

WASHINGTON JEWISH WEEK

InFocus



Salo Levinas

Salo Levinas has designed houses and schools, stores and cultural institutions, projects large and small.

But, it is religious institutions that he loves to do.

"You can express yourself so much more," the architect says.

Since 1995, Levinas and Milton Shinberg have been partners in the Bethesda architectural firm, Shinberg Levinas.

Among their projects have been the buildings of Chabad of Potomac, which received a design award from the American Institute of Architects Potomac Valley Chapter, and of Congregation B'nai Tzedek, also in Potomac.

An important element of synagogue design, Levinas says, is working with the congregation and rabbi to "understand who exactly the client is, their needs and their wants. It's not just a checklist of 400 seats for the

sanctuary...We try to discover what is the spirit of each of the congregations."

For example, he said that while designing B'nai Tzedek, where he's a member, there was a sense of a need to be open and welcoming. As result, he says, the bima "is kind of round with two arms... to embrace the congregation."

An Argentina native, Levinas grew up in Buenos Aires, in what he terms a "very strong Jewish community."

"My father was very involved in the Jewish community and transferred that to me and to the family," he says.

While still in Argentina, he began focusing on two different disciplines, physics and sociology.

Political upheavals in that country forced the university's closing for a time. Levinas then took a semester off, and realized that architecture would be his calling.

It satisfied his artistic desires, while allowing him to

draw on his sociology in working with people and use some of the science of physics.

Levinas first came to the States about 20 years ago, to join his brother already living in this country.

The political and economic situation back home "was not the best at the time," says Salinas, who returned to Argentina after two years, but then decided to come back to the United States.

Despite two decades living in this country, he hasn't yet become an American citizen. "Those are feelings that are difficult to describe," he says, trying to explain why he hasn't yet taken that oath, "feeling that I still think that I am Argentinean."

But, he's grateful to this country.

"I'm very lucky I found a wife here who is American and have three beautiful girls." - Debra Rubin

Name: Salo Levinas

Birthday: June 18, 1954

Hebrew name: Yosef Shlomo

Lives in: Bethesda

Synagogue: B'nai Tzedek, Potomac

Favorite Jewish food: "my mother's gefilte fish"

Favorite Jewish celebrity: Golda Meir

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And, the winner is...

A Bethesda firm, Shinberg Levinas Architects has been honored for a synagogue design in this year's American Institute of Architects Potomac Valley Chapter Design Awards. The merit award was given for the firm's design of Chabad of Potomac. The jury called the structure "small, but powerful."

