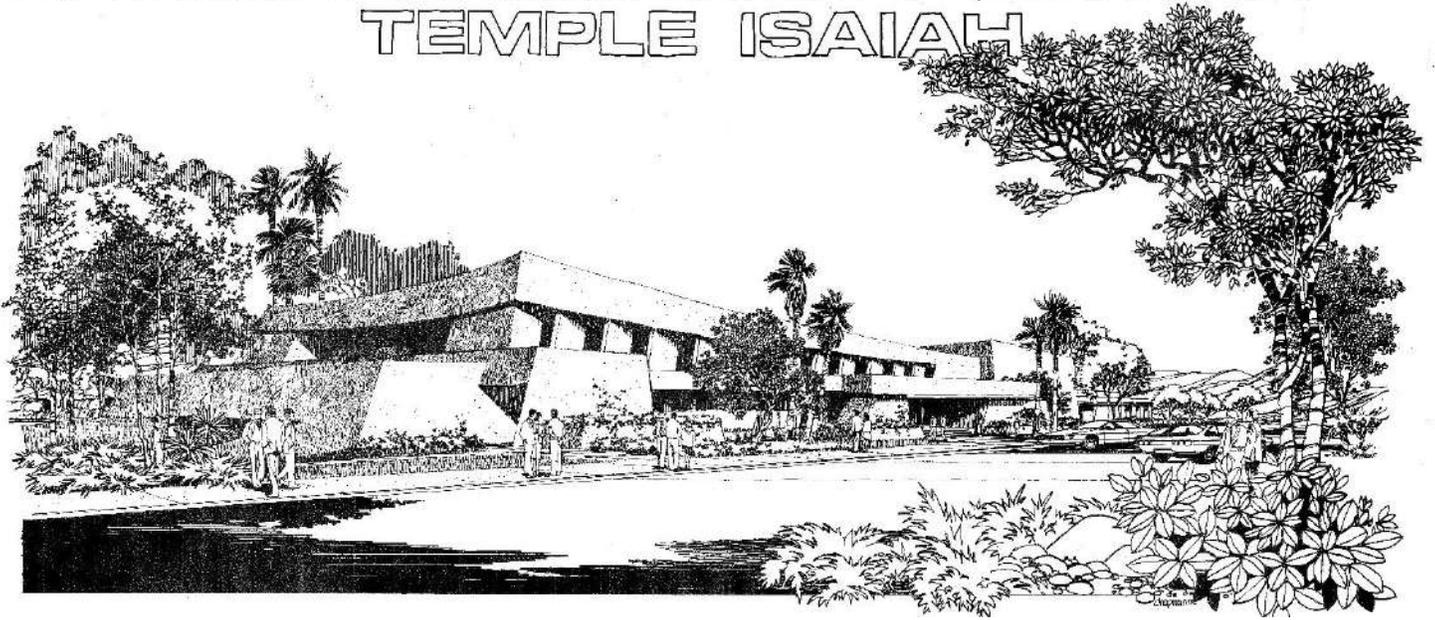


# TEMPLE ISAIAH

332 West Alejo Road, Palm Springs, California 92262

## JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER TEMPLE ISAIAH



*Rendering from David Christian drawings, courtesy Palm Springs Art Museum, Architecture & Design Center Archives.*

### **NOMINATION APPLICATION FOR CITY OF PALM SPRINGS**

### **CLASS 1 HISTORIC RESOURCE**

**PREPARED BY**

**STEVEN KEYLON**

**FOR THE**

**PALM SPRINGS PRESERVATION FOUNDATION – FINAL NOVEMBER 28, 2025**

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# INTRODUCTION

The Palm Springs Preservation Foundation (PSPF) is a non-profit organization whose mission is "to educate and promote public awareness of the importance of preserving the historical resources and architecture of the city of Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley area." In June of 2025, the PSPF board of directors assigned the task of writing the Temple Isaiah Class I Historic Resource nomination to Steven Keylon.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### SIGNIFICANCE

Temple Isaiah at 332 West Alejo Road in Palm Springs is a multi-phase religious complex representing three significant periods of mid-century and contemporary architecture. The original building was designed in 1949-1952 by master architect E. Stewart Williams, FAIA, expanded in 1970-1972 by the firm of Wexler & Harrison, and comprehensively redesigned in 1982-1987 by David Christian, AIA. The complex houses internationally significant artwork by kinetic artist Yaacov Agam and has served as the spiritual and cultural center for Palm Springs' Jewish community for over 75 years, making it an exceptional example of evolving Reform Jewish sacred architecture in Southern California.

Founded in 1950, Temple Isaiah has served continuously as the focal point of organized Jewish communal life in the Coachella Valley, providing religious, educational, and social services to Conservative, Reform, and Orthodox communities across the desert region.<sup>1</sup> The building gained additional cultural significance through its association with the historic 1982-1983 Frank Sinatra fundraising concerts, which raised approximately \$4 million for the temple expansion.<sup>2</sup>

The complex exemplifies the architectural evolution of Reform Jewish worship spaces over four decades, reflecting changing liturgical practices, demographic growth, and aesthetic sensibilities while maintaining continuity of sacred purpose and community service.<sup>3</sup>

### DESIGNATION CRITERIA

#### **Pursuant to Palm Springs Municipal Code (PSMC) Section 8.05.070(C.1.):**

A site, structure, building, or object may be designated as a Class I Historic Resource or a Contributing Resource in a proposed historic district by the Palm Springs City Council, provided both of the following findings are met. Refer to the U.S. Department of the Interior National Register Bulletin *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* for additional guidance.

As outlined in the analysis beginning on page 25, **Temple Isaiah qualifies as a City of Palm Springs Class I Historic Resource.**

The property possesses exceptional historic and architectural significance and meets **four of seven** of the eligibility criteria outlined in Municipal Code Section 8.05.070(C.1.a):

- **(i)** Significant events in local history;
- **(iii)** Exemplifying a particular period in local history;

- **(iv)** Embodies the distinctive characteristics of an architectural type;
- **(v)** Represents the work of master architects and artists whose individual contributions influenced their age (i.e., peers, profession) and possess high artistic value.

Furthermore, the building possesses a **high degree of historic integrity** as outlined in Municipal Code Section 8.05.070(C.1.b), retaining integrity of **Location, Setting, Design, Materials, Workmanship, Feeling, and Association**, particularly as they relate to the 1982–1987 David Christian expansion, which now constitutes the building’s primary period of significance, for the exteriors.

The historic context within which Temple Isaiah was evaluated, as outlined in the *Citywide Historic Context Statement & Survey Findings*, is most closely related to the **Post–World War II period (1945–1969)**, though the exteriors fall outside that 1969 end date,

# APPLICATION



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## CITY OF PALM SPRINGS

Department of Planning Services  
3200 East Tahquitz Canyon Way, Palm Springs, CA 92262  
Phone 760 323 8245  
Fax 760 322 8360  
Historic Preservation Officer 760 322 8364 x8786

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### HISTORIC RESOURCE DESIGNATION (HRD)

#### WHEN TO USE THIS APPLICATION:

Use this application if you are seeking historic designation for a property, parcel or historic district.

For alterations to Class 1, Class 2, or contributing sites in a Historic District, use the CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS application. (C of A)

For alterations or demolition of Class 3, Class 4 or non-contributing sites in a Historic District use the MINOR ARCHITECTURAL APPLICATION (MAA).

(Contact the Planning Department if you are unsure of the classification of your property.)

#### WHO MAY APPLY:

Any individual or organization may apply to the City for consideration of a request for historic designation, however applications must be signed and notarized by the owner(s) of record of the site, structure, building or object for which the designation is sought. For Historic Districts written signatures from at least 51% of the property owners in the proposed district must be included in the application.

#### PROCEDURE:

1. For proposed historic sites or resources: Refer to Palm Springs Municipal Code ("PSMC") Section 8.05.070 for *Procedures and Criteria for the Designation of Class 1 and Class 2 Historic Resources*. ([www.palmspringsca.gov/government/departments/planning/municipal\\_code/title\\_8/section\\_8.05](http://www.palmspringsca.gov/government/departments/planning/municipal_code/title_8/section_8.05_Historic_Preservation) "Historic Preservation").
2. For proposed historic districts: Refer to Municipal Code Section 8.05.090 for *Procedures and Criteria for Designation of Historic Districts*. ([www.palmspringsca.gov/government/departments/planning/municipal\\_code/title\\_8/section\\_8.05](http://www.palmspringsca.gov/government/departments/planning/municipal_code/title_8/section_8.05_Historic_Preservation) "Historic Preservation").
3. Complete all parts of the application and include related reports, mailing labels and back up information in support of the application. Denote "NA" for any line item that is "not applicable".
4. Prior to submittal of the application, contact the City's Historic Preservation Officer ("HPO") to review the application for conformance and completeness.
5. Submit the completed application and related materials to the Department of Planning Services. A Planning Department case number will be assigned to the application.
6. Applications for historic site / resource or historic district designation are evaluated by City staff who will prepare the application for consideration by the City's Historic Site Preservation Board ("HSPB") at a noticed public hearing. Applicants should plan on attending the hearing. City staff will schedule site visits for members of the HSPB to become familiar with the site prior to the public hearing. (Exterior review only, interiors are not subject to HSPB review.)
7. At the public hearing, the HSPB will evaluate the application and make a recommendation for City Council action. The City Council will consider the application and the HSPB's recommendation at a second noticed public hearing. The applicant should again attend that hearing.
8. The final action of the City Council to designate will be recorded on the property title with the County Recorder's office.

**FOR HISTORIC SITE / RESOURCE APPLICATIONS, SEE PART 1 BELOW.**  
**FOR HISTORIC DISTRICT APPLICATIONS, SEE PART 2 BELOW.**

**PART 1: REQUIRED MATERIALS FOR HISTORIC SITE / RESOURCE DESIGNATION APPLICATIONS (See PSMC 8.05.070(A,3):**

An application for historic site / resource designation must include the following items. After preliminary review of the application by the HPO, provide twelve (12) hard copies and 1 electronic copy on disk or thumb drive of the following materials unless otherwise noted:

		APPLICANT CHECK	CITY STAFF CHECK
1	Original Completed Application (1 copy)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Owner Consent Letter w/ notarized signature, (1 copy)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Ownership and address history; ("Chain of title") (1 copy.)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	A report that describes how the proposed site(s), structures, buildings or objects are eligible and appropriate for designation under PSMC 8.05.070 for historic resources.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Photographs of the exterior of the proposed sites, structures, buildings or objects.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Aerial photo of the site / resource (from Google Maps or equal).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Information about the architect(s), designer(s), planner(s), and/or developers of the proposed sites, structures, buildings or objects, if known.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Date and method of construction of any structure, building or object upon the proposed site or within the proposed district (provide copies of building permits where possible).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	A detailed assessment of the character-defining features of the site, structure, building or object, (such as materials, architectural details or landscape elements, architectural style, and other relevant descriptors, etc.)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	Evaluation of the site, structure, building, or object relative to the Criteria and Findings for Designation of Class 1 and Class 2 Historic Resources. (PSMC 8.05.070 (C).*	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	Identify the source of the information provided in the application, such as building permit numbers, date and issue of publications, organizations or individuals.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	Site Plan (8-1/2" x 11" or 11" x 17")	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13	Any other documentation or research as may be deemed necessary by the HPO to determine the qualifications of the site, structure, building or object for historic designation.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	Public Hearing Labels. The applicant shall submit public hearing mailing labels pursuant to Zoning Code Section 94.09.00.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

\*Applicants are encouraged to review the City's Technical Assistance Bulletin titled "How to Apply the Palm Springs Eligibility Criteria for Historic Designation" available under "Historic Resources" of the Planning Home page of the City website ([www.palmspringsc.gov](http://www.palmspringsc.gov)) and the bulletin from the U.S. Department of the Interior National Register Criteria for Evaluation" (National Register Bulletin 15 (<http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/>)).



(to be completed by Planning staff:)

Date:
Case No.
HSPB No.
Planner:

**CITY OF PALM SPRINGS**  
Department of Planning Services

**HISTORIC RESOURCE DESIGNATION (HRD)**

**TO THE APPLICANT:**

Complete all parts of this application. Denote "NA" for lines that are not applicable.  
Submit the completed application with attachments to the Department of Planning Services at  
3200 E. Tahquitz Canyon Way, Palm Springs, CA 92262 Phone: 760-323-8245 Fax: 760-322-8380

This application is for a proposed: (Check one)  Historic Site / Resource  Historic District:

Applicant's Name: ROBERT WEINSTEIN, ESQ

Please Print  
 Owner  Lessee  Authorized Agent  City  Other

Applicant's Address: 1039 S. PALM CANYON DR  
PALM SPRINGS CA 92264  
Number and Street Name or P.O. Box  
City State ZIP

Telephone Nos: 310-431-7712

E-Mail address: WEINSTEIN.LAW.100@GMAIL.COM  
Residence Cell Work

Note: For Historic District applications: On a separate page, provide a list all sites / parcels within the proposed historic district boundaries with the following information provided for each parcel / APN.

Site Address: 332 W. ALEJO ROAD

APN 505313007 Zone: \_\_\_\_\_ Section: \_\_\_\_\_ Gen'l Plan Land Use Desig. \_\_\_\_\_

Is the project is located on the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians Reservation? \_\_\_\_\_  
(Refer to the Land Status Map under Tribal Resources on the Planning Department home page.)

Construction Date: 1950, 1982?  Estimated  Actual (denote source, i.e. bldg. permits)

Architect: DAVID CHRISTIAN Builder: \_\_\_\_\_

Present Owner: TEMPLE ISAIAH

Present Owner Address: 332 W. ALEJO ROAD

Original Owner: TEMPLE ISAIAH  
Other notable past owners: N/A  
Other Historic Associations: JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER  
Common Name of Property: TEMPLE ISAIAH  
Historic Name of Property: TEMPLE ISAIAH

Attach to this application any information, photos, drawings, newspaper articles, reports, studies, or other materials to fully describe the characteristics or conditions that support this application for historic designation.

Architectural Style: LATE MODERN  
(Refer to the Architectural Styles chapter of the Citywide Historic Context Statement, under Historic Resources on the Planning Home page ([www.palmspringsca.gov](http://www.palmspringsca.gov)).

Period of Significance: 1949-52; 1960-62; 1982-87  
(See the Citywide Historic Context Statement Document.)

Please list any informational reference sources used to complete this application:

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**PSMC 8.05.070 (C.1): Criteria for the Designation of Class 1 Historic Resources.**

A site, structure, building or object may be designated as a Class 1 historic resource or a Contributing Resource in a proposed historic district by the Palm Springs City Council, provided both of the following findings are met.

Provide a written description of how the site qualifies as historic resource under one or more of the following criterion:

**FINDING 1:** The site, structure, building or object exhibits exceptional historic significance and meets one or more of the criteria listed below:

- i. The resource is associated with events that have made a meaningful contribution to the nation, state or community.<sup>1</sup>
- ii. The resource is associated with the lives of persons who made a meaningful contribution to national, state or local history.
- iii. The resource reflects or exemplifies a particular period of national, state or local history.
- iv. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type of construction, a period of construction or a method of construction.<sup>2</sup>
- v. The resource presents the work of a master builder, designer, artist, or architect whose individual genius influenced his age, or that possesses high artistic value.
- vi. The resource represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction, as used in evaluating applications for designation of historic districts, for parcels on which more than one entity exists.
- vii. The resource has yielded or may be likely to yield information important to national, state or local history or prehistory.

<sup>1</sup> NOTE: Unlike the National Register criteria, The City's criterion does not consider "patterns of events". For consideration of "patterns of events", use Criterion "iii", reflecting a particular period.

<sup>2</sup> Unlike the National Register criteria "type, period of method of construction relates to construction only" For design theme or characteristics use Criterion "iii" (period) or Criterion v (high artistic value).

**FINDING 2:** The site, structure, building or object retains most if not all of the following aspects of Integrity, as established in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards<sup>3</sup>: Design, Materials, Workmanship, Location, Setting, Feeling, Association.

**PSMC 8.05.070 (C.2) Criteria for the Designation of Class 2 Historic Resources.**

A site, structure, building or object may be designated as a Class 2 historic resource, or a Contributing Resource to a proposed historic district by the Palm Springs City Council provided the site, structure, building or object exhibits exceptional historic significance and meets one or more of the criteria listed in Finding 1 above. A Class 2 historic resource is not required to meet the findings for integrity as described in Finding 2 (above).

