

LOUIS I. KAHN'S TRENTON BATH HOUSE AND DAY CAMP RESTORED

On July 28, DOCOMOMO New York/Tri-State helped sponsor a press tour of Louis I. Kahn's Trenton Bath House and Day Camp (completed in 1955 and 1957 respectively) in Ewing, NJ. Approximately 40 journalists and friends of Modern architecture gathered to witness the ongoing restoration work, touring the property with architects from Farewell Mills Gatsch Architects, LLC and landscape architects Heritage Landscapes. Representatives from Mercer County

and National Registers in 1984, prior to having reached 50 years of age, reflecting their high level of significance within Kahn's portfolio as well as their importance within the history of the development of Modern architecture at mid-century.

The Bath House is noted for its spare elegance. Built of simple materials (concrete block, wood trusses, and asphalt shingles) it comprises five square pavilions arranged in a Greek cross plan, four of them roofed,

views of the sky and trees.

The Day Camp pavilions, like the Bath House, were built using relatively standard, inexpensive materials. The four rectangular pavilions are centered on a small courtyard, each set at a slight angle to the next. Vertical members were created with terra cotta flue tiles stacked one on top of the other and filled with reinforced concrete. The roofs, or horizontal members, were reinforced concrete beams; the floors concrete slab. Two pavilions were completely open, while the others were either partially or fully enclosed with brick to house toilet facilities and an office for the Camp Director.

The restoration of the Bath House has included removal of elements not designed by Kahn but added after the building's completion, including a "temporary" snack bar that had been appended to the south elevation. A storage shed, fencing, and foundation

pavilions have been repaired.

The project team also studied Kahn's plans closely in designing a new, free-standing Snack Bar, decorative fencing, and accessibility ramp. The Snack Bar has been sited to the west of the Bath House, in one of the many locations shown by Kahn in his design drawings, and is separated from the Bath House by a new, larger picnic area that accommodates increased usage. New trees have been planted to the south of this area to establish a segment of Kahn's framing bosque. The Snack Bar was constructed of materials compatible with the Bath House structure but does not mimic it; the roof is a wing-like structure supported on wood trusses that hovers over the concrete block walls like the pyramidal roofs of the Bath House. The design intent was to honor the Kahn work but to make clear what is historic and what is not.



Restored Bath House with newly planted framing bosque

and Ewing Township were also on hand to discuss their role in the project and answer questions.

A key work within Kahn's oeuvre, the Bath House in particular represented a new way of defining space and of fusing modernism and classicism. It was the first building to reflect Kahn's distinction between primary spaces ("served" spaces) and spaces of lesser importance that provided support to the served ("servant" spaces). The project also helped to launch the most prolific decades of his career, during which he designed such seminal works as the Richards Medical Research Building and Biological Research Building at the University of Pennsylvania (1957–1961); the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla, CA (1959–1965); and the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, TX (1966–1972). Both the Bath House and Day Camp were listed on the New Jersey



Restored entrance mural

the fifth open to the air. The roofs, pyramidal in shape, rest on concrete "columns" (slabs that comprise the roofs of the servant spaces) and appear to float freely. The void between the base of the roof and top of the unfinished concrete block walls is one of the design's most distinctive features, providing not only air but also filtered light and framed



Kahn's Day Camp pavilions with columns constructed of terra cotta flue tiles stacked and filled with reinforced concrete

plantings; reconstruction/restoration of elements designed by Kahn but later removed, including the entrance mural and the gravel circle in the square atrium; and upgrading of the complex to current standards, including barrier-free accessibility, fire protection, and sanitary requirements. The two largest pavilions of Kahn's Day Camp have been completely reconstructed, following thorough documentation, and the two smaller

Work was completed in October, and the Bath House and Day Camp continue to serve as a recreational and social center for the local and regional population, much as they have since their initial completion. —Meredith Arms Bzdak

For a full history of the Bath House and archival photos visit:
www.kahntrentonbathhouse.org