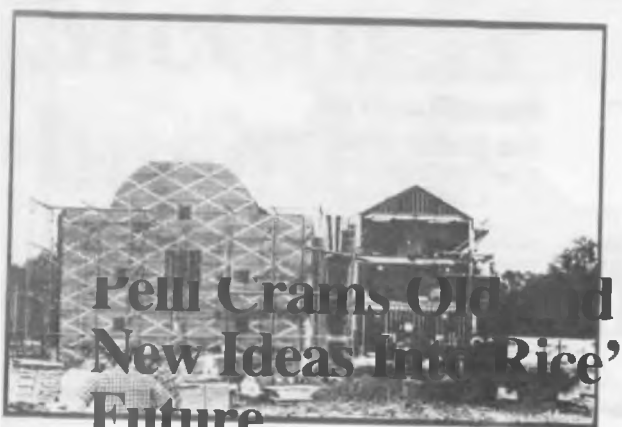
The Development Ordinance and Its Discontents

By Joel Warren Barna



Pelli Crams Old and New Ideas Into Rice's Future

By Peter C. Papademetriou

Worthan A Center o

By Stephen Fox

InCite

Coming in the Spring Issue:
Dreams of Houston in the Year 2000
Houston Skyscrapers: The Impact of Tall Buildings

Cite

Publication of this issue of *Cite* is supported in part by a grant from the Texas Commission on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

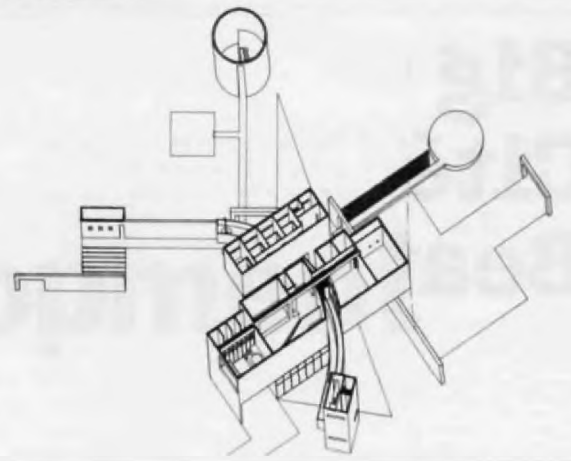
The opinions expressed in *Cite* do not necessarily represent the views of the Board of Directors of the Rice Design Alliance.

Notes on Contributors

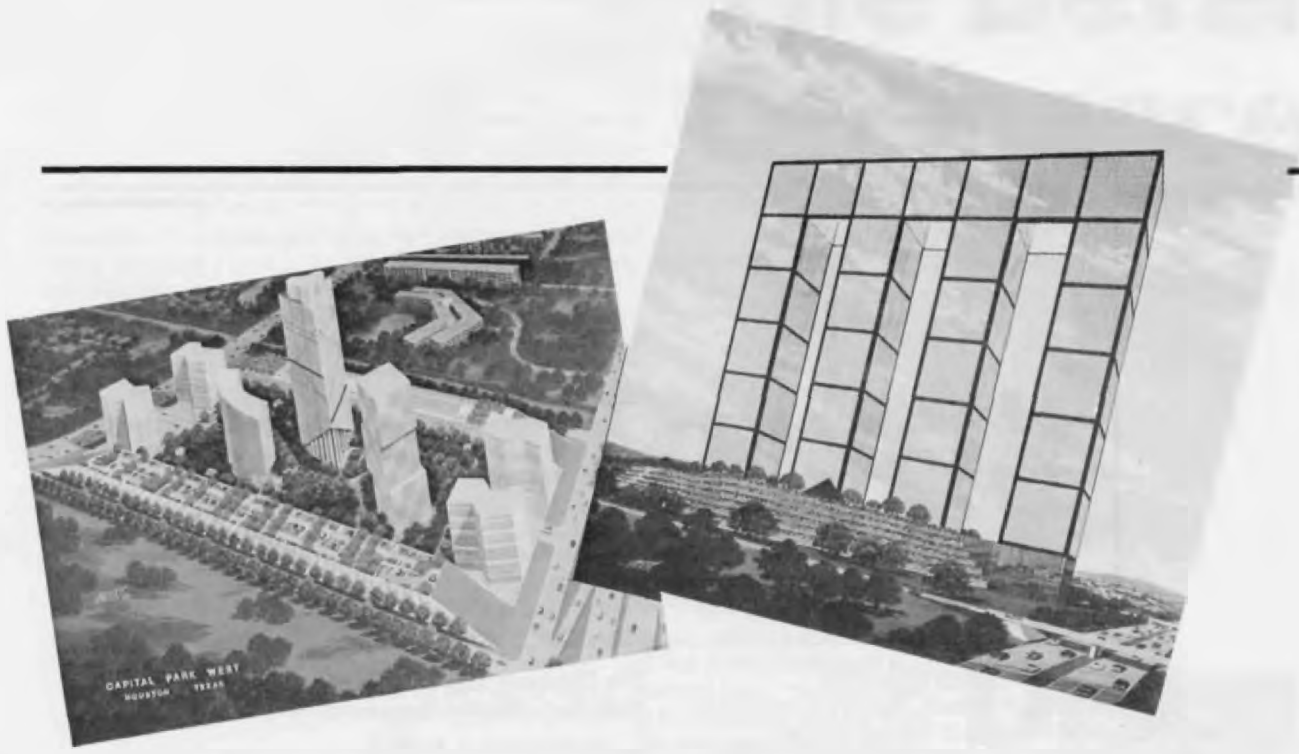
Elizabeth S. Glassman is an art historian and a partner in the firm of Glassman and Lorenzo, Cultural Planners.
Paul Hester is a professional photographer who exhibits at the Graham Gallery and writes book reviews for *Image*, published by the Houston Center for Photography.
Janet O'Brien is a Houston architect. She was managing editor of the first issue of *Threshold*, the journal of the School of Architecture at the University of Illinois at Chicago.
Peter C. Papademetriou is a Houston architect and associate professor of architecture at Rice University. He is editor of *The Journal of Architectural Education* and southwest regional correspondent for *Progressive Architecture*.
Paul W. Schieffer practices architecture in Dallas where he also teaches at El Centro College.

Cite welcomes unsolicited manuscripts. Authors take full responsibility for securing required consents and releases and for the authenticity of their articles. All manuscripts will be considered by the Editorial Board. Suggestions for topics are also welcome. Address correspondence to: Managing Editor, *Cite*, Rice Design Alliance, P. O. Box 1892, Houston, Texas 77251.

Citelines



House for a Russian Film Director based on "Proun 12E" by El Lissitzky, project by Josephina de Léon (Explorations, 1983)



Capital Park West, Houston (Arquitectónica)

Horizon Hill Center, San Antonio (Arquitectónica)

Arquitectónica Texas

Arquitectónica's brash sense of style is slated for some major exposure in Texas. Since opening a Houston office in 1982, Arquitectónica has produced a number of low-rise, infill, residential projects locally. Now the firm has two designs in progress for high-rise complexes in the suburbs of Houston and San Antonio.

The San Antonio project, commissioned by Efraim Abramoff's Orah Wall Investments, is Horizon Hill Center, located on a former estate at the northwest corner of Interstate 10 and Callahan, near the San Antonio airport. It comprises a 45-story "arcade:" four, square shafts joined horizontally at their bottoms and tops. Three of the shafts contain 800,000 square feet of office space, the fourth will be a 366-room hotel and apartment building, and the base structure contains a 200,000 square-foot retail mall and a six-level, 2,750-car parking structure disguised as a terraced garden and split by a street of shops. Incorporated into the design is an existing country house. Construction will begin after Abramoff concludes negotiations with the Federal Aviation Administration, inasmuch as the arcade, as designed, rises several floors above the FAA's height ceiling. Horizon Hill Center will be the tallest building in San Antonio.

For the Kelly Capital Corporation, Arquitectónica, in association with Kendall/Heaton Associates, has designed Capital Park West, a complex of seven office buildings and two mega-garages on a 32½-acre site between Interstate 10 and Memorial Drive in Houston's Energy Corridor now occupied by the former Ashland Chemical Company Building (1962, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, architect). Completed or under construction nearby are three Skidmore, Owings and Merrill towers in West Lake Park; Kevin Roche, John Dinkeloo and Associates' Conoco Woodcreek complex; Caudill Rowlett Scott's Shell Woodcreek building; and the first two buildings in Westbranch Energy Plaza by Gunnar Birkerts and Associates and Morris*Aubry Architects.

At the north and south entrances to Capital Park West's rectangular site pairs of 15-story, Z-plan office buildings flanking entrance boulevards are set in moats that double as retention basins. Two 4,500-car garages wall in the east and west boundaries; both are heavily landscaped and one will feature an athletic club along its summit. Within this enclosure is a garden traversed by an S-shaped road, lined with crepe myrtle trees, that curves around three towers: a 22-story, 440,000 square-foot curved slab; a 42-story, 825,000 square-foot triangle; and a 34-story, 725,000 square-foot stack of cubical blocks. A construction date for the first phase of development has not yet been announced.

In both projects Arquitectónica explores the surreal dimension latent in the gridded aluminum-and-glass curtain-wall, the very emblem of cheap, banal modern architecture. Abrupt shifts of scale in the enclosing armature of Horizon Hill Center endow its urbanistic role as a neo-Suprematist gateway to San Antonio with an undertone of menace. The hidden scandal lurking beneath the cliché of the grid-as-neutral-container is blown wide open at Capital Park West. Houston's infatuation with the "shaped" skyscraper and its corporate paranoia fantasies are indulged in this clutch of unbelievably formed buildings dispersed in a lush garden of perpetual security. As at Horizon Hill Center, the metaphorical aridity of Cartesian rationalism is juxtaposed ironically with an artificial, paradisical landscape.

From Coast to Côte: Houston Architects On Display

Two recent exhibitions in New York and Los Angeles have featured the work of students from the University of Houston College of Architecture. During October and November 1983 projects from fourth-year studios were exhibited in a show called "Explorations," held at Avery Hall on the campus of Columbia University. The work consisted of a series of transformational exercises produced by students of Bahram Shirdel and designs for a country retreat for a hypothetical Russian film director derived formally from an El Lissitzky painting, a problem assigned by visiting critic Kenneth Frampton. The College of Architecture has published a catalogue of the exhibition, also called *Explorations*, designed by Lorraine Wild.

As part of a series of exhibitions called "Home Sweet Home, American Domestic Vernacular Architecture" held in 12 Los Angeles area museums and galleries, students from the UH's Texas Studio contributed to Charles Moore, Sally B. Woodbridge, Peter Zweig, and Bruce Webb's installation "Cabin, Temple, Trailer" at the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Arts, which ran from November through December. The three aspects of American domestic architectural culture described by the title were the focus of the exhibition. Interpretive models built by students elaborated upon these themes. Ellen Singer presented a Texas-German Sunday house, Frank Vargas a replica of the Old Faithful Inn, and Lynn Wang a prefabricated house that could be ordered from a Sears, Roebuck and Company catalogue of the 1910s. Mark Hoistad's models described the symbolic role of the tower in traditional building types, and Tom Heatwole's the symbolic role of the porch. Akai Yang's reconstruction of Houston's now demolished Majestic Theater (1923) by John Eberson, Eberson's first "atmospheric," stole the show. A catalogue of the combined exhibitions called *Home Sweet Home* has been published by Rizzoli International Publications. It contains essays by Moore and by Zweig and Webb.

In London Dennis Sharp is organizing a show to open in April at The Building Centre that will document the career of Alfred C. Bossom (1881-1965), an English architect who practiced in New York between 1903 and 1926. Bossom specialized in the design of tall buildings. Toward the end of his American career, Bossom designed a series of tall buildings in Texas that included the Magnolia Petroleum Company Building in Dallas (1921), the United States National Bank Building in Galveston (1925), and the Petroleum Building in Houston (1927). Following his return to England, Bossom entered politics as a Conservative MP from Maidstone. He was knighted in 1953 and created Baron Bossom of Maidstone in 1960. Bossom also was a president of the Anglo-Texan Society. Efforts are currently underway to bring the Bossom exhibition to Texas in 1985.

In Paris, at the end of spring, an exhibition of Houston architecture and city form called "Why Houston, Why?" will be shown at The American Center. To open on 28 May with a symposium featuring architects, developers, and public officials from the U.S. and France, it is being organized by Burdette Keeland and François Ceria under the sponsorship of the University of Houston College of Architecture. The exhibition will contain introductory data on Houston's culture, geography, and economy, models and photographs specially taken by Richard Payne of Houston's tall buildings, a video "ride" down Westheimer Road, and a selection of work by Houston's "Young Turk" architects. "Why Houston, Why?" will travel to Houston to open the new office of the Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects in the Houston Design Center.

Big Cité Beat

☛ Houston's **Tidelands Motor Inn,** an irridescent survivor of the Fabulous Fifties, was sold to Rice University in October 1983, 25 years after its opening (which was studded by stars Robert Culp and Marie McDonald) in 1958. The 200-room Tidelands, designed by Austin motel architect Winfred O. Gustafson, displayed a Modern Oasis theme: banana trees, flamboyant colors, and barrel-vaulted roof forms *a la* Le Corbusier. The motel's now dismantled sign said it all: a neon palm tree, incorporating the word *Tidelands*, shading a giant, orange *T* (in which *Motor* was arrayed horizontally and *Inn* vertically), all perched on the edge of an ameboid shape filled with blue neon waves, where the word *Pool* floated lazily. Aficionados can console themselves at the Tides II, a '70s spinoff just two blocks away (although **John Margolies** reports that it just isn't the same). Meanwhile, Rice plans to use the former motel, which is adjacent to its campus, for graduate-student housing.

☛ In the midst of wars, recession, and the threat of global nuclear holocaust comes **Debrett's Texas Peerage** (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1983, 385 pp., $25), a gabby, not scrupulously accurate, and often inconsistent gazetteer of Texas's indigenous "aristocracy" by Hugh Best. In scope and execution *Debrett's Texas* comes in well below the undisputed masterpiece of the genre, John Bainbridge's *The Super-Americans* of 1961. Of some interest nonetheless is Chapter 14, "The Clients of John Staub — 'The Court Architect.'" This consists of an introductory paragraph, followed by a 14-page list of Staub's buildings cribbed from Howard Barnstone's monograph, *The Architecture of John F. Staub, Houston and the South* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), without even the merest acknowledgement. Several other passages in the book betray a close reading of Barnstone. But not close enough it would seem. For above a caption that purports to depict the central hall of Bayou Bend (1928), Staub's house for Ima Hogg, is a photograph of the long gallery of the Steves House (1965, O'Neil Ford and Associates, architects) in San Antonio. In forthcoming volumes of its promised series on American peers of other regions, Debrett clearly needs to do better than best.

The Tidelands Sign (Drawing by Alan E. Hirschfield from the Collected Monuments Series, 1978)

☛ **Taft Architects** have scored again. In October they won the commission to design the new Corpus Christi City Hall in association with Kipp, Richter and Associates of Corpus Christi. The site is three blocks at Leopard and North Staples, near the garish Nueces County Courthouse. The building will contain 135,000 square feet and cost $12 million. Construction is scheduled to begin in January 1985.

☛ **Charles Moore** will be named O'Neil Ford Professor of Architecture at The University of Texas at Austin. Funding for the chair was completed early in 1982, six months before the death of the celebrated San Antonio architect in whose honor it was endowed. Since then, several well-known candidates have been rumored to be on the verge of getting it, among them Donlyn Lyndon and Robert A. M. Stern. Moore emerged as the spontaneous consensus choice following a lecture stop at UT last fall.

Joel Warren Barna

The Development Ordinance and Its Discontents

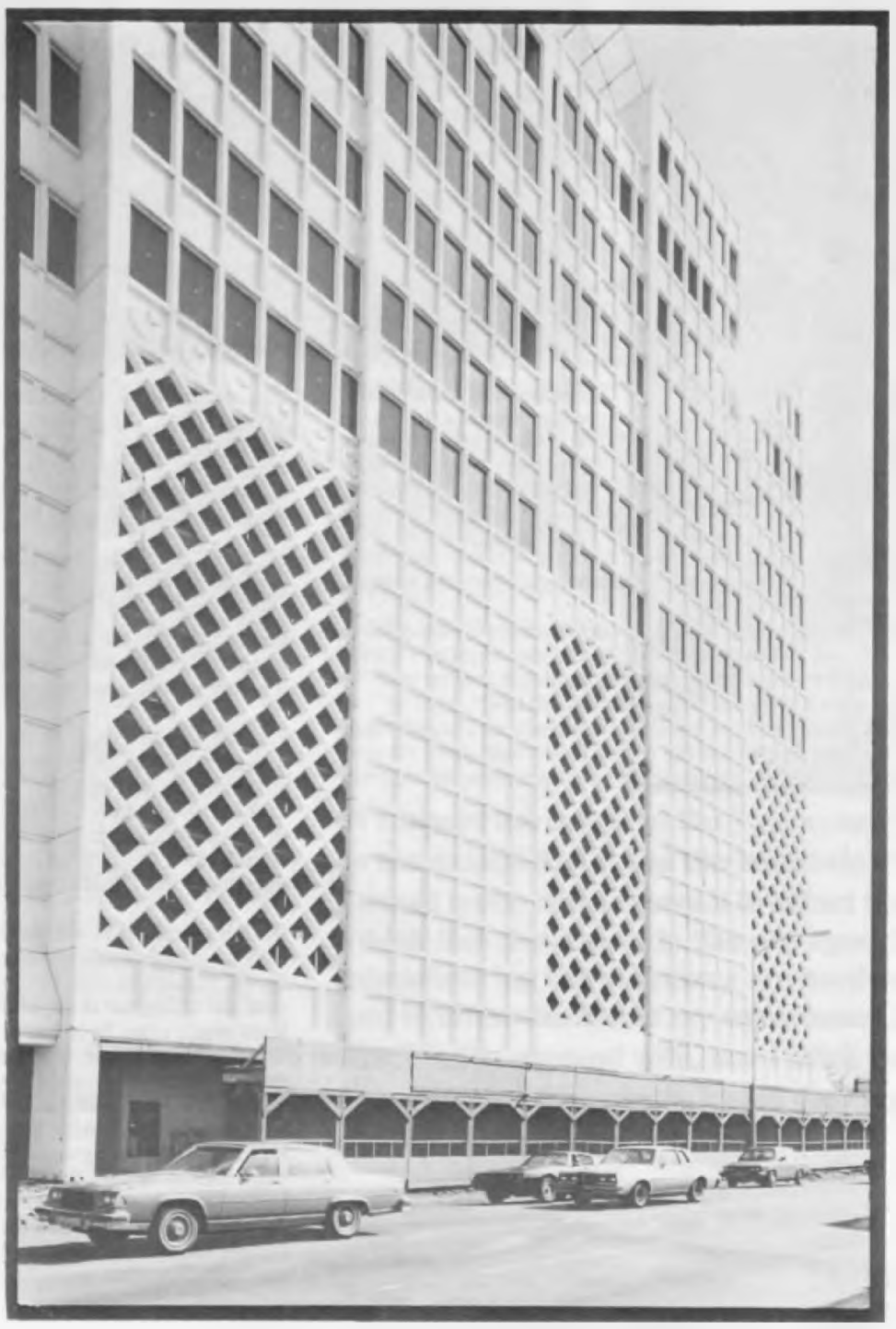
Houston's first development control ordinance went into effect just over a year and a half ago, and although many consider the measure sane and successful, others think the ordinance is in need of a major overhaul. These two camps most often diverge depending on the type of real estate project and the area of Houston involved. Large firms with commercial projects outside the loop have become born-again setbackers, while smaller developers trying to build and market townhouses in Montrose or the Heights often voice frustration, if not outrage, with the city's administration of the ordinance.

