



# Blithewold Mansion: A Vision for the Visitor Center

Spring 2012

Community Partner:  
Blithewold Mansion, Gardens & Arboretum

Academic Partner:  
School of Architecture, Art and  
Historic Preservation

*Photo: Liz West*

# The Roger Williams University Community Partnerships Center

The Roger Williams University (RWU) Community Partnerships Center (CPC) provides project-based assistance to non-profit organizations, government agencies and low- and moderate-income communities in Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts. Our mission is to undertake and complete projects that will benefit the local community while providing RWU students with experience in real-world projects that deepen their academic experiences.

CPC projects draw upon the skills and experience of students and faculty from RWU programs in areas such as:

- American Studies
- Architecture and Urban Design
- Business
- Community Development
- Education
- Engineering and Construction Management
- Environmental Science and Sustainability
- Finance

- Graphic Design
- Historic Preservation
- History
- Justice Studies
- Law
- Marketing and Communications
- Political Science
- Psychology
- Public Administration
- Public Relations
- Sustainable Studies
- Visual Arts and Digital Media
- Writing Studies

Community partnerships broaden and deepen the academic experiences of RWU students by allowing them to work on real-world projects, through curriculum-based and service-learning opportunities collaborating with non-profit and community leaders as they seek to achieve their missions. The services provided by the CPC would normally not be available to these organizations due to their cost and/or diverse needs.

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1. The Project is being undertaken in the public interest.
2. The deliverables generated hereunder are intended to provide conceptual information only to assist design and planning and such are not intended, nor should they be used, for construction or other project implementation. Furthermore, professional and/or other services may be needed to ultimately implement the desired goals of the public in ownership of the project served.
3. The parties understand, agree and acknowledge that the deliverables being provided hereunder are being performed by students who are not licensed and/or otherwise certified as professionals. Neither RWU nor the CPC makes any warranties or guarantees ex-

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Fall 2012

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# Introduction

In the spring of 2012, students from Professor Gary Graham's Advanced Architectural Seminar — Conceptualization worked with Blithewold Mansion, Gardens & Arboretum to develop plans for a redeveloped Visitor Center which would complement the beautiful site. The goal for the project was to preserve the fine garden estate while enhancing the entryway to the site.



# Project Narrative

Blithewold Mansion, Gardens & Arboretum, a 33-acre summer estate, is nationally significant in American history as one of the most fully developed and authentic examples of the Country Place Era.

The Visitor Center is one of the most important programmatic elements of the estate. The building tends to get overlooked due to its small size and unclear signage. It currently houses a ticket booth, an information center and a gift shop, but there isn't much space leftover for employees, guests or expansion.

The Blithewold Mansion, Gardens & Arboretum Visitor Center is in need of reconsideration in order to ensure that the visitors' experience complements the historic site. It is our goal to preserve the fine garden estate while enhancing the entry procession with a new approach.



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1. Bamboo grove in the Enclosed Gardens.

2. Current Visitor Center viewed through the moongate.

3. The Display Garden at Blithewold.



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# Mission Statement

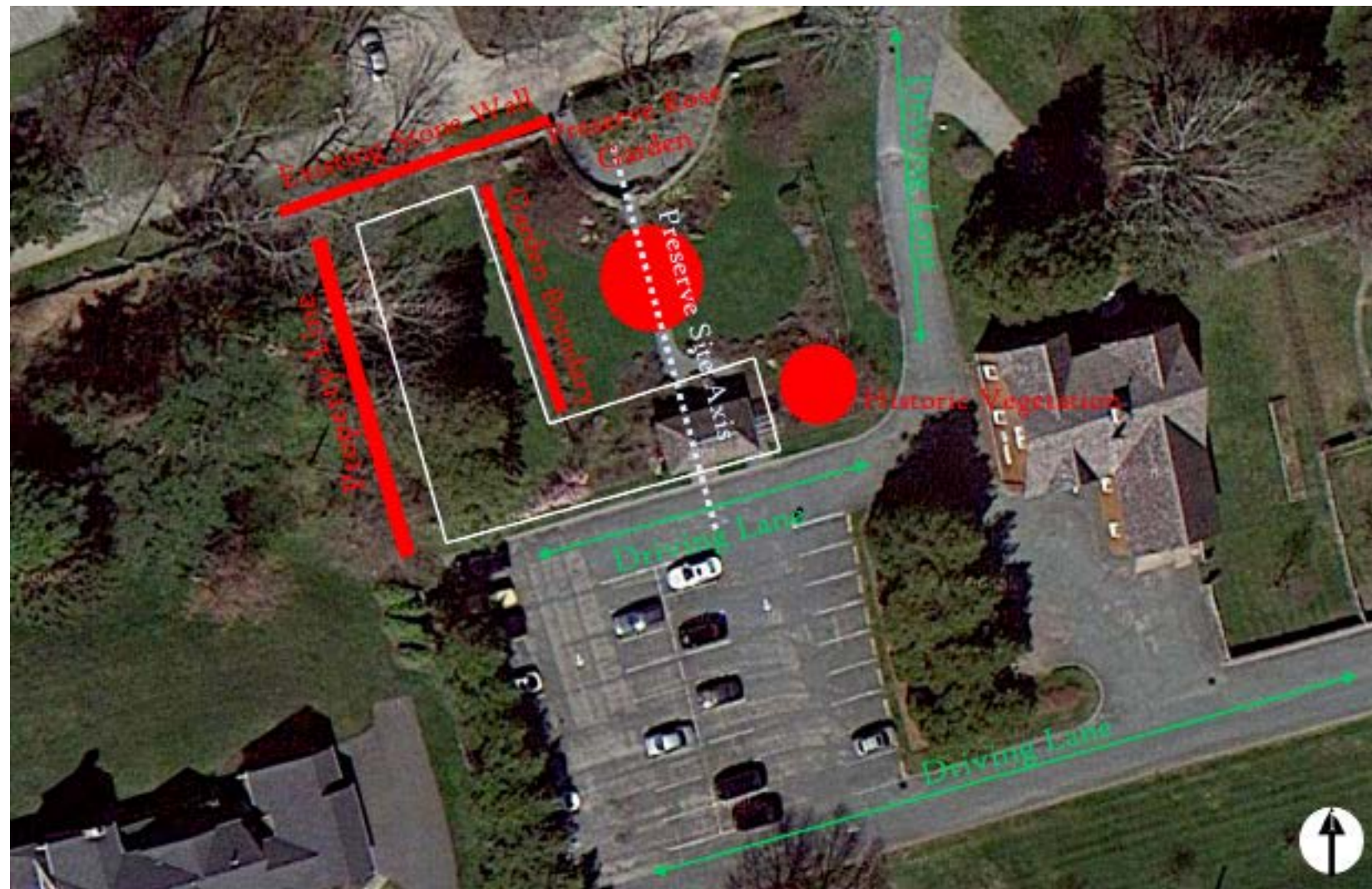
It is our mission to accommodate the function and form as well as the physical and economic attributes of Blithewold Mansion, Gardens & Arboretum visitors and staff by expanding the Visitor Center without drastically altering the existing conditions or gardens.

