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A windowless cylindrical chapel that has been called one of the most extraordinary religious buildings of our time will be dedicated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology next Sunday (May 8).

Designed to meet the needs of all faiths, the chapel will be one of the few in the country to be used for regular services by Catholics, Protestants, and Jews alike.

The chapel and an associated 1200-seat auditorium are the principal elements of a new campus center at M.I.T. which was made possible by a grant of \$1,500,000 from the Kresge Foundation. Both buildings were designed by Eero Saarinen.

A solid brick cylinder, the chapel stands in a water-filled moat. Structurally, there is complete separation of interior from exterior. The building amounts to a platform for the congregation and altar which is surrounded by a separate covering.

Cut into the bottom of the chapel cylinder are irregularly shaped and irregularly spaced arches. Light is reflected from the water of the moat into the interior of the chapel through these arches. Additional soft light may be provided by pin-hole ceiling lights.

(more)

chapel

Chapel - M. I. T.

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Within the chapel, the principal permanent frontispiece is a solid marble pedestal, rectangular in shape and about three feet high. The special religious objects required by the different faiths will be placed on this pedestal as they are needed.

Separate vestment and storage rooms are provided in the basement of the chapel below the pedestal and changes at the pedestal will be facilitated by elevator service between the basement and the main chapel floor. The pedestal receives its own special light from a circular glass ceiling port called a lantern. The lantern also provides artificial light for nighttime use. Both the daylight and artificial light from the lantern enter the chapel from behind a honeycomb grill.

The altar light presents a striking contrast to the dimmer light reflected from the moat. This contrast is further accentuated by a metal screen that hangs from ceiling to floor behind the altar.

Designed by the noted sculptor Harry Bertolia, the screen is not a solid partition but an open fret of slim metal rods and cross plates. It is an ornamental separator which serves to heighten the effect of the lantern light above the altar.

The walls of the chapel are brick inside and out and the irregularly shaped arches of the exterior represent an outstanding piece of masonry. Here each individual brick had to be cut to shape and no two bricks are the same.

Within, the brick walls are wavy or serpentine in shape. This waviness was needed for acoustical reasons. The chapel floor is Travertine marble set in an unusual diamond pattern and the inner brick is softened with the same wood wainscoting that is used in the nearby Kresge Auditorium.

(more)

Chapel - M.I.T.

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The chapel seats are individual ladder-back chairs instead of conventional pews. They were especially designed by Saarinen for the chapel and were manufactured by a Cambridge (Massachusetts) firm.

Leading into the chapel, the long narthex or passageway is walled in glass stained in antique gray. Directly above the entrance of the narthex is the organ built by Walter Holtkamp, internationally known organ maker.

The outer brick cylinder of the chapel is about 50 feet in diameter and 30 feet high. By next fall it will be topped by an aluminum spire that will be taller than the cylinder itself. The spire is the creation of Theodore Roszak, the sculptor, who also designed the bell which will hang at the base of the spire.

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The M.I.T. chapel has been planned as a quiet retreat. Its isolation is effected in part by the device of the moat and by the solid windowless cylinder of the chapel building.

The approach from the main campus is through a grove of trees beside a screening wall of brick. The light dims in the stained glass entryway of the narthex and, except for the altar light, becomes even softer within the chapel itself. The separation from the outer campus is complete.

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Architects were Eero Saarinen and Associates, in association with Anderson, Beckwith, and Haible. Structural engineers were Ammann and Whitney, and mechanical and electrical engineers were Hyde and Bobbio. Bolt, Beranek, and Newman were the acoustical consultants and the George A. Fuller Company was the general contractor.