

Oratoire Saint-Joseph du Mont-Royal Phase 4

Canadian Architect 2018
Awards of Excellence

Location and Client
Montréal, Quebec
Oratoire Saint-Joseph

Area
3500 m²

Budget
13.5M\$

The project is the winning entry in a Quebec-wide architectural competition held in the spring of 2018.

An important component of the Oratory's major renovation plan, the fourth and last phase of the project will make the inter-dome space accessible to the public, offering the highest viewing belvedere onto the city. From the *drum* of the dome to the *lanternon*, visitors will be invited to discover this long hidden, exceptional space within the Oratory. Adding to the experience, the museum, beneath the sanctuary level, will also be fully redefined.

From grounded to celestial: the Oratory from place to space

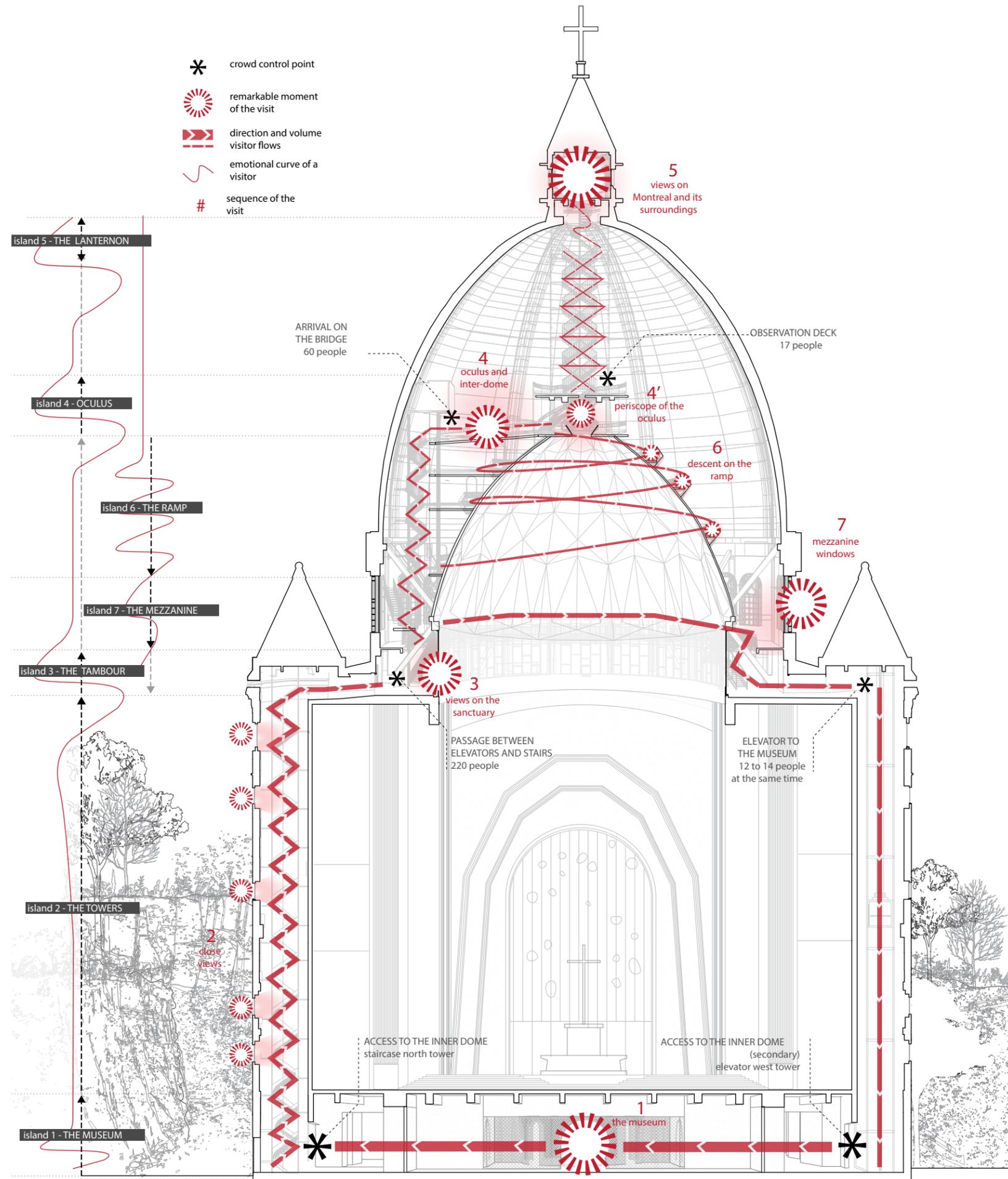
St Joseph's Oratory is the result of an "infectious dream". Founded by Brother André, with immediate popular support, the sanctuary grew little by little over time, through the will of the growing congregation. The Oratory is above all a place of pilgrimage: an experience that begins upon entering the site. The new promenade through the museum and the inter-dome is an extension and an enhancement of this pilgrimage. The ambulation takes several forms: horizontal, vertical, circular, even diagonal. This is a spectacular journey in and of itself, a breathtaking experience through an ascent of over 80 meters beginning at Queen Mary road. The path begins at grade with the mountain as a backdrop, and ends with the city as subject of contemplation; offering the experience of a series of different temporalities and scales: from nature to the religious object, from architecture to the city. The proposed poetic concept presents the Oratory as a journey, both physical and spiritual, rather than a simple object of consumption. It calls for the elaboration of a unique architectural device that structures the ascension from the ground to the sky.

