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I have, from time to time, written about my love of architecture. It is a strange love, no doubt, because it's not something a lot of kids who grew up in the 70s have. Why? Because 1970s and early 80s architecture was nearly completely inaccessible to people who didn't REALLY dig architectural theory. With a lot of art, you can find something to appreciate, something emotional, or at least visceral, but with architecture, it's far too easy to fall into the "but how do you get to the bathrooms" about it.

Me? I loved it. Why? Because I love Brutalism.

There's a style of architecture that is at once a combination of Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism and Pragmatism. It's ugly, most people say, it's overly-functional. Me? It's imaginative, it's full of the things that make me love SciFi! It's SCIENCE, and at the same time it's ART! I adore it, adore how it makes use of the needs of the building as a major part of the presentation of the building. Plus, I just love concrete.

The death of I.M. Pei really brought it home. He was the first architect I can be certain I'd heard of, back about 1979 or so. Then I discovered Kenzo Tange when he won the Pritzger Prize in 1987, and then all hell broke loose when I found Frank Gehry! To this day, Gehry is my fave working architect. Not ever a question on that one.

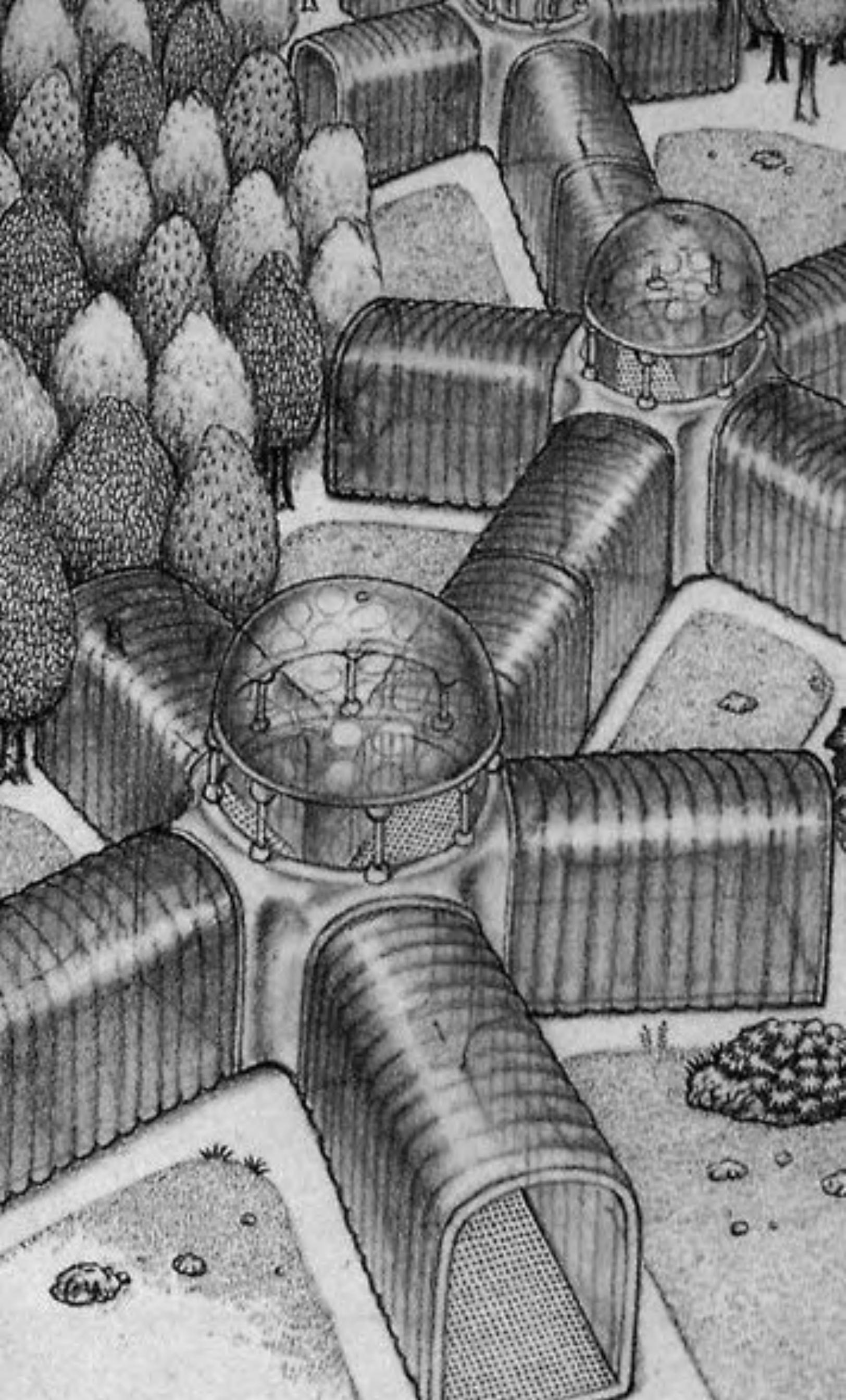
Pei's buildings are modernist. Noe just modernist, I think, but Modernist. The same way that a Picasso's work pretty much sums up Modernist painting, Pei's work sums up modernist architecture. The Louvre Pyramid alone is worth it. His works are amazing, and one of the few architects who managed to stay relevant for longer than two decades without either 1) constantly reinventing, or 2) being so far ahead of the curve that everyone else was playing catch-up.

That latter is pretty much Frank Gehry. He's either a post-modernist, or what I believe, a sensationalist. He's about the experience of a building being something beyond the form or the function. In a way, his entire buildings are serving the same purpose that the gargoyles on Notre Dame served.

Tange brought an idea of Japanese traditionalism mingled with new Modernism. The house he built for himself probably shows this better than any other I can think of. It's elevated, but the central area of the house is still based around tatami, and is open, but dividable.

This issue is all about my love of buildings, with a slight bent towards what a building means today where so much of the world is based around not being bound to a particular one any more.







Silicon Valley Architecture

There actually is architecture in Silicon Valley; there is no Silicon Valley Look, though. Santa Barbara, there's a look. LA during much of the 20th Century? A look. Miami? A look. It's harder to define any sort of look for Silicon Valley because it's ultimately a land of pragmatism, and 'looks' tend to be created out of excess. Still, there is a sensation of Silicon Valley, tent poles pulling the otherwise flat sheet of visual built environment up in a few places.

And these are the places that have moved me.

