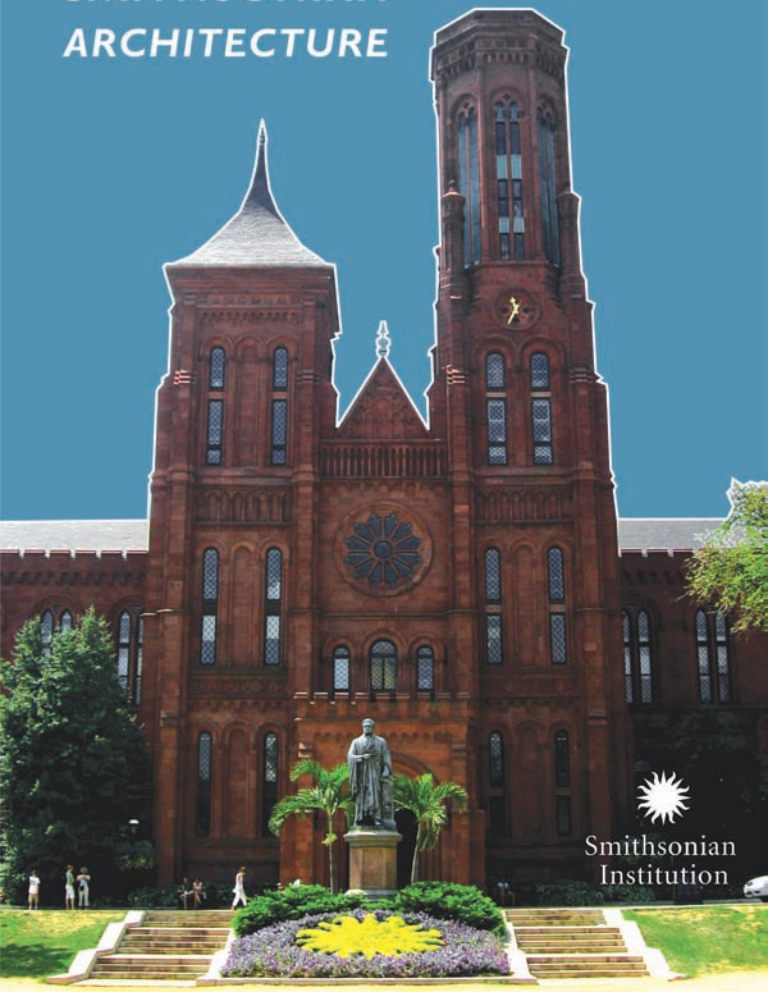


A GUIDE TO
SMITHSONIAN
ARCHITECTURE



Smithsonian
Institution



THE LARGEST PIECES IN THE SMITHSONIAN COLLECTION

The buildings of the Smithsonian Institution frame the National Mall. They not only contain impressive collections, but serve themselves as icons of great cultural significance. Their forms illustrate the changing styles and sensibilities of America as an evolving nation. Each one represents a specific time in history: the turreted Castle, the majestically domed Natural History Museum, the sky-reflecting Air and Space Museum and the golden, undulating American Indian Museum.

Deemed to have exceptional value to the nation, most of these structures are National Historic Landmarks or are included on the National Register of Historic Places, the official roster of our nation's historic sites.

This guide lists first the nine Smithsonian buildings that sit on the National Mall and then five others that lie outside its boundaries. We invite you to explore these treasures and experience our collective history through the largest pieces in the Smithsonian's collection: its buildings.

THE SMITHSONIAN CASTLE

Architect: James Renwick Jr.

Completion Date: 1855

Style: Medieval Revival

Fun Fact: James Smithson, founder of the Smithsonian, is interred in a crypt here. He is the only known person laid to rest on the Mall.



The red sandstone Smithsonian Building, commonly called The Castle, was the first home of the fledgling Institution. Robert Dale Owen, chairman of the building committee, advocated a large and showy structure. The future success of the Institution, he believed, depended upon a building that could make “conspicuous the work of the organization.” He argued that a medieval architectural style would meet his criteria, with its “lofty character” and “aspiring lines.” Eight unique, crenellated towers of this richly colored building stand etched against the changing sky. The unusually crisp execution of details and the rhythmic massing of the building have contributed to the creation of an image so strong that it became the most memorable symbol of the Institution.



