

## THE PLACES OF MEMORY

**The Omaha Nation Cultural and Interpretative Center**  
 Omaha Indian Reservation, Macy, Nebraska

**Vincent Snyder**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

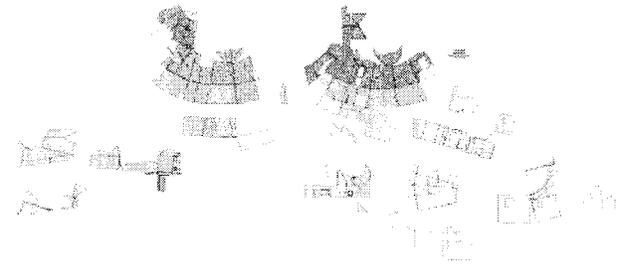
*2002-2003 ACSA Faculty Design Award*

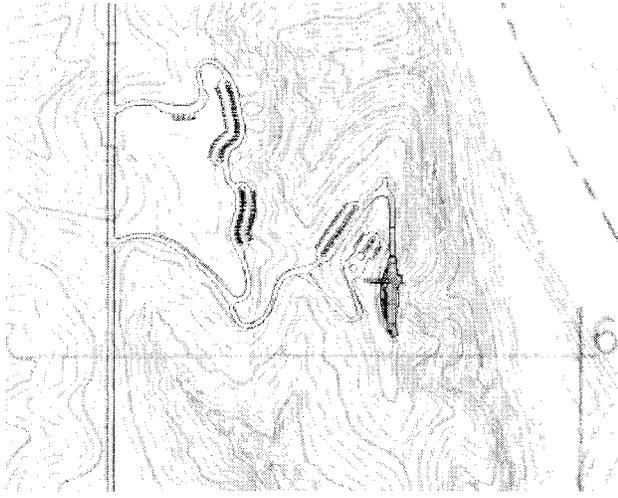


The primary purpose of this project is to provide a home for a sacred living being called Umon'hon'ti, also known as "The Venerable Man", or "The Ultimate Omaha" or commonly, in the dominant culture, as the Sacred Pole. He, along with the Sacred White Buffalo Hide, and 250 other ancestral items, has been repatriated to the Omaha after a century of "protective custody" by the Harvard Peabody Museum. In addition to the housing and periodic display of Umon'hon'ti and these sacred items, this 45,000 s. f. project also includes spaces for contemporary exhibits, conference/multi-purpose rooms for community events, classrooms and a library for educational purposes, an Omaha restaurant, and limited tribal offices.



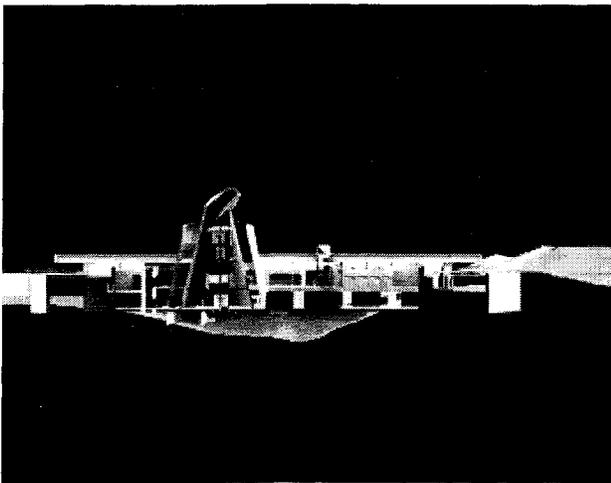
Scrub trees cover the sandstone bluffs into which this project is nestled some 270 ft. above the Missouri River with visibility of over 50 miles eastward into the prairies of Iowa. This sacred site is within close proximity of Hole-in-the-Rock and Chief Blackbird's grave, both of which served as expeditionary markers for westward adventurers such as Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, and later, George Catlin.





In keeping with the Omaha cultural emphasis on duality, the client's primary concerns are for an expressive building that is uniquely Omaha, alluding to a proud, powerful past while simultaneously anticipating the promising future. Pragmatically, this project must allow for the independent operating hours of the various venues and be energy efficient.

The above concerns resulted in a design that acknowledges the necessity of a transcultural dialogue as represented by a buried quadrilateral container in a dialectic with a collection of figural elements emanating and evolving from circular origins with registrations to mythical and celestial references. Most notably reflected in the design are the predominance of dualities, the sanctification of the landscape, and the deference to the cardinal directions- all of which continually clarify the individual Omaha's position within the world.



The primary strategies applied to address the major issues of identity within the Omaha culture and the pragmatics of construction and program are:

1. Acknowledgement and reinterpretations of transcultural influences.
2. Investigations into the creation, development, and significance of *mood*.
3. Refinement of architectural expression through geometrical resonances relating to and controlled by: a) Omaha mythological, cosmological, and numerical references, b) typical constructional grids, and lastly, c) formal surfaces restricted to the descriptive geometry of *developed* shapes, whereby, a 3-d system of regulating lines is explored between the conceptually unrolled 2-d and the manifestly folded 3-d *developed* shapes.