**PSMC 8.05.090 (C) Criteria and Findings for Designation of Historic Districts.**

In addition to the criteria listed in Finding 1, to be considered for designation as a Historic District, a defined area must:

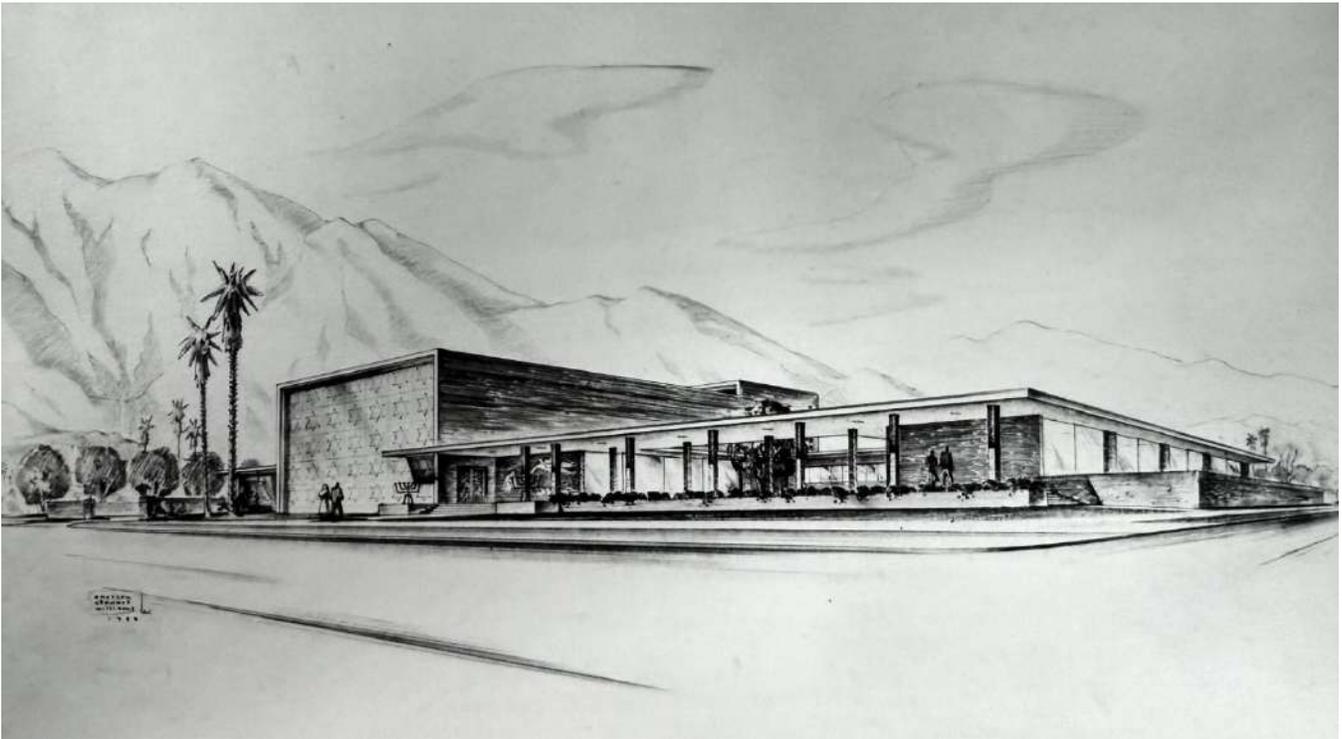
- a. Contain contributing resources on a majority of the sites within the proposed district which individually meet the criteria in Finding (1). The defined area may include other structures, buildings, or archaeological sites which contribute generally to the overall distinctive character of the area and are related historically or visually by plan or physical development.  
(Identify list by address and APN number each site / parcel that meets the criteria outlined in Finding 1 above and document how each meets the criteria.)
- b. Identify non-contributing properties or vacant parcels to the extent necessary to establish appropriate, logical or convenient boundaries.  
(Identify list by address and APN number each site / parcel within the proposed historic district that is considered non-contributing to the overall historic significance of the historic district.)

Please attach any additional information related to the application as necessary.

Questions: Contact the Palm Springs Planning Department at 760 323 8245.

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<sup>3</sup> Refer to the U.S. Department of the Interior Bulletin for How to Evaluate the Integrity of a Property.



Architect E. Stewart Williams' rendering for Temple Isaiah, 1950. Courtesy Palm Springs Art Museum, Architecture and Design Center Archives.

## Architectural Evolution

The building represents three distinct periods of significant religious architecture:

**E. Stewart Williams Period (1949-1952):** The original design exemplifies the postwar national trend, as approximately 85% of new Jewish synagogues adopted modernist principles.<sup>4</sup> Williams's design featured poured concrete construction,<sup>5</sup> with distinctive interior elements including concrete arches flanking the sanctuary, exposed aggregate concrete block walls, cantilevered entrance stairs, and naturally finished white oak liturgical furnishings.<sup>6</sup> The building originally featured a C-shaped plan organized around a central courtyard, with a south facade composed of forty precast Mo-Sai slabs (concrete with pink granite chips) featuring incised Stars of David—creating what was described as "an impressive mosaic pattern of basic simplicity."<sup>7</sup> Williams's approach reflected "the other tradition" of Modernism, emphasizing human scale and natural materials influenced by Scandinavian architects including Eliel and Eero Saarinen and Alvar Aalto.<sup>8</sup> The building received recognition from the American Institute of Architects as one of the finest religious facilities of its kind in the nation.

**Wexler & Harrison Period (1960-1962):** As the congregation grew, prominent desert modernist architects Donald Wexler and Richard Harrison designed a six-classroom addition inserted into the former central courtyard, a sensitive expansion compatible with Williams's original design vocabulary. Wexler later contributed liturgical furnishings, including an ark, Torah stand, and lectern, and coordinated the integration of significant artistic elements. Donald Wexler alone also later designed an expansion for the Temple, which was not realized.

**David Christian Period (1982-1987):** Following Frank Sinatra's fundraising success, Palm Springs architect David Christian—who served on the city's Planning Commission—designed a major expansion that completely absorbed the Williams and Wexler & Harrison exteriors while preserving their interior spaces. Christian's Late

Modern design is a sculpture in and of itself, with strong bold geometries and heavy white stucco that represent significant 1980s contemporary religious architecture. The composition features canted shapes and sloping profiles referencing Pueblo architectural traditions (perhaps inspired by his time working for Hugh Kaptur), a dramatically swooping roofline suggesting spiritual uplift, and sophisticated natural light choreography through clerestory windows. The expansion increased the building's size from 14,140 to 51,000 square feet, including the Bochner Sanctuary (seating 500, expandable to 700), Levy Hall with mountain-framing clerestory windows, the Warsaw Ballroom, the Vener Reception Hall, and extensive support facilities.<sup>9</sup> The sanctuary faces west toward the mountains, rather than the traditional east toward Jerusalem, creating a uniquely Californian interpretation of sacred space that celebrates the connection to the dramatic natural landscape.<sup>10</sup>

### **Artistic Contributions**

Into this living work of sculpture by David Christian, the artwork designed for the spaces creates a remarkable dialogue between architecture and liturgical art spanning multiple decades. Temple Isaiah features exceptional artistic elements spanning multiple decades. Eric Ray's 1969 stained glass windows depict Jewish history through abstract designs representing the fire of Torah, tablets of stone, Star of David, Tower of David, and redemption. Victor Ries created Hebrew calligraphy in metal forming the Ten Commandments, arranged to appear soaring toward heaven.<sup>11</sup> Most significantly, internationally recognized kinetic artist Yaacov Agam designed the Tash/Agam Ark—one of the first computer-controlled liturgical elements in American synagogue architecture. The ark features lucite and acrylic panels with color decals coordinating with the sanctuary's graduated pew upholstery colors, and incorporates pioneering technology where the Ner Tamid (eternal light) lowers while Torah scrolls rise from a bottom shaft via computer control. Agam's vision that "the most daring innovations in technology and electronics should be employed to enhance our worship experience" found groundbreaking expression at Temple Isaiah.<sup>12</sup>

## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

### **Summary**

Temple Isaiah, constructed in multiple phases between 1949 and 1987, reflects the work of master architects E. Stewart Williams, Donald Wexler, and David Christian, and serves as the historic religious and cultural center of Palm Springs' Jewish community.

### **Location**

Temple Isaiah is located at 332 West Alejo Road, adjacent to the O'Donnell Golf Course and within central Palm Springs.



*View of Temple Isaiah from Alejo Road. November 2025 photograph by the author.*

## **THE ARCHITECTURE OF TEMPLE ISAIAH**

Temple Isaiah is a multi-building religious complex reflecting several phases of construction, with its current exterior appearance defined almost entirely by the **1982–1987 David Christian Late Modern expansion**. The present complex exhibits the massing, materials, roof forms, and fenestration patterns characteristic of contemporary religious architecture of the 1980s, with limited surviving exterior fabric from the original 1949–1952 E. Stewart Williams design. The following description documents the building as it exists today, organized by elevation.



*Two views of the primary façade seen from Alejo Road. November 2025 photographs by the author.*

## **PRIMARY (SOUTH) FACADE – ALEJO ROAD**

The primary façade presents a composition of angular stucco volumes characteristic of Christian’s 1980s design vocabulary. The elevation begins at the left with a tall, sharply angled white stucco mass forming folded planes that create deep shadow lines. Mounted on this plane is a vertical geometric screen composed of dark linear members, forming an abstract decorative element. Signage reading “Temple Isaiah” and “Leah and Florence Elkin

Jewish Community Center” is affixed to this wall. Tall fan palms flank this section and provide vertical contrast to the angular massing.

Moving eastward, the façade transitions to a long horizontal volume capped by a pronounced sawtooth roofline composed of triangular clerestory elements. This serrated profile introduces rhythmic modulation to the roof edge while admitting natural light to interior spaces. Beneath this roof, the wall surface alternates between recessed glazing and solid stucco planes. The primary entrance is located within this bay, accessed by a short run of steps and sheltered beneath the projecting roof canopy.

Further right, the façade continues with lower horizontal stucco masses displaying minimal fenestration. Window openings appear in both horizontal bands and vertical slots. The consistent white stucco finish unifies the composition. Xeriscape planting, gravel beds, and additional palm trees frame the base of the elevation, reinforcing the building’s integration with its desert context.



*The west facade. November 2025 photograph by the author.*

## **WEST FACADE – SANCTUARY ELEVATION**

The west façade reveals the sanctuary as the dominant architectural element. A large curved roof sweeps upward in a broad arc, creating the most prominent roof form in the complex. Beneath this overhanging roof plane, a continuous band of dark-tinted glazing wraps the sanctuary volume. The glass is recessed to create deep shadow lines that visually separate the roof from the wall plane below.

The lower portion of the façade consists of white stucco walls stepping down in height to accommodate grade changes. Shrubs trimmed into spherical forms line the base of the wall, introducing a uniform landscape element. Wall-mounted text identifies the “Rabbi Joseph Hurwitz Pavilion.” Parking along this elevation includes accessible spaces and blue-painted curbs. Tall fan palms and low-water desert planting surround the façade, integrating the structure into its broader landscape setting.



*The east façade. November 2025 photograph by the author.*

## **EAST FACADE**

The east façade serves secondary functions and includes service and support spaces. A substantial Chinese elm tree anchors the foreground and partially screens the elevation. The façade is composed of white stucco masses arranged in stepped and angled forms that follow the site’s topography.

A recessed entry with stairs and metal handrails descends to a lower-level doorway defined by white retaining walls. Above this area, the wall surfaces rise in simple planar forms with limited fenestration. The roofline features sloping planes and clerestory modules consistent with Christian’s overall design vocabulary. Portions of gray-toned building fabric appear behind the primary white volumes, suggesting later modifications.

The San Jacinto Mountains form a dramatic backdrop to this elevation. A tall hedge defines the eastern property edge. Adjacent paved parking and gravel-based xeriscaping maintain continuity with the remainder of the site.



*The north facade. November 2025 photographs by the author.*

## **NORTH FACADE**

The north façade reflects the complex architectural history of the site, incorporating both surviving Williams fabric and Christian's later construction.

At the far left stands the only remaining exterior portion of the original Williams design, now painted white to match the later work. The underlying brick construction remains discernible through its textural variation. Original steel casement windows with slender profiles remain in place, representing the mid-century fabrication methods used during the 1949–1952 construction period.

Above this Williams volume, a heavy angular fascia—part of Christian's redesign—wraps the roofline, visually integrating the earlier structure into the later composition.

Proceeding rightward, the façade transitions into Christian's white stucco volumes of varying height, arranged in stepped masses. Recessed openings, clerestory windows, and terraced levels provide light to interior rooms. White retaining walls define grade changes and circulation pathways.

Portions of the rear yard are enclosed by chain-link fencing, delineating outdoor areas used for children's play and recreation. A sand-covered play area with swings and shade structures reflects the community center function of the facility. Tall palm trees and the mountain backdrop remain prominent features.

A long single-story wing extends horizontally near the center of the elevation. This section is clad in white horizontal siding, contrasting with the smooth stucco finish of the adjacent volumes. Minimal fenestration punctuates the wall plane. A flat parapet roof completes this utilitarian wing.

Beyond this, the sanctuary volume rises above the lower masses, distinguished by the angular stucco planes and sawtooth roofline characteristic of Christian's work. Terraced levels reveal rooftop mechanical equipment and service areas. The overall composition emphasizes horizontal lines, solid planes, and recessed glazing.

The juxtaposition of the small surviving Williams element with the more extensive Christian redesign documents the architectural evolution of the complex, illustrating two successive phases of mid-century and late modernist religious architecture in Palm Springs.

## **Character-Defining Features of Temple Isaiah**

The 1982-1987 expansion by David Christian represents a significant example of 1980s contemporary religious architecture. The design absorbed the earlier Williams and Wexler & Harrison structures while creating a bold new Late Modern architectural statement characterized by heavy geometric forms, dramatic rooflines, and sophisticated natural lighting. The 51,000-square-foot complex exemplifies Christian's design vocabulary of canted shapes, sloping profiles, and expressive monumentality, while incorporating groundbreaking artistic collaborations and liturgical innovations.

## **Contributing Elements:**

### **Overall Massing and Form**

- Composition of canted geometric forms dominated by upswept main sanctuary volume
- Two-level structure integrating basement and main level functions
- Dramatically curved, upswept roofline rising toward Mt. San Jacinto
- Heavy geometric massing with sloping profiles referencing Pueblo architectural traditions
- Long horizontal volumes punctuated by vertical elements
- Integration of sculptural roof forms with functional spatial organization

### **Exterior Materials and Finishes**

- White stucco facade on metal studs encapsulating original Williams building
- Consistent white finish unifying multiple building phases
- Long series of louvered stucco vertical fins on side elevations
- Textural variation through angular planes and shadow lines
- Desert-appropriate material palette emphasizing permanence and solidity

### **Rooflines and Roof Forms**

- Dramatically curved west elevation roofline creating sculptural silhouette suggesting spiritual uplift
- Sawtooth roofline composed of triangular clerestory elements providing rhythmic modulation
- Sweeping curved roof over sanctuary as dominant architectural element
- Angular fascia wrapping and integrating earlier Williams structure
- Complex interplay of flat, sloped, and curved roof planes

### **Fenestration and Glazing**

- Eighteen angular windows punctuating façades on two sides (The word chai means "life" in Hebrew, making the number 18 a powerful symbol of good luck and well-being).
- Panoramic window above Bimah with 12 panes of glass representing 12 tribes of Israel
- Fixed glass panels facing west in vertical fins
- Continuous band of dark-tinted recessed glazing wrapping sanctuary volume
- Clerestory windows creating sophisticated natural light choreography
- Strategic window placement balancing light, views, and privacy
- Deep reveals and recessed glazing creating pronounced shadow lines

### **Landscape Integration**

- Xeriscape planting with gravel beds and native/adapted species
- Tall fan palms providing vertical punctuation
- Spherically-trimmed shrubs as uniform landscape elements
- Terracing and grading responding to site topography

- White retaining walls defining circulation and grade changes
- Desert planting reinforcing integration with Palm Springs context
- Mountain views framed as integral design element

### **Interior Spatial Organization - Main Level**

- Large south lobby (Vener Reception Hall) running length of new wing
- Bochner Sanctuary seating 500, expandable to 700 with adjacent Levy Hall
- Levy Hall with dramatic clerestory windows framing mountain and palm tree views
- Long north lobby for secondary circulation
- East lobby with adjacent professional kitchen
- Warsaw Ballroom for social and event space
- Conference room, library, and administrative offices
- Non-traditional sanctuary orientation facing west toward mountains rather than east toward Jerusalem

### **Interior Spatial Organization - Basement Level**

- Large central multi-purpose/classroom space
- Mechanical rooms, storage rooms, warming kitchen
- Support facilities including bathrooms, janitor's room, bride's room
- Efficient circulation connecting functional spaces

### **Interior Finishes and Details**

- Color-graduated upholstery on the pews coordinated with Agam ark: muted blue at front (near bimah) transitioning through pinkish hue to red at back
- Interior design by Cathleen Jones in collaboration with Yaacov Agam
- Integration of artistic elements with architectural design

### **Yaacov Agam Artistic Features (Groundbreaking Computer-Controlled Liturgical Elements)**

- Tash/Agam Ark: colorful glass and acrylic cabinet structure with visible Torah scrolls representing radical departure from traditional concealed ark
- Kinetic mechanism with computer-controlled system where Ner Tamid (eternal light) lowers and Torah scrolls rise from bottom shaft
- Engineering innovation allowing Torah scrolls to disappear for non-religious community events
- Lucite and acrylic panels with color decals creating dynamic visual effects
- Five framed Agam works on sanctuary south wall
- Integration of cutting-edge 1980s technology with liturgical tradition

### **Site Features and Context**

- Alejo Road frontage establishing primary public identity
- Parking areas landscaped to minimize visual impact

- Service areas discreetly located
- Outdoor play areas with swings and shade structures supporting community center function
- Chain-link fencing defining children's recreation zones
- Integration with surrounding residential neighborhood scale
- Dramatic San Jacinto Mountains backdrop as designed visual element

### **Surviving Williams Elements (1949-1952)**

#### Exterior:

- North elevation brick construction (now painted white) retaining textural variation
- Original steel casement windows with slender mid-century profiles
- Foundation and structural elements incorporated into Christian expansion

#### Interior:

- Exposed reinforced concrete beams (bents) left unpainted on ceiling and walls
- Naturally finished white oak woodwork with clear lacquer on altar, choir screen, Ark, and trim
- Sandblasted and stained ceiling in soft mulberry color
- Cantilevered stairs
- Small choir enclosure (seating 12) with small organ console below high windows
- Single eternal light hanging from ceiling

### **Non-Contributing or Altered Elements:**

- Modern mechanical equipment and rooftop installations
- Updated life safety systems (fire alarm, sprinkler, emergency lighting)
- Contemporary signage not part of original Christian design

## **BACKGROUND / HISTORIC CONTEXT**

### **Criterion 1 — Significant Events**

Temple Isaiah has served as the center of organized Jewish communal life in the Palm Springs area since 1950, providing religious, educational, and social services to the community. The property also hosted significant cultural events, including the 1982 and 1983 fundraising concerts organized with Frank Sinatra, which raised approximately \$4 million for the temple expansion. Through its longstanding role as a religious and cultural hub, Temple Isaiah made a meaningful contribution to the development of Palm Springs.

