

# COMING IN FROM THE COLD WAR



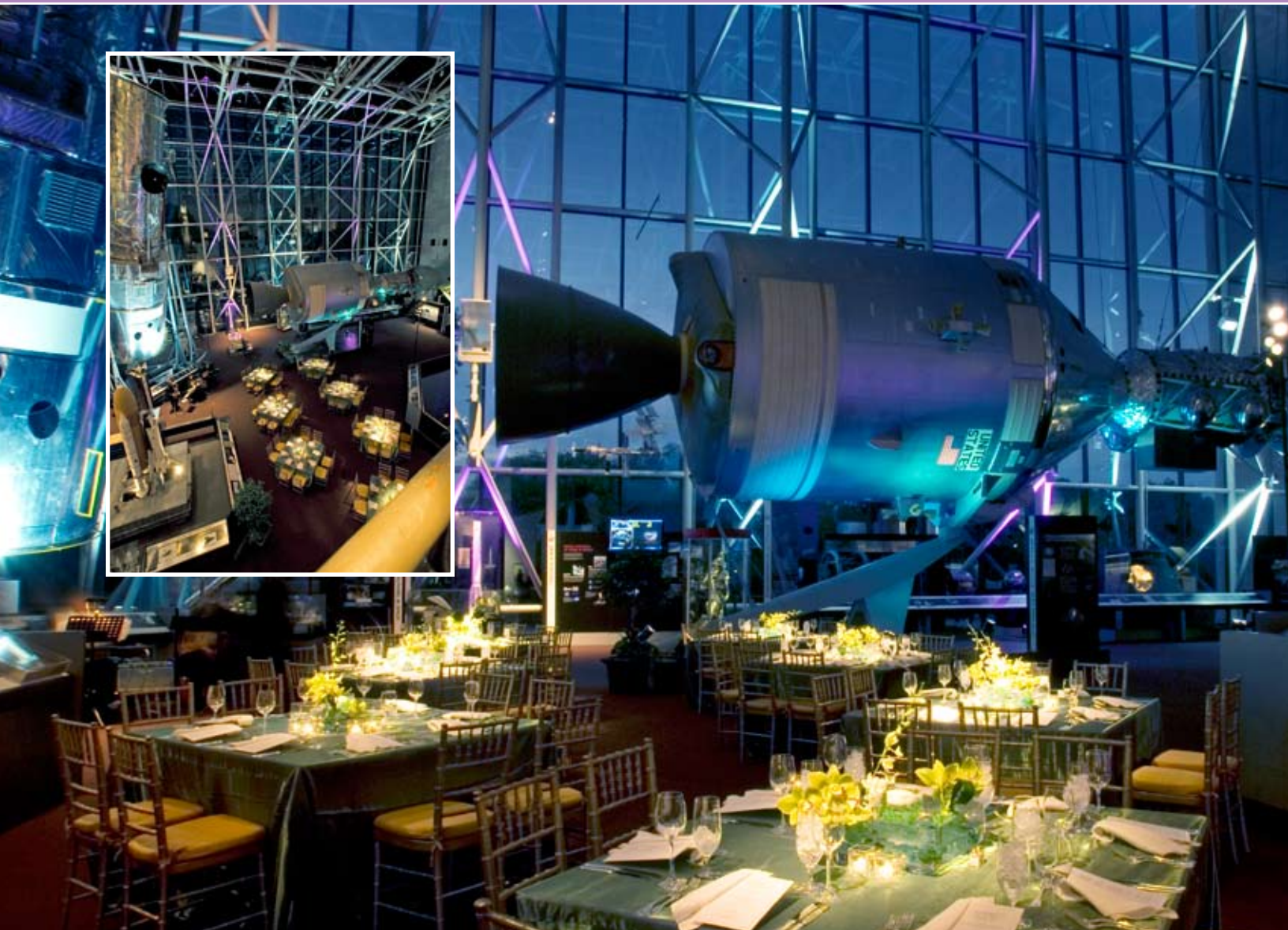
2008 ISES DC WINNER FOR BEST PLANNED EVENT

2008 ISES Winner for Best Planned Corporate Event-Coming in from the Cold War, held at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum. Dinner was served among missiles and space capsules and guests experienced a private tour with the museum's curator. All text excerpted from Special Events Magazine, June 2008.

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## COMING IN FROM THE COLD WAR—NATIONAL AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM



When BMC switched the destination of its corporate sales incentive trip from exotic Egypt to good old Washington, it was up to the event production company to keep the 80 guests from feeling slighted. CSI pitched an event that featured the new destination as “vibrant, creative, fun and anything but full of cold marble monuments that the guests hadn’t visited since the fifth grade,” Senior Operations Manager Kelley Gillespie says.

In its pitch, CSI relied on photos of existing venues to convey its vision. “The fun came when we decided to repackage our city’s typical offerings with a new, but very retro, twist,” Gillespie explains. The team used the Cold War as a narrative backdrop to the five-day October incentive plan by highlighting such landmarks as the Watergate break-in suite, the Russian Embassy (with professional actors describing scandals from the Cold War era), a cruise on the presidential yacht U.S.S. Sequoia and a party at the Smithsonian’s National Air and Space Museum.

**MIDDLE GROUND:** BMC selected CSI’s vision just six weeks before the event was scheduled, yet even within that brief production window, CSI wound up re-imagining the event three times to accommodate budget cuts. The team booked less expensive venues, canceled tours and golf outings, reformed menus and scaled down gifts to meet budget adjustments.

But the cuts provided at least one surprising opportunity. An original plan to hold a dinner at the Russian Embassy included two speakers: one a former CIA operative and another an official from the former Russian secret police and intelligence agency, the KGB. When the venue and speakers were scrapped, the National Air and Space Museum provided an outstanding substitute. The switch proved timely because the museum was in the midst of celebrating the 50th anniversary of the launch of Sputnik, the event that kicked off the legendary “Space Race.”