

January 2020

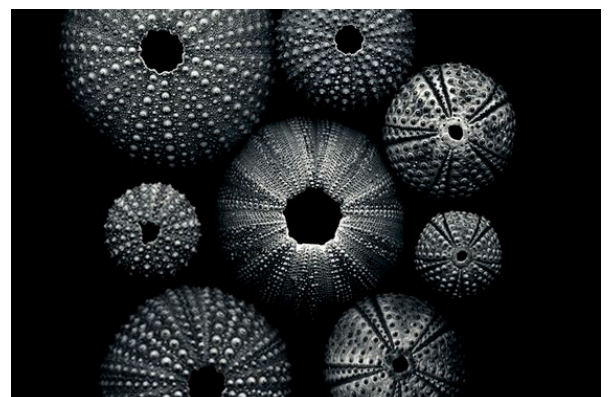
# Hopkins Architects completes Buhais Geology Park, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

Client: Sharjah Environment and Protected Areas Authority (EPAA)  
with HH the Ruler's Office.

*Hopkins' design for new geology park responds sensitively to its spectacular desert site, sitting within the former seabed basin of the al-Madam Plain in Sharjah, UAE.*

The Buhais Geology Park Interpretive Centre – designed by Hopkins Architects – has been officially opened by His Highness the Ruler of Sharjah. The Park lies approximately 30 miles (50 kilometres) south-east of the city of Sharjah in a region of exceptional prehistoric and geological significance. The site features an abundance of marine fossils from over 65 million years ago, spectacular mountain ranges and ancient burial sites from the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages.

Hopkins Architects



Bottom right image: Prehistoric sea urchin fossils – the inspiration for the design of Buhais Geology Park © Hopkins Architects

Seeking to create a series of exhibition spaces which vividly present the region's significant geological phenomena – including deep earth structures, plate tectonics, geomorphology and sedimentation – Hopkins Architects has designed five interconnected pods of varying sizes. These accommodate exhibition areas, an immersive theatre, a café offering panoramic views of the dramatic Jebel Buhais ridge rising some 100 metres above, a gift shop and other visitor facilities.

The geometry of the pods was inspired by the fossilised urchins present on site and developed into a typology which could be sized to suit the Centre's different functions. To minimise disruption to the existing fauna, geology and terrain, the pods were designed as pre-fabricated concrete structures and only lightly touch the ground on in-situ reinforced concrete foundation discs. A sixth, unconnected pod is used as a service building.

The pods are clad in steel panels, coloured to reference the different hues of the surrounding landscape as well as to shade the precast concrete structures. These panels are fixed into an array of steel ribs, giving the pods their distinctive sculptural, cantilevered forms and further referencing the exoskeleton of the urchin fossils.

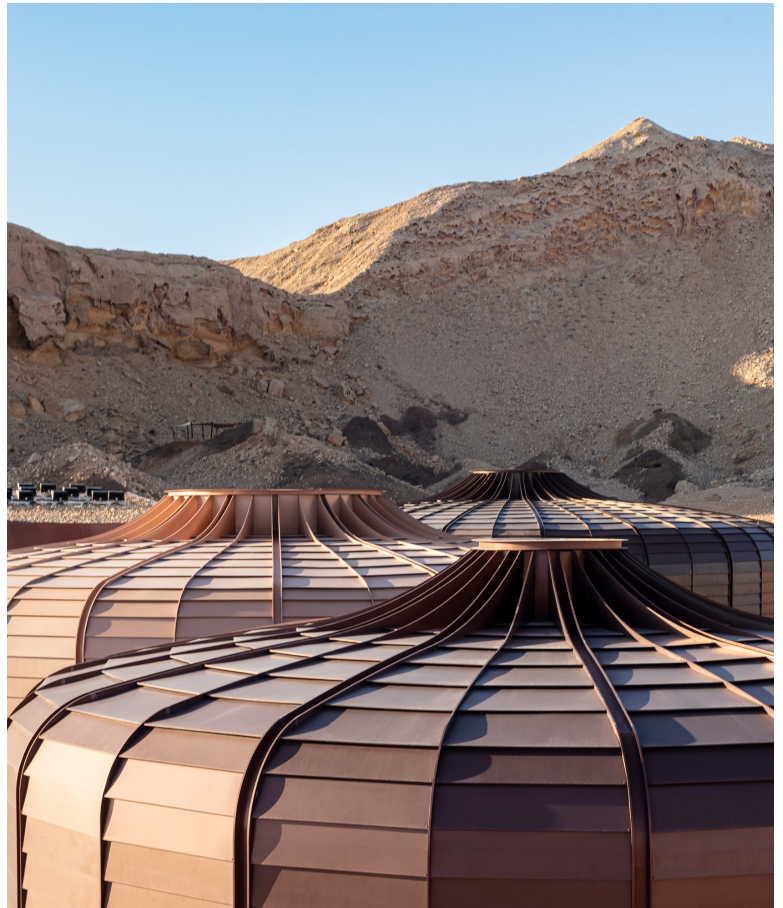


Visitors enter the building along an elegant ramp to the central hub where, once inside, they are greeted and guided through the Centre. The restrained palette of the interior materials complements the pods' exposed pre-cast concrete shell segments. In some pods, glazing and oculi have been inserted to control natural light into the space, tempering the brightness of the desert sun.

