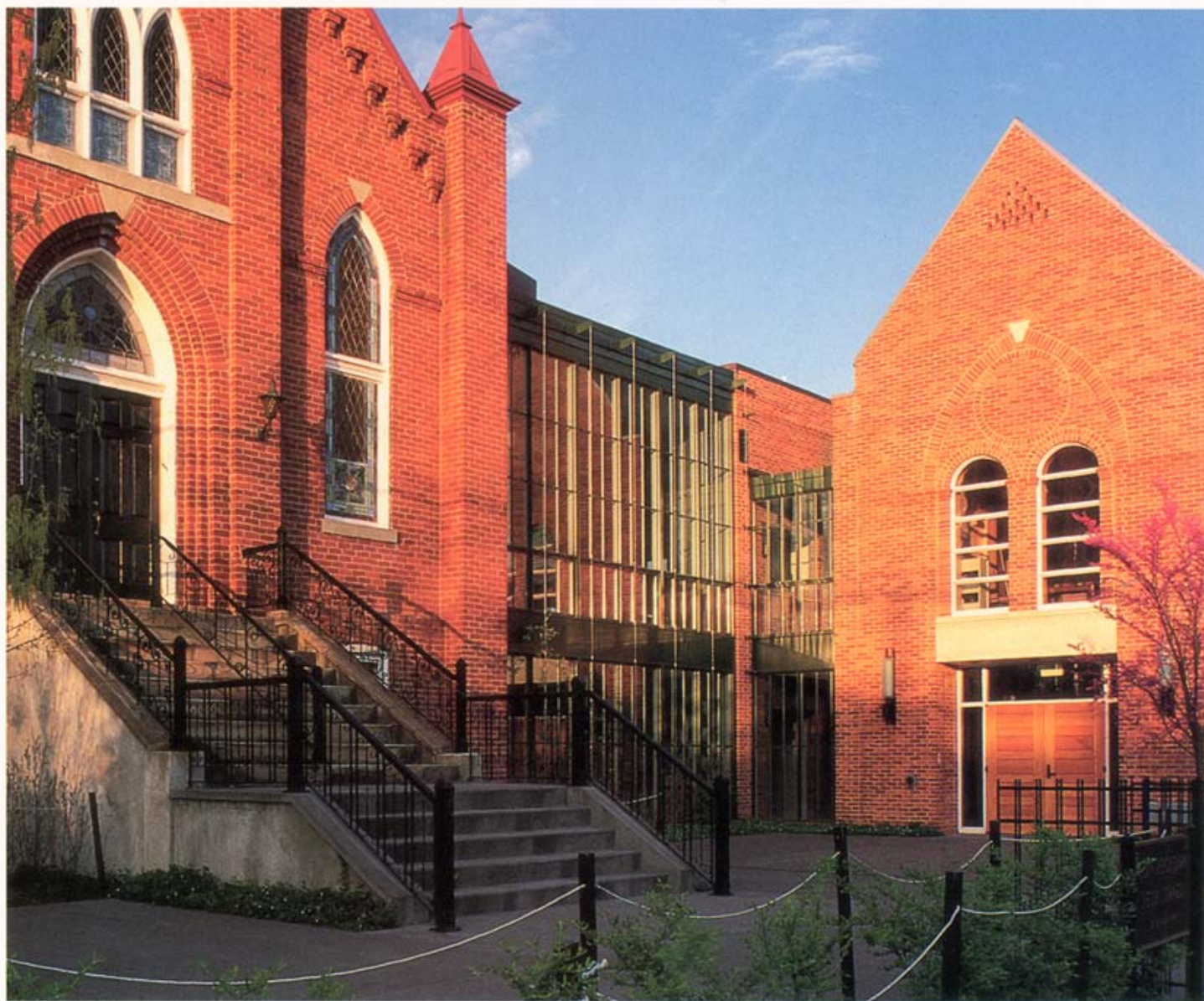


A Secular Village

Temple Beth Israel • Bruce R. Wardell, Architect



Photos: Charles Shoffner

The addition (center and right in photo, above) creates a new courtyard. Chapel (below) is a reinterpretation of Gothic forms that appear in the old synagogue.

18

Congregation Beth Israel in Charlottesville added new educational and worship facilities to its existing 19th century facility, the tenth oldest synagogue in the country. But architect Bruce R. Wardell, AIA, of Charlottesville was quick to acknowledge that any addition to the venerable building needed to respect the integrity of the original historic structure while tripling the square footage of the existing facility.

In order to create a massing that was sympathetic to the existing scale and detail of the street, Wardell adopted a design strategy that creates a "village" of structures



smaller in scale than the original temple. He began by locating a small chapel to the southeast of the old temple – a new sanctuary which reflects the Gothic precedent of the original structure and obscures the mass of the new construction. It is also oriented so that, on the interior, the ark can be placed properly at the east end of the space, a condition that had not been satisfied for more than a hundred years.

Connecting the two worship spaces is a structure whose metal-and-glass curtain wall is rendered in a decidedly Modern idiom. Embellishing the glass wall is a wire "trellis" upon which trumpet hon-



New social hall incorporates exterior of the original synagogue.

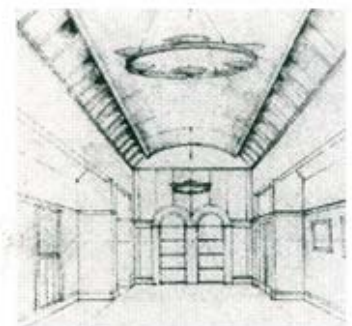
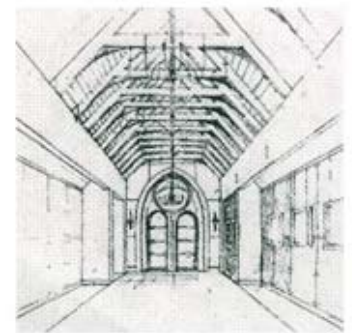
eyessuckle vines are planted. This contemporary element creates an intentional relationship between the historic and the new. From inside the new social hall, the expansive glass wall also frames a dramatic view of the surrounding urban landscape.

Wardell studied many options for the interior of the chapel, starting with a scheme based on the strong Gothic/Victorian precedent of the old temple. He was told by the rabbi and building committee that the chapel would serve a wide array of people – some liberal, others quite conservative – so his first sketches were considered to be too sacred, or vertical, in nature. “They wanted, rather, to emphasize the horizontal nature of the space for the sake of a secular, community feeling,” says Wardell.

That led to the final design with a truncated pyramidal roof and a strong horizontal band at the head of the windows. “Everything below that line was made of natural material – white oak paneling,” Wardell notes. “Above that line, on the metaphorical sky, the surfaces are all painted. That ended up being the right balance, the right complement to that space.”



Early studies of the chapel interior (right) were deemed to be scaled too much like sacred space. As built, the final design (left) is more secular in its feeling.



Second Floor Plan



- 1 New Social Hall
- 2 Classroom
- 3 New Chapel
- 4 Kitchen
- 5 Existing Sanctuary
- 6 Existing Lobby