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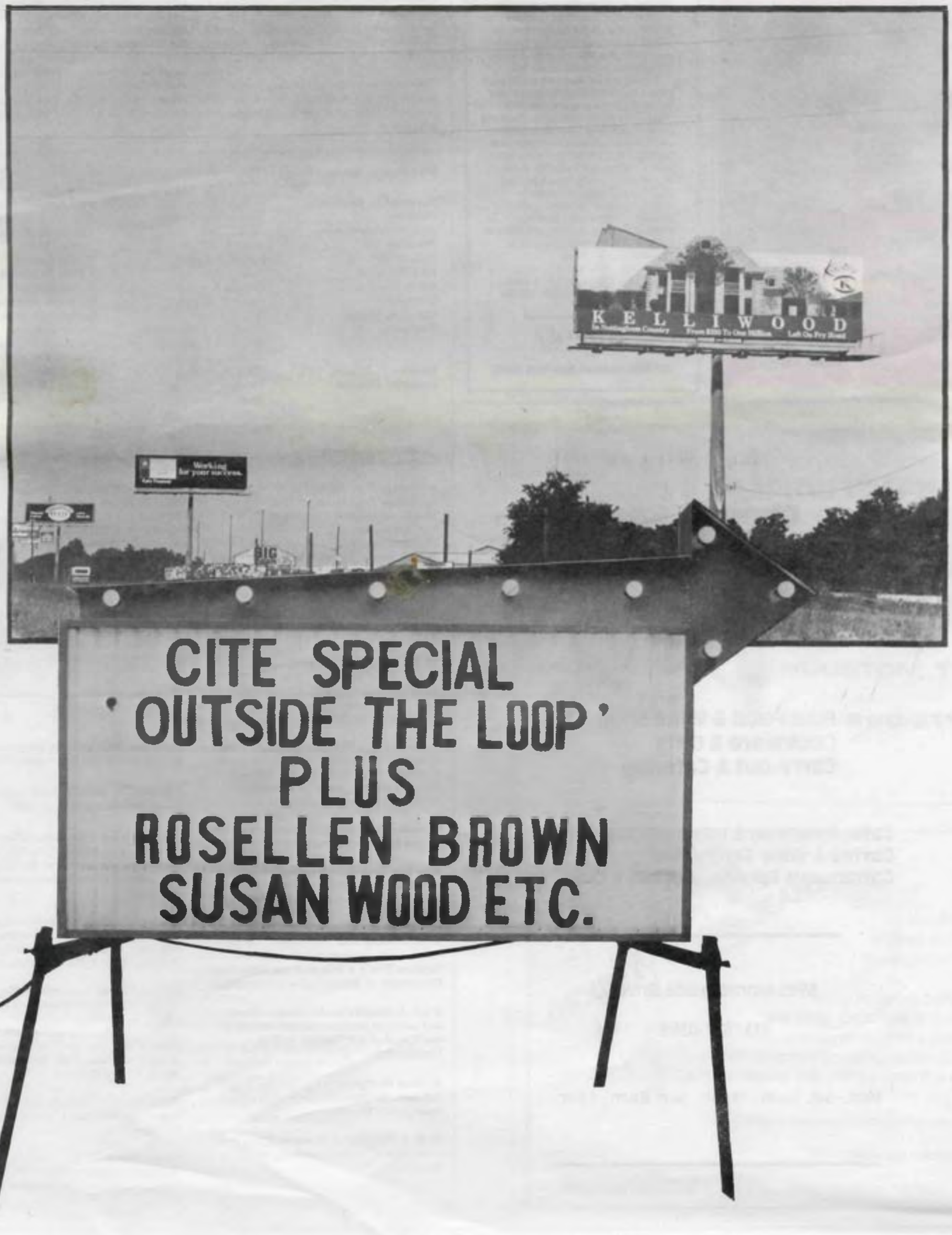

Cite

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Big Cité Beat

From top to bottom: Rattan Unlimited Furniture (Photo by Peter C. Papademetriou); Big Apple 2XX Peep Show; and all that remains (Photos by Paul Hester)

☛ *No sooner did* Robert Venturi *conceive the* "bill-ding board" *than Houston entrepreneur Stanton L. Friedman propped an advertising billboard against a wooden barracks on the Gulf Freeway, cut windows in the face of the billboard, and painted it up as a giant false-front for his* Rattan Unlimited *furniture store. That was 1971. Now, 14 years later, the house of Rattan has ignominiously fallen, its last occupant, Big Apple 2XX Peep Shows, having met a fiery end. What can this presage for Postmodernism?*

☛ *Just to prove that Houston does have a past,* Jeffrey Karl Ochsner *and* Eduardo Robles *have published for sale a three-color poster featuring an axonometric drawing of the* Main Street-Market Square National Historic District. *Illustrating and identifying all the contributing buildings within the district, the poster is intended to promote public awareness of the historic buildings remaining in lower downtown. Ochsner sees this as the first of a series of poster images documenting Houston's historical architectural resources.*

☛ Alberto Perez Gomez *has received the* Alice Davis Hitchcock Award *for distinguished architectural historical scholarship from the Society of Architectural Historians for his book,* Architecture and the Crises of Modern Science. *Perez Gomez is a former associate professor at the University of Houston College of Architecture, and is now dean of the School of Architecture at Carlton University in Ottawa, Canada. The award was presented at the society's annual meeting in Pittsburgh in mid April.*

☛ *The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston has announced the theme of its annual ball:* A Celebration of Houston in Black and White. *Featured artist for the October event will be* Richard Payne.

