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Point of Arrival: Cranbrook Educational Community

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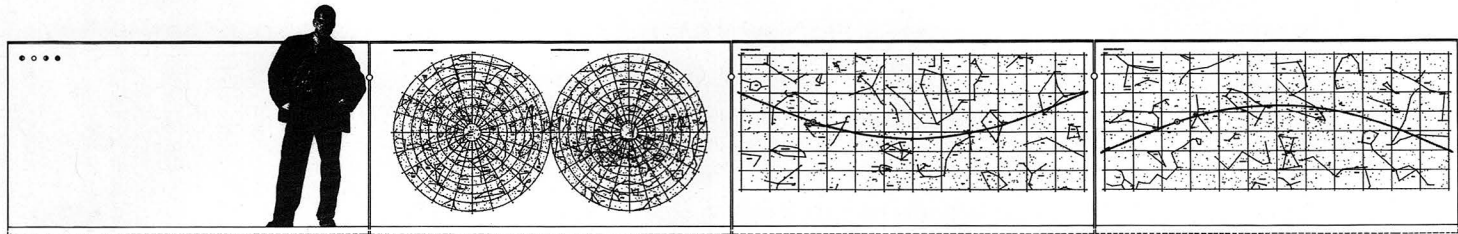
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Curved bronze wall elements with star maps.

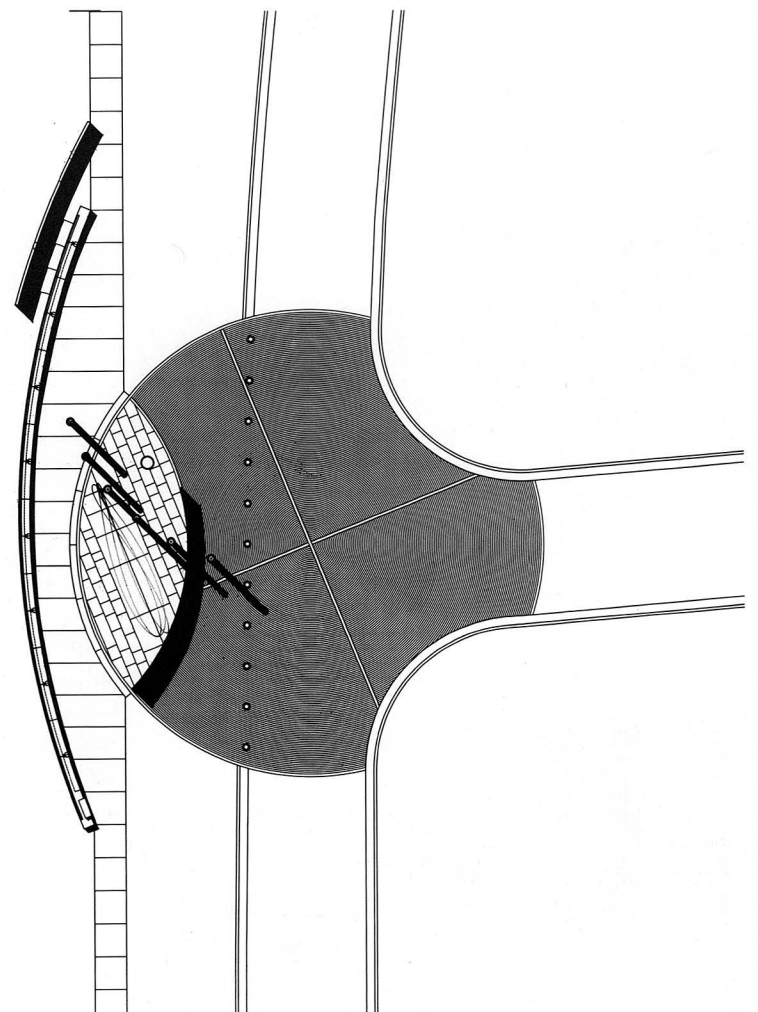
The proposed arrival plaza, “Point of Arrival,” creates a visual and symbolic termination for the new entrance road to the center of the Cranbrook Educational Community. The concept integrates aspects of landscape architecture, sculpture, architectural design and a scientific instrument. The elements of the project mediate movement of cars from the flowing curves of the gracefully landscaped arrival road to the rectangular geometry at the center of the Cranbrook campus. The circular plaza creates a sense of distinct place, and the two curved configurations of a colonnade and bronze wall echo the swinging movements of cars through the plaza.