1. **Function:** Create a more welcoming entrance and redefine the circulation paths to create easier access.
2. **Form:** Maintain some existing features, respect the land and adjacent rose garden.
3. **Physical:** Enlarge the footprint to allow a larger program.
4. **Economy:** Stay within a reasonable budget.



Students from Professor Gary Graham's course visit the Blithewold Mansion, Gardens & Arboretum.

## Existing Conditions



1. Existing Visitor Center



2. Parking lot



3. Carriage house



4. Rose garden



1. Road entry



2. Side entrance  
to mansion



3. Path intersection

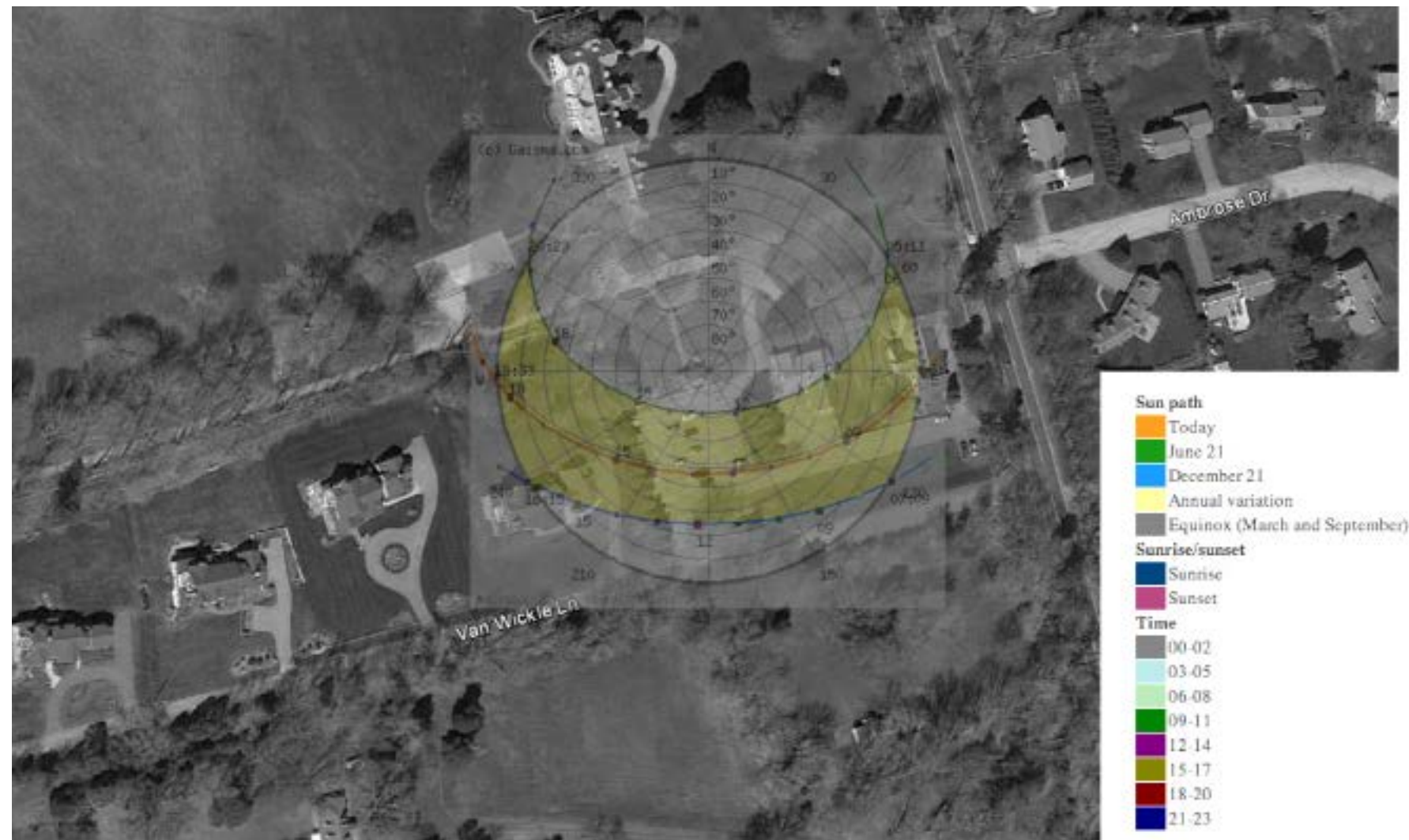


4. Blithewold Mansion

## Site Analysis



Boundaries to respect (shaded in red) include the moongate, the path to the moongate, the historic rose bush and the property line.



