



Completed lobby display



CHUPPAH 1998

Jewish weddings traditionally take place under a *chuppah* (wedding canopy), which often consists of a cloth, sheet or *tallis* supported by four poles held by members of the wedding party. When a newborn child is named, or at a *Bar* or *Bat Mitvah*, one of the blessings that's recited wishes for the child "a love of *torah*, *chuppah* and a life of good deeds."

When Merkwitz's daughter Sheryl and her fiancé Mitchell Katzman were planning their wedding at Temple Israel, she asked her father if the Ark Builders could build her *chuppah*. Merkwitz agreed, and asked the group to design one that evoked the feel of a Bedouin tent. (He'd been in one on an earlier trip to Israel, and was enamored with

both its graceful lines and its capacity to hold a large family: Cheryl's *chuppah* would have to provide room for the bride and groom, three rabbis, two cantors and both sets of parents — eleven people in all!)

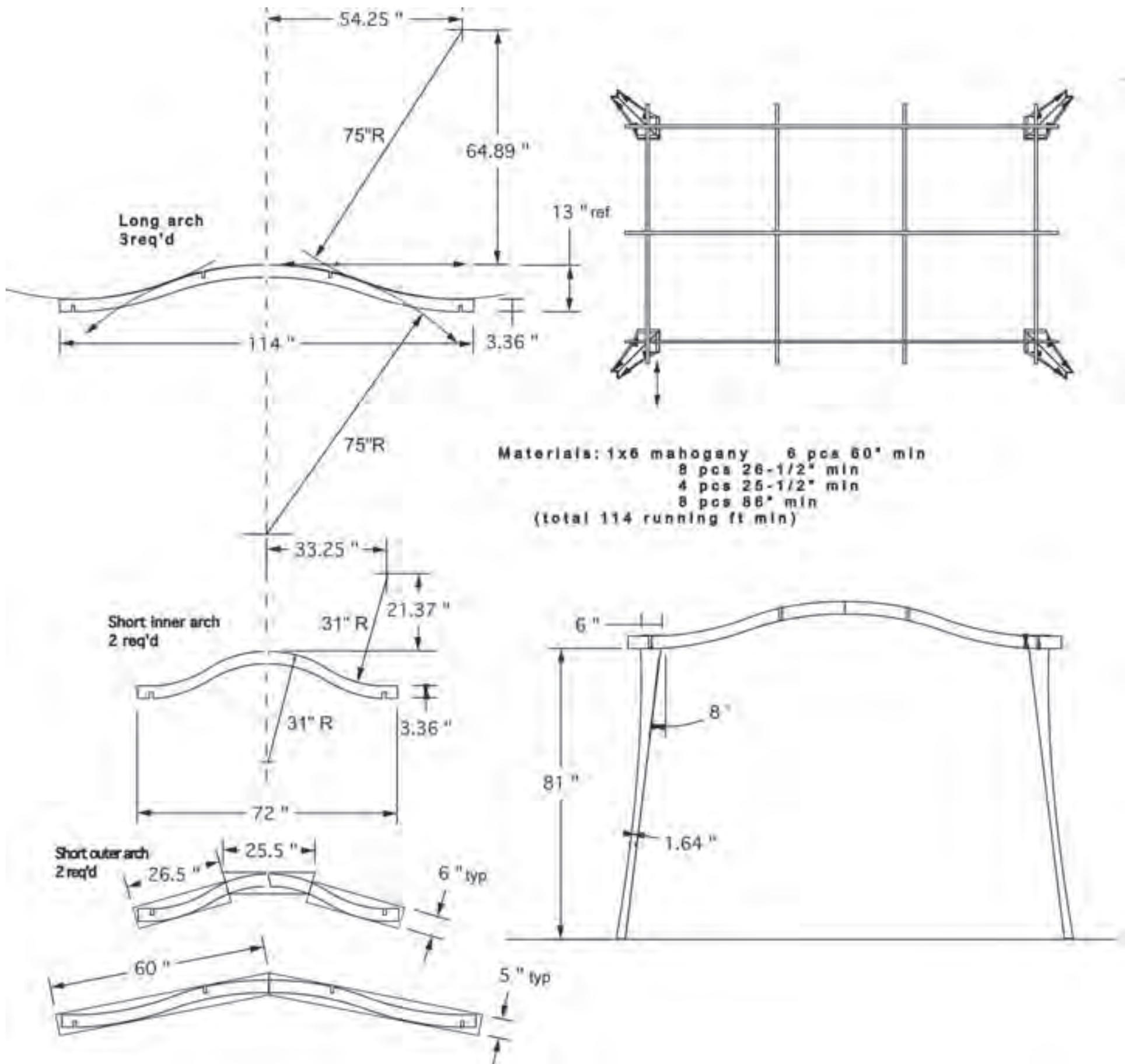
Miller and Ball both undertook to design it. Like many Ark Builder projects, this one stimulated some heated debate: Miller's original design certainly brought to mind a Bedouin tent, but Ball argued that while the roof was exquisite, the legs looked clumsy. The final design was an amalgam, with Miller's graceful arched roof and Ball's slim, tapered legs. It also initially met their mutual objective that no tools or fasteners would be required to assemble it.

