevertheless, the discourse about architecture and religion carries a problem that not even this book is able to solve. The diversity of terms such as religion, transcendence, faith, sacred, numinous, and spiritual is, without doubt, markedly constructive for the acceleration of thinking about the sacred in architecture. But at the same time we would also need to put emphasis on reflecting how different approaches in different disciplines relate to each other and how they might interact in a common space. I do not, of course, demand one common mandatory concept for all, as the diversity in itself represents an important intrinsic value, but I have problems with using the book title's central term of transcending to serve as an umbrella for all. One should not over-interpret my question, as the discourse on the conditions of late modern life is still in a phase of its beginning and, as I said above, cautiously blooming. Maybe it is not yet the time to envision one common language, but one should exercise patience.

Having walked through these chapters, which in different ways are transfiguring both faith and form in architecture, a silent and light-toned hope ensues. A hope that doing good by and through architecture might help us to transform the post-metropolis, and the landscapes carrying it, into a space that is habitable for all beings. Spatial design develops in such a hope in synergy, with the life-giving Holy Spirit who takes place.

—Sigurd Bergmann

THE AUTHOR IS PROFESSOR IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES, NORWEGIAN UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, INITIATOR OF THE EUROPEAN FORUM FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND THE ENVIRONMENT, AND THE AUTHOR AND EDITOR OF NUMEROUS BOOKS AND ARTICLES ON RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT.

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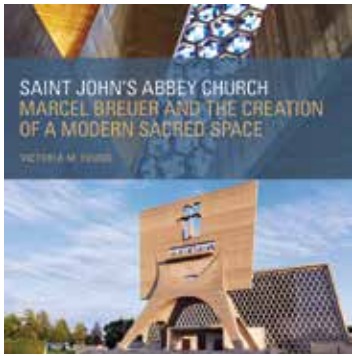
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*Saint John's Abbey Church, Marcel Breuer and the Creation of a Modern Sacred Space.* Victoria M. Young. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

No more unlikely – and magical – a tale exists of an architect and a client creating a landmark church than that of architect Marcel Breuer and the Benedictines of Saint John's Abbey, creating the Abbey's church in Collegeville,

Minnesota – told in the recently released and beautifully illustrated book by the architectural historian Victoria Young, who teaches at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul.

Who would have thought that this Catholic monastic community with German roots would select, as the designer of their church, a Lutheran Hungarian-born architect who had never before designed a religious building? And who have guessed at the time that that combination of talent and conviction would end up producing what renowned architect I.M. Pei called “one of the greatest examples of 20<sup>th</sup>-century architecture”?

Young offers much more than architectural history in her book. Throughout it, she weaves the remarkable history of Saint John's Abbey, located 90 miles north of the Twin Cities and the largest Benedictine community in the Western Hemisphere. She also ties that narrative to the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Liturgical Movement, which culminated in the Second Vatican Council's changes to worship practices. Those liturgical reforms drove the design of the Abbey Church, as Young so ably describes. Aimed at involving the congregation more in the Mass, the Liturgical Movement encouraged the positioning of the altar more centrally and

prominently in the worship space, and the making of church interiors more functional and responsive to worship – all characteristics of Breuer's design of the abbey church.

Breuer's lack of previous religious-design experience – as well as his humility, listening skills, and youthfulness – served him well as the Abbey rethought its worship space in light of the Liturgical Movement. He envisioned a sacred space unlike that ever seen before: a large, trapezoidal room with a white-marble altar at its center, raised above the congregants, and lit from a clearstory above.

The church's folded, thin-shell concrete structure, which Breuer designed in partnership with the noted engineer Pier Luigi Nervi, provided the simple, unadorned interior that the liturgical movement favored. And the new emphasis on the congregation's participation in the rituals of the Mass led Breuer to one of his greatest inventions: the concrete bell banner, which marks the church's location at the top of the hill, visible for miles around. That free-standing structure, with its legs straddling the entry and its uplifted arms holding the trapezoidal, concrete banner, recalls the procession of people into the church.

The church's decorative art also reflected the Liturgical Movement. From the stained-glass north window by Bronislaw Bak to the altars designed by Breuer and art consultant Frank Kacmarcik, the church's interiors have simple, bold forms; intense, colorful patterns; and unpainted, wood and concrete materials.

Young's book does what the best architectural histories should do: reveal the ways in which buildings reflect the people and cultures that give rise to them. Such books also teach us a lot about ourselves and, in this case, what we have come to expect in church architecture: powerful aesthetic and spatial experiences.

–Thomas Fisher

THOMAS FISHER IS A PROFESSOR IN THE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND FORMER DEAN OF THE COLLEGE OF DESIGN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA, AS WELL AS A MEMBER OF FAITH & FORM'S EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD.

