

**A P R E C I O U S V I E W**

BY

YIHUAN FANG

Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Architecture

Heinrich Schnoedt  
**Committee Chair**

Ellen Braaten

Kevin Jones

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# ABSTRACT

## VIEW

*noun* 1. a sight or prospect, typically of attractive natural scenery, that can be taken in by the eye from **a particular place**.  
2. the ability to see something or to be seen from **a particular place**.

*verb* 1. look at or inspect (something).  
2. regard in a particular light or with a particular attitude.

## PRECIOUS

*Adjective* (of an object, substance, or resource) of great value; not to be wasted or treated carelessly. [1]

Architecture can be significant in defining a particular place. While architecture typically offers basic shelter, its value and contributions to culture lie beyond these basic needs. The thesis proposes that by specific framing of a scenery, a view of the city can be a contribution which inspires a Precious View.

# GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

A Precious View in this case is not only about the image that we see but also the scent we smell, the sound we hear, or the wind we feel. Not only what we see matters, but all senses contribute to that what we call experience.

This thesis explores ways to offer a Precious View by framing the skyline of Midtown New York.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my committee -- Heinrich Schnoedt, Ellen Braaten and Kevin Jones – for their valuable advice and unparalleled support in my thesis. My completion of the thesis project would not have been possible without the contribution and nurturing of them.

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Last I gratefully acknowledge the assistance and effort of my family and friends. Without the relentless support and devotions of my family, I would not have been able to study in the states. Thanks also go to all my friends who supported me in many ways. They provided me with encouragement and patience throughout the duration of this program.

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# INTRODUCTION

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Different ways of viewing evoke different ways of thinking. When architecture elevates what would normally be an ordinary view, it can be considered a form of enlightenment. The project proposes a special way of viewing the city.

In the last two decades, mass urbanization and globalization have happened around the world. Skyscrapers are an inevitable typological part of this urbanization. Their heights allow cities to be viewed from an elevated point of view. Today, another urban view frame is possible with digital software—the screen of smart phones and cameras.

# RESEARCH / CASE STUDY



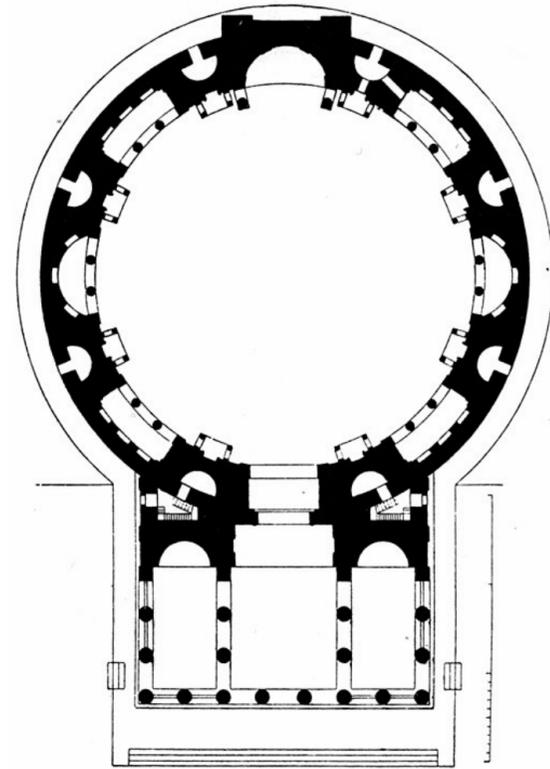
Interior of the Pantheon, Rome [2]



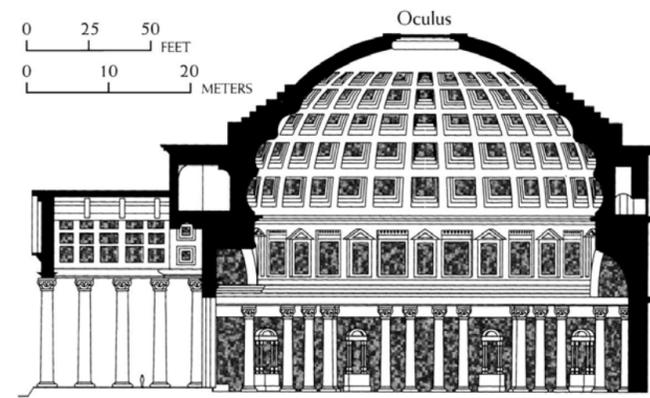
Giovanni Paolo Panini - Interior of the Pantheon, Rome [3]

2

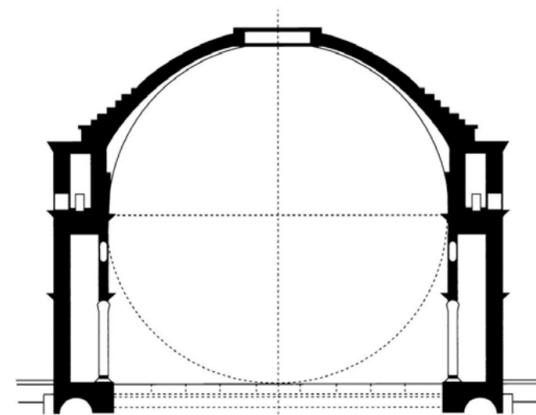
The oculus of the dome of the Pantheon frames the sky and depicts the imagination of heaven. The geometry of the dome ceiling, as well as the sunlight moving along the surface of the dome, gives the viewer a sense of time and direction. Light is always an element of architecture.



Plan of Pantheon [4]



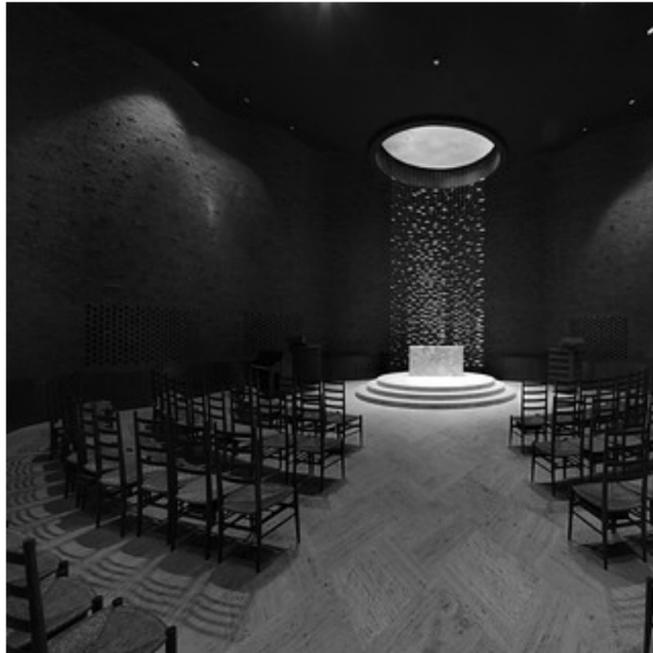
Sections of Pantheon [4]



Clear geometry forms the plan and section of the Pantheon. Both are based on the circle as an organizing figure. The dome which is positioned on circular wall forms a part of a sphere which conceptually fits inside the space. Translation, reflection and rotation are the three geometric strategies which determine the architectural form.

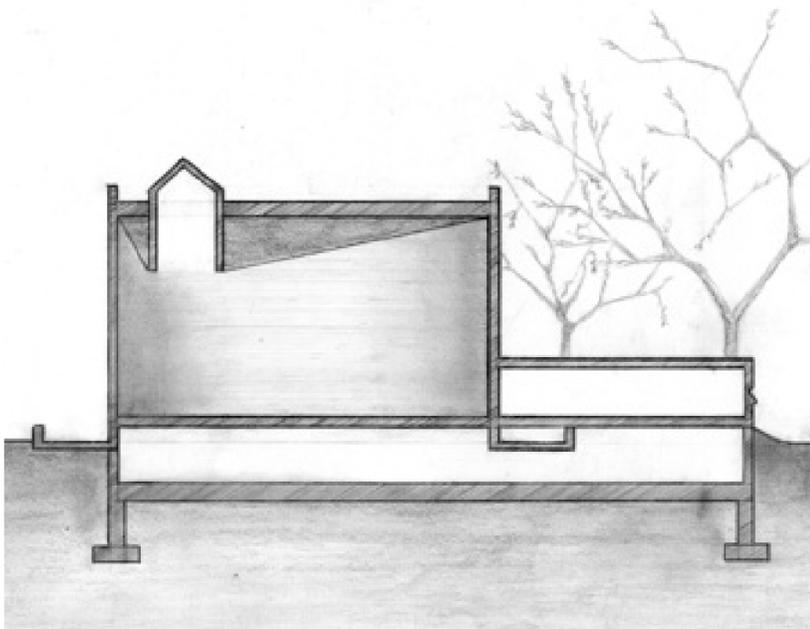


Exterior of MIT Chapel [5]

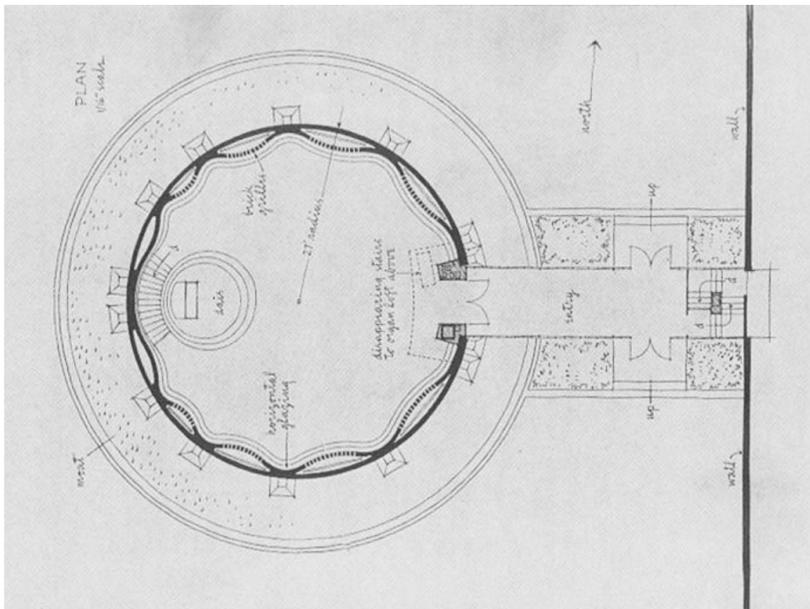


Interior of MIT Chapel

The chapel offers a space of solitude by allowing the light come into the building in a very special way. The cylindrical form stands out against the regular grid of the MIT campus. The building façade is windowless and creates an isolated sanctuary with a focus on the impressive interior atmosphere.



Section of MIT Chapel [6]



Plan of MIT Chapel [7]

From far away, the building seems to be nothing more than a simple brick cylinder. However, the interior appears as a dynamic space. The special atmosphere is mostly due to the multiple layers of the wall and the indirect light filtered between its undulating surface. Reflection in pools of water collaborates with the gap between the walls and allows the light to reflect into the room.



Mark Rothko, Orange and Tan, 1954 [8]

Mark Rothko, as an American abstract expressionist, created his classic paintings during 1950s. These large-scale works have thin layers of different colors in order to express a spatial and dimensional view. The juxtaposition of the color contrasts creates a horizontal and a wider view. Also, framing of the painting confines the elements on canvas. Proportion, scale and surface are carefully organized.

# A JOURNEY TO THE PRECIOUS VIEW

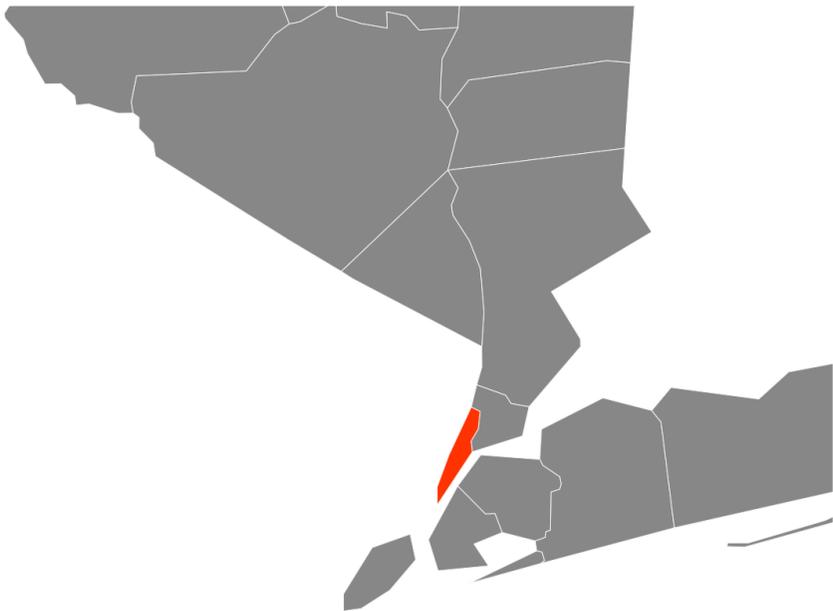
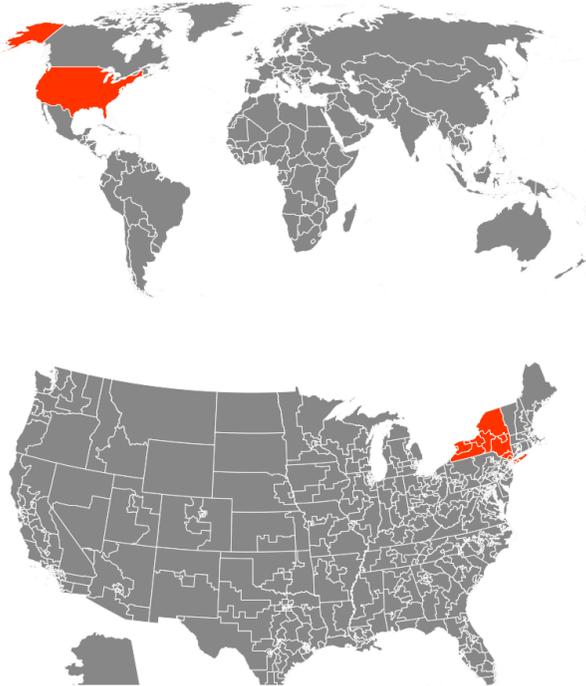
The Journey to the Precious View is a series of moments shifting from the city to the building and back to the city again. This directional movement is leading into the green and peaceful core of the city. One aspect of a view is the relation of viewpoint and the distance to the observed. Here, the skyline of Midtown Manhattan is the object to be viewed.

