Fire Cella (The Well)

The cylinder within which the main fire is kept consists of three levels from where the fire can be seen. Once the devotee has come down the grand staircase, the first glimpse is that of the slight touch of light that emits from the egg in which the fire rests. On passing through the dark corridor one tends to move only toward the light from the fire lead by a light coming from the lobby windows on the other side of the egg. This position of entering into the well elevates the eternal flame as if one is bowing down before entering the inner sanctum. The first glimpse that can be seen of the cauldron is from the bottom where only the container can be seen and the rays of light reflecting off the ceramic tile walls hit the onlooker at the bottom. This movement from literally under the fire brings a new aspect of thought where one now knows where he or she is heading and has a feel for it but yet hasn’t seen it. Thus the devotee crosses to the other side to begin the ascent by walking under the Holy Fire.

Two staircases lead up symmetrically to the three levels from where the fire can be seen and felt. The devotees stand on these levels and pray as they move up to the fire and past it. In section these levels are symbolic of the tenets of Zoroastrianism (humata, hukhta, huvarshhta) and in plan too, there are three layers, that are the walls of the egg, the cavity wall of the staircase and the external wall. The structure is load bearing with hollow clay masonry blocks lined with ceramic tiles on the inside with cast-in-place concrete as the slabs. The egg too is cast-in-place concrete and is monolithic with the slabs of the structure.

The windows of the cylinder point in the directions of east, south and west and mark the landings and start of each new level. They guide the devotee on the path to the next level and offer natural light to the insides of the structure. The staircase is designed to be narrow at four feet in width and so when a person moves along the staircase and enters each new level, he feels the vastness of the space as each level has a double height and overlooks the Fire.
As one passes below the Fire the lobby opens up to a spectacular view of the valley with the mountains in the horizon. This is marked by an overhead window that sheds light on the lobby and the lower windows on wither side to mark the start of the staircases. At this point, a devotee makes a choice to move in any one direction to start the ascent toward the Fire. A painting of Zarathushtra welcomes the devotee and marks the start of the journey toward the holy Fire.
Fig. 4.6: Start of ascent (lobby)
“Ring is inviolability. Neither beginning nor end exist in it; it begins and ends everywhere. The ring becomes the form of cohesion, of girdling, of enclosure. It becomes the expression of abundance and safety. Since, of all the figures, the ring unites the smallest perimeter with the largest content, it is the richest and the most indwelling of them all.”

Rudolf Schwarz, The Church Incarnate, 1938

Once a devotee has started on the ascent towards the Fire, he is greeted by rays of light emitted from openings within the staircase at the top of every step. In the day time these openings bring in the sunlight and at night they are designed to carry and emit their own light as explained in figures 5.0 to 5.4. As the volume of the staircase is long and narrow, the vision is focussed on the floor and not on the ceiling. This is also due to the fact that the lighting in the staircase is minimal at the ceiling and most evident at each step. The flooring pattern thus has been carefully worked out to guide the person through with an enriched feeling of being in a holy place. The ceramic tiled walls with the terrazzo flooring of brick red color add to the ambience and make the devotee feel pious as every detail relates to the essence of fire.

The circular plan demonstrates continuity and the fire placed at its universal center, reinforces the feeling of safety and comfort. All the levels are planned around the fire and although fire has no direction except upward, the cauldron can be viewed from three levels and all sides giving the devotee a sense of being enveloped in its light. The windows placed in the cardinal directions allow the sun to enter the building at different times from different directions thus marking the passage of time.
Fig 4.9: Pathway to the Holy Fire
Fig. 5.0: Riser/Tread Detail

Fig. 5.1: Staircase Details
Fig. 5.2

- Off-white ceramic tiles
- Stained Venato marble
- Black granite
- Wood & S.W. marble
- Brick dust/powder terrazzo
- Granite (light)
Fig 5.3/5.4: Details of Light Fixture/Opening above Treads