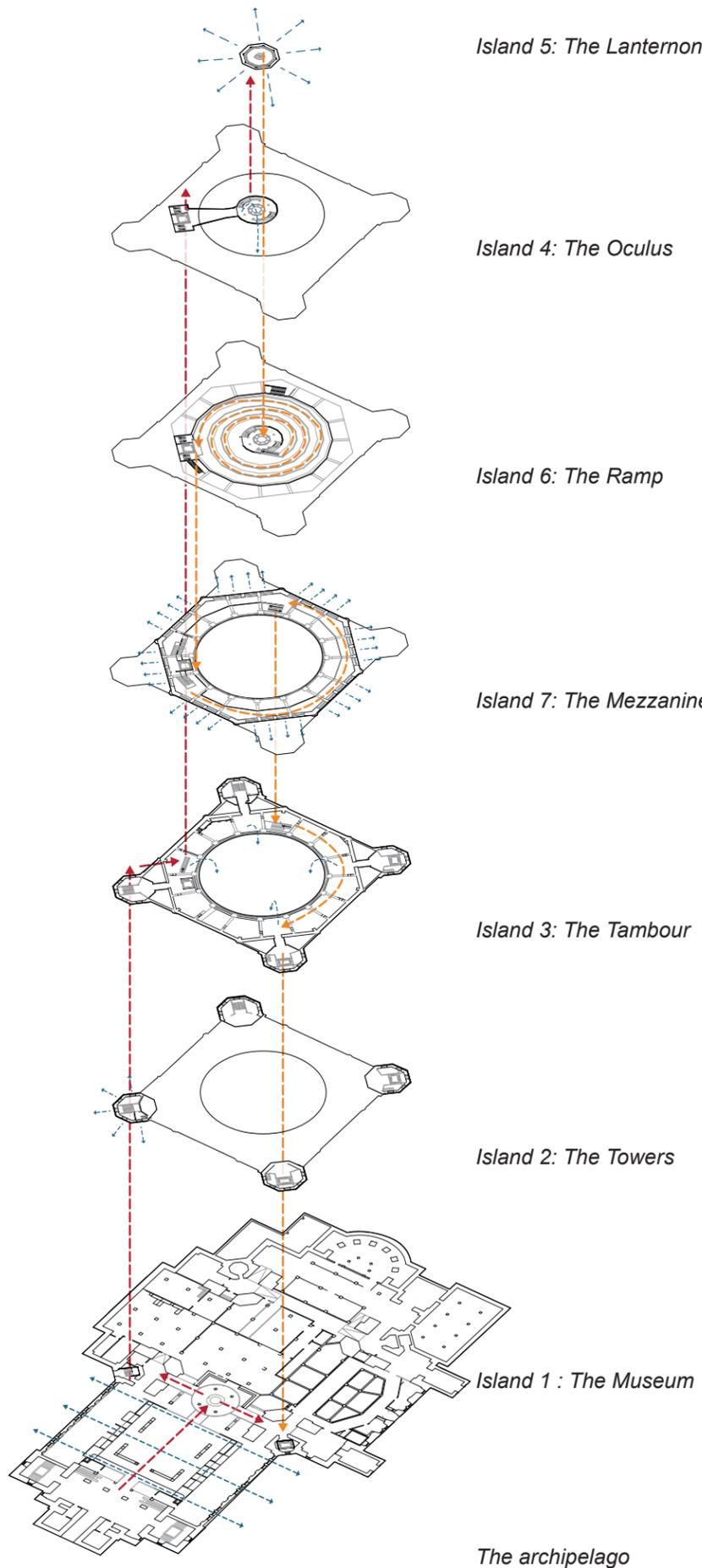
The development of the architectural concept begins with a critical examination of the nature of the this journey's culmination point, the inter-dome. By entering the inter-dome, the visitor explores a previously hidden dimension of the Oratory, long inaccessible. The existing raw space is fascinating, an essentially residual and utilitarian "machine" space. The proposed project resists the nostalgic desire to leave the space untouched. Instead, it materialises the ultimate chapter of Brother André's dream within the continuum of the unique but pragmatic architecture, a contemporary approach to the legacy of Dom Bellot's architectural thinking: a search for beauty through utility from which derives the primary