# I ESCAPING THE CITY

# Project Overview

The project is located in the Central Park of Manhattan, New York. New York is the most modern and populous city of the world. The proposed building is an object-like cylinder form surrounded by greens. It is 160ft in diameter and the height varies from 20ft to 48ft. The building presents itself as an object and speaks for itself in this large city scale.

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Site Plan of Manhattan, New York



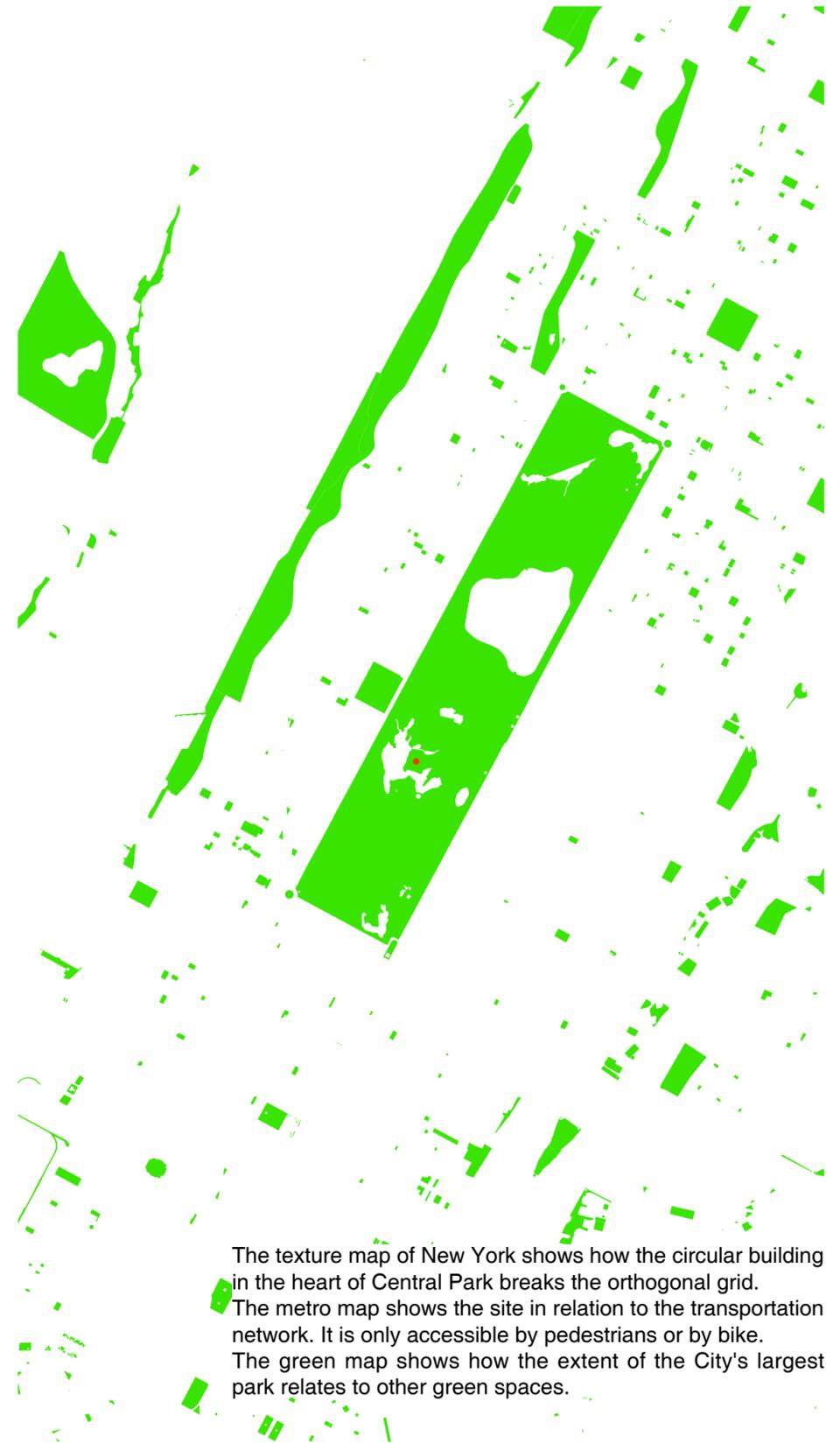
From the perspective of skyscrapers, the building in Central Park reveals only its roof as an aluminum shield which draws people's attention. Architecture should always attract people. It either blends into the surroundings or is completely different.



City Texture of Manhattan, New York  
A PRECIOUS VIEW



Railway Map of Manhattan, New York



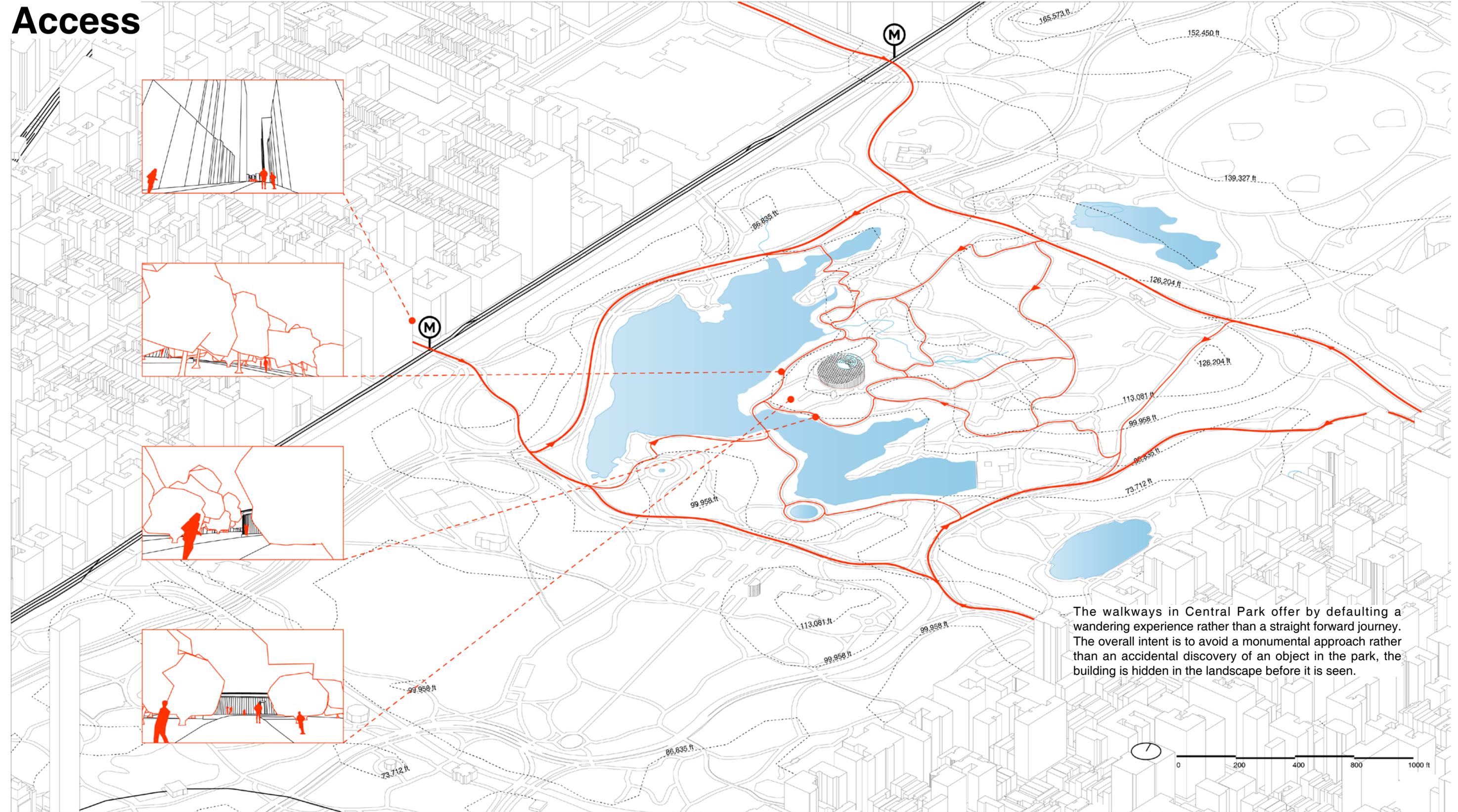
Parks in Manhattan, New York

The texture map of New York shows how the circular building in the heart of Central Park breaks the orthogonal grid. The metro map shows the site in relation to the transportation network. It is only accessible by pedestrians or by bike. The green map shows how the extent of the City's largest park relates to other green spaces.

## **II APPROACHING THE BUILDING**

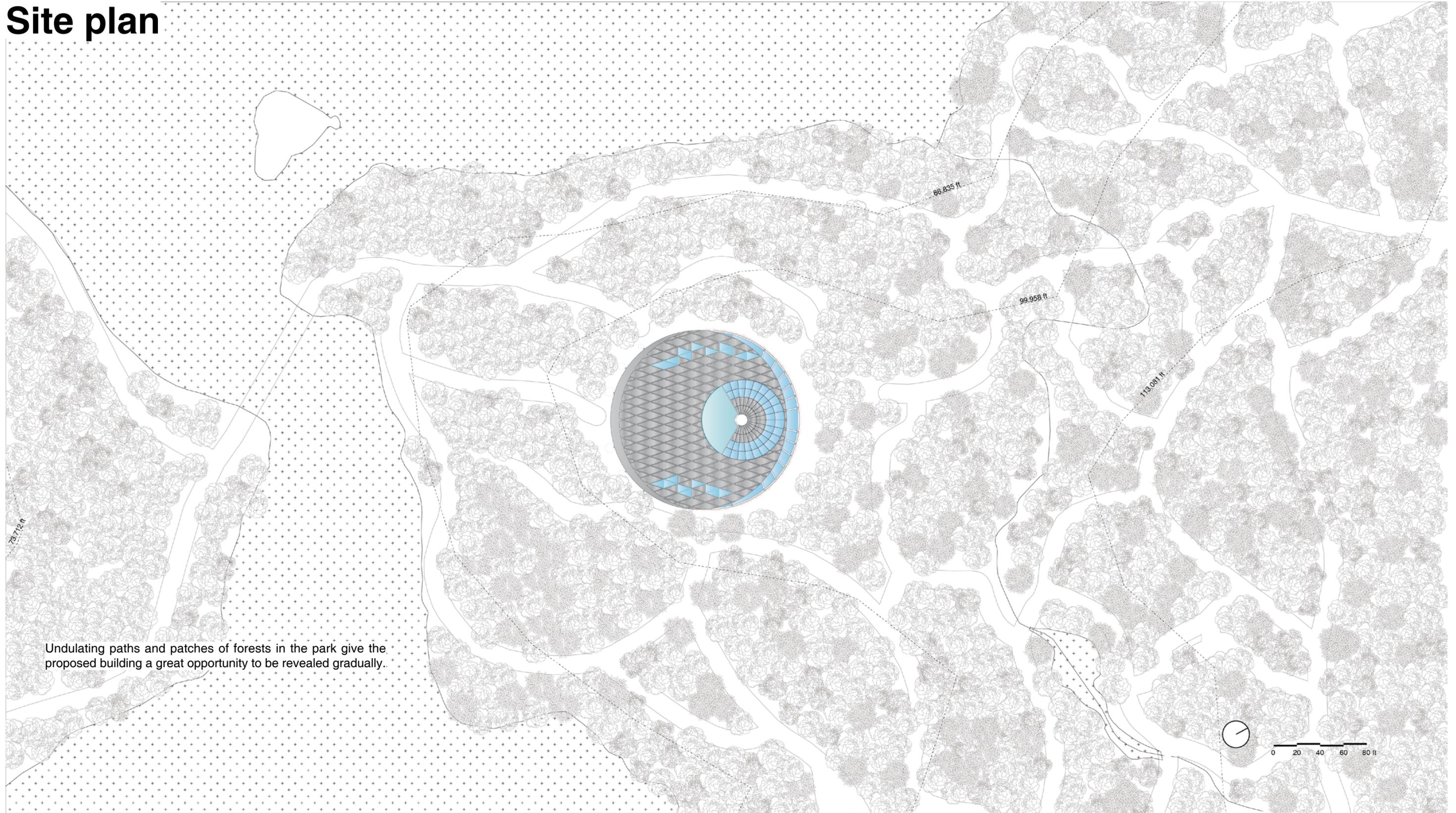
# Access

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The walkways in Central Park offer by defaulting a wandering experience rather than a straight forward journey. The overall intent is to avoid a monumental approach rather than an accidental discovery of an object in the park, the building is hidden in the landscape before it is seen.

