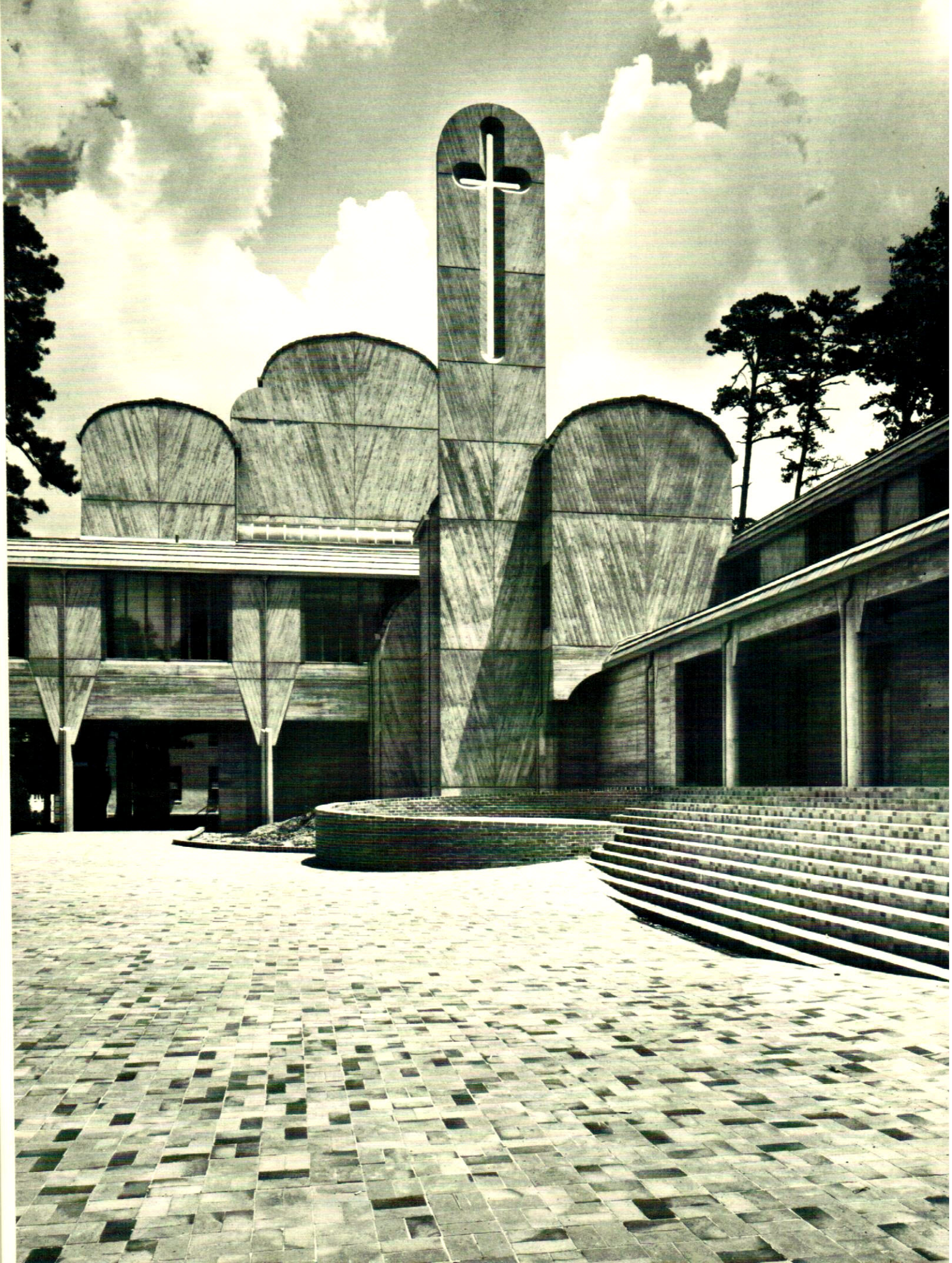


EMORY

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A New Portrait of the University



