

THE PRESENT CHURCH



After the first Church was built, a report appeared in the Los Angeles *Herald*, November 25, 1921, forecasting a future vision of how the church building would look: "...the future St. Basil's Church, some years hence, will be built in the purest Spanish Renaissance style." Reality was to be far different, however, particularly in the lack of any external embellishments so representative of the Spanish Renaissance.

As we know it today, St. Basil Church incorporates an architectural character and individuality unique to the West Coast. At the same time it retains the simplicity and strength of a theme dominated by monastic features such as heavy masonry walls and a fortress-like tower construction. As Albert C. Martin and Associates, the Los Angeles architects for the church, described the building, the "design concept of St. Basil is a marriage of early Christian with contemporary to recall the time when the church often served as a place of refuge. It is devoid of external embellishments as early churches were, but it is not a carbon copy of early churches. It at one time retains the feeling of the past and present."

Because of its unusual design, the process of building St. Basil was a challenge to the craftsmen who built it and the artists who adorned it. Some of the walls are thicker at the top than at the bottom, others taper from the bottom up and occasionally one is perpendicular.

This magnificent Wilshire Boulevard landmark, St. Basil Church, was dedicated June 29, 1969. The 900-seat church is owned by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. The building is an unusual combination of massive concrete towers, unique shafts of three-dimensional colored-glass windows, original artwork and religious art treasures from Europe.

Exterior

The faceted walls are formed by 12 separate towers, each over 80 feet high. The towers, positioned close together in a basically rectangular shape, are separated by the full-height window shafts. The spire is 160 feet high and at the top is a cross that rises another 20 feet in the air.



Over 9,000 cubic yards of concrete were used in the structure. To support the heavy weight of the towers, 208 piles two feet in diameter and extending 40 to 45 feet into the earth had to be drilled and poured.



All the walls were bush-hammered to create a rough texture and expose the color of the aggregate.

Interior

Ceiling:

The church ceiling is considered to be a masterpiece of contemporary sculpture. It takes its form from the clusters of 2,400 teak-covered, seven-foot long aluminum tubes attached at various angles to the actual roof truss members. The convoluted, multi-directional elliptical patterns of the tubes create the sensation of motion. The patterns formed by the tubes contrast with the plain mass of the concrete walls.

Acoustical vibration is minimized by an absorbent filler substance sealed into the enamel-finished tubes.

Walls:

The interior walls containing the fourteen Stations of the Cross (see below) are a remarkable achievement of artist and artisan. The 10-foot-square panels depicting Biblical characters in larger-than-life size were created by Franco Assetto of Torino, Italy. Assetto made the clay models from which plaster molds were cast. The molds were then incorporated into the formwork for the actual concrete pour. Thus, the figures become a monolithic part of the Church walls. Great care had to be taken in the handling of the forms and in matching the color and texture of the adjacent walls with the backgrounds of the bas-relief panels.

Windows:



The towering window sculptures were designed by the internationally famous Southern California artist-sculptor Claire Falkenstein, under one of the most complex architectural commissions ever granted to an American artist.

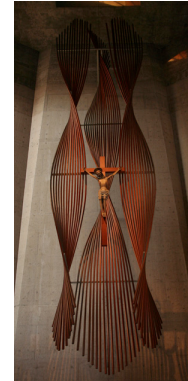
Ms. Falkenstein began working in the close collaboration with the architect at the early stage to make sure the window sculptures were in harmony with the building design. Her work included drawings, models, a mock-up and supervision of fabrication.

The three-dimensional windows are made of overlapping sheets of colored glass in a framework of weathering steel angle iron. Assembling the thousands of pieces of glass into the metal frames was like putting together a giant jigsaw puzzle. The related patterns in the window sculptures convey a harmony of two and three-dimensional interstices by providing a complimentary balance of intricate ornamental detail to the silent strength of the soaring walls. As the exploring fragments of color bounce off the steel and pane structures, a lyrical, discontinuous line of light soars upward in a pleasant field of compatible shade variations.

A network of circular devices characterizes the bronze 13-foot high narthex door screens. These screens are also designed by Ms. Falkenstein, and are related thematically to the window sculptures.

Sanctuary:

Directly over the altar and suspended from the reredos wall is the superbly designed baldachino. It consists of 45 teak-covered, chromatically veneered metal tubes, each 55 feet long, gracefully curved to give aura and dimension to the 14th century Tuscan crucifix.



Two large teak carvings on either side of the altar were done by the designer-architect Boxidar von Serda. One portrays Mary and the Infant Jesus, while the other is of St. Basil, patron saint of the church, preaching the Word of God. Each weighs approximately 1,500 pounds.

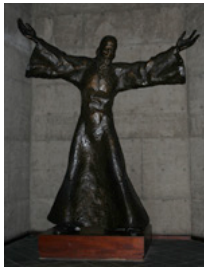
The tabernacle, (thought to be of French Gothic origin), is styled after the Arc of the Covenant. It, along with the 13th century crucifix and an early nativity scene were given to the church by Sir Daniel J. Donohue in memory of his wife, the late Countess Bernardine Murphy Donohue. *[The nativity scene (called the "precipio" or nativity creche, containing 70 ceramic figures has been moved to the mausoleum of the new Cathedral.]*



The ceiling and baldachino were designed by Martin's firm.