# Site plan



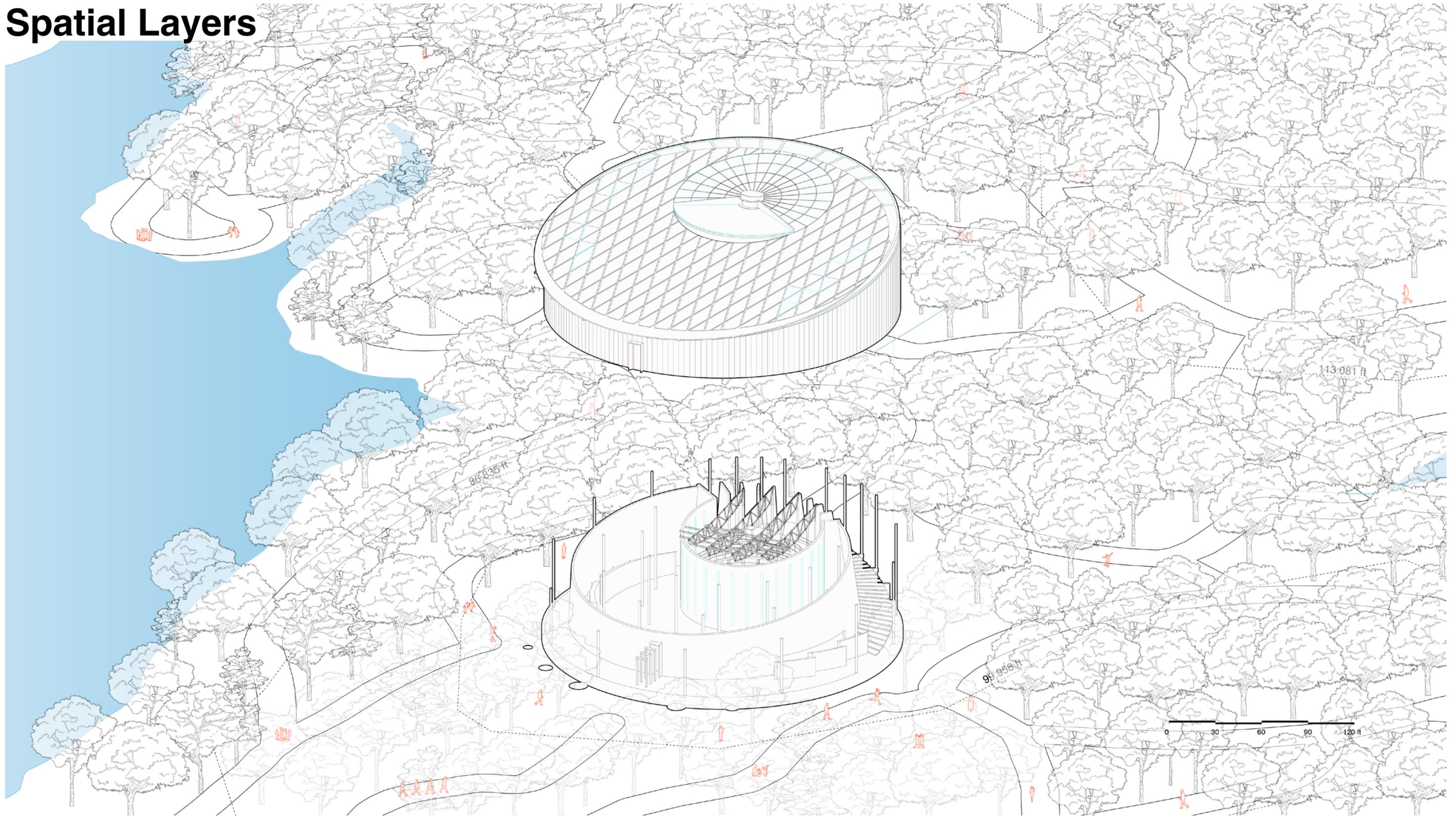
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Undulating paths and patches of forests in the park give the proposed building a great opportunity to be revealed gradually.

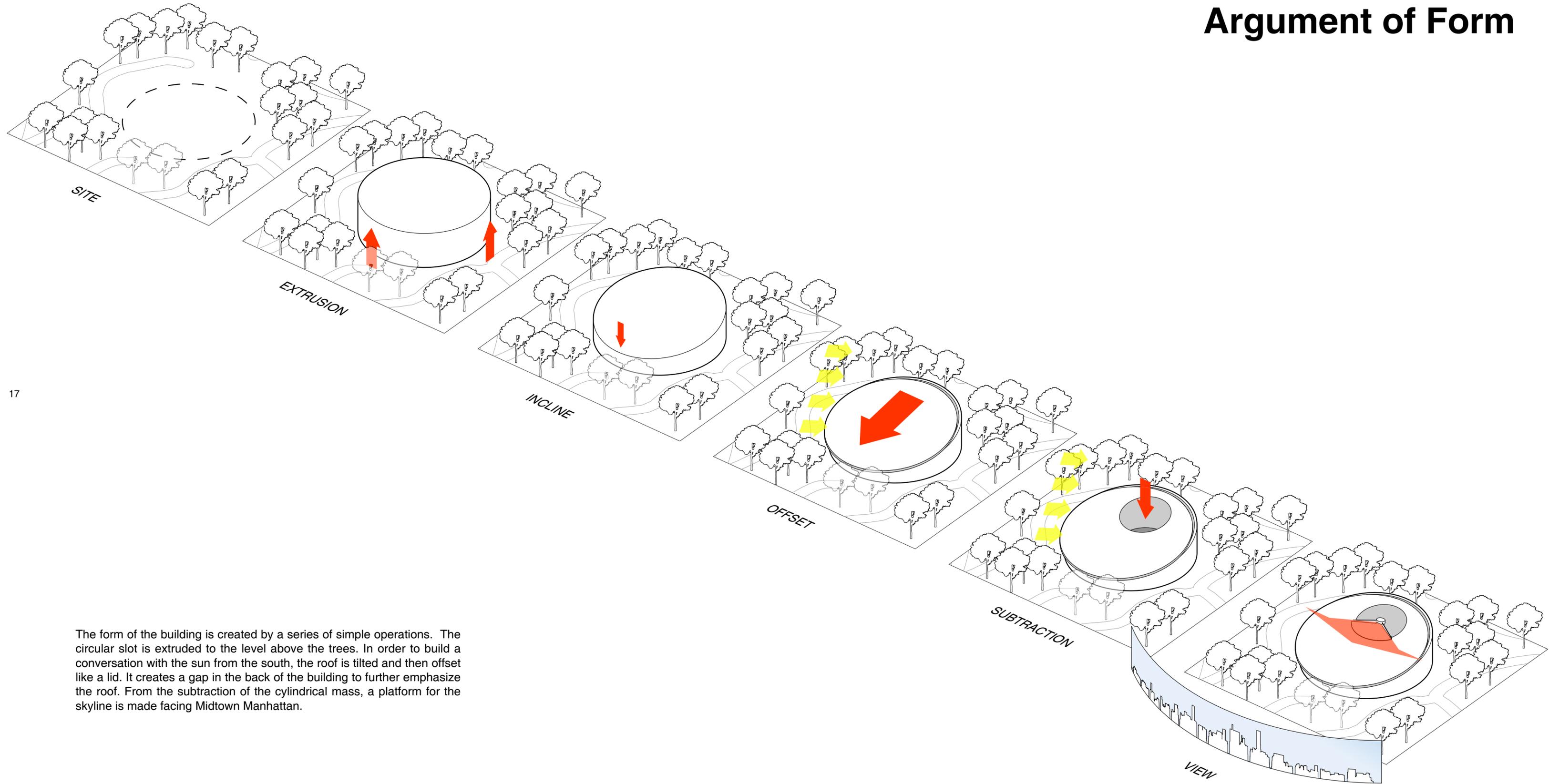


The majority of the building is concealed by the landscape.

# Spatial Layers

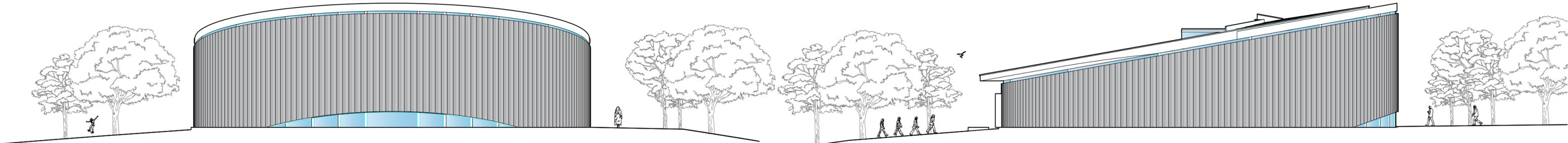


# Argument of Form

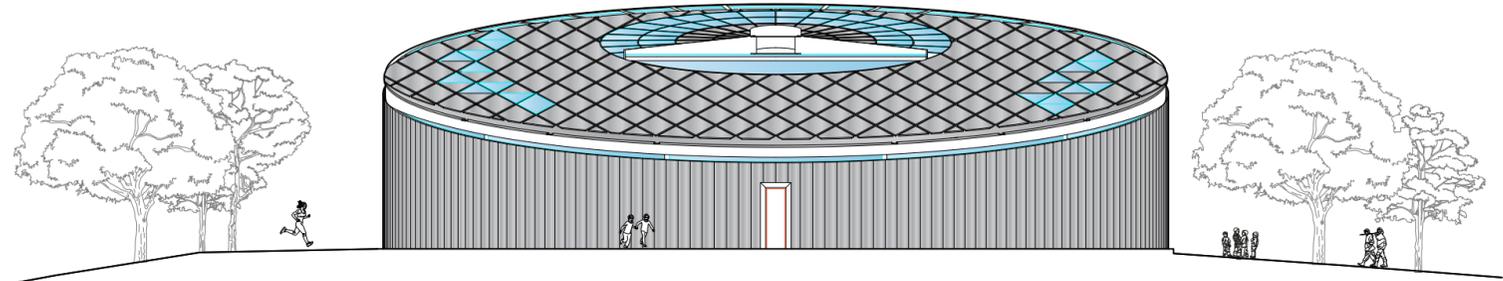


The form of the building is created by a series of simple operations. The circular slot is extruded to the level above the trees. In order to build a conversation with the sun from the south, the roof is tilted and then offset like a lid. It creates a gap in the back of the building to further emphasize the roof. From the subtraction of the cylindrical mass, a platform for the skyline is made facing Midtown Manhattan.

# Elevations



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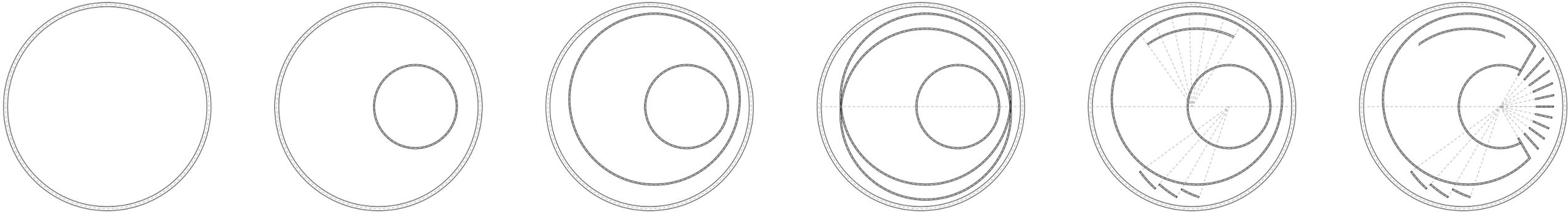


The building is covered mostly by aluminum panels which serves as a rain screen for the façade. The panels provide some reflection of the surrounding greens.

# III A BUILDING OF TWO SPACES

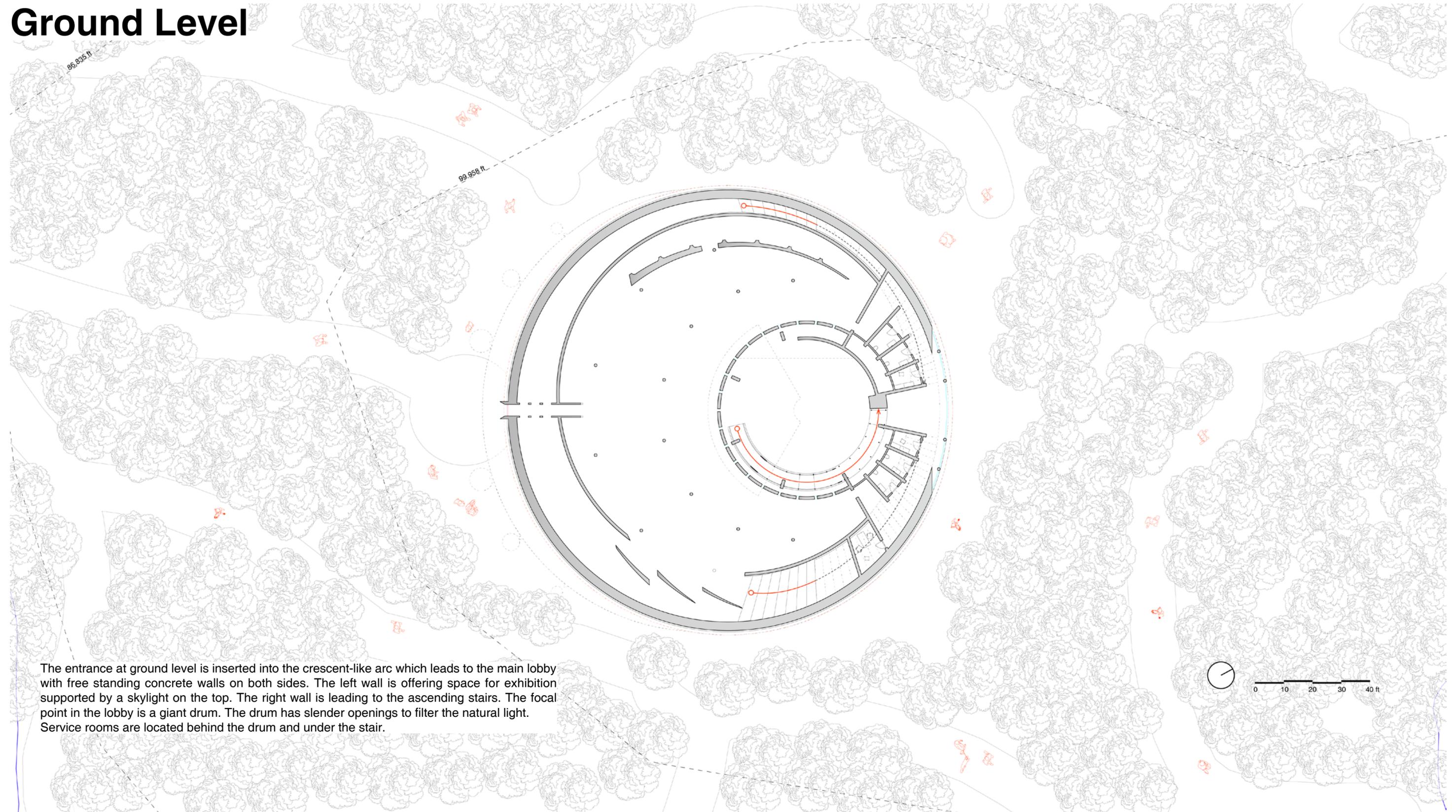
# Plan Diagram

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The plan is formulated by translation, reflection and rotation. The slot is divided into two parts by a big circle and a smaller one. A third circle offset from the center point creates the circulation area. Reflection of the third circle breaks three circles. Tangent shards break the gap between circles and resolve the proximity.

