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Eagle Mountain Observatory

Eagle Mountain, Minnesota

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Critics: Gene Ernst
Virginia Cartwright
Don Watts

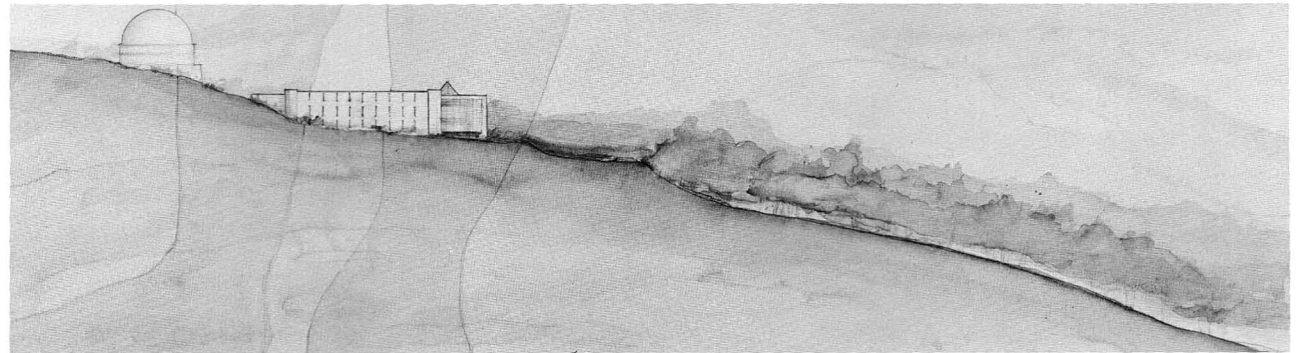
"The way we design universes today, with the observational approach of modern science, may differ from the sacred metaphors of our ancestors, but we all do it for the same reason: to comprehend the universe in a way that lets us feel at home in it."

—Dr. Edwin C. Krupp
from *Echoes of Ancient Skies*

The stimulus for the design of Eagle Mountain Observatory originates in the above quotation. Our contemporary understanding of the universe has become a rational and systematic science, separating man as a casual onlooker in the scheme. Ancient man on the other hand, believed the universe to be a delicate balance of earth, sky, and man. The blending of these three elements lends a richness that is absent in our modern interpretation.

Mindful of this premise, the timberland of northern Minnesota is selected as the site for an astronomical research community. The specific location, Eagle Mountain, being the highest point in Minnesota and removed from civilization, allows a clear and unobscured night sky. Its remoteness also reinforces the concept of man's isolation in the universe and generates a dialogue between the natural landscape and the cosmic world.

A permanent team of scientists will make Eagle Mountain their work place as well as home place. The interplay of



Partial site section.

work and leisure form the notion of community. Individual cottages and a community lodge provide for a variety of personal and social activities and offer important symbolic meanings. The functional and symbolic center of the community lies in the observational structure. Poised at the crest of the mountain, it becomes the catalyst for the major ordering concept.

The observational dome terminates the main organizing axis which originates in the gate building at the base of the mountain. On approach to the research community, occasional glimpses of the shimmering white dome can be seen across lakes and over tree tops. From the waters edge the gate building marks the entry and frames the distant dome in the threshold to the site.

A series of man made and natural transitions provide a sequential hierarchy along this axis. From the gate building a path carved through the trees, along the axis, unfolds onto a great outdoor room. This outdoor room, defined by



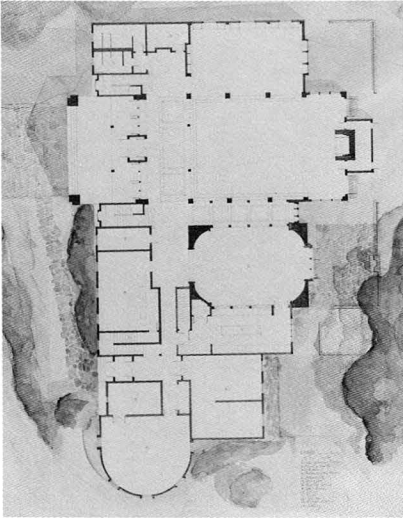
Lodge elevation.

the bounding trees and stone plinth, establishes the center of community life at Eagle Mountain and marks a cross axis connecting the cluster of cottages with the lodge.

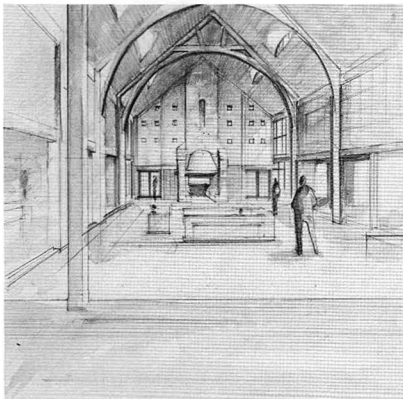
The cottages, organized around a great hollowed clearing, follow the natural contours of the site. Tucked behind gentle berms and shielded by trees, they become secondary to the greater landscape. Beyond the cottages lies the gardens and orchards. The garden

buildings become a terminous point for this secondary axis, as well as a transition point to the unordered landscape.

