Louis I. Kahn's JEWISH ARCHITECTURE

Mikveh Israel and the Midcentury American Synagogue  Susan G. Solomon
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Acknowledgments

Graduate students learn to choose a dissertation topic they like passionately. They will be living with it for a long time. It is only with this book on American synagogues that I have come to realize the true meaning of that decision. My own dissertation, which was on architect Louis I. Kahn’s public work for the Jewish community in the 1950s and 1960s (and took more than a decade to complete), has spawned all the projects I have tackled since. Lou Kahn’s work was even the generator of a book I wrote on playgrounds, giving further evidence that a dissertation is a research assignment that is never finite. Kahn’s ongoing presence in my life means, too, that I have continuing and heartfelt thanks to give to David Brownlee (my dissertation supervisor) and the Architectural Archives of the University of Pennsylvania (home of the Louis I. Kahn Collection). Marian Burleigh-Motley, by asking me to speak on Kahn’s unbuilt synagogues at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, gave this project a boost.

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While trying to retain a critical eye and unbiased stance, I have found that writing this book has taken me on a nostalgic voyage. Some of my earliest childhood memories involve synagogues in Perth Amboy, New Jersey: the small shul in the basement of one grandfather’s house and the imposing Conservative synagogue where my other grandfather had been president. One of my sweetest recollections involves walking home from holiday services. I also have fond memories of the suburban midcentury synagogue to which my parents moved when we relocated to suburbia and at which my husband (my most dedicated photographer and traveling companion) and I were married. After such a wistful journey, I am delighted to acknowledge the unlimited aid I have received from my family. In addition to my husband Bob Solomon’s assistance, I have been able to tap into the skills of our talented children: Jon Solomon (the conqueror of all design issues and computer woes) and Debra Solomon (the master of the written word) and enjoy the encouragement of their wonderful spouses, Nicole Scheller and Gil Carmel. It is only fitting, therefore, that I dedicate this book to the next generation of our family: the Solomon-Scheller and Solomon-Carmel grandchildren.
Louis I. Kahn’s Jewish Architecture
ARCHITECT LOUIS I. KAHN (1901–1974), who created haunting plans (1961–1972) for Mikveh Israel synagogue, infused his designs with subtle Jewish content. By grounding his schemes with original but not necessarily obvious Jewishness, Kahn set himself apart from many contemporaries who had been designing synagogues since the end of World War II. While other architects applied superficial decorations or manipulated floor plans to “look Jewish,” Kahn found (albeit serendipitously) ways to “become Jewish.”

Kahn’s six schemes for Mikveh Israel, none of which was ever executed, offer a lens through which to examine the transformation of the American synagogue during the decade and a half between 1955 and 1970. This book focuses on Kahn’s plans while also examining the designs of synagogues that were most frequently exhibited or published at the time. The objective is to scrutinize the context and legacy of Kahn’s proposals in order to explain the individuality of his solution.

Kahn, and those who designed the midcentury synagogues that preceded Mikveh Israel, had to wrestle with the issues that challenged postwar Jewish institutions. They had to confront the changing place of Jews within America’s complex religious system. They had to tackle the pull of suburbanization, the role of modern architecture and decoration in contemporary synagogue design, and the place of nature in a religious structure. The Mikveh Israel clients also demanded that Kahn preserve the history and material trappings of one of America’s oldest Sephardic Orthodox congregations.

American Jews, who accounted for 40 percent of world Jewry after World War II, recognized that they had become the hub of global Jewish culture. Synagogue construction could show that Jews had a secure place at home. In the aftermath of World War II, American synagogues followed a trajectory similar to that of their counterparts in the time following the Civil War. In both eras, a newly successful Jewish population developed an original architecture, an architecture that would define a presence for Jewish Americans.
in the evolving religious and cultural landscape of the United states. Congregations, in both periods, sought to retain and expand their numbers of young members.2

Synagogues became active patrons of modern architecture and architectural decoration after World War II. Having a particularly American cast, these buildings sprang up in the suburbs and were aligned primarily with either the Reform or Conservative movements.3 The national leaders of the Reform movement, in particular, played an important part in encouraging progressive design. They chose modernism because it shared their goal of breaking with the past; they rarely choose modernism because it was inexpensive, which it often was not. Professional journals and the popular press spread the renown of these suburban synagogues and helped to establish them as an authentic, original building type.

In the late 1940s, architects believed that 1,800 synagogues were building new facilities or updating old ones.4 The total number turned out to be less, but it seems clear that architects were confident that the demand was accelerating for Jewish houses of worship. Always working with an enlightened rabbi, who was often the secret weapon in the successful completion of a building campaign, synagogue committees first hired people who shared their own Jewish heritage. It was not long after the war that their roster of well-regarded mid-twentieth-century architects expanded to include both Jewish and non-Jewish designers. Professional inclusiveness was a fitting tribute to earlier non-Jewish luminary architects—such as Peter Harrison, William Strickland, Thomas U. Walter, Frank Furness—who had designed American synagogues in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Decorative programs distinguished synagogues from modernist churches, restaurants, and schools. Postwar synagogue architects working in the modernist idiom often solicited the participation of adventurous painters and sculptors for elaborate decorative schemes. Bauhaus-inflected crafts and the work of abstract expressionist painters and sculptors began to appear in synagogues before they had been seen widely at gallery exhibitions in the United States or graced the pages of American art journals.

Postwar euphoria still lingered when Kahn took on the Mikveh Israel commission in 1961. Young Jewish Americans believed that opportunities were limitless for themselves and their children. They were also finding that identifying themselves as Jews helped to make them American, participants in one of the three primary religions: Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism. A tiny minority of the total population, Jews gladly accepted the
implied invitation to use their religion to defeat Communism as the Cold War heated up and America proclaimed itself the leader of the free world. As discriminatory barriers faded and antisemitism declined, Jews were delighted to see themselves as full participants in the successes of American educational, corporate, residential, and consumer life.

Swept up by the optimism of the postwar era, Jews were able to avoid dwelling on the grim details of the Holocaust, and though affected by the creation of the State of Israel, they were far from overwhelmed by it. Even the frightening aspects of the Cold War—the national defense drills and “duck and cover” exercises—often confirmed that if Jews were going to be extinguished, it would be because they were Americans, not because they were Jews. There is no evidence that Jews of the late 1940s or 1950s were compensating for the horrors of the war by building extravagantly or that they were using architecture to display novel pride because Israel had come into existence in 1948. They were too sure of themselves to believe they were victims and too focused on their own improvement to identify completely with creation of the Jewish state.

Kahn’s Mikveh Israel commission demanded that he translate the vitality of American Jewish life in the 1950s, which had just ended, into a uniquely urban plan. Mikveh Israel was returning to the historic area of Philadelphia, close to where it was incorporated in the eighteenth century. Kahn had to find a way to honor that history, to reinforce his client’s claim that it was the “synagogue of the American Revolution.” Kahn’s strongest designs emerged during his first two years of work on the project. It was another decade before the congregation dismissed him. The underlying cause was lack of funds resulting from a financing scheme that was as naive as it was ingenious. Kahn, who had experienced many disappointments in his professional life, found the loss of Mikveh Israel to be one of the most stinging.

The Mikveh Israel commission had arrived at a particularly upbeat time in Kahn’s career. After fifteen years of teaching and more than three decades of work on public housing, Kahn was finding his distinct style and articulating a commanding personal philosophy. Work was, at last, flowing into his office. He had secured the commission for the Alfred Newton Richards Medical Research Building at the University of Pennsylvania, a building that the Museum of Modern Art honored with a special exhibition in 1961. Another religious structure, the First Unitarian Church in Rochester, was about to go into construction. The Salk Institute in La Jolla, California, was
Introduction

under way. Vincent Scully published the first monograph on Kahn's work, a book that appeared in 1962.

Kahn took it upon himself to use his Mikveh Israel mandate to critique the state of American architecture and synagogue design in the early 1960s. He had begun to fret about modernism even before this commission and the many others that were coming into his office. His concern was not unique. Architects in Europe and America had been trying to temper modernism's severity for decades. Concerns emerged as early as the 1930s, just a decade after the birth of the movement in Europe. Apprehension intensified in America even before World War II ended. Postwar prosperity and the building boom of the 1950s accelerated the anxieties of Kahn and many of his professional peers. Kahn feared that modernism, which found fertile ground in the United States after the war, had become another historical fashion. He worried that it had become a lifeless style, spawning buildings that could be used interchangeably to accommodate religious and secular purposes.

Always believing that he was a modern architect, Kahn took it upon himself to revitalize modernism's core and find a way to make it timeless, enduring, and reflective of a client's institutional purpose. With Mikveh Israel, Kahn was able to develop a robust version of modernism that would yield a distinctive synagogue. His interpretation met his own desire to have finite use-specific spaces that would be responsive to human needs and personal interaction. In his plans for Mikveh Israel, he was particularly sensitive to nature, in the form of both warm natural light without glare and landscape. Kahn's ideals found their best expressions in his proposals for Mikveh Israel's light towers, whose reflective light would become the ephemeral decoration for the sanctuary and the chapel walls, and in the sukkah, the temporary "primitive hut" that is erected each fall. He froze the sukkah in time, making it a permanent garden folly and his personal version of an ideal sanctuary. Mikveh Israel's designs were the ones in which Kahn showed how an American, urban, postwar synagogue could bolster its own humanist objectives, a goal that was not driven by collective identity but by a concern for how people use and benefit from the constructed world.

Kahn's plans reveal how he tried to balance his personal belief in the universality of religion and the specificity of Judaism, a religion into which he was born but about which he knew little. Despite his private suspicion of any organized religion, he felt a growing yearning to incorporate and accommodate Jewish meaning. Knowing a scant amount about traditional doc-
trine and observance, Kahn interpreted Jewish content in a sincere, even quirky, manner. In this pursuit, he arrived at ways to accommodate Jewish meaning. There is no evidence to support notions that he was swayed by direct knowledge of or interest in Kabbalah. The resemblance, however, between Kahn’s views and the philosophy of Abraham Joshua Heschel, renowned theologian and professor of ethics and mysticism, raises the possibility that Kahn may have indirectly absorbed a bit of mystical thought. Both men strove to understand the substance of a synagogue.

Kahn may indeed have been “deeply spiritual” (a view maintained by his daughter Sue Ann), if one posits spirituality as a heightened awareness of oneself and one’s surroundings, including the human condition and the splendor of nature. If spirituality also includes an imperative to act in order to improve people’s lives, then it squares well with the original intent of the modern movement in Europe in the early twentieth century, which set out to create a better society. Probably unknown to Kahn, there are Jewish teachings that espouse the same ideals: Tikkun Olam, the ethical precept to heal the world; and Pikkuah Nefesh, which makes it possible to dispense with all commandments (there are 613 that must be observed so as to lead a truly religious life) in order to save a human life.

By trying to bridge modernism and Judaism, Kahn had the potential to overcome the inconsistencies that exist in any synagogue design. Synagogues have their own internal contradictions. Foremost is Judaism’s basic ambivalence toward permanent structures. The pivotal event for synagogue architecture was the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Lacking a site where “God’s presence could be witnessed,” Jews devised an alternative system of prayer and textual interpretation; Judaism has maintained since that there is nothing inherently holy about the space of a synagogue; it cannot replicate the Temple. A synagogue exists anywhere that a minyan (a quorum of ten people) comes together. The emphasis is on people praying together rather than where they gather; how people come together is more consequential than where they assemble. The synagogue exists in a political and social realm that is expressed in its physical presence, although that physical reality has no inherent sacred nature. One scholar notes: “Sanctity rests in the worshipping congregation, in the community of believers.” Putting the same thoughts into even more precise terms, one rabbi wrote in the 1950s: “Without a congregation there is no synagogue.”

In addition to this abstract and human-centered definition, there are three architectural elements that have become traditional aspects of a synagogue...
interior: the ark, a niche or cabinet in which the holy Torah scrolls that are the centerpiece of all observance are stored; a bimah, the reading table on which the scrolls are placed when they are being read; and an eternal light that burns constantly, thereby showing the endurance of the faith. In Reform and Conservative congregations, it has been the twentieth-century norm to place the ark and bimah together, along the eastern wall.

America and American architecture changed over the course of the Mikveh Israel commission. Jewish identity, so focused in the 1950s on the synagogue as a means of personal representation, changed in the 1960s by becoming more dispersed. Jewish self-perception began to shift from American patriotism to self-appraisal, with Israel and the Holocaust vying for attention. The trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961 made it imperative for American Jews to confront the fact that the Nazis had exterminated more than three-quarters of European Jewry. The Six-Day War, in 1967, tied American Jews more deeply, emotionally and financially, to Israel’s fate. Israel’s victory had created a sense of collective relief that the Jewish state had survived, that “another Auschwitz” had been averted. Some have argued that Israel had “become the faith of the American Jew.” The Holocaust, too, emerged as a means of identity. The late Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg remarked that the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. (completed in 1993), became “the national cathedral of American Jewry’s Jewishness.”

The optimism of postwar America began to fade during the 1960s; synagogue construction slowed as well. By the mid-1970s, many Americans were disillusioned with the power of organized religion to pull people together. Synagogues were less sure of their roles in their communities and in the lives of ordinary Jews. Spurred on by the political activism of the previous decade and by alternatives that emphasized more home-centered participation, Jews began to see the synagogue as just one of many options for religious and social participation. Jewish institutions became more inclusive by counting women in the minyan and ordaining female rabbis at the same time that many Jews began to feel that their own homes had an authenticity that was lacking in synagogue participation.

Today, many synagogues are contending with problems that can be traced to prior decades: declining membership, changing demographics, and escalating costs. Frequently burdened by deteriorating infrastructure and the overwhelming spaces of their mid-twentieth-century buildings, synagogues are trying to reconcile the old, staid spaces with the congregation’s
demand for greater informality and accessibility. Synagogues grapple with questions of preservation and restoration, often unsure what their commitment should be to structures and artwork that have become historically or financially significant.

Three decades since Kahn was fired from the Mikveh Israel project, its unbuilt status remains troubling. Kahn had provided a fresh paradigm for a synagogue, one that offered innovative concepts regarding planning, decoration, and the incorporation of light and nature into building design. Kahn’s work for Mikveh Israel showed that a revitalized modernism could promote human contact and positive interaction. Kahn, therefore, managed to conceive of a structure that would embody the essence of Jewish belief about the sanctity of the community. He showed that it was possible to pioneer ways in which a building could incorporate Jewish content without being sentimental or heavy-handed, by capturing the ephemeral aspect of Judaism. While the needs of today’s synagogues pose different challenges than those Kahn handled, contemporary architects might still be able to find some inspiration in his approach. It should not be copied, but aspects of it could be evoked in new and engaging ways.

Kahn demonstrated that an excellent architect, one whose vision of a synagogue could elevate the needs of his client, could transform practical uses into an exceptional place for worship. Perhaps now, in the early twenty-first century, when so much of Judaism and its buildings are in flux, the time is right for American synagogues to reach out once again to America’s most promising architects. These practitioners, including a young generation that is just beginning to build, should be able to adapt and interpret Kahn’s approach in hopes of once more establishing a progressive cultural and architectural image for each Jewish community. Jewish museums have paved the way. Now is the moment for synagogues to join them in being vital expressions of American Jewish life.
During the late 1940s and through the 1950s, the United States experienced a wave of renewed religious interest. While it appears that this was less a religious revival and more a means to self-identification and a rejection of communism, synagogues and churches, many of which arose to meet the needs of an increasingly suburbanized population, feverishly built new structures to respond to meet the demand. The implications were particularly profound for Judaism. Americans came to see Jews, who made up about 3 percent of the population from the 1950s to the 1970s, as the country’s “third religion,” after the Protestant and Catholic faiths. Jews, most of whom were only a generation or two removed from parents or grandparents who had emigrated from Eastern Europe, found a new inclusiveness.

Optimism, a key part of the American psyche, was the underlying theme of Jewish life in the 1950s. Even McCarthyism and the execution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, which Jews feared would link them to communism, now appear as confined deviations from an otherwise positive historical path. Jews were propelled into the suburbs as a positive endorsement of postwar possibilities: Jews could live in areas from which they had previously been barred, work in fields that had previously been hostile to them, and attend schools from which they had been excluded by quotas. It’s a compelling fact that Jews accounted for one-quarter of the Harvard student body by 1952.

Suburban synagogue construction was dynamic, a symbol of thriving contemporary Jewish life. Jewish institutions, which have always had a great deal of local control and have never been permanently tied to any one neighborhood or single building or resident population, easily made the shift or emerged as new entities. Many facilities emerged in nonurban areas that had never had Jewish communities before. Synagogues were built to be original presences that reflected well on Judaism; their designers replicated Protestant values and building models in order to make them a cultural
force, at once unique and recognizably American. While churches chose from a variety of styles, postwar synagogues were exclusively modern and became “showpieces of the modern movement.”

Modern architecture succeeded in an American Jewish context because Jewish leaders, especially those in the Reform movement, proclaimed that it meshed with what they saw as the forward-thinking nature of American Judaism. Modernism offered congregations a chance for physical representation of their own progressive ideals, and Jews, who had reason to be ambivalent about architecture, embraced it and its modern vocabulary. The synagogue building proclaimed that Jews were a visible part of American society; they had truly “arrived” in the suburbs. Their new religious homes were as bold as their synagogue’s religious, social, and educational activities. The Reform movement, unlike the other main branches of American Judaism, adopted a single message about architecture. It relied on a definition of modernism that was inclusive, accepting any building not laden with historical decoration or one that did not display a historical style.

American Religion and Judaism after World War II

World War II was a watershed. One pair of observers noted that American Jews had been “jet-propelled from the periphery of American life, an immigrant, low-income, embattled, defensive group, to a rising middle-class status, in a community of highly educated, mobile, culturally advanced, predominantly native-born Americans.” Accelerated growth of Jewish populations in the suburbs accompanied this transformation. Congregations either followed their urban membership to suburban turf or sprang up as totally new institutions. Conservative congregations dominated the scene, although Reform congregations were significant presences. In the 1950s, the Rabbinical Assembly, the ruling body for Conservative rabbis, permitted car travel to the synagogue on Sabbath and holidays. The rabbis, by allowing car travel that the Orthodox wing did not sanction, hoped to promote synagogue attendance and heightened observance. Conservative congregations, removed from the constraint of serving only members in their neighborhood, now vied with Reform synagogues for support from the same population pool. Increased demand for spaces for worship, education, and general socialization soon led to membership campaigns and construction plans.

Synagogue success can be attributed only partly to the need of a reli-
gious and/or ethnic group to spend time together in a new setting. Throughout America, a postwar religious revitalization was taking place. The phrase “under God” was added to the pledge of allegiance in June 1954. Though it had appeared on coins since the Civil War, “In God We Trust” did not become the official motto of the United States until 1956. The motto had been used at Eisenhower’s 1953 inauguration, where it was emblazoned on the “float to God” that led the floats of each of the states.

Jews and Judaism became integral parts of the American stew. Television advertisements of the 1950s proclaimed that “the family that prays together, stays together,” and the accompanying visuals made it clear that Americans could choose from three different houses of worship, one of which was Jewish. The Cold War and the specter of communism must have fueled some of a Christian, largely Protestant, America’s relinquishment of exclusivity. Rabbi Joshua Loth Liebman’s 1946 book *Peace of Mind*, a self-help manual that sold more than one million copies, heralded “Judaism’s emergence as an intellectual, cultural, and theological force within postwar American society.” The architectural world made a similar announcement. *Architectural Record*, one of three primary journals for modern design at the time, depicted a Star of David alongside a cross on the August 1951 cover.

Chronicler Will Herberg was one of the first to take note of these occurrences. While Americans may have divided themselves into a tripartite nation of Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish identities, Herberg recognized as early as 1950 that in order to be fully “American,” citizens felt that they needed to be allied with one of these three dominant religions. For Jews, as well as Christians, religion was the key to acceptance in the secular world. But religious identification was rarely tied to increased observance and could be interpreted as “a religion . . . of the American Way of Life.” Sociologist Herbert Gans found that Jews in a newly formed suburb wanted their children to grow up with a sense of Jewish identity and some formal Jewish education. These same Jewish adults did not indicate any interest in furthering Jewish ritual in their own homes. A synagogue was needed for ethnic identity and cohesiveness, for Jewish education, and to “demonstrate the solidarity and respectability of the Jewish community” to the rest of the neighbors. Both Gans and fellow sociologist Nathan Glazer refuted the notion that Hitler or Zionism were responsible for renewed Jewish participation in synagogues. Gans concluded that the “arrival of children” was a more profound motivator for parents; Glazer believed that adults, with unlimited freedom, consciously chose not “to become non-Jews.”
It should come as no surprise, then, that synagogue membership widened. The proportion of Jews who were synagogue members rose from 40 percent in the late 1940s to 60 percent in the late 1950s. One pollster reported that synagogue membership may have been as high as 80 percent in 1956.

**UAHC and Modernism**

Architectural commentators of the 1940s and 1950s set out to document their profession as Herberg was chronicling Jewish mores. In 1944, architects prepared for postwar peace by discussing the coming need for schools and religious buildings. In that year, *Architectural Record* responded to growing interest by adding “churches” as a distinct category in its ongoing Building Types Study. That journal’s editor, Kenneth Stowell, like others in the architectural world, was skeptical that the modernism would become a compelling choice for religious institutions. He felt that postwar church architecture would again fall into “modern” and “traditional” camps, with change coming only slowly.

In that same issue of *Architectural Record*, the architect Ben Bloch (of the firm Bloch and Hesse) provided the Jewish perspective. Like Stowell, he doubted that a modern vocabulary would make any headway in the Jewish world. Synagogues had made little architectural impact in the spare building years of the 1930s and early 1940s, and Bloch predicted that both Reform and Conservative congregations would return to earlier historicist models that valued the comfort of architectural details of prior centuries: “Doubtless in most cases the new building will be in one of the traditional styles. There may be some synagogues, as well as churches, in the modern functional style, but they probably will be few in number in the immediate future, because man’s urge to build a place of worship is basically sentimental and emotional, inevitably linked to the past.”

Bloch had reason to be guarded. He saw no reason for architects to adopt an untried building vocabulary as long as they could exploit new materials and new means of construction, erecting buildings that reflected current advances in technology while retaining a familiar style. The question at that point, then, was which vocabulary would prevail. When Congregation B’nai Amoona, for instance, purchased land in 1942 in St. Louis, they expected that their new sanctuary would be built in a historicist mode. Joseph Hudnut, dean of the architecture school at Harvard, who was trying to advance the cause of modern church design, presented an alternative
option in 1944. Acknowledging that it would be accepted slowly, he argued that the time had arrived for “welcoming the presence of the contemporary world” by taking advantage of new materials. Hudnut also declared that inevitably the church will “declare herself for modern art” because of its “rightness and strength” and in order to use decorative arts for their “humanity and warmth.”

Immediately after the war concluded, a shift in Protestant church architecture encouraged synagogues to follow a daring route. The Interdenominational Bureau of Architecture, a joint venture of the major Protestant denominations, responded to suburban development by advocating a non-historicist approach for churches. It published its recommendations in Planning Church Buildings, a book that was available as early as 1945 and highlighted in Architectural Record in 1947. The Interdenominational Bureau maintained a positive, albeit limited, method. It eschewed “style,” thereby ending any discussion that could have favored historicism. Use and function, rather, were its criteria. To those ends, the bureau focused on how congregations could achieve a program. If a congregation could not produce such a document on its own, the Interdenominational Bureau had a clearly thought-out plan that would enable a panel of architects to work with congregations to elicit it from them.

Protestants thereby set the stage for outside consultants to aid local congregations in the design of religious buildings; to guide them toward modern problem solving in order to arrive at buildings that reflected their own time and need. The bureau advised its member congregations that “architecture is an expression of life. Don’t under any circumstances, if you have a competent architect, tell him how the building is to be designed. Allow him freedom to develop a plan and exterior design which he believes is the best possible solution for your particular problem and environment. Don’t tell him it must be ‘colonial’ (a misnomer) Gothic or Swedish.”

Judaism’s Reform movement moved quickly to affect the design of synagogues that were still in planning or even preplanning stages. The Reform movement’s alliance of synagogues, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) enlisted the aid of an art historian and set up its own panel, the Synagogue Architects Consultant Panel (SACP), no doubt following the Protestant model. They tapped art historian Franz Landsberger, former director of the Jewish Museum in Berlin, to consult with congregations or their architects, presumably about decorative schemes. The Jewish Museum in Berlin, following the lead of Protestant theologians who
had encouraged creation of modern ceremonial objects for all religions, had actively supported the display of contemporary Jewish objects. Landsberger’s identification with the museum and alliance with UAHJ signaled the forward-thinking nature of the Reform movement, although there is no evidence that any congregation took advantage of his expertise.

The SACP was more active. Architect Harry M. Prince was the first leader of the group, and for a while its only participant. Prince took it upon himself to review congregational building plans and advise against pitfalls. Later, the SACP evolved into a group of volunteer architects who would counsel congregations on how to initiate and carry out a building process. The SACP had no stock plans, and its architects were forbidden to promote their own work. Keenly aware that the Conservative movement was growing in numbers and garnering much attention through its highly successful NBC radio program, The Eternal Light, the Reform movement may have looked to the SACP as a way to further its own success in the suburbs. The panel, therefore, can been seen as having had a dual purpose: it emulated Protestant efforts in hopes of steering congregations away from historicism, and it positioned the Reform movement to soar ahead of the Conservative branch. At some point, even famed non-Jewish architect William Lescaze signed on as a volunteer.

Commentary magazine, begun in 1945 by the American Jewish Committee as a nonsectarian monthly journal of opinion on politics and the arts, became the medium that brought discussion of synagogue design to many American Jewish households. Fiercely anticommunist, Commentary became a vehicle for intellectual discussions that bridged the gap between “American and Jewish identities.” Beginning in March 1947, Commentary ran a series of articles that dealt specifically with synagogues, hoping to provide useful guidelines for people making decisions about new construction. The first article, by Rachel Wischnitzer, a prolific art historian, architect, and former curator at the Jewish Museum in Berlin, has an intriguing title and a revealing subtitle: “The Problem of Synagogue Architecture: Creating a Style Expressive of America.” Wischnitzer, confident that America, aided by the emergence of Jewish architects, would be able to develop an architecture that could reflect the role of Jews in an open society, does not endorse modernism directly but makes it clear that historicism would no longer be appropriate. She views historicist synagogue design as a benign but “gentile notion of what Jewish tradition looks like.” She seeks a synthesis appropriate to the freedoms that Jews were discovering in the postwar years, in
light of which they no longer had to create synagogues that evoked histories that were fantastical, such as those built in the prevalent nineteenth-century “Moorish” style. For her own era, Wischnitzer demands “something new, expressive of a more self-conscious Jewishness, at home in America.” At the same time, she warns against too much brazen or boastful architecture, displaying nostalgia for “the small, intimate, and humble things, for what is unpretentious and human in scale.”

Three months later, *Commentary* published responses from three Jewish architects and art historian Landsberger. All of them argue against historicism or “copying” and in favor of creating a new, dynamic architecture that is appropriate for their times. Landsberger argues most cogently for the adoption of a modern sensibility. After noting that lack of ornamentation makes it easier for a building to reveal its function and that it provides a more dignified presence than the historical pastiches of the past, he states the real connection between synagogues and modern design. He writes unequivocally that modernism “parallels our striving toward clarity and truth in our religious thinking.” Landsberger posits that, in order to continue their mission and to affect the streetscape, synagogues should employ the best architects that they can find. Three of the other writers, architects Ely Jacques Kahn (no relation to Louis Kahn) and Percival Goodman, along with Goodman’s brother, novelist Paul Goodman, take that idea further by insisting that synagogues find the best painters, sculptors, and even craftsmen for their jobs.

Eric Mendelsohn, from whom Wischnitzer was hoping to elicit a definition of a “Jewish American” architecture, does not comment on the role of Jews as architects or on a “Jewish” style. Instead, he proposes a bold, thoughtfully conceived architecture that takes advantage of contemporary building materials and methods in order to position Jews as “full participants in this momentous period of America’s history.” Mendelsohn urges timelessness and human scale, so that synagogues will be appreciated by future generations; natural light for inspiration; and flexibility, so that money is not squandered on spaces that are used only a few times each year. He also argues for a good fit between the building and its topography. It is worth noting that the architects who wrote for *Commentary* (Mendelsohn, Goodman, Ely Jacques Kahn) were already working on or were about to design a New York City monument to commemorate Jews who perished in Europe. That memorial was not constructed and the entire urge to remember was put on hold until Holocaust monuments began to be built in the mid-1960s. Synagogue
construction apparently supplanted memorials in the 1950s because their construction was more forward thinking and dynamic.46

The UAHC, aware of its power to generate discussion on architecture, inaugurated two conferences on synagogue architecture in 1947. Held in New York and Chicago, in order that as many congregations and architects as possible could participate, the first of these took place the same month that the four opinion pieces ran in Commentary.47 Three of the authors (Mendelsohn was not there) participated. The conference theme, “An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow,” indicated a demand for immediate action and for long-term plans. Attendees at both heard pleas for the modern approach. Percival Goodman later recalled a glorious moment during which he felt the conference endorsed modernism: “Most of us who spoke made a plea for the acceptance and support of modern architecture, describing its integrity, reasonableness, and beauty. The result of the conference was enthusiastic support by the Union of an artistic position considered by many to be radical.”48 Another participant recalled things differently, suggesting that while there was castigation of the old “historical styles . . . no conclusion was reached as to what style of architecture ought to shape the synagogue of our land and our day.”49

The UAHC, aware that “this is a new era and there are many important problems that precedent will not decide,” had organized the conferences in order to show that “the American synagogue of the future shall be a well-planned modern and distinctive building, avoiding the false traditions and the architectural mistakes of the past.” The conference hosted two exhibits to reinforce its premise. One showed photos and sketches of “outstanding examples of new American synagogues in the modern style.” The other exhibited examples of “synagogue ornamentation and decoration” created by Jewish artists. The UAHC had clearly arrived at an early conclusion: modernism would be the language of the future (as soon as possible), and decoration would be key to transforming universal modernism into Jewish particularism.50

The resulting lack of firm acceptance of modernism must have been a setback and might explain why the UAHC initially declined to publish the conference proceedings for member congregations.51 It is also possible that congregations may not yet have latched on to modernism as a radical break with the past and an affirmation of a new era. One architect, alluding to the connection between modernism and American context, proclaimed that it was imperative to build in a modern style because it was the dominant trend
and "Jews have always built of the time and of the country in which they found themselves and it is this tradition that you should carry out." So for some observers, modernism was another style to which Judaism should conform.

It was 1953 before the UAHc published a book that contained some of the proceedings of the 1947 meetings; the volume included additional historical material along with seating, lighting, and acoustical suggestions. This book not only makes it possible to glean how architects presented projects and opinions at the early gatherings but also to see how the UAHc became more vocal in its advocacy of modernism by the mid-1950s. Expanding on the theme of the earlier conferences, the book is titled An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow: A Guide Book to Synagogue Design and Construction. This compendium was edited by Peter Blake, then a fervent modernist. Blake, who later credited architect Goodman as the force behind publication, complains that congregations had not yet sought out excellent architects or craftsmen. He hoped that the book would ignite “a renaissance in synagogue architecture.”

Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath, president of the UAHc, used the book’s publication to sell modernism to his member congregations. Having wavered at first in his support for the modern cause, Eisendrath had become a firm and loyal spokesperson by 1954: “It is hoped that through this volume the tendency of mimicry and simulation in the synagogue will become speedily an unhappy remembrance of things past, and that a stirringly creative period of synagogue architecture expressed in esthetic modern idiom may be stimulated.”

Eisendrath had a message for architects, too. Writing in Architectural Record, he fleshed out the UAHc’s position on modernism, announcing that the style had become an American phenomenon and that worshipping in a modern structure would signal that Jews were participating in a national event as well as a religious one. Jews already knew that they had to identify with their religion in order to be perceived as Americans; now architects learned that they could give physical form to that identification by using the vocabulary of modernism. According to Eisendrath, the honesty and simplicity of modern architecture promoted civic awareness in addition to prayer: “The members of the Synagogue Architects Consultant Panel of our Union, which consists of nearly 40 architectural firms, are committed to the belief that 20th-century American Jews can be most suitably inspired to worship God in daily services, on Sabbaths, festivals, and holy days in
temple sanctuaries that incorporate the clean lines and untrammeled spaces of contemporary architecture. . . . Large or small, the sanctuaries now being built mirror the oneness of the Jew with this unique and beloved land.”

Practicing modern architects wrote short entries for *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow* in order to bolster Eisendrath’s remarks and to demonstrate variety within the modernist, antihistoricist approach. Having been urged to choose the best possible architects, synagogue members could pick up this single volume to investigate some of most accomplished practitioners of the decade. Eric Mendelsohn’s statement on his B’nai Amoona in St. Louis was published posthumously, following his death in 1953.

A Conservative congregation founded in the early 1880s by German Jews, B’nai Amoona was the first modern synagogue to enter the American consciousness (see fig. 1.1). Built between 1948 and 1950, the congregation’s new, modern synagogue became known in both the Jewish and secular architectural worlds. B’nai Amoona’s prominent position on the June 1953 cover of *Architectural Forum* would have made it hard for professionals to avoid it. Indeed, architects had eagerly awaited its completion, as it was Mendelsohn’s first American building. Mendelsohn, who had built extensively in Germany before fleeing in 1933, had also worked in London and Palestine before coming to the United States in 1941. He had previously done work for...
the Jewish community in Europe, including cemetery chapels and social centers. His fame in the future Israel rested on the sprawling Hadassah Hospital on Mount Scopus (1934–39). Shortly after his arrival, Mendelsohn was the subject of a retrospective exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art.

Mendelsohn’s German work included the Einstein Tower, with its nod to expressionism, and a number of modern commercial buildings, especially department stores. His commercial projects led the way in a modernism that was reflective of German progressive design. His projects were characterized by undecorated surfaces that took advantage of technology but were not as industrially oriented or focused on standardization as the work coming out of the famous Bauhaus. Mendelsohn, along with many German colleagues, sought a way to update and reinterpret the integration of all the arts that had first been advocated by the Arts and Crafts movement of the nineteenth century.

At the end of World War II, B’nai Amoona planned a move to a site in University City, just outside of St. Louis. For the new synagogue, Mendelsohn devised a plan of clearly defined uses marked by easily legible volumes, especially the off-center, truncated parabolic roof that tops the sanctuary. His plan shows how a synagogue could express its individual hierarchic parts without forsaking a unified whole. B’nai Amoona departs from elongated “Moorish” or centralized “Byzantine” plans of the past by allowing the sanctuary’s sweeping roof, visible from the street, to dominate the composition. This broke with American urban precedent whereby the front, street-side portals were exaggerated or the composition focused on centralized vertical massing.

A carefully assembled plan, B’nai Amoona unifies the distinct parts and allows for flexibility, exactly as Mendelsohn had advised in his 1947 Commentary essay. At the street, a covered porch begins the circulation route. Entering the building, the primary spaces are organized from west to east so that the sanctuary’s eastern wall can accommodate the ark. A foyer separates the sanctuary from an assembly hall. The circulation route continues on to a small chapel, a meeting room, and a series of classrooms. It is of great consequence that a garden is at the heart of the project, an indication that nature can be brought into synagogue space in order to provide places for reflection and enjoyment of nature. Mendelsohn’s contemporaneous Park Synagogue in Cleveland (completed in 1952) expands the size of the “patio” and uses it as the organizing concept for the school and as a foil to a deep foyer that is linked to a sanctuary.
Mendelsohn, who neither invented nor promoted “expandable space,” illustrated here that he could refine and tame it. He exploited expandability in order to tackle the ongoing problem of accommodating a large crowd for the High Holy Days at the same time that he rejected overwhelming spaces for smaller groups during daily and weekly worship. For B’nai Amoona, he placed a sanctuary for 600 people on an axis with a foyer and an assembly hall; the three areas could be connected to accommodate 1,500 people during the High Holy Days. Mendelsohn was careful to make sure that the dramatic sanctuary ceiling never merged with the ancillary rooms, in order to retain the integrity of each space.

The expandable sanctuary was already an accepted arrangement by Mendelsohn’s time. As early as 1903 Albert Kahn (another architect unrelated to Louis Kahn) had designed an expandable space to provide a way to unite the social room with classrooms at Temple Beth El in Detroit. Chicago architects Loeb, Schlossman and Demuth had created expandable space in the 1930s, using a movable platform between the sanctuary and the Sunday school auditorium. Ben Bloch, the architect who believed there would be a return to historicism, stated in 1944 that the problem of expandable space “has been solved in some recent synagogues by the simple expedient of locating the social hall so that it adjoins the synagogue, and permits the two auditoriums to be used as one by means of folding partitions.”

Mendelsohn’s synagogue, which would be the first of four, strove to convey the nonhistorical timelessness that he had written about. Kathleen James-Chakraborty notes that Mendelsohn found a model in Otto Bartning and Dominikus Böhm’s concepts for German churches. The German designers had put a new emphasis on community in the sanctuary and had used “immaterial light” in place of historicist decoration in order to intensify the religious experience. James-Chakraborty maintains that Mendelsohn adapted their ideas, which had been spreading in postwar churches, to a Jewish context. This is particularly evident in the natural light that pours in from clerestory windows that outline the arch and illuminate the ark. Together, ark and light seem to form a single composition that starts with the materiality of the ark and ascends to the immateriality of the sky above.

An ark, whether a freestanding piece of furniture with doors or a simple niche in a wall, would typically have a cloth covering in front of the area housing the Torah and a representation of the Ten Commandments (Decalogue) above. Mendelsohn was able to meld these traditional elements into a single unit while excluding other vernacular references, such as a crown or
lions, both of which were often found in or near an ark. His ark is in some ways as dramatically innovative as the roof design (see fig. 1.2). It is a rectangle composed of four folding panels, each an abstract pattern formed by open metal grillwork. Louise Kayser (1899–1983), better known as a designer of stained glass, did the weaving, which rests behind the ark doors.

Mendelsohn was equally spare with his treatment of the Star of David as a design element on the exterior. His initial model displayed a side wall composed of intersecting Stars of David; the final design substituted a solid brick wall, with just a single, relatively small Star of David, inscribed in a circle, to denote a Jewish house of worship.

Percival Goodman, the architect who probably instigated the publication of the UAH C book An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow, used that tome to display his recent work and to express his views about “The Character of the Modern Synagogue” in a piece by that title. He was well positioned to become the architectural authority on work for the Jewish community. Having participated in a renovation of the Jewish Museum...
in the 1940s, Goodman found himself in the center of burgeoning discussions about synagogues in *Commentary* magazine and at the UAH C conferences. In his essay “Character” he writes about the evolving nature of the synagogue, an institution that was being transformed by members’ needs for socialization and group identity more than by religious pressures. He recognizes that the architect is “faced with the difficulty of designing a building whose primary uses are secular, but whose main reason for being is sacred.”

In his essay, Goodman expresses a philosophy that has shifted toward flexible accommodation. In the late 1940s, he had mocked Ben Bloch’s assertion that a sanctuary could be joined to a social hall for the large High Holy Day seating, writing that architects “must not forget the maxim that ‘an all purpose object is rarely good for anything.’” But by 1954, Goodman had found a solution that usually had the sanctuary open into a social hall for a large crowd. He exploited the concept in many of his successive synagogues, often creating a dull, tunnel-like arrangement.

Goodman does not shy away from promoting his own work in the UAH C volume. He uses views and plans for his B’nai Israel (1949–51) to illustrate his points and to demonstrate his new faith in expandable, flexible space (see fig. 1.3). In that plan, the sanctuary can be expanded into a reception area and combined with the social hall to accommodate the largest crowds. Educational and some social functions are housed in a low, attached structure. The materials are simple wood and brick throughout. B’nai Israel, a Conservative congregation, may have been Goodman’s best work in that building type. It became America’s iconic modern synagogue.

Long and low, B’nai Israel sits on a leafy suburban tract in Millburn, New Jersey. The building runs parallel to the bustling thoroughfare (part of a major access route to Newark) in front of it. The massing is simple, with a large block given over to the sanctuary and the most plastic area reserved for the ark wall. Goodman planned a garden to cling to that same suburban streetscape. The garden’s role was supplementary, preventing it from being anything like the internal view of nature that is central to Mendelsohn’s St. Louis plan.

B’nai Israel swiftly gained fame. Like the more than fifty synagogues that Goodman executed between 1947 and 1979, its design was widely published; even *Time* magazine reported on its completion. Recognition came not just because of its spare plan and use of elegant but readily available materials but also because it expressed forcefully that synagogues could be new patrons for art. An entire chapter in the book *Contemporary Synagogue*
Art, published by the UAHC in 1966, was devoted to this synagogue. At B’nai Israel, Goodman, who had in 1947 urged decoration of the parts of the synagogue that supported the service, came up with a full-scale decorative program. Taking the ark as the “fulcrum” for everything else that occurs in the sanctuary, Goodman oversaw the decoration, commissioning artists to provide work for the interior and exterior. Herbert Ferber crafted the “And the Bush Was Not Consumed” sculpture for the exterior, public side of the ark; Adolph Gottlieb designed the ark cover (and would soon design another one for Goodman’s Temple Beth El in Springfield, Massachusetts) and cover for the reading table; Robert Motherwell provided a large interior mural for the entry foyer.

The artworks show how abstraction could be a way to communicate meaning. Ferber’s “direct-metal construction,” in which the artist worked to bend, cut, and hammer the metal into expressive forms, has raw power. Gottlieb’s ark cover further developed his “pictographs,” small symbols with which he had been experimenting since the 1940s. He includes references to a seven-branched menorah and the Decalogue, along with less
overt symbolism in a vertical composition that enhances the ark. Gottlieb’s ark curtain adds a sense of verticality to the sanctuary interior; at the same time, Ferber’s sculpture on the exterior of the ark provides a similar outward thrust. Motherwell filled his mural with abstract symbols, tackling the question of representing the Diaspora and the notion of a “temple wall.”

For many worshippers the synagogue may have provided their first encounter with current abstract art. Even for Christians interested in contemporary art, the synagogue became the place to see some of the newest works by artists who would become part of the group known as the New York school. Gottlieb had shown his work in group exhibits in the 1940s, but the B’nai Israel pieces were his first commissioned work. Ferber had mounted a solo exhibit at the Betty Parsons Gallery in 1947; the B’nai Israel sculpture was his first in situ commission. Motherwell had shown more than the others in the 1940s but rarely exhibited any of this work in the 1950s.

The experience for the artists was similarly unique. They were young, just establishing themselves, and did not have much work. Some felt that placing their art on or in a building would betray their ideals about creating a pure, abstract art unrelated to context. Recalling events surrounding the creation of his B’nai Israel sculpture, Ferber (who had trained as a dentist before becoming an artist) noted the differences between his views and those of young painter Ad Reinhardt, as well as the similarities he shared with painter Barnett Newman:

Perhaps even in those days [Reinhardt] had a kind of purist idea about it. I know he was very much opposed when I made my architectural sculpture in 1951 for Percy Goodman for a synagogue. He was very much opposed to the idea that I should do anything as commonplace and public as a sculpture for an architect. Barney Newman, on the other hand, encouraged me. This really sounds ridiculous now but at that time this was really an ethical question that we faced and tried to solve. . . . Since we had certainly been rejected by the largest part of the public, and that included the museums and collectors, we felt considerable antagonism to the outside world as we looked at it. So that when an architect such as Percy Goodman, who was really the first architect in America to face up to the problem of using abstract art on this building, when he came along everybody began to discuss it as if it were a questionable thing to do.79

Goodman never again reached the same equilibrium of restrained modesty and artistic bravura as he did for the Millburn synagogue. When he
selected artists of the Kootz Gallery, which provided him with artists for the Millburn job, or a few fine independent artists, he chose painters and sculptors of superior skill. When, with an increasing number of commissions, he began to seek artists from outside the Kootz stable, his artistic choices frequently faltered. It is quite possible that economics entered into his decision for decorative schemes and that he later chose affordable, often sentimental, artists.