# Ground Level



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The entrance at ground level is inserted into the crescent-like arc which leads to the main lobby with free standing concrete walls on both sides. The left wall is offering space for exhibition supported by a skylight on the top. The right wall is leading to the ascending stairs. The focal point in the lobby is a giant drum. The drum has slender openings to filter the natural light. Service rooms are located behind the drum and under the stair.



0 10 20 30 40 ft

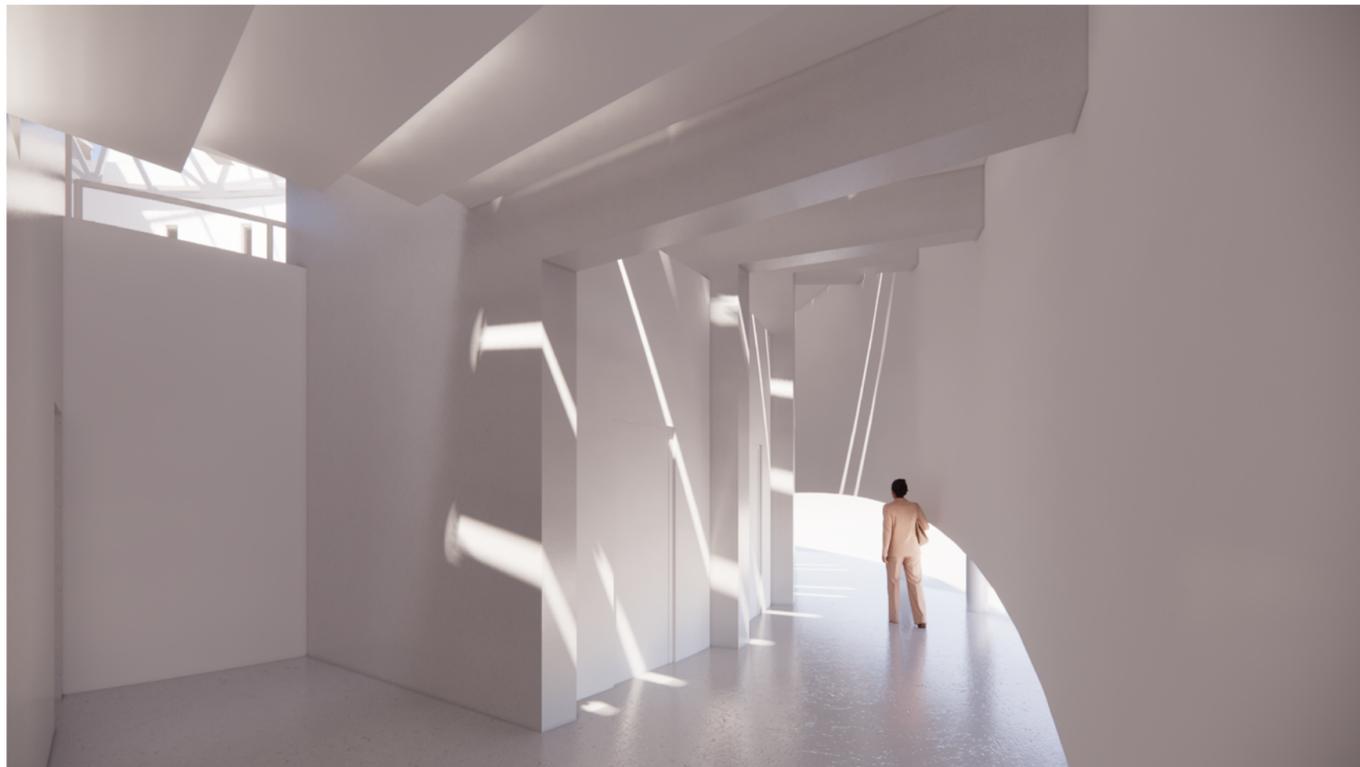




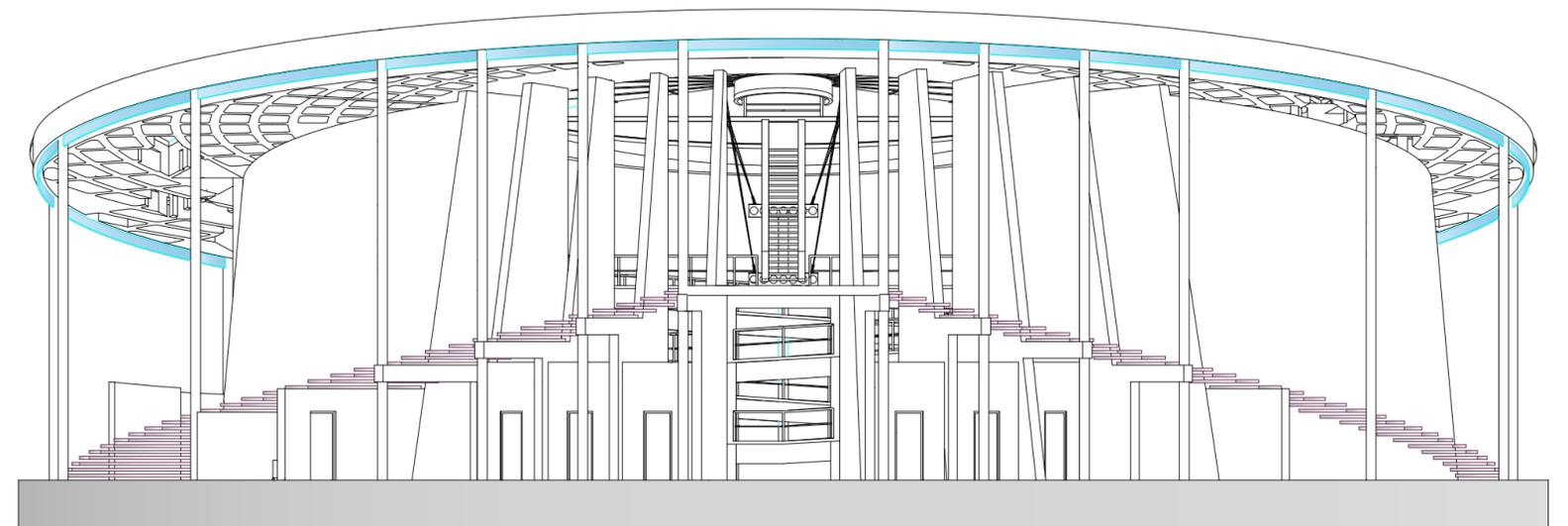
# Stairs

Two sets of stairs, one dedicated to ascending, the other to descending, allow people to move both horizontally and vertically. The stair is the connection between spaces, but forms its own space. The width of the stair changes as it leads to different spaces.

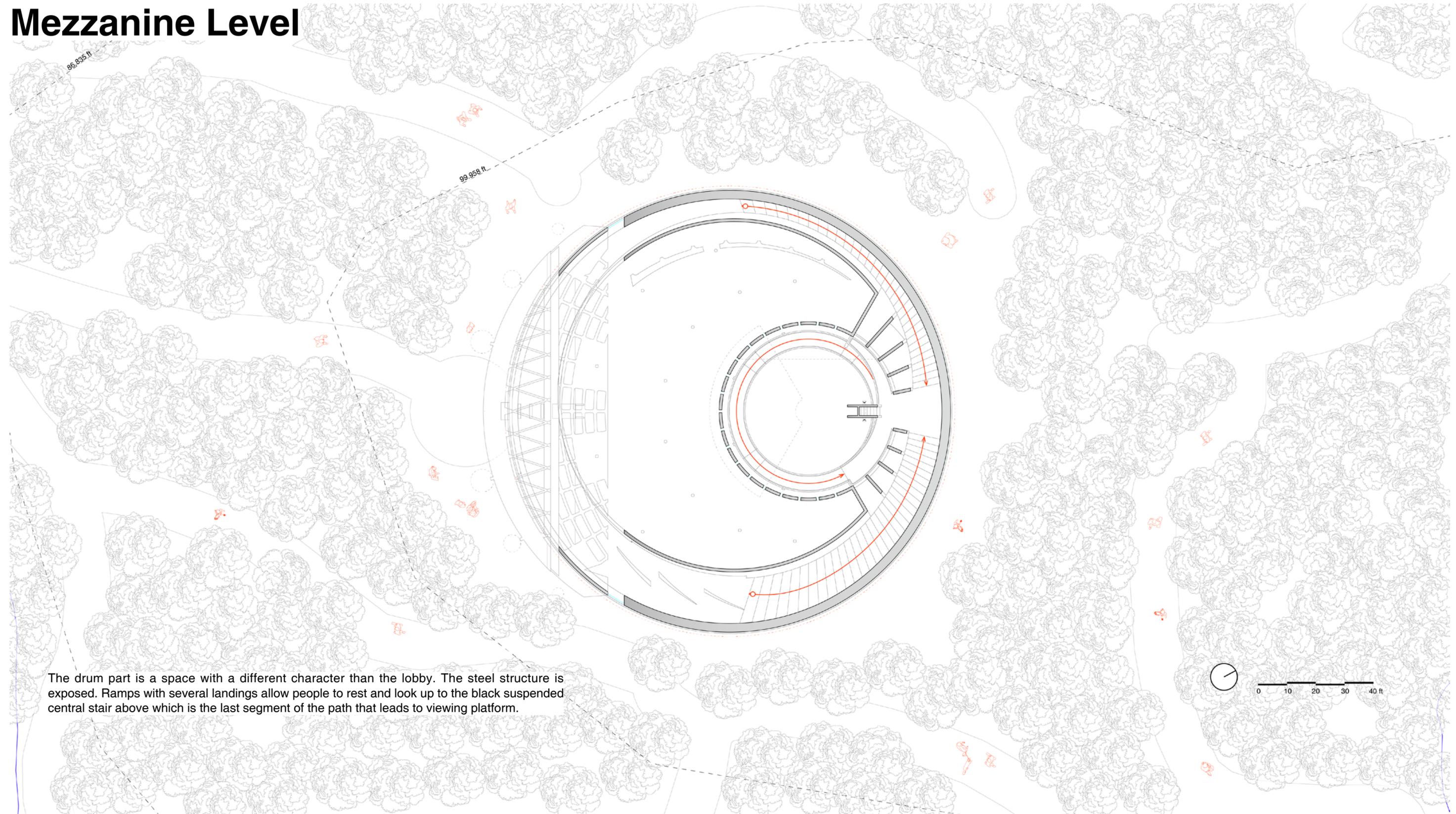
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Office Rendering



# Mezzanine Level



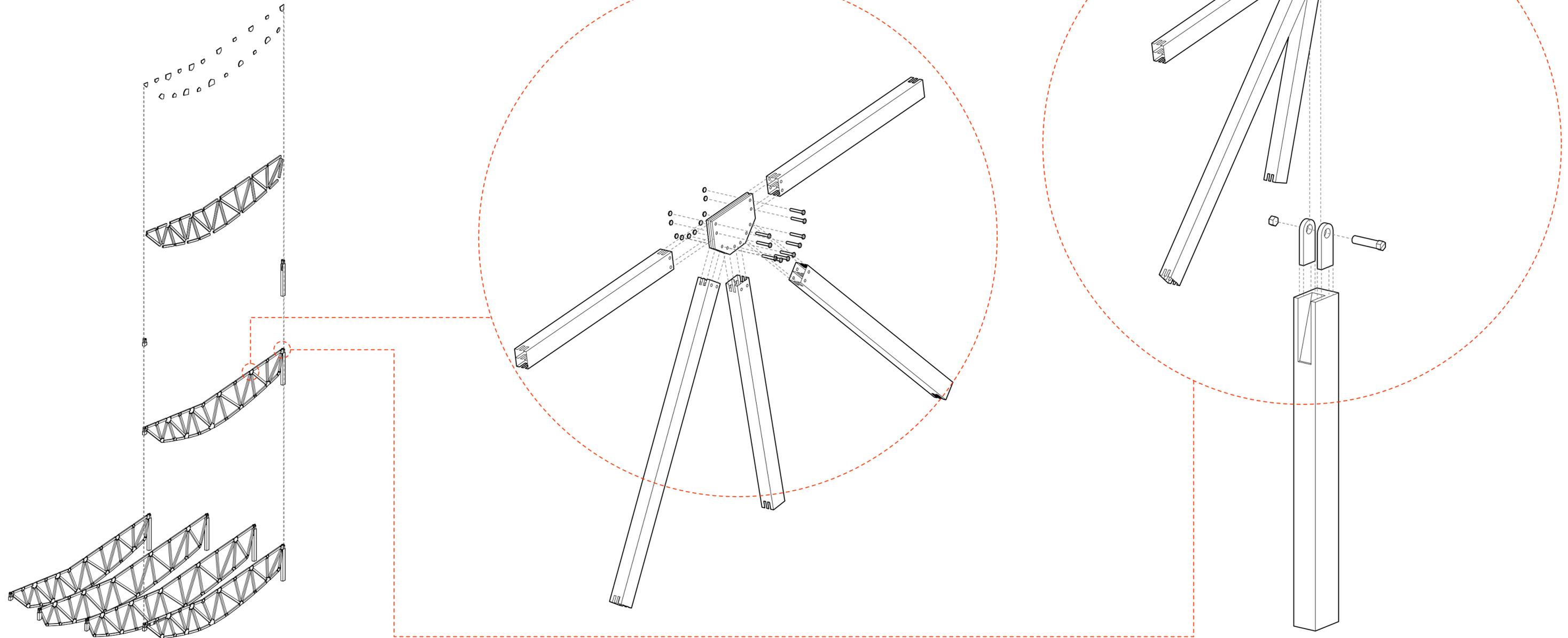
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The drum part is a space with a different character than the lobby. The steel structure is exposed. Ramps with several landings allow people to rest and look up to the black suspended central stair above which is the last segment of the path that leads to viewing platform.

