

CONGREGATION BETH YAM
OUR HOUSE BY THE SEA:
Art, Culture, Symbols, and Values



A TOUR OF
CONGREGATION BETH YAM

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FOREWORD

Congregation Beth Yam is proud of its collection of ritual art and sacred objects that are integrated into the architecture of our synagogue. This beautiful brochure represents another example of building the spiritual community that forms the core of our temple.

Judaism has a long history of artists and crafts people who used their talents to adorn the worship experience in their synagogues and to enhance the ritual objects used in home observances. Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, “The purpose of ritual art objects is to to inspire a love of God, to enhance our love of performing a mitzvah (religious act), and to add pleasure to fulfilling the act and delight in its completion.” Note how our beautiful Judaic objects enhance the performance of blessings like Shabbat, Havdallah, Hanukkah, other festivals or holidays in the Jewish liturgical calendar, and the most important, the study of Torah, which is equal to them all because it leads to the performance of all of the other mitzvot.

Art supports religion in order to stimulate the Jewish imagination and creativity towards engaging the Eternal One. Our fervent hope is that our community will not only enjoy admiring the artistic designs in our building, but that we will also think about bringing more ritual art into our homes and increase our performance of the many opportunities to practice our faith traditions.

Rabbi Brad L. Bloom



We welcome you to Congregation Beth Yam.

We hope this booklet will show you how our building's architecture, art, culture and symbols represent the values, mission and vision of our congregation. We are proud of our building. Enjoy this tour.

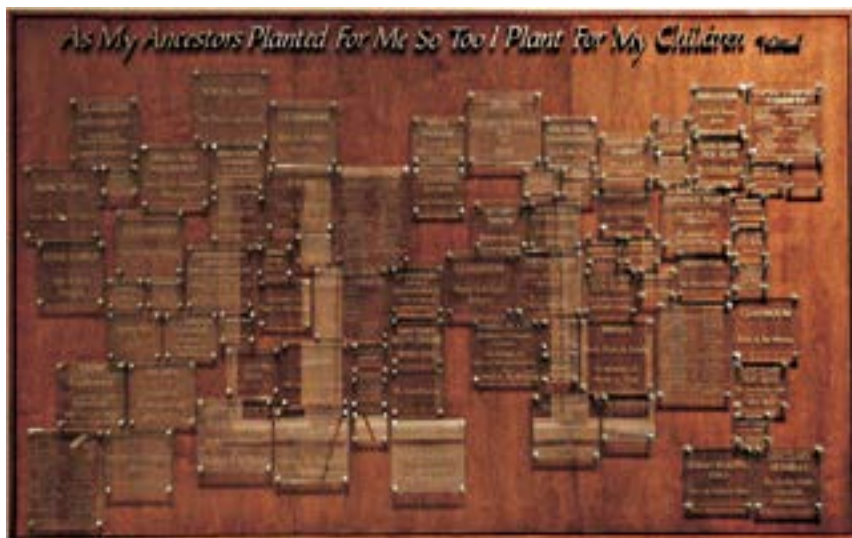
Our structure is defined by artistic elegance and well-planned design representing the collective vision, work, talent and generosity of our congregants. Many professionals helped bring it to its present form.

ART, CULTURE, AND SYMBOLISM THROUGHOUT

As you pass through our porte cochere, you will see our native palmettos and landscaping designed to complement our synagogue. The **mezuzah** to the right of the arched entry doors graced our former building and is the traditional entrance symbol to a Jewish home or House of Worship. Inside the casing is a rolled parchment containing the Hebrew verses from Deuteronomy 6:9, fulfilling the biblical commandment to inscribe the words of the Shema on the doorpost. The unique design on the doors is repeated at the entrance to our sanctuary.



The inviting **foyer** and **hallway** can be used for life-cycle event receptions or Oneg Shabbats, our gathering for snacks and socializing after Shabbat services. The **Donor Wall** to your right is a beautiful design of a rich wood with glass panels engraved with the names of all of the donors to the Capital Campaign for our 2009 building expansion, whose generosity we gratefully acknowledge. From close up one can read donors names, but the artistic design is best appreciated from a distance.



The **Tree of Life** on the next wall to your right, refers to the prayer said after reading from Torah, "It is a tree of life to all those who hold fast to it." This image is used repeatedly in Judaism. This tree marks life-cycle events of our members and their friends and families. It began with a single tree and has grown to include more trees and several rocks underneath as our simchas (joyous occasions) multiply. On the opposite wall is our **tzedakah box** which allows members and guests to fulfill the fundamental mitzvah (blessing) in Judaism, giving tzedakah (literally justice, meaning charity). The funds collected are used to support those in need.



