

Four Searches: Antoine Predock Architect

Eileen Devereux

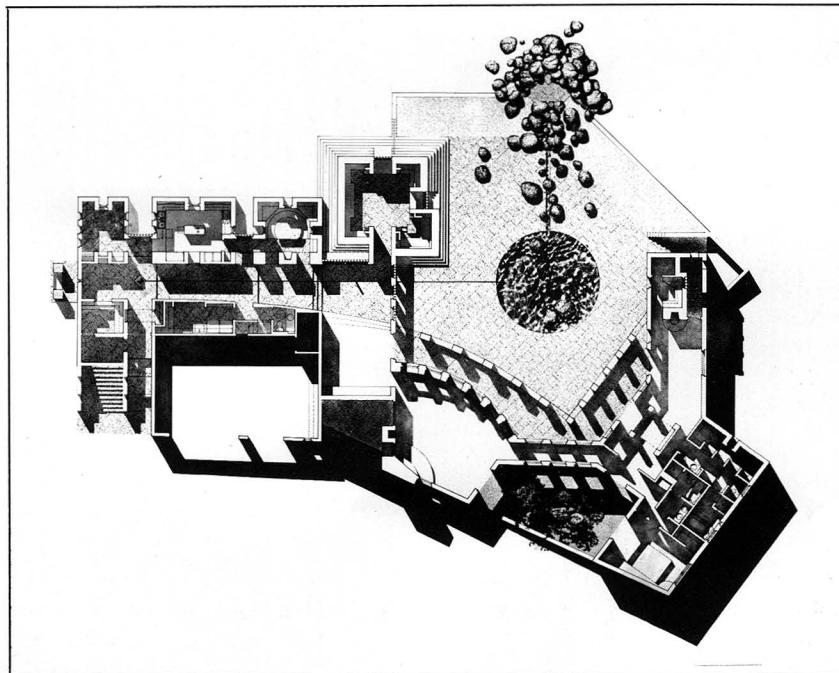
The power of the narrative metaphor in describing architecture and the design process is compelling and seductive. Its strength lies in a capacity to absorb and reveal concepts which elude common understanding; its weakness, in the temptation for specious interpretation where discerning analysis is required to define the distinctive elements of the architectural and linguistic systems.

In our work the notion of narrative accompanies other explorations: memory, landscape imperatives, and cultural stratigraphy. If, in this effort we create 'tales', they are adventures, non-fictional accounts of forays into the spiritual, social, and physical micro-environment of each project. The architecture summarizes those explorations and reifies the essence and spirit which we have unearthed and defined. The text for the four projects discussed here recounts not a design process but a distillation of the process and research. The themes are overlapping, but in each architectural 'text', and the written text which describes it, a distinct atmosphere emerges.

Thus, for the Fuller House the focal points are the desert spirit, natural cycles, human patterns, and the geologic context. The design for the Las Vegas Library and Children's Museum, also a desert project, derives from concepts of desert colonization, the significance of a cultural civic 'heart', 'Wild West' urbanization, technology, and fantasy. For the American Heritage Center and Art



Sketch of Fuller House



Floor Plan

Museum at the University of Wyoming, marks on the landscape, alignments, campus context, and historical 'rendezvous' were the salient points. Landscape

transformations, the meaning of gateway, and the intangible aspects of campus patterns inspired the development of the Classroom/Laboratory/Administration

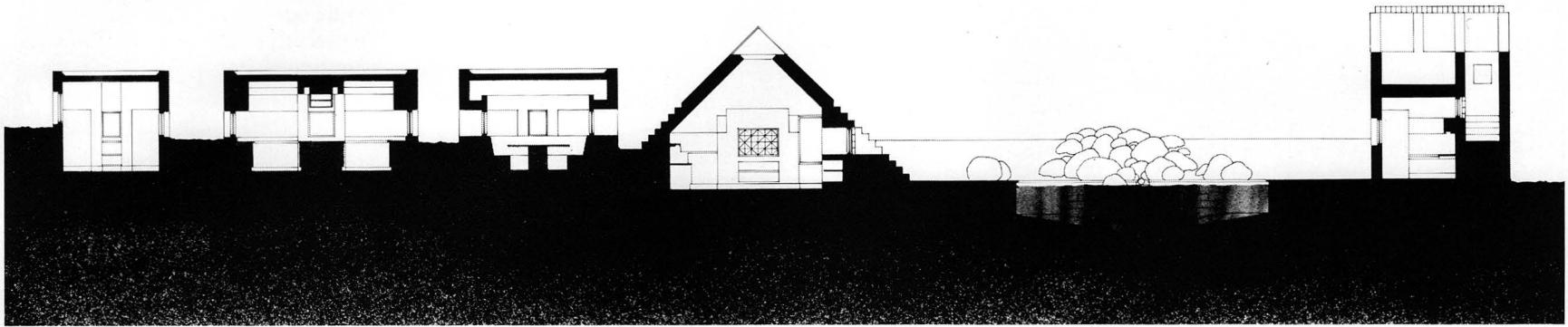
Building design at California Polytechnic University at Pomona.

