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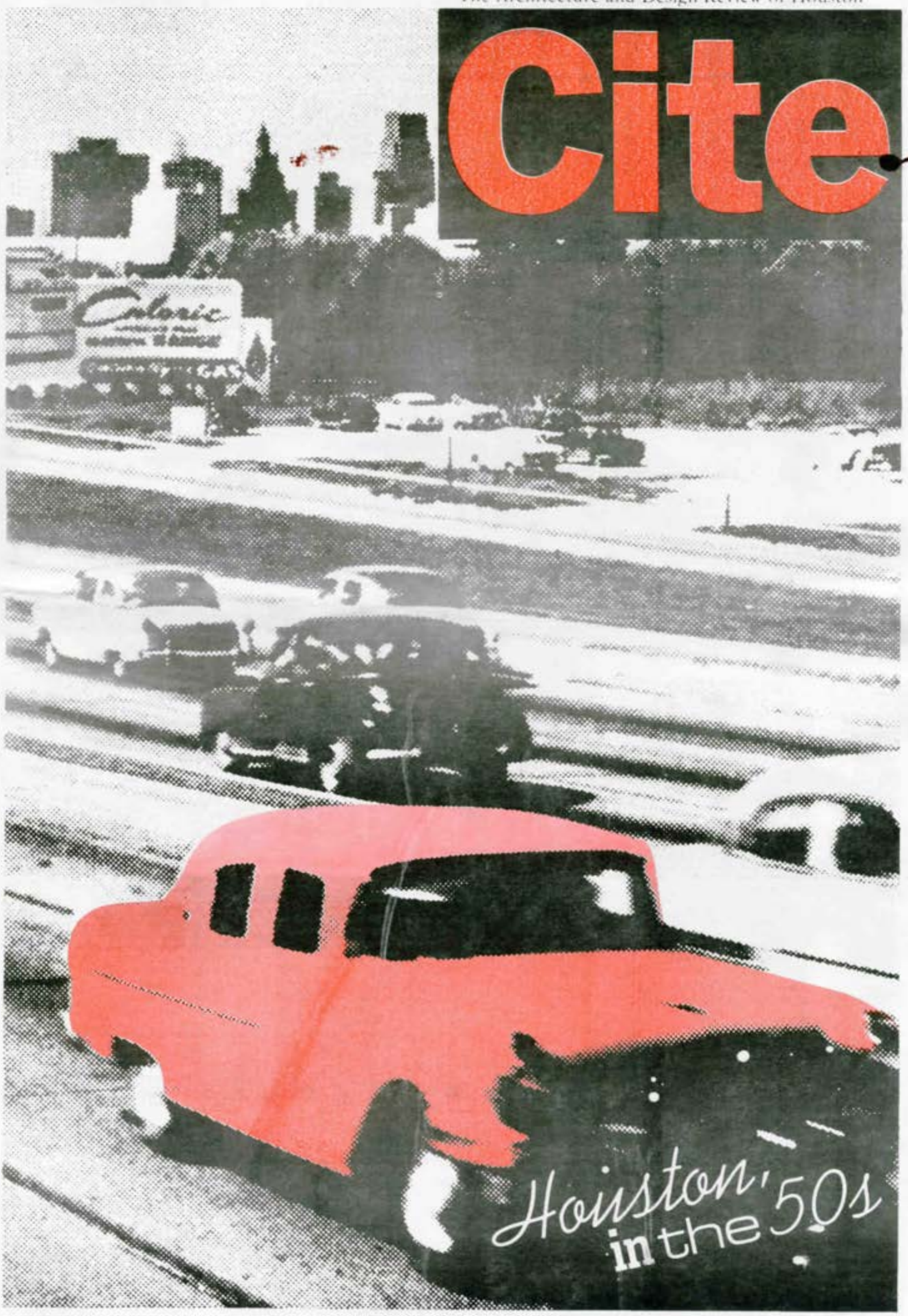

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InCite

Cover: *Gulf Freeway looking west toward the downtown skyline, 1956 (Houston Chamber of Commerce)*

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- Reduced price for all RDA programs
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- Invitations to members only program events
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- Receipt of the RDA publication, *Cite*
- Invitations to Farish Gallery openings

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- All of the benefits accorded Patron Members
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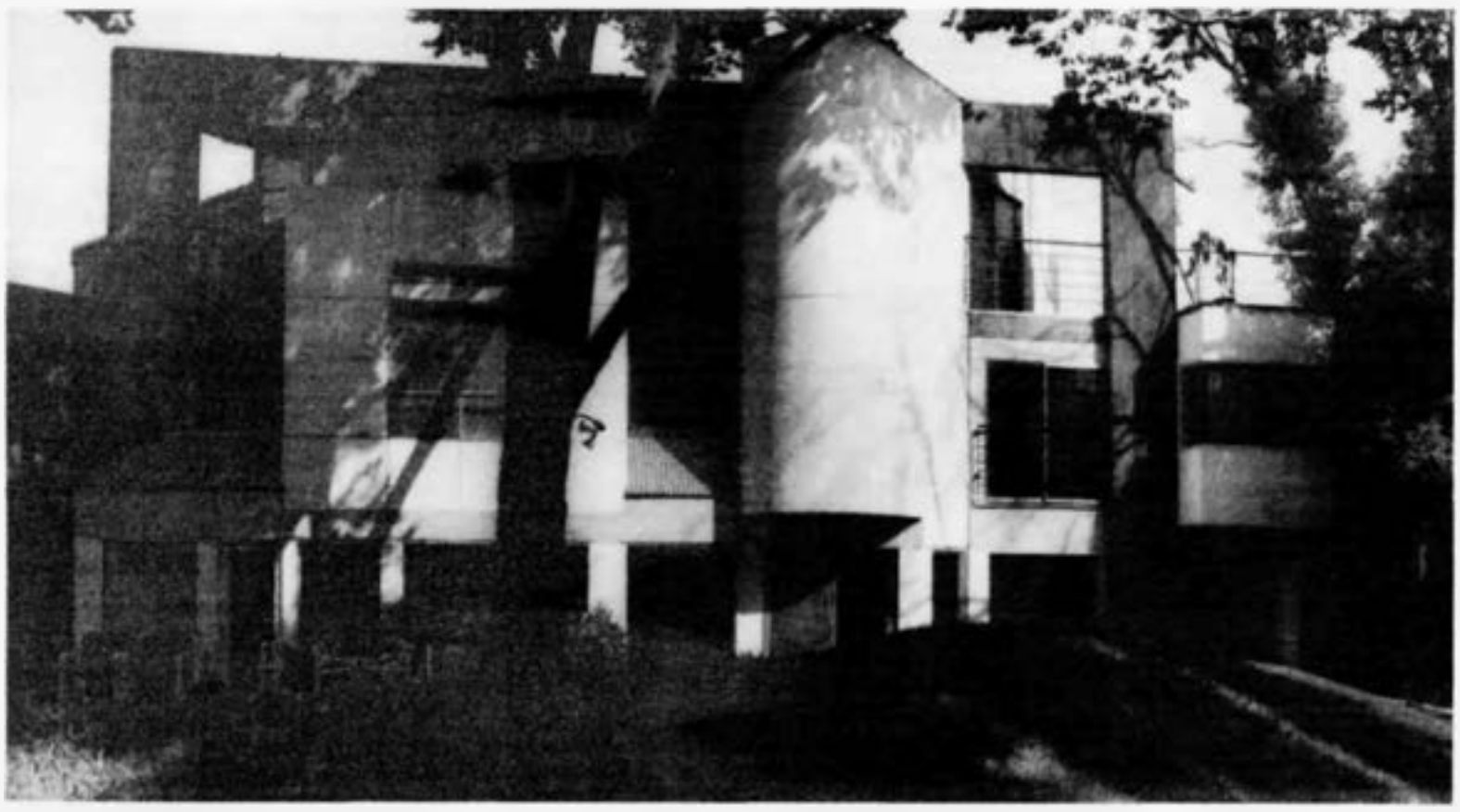
TWO IMAGINATIVE STRUCTURES FOR TODAY IN THE MONTROSE/MUSEUM AREA

Architect: W. Irving Phillips, Jr., AIA



An Exhilarating 1980's Contemporary Home plus a garden house—both focused on the pool and grounds

Three stories. Spacious entry, dining area and kitchen facing deck and pool. Second story living/entertaining area, study and bath. Third story master bedroom with shuttered overlook of living area; master bath and wardrobe closet. Connecting garden/guest house, one living area, kitchenette, bar and bath. Second story bedroom.

Fascinating design, harmonious use of space, materials and color.

$600,000

A Gracious 1920's Greek Revival Residence recently expanded and converted into fine professional offices

Three stories. Entrance hall, reception area, 3 offices, 3 conference rooms, projection room, 8 work areas, storage and equipment rooms, kitchenette, baths, rooftop deck.

Could be studios, gallery, educational facility, club, etc., or reverted to a fine residence.

$600,000

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CiteLines

RDA Programs Fall Into Line

The Rice Design Alliance begins its fall 1984 season with the first in a series of five public lectures called "Architects Speak for Themselves." Presented will be Frank Welch, Barbara Littenberg, Hugh Newell Jacobsen, and Daniel Solomon. These will occur on successive Wednesdays between 26 September and 24 October at 8 PM in the Brown Auditorium of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

On the last weekend in October RDA will stage its annual architectural tour. This year the subject is Executive Suites. Open to the public will be offices featuring the work of some of Houston's most noted interior designers. The tour will be on Saturday and Sunday, 27 and 28 October. A special reception will be held on Friday, 26 October.

The RDA Forum will present a public symposium on the issue of Allen Parkway Village. This is scheduled for Wednesday, 5 December, at 7 PM in the Brown Auditorium of The Museum of Fine Arts.

For ticket information and reservations for any of these events, call the Rice Design Alliance at 713/524-6297.

Upcoming Architectural Exhibitions

Rice University's Farish Gallery will present an assortment of architectural exhibitions this fall.

Opening the season on 29 August will be "Great Drawings from the Collection of the Royal Institute of British Architects," to run until 7 October. Organized by the Drawing Center and circulated by the American Federation of Arts, the exhibition will contain 82 drawings, ranging from the 15th century to the present. Included are works by Palladio, Inigo Jones, Wren, Robert Adam, Shaw, Lutyens, and Stirling. An introductory lecture is scheduled.

Following will be "Renzo Piano: Piece by Piece," to run from 15 October to 10 November. This exhibition, organized by the Italian Institute of Culture, will display Piano's work of the last 20 years. An introductory lecture by Renzo Piano and a guided tour of the Menil Collection Museum construction site will accompany the opening.

From 22 October to 4 November, photos of the winning entries from the 1984 Houston Chapter AIA Design Awards will be shown in the Jury Room, adjacent to the Farish Gallery. The Farish Gallery is located in Anderson Hall on the campus of Rice University. It is open from noon until 5 PM daily. For more information, call the School of Architecture at 713/527-8101.

AIA Octoberfest

This October the Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects will again stage its month-long Celebration of Architecture. Special media events focusing public attention on the city are planned. There will be free Brown Bag lectures on Fridays between 5 October and 2 November at noon at the Central Library on various architectural topics. There also will be a program of architectural tours, to include downtown, River Oaks, and notable Houston churches and synagogues. The culminating event will be the annual convention of the Texas Society of Architects, to run from 1-3 November. For information on any of these events call the Houston Chapter AIA at 713/520-8125.

Allen Parkway Village Charrette

On 6 and 7 April 1984 teams of students from Rice University, the University of Houston, and Texas A&M University gathered for a challenging one-day design charrette. The design problem was to save and rehabilitate Allen Parkway Village, a 1,000-unit, public-housing complex slated for demolition by the Houston Housing Authority. Organized by Dana Cuff, assistant professor of architecture at Rice, along with historian/critic Diane Ghirardo of Texas A&M, the politically provocative design exercise was intended to aid residents of the beleaguered project in fighting the city housing authority's plan to close the village and relocate its lower-income inhabitants in new housing (that stands little chance of being built) or in existing stock far from the Fourth Ward, the historic black neighborhood that adjoins the project. The charrette brought together an unlikely coalition of sponsors and interested parties, including professors from all three university architecture schools, members of the press, the Allen Parkway Village Residents Association, Fourth Ward political activists, the American Civil Liberties Union (which is representing the residents in a lawsuit against the city), and even the Houston Chapter of the AIA, which acted as cosponsor with the three schools. Houston's architectural community, normally complacent on issues of social concern, was given a brief display of heady activism.

The 12 teams of three to four students each were asked to produce designs for the open space and exteriors of the buildings in the complex. These had to demonstrate the viability of a low-cost renovation that would allow Allen Parkway Village to remain low-income housing, and thereby also protect the Fourth Ward from large-scale redevelopment. Faculty members from the participating schools acted as guest critics. The culmination of the Saturday charrette was an evening meeting in the Allen Parkway Village community auditorium and an evaluation of the student projects by a distinguished jury, consisting of Houston AIA president Tom McKittrick, Rice architecture dean O. Jack Mitchell, Allen Parkway Residents Association's Lenwood Johnson, and (most notably) Aldo Rossi. Rossi was impressed with the architecture of the village, calling for its preservation, and helped sway the jury in choosing two student projects which made minimal improvements in the site as winners. The two first-place teams, from Rice and the University of Houston, responded to the award in the spirit of the charrette by donating their small cash prizes to the Residents Association to aid their legal efforts.

In mid May the Houston Housing Authority, unswayed by the results of the exercise, made final its decision to demolish the project. With the approval of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the demolition and relocation plans will probably proceed within the year.

Proposed Historic District Faces Opposition

On 28 July 1984 the Board of Review of the Texas Historical Commission, meeting in Houston, unanimously voted to nominate the 43-block Freedmen's Town Historic District to the National Register of Historic Places. The proposal was sponsored by the Freedmen's Town Association, a community group headed by Gladys M. House, a resident of the Fourth Ward. The nomination faces opposition from property owners as well as the City of Houston's newly-renamed Department of Planning and Development. Department director Efraim García wanted a district of no more than 6 blocks, so that the city would not be impeded in clearing the remaining 90 blocks of the Fourth Ward, Houston's oldest black neighborhood, which lies just west of downtown and just south of Allen Parkway Village.

Acting on behalf of the property owners, the city proposes to offer the cleared land to a single developer for a mixed-use project that would include low-income housing only for the elderly. The remainder of the residents of the Fourth Ward, most of whom are renters, would be eligible for relocation assistance to other parts of the city. Because the city hopes to use Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) money to clear the area and install new infrastructure that is a prerequisite to redevelopment, it must justify to the Department of Housing and Urban Development its treatment of the area's historic resources. Nomination of the 43-block district to the National Register by the Board of Review provides official endorsement of the historic significance of the Fourth Ward, complicating the city's effort to secure federal funds to raze it. If listed, the Freedmen's Town Historic District will become Houston's fifth National Register historic district.

Self Portrait *by Richard J. Neutra, 1917 (Neutra Archive, UCLA, courtesy Blaffer Gallery)*

Neutra Show at Blaffer

Houston goes Modern again this fall with the opening of "The Architecture of Richard Neutra: From International Style to California Modern." The Museum of Modern Art's exhibition of the work of the Austrian-born Neutra will be shown at the University of Houston's Blaffer Gallery from 9 September to 4 November, concluding an international tour that began in New York then moved to Berlin, Vienna, Barcelona, and Los Angeles. Organized by Arthur Drexler, director of MOMA's Department of Architecture and Design, and Thomas S. Hines, professor of history at the University of California at Los Angeles and Neutra's biographer, the exhibition includes original drawings, photographs, memorabilia, and a spectacular model of Neutra's first, and most famous, building in the U.S., the Health House of 192[illegible]-1929.

