For my parents who gave their constant love and support, and to my friends who indulged me in my passion.
Cities hold a varied collection of individuals and provide unique adjacencies for those who live, work, and play in their urban fabrics. The relationship between the city and the individual has many facets, and this project is an exploration of one aspect of that relationship. What we do, and the way we do things, can be influenced by what we see and visually connect with as we move about the city.

This thesis thus explores the simple notion of having a view. A view being the gateway into understanding a city, and connecting to it. It is a means to reference one’s self to the city. The experience of a view takes on varied scales, and the fundamental initiative in this project has been the exploration of a private view out to a public vista.
elevation study: @

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A view is defined by Webster’s dictionary as being the act of seeing or examining; as well being a range of vision. The action defined is a personal survey, which through an observant look gathers information from the scene prospect. In earlier times, humans sought out overlooking views to gain advantage in human survival. During a hunt, or in battle, a commanding view was a tool for keeping watch over enemies and threats.

It was not until around the 19th century where the idea of a view for pleasure began to form, as seen in the rise of landscape painting at that time. Today’s society still desires to have a view, and still thought of as an asset which possesses a value. While survival may not remain the reason, a view provides us a scenic overlook from which to enjoy and understand more about our surroundings.

For urban dwellers, our cityscapes offer a variety of public vistas containing distant views along avenues and openings. These vistas allow city-watchers to see a broad context and gain a new insight through different vantage points upon which to study the city, its make up, and its people. With a view, we can keep watch over the essence of that which makes our cities run.
Why does a view matter?

The relationship between a city and its inhabitants is greatly strengthened as one gets to know the city. In The Image of the City, author Kevin Lynch describes the quality of a legible city as the ability to understand the parts of the city as they relate back to the whole. Utilizing a view, a vantage point from above, city dwellers are able to relate pieces of the city to the whole, beyond just the specific path they may take, but through a broad look. The ability to see far allows for preparation and thought. It becomes a way to see the future, by giving a glimpse of what to expect.

The city is not simply a backdrop, but it also is a character. The form of a city plays a dominant role in the manner in which it is used. The way we travel, the routes we take, the places we choose to stop, the places we seek out, and the areas we avoid, can be heavily influenced by the city’s design. The view becomes important in our attempts to look back to the city to decipher where we have been, as well as forward to see where we want to go. The view also tells a story. Cities have a narrative to share, and just as in any work of literature, there are overlapping plots and themes that get written into the urban novel. Our view can help us understand this plot better, and through the means of multiple and changing views, one’s understating can be increased.
washington circle : foggy bottom

The site for this thesis project is located at the southeast quadrant of Washington Circle in Washington D.C. The location is known as Foggy Bottom, a neighborhood on the west end of the city that houses such prominent city residents as the World Bank, George Washington University, The Kennedy Center, a variety of government agencies, and several blocks comprised of 19th and 20th century row houses. The extents of the site are bounded by Pennsylvania Avenue on the north, 22nd Street on the east, 23rd Street on the west, and I Street to the south.

Washington D.C. as a whole, is known for its landmarks of memorials and monuments. Experienced from an elevated platform significantly above the ground plane, it takes on a new character. Many persons would find a surprising amount of green vegetation from the city’s many park-like islands throughout the city grid. Also from above, the grid of the city becomes easier to understand as relationships from various points of interests can be understood in different manners than normally traveling between them by foot. Like many cities, Washington is a wonderful city to experience from these high viewpoints, and much can be learned about the city from these perches.
The major design intention explores having a private view looking out to the public vista, and this idea gave impetus in the project to design a kind of urban skybox to the city. Skyboxes are often familiar forms at sporting venues. Usually these spaces are roofed enclosures having private seats situated high above a playing field. Most feature well appointed amenities, and give a select vantage points to the game below. In the same spirit as these elevated spaces this thesis looks at the idea of a skybox in the context of the city. They are places from which to view out upon the urban playing field.

The composition of the building is comprised of three skyboxes cascading as a transition from taller buildings neighboring to the east to lower buildings neighboring to the west. The stepped rooftops become elevated vantage points from which the city can be enjoyed.
section through washington circle
The program for the project is a mixed use building. Occupying the lower two levels is a retail component which aids to enhance the activity of the street life. Above the retail are private apartments, which look outward to the city. The building is organized using geometry borrowed from Washington Circle, with the circle being the first and most prominent view most will encounter as they move throughout the building.

In any city, the street level is one of the most public realms. It is usually related with travel, either via car, bus, or foot with people moving to and from their daily destinations of work, errands, home, and leisure activities. It is also a gathering spot where people meet, interact, and socialize. There are many areas in the city which offer great places for this type of gathering.