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The Duke Endowment  
Charlotte, NC

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OMNIPLAN  
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### Liturgical Consultant /

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# DISCOVERING GAUDI ON A RAINY EVENING

THE LAST WORD ★ SHANETTA MURRAY


Even after seven hours of flight, it still didn't feel like we were in Barcelona. Our legs were cramped and butts were sore, but it still felt as if we were in a dream. Our architecture study group got to the hotel and took a couple of hours to unwind before dinner. We awoke feeling refreshed and ready to explore the town, only to find it dark and rainy; our mood was as damp as the streets when we learned that we had to walk to the restaurant a few blocks away. The streets and sidewalks were soaked, wet with pouring rain. We saw people in a bar laughing and having a drink. I paused to watch them. They seemed so happy just enjoying the company of their neighbors and the fútbol game playing on the television. The restaurant felt miles away as we held our umbrellas, following in pursuit of our professor, who was now a block ahead of us. A few of us lost track of the group as we began to notice our surroundings. The details, such as wrought iron flowers budding on the gate and even the way the bricks were laid on the curb, was mesmerizing. Barcelonans took pride in their architecture.

We arrived at the restaurant and our Spanish welcome dinner. The food, like the city, was rich. On the way out we realized the rain had cleared. I stepped out onto the curb and noticed a change in the air. It felt like opportunity or possibility was upon us. We could now take our time walking back to the hotel and slowly observe the architecture.

Then, someone in our group informed us that La Sagrada Familia—Antoni Gaudí's greatest work of architecture—was right in front of us. It had been raining so hard before that we didn't realize we walked right by the unlit church. I braced myself, realizing that I would finally see this work in "real time," a building I have studied since freshman year. Feeling excited, I took a deep breath and crossed the street to get the full view of the Sagrada. As I walked toward it, I tried not to peek. Then, with my back against its façade, I took a deep breath and spun around. Now lit with scaffolds high above the towers, I felt as if I were in the presence of greatness. It didn't even feel like I was in Barcelona anymore, but as if I had transcended to another place. I

have never been in such awe. I stood admiring Gaudí's magnum opus intently, not even realizing that I was paying respect to a building. Under the deep indigo night sky, you could get a clear view of only the front facade. The rest of the building seemed hidden, draped by a sky-hung shroud of darkness.

There was so much detail everywhere. It seemed crazy, obsessive, that mere humans had dedicated themselves to carve these perfect figures. My eyes simply could not focus on one thing. I was drawn to every curve, every edge, every single detail. I was in the presence of something much, much bigger than me—not just physically bigger, but historically bigger, spiritually bigger.

Walking back to the hotel I thought about my experience with the Sagrada and couldn't stop smiling. It now felt as though we had finally arrived in Barcelona. I suddenly realized that not only could a piece of architecture inspire me, it could change me as well. 

SHANETTA MURRAY IS A RECENT GRADUATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD ARCHITECTURAL ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM.



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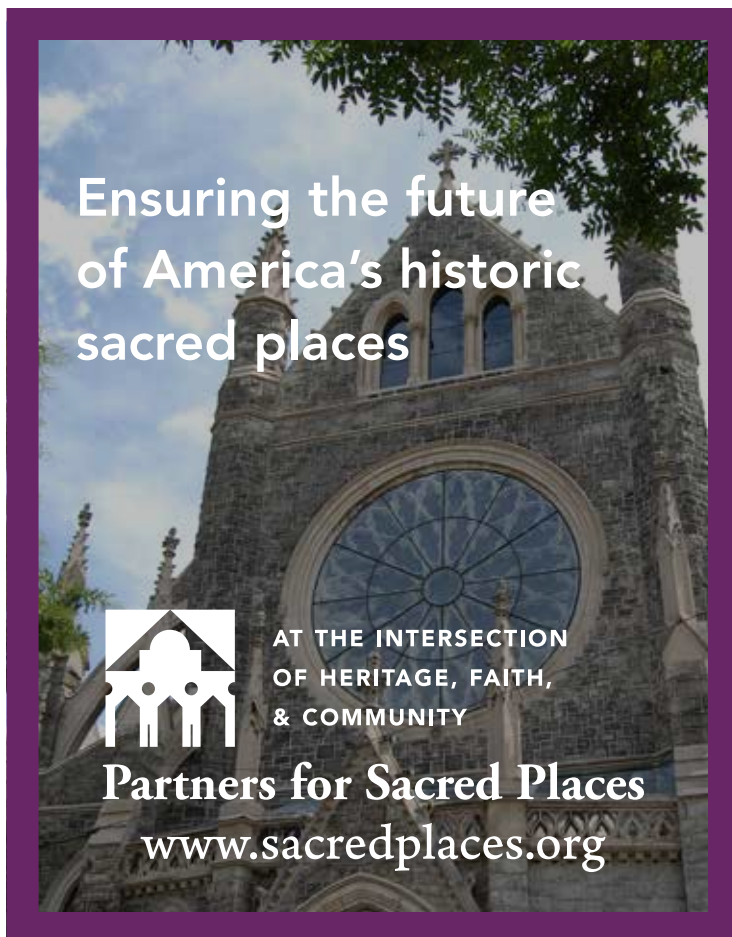
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