The property qualifies under Criterion 1.

### **Criterion 2 — Significant Persons**

Although associated with notable individuals—including architect E. Stewart Williams, Rabbi Joseph Hurwitz, and entertainer Frank Sinatra—these associations do not reach the level of significance required under this

criterion. Williams's exterior architectural work is no longer extant, and associations with Rabbi Hurwitz and Sinatra, while locally important, are not directly expressed through the physical fabric of the resource.

The property does not qualify under Criterion 2.

### **Criterion 3 — Exemplifies a Particular Period of History**

Temple Isaiah reflects several significant phases of American synagogue architecture. The original 1949–1952 sanctuary and classroom buildings by E. Stewart Williams embody the postwar shift toward Modernist religious design. The 1960–1962 classroom addition by Wexler & Harrison reflects the mid-century expansion of the congregation and the development of flexible educational facilities. The 1982–1987 sanctuary expansion by David Christian illustrates late twentieth-century religious architecture characterized by expressive geometric massing and contemporary construction methods, and includes Yaacov Agam's computer-assisted kinetic ark, an early example of technologically integrated liturgical design.

The property qualifies under Criterion 3.

### **Criterion 4 — Embodies Distinctive Characteristics**

Temple Isaiah incorporates architectural elements from multiple periods, including surviving Williams-designed interior features from the early Desert Modernist phase and the intact 1980s sanctuary by David Christian. While the extensive removal of the original Williams exterior architecture in the 1982–1987 expansion prevents the property from embodying the distinctive characteristics of its mid-century period, the Christian expansion represents a significant example of Late Modern architecture as defined in Historic Resources Group's Citywide Historic Context Statement & Survey Findings.

Christian's design exemplifies the character-defining features of Late Modern architecture: bold geometric volumes with canted shapes and sloping profiles, large expanses of heavy white stucco creating unrelieved wall surfaces, uniform cladding materials, exaggerated sculptural expression, and dramatic manipulation of natural light through deeply set clerestory windows. The building's sculptural massing and sophisticated geometric composition demonstrate the "deliberate sculptural quality" that distinguishes Late Modern from earlier modernist approaches. As a substantial example of 1980s Late Modern religious architecture in Palm Springs, the Christian expansion embodies the distinctive characteristics of this architectural type.

The property qualifies under Criterion 4 for the David Christian Late Modern expansion (1982-1987).

### **Criterion 5 — Work of a Master / High Artistic Value**

Temple Isaiah represents the work of several master designers. E. Stewart Williams's contributions illustrate his early Modernist approach and experimental use of concrete materials. Donald Wexler's classroom addition demonstrates his sensitivity to existing architectural vocabulary. David Christian's 1980s expansion reflects his command of contemporary religious design principles. Artistic contributions include Yaacov Agam's kinetic ark, Eric Ray's stained-glass windows, and Victor Ries's metal Hebrew lettering. Collectively, these works contribute to the artistic significance of the property.

The property qualifies under Criterion 5.

## **Criterion 6 — Historic District**

Criterion 6 applies only to historic districts and collective resources. Temple Isaiah is evaluated as an individual property.

The property does not qualify under Criterion 6.

## **Criterion 7 — Information Potential**

Temple Isaiah is unlikely to yield information important to national, state, or local history or prehistory beyond what is already known.

The property does not qualify under Criterion 7.

# **INTEGRITY ANALYSIS**

(Using the U.S. Secretary of the Interior Standards)

Integrity is evaluated through seven aspects: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Because the earlier exterior architectural work by E. Stewart Williams and Wexler & Harrison is no longer extant, the integrity analysis focuses solely on the 1982–1987 David Christian expansion, the building’s surviving and character-defining architectural expression.

## **DESIGN**

The David Christian expansion retains excellent integrity of design. Christian’s comprehensive reconfiguration established a unified architectural envelope defined by sculptural geometric massing, sharply angled wall planes, clerestory glazing, and a multi-level sanctuary plan. The intact organization of volumes—including the west-facing sanctuary, narthex, circulation routes, and associated programmatic spaces—continues to reflect the design intent of the 1980s expansion. The overall composition remains coherent, legible, and representative of contemporary religious architecture of the period.

Design integrity is excellent.

## **MATERIALS**

Christian’s material palette remains intact and clearly expresses the architectural character of the 1980s expansion. Surviving materials include stucco cladding over steel framing, angular and clerestory glazing systems, metal fins and trim, interior finishes, and fixed liturgical elements. The Agam kinetic ark, Eric Ray stained glass, and Victor Ries metal calligraphy continue to represent the artistic and material vocabulary of the period.

Material integrity is excellent for the Christian phase.

## **WORKMANSHIP**

The expansion retains high workmanship integrity, visible in the precise execution of its angled stucco forms, clerestory window installation, integrated lighting and mechanical systems, and interior finishes. The fabrication and installation of the kinetic ark further represent the emerging electro-mechanical craftsmanship of the era.

Workmanship integrity is strong and remains legible throughout the Christian-designed portions.

## **LOCATION**

The building remains on its original site at 332 West Alejo Road. Christian’s design was conceived specifically in response to this location—most notably the west-facing massing oriented toward the San Jacinto Mountains—and continues to express this relationship.

Location integrity is complete.

## **SETTING**

The Christian expansion maintains its historic setting, including its orientation toward the mountains, its relationship to the O’Donnell golf course, and its position within a maturing urban neighborhood. These environmental conditions remain consistent with those at the time of Christian’s design and continue to reinforce the architectural intent of the 1980s expansion.

Setting integrity is excellent.

## **FEELING**

The building strongly conveys the feeling of a late-twentieth-century religious complex. Christian’s distinctive geometric volumes, dramatic rooflines, clerestory lighting, and sculptural exterior surfaces remain intact and clearly communicate the expressive design sensibilities of the 1980s.

Feeling integrity is very strong for the Christian period.

## **ASSOCIATION**

Temple Isaiah retains clear associative integrity with the era of the Christian expansion. The building continues to function as an active synagogue, reinforcing its original religious and communal purpose. Surviving artistic elements—including the Agam ark and other liturgical artworks—preserve associations with the artists and designers involved in the 1980s renovation.

Association integrity remains high.

## **INTEGRITY SUMMARY**

When evaluated solely on the basis of the 1982–1987 David Christian expansion, Temple Isaiah retains excellent integrity across all applicable aspects. The Christian design has now achieved historical significance in its own right and is the building’s defining architectural period. Its exterior massing, materials, workmanship, and spatial organization remain largely unchanged, allowing the property to clearly convey its 1980s design intent and architectural character.

# APPENDICES

## I OWNER'S LETTER OF SUPPORT



**City of Palm Springs  
City Council**

In accordance with our bylaws, the Board of Trustees has approved the nomination of Temple Isaiah for Class I Historic Preservation status. Both our leadership and our congregation fully support this effort to preserve the nationally recognized treasure that is Temple Isaiah in Palm Springs.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carol K. Fragen".

**Carol Fragen  
President of Temple Isaiah**

332 W. Alejo Rd. • Palm Springs, CA 92262 • 760-325-2281  
[www.templeisiahps.com](http://www.templeisiahps.com)

## II ASSESSOR'S MAP AND AERIAL

<b>Property Address</b>	332 W ALEJO RD PALM SPRINGS, CA 92262
<b>Assessment No. (PIN)</b>	505313007
<b>APN (GeoCode)</b>	505313007
<b>Property Type</b>	Place of Worship
<b>TAG</b>	011-003 PALM SPRINGS
<b>Acreage</b>	3.30
<b>Doing Business As</b>	
<b>Business Use</b>	
<b>Legal Description</b>	
3.30 ACRES M/L IN LOTS 1, 2, 3 & 4 BLK 3 MB 011/002 VISTA ACRES FOR TOTAL DESCRIPTION SEE ASSESSORS MAPS Lot 1 Block 3 SubdivisionName VISTA ACRES Acres 003.30 M/L LotType Lot RecMapType Map Book MapPlatB 011 MapPlatP 002 Lot 2 LotType Lot Lot 3 LotType Lot Lot 4 LotType Lot	



### III ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY



*Palm Springs Art Museum, Architecture and Design Center Archives.*

#### **THE ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF TEMPLE ISAIAH**

Temple Isaiah stands as a significant example of mid-century modern religious architecture in Palm Springs, representing a bold departure from traditional synagogue design. Designed by Williams and Williams (later Williams, Williams, & Williams) between 1949 and 1951, the building embodies the postwar embrace of contemporary design in houses of worship, reflecting a broader national trend where approximately eighty-five percent of new Jewish synagogues and temples adopted modernist principles emphasizing simplicity and clean, uncluttered lines.



*Palm Springs Art Museum, Architecture and Design Center Archives.*

### **Initial Design and Construction (1949-1950)**

The first phase of Temple Isaiah, completed in 1950, established the architectural vocabulary that would define the entire complex. Williams conceived a C-shaped structure organized around a central open square courtyard, creating an intimate relationship between interior spaces and the desert landscape. The west side featured a large social room, while the east side housed three classrooms and a larger nursery room. The north wing contained offices, a kitchen, and other utility rooms.

The central courtyard became the heart of the composition, featuring a large grass panel punctuated by multi-trunk olive trees. A covered, colonnaded walkway faced south toward Alejo Road, creating a welcoming transitional space between street and sanctuary. This flat-roofed structure established a consistent rhythm through square concrete block columns supporting the roof, which was distinctively covered in Tropicool white rocks—a practical response to the desert climate.

The landscape design integrated architecture and nature with particular ingenuity. Against the social room wall, wires supported pyracantha espaliers trained in the form of menorahs, creating living religious symbols. Foundation plantings of various shrubs softened the building's edges while maintaining the elegant simplicity of the modernist composition.

Plans for the building were prepared by E. Stewart Williams and presented to the congregation by Building Chair Leo Baker. Palm Springs Mayor Charles Farrell turned the first shovels of earth at the groundbreaking, made possible with funds raised by members of the community. The initial building site measured 225 feet by 115 feet.<sup>13</sup>

Two critical constraints shaped the architectural approach: a limited construction budget and the building committee's lack of a specific programmatic direction regarding denominational affiliation (Liberal, Reformed, or Orthodox). These limitations, paradoxically, became creative opportunities. Williams responded with what Edith Carlson described as "a straightforward approach," selecting common cement blocks as the primary wall material and leaving them exposed both inside and out, producing "an effect of rugged solidity."<sup>14</sup>

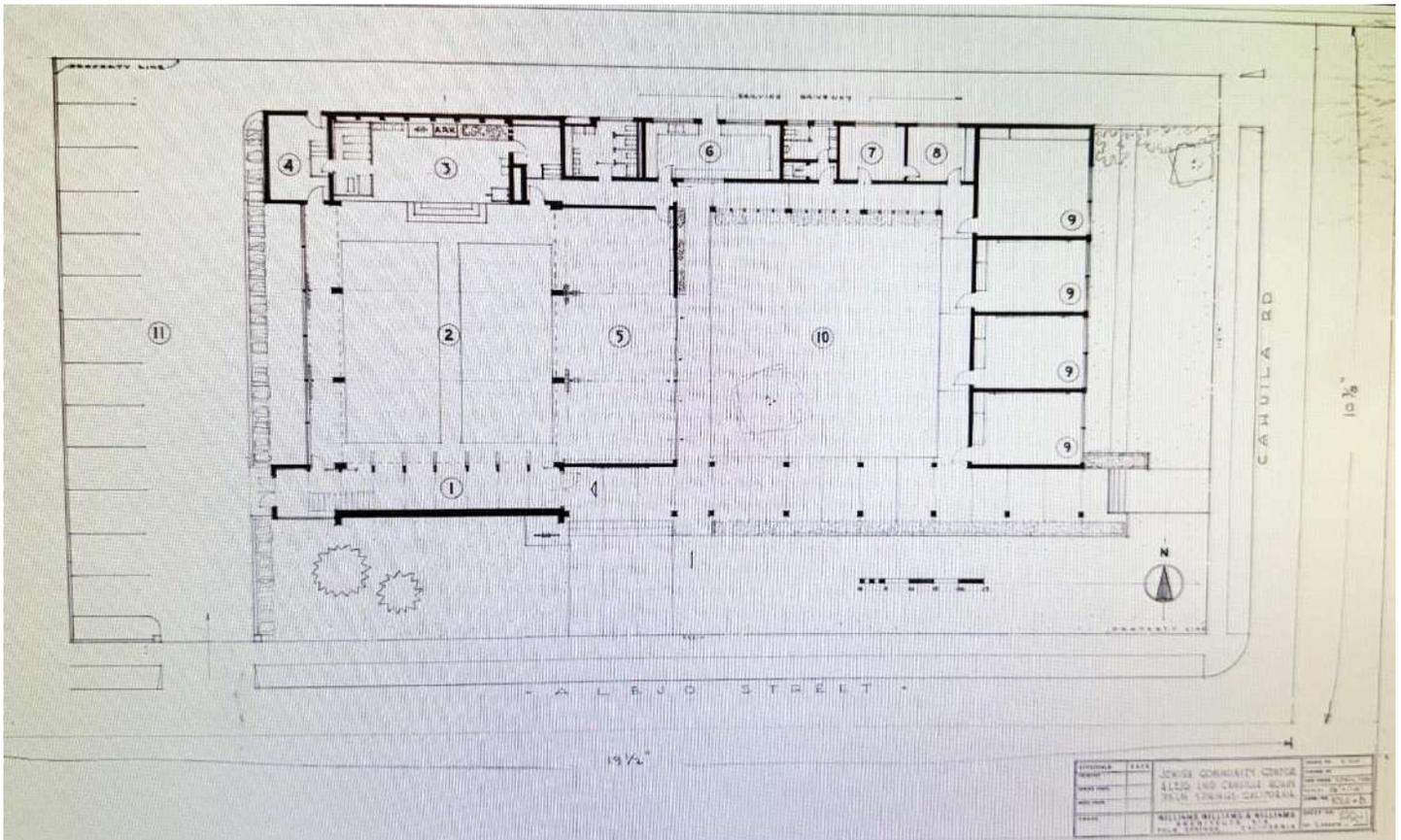


*E. Stewart Williams design for Temple Isaiah. Julius Shulman photograph, courtesy Palm Springs Art Museum, Architecture and Design Center Archives.*

## The Sanctuary Addition (1951-1952)

The second phase, starting in 1951 and completed in 1952, introduced the sanctuary—a dramatic two-story rectangular volume that became the architectural centerpiece of the complex. As *The Desert Sun* reported on May 25, 1951: "The building will be a distinctly modernistic type and will be unique in church architecture, planners said. Stewart Williams of Williams, Williams and Williams, local architects, will supervise construction." This addition used the same concrete block with exposed aggregate finish used in the first iteration.