Linking the pods and looping sinuously around the site is an outdoor trail accessed from the main exhibition area. This trail – designed to encourage visitors to explore the jebel (Arabic for mountain) – incorporates viewing areas, a classroom shaded by a high-tensile canopy and raised walkways across natural rock formations and ancient burial grounds.

Using a series of model-based interactive displays, the Centre explores the region's mountains, sand dunes and the Arabian Gulf as dramatic evidence of the area's rich tectonic history over time – in particular, the disappearance of an earlier ocean and the creation of the limestone mountain ranges of Jebel Buhais. Visitors and researchers can actively examine local rocks and fossils.

The Geology Park is the latest addition to a suite of learning centres operated by Sharjah's Environmental Protected Areas Authority who lead conservation efforts in the Emirate, manage protected areas and provide exceptional educational experiences.



Bottom right image: The pods are clad in steel panels, coloured to reference the different hues of the surrounding landscape © Hopkins Architects

**Simon Fraser, Principal and Lead Designer, Hopkins Architects** said: *“Rarely is an architect offered the opportunity to design a building for such a beautifully barren landscape with so much geological and cultural significance.*

*“Our ‘light touch’ approach references the site’s marine fossils by delivering a series of ‘urchin’ pods that sit cleanly on the ground and seek to become a part of the local environment. The Centre’s inner spaces enable visitors to follow a journey that ultimately leads them to explore the jebel itself. We are confident that this exciting new facility will encourage many people from all over the world to understand the way in which landscapes are formed by tectonic activities and how the Earth has changed over time.”*

**Peter Jackson, Architect Advisor, and the project coordinator in HH the Ruler’s Office** said: *“The Park is important in locating a significant interpretive centre outside of the main urban centre, where traditionally museums have been sited. Though primarily an educational resource, the Park is also important for tourism in the Emirate. Hopkins’ powerful but sensitive architecture offers Sharjah an exciting new environmental focus, containing a dynamic exhibition authored by the geologist, the late Dr. Gautam Sen, which is especially relevant as we face further dramatic climate change.”*

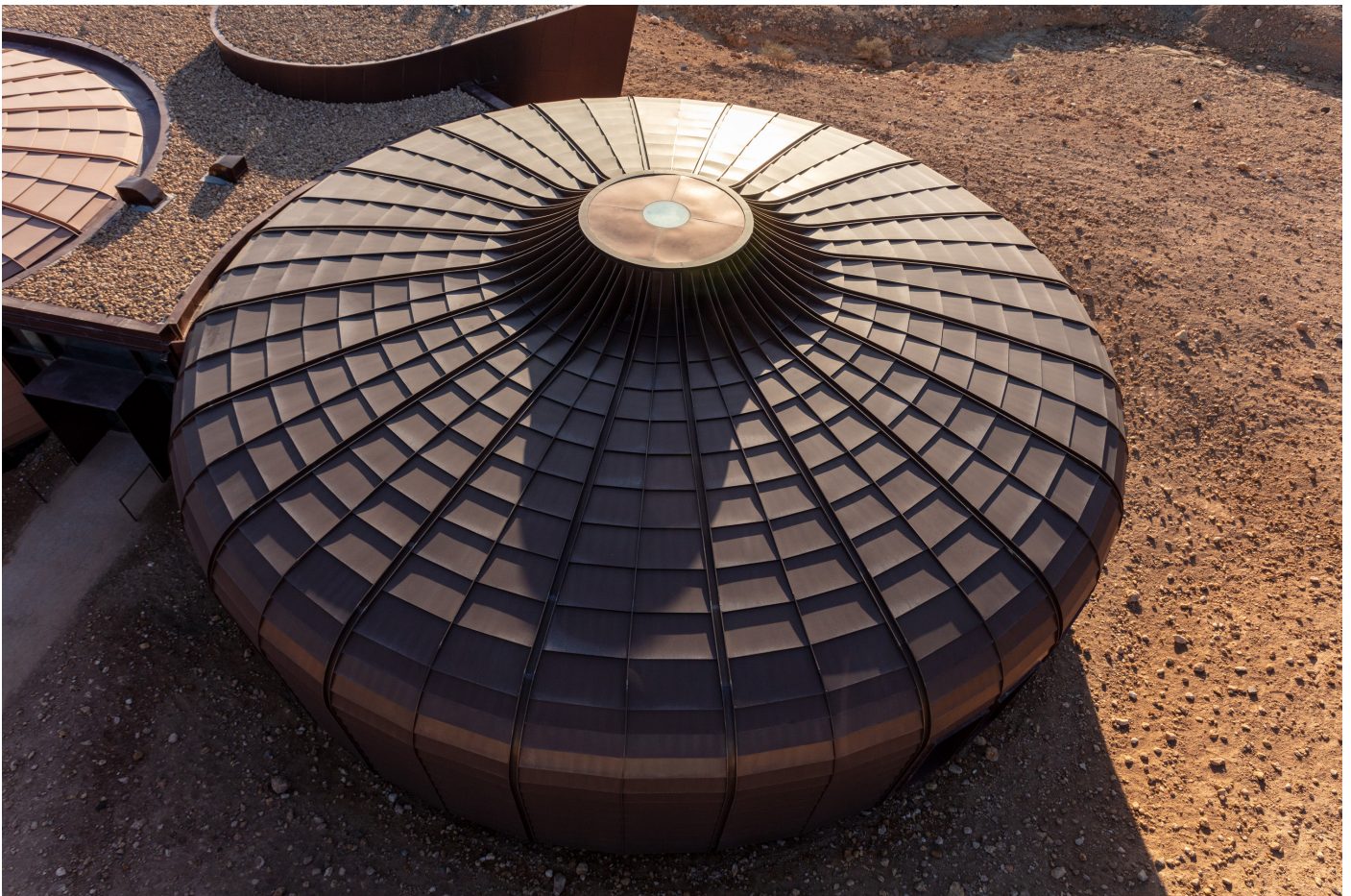
Hopkins Architects is also nearing the completion of a parallel project for the EPAA in Sharjah, the Al Qurum Mangroves & Turtles Interpretive Centre, which is due to complete later in 2020. The practice, which this year celebrates 15 years based in UAE, has also designed over 90 buildings for Expo 2020 in Dubai.

