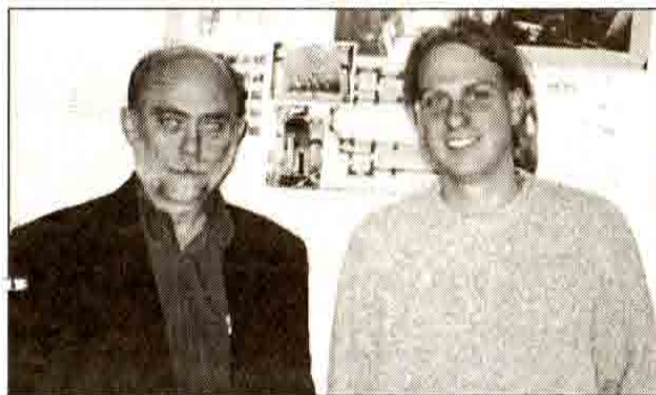


Israel & the Jewish World

German university reconstructs shuls on the Web



Manfred Koob (left) and Marc Grellert
[Sheldon Kirshner photo]
By SHELDON KIRSHNER
Staff Reporter

DARMSTADT, Germany — Synagogues in Germany destroyed by Adolf Hitler's hordes have been brought back to life through the wonders of computer technology.

In a remarkable and unprecedented achievement, architects at the Technical University here have reconstructed "virtual synagogues" sacked and burned by the Nazis between June and November 1938.

"We were the first in Germany to come up with this project," said Marc Grellert, a 36-year-old professor of architecture who initiated it after the 1994 firebombing of a synagogue in the northern German city of Lubeck.

"We went into this not knowing anything about synagogues," acknowledged Manfred Koob, chair of the faculty of architecture. "My generation knew nothing about Jewish culture."

Koob, 51, added: "The idea was to show that it is not foreign to Germany."

Since then, the Technical University has produced a Web site and a documentary film displaying three-dimensional images of the shuls. The Internet address is <http://www.cad.architektur.tu-darmstadt.de>.

On May 17, an exhibit on the project was launched in Bonn at the Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany, *Synagogues in Germany: A Virtual Reconstruction*. It ran until July 16.

Under the guidance of Koob, the project commenced with the digital rebuilding of three synagogues in Frankfurt erected in 1860, 1881 and 1907 in the Judengasse, the Bornplatz and the Friedberger Anlage. They were razed on Nov. 9 and 10, during Kristallnacht.

The cyber team, composed of seven students as well as Grellert and Koob, is currently reconstructing the Glockengasse synagogue in Cologne (1861), the Senefelderstrasse/Ecke Engelstrasse synagogue in Plauen (1930), the Bergstrasse synagogue in Hannover (1870), the Herzog-Maxstrasse synagogue in Munich (1887), and the Fasanenstrasse synagogue in Berlin (1912).

With the sole exception of the Munich shul, which was pillaged on June 9, these synagogues were set alight on Kristallnacht.

Grellert and Koob are still working on the interiors of the Luisenstrasse synagogue in Kaiserslautern (1886), the Hans

Sachs Platz synagogue in Nürnberg (1874), the Gottschedstrasse/Ecke Zentralstrasse synagogue in Leipzig (1855), the Zeughausstrasse synagogue in Dresden (1840), and the Hiltropwall synagogue in Dortmund (1900).

The first two were demolished in August, while those in Leipzig and Dresden were ravaged in November. The temple in Dortmund was smashed in October.

According to Grellert, they were designed in a variety of styles, ranging from Moorish in Kaiserslautern and German Romanesque in Munich to neo-classical in Berlin and Bauhaus in Plauen.

They were grand buildings, reflecting the self-confidence of the Jewish community in the second half of the 19th century and the first third of the 20th century.

Geometrically, the reconstructions are almost completely accurate, true to architectural nuances and colours.

"The objective is to convey an impression of what was lost, not an exact facsimile," explained Grellert. "I was interested not only in creating beautiful images, but in generating an interest in Jewish culture. So it's a political project. I knew very little about Jewish history in Germany when I began."

Koob, who had never met a Jew before coming on board, said that his students were animated by "a special responsibility for German history."

As he put it: "They understand what was destroyed. The point was to recreate a consciousness of what was lost."

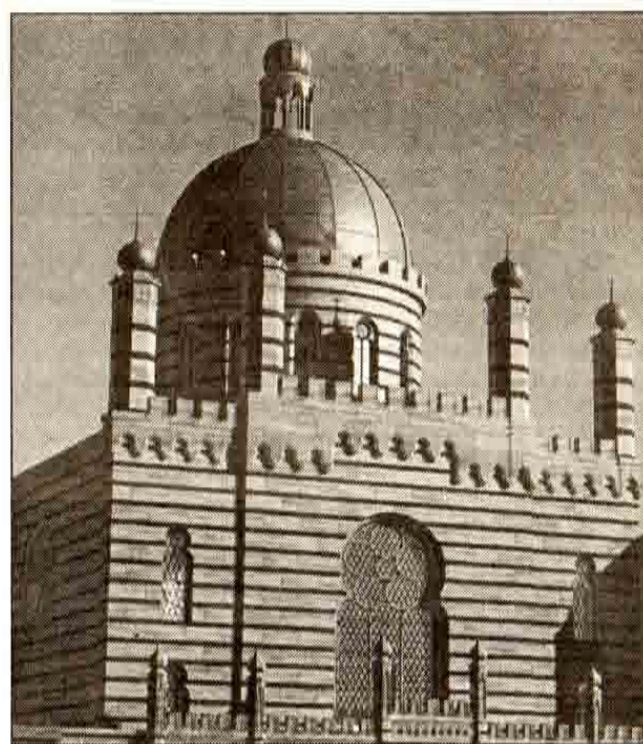
To prepare themselves for the task, Grellert and Koob enlisted the aid of local Jewish communities. They scoured archives for blueprints, photographs and illustrations. They also talked with Jews who had worshipped at these synagogues.