No Ordinary Chapel

Emory consecrates a new center for spiritual growth

By Shelley V. Brown

Photographs by Michael McKelvey

It is early July, and it is hot. Bent over, heedless of the intensity of the mid-afternoon sun, Mario Mion fits a sliver of brick into a crevice on the still treeless courtyard of the William R. Cannon Chapel and Religious Center. Mion, a specialist in mosaic-like brickwork from Italy, has spent two and a half months painstakingly cutting hundreds of irregularly shaped bricks to fit every twist and turn in the courtyard. His work nearly done, Mion is laying the last of 40,000 bricks that will link the chapel courtyard to the brick esplanade surrounding White Hall. Asked if he is pleased with the courtyard, he modestly answers yes. But as he turns to look at the chapel, he adds that he is pleased with the way *everything* has turned out.

This is no ordinary chapel. Designed by a world-famous architect, its groundbreaking was celebrated by a president of the United States. It contains 316,000 pounds of reinforced steel, 2,000 sheets of plywood, six tons of nails, 900 tubes of caulk, 20,000 feet of conduit, 100,000 feet of wire, and an unestimable amount of poured concrete. But it is much more than the sum of its parts.

Originally conceived in 1975, when officials at the Candler School of Theology promised then-President Sanford S. Atwood that they would build a chapel to replace the one they had converted to a library, the Cannon Chapel is also more than just a promise

made good. It is an impressive and stately building, an architectural celebrity made possible because dreams were translated into designs, emotions were lavished upon it, headaches were endured. It is functional art, a bold representation of Emory's push toward excellence.

Strategically situated between Bishops Hall and the Pitts Theology Library, the Cannon Chapel is a solid and modernistic piece of architecture that at last stands ready to receive Emory worshippers and a multitude of others who will come to its many functions. The chapel's consecration on Sept. 30 began a year of music festivals, concerts, lectures, art exhibits, dance performances, and workshops that will help fulfill its promise as an important new part of the Emory community.

"Throughout the planning of the chapel, it has been intended as a center for witness, mission, and the renewal of the community of faith, and as a place of encounter with the significant moral and social issues confronting the church, the seminary, and the University in the contemporary world," says theology school Dean Jim L. Waits.

The chapel's completion marks the culmination of a long series of events that began in late 1975 when the theology school purchased a quarter of a million books and other items from the Hartford Seminary in Hartford, Conn. The acquisition of the Hartford Collection marked an important point in the

development of the theology school's academic reputation but presented a serious problem: it contained more books than the theology school could house. The solution—converting the Durham Chapel into a library—was proposed by President James T. Laney, then dean of the theology school, who also recommended an architect, Paul M. Rudolph.

As an internationally known architect, recipient of distinguished architectural awards, and former dean of the School of Art and Architecture at Yale University, Rudolph appeared to be the perfect man for the job. Add to that the fact that his father, Keener L. Rudolph, was a graduate of the theology school's first class in 1915, and Rudolph's selection seemed even more appropriate. (The Keener L. and Eurye Rudolph Courtyard of the Cannon Chapel was given by the architect in honor of his parents.)

Rudolph came to Emory, saw what needed to be done, and conquered the hearts of his employers with his renovation of the Durham Chapel into the Pitts Theology Library. Librarian Channing Jeschke, head of the Cannon Chapel building committee, says Rudolph converted the chapel into a library "honestly." Art historians might say that he designed it with "integrity," that is, he did not disguise the chapel's original structure or purpose, but instead worked with what was already there to make the space

functional as a library. When he completed the library everyone was pleased with his work, and Rudolph was asked to turn his talents toward the design of the new chapel.

But before the first blueprint was drawn, the University and the theology school had to determine what they wanted. Student surveys were taken, committees were formed. Slowly, visions were brought into focus.