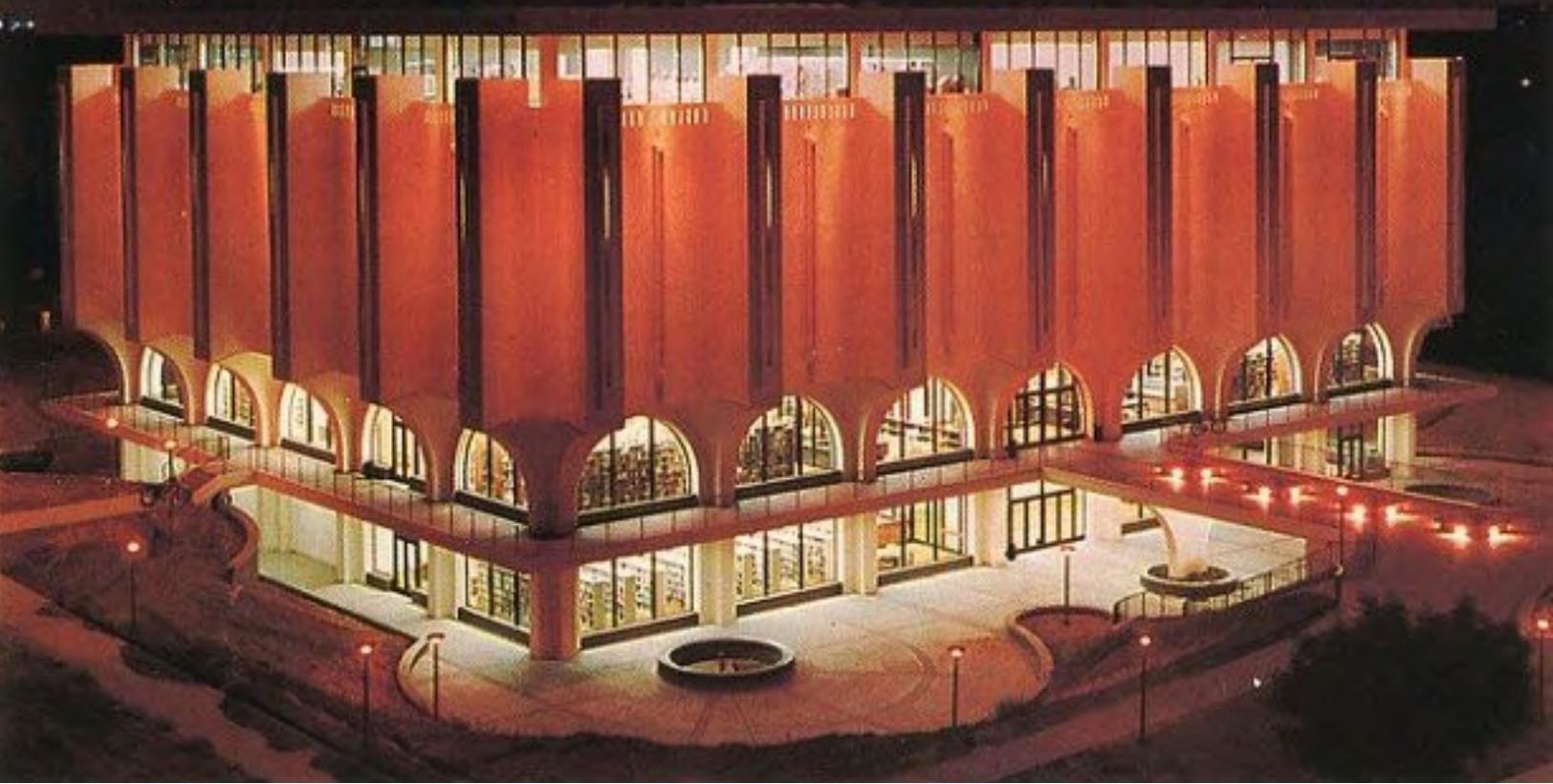
Growing up, it was all around me, and I usually didn't get it. That's OK, you're not really supposed to get it when you're a kid, but as I started looking into architectural heritage, I realized that there were three distinct phases where Silicon Valley had a look, and how long-lived those looks had actually been.

The first was the rancho style. There's not a lot of it left, but you can still find hints of it. This was the first style to take root, with examples like the Peralta Adobe, and then the oldest ranches along the foothills. These were the ultimate in functionality buildings, with limited ornamentation, and a lack of what could be called 'neighborhooding' where one building sets off of another. The idea, of course, is that each of these buildings was meant to stand alone, to stand apart, to be its own things. Makes sense, no?

Then, and largely concurrent, there was the Victorian era. Most of downtown was Victorian design, and most of the houses. The houses have survived in many places, partly because they became quaint faster than they could be redeveloped. There were far more around when I was a kid, but there are still plenty.

Then, we got Mid-Century Modern, and I grew up with that as the aesthetic of my childhood, and I fell in love with it. This is what we're currently destroying around here to make way for whatever it is we're doing now, and with it, we're destroying a significant part of our architectural heritage. You'll understand more about that as we go along, but there are issues within the Valley that are fighting and all the Mid-Century Buildings are one of the major battlegrounds.

This is a Valley of streamlining, of money, of a desire to be bold and flashy, and to make it as easy as possible to get work done. The buildings I'm going to talk about aren't architectural masterpieces, for the most part, but they are our heritage and tell a story of Silicon valley as a place, and its inhabitants as people.



Main Branch San Jose Library

If you were at WorldCon, during the Masq, I told the story about how the site where I was hosting the Masq had once been the fiction section of the old San Jose Main Branch of the Public Library where my Mom and Uncle had worked. That's true, but it wasn't nearly as important that this was where I encountered Vonnegut and Sturgeon and Farmer and Robinson, but it was the building itself.

This is the intersection of Mid-Century Modern and Brutalism, which was still a few years away from being a thing. Those glassed arches, the windows right below the roof-line, the fluted columns on the outside. They are all elements that scream of what the MCModernists were doing, but just as important they are elements realized in concrete and glass. You would walk across a bridge to the ground floor, and through one of those arches. The area in front of you is huge, flat with the shelves and desks rising up, and only the central core interfering with the flow. You could go down, or up, but that sense of openness, of a field in front of you, is always there. I know they outgrew it by the time I was old enough to remember going to see Mom and Wayne, but it never felt cramped. It felt massive, unending. I know now that this was a part of the sightlines, and a brilliantly played part as well.

I'm a big fan of the use of concrete as the exterior. It's simple, cold, and the material is unadorned. That's a powerful statement. It wasn't made to look like stone, but was allowed to be concrete, though lightly painted. The feeling of the austerity plays so well. It is an incredible effect to me, because at night, when it was lit up, it reminded me of Petra, of red rocks, of 1920s images of India, Egypt, Victorian London. It was beautiful, and that photo above is largely how I remember it.





San Jose Buddhist Betsuin Temple

This building is a simple, beautiful, and impressive building. It is a wonderful surviving part of Japantown's history. It is a calm site, as strange as it seems in the middle of San Jose. For the most part, Japantown's architecture is nothing to write zines about, but here it is a lovely piece of work, a temple that somehow sets itself apart from everything.

The fun thing about this is that there is no influence of it on the surrounding area. It is actually at the edge of Japantown, It's as if it was a pebble dropped into a pond, but no ripples expand out from it. This may have to do with the sheer number of times things have been torn down, rebuilt, re-developed, and simply forgotten about. Today, Japantown is a place to go to for lunch, for dinner, or simply to walk around.

And to pass by this building.

Walking by, you find something strange, especially if you approach it a bit. You find that the lines aren't exactly as simple as they look from the front. It actually feels like a floating roof, almost ramp-like, something that's really common in more recent architecture. From the side, with the landscaping, it's about a set of horizontal braces, and that slanted roof that makes it an element in the garden that it serves as a background for. It certainly feels more modern than I would have expected, and though I've never been inside, I can only say that it feels from the outside that it isn't a part of San Jose.

Winchester Mystery House

This is likely the most famous building in all of San Jose. It is a beautiful Victorian with a strange story behind it. I wrote an entire issue about it in the early days of The Drink Tank (<http://efanzines.com/DrinkTank/DrinkTank31.pdf>) and it's an impressive part of my life, as I can trace my love of the paranormal to the House, and can 100% say that this was the first house whose architecture I tried to understand.

Looking beyond the idea that it was built on plans drawn up by a crazy woman, which it wasn't, the entire house is built with a single woman's needs in mind. She understood the climate enough to design the house to use every drop of water, and to have her rooms stay cool, even on hot days. She had an over-look, so she could spy on her workers from above, almost completely undetectable from below. She understood acoustics enough to allow her to hear her workers from rooms, or even floors, away. She had an announcement and alarms system. She was super-smart, and the house has elements that are truly ingenious.

