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## Arctic Centre: Rovaniemi, Finland

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# Arctic Centre

Rovaniemi, Finland

William C. Miller  
Gregory A. Yager

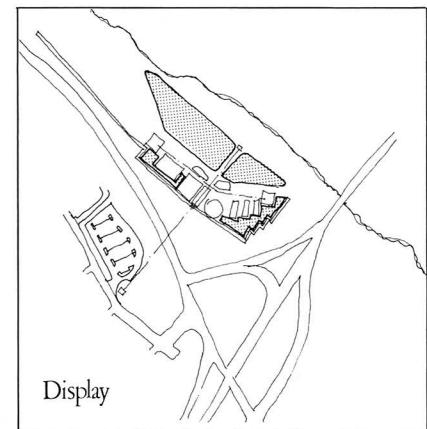
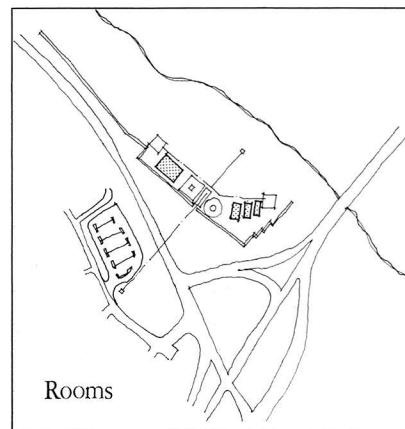
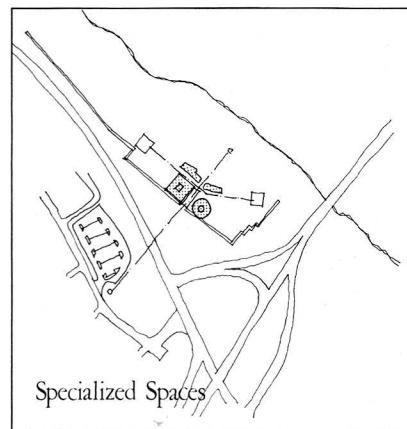
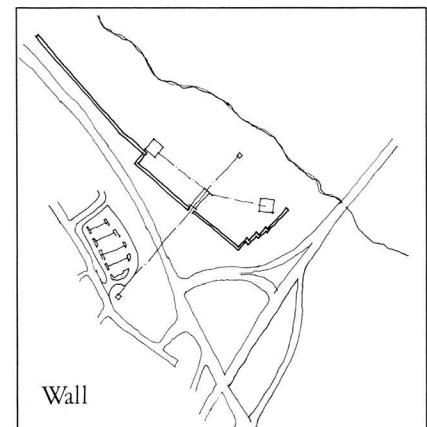
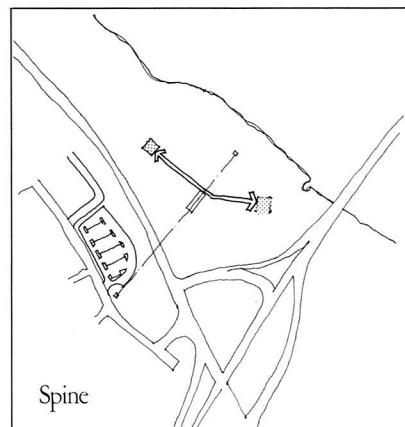
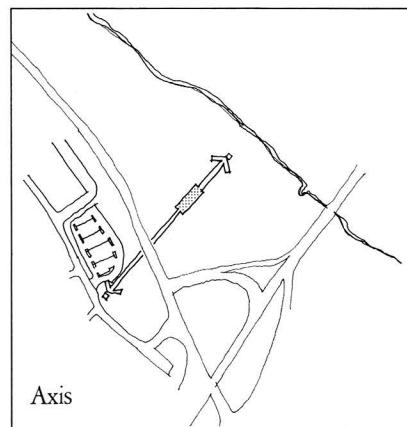
## Background

The Arctic Centre, developed in response to the City of Rovaniemi's issuance of an ideas competition, is a complex incorporating two facilities: the Arctic Museum and the Lapland Provincial Museum. The competition's objective was to provide a museum center which would promote public awareness of the following: 1) the unique ecological and natural phenomena of the northern sphere; 2) the cultural history of, and man's impact on and response to, the Arctic region; and 3) the history and development of Finnish Lapland and the City of Rovaniemi.