Both cynical and prosaically practical, Goodman began to rely on (and replicate endlessly) a simplistic formula. In order to answer the needs of secularized Judaism, he perfected the expandable plan that permitted the sanctuary to merge with the social hall for the High Holy Day crowds. His solutions became unnecessarily vast and spatially dull. Just before the uahc book was released, Goodman told one prospective client that he planned a synagogue according to how it could be expanded and how it could be used as a community hub; only secondarily did he consider how it could be used for worship and learning. He had internalized perfectly the postwar sentiment that religious structures were responses to group identification more than religious experiences. As he said as early as 1949, synagogue design “had nothing to do with religion.” He could have added that he never aspired to a sense of dignity or poetry.

In addition to Goodman’s B’nai Israel, the uahc book An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow features five other synagogues to illustrate varied ways of working within the modern idiom. All of the architects, except one, had some personal Jewish identification. The exception was Philip Johnson, whose Kneses Tifereth Israel, in Port Chester, New York, was featured. Johnson’s preliminary plan, dated 1952, is much more spatially complex than the final synagogue, which he began to design the following year. Drawing a rectangle with a large internal court, Johnson proposed that the interior glass walls open into the adjacent auditorium and lounges for the High Holy Days. The chapel is a round room inserted into a separate square space.

Johnson’s design is less remarkable than the fact that he was connected with any of the uahc activities at all. Johnson’s participation, less than two decades after he had shamefully engaged in pro-Nazi propaganda in the United States and Germany, is curious. A likely scenario is that the uahc reached out to Peter Blake, a German Jewish refugee, to edit their book. Blake, who was then associate editor of the influential journal Architectural Forum, had been curator of architecture and design at the Museum
of Modern Art (1948–50) where Johnson, the director of the MoMa department, had effectively been his boss. It is also possible that Johnson sought inclusion in order to obscure his past. It is more likely, however, that Blake included Johnson in the book because he knew that the taste making of the Museum of Modern Art would have been important to Jews just emerging as postwar patrons. Johnson and architectural historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock had defined modernism for America when they created the “International Style” exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in 1932. Their definition of modernism, based mostly on European examples, was tightly controlled and less inclusive than what the UAHC was promulgating. In addition to the abandonment of historicist ornament, the International Style constituted an emphasis on volumetric space as opposed to mass, standardization of parts, and well-balanced compositions that reveal structure. International Style modernism became an accepted term, and, even more important for synagogues, the UAHC was able to bring its most illustrative (and notorious) promoter into its fold.

Transmitting the Message

In 1957, SACP organized another conference and exhibit on synagogue art and architecture, under the title “The American Synagogue: A Progress Report.” It had been a decade since the formation of the group and its first conferences, and this time the message was clear and direct. Many points of view were expressed, but there was an “unquestioning acceptance of modern functional architecture, with a complete rout of the traditional mode. The battle of styles fought during the last decade has seen the modernists in architecture achieve a complete victory.”

The UAHC, having orchestrated conferences and publications in 1947, 1953, and 1957, soon reaped rewards for its efforts. By the late 1950s, a number of books had been published that supported the group’s acceptance of a modern vocabulary. In 1955, Rachel Wischnitzer published Synagogue Architecture in the United States: History and Interpretation (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society) a comprehensive historical review. She was the first to attempt a synagogue survey in almost three decades. Wischnitzer, noting what was already a “fact on the ground,” proclaims that American Jews no longer had to adapt what was available locally; they could lead design initiatives. She makes a cogent plea for acceptance of modernism on the justification that it deviated from the contextual styles of the past. To validate
her stance (and perhaps to invoke the authority of MoMA), she asked Philip Johnson to write the introduction. It seems probable that Wischnitzer, whose own father had been killed by the Nazis, knew nothing of Johnson’s earlier right-wing dalliances.

Synagogues shared in American appraisals of recent religious architecture. Paul Thiry, Richard M. Bennett, and Henry L. Kamphoefner published Churches and Temples in 1953, as part of a series meant to highlight work published in Progressive Architecture (other titles focused on similarly thriving building types: hospitals, retail stores, shopping centers, and schools). Architectural Record came out with its own publication, Religious Buildings for Today, four years later. Synagogues were heavily represented. The popular press, primarily general interest magazines, also played a significant role in shaping opinions and acceptance of Jews and their religious buildings. Time and Life, two of the most-read magazines of the 1940s and 1950s, appear to have been keen on covering both synagogue attendance and design. Time ran at least six articles on synagogues in the 1950s; Louis Finkelstein, chancellor of the Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary, was the subject of the cover article in October 15, 1951.

The Reform UAHC had promoted modern suburban architecture primarily to congregations within the Reform movement, but it had taken care to include Conservative congregations in its publications and exhibitions; as a result its message was absorbed by the Conservative community and, sometimes, by the Orthodox world as well. As the UAHC was reaching out to non-Reform Jews and becoming more architecturally bold, the divisions among the movements, in terms of ritual and observance, were becoming less clear, with Reform congregations becoming more observant in general.

Reform and Conservative movements approached architecture differently (and still do). The architecture of Reform and Conservative congregations cannot be pegged as one denomination or the other. They differed in how they arrived at modern solutions. Many Reform congregations simply internalized the UAHC message, then vetted architects on their own and proceeded without any direct SACP assistance. Whether they worked with the SACP or not, Reform congregations recognized that their movement set a tone and provided support; individual congregations knew that help was available if they requested it. There was no Conservative equivalent to SACP and no pronouncements about architecture. The United Synagogue (the national coordinating body for Conservative congregations, renamed...
United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism in 1991), a looser network than the UAHC, provided no architectural scaffolds. Member congregations had to rely on the personal interest or vision of their leaders (usually their rabbis) to fill this void. Conservative congregations frequently found that the Reform movement’s advocacy of modernism was suited to them, too.89

Quietly, individual rabbis campaigned for good design and shared their knowledge, defying Percival and Paul Goodman’s assertion that rabbis did not matter in decision making. The Goodmans had simply assumed rabbis were always looking for better pulpits and congregations were always searching for more aggressive leaders.90 Rabbi Levi Olan, the rabbi of Temple Emanu-El in Dallas, had an excellent rapport with his architect, William Wurster. Wurster, the founding dean of the College of Environmental Design at the University of California, Berkeley, had produced an excellent design with two local Texas architects. The Dallas rabbi then urged his friend Philip Bernstein, a distinguished rabbinical leader in Rochester, to consider Wurster for his upstate New York congregation. Olan also had reached the conclusion that mortgage financing was essential for producing a good building outcome, writing that a synagogue should not “try to build a Temple with the amount that you have on hand. It will make the difference between a distinguished building and an ordinary one.”91

Another Reform rabbi, Norman Gerstenfeld of Washington Hebrew Congregation in Washington, D.C., learned the value of an outstanding lighting designer and was anxious to share his own epiphany with rabbinical colleagues. Gerstenfeld, writing to the rabbi of the Jewish Community Center of White Plains, New York (a Reform synagogue rather than a secular Jewish community center), who had previously come to inspect the D.C. building while it was under construction, had perceptively wise and sophisticated words for his counterpart: “When you plan your Temple changes[,] may I enthusiastically recommend a lighting genius, affiliated with the Museum of Modern Art, Mr. Richard Kelly, who has done some of the revolutionary applications of modern lighting in some of the leading institutions of the country at a very slight cost. . . . It would be worth your while to drop in to see him in New York and go over your plans with him. Using him would be the best investment you could make.”92 Gerstenfeld understood that architecture was developing subspecialties that could not be ignored. Kelly, in fact, worked independently, but the statement further amplifies how useful it was to invoke MoMa’s authority.

Modernism spread, too, because suburban synagogue membership was
geographically fluid, leading to cross-pollination of ideas between members of the different movements. Jews, who have always acted freely in their affiliations with congregations because there is no equivalent of a Catholic diocese, were now traveling greater distances for worship than they had in the denser urban areas. “Commuting” to a synagogue became a new norm. Conservative and Reform congregations in the suburbs looked to nearby communities for members, thereby turning themselves into “area” operations. Congregation Adath Israel, for example, was located in Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, but served surrounding suburban communities, including Bala Cynwyd, Merion, Narberth, Overbrook Hills, Havertown, Ardmore, and Bryn Mawr.93 Congregation Beth El, in South Orange, New Jersey, dubbed itself “Congregation Beth El of the Oranges and Maplewood.” North Shore Congregation Israel drew members from the Chicago suburbs of Glencoe, Winnetka, Highland Park, and other “nearby villages.” Suburban congregations were delighted to expand their geographic limits in their outreach to potential new members.

Surely, Jews must have been aware that their new synagogues were markers of their increasingly bold participation in American life. It is unclear how cognizant they were that their own religious structures were more daring than the churches of their Christian counterparts. Protestant churches, which had provided early leadership in organizing and energizing local religious buildings, failed to deliver a consistent message about postwar design. By 1952, the editors of Architectural Forum indicated that there was “Anarchy in our Churches.”94 They groused that architects were producing shoddy imitations of historical styles; they chastised them for not pursuing a clear-cut and progressively hopeful break with the past. Although the architecture and design journals contained frequent entries for churches, one can only imagine how many more examples were not sufficiently interesting to merit publication.
THE UAHC’S PUBLICATIONS did not directly address how it would be possible to construct a modern building with Jewish meaning. Three images of midcentury buildings shown later in this chapter — a synagogue, a church, and a restaurant (see figs. 2.6–2.8) — make it clear that the visual language of modernism can be adapted to diverse uses. In none of these three examples (nor in countless schools of the 1950s) does an A-frame (single or double) construction look out of place. Jews, wanting to celebrate their arrival in the suburbs and ascension into the pantheon of American religions, needed a way to distinguish synagogues from different building types employing a modern vocabulary. Architects found one solution in the integration of decorative arts with Jewish themes into their universal solutions. Modern exteriors showed that Judaism was progressive and American; the decorative programs often echoed those sentiments. Decorations on the interior further reminded congregants that their buildings had a connection to Jewish tradition and that they were leaders in the world of art patronage.

Two architects, Pietro Belluschi and William Wurster deserve consideration because of the ways they grappled with the task in the 1950s. A major exhibition, organized at the end of the same decade, brought these concerns to the attention of the general public. Synagogue patrons were, in fact, adding a Jewish component to the blending of architecture, painting, and sculpture that characterized the time.

Pietro Belluschi and William Wurster

Jewish architects, some identifying themselves as Jewish only by birth, dominated the UAHC events. Philip Johnson was the exception. After his inclusion, the Jewish world began to reach out to academics and practitioners with the highest profiles. Non-Jewish architects Pietro Belluschi and
William Wurster, both of whom operated outside of the uahc sphere of conferences and publications, were among those tapped for new designs.\footnote{Deoration} They produced work that was sympathetic with the efforts of the uahc and in the manner established by Mendelsohn’s work for B’nai Amoona. Both architects commissioned site-specific pieces by sculptors, weavers, and glass designers, many of whom had links to the Bauhaus or other progressive German institutions. The decorative programs actually form a bridge between two types of modernism. They connect Bay Area regionalism, which dwelled on local materials (e.g., wood) for both structure and decoration (and with which Belluschi and Wurster’s names are usually associated), and European modernism, which emphasized universality and an industrial image.\footnote{Deoration} The Museum of Modern Art, the same institution that had hosted the 1932 exhibition in which Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock had defined the International Style, had investigated a more humanistic, regionalist modernism as early as 1944.\footnote{Deoration} While recent scholarship has shown that European émigrés had less of an effect on the adoption of modernism in America than earlier historians had believed, it is possible to make the case that émigrés were critical to synagogue decoration and thus had a specific audience to whom they displayed their craft.

Oddly, Belluschi and Wurster’s work on synagogues is hardly praised today. Belluschi’s early career, starting with modest churches in the Pacific Northwest, has been obscured by his later association with the critically reviled Pan Am building in New York.\footnote{Deoration} Wurster’s reputation is almost exclusively tied to his lovingly crafted private homes, not public spaces. His synagogue work, which consists of only one example, may have been overlooked because he was always credited as “consulting architect” when, in fact, his role was quite substantial.

The churches that Belluschi designed in Portland, Oregon, where he practiced from 1925 until 1950, were inspired by Japanese and vernacular building traditions. Wood often doubled as both construction method and inherent decoration. Images of Belluschi’s Zion Lutheran Church (Portland, 1948–50), were widely published and typical of his designs at the time: clear volumes, a steeply pitched wood-shingle roof with a separate hip-roofed wood porch, and a pleasing nave that is decorated largely by its laminated wood trusses and by the pattern of glass blocks set into its brick walls. Belluschi wanted churchgoers to discover his building as they walked through it, hoping that the experience would lead to “spiritual uplift.” He did not hesitate to hire sculptors if their work had architectural integ-
Does It Look Jewish?

rity, not mere decorative appeal. At Zion Lutheran Church, for example, Belluschi hired sculptor Frederic Littman to design the repoussé copper interior doors. Belluschi attracted synagogue commissions once he moved east and became the dean of the architecture school at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His first synagogue was Temple Israel in Swampscott, Massachusetts (1953–56, in association with Carl Koch & Associates). The members showed a great deal of sophistication in the way in which they came to Belluschi. They first contacted Chicago architect Ernest Grunsfeld (associated with the large firm Friedman, Alschuler & Sincere), who signed on to advise the members about how to salvage a partially constructed plan that they had abandoned. He claimed that his office had designed more than thirty-five synagogues since 1949. Declining the Massachusetts commission for himself, Grunsfeld introduced the congregation to Belluschi (Grunsfeld had been educated at MIT). Grunsfeld made the point that Belluschi could design a building that would be appropriate for a Jewish context and that would also bring pride to the congregation and the surrounding community. He argued that a Belluschi building would cost the same as one designed by any other architect, indicating that it would be a simple structure without a lot of customized detail. Grunsfeld persuaded the congregation that good modern design would harmonize with the surroundings.

At Temple Israel, Belluschi introduced a hexagonal sanctuary (and an identically shaped chapel below it), topped with a six-sided cupola. Belluschi’s later synagogues (as well as Portsmouth Abbey Church, which he revised after working on Temple Israel) were variations on the polygonal plan and high cupola scheme. Mendelsohn’s legacy can be seen in these highly visible exterior markers of the main interior space and in the attention to nature. At Temple Israel, a pergola stepping back toward the entryway provides access and also creates a forecourt for the sanctuary and auditorium wing, allowing nature to enter the complex.

Belluschi, following his client’s wishes, honored Temple Israel’s request for an expandable space. He created an arrangement where the hexagonal sanctuary opens up to a transitional lobby and then a deep auditorium, attempting to avoid a series of connected rectangles in creating a large expandable space for the High Holy Days. Belluschi created an intimate, defined space for 250 people in the regular sanctuary; the expanded space, for an additional 1,800, is certainly not homey, but at least it eludes the unrelenting void of a Goodman building during the High Holy festivities.
Much of Temple Israel’s success relies on decoration of the interior, a continuation of practices Belluschi had begun in the Pacific Northwest. The exposed laminated structural wood frames of the sanctuary rise to form the cupola and provide an intricate visual component executed in a low-tech, presumably local material. Belluschi tried to find a way to distinguish his synagogue from church design. He took the Star of David as the inspiration for the hexagonally shaped sanctuary; he planned menorah images on the wood screens of each side of the cupola. A Star of David rises over the cupola in a fashion reminiscent of the way a cross would have topped a church steeple.

Belluschi turned to sculptor Richard Filipowski to execute the decorative scheme, entrusting him with the ornamental metalwork for the eternal light, the aluminum panel for the ark doors, and a work of sculpture for the wall under the entrance canopy. Filipowski’s copper relief sculpture uses an off-center Star of David to generate an abstract pattern of intersecting, overlapping metal strips. The industrial look reveals Filipowski’s strong allegiance to Bauhaus design. He had taught at the Institute of Design before Walter Gropius tapped him, in 1950, to lead the Bauhaus-inspired Design Fundamentals course at Harvard. In 1953, after Dean Joseph Hudnut was able to cancel the Harvard course, Belluschi invited Filipowski to MIT “with a promise of tenure.”

Belluschi’s second synagogue was Temple Adath Israel, dedicated in 1959, in Merion, Pennsylvania, a suburb adjacent to Philadelphia (see fig. 2.1). Like so many other synagogues, Adath Israel was begun by a few families who were looking for a place to worship near their homes. In this particular case, twenty families formed the congregation in 1946. They hired Belluschi to design a sanctuary for their already existing L-shaped religious school and auditorium. He devised a circular sanctuary as well as supplemental space in the form of an irregular, reversed L. The resulting interior space forms an internal court. Mendelsohn’s approach resonates in the design of the garden and the high cupola over the sanctuary.

At Temple Israel, Belluschi conveyed Jewish content in the six-sided shape, the star over the sanctuary cupola, and Filipowski’s entrance relief sculpture. At Adath Israel, he confronted the same issue by expanding on those imageries. On the exterior, flat brick screens turn the circular structure into a twelve-sided sanctuary that signifies the twelve tribes of Israel and/or the original tent of meeting. On the interior, the roof bracing is in the form of a Star of David; the same star is replicated in the window panels of the
cupola where the star becomes the pattern of all of the glass. Both features were seen by critics as heavy-handed, an assessment with which the architect later agreed. He felt that the bracing was “ponderous” and the glazing “overly saturated.”

This building never did arrive at the decorative high point Belluschi had envisioned. While the building was still in the design phase, in 1957, Belluschi indicated, following Goodman’s lead, that the ark should be the focal point of the sanctuary. He envisioned an “artistic masterpiece” related to the ark, considering as collaborators Adolf Gottlieb, Ibram Lassaw, Theodore Roszak, and “Lipman” [sic, most likely Seymour Lipton], all of whom he described as “Jewish and all great artists and sculptors.” He also hoped to enlist Gyorgy Kepes, another artist identified with the Bauhaus, to work on the color scheme. It is unclear what stifled those plans. Budget concerns could certainly have been a factor. In the end, the ark was placed in front of a screen made from a gold metal and reinforcing rods. Sculptor K. George Kratina, a New York State artist who was known for figurative church decoration, provided its abstract design. Metal Hebrew letters, which decorate the ark wall, add to the industrial effect and present the Ten Commandments as both text and decoration. These have been freed from

Figure 2.1. Pietro Belluschi, Temple Adath Israel (1959), Merion, Pennsylvania. Exterior view of the sanctuary. Courtesy of Meredith Clausen
the traditional confinement of a biblical tablet and no longer perch over
the ark. Adath Israel garnered some fame in its own day. The Architectural
League of New York asked the architect to submit it to its Gold Medal Exhi-
bition. The Philadelphia chapter of the American Institute of Architects
(IAA) commended it for excellence in a religious building, lauding it for fine
integration of the arts with the architecture.

Belluschi had clearly settled on the Star of David as the way “to look Jew-
ish.” Creation of the State of Israel, with a blue Star of David as its symbol on
its flag, may have spurred its use. Few artists or congregants probably real-
ized that it was not a symbol with an ancient lineage; it had only a short his-
tory, especially in synagogue decoration. The Star of David did not appear
on American sanctuaries until the mid-nineteenth century, was not linked
with Judaism until the sixteenth century, and was not seen on European syn-
agogues until the seventeenth century. And yet, for midcentury America,
it became the favored means of conveying Jewish content. What began as a
stately symbol soon became trite. Percival Goodman, for example, who had
used a simple dignified Star of David on the exterior and interior at his Mill-
burn synagogue, began to exploit it thereafter as a decorative tool. Goodman
placed a Star of David on a steeple-like arrangement over the chapel of Tem-
ple Beth El (1950–53) in Springfield, Massachusetts. He abstracted the star
for the grille work on the sanctuary windows. Goodman’s window screens
at Temple Beth Sholom, Miami Beach (1953–54), are composed entirely of
a pattern formed by replicating the star. By reproducing the star in an orna-
mental pattern, both Belluschi and Goodman showed that it could quickly
lose significance by becoming a repetitive motif. Another alternative, one
tried by Marcel Breuer, was to use the Star of David as a floor plan. Breuer
did that at Westchester Reform Temple (1957–59) in Scarsdale, New Y ork,
where the resulting building looks contrived.

While Belluschi was working on his first two synagogues, William
Wurster, regarded as “the most prominent architect of his generation” was
trying his own hand at synagogue design. Wurster’s synagogue, Temple
Emanu-El in Dallas, was widely recognized at the time of its completion in
1957 and remained a critical favorite into the 1960s. Before taking the com-
mission, Wurster had never attended a Jewish service, a shortcoming he did
not rectify until 1955, when he accompanied landscape architect Lawrence
Halprin to San Francisco’s grand Temple Emanu-El.

For the Dallas project, Wurster worked with two local practitioners,
Howard Meyer and Max Sandfield. They became associated for this project.
Meyer, the more accomplished of the two, is considered a leader in bringing modernism to Dallas in the 1930s. He had graduated from Columbia University in the late 1920s. Sandfield, who moved to Dallas in 1945, had graduated from MIT in 1925.

Despite his title of consulting architect, Wurster’s role should not be dismissed as minimal. When the building was completed, the congregation decided that Wurster, who was the final authority on major decisions, had been “underpaid for what he did, and the Temple made a very substantial gift to him in addition to what he got from his contract with the architects.”24 Wurster, then, belongs to what must surely be a tiny fraternity of architects who have clients who appreciate their efforts and are willing to compensate them properly for their professionalism, whatever the terms of their contracts.

Prior to hiring Wurster, Meyer, and Sandfield, Temple Emanu-El had become familiar with several distinguished architects. The congregation began its architectural quest in 1950. Their site was a difficult one on steep terrain. In June of that year, the synagogue president contacted the architecture deans at MIT and at Harvard. Wurster, most likely still the dean at MIT before his departure to Berkeley later that year, recommended Eric Mendelsohn, Eero Saarinen, or Max Abramovitz.25 Joseph Hudnut, then dean at Harvard, made the same suggestions. The Emanu-El board, perhaps swayed by Mendelsohn’s position as the premier designer of American synagogues, quickly encouraged his work. He produced preliminary drawings, but they did not excite the Emanu-El leaders, who subsequently let Mendelsohn go and sought a new site. Relations between the client and architect must have stayed cordial, because the congregation returned to Mendelsohn after they secured a new seventeen-acre site in 1952.26 By then, time was of the essence. The congregation had purchased the acreage at reduced cost. The seller had stipulated that the buildings be dedicated to religion or education, that they be brick or stone, and that the congregation spend at least $500,000 on construction by January 1, 1956.

The congregation focused on Mendelsohn and Saarinen as potential architects.27 Saarinen made a major presentation in June 1952.28 He was already working on his chapel for MIT, for which Wurster had also recommended him.29 In Dallas, he talked about developing a prototype with local materials and responding to climactic conditions.30 Before a choice was made, other architects expressed hopes of winning the commission for themselves. In addition to local architects Meyer and Sandfield, Harry Prince,
who led the SACP, did not seem to hesitate to present his own credentials.\textsuperscript{31} The Temple committee also investigated Percival Goodman, who, with a job in Tulsa and relatives in Shreveport, Louisiana, was happy to come at his own expense.\textsuperscript{32} In the end, Meyer and Sandfield, both members of the congregation, gained the commission, and they suggested Wurster as their colleague.\textsuperscript{33}

Emanu-El members were open to progressive thought, including modern architecture. During a time of heightened suburbanization, Temple Emanu-El was (and remains) an anomaly. Like many contemporary institutions, it had been set to follow its members, who had been relocating to the northern section of the city since the late 1930s.\textsuperscript{34} But Dallas is a suburbanized city; many of the outlying suburbs, including the one to which Emanu-El finally relocated, are within the city limits. Without a clear divide between city and country and with only a short commute to downtown, many members were active in sophisticated civic institutions, such as the museum and the symphony, and were actively engaged with modern design. Alex Weisberg, immediate past president of the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, was the president of Emanu-El who had the called deans of Harvard and MIT for recommendations.\textsuperscript{35}

Working with Sandfield and Meyer, Wurster devised an elegant solution that was modern, an appropriate vocabulary for the new home of the oldest Reform congregation in the city (it was founded in 1875), and one that reflected his own penchant for well-crafted materials and cleverly orchestrated circulation. Here, too, a team of artists enhanced the building by creating work of architectural integrity. Early in the project, Wurster recognized that building on the flat, treeless Texas prairie called for the insight of an excellent landscape architect, one who would maximize the way natural settings can bring people together. He chose Marie and Arthur Berger, well-known landscape architects in Dallas, for that task.\textsuperscript{36} They, and the artists, enhanced the synagogue.

Wurster had told the congregation that “a grove of trees” could be the most important part of his plan (see fig. 2.2).\textsuperscript{37} After the synagogue was complete, he described his thinking on landscape to the congregants: “A grove of trees on the great plains always evokes a feeling of pause and refreshment. The weary traveler finds this true the world over. His spirit is refreshed as well as his body. This is the basis which has caused your architects to conceive of Temple Emanu-El as being in a grove of trees. This is the basic and most important element in our plan. Of course, it will be years before the full ben-
efts will be realized but we feel the practical and spiritual value of this will be an ever-increasing factor in the life of the Temple.”

As the synagogue was being completed, Wurster wrote to the rabbi that placing the sanctuary in a grove of trees would “bring increasing delight over the years” and “make the Sanctuary a worshipful place. . . . As you stand under the lofty dome and sense the dignity of it all, one actually feels the glory of God and the dignity of Man.”

Wurster’s architectural plan has a cohesiveness and respect for nature that reflects Mendelsohn’s influence in the way the landscape is integrated into the design. A clear circulation path unites two low blocks, each of which is centered on a rectilinear area of plantings: an open-air atrium serves as an entryway into the sanctuary from the parking lot; an enclosed courtyard is surrounded by classrooms in the school wing. The sanctuary is capped by a low saucer dome on a high drum, evoking a religious building without any decoration, such as a Star of David. Although the saucer dome could, in fact, suggest a mosque and the nineteenth-century pursuit of an “oriental”
40  D E C O R A T I O N

style as an appropriately Jewish one, this dome has a noticeable simplicity and abstract dignity.

The sanctuary is both impressive and clever (see fig. 2.3). It is circular, defined by the dimensions of the dome, which is fifty-five feet high. The elliptical bimah and horseshoe seating provide some intimacy within a very large hall. Wurster tamed the circular area by inserting it into a larger cubic volume. By retaining an empty space between the sphere and the cube, Wurster found a new tool for moveable seating and expansion during the High Holy Days. For the largest crowds, the entire space can be opened into an auditorium, slightly narrower than the width of the circle, thereby controlling the potential vastness of an expandable plan. Wurster described the expandable space — which can hold 750 to 1,200 people without opening the doors and up to 2,500 when merged with the auditorium — as a union of materials more than a conjoining of spaces: “as the Sanctuary and the Auditorium are to be used in one service for the High Holy Days, we felt they should have great kinship and this you find in the wood verticals for the acoustics and in the use of brick for the walls.”40

Figure 2.3.
William Wurster, Max Sandfeld, and Howard Meyer, Temple Emanu-El (1957), Dallas. Interior view, showing ark curtain designed by Anni Albers; menorah designed by Richard Filipowski, and stained glass by Gyorgy Kepes. Kepes was the art coordinator for the project. Courtesy of Temple Emanu-El Archives, Dallas
After the groundbreaking in June 1955 (construction had actually started a month earlier), Wurster approached Gyorgy Kepes, another MIT faculty member, to join the team as a consultant to oversee the art. Kepes would later work in a similar capacity for Belluschi. Although never a member of the Bauhaus, Kepes was dedicated to interdisciplinary methods in order to create a better world, and he infused the project with the craft-based tradition of the German institution. He had come to the United States from Hungary in 1937 to inaugurate a department of light and color at the New Bauhaus in Chicago and wrote *Language of Vision* (1944), which presented Bauhaus ideas about vernacular and craft work as the underpinnings of industrial design to a mass American audience.

Once Kepes took hold of the art commissions, a variety of artists began to appear as designers of synagogue decoration. He commissioned Anni Albers to design the ark curtain and Richard Filipowski to design the large menorah for the sanctuary; Kepes began his own designs for the stained glass, a mosaic of a menorah embedded into the brick wall behind the bimah, and the general lighting scheme. Albers, after considering flowing curtains, came to believe it would be best to execute flat panels. She hoped that with the yardage saved she would be able to weave background material for the Torah ark and a chapel curtain; this became the new plan. Taking her gold, blue, and green palette from Kepes’s windows and the gold menorah pattern he designed for the brick sanctuary wall, Albers created a stunning, twenty-foot-high covering. Her ark design, the first of several for ark curtains that she did in the 1950s and 1960s, is shimmering Lurex mounted onto sliding wood panels that open from the center. The synthetic yarn and machine-woven strips reinforce the crisp, industrial aesthetic that comes from Albers’s Bauhaus heritage. She devised eight identical panels, mounted at different points and with the central strips hung upside down, so that the articulate geometry pushes forward. The result is a “splendid architectural element.” It gives the ark a needed prominence and artistry without making it a fetish.

Lighting designer Richard Kelly played a part in the lighting scheme by consulting with Kepes. Wurster was particularly enthusiastic about the idea of bringing in Kelly; he liked Kelly’s work at the Yale Art Gallery, the building Louis Kahn had completed in 1953. Wurster hoped that the Temple, like Yale, would “not get a monotonous even glow over everything.” Presumably he wanted something more architecturally articulate. For Dallas, Kelly’s role turned out to be limited; he was consulted to confirm Kepes’s inclinations.
Kepes conceived of forty-four small, hanging pendants for the sanctuary, a deviation from the six that the architects had first specified.\footnote{52} When the engineers resisted his plan, Kepes sought out Kelly's advice.\footnote{53} Kelly backed Kepes, and the design went forward, with impressive results. With the soaring ceiling and ample width, the cohesiveness of Temple Emanu-El depends on the hanging pendants to unite visually the dome and the seating.

Kelly added some of his own insights when he conferred with Kepes.\footnote{54} He was probably the one who suggested that Kepes's stained glass for the sanctuary, which is found only on the low exterior walls, “should be darker in color to reduce the amount of outside light.”\footnote{55} By the time Kelly became involved in the project, it was already too late to act on his suggestion of placing interior perimeter lights around the dome.\footnote{56} There was also little enthusiasm for it among the architects.\footnote{57} Commenting on Anni Albers’s designs for the ark interior, and thinking architectonically and as a lighting designer, Kelly recommended that Albers use black and silver material for the interior of the ark. He felt that a lighter color, such as the gold she preferred initially, would just reflect light and lead to glare.\footnote{58}

Kepes later pondered his role by expressing what amounts to a Bauhaus ideal: “Not the various individual liturgical symbols, but only their absolute convergence into visual harmony could give a true expression of the high purpose of the space. My aim was therefore to find an optimum orchestration of all space, symbolic and functional, with their colors, lights and textures. Instead of merely traditional symbols, I tried to infuse a symbolic image into the total environment.”\footnote{59}

He appears to have achieved his goal. No one element dominates. The imposing nature of the Emanu-El sanctuary is felt in its entirety. The ark, eternal light, and menorahs (both freestanding and embedded into the stone wall) make clear, in an abstract way, that this is a Jewish house of worship. It is the intertwined totality of the ensemble that makes the space comforting. Even though the physical dimensions are quite large, the sanctuary is filled with a unity of purpose that makes additional symbols seem redundant.

Temple Emanu-El was highly praised on its completion in 1957. The project was expensive (construction costs, in the end, were over $1.75 million, or more than $13 million in today’s dollars). The architectural world responded positively. Architectural Forum’s article about “A High-Domed Temple in Texas” mentions how “soaring space and brilliant access make this Dallas synagogue a striking place of worship.”\footnote{60} Both Time and Life magazines ran
short entries. *Life*, which failed to mention the names of the architects or artists, did hail it as “one of the most remarkable synagogues in the United States,” publishing a glossy color photograph of the interior.Both articles provided evidence that Jews were thriving outside of the traditional enclaves of Philadelphia, New York, and Chicago, and that their religious structures were bold, dramatic, and not historicist. Locally, a model of Temple Emanu-El was displayed at the Texas State Fair’s exhibit of Texas architecture. The AIA gave the building a merit award in 1959. The Architectural League invited it to participate in a 1959 exhibition in New York. It was also included in the 1960 National Gold Medal Exhibit.

The new building energized the Jews of Dallas. Membership increased; in the fall of 1958, Rabbi Olan claimed he had not officiated at a single wedding in a hotel since the sanctuary had become available for weddings. He wrote elsewhere to express his gratitude to Wurster and to speak of architecture’s role in observance: “We have proved that an old, a living, and a dynamic faith can be expressed in architectural and art forms of the modern world. It is possible to give the experience of reverence in Contemporary terms. I have watched hundreds of people come into our Sanctuary; people of all faiths and of no committed faith. All of them unite in recognizing the sense of the spiritual which has been achieved there. . . . If religion is to have any meaning in our Contemporary life, it must find its expression in Contemporary forms.”

Wurster had already expressed his own sense of satisfaction. Asked to write something for a book to mark the dedication of the Temple, Wurster noted that it had “been a happy job from the start. . . . The work has been one of the high points in my life and I hope it brings years of comfort and uplift to those who use it.”

**Synagogues and Crafts in the 1950s**

Architects Mendelsohn, Goodman, Belluschi, and Wurster were at the forefront of a paradigm shift in the way architects conceived of American synagogue interiors. They insisted on works that enhanced the architectural integrity of a building, selecting young artists or those reestablishing careers after arriving from Europe. By the late 1950s, there was a vibrant, energetic pool of artists from whom to choose. New York City was now the center of the international art world. Architects found that the abstract and semi-abstract work of painters and sculptors such as Seymour Lipton, Ibram...
Lassaw, Ben Shahn, and David Hare suited their religious, as well as secular, buildings. The works were expressive without being too figurative or too literal; they could accommodate a range of emotions and individual interpretation. The irony is that the Jewish world (especially the Reform wing) was re-interpreting the Second Commandment, by allowing figurative representation, at the same time that artists were discovering abstraction.

Crafts were as vibrant as the visual arts scene. The revival of interest in handicrafts, visible in the 1956 opening of the Museum of Contemporary Crafts in New York, meant that there was new support for American crafts that were largely abstract. The craft renaissance was, no doubt, a reflection of Cranbrook Institute of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, founded by Eliel Saarinen in the 1920s. Cranbrook emphasized craft production for its own expressiveness, forgoing the Bauhaus interest in seeing craft as the basis of industrialization. America’s new craft-focused milieu fostered the American Craftsmen’s Council (founded in 1943) and its publication, Craft Horizons Magazine. The emergence of the Cranbrook aesthetic did not replace Bauhaus leanings. The two traditions are often found in work placed at one location.

The same impulses most likely spawned a Jewish interpretation, one that was closer to the European than the American ideal. The Jewish Museum (an arm of the Conservative movement’s Jewish Theological Seminary) in New York set up the Tobie Pascher Workshop in 1956. The goal was to have a thriving workshop for design of metal ritual objects for synagogues and homes in hopes (analogous to permitting car travel on Sabbath and holidays) of generating greater observance among lay members. Appropriately, the Jewish Museum chose Ludwig Wolpert as the workshop’s founding director. The talented silversmith-sculptor had been trained in Germany at the Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Arts and Crafts) in Frankfurt-am-Main. Beginning as a sculptor, Wolpert came back to the school after he had graduated so that he could study metalwork with a teacher who had previously taught at the Bauhaus in Weimar. Wolpert’s work was known in Germany in the 1930s; his Seder plate and Hanukkah menorah were included in an exhibit of contemporary Judaica at the Jewish Museum in Berlin.68

Wolpert modernized synagogue decoration, devising a clean, sharp-edged Hebrew calligraphy that functioned as both text and decoration. He turned inscriptions into a new type of symbol, one that blended modern metal techniques with a text-based iconography. His work, which could effortlessly be incorporated into modern architecture, appeared Jewish without any figu-
rative sentimentality. It offered a vibrant decoration that also made oblique reference to Israel, where modernization of Hebrew was a major undertaking. His work brought to America the industrialization of European modernism, filtered through the New Bezalel School for Arts and Crafts, where Wolpert had taught in Jerusalem prior to coming to the United States. Once on American shores, he received commissions for arks, torah ornaments, and menorahs of new synagogue buildings. By extending a modern approach to crafts to nonarchitectural items such as Kiddush cups or coverings for the Torah, Wolpert played a part in creating a new American industry, the production of Judaica for public and private use.

Having ceded architectural discourse to the Reform movement, the Conservative wing found its own artistic niche in the development of modern crafts. Unfortunately, the high standards of the Pascher Workshop were often not widely dispersed in the synagogue gift shops that became numerous after World War II. Like the synagogue buildings in which they were housed, gift shops inadvertently sold a means of identification without deep or extensive participation. Herbert Gans referred to it as “symbolic Judaism,” whereby Jews focused on a youth-oriented (and relatively minor) holiday such as Chanukah or acquired a piece of Judaica (a Seder plate, for example) for display more than for ritual use. Like synagogues, gift pieces were frequently decorated with a banal Star of David. Abraham Joshua Heschel, scholar and conscience for the Jewish community, was probably responding to these occurrences when he wrote in 1954 that ritual objects had no “inherent sanctity”; their purpose was to inspire religious action and involvement.

Well-executed liturgical crafts had a more positive outcome. The Museum of Contemporary Crafts observed that synagogues and churches were institutions that were actively promoting modern crafts. In late 1957, its second year of operation, the museum mounted a major exhibition, “The Patron Church.” The exhibition highlighted how the modern synagogue had also become a patron of American crafts. A few earlier exhibitions, such as “Modern Church Architecture” and “Church Art Today” had considered the role of contemporary architecture and liturgical art in current church design but had not given any attention to Jewish institutions. Recognizing that the vast number of religious leaders might not be familiar with America’s evolving art resources, the museum’s assistant director stated that its purpose was to demonstrate that good contemporary design could be affordable. The implied meaning, too, was that architects could employ craftspeople to mitigate the starkness of bare walls or large expanses of glass
with innovative decoration. Crafts could make modernism more palatable; crafts could also make a synagogue “more Jewish.”

The “Patron Church” exhibit showcased fourteen religious structures and the decorative schemes that they had initiated. Three of the structures are synagogues; a fourth Jewish entry was actually the community building and chapel for a large New York City congregation. The number of synagogues included reinforces Herberg’s thesis that Judaism had become America’s third religion.

The exhibit makes clear that craftspeople could work for a synagogue or for a church. While there are examples of individual pieces the craftspeople had created for churches, and some artists worked for both Christians and Jews, the synagogue projects had a decorative unity that was sometimes missing in their Christian counterparts. Most of the church examples in the exhibition (Anshen and Allen’s Chapel of the Holy Cross in Sedona, Arizona; Belluschi’s Central Lutheran Church in Portland, Oregon) are, therefore, heavily weighted toward architectural expression; the architecture becomes the decoration.

The projects for the Jewish community are particularly strong, showing a seamless integration of craft with architecture. All four used stained glass in a “painterly” way; each created a balance between the ark and its surroundings. The projects demonstrate that architects had learned how to maintain their overall vision while delegating the decorative programs of their projects to talented craftspeople. In the nineteenth century, the architect was responsible for creating an integrated set piece, where the ark and eternal light were functions of an overall design program for the entire sanctuary. By the mid-twentieth century, that design program became a team effort. As a result, there were several ways to make sure that the synagogue exerted a particularly Jewish message.

No Percival Goodman buildings were included in the Craft Museum exhibit, although he was amply represented by decorative features he had chosen for some of his synagogues, including Temple Beth El (Seymour Lipton, menorah) in Gary, Indiana, and Congregation B’nai Israel (Calvin Albert, eternal light) in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Goodman might have felt slighted. Ten years earlier he had announced that he was reviving the collaboration among architects, painters, and sculptors in initial planning of his early synagogues.

The group of synagogue architects featured in the “Patron Church” exhibit, all of whom were exhibiting concurrently at the UAHC’s 1957 con-
ference on synagogue architecture, included both experienced older architects and younger, emerging practitioners. Fritz Nathan and Philip Johnson were in the older group.

Nathan was a well-established architect in Frankfurt-am-Main who came as a refugee to America and established himself as an architect in New York. A member of the SACP, Nathan, who like Eric Mendelsohn had graduated from the Technical University of Munich, came to America after having worked on public projects for the Jewish community. He had designed several synagogues in Germany.81 Nathan was represented by his Jewish Community Center of White Plains, a new facility for a congregation that had existed in White Plains since the 1920s. Later renamed Congregation Kol Ami, its membership had increased dramatically when White Plains became a commuter hub for New York City in the 1950s.

At Kol Ami, Nathan employed a sleek yet warm modernism. The elliptical sanctuary (see fig. 2.4) juts out from the block that houses the rest of the building. Inside, the shape encourages an intimate gathering that focuses on the short end where the ark is located. Nathan’s choice of materials was refined and rich, as seen in the granite ark and mosaic-sheathed columns. He commissioned Ludwig Wolpert to provide the calligraphy on the side of the ark. The Hebrew letters further abstract, and explode in size, the typical representation of the Ten Commandments that were often found above an ark.82 Wolpert’s work adds to the totality, and the apparent Jewishness, of Nathan’s design.

Robert Sowers, one of the leaders in abstract stained glass production at the time, designed the windows. These are in the lower registers, in order

Figure 2.4.
Fritz Nathan, Temple Kol Ami (1957; formerly Jewish Community Center of White Plains, New York).
Interior view. Photograph by Lionel Freedman
to emphasize their colorful abstraction from the viewpoint of seated con-
gregants. In 1947 Percival and Paul Goodman had railed against the use of
stained glass, arguing that it was associated with the mystery of the Catholic
Church and thereby had no place in a synagogue.83 In White Plains, Nathan
has exploited it for delight and warmth. The whole ensemble at Kol Ami
illustrates the skillful integration of architecture and crafts. The blending of
abstraction, particularly in the windows, with the specificity of the Hebrew
lettering, creates a balance that is not unlike the achievements at Temple
Emanu-El in Dallas.

Philip Johnson, in spite of his fascist leanings in the 1930s, again found
his way into one of the most significant venues for synagogue display. He
was represented by his completed synagogue for Kneses Tifereth Israel
(KTI), a Conservative congregation in Port Chester, New York (see fig. 2.5).
Johnson, whose connections to American synagogues had begun with his
participation in the UAHC publication and had continued through his writ-
ing a foreword to Rachel Wischnitzer’s book on American synagogues, was
most likely identified primarily with modern architecture and the Museum
of Modern Art. It seems unlikely that Albert and Vera List, the art patrons
and ardent supporters of the Jewish Theological Seminary who introduced Johnson to Rabbi Joseph Speiser of KTI, knew the sordid details of Johnson’s past. Johnson worked without pay for this commission, presumably as atonement for his misguided politics.84

KTI became well known in the architectural world because of Ezra Stoller’s masterful photographs of the building, used on the cover and in the interior of Architectural Record in December 1956.85 Johnson distilled a suburban synagogue to its essential needs. The overall shape is the Miesian box, housing a sanctuary and a social hall that can be expanded into a single space. The entrance foyer is reached through a large ellipse; it is on an axis with the space that divides the two interiors and with an entrance to a small service block at the rear that houses subsidiary services such as the kitchen and restrooms.

