

Glossary of Terms

ARK or Aron Kodesh (AH-rohn KOH-desh)
The cabinet where the Torah scrolls are kept.

BIMA (BEE-muh)
The pulpit. Usually a raised platform on which services are conducted.

MENORAH (m'-NAW-ruh)
A candelabrum, traditionally with 7 branches.

MINYAN (MIN-yin)
The quorum, consisting of ten Jewish males or females past the age of 13, required to recite certain prayers. Also refers to the daily morning and evening prayer service.

NER TAMID (NAYR tah-MEED)
Usually translated "eternal flame." A light that hangs above the bima and symbolizes God's ever presence.

PAROCHET (paw-RAW-khet)
The curtain that covers the Ark.

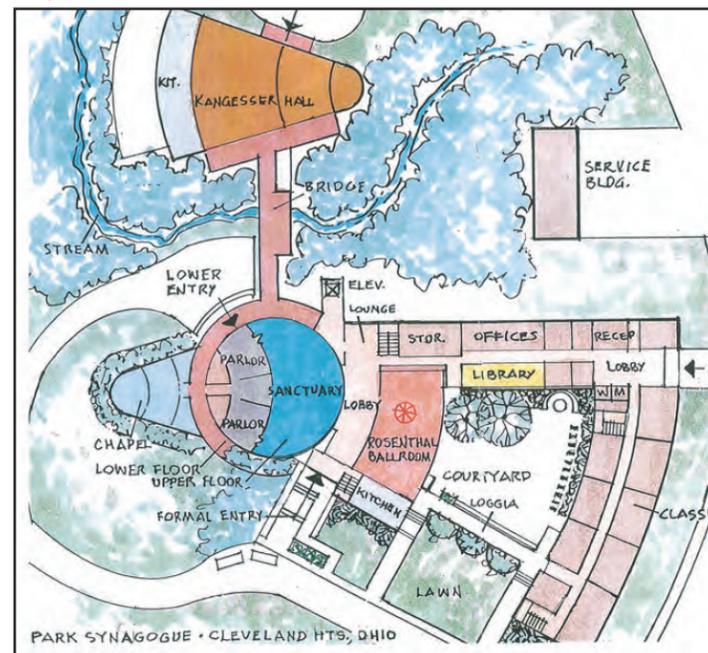
SHABBAT (shah-BAHT)
The Jewish Sabbath, a day of rest and spiritual enrichment. From sunset Friday night to an hour after sunset on Saturday night.

SHEMA (sh'-MAH)
The most important Jewish prayer that affirms Jews' belief in one God. Translated as: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One."

TALMUD (TAHL-mud)
The most significant collection of the Jewish oral tradition interpreting the Torah.

TORAH (TOH-ruh)
The first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The Torah is considered to be the history of the Jewish people.

 Indicates an area or item of special note.



The Exterior



The exterior of Park Synagogue is a fine example of the dramatic and sprawling Expressionist form with sweeping curves punctuated by circles. The building is dominated by a hemispherical dome, reputed to be the third-largest in the U.S. at the time of construction. The cream-colored brick walls unify a dynamic flow of forms. There is organic continuity, and the complex's several levels – each featuring different functions – fully take advantage of a picturesque, 33-acre property filled with a wooded ravine and flowing brook. How many synagogues – of any era or locale – could claim such a spectacular natural setting?



Around the main entrance to the Synagogue is a metal grillwork made up of the very stylized Hebrew letter, shin. The design includes small shins and two large shins inside circles. Over the front doors are Hebrew words that translate as "Welcome in the name of God."



Main entrance

Upper Level

Rabbi's Study

The room that was designed as Rabbi Armond Cohen's Study is currently a place for teens to gather on Shabbat mornings. It is still graced by beautiful paneled walls in the lighter tonalities of the Modern movement. Imagine stepping into a 1950's comfortable interior, featuring an impressive book collection, fine art, memorabilia, and a superb view of nature.



Note the original ceiling lighting fixtures chosen by Mendelsohn.

