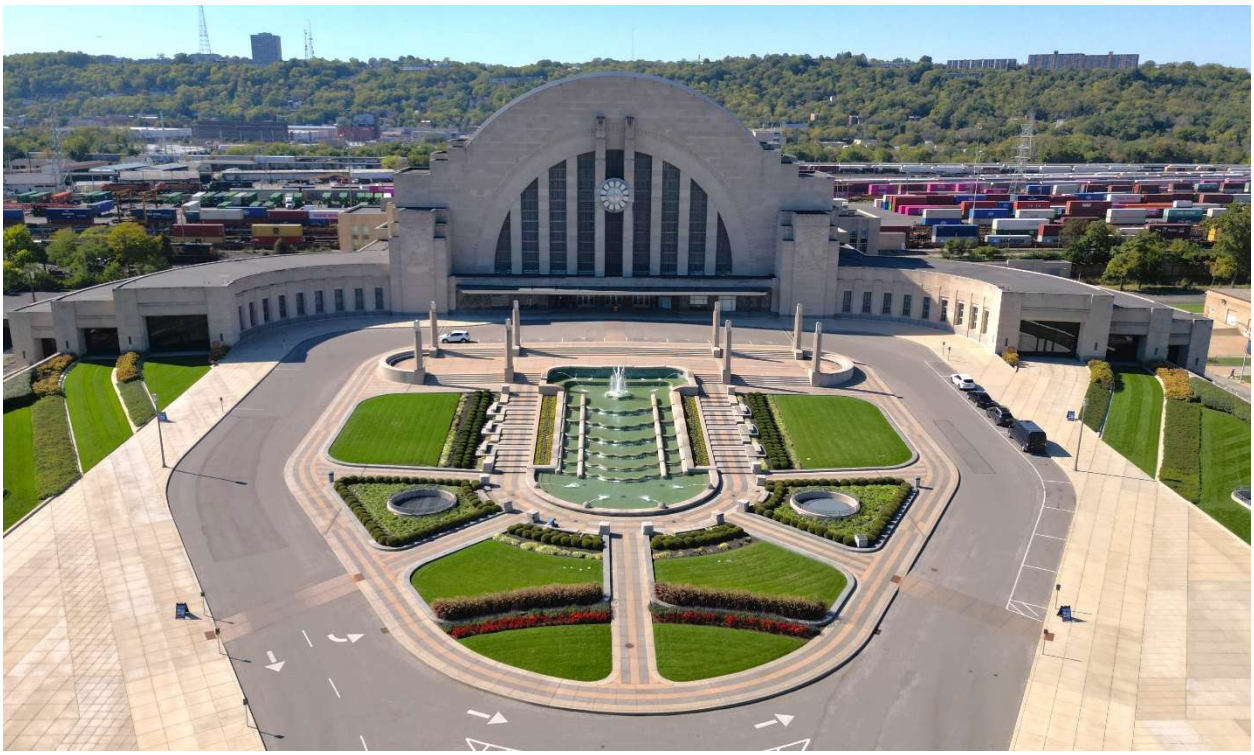
The Flyin' Solo VanLife on the Highways and Byways of North America
RICK'S ROADS
Ride Along and Enjoy the People, Places, and Who Knows What

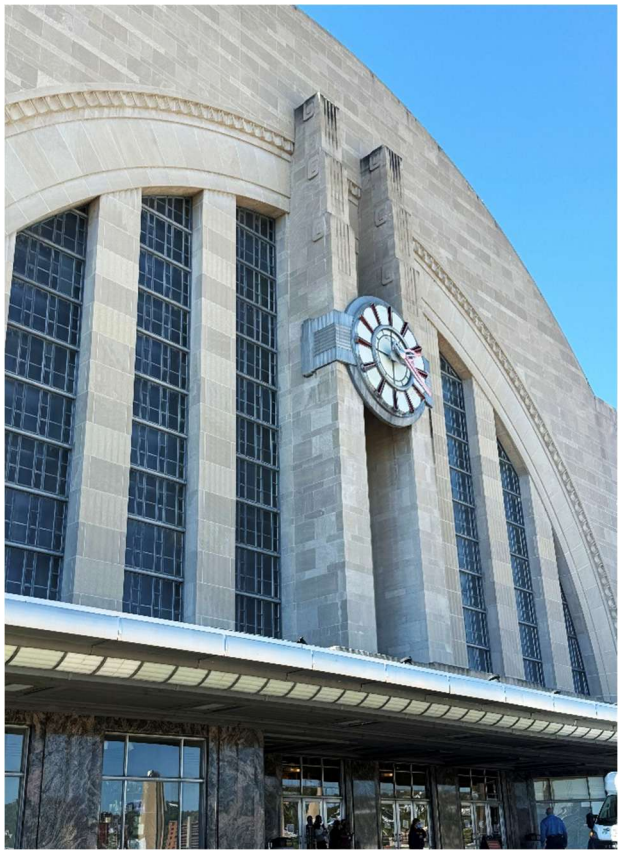
BLOG POST: 2025.10.14 &16
Cincinnati Union Terminal, Cincinnati, Ohio



