

Architecture

and cultural definition

John Nelson

Problem Statement

Can architecture be a catalyst in reviving and uniting a localized cultural community?

Claim

Architecture can become a unifying artifact for a cultural community.

Premise

Architecture is a symbol; it can redefine, unite, and memorialize the culture of the Native Americans of North Dakota.

A flourishing community relies on the unity of its members.

Cultural strength is retained in those who share in their culture.

Unifying Idea

By means of proper interpretation and sensitivity to cultural values of the past and present the architect can become the carpenter of a unifying cultural artifact.

Narrative

Our society is home to a variety of cultural groups which have become disconnected from each other and their overall community. This can be attributed to a variety of reasons such as financial pressures, physical barriers, mental struggles, or the overbearing nature of the surrounding society. But I believe many of these things can be overcome through a supportive and strong community. We as human beings rely on community and connect best with those in which we can share in our cultural heritage.

Though our past culture seems to escape us as we embrace our present society. So what reunites us with our cultural heritage: relatives, relations, events, celebrations, history, and so on. All these things recall our cultural past and give us a day to remember our history but many of us spend little time incorporating this history into our present lives. Whether that be sharing in your cultural heritage with those similar to you or with your community.

So how better can we retain, represent, and share in our unique cultural differences. I see architecture playing a role in defining the cultural variety within our communities. Through its ability to be a symbol of the group, retaining their cultural identity while representing their present relation with

the community. Ultimately becoming a catalyst for cultural growth and education within the community. While eventually growing to be an artifact representative of the people and an ambassador to the community.

In my specific project I shall be looking at the Native American cultural group within and around the metropolitan area of Bismarck/Mandan North Dakota. This group makes up the next largest racial group in the metropolitan area and the state of North Dakota. While a disproportionate number of the people suffer from financial strains, poor health, and problems with dependency and depression. And yet there is oddly a limited number of identifiable cultural resources for these people within the metropolitan area. Being so I am proposing a cultural artifact for the people that is relevant to their time where the community can seek support for their personal burdens and share in cultural growth. In addition I hope for this piece to relay to the society the cultural groups history, art, and values in a positive manner.

Typology

North Dakota American Indian Center

User groups

Students/teachers

Tourists

Citizens of Bismarck

Citizens In need of Health, Psychological, and Financial Counseling

Employees and Volunteers

Project Elements

Exhibit

Great Hall

Gallery

Breakout spaces

Landscape

Site

Region

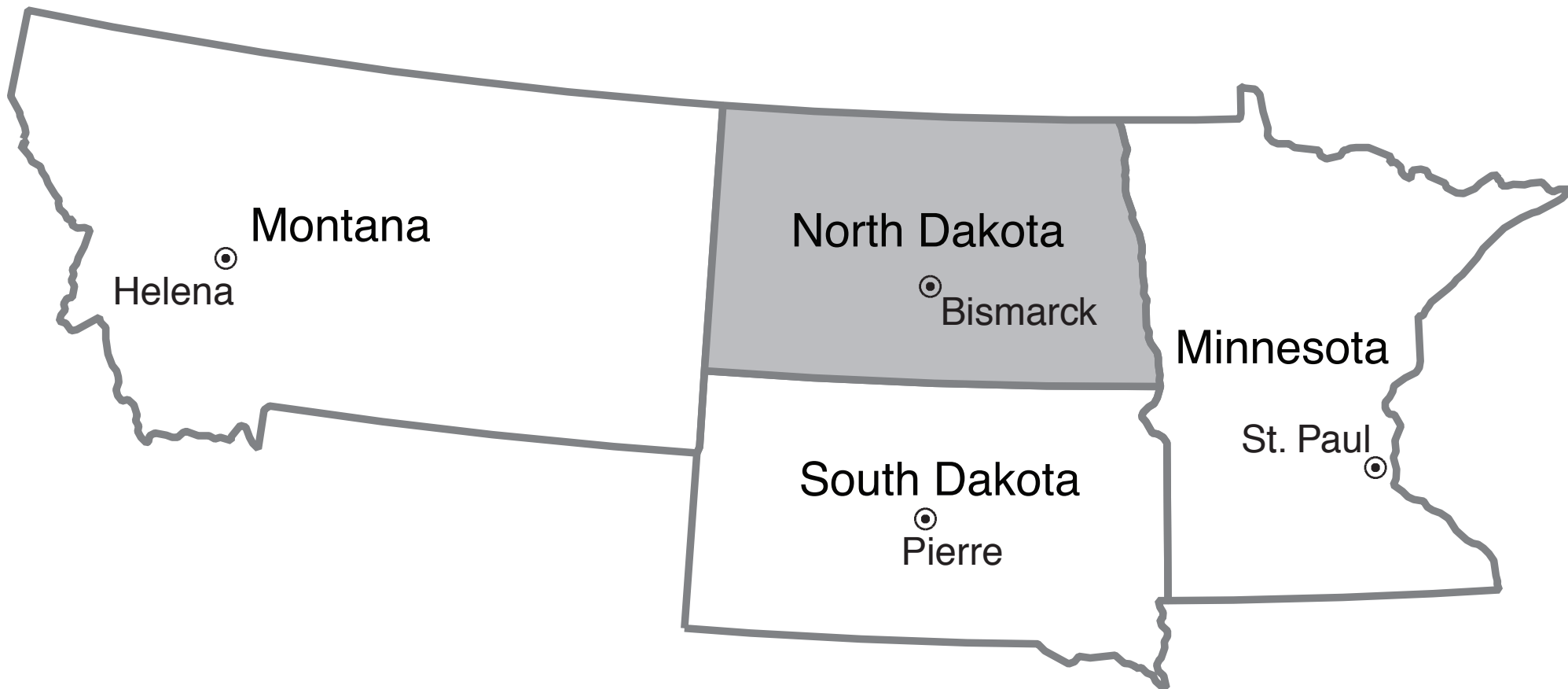
North Dakota is on the top edge of the American Midwest and is a rich area for Native American culture. Holding within this specific state four prominent Native American reservations and many other cultural settlements. In this region the Native American population is also the second highest racial group and historic population of the land.



Site

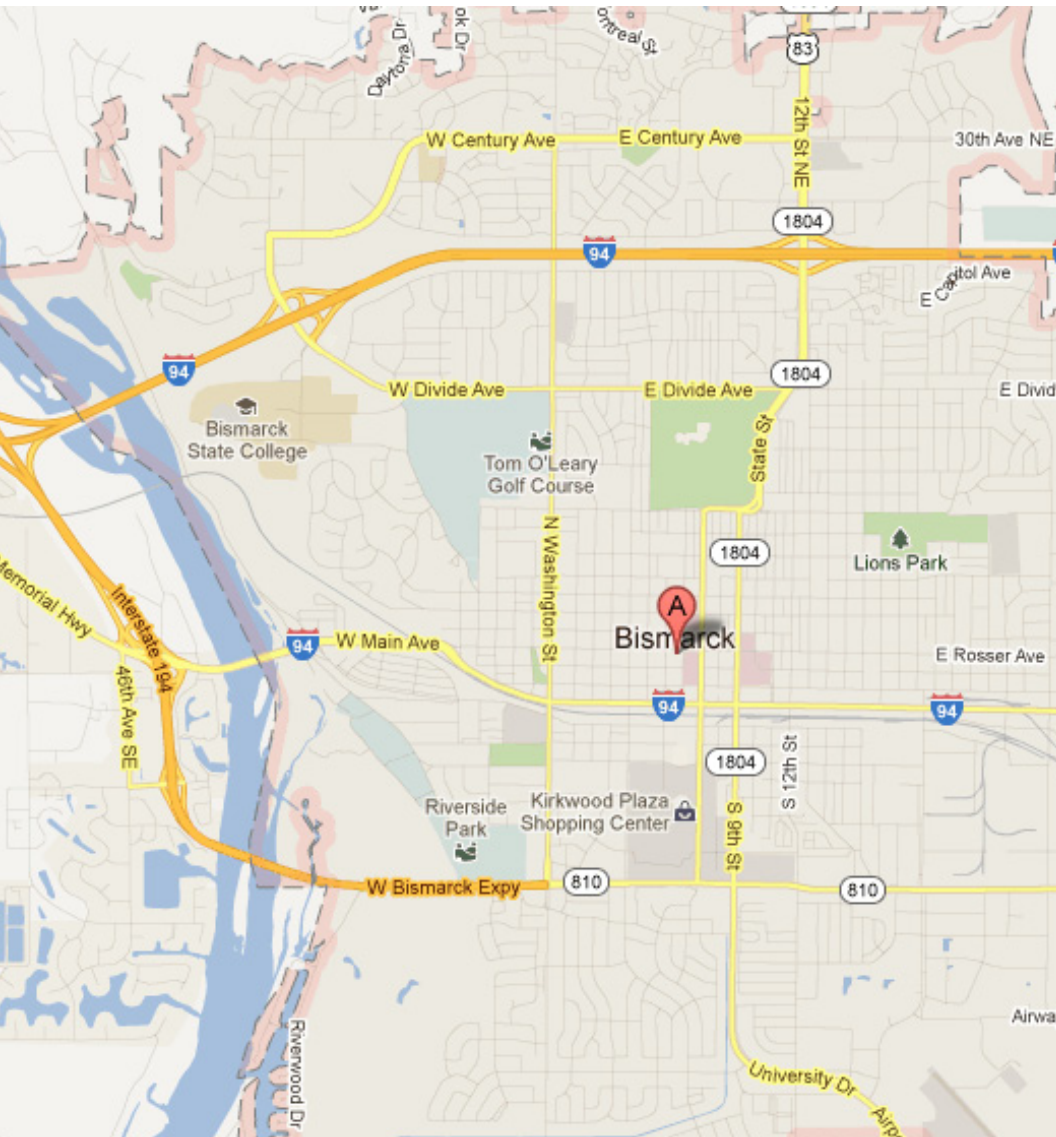
City

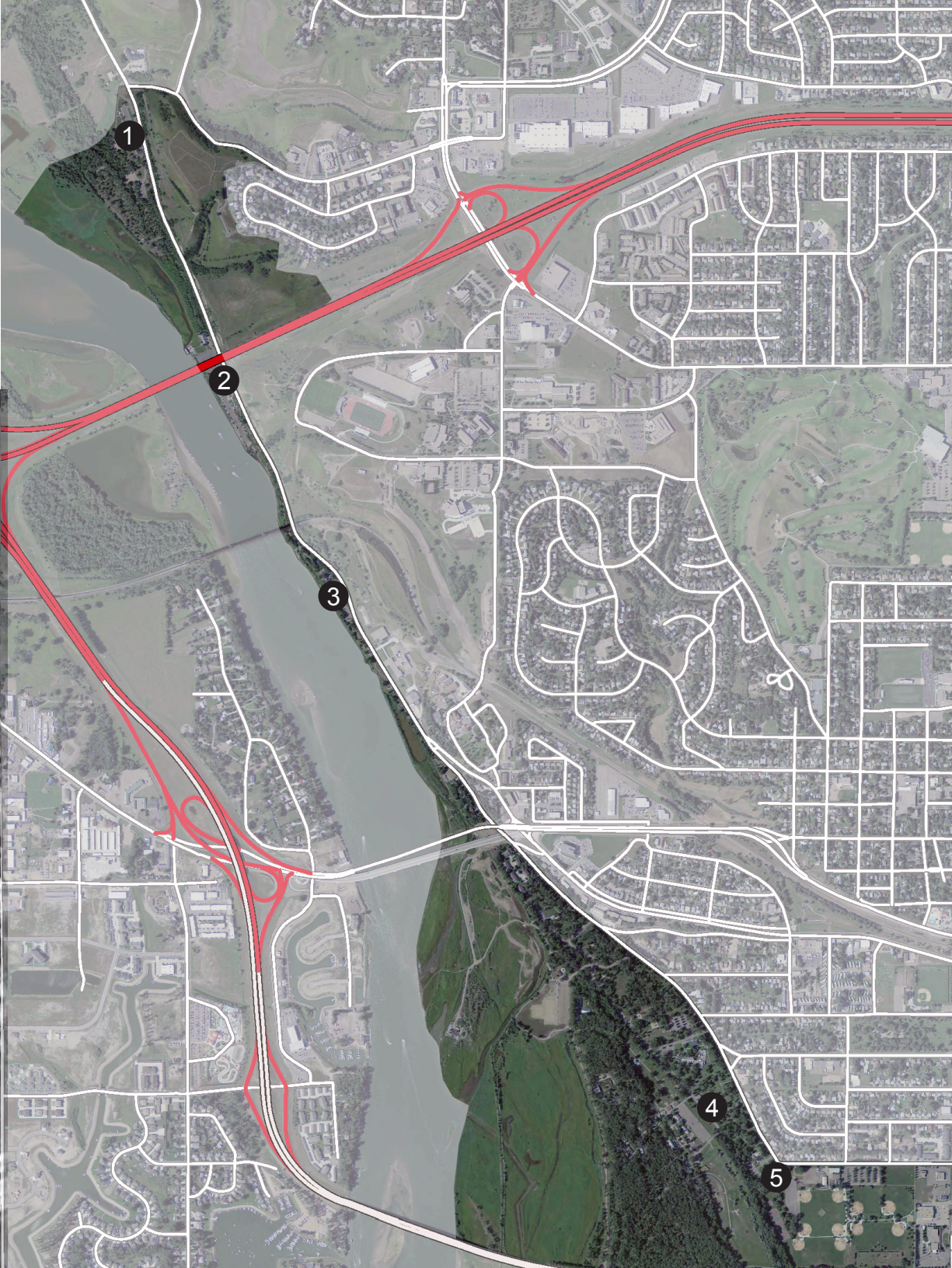
Bismarck is the Capital city of North Dakota and has a population of 61,217 of which nearly 5% are of Native American ancestry, being the largest non caucasian cultural group within the city. The city is also the center for state governmental decisions and is a cultural and economic hub for the state. Along with being surrounded by an array of Native American cultural sites such as the United Tribes Technical College, Chief Looking's Earthlodge Village, Fort Abraham Lincoln State Park, and Double Ditch historical Site.