ARTS AND INDUSTRIES BUILDING

Architect: Adolf Cluss with Paul Schulze

Completion Date: 1881

Style: High Victorian

Fun Fact: Architect Adolf Cluss, who came to Washington from Germany, was a friend of Karl Marx, author of the *Communist Manifesto*.



The Arts and Industries Building has a special role among Smithsonian buildings as the original home of the National Museum. From this structure grew the complex of Smithsonian museums that line the Mall—those dedicated to the history of America, the natural world and human flight. The building provided a place for the Smithsonian collections to be presented, scholarly and unabridged, to the public. The building's design was remarkably advanced for its day with flexible spaces and windows that wrap the building and roof, providing ample natural light and ventilation. The building's unique style, in typically forthright 19th-century practice, is based on modern principles of construction and the use of colorful contemporary materials.



NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Architects: Hornblower and Marshall

Completion Date: 1911

Style: Beaux Arts

Fun Fact: During the First World War, an entire exhibit hall was filled with clerks working on typewriters supporting the war effort.



The National Museum of Natural History features a domed rotunda in the Roman style and a portico entrance that expresses the architectural vision of the Senate Park Commission of 1902. The exterior was designed by Daniel Burnham and Charles McKim, who intended to unify the entire Mall under a grand Beaux Arts style. The remainder of the museum was designed by Washington, D.C. architects Hornblower and Marshall in a more restrained manner to provide abundant light and space for the exhibition and research of the natural world. Designers and curators worked together to create a building that is both functional and noble. Large wings on the west and east were added in the 1960s with façade improvements in 1989.



FREER GALLERY OF ART

Architect: Charles A. Platt

Completion Date: 1923

Style: Renaissance Revival

Fun Fact: The Freer contains a dining room (the Peacock Room) designed by James McNeill Whistler that was relocated from London.



The Freer resembles an Italianate palazzo with its granite façade and interior open courtyard. In true Renaissance style, Doric pilasters, surface rustication and a decorative cornice greatly enrich the modest façade. The building was commissioned in 1904 by Charles Lang Freer, the first donor to give the Smithsonian both a collection and a building for its display. The gift was accepted in 1906, but construction did not begin for another 10 years. Freer chose Charles A. Platt to design the building, which opened to the public in 1923, sadly after the patron's death. The Freer has remained mostly unchanged aside from a 1988 restoration project that added rooms under the courtyard and an impressive underground connection to the Sackler Gallery.



NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY

Architect: Walter O. Cain of McKim, Mead and White

Completion Date: 1964

Style: Post-War Modern

Fun Fact: The architect claimed that this was the first museum to use escalators throughout.



The first post-World War II building of the Smithsonian collection, the NMAH, Kenneth E. Behring Center captures the cautious, introverted mood of its time. The structure was conceived as a link between the classical architecture of the existing buildings and modern structures yet to be. Its straight-edged, rectangular simplicity predicts the modern era, yet it blends easily with its grand environment. The marble façade is clean and symmetrical, void of traditional ornamentation, but the repetition of bays and cornices are reminiscent of the colonnades of the surrounding buildings. The interior is treated with a similar simple elegance, creating a restrained opulence appropriate for housing artifacts of such importance as the Star-Spangled Banner.



HIRSHHORN MUSEUM AND SCULPTURE GARDEN

Architect: Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill

Completion Date: 1974

Style: Brutalist Modern

Fun Fact: The sculpture garden was originally designed to extend the full width of the Mall.



Secluded from its surroundings by rough concrete walls, the Hirshhorn is focused entirely to the interior. With a height of 82 feet and a diameter of 231 feet, the massive concrete cylinder is an imposing figure, unique among its more straight-edged neighbors. Its enduring impact upon the popular imagination is not unlike a modern fortress – protecting the valuable modern and contemporary art within its walls. Once inside the fortress, though, paintings, photographs and sculptures dominate, and the architectural presence, deliberately muted, recedes into the background. While windows surround the interior courtyard, only one window punctures the exterior shell. A full 180 degrees from the entrance, the expanse of glass provides a panoramic view of the Mall.