Fuller House Pinnacle Peak, Arizona

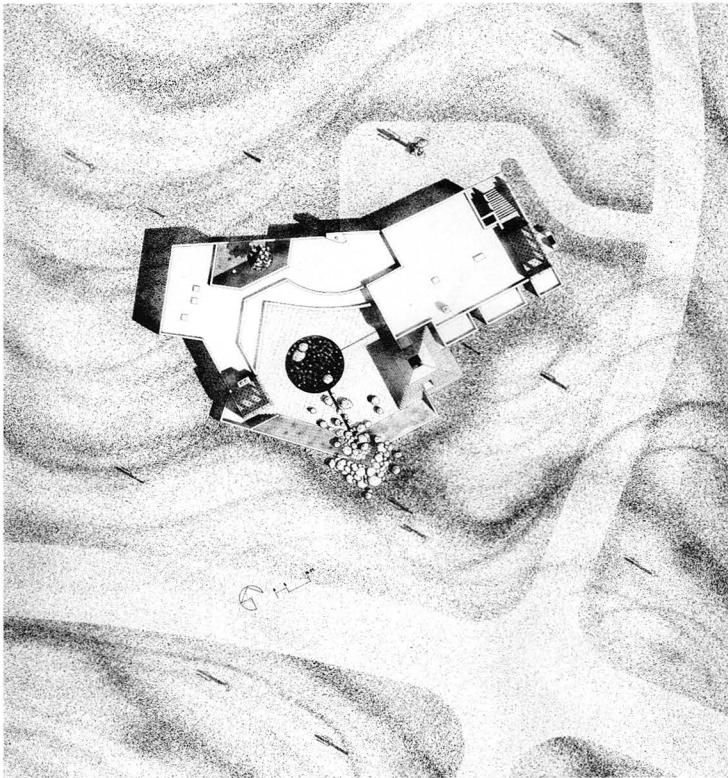
The high Sonoran desert site of the Fuller house is enclosed by eroded granite ridges and peaks. Below this encircling rim, saguaro, cholla, ocotillo, and prickly pear cacti grow amidst palo verde and ironwood trees and jojoba and creosote bushes. This sparse vegetation, at once hardy and fragile, speaks of the adaptations necessary for life beneath an unremitting sun.

In this desert environment, architecture and landscape, human procession and natural cycles, join in synchronous dances. The low, weighty perimeter of the house connects in its massiveness to the powerful geologic context and in color to the olive-beige of the desert floor. Viewed from a distance this base becomes a mesa, and the pyramidal den, a dusty abstraction of the surrounding sculptural peaks. Contrasting, brittle shade structures create shadow patterns recalling the tracery cast on the site by the lacy branches of the ocotillo and palo verde.

The plan of the house distills into a single symbolic pattern the daily course of the sun and the routine of domestic activities. A sunrise-viewing pavilion is situated above the breakfast room; an interior



Section



Site Plan

'canyon' (gallery with centered, sequential water system) leads past abstracted kitchen and dining 'boulders'; the 'mountain' (pyramidal den) introduces the 'valley' (a central patio); across the 'valley' a trellised, sunset-viewing tower completes the sequence.

At each event in this sequence the building exposes significant vantage points. The stepped exterior of the pyramidal den provides seating for viewing the night lights of Phoenix. The living areas focus on the distant mountains beyond the city. The bedroom zone, set

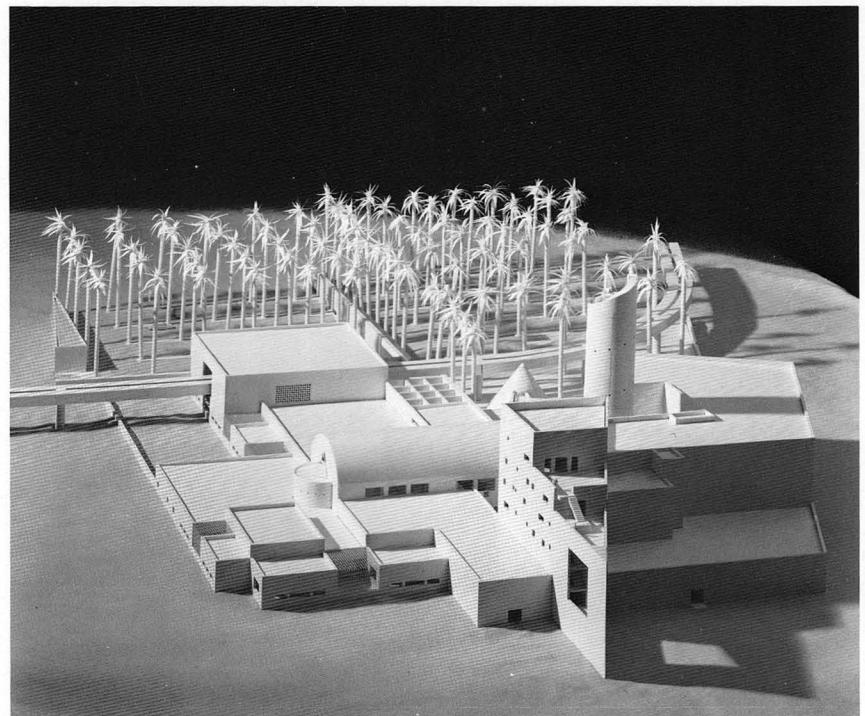
apart from the rest of the house, focuses on its private patio and sunset tower.

