Put away those hardhats. Stern Chapel, the architectural and psychic showplace of Temple’s expansion and renovation project, is open for business. Spiritual business that is—the real work of building our community from within as we experience prayer anew. We hope you’ve had a chance to experience the power of the new chapel over the past two weeks in our “month of firsts.” And by all means, don’t stop at one visit.

THE DESIGN

The chapel was designed as a complementary addition to our historic midcentury building by Howard Meyer and Max Sandfield. Described below by Cunningham Architects are some of the design features to enhance our experience of it.

WINDOWS The frosted windows are composed of three different types of frosted glass, with each glass type having a slightly different transparency level. This mosaic glass is a modern interpretation of the art glass located throughout the existing building (specifically seen throughout Olan Sanctuary), but also serves to focus the gaze of chapel visitors toward the live oak trees inside the Nasher-Haemisegger Atrium and away from unwanted distractions.

ACOUSTICAL CEILING PANELS Commonly re-
ferred to as the “clouds,” they are wood panels supported by steel framing, which serve to reflect sound and music from the bimah to the seating area.

MATERIALS The primary material used throughout is white oak wood, selected for its lighter color tones and interesting grain pattern. The other materials, such as cork flooring, plaster ceiling and walls, miscellaneous dark bronze elements, were selected to match materials and finishes used throughout both the original existing building as well as the new and renovated areas.

ENTRANCE The primary entrance procession into Stern Chapel was designed so as to require visitors to pass through the Tycher Gathering Space, through a new “connector” vestibule and into the chapel. This procession leads visitors past a collection of existing, renovated and new building elements; reminding visitors of the history and growth of the building and congregation.

SCREEN WALLS AND BALCONY DETAIL The perforations seen at the balcony guardrail and the screen walls primarily serve to provide acoustical openings in the wood, allowing a percentage of the sound to emanate from the bimah. The hole pattern is an interpolation and abstraction of images of nature and foliage (using advanced software to achieve this effect), helping to reinforce the connection with nature and more specifically the Nasher-Hae-misegger Atrium.

THE ART

“Respecting Howard Meyer’s original ‘legacy of vision and light,’ the new chapel includes three major artist commissions: The ner tamid by Linda Ridway in collaboration with Jim Cinquemani, the ark doors by Suzanne Tick and the custom bimah furniture by Mira Nakashima. Intentionally, the medium of the artists references the materials used in the Olan Sanctuary but reinterprets the ritual pieces with a contemporary spirit.” -Barbara Rosenblatt, Art Subcommittee, Design and Construction Committee

THE NER TAMID “This was the first large-scale piece where I have incorporated 24k gold leafing to the final patina. The gold added the light I was searching to describe in the ner tamid.” -Linda Ridgway

“The ner tamid itself is cast bronze of a random arrangement of twigs and branches. Because this arrangement is asymmetrical, its center of gravity is not a perfect balance from a hanging standpoint. Therefore, special provisions were incorporated into the cable mount system above the ceiling to counter-balance the load of the bronze in order for it to appear to hang as the artist had intended.” -Jim Cinquemani

THE ARK “I am especially moved by the ark and its doors. The doors will be covered with a Suzanne Tick weaving made exclusively of copper wire and fragments of colorful Mylar balloons washed up on the beaches of Fire Island. The notion that the Torah will be housed in something bright and beautiful that others considered discarded issues a powerful message. Too often we think of a congregation as the place to come when we...
are dressed up for a holiday or a simcha, with our best smiles on and our best selves always in evidence. But the truth is, we need to be a place where people can come when they are feeling broken, abandoned, alone. To say that our holiest object will be housed in something decorated with material which was “washed up”—and that what seems washed up can be beautiful—goes to the heart of who we try to be as an open and compassionate community. Our sages taught that the first set of tablets of the commandments, broken by Moses in his anger at the Golden Calf, traveled in the ark with the second set Moses later created with God. Our message is the same: Wholeness and brokenness both partake of the holy, and both have a home here.” -Rabbi David Stern

THE BIMAH FURNISHINGS  “The music stands were all cut from a single interesting plank of walnut in order to give them a sense of continuity and relationship to each other. The kiddush table was made from a very special, thick and figured piece of black walnut with bark inclusions and small portions of free edges (the natural contours of the tree) breaking its rectilinear form. The Torah reading table had more complete free edges even in the center, and because of its height, was finished carefully on both sides. There is a large East Indian rosewood lip on the bottom to hold the Torah.” -Mira Nakashima

THE EXPERIENCE
What do you hope visitors to this space will experience?

“The poet Mary Oliver says it best. ‘Beauty can both shout and whisper.’ ”
-Linda Ridgway

“Encounters with one another, the sacred texts of our people, and the beauty of nature. The design reinforces the spiritual idea that something larger binds us together.”
-Rabbi Asher Knight

“The beauty and cycles of God’s creation that organize Jewish life. The windows of the Stern Chapel offer this wonderful opportunity for inspiration and connection.”
-Rabbi Debra Robbins

“Sacred quality, a sense of peace, a connection to nature and the universe that my father believed existed in all solid wood when treated with the proper respect—the soul of a tree.”
-Mira Nakashima