HORIZONS

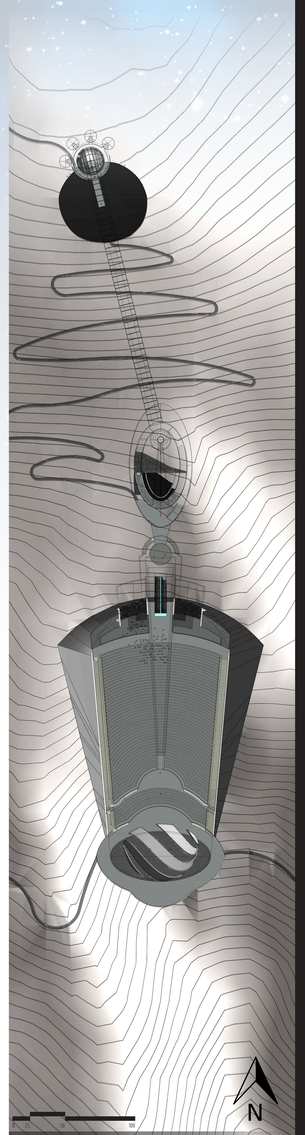
Bridging the Finite and Infinite to Rekindle Mankind's Cosmic Affinity

Aaron Warner

OBSERVATORY

OCULUS

AMPHITHEATER



Located in Samish, Washington, at the foothills of the Cascades Mountain Range, this site is carved out of Blanchard Mountain, a local gem for hikers, horseback, parasailing, hang gliding, and the beautiful intersection of the mountainous Washington rainforest, the Pacific Waterfront, and the northern Seattle-area countryside. The site is located at the crossroads of existing roads and trails and expands off of the current popular mountaintop development, Samish Overlook.

THE SPLIT

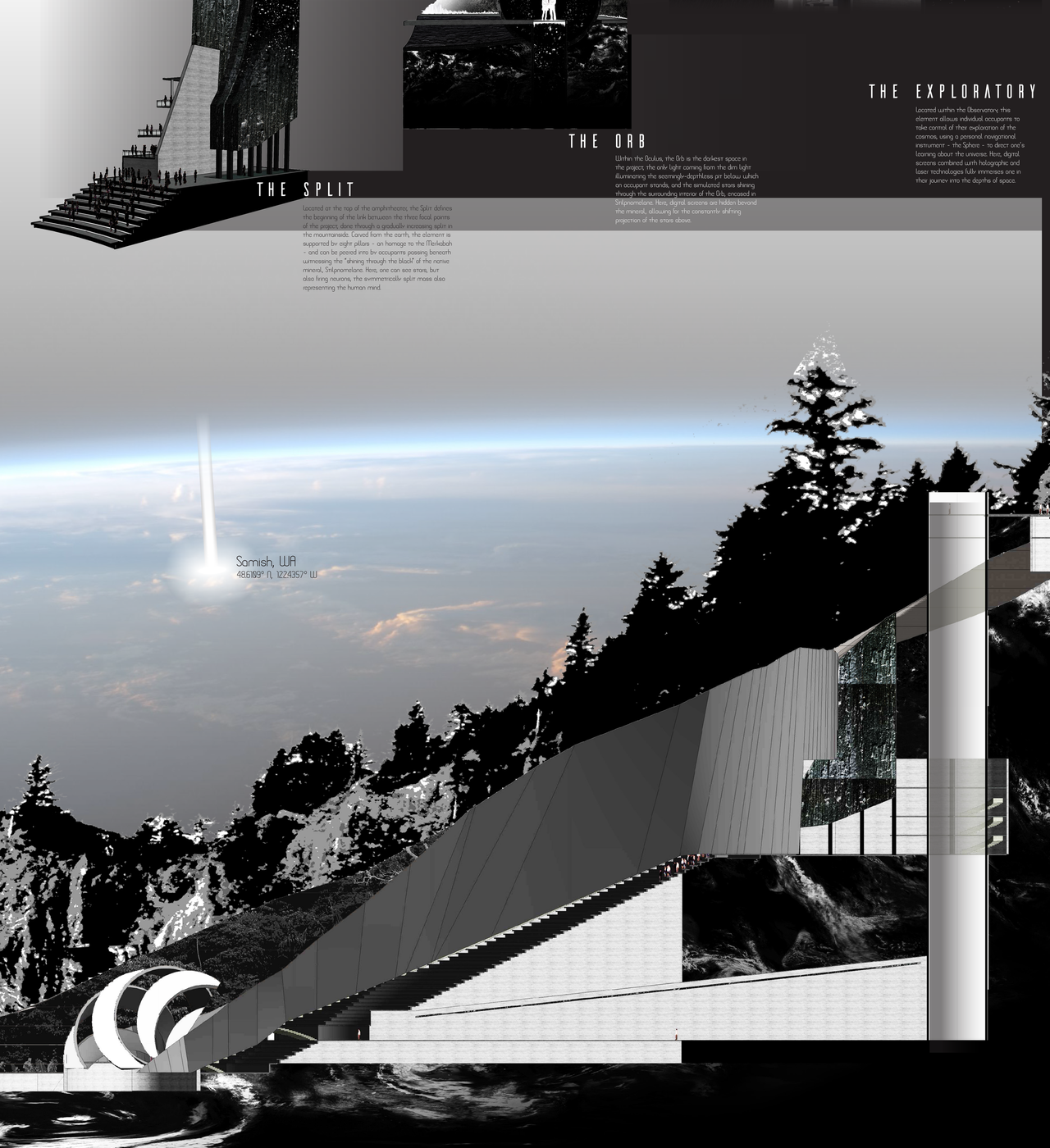
Located at the top of the amphitheater, the Split defines the beginning of the link between the three focal points of the project, done through a gradually increasing split in the mountainside. Carved from the earth, the element is supported by eight pillars - an homage to the Merkabah - and can be peered into by occupants passing beneath witnessing the "shining through the black" of the native mineral, Stilpnomelane. Here, one can see stars, but also firing neurons, the symmetrically split mass also representing the human mind.