The sense of place is further emphasized by the shallow curve of the concrete retaining wall, which bulges gently towards a magnificent park and lake view, and creates a bench for pedestrians. At night a row of airport lights marks the edge of the vehicular road and creates a vertical screen of light against which the bronze wall and the colonnade are seen. A row of ring-shaped lights, recessed into the concrete bench, illuminates the sidewalk.

The circle, curved colonnade, and bronze wall create an ensemble that is an urban and architectural response to the conditions of the T-intersection. This is intended to evoke a sense of place through a purely plastic and sculptural arrangement. It also functions as an enormous astronomical instrument, or calendar structure, guiding the visitor to think about his/her position in the universe at a variety of scales. These extend from the actuality of the site at Cranbrook, to the geographical dimensions of the earth, and finally, to the immensity of our solar system.

The columns are composed of elements growing upwards in size in accordance with the Fibonacci series, suggesting an infinite vertical expansion. Post tensioning enables the slenderness of the columns—a character that combines contemporary technology with an ancient image.

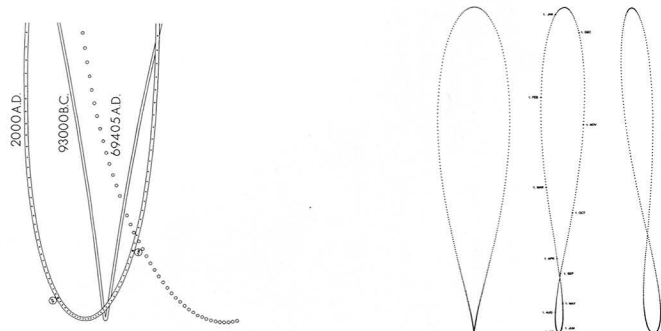
These variously colored granite columns are meant to represent glacial movements in North America. The granite used for the columns was quarried from rocks located in Canada. Glaciers deposited debris from these same rocks near what is now Cranbrook,



Site plan.

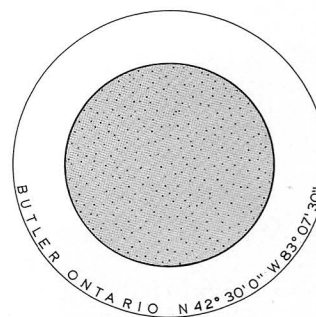




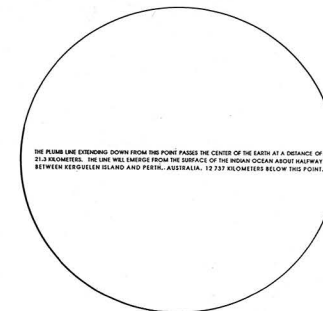


Detail of the southern tip of the analemma figures set in lead, stainless steel and bronze in the stone paving.

Analemma figures for years: 93000 B.C., 2000 A.D. and 69405 A.D.



Bronze base plate of one of the columns, and the text on a stainless steel manhole cover on the site to evoke awareness of the essence of verticality and the flattened sphericity of the earth.



which was located at the edge of the glacial End Moraine, some twenty thousand years ago.

The colonnade also creates a quadrant for star orientation. Precise star charts computed at the Astronomy Department of Helsinki University have been engraved on the concave surfaces of the four bronze walls. The charts can be used in surveying the night sky. A stainless steel disc, sliding along the sun's elliptical path, indicates the position of the sun (and/or its anti-pole) in relation to the star system; all heavenly bodies visible to the naked eye can be identified.

The second column functions as the gnomon of the sun dial. A precisely ground lens casts an image of the sun in the form of a bright 40 mm spot on the ground. Three analemma figures indicate the exact position of noon shadow for each day of the year. Three analemmas have been computed and juxtaposed on top of each other; 93000 B.C., A.D. 2000, and A.D. 69405; the two distant points of time were chosen because they represent the extreme asymmetries of the analemma. The three analemma figures will illustrate long term periodical changes in the positions

of the earth and the sun, relative to one another, and concretize time scales beyond everyday experience.

The shape which the curve of the bronze wall dissects from the circle of the plaza is called a vesica pisces; the figure was used as the background figure of Christ in medieval art. The shape delineated by two arcs of a circle derives from ancient rituals related with founding a temple.

The astronomical instrument has been conceived as an open ended exploration into the mysteries of space and time; the users and future generations can add their findings of the celestial geometries onto the fourth wall, first marked in hand writing by chalk and, eventually, engraved onto the bronze surface.

The Project aims at paying tribute to the sensuality and multiplicity of meaning in Eliel Saarinen's designs for the Cranbrook Academy.

This project was done in collaboration with Dan Hoffman and a Cranbrook Architectural Studio.