Sponsored by two-term Houston City Councilmember Eleanor Tinsley in June of 1982, the development control ordinance contains several provisions. It sets minimum standards for the distance between new structures and city rights-of-way – 10 feet along residential streets and 25 feet along major thoroughfares – to provide a view corridor unobstructed by buildings and for later right-of-way expansion. The ordinance limits block lengths – 1,800 feet on major thoroughfares and 1,400 feet on residential streets – and prohibits the creation of dead-end or "stub streets" between future residential and commercial developments, to promote traffic circulation.

"In 100 years all the city will be set back 10 feet. A lot of people don't understand that, particularly when they could make a lot more money if we would give them a variance. But they're not looking past their own project to the future."
Planning commission chairman Burdette Keeland

Perhaps the most important provision of the ordinance is the requirement that developers, for the first time, submit their plans for approval by the City of Houston Planning Commission, to make sure regulations are being followed. Before September 1982, only residential developments that included proposals for streets needed commission approval. However, many of the provisions of the development ordinance were observed in residential subdivisions on a voluntary basis before the measure made them law.

"Our office gets a lot of calls from people who are upset because they have to check with the Planning Commission. They've never had to get this kind of approval before, and now they find they have to set their projects back from the city right-of-way," Tinsley said in a recent interview. "That's how we know the ordinance is working."



Shepherd Place, under construction, Lloyd E. Pape and Ambrose and McEnany, architects. A project begun before the development ordinance went into effect. (Photo by Paul Hester)

"New rules always shock people, especially developers, but a year after the ordinance has gone into effect, I think we can say most of the problems have been worked out," says architect-developer Burdette Keeland, a member of the Planning Commission since 1963, and recently appointed its chairman by Mayor Kathy Whitmire.

Keeland, Tinsley, Whitmire, newly appointed Planning Director Efraím García (everyone associated with the development ordinance) have declared his or her opposition to the *bête noire* of Houston politics — zoning — and emphasize that the development ordinance is *not* a zoning ordinance.

"I worked against the referendum on zoning in 1962," says Keeland. "What was proposed was just a modified version of the 1916 Manhattan zoning ordinance. I didn't think that made sense, and I still don't think zoning – where a bureaucrat makes decisions about what can go where in a city – can work in Houston. I don't think there's a planner in the world smart enough to figure out how to use land people live on. I think it's important that we leave developers the freedom to make the choice of location for their projects."

After the 1962 zoning measure was defeated, Keeland was appointed to the Planning Commission, where he had helped come up with a substitute measure called a "subdivision ordinance," containing many of the provisions of the later development ordinance. Efforts to pass the measure failed, however. The commission proposed the subdivision ordinance to city council several times during the Welch, Hofheinz, and McConn administrations, but for the most part the council refused even to consider it. On the few occasions when the measure came up for a vote, it was unanimously defeated.

"One time, during the Hofheinz administration, some other commission members and I took four city councilmen to lunch and described the subdivision ordinance to them," Keeland recalls. "They all agreed that the city needed what we were describing, and said they would support it. The next day they all voted against it."

Kathy Whitmire "seriously had in mind considering what needed to be done to continue successful development in the city," Keeland adds. "But Tinsley took on the tough task of convincing her fellow council members of the importance of the subdivision ordinance – and she got us to stop calling it the subdivision ordinance."

Keeland says the enactment of the ordinance has saved Houston from a number of "problem developments;" he cites a proposed office tower on a 50-foot by 100-foot lot at the corner of Post Oak and Westheimer, on which the developer wanted to put a building cantilevering out into the city's air space over both streets. Revision of the city major-thoroughfare designation and enactment of the development ordinance left the builder with "a sliver of useable property," Keeland says. "We [the Planning Commission] turned down the request for a variance on the project. Imagine what that would have been like at one of the most crowded corners in the city."

Other projects are not so cut-and-dried, according to Keeland. "We have had people come to us for variances with townhouse projects in inner-city neighborhoods. They say they want to put their project no closer to the sidewalk than the buildings on either side. We have to tell them we're sorry, but they are the first people on the block who have to set their buildings back at least 10 feet."

Adds Keeland, "In 100 years all the city will be set back 10 feet. A lot of people don't understand that, particularly when they could make a lot more money if we would give them a variance. But they're not looking past their project to the future."

"Our office gets a lot of calls from people who are upset because they have to check with the Planning Commission. They've never had to get this kind of approval before, and now they find they have to set their projects back from the city right-of-way . . . That's how we know the ordinance is working."
Houston City Councilmember Eleanor Tinsley

Many major outside-the-loop developers agree that the development ordinance is necessary and well-designed, in large part because their cooperation was assiduously cultivated by city staffers and Tinsley in a series of meetings designed to work out a compromise ordinance everyone could live with. The success of Tinsley's consensus building was shown by the fact that when she introduced the ordinance in June 1982, it was denounced by Jeff Lewis, then president of the Greater Houston Builders Association. Two months later, when the ordinance came up for a vote, Lewis urged city council to pass it.

Three555 Timmons, 1983, Kendall/Heaton Associates, architects. A project built before the development ordinance went into effect. (Photo by Paul Hester)

Richard Bowe of Bowe Incorporated, Lewis's successor as president of the Greater Houston Builders Association, says, "I think the effect of the ordinance has been very positive. The primary impact has been on commercial development, since the residential developers were already pretty much following the rules. I haven't heard about any problems, but I'm sure that if there are any, the city will be receptive to working them out."

Portsmouth Townhomes, under construction, Alan E. Hirschfield, architect. A project built after the development ordinance went into effect. (Photo by Paul Hester)

Says developer John Hansen of John Hansen Investment Builder, "Overall this has been a positive step for Houston. I guess we've found, if anything, that the requirements didn't go far enough – the setback required on major thoroughfares should have been 50 feet instead of 25 – but we did what was practicable at the time."

Hansen was developer of the Riverway complex, one of a number of mid 1970s projects plunked down along the sidewalks of the terminally congested Woodway Drive in the booming Post Oak area. The apoplectic irritation of motorists stuck in the "Woodway canyon," as the stretch came to be called, formed the catalyst for the passage of the Tinsley ordinance.

Both Hansen and Bowe cheerfully allow that in the past they have built projects that would now be illegal. Like Bowe, Hansen says he hasn't heard about any problems with the ordinance or its administration. Where problems might arise, he is less sympathetic to other developers than one might expect. Says Hansen, "I think any quality developer wouldn't be afraid of these rules. Requiring a 10-foot setback in residential areas is really not a lot to ask. Houston has too many examples of overbuilding – cramming eight townhouses onto a lot where there should be only three. The effect of the Tinsley ordinance is to do away with that, and that's good. Overbuilding may benefit the developer, but it doesn't benefit the city. In most cases, a responsible developer wouldn't have that problem in the first place."

"I think the Tinsley development ordinance is confiscatory and illegal . . . It's just like condemning property for streets. I don't question that the city has the right to do that, but when they do it, the city is required to compensate property owners for their lost property."
Architect-developer Howard Barnstone

Shady Side Residences Townhouses, 1983. A project that predates implementation of the development ordinance. (Photo by Paul Hester)

Other developers disagree, some in the most strenuous terms.

"I think the Tinsley development ordinance is confiscatory and illegal," says architect-developer Howard Barnstone. "It's just like condemning property for streets. I don't question that the city has the right to do that, but when they do it, the city is required to compensate property owners for their lost property. That's not being done under the Tinsley development ordinance. I suspect that the U.S. Constitution doesn't allow taking property without compensation. Perhaps it's something she [Tinsley] should go to jail for."

Barnstone says he decided against challenging the ordinance's legality in court, even after a project he planned in the Montrose area was blocked by the Planning Commission. "I have heard that various people have considered suing the city over the ordinance. Of course, an architect who did that would never get another client," he explains.

However, even some developers more comfortable with the statutory authority of the city under the ordinance express reservations about the way it has been administered.

The most common complaint, voiced primarily by those trying to put up high-density housing projects inside the loop, is that the new rules combined with the nonstandard shape of many residential lots – lots sometimes already purchased, often at real estate boom prices – make it impossible to build townhouses for a marketable price in many areas. An ordinance intended to control traffic congestion and commercial overdevelopment is having the side effect of fostering stagnation in inner-city neighborhoods and sprawl outside the loop, they charge.

"I think the intent of the ordinance is appropriate," says architect William Stern of William F. Stern and Associates. "The problem is that it's a blanket ordinance, treating Montrose the same as the Galleria. As a result, I think the ordinance is having unforeseen, unwelcome consequences. The effect has been to redline whole blocks of Montrose and the Heights, where you can no longer build high-density residential projects. That needs to be questioned if we are to keep people moving back into the parts of the city inside the loop."

The Planning Commission's Keeland denies that the Tinsley development ordinance is causing stagnation in inner-city neighborhoods.

"The motive behind the ordinance was to keep the city a place with trees and grass," says Keeland. "I think in 100 years the ordinance will have allowed for greater inner development, but it will make it look as if the density is still low. The city will be as it is now, with trees and lawns."

But others point out further problems with the ordinance that work against inside-the-loop development. Steve Flowers, of Steve Flowers Interests and president of the Houston Heights Association, says: "I support the intent of the Tinsley ordinance, to the extent that it has the interests of the city in mind. I would much rather have it in effect than nothing. I think that the people in the city agencies administering the ordinance are hardworking and reasonable. But in my experience, the Tinsley development ordinance is really something to contend with, and I think the problems I've encountered are going to come up again and again for projects inside the loop."

Flowers purchased a lot in the Heights, the site of an abandoned grocery store. He lined up a lender, enough sewer-connection permits to allow for a high-density townhouse project and worked with an architect to develop a plan he regards very enthusiastically.

"It was a project that I felt was going to improve the neighborhood – townhouse units for a marketable price, while still preserving considerable green space and adding a 65-foot swimming pool," Flowers says. "I tore down the abandoned store and ripped up an acre of asphalt, and took the 'footprint' of the plan to the planning department, and they sprinkled holy water on it."

But Flowers's project soon ran afoul of one of the ordinance's stranger loopholes. "We conformed to the 10-foot setback requirements, and we thought that was it," he says. "But the project had entrances to the garages through an alley, and we found out that having access for more than three parking spaces through an alley changes the project from a 'development' to a 'subdivision.' That's absurd. Kingwood is a subdivision. A six-lot townhouse project in the Heights is not."

Flowers found that the rules had changed – subdivision rules require 20-foot setbacks. The discovery was made soon after former Planning Director Roscoe Jones resigned and before Efraím Garcia took the job as his successor, Flowers says. In the interim, the staff was playing everything by the book. It took visits with several staff members and two hearings by the Planning Commission before a variance was granted exempting Flowers from the subdivision rules.

"Meanwhile the interest clock was running on the $2.5 million I had borrowed," Flowers says. "This was my only project at the time, so I could afford to spend all my time at city hall trying to clear it up. I couldn't have done that if I had other projects going. This kind of thing may not cause trouble for large companies with big staffs, but it really penalizes small companies."

Other developers echo Flowers's argument, and say that it is merely a symptom of the disorganization affecting city agencies who deal with development. "The Wastewater division doesn't know what Traffic and Transportation is doing, and neither of them informs Planning of what rules they're changing," says one.

Says another, "Traffic and Transportation just ruled, without any specific authorization, that all apartment units now have to have two parking spaces. That eliminates the one-bedroom-with-a-loft type of floor plan, which is in strong demand here, particularly in areas where there is good bus service to downtown. The Wastewater division just announced that 5,500-square-foot lots that used to count as possessing two sewer-connection permits, now count as possessing only one. Neither of these agencies informed Planning before they acted. The city administration is breaking into fiefdoms working against each other."

Burdette Keeland agrees that lines of communication between city agencies may have been crossed, but adds, "That's why we have the Planning Commission empowered to grant variances. I've formed a commission committee to review the development ordinance, to make minor changes, and get some of the lumps out of it. We're starting to refine the ordinance, and then we're going to go after the bigger issues."

"I support the intent of the Tinsley ordinance, to the extent that it has the interests of the city in mind. I would much rather have it in effect than nothing. I think that the people in the city agencies administering the ordinance are hardworking and reasonable. But in my experience, the Tinsley development ordinance is really something to contend with, and I think the problems I've encountered are going to come up again and again for projects inside the loop."
Developer Steve Flowers

A Cite Editorial

The most visible aspect of the proposed Wortham Theater Center is its architecture which, however commendable the intentions of its advocates, is disappointing. Indeed, because of the process which led to it, it is difficult to argue that the Wortham Theater Center in its present form is anything but flawed in contrast to the aspirations of the artistic companies it may someday house.

However, of even more fundamental concern than the proposed building's architectural flaws are the root causes of these shortcomings. These are four:

- **The lack of a requisite breadth of perspective on the part of the patrons of the project.**
- **The inadequate participation of local government officials nominally representing the community at large.**
- **The absence of a formal process for timely public review and criticism of the project.**
- **The inability of the project's architect to resolve successfully the competing issues of design, civic responsibility, and client demands.**

Whatever the final outcome of the Wortham Theater Center project, now is the time to alter existing philosophies so that the root causes of its problems will not afflict other Houston projects. The good intentions and generosity of community-spirited private benefactors continue to be vital to Houston; however, these attributes alone can no longer be considered sufficient. The maturity and resultant complexity of this city at its current stage of development demand much more.

In order for Houston's built environment—especially those components of it in the public domain—to be of the quality we desire, there needs to be a community-wide commitment to a higher order of planning accountability and leadership in the private and, especially, the public sectors. Such a commitment, and the deliberate and rational processes it would generate, now are overdue. If they were in place today, the Wortham Theater Center would be a much improved design and all Houstonians would be the beneficiaries.

A Report On The Wortham Theater Center

By Stephen Fox

When visitors come to Houston from other parts of the United States or abroad, it is not unusual to hear them exclaim over the city's vitality. Mirror-glass office buildings, freeways, shopping malls: all appear to exude an enthusiasm and optimism that, as one is apt to be told, are a thing of the past elsewhere. Houston presents itself as a visible testament to this cultural disposition. Here, it still seems "natural" to think that achievement is the reward of vision, determination, effort, and, of course, luck. And that it is available to anyone who pursues it diligently.

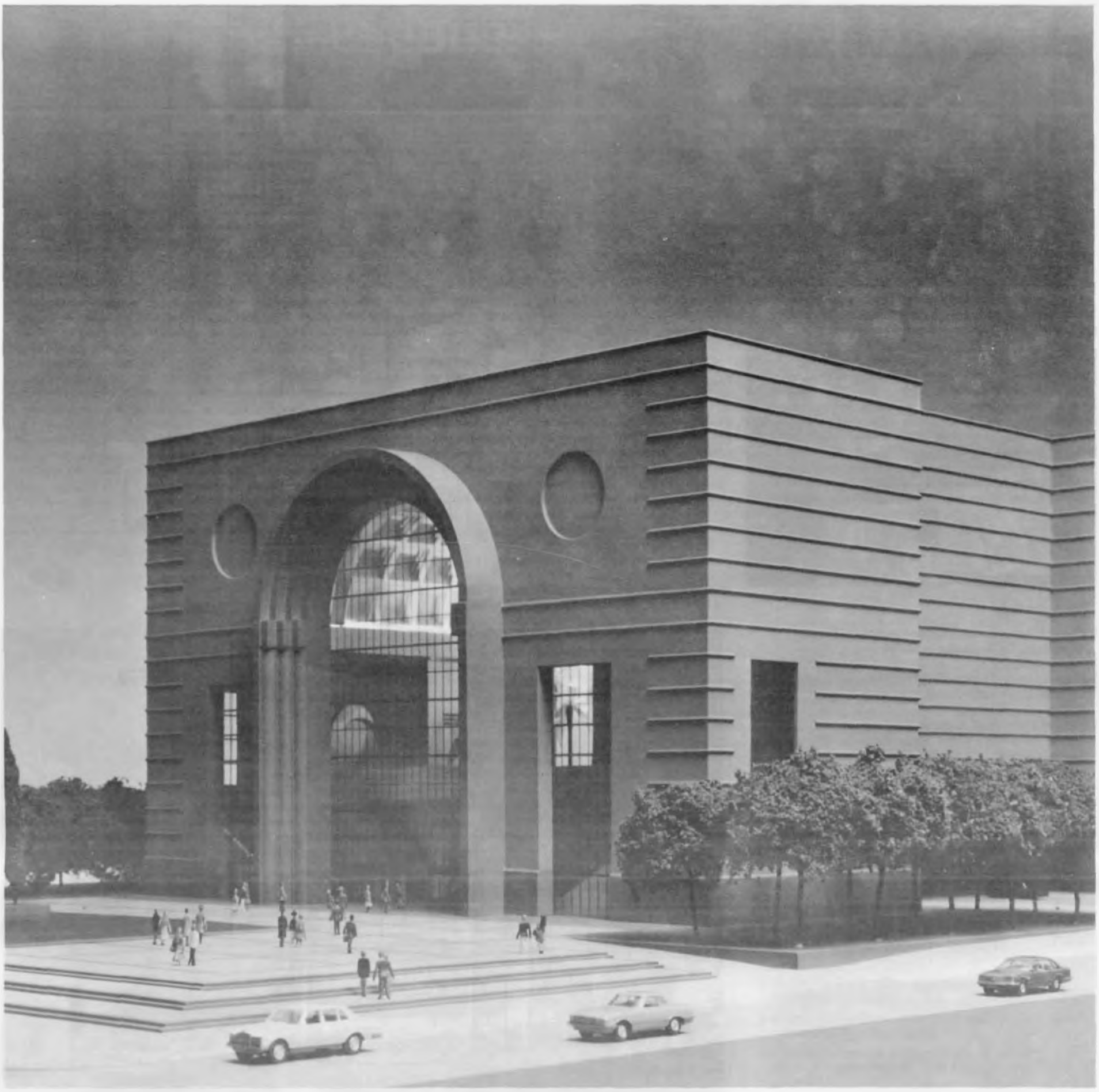
One conspicuous civic endeavor threatens to contradict this cultural presumption. Since 1977 a group of public-spirited citizens, organized as the Lyric Theater Foundation, has been trying to build an opera and ballet theater to accommodate the Houston Grand Opera and the Houston Ballet. But in this effort to complement the Jesse H. Jones Hall for the Performing Arts and the Alley Theatre, uncomplicated optimism long ago turned to frustration and even the most effervescent enthusiasts have become weary. Respected voices in the art community have been raised publicly to question the financing, programming, and design of the proposed opera and ballet center. After four years of fund raising the foundation has yet to secure its goal of $75 million.

The precise cause of the foundation's inability to raise the money to build the Gus. S. Wortham Theater Center, as the project has been called since 1982, has never been established. The effects of the recession certainly deflated expectations that fund raising would be no problem. A pledge of $15 million from the Wortham Foundation, $5 million apiece from the Brown and Cullen foundations, and substantial pledges and gifts from other foundations, corporations, and individuals brought the sum to about $48 million by 19 July 1983, when the Houston City Council approved the proposed architectural design. This left the Lyric Theater Foundation $17 million short of its goal for starting construction.

It is estimated that the 450,000-square-foot center will cost $75 million. This figure includes the cost of constructing the building, finishing and outfitting it, and paying professional consultants' fees. Once completed, the Wortham Theater Center will be turned over to the City of Houston, which will own and manage it.

The notion of organizing a charitable foundation to plan, construct, equip, and pay for a publicly owned building was derived from Houston Endowment's example of providing the city with Jones Hall, a 3000-seat performance center that opened in 1966. Houston Endowment was not an *ad-hoc* organization, as is the Lyric Theater Foundation, but it functioned independent of the municipal government in carrying out the project for a municipal concert hall. Similar arrangements, with groups of individuals acting together to provide sites for or build public structures that would be owned and operated by governmental bodies, were responsible for bringing into being the Astrodome, the Intercontinental Airport, and the Summit. Houstonians like to think that this is a typically Texan way of building needed public accommodations, circumventing what are assumed to be the inevitable compromises, delays, wastefulness, and expenses associated with public works projects. The un-Texan complication is that the Wortham Theater Center has become subject to delays, compromises, and a measure of public criticism, much of it focused on its architecture.