The project embodies the gentle standoff between built forms and the desert environment. In the ensuing struggle the line of demarcation between the house and the terrain becomes ambiguous. In certain places the desert enters, in others a tight line of defense prohibits entry. Refuge in this arid precinct has been created by the presence of water, shade, and enclosure. Looking out from this sequestered desert retreat, the vast landscape scale can be better comprehended.

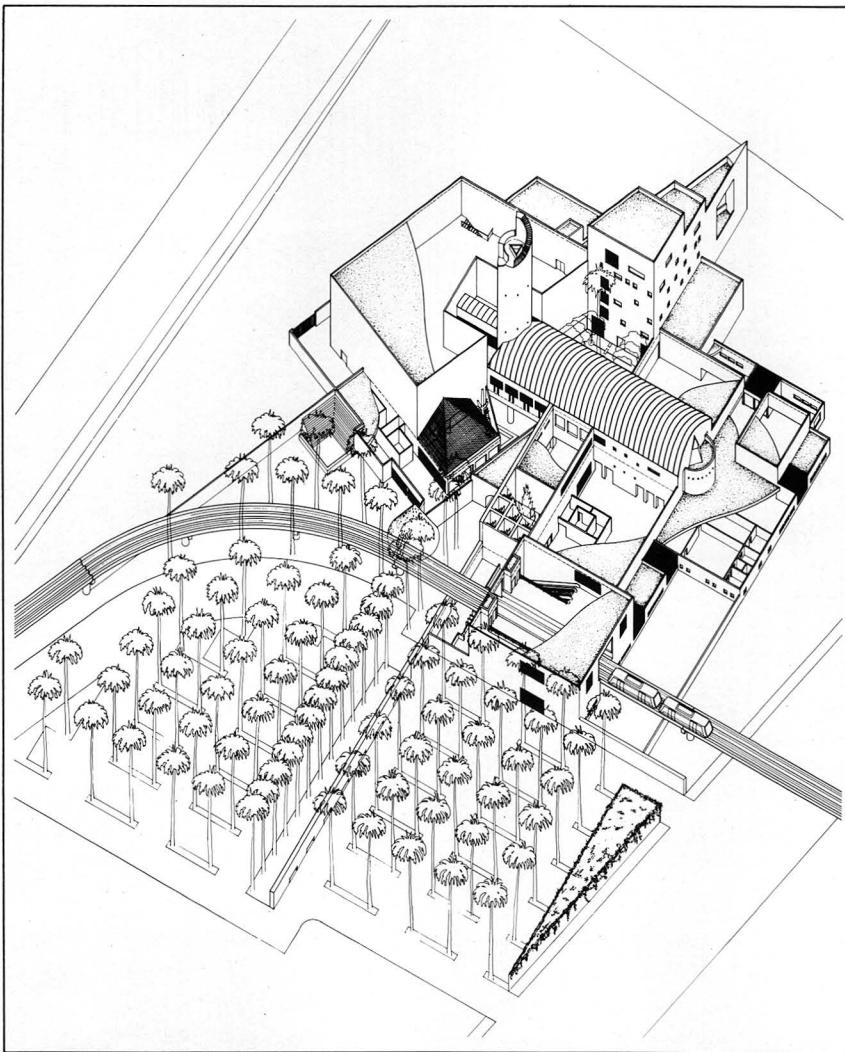
Las Vegas Library and Children's Museum Las Vegas, Nevada

The fragility of both the desert and the communities which colonize it is apparent when one views Las Vegas, Nevada from the air. The Strip, Glitter Gulch, and the city form a thin, permeable membrane which keeps the desert marginally at bay. Where the desert relents, rectilinear grids of grass and asphalt parking prevail.

