

WORSHIP ON THE WILD SIDE

OVER THE YEARS and across the globe, modern-styled churches have taken on a variety of forms, ranging in mood from contemplative to boisterous, and from modest to pull out the stops. Consider the variety shown in these six striking and unforgettable examples of world-class houses of worship.

A Cathedral of Maringá

Architect: José Augusto Bellucci
Maringá, Brazil, 1972

In mid-century United States the A-frame church, well or poorly designed, became so common as to be trite. In Maringá, for his Cathedral Basilica of Our Lady of Glory, Bellucci created a foundation of A-frames and topped them with a conical skyscraper that, at 400-plus feet, is the tallest church in South America.



The A-frames hold stained glass producing a glorious colorful interior. More stained glass rises up along the side of the tower. Even more colorful is the exterior when illuminated at night in a variety of shades and patterns.

B Thorncrown Chapel

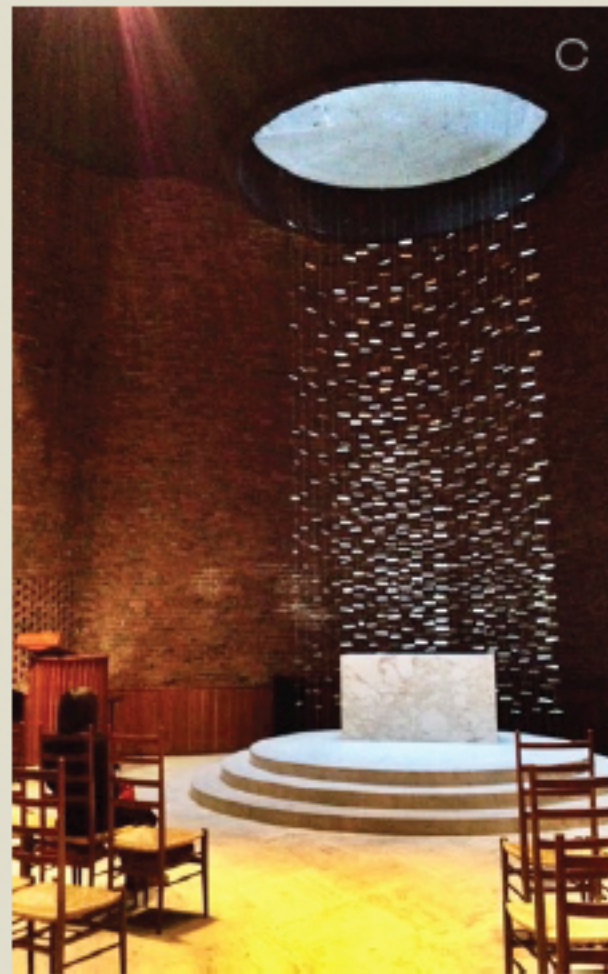
Architect: Fay Jones
Eureka Springs, Arkansas, 1980

This compact yet spiritually soaring chapel in the woods was designed to look like the woods itself. Jones was

inspired by Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, which houses the crown of thorns—hence the name.

Nature, Jones told reporter Jan Cottingham, “is where I’ve felt my most spiritual feelings.”

One fan of the chapel was Prince Charles, who praised it as a form of “poetry arising out of buildings in



