

---

**NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN**  
The Mall, between Maryland Avenue, 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, Jefferson Drive, and 4<sup>th</sup> Street, SW  
Washington, DC

Report to the Smithsonian Institution

June 1, 2000

---

*Abstract*

The Smithsonian Institution submits final site and building plans for the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). The revised preliminary site and building plans were approved in July 1999 and the final plans represent refinements to those plans. The site of the NMAI is the last available museum site on the Mall, as indicated by the Mc Millan Plan of 1901.

*Authority*

D.C. Code, sec. 5-432, and Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act of 1952, as amended (40 U.S.C. 71d).

---

*Commission Action*

The Commission **approves** the final site and building plans for the National Museum of the American Indian, on the Mall between Maryland Avenue, Third Street, Jefferson Drive, and Fourth Street, SW, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.41(38.00)-40803.

\* \* \*

## **BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION**

### *DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL*

The final site and building plans represent a refinement of the revised preliminary plans approved by the Commission on July 1, 1999. The Transportation Management Plan has been submitted as well as details of the museum's features.

#### Site

On the south side of the Mall, the site is bounded on the north by Jefferson Drive, on the south by Maryland and Independence Avenues, on the east by 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, and on the west by 4<sup>th</sup> Street, SW. The prominent site is near the U.S. Capitol and Botanic Gardens to the east; the open great panels of the Mall and the National Gallery of Art's East Wing to the north; the National Air and Space Museum to the west; and the Department of Health and Human Services Building to the south. Currently used as recreational open space, this site is the last on the Mall designated for a building.

#### Program

The museum program requires a 324,186-square-foot building with a footprint of 49,331 square feet. The building is composed of a basement and five above-grade-levels including two mechanical mezzanine levels (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> floor). The museum will accommodate 333 employees.

#### Design Concept

The design concept derives from Native American principles:

- The acknowledgement of the four cardinal points, the earth and sky, and the solstice solar positions.
- Strong connections between the indoor and the outdoors.
- Respect for the earth as a living organism and for the value of the straightforward way in which objects are made.

The following is a brief summary of refinements to the revised preliminary submission:

- The northwest corner of the site will continue to be an extension of the museum site paving (American mist granite) to announce the museum's presence and set the tone for entering the site at this critical location. The American mist granite is proposed for all on-site paving, the Tribal Recognition Wall, and the bench wall. Perimeter sidewalks will be the exposed aggregate called for in the Mall Streetscape Manual, except at the northwest corner. A water cascade at the building's northwest corner will dramatically link building wall to water habitat.

- The habitat zones will be planted with native species of particular importance to Native American tradition and culture. A common feature of Native American way finding, key marker trees will be planted at the principal entrances to the museum.
- The surface of the façade is a stratified stone mass; the lower courses are large, rough stone blocks of Kasota limestone that express massiveness and the transition from earth to building. The stone courses narrow, expressing compression, as the walls rise.
- Louvers and openings for fresh air intake are disguised behind undulating masonry curves. The proportions of the glazing panels (windows) are narrower and more sinuous.
- The redesign of the solstice window on the south façade and the continuing evolution of the entrances have enhanced the organic character of the building.

#### *PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION*

At its July 1, 1999 meeting, the Commission complimented the Smithsonian Institution and its design team for the continuing evolution of the design of the museum. The Commission further approved the revised preliminary site and building plans for the NMAI. Finally, the Commission requested that the Smithsonian Institution, in the preparation of final site and building plans provide material samples and a list of plant species and any information regarding other site elements such as fencing. It was also requested that the Transportation Management Plan be submitted as soon as possible.

#### *CONSULTATION*

During the refinement of the final site and building plans, the Smithsonian Institution and its consultants have met with the staff to review adjustments to the design. Additionally, staff met on-site to review material samples. All of the refinements appear to strengthen the overall organic quality of the NMAI.

#### *EVALUATION*

Staff is pleased with the refinements to the design of the NMAI. The final plans represent thoughtful consideration of several issues raised by both the Commission and the Staff.

- The Transportation Management Plan has been submitted with the final plans and is acceptable.
- The material samples have been included as well as the plant species and information regarding other site improvements.
- The truck delivery entrance on the west side of the museum has been refined to strengthen the relationship between the building and the landscape. The driveway wall was lowered to a height of 3 feet – six inches for the majority of its length, thereby allowing views between the building and the street. This wall will be of the same Kasota stone and American mist granite used on the museum and walkways.

- The entrance vestibule is comprised of a two-story high glazed surface, which allows for views of the curving stones to flow from the inside to the outside without perceived visual interruption.
- The selection of faceted glass for the glazing panels works well with the curving form of the building. The consultants have demonstrated to staff the benefits of using faceted glass verses curving glass and staff concurs that the overall “effect” is more compatible with the form and material of the building.
- Finally, the perimeter site tribal recognition wall will be constructed of American mist granite with engravings of tribal symbols on the top surface of the capstone. The capstone is designed to have a slight slope on the top surface to provide better visibility of the symbols and to discourage sitting on the 30-inch high wall. There are no donor plaques.

All of the refinements represented in the final plans are well thought out and staff recommends approval of the final site and building plans.

### *COORDINATION*

#### Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on May 10, 2000, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies participating. The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; Fire Department; the Department of Housing and Community Development; the General Services Administration; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

### *CONFORMANCE*

#### Master Plan

The proposal is consistent with the Development Concepts for the Mall, approved by the Commission on September 15, 1966, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.40(05.12)-24636.

#### Commission of Fine Arts

The Commission of Fine Arts approved the final site and building plans at its May 18, 2000 meeting.

#### Comprehensive Plan

The proposed museum would be located on the National Mall, which is a national landmark property and is a designated Special Place in the Preservation and Historic Features Element of the Comprehensive Plan. The proposed facility would also be located adjacent to Independence and Maryland Avenues, SW, which are designated Special Streets in the Element. The proposed final plans are consistent with the applicable policies relating to the protection and enhancement

of historic properties and Special Streets and Special Places. The proposal is also consistent with the Comprehensive Plan employee parking requirements for the Mall area.

#### National Environmental Policy Act

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, the Smithsonian Institution and the Executive Director determined that this proposal did not require an environmental impact statement. In lieu, thereof, the Smithsonian submitted an environmental assessment (EA) in September 1993. In May 1996, the Commission took responsibility for the scope and content of the environmental assessment.

The museum would affect the limited amount of available parking by increasing parking demand in the area. Visitors would compete for parking spaces at nearby lots and in area garages. The Smithsonian now provides only two parking spaces for employees. Tour buses may potentially displace automobile parking spaces in the nearby area, but not significantly so. The EA identified several short-term parking spaces and long-term parking lots in and near the Downtown where buses could park.