The present design dates from 1980. It is the work of Morris*Aubry Architects; Jean Rosenthal Associates, theater and lighting consultants; Jaffe Acoustics, acousticians; CBM Engineers, structural engineers; and Cook and Holle, consulting engineers. Since 1982 Gerald D. Hines Interests has been involved in the project as volunteer project coordinator, and the W. S. Bellows Construction Corporation has provided construction and pricing consultation.



*Wortham Theater Center, Morris*Aubry Architects, detail of model showing accepted design of revised entrance pavilion, July 1983 (Morris*Aubry Architects)*

Tuning

The Lyric Theater Foundation was organized by Harris Masterson III, Eugene F. Loveland, Isaac Arnold, Jr., Searcy Bracewell, and Jonathan Day, all supporters of the opera and the ballet, when it became obvious that Jones Hall could no longer accommodate these two organizations and the Houston Symphony Orchestra. Although built as a multipurpose performance center, Jones Hall functioned best as a concert hall. Therefore it seemed reasonable to construct a new building designed specifically as a professional residence for the opera and ballet. In 1977 Irl Mowery, a Houstonian who had been involved in the theater in a variety of ways, was hired as executive director of the foundation. A grant from the Cullen Foundation enabled the Lyric Theater Foundation to hire Johnson/Burgee Architects to prepare schematic designs. During 1977 Masterson, Mowery, and Philip Johnson chose a site for the center, for which Johnson/Burgee prepared at least two proposals.

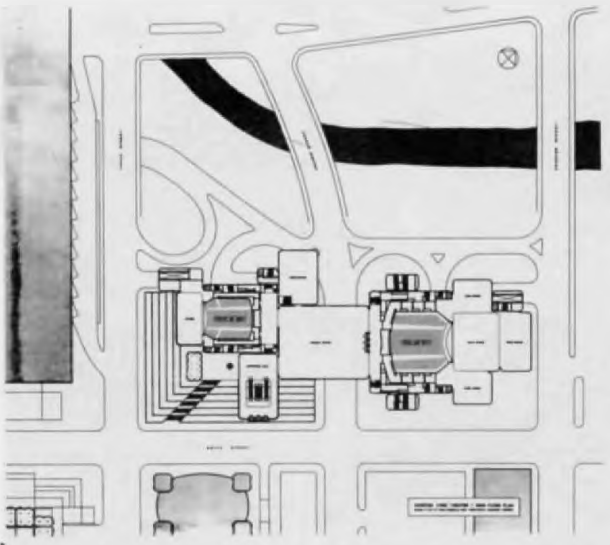
The site was an obvious one. It comprised two blocks in the Civic Center, blocks 61 and 40, bounded on the east by Smith Street, on the north by Preston Avenue, on the south by Texas Avenue, and on the west by Buffalo Bayou. Prairie Avenue separated the two blocks. Block 61 was diagonally across the Smith-Texas intersection from Jones Hall Plaza, the raised, terraced square that crowned the east end of the underground Civic Center Garage. Disposed around the plaza were Jones Hall (1962-1966, Caudill Rowlett Scott, architects), the Alley Theatre (1964-1968, Ulrich Franzen and Associates and MacKie and Kamrath, architects), the Albert Thomas Convention Center (1964-1967, Caudill Rowlett Scott, architects), and a brand new addition, Johnson/Burgee's celebrated Pennzoil Place (1970-1976). Pennzoil, Jones Hall, and the Alley Theatre were all recipients of AIA design awards; in fact, Jones Hall and the Alley Theatre were two of only three major performance halls in the entire country to have won these national architectural awards.

The site was not without disadvantages, though. The western edge of block 61 contained ramps leading to and from the Civic Center Garage. The Texas Avenue side of this block faced the truck docks of the Albert Thomas Convention Center, a three-block-long concrete box that severed blocks 61 and 40 from contact with the rest of the Civic Center to the south. Formerly the site of the Farmers' Market (1927-1929) and the six-story Scanlan Warehouse (1910-1911, D. H. Burnham and Company, architects), these blocks had been cleared to permit a connection to be made between Memorial Drive and the downtown street system, completed in 1960. Since Prairie Avenue functioned as the access ramp to Memorial Drive, it could not be closed. Moreover, the intersection of Bagby and Prairie, just west of the two blocks, occurred on a bridge over the bayou channel, making any realignment of Prairie prohibitively expensive. On the west side of the bayou lay the Central Fire Station and an elevated stretch of Interstate 45. On the east side of the site, along Smith, were the Alley Theatre, two parking lots, and at Preston and Smith, the old Tel-Electric Building, a boarded-up reminder of the area's past as a wholesale and warehouse district.

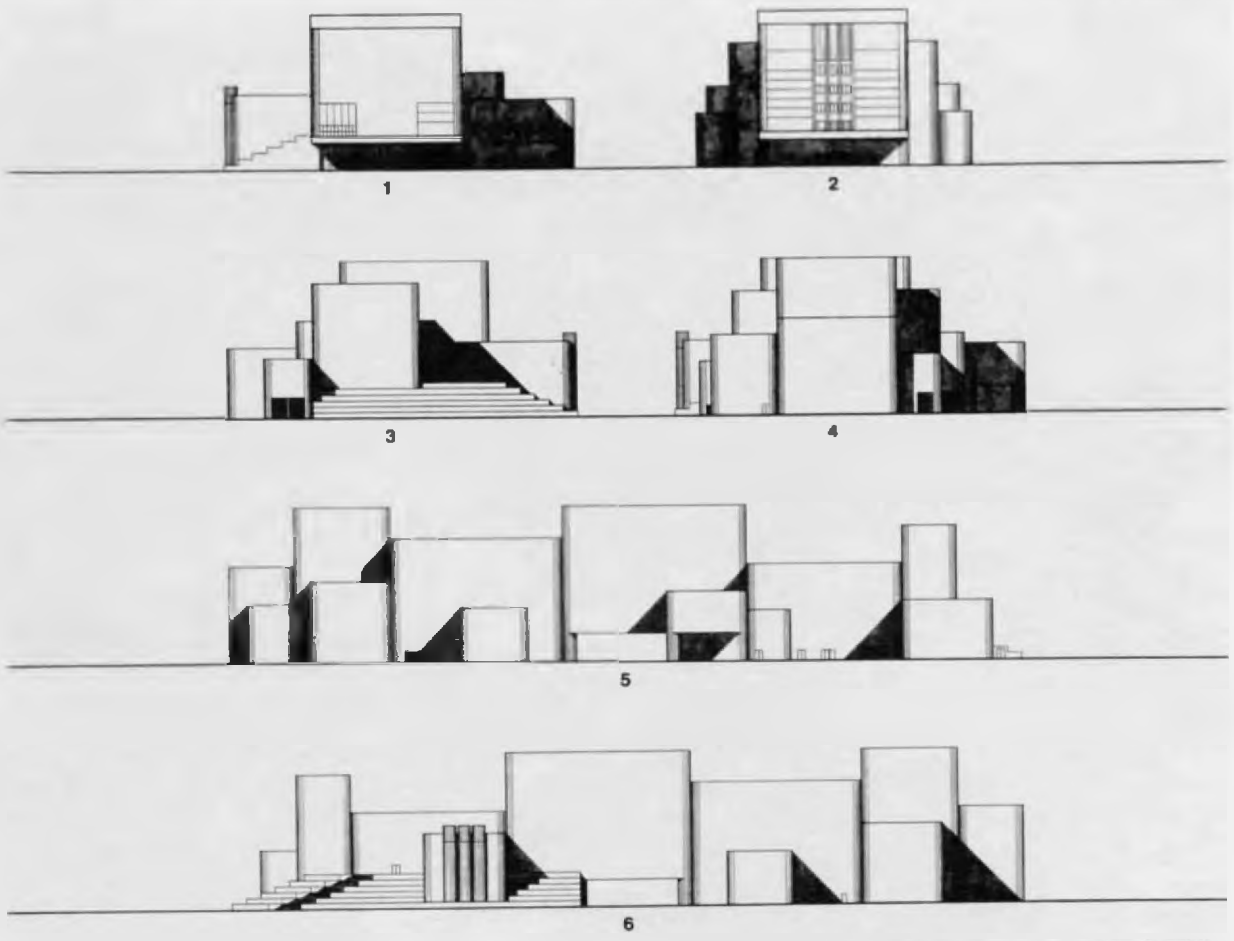
Because the two blocks were owned by the city, the foundation would not have to purchase real estate. However, it would have to convince the City Council to permit the lyric theater center to be built there. Informal discussions between representatives of the foundation and members of the council revealed that the foundation could not be assured of obtaining the site automatically. One problem was that the two blocks furnished a potential site for additions to the Albert Thomas Convention Center, which was in danger of losing its competitive standing to cities with newer, larger, exhibition halls. Another was that the lyric theater was viewed by some council members as a politically sensitive, "elitist" project, without broad, popular appeal. The foundation decided to deflect this objection by increasing the number of theaters in the center from one to two: a large (2,000 or more seats) opera and ballet theater, and a smaller hall that could be used by community performance groups.

The proposal that Johnson/Burgee submitted in March 1978 reflected this enlarged program. Their schematic design indicated an 800-seat theater on block 61, with its stage house turned toward Texas, and a 2,200-seat opera house on block 40, with its stage house backed up to Preston. Connecting the two theaters was the "grand foyer," an enormous civic room, 130 feet long, 105 feet wide, and 75 feet high, that bridged Prairie Avenue to serve as the common lobby for both theaters. The grand foyer was reached from an entrance pavilion accessible from two different levels: a street entrance on Smith, and an elevated plaza at the Smith-Texas corner up which an external stair was routed diagonally. Circulation spaces were generous and backstage spaces were ample. The grand foyer and an adjoining restaurant were positioned to overlook Buffalo Bayou and (inescapably) Interstate 45.

The elevations represented little more than volumetric extrusions of the principal spaces. They were uninspiring, implying a reversion to the New Brutalism of the 1960s. But as Philip Johnson and John Burgee subsequently cautioned, these were preliminary diagrams — not yet architecture. Nor, as it developed, were they fated to become so. The Linbeck Construction Corporation estimated a construction cost reported as ranging from $100 million to $140 million, considerably more than the $25 million that the foundation had anticipated raising. No provision appeared to be made for rehearsal or office space. Moreover, since the two auditoriums



1



2

3

4

1 Project: Lyric Theater Center, Johnson/Burgee Architects, 1978, plan

2 Project: Lyric Theater Center, Johnson/Burgee Architects, elevations and sections

3 View of Jones Hall Plaza looking north. Surrounding the square are (from left to right) the Albert Thomas Convention Center, Blocks 61 and 40, the Alley Theatre (with the Alley Theatre Center behind it), the Lancaster Hotel, and Jones Hall. (Photo by Paul Hester)

*4 Preliminary proposal: Lyric Theater Center, S. I. Morris Associates, architects, February 1980. Perspective rendering of main entrance at the Smith Street-Texas Avenue intersection. (Morris*Aubry Architects)*

were set above the street, at the level of the Prairie Avenue bridge, the stages would be about 20 feet above the street, necessitating an elevator behind each stage to hoist an 18-wheel truck up from the street to load and unload sets and equipment. Only the public spaces of the two theaters were to be shared. Their stage and backstage areas were to be completely self-sufficient.

Overture

Disenchantment with Johnson/Burgee led the trustees of the foundation to retain S. I. Morris Associates in December 1979 to prepare a scheme for presentation to the City Council in connection with the foundation's formal request for the two blocks at Smith and Texas. S. I. Morris Associates had not built a performance hall, as had, for instance, Caudill Rowlett Scott, who actually prepared a schematic design for the lyric theater at the behest of Cadillac-Fairview, in an attempt to interest the foundation in a one-block, donated site in Cadillac-Fairview's Houston Center. However, the Morris firm had designed the new Central Library (1970-1975) in the Civic Center and restored the adjoining Julia Ideson Building (1977-1979), the previous central library building. S. I. Morris was widely regarded as the most powerful and politically influential architect in Houston, attributes that the foundation needed to secure the site. Morris's partner, Eugene Aubry, was the firm's designer. Since joining Morris in 1969, Aubry had developed a distinctive style, a minimal, modernist aesthetic infused with spontaneity and wit. His penchant for the unpretentious, even the funky, gave his sculptural, formalist buildings an unexpected "pop" edge. Aubry's best buildings seemed to combine the image of sophistication for which the city strove with the infectious energy that propelled Houston.

On 19 February 1980 several trustees of the Lyric Theater Foundation and S. I. Morris appeared before City Council and presented the scheme that S. I. Morris Associates had prepared with the help of the directors of the Houston Grand Opera and the Houston Ballet. It contained two theaters, each on a separate block. A pedestrian bridge spanned Prairie, but lobbies were placed next to the theaters. The opera house was on block 61, with its stage house backed up to Buffalo Bayou; the smaller theater shared block 40 with a multistory parking garage. Both blocks were filled with building. An undulating curtain-wall of glass block cloaked the four-level lobby spaces that ran from the Smith-Texas corner entrance back down Smith Street. After being assured that the center would contain a theater space appropriate for community groups, the City Council authorized building the lyric theater on the two blocks. This meant that, after two years, the real planning (and fund raising) could begin.

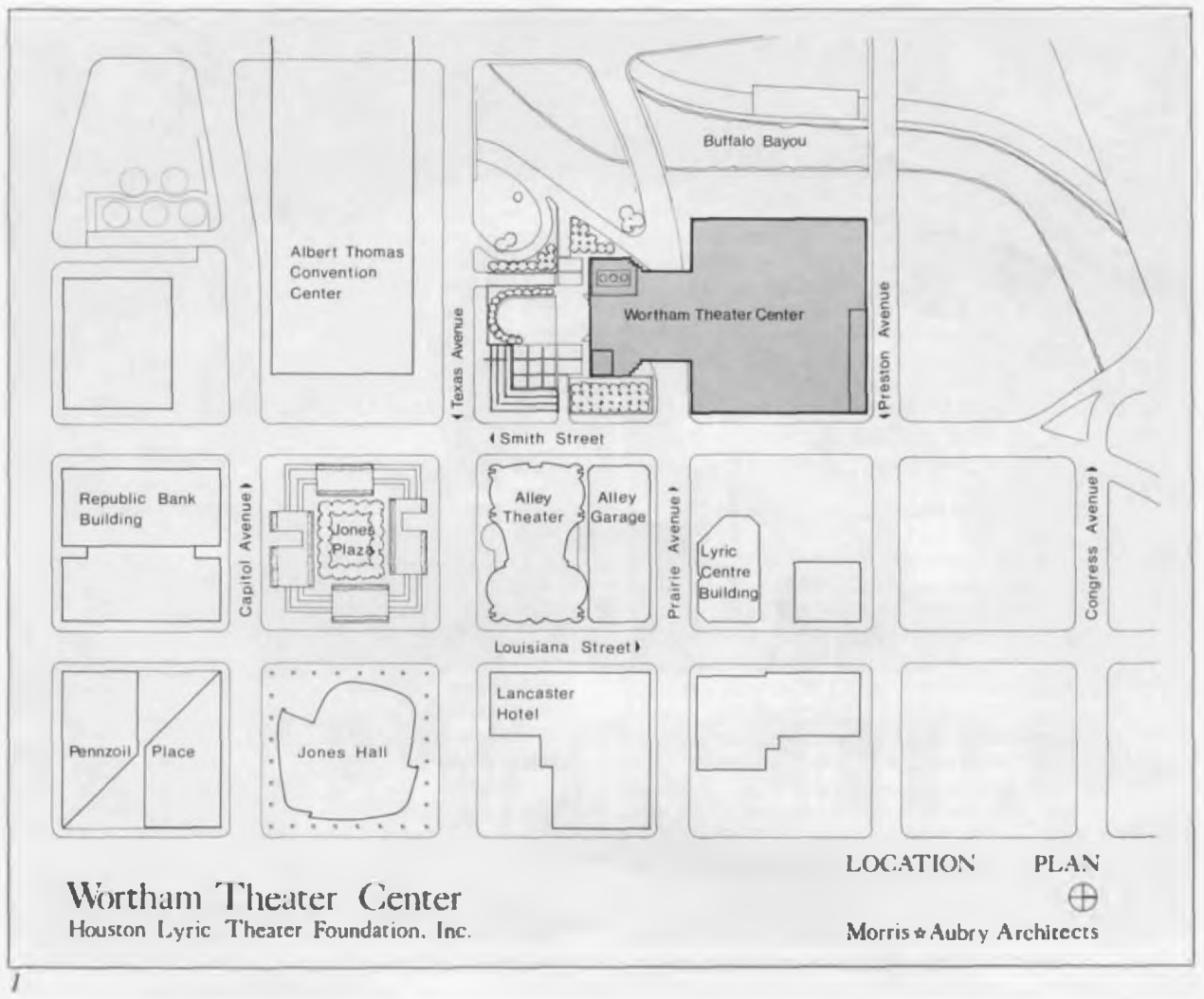
Act I: The Curtain Rises

Although press reports treated the wavy wall project as a considered design, it began to be subject to intensive redesign following the selection of professional consultants to work with the foundation, the two resident companies, and the architects in programming and planning the lyric theater. David Gockley, general director of the Houston Grand Opera, Ben Stevenson, artistic director of the Houston Ballet, Harris Masterson, Eugene Loveland, and Irl Mowery compiled lists of candidates for acoustical and theatrical consultants, and Morris*Aubry Architects (as S. I. Morris Associates became known in March 1980) compiled a list of structural and mechanical engineering consultants. By this process, Christopher Jaffe; Nananne Porcher and Clyde Nordheimer of Jean Rosenthal Associates; Joseph P. Colaco of CBM Engineers; and Jack Holle of Cook and Holle were selected in April 1980.

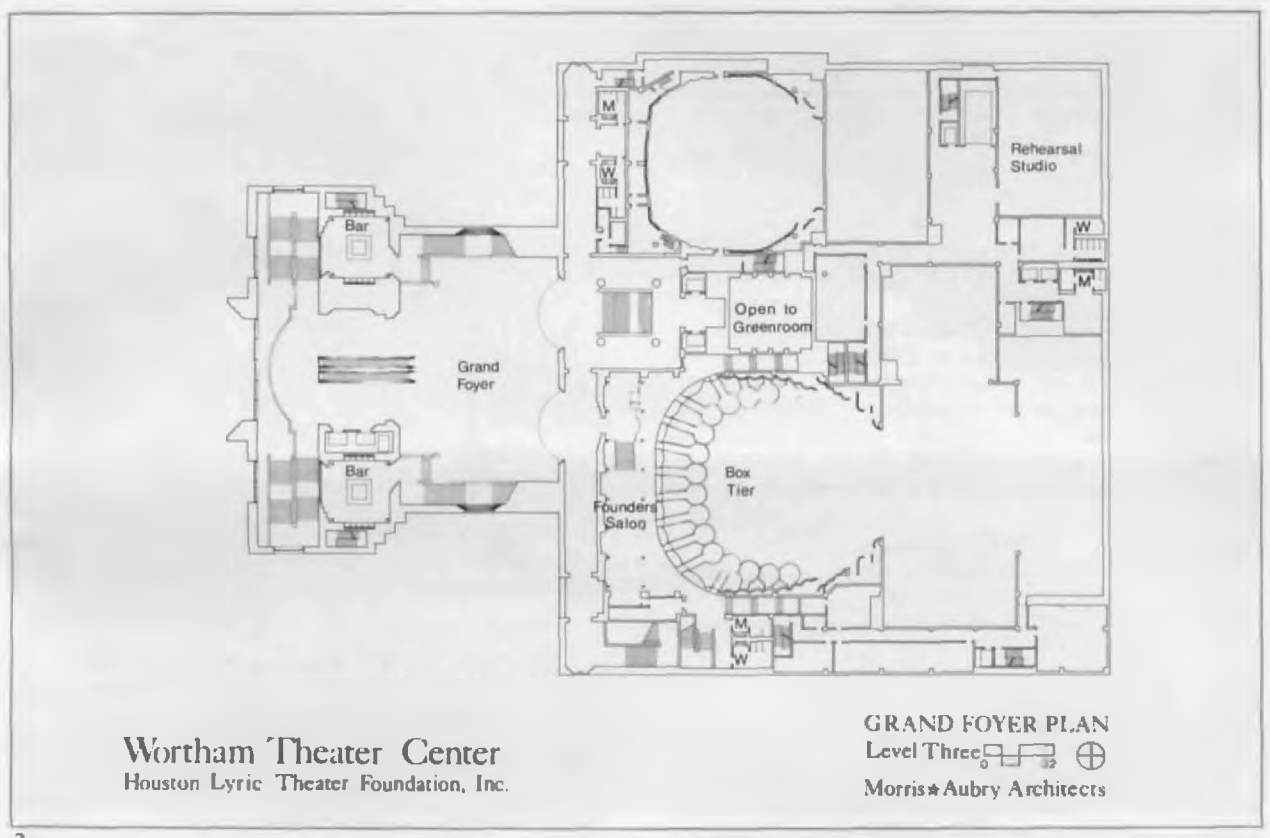
Once the choice of professional consultants was made, representatives of each firm traveled together to inspect the Metropolitan Opera House (1966, Harrison and Abramowitz, architects) and the New York State Theater (1964, Philip Johnson, architect) at Lincoln Center in New York, the opera house at Kennedy Center (1971, Edward Durrell Stone and Associates, architects) in Washington, D. C., and the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion at the Music Center of Los Angeles (1964, Welton Becket and Associates, architects) in Los Angeles. These four theaters, along with the Civic Opera Building (1929, Graham, Anderson, Probst and White, architects) in Chicago and the San Francisco Opera House (1932, Arthur Brown, Jr. and G. Albert Landsburgh, architects) were the only major public houses in the United States built specifically for the performance of opera since World War I. It was indicative of Houston's civic and artistic ambitions that it now sought admission to this rank.