Site

The site will be located within the Pioneer Park Overlook in Bismarck, North Dakota which also houses the site of Chief Looking's Earthlodge Village. This historical site has been in decline over the years but remains a strong cultural and visual site. The Site was originally occupied by the Mandan Indian Tribe, from 1675- 1780. Marked by 43 earthlodge depressions, and a number of cache pit mouth depressions. In 1930, the Bismarck Parks and Recreation District acquired the property and in 1934 Civilian Conservation Corps conducted an archaeological investigation of the site. Later constructing 3 reproductions of three excavated lodges, all three have now been destroyed by fire.





Sculptures

Along the trails of the river are a number of sculptures and installations relevant to the history of the river basin. Some of these are recreations of historic figures and tools while others are artistic interpretations of the areas cultural past. These interpretive sculptures are installments from the United Tribes Technical College's art students and a gateway to their peoples cultural past. A wonderful addition to an already beautiful trail and another reason in why I choose the pioneer overlook as my site. Being that the site can be a start or end to a cultural and historical journey along this beautiful river trail.



Project Emphasis

“ Monuments last much longer than words. Civilizations are remembered by buildings. There is nothing more important than architecture.”

- Philip Johnson

What is architecture's role in defining a cultural group's present relation within the larger society. Philip Johnson has said “ Monuments last much longer than words. Civilizations are remembered by buildings. There is nothing more important than architecture.” So in my search for a way to define our uniqueness as people I see nothing more apt to represent and define a group than architecture. Simple examples of this idea can be easily seen in way chains brand their buildings or the monumental stature of governmental buildings. Though with my thesis I hope to find a way in which to create a culturally significant artifact which would be able to serve as a catalyst in the growth of the community. By representing the people in a honorable manner and creating a point for cultural exchange. Ideally being able to serve as a monument to the community's diversity and acceptance.

Research

Urban Indian

Our nation as a whole has seen an increase in the Native American population at a greater rate than any other minority and surprisingly more than half of the population is located in metropolitan areas outside of the reservations (Schneider, 1994).

Growing up between two cultures has led to a difference of opinion in which culture Native Americans accept to be their own. Jane Schneider's (1990) text has characterized 4 ideals felt within the Native American community; traditional, transitional, marginal, and bicultural.

Traditional - strongly supportive of Indian values while caring little for non Indian values (22%)

Transitional - thinks negatively of Indian values and believes in an assimilation with the modern society (47%)

Marginal - can see no value in either culture (16%)

Bicultural - thinks of themselves as living in two worlds which they integrate into their lives (23%)

In addition to changing cultural ideals Native Americans are also struggling against financial inequalities, failing education, and health issues compared to other residents within the metropolitan (Peterson 2007).

Compared to the general population, urban Indians have:

- 38 percent higher rates of accidental deaths
- 54 percent higher rates of diabetes
- 126 percent higher rates of liver disease and cirrhosis
- 178 percent higher rates of alcohol-related deaths¹⁵
- The poverty rate of urban Indians is 20.3 percent compared to 12.7 percent for the general urban population.
- The unemployment rate of urban Indians is 1.7 times higher than that of non-Indians in urban areas.

(Information from *Urban Indian America* by the National Urban Family Coalition)

Research

Urban Indian

Educational averages of Native Americans has tended to be some of the highest dropout ratings and lowest test scores though that's not true for all areas as Oklahoma specifically, have seen Native Americans at the top of the charts (Peterson 2007).

Though in many cases the education system hasn't been trying to work with the students culture, example being that english would be the only language spoken and teachings focused only a european values (Schneider 1994). This was a way in which the government thought to achieve assimilation of the people but has done more to cripple them, but today many schools across the nation are beginning to accommodate their culture through language mainly.

Which has left Native American's with the highest rates for infant mortality, alcohol related deaths, and diabetes. Mostly stemming from the abuse of alcohol which has been shown to be Native American's greatest crutch at the moment.

Though all of these issues financial, education, and health alike are all solvable issues and the most obvious solution I see lies in community action and support. Native American history is tied to a strong community and I believe that this could be a start in strengthening the Native American population.

Research

Community

The people of this area would keep large extended families stretching to distant relatives and even others we wouldn't currently consider to be family (Schneider 1990). They lived this way to help each other survive in this unforgiving land. This in turn led to tribes having little or no laws because so many of the people were relatives, crime was rarely an issue due to their respectfulness for family, survival, and the tribe.

Even today many Indians who value their heritage continue to make a point to stay connected with their history and the members of the tribe (Schneider 1994).

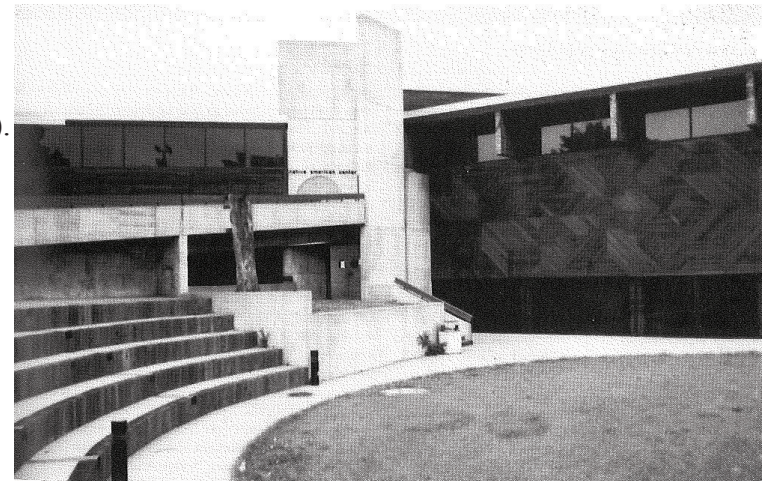
Large scale problem remains to be tribal differences.

Minneapolis American Indian Center.

Thomas Hodne and Gerald Johnson spent two years of researching, designing, and in council with the clients to achieve the following goal.

“Help spur a renewed sense of identity, a truer self image... [through] a physical form that would proclaim to the Indian community and the rest of the city an emerging pride in the Indian heritage.” (Krinsky 1996)

The end result is one of the nation's oldest Native American Cultural Centers providing social and cultural services to the people of the area since 1975 (Minneapolis American Indian Center, 2009). Though the true success is in the 10,000 members of the community it serves annually (Minneapolis American Indian Center, 2009). As well as the work it's done to create a supportive and strong community.



Research

Architecture

Architecture's role as a catalyst I feel stems from its power to be a symbol. Frank Lloyd Wright called pieces of architecture he found important "great granite books" referring to the story a building tells of the people, time, and place (Goldberger, 2009).

One example of architecture's power as symbol was Abraham Lincoln's demand to continue the construction of the dome upon the capital during the civil war (Goldberger, 2009). Despite the lack of manpower and money he knew this was a symbol of the nation coming together and there was no speech he could deliver that could relay a more powerful message (Goldberger, 2009).

I personally agree with Goldberger's (2009) statement:

We build, in the end, because we believe in a future - nothing shows commitment to the future like architecture. And we build well because we believe in a better future, because we believe that there are few greater gifts we can give the generations that will follow us than great works of architecture, both as a symbol of our aspirations of community and as a symbol of our belief not only in the power of imagination but in the ability of society to continue to create anew.

The Native American population of the Bismarck/Mandan area I feel deserves and could grow from an architectural embodiment of their values. A piece which could become an urban center for cultural preservation, education, and sharing. Helping to strengthen the community of the Native people as well as the Native American relation to the metropolitan community.

Historic Context

Beginning in the early 1700's these tribes had contact with white traders and specifically in 1738 with La Verendrye a french explorer who was the first recorded contact with Indians within this territory and more importantly recorded a friendly contact (Schneider, 1990).

Though in 1837 a small pox epidemic struck the Missouri river basin taking nearly 2/3 of the Mandan population and slightly less of the Hidatsa (Schneider, 1990). This loss of population and threat from other tribes forced the two tribes to move from the Heart river and establish a new village up the Missouri called Like-a-Fishhook. They were later joined by the Arikara in 1866 making the village a trading stop for steamboats and a diverse cultural center.

Many of the tribes around the late 1800's are making treaties for the reservations though a conflict arises in Minnesota and works its way to North Dakota becoming the only army encounter to happen here but one that led to much distrust and conflict. This began with a treaty between the Dakota and the state of Minnesota that failed and led to small pockets of violence though the majority of the Dakota made a point to leave in peace and have no part in it. Army action was subsequently taken to bring order to the unruly Dakota Indians which resulted in the Battle of Whitestone Hill. A battle that was brought upon an innocent hunting party unrelated to the acts which resulted in their massacre (Schneider 1990).

Though this accusation was most of what amounted as Indian hostility largely remained directed at other Indians. Events did occur though it was largely soldiers defending Indians they traded with which eventually led to a few events of hostility toward the settlers in turn attracting military attention. This tension between the military and the native people reached its peak in 1864 when a group of five thousand natives were attacked by general Sully.

At this point Natives are seen by whites as uneducated and ruthless people making their prosecution acceptable and their reform necessary. Transforming the reservations into places of reform for the Native Americans limiting the languages they could speak, rituals and ceremonies they could perform, and even gardens at times weren't allowed.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs was established and the agents took control of the reservations enforcing the acts of Congress. One of the first of which being the Allotment Act which gave a parcel of land to each Native on the reservation and sold off the rest of the land to fund the community.

Historic Context

In addition many members of the tribe continue to distrust whites and our government while many others embrace a life within the American society. So what can be done to help a group with such diverse opinions of their place in the overarching society.

Cultural Values

Retaining cultural value through stories their form of record keeping. Culture is also retained through language and despite the many languages this still an place in which it can be shared and practiced. Then the cultures qualities of selflessness and community through family ties are qualities which can valuable in our society today.

All tribes are unique in their own ways so I will be looking at overarching themes.

Tribes of this area believe that the environment around them is host to living entities which they could learn from or influence. Being so many stories relate events and lessons learned through stories taught or learned from “other-than-human-persons” (Nabokov, 2006).

The deities and natural entities are remembered and proclaimed in stories, rituals, and self sacrifice. Men of the tribe would commit themselves to fasting and self mutilation to show humbleness to the deities or living entities to maintain good relations and gain knowledge. This would be repeated until an entity had spoken to or passed knowledge onto the person which is how the people discovered many of the sacred lands and objects of their history (Schneider 1994) .

Being so the land, its forces, and creatures have had religious history tied into the Native American culture making it difficult to think of the land in the terms of the European. Cheif Robbie Dick explained it in this manner: “It is very hard to explain to the white people what we mean by land is part of our life” “Were like rocks and trees” (Nabokov, 2006). Showing their humbleness in belief that they are a part of the land no better or worse than any other entity.

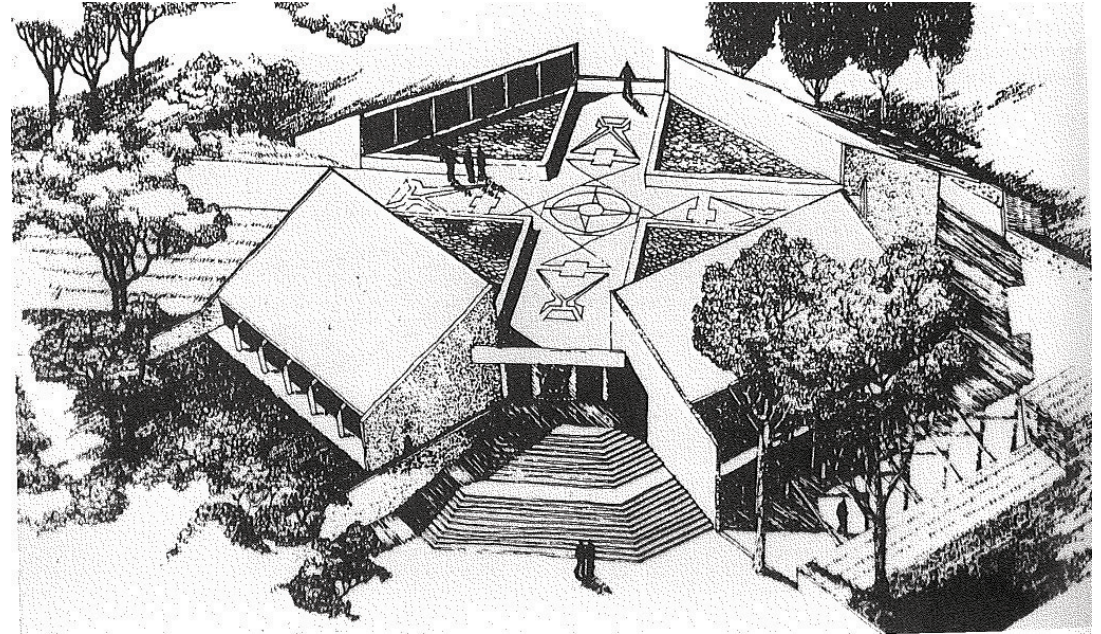
Case Studies

Daybreak Star Center

Designed for the Indian people of the nation located within Seattle, WA. The building was design from Black Elk's Vision explained by Krinsky (1996)

- "vision of a sheltering tree and daybreak start dropping to earth rooting. From its single stem sprouted four differently colored blossoms, each now associated with the four principal architectural divisions."

Each of these divisions representing a cultural region; the Pacific Coast and Alaska, the Plains and Basin, the Southwest, and the eastern woodlands. The building itself containing culture and history from across the nation but not identifying solely with any one tribe. Also within the building the foundation offers not only a museum and gallery but a preschool program, social service agencies, and vocational preparation. Being so the project has been a success over the years in serving and educating the people of Seattle.