As a complement to this acclaimed and comprehensive exhibition – reappraising both Neutra and the impact of European Modernism in America – the Blaffer Gallery will join with the University of Houston College of Architecture to present a series of public lectures scheduled for successive Tuesday evenings beginning 2 October in Dudley Hall at the Fine Arts Building on the university's central campus. Addressing various aspects of Modernism will be Marshall Berman, William Jordy, Stephanos Polyzoides, and Charles Gwathmey. For information on this series and other special events connected with the exhibition, contact the Blaffer Gallery at 713/749-1320.

Magnolia Lounge, Dallas (Photo by Peter C. Papademetriou)

Historic Preservation League to Restore Modern Landmark

Dallas's Historic Preservation League will contribute to the 1986 Texas Sesquicentennial by restoring an International Style landmark. This is the Magnolia Lounge, designed by the Swiss-born New York architect William Lescaze and built at Fair Park for the Texas Centennial Exposition of 1936. Restoration of the lounge, which was the first International Style building in Texas, will complement an $18 million project to rehabilitate Fair Park, sponsored by the Dallas Parks and Recreation Department. Site of the annual State Fair of Texas since 1887, the park was rebuilt in 1936 for the Centennial Exposition under the direction of Dallas architect George L. Dahl. Its severe, stripped-classical buildings comprise one of the major concentrations of modernistic architecture in the United States.

According to Virginia McAlester, a member of the league's board of directors, Lescaze was selected by the Magnolia Petroleum Company of Dallas to design its corporate pavilion — housing visitor orientation, restrooms, and child-care — on the recommendation of fashion arbiter Stanley Marcus. Mrs. McAlester reports that Dahl's design review committee made Lescaze tone down a preliminary scheme: it was *too* modern. Nonetheless, the building's place within the modernist canon was confirmed when Henry-Russell Hitchcock featured it in his 1936 Museum of Modern Art show on exposition architecture, along with pavilions by Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, and Gunnar Asplund. In 1947 theatrical entrepreneur Margo Jones opened her Theatre-in-the-Round in the Magnolia Lounge's 120-seat auditorium, producing during her first season there the world premiere of Tennessee Williams's *Summer and Smoke*.

Used intermittently for various purposes after the opening of Frank Lloyd Wright's Dallas Theater Center in 1959, the lounge is suffering the effects of long-term neglect. However, Dallas architects Thomas-Booziotis and Associates have estimated that the building can be restored for $450,000. The Historic Preservation League hopes to raise the funds to accomplish this by 1986, when the Magnolia Lounge will reopen for the Sesquicentennial as a multi-media center of Dallas history.

Big Cité Beat

☛ *En route to the dedication of the Transco Tower on 12 April, Philip Johnson stopped by the University of Houston to rip his design for the Ledoux-inspired College of Architecture Building. Crowned with a postmodern mitre, Johnson used his finger to open a slit in a giant rendering of the building, which he and John Burgee then ran through. The* ad-hoc *event was organized by UH Professor Burdette Keeland since Johnson could not attend the official groundbreaking by Governor Mark White and collaborating architect Eugene Aubry. Nervous UH officials discouraged media coverage of the unsanctioned event, which included a dig-in with "soft" shovels by Burgee, Johnson, Keeland, and architecture grad student Vicki Barrington, impersonating Mayor Kathy Whitmire.*

Philip Johnson and John Burgee rip Architecture Building as Burdette Keeland (left) applauds

☛ *What dire threat confronts Philadelphia's historic Center City? According to Philadelphia* Inquirer *architecture critic Thomas Hine, it is the "curse of Houstonism." This chilling possibility took form after two developers announced plans to construct office buildings higher than the statue of William Penn atop Philadelphia's City Hall. The tallest of these? A paddlin' 60 stories. Don't those boys in the City of Brotherly Love know that down here we grow 'em taller 'n that Outside the Loop?*

☛ *There are those who claim that the average Houstonian is not interested in the public life. Yet recent events would suggest otherwise. In fact two events suggest that Houstonians, like people everywhere, love to watch others as much as they want to be seen. This year over 50,000 people gathered on two successive nights at Miller Theatre in Hermann Park to watch the Houston Symphony's free Fourth of July concerts. The crowd was so large that it spilled well over the top of the grass-covered hill and stretched almost to the perimeter roads. To see so many people gathered so peacefully in a Houston public space was as warming as the weather they sat through. On the private side, Homart Development Corporation estimates that over 250,000 people per day strolled the interior streets of their new Deerbrook Mall (Charles Kober and Associates, architects), featuring Houston's first Macy's, the weekend of 20 July. The crowds were wall-to-wall and the feeling was akin to a Hong Kong street. Yet nobody seemed to mind. In fact, many seemed positively thrilled at the excitement of the urban life, albeit in a suburban mall.*

☛ *UT-Austin's Southwest Center for the Study of American Architecture will feature the work of Harwell Hamilton Harris in a major exhibition planned for the spring of 1985 by Visiting Scholar Lisa Germany. A gift from Austin architect David B. Barrow, Jr. has enabled the UT Architectural Drawing Collections to acquire Harris's papers and drawings, and the School of Architecture is raising funds to endow the Harwell Hamilton Harris Fellowship in Architecture. Best known for his California houses of the '30s and '40s, Harris was chairman of the School of Architecture at UT from 1951 to 1955. During his term there he added Colin Rowe, John Hejduk, Robert Slutzky, Marcus Whiffen, and Bernhard Hoesli to the school's faculty. Underwriting the exhibition is the Amon G. Carter Foundation of Fort Worth; Harris's biggest house in Texas was for foundation president Ruth Carter Stevenson.*

H. H. Harris and Lisa Germany (Photo by Debbe Sharp Focus)

(Photo by Paul Hester)

☛ *Arriving by executive helicopter, Michael Graves and Houston developer J.R. McConnell touched down at Galveston's Bob Smith Yacht Club on 24 July to announce McConnell's 15-year development plan for over 400 acres on the island's East Beach. Co-investor Graves will head the design review committee for what a hand-lettered banner hanging from the club's ceiling proclaimed "The Hilton Head, the La Jolla, the Carmel of the Southwest." Graves also is to design two condominium buildings and a club for East Beach. In addition he is architect for a set of townhouses that McConnell will build in Houston.*

Bold Strokes: The Making of the New Orleans Fair

Malcolm Heard, Jr.

Detail of Wonderwall (Photo by Malcolm Heard, Jr.)

The view from the Ferris wheel at dusk is spectacular: 178 feet tall, the wheel stands perpendicular to the end of the Wonderwall which rises toward it, becoming nearly half as high. Enormous alligators (made using Mardi Gras float technology), their reptilian skin missing at the torso to reveal their steel skeletons, climb along the Wonderwall's scaffolding. Their paws and tails drape over its thin facades, in apparent pursuit of several stylized pelicans. Below, William Turnbull's Cajun Walk ambles serenely along the edge of a lagoon. It is the Wonderwall's finest moment – a triumph.

The Wonderwall is the linear centerpiece of the Louisiana World Exposition of 1984, going on in New Orleans through 11 November. The Exposition occupies a site of over 80 acres along the banks of the Mississippi River, extending roughly from Poydras Street to the Greater Mississippi River Bridge. The site is splendid but difficult. Linear barriers – levee, flood wall, a band of railroad tracks to service the wharves – that keep the city of New Orleans surprisingly separated from its river cut the site in two lengthwise. Some two dozen existing structures from the city's reviving warehouse district fall within the fair's fences, adding flavor and boosting the renewal of the area, but introducing the uncertainties of renovation and preservation to the already staggering tasks of the architects.

The New Orleans architectural firm of Perez Associates acted as master planners and chief architects of the fair, leading a group of some three dozen architectural and engineering firms which together designed or renovated the fair's buildings. The Perez firm designed the New Orleans Convention Center that occupies 15 acres of the site and accommodates a host of exhibits and concessions for the fair, its first tenant. The Perez effort, with the active involvement of principal August Perez III, was headed by R. Allen Eskew. Dennis Brady and Charles Sanders worked directly with Eskew from the beginning of the project, some 40 months ago, and 40 members of the Perez firm were involved.

Perez Associates invited Charles W. Moore to participate in the design of the fair, repeating an arrangement that has worked amicably several times since Moore's first collaboration with the firm on the St. Joseph Fountain of the Piazza d'Italia. Ultimately as involved in the fair as Moore was William Turnbull, his former partner and frequent collaborator. At Moore's suggestion, Perez hired Arthur Anderson and Leonard Salvato, two young architects who moved to New Orleans to work specifically on Moore's parts of the fair. Between them this group of seven – Eskew, Brady, Sanders, Moore, Turnbull, Anderson, and Salvato – made a body of decisions that determined the fair's architectural character. To reduce the scheme to its broadest strokes, one senses the underlying visual and organizational ideas of Moore and Turnbull, with Eskew as editor, strategist, and tactician.

When you talk to people in New Orleans, expect food analogies. People here speak a great deal about what they eat. "Gumbo, not soufflé," says Allen Eskew, describing the creative process of making a fair. The idea is that the process and ingredients cannot be predicted, and the results cannot be precious. During the course of the design, the participation of corporations and nations was in constant flux; budgets changed; the main entrances danced from one side of the site to the other. In the face of all this, a site was needed that had constant elements independent of the changing program. What emerged was a long loop of circulation defined on the land side by the Wonderwall, marching the length of the site, and on the other side by two levels of walkways standing along the edge of the Mississippi River. Three sets of bridges and ramps – two growing out of Centennial Plaza near the City Gate, the other taking off from the artfully sloped and covered perambulations of the Cajun Walk near the Bridge Gate – climb across the railroad tracks and the flood wall to complete the loop at the opposite ends of the site. At either end of the Wonderwall are the gates: the City Gate opens to Poydras Street, the Central Business District, and the French Quarter; the Bridge Gate opens onto an expanse of parking beneath and beyond the Greater Mississippi River Bridge.

The Wonderwall itself is a construction of concrete slabs and columns stacked high with steel scaffolding. A set of thin-plaster wall elements – arches, pediments, and domes of all sorts – hang from the structure in many permutations of sequence. They are broken, stacked, layered, and penetrated in dozens of ways along the wall's half-mile length. The wall breaks rank occasionally for an intersecting axis or for one of sculptor Kent Bloomer's spreading aluminum trees which, abstract but intricate, give needed relief. The kit of parts is a rich one. There are places along the way where invention flags, where the melody becomes repetitive or the rendition sounds tinny. But overall the Wonderwall is a fine stroke, successful in its multiplicity of roles: container of shops, performance stages and oases; marker of half the fair's principal circulation route; distractor from South Front Street's scraggly double row of power lines; and most importantly, a single integrated piece of design, essentially independent of program, long and strong enough to give a formal armature to the irregular site.

There may be an analogy between the Wonderwall and the fair as a whole. Both work because they attain a requisite richness, because they pass beyond a certain point. Excess is necessity. Could the Wonderwall make do with fewer domes or alligators? Does the fair *need* its nightly fireworks display from a barge

Bold strokes: The Making of the New Orleans Fair

in the Mississippi? How much is enough? How little is too little? Can there be too much?

In the middle of the vast New Orleans Convention Center is a small concrete lagoon that is instructive to consider. Several fanciful "ships" float back and forth in it on straight, parallel tracks ("layered" paths one might say in the current jargon) designed so that the ship images can come together and pull apart in various ways. The ships themselves are of cunning design, quite varied in image and material. One is made of wood lattice, incorporating the shape of an elephant, and another is a handsome mass intended to suggest a floating magic mountain from which flow the rivers of the fair's theme. The lagoon and its ensemble are a vestige of an early idea of a stream that would flow the length of the site.

This lagoon sounds terrific, but visually it doesn't work; it is hard to say why. Being inside, the lagoon looks disturbingly artificial and lacks the play of natural light on its waters. Parts of the scheme were eliminated by budget cuts and time constraints. A minor failure amid outstanding successes, this lagoon deserves attention because it shows through the possibility of failure the imperative of going far enough, of attending to just enough details, and to attaining a critical mass of theatrical effects beyond which everything seems wonderful and without which things fall flat. The wonder, and the real design achievement of the fair, is that this incredibly demanding critical mass has been attained so much of the time. The Perez - Moore/Turnbull team has taken an admirably bold approach. To celebrate the fair's inherent vitality, but stop it short of chaos, they have not merely arranged a disparate set of exhibits, amusements, and concessions like so many ungainly flowers, they have instead actively intervened. The play they devised is not merely implicit; it is made explicit. A gate for this fair is not merely the absence of a wall; it is a built cartoon, a constructed vision imbued with wizardry sufficient to alter one's mood when passing through it. The fair's midway is not merely a wide path marked by the absence of buildings. The path, with a strong sense of paradox, is a wall that people can walk into and on either side of as they pursue the attractions of the fair. At the two opposite ends of the Wonderwall there are no idle formal plazas but real places where water, light, color, and structure appeal simultaneously to one's eyes and one's memory in making Centennial Plaza and Bayou Plaza.

At Centennial Plaza, just inside the fair's City Gate, there is no sign explaining that if you stand in the center of a certain aedicule you can look across a lagoon and see an elevation of the Main Hall of the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition held at Audubon Park in New Orleans in 1884. The effect is serene; the water of the lagoon separates the image of the pavilion from the visual confusion of its surroundings. Those who have read the official guidebook know the trick. "From a designated spot on the lagoon's edge, a set of seven modules in an astonishing architectural configuration appear as a single structure." From any other vantage they appear as interesting but fragmentary Second Empire forms suggested by piling up scaffolding on a concrete base, applying plywood facades, inserting herms and other statuary, and draping the interiors with shifting clouds of gauze. Some are small, some are large, depending on their distance from the viewing point. Although some are islands, they are connected to the shore and one can walk among them, exploring their quite different scales and the views framed by their arches. At the edge of the lagoon is a covered promenade known as the Empress's Walk. It is lined with benches and is a popular place to sit. One can sometimes see small barges in the lagoon, fanciful shapes of fish or sea monsters, elegant in detail, designed and built by Michael Crosby's students at the Tulane University School of Architecture.

Centennial Plaza, its buildings and lagoons, are principally the work of Charles Moore and Arthur Anderson. It was Moore's favorite piece of the fair to describe in napkin sketches to his friends. Anderson also coordinated the design of the City Gate nearby, which had its genesis in drawings by Duke Reiter and owes much to the sculptural work of the Barth family who design and build the most beautiful of New Orleans's Mardi Gras floats. One wished for a camera during the last stage of the gate's construction: workmen in the sun, looking like they came from a *National Geographic* pictorial on the quarries at Carrara, would finish carving a rusticated piece of the gate's wall and then toss it lightly to a helper — the "stones" are stacked blocks of Styrofoam.

An interesting comparison of Mardi Gras technologies and styles is available in the fair's two gates. In contrast to the Barth Brothers' monochrome subtlety (relatively speaking) at the City Gate, Blaine Kern erected next to the Bridge Gate a sensuously sprawling goddess, half submerged in water, and a towering Neptune astride a couple of rearing alligators. Kern's wildly polychrome figures dwarf the tourists forever being photographed next to them. The goddess's langourous hand, if alive, could grab you as if you were a Lilliputian. Far less interesting artistically than those of the Barths, Kern's figures are nevertheless more compelling presences. Their size, color, and vigor succeed at the fair's scale. They force their surroundings into subservience and threaten Leonard Salvato's nicely conceived gate structure with its pelican-shaped brackets and giant, rotating disco ball. Nearby, beyond the Cajun Walk, is Dennis Brady's Aquacade, clear and lively with its twin diving towers and mobile stage.