This was actually a two-day visit, but they were not consecutive days. I came here on Monday 10/14 and reveled in the famous Art Deco exterior of Cincinnati Union Terminal. On Tuesday 10/15, I drove 107 miles south to Louisville and toured Churchill Downs. Then, on Wednesday 10/16, I drove 107 miles north to return to Cincinnati Union Terminal to revel in its famous Art Deco interior.

Odd schedule, yes? Well, I had a better plan, but I had to adjust it on the fly due to the notoriety of some Italian explorer/marauder.

Monday was Columbus Day (observed), so this municipal facility – an operational train station – was closed. The emptiness of the huge parking lots – notice Maxx's prime parking spot (the 4th in a line of 4 on the right side of the photo) – should have tipped me off, but I figured I had just gotten lucky and had arrived at a not-busy time.



Only after I pulled on several of the front doors did I realize I was locked out. This was not good since it was an online photo of the *interior* that had made me add this destination to my travel plan in the first place.

But I shrugged it off. The outside was entertaining me quite well, and I was happy that no people would be in my photos.

Cincinnati Union Terminal (CUT) was opened in 1933, after five years of construction.

During World War II, the terminal ran 24/7 and handled as many as 20,000 soldiers in a single day.

When train traffic declined, the station was used as a shopping mall, as a science center, and even sat vacant for long periods.

Several demolition proposals came up, but preservation efforts saved it. Amtrak revived some of its service there in 1991, and a $228 million renovation was completed in 2018.

Today, it houses the Cincinnati Museum Center and an Omnimax theater. It has even received designation as a National Historic Landmark.

The façade of CUT is 180 feet tall and 550 feet wide. The clock measures 18 feet across and weighs 10,000 pounds (5 tons).

In front, there is a terraced fountain about 120 feet long, surrounded by colorfully landscaped shrubs and flowers.