NATIONAL AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM

Architect: Gyo Obata of Hellmuth, Obata Kassabaum

Completion Date: 1976

Style: Late 20th-century Modern

Fun Fact: The west glass wall functions as a giant door for the installation of airplanes.



If the Hirshhorn turns inward, the National Air and Space Museum that rose beside it in 1976 opens itself to the outside world. Built with a similar size and shape, and of the same pinkish Tennessee marble as the traditionally styled National Gallery of Art across the Mall, the Air and Space building was designed to express contemporary aesthetics. The enormous glass walls and ceilings bring plentiful light to the seemingly boundless interior. The floor is kept clear for wandering visitors by hanging many of the historic airplanes from the roof trusses where they can be seen against the changing sky. At night, the museum's interior illumination makes these milestones of aviation visible from outside, an effect that turns the museum inside out, if only for a while.



THE QUADRANGLE: RIPLEY, SACKLER AND AFRICAN ART

Architects: Jean-Paul Carlhian of SBRA and Junzo Yoshimura

Completion Date: 1987

Style: Post-Modern

Fun Fact: The Enid A. Haupt Garden between the entrances sits above three floors of galleries.



Behind the copper-domed kiosk entry to the S. Dillon Ripley Center, a winding path leads back to the inviting Enid A. Haupt Garden that tempts visitors into the Quadrangle complex. Once inside the lush, Asian-, French-, and Moorish-influenced garden, the landscape opens into views framed on either side by the entrance pavilions of the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and the National Museum of African Art. On the garden's surface the distinct rooftops, echoing the classic style of the Mall, create an illusion of small, independent buildings. Once inside, the visitor is surprised to discover the buildings lead to a multi-leveled underground complex, as they descend grand staircases into the complex of galleries, classrooms and offices below.



NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

Architects: Douglas Cardinal with GBQC; Polshek Partnership

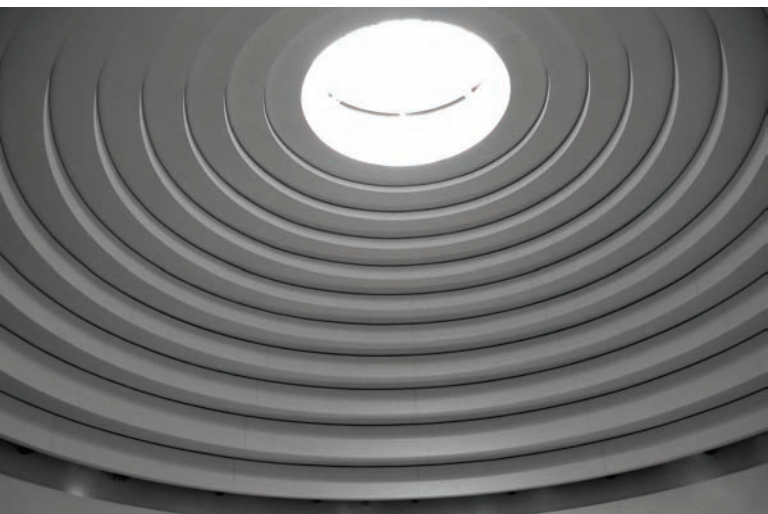
Completion Date: 2004

Style: Expressionist

Fun Fact: The building faces East toward the rising sun, respecting Native American tradition.



The curvilinear asymmetry of the American Indian museum provides a strong visual contrast to the regularity of its surroundings. Designed through consultations with the diverse Native groups of the Americas, the building reflects the “broad commonalities” that emerged from those meetings, one of the most important of which was that the museum should honor its natural and built environments. The incorporation of nature may therefore be seen throughout the design, including in the form of the building itself, which is meant to represent a block of stone carved by wind and water. Not only is the structure itself an abstraction of natural elements, but in its sculptural form the building also illustrates the force of nature’s energy through its effects upon the stone.