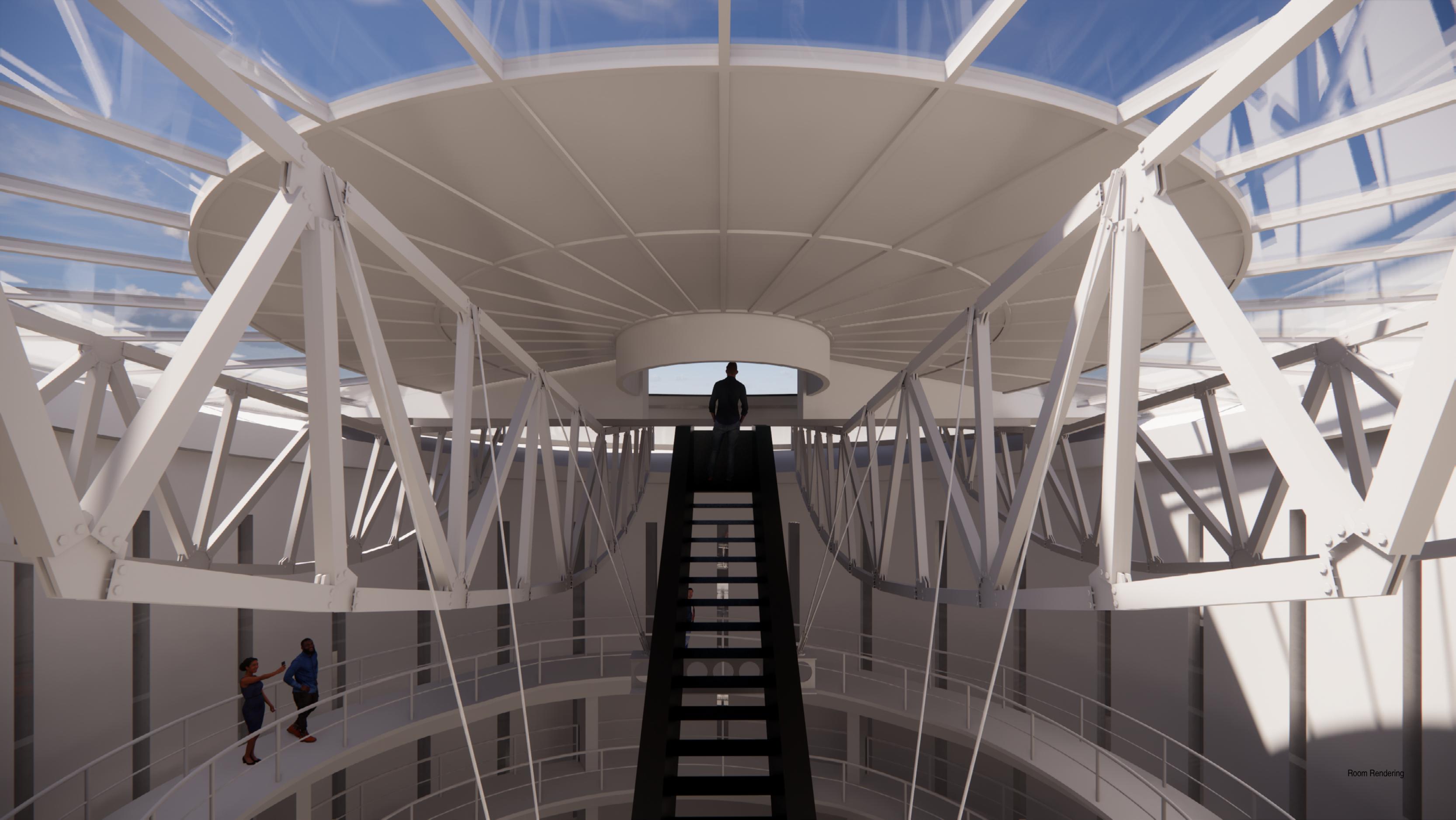


# Truss Detail

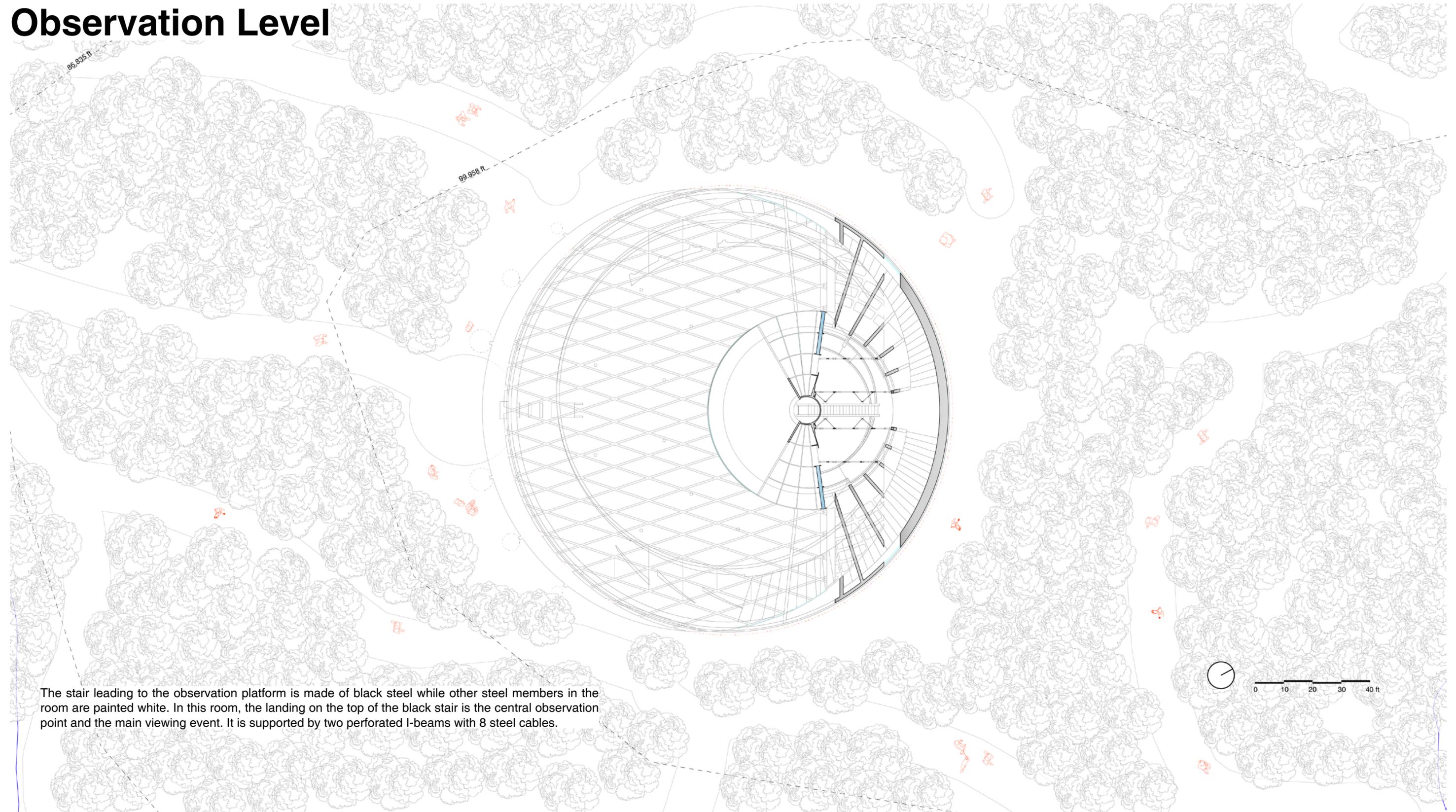
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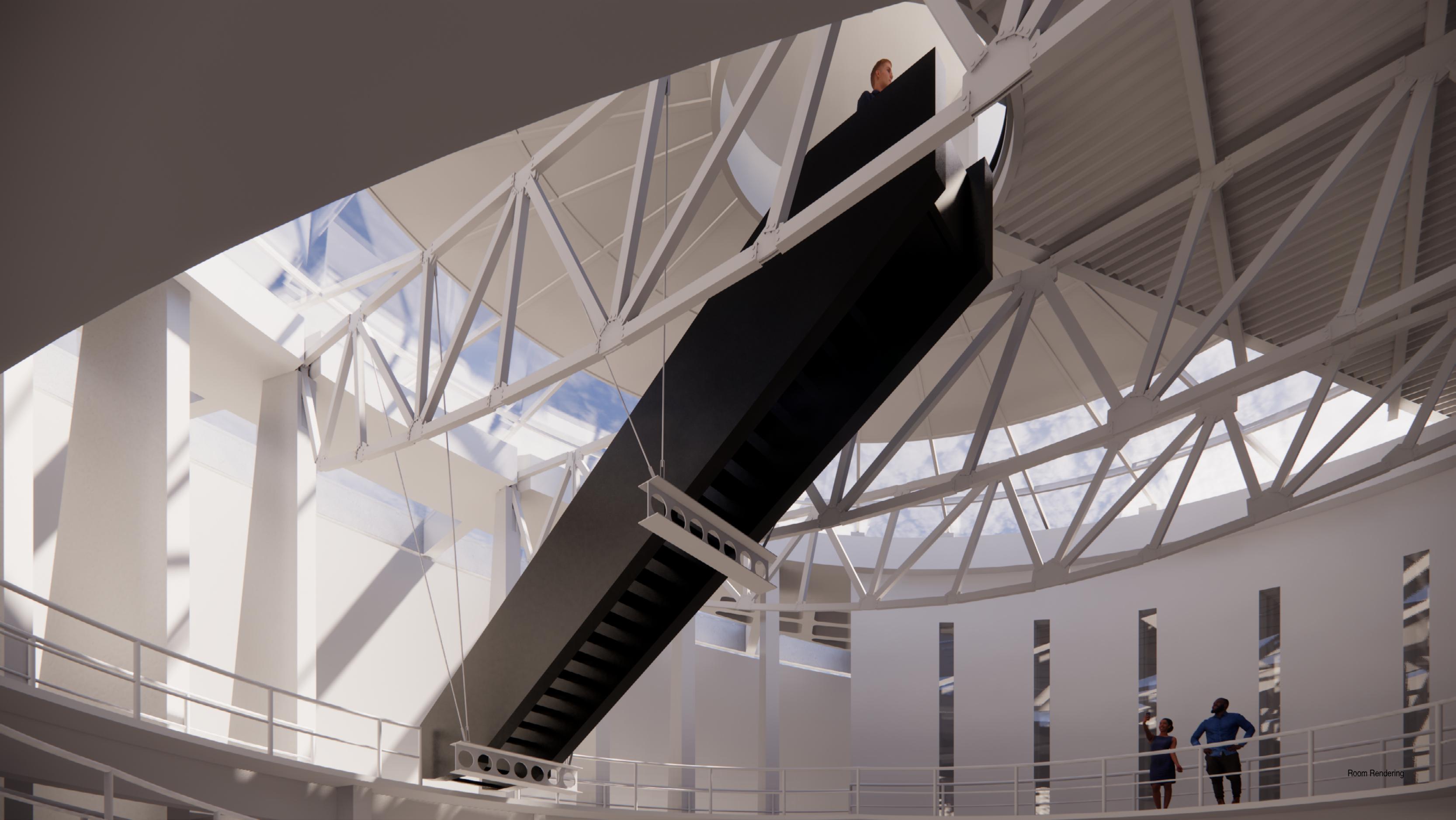
The glass and aluminum roof is supported by four large trusses. On the top of the roof is a pool of water which reflects the city skyline. Chords are bolt-connected together by gusset plates. The trusses are sitting on the extension of columns which join the drum walls.