An oasis is forming in this brittle environment. The Las Vegas Library and Children's Museum will be built at the cultural heart of the city where temporary Paiute shelters were located prior to colonization and, later, the first permanent Anglo-American settlement in the area. Visitors experience the library and children's museum as desert building and civic monument. These overlays surface immediately in the Palm Court which signals shelter and convenient automobile access. From this area one follows



View of Model



Axonometric



View of Model

the water course and sandstone wall to the entry.

The track and column of an overhead magnetic-levitation transportation system frame the view of the focal entry plaza. Ceremonial elements of the complex impinge on this building forecourt: the conical Birthday Room, the Science Tower, and the Meeting Room. Access to these pieces is through the Lobby fissure which delineates the programmatic bifurcation of the building — museum to the west and library to the east.

The Young People's Library physically bridges this architectural and conceptual break. Its blue metal vault spans from the massive landform of the two-level exhibition areas to the aggregated village form of the library below. The sandstone wedge which is lodged at the north end of the building houses the administrative areas of both the Museum and the Library District. From the shared Boardroom at the top level visitors view a subtly intricate panorama. Pieces of mountains, deserts, casinos, neighborhoods, and technology come into focus from perimeter openings. This visual confluence of nature, fantasy, urbanization, and science underscores the complexity of both the desert environment and the task of creating architecture responsive to its many faces.

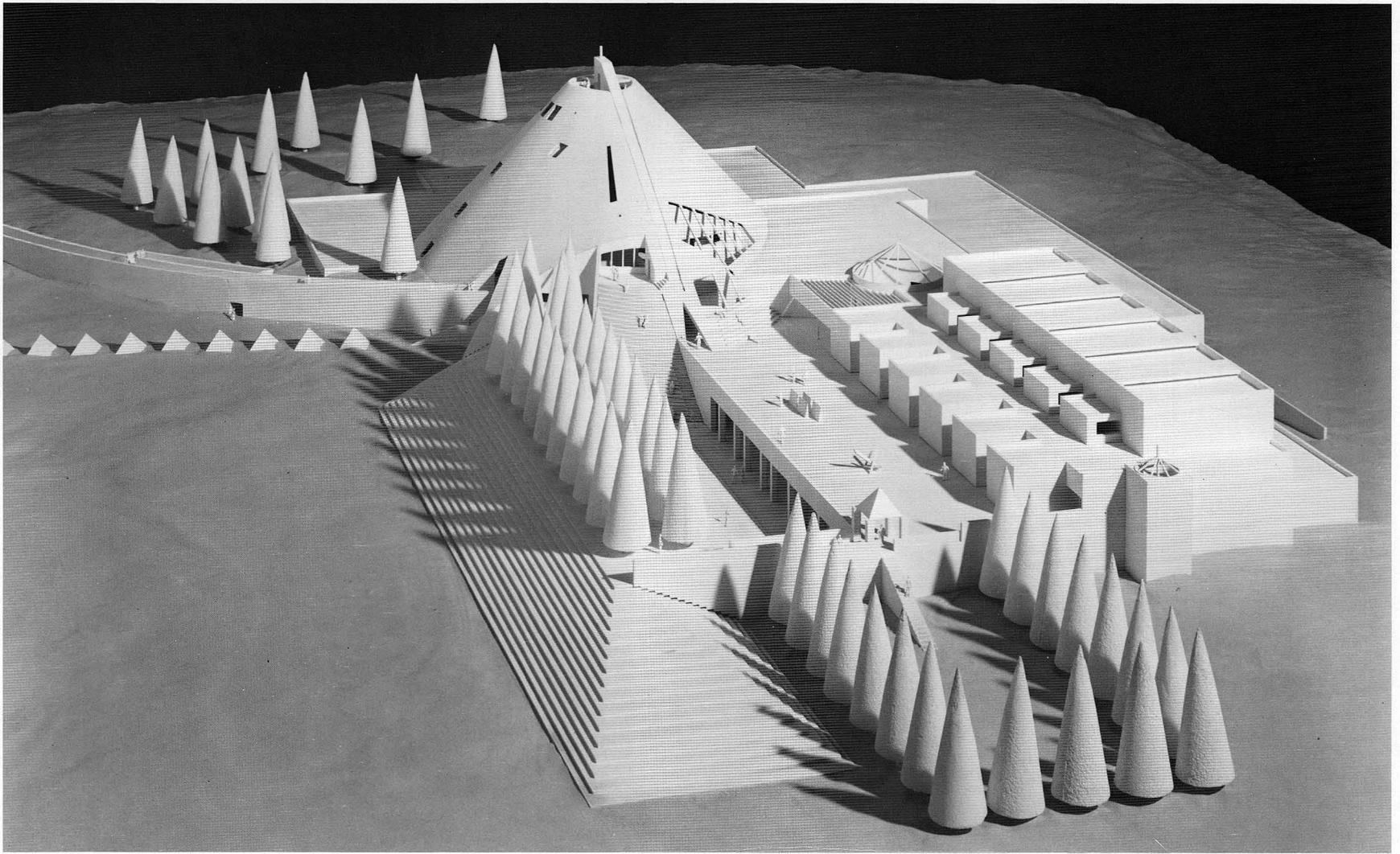
American Heritage Center and Art Museum University of Wyoming, Laramie

In marking the landscape in the American West, architecture confronts daunting expanses of land and geologic formations. The scale of the natural features is difficult to perceive and to impact. Sited on the University of Wyoming campus, the American Heritage Center and Fine Arts Museum is framed by the distant Snowy Range and the nearer Laramie Range, each highlighted by a single peak.

