



Cafe at the Point

Point State Park
Pittsburgh

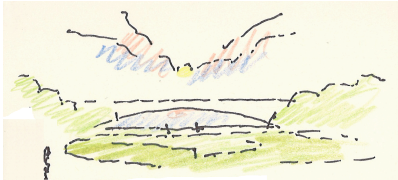
Completed June 2011
Project Type: Architecture

Cafe at the Point

Building Area: 230 sf

Project Cost: \$600,000

Project Completed: July 2011



Beyond fast food: Significance and sustainability

The design for the Cafe at the Point in Pittsburgh's historic Point State Park was born from the idea that a conventional food stand could be much more—and tell visitors the significance of Fort Pitt located at their feet! While the park was well served with fast food during occasional events such as the arts festival, it lacked a permanent food vendor with facilities to offer more creative, well-rounded dining options. Renovations to the park brought a sufficient increase in foot traffic from lunchtime walkers and commuters crossing through the park to support a small cafe on a seasonal basis.

The result is an eco-friendly structure that is more interpretive element than building. An etched stainless steel facade and glass canopy illustrate 250 years of history on the site. A living roof and walls enclose a super-efficient compact kitchen, storage and ADA toilet. Other green features include recycled steel and masonry, skylights, high-efficiency external LED light fixtures, and a storm water retention system. A LEED-NC Silver rating is anticipated.

Context: Confluence, conflict and renewal

Utilizing the highly visible front facade as an interpretive canvas was an outgrowth of the architect's work as part of the master planning and interpretive design team for the restoration of the park for Pittsburgh's 250th anniversary. The goal was to interpret the multilayered palimpsest that is the history of The Point—where the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers meet to form the Ohio. A key urban renewal project of the 1950s and an anchor for the city's famed post-World War II Renaissance, Point State Park commemorates the strategic importance of Pittsburgh's place in world history since the French and Indian War. Designed by Griswold & Stotz and featuring Gordon Bunshaft's Portal Bridge, the park is a seminal work of modernist landscape design.

Building as exhibit

Working with experts in history, traditional food-ways and native botany, the architects designed the stainless steel panels as a triptych illustrating Native American, French and English food traditions. Floating above the etched facade is a minimal glass canopy gently reflecting the arc of the Portal Bridge and approaching walkway. Evoking the natural tree canopy, the cafe's canopy contains translucent images of native tree foliage located at the Point at the time of settlement. The secondary surfaces of the rectilinear volume are covered with native-vegetated green wall and roof systems responding to the park's historic natural elements.

Historic location

The location of the cafe was very carefully determined through archaeological and historic review of the design of the park. Early sketches guided the location of the structure. The cafe sits above 18th-century remnants of Fort Pitt and just inside the location of bastion walls that have been reinterpreted as a "tracery" of granite blocks set into the paving and grass. The site is also at an inflection point in the park's view corridors on an off-axis curved walkway that connects to the Portal Bridge and then to the Fort Pitt Museum located further into the park. The bridge and view corridor from the city are key components of the park's original design.