The **Judaica Shop** is operated by the congregation's Sisterhood and is the only full-service Judaica Shop in Southern Beaufort County. It features Jewish ritual objects, books, cards, and jewelry crafted by Jewish artists, which are available for purchase as gifts. The hours of operation are noted on the shop's window.

Adjacent is the **administration office**. Here there is ample work space for the administrative staff and volunteers to assist in the operation of the synagogue. In addition, there is office equipment, a video security system, and storage space. The **Rabbi's study** allows him to hold meetings, counsel members and prepare for services. Open shelves house the Rabbi's extensive book collection.

Down the hall is our **Jewish Resource Center** and the new home of our original building's **ark doors** and *ner tamid*, or Eternal Light. These allow us to use this space as an intimate sanctuary as well as a library. The Ark design is a collage of powerful Jewish symbols described in the pages of the



Torah incorporating unique images, color and texture. The tree of life is the foundation for the menorah from the tabernacle, along with the Ten Commandments surrounded by the burning bush. Internet access and an enhanced selection of books, DVDs and video tapes make the space ideal for study and meetings. The library is open to the public interested in Jewish history or literature and enhances the value of the Jewish Community to the Lowcountry. The Rabbis say, "Learning is the pathway to the fulfillment of

all other commandments." It is our library, a place to sit and search the internet or just read a newspaper or book of Jewish interest.

Across from the Jewish Resource Center is our **Judaica Display Cabinet**, which was financed through the Caplan Fund.

It contains a revolving display of pieces of Jewish art and artifacts that were donated or loaned to the synagogue by generous members and friends of the congregation.



A WARM AND WELCOMING SANCTUARY

The entrance to the **Sanctuary** sets the mood for the space. The door handles are in the shape of the Hebrew letter "Shin." This has several meanings, including the emblem for Shaddai (God Almighty), one of the biblical names for God. It also represents shalom, the Hebrew word for peace. The **etched glass door panels** feature an olive tree, which can live and bear fruit for over 1,000 years, thus



symbolizing longevity and immortality. Olive oil was used for food, commerce, to anoint kings, and light the Temple lamp. Its strength makes it fit for survival in the sometimes harsh climate in Israel and it lives a long life. It is mentioned throughout the Torah as a symbol of rootedness and a ground connection to Israel.

As you enter the Sanctuary there is a niche on the left wall that houses our **Holocaust Torah**, that was rescued from Czechoslovakia after World War II. This Torah is used by our congregation in ritual life and on special occasions. This remembrance of unparalleled tragedy in human history inspires us because it, like the Jewish people, survived. We feel privileged to be a congregation that received one of these special Torahs.



Inside the sanctuary, our uniquely designed **ark doors** represent the words L'Chaim, "to life." Although the design concept was a tree of life with two

figures pulling from and giving to the tree, the abstract design incites the viewer to experience their own emotional response. The depth of this work, both the carving and the shading, create a sculpture that seamlessly transcends time. The *ner tamid*, above the ark represents the eternal flame that Moses instructed the Hebrews to burn continually near the Ark of the Covenant as a symbol of the eternal nature of our covenant with God.



The **bimah**, from the Hebrew word for "high place" is the platform upon which the prayer leader stands to conduct services. It is like a mountain or altar, symbolizing access to the divine and is the spiritual center of the synagogue. Our curved bimah is of Jerusalem stone, styled like the Western Wall, the remains of the great Jewish Temple, which stood approximately 1,000 years before it's destruction in 70 C.E. The Hebrew words etched in the stone above the ark constitute the priestly blessing (from Numbers 6:23), "May God bless you and keep you," welcoming all into the House of Worship. The Torah tells us that these are the words that God commanded the kohanim (priests) to use to bless the people.



A contemporary **menorah**, one of the oldest symbols of the Jewish faith stands near the bimah. The first one was the candelabrum that God commanded the Jewish people to place in the Ark during the Exodus and then in the Temple (from Exodus 25:31-40). It is the official emblem of the state of Israel. The main inscription at the bottom of

that menorah is from Zechariah 4:1-6. Zechariah sees a menorah, and God explains: “Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit.” The message on this menorah is that Israel is to accomplish its mission by setting an example, not by using force.

The **cracked glass windows** at the sides of the bimah symbolize rushing water. Water, the symbol of life played a large part in the life of the Hebrews in biblical times and still today in Israel. The Sea of Reeds saved the Hebrews from the Egyptian soldiers; immediately after the death of Miriam, God gave water in the form of a spring to the Hebrews.

The **cupola** brings natural light into the sanctuary and is lined with the wood from our original building, helping us remember our heritage at Congregation Beth Yam.

