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Jeff Cutberth

Ed DeVilbiss

J. C. Heintzelman

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# A Visitors Center at the Washington Monument

*an entry in the ASC/AIA Tile Council of America*

Jeff Cutberth

Critics: Ed DeVilbiss

J. C. Heintzelman

This proposal responded to the dual purpose established in the program for a visitors center for the nation's capitol and a waiting area for visitors to the Washington Monument.

The facility consists of 3 major program elements: a lobby, a waiting area for Monument visitors, and an exhibition/audio visual area. These elements were to jointly accommodate 600 people.

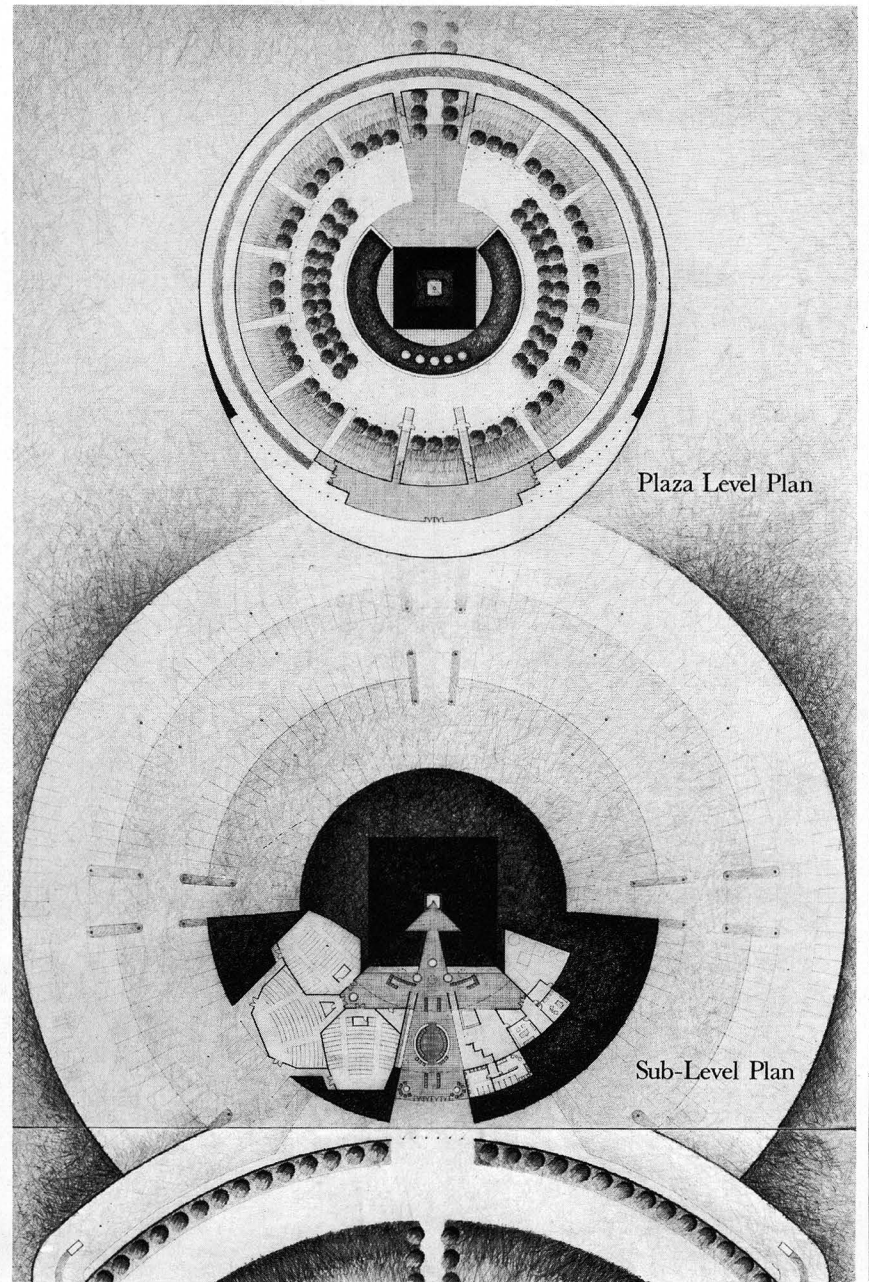
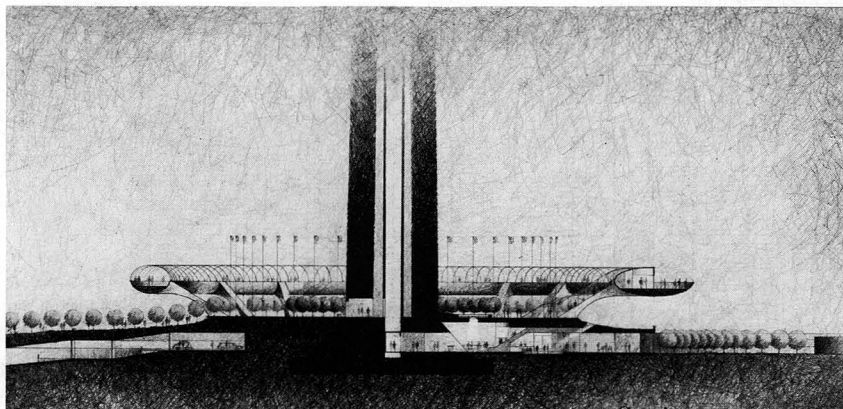
The geometry of the mall and the physical characteristics of the Monument were the primary influences on the design concepts. The Monument is situated on a gentle mound. The design reinforces a visitor's sense of the mound through the development of an underground pedestrian mall. Its east side location allows a distant focus on the Capitol building.