The deficit between parking supply and demand will likely encourage employees and visitors to use mass transit, as is the case with other museums on the Mall. Several bus routes and the Federal Center SW, and L'Enfant Plaza Metrorail Stations serve the site. The Smithsonian plans to increase the estimated 1.4 average passenger occupancy to 1.6 through the implementation of a Transportation Management Program (TMP). TMP strategies include provision of a shuttle bus route to the Suitland facility, participation in the use of Metro through the Smithsonian Institution Commuter Option Program, and provision of lockers and racks for bicycles and showers for employees who bicycle or walk to work.

Traffic associated with the museum will not significantly affect the levels-of-service (LOS) at surrounding roadway intersections. The LOS at each intersection would operate at acceptable levels of "D" or better. Associated traffic would not noticeably affect ambient air or noise quality.

In the submittal of final plans, the Smithsonian indicates its preparation of a final TMP. The TMP essentially follows the Commission's guidelines regarding commitments to a strategy, descriptions of monitoring measures, and a summary of the TMP's relationship to local and regional traffic goals.

#### National Historic Preservation Act

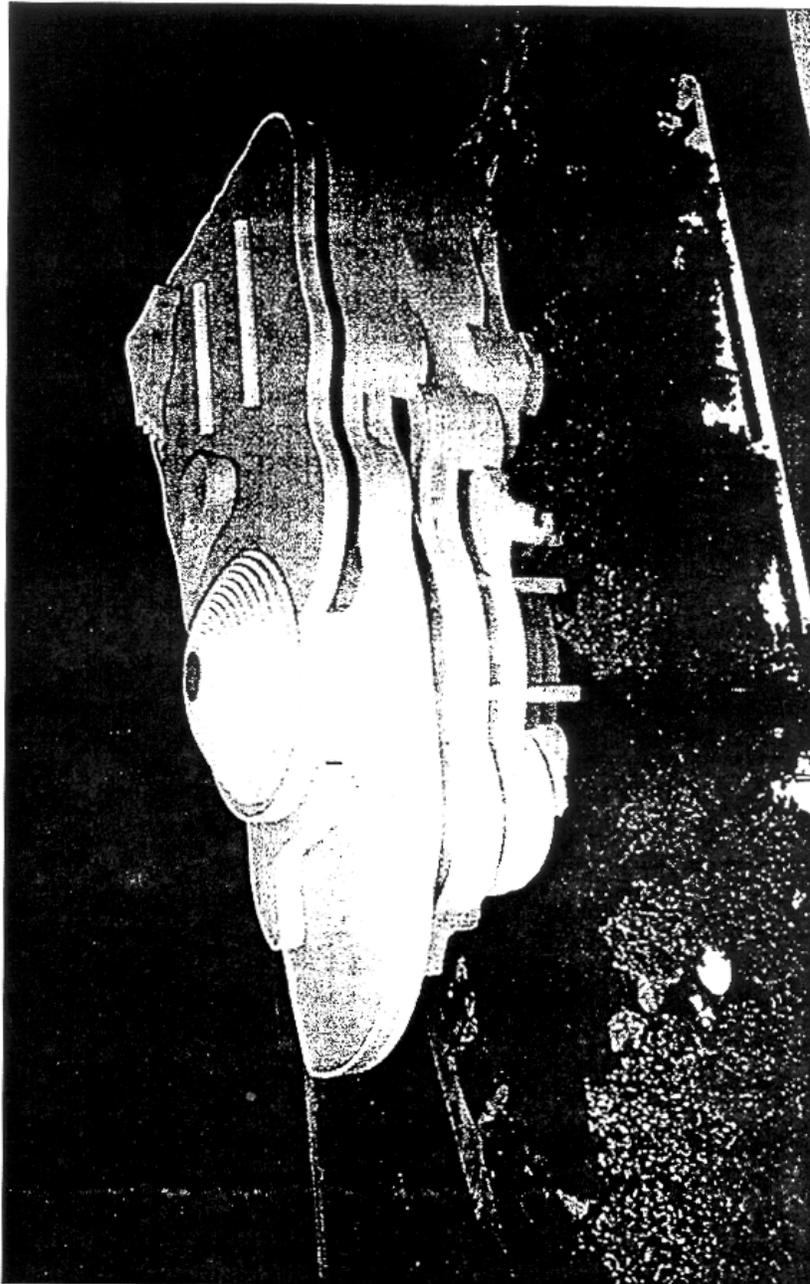
The Smithsonian has concluded its Section 106 responsibilities under the Act.

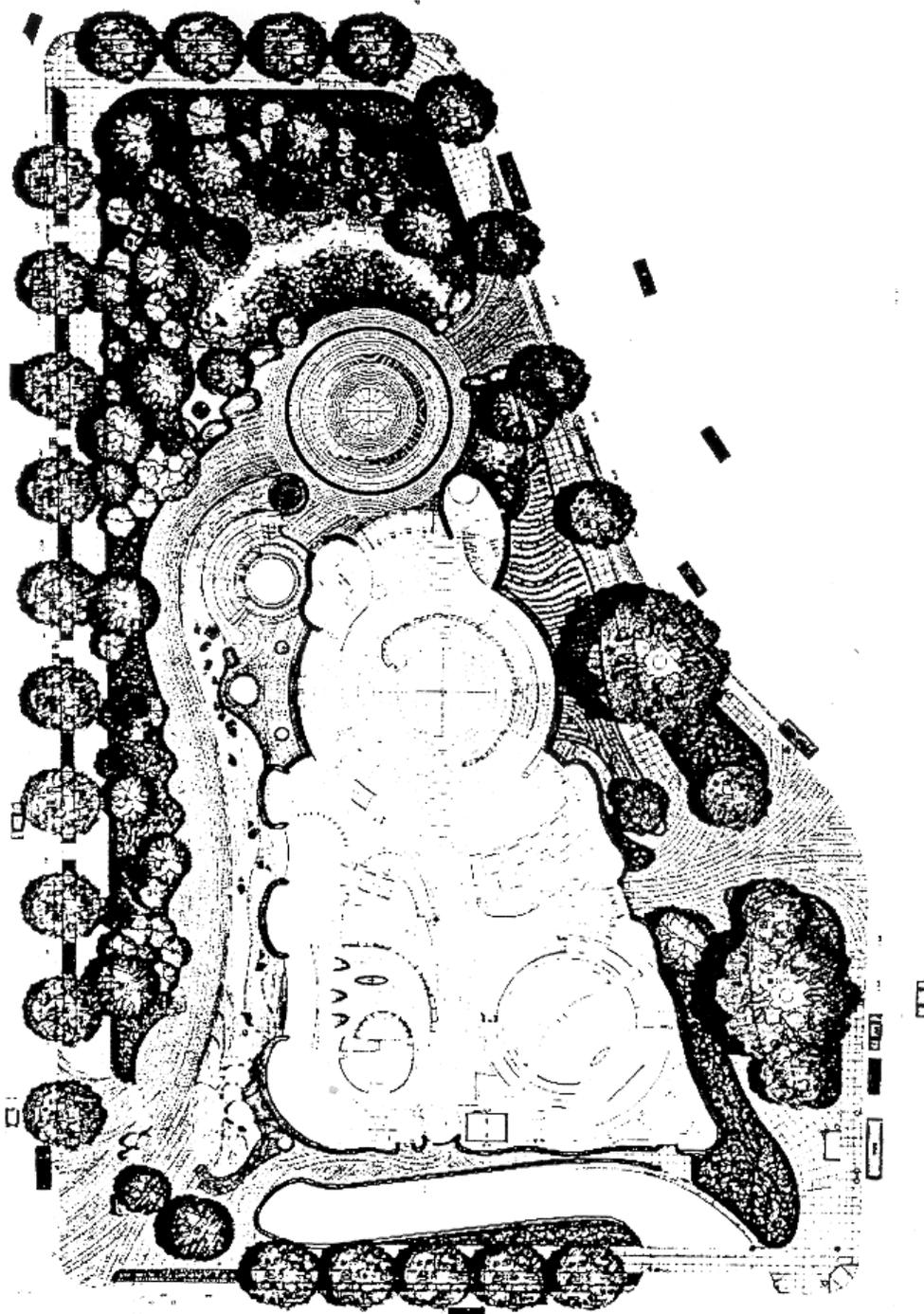
#### Federal Capital Improvements Program