☛ *The first gathering of the* Young Architects Forum *occurred 1 April in the arty ambiance of the Driscoll Street Cafe. Approximately 60 "young" architects (not a rigid classification) responded to invitations from the AIA to establish a group more responsive to the needs of emerging professionals. Steering committee members presented ideas for the group, ranging from organizing exhibits and awards designed to highlight new talent to simply meeting informally every month in a similar setting. Among the positive comments from the guests was an intriguing suggestion for the concurrent creation of a "Young Clients Forum," presumably of recent MBAs.*

☛ *Judy Chicago, call your office: To celebrate the opening of its first Texas store, in Dallas,* Bloomingdale's *tossed a "State of Style" pagent in early May honoring the National Wildlife Research Center and* Texas Style Setters *in art, architecture, and entertainment. Among the programmed events were "lavish tables set by Texas' top hostesses."*

☛ *If Harry Dean Stanton and Nastassia Kinski, poised mid-air before the skyscrapers of Smith Street in Wim Wenders's "Paris, Texas," weren't enough to imbue Houston architecture with star status, then wait till you tune-in on* Robert A. M. Stern, *doing a number on Cesar Pelli's* Herring Hall *at Rice University, in his up-coming TV series* "Pride of Place." *Of course, the* BBC *beat Stern out on Anderson Hall at Rice, filmed in March for an English television special on the architecture of* James Stirling *and* Michael Wilford. *Waiting in the wings for its media debut is* Philip Johnson *and* John Burgee's *Architecture Building at the University of Houston, all framed-up and getting its face applied. A knock-out, Po-mo sensation, it already eclipses all the big, dreary buildings around it.*

University of Houston College of Architecture Building, under construction, John Burgee Architects with Philip Johnson and Morris•Aubry, architects, 1985 (Photo by Paul Hester)

☛ Taft Architects *received the Graham Foundation Advanced Fellowship in Architecture for 1985-1986 in March, which will enable partners* John J. Casbarian, Danny Samuels, *and* Robert H. Timme *to spend six months at the American Academy in Rome. Each partner will spend a period in individual residency, then all three will join together for a shared stay. Back at home, the trio is working on two commercial projects for Linear Development in Austin, restoration of the Lucas Apartments in Galveston, a deluxe spec house for Westover Square in Fort Worth, and the Houston branch of the Hard Rock Cafe.*

Citelines

News From Freedman's Town

Getting and assessing the news about the Fourth Ward, or Freedman's Town, is not always easy. Given the number of differing political stances taken on the area, multiplied by the variety of actors, concerned citizens can only hope to obtain episodic readings of the situation. The dynamics are as follows: groups like the city government, the Housing Authority of the City of Houston, and the Fourth Ward Property Owners Association proceed on a slow but steady course toward redevelopment; on the other side, community groups initiate numerous, small-scale projects directed at revitalization. Inevitably, there is more news from community groups, not only because their activities are more plentiful, but also because they seek public attention for these activities. This is not the case for the municipal and landowners' agencies, who seem to spurn publicity.

Within this framework, a number of events have occurred and are being planned that together may be interpreted as an overview of the present state of affairs in Freedman's Town. The city has not come forth with a specific plan to finance the installation of new utilities which is intended to attract developers to the area. However, water, sewer, and paving improvements in progress along West Dallas Avenue are part of the overall plan. In the meantime, rumors fly among residents in Freedman's Town regarding the quiet activities of the property owners. Many of these rumors indicate that cohesion among landholders is something less than has been indicated in public statements. General maintenance and repairs to some individual properties are taking place. Although a number of landowners see the historic district as a threat to redevelopment plans, there appears to be interest among others in the financial benefits of an historic district. A meeting was called for this purpose on 25 April, where information about the economic incentives of working within historic districts was provided to landowners and residents.

In September, Diverse Works, the alternative gallery near Market Square, will open an exhibition on Freedman's Town and Allen Parkway Village. The multimedia exhibition will include photographs, drawings, videos, oral histories, gospel singing, and lectures portraying the neighborhood's social and physical qualities. The exhibition will focus on contemporary Freedman's Town, its history, as well as new possibilities for neighborhood revitalization that have been developed by Rice University architecture students.

Across West Dallas at Allen Parkway Village, more apartments are boarded up each week. Contrary to popular belief, demolition has not been granted the necessary approval by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Those opposing demolition have the right to express their opinion prior to HUD's final decision on the matter. Within the month, concerned citizens, residents, Gulf Coast Legal Services, and the American Civil Liberties Union will meet with HUD officers from the Fort Worth regional office, and then with officers from Washington, D.C. The case will be made that the economic arguments of the Houston housing authority are no longer valid. Lack of interest on the part of developers in today's soft real-estate market make dubious a transaction of the magnitude anticipated by the city. Demolition was justified by the housing authority on the rationale that proceeds from the sale of the land could be used for replacement housing and improvements to other public-housing developments in Houston.

The meeting with HUD officers also will reveal some astonishing new estimates for the cost of rehabilitating Allen Parkway Village. Jim Bridenstine, who specializes in the rehabilitation of distressed properties, calculated that the housing authority's estimates may be double or triple the actual cost. Instead of approximately $36,000 per unit for full rehabilitation, Bridenstine estimates it can be done for $17,000. If resident labor can be used (as it has in other public-housing projects), then the per-unit cost might be as low as $12,000.

Finally, a court case continues on the fate of five Indochinese families residing at Allen Parkway Village. The families say they followed the instructions of the only housing authority employee who spoke their language. He was found to be accepting rent illegally, and was fired for his actions. Now the housing authority wants to evict the families because they are not legal tenants of public housing. On 21 March, a district judge disregarded undisputed evidence and decided against the Indochinese families. This ruling is now being appealed, and the families have been granted an injunction allowing them to remain in their apartments until a final decision has been reached. All legal work up to this point has been donated by lawyer Michol O'Connor.

The future of the Fourth Ward is far from resolution. Whether the steady path of the city, the housing authority, and property owners will be deflected by community actions remains to be seen.