The need for a larger and more flexible space was obviously there. The Durham Chapel, designed by Henry Hornbostel and built in 1916, was a single room that had been kept frantically busy during its years of service. It had accommodated Episcopal services Monday through Friday; Catholic services on Sunday; Candler's community worship on Tuesday and Thursday; University worship on Sunday; funeral and memorial services; Phi Beta Kappa presentations; and weddings, *lots* of weddings.

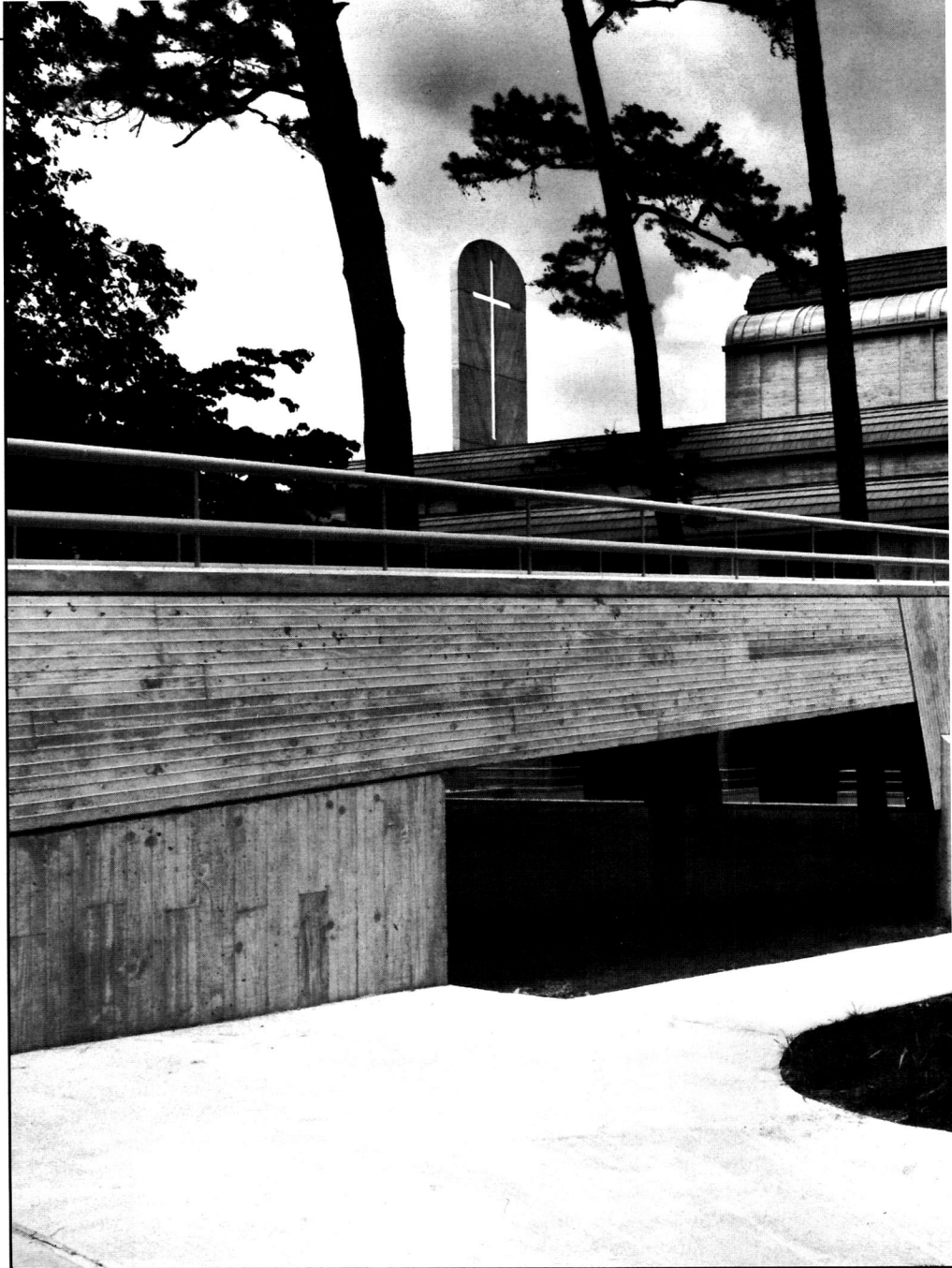
"In June, just before and after graduation—many of the college students married classmates—I think we had weddings scheduled every 20 minutes for several days," says Jeschke. "You couldn't even get the flowers off from one before the next one came."