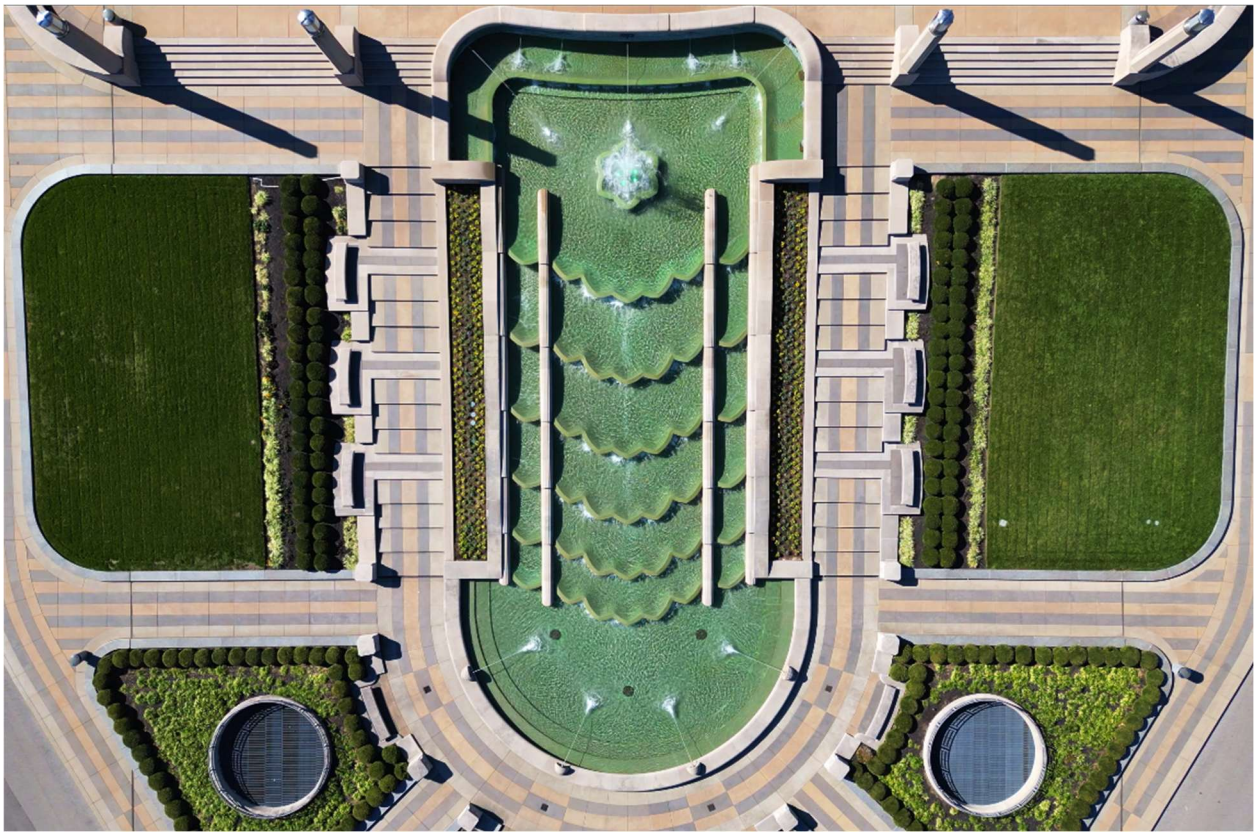






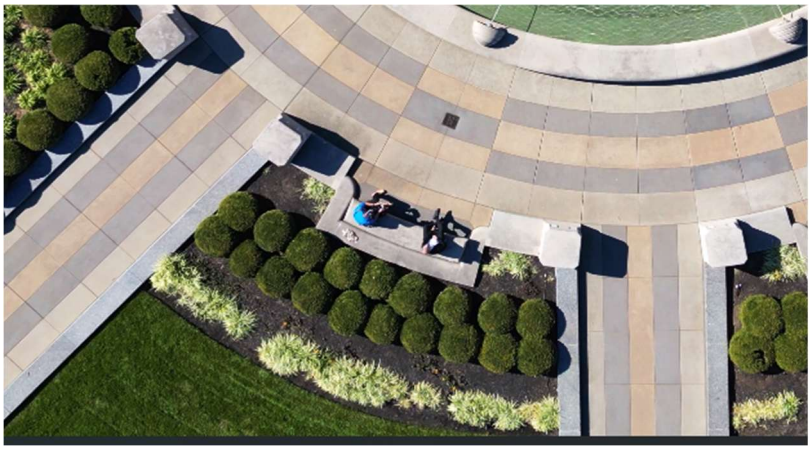
It all struck me as being really nice. And the day was really nice: bright sunshine and almost no wind. And no people were around. Hmmm, is that chirping noise I hear coming from inside my van?

Yes, I decided, the conditions were right for – and the subject was certainly worthy of – some Little Bird's eye view images.



Trouble was, this sentiment was not shared by the security personnel on duty. A tall, white-haired, uniformed man walked slowly but with purpose in my direction. He politely informed me that, as an active train station under certain security requirements, as well as a National Landmark protected federal strictures, drone operation was not allowed on premises.

He was polite, which made me more willing to politely comply. I told him I would summon my bird forthwith. Clearly relieved that there would be no debate about it, he sat down on the concrete bench with me to await LB's return (see photo, right).



We had a pleasant conversation about the terminal, the grounds, and the fountain. He informed me that today was actually the final day that the fountain would be on. Tomorrow, it would be shut off and battened down for the winter season. Just like in Pittsburgh, Columbus Day seemed to signal the onset of winter prep here.

He was caught a tad off guard when Little Bird suddenly hovered about 8 feet in front of him. He had not heard the motors at all. I decided to show off my skills a bit – partly to show that I was a capable (albeit illicit, in this case) pilot – and eased the drone over to within my arm's reach, lowered it to eye level, casually reached out and grasped its underside, and flipped it over to kill the motors without ever moving from my seat.