## ENDS





Visitor centre entrance approach view © Hopkins Architects



Aerial view of exhibition pod © Hopkins Architects



Night view of café and jebel © Hopkins Architects



View of exhibition space © Joanne Yu



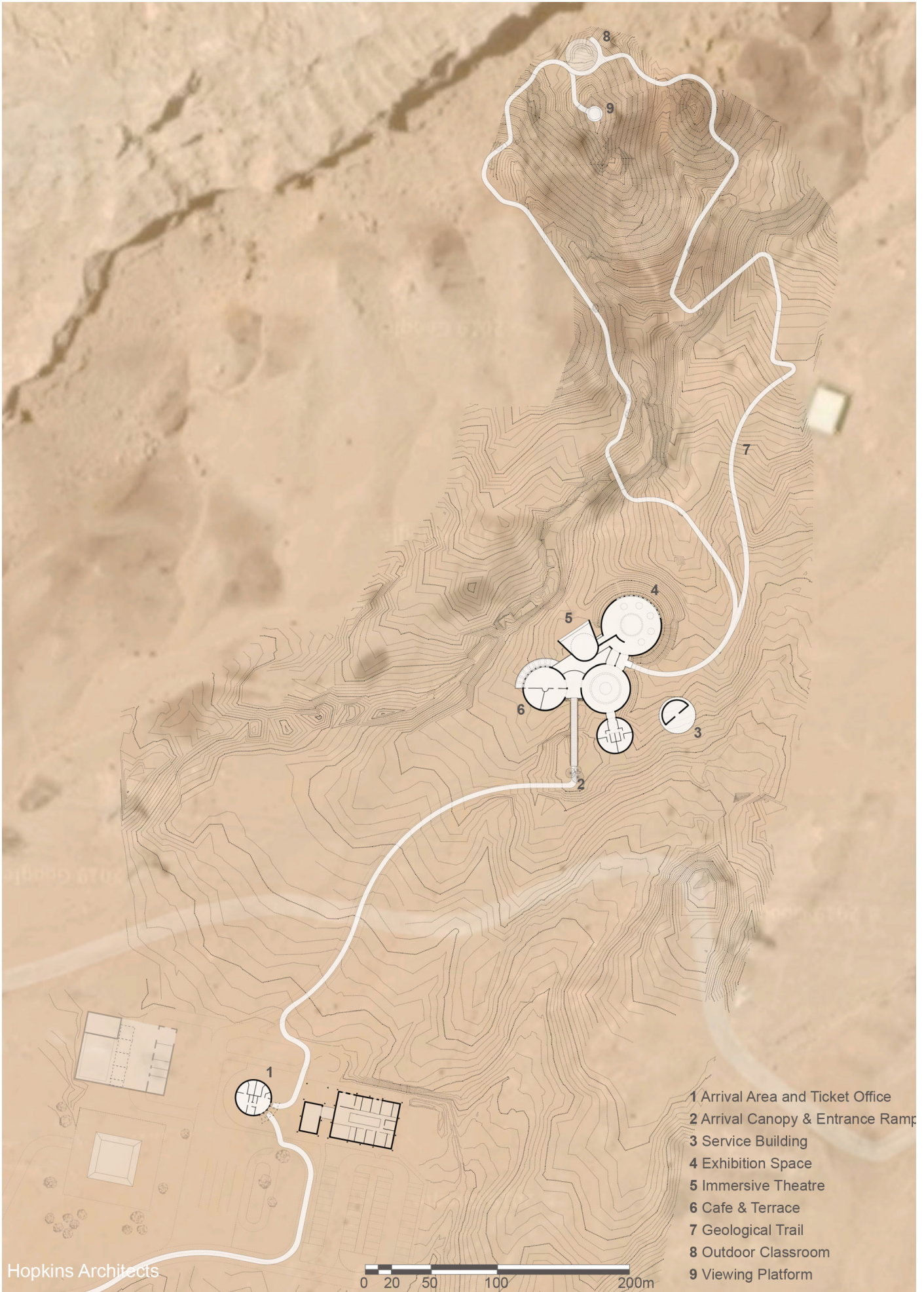
Aerial view of visitor centre from the jebel © Hopkins Architects

