

# ancient look, new setting

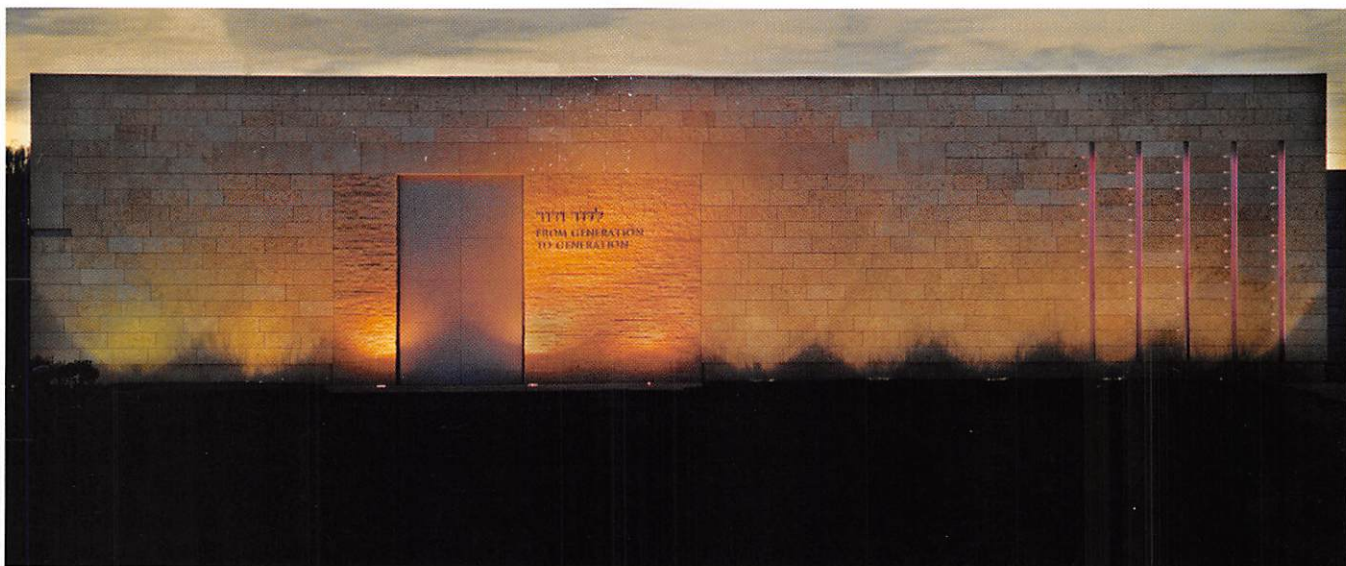
MALTZ MUSEUM OF JEWISH HERITAGE

By M.W. Penn

**Project Developer:** The Malrite Co., Cleveland

**Architect:** Westlake Reed Leskosky, Cleveland

**Masonry/Installation:** SPS & Associates, Hudson, Ohio



(Left) The Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage features a cladding of Jerusalem limestone with a no-mortar facing, to emulate the look of ancient construction. (Above) One face includes the use of thin zinc-lined vertical inserts, resembling scroll niches, with fiber-optic illumination for a candle-like appearance at night. (Photos by Kevin Reeves/courtesy Westlake Reed Leskosky)

**B**EACHWOOD, Ohio – The **Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage** was conceived as a celebration of the Jewish immigrant experience in northeast Ohio, but the scope of museum exhibits encompasses the entire history of Judaism. To symbolically connect the museum with the heritage of the people it honors, the building's facing is more than 126 tons of Gold Jerusalem limestone from the Ramon Mitzpeh quarry in southern Israel.

Hand-chiseled in Israel to evoke the texture of an ancient city, the rough surface of the stone creates an endless play of light and shadow on the façade of the simple, solid rectangle of the main exhibit space, and bestows a serene beauty to the surrounding landscape.

The idea for a museum of Jewish heritage happened many years ago, when Cleveland media executive Milton Maltz and his spouse, Tamar, were in Amsterdam visiting a Portuguese synagogue. Across the street from the synagogue, they found a Jewish museum detailing an important part of the history of Holland.

In the 17th century, Holland was a small country with little influence or bearing in the world. The country had one asset, water, which was also viewed by many as a negative, until Jewish bankers and financiers decided to take advantage of the water and build a mercantile navy. Holland's navy eventually competed with the major powers of the era, Spain, England and France; Holland's rise to a place of prominence was based on the willingness of entrepreneurs to take risks.