At the street level, Washington Circle takes first view at the cafe, as well as the entrances to the residential lobbies. The cafe is located below the middle skybox, which cantilevers over the cafe’s outdoor seating area. The view of the circle is just across the street, and becomes a visual extension of the immediate surrounding. The shoppers in the retail store can also view outward to the presence of the circle as they traverse throughout the two main shopping levels.
The third level provides a garden terrace that separates the retail store from the residential apartments above. The space is designed to be accessible to both. This level is still a public realm, but slightly removed from the quite public street below. It is also here that a new vantage point of the city is offered from thirty feet above.

Seeking a poetic gesture towards the city, an urban hill is created for the retail roof which climbs over the two story retail space below. The grass-like hill affords the opportunity to sit, relax, and observe the surroundings of the city.
Above the garden terrace, the residential apartments begin at the fourth level. The apartments are organized along the building’s curving spine. Apartment entries gather about two elevator and service cores.

The common space carved from this layout allows for light filled interior avenues which maintain a viewshed oriented through the axis of Washington Circle. This allows residents to continually reference back to the city without limiting or restricting the privilege for views from the private apartments. These viewsheds are shared by the community, regardless of the particular unit or price paid for a residence.
Vertical movement through the building becomes more significant as each floor offers a different perspective of the city through the light filled interior avenues. Orientation and comprehension of the city is therefore enhanced utilizing multiple shifting vantage points accessed within the building.

In the case of Washington Circle, the first view happens at the ground level entrances which also align with the circle. As residents move vertically to a new floor, a new perspective of the circle is gained at each new level. In the same manner, the view of the city, and its vistas also change. The idea of how tall a neighboring building is changes with each new level.

New available vistas uncover a broader scope to the city. Perceived distance, for example how far one thinks something is, suddenly changes when someone is twelve stories high versus being on the ground. This bird’s-eye perspective, with the ability to see the complete path one might traverse below, may cause a change in how one investigates the city.
looking out from apartment view

residences: sixth level

future development

Washington Circle

Penn Ave

22nd Street

23rd Street
The cascading skyboxes allow public vistas to be shared on varying scales, not only by residents of this building, but for future residents on neighboring vacant sites to the south. Future development will be able to take advantage of these communal vistas that a uniformly taller building would impermissibly obstruct.

With each of the three distinct rooftops, views of civic features and landmarks at a greater distance can be experienced. These terraces offer public spaces that take advantage of the idea that the distant public vistas belong to the city. These spaces are designed to be areas for collective and social views to the city.

The rooftop terraces also define space for the public functions of the residences. On the eighth level, a skygarden is next to a fitness center and spa for residents of the building. The tenth level terrace has a semi-circular grove of trees, with a reading room and library. At the twelfth level, vista cabanas overlook the city, and gaze out to the far extremities of the viewshed.
A semi-circular grove of trees next to a two story reading room occupies the middle rooftop terrace.
At the uppermost rooftop terrace, vista cabanas are available for apartment owners to enjoy the high viewpoints and far off landmarks of the city. These spaces allow residents to garden, and customize personal areas of the roof for entertaining and leisure. Separating the cabana units are walls of vegetation that can be grown thick or thin depending on the level of privacy desired by cabana owners. Utility and water connections are also available for further customization of the outdoor area.
Spanning across all three skybox terraces, is an aluminum clad canopy. The canopy becomes a frame for neighboring buildings viewing through the structure of the columns which support canopy frame. The canopy provides relief from the sun for users of the terraces, but is pierced above select points to allow water and sunlight to reach vegetation below.
Typical construction methods in D.C. often rely on the use of site cast concrete. In this project, the structure of the building is comprised of site cast concrete, used to form floor slabs, columns, and beams. This allows for a free facade largely made of glass that engage opportunities to view out to the city. Walls clad in shiny dark granite panels are used in areas of the building to frame views, and provide a play of light to light filled interior avenues.

Just as views flow from space to space, air must flow as well throughout the building. A vast amount of public and private outdoor space is available to residents of the building via public balconies, and rooftop terraces. With this in the mind, the choice was made to maximize interior space for each individual apartment, in lieu of private apartment balconies. Utilizing free facade glass walls, sliding glass panels can be used to open interior space to the outdoors to let light, and air freely enter the residences.
What we look onto, especially in urban areas, are public scenes of our civic environments. Being in touch with these environments requires a continuing interaction, and a view of these public vistas can help guide our relationships with our city. A view is thus a personal experience, and will shape the manner in which users interact with the city. With it, the relationship between the city and the individual becomes enhanced, and help gain insight and understanding of what it means to live in a city.

**conclusion**
view looking south from Penn Ave
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