Dana Cuff

Allen Parkway Village street scene (Photo by Paul Hester)

Austin's New Laguna Gloria Museum

This January, Austin voters approved passage of $14.7 million in bonds for the construction of a new downtown building for the Laguna Gloria Art Museum. The museum will be built on a long, narrow site, 66 feet by 263 feet, on Fourth Street facing Republic Square. The land and funds for preliminary project expenses, valued together at $3 million, were donated by Watson-Casey, investment builders, whose downtown holdings include nine blocks adjoining the museum's site. The museum selected as architects the Philadelphia firm of Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown, which designed the expansion of the Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College (1974) and are architects for the newly announced, $50 million Seattle Art Museum, also planned for a downtown site. The schematic design of the Laguna Gloria Museum, now nearing completion in anticipation of a November groundbreaking, was the subject of an exhibition at the Farish Gallery, Rice University, 8-24 April, and an introductory talk by Robert Venturi and Laurence Miller, director of the museum and guest curator of the exhibition.

The Laguna Gloria Museum presently occupies a large house on the grounds of a lakeside estate in northwest Austin, where it maintains a small gallery for changing exhibitions (3,500 square feet), an art school, and a sculpture garden. The new building, estimated to cost $16.6 million, will contain 77,000 square feet, including 18,000 square feet of exhibition space to accommodate changing exhibitions and a modest permanent collection of American art of the 20th century. It will also contain a 300-seat auditorium and performance space; offices, storage, preparation, and conservation areas and, at ground level, a museum store and cafe both of which can be kept open independent of gallery hours. The museum school and outdoor sculpture will remain at the present location in northwest Austin.

The new museum building, which is not intended for subsequent expansion, is almost identical in area to The Museum of Modern Art of 1939 by Philip L. Goodwin and Edward Durell Stone and is approximately two-thirds the size of the Kimbell Museum (1972) by Louis I. Kahn. In section and plan, it resembles Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown's somewhat larger project of 1979 for the Museum of Decorative Arts in Frankfurt. Both consist of four above-ground levels and a basement with two long expanses of galleries separated by a narrow longitudinal core which contains a stairway connecting the main public and gallery floors, levels one and two. Libraries and secondary galleries occupy a third level and offices and other work

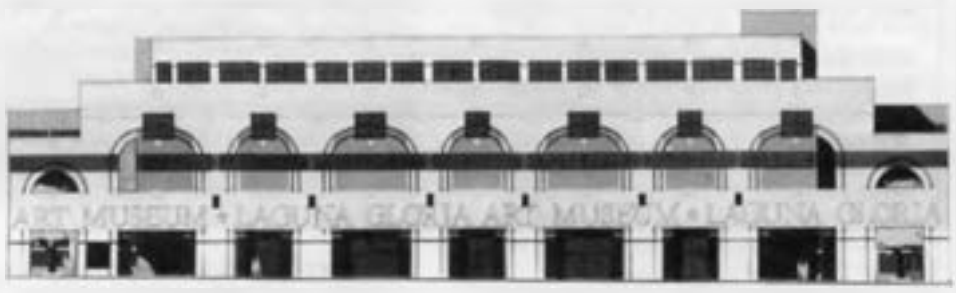

Figure 1: *Fourth Street elevation, December 1984, Laguna Gloria Art Museum, Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown, architects*

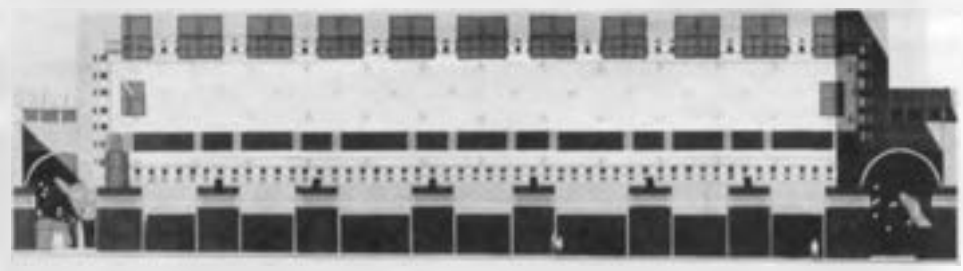

Figure 2: *Fourth Street elevation, February 1985, Laguna Gloria Art Museum*

areas the fourth. But Laguna Gloria, by virtue of its program, site, and surroundings has assumed a tighter, almost ship-like arrangement and produced a more extroverted series of proposals for its principal elevation.

Although numerous sketches and drawings for the Republic Square elevation are included in the exhibition, two themes have received fuller development than the others. The first (represented by figure 1) is dominated by a colossal arcade with arches of alternating width, suggesting a syncopated Bibliotheque Ste-Genevieve (Henri Labrouste, 1850) or closer at hand, Cass Gilbert's gentler, Mediterranean design for the library of the University of Texas (1910). Much of the arcade is blind with actual fenestration limited to arrangements that suggest framing elements - keystones and lintels - rather than actual window areas. The scheme is engaging yet unassuming, sharing a subliminal affinity with Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown's Wu Hall at Princeton (1981) absent the emphatic, sign-like entrance bay.

The second line of development (represented by figure 2) is more arresting and opaque than the first. Its most prominent feature is a large, tablet-like expanse that satisfies both the need to limit fenestration in the galleries (as a function of conservation and hanging space) and to establish a more assertive civic presence. In doing so, it recalls such Mannerist buildings as the Casino of Pius IV by Pirro Ligorio (1563) and the Aqua Paola by Flaminio Ponzio (1611). At present, this elevational approach relies chiefly on a pattern of stars to occupy the tablet. The stars also appeared in studies for the previous arcaded scheme as did, at various stages of development, lists of great artists arranged vertically (as at Ste-Genevieve) and a frieze of large, continuous lettering (ART MUSEUM LAGUNA GLORIA ART MUSEUM) ranged across the entire expanse of the façade just above street level. The overlaying of such multiple devices on the field of stars in the manner of Jasper Jones may ultimately provide the intensity needed to sustain the now considerable expanse of unfenestrated surface and to advertise the special nature of the buildings and its contents.

