

HANDOUT - SECTION 2

Historical Background:

In 1953, Eero Saarinen was commissioned to design two buildings as part of a new extension of the MIT Campus to house the non-denominational MIT Chapel and the Kresge Auditorium, a multi-purpose performance hall. The designs for both buildings were to be distinctive as landmarks testifying to MIT's commitment to arts and humanities and were to figure prominently into a much more extensive campus plan to the west of Massachusetts Ave. including graduate student housing, more dormitory space and a student center. Separated from the classrooms to the east of Mass Ave., the chapel and the auditorium were to become the centerpieces of the non-academic precinct of the MIT campus and marked the first stages of a new building effort to contribute to the character of MIT as well as to provide for the increasingly diverse curricula of the Institute.

Construction of the MIT Chapel began in May 1954, initial occupation in May 1955.

Architect:

Eero Saarinen shared the same birthday as his father, Eliel Saarinen. Saarinen emigrated to the United States in 1923 at the age of thirteen. He grew up in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, where his father was a teacher at the Cranbrook Academy of Art where he took courses in sculpture and furniture design. He had a close relationship with fellow students Charles and Ray Eames and became good friends with Florence Knoll (nee Schust).

Beginning in September 1929, he studied sculpture at the Academie de la Grande Chaumiere in Paris, France. He then went on to study at the Yale School of Architecture, completing his studies in 1934. Subsequently, he toured Europe and North Africa for a year and returned for a year to his native Finland, after which he returned to Cranbrook to work for his father and teach at the academy. He became a naturalized citizen of the U.S. in 1940. Saarinen was recruited by his friend, who was also an architect, to join the military service in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). Saarinen was assigned to draw illustrations for bomb disassembly manuals and to provide designs for the Situation Room in the White House. Saarinen worked full time for the OSS until 1944. After his father's death in 1950, Saarinen founded his own architect's office. "Eero Saarinen and Associates".

Sculptor:

The chapel's curving spire and bell tower was designed by the sculptor Theodore Roszak and was added in 1956.

Theodore Roszak (May 1, 1907 - September 3, 1981) was an American sculptor and painter. He was born in Posen, Prussia (German Empire), now Poznan, Poland, as a son of Polish parents, and emigrated to the United States at the age of two. From 1925 to 1926 he studied at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, in 1930 he won the Logan Medal of the Arts, then moved to New York City to take classes at the National Academy of Design with George Luks and at Columbia University, where he studied logic and philosophy before going back to Chicago to teach at the Art Institute. He taught at Sarah Lawrence College throughout the 1940s and 1950s. He was a participating artist at the documenta II in Kassel in 1959 and at the Venice Biennale in 1960.

Roszak's sculpture at first closer to Constructivism and displaying an Industrial aesthetic, changed around 1946 to a more expressionistic style. Roszak was also an accomplished violinist, and liked to use musical references in his artworks. Roszak died in New York City, where he lived.

Plans:

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