This project was included in the Federal Capital Improvements Program, Fiscal Years 2000-2004, adopted by the Commission on July 1, 1999. The total project cost is 110 million (73.3 million in Federal funds and 36.7 million in private funds).

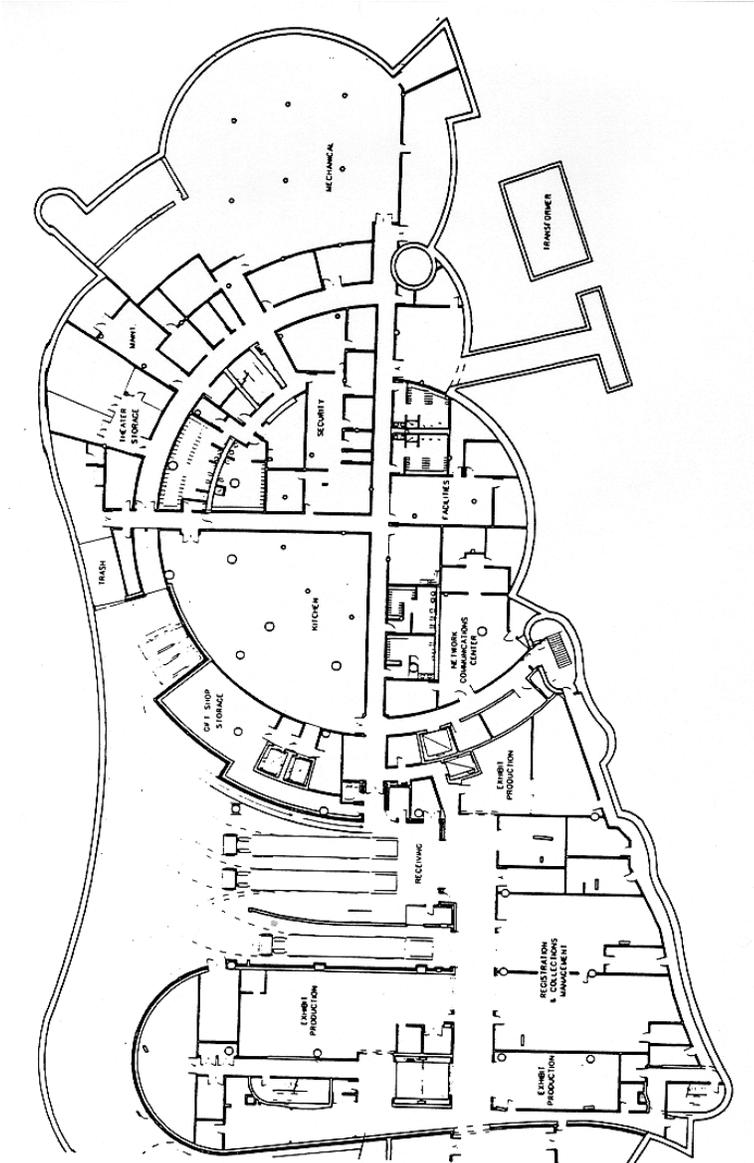


Model

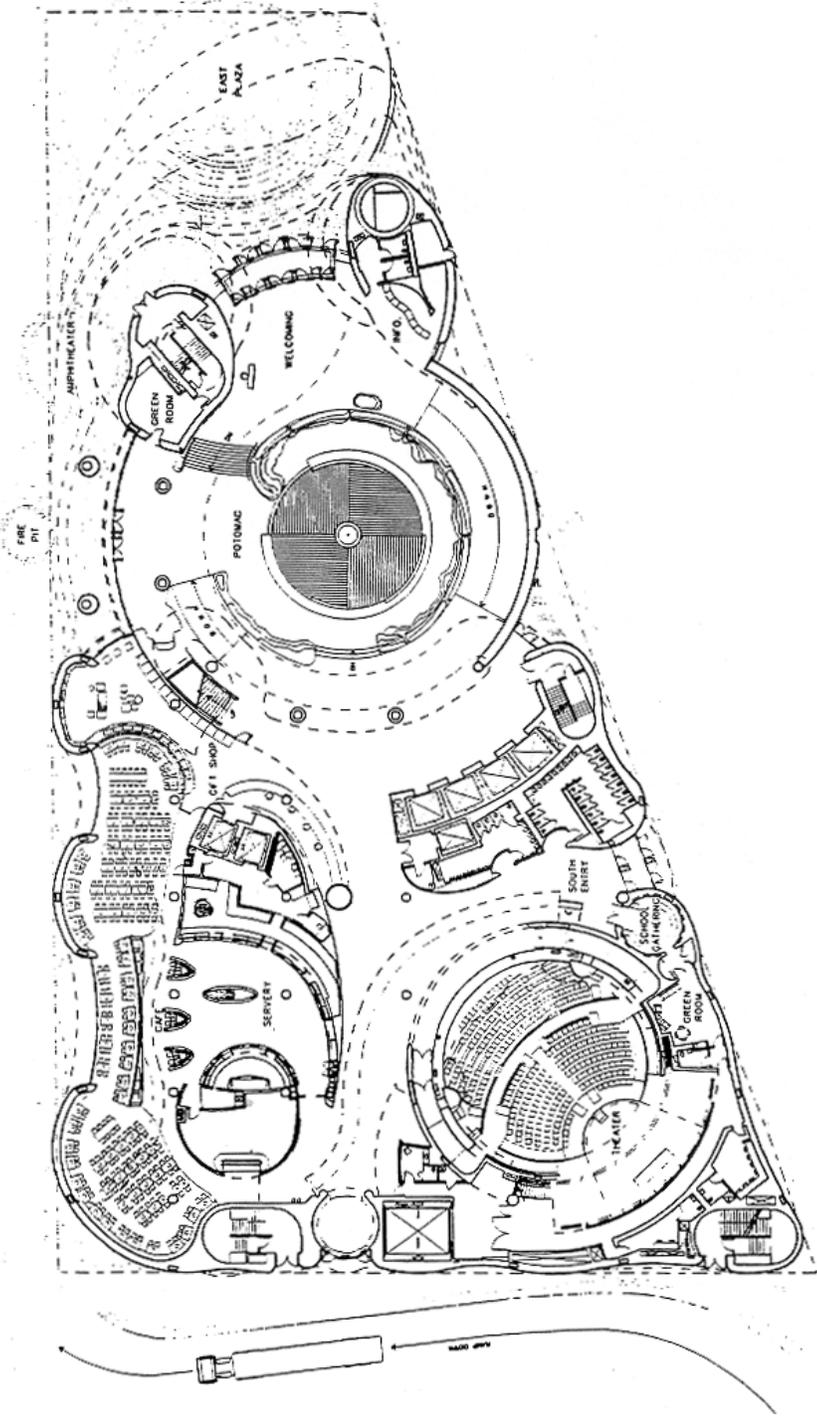




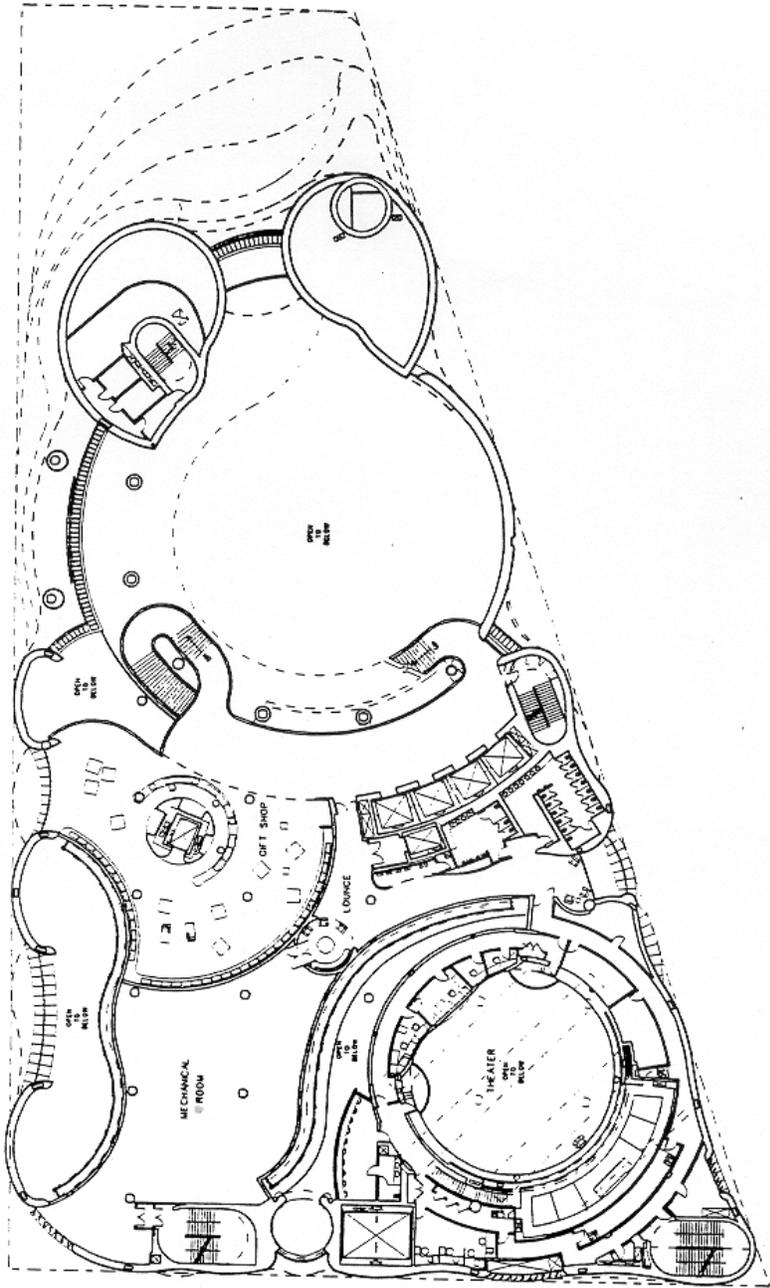