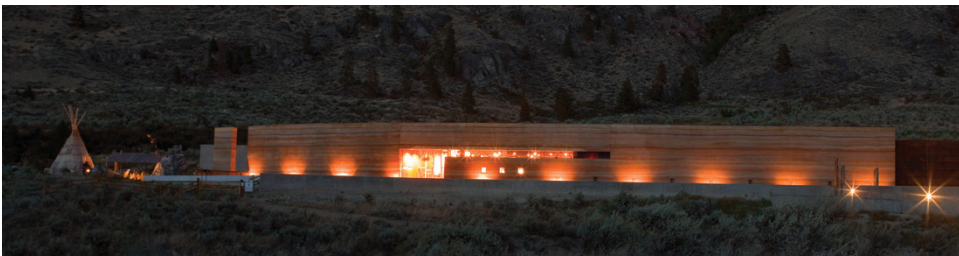
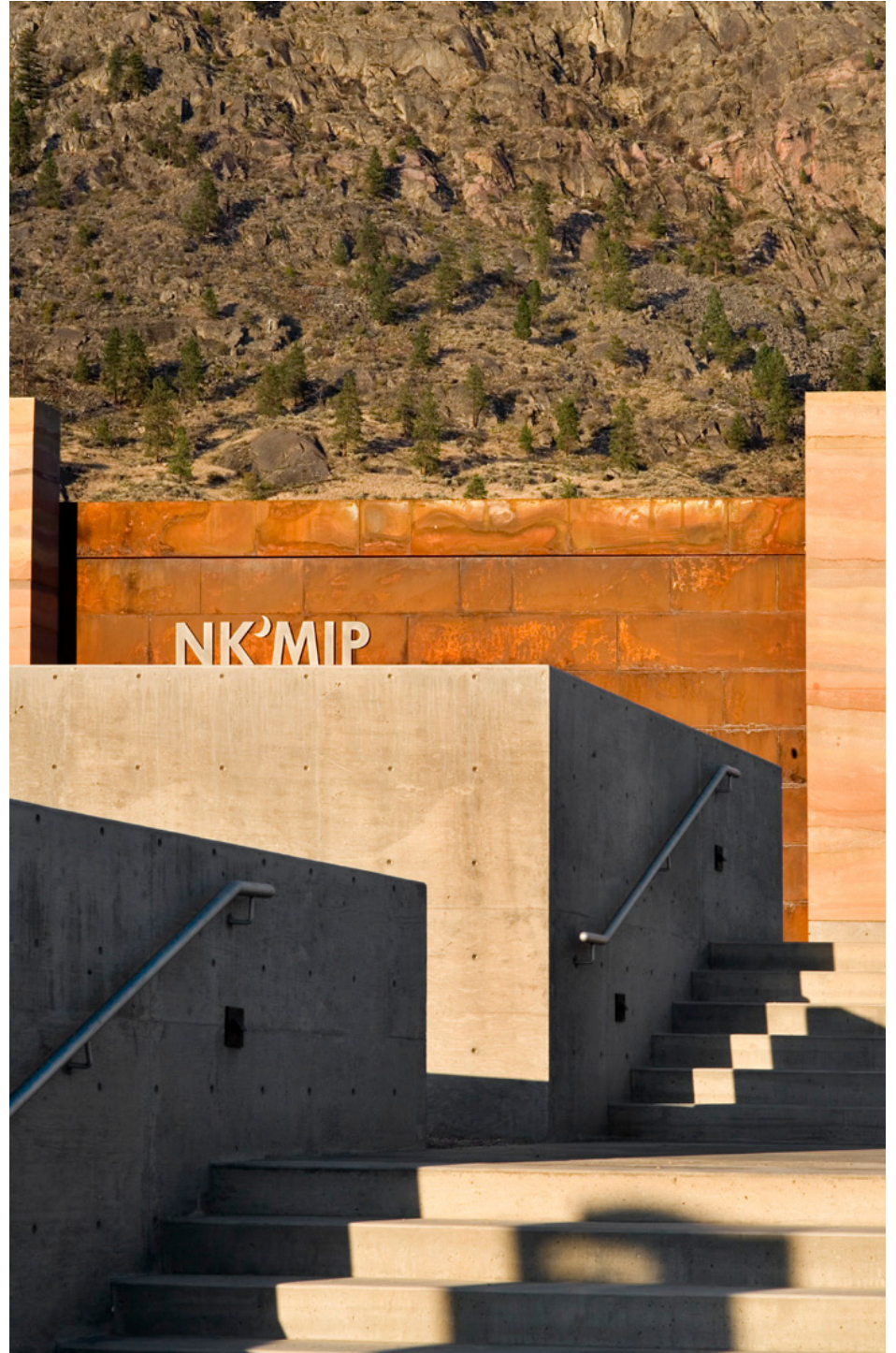
Case Studies

Pyramid Lake Cultural Center

Is a museum for the Paiute Tribe located in Nixon, NV. This project caught my eye because of its typology but more importantly its design. The design was done by Dennis Numkena and I feel Krinsky (1996) explained the design circumstances well: “In absence of a usable historic model, the architect designed a building accessible to Native people of many nations; rooted in the land, it also aspires. One of the most imaginative designs in contemporary Amerindian architecture.” I personally enjoyed the design and its use of the sites resources to create a connection to the people and the land through the reoccurring stone on the inside and out as well as the dynamic physical form. A wonderful project and design that showed innovation when looking for a present day embodiment of the Native peoples culture.



Nk'MIP Desert Cultural Center





Location:

Osoyoos, BC

Architect:

**Hotson Bakker
Boniface Haden**

area:

12,000 Sq. Ft.

Completion:

2006



The Nk'MIP Desert Cultural Center is a response to the unique desert climate and local aboriginal culture. Exploring architecture's role in representing the cultural past and helping shape the future of the aboriginal culture. Representing the culture through indoor and outdoor exhibits with the building being a piece of the historical site. A portion of the building literally being submerged and covered by the site for sustainable purposes learned from the aboriginal culture. Though what really speaks of the project is the layering of the rammed earth and concrete walls.

The Craig Thomas Discovery and Visitor Center



**Location:**

Moose, Wyoming

Architect:

Bohlin Cywinski Jackson

area:

22,000 Sq. Ft.

Completion:

2007



The uniqueness I found in this building was in the details and its intimate relation to its site. As Peter Bohlin (2009) put it, “We aimed to make a building that is sensibly ordered and surprisingly evocative, shaped to the nature of the land and the people who visit it.” Surprisingly evocative I think was a perfect explanation as they turned views of nature into a gallery and put such detail into their work that each connection was elegant and beautiful in itself. Even taking the time to mimic the geologic reaction of site through their gallery displays or mimic the peaks through the jagged roof and glass. Though the building has more to offer yet as it is designed to weather much in the way an old abandoned barn will when left to the prairie (Lehoux, Riddell & Bohlin, Cywinski, Jackson (Firm), 2009). This move gave the building more character as it continues to visual grow with its visitors. Making it just like an old friend, holding a special place in their heart and undergoing the same hardship as each and everyone of us. Becoming a piece of this wondrous landscape in the most modest manner as its success is in its ability to inspire and focus its visitors on the beauty within the national park.

Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook





Location:

Los Angeles, CA

Architect:

Safdie Rabines Architects

area:

7,200 Sq. Ft.

Completion:

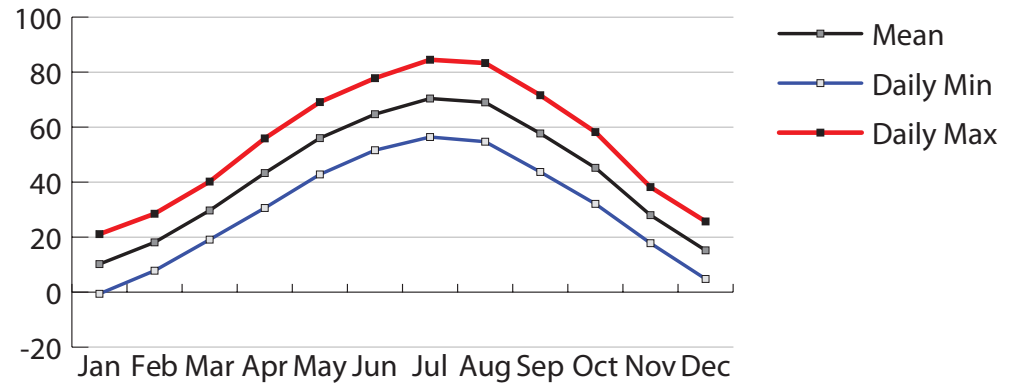
2009



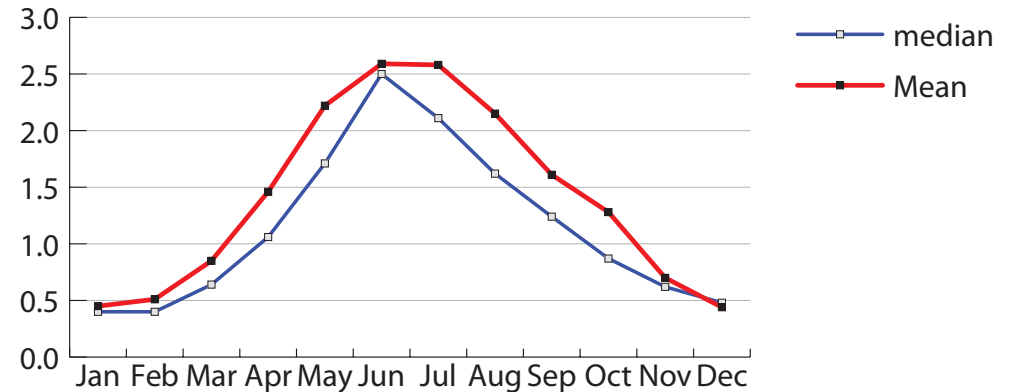
Baldwin Hill Scenic Overlook is an urban state park that rises more than 400 feet above Los Angeles and developments built there were initially guided by one word, “unobtrusive” (Howard, 2009). The plan developed for the site included a visitor center, support building, open-air pavilion, a garden, and a network of trails.

Design: Climate of the Site

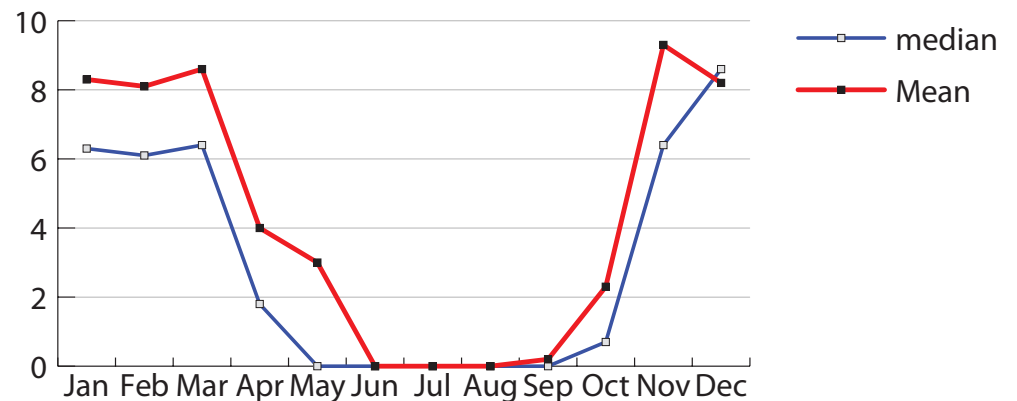
Temperature (Fahrenheit)

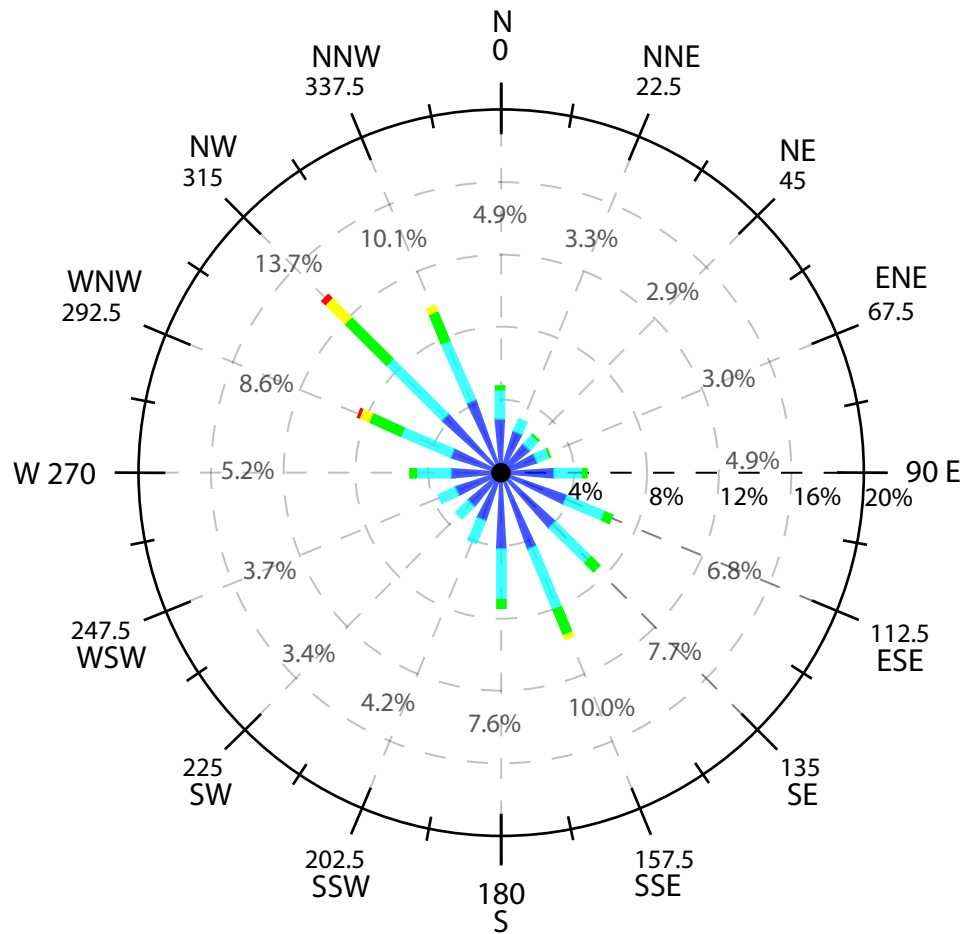


Precipitation (Rain) Inches

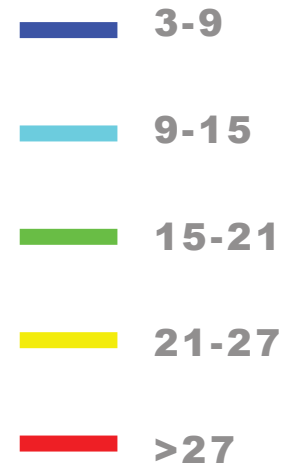


Precipitation (Snow) Inches





Avg Wind Speed (mph)