The Visitor Center is already in a prime location for optimal sun exposure. The new design should maintain this orientation.



Orange - vehicular  
circulation  
Blue - pedestrian  
circulation

How can these paths  
become more user-  
friendly?

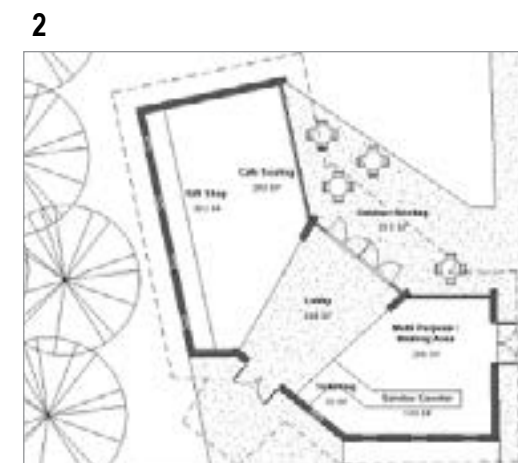
# A New Vision: Program Analysis

Blithewold Visitor's Center Program Analysis					
<b>Existing Program</b>					
Program	Occupancy	#	Sq. Ft.	Net Sq. Ft.	Description
Gift Shop		1	180 sq. ft.	180 sq. ft.	Seals, scarfs, Postcards, and more.
Ticket Register		1	20 sq. ft.	20 sq. ft.	Cash Register shared for Ticketing and Gift Shop
<b>Total Square Footage</b>				<b>150 sq. ft.</b>	
<b>Initial Proposed Program</b>					
Program	Occupancy	#	Sq. Ft.	Net Sq. Ft.	Description
<b>Administration</b>					
Ticket Reception	1 to 2	1	80 sq. ft.	80 sq. ft.	Separate Register for Tickets only
Information Screen	6	1	50 sq. ft.	50 sq. ft.	
<b>Support Spaces</b>					
Restrooms	3	3	60 sq. ft.	120 sq. ft.	
Storage Space	5	1	100 sq. ft.	300 sq. ft.	Storage for Merchandise and Supplies
<b>Cafe</b>					
Cafe/Refreshment Area	20	1	150 sq. ft.	150 sq. ft.	Refreshments Area with small seating area
Covered Outdoor Patio	30		300 sq. ft.	300 sq. ft.	Outdoor Patio by the Garden
<b>Giftshop</b>					
Gift Shop	25	1	300 sq. ft.	300 sq. ft.	Double the room for more merchandise
<b>Total Square Footage</b>				<b>1200 sq. ft.</b>	
<b>Final Proposed Program</b>					
Program	Occupancy	#	Sq. Ft.	Net Sq. Ft.	Description
<b>Administration</b>					
Ticket Reception	1 to 2	1	70 sq. ft.	70 sq. ft.	Separate Register for Tickets; Organized/Functional
Lobby	30	1	296 sq. ft.	296 sq. ft.	Open Area provides plenty of circulation/view to the garden.
<b>Support Spaces</b>					
Multi-purpose/Waiting Area	20	1	160 sq. ft.	160 sq. ft.	Adjacent to Service Counter, flexible (possible orientation zone)
Service Counter	15	1	120 sq. ft.	120 sq. ft.	Site of Gift Shop items/Cafe Refreshments (adjacent to Ticketing)
Restrooms	0	0	0 sq. ft.	0 sq. ft.	Avoid Additional Costs in Future w/ Larger Building Footprint
Storage Space	0	0	0 sq. ft.	0 sq. ft.	Reinforced possibility of using the Carriage House as a storage area.
<b>Cafe</b>					
Indoor Seating			258 sq. ft.	258 sq. ft.	Place for guests to relax, buy a snack, drink or lunch; increased profits.
Outdoor Seating			515 sq. ft.	515 sq. ft.	Outdoor Patio by the Garden.
<b>Giftshop</b>					
Gift Shop	25	1	382 sq. ft.	382 sq. ft.	Larger display areas; increased profits.
<b>Total Square Footage</b>				<b>1801 sq. ft.</b>	