Across the tracks and along the river's edge, the upper and lower concourses of the International Pavilion (also by Dennis Brady) extend for some 1,200 feet. They house, warehouse-like, installations of the participating countries. Ships of different nations dock at the wharves and are open for visiting. Cable-suspended benches carry tourists back and forth overhead. There is a sense here, however, that something is missing. Properly addressed, the Mississippi River could certainly hold its own against the Wonderwall, which enlivens a similar linear stretch on the other side of the site. But the architecture never embraces the river, and a plan for a linear aqueduct structure by Duke Reiter was scrapped in a budget cut. Adequate but anonymous, the International Pavilion shows what the whole fair might have been without sufficient infusions of invention.

Among local skeptics (whose number was legion before the fair opened) a standard question was, "Why would anybody who doesn't have to come to New Orleans in the summer?" The question underestimates the city's charms and overlooks a thriving summer tourist business, but it does have a point borne out, perhaps, by smaller-than-expected crowds and attendant financial difficulties. Typical New Orleans weather defines the word "muggy," and summer rains, far from clearing the air, saturate it with heavy vapor. Fair designers have responded to this situation with intelligence, an awareness of history, and some invention. Spaced periodically outdoors are a series of oases, shaded outdoor rooms with places to sit, some with tables, some without. The most successful are Duke Reiter's square pavilions covered with several layers of hipped metal roofs, stacked and spaced to allow air flow between them. In the airy and cool space below, a swarm of ceiling fans assists the natural air flow around a central fountain. Shade, air flow, and moving water — the historical cooling devices for hot climates — still provide a gentle alternative to the shock of air-conditioning. Water, the fair's theme ("The World of Rivers: Fresh Water as a Source of Life"), is celebrated in numerous fountains and particularly in Herb Rosenthal's playful Water-

garden beside the Ferris wheel.

Capitalizing on the cooling effects of shade and air movement along the Mississippi River is one of several signal successes of the fair's amphitheater. Magnificently sited at the river's edge, it was initially designed by Frank Gehry of Los Angeles with Charles Sanders of Perez Associates. Gehry withdrew from the process rather early, and the structure as completed is largely the work of Sanders who also designed the clear,

straightforward monorail stations. The amphitheater is also direct, with a jagged, almost undesigned, esthetic in a lucid combination of structure, function, and form. One large roof slopes to the river, and a series of flap-like planes deals with the southern and western sun coming from behind the audience. Fifty-five hundred people can sit in radiating rows of seats with unobstructed views and a surprising sense of intimacy with the performers. To either side is a well-framed view of the river – Algiers Point to the north and the Greater Mississippi River Bridge to the south. The stage's backdrop itself can open to the river, allowing for performances from docked ships or dramatic entrances of performers by boat.

The extensive landscaping at the fair is all leased – every leaf, bloom, branch, and root. After 11 November it will be carted up and carried off by its suppliers. The plants are beginning to look at home, recovering from their initial surprise ("shock" is the horticultural term) at finding themselves literally uprooted and set down on some 80 treeless acres, as if palms were as portable as the aluminum fronds of Kent Bloomer's Wonderwall trees. In some ways, the palms have been treated very much the same as have their prefabricated counterparts; young Chinese fan palms sit atop metal columns in the Wonderwall to lift them as nature in time might have done with a trunk. Nature has been assisted in numerous other ways, not the least of them in the process of selection. Fast growing plants considered pests by some gardeners – kudzu vines and banana trees, for example – were sought out and planted by landscape architect Luis Guevara of Design Consortium in New Orleans. Morning glories grow happily and quickly up hardware cloth in places where a fast screen was needed. Moon vines are planted with them so that their nocturnal white flowers work the evening shift after the morning glories fade.

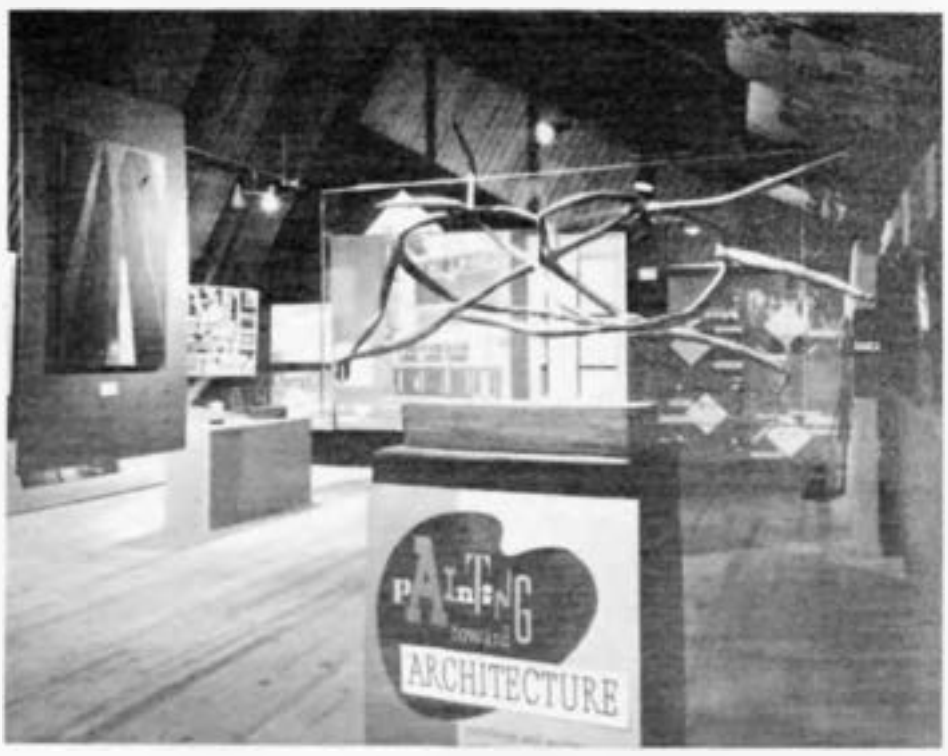
Guevara knows New Orleans plants. If the fair as a whole has worked to identify itself with the city's personality, the landscaping gives a special instance of the local connection. Notwithstanding the craziness of instant landscaping, something of the city outside the fair's gates creeps in with the mirliton vines on the Wonderwall.

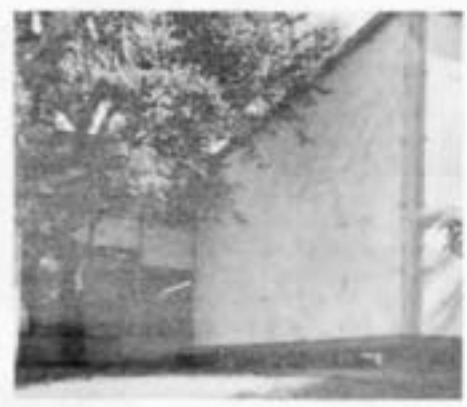
In the final days before the fair opened, Richard Peters was everywhere on the site, especially at night, concerned with the individual and collective effect of hundreds of thousands of light bulbs. He wore a hard hat studded with twinkle lights lit by a power pack, all made for him as a present by the lighting contractors. Friends could spot him, he reported, from as far away as the Greater Mississippi River Bridge. Former chairman of the Department of Architecture at Berkeley, Peters has designed the lighting for many projects in which Charles Moore has been involved, including the Piazza d'Italia fountain a few blocks from the fair. Lighting at the Piazza combines neon with glowing light from hidden sources, whereas lines and masses of tiny bulbs dominate the fair. The effect is much the same. In both places there is a pervasive softness of illumination that entices one to look closer at the objects lit. At night at the fair, one is surprised that such an effect can be carried off. One would expect the quiet sparkle of the Wonderwall, towers, and arches etched in light to be overwhelmed by the sideshows around and in it. In fact, Peters has orchestrated this lighting – all of it – so that the fair's inherent cacophony turns into something smooth and episodic, like Dixieland jazz. This orchestration, missing in the daytime, transforms the fair when dusk approaches. The fair is most beautiful in the evening.

Pavilions in the lagoon at Centennial Plaza (Photo by Malcolm Heard, Jr.).

The lighting is seductive, the planting is artful, and there are places to rest and cool off. There is lively architectural design and some sensitive renovation (Tony Styant-Browne's interior spaces at the Federal Fiber Mills Building, for example). Although a host of details have been carefully tended to, the 1984 Louisiana World Exposition is no exercise in total design. Exhibition design ranges from excellent to terrible. The Popeye's Fried Chicken stands are no less offensive at the fair than outside. The architects' strategy has not been to ponder every display case and design every concession; that was not possible. But with admirable energy and skill they have selected and built a few essential pieces – two gates, two plazas with lagoons, an amphitheater, the Wonderwall – that are strong enough and beautiful enough to dominate one's perception of the scene. Their accomplishment sings.■

The city that lies before us, for better or worse, one of the purest examples we have of a modern American city.





Clockwise from upper left corner: *Dominique de Menil and Philip Johnson, 1949 (Houston* Post*). Aerial view of Gulf Freeway looking east from St. Emanuel Street, 1950 (Houston Chamber of Commerce). Welder Hall, University of St. Thomas, 1959, Philip Johnson Associates, architects, Bolton and Barnstone, associate architects. View of Commons, altered (Photo by Alexandre Georges). Meyerland Company advertisement, 1958 (Houston Chamber of Commerce). Project: Montclair Shopping Center, 1950, Irving R. Klein and Associates and Victor D. Gruen and Associates, architects (Houston Chamber of Commerce). Texas Instruments Building, 1957, O'Neil Ford and Colley and Tamminaga, architects, altered; a modern office and industrial building built in the Buffalo Speedway corridor (Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library). Houston* grandes dames *gathered in a modern living room in the Pine Hill section of River Oaks, Wilson, Morris, Crain and Anderson, architects (Photo by Beadle, courtesy* House and Garden*). The Museum of Modern Art's "Painting Toward Architecture" exhibition on display at the Contemporary Arts Association museum, 1949 (Courtesy MacKie and Kamrath). Aerial view of downtown Houston, 1953 (Photo by Jack F. Laws).*

Peter C. Papademetriou

Houston, in the 50s

Going Modern in Houston

It might reasonably be said that *Giant* was the myth of Texas in the 1950s: a fascination with size, power, and optimism created through the advent of technological change. Bigness and a faith in new technologies permeated all facets of urban life. Houston's emergence as an industrial center of more than regional consequence, the founding of the Texas Medical Center as a tool of economic development, and the eventual location of the Manned Spacecraft Center outside Houston in the early 1960s symbolized the city's commitment to bigness and entrepreneurial adventurousness. A culture of energy consumption became the symbol of progress and newness, its media the technologies of petrochemical production, the evolution and expansion of an automobile-based urban form, suburban homes, air-conditioning, and a drive-in, dispersed service network.

In a pattern consistent since the late 19th century, Houston's urban form has grown geometrically in the past four decades, eclipsing that which came before it. Houston in 1940 reflected a way of life now radically altered. The assumptions and aspirations of the past few decades that have made this place what it is contrast to that which came before.

If one idea characterizes this period of time, it is the idea of "being modern." The city that lies before us is, for better or worse, one of the purest examples we have of a modern American city. Its forms, both at the macroscale of the urban fabric and the microscale of individual building types, exist as embodiments of a modern idea.

The freedom of expression inherent in the symbolic use of the modern style failed to produce a clear sense of a wholeness at the urban level.

Change also was manifested in social and demographic tensions. Legally enforced racial desegregation brought with it the redefinition of neighborhood structure. Houston's middle-class Jewish community redistributed itself from Riverside Terrace to the new Meyerland area, contributing to the development of the city's southwest section and, in turn, opening opportunities for middle-class blacks who could afford to leave the Third, Fourth, and Fifth wards. In the case of San Felipe Courts, built in 1942 in the Fourth Ward as public defense housing, the resident population expanded to fill what became Allen Parkway Village. Both changes reflected the increased presence of a black population in the city's landscape. However, reactionary elements mounted a strong stand during this period, particularly evident in the conduct of the Houston public school board and the zoning battles of 1948 and 1962. Suggestions of government intervention and socialistic tendencies took advantage of Cold War tensions in an inherently conservative political climate. Yet the militance and extremism of this conservatism were in part the product of rapid growth in an expansive, opportunistic area.

Modernism, therefore, was a badge of progressive liberalism in Houston in the 1950s. Its patrons devotedly nurtured its manifestations as an architectural style. Institutions took advantage of the progressive associations of modernism to assert the new-found prestige of newness: The nine-year-old University of St. Thomas had its campus built according to the designs of Philip Johnson and The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston sought to counteract its stuffy and parochial image by adding Mies van der Rohe's Cullinan Hall as well as appointing a progressive director in the person of James Johnson Sweeney. There were instances of private homes, in many cases reflecting the purist style of Mies van der Rohe and his followers, and occasionally such enclaves as Pine Hill in River Oaks (with houses by Hugo V. Neuhaus, Edward Durrell Stone, O'Neil Ford, and Wilson, Morris, Crain and Anderson) or Briar Hollow (with houses by Ford, Wilson, Morris, Crain and Anderson, as well as Bolton and Barnstone). However, modernism in the 1950s did not propose a coherent formal image addressing both ideas of urban fabric and a unity of formal expression between buildings that might evoke a sense of neighborhood identity. The freedom of expression inherent in the symbolic use of the modern style failed, in other words, to produce a clear sense of wholeness at the urban level. This contrasted with previous decades, particularly the 1910s and 1920s, in which a combination of Beaux-Arts classicism and City Beautiful planning concepts had defined distinct zones. The Museum of Fine Arts was one product of this, as were Hermann Park and South Main Street, with its rotary intersection at the foot of Montrose Boulevard and its tree-lined parkway esplanade.

In the 1980s we have learned that the radical changes and wholehearted assumptions behind those changes that made Houston a "modern" city are a double-edged sword – a double-edged sword that cuts both ways.

In contrast, the principle of "functionalism" produced no clear formal image as the City Beautiful gave way to the City Efficient. Beginning in 1940, Houston obtained a Department of City Planning as an agency of government. Its director, Ralph Ellifrit, attempted to rationalize suburban growth, providing standards for subdivision development and the location of schools, neighborhood parks, and bayou parkways. The principal medium for channeling growth was the Major Street and Thoroughfare Plan, adopted as public policy in 1942. By 1950 a pattern of efficient arterial streets began to appear, and, on top of these (literally), the first of Houston's freeways, the Gulf Freeway, begun in 1946 and completed in August 1952. Here, however, were not concepts of formal composition related to architectural groupings – the axial boulevards of previous generations – but a new geometry created by engineering, whose monumental scale, while redefining the face of the entire city, was unrelated to anything existing before.

The freeways were developed with public funds in support of private vehicles at a time when the Houston Transit Company remained in private hands. Advances in automobile technology enlarged the number of owners, enfranchising large segments, such as women. Such public policy mechanisms as Federal Housing Administration subsidies and an inherently anti-urban attitude encouraged the new scale of suburban subdivisions, ranging to Frank W. Sharp's Sharpstown which surpassed Levittown as the nation's largest subdivision when it opened in 1954. To serve this dispersed city such new types as suburban office buildings also appeared. Those by MacKie and Kamrath for Schlumberger, the Humble Research Center, and Farnsworth and Chambers or by O'Neil Ford and Richard S. Colley for Magcobar and Texas Instruments were significant examples. Also such shopping centers as Palms Center, the 60-acre Gulfgate, Meyerland Plaza, and Sharpstown Center followed in the wake of Victor Gruen and Irving R. Klein's unbuilt Montclair Center of 1950, the first air-conditioned shopping mall proposed in the United States. A series of annexations by Houston also transpired, the largest being in 1956 when incorporated limits were nearly doubled. This policy facilitated private development as new subdivisions came under the jurisdiction of city services, thereby relieving developers. At the same time, the mid 1950s also saw the first of separate incorporations in what eventually would become city limits: the "villages" of the Memorial area. Here was a clear reaction to the unpredictability of the new energy patterns: zoned communities maintaining a definite environmental character. Hunters Creek was the first in 1954, followed by Hilshire, Spring Valley, Hedwig, Bunker Hill, and Piney Point, all of which were surrounded by Houston annexation in 1957.