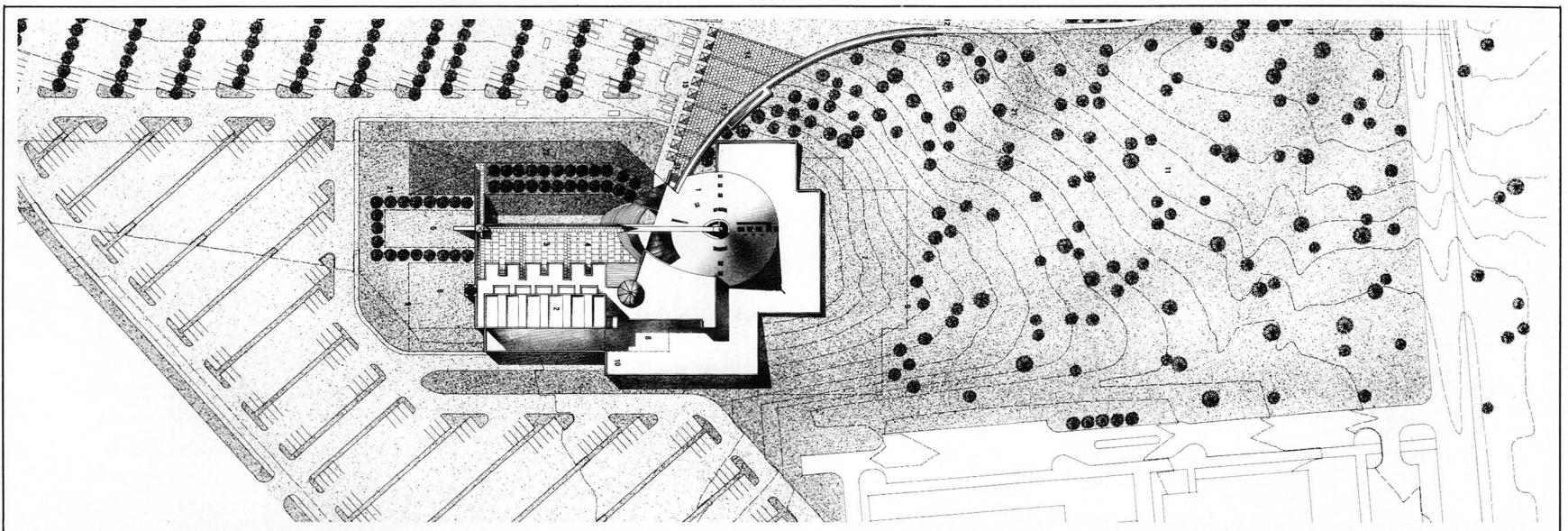
Adjacent facilities on the campus are object buildings, whole or partial geometric solids resting on the prairie. The AHC-AM is both object building and non-building; its form emerges from this plain but remains horizontally rooted in the landscape. Situating the AHC-AM in a taut relationship to these adjacent buildings establishes a new, forested quadrangle at the western edge of the site. Additionally, what is forecourt to the AHC-AM stretches out to the south to become a sports plaza across Willet Drive. Intellectual, athletic, and social 'rendez-vous' occur simultaneously.

Two discrete forms, an archival mountain and a clustered village, give separate identity to each facility and celebrate the special functions of the complex: dedicated rooms, visitor research areas, lobby, permanent and traveling galleries. These forms rest on a landscape-integrated base containing work and storage areas. The image of the building in sun, snow, and wind is bold yet welcoming and protective.