«It is necessary to go round the immense nave, to penetrate under the dome unfolded a few hundred feet above our heads, to see the sanctuary already collected and full of mystery; to penetrate under the roofs by the circular ambulatory which encircles the vault; to go a hundred feet higher, and to look at the summit of the interior dome, from which the men on the floor appear only as flies; finally to reach, through a staircase sixty feet high, the skylight which dominates all and to see all of Montreal at its foot ... What an incomparable moment with Saint-Joseph it will be! The question on everyone's lips: When will we see it finished?»

Recteur Deguire, spring 1940

Section, choreography of the visitors





Ariadne's thread of the archipelago: the Oratory through time

The design of the promenade itself builds upon the state of mind of visitors during the ascent and descent. The experiences are choreographed to amplify the emotions created by the discovery of the place. The discovery of the inter-dome takes place at the level of the oculus rather than by a gradual ascent by the ramp. In an ascent (towers, steeples, mountains, trees), the view from the top is the premise of the visit. The ultimate motivation is to see what is hidden at the top, to see a familiar landscape with new eyes.

The Oratory's lantern is the highest point in Montreal, but the oculus will be the apex for the many who will not venture further. In this context, there will be two destinations; two experiences that must be equally symbolic. The proposed path allows an articulated experience supporting one or the other finality. It is also natural to continue the pilgrimage in the mediation of the effort to the summit. Once the exaltation of reaching the summit is passed, visitors' state of mind will be more conducive to listening. The descent is therefore more favorable to a multimedia animation and, from an ergonomic standpoint, better suited to ease the viewer's gaze into the distance to admire the vastness of the place.

A pilgrimage, from "isle to isle", all the way to the top. The ascent becomes promenade. The visitor climbs, quietly walking up to the city's highest point. As a fragmented territory, in terms of time and space, the visit of the Oratory is conceived as an archipelago whose draping device embody Ariadne's thread. It is thus through a combination of staging, content, and architecture that the visitor is guided through the seven islands creating an intimate experience of the archipelago. Structured by the architecture of the space, a path is suggested to the visitor, but evolves according to each individual's sensibilities. It is, in a way, the extension of the religious experience of the Oratory, an iconic space marked by the ascent of the grand stairs of its forecourt as a journey of self discovery and discovery of the world.



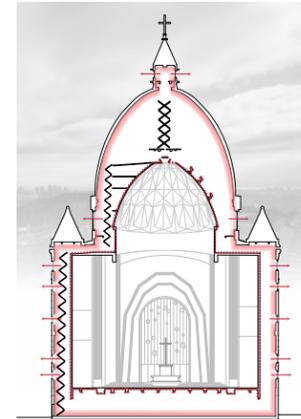
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Veiled Christ,
Antonio Corradini, 1753

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View on the oculus and the stairs
to the Lanteron



The function of the drape

The drape veils to better reveal. Its primary function is to calm the visual complexity of the existing circulation infrastructure in order to fully take in the unique, grandiose and anagogical spatial experience of the inter-dome, the climax of the ascent. The drape is an architectural device that is both poetic and pragmatic. The quiet beauty of the assembly derives from the simplicity of the intervention; a straightforward veiling of the utilitarian steel structure built in 1976.