All of the four new houses had met with critical acclaim as performance halls, but with unrelenting critical opprobrium as architecture. Conservatively designed from an acoustical and technical standpoint, each exemplified the gaudy culture-center modern style of the late '50s and early '60s. Most had endured prolonged and complicated building histories: the New York State Theater took 8 years to get built, the Met took 10 years, and the Kennedy Center 13 years (and then with only three of its five theaters complete). Of the four, the New York State Theater was closest to the Houston center in program (it was shared by the New York City Opera and the New York City Ballet), but the Kennedy Center was closest in size (2,300 seats). The entire Kennedy Center had cost $66.4 million to build. All of Lincoln Center (including the 3,800-seat Metropolitan Opera and the 2,700-seat New York State Theater) had cost $165 million to build. By contrast, Jones Hall was built for $6.6 million, and the Alley Theatre, containing an 800-seat and a 300-seat theater, for a thrifty $3.5 million.

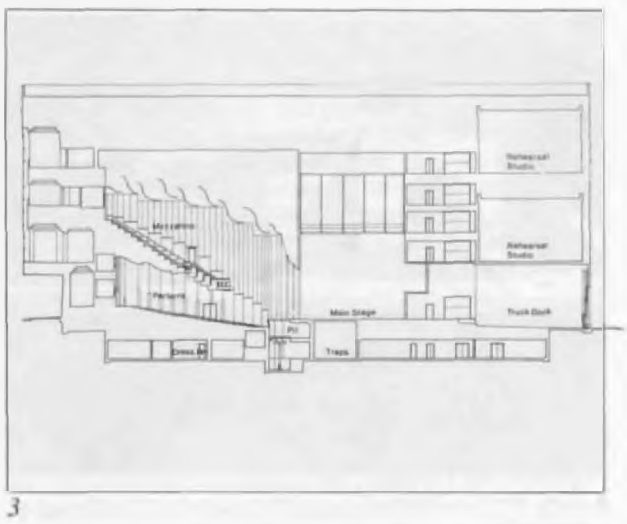
According to Eugene Aubry and his associates, Pete Ed Garrett, project designer, and Donald Springer,



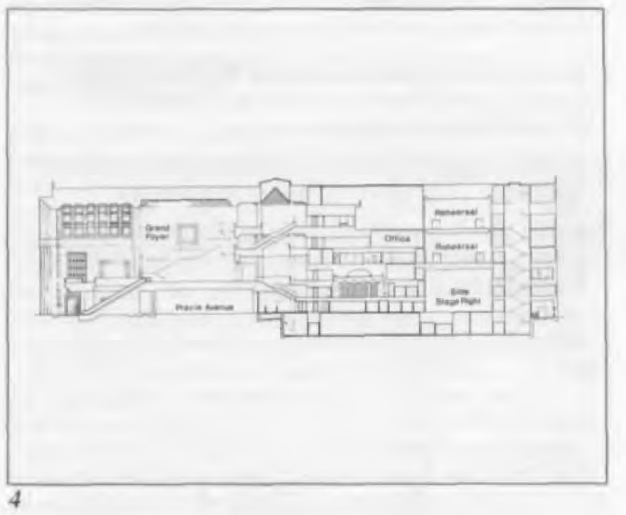
1



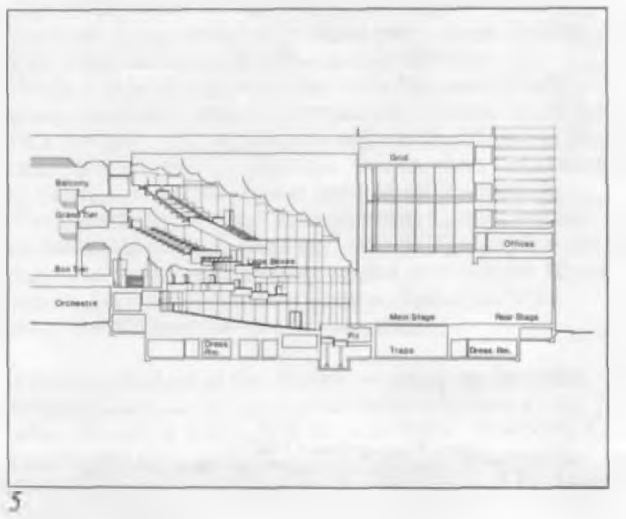
2



3



4



5

*1 Site plan, July 1983 (Morris*Aubry Architects)*
*2 Level-three plan, July 1983 (Morris*Aubry Architects)*
*3 Partial cross section through small theater, July 1983 (Morris*Aubry Architects)*
*4 Cross section between the two theaters, July 1983 (Morris*Aubry Architects)*
*5 Partial cross section through the Alice and George Brown Theater, July 1983 (Morris*Aubry Architects)*

partner-in-charge, Porcher, Nordheimer, and Jaffe came to the conclusion by mid 1980 that to bring the lyric theater within the realm of affordability, a crucial series of design decisions needed to be made. The two theaters had to be consolidated on one block. This meant considerable economies in shared backstage spaces, dressing rooms, and technical apparatus. A critical point was the truck dock. Since the labor costs of loading and unloading shows are so high, the multiple trucks that a large traveling production generate have to be serviced quickly and efficiently. Therefore, the dock needed to be at street level, where trucks simply could back-up to it. The dock had to accommodate three trucks at a time, rather than one, making the prospect of truck elevators economically untenable. This in turn meant that the stages had to be at street level, as they were at Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, and the Music Center of Los Angeles. Because the most generally accepted conventions were to be followed to produce houses with optimal sight-line and acoustical attributes, the configurations of the auditoriums were limited strictly by a set of already tested and proved shapes and dimensions. The result of this chain of circumstances was that the orchestra seating level of the two theaters would be entered a half-level above the street and a full level below the Prairie Avenue bridge, rather than directly from the bridge.

One individual engaged in the planning recalls that "there was an urgency about fund raising, but there wasn't." Since it was assumed that Houstonians would come forward to underwrite the lyric theater generously, what seemed most compelling was to focus the collective energy of all the participants on the design of the center. As the architects explained, the center was designed from the inside out and from the back forward. The personal experience that Mowery had with theatrical production fortified the foundation's commitment to provide the Houston Grand Opera and the Houston Ballet with unsurpassable performance spaces and professional residences where each company could expand and mature.

The consultants and representatives of the two companies were specific and detailed in their requirements. This meant that a strong constituency existed for determining the programming and layout of the performance and backstage spaces, for technical and acoustical requirements, and for the shapes, dimensions, and finishes of the halls. Multitudinous personnel — crew members, seamstresses, musicians — gave advice and passed judgement on the arrangement and outfitting of the theaters. For example, these consultations revealed that for the production of opera, the large house needed only one side stage, rather than two symmetrically flanking the stage. The architects and consultants had learned on their tour of inspection that the Metropolitan Opera House, the most elaborately equipped opera theater in the country, routinely used only one of its side stages. Therefore the larger theater's left side stage was only half as long as its right side stage.

To preserve optimal sight-line and acoustical conditions, the maximum seating capacity of the larger theater was determined to be 2,300. This theater took form as a lyre-shaped chamber containing 2,225 seats distributed in four tiers: the 1,102-seat orchestra level, the 124-seat box tier (half a level below the Prairie Avenue bridge), the 595-seat loge box and grand tier, and the 404-seat balcony tier. The orchestra floor was curved upward from the orchestra pit in a shallow bowl. The ceiling above, a series of sail-like curved planes, had a much more steeply curved sectional profile. The ceiling, the cylindrically ribbed surfaces of the walls, and the balcony and box parapet faces were finished with plaster to ensure hard, resonant surfaces. For although it would be equipped with electrical tuning equipment, the large house had to be able to function acoustically without technological intervention.

The capacity of the smaller theater was increased from 800 to 1,088 seats. Of these, 650 were at the parterre level (entered from the same level as the larger theater's orchestra), and 438 in a mezzanine balcony, entered from the same level as the large house's grand tier. A staging area between the truck dock and the back of the smaller theater's stage could serve as auxiliary backstage space, if necessary. The walls of the smaller theater also were configured as a series of cylindrical ribs surfaced with plaster.

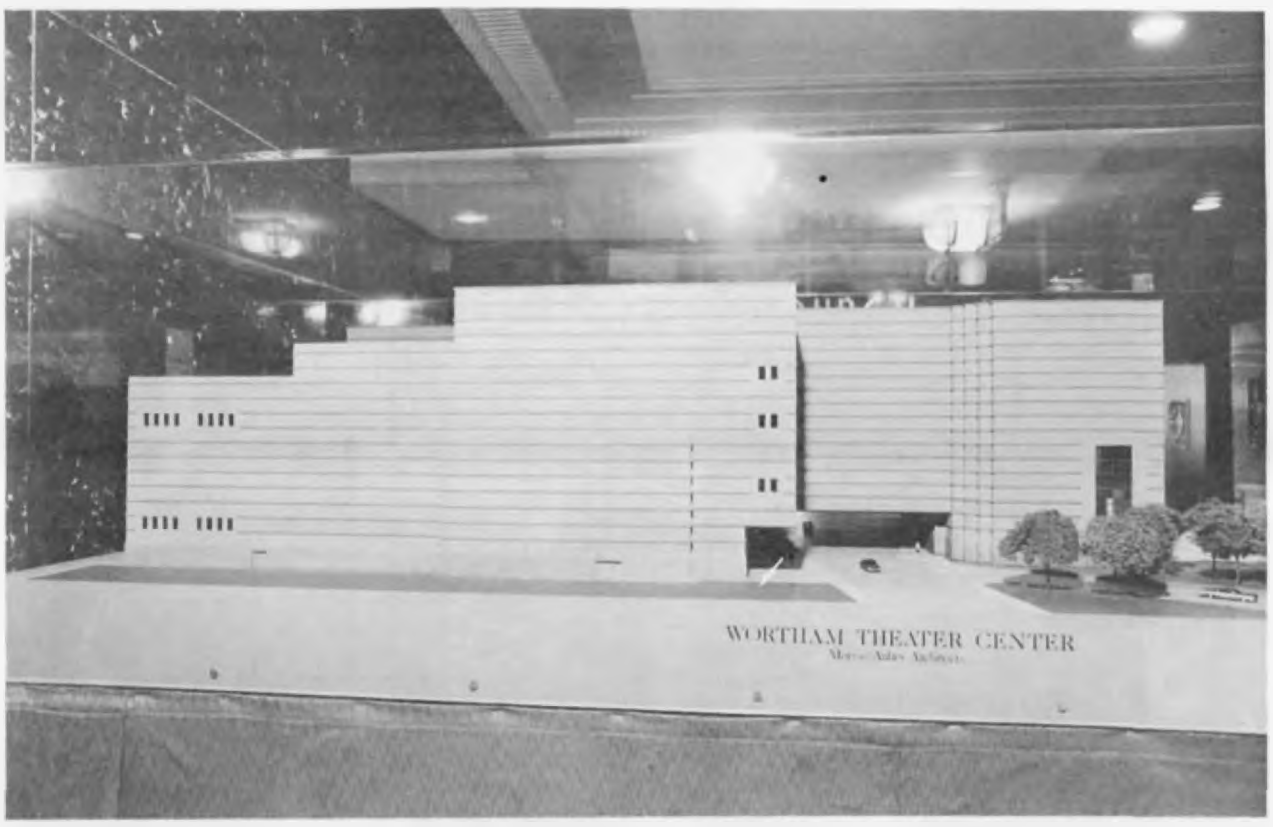
Consultation with members of the city's Civic Center Department staff indicated that the 1,750-car Civic Center Garage was adequate to handle the traffic generated by the lyric theater, so that no additional parking would be required. The architects conferred with the Civic Center staff to identify and resolve potential problems with the lyric theater's eventual operation and maintenance: such issues as circulation in the public spaces, the location of the ticket sales counter and public toilets, and energy consumption.

The two theaters completely filled block 40. Between the entrance side of the two auditoriums and the street wall, along Prairie, there was enough room for a transverse passage only, not an entrance lobby. Therefore, the parts of the building most visible to the public — the entrances, ticket counters, and lobby — had to go on block 61. Elimination of the parking structure meant that no other construction would be required on this block. The emphasis on precisely calculated performance and service spaces (what the architects had come quickly to call the "factory") did not extend to the public spaces or to the exterior of the building. For unlike the back of the house, these parts of the design had no special constituencies among the clients.

The chief obstacle in designing the public spaces was the presence of Prairie Avenue. Since it could not be closed, it had to be bridged. This meant

1

2



3

*1 Model showing east elevation of Wortham Theater Center, Morris*Aubry Architects, December 1981 (Morris*Aubry Architects)*

*2 Detail of model showing revised entrance pavilion, November 1982 (Morris*Aubry Architects)*

3 Model showing west elevation of Wortham Theater Center, facing Buffalo Bayou, July 1983 (Photo by Buster Dean, Houston Chronicle*)*

bringing the public up to the bridge level, 25 feet above Prairie, then getting at least half of them back down again to the level of the orchestra and the parterre. Morris*Aubry returned to Johnson/Burgee's notion of using the bridge level as the common lobby for both theaters rather than a mere pedestrian crossing. This lobby became a great, rhomboid-shaped space, 275 feet long on its longest side, 90 feet wide, and 60 feet high. The first scheme made public, in September 1981, featured an entrance pavilion on block 61 set at the head of a monumental external stairway that was routed upward from the Smith-Texas corner on the diagonal. The pavilion, facing Texas Avenue, was an opaque wall, a sculpturally-shaped folded plane cleaved in two by the entrance portal. In contrast to the seeming massiveness and solidity of this frontal plane, the diagonally aligned east and west walls of the lobby bridge were entirely glazed. The rest of block 61 became a heavily landscaped "mountain." This proposal represented only one of an eventual 26 elevation studies, most of them simply sketches, as the architects phrased it. However, as interest continued to be fixed on the back of the house (which, once set, remained essentially unchanged), Morris*Aubry received neither strongly considered nor consistent opinions on the public face of the lyric theater from the foundation's trustees.

At the beginning of 1980 the foundation calculated that the lyric theater could be built for between $30 and $40 million. By the spring of 1982, when the design that Morris*Aubry and their consultants completed in late 1981 was announced publicly, the figure had risen to $65 million, despite elimination of the parking garage. The official design, the third to be publicized, featured a giant, triangular entrance pavilion facing the Smith-Texas corner. A broad, depressed arch, 80 feet high, was centered on the pavilion's angled front façade, suggesting an immense proscenium. Behind a glazed wall deeply inset in the archway, the entrance lobby rose the full height of the pavilion, 115 feet from foundation to parapet.

The "factory" behind was a big, box-like mass, filling block 40. Like the triangular pavilion it was to be faced with travertine. Red granite was to be used for the base course, a mid-level belt course, the parapet, and the framing of the great arch. External balconies, set behind long, horizontal slit openings, were accessible from the grand foyer (as the bridge lobby was called) and the promenade bridges that encircled the foyer at the grand tier and balcony tier levels. Huge square windows, some with balconies, faced Smith and the bayou at the east and west ends of the transverse passages on the grand-foyer, grand-tier, and balcony-tier levels. The opera and ballet offices and rehearsal studios were wrapped between and around the fly lofts above the two stages, facing north, east, and west. Long, strip windows articulated the position of these spaces. The plaza in front of the entrance pavilion consisted of a broad, diagonal walkway flanked by massed trees, focused on Jones Hall Plaza and Pennzoil Place, and screening the truck docks of the convention center.

The exterior was simple; the scale was Texan. The internal arrangement lacked the diagrammatic clarity of Johnson/Burgee's scheme. The entrance pavilion and grand foyer were modernist lofts, continuous space activated by changes of ground plane, breath-taking vistas, and the sculptural treatment of constructive elements: stairs, escalators, the promenade balconies, the exposed tiers of floor levels, and the rounded ends of the two halls protruding behind a screen of structural columns that stretched across the long side of the grand foyer.

This project, containing 750,000 square feet, was called the Gus. S. Wortham Theater Center in acknowledgement of the Wortham Foundation's pledge, made in September 1981. During July 1982 the opera house officially became the Alice and George Brown Theater in recognition of the Brown Foundation's substantial pledge. In the year-and-a-half that the project was being designed the Lyric Theater Foundation board of trustees had been increased in number from 15 to 85. Most of the new trustees were added in recognition of major gifts and pledges made between 1980 and 1982, which brought to a total of $39 million the amount of money committed to the project. But even in the face of these accomplishments, the pricing estimates came as a shock: $115 million. The foundation had announced its intention to begin construction in December 1982 and to open the Wortham Theater Center in 1985. Instead, cost cutting revisions became imperative.

Act II: Missed Cues
Economizing reversed the initial direction of design: cutbacks proceeded from the outside in and from the front backward. The exterior would be finished in brick rather than travertine; only the base course would remain granite. Window openings all but vanished and the huge, triangular entrance pavilion was eliminated. As part of the process of revision, Gerald D. Hines Interests contributed their services as project coordinator and for the first time during the design process emphasis began to be placed on the external appearance of the center.

The revised design for the entrance pavilion, which was made public in November 1982, resulted from Morris*Aubry and Hines Interests' working together to arrive at an economical alternative to the triangular pavilion. In their revised version, the rhomboid-shaped grand foyer converged on a flat, planar façade, stepped in profile and once again facing Texas Avenue rather than the Smith-Texas intersection. A giant, postmodern Serlian arch was cut into the front of this planar elevation at the grand-foyer level. From the arched portal two escalators, flanked by two wide stairs, descended to the plaza beneath a glass semi-dome carried on a ring of paired columns. The plaza, striated with radial runners, now swung across all of block 61 in an expansive circle while maintaining a strong link to the Smith-Texas intersection. The 100-foot-high "greenhouse" semi-dome substantially reduced the enclosed area devoted to public circulation. Because it would have been air-conditioned only at the floor levels, the architects felt that it represented an additional savings in mechanical equipment. The design was praised enthusiastically by Ann Holmes, fine arts editor of the *Houston Chronicle*, in a front page review that appeared in the paper's Sunday magazine, *Zest*, on 14 November 1982.