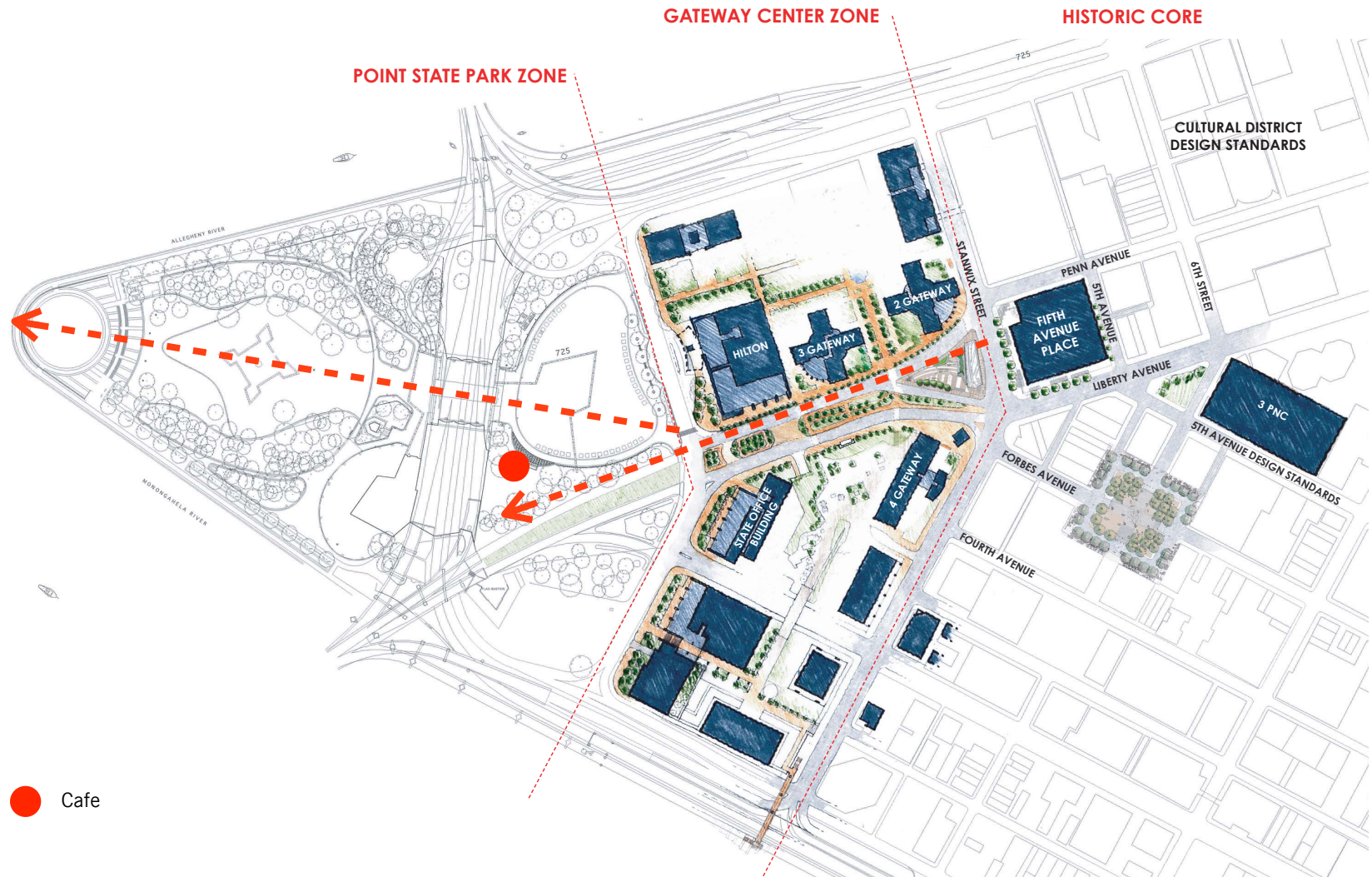
Contemporary gathering place

In the year since it opened, the cafe has become a popular place for lunch or for a snack when traveling to and from the city's new trail connections. In the future it is hoped that the cafe could become a stage set for special exhibitions on food and drink.