Johnson used an abstract pattern of stained glass (his own design) to decorate the interior and exterior walls, again showing that stained glass can be a factor in synagogue design if used abstractly. Johnson saved the design of the ark, a freestanding piece of wood furniture, for himself. It dominates, but does not overwhelm, the bimah. The four rows of bronze letters on the English oak door are an acrostic (four phrases of four words each) chosen by the rabbi, who made sure that the numeric value of the letters is a total of 613, the number of commandments that Jews are supposed to fulfill.86

Johnson did not attempt to design the lighting, instead assigning the task to Richard Kelly, or any additional decoration, which he left to Ibram Las-saw. A Jewish artist who had been born in Egypt to Russian parents, Lassaw had previously received commissions from Percival Goodman for sculpture at Congregation Beth El in Springfield, Massachusetts, and Temple Beth El in Providence, Rhode Island. Both of these commissions had been subjects in a 1956 exhibit, “Art for Two Synagogues,” at the gallery of Lassaw’s dealer, Samuel Kootz.

For Johnson, Lassaw designed the screen behind the ark, the eternal light, and the letters on the ark. All of these were installed in December 1957, after the “Patron Church” exhibit was already under way. Lassaw’s screen, which is twelve feet high and more than thirty feet wide (in order to cover the bimah wall), is wire covered with bronze rods and copper sheet; its title is “Creation.” It is freer, less heavy, more ethereal than Johnson’s furniture. The KTI screen has a vitality of movement and sense of expanding space that is appropriate to “creation” without relying on a figurative representation.
The eternal light, made of copper sheet covered with bronze and chromium bronze, is not in the usual position over the ark but is hanging off-center. Standing freely, it is a flat disk of great presence. The visible light bulb, centered on the side facing the congregation, makes clear that this is a modern sculpture, although the rough materials give it an archaic image. Lassaw’s direct metal technique and use of abstraction usually puts him in the company of his contemporaries Herbert Ferber, Seymour Lipton, and David Hare.87 Even more than the emotional appeal of “Creation” or the refinement of Johnson’s ark, the eternal light gives this ensemble a novel cast. It is bold, assertive, and unexpectedly crude. This is an external light that holds its own weight visually with the immense screen and heavy ark. By giving his eternal light a primordial character, achieved through contemporary methods, Lassaw found a way to reinterpret Jewish content. His light is meant to evoke the “eternal” for which it is a symbol. It is also supposed to show that traditional synagogue art can have a bolder, more everlasting presence than seen previously.

The other two synagogue projects in the “Patron Church” exhibition were designed by less experienced firms. Kelly & Gruzen’s Milton Steinberg House, in New York City, was an important urban contribution. It demonstrates how an existing synagogue could add administrative space, classrooms, and a small chapel. Without any possibility of expanding into land behind it, the Park Avenue Synagogue had purchased adjacent land for an auxiliary building in 1954. Images of Steinberg House were widely published because Adolph Gottlieb designed and supervised the stained glass windows, which fill the exterior grid of the street facade. Gottlieb brought his pictographic language to the project. Some of the ninety-one panels feature abstract patterns, while other designs refer to Hebrew letters or symbols, such as the shofar or the Decalogue.

Congregation Beth El of the Oranges and Maplewood was the exhibition’s star, and it, too, was featured in the UAHC’s concurrent second exhibit on modern synagogues (see fig. 2.6).88 The New Jersey building was still under construction, with a year to go before its dedication. For the young architects, Lewis Davis and Samuel Brody (of the firm then known as Davis, Brody & Wisniewski, founded in 1950), this was a hefty commission. They had previously designed a synagogue only a few miles away, the small Orthodox West Orange Jewish Center. Beth El, owing in part to its inclusion in “Patron Church” and the prize it won as the outstanding synagogue in the exhibition, generated a great deal of publicity.89 The Architectural League
of New York invited Davis, Brody & Wisniewski to submit Beth El to the “Religion” section of the 1960 National Gold Medal Exhibition of the Building Arts. The highly visible building was featured in several other exhibitions: first in some preliminary exhibits at the Architectural League, then in a “comprehensive exhibition” at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts (February 15 to May 15, 1960) which the American Federation of Arts then toured around the country for two more years. The Church Architectural Guild of America also honored it. It may be less well known today than many Goodman synagogues because Davis and Brody soon expanded their practice to include educational and corporate commissions in addition to synagogues; Goodman worked almost exclusively on synagogues.

Beth El’s location in South Orange, a suburb of Newark, was ripe for synagogue growth. Goodman’s B’nai Israel was just a few miles away. Newark’s premier Reform congregation, Temple B’nai Jeshurun, would soon move to a nearby location in Short Hills. That congregation hired and then fired Marcel Breuer before Belluschi came up with their built scheme. Peter Blake and Julian Neski would soon be working on another Reform synagogue, Temple Emanu-El in nearby Livingston.

Beth El’s successful building campaign was made possible in part by its rabbi, Theodore Friedman, a leader in the world of Jewish letters. He arrived
at Beth El in 1954 and retired from there in 1970. Friedman served as managing editor of the influential journal *Judaism*; his editorial board included Will Herberg, then documenting the rise of secular Judaism in America’s tripartite religious sphere; Reconstruction pioneer Mordecai Kaplan; and the rabbi Robert Gordis, an eminent scholar of Conservative Judaism.\(^{93}\)

The Davis, Brody building was technically an addition. Beth El, which twenty families started in 1946, had built an auditorium with classrooms by 1949. Beth El’s new program called for a sanctuary for 600, expandable to 1,100 or 1,200 people; a chapel for 100; and a new kitchen, which would be added to an existing one in the original building. Parking was also a requirement for the new building. This synagogue had clearly agreed to the Conservative movement’s acceptance of driving to the synagogue on the Sabbath and holidays.

The young architects responded with a plan that makes the sanctuary the most visible component and the one closest to the street. The secular area is now hidden from view. The sanctuary, with glass walls and a bold, intersecting A-frame roof that was meant to appear to float, dominates the site.\(^{94}\) Respecting the sloping site, the architects created a sanctuary that “was designed as distinct element and set on a garden platform.”\(^{95}\) There is a sense that the platform alludes to an ancient temenos wall.

Entry, from the sizable parking lot, is along the side of the complex and close to the nexus between old and new sections. It is clear that driving is the standard means of arrival. The position of the parking lot, adjacent to the sanctuary and coming close to the street edge of the property, reinforces its primary role in the life of congregants. Perhaps to offset the trend to return to one’s vehicle after services, the architects created three plazas for informal gatherings before and after prayer: one next to the parking lot; one on an axis with the entry, on the other side of the building; and another at the street, in front of the sanctuary.\(^{96}\)

Inside, Davis, Brody adroitly addressed slight changes in grade by varying the interior levels.\(^{97}\) The entry and chapel are a few steps above the lounge (the “expandable space”); the lounge leads into the sanctuary, where the floor slopes slightly downward toward the bimah. These subtleties help avoid the sense of unmitigated vastness that can be a problem when expanded spaces are utilized during the High Holy Days.

In choosing decorative elements, the architects attempted to interact with and enhance the architecture, weaving together a harmonious unit that would distinguish the building as a Jewish house of worship. Decoration
was particularly critical because the intersecting A-frame roof was gaining popularity as a common church form (see fig. 2.7) and would soon be found in structures ranging from homes to coffee shops (see fig. 2.8).98 To keep the distinction clear, Davis, Brody called for the exterior wall to have a series of freestanding metal screens. Never executed, the screens were to have the theme "Days of Creation." A nondenominational meaning would have been appropriate for the street side. Sculptors Samuel Wiener and Judith Brown were to be the artists.99

Wiener and Brown were also the designers of the primary handicrafts of
the interior (see fig. 2.9). Brown designed the graceful eternal light that looks like an intricate metallic bird’s nest. Wiener, with the architects, designed the abstract stained glass of the sanctuary. Wiener also designed the woven tapestries that hang above the ark. The tapestries provide a vertical backdrop for the horizontal wooden ark that the architects designed; without them, the ark would have been lost in the soaring space. Like Gottlieb, Wiener incorporated traditional symbols that would be recognizable to all congregants. The lions, Decalogue, and crowns, which come from folk art decoration of the ark, can all be found here. In Wiener’s design, they are figurative enough to be immediately recognizable but abstract enough to look contemporary, appropriate for the universal space in which they exist.

Wiener’s designs, in glass and fiber, are bound to an abstract system of rectangles; placed both horizontally and vertically, they create a tension that keeps the interior rooted to the ground while it reaches upward. The stained glass employs a vertical arrangement of flat color and a horizontal disposition of darker areas interspersed with clear glass. The vertical dividers on each of the three glass walls are structural supports, which double as window mullions so that the stained glass is placed within defined frames.

**Figure 2.9.** Davis, Brody & Wisniewski, Congregation Beth El (1958), South Orange, New Jersey. Interior view of the sanctuary. Samuel Wiener designed the wall hanging; Wiener and the architects designed the stained glass; Judith Brown designed the eternal light. Photograph by Ben Schnall
The horizontal pattern, which weaves behind the vertical supports, is especially strong. The space soars upward, while the decorative program keeps it from being too overwhelming. Nature filters into the sanctuary, through either colored light or patches of clear glass. Wiener, who had begun training at Yale as an architect and finished his coursework as a fine arts student of Josef Albers, brought a keen understanding of building, abstraction, and color to this project. This was one of Wiener’s first projects; there would soon be many commissions from Davis, Brody as well as Percival Goodman. Goodman, who had expressed such deep reservation about stained glass for a synagogue, had even embraced the medium and often used Wiener for his projects. The lighting pendants, handled ably, are smaller and less numerous riffs on the vertical enhancement used at Emanu-El in Dallas.

The suburban synagogue, more than any other public institution, confronted a large audience with contemporary design. Corporations, such as General Motors, were equally active art and architecture patrons, but their holdings were usually not available to anyone who was not an employee. In more public venues, such as the hotel that Edward Durell Stone designed for American tourists in El Salvador, the art work was often relegated to murals, lamps, or the swimming pool. Architectural Forum, which reported on the hotel in its January 1953 issue, followed it with an essay by Aline Saarinen in June 1954. Ms. Saarinen argued that art had to serve, not distract from, contemporary buildings, an indication that art was playing a pivotal but not necessarily useful role in current construction.

Synagogues provided a more comprehensive experience. Jewish worshipers, even those who came only two or three days a year, found that the synagogue more than any exhibition or publication exposed a young generation to modern buildings, often designed by prominent architects. These congregants may not have come often, but when they did attend, they sat for several hours in some of the most exciting buildings of the time. Synagogue decoration was often the product of artists who wanted to enhance and support the architecture, not simply decorate upon it. In the synagogue context, these artists were able to transmit abstraction, whether inflected by abstract expressionist painting or the teachings of the Bauhaus, to their first large American audiences.
The boom in construction of religious buildings, a public success story in the 1950s, began to show signs of fatigue by the beginning of the 1960s. Synagogue leaders found themselves in a situation where they had to increase membership and programming in order to support their expanding institutions. The journal *Architectural Record* omitted religious buildings when it handed out awards for distinguished work in 1961. The magazine’s editors, who had enthusiastically reported on and praised religious buildings of the 1950s, felt that there had been a decline in the building type. They implicitly acknowledged that first flush of postwar construction was over and openly harbored deep concern about the quality of synagogues and churches of recent vintage, thereby setting the stage for artistic reform that some architects had been advocating for decades.

Louis Kahn was aware of both the architectural and Philadelphia contexts. Kahn’s life was filled with secular, professional markers that were not uncommon for a striving immigrant: good education (University of Pennsylvania, class of 1924); lull in employment during the Depression; and interest and practice in architecture that had a social mission, especially public housing and urban planning during World War II. Accordingly, he was elected the president in 1947 of the American Society of Planners and Architects, a group that had begun in 1944 by courting other idealistic planners. Teaching became an increasingly important part of his career, first at Yale University (1947–55), and then at the University of Pennsylvania (1955, for the remainder of his life). As an academic, he served on many juries at a range of architecture schools from the 1940s through the early 1970s.

Even before journals and other architects proclaimed a recent decline, Kahn was working to reform the prevailing versions of modern architecture.
He had worked on two synagogues in Philadelphia, one of which owed a great deal to Frank Lloyd Wright’s only synagogue, which was about to rise in a Philadelphia suburb. Kahn also began to carve out his own relationship with the Jewish world. He identified with Zionism and at the same time began to discuss religious belief in universal terms that put him at odds with most definitions of organized religion. His views about synthesizing modernism and religion first crystallized not in Philadelphia but several hundred miles north, in Rochester, New York.

Mikveh Israel hired Kahn in May 1961. A congregation with a long institutional memory for fine architecture, Mikveh Israel had not been an active patron of buildings for almost half a century. Their choice of Kahn, not made without internal dissent, was a bold move that meshed with their equally brash decision to return to their origins in the historic center of Philadelphia. They were grappling with their role in the community at the same time that Kahn provided them with plans that were an inherent critique of contemporary architecture and emerging synagogue designs.

Kahn and Synagogues

Kahn’s association to formal Judaism was always tenuous. Nationalism and aestheticism often supplanted it. Kahn’s daughter Sue Ann remembers that the major family celebrations were Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Washington’s Birthday, the last two having a principally American association. She has also noted that her father instilled in her a belief that artistic creation, not parochialism, could ennoble people. She was taught that one should aspire to be an artist (she is an accomplished musician) or at least to make the world a better place for others.

Unschooled in the religion into which he had been born in Baltic Russia, and unaffiliated with a synagogue or any Jewish institution, Kahn viewed Judaism with a feeling of remote kinship. Kahn’s parents, who had withdrawn from their Philadelphia synagogue after their son had a bad experience in religious school, did retain an affection for Judaism. They were the ones who insisted that there be a rabbi at their son’s 1930 wedding to Esther Israeli, whose family’s own Jewish background was even more assimilated than was that of the Kahns. It is unknown whether Kahn’s parents, when anglicizing their surname (originally Schmuilowsky), purposely chose a variation of “Cohen,” the name usually taken by those believed to be descendants of the ancient high priests.
Kahn’s strongest ties to Judaism were through Zionism. He probably never called himself a Zionist, but his actions reveal a strong commitment to Israel that started when he made his first trip to the new state in 1949 with a group of philanthropists and planners who were looking at emergency housing. Kahn got to know many Israeli architects with whom he retained strong ties for the next two and half decades. He was motivated to participate in the Philadelphia branch of the American Technion Society. Kahn made a second trip to Israel in 1958 in order to lecture at the World Assembly of Architects and Engineers, a congress organized by the Technion and the Association of Architects and Engineers in Israel, and consulted on the new town of Besor in the early 1960s. In 1962, he was a judge for an open, international competition for the planning of the “central area of Tel Aviv-Yafo.” In the period after the 1967 Six-Day War, Kahn participated in Mayor Teddy Kollek’s Jerusalem Committee and labored on plans for two outstanding commissions in Jerusalem: rebuilding the Hurva synagogue and creating a mixed-use hotel and retail scheme for Government House Hill. Kahn returned again and again to Israel, often at short notice, in the 1960s and early 1970s; his close connections with the country are evident in the fact that on a trip to Bangladesh in 1969, Kahn stopped in Israel at Kollek’s request. Kahn then volunteered to return on the back leg of his trip, a convoluted itinerary because of the standing Arab boycott of Israel.

Despite his engagement with Israel, Kahn remained detached from organized American Jewish life, which makes it all the more ironic that his first architectural commission (in the 1930s) was a synagogue, and that another Jewish house of worship was one of his first institutional clients after World War II. The earlier synagogue, which was built to completion, was Ahavath Israel in the Oak Lane neighborhood of Philadelphia. The later one, which did not advance beyond a preliminary phase before Kahn was dismissed, was Adath Jeshurun, planned for a site just a few blocks from Ahavath Israel. When the latter project fell through, Kahn expressed regret at losing it: “I undertook the making of drawings for a nominal sum of $1,000 because I wanted to design a synagogue and because I was assured by your committee that I was to be the architect if the project on the new site goes ahead.”

Separated by two decades, these commissions showed some similarities. Both sites were in the northern reaches of the city, close to the border with Montgomery County. Each synagogue was nominally connected to the Conservative movement, although their outlooks were entirely different.
Ahavath Israel’s service flirted with Orthodoxy, and its members were typically first-generation Americans. In the late 1940s, the rabbi delivered a sermon in Yiddish at least once each month. Adath Jeshurun, concurrently, still clung to an elite German heritage while positioning itself along the left fringes of Conservative thought.

Kahn’s architectural solution for Ahavath Israel (1935–37) had been simple and straightforward. He tried to balance a predominantly immigrant population’s memory of “shuls,” old-time urban synagogues, with his own desire to provide an up-to-date (and no doubt modestly priced) building. Kahn’s three-story synagogue, the congregation’s first permanent home, was a simple rectangular block. The west facade, a blank brick screen, pushes toward the street and extends a few feet in front of neighboring dwellings. It can be seen as a precursor to Kahn’s flat brick wall at the front of the Yale University Art Gallery (1953).

Following the precedent of urban shuls, Kahn placed the two-story Adath Jeshurun sanctuary on the floor above and the social hall and classrooms in the basement below. The entry is midway between the two levels. The orientation of the narrow sanctuary is toward the bimah and ark, which were placed together along the eastern wall, beneath six horizontal rows of glass bricks. Kahn started the glass bricks at the ceiling line and continued them down the wall, until they fill the top third. This wide band, which spans from sidewall to sidewall, allows light to enter the sanctuary close to the ark. The light provides a dramatic focus, particularly during morning worship, drawing attention away from the more common narrow vertical windows on the north wall. The use of translucent blocks was an early attempt of Kahn’s to capture natural light without glare, a concern he would voice cogently in the 1960s at Mikveh Israel.

The Adath Jeshurun situation was different. Adath Jeshurun wanted to leave the Strawberry Mansion neighborhood, a Jewish enclave since the 1890s, for another urban site, close to the northern border with suburban Melrose Park and Elkins Park. Kahn’s preliminary 1954 plan settles on clearly defined, simplified geometric shapes: triangle, rectangle, and circle. His plan contains a two-story rectangular school building and a separate two-story triangular structure. In the triangular building, he segregated the spiritual and secular functions by placing the nonexpandable sanctuary, chapel, and library on the second floor and the auditorium at ground level, thereby creating an updated urban parti, as the congregation was not abandoning the city for the suburbs. Harking back to prewar practices,
the sanctuary was meant to have room for the entire congregation during the High Holy Days.\textsuperscript{17}

Kahn captured the congregation’s parental ambivalence toward organized religion in the way that he juxtaposed the sanctuary/auditorium building with the school wing. Because of the sloping site, Kahn was able to draw a sanctuary-auditorium building that rose over the lower school block. The “secular” level of the triangular building connected with the top story of the school. He drew a driveway that made it easy for parents to drop off their children at the synagogue without having to encounter other people or other sections of the building. Kahn thus gave architectural representation to a 1950s phenomenon whereby parents tended to “reject involvement in the cultural-religious aspects of the Jewish tradition for themselves as adults, while they demand that their children involve themselves to the extent of learning about this tradition, without, however, getting so involved as to wish to practice it.”\textsuperscript{18}

The Adath Jeshurun plans reflect Kahn’s rejection of universal space and his commitment to the character of the individual room, principles that he was just beginning to explore in plans and had not yet fully articulated in his writings. Departing from the expandable paradigm that Goodman was promoting, Kahn opted for separate spaces that would sustain human interaction.\textsuperscript{19} Architecturally, the sanctuary’s geometric and functional independence may be seen as a precursor to the discrete pavilions and “servant”/“served” spaces that would emerge in Kahn’s Trenton Bath House in the spring of 1955.

Architect Frank Lloyd Wright probably had a hand in how Adath Jeshurun courted Kahn and in how Kahn arrived at his preliminary design. In late 1953, Congregation Beth Sholom had hired Wright as the architect for a main sanctuary and small chapel they planned to build on a five-acre site in nearby Elkins Park.\textsuperscript{20}

When Beth Sholom hosted a well-publicized “kick-off” fundraising dinner during the first week in June 1954, Adath Jeshurun scrambled to contact Kahn and discuss its own plans. Adath Jeshurun, a synagogue that had been a bastion of German-Jewish “uptown” elitism since 1858, was not about to allow Beth Sholom, an “upstart” congregation initiated by early twentieth-century Eastern European immigrants, to become the most famous synagogue of the Conservative movement.

For Beth Sholom, Wright retained the urban part of an elevated sanctuary over a smaller chapel. The main entrance leads to a landing in the
intermediate space between those two public spaces: a 1,214-seat, nonexpansible sanctuary placed above a 268-seat chapel. It has long been recognized that Kahn’s triangular space was a variation of Frank Lloyd Wright’s basic nonexpandable, loosely triangular concept for Congregation Beth Sholom. Kahn strengthened and adapted Wright’s spaces. He also tried to adapt the way Wright skewed Beth Sholom’s seating to conform to the roughly triangular floor plan (see fig. 3.1).

Wright’s plan had even more urban significance than is immediately perceptible. He succeeded in separating the sanctuary, with its 100-foot high pyramidal roof, from its massive concrete base. He intended to cap the top with Hebrew letters spelling out the biblical injunction “I am the Lord thy God.” In a strange way, the arrangement reflects the way Wright’s mentor, Louis Sullivan, had organized early skyscrapers in Buffalo and St. Louis. There, too, the higher stories were placed firmly on solid bases; these were topped with a strong cornice. In Elkins Park, the sturdy base, all-encompassing roof, and Hebrew biblical quote at top (this was never executed) could have recalled the classical base, shaft, and capital to which Sullivan alluded. Wright effectively created a religious skyscraper, for an approximately suburban site; Kahn, on the other hand, crafted a suburban synagogue for an essentially urban location.

Kahn did not, at least at Adath Jeshurun, adapt one of Wright’s finest achievements for the interior at Elkins Park: the ingenious method Wright developed to control light. Wright provided a luminous ceiling that not only covers the entire sanctuary but swoops down at three points to meet the low walls. Most of the sanctuary is enclosed by the ceiling rather than by more traditional walls. By using a double shell, wire glass over opaque fiberglass-type material, Wright brought natural light into the primary public space. The changing light throughout the day is noticeable in the interior, but the space is never subjected to glare. No other windows are necessary. The notion of capturing natural light without glare and without traditional windows would haunt Kahn, especially as he began to plan Mikveh Israel. Strangely, Wright’s opaque light is the only evidence of nature to filter through the sanctuary, an odd choice for an architect who began his career by merging his buildings with their natural surroundings. It was consistent with the self-contained aspect of Wright’s contemporary Guggenheim Museum in New York City.

Rabbi Mortimer J. Cohen was the eminent leader who secured Wright’s services for Beth Sholom. The Conservative movement’s lack of institutional control allowed this determined rabbi to make strong architectural
decisions, reaching out to the most famous name in American architecture. The renown that the building earned in Jewish circles may have reinforced the desire of other congregations, both Conservative and Reform, to create their own monuments. Beth Sholom illustrated that impressive architecture could generate an increase in membership at a reasonable capital cost, an effect that certainly appealed to most other congregations. The projected cost was $750,000, less than half of the amount spent to realize Mendelsohn’s Park Synagogue in Cleveland, Ohio, and just about one-third the cost of Goodman’s Fairmount Temple (1957), also in Cleveland.

Rabbi Cohen was an active participant in Wright’s planning, although his role is not always immediately apparent. The sanctuary’s interior space, for example, soars. A large, triangular, hanging light fixture barely interrupts space that moves upward in an ineffable ascent. Wright did not attempt to control verticality in the same way that Wurster did in his Dallas synagogue.

Figure 3.1. Frank Lloyd Wright, Beth Sholom Congregation (1959), Elkins Park, Pennsylvania. View of the sanctuary from the bimah. Author’s photograph, 2008.
Scholar Emily Cooperman is quite right when she notes that the space is “sublime” and “creates awe.” It is not clear whether “awe,” a sensation that would be desirable in a church, is actually appropriate in a synagogue. Judaism is a religion, after all, in which “awe” is reserved to describe the sacred time (“Days of Awe”) between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, moments when Jews are expected to engage in rigorous introspection and repentance.

And yet, Wright did temper his lofty interior thrust by providing a sloping floor and directional seating that reinforce a processional connection between congregants and the bimah. From the bimah side, Wright took care to have the ends of the steps merge with the surrounding floor. This seamlessness between congregants and the bimah and between the bimah and the surrounding floor is a powerful horizontal unity that had been ordained by the rabbi. He was the one who tried to impress on Wright that Jewish leaders want to be close to their congregants; this rabbinc view, which was unusual for a moment when bimahs tended to be high above congregants, clearly affected the architect’s final design.

Emily Cooperman’s recent scholarship, undertaken on behalf of the synagogue as part of its successful effort to gain status as a National Historic Landmark, has demonstrated that Rabbi Cohen devised all of the building’s symbolism. Although the rabbi had given him carte blanche, Wright actually had nothing to say about the meaning of his structure. According to Cooperman, Cohen produced his own narrative about Wright’s work, thereby creating a series of long-standing myths about the architect’s intentions while also revealing how a visionary rabbi struggled to bring Jewish content into his congregation’s new home. Cohen decided that the exterior massing of Wright’s synagogue was invested with complex allusions to Mount Sinai and that the seven protrusions on each vertical joint of the exterior were references to the ancient menorah. He devised the notion that the entry canopy resembled the hands of the ancient priests as they blessed their congregation. Cohen, presumably unable to locate Jewish meaning in current synagogue design, created his own connotations.

Kahn and Modernism

Kahn’s career continued to advance, despite his loss of the Adath Jeshurun commission, accelerating during the late 1950s. Remaining an influential teacher, he became a frequently sought lecturer and increasingly visible prac-
titioner. Fellow academics and architects valued his opinion. In 1953, when Kahn’s office had no current synagogue project on the boards, he participated in at least two panels with colleagues who were already designing or would soon design synagogues, including Philip Johnson, Pietro Belluschi, and William Wurster.²⁸ All were well known to him through his work with the American Society of Planners in the previous decade.²⁹

As early as 1953, the authors of one of the first books on American post-war religious buildings argued that modernism had already deteriorated into a simplistic appearance of contemporary design, something that they dubbed “modernistic.”³⁰ By the late 1950s, many other practitioners had developed doubts about the direction the movement had taken. Kahn was tentative in his own early criticism. In 1953, he implied that he wanted to throw off the confining aspects of his Beaux-Arts education: “I have spent all my time since that time, since graduation, unlearning what I learned.”³¹ It was unclear, at first, what would fill this personal void. Neither then, nor later, did he ever want to forgo the dignity or clarity of classicism. By this time, Kahn had already begun to think about distinctions between “order” and “design,” and he seized on those dualities so that he could take aim at the stylistic muddle of contemporary modernism. Rather than following “style” or any exterior trappings, Kahn argued for reinvigorating architectural thought, encouraging practitioners to think abstractly and broadly about their clients’ needs. He wanted architects to imagine underlying history and comprehensive aspirations (order) as opposed to material remedies (design). At a conference at Princeton University, Kahn proposed a total reconceptualization of how architects work, how they approach their clients, and how clients could expect their needs to be continually reinvigorated and met. Fearing that he had not expressed himself adequately, Kahn wrote to William Wurster, who had also been a participant at the conference, asking for comments on Kahn’s remarks.³²

There is an uncanny resemblance between Kahn’s thesis on order and design and the words of Jewish scholar Abraham Joshua Heschel. In 1951, Heschel had written (in The Sabbath) that “Judaism is a religion of time” and that time had to be balanced with space. Heschel sees time as history, an all-encompassing accumulation of past events. Space, for Heschel, is material reality.³³ For both Kahn and Heschel, the understanding of human endeavors has to start with an abstraction; only by understanding that is it possible to construct a more concrete materiality. There is no way to connect Kahn directly to Heschel, as Heschel’s book was not widely reviewed or publicized
in the early 1950s; he does not appear to have lectured in Philadelphia during that time. The connection is, nonetheless, a fascinating detail that leaves open the possibility that Kahn had a deeper understanding of contemporary Jewish thought than his biography would suggest.

Kahn’s most forceful early attack on modernism is found in a private letter of late 1953. Kahn wrote to his associate Anne Tyng, who was then having their baby in Rome: “I saw the Lever Building—it is dead—it looks like something made flat in Hoboken in one piece and picked up, put in place in one piece vertically (the name Whitman Chocolate rubbed off) in Manhattan.”34 In these few words, Kahn makes it clear that he dislikes the inhuman scale and vast interior space of a modern building that he sees as a descendant of an industrial factory; that the glass curtain wall (a hallmark of Lever House) is dull and lacks distinction; and that a building has to relate better to its context. Although Lever House architects Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (led by Gordon Bunshaft) were widely lauded for producing an elegant postwar skyscraper, Kahn found their creation to be an uninspiring addition to the urban fabric and, by extension, an insipid environment for those who worked there. Kahn, who did not believe in copying historical styles because each era has its own passions and needs, felt that modernism had made a wrong turn.

Kahn responded to prevailing modern design and demonstrated his new approach when he designed the Trenton Bath House in 1955 (see fig. 3.2). These changing rooms for the outdoor pool of the Jewish Community Center in Ewing, New Jersey, inaugurated Kahn’s mature career, over the course of which his objective was to renew modernism’s humanistic idealism by reconfiguring its formal obsessions with space and light. At Trenton, he designed a building of functionally distinct parts arranged in the shape of a Greek cross. The subsidiary spaces such as bathrooms and storage areas are given their own place in a visual hierarchy that distinguishes between primary (“served”) and secondary (“servant”) uses. Kahn retained classicism’s sense of progression for visitors who would enter at a corner of the structure, walk through an atrium open to the sky, proceed to a men’s or women’s changing area, then deposit street clothes in a “basket room” before reentering the atrium and walking forward to a flight of stairs that ascend to the outdoor pool. Instead of using details such as classical columns or historicist cornices, Kahn substituted Platonic geometry: square pavilions, a circular gravel pit in the atrium, pyramidal roofs with an oculus. The materials are uncomplicated: concrete block for the walls and wood for the roofs.
For light and circulation, Kahn eschewed the glass that is the salient feature of Lever House. In this suburban swim club, he succeeded in capturing the flowing spaces and light-filled interiors of modernist buildings. Using dense concrete blocks, he furthered the integration of light and space. A void between the wall and the roof, which Ann Tyng says Kahn called a “light joint,” articulates his belief in the power of light to bind inanimate surfaces and to decorate a wall. Swimmers can look up and see sky and treetops. They can experience the natural glories of light and foliage, presented directly to them without the interference of glass, thus avoiding the sensation of an overheated cocoon. In practical terms, there is no need for any additional ventilation because air circulates freely.

With the Bath House, Kahn has countered the weightlessness of the large Lever House with a small building that has gravity and that encourages maximum interaction among its users. He has also given expression to some of the disapproval of modernism articulated by his colleagues, including Joseph Hudnut. Hudnut, for example, had argued as early as 1938 for a modernism that would promote “space,” “human values,” and “community.” The Trenton Bath House demonstrated (and even augmented) Kahn’s thesis about “order” (which he later called “form”) and “design.” At Trenton, the
client had asked simply for a place where swimmers could change and store their clothes before going to the pool. Kahn, thinking about what this process entailed, realized that he could answer that need and at the same time let users have a sense of their natural surroundings. He also gave them spaces that could be used for playing cards, having dances, and listening to music. Kahn's humanism was pragmatic, based on a sense of how people use and benefit from the constructed world. It was also idealistic, promoting a social agenda, one of the tenets of European modernism before the war.

Kahn held a romantic view of the noble architect who could orchestrate change—a visionary, not a team player: "I think one man can conduct a symphony better than a team can." Kahn appreciated neither Skidmore, Owings & Merrill's corporate structure nor Walter Gropius's team approach, devised when he directed the Bauhaus and exported to America when he formed The Architects Collaborative in Boston.

Kahn took on an increasingly heroic role in the architectural community following the 1957 publication of images of Trenton Bath House. His contemporaries noted that, unlike many others, he had taken a clear stance that was deeply felt and not at all superficial. By the time he addressed the closing convocation of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) in Otterlo, the Netherlands, in 1959, Kahn had the building experience to reinforce what he had been writing for more than half a decade. He made the distinction between architects who can grasp the most abstract and inclusive uses of buildings and those who can only supply immediate, short-range solutions to problems. The former group had found "form" whereas the latter made the superficial choice of skipping to what Kahn called "design."

Kahn and Religion

In the mid-1950s, Kahn began to write on synagogue architecture and how the building type could be redefined. At some point, he acquired a copy of Thiry, Bennett, and Kamphoefner's Churches and Temples. Published in 1953 and coauthored by his friend Paul Thiry, this review of recent developments would have provided Kahn with a primer on religious buildings. More significant, in 1955, Kahn wrote a prepublication review of Rachel Wischnitzer's Synagogue Architecture in the United States. He used this as a forum for stating his own developing ideas about synagogues and communal space: "Synagogue is a spirit continually expressing what it wants to be; To be a place to meet under a tree; To become a great center of communion—a
place under many trees. Free from a single traditional plan, free from a space everyone remembers as typical and bound to no continued association with a powerful style, ‘Synagogue’ is freer to become what it wants to be.”

He was clearly endorsing the ahistoricism that *Commentary* magazine had promoted since the late 1940s. At the same time, he was recognizing the most basic role of the synagogue: fostering personal interaction and a sense of community. For Kahn, all human connections started in the sparsest natural settings—the space under a single tree or enclosed by a group of trees. By positioning the synagogue as an elemental, natural setting that had the power to promote a variety of actions and personal associations, Kahn was effectively showing how his definition of a synagogue aligned with his own definition of “order,” developed that same year.

By the late 1950s, Kahn was also thinking seriously about religion, seeing it as a key ingredient in understanding the world. For Kahn, thought is philosophy, but feeling is religion. Both are essential underpinnings to his work because together they achieve understanding, which he dubbed “realization”: “You never really come to any great moments in design unless you work from a broad realization,” he told an audience at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York, in 1959. His remarks at CIAM in Otterlo (and on many subsequent occasions) reveal a quest for unique experience that will be uplifting without being attached to any particular rite. Kahn recognizes religious experience as an emotional one, if it is divorced from the agenda of any one group. He extols a universal religion when he advocates: “Not ritualistic religion. I mean religion from which we derive such feelings as nobility—that religion.” He was really calling for religion or spirituality that would improve people’s lives and sense of their place in the world.

In his 1959 speeches, Kahn launched into a discussion of a university chapel, alluding just briefly to Eero Saarinen’s interdenominational chapel at MIT (1955) and how a student might approach it. He tells the story of a student who has done well in school, then goes to a chapel (presumably to give thanks), and instead stays outside and winks at the building. The implication seems to be that success is personal, not a matter of divine intervention. The student does not need the chapel, although he seems pleased that it is there should he require it. Kahn then gives his anecdote an architectural twist:

That is your ritual—you don’t have to go in the chapel—you wouldn’t wink at a gymnasium, you’d wink at a chapel. The chapel is the right
place, so therefore, what is a chapel of a university? . . . It might be a room which I came to find for the moment and this room might an ambulatory you see for those who don’t want to go into the room, and it may have an arcade for those who don’t want to go into the ambulatory, and the arcade might be in a garden for those who don’t want to go into the arcade, and the garden might have a wall around it for those who don’t want to go into the garden. And finally you can wink at the chapel.42

He added an existential dimension: “The essential thing, you see, is that the chapel is a personal ritual, and that it is not a set ritual, and it is from this that you get the form.”43 For Kahn, it is humans who decide what ritual they are going to perform, according to their own desires. The winking, in fact, seems to say that people are in control of their destinies; one does not need to follow any set requirements. The architectural implication is that a religious structure has to be able to accommodate this unstructured conduct of any personal observance.

By setting up a series of enclosures that provide choices rather than requirements, Kahn paves the way for the layered spaces and explicit ambulatories that he would create in his later work. He may even have been trying to evoke the sequence of spaces at the ancient Jewish temple, though perhaps not a specific archeological rendition.44 His words reflect a reconstruction of Solomon’s temple that was drawn by New York architects Frank Helmle and Harvey Corbett and then displayed at the Philadelphia Sesquicentennial in 1926.45 Certainly, reconstructions of the Solomonic temple have been envisioned for centuries. The intriguing aspect of this precise twentieth-century rendition is that Kahn might have actually seen it, given that he was the architectural senior draftsman for this world’s fair. Helmle and Corbett’s reconstruction includes an exterior courtyard that has rectangular space at its center. An ambulatory is not explicit, but an arcade might be; it is enclosed by a garden, which is further circumscribed by densely placed columns forming another type of enclosure. It is possible that the image of sequenced enclosures stayed with Kahn until he had an opportunity to reconstruct it verbally, thirty years later.

Kahn and Rochester: The Road to Philadelphia

Rochester, New York—headquarters of photographic/optical giants Xerox (then Haloid-Xerox), Kodak, and Bausch & Lomb—had, in the 1950s, a thriving Jewish community.46 Attracting a diverse population, Roch-
ester became a hub for vibrant religious architecture by 1960. Three projects (one was Kahn’s Unitarian Church; the other two were synagogues) had implications for the ways Kahn approached the Mikveh Israel commission. All three congregations were moving from the central business district; their new buildings were under construction at roughly the same time from 1961 until 1963; and all three were dedicated in the spring of 1963. The differences in final costs were considerable: The synagogues each cost more than $1 million; Kahn’s church cost only about $600,000.

Temple B’rith Kodesh initiated this building activity by hiring Pietro Belluschi. In 1958, he began to design a temple complex for suburban Brighton, a formerly restricted area just southeast of the city that became a popular address for Jews after the war. By 1980, more than 40 percent of Rochester’s Jews had relocated there, an unambiguous statement that changes during the postwar years really did expand areas where Jews might live.

A few miles away, members of Rochester’s Unitarian Church hired Kahn in 1959 to design their new building on South Winton Road, just within the city limits. Directly across the street, Congregation Beth El employed Percival Goodman to design their sanctuary, next to a school and auditorium they had built there in the early 1950s. Goodman got started on their plans that year; they broke ground in 1961.

Temple B’rith Kodesh, a Reform congregation, and Beth El, a Conservative institution that had split from Orthodox Beth Israel in 1915, had an unusually cordial relationship. The rabbinic leaders, Philip Bernstein at B’rith Kodesh and Abraham Karp at Beth El, were undoubtedly instrumental in cultivating those ties, even as both congregations prepared to leave the heart of downtown. In 1960, Beth El and B’rith Kodesh held joint High Holy Days children’s services. When Rabbi Karp was going to be away for a week, the Ritual Committee of Beth El invited Rabbi Herbert Bronstein, the assistant rabbi at B’rith Kodesh, to give the Friday night sermon. At least one member (with his father, an Orthodox cantor) of Beth El would often walk over to B’rith Kodesh to hear Rabbi Bernstein’s Friday night sermon.

Although these congregations were the largest in downtown Rochester, their histories were different, and their approaches to architecture were completely dissimilar. B’rith Kodesh, founded in 1848 as an Orthodox synagogue, was known as the bastion of wealthy German factory owners; more recently arrived Russian immigrants, who became the factory workers, formed their own synagogues. Beth El, founded in 1915, was the most suc-
cessful of these. The demographic distinction was similar to the situation in Philadelphia, where Adath Jeshurun and Beth Sholom were on opposite sides of the class divide. The Rochester congregations exhibited a camaraderie that did not exist in Philadelphia.

In the mid-1950s, Temple Brith Kodesh took an enlightened, open approach toward moving and finding an appropriate architect. After deciding that the area around their downtown location was continuing to deteriorate and that parking would always be a problem, they began to consider “long range plans for the Temple of Tomorrow.” They investigated recently built synagogues, eventually dispatching a board member to inspect Temple Emanu-El in Dallas. Temple Emanu-El had acted without the help of the SAACP, and it appears that Brith Kodesh did, too. Rabbi Bernstein, like his counterpart in Dallas, was a forceful leader who was known nationally. Like Rabbi Olan at Emanu-El, this engaged rabbi (who also spent most of his career at a single congregation) was able to direct investigations of other purpose-built, recent synagogues, helping to steer congregants toward an appropriate architect and, ultimately, the successful conclusion of a building campaign. Bernstein, in particular, displayed faith in architects and the ubiquitous expandable space when he told his congregants “today’s synagogue architects know how to build sanctuaries opening on to assembly halls and other facilities which meet with reasonable adequateness the normal year-round needs and the extraordinary requirement of the holidays.” He envisioned a new building where the synagogue could become the “center of the congregation’s life.”

By 1958, Temple Brith Kodesh (TBK) had selected a fifteen-acre site, auspiciously located across from the Brighton town hall. The Building Committee interviewed twelve architects before settling on Belluschi. Although the names of the twelve have been lost, there is no doubt that a reasonable list would have had to include Percival Goodman, Eero Saarinen, Philip Johnson, Wallace Harrison and Max Abramovitz, Fritz Nathan, and Kelly & Gruzen. The congregation reached out to William Wurster, because of his success in Dallas, but there is no documentation about how far he may have gotten in the interview process. Davis and Brody of Davis, Brody & Wisniewski, who had completed Beth El in South Orange, are the only other architects known to have been interviewed. There is no suggestion that Kahn was on the list.

The story from the other side of Rochester was not as heartening. Beth El’s committee lacked the curiosity that TBK exhibited. Rabbi Abraham
Karp, a respected scholar of Jewish history, had only arrived in 1956. He may not have established himself yet as the forceful voice of the congregation. The Beth El congregation simply wanted to pursue the nuts-and-bolts job of hiring a local architect with synagogue experience. While the rabbi at B’rith Kodesh sought “architecture,” Beth El aspired to have just a “building.” This discrepancy became more obvious as the Beth El congregation came closer to making their selection. Initially they did not want a “consulting architect” because the term, for them, implied a fancy outsider who would put his name on the drawings but not make a real contribution. When they could not find a local firm with a history of synagogue success, they softened their opposition and sought someone who could work with the local architectural firm, Todd & Giroux, which had designed the school and auditorium buildings that were already on their site.

In the end, Beth El chose Percival Goodman, after several interviews and site visits with other architects. Goodman had a track record in synagogues; congregations that had hired him were happy to recommend him heartily. Beth El was also pleased that Goodman presented himself and his wife as a design team. Her name was written into the contract as the person in charge of the furnishing and colors for the entire building.

Not surprisingly, the architects provided each congregation with the types of buildings that suited their aspirations. Belluschi’s plans show that he attempted to create an ennobling space that furthered the alliance between architects and Bauhaus craftsmen. At TBK, he finally had a chance to create a sanctuary from the beginning, unencumbered by the abandoned scheme he had faced at Temple Israel in Swampscott, Massachusetts, or the L-shaped religious school building to which he had to adapt at Adath Israel in Merion, Pennsylvania. The program and needs for TBK were much more complex than those of Belluschi’s earlier synagogues: a sanctuary for 1,250 that could expand to hold almost 3,000; a large religious school; and a smaller chapel for weddings or funerals.

B’rith Kodesh sits grandly, an imposing presence, but one that does not create tension with its ample, flat site (see fig. 3.3). Belluschi positioned the building so it occupies a wide swath fronting a thoroughfare. He organized the synagogue around two courtyards, so all rooms are close to nature. There are several ways to access the building, the most typical being a progression that directs worshippers from the parking lot that is hidden at the rear of the building. In inclement weather, worshippers could be dropped off under a portico attached to the west side of the building; otherwise, congregants
were expected to go halfway around the building, enter a deep, recessed atrium that faces the street, and arrive at an interior porch between the wing housing the sanctuary and the auditorium and the one housing the school. The arrangement may have been inspired by Wurster’s similar handling of exterior courtyards in Dallas.