The image of a downtown – the central business district – also changed in this period, for there were few new significant additions to the skyline. Instead, decentralization diffused development, setting the stage for the Houston of the 1970s and 1980s. This would become the polynucleated urban network, a series of high-density centers spread at intervals across the landscape, created by distribution available through the emerging freeway system.

Architecture itself reflected the diffusion and spread that gradually became the image of today's Houston. Architectural form responded to postwar changes in the International Style: a reduced, physically and visually light vocabulary of great transparency whose dematerialized qualities echoed the elusiveness and amorphousness of the city developing all around.

During the 1950s, Houston emerged in a new form. Its optimistic, modern assumptions lie at the heart of the very issues that confront the city in the 1980s. Suburbanization as the substance of urbanity has raised the question of quality of life. The consumerism and abundant waste of mid 1950s technologies created inflation. The vagaries of modern architecture's postwar phases of expressive changes have accentuated the lack of coherence in the visual environment. In the 1980s, we have learned that the radical changes and wholehearted assumptions behind those changes that made Houston a "modern" city are a double-edged sword – a double-edged sword that cuts both ways.■

Houston, in the 50s

Mark A. Hewitt

Neoclassicism and Modern Architecture, Houston Style,

That an avant garde art journal, a conservative organ of the architectural profession, and a magazine for home-makers and interior decorators all took notice of this small movement in contemporary domestic architecture in a growing southwest city is significant.

Progressive corporate and public architecture in America, which in the few short years after the Second World War had effectively legitimized European Modernism as the only proper style, was by the middle 1950s beholden to a single influence. The shadow of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe over the decade of the '50s was so powerful it is still in evidence today. Arthur Drexler, writing in 1952, called Mies's pure, severe idiom "the most refined style of our day." Drexler found in the Farnsworth House (1950) "emotional overtones as insistent as the hum of a dynamo" and considered the Lake Shore Drive apartment towers in Chicago (1951) "the most formidable urban objects in the United States." Henry-Russell Hitchcock was less rapt, and cited a strong resurgence of influence from Frank Lloyd Wright as well as "the Gropiusites" and their Harvard progeny, but admitted that "the doctrine whose usual results are most surely recognizable and which at present is probably most widespread is that which the interpreters of Mies van der Rohe's thought and practice have provided."[1] It is fair to say that the progenitors of postmodernism — Robert Venturi, Philip Johnson, and Stanley Tigerman in particular — all owe a great debt to Mies's impact on American architecture in the 1950s, which provided a foil for the backlash of the mid '60s and '70s. Because they were bored with it, we're now bored with them.

If the *zeitgeist* of the decade that brought us television, Doris Day, and James Dean was really "Shake, Rattle and van der Rohe," as Peter Papademetriou has cleverly suggested, then we might reasonably expect to find evidence of a profound Miesian impact on the domestic environment of a quintessentially '50s city like Houston. The booming economy and the fortuitous immigration of several bright, talented, and ambitious young architects from the east did, of course, conspire to give this city what is now a distinguished collection of houses in the prevailing Miesian "neoclassical" mode. But just how "Miesian" were these houses? Did they really share the values of dynamic composition and "conspicuous space" present in so pristine a work of art as the Farnsworth House? And how pervasive was the influence of Houston's young *avant garde* on the domestic architecture of this important period in Houston's growth?

Colin Rowe was quick to distinguish between two strains of what he called "neoclassicism" in the 1950s.[2] His two essays on this subject, written in 1956 while he was teaching at the University of Texas, illustrated the work of Houston architects Preston M. Bolton and Howard Barnstone alongside that of John Johansen, Philip Johnson, and Eero Saarinen. According to Rowe, "the American followers of Mies subscribed to a shallow "Palladian" planning mode which emphasized the center in a static manner, and which used Miesian elements almost as window dressing Mies's own work, stemming from its revolutionary European origins in the 1920s, was dynamic, emphasizing the edges of the plan in peripheric spatial compositions. Moreover, it was abstractly conceived, and not bound to the rhetoric of Bauhaus problem-solving and "functional" planning. One can still marvel at the uncompromising integrity of Mies's work; both the extraordinarily elegant Farnsworth House and his domestic projects of the 1920s and '30s have an intensity and conciseness of expression that is truly classical in its philosophy. It is indeed a far cry from the work of most of his American followers in the 1950s.

Rowe's term "Palladian" was simply a convenient, if not very succinct, code word for any plan with a central block or bay framed by dependencies. Such a compositional type has a long history in American domestic architecture, dating back to the earliest colonial dog-trot and center-hall houses. It connoted static symmetry, and set Mies apart from young American architects like Bolton and Barnstone who were struggling to adapt his strikingly clear (and uncompromising) architectural idiom to an established building type: the suburban, American, single-family house. This was a problem which the *Baumeister* (the Farnsworth House notwithstanding) never really grappled with. Of the European masters practicing in this country, Richard Neutra and Marcel Breuer were the real leaders in what William Jordy has called the "domestication of modern" after the war.[3] Nevertheless, the attraction to Mies was pervasive, as the pages of *Arts and Architecture*, *Architectural Record*, and *Architectural Forum* attest. And Houston had more than its share of neophyte "neoclassicists."

Mute Walls, Garden Courts, and the Steel Frame

In 1949 a young Princetonian named Anderson Todd, fresh from the rigorous tutelage of Jean Labatut, came to teach architecture at the Rice Institute under its founding director, William Ward Watkin. In December of 1952 a little-noticed paragraph in *Texas Architect* announced that Preston Bolton had formed an architectural practice with Howard Barnstone, then teaching at the University of Houston. Burdette Keeland and William R. Jenkins, who began teaching at the University of Houston College of Architecture during the 1950s, also started architectural practices during this time. Meanwhile Hugo V. Neuhaus, scion of one of Houston's most influential families, had returned from an architectural education at Harvard's Bauhaus-oriented Graduate School of Design. In 1949 he began his own practice with C. Herbert Cowell, while his cousin, J. Victor Neuhaus III, teamed with the talented, Texas-educated Harwood Taylor in 1955. Before long, these young Houston architects began getting small commissions. Amidst the more conservative suburban developments and commercial centers of Houston one could find daring, if rare, examples of the new architecture.

Houston's first Miesian house, built in 1949-1950 for Dominique and John de Menil in Briarwood, might have come from the hand of the German master himself, had not the clients had reservations about the uncompromising severity of his work. Instead they chose his biographer and leading apologist, Philip Johnson, whose Glass House in New Canaan was then under construction.[4] However, rather than using the glass pavilion model, Johnson chose to adapt Mies's brick court house projects of the 1930s to the Menils' three-acre Houston lot. Mies's construction vocabulary was combined with planning notions which Johnson learned at Harvard under Gropius and Breuer, neatly encapsulating the program in separate wings. In what was to become a canonical solution to the problem of the private, suburban court house, Johnson screened the house from the street with brick walls framing "a single large opening, asymmetrically placed"[5] and turned the house inward around garden courts. Wall panels of brick and glass were carefully and minimally detailed, evoking the spirit of Mies if not his classical rigor or his spatial dynamism.

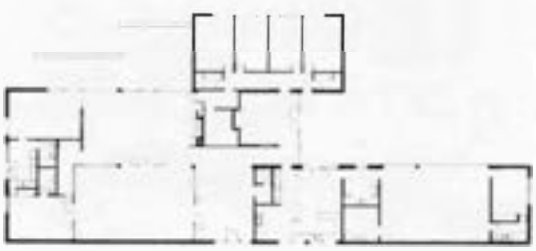
The Menil House brought the fashionable, progressive MOMA Modern style to Houston, and its impact on the younger generation of architects was tremendous. Led first by Johnson's influential collaborator, Hugo Neuhaus, who built a sprawling house for his family in River Oaks in 1951, the Miesian creed spread through the University of Houston faculty. Its most successful early proponents were Barnstone and Keeland, who by 1955-1956 had acquired a national reputation through publication of their modern houses, especially in the Los Angeles-based magazine, *Arts and Architecture*. Bolton and Barnstone's Gordon House (1954), which innovatively used the garage and a small entry court to screen the main two-story block of the house from the street, appeared on the cover of *Architectural Record's Record Homes of 1956*. Shortly before, *House and Garden* featured the Neuhaus residence in an article that confidently proclaimed "Texas Has Taste."[6]

(Continued on page 14)

Opposite page, left, from top to bottom: *Cook House, Friendswood, 1959, Bolton and Barnstone, architects, view of entrance front (Photo by Fred Winchell). Parade of Homes House, 1955, Burdette Keeland, Jr., architect (Photo by Hedrich-Blessing). Menil House, 1950, Philip Johnson Associates, architects, Cowell and Neuhaus, associate architects, view of entrance front (Photo by Paul Hester). Cullinan Hall, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1958, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, architect, Staub, Rather and Howze, associate architects, view of street front (Photo by Hedrich-Blessing).*

Opposite page, right, from top to bottom: *Gordon House, 1954, Bolton and Barnstone, architects, living room, Knoll Planning Unit, interior designers (Photo by Fred Winchell). Todd House, 1961, Anderson Todd, architect, view of entrance front (Photo by Paul Hester). Strake Hall and Jones Hall, University of St. Thomas, 1958, Philip Johnson Associates, architects, Bolton and Barnstone, associate architects, view of street elevations (Photo by Frank Lotz Miller). Menil House, floor plan.*

Or The Domestication of Mies



That an *avant garde* art journal, a conservative organ of the architectural profession, and a magazine for homemakers and interior decorators all took notice of this small movement in contemporary domestic architecture in a growing southwest city is significant. Houston's young modernists were designing houses which addressed the needs of middle-class American families, with their cars and manifold household machines (including, of course, the air-conditioner), their penchant for "outdoor living," and paradoxical demand for privacy, and, if upscale, their small collections of modern art and design (which *invariably* included two Barcelona chairs and a glass coffee table). Yet the vocabulary of these houses, which could be distinguished pieces of abstract "design," was self-consciously Miesian. Low brick walls facing the street with that ubiquitous single opening; small, enclosed garden courts off the main living and sleeping areas of the house; the familiar expression of the steel frame; interior elements like the storage divider or kitchen counters "floating" in the continuous space of living-entry-dining-kitchen-library-den (with those oh-so-carefully placed chairs, tables, and consoles) - these elements maintained the artistic authenticity, the genre of the court house, the connection to Mies. But ultimately that connection was superficial. Houston's modern houses of the 1950s were as close to Tanglewood as they were to Barcelona. The car, privacy, more casual patterns of living and entertaining - the things that *House and Garden* noticed - were as important as the things that *Arts and Architecture* noticed. With the zeal of a young revolutionary, Howard Barnstone could write in 1963: "The new expression, however, should certainly be that of the 'car in urban society.' Nobody faces up to it. Yet the car in just 50 years of existence has done more to change cities than anything in the previous 50 centuries."[7] The achievement of Barnstone and his contemporaries in Houston was the reconciliation of an established architectural idiom with the exigencies of emerging social patterns and technological advances. It is remarkable that they did precisely what they set out to do.

From New Canaan to Tanglewood and Back

The characteristics of the typical Houston court house, this hybrid of elements from chic New Canaan and mundane suburbia, can be seen in a comparison of several houses from the mid 1950s. Neuhaus and Taylor's Watson House (1955), Burdette Keeland's Parade of Homes House (1955), and Bolton and Barnstone's Blum House in Beaumont (1954) all appeared in several magazines of this period, and were seen as exemplary solutions to their particular design problems. Each was a relatively self-contained box - the Blum House a three-bay rectangle of roughly three-to-five proportions (a favorite Miesian plan configuration), the Watson House a series of spatial layers defined by walls and courts, and the Parade of Homes House a roughly three-to-five brick enclosure eroded by a square entry court. Each is neatly divided according to functional zones - it was typical for writers and architects of the time to correlate spaces with activities rather than room names: hence one might find "eating," "sleeping," "service," "living," and "playing" areas designated. At the center of this organization of hidden symmetries, a large, open living-eating zone might divide two zones of bedrooms, one for parents and one for children, as in the Blum House, or screen an entire range of bedrooms at the back of the site, as in the Watson House plan. Relationships between walled courts and living spaces could be less formal than those found in these houses, but the introversion and intensely private character of the court house was a given. Integration of the garage into these rigidly formal plans was a trick best mastered by Barnstone, who really did care about the car in ways that J.B. Jackson would have loved. In his finest houses of this period, the Gordon, Moustier (1955), Farfel (1956), and Cook (1959) houses, Barnstone experimented with various versions of what Jackson was to call "the family garage," which became a vital part of the kitchen-service wing of the house, and had its own entrance to the "mud room."[8] Though far more concisely ordered and carefully detailed than the better suburban builders' houses in Tanglewood or other new subdivisions, these residences solved similar problems in similar ways.

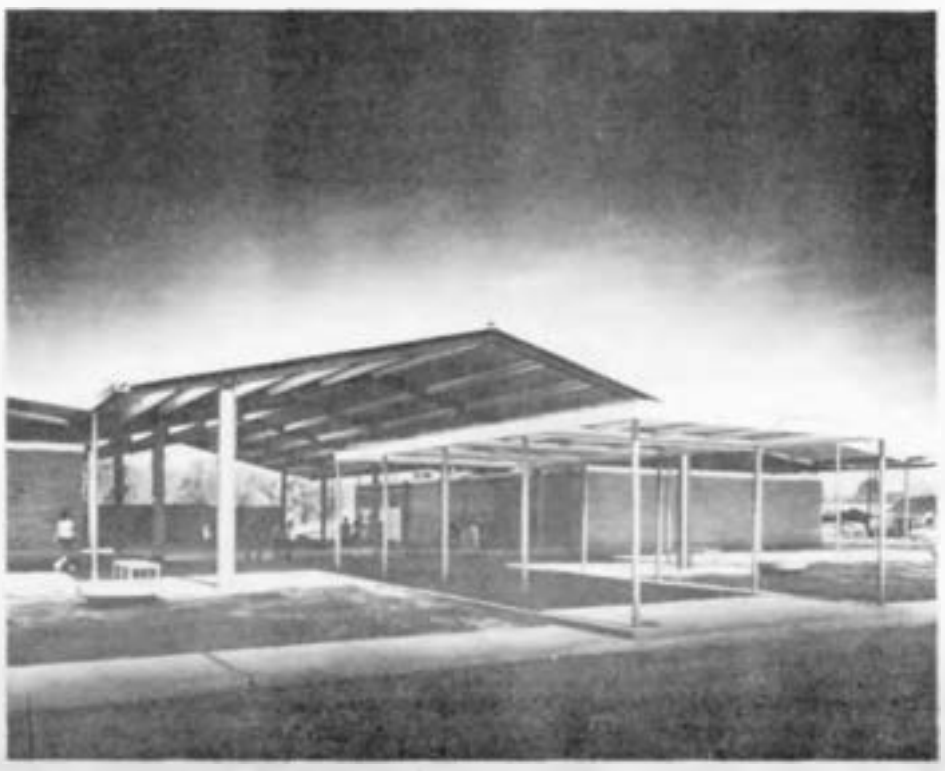
That these distinguished experiments in residential architecture did not supplant or even seriously compete with traditional (or "organic" modern) houses designed by more conservative architects is not surprising. The fatal flaw in the Miesian court house in any suburban American setting is its introversion, its complete absence of a public face to the street (often exacerbated by a hidden front door). Next to a row of upstanding, traditional houses on a street, most of these houses were literal affronts, and still seem so. Of course, the so-called modern house never caught on with the general public, even in the '50s, and was limited to those forward-thinking clients, like the eccentric Lovells of Los Angeles, or the cultivated Menils, whose way of life was as unique and daring as the architecture they supported and the art they collected.