The look is so very Victorian, and perhaps a bit out of fashion by the time it was done in the 20s. I also think one of the reasons that Victorians were more protected was because of the Winchester House. It was such a visible symbol of Victorian opulence is going to have an impact on the entire area. From the road, it is a massive piece of over-wrought Victoriana. Every thing that people point to as gaudy in Victorian architecture is present, but the balance of them is incredible. Looking at the front door area alone, there are gables, gingerbread, columns, curving low walls with heavy coping, over-lapping slats, high-arch windows, turret, excessive carving, it's all there, but none of it seems crammed together, instead it is given space to breathe. That's impressive.

It may not be the best example of a Victorian Home (that would be the Carson Mansion in Eureka) but it is one of the most impressive buildings in San Jose, and one of the few architectural joys.





You may only truly understand what you love when you are confronted with what you hate.

I hate the Tech Museum.

I'm not saying that because of the natural rivalry between the Tech Museum of Innovation and the Computer History Museum, or the fact that people assume I work at the Tech, or the fact that they are SO much better funded than we are, no, none of those. They just have about the ugliest building I know of.

You see, it's supposed to be whimsical, and the colors, orange, purples, blues, are supposed to appeal to children, who are the target demographic. That's cool, right? Sure, though it stands out so thoroughly against the grey of the other buildings that it pops. But it's also in direct opposition to the natural beiges and green of the mountains and foothills that surround the Valley. It's a towering example of late-1990s Business Park Contemporary, and it's ugly as sin, while standing out, serving as its own sign, marking its territory.

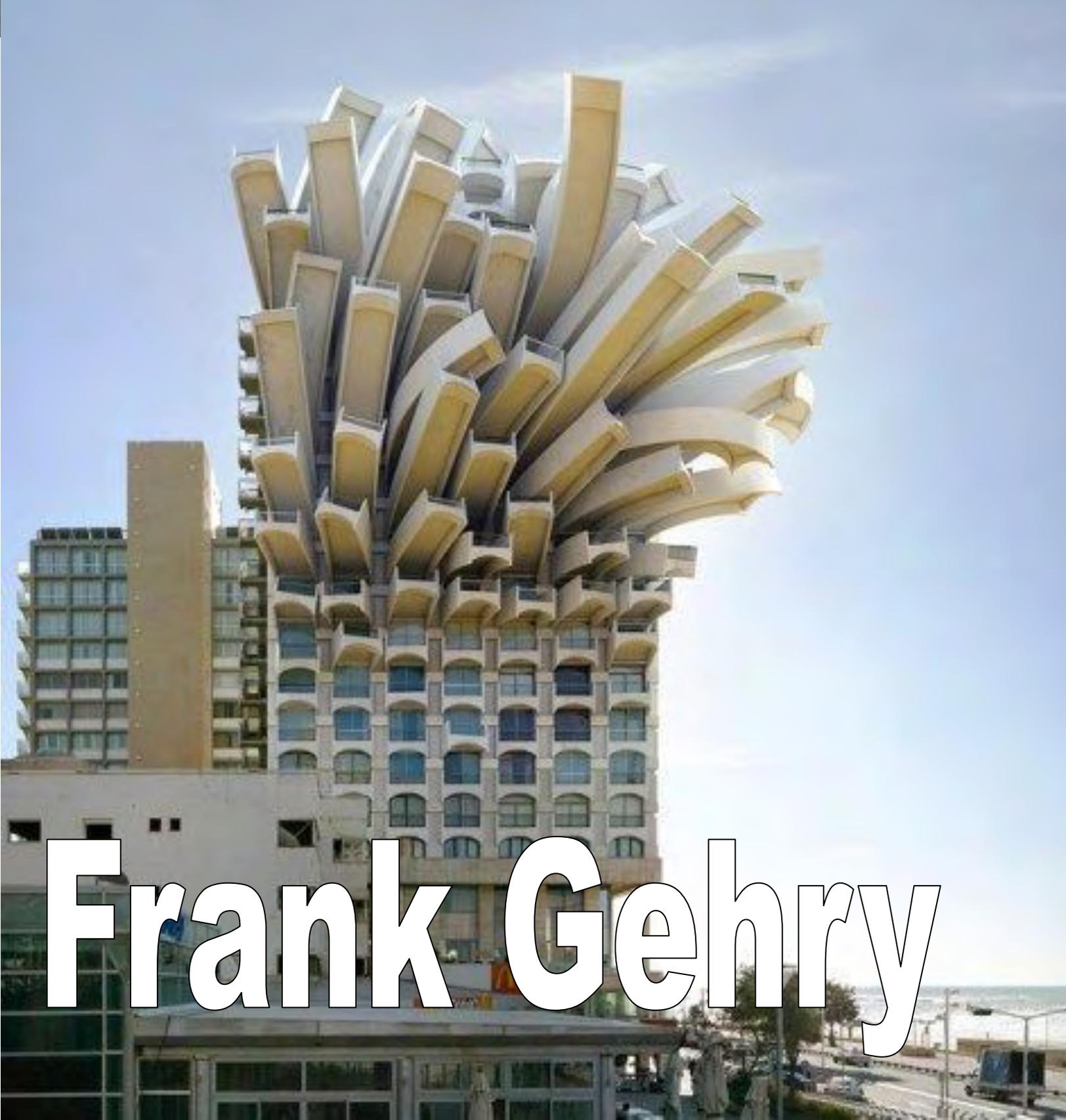
The key to this building is actually it's functionality. That ugly dome is used to project dome-based IMAX films, which is not nearly as cool as you would think. The orange square extends below street-level, and they use it incredibly well, with the building being about 150,000 square feet, actually less than the Computer History Museum, but they make such incredible use of it. Much like the old San Jose Main Library, it's an open floor plan save for a central stack. That allows for simple things to make it feel so much bigger. In fact, when I was looking up the info on The Tech's square footage, I was shocked that my estimate of its size was at least 3 times as big as it actually was.

And that's the thing about Silicon Valley buildings; they are shockingly efficient. Maybe not in power consumption, maybe not in heating and cooling costs, but in space utilization theories. There is an understanding that open has a more useful disposition than closed... even if it leads to the terrible Open Floor plan, and the idea that unplanned use is actually more frequent, and far more useful, than planned use. These things are baked into Silicon Valley buildings, and you can see it strongly in The Tech.

Even if it's an ugly eyesore of a building.