Although the executive committee of the foundation's board approved the scheme in writing, it was released to the news media before representatives of all the major donors had the opportunity to view it. From within this group such strong objections to the greenhouse bubble were voiced that the design of the entrance pavilion once again had to be revised.

On the heels of this controversy came a more serious move, a reorganization of the Lyric Theater Foundation. In January 1983 Irl Mowery was charged with raising funds on a full-time basis and a building committee, composed of Robert Cizik, president of Cooper Industries and a supporter of the Houston Grand Opera, and R. W. Wortham III, a developer, both members of the board's executive committee, was constituted to act as the client. Pledges and contributions amounted by then to over $41 million, but it was clear that the center would cost $75 million, rather than $65 or $70 million. However, once $65 million was raised, construction could begin. The foundation hoped that this would happen in March 1983.

Cizik and Wortham initiated another, and much more severe, round of cutbacks to reduce the $115 million estimate to $75 million. This entailed the deletion of 300,000 square feet of space. According to Wortham, $10 million of an estimated $23 million worth of theatrical technological equipment was deferred. The plaza and the tunnel beneath it, joining the lobby to the Civic Center Garage, were eliminated from the contract. It was decided to defer installation of equipment and seating in the small theater, for a savings of $4 million. The number of rehearsal studios was reduced from eight to two, and 50 percent of the planned office space was eliminated. An attempt also was made to concentrate the building on one block, but this proved impossible. Some consideration was given to eliminating the small theater altogether and building a one-house center, but it was felt that to do so would jeopardize existing political commitments and financial pledges. Still, the amount of money that the building committee had to excise, $40 million, was what the Lyric Theater Foundation had hoped to build the center for in 1980.

Reductions were made in such a way that the deleted equipment and rehearsal and office space could be added subsequently as money became available. Revisions to the front of the building were significant. The rhomboid-shaped grand foyer was reduced to a rectangular volume 75 feet by 128 feet in area. The entrance pavilion became a shallow, rectangularly planned block. The reduction of the grand foyer necessitated some internal realignment of circulation. In place of a continuous, modernist space sculpturally enlivened with constructive elements, the entrance pavilion, grand foyer, and theater circulation passages were reconfigured as an axial sequence of symmetrically composed, rectangularly shaped, and spatially centered rooms. The use of *poche* cleverly masked the asymmetrical disposition of the two auditoriums and the main stairs at the grand-foyer level. Its presence in the transverse circulation passage serving the orchestra and parterre seats caused the width of this passage to be shrunk to the allowable minimum. Circulation from the grand foyer to the two upper tiers was improved. But compacting the rhomboid into a rectangle meant that inevitably the right-hand stair from the grand foyer down to the orchestra and parterre levels was emphasized while the left-hand stair ceased to be visible from the grand foyer, or even the transverse passage that led from the foyer to that stair.

The exterior of the Wortham Theater was recast in a straight-forward, dignified way. A central, arched portal, 85-feet high, was framed by receding granite voussoirs and flanked by a pair of tall windows. Windows of the same dimensions occurred on each side of the entrance pavilion and a pair of tall, arched windows faced Prairie Avenue on the south elevation of the factory. Small, paired windows were set at both ends of the cross-axial passages serving the grand foyer, grand tier, and balcony tier facing Smith Street and the bayou. Groups of small windows also occurred at the back of the building, in the rehearsal and office spaces. The exterior preserved the granite base course that encircled the building. The walls above were to be faced with rose-colored brick. Horizontal bands of oversized, molded, dark-purple brick occurred at six-foot intervals to provide surface modulation.

This was the fifth and ultimate scheme to be presented publicly. On 19 July 1983, 3½ years to the day after obtaining the property, representatives of the Lyric Theater Foundation again appeared before the City Council to present the design for official approval. Several council members raised questions about the small number of windows in the building, its evident lack of relationship to Buffalo Bayou, and its projected maintenance costs. The council learned from Robert Cizik that the building's estimated cost was $80 million, but that the foundation was committed to raising only $75 million, of which $48 million had been pledged or given. Also, the plaza depicted in the model would not be constructed by the foundation. Despite reservations, the City Council voted to accept the design after declining, by a vote of eight-to-seven, Councilman George Greanias's motion that the design be approved in principle only and not in detail.

Following the council's approval of the project, critics in both of the daily newspapers reviewed the design. Ann Holmes, in the *Chronicle*, described it as "a totally derivative, watered-down, post-Modernist building, a mediocrity of a building which, while its interior may serve the theatrical purposes very well, has not matched the aesthetic levels this community has come to expect; and for the price, has a right to expect." Carl Cunningham, writing in *The Houston Post*, concentrated on the disorganized proceedings of the Lyric Theater Foundation. Referring to the design, he questioned the "up-and-down steps and run-around-the-corner passageways that threaten to cram people together in the way they do in Jones Hall," and was anxious that "cost factors and design problems also seem to be nibbling away at important backstage features of the two theaters, which is a far more tragic prospect for our rapidly maturing opera and ballet companies." Although Cunningham observed that "the world is full of great-big, chunky-looking, utilitarian opera houses. That's the nature of the beast," he was much less disturbed by the external appearance of the center than was Holmes.

Such public rebuke was indeed bitter for the foundation and the architects. In response, the building committee authorized Morris*Aubry to make $250,000 worth of external modifications. The grand foyer obtained windows and balconies on its east and west sides at the landing level of the two stairs leading to the grand tier. The east and west windows on the entrance pavilion and the south-facing Prairie Avenue windows on the factory were reproportioned to match those on the grand foyer bridge. Balconies were inserted in the openings at the east and west ends of the transverse passages. A series of long, narrow, rectangular panels capped with rondel panels were sunk into the east, west, and north street walls to produce further surface modulation, much as Johnson/Burgee did at the base of the RepublicBank Center. These panels were to be illuminated at night by upward-directed external lighting. The architects proceeded to complete construction documents, and in January 1984 these were sent out for bids. The foundation's building committee expects to award a construction contract in March or April for about $50 million. Favorable pricing conditions made it possible to include the seats and theatrical equipment for the small theater in the bid package. Projected expenses of $13 million for technical equipment and $6 to $7 million in fees and salaries will bring the total expenditure for the building to between $69 and $70 million.

Act III: What the Critics Had to Say . . .
From the prospect of today, it is clear that the image of an opera and ballet theater built and equipped entirely with private contributions was a product of the myth of Houston's boundless opportunity, a myth that in the end proved seductive to no one more than Houstonians. It seems uncharitable, to say the least, to disparage the efforts of the Lyric Theater Foundation's trustees and staff. Their optimism was overwhelmed by the magnitude of the project, the effects of inflation on building construction, and the simple bad luck of an unanticipated recession.

Six years later, the estimated $100 million cost of Johnson/Burgee's scheme seems to have been a reasonable sum for the kind of residence hall that supporters of the Houston Grand Opera and the Houston Ballet believed these two companies to deserve. That the trustees of the Lyric Theater Foundation failed to come to terms with this, either in 1978 or in 1982, was ominous. Once it became apparent that the true cost of building a performance center had been seriously underestimated — and by 1981 that was apparent, the project should have been subjected to an intensive critical review by all parties concerned: the foundation, the two companies, and the City of Houston. Alternative sources of funding, a revised building program, and a revised construction schedule should have been considered. But as several individuals connected with the process of planning have remarked, no one was in charge.

The role of the City of Houston seems to have been entirely passive. The foundation and the architects had to seek out the advice and counsel of various municipal officials in regard to the design of the center. Apart from dedicating the property and voting approval of the design, the city exercised little guidance over the planning and design process. From the perspective of the city government, the lyric theater center was a private effort, best left to succeed or founder on its own.

This disposition points toward the source of the frustration generated by the lyric theater project. It was conceived and carried out as something done for the public good, but from which the public was excluded. The one public body involved, the City of Houston, lacked the interest (or ability) to redress this problem. No mechanism existed for public review and criticism. If everything had proceeded smoothly, this familiar manner of doing business in Houston might not now seem so deficient. As it was, the foundation did not awaken to its own state of crisis for a full year. Only at the end of 1982 did the trustees seem to realize that the funds needed to build the building might not be raised and that drastic action had to be taken to rescue the project.
The architecture of the Wortham Theater Center has been compromised by these procedural failings. The most serious problems derive from the site. While it was the obvious site, one Houston block — even one that is slightly over-sized — is too small for two theaters. If it was inadvisable to build two separate theaters on two separate blocks, then the choice of blocks 61 and 40 should have been reassessed. The questions of street realignment, street closings, or traffic re-routing were not raised. The city's commitment to the lyric theater center seemed too tenuous to risk exploring these issues. The architects were left to cope as best as they could.

The biggest flaw in the design — going up in order to come back down — derives from a failure to resolve the siting issue. It is an intractable problem, contingent on a sequence of otherwise reasonable decisions, but compelled by the necessity of bridging Prairie Avenue.

With the accepted design of July 1983 the desire to produce in the Wortham Theater Center a monumental public building seems to have been achieved. (The subsequent "face-saving" modifications remain open to question. The accepted design needed more windows, but as much for the relief of its occupants as for the external effect.) The building will exhibit a more richly colored and textured surface than Jones Hall and the Alley Theatre, and a much more surely proportioned monumental scale than does Jones Hall. (The two buildings are about the same height.) The factory block, which appears so vast and forbidding in model form, will be about the same size as Foley's department store, a ten-story building that fills its square-block site and is faced with patterned brickwork. The principal difference is that Foley's has display windows and a projecting sidewalk canopy on the ground floor, whereas the Wortham Theater Center will not. Perhaps if the center had contained storefront lease space at sidewalk level to provide visual relief, activity, and some extra income, this would be different. It was only one of many alternatives precluded because the planning process was so narrowly focused.

With increasing frequency the example of Dallas has been held up lately as a corrective to Houston. The downtown Dallas Arts District, which was conceived in 1977 and began to be implemented in 1978 and 1979, provides an alternative model of cooperation between public and private bodies in planning and building public institutions for artistic exhibition and performance. Nonetheless, Dallas has had its own tribulations. I. M. Pei and Partners' 2,200-seat Symphony Concert Hall, unveiled in May 1982, was the beneficiary of $28.6 million voted in a bond referendum in August of that year. Since then, however, it too has experienced significant reductions to bring it within reach of a construction budget of $49.5 million, $20.9 million of which must be raised from private sources.

Houston has long prided itself on not being like Dallas. The expansiveness, independence, optimism, and energy that are the attributes of Houston's civic identity oppose the apprehensive conformism that is Dallas's mythic characteristic. The Dallas Arts District will achieve what happened in downtown Houston 15 years ago; the difference is that Dallas will make up in planning what it lost in time. What Houston's characteristic style of operation lacks — and it is the deficiency that the history of the lyric theater project illustrates — are an organized and responsible city government, and mechanisms to encourage public participation and critical inquiry.

Pelli Crams Old and New Ideas Into Rice's Future

Peter C. Papademetriou

In early October 1983, Cesar Pelli delivered a public presentation of his suggestions for a Master Plan for growth of the Rice University campus.[1] An architect familiar to many Houstonians for his Four-Leaf Towers and Four Oaks Place rising above Post Oak, Pelli is presently engaged as designer of Herring Hall, the building to house the new Jones Graduate School of Administration on the Rice campus. As the first major overall study to be given public exposure since the General Plan of 1910 by Cram, Goodhue and Ferguson,[2] the Pelli offering is of interest for a range of reasons. For the Rice campus there are both specific and general recommendations; for Houston, it offers an opportunity to examine principles for the creation of a cohesive physical environment. Within the current state of architectural discourse, it suggests a renewed interest in both stylistic and planning concepts long regarded as anathema to those who considered themselves progressive modernists.

The chief virtue of the Pelli recommendations, aside from indicating the continuing viability of organizational and compositional principles put forth by Ralph Adams Cram, is its very fine-grain level of design. In a few specific instances, Pelli's strategy approaches the level of darning as it knits together existing situations. With both dead-serious pragmatism and a sensitive eye toward the potential of existing circumstantial conditions, Pelli rearranges specific bad situations to propose a positive, larger whole. As such, he shows that the process of accretion over time is one that never can be reduced to pure functional consideration. Instead, it must be tested by the logic of each decision, addressing the past as it also considers the future.

Certain expedient circumstances have resulted in unpleasant situations for those who use the campus, and Pelli suggests minor adjustments as a means toward amelioration. This includes both the reconfiguration of the Fondren Library's loading dock in order to provide a valuable east-west pedestrian path, new arcades and redefined walls to connect a series of presently unrelated buildings to either side of Hamman Hall, and removal of selected *ad hoc* elements in the Engineering Quadrangle to facilitate the introduction of new buildings.

One of the better recommendations is a proposed T-shaped mechanical engineering building. Its form completes a space begun by Cram, forms a visual bridge to a series of later and stylistically unrelated buildings, and knits together a convergence of pedestrian ways. Pelli demonstrates, in such ways as this, a recognition of existing fine-grain conditions. Unfortunately, as observed in *The Rice Thresher*, "The very week of its announcement, this master plan was practically outdated; instead of the mechanical engineering structure suggested in the schematics, a more modest building has been selected for construction."[3] Pelli makes other suggestions to enhance rather bland locations such as the Rice Memorial Center and the west (rear) elevation of Fondren Library.

Knitting at a larger level, balancing the composition of the quilt if you will, Pelli recommends that buildings be inserted in the midst of existing groups. Generally, the suggestions are positive, formal realignments in the spirit of the original plan by Cram, particularly for the Hamman Hall forecourt, and for completing the southeast edge of the Engineering Quadrangle.

Additions that would complete certain campus buildings and spaces and the introduction of new elements also are proposed, as well as two comprehensive plans for future extensions half again the size of the campus. These include new residential colleges, which continue residential themes already present and suggest integration into a larger whole, as well as a proposed conference center adjacent to Cohen House and Lovett Hall. The conference center footprint is, in fact, a direct take from what was to have been the architecture building in the General Plan of 1910. One is reminded of Affonso Eduardo Reidy's use of the Endless Museum by LeCorbusier in one of his urban-design schemes; a compliment was intended by both Reidy and Pelli.

It is in the extensions to the west campus that Pelli indulges in the most overt exhibition of Beaux-Arts-derived compositional principles, including a reinforcement of the main axis and its elaboration into a court between the back of Fondren Library and a proposed assembly hall. This court would be of even greater dimensions than the original Academic Court. This gesture is reinforced by proposing a second, parallel, east-west axis to the north that would extend the science group, and a new north-south cross axis (implicit in one version and more explicit in the full-house, fill-it-up-to-the-rim growth proposal) anchored in turn by a 10,000-seat arena off Rice Boulevard.

A more modest strategy, and one for which Pelli should be congratulated, is the recognition and use of landscape elements as a means of defining and unifying campus spaces. Pelli notes "an extraordinary stock of mature trees" as a significant characteristic of the campus, and his use of trees in various combinations of type and scale is a constant theme throughout the proposal. This is landscape *architecture*, in contrast to the discontinuous planting "wallpaper" found in so much new development in Houston.

The Pelli commission is, in its own right, an interesting event. The very idea of Rice undertaking a physical study for potential expansion to twice its size, and demonstrating concern with aesthetic and entrepreneurial issues (arena, conference center, and so on) charmingly recalls the enclave elitism evident in other parts of Houston, be it Courtlandt Place, Greenway Plaza, or The Park in Houston Center. To this end, the idea of "image" is of specific and proprietary concern. There are, however, some notable pieces missing from the strategy, in large part no doubt because the client was the Rice Board of Governors building committee, to whom Pelli insists he was responsive and responsible. In Pelli's own words, he was charged to do certain things, and these alone he considered.

Among the missing pieces is the lack of any social considerations, particularly for a university nearly doubling its size in terms of faculty. Stated simply, real estate values (or at least costs) in surrounding neighborhoods have gone beyond the means of most full-time teachers. Southampton, Southgate, West University, Montrose: who among associate and assistant professors and graduate students can afford to live there? The concept of on-campus housing, perhaps in even higher-density forms that those now emerging in Houston, would appear to be a more reasonable priority than an arena.

Second, a controversial issue that is a constant irritant to faculty, staff, and students, is insufficient on-campus parking. The suggested north-quarter residential college complex crowds existing lots accessible from Rice Boulevard, which probably need expansion if nothing else. Introduction of a conference center would naturally increase pressure on the Cohen House lot, and expansion to the west side of the Rice Memorial Center eliminates a modest amount of existing parking. Finally, the so-called "new building" opposite the Physics building wipes out an intensively used faculty-staff lot. Although there are fewer off-campus students than before, nearly 400 more parking stickers have been issued this year. The Pelli plan unrealistically ignores the need for on-campus parking that is in some convenient relation to actual destinations. This is particularly true for night-users, faculty, or off-campus students. The complaints heard daily and the failure of Pelli's clients to be sensitive to such needs recall Marie Antoinette's suggestion regarding bread and cake.

Finally, the needs of emerging special activities were cavalierly misdirected in the charge given to Pelli. Specifically, the Shepherd School of Music, a performance-oriented faculty instructing both undergraduate and graduate students as well as non-major undergraduates, obviously has never had its requirements presented to Pelli's clients. Both the physical separation of the recital hall and the total removal to some distant time in the future of a so-called assembly building work against an adequate use of either facility. (However, Pelli does suggest that the assembly building's construction, along with significant tree planting, could maintain a physical connection to the existing campus.) Moreover, the loca-

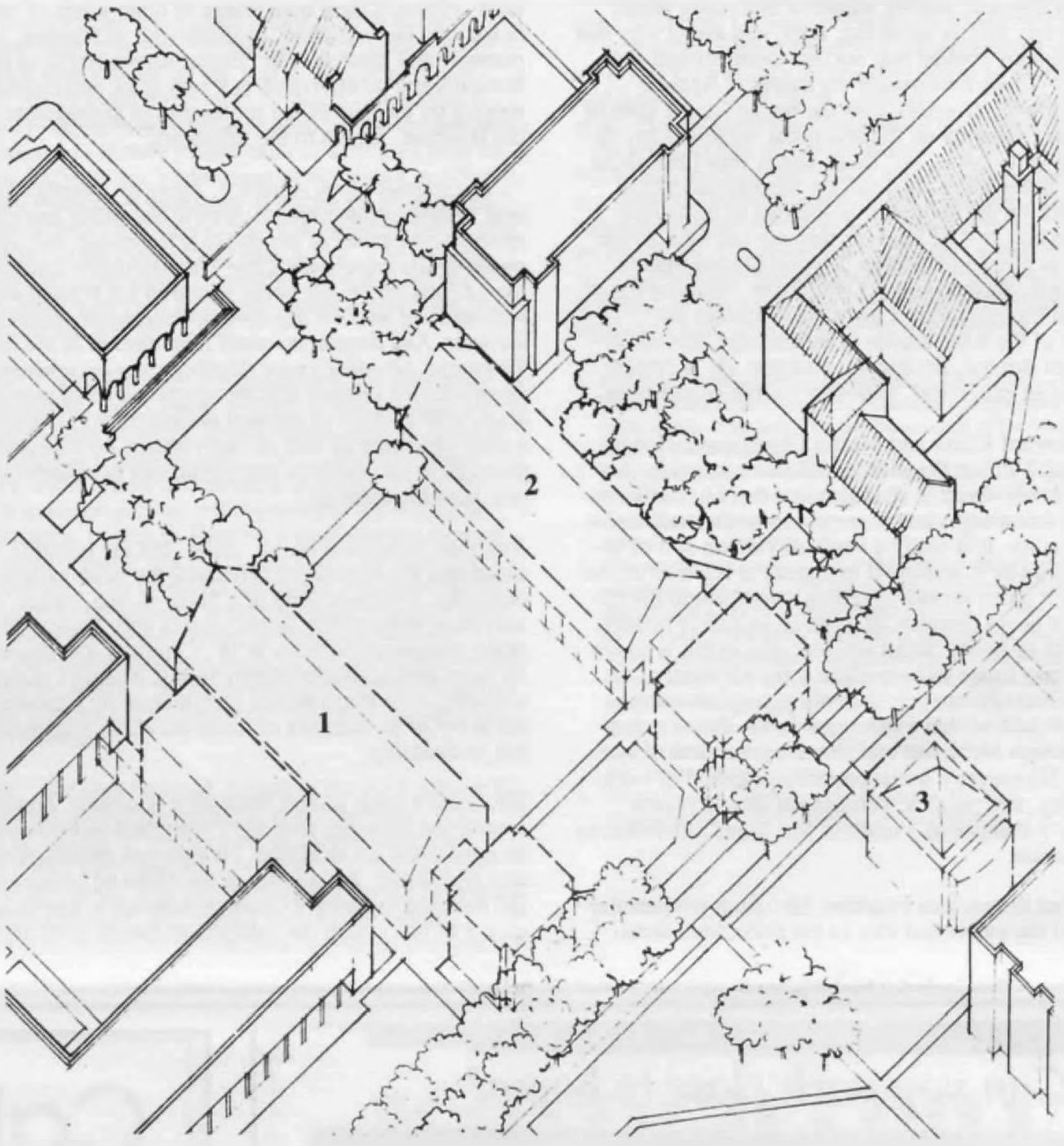
Herring Hall under construction, Cesar Pelli and Associates, architects (Photo by Paul Hester)

tions are justified with vague statements about the proposed buildings being used, ". . . for theater, music, convocations, and University assemblies" (assembly building) or ". . . for classes by the rest of the University as well as for recitals" (recital hall). Neither statement demonstrates any regard for the specific and specialized needs of musical performance and acoustics, and the differences between types of performance. Moreover, that such a generalized charge should be given to Pelli at a time when the Shepherd School has doubled in size, is confronted with such an increase in applications that it may well double again, and requires highly qualified instructors who will demand first-rate commitments to remain at Rice is a measure of the distance between users of the campus and those at the decision-making levels.