Basement Floor Plan



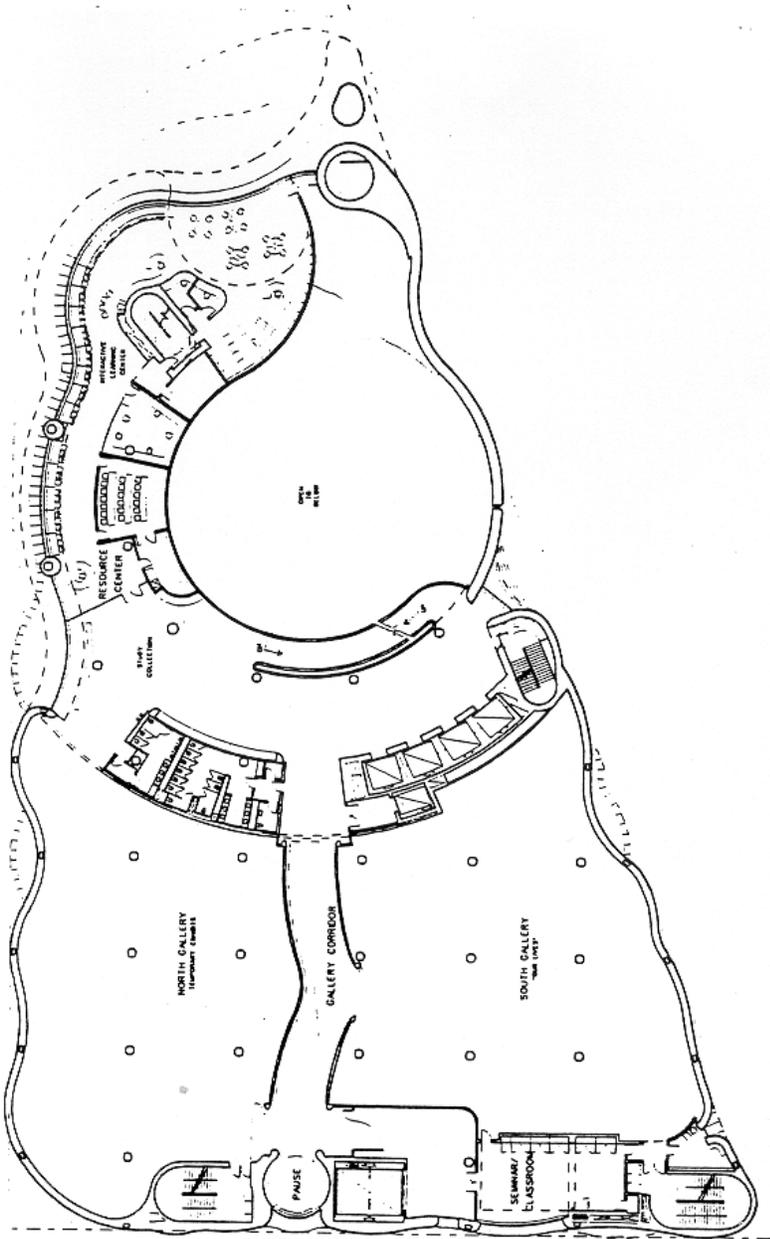
Ground Floor Plan



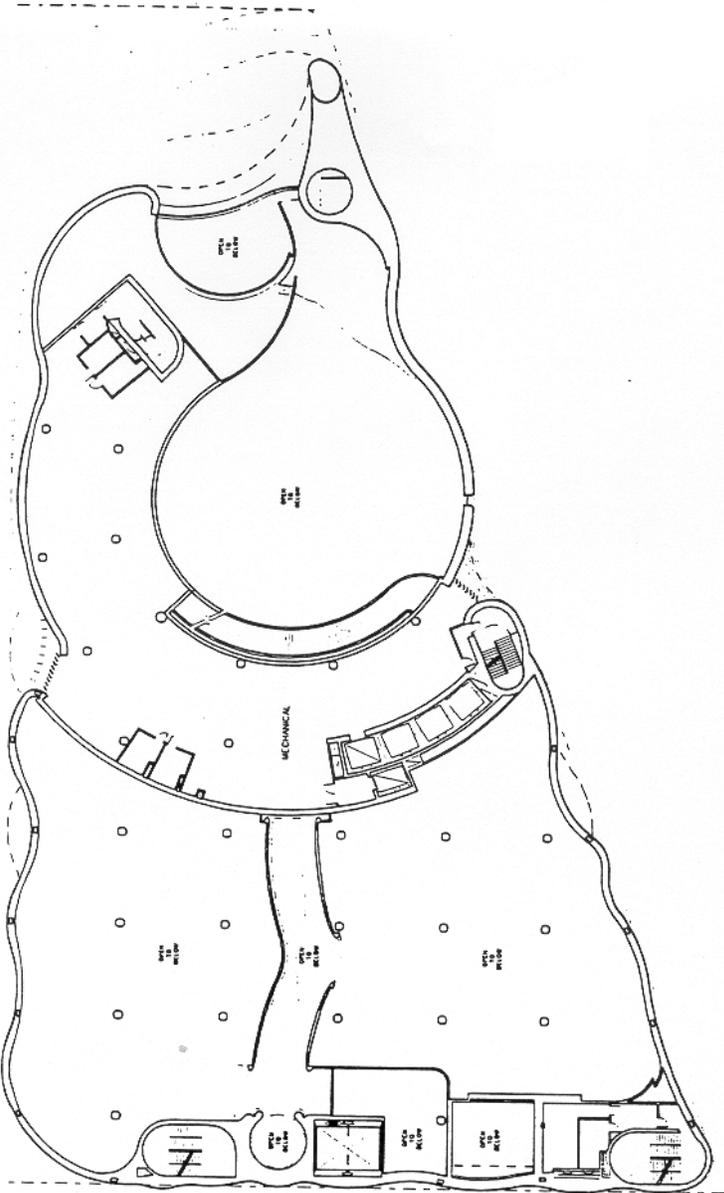
Second Floor Plan



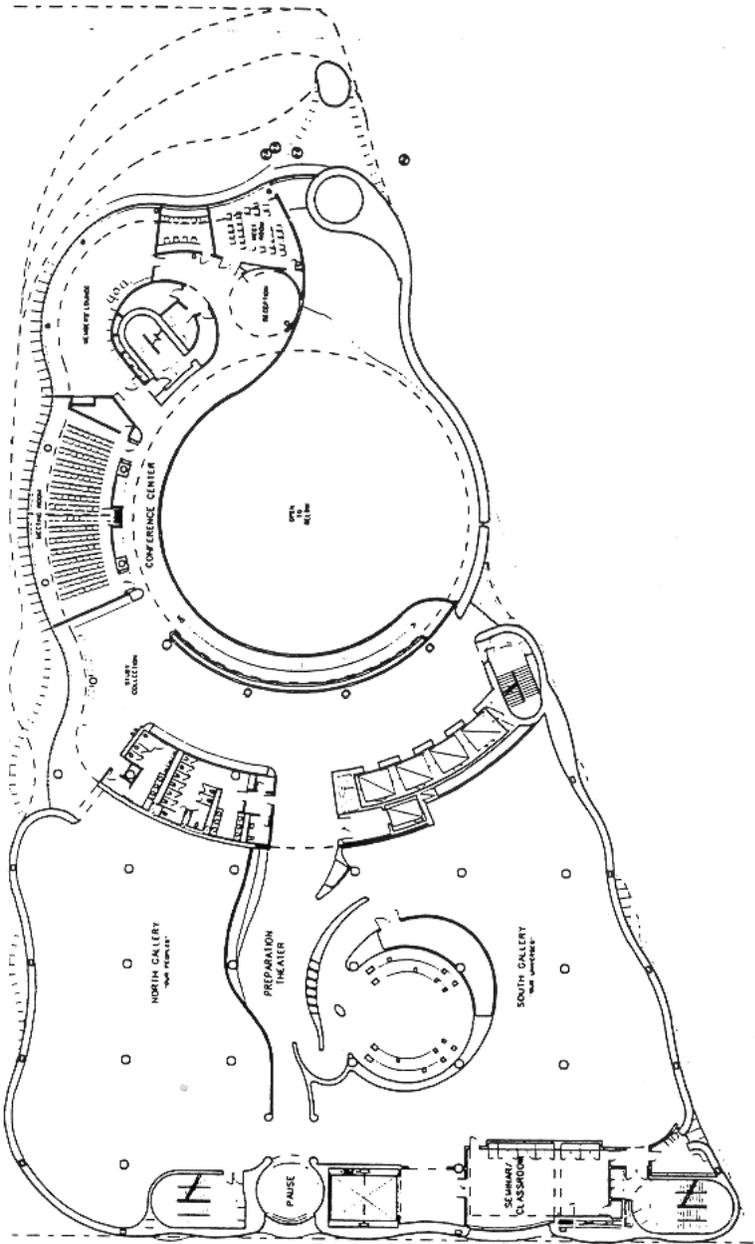
