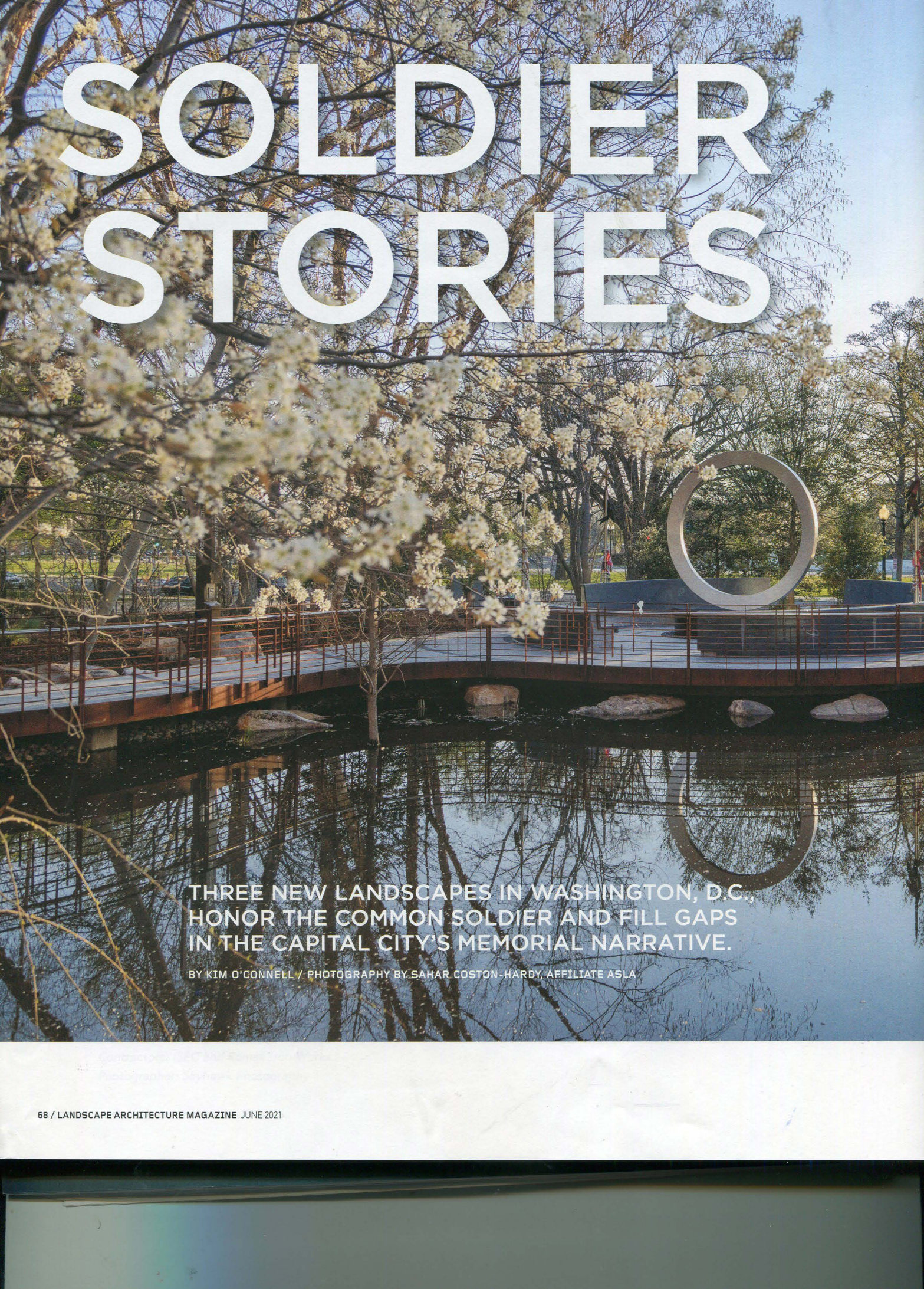


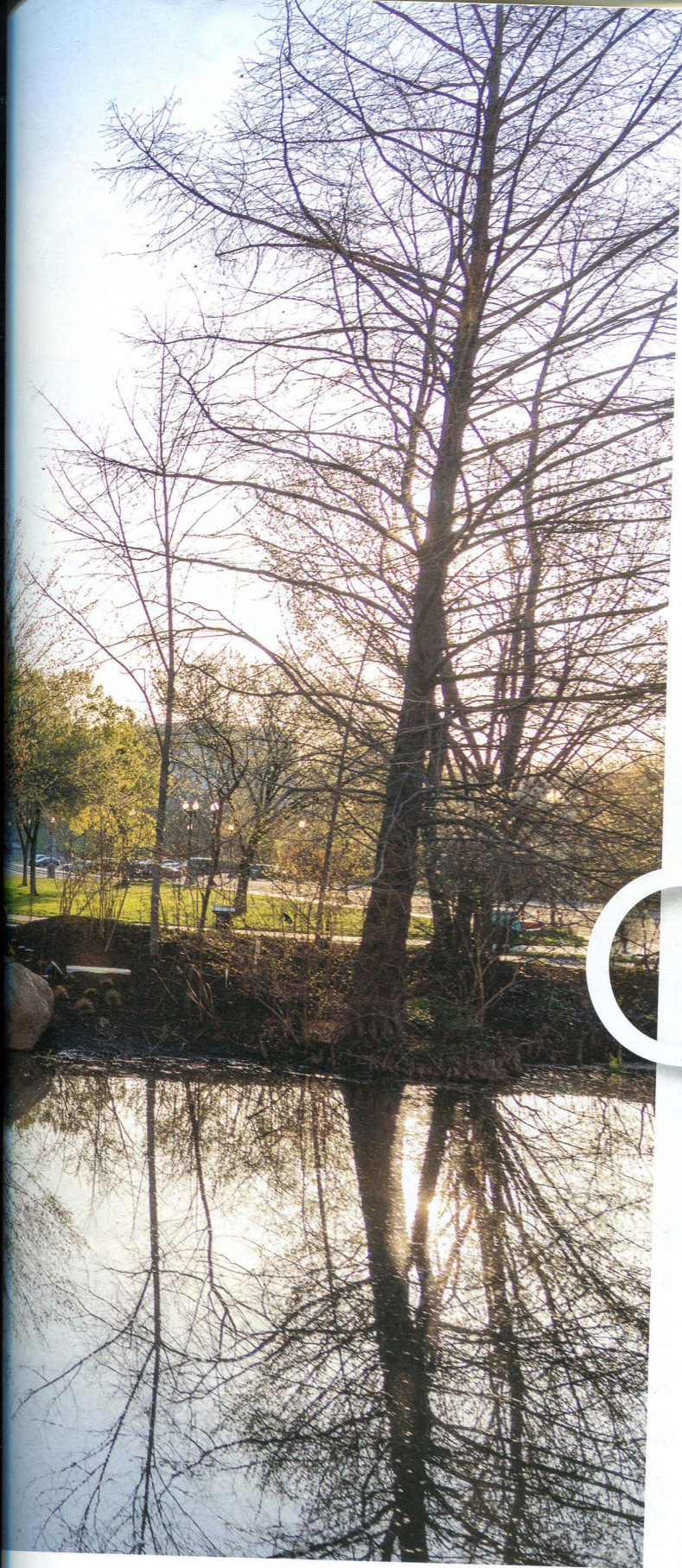
# SOLDIER STORIES

A photograph of a park landscape. In the foreground, a bridge with a wooden deck and metal railings spans a body of water. The water reflects the bridge and the surrounding trees. In the background, a large, circular, metallic sculpture stands on a raised platform. The scene is filled with trees, some of which are in bloom with white flowers. The sky is blue with some light clouds.

THREE NEW LANDSCAPES IN WASHINGTON, D.C.,  
HONOR THE COMMON SOLDIER AND FILL GAPS  
IN THE CAPITAL CITY'S MEMORIAL NARRATIVE.

BY KIM O'CONNELL / PHOTOGRAPHY BY SAHAR COSTON-HARDY, AFFILIATE ASLA





#### LEFT

It's no accident that the familiar dome of the U.S. Capitol is visible from the new National Native American Veterans Memorial.

