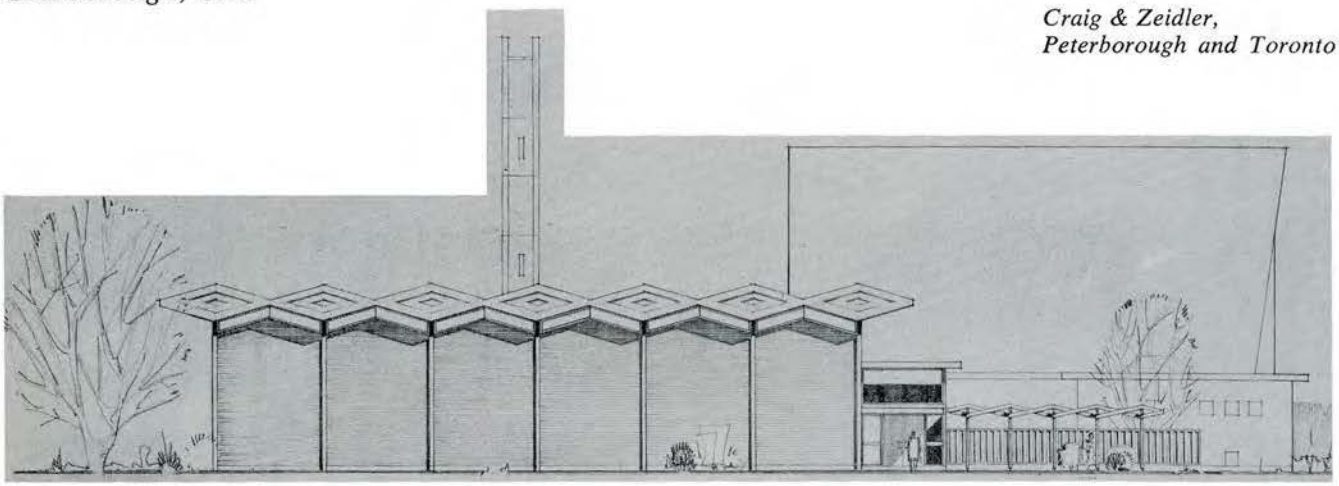
PANDA

West Ellesmere United Church, Architects, Craig & Zeidler

WEST ELLESMERE UNITED CHURCH AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION CENTRE

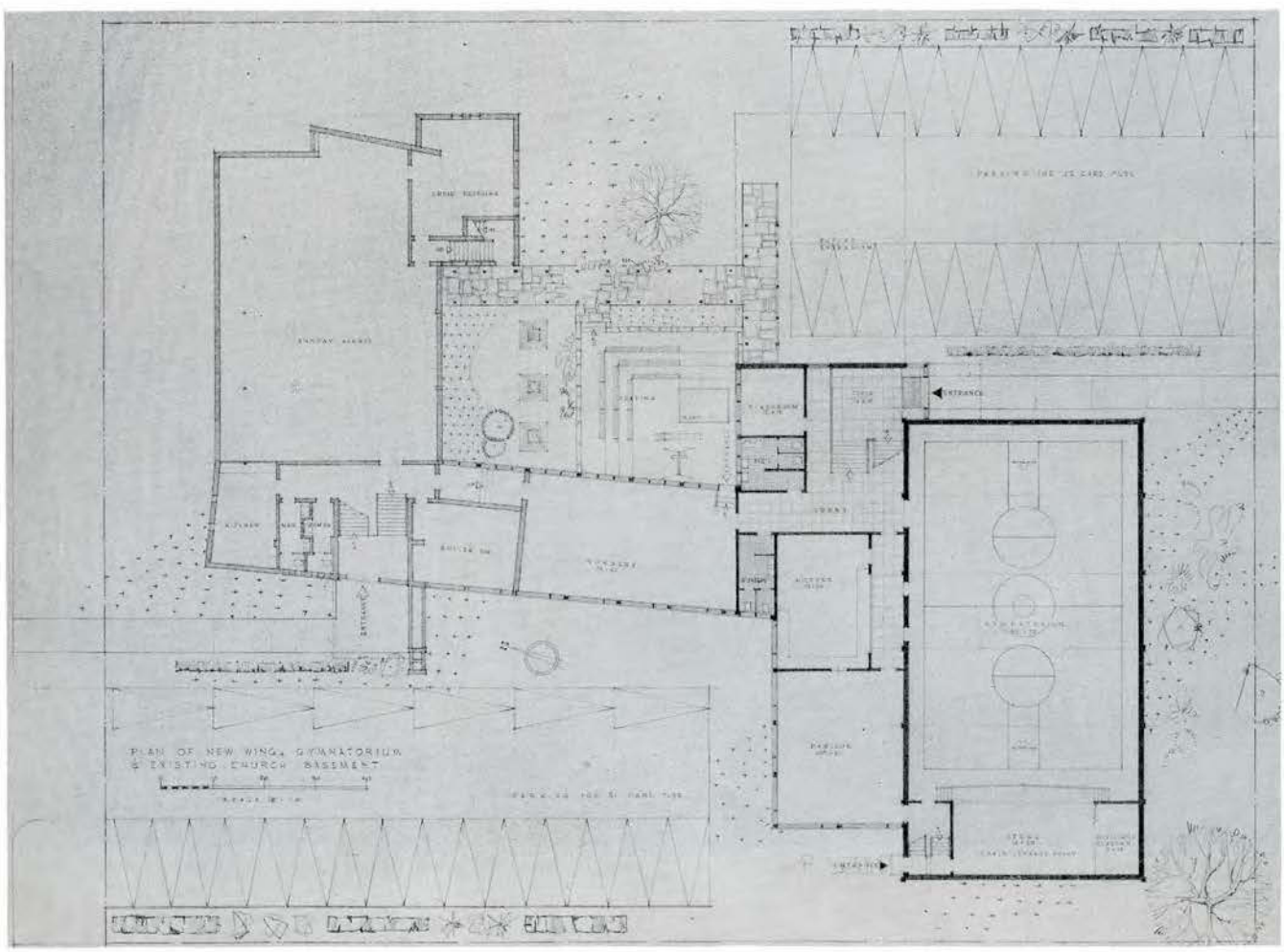
Scarborough, Ont.