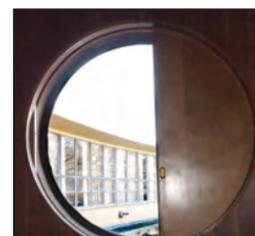
The Library

This space, like the Rabbi's Study, is an appealing assemblage featuring light-toned paneled walls and bookshelves with an entire wall of windows overlooking the Patio. Few American synagogues at the time of Park Synagogue's construction could boast a library of such proportions or as having such an outstanding collection. The Library was dedicated in 1953, along with the educational wing.

Glass Auditorium

(on second floor of school wing)

An auditorium/theater devoted entirely to an American synagogue's school, which in fact boasted 21 large classrooms, was indeed unusual in 1953. The most striking features here are the round windows, consistent with the dominant visual theme of Park Synagogue—repeated circles. Today, Glass Auditorium is used twice weekly by a church for its worship services.



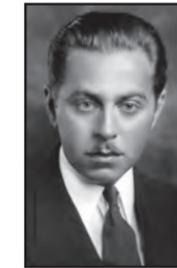
Glass Auditorium window



Glass Auditorium's windows feature pull-out wooden shades, hidden in wall pockets, to darken the room when necessary.

A Little History

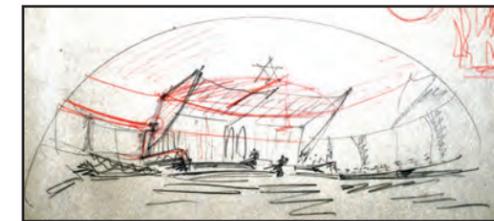
Our congregation had its beginnings in 1869 when a small group of Polish immigrants formed Anshe Emeth Congregation (People of Truth), which later merged with Beth Tefilo Congregation (House of Prayer). Over the years, the congregation has met in several different buildings, including the Cleveland Jewish Center, now home to Cory United Methodist Church on E. 105th Street in the Glenville neighborhood.



A young Rabbi Armond Cohen

In 1942, as Cleveland's Jewish population began moving eastward to the Heights area, the congregation acquired 33 acres of land from the Park School, a private school which closed during World War II. Wanting a new synagogue that would be unique among synagogues of the world, the building committee sought plans from local architects. Rabbi Armond Cohen, Senior Rabbi of the congregation at the time (and who remained a member of the clergy until his death in 2007, one day shy of age 98), was not happy with any of the plans presented.

He thought back to 1941 when he saw the Expressionist works of Eric Mendelsohn at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Mendelsohn (1887-1953), a Jewish architect who had fled Nazi Germany in 1933, was well known in Europe for his straight-forward, simple architectural forms and the use of reinforced concrete and symbolic forms. Since he was relatively unknown in the United States, he was "hungry" for commissions and came to Cleveland quickly after receiving an invitation from Rabbi Cohen and was ultimately awarded the contract.



The Sanctuary as envisioned by Mendelsohn

In June 1946, Mendelsohn began designing the new synagogue. Unfortunately the cost of the proposed building came in two times over the budget, and Mendelsohn

was forced to change the design. A new plan was approved in 1947. Construction lasted through 1949 and the new building, along with a new name, The Park Synagogue, was dedicated in December, 1950. Eric Mendelsohn attended the dedication, but died in 1953 of cancer at the age of 66.

During the baby boom era, membership swelled to over 2000 households and Mendelsohn's building became too small for High Holiday services. Designed by a colleague of Mendelsohn's, Kangesser Hall was added, giving the congregation a second large social hall, kitchen and the 600-seat Stein Auditorium. With the wall open between Stein Auditorium and Goldberg Assembly Hall, we seat an additional 2000 members for High Holiday Services. Kangesser Hall is connected to the main building by The Bridge which spans the ravine and Doan Brook. Ironically, this concept was essentially what Mendelsohn had proposed in his original plan that was discarded as too expensive. Today, Park Synagogue is a proud Cleveland Heights landmark.



Construction of the dome



Welcome to Park Synagogue!