Rice has always been an anomaly in Houston: a balanced, coherent, and often beautiful and humane physical setting. That this should be maintained in the projected future in a manner consistent with its past is a lesson for the city at large. But what remains problematic is also obvious: arriving at common goals and balancing basic needs with prestige projects. At an urban scale this means workable transportation and basic services before convention centers and sports arenas. Pelli's suggestions in many ways are brilliant. But are they always about the right problems? Who is the architect's constituency?

Within the discourse of contemporary architecture, Pelli's plan demonstrates that the principles of Beaux-Arts composition are not merely pictorial. Instead they embody a transcendent quality of organization capable of both crystallizing a formal image and being freely adapted to changing needs over time. The notion of "growth and change," so redolent of 1960s urbanism, turns out to be latent in the very precepts that were regarded as reactionary and oppressive. Furthermore, Pelli's concept of an "aesthetic freeze" (or perhaps "creative non-proliferation") in architectural style runs against the grain of so many of the modern buildings on the west end of the campus. Pelli has, of course, decided to fish instead of just cutting bait, and the principles he advocates are exhibited in Herring Hall (now under construction). His design continues the bold move to deference initiated by James Stirling and Michael Wilford in their alterations and additions to Anderson Hall, the Rice School of Architecture.[4]

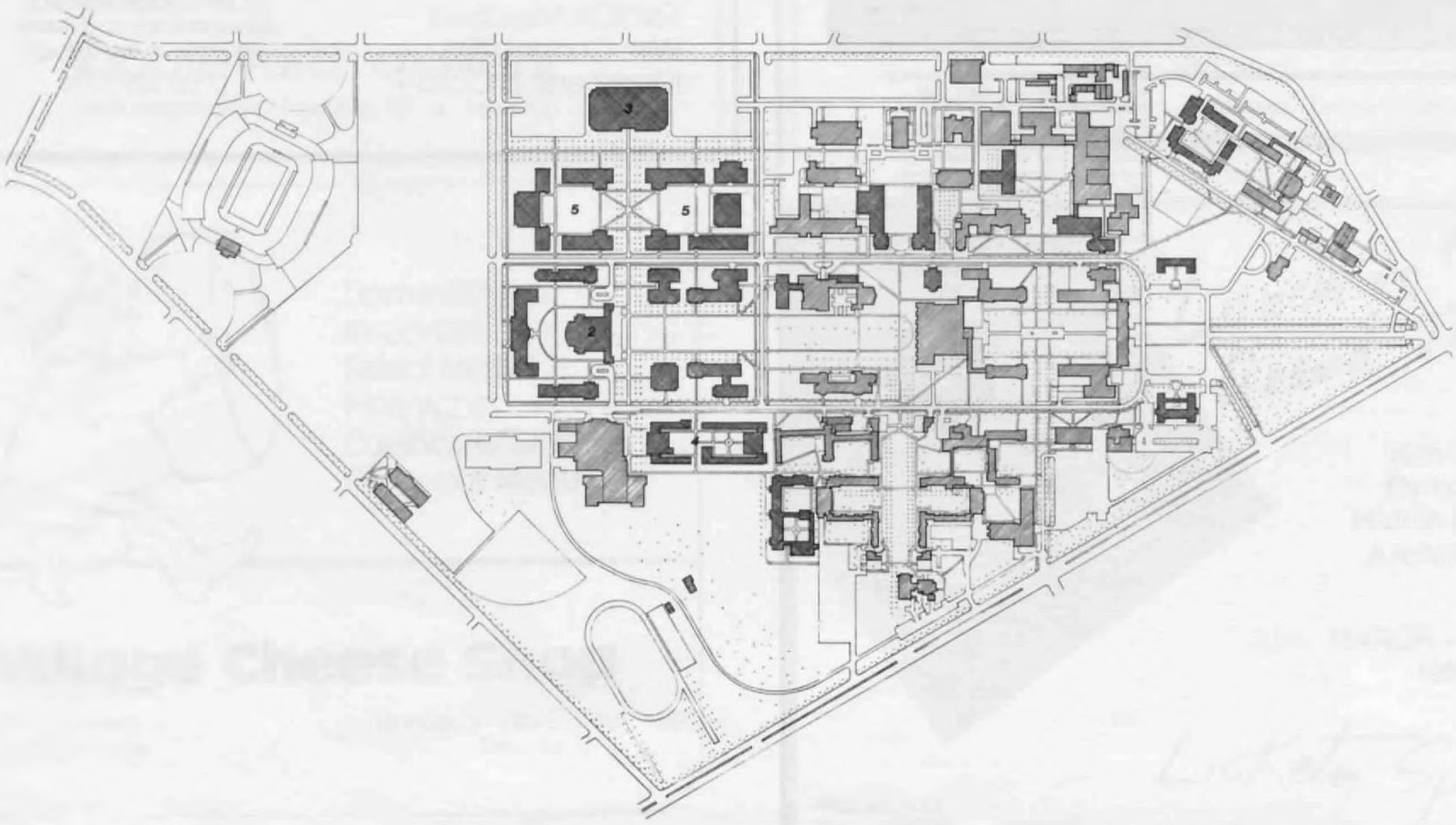
Pelli's *Master Plan for Growth* proposals demonstrate a sensitivity to existing conditions and a gift for elaborating these conditions to rectify previous developments and guide future evolution. Within the physical and political context of Rice, both his projected solutions and his notable omissions should aid an institution that is just embarking on a major self-study program. As a more general set of ideas Pelli's plan shows that the once-discredited methods of the past still maintain the resonance sufficient to propel a historically sanctioned environmental order into the future.



Proposed location and building shapes for a biochemistry building (1), a music school building (2), and a recital hall (3), Cesar Pelli and Associates

Notes

1. Cesar Pelli and Associates, Architects, *William Marsh Rice University, Master Plan for Growth*, September 1983; and "Pelli's Vision of Rice" in *The Rice Thresher*, vol. 7, October 1983, 11-14.
2. A partial study of the west section of the central area was undertaken by Louis I. Kahn in June 1970. It was never made public nor pursued beyond the initial stage. For a history of campus growth through 1980, see Stephen Fox, *The General Plan of the William M. Rice Institute and Its Architectural Development*, Houston, School of Architecture, Rice University, 1980.
3. Fox, *The General Plan of the William M. Rice Institute*.
4. Discussed at the end of Fox; see also Peter Papademetriou, "Stirling in Another Context" and David Gebhard, "Critique," *Progressive Architecture*, vol. 62, December 1981, 53-61; Peter Papademetriou, "Stirling at Rice," *The Architectural Review*, vol. 171, February 1982, 55-57; and Paul Goldberger, "Buildings in Context" and Peter Papademetriou, "Critique," in *GA Document 5*, 1982, 50-71.



Master plan for campus expansion by two-thirds of present size. Buildings shown with cross-hatching are proposed new buildings (Cesar Pelli and Associates)

Citeations

The Image of the Architect.

Andrew Saint, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983, 180 pp., 59 illus., $19.95.

Reviewed by Paul W. Schieffer

Benjamin Disraeli, having admitted that many public buildings are, mildly speaking, ugly, and asked why this was so, quickly replied that not one architect had ever been shot, "*pour encourager les autres.*" Andrew Saint, following Disraeli, puts the blame for the state of architecture squarely on the architects. In this richly detailed and witty book, Mr. Saint writes very little about works of architecture. Instead, he focuses his critical intelligence on the architect. In a series of brilliantly conceived chapters he leads us through the roles of the architect as Hero and Genius, Mythic Master Mason, Professional, Businessman, Gentleman, Bauhaus Innovator, and Entrepreneur. Lastly, he discusses the influence of the imagination in architecture. His observations are shrewd, intelligent, and just. He is critical, but he has an exegetical, expository sense of criticism.

Surely Howard Roark and Martin Chuzzlewit, Hannes Meyer and William Wayne Caudill share space in very few books. Mr. Saint is so discursive that he nearly convinces us that images taken so randomly illustrate a sort of universality. It is really a very convincing sort of argument. And he is so fair. If he means to mislead us, he would omit those people who didn't conform to his thesis. But he never pretends to write an inclusive history. The wealth of loving detail and learning in this wonderful book may cause us to mistake it for a history of architects. Oscar Niemeyer, the only person who seems omitted, would not have belonged in Mr. Saint's chapters. Although Mr. Saint must have a great deal of sympathy for Niemeyer's social concerns, method of working, artistry, and politics, perhaps we should regard Niemeyer's absence as a mark of Mr. Saint's devotion to critical justice.

Throughout the various chapters, Mr. Saint pursues the relation of the individual idea to the collective, architects' vision of their own image to other kinds of images in society: businessman, professional, gentleman, social planner, and idealist. The chapter on the Battle of the Bauhaus and its aftermath is a very clear and helpful writing on the role of the profession of architecture in the Bauhaus. Listen to the following:

*Walter Gropius and other members of The Architects Collaborative photographed in 1949 (*The Image of The Architect, *1983)*

"*. . . Gropius chose America. There an overtly capitalistic system obliged him to confine the social and cooperative elements of his thinking to limited, largely meaningless experiments like The Architects Collaborative, a firm which has never ventured far beyond the orthodoxy of modern big-time architectural practice in the west. And despite constant lamentation of the fact in his essays, Gropius's own thinking soon became confused with the cruder, less thoughtful views of men like Mies, who thought of modern architecture essentially as a style practised by and for individuals, all objective facts about the methods and conditions of modern practice notwithstanding.*"

You may disagree with Mr. Saint, but the richness of detail and the flashing wit livening the book make it delicious, a Sacher Torte of a book — rich, sweet, and very dark in tone. Mr. Saint's ear is very keenly developed; his quotation from W.W. Caudill's *Architecture by Team* seems almost cruelly funny. Noting Caudill's sincerity, he reflects that in architecture by teamwork, the benefits are said not to serve the client's interests, but profitability.

Mr. Saint's book is dark because it is serious. Having assembled these devastatingly witty and shrewd essays he must draw a conclusion. He believes architects are, as a profession, not worthy of the claim of leadership in the building industry. (I have transposed a rhetorical clause of his.) Even the salaried architects working for government agencies such as the Greater London Council are flawed, unhappy, and beset with difficulties similar to those in individual practices.

Having pursued the individual/collective themes in a dialectic form of reasoning, Mr. Saint's final chapter is about imagination. To raise a goal such as "sound building" to the level of ideology, eschewing the "game of styles, novelty of appearance, and paper projects . . . resolute in the face of the allurements of commerce, we may at last get a profession worthy of the claim of leadership." Even Mr. Saint feels this is hardly a charismatic call to arms. He is, of course, correct. But those architects known for "sound building" aren't very prominent in his book, or, to be fair, do not figure much in his discussions. Many are very sound builders indeed. Mies seems a good example. His work is, viewed years later, lovely. But Mr. Saint writes not about buildings, but about architects. Vitruvius said we may consider the owner responsible for the commodity, the builder for the firmness, and the architect for the delight. Buildings that are suitable (that fit their programs), are appropriate for their users (*not* the clients), and then exhibit a sense of delight are a credit to the profession of architecture. It is fitting then that this book on the manner in which architects practice concludes with a chapter suggesting that *how* they practice is not nearly so important as *what* they practice. Architecture maddens, consumes, frustrates, and dismays its victims. As a profession, architecture offers a sort of compensating satisfaction which may explain its lurid, seedy, compulsive appeal. *The Image of the Architect* seems so polished, so elegant, so intelligent that one almost forgets its author has a razor in his hand.

Houston-in-the-Round, Panoramic Photographs of the City 1903-1983

Houston Public Library
Sponsored by the Houston Metropolitan Research Center
12 September — 22 October 1983

Reviewed by Elizabeth S. Glassman

Rumor has it that the Irish painter Robert Barker calculated his method for constructing what he termed "pictures without boundaries" while interred in a basement prison cell in Edinburgh (a matter concerning some financial embarrassment with his creditors). Some years

later, in July 1787, when establishing a concession in London to view his oblong, semicircular vista, Barker received a patent for his system to achieve a "total view." The invention, called "La Nature à Coup d' Oeil," was intended to "perfect an entire view of any country or situation as it appears to an observer turning quite round." The vogue for panorama studios thus was launched and these enclosed rotundas with 360° canvasses quickly spotted Europe, Russia, and the United States; 13 in Paris alone. The public passion for panoramas was eclipsed during the 1910s with the rise of the moving picture for popular entertainment.[1]

In a parallel development, photographers devised technologies to achieve a more encompassing view, the conventional camera having an angle of only 40° to 50°. As early as 1845, Frederick von Martens, a Parisian engraver, invented a camera for creating, on a single plate, 150° daguerreotype images of the city. At the end of the century, the Cyclographe camera was manufactured in France. Unlike earlier models, it worked on a principle of rotating both the camera body and the film plate and was capable of producing 360° pictures on one negative. This was the prototype for the Cirkut camera designed and marketed in the United States just after the turn of the century and produced until the mid 1920s.[2]

In Houston, three photographers — Joseph Litterst, his son, Joe, Jr., and Frank Schlueter — produced more than 800 panoramic pictures with the Cirkut camera. In 1980, photographers Curtis Bean and Paul Hester, at work on a separate project for the Houston Public Library, found the negatives and began the study that culminated in the exhibition "Houston-in-the-Round." The exhibition contained panoramas by all of these men. The older images were culled from two collections: the Frank Schlueter Collection, on loan to the Houston Metropolitan Research Center from the Bank of the Southwest, and the Litterst-Dixon Collection, purchased by the Anchorage Foundation and given to the Harris County Heritage Society. Hester and Bean produced contemporary images using Schlueter's equipment.

Editing from the original negatives, as few vintage prints exist, Bean and Hester selected more than 100 panoramas and printed each by contact from negatives eight- to ten-inches high and two- to six-feet long. Their strategy was to establish comparisons — Houston then and now: a developing city in the 1920s and 1930s, a metropolitan mass in the 1980s. The exhibition chronicled the result.[3]

An astonishing array of visual, sociological, and historical information was inventoried in these modest pictures. The juxtapositions of downtown skylines (Schlueter, 1924; Bean, 1982) reveal the altered physical fabric of the city. Identifiable buildings are seen in context with each other and in relationships that are rapidly changing: tin-roofed storage units metamorphose into freeways; parking lots, once topped with asphalt and automobiles, are now dominated by steel and the ubiquitous building crane. In 1931, Litterst assembled the Westheimer Moving and Storage Company fleet at the Sam Houston Monument in Hermann Park. Paul Hester did the same in 1983. We witness more than the changed technology of transportation or the physically altered ambiance of Hermann Park in the span of 50 years. In 1931, decorum dictates that the all-black crew stand in identical uniforms, ties, and flat-topped hats; in 1983, individual expression reigns as the integrated team of drivers proudly display their logoed T-shirts and mesh baseball hats.

Some comparisons were more conceptual in nature: festival events, religious rituals, political gatherings of the 1930s versus those of the 1980s. Schlueter's panorama of the cloister at the Villa de Matel (Lawndale at Wayside) with habited nuns stationed across the grounds was opposed to Bean's photograph of activities prior to an open-air Mass for Vietnamese congregated in Allen Parkway Village. A gathering of trucks on an unpaved downtown street was juxtaposed to a Houston Helicopter Happening in the Astrodome parking lot. The jostling crowd at the community swimming pool was set opposite a private backyard gathering around a pool that is kidney-shaped and fenced-in.

Panoramic pictures were extremely popular during the years Schlueter and Litterst worked as commercial photographers. Just as artists painted panoramas in order to create pictures without boundaries, so photographers sought a wider frame of reference. One important distinction between painted panoramas and photographic ones remains, however. Painted panoramas are viewed in enclosed circular spaces; photographs are generally displayed flat. The spherical section is perceived along a two-dimensional format. What was once a slice of time and space is now transformed by the linear picture space. The result creates a dynamic tension between our desire to reconstruct the three-dimensional world and to read the picture as a scrolled text, relishing the detailed, narrative content.

Visually, the conventional camera is descended from the *camera obscura* of the Renaissance. The object is depicted according to the laws of geometric projection which imply a unique point-of-view — a framed window on the world. The panoramic photograph represents a radical departure, a language that is still foreign. Rather than one-point perspective, we see in continuous perspective. Instead of lines from the edges converging as we recede from foreground to background, planes of vision intersect with the spectator (self) as center, not the outside vista (other). It is like believing for the first time that the world is round. Our grids of streets so nicely squared become gentle illusions we allow ourselves: true perception of our rapid assault through space might be too disturbing.

Objects, caught in the time warp of the camera's path, blur. As the camera sweeps, it transforms. The viewer is held at the center, or marched along the detailed inventory of narrative fact. The act of seeing becomes not a passive vista, but a physical dance.

The Russian avant-garde photographer Rodchenko asserted that the revolution in visual thinking would evolve from a "revolution in perception." As articulated by fellow *Oktyabr* photographer Volkov-Lannit: *"The history of the appearance of outstanding works of art is mainly a history of breakthroughs in perspective and habitual composition schemes . . . That is, a history of the disruption of the automatism of visual perception – the unusual process of alienation."*[4] For Litterst and Schlueter, the long horizontal format was perfect for the low horizons and flat vistas of the Texas landscape or the large group activities they were hired to record. For Hester and Bean, the panorama documents a city in transition and disrupts our automatic visual perception. The language of the panorama, like the physical attributes of Houston itself, is in the process of becoming.

1. For an excellent history of the panorama see Evelyn J. Fruitenia and Paul A. Zoetmulder, eds., *The Panorama Phenomenon*, The Hague, Netherlands, Foundation for the Preservation of the Centenarian Mesdag Panorama, 1981.
2. Van Deren Coke, "Wider-View I" and Philip L. Condax, "Wider-View II," *Image*, vol. 15, July 1972, 15-20; and Brian Coe, *Cameras, From Daguerreotypes to Instant Pictures*, New York, Crown Publishers, Inc., 1978, 169-176.
3. The sense of the comparisons is heightened in the portfolio of printed panoramas, the catalog for the exhibition. Accompanied by an introduction and notes by Houston writer Douglas Milburn, the folder has a more clearly delineated conceptual viewpoint than the exhibition which was, unfortunately, divided on two floors. In addition, the exhibition facilities for this type of picture were dismal. Bars of metal cases often interrupted the continuity of the visual field so important in the panorama; many photographs were not identified. The portfolio may be seen in the Archives office, second floor, Julia Ideson Building, Houston Public Library.
4. Victor Burgin, "Photography, Phantasy, Function," *Thinking Photography*, London, The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982, 180.