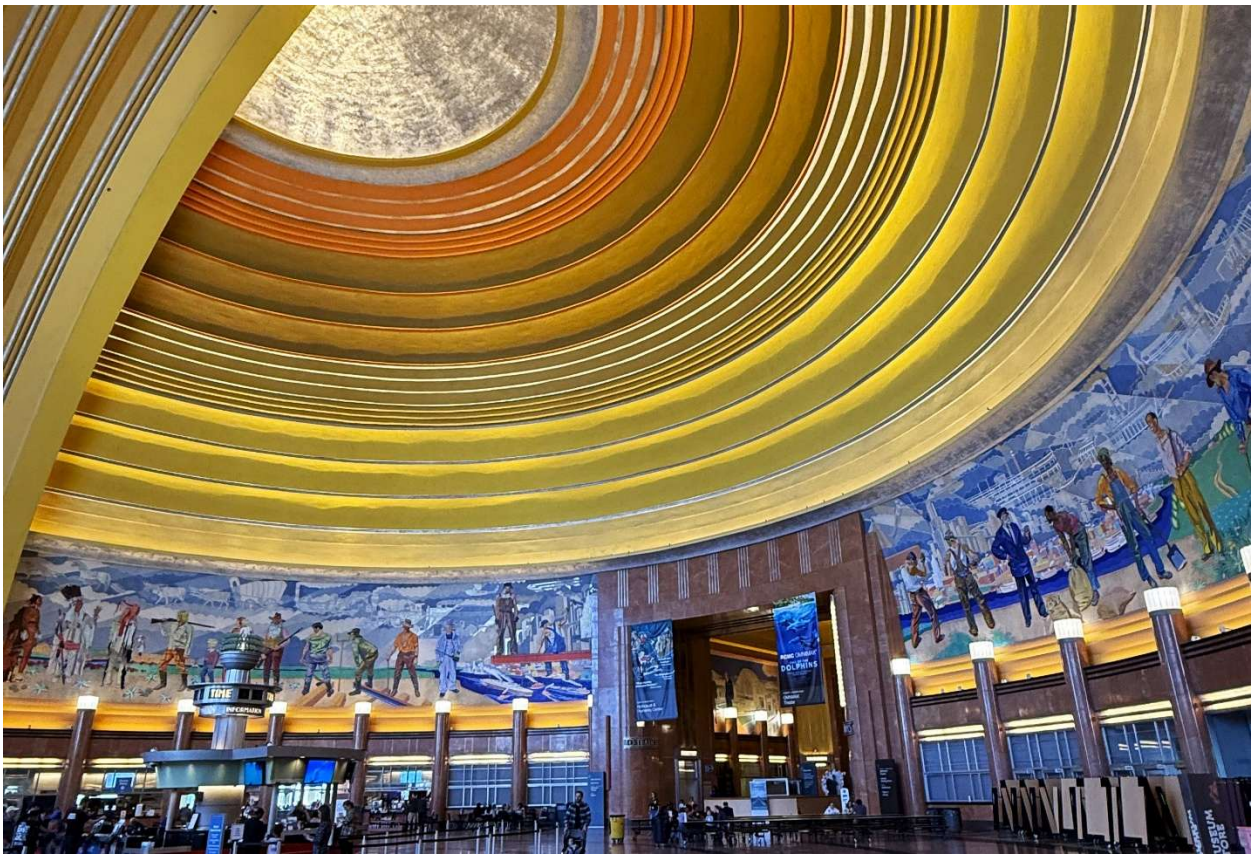
He nodded in approval and stood to move back indoors. I think he was digging the beautiful day, the view of the fountain and flora and the lack of people, just as I had been, but he had done his assigned task and had to get back to his boring inside duties.



I left Cincinnati figuring I was done with it. I had already made reservations for my Churchill Downs visit on Tuesday, and the plan right after that called for a southerly course to New Orleans.

But that online photo I had seen nagged at me. When Wednesday dawned sunny and beautiful, I flicked the Wing-It Switch and spun back northward. Less than two hours later, I was walking through the CUT doors that had denied me on Monday.

What I saw blew me away right away. It was a Whoooooaaa Moment. Colored swaths just swept upward, outward and across. My brain had to take a moment to get it all sorted.