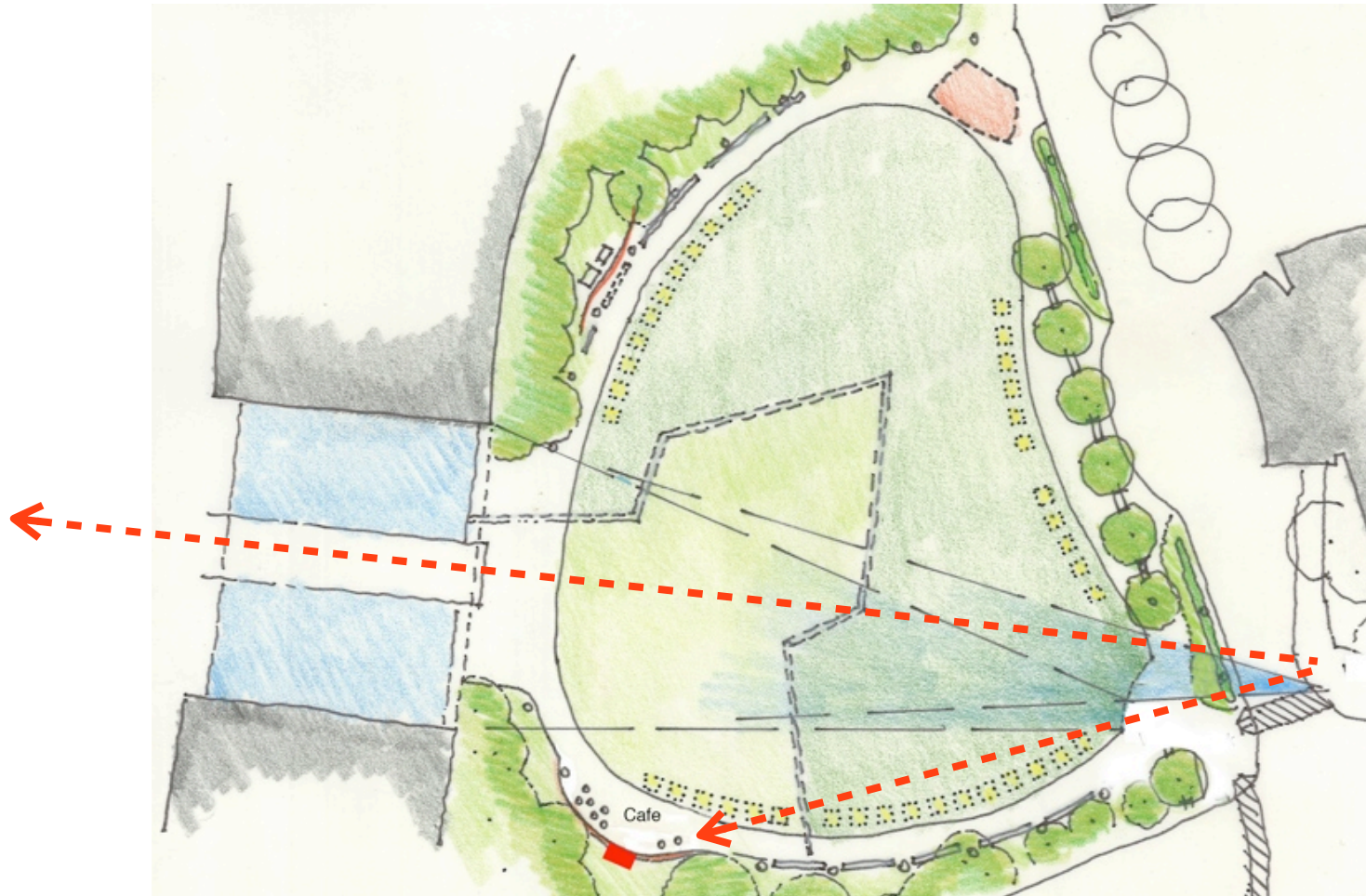
More interpretive element than building . .

Front facade of the cafe after hours illustrating the King's Gardens, which once fed Fort Pitt soldiers



