



1. INTRODUCTION

Hi, I'm Michael Mills. I'm partner with Farewell Mills Gatsch Architects. We're restoration architects for the Louis Kahn Bath House, a very significant building to Lou Kahn, done early in his career, and a very seminal building for his other work at Kimball, at the Kimball Art Museum, at Salk Institute, as well as the Richards Medical Center in Philadelphia. This site would've looked very different had it been built the way Kahn intended. To my right there's a large parking lot. That parking lot would not have been here in Kahn's design. It would've been along the perimeter of the site in front of me. In front of the Kahn Bath House would've been open space and then a grove of trees. Kahn was very interested in the use of landscaping as architectural elements, and what he did here was very similar to what he ultimately did at the Salk Institute. You approach the building through a grove of trees, and not directly from a parking lot. Hopefully the restoration will be able to re-institute some of the ideas of Kahn on this landscape

Kahn designed this building with a Greek cross plan. There are four pavilions arranged at the cardinal points of the compass and within that, within those four pavilions, is open space, an open atrium open up to the sky. Each of the pavilions is capped by a pyramidal roof which is essentially floating on top of the walls that support it. And those four pyramids define the space beneath. The materials are very simple, they are concrete block, concrete and wood framing. And while the materials are simple, they create a very complex composition, which we'll see when we enter the building in a few minutes.

Many people who are interested in Kahn's career have come here to see this seminal work by the master. We've had several site meetings here, and on one occasion in particular on a snowy day in February, we're sitting around a table and an Asian student showed up, who had just gotten off the plane in New York, taken the train to West Trenton and had walked to this site to see the Kahn Bath House. He made a purposeful visit, and he was fortunate enough to come on the day that we were having our site meeting, and so we took him on a tour and really talked a lot about the building itself and the restoration. But that's just one example of the types of international interest that there is in this place.

So you are here to make the same sort of pilgrimage, so let's take a walk over to the Bath House.



2. MURAL

We're going to enter the building through what was one of two main entrances to the original construction. This has been closed off for a number of years, but the intention during the restoration is that it would be reopened. On this gray wall behind was painted a beautiful mural done by Kahn and an assistant, Marie Kwo, which depicted stylized fish and waves, and it was really based on a historic

precedent in Rome on the floor of the Baths of Caracalla. And so it was a sort of a pictograph, a version of that floor. Also, here was designed a set of ornamental gates, which is no longer here, and the intention in the restoration is to restore those. And those were beautifully detailed, we have Kahn's drawings for them, the full-scale drawings, and those can be replicated and installed here.



3. WOMEN'S CHANGING ROOM

We're inside the women's changing room, and here you can really appreciate the artistry of Kahn's use of materials, and also the way he modulates space with—how the materials are arranged. You see we're surrounded by massive concrete block walls that are quite high, and which gives a sense of enclosure, privacy, and so forth, which you need in a in a changing room, yet above that is this light pyramidal roof, supported just at the four corners on the servant spaces, that tends to hover and float over the space. And there's a large area of open space, in-between these walls and the roof. This is a way for light to enter and give wonderful natural light to the space. It's also a way for air to enter and ventilate the space as well. The skylight at the top of the pyramid roof is a part of that, it kind of induces a chimney effect, pulls air in and through and through this marvelous space.

And you'll see this later in some of his buildings, like the Kimball Art Museum, which is the—in some ways this is very similar to in the way the light is brought into the space and reflected around the space.

So all of this has been prelude to going to the swimming pool, and that's what we'll be doing next.



4. ATRUIM

Now we've arrived at the original entrance to the Bath House, which is the atrium and the basket room. The basket room is where one would drop clothes in order to use the facilities here. The basket room is the only place where the concrete block walls are inboard of the roofs, and it was done of course for protection, to keep the clothes dry and so forth.

In the atrium originally, there was a large circular feature that contained gravel and it was edged by paving stones. There had been an intention on the drawings to put a fountain there. That was never done; instead, it was just sort of a landscape feature, but it was taken out pretty early, I think it was probably a tripping hazard. Our intention is actually to restore that. The circular feature inscribed within the square was a key component of Kahn's design for this space, so we're planning to recreate it with a pebbled surface, but that it will be barrier-free accessible so that one could roll a wheelchair over it and it'd be a safe surface.

From this spot one can also see a lot of the deterioration that's occurred to this building in the last fifty years. And a lot of it has to do with the water running off the roofs. And it's a real challenge with this building for us as the restorers. I was fortunate to be able to speak to Anne Tyng last summer about the design intentions, because one option was to put gutters on these roofs to help direct the rainwater to preserve the concrete block below them. And I asked her what was the intention for gutters, and she said, "Oh my, no. We would not want gutters on these roofs." She said, "Part of the aesthetic was that water would be flowing over the masonry." And it's very poetic but also very damaging to the masonry. And so

we're intending to restore the masonry but also make them a little more, shall we say, impervious to the moisture penetration that has caused the damage that you that you see here.



5. STEPS TO POOL

We're now at an area that's called the porch on Kahn's plans. And this was just an open arcade that led to the pool. When you see the steps behind me leading up to the elevated pool, that was part of the original design. The pool was elevated because the water table was quite high; the pool had to be above grade, so there was fill made to accommodate this pool. And this stairway behind me was an original design feature. And this space that we're in modulates the space between the rest of the Bath House and the pool itself.

The four columns that support this roof are in fact hollow, and they contain the functional elements that allow the pool house to function the way it does. In just the space where we're standing, there's circulation elements in two of them, there is pool equipment in one of them, and there's a pool office in the other, so in this case they are servant spaces allowing the served space to function better.

Kahn made this sort of a generating idea for a lot of his designs, not just this one. He explored it in this context, but he went on to Richards Medical Center in Philadelphia and even got more rigorous about servant and served spaces there as well as the Yale Art Gallery and some—many of his other buildings.

So now we're going to walk down the path behind me toward the snack bar area and so I'll have the opportunity to talk to you more about the restoration plans for the site



6. SNACK BAR

Behind me is the snack bar. This snack bar was not designed by Lou Kahn; it was installed by the JCC about a year after Kahn was dismissed from the commission. Kahn did have the intentions to build a snack bar in this area, in this precinct, but it was not to be added to the side of the of the original building. Part of the restoration plans call for removing this feature and actually building something new in the location intended by Kahn, but not to the same design, so that one can clearly tell it was not part of the original construction for this site.

When I was a student in architecture, we were brought here to see this building, and it was talked about very much in our original classes in architecture.

This is really an exciting project to work on. It's also a little daunting because every architect in the Delaware Valley is sort of looking over our shoulder, everyone who has worked with Kahn or who've been influenced by Kahn, which is the entire architectural community, is very interested in what's going to happen here. And so we have been taking great care and responsibility in studying the site and making plans for its restoration.

We have engaged in oral history, working, talking with Anne Tyng, talking with Nick Gianopoulos, who was the original structural designer. We've spent a lot of time in the Penn archives, looking at the original docents and retrieving them for our use and our guidance. And we really look forward to the opportunity and to the day when this is fully restored to its prior glory.