Temple Isaiah represented what may be considered E. Stewart Williams's experimental project, where he mastered his craft of poured concrete.<sup>15</sup> The sanctuary interior is flanked by poured concrete arches—a structural and aesthetic achievement that demonstrated his command of this demanding material.<sup>16</sup> The building also features cantilevered stairs at the entrance, another expression of Williams's mastery of concrete construction techniques.<sup>17</sup>



E. Stewart Williams site plan, courtesy Palm Springs Art Museum, Architecture and Design Center Archives.

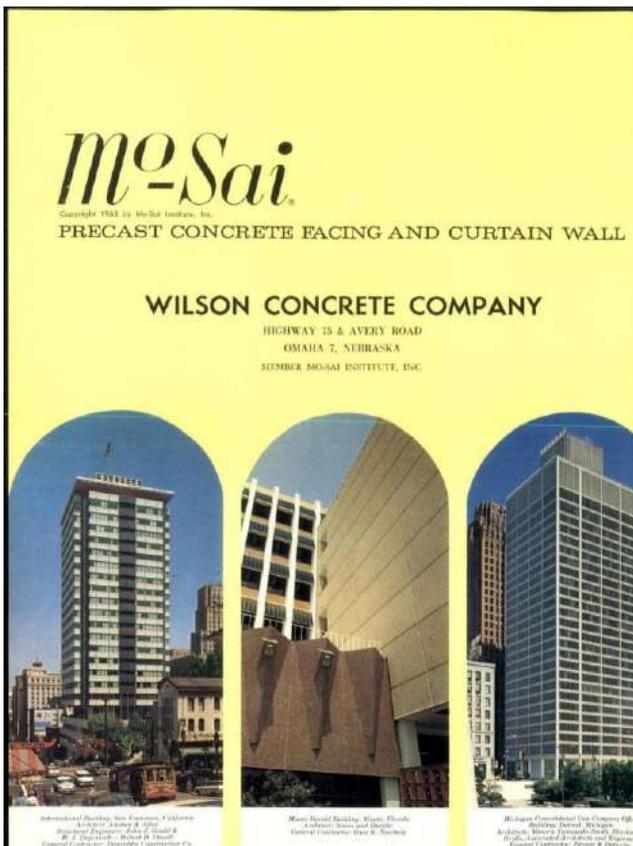
The sanctuary's primary south elevation, facing the O'Donnell golf course, presented the most distinctive and symbolically charged element of the entire complex. The wall was covered with forty-five-foot-square precast Mo-Sai slabs—concrete embedded with pink granite chips—with a Star of David incised into each panel, creating "an impressive mosaic pattern of basic simplicity."<sup>18</sup> This repeated geometric motif achieved monumentality through simplicity rather than ornament—a thoroughly modern approach to sacred architecture. The front was further adorned with a custom-designed menorah sculpture created using square metal tubing, which stood as a bold three-dimensional counterpoint to the pattern of incised stars.

Inside, the sanctuary (also known as the Liberman Chapel) seated 300 to 350 people, with an outdoor court accommodating an additional 400.<sup>19</sup> The two-story height of the sanctuary created a dramatic interior volume befitting its sacred purpose. The ceiling was sandblasted and stained a soft mulberry to match the chair seats, while acoustic plaster finished the ceilings of classrooms and the social room. Though acoustics presented potential challenges due to the hard surfaces and parallel walls, the projecting ceiling beams effectively broke up sound waves, preventing echo or unpleasant reverberations.<sup>20</sup>

Williams designed the sanctuary with a utilitarian theme, meaning it could serve multiple purposes beyond religious services. The two side walls originally had partitions that could be opened and closed, allowing the space to be configured for lectures, meetings, and even fashion shows and concerts.<sup>21</sup> When used for non-religious events, a curtain would cover the entire front Bimah area, temporarily concealing the sacred elements.<sup>22</sup> This flexibility reflected the practical needs of a growing congregation while maintaining architectural integrity.



*Detail showing the Mo-Sai pink aggregate precast concrete panels, incised with a repeating Star of David motif. Courtesy Palm Springs Art Museum, Architecture and Design Center Archives.*



*Mo-Sai brochure pages, showing the various textures available, as well as a very wide range of colored aggregate and concrete. Williams selected pink aggregate Mo-Sai panels at Temple Isaiah.*

A single "eternal light" hung from the ceiling, maintaining the essential Jewish tradition through minimalist expression. High windows provided accent light for the stage and Ark, creating a carefully choreographed play of natural illumination that enhanced the sanctuary's spiritual atmosphere. Directly below these high windows, a small choir enclosure seated 12 persons plus a small organ console, integrating musical elements into the architectural composition without overwhelming the space.

The lighting throughout the sanctuary demonstrated Williams's attention to every detail of the design. The fixtures were custom designed by the architects and manufactured by Ledlin Lighting Co., ensuring that even utilitarian elements contributed to the building's unified aesthetic vision. These included a menorah sconce created using square brass tubing, and a matching menorah squared brass candelabrum for the travertine platform on the bimah. Williams also designed six beautiful spun aluminum chandeliers with pierced shades for the sanctuary, though they were unfortunately removed during later renovations when Rabbi Joseph Hurwitz, who was not fond of certain aspects of the original architecture, altered the interior.<sup>23</sup> The matching spun aluminum wall sconces that Williams designed still remain. The exposed concrete floors were also covered during these changes.<sup>24</sup>

The completed complex comprised a sanctuary, library, offices, patio, meeting rooms, and classrooms, totaling 10,752 square feet. Physical facilities included the chapel, seating 350, and a social room for 150.



*View towards bimah, with lighting fixture designed by E. Stewart Williams above, fabricated by Ledlin Lighting Co. Note the tall vertical window openings, which lit the stage. Julius Shulman photograph, courtesy Palm Springs Art Museum, Architecture and Design Center Archives.*

Over time, the Liberman Chapel became renowned for its art and symbolism as much as for its architecture. Stained glass windows by artist Eric Ray were added in 1969 and feature relatively abstract designs that relate to Judaism—depictions of the fire of Torah and the two tablets of stone, a Star of David, the Tower of David, and beams of light. Ray, whose grandparents were hairdressers to the royal family in England, came to Los Angeles where he studied art and later became a rabbi. His windows for the sanctuary represent the history of the Jewish people throughout time and also tell the story of redemption and humility. The chapel also features Hebrew letters styled like calligraphy by metal artist Victor Ries, spelling out the Ten Commandments and arranged to appear as though they're soaring up to heaven—a powerful visual metaphor for divine ascension.<sup>25</sup>



*Palm Springs Art Museum, Architecture and Design Center Archives.*

### **Functional Flexibility and Jewish Ritual**

The building's design responded intelligently to the dual demands of Jewish worship, which requires both religious and social spaces, particularly for high holiday feasts. The social room was placed adjacent to the large auditorium, separated by folding partitions that allowed flexible configurations: closed for small meetings or opened to combine with the auditorium for large gatherings.<sup>26</sup> Sliding doors opened the social room to the patio, so that the entire floor space—auditorium, social room, and patio—could flow together for social events, feasts,

or the Succoth service, where an outdoor covered shelter symbolizes the Tabernacle in the Wilderness. A curtain separated the religious corner during these combined uses.<sup>27</sup>

Interior religious elements maintained the building's aesthetic of restrained elegance. A bronze seven-armed candelabra stood at the entrance, with additional menorahs appearing inside on the altar by the Ark and by the reading table. The altar, choir screen, and Ark were crafted of white oak, with the altar extending in a vertical pattern across the full width and ends of the space. This "softening effect of the wood" struck "a pleasing contrast to the starkly rugged concrete of the Temple walls."

The unifying experiences of the war years and the leadership's vision of unity instilled a philosophy of total service. This unique Temple/Center became the focal point of organized Jewish communal life in the Palm Springs area, with service to the Conservative, Reform, and Orthodox communities.

### **Architectural Philosophy and Influences**

Notably absent from Temple Isaiah were sculptured pieces or stained-glass windows in the original design. Instead, Williams chose clear plate glass to frame views of the garden and mountains, allowing sunlight to create "an ever-changing play of color shadows on the walls."<sup>28</sup> This decision reflected a fundamental principle of desert modernism: the integration of architecture with its dramatic natural setting.

Lauren Weiss Bricker, Archivist at Cal State Polytechnic University at Pomona, identified the architectural lineage informing Williams's design. The building's "form and aspects of the site plan convey a restraint and simplicity that reflects the influence of Finnish architect Eliel Saarinen...and his son, architect Eero Saarinen." Williams's response to the Saarinens indicated his attraction to Scandinavian Modernism, first evidenced in notes he made about buildings visited in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark in 1938.<sup>29</sup>

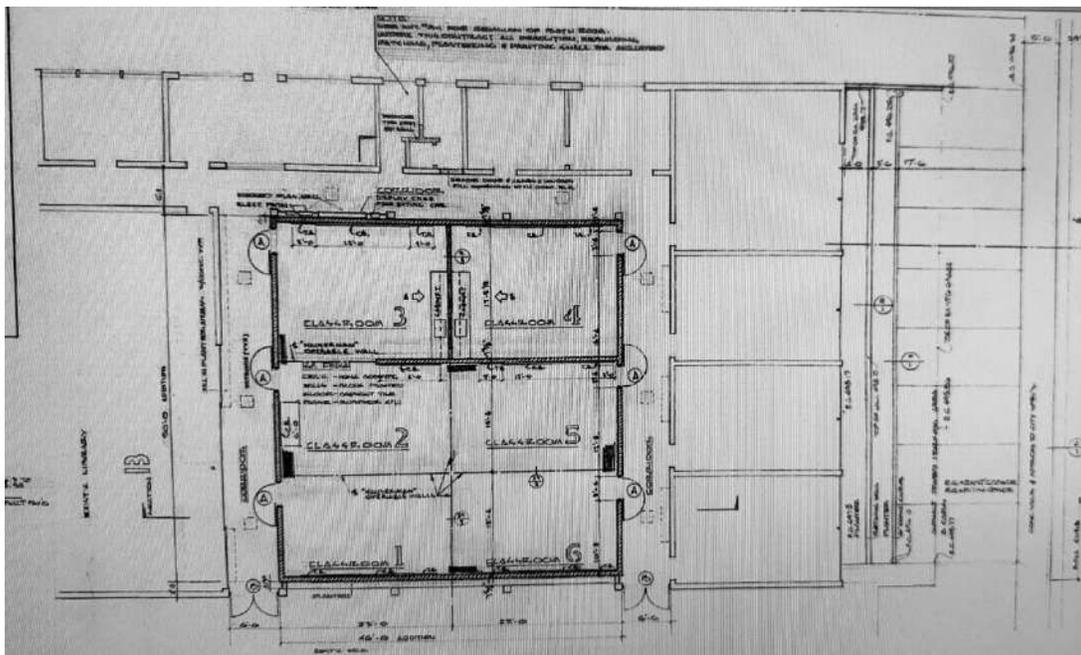
Bricker characterized Williams's approach as aligned with what British architect and critic Colin St. John Wilson termed "the other tradition" of Modernism—"an approach defined by human scale and the use of natural materials rather than a dependence on the machine aesthetic." Like the Saarinens and Finnish architect Alvar Aalto, Williams "took a non-doctrinaire approach to Modernism. He embraced a rational use of technology but did not let it override the expression of humanizing values conveyed through scale and natural materials."



*Palm Springs Art Museum, Architecture and Design Center Archives.*



Photograph shows the new wall enclosing the former open courtyard, after Wexler & Harrison's classroom addition. Palm Springs Art Museum, Architecture and Design Center Archives.



Wexler & Harrison's plan for six new classrooms. Palm Springs Art Museum, Architecture and Design Center Archives

## **The Wexler & Harrison Classroom Addition (1960-1962)**

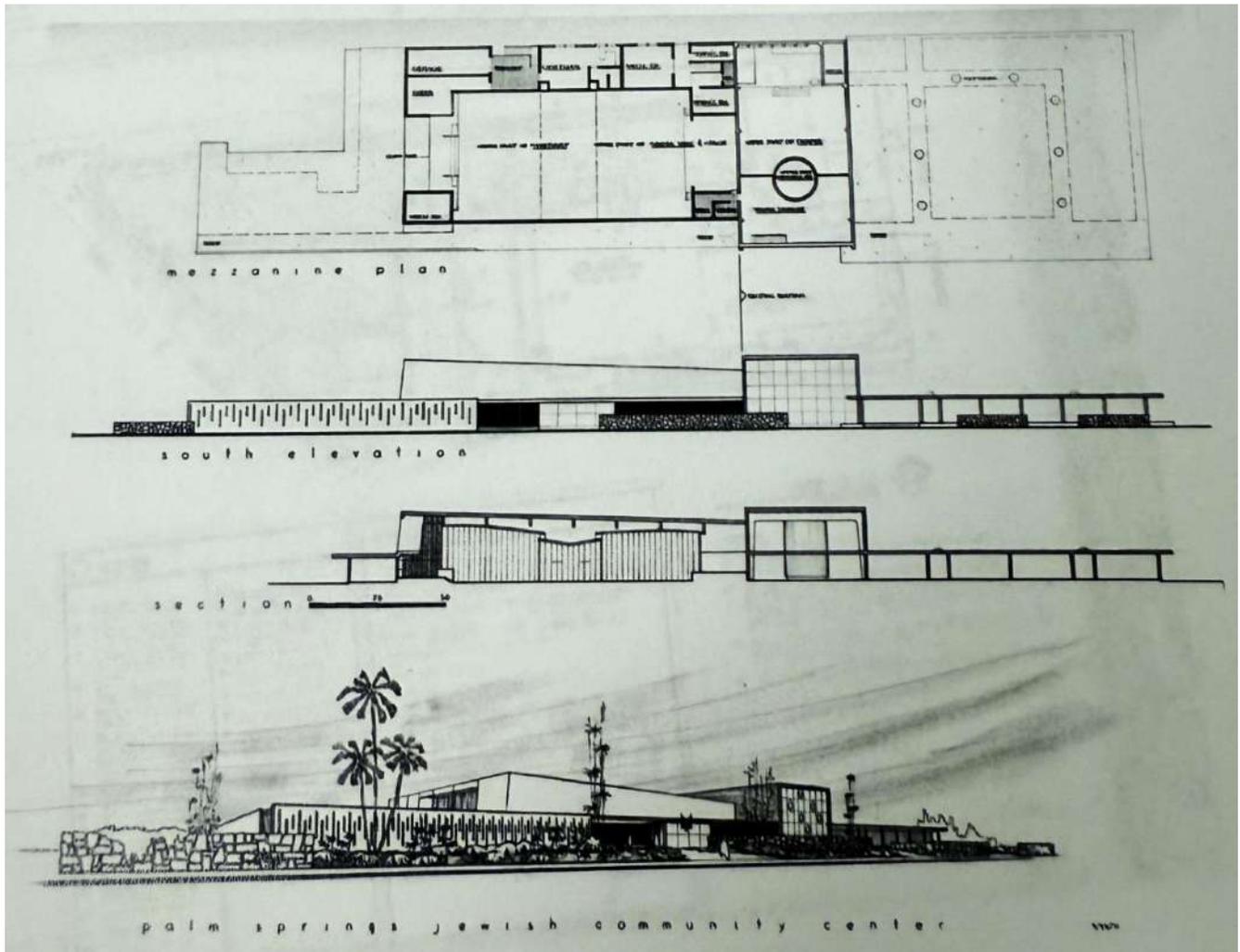
A decade after the original construction, the growing congregation required additional educational space and parking. To meet these needs, a fundraising initiative began, with campaign chair A. L. Levin stating: "Although I realize that \$200,000 is a considerable sum to raise, I feel certain that our members and friends will respond to this challenge adequately to ascertain the construction of these much-needed buildings in 1962."<sup>30</sup>

Architects Donald Wexler and Richard Harrison were engaged for the expansion in 1960. The six-classroom addition was inserted into the former grass panel open courtyard at the center of the original 1950 structure, transforming what had been a contemplative outdoor space into enclosed functional area. The design included a roof structure located within the Temple's courtyard.

