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Why There's A Massive Geodesic Dome Off I-35

[DAWNYA BARTSCH](https://kansascitymag.com/author/dawnya-bartsch/)

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS MULLINS.

Looking like a massive alien head that should be hidden somewhere in Area 52, the classic geodesic dome on Lamar Road has been piquing the curiosity of passersby for thirty-four years.

Just off I-35 in Mission, the five-story, other-worldly structure was built by an architecture enthusiast and professional photographer in 1988. It originally housed his photography studio in the lower levels and living quarters on the top floors. Currently home to the aerial fitness studio [Learning2Fly < https://iamlearning2fly.com/>](https://iamlearning2fly.com/), the building has housed myriad businesses over the years, from a talent agency to a therapist's office.

Unknown to most, the first geodesic dome was designed and patented by German engineer Walther Bauersfeld in the early 1920s to house a planetarium projector. It was some thirty years later that American Buckminster Fuller, who is often erroneously given credit for the original design, coined the term “geodesic” and popularized the structure around the world by building structures like the Montreal Biosphere.

The dome on Lamar Road was built from a kit the owner, who is a very private person, ordered and then customized to fit his particular plot of land. Set back from the road and nestled into the side of a hill, the back half is purposefully submerged underground. Weight-bearing stress is evenly distributed throughout the structure, which is built with triangular shapes that fit together like a 3D puzzle, allowing for soaring ceilings and the ability to constantly reconfigure interior rooms if need be.

The first floor's voluminous space was originally used as a photography studio with one large, slightly curved wall, making it ideal for a large green screen. Years later, when aerial fitness guru, yogi and former female professional boxer Sumya Anani stumbled across it, she knew the vast interior—domes need no support walls—made it the perfect place to start her fitness business.

“I saw a big For Rent sign outside,” says Anani, a four-time world champ and Boxing Hall of Famer. “I didn’t think this building would work for me at all, but I was curious. I had always wondered what it was like inside.”



Dawnya Bartsch

Contributor Dawnya Bartsch writes about architecture and interior design. A California transplant, she’s a seasoned journalist and art history buff.

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