Third Floor Plan



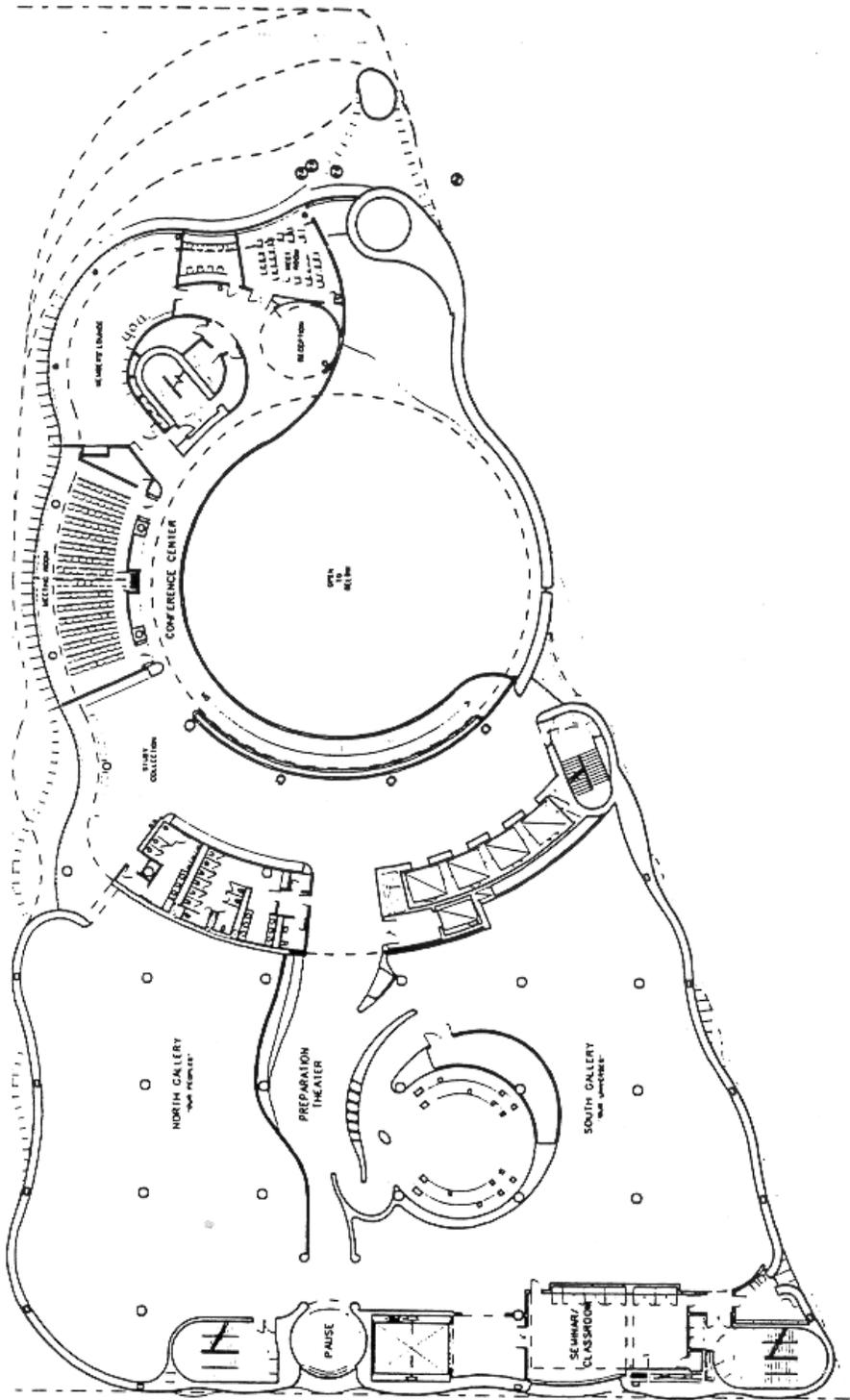
Third Flr Mech Mezz Plan



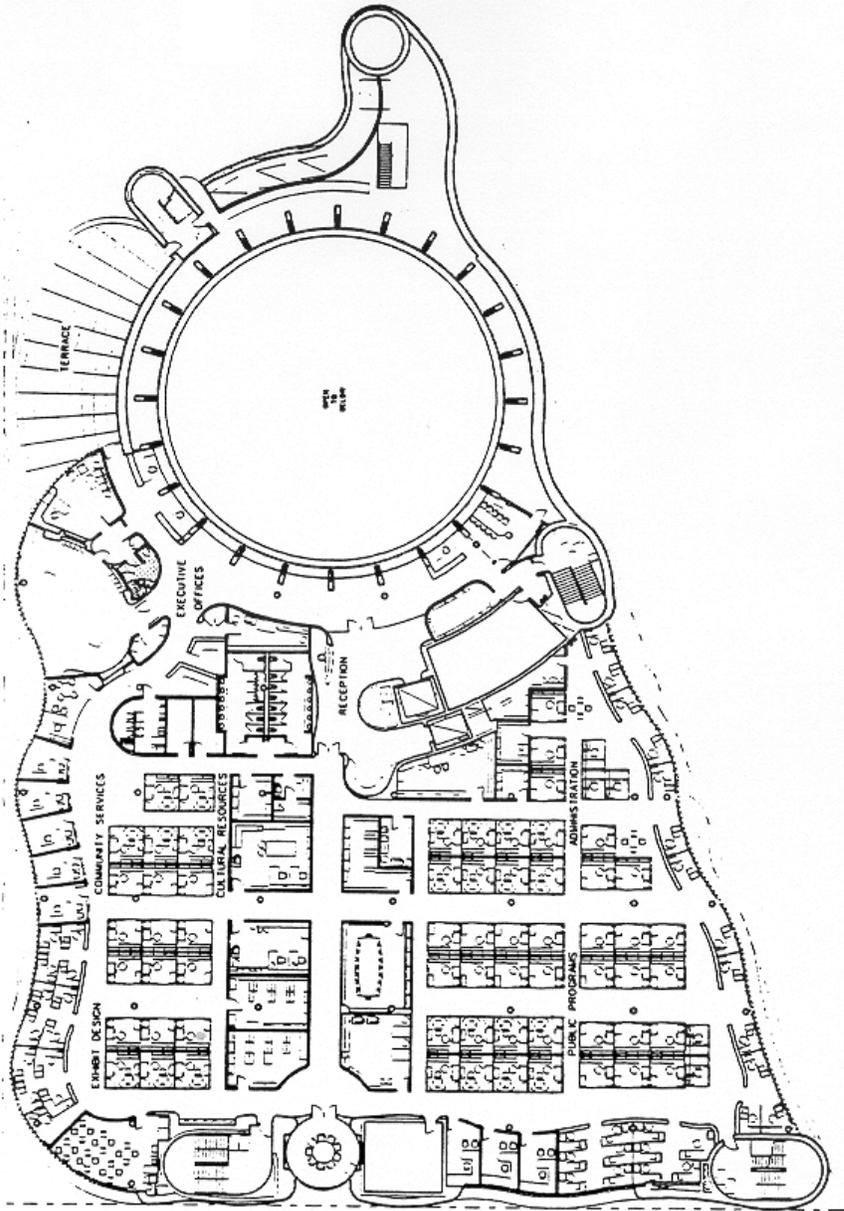
Fourth Floor Plan



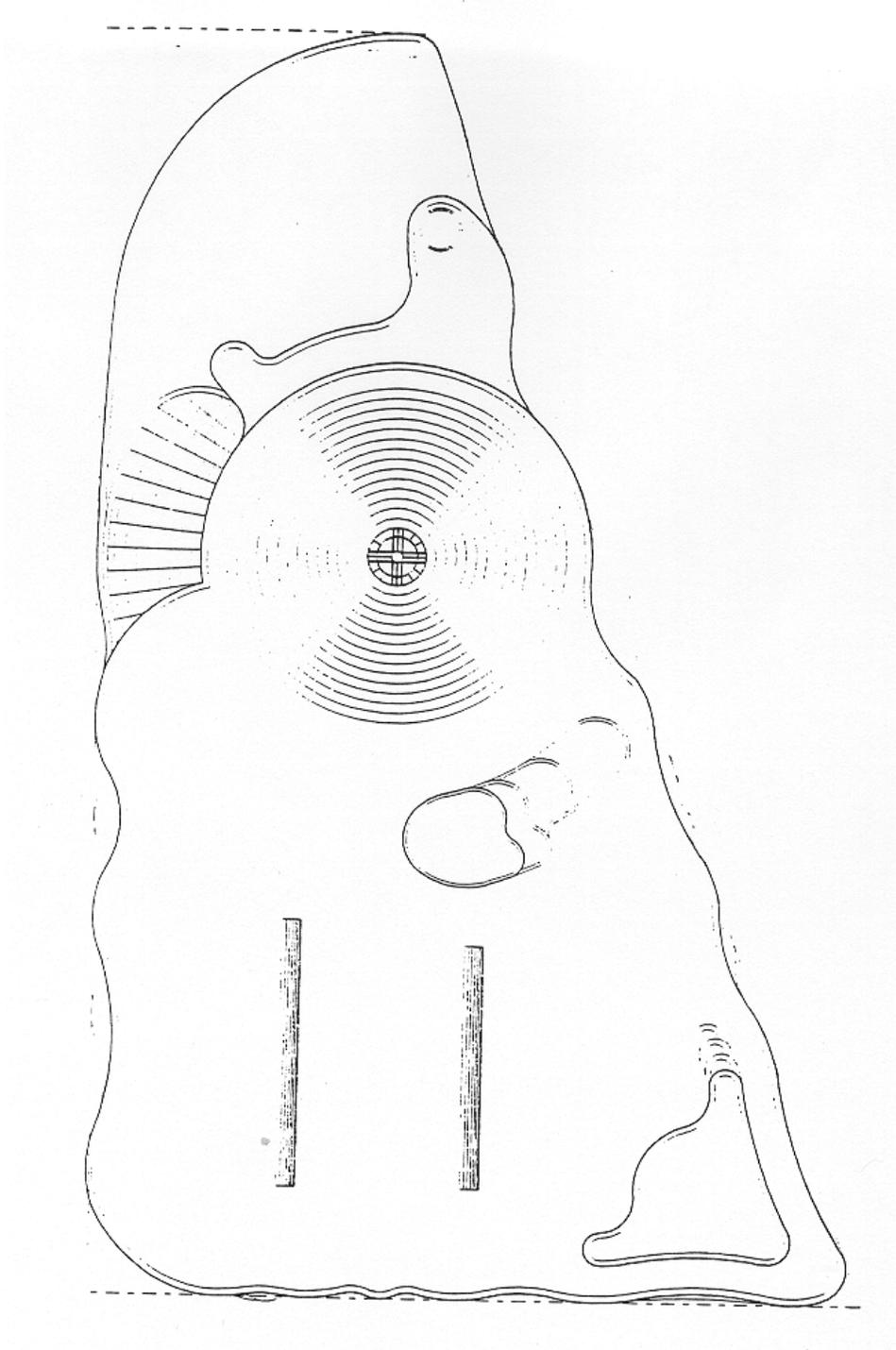