Comprising approximately 10,000 square meters apportioned between the two museums, the Arctic Centre includes interior and exterior exhibition spaces, meeting rooms and gathering places, administrative suites, research facilities, and support areas. Within the Arctic Museum, a unique space termed the "Polarium" is specified. Its purpose is to provide a place where various northern phenomena may be simulated. The northern lights, for example, as well as nightless nights, dayless days, and polar exploration are among these phenomena.

## Site

Rovaniemi, the provincial capital of Lapland, is situated on the Arctic Circle at the confluence of the Kemijoki



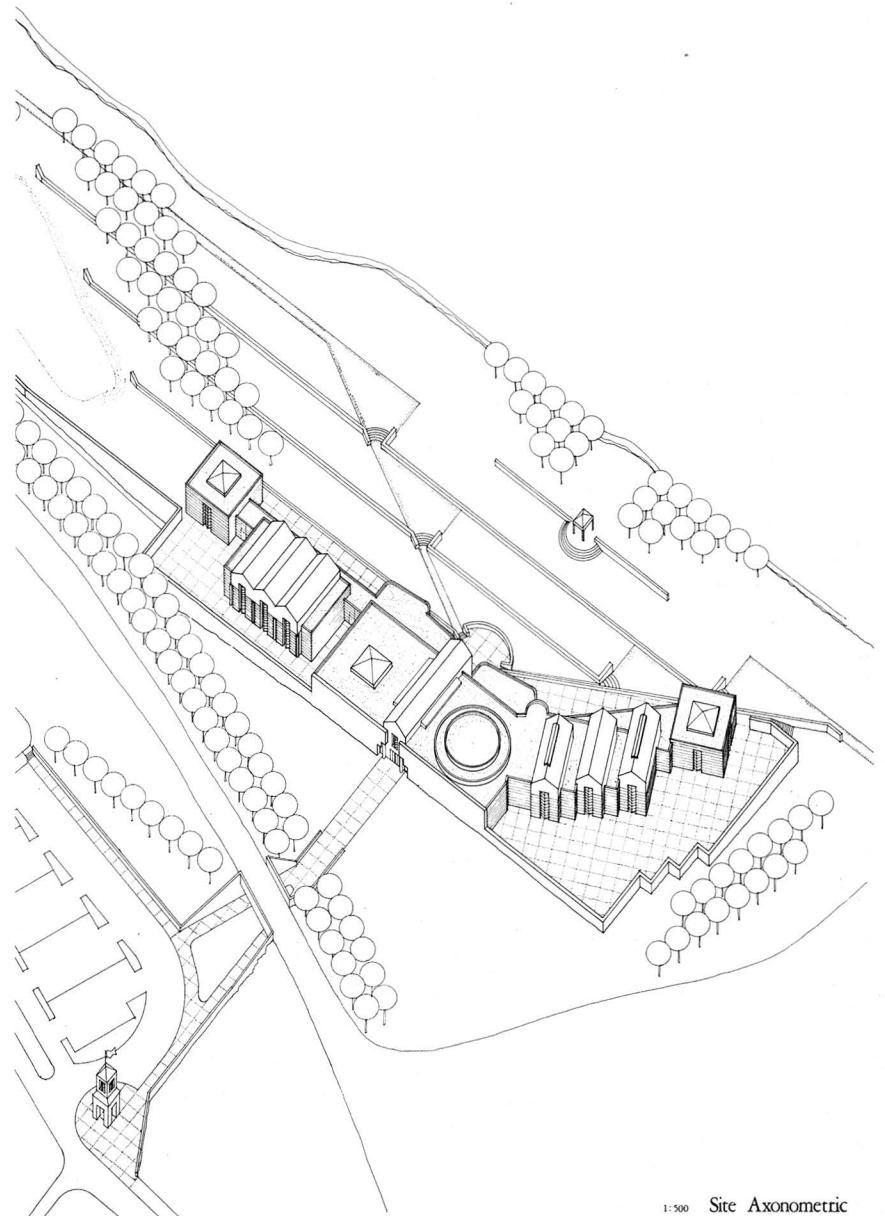
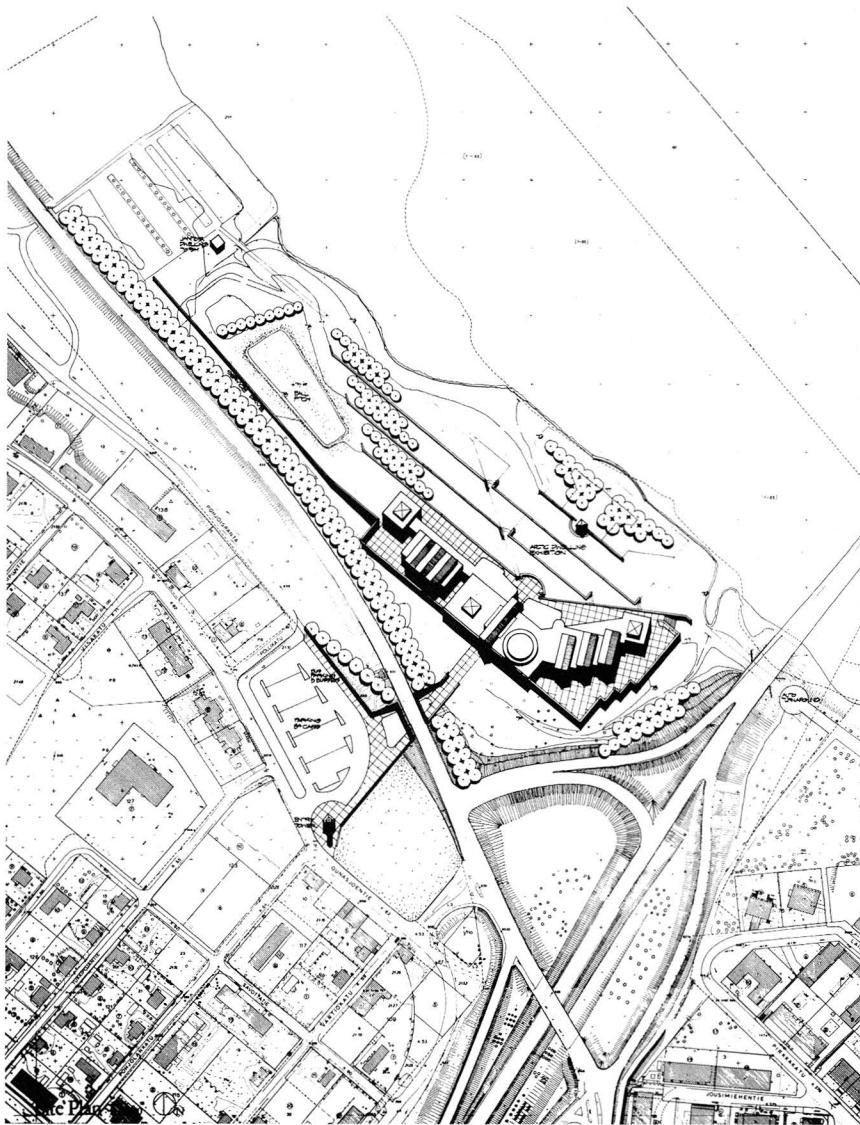
and Ounasjoki rivers. The site, located on the southern bank of the Ounasjoki river and next to a national highway, is at the northern edge of the town center. Acting as a gateway to and from Finnish Lapland, the gently sloping site is divided into two sections by a feeder road. The larger northern portion of the site is designated for the museum proper, while the smaller, southern section is

underpass beneath the feeder road is required to accommodate access between the two parcels.

