

Folding Tradition: The Indiana Sukkot Project

1998 ACSA Design Award

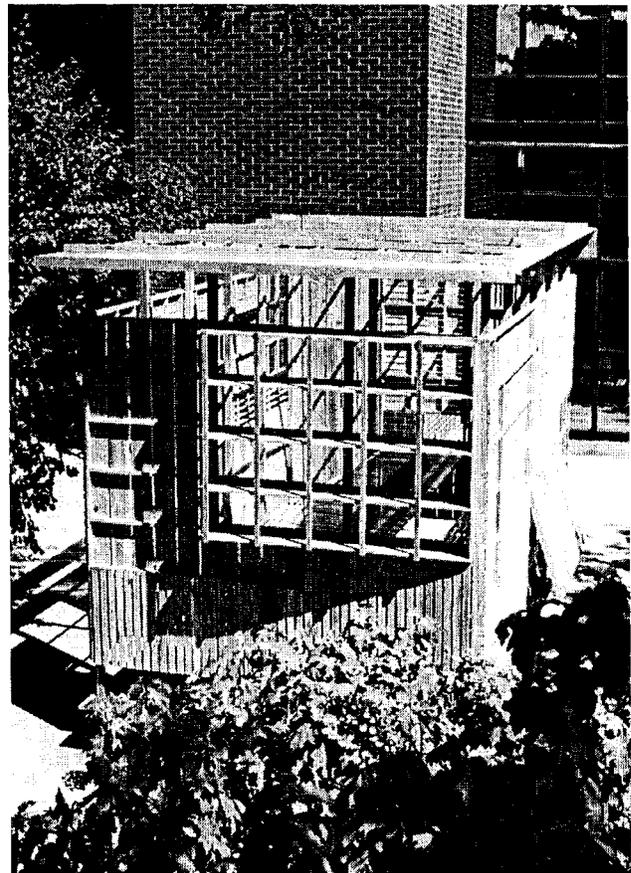
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These projects represent a body-of-work that explores several general design issues: the relationship between historic images and the contemporary condition, between myth and reality, between expectation and realization; the formation of space by wrapping, layering, and bending wood; and the mysterious connection between the viewer and a cupped and partially revealed space.

The prize-winning Sukkah design reinterprets the ancient Jewish ritual hut in a contemporary way, at the same time constructing a new religious and cultural identity for this traditional structure. The design posits a site-specific character for the Sukkah, one rooted in the Indiana landscape. The design uses layers of transparency – material, physical, cultural, and historical – to make a complex experience in a simple space. By questioning the image of the traditional object, the project exhibits a cultural open-mindedness, and interest in the contemporary aspects of the American cultural identity.