My Favorite Architects



Frank Gehry



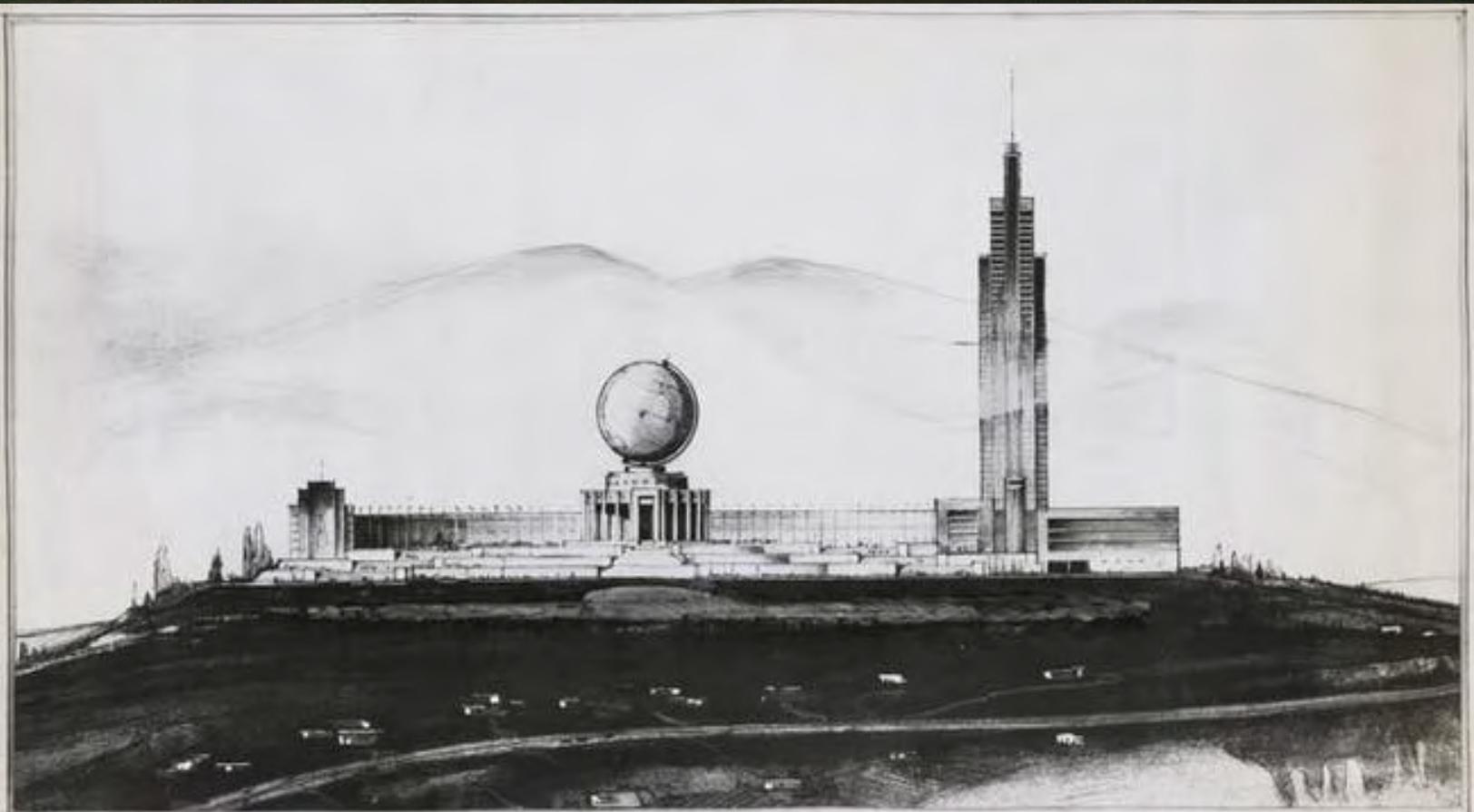
Kenzo Tange



I.M. Pei



Zaha Hadid





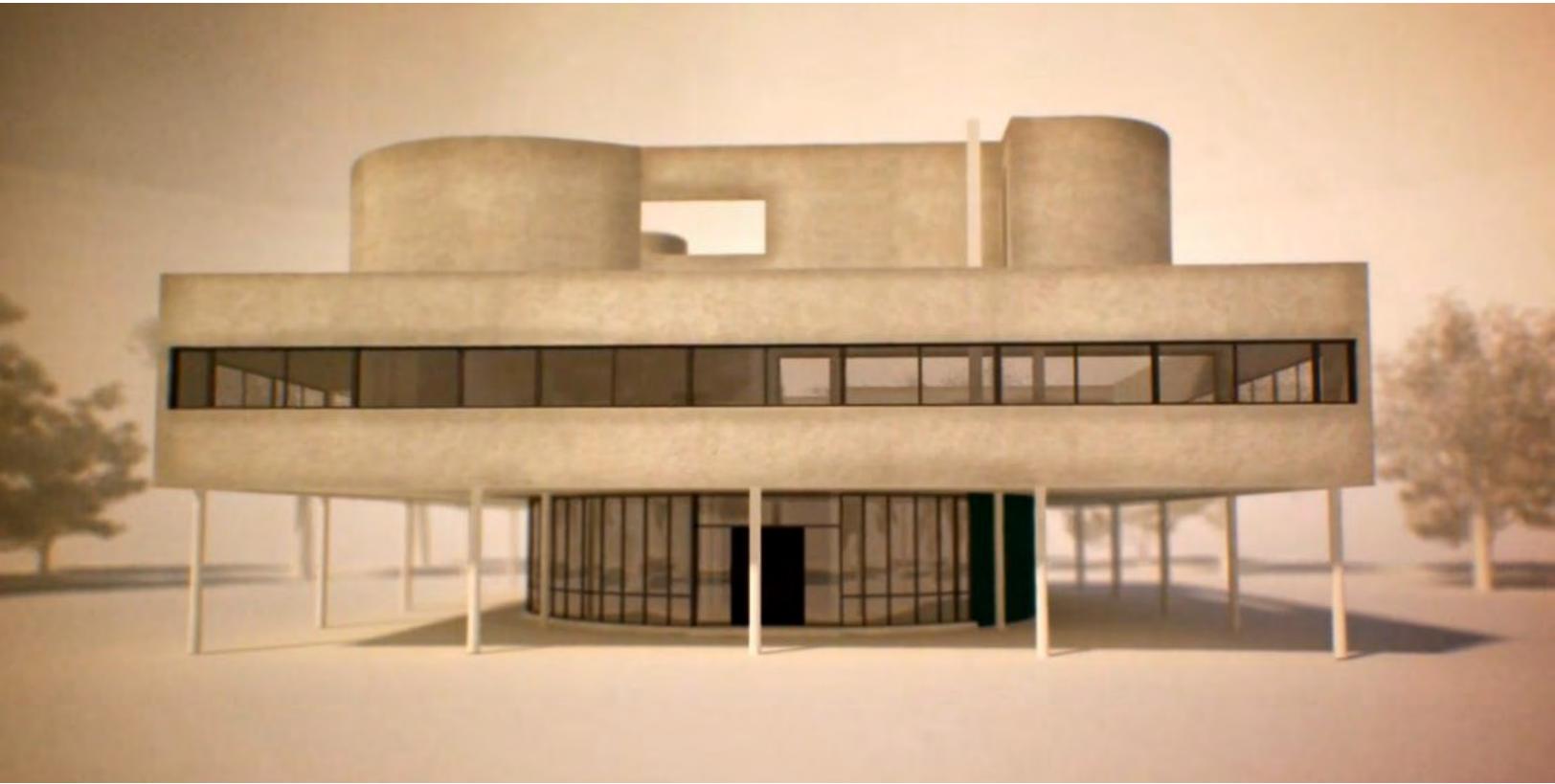
Erno Goldfinger





Moshe Safdie





Le Corbusier

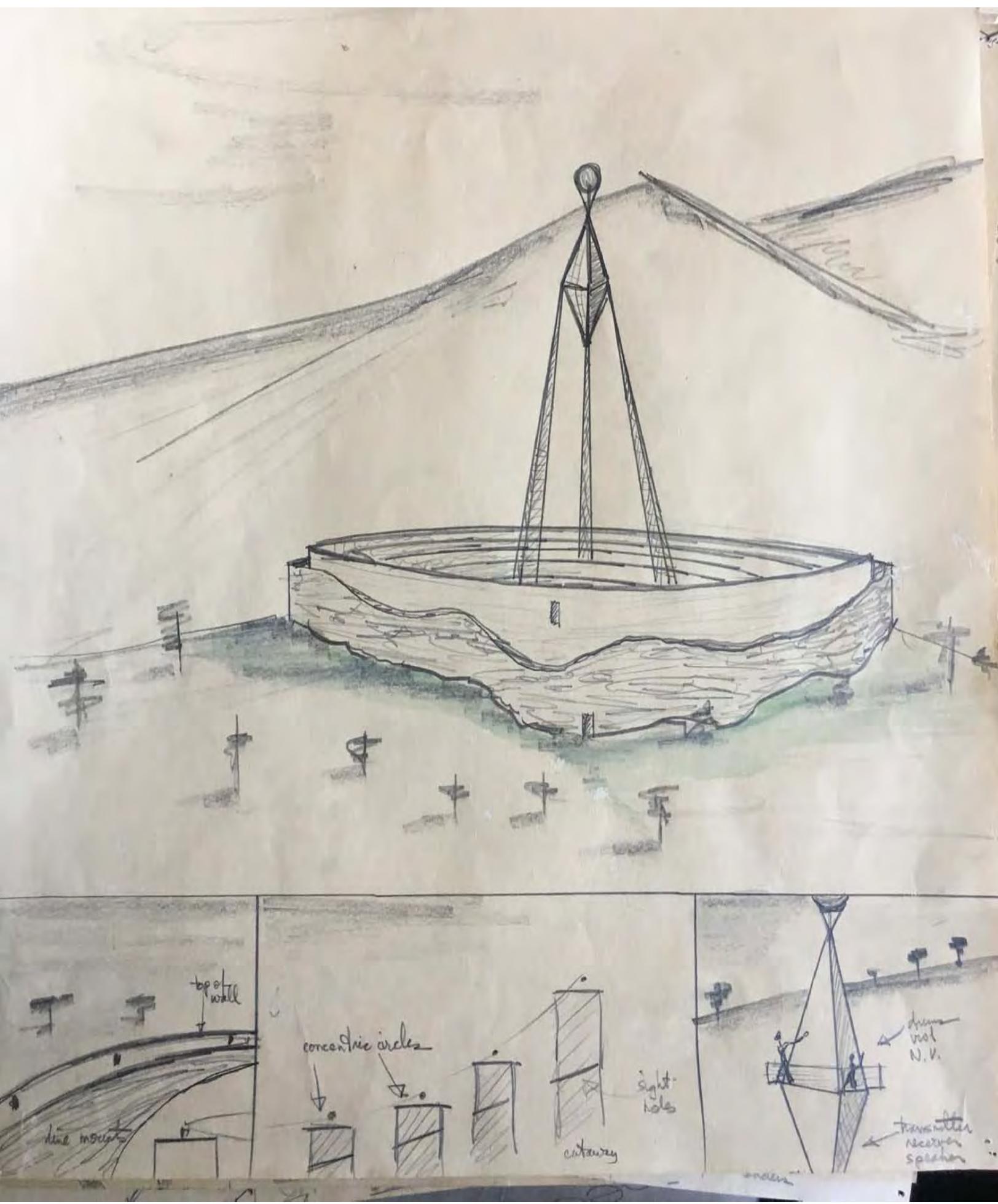