## Order and Place

The general concepts brought to bear upon the program are comprised of order, including those ideas which regulate the direction of the design. The diagrams indicate the primary organizational properties of the Arctic

Centre: an axis connects the site parcels together with the river, and establishes the location of the entry hall; a granite wall defines the domain for the building, creating a smaller site-within-a-site; all of the museum's galleries are ordered along circulation spines that run perpendicular to the axis; the spatial hierarchy is established by the differentiation of specialized spaces (foyer, Polarium, administrative suite, meeting halls, and



1:500 Site Axonometric

cafeteria), generalized spaces (entry hall and galleries), and circulation (promenades); and landscaped terraces, which house outdoor displays, step from the complex to the river to acknowledge the slope of the site.

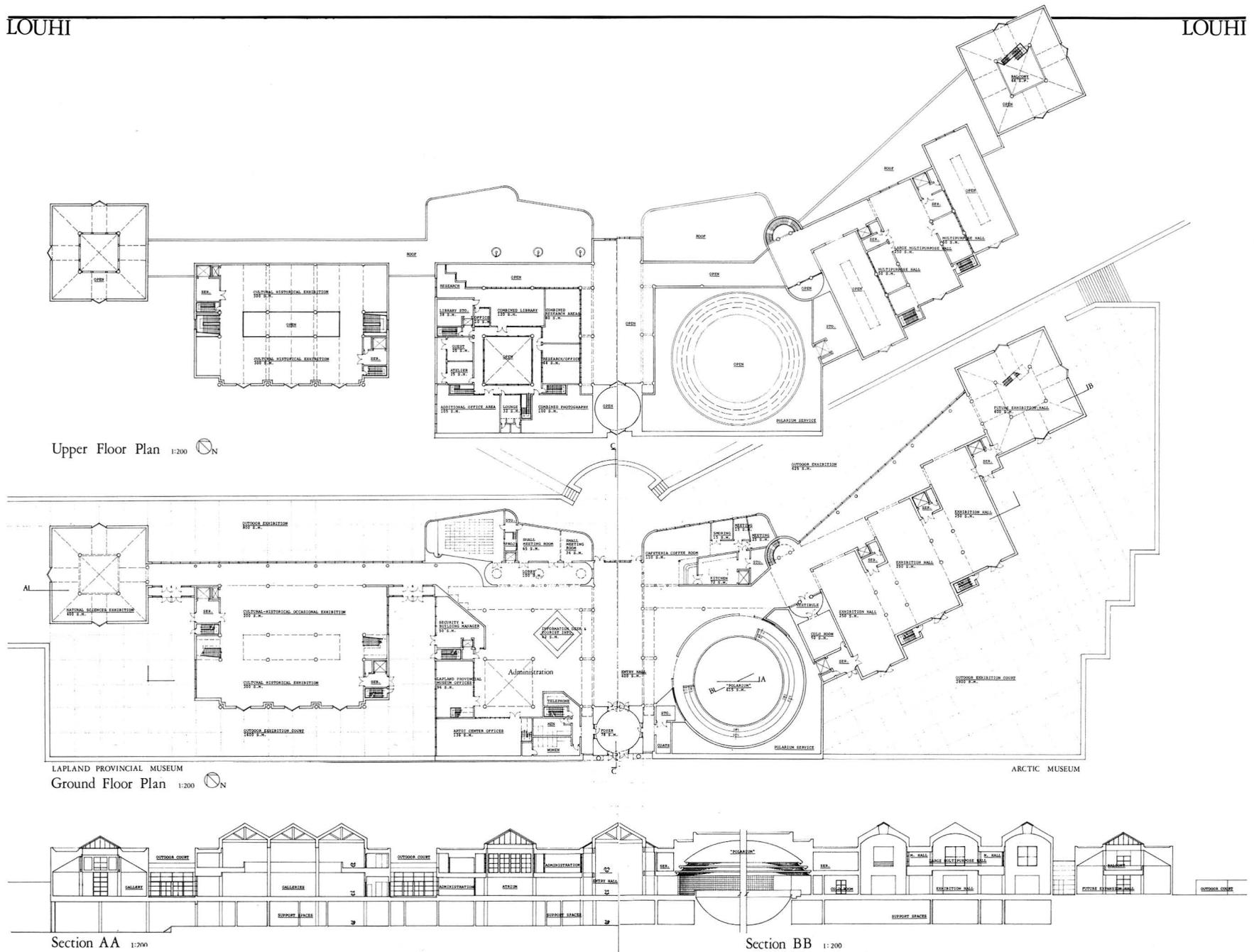
To establish or make *place*, is to denote the modification of the general conditions to the particular or circumstantial situations found or realized within the extant context. Here