THE ORB

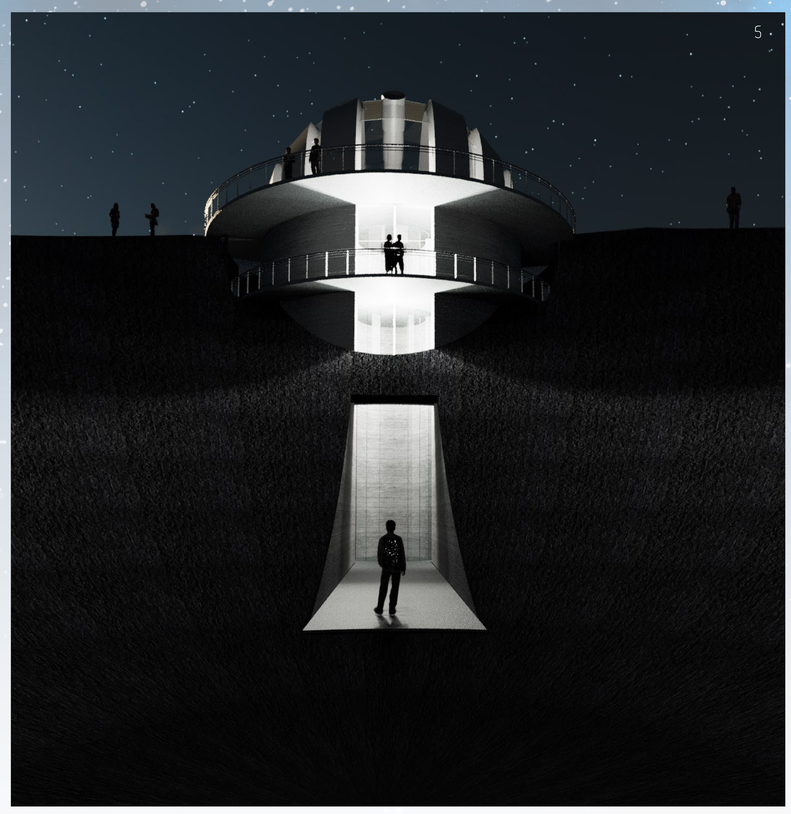
Within the Oculus, the Orb is the darkest space in the project, the only light coming from the dim light illuminating the seemingly-depthless pit below which an occupant ascends, and the simulated stars shining through the surrounding interior of the Orb, encased in Stilpnomelane. Here, digital screens are hidden beyond the mineral, allowing for the constantly shifting projection of the stars above.