Belluschi handled the massing with more confidence than he had displayed in his two previous synagogues. Here, he dropped the Star of David, which had become an impediment. On the exterior, the symbolism rests on an updated version of his earlier cupolas. This one is high, and again twelve-sided, recalling the twelve tribes of Israel or an ancient tent. It is now bolder than the versions in Merion or Swampscott—sixty-five feet high and almost the same width. Unlike the more hesitant gestures at the earlier synagogues, Belluschi here recast the cupola as a cap to the sanctuary. It is the visual, off-center anchor for the whole project, an arrangement that seems to owe a great deal to Wurster’s strategy in Dallas and to Mendelsohn’s earlier B’nai Amoona.

Belluschi tried, not always successfully, to bring light into the sanctuary by using a system of latticed wood screens within the interior windows of the cupola (see fig. 3.4). He also varied the interior shape of the sanctuary so that its expanded version does not resemble a characterless hall, a fail-
ing apparent in earlier Jewish venues and a situation that had been rectified by Wurster.

Belluschi’s design for the chapel is a highlight of TBK (see fig. 3.5). Unable to commission the artist he wanted originally for the sanctuary decoration (the rabbi had a favorite, Luise Kaish, in mind for the ark, and Belluschi had agreed to that request), Belluschi took charge in the more informal prayer space.61 He uses brick walls in a flowing manner that recalls fabric; the wood ceiling increases the sense of depth in a room that is wider than it is deep. Belluschi again enlisted Richard Filipowski, the sculptor who had designed small pieces for Temple Israel in Swampscott and who Wurster had used in Dallas. The welded metal ark functions as a wall screen, not unlike Lassaw’s design at Kneses Tifereth Israel. Filipowski’s screen is both decoration and ark. Here too, voids in the pattern keep the ark from being too heavy visually. Denser metalwork makes clear where the ark’s cabinet is centered in the screen. Consequently, the depth of the screen goes from the thicker center to the airy periphery and creates a type of visual explosion. Appropriately, Filipowski titled it “Firmament.” When the light inside the ark is turned on, the entire piece emits light that glows.

Belluschi’s Brith Kodesh made a big splash in the architecture world.
Architectural Record featured it as “A Major Synagogue by Belluschi.” The architect himself recognized the importance of the project in changing perceptions of the building type, writing in 1963: “In America, the synagogue is developing into a complex institution where the multiple manifestations of Judaism can take place in warmth and freedom. . . . By emphasizing the especial nature of simple materials such as wood and brick, they [architects] may achieve beauty without ostentation and with economy of means.” Belluschi’s synagogue reinterprets his earlier work and that of others: a multi-sided dome; the primary role of nature, the ability of simple brick or wood material to give dignity to a building, and the critical role of artists in enhancing a building’s delight. With few direct references to Judaism and without an obvious Star of David, Belluschi worked out refined spaces for a large congregation.

A different tale began to unfold a few miles away, as dueling concepts and ideologies emerged in the pair of projects on South Winton Road. There, Percival Goodman’s Beth El synagogue and Kahn’s Unitarian Church began to illustrate some of things that were going wrong in synagogue design, and the design of religious buildings in general, and how Kahn might have the power to rectify those faults. Goodman, seeking only to fulfill the program requirements, referred to his method as “functional.” Since the 1930s, “functionalism” had carried the stigma of honoring use more than aesthetic outcome. He wanted to get the job done efficiently. Goodman relegated the sanctuary to the status of “prayer hall,” giving equal weight to its social and religious functions. Earlier in his career, he had said that “light simply must be
bright and white”—that light should be brought into the sanctuary in such a way that it would ease a worshipper’s reading of the prayers. This may have reflected a real need, but it did not create for worshippers any sense of being in a place that was comforting, warm, or artistically adventuresome.

Goodman’s view of synagogues hinged on how people used the space to perform their everyday and holiday needs. Samuel Poze, who at one time was both chair of the Building Committee and the head of the Ritual Committee for Temple Beth El, compiled a chronological record showing how Goodman and the congregation worked together. Poze’s report indicates that Goodman had no philosophical ambitions. His goal was to provide a solution that would meet what the congregation viewed as their needs. To that end, he sent them a questionnaire. Beth El’s building subcommittees (dealing with topics such as the school, youth, and so on) worked with the main Building Committee to produce a report on exactly what their “space requirements” were. The architect then produced preliminary sketches “which incorporated all . . . requirements” and gave a cost-per-square-foot estimate. Beth El requested an expansible sanctuary that could serve from 750 or 800 worshippers on a regular basis, and up to 2,600 for the High Holy Days. They also requested a social facility that could expand to serve 100 to 800 diners. Only the rabbi, who requested a sanctuary that would allow as many people as possible to sit near or see the bimah, appears to have had a more elevated objective.

The problem with Goodman’s approach is that it almost guarantees mediocre design. The architect, having asked the congregants to define their specific needs by enumerating a “grocery list” of desires, has to realize a mundane program. The clients, reflecting only what they have had previously or seen elsewhere, can give only a prosaic response. By not encouraging his clients to think broadly, Goodman received a list of particular rooms; he then filled the shopping cart with what was asked of him. This is exactly the kind of interaction that Kahn detested; it is the reason that he suggested to his students that they “throw out the program.” He was not trying to overlook the functions of a space, but he was trying to avoid the formulaic responses that were driving approaches such as Goodman’s. Goodman never transcended the client’s needs, but Kahn’s goal was to give his clients something that was both practical and transcendent—something that reached beyond what they could verbalize.

The result at Beth El is disheartening, with both an overpowering exterior (see fig. 3.6) and a banal interior (see fig. 3.7). When it was dedicated,

critics referred to the synagogue as being "designed like a book." The massive exterior brick walls might evoke a book, but a very heavy one. The wall could just as easily resemble an unwelcoming fortress. Kahn, who talked about how he loved castles in Scotland, would have found a way to break the monotony and create interior areas for quiet contemplation or reading; Goodman offered only unrelenting mass.

Goodman, adhering to the rabbi's atypical request that parishioners be close to the bimah, gave the reading platform an oval shape, extending into a fan-shaped sanctuary. As it widens and deepens, the fan shape seems to deter rather than encourage an intimate connection to the bimah. There is also a disjunction between the sanctuary and the entryway and auditorium into which it can expand. Belluschi and Wurster had learned to craft the differing shapes and extend the materials of the sanctuary into an asset of expandable space; Goodman let them devolve into emptiness.

Perhaps to offset the depth and to heighten the drama, Goodman provided a towering thirty-two-foot ark made of marble veneer imported from Israel. Lit from behind, it does provide a focal point, albeit one that seems excessive. Goodman certainly did not pay attention to Rabbi Eugene Mihaly's warnings, expressed in 1958, that synagogue arks that supported "performance" were substituting impressive objects for congregants' participation. Mihaly worried that arks, "ever more impressive, ever larger and more elaborate" were leading Judaism toward a type of idolatry. At Beth El, the other decoration, including Samuel Wiener's narrow strips of stained glass (five on each side of the sanctuary, to represent the Ten Commandments, plus two larger windows flanking the ark) and the interior brick walls, take secondary roles in relation to the dramatic ark. The overall impression is exhibitionist, a weak imitation of the awe that Wright achieved. One could argue that Frank Lloyd Wright's synagogue space was too grand for Judaism but that Goodman's tapped neither majesty nor intimacy.

Across the street, Rochester's Unitarian community seems to have had its own objections to contemporary church and synagogue design, even before Beth El was completed. Before choosing an architect, they decided that they wanted a nonexpandable building that had a centralized plan, lacked any "gimmickry, and had stone or brick walls." The Unitarian Church, not unlike Mikveh Israel, had a distinguished architectural past. It had met for many years at a downtown Rochester facility designed by Richard Upjohn. Forced to move from that building because of urban redevelopment, the
congregation “felt a responsibility to replace it with one by a leading 20th-century architect.” The Selection Committee visited a number of well-regarded firms. In addition to Kahn, they interviewed the Architect's Collaborative (Walter Gropius's firm), Hugh Stubbins, Eero Saarin, Paul Rudolph, and Carl Koch, who had worked with Pietro Belluschi at Temple Israel in Swampscott, Massachusetts. With the exception of Kahn, who had built little by that time, these practitioners were among those most solicited for public buildings of the day.

Kahn began his investigation of the Unitarian commission by drawing a now-famous diagram that shows concentric circles around a question mark. Kahn set out to diagram how Unitarianism works, how it questions, and how it provides for layers of access. This quick sketch appears to have become the genesis of an ambulatory that, in the early drawings, surrounds the sanctuary/auditorium/meeting hall. In Kahn's final design for the church, the sanctuary is a square with a permanent stage, although seats could be arranged freely. Classrooms and meeting rooms can be found off a corridor (not an ambulatory) adjacent to the auditorium.

Light is clear, not centralized, and indirect. It is dispersed to the corners by four indirect light monitors. Kahn grasped that a Unitarian church could dispense with the directional light found in doctrinaire Christian churches. There was no altar to light intensely and no need to propel worshippers toward a singular sacred object. Kahn's light and seats are not fixed, indicating that the spaces and the congregants are not completely determined and, by extension, are in sync with the tenets of the religion.

Decoration is minimal. Kahn designed a wall hanging based on the color spectrum, an outgrowth of nature rather than literary content. He wanted Anni Albers to weave it; in the end, Jack Lenor Larsen completed the task. The tapestry, intended to go around the room, serves as a reminder of light; it is a far cry from the artificial and staged (perhaps, even Christian) light that Goodman focused on his ark across the street at Beth El. Kahn wanted to wrap the congregation in his cloth design, surrounding people with the essence of light on the walls and with real light that penetrated the four corners.

Goodman's synagogue design shows his hand all at once, but in the Rochester church Kahn allows for subtlety (see fig. 3.8). Whereas Beth El's composition dwells on extending the brick's materiality and creating dense forms, the Unitarian Church has stability, not showmanship. Kahn's work emits a quiet reserve, perhaps even classical repose. He reveals his respect for
the void as an expressive unit on the exterior, by placing each deeply recessed classroom window behind a projecting brick wall.

**Mikveh Israel: The Client**

While the Unitarian Church was already under way, Kahn received a synagogue commission unlike his others. The client was Mikveh Israel, the oldest synagogue in Philadelphia and one of the most venerable in the United States. It had a clear sense of its place in the Jewish and secular world, as well as a long tradition of arts patronage. In the late 1950s, Mikveh Israel attempted to reposition itself in the most historic area of downtown Philadelphia and to build a strikingly original new home for “the synagogue of the American Revolution.”

Mikveh Israel was founded in 1740 and met for its first four decades in private homes and rented spaces; as the congregation grew, it imported a rabbinical leader from Shearith Israel in New York City and adopted that congregation’s Sephardic organization and rites in 1780. Mikveh Israel’s membership had long revered luminary eighteenth-century members, including Haym Salomon, “well-known to Robert Morris, James Madison, Edmond Randolph and who was of considerable assistance in helping in the finances of the Revolutionary Government”; Nathan Levy, “who brought the Liberty Bell to these shores on his ship, the Myrtilla”; and Rebecca Gratz, “beautiful and creative philanthropist whose personality was reflected in Walter Scott’s Ivanhoe.” Although some of this information is considered apocryphal by today’s historians, it confirms that the Mikveh Israel membership has long been devoted to its glorious past.

Mikveh Israel’s religious directors were equally distinguished. Isaac Leeser,
the translator of the Hebrew Bible into English and the founder of the first Jewish Publication Society, was the leader of Mikveh Israel from 1829 to 1850. Sabato Morais, who followed Leeser at Mikveh Israel, was also a founder and the first president of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), the rabbinic arm of what became the Conservative movement.

This congregation has been consistently proud of its patronage of the arts and of its own acclaimed architectural history. In the eighteenth century, Mikveh Israel commissioned and purchased Torah finials (rimonim) from the renowned New York silversmith Myer Myers. After a period of decline and internal conflict in the 1790s, the congregation recovered vigorously. In the nineteenth century, Mikveh Israel commissioned William Strickland to design a building for them on the same Cherry Street site, near 3rd Street, where it had maintained a small building since the 1780s. The Jewish community of Newport, Rhode Island, one of the three Jewish settlements that predated the Jews’ arrival in Philadelphia, had already set a high architectural precedent by selecting Peter Harrison as architect for their Touro Synagogue in 1763. In hiring Strickland in the early 1820s, Mikveh Israel had met the challenge by enlisting a Philadelphian who was one of America’s most outstanding architects. He was then designing the landmark Second Bank of the United States (1819–24), a few blocks away.

In the 1950s, as Mikveh Israel prepared to build again, scholars had focused attention on the Strickland building. Agnes Addison Gilchrist had published her study, *William Strickland: Architect and Engineer*, at the beginning of the decade. Architect Alfred Bendiner’s investigation of Mikveh Israel’s early building forged an even stronger link between the congregation and the Strickland plan. Bendiner, an illustrator and architect who was also a member of Mikveh Israel, had reconstructed the plans for the Strickland building as part of the 1953 Tercentenary Celebration of Jewish Settlement in North America. Basically a classical structure with Egyptian motifs, Strickland’s building would, in the 1820s, have allowed the congregation to feel that they were participating in an “American” adaptation of ancient style (see fig. 3.9). Arguing that this was the first Philadelphia building to adapt Egyptian revival details, architectural historian Rachel Wischnitzer has situated this structure as a design pioneer. Friedrich Weinbrenner had designed a synagogue with Egyptian details on the facade in Karlsruhe, Germany, in 1798, but American designers had rarely employed similar motifs.

Strickland had to address several conventions of synagogue building,
tasks he handled masterfully. The ark is commonly located on the eastern wall, facing Jerusalem. Sephardic congregations place the ark and bimah on opposite walls, highlighting the void between the reading desk and the ark. During a Sephardic Sabbath or festival service, the Torah scroll is removed from its place of honor in the ark, then ceremoniously, with measured steps, carried to the bimah. Following the reading, the process is reversed.

Strickland had to accommodate these customs on a site that made it difficult to honor them. The parcel of land was deep, rather than wide, with a north-south orientation. It is to Strickland’s credit that he provided a
solution that was both pragmatic and inspired. He created an oval sanctuary with half-domes that flanked each side of a barrel vault. The east-west corridor, below the vault, was short but immediately noticeable. Men sat in seats arranged in semicircles below the half domes; women occupied galleries in the semicircles above them. A more traditional plan would have had the galleries extend along three sides of a rectangle.

Mikveh Israel members long cherished the memory of their Strickland building. When the congregation vacated it in 1859, they preserved the original benches. They retained strong feelings for Strickland in a way that they never did for John McArthur Jr., the architect of their succeeding building. McArthur, although never matching Strickland’s accomplishments or national fame, was well known locally. His Mikveh Israel, designed in 1860 for a 7th Street site near Arch Street, near the synagogue’s previous locations, was in fact an unremarkable building. Its exterior had three high, central bays that rose into an elaborate pediment, flanked by lower, truncated tower blocks. One author called it a sober version of “rundbogenstil” (an abstraction of medieval German architecture) that lacked “the charm of Strickland’s synagogue.” This particular Mikveh Israel building did not display any of the flamboyant classical vocabulary that McArthur relied on when he designed Philadelphia’s City Hall in the 1870s.

Mikveh Israel appears to have been content with its McArthur building, comfortable with the size of its membership and its role in the Jewish world during the half-century that it occupied that structure. Unlike younger institutions, Mikveh Israel did not compete in order to announce its congregation’s “Americanization, their heightened self-confidence, and their rising station in society” in the feverish post–Civil War years. At that time, Orthodox congregations, as well as those of a more reforming bent, built imposing synagogues in their densely populated urban centers, importing famous cantors, offering sermons in English, and insisting on greater decorum during the service. The nineteenth-century goal was to position Jews as a positive part of American life and to retain members (especially younger American-born Jews) or poach them from nearby competitors. Reform congregations, following the establishment of their own organizational infrastructure in 1873, began to hire American-born rabbis in the 1880s and 1890s and would soon initiate building campaigns to accommodate these rabbis’ visions of increased activities and family participation—and to increase membership to support these endeavors. Mikveh Israel, with its distinct colonial past and a collection of rare colonial Judaica, did not need to indulge
in such posturing. Two of its early-nineteenth-century spiritual leaders, Isaac Leeser and Sabato Morais, had actually led the way in transforming the sermon into a weekly event in English that dealt with worldly matters that went beyond interpretation of biblical text. Having its own set ways, the congregation does not seem to have been altered by swarms of Eastern European immigrants who were part of the great immigration wave of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Nor had the congregation been swayed by some synagogues’ inclusion of Reform practices after that movement graduated its first class of American-trained rabbis in 1883. Reform inspired mixed seating, vernacular prayer, and organ music. An overriding concern for many older synagogues, even then, was to keep members from defecting to another congregation or leaving the synagogue fold. Mikveh Israel, however, was unaffected by synagogues’ transformation in the 1880s into a “Jewish church” in imitation of its Protestant peers.

Mikveh Israel eventually followed the Jewish community to a north Philadelphia location. By the early 1900s, the synagogue was housed within an impressive complex of Jewish institutions that had been built between 1909 and 1911 at Broad Street (Philadelphia’s major north-south artery) and Old York Road (see fig. 3.10). William G. Tachau, of the New York firm Pilcher & Tachau, designed all three structures. In addition to Mikveh Israel, these were Gratz College, a Hebrew teachers’ college, and Dropsie College for
Tachau, unlike Strickland and McArthur who designed no other synagogues, had many to his credit. In the 1920s, he wrote an article on synagogue architecture that provided the most comprehensive survey of American examples until that date. He also used the article to showcase his own work, indicating that once again Mikveh Israel had turned to an architect with considerable renown as well as skill.

The composition of the three buildings, which form their own civic complex, is noteworthy. Tachau took advantage of the rectangular site, parallel to Broad Street, to provide as much open space as possible and to make the buildings visible from the road. He positioned the three institutions in an L-shaped composition, with the long arm parallel to the street. Mikveh Israel anchors the complex, occupying the corner site of the short end (see fig. 3.11). Gratz is behind the synagogue; Dropsie is parallel to the street, sited behind a grassy patch of land. Each building is a quiet essay in refined classicism, a style that was popular following the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893. Dropsie, the least decorated of the buildings, evokes Ange-Jacques Gabriel’s Petit Trianon at Versailles, which is exactly what Tachau had in mind.

Tachau brought particular subtlety and sensitivity to the Mikveh Israel component. The synagogue’s corner location makes it possible to see that the

Figure 3.11. Pilcher & Tachau, Congregation Mikveh Israel (1909), Philadelphia. Exterior view of the corner facing Broad Street. The congregation was still holding services at this building when they hired Louis I. Kahn to design a new synagogue in 1961. Courtesy of Congregation Mikveh Israel, Philadelphia

Hebrew and Cognate Learning, a Jewish research center. Mikveh Israel was still located at this site when the congregation hired Kahn in 1961.
Portico telescopes back to a wide entrance foyer and an even wider, higher, relatively shallow sanctuary block. The interior of the entrance foyer, faced in limestone, is elegant. It also serves a practical purpose. With just ten low, broad steps on each end leading up to the women’s seating area, the foyer promotes social gathering between men and women before and after each service.99

The sanctuary space is exactly as one expects from the exterior massing: wide, high, and shallow (see fig. 3.12). Enhanced by a deep-coffered ceiling and wood paneling in front of the women’s section, the sanctuary space is compressed for a congregation that focuses on the usual longitudinal march from bimah to ark. Members who knew about Strickland’s earlier solution would most likely have viewed the arrangement as a reference to the shallow space of that beloved structure. The decoration of the sanctuary brings folk art traditions to this imposing setting. There are two carved lions and a seven-branched menorah over each door lintel, while the ark has a more sophisticated pedigree. At the top of several steps, it is a Roman aedicule with imposing entablature.

*Figure 3.12. Pilcher & Tachau, Congregation Mikveh Israel (1909), Philadelphia. View of the interior, looking toward the bimah and the entry doors. Courtesy of Congregation Mikveh Israel, Philadelphia*
Tachau provided a distinctive arrangement for men’s and women’s seating, one that Kahn eventually tried to replicate. Tachau placed parallel, opposing pews in the interior space. Men sat on either side, facing each other, on the main level. That is considered a typical Sephardic arrangement. The women’s section was unusual. Rather than being sequestered in an entirely separate gallery or being hidden behind a cloth (mechitza) on the same level, women sat behind men on each side, in slightly raised “tribunes.” There was a clear line of sight among all worshippers. The low, visible position of the women was, in fact, considered unique in American architecture—an innovative way to follow Jewish practice while creating a unified space. Architect Tachau later attributed the tribune system to the fact that “it was too much of a physical hardship for the women to climb to a high gallery,” perhaps signaling that the congregation was rapidly aging by the time it arrived at the Broad Street location.

Tachau’s clients were extremely pleased with their building. Cyrus Adler, the first president of Dropsie College, spread the word, indicating that the institution was delighted with its choice. Writing to a New Yorker who was investigating Tachau for a synagogue commission, Adler stated that “we think we have very beautiful structures, solidly built and practical. My own personal experience with Mr. Tachau was most favorable as an Architect, Engineer and man.”

Mikveh Israel: The Commission

Even before the three Rochester projects were breaking ground in the late 1950s, Mikveh Israel and the adjoining Jewish institutions were finding it increasingly difficult to retain their gracious Broad Street buildings. Mikveh Israel was perhaps in the shakiest position of the trio. Postwar dispersion and secularization of Jewish life meant that Orthodox synagogues like Mikveh Israel were finding it difficult to survive. Caught between urban and secular worlds, Mikveh Israel tried to juggle them, maintaining a religious school in the nearby township of Melrose Park in order to provide easy access for families in the northern suburbs while conducting the primary prayer services at the Broad and York complex.

The congregation was not inclined to relocate to suburbia. The Orthodox prohibition against driving on the Sabbath or on major holidays was, interestingly, not an issue for Mikveh Israel members. Many were not particularly observant and thus unconcerned about the ban. A more formidable
problem was that Mikveh Israel had no interest in the expandable sanctuaries, extensive secular programming, and intense membership drives that were integral parts of the experience of suburban congregations. Mikveh Israel’s leaders simply wanted to maintain a large enough membership to allow the congregation to be self-supporting, and to have a sanctuary that would accommodate all of those members at one time. Well aware that their membership of fewer than 400 could not raise sufficient capital for yet another facility in the suburbs, the congregation’s goal was survival and stability on its own terms, as a closely knit community.

Mikveh Israel, operating within a world that it had defined for itself, still had to face the facts: its membership was diminishing, and it owned a stately building that was expensive to maintain. Unsure of the future, Mikveh Israel’s leaders were offered an intriguing solution by the local rabbis. The Philadelphia Board of Rabbis was concerned that the Independence Hall area was being renewed without any Jewish presence. They suggested, in 1959, that Mikveh Israel return to this most historic area of downtown Philadelphia, where the congregation was founded and where its original cemetery still existed. The Board of Rabbis encouraged the congregation to move to Independence Mall either independently or as part of a “Jewish Institute on the Mall,” which could unite a chapel, a museum, and a library. Mikveh Israel’s outstanding collection of Judaica and extensive archives would have made it a strong partner within any cultural organization.

The burgeoning Mall area was hard to resist. The development of the Society Hill neighborhood, southeast of Independence Mall, was transforming it into an expensive residential sector, a place where Mikveh Israel might look for members to help it sustain itself. Mikveh Israel knew, too, that a move to the historic district could be aided by their congregant Albert M. Greenfield. One of the major figures in the redevelopment of historic Philadelphia and a former head of the City Planning Commission, Greenfield could be counted on to help the congregation maneuver through bureaucratic hoops.

Overcoming its initial reluctance, the congregation began to see the move to the Mall as an economic necessity. They reasoned that outside financing would make the move feasible. Mikveh Israel leaders maintained that the venerable Mall site would justify a national campaign to raise money from American Jews, even non-Jews, who would take enormous pride in supporting the congregation’s return to a site that was so quintessentially American. It was a perfect solution that would provide funds for building
without the congregation's having to alter their temperament or ideals. Mikveh Israel leaders believed that they had found a way to lead, rather than follow, their members to a hopeful destination.\textsuperscript{112}

Mikveh Israel’s members publicly adopted the Mall option in November 1960.\textsuperscript{113} Their national funding campaign had its own historic lineage: in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was common for a new American congregation to ask for financial support from established synagogues in other cities. In 1782, the leaders of Mikveh Israel had themselves appealed to Jews outside of Philadelphia for help. They approached at least two members of the Newport community as well as the Jews of Surinam, St. Thomas, and St. Croix.\textsuperscript{114} In 1788, the congregation had even solicited the help of non-Jews in order to keep the synagogue afloat.\textsuperscript{115} Benjamin Franklin, William Bradford, and David Rittenhouse were among the contributors at that time.

Touro Synagogue (Peter Harrison, 1759–63) in Newport, Rhode Island, was another venerable synagogue that had originally been funded by outsiders, including “local families and congregations in New York, Jamaica, Curaçao, Surinam and London.”\textsuperscript{116} That tradition continued, and in the summer of 1959, the \textit{New York Times Magazine} carried an article about a restoration under way at Touro, financed by the Society of Friends of Touro Synagogue and the Touro Synagogue Restoration Committee.\textsuperscript{117} The article did not specifically discuss Touro’s national funding campaign, but its existence was implied by the fact that New York real estate developer William Zeckendorf was identified as chairman of the restoration efforts. Congregation Shearith Israel, the Sephardic synagogue in New York that is still considered Mikveh Israel’s sister congregation, helped in the planning.\textsuperscript{118} Several foundations, including the Reader’s Digest Foundation, had made contributions. Touro’s successful campaign, which blended Jewish and gentile assistance, was the likely inspiration for Mikveh Israel’s confidence in a national financial initiative.

Like Mikveh Israel, Touro was an Orthodox congregation, maintained a Sephardic rite, and had had a largely Ashkenazic constituency. Both Touro and Mikveh Israel had Orthodox rabbis but largely non-Orthodox congregants. There were profound differences, too. Touro’s building, an outstanding example of Georgian architecture, was the oldest extant synagogue building in America. Not only did it have a unique place in Jewish memory and an architectural pedigree, but also it was the first synagogue and fourth religious site that the National Park Service had designated a National His-
toric Site. In contrast, Mikveh Israel did not have a building to preserve. Its location in Philadelphia, site of one of the largest and most prosperous Jewish populations in the United States, decreased the possibility that dollars would pour in from smaller and less affluent Jewish communities elsewhere.

Mikveh Israel leaders pushed ahead with the “move to the Mall.” Following the original concept set forth by the Philadelphia Board of Rabbis, Mikveh Israel launched an effort to ally the synagogue with a cultural or educational institution on the same site. The congregation worked aggressively to fulfill that vision, contacting other Jewish institutions, including the American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS), which did not have a permanent home. Always conscious of institutional autonomy, the leaders of Mikveh Israel envisioned a complex in which the synagogue would remain an independent entity housed within its own building.

Mikveh Israel’s leaders and members were energized by the proposed move. One member requested the honor of sponsoring the first Kiddush (the wine and challah served after a prayer service) in the new building; another arranged a dinner with nearby non-Jewish houses of worship in order to discuss their potential roles in Mikveh Israel’s move. David Arons, president of the congregation, wrote to Francis J. Lammer, executive director of the Redevelopment Authority of Philadelphia, depicting the move as one that fulfilled the immigrant experience by proclaiming a new role for Judaism within the Diaspora, a fulfillment of America’s commitment to freedom of religion and religious identity.

Choosing Kahn

The leaders of Mikveh Israel made several key decisions before contacting an architect. The Architectural Committee let it be known that they favored a single building, one that would contain a chapel. They hoped that the chapel, especially useful for daily prayers, could replicate the Strickland interior. Recreating older buildings or reusing parts of former sanctuaries had a strong currency. Shearith Israel, Mikveh Israel’s sister Sephardic congregation, retained some of the contents of its first home on Mill Street (America’s first synagogue building, no longer extant) in its 1897 small chapel, designed by Arnold Brunner. The New York Board of Rabbis, planning a synagogue for Idlewild Airport in 1959, announced that its interior would replicate the one that had existed at Mill Street. At the time, literal
Confront historic accuracy was in vogue as a means of establishing visual links to the past.

The president of Mikveh Israel, writing to a city official, established a different parti: a building of two units, synagogue and museum, connected by an entrance lobby. The lobby would double as additional exhibition space. The description evokes an image of the bi-nuclear house, popular in the postwar period:

Because we have both a religious and historic purpose, we propose to build a Synagogue building and a Library-Museum, using as a nucleus the Archives of Mikveh Israel, probably the largest collection extant of American Colonial Judaica. These two units may be joined by a central and spacious exhibit hall and lobby which will lead to a House of Worship, whose ritual traces its origins through the Spanish dispersion back to the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. And this lobby will also give entrance to a House of History which will provide the material for that American Chapter which tells how an ancient tradition fared in a unique land 6,000 miles and more than 2,000 years from its origins.126

Mikveh Israel’s choice of Kahn as architect was more problematic than settling on a parti. Kahn was the first architect offered the commission, but the choice was controversial. The situation was complicated by the fact that a dominating lay voice at Mikveh Israel was Kahn’s dear friend, Dr. Bernard Alpers. Alpers employed Kahn’s wife, Esther, in his laboratory at Jefferson Hospital and had known Louis Kahn for many years.127 Alpers served on the Architect Selection Committee while his wife, Dr. Lillian Alpers, was active on the Fund-Raising Committee. From Kahn’s point of view, the Alperses’ leadership augured well. He believed that they would be his champions and ensure that the building would be completed.128

Bernard and Lillian Alpers utilized their prominent positions in order to expedite plans and to aid Kahn. Bernard Alpers recommended to the Board of Managers on May 17, 1961, that Kahn be chosen as the synagogue’s architect.129 The following week, the leaders of Mikveh Israel passed a resolution that formally handed the commission to Kahn, although the vote was not unanimous. Two trustees voted against Kahn, their objections based entirely on how the selection was being determined. One trustee indicated that he believed it was too early in the process to designate an architect; the other said that he wanted to be able to review proposals from several different practitioners.130
The Alperses wanted to compensate for Kahn’s near-absence from the
contemporary redevelopment of downtown Philadelphia.131 Kahn’s increas-
ing stature as an architectural leader may have further justified their actions.
Just a month earlier, a national publication had glorified Kahn as the “spirit-
tual leader” of a newly defined “Philadelphia school” that was attempting
to renew architecture as an expressive art.132 Peter Shedd Reed notes that
by the early 1960s, the local architectural community was embarrassed that
Kahn was not a participant in the very visible Philadelphia renewal proj-
ents. Reed believes that the presence of the AIA National Convention, which
took place in Philadelphia in April 1961, finally forced the Planning Com-
mission to hire Kahn in March as a consultant for the Market Street East
project.133

Kahn’s Mikveh Israel commission also brought to light a problem that
was facing many other synagogues: how to deal with architects who are
congregants. In the case of Mikveh Israel, congregant and architect Alfred
Bendiner seems to have been deeply hurt by the way the committee forced
Kahn’s commission on the congregation.134 Bendiner, who had drawn the
1950s reconstructions of the Strickland building, fully expected that the
commission would come to him. Consequently, the congregation was not
united behind Kahn.

Mikveh Israel was certainly not the first (and undoubtedly not the last)
congregation to have to decline the architectural services of a congregant.
At least one contemporary synagogue, North Shore Congregation Israel
(nsci), in Glencoe, Illinois, handled a similar situation with more grace. Fol-
lowing the direction of Rabbi Edgar Siskin, the lay committee decided not
to consider any architect who was based in Chicago, but instead to hire the
local firm of Friedman, Alschuler & Sincere (which included a congregant,
Alfred S. Alschuler) as the associate architect because of its long-standing
relationship with the congregation’s previous building campaigns.135 Siskin’s
move was particularly brave because the Alschuler firm, through its associ-
ation with Ernest Grunsfeld, was counseling congregations such as Temple
Israel in Swampscott, Massachusetts, on the hiring of an architect. Con-
gregant Alschuler agreed to this arrangement and became the rabbi’s ally in
finding the most successful architects of the moment.

It is a pity that Mikveh Israel’s rabbi was not able to issue a similar direc-
tive or to insist on how architecture could help the congregation. Despite
the Alperses’ intrigues and Bendiner’s discontent, Kahn was a good choice.
He was personally committed to urbanism, and this was his first major
commission on a city street since the Yale Art Museum addition in the early 1950s. Kahn was particularly sympathetic to the oldest section of Philadelphia. Having grown up in the city, he had sketched Independence Square when he was a young boy. “I recall how much I loved American history, of which this place is the center,” he reminisced in 1971. Admitting that at first he had been hesitant about the construction of Independence Mall, Kahn had come to admire it, seeing the mall as “a celebration of Independence Hall.” Kahn’s discomfort with suburbia, especially with the proliferation of freestanding shopping centers, was already imbedded in his speeches. Several times, beginning in the late 1950s, he dismissed the shopping center as a “buying center” that lacked the interactions and layers of history of a real urban shopping experience.

By 1959, Kahn was particularly well acquainted with contemporary religious architecture, having served that year on the jury for the Architectural League of New York’s Gold Medal Exhibition of the Building Arts. One area of consideration, “Religion: Churches, Temples and Synagogues,” enabled Kahn to get a broad overview of the approaches to the subject. Even if he had not seen the publications or viewed the “Patron Church” exhibition, as a juror he would have viewed synagogues by Pietro Belluschi; Davis, Brody & Wisniewski; Percival Goodman; Philip Johnson; Kelly & Gruzen; and William Wurster. The exhibition also included Harrison & Abramovitz (Brandeis University chapels) and The Architects Collaborative (Temple Reyim, Newton, Massachusetts), whose work had not shown up in previous synagogue discussions.

Once hired by Mikveh Israel, Kahn’s first task was to meet with the committee, now called the “Building Committee,” in order to discuss available redevelopment authority sites and to choose one. The continuing search for a site was not directly related to the hiring of Kahn, for the Mikveh Israel trustees had never been completely satisfied with their first assigned location. The Building Committee considered several possible sites. In order to reach a decision, the congregation asked Kahn to “prepare studies showing feasibility of the sites using the present synagogue for visual reference.” Kahn readily obliged. His office contacted Maxwell Whiteman, the librarian at Dropsie College and historian for the local Jewish community, in hope of securing drawings of the Broad and York building. Kahn’s office also consulted the City Hall Archives. When neither of those sources was able to supply plans, Kahn contacted the original architect, William G. Tachau, who was retired and had no remaining files. Unable to find proper docu-
Client, Architect, Philadelphia (and Rochester) 95

mentation for Mikveh Israel, Kahn had his office conduct a “field survey” in order to produce an accurate site plan as well as measured drawings for the old sanctuary. Kahn, having reviewed Rachel Wischnitzer’s book, would have already known that the minimal separation between men and women in Tachau’s plan had been especially innovative.

Kahn presented schematic models that compared the potential sites. Based on his drawings, the Board of Managers settled on the site at Fifth and Commerce, a property abutting the Mall to the west (on its shorter side) and the wall of Christ Church Burial Ground to the north. Kahn was pleased with this awkward, deep, narrow site because he felt it would direct his design by limiting his options. The east-west orientation of the site meant, too, that Kahn did not have to struggle with the seating arrangement the way that Strickland had done in the nineteenth century.

There were added bonuses in that the city had plans to transform Commerce Street into a pedestrian zone (known as the Christ Church Greenway) that would create a visual link between the Mall and Christ Church, two blocks to the east. The congregation also saw the proposed underground parking at Independence Mall as a plus. The Redevelopment Authority was pleased with Mikveh Israel’s location for what they were calling the “reconstruction of the Historic Mikveh Israel.” They hoped to reserve that side of the Mall for institutions that would attract tourists. The Mikveh Israel committee, surprisingly, had almost dismissed the site for being too close to tourist traffic.

Mikveh Israel’s new home would make it part of a physical manifestation of Herberg’s thesis about the tripartite division of American religious life into equivalent Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish sectors (see fig. 3.13). Mikveh Israel would be the Jewish presence standing alongside two close and quite distinguished neighbors with a particularly Philadelphia cast: Christ Church (Episcopal) and the Quaker Meeting House. Congregation president David Arons’s message to the city neatly spelled out the new synagogue’s role as a representative of Jewishness in a celebration ofAmericanness: “The American idea of providing ample room for the full development of varied self-identities in harmonious relations one with the other is America’s unique contribution to the spiritual evolution of mankind. This, in our view, is the meaning of the presence of Mikveh Israel in the area of Independence Hall, together with Christ Church, Friends Meeting House, The Church of St. Joseph, and other living reminders of the variety in unity which is the American statement of the possibilities in the human spirit.”
Mikveh Israel could join a growing list of “tripartite” American complexes. Brandeis University, a Jewish institution, had paved the way, asking the firm Harrison & Abramovitz to design three distinct chapels grouped around a single lake. Harrison & Abramovitz’s tripartite solution, demanded by the students rather than the administration, created a new cultural marker. Brandeis, with an almost entirely Jewish student body, appeared to be welcoming non-Jews in the same way that Jews would hope to be accommodated at other, nonsectarian institutions. It was a far cry from the 1920s, when private universities such as Princeton and the University of Chicago erected massive edifices that were modeled on Gothic university chapels but supposedly meant for all students. Eero Saarinen’s modest but exquisite chapel, opened for all religions on the MIT campus in 1955, suddenly seemed out of step with contemporary religious identification.

Even the Air Force Academy, not known as a haven for Jewish students or faculty, created three distinct spaces for worship in its chapel (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill 1959–63). The Academy had settled on building three facilities under one roof in 1956. The Jewish area (100 seats), despite its

Figure 3.13. Louis I. Kahn, Congregation Mikveh Israel (1963 or later), Philadelphia. Bird’s-eye view of the synagogue buildings on Independence Mall. View is from the north, looking toward Independence Hall. Courtesy of the Louis I. Kahn Collection, University of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission
placement in the basement with the Catholic chapel, below the enormous main floor Protestant chapel, presents a modest but unified whole.

Similar structures were built outside of academia as well. Idlewild Airport which included three chapels for fearful flyers of different faiths, was the most prominent example (see fig. 3.14). Max Abramovitz, who had worked on the Brandeis chapels, was also an adviser to the New York Port Authority on the Idlewild airport project. As at Brandeis, these buildings were adjacent to water; in this case the three structures were lined up alongside a lagoon. In March 1959, Progressive Architecture reported that the Catholic chapel, designed by George Sole, was already complete; the Jewish chapel, by Bloch & Hesse, was being planned; and Edgar Tafel had just completed his plans for the Protestant chapel. Fittingly, Bloch (who had thought that synagogue design would continue in a historicist mode after the war) had made his own peace with modernism. The 1959 announcement shows a building that appears to be a single block, with a stark portico and exterior abstraction of the Decalogue.

None of these chapels lacked appropriate decoration. When the Jewish chapel was dedicated at Idlewild in the mid-1960s, it was characterized by a large bronze gate at the entrance. Metalsmith Ludwig Wolpert was the designer. The Jewish Chapel at Brandeis, known as the Berlin chapel, has its own distinctive decorative program. Max Abramovitz designed the freestanding ark; Mitchell Siporin designed the ark cover; Herbert Ferber designed the eternal light and the freestanding menorah. In Colorado

Figure 3.14. Three chapels at Idlewild Airport, as intended to be seen from the lagoon. This image appeared in Architectural Forum in October 1961.
Springs, Wolpert designed all of the decoration for the Jewish section of the Air Force chapel. He was given free reign in designing the ark screen and menorahs, as well as the breastplate and finials for each Torah, the mezu­zah for the door, and a Kiddush cup for sacramental wine. His decoration illustrates how Bauhaus-inspired craft can unify and improve an otherwise dreary space.

With its own place in Philadelphia religious history, Mikveh Israel’s new location reinforced its institutional memory. Mikveh Israel saw itself not only as a participant in America’s religious identification but also as a quintessential American synagogue. By self-identifying as an American institution, Mikveh Israel distinguished itself from other Sephardic congregations that were beginning to build synagogues. The Sephardic Temple of Cedarhurst (Bertram Bassuk, 1963), one of the largest and best-known Sephardic congregations to build after World War II, provides a contrasting example. For its members, many descended from Greek and Turkish Jews who had settled in Brooklyn in the early twentieth century, the move to Long Island marked their arrival in “the modern American scene.”157 When they initiated their own designs in 1961, they asked architect Bassuk for “architectural symbols that would evoke images associated with their ethnic background.” The architect responded with a domical element associated with the Levant and decorative motifs based on those found in the medieval synagogues of Spain. Even the architect admitted that these solutions were “distilled from a mixture of Romanticism, archeology and myth.”158

Kahn was working for a unique group of Jews, immensely proud of their American architectural heritage. Beyond their fascination with William Strickland’s building, they were anxious to build a home that would ground them in their American past as they redefined their role in an American future. Kahn could not have asked for a better client for his evolving modernism.
WORKING QUICKLY AND INTENSELY, Kahn produced his most impressive schemes for Mikveh Israel between the spring of 1961 and the spring of 1963. He continued to work on the project, albeit with less intensity, through 1972. Throughout those years of lessened activity, Kahn waited for his clients to mount a successful fundraising campaign. He never lost contact with the congregation and continued to make modest adjustments to his plans. In the early 1970s, however, the congregation reconfigured their funding approach and asked Kahn to devise a pared-down scheme. He tried to comply, but finally he was dismissed.

Kahn’s Mikveh Israel schemes display a quiet stateliness, not at all inappropriate for this congregation. At a time when some synagogue architecture had become excessively dramatic, unsure of how to be both universally modern and Jewish, and increasingly remote from the lives of congregants, Kahn’s synagogue showed a different path. His designs provided a unique solution of intimately scaled, sensibly hierarchical, and functionally distinct spaces that promoted human interaction. Kahn conceived buildings that had both a contextual awareness and a reinvention of modernism’s commitment to free space. He molded light for both its own natural beauty and for its ability to displace excessive decoration; he highlighted nature in the form of a garden setting and sukkah, the temporary hut erected for the fall harvest festival of Sukkot. Kahn used the sukkah to connect Judaism with classical building traditions and to further his own quest for an ideal synagogue. The light towers and sukkah, devised for Mikveh Israel, emerged as some of Kahn’s most significant contributions to synagogue design, each providing innovative Jewish content.

Program and Overview of Plans, 1961–1963

During the first two years of the Mikveh Israel project, Kahn worked quickly and responded vigorously to what his clients requested. His prelim-
inary model, probably executed while the site was still under consideration, marks the first of six schemes (see fig. 4.1).\(^2\) It shows a nonexpandable sanctuary, with what may be an attached school and separate space for an allied cultural institution.\(^3\) The high, interlocking vaults of the sanctuary would have made it clear that Mikveh Israel was the dominant force on the site. Mendelsohn, Wurster, and Belluschi had shown the way for handling exterior mass, although Kahn may have been referencing Strickland’s interior (arches supporting half-domes), by turning the Strickland plan inside out.

