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## How Boston Synagogue Went a Little 'Mod'

by **Eddie Small**  
**Courant News Writer**

In a 1995 Pulitzer Prize-winning column, Boston Globe architecture critic Robert Campbell had few kind words for Charles River Park on its 35th anniversary.

However, there were two buildings in the area that he singled out for praise: St. Stephen's Catholic Church and the Boston Synagogue, which he described as "an architectural gem where a mysterious golden light falls into the interior as if coming directly from God."

The Boston Synagogue established its location at 55 Martha Road in 1971 and continues to attract guests from across the globe to this day. Many of them walk away similarly impressed with its design, according to treasurer Michael Weingarten.

"We get a lot of visitors from over the world, and they come in, and they say, 'I've never seen anything like this,'" he said.

Maurice Saval, chair of the Boston Synagogue from 1970 to 1989, presided over giving the building a more modern structure. Weingarten found this surprising, as Saval was already in his late 60s at the time of construction.

"I would've thought that a guy like that would go for a very traditional, old fashioned looking place," he said. "And he didn't."

The design came from CBT Architects, a three-year-old business at the time that has since become one of the city's more established architecture firms. Richard Bertman, a founding principal at the company, said the fact that Saval was friends with his wife's grandfather helped bring about the transaction.

"As young architects, we would not normally get a commission like that," he said.

The building was meant to reflect the park-like atmosphere of its West End location. Its layout was also designed to help visitors transition from being in a bustling city to being in a peaceful house of worship through elements such as the synagogue's translucent roof.

"Light comes through, and then when it rains you can hear the sound of the rain on the roof," Bertman said. "It was almost like a tent that reflected the nomadic quality of the Jewish people."

The synagogue earned the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Design Award in 1974, but Chairman of the Building Fund Committee Allan Robinson still appeared a bit nervous about its appearance in a 1970 fundraising letter.

"You'll see we've gone a bit 'Mod,'" he wrote. "Do you mind?"

Despite these initial misgivings, Weingarten said that he felt the synagogue had held up much better than several other structures from the 1970s.

"A lot of the buildings from that era, they don't look good today," he said. "And that's not the case with this building."