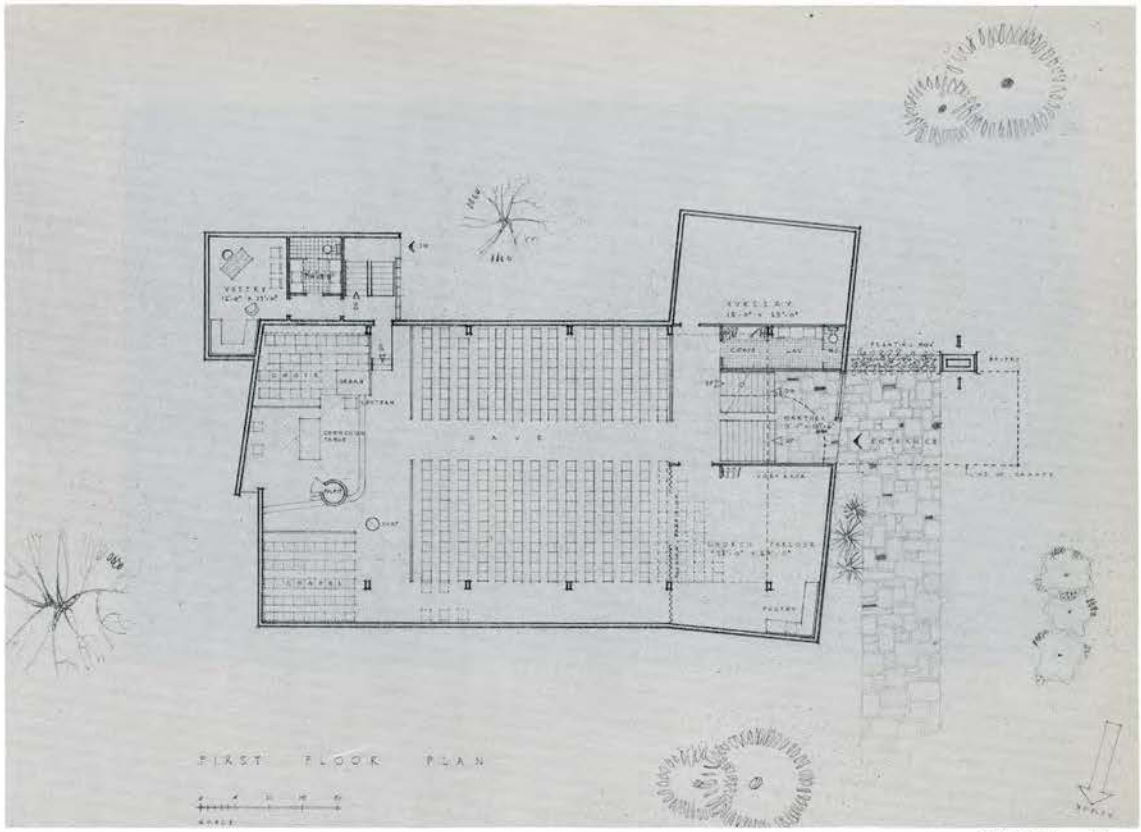
Architects,
Craig & Zeidler,
Peterborough and Toronto