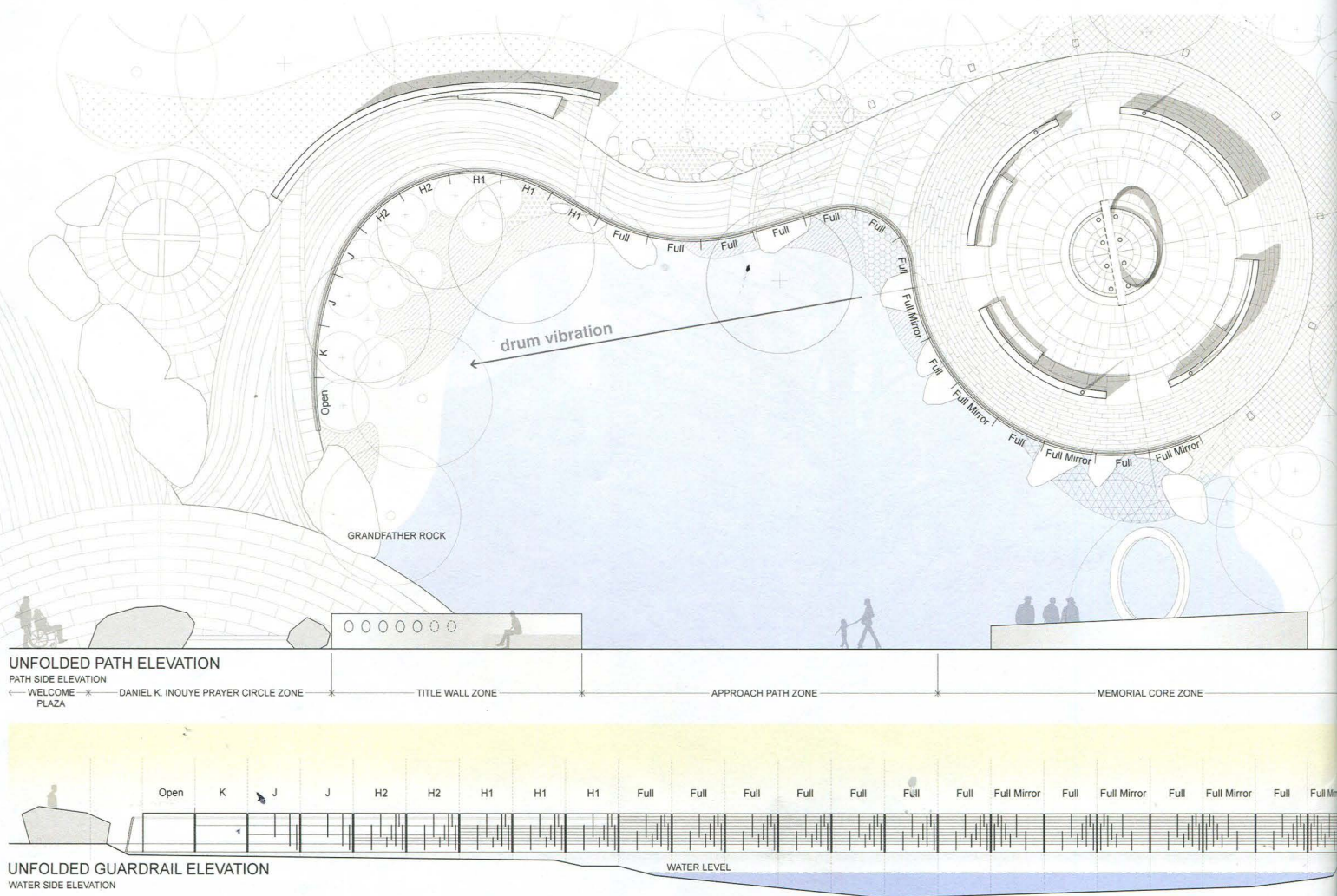
#### IN THE NATIONAL MALL,

it's unusual to feel as if you've stumbled upon a secret, sacred space. The nation's history is an open book on this great expanse, a story told in granite and marble, if somewhat unevenly, through dozens of memorials to significant events and people. War is the dominant theme, with monuments that speak of large-scale sacrifice in places like the World War II Memorial, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and the Korean War Veterans Memorial. Other Washington, D.C., memorials revere larger-than-life figures such as Franklin D. Roosevelt, Martin Luther King Jr., and Dwight D. Eisenhower, the latter being the subject of a massive new Frank Gehry-designed memorial just south of the Mall, one of the most recent to undergo the multiyear, many-layered process of creating public space in the nation's capital.