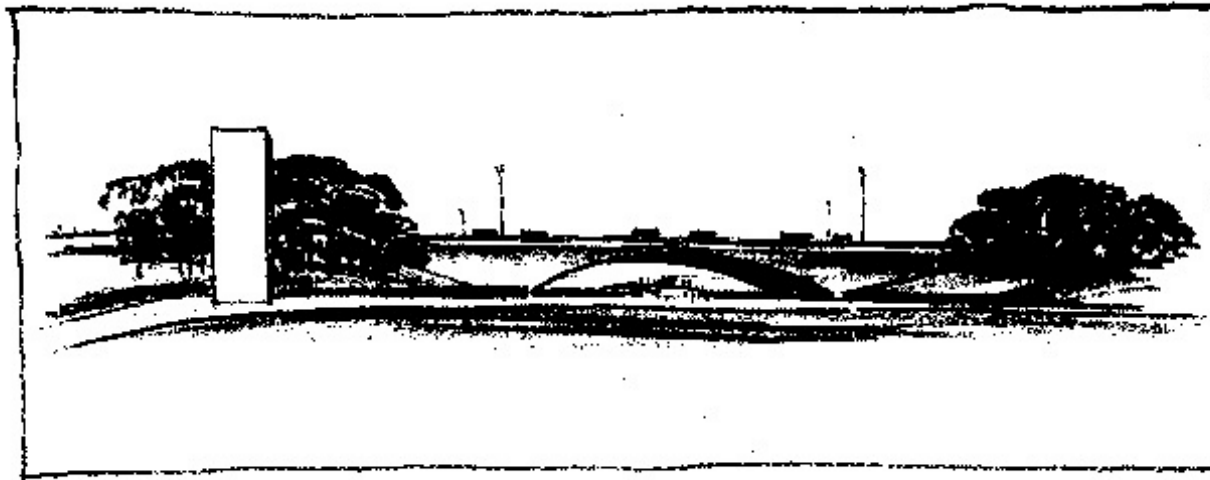
Site plan

The cafe is situated in the heart of the city's modernist Point State Park and adjacent Renaissance I buildings



View corridors

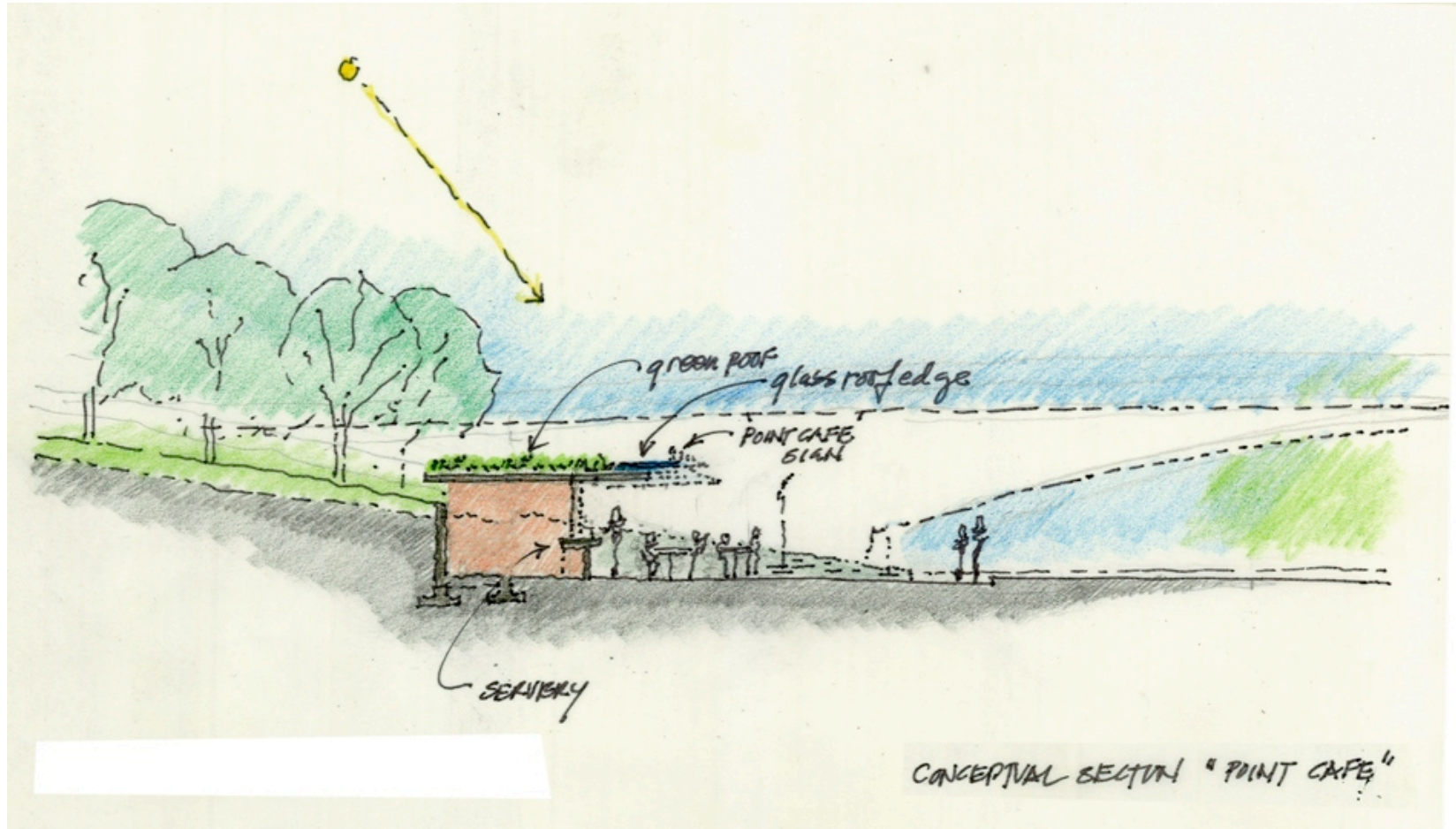
The cafe is carefully sited to respect historic archaeology and the view corridors into the park from downtown designed by Griswold & Stotz