Schematic drawings, followed by office drawings, show that Kahn soon broke the plan into functionally distinct parts (see fig. 4.2). These drawings mark the second scheme. Aided by the deep site, Kahn began to explore units — individual rooms. This segregation became the armature for all subsequent plans; it allowed for the creation of urban plazas and smaller gathering spots. Kahn was not alone in thinking of this arrangement. Marcel Breuer was working in discrete elements for the twenty-acre site of Temple B’nai Jeshurun, in suburban Short Hills, New Jersey (see fig. 4.3).\(^4\) Whereas B’nai Jeshurun ultimately abandoned its plan and architect, Mikveh Israel responded favorably to this format.\(^5\)

Kahn’s separate buildings would be experienced sequentially from west...
Progression would start with a secular museum or historical society, close to Independence Mall, then go on to a school building with a small chapel, before completing the journey toward the eastern end of the site where the sanctuary is located. Kahn's sanctuary retains the plan of inwardly directed pews separated by the void between bimah and ark, the arrangement that had been used in the 1909 building. Kahn further adapted the tribunes for the women. The rabbi hoped to reuse the eternal light from the old site, a common request for that time. He also wanted a more secure ark than Kahn had provided initially, as well as a larger bimah (or the reuse of the one from the Broad and York site).

Kahn and the congregation began to work toward these and even more specific goals. They agreed on a 500-seat sanctuary, with equal numbers of seats for men and women, in the hope of housing the entire congregation for High Holy Day services; a chapel holding from sixty to eighty people; and the museum or historical society. Specifications also included a separate vault for silver Torah ornaments, and a “lunchroom for kiddush.” The role of kiddush, the blessing and eating of wine and challah after Sabbath services, was significant, and a special donation was made to create a “kiddush room.” While it was not unusual for a synagogue to consider a place for kiddush, it was rare to dedicate a space to that purpose. Mikveh Israel's
“lunchroom for kiddush” was based on the assumption that congregants, who would have traveled a distance to reach the synagogue, would want to socialize after the service. Situated away from an especially Jewish neighborhood, the congregation needed the more elaborate kiddush to bolster a sense of community. In addition, the “Auditorium–Social Hall” needed to be large enough to accommodate 300 people for the annual Christ Church dinner, a festive meal shared with the neighboring Episcopal congregation. Held alternately at the church and the synagogue, the dinner was an important event on the Mikveh Israel calendar and reminded congregants that their history was just as distinguished as that of the illustrious church.\footnote{11}

A drafted plan dated April 10, 1962, and revised May 1, 1962, inaugurated the third scheme (see fig. 4.4). Most significantly, the chapel has become a freestanding structure, thus bringing the number of buildings to four. Kahn provided a broad entrance to the sanctuary building, indicating that it could double as the kiddush room. This ample entry is a reminder of the social function of the lobby at the Broad Street site. The ark is a niche, presumably to provide the security sought by the rabbi in his earlier request. In this new plan, Kahn also showed a freestanding building with classrooms, an office,
a library, a lounge, and a second-floor auditorium. Knowing that Mikveh Israel was hoping to entice the American Jewish Historical Society to join the Mall complex, Kahn drew a generous square as its placeholder. The budget was set at $500,000, and Kahn specified brick as building material. Bowing to the traditional building materials of colonial Philadelphia, Kahn also specified brick as the surface material for the area between the chapel and the sanctuary, as well as for all the other remaining open spaces, including the Christ Church greenway. In order to maximize the open areas, he placed all of the Mikveh Israel buildings as close as possible to the wall of Christ Church cemetery, the northern boundary of the site.

Kahn had to alter his concept at the end of May 1962 when the American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS) decided not to move to Philadelphia. This forced Kahn to abandon his plans for a freestanding museum, but it relieved him of the need to guess at the wishes of a phantom patron. In his fourth scheme, dated June 22, 1962, Kahn reduced the plan to three buildings: school/administration, chapel, and exhibition space/sanctuary (see fig. 4.5). The museum, now solely the provenance of the synagogue, becomes...
a modest “historical room.” Located on the south side of the sanctuary’s entrance hall, this museum would have been dedicated to the congregation’s own historic treasures. Kahn also showed two “kiddush rooms,” one on the north side of the sanctuary entrance hall, and a smaller one appended to the chapel. The school is located on the second floor in the building housing the social hall/auditorium.

Without the large museum building, Kahn could provide for more social spaces and for more contact with nature. In the interior of the sanctuary building, the entrance hall is now circular and prominent; it provides a hub at which visitors choose their destination. On the exterior, Kahn pulled his buildings away from the Christ Church cemetery wall. The new open space allows each building to stand firmly as an independent entity and provides areas for gathering. Rather than making these outdoor spaces bare, brick plazas, Kahn filled them with foliage, using an irregular grove of trees between the sanctuary and the adjoining wall. The areas between the chapel and Christ Church walkway and the space that is closest to Independence Mall also have plantings. Kahn used nature to bring the size of the spaces into line with human scale, bringing delight to those who are coming into or
just passing by the synagogue. The trees just south of the chapel and close to the walkway are quite important, segregating the chapel from the hustle and bustle of the walkway. They also demand that those coming to the chapel pass through the protective grove. As people enter under the protection of a canopy of trees, they are reminded that institutions (according to Kahn) originated as unstructured gatherings under single or several trees. He had written specifically that a synagogue had the potential to “become a great center of communion — a place under many trees.” Kahn understood, literally and metaphorically, the core of Jewish worship.

The light towers make their appearance at the end of the summer of 1962 and mark the arrival of the fifth scheme. At first, they were not well integrated with the public spaces. Kahn alleviated that awkwardness by early September, altering the plan so that the light towers were joined to form ambulatories. By October 1962 he provided two sets of these; one rings the sanctuary and another anchors the corners of the square chapel (see fig. 4.6). These ambulatories have a different function from those at the Rochester Unitarian church, where Kahn had hoped they would allow for distance from the service. Here, they link the light towers and thereby create
a way for the towers to function as part of the sanctuary, not just as isolated rooms. Another plan, dated January 22, 1963, shows that Kahn had absorbed the lessons of Sephardic Judaism, creating a well-unified oval plan. In an undated statement about the synagogue, he wrote that it was “oblong in keeping with the ritual.” In one of his sketches, with the same January date (615.16 in the Kahn Collection) Kahn included the notation: “Kaddish/Kiddish.” He was undoubtedly trying to remember the difference between the recitation of a prayer (kaddish) to mark the anniversary of the death of a relative and the light meal (kiddish) that comes at the conclusion of a service.

It would be difficult to argue that Kahn had ignored the needs of his patrons. The clients responded to his plan and his thoughtfulness by endorsing the scheme, although they showed concern about financing it. Almost all of the successive schemes are variations on the light tower arrangement. At the Richards Medical building, the “servant” vertical shafts on the exterior drew air away from the heart of the building. At Mikveh Israel, the “servant” light towers bring light into the sanctuary, the “served” space.

Because the project was never built, there are—understandably—few drawings that give precise information about the exterior and especially the interior. The few salient facts are that the sanctuary building would have been fifty-five feet at its highest. Most drawings show three stories. The chapel and auditorium/social hall would have each been two stories high. The sanctuary, thus, had a hierarchical significance of volume that did not demand any further distinction to its roof profile.

The interior perspectives reveal more about the spatial configurations than they do about details. The seating arrangements, including the towers for women, are boldly defined. The main floor creates a dignified, orchestrated space appropriate for the Sephardic rite (see fig. 4.7). Kahn drew a hanging chandelier, for times when natural light would be insufficient. The fixture hangs low and has multiple arms, possibly deriving from the design of the multibranched hanging fixtures at the Spanish-Portuguese Sephardic synagogue in Amsterdam. Strickland’s planning is evoked in the perspective of the chapel (see fig. 4.8). Kahn’s elliptical balcony, oval seating, and the placement of the ark and bimah across from each other with the shortest distance between them, all recall Mikveh Israel’s early-nineteenth-century building.

Kahn’s design success was not matched by that of the financing campaign. In the fall of 1962, just as Kahn was introducing the light towers, the
committee became painfully aware that it could not finance his buildings. The projected cost at that time was $2.25 million. By November 4, 1962, Mikveh Israel had received pledges for only $231,000, along with an additional $100,000 of “unwritten pledges.” Kahn, still working without a contract (it was not ratified until March 1963), continued to enhance his plans in small ways. He paid keen attention to the school building in the mid-1960s; it became more and more L-shaped. Although it was not unusual for Kahn to keep tinkering with a project even when its chances for success were dimming, he must have recognized that Mikveh Israel was beginning to occupy a decisive place in his oeuvre.
The Light Towers

Kahn’s Mikveh Israel drawings mirror his views on light and religion in the early 1960s. Kahn frequently discussed the lighting scheme for Mikveh Israel with members of his office and with his clients. Many scholars, particularly those who believe that Kahn had mystical leanings, have viewed Mikveh Israel as an instance where Kahn saw light as having a potent spiritual quality. The documents suggest otherwise, pointing out that Kahn approached this element in a practical, demystified manner. Al Levy, who worked for Kahn during the early years of the project, notes that Kahn had his assistants build models of the light towers, which they would take outdoors to see how natural light affected them (see fig. 4.9). Kahn sought a rational way to bring natural light into a building while eliminating glare. For Kahn, light was nature. The towers complement the extensive plazas on the exterior where people could walk through gardens, observe the sky, feel the wind, or see the stars. Emphasizing the perimeters of each building, the
light towers bring that experience indoors by allowing light, air, and a view of the sky into the sanctuary.

Natural light, for Kahn, was the defining element of a building. In 1959, he wrote: “If architecture can be defined in a sentence it might be defined as the thoughtful making of spaces. And if one thinks of the space as being architectural I think one must think of it as being in natural light, never in artificial light because the way that you make the space should be evident in the space itself. Because the wheels of force are all devices for bringing light in and for making the structure out of the space itself.”

Kahn’s concerns with light here were identical to those he expressed while working on the American consulate in Luanda, Angola (unbuilt, 1959–61). He had found inspiration in how the Angolan people would face away from an exterior opening when they worked, preferring the reflected light from an interior wall. Kahn described his views shortly before he received the Mikveh Israel commission: “I am doing a building in Africa, which is very close to the equator. The glare is killing... I came back with multiple impressions of how clever was the man who solved problems of sun, rain and wind. I came to the realization that every window should have a free wall to face. This wall
receiving the light of day would have a bold opening to the sky. The lighted wall modifies the glare and the view is not shut off. In this way the contrast made by separated patterns of glare which stylish grilles close to the window make is avoided.”

In both Luanda and Philadelphia, Kahn sought a rational way to bring light into a building while eliminating glare. He was tackling a particularly modern problem, one that became pronounced when large sheets of plate glass were used for twentieth-century curtain wall construction. His criticism was implied in his dismissal of Lever House, even with its tinted glass. But glare had not been restricted to office towers or private homes; synagogues had to grapple with a similar problem. Belluschi’s Adath Israel in suburban Philadelphia illustrates the point. The current executive director points out that fabric curtains have been added along the glass of the drum of the dome that covers the sanctuary because that original arrangement admits “too much glare.”

In previous designs, Kahn had tried to substitute voids as alternatives to large expanses of glass. Building on his solution at Rochester, where he used high monitors to reflect light before it entered the voids of each corner, and his even earlier solution for the Trenton Bath House, where a void between ceiling and walls acted as a transmitter of light, Kahn depicted a spherical void to bring light into Mikveh Israel. The light tower gave expression, in a manner very visible on the synagogue’s exterior, to the void that had been relegated to the roof at Rochester. Recalling the dramatic way in which the void between roof and walls allows light to enter the Trenton Bath House, Kahn used the Mikveh Israel light towers to process light through a void before it entered the sanctuary or the chapel.

Kahn was pleased with what he had done. Discussing the Mikveh Israel towers, he explained how they filtered light and functioned as separate, subsidiary rooms: “I show you this synagogue, which I’m going to build in Philadelphia. It’s born out of the idea of the realization that light and glare is a problem in an assembly; therefore, I made a window, which was 20 feet deep. This window has a window in glass on the outside, but has merely an opening on the inside. The difference in these two openings as you look through would give you no glare, and through the entire plan I used this as a way of bringing light in. It’s the finding of an element, which does not give glare and gives rest, repose on the interior.”

Without mentioning “servant” and “served” space (the hierarchical distinction between primary space and infrastructure that he pioneered at the
Trenton Bath House), Kahn makes it clear that the light towers do function that way. They are subsidiary, individual rooms. Oddly, Kahn referred to the Mikveh Israel sanctuary as a “church,” further indication that he found it difficult to identify communal experience with any particular creed:

This was the beginning of the idea. When I found this I really found the entire church, it was so right. Through this and through the feeling that I could repeat this. There was nothing shameful about repeating it. It always gave me more. It became first a stairway, it became an ambulatory, it became so many things. It gave me also the place for the women on high holidays. It was just full of life, the discovery of a window, or a room within a room, or a window that was actually something in itself. There wasn’t anything residual, it was a definite element like a column or anything else.27

Having been tentative but effective in the lighting for Rochester’s Unitarian church, Kahn grasped how the same principles could be applied to a synagogue. The religions are similar in that neither attributes an inherent sanctity to the altar or any other artifact. Light should be diffuse, not directional or focused on an object. In Rochester, Kahn placed the light at the corners; in Philadelphia, he was able to merge it with the ambulatory. On a sunny day, the Mikveh Israel sanctuary would have glowed while glare would have been minimized.28

The light at Mikveh Israel became the decorative motif for the interiors of both the sanctuary and the chapel. Kahn declined to employ contemporary artisans to create an entire decorative program. Mikveh Israel’s finances made the latter an unlikely choice. Even more significant, Kahn had designed a tapestry of the light spectrum to evoke greater light in his Rochester church. At Mikveh Israel, he had the ability to allow light alone, not a substitute, to decorate the walls. Light had a powerful presence, one that did not need to be reinforced materially.

Kahn, by relying on natural light, chose a decoration that was immaterial and in constant flux; it was never fixed or finite. His decoration meshed with the building’s walls and floors, thus creating a “decorative scheme” that was even more “architectural” than the schemes of the 1950s that integrated decoration and building. An analogy could possibly be found in American painters of the same time, such as Mark Rothko. Rothko soaked color into the body of his canvases, merging color and canvas. Kahn effectively did the same thing, merging light and architecture. For both Kahn and Rothko, the
goal is to have a surface emit light. In Rothko's case, his color brings out a sense of light; in Kahn's, the light animates the surface and merges with it. Rothko painted on a large scale in order to envelop the viewer's vision and thus produce something "intimate and human." Kahn sought to bring light into his structure because he had exactly the same objectives.

Kahn's solution, perhaps unknown to him, may even have had a particularly Jewish cast, although it is a connection to some of the basic tenets of the religion rather than to mystical images or numerology. Abraham Joshua Heschel's writings offer one Jewish connection. In addition to juxtaposing time and space in a way that can be seen to equate with "form" and "design," Heschel developed his notion of time as distinct from the rigidity of space. By arguing that Jews are a people of time, Heschel not only advanced the notion that history is an essential component of Judaism but also that Judaism is an ongoing phenomenon that is never static; it is constantly evolving without any required physical dimension. Kahn's light, given by the light towers, would have been always changing; it would have been different from moment to moment, and on each given day of the year. Kahn's building would have retained the solidity of "space" while his "decoration" would have achieved the immateriality of "time."

It is even possible to say that Kahn's discussions about "quest for beginnings" and his search for "volume zero" follow a Jewish precedent. These notions, which had been on Kahn's mind since the 1950s, imply constant evolution and rediscovery, similar to his light. Jewish texts, after all, are constantly and continually reinterpreted. It might be knowledge or chance for Kahn, but the Talmud (the interpretation of the Torah) "always begins on page two, indicating that a discussion is already in progress and never finished."

**The Sukkah**

The sukkah, largely overlooked by investigators of Kahn's work, deserves recognition. It was common for mid-nineteenth-century synagogues to have a sukkah frame on site or to dedicate a space for it. Members of the Philadelphia synagogue Adath Jeshurun, for which Kahn was developing plans in 1954, had asked him to set aside a space for a sukkah, the temporary primitive hut erected each year for use at communal meals during the fall harvest festival of Sukkot. Designating a place for an ephemeral sukkah would have been possible for Adath Jeshurun's slightly hilly site. But
Kahn’s Vision

Kahn, who had no firm grounding in Jewish practice, and probably knew little about such a structure, ignored this demand and left the land as a bucolic park.

In 1961, at an early meeting between Kahn’s office and the Mikveh Israel Building Committee, historian Maxwell Whiteman requested a space for a sukkah. He suggested a piece of land, measuring twenty by forty feet. At its old complex, Mikveh Israel had always used the residual open space along busy Broad Street for an elaborately decorated sukkah. This time, Kahn not only complied but also seized the opportunity, providing a permanent freestanding sukkah in all but one of his six schemes.

It is likely that the erudite Whiteman (or someone else from Mikveh Israel) was able to impress Kahn with the simplicity of this structure, commemorating the booths used by Jews during the biblical exodus from Egypt. Whiteman may have tutored Kahn on Jewish themes of human fragility and divine protection, the traditional meanings ascribed to a sukkah. Perhaps Whitman advised him on the rules of construction. A sukkah, usually but not necessarily built in a rectangular shape, needs walls that cover at least two of its sides and one-half of a third. These walls can be as simple as cloth hung between vertical posts. The roof marks completion of the sukkah. It has to be composed of natural materials that have been severed from the ground. Corn stalks or leaves spread over slats are acceptable and typical. The roofing must be arranged to provide protection from the sun while also allowing participants to look up at night and see the stars. Halacha (the body of Jewish law) prohibits the roof from being so thick that rain cannot seep through it.

When Kahn presented his first scale models to the Mikveh Israel Building Committee, he included a permanent sukkah (see fig. 4.1). In the drafted plans that followed, Kahn appears to have reconsidered the whole notion and abandoned the freestanding hut (see fig. 4.2). The rabbi emeritus had asked for an interior sukkah with a removable roof; Kahn responded with a sizable rectangular court surrounded by a shallow overhanging roof. An interior sukkah, created by providing a room where a section of roof can be rolled back and then covered by leaves or stalks, has a long Eastern European pedigree. By spring 1962, Kahn had settled on his own sukkah formula: six marble piers arranged in a double square (see fig. 4.4) not unlike the simple trabeated structures Kahn had provided for the Trenton Jewish Community Center day camp in 1957.

In subsequent drawings, Kahn always sites the sukkah so that it can accommodate a maximum number of visitors or provide a way for them to...
experience nature. In early drawings it is aligned with a garden, on a direct axis with a rectangular area with dense plantings. The sukkah, functioning most of the year as a gazebo, unites with the garden to identify the north side of the walkway that pierces the site. Together, the garden and sukkah create a gathering spot and a smaller defined space, separate from the brick plaza. In another drawing, it is removed from foliage in order to mediate the space between chapel and sanctuary (see fig. 4.5). Here, the sukkah has lost its direct access to nature, though it is still clearly visible on the north side, so that it becomes an additional “kiddush room,” performing another function that brings people together and supplementing those spaces for kiddush found in the sanctuary building and in the chapel structure. The sukkah, it seems, occupied Kahn’s mind even when his thinking was most abstract (see fig. 4.10).

Kahn may have been attracted to the sukkah because of the structure’s paradoxical conceptual gravity. Unlike the notion of a synagogue, which exists anywhere that ten people come together to form a quorum (minyan), the sukkah, though temporary, is required to be tangible. It is not an abstraction or a concept; it is an actual building. Kahn’s solution differed from that
of his colleagues; most made no accommodation for the sukkah, because synagogues typically erected a sukkah quickly and then dismantled it just as efficiently after the holiday. Pietro Belluschi, one of the few architects to think in terms of making it a permanent fixture, included one attached to a garden wall at Temple Brith Kodesh. He deviated from tradition by attaching the sukkah, a two-legged redwood frame, to a side of the school building. It has no chance of falling down. In an earlier, design, for Temple Israel in Swampscott, Massachusetts, he had made the exterior pergola do double duty as a sukkah.41

A few architects, notably Percival Goodman, allotted a space but never drew a perspective with an erected sukkah. Goodman frequently provided space for a sukkah in his designs, often dedicating a part of a garden to it, while also considering this a space in which the congregants could spend time “milling-round” during a long service.42 He called for a “walled garden” off of the entrance for B’nai Israel in Millburn, New Jersey, indicating that it was meant to house the sukkah or host a wedding.43 For Congregation Shaarey Zedek in Southfield, Michigan (for which Goodman provided the design and Albert Kahn’s office supplied the engineering and working drawings), Goodman created a glass expanse overlooking the garden, calling it “the place of the succah.”44

The sukkah could have resonated with architectural interest for Kahn. The architectural world was filled with discussions about the primitive hut.45 Most of Kahn’s drawings of the sukkah were made around the same time as the 1962 American publication of Wolfgang Herrmann’s Laugier and Eighteenth Century French Theory, the book that brought renewed attention to Marc-Antoine Laugier’s 1753 discussion on the supposed origins of building.

The most important reason for the changes in Kahn’s conceptualization of the sukkah at Mikveh Israel can be found within his own writings and speeches. Over the seven years that separated the two requests for a sukkah, Kahn had perfected his own philosophy of building. The permanent sukkah became the vehicle through which he could express views that had become sharper, more focused, more refined. In the early 1950s, Kahn had expressed respect for the individuality of the room, a simple, spanned space in which nothing was concealed. As the decade continued, he expounded on architectural rationalism, in the tradition of Laugier; he noted that “an architectural space is one in which it is evident how it is made; you will see the columns, you must see the beams, or you must see the walls, the doors, or the domes.
in the very space which is called a space.”46 For Kahn, the column was the beginning of architecture because it was a distillation of the most basic form necessary for construction to begin. “I believe,” he said in 1959, “that even the so-called hunchback columns of Paestum you see are to me more beautiful than the Parthenon. Why? Because it is the beginning — the beginning is always the more beautiful to the artist.”47 He also continued to evolve his own approach to institutions by seeking their most abstracted and essential qualities. To that end, he wrote about a school, as “a realm of spaces within which it is well to learn”48 or a house as “a realm of spaces where it is good to live.”49 His objective, as always, was to allow buildings to support human interaction.

The sukkah brought these notions together: the single room where people came together to share a meal; elemental, trabeated, classical construction in which light was filtered through a permeable roof; light existing as a wondrous natural force and simple form of decoration. For most of the year, Kahn’s sukkah would remain a garden folly — a sculpture composed of pure rectilinear form, evocative of a ruined classical temple. This became particularly clear when he placed it close to the school building; it sets a directional path from school to chapel. As a garden foil, the sukkah encapsulates Kahn’s position on history; he viewed historical structures, especially antique buildings (the Pantheon was a favorite) or medieval fortifications (Carcassonne was frequently discussed), as armatures that could be stripped to their underlying forms and then redeployed as the underpinnings of contemporary uses. The Cistercian Abbey of Thoronet is a fine example. Kahn showed an image of it in a 1965 speech, expounding on how “each element was studied to the point there was nothing left but its pure shape and duty.” He mentions, at the same time, that his source is “one of the greatest books,” The Architecture of Truth. The book, in fact, is photographer Lucien Hervé’s loving rendition of architectural details illuminated by natural light: the deep set openings in the walls; the arcade of the cloister; the texture of the stone walls.50

At times, the sukkah’s classical underpinnings seem to outweigh its allegiance to halacha. In one drawing of a sukkah, Kahn emphasizes the starkness of the peristyle (see fig. 4.11). He contrasts the lush foliage, placed over beams in order to meet the sukkah’s roofing requirements, with the crisp geometry of the structure. Then he ignores Jewish law by omitting the sukkah’s necessary walls.

In two instances in which Kahn continued to omit the walls, he did strive
hard to retain a connection to Jewish traditions and historical sources. In one noteworthy example, he reinterpreted the unusual focal point of an eighteenth-century source for his own use. He looked carefully at images in the multivolume work by Bernard Picart, *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde* (see fig. 4.12).\(^5\) Picart illustrates a bulbous metal-and-vine canopy suspended from the center of the roof. Kahn’s drawing, which he identifies as “succah during evening celebration,”\(^5\) and which can be recognized by the prominent moon, incorporates Picart’s canopy into his rectangular sukkah, proof that Picart was his source (see fig. 4.13). It is unclear what purpose was served by introducing Picart’s hanging vines, and no more clear what Kahn had in mind beyond copying a strong visual element and giving his classical form a combined Jewish and historical provenance.

Although his figures are not clearly drawn, Kahn seems to have placed the men along the left side of the sukkah and the women along the right. The figures on the left are wearing prayer shawls (tallith); it is unclear if
these are worn by the people on the right. By inserting the common Orthodox seating arrangement and the prayer shawls used during service into the sukkah, Kahn was injecting Jewish content where it was neither necessary nor appropriate. Kahn’s figures also hold the lulav, the palm and other tree branches that are waved in the synagogue during this festival. The lulav and a citron (etrog), held together to praise God and celebrate the fruits of the harvest, are usually reserved for use in the synagogue during the morning service. Kahn introduces them into his night view of the sukkah, thereby compounding his mistakes.

In another case, Kahn made a sepia print of the classical temple with roof foliage and then added figures into this context (see figs. 4.11 and 4.14). While it is clear from these drawings that Kahn had a somewhat quirky way of presenting the sukkah, his remarks on those drawings indicate that he wanted to transform the sukkah to serve his own definition of religion. “This shows a little chapel on the outside for a certain autumn holiday,” he told the audience in his keynote address to the National Conference on Church Archi-
tecture in 1965.53 “There’s a view,” he continued, “and there you see that little chapel I mentioned, the Sukkoth [sic] which is right there.54 Kahn referred to the sukkah as a chapel, which it definitely is not. In this way, Kahn confirmed what had been implied in some of the drawings; he viewed this structure as a site for generalized, nonspecific, sacred activity.

In his sukkah, Kahn embodied religion on his own terms. By reenvisioning the sukkah as a chapel, he had justified the permanence of his structure and had succeeded in blending the universality and finite space of classicism, the glory of natural light integrated with structure, and the simplicity of a gathering place for eating. He added the specificity of Judaism by alluding to aspects that do not demand strict observance or participation in specific prayers: gendered space, simple garments to wear, and tree branches and a piece of fruit to wave. He had discovered a building type through which he could explore spiritual concepts without abandoning his deep distrust for specific rites. This was a religious building one did not have to avoid (or wink at) because it was open on all sides; it could be appreciated at a
distance, or entered (and exited) from any point. By creating a sukkah that fulfilled his very personal architectural and religious needs, Kahn also produced a sukkah that could become his own ideal synagogue. He may have also found a symbol, one both classical and Jewish, to express his complex personal meaning.

Kahn talked about the “character” of a building; how it should be uniquely representative of what it is. His plans for Mikveh Israel pass that test of “character” only when they are understood with both the light towers and the sukkah as complimentary components. Together they represent Kahn’s personal view of Jewish meaning, and they may impart a unique Jewish quality that exists but is not necessarily visible to a casual passerby. It is essential to recognize that once Kahn introduced the light towers, he placed the sukkah closer to the school. As that building takes on a short L-shape, the sukkah begins to nestle within the garden space between the chapel and the school. Kahn may have realized that once he brought nature via light into the sanctuary and chapel, he could remove the sukkah — another version of

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**Figure 4.14. Louis I. Kahn, Congregation Mikveh Israel (1965), Philadelphia.** Sepia print with Kahn’s hand-drawn figures. Courtesy of Louis I. Kahn Collection, University of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission
nature and filtered light—to a different part of the plan. He could disseminate his successes to other areas of the same Jewish site.

**Jewish Museum Exhibit, 1963**

A major event, one over which Kahn had no control, occurred at Mikveh Israel in 1962. The rabbi announced in November 1962 that he would leave his post before the 1963 High Holy Day season. Much attention was then diverted to finding a new rabbi. As a result, the Mikveh Israel Board of Managers had to refocus their energy. Conducting a search for a rabbi, they paid little attention to the proposed building or its attendant funding campaign during the latter part of 1963 and throughout 1964. In retrospect, it can be seen that the project was doomed, both by its odd financing scheme and by the lack of a long-term rabbinic commitment.

The Jewish Museum gave Kahn's plans a boost by featuring them in a major exhibition in the fall of 1963, titled "Recent American Synagogue Architecture." Exhibition curator Richard Meier acknowledged three decades later that he had conceived the show in order to bolster Kahn's position with the Mikveh Israel clients. Apparently it was public knowledge that the project was in trouble, although at that point it was the financing, rather than the design, that was in doubt. Prior to that, Kahn had published only some sketches for Mikveh Israel; once the Jewish Museum show was mounted, Newsweek highlighted it in an article titled "Where Jews Worship."

This museum venue was perfect. At that time, the Jewish Museum, an arm of the Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary, celebrated and exhibited cutting-edge contemporary art while also hosting exhibitions that had specific Jewish meaning. The Jewish Museum staged some of the earliest shows for both Jewish and non-Jewish artists such as Jasper Johns, Kenneth Noland, and Adolph Gottlieb. The synagogue exhibition, which could appeal to both of the museum’s audiences, opened the same year as a major showing of Robert Rauschenberg’s work; two years later Richard Diebenkorn and Larry Rivers were featured in big shows there. By placing it in that company, the Jewish Museum legitimized the significance of the synagogue as an avant-garde art form. With this show, the museum set a precedent: at least one other museum mounted an updated, similar exhibit in the 1970s.

Curator Meier was enormously impressed with Kahn’s Mikveh Israel achievement. Having just established his own practice, the young architect
had come into his own while working on a contemporary synagogue design. Meier had spent three years working for Marcel Breuer (1960–63), during which time his primary assignment was planning Temple B’nai Jeshurun in Short Hills, New Jersey. That project, a series of functionally distinct structures for a suburban site had a conceptual commonality with Kahn’s approach (see fig. 4.3).

Meier boldly placed a Kahn drawing of the Mikveh Israel interior on the exhibition catalog’s cover. He also allotted a few interior sepia-colored pages (visually distinct from the catalog’s other pages, which were black and white) to Kahn’s drawings and those of Eric Mendelsohn. In his initial correspondence with Kahn, Meier referred to Mikveh Israel as “the most significant synagogue designed in recent years.” Shortly after the exhibit closed, Meier expanded on the reasons for his enthusiasm. He claimed that Mikveh Israel, of all of the postwar synagogues, was the only one that controlled natural light and used the space to support the hierarchical relationships of ark, bimah, and congregation. While some of those hierarchies are embedded in a Sephardic disposition of bimah and ark, Meier did grasp that Kahn had clearly defined how that space enhanced rather than overwhelmed the experience of the congregants.

Meier also noted that churches and synagogues had relied for too long on “symbols to determine architectural form” that had become meaningless to the congregation, especially if imposed on a plan. Symbolic representation, according to Meier, had made it impossible to find new solutions for space and light. In other words, Kahn sought (and had found) the essence of a welcoming space that could inspire congregants without dwelling on the ubiquitous Star of David to make the building seem Jewish. Meier wrote in his introduction that Kahn’s “philosophic sense of the problem and his architectural sense of space rising above the congregation are magnificent.” He presumably included the light towers as part of the spatial success.

Critics, seeing drawings and images of Kahn’s models from late 1962 and early 1963, came away with an equally positive impression. The Jewish Museum exhibit may not have energized the Mikveh Israel leaders, but it certainly brought Kahn’s plans to prominence in architectural circles and perhaps even in the world at large. “One design stands out: Louis Kahn’s Mikveh Israel Synagogue projected for Philadelphia,” wrote Ada Louise Huxtable, then the formidable architecture critic for the New York Times when she reviewed the exhibition. She added: “Next to this building, the rest seem like exercises in tasteful, decorative, pragmatism or free-wheeling
eclecticism, like the museum itself.”66 She singled out Wright’s Beth Sholom as a display of “gaudy theatricalism.”67

The Jewish Museum exhibit illustrates the unique qualities of the Mikveh Israel scheme. It corroborates the argument that synagogue design, during the decade and a half of postwar construction, had followed several paths. Mendelsohn’s designs elucidated one direction: high massing for the sanctuary roof, clear circulation around open courts, carefully modulated interior spaces with well-calibrated light and refined, nonindustrial materials. Appropriately, the exhibit included Mendelsohn’s Mount Zion Temple and Community Center (St. Paul, Minnesota, 1954), which had been finished posthumously. Belluschi’s Rochester synagogue was present, too. The architects of Temple Emanu-El in Dallas chose not to participate.68

Percival Goodman offered another possibility. The Jewish Museum show included his Beth El in Rochester, a good representative of his formula. His Shaarey Zedek in Southfield, Michigan (done with Albert Kahn’s office), also part of the Jewish Museum presentation, exaggerates the form, as well as an indebtedness to Wright’s triangular plan and pyramidal massing (see fig. 4.15). The interior space is large but dull. The decoration, exaggerated stained glass that outlines both the ark and the shape of the roof, adds to the feeling that this is flourish without content.

Philip Johnson’s Knesses Tifereth Israel, Breuer’s B’nai Jeshurun, and Davis, Brody & Wisniewski’s Temple Emanu-el in East Meadow, New York, were more distinctive and provided other possibilities.69 Two featured synagogues, both in Connecticut — Geddes, Brecher, Qualls, and Cunningham’s Temple Beth Sholom in Manchester, and Oppenheimer, Brady, & Lehrecke’s Temple Sholom in Norwalk — reveal a debt to Louis Kahn. These architects had not looked to Mikveh Israel for inspiration (its design was still largely unpublished); instead they had been influenced by Kahn’s Trenton Jewish Community Center main building (unbuilt), his Bath House, and his Unitarian Church, whose plans were published in 1961. The JCC main building informs the hierarchical massing (pyramidal in one scheme) and octagonal elements, while his Unitarian Church clearly informed how some of the architects created individual parts and ambulatories.70

The exhibit confirms that Mikveh Israel was distinguished on a number of levels. It was one of just two urban sites in the exhibit. Kahn’s permanent sukkah was a radical departure from current synagogue design because of its visibility, central role in the whole scheme, and permanence. Kahn’s Mikveh Israel was one of only three designs (of the eighteen exhibited projects from
fifteen architects) to include a permanent sukkah. Kahn was unusual, too, in that his plans did not include excessive decoration or a Star of David. A decade earlier, he had thought about using that ubiquitous symbol in his own Adath Jeshurun plan but quickly discarded the idea as trite. Other architects did not let go of the image as swiftly, with at least four of the exhibited plans using it as their primary decorative motif; Harold Edelman and Stanley Salzman’s Sinai Reform Temple, in Bay Shore, New York, used it to generate the sanctuary plan.
Minoru Yamasaki’s North Shore Congregation Israel (nsci) in suburban Glencoe, Illinois (the synagogue that had handled its member-architect conflict so adroitly), was also included in the Jewish Museum exhibition (see fig. 4.16). Unbeknownst to casual observers, and not discussed in the catalog, nsci had been an enlightened client. With an engaged, forward-thinking rabbi, this congregation handled their architect selection in an exemplary way. Early in the planning process, the rabbi had already suggested three of the best-known practitioners of the day: Eero Saarinen, Edward Durell Stone, and Frank Lloyd Wright. He clearly wanted a high-profile name.72 The rabbi believed that the congregation “must have large vision on a new building; it should be the most beautiful in our capacity to build and one that is a landmark in religious architecture—a real contribution to Jewish structures.” To that end, he reiterated that the Selection Committee “should not hesitate to approach the outstanding architects in the nation.”73

Shortly after Wright’s death in April 1959, Alfred S. Alschuler Jr., the congregant who was to be an associate architect once a main architect was chosen, offered his own list to the Selection Committee.74 Alschuler added the names of several contemporary luminaries: Marcel Breuer; Harrison and Abramovitz; Hellmuth, Obata and Kassabaum; and Pietro Belluschi, because they had done or were currently working on synagogues, as well as
Alden B. Dow, because he “does churches.” Two firms, Yamasaki and Leinweber of Detroit and Morris Lapidus of New York, made the list because of their fame at the time, although neither was known to have tackled a synagogue before. Their pairing is appropriate. Each was defining architecture as modern, opulent, and luxurious. Yamasaki was known to leaders of the architectural and commercial worlds; Lapidus, if not known by name to the Jewish community, would have been recognized by his work. His Fontainebleau Hotel (1954) in Miami Beach was defining lavishness for the young Jews discovering that beach resort as a winter haven. The Fontainebleau offered kosher-style food, a mikvah (ritual bath), nightly entertainment, and cha-cha lessons under dazzling chandeliers. His Miami hotels, including the Eden Roc (1956) and the Americana of Bal Harbour (1956) so overwhelmed Lapidus’s career that few, including the members of nsci, realized that he also designed synagogues. About this time, he designed Temple Beth El (St. Petersburg, Florida, 1960), marked by a parabolic roof; and Shaare Zion Temple (New York City, 1960), a “theater in the round.” Earlier, in 1952, Lapidus’s plan for the Jewish Communal Center of East Rockaway, a low-slung building using Star of David tracery for its sanctuary window, was published in *Progressive Architecture*.77

Before making a decision based on their list, the congregation dispatched some members to the Conference on Church Planning and Design, being held in Chicago on April 21, 1959. Those attending returned home with a very sound message about how to proceed: have a well-defined architectural program, and seek out the best architect possible, even if that person had no prior experience with a religious building. The conference bolstered the rabbi’s position on selecting an architect with a national reputation. The committee sought out both Eero Saarinen and Yamasaki, who were located in the Detroit area. They interviewed each on his home turf before settling on Yamasaki. The committee noted that Yamasaki was the only architect, other than Frank Lloyd Wright, for whom the Architectural League of New York had hosted an exhibition and held a banquet. Members of nsci pointed with pride to the fact that the Museum of Modern Art had exhibited Yamasaki’s St. Louis Lambert airport (Hellmuth, Yamasaki and Leinweber, 1957) in the “Building for Government and Industry Exhibit.” Before its completion, the AIA had given the airport an Honor Award in 1956.

Once the congregation settled on Yamasaki, he showed himself to be an enthusiastic learner. He spent the entire day of Yom Kippur at the syna-
gogue and had one of his associates remain for a few extra days to carry out discussions with the congregants. He also accompanied the rabbi and two congregants to Cleveland in order to see Percival Goodman’s Fairmount Avenue Temple and Eric Mendelsohn’s Park Avenue Synagogue.

For nsci, Yamasaki sought a flexible but nonexpandable sanctuary that honored human scale; he wanted a light system that controlled natural and filtered lighting; and he wanted a building that honored the presence of nature. Like Kahn, he hoped to devise an “architecture of light.” Yamasaki positioned himself as someone who wanted to “embrace man” rather than to “awe” him. Neither the $2 million original estimate nor the $3 million final cost for nsci seems out of line with the expenses that Kahn expected to incur in Philadelphia.

The results, although apparently predicated on some of the same goals held by Kahn, could not have been more different. nsci is a sprawling suburban structure that fronts onto a parking lot. Where Mikveh Israel is rooted to the ground, with a palpable solidity, nsci appears ethereal, weightless. The reinforced concrete shell dispenses with the distinction between walls and roof, a type of union that some critics have likened to Art Nouveau. If Kahn harks back to classicism, nsci evokes a pastiche of orientalist nineteenth-century synagogues with its lancet windows and flower-shaped vaults. At first glance, it appears that Mikveh Israel and nsci share only a lack of implicit or explicit references to the Star of David.

Yamasaki avoided the expandable space concept by lining the sanctuary walls with a low platform (see fig. 4.17). This unobtrusive, raised area allows for movable seats that can increase the room’s capacity from 800 to 1,200. Yamasaki used the platform as an ambulatory, then directed it into the heart of the service by having it merge with the bimah. By contrast, Kahn (working almost simultaneously on the Unitarian Church) wanted an ambulatory so that people could stay away if they chose to. Kahn meant to keep visitors at a distance; Yamasaki worked to pull them in. The immensity of the structure, however (the sanctuary is 50 feet high, 80 feet wide, and 126 feet long), negates Yamasaki’s accomplishment.

The biggest difference between the projects can be seen in how Kahn and Yamasaki handle light. Kahn is selective; Yamasaki did not quite know how to tame it. Ogee windows at nsci, next to the seating platform, are of clear glass that provides no distillation of light. Each ogee window is placed within a reinforced concrete shell and outlined by a glass diffuser. These diffusers, continuing up to and into the ceiling, become wider when they meet
at the center of sanctuary ceiling. Yamasaki’s diffusers are too inclusive, too decorative. Kahn’s handling of light at the Kimbell Art Museum, begun a few years later in 1966, was radically different (see fig. 4.18). Kahn relies on the separation of the wall and the roof, updating what he had done at Trenton, in order to allow light to penetrate into the building. Kahn, too, has a diffuser system on the ceiling. This element, which also holds the lighting for an evening event, is suspended from the ceiling. It appears to float, which makes it sympathetic to the light that comes in from the “light joint.” Yamasaki’s diffusers appear to be pasted onto the ceiling, without any sense animation from or for the light.

Yamasaki sought to impress congregants with the technical wonder of reinforced concrete shells. He talked about “delight.” Kahn, by contrast, sought to make modernism stronger. He believed that he had a serious mission and that the results should display both modesty and power, not fun or excess. Tellingly, Yamasaki recommended D. Lee Du Sell to execute the ark, a confection that is teakwood with a gold leaf cover; the sculptural wall behind it is meant to evoke the fabric of a prayer shawl.

Like Kahn, Yamasaki thought hard about landscape design. Unlike
Kahn, who often worked out his own ideas for inserting a building into a site before he turned to a landscape architect, Yamasaki hired Lawrence Halprin just before the project broke ground. Halprin worked on many synagogues, but this was his only synagogue project outside California. By closing off the view of Lake Michigan, which was just behind the eastern wall, Yamasaki had ruined any chance for Halprin to build on that view. Instead the landscape architect had to work within more contrived spaces closer to the new building.

Yamasaki’s career was the cover story of *Time* on January 18, 1963 (the same honor Eero Saarinen had received in 1956). He had just been commissioned to design the World Trade Center in New York, a project that provided an opportunity for the popular weekly magazine to assess his career up to that point. The message was that Yamasaki was an architect who thought modernism had become dull. His solutions were to add playful decoration, as he did at the U.S. Science Pavilion at Seattle’s Century 21 Exposition (1962), or to modernize classicism, as he did at the Helen L. DeRoy Auditorium at Wayne State University (1959). Even the magazine realized that his
work could be too decorative, further confirmation that his trajectory was far different from Kahn’s.88

The Devolution, 1964–1972

With Kahn’s Mikveh Israel plans effectively in limbo while the congregation searched for a rabbi, the architect remained undeterred. He saw the Jewish Museum exhibit as an opportunity to impress his patrons, taking great care to make sure that prominent and active members of the Board of Managers received special invitations.89 Kahn’s reputation must have been enhanced when Bernard Alpers tried valiantly to give an upbeat report to the congregation in January 1964. He proudly mentioned that the building had been receiving widespread acclaim.90 But neither the exhibit nor the critical raves could overcome internal difficulties at the synagogue.

