

The Perfect Setting

ARTHUR CHABON ARCHITECT

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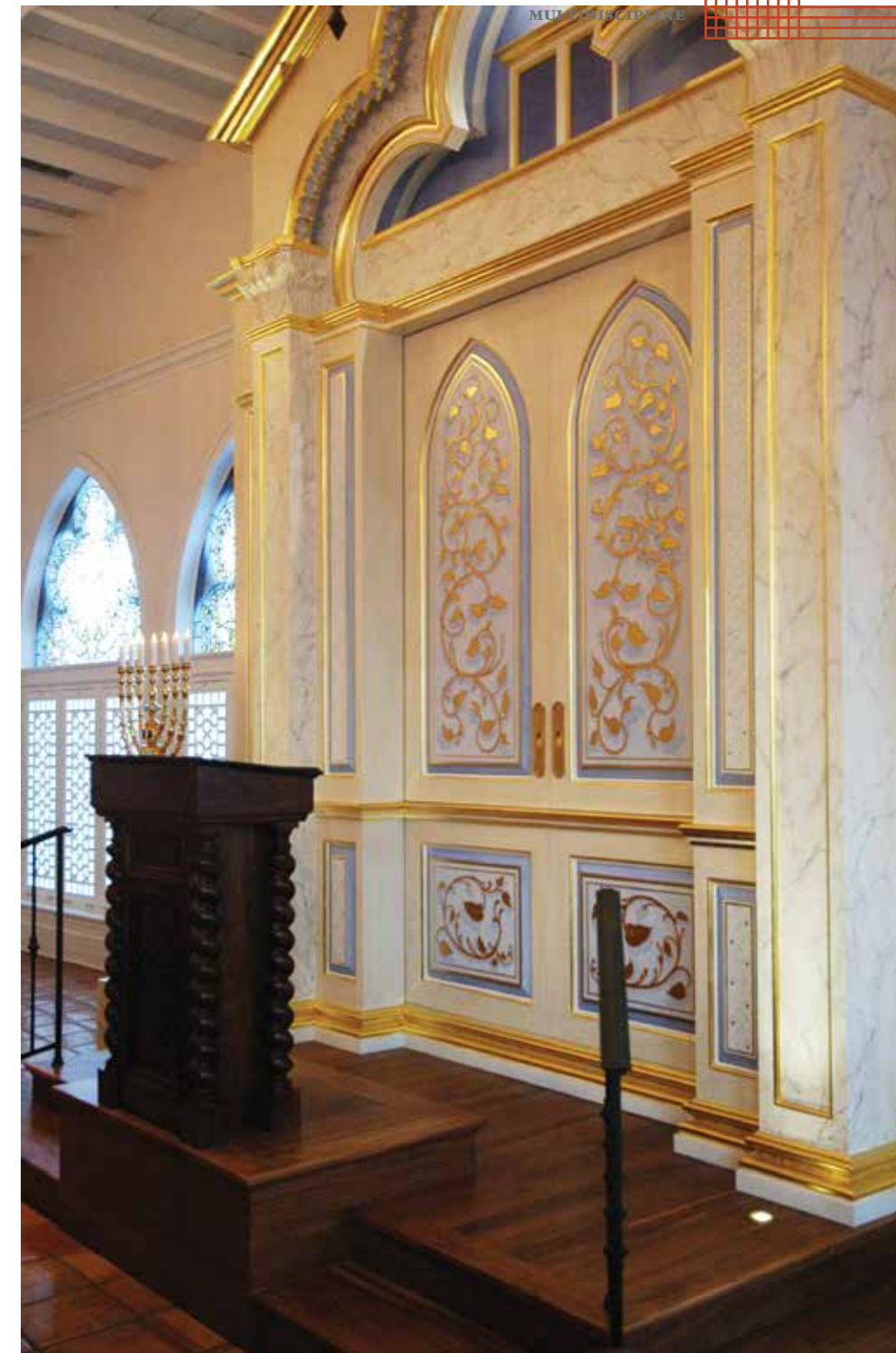
Story by Joel Cornell Photos by Arthur Chabon Architect

Before he dove headfirst into the vast realm of architecture, master designer Arthur Chabon attended the Rhode Island School of Design in order to further his passion for sculptures. Always with the intention to one day seek a career in design, Chabon's highly artistic beginnings served to form the entirety of his career. Encompassing a wide range of high end residential and institutional work, Chabon's true genius is revealed in his unique ability to extract the dreams and fantasies from a client and build them, brick by brick.

Founded in 1998, Arthur Chabon Architect began, as many other firms do, with a heavy focus on residential work. However, it quickly became apparent that the firm is not like many other firms. Soon, Arthur Chabon Architect took large steps forward into the world of major estates, all across the United States. Additionally, however, the firm still performs a wide array of institutional work, as well as smaller renovations and additions in their home town of Irvington, N.Y.