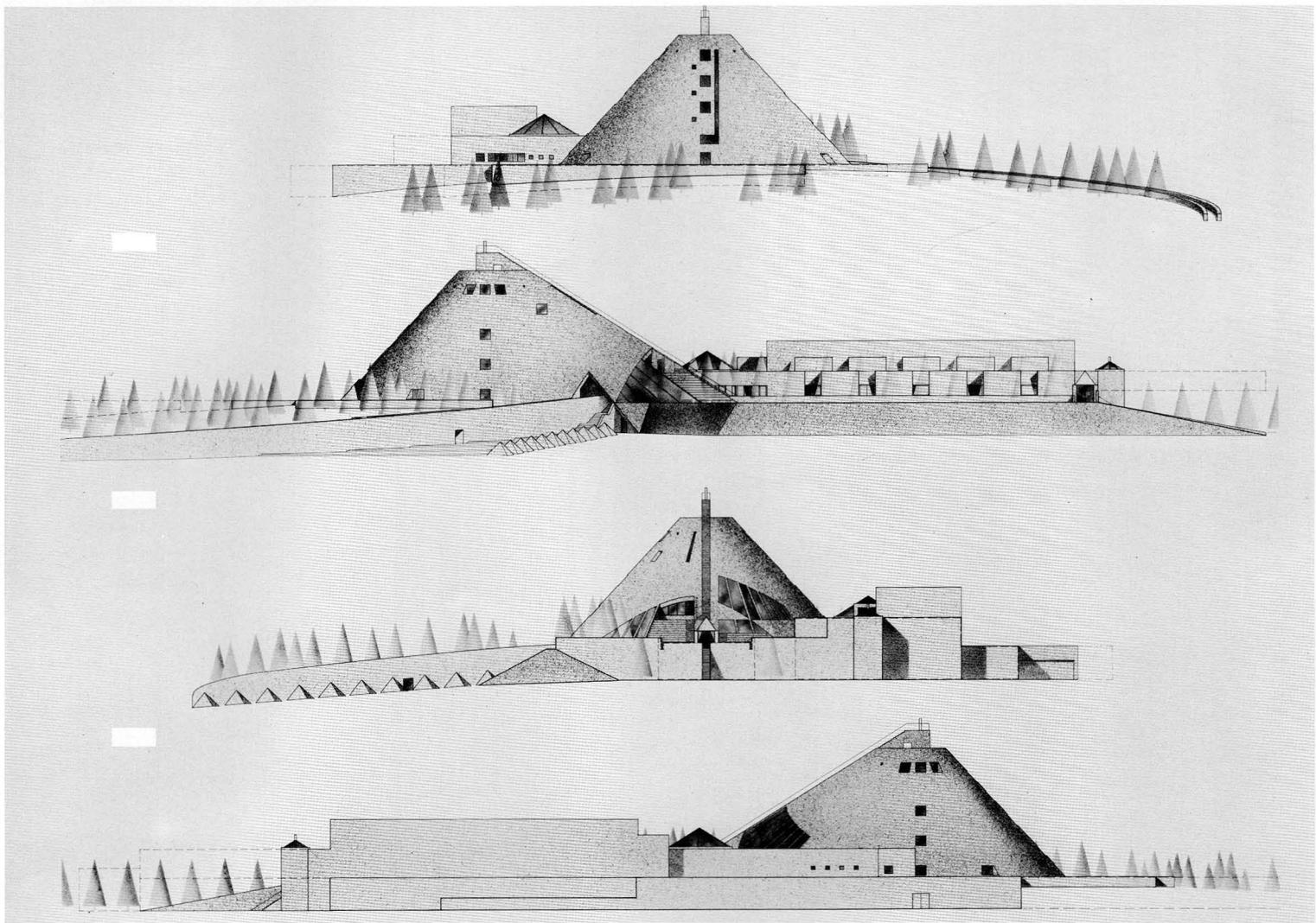
Akin to the buildings of the Old West town which adopted classical pediments to assert their presence, the AHC-AM is a consciously monumental landscape abstraction visible from vantage points on the interstate highway, on campus, and in the stadium. Its forms represent a symbol for the present campus, a gateway for future growth near the site, and a statement of the powerful spirit of Wyoming.