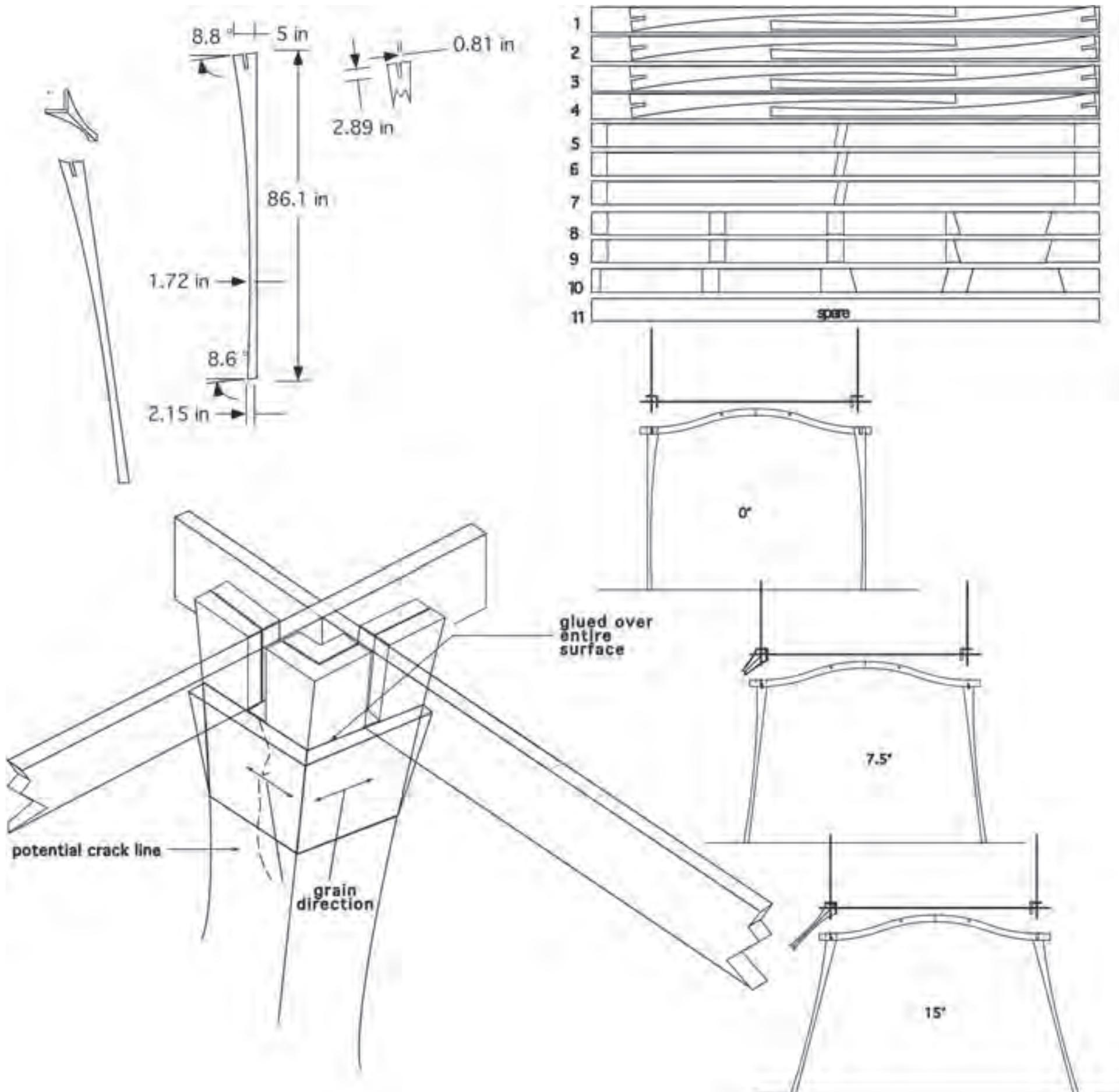
Katzman, shown below, helped in the actual construction of his *chuppah*



along with Miller, Ball, Elovitz, Yarckin, Eventov, Finkelstein and, of course, Merkowitz. The construction schedule was tight, but when the wedding day arrived, the *chuppah* was ready — and everyone who needed to fit underneath *did!*

CHUPPAH PLAN







Although they didn't realize it at the start, the *chuppah* was a gift the Ark Builders gave not only to Merkowitz's daughter, but to themselves as well. In 2000, Ball's son Alan got married in Chicago under a modified version: smaller than Sheryl's, Ball had made another set of arches so that the *chuppah's* width was the now same as its depth. It radiated a special warmth to those gathered below it because the arches were covered, not with a cloth, but with the *tallisim* of the bride's grandfather and Alan's brother, father, grandfather and great-grandfather.



Getting the disassembled *chuppah* from Natick to Chicago and back was a challenge that required the construction of a custom shipping container, a huge plywood affair that looked for all the world like an oversize Toblerone chocolate bar.

Greenberg's daughter Melissa was the next Ark Builder child to be exchange rings beneath it. Her wedding to Jeremy in 2007 was in Boston, at the former home of the French Ambassador. Greenberg remembers that it was a very hot night, the air-conditioning broke down and, in his words, "the only cool thing there was the *chuppah*."

The *chuppah* served again in 2010 at Eventov's son Simon's wedding in New Jersey. Eventov built a car-top carrier to transport it there, and a week after the ceremony it was used again by Miller's son Adam at his wedding to Gail in West Orange. When Adam and his father carried the box into the lobby of the hotel where the wedding was to take place, they told curious onlookers that "Grandpa always wanted to attend the wedding, and so we're bringing him!"

In 2012 Gordon's daughter Keren was wed beneath the *chuppah*, and other members of the congregation have used it for their children's weddings as well. It has proven fragile, though: the slotted ends are particularly prone to breakage, and bolts — hardware they tried so hard to avoid using — now reinforce the places where the arches join the legs.