such notions as *gathering, inside, and particularization* are important. Gathering is an important concept, for one not only gathers the elements of the building together, but also of the site and the surrounding world. The axis gathers the major building and site elements together sequentially, but superimposed upon the axis are the perpendicular circulation spines (promenades overlooking the river) and the diagonal pathways leading to

the river. These elements form embracing gestures to the larger world, gathering in the immediate site, the river, and finally, the surrounding Lap landscape. The eastern wing of the complex, which is rotated about the Polarium, acknowledges the edge condition created by the national highway off-ramp, and thus intensifies the embracing gesture.

Inside is established in several ways.

The granite wall surrounding the complex and making outdoor exhibition courts, demarks inside from outside by creating a miniature site or domain within which the building is placed. Passage through the wall denotes being in, or arrival. The stepped terraces also acknowledge being in; one is simultaneously within the embrace of the complex's outstretched wings and in the landscape beyond. The placement of landscape elements, the rows



and groves of trees, reinforces both gathering and being in through positional layering and gestural inflection.

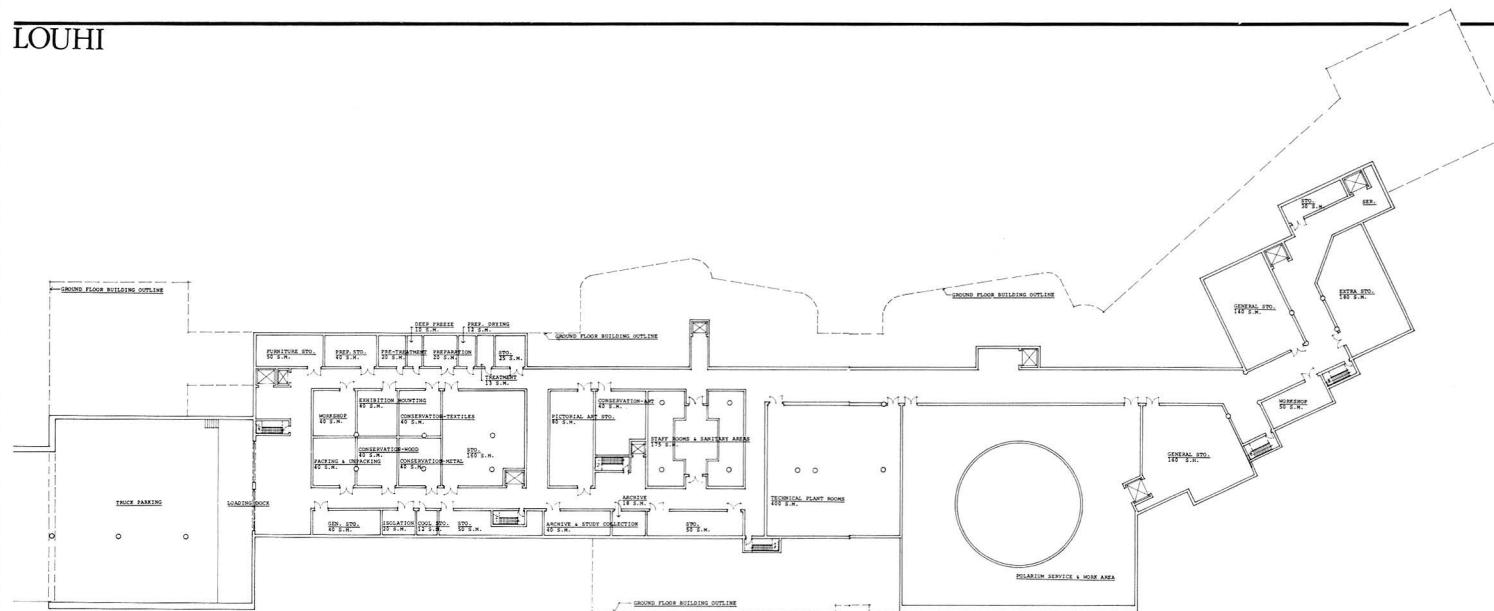
Spatial particularization, manifested through specialized room configuration and by ceiling manipulation, defines a number of special places within the composition. One is the cylindrical foyer with its conical ceiling, while another, the circular