Utilizing the firm's broad expertise and their uncanny ability to infiltrate the mind of the client in order to bring their dreams to fruition, the Palm Beach Synagogue community asked the firm to unify their already disparate community and worship centers. Originally, when Arthur Chabon Architect came on board, the Palm Beach Synagogue consisted of two separate buildings. The congregation owned one building on the street corner, as well as a similar building one block down the road. Soon enough, in 2004, the Palm Beach Synagogue purchased the building in between the two, and sought out Arthur Chabon Architect.

"This project has been one of our longest lasting; it's been very difficult and complex, but still it's been a fantastically unique experience," Chabon said. "The



Palm Beach Synagogue wanted us to take the three clearly separate buildings, and make them feel as if they were one. We were tasked with making the plans coherent and creating a proper flow between all three.

“At the same time, however, we were dealing with three separate buildings each of which retained a unique historic value for the town of Palm Beach. We had to honor the precise historic guidelines governing the buildings. Basically, we had two opposing goals to accomplish at once. For the Palm Beach Synagogue and the local Jewish community, we had to blend the buildings into one cohesive unit. Meanwhile, we had to keep the very distinct aesthetics of each building separate and unique so that their historical value would remain intact.”

While the original building for the synagogue was concrete and stucco on brick, the other two were constructed out of coquina stone, a very popular material locally sourced from the state. Through their expert approach,

Arthur Chabon Architect was able to unify the facades in terms of color and materials, while at once honoring their distinct backgrounds.

Further, the firm faced several challenges based on the unique liturgical needs of the Jewish community. The sanctuary, for instance, had to face East. Unfortunately, this was exactly where the original entrance was, and so the firm had to entirely rework the paths, aisles and flow of the building in order to remain consistent with the faith-based needs of the Jewish community.

Also, many Orthodox synagogues feature dividers to separate the men and the women during times of worship. But, the diverse congregation held many different levels of direct observance of these traditions. Thus, it was difficult for the firm to bring to life a design that wouldn't alienate the less rigorous believers while also not frustrating the believers who wanted the barriers to be denser, higher, etc.

“It was like designing 20 different houses for 20 different people all at

once,” Chabon said. “Along with these reworkings and renovations, we also designed the gold candelabras, which were cast by a foundry in Colorado along with all other liturgical furnishings. We worked with a local artisan on the stained glass. Every bit of custom furniture for the synagogue was designed in-house. The client maintained an unprecedented level of involvement throughout the entirety of the project.

“What's more, in a community like Palm Beach, we had some expectations of the level of wealth within the synagogue. We recognized the context, and were able to adapt our designs. Having the synagogue come off as too lavish would be a bit of a turn off to many; but the designs are still elegant and beautiful, as one would expect in a place of worship.”

In Palm Beach, a rather wealthy community, expectations in design are as high as they can be. Similarly, they faced a unique level of expectations with their recent Sunshine Ranch project, in the prestigious community

PREVIOUS SPREAD: Palm Beach Synagogue, Palm Beach, Fla. Sitting room. The goal of this project is to seamlessly integrate the interior spaces of three distinct buildings and create a coherent identity for their historical facades

ABOVE, LEFT: The interior architectural language is an eclectic mix of Moorish, Eastern European and oriental motifs.

ABOVE, RIGHT: Pulpit. As an additional space for this growing congregation became necessary, Arthur Chabon Architect was brought on to bring the sum of their parts together into one unified expression of faith.



THIS PAGE: Sunshine Ranch, Aspen, Colo. Working closely with famed designer Rose Tarlow, Arthur Chabon Architect developed an interior architecture that evokes the sensibility of a mountain home with an air of classical serenity.

OPPOSITE, TOP DOWN: Informal spaces are distinguished by rustic materials like reclaimed French limestone floors, timber beams, and antique architectural artifacts.

The formal rooms are characterized by intricate classical details and significantly more refined materials throughout.





ABOVE: Throughout the home, the authenticity of the design is largely achieved through the authenticity of the materials and antiques.

OPPOSITE: Arthur Chabon Architect seamlessly integrated into the design chimney pieces, antique doors, and limestone surrounds purchased by Rose Tarlow in Europe, blending rooms in harmony with these elements.

of Aspen, Colo. The project was an intimate collaboration between Arthur Chabon Architect and the office of famed West Coast architect, Rose Tarlow. Having worked together several times before, Chabon and Tarlow brought a one of a kind design to the project.

“This project was all about collaboration,” Chabon said. “We both picked up the design where another had left it off. We worked quite intimately with the client as well, as we rescaled a lot of the spaces. In working with Rose, we were able to reorganize the spaces slightly. We worked on creating a house that felt very classical and formal in its design, but at the same time was very comfortable and related to the sensibilities of mountain living. It’s all about creating that balance that was appropriate for a community like Aspen, but still retained that pragmatic appeal.

“The informal spaces are distinguished by rustic materials like reclaimed French limestone floors, timber beams, and antique architectural artifacts. The formal rooms are characterized by intricate classical details and significantly more refined materials.

“Throughout, the authenticity of the design is largely achieved by the authenticity of these materials. We seamlessly integrated into the architecture chimney pieces, antique doors, and limestone surrounds purchased by Ms. Tarlow in Europe, scaling the rooms and ornament in harmony with these elements.” Chabon said. *ALT*