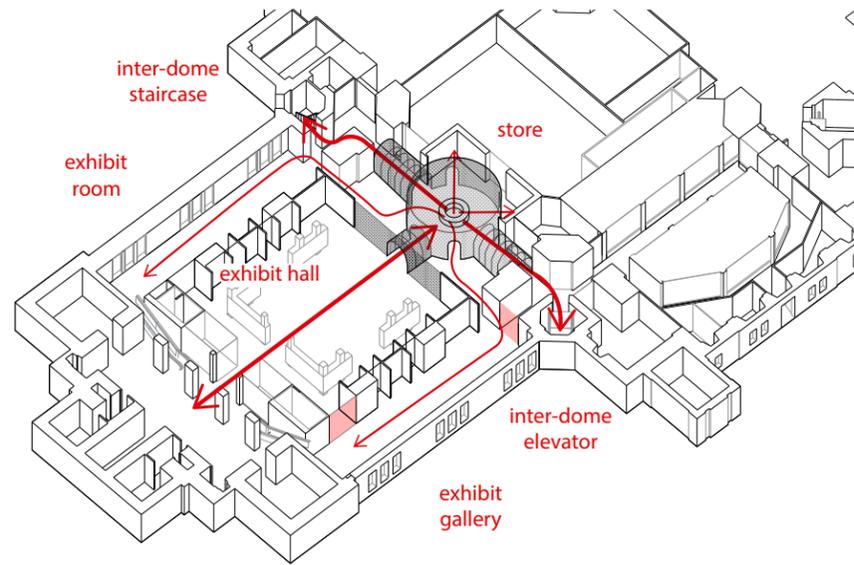


Given the context of the building's great height, the project develops a simple construction system based on an optimal use of means: the use of a malleable and portable metal mesh which is stretched over the existing secondary structure. The architectural textile is chosen for its transparency, low maintenance, lightness, reflective surface, durability and fire resistance. A simple lining that molds the existing, the veil confers an ethereal appearance to the inter-dome space, while its woven surface reflects specks of light, allowing a certain visibility of the visitors in motion who cross it. Its pattern is the result of its industrial manufacturing which itself derives from the traditional and artisanal know-how of ornamental elements found in the sanctuary. From a performance and utilitarian point of view, the drape fulfills several functions: it provides an economical solution, rendering the existing stairs and ramps code-compliant, it offers a protective coating to the asbestos surface of the domes and a subtle integration of mechanical systems and acoustic surfaces where needed. Maximizing the existing profile of the ramp's guard-rail, the transparency of the mesh allows the installation of lighting fixtures within the structure already designed for this purpose. Finally, its filigree yet continuous surface comforts those suffering from vertigo while revealing the spectacular and Dante-esque space of the inter-dome to all.

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The drape over the Main
sanctuary

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Metal ornament present in the
Crypt of the Oratory

Axometric view: the Hub as a focus point of the Museum



The museum axis: the position of ticket counter as a structuring decision

From a functional point of view, the first issue raised is the strategic position of ticket counter. Indeed, it must be visible and accessible from several directions, including the esplanade, from which groups arrive, and the hall to the basilica, entry point for regular visitors. From this constraint emerges an optimized solution that exploits horizontal panopticon surveillance as a device that gathers and redirects, visible from everywhere. Focal point and end point of the main axis that structures the exterior climb through the site from Queen Mary Road, the optical and material concept of the ticket office acts as a “Mesmerian” device from the main entrance hall of the basilica.

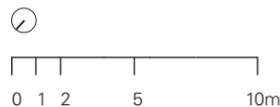
Approaching the ethereal, filigree structure that delimits the ticket office, the visitor crosses a first museum hall whose concentric structure reveals sub-spaces and luminous side views to the outside connecting the glazing to both North and South. The formal composition of space and the play of chiaroscuro creates a notable first impression on the visitor. Here, guests are welcomed among the artefacts of the permanent collection, arranged symmetrically so as to reflect the trajectory of the pilgrimage and the axial composition of the Oratory. The museum hall’s free access elevates the notion of openness, a fundamental pillar of the Oratory.

The large central gallery offers maximum flexibility thanks to its wide span and allows the planning of various lighting environments. The two lateral galleries present a classical arrangement in a linear suite, able to integrate an independent narrative thread. They are in contrast with the main hall through the integration of natural light, coming in through windows that frame the landscape and celebrate nature, in accordance with the third motto of the Oratory.