So it is somewhat surprising to come across one of D.C.'s newest memorials in a tree-lined grove set in a wetland—and that it is focused on a simple steel circle rising above the earth. Situated



# NATIONAL NATIVE AMERICAN VETERANS MEMORIAL



just beyond the famous cantilevered roof of the National Museum of the American Indian, this is the National Native American Veterans Memorial, which opened last fall to honor the long and underappreciated tradition of Indigenous military service. Although the memorial shares some traits with others in the capital city, where it's not uncommon to see elemental shapes and enduring materials used as symbols, it's part of a new wave of veterans' memorials that seek to speak as much to the present and future as they do to the past.

Significantly, three recent memorials—the Native American memorial, the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial, and the just-opened national World War I Memorial—also have things to say about the role of landscape architecture in elevating the voices of often-forgotten groups of

people. They each focus on the common soldier's experiences while making important civic connections to their surroundings.

This last part has become increasingly essential. Because of the 2003 congressional moratorium on new museums and memorials on the Mall (as the National Mall Coalition, an advocacy group, once opined, "We do not need any more 7-acre monuments paving over the dwindling open space."), recent memorials have been sited in more constrained locations, sometimes a block or more away from "America's Front Yard," and often only after considerable dialogue and debate with advising institutions such as the National Capital Planning Commission, the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission, and the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts. This means that, to varying degrees, these new sites must behave

## ABOVE

For the design team, the approach to the memorial circle was as important as the object itself.

## OPPOSITE

Harvey Pratt, a veteran and member of the Cheyenne and Arapahoe tribes, was the original designer of the 12-foot steel circle that represents nature and harmony.





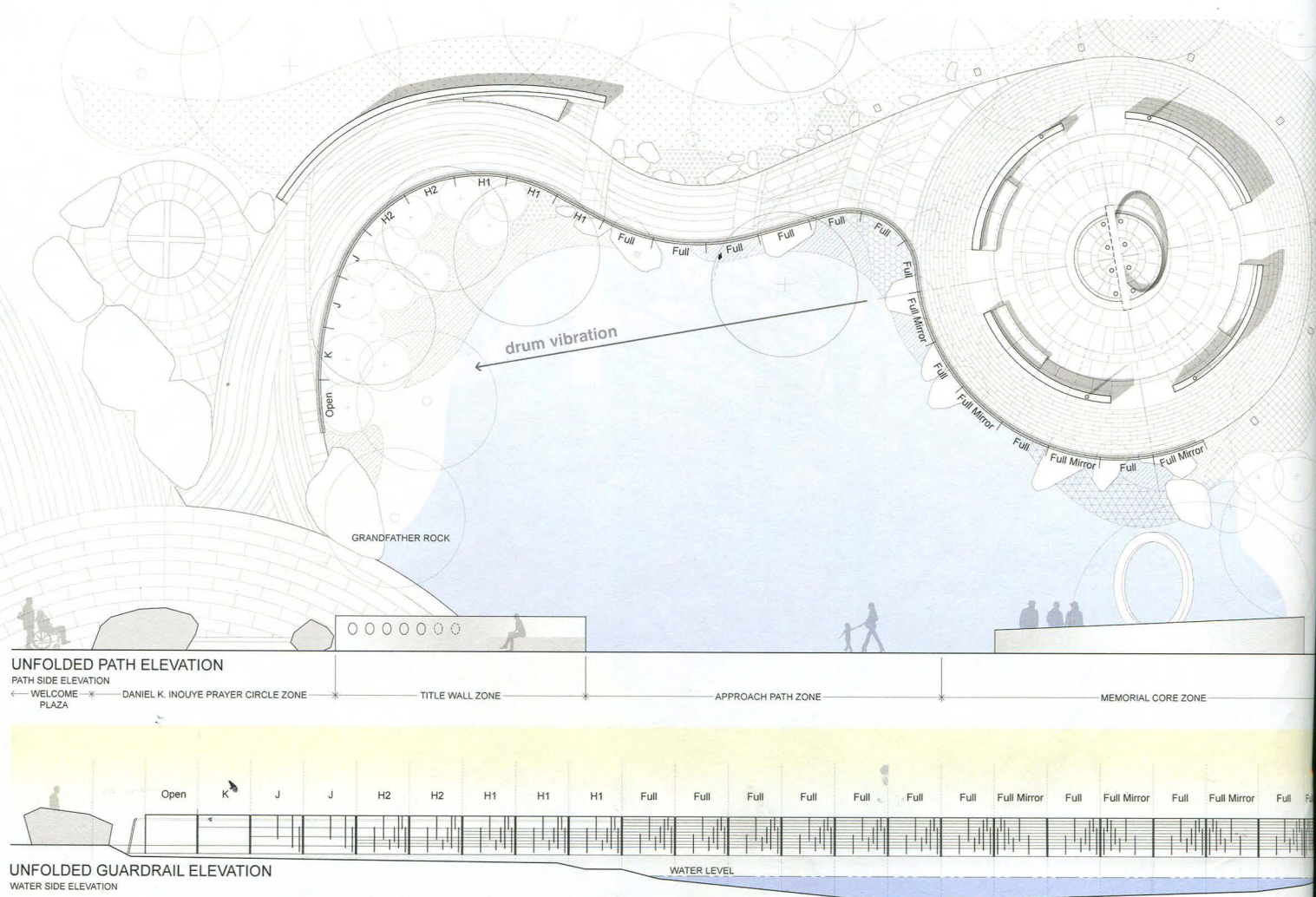
less like one of a precious collection of tourist destinations and more like the civic urban spaces they are called on to be.