This pragmatic expansion necessarily altered the character of the original courtyard, which had served as the organizing element of the C-shaped plan. As part of this addition, the once-open colonnade facing south toward Alejo Road was enclosed with a new wall constructed using the same concrete block with exposed aggregate finish as the original building, demonstrating respect for Williams's material palette. Doors and windows punctuated this new wall to provide access to the classrooms, maintaining visual and physical connections while adapting the building to its evolving programmatic needs. The original E. Stewart Williams Star of David facade, roofline, colonnade, and covered walkway along Alejo Road were maintained.

Completed in 1962, the addition increased the total building size to 14,140 square feet.

Between 1960 and 1969, further additions to the Liberman Chapel included an ark, Torah stand, and lectern designed by Donald Wexler, who was a very good friend of Rabbi Joseph Hurwitz. Wexler's contributions also included Eric Ray's stained-glass windows depicting the history of the Jewish people, and Victor Ries's Ten Commandments—Hebrew letters sculpted in metal.<sup>31</sup>



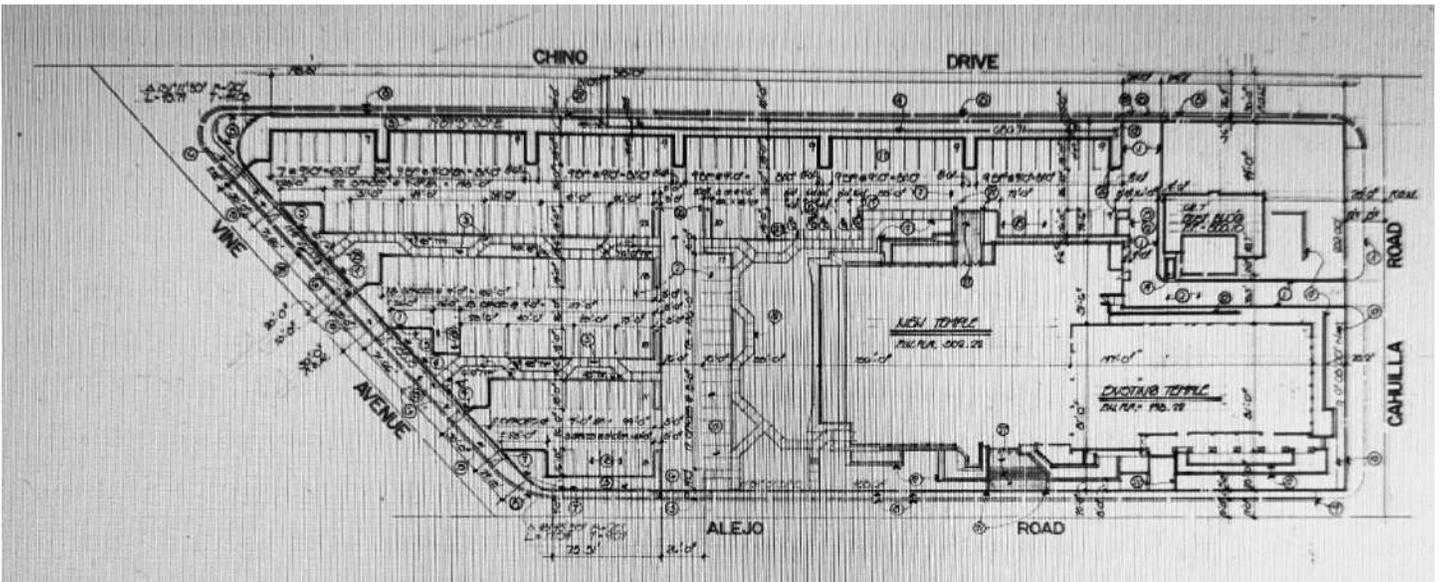
*Donald Wexler's proposed addition. Palm Springs Art Museum, Architecture and Design Center Archives.*

### **The Wexler Proposed Addition (1971)**

In 1971, Donald Wexler prepared plans and renderings for a major Temple expansion with a large addition to the west, preserving the original E. Stewart Williams temple building.<sup>32</sup> As Lauren Weiss Bricker and Sidney Williams reported: "The proposed Jewish Community Center in Palm Springs entailed a series of additions to an existing synagogue designed by E. Stewart Williams. Wexler's plan added a dramatic new 560-seat sanctuary and social hall west of the chapel and classrooms to the east. The dramatic upward slope of the new sanctuary created a visual foil for the flat-roofed rectilinear volume of the original synagogue; a large picture window at the end of the sanctuary provided a view of the mountains."<sup>33</sup>

Wexler's design incorporated landscape into the complex by opening a number of spaces onto a courtyard and surrounding terrace. "The soaring roof profile and visual connection with nature expanded Wexler's architectural symbolism beyond the literal reference to the Star of David on the facade of the original synagogue." This ambitious proposal, however, was not realized.

At the time of the Center's silver anniversary in 1972, the Temple boasted a membership of 525 and a religious school attendance of 175 children.<sup>34</sup>



David Christian's site plan shows how addition relates to the existing structure. Palm Springs Art Museum, Architecture and Design Center Archives.

### The David Christian Expansion and Remodel (1982-1987)

The growth of Temple Isaiah/Jewish Community Center made it imperative to expand once again. The story of this expansion is inseparable from an extraordinary friendship between Rabbi Joseph Hurwitz, who spent four decades at Temple Isaiah, and entertainer Frank Sinatra. Hurwitz also served as a chaplain at the Desert Regional Medical Center, where he struck up a friendship with Frank Sinatra while Sinatra's mother, Dolly, was hospitalized. After Dolly Sinatra died in a plane crash near Palm Springs in 1977, Hurwitz was asked to give a small pre-eulogy at her service. Frank Sinatra was so touched that he told Rabbi Joe to let him know if he could do anything, and two years later, when it came time to build an expansion, Sinatra made good on his promise in spectacular fashion.<sup>35</sup>

He performed a series of concerts and fundraising events in 1982 and 1983, bringing many of his friends from Los Angeles and New York, ultimately raising approximately \$4 million for the new temple. Although Sinatra was Catholic, he received a lifetime membership at the temple and his name is preserved in perpetuity on two pews inside the new chapel. Sinatra was a very good friend of the Jewish people in America, and the Sinatra family continues to maintain this relationship. Both Sinatra and Rabbi Hurwitz helped to dedicate the new sanctuary, which was completed in 1987.<sup>36</sup>

Palm Springs architect David Christian was engaged to design the new addition. Christian had served on the city's Planning Commission, and his architectural work was in vogue at the time; he is also known for designing Lulu's California Bistro and several other restaurants in Palm Springs. Rather than adding a new concrete structure as was proposed by Donald Wexler, Christian's design created a stucco facade on metal studs that encapsulated the original E. Stewart Williams synagogue, producing a sculptural building in the 1980s Brutalist style.<sup>37</sup>

The expansion was ambitious in scale and program, organized across two levels. The basement level featured a large multi-purpose/classroom space at the center, surrounded by mechanical rooms, storage rooms, a warming

kitchen, bathrooms, a janitor's room, and a bride's room—accommodating the diverse functional needs of a growing congregation.

The main level created a dramatic processional sequence. Entry at the east opened onto a large south lobby (Vener Reception Hall) running the length of the new wing, establishing a generous gathering space. The centerpiece was Levy Hall with dramatic clerestory windows framing views of Mt. San Jacinto and the skyline of palm trees, maintaining the connection to the natural landscape that had been central to Williams's original design. The Bochner Sanctuary occupied the front of the hall, with storage behind. A long north lobby provided secondary circulation, while an east lobby with adjacent new professional kitchen facilitated social functions. Bathrooms and additional storage rooms completed the program. The Warsaw Ballroom provided additional social and event space.



*The graduated colors of the upholstery. November 2025 photo by the author.*

The upholstery fabric on the sanctuary's long pews featured a carefully considered color progression that gradually changed as one looked from the sanctuary to the back of the hall. The color scheme starts as a muted blue at the front, closest to the bimah, and transitions to a pinkish hue and then red in the back—creating a subtle visual gradient that enriched the spatial experience and reflected the spiritual journey from the sacred to the communal. Cathleen Jones from David Christian's team served as the interior designer, collaborating with artist Yaacov Agam on the interiors.



*Artist Agam's innovative Tash/Agam Ark. November 2025 photo by the author.*

In an unusual design decision, the sanctuary faces west toward the mountains, rather than east toward Jerusalem, which is the traditional orientation for synagogues where prayer is focused. This westward orientation prioritizes the connection to the dramatic natural landscape of the San Jacinto Mountains—a distinctly Californian interpretation of sacred space that places equal emphasis on the spiritual significance of the immediate natural environment.

Agam's contribution to the Bochner Sanctuary proved extraordinary and technologically innovative. When the Israeli sculptor and artist was commissioned to build an ark for Temple Isaiah, he designed a colorful glass and Plexiglas cabinet-like structure, leaving the Torah scrolls visible inside—a radical departure from tradition, as scrolls are typically placed in arks with cabinet doors or behind a curtain. The Tash/Agam Ark became the central focus in the sanctuary, with Agam-inspired colored upholstered pews creating a unified aesthetic. Agam designed and signed the ark—constructed of lucite and acrylic panels with decals of colors that mimic the seats of the sanctuary—setting the color tone for the entire space, its furnishings, and Torah scroll covers.<sup>38</sup>

Five framed Agam works were displayed on the sanctuary's south wall with the inscription "Presented to Temple Isaiah in honor of Rabbi and Mrs. Joseph Hurwitz by Agam 1976." Agam likely visited the temple and Rabbi Hurwitz during the opening of the Palm Springs Desert (now Art) Museum in 1976.<sup>39</sup> An early figure of the "kinetic art" movement, Agam also has work on display at the Palm Springs Art Museum and Sunnylands Center and Gardens.

Agam's vision for sacred space was deeply considered. He once said: "my ideal synagogue would use architectural innovations to create a sacred space that would truly satisfy our needs...The most daring innovations in technology and electronics should be employed to enhance our worship experience." He implemented this experience at Temple Isaiah Jewish Community Center, where the ark was designed to be kinetic—a pioneering achievement in religious architecture. The Ner Tamid (eternal light) would lower itself down while the Torah scrolls would rise up from a bottom shaft, controlled by computer. The ark is also engineered so that the Torah scrolls can disappear for non-religious services—a remarkable fusion of ancient ritual and contemporary technology.<sup>40</sup>

The exterior architecture departed dramatically from Williams's modernist restraint. The main hall's roofline featured a dramatic curved upsweep with a slightly sloped profile, raising towards Mt. San Jacinto in a gesture of reaching skyward. The shorter west elevation also featured a curved roofline, creating a sculptural silhouette that contrasted sharply with the flat-roofed rectilinear volumes of the original 1950-52 complex. Many have observed that the west end of the building resembles an ark, though Christian and Temple Isaiah have said this wasn't intentional.

The exterior was clad entirely in stucco, creating a unified material palette across the expanded complex—though at the cost of concealing Williams's original exposed aggregate concrete architecture. Windows have symbolic meaning in the design. The side elevations featured a long series of louvered stucco vertical fins, with fixed glass panels facing west placed in each fin, flooding the hall with light. Additionally, 18 angular windows punctuate the façade (nine on each side), as the word *chai* means "life" in Hebrew, making the number 18 a powerful symbol of good luck and well-being. A panoramic window above the Bimah features 12 panes of glass representing the 12 tribes of Israel. The facade presented a composition of canted geometric forms, dominated by the long-upswept volume of the main hall—a bold architectural statement reflecting 1980s sensibilities.

One of the major differences between the new chapel compared to the old—aside from size—is the incorporation of natural sunlight and modern feel. The Bochner Sanctuary seats 500 and can be increased to 700 when opened to the adjacent Levy Hall. The addition brought the total building size to 51,000 square feet.<sup>41</sup>

### Recognition and Legacy

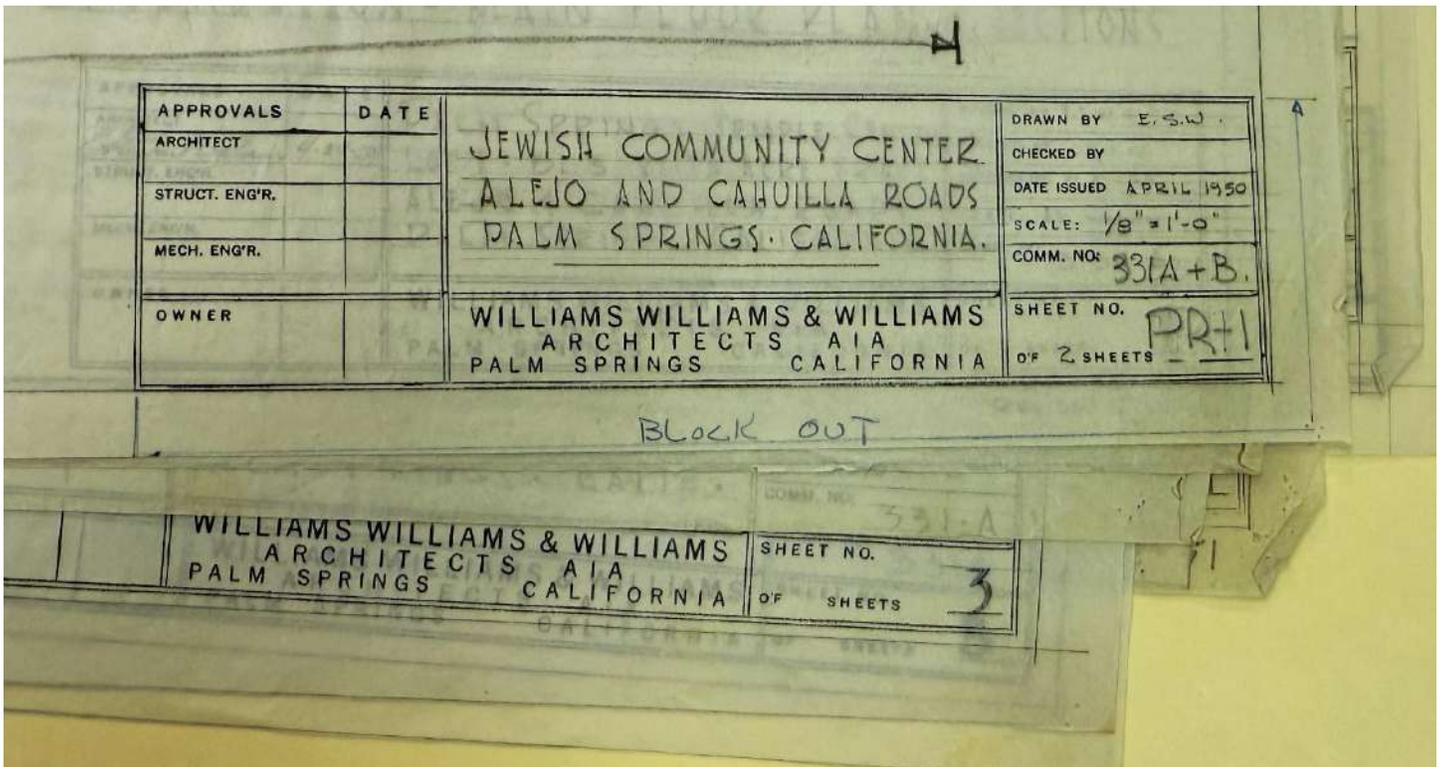
Temple Isaiah won recognition and praise from the American Institute of Architects and laymen as one of the finest facilities of its kind in the nation. The temple demonstrated that modernist principles could serve religious functions without sacrificing spiritual dignity, that budget constraints could inspire material honesty rather than compromise quality, and that contemporary architecture could create spaces of contemplation and community equally suited to the demands of both sacred and social life. Standing in the shadow of the San Jacinto mountain range, Temple Isaiah represented both a sophisticated response to its specific site and program, and a confident assertion of modernism's capacity to serve timeless human needs in radically new forms.

The importance of Jewish continuity and respect for the beliefs of others has been taught within these walls for more than half a century. Temple Isaiah continues as a vibrant spiritual and cultural home for the Jewish faith in the desert communities, offering settings for worship, study, education, social services, cultural events, weddings, and concerts. The building's multiple expansions—by Wexler and Harrison in 1960-1962 and by Christian in 1982-1987—testified to both the success of the original design and the evolving needs of a growing congregation, though these additions fundamentally altered Williams's original modernist vision.