Legend

- 1 Hall
- 2 Flower storage
- 3 Exhibition
- 4 North Gallery
- 5 South Gallery
- 6 Tickets
- 7 Dioramas
- 8 Administration
- 9 Reserve
- 10 Workshop
- 11 Inter-dome stairs
- 12 Inter-dome elevator



Museum Plan



Museum section



Defined by the transcription of the cupola's geometry, the circular space of the ticket office is a unifying crossroad that serves the other programmatic elements. This panopticon of museum operations allows minimal staff to effectively direct visitors' comings and goings. Several destinations open from here: The North gallery's temporary exhibitions, the South gallery's sculpture garden, stairs (or elevators) leading to the inter-dome, and the dioramas or boutique spaces. While the museum is closed, the functional circulation between the esplanade and the main lobby occurs instinctively through the South Gallery.





Management of circulation and ascent to the inter-dome

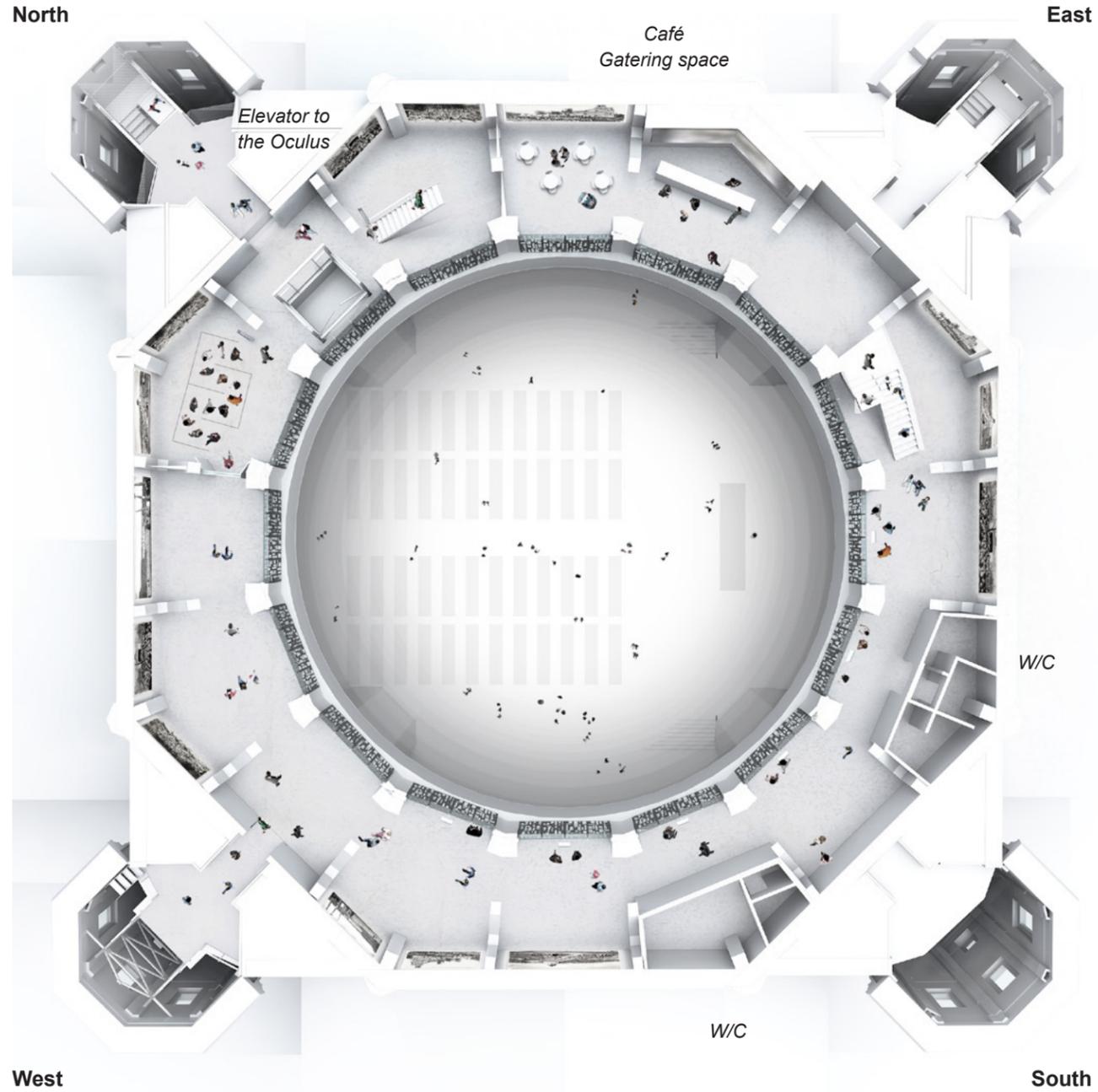
The visitor engages the ascent, step by step, entering the cadence, and reducing the distance to the summit, one step at a time. This emotion is amplified by the accompanying soundtrack flowing into the stairwell, in a crescendo up to the tambour level. The drum deftly sorts the flow of visitors up and down, avoiding cross traffic. It acts as the inter-dome's visitor reception area, a social space where multiple events will take place.