Grellert and Koob are still searching for eyewitnesses who can assist them with the reconstruction of synagogue interiors and colouring in Kaiserslautern, Nürnberg, Leipzig, Dresden and Dortmund.

They received financial assistance from the federal government and municipalities, but banks and companies rejected their overtures.

Out of a feeling of "historical responsibility," they did not solicit funds from the Jewish community.

Grellert, whose late grandfather belonged to the Nazi party, was a graduate student when he approached Koob. "After the firebombing in Lubeck, I wanted to raise a protest against racism and anti-Semitism, and to pay tribute to the ar-



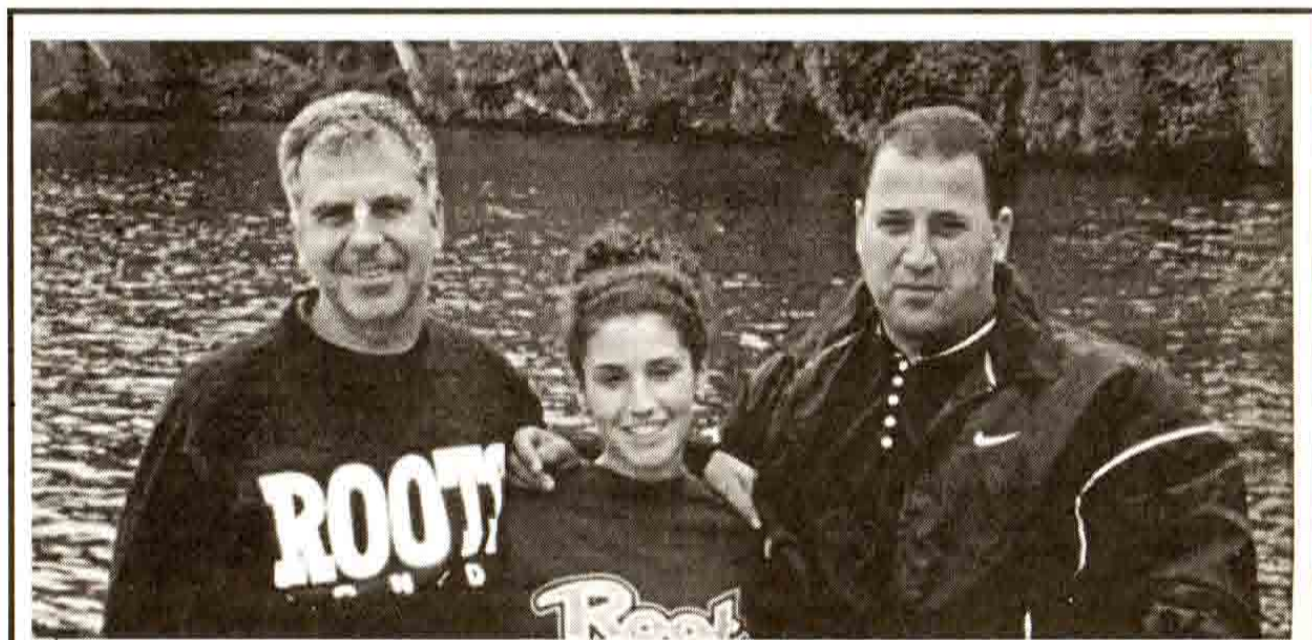
The Glockengasse synagogue in Cologne, as reconstructed by the Technical University.

chitectural importance of the synagogues. I was basically interested in the connections between architecture, society and minorities."

Grellert, who had digitally reconstructed a Bauhaus building in Germany and a pre-French Revolution church in France, consulted Koob because of his expertise in rebuilding historic structures using the computer.

"When he came to me, anti-Semitism was on the rise in Germany," said Koob. "Jews supported our project wholeheartedly, though I was not sure that this would be the case."

Grellert and Koob have no plans at present to reconstruct more synagogues, but believe that their project may inspire additional schools of architecture in Germany to emulate their example. In the meantime, they hope that Synagogue in Germany will travel to other museums in Germany and abroad, particularly Israel.



ISRAELI VETERANS WELCOMED: Ten disabled Israeli war veterans recently spent two weeks visiting Canada as part of Beit Halochem Canada's Aid To Disabled Veterans of Israel program. The veterans were housed with Jewish families and taken to visit places of interest in Toronto, Kingston and Niagara Falls. The annual program was co-sponsored by Beth Emeth Bais Yehuda Synagogue in Toronto. Seen (from left) are veteran Gidi Ehrenhalt, hostess Danielle Bizouati and veteran David Levi.

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