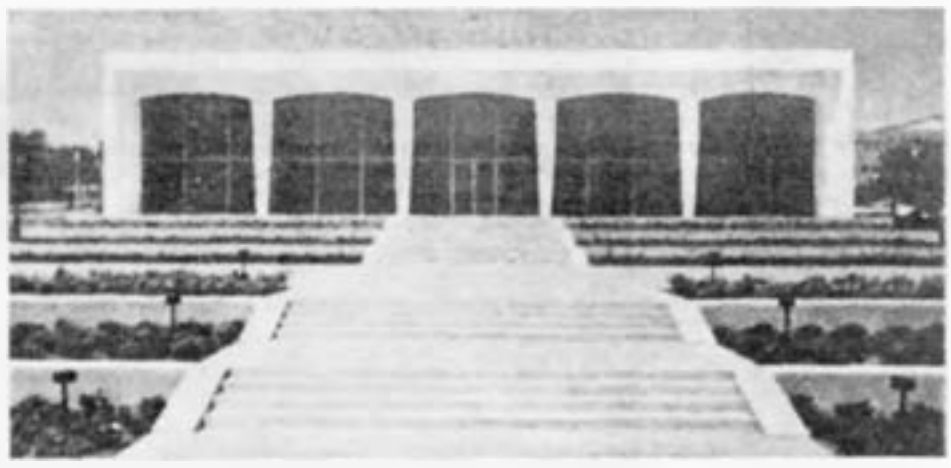
Postscript: Modern Goes Public in the '60s

In 1958 the decade of Mies in Houston was capped by the completion of both a superb building by the master himself and an excellent group of structures by his most influential pupil. Cullinan Hall at The Museum of Fine Arts and the first three buildings of Philip Johnson's University of St. Thomas campus showed Houston Miesian architecture at its best. But the taste of High Culture patrons was shifting by 1960, as were the predilections of architects. While Houston was to see another decade of "neoclassical" modernism in its public buildings, it was the architecture of Saarinen, Rudolph, and Kahn that lit up the architectural schools and the media.

Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, Kenneth Bentsen, and Wilson, Morris, Crain and Anderson employed a spare, corporate modern style in such public buildings as the Tenneco Building (1963), the Southwest Tower (1962), and the Bank of Houston (1966). But it was Anderson Todd, of Todd Tacket Lacy, who gave Houston its purest taste of Miesian neoclassicism in his own house of 1961 and in Fire Station No. 59 of 1968. Todd's work was augmented briefly by the designs of David Haid, one of Mies's project architects for the museum addition, who worked for a time in the office of Cowell and Neuhaus, producing several exceptional commercial and residential projects. In the buildings that Todd and Haid produced, the lack of formal and structural discipline, the weak symmetry, and false use of Miesian elements that Rowe had seen in much work of the 1950s gave way to a truer understanding of the principles behind Mies's architecture.

Howard Barnstone was prophetic when he wrote in 1963: "New thought always seems to come from young revolutionaries who are followed by a generation of Madision Avenuers who make cash out of the thoughts and hopes of the innovators... Our present giants are marketing contributions made by Mies, Neutra, and Kiesler when they were young."[9] No great new artistic ideas are found in the





Clockwise, from upper left: *San Jacinto Elementary School, Liberty, 1956, Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates, architects (Courtesy CRS/Caudill Rowlett Scott). Temple Emanu-El, Dallas, 1956, Howard R. Meyer and Max M. Sandfield, architects, William W. Wurster, consulting architect (photo by Ulric Meisel). Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, Fort Worth, 1961, Philip Johnson Associates, architects, Joseph R. Pelich, associate architect (Photo by George Cserna). Crossroads Restaurant, Arlington, 1957, O'Neil Ford and Richard S. Colley, architects, A.B. Swank and S.B. Zisman, associate architects.*

corpus of work described above. It might best be seen as an energetic experiment marked by individual works of considerable distinction, none of which can be classed with Cullinan Hall or the Farnsworth House. Both the triumphant glories and the tragic failures of the Miesian idiom belong finally to the inventor himself. His architectural idiom remains the most coherent, disciplined, refined, and "classic" of any produced during this tumultuous century.■

Opposite, clockwise from upper left: *Student Union Building, Trinity University, San Antonio, 1951. O'Neil Ford, Bartlett Cocke, and Harvey P. Smith, architects. William W. Wurster, consulting architect (Photo by Ulric Meisel). First Church of Christ, Scientist, Victoria, 1952, Milton A. Ryan, architect (Photo by Ulric Meisel). Flato Memorial Livestock Pavilion, Kingsville, 1959, Alan Y. Taniguchi, architect York House, Harlingen, 1954. Cocke, Bowman and York, architects (Photo by Ulric Meisel).*

Notes

I owe a great debt of gratitude to Stephen Fox, whose research, encouragement, and help made this article possible.

1 Preface by Philip Johnson, Introduction by Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Essay by Arthur Drexler, *Built in USA: Post War Architecture*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1952, 15, 20-37.
2 Colin Rowe, "Neoclassicism and Modern Architecture, I," *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1976, 120-138.
3 William Jordy, *American Buildings and Their Architects*, vol. 4, Garden City, Doubleday/Anchor, 1972, 165-219.
4 James Johnson Sweeney, "Collectors' Home", *Vogue*, vol. 147, 1 April 1966, 184-193.
5 Philip Johnson, *Mies van der Rohe*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1947, 96.
6 "Texas Has Taste: In Texas, An Air-Conditioned Villa," *House and Garden*, vol. 105, February 1954, 50-53.
7 Esther McCoy, "Young Architects in the United States: 1963," *Zodiac 13*, 1964, 186.
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. . . And in the Rest of Texas, Too

Stephen Fox

During the 1930s the spirit of the new pervaded the architectural scene in Texas, inspiring the design of buildings with a fresh sense of purpose and direction. By 1950 modern architecture in the U.S. gravitated between two poles, represented by Frank Lloyd Wright and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, both of whom acquired Texas followings concentrated largely in Houston. It was in the space between these two figures that a distinctive school of Texas modern architecture flourished. Its source, however, was neither the Chicago of Wright nor of Mies, but the California of Richard Neutra and William Wilson Wurster.

This school of Texas modernism – although it never was recognized as such – exhibited two formally distinct, but by no means antithetical, tendencies. Wurster and Neutra might conveniently serve as the eminences grises *for these dispositions if the influence of Cranbrook, especially as manifested in the work of Eliel and Eero Saarinen, also is taken into account.*

O'Neil Ford (1905-1982) of San Antonio and Howard R. Meyer (b. 1903) of Dallas were the foremost proponents of the Wurster contingent. Both collaborated with Wurster on important commissions: Ford as principal architect for the new campus of Trinity University in San Antonio (1949-1952, with Jerry Rogers, Bartlett Cocke, Harvey P. Smith, and S. B. Zisman) and Meyer as principal architect for Temple Emanu-El in Dallas (1956, with Max M. Sandfield). Richard S. Colley (1910-1983) of Corpus Christi and J. Herschel Fisher (b. 1914) of Dallas were also ranking members of this group.

The second contingent worked under the dispensation of Neutra, but not under his tutelage. In fact, it was Charles Eames's Case Study House of 1949 – Cranbrook translated to California – that summarized the ideals of this group. The West Columbia Elementary School in West Columbia (1951) by Donald Barthelme (b. 1907) of Houston, the First Church of Christ, Scientist in Victoria (1952) by Milton A. Ryan (b. 1904) of San Antonio, and the house (1954) that John G. York (1914-1980) of Harlingen designed for his own family were its Texas monuments. Thomas M. Price (b. 1916) of Galveston belonged to this group, as did many of the buildings produced by the Austin architects Fehr and Granger.

What differentiated these tendencies was the relative emphasis placed upon natural materials, on the one hand, and "new" industrially produced building components on the other hand, and the degree to which supporting structure was accorded conspicuous exposition.

Ford, Meyer, Colley, and Fisher did not fail to articulate their concrete structural ribbing and floor and roof slabs; Ford and Colley were the earliest architects to use the lift-slab method of concrete construction, first employed at Trinity. But in their public buildings, as well as in their residential work, wall planes of masonry were the dominant visual element.

The second group boldly displayed its constructivist icons: the insulated, modular, cement asbestos panel, the steel lally column, and the exposed steel bar joist. Doing the most with the least was exuberantly celebrated.

What unified these two tendencies was a consistent preference for simple, box-like building forms, roofed with flat (or perhaps shallowly pitched) planes. The scale was domestic and non-monumental. Symmetry was avoided. Buildings tended to be long and thin to ensure cross-ventilation. End-walls were treated as solid planes while windows and doors were integrated into horizontally aligned panel strips that spanned the long sides of the building. These faced north and south, with the roof plane and the end-walls pulled forward on the south side to protect openings from the sun and the rain. Where privacy was required, clerestory strips were slotted-in. Interiors were conceived as open lofts, to be subdivided by nonbearing partitions as required programmatically.

When possible, buildings of either disposition might be planted out, California style, with lush, romantic landscaping. This was frequently done by the leading modernist landscape architects of the day, Marie and Arthur T. Berger of Dallas, quite engagingly, for instance, in the house and studio designed for them by O'Neil Ford and Scott W. Lyons (1955).

The compatability of these two tendencies was best demonstrated in the work of a firm organized by three young instructors at Texas A&M University in 1948, Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates. Caudill, Rowlett and Scott specialized in what was the *building type of the 1950s, the suburban public school. Intensive programmatic analysis, coupled with ingenuity, led them to design schools that were scaled to their inhabitants, responsive to new directions in teaching, and made every effort to resist the sun and attract the breeze. CRS transmitted this spirited, small-scale aesthetic to the design of churches, office buildings, and – remarkably – the Brazos County Courthouse in Bryan (1956). Purposefully organized like a school campus, it was antimonumental, inviting, and modern.*

The growing interest in formal exploration, evident in the work of Eero Saarinen and Philip Johnson by the middle 1950s, was absorbed by the Texas school because it could be sanctioned as structurally determined. Folded plates and vaults of thin-shell concrete construction superseded the lally column and the bar joist as the tech icons of the late '50s. Although they inclined toward formal assertiveness, spatial particularity, and symmetrical composition, their appeal, and ready acceptance, lay in a combination of constructional economy and "advanced" technological prestige.

As early as 1951 Donald Barthelme had employed a thin-shell concrete canopy at West Columbia. Ford, Colley, and A. B. Swank, Jr., collaborating with the Spanish-Mexican engineer Félix Candela, designed hyperbolic paraboloid umbrellas to provide a structural-spatial leitmotiv *for the Crossroads Restaurant in Arlington (1957) and the Texas Instruments Semiconductor Building in Richardson (1958). Colley's Braselton House (1957) in Corpus Christi comprised a whole family of concrete sails, while Alan Y. Taniguchi (b. 1922) of Harlingen created instant highway landmarks with the rigorously conceived, rigidly economical, but visually scintillating roof forms of his Flato Memorial Livestock Pavilion in Kingsville (1959) and his House of Mo-Rose Packing Shed in Olmito (1960).*

Much more subversive was the erudite formalism that Philip Johnson essayed in designing the tense, spiky Amon Carter Museum of Western Art in Fort Worth (1961), where symmetry, frontality, and history all were engaged. Prophetic also of what Johnson described as a "neo-historicist" trend, if less aggressive, was Edward Durrell Stone's white-and-gold, solar-screened villa for Josephine Graf in Dallas (1957).

The Amon Carter Museum symbolized not just a renewal of interest in form per se, *but in the issues of monumentality, history, and culture. Johnson deployed formalism polemically to criticize suburbanism, antihistoricism, and the idolatry of technique. Faced with the basic challenge to its values that the Amon Carter Museum posed, Texas's modern school dissolved, the victim of an inability to articulate specific themes that could sustain a movement. O'Neil Ford tried, with the revival of his campaign on behalf of Regionalism in the early 1960s. While it was subscribed by small but influential segments of the profession in Dallas, Austin, San Antonio, and Midland, its appeal was largely sentimental. And its aim – to perpetuate the ethos of the '50s – was undercut by its proponents' inability to refrain from trying their hands at the fashionable new styles they routinely denounced.*

After 1960, ingenuity, innovation, and pragmatic experimentation were valued less and less. California was eclipsed as a model. Texas architects followed new trends emanating from Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. Some did so with skill, but most fell into the syndrome that Howard Barnstone has detected in the phenomenon he calls Out-of-Phase: the increasingly stale repetition of packaged formulas.■

Houston, in the 50s

John Kaliski

The Wright Stuff: Houston's Natural House

In an organic architecture the ground itself predetermines all features; the climate modifies them; available means limit them; function shapes them.[1]

A perusal of decorator and life-style magazines from the 1930s through the 1950s suggests that the obsessive focus of the American home shifted from the matriarchal all-electric kitchen to the paternal barbecue pit. This reorientation of the home reflects a nascent back-to-nature movement, yet more importantly, is related to a systematic quest carried on in the popular press for a natural American domestic order.

Somewhat simplistically, we now believe that the post-World War II family was not only buffeted by the mental anguish of war-related separations but also by the rigidity of corporate life in an homogenized mass-production society. Other neuroses were related to the new threat of nuclear holocaust and, worst of all, the belief in Communist infiltration and the inevitable destruction of the American way of life.

The casual yet natural house of the late 1940s through the early 1960s was an escape from the pressures of this new, unstable world. On another level, the organically styled house was a reaffirmation of the American pioneer spirit; a perennial attempt to get back to the land and define a personal backyard frontier. In countless houses throughout the rapidly spreading suburbs, Dad grilled sirloin, Mom and Sis washed dishes in the kitchen, and Davy Crockett, Jr. slashed away at spirits in the backyard fort.

While millions of Levitt-like Cape Cods, colonials, and gingerbreaded Cinderella cottages continued to be built across the country, a new, authentic American style — the "organic" — was defined not as "form follows function" but as "comfort and performance and beauty."[2] For every glass or "modern" house designed by a Mies van der Rohe, Marcel Breuer, Philip Johnson, or their followers, thousands of organic houses peppered the expanding landscape. By the end of the 1950s the organic style had reached a peak of fevered popular acceptance.

In Houston the look and feel of entire subdivisions and sections of the city were affected by the style. Such neighborhoods as Riverside Terrace and Timber Crest are filled with architect-designed, organically styled houses. North and South MacGregor Ways from MacGregor Park west to Hermann Park are, in parts, dominated by the post-war natural style. Even staid River Oaks boasts an organic-style oasis.

Large developers as well as builders were influenced by the organic. Many a house in Tanglewood or Sharpstown displays detailing that suggests an organic stylistic tradition that ultimately rests squarely on the works and writings of the 1930s and 1940s of Frank Lloyd Wright. In his Usonian houses of this period Wright developed the servantless, self-sufficient single-family house. This type of house emphasized the horizontal relation between the line of the horizon and the lines of the house. These houses made use of local materials and simple detailing. The automobile was accommodated in a carport, a word Wright claimed he invented. Family life was centered around a living-dining-kitchen-hearth space. This "work area" looked out onto the all-important backyard garden. In short, Wright played a crucial role in the development of the 1950s dream house.