The chapel also served as an important training ground for student ministers.

The theology school made a list of these activities, as well as the additional functions they wanted the new chapel to serve. They needed more office space, seminar rooms, a teaching center, better facilities for ministerial training, an organ, and a cultural center for performances, recitals, and plays.

"We wanted an alternative to Glenn Memorial, which seats about 1,000," Jeschke says. "We wanted a more intimate space that would serve the purpose of something like a string quartet."

The list of needs was given to Rudolph and the planning began. He knew the chapel would require sufficient mass in order to work harmoniously with the other buildings on campus. It had to have an appropriate design and interior in order to serve as an interdenominational space. And it had to have a feeling of spirituality. More than 100 designs were drawn before Rudolph was struck with the idea of using the theme of the arches in



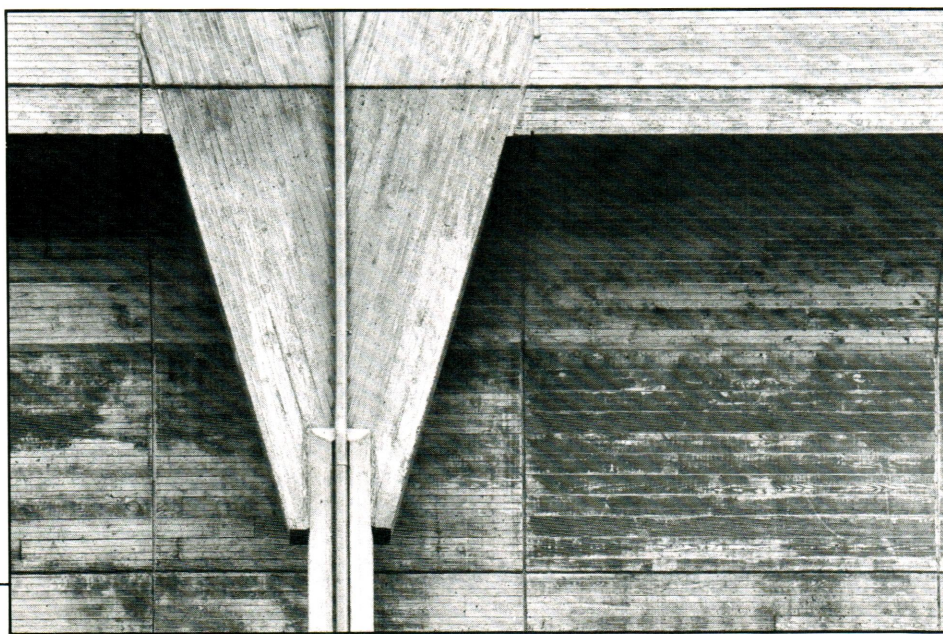
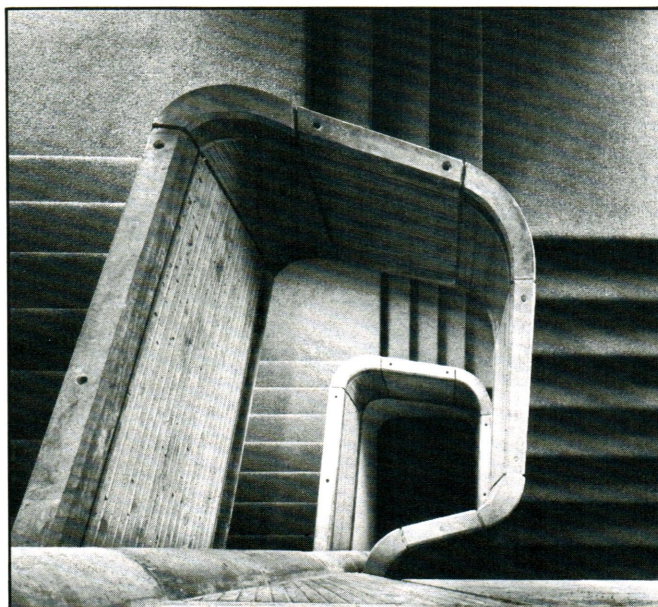
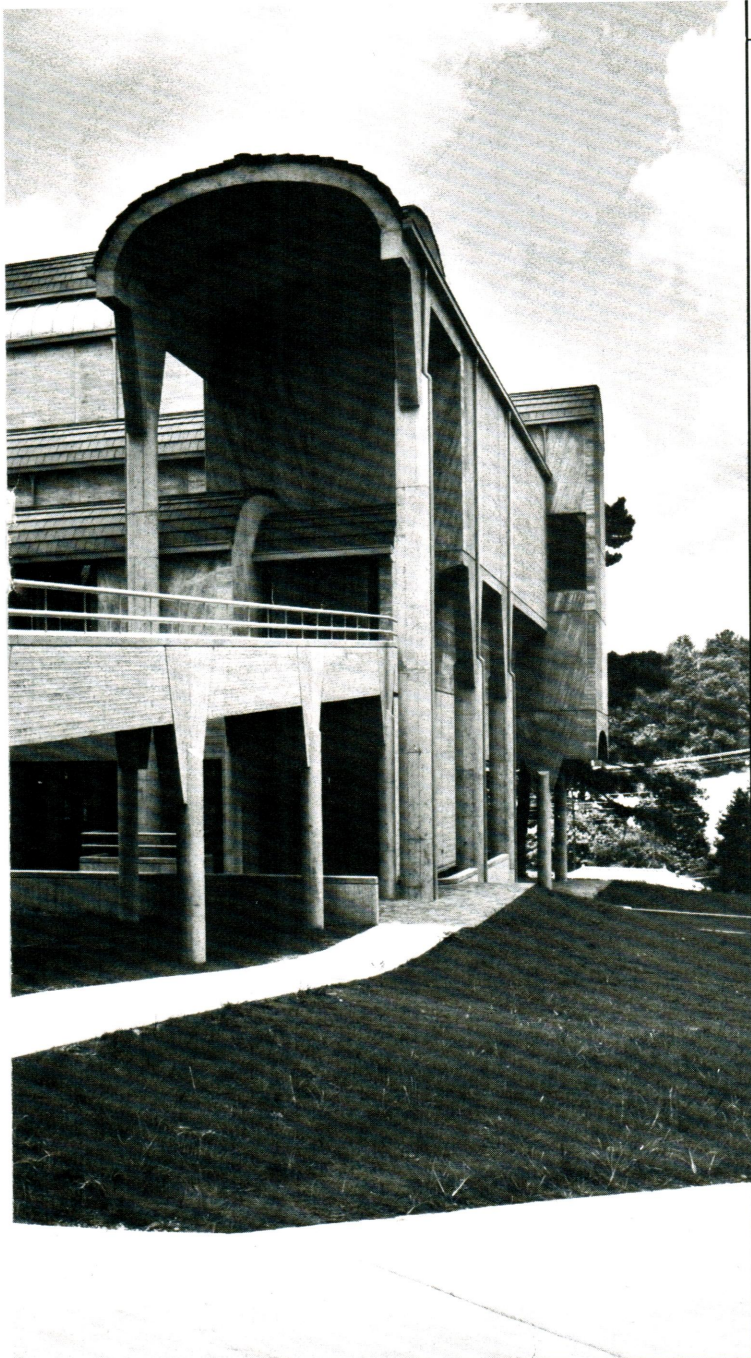
the Hornbostel buildings as vaults for the new chapel.