South Elevation

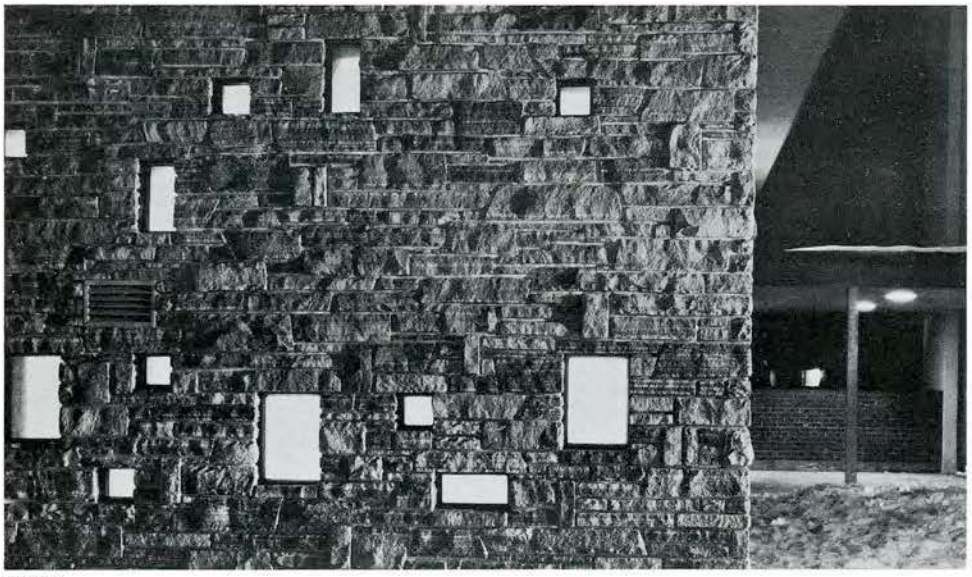
The church was completed in 1958 and construction of the Christian Education Centre is to begin early in 1961. The basic frame of the first floor of the church is parabolic glulam arches with wood joists, wood deck and plaster on the south side and 4" AM deck on the north side. The exterior facing is natural stone, which was quarried in Napanee and has very bright colours. The exposed arches are covered on the exterior with anodized aluminum flashing. Flooring is asbestos tile. The basement is partly poured concrete, partly concrete block, with steel beams, wood joists and sound insulation ceiling. The entrance stair is steel and terrazzo. The heating system is hot water, thermostatically controlled. Structural consultants were Carruthers and Wallace, Toronto; mechanical and electrical, McGregor and Beynon, Toronto; and the general contractor was the L. C. Scott Construction Co. Ltd, Willowdale, Ont. and for the Christian Education Centre the consultants are, structural, Gordon Dowdell and Associates, and mechanical, W. Hardy Craig, Toronto.





First Floor Plan

PANDA



PANDA

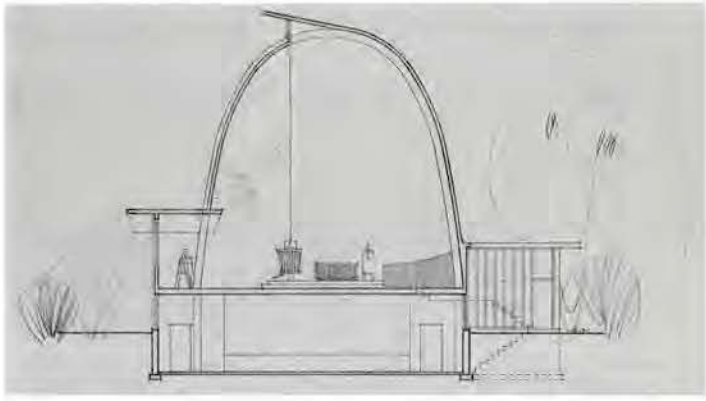
Detail of
Exterior Facing

PANDA

The Design of West Ellesmere United Church

By

Eberhard H. Zeidler



It is always dangerous to put an evolution into a system but it appears to me that the form world of modern architecture has gone through three stages since the twenties.

