



forget us not

Before architect Michael Witkins designed the synagogue for his Conservative congregation Beth Am in Carmel Valley, he became fascinated by the congregation's Czechoslovakian Torah scroll, known to have survived the Nazi Holocaust.

Witkins did some research, made a trip to Prague, and

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Architect Michael Witkins duplicated the façade of a synagogue in Prague for this "Courtyard of Remembrance" in Carmel Valley. Door by James Hubbell.



Forget

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discovered that the Torah's ancient home was a synagogue in a forest outside the 14th-century town of Roudnice. The Nazis had killed its congregation, and destroyed all but the façade of the synagogue.

Witkin was intensely moved. He made polyurethane and latex rubber molds of details of the columns' capitals, incorporating angels' wings and seashells. He dug down to mosaic flooring, took many photographs, and brought them home to San Diego. When he told the congregation leaders of the story behind their Torah, "there were tears," he says.

His idea: exactly re-create that façade in a "Courtyard of Remembrance" surrounded by a 60,000-square-foot synagogue and classroom complex. His design, which included stained-glass ark doors by designer James Hubbell, and detail work by Mexican carvers, was completed two years ago. A bonus: The domed sanctuary's acoustics are so good the San Diego Symphony comes to play.