**SITUATED OPPOSITE** the doors of the Museum of the American Indian, and reached by a winding stone pathway, the Native American Veterans Memorial features a 12-foot stainless steel circle balanced on a carved stone drum that is animated by a gently pulsing pool of water and, for special occasions, a fire element that

ignites from the circle's base. Four lances mark the cardinal directions that are sacred symbols for many tribes, and veterans and others are invited to tie prayer cloths on the lances, adding a loose, tactile, personal quality to the space. A perforated stone wall encircles the drum and enhances the site's intimacy while allowing points of entry and egress, with benches incorporated for reflection. A blanket motif in a darker shade also adds a feeling of softness and nods to the significance of weaving in Indigenous cultures.



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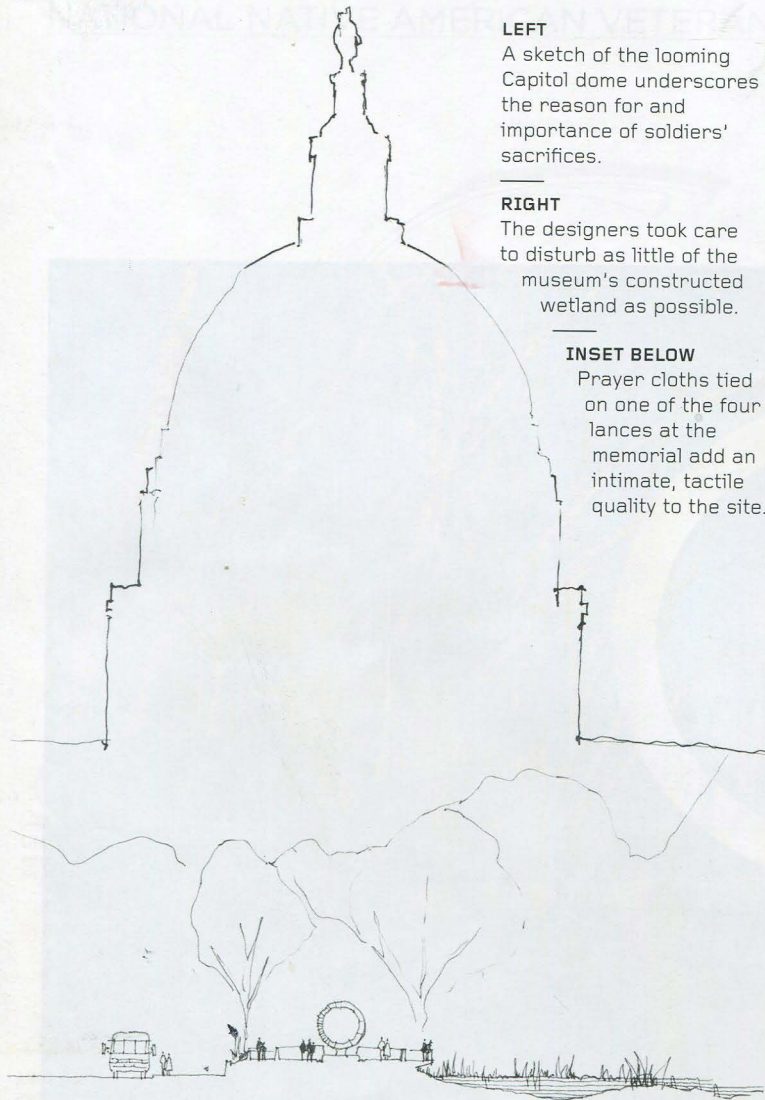
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**LEFT**  
A sketch of the looming Capitol dome underscores the reason for and importance of soldiers' sacrifices.