**The Radio Telescopes
of David Cope**

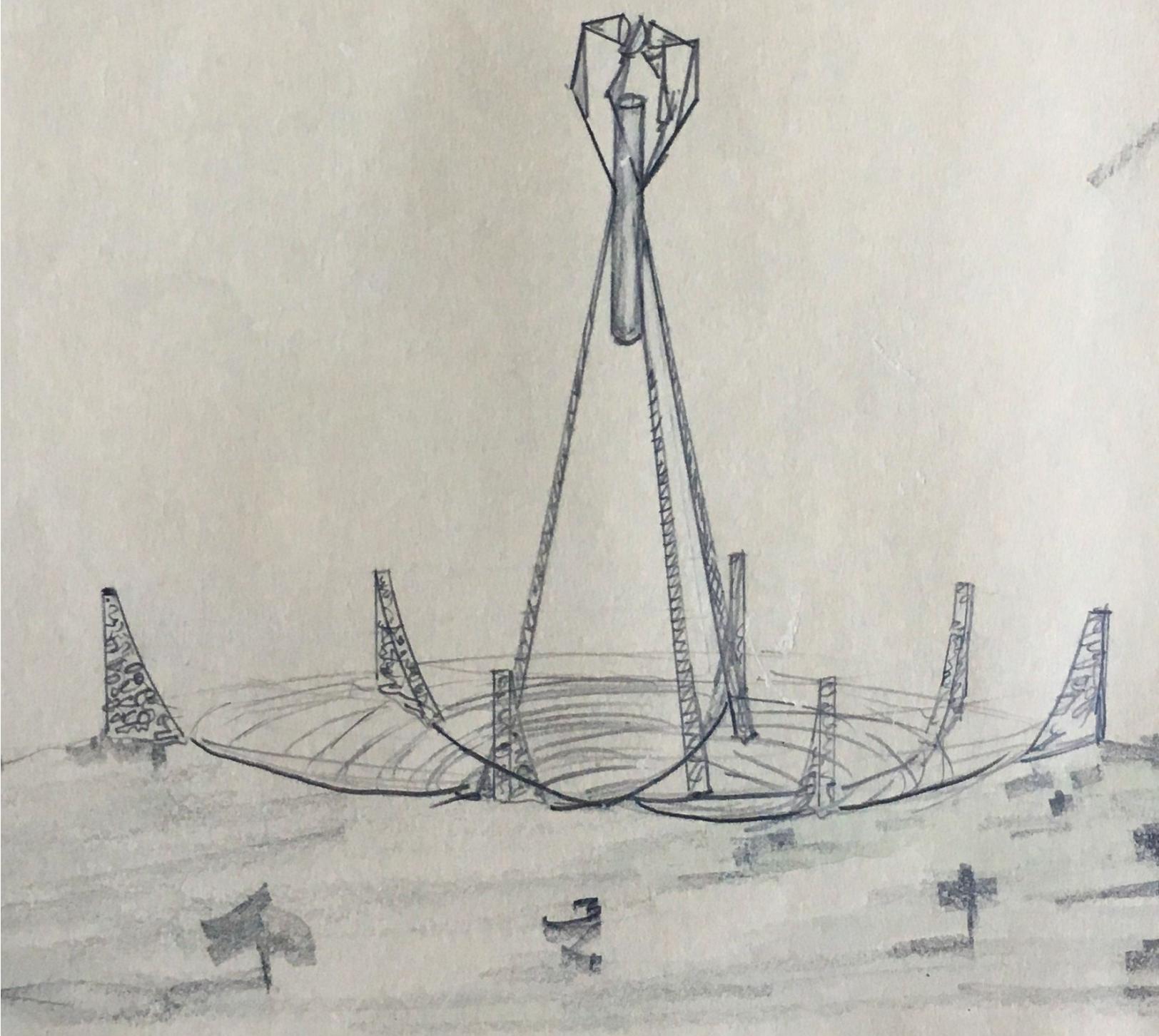
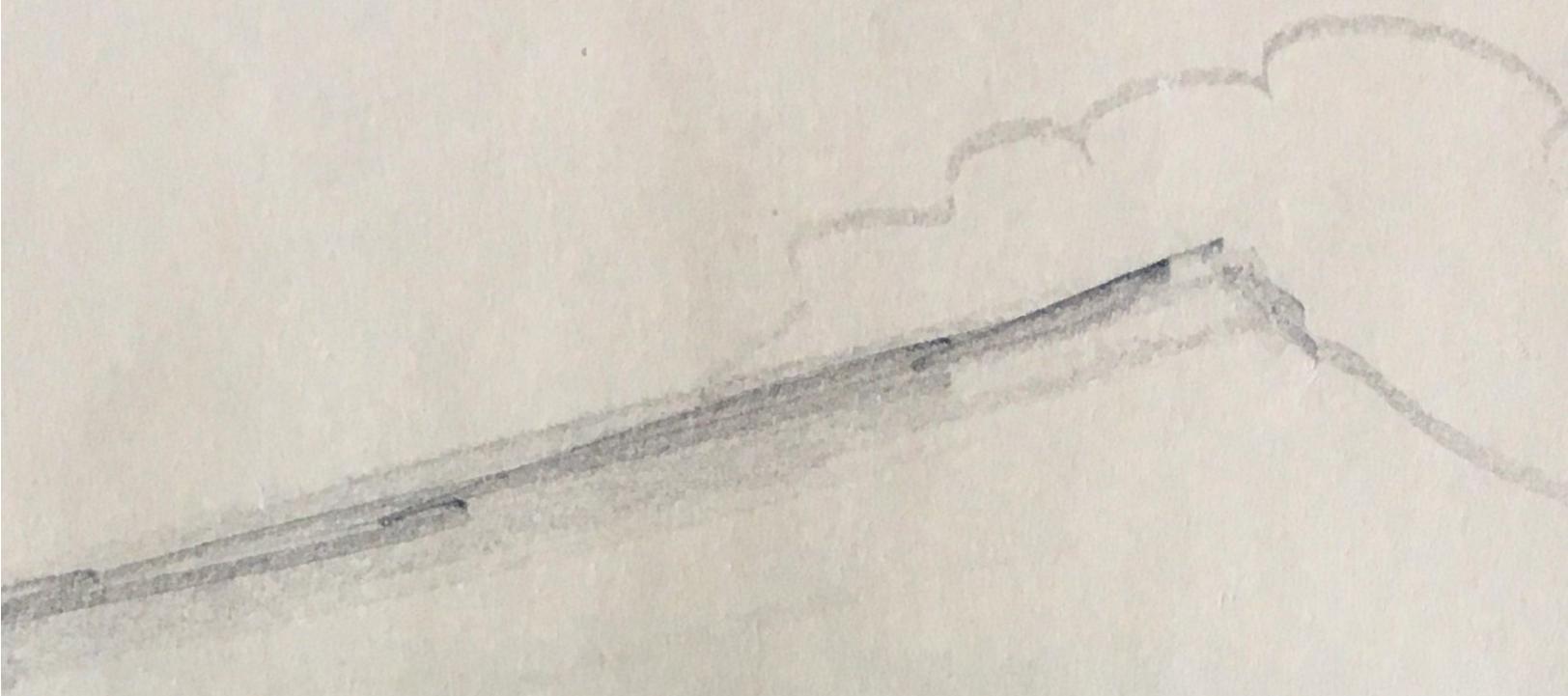
David Cope is a friend. He also happens to be one of the most amazing humans I've ever had the honor of meeting. He's a great writer, a computer scientist, a composer, and the developer of some of the most impressive music-composition programs, notably EMI (Experiments in Musical Intelligence) and Emily Howell. I even wrote a thing on his work for the Museum's blog—<https://www.computerhistory.org/atcm/algorithmic-music-david-cope-and-emi/>