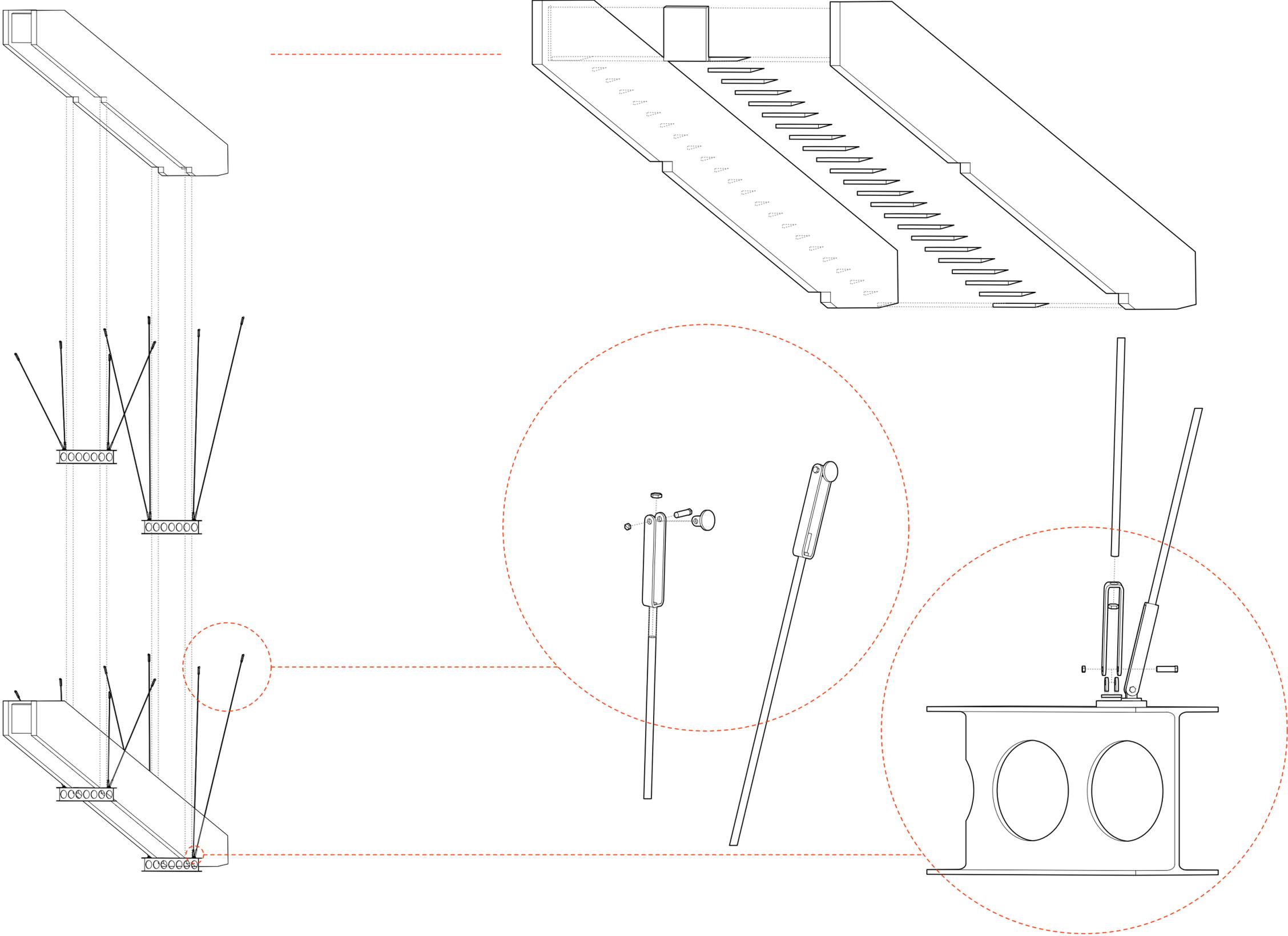
# Observation Level



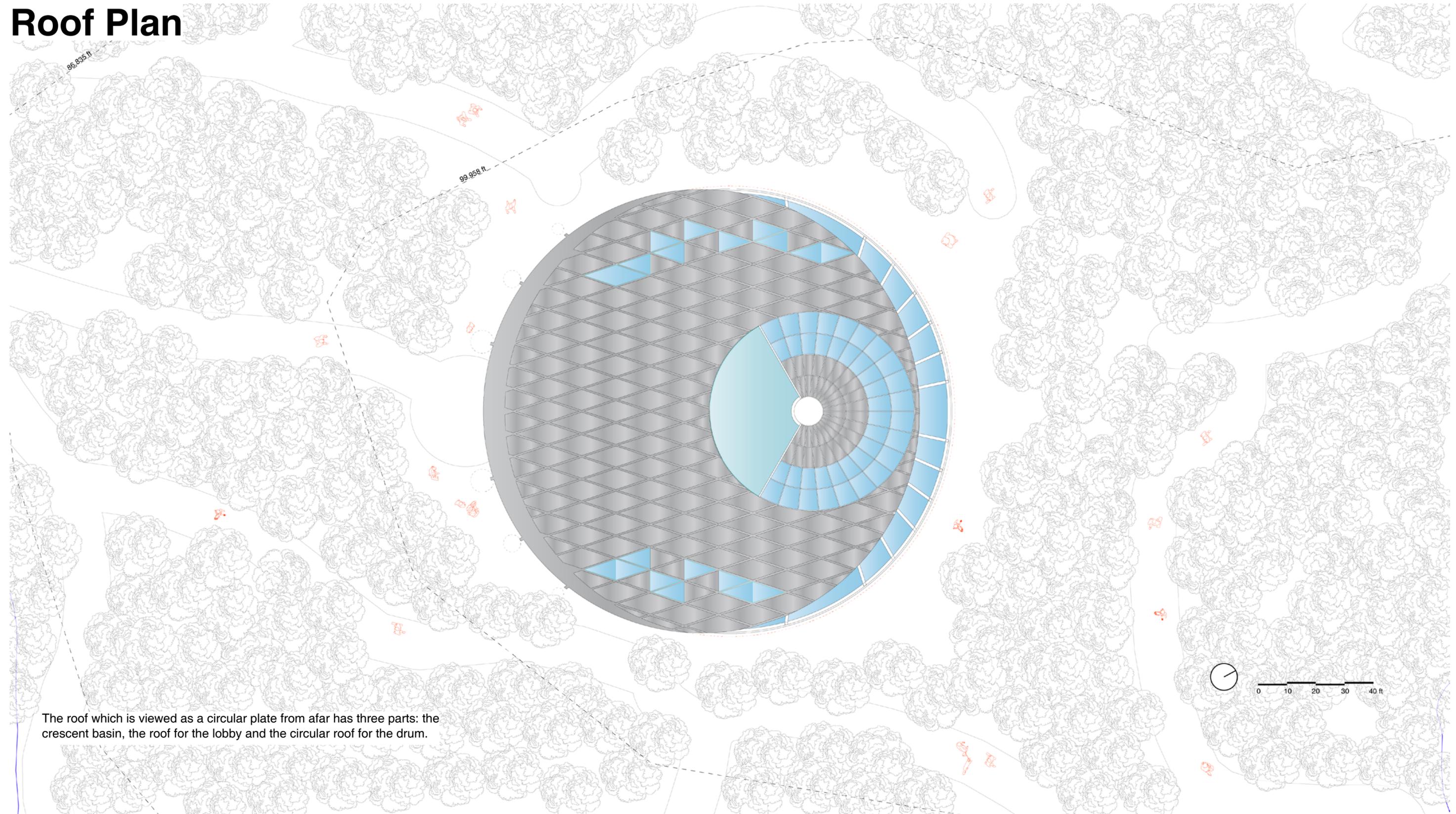
The stair leading to the observation platform is made of black steel while other steel members in the room are painted white. In this room, the landing on the top of the black stair is the central observation point and the main viewing event. It is supported by two perforated I-beams with 8 steel cables.



# Stair Details

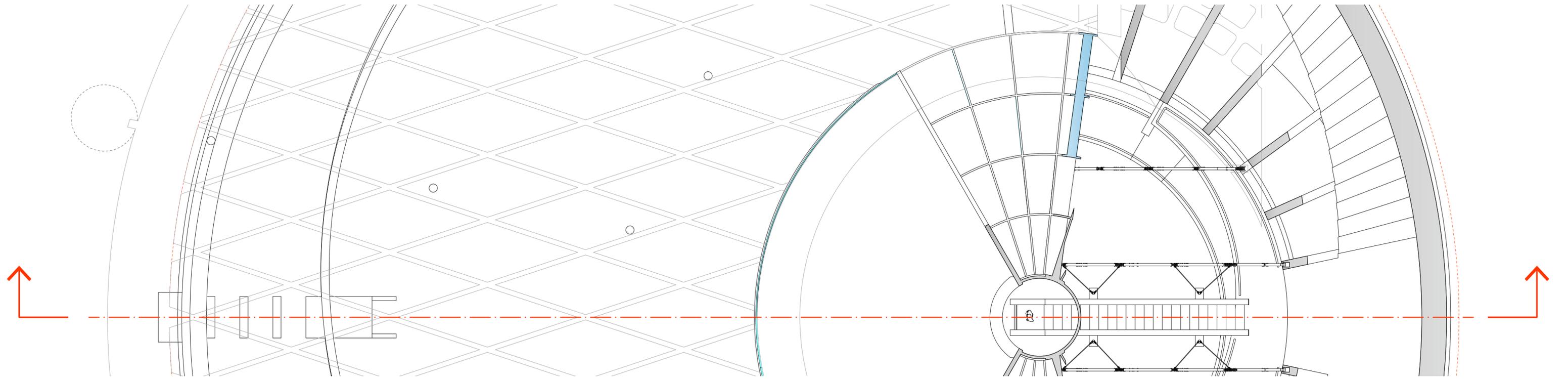


# Roof Plan

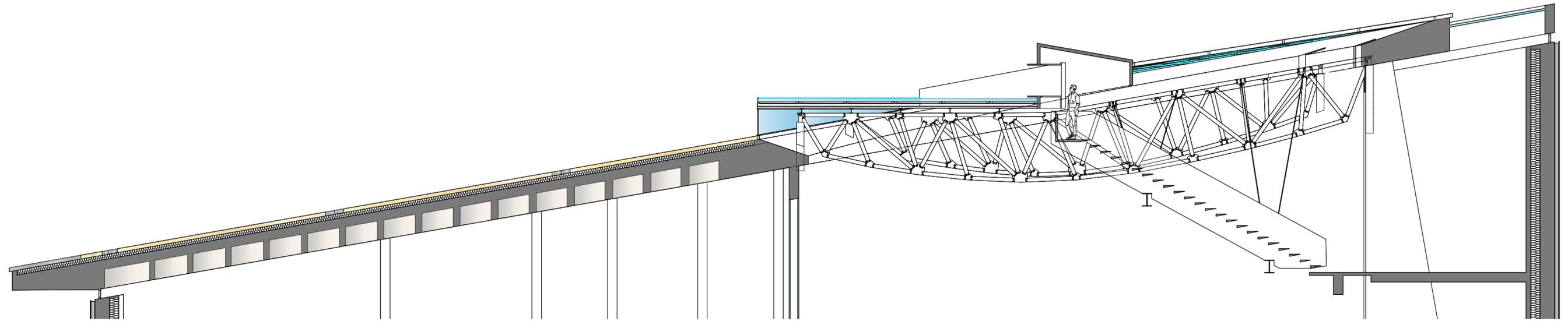


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The roof which is viewed as a circular plate from afar has three parts: the crescent basin, the roof for the lobby and the circular roof for the drum.



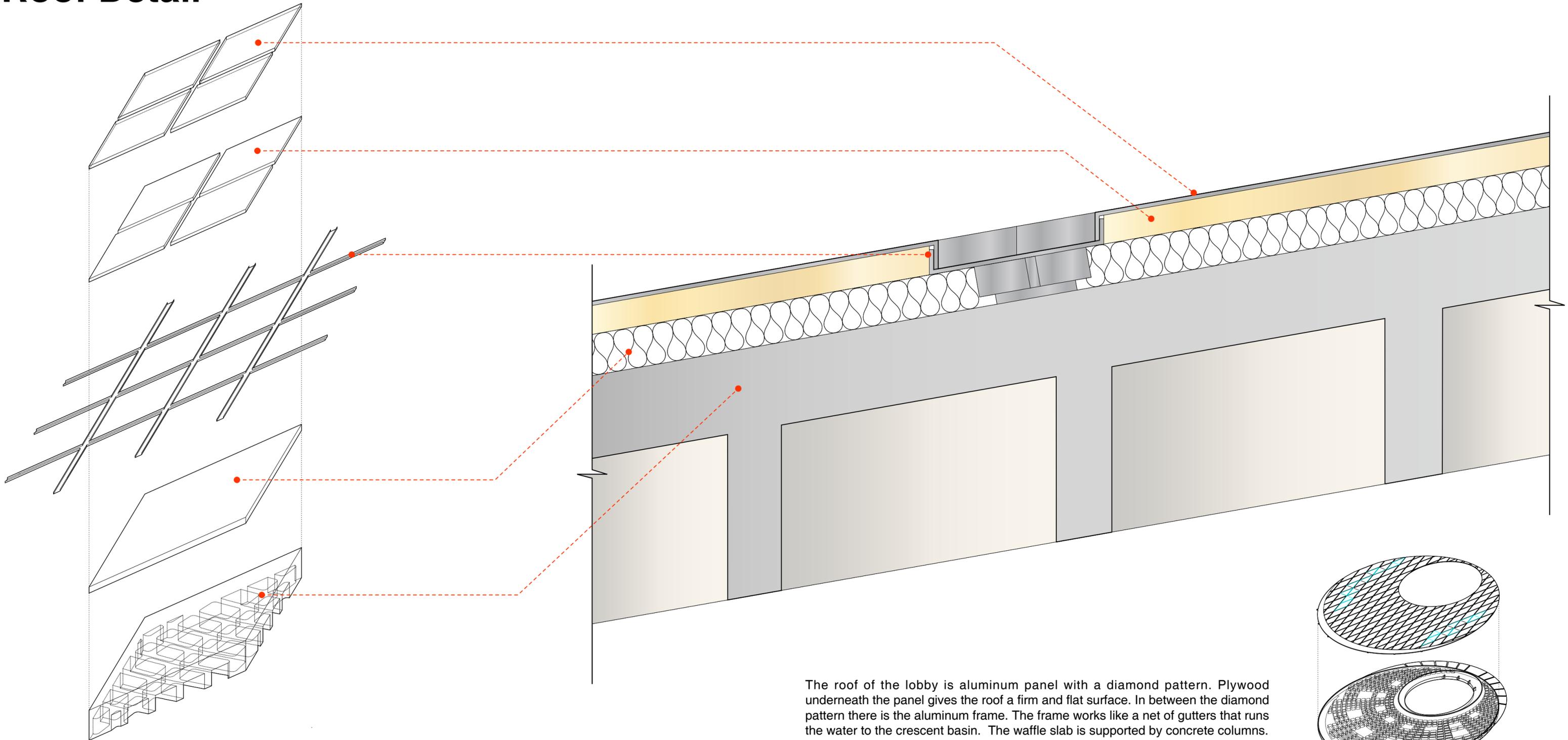
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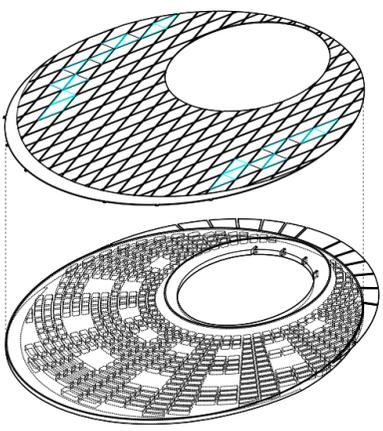
0 5 10 15 20 ft