View ③ is taken at the plaza before the sculpture which proclaims the Theme of the Park. At this point the visitor has not yet reached the court in front of the Portal where the full view of the Park may be seen. The sculpture is indicated as a blank pylon as it has not yet been designed.

Seminal Modernist landscape

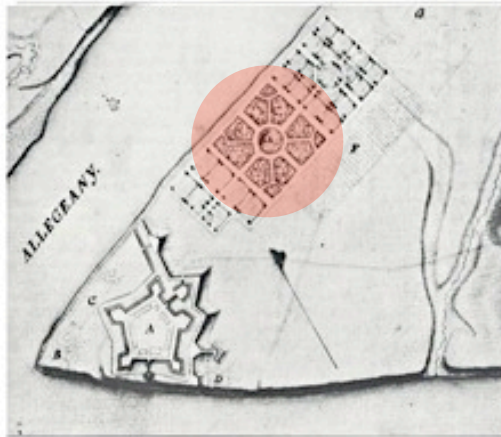
Early concept sketch for the site by Griswold & Stotz, 1959



Concept sketch

The geometry of the cafe reflects the sculpture initially suggested by Griswold & Stotz

English traditions...



“The glamorous name, King’s Gardens, belies the grim struggle waged by the garrison of Fort Pitt against forest, flood, Indian vandalism, weather and insect pests to provide crops for the survival of man and beast.”

—Charles M. Stotz, *Point of Empire, Conflict at the Forks of the Ohio*

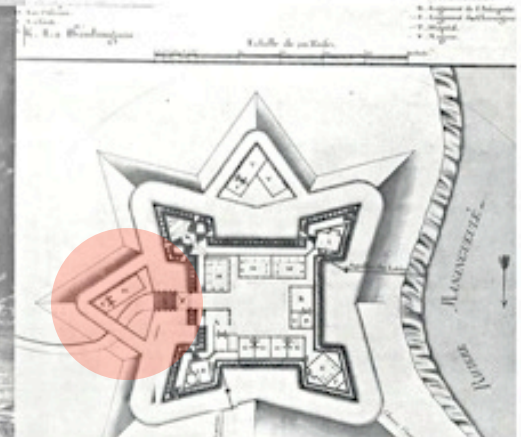
Native American traditions...



“In this image, we see a Delaware camp hurriedly preparing their warriors for battle. The women prepare a final meal and pack parched corn flower called ‘tassmanane.’ Nearby, painted warriors check their weapons before beginning their long journey down the path to war.”

—George Irvin, *The Art of Robert Griffing*

French traditions...