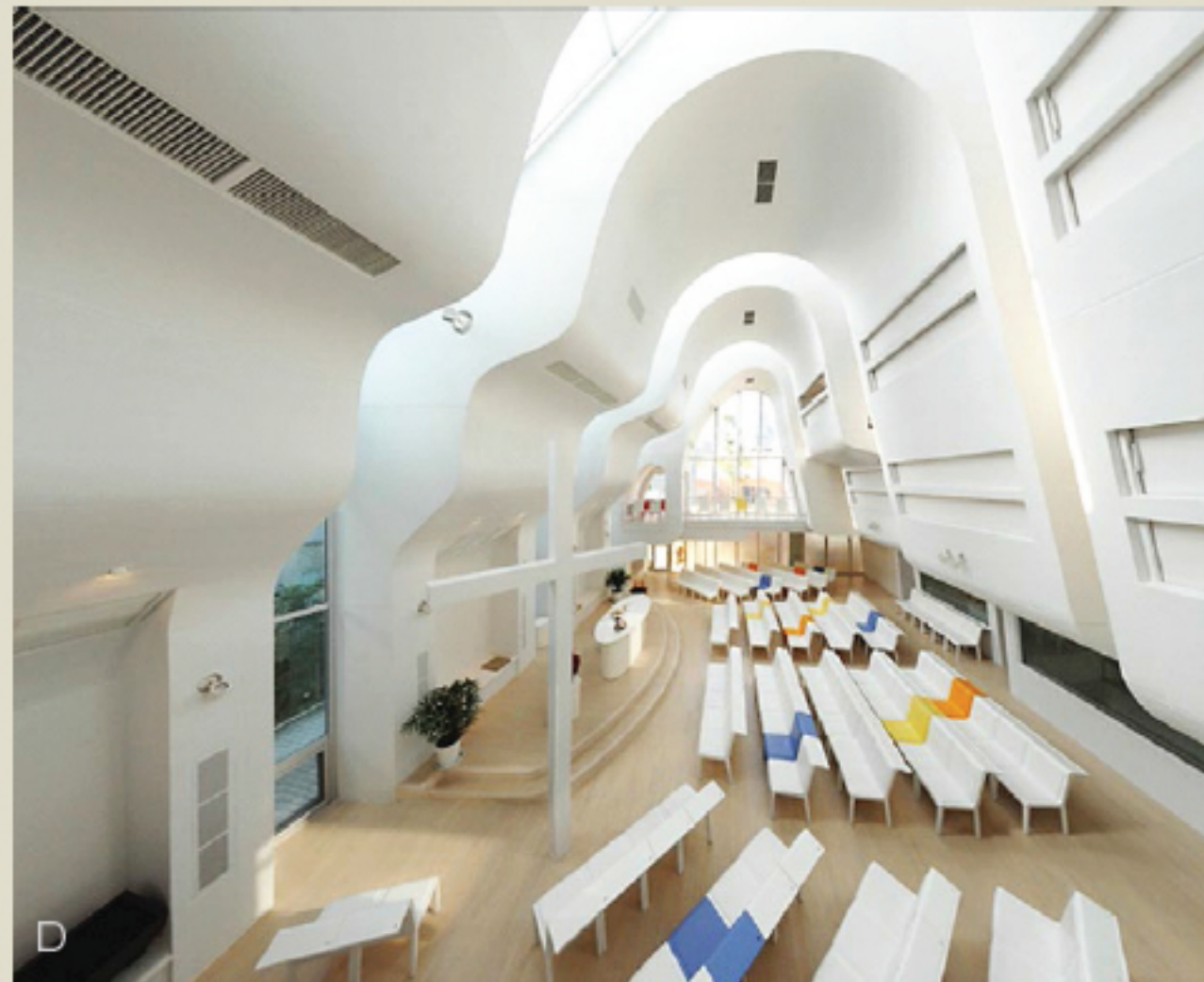
harmony with their natural surroundings.” Charles added, “Thorncrown Chapel was built in the woods from timber carried to the site by hand. Not one of the trees around it was touched.”

C MIT Chapel

Architect: Eero Saarinen
Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1955

This lovely, circular plan chapel, with 128 seats and serpentine interior walls featuring outrageously deformed brick, represents the meditative style of modern sacred architecture.

Essentially windowless, the chapel has light shining down from a skylight onto a shimmering metallic curtain on the altar by artist Harry Bertoia.



Light also bounces upwards through low arched openings near the floor, as it is reflected from a moat that surrounds the chapel.

Saarinen succeeded in the modernist quest to strip away nostalgic references to the past and pasted-on decoration, while provoking a sense of quietude and awe.

D Harajuku Church

Architects: Henri Gueydan and Fumiko Kaneko (Ciel Rouge Création) – Tokyo, Japan, 2006

This 21st century church shows that modernism remains a force in church design, and whimsy never goes out of style—even in worship.



E Metropolitan Cathedral of Brasília

Architect: Oscar Niemeyer
Brasília, Brazil, 1970

Many architects sought to give their modern churches a unique form. Niemeyer succeeded here, with 16 curved structural-concrete piers shooting towards the sky and supporting walls and ceiling of stained glass.

The interior is a dream of color, abstract stained glass overhead and sculpted angels suspended above parishioners. This is the church as show biz, suggesting in spirit one of Bernini’s Baroque interiors in Rome.

Yet, unlike Bernini, who lavished on details and played up the melodrama, here the shape and symmetry is simple and comprehensible, altogether modern.

F La Sagrada Familia

Architect: Antoni Gaudí
Barcelona, Spain, 1882-1926

“There is no better beginning for the history of modern religious architecture than Gaudí’s work,” architect Joseph Pichard wrote, calling this church—which Gaudí never completed—“a poem in stone in which medieval mysticism and contemporary lyricism are strangely combined.”

Yet Pichard recognized the Art Nouveau church would not prove a model for others because of its “highly individualized romanticism.”

Historian Nikolaus Pevsner wrote of the church: “The four sugar-loaf spires, Tunisian more than anything else, with their amazing pattern of voids and solids and their even more amazing crustaceous pinnacles, are the lasting monument to Gaudí’s intrepid daring.”