DONALD W. REYNOLDS CENTER FOR AMERICAN ART AND PORTRAITURE

Architects: Town and Elliot; Robert Mills;
Thomas U. Walter and Edwin Clark

Original Design Date: 1838

Style: Greek Revival

Fun Fact: On March 6, 1865, President Abraham Lincoln held his second inaugural ball here.



Praised by Walt Whitman as “that noblest of Washington buildings,” the old Patent Office is a masterpiece of Greek revival, a bold style appropriate for a building of such stature. It was the third major government building constructed in the fledgling U.S. capital (after the White House and the Capitol Building.) Despite many distinct construction phases, the exterior of the building is of a largely unified appearance. The interior spaces, however, vary greatly; from the low vaults of the ground floor to the sky-lit storage hall on the top floor. Now housing great works of American art, the building continues to evolve with the addition of an undulating glass canopy designed by British architect Norman Foster to enclose the central rectangular courtyard.



RENWICK GALLERY OF THE AMERICAN ART MUSEUM

Architect: James Renwick Jr.

Completion Date: 1859

Style: Second Empire

Fun Fact: Completion of the building was delayed due to the Civil War while it was used as offices for the Union Army.



The Renwick Gallery is a rich example of mid-19th century architecture, with its vivid display of contrasting white stones on red brick, mansard roofs, corn-topped “Columbia Capitals” and ornamental details. William Wilson Corcoran commissioned architect James Renwick Jr. (designer of the Smithsonian Castle) to build Washington’s first public art gallery. It was one of the many prestigious buildings awarded the young Renwick whose reputation as a creative and innovative architect was renowned at the time. The museum opened in 1874 as the Corcoran Gallery. Nearly 100 years later, after serving as home to the U.S. Court of Claims, it was rescued from demolition by First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy and restored as a gallery of American craft and design.



NATIONAL ZOOLOGICAL PARK

Architect: Olmsted Associates

Opening Date: 1889

Size: 165 acres

Fun Fact: After his single term as the 5th President of the United States, John Quincy Adams owned a mill that was on Zoo property.



In contrast to earlier zoos that focused on displaying caged animals to the public, the National Zoological Park in Rock Creek Park was formed for the care and conservation of endangered species in a more naturalistic habitat. For this purpose, landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted (of Central Park, New York City fame) was chosen to plan a system of paths winding gently through the steeply sloped, verdant park. Over the years, the Zoo has constructed many types of buildings, notably the early rustic wooden structures that are no longer standing; the stately brick and stone masterpieces of the 1930s (such as the Reptile House, below); and the buildings of the 1960s and 1970s, when exhibits and offices were literally blended into the earth.



ANACOSTIA COMMUNITY MUSEUM

Architect: Keyes Condon Florance; Architrave; Wisniewski Blair Associates

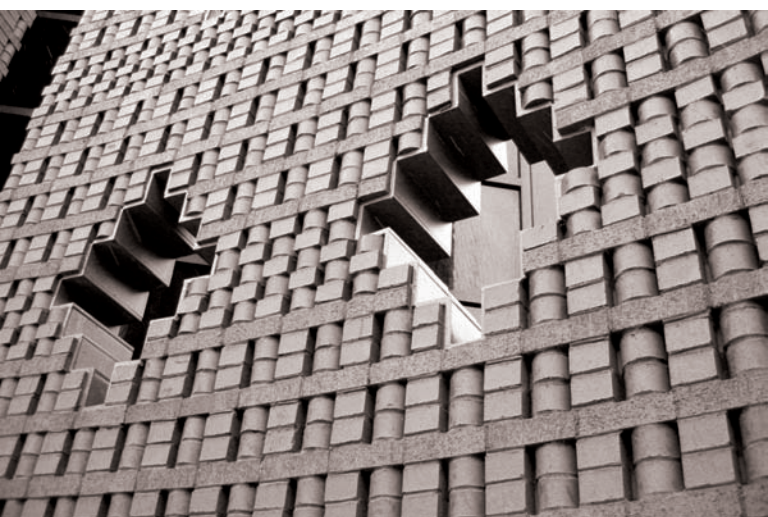
Completion Date: 1987

Style: Cultural Expressionism

Fun Fact: The museum's first home was in the historic George Washington Carver Theatre.