Park Synagogue is one of the country's largest and most active Conservative Jewish congregations with a membership of approximately 1700 households. We are led by our clergy team of Rabbi Joshua Hoffer Skoff (Sr. Rabbi), Rabbi Sharon Young Marcus (Associate Rabbi), Cantor Misha Pisman, and Gadi Galili (Ritual Director). Besides Park Synagogue Main (the building you are in), the congregation has a smaller branch building, Park



Park Synagogue's iconic dome

Synagogue East, on Shaker Boulevard in Pepper Pike. Synagogue offices, Park Preschool, Wolf Religious School, daily minyan and Friday night Shabbat Services

are held at Park Synagogue East. Park Synagogue Main is open for Saturday Shabbat Services, High Holiday and other holiday/festival services, and large community events.

One of Greater Cleveland's most architecturally significant complexes, Park Synagogue Main is the only public work of world-renowned architect Eric Mendelsohn in Ohio. Mendelsohn had taken on the synagogue project as one of his first American works; he arrived in the U.S. in 1941, after designing many important modern complexes in Europe and Palestine. The new edifice became a model for religious structures and complexes across the country. The architecture and natural beauty of the 33-acre complex is dominated by the dramatic 100-foot diameter dome of the Sanctuary.

Park Synagogue Main is a Cleveland Heights landmark.

It was the first synagogue in Greater Cleveland built in a fearlessly modernistic vein – actually Expressionist – though Mendelsohn did not consciously create a new style; the quest for eternal beauty was his pursuit.

When experiencing Park Synagogue, one comes to realize its subtleties and special grace. It has been said all feel comfortable here.



Park Synagogue Main Sanctuary

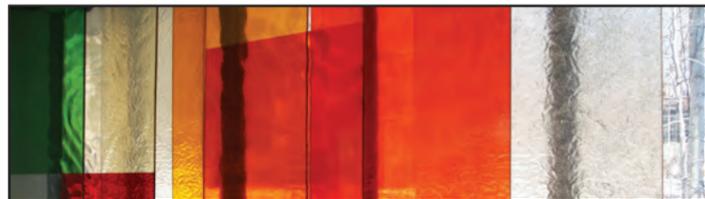


PARK SYNAGOGUE EAST

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The Bridge

Integral to the Kangesser wing (added to Park Synagogue in 1969 and designed by Michael A. Gallis, a former associate of Mendelsohn, along with the firm of Bialosky and Manders), The Bridge is cantilevered over Doan Brook in the very location where Mendelsohn had envisioned school offices leading to a school wing. In 1971, the sliding, multicolored plexiglass panels entitled "Infinity, Transparency and Dialogue" designed by the Israeli-French artist, Yaacov Agam, were installed. Agam also designed the distinguished Ark* and Torah* covers used during High Holidays in Kangesser Hall.



Detail of "Infinity, Transparency and Dialogue"

Miller Chapel

On the lower level, Mendelsohn designed a small chapel that juts out below the Sanctuary. It is customary for all males to wear a kippah, or yarmulke, inside the Chapel. They are available outside the Chapel doors if you choose to wear one. The room seats 125 and is used for small weddings and services. Note the original Mendelsohn uprights along the outer walls. As in the Sanctuary, Mendelsohn incorporated a variety of symbolism.



Miller Chapel

Details about the symbolism are in The Sanctuary section, but take special note of how he treated these items in the chapel:



The Hands on the front of the lectern: The sign of the priestly blessing. Notice how the hands are different than in the Sanctuary.

Two Menorahs* in the shape of the Hebrew letter shin: They each have seven branches symbolizing the seven days of creation and the seven days of the week.

Hebrew words over Ark*: Mendelsohn included two Hebrew words "Adonai Echad" which translates as "The Lord is One," the last two words of the Shema* prayer.

Grapes and wheat: Mendelsohn chose grapes and wheat to be painted in gold and silver on the back wall of the bima. He chose these two native species of Israel because he envisioned young couples coming to be married in the chapel. The grapes and wheat symbolized to him that the couples should be fruitful and multiply.