Energized again in the effort, one undertakes the second climb, enclosed within the stair tower. The meditative pace, integral to the concept, is induced again. The intensity of the soundscape increases from floor to floor, supporting the effort. Visitors know they are heading toward the sublime. The arrival on the floor of the oculus is an unveiling: the visitor enters the bridge and finally discovers the immensity of the space. One admires the size of the two domes, and finally sees the summit of the climb.

The final ascent is an uncanny experience: up a spiral, perched above a large dome. The vertiginous impression of being levitated is mitigated by the enveloping presence of the architectural drape. The ultimate destination, the *lanteron*, is the apex of both the experience itself and of Montreal.

The drum

Back at the drum level, visitors share their experience with one another and with the Oratory (guest book), taking advantage of a new perspective on the sanctuary below. Surrounded by oversized photographs, reflecting on the collaboration and the human history behind the realization of Brother André's dream, visitors head to the elevator of the West tower.



Plan Tambour

0 1 2 5 10m

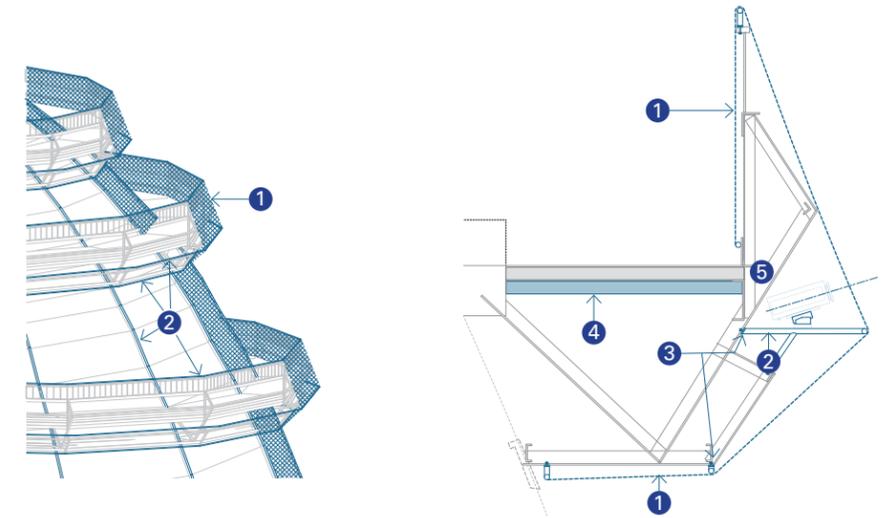




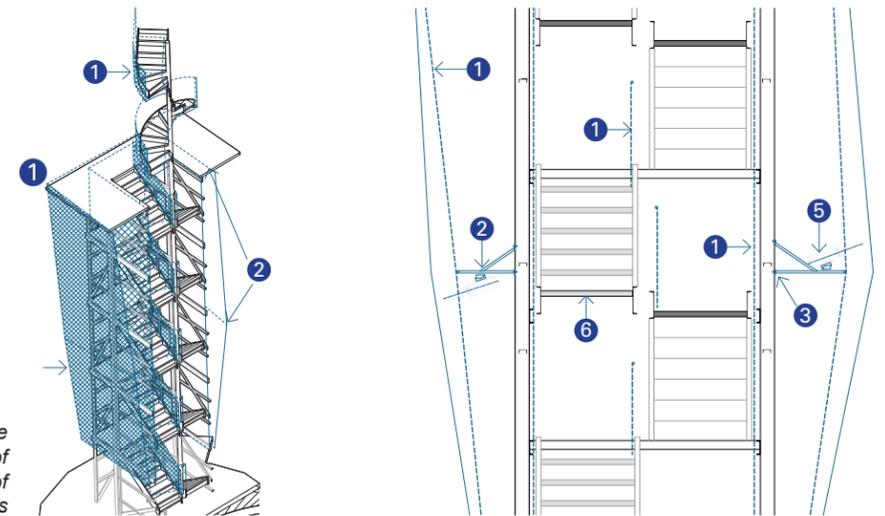
The ramp

Gently circling the dome, the natural, emotional remission brought on by the descent makes it possible to assimilate all of which the visitor has just experienced. Receptive, one is now mentally ready. The low-angle views, accentuated by the curvature of the dome, allow one to better appreciate contents, the visual poetry. The effort is now easy and invites one to stop, admire and then continue the path.