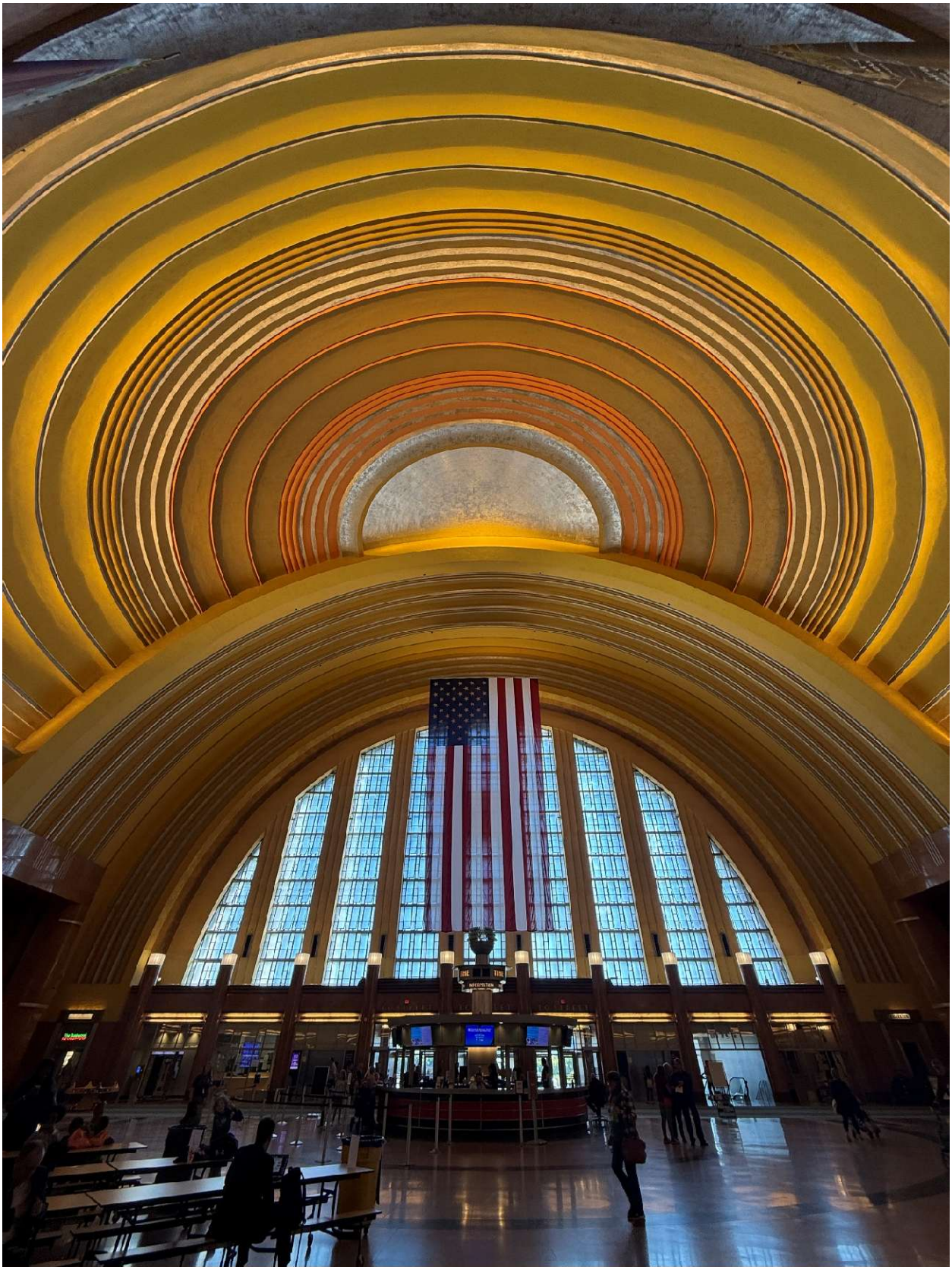


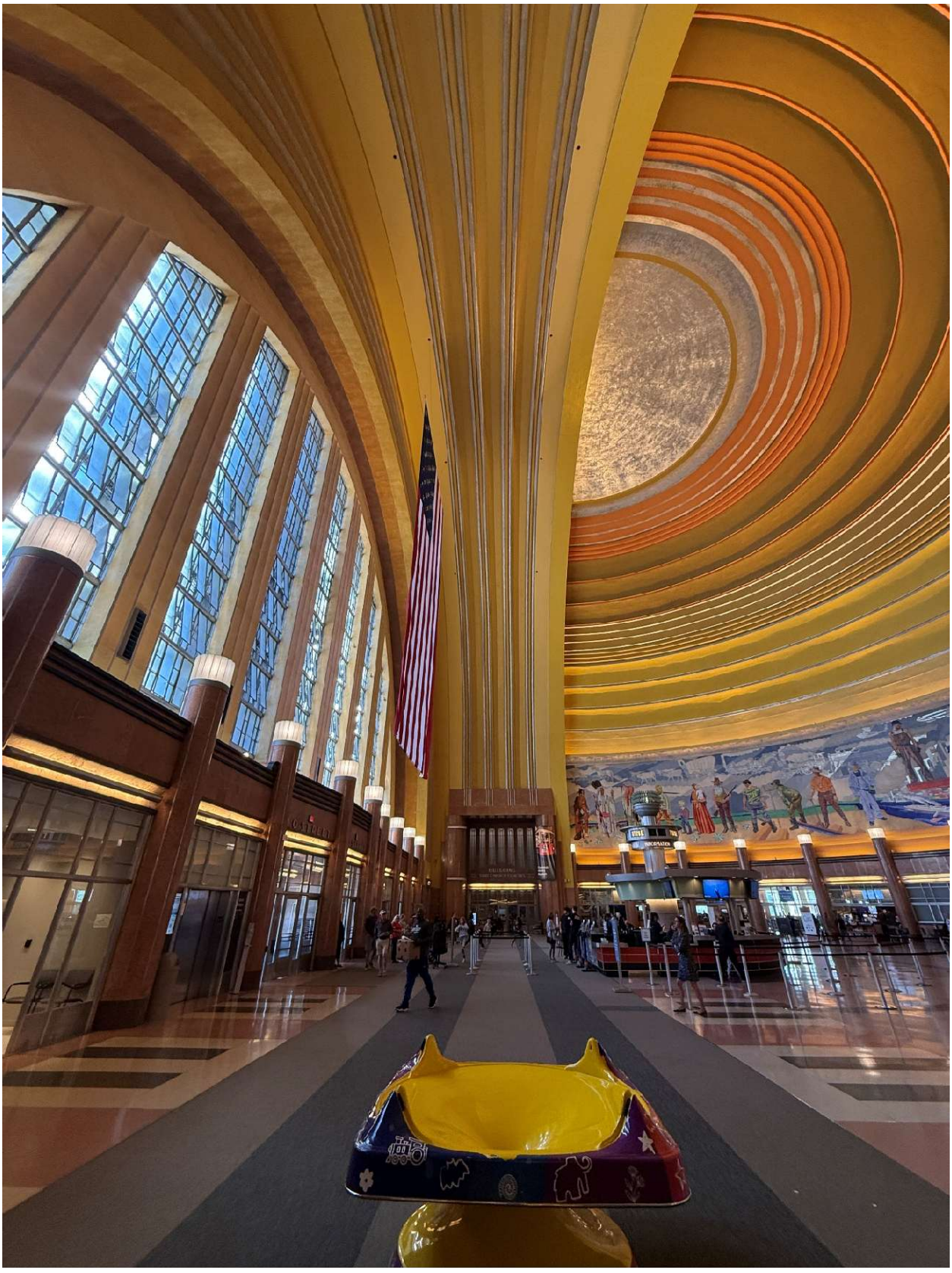
The curved side walls of the rotunda were covered with a huge glass murals depicting local history and various Cincinnati industries.