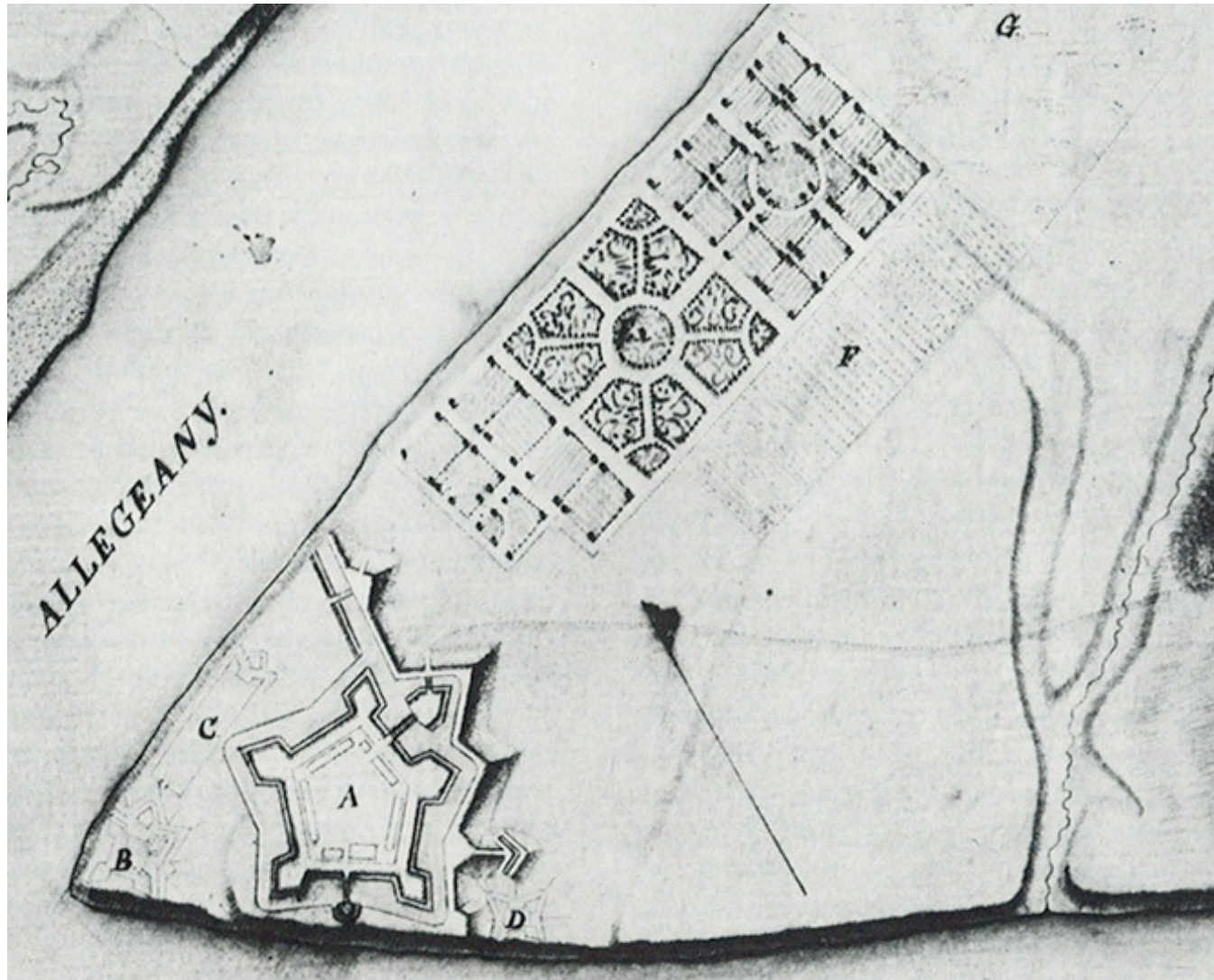


“Three of the bastions of the fort contained buildings. In the northeast bastion were the kitchen and bake oven, which the Paris drawing shows as a round form. Pleydell identified this as ‘Bakehouse with an oven, 40 loaves of six pounds.’”

