

Axis Architects' Salt Flats Viewing Pavilion proposes a 60-foot-wide frame for the Utah landscape.

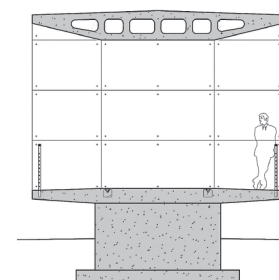
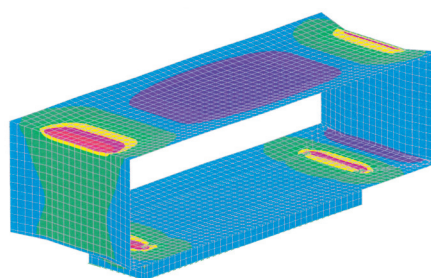
## A Road with a View

**Could a minimalist structure on a deadly stretch of highway help save lives?**

Interstate 80 tears across Utah's Bonneville Salt Flats, so fast and arrow-straight that it has become infamous for lulling sleepy drivers into fiery accidents. The state's traffic planners wanted to slow cars down, but they couldn't rebuild the road. So they hit upon a poetic solution: a viewing deck that would entice drivers to stop and savor the landscape instead of streaking past it. In 2006 they tapped Axis Architects, a small local firm, to design an enormous viewfinder set just off the highway.

The Salt Flats Viewing Pavilion is stark and simple, composed of two basic elements. "We didn't want the building to compete with the natural beauty of the site," explains Pierre Langue, Axis's founder. On the side of the freeway facing the Great Salt Lake, in the lake's wading shallows, floats the project's signal gesture: a hollow concrete box that forms a minimal frame for the landscape. On the other side of the highway is a visitors' center and a 70-foot-tall Emilio Ambasz-esque tower that peers over the road.

The state originally wanted a raised platform facing the lake, but Langue demurred: "Going higher doesn't really change the view"—these are the salt *flats*, after all—"and you get away from the sand." Instead, his approach defers to the vista and keeps viewers close to the land. Both buildings will be made from an aggregate of white quartz, white sand, and white cement to blend them with the powdery salt all around. ("We would have made the thing from salt if we could have," Langue says.)



The pavilion's thin frame (above right)—the eight-inch front edge tapers to just three feet—requires reinforcement of the weakest points (above, in red).

Upon seeing the plan, officials raved. The pavilion won a People's Choice Award from the *Salt Lake Tribune* in 2006 and an Honor Award from the AIA's regional chapter last September. But government bureaucracies work in mysterious ways, and the pavilion's \$500,000 budget, originally earmarked by the Utah Department of Transportation for a 2007 ground-breaking, was shifted to other public works. Langue is hoping the money will return next year. If so, architecture fans will have a new rallying cry to take up: "When seat belts fail, Modernism makes you safe." —Cliff Kuang