## IV BUILDING PERMITS

Date	Owner	Permit Type	Description of Work
07-07-83	Jewish Community Center	Building	Construct Type II 1-hour fire sprinklered addition to multi-purpose assembly building. Permit to include demolition.
06-13-11	Temple	Building	Permit to changeout 40 gallon water heater in the same location.
08-15-12	Temple Isaiah	Building	Install three new junction boxes with circuit wiring for emergency lighting in school use within existing building.
08-16-12	Temple Isaiah	Building	Install four junction boxes for exit signs and four boxes for emergency lighting packs with required circuit wiring and one circuit and box for fire alarms systems.
07-07-21	Temple Isaiah	Building	Re-roof with foam. Upper section hall only.
10-08-24	Temple Isaiah	Building	Address assignment request (need to establish separate addresses for Montessori school and Preschool, respectively)

## V ARCHITECTS BIOGRAPHIES



*Palm Springs Art Museum, Architecture & Design Center Archives.*

### E. Stewart Williams

(The following biography, written by Andy Sotta, is excerpted from the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation's 2005 book – *E. Stewart Williams: A Tribute to His Work and Life.*)

Emerson Stewart Williams was born in Dayton, Ohio on November 15, 1909 to Harry and Una Williams. At the time, his father was partner in an extremely successful architecture firm, Schenk and Williams. At its peak, the firm employed 120 people with a focus on large commercial buildings for corporate clients such as Delco, Frigidaire and National Cash Register Corporation. The occasional house project included one designed for the Wright brothers of flying fame.

By all accounts, Stewart was an extremely bright and charming young man with a great sense of humor who enjoyed athletics, his studies, socializing and the arts - traits which stayed with him throughout his life. Knowing since age five that he desired to follow in his father's footsteps to become an architect, Stewart entered Cornell University in 1928 and graduated with a Bachelor of Architecture degree in 1932. He then attended the University of Pennsylvania where he earned his Master's Degree in architecture in 1933 and was awarded the prestigious Theophilus Parsons Chandler Fellowship.

By this time, the Great Depression had swept across America, bringing with it major change. The Williams family's affluent lifestyle was not spared. Architectural commissions evaporated. Schenk and Williams' once thriving firm was reduced to just two partners scrounging for whatever work they could find. Undoubtedly this

reversal of fortune had a profound effect on the young Stewart Williams (he resisted expanding his firm throughout fifty years in practice), steering him at times away from a career in architecture and towards a career in art and design. Fortunately, Williams found a position at Bard College (then part of Columbia University) teaching art and design from 1934-1938. While there, he supplemented his teaching salary by selling his etchings and paintings. Upon entering one of his artworks in the American Watercolor Society Exhibition in New York, he was awarded the Zabriskie Prize, the top purchase award.

In 1938, Williams departed on a long-delayed grand tour of Europe to study architecture and art. His travels took him to Stuttgart, Germany where he was profoundly influenced by the Werkbund (a modernist workingman's housing complex designed by a collaborative of some of Europe's greatest modernist architects). Williams recalled in a 2000 interview for *Palm Springs Life* magazine: "I once went to a Seidling in Germany done by Gropius, Mendelsohn, Behrens, Mies van der Rohe and others where there were tract houses nearby. The little inexpensive houses were full of people while the elegant structures done by those world-famous architects were empty. So, I asked one of the guards why these houses were empty and he said people didn't like living in boxes. This was early in the modern movement and people had not changed their thinking about being closer to the earth. The use of materials like beautiful wood, native stone and glass, to a certain extent, were mixed with colorful interiors. They loved fabrics that were patterned and they loved flowers and had vines growing in the house. There was a feeling of simplicity and warmth that made me feel this was the way I would like to work."

While visiting the south of Sweden, Williams met the love of his life, Mari Schlytern, a young and beautiful art student at Stockholm's Kunsthalle. After six months touring Europe, Williams returned home with hopes of making Mari his bride as well as with a profound appreciation of the Swedish design philosophy, significantly their use of natural materials. In 1940, after a brief stint working in his father's architectural firm Williams took a job with famed industrial designer Raymond Loewy of New York, where Stewart and Mari eventually married in Woodstock.

By 1942 Williams felt he would inevitably be drafted into World War II service. Wanting to determine which branch he would serve in, he enlisted in the Navy and was assigned to the Mare Island Naval Yard in San Francisco. While there, he supervised the design and construction of the dry docks serving the U.S. Navy fleet. Meanwhile, Harry Williams had decided to move to Palm Springs for semi-retirement and to a climate that would help alleviate the symptoms of his wife's debilitating arthritis. After designing a home and a commercial building in Palm Springs for Julia Carnell, Harry was commissioned by Carnell to design The Plaza Shopping Center, now Class I Site No. 22, on Palm Canyon Drive in 1936. It was a mixed-use project combining retail/office and residential components - a novel concept at the time. It was the senior Williams' first significant commission in almost 8 years after suffering the collapse of Schenk and Williams.

With World War II over, in 1946 Stewart decided to join his father and brother Roger in establishing an architectural practice in Palm Springs. From 1946 to 1956, the three Williams's worked in partnership. During this time Harry taught his sons about specifications, building codes, zoning, and the ups and downs of working with clients. He also taught them how to run an architectural practice; there was little money to be made in a residential practice, so Harry encouraged his sons to pursue commercial work for banks, office buildings and schools. While Stewart continued designing an occasional house during his career (usually with spectacular results), the bulk of his work was in the commercial arena. He acted as lead designer, Roger as engineer and Harry as facilitator. The years 1946 to 1948 were busy for Williams. Besides the Sinatra Residence, he would

design The Colony, Temple Isaiah, the Bissonte Lodge, and a modern addition to the 1924 Pepper Tree Inn. All but the Sinatra Residence have either been altered beyond recognition or demolished.

Southern California proved an especially fertile ground for modernist architecture due to a climate which encouraged indoor/outdoor living. Palm Springs, a playground for wealthy movie stars and industrialists, not only provided perfect climate and scenic beauty as the backdrop for modern designs, but also the financial resources to take those designs from drafting table to reality. This is evident when one looks at the concentration of modern architects and projects built or under construction in Palm Springs during E. Stewart Williams' first year in practice, 1946 to 1947.

In that year alone, significant modernist projects included the Edward Kaufmann Residence by Richard Neutra; the Clark & Frey-designed Raymond Loewy Residence; and the Del Marcos Hotel by desert newcomer William F. Cody. Williams commented about his own early expertise in a 1997 *Palm Springs Life* interview; "I didn't know anything about architecture really when I came out here in 1946. I had only sort of bits of experience, I didn't know about zoning, about building codes, didn't know anything about construction. I didn't know how to mix concrete. I detailed a lot of things in my Dad's office but I didn't know how to build."

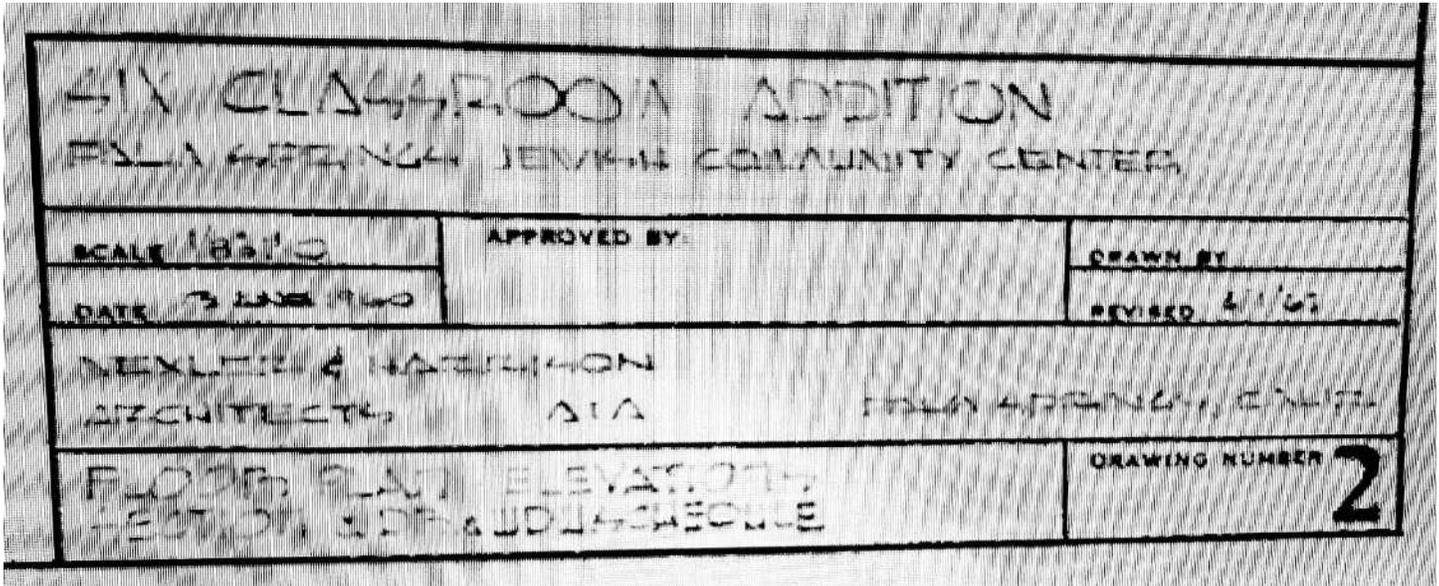
A common thread running through Williams' designs is that the site generated the form. Williams is often quoted as saying, "buildings must be compatible with the land where they sit, compatible with the colors of materials and shape and form of the site. I don't design something that looks as if some alien spaceship set down onto the landscape."

Unlike some of his contemporaries, he also lauded the craftsmen who built his projects. "They are responsible [for the work] as much I am. That's the way architecture is. It's a team effort...we dream them up and design them but it's a collaborative effort." These philosophies guided Williams throughout his entire career.

During the 1950s, Williams' work consisted of both commercial and residential commissions, however, most of his notable residential work was done during this period. These include Kiner, Bligh, Edris, and Sutter houses, and, in 1955, a home for his growing family. Notable commercial projects of this period included the original Desert Hospital, the first Palm Springs Desert Museum, the interior of Florsheim shoe store on Palm Canyon Drive, the Oasis Hotel and Oasis Office Building where he housed his offices, and the first Coachella Valley Savings & Loan bank building in 1956. Heeding the advice of his father, Williams pursued commercial work which comprised the majority of his projects from the mid-fifties through his retirement in 1990. In addition to the aforementioned projects, Williams work included: the Palm Springs High School gym, 1947; Palm Springs baseball stadium, 1949; the original Desert Hospital, 1950; Palm Springs City Hall (with Clark & Frey), 1955; Palm Springs High School auditorium, 1956; both the Palm Springs High School library and the College of the Desert gymnasium and pool, 1958.

From the late fifties until the early seventies, Williams practiced with his brother Roger, later joining forces with fellow desert architect, neighbor and friend, John Porter Clark, in 1972. The outstanding and impressive body of work from this period in Williams' career includes: Santa Fe Federal Savings building on Palm Canyon Drive; a second bank building for Coachella Valley Savings and Loan was completed in 1961 at the corner of Ramon Road and Palm Canyon Drive; the design of the Aerial Tramway mountain station; Crafton Hills College in Yucaipa, and the new Palm Springs Desert Museum.

Although an avowed modernist heavily influenced by the International Style, Stewart Williams always charted his own course. Through his interpretation, he eschewed its rigid tenets and approached architecture with an open mind. Williams had great respect for Mies van der Rohe’s work and appreciated the graceful lines of his houses and the way in which he invited the outdoors inside. Williams labored with each design to make the building appear to grow out of its site. The beauty of the materials used in his buildings always predominated. When asked about the essence of his style, Williams said over and over again, “Let the natural beauty of the materials be the thing you see.”



*Palm Springs Art Museum, Architecture & Design Center Archives.*

### **Wexler & Harrison, AIA (Partnership Years 1953-61)**

Few architects or firms left a deeper imprint on the built environment of Palm Springs than Wexler & Harrison. Through the course of a nine-year partnership, the duo designed buildings in almost every genre including important residential, commercial, and civic projects that helped define the essence of the Palm Springs School of Architecture. Donald Wexler and Richard Harrison met while working as draftsmen in the office of revered Palm Springs architect William F. Cody, FAIA. Here, the two young architects bonded over shared life experiences and the ambition to one day see their own designs made real. While with Cody, they learned many valuable lessons in both the artistic and business sides of running an architectural practice, but tired of Cody’s unpredictable hours and unorthodox working style.<sup>42</sup> With their architectural apprenticeship requirements satisfied, they launched the firm of Wexler & Harrison in 1953. The firm’s first office was located inside a second-floor suite at The Center (1947, Paul R. Williams and A. Quincy Jones, architects), and later moved to a location adjacent to the Sun Center on South Palm Canyon, which they had designed.

Commercial work in the early years of the partnership provided important inroads to the developers who were transforming Palm Springs in the early 1950s. Completed in September 1954, the exterior remodel of the Ramon Drugs building on South Indian Canyon Drive was an auspicious first effort for the firm as they began pursuing additional commercial commissions. This was quickly parlayed into significant jobs such as the sleek EF Hutton office (1955) —an addition to the interior courtyard area of The Center—where the firm’s office was located at the time.<sup>43</sup> In 1958, Wexler & Harrison received one of their most important commissions when they were

appointed as executive architects for the Spa Hotel Bathhouse project, a joint design effort with former employer William F. Cody and Philip Koenig. Located at one of the most prominent intersections in the city and sited on the ancestral grounds of the Agua Caliente Tribe's natural hot springs, the Spa Bathhouse was widely regarded as one of the great pieces of Modern architecture ever built in Palm Springs. Another key commercial project was the Welmas Building (1959), sited across the street from the Spa and built for developers and lawyers Simon, Simon & Simon. The Simons named the building after Leon Welmas, one of the owners of the land upon which Canyon Country Club would one day be built. Harold Simon was the lead attorney who negotiated the long-term land lease at Canyon Country Club, and A.R. Simon partnered with oilman Ray Ryan in several real estate development ventures including Sunmor Estates (1955), designed by Wexler & Harrison. Wexler & Harrison's connection to the Simons may have led to the introduction to Canyon Country Club developer Robert Grundt who, as an outsider to Palm Springs, had no existing relationships in local architectural or construction circles. The Pavilion Lodge on Catalina Island (1958), the Pitts & Rosin Building in downtown Palm Springs (1960), and the Sun Center (1961) on South Palm Canyon Drive added to the firm's impressive commercial portfolio in the later years of the partnership.

The Coachella Valley's population boom in the late 1950s created the need for an expanded network of educational facilities. The firm's first project in the educational sector was similar to its first effort in the commercial space: an addition and remodel to the Desert Hot Springs School (1956). This was followed by three projects that saw the firm contribute comprehensive design and planning work for entire campuses at Cahuilla Elementary School (1957), Cathedral City Elementary School (1958), and Nellie Coffman Junior High School (1958).<sup>44</sup> Later in 1958, the firm added the distinguished administration building at Palm Springs High School, adding to the master plan designed by Williams, Williams and Williams in 1949. The first institution of higher learning in the Coachella Valley, College of the Desert, selected an architectural team consisting of Wexler & Harrison, John Porter Clark, Williams & Williams, and Frey & Chambers to work under master plan and design architect John Carl Warnecke of San Francisco.<sup>45</sup>

Residential projects helped establish Wexler & Harrison's reputation as designers of both custom and mass-produced homes. Liliana Gardens (1954) was a pair of quintessential post-and-beam homes in the Mesa neighborhood, built for developer Joe Pawling. The Wexler Family Home (1955) was designed to meet the needs of the architect's growing family and would go on to become a designated Class I Historic Site in the City of Palm Springs. Sunmor Estates (1955) for developers A.R. Simon and Ray Ryan, and El Rancho Vista Estates (1960) and Caballeros Estates (1960) for developer Roy Fey, saw Wexler & Harrison contribute distinguished designs for tract housing.<sup>46,47</sup> The firm also produced designs for multi-family residential developments such as Royal Hawaiian Estates (1959), Bermuda Dunes Colonies (1961), and the Shadow Mountain Fairway Cottages (1961) in Palm Desert.

Some of the most enduring images of Wexler & Harrison's legacy stem from their use of prefabricated steel in residential architecture. The 1960 Bel Air home for engineer and collaborator Bernard Perlin is the earliest example of the firm working in this mode, followed by the Calcor Prefabricated Homes/Alexander Steel Homes of 1961-2 in Palm Springs. Originally intended to be a tract of thirty-eight homes adjacent to the Racquet Club neighborhood, only seven were built due to rising costs in steel at the time of construction.<sup>48</sup> All seven are now Palm Springs Class I Historic Sites and one is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The designs of these homes—ranging from a reserved International Style model to an exuberant zig-zag roofline cast in poured concrete—exhibited the exciting creative possibilities of steel in residential architecture. In 1962, the Rheem

Manufacturing Company's Rheemetal Division, headed by Perlin, would construct a single Wexler & Harrison zig-zag model in Las Vegas, while a solitary flat-roof model was built in Palm Beach, Florida.<sup>49</sup>

Wexler & Harrison's partnership culminated in the master plan and clubhouse architecture for Canyon Country Club, which opened on New Year's Eve, 1961. When the two architects went their separate ways, Wexler intended to pursue further civic projects while Harrison chose to focus on working with developers on residential and commercial commissions. However, both architects went on to design significant buildings of all kinds as sole practitioners or as part of other partnerships each formed over the course of their respective careers.