Ramp structure details



Details of the structure of the stairs of the oculus

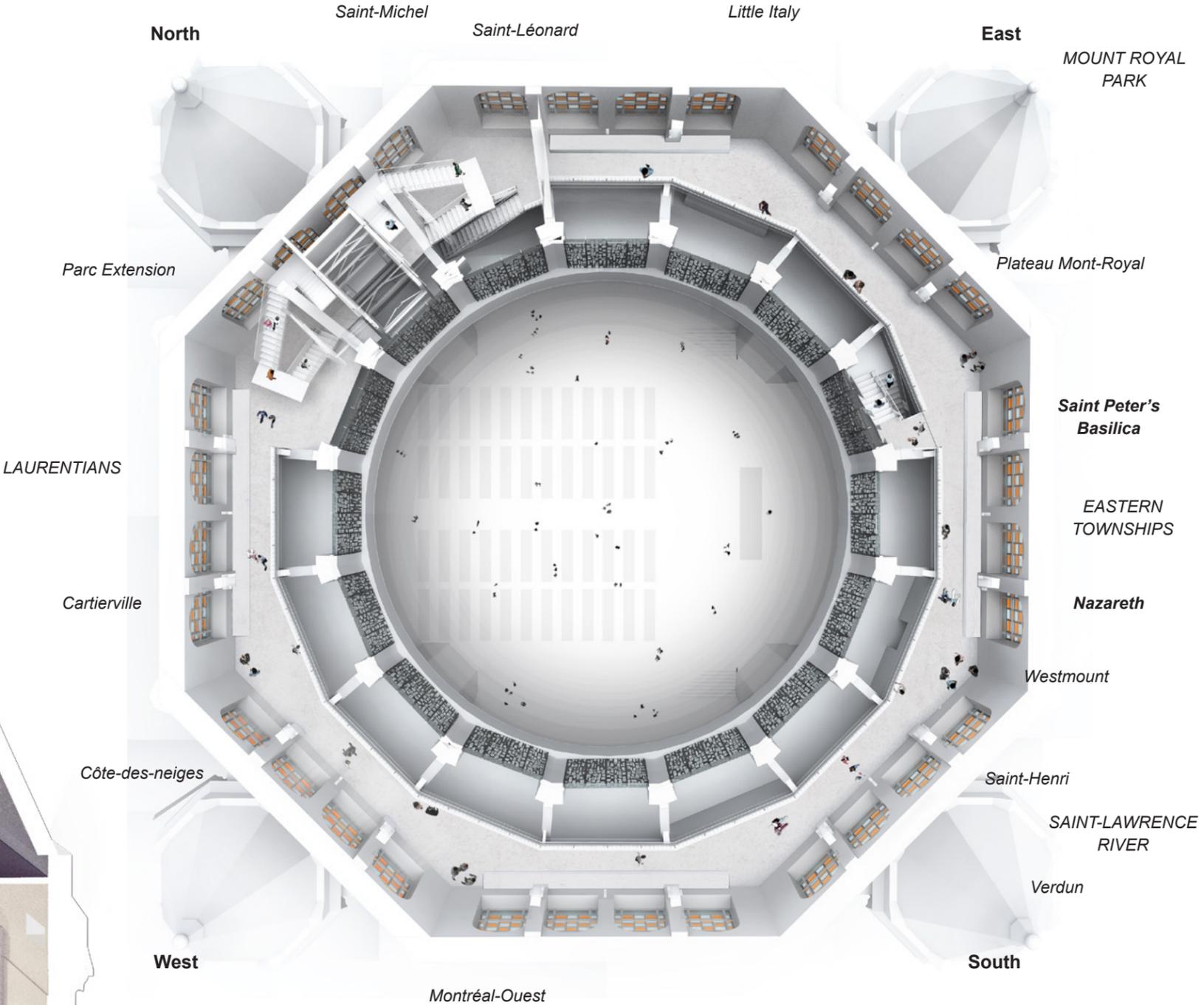


Stainless Steel Mesh

- ① stainless steel wire mesh (~ 1300g / m.ca.)
- ② support of the prefabricated steel tube mesh
- ③ mechanical fastener to avoid welding
- ④ 50mm acoustic insulation
- ⑤ scenographic equipment behind metal mesh
- ⑥ precast concrete steps