We are fortunate to have a **Megillat Esther**, a Scroll of Esther to read on Purim, the Feast of Lots. This scroll, hand written on goat skin, a North African tradition, was designed especially for our congregation. It is housed in a unique container with a hand painted scene of the ancient city of Shushan. It is a mitzvah to read the scroll which contains the story of the bravery of Esther and Mordechai, who saved the Jewish people from the evil Haman in ancient Persia.



The **yahrzeit boards** are a constant reminder of deceased loved ones. Judaism places great value on the ritual and prayers for remembering our loved ones who have passed away. The built-in kippot and tallit niches are here for those to use if it so suits one’s worship style. The tallit reminds us of performing Judaism’s 613 commandments or mitzvot. The kippah is a head covering representing our respect for God’s presence in the worship service and our lives.

A FACILITY THAT MEETS MEMBERS’ NEEDS

At the back of the sanctuary, just beyond the last pew, there is a folding partition. It can be opened to increase the sanctuary space when needed or closed to confine the sanctuary area to a more intimate space. The **social hall** has six chandeliers and recessed lighting that can be set to various themes to integrate with the way the room is being used and will seat 162 for dinner at round tables. It can be divided into two separate spaces by the panel wall giving us great flexibility for events and meetings. In the rear of the social hall is a terra cotta wall sculpture with bronze finish, **The Four Matriarchs**. It depicts Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, each identified by an element from their



story in the Torah. This piece is one of several beautiful pieces of art in the synagogue that were donated by generous members and friends of the congregation over the years. These pieces have plaques to identify the artists and donors.

Our **kitchen** is equipped with everything imaginable from a 10 burner gas cook top, convection oven, large refrigerator/freezer, ice maker, commercial dishwasher, triple sink, warming box, a full walk-in pantry, and more. Our policy is to respect Judaic dietary laws and adapt them for a progressive temple that serves a variety of Jewish practices. We work with local caterers to insure they are acquainted with the equipment and policies so members can make full use of our social area space. In addition, our members use the kitchen to bake and cook for our own events.

You will see our five **Religious School classrooms** including the “family room” for small children and the school office. A children’s bathroom between the family room and the Aleph classroom includes a baby-changing table. Our students’ work decorates the hallway walls.



Directly behind the sanctuary is our peaceful **garden**, enhanced by brick pavers and benches. In addition, to being an area of contemplation, it can be used for outdoor celebrations.



TIKKUN OLAM

Much of our building reflects our dedication to **tikkun olam**, our effort to repair the world. This phrase, which connotes social action and the pursuit of social justice has its origins in classical rabbinic literature and is the basis for our congregation’s social action programs. An important element is protection of the environment, demonstrated by our commitment to a building that contains many green, environmentally friendly features and is Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant.

MOVING FORWARD TOWARD OUR FUTURE

When Congregation Beth Yam held its first service in its new sanctuary, on August 29, 2009, more than 300 people attended to watch the Torah scrolls placed in the new ark for the first time. Shortly thereafter, life cycle events, the High Holy Days, Oneg Shabbats, religious school sessions and several board and committee meetings began to take place as the congregation comfortably settled into this beautiful building that mirrors the natural beauty of Hilton Head Island. Our building is allowing us to move to a new level of activity of Jewish Life here in the Lowcountry.

ARTISTS AND ARTISANS

We appreciate the skill, creativity, and dedication of the artists and artisans who contributed to the beauty of our synagogue:

Architect:

Kert Huggins, AIA of Kermit Huggins Architecture and Design, Inc.

Ark Doors:

Designed by Angela Misthal and manufactured by David Klass

Donor Wall:

Design concept by Jane Joseph and Jocelyn Metzger Staigar

Entrance Doors:

Design concept by Angela Misthal and local builder Ken Kohler

Eternal Light:

Designed and fabricated by David Klass

The Four Matriarchs:

By Sheri Farbstein

Jewish Resource Center Ark and Eternal Light:

Designed and fabricated by Sheri Farbstein

Judaica Display Cabinet:

Designed by Nick Bass and fabricated by Marty Levinson

Megillat Esther:

Designed and fabricated by Neil Yerman, Artist and sofer

Sanctuary Entrance Doors:

Combined design efforts of Sheri Farbstein and Angela Misthal; Etched by Veronica of Veronica Art Glass

Shin Door Handles:

Designed by Angela Misthal and David Klass and fabricated by David Klass

Signage and Donor Recognition Plaques:

By Jocelyn Metzger Staigar

Tree of Life:

Artistic enhancements by Sheri Farbstein

Tzedakah Box:

Designed and fabricated by Sheri Farbstein



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