

Desert Space Station

Amargosa Valley, Nevada

Role: Design Architect for New Museum

Program: 30,000 sf of exhibit space, 250-seat 3D IMAX theater, Digistar theater/planetarium, and interactive theater, science store, food service facilities, rooftop observatory, exterior environmental and technology exhibits accessed via an underground exhibit tunnel, outdoor interactive exhibits bordered by a shaded loggia.

Status: Construction Documents completed but project funding was not obtained.

Description: Located in Amargosa Valley in Southern Nevada, the Desert Space Station focuses on science and technology. The site, consisting of approximately 2,500 acres, is part of a vast flat plain with a backdrop of the Yucca Mountains to the northwest. The sparse vegetation and lack of structures permit virtually uninterrupted 360-degree panoramic views. This stark, beautiful landscape provides an unusual opportunity to create a special desert area to contain the Desert Space Station, a unique structure designed specifically to attract the attention of tourists traveling along the highway between Las Vegas and southern California.

As visitors approach the building, they would see a north-south needle-like mass of mounded earth with intriguing forms protruding and floating above the mounds. The extended parts of the building's superstructure, highlighted at night by laser light beams, are intended to entice passer-by on the highway to venture near and discover what is hidden behind and beneath the beamed earth mounds. The building is designed to evoke thoughts of a space station recently landed and partially sunken in the desert. Clad in local desert stone, the lower portion of the building establishes a material continuity with the ground. In contrast, the metal-clad domes and canopy, illuminated from below to emphasize their hovering aspect, shape the building's space imagery. At night, in the darkness of the isolated desert location, the building forms would flow almost as if they were releasing the heat they had absorbed during the day from the desert sun.

The central exhibit area consists of a sunken three-story space, architecturally emphasizing the nature of the exhibits below. Over this central space floats a kinetic energy machine, propelling visitors into the other exhibit spaces. A glasses-in passenger elevator provides access to the lower level exhibits as well as to the Dining Area, and the Observation Deck above. From the Observation Deck visitors would enjoy spectacular views of the starlit desert night sky and the daytime desert landscape.