Frank Lloyd Wright's ideas are to this day prolifically expressed throughout Houston in the built work of the firm of MacKie and Kamrath. Formed in 1937 by principals Frederick J. MacKie and Karl Kamrath, this office's early work was in a variety of eclectic styles. By the beginning of World War II the firm was beginning to experiment more frequently with Wrightian forms. This new direction in their work did not become permanent, however, until June 1946. At this point in time Kamrath, like many young architects before him, made the pilgrimage to Taliesin, Wright's home and studio school located near Spring Green, Wisconsin.

Kamrath felt encouraged to show the great master his Houston office's work in the organic style. The viewing solicited from Wright the following observation: "Karl, anybody that builds buildings ought to be here."[3] Though he regretted his ultimate decision not to stay at Taliesin to work directly with Wright, Kamrath did return to Houston inspired.

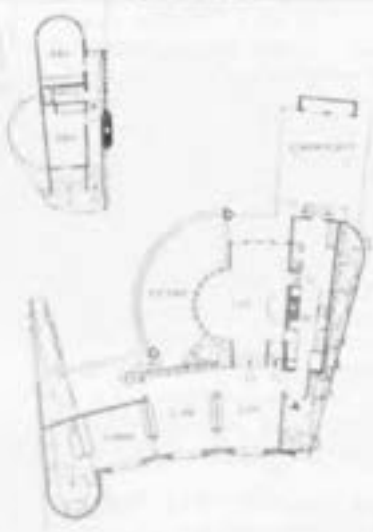
After this direct encounter with Wright, MacKie and Kamrath worked exclusively in the master's manner. This Houston firm became the city's most direct link to organic ideology for almost 20 years.

Residential buildings by MacKie and Kamrath are scattered throughout Houston. The most concentrated grouping of their organic houses of the 1950s can be found nestled into a corner of River Oaks on Tiel Way. Here, almost an entire neighborhood of their houses is hidden under an umbrella of trees. This firm designed six houses on Tiel Way and many of the other addresses on the street are heavily influenced by the MacKie and Kamrath work.

The first visual impression that marks the MacKie and Kamrath houses is the overwhelming horizontality of the masses. From the low garden walls that lead the eye up driveways, to the low-pitched and hipped roofs that stretch well beyond the brick or redwood siding, the design emphasis is always low and in the direction of the horizon. Often all that is presented to view from the street is a shadowed carport.

Entry to these houses is deep within cool shadows under overhangs or down paths mysteriously hidden from view. At 8 Tiel Way a squat, vertical mass contrasts with the dominant horizontality. Here the vertical mass encloses a great, central hearth around which the family gathers. For Wright the hearth was a seat of paternal authority. As Kamrath designed this house for himself, one suspects that the hearth was meant to serve the same purpose. The Wrightian detailing of the houses on Tiel Way even extends to the garden wall lamps. At 54 Tiel Way, Wright's signature red square becomes a simple lamp box which marks the corner of the house.

MacKie and Kamrath's largest and most meticulous organic house was begun in 1958, though was not completed until 1963. Yet this project was the culmination of years of design and construction going back to the turn of the decade. Designed for Houston oilman and Woodlands developer George Mitchell, his wife, and ten children, no expense was spared to create finely crafted exteriors and interiors.[4] To keep the scale of the 12,500-square-foot house from overwhelming its neighbors, not only was the roof line kept low, but the tennis court was sunk into the ground. Because ten children can quickly wear down linoleum floors running to and



Top left: *Durst House, Piney Point Village, 1958. Bruce Goff, architect, view of street front (Photo by Frank Lotz Miller).* Bottom left: *Durst House, floor plan.* Bottom center: *Durst House, detail of garden terrace (Photo by Frank Lotz Miller).* Far right: *Houston Lighting and Power Company advertisement, 1955 (Houston Chamber of Commerce).*

Opposite page, top left: *Townsend House, 1955, Wylie W. Vale, architect, view of street front (Photo by Paul Hester).* Bottom left: *Mitchell House, Piney Point Village, 1963, MacKie and Kamrath, architects, detail of street front (Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library).* Bottom center: *Proler House, 1948, Bailey A. Swenson, architect, view of street front (Photo by Paul Hester).* Top right: *Penguin Arms Apartments, 1950, Authur Moss, architect, view of street front (Photo by Paul Hester).* Bottom right: *Penguin Arms Apartments, view of interior (Photo by Paul Hester).*

The organic house was where Americans imagined themselves alone on the frontier, steeped in the Jeffersonian values of mythic American individuality.

from the refrigerator, the decision was made to use onyx floors as a durable substitute in the kitchen. Despite the huge scale of the house, only the dominant hipped roof of the house is visible from the street and even it seems to disappear into the surrounding heavy landscaping.

The plan of the Mitchell House is organized on a Wrightian diamond grid made up of joined equilateral triangles. Halls and galleries spin out from a 170-ton chimney wall. Galleries providing access to the four living and sleeping wings of the house stretch up to 300 feet into the wooded landscape. The exterior detailing of the Mitchell House makes broad use of regional materials, especially Texas stone. Inside, coved lighting with triangular incandescent fixtures and plaster ceilings stripped with thin wood slats more than ever appear to be a MacKie and Kamrath homage to Wright.

While MacKie and Kamrath were the closest imitators of Wright working in Houston, the organic style appealed to many other local architects. Some of these designers flirted only briefly with organic notions of design before moving on to other work for which they are better known today.

as his "Frank Lloyd Wright" house. The use of weathered wood siding and a low, hipped roof with overhangs is a departure from the usual aesthetic devices of this architect at this time.

Among the Houston architects better known for their organic work, Wylie W. Vale must be included. His 1955 Townsend House in River Oaks at 3723 Knollwood features a giant stone chimney which is only one of several rectangular wood-and-stone masses that overlap or intersect horizontal roof slabs. The master bathroom of this house featured turquoise mosaic that matched the opera-singing Mrs. Townsend's eyes.[6] Another local architect, David D. Red, designed his own home at 1802 Sunset in 1951. This house, formed of triangular elements in plan, has a prow-shaped room with strip windows that speed the movement of the eye in a horizontal direction around the corner site. A triangular shed roof precariously ties the one-story prow to a two-story bedroom wing. Originally this inclined surface boasted a grass surface - a literal organic roof.

Perhaps the most startling domestic organic structure in Houston is a multiple-unit apartment complex. Located at 2902 Revere Street, the Penguin Arms

box with secondary volumes.

The primary components of Swenson's compositions are mainfest in the design of the Proler House of 1948 at 4216 Fernwood. There, a long brick wing races to the west yet is anchored to its corner site by a slightly rotated, two-story, boxy wing. The rotated angle of this box acknowledges the intersection of two streets. Where the two main pieces of the composition intersect, the slab roof of the western wing cuts across a vertical slab of plate glass at the corner of the box and demarcates the entrance.

In Swenson's Daniel House of 1950 at 4505 North Roseneath, vertical and horizontal strip windows are placed at the corners of a cubical two-story pavilion beneath a low-pitched roof. The resulting box visually disintegrates and at the same time appears to split the long hipped roof of the brick, one-story wing.

Swenson's architecture during this period is not just an undisciplined, formal, compositional exercise. It is an attempt to resolve two types of architecture: the organic, which demanded fealty to a vision of the horizon, and the International, which reveled in the manipulation of the box. Swenson worked with both ideas at the same time. The work

auto-court and possibly the largest domestic carport in Houston are accentuated by wonderfully perverse upward-turning roof eaves. Springing up from the brick walls like 1950s tail fins, these eaves and the planning of the house seem inspired by an infatuation with the automobile. Both as potent symbol of suburban freedom and as prime generator of the plan, the automobile is crucial to an understanding of Dow's design.

Like the Reed House, the Lyne House of 1957 at 3605 Meriburr uses the automobile as a prime design consideration. This house, designed by Herb Greene after an apprenticeship with Oklahoma architect Bruce Goff, also features a remarkable carport as an introduction to the rest of the house. Terminating a short gravel drive, the carport sweeps like a giant bird wing to form a huge entrance overhang. The (originally) self-supporting hyperbolic form of the carport then melds into the roof, which covers a triangular floor plan. Like a giant, but lopsided, mushroom the house hovers over the forest floor.

One of America's most original architects, Bruce Goff (see *Cite*, Spring 1983, "Autobiography in the Continuous Present; An Interview with Bruce Goff," page 7) designed one house in Houston, the

John F. Staub, Houston's most famous eclectic architect, was not averse to experimenting with a watered-down organic modernism. The Fay House of 1950 in Kemah, Texas, and the Sacks House of the same year (now surrounded by the corporate office park of Riverway) are low-swept ranch houses that gently hug their hillocks.[5] Both houses realize an organic ideal by accentuating the means of construction in a decorative manner. In this regard the exposed ceiling rafters of the Fay living area are of particular interest.

O'Neil Ford, the dean of Texas regional architects, tried his hands at the organic in Houston when he designed the Garth House at 63 Briar Hollow Lane. Completed in 1956, this flat-roofed house is sited at the end of a cul-de-sac and addresses the street with several eye-level concrete panel screens that just allow the viewer to glimpse through glass-walled rooms to the shaded wood beyond.

Howard Barnstone, who achieved wide publicity during the 1950s for his brick, steel, and glass houses which helped push modern architectural ideology to a more forgiving stance, also made a foray into the organic early in his career. The 1952 Bloxsom House at 22 East Shady Lane has been described by the architect

Apartments were completed in 1950 to the designs of Arthur Moss. Labeled "googie architecture" by an imaginary Professor Thrugg in Los Angeles, this apartment building is an authentic Houston example of organic expressionism.[7] Giant, inverted triangular trusses float precariously over glass-corner windows that bulge out from the force of the visual load. The structure seems either poised for take-off, or imploding even as one views it.

The materials of which this structure is built run the gamut of the organic palette. The juxtaposition of the angled-out glass set in redwood trim, rubble walls, and green rolled-tarpaper siding gives the impression of an abandoned semipermanent encampment set amidst a stone ruin. The effect is not unlike an exaggerated and populist version of a Frank Lloyd Wright desert camp.

The 1950s work of Baily A. Swenson is more difficult to place squarely within the organic camp. The eclectic nature of this architect's work during the period is a combination of influences from *Art Déco* to the *Arts and Architecture* California Case Study houses of the late 1940s. Unlike either of these precedents, which tended to contain a single volume within the confines of a box, Swenson always stretches and erodes, then ruptures the

that resulted is uniquely inventive, even when it appears awkward. Unfortunately for the present day aficionado of Swenson's architecture, the work is generally neglected and at times appears to be in an advanced state of decay.

There were several organic houses built in this city to the designs of nationally recognized architects. In each of these houses the strength of the architectural statement transcends the purely aesthetic motivation that guided most Houston designers. An examination of four houses designed by different architects reveals that ideology rather than fashion generated the work.

The Reed House of 1960 at 111 Carnarvon Drive was designed by one of Frank Lloyd Wright's most talented disciples, Alden B. Dow. Many of the compositional devices previously described are present in this house: the hipped-roof forms, the subtle overlapping of verticals and horizontals, and the low, brick garden walls defining outdoor rooms. What is unusual in this design is a classicizing tendency. Dow restrains the typical robust organic asymmetry for a staidness of massing and detail that is Japanese in effect.

Despite this calm, the house is also a celebration of the automobile. A huge

Durst House of 1958 at 323 Tynebrook Lane.[8] Goff, with Herb Greene as the supervising architect, generated the design of this house from the round cul-de-sac adjacent to the site. The site-specific plan, landscaping, and articulation of the massing and details constantly refer to this circle. Greeting the viewer from the roundabout are three, giant, circular windows popping like eyes out of the brick front facade. This facade's gentle curve has a radius terminating in the center of the cul-de-sac. Segments of circles also appear in plan, in the apses completing the wings of the house, the bay of the living room, and the backyard terrace.

Two stories above the carport of the Durst House a great overhanging roof floats above a strip window; as in Greene's Lyne House, the roof resembles a fragile but protective bird wing. Goff's design is notable for the integration of the plan with the site and is the best example of an organic design process of any house examined to this point.

No great American city would be complete without a Frank Lloyd Wright house and Houston is no exception. While MacKie and Kamrath worked as if they had a mirror to Wright's work, their designs were a shadowed resonance when compared to the master's projects.

Lyne House, detail of tile-hung exterior wall (Photo by Paul Hester).

Above: *Lyne House, 1957, Herb Greene, architect, floor plan.* Top: *Lyne House, detail of carport (Photo by Paul Hester)*

Wright's Thaxton House of 1955 at 12020 Tall Oaks Road is based on the same diamond grid of equilateral triangles as MacKie and Kamrath's Mitchell House. Unlike the Mitchell House, Wright's design always rigorously conforms to the hexagonal grid. Even beds accommodate the geometry of the house with oblique configurations.

As in any Wright design, a demanding, ritualized use of the house is suggested by the plan. From the street all that appears to the visitor is a low, horizontally banded concrete block wall that is suddenly terminated by a huge pylon of block which conceals the maid's room and marks the entrance path. Supported by this pylon is the carport, under which one discovers a mysterious quality of light. Filtered through a wood screen, the light spills onto a short path that parallels the screen to the front door. From the entrance, the axis of movement continues along an interior glass wall that opens onto an outdoor room which originally was both a porch and a pergola. To the other side of the axis, deep within the shadows of the house, is the living room. The axis finally terminates at the center of the house, the dining-room table. From this table the house radiates in different directions to the kitchen, the living area, the bedrooms, and the garden. The table is just a step or two from the kitchen as well as from the garden pool. The family is symbolically gathered at this center even when they are apart. The table becomes the source of familiar sustenance as well as authority. A social hierarchy within the family, as well as an order between man and nature, is suggested by the configuration of the plan.

The Thaxton House is detailed with a module and panelized construction methods that were developed for Wright's earlier Usonian houses. Much of the furniture is built-in and every joint and square foot of the house is studied. When asked once what his detailing grid was, Wright replied that it was a sixteenth of an inch. The ruthless level of integration that permeates the detailing of this house reflects his comment.

One particularly beautiful element of the house is the pool, which is set directly against the exterior wall of the master bedroom and bath. This placement allows for a reflection of western light onto the ceilings of the adjacent rooms. At the same time, a surreal note is struck by the pool. The locale permits the owner to wake up in the morning, pass immediately through the master bathroom, and dive directly into the water - a refreshing morning swim.

The use of the organic style in architecture was not limited to domestic architecture in Houston during the 1950s. Corporate office parks, schools, churches, a museum, and eventually even a skyscraper were built. This work constitutes an unseen treasure, ignored in the hustle of expansion. By the mid '60s taste had moved onward, and today Karl Kamrath is the only remaining link to a rich tradition and ideology that extend back to the attempt to define an American architecture after the Philadelphia Centennial.

To explain the popularity of the organic style one must recognize what this architecture symbolized for the popular press and the *vox populi* American values. In such articles as Elizabeth Gordon's "The Threat to the Next America," which appeared in the April 1953 issue of *House Beautiful*, a McCarthy-like stance was taken. This argument outlined a battle of the styles and its relations to conflicting national ideologies; Red, European-influenced Internationalism versus red-blooded, American organicism. Gordon wrote with paranoia:

There is a well-established movement in modern architecture, decorating, and furnishings, which is promoting the mystical idea that "less is more" . . . They are promoting unlivability, stripped down emptiness, lack of storage space, and therefore lack of possessions.

In an atmosphere of Red baiting, Frank Lloyd Wright and organic inspired architecture were held up as a fortress of individual self-expression and the fruit of American democracy.

