

religion

God-Inspired Artist

Sephardic Jew Seeks To Maintain Tradition Within The Embrace Of His Art

By Billie Cheney Speed
Journal Religion Editor

ARTIST SOL BETON turns to God first when he starts on a new religious project.

"God inspires me to come up with something creative which at the same time retains the characteristics of a culture which is basically Jewish," Beton said.

That is what happened some years ago, when Beton designed the stained glass windows for his own Congregation Or VeShalom on North Druid Hills Road.

The 12 sons of Jacob were depicted in the windows. The colors, bold and progressive, were predominantly those of the temple described in the 25th Chapter of Exodus.

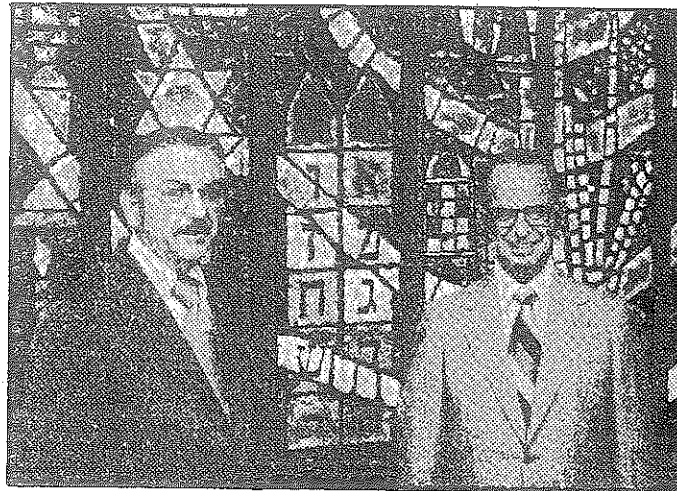
And it can be seen again in Beton's most recent religious artistic effort in a room for youth in the new Zaban Park branch of the Atlanta Jewish Community Center, located on a 40-acre site on Tilly Mill Road in Dunwoody.

The public will have an opportunity to see the center and Beton's stained glass windows when the new building is dedicated at 3 p.m. Sunday.

Each 2-by-8-foot window depicts a principal Jewish holiday, including the Sabbath, Passover, Rosh Hashanah, Shavuot, Yom Kippur, Succoth, Simhat Torah, Hanaukka and Purim.

And the artist has used a tree of life, similar to the Jewish menorah or candelabra, to "hold" the holidays together.

It really looks like a 16-by-8-foot mural.



SOL BETON (LEFT) STANDS WITH IRWIN ZABAN
Zaban Made Largest Donation To Jewish Center

The brilliantly colored faceted glass windows have a diamond-like appearance, effected when the glass was struck by tools. The unique effect also comes from the fact that the glass is not leaded but has been put together with epoxy and black marble.

Beton's talents are many. He also designed the Jewish Calendar for the 1970s for the Coca-Cola Co.; almost 300,000 of these were distributed across the United States, Canada and Mexico. Recently Coke commissioned him to do another one for the 1980s.

Beton, a deeply religious man, puts great emphasis on the Jewish tradition in his personal life as well as in his career as an artist and owner of an advertising firm.

He teaches Sunday School and sings in the choir. And as a member of the only Sephardic congregation in Atlanta, Beton is concerned that the history and tradition of his people be recorded.

The 58-year-old native Atlantan explained that the Sephardic Jews come from Spanish and Portuguese background and constitute only about 5 to 10 percent of the Jewish population in the world.

"We are in the minority," Beton said. "The Ashkenazic Jews come from German, Polish and Russian backgrounds."

Beton is writing and illustrating a book based on the history of the Sephardic Jews and his own congregation. He has included a chapter on the lost art of Hebrew-illuminated manuscript.

"The scribes did the manuscripts by hand and would illuminate the letters by adding silver and gold and interlacing them with scrolls and borders," Beton said.

Another chapter will be devoted to the Ladino language, used by the Jews in Spain and Turkey 400 to 500 years ago.

"The present generations are just not carrying on the tradition," said Beton, who speaks nine different languages.

Beton has included some of the old Ladino folks songs, passed on to him by his mother.