The Ner Tamid* is made out of silver petals with a blue covering over the light.

Names listed on the front wall are memorial names of loved ones who have died.

Bet Hamidrash

The small room behind the Miller Chapel is referred to as the Bet Hamidrash or House of Study. It was used by the men and women attending the daily morning and evening minyan services. On the front wall of the room is a small Ark* for a Torah scroll and above the Ark is a Ner Tamid*.

Mendelsohn Exhibit

Don't miss the newly created exhibit in the Men's Club Parlor, to view the collection of Mendelsohn sketches, furniture, photographs and memorabilia. Relax in the Mendelsohn Reading Room, located in the Sisterhood Parlor, featuring original furniture selected by Mendelsohn.



On display at the end of The Bridge is the original Mendelsohn-designed Ark curtain, or parochet, woven in 1950 by Trude Guermontprez. Today, the parochet in the Sanctuary is a reproduction of the original. Every effort was taken to recreate it accurately.*

The Foyer

The curved Foyer with its contemporary furnishings serves as a worthy gathering space for visitors entering a grand modern synagogue. The mahogany wall bordering the Sanctuary is entirely movable and disappears into two wall pockets.



Note the display case of religious artifacts; the portrait of Rabbi Armond E. Cohen, who worked so closely with Mendelsohn; Torah covers designed by artist Yaacov Agam; and the vista overlooking Doan Brook and ravine at the far end.*

Rosenthal Ballroom

Rosenthal Ballroom, the original assembly hall, can add up to 700 seats to the Sanctuary on the High Holidays or as needed, when the walls are open. This feature was innovative, if not a totally original concept, in postwar synagogue design. The largest doors in the building are here, between Rosenthal and the Patio, of stainless steel and plate glass – each reputed to weigh two tons. They were designed to open in the center, powered by an electric motor, allowing the large space to flow into the outdoors when the weather allowed.

The Patio

Adjacent to Rosenthal Ballroom is the Patio, which was recently resurfaced. Mendelsohn designed the Patio to be a continuation of the Sanctuary and Rosenthal Ballroom, when the glass wall was open. He envisioned members sitting on the Patio at summer services, so he created the three areas to flow from one into the other, with a clear sight line from the Patio to the bima in the Sanctuary. Today, the Patio is used occasionally for informal summer services on Saturday mornings and for summer social events.



Detail of the Blessing Canopy

Blessing Canopy

Hanging in the stairwell adjacent to the Foyer, is an original Blessing Canopy used in blessing ceremonies, such as Confirmation and Consecration. It was designed and executed by Sandra Bohl, a local fabric artist and Park Synagogue member. During a great inter-generational celebration, members wrote personal blessings on slips of paper. Bohl then sewed the papers inside each leaf on the tree of life.

**See Glossary for definition.*

The Sanctuary

The Sanctuary is where Eric Mendelsohn put the most effort to incorporate both important architectural and religiously symbolic designs. It is customary for all males to wear a kippah, or yarmulke, inside the Sanctuary. They are available outside the Sanctuary doors if you choose to wear one.



SEATING AND BACK WALL

The Sanctuary can seat almost 1000 worshippers with the back walls closed. For large services or other events, the back walls open—they slide into pockets on both sides—and 700 chairs can be added in the Foyer and Rosenthal Ballroom. Having a wall that opens, while commonplace now, was highly innovative when Mendelsohn designed this building. The Sanctuary has a "backwards" sloping floor, so even someone seated in the back row of Rosenthal Ballroom can see the bima*.

THE DOME

Virtually the entire Sanctuary is dominated by the dome above, which is 100 feet in diameter and 65 feet high in the center, and weighs 680 tons. The exterior of the dome is covered with copper, that has weathered to green; the interior is covered with acoustical tile, making for excellent sound transmission. Mendelsohn designed the dome to appear to be reaching down to the earth, symbolizing the nearness of heaven to earth, and God's closeness to man. There are no walls supporting the dome or dividing the heavens from the earth. The dome rests upon six pillars enclosed by a solid band of clear glass 15 feet high.