The organic house embraced and celebrated the automobile. The organic house glorified the particular nature of the American landscape. The organic house projected a reassuring hierarchical image of the American family that provided psychic comfort in times of psychic disintegration. The family, mother, and apple pie were intertwined and protected as surely as the roof provided shelter or the hearth warmth. The organic house was where Americans imagined themselves alone on the frontier, steeped in the Jeffersonian values of mythic American individuality.

The best organic architecture transcends, however, the passions of the moment and projects a stronger living unity. Deeper emotional concerns than correct fashion direct the mind and eye of the true organic architect. Ultimately, organic architecture was not a *style* for these designers, but an attitude. For Frank Lloyd Wright it was a struggle to integrate natural law with structure, life with architecture, and the ideal of the organic whole with immortality. He wrote:
After death we experience true freedom. Without that, we would not be true individuals. The sense of continuity is the soul of organic architecture, and it is equally essential to the individual."[10]

1 Frank Lloyd Wright, "Broadacre City: A New Community Plan," *Architectural Record*, vol. 77, April 1935, 247.
2 Elizabeth Gordon, "The Threat to the Next America," *House Beautiful*, vol. 95, April 1953, 131.
3 Wright story recounted in a lecture by Karl Kamrath at the University of Houston College of Architecture, "Organic Architecture," 26 October 1983.
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5 For more information on the Staub houses see Howard Barnstone, *The Architecture of John F. Staub*, Austin, The University of Texas Press, 1979, 272-273, 329.
6 "The $250,000 House," *Fortune*, vol. 52, October 1955, 141.
7 "Googie Architecture," *House and Home*, vol. 1, February 1952, 86-88.
8 For more information on the Durst House, see "Goff on Goff," *Progressive Architecture*, vol. 43, December 1962, 116.
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Lovell (Health) House, Los Angeles, 1929, Richard J. Neutra, architect (Photo by Willard D. Morgan, courtesy Blaffer Gallery)

On the Edge of the World: Four Architects in San Francisco at the Turn of the Century

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Reviewed by Diane Ghirardo

Richard Longstreth traces the early careers of four leading San Francisco architects in *On the Edge of the World: Four Architects in San Francisco at the Turn of the Century*. Ernest Coxhead, Willis Polk, A. C. Schweinfurth, and Bernard Maybeck, following a pattern to be emulated by leading architects over the next century, studied and practiced elsewhere before coming to San Francisco in the late 1880s. They found a society less constrained by architectural traditions and, most importantly, one not dominated by large, well-established, and famous architectural firms. All had worked for such firms in the eastern United States, and all sought the kind of freedom that California offered. Interaction with California's mild climate, rugged terrain, and relaxed life style produced a regional architecture of distinction. To Longstreth's credit, he does not attempt to make the four into something they were not: while all were gifted, none was an architect of international significance. Within the limits of their modest practices, the four architects managed to build intelligent, interesting, and comfortable houses, not an inconsiderable achievement. Their talents were admirably adapted to the needs of the Bay area with enough Eastern gloss to remain fashionable.

Working with only minimal archival material (much was destroyed in the 1906 earthquake and fire), Longstreth manages to present a full account of the important early years of their practices. Polk and Schweinfurth both worked for A. Page Brown before they moved west, and Maybeck worked for Carrère and Hastings after a stint at the Beaux-Arts. All were familiar with the work of McKim, Mead and White, the firm that set the standard of excellence throughout this period. But the four architects drew from many other sources as well. One of the most attractive features of Longstreth's book is the careful addition of material relating to the European sources from which each drew. Maybeck, the most intellectual of the four, was particularly attracted to the theories of Viollet-le-Duc and Gottfried Semper. His career developed later than those of the other three; likewise his reputation is greater. Hearst Hall at the University of California and the Palace of Fine Arts secured him a place in history, and his rustic country houses fostered a local tradition of considerable significance. The other architect who developed an international reputation was Willis Polk, for his Hallidie Building. This striking building - one of the few major office building commissions Polk received - has no precedent in his work. Kenneth Frampton lavishly covered it in his recent *Modern Architecture, 1919-1945*, and unlike many other buildings in San Francisco, it has eluded the wrecker's ball. Longstreth confesses that no hard evidence about the building exists, but apparently Polk's client, the University of California, wanted a "glass-fronted building." How Polk went from the elegant Baldwin Compound in Santa Clara County (c. 1900) to the Hallidie Building remains a mystery - and a fascinating one that Longstreth does not explore.

From the sober, even fashion-conscious work of these Bay Area architects to the work of Richard Neutra is quite a jump. Neutra's practice in California spanned over four decades, and his influence on students and on housing and school design has been enormous. Thomas S. Hines's biography, *Richard Neutra and the Search for Modern Architecture*, covers his life and career in meticulous detail. As the most famous architect to maintain a practice in California, Neutra clearly deserves this kind of careful attention. Hines received full access to the Neutra archives from his widow, Dione, and poured enormous energy into the project: he visited nearly every building Neutra designed (even lived in one!) and interviewed his professional associates, friends, and family. The result is a book that will no doubt remain the definitive work on Neutra for a long time to come.

Inspired and influenced by Adolf Loos, Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Rudolph Schindler, Neutra brought to his work a passionate belief in the importance of design in day-to-day life: the title of one of his books, *Survival Through Design*, suggests just how significant he believed it to be. In his exploration of the relation between the built environment and human psychological development, Neutra concluded that poor design is not just aesthetically repugnant, it is also bad for us. His own work involved a constant search for an architecture at once aesthetically pleasing and technologically refined, easily repeated in low-cost versions, and perfectly adapted to the needs of a client. Because of his sensitivity to locale and to client needs, Neutra moved easily between the crisp, Modernist designs for which he is best known to a relaxed, textured version of the International Style in brick and wood, often with sloping roofs. One mark of Neutra's distinction is that he shared discriminating clients with Rudolph Schindler (the Lovells) and Frank Lloyd Wright (the Kauffmans). A detailed comparison of the respective houses is instructive, not least for what it reveals about the interests of the three architects.

Hines presents an old-fashioned biography - in the best sense of the word - but there is room for more work. Neutra still needs to be understood as one among many protagonists in an important and complicated period, and Neutra's ideas as presented in his books need to be explored more thoroughly. From the most intimate to the most global level, Neutra believed the character of the environment to be crucial to well-being and he elucidated the arguments for this view in his books. Indifferently edited, repetitive, and often difficult to follow,

the books nonetheless represent Neutra's mature reflections on design. That Hines passes over them rather briefly is puzzling. Hines declares his work to be an "analytical narrative," a detailed chronological account of Neutra's life. As such it is readable, meticulously researched, and important. Yet its primary weaknesses derive precisely from the models Hines chose: Neutra also needs to be examined in the context of architectural culture from 1924 to 1960, which demands more developed studies of the work and ideas of his contemporaries, reciprocal influences, and his own writings. No one book can accomplish everything, and this is not to fault Hines's text but rather to indicate directions for further work.

The most notable link between Neutra and those whom Esther McCoy calls, in the title of her book, *The Second Generation* (Gregory Ain, Harwell Hamilton Harris, and Raphael Soriano, as well as J. R. Davidson) is their passionate commitment to a socially responsible architecture. Her highly personal, largely anecdotal accounts bring the architects to life and, from my knowledge of Raphael Soriano, are wonderfully accurate. McCoy helps fill in major gaps in the literature on California architects, but precisely because her account is so personal and anecdotal, the book is of limited use for scholars, although it makes for delightful reading.

Perhaps the most significant fact that emerges from a comparison of the three books is the way interest shifted, over time, from matters of fashion and style toward matters concerning social responsibility, low-income clients, inexpensive but adequate housing, and the liveability of cities. The new consciousness about the architect's responsibility to more than the single client came to California with its immigrant architects, who reacted to California's openess in the 1890s as a later generation did in the postwar (I and II) years. Although only Neutra attained international stature, in different ways all the architects made special contributions to California. Many critics have long argued privately that California's best architects have tended to come from elsewhere, and the three books reviewed here tend to confirm that suspicion.■

The Land, The City, and The Human Spirit; America the Beautiful—An Assessment

Lyndon B. Johnson Auditorium, Austin, Texas

Sponsored by
The University of Texas at Austin,
The Lyndon Baines Johnson Library,
and the Southwest Center for the Study
of American Architecture.

12-13 April 1984

Reviewed by John Kaliski

When the Southwest Center for the Study of American Architecture was inaugurated at the School of Architecture at the University of Texas at Austin, its goals were described as follows: ". . . to heighten interest in and respect for local architectural traditions, to establish the value of specialized studies in local and regional architecture, and to provide local collection points for the architectural records of the region." With these notions firmly in mind, this writer traveled to Austin somewhat suspicious of the Southwest Center's first major event which proposed discussions featuring participants of whom only 7 out of 23 could reasonably be called Southwesterners. The admittedly provincial question is: what could New Yorker James C. Bowling, senior vice president of Phillip Morris, or New Yorker Robert A.M. Stern, architect, much less that consummate New Yorker himself, Mayor Ed Koch, tell us Texans? Biblical rout rather than critical discourse was more than a distinct possibility since all of the above were scheduled to participate on the same panel.

The two-day symposium, titled *The Land, The City, and The Human Spirit: America the Beautiful — An Assessment* was cosponsored by the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The broad mix of national personalities who participated, some currently famous, others long since retired, made for a variety show which skipped lightly over the triumphs and failures of a generation of attempts to "beautify" America. The best attitude to take for enjoyment of this event quickly became clear: sit back and be surprised by the nuances which were constantly gushing forth from the collective group.

The first morning of the conference, under the rubric "The Land," Nathaniel Owings, champion of the corporate skyscraper, proposed a national 21-story limit on buildings and a deconstruction of Houston's skyline; a skyline for which his firm is largely responsible. Wolf von Eckardt, design critic for *Time* magazine, spoke at the same session of America's "wonderful new towns" without naming any examples. Stewart Udall, former Secretary of the Interior, likened Houston to Guadalajara, Mexico, explaining that neither had sufficient public space. This same morning Ian McHarg, chairman of the Department of Landscape Architecture and City Planning at the University of Pennsylvania, described American industry as "toxically incontinent" while William K. Reilly, president of the Conservation Foundation of Washington, D.C., lauded the new sensitivity of American business. Needless to say, not much was agreed upon at the first session, a pattern that was to continue for the rest of the conference.

The afternoon session was titled "The City" and featured the most marked contrasts in style and prominence. Unlucky Robert Timme, of Houston and Taft Architects, was alone in defending his city against the irascibility of Robert Stern and the ebullience of Ed Koch. J.B. Jackson, former editor of *Landscape* and resident of Santa Fe, should have been of help to Mr. Timme in the latter's defense of the generic Sunbelt city. But Jackson made the fatal mistake of trumpeting Lubbock, Texas, as the ideal of the new American polis. Lubbock may have its charms, but this was a fateful statement for Mr. Jackson. No amount of elucidation of the joys of weekend fleamarkets in the suburbs or the relevance of 35-mph cruising as an indulgence of the populace could convince Stern and most of the other panelists that Lubbock was not a humdrum place.

Ed Bacon, the venerable city planner from Philadelphia, spoke most sensibly at this session with his reasoned call for the conscious development of "connections" in urban areas and his admission of the intellectual failures of city planners during the last 40 years. Yet Robert Stern was right to question Bacon's supposedly rational approach, which in Philadelphia resulted in the creation of yet another Rouse Company project. Stern claimed that the homogenization of the American city by the building of essentially the same project in ever increasing numbers of locales by Rouse is tantamount to the Disneylandization of our metropolitan areas. This panel, though ideologically divided and inconclusive, came the closest to questioning the assumptions which lie at the heart of any discussion about the role of cities in the American landscape and life.

The final morning of the conference was dedicated to the hopeful theme of "Visions." Unfortunately, much of the session was tangential to the topic at hand and centered on Denise Scott Brown's complaints about design review boards which did not let her firm, Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown, promulgate specific projects of their own design. The resulting upset was fortunately broken by the silly remarks of Bernardo Fort-Brescia, a partner in the Miami firm of Arquitectonica. Fort-Brescia attempted to equate the use of ornament with support of Ronald Reagan and unconvincingly drew a parallel between his own designs for condominiums for millionaires with worker housing projects of the early 20th century. The final session ended as divided and directionless as the others.

Tom Wolfe gave a churlish concluding address. As might be expected from the author of *From Bauhaus to Our House*, 75 years of art and architecture were simplistically rejected as a useless debate between the now vanquished philistines of taste and the until-recently-forgotten champions of the *vox populi*.

If all this activity sounds confusing, it was. Though entertaining, the conference at its worst degenerated into confrontations between people who would not normally gather in the same room. At its best, *The Land, The City, and The Human Spirit* was akin to a giant and fascinating cocktail party hosted by Lady Bird Johnson, whose presence throughout the proceedings was positively acknowledged by all.

To Mrs. Johnson's credit, she was one of the few participants whose actions consistently speak louder than her words. Through her endowment of the National Wildflower Research Center she will do more to emphasize and promote the specific aspects of each particular area of the country than many a planner or architect as this center reintroduces native wildflowers to native habitats. In the future, the Southwest Center for the Study of American Architecture would do well to follow Mrs. Johnson's example as it sets out to organize future symposiums related to its stated goals: start with a small seed and let it flower rather than start with a cut flower and watch it wilt.■

The American Cityscape: New Directions in Civic Art

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
Sponsored by the Rice Design Alliance
22 February - 28 March 1984

Reviewed by Barbara Cochran and Michael Underhill

The challenge presented by the Rice Design Alliance's spring lecture series was clear: How can we improve and thereby come to appreciate our American cities? As the title, "The American Cityscape: New Directions in Civic Art" implied, civic art is more than the random placement of isolated objects, whether large-scale sculpture, landmark buildings, or public squares. Rather, it is the integration of all these features into a cohesive urban fabric.

For Houston in particular, this series addressed timely, albeit difficult, issues. How do we define Houston's urban fabric? And, more importantly, how do we establish the criteria with which to judge additions to, or subtractions from, this fabric? We need to form a shared sense of judgment about, and responsibility for, our cityscape. The fact that the lecturers rarely revealed their criteria bears witness to the difficulty of resolving the inherent problems of choice on a public scale. As speaker Barbara Rose stated, the imposition of civic art on future generations is a "grave responsibility" compared with the choice of a painting for a private home. Yet in the series, choice was never elevated above matters of personal taste and financial will. Surely, on the civic scale, we need to be clearer.

The first talk of the series was perhaps the most charming. *New Yorker* drama critic Brendan Gill has served as president of both the Landmarks Conservancy and the Municipal Arts Society of New York, a city which he described as vulgar and insensitive, where developers clamor to build the largest and the newest. "Does any of this sound familiar to you of Houston?" he asked.

Gill sang the praises of older neighborhoods and buildings. He admonished us to consider future generations before demolishing buildings that may not presently appear to have architectural merit. His argument was twofold: (1) we come to value architectural styles after they have gone through a period of disfavor, and (2) the loss of an individual building, however unnoteworthy, can mean the loss of the neighborhood fabric.

While these arguments are valuable for Houston, everything is not worth saving. The urban fabric must be understood before we may decide what constitutes an irreparable loss. And how do we judge the works of the recent past unprejudiced by current fashion?

Stanton Eckstut, a New York urban designer, fulfilled the roll of antihero – a designer interested in reworking the fabric of the city rather than building monuments. The case of Battery Park City, for which his firm prepared a master plan, is a very effective argument. The discarded vision of a multileveled, air-conditioned urban compound was not only unfeasible, it represented a nightmarish misunderstanding of cities.

