



## A Unique Memorial for Albert C. Martin, Jr.

Kenneth Caldwell

Saint Basil's Catholic Church, 3611 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, 1969  
 photography by Julius Shulman, courtesy of AC Martin Partners.

Al Martin's memorial was held near where he grew up, at Saint Basil's Catholic Church, which his firm designed. Like the man himself, the building—one of his favorites—is somber, confident, and subtle in its joyful expression. His firm's Department of Water and Power is bolder and more renowned. Yet this church has an elegance of means, a restraint, and a timelessness that few buildings in Los Angeles possess. The building combines the power and order of historic churches with the abstraction of the contemporary era. The twelve slender concrete towers convey the permanence of the human condition (or represent the twelve apostles). In contrast, the stained glass sculptures by artist Claire Falkenstein—she called them “endless screens”—evoke the fragile and infinite nature of the individual human life.

Al's son, David Martin, remembers the Cardinal asking for an early Christian church. On a trip to Rome, the young Martin convinced his father to ride with him on a motor scooter to see firsthand the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls. He says that Saint Basil's is a modern interpretation of a Basilican church, as can be seen in the floor plan, the choir, the organ, and most importantly the proportions. At the memorial, the choir sang Gregorian chants, which continue to reverberate. ●