Although the site of the museum facing onto Republic Square affords a degree of immediate civic visibility, the museum must also contend with the much larger, inherently more conventional faces of office and commercial structures planned nearby. As a general strategy, the architects have sought to use large- rather than medium-scale elements for the elevations and a perceptibly civic palette of materials and allusive imagery. The civic character of the museum and square eventually may be extended by means of a six-block *rambla* or promenade proposed by Denise Scott Brown in a separate planning study for Watson-Casey's holdings in the area.

The Laguna Gloria project demonstrates for the first time in Texas the merit of using residual parts of commercial-development sites to accommodate civic and cultural buildings, particularly as an alternative to the continued proliferation of corporate plazas. Also apparent, even at this preliminary stage, is the intelligence of the building's design - both as a working museum and as a larger civic artifact. In this instance, Austin not only gains a building by a preeminent American architect, but a monument that works on a variety of levels.

Drexel Turner

Throwing MUD At Taft

Partially hidden among the East Texas pines in a corner of what will be the civic sector of The Woodlands's downtown, a new building has just opened that is not of reflective glass, or of brown-stained wood, or of buff concrete. Rather, this structure, the Water Resources Building, designed by Taft Architects, is faced with red-brown brick, gray-concrete columns, and green-aluminum mullions. One is struck immediately by the aesthetic differences between this building and typical Woodlands architecture. To paraphrase the client's representative, "We wanted something unique to The Woodlands, something with identity. A place our customers could find and remember. A place where Municipal Utility District (MUD) boards could meet in comfort and style." The client got just what was asked for.

The escalating costs of leasing space in a plain-vanilla office building and uncertainty about the ability to expand within such quarters persuaded the eight Municipal Utility Districts operating in The Woodlands to build a structure of their own to provide permanent space, as well as a distinct identity within the community. Located just off Grogan's Mill Road, one of the main thoroughfares of The Woodlands, and lying alongside what will be The Woodlands Riverwalk, the building achieves a notable presence and sets a high standard for future public buildings.

How does exceptional architecture happen in a place like The Woodlands which, besides being "almost to Dallas" and considered "country" by inner-city Houstonians, also imposes tough design criteria through its Development Standards Committee? Although intended, in the words of Robert Heineman, vice president for advanced planning of The Woodlands Corporation, "to prevent bad design and encourage good" there is a tendency for design review committees (or architectural review boards as they are entitled in many other places) to be conservative, sometimes even hostile, to innovation.

Established by the convenants of The Woodlands, the Development Standards Committee (DSC) consists of a group of employees of The Woodlands Corporation appointed by the developer. Its responsibility is to review all new construction within The Woodlands for appropriate site planning through control of access, parking, land use, lot coverage, height, and preservation of natural amenities. Of secondary concern is the appropriateness of the design, which often leads to questions based upon taste, style, and the aesthetic values of the individuals on the committee. So far, as may be seen from a quick drive through the community, the DSC has done a commendable job with most of the buildings. The general lack of distinguishing architecture is more the responsibility of architects and clients than of the DSC, for it cannot design buildings. Responsibility for the few errors that might be found must be placed with the marketing contingent of The Woodlands Corporation, which can bring pressure on the members of the DSC.

The normal process encountered when working with the DSC in The Woodlands is at least a three-stage activity. First, there is an initial conference with the architects at the pre-design stage. At this time restrictions for the particular site are discussed and questions regarding the project answered. This meeting is followed by a review of the schematic design when the DSC checks to make sure everything is going according to plan. This also is the time when the architect may appeal some rulings or make some alternative suggestions for use of the site. After this, there is a third meeting to grant final design approval. Taft's MUD Building made it through this process, although there were comments and criticism concerning the passing fancies of Postmodern architecture.

What might be learned from this process is that within the constraints of strong and enforced development criteria a good client and a good idea can exert enormous positive force on the taste-makers and aesthetic controllers of a community not heretofore known for its architectural savvy. Design review activities in The Woodlands should continue to encourage innovation and excellence that will pave the way for further successes.

Peter Wood

The Water Resources Building, The Woodlands, 1985, Taft Architects, architects (Photo by Paul Warchol)

Greenway Plaza Scenic District

Houston's municipal sign-control ordinance adopted in May 1980 provides not only for a system of city-wide sign regulation but also permits more stringent controls to be adopted for special scenic thoroughfares and scenic districts. The first such scenic district was created in December 1983, encompassing an area of approximately three square miles bounded by Woodway (north), the West Loop (east), the Southwest Freeway (south), and Chimney Rock (west). Instigated by the City Post Oak Association, it imposes limits on the size of on-premise signs that are twice as stringent as the city-wide standard. Full compliance will not be required until six years following creation of the scenic district, in this case, 1989.

The Houston City Council may take final action in June on plans to create a second scenic district, this time in the Greenway Plaza area. The district will encompass approximately 1.25 square miles and be bounded by West Alabama (north), Lake (east), the Southwest Freeway (south), and the West Loop (west) with a smaller area south of the Southwest Freeway and north of Westpark between Buffalo Speedway and Weslayan. Creation of the proposed scenic district is supported by Century Development Corporation, the largest landholder in the area, and Christin Hartung, the councilmember who represents the area affected. Its restrictive provisions are identical to those of the Galleria area scenic district; full compliance will not be required until six years following enactment.