Opened in 1967 as a neighborhood museum, the Anacostia Community Museum was the first locally-oriented museum in the Smithsonian. Over the years, the museum's mission grew to incorporate not only African American culture but urban issues as well. Its current home, nestled into the trees of Fort Stanton Park, was opened in 1987 and expanded in 2002. The structure takes advantage of its naturalistic setting with large picture windows at the entrance and side galleries. African motifs are prevalent in the unique use of red brick, suggesting a woven kente cloth. Concrete cylinders punctured with glass block and blue tile flank the entry, evoking the conical towers of the 11th century city of Great Zimbabwe, the largest complex of ruins in Africa.



NATIONAL AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM STEVEN F. UDVAR-HAZY CENTER

Architect: Hellmuth, Obata + Kassabaum

Completion Date: 2003

Style: High tech

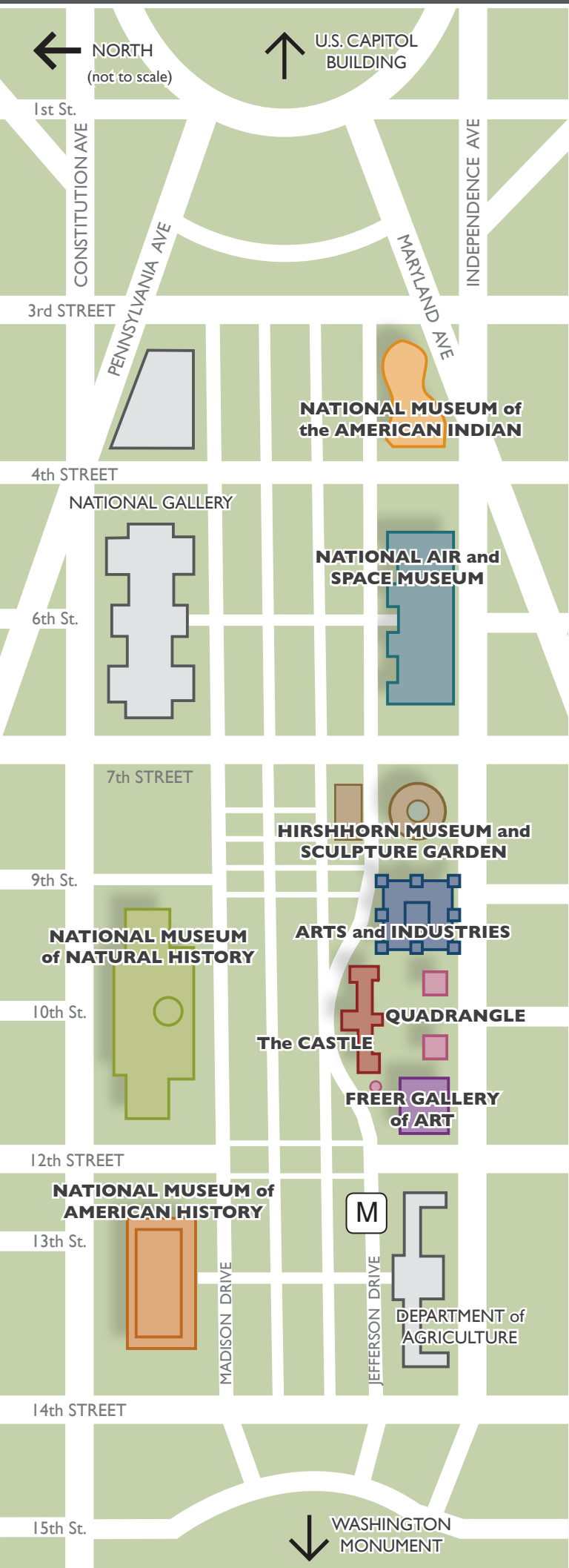
Fun Fact: The entire Air and Space Museum on the Mall could fit inside Udvar-Hazy's central Boeing Aviation Hangar.



