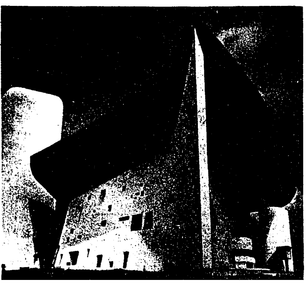
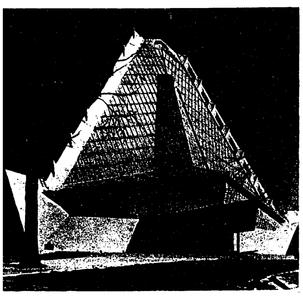
Soaring Pattern— The Air Force Chapel

One of the most stimulating challenges for architects today is church design. Daring experiments with new shapes, new materials and new ways of building have created singularly dramatic effects. One of the most notable examples is the nearly completed chapel for the Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs, Colo., designed by the firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, with Walter Netsch as architect-in-charge. Its seventeen aluminum spires thrust skyward against the backdrop of the Rockies. By night, bands of stained glass outline its soaring geometrical pattern in brilliant color. Shown here are views of the Air Force chapel and of three other recent religious edifices. —ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE.

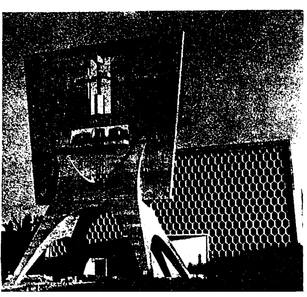
THREE MODERN CLASSICS



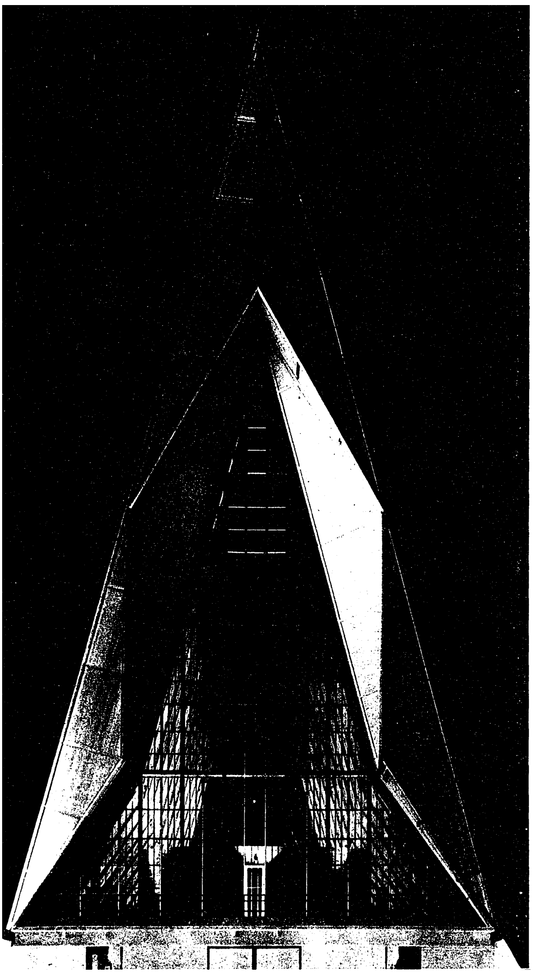
LE CORBUSIER—The Swiss-born architect designed this concrete church for the French town of Ronchamp.



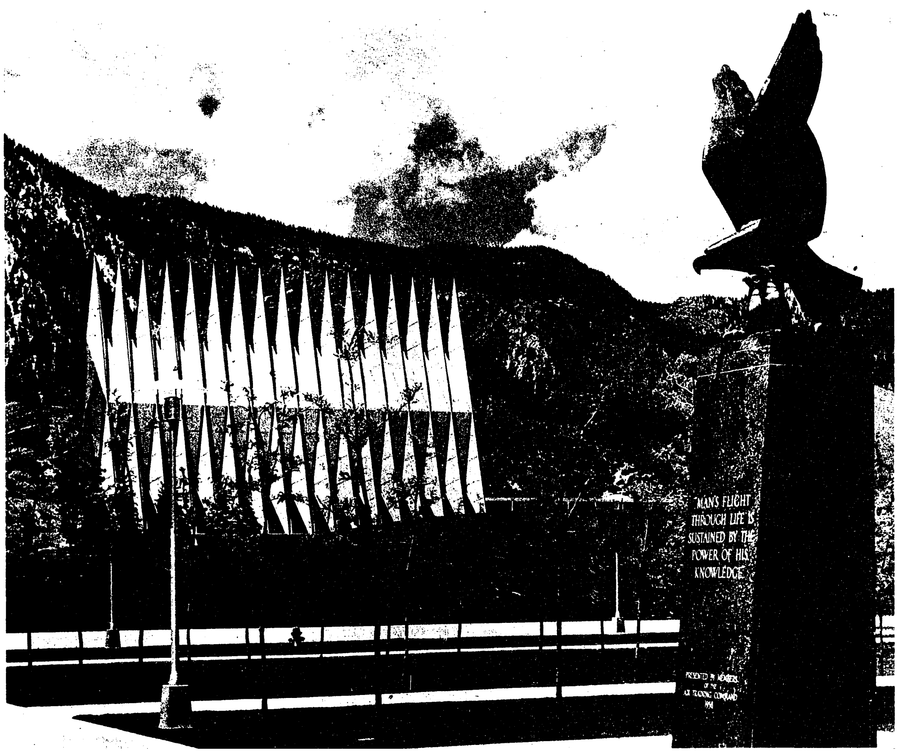
FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT—The American master used glass and copper for this synagogue in Elkins Park, Pa.



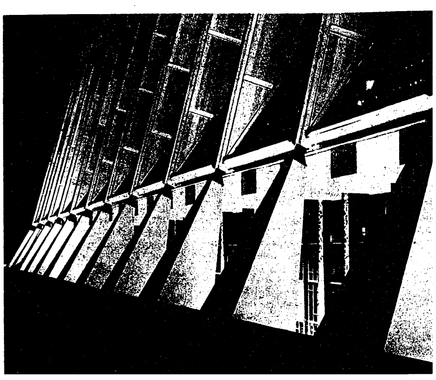
MARCEL BREUER—For St. John's Abbey Church, Collegeville, Minn., he designed a billboardlike tower.



TRIANGLES—The main facade of the Air Force Academy chapel by night. The basic shape in the building's design is the tetrahedron, a four-sided pyramid, each of whose faces is a triangle. Spires rise 151 feet from the ground level.



SETTING—Looking across the academy campus to the chapel. It is built on two levels, with a 900-seat Protestant chapel on the upper, and 500-seat Roman Catholic and 100-seat Jewish chapels on the lower. In addition, there are robing rooms, sacristies and a baptistry. The motto beneath the sculpture was composed by an anonymous member of the Air Training Command.



UNDERPINNING—Here is what keeps those soaring aluminum triangles up. At bottom, they are anchored to solid concrete pylons, a technique reminiscent of Gothic flying buttresses.

PATTERNS—The horizontal beams that mark the roof line of the lower chapels contrast with the slope of the buttresses, shown from a different angle in the picture at the left.