Wish You Were Here: The Architecture of America's Great Resorts

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
Sponsored by the Rice Design Alliance
21 September — 26 October 1983

Reviewed by Janet O'Brien

The Rice Design Alliance's fall lecture series "Wish You Were Here: The Architecture of America's Great Resorts" was unusual fare for architecture devotees. Though one may question the subject matter, the line of professionals waiting outside The Museum of Fine Arts's Brown Auditorium for the first lecture obviously hoped not only to spend a pleasant evening but to garner information or inspiration. How well did the series's six lectures fulfill such expectations?

The opening lecture, given by Steven Izenour of Philadelphia, a partner in the firm of Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown, was entitled "Atlantic City: Beach, Boardwalk and Boulevard." Izenour reminded us of the forces that generated this place; of the 19th century city dweller in his cramped apartment yearning to spend his newly gained leisure time in the great outdoors; of the Philadelphia Quakers who, in the 1850s, created Atlantic City along the marshy Jersey shore by investing in a railroad line from their city to the coast. Scenes from early postcards and drawings accompanied his descriptions of Atlantic City as a "special place and American anyplace" in which the Boardwalk became as much a feature of the scene as the sea. By the turn of the century, as the game Monopoly suggests, the race for land, views, and ever larger, grander hotels was on. Izenour stated that the appetite for novelty proved to be constant, that fantasy had continuously to be manufactured to capture the tourists' imaginations.

But by the middle of this century, as the automobile and airplane opened the entire world to middle-class tourism, Atlantic City failed to retain its captivating hold and its popularity waned. In response, these great turn-of-the-century hotels have been torn down to make way for huge gambling casinos. Though Izenour admitted that these hotels had, in their day, displaced other, perhaps equally charming, hotels, he accused casino owners of wanting a desert, another Las Vegas, and accommodating but embarrassed government officials of legislating blank walls to hide the gambling from the Boardwalk and draw the life from the street.

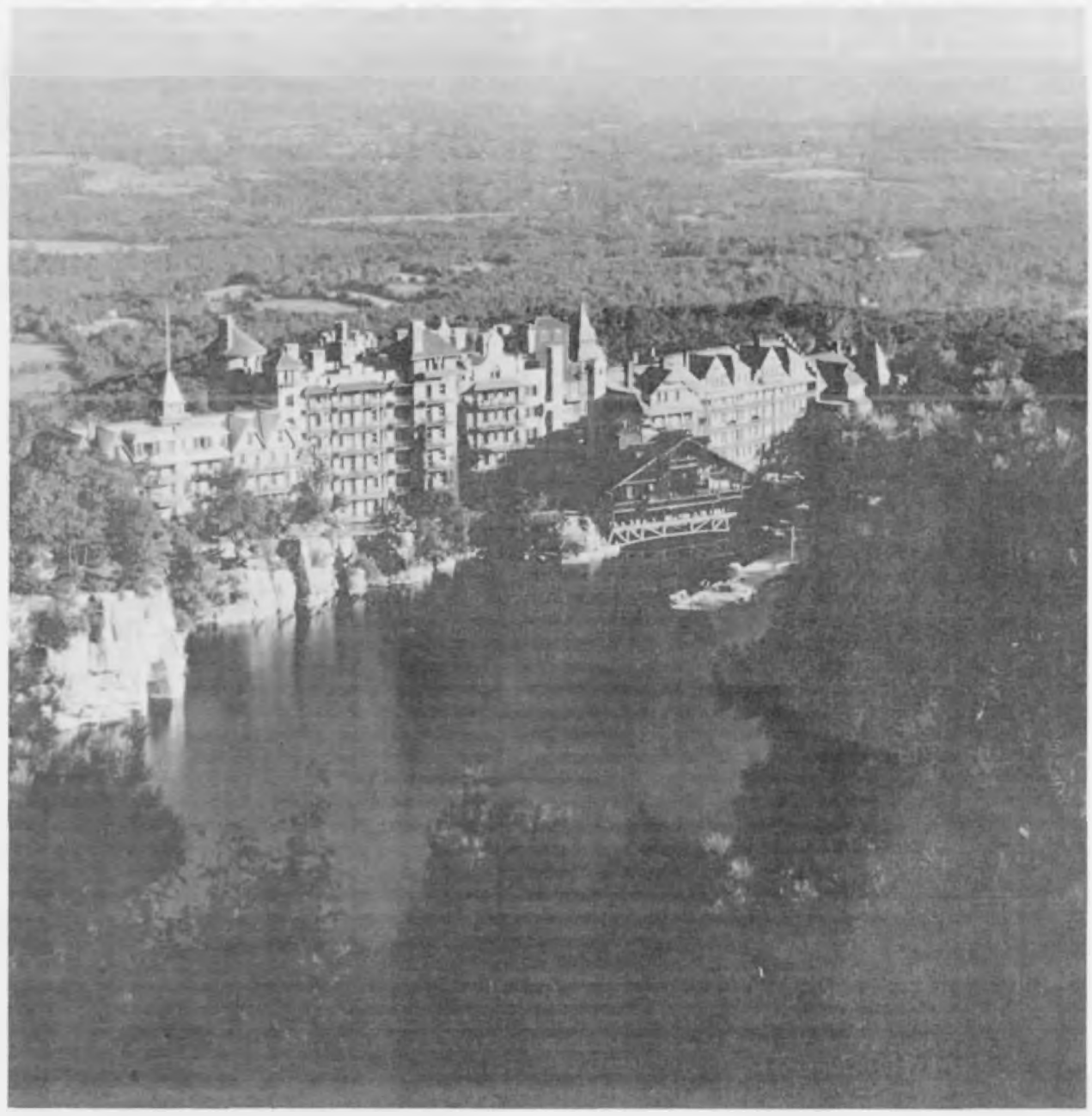
Unfortunately, Izenour forgot to apply his studies of "everyman" to the audience. Instead of providing images of amusing tourist trivia and magnificent hotels, he presented us with slides of his exhibition boards — of miniscule pictures and illegible captions. His tendency to read these made the lecture drag badly.

The second lecture, "The Catskills," by John Margolies, America's leading connoisseur of modern vernacular architecture, was reminiscent of a well-organized and clearly labeled family album. His general history of its development was brief: this time around it was New Yorkers who discovered the mountains close at hand by boat or rail. Since Margolies said there was no architecture in the Catskills, he proceeded to introduce us instead to the owners of various establishments and then walk us through each lobby, dining room (complete with sample meals), bedroom, and entertainment area, by each kidney-shaped pool, and down each endless corridor built to protect winter visitors. This lecture was like a country drive, and though some of the nicest hotels crumbled to dust before our eyes, poignancy was balanced by assurance that the beautiful mountains themselves would endure.

Sally B. Woodridge, an architectural historian and noted author of guidebooks to California architecture, presented "Recreation and Resorts in the Yosemite Valley." Her credentials and bearing led to high hopes for a lecture that, unfortunately, tended toward the academic. Yosemite Valley has none of the problems of Atlantic City or the Catskills. On the contrary, the problem for this stunning natural wonder is how to limit the numbers of visitors that threaten to overwhelm it.

The first Anglo-Americans who discovered the valley by chasing raiding Indians gave way to visitors on horseback, naturalists (like John Muir), landscape painters, and photographers. Albert Bierstadt and Ansel Adams made the Yosemite Valley famous and thereby destroyed their own "sublime solitude." The first hotels, direct colonial imports from the East, were of white clapboard and oblivious to the natural setting. Later buildings initiated a tradition of rustic park architecture culminating in the Old Faithful Hotel by Robert Reamer and the Awanee Hotel by Gilbert Stanley Underwood. But far from being truly natural, the Awanee, built in 1927, was of steel-and-concrete construction, stained to look like wood. Fortunately, Woodridge included enough humorous images of ungainly tourists and of the fiberglass restoration of "timbers" at the Awanee to break the classroom atmosphere and leave us smiling.

The lecture by John Pastier, senior editor of *Arts and Architecture*, "Las Vegas: Oasis and Mirage," was attended with less enthusiasm than previous lectures. After all, Robert Venturi had described the city so well in *Learning From Las Vegas*. Fortunately, Pastier overcame this attitude of complacency by recounting not only the oddities of Las Vegas but also some key points



Mohonk Mountain House, New Paltz, New York (Photo by John Margolies, ESTO)

in its development. According to Pastier, Las Vegas has the airport and hotel capacity of cities six times its population, yet as a resort city *par excellence*, it fares poorly in such areas as housing, education, and crime control. Begun as a railroad stop in the desert, Las Vegas was given impetus for growth by the creation of Boulder Dam and the legalization of gambling in Nevada in 1937. The first person to attempt to popularize Las Vegas as a gambling center was the Los Angeles gangster Bugsy Segal. Though the idea caught on, it proved too late for Bugsy, who was shot by his irate co-investors when profits did not materialize quickly enough.

While showing a series of images of brilliantly lit signs, Pastier quipped that Las Vegas is "illuminated but not enlightened," concerned with style and symbolism rather than architecture. He contended that Las Vegas's imagery was most effective in evoking the Near East or the American West, Aladdin's lamp or cowboys and Indians. Pastier clearly had learned some lessons from Venturi, for he featured plans and diagrams from Venturi's book of hotels noteworthy for their ambitious site plans, elaborate fountains, swimming pools and *portes-cochère*.

But Las Vegas, Pastier concluded, is losing its uniqueness. While Atlantic City is being redeveloped on the model of Las Vegas, Las Vegas is developing into a conventional city as the density of buildings increases and "The Strip" dissolves into a true city core.

The fifth lecture, given by Christina Orr-Cahall, chief curator of the Oakland Museum, should have been entitled "Addison Mizner, Architect of Palm Beach" rather than "Palm Beach." It was a lively presentation, spiced with social gossip, about an architect who clearly was influential in a resort community and, according to our speaker, remains so even today.

She sketched a picture of a well-to-do Bohemian, a man who studied in Spain when poor grades kept him out of California's university, and then traveled the world from China to Alaska, even becoming a prize fighter in Samoa. Mizner's career crystallized when he moved to New York and adopted Stanford White as his mentor. White referred jobs to Mizner that were too small for McKim, Mead, and White, although Mizner never worked for the firm.

In 1918 Mizner joined Paris Singer in Palm Beach, Florida, to design and build a putative hospital for convalescent soldiers that became, in short order, the Everglades Club. Palm Beach, first settled in the 1850s, gained prominence in 1894 when Henry M. Flagler, the railroad and hotel baron, extended the railroad to Palm Beach and settled there himself.

Mizner proved to be an inventive architect, drawing on his travel experiences to create a romantic Mediterranean style he felt was appropriate for Palm Beach. He was also an astute businessman, starting Mizner Industries to fabricate such elaborate handcrafted items as tile and planters and such industrial items as his patented disappearing pocket window. He also experimented with such local materials as native coral stone, and developed a "fake wood" for wainscotting. The large houses and clubs for which he was famous boasted such elegant touches as arcaded entrance halls and broad cantilevered stairs, and such practical touches as changing rooms adjacent to boat entrances.

Boca Raton, his planned community for the very wealthy south of Palm Beach, was devastated by two hurricanes and the crash of the Florida real estate boom, ending his preeminence in Palm Beach. However, Orr-Cahall indicated that his out-of-state practice increased considerably thereafter.

The final lecture, "Santa Barbara: The Voltarian Retreat," was given by David Gebhard, professor of art history at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Gebhard began by protesting that Santa Barbara was not a resort in the popular sense and the city certainly did not "wish you were here." Santa Barbara is rather a landscape descended from Pliny's villas of classical antiquity, Palladian villas of the Italian Rennaissance, and the great English country houses of the 18th century.

The city began as a Spanish colony in the late 18th century, the large mission and the adobe houses that surrounded it setting the stage for the city that followed. The first hotels, while outfitted with elaborate grounds, were not architecturally pretentious. It was not until winter residents began to become permanent residents and built large villas on the mesa that the picturesque Mission style was taken-up. When fire destroyed the first Arlington Hotel in the early 1900s, it was rebuilt by Arthur Benton in the Mission style, incorporating the lush vegetation that grows so well there.

After a devastating earthquake in 1925, Santa Barbara was recreated "as a backdrop for the villas," according to Gebhard, and restricted as such by innocently titled, yet powerful, local boards called the "Arts Architects Advisory Committee" and the "Architectural Drafting Service." Strict municipal ordinances now control every facet of building in the city, which is even attempting to fix a ceiling for population growth.

Gebhard was perhaps a more polished speaker than some others in the series. Yet he could have enriched his lecture with more contemporary photographs of the town. It would have been enlightening, in his defense of architectural controls, to see what a legislated style means to a small American city, and he could have satisfied our overwhelming curiosity about the appearance of a Mission-style McDonald's.

The lectures in the series, which at first glance seemed to be concerned only with quaint, problem-free vacation areas, began to raise some broader questions. How does architecture create a special environment without destroying natural wonders? Are planning and controls necessary to create and sustain such places? Should everyone benefit, or are there necessary limits to growth? Although no lecture series could completely answer such questions, "Wish You Were Here" gave us some larger issues to ponder — preferably in Palm Beach.

Richard Payne, Photographs

Kauffman Galleries
10 September — 10 October 1983

Reviewed by Paul Hester

Mexico is *different*. The first time I visited South of the Border it was difficult to believe that anything could be that close to the United States and still be so different. Of course, that's what most of us are looking for when we go there. It's a vacation, so we want to be removed from our familiar everydayness. We desire a change of pace and, at the same time, something worth writing home about; or, at the very least, some good postcards to send back. Most of us take our cameras on these escapades. The results usually provide a few memories of the good times, leavened with an occasional educational view to instruct our audience about the way it really is down there.

Imagine the predicament of the professional photographer. His or her everydayness consists of the very activity that most people only pursue actively on their vacations. Of course, this busman's holiday is not complete without picture taking. But how do you make the activity sufficiently removed from the habits of making a living?

Photographer Richard Payne, well known for his monumental treatment of the architecture of Philip Johnson and John Burgee, has in this exhibition made three distinct decisions to move beyond his commercial reputation. He left his large-format camera and tripod at home, carrying his 35-mm camera in a loose and casual manner; he loaded it with black-and-white film; and he aimed it not at the Baroque or vernacular architecture of Spanish Mexico, but primarily at the Mexican people.

Why would anyone take black-and-white film to Mexico you might ask? Remember, this is a professional we're talking about. Not only is he looking for a break from photographing all those buildings, but he'd also like to see his work in a gallery. Until not so long ago, serious (*i.e.*, fine art) photography was done in black and white, like that of Paul Strand, Edward Weston, and Ansel Adams. Color was commercial. And Payne wants these pictures to be accepted as art.

Payne is a very good photographer, and in the best of these pictures, such as "The Fountain, Puebla" and "Shadows of the Cathedral," his skills matched his heroic ideas about art. But his attitude toward the people never penetrated beyond typecasting, and the subjects remained representatives of categories: beggars, market sellers, waifs. In spite of the specificity of photography, the pictures remained impersonal. We did not see the individual but instead encountered a stock response: "old people are stooped, mothers with children are noble." They were simple, straight-forward images, but except for a handful, I had the feeling I had seen them before. For the most part they were street photographs, made in the style of such Europeans as Robert Doisneau, but without the intimacy or the humor.

"Generation II, Guanajuato" (Photo by Richard Payne, courtesy Kauffman Galleries)

The vantage point of a gringo photographer headed for Mexico is always that of the outsider. We have language barriers, cultural barriers, economic barriers. We are looking for the differences, but unless we're careful, our pictures will be about the barriers. We try to be candid cameras, believing that in our surreptitious mode we capture the real Mexico.

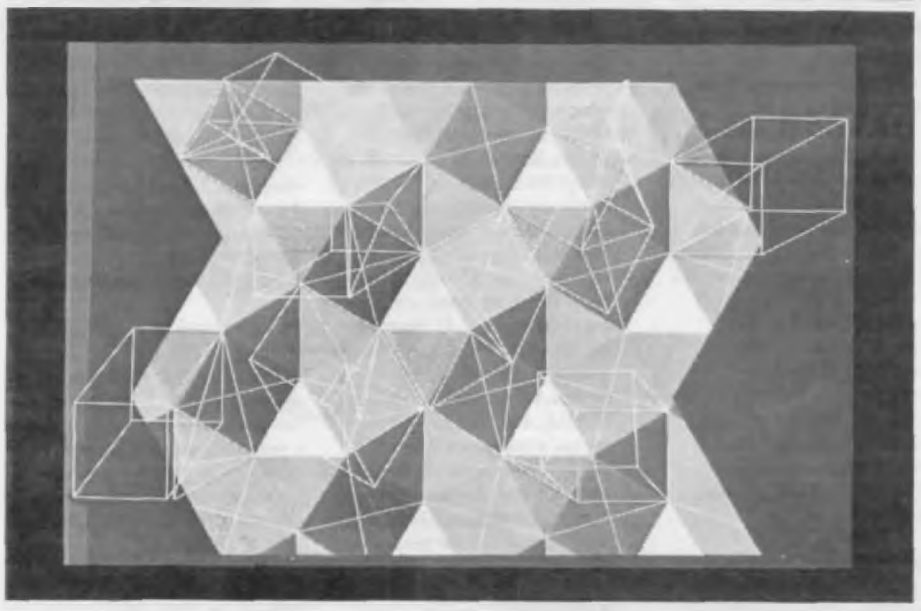
Is candid photography more honest? Are we seeing the Mexican people in their natural habitat, unaware of our Nikon stares? One of Payne's striking images was of a mother nursing in the market; the child is covered, her breast is exposed. She is going about her business selling fruit. Centered, facing the camera, she appears completely oblivious to the photographer except for a slight tension in her face. Behind her several people are also going about their business, only a young boy is looking in the direction of the camera. Rather than a stolen glance, the photograph was of silent people studiously ignoring this cameraman, overlooking his impolite stare.

This tolerance for the tourist is diminishing in Mexico as resentment over economic hardships increases. One person's playground is another's marketplace, the source of our exotica is their livelihood. We invade their movie set and treat it like our movie. In essence it is a form of colonialism; our presumption that their images are there for the taking.

Payne wrote in an issue of the *Houston Chronicle*'s *Texas Magazine* featuring this work that the pictures "are made often without even looking through the viewfinder," which explains in part the waist-level and knee-high vantage points. It worked very effectively in his image of "Father and Daughter, Oaxaca," in which we are eye-level with a young girl crying, as her father, stone-faced as an Olmec head, strides away. And this shoot-from-the-hip approach produced a dramatic tilt in "Record Shop, Oaxaca," as a woman in high heels steps past an album by KISS, *Dressed to Kill*.

"Generation II, Guanajuato" is a luminous print of an older woman seated in a glowing market stall, demurely avoiding the photographer, while a young woman stands against a back wall, arms folded, returning the camera's stare. Neatly divided in half by the vertical wall of the booth, and activated by the diagonals of its bracing, the image clearly symbolizes the generational responses to American presence.

Whenever someone talks about photography as a "communication device" as Payne did in *Texas Magazine*, he is talking about "great themes," such as Love, Old Age, and Poverty. These are great ideas, but usually so generalized as to have no guts — no particulars about how hard it is to love, or that being old involves more than being stooped. I wish that more of his wit had come through, as in the "Seller of Fireworks, Guanajuato" blowing a bubblegum bubble. But too often we were shown nothing fresh beyond an ironic "modern" artifact in contrast with the romantic image of the "noble peasant." In this case the white man's burden may have consisted of only a Nikon or Hasselblad, but the stance was that of the great white hunter, complete with safari hat, stalking the next photographic trophy.



