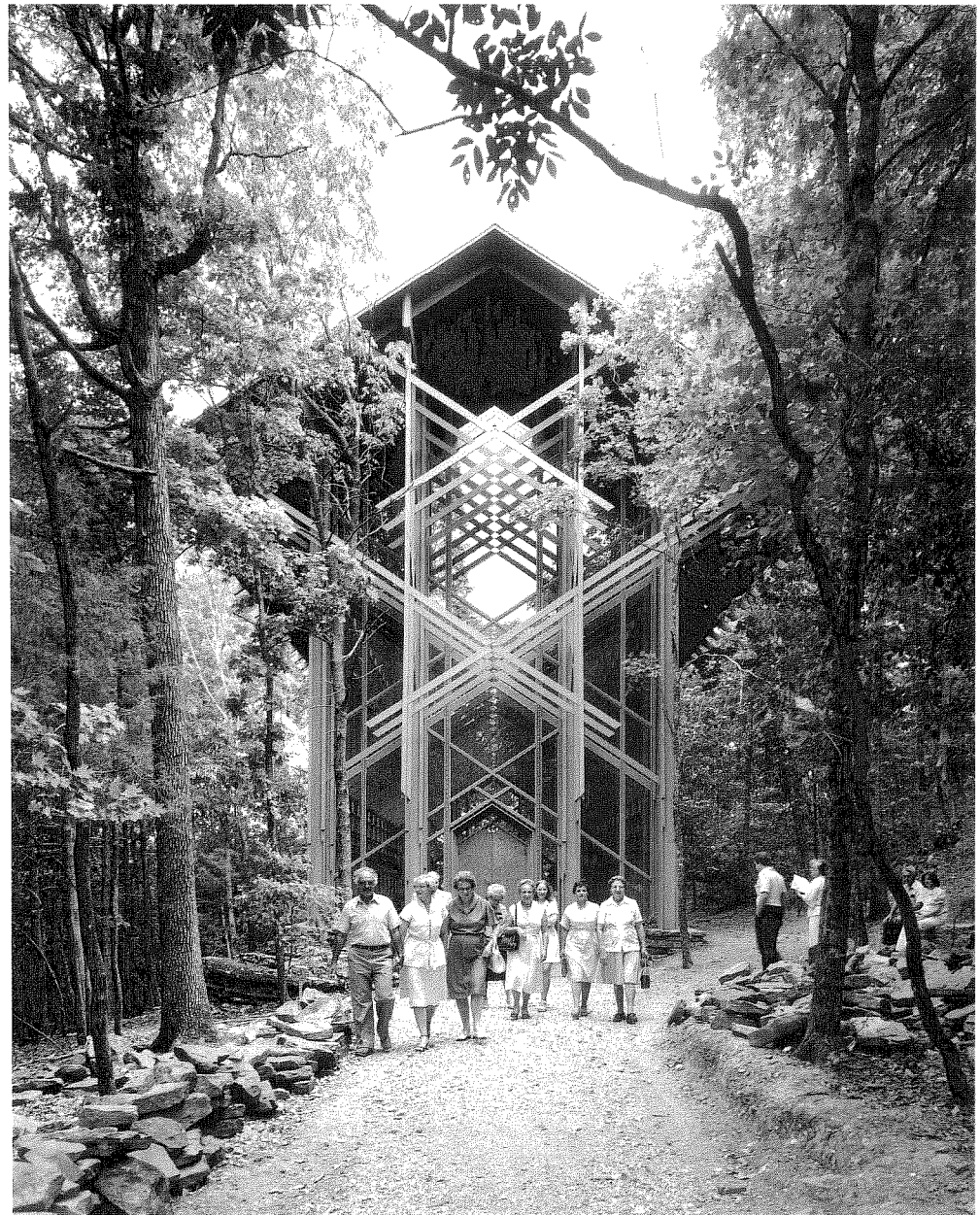


Thorncrown Chapel

Jury Comments

Thorncrown Chapel is a building that is also an astonishing formalization of the forest setting into which it is placed. Great care was taken to preserve its wooded site. A cage of small wood and glass pieces carried through the woods stands among the trees. Its wood pieces have been hand-rubbed with grayish stain to blend with the bark of the surrounding trees. The roof beams form a canopy reminiscent of the trees, reminding us of Ruskin's observation that being in a Gothic church is like being in a verdant forest.

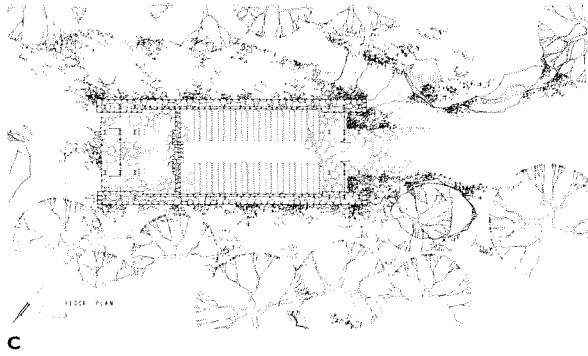
Yet the precision and intricacy of its geometric form and its interior finishings set the building apart as well. The cool blue of the bench cushions reinforces the serenity and peace appropriate for a place of worship and meditation.



A Thorncrown Chapel
© Hursley & Lark

B Thorncrown Chapel, interior
© Hursley & Lark/
Christopher Lark, photographer

C Thorncrown Chapel, floor plan



C

Architect's Statement

Thorncrowne Chapel, set on an eight-acre wooded hillside site near Eureka Springs, Arkansas, is a nondenominational Christian chapel for the wayfarer.

In walking the site there was an early realization that heavy earth-moving equipment or massive construction materials could not be used without destroying the wooded setting; and that the whole design must hinge on not using anything too big for two men to carry along a narrow hillside pathway. This limitation was the key to the structural concept. It became a building of many small pieces—pine two-by-fours and two-by-sixes linked together into modular, angular structural elements, that formed a larger cage-like structure infilled with clear glass.

In its structural expression, it is a kind of reversal of Gothic cathedral architecture, which has repeated external flying buttresses pushing the structure upward and inward. Thorncrowne Chapel has this repetition of structural elements, but stability is achieved by wooden tensile members pulling from within. This stabilizing web of braces, under a ridge skylight, receives a constantly changing play of light and pattern—a natural ornamentation of the structure and the space.



B