Design: Site





Site Paths



Primary Road



Road in Site



Gravel Path



Walking Path



Bike Trail





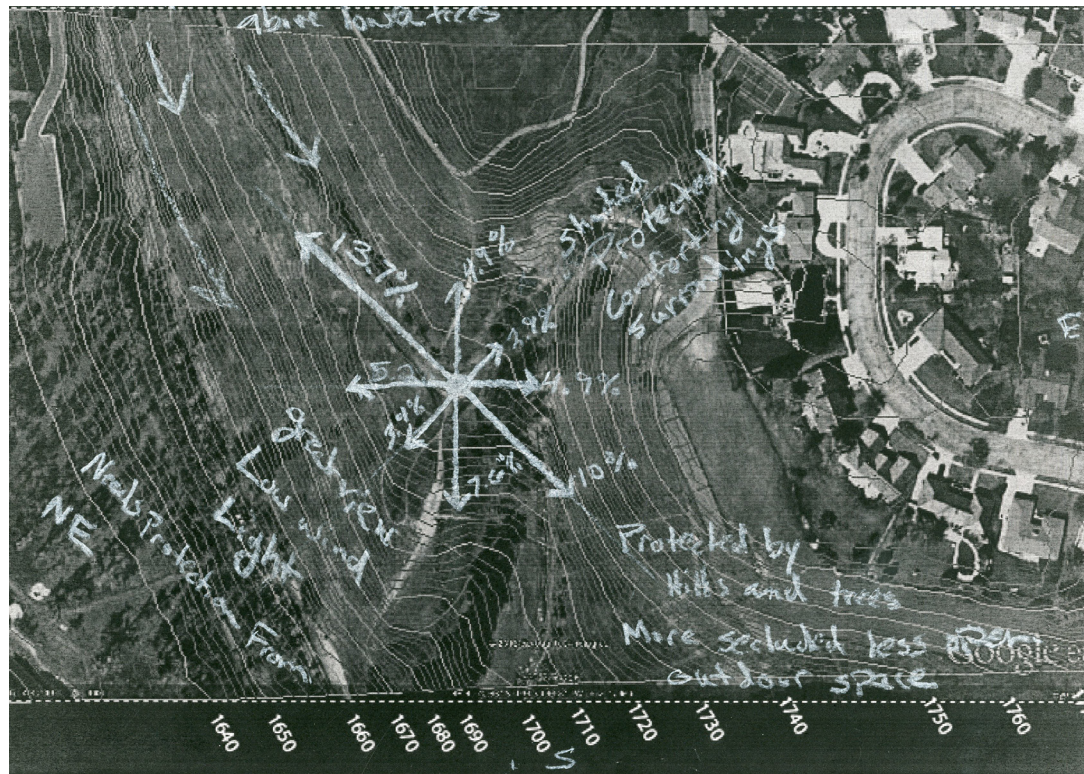
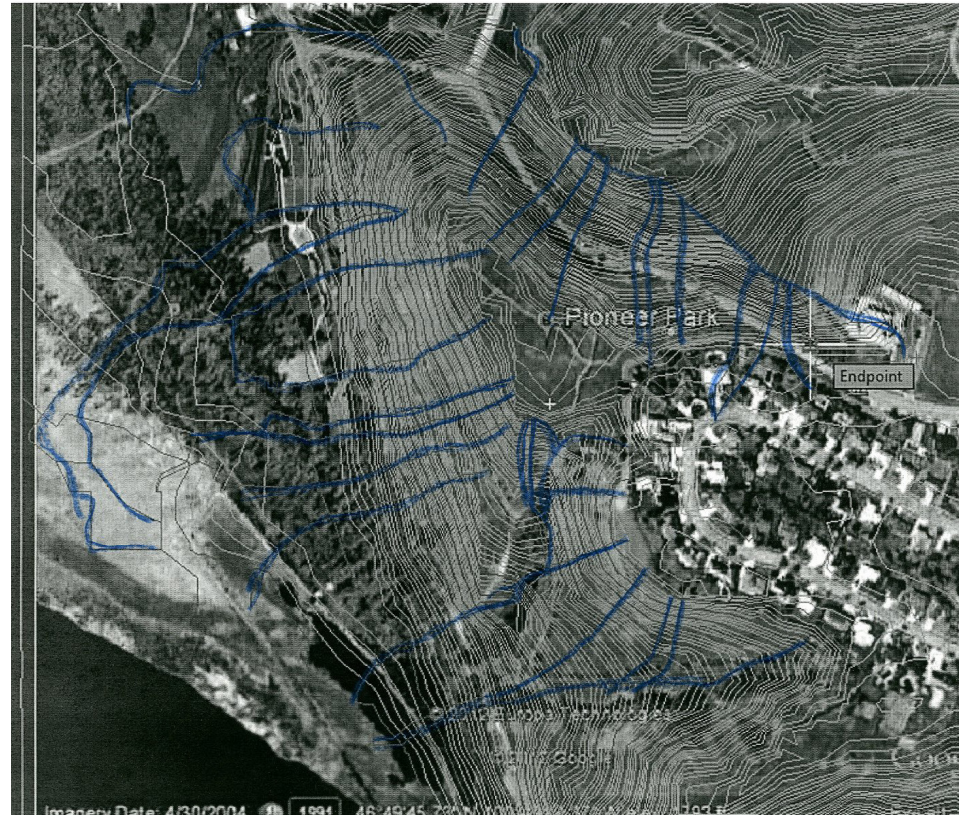
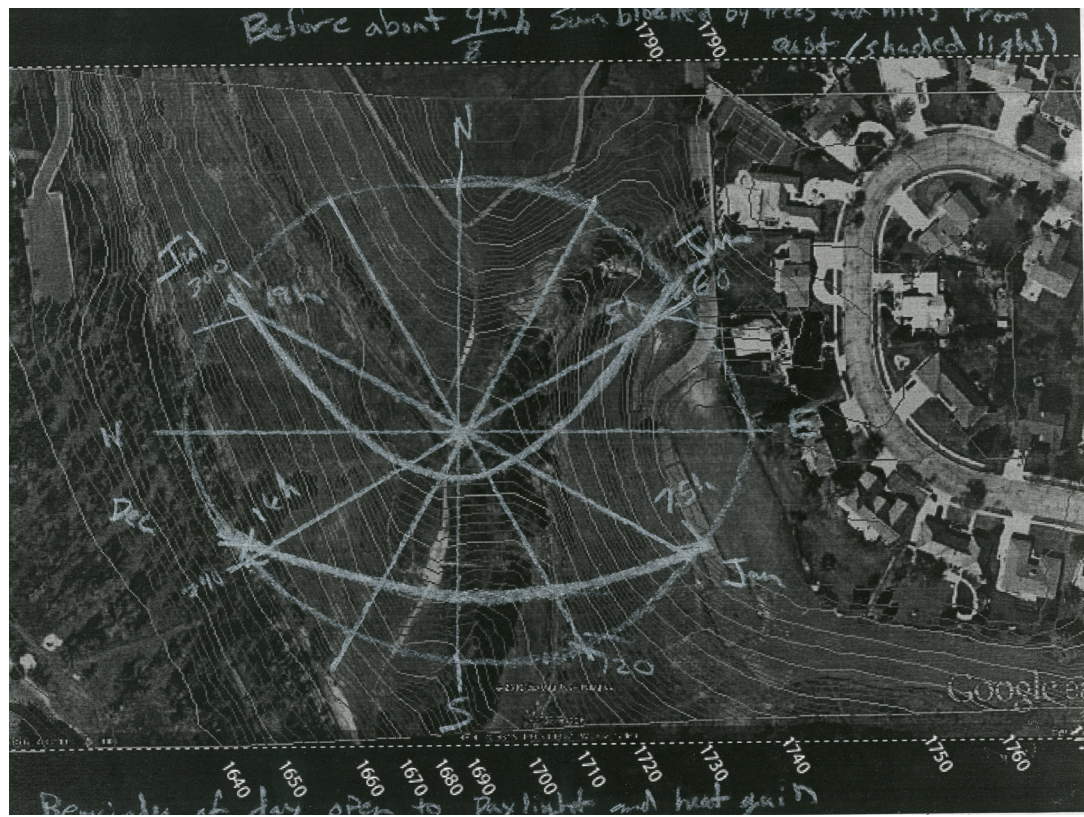












Design: Influences / Parti

Landscape

Flooding Patterns

Cultural history

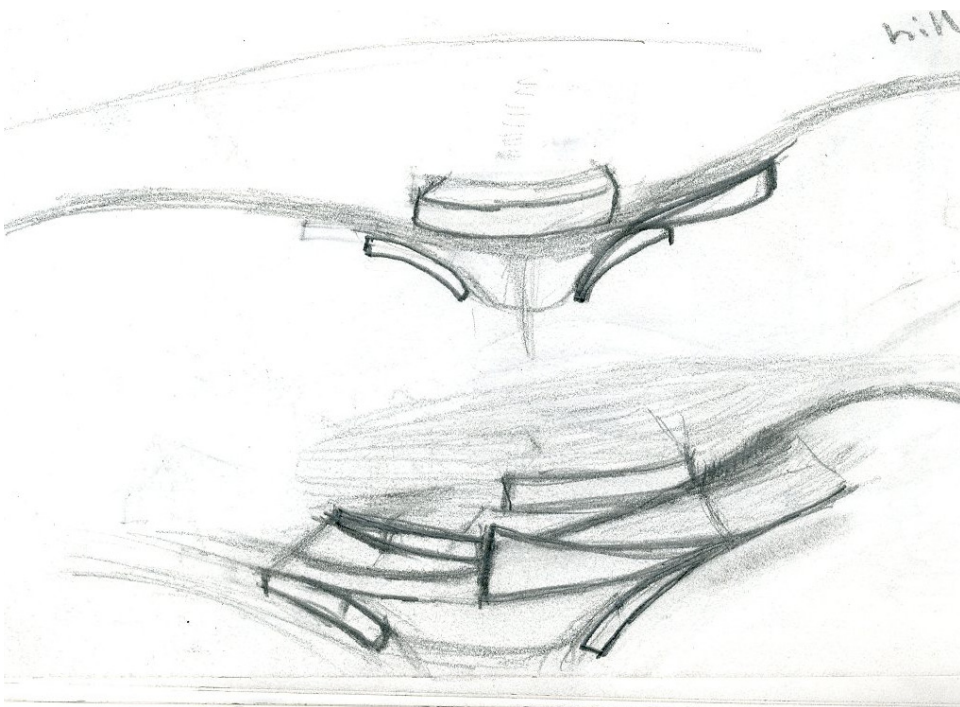
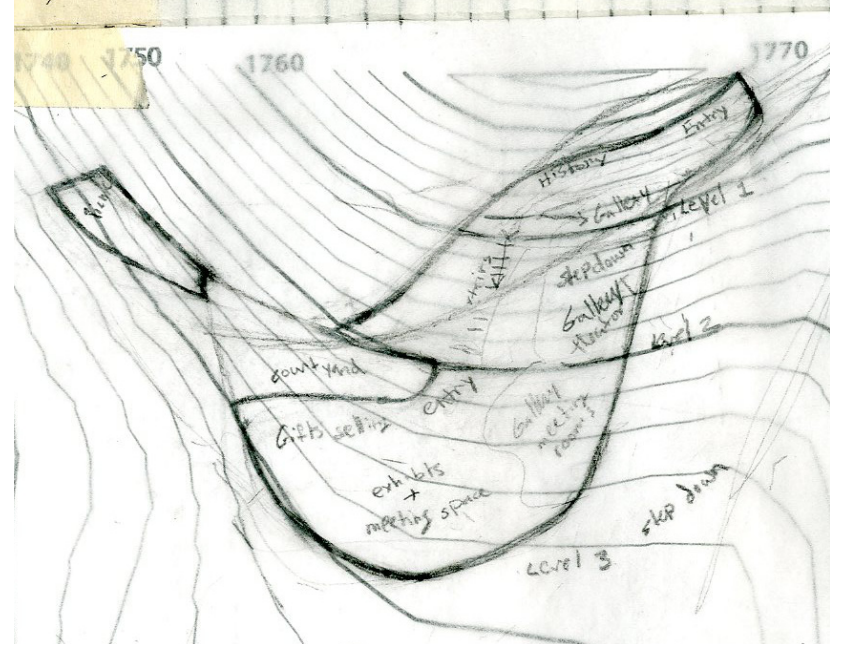
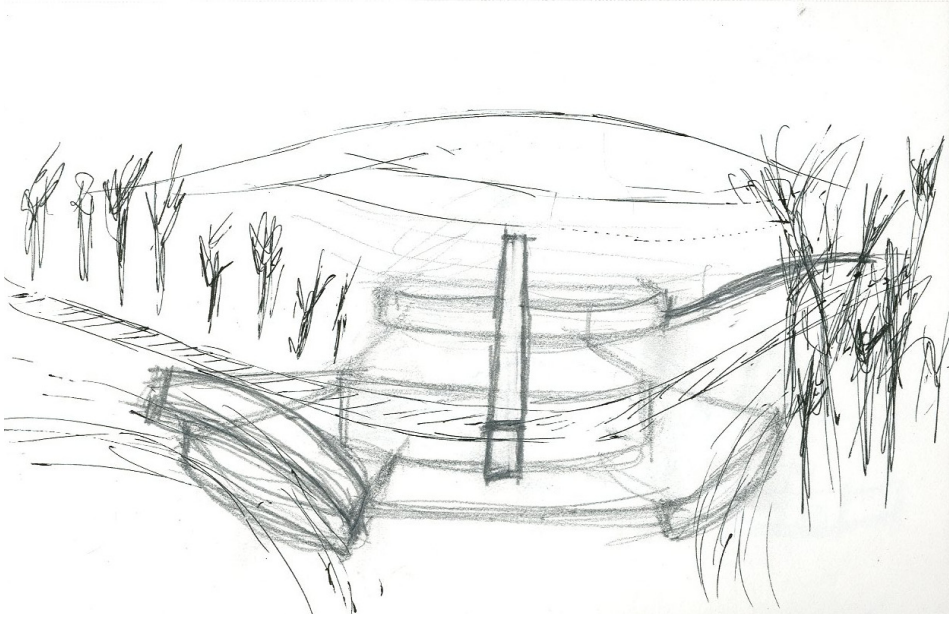
The Lord of Life then desired the first man to make the north bank of the Missouri, while he himself made the south-west bank, which is beautifully diversified with hills, valleys, forests, and thickets. The man, on the contrary, made the whole country flat, with a good deal of wood in the distance. They then met again, and when the lord of life had seen the work of the first man, he shock his head and said, "You have not done this well: all is level, so that it will be impossible to surprise buffaloes or deer, and approach them unperceived. Men will not be able to live there. They will see each other in the plain at too great a distance, and will be unable to avoid each other, consequently they will destroy each other.