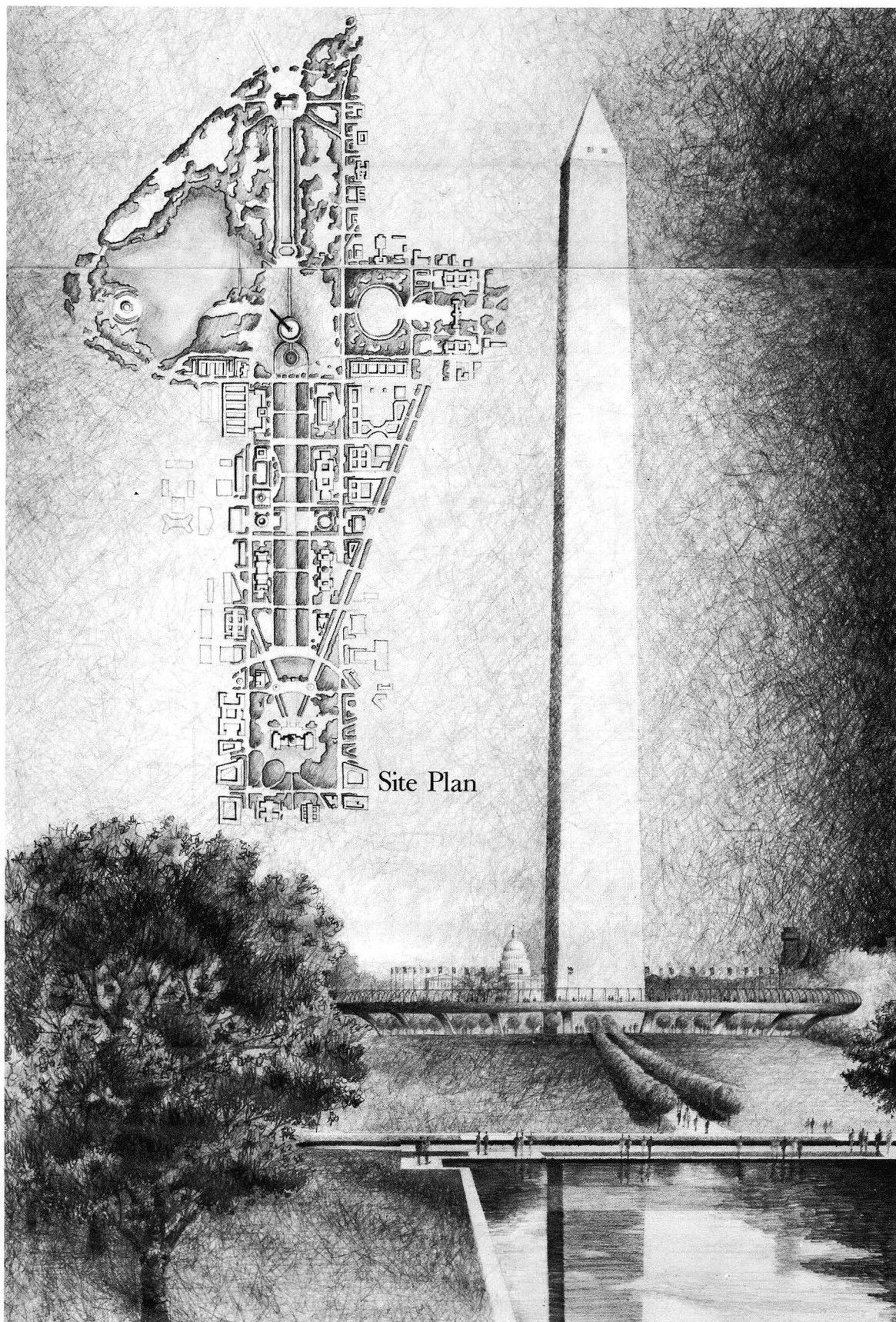
The foremost characteristic of the Monument's site, however, is its location on two major axes: one running north-south between the

Jefferson Memorial and the White House, the other running east-west between the Capitol and the Lincoln Memorial. Additionally, several minor axes, and the elliptical drive in front of the White House, have a strong presence on the site. This geometrically unique location was reinforced through several devices. The ground plane was developed in a formal manner, reflecting the symmetries implicit in each axis.

More significantly a floating ring was developed to encircle the Monument. This ring hovers above the tree line and allows visitors to experience a 360° panorama from the perimeter moving walkway. At its east end the ring is expanded to contain an elliptical gallery.

The ring provides a much needed base for the Monument. Visible from all aspects, the ring significantly reduces the scale of the Monument and provides a partial screen through which to view it. Without such an element, it is virtually impossible to feel a sense of place





next to the overwhelming mass of the Monument. A reflecting pool on three sides of the Monument alters the shaft to ground relationship and, with additional landscaping on the plaza surface, significantly contributes to the pedestrian experience.

Subsurface spaces beneath the pedestrian plaza are organized around a central public lobby. The powerful east-west axis has been reinforced by the escalators connecting the lobby to the gallery above. The central position of the Monument is reinforced by the inward direction of the radial movement. The elliptical geometry of the gallery in the ring is reflected in the shape of the seating area in the sky-lit lobby. These spaces gain virtual connection to the Monument, plus natural light, through a series of circular skylights projecting the reflecting pool above.

In contrast to the overt formalism and site references of the major spaces and circulation, the remainder of the subgrade spaces have been organized asymmetrically according to functional requirements. Three small theaters for audio visual presentations are clustered around a central ticket collection area. The remaining areas include a gift shop, concession spaces, offices, restrooms and storage.

The major objective of this Visitors Center design has been to develop an environment capable of physically accommodating large numbers of people while remaining respectful of and enhancing the remarkable formal qualities of the Washington Monument.