David has the most amazing office I've ever seen. It's a room on the second story of his home in Santa Cruz, and it's full of windchimes. Dozens of windchimes! You can not walk through without activating a few of them, and that is magic! On the walls, on my first visit, I noticed these wonderful, science fictional drawings. I asked what they were, and David said they were designs for Radio Telescopes! They are amazing, is what I think!

David did these drawings in 1982, and showed them to Frank Drake, who is famed for the Arecibo radio telescope, and he declared they'd all work!



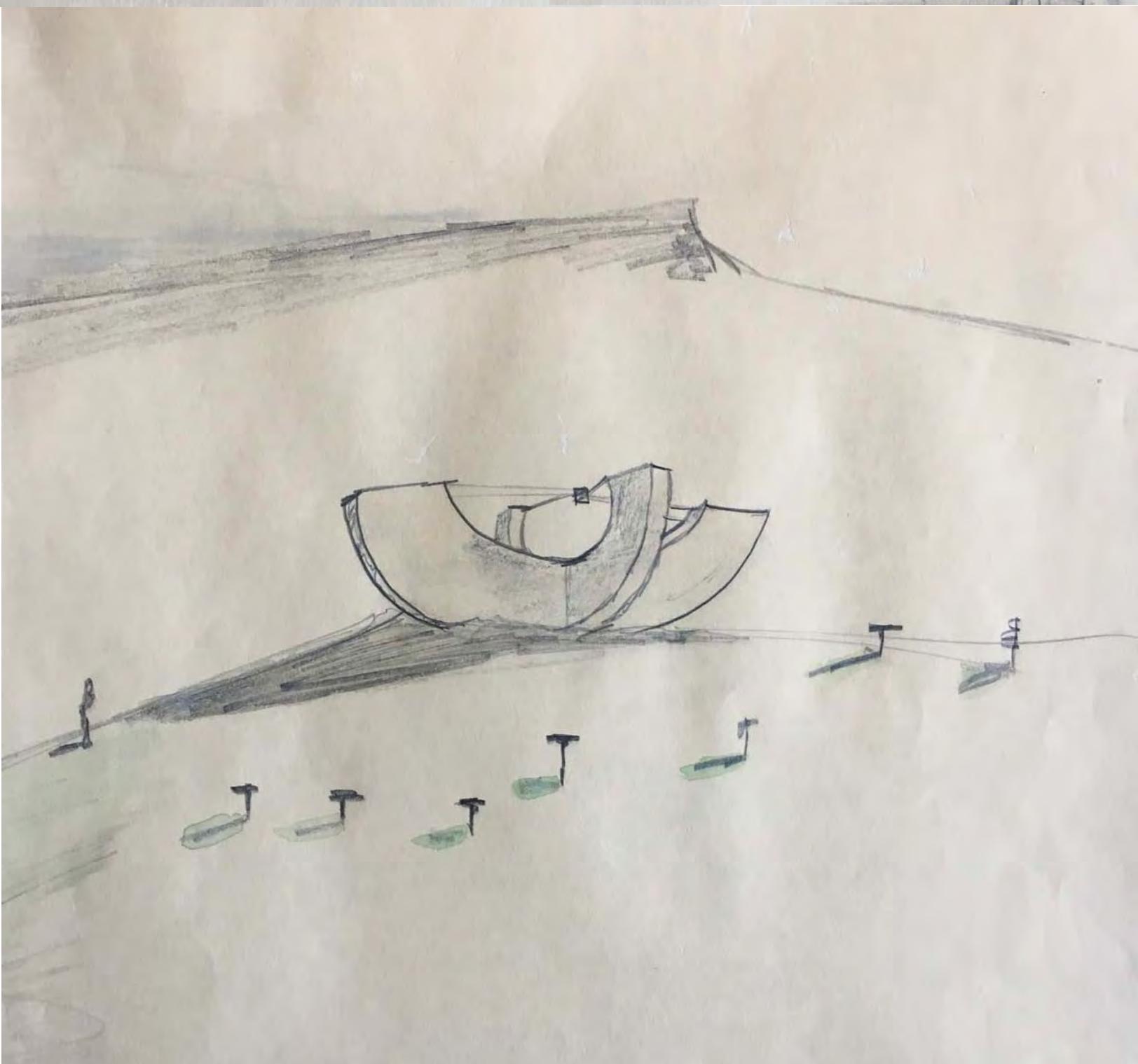
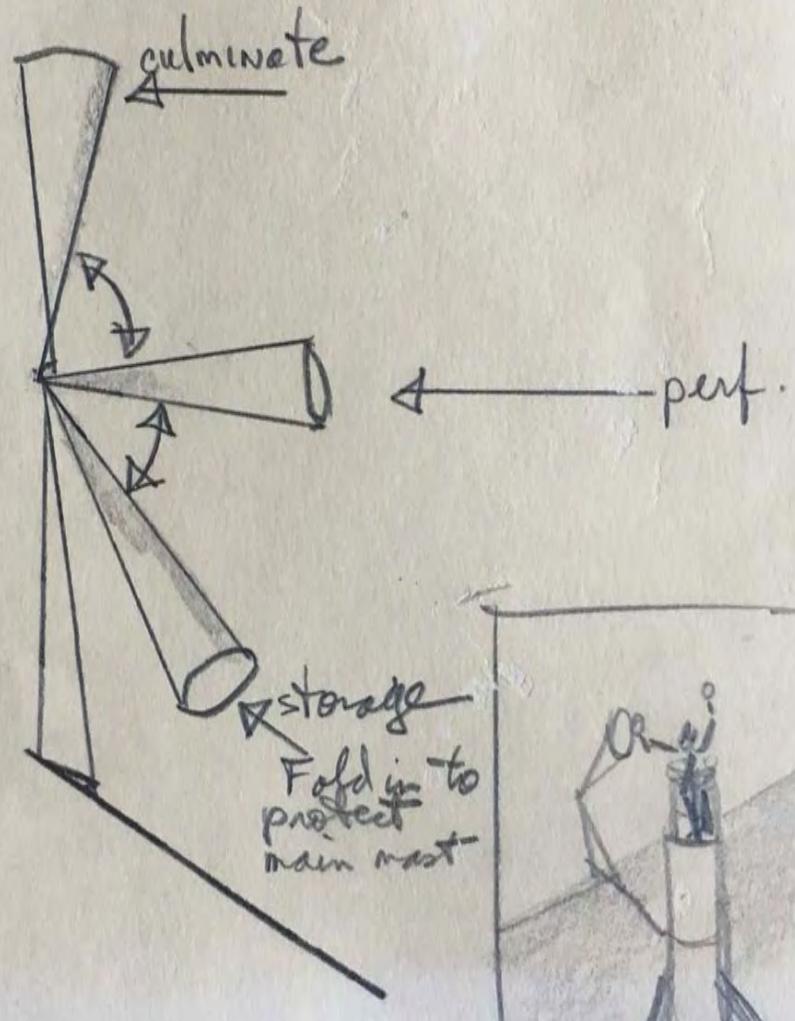
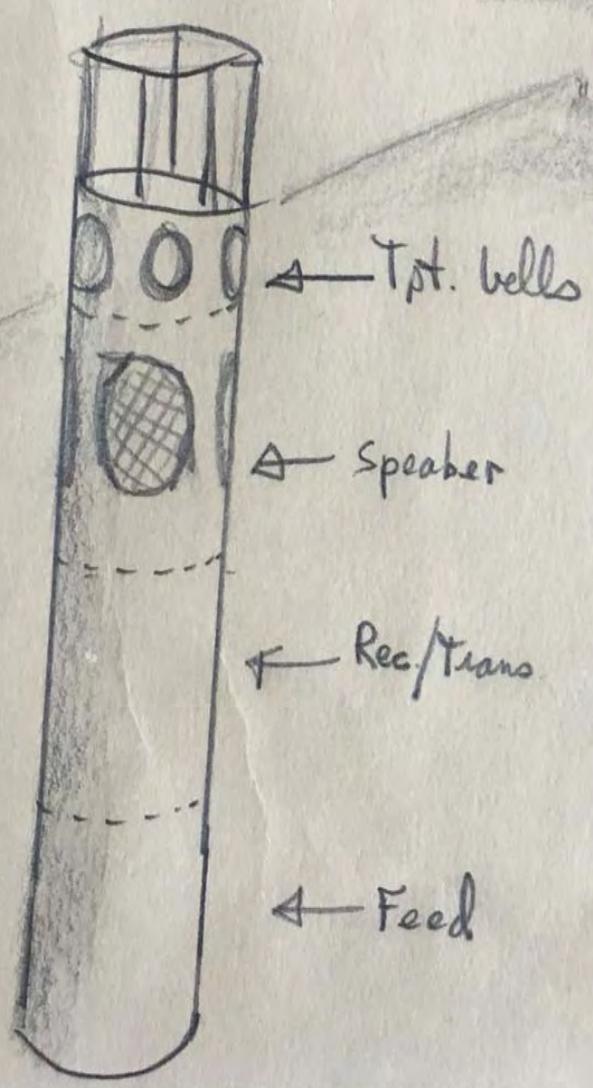