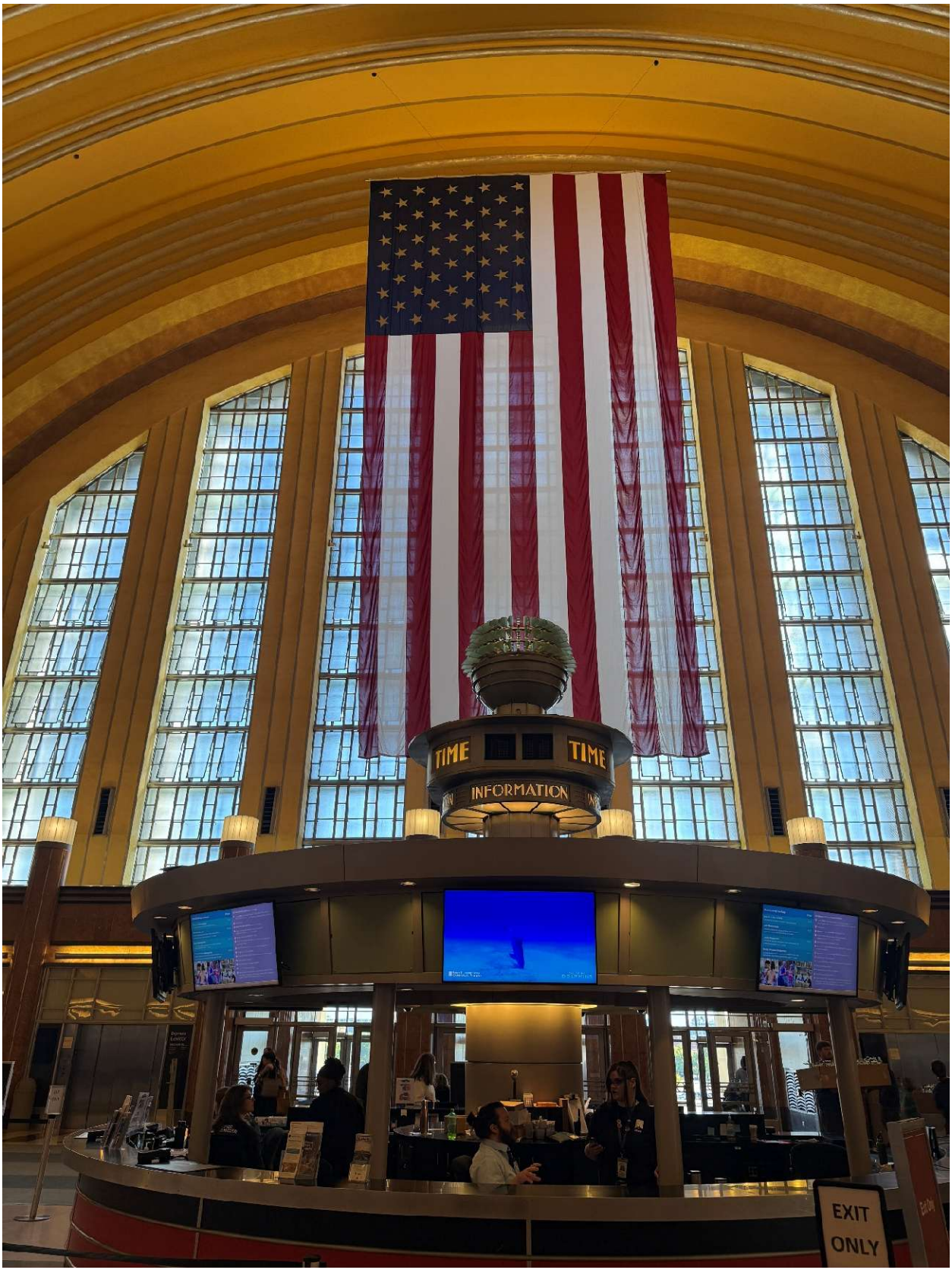
When built, this was the largest semi-dome in the world, rising 106 feet from floor to apex and spanning 180 feet in diameter. Each layer of the rising dome is lit from underneath. It was laid out to depict a brilliant sunrise. Recent upgrades to computer-controlled LED lighting have made it possible to change the colors to suit the occasion, such as red-white-and-blue for Independence Day.



Every fixture, furnishing and detail in here screams Art Deco, and it's like a Time Machine experience. It's easy to picture the hats, coats and shoes of the era rushing through here to catch their trains.