Following the conclusion of the Jewish Museum exhibit, the congregation and Kahn worked in different universes. Through the mid- and late 1960s, Kahn had intermittent contact with the congregation. He was not shunned and was invited to be a speaker at their winter lecture series.91 A new rabbi arrived at the end of the summer of 1964. Faced with daunting cost estimates, Kahn did nothing to limit the financial woes. On the contrary, drawings made in mid-1965 show that Kahn continued to develop a more elaborate concept of the sanctuary, including an oval “dome” roof over the octagonal sanctuary.92 He also made small sketches for a simple ark, two panels opening into the wall, and developed a lighting scheme for nighttime events in the sanctuary. One drafted drawing from 1965 shows eighteen light towers, each twenty-two feet in diameter. Previous plans had had fourteen towers. Kahn, by adding four towers (which are also entrances) within the school building, came up with a number that even he must have known is a particularly powerful and evocative symbol for Jews. The Museum of Modern Art’s exhibition of Kahn’s work (April 11–May 22, 1966) added to his considerable stature. Models of Mikveh Israel, both the site model and a single “light-making element,” contributed to the project’s renown.93 A drawing from 1967 shows that Harriet Pattison, mother of Kahn’s son Nathaniel, created a detailed landscape plan based on a series of stepped pools for the Christ Church greenway. The formality of this plan, which seems to run counter to Kahn’s own penchant for a less controlled landscape, at least indicates that Kahn was still trying to improve his plan.94 Kahn did make contributions to Mikveh Israel publicity when the congregation requested it. His
plans were shown, possibly alongside his sketches of the Strickland building, at an Israeli Trade Fair at the end of 1969.95

The few Mikveh Israel members with real power to reach out to the community began to die or become incapacitated. It was especially unfortunate for Kahn that by 1968 both Dr. Bernard Alpers and his wife stepped down from the Board of Managers. When they attended the July 23, 1968, board meeting, they came merely as “guests.”96 Kahn could no longer count on direct access to the trustees. The Alperses remained active supporters of the congregation, but never again did they have day-to-day knowledge of what the board was attempting to do.

By the late 1960s, there was a growing awareness that Mikveh Israel's building objectives would have to be more modest, and the congregation began to discuss the "possible scale-down of plans and consequently funds needs" and "raising as much money as possible and seeing how much could be built with it."97 In 1970, with the American Bicentennial less than a decade away, the congregation organized a “citizen group” that would bring together a more diverse group of supporters. Mikveh Israel began to refer to itself consistently as "the synagogue of the American Revolution."98 The Board of Managers was still thinking about Strickland. In the spring of 1970, there was another motion to replicate Strickland's interior for the new chapel.99 Apparently Kahn's oval sanctuary was not evocative enough.

By September 1970, with a Mall steering committee in place, Mikveh Israel decided that it needed a “dynamic fund raiser” and “revision of our architectural aims.”100 They agreed to raise an additional $200,000 to $300,000 locally and to float a mortgage to pay the remaining costs. In its first phase, the new program called for a chapel, retaining the "general plan of the Strickland synagogue," with classrooms below.101 They believed that Kahn had agreed to that. It is unclear how the death of Lillian Alpers, at the end of December 1970, affected Kahn’s view of the Mikveh Israel situation. The influence of the Alperses had been declining for several years, but certainly her death would have contributed to Kahn’s realization that, with one less advocate, he had to be more flexible.

Mikveh Israel's situation became increasingly desperate. They thought of merging with another congregation, then abandoned that notion.102 They flirted with the idea of moving the Broad Street building to Independence Mall.103 After several false starts, the board appointed Ruth Sarner as coordinator for the move to the Mall.104 She reactivated the Building Committee, which had been dormant. In its regenerated role it decided on a
two-building scheme in January 1972. During 1972, the Mikveh Israel committee reinvented itself again. Ruth Sarner became chair of the Mikveh Israel Action Committee, which sought to redefine the project’s goals. In order to get something erected, the committee directed Kahn to redraw the plans. They requested two units: a modest sanctuary and a “Museum of American Jewish History.” In other words, after eleven years, the synagogue was hoping to have Kahn adjust his concept to a variation of the parti they had envisioned even before he was hired. Kahn balked at these requests and demanded a new contract. For months he ignored the committee and submitted no new designs. A sketch, undoubtedly not for presentation to the committee, shows how he was envisioning a two-building scheme (see fig. 4.19). The same sketch reveals that Kahn still thought of the sukkah as integral to his overall plan, though at this late stage, the piers were reduced from six to four.

It did not bode well for Kahn when the Mikveh Israel board members tried to make their own architectural decisions and when they began to look outside of the congregation for leadership and fund-raising. The congregation offered Kahn suggestions on how to cut costs based on their own discussions with a contractor. Kahn was advised to use brick veneer, drywall over cinder-block walls for the interior, and carpet or terrazzo instead of travertine for the floors. Simultaneously, Mikveh Israel was courting a well-known philanthropist to chair their general fund-raising efforts in order to give the congregation greater visibility. Frederic Mann, a manu-

Figure 4.19. Louis I. Kahn, Congregation Mikveh Israel (ca. 1970), Philadelphia. Rough sketch of scaled-back scheme (after 1970), which shows that the sukkah was still on Kahn’s mind. Courtesy of Louis I. Kahn Collection, University of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.
facturer long known for his support of the arts in Philadelphia and Israel, turned them down, but William S. Fishman, president of ARA Services, agreed to become general chairman. Fishman, a successful food-service executive, was not a congregant. Approaching the project as if he were running a global marketing campaign, he appointed two co-chairs for the local campaign and envisioned himself attracting money from national and international sources. Fishman, who was unfamiliar with any of the recent architectural history of Mikveh Israel, was given a “memorandum detailing the problems met in trying to elicit a new design from the Architect.” The Board of Managers’ minutes recorded that his initial reaction was to fire Kahn.

The congregation did not abandon Kahn immediately. To placate Kahn’s supporters, particularly Bernard Alpers, the board decided to meet with Kahn to assess whether it would be “practical” to continue with his participation. As a sign of respect, Alpers was invited to the meeting. A “Special Committee,” which met with Kahn on May 2, 1972, was able to secure a small reprieve. They reported that he would work on something quickly, promising detailed plans within two weeks.

Kahn prepared a new model and drawings, adopting the two-building parti. When he made his presentation, he “advised that modification can be made and that he had not labeled the rooms to allow for flexibility”; Kahn still insisted, however, that “only the finest materials will be utilized, Flemish bond bricks, wood floors, stainless steel windows, etc.” As a result, even his apparently simple design did not save any money. The estimated cost was $3.25 million. The Board of Managers was shocked that the price had not plummeted. Fishman, who seems to have been intent on Kahn’s dismissal, stated he would rather “sell a better product.” It appears that Fishman was not intimidated by the financing; he just felt that Kahn’s plan would not elicit money from the national sources that he felt could be tapped.

Fishman showed some of his disdain for Kahn by asking one of his subsidiary companies to review the plans and begin “preparing a comparative cost estimate.” Two months later, Fishman reported that Kahn’s figures were wrong; the true cost would be $5 million. Fishman, who was prepared to raise three or four million dollars, felt that such an amount was unattainable. He gave the board an ultimatum, insisting that they had to reduce the proposal, build in stages, or use mortgage financing. The committee decided to go back to Kahn. They asked him to come up with a design that
would cost $2.75 million, without destroying the aesthetic integrity or majesty of the old design.

The next few months were difficult for Kahn, as the synagogue committee continued to change its demands, perhaps hoping that Kahn would resign out of frustration. They wanted the museum placed within the sanctuary building, sharing an entrance foyer. The foyer, several stories high, would have provided additional museum exhibition space. Kahn first balked at the request, but met their demands by October 9.\footnote{119} It is not clear what occurred next. According to Sarner, who chaired the Action Committee, Kahn reneged on his most recent concept and, in December, went back to an earlier one.\footnote{120} Sarner ordered Kahn to stop work in December, while the congregation and the architect were in contractual limbo.\footnote{121} Complaining that Kahn had never given them a definitive plan and that he had not produced a suitably simplified plan within the time frame allotted, the Mikveh Israel committee fired Kahn.\footnote{122} The actual date, which had to have been late 1972 or early 1973, is unclear. There are drawings dated as late as December 28, 1972.

Although he was crestfallen to see the project end, and his patron, Bernard Alpers, registered indignation, Kahn was clearly unwilling to compromise his position again. At the beginning of the project, he had devised his own ways to honor history, human activity, light, and nature. There is good reason to believe that he felt that those early plans were satisfying. Kahn’s most successful plans for Mikveh Israel had been developed about the same time that he had talked about art being the "language of God."\footnote{123} This may explain why Kahn, lamenting the loss of Mikveh Israel, felt that it was a terrible blow. He bemoaned to a friend that he was "too religious, to be religious."\footnote{124} Kahn’s daughter Sue Ann still believes that he was even shocked in practical terms, having believed for so long that Bernard Alpers’s hand would always have the power to make this commission a reality.\footnote{125}

Events that occurred after Kahn’s death in 1974 produce an intriguing epilogue to the Kahn years at Mikveh Israel. That same year, the congregation still lacked sufficient funds (they had less than $400,000) to initiate construction. With America’s Bicentennial two years off, the congregation began to recognize that grant opportunities would become available to secular institutions. They came up with a clever idea, one that would "flip" the ownership. From their own holdings, they created a museum, the Museum of American Jewish History. Instead of being a synagogue with a museum, they effectively became a museum with a synagogue. The museum, with
the synagogue as its tenant, became the driving force of the project. The ploy worked: the city and the Bicentennial Commission came through with sizable grants; architects Harbeson, Hough, Livingston and Larsen (soon to rename themselves H2L2) drew up plans for the combined building.126 When the building officially opened on July 4, 1976, the museum cum synagogue appeared to be free of Kahn’s imprint; it looked nothing like his design. And yet, in subtle ways, there were a few reminders that Kahn’s own history lingered over the project. H2L2 was a descendant of the firm that architect Paul Cret had formed in 1907; Cret had been Kahn’s vaunted teacher at Penn and then, for a short time, his employer. The H2L2 architects, perhaps hemmed in by the site and anxious to have the building completed for the Bicentenary, evoked the parti of some of Kahn’s last designs: museum on the west end; sanctuary on the east; entrance in the “hyphen” between the two. Like Kahn, H2L2 looked to the 1909 building for disposition of seating.

A New Context Unfolds

The world, Judaism, and architecture had changed considerably over the lifespan of Kahn’s Mikveh Israel project. As Kahn had begun work, synagogues of the 1950s and early 1960s, by being bold and assertive, had shown that Jews aspired to be a critical part of American life, celebrating the completion of a process of assimilation, begun in the early twentieth century as immigrants encountered American culture, and fulfilled by those newcomers’ children and grandchildren.

The American Jewish world began to experience both internal and external pressures in the mid-1960s. Leaders began to think less about their place in America and more about comprehending and interpreting the Holocaust and Zionism. The trial of Adolf Eichmann, held in Jerusalem and televised worldwide in 1961, did more than any other event to make Jews in America finally face the shocking magnitude of the losses during World War II. American Jews, who in the 1950s did not dwell on the genocide, could no longer avoid the issue.127 The internalization of such horrific events led to purpose-built memorials as well as to shaking the faith that many American Jews had in their own secure place in any society. Heightened Zionism, another by-product of the revelations about the Nazi exterminations, became a proverbial blessing and curse. American Jews, who had felt detached excitement about the formation of Israel in 1948, began to appreciate more fully the necessity of maintaining a Jewish state. Feeling great pride
and relief at Israel’s swift victory in the 1967 Six-Day War, American Jews donated unprecedented amounts of money to the victorious young country. Inevitably, fund-raising for Israel, as well as for Holocaust memorials, cut into the ability of local communities to construct synagogues on the scale of the previous decades.

Jewish concerns of the 1960s were aligned with many of the forces that were shaping American society. Jews took pride in their participation in the Civil Rights movement. The famous photo of Martin Luther King Jr. marching for voting rights in Selma, Alabama, in 1965 epitomizes a high point in Jewish participation in that struggle. King links arms with his biggest supporters, one of whom (the second person on King’s left) was theologian Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. But in a short time, as American antisemitism declined yet racism persisted, the Jewish-black alliance disintegrated, disillusioning those Jews who had been so committed to the cause.

The parallel women’s movement was more visibly enduring for the Jewish community. Energized by Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), women began to insist on equal representation in the synagogue. The Reform movement, which had begun to count women toward the minyan in the nineteenth century, ordained its first woman rabbi in 1972. The Conservative movement, more decentralized and moving at a slower pace, recognized women as part of a minyan in 1973. The movement waited until the 1980s to admit women to its rabbinical and cantorial schools, ordaining its first woman rabbi in 1985.

The practice of Judaism was changing from the bottom up, unlike Catholicism, where the Vatican II council (1962–65) imposed liturgical reforms that led to architectural reconfigurations. The emergence of the Havurah movement in the late 1960s and the publication of *The Jewish Catalog* in 1973 confirmed that deep distrust of Jewish institutions existed. Havurot, informal alliances of friends who came together to pray, were challenging the formal spaces and organized structures of conventional congregations. *The Jewish Catalog* translated those same ideals into simple, do-it-yourself alternatives. The Catalog taught many young adults of the 1970s how to implement home-based rituals, such as building a sukkah or baking challah. The full impact of some of these shifts was not felt until several decades later.

Kahn’s life and office at the end of the project were also quite different than they had been when he began his tenure. He had worked out his own philosophical stance and had been able to build according to his strong views, although his number of completed projects remained small. By the end of
his work on Mikveh Israel, he was one of the most visible and respected architects in the world. The Kimbell Art Museum, begun in 1966, had been completed. Kahn was receiving commissions on a worldwide basis. He was hard at work on the national capitol buildings in Dhaka, Bangladesh, a project started in 1962 and completed posthumously.

Kahn’s fame had grown in the Jewish world, too. Temple Beth El of Chappaqua, New York, commissioned a synagogue, which was begun in 1966 and dedicated in 1972. Having seen that design weakened by the decision to build the entire program at once with too small a budget, Kahn may have realized that an incremental method might produce a stronger design for Mikveh Israel. Kahn’s memorial for the Six Million Jewish Martyrs was an impressive, early commemoration of the Holocaust. Designed between 1966 and 1972 for a site at New York City’s Battery Park, overlooking the Hudson River and the Statue of Liberty, it was never executed but its glass pylons had a lasting effect on some of the better monuments that followed it. In Israel, Kahn received the two best commissions that the country had to offer after the Six-Day War: the rebuilding of the Hurva synagogue in the Old City of Jerusalem and a mixed-use project on Government House Hill, also in Jerusalem. Neither was executed, but they brought Kahn into continuing conversations with his Israeli colleagues and with Teddy Kollek, who became one of Kahn’s most vocal supporters. Christians reached out to him, too. Kahn was a frequent critic on panels that related to religious design, including a three-day “Institute of Church Design” conference held in Pittsburgh in 1963. The Carnegie Institute and the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary were the cosponsors. He received church commissions such as the Dominican Motherhouse of St. Catherine de Ricci (Media, Pennsylvania, 1965–69, unbuilt) and St. Andrew’s Priory (Valyermo, California, 1961–67, unbuilt). The latter two are remarkably different from Mikveh Israel. Kahn would have constructed dense exterior walls on two or three sides; he then proposed individual, freely arranged buildings within those tight boundaries.

Architecture was going through a period of intense self-appraisal. Robert Venturi’s Complexity and Contradiction, completed in the early 1960s, received significant attention when it was published in 1966. Venturi crystallized and categorized much of the discontent with modernism that had been brewing among American architects. Kahn’s plans for Mikveh Israel can be seen as part of the same discourse, one in which he tried to alter modernism by having it re-conceptualize institutional needs without neglecting light, nature, and interior space.
Not Just the End for Kahn

By the time the Mikveh Israel board dismissed Kahn in 1972, synagogue design had lost its verve. The architectural community recognized this and, accordingly, journals published fewer articles on synagogues in the 1970s. The splashy, multipage write-up, common in the 1950s, disappeared from the most widely read journals. Paul Goldberger, then architecture critic for the New York Times, summed it up when he was a featured speaker at the Fourth International Congress on Religion, the Arts, Architecture, and the Environment in 1978. He began his remarks by noting: “Most architecture built in the United States for religious purposes is dreadful. Most churches and synagogues built these days are mediocre buildings.” Goldberger assessed the majority of religious buildings as “fabulously pretentious” or “depressingly ordinary.”

As they moved deeper and deeper into suburbia, synagogues strove to be all things to all congregants. Synagogue design reflected larger membership; bigger schools and increased multipurpose space became common. The synagogues of the 1950s and 1960s had reflected their congregations’ increased social and political roles in their communities; by the 1970s, these aspects remained important but were no longer central. American Jews had, increasingly, found themselves accepted in their surrounding culture; in turn synagogue membership declined, while home observance increased. Synagogues, consequently, began to look tired and boring. The vitality of the earlier decades faded as congregations built the uninspired behemoths of the later years of the twentieth century. The synagogue lost its value as the architectural innovator at the center of Jewish identification. In the 1980s and 1990s, Holocaust memorials and memorial museums became loci for Jewish distinctiveness; peoplehood was equated with collective tragedy.
EPILOGUE  Preservation and Legacy

A young Jewish immigrant arriving from eastern Europe in the early twentieth century would have found it hard to envision the lives (religious or otherwise) of his or her descendants. The children of these immigrants, born in the teens of the past century, grew up to become the well-educated, middle-class, suburban adults of the 1950s. Their generation believed that Judaism would continue as a dynamic marker of an Americanized way of life. They felt certain that synagogues would remain significant architecturally and still be hubs of their children’s social lives and that Orthodoxy would quietly die out for lack of members, while a modernized practice, Conservative or Reform, would become dominant in American Judaism.

They were mistaken. Conservative and Reform synagogues are struggling today to retain members; in some cases, they have found it a chore to stay afloat. Mergers are especially common in the Conservative branch. Both movements have grappled with how to make services more informal and accessible and how to accommodate intermarried couples in which a non-Jewish spouse has not converted. Conservative and Reform congregations have been invigorated by female rabbis and cantors and by the commitment of lay leaders, but it is Orthodoxy, amazingly, that has flourished.

American society is more pluralistic today than anyone could have foreseen in the 1950s. The simple division of Americans into three faiths looks quaint and naive today. The three independent chapels at JFK Airport have been torn down. The routine nature of flying, surely, contributed to their demise, but so did the growing awareness that America can no longer be defined by just three faiths. Brandeis University is an example of this multicultural perspective. It is currently contemplating changes to the three chapels, tentatively planning to combine the Protestant and Catholic chapels into a single building so that it can dedicate the remaining chapel to serve adherents of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism.
Meanwhile, the synagogue buildings of the 1950s and 1960s are not thriving. Physical plants are often crumbling or in need of structural and cosmetic repairs. Many congregations consider their midcentury buildings too grand for today’s relaxed services; they also face practical problems about access for those in wheelchairs or for the hearing-impaired. Many suburbs that were destinations for children of immigrants in the 1950s are now losing their Jewish populations; prospective members are moving further from urban centers. It is unclear what will happen to major edifices as their constituents continue to move away without being replaced by young families.

The recent return of Jews (especially older Jews) to urban areas, after suburban interludes, may prove helpful for older synagogues. While this reurbanization may be a source of angst for suburban facilities, it may have some hopeful ramifications. One site, in Washington, D.C., is emblematic of past and recent trends. In 1951, Congregation Adas Israel sold its 1908 building to Turner Memorial A.M.E., an African American church. In 2002, Turner followed its congregants to the Maryland suburbs. Three Jewish developers, all of whom had had connections to downtown Washington in their formative years, purchased the property in hope of restoring it as synagogue. They carried out their plans and rededicated the building as the 6th and I Historic Synagogue in 2004. The emerging congregation is one that is comfortable offering a variety of services (family, multicultural) at no charge, as well as diverse, often not specifically Jewish, cultural programming.

Congregations, especially those saddled with older structures, now have to rethink how their synagogues function and what they embody. The synagogues of the 1950s, for all of their eccentricities, represented a hopeful moment when architects and patrons were willing to take risks. The question, six decades later, is how to honor those innovations while at the same time allowing contemporary congregations to flourish. As these buildings age, it is critical to ask questions that do not have easy answers. Are midcentury synagogues documents of the recent past and the culmination of the immigrant experience that must be preserved at all costs? Is it possible to preserve or restore an old building and still invigorate a congregation? Do synagogues have a responsibility to assure the proper disposal of artwork (or even buildings) that they no longer cherish? The answers are not always clear, but the discussions they generate are worthwhile and should engage all American synagogues.

Similarly, architects have to consider ways of using their craft to reinvigo-
rate the synagogue experience in new, purpose-built structures. They need to ask what valuable lessons were taught by midcentury buildings, and in doing so they must assess Louis Kahn’s unbuilt achievements for Mikveh Israel. It is heartening that two architects in particular, Robert Venturi and Stanley Saitowitz, have seriously considered these questions. They have looked to Kahn as their muse. Each has found a way to create an exciting synagogue that mirrors Kahn’s philosophy and builds on Mikveh Israel’s legacy. These architects, and their peers who are also appraising the totality of the new synagogue and trying to discover its “form” ahead of its “design,” are the true descendents of Kahn.

**Changes in Judaism since the Early 1970s**

Judaism has not changed in a vacuum. American religion has undergone several shifts. As far back as 1978, a survey of baby boomers found that two-thirds of them had not been connected to a religious institution in more than ten years; just 13 percent attended synagogue or church weekly. The same survey showed that an equal proportion (about two-thirds) had been regular attendees when they were young. Sociologist of religion Robert Wuthnow has explained the adjustment as a move from “dwelling” to “seeking,” from attachment to a particular religion and its doctrines to less-defined alliances. By the 1970s, religion had become a personal quest whereby “religious institutions need to be conceived as facilitators, rather than as ends in themselves.” Churches and synagogues, which had once been the center and steadying force for immigrant communities and for their successive generations, have been replaced by broader choices. Alternatives offer different belief systems, modes of socialization, and senses of community. Religious observance is no longer tied to creed; people who want to have a connection to a faith are developing personal strategies, ones that often pick and choose from various denominations and outlooks. Americans have been accepting universality in a way that sounds like Louis Kahn’s insistence in the 1950s that he believed in “religion” but not “a religion.”

Religious institutions have taken action, devising strategies to make their services appropriate to the demands of congregants and salvage the membership rolls. Vatican II, in the 1960s, fostered liturgical and spatial changes that were attempts to increase inclusion and participation in Catholic communities throughout the world. Protestant churches, since the 1970s, have tried to create more homelike, less institutional settings.
have been an exception. Evangelical fervor has created its own kind of warmth in spite of vast, unremarkable surroundings.

Judaism has faced similar challenges. Many synagogues initially pursued a nostalgic quest for eastern European connections. Often, synagogues adapted wordless “niguns” (old eastern European melodies) into their services. Like their Christian counterparts, Jews began to seek more intimate surroundings, more participation in a service that itself was becoming more informal and less of a performance. They wanted a closer physical connection between the rabbi and the congregation, a familiarity that Frank Lloyd Wright first interpreted at Beth Sholom in the late 1950s. They hoped to see their rabbi becoming less of a Protestant preacher and more of an authentically Jewish religious teacher and guide. The emphasis today is on “teaching not preaching,” working with congregants as opposed to talking at them. The Havurah movement, which first revealed similar sentiments in the 1960 and 1970s, has blossomed into a sizable and flourishing network of minyanim, independent prayer groups, not linked to synagogues.

Having looked to architecture to represent them in the secular world in the 1950s and 1960s, congregations have been reevaluating their buildings in view of contemporary demands for less-structured services. The Union for Reform Judaism’s consultancy, now renamed “Architects Advisory Panel Congregational Consulting Service,” is suddenly in huge demand. Its all-volunteer force spends less time consulting on new facilities and more time helping congregations to come to terms with how to deal with their fifty-year-old structures, helping them “think about what they should be thinking about,” by considering options for preservation, creative reconfiguration, or even removal to new sites.

The competition is again stiff in terms of loyalty and funding. Museums have arisen as the newest cultural/political marker of Jewish success in America. Large urban areas, in particular, have begun to construct highly visible Jewish museum buildings on prime downtown real estate. In each case, Jews can display their accomplishments and aspirations; these institutions, by positioning themselves to accommodate all branches of the religion, have achieved an inclusiveness that was formerly the bailiwick of Jewish community centers. Edward van Voolen notes, “Just as the museum has become the cathedral of the twentieth century for the Gentiles, Jews have equally made the museum their synagogue, where they relate to their past, meet socially, and celebrate secularized festivals and lifecycle events.”
Accordingly, Jewish museums have hired creative architects for plum commissions. The Contemporary Jewish Museum (Daniel Libeskind, 2008) in San Francisco is a “kunsthalle” for changing exhibitions with Jewish themes or relevance; the Spertus Institute and Museum (Krueck & Sexton Architects, 2007) in Chicago continues its long legacy of educational and cultural activities. In Philadelphia, the National Museum of American Jewish History (NM AJH, once the offspring of Mikveh Israel and now divorced from it), will open a 100,000 square-foot facility (Polshek Partnership, 2010). The site, at the corner of 5th and Market Streets, has a commanding position that faces both Independence Mall and one of Philadelphia’s main arteries.

It is hard to ignore the many ironies of the NM AJH success when it is seen in the context of Kahn’s years of toil for Mikveh Israel. The museum’s architect, James Polshek, a former dean at Columbia University’s architecture school, has a deep reverence for Kahn. When he delivered the annual Kahn Memorial Lecture at the University of Pennsylvania (2008), Polshek pointed out the many similarities in their lives and professions; most notably, Polshek was the architect who, in 2006, restored the first of Kahn’s museums, the Yale Art Gallery (1953). Even before it opens its doors, the NM AJH will have achieved the national financial success that eluded the Mikveh Israel fund-raising committees. The countrywide campaign in the 1960s to fund a synagogue, even such a historically auspicious one as Mikveh Israel, had its own inherent drawbacks; the national campaign to fund a museum that details “Jewish exceptionalism,” however (and in this case, one affiliated with the Smithsonian Institution), has had stunning success. Steven Spielberg’s foundation, the Dell family, and Eli Broad are among many out-of-towners who have made considerable donations to the museum and its endowment. It is not outrageous to say that the NM AJH brings to fruition the financial campaign that had been inaugurated to underwrite Kahn’s designs.

New Changes to Old Synagogues

Architectural changes have been staggering. Some of the most successful interventions have occurred in older, presumably less flexible structures. Central Synagogue (Henry Fernbach, 1872) in New York and Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco (Brown and Bakewell, 1926) have found ways to lower their bimahs in a fashion that is hardly perceptible. Officials at
North Shore Congregation Israel (nsci) in Glencoe, Illinois, recognized even before their famous Minoru Yamasaki building was twenty years old that their sanctuary was dazzling, but too “high church,” too formal. As a result, they invested money and energy in a smaller sanctuary, the Perlman sanctuary (Hammond, Beeby & Babka, 1979) so that the congregation could have a more flexible seating plan as well as closer interaction with the clergy. The congregation is content to retain the old sanctuary as a “special occasion” venue.

Some changes are more understandable than others. In the late 1950s, Walter Gropius designed Temple Oheb Shalom in Baltimore. He took the unusual course of making the sanctuary floor ascend toward the bimah on the eastern wall. In a recent renovation, the bimah and ark were moved to the western wall, reversing the arrangement in favor of a descending floor.\(^10\) In St. Louis, Mendelsohn’s B’hai Amoona was decommissioned as a synagogue after its congregation moved further from the city in the 1980s. Mendelsohn’s ark has been reinstalled in the congregation’s new home, designed by Hellmuth, Obata + Kassabaum, while his original building now thrives as the Center of Contemporary Arts. In Swampscott, Massachusetts, Belluschi’s Temple Israel may become a candidate for the oddest rehabilitation. After Temple Israel merged with another congregation, the city bought Belluschi’s building in 2006 and is considering turning it into the local police station, though its three-and-a-half-acre site might have more appeal as a recreation site.\(^11\) Belluschi undoubtedly would have frowned on this proposed conversion. In 1961, he was upset to find that Adath Israel, without consulting him, had installed “cheap stained glass” windows in his entryway. He asked that his name be withdrawn as architect for the building because he considered the glass a defacement of his own design.\(^12\)

Radical changes have taken place at all four of the Jewish buildings that were in the 1957 “Patron Church” exhibition. Fritz Nathan’s Jewish Community Center of White Plains (now Kol Ami) intends to revamp the sanctuary; plans there are still being formed. The rabbis and the congregation have agreed that they need flexible seating, a moveable bimah, and a lower ceiling. They also want better accessibility for both ends of the age spectrum. Four congregants are over 100 years old; there are also many young families who attend services, and their children want to see what is happening during worship.\(^13\)

None of the architects featured in “Patron Church” is still alive, although two firms (Kelly & Gruzen; Davis, Brody) still thrive. The community
building that Kelly & Gruzen designed for Park Avenue Synagogue (Milton Steinberg House) has been revamped. Only a few of Adolph Gottlieb's windows still exist in situ. In New Jersey, Davis, Brody's Congregation Beth El has inaugurated a $5 million capital campaign. Working with preservation architects Holzman & Moss, the congregation plans to rip out the old seats, install a horseshoe configuration, and transform the bimah by changing its shape to a semicircle and lowering its height. The architects are also designing a new chapel, accessed from the parking lot, to replace the one that had previously had interior entrée only. It is unclear what how these modifications will alter the cohesiveness of the original plan.

The most troubling changes have occurred at Philip Johnson's Kneses Tifereth Israel (KTI) in Port Chester, New York. There, the synagogue has put in new seating, redesigned the bimah, and sold almost all of architect Philip Johnson's and sculptor Ibram Lassaw's decorative work. The story is not all glum. It was a lucky day when one of Lassaw's relatives (living in Alaska) alerted curator Fred Wasserman of the Jewish Museum in New York that the entire bimah suite was for sale. It was even more fortunate that the Jewish Museum's trustees acted quickly in 2006 to purchase Lassaw's screen and eternal light, along with Johnson's ark, lectern, and four of his chairs for the bimah. These are now securely (and beautifully) installed in the permanent collection at the Jewish Museum. The museum considered the acquisition so remarkable that it was willing to redesign an entire floor to accommodate their purchase. The thirty-one-foot-long Lassaw screen has been cut in the fewest number of places so that it would fit into an available space.

This acquisition suggests a positive message, one that encourages other congregations to contact Jewish or local museums before they dispose of artwork. Unfortunately, few institutions can provide the sort of glowing installation that the Jewish Museum has built for the entire Johnson/Lassaw ensemble. What about good work with a less secure pedigree? Should it be sold at auction, sold privately, or given to a public collection? Ideally, the Council of American Jewish Museums and Synagogues could establish a policy to handle and distribute synagogue deaccessions of the future. There is much room, too, for synagogues and museums to work together to educate congregations about the historical significance of what they already own and why it might be better to leave it in place.

At KTI, institutional fortitude may have been lacking to fight to retain the bimah and accompanying artwork. On the practical side, the congregation
has thrived by being able to attract younger members from surrounding, often newly incorporated communities. A new rabbi arrived in 2005. Both the rabbi and the congregants saw a physical space that seemed “old” and “tired.” Their desire for an updated interior was compounded by memory of Johnson’s arrogance. Jules Harris, an active congregant, remembers that he had called Johnson when an aging population needed better acoustics. Johnson had told him that his buildings do not need any amplification. The proverbial “last straw” seems to have been the publication of Franz Schulze’s biography of Johnson (1994) and Johnson’s death in 2005. The biography and the obituaries recalled Johnson’s infatuation with the Nazis in the 1930s. At least one commentator noted that the task of dismantling the artwork was made easier by evoking Johnson’s unsavory political views, which had previously not been known by many congregants. Even the trustees of the Jewish Museum had mixed feelings about Johnson’s past, and one of them felt it was sufficient grounds to reject the acquisition.

Johnson’s earlier political activities raise a question about whether an architect’s politics should be known or evaluated by his client. In Johnson’s case, his relationship with Jews and the Jewish community was quite nuanced. Johnson’s disgusting political dealings, along with the possibility that he made an “apology to the Jewish community” that has never been fully documented and was certainly not made public, should not be whitewashed. His actions, though, need to be seen in the context of his other associations that show just how deeply connected he was to the Jewish world. Phyllis Bronfman Lambert, sister of Edgar Bronfman (who once led the World Jewish Congress), hired him to work on her family’s Seagram Building with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe; art critic Thomas B. Hess, whose wife was the granddaughter of Sears executive and Jewish philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, hired him to design an art gallery; Teddy Kollek enlisted him as a founding member of the Jerusalem Committee in 1969. Johnson was also the architect for Israel’s research nuclear reactor in Rehovot, Israel, completed in 1964. The last was hardly a secret, having garnered an AIA honor award in 1961.

Some of Johnson’s commissions brought him even closer to Jewish institutions. Johnson designed a house for Jewish insurance magnate David Lloyd Kreeger and, ironically, guided Kreeger (and the American Jewish Committee) to choose Louis Kahn to design a Holocaust memorial in New York City (unbuilt, 1967–73). Even earlier, Johnson had displayed Percival Goodman’s proposed Holocaust memorial (one of the first in America) at
the Museum of Modern Art in order to aid its acceptance by the New York City Parks Department. There are equally incongruous connections to the Jewish Museum. Throughout his life, Johnson was a good friend of Edward M. Warburg. Warburg's mother donated the family's Fifth Avenue mansion to the Jewish Theological Seminary in order to house the Jewish Museum. The KTI bimah is now installed in a Jewish Museum building that bears the name and reveals the generosity of the List family, the people who first introduced Johnson to KTI's rabbi.

KTI's new ark and bimah pose other concerns. Inoffensive in its blandness, the new ark and decorations have a disquieting presence. The ark has a stone facing that is meant to look like Jerusalem stone, the golden-colored limestone that has been used for decades to clad all buildings in Jerusalem. In 1958, when Temple B'rith Kodesh consecrated its land, the rabbi wanted to have some stones from Israel on hand. It was a way of making a connection with Israel as the Jewish homeland. Five decades later, Jerusalem stone (or its facsimile, usually quarried in the American Midwest) has become ubiquitous. Recently, the Hasidic Chabad Lubavitch of Litchfield County, Connecticut, submitted plans to the local Historic District Commission that specified the use of Jerusalem stone to cover the slate foundation. The commission objected. The leader of the synagogue, Rabbi Joseph Eisenbach, retorted that he was surprised because "every synagogue in the world has Jerusalem stone in it."

One has to wonder if Jerusalem stone has become a new American fetish, replacing the overemphasis on the ark of the 1950s. Henry and Daniel Stolzman are more generous; they see a reference to Jerusalem stone as the inclusion of "iconic, authentically Jewish form." Yet Swiss Architect Mario Botta, designing a synagogue in Israel, felt no need to include it when he designed the Cymbalist Synagogue and Jewish Heritage Center at Tel Aviv University, completed in 1998. The exterior stone cladding comes from Verona, Italy, and the stone that covers the interior walls is from Tuscany.

One could argue that the Israelis do not need to replicate what they have nearby. The more essential inquiry is whether American synagogues are retaining a sentimental gesture that might be preventing them from making more interesting aesthetic choices.

A different and constructive scenario is playing out in suburban Philadelphia. Beth Sholom, the synagogue that Frank Lloyd Wright designed in the 1950s, became a National Historic Landmark in April 2007. This recognition is a superb award for a congregation that has long cared deeply about
its building. The synagogue, which already hosts many visitors each year, expects even more with its new landmark designation. In addition to architects and students, large numbers of Jewish groups come to see America’s best-known synagogue building.

Landmark status also says something about the congregation’s pride as it looks to a future that is not entirely secure. Beth Sholom’s membership is currently 950 families, down from a high of 1,300 in the mid 1960s. In recent years, local Jews have either moved to suburbs that are even farther away from the city than the Elkins Park site or returned to downtown Philadelphia. The congregation, which will not be closing this facility anytime soon, and perhaps not for many decades, realizes that it must be a responsible steward of this landmark. They are planning now for the day that the synagogue might have to become a museum because of these changing demographics.

In order to accommodate current tourists and to plan for the long term, the congregation has hired Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown of Venturi Scott Brown Associates (VSBA) to create a visitor center, including an interpretive space and a gift shop. The designers and the congregation agree that museum and retail functions have to be inserted into Wright’s plan without destroying the integrity of his project. Plans call for carving out two new spaces by converting a lounge and an occasional classroom that had been underutilized. An elevator is also part of the proposal, which will fill a more immediate need for handicapped people trying to reach the sanctuary on the upper floor.

Kahn’s Legacy

It has been more than thirty-five years since Mikveh Israel dismissed Kahn. His plans have been widely published. One would expect that Kahn’s strategies might have become iconic paradigms for synagogue designers. The historical record, however, shows that few have picked up on his hierarchical, self-contained units with a clear sense of procession or his sculptural exteriors that manipulate light and shade in subtle ways. Kahn provided ways to evoke nature and to promote human interaction. His vision for Jewish meaning was not tricky or gimmicky. It was appropriately Jewish. At Mikveh Israel, Kahn broke with many conventions of synagogue design. He reversed the common sense of what is permanent and what is temporary. By using changing light to “paint” the walls, Kahn substituted light for any per-
permanent decoration. He found the perfect metaphor for Judaism, a religion that is never static but constantly reinterpreting and renewing itself. With the sukkah, Kahn continued to overturn tradition by making an ephemeral object into a permanent one. He not only envisioned his own ideal synagogue but also may have found a way to identify a building as Jewish without resorting to any symbols or added signs.

Few of Kahn’s contemporaries made use of his achievements. One exception is Congregation Beth David. Located in New York State’s Southern Tier, in Binghamton, Beth David demonstrates neither KtI’s abandonment of its own history nor Beth Sholom’s loving care for an uncertain future (see fig. 5.1). The situation there (benign neglect) is not necessarily a bad thing. An excellent building, one of the gems of the 1963 Jewish Museum exhibit and the recipient of a Progressive Architecture citation for religious building, the synagogue retains all its original spaces. An expanded front doorway is the only inappropriate incursion.27

Werner Seligmann, who would become dean of the Syracuse School of Architecture, designed the building for a congregation that was reactivating itself. Seligmann had strong credentials as a modernist. He was one of the original “Texas Rangers,” who transformed the University of Texas School of Architecture in the 1950s. The synagogue has a similarly proud history as an Orthodox congregation. It began in the early twentieth century, when Binghamton was a hub for itinerant peddlers. Beth David faced a decline in membership in the first years after World War II, as the city’s economy made the transition from manufacturing to a more complex, high-tech system, based on a large state university and aerospace and industrial contractors. The congregation began to revive by the late 1950s. In 1960, the congregation decided to build within a strongly Jewish neighborhood, close
to the downtown. Beth David formally moved into its new building in February 1964.

The budget (less than $200,000) and the site (a buildable lot measuring 80 by 120 feet) were both small, almost domestic in scale. Seligmann teased many uses from this limited space and accommodated them in an uncramped fashion. He provided a sanctuary for 400 people and a social hall for 200; he also adhered to other programmatic requirements, including a mikvah (ritual bath), two kitchens (milk and meat, in order to separate foods made from each), and five classrooms. By placing the sanctuary on its own second floor and by using copper fascias on the exterior of the sanctuary and chapel roofs, Seligmann wanted to make clear that religious uses dominated the space, even if the building was shared with more secular functions. Reportedly, the architect would have liked ivy to grow on the walls, thereby turning the entire structure into a garden, an intriguing inclusion of nature. Seligmann gave a new twist to the introduction of nature that haunted the plans of Mendelsohn, Belluschi, Wurster, and Kahn.

There are two clear routes to the second-floor sanctuary, making clear that this building only remotely echoes oldtime shuls. One path goes through an interior stairway, where a small skylight guides a visitor through the naturally lighted stairwell. The other path crosses the well-proportioned exterior courtyard that is open to the sky, skirting the main floor doorway, at the far end of the court. This route takes advantage of “ascending” to the sanctuary on the exterior, following an almost classical sense of procession while also honoring the Jewish notion of “going up” to the Torah. There are wide views of sky and the second-floor exterior terrace. The exterior path seems to readapt Kahn’s sense of progression at Mikveh Israel: from the most secular uses toward the more sacred ones. Even in a harsh winter, there is a sense of dignified arrival.

The sanctuary, with a traditional freestanding bimah, has glass walls on three sides. The seating for the women replicates the tribunes that Kahn had used at Mikveh Israel, drawing on Tachau’s even earlier designs. The men’s seating, however, is in the shape of a U and further harmonizes with the attempt to centralize the space. The proportions for the sanctuary, as well as for the social hall below it, are pleasingly ample for such a limited site. Small details show how the architect understood Orthodox requirements. The foyer outside of the sanctuary includes recessed bookcases and hooks for prayer shawls. These thoughtful details allow the overall design to remain uncluttered by makeshift tables, carts, or racks. Downstairs, the entrance to
the mikvah is next to an exterior door, a nice accommodation, letting anyone using it have complete privacy when coming or going. The social hall has a carefully positioned, unobtrusive “washing station” for hand washing before meals.

In contrast, recent American synagogues have tended to be banal. Starting in the early 1960s, American synagogues entered a period of architectural decline. Staid and predictable structures have eclipsed the brash hopefulness of the 1950s. Synagogue selection committees have frequently looked to “safe” architects who can deliver uninspiring buildings on budget. There is an unconscious retreat to an old mentality, looking back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: build to fit in and be unobtrusive. Decoration remains an “add-on,” often unrelated to the architecture of a site. Humdrum, often sentimentally bad art now receives a place of honor in many synagogue schemes. The end result is that many contemporary American synagogues are not only undistinguished architecturally but are also indistinguishable from equally dull secular buildings.

The experiences of the Flemington Jewish Center, a small Conservative congregation in central New Jersey, can shed some light on how the building process often goes awry. An international competition, held in 2001, should have been a vehicle to energize interest in new synagogue construction. Working under a grant from the New Public Works program of the National Endowment for the Arts, the competition set the stage for again bringing young, talented architects into the design process. The response was outstanding, especially among hungry architects. A stellar jury (Ralph Lerner was the jury adviser; architectural jurors were Preston Scott Cohen, Laurie Hawkinson, Guy Nordenson, and Enrique Norten, the rabbi and a member of the congregation) selected the winning team, L/1S Levit Iwamoto Scott. Robert Levit, Lisa Iwamoto, and Craig Scott, all then faculty at the University of Michigan, had presented an excellent design. It combined an untraditional spatial link between sanctuary and social hall with an abundance of nature, from both skylights and courtyards.

The L/1S design was never built. The congregation ultimately selected an architect with a long building history, a designer of shopping centers. Congregants were unwilling, even after the approval of such an architecturally impressive jury, to take a chance on highly skilled (but unproven) professionals. The congregation can be blamed for short-sightedness and risk avoidance. After such a public competition, the message to young designers was not encouraging.
There is a bit more hope for experienced architects. Two recent synagogues, one completed in 2007 and the other in 2008, suggest that Kahn’s Mikveh Israel can serve as a touchstone. In both cases, the architects have internalized Kahn’s lessons before creating their own fresh, innovative designs.

Venturi Scott Brown Associates

Venturi Scott Brown’s first synagogue, Temple Beth-El of Sunbury, Pennsylvania, was completed in 2007, just as the architects were receiving the commission for the Beth Sholom interventions. The congregation, which includes sixty families, is independent, unaligned with the Conservative, Reform, or Reconstructionist movements, although the rabbi graduated from the Reconstructionist rabbinical school. A local philanthropic family, who had met Venturi when he was working at Franklin & Marshall College, thought that he would be a good match for their congregation and brought him into the project.

The site, in rural central Pennsylvania, is in a small town that is unlike suburban or urban counterparts. Sunbury, a county seat (12,000 residents) that has eighteenth-century roots, is in an agricultural and coal mining belt. The architects sought to establish a civic monument in a part of town that had no distinguished history of public structures, although there was some domestic gentrification nearby.

Beth El, organized in the early twentieth century, is representative of the smaller synagogues that once dotted rural areas. In this part of Pennsylvania, many have ceased to exist; others have been folded into the surviving Beth El congregation. The congregation challenged the architects to create a building that would draw its members together, especially since they travel from different communities, such as the college towns of Lewisburg (Bucknell) and Selinsgrove (Susquehanna) for both worship and school activities.