—Charles M. Stotz, *Outposts of the War for Empire*

Food traditions of three cultures

A triptych of interpretive panels illustrate the historic significance of food on the site

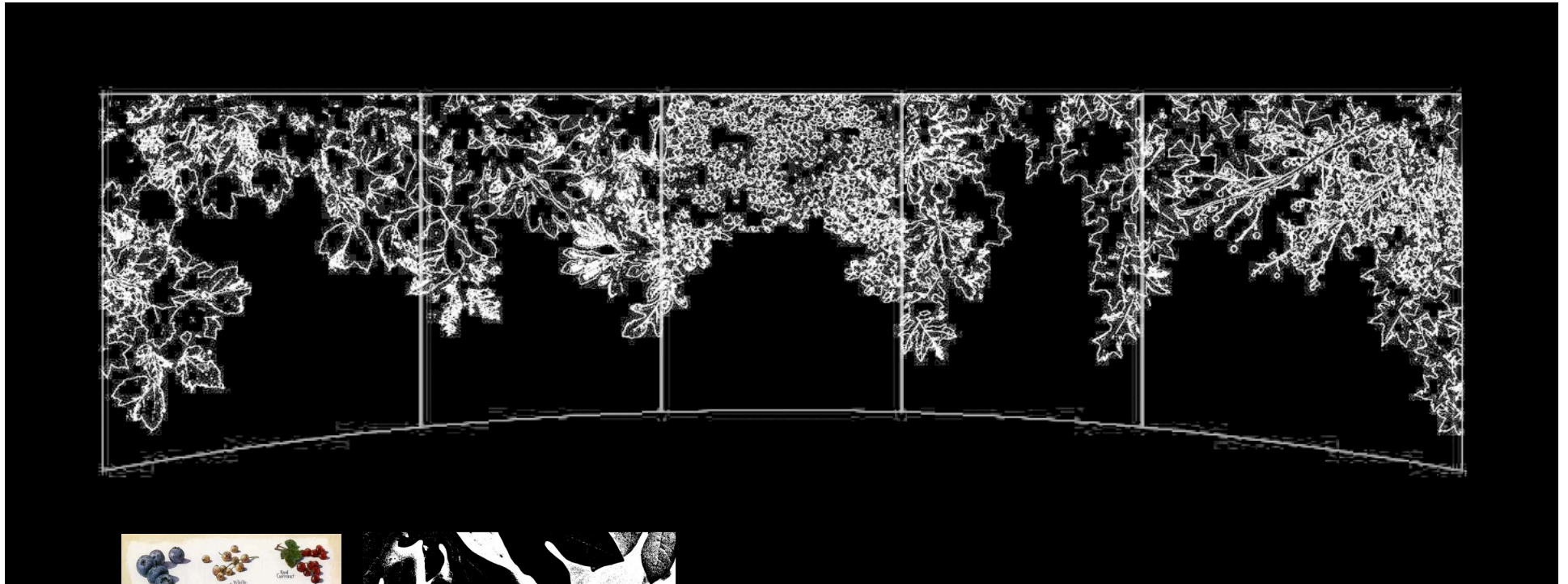


Historic references

Fort Pitt and the King's Gardens provided food on site 250 years ago



Front facade & seating



"Seneca people called Pittsburgh *Diondega* which translates into "place of the two woods." It could perhaps refer to the many ecosystems that the region holds."

"Plants and trees are referred to specifically by the Haudenosaunee as "brothers and sisters" and by viewing them as family members they become far more than a mere resource to be exploited. The gifts of the forest can be divided into three categories; medicinal, edible, and utilitarian. Some plants were introduced early in the colonial period and native people found uses for them."

—From *Ethnobotanical Report: Point State Park Plantings*, by Michael Galban, 2008

Botanic interpretation of native tree species

Details of the glass canopy inspired by historic local plants



Canopy detail



The cafe and Portal Bridge at dusk



Front facade at night