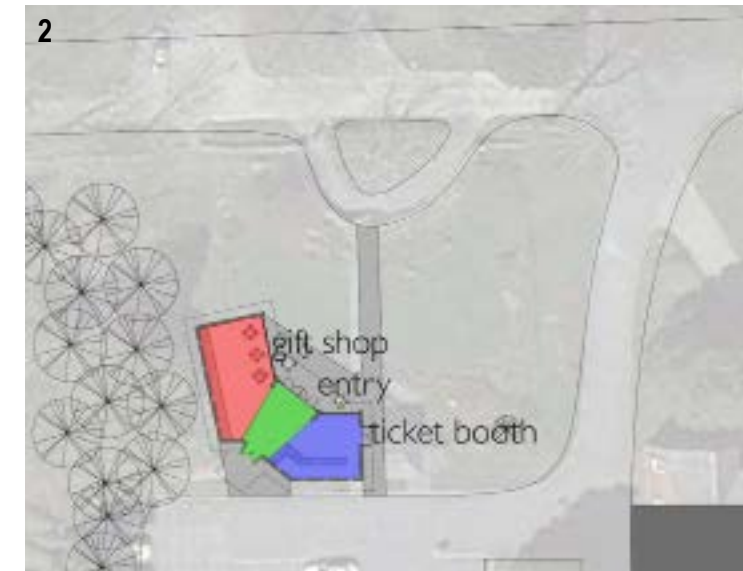
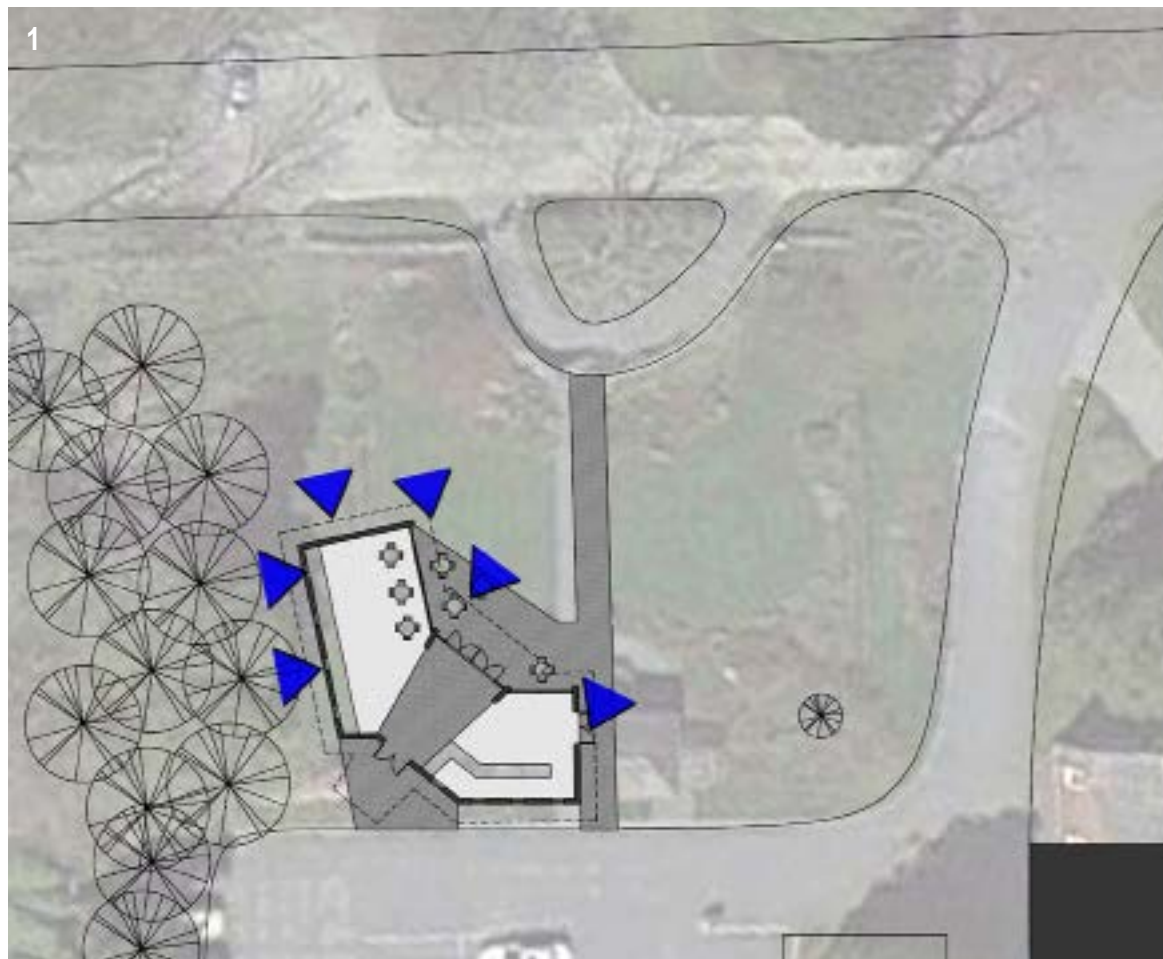