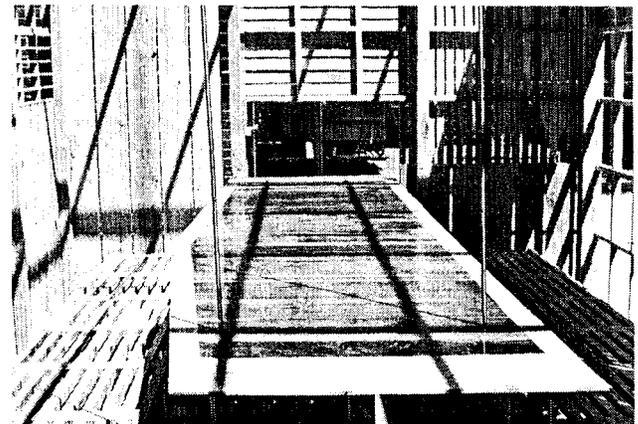
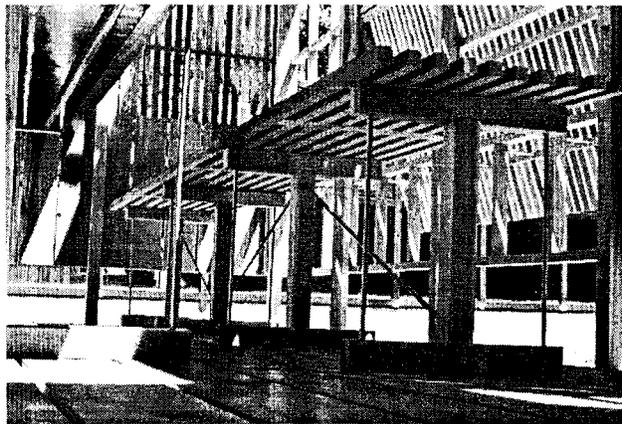
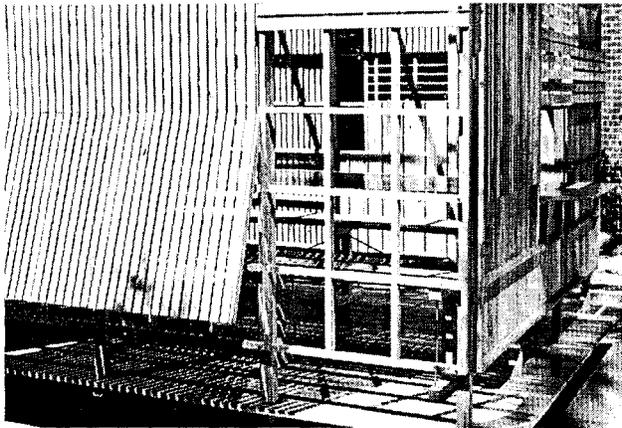
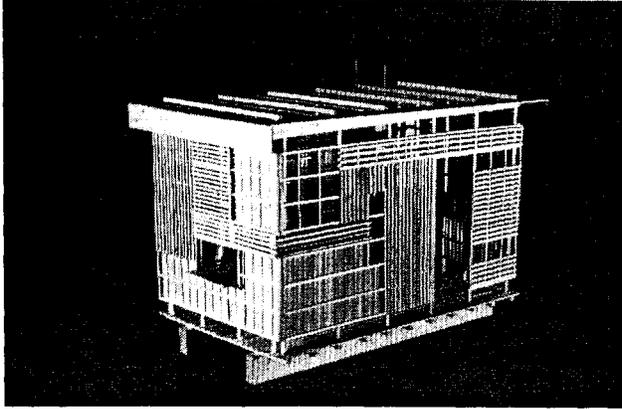
The Sukkah is a garden pavilion assembled once each year for the harvest celebration. On each day for eight days, family and friends gather together in the Sukkah in order to eat their meals in a celebration similar to the American Thanksgiving. Some people even choose to sleep in the Sukkah, a practice harking back over three thousand years when farmers constructed simple huts in the fields during the harvest in order to be as close to the crops as possible. The Sukkah is usually a simple hut constructed of four wooden posts supporting an open lattice on the roof which is covered with fruits of the harvest.

The new design attempts to re-focus attention on the landscape in a number of ways. The walls are at once opaque and permeable; giving a sense of enclosure and privacy, yet permitting people standing outside to peer in to witness the ceremony as it transpires, or permitting those inside to observe the surrounding landscape. Each facade has openings of different dimensions, placed at different heights, and oriented sometimes on the vertical, sometimes on the horizontal. These openings frame specific views to the outside helping to further emphasize the natural environment. At the same time, they frame specific places on the inside focusing a passerby's



view on the ceremonial table, the celebrants' heads, or a human figure. These visual connections are crucial to the experience, reinforcing the spirit of Sukkot, which celebrates the harvest, the fruits of the landscape, and the human interconnection with nature.

The walls are intricate compositions whose patterns emphasize the dialogue between the vast horizontal expanse that is the Northern Indiana landscape, and the vertical thrust of natural elements. Periodically, they gently flex like corn stalks bending in the wind. The complex figures formed by the layered wooden lattice create a rich play of light and



shadow on the structure's interior, reminiscent of the light conditions in an Indiana hardwood forest.

The Sukkah is raised up off the ground, on two large, wooden beams, in order to suspend it above the earth, where it hovers on the edge between the past and the present. The wall panels are suspended from the wooden frame, floating in the space between the floor and the roof; the table is perched on one wall and hung from the beams by two thin steel cables, seemingly magically levitated into position. The sensation is one of impermanence, of precarious balance, of potential movement. The arklike, or ship- like, character of the Sukkah

is also a reference to biblical myth.

The entire pavilion is constructed of natural products from Indiana in order to reiterate the connection between the Sukkah and the Indiana landscape. Columns, beams, cladding, flooring, and furniture are all made from one of the indigenous hardwoods: either poplar, oak, cherry, maple, or walnut. The wood-framing techniques also refer to historic American building practices, and the Indiana building heritage. The roof is a gridded wooden plane, on top of which, and through which, corn husks will be threaded, taking advantage of one of the icons of the Indiana natural environment.