The first stage, the beginning of "modern architecture", started with austere rectilinear forms and a restricted use of materials. As it matured it began to encompass a wider range of materials and a greater leniency towards forms. Mies Van Der Rohe, Gropius and Corbusier in his early works, exemplify this evolvement. Even after 40 years, the majority of today's buildings are still designed with the "square" in mind.

The predomination of this form world is a logical reflection of today's technology and economy. Both are in reciprocal relation to each other in the practical application of architecture.

I think even some of the later works of Rudolph fall into this category which at the end of its development might be termed "decorative first stage".

The second stage began with the use of the plastic potentials of building materials. However, its resultant form is still tied to symetric geometry. Many of Saarinen's buildings exemplify this category — his Ice Rink at Yale and his M.I.T. Auditorium.

It appears that each stage is separated from the next by a thought barrier. There is a certain parallel between Saarinen's development and Perret's. Both broke through a thought barrier and both fell short of the full potential they had begun to explore. Perret broke the first barrier by shedding eclectic ornament and using concrete structure as an aesthetic expression but he applied this structure within a classical aesthetic of rectilinear composition. Saarinen broke through this rectilinear barrier by using the plastic potential of concrete aesthetically but his forms are still tied to the classical harmony of symmetry and repose — a classic composition with modern plastic forms.

The third stage was envisaged by Corbusier at Ronchamp. Here, symmetric geometric forms were replaced by shapes which could not be comprehended by classical aesthetic. Architecture began to flow freely, breaking loose from century-old ties. The Lieder Halle in Stuttgart also is an experiment of this third stage, with the reservation that the interior of the concert hall achieved this freedom while the rest of the building has no relation to this concept. Some might call this development the baroque of modern architecture and there are other parallels between this stage and baroque that just the reminiscence of form. Corbusier achieved in Ronchamp a space feeling by "theatrical" rather than "architectural" means paralleling the same "unarchitectural" use of materials found in the baroque churches of the 18th century. The huge walls of Ronchamp simulate the feeling of romanesque fortresses but are in structure nothing but concrete frames disguised by thin shells.

If the third stage follows this "theatrical trend" it will quickly be doomed, and like Baroque and Rococo die within a short while; for we can only express dynamic forms architecturally if we use materials and techniques truthfully. Art Nouveau, for example, freed itself from static geometric forms to dynamic forms but forgot that any architectural form is an expression of its material and technique and cannot be applied as a fake. As a formal expression, art Nouveau invoked delight, but as architecture, it withered in a decade stilted in formalism.

But there is another way to look at Ronchamp. Perhaps architectural design, as exemplified in this Church, has advanced further than technology and maybe this building is an idea of a new form world which only lacked the proper technology to fulfill itself. I feel that this new stage is more than a frill, but if it is, it must adhere to the same principles which governed the previous stages, in fact all architectural styles.

I feel, that today as in the days of Wotton, or Vitruvius, architecture is fulfilled by three components, may they be called "function", "construction" and "beauty" or "commodity", "firmness" and "delight". These three components must be integrated as a unit, but in their service to this unit they are not equal but have a varying hieratic order while serving the other and the whole. If the resultant form has changed through the centuries it is not because these components have changed or that we have discovered new ones but it is that the respective times have put different demands on these components, and have placed them in different relationships one to the other.

The space concept of West Ellesmere falls into the third stage but it expressed these three principles as a unity. The basic structural form of the church is developed from parabolic glulam arches, however, the space created is *free-flowing, asymmetric and dynamic.*

It contrasts light with shade. Through a clerestory between the two roof planes, light is reflected from the curved north wall into the nave slowly decreasing in its intensity as it descends towards the nave floor. In this way, height is emphasized. The low side aisle, covered by a series of gables, is lit by multi-coloured small glass openings carrying further the idea of height in light levels. The low gables and the entrance under the balcony are in contrast to the loftiness of the nave.

Architecture is a meeting between interior and exterior, between form and space, each being the expression of the other. The arches in West Ellesmere are exposed towards the interior on the south wall, accentuating the contrast and the flow of forms; while they are used as a rhythmic expression on the exterior of the north wall. The gables which form the side aisle in the nave are on the outside a linking scale for the surrounding houses above which the body of the main nave rises.

If architecture is an expression of its time then economy must become a factor in our design. Our standard and freedom of living are due to the advances of our economy. However, we have to find a similar relationship to this economy as we find in the designs of nature, where a delight in *structural economy* gracefully fulfills purpose without waste. Thus, in West Ellesmere, economic restrictions became a challenge rather than a hindrance.