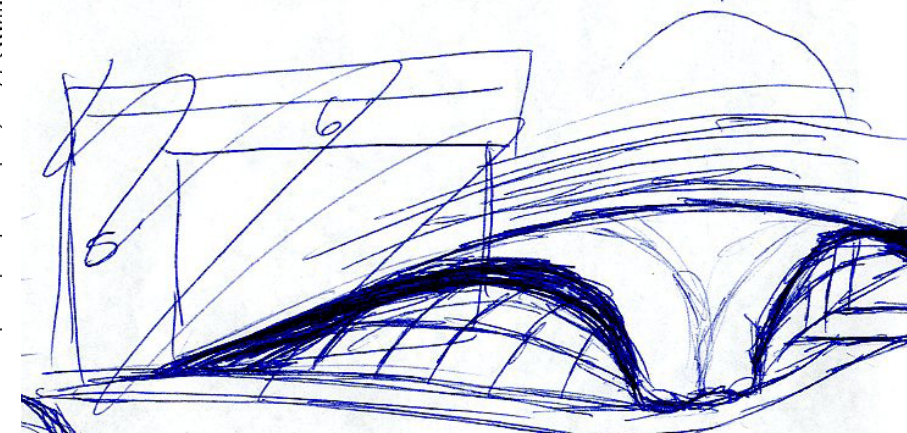
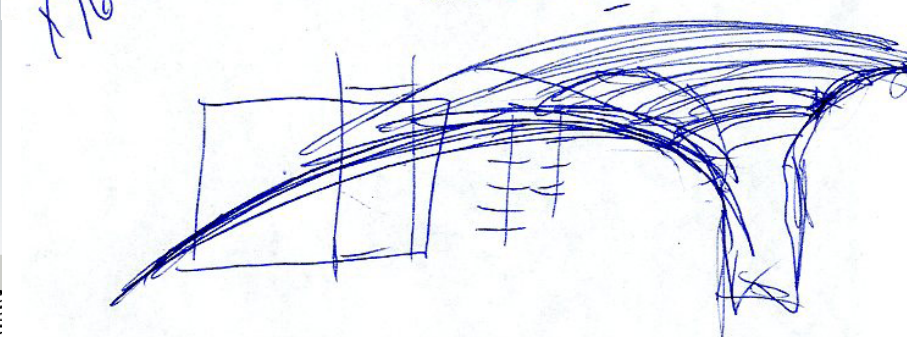
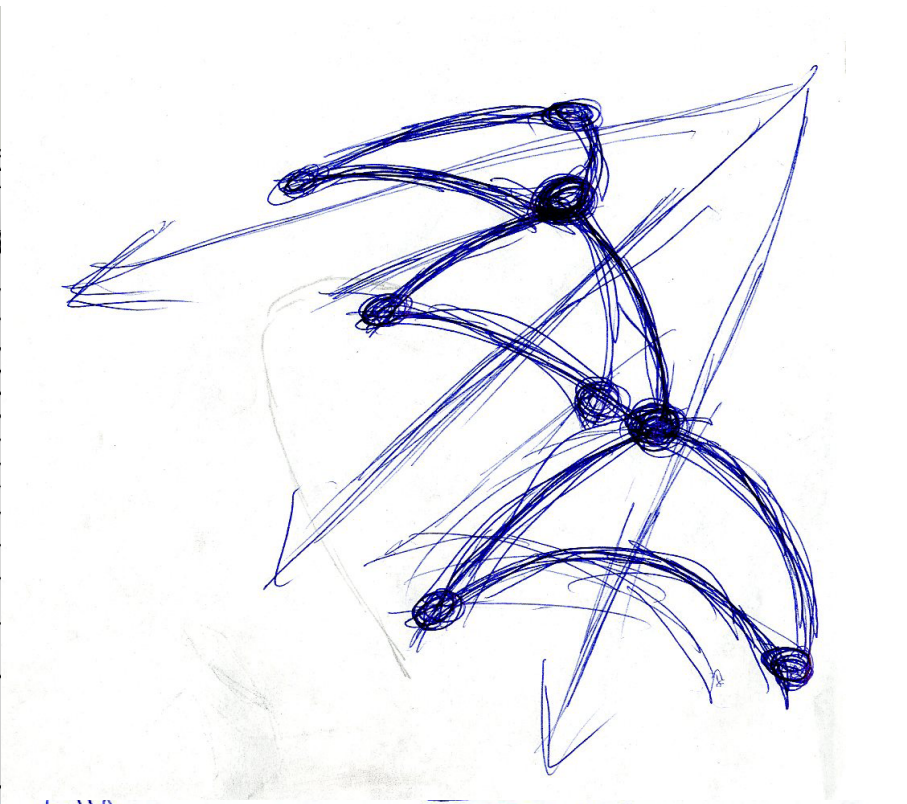
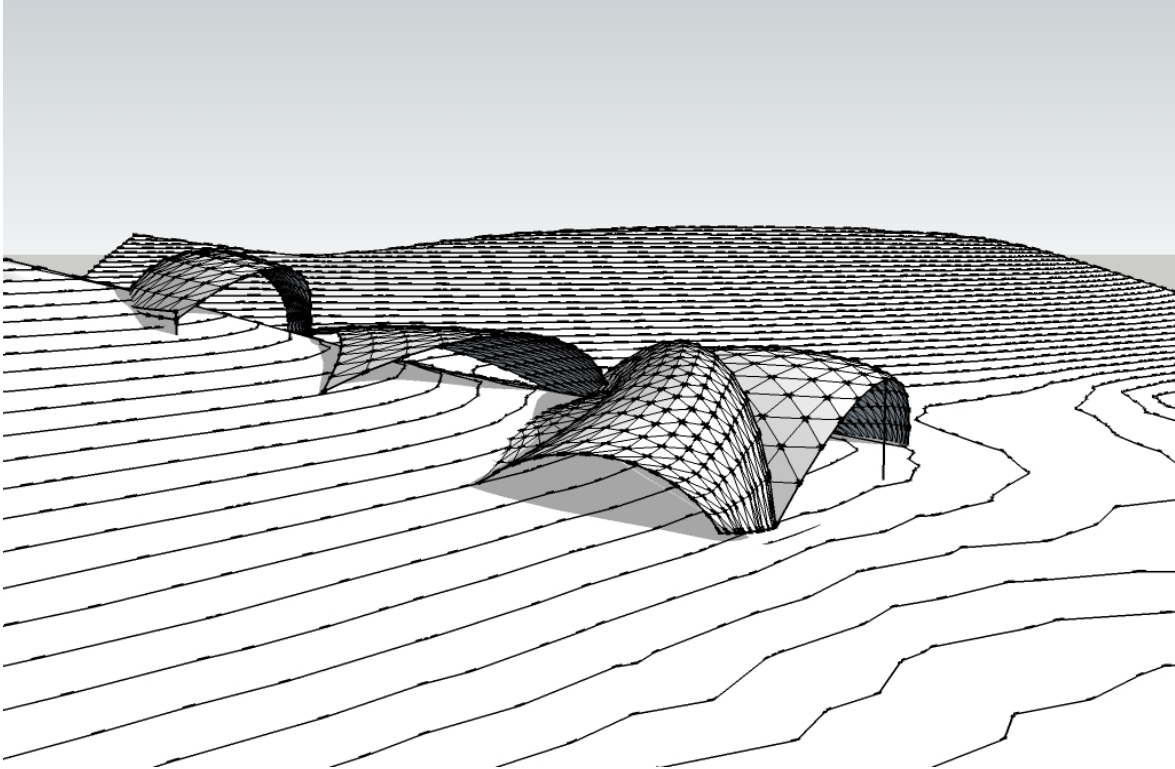
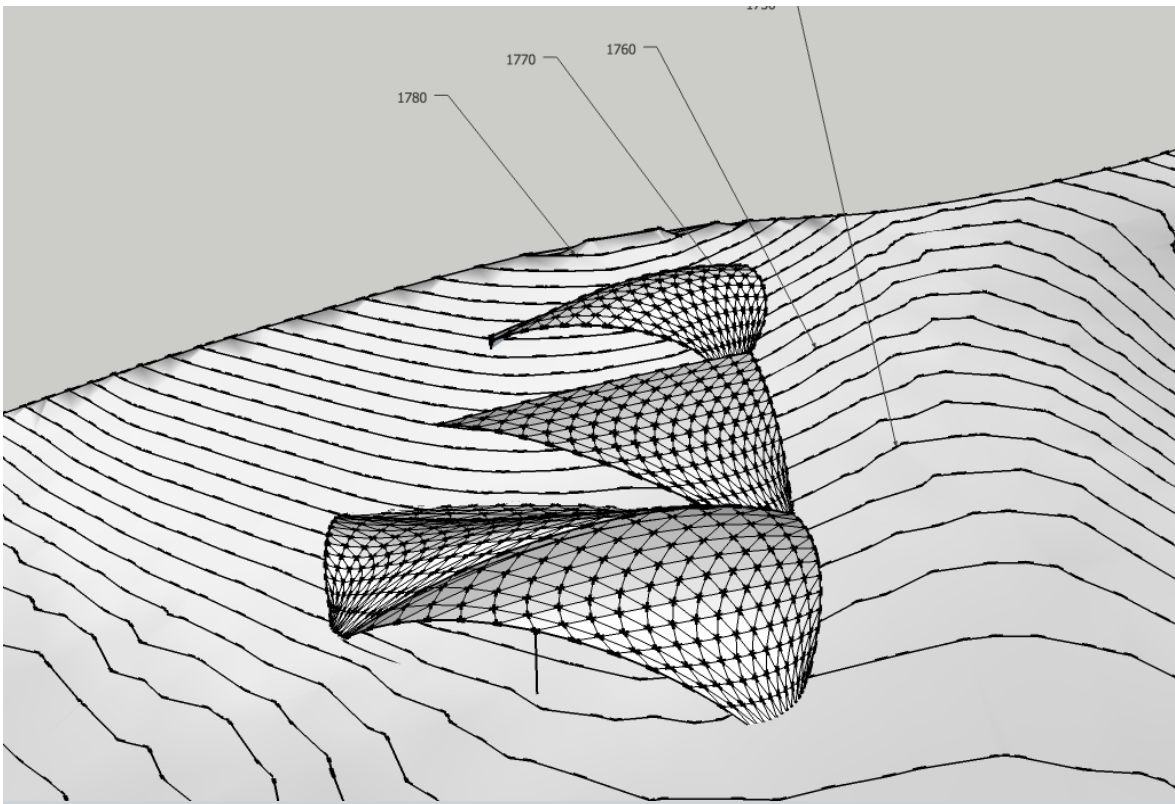
He then took the first man to the other side of the river, and said, "See here, I have made springs and streams in a sufficient abundance, and hills and valleys, and added all kinds of animals and fine wood; here men will be able to live by the chase, and feed on the flesh of those animals.