Model showing view looking southwest of the Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden, 1983 (Photo by Paul Hester, courtesy The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston)

Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden

A proper space for the display of outdoor sculpture has long been a goal of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The dream came closer to reality in 1978 when the museum commissioned Isamu Noguchi to design the Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden. On 14 April 1985, Noguchi, Isaac Arnold, Jr., chairman of the board of trustees of the museum, and Mayor Kathryn J. Whitmire broke ground for the garden in a ceremony on the now-empty one-acre lot between the museum and The Glassell School of Art. Completion of the garden is set for spring 1986 - Texas's Sesquicentennial year.

The garden will be a landscaped plaza featuring red Carnelian granite paths interspersed with curving islands of grass and trees. Some of the islands will be elevated to provide focal points for the sculpture. The organic shapes of the plaza spaces will echo the biomorphic forms often found in Noguchi's sculpture. Vine-covered walls ranging between two and fourteen feet in height will shield the garden from traffic and noise, without isolating it from its surroundings. Further freestanding concrete walls of varying heights will form backdrops for the sculpture.

In addition, Noguchi has designed furniture specifically for the Cullen Sculpture Garden to complement the overall design. This furniture, which will accommodate about 100 people, is fundamental to the intended use of the garden. Waste cans and drinking fountains also will be installed. The resulting space will be attractive to both lunch-time visitors and pedestrians who stroll through the garden. The garden will also have special places for student sculpture and for temporary displays. The garden also may be used for outdoor exhibition openings and performing-arts events.

According to Peter C. Marzio, the museum's director, "The Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden will provide the ideal outdoor setting for the public to enjoy the museum's finest examples of 19th- and 20th-century sculpture. The garden will be one of Houston's most beautiful sites."

The Cullen Sculpture Garden will not be a static exhibition space; rather, it will change through the years. George Shackelford, assistant curator of European sculpture and painting, explains that "The museum's present collection of 19th- and 20th-century sculpture will be added-to so that the garden will continue to evolve. Already in the last few years the museum has been fortunate to acquire such significant examples of European sculpture as the Bourdelle *Adam* (1889) and the Maillol *Flore Nue* (1910)." Alison de Lima Greene, assistant curator of 20th-century art, adds, "Many of our acquisition priorities for 20th-century art now lie in augmenting the sculpture collection. Our goal is not to create an encyclopedic survey, but to concentrate on certain themes which will lend a certain unity and wholeness to the Sculpture Garden. We hope to concentrate on artists' interpretations of the human form, both figurative and abstract, as seen in the three Robert Graham pieces (*Fountain Figure* 1, 2, and 3; 1983) and the David Smith (*Two Circle Sentinel*, 1961), as well as on other forms borrowed from nature."

Isamu Noguci is himself one of America's foremost living sculptors. Born in California in 1904 and raised in Japan, Noguchi has always embraced both a Western and Asian aesthetic in his sculpture, combining a wide range of materials and purposes. In addition to his sculpture, Noguchi has designed a garden for the UNESCO Building in Paris (1956-1958), a plaza for the Chase Manhattan Bank Building in New York (1961-1964), the Billy Rose Sculpture Garden in Jerusalem (1960), and most recently, a sculpture garden in Costa Mesa, California (1982).

The cost of the overall project is estimated at $3.2 million. Funding for the land has been provided by the Brown Foundation and the City of Houston. Funding for the design and construction has been provided by the Cullen Foundation in memory of Lillie Cranz and Hugh Roy Cullen.

Peter J. Holliday

Isamu Noguchi addresses guests during the groundbreaking ceremony for the Cullen Sculpture Garden (Photo by Chris Crane)

Out of Cite

Our House the Bauhaus,

Or, Life Without Laura Ashley

(Illustration by Celeste Vickrey)

An Architect's Wife

Having been raised in rural Connecticut, where one is perpetually surrounded by New England saltboxes, wing chairs, hooked rugs, and pewter, it came as quite a shock to my posterior to spend three hours in a Wassily chair at the cocktail party where I met my architect husband-to-be. Later, I should have known by the way his lip curled in disdain at the sight of a set of matching Limoges placecards we'd received as a wedding gift that we were headed for trouble. ("You can give *those* to the Goodwill.")

When our first furniture purchase finally arrived - a Mies van der Rohe coffee table and two matching (you guessed it) Wassily chairs - it was explained that this was "museum-quality furniture" that would "increase greatly in value over time" and would "look terrific in any room." On the positive side, it is and it does. Otherwise, the table requires three gallons of Windex per annum, and has opened my shin once and our daughter's head twice. And anyone who has tried to read anything from *Goodnight Moon* to *War and Peace* in a Wassily chair had better have buns of steel.

As chrome, glass, plastic laminate and Andy Warhol entered my life - along with the requisite white and/or gray walls, wire pulls, and Luxo lamps - visions of Queen Anne/Chippendale, Schumacher fabrics, and brass accents went by the wayside. It appeared there was to be no meeting of the twain.

When Mary Emmerling, whom I remembered as a fellow staffer at *Mademoiselle* magazine during college days, published her glossily photographed book on the "American Country" look, I rushed out and bought a copy. Here, at last, was a viable alternative! At the same time, I poured over the Laura Ashley catalogues that came to our door. I loved the romantic, lofty bedrooms with hand-stenciled floors, mini-print fabrics and wicker baskets of dried heather. Outside Laura's bedrooms there were always sunny, cloud-scudded moors and scenes of bovine passivity.

Once I placed a sheaf of dried wheat on the mantel in our spartanly-furnished gray living room before departing with my children for vacation. When we returned to my husband the wheat was nowhere to be seen ("That bleeping stuff had *bugs* in it.") It had vanished, gone to some purgatory for scorned minutiae, along with the two needlepoint pillows I'd left unguarded on the sofa. Rest in peace.

In all fairness to my well-educated architect, I can say that he does have an admirable knowledge of traditional and antique furnishings. He is, in fact, from a part of the country which abounds in such items and he knows them well. Too well, I'm afraid. If the $300,000 highboy cannot be had, let's go without it. I have also discovered that, like a person with some chronic condition, he cannot control his "architect-ness." He's been trained too well, thanks to Rice and Harvard.