# Location Plan

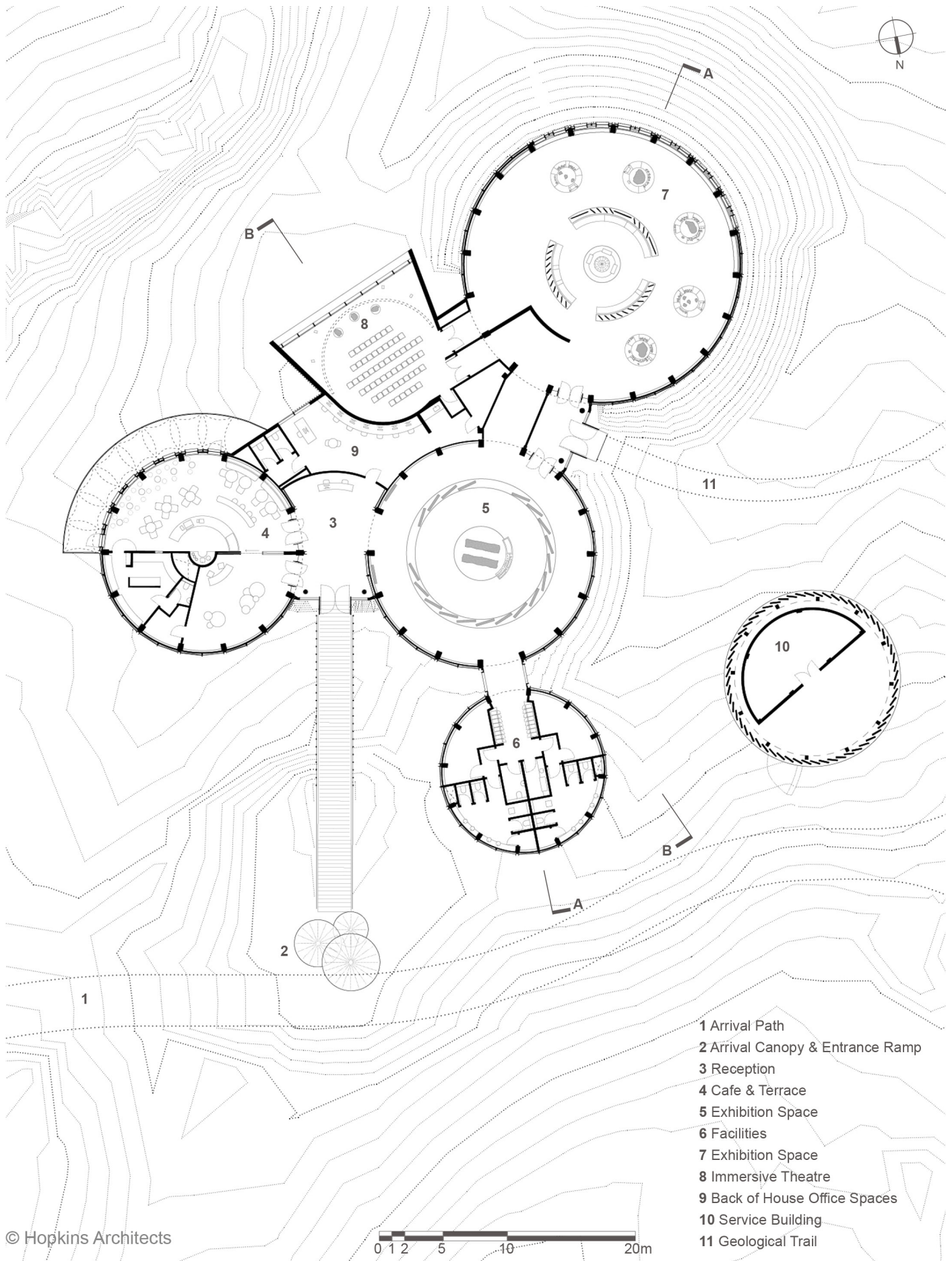




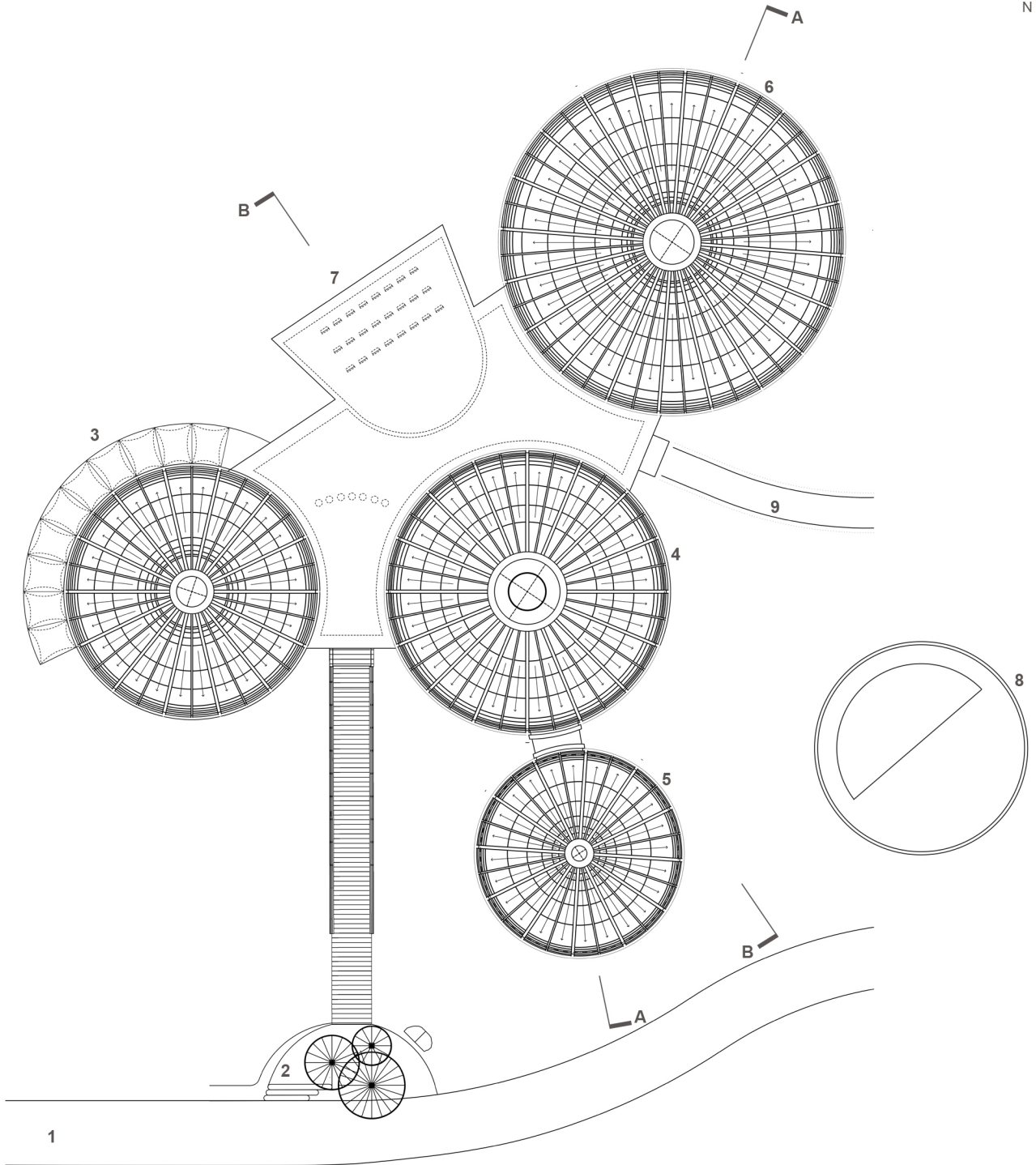
# Site Plan



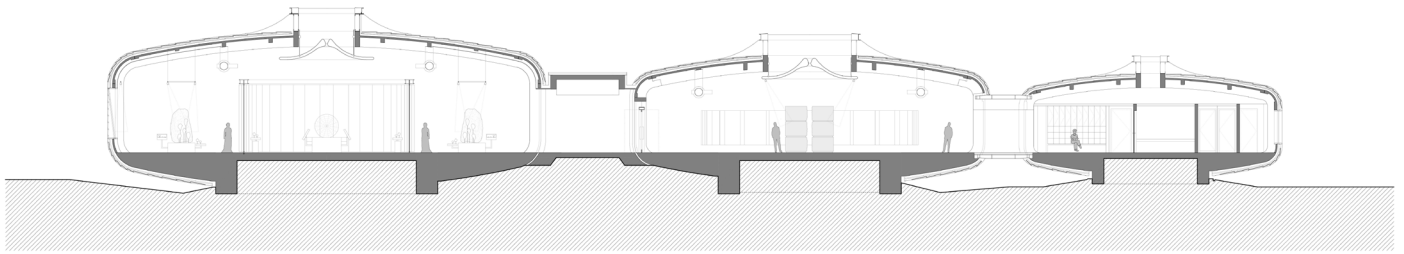