Polarium, with its domed ceiling and sunken curved floor, marks the unique space in the building. Light courts, as aediculae, are defined by four columns and a pyramidal skylight, and are used in the administrative suite and the galleries, terminating the circulation spines. The meeting rooms and cafeteria are acknowledged by more of a free form plan configuration. These special

places are in contrast to the more generalized and regular order of the complex. The gallery spaces in the Arctic Museum and the Lapland Provincial Museum are differentiated by their ceiling configuration. The Lapland Provincial Museum is a simple shed form supported by trusses, while the Arctic Museum has curved, skylight surfaces, recalling the ceiling of the Polarium.

Associations

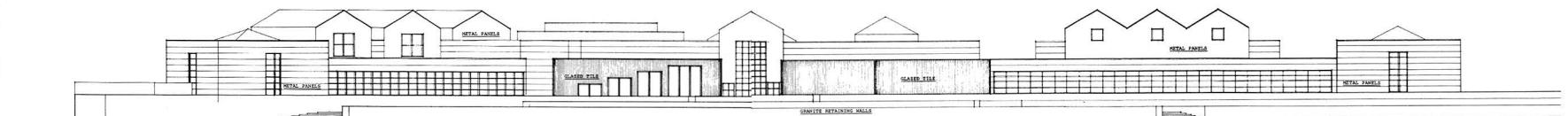
While order becomes manifest through the relational potentials of the program, and place is established by acknowledging the specifics of context, the idea of association is witnessed in the formal images selected for the Arctic Centre. These formal images and their concomitant experiential qualities are both general



Basement Plan 1:200



Highway Elevation 1:200



River Elevation 1:200



Section CC 1:200

and particular in their associative references.

The entry tower, formally derived from the detached bell towers of Finnish vernacular churches, demarks entrance to the site and complex while simultaneously denoting the civic purpose of the Arctic Centre. The tower begins the axial sequence which is terminated by a riverside pavilion in the

form of an aedicula. As an archetypal form, the aedicula is transformed into light courts that are used to mark special places within the composition—the central space of the administrative suite and the pavilion-shaped galleries terminating the circulation spines. The skylighted interior court is a common element found throughout Scandinavian and Finnish architecture. The volumetric

configuration selected for the entry hall and exhibition spaces is also a reference to Finland's vernacular building traditions. The simple shed forms recall the rural farm buildings, boat houses, and haylofts found in the Finnish countryside. The great domed Polarium space alludes to Finnish Neo-Classic architecture as well as to Gunnar Asplund's Woodland Chapel and Stockholm Public Library.

It is traditional in Finnish architectural competitions for projects to be submitted under a pseudonym to ensure the anonymity of the competitors. "Louhi," the pseudonym chosen for the entry, is a character from the *Kalevala*, the Finnish national folk epic. Louhi was the mistress of the land of Pohjola, a place that is often associated with Lapland.