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*Palm Springs Art Museum, Architecture & Design Center Archives.*

### **David Christian, AIA (b. 1946)**

David Lynn Christian, born November 26, 1946, in Clovis, New Mexico, to Orphane E. Christian and his wife Maxine, emerged as a significant figure in Palm Springs' architectural landscape during the 1980s and beyond.<sup>50</sup> After graduating from Texas Tech University in 1970, Christian relocated to Palm Springs where he worked for prominent desert architects Don Wexler and Hugh Kaptur, gaining invaluable experience in the region's distinctive architectural traditions before establishing his own practice.

Christian founded Christian Associates in the mid-1970s, a firm that over thirteen years grew to employ almost 30 professionals and undertook projects of international scope, with considerable work in the Middle East during the early 1980s. Despite the firm's commercial success, Christian closed Christian Associates in 1989, explaining that he found himself "doing very little actual design work and was primarily just managing a large office. To me, that was no fun." For the subsequent 25 years, he maintained a smaller practice focused on "restaurants, residences and other design intensive projects," along with considerable conceptual design work.

Christian's early commercial work established his reputation for sophisticated interior environments. His 1977 design for the cocktail lounge at Melvyn's Restaurant in the Ingleside Inn reflected "the atmosphere of an authentic European restaurant," demonstrating his ability to create theatrical dining experiences that would become a hallmark of his career.<sup>51</sup> This attention to ambiance and carefully curated environments would inform his later religious and institutional work.

Beyond his architectural practice, Christian distinguished himself through civic engagement. He served on Palm Springs' Architectural Advisory Committee and Planning Commission during the late 1970s and early 1980s, becoming "one of the most successful critics in town" and a "familiar face around City Hall." The *Desert Sun* noted in 1980 that "Christian often drops by the Planning Department to comment on how to make the city better." His advocacy for rigorous project review—particularly regarding traffic studies and financial impact

analysis—influenced municipal policy and demonstrated his commitment to thoughtful urban development.<sup>52</sup> Although proposed for Palm Springs City Council appointment in 1980, concerns about potential conflicts of interest for a practicing architect serving in that role led to delays, and the appointment was ultimately not pursued.<sup>53</sup>

Christian's most architecturally significant commission came with the 1982-1987 expansion and redesign of Temple Isaiah, the result of Rabbi Joseph Hurwitz's friendship with Frank Sinatra and the entertainer's subsequent fundraising concerts that raised approximately \$4 million. Speaking of the project, Christian acknowledged the unique challenge: "The temple was a particular challenge, especially with a name like Christian. As a non-member of the temple, I felt a special obligation to try to be sensitive to the requirements of the Jewish faith and culture. Rabbi Hurwitz was the best possible guide for me. His assistance was invaluable during the design process, and the overall reaction of visitors has been most gratifying."<sup>54</sup>

The Temple Isaiah expansion represented Christian's mature design philosophy, featuring dramatically curved rooflines, sophisticated natural lighting through clerestory windows, and heavy geometric forms that referenced both Pueblo architectural traditions and contemporary religious monumentality. Working with interior designer Cathleen Jones, Christian created a 51,000-square-foot complex that more than tripled the building's previous size while completely absorbing the earlier E. Stewart Williams and Wexler & Harrison structures within a bold new architectural statement. The "soaring, finned construction set in a vista of surrounding mountains" became, according to officials, "a conversation piece in the community." Christian and Jones received awards of recognition from Rabbi Hurwitz at the temple's 1986 annual membership meeting for their design achievement.<sup>55</sup>

Christian's practice continued with diverse commercial and institutional projects throughout the 1980s and beyond. He designed a new office and publishing facility for The Desert Sun Publishing Company and developed plans for the complete renovation of the 450,000-square-foot Palm Springs Mall, both announced in 1986.<sup>56</sup> His residential work included The Villas in Old Palm Springs, a gated community of 47 Tuscan-designed homes completed in the 2000s, where Christian himself chose to live. Reflecting on that project, he noted: "The Villas exceeded my wildest dreams and we really enjoy the social experience of life inside the Villas."<sup>57</sup>

Christian's restaurant designs became particular landmarks in Palm Springs' culinary landscape. Beyond his early work at Melvyn's, he designed LULU's California Bistro, which occupied a prominent corner at 200 S. Palm Canyon Drive and became sufficiently iconic that subsequent restaurateurs specifically sought to occupy the "Christian-designed" space.<sup>58</sup> His architectural vocabulary—characterized by bold geometric forms, sophisticated material palettes, and carefully orchestrated spatial experiences—influenced Palm Springs' commercial architecture throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

A lifelong resident of the Coachella Valley who grew up in Bermuda Dunes and graduated from Palm Springs High School in 1979, Christian maintained deep roots in the community. In a 1996 interview, he emphasized his local commitment: "This is my home. I've lived here all my life. I'm not some guy from L.A. who's going to come in and leave. I'm going to be here for a long time." This personal stake in the region informed his architectural philosophy, which accepted "the inevitability of growth and development" while striving to create buildings that would be "praised, not vilified" by future generations.<sup>59</sup>

Christian's work at Temple Isaiah remains his most architecturally significant achievement, representing an important chapter in the evolution of contemporary American synagogue design. The building's 1980s contemporary aesthetic—with its swooping rooflines, angular geometries, and integration of cutting-edge

liturgical technology through Yaacov Agam's kinetic ark—documents a pivotal moment when Reform Judaism embraced bold architectural expression and technological innovation in sacred space. The temple's continued recognition through Modernism Week tours and international visitor interest confirms Christian's success in creating a building that transcends its immediate function to become a significant work of religious architecture.<sup>60</sup> As Rabbi Steven Rosenberg has noted, the building provides "a tremendous amount of hope" for what architecture can offer future generations, serving simultaneously as house of worship, community center, and cultural landmark—a synthesis that reflects Christian's broader vision of architecture in service to community life.<sup>61</sup>

