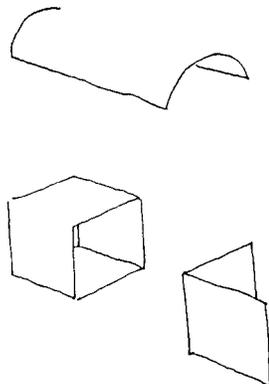
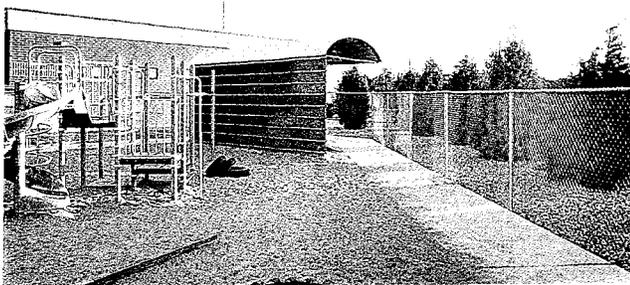
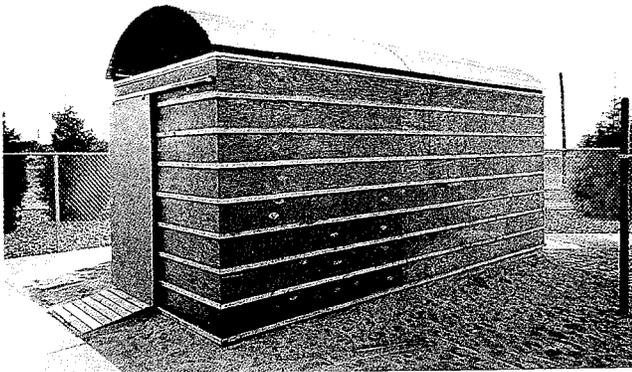


# B'Nai Israel Playground Building: Elementary Abstraction

1996 ACSA Design Award

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The B'Nai Israel playground building combines utility and symbolic form with an educational premise. Located in Albuquerque, New Mexico, this small structure (8' x 20') is part of an ensemble of outdoor spaces. Swing sets, vegetable gardens, and over-sized toys are placed within the playlot; together they speak of the relationship of the everyday built environment to the mind, body, and spirit. The storage building refers to the intellect, through the exposure of its structure. A sandbox (made of a donated rowboat covered by a wood-and-corrugated-metal gable) takes the form of an ark, thus representing the spirit. Vegetable gardens, scaled for the children, suggest growth. These elements comprise a triad that portrays the character of the Congregation B'nai Israel, and the curiosity of the children.

The children at the B'Nai Israel pre-school needed a secure place to park their bicycles without the assistance of the teachers. The building, conceived of as a covered bridge, connects one sidewalk to another across the corner of a large court. The children pedal up ramps and through the open ends of the structure as they circle the playground.

The Playground Building is a wood frame structure which reveals the system by which it was built, a plywood membrane woven between an interior vertical and exterior horizontal wood framework. The exposed structure illustrates how the children's own houses might have been built. Additionally, the Playground Building is made of simple forms, to help introduce geometry into their pre-school education. One end of the mass is a triangle, cut at a 45 degree angle to respond to the site, while the other end is a square. These shapes are extruded upward beneath a barrel vault covering the full length of the building. This vault, of corrugated steel, describes an arc.

By approaching the building as an educational tool, it has been possible to distill architectural design to an elemental level. Similarly, tectonics could be made explicit. The B'Nai Israel Playground Building is as much a demonstration of material fact as it is communicative of greater meaning.

## Project Credits

Playground design: Teva Hesse

Project team: Steve Bromberg, Kameron Cheney, Steve Dixon, Jeffery Saffer

