

# FIELD WORK

## IIT studio students build a light, timeless chapel in Germany



Simple yet soaring, the chapel stands on a small platform, inviting passersby for a short visit

**A dozen architecture students and their professor spent two months in a rural section of Germany last summer creating a small wooden chapel whose ethereal look is largely the result of a short design-and-build timeline.**

Built of unfinished larch, the field chapel outside the town of Boedigheim is strikingly simple, with an open louvered tower nine meters tall atop a 100-square-foot worship space. Adjacent to a bike path on its mountainside site, the chapel was commissioned by a local Lutheran priest but was intended to be a non-denominational space where passing bicyclists, hikers and others could stop for a meditative rest.

In spring 2009, Frank Flury, an associate professor of architecture at IIT, led his studio students (at their own expense) on a one-week site visit to rural Boedigheim, in northern Baden-Württemberg. They then spent the spring designing the

structure, and in the summer returned to the town for a two-month stay, during which they built the chapel together.

"The first day, we got out there and mowed the grass in the shape of the site," recalls Kevin Kamien, a member of the studio who is due to complete his master's degree this spring. In the eight weeks between mowing and a last-morning ceremony consecrating the space, the students did everything from transporting logs to the local carpenter's mill, to installing forms for the foundation, to screwing together the timber structure. They had pro bono assistance on permitting and other issues from Ecker Architekten of Buchen, Germany, whose Dea Ecker is an IIT alumna.

The site includes a large stone and earth plaza, which represents the secular realm. A low brick platform provides entry to a transitional, or cleansing, space, and then a portal to the innermost space, which represents the sacred or transcendent element of life, Kamien explains. The structure stands on eight steel anchors, positioned to allow light in through a ground-level gap that runs around the perimeter.

Looking up from the base of the sacred space, visitors do not see the openings between beams that, seen from outside, make the tower appear transparent. Instead, because those beams are rotated, they see nearly flat sides all the way up, with the source of daylight seemingly concealed "All outside contact is taken away," Flury notes.

Nearly all materials were sourced near the site — from larch logs harvested in municipal forests and cut at a local sawmill, to limestone blocks for benches

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