Client:
Seattle University,
Seattle, WA

Structure:
Tilt-up concrete;
Steel-frame roof

Spaces:
Approx. 4600 s.f:
Sacred spaces
~ 4000 s.f.
Support spaces
~ 600 s.f.

Design Concept:
"A gathering of different lights," corresponding to the Jesuit liturgical program, as well as to the diversity of the student body

Sources:
"The Chapel of St. Ignatius" - Stephen Holl, 1999

"L'Architecture D'Aujourd'hui" #322, May 1999 p.82

"Architectural Review" #185, July 1997 p.40

Project Analysis:
Carla Smith

Steven Holl  The Chapel of St. Ignatius
Plan Organization
The elongated building form corresponds to the University's need for common green space. Situated in the center of a former street, the remaining open space forms new quadrangles for the campus. This elongated form merges a linear processional space as well as a worship space "in-the-round" in one volume. The individual spaces are then distinguished by the "bottles of light" which are expressed in the plan. Each space brings light in from above, except for the main worship space. Here the east and west walls are cut away, bringing in light more horizontally. This variety of light openings creates dramatic effects as the sun moves through the sky.

The Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament is the only space bringing in north light, from the direction of the city. This symbolizes the University's mission of community outreach. The seventh bottle, the bell tower, is situated to the south of the chapel, on the far side of "the thinking field," a rectangular reflecting pool.

The Chapel of St. Ignatius
Design Parti:
Bottles of Light

The metaphor of 'bottles of light' is expressed by Holl's drawing, at left. The seven lenses correspond to different stages in formal Jesuit services: the narthex; the processional; the main gathering space; the reconciliation chapel; the choir; the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament; and finally the bell tower. With the mouths of the 'bottles' facing all four cardinal directions, the interior spaces are filled with ever-changing qualities of light throughout the day. The ceiling and wall surfaces adjacent to the skylights are painted bright colors, which are reflected into the space.

Holl drew his ideas for light in this project from the writings of St. Ignatius of Loyola, who envisioned "a light from above" which would help one to "perceive what can best be decided upon".

The Chapel of St. Ignatius
The Chapel of St. Ignatius
Diagrams

1. Bottles
The volumes defined by the conceptual bottles of light, resting inside a stone box.

2. Light
Light enters each space from one direction only, except in the main worship space where it enters from both east and west.

3. Geometry
The site plan demonstrates regulating lines of geometry running both horizontally and vertically through the building.

The Chapel of St. Ignatius
The "stone box" of the architect's original concept was realized in concrete. The elevation at top left demonstrates how design and construction merge in this project: the panels interlock at the corners, revealing the thickness of the vertical slabs; and cut away at joints to create window openings. Before construction, twenty-one tilt-up slabs were cured on the ground for eighteen days. Next, they were hoisted into place. Holl refers to Schindler's Kings Road House as a model for his idea, but in this case, pulleys were put aside in favor of a multi-boom crane. The entire vertical enclosure for the project was erected in only 12 hours, like an "apparition" on the campus. The architect carefully designed the bronze plugs that would both mark and protect the "pick-pocket" points on the concrete panels where the hoisting cables were attached, as shown below left.
4. Acoustics
The ceilings are shaped so that the surface radii occur either above or below the level of the human ear. No amplification systems are needed in the building.

5. Sequence
The non-linear spatial sequence of the Chapel of St. Ignatius is striking when seen in contrast to other churches. Shown here are Chartres Cathedral and The Church of the Year 2000 in Rome by Richard Meier.
1. Nave
2. Altar
3. Chapels

The Chapel of St. Ignatius