Rice Design Alliance Annual Report For 1982-1983

William O. Neuhaus, III

Report of the President

During 1982-1983 the Rice Design Alliance sought to augment its customary programs, which focus on trends and personalities in architecture and design, with stronger community involvement. These efforts "to provide a forum for discussion . . . and to provide the opportunity for examination of problems of creating a humane man-made environment" are not new to this organization, they are part of the purpose of the Rice Design Alliance as stated in its by-laws. Through these efforts, it has become apparent that as RDA matures it can stimulate discussion, provide enlightenment, and cause action. This realization has led RDA to discuss openly the potential, and the pitfalls, of becoming a forum, and the need for balance in that journey.

This past year led to the following actions that demonstrated our efforts to achieve those ideals. In August *Cite* was published for the first time. The banner issue included a critical review of the Menil Museum, an interview with Cesar Pelli, and an article on the sewer moratorium. This issue helped set the tone for the year at RDA. September saw the advent of "Classical Architecture in the South: Transformation of an Ideal," a six-lecture series. The series was given in conjunction with a symposium and exhibition of "The Classical Ideal in Twentieth Century American Architecture," co-sponsored by RDA and the Farish Gallery of the Rice University School of Architecture.

The Courtlandt Place Neighborhood Tour in October marked a change in direction for the annual RDA tour by concentrating on a neighborhood. This walking tour in a near-town area allowed a feeling of context unobtainable in past efforts. Courtlandt Place, restored and saved from the beginnings of decay, demonstrated the positive effects of involved residents who are sensitive to their neighborhood.

In November *Cite: Special Issue* was published to inform our readers and cause discussion of METRO's plans for an elevated, heavy-rail system along Main Street. The issue did not completely alleviate misgivings about the rail system — the METRO bond referendum was soundly defeated in June.

"Design and Communication" was a highly successful series of six lectures starting in February. Delivered by graphic and environmental designers as well as architects, this series extended the customary focus of RDA programs beyond the built environment.

In April and May "Houston Options" was our most ambitious public forum concerning Houston, its future, and its relationship to other cities. The five urban-affairs symposiums confronted problems and opportunities posed by Houston's recent growth. They also illustrated the difficulty RDA has in reaching the community outside our general membership.

The annual meeting was held in May at the Orange Show, a regional, graphic, and primitive construction on the east side of town. The location, like RDA's programs and publications, seemed to reflect the year's focus — RDA as an organization for the city of Houston, not just the South Main area.

The spring issue of *Cite* represented our most ambitious publication. It included a critical review of Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown's Park Regency, an analysis of the Regional Mobility Plan, and articles on, and proposals for, Hermann Park, "Houston's equivalent of Central Park." *Cite* printing runs in the year grew from 3,500 for the first issue to 10,000 for the Spring issue.

These projects and programs have produced an excellent year. However, they were only part of the progress which took place this year. RDA now has a record 16 Corporate members thanks to a strong development committee. The treasurer's report indicated that, by a slim margin, RDA took in more money than it spent in 1982-1983. We will continue to require even larger sums of money if we are to expand our programs. How to increase RDA's effectiveness as a forum while securing the financial support of established organizations and agencies are goals that may conflict on occasion. On the other hand, RDA must not settle complacently for proven formulas lest even our regular audience of members and supporters feel that we have become predictable and boring.

The Rice Design Alliance underwent trial by fire with the loss of Betsy Griffin, our combination executive director and mother, who departed to help with the formation of the Houston International Protocol Alliance of which she is now executive director. She was the most visible representative of RDA and provided continuity, cohesion, and serenity that made us confident of our ability. Raine Roberts, Betsy's assistant, became acting director. She was superb; as her two-week stint stretched to months, I marveled at her ability and patience. RDA thanks her for holding us together.

Melanie Young is our new executive director, and brings new talents and ideas to the position. Raine will remain, allowing Melanie more time to help with *Cite*; she has a background in publication and understands much of the organization that *Cite* will need as it grows. She is a major asset to RDA.

Under the leadership of Bill Stern, RDA should find 1984 its best year yet. With a growing membership and its expanding horizons, RDA will take its place as a more visible leader in the maturation of Houston.

William O. Neuhaus, III

Financial Report 1 July 1982– 30 June 1983

Receipts	
Memberships	$35,872
Program Income— Tickets	15,680
Program Contributions	11,229
General Contributions	1,025
Restricted Grant	13,500
Cite—Sales and Contributions	2,003
House Tour	5,322
RDA Salaries and Fringes	7,185
Total	**$91,816**
Disbursements	
Program Expenses	$21,985
Contributions	
Sophomore Field Trip	750
Farish Gallery	1,000
Operating Expenses	9,566
Restricted Grant (1981-1982)	7,496
Salaries	18,311
Cite	17,494
Total	**$76,602**
Reserve for Restricted Grant	$ 8,832
Excess of Receipts Over Disbursements	**$6,382**

Report of the Executive Director

The Rice Design Alliance marked the beginning of its second decade by publishing *Cite*, a journal designed to supplement RDA's well-established lecture series and to expand the role of the organization. *Cite* is Houston's only publication devoted to architectural criticism and commentary on the problems and possibilities of Houston's civic growth. The first issue was published in August 1982 under the leadership of a volunteer Editorial Board working with a professional managing editor and a volunteer design director. The publication was well-received initially, and subsequent issues appear to be reaching an increasing number of readers.

The Rice Design Alliance is indebted to the *Cite* Editorial Board chaired by Gordon Wittenberg and composed of Anne S. Bohnn, Herman Dyal, Jr., Stephen Fox, Elizabeth Griffin, Karl Kilian, O. Jack Mitchell, W. O. Neuhaus, III, Barrie Scardino, William F. Stern, Drexel Turner, and Bruce C. Webb. Special thanks are due to the managing editor, Joel Warren Barna, to Herman Dyal, who created the *Cite* format and originated the name, and to Peter H. Boyle and Richard J. Scheve, who helped with the graphics. Karl Kilian, former president of the alliance, graciously hosted a party at the Brazos Bookstore to introduce the new publication.

The first lecture series of the year examined the initial influence and the several reappearances of the classical tradition in architecture in the American South. This series, entitled "Classical Architecture in the South," was chaired by Stephen Fox. Lecturers and their topics were Eugene George, "Hispanic Antecedents of Texas's Colonial Architecture;" James Patrick, "Antebellum Classicism: From Asperity to Romance;" Thomas S. Hines, "The Architecture of Yoknapatawpha: The Built Environment of William Faulkner's World;" Samuel Wilson, Jr., "Richard Koch and the Formation of a Louisiana Regional Architecture;" Frederick Doveton Nichols, "Monumental Richmond: The Making of a Classical Southern City;" and Andrew Batey, "Classicism and the Vernacular: A Regional Perspective."

Under the leadership of the president, W. O. Neuhaus, III, and the committee chairman, Anne Bohnn, RDA held a very successful tour of houses of architectural interest in one significant Houston neighborhood, Courtlandt Place. The tour was planned in cosponsorship with the neighborhood association led by Dr. Hal Boyleston and Mr. and Mrs. David Beck. Approximately 180 volunteers assisted with the tour. Barrie Scardino was chairman of the popular preview party, and Anne and Jules Bohnn hosted a party for the volunteers after the tour. Graphic credits for the announcement brochures go to Edwin Eubanks and Anne Bohnn. The tour earned $5,322 for RDA.

In January and February of 1983 the Rice Design Alliance was pleased to join the Rice School of Architecture in sponsoring public lectures by Michael Graves, Kenneth Frampton, and Jorge Silvetti.

The spring lecture series, "Design and Communication," was very well received. This series of lectures by graphic and environmental designers extended the focus of RDA beyond the programs on the built environment to realms of print and film, illusion and object. William F. Stern was the chairman of this series which was supported in part by Knoll International, McIntosh/Drysdale Gallery, Monarch Paper Company, 3D/International, and Wetmore and Company Lithographers. The speakers were Richard Haas, James Wines, Colin Forbes, Stanley Tigerman, Ivan Chermayeff, and Saul Bass.

Houston's options in confronting the problems and opportunities posed by its recent growth were the subject of a five-part urban affairs symposium, "Houston Options." The chairman was Andrew Rudnick. This symposium was supported in part by a grant from the City of Houston through the Cultural Arts Council. Speakers and their topics were Mayor Kathryn Whitmire, Royce Hanson, and Robert Haynes, "Houston in the 1980s — An Adolescent in the Family of American Cities;" City Comptroller Lance Lalor and George Peterson, "Urban Infrastructure — Too Little, Too Old, Too Late;" Lance Tarrance, Richard Murray, and Andrew Rudnick, "Power and the Urban Decision-Making Process — Lessons For and From Houston;" Alan Kiepper and Arthur Teele, "Or Lack Thereof — Mobility in Houston;" John Cater and Richard Fleming, "Public/Private Partnerships — Building Blocks For Houston's Tomorrow."

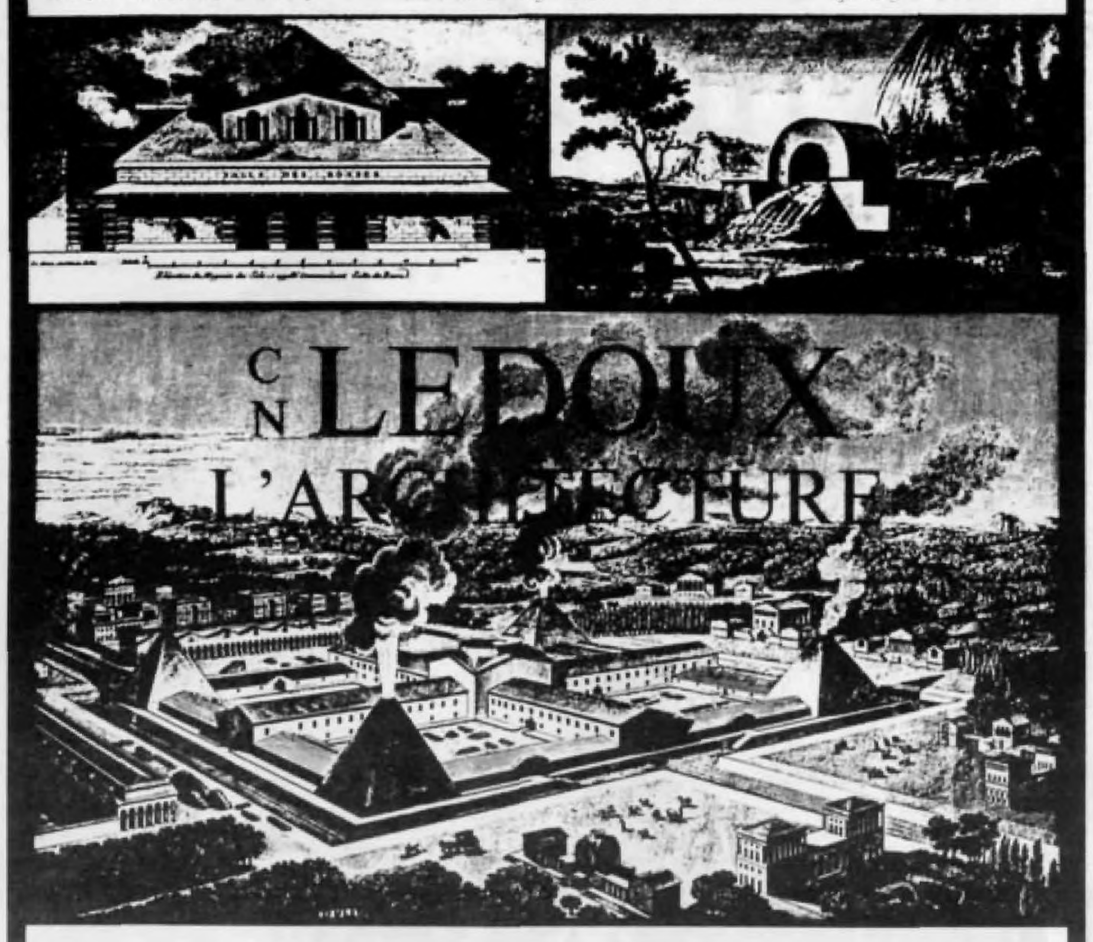
The Annual Meeting was held at the Orange Show. The chairman was Burdette Keeland. Guest speakers were Barry Moore, who spoke on the dream of Jeff McKissack for the Orange Show and the hoped-for renovations, and Peter Armato of the East End Progress Association, who spoke on the overall civic plans for improvements in the East End area. W. O. Neuhaus, III, president, thanked the former executive director, Elizabeth Griffin, for her effort on behalf of RDA, and Lorraine Roberts for her work as acting director. He then introduced the new executive director, Melanie Young. New board members and officers were elected and the meeting was adjourned.

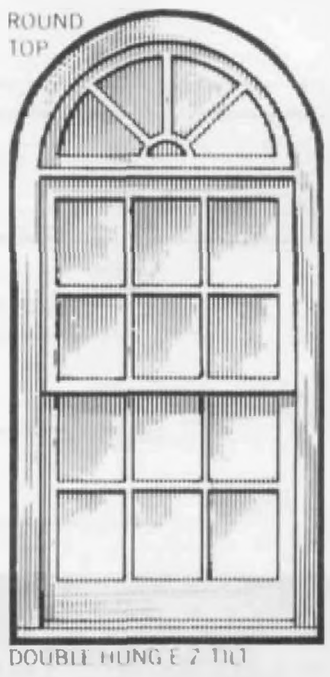
RDA would like to thank Ann Holmes of the *Houston Chronicle* and Pamela Lewis of the *Houston Post* for their generous coverage of RDA events. Thanks to our student Board members Steven Gendler, Helene Gould, Julia Nolte, and Heather Young for their work on all our activities. A very special thank you is due to O. Jack Mitchell, dean of the School of Architecture, Rice University, for his ongoing interest and support of RDA. RDA is most appreciative of Stephen Fox for all the work he has done not only for RDA but for *Cite*. As in the past, Herman Dyal has provided graphic design for RDA publications. RDA remains indebted to The Museum of Fine Arts for its generosity in making the Brown Auditorium available for lectures. RDA would like to thank Drexel Turner who graciously assumed the responsibility for writing grant applications on behalf of RDA.

The continued growth of our membership is the strength of the organization. In 1982-1983 our membership has increased to 16 Corporate members, 2 Sustaining members, 7 Patron members, 55 Sponsor members and 453 Individual members. A major part of this effort is due to Raymond Brochstein and Richard Keating.

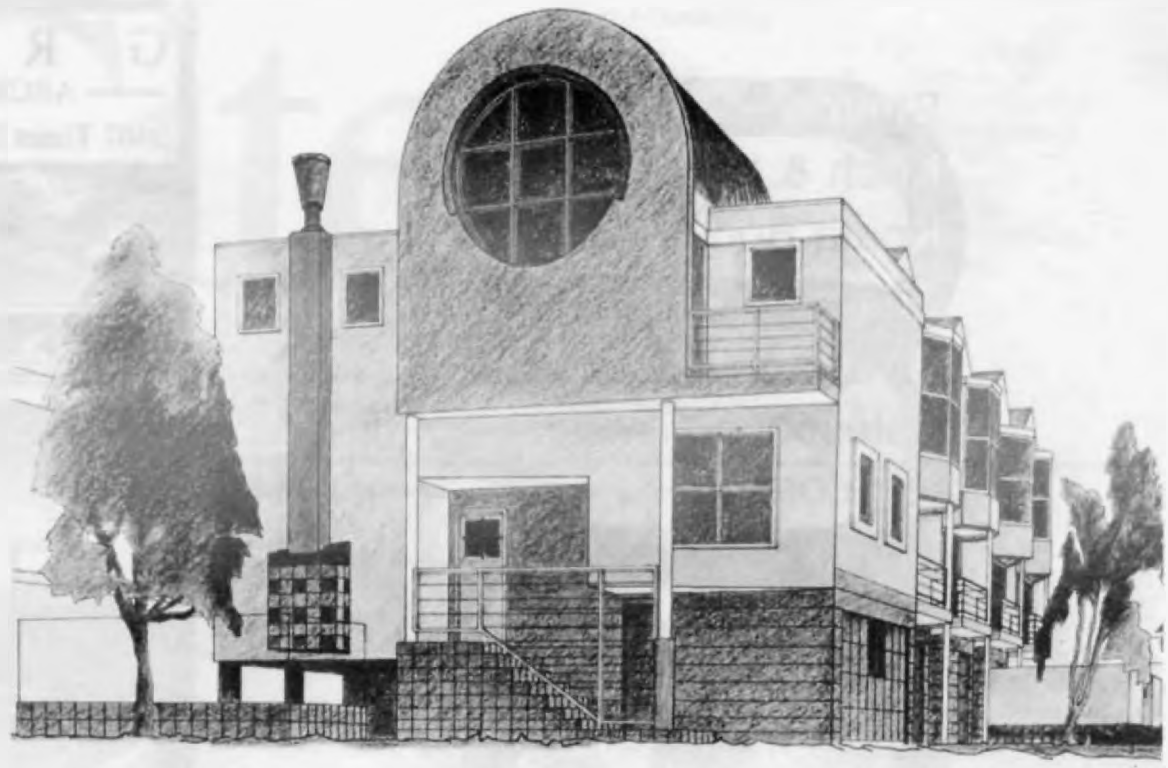
The leadership of the president, William O. Neuhaus, III, and a strong Board of Directors ensured not only a smooth operation but progressive programs in a year rendered difficult by a change of directors. Financially the organization remained sound and ended the year with a net balance of $6,382.

Elizabeth P. Griffin
Lorraine P. Roberts





Portsmouth Townhomes



THE HOUSE STORE

1722 Sunset Boulevard, Houston, Texas/77005 • 524-3617

The Portsmouth Townhomes are designed to fit the needs and pleasures of the discriminating and energetic young buyer. The appearance is striking, the careful three story design a study in modern living. You will find an unusual and complementary use of space and function as well as beautiful finishes and interior detailing.

All the homes have well defined, separate living and dining rooms, two bedrooms, large closets, additional storage space, woodburning fireplaces and kitchens with breakfast areas.

Standard finishes include solid marble vanities, highly efficient laminate cabinetry, carefully chosen lighting systems and hardware, tile and/or hardwood floors, custom coordinated paint colors and much more—including a view of Downtown Houston!

Priced from $144,500 to 165,000.

A project of PARKTOWN INCORPORATED

Designed by ALAN E. HIRSCHFIELD

Rice Design Alliance Membership Application

Name _____ Date _____

☐ Home Address* _____ ☐ Business Address* _____

Zip _____ Telephone _____ Zip _____ Telephone _____

*Check preferred mailing address

Occupation _____ Membership Category _____ Amount Enclosed _____

Cite Subscription

One year — 4 issues $8 ($20 overseas airmail)
☐ Check for $_____ enclosed
☐ Bill me
☐ Gift Subscription

Name _____

Address _____

Zip _____

Checks should be sent to Rice Design Alliance
P.O. Box 1892, Houston, Texas 77251

Membership Benefits

Individual Membership $30
- Reduced price for all RDA programs
- A discount on selected titles from the Brazos Bookstore
- Invitations to members-only program events
- Participation in the annual membership meeting and event
- Receipt of the RDA publication, *Cite*
- Invitations to Farish Gallery openings

Student Membership $15
- All of the above benefits

Sponsor Membership $125
- All of the benefits accorded to Individual Members
- The option to receive courtesy tickets to two selected RDA programs with reservations in advance

Patron Membership $250
- All of the benefits accorded to Individual Members
- The option to receive courtesy tickets to three selected RDA programs with reservations in advance

Sustaining Membership $500
- All of the benefits accorded Patron Members
- Courtesy tickets to all RDA programs

Corporate Membership $1,000
- All of the benefits accorded Patron Members
- Courtesy tickets to all RDA programs

RDA Rice Design Alliance
William Marsh Rice University
P.O. Box 1892
Houston, Texas 77251

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage Paid
Houston, Texas
Permit No. 7549

Cite