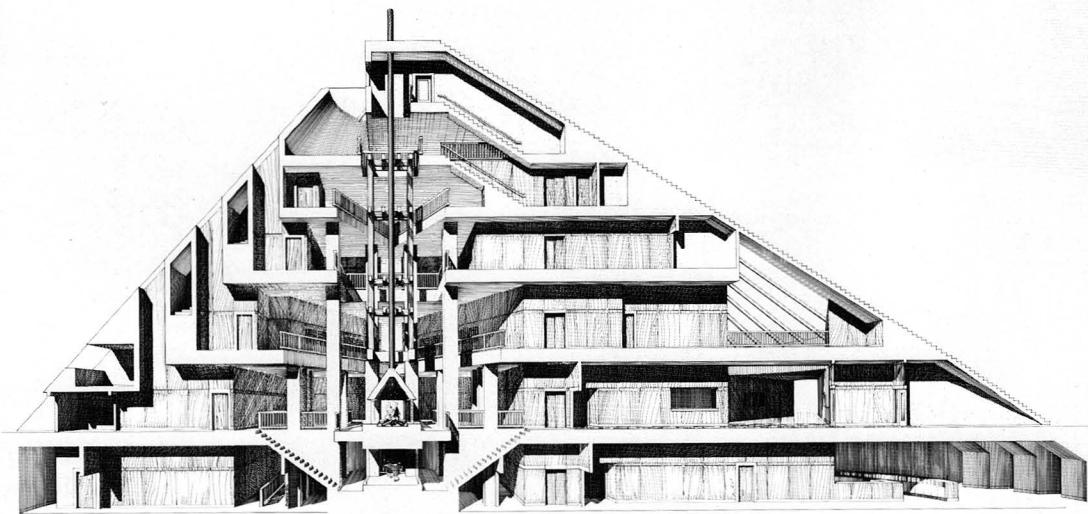
American Heritage Center and Art Museum



Site Plan



Elevations

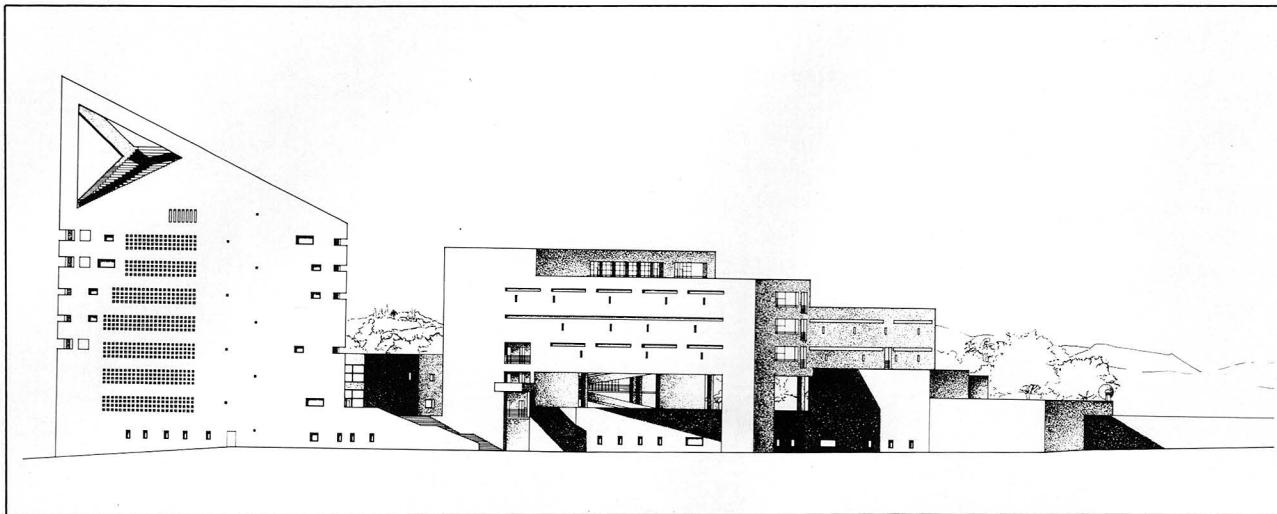


Section Perspective

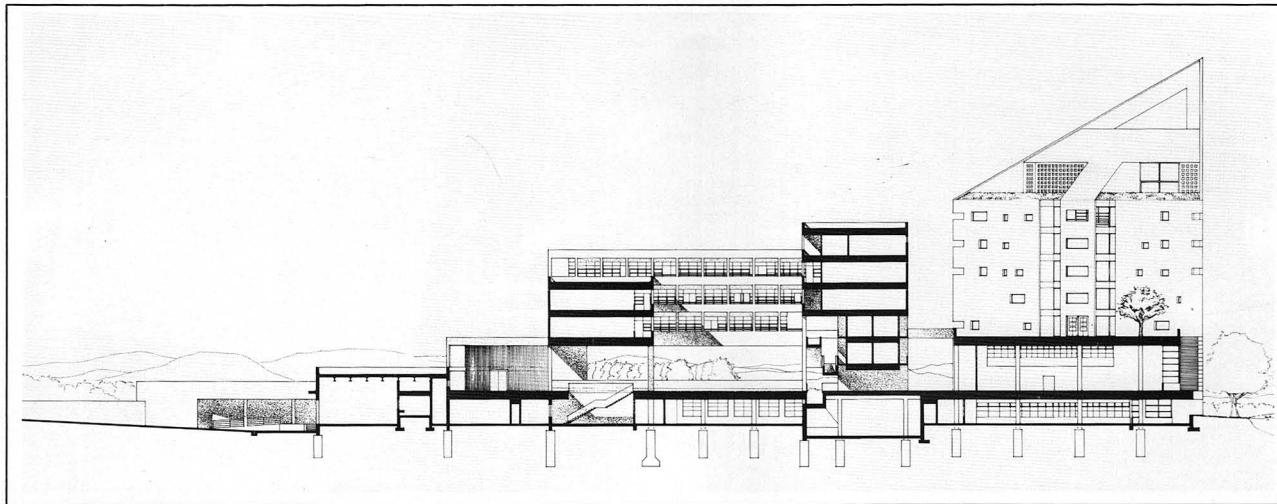
Classroom/Laboratory/Administration Building
California Polytechnic University,
Pomona

Altered landscapes result inevitably from human settlement. Successive transformations of Pomona — from the dry, swept-earth Rancho San Jose to the romantic, verdant ranch of W.K. Kellogg to the technological, super-scale freeway interchange — have produced a panorama of palpable cultural depth and visual intensity.

