I have always remembered one night on my travels as a student, when I sat in a mountain village in Sparta. There was bright moonlight overhead and then there was a soft, hushed secondary light around the horizon. That sort of a bilateral lighting seemed best to achieve this otherworldly sense. “Eero Saarinen.

In the boldly dramatic churches of Eero Saarinen, light is employed in traditional ways to consecrate space and focus attention upon the altar, but it is also based on a unique bilateral combination of top and bottom illumination. Light enters from above to drift down over and spotlight important liturgical elements, while a more general ambience is shed on the walls below, slipping up through cracks to give the room a mystical glow without any evident source.

Since this was to be a non-denominational chapel, Saarinen sought an atmosphere “not derived from particular religion, but from basic spiritual feeling. The chapel wall is a double shell, faintly Baroque in character and function. Within the brick drum is a detached, undulating lining, also brick, a form adopted for acoustic reasons as well as to blur geometry and soften the enclosure, making the cylinder more inviting. An additional role of the wavy brick is to model the light entering at an upward angle. Having bounced up outside from a watery moat, illumination is admitted through a waist-high perimeter slit between linings. The mysterious shimmer is delicate and enchanting, seeming to come out of nowhere at a steep angle, to graze along tactile undulation. Waves of light give the room a fluid rhythm, as if space were enclosed in a softly lit wavy curtain. Enriching the chiaroscuro is a phenomenon derived from fellow Finn Aalto - a relief of faceted bricks, laid at irregular and changing angles with deeply recessed mortar joints, some brick deliberately projected to heighten the tonal play. Because light arrives from reflections off water, the glow on the brick is rarely still and often alive with liquid motions, as wind disturbs the mirrors outside.

Piercing darkness from above is a vertical beam of light, shed from rooftop opening over altar, to make of this spot a holy place. Illumination is guided down and over a shimmering golden screen by Harry Bertoia, made of small strips of metal, supported on barely visible cables. The effect is ethereal, for the metal stripes seem to float in the dark as hundred of separate particles of light - like so many dust motes, or glinting waves, each varied in intensity according to its angle respect of the source. The reflective strips are sparse above and dense below, making the radiance brighten towards the altar and guide the vision down like an arrow.