1. Proposed program diagram

2. Schematic floor plan for Blithewold Visitor Center



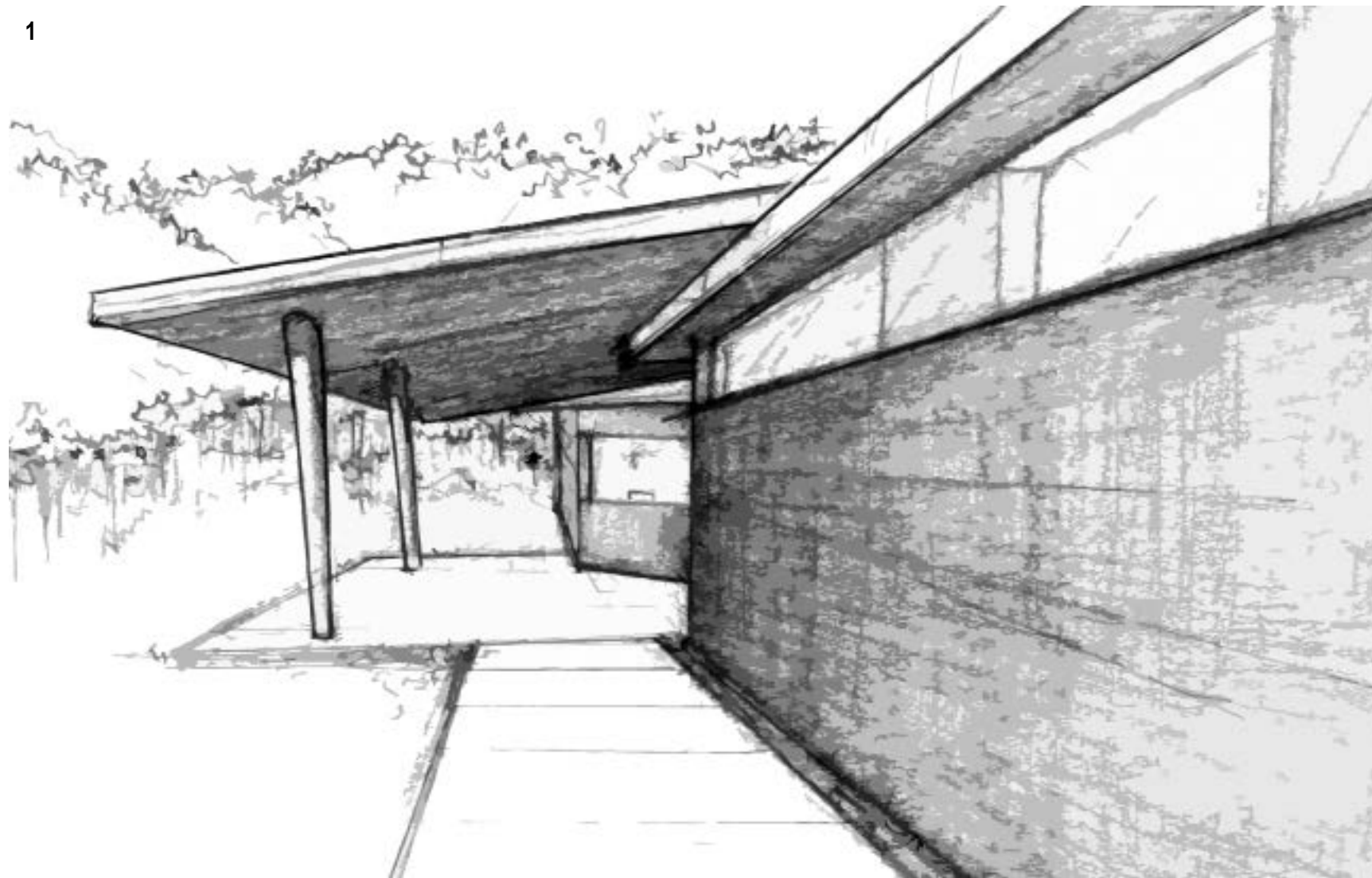
## A New Vision: Diagramming



1. Optimal views
2. Program blocking
3. Circulation through the building.

## A New Vision: Preferred Scheme

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south elevation



north elevation



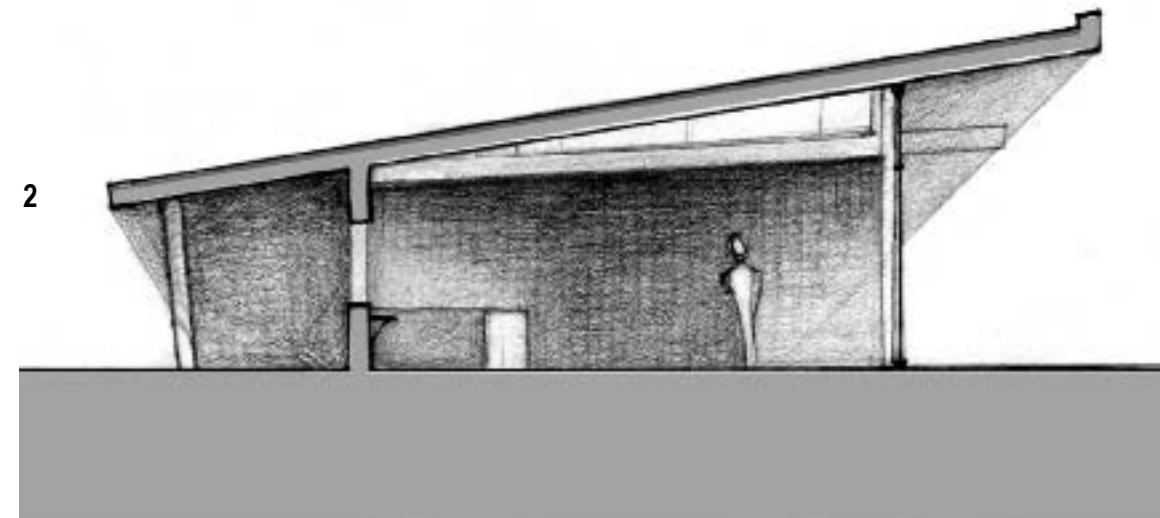
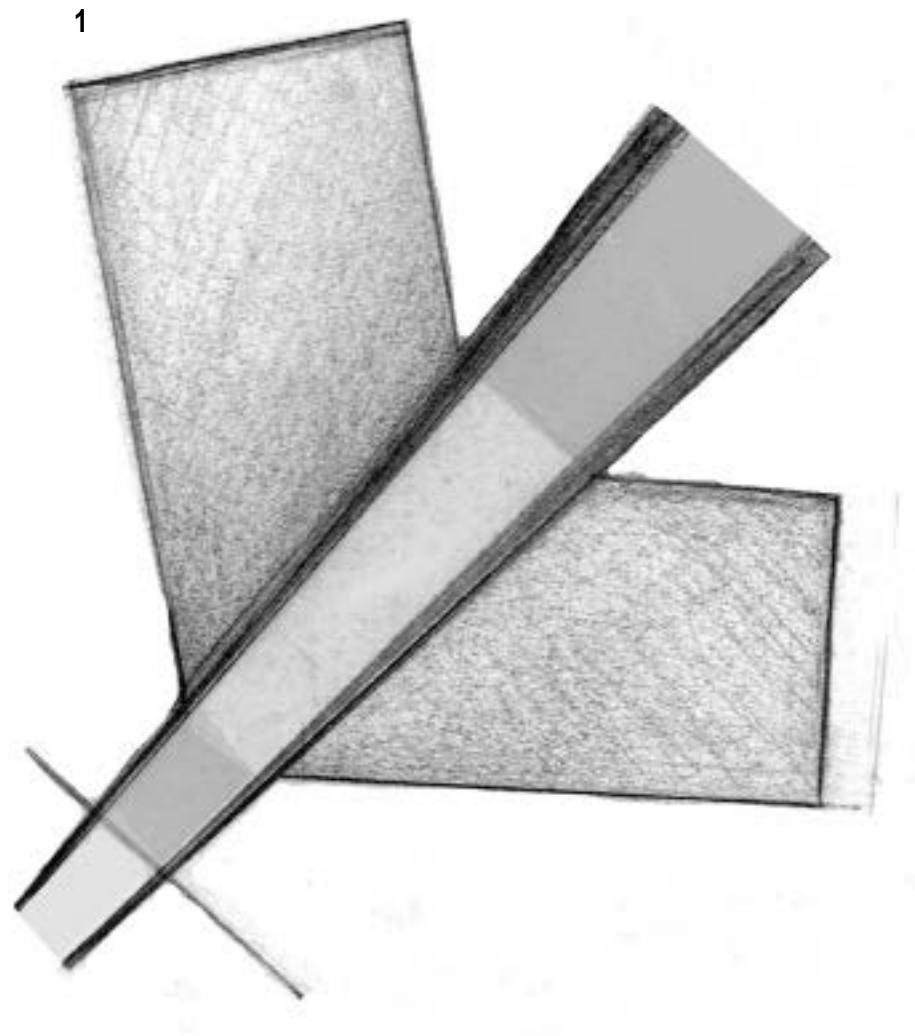
east elevation