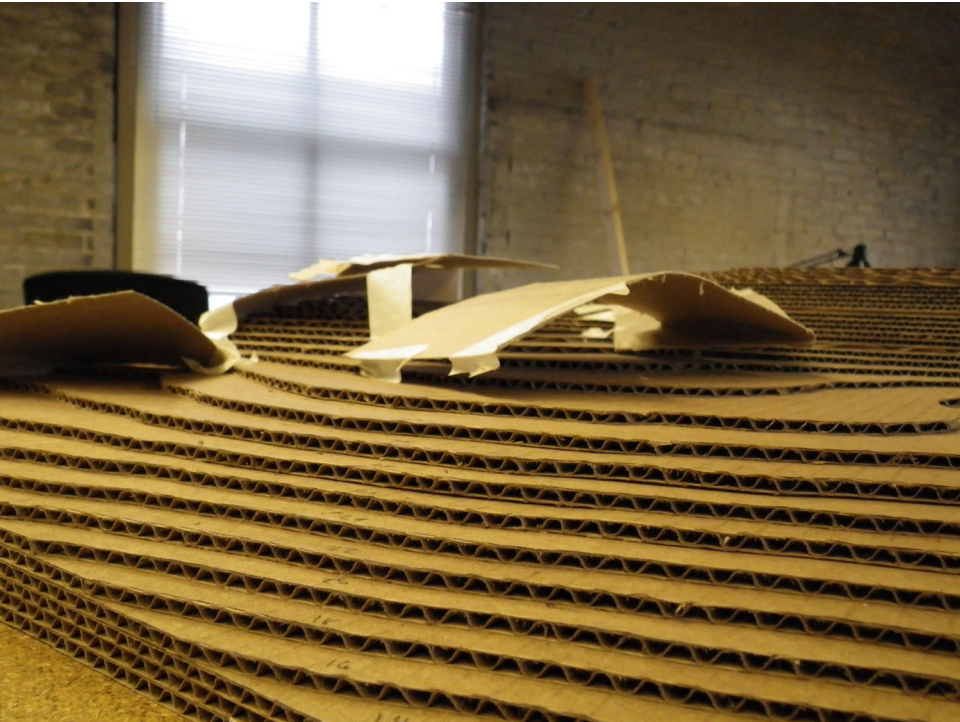
Architecture

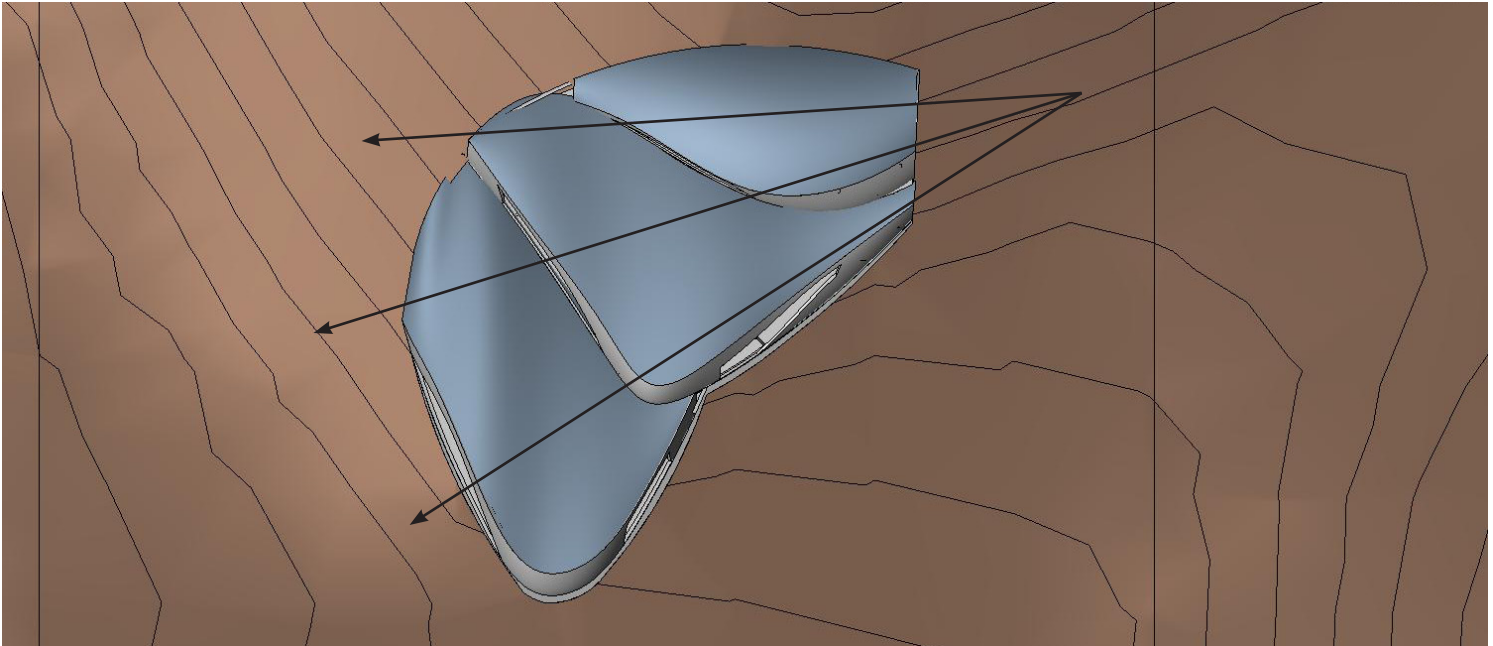
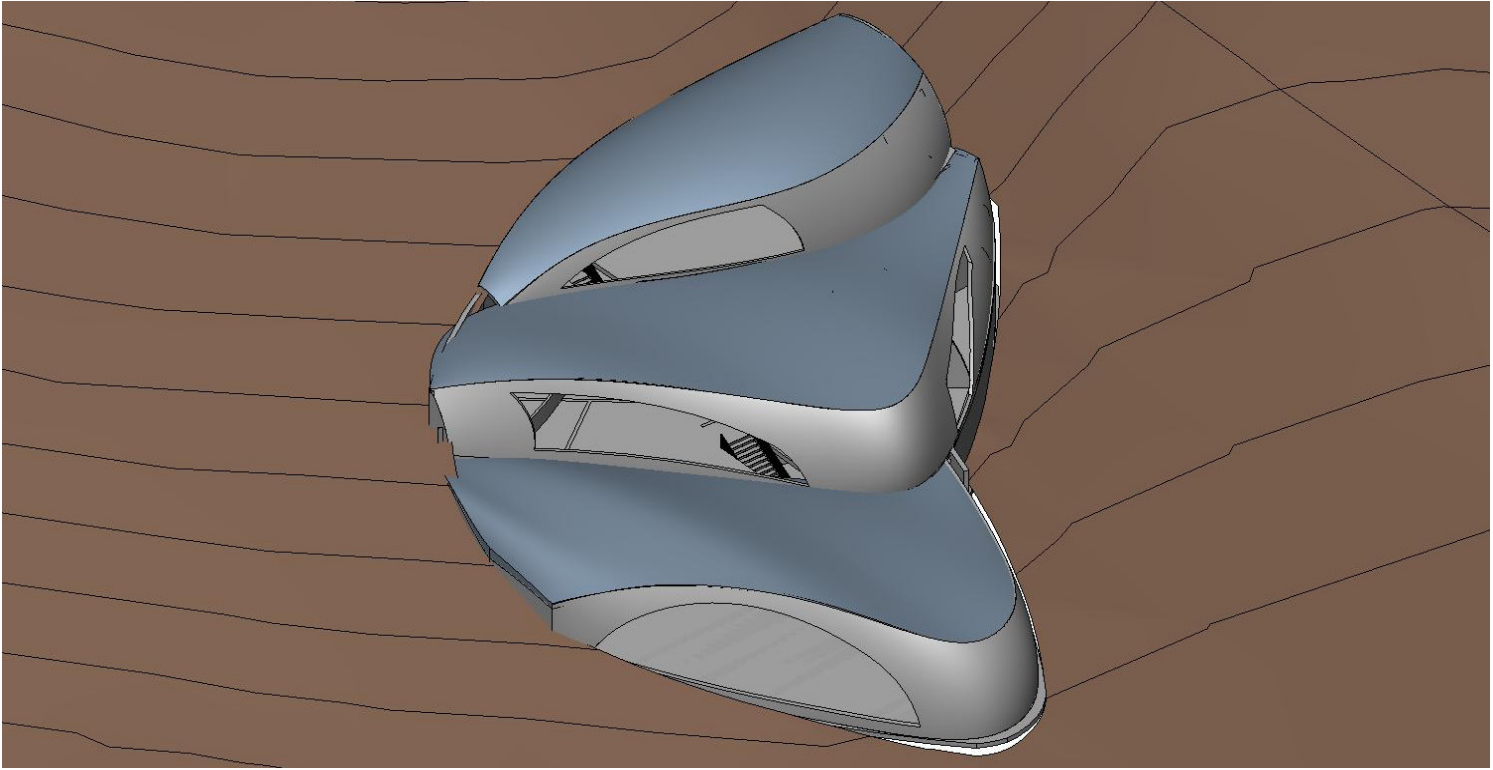


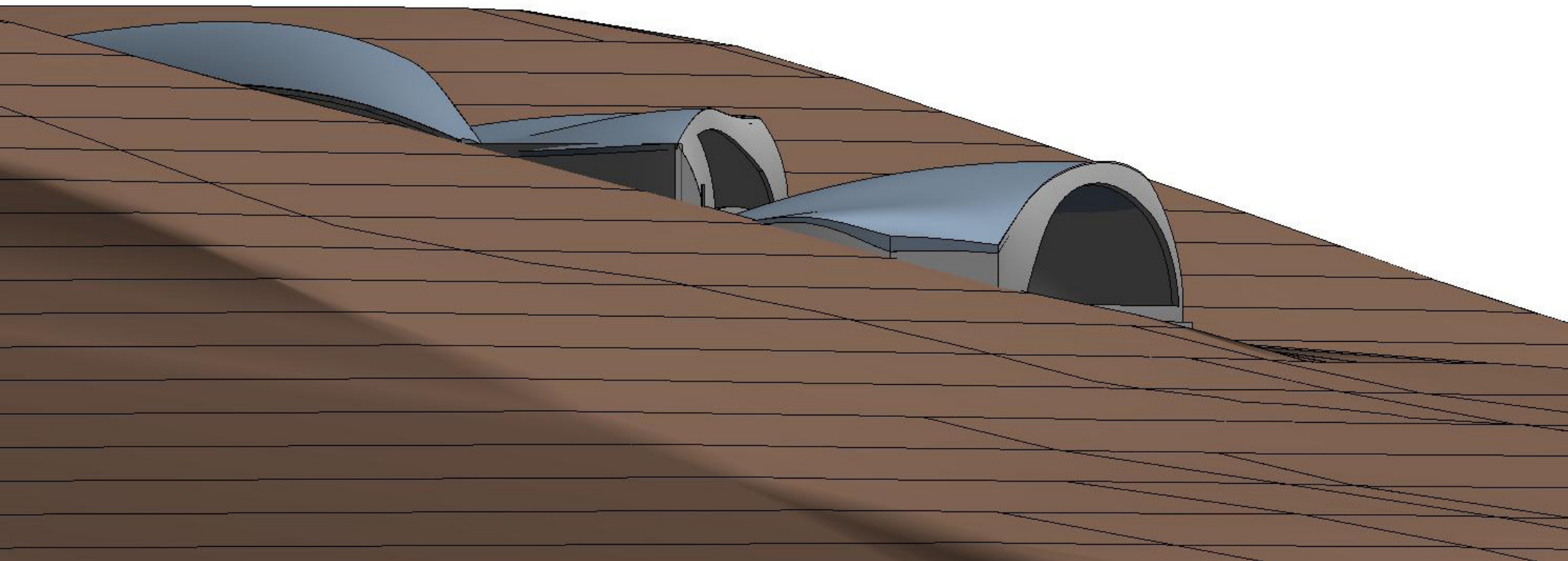
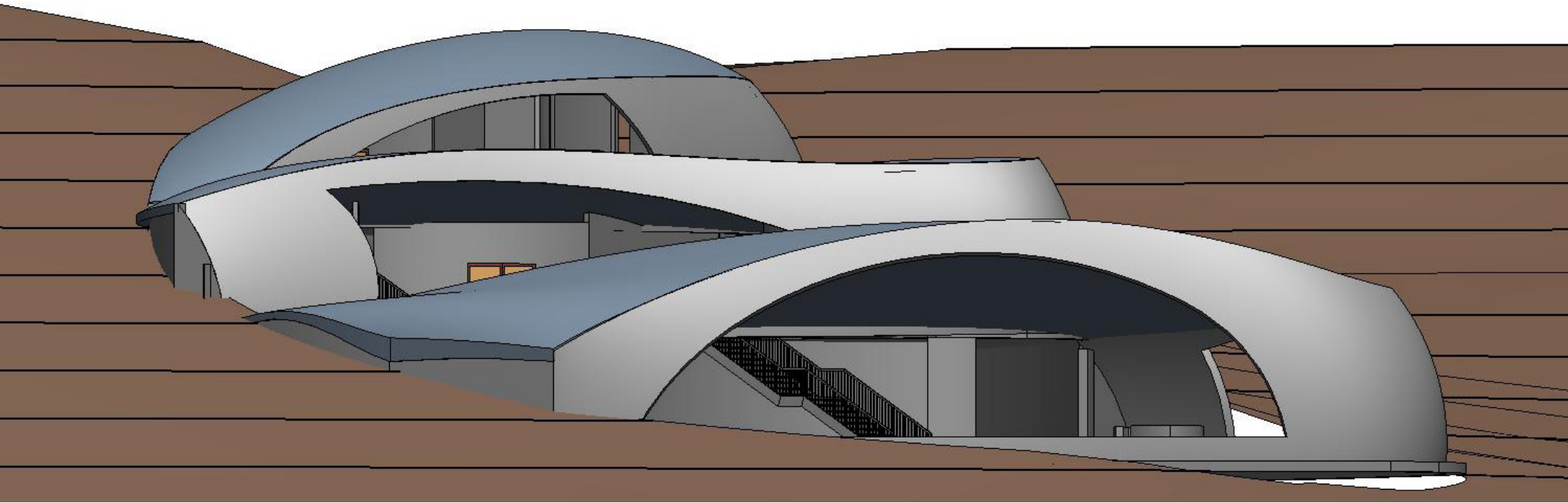
Design: Process