**RIGHT**  
The designers took care to disturb as little of the museum's constructed wetland as possible.

**INSET BELOW**  
Prayer cloths tied on one of the four lances at the memorial add an intimate, tactile quality to the site.

The memorial's principal designer, Harvey Pratt—a member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes of Oklahoma, a Cheyenne peace chief, and a self-taught artist—says he was challenged by how to represent the 574 federally recognized tribes in one place while incorporating a message that would speak to and for military veterans. Native Americans have served in every major U.S. conflict in the past 200 years, and in the last 20 years, a higher percentage of Native Americans (19 percent) have served in the military than all other ethnicities (an average of 14 percent). And yet their extraordinary service has frequently gone unrecognized. Pratt is a veteran himself, having served in the Vietnam War as a Marine.

"Native people are really attuned to nature, historically, and my grandfather would say, 'We are people of a circle,'" Pratt says. "Everything comes around. A tree trunk is a circle, you have a cycle of life, and you

BUTZER ARCHITECTS AND URBANISM, TOP LEFT









# "THE STRENGTH OF OUR PEOPLE COMES FROM CERTAIN DIRECTIONS, AND WE HAVE A PATH WE WALK TO GET TO HARMONY."

—HARVEY PRATT

can think about the seasons in a circle. There is a timelessness to it. We all use the elements—the water, the fire, the earth, and the air—and I needed to incorporate those basic elements. The strength of our people comes from certain directions, and we have a path we walk to get to harmony. I call the path at the memorial the Path of Life."

"Successful memorials function emotionally and intellectually," wrote the *Washington Post* architecture critic Philip Kennicott of the Native American memorial, "even if you don't know that, say, the stars on the wall represent lives lost in battle, or that flame symbolizes sacrifice while water stands for hope and renewal."

To help ground his design in place, Pratt reached out to Hans and Torrey Butzer, the founding principals of Butzer Architects and Urbanism (BAU). The Butzers have already made a significant mark on the history of memorialization with their design of the Oklahoma City National Memorial, a study in how to incorporate both individual stories and an overarching, layered narrative in a single place.

"We knew we needed to understand the context of the site, but at the same time we sensed this desire to not do the traditional Washington memorial," Hans Butzer says. "And how could you,







**RIGHT**  
 I representations of  
 patterns emanating from  
 central drum are echoed  
 e paving and railing.

**E**  
 tail from the carved  
 e drum at the base  
 e steel circle.

**OSITE**  
 ing Cor-Ten metal  
 gs infuse the space  
 inviting warmth  
 visual interest.

in this constructed wetland? The memorial is not something you just stumble upon when you walk in the woods. It was about getting there as much as it was about the memorial object. It's about merging into the landscape and about extending out from the landscape." The museum's original naturalistic landscape—including its simulated wetland—was the product of a design team led

by the firms Jones & Jones Architects + Landscape Architects + Planners and EDAW (now AECOM), which similarly wove together common threads from tribal narratives to inform the project.

"We worked with Harvey and Gina [Pratt's wife, who helps manage his business] to give this concept a physical context and introduce a sense of revealing and depth," Butzer says. "Our original suggestion was to set this memorial in a way that creates this conversation between the museum and the U.S. Capitol." Although that originally placed the circle directly on axis between these two elements, in the final design, it's now slightly

off axis but still situated in between. The designers wanted the memorial to engage with the Capitol as a potent symbol "of what these veterans give their lives for," Butzer says.

The team also worked closely with Quinn Evans Architects and the landscape architects Rhodeside & Harwell (RHI), which, among other things, developed a planting scheme that connected the new memorial with the existing wetland in a way that caused the least disturbance to what has become a sacred site, commonly a place of offerings.

"We decided that, one, we wouldn't introduce new materials that would be alien to the existing landscape," says Elliot Rhodeside, FASLA, a cofounder and principal at RHI. "Two, we would be as sensitive as possible [so as] not to disturb the existing landscape. And three, we would not use any plant material that wasn't on the original planting plan." Because the original plan used straight species and not cultivars, that meant new plants—all natives including river birch, pawpaw, and bulrush—were also straight species and often harder to source, but they found them.