# Ground Floor Plan



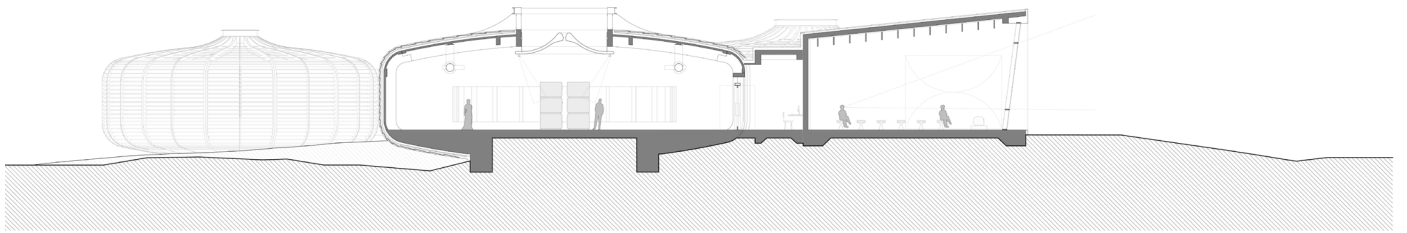
# Roof Plan



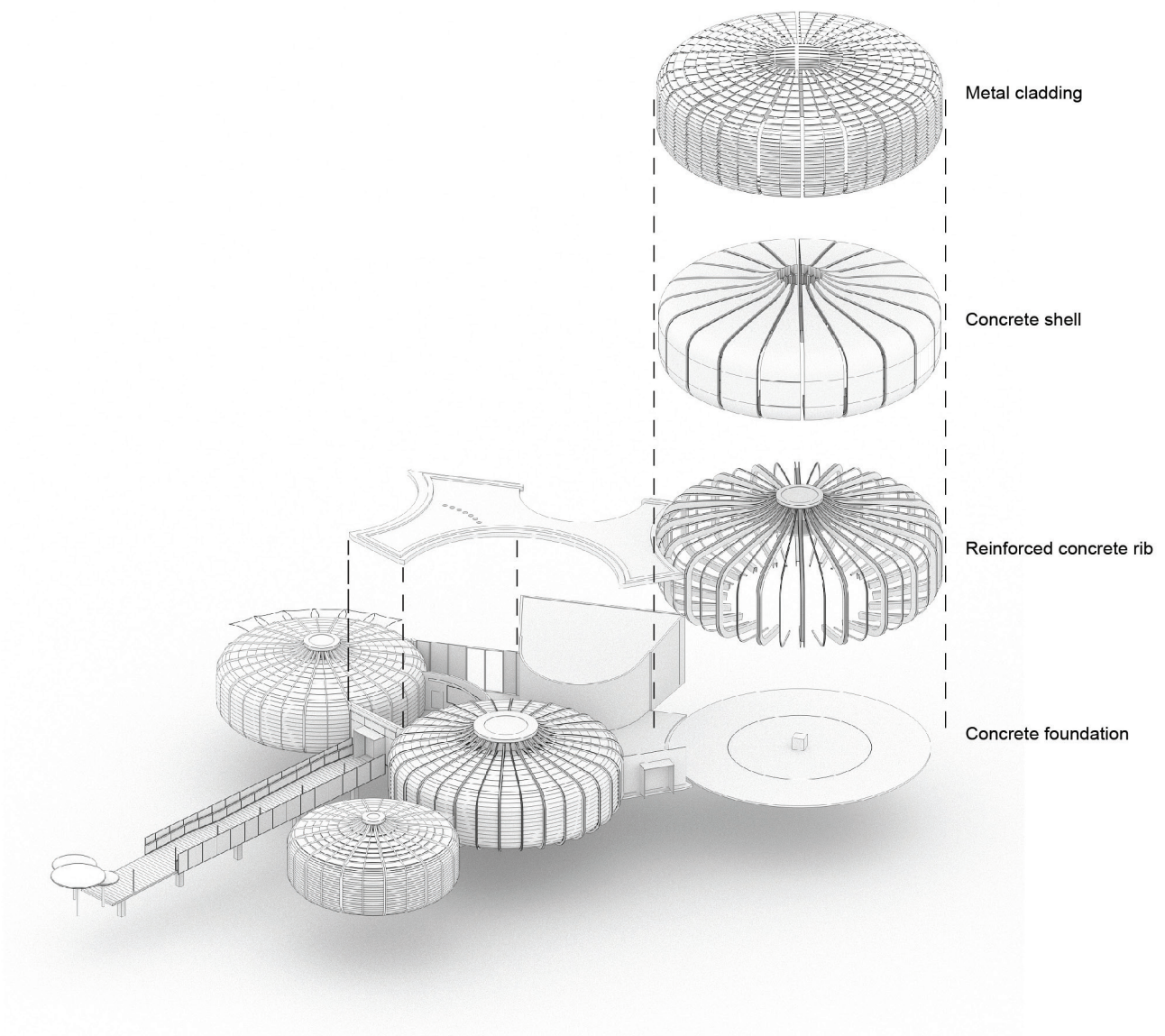
- 1 Arrival Path
- 2 Arrival Canopy & Entrance Ramp
- 3 Cafe & Terrace
- 4 Exhibition Space
- 5 Facilities
- 6 Exhibition Space
- 7 Immersive Theatre
- 8 Service Building
- 9 Geological Trail