VSBA came up with an appropriately scaled, comforting design. The exterior displays many of the features that VSBA frequently employs to announce the place of its buildings in their local context. The congregation’s name is at the front, spelled out in large letters; the building’s facade is hidden behind a flat screen that alludes to the columns and porticos of classical civic monuments. Other references to traditional civic facades can be found on the same screen: stepped outlines of a string course and an open circle topped by a segmental arch. The architects incorporated brick in order to reflect the local residential context.
The interior takes its cue from a Quaker meeting house aesthetic (an allusion endorsed by the rabbi) and succeeds in being modest without being boring. It creates the residential scale that counterbalances the exterior’s homage to civic grandeur. It allows light to decorate the sanctuary, and it accepts the simplest, most straightforward type of furniture. Taking care not to create another impersonal, deep, expandable sanctuary, VSBA cleverly places the expansion area off to the side of the sanctuary. This same expanded room also functions as a social hall.

Working within a tight budget (approximately $2 million), VSBA organized interconnected spaces around an irregularly shaped courtyard (see fig. 5.2). The sanctuary, entry hall, and classroom corridor all rotate around the diminutive outdoor space. A single tree anchors one corner, the heart of this light-filled yard.29 When asked about the tree, the rabbi responded that it is an architectural expression that had been in the plan from the start.30 While Venturi’s relationship with Kahn, for whom he worked for a short time, was not always an easy one, the tree appears to be a reference to his former employer. Kahn, in 1955, had of course distilled the essence of an
abstract synagogue as “a place under a tree.” For Kahn, and then for Venturi, the tree was both a natural element and the most primitive architectural expression of a gathering place for people.

The sanctuary provides other delights. The fixed pew seating (a rarity in this day of informal flexibility) is organized in rows facing each other; these are supplemented by moveable seats. The arrangement of facing pews is somewhat reminiscent of the old Mikveh Israel, and of Kahn’s interpretation. The bimah is removed from the ark (see fig. 5.3). It is closer to the center of the room, a reflection of older European practices. The distance between ark and bimah allows for a fine processional space. The arrangement, all at the same floor level, fulfills the rabbi’s request that everything be accessible; she had preferred that the bimah and ark sit on the ground to avoid requiring any special ramps to make them accessible to all congregants.

The architects designed the bimah, pews, and ark, all of which were executed by local craftspeople. The ark sits flush with the wall that overlooks the courtyard. Its niche, which extends into the courtyard, is lighted from below. It also extends vertically, so that the top of the niche can be seen from

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Figure 5.3.
a distance, perhaps a reference to some of the projecting ark walls of the 1950s. Here, it is handled with more subtlety and grace. At night, it emits a glow from the top of the synagogue roof. To economize, the eternal light is a generic light fixture, chosen from a standard catalog. This pendant, bearing an uncanny resemblance to similar ones at coffeehouses throughout America, is actually perfect because of its simplicity.

Before the ark was inserted into its niche, the rabbi asked the people who had fashioned it if they would like to write their own blessings on the interior wall. Coming from deeply religious Christian backgrounds, the craftsmen had studied the history of the ark and were prepared to add their own reflections. The rabbi wrote her thoughts, too. This activity was not about proselytizing but about finding and sharing common roots and traditions, again honoring the synagogue’s presence as a responsible civic establishment and a respected local religious institution.

Glare, Kahn’s old nemesis, is still a problem here. The architects are working on a solution that will incorporate mesh shades. The flip side of that concern is that the congregants are free to enjoy the night sky for all of its glory. That was certainly the case during the congregation’s first High Holy Days in their new facility. The rabbi reports that at the conclusion of Yom Kippur, after the sun had gone down, it was possible to see the moon through the windows over the ark. It was, according to her, a magical moment: the congregants were singing the last prayers of the day; they could see the composition of the tree in the background, the ark in the foreground, and the moon framed by the windows over the eternal light.

Stanley Saitowitz

Stanley Saitowitz has worked with Congregation Beth Sholom in San Francisco in order to build a new complex on its old, urban site, in a neighborhood that once had the densest Jewish population in the city. Although that concentration has decreased, the congregation never imagined moving from its home base. Leaders of Beth Sholom, San Francisco’s premier Conservative congregation, recognized that their members would continue to travel from other neighborhoods and even from the suburbs. The congregation was content to forgo an expandable sanctuary because it had a history of conducting parallel or successive services on major holidays.

This self-assured congregation made its own investigation of nationally recognized architects before settling on Saitowitz. Based in the Bay Area, where he has practiced and taught for more than thirty years, Saitowitz came
with experience with both secular and Jewish buildings. He has designed a skateboard park for Louisville, Kentucky, created several synagogues, and won a 1984 competition to design a San Francisco sukkah. That particular hut was both temporary and permanent, designed to be erected and taken down each year.32

Although being Jewish should not be a prerequisite for building a synagogue, Saitowitz has read and interpreted more Jewish texts than most Jewish Americans have. During the earliest stages of this commission, Saitowitz participated in a dialogue about Jewish texts and tradition with the congregation’s rabbi, Alan Lew. Lew, a leader in the Jewish mediation movement, has written about the state of the building when he arrived in 1991. Even then, with a deteriorating physical plant, 300 people regularly showed up for a traditional Conservative Shabbat morning service.33 A strong rabbi had always propelled this congregation, and Lew was able to sustain that tradition. Lew also brought a sensibility to architecture, having grown up in one of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Usonian homes.

Lew’s leadership was crucial. He persuaded his congregants that it was no longer possible to keep repairing the old building; it would have to be torn down in spite of all the affection for it. Having been instrumental in shaping the architect’s choices, Lew then did an outstanding job of transmitting Saitowitz’s ideas to the congregation and helping craft a positive response.34 His retirement in 2005 left a leadership void for a short time, and it was unclear whether Saitowitz’s plans would survive. The congregation was able to weather the transition, and construction began in the fall of 2006. The building, completed in 2008, reveals that most of Saitowitz’s ideas were executed as planned.

Saitowitz, born in South Africa and educated by architectural instructors who had studied with Kahn in Philadelphia, found a solution that indicates how well he has absorbed Kahn’s lessons. He segregated different functions of the synagogue in order to maximize the relatively small lot and to provide as much space as possible for people to gather and to experience nature. Accordingly, Saitowitz placed the school, chapel, and social spaces in a glass-and-zinc-sheathed cube on the corner of the site. The sanctuary is in a freestanding masonry building, shaped like a “bowl or vessel,” anchored over a rectangular plinth that contains offices. The refined poured concrete building, sited parallel to scenic Park Presidio Boulevard (see fig. 5.4), is a direct descendant of how Kahn employed bold geometry and crafted masonry surfaces.
Saitowitz’s buildings, with the sanctuary parallel to the street, show that this congregation is rooted to its old neighborhood. The main entrance to the complex is through the interior plaza that separates the two buildings. Saitowitz has adroitly provided access to the complex via a courtyard that is both embracing and directional. Partly sheltered by the overhang of the sanctuary, this is a small, well-developed space where people can meet. The overhang provides a sense of shelter, while the space between the overhang and the school building provides glimpses of the sky. There is direct access to either building from the street level, but a visitor is naturally drawn to the grand staircase straight ahead. Ascending the stairs, one follows a processional route to the upper plaza, which is open to the sky and that can be only partially glimpsed from below.

This upper courtyard provides access to the sanctuary and to the social hall, both of which benefit from this position, as each appears to be an independent entity. There is nothing to remind the visitor that the sanctuary has offices below or that the social hall sits over classrooms and a chapel. This plaza is also an excellent link between the nonexpandable sanctuary and the social area. This open space allows “expandability” by providing additional room, an outdoor space for events that use the social hall. It is a good example of how an architect, after carefully considering the needs of the congregation, expands on the program to include more than they ever requested.
This space for informal assembly is a good example of how “form” can be translated into “design.”

Saitowitz created an ample, well-proportioned sanctuary that uses contemporary materials and promotes human interaction (see fig. 5.5). The ark, a deep niche, has doors that are flush with its wood walls. The eternal light, an LED floodlight, is a faint flicker above the ark. It is subtle and unobtrusive, a complement to the opposite wall where laminated etched glass (with its own LED program) contains names of deceased members. The freestanding bimah is removed from the ark. Rabbi Lew had insisted on the traditional placement of ark and bimah. His goal was to make services more participatory. Seats, which face each other across the building’s east-west axis, closely resemble the seating arrangement Kahn tried to adapt from Tachau’s Mikveh Israel. Here there is no gender separation, but the steeply sloping rows of seats do evoke the Mikveh Israel tribunes.

Saitowitz’s use of light reveals how much he has considered Judaism, Kahn, and Abraham Joshua Heschel. His thoughts are fused with notions of an ever-changing sense of time and light. For Saitowitz, a “Hebrew dwelling”
is always in flux, something that is apparent in the changing light patterns on the sanctuary walls. Without any side windows, the sanctuary is dependent on light entering through the space between the wall and ceiling. Eschewing all other decoration, Saitowitz has configured the light source so that there is an ever-changing pattern of a menorah on the walls. Saitowitz, in this single room, has combined Kahn’s love for ephemerally mutating light, the “light joint,” and light without glare. At the same time, he has given a physical dimension to Heschel’s belief that Jews are people of time, not space. The architect’s immense achievement is that he has combined all of these elements into a unified room that is warm, dignified, and essentially Jewish.

Conclusion

In the 1950s, leaders of synagogues knew that they had extraordinary opportunities. They recognized that they were part of a dynamic, patriotic, postwar society. Jewish identification became a means of American identification, and the support and encouragement of family activities assured the continuation of Judaism into the future. As congregations relocated to the suburbs, they hoped that the synagogue — the center of life in eastern Europe and in the “old country” of the dense urban settings from which they were moving — could retain a central position. They seized a chance to create a new building type: the suburban synagogue. Looking occasionally over their shoulders for Protestant precedent, they aimed to create buildings that would forcefully announce their presence and participation in the American system of worship. By reaching out to the best architects practicing at the time, synagogues achieved works of art that stand as examples of highly integrated cooperation between craft designers and architects.

Architecture gave Judaism a public, visible, progressive presence in postwar America; at the same time, it gave worshippers a sense that they were in a distinctive space. The architecture confirmed what most Jews already knew — they were no longer new immigrants but participants in a broader, more inclusive American culture. Jews had looked to architects to provide symbols of their place in this society, and architects had responded with vigor and imagination.

Some of the optimism lingered when Mikveh Israel was first commissioned. The chance to build on Independence Mall, redolent with patriotic messages of American freedom, had a special appeal for Kahn as a naturalized citizen. American synagogue design, forgoing its first moments of rigor,
became a catalyst by giving Kahn examples against which he could react. His designs for Mikveh Israel became critiques of current synagogue architecture. At the time of its commission, Kahn was at a position in his own career where he was firm in how he approached projects. He was deeply committed to directing modernism (especially the type found in corporate America) toward a reformation and strengthening of itself. He labored on Mikveh Israel with diligence, without ever having the satisfaction of seeing it built. He felt particularly stung because his plans had the possibility of producing an exceptional building, one that would have had a lasting impact on synagogue design and American architecture. He had created a synagogue with a specific Jewish presence without adhering to the common symbols or decorative scheme that his peers demanded.

Today, almost half a century after Mikveh Israel handed Kahn their memorable commission, the dynamics have changed. Synagogue affiliation is low. A recent survey by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life suggests that Jews make up just 1.7 percent of the United States population. Reform is now the largest branch of Judaism in America. Cer Congregations are still moving to suburbs, and these are increasingly distant from old urban hubs. At the same time, there has been a return to urban life and a reclaiming of old institutions. Reverse suburbanization is rising. American synagogues have been struggling, trying to figure out how their liturgy and programming can attract and retain members. Architecturally, the situation is even more disturbing. The popular press never carries stories about synagogue design, which is generally considered too uninteresting, a non-story. Some of the most sensitive architects have never even been asked to design a synagogue.

Synagogue 3000, which has emerged as a nonpartisan effort to revitalize synagogues, is directing the conversation toward spirituality and revitalization of buildings. Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman, a cofounder of the group, argues that synagogues must be redirected, that they can no longer be sustained by a corporate model of bottom-line financing, driven by rabbis thinking like MBAs. He endorses recent architectural changes that seek more interactive spaces, with lower bimahs and rearranged or flexible seating, hoping that these will form a major component of a solution. The architectural dimensions are found in a new emphasis on intimate chapels and in “new or renovated sanctuaries that reflect intimacy, natural light, simple design, and no social distance between clergy and participants (so that both may actively pray together).”
Architects and architectural historians should take note and be appropriately flattered. The problem with this new approach is that it is creating a new straitjacket, an inflexible model. Building committees are ripping out pews, reconfiguring seats, refashioning the bimah. New and renovated synagogues exhibit characteristics that are strikingly ubiquitous: Jerusalem stone near the ark, seats that form a semicircle or U, skylights that pierce the roof. Many congregations feel that all of their problems can be solved simply by following this formula. In the 1950s, architecture could create a positive, dignified, creative image for Jews just arriving in the suburbs. It may be too much to ask of architecture to solve today’s problems, problems that require a systemic overhaul. Even the best architects cannot counter the effects of membership dues that are too high, rabbis who are too remote from the lives of their congregants, and institutions that ask members to participate in endless events, many of which are only remotely tied to religion.

Synagogues would be more effective and responsive to their congregants—and create better examples of design for the twenty-first century—if they would just heed some of Kahn’s words and admonitions and some of the lessons of the mid-twentieth century. Synagogues should be reaching out to the best architects they can find. These people might have national or even international reputations. Or they might be young, just starting out on their own. Prior synagogue experience is less important for an architect than his or her ability to interpret what the congregation needs and to envision something that is timeless and noble—that enhances the experience of anyone who comes to pray. Taking a cue from Kahn, the architect has to investigate what the congregation really wants and then he or she has to be talented enough to provide something that greatly transcends those requirements. A fine architect will not only fulfill needs but provide something more glorious, something that gives the congregants more than they were able to ask for.

The current rabbi of Mikveh Israel has asked several times whether it would be possible to build Kahn’s unexecuted designs. While there are somewhat complete plans, these never got to the state of specifications, so it would be difficult to create exactly what Kahn had intended. A bigger problem is that Kahn had envisioned these plans as a way to create a powerful place for the congregation within the developing Independence Mall and Society Hill neighborhood. An accurate recreation of Kahn’s work might look stale and out of date on the current site. Perhaps it would be better to ask a young, aspiring firm to take Kahn’s lessons and apply them to a
building or series of buildings that react to today’s world and to the needs of the congregation in the early twenty-first century. It is time to ask young architects to provide new models that will jolt synagogue design out of its current moribund state and follow Kahn in establishing creative ways to “be Jewish.”
Introduction

2. Kaufman, Shul with a Pool, 35.
3. The Reform movement, begun in Germany, came to America in the mid-nineteenth century. The first American iterations, reactions to European Orthodox particularism and ritual, were vehement about altering dietary laws and redefining Sabbath observance. Reform introduced shortened services that gave greater attention to vernacular language in place of biblical Hebrew, encouraged preaching, and accommodated mixed seating. Believing in the universal nature of Judaism, the Reform movement began as fiercely anti-Zionist before changing that stance in the twentieth century. Some Reform views were considered so extreme that a reaction was inevitable. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the Conservative movement emerged to reform the Reform—to “conserve,” or at least adjust to modern America, some of the older Orthodox ways. Conservative synagogues sought a reasoned middle-of-the-road approach. Judaism’s fourth denomination, Reconstruction, has its roots in the Conservative movement. Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan formulated it in the early 1920s to provide a vehicle for Judaism to evolve culturally. Reconstruction was already making itself known in the 1950s but usually without permanent buildings until later in the twentieth century. This quadpartite arrangement exists primarily in the United States.

8. This definition of spirituality owes a great deal to Alan Lew’s book, One God Clapping.
9. For a summary of the Jewish building campaigns for the Temple, extending from

Notes
586 b.c.e. to 70 c.e., when the Romans destroyed the last version, see Gruber, American Synagogues, 15.


13. Eugene Mihaly, “Jewish Prayer and Synagogue Architecture,” Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought 7 (Fall 1958): 309. Mihaly notes: “It is striking and significant that the vast halachic and midrashic literature, concerned as it is with defining all the minutiae, has but negligible reference to the synagogue structure.” Mihaly brought unusual authority to his discussion. He had been ordained as an Orthodox rabbi and had led two congregations before entering the Reform seminary where he was reordained in 1949. See obituary, Jewish News Weekly of Northern California, July 12, 2001.


15. Fein, “Failing God,” 275. The implication was that the necessity to belong to a synagogue, evidenced in the 1950s, had been replaced by the need to identify with Zionism. The power of the Six-Day War to extinguish funding for American projects has been examined in Rochelle G. Saidel, Never Too Late to Remember: The Politics behind New York City’s Holocaust Museum (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1996).


Chapter 1. History: The Postwar Synagogue


2. Sarna, American Judaism, 375; Will Herberg, Protestant, Catholic, Jew.

3. Sarna, American Judaism, 276–79.


5. Gamm, Urban Exodus. Gamm claims that “white flight,” in the case of Jews, was not propelled by racism or fear of crime but by opportunities for housing and relaxed living. For an alternative assessment, relating specifically to Mikveh Israel, see Stanger-Ross, “Neither Fight nor Flight.” For a more general view, see Gordon, Jews in Suburbia, 9.
10. Ibid., 301.
20. Sarna, *American Judaism*, 277. Hasia Diner believes the number who joined congregations was more than 50 percent, but she does not elaborate further (*The Jews of the United States*, 260).
22. “Churches: Architectural Record’s Building Types Study Number 93,” *Architectural Record* 96 (September 1944). Until 1946, the only religious building type in the study was one labeled “churches.” In 1946, the name was generalized, becoming “religious buildings.” “Religious Buildings: Building Types Study Number 129,” *Architectural Record* 102 (September 1947): 99–101, highlighted three synagogue proposals. One appeared in the UAHC report “An American Synagogue for Today and
Notes to Pages 12–13

Tomorrow." The other two were non-site-specific proposals by Percival Goodman, "Synagogue Proposals in a New Traditional Light." It was 1948, however, before a separate listing for "synagogues" appeared in the semiannual index. That was the same year in which Architectural Record began to shun historicist religious buildings in order to concentrate on the development of modernism. The modern synagogue became a desirable building type to showcase. The religious buildings type study for June 1948 (vol. 103) focused on a small number of modern churches, as well as on Harrison & Abramovitz’s plans for a Hillel Foundation at Northwestern University.

23. Kenneth Stowell, editor of Architectural Record, wrote the following as part of an editorial titled "Postwar Quantity and Quality" in Architectural Record 96 (September 1944), devoted to "churches" as part of the Building Types Study: "We look for rapid change when building gets under way again. . . . We look for greater freedom from the conventions of modern stylists, as well as from the conventions of the periodists."

24. Ben C. Bloch (Bloch and Hesse, Architects), "Notes on Postwar Synagogue Design," Architectural Record 96 (September 1944): 104–5. To further clarify his point, Bloch included a photograph of Temple Beth El (Great Neck, New York), a Reform synagogue his firm had designed in the 1920s. A stone building in a vaguely Gothic style, Beth El’s facade confirms that Bloch’s conception of “traditional” was rooted in the use of historicism as an applied stylistic veneer. Beth El’s picturesque massing, loosely conceived squat bell tower, and narrow, tall windows framed by pointed arches were all intended to evoke the drama and spirituality, without the Christianity, of medieval Europe.


28. Wischnitzer, Synagogue Architecture in the United States, 135–36. Wischnitzer listed the Interdenominational Bureau and its publication, which she cited as Planning of Churches, as one of several developments in the creation of postwar religious buildings.


30. Pamphlet No. 40 was titled “Suggested Plan of Organization for a Church Building or Improvement Program.”

31. Michael Brenner points out that the museum opened its first permanent building in 1933, one week before Adolf Hitler became chancellor (The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany, 177). Landsberger served as the director until the Nazis arrested him in 1938. A 1931 exhibition of modern ceremonial objects for all religions had been held at the Berlin Museum of Applied Arts in 1931; it was titled "Kult und Form."


34. Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath, executive director, UAHC, “State of Our Union Address” (39th Convention of the UAHC, March 3–6, 1946). Transcript at UAHC Archives, New York City. Eisendrath notes that the Commission on Synagogue Activities had just finalized arrangements with a professor of Jewish art at Hebrew Union and a “well-known architect in New York City.” The unidentified art historian was Franz Landsberger, who was then teaching at Hebrew Union College. The unnamed architect, undoubtedly Prince, would happily review plans submitted by a congregation. The panel’s name varies; sometimes it is called the “Synagogue Advisory Committee” or “The Architect’s Panel.”

The minutes of the UAHC Executive Board meeting, held in Cleveland, May 21–23, 1949 (UAHC Archives, New York City), show that Rabbi Jacob D. Schwarz, director of synagogue activities, requested a resolution thanking Prince for donating “his time and talents” to congregations who had embarked on building campaigns. Schwarz wanted the resolution because Prince was both a “well known architect” and a “congregational leader” who had done extensive consulting but was reimbursed only for his travel costs. It is highly likely that Prince, whose credentials included the code-sign (with Sylvan Bien) of the stylish Carlyle Hotel in his hometown of New York City, had already received a plum reward, the commission for the UAHC Headquar ters at 838 Fifth Avenue (at 64th Street) in New York. The UAHC, which had moved to that building from its previous home in Cincinnati in 1951, sold the Fifth Avenue building in 1999 to a Sephardic congregation. Beyer Blinder Belle converted the office building into a synagogue; it has since become a residential condominium. Passers-by still know the building by the motto “love thy neighbor” etched onto the front facade.

35. Minutes, UAHC Executive Board meeting, Chicago, January 18, 1944 (UAHC Archives, New York City). Reform officials were always looking over their shoulders at the Conservative movement, envying its ability to garner publicity.


*Commentary*, for which Clement Greenberg served as associate editor, needs to be understood as a champion of liberal but anticommunist thought. Its role as a vehicle for progressive thought of the 1950s is reflected in a comment by Margaret Olin, discussing Meyer Schapiro, Harold Rosenberg, and Clement Greenberg: “Migrating in their youth from far-flung Yiddish-speaking areas of the Bronx and
Brooklyn to Greenwich Village, they published in the Partisan Review and Commentary in the 1940s and 1950s, uniting cultural and political activism and championing Abstract Expressionist painters.” Margaret Olin, “Violating the Second Commandment’s Taboo,” The Forward, November 4, 1994. Commentary, currently a mouthpiece for neoconservative ideas, is no longer connected to the American Jewish Committee, which founded it.

40. Ibid., 240.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid., 241.
44. Franz Landsberger, “Expressive of America,” Commentary 3 (June 1947), 539. This essay was originally prepared for the UAHC.
45. Mendelsohn, “In the Spirit of Our Age,” 542.
46. Young, Text of Memory, 287–91.
47. Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath, introduction to Blake, An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow. The conferences were held in New York, June 1947, and in Chicago, November 1947. The conferences were preceded by and announced in “An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow,” an article that appeared in Architectural Record 102 (September 1947): 99. Eisendrath credits Rabbi Jacob D. Schwarz, the director of UAHC’s Commission on Synagogue Activities, for convening the Synagogue Building Conference.
50. All quotes in this paragraph are from the program for the New York conference, “An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow,” June 22–23, 1947. A copy of the program can be found at the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives. Very little is known today about synagogues built in the 1940s. It is a subject that requires further research.
51. Minutes, UAHC Executive Board meeting, New York City, November 22–23, 1947 (UAHC Archives, New York City).
52. Ernest Grunsfeld quoted in “Report of the Temple Israel Building Commit-
tee,” September 8, 1952, box 471, Pietro Belluschi Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Library. Grunsfeld was one of the architects who participated in the early UAHC (1947) conference on American synagogues.


56. Eisendrath, introduction to Blake, *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow*, xv. Topical chapters cover the history of ancient synagogues; when to think about building instead of remodeling; contemporary art; and the lighting, acoustics, and heating of new buildings. Astoundingly, there is no discussion on cost or advocacy of modernism as a cost-effective solution. A similar dearth is found in the architectural press. Paul C. Ruth, “Modern Church and Building Costs,” *Architectural Record* 100 (October 1946): 106, notes that lack of “archeological” ornament will reduce costs and that “industrial construction” could offer materials that would help to keep costs low. His primary concern is showing how multipurpose spaces could maximize efficiency.


58. James-Chakraborty, *In the Spirit of Our Age*, 32–38. James-Chakraborty notes that Mendelsohn’s first plans, which date from 1946, proved to be too expensive. Groundbreaking was in September 1948. The budget was $565,000 (the equivalent of approximately $5.2 million in 2007).

59. Ibid., 9

60. Ibid., 18–21. James-Chakraborty notes that the exhibition traveled to Chicago and San Francisco.


64. Bloch, “Notes on Postwar Synagogue Design,” 104. Bloch also suggested using folding partitions in the classrooms in order to create space for small classes.


66. Ibid.

67. Ibid., 44. James-Chakraborty quotes from a letter Mendelsohn wrote to his wife in which he described the materials as “silver bronze and brass.”

68. Louise Kayser’s husband, Stephen Kayser, was the first curator at New York’s Jewish Museum, starting in 1947. Thanks to Vivian Mann of the Jewish Museum for pointing out this connection.


73. B’nai Israel was the subject of an article in *Time*, November 15, 1951; also see “New Churches,” *Time*, September 19, 1955.

74. Janay Jadine Wong, “Synagogue Art of the 1950s: A New Context for Abstraction,” *Art Journal* 53 (Winter 1994): 37–43. Goodman also seems to have helped keep the Kootz Gallery afloat. In a letter from Kootz to Goodman, June 23, 1953 (Goodman Papers, 24: 2, Avery Library, Columbia University), Kootz agrees to assign part of his fee for artwork for Beth El Synagogue in Springfield, Massachusetts (which Goodman was designing), in order to pay back a $2,500 loan that Goodman had made to him.

75. Kampf, *Contemporary Synagogue Art*, 75–86.

76. Goodman and Goodman, “Tradition from Function,” 543. That article speaks highly of two Jewish artists, Jacques Lipchitz and Mark Chagall, as the masters of their craft. Both of those artists had participated in the 1947 UAHC New York conference. Gottlieb’s ark curtain for B’nai Israel is now in the collection of the Jewish Museum, New York; the congregation uses an excellent copy of the original.


79. Herbert Ferber, interview by Irving Sandler, April 22, 1968. Smithsonian Archives of American Art (http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/ferber68.htm). Ferber concedes it was the only opportunity he had “to make a large sculpture [that] was for a place that was set aside for it.” He actually created a twelve-foot-high piece after he had been commissioned for one only six feet tall.

80. Minutes, meeting between Building Committee and Goodman, April 26, 1953, Temple Emanu-El Archives, Dallas.


82. The other architects and their projects were Eric Mendelsohn (B’nai Amoona), Harrison & Abramowitz (Benjamin Franklin Memorial Hillel Building, Champaign, Ill.), Loeb, Schlossman & Bennett (Temple Beth-El, South Bend, Ind.), and Leonard Gabert and MacKie & Kamrath (Congregation Emanu-El, Houston). According to Stephen Fox, *Guide to Rice University* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2001), 207, Gabert was a member of the Houston congregation.

Israel is not identified by name in the UAHC book where the text for his drawings states that these show the principle for a synagogue “now being built by Mr. Johnson for an east coast congregation.” He designed no other synagogues. Michael Sorkin’s account of Johnson’s profascist activities, “Where Was Philip?” did not appear until October 1988. It was published first in Spy magazine and then reprinted in Sorkin’s essay collection *Exquisite Corpse: Writing on Buildings* (London: Verso, 1991; paperback ed., 1994), 307–11 [1994 ed.]. Hilton Kramer names additional Jewish clients in his review of Franz Schulze’s biography of Johnson, in *Commentary* 100 (September 1995). Blake, *No Place like Utopia*, writes that many architects were aware of Johnson’s pro-Nazi sympathies. The situation was not unlike the cordial relationship between Henry Ford and his Jewish architect, Albert Kahn.


86. The focus on architecture was an outgrowth of feature articles in the 1940s and 1950s on the most famous practitioners of the day. Clausen, *Pietro Belluschi*, 204.

87. In spite of the difficulty of establishing themselves in suburban settings, several Orthodox synagogues succeeded in doing that and in hiring distinguished architects. Images of several of these buildings were published in the architectural press. These include the Jewish Center of West Orange by Davis, Brody and Orthodox Congregations of Omaha by Kivett and Myers. The Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations launched a $300,000 campaign to establish Orthodox congregations in the suburbs. Abraham J. Karp, “Overview: The Synagogue in America; A Historical Typology,” in Wertheimer, *The American Synagogue*, 24.


Even in 1955 there was an awareness that the divisions of Judaism were becoming less distinct, largely because the Reform movement had already become more traditional and increasingly inclusive. Marshall Sklare, *Conservative Judaism* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1955) 216–17, writes that “the increased traditionalism of Reform, and the Americanization of Orthodoxy, tends to make the type of relationship existing between the three movements previously less meaningful.” Stephen Sharot observes: “The increasing homogenization of socio-economy class and the diffusion of ritual of the three Jewish denominations may be compared with somewhat similar developments among the Protestant denominations in America. Both the theological differences of the liberal and moderate Protestant denominations (Episcopalian,
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Presbyterians, Methodists, Congregationalists, etc.) and the differences in the class composition of their memberships have narrowed.” Sharot, Judaism: A Sociology, 168.

89. “Suburban Synagogue Designs Linked to New Patterns of Life,” New York Times, July 29, 1962. This article cites Irving Lurie as an architectural consultant for the United Synagogue. Nothing is currently known about his work for them.

90. Goodman and Goodman, “Modern Artist as Synagogue Builder,” 55. “Besides, it is understood on all sides that the building will be permanent, unlike the rabbi.”

91. Letter, Levi Olan to Philip Bernstein, November 10, 1958, Temple Emanu-El Archives. Both Olan and Bernstein were nationally known figures. See Weiner, Jewish Stars in Texas, 222. Weiner devotes one chapter to Olan and his achievements. He was a civil rights activist (in the text, he is pictured with Martin Luther King Jr. in January 1963), president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis in the late 1960s, and a Regent of the University of Texas (1963–69). Bernstein, who had an equally distinguished career, had been president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and was the long-standing chair of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. Olan’s sister was also one of his congregants. Letters between rabbis remain an untapped source for further investigation.

92. Letter, Rabbi Norman Gerstenfeld (Washington Hebrew Congregation) to Rabbi Lawrence Schwartz (Jewish Community Center of White Plains), January 14, 1954 (Fritz Nathan Papers, reel 10, Leo Baeck Institute, New York City). George Goodwin has pointed out that Gerstenfeld brought an unusual architectural sophistication to pulpit: His wife was a cousin of Frank Lloyd Wright’s patron Edgar Kaufmann Jr., and the rabbi had made a tentative inquiry to Wright in 1936. See George M. Goodwin, “Wright’s Beth Sholom Synagogue,” American Jewish History 86 no. 3 (1998): 325–48. See also James-Chakraborty, In the Spirit of Our Age, for more on the encounter between Wright and that synagogue. In the late 1940s, Wright and Mendelsohn competed for that commission.

93. “Adath Israel Building Fund Pledge $335,000 in Advance,” Jewish Exponent, October 26, 1951. See Gamm, Urban Exodus, for a broader discussion on Jewish affiliation with synagogues versus Catholic association with their local parishes.


Chapter 2. Decoration: Does It Look Jewish?

1. Clausen, Pietro Belluschi, 193. Wurster became dean at MIT in 1944 and then moved back to his native California, becoming founding dean at the College of Environmental Design at the University of California, Berkeley in 1950. Belluschi succeeded him as MIT dean in November 1950, largely on the basis of Wurster’s hearty recommendation. Clausen’s extensive research on Belluschi has provided factual information about his life and practice.

2. Clausen, Pietro Belluschi, 207. Clausen cites the role of Lewis Mumford in supporting the Bay Area modernists (1947) who were looking to vernacular forms in
order to humanize their modernism. She also gives credit to the Museum of Modern Art for hosting a symposium titled “What Is Happening to Modern Architecture?” in 1948, discussing the issues that Mumford had raised. Also, Oliver Wick, *Robisko*, 17, cites a 1951 symposium at the Museum of Modern Art titled “How to Combine Architecture, Painting, and Sculpture.”


5. Ibid., 146–50.


8. Ibid.

9. There is a rough draft of the program, dated May 22, 1953, in box 471, Belluschi Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Library. It calls for a main sanctuary for 1,200, a “small” sanctuary for 230, and a chapel for 60. Belluschi’s church commissions show that churches, too, were interested in an expandable model. The program for the Central Lutheran Church in Portland, Oregon (1948–50), asked for a flexible space that could expand from 750 to 1,000 worshippers.


A more complete discussion of Temple Israel appeared after it was completed. See “Synagogue, Swampscott/Marblehead, Massachusetts,” *Progressive Architecture* 40, part 1 (June 1959): 124–28. In this particular case, the architect had to work around a partially completed basement level that had been begun by other architects. The *Architectural Record* issue, focusing on religious buildings, also had a section devoted to “Architecture in the Atomic Age.” John Stewart Detlie asked in his introduction to the issue, “What congregation or church or temple demands that its edifice be witness to the strength and fervor of its faith and stand boldly as a symbol in a perilous age?”

11. Letter, Leon Lipschutz (Carl Koch & Associates), to Harry Simon (chair of the Temple Israel Building Committee), November 27, 1957, box 471, Belluschi Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Library. Biographical information and description of Filipowski’s projects can be found at the Archives of American Art (Smithsonian Institution), Filipowski Papers, box Ve6B1.


16. Letter, Belluschi to C. Frederick Wise (associated architect in Philadelphia),
June 25, 1957, box 471, Belluschi Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse
University Library.

17. Letter, Belluschi to Wise, August 2, 1957, box 471, Belluschi Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Library.

18. Letter, Belluschi to C. Frederick Wise, September 18, 1959, box 471, Belluschi Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Library.


20. Wischnitzer, Synagogue Architecture in the United States, 40–41, and European Synagogues, 246–47. She does feel that the Holocaust cemented the star with Jewish identity and survival.


23. Documentation can be found in “Temple Emanu-El, 1956–1966, Dallas, TX,” Environmental Design Archives University of California, Berkeley (hereafter referred to as ED Archives), IV. 1299 (5337). In a letter, dated March 14, 1955, to Meyer and Sandfield, Wurster wrote that landscape architect Lawrence Halprin had come by to see him and had mentioned that he planned to go to Emanu-El. Wurster reported that he told Halprin: “This is just the time for me to go as I have been feeling guilty that I’ve never been to a service and here I am helping on a synagogue.” He added: “It so happened that I attended a most remarkable service and I enclose the program. It was beautiful and impressive.” From this description, there is no doubt that this was Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco.


25. Extract of minutes, Temple Board of Trustees, June 6, 1950, Temple Emanu-El Archives, Dallas. The deans are not identified by name. Gerry Cristol, archivist at Emanu-El, has been an important asset in locating information in the synagogue’s extensive and well-organized collection.

26. Cristol, A Light in the Prairie, 162.


31. Letter, Bloom to Prince, July 22, 1952, Temple Emanu-El Archives. In an undated letter to Bloom, also in the Temple Emanu-El Archives, Prince felt that there was no need for him to come, as the synagogue was negotiating with Saarinen and Mendelsohn, but asked to be considered should the situation change: “Should the present picture change and your committee still be interested in my qualifications,
background and experience in Temple design and planning, I would appreciate being so advised."

32. Letter, Louis Tobian (chair of the Emanu-El Building Committee) to Henry Frank of Baltimore, March 23, 1953, indicates that Tobian had gone to see "your architect" in New York City. Minutes of meeting with Goodman, April 26, 1953, Temple Emanu-El Archives.

33. Letter, Wurster to Gyorgy Kepes, July 12, 1955, ED Archives. See also letter, Wurster to Sandfield and Meyer, November 17, 1953, ED Archives. Documentation can be found in "Temple Emanu-El, 1956–1966, Dallas, TX," ED Archives. The contract had been signed on December 1, 1953. Wurster was a dear friend of Mendelsohn's—he was the person Mendelsohn had requested as the speaker at his funeral. Mendelsohn died in September 1953.


35. Ibid., 160. The generally held assumption is that Jews, in spite of their inclusion in so many areas of postwar society, were usually not asked to serve on museum boards. Weisberg's presidency of the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts shows that this a topic, outside the scope of this book, that might be worthy of future investigation.


41. Letter, Wurster to Gyorgy Kepes, July 12, 1955, ED Archives. Howard Meyer later remembered that Sam Bloom had suggested Kepes (who had taught at North Texas State College in nearby Denton in the early 1940s) and that Wurster, who had appointed Kepes to the MIT faculty, was extremely enthusiastic. See "Art and Architecture of Temple Emanu-El," panel held February 10, 1974, quoted in Cristol, *A Light in the Prairie*, 167.


44. Ibid., 10–11.

45. Letter, Kepes to Meyer and Sandfield, March 5, 1956, ED Archives. Kepes, in a letter to Sandfield, November 9, 1959, says that he did not keep any drawings or sketches for this project.
46. Letter, Kepes to Meyer and Sandfield, March 5, 1956, Temple Emanu-El Archives, indicates that Albers had been to see Kepes and that she decided a fabric panel would be best. She hoped saving yardage would enable her to “weave a plain gold fabric for the background of the Torah.” Letter, Kepes to Meyer and Sandfield, June 4, 1956, ED Archives, mentions that Albers suggested that she create the chapel curtain and ark lining.


48. Ibid.

49. Ibid., 120.

50. Letter, Wurster to Kepes, March 20, 1956, ED Archives. Interestingly, Rabbi Norman Gerstenfeld of Washington Hebrew Congregation wrote to Louis Tobian of Dallas on December 30, 1953, that he would recommend Kelly for lighting and Robert Newman (yet another person from the MIT faculty), who had both worked on his synagogue. Temple Emanu-El Archives.

51. Letter, Kepes to Wurster, March 25, 1956; and letter, Meyer and Sandfield to Kepes, March 12, 1956, both at ED Archives. Kelly seems to have been consulted because the engineers (Blum and Guerrero) would not support the lighting scheme.

52. Letter, Meyer and Sandfield to Herman Blum (Blum and Guerrero, Engineers), February 27, 1956, ED Archives. Letter, Sandfield to Kepes, May 8, 1956, ED Archives, indicates that Kelly had come to Dallas and made a trip to the building site with Sandfield.

53. Letter, Meyer and Sandfield to Blum, February 27, 1956, ED Archives.

54. Kelly’s survey, June 25, 1956, is in ED Archives.

55. Minutes, Executive and Art Committees, April 14 and 15, 1956, ED Archives. Kepes’s recommendation came “per suggestion from the lighting expert.”

56. Letter, Meyer and Sandfield to Kepes, June 22, 1956. They were also waiting for Kelly for the final lighting scheme. Per letter, Kepes to Meyer and Sandfield, June 4, 1956, he was awaiting Kelly’s “checking on our lighting plan, price estimate, the manufacturing of the fixtures, chain, etc.” All correspondence is in ED Archives.

57. Letter, Sandfield to Kepes, May 8, 1956, ED Archives.

58. Letter, Kepes to Meyer and Sandfield, May 18, 1956, Temple Emanu-El Archives. Although unspecified, the lighter color was most likely gold. Kepes, letter to Meyer and Sandfield, March 5, 1956, Temple Emanu-El Archives, indicates that Albers wanted a plain gold interior fabric but that she also supplied a sample of black and silver.


62. Clipping of newspaper article in Emanu-El Archives. The photo of architects inspecting the model at the State Fair was published in the *Dallas Morning News*, October 7, 1957. It shows architects John W. Lawrence (New Orleans), Walter Netsch (Chicago), and Don P. Stevens (Albuquerque).

63. Letters, Meyer to Wurster, October 9, 1959; and Meyer to Morris Ketchum Jr. (president, Architectural League of New York), March 7, 1960, both in ED Archives.

64. Letter, Kepes to Sandfield, November 9, 1959, Temple Emanu-El Archives.


66. Letter, Olan to Wurster, August 14, 1957, ED Archives.

67. Letter, Wurster to Stern, November 6, 1956, ED Archives.


69. Gruber, *American Synagogues*, 20. The Pascher Workshop decamped from the Jewish Museum in 1988 and has been absorbed by New York’s 92nd Street Y. While the inscription on the ark at Belluschi’s Adath Israel looks like Wolpert’s design, no documents have yet surfaced to prove that.


71. The American Craftsmen’s Council sponsored the museum, later called the American Craft Museum. The organization, now called the American Craft Council, is no longer connected to the museum now known as the Museum of Art and Design. The council’s current mission is to document and preserve evidence of crafts in America from the 1940s to the present.

72. Files at the American Craft Council show that several synagogues that owned works by sculptors Ibram Lassaw and Herbert Ferber, including Fairmount Temple of Cleveland (Percival Goodman), turned down the loan request from the museum’s director because these ceremonial objects were needed for the High Holiday season. Sculptors were included, at that time, in the definition of “craft.”

73. Prior exhibitions, none of which contained synagogue-related material, include “Contemporary Religious Arts in Texas,” March 31–April 11, 1957; see “The Record Reports,” *Architectural Record* 119 (January 1956): 20. According to *Interiors* 116 (June 1957): 10, the Museum of Modern Art organized a traveling exhibition, “Modern Church Architecture,” which was a global survey in two parts, with separate American
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and international sections. Grace Cathedral of San Francisco held a juried exhibition, “Church Art Today,” December 1–22, 1957. A press release from the American Craft Council indicates that all work had to be “suitable to Christian liturgical and devotional use.”

74. Letter, Robert Laurer (assistant director, Museum of Contemporary Crafts) to architect Paul Thiry, September 19, 1957, American Craft Council Archives.

75. Thomas B. Tibbs, director of the museum, wrote in his foreword to the catalog that the church was again becoming an active patron and that the exhibit would highlight that, as well as being “a survey of recent work in the liturgical arts.” American Craft Council Archives. The American Federation of Arts toured the architecture section of the exhibit under the title “God and Man” (according to itinerary in the Davis, Brody archives; the stops included the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, Cincinnati Art Museum, Rochester Memorial Art Gallery, and Syracuse Museum of Fine Arts).

76. All four of the works for Jewish communities were later included in Kampf, Contemporary Synagogue Art.

77. The catalog for this exhibition lauds the architecture and especially the harmony between building and decoration. In addition, some works for synagogues were shown in a separate section for “ceremonial objects and appointments,” including Jack Lenor Larsen’s “casement” (ark cover) for the Jewish chapel at Brandeis University. Ludwig Wolpert showed a menorah, eternal light, and a breastplate for a torah. Some artists worked both for synagogues and churches: Judith Brown exhibited a crucifix in addition to her pieces for Congregation Beth El, one of the highlighted synagogues. Zelda Thomas Strecker showed wall hangings for both Jewish and Christian clients.


79. Once again, the UAHC tried to aid its congregations; the organization even maintained an “approved” list of artists that included Samuel Wiener, Ludwig Wolpert, and Seymour Lipton. Letter, Rabbi Eugene Lipman (director of UAHC Commission on Synagogue Activities) to Garson Meyer of Temple B’rith Kodesh in Rochester, New York, September 11, 1959, Bernstein Papers at the University of Rochester.

80. Letter, Goodman to Olga Gueft (managing editor of Interiors magazine), December 29, 1947, box 24, Goodman Collection, Avery Library, Columbia University. Goodman wrote that he was already designing two synagogues for which he was proposing “for the first time in many a year, to have a team of architect, painter and sculptor collaborate almost from the start. The sculptor is Lipschitz [sic], the painter, Chagall.”