The Dutch museum led the Maltzs to discuss the tremendous entrepreneurial activities that went on in their own community of Jewish immigrants, and eventually encouraged them to tell the story of Cleveland and its pioneers. They pledged \$8 million to the construction of the museum, and to begin an endowment.

The Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland's

Centennial Initiative contributed an additional \$4.3 million to the museum, built on land belonging to The Temple-Tifereth Israel. Research support was provided by the Western Reserve Historical Society. Milton Maltz was intimately involved in almost every detail of the progress of this living testament to the courage and achievements of Cleveland's Jewish community.

The national architectural and engineering firm, Westlake Reed Leskosky, received the task of designing the building. Established in 1905 by Abram Garfield, son of President James A. Garfield, it's one of the one of the oldest architectural firms in the country and the largest in northeastern Ohio.

Creating a free-span rectangle and then cutting it into the ground plane contained the cost of the structure. Substantial earthwork, one of the least-expensive areas of any construction project, not only reduced the overall expense of construction, but artfully integrated the building into the landscape. It emphasized the elegance and simplicity of the architectural form, and created a precinct of building and landscape within a larger wooded area while shielding the area from nearby vehicular traffic.

The design expresses a highly sophisticated simplicity and elegance. The main exhibit spaces and auditorium theatre of the museum are housed in a classic, solid rectangle. According to Ronald A. Reed, FAIA, IIDA, a Westlake principal and a lead designer, keeping the structure simple was one of the biggest challenges. No air shafts or heating vents mar the clean lines of the pure planes.

The expansive walls emphasized the need for excellent material and superb craftsmanship; at the same time the simplicity of form created room in the budget for both. The beauty and symbolic significance of Jerusalem Limestone made it the obvious choice for 24,000 ft<sup>2</sup> of cladding.

Ideally, the design would accentuate the ruggedness of

the limestone and its meaningful connection to ancient walls – what Paul E. Westlake, Jr., FAIA, principal in charge and a lead designer, calls the psychology of the stone. “We didn’t want walls that appeared wallpapered, but instead, hoped to reflect the ‘Diaspora of stone’ in ancient sites,” he says.

Walls of ancient temples are often made from the remnants of older foundations, incorporating stone from buildings of many eras. They are, Westlake says, “walls that reach back through time.”

This continuum of material gives the walls more than history – memory perhaps – as if the stones speak of the past. The design team knew that it was important to give the walls of the museum this same appearance, the randomness of salvage.

In the historical context of its native environment, Jerusalem limestone is used in huge blocks of dry stack, and the architects wanted to achieve this feeling despite a move to the modern usage of veneer. The solution was a collaborative effort between the architects, stone fabricator and the mason, SPS & Associates of Hudson, Ohio. SPS did the engineering/shop drawings and stone tickets (in metric) and oversaw production and sequencing. They also handled the shipping of the six containers of stone and erected the entire project.

SPS’s Paul Shand notes that the block masonry walls are covered with black damp-proofing and 2” of black insulation. The stone is anchored to the walls with black-ened steel clips, and the joints are not mortared or caulked. The absence of mortar articulates each individual stone,

and gives a strong shadowing effect that creates the impression of the stones floating on the surface of the walls.

The roughly chiseled stone is set in a 24” to 36” ashlar pattern with random vertical coursing; no vertical joint is set within 4” of a joint in neighboring courses. The visual result is a solid, dry-stack appearance reminiscent of the huge blocks of stone found in ancient walls of the Old City of Jerusalem; you don’t realize it’s a skin unless you inspect it closely.

The stone is a moisture shield rather than a barrier. Moisture entering the system through the joints falls along the cavity, hits flashing at the lower course, and flows to the ground as in a rainscreen system.

The warm palette of the stone and the crisp geometry of the form capture the golden hue of walls in Israel. At the same time, every chisel mark creates a different subtlety of color, unveiling the inner unique qualities of each stone. To enhance the visual appeal of the coloration, zinc is used exclusively on the exterior fittings.

Westlake noted that designing a modern museum is often problematic.

“Because exhibits must be protected from light and the environment, a museum doesn’t want openings,” he says. “With no decoration from piercing, museum walls are often vast, uninteresting planes. At the Maltz Museum this effect is increased by the rectangular design.”

To provide interest, vertical reveals suggesting scroll niches are spaced along the northeast corner. The niches are lined in zinc, and illuminated with hidden fiber-optics,

(Left) The vertical inserts, on the building’s northeast corner, provide additional relief for two of the structure’s windowless walls. (Below) The museum is set under a surrounding limestone-capped berm that provides visual and sound protection for the site. (Corner photo courtesy SPS & Associates; site photo by Kevin Reeves/courtesy Westlake Reed Leskosky)