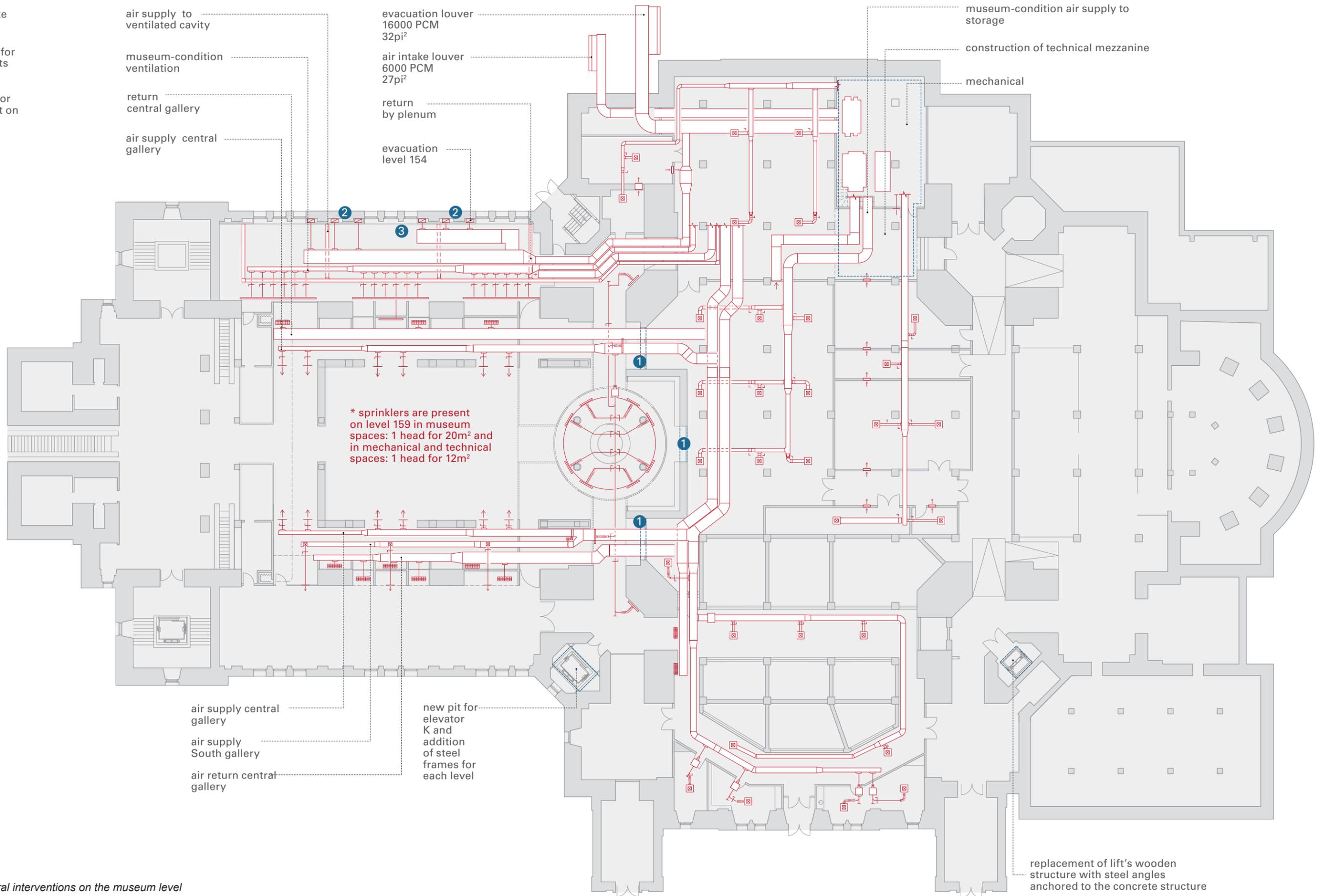
The mezzanine

From the dimmed space of the dome, the final landing on the mezzanine, by contrast, is bathed in light. Here visitors gather, admiring the very distinct perspectives on the surrounding landscape while waiting for the others.



Mezzanine Plan
0 1 2 5 10m

- 1 opening in concrete wall
- 2 6 openings in slab for evacuation conduits
- 3 repair of opening for evacuation conduit on level 154



Mecanical and structural interventions on the museum level