# Roof Detail

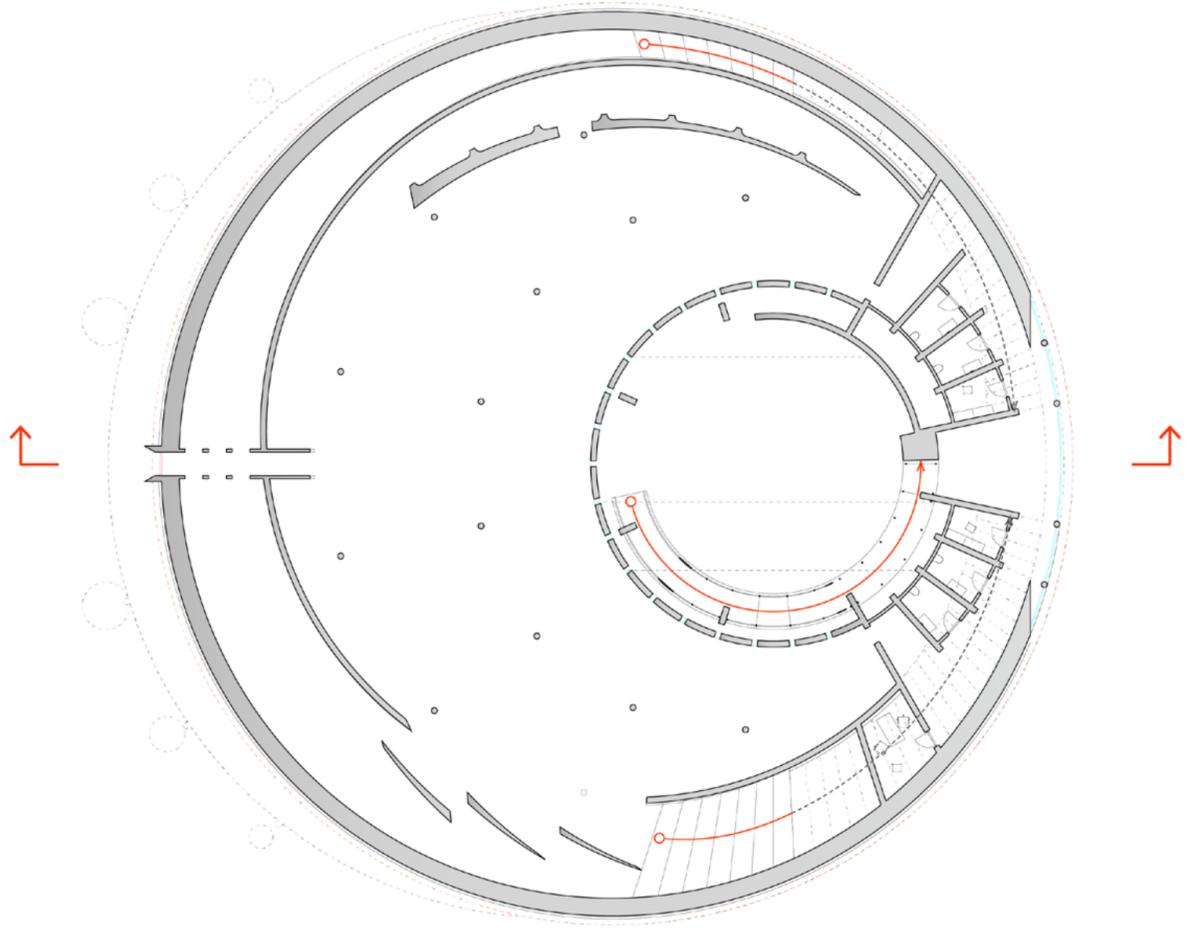
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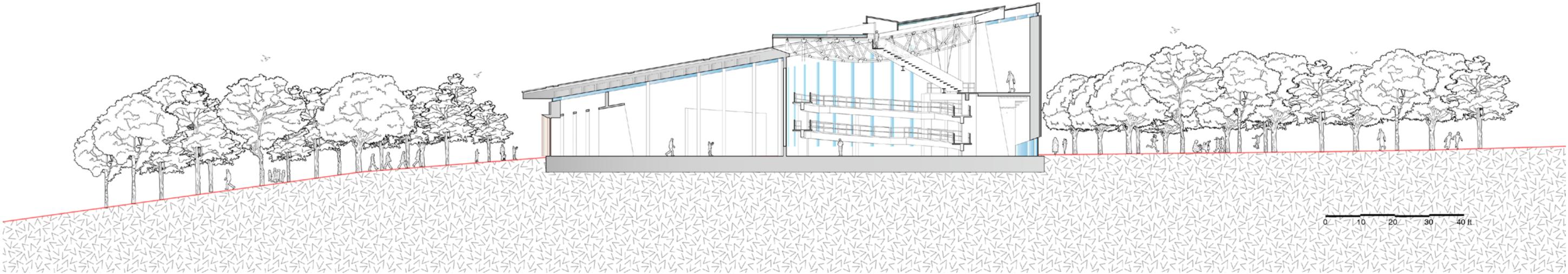
The roof of the lobby is aluminum panel with a diamond pattern. Plywood underneath the panel gives the roof a firm and flat surface. In between the diamond pattern there is the aluminum frame. The frame works like a net of gutters that runs the water to the crescent basin. The waffle slab is supported by concrete columns.

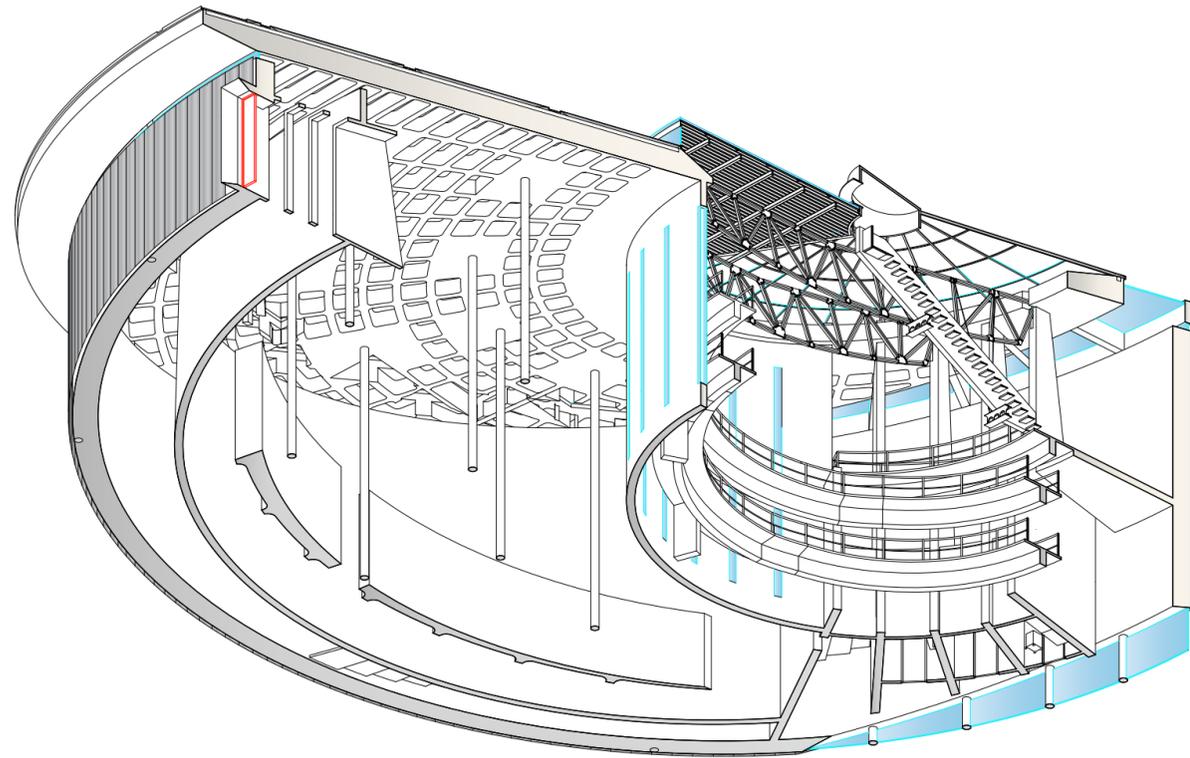


# Section

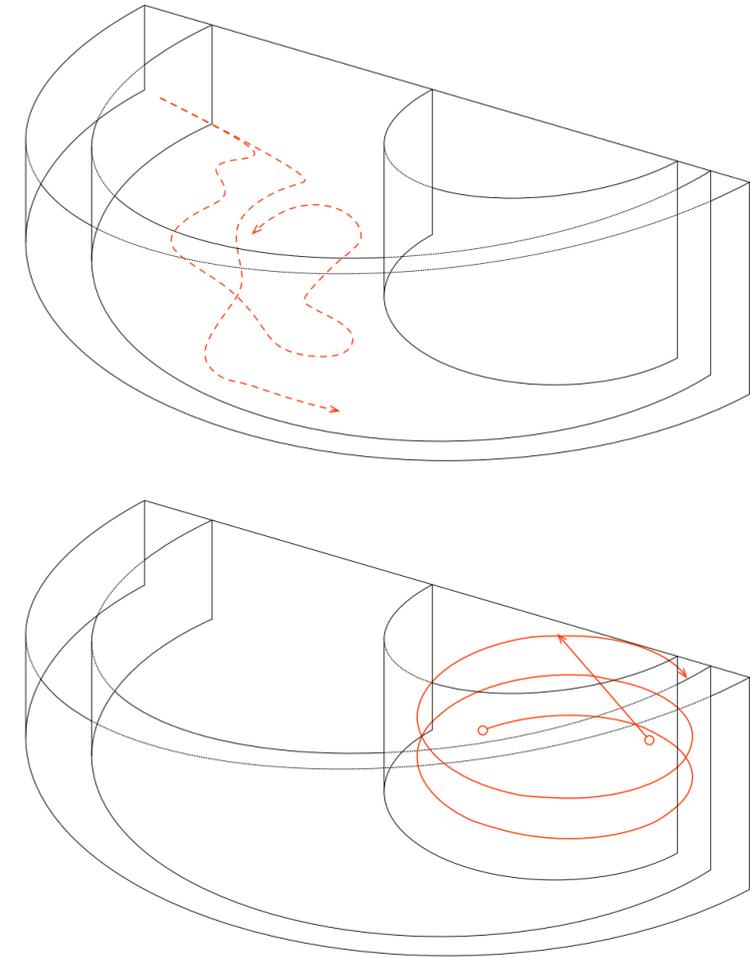


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Axonometric from the Bottom

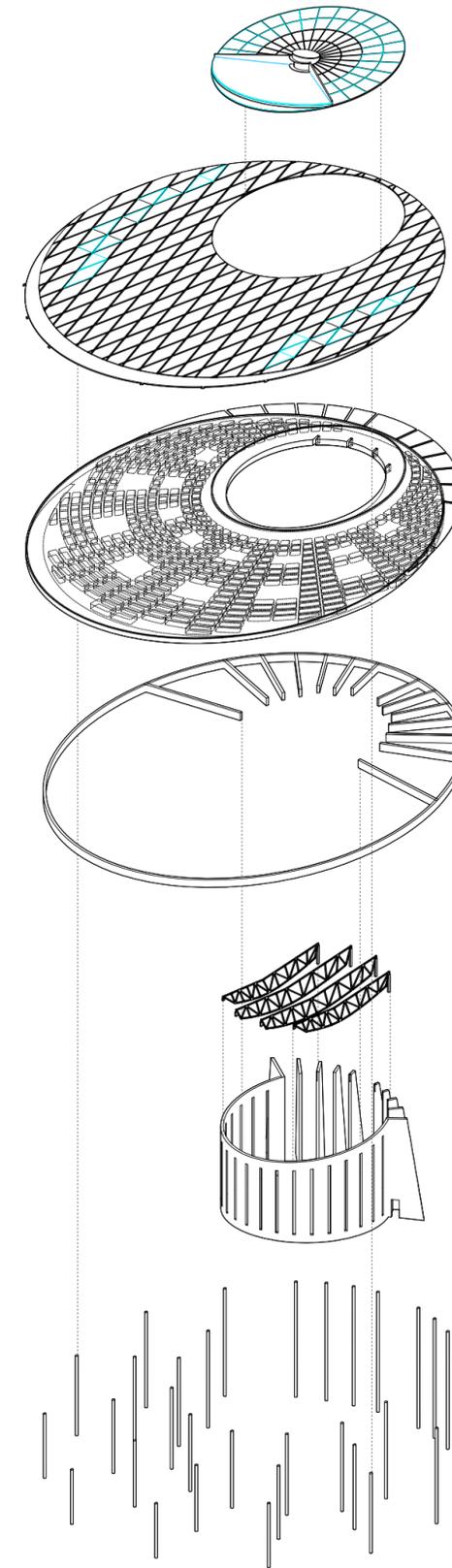


The stair and ramp inside the interior cylinder visibly suggest a vertical movement. The patterns under the two roofs are different. The waffle slab creates a regular grid on the ceiling while the trusses expose the structure.