When a small sofa upholstered in a flower-and-bird motif was place in our library, my husband hyperventilated so badly he had to be taken to the Medical Center. He still gets a nervous tick in his left eyelid whenever he walks through the room, and has been known to open up a folding plastic chair to watch television there when no one is sitting on the sofa.

Could it really be true that the longer two people are together, the more alike they become? To my utter horror, I recently have discovered my own tastes in some areas are becoming more "architectural." It started in small ways. I began buying kitchen accessories only in white. One memorable afternoon, in a burst of creative energy, I placed all the labels on the bottoms of our white-capped spice jars so that they wouldn't show, then memorized where the jars were on the rack. It gave our spice rack a much cleaner line. A major family upheaval occurred when my mother gazed sympathetically around the living room and unwittingly quipped, "But where are your drapes, honey?"

I came close to seeking therapy when it occurred to me that years of renovating and whitening apartments and houses had made hardware a major concern in my life. I found myself obsessed with an item of design of which I hitherto had been blissfully ignorant. "Will you look at this!" I'd screech in indignation. "They painted *over* the hardware!" Noting the absence of wire pulls, I'd confide to my husband, "Can you believe those hideous-looking casket handles the Smiths put on their kitchen cabinets? Are they *sitting* on their brains?"

When I began using the Dustbuster to remove specks from the undersides of the Wassily chairs, being extra careful not to scratch the leather, I realized that either I was going to have to purchase a Laura Ashley lamp within 24 hours, or enroll in a post-baccalaureate architectural program and open my own firm. I bought the lamp.

Gradually, our home is moving towards an eclectic ambience somewhere in the gray regions (oops, there's that color again) between "Less is More" and "Less is a Bore" (thank you, Robert Venturi). We are currently a hodge-podge of chrome and glass, flowers and brass, with one Laura Ashley lamp thrown in for punch. Our wire pulls are now white instead of only chrome. Well, some of them are. Our about-to-be-renovated-for-the-past-three-years kitchen will still be all white, though I did lobby inexhaustibly for a red or blue sink, or a Mexican tile or two. The microwave oven has been temporarily vetoed because the best-designed door comes only in black.

"We are talking about a very serious problem here," I confided to a friend one day at lunch. "We are talking about a man who won't even wear light-blue underwear." "So what?" she said, a bit unsympathetically, I thought, "at least he doesn't wear white socks."

During this period of "kitchen detente," we are finding our lines a bit less firmly drawn and negotiations are continuing. And I just saw the most darling pine hutch over on Bissonnet. ■

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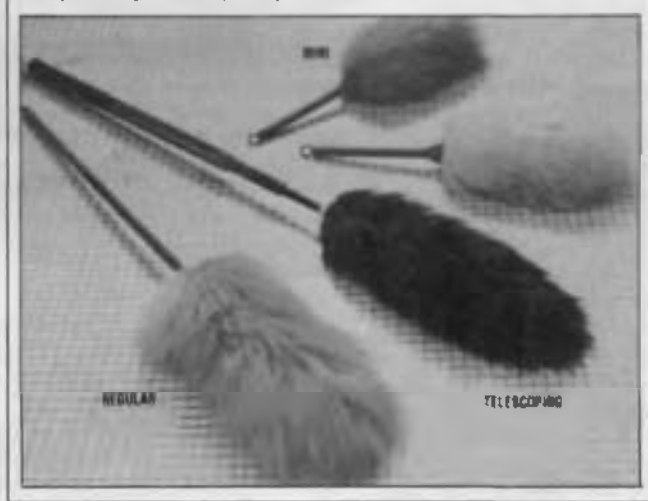

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From Loop, To Loop, To Loop

Cameron Armstrong

The psychological and physical impact of Loop 610 on Houston cannot be exaggerated. Places are described as inside, outside, or beyond this 44.3-mile route around inner Houston. Buildings are in its "area" or "corridor." The loop's effect is not simply geographical: its circumference has become a fact in the city's social worlds too. People identify themselves and their neighborhoods according to a consensus about a cultural divide that occurs at the loop. No matter that human birds flock in diverse groups, this eight-lane great wall has given the city's stereotypes vigorous life. Concepts of "lifestyle" dominate the view on both sides of the road. The possibility of going aimlessly east or west, north or south, inside or outside Houston disappears among the implications of cultural and social proximity.

Windsor Plaza (Photo by Paul Hester)

Retail Center, Dairy Ashford (Photo by Paul Hester)

This divided ideological terrain contains differing versions of Houston's present and divergent expectations about its future. Chief among presumptions is that the loop itself is eternal, sustaining our prejudices of the form of the city far into the future. The completion of Houston in that future is supposed to echo distinctions already made. Indeed, given that self-fulfilling prophecies are the norm in our development system, such a view is in order. Nevertheless, whether the future will happen inside or outside the loop remains a contentious issue.

"Inside" versus "outside" is in truth a question of agenda. One side seems to require a center of gravity, a critical mass of population without which "true" urbanity cannot be achieved. Institutions, whether museums, opera houses, or universities, must be piled one atop the other; neighborhoods must reach the density of old-world (or at least Yankee) settlements. The whole must be driven by an economic core with the power to define and project the values of the social order. Opposed to this view is a vision of dispersion: of extended, low-density development punctuated by modest versions of traditional urbanism à la Houston - Galleria-type malls, areas of mixed, apartment and strip-retail development, and scattered concentrations of office towers. From this perspective, Houston is to be a world of glass towers amid treed suburbs - an endless freeway network connecting village to village.