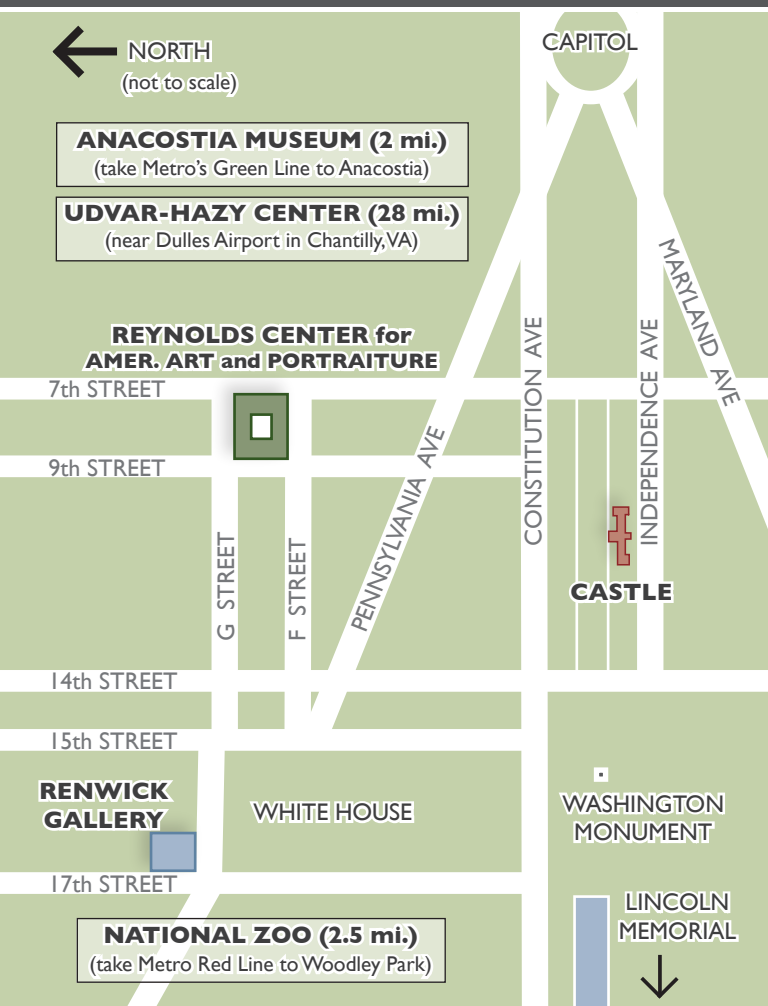
Between the 18th century Sully Plantation and the 20th century Dulles Airport looms the 21st century Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center. Designed by the same architectural firm as its parent museum on the Mall, the mammoth Udvar-Hazy Center houses the largest aviation and space artifacts in the Air and Space collection. The design of the expansive central hangar (a half-cylinder of steel trusses) was influenced by the immense structures used in the 20th century to house dirigibles. The spaces were designed to ensure conservation of the artifacts using a minimum of direct natural light, with elevated walkways to ensure optimum viewing. The glass observation tower is reminiscent of an airport control tower, permitting panoramic views of the surrounding area.



SMITHSONIAN BUILDINGS ON THE MALL



SMITHSONIAN BUILDINGS OFF THE MALL



THE CARE OF OUR BUILDINGS

All of our buildings require a continuing program of maintenance, restoration and renovation, and although we, the Smithsonian, are the caretakers of these buildings, we hold them in trust on the public's behalf.

The Architectural History and Historic Preservation Division (AHHP) was organized in 1986 to act as curator of the Smithsonian's diverse campus of buildings. In this role, AHHP strives to foster a superior understanding of the heritage of the Smithsonian buildings through preservation, research, and education. The many activities of this division can be separated into three primary areas of responsibility: architectural history, historic preservation, and collections management.

Please visit www.si.edu/ahhp for more in-depth information about the Smithsonian's rich architectural collection and other items of interest.

Written and edited by Cynthia Field, Amy Ballard, Christopher Davis and Molly MacKean. All photographs from AHHP archives. Designed by Christopher Davis.

**Smithsonian Institution
Architectural History and
Historic Preservation Division**
www.si.edu/ahhp