THE EXPLORATORY

Located within the Observatory, this element allows individual occupants to take control of their exploration of the cosmos, using a personal navigational instrument - the Sphere - to direct one's learning about the universe. Here, digital screens combined with holographic and laser technologies fully immerses one in their journey into the depths of space.



Samish, WA
48.6169° N, 122.4357° W



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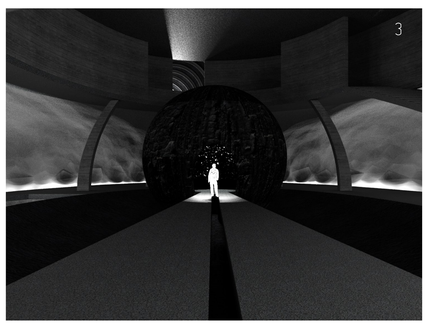

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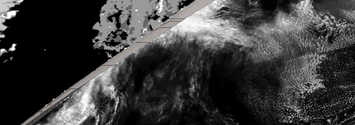
Depicting an occupant's ascent or descent throughout the mountain, the selected views align with specific moments throughout the project, identifying the importance of not only the three main focal points, but also the pathways to and from, placing importance on the journey in stark contrast with the destinations, each providing progressively emerging views of the Washington landscape. Utilizing global contextual precedents with similar purposes, Horizons strives to link - earth and sky, art and science, ritualistic and technological, material and digital - to reverse one's perspective and inspire cosmic ideals under a common banner, a new age of mankind's exploration, discovery and settlement of the cosmos.

The project melds several different ideologies, linking past and future culture with a collective purpose, passion, and immanency. This is done through using the ideal cosmological geometry - the sphere - in combination with the ancient Jewish symbol - the Merkabah - to create experiences and spaces resonant throughout history. The symbol, is a three-dimensional Star of David containing eight sacred directions, and is considered a vehicle to simultaneously reach the cosmos and enlightenment. Drawing inspiration from works by James Turrell, these elements combined can make simplistic yet powerful experiences, their perfect geometries and solemn presences evoking subliminal, romantic notions from their participants. While these experiences use the weight of the mountain and its material, derived from within - Stilpnomelane, whose Greek etymology means "shining through the black" - to create a sense of compression and darkness with moments of clarity, the three checkpoints offer an reward vast panoramic views of the Washington countryside and Pacific waterfront, allowing one to stand at the edge of the mountainside and become spiritually uplifted from the surrounding landscape, but also look back into the mountain towards the direction from which they came.



Newton's Cenotaph, a theoretical project proposed by Etienne-Louis Boullée, was also heavily influential on this project as well as the architecture profession as a whole, noted as the hinge defining the industrialization of building practices, riding the crest between architecture as artistic interpretation and rational functionalism. Honoring Sir Isaac Newton, the cenotaph places Newton's final resting place in the bottommost center of the sphere, while the immense chamber is filled with darkness, broken only by small punctures in the envelope to allow bits of light to shine through, simulating stars in the night's sky. Boullée's proposal marked the end of an era which equally valued art and science, art once being the means through which scholars could communicate their findings to the general populace. This point also marked a shift in mankind's relationship with the cosmos through buildings, architectural practice placing greater importance on utility and efficiency rather than a higher purpose and the inspiration of the surrounding populace, spelling the decline of the erection of cathedrals and other typologies which oriented an occupant towards the heavens and cosmos.

Horizons strives to embody mankind's progression throughout history in relationship to the cosmos, incorporating humanity's three primary means of communicating astronomical findings to the public: built space, artistic representation, and enhanced telescopic imagery. Their effectiveness can be enhanced by modern digital technologies, providing occupants with a fresh take on cosmologically-oriented architecture and a perspective encompassing a seemingly infinite context. While such a context may seem daunting, mankind now enters yet another space race, challenging humanity's terrestrial limits to venture into the depths of the unknown. Now more than ever, architecture has the opportunity to embrace the rekindled interest in the cosmos, and once again produce outward-oriented structures with means of a higher purpose, bridging modern cultures and beliefs while inspiring cosmic ideals, propelling future culture into a new age of exploration and discovery - fitting of mankind's inherent nature to pioneer, invent, and dream beyond the Horizon.