St. Pius X Catholic Church

6666 Spanish Fort Boulevard

With a roof shaped more like a big bird than a church, St. Pius X Church is unique in the New Orleans area, and the interior, to no ones surprise, incorporates daring architecture. Designed in 1963 and dedicated in 1966, the church rises more than 75 feet over the sanctuary.

St. Pius X Parish came into existence in 1953 by combining territory from Holy Rosary, St. Dominic, and St Frances Cabrini parishes. Although Mass was first observed in the Lake Vista Community Center, within the year the new parish had dedicated a church-school-rectory building. A new rectory and a separate school building followed by September 1957.

The Vatican II conference recommended inclusion of all worshipers. Thus, the sanctuary, which seats 800, is circular so no one is more than 60 feet from the altar. To maximize the swoop of the roof, designing architect James Lamantia, from the firm of Burk, Le Breton & Lamantia, called for low exterior walls. From these, the roof soars upward, creating a vortex of space.

For a tour organized by the Tulane School of Architecture in 1994, the architect explained that the selection of materials was important in creating an elaborate structure on a modest budget. The original roof was of Terne, carbon steel coated with tin and lead, though this was replaced after Hurricane Katrina. The infrastructure is of reinforced concrete resting on the piers flanking the entrances, with precast concrete panels forming the walls.

Interior decoration is sparse. The confessionals and organ chamber are of walnut-faced plywood, and the pews are of red oak; both were designed for this church. The doors, of simple narrow vertical panels, are of bronze over a hollow core. The architect specified the shape of the central altar, but details of its construction are unknown. The legendary and quirky Dutch monk Dom Gregory de Witt created the Stations of the Cross, which were added after the dedication.

The architects designed the windows. Divided into apparently random shapes by pronounced lead lines, some flowing gracefully in a horizontal fashion, the clerestory-level glass provides a ribbon of muted color. Graylite glass was selected to reduce glare and heat transmission. While red and blue dominate in the wall windows, the glass in the north-facing steeple skylight uses neutral and yellow tones. Mr. Lamantia thought that the Emil Frei studio of St. Louis had made the windows, but the 1986 document list from the Missouri Historical Society does not mention this church.

*Not visited*

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