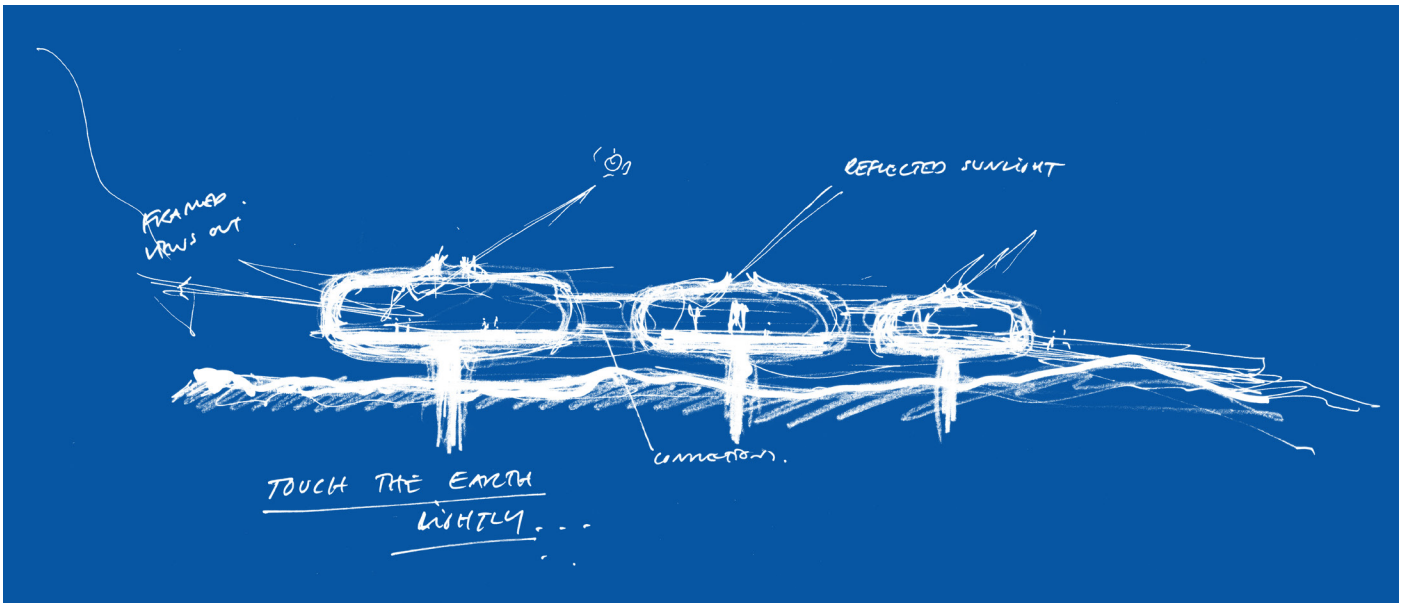
Section © Hopkins Architects



Section © Hopkins Architects



Exploded isometric of visitor centre © Hopkins Architects

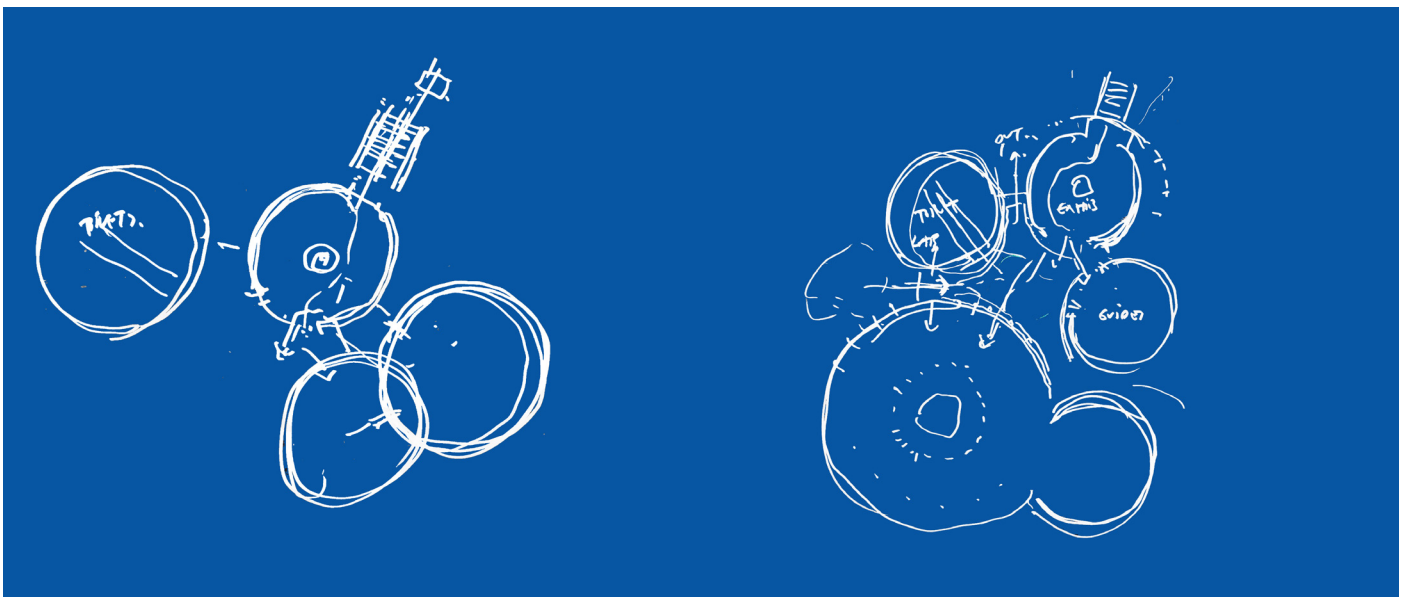


© Hopkins Architects



Cladding shading sketch © Hopkins Architects

Oculus daylighting sketch © Hopkins Architects



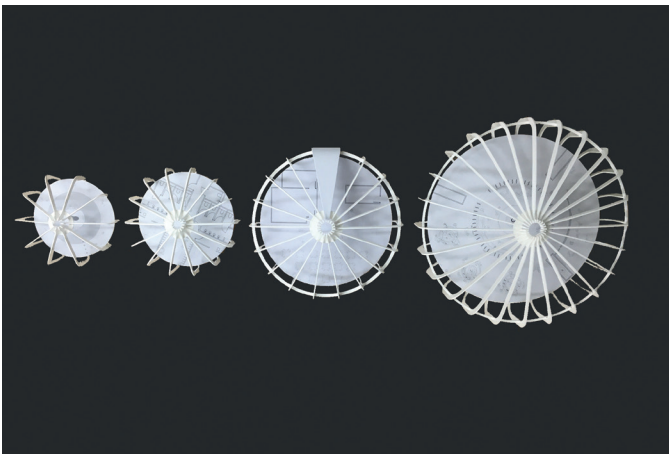
Early plan layout sketches © Hopkins Architects



Images of construction process © Hopkins Architects



Pod model in the workshop © Hopkins Architects



Top left: Pod models, Top right: Sun-reflector model, Bottom left: Topography model, Bottom right: 3D-printed visitor centre © Hopkins Architects

# Notes to Editors

## Project Information

Completion Date	January 2020
Location	Sharjah, UAE
Client	Hana Saif Al Suwaidi Sharjah Environment and Protected Areas Authority (EPAA) with HH the Ruler's Office

## Project Team

Architect & Lead Consultant	Hopkins Architects
Structural Engineer	e.Construct
M&E Engineer	GAJ
Lighting Consultant	Lux Populi
Acoustic Consultant	Gillieron Scott
Cost Consultant	De Leeuw
Fire Consultant	Design Confidence
Landscape Designer	Spencer
Main Contractor	Hardco Building Contracting
Specialist Contractor	MARF Steel
Exhibition Design	Ralph Appelbaum Associates
Photography	Marc Goodwin

## Architect's Team

Simon Fraser  
Andrew Ardill  
Tim Sheridan  
Larry Buraga  
Angus McDougall  
Joanne Yu

## Buhais Geology Park Visitor Information

**Location:** <https://maps.google.com/?q=25.019510,55.796852>

Opening times:

Sunday – Thursday	9:00 – 19:30
Friday	14:00 – 19:30
Saturday	11:00 – 19:30
Tuesday	Closed



# Notes to Editors

## About Hopkins Architects

Hopkins Architects is an international architectural practice based in London, with an additional Design Studio in Dubai. Over the past four decades the practice has realised projects across Europe, the US and Asia.

Led by five Principals, the practice produces buildings which combine advanced design, craft and sustainable solutions with rigorous cost and programme control to deliver projects of the highest architectural integrity. Hopkins is a noted urban designer and much of its work integrates with sensitive contextual locations. The firm's designs have been widely acclaimed by both architects and the public alike and they have received many architectural awards and honours.

Past work has included well known projects such as Glyndebourne Opera House, the New Parliamentary Building at Westminster, the London 2012 Olympic Velodrome and Shin Marunouchi Building in Tokyo. Notable projects in Dubai include Villas at Emirates Hills, Dubai World Trade Centre Masterplan, Gate Village district and recently completed 'thematic districts' for the Dubai Expo 2020. The Buhais Geology Park is the latest in a series of educational and cultural projects realised by the practice in the UAE.

[hopkins.co.uk](http://hopkins.co.uk)

[@hopkinsarchitects](https://www.instagram.com/hopkinsarchitects)

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