west elevation

1. Proposed design of the Visitors Center.

2. Elevation Models for the proposed Visitor Center.



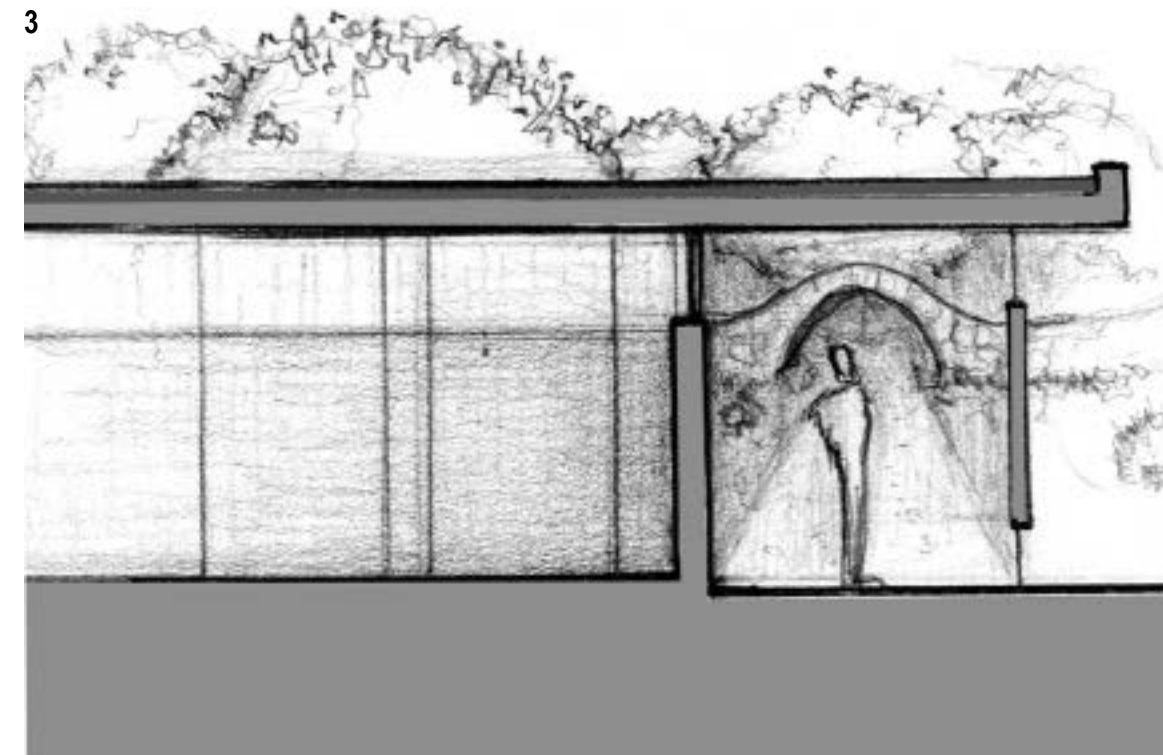
1. Aerial view of proposed design for the Visitor Center.
2. Section view through the roof.
3. Rendering of the proposed Visitor Center.



1. Moongate as seen from inside the proposed Visitor Center.

2. Site plan for the redesigned Visitor Center.

3. Section view framing the moongate.



# A New Vision: Cost Analysis

Visitor Center SF	SF	1288	
Quality: Excellent One Story Construction			
Base Cost		\$	189.45 Interpolated from Reference Source (Means)
Perimeter Adjustment	\$ 5.00	\$	194.45
Height Adjustment (per foot above ref.)	2 \$ 1.55	\$	197.55
Premium Material Consideration	\$ 12.50	\$	12.50 Stonework, Good Quality Stone Front
<b>Adjusted Base Costs</b>		\$	<b>210.05</b>
Current Cost Multiplier (Inflation Factor)	1.03	\$	216.35 Mid-Point of Construction/8/Projected Inflation Rate
Local Conditions Multiplier (Providence)	1.07	\$	231.50 Local Conditions Adjustment
<b>Adjusted Square Foot Costs</b>		\$	<b>231.50</b>
Estimated Construction Costs (Building)		\$	297,703.99
Site Development Costs	72 500	\$	36,000.00 Parking Lot Work
Special Feature: Outdoor Deck	515 50	\$	25,750.00
Equipment/Furnishings		\$	6,000.00 Stone Features/Display
<b>Total Hard Costs</b>		\$	<b>\$67,453.99 \$285.73</b>
Base Design Fees	11.5%	\$	42,257.21
Max. Project Costs(Printing & Reimbursables)	2.0%	\$	7,349.08
Contingency	15%	\$	56,118.10 15% @ Conceptualization Stage
<b>Project Costs</b>		\$	<b>472,178.38 \$367.17</b>



The current Visitor Center viewed from the rose garden.