THE WINDOWS

Mendelsohn insisted on having clear glass in the Sanctuary even though many members wanted traditional stained glass windows. Mendelsohn argued that everyone in the Sanctuary should be able to look outside, see the changing seasons and nature around the building, and feel the presence of God in nature. The windows also provide wonderful natural light to worshippers.

THE BIMA*

Three Levels: The bima was designed on three levels. The first (lowest) level is where the Rabbi's lectern is placed; the second is where the Torah is read and prayers are chanted; and the third, or highest level, contains the holy Ark*.

Chairs: Mendelsohn included 12 permanent chairs on the bima for those who participate in the Torah service.

Menorahs*: On either side of the bima are white-bronze menorahs with seven branches, representing the seven days of creation and seven days of the week. Notice how Mendelsohn incorporated the Hebrew letter shin at the base of each of the branches, which hold long candles that are lit before each service.

Ner Tamid*: Mendelsohn designed Park Synagogue's ner tamid in an unending circular shape with spokes, and had it executed in brass, copper and aluminum.

Names listed on the front wall are memorial names of loved ones who have died.



The Hebrew letter shin

Mendelsohn's stylized shin

The Canopy: The canopy or front wall of the Sanctuary was designed to symbolize a tent, the first sanctuary of the Israelites as they wandered in the desert. The vertical copper strips represent the poles holding up the tent. They are lit from inside by cold cathode ray light bulbs, what was the latest in contemporary lighting technology.

Canopy Symbols: Mendelsohn repeated three symbols that he took from the Bible and other Jewish writings. The symbols are hand-painted in gold, silver, and brass tones.



Early sketch of the canopy symbols

The Crown: Chosen because of this significant quote in the Talmud. "Rabbi Shimon said: 'There are three crowns that a person can strive to attain: the crown of learning, the crown of the priesthood, and the crown of royalty; but a crown of a good name exceeds them all.'" –Pirke Avot.

In Judaism, the most important quality is having a good name or reputation. To attain this, Jews performs mitzvot or good deeds to help all people on earth.

The Hands: The sign of the priestly blessing. In Biblical days, Rabbis were called priests. They blessed people with their hands in this position or with their fingers separated in a V-form, as seen on the front of the lectern in Miller Chapel.

The Tablets of the Law or Ten Commandments: Mendelsohn used a stylized version the Hebrew letter "shin" instead of writing out the commandments or numbering them in Hebrew. He decided on the shin since it is the first letter in three significant Hebrew words: **Shalom** which means "peace" (as well as "hello" and "goodbye"); **Shema***, the first word of the most important prayer in Judaism that affirms Jews' belief in one God; and **Shaddai**, an ancient Hebrew word for God.

Torah* Scroll: All Torahs are handwritten by scribes in Hebrew on panels of parchment using a special ink and quill pen. The panels are then sewn together to form one continuous long strip. The ends of the strip of parchment are attached to wooden dowels and then the Torah is rolled up to form a scroll. One never touches the written surface of the Torah so it does not get dirty. Instead, when the Torah is read, a yad, or pointer in the shape of a hand, is used to keep one's place. All Torahs are identical. Each contains the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. It takes special training to read the Torah since the Hebrew is written without vowels to know how to pronounce the words, and without punctuation. The Torah is usually chanted instead of just read. As with all Hebrew texts, the lines of the Torah are read from right to left.



Park Synagogue Torahs with Mendelsohn breastplates

When a Torah is rolled up, it is protected from dust and dirt by a cloth cover. Torahs often are adorned with silver crowns on the top of the wooden dowels and with breastplates of different designs. Mendelsohn designed our beautiful breastplates featuring three of the seven native species of Israel—grapes, wheat and pomegranates. The breastplates are fashioned from brass and silver, highlighted with a variety of semi-precious stones including opal, turquoise and topaz.



Be sure to see the open Torah in the front of the Sanctuary.