By **RUTH ROVNER**, Main Line Ticket

When fans go to the Phillies’ new baseball stadium this summer, their main focus, of course, is on the players. But since the Citizens Bank Park is still such a novelty, they also admire design details of this brand new ballpark, from the glass-enclosed elevator atrium to the modern scoreboards.

Quite often, they’re drawn to a striking work of mosaic art: an 8-by-6-foot mosaic that’s a portrait of the ballpark itself. It captures many images of the park, from the clock tower to the hot dog vendors, and it’s done with numerous semi-precious stones and minerals. Located in the main concourse by Section 125 (inside the park, this is home plate), it has become a landmark. Families pose in front of it while cameras click.

This unique creation is the work of Bala Cynwyd artist Jonathan Mandell, who specializes in mosaic art. Besides the semiprecious stones and minerals, his mosaic is also made of ceramic tile, glass and metal.

“The Phillies organization went out of its way to have artwork which celebrates the Phillies,” says Mandell, who was one of four artists commissioned to create art for the ballpark.

Besides the large portrait of the park itself, Mandell also created a 6-by-4-foot mosaic of Phillies home run hitter Jim Thome. Positioned on a wall at the west entrance opposite the VIP elevator, it’s made of ceramic tile in 12 colors. Mandell has done sports-themed works before this. In fact, it was another mosaic with a Phillies motif — one commissioned by Main Line clients — that led to the ballpark portrait.

The earlier Phillies mosaic was done for Wynnewood residents Lori and Larry Bendesky. They are devoted Phillies fans, and they wanted a work of art with a Phillies motif for their home. Mandell’s 8-by-3-foot mosaic, which he titled Phillies Field of Dreams, is an idealized image of a ballpark with Phillies pennants, a Philly Phanatic, and other recognizable symbols. The Bendeskys were delighted with it, and when plans for the new ballpark began to take shape, Mandell invited Joe Giles, an executive in the Phillies organization, to see this Phillies- themed mosaic. Giles liked it so much that he envisioned something similar for the new stadium.

After Mandell created preliminary sketches, he was given the commission last fall. “I was thrilled beyond belief,” says the native Philadelphian and Phillies fan. “I considered it an honor to participate in this incredible new project.”

The project had a deadline: The first pre-season game between the Phillies and the Cleveland Indians was scheduled for April 3. The mosaic had to be finished before then.

Mandell first worked from architectural renderings to make his own sketch for the portrait. Then he had to select the materials for each image and painstakingly put each piece together into an intricate whole.

The completed work is, in effect, a bird’s-eye view of the ballpark. The images include the fan vision tower, a Coke sign, scoreboards, the clock tower, the enclosed box seats, the fans in the bleachers — even a cotton candy vendor near the visitors’ dugout. Mandell also included a fan who’s talking on a cell phone while walking up the stairs.

And of course, there are the players on the field. One player is in the batter’s box. He has just hit the ball, which is sailing toward the outfield. Another player is running from first to second base. And the fans in the bleachers have their heads turned toward the ball. This is probably one of the few baseballs made from iridescent glass.

Mandell used a wide array of materials to depict the familiar objects in his ball park. In all, he estimates that the mosaic includes 30 different semi-precious stones and materials, including tiger eye, amethyst, rose quartz, abalone, and more. These stones and minerals are used in ingenious ways. The sky is made of sodalite. A piece of marble depicts an advertising sign. There are crystals for the clock tower, obsidian for the scoreboards, abalone for the enclosed boxes. The hot dog vendor has hair of bronzite, tiger eye for his eyes, and nickel tile for his hot dog caddy. As for the cotton candy, it’s made from rose quartz.

Integrating all this required painstaking work and skill. Using special tools, he often had to first cut the stones and minerals, and then shape the pieces individually so they would fit with the neighboring piece. Mandell worked on the mosaic full time for three months, often putting in 12-hour days. He finished it on time. When completed, it weighed over 300 pounds.

On April 1, art handlers put it in a custom-fitted crate and took it to the stadium, where a team of carpenters was waiting to install it, with Mandell supervising. When the big moment came, and the mosaic was uncrated and revealed in its entirety, those watching burst into applause. And baseball fans have been admiring it ever since.

Now they can also have their own reproduction. The Phillies have launched a project, Art in the Ballpark. Each of the four commissioned artists produced a poster that’s a printed reproduction of an original work in the park. In Mandell’s case, that work is the ballpark portrait. The posters are on sale starting this month, and Mandell and the others will be on hand on several nights to sign the posters.

But Citizens Bank Park is not the only place where Mandell’s works are on public display. The versatile artist has done mosaics on many themes, from sports to animals to Judaica. One of his most ambitious mosaics is on display at the Hillel House of the University of Pennsylvania: It’s a timeline history of the Jewish people — done entirely with stones and minerals. Another Jewish-themed mosaic is at the Abrahamson Center for Jewish Living in Horsham. This 8-by-3-foot mosaic depicts the Western Wall. It caught the attention of Hallmark, which has just been released a new Jewish New Year’s greeting card using an image of Mandell’s work.

Ever since l990, Mandell has been applying fine arts principles to mosaic art. But it wasn’t a career he chose early on. After graduating from Lower Merion High School, where one of his major interests was sports, he went on to Northwestern University and majored in history. But along the way, he took a fine arts course in sculpture.

“That lit an interest,” says Mandell, who after graduation returned to Philadelphia and took courses at the former Philadelphia College of the Arts. Later, he attended the Graduate School of Fine Arts of the University of Pennsylvania, majoring in sculpture and earning his MFA in l990.

It was an Egyptian artist friend, Selim El-Sherif, who introduced him to mosaic art. “For me, it was the perfect fusion of sculpture, painting and drawing,” he says. “It all came together with mosaics.” Ever since then, this has been his focus. And whether it’s a timeline of Jewish history or a portrait of the Phillies stadium, he finds the work challenging and highly satisfying.

“You start with a white panel and you try to envision a full composition,” he says. “The satisfaction comes when the last piece is in place. You finally see all your efforts come to fruition. And you’ve brought it all to life through your imagination.”

For more information about mosaic artist Jonathan Mandell, visit his Web site at www.jonathanmandell.com, where the body of his work is on display.