At present, both views coexist in the city's mid-decade economic doldrums. In a town awash in borrowed money, there seems little urgency in the choice between alternative futures. But by the end of the decade, hundreds of millions of dollars will have been spent on engineering projects aimed at fixing the city's mobility problems. As they become part of Houston's landscape of ramps and overpasses - the man-made geography that dominates thinking about neighborhoods and their proximities - these public works will rewrite the meaning of the loop.

First among the projects is Metro's Regional Transit Plan. Depending upon the option chosen, the plan will entail capital expenditures of up to $6.3 billion concentrated on existing corridors into and out of the city. By the end of this decade, almost $2 billion may have been spent on buses, transitways, and possibly rail vehicles and track. Second, there is Beltway 8, already under construction, planned as an 87.5-mile, six- to eight-lane ring around outer Houston. Its cost will be borne partly by tolls charged on the northwest section by the Harris County Toll Authority. The balance of funds and construction will be provided by the Texas State Department of Highways and Public Transportation.

In the abstract world of transit planning, these systems are seen to complement each other in delivering mobility to our jammed city. But consider the timetable. By 1991, with Metro only 15 to 20 percent into its capital budget, the authority's segment of the Beltway will be complete and charging tolls. Running from the intersection at Roark Road and US-59 north to I-10, US-290, and then east to I-45, this 28-mile arc will make the drive from Sugar Land to Westchase to the Energy Corridor, or even to Greenspoint and the North Belt developments, a quick commute. More than offering just an easier way to Houston Intercontinental Airport, the Beltway will bolster the ease of life and work outside Loop 610.

Partly by luck and partly by plan, the Beltway will give geographic form to the split personality of the west side. At present, driving west from the Galleria, the surroundings yield a mixed bag of wealth, poverty, crowding, and dispersion. Areas like Memorial and Spring Branch accompany each other westward along the Katy Freeway (I-10), while US-59 cuts through southwest Houston and Sharpstown. However, just beyond the line of the Beltway at West Belt an endless expanse of prosperous Ashfords, Lakesides, Villages, and Colonies stretches past State Highway 6 and north of I-10 to link up with the Champions area of FM-1960. Directly north of Loop 610, the close-in mix of industry and "older" (circa 1950) neighborhoods rapidly gives way to stretches of open land interspersed with subdivisions and apartments. To the north of the Beltway, as to its west, a more certain world of large subdivisions and corporate headquarters exists. The completion of the Beltway will exaggerate the west side's already schizophrenic condition.

The west side saw explosive growth in the 1970s, especially in the far west. Here development has slackened little with the onset of Houston's mid-1980s blues. Meanwhile, the vitality of the North Belt and Champions areas have prompted yet more ambitious office- and land-development schemes. And with projects like The Woodlands and First Colony, both the north and the west have seen the creation of virtually autonomous new towns. These outer areas are in little doubt about their economic or social identities. Corporate expansion and relocation has brought both the expectations and the people to populate this linear-city environment. Not so the intermediate zone between the Beltway and Loop 610. Here is where "entertainment" malls and night clubs jostle apartment complexes and exclusive residences, where economic appreciation and runaway growth coexist with decay and bankruptcy.

Already the site of the city's highest population densities, this "loop-to-loop" area is seeing growth in both retail and restaurant capacity. Streets like Fondren are becoming home to districts of specialty retailing and discount stores. Others are the make-or-break testing ground of Houston's night life. Still others, like the North Post Oak-Hempstead Highway area, are witnessing a return of industry in the form of service centers and industrial parks. From the strip centers of Westheimer and Richmond, to the restaurants and bars of Hillcroft and Windsor Plaza, to the spec office towers dotting the periphery, one senses a pent-up energy.

The vitality of the northwestern area between Loop 610 and Beltway 8 (and of all other parts of Houston) has always relied on a not-so-subtle relationship to the promotion of the city as a whole. While dedicated to growth, Houston's myth bestows success only on areas which can sustain investment in the "future." Translated into marketing, this visionary boosterism results in competition to project the most exemplary image of the Sunbelt life (whether fulfilled or not). Houstonians are thus attuned to a complicated cross-referencing of taste, concept, and proximity. Is southwest Houston beautiful? Is First Colony "close-in"? Is the parity in office rents between downtown and the Energy Corridor permanent (does it exist)? The answers to these questions depend on how one juggles the terms of fact and fiction between the loops 610 and Beltway 8.

Generally, such juggling also depends on what direction one wants the city to take. For most Houstonians, a position on either side of the dispersion/concentra-

