

ABBA I POLANGIN AIA AIP
ARCHITECTURE PLANNING ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN

November 15, 1971

Mrs. Edward Frank, President
Temple Beth Israel Sisterhood
840 Highland Road
Sharon, Pa. 16146

Dear Mrs. Frank:

It was a pleasure meeting with you and the Rabbi last month to discuss the revitalizing of the Temple decor. It is amazing that after all these years this Temple still remains as I remember.

My overall impression of the Temple is that the total Temple environment does not have the vitality and focus that temples of current design have. The concept of design that was in vogue when the Temple was originally built was one of subdued, underplayed religious symbolism which now makes the edifice rather institutional in character. What seems to be needed most is to induce a feeling of warmth and to bring back some of the symbolic. There are also many items collected by the community related to the Temple and also items of religious significance which currently have no place to be presented and should be displayed. Items of this nature would tend to give a more personal touch and provide a more community oriented, tradition backed stability. Many momentos I remember seem to have been lost or set aside.

Because I believe that the routine maintenance including painting, replacement of equipment, furniture and general repair work should be tied to some plan, I feel it is imperative that a general overall plan be developed for the Temple refferbishing. Certainly, there is much that could be done even on a piecemeal basis to enhance the general appearance. It also makes more sense to spend money upgrading rather than keeping the status quo. The difference is in planning ahead with a plan in mind and not doing things on a haphazard basis.

With a plan in mind, it would be possible to gradually enhance the quality of the Temple environment. There is certainly little welcoming warmth in the main entrance foyer or preparation for the entrance into the main sanctuary. This is an area where the relics prized by the community should be kept and displayed using, perhaps, a piece of artwork to enhance the space. The color scheme for the foyer should be the same as the main sanctuary.

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Lacking in the main sanctuary is a focus on the ark and the pulpit area in general. The area is essentially bland by today's taste and is capped by a rather unpleasant view of ceiling, lights and rear windows in the choir loft. The choir screen does little to screen the choir loft, letting this area detract from the main interest below. The doors to the ark itself are uninspirational, and because of the central location of the pulpit, the ark is hidden from view. The central pulpit should also be replaced by one or two podiums on the side of the bema, more in line with current theology. Certainly any redesign of the pulpit area must consider the need to emphasize the three most important elements - the Ark, the tablets of the Ten Commandments, the Eternal Light - and unify their design for a more dramatic impact on the viewer.

The redesign of the pulpit area alone will not, of course, change the entire atmosphere of the sanctuary. Any change in carpeting, the installation of lighting fixtures, sound equipment and the like, should be done with care to relate to the overall design. This, the community's home, should be furnished with as much sensitivity as one would furnish his own home.

Although the general condition of the building is excellent, obviously maintained with care and consideration, there are things that should be done in other parts of the building. Floor covering needs to be replaced in some areas, and painting, maintenance, including replacement of some parts, of the mechanical system, kitchen equipment and door hardware all need more attention. Replacing or repairing these items should be considered as a part of the general maintenance program for the building, to maintain the building in first class condition after its twenty plus years.

The Meeting Room and Chapel on the lower level of the classroom wing also need additional attention. These two well-used rooms should be furnished more appropriate to their use and given some character instead of the rather temporary appearance they now have.

Although the grounds have been kept in good condition, some rejuvenation of the original planting and some additional planting could significantly enhance the exterior of the building.

As you can see, I feel there are a number of things that should be done as well as a number of things that could be done. As I mentioned earlier, however, I don't think anything should be done until an over plan is drawn up for the entire building listing priorities and setting some sort of budget to phase the work over a period of time. It would be a complete waste of time to plan any further maintenance or refurbishing not tied to a priority and budget plan. The budgeting plan would also, of course, define the extent of any refurbishing, and is necessary before any design recommendations.

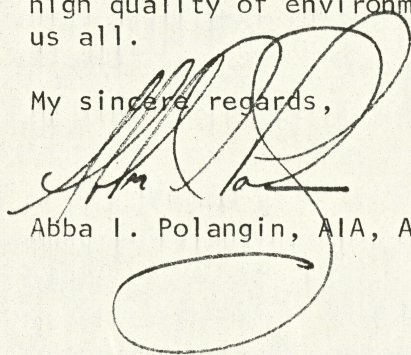
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I hope the above recommendations outline the approach and some of the areas I think require your attention in the Temple. I know that if these suggestions are followed your work in the Temple will not take on the usual decorators "cosmetic" appearance, but will result in a genuine upgrading of the facilities.

I am ready to assist you in your endeavors, if you should so desire, and would also be in a position to direct you to others specializing in the various construction, materials and equipment fields. I am sure we could negotiate a business arrangement satisfactory to your needs.

Thank you for contacting me. I share your interest in maintaining a high quality of environment in a building which holds fond memories for us all.

My sincere regards,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Abba I. Polangin', is written over the typed name below.

Abba I. Polangin, AIA, AIP