Site Paths



Primary Road



Road in Site



Gravel Path



Walking Path

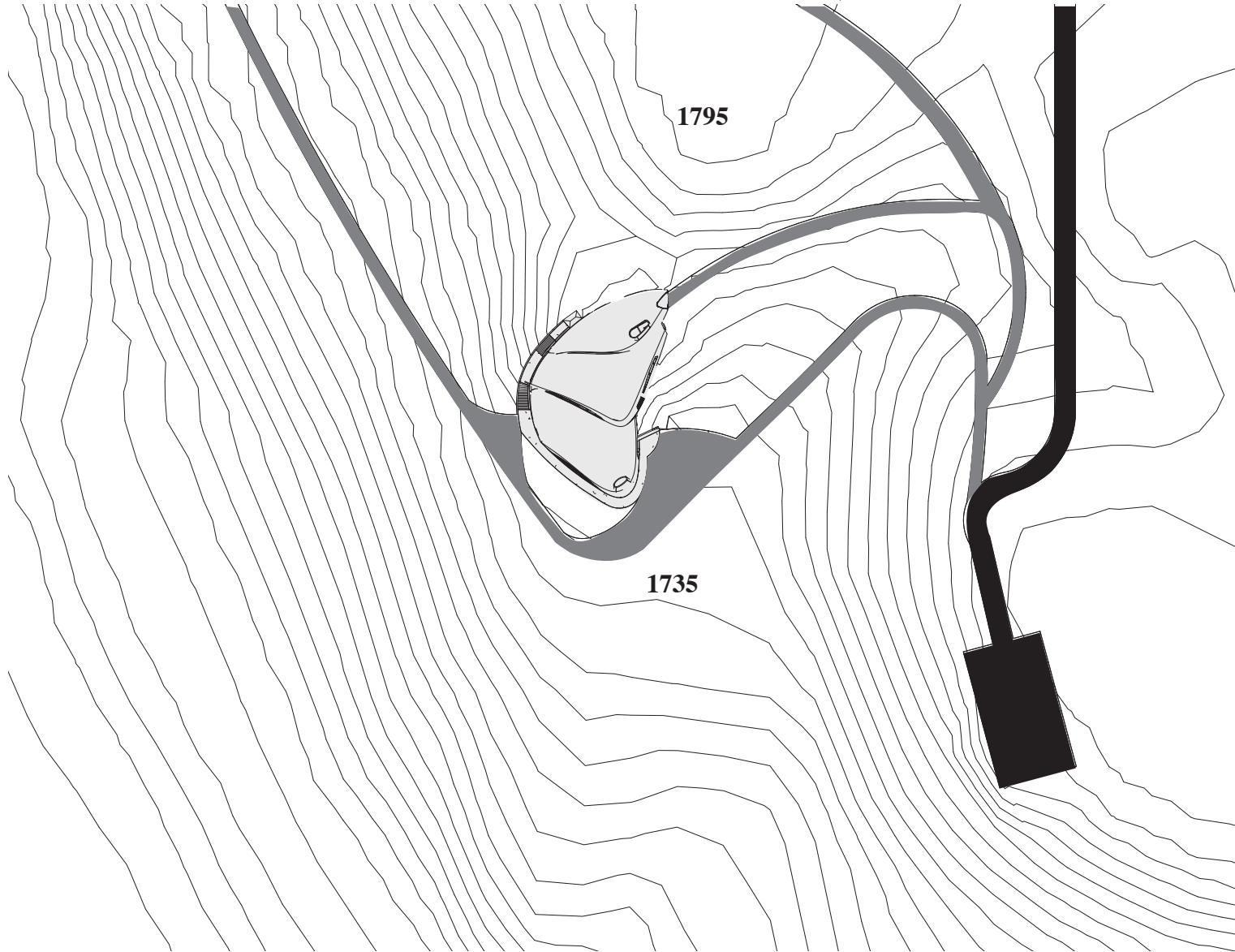


Bike Trail

Path to
River Walkway

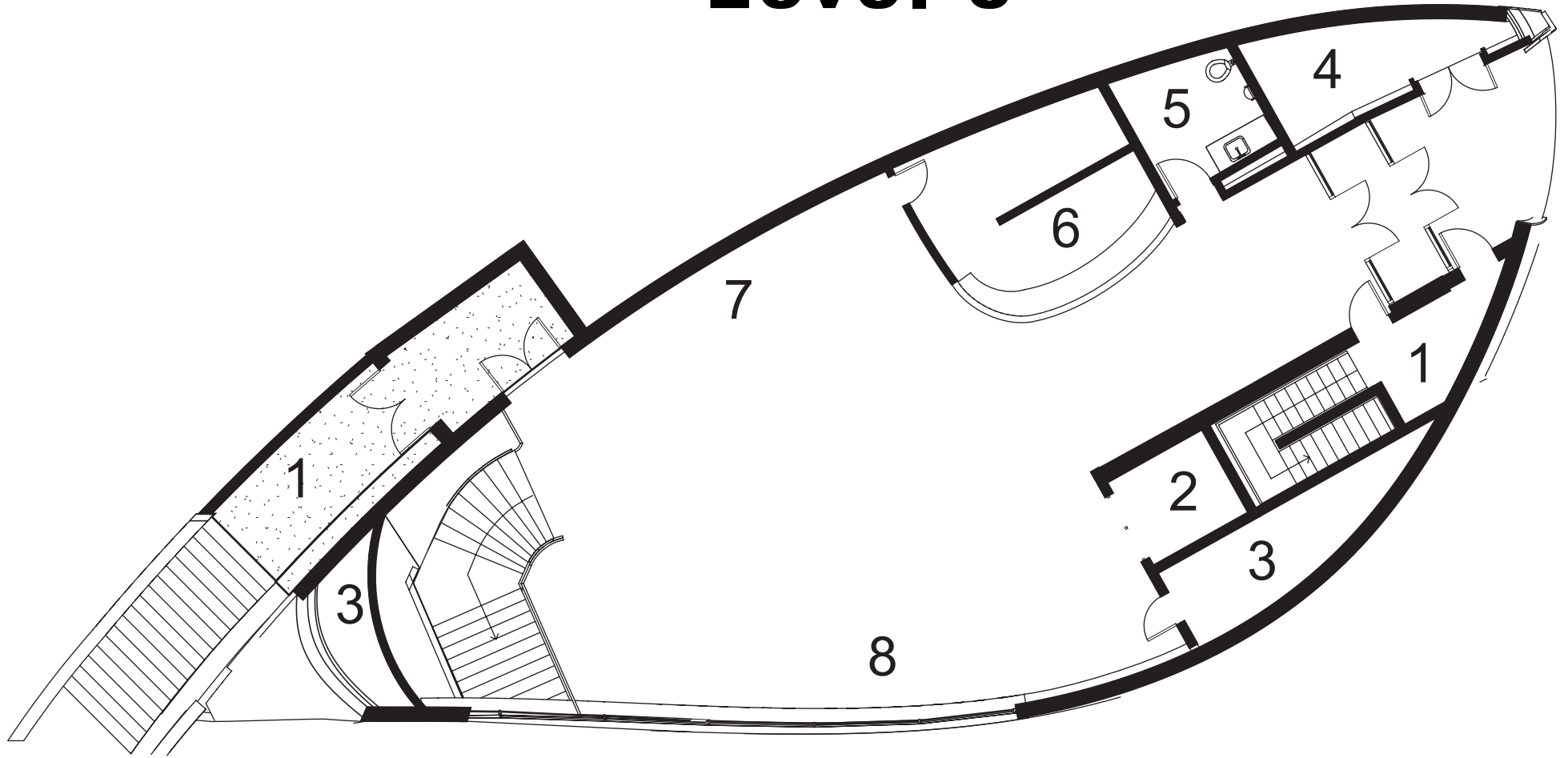
Path to
Historic site

Car Entry





Level 3



1 - Fire Stair

2 - Elevator

3 - Mechanical

4 - Storage

5 - Restroom

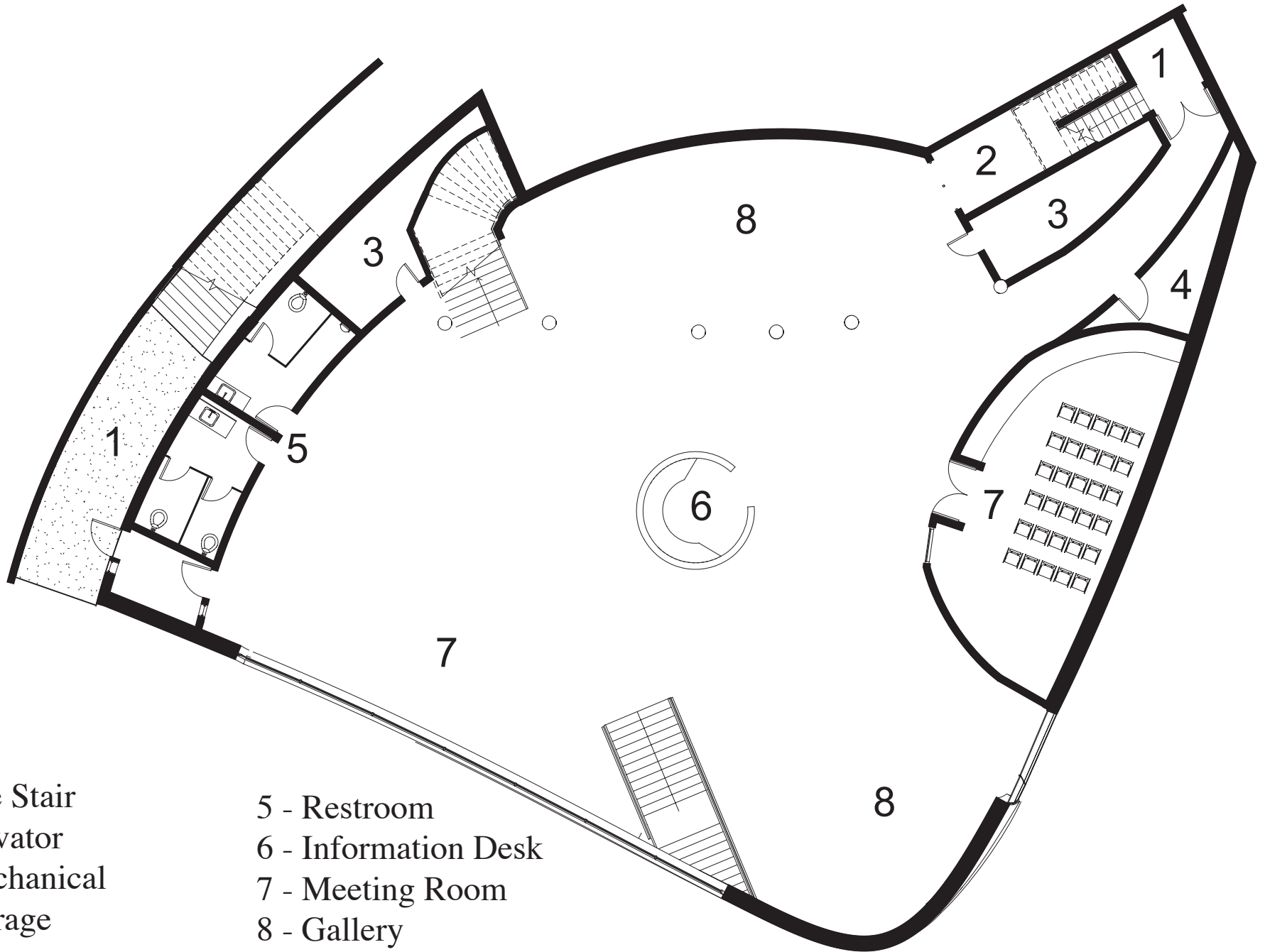
6 - Information Desk

7 - Site and Geological Exhibit

8 - Meeting Area



Level 2



1 - Fire Stair

2 - Elevator

3 - Mechanical

4 - Storage

5 - Restroom

6 - Information Desk

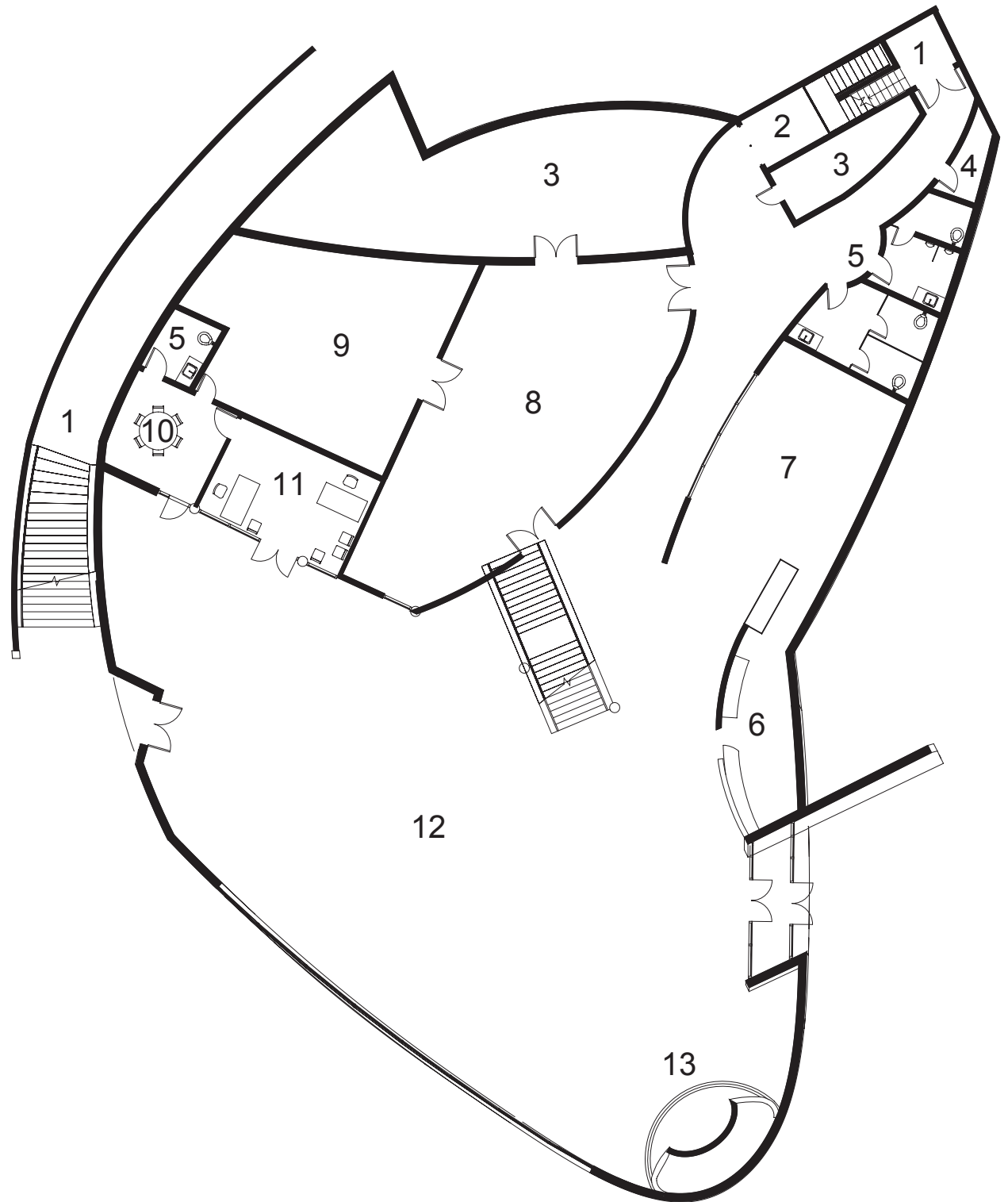
7 - Meeting Room

8 - Gallery



Level 1

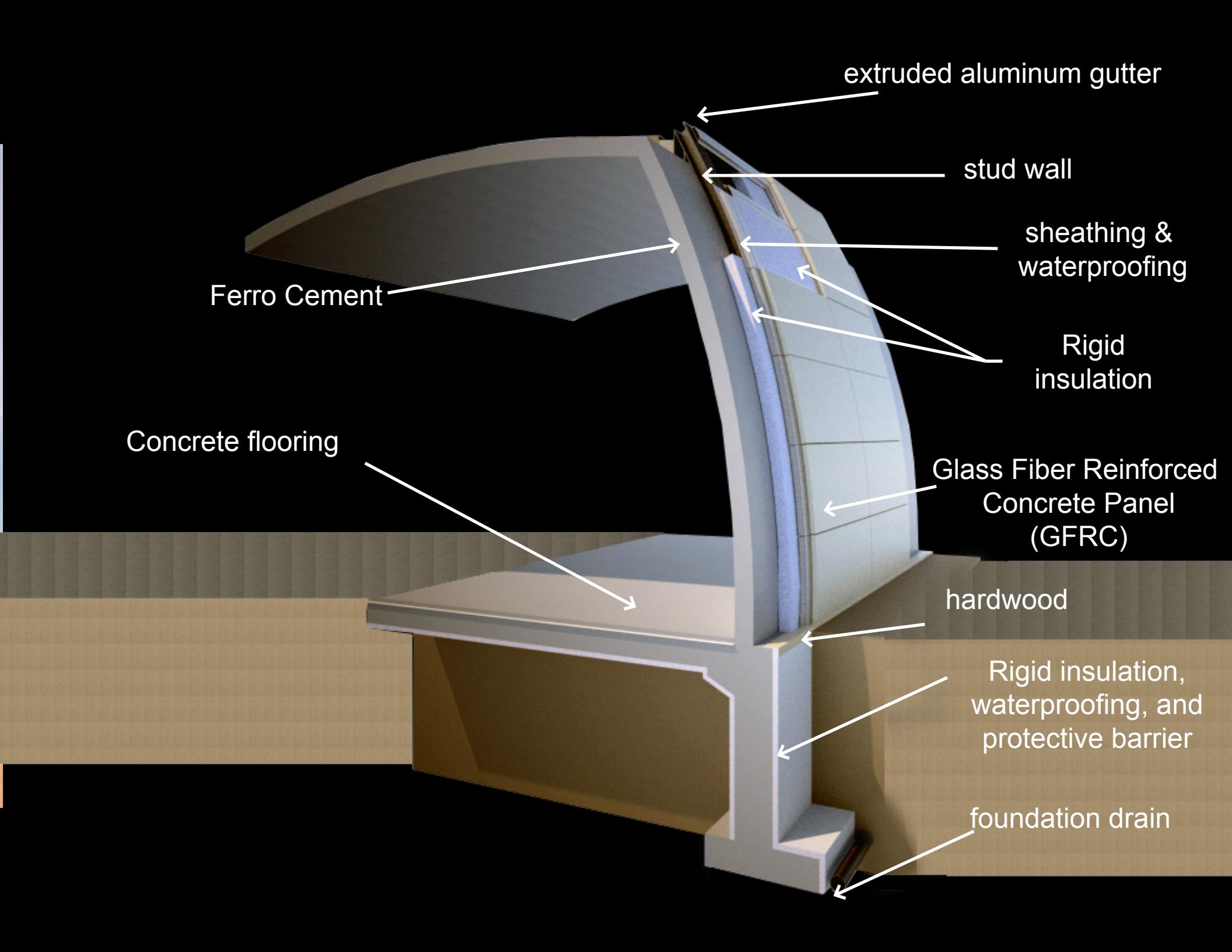
- 1 - Fire Stair
- 2 - Elevator
- 3 - Mechanical
- 4 - Storage
- 6 - Restroom
- 7 - Information Desk
- 8 - Storage and Prep area
- 9 - Controlled Storage
- 10- Employee Lounge