The other terminous point of this secondary axis rests at the hearth within the great room of the lodge. At this place the participants of the community come together. The movement from this communal domain to the more private domain is syncopated by a series of transitions such as the massive stone columns of the lodge, the break in the trees,



Lodge plan.

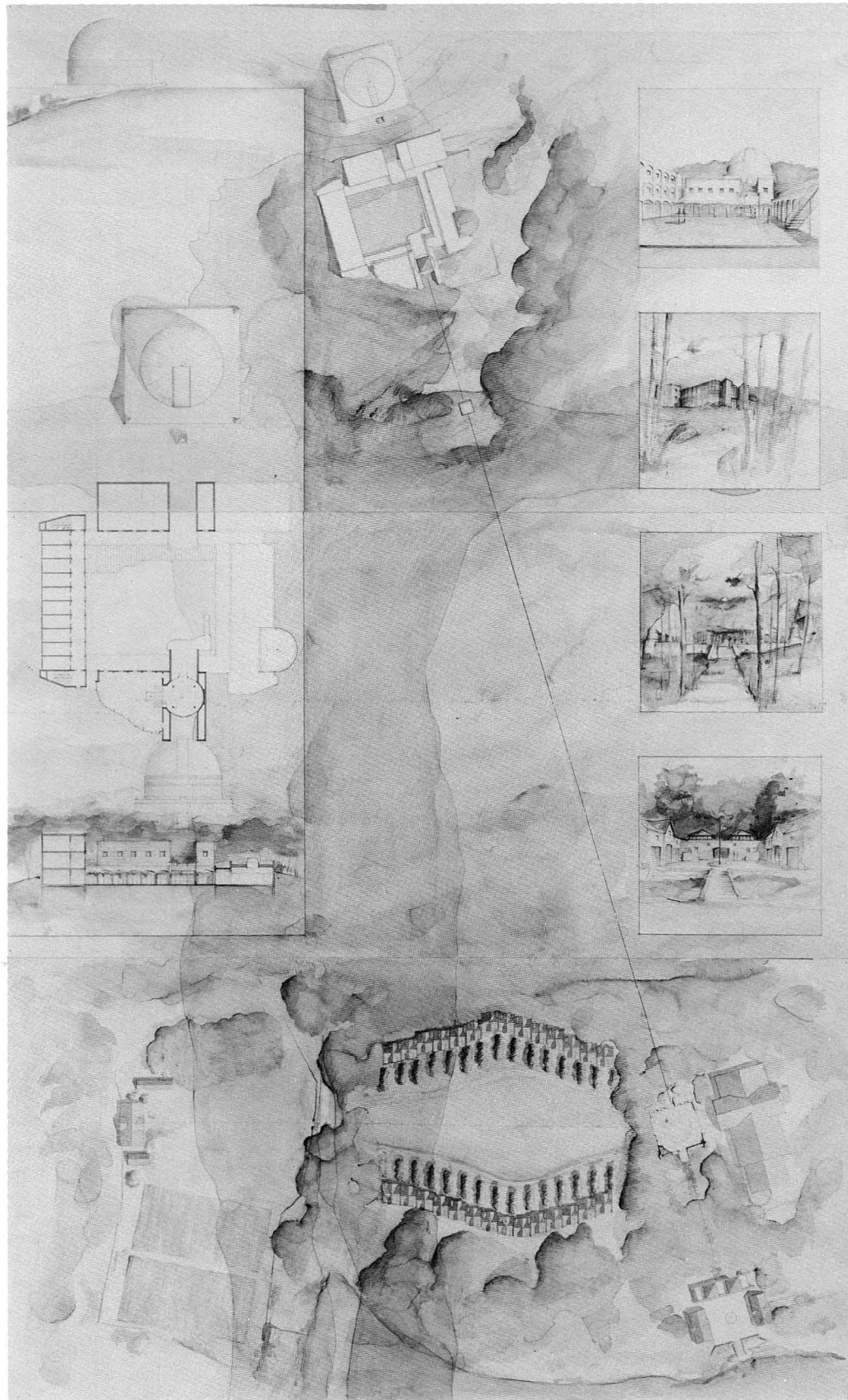


View of great room.

the stone steps to the cottages, and the gate to the gardens, all of which add to the experiential qualities of the place.

From the great outdoor room, a path through a group of rock outcroppings picks up the main axis. Upon passing through this natural gate, the path begins to meander and view of the dome is obscured. At the crest of the mountain the forest surrounds a clearing, the location of the observatory. A tower marks the entry to the structure and reestablishes the axis.

From this vantage the pervading site order is clear. The alignment of the formal elements is realized, and their connection reinforced through the motif of the circle inscribing a square. Sky, earth, and water become intertwined with man.



Site plan with administration building plan and perspectives.