## AMERICAN VETERANS DISABLED FOR LIFE MEMORIAL

"Working on a project to honor Native Americans made me personally feel very connected," Rhode-side says, "and feel responsible to do whatever I could to develop a memorial that's going to have meaning for so many people, [both] Native Americans and non-Native Americans."

**I**N ADDITION TO being oriented toward the Capitol, Pratt says it's also serendipitous that the Native American memorial forms a civic triangle between the Capitol and the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial, located just one block east and one block south of the American Indian

### ABOVE

Transparent walls at the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial tell a powerful visual storytelling





IN WAR, THERE ARE NO UNWOUNDED SOLDIERS.

How is a life replaced – the  
companionship, nurturing  
love and support of a husband  
and father.  
We were totally unprepared for  
and were devastated by years  
of illness.

I AM ALWAYS PROUD OF YOU

museum. Designed by Michael Vergason Landscape Architects and Shalom Baranes Associates, and dedicated in 2014, the memorial is an urban respite of granite and glass, with a large reflecting pool at its center and a star-shaped fountain on one end. Like the Native American memo-

rial, fire is a kinetic element of the site, igniting from the star's center. A strategic opening in the stone wall frames a striking view of the Capitol beyond.

Like the public triangle it helps to form, the memorial is itself located on a triangle-shaped lot above





the I-395 tunnel complex that is a major route in and out of the city. The site was the final outcome of a multiyear debate that began in the late 1990s over the memorial's purpose and location, which intensified when plans to site the memorial on the Mall were denied. Eventually, the foundation sponsoring the memorial embraced the current site precisely because of its civic connections. As the late Veterans Affairs Secretary Jesse Brown told the *Washington Post* in 2001, the memorial would "remind our legislators...that the sacrifices of disabled veterans throughout history paid the price of freedom here and abroad." A quarter of all veterans have a service-related disability, and that number climbs to more than 40 percent when only post-9/11 service is counted.

According to the designer's statement, the memorial's dialogue between stone and glass—which is etched with quotes and stories of soldiers, caregivers, and others—encompasses the strength and vulnerability, and the loss and the hope, that disabled veterans grapple with all their lives. The memorial also contains a grove of 69 ginkgo trees, which symbolize longevity and healing, and two dozen pond cypress trees, which help to screen nearby buildings and give the site a feeling of enclosure. Like the Native American site, the memorial honors another often-forgotten segment of society—the disabled—and emphasizes not death, but personal choice, sacrifice, and agency. Last year, the design won an ASLA Honor Award for General Design.

#### ABOVE

A fire element from the star-fountain represents the interplay between injury and healing, loss and rebirth.

#### OPPOSITE TOP

While the stone "Wall of Gratitude" speaks to D.C.'s memorial core, the glass walls are in a new direction.





TO NATIONAL NATIVE  
AMERICAN VETERANS  
MEMORIAL

U.S. CAPITOL

## PLAN

- 1 STAR POOL WITH FLAME
- 2 REFLECTION POOL
- 3 MEMORIAL GROVE
- 4 VOICES OF THE VETERANS
- 5 WALL OF GRATITUDE
- 6 ACCESSIBLE PARKING

Materially, the memorial is designed to speak to its larger context, with the granite "Wall of Gratitude" on the west side, while also departing from it with the translucent

glass walls on the opposite side of the angle. "The granite is reminiscent of D.C.'s buildings," Corcoran says. "It feels like it's part of the family of memorials, so there's an idea of recognition and inclusion. Whereas this other side is where we hear the voices of the veterans." The glass also signals transparency, ensuring that the site doesn't feel too closed off and insular.

"It had to be more than a static memorial," Corcoran says. "It needed to be a gift to the city, a public space to be enjoyed by others beyond the veterans."

"It was a story that needed to be told that goes back all the way to the beginnings of our country, that veterans have not been adequately honored," says Beata Boodell Corcoran, ASLA, a design manager and senior associate for Vergason's firm. "We wanted to think of it in a different way, as something that was more alive, something that could also reflect the temporal nature of the seasons as well as the idea that veterans are still living when they're being honored here. It's about recognition of those who have continued on after they've given so much."