- 11 - Office
- 12 - Exhibit / Great Hall
- 13 - Hearth











extruded aluminum gutter

stud wall

sheathing & waterproofing

Rigid insulation

Glass Fiber Reinforced Concrete Panel (GFRC)

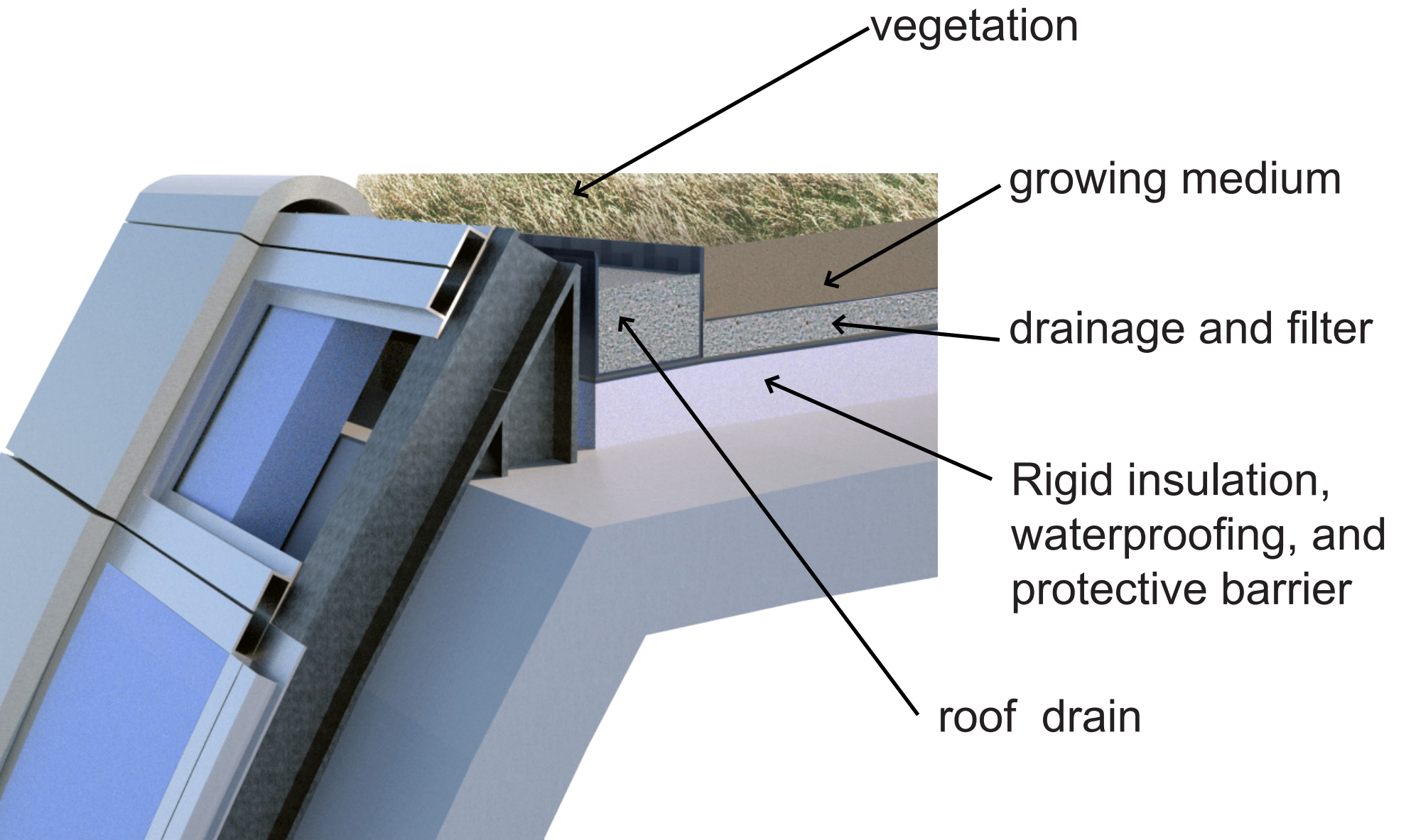
hardwood

Rigid insulation, waterproofing, and protective barrier

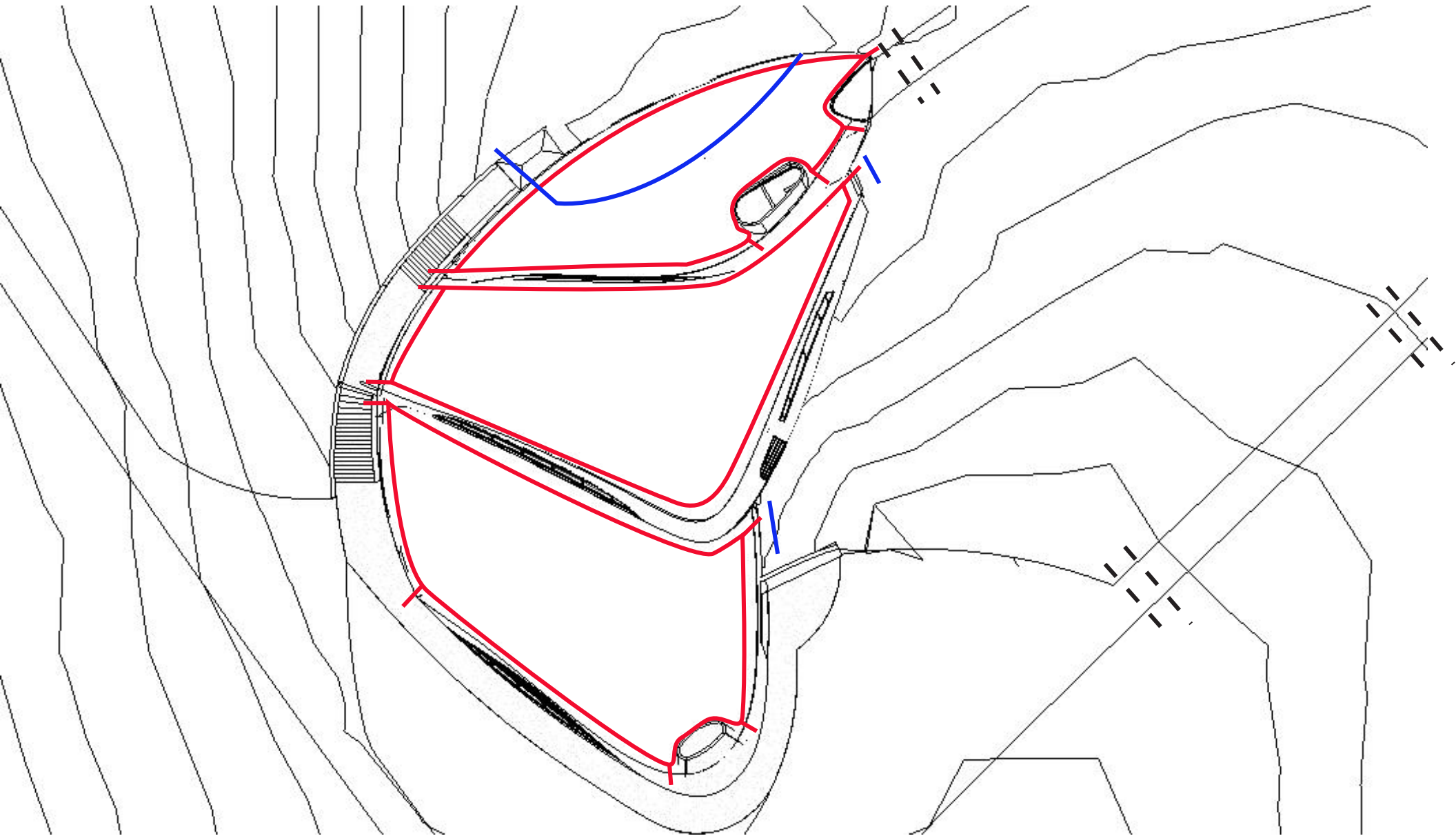
foundation drain

Ferro Cement

Concrete flooring



- Protective Barrier
- Roof Drain and exits
- - - - Drain Tunnel



A landscape photograph featuring a modern, curved, metallic building with a large arched opening. The building is situated on a grassy hillside. In the foreground, a dirt path leads towards the building, and several people are walking along it. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The overall scene is bright and open.

Architecture and cultural definition

John Nelson