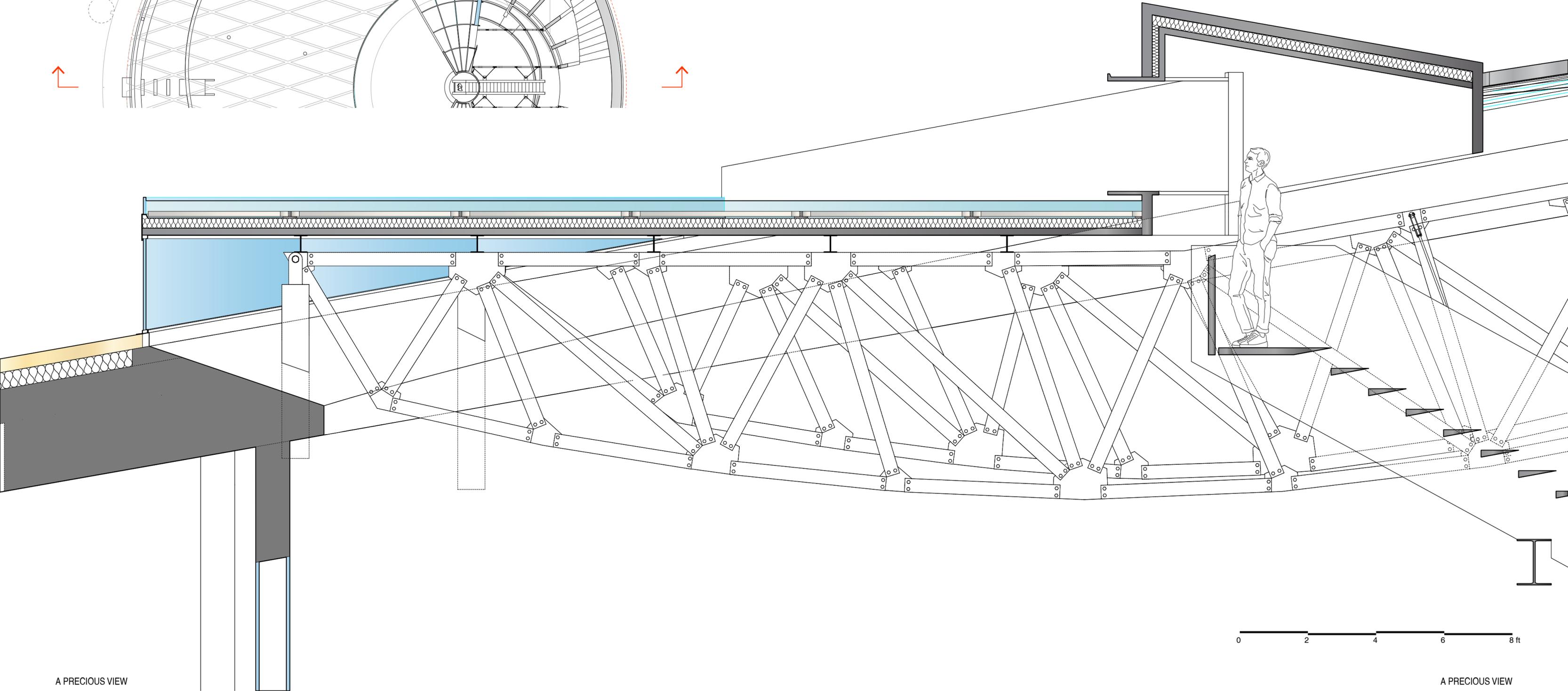
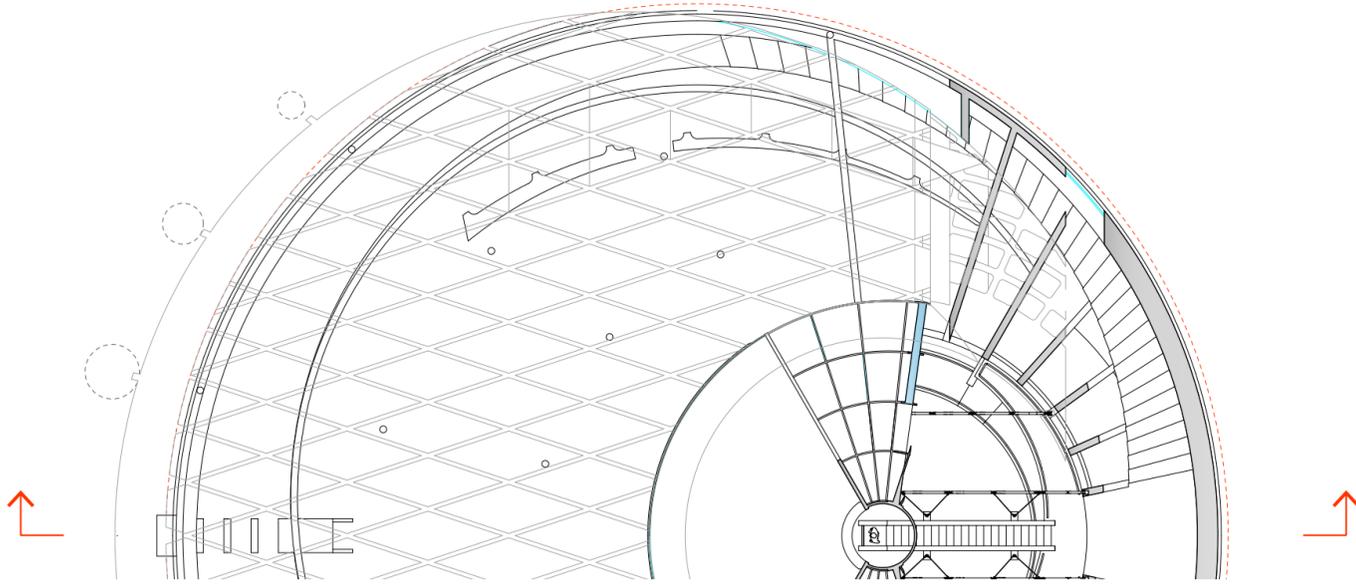
# Structure

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Structure is the form that resists change. It is also a strong contributor to the expression of spatial differentiation.



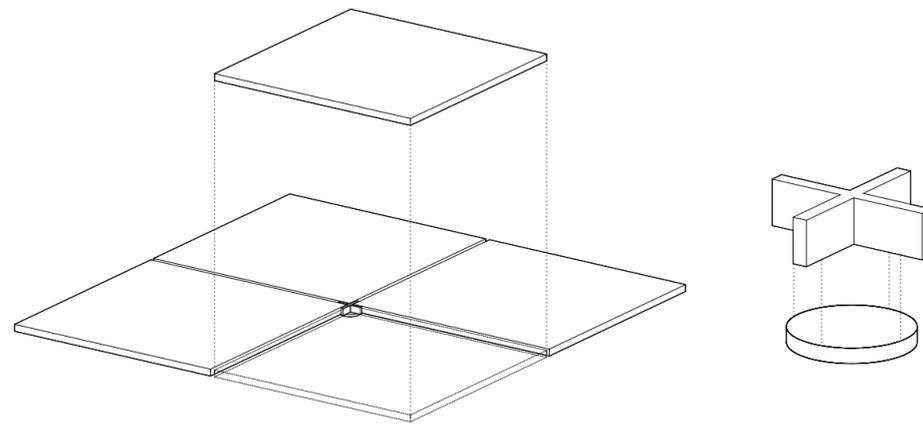
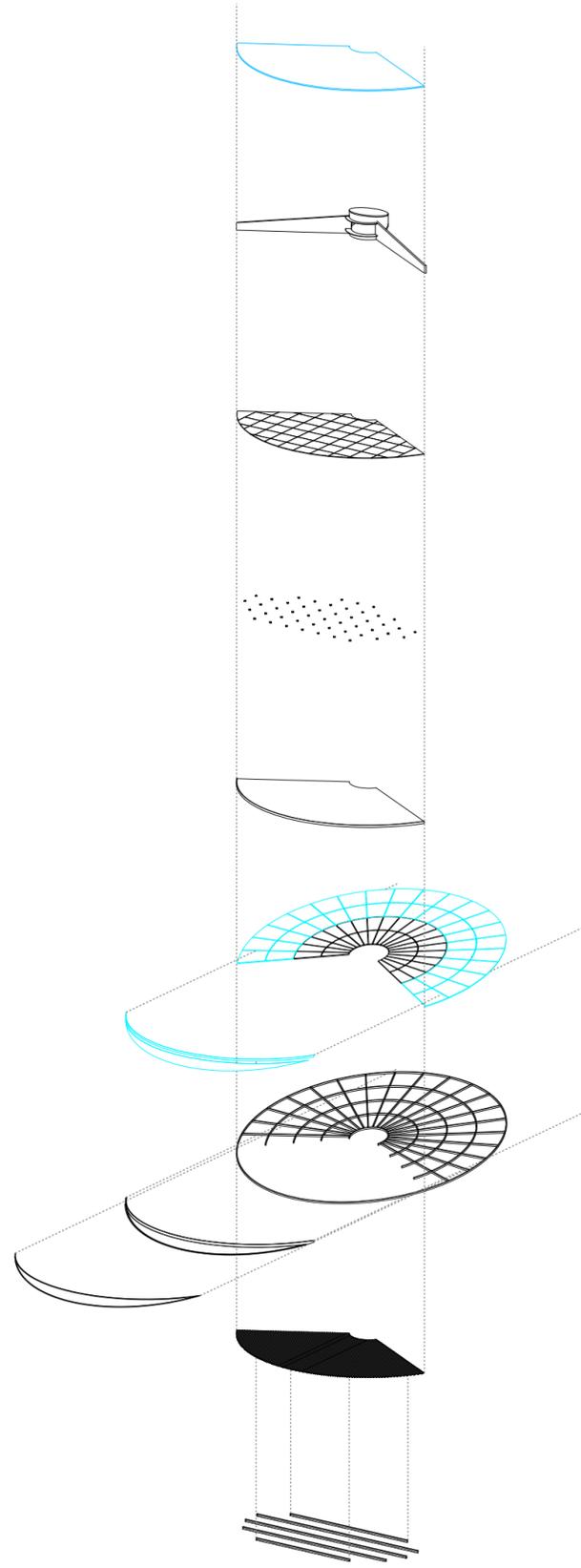
# **IV A PRECIOUS VIEW**



A PRECIOUS VIEW

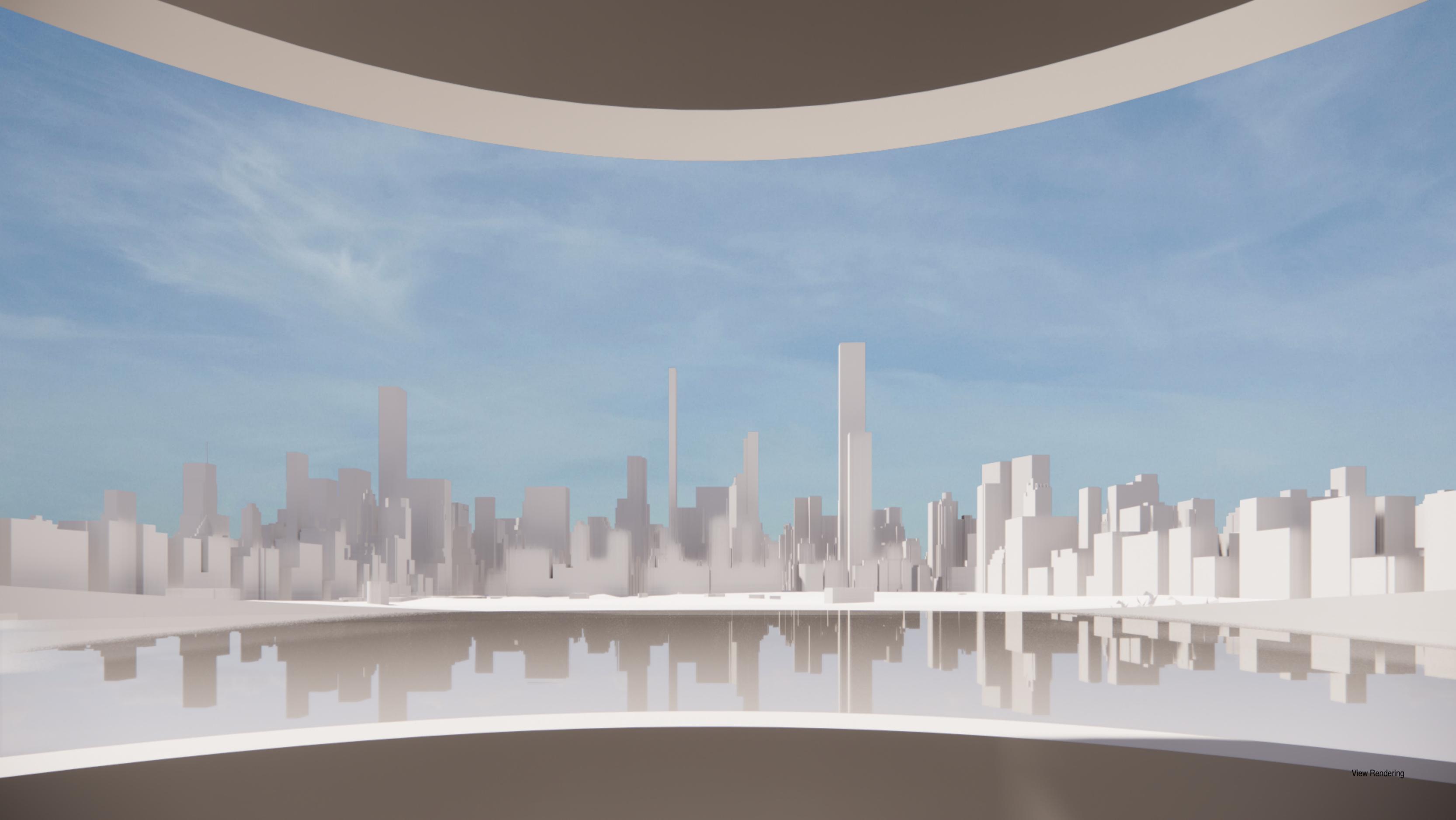
A PRECIOUS VIEW

0 2 4 6 8 ft



The shallow pool, lined with ceramic white tiles reflects light to the inside of the building, but its most important contribution is to complement the view of the city with a reflection of the skyline.

The rectangular opening frames the skyline view which is similar to the frame of a painting. The depth of the vertical constraints confines the cone of vision to the important part of the skyline. The opening is not sealed so viewer can feel air movement, temperature and the presence of water from the pool.



# CONCLUSION

A Precious View in this context is an architecture that amplifies something that we already know. The view is a renewed bond between the viewer and the city. Because of this bond, people get inspired and enlightened. Architecture has the power of universality and preciousness through geometric means. Geometry relates to form. Form creates space while light fulfills it. Architecture should always carry the possibility that a new view can be made to inspire people.

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## **Photographs in Mark Rothko of Research/Case Study**

[8] Mark Rothko, Orange and Tan, 1954, Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington

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