

# Sukkah : Shalom | Building Culture through Architectural Artifice

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Architecture, at its most meaningful, is the physical embodiment of culture. In the fall of 2012, a small group of architecture students, professors and volunteers from the local community were united in the design and construction of a cultural artifact that reflected upon the phenomenological connection of humans and their most immediate environs through the construction of sukkah:shalom.

During the week long festival of Sukkot, the Jewish faith celebrates the culturally significant event of their fall harvest, and connection to their history and environs through the building of a temporary shelter, called a Sukkah. In the Book of Leviticus the structure is described as a “wilderness structure” to symbolize the Israelites time of wandering through the desert after they were freed from their slavery in Egypt. What is significant is how the specific architectural guidelines outlined in the Talmud (a central text of Judaism) become center point to the celebration by ensuring a certain phenomenological experience of this temporal event through the materiality, structure and overall openness of the structure.

Embedded within the ancient text is the importance of constructing by hand. By using readily available materials from the fall harvest, people of the Jewish faith are presented with a haptic understanding of the world around them through the physical construction of the structure - connecting the earthly endeavors toils of the fall harvest to the design of the sukkah. By reinterpreting the tectonic qualities of earthbound materials [wood, rope, and metal] - removing these natural elements from the ground and in an open design that hovers just above the ground – the architecture allows for the reification of the person with the space he or she occupies in the world. Upon entering the sukkah, the connection with ones surrounds forces a reinterpretation through a filigree of lightweight hemp rope, held in place by a lightweight structural wood frame. This combination of wood and rope present at once a sense of protection and security, while still being physically engaged with the nature enveloping the thin membrane of rope and wood lattice. This thin transparency is punctuated by a series of wooden apertures that create three distinct moments for reflection, marked not only by their potential for resting, reading, eating, reflection and prayer, but each is mapped with the solar angles on the seven day festival of sukkot, situated within Austin, Texas. It is within this sukkah that ones connection to natural is reinforced through the constant temporal reminder as these simple materials are animated by the interplay of sunlight during the day, and moonlight at night. The rope thatch is utterly open to wind and rain, day and night. This openness reminds us that spirituality is open to others, and that our life should be connected to natural elements and surroundings. Combining two cherished ideals of sukkah and shalom.

