

The Capitol Visitor Center

Touchable Dome Model Arrives at the Capitol

Recently, one of the more unusual exhibits arrived at the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center – an 11-foot-high touchable model of half of the Capitol dome. The dome model will provide visitors with an intimate look at this iconic symbol of representative democracy. The polyurethane model is tough, durable, easily cleaned, and it never needs to be painted since color is impregnated into the mold.

Architectural features of the Capitol dome, both interior and exterior, have been meticulously replicated. The front of the model shows the exterior of the dome from its base to the Statue of Freedom. The back side of the model depicts a cutaway showing the construction of the inner and outer cast iron dome and the interior of the Rotunda, from the fresco depicting George Washington to the sandstone blocks of the Rotunda floor.



Over two years in the making, a scale model of the Capitol dome was recently installed in the Capitol Visitor Center's Exhibition Hall. As seen here, the model faithfully replicates the interior architectural details and artistic treasures of the Rotunda.

The lighting on the dome will simulate a day/night cycle, showing how the light in the tholos (the ring of columns below the Statue of Freedom) will come on when Congress is in session.

Visitors will be able to peek through the windows on the front of the model and see inside to the artistic treasures in the Rotunda, including paintings and bas-reliefs that were carefully color-matched to the actual paintings on the east side of the Rotunda. Even the fresco masterpiece in the Rotunda ceiling, the “Apotheosis of Washington” by Constantino Brumidi, was carefully replicated using a combination of photographs and hand painting.

To ensure the accuracy of the model, a combination of historical drawings and laser scans were used to make the initial 2-D drawings, verified by an Architect of the Capitol historian. These were followed by 3-D drawings in which features were literally “sculpted” with a computer mouse and converted into molds.



An 11-foot-high model of the Capitol dome is the centerpiece of the Exhibition Hall in the Capitol Visitor Center.

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