# Decisions Made

## Why did you choose to build where you did?

We chose to avoid building in close proximity to the existing historical tree, which is present on-site. Additionally, we decided to leave the central path untainted by building to the left of it. This way the view to the moongate will remain visible at all times.

## Why is building to the left of the central path important?

By building to the western side of the site, we will be framing the area around the rose garden, thereby creating a pleasant atmosphere for visitors.

## How did the building shape come to be?

We decided to create a building which is not divided into a series of various compartments. By doing so, we minimized the amount of staff required to maintain the new Visitor Center.



Rendering of the proposed Visitor Center at Blithewold.

## What is the meaning behind your material palette?

When choosing which materials would be present in the new Visitor Center, we focused upon creating something modern to contrast the current architecture on-site.

## How did you decide upon the new program for the Visitor Center?

Taking into consideration the client's needs, we decided to include: ticket booth, entry, seating, café and gift shop.

## Why did you leave bathrooms out of the program?

We elected to keep bathrooms out of the new Visitor Center in order to maintain an abundance of space within the building. As we were seeking a Visitor Center that was somewhat small in scale, bathrooms could not be accommodated for.

## Appendices

After several meetings with the Blithewold staff, we decided as a class upon a single design.

The following is a compilation of work from each of the five groups



*Photo: Liz West*

## Group 1

- Move the gift shop off axis from the moon gate to make it more on axis with circulation paths.
- Draw attention to the moon gate by using an architectural or sculptural piece that highlights it.
- Introduce a ticket booth off of the carriage house to eliminate the need for buying tickets within the visitor center.



Open space in Visitor Center is transparent into rose garden giving visitors a strong connection.

## Group 2

- Highlight the moon gate with an arbor.
- Introduce an angular roof for a more modern feel.
- Maintain the existing footprint of the visitor center.



## Group 3

- Reorient moon-gate axis.
- Draw attention to the historic rosebush.
- Use angular lines to introduce a modern aspect to a historic site.

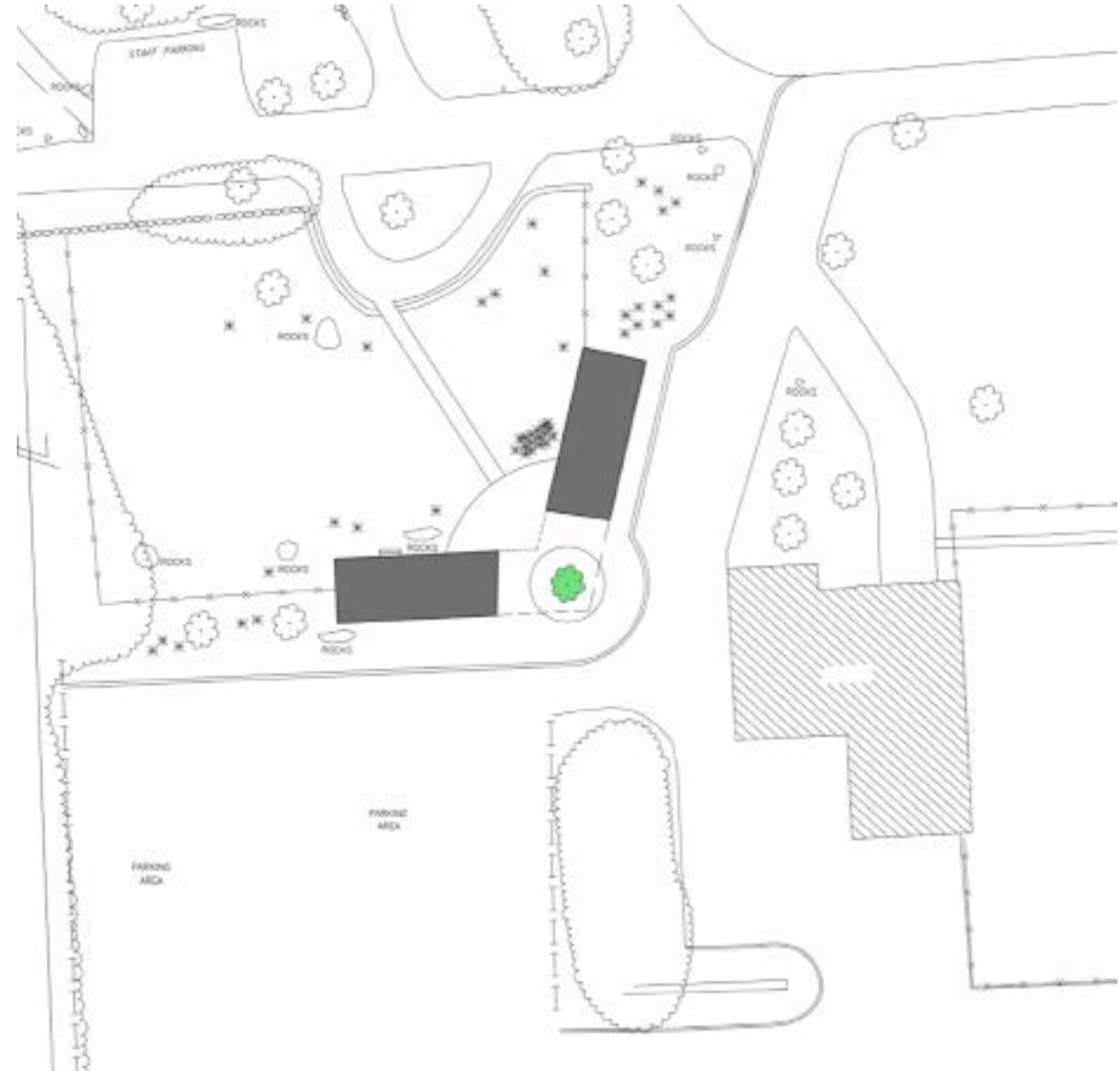
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1. This strategy minimizes the amount of plants that need to be disturbed while creating an exterior patio to enjoy the rose garden.

