In designing this facility, Antoine Predock drew inspiration from the surrounding Central Valley landscape, in particular its organization into decentralized plots of land (Figure 2). SS&H offers a man-made version of this landscape, fragmenting a traditional academic building into equal and adjacent parts with no distinct hierarchy. Twenty years later, the architects of the Shrem Museum also found their inspiration in this quilted agricultural landscape.

The exterior presents materials in their “natural” state, neutral and devoid of color (Figure 1). Poured-in-place concrete, stucco, glass, and aluminum panels predominate. These panels lend the facility its metallic and futuristic aesthetic, which in turn fuels its nickname, Death Star.

The concrete aesthetic is evident on the exterior and even extends through the glazed entryways (Figure 3) into the lobbies. In these entryways, the abrupt transition to less durable materials can be observed. In addition, these entryways act as portals that transport one into a labyrinth of hallways. It is so discombobulating, in fact, that room numbers are displayed on windows—a valiant attempt to assist visitors who haven’t even the slightest clue as to their location.

The SS&H “landscape” is often criticized for its maze-like structure and disorienting lack of hierarchy—there is no main lobby or entrance. However, the beauty of this facility is revealed in its hidden niches and terraces (Figure 4) found only through exploration and attention to detail (Figure 5). SS&H challenges the conventional notion of what constitutes good architecture.