82. The Fritz Nathan Papers at the Leo Baeck Institute in New York City has a list of the artisans involved: Mary Allarad was the weaver of the ark curtain, made to
the specifications of Mr. and Mr. William Wiesner; Helen Beling was sculptor of the eternal light. The exterior has wall sculpture designed by Jose de Creeft, the figu- 
tative sculptor of the Alice in Wonderland statue in Central Park. Nathan also designed at least four other synagogues, including B’nai Jacob, Woodbridge, Conn., and Mishkan Israel, Hamden, Conn., both in the late 1950s. Prior to beginning work on the White Plains synagogue, he had already completed work for Congregation Sons of Israel, Woodmere, N.Y. (1946–48), and the United Jewish Center, Danbury, Conn. (1951–55).


84. Schulze, Philip Johnson, 238–39.


86. Information about KTI comes from a KTI commemorative booklet titled “A Century of Jewish Commitment, 1887–1987.”

87. Lassaw, in 1960, received his first church commission, for a baldachin and altar screen at St. Leonard Friary in Dayton, Ohio.

88. An image of Beth El highlights the New York Times article reporting on the second UAHC conference. Stanley Rowland Jr., “Synagogues Here Hailed on Design,” New York Times, December 2, 1957. The choice of a Conservative synagogue to represent a Reform conference is an indication of the fluidity between the two movements. The article also reports that the cost of Beth El was $400,000 (approximately $3 million in today’s costs) and that approximately thirty synagogues per year were being built in the New York metropolitan area. Letter, Thomas S. Tibbs (director of the Museum of Contemporary Crafts) to Davis, Brody & Wisniewski, August 6, 1957. He requested material on the Jewish Center of West Orange. This raises the possibility that the architects asked to make a substitution (American Craft Council files).

89. “Art and Architecture Exhibit: ‘The Patron Church’” is a one-page explanation and montage in “The Record Reports,” Architectural Record 123 (March 1958): 18. Nine photos are presented, six of which show different views of Beth El, including the stained glass, eternal light, and tapestries for the sanctuary. Thumbnail photos show an installation view of the exhibit as well as exterior view of Eero Saarinen’s chapel for Stephens College and Anshen & Allen’s Chapel of the Holy Cross. The award was the Edward Fields Award, presented by the manufacturer of artist-designed tapestries, which was given to the best Jewish and the best Christian examples that displayed “the excellence of their architecture, design and the extensive use of the artist and craftsman in the design and execution of important details” (from public relations material at the American Craft Council, n.d.). The Jewish prize was an Edward Fields tapestry designed by American painter Abraham Rattner; the Christian award, a Fields tapestry designed by American painter Hans Moller, went to the Danforth Chapel
designed by James M. Hunter for Colorado State University in Fort Collins. Rattner was, at that time, handled by the Samuel Kootz Gallery, which also represented Las-saw, Motherwell, Gottlieb, and Ferber.

90. Letter, Morris Ketchum Jr. to Davis, Brady [sic] & Wisniewski, September 8, 1959. Davis, Brody [now Davis Brody Bond Aedas] archives. They happily accepted in a letter to Ketchum, October 20, 1959, also in the firm’s archives.

91. Undated press release from Seaporcel Metals, “Double Honor-Winning Syna-gogue Uses Porcelain Enamel Curtain Walls,” Davis, Brody archives. Another undated press release, also in the Davis, Brody archives, shows that Beth El was the only syna-gogue in a small exhibition of “churches” that had won awards at a past annual con-ference sponsored by the Department of Church Building and Architecture of the National Council of Churches and the Church Architectural Guild of America. Beth El’s award was granted in 1958. These were photographs meant to illustrate “trends in contemporary design.”

92. Two of their other projects were for Orthodox congregations: Agudath Sha-lom, Stanford, Conn., featured in Progressive Architecture (March 1966): 47; and Sons of Israel in Lakewood, N.J., featured in Progressive Architecture (March 1965): 138–41.

93. Judaism, published by the American Jewish Congress, was subtitled A Quar-terly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought. In the mid-1950s, contributing editors included luminaries Martin Buber, Abraham J. Heschel, and Nelson Glueck, president of the Reform movement’s seminary, Hebrew Union College. Jonathan Sarna (American Judaism, 281) notes that the founding of the journal in 1952 was an attempt to create a forum that would allow crosscurrents among the various institutional divisions of Judaism.

94. Rowland, “Synagogues Here Hailed on Design.”

95. Information is from records at the Davis, Brody archives. It is unclear what part landscape architect Karl Linn played in the sitting. He was listed in some documents, but the architects omitted his name from the list of credits they sent to the director of the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, indicating that his connection to the project was probably limited.


98. St. Francis of Assisi in Weston, Conn., was included in the exhibit, and photo-graphs of it were published in Architectural Record 119 (June 1956): 202–5. It appears not to have been built to Joseph Salerno’s plan. Its roof massing, stone wall, raised pre-cinct, and exterior grillwork bear uncanny resemblance to Beth El, another indicator of how interchangeable churches and synagogues were at the time. See Chad Randl, A-frame (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), 127. Randl notes the transition: the design “for play was effortlessly being adapted as a place to pray.”
99. Each received commissions from other architects for Judaica: Brown for an eternal light at nearby Temple Sharey Tefilio in East Orange, N.J.; Wiener for Percival Goodman’s Beth El synagogue in Rochester, N.Y.; and Davis, Brody’s Congregation Sons of Israel in Lakewood, N.J.

100. Samuel Wiener, interview with author, April 13, 2008. Temple Beth Emeth in Albany (1953–57), designed by Goodman, was another early stained-glass commission for Wiener.

101. Merkel, Eero Saarinen, 73.


Chapter 3. Context: Client, Architect, Philadelphia (and Rochester)


2. Ibid. The Kahns lived in an apartment in the Israelis’ house in West Philadelphia while Sue Ann Kahn was growing up. Their West Philadelphia residence was at 53rd and Chester, in a largely Irish Catholic neighborhood. Sue Ann remembers being invited only once to a seder.

3. Historically, Jews have always divided themselves into three castes according to patrilineal heritage. The descendants of the high priests are kohanim; the others are Levites or Israelites. In America, these distinctions are still recognized by the order in which people are called upon to read from the Torah during an Orthodox or Conservative service. Another interpretation, as Carol Krinsky points out, is that kahn means boat or rowboat in German and may have no religious significance.

4. For a more detailed description of Kahn’s trip to Israel in 1949, see Solomon, Louis I. Kahn’s Trenton Jewish Community Center.

5. See box 63, “American Technion Society,” Louis I. Kahn Collection, University of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Philadelphia. This archive will be cited hereafter as “Kahn Collection.” Kahn was invited to join the Technion Society as early as December 1948. There is no evidence that he joined until 1954, when his friend Samuel Genel was the president of the Philadelphia chapter. Letter, Genel to Kahn, February 6, 1954, box 63, “American Technion Society,” Kahn Collection. Technion is Israel’s technology university.


7. Ada Karmi-Melamede, interview with author, March 17, 1993, Tel Aviv, stated that her father, architect Dov Karmi, had been “assigned” by the government to head a team to design Besor. Karmi put together a group of young architects and also made the decision to invite Kahn.

8. Letter, Avraham Harman (Israeli ambassador to the United States) to Kahn,
June 7, 1962, box 64, “Tel-Aviv Townplanning Competition,” Kahn Collection. Har- 
mann’s invitation indicated that the government of Israel and the municipality of Tel 
Aviv were sponsoring the competition.

files, Israel Museum.

10. Letter, Kahn to Benjamin Weiss (copy to Rabbi Klein), May 20, 1955, box 65, 
“LIK-Miscellaneous 1954–56,” Kahn Collection. Kahn wrote this letter after learning 
that he had not received the commission.

11. Harriet Kessler, “Ahavath Israel’s Goals Perpetuated by Gifts,” Jewish Exponent, 
January 20, 1984. Clipping in Philadelphia Jewish Archives at Balch Institute, now 
Philadelphia Jewish Archives Center. (Differences in transliteration are in original.) 
Kessler notes that the congregation, which was chartered in 1927, “reached its prime 
during the period of expansion after World War II” but that the demography of the 
neighborhood shifted by the late 1950s. By 1981, the congregation had a membership 
of fewer than 100 families. The synagogue closed that year; the building was sold the 
following year to Grace Temple Baptist Church.

12. Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg (rabbi at Ahavath Israel, 1944–47), phone conversa-
tion with author, February 22, 1994; and interview with author, March 17, 1994, Te-
neck, N.J.

13. For more information on these two synagogues, see Solomon, Louis I. Kahn’s 
Trenton Jewish Community Center.

American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow, 89. He summed up the precedent: 
“A typical plan of the older American Synagogue was to have the worship hall as the 
major floor area of the structure. It was generally raised half a story above the street 
and designed to contain seating for the entire congregation. Its decoration was as elab-
orate as means allowed. Below was a large, low-ceiled room, the vestry, used for 
social functions, lectures, and the like. Flanking it were permanent or semipermanent 
classrooms.” See also Lance Sussman, “The Suburbanization of American Judaism 
as Reflected in Synagogue Building and Architecture, 1945–1975,” American Jewish 
History 75 (September 1985): 33. Sussman writes that before 1945, “the sanctuary was 
generally a half-story above the street. Downstairs was a large, low-ceiled room, the 
vestry, used for social affairs and various educational activities. Sometimes modest an-
exes were built to house additional classrooms, meeting rooms, and various offices.”

noting that both Ahavath Israel and Adath Jeshurun were Conservative synagogues, 
stated that Ahavath Israel was “basically Orthodox,” whereas Adath Jeshurun leaned 
toward Reform.

Perspecta 3 (Spring 1955): 62–63. The second-floor plan published in Perspecta was 
printed in reverse.
22. Letter, Robert Alpert (associate rabbi of Beth Sholom Congregation) to author, May 15, 1996: “As a Frank Lloyd Wright building, the only synagogue ever built by this great American architect, we are privileged to host visitors from all over the world throughout the year. The renown and honor that come from this is considerable when considering that new arrivals in the community will come first to our congregation when they are looking for a Conservative synagogue.”
28. Johnson and Belluschi were quoted in “On the Responsibility of the Architect,” Perspecta 2 (1953), based on a taped session with them and Kahn, as well as Vincent Scully and Paul Weiss. Wurster and Abramovitz appeared with Kahn and others at the conference “Architecture and the University,” Princeton University, December 11–13, 1953; see Kahn Collection, box 30.

32. Letter, Kahn to Wurster, December 17, 1953, Kahn Collection, file 030.II.A

34. Letter, Kahn to Anne Tyng, December 18, 1953, in Louis Kahn, Louis Kahn to Anne Tyng, 77–78.


37. Thomas H. Creighton, edited responses to inquiries, “The Sixties: A P/A Symposium on the State of Architecture,” part 1, Progressive Architecture (March 1961): 122–23. Fred Bassetti noted: “No one could argue that Mies or Aalto or Louis Kahn are confused.” Paul Schweikher wrote: “Only one or two know which way to go (in this country, Mies and Kahn); the rest are without conviction, waste good talent and energy in unrelated insignificant bypaths; popular perhaps and frequently profitable, but architecturally pointless.”

38. Thanks to William Whitaker of the Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania, for pointing out Kahn’s friendship with Thiry and indicating that Kahn owned a copy of Thiry, Bennett, and Kamphoefner’s book, Churches and Temples. Kamphoefner, dean at North Carolina State College, should have been known to Kahn, too.


42. Kahn, “Directions in Architecture.”

43. Kahn at CIAM’59, in Newman, Dokumente der Modernen Architektur, 208.

44. Rabbinic interpretation has always viewed the ancient temple as a series of progressions from the general world to Israel: “to walled cities within Israel; the wall of Jerusalem; the Temple Mount” and then to a series of decreasingly smaller courts
that were assigned to gender or tribal allegiance. “The plan and ornamentation of the
Temple articulated this socio-spatial stratification: larger spaces progressively enclose
smaller spaces and smaller demographic groups.” Mitchell Schwarzer, “The Archi-
tecture of Talmud,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 60 (December

Wallace K. Harrison into their partnership; see Victoria Newhouse, *Wallace K. Har-

46. Peter Eisenstadt, interview with author in Rochester, April 26, 2007, indicated
that Rochester probably had the largest Jewish population in upstate New York in
the 1950s.

47. Eisenstadt, *Affirming the Covenant*, 201–2.


49. Minutes, Beth El Ritual Committee, November 7, 1960, in the Beth El folder at
the Special Collections Library, Jewish Theological Seminary. Also, for more history
on Beth El, see Karp, *Jewish Continuity in America*.


51. Ibid., 121.

52. Report of committee formed in 1955 to “evaluate our picture and develop long
range plans for the Temple of Tomorrow and do so with imagination and courage,”
cited in a letter from president Garson Meyer to the membership, March 19, 1956,
Philip S. Bernstein Papers, University of Rochester, box 14 D 299.

53. Correspondence, Philip S. Bernstein Papers, University of Rochester, box 14 D
299. Letter, Bernstein to Olan, October 10, 1958, Temple Emanu-El Archives. Rabbi
Bernstein set the stage for Goldberg’s visit by writing to his friend Rabbi Levi Olan
in Dallas. Bernstein noted that Albert Goldberg was a board member and close per-
sonal friend. While the relationship between Bernstein and Olan was very cordial, it
is unclear if they actually knew each other while growing up in Rochester.

54. Bernstein’s report at the annual meeting, January 26, 1958, Bernstein Papers,
University of Rochester, box 1:33.

55. Eisenstadt, *Affirming the Covenant*, 202. Peter Eisenstadt has not been able to
recreate that list. The congregation’s annual report of May 19, 1958, shows trustees had
voted to build a new temple; they had already hired Belluschi and the local firm of
Waas-dorp, Northrup and Austin. Bernstein Papers, Box 14 D 299.

am happy that you called Wurster, and that he is interested in working with you.” In
an earlier letter, Bernstein to Olan, December 24, 1958, Bernstein noted that his con-
gregation was expecting Wurster in January and that a consulting role might be a good
fit for a congregation that wanted to make sure that a local architect played a role.
Temple Emanu-El Archives.
57. Letter, C. L. Todd to Lewis Davis, January 6, 1960, Davis, Brody archives. Todd was the local architect, part of the firm Todd & Giroux.

58. Abraham Karp arrived in 1956; he had been rabbi at Temple Israel, Swampscott, Massachusetts, from 1948 to 1951, before Belluschi became that congregation’s architect.


60. Ibid.

61. In the mid-1960s, Kaish received commissions from other synagogues. Her bronze piece Ruth is at Temple Israel, Westport, Conn. See Kampf, Contemporary Synagogue Art, 62—63, 227—37, for an extensive description of the TBK ark.


68. The fan shape had been used more successfully by Kenneth Lind at Temple Isaiah in Los Angeles. Lind’s sanctuary opened onto a shallow assembly/recreation room, thereby obviating the deep combined space of Beth El when it was opened on the High Holy Days. Images of Lind’s project were widely published. See “Progress Preview,” Progressive Architecture (March 1952): 15—16; “Temple Isaiah,” Progressive Architecture (October 1956): 112—15.


71. Jean France (architectural historian who was active in the selection process), text for the brochure given by the Unitarian Church to visitors, n.d., and still available at the church.

73. The name “Mikveh Israel” is preceded by “Kahal Kadosh,” meaning a holy community. In the records, Mikveh Israel is often referred to as KKMI.

74. Though Sephardic ritual is derived from the practices of the Jews of the Iberian peninsula, the majority of the Mikveh Israel congregation has long been Ashkenazi, of German or eastern European descent.

75. Letter, David Arons (president of Mikveh Israel) to Francis J. Lammer (executive director, Redevelopment Authority of the City of Philadelphia), n.d., but prior to May 1961, Kahn Collection, box 38, “Mikveh Israel — All Correspondence to 1971.”


77. Leeser held the title “chazzan,” which today would denote the cantor, the person in charge of liturgical music. In the nineteenth century the term was used for congregational leaders who were not ordained rabbis. Mikveh Israel uses Sephardic terminology, including “parnas” for president of the congregation and “minister” to address the rabbi. It also uses the Sephardic term “almemar” or “tebah” instead of bimah. In order to reduce confusion, terms here will be the Ashkenazic ones that are in more common use in the United States.

For more information on Leeser’s first — and failed — Jewish Publication Society (1845–51) and a history of the successful publishing endeavor with the same name, begun in 1888, see Sarna, JPS: The Americanization of Jewish Culture, 1988–1998, 1–27.

78. While it is known that both pairs arrived at Mikveh Israel in the eighteenth century, it is unclear which is the one that was commissioned by the congregation. See David L. Barquist, Myer Myers: Jewish Silversmith in Colonial New York (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Art Gallery and Yale University Press, 2001).

79. Sarna, American Judaism, 52–53.


81. According to Wischnitzer, Synagogue Architecture in the United States, 32, Alfred Bendiner received a 1953 Penrose Grant from the American Philosophical Society in order to reconstruct the plans for the Strickland building. His findings and drawings were contained in Bendiner’s September 1954 preliminary report to the Society. It is not clear why they were never published in the Transactions of the American Philosophical Society. They would have been completed after the 1953 volume dedicated to early Philadelphia architecture was published. It is unclear if they were late for the publication or not commissioned until an omission of Mikveh Israel was spotted. Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, n.s., vol. 43, part 1 (1953).
82. Wischnitzer, *Synagogue Architecture in the United States*, 28–32; Wischnitzer, “The Egyptian Revival in Synagogue Architecture,” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 41 (September 1951): 61–75. Wischnitzer believed that the parti was established before Strickland began work on the project in 1822. This article provides the most reliable information on Mikveh Israel’s earlier buildings.


85. Rachel Wischnitzer has dubbed this the “Sephardi Two-Pole Pattern.” Wischnitzer, *European Synagogues*, 57–75.

86. Ashkenazic performance of the same ritual lacks the slow, deliberate steps; it employs a less coordinated march that often brings the Torah through the synagogue aisles. It was typical of Ashkenazic synagogues, up until the twentieth century, to place the bimah in the center of the sanctuary. It was never as distantly removed as the Sephardic model.

87. Unknown handwritten memo, “Purpose: Crystallizing Program,” December 5, 1961, Kahn Collection, box 38, “M.I. Job Meeting Drafting Rm. File 1961–1963.” It mentions “Benches from Strickland Syn. at 6th & Lombard.” The latter address was presumably where benches were stored.


95. The address is Broad and York Streets, also listed as “6835 Old York Road” on Mikveh Israel’s letterhead in the 1960s. In the 1950s, suburban churches and synagogues favored Old York Road (outside the city) as a premier address.

96. Although all three buildings remain, Mikveh Israel is the only one where the original spaces and decorative motifs are visible. Gratz College was founded in 1856 when Hyman Gratz bequeathed money to Mikveh Israel to establish a teacher training institute. The college met at Mikveh Israel from its founding, until the move to the 1909 complex. Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning was founded in 1907. The Broad and York site was its first building. Both of these institutions still exist. Gratz College has retained its name and is currently located in suburban Mel-
rose Park. Dropsie College became Dropsie University and then the Annenberg Research Institute. It is presently known as the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, although its Philadelphia site is not on the university’s main campus.

97. William G. Tachau, “The Architecture of the Synagogue,” in Harry Schneiderman, ed., The American Jewish Year Book 5687, vol. 28 (Philadelphia: American Jewish Committee/Jewish Publication Society, 1926), 155–93. Illustrations include the following synagogues that Tachau designed by himself or with a partner: Temple Israel, New York City (Tachau & Vought); Beth Israel, Atlantic City, N.J. (Tachau & Vought); Sinai Temple, Mt. Vernon, N.Y. (Tachau & Vought); B’nai Israel Synagogue, Elizabeth, N.J. (Tachau & Vought); an addition to Kneseth Israel Synagogue, Philadelphia (Tachau & Vought). See also Robert Koch, “The Medieval Castle Revival: New York Armories,” Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 14 (October 1955): 23–39. Thanks to Katherine Tachau for sharing her research on her ancestor. Katherine Tachau’s research at the Library of the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, University of Pennsylvania, reveals that the firm was known as Tachau & Vought by February 10, 1922. She has also identified some of her relative’s other public work, including the Louisville Public Library, Louisville Jewish Hospital, and a dormitory at Vassar College, and has discussed his religious affiliation. By the time he got the commission from Mikveh Israel, Tachau was no longer a practicing Jew and had converted to Christianity; this does not seem to have interfered with his work on the project.

98. Katherine Tachau has found correspondence between Adler and Tachau, dated September 1923, in which Tachau claims that Dropsie College was designed in the style of Louis XVI. She has also found correspondence from September 1923 in which Adler asked Tachau to write a review of Richard Krautheimer’s Mittelalterliche Synagogen, about which Tachau was quite excited.

100. Ibid.
102. Letter from Cyrus Adler to Daniel P. Hays in New York City, April 21, 1921, Adler Papers, Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, University of Pennsylvania, box 106 FF18. Thanks to Katherine Tachau for this citation.
104. In early 1962, the Melrose Park School was demolished. Mikveh Israel then moved its school to Oak Lane Day School in another northern suburb, Glenside. By the end of 1963, the school had moved again, this time to Old York Road in Elkins Park.


107. Minutes, Mikveh Israel Board of Managers, May 29, 1959, Mikveh Israel Archives.


109. “PA Awards,” *Progressive Architecture* 42 (January 1961): 142–44. *Progressive Architecture* magazine gave its annual Residential Award for that year to I. M. Pei for his design of Society Hill Towers (originally called Washington Square East and later renamed), the three reinforced concrete towers that were to be the centerpiece of a plan that included 150 townhouses as well as 72 rehabilitated houses and 26 “fill-in” buildings.

110. Minutes, Mikveh Israel Board of Managers, May 29, 1959, Mikveh Israel Archives.

111. Ibid.

112. Gamm, *Urban Exodus*, 20. It was more typical that a congregation would follow members to an outlying area, a move that would assure immediate members and financing.

113. Resolution supporting the move to the Mall, minutes, Mikveh Israel annual meeting, November 6, 1960, Mikveh Israel Archives.


115. Ibid., 119.


117. Ibid.


119. Donna Nedderman (Touro Synagogue archivist), phone conversation with author, March 7, 1996. Touro had made a remarkable comeback. It had been abandoned in the 1820s and had been revived in the 1880s. By 1948, it had a stable but
small congregation. A “Society of Friends” was set up to conduct national fund-raising because it was apparent that the synagogue could maintain a small congregation but could not afford extensive restoration work.

120. Bertram W. Korn, “Prelude to Progress, Address of the President,” delivered at the Fifty-eighth Annual Meeting of the American Jewish Historical Society at the Baltimore Hebrew College and Teachers’ Training School, February 20, 1960, and printed in *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 49 (March 1960): 147–56: “It is our hope and expectation that by this coming September at the latest, the Society will have left our minuscule rooms in the Jewish Theological Seminary of America for quarters which will meet our minimum needs, even if they will not provide thoroughly ideal facilities.” In addition, Richard Saul Wurman (in Kahn’s office) reported in an office memo of February 7, 1962, a phone conversation with David Arons regarding the American Jewish Historical Society Library. He noted: “Nothing is definite concerning this aspect of the total project and there isn’t any person/s to contact, before say April, for any more information.” Kahn Collection, box 38, “Mikveh Israel — Meeting Notes to 1966.” Minutes from the Mikveh Israel Board of Managers Meeting, April 16, 1962, Mikveh Israel Archives, indicate that a final decision was expected by early May.

121. Minutes, Mikveh Israel Board of Managers, May 25, 1960, Mikveh Israel Archives.


123. Letter, Arons to Lammer, n.d., but prior to May 1961, Kahn Collection, box 38, “Mikveh Israel — All Correspondence to 1971.”

124. Minutes, Architectural Committee, May 3, 1961, Kahn Collection, box 38, “Mikveh Israel — All Correspondence to 1971”; Bernard Alpers, report of the Architectural Committee, May 3, 1961, Kahn Collection, box 38, “Mikveh Israel — All Correspondence to 1971.” Orthodox congregations follow the strict observance of holding three prayer services each day. Typically, the morning service is held very early; the afternoon and evening services are often recited sequentially in the late afternoon.


129. Minutes, Mikveh Israel Board of Managers, May 17, 1961, Mikveh Israel Archives.

130. Minutes, special meeting, Mikveh Israel Board of Managers, May 24, 1961, Mikveh Israel Archives.

131. For a discussion of Kahn’s lack of work in Philadelphia, see Peter Shedd Reed,


134. Margaret Yarnall (curator of Bendiner Collection, University of Pennsylvania Archives), phone conversation with author, May 31, 1996, indicated that the Bendiner Collection has no material on Mikveh Israel. Yarnall did remember Mrs. Bendiner saying that Kahn and Alfred Bendiner never spoke after Bendiner felt that Kahn was trying to win a synagogue commission that Bendiner felt he deserved. The feud would most likely have been over the Mikveh Israel commission. Before Kahn received the commission, Bendiner expressed belief he would be chosen. See minutes, Mikveh Israel Board of Managers, September 14, 1960, Mikveh Israel Archives. After general discussion of the building, it was noted that: “Apparently, Mr. Alfred Bendiner feels that the Congregation is committed to him.” Presumably, this meant that Bendiner felt that the congregation was indebted to him and would give him the commission, although the meaning is unclear. Daniel Cohen (former chair of the School Committee), interview with author, October 22, 1996, Melrose Park, Pa., says that some members of Mikveh Israel felt that, out of loyalty, they should have offered the job to Bendiner.

135. Siskin came to NSCI in 1948; he became emeritus in 1972. The congregation was organized in 1920. Alschuler’s father, who had designed the congregation’s first building in 1928, had an illustrious career in Chicago. See Gruber, American Synagogues, 54–59.


137. Kahn at CIAM ’59, in Newman, Dokumente der Modernen Architektur, 214.

138. See Kahn Collection, box 61, “Louis I. Kahn — Architecture League.”


140. Ibid.

141. Letter, Kahn to Alpers, July 7, 1961, Kahn Collection, box 38, “Mikveh Israel—All Correspondence to 1971.”


143. The drawings, filed with drafted drawings for Kahn’s Mikveh Israel, were executed between July 20 and 28, 1961. The other site was 5th and Locust Streets.

144. Wischnitzer, Synagogue Architecture in the United States, 100–104. “Most remarkable is the interior with the novel arrangement of the women’s section. Tachau replaced the gallery with low tribunes.... He thus avoided the impression of isolation and separateness conveyed by galleries.”
145. Levy, office memo for a meeting between Kahn and “an executive session” prior to a meeting of the Board of Managers, August 7, 1961, Kahn Collection, box 38, “Mikveh Israel — Meeting Notes to 1966.”

146. Ibid. The annual congregational meeting got to ratify the 5th and Commerce Street site on November 5, 1961. Minutes, Mikveh Israel annual meeting, November 5, 1961, Mikveh Israel Archives. This was the only potential site that faced the Mall.


149. Letter, Michael von Moschzisker (chair of the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority) to David Arons (president of Mikveh Israel), July 12, 1961, Kahn Collection, box 38, “Mikveh Israel — All Correspondence to 1971.” Mikveh Israel and Kahn had not yet made a final choice.


153. For an excellent analysis of Eero Saarinen’s original master plan for Brandeis and how students, not the administration, demanded three chapels in place of a singularly Jewish one, see Merkel, Eero Saarinen, 106–11.

154. Nauman, On the Wings of Modernism, 113–15. The Air Force Academy was designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and opened in 1959; Saarinen, Belluschi, and Welton Becket were the advisers to the Academy on architecture. Construction did not begin until late summer 1959 and was not completed for four years.


**Chapter 4. Plans: Kahn's Vision**

1. It is unclear when Kahn was officially fired. The last drawings are dated the end of December 1972; the official letter to the congregation is dated early 1973. It is most likely that he was dismissed at the end of 1972. Whatever the final outcome, it appears that the commission elevated Kahn to a position of authority on synagogue architecture. Letter, Paul A. Wolkin (for Har Zion Temple) to Kahn, December 12, 1961, Kahn Collection, box 66, unmarked file, indicates that Kahn had agreed to write a 500-word piece for the synagogue bulletin. Kahn’s topic was “Random Thoughts about New Synagogues.” It is not clear if he ever completed the piece. In 1963, Kahn worked and appeared on a special Philadelphia TV episode, “The Architecture of Judaism.” Letter, David E. Wilson (CBS producer) to Kahn, May 28, 1963, Kahn Collection, box 55, “Correspondence — Louis I. Kahn Miscellaneous 1964.”


3. Ibid.

4. “3 New Projects: Marcel Breuer,” *Architectural Record* 131 (March 1962): 127–30. Breuer’s plan had articulated separate buildings for school, sanctuary, chapel, and assembly (social and administrative uses). This is the same congregation that later approached Kahn about designing a synagogue. Letter, David Marks Jr. to Kahn, November 25, 1963, Kahn Collection, box 59, “Congregation B’nai Jeshurun (Mr. David Marks Jr. Chairman Building Committee).”

5. Wurman, office memo reporting on phone conversation with David Arons, February 7, 1962, Kahn Collection, box 38, “Mikveh Israel — Meeting Notes to 1966.” Arons expressed general acceptance of “the disposition and size of spaces.” Richard Saul Wurman, Alan Levy, and Moshe Safdie were the members of Kahn’s office who met with the congregation or accompanied Kahn to meetings.


7. Ibid.


10. Wurman, office memo reporting on meeting with Rev. Alan Corré, February 12, 1962, Kahn Collection, box 38, “Mikveh Israel — Meeting Notes to 1966.” Memo says that Corré indicated “that a sizable sum of money is being given or has been given for a ‘kiddush room’ specifically.”


12. Wurman, office memo reporting on phone conversation with David Arons, February 7, 1962, Kahn Collection, box 38, “Mikveh Israel — Meeting Notes to 1966.” Wurman noted that Arons felt the current size for the Historical Society was “absolutely minimum perhaps it should be 50% larger or 2x larger.”


14. Minutes of a special meeting, Mikveh Israel Board of Managers, May 23, 1962, Mikveh Israel Archives.


17. Handwritten Kahn statement found in Kahn Collection, box 38, “17. Mikveh Israel.”


19. Minutes, Mikveh Israel Board of Managers, March 20, 1963, Mikveh Israel Archives.

20. Wurman, job meeting notes, May 1, 1962, Kahn Collection, box 38, “M.I. Job Meeting Memos Drafting Rm. File 1951–1963.” Wurman notes that “Louis I. Kahn discussed light and light source (with references to the three perspectives); he discussed glare and artificial lighting by the use of chandeliers.”


Notes to Pages 110–112


29. Mark Rothko quoted in Wick, *Rothko*, 17. The introductory label for the same exhibition states that Rothko and other abstract expressionists reacted to the end of World War II by trying to convey “new realities and reassert the fundamental values of human existence.”


33. Mitchell Schwarzer, “The Architecture of Talmud,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 60 (December 2001): 481. Schwarzer also notes the circular, infinite nature of Torah, which comes back to the same spot each year.


36. “List of Requirements for Synagogue,” June 27, 1954, Kahn Collection, box 60,


39. Minutes, Mikveh Israel annual meeting, November 5, 1961, Mikveh Israel Archives.


45. Thanks to Carol Krinsky for suggesting this connection.


49. Ibid., 208.


51. The image has been frequently published in twentieth-century books but rarely attributed. It is the bottom half of plate 8, “Repas des Juifs pendant la Fête de Tentes” in the section on “La Fête des Tentes ou des Tabernacles,” found in vol. 1 of Bernard Picart, Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde (Amsterdam: J. F. Bernard, 1728–39). Thanks to William Whitaker for pointing out the slide of this in Kahn’s own collection.
52. Letter, Alan Levy to D. Hays Solis-Cohen, January 30, 1963, Kahn Collection, box 38, “Mikveh Israel—Correspondence 1962–63 Drafting room File.” Levy noted that he was including “Photostats of seven (7) perspectives drawn by Mr. Kahn for reproduction purposes.” Letter, Levy to Arons, February 15, 1963 (same box and file), notes “succeh during evening celebration.”


54. Ibid.

55. Minutes, Mikveh Israel annual meeting, November 4, 1962, Mikveh Israel Archives.

56. The exhibit was shown October 1–December 22, 1963.

57. Richard Meier, panel discussion at Jewish Museum, New York City, November 19, 1996. Meier, interview with author, June 24, 2008, New York City, reiterated this and noted, too, that Alan Solomon (director of the Jewish Museum) had been a personal friend, a friendship that began when Meier took Solomon’s course on twentieth-century painting and sculpture at Cornell.


59. The Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, hosted “Two Hundred Years of American Synagogue Architecture” in 1976.

60. Meier’s application for Kaufmann International Design Research Grant, included with letter from Meier to Kahn, January 21, 1964, Kahn Collection, box 30. Meier asked Kahn to recommend him for the Kaufmann grant. Meier proposed to work with Arthur Cohen, who would make a liturgical analysis of synagogue design in order to aid his design outcome. According to Richard Meier, whose family was active in the B’nai Jeshurun synagogue, the rabbi asked Meier to recommend architects for the congregation to interview. His choices included Breuer (his boss), Kahn, Le Corbusier, and Alvar Aalto. Meier, interview with author, 24 June 24, 2008, New York City. According to the Breuer Papers at Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Breuer signed the contract with B’nai Jeshurun in January 1961. He was fired in 1965; Belluschi eventually completed the project.

61. For exhibition catalog, see Jewish Museum, Recent American Synagogue Architecture (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1963).

62. Letter, Richard Meier (director of the exhibition) to Kahn, May 8, 1963, Kahn Collection, box 58, “The Jewish Museum—Dr. Alan Solomon, Director.” Kahn, and the other participating architects, were later asked for personal statements. One can
only assume that Kahn did not submit it on time, because it does not appear in the catalog.

63. Meier’s application for Kaufmann International Design Research Grant, included with letter from Meier to Kahn, January 21, 1964, Kahn Collection, box 30.

64. Ibid.


67. Ibid.

68. Letter, Richard Meier to William Wurster, May 17, 1963, ED Archives. Wurster left the decision to the local architects, who may have chosen not to participate.

69. Johnson participated in a panel with Kahn and Arthur Cohen, on November 7, 1963, for the exhibit, further indication that the Jewish community had forgiven his participation in fascist activities (Jewish Museum files).


71. Jewish Museum, Recent American Synagogue Architecture. The other projects with a permanent sukkah are Temple Beth Sholom (Geddes, Brecher, Qualls, and Cunningham) in Manchester, Conn., and Temple B’rith Kodesh in Rochester. Although Kahn and Geddes were both teaching at Penn at this time, there is no indication that they ever discussed their projects. Belluschi’s sukkah is in the courtyard; it has two freestanding legs, with the rest of the structure attached to and supported by the exterior wall of the building.

72. “The Architect and the Congregation/February 1959,” from notes of the Architectural Selection Committee, North Shore Congregation Israel (NSCI) Archives. Saarinen is erroneously referred to as “Eric Saarinen,” an indication that he was known more by reputation than from published work.

73. Minutes of the Architect Selection Committee, April 14, 1959, NSCI Archives.

74. Minutes of the Architect Selection Committee, April 21, 1959, NSCI Archives.

75. Ibid.

76. Moore, Golden Cities, 34. Moore notes that the hotel added a mikvah (ritual bath) in 1958, an indication that some of its clientele was religiously observant.

78. NSCI Archives, box 1, “1959 Architect Selection Committee.”

79. Letter, President Alan Altheimer to the congregation, August 20, 1959, NSCI Archives, box 1, “File Building Plans.” Altheimer announces to members that they have chosen Yamasaki as the chief architect. The letter mentions that the committee had interviewed him in Glencoe and Detroit, along with “another internationally famous architect” in Detroit, who could only have been Saarinen.

80. Letter, President Alan Altheimer to the congregation, August 20, 1959, NSCI Archives, box 1, “File Building Plans.”

81. Memo, October 20, 1959, NSCI Archives, box 1, “1960 Building Committee.” The rabbi (Edgar Siskin), former president (Norman Korff), Yamasaki, and W. J. Rabon traveled to Cleveland, October 20, 1959. They also went to see an unnamed 1920s building with an addition by Perkins & Will.

82. Lane, Chicago Churches and Synagogues, 208.


85. Lane, Chicago Churches and Synagogues, 209.


87. Yamasaki recommended Halprin on September 12, 1960. See notes in NSCI Archives, box 1, “1960 Building Committee.” Thanks to William Whitaker at the Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania, for providing a list of Halprin’s synagogue commissions.


89. “List Requested by Mr. R. Meier for Invitations for the Jewish Museum Exhibit,” found in Kahn Collection, box 58, “The Jewish Museum — Dr. Alan Solomon/Director (Mr. Richard Meier — Spec. Director) Re. Mikveh.” List included David Arons, Leon Elmalch, Hays Solis-Cohen (Sr. and Jr.), and Daniel Cohen.

90. Minutes, Mikveh Israel deferred annual meeting, January 5, 1964, Mikveh Israel Archives.

91. Minutes, Mikveh Israel annual meeting, October 30, 1966, Mikveh Israel Archives. Letter, Rabbi Musleah to Kahn, August 12, 1966, Kahn Collection, box 38, “Mikveh Israel — All Correspondence to 1971”: “I shall be immensely grateful if you will agree to present the second talk in the series, entitled ‘Synagogue Architecture.’” The same file includes Kahn’s reply, dated August 16, 1966: “I would be very happy to talk on ‘Architecture’ with some reference to ‘Synagogue Architecture.’ I believe that this little change in emphasis will not digress from your intention.”

92. See drawings initialed and dated by Kahn, June 16, 1965, LIKC 615.21, and June 25, 1965, LIKC 615.23.
93. Kahn Collection, box 53.64, “Museum of Modern Art/Exhibit April 11–May 22.”

94. Harriet Pattison, interview with author, November 28, 1996, Princeton, N.J., indicated that her formal training in landscape architecture was not completed until the mid-1960s. She believes that Kahn looked at gardens differently after they had gotten to know each other, beginning in 1959.

95. Minutes, Mikveh Israel Board of Managers, January 27, 1970, Mikveh Israel Archives.

96. Minutes, Mikveh Israel Board of Managers, July 23, 1968, Mikveh Israel Archives.

97. Ibid.

98. Letter, Daniel Coehn to Kahn, May 4, 1970, Kahn Collection, box 38, “Mikveh Israel—All Correspondence to 1971.”

99. Minutes, Mikveh Israel Board of Managers, April 13, 1970, Mikveh Israel Archives.

100. Minutes, Mikveh Israel Board of Managers, September 10, 1970, Mikveh Israel Archives.

101. Minutes, Mikveh Israel annual meeting, December 10, 1970, Mikveh Israel Archives. "A special Mall steering Committee is meeting every other Monday night."

102. Minutes, Mikveh Israel Board of Managers, April 27, 1971, Mikveh Israel Archives.

103. Minutes, Mikveh Israel Board of Managers, November 20, 1971, Mikveh Israel Archives.

104. Minutes, Mikveh Israel Board of Managers, December 28, 1971, Mikveh Israel Archives.

105. The directive to Kahn was delivered on January 13. Minutes, Mikveh Israel Board of Managers, February 15, 1972, Mikveh Israel Archives.

106. Letter, David Wisdon (Kahn’s office) to Ruth Sarner, June 13, 1972, Kahn Collection, box 38, “Mikveh Israel—Correspondence Congregation 1972.”


108. Minutes, Mikveh Israel Board of Managers, February 15, 1972, Mikveh Israel Archives.

109. Minutes, Mikveh Israel Board of Managers, April 18, 1972, Mikveh Israel Archives. Fishman also hoped to have a steering committee composed of “½ Mikveh Israel, ½ Jewish community, ½ non-Jewish community.”

110. Minutes, Mikveh Israel Board of Managers, April 18, 1972, Mikveh Israel Archives.

111. Ibid.

112. Ibid.
Notes to Pages 133–142

113. Minutes, Mikveh Israel Board of Managers, May 23, 1972, Mikveh Israel Archives.
114. Ibid.
115. Ibid.
116. Ibid.
117. Ibid.
118. Minutes, special meeting of the Mikveh Israel Board of Managers, July 25, 1972, Mikveh Israel Archives. Fishman remarked at that meeting that he was a fundraiser and did not want to negotiate with the architect.
120. Letter, Sarner to congregants, February 6, 1973, Mikveh Israel Archives.
121. Letter, Sarner to Kahn, before December 19, 1972, Kahn Collection, box 38, “Mikveh Israel — Correspondence Congregation 1972.”
122. Letter, Sarner to congregants, February 6, 1973, Mikveh Israel Archives.
124. Sam Maitin, interview with author, October 22, 1996, Philadelphia. Maitin, a Philadelphia painter, was the main speaker at the 1972 annual Mikveh Israel–Christ Church dinner. He had heard a rumor at the dinner that Kahn had been fired. When Kahn later confirmed that it was true, he made his remark about being religious.
127. Novick, The Holocaust in American Life, 128–45. Novick cites Hannah Arendt’s Eichmann in Jerusalem (1963) and Rolf Hochhuth’s play The Deputy (1964), about Pope Pius XII’s silence during the war, as contributing to the more open discourse about the Holocaust. William Shirer’s The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich was published in 1960 and became a best seller.
128. Letter, Emerson Goble (editor of Architectural Record) to Kahn’s office, received May 28, 1963, Kahn Collection, box 30.

Chapter 5. Epilogue: Preservation and Legacy
1. Wuthnow, After Heaven, 75–76.
2. Ibid., 17.
3. Ibid., 1–17.
5. Hoffman, Rethinking Synagogues.


8. Rabbi Daniel Freelander (vice president of the Ida and Howard Wilkoff Department of Synagogue Management) and Judith Erger (assistant director, Union for Reform Judaism (formerly UAHC), interview with author, July 26, 2007, New York City.


12. Letter, Belluschi to Matthew Weinstein (chair of the Building Committee), October 27, 1961, box 471, Belluschi Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Library. Ironically, Belluschi was at the site because of the warm friendship that had developed between him and Weinstein. Belluschi had returned to Adath Israel to attend Weinstein’s son’s bar mitzvah.


14. Information about the Jewish Museum’s participation comes from a phone conversation with Fred Wasserman, former curator of Contemporary Judaica at the Jewish Museum, August 2, 2007. The Jewish Museum acquisition was made with the Contemporary Judaica Acquisitions Fund, 2006.


18. Ibid.

19. Franz Schulze, who has written a biography of Johnson, maintains that Johnson later claimed to have gone directly to the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai Brith and expressed his personal apology after the war. See Schulze, Philip Johnson, 238–40.


22. Invoice from Holy Land Marble to Temple Brith Kodesh, October 1958, for
fourteen pieces of Israeli marble. Bernstein Papers, BOX 14:15–10, University of Rochester.


29. Rabbi Nina Mandel of Beth El of Sunbury, interview with author, October 7, 2007, Sunbury, Pa. James Kolker (VSBA), phone conversation with author, February 5, 2008. Rabbi Mandel and James Kolker have provided all of the information about this project. Kolker does not agree that Kahn was the inspiration for the tree.


31. Information is from author’s interviews with Saitowitz, November 12, 2007, and January 19, 2008, San Francisco. See also Saitowitz, Stanley Saitowitz/Natoma Architects Inc.

32. The sukkah is housed at the Magnes Museum in Berkeley.

33. Lew, One God Clapping, 274–75.

34. Lew, who became emeritus in 2005, worked on all of the initial planning for the complex.


37. Hoffman, Rethinking Synagogues, 1–16.

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