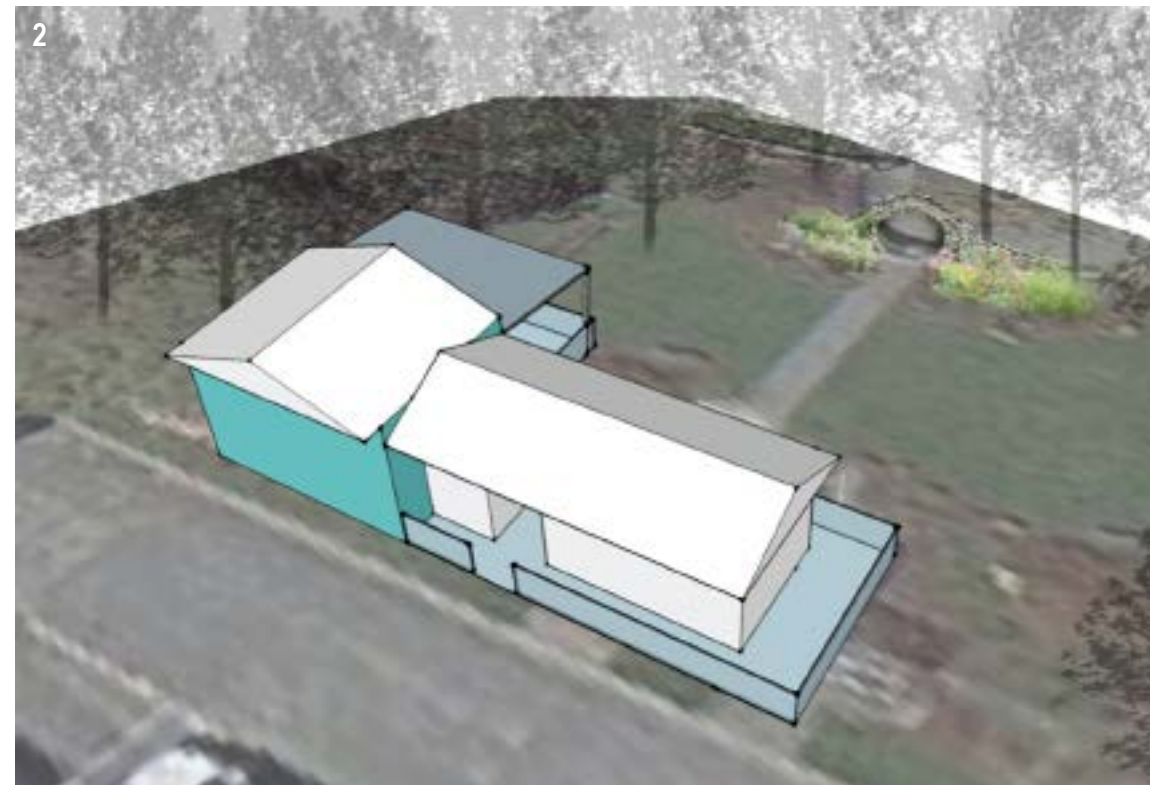
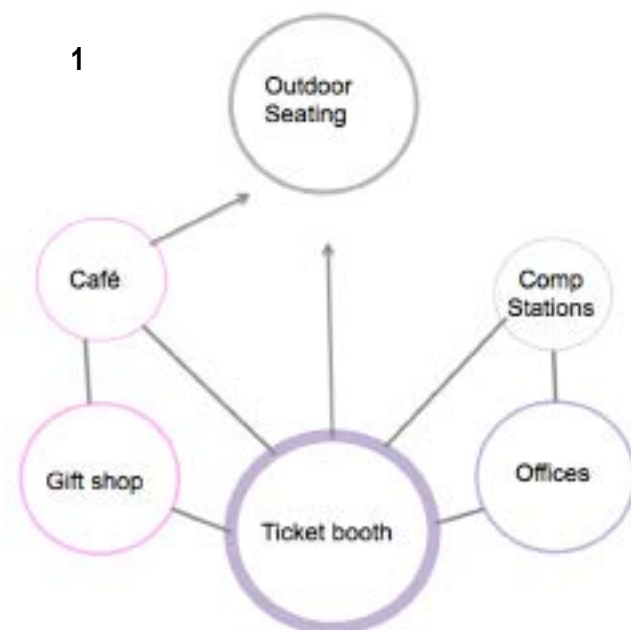
2. This scheme highlights the bush from Mt. Vernon.

2



## Group 4

- Ticket gate upon entry to parking lot with validation in the gift shop.
- Respect and renovate the existing structure.
- Maintain a smaller footprint.



1. Covered outdoor space.

## Group 5

- Draw attention to the moon-gate by introducing an overhang to highlight it.
- Draw inspiration for the curved structure from the curved lines in the rose garden.
- Outdoor seating areas are created by using overhangs to provide a sense of space and coverage during rainy days.





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