



Thorncrown Chapel

E. Fay Jones
Eureka Springs, Arkansas
1980

This chapel by architect Fay Jones exemplifies the integration of design methodology, intention, and use. Having been inspired by the natural beauty of the site, Jim Reed, a retired schoolteacher, had purchased the property and commissioned the church. The design and construction of the church treated the natural landscape and church as a synonymous entity. As such, a thoroughly green approach would ensure sufficient respect for the divine space. Construction materials were almost completely sourced locally in Arkansas. In order not to disturb the forest, each building component could not exceed a size and weight which could be carried by two persons traversing the forest landscape.

The sunken nave is surrounded by a rock wall and paved with local stone. This, along with the forest canopy rhythm repeated in the elaborate wood truss ceiling, suggests a direct relationship between the natural environment and the divine. The pews have glazed walls on either side connecting worshipers with the surrounding landscape. And finally, behind the altar, as an alternative to typical Christian iconography or symbols is a direct view to the forest beyond.

The ideology embodied in this project is one that could be applied to similar religious projects today. The apparent intentions that created the Thorncrown Chapel seem a fundamental viewpoint for religious architecture although the trend of green consciousness in religious design seems to be only beginning to make a foothold today.

For the construction of Thorncrown Chapel, the architect, Fay E. Jones was awarded the 1981 AIA Honor Award and the AIA Gold Medal in 1990. As well, the church was listed fourth in the AIA's list of the top ten buildings of the twentieth century.