As the design progressed, the theology school began raising money for the \$4.8 million chapel. Two budgets were established, one for construction, one for furnishings. Eventually, about a quarter of the money came from Georgia Methodists, a quarter came from Methodists outside the state, another quarter from foundations and individuals, and the last quarter from the University.

Ground was broken on Aug. 30, 1979. In attendance were President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, there to honor their longtime friend and pastoral counselor, Bishop William

R. Cannon, for whom the chapel was named. It was the only time an incumbent president had visited Emory's campus. Just two years and one month later, Sept. 30, 1981, the new chapel was consecrated.

The chapel is a complex structure, offering radically different views from different directions. Composed largely of a series of elongated vaults of different heights, the chapel offers a stark—and some say unsettling—contrast to the stately, but staid, buildings that line the nearby Quadrangle. And yet, the structure does not appear out of place. Its poured concrete exterior—giant gray slabs with geometric patterns in subtle stripes and vees—blends well with the



Photographs clockwise from upper left show: the ascending concrete ramp that leads visitors to the rear entrance of the chapel; a bird's-eye view of the spiraling staircase inside the front entrance; a detail of the tile roof, clerestory windows, and concrete walls that form the vaulted ceiling of the main sanctuary; and a detail of the chapel's stark concrete exterior with its giant gray slabs of subtle stripes and vees.

gray marble buildings beside it. The chapel is topped with a traditional red tile roof, blending in further with neighboring buildings. Soaring above it is a gray concrete arch with a cross, the only permanent Christian symbol on or in the building.

Approximately 10,000 pieces of wood were used for molds to shape the concrete to Rudolph's precise specifications. A concrete model, used as a teaching aid for the workmen before construction actually began, stands like a piece of sculpture in the grass by the side of the chapel. It had been suggested that the model remain as a monument to the workers, but it is scheduled for removal. Still, the workers feel an attachment to the building.

"Our job was to take what the architect had in mind and make it into a physical being," says Scott McEwen, the field engineer responsible for controlling the poured concrete. "The concrete was a complex system—really a challenge, but I feel honored to have worked on this building. I doubt I will ever do anything like this again."

In mid-July, Atlanta architect Kemp Mooney, a former student of Rudolph's at Yale, arranges to take a tour of the not-quite-completed chapel with two colleagues and two architectural students. As the men gather in the shade, someone notices that a bird has already built a nest in the elongated vault that serves as the chapel's west entrance. The group laughs and enters the building.

Inside, it is cool and quiet. Because it has no nave, apse, or transept, the chapel offers an unspectacular first impression. Straight ahead is the D. W. Brooks Commons, a student lounge dedicated to the longtime chairman of the theology school's Committee of One Hundred. Twenty minutes earlier, a bride and her florist viewed the space and decided it would be perfect for the 275 guests who will use it as a wedding reception area in November.

To the left, a spiral staircase leads to the sanctuary on the next floor. The sanctuary is square and has seating galleries on all sides; each is slightly higher than the last, forming a "pinwheel effect" that also can be seen in other Rudolph buildings.

"I think the one thing an architect should do for a church is (to give) a sense of transcendence, and I think Rudolph—through using that archi-

tectural technique of the pinwheel—*does* give that sense of lifting you up," says Jeschke, who accompanies the architects on their tour. "There is a sense of loftiness, particularly in the morning, when the shaft of sunlight is coming in the window."

The architects are silent. Each one seems to be in his own world. Minutes go by as their eyes squint, taking in proportions from floor to ceiling, focusing on details like the traditional clerestory windows and the contemporary open duct work. Finally, Mooney nods his head and says slowly and reverently, "It is a *very* handsome space."

Some of the architects disperse and begin climbing to the top of the galleries. Others remain to question Jeschke.

The sanctuary will seat 430 people with the addition of movable chairs, Jeschke explains. The pews, built into the galleries, will have cushions to match the seats of the chairs. Everything on the main floor of the sanctuary is movable—the pulpit, the communion table, the copper menorah, the copper cross—making it a flexible space.