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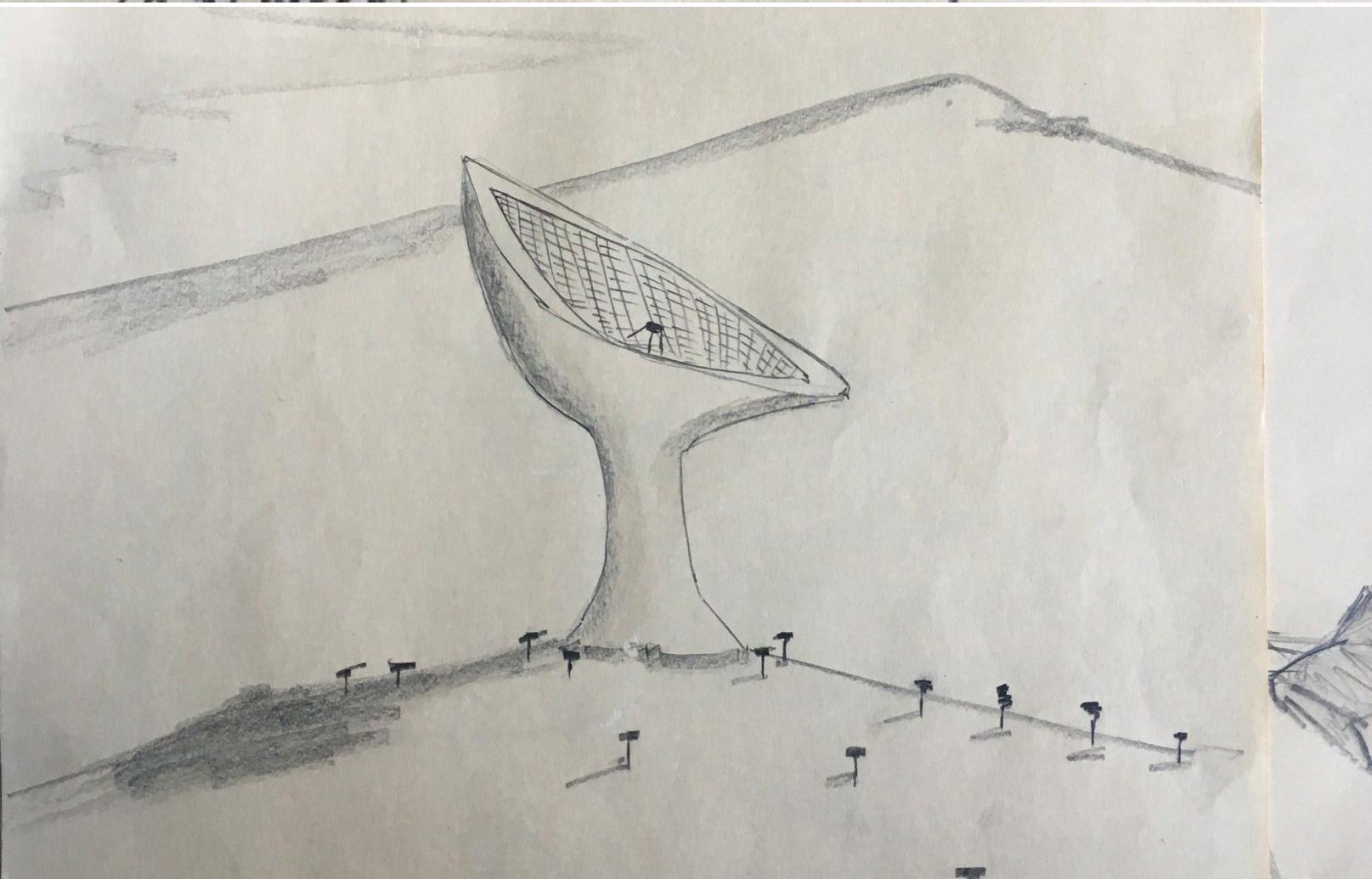
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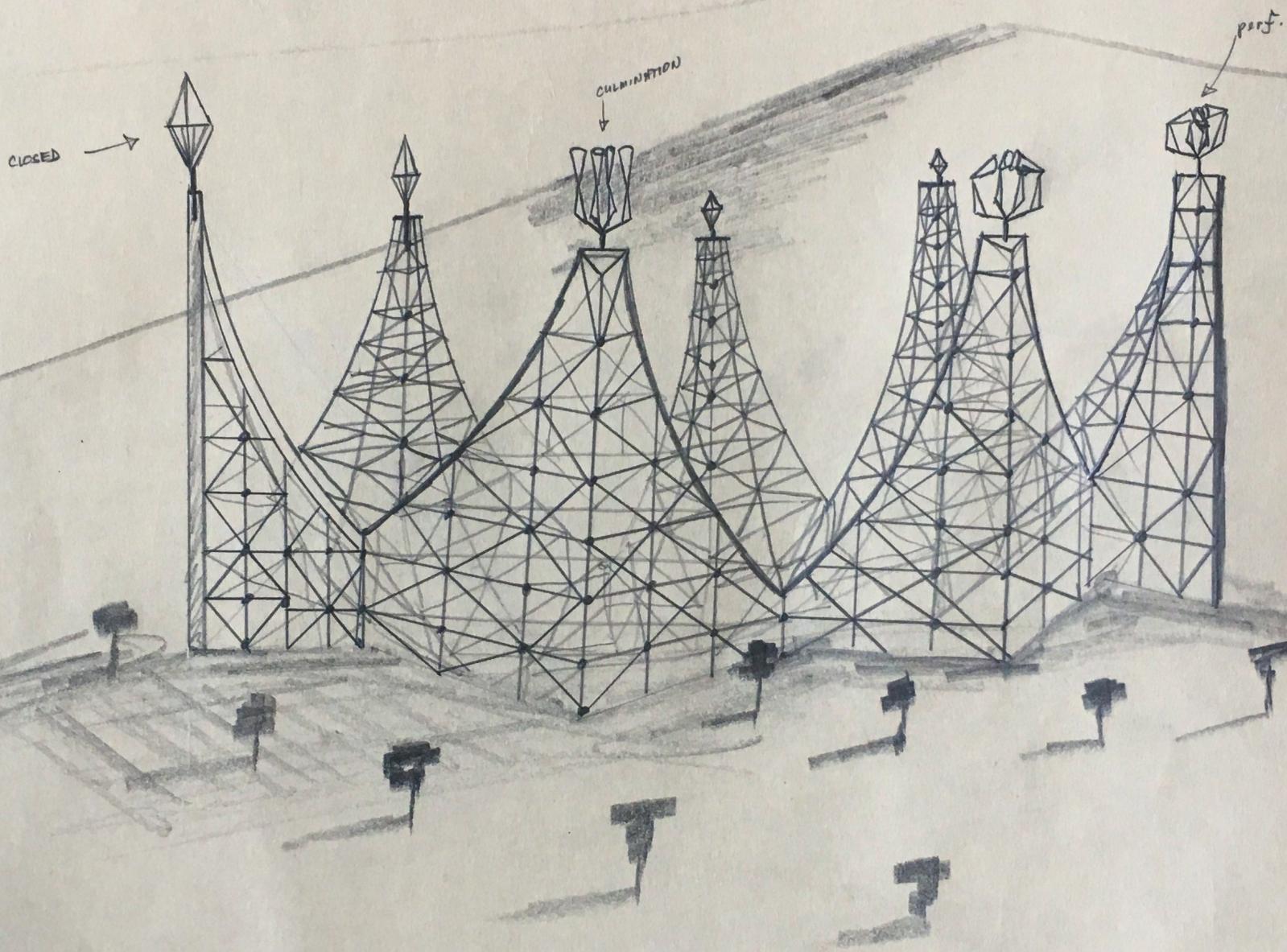
from the road



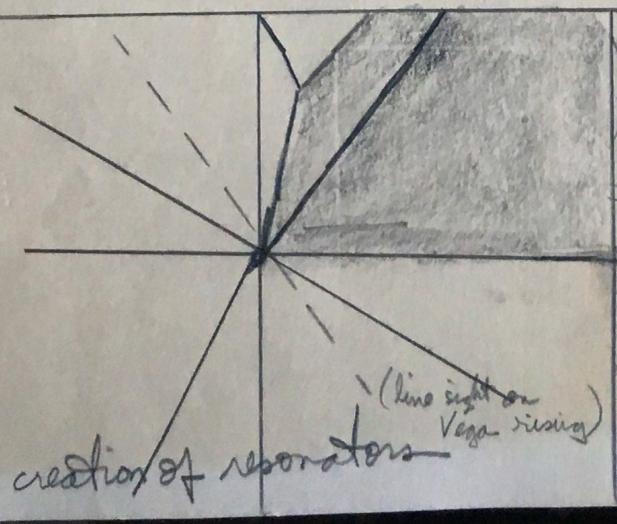
in a piece.



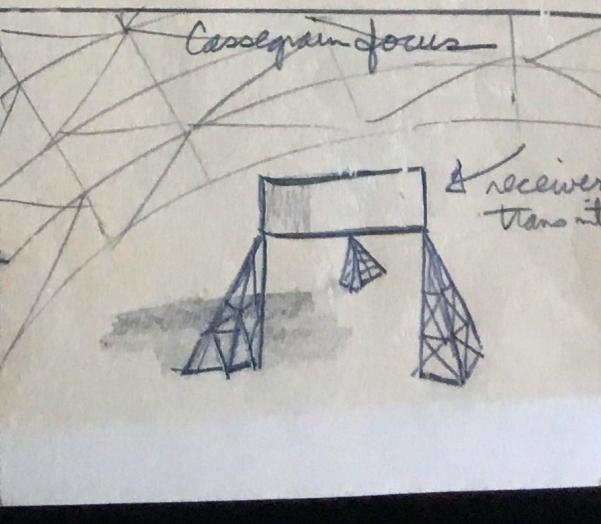
seum



from above



(line sight on Vega rising)
creation of resonators



Cassegrain focus

& receiver transit