In his talk, and his firm's Battery Park City plan, Eckstut stressed the use of development guidelines, multiple designers, and configurations of streets, blocks, and lots that related to the financing and development of real estate. Most importantly, he showed how his plan was a literal extension of the existing fabric of the city. As he spoke, the reasoned anti-hero became the hero. The approach certainly looked right for New York.

But how do we apply this approach in Houston? Is the new convention center bad because the plan alters the the street and block patterns? Not necessarily. Must new areas of urbanization invariably follow the existing patterns of development? Surely not. We need to be able to *evaluate* our urban fabric as much as we need to respect existing patterns.

Barbara Rose addressed the issue of monumental sculpture within the cityscape. Rose, an art historian and critic, argued that more is not necessarily better, expressing concern with the practice requiring developers to devote a portion of their building budgets to art. Downtown areas must not become "junkyards" of sculpture.

Rose at least attempted to explain her choice of monumental sculpture. Yet her criteria of participation and whimsy only brushed the surface of why one piece is good and another bad. While she was clear and well-spoken about which pieces she liked or disliked, a more critical analysis would have done much to help the public differentiate between a Dubuffet and an Adickes.

Architect Hugh Hardy chose to discuss museums, the traditional repositories for art. He neglected, however, to acknowledge that these "artful lodgings" were placed within a larger whole, the city. His presentation of the addition to the Museum of Natural History in New York was a rare exception. There, he not only explained the impact of the addition to the existing structure, but he carefully discussed the context of the immediate neighborhood and the overall skyline of Manhattan. A pity he didn't present similar analyses for his other projects.

Philip Seib was the assistant director for Public Affairs of the Dallas Museum of Art and coordinated the bond election campaign for its new building. Seib's pragmatic approach to the development of the Dallas Fine Arts District addressed financial and political issues all too often ignored. In retrospect, although the methods seemed heavy-handed, the lesson was instructive. But do clever means necessarily lead to the creation of exciting urban space? Seib seemed to suspend any critical judgement of the final product. Funding may be a large problem, but it's only half the battle.

R. Allen Eskew, an architect with Perez Associates, master planners for the New Orleans World Exposition, also discussed practical problems with a lesson in cutting red tape. An interesting aspect of the fair is that since it is temporary, one can take chances. Barbara Rose stated that it was easier to favor monumental art when temporary, and the designs for New Orleans celebrate an ephemeral and festive role. Yet the results seem to fall short of the apparent potential. Was it because the goals themselves were ill-defined? Do shaky and insubstantial goals invariably result in shaky and insubstantial architecture? It is a sad commentary when a city needs to host a fair as an excuse to refurbish itself.

In closing, we would like to offer kudos to Drexel Turner, who organized the series, and RDA for dealing with this topic. It was a disappointment because the speakers did not address what we believed to be the crucial issue – establishing criteria for judging civic art. This is not a heroic subject; sparks don't fly. But it is crucially important to Houston today as we try to establish the character of our urbanization.■

Existence Precedes Essence: Selected Projects in Architecture

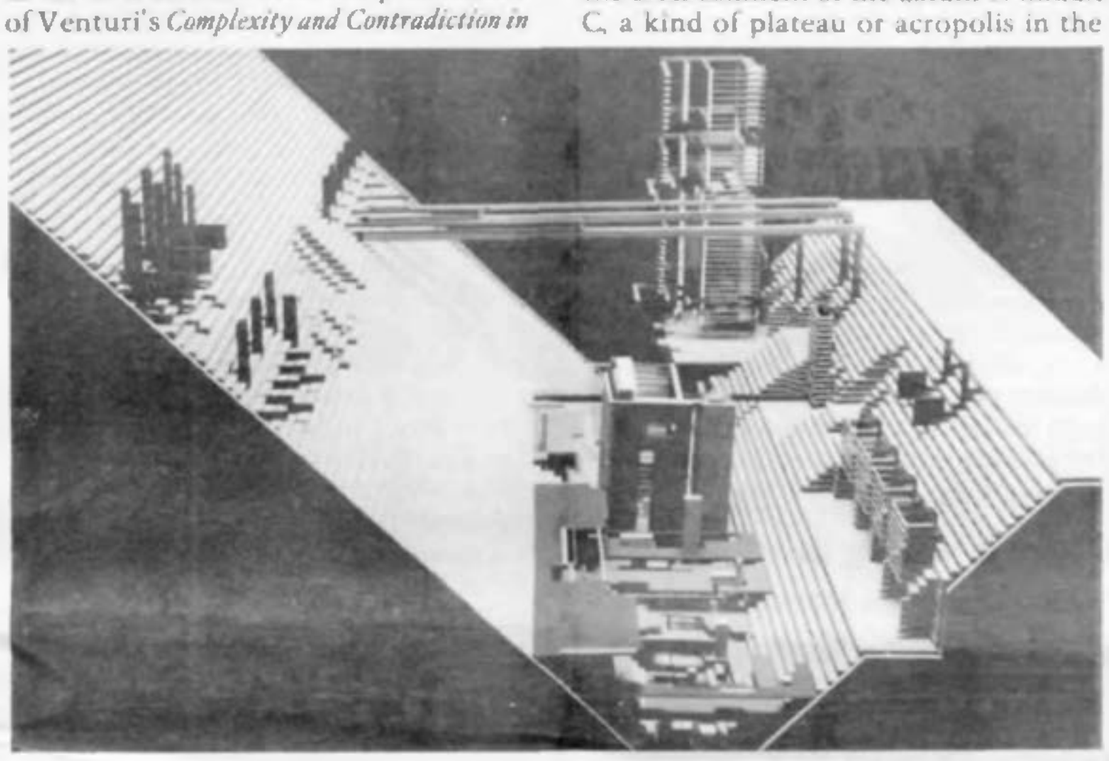
Lawndale Annex
Sponsored by the University of Houston College of Architecture
4 April - 18 April 1984

Reviewed by Peter D. Waldman

Alice in Wonderland provides us with a narrative of "seeing" both fantasy and familiarity in a world without scale or gravity. The story is both liberating for a summer's slumbering imagination and terrifying when one awakens to find oneself back on the ground beneath the cooling shade of a tree. In contemporary architectural education time never seems to stop, but history is made anew ever so frequently with the invention of pedagogic looking glasses.

Student work recently exhibited at the Lawndale Annex by the College of Architecture of the University of Houston illustrates a way of "seeing" through one such looking glass. It offers a liberating alternative to the current doldrum-like quality of the use of history in architectural education.

In the two decades since the publication of Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* and Rowe's collected essays on painting and architecture, pedagogy appears to have come full circle. This student work proposes a fundamental reconsideration of the principles of modernism.



Second year project, 1984, Pat Farmer, model

In this decade there have emerged three distinct approaches with respect to the use of history. One camp pursues a romantically selective review of history for fundamental and recurrent architectural themes. Another feigns a posture of prehistory, neoprimitivism, and the search for archetypes of the institutions of society and the principles of construction. The final group looks once again at history, defined now as our recent past, and stresses the lessons of the Modern Movement as the foundation of architecture joined to and simultaneous with cultural history. To this last group belong William Taylor and Ben Nicholson, faculty members at the University of Houston and former students of Daniel Libeskind at the Cranbrook Academy.

Polemically, the work of Taylor and Nicholson with students in their first and final years is the same. Readings in architecture as cultural history are integrated with the sequential analyses of both extraordinary buildings and commonplace objects. After this strategic introduction, students are asked to combine and to reconfigure in plan and section both buildings and objects, first in terms of their own autonomous will and then in terms of externally generated programs: a business school, an urban square. The work presented is varied in theme and scale, but united in a simultaneity of parts, an articulation of joints, and a rigorous abstraction of conventions that all serve to encourage the Muse of Willful Figuration. This willfullness of the composer permits a liberation of the mind and a tyranny of the eye in a world without gravity or scale.

Two student projects reveal the value of this work as, in Nicholson's words, "an architectural methodology that can hereafter be used as a way of perception." The first project is two-part: a fifth-year analysis of a Vermeer painting, and then its reconfiguration to establish a strategy for a new institution of society: a business school.

Siobham Roome's "The Light Roped Figures:" *With the essential nature of Business understood as the negotiation of conflict between two parties, this interpretation of Vermeer's painting reveals the oscillating interchange of the two protagonists, the back-turning painter and the pouting coquette. This oblique confrontation between painter and coquette is the mirror for the solemn yet blurred discourse of commerce.*

The orchestration of time lapses within spatial rhetoric modulates their feverish struggle to extricate themselves from alternating passivism and activism. The central plane in the project is the extension of the artist's picture plane. It is the medium of their focus and is that temporal barrier upon which the metamorphosis of their spatial definitions interact, producing a blurred reality to both parties.

The second project is also two-part: a fourth-year analysis of a musical score for a piano and its reconfiguration to establish the spatial parameters of a new urban square. A context is formed with the establishment of the datum of middle C, a kind of plateau or acropolis in the midst of an 88-keyed and stepped site section. Chords form bridges between the two hands and notes incise themselves with frequented pressure onto the walls of this new urban context.

These projects describe a spatial middleground, an ambiguous realm between today and tomorrow so very different from a discipline with a fascination for yesterday. Taylor and Nicholson and the splendid work of their students have declared a suspension of disbelief in today that has not been seen in schools since the early 1960s. Architecture as "the world anew" is very different from architecture as "the world again." Emerson, Thoreau, and even Aldo van Eyck would be most at home with this new work.

What is sought in both first and final years is not a specific didactic or strategy that leads to a surrogate for architecture, but a sensitivity and dedication to the making of form itself. This is an essential lesson for the young, as well as an important reminder to the sophisticated student of our discipline. However, one ultimately stands to alienate oneself from the very human sensibilities one is courting by liberating oneself from the two most fundamental themes of architecture: the weight and structure of gravity, and the dignity and congeniality of scale.

Paradoxically much of the new work is reminiscent of studies by LeCorbusier and Ozenfant from the 1920s, another historical period. Above all else the work is the most articulate and clearly jointed combination of distinct elements seen in years in architectural schools. No fascination with *poché* or superficial surface; point, line, and plane suggest space rather than "trap" it by another generation's use of walls, cornices, and plinths. A spirit of craftsmanship dominates all the work, giving promise of a renewed interest in an architecture of joinery rather than appliqué. A new exhibition, planned for next year, promises to continue the architectural discourse emerging from Cranbrook.■

HindCite

Ann Holmes

(Photos by Michael Thomas)

Cite *initiates a new opinion column, HindCite. Contributing the first piece is Ann Holmes. Her subject: a response to critic Peter Blake's recently published assessment of Houston.*

Peter Blake has become the Neil Simon of architecture panelists. Like the popular playwright, his one-liners resonate. They echo down the wine-and-cheese lines at little museum soirées. ("Houston looks like the neutron bomb has hit it" is a recent favorite line.)

A recent article that shows us the best of Blake, in his fashion, castigating Houston while ridiculing the idea of the architecture critic vogue, ricocheted out of the pages of the April 1984 issue of *Interior Design*.

Blake's piece begins with the observation that "Houston may not be the coziest place on the face of the earth; but if you are interested in current architecture, you need to spend about half an hour there, once every five years or so, because Houston, Texas, has a little bit of everything, and something for

Blake is wrong in not recognizing what is good. He is right in saying that it is very late. A great deal of bad stuff is already irrevocably in place.

everyone." He lists a prodigious group of "designer" buildings. Is Blake's aerial act a means of showing the naïfs how architectural criticism should be done? It's his point that Houston's architectural and planning mistakes have already been made: "The Houstonization of Houston is complete, so [architectural criticism] won't make much difference there. The Houstonization of Dallas, of Atlanta, of New Orleans, of Denver, and many other places is well under way." It may not be too late to save the other mentioned cities, he suggests. Houston, Blake intones "isn't a city at all – it's a stack of megabucks, piled up to the sky and shrink-wrapped in some kind of reflective curtain-wall. It has no people (they're scurrying around like moles in all those tunnels) so it looks like the place has been neutron-nuked. The only visible moving objects are air-conditioned limousines that circle those stacks of megabucks on elevated highways."

Blake is wrong in not recognizing what is good. He is right in saying that it is very late. A great deal of bad stuff is already irrevocably in place, and more depressing, there is no visible urban philosophy except *laissez-faire*.

One of the ideals held by those of us who write about architectural design is an opportunity to comment on a building or a development in its early design stages. As we all know, that doesn't happen very often. In the case of several buildings in Houston, early notice was valuable. One was the Alley Theatre Center (by Morris •Aubry Architects with Peter D. Waldman) which was to be a new tower to rise, one feared, like a splint onto Ulrich Franzen's heraldic, prize-winning Alley Theatre. Thanks to the alarmed press commentary and the taste, vision, and scrutiny during late design of developer Gerald Hines, that building escaped being a disaster. The Wortham Theater Center by Morris •Aubry Architects could not avoid vilification from the press as well as by at least one member of City Council, George Greanias. And as a result, a few alterations were made for the better. Not much better, but some.

There have been numerous articles of concern and criticism from the press with indications of positive response from Hines, Borlenghi, Schnitzer, and others. The publicity generated by outstanding individual buildings – Pennzoil Place, RepublicBank Center, Post Oak Central, Transco, Four-Leaf Towers – has created an encouraging atmosphere for brilliant architectural undertakings here. It's obvious that Houston's skyline is provocative and individualistic. Some critics find that positive and say so. Why not Blake? Many a passing horseman knows that it's an infallible platform gimmick to roast the host. It assures that you'll be quoted. Blake avoids any real evaluation and dodges the issue by simply listing, quantitatively, Houston's buildings in his recent piece.

We do know of our problems. Beautiful as some of our buildings may be in the abstract, many turn out to be monuments to corporate isolation, the executive suites so extravagant that the chiefs won't let anyone but their peers in the doors. The walls drop sheer from those palaces in the sky to the street. At the base of some there's nary a flower or a tree for the man on the curb. Nor are there benches. Certain developers are outright tree scrooges. Lately, I'm glad to say, more trees, flowers, and benches have been appearing.

On the other hand, the tunnels under the city make up a remarkable but underutilized network. They were put there, we are reminded, for the convenience of the tenants in the building, not for the public. There are few signs telling the cold, the sun-struck, the rain-soaked pilgrim how to get to the sanctuary of that tunnel. Why? Some business leaders believe such signs would attract "undesirables."

These aspects of Houston have, together with other problems, brought on an aspect of charmless coldness, if not pretentious iconoclasm. The humane qualities, the vigorous presence of life on the streets, little shops, and sidewalk cafes just don't exist where they are needed the most – downtown. Nor have people begun to live there yet. Downtown residency will be prime to any real consideration of Houston as a true metropolitan nerve center.

As to the urgent push for full-time architecture critics: we don't need a cosmetic or token critic anywhere. What should eventually come is serious commentary not only on this or that building, but on the whole concept of what the city should be doing. Houston's architecture writers, like others elsewhere, tend to focus on the newsmaking buildings – whether for good or bad. Issues here have been faced squarely about Buffalo Bayou, the Federal Building, Main Street, Allen's Landing, the Mecom Fountain in its early days, certain county buildings, and the issue of Philip Johnson and the Ledoux design as inspiration for the architecture building at the University of Houston.

The whole city has had to endure the effects of bad design or non-design often brought on by clients who simply slip the job to a crony, whether equipped or not to do credit to the owner or to the city. Houston is not necessarily any worse than some other cities about that. But we have already lived to agonize over architectural choices hardly made in Heaven, resulting in copycat or inept buildings. They lessen the quality of our lives visibly. So, do not ask for whom those doleful critical bells are tolling. They're tolling for us, and in this case, Peter Blake is gleefully pulling the cords.■

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