The sanctuary floor is parquet, wood over concrete, something Barbara Brown, chapel program director, felt obligated to tell members of the Joffrey Ballet Company III, who will perform there Oct. 20. Dancers are particular about the surfaces they dance on, so the Joffrey sent someone from Atlanta's City Center Dance to test it. He not only approved the floor but immediately wanted to book the space for his company in the spring.

The red oak pews, which were originally to have remained their natural color, have been sprayed gray. Rudolph, who selected them, later decided the richness of the wood distracted from the lofty feeling of the sanctuary and ordered them painted.

In the northwest corner of the sanctuary, still empty on this visit, is the area reserved for the organ, to be dedicated to Bessye and Ira H. Hardin. The handmade, baroque instrument is a sensitive subject no one in the theology school likes to talk about. Built by the Holtkamp Organ Company of Cleveland, Ohio, one of the oldest and most respected organ makers in the country, the \$155,000 organ will have an unusual depth and range for an instrument of its size and promises to

be a premiere instrument in the South. Theology school administrators are enthusiastic about it. They feel the organ "promises to be a crucial development for Emory's own music and for the development of recital and church music for the Atlanta area." It will stand 25 feet high and, like the pews, is red oak. Rudolph wanted it painted gray. The organ makers refused. Finally, a compromise was reached. The organ will be stained to match one of the darker colors of the parquet floor.

Works by regional artists will hang on office walls in the chapel, but there will be no stained glass windows. Emory looked to internationally known artists Frank Stella and Ellsworth Kelly to design the windows, but when Stella came to Atlanta to see the chapel, he inspected it carefully—and turned down the commission. Stella explained that the chapel was "right" the way it was, that Rudolph's ideas came through purely, that the use of stained glass would diminish the building. Not only did he not want to do the windows, he recommended that no one else do them either. Emory officials took Stella's advice; the chapel has clear windows that allow shafts of sunlight to pour in.

The group of visiting architects is impressed with the building in general, and with the attention to detail in particular.

"It's a very gutsy building, very handsome," says Mooney.

But not everyone on campus feels that way. To some, the chapel is too modern, too contemporary, too much unlike what they expect a chapel to be. Barbara Brown, who wholeheartedly likes the chapel, offers an explanation with wide eyes and a shrug of her shoulders. "It's modern architecture," she says, "and a lot of people really like old Victorian, baroque-looking chapels."

Emory art historian John Howett says an anti-modern attitude comes from not living with contemporary art and architecture. In Emory's case, he says, it is the lack of "links" between the good, older architecture and the good, newer architecture on campus. Too much of a gap exists between Hornbostel and Rudolph, he explains.

"Art isn't for everybody. It's something you have to *learn* about, and the only way to learn about it is to live with it," Howett says. "The Rudolph (chapel) is going to be seen as a major



building in American architecture. Bill McDonald (an architectural historian) from Smith College was here and he thinks it's a major building. There are very few campuses that have the guts to get a really good architect."

Members of the Emory community will have plenty of time—and plenty of opportunities—to view the new chapel and make up their minds. In addition to the Joffrey Ballet Company III, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Director Robert Shaw will make two appearances, and the Juilliard String Quartet will perform in February. Early in

October, various Emory religious communities will gather to celebrate the opening of the chapel with a musical service. Later in the month, a special ceremony for the workers who built the chapel will allow them to see the result of their toil.

And while the jury may still be out on the chapel's design, one telling comment came from a blind student in the theology school. Although unable to observe the chapel's appearance, after a walk through it with his guide dog, he said it *felt* like a cathedral. □

Photographs clockwise from left include: the main sanctuary with its vaulted ceiling and spiraling, pinwheel-like galleries; the teaching chapel named in honor of Methodist leader John W. Rustin; and the concrete pillars, decorative air ducts, and parquet floor of the main sanctuary.