Statues, Sculptures & Furnishings

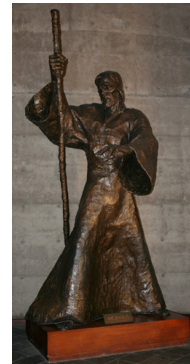
The statues of Sts. Peter and Paul in the narthex are by sculptor Rafe Afflick. The



statue of Our Lady Queen of the Angels at the corner of Wilshire and Harvard, and the Baptism of Christ bas-relief on the north wall of the Baptistry all were produced by the famous Southern California sculptor Ernest Shelton.

The sculpture pieces at the side altars—The Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph—are by Herb

Goldman, Los Angeles.



The altar, confessionals, sanctuary furnishings and pews were made from hand-selected Thailand teak by J.J. Pellkofer & Associates, El Monte, California.

Organ:

The magnificent organ, manufactured in the Los Angeles studios of Justin Kramer, conveys a tone rich in the best traditions of the Church's liturgy. Each of the 1,816 pipes, 256 of them reed or clarinet-like and 1,560 flute or flute-like, is individually fitted with the precise combination of wood, pipe metal, zinc and copper necessary to insure proper timbre. The electronic relays in the distinctively modern console are engineered to guarantee instant harmony between the three keyboards and the valve controllers. A diamond-shaped canopy above the choir combines the strength of suspended energy with that of the grand ceiling pattern, its component parts twisted to complement the elliptical curvature of the surrounding designs. The tensor's suspended fore-end, forged by interlocking aluminum decking veneered with thin strips of teak, can be tilted to serve as a sounding board for the organ and choir.

An elaborate system of carillons, conforming in tonal quality to the master bells of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, can provide the entire range of the Westminster sequence. The "Americana" instrument, developed by Schulmerich Carillons, Inc., Sellersville, Pennsylvania, produces the equivalent resonance of 100,000 cast bells by driving miniature hammers against a series of small bronze receivers. The minute sound is then amplified over a million times.

The 14 Stations of the Cross

The "Via Crucis" of Franco Assetto (1911 – 1991) is rooted in the Italian figurative traditions in which composition as well as outlined figures are derived from 13th to 15th century statues and bas-reliefs.



Every traditional detail of the majestic procession towards Calvary is rethought and scrupulously conserved in these 14 Stations by Assetto. But since he was a man of his times he depicted the passage of Christ's martyrdom moving in the rapid tempo of today's quick-changing images. The strictness of composition and drawing such as is found in the great line from Duccio to Roualt is maintained, as is the figurative formality of Manzù.

Stone and marble are exchanged for reinforced cement, immediately ready to be shaped; the studio for the builder's yard. Assetto plunged into his material, working the figures into relief with the violent and feverish energy of a man absorbed in an antique universal book. The sublime Calvary is transformed into the human suffering of a man.

These 14 Stations by Assetto depict an austere belief, both sacred and human, that these final moments of Christ succeed in illustrating the perpetual way of faith between the Son of the Father and each succeeding generation.

Giorgio Sebastiano Brizio
Turin, Italy 1981

After gaining the Cardinal's approval, Assetto was given only a month to make the 14 sculptures since they were to become an integral part of the church's construction, which had already begun.

In the short period of 28 days Assetto modeled 5600 pounds of clay into molds that were converted into reverse plaster castings in a factory. The plaster castings, 110 feet square and weighing about 2500 pounds each, reinforced with on-foot-thick wood to sustain the weight of the cement, were used as containers in the construction of the huge walls.



The Stations of the Cross were ordered from Assetto with the requirement that the full-size designs be presented for the approval of the Cardinal.

*"Every eye shall see him, and they also who pierced him...
I am the alpha and the omega,
the beginning and the end,...*

who is and who was and who is coming, the almighty”.

Revelation 1, 5 a - 6

Rectory

The three-story rectory at the north end of the complex has accommodations for 10 priests and encircles a cloistered courtyard. The compact but serviceable building, finished in the same bush-hammered substance as the church, was the episcopal residence of the late Cardinal James Francis McIntyre, Archbishop of Los Angeles.

In addition to the church-rectory complex, a spacious parish hall is provided on the basement level as well as storage area and parking facilities for the resident clergy.

The Rev. Msgr. Benjamin G. Hawkes was the pastor and builder of St. Basil Church.

The contractor for the new complex was Pozzo Construction Company, Los Angeles. Reiss and Brown were the structural engineers. Bolt, Beranek and Newman were acoustical consultants to Martin for the church and downstairs chapel, and the sound system was by Hannon Engineering.

In February of 1973, the American Institute of Architects bestowed on St. Basil Church an Award of Merit for “excellence in design and execution.”