## V CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHS



## THE PRIMARY FAÇADE ALONG ALEJO ROAD

























**THE EAST FAÇADE**







**THE NORTH FAÇADE**

















## THE WEST FAÇADE







# INTERIORS

## DAVID CHRISTIAN ERA

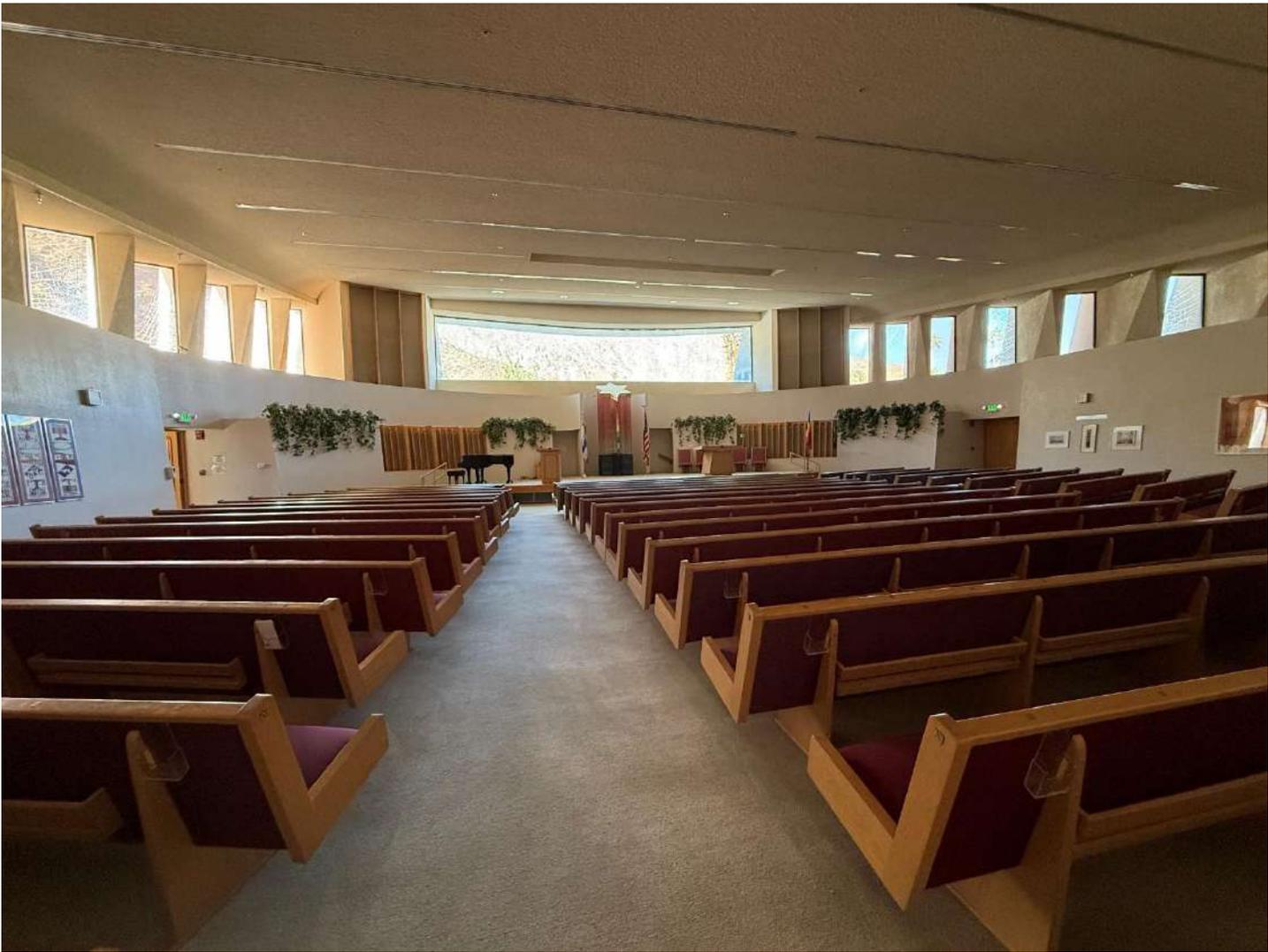








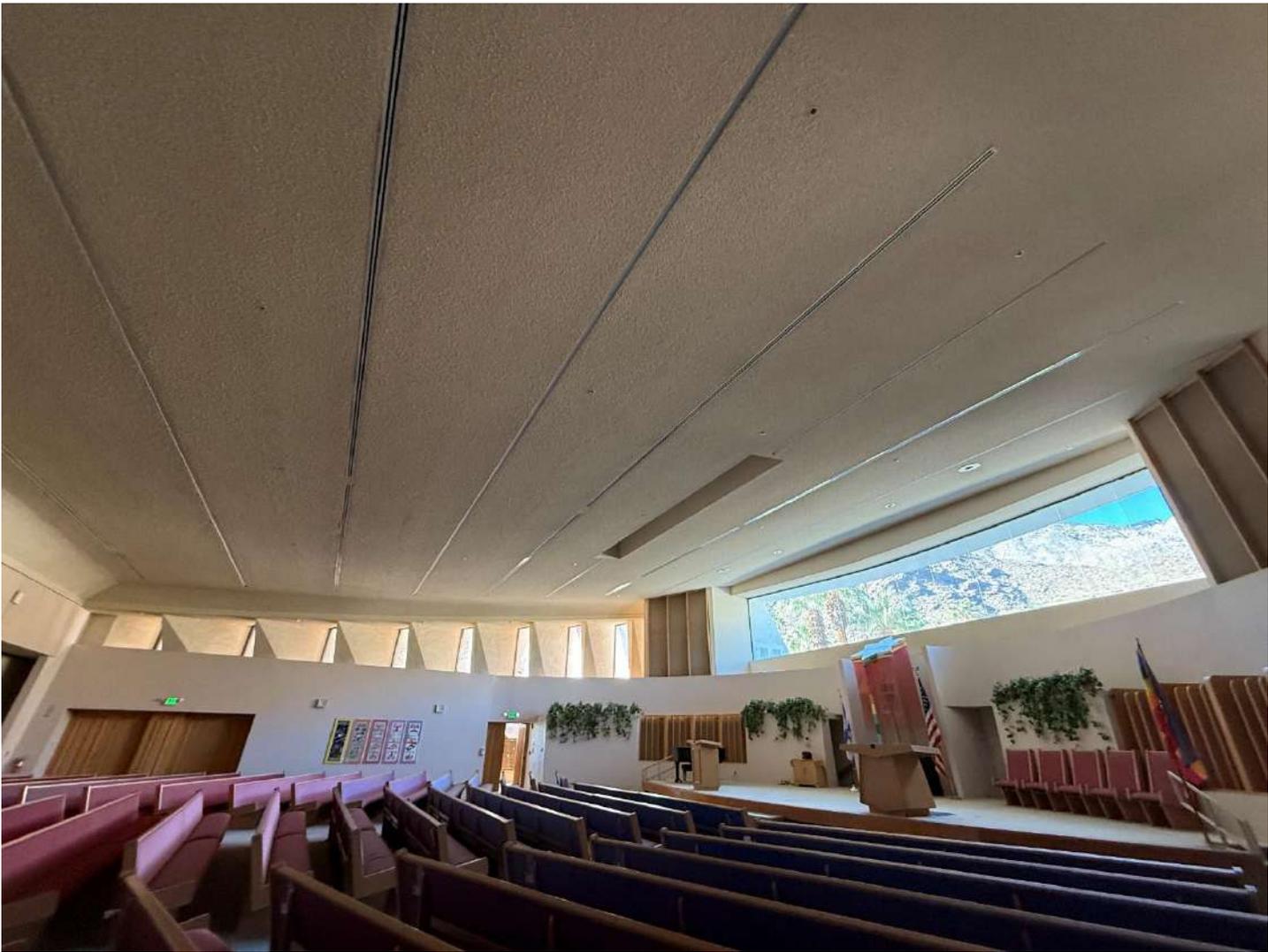






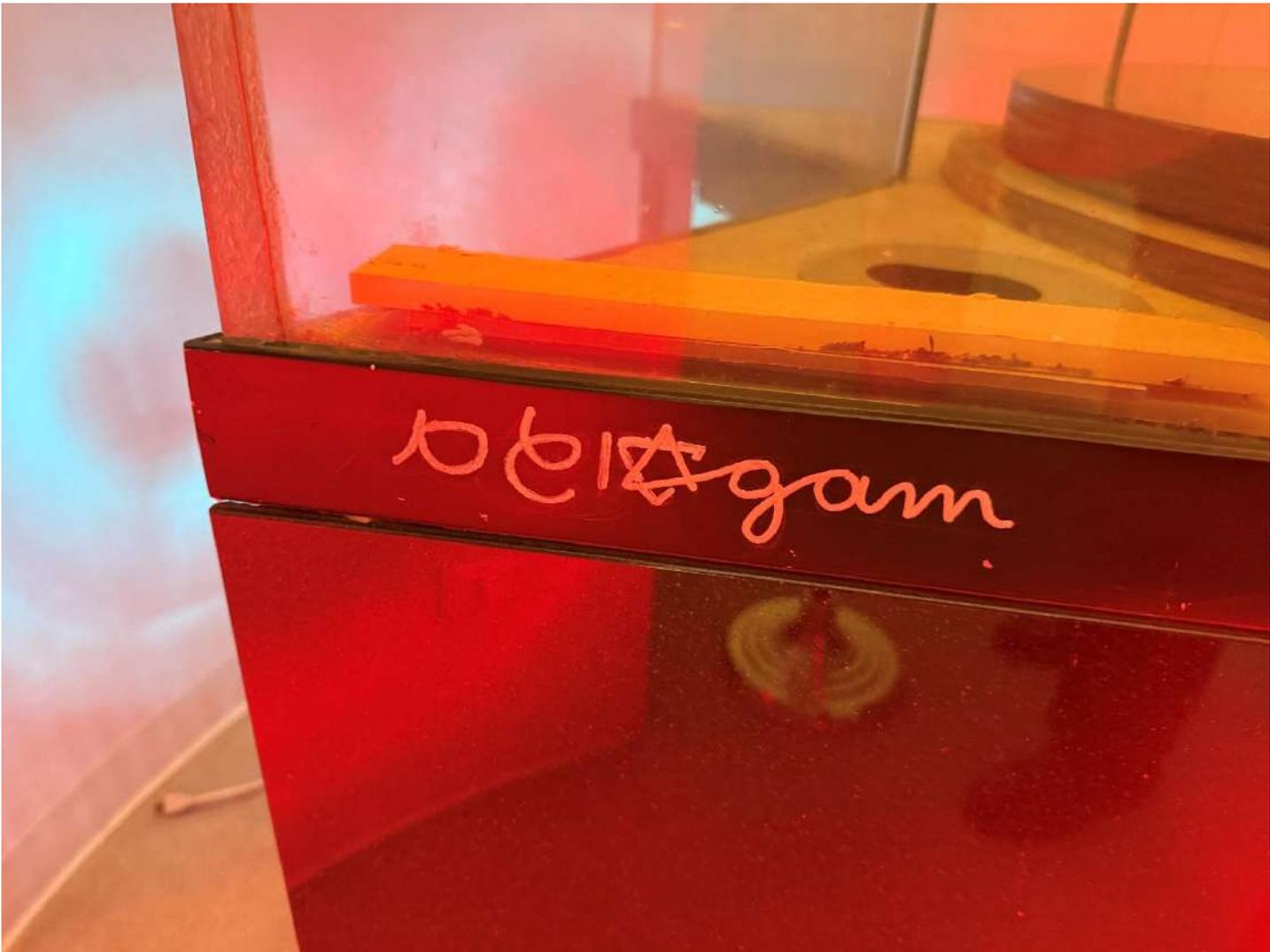




















**WEXLER & HARRISON CLASSROOM ADDITION**

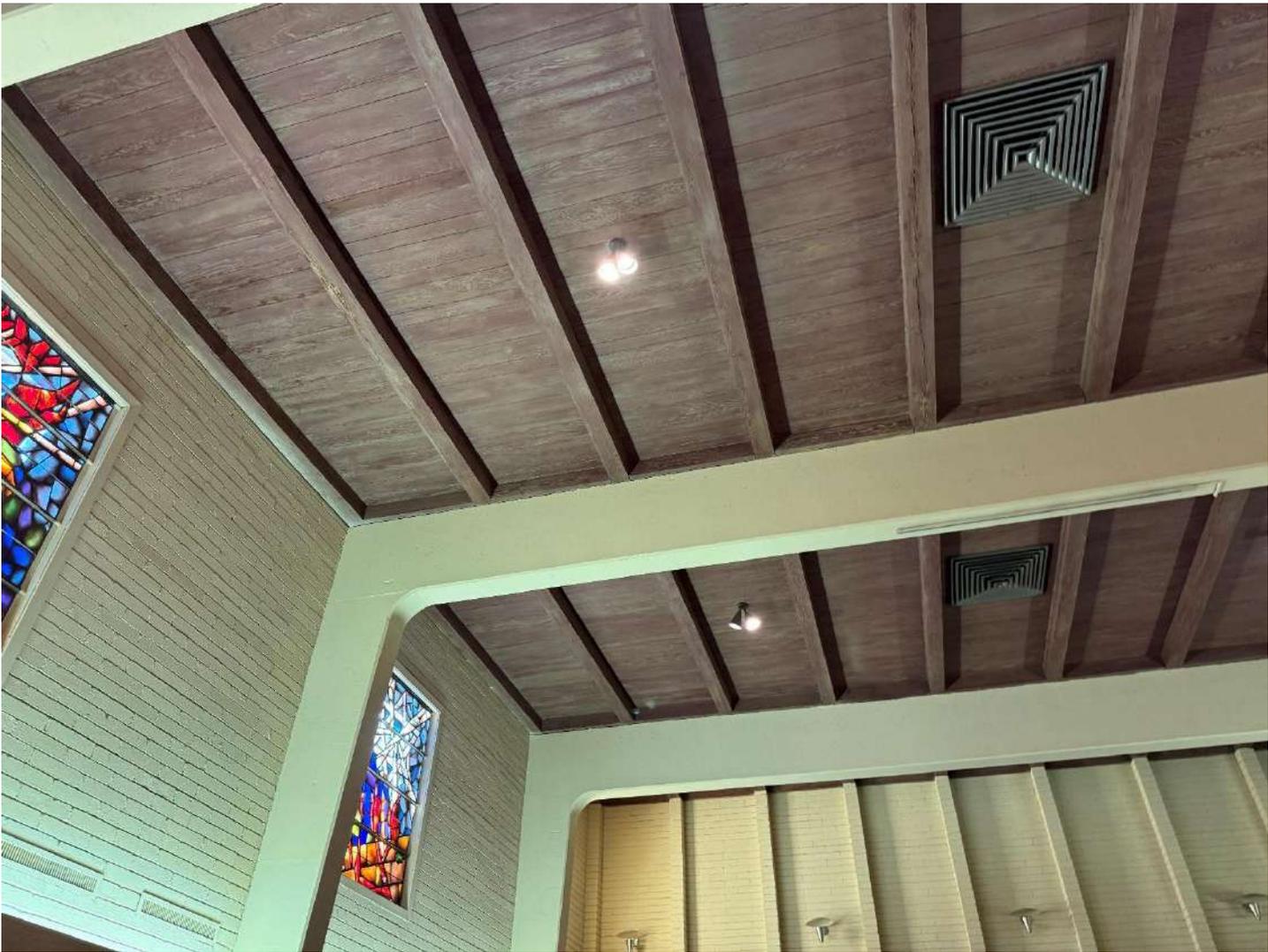




**E. STEWART WILLIAMS INTERIORS**

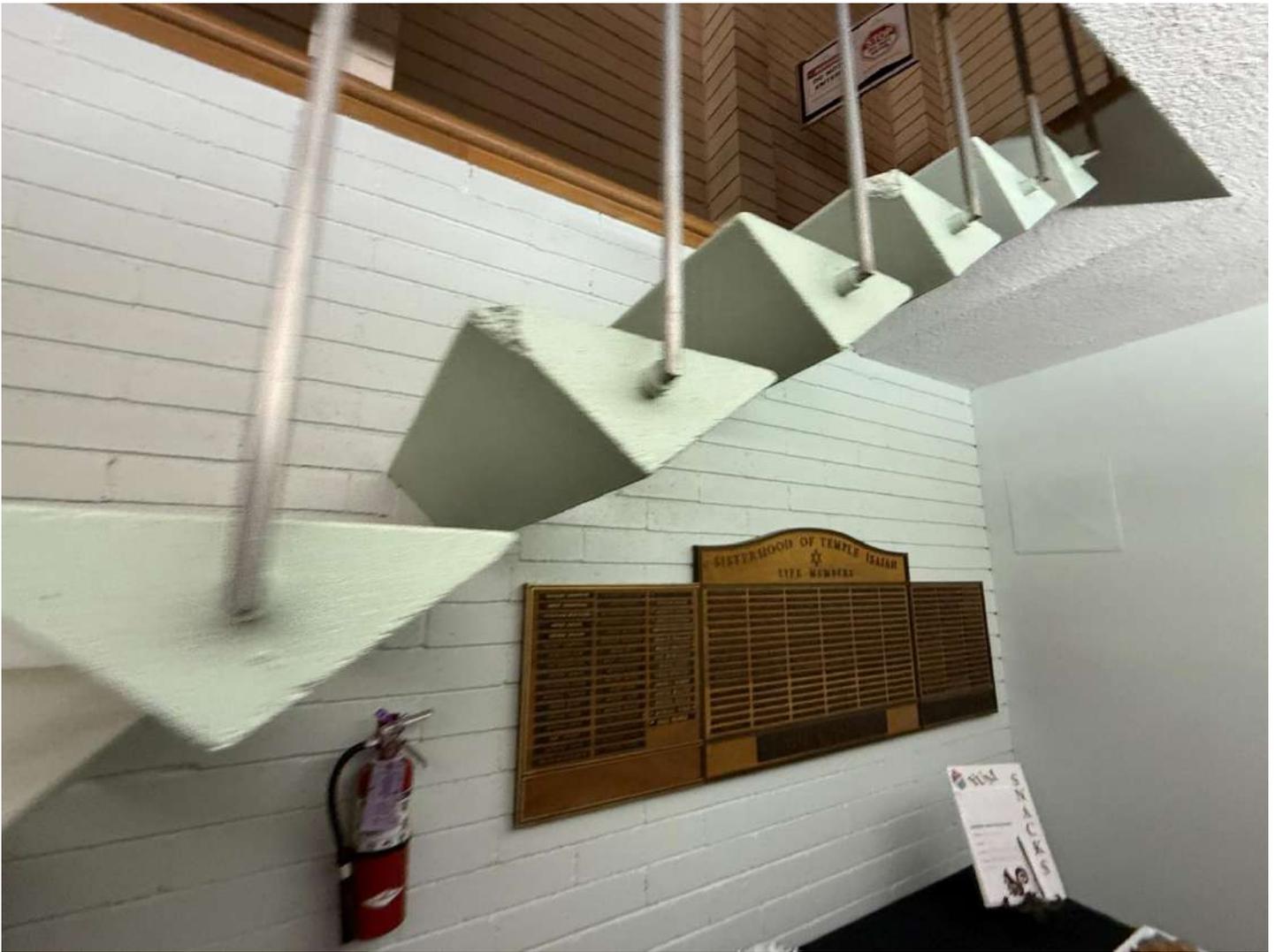












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<sup>1</sup> “Architecture in Service of the Sacred and Spiritual – A Study in Contrasts,” Modernism Week brochure, 2018, PDF

<sup>2</sup> “Architecture in Service of the Sacred and Spiritual – A Study in Contrasts,” Modernism Week brochure, 2018, PDF

<sup>3</sup> Modernism Week brochure, “Architecture in Service of the Sacred and Spiritual – a Study in Contrasts,” Nicolas Behrmann and Chuck Steinman, Co-Chairs, Temple Isaiah Modernism Week Tours, February 2018.

<sup>4</sup> “Impressive Temple Isaiah,” by Edith Carlson. *Palm Springs Villager*, May 1955.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Temple Isaiah – Modernism Week’s Man About Modernism episode, YouTube video, 0:00–6:01.

<sup>7</sup> “Impressive Temple Isaiah,” by Edith Carlson. *Palm Springs Villager*, May 1955.

<sup>8</sup> *An Eloquent Modernist: E. Stewart Williams, Architect*, Williams, Sidney (editor). Palm Springs, California: Palm Springs Art Museum, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> “Architecture in Service of the Sacred and Spiritual – A Study in Contrasts,” Modernism Week brochure, 2018, PDF

<sup>10</sup> “Architecture in Service of the Sacred and Spiritual – A Study in Contrasts,” Modernism Week brochure, 2018, PDF

<sup>11</sup> “Architecture in Service of the Sacred and Spiritual – A Study in Contrasts,” Modernism Week brochure, 2018, PDF

<sup>12</sup> “In Motion: Agam at Sunnylands,” Katherine Hough, Frank Lopez, authors; Janice Lyle, editor. Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> “Architecture in Service of the Sacred and Spiritual – A Study in Contrasts,” Modernism Week brochure, 2018, PDF

<sup>14</sup> Carlson article

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- <sup>15</sup> Temple Isaiah – Modernism Week’s Man About Modernism episode, YouTube video, 0:00–6:01.
- <sup>16</sup> Temple Isaiah – Modernism Week’s Man About Modernism episode, YouTube video, 0:00–6:01.
- <sup>17</sup> Temple Isaiah – Modernism Week’s Man About Modernism episode, YouTube video, 0:00–6:01.
- <sup>18</sup> Carlson. Mo-Sai is a method of producing precast concrete cladding panels. It was patented by John Joseph Earley in 1940. The Mo-Sai institute later refined Earley's method and became the leader in exposed aggregate concrete. The Mo-Sai Institute, an organization of precast concrete manufacturers, adhered to the Mo-Sai method of producing the exposed aggregate precast concrete panels.
- <sup>19</sup> Carlson
- <sup>20</sup> Carlson
- <sup>21</sup> Temple Isaiah – Modernism Week’s Man About Modernism episode, YouTube video, 0:00–6:01.
- <sup>22</sup> “Architecture in Service of the Sacred and Spiritual – A Study in Contrasts,” Modernism Week brochure, 2018, PDF
- <sup>23</sup> Temple Isaiah – Modernism Week’s Man About Modernism episode, YouTube video, 0:00–6:01.
- <sup>24</sup> Temple Isaiah – Modernism Week’s Man About Modernism episode, YouTube video, 0:00–6:01.
- <sup>25</sup> Temple Isaiah – Modernism Week’s Man About Modernism episode, YouTube video, 0:00–6:01.
- <sup>26</sup> Carlson
- <sup>27</sup> Carlson
- <sup>28</sup> Carlson
- <sup>29</sup> *An Eloquent Modernist: E. Stewart Williams, Architect*, Williams, Sidney (editor). Palm Springs, California: Palm Springs Art Museum, 2014.
- <sup>30</sup> *The Desert Sun*, Nov 15, 1961, 12.
- <sup>31</sup> Temple Isaiah – Modernism Week’s Man About Modernism episode, YouTube video, 0:00–6:01.
- <sup>32</sup> “Architecture in Service of the Sacred and Spiritual – A Study in Contrasts,” Modernism Week brochure, 2018, PDF
- <sup>33</sup> *An Eloquent Modernist: E. Stewart Williams, Architect*, Williams, Sidney (editor). Palm Springs, California: Palm Springs Art Museum, 2014.
- <sup>34</sup> “Architecture in Service of the Sacred and Spiritual – A Study in Contrasts,” Modernism Week brochure, 2018, PDF
- <sup>35</sup> Temple Isaiah – Modernism Week’s Man About Modernism episode, YouTube video, 0:00–6:01.
- <sup>36</sup> Temple Isaiah – Modernism Week’s Man About Modernism episode, YouTube video, 0:00–6:01.
- <sup>37</sup> “Architecture in Service of the Sacred and Spiritual – A Study in Contrasts,” Modernism Week brochure, 2018, PDF
- <sup>38</sup> Temple Isaiah – Modernism Week’s Man About Modernism episode, YouTube video, 0:00–6:01.
- <sup>39</sup> In Motion: Agam at Sunnylands, Frank Lopez essay. Sunnylands, 2022.
- <sup>40</sup> Temple Isaiah – Modernism Week’s Man About Modernism episode, YouTube video, 0:00–6:01.
- <sup>41</sup> “Architecture in Service of the Sacred and Spiritual – A Study in Contrasts,” Modernism Week brochure, 2018, PDF
- <sup>42</sup> Weiss Bricker, Lauren and Williams, Sidney. *Steel and Shade: The Architecture of Donald Wexler*. Palm Springs, CA: Palm Springs Art Museum.
- <sup>43</sup> “Work Starts on New Office for Hutton Firm in Center,” (*Desert Sun*, June 30, 1955), 1
- <sup>44</sup> “Sunmor Names Associated as Exclusive Agent,” (*Desert Sun*, March 14, 1956), 2.
- <sup>45</sup> “5 Architects Named for Junior College,” (*Desert Sun*, April 10, 1959), 1.
- <sup>46</sup> Weiss Bricker, Lauren and Williams, Sidney. *Steel and Shade: The Architecture of Donald Wexler*. Palm Springs, CA: Palm Springs Art Museum.
- <sup>47</sup> “Fey Tells Plans for Luxury Homes,” (*Desert Sun*, November 13, 1959), 7.
- <sup>48</sup> McGrew, Patrick. *Donald Wexler: Architect*. Palm Springs, CA: the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation.
- <sup>49</sup> “New Metal House Shown in Palm Beach Gardens,” (*Palm Beach Post*, March 11, 1962), 46
- <sup>50</sup> Ancestry.com
- <sup>51</sup> “Ingleside Inn Now Has Its Fourth Restaurant,” *Desert Sun*, September 5, 1977.
- <sup>52</sup> George Rooney, “Scrutiny expected by PS nominee,” *Desert Sun*, August 19, 1980.
- <sup>53</sup> “Commission appointment delayed by PS council,” *Desert Sun*, September 3, 1980.
- <sup>54</sup> “AWARD - David Christian, architect, with Cathleen Jones, designer, receives an award from Rabbi Joseph Hurwitz,” *Desert Sun*, April 19, 1986.
- <sup>55</sup> “AWARD - David Christian, architect, with Cathleen Jones, designer, receives an award from Rabbi Joseph Hurwitz,” *Desert Sun*, April 19, 1986.
- <sup>56</sup> “Desert Sun to build new plant,” *Desert Sun*, March 11, 1987.
- <sup>57</sup> “An evening view of the gated entry to The Villas in Old Palm Springs,” *Desert Sun*, August 11, 2007.
- <sup>58</sup> Debra Gruszecki, “Familiar taste in new place: Palm Springs welcomes Acqua Pazza owners to downtown corner site,” *Desert Sun*, January 13, 2011.
- <sup>59</sup> Sheila Murphy, “Architect has personal stake in track: INEVITABLE PROGRESS: Local designer hopes he's praised – not vilified – for role in project,” *Desert Sun*, April 6, 1996.

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<sup>60</sup> "Temple Isaiah attracts international visitors," *Desert Sun*, October 16, 2022, A7.

<sup>61</sup> "Temple Isaiah attracts international visitors," *Desert Sun*, October 16, 2022, A7.