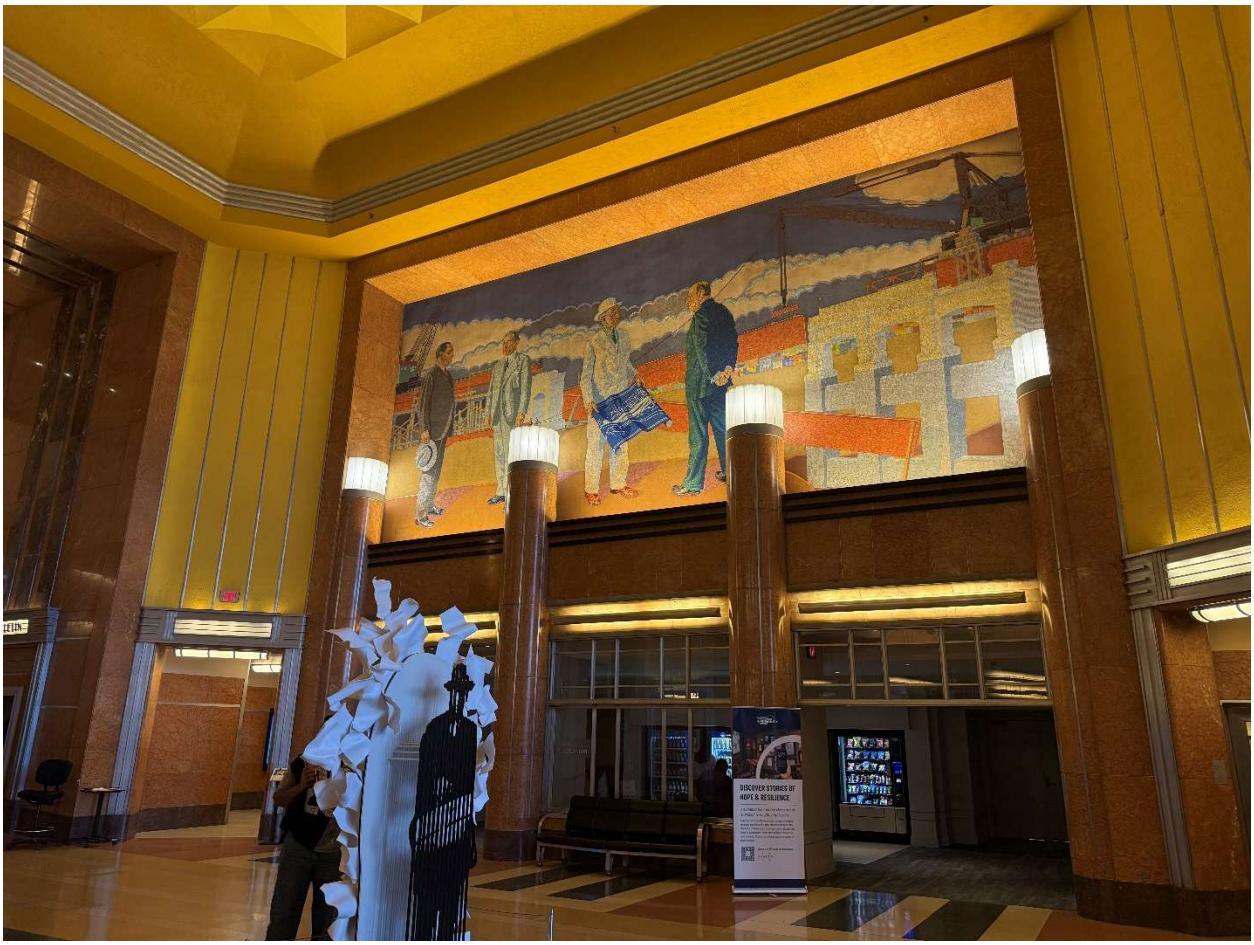





TIME
TIME
INFORMATION
EXIT
ONLY


OUTGOING
TAXIS & MOTOR COACHES
EXIT


TIME
TIME
INFORMATION
IMAX
CALL OF THE
DOLPHINS
Auschwitz





Since I was here, I decided to drop a few bucks and see “The Call of the Dolphins” in the Omnimax theater.

The underwater sequences looked amazing on that big arched screen, but there was bit too much laboratory stuff, and more time watching the crew make their preparations and study their computers, than I thought such a movie should have.

It was legit documentary footage, don’t get me wrong, but you go to see something in a theater like this, you want non-stop wows.

Anyway, I was very glad that I took the added 200-plus-mile detour to my route. The exterior of CUT was good, but the interior was outstanding.

I did not check out anything else in Cincinnati. Maybe next time….