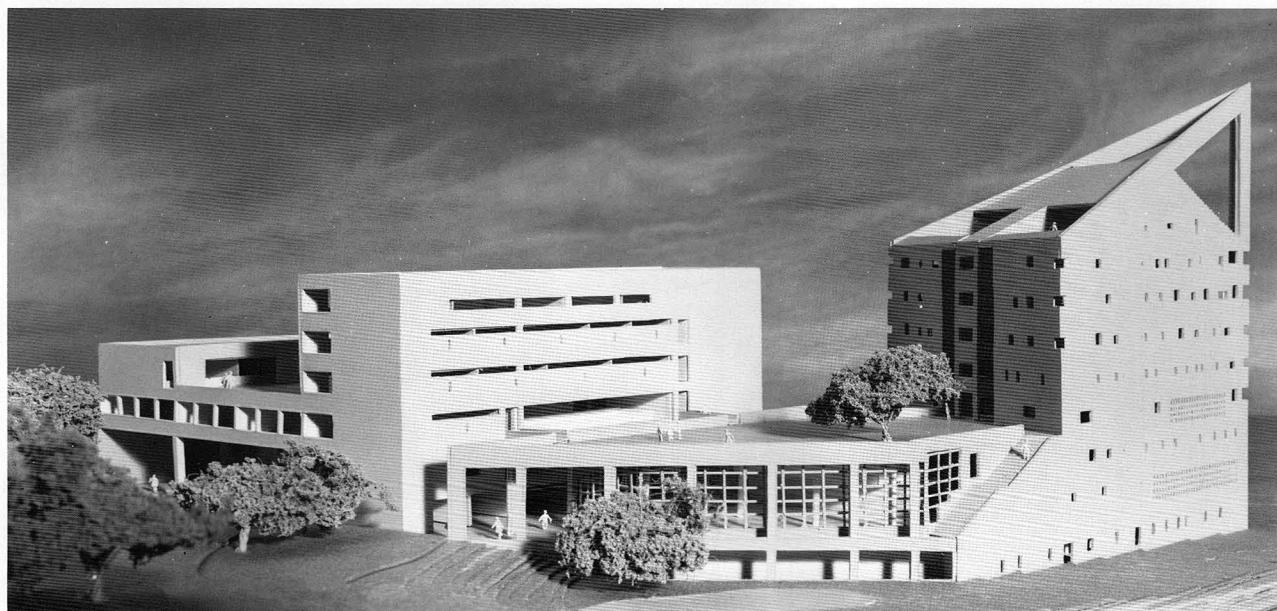
The design for the CLA building alters a fragment of the original *rancho* and a corner of the early twentieth-century 'Mediterranean' ranch to create a sym-



Elevation



Sectional Elevation



View of Model

bolic gateway for the CalPoly campus. The organization of the building emerges from the overlays of site-specific geometries, program accommodations, and the elaboration of observed patterns of campus life. Within a unified structure, discrete pieces — administrative tower, open-circulation classroom wing, and multi-use base — are faceted individually to address not only the ceremonial and intimate approaches to the facility but also the intangibles of the place: the sensuousness of the nearby pastures, the aura of the rose garden, and the latent energy of the barbecue pit and dusty picnic grounds.

The stone tower and earth-toned stuccoed court building, joined to a concrete base, anchor the CLA to these historical atmospheres and the spirit of the Pomona Valley. Coming into view from the LAX flight pattern, the building beckons from the unfolding landscape of basin, foothills, and mountains.

Summary

These projects and others we have designed did not lend themselves solely to development along lines suggested by a narrative metaphor. The linguistic comparison does not accommodate the methods and variety of exploration in which we typically engage. The complexity of the tangible and intangible aspects in every project implies multiple levels of meaning which are developed and conveyed through design. Although solidly grounded in the practicalities of client requirements, each building strives to be timeless and autonomous, to be capable ultimately of shedding the program and remaining vital. The architecture which results develops content not through compositional hierarchies, then, but through the accretion of intensely rooted significance. The work is, as we stated at the outset, a tale of adventure and searching wherein the forms are episodic, shaped by the compelling events of site, program, context, poetic interpretation, and narrative skill.