Fourth Flr Mech Mezz Plan



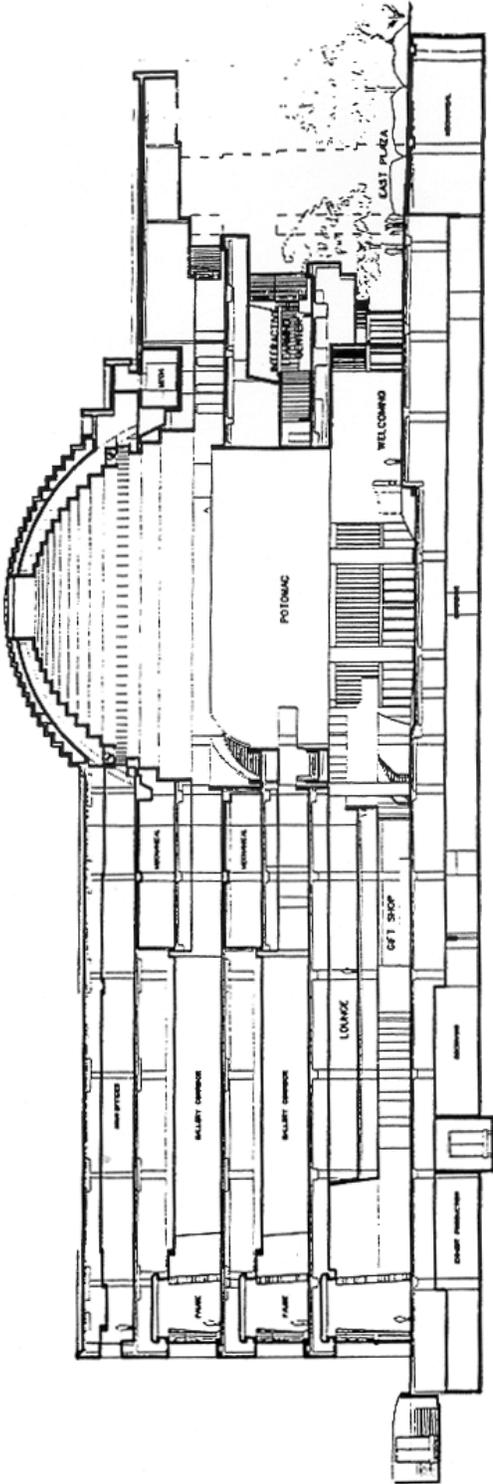
Fifth Floor Plan



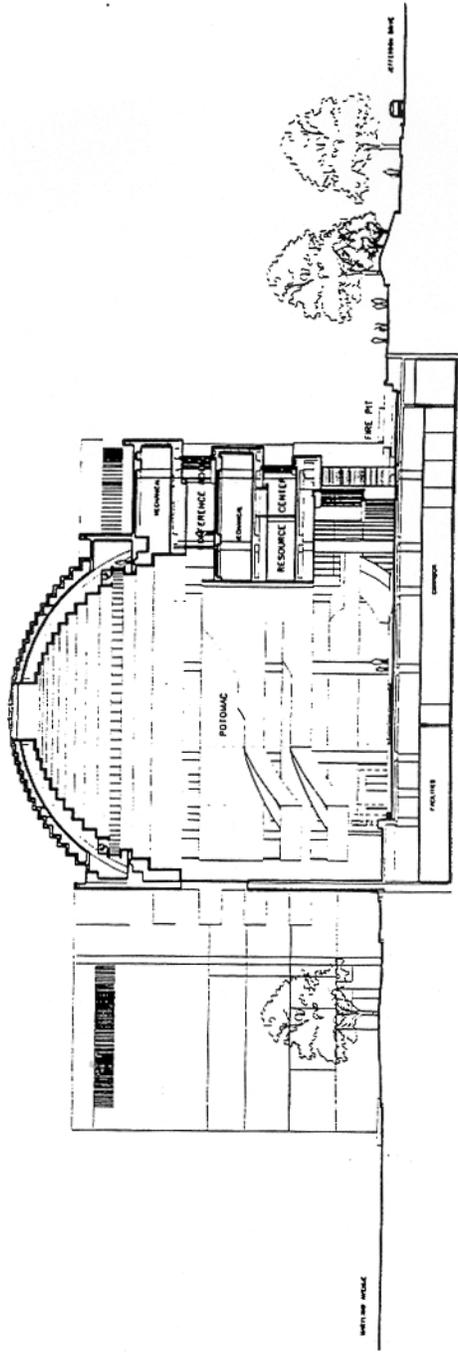
Roof Plan



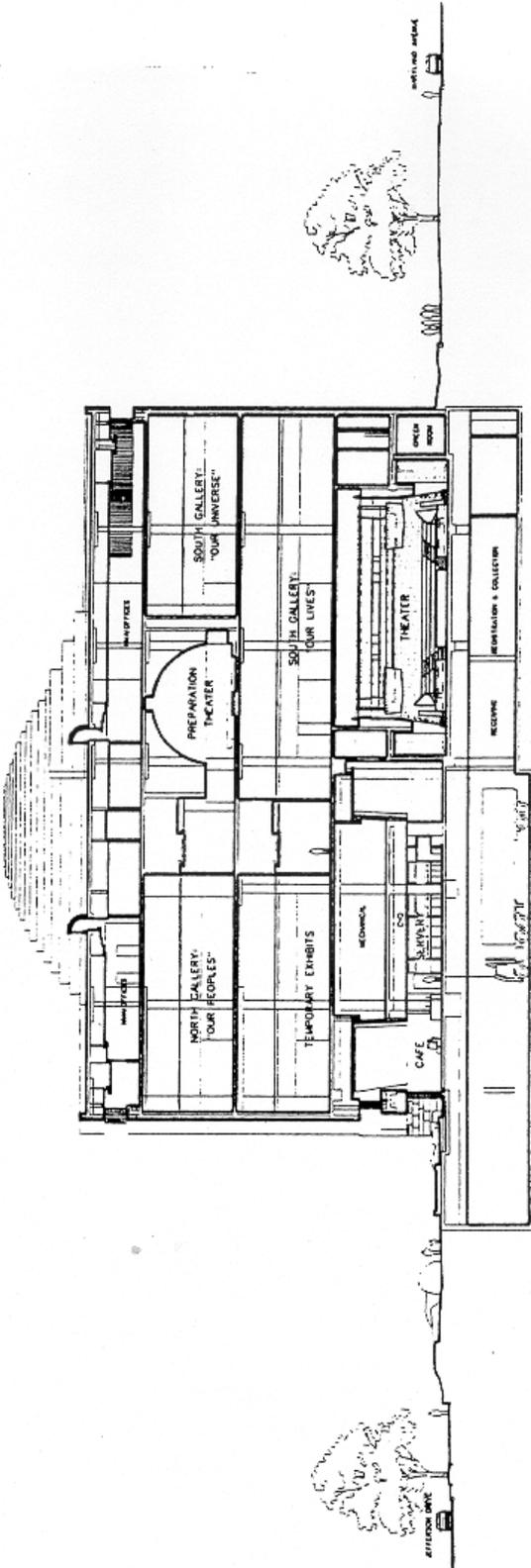
Building & Site Section  
East-West Looking North



Building & Site Section  
North-South Looking West



Building & Site Section  
North-South Looking East



Wall Section