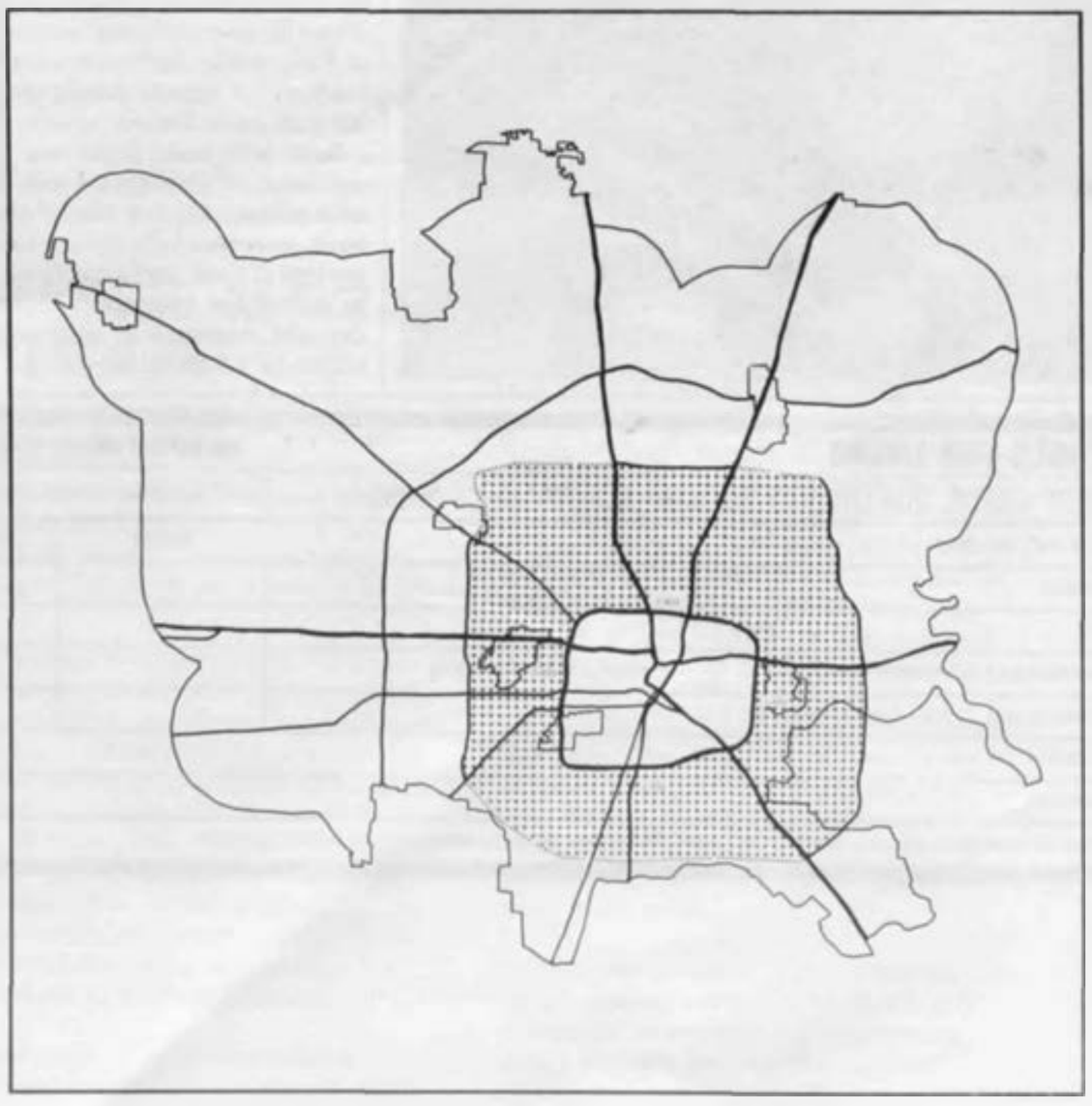


Diagram of Houston regional freeway network; shaded portion shows area between Loop 610 and Beltway 8

The Insider's View of Outside the Loop

Jerry Wood

Dairy Ashford Village, Dairy Ashford (Photo by Paul Hester)

tion issue is enough to color predictions of the future. The area between the two loops, seen as a vassal of a dense center city, becomes slated for the ambiguities of a partly urban economy. But portrayed as a collection of villages, it is promoted as an extension of endless suburbia. Neither view takes into account the simultaneously concentrated and dispersed form of present-day Houston.

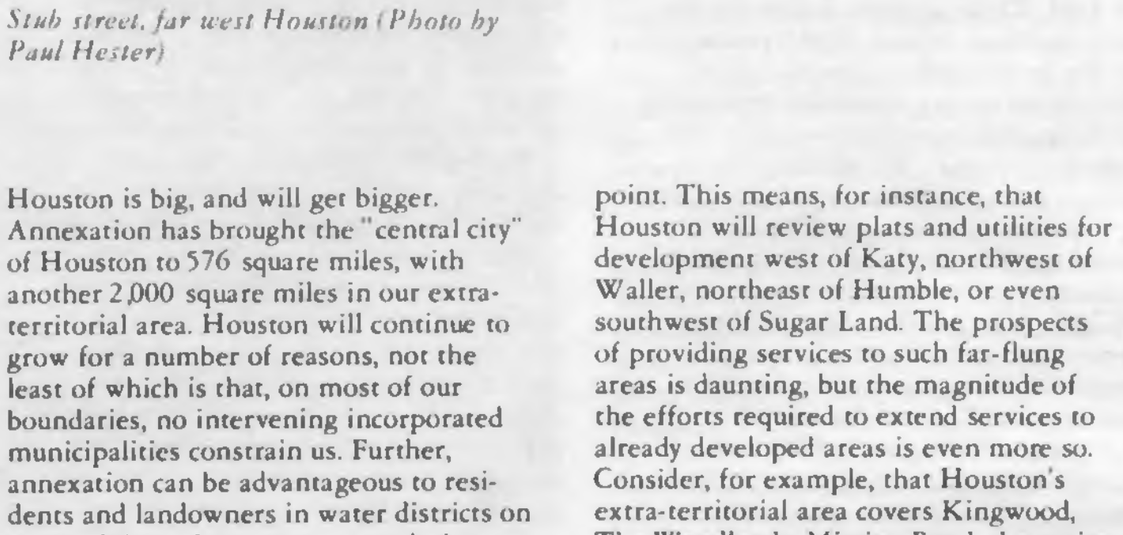
Up to now, the language with which to talk about this kind of urban form has not existed. But the growth of a new discriptive vocabulary is as inevitable as the obsolescence of Houston's polarized concept of itself. The year 2000 may find the area between the loops spurned by a city growing in opposite directions. Or it may be the sought-after center of an array of inward-looking satellites. Either way, this locale will form the middle ground in a subtler and certainly more mature city, a place less willing to make strict distinctions and better able to decide its fate consciously.

Rather than evoke false expectations by reference to a single loop, residents will point out relationships in, around, through, and beyond a whole region. From loop to loop and through the loop, the Houston of tomorrow will invent a new way of talking about, and valuing, itself.■

The terms "inside the loop" and "outside the loop" are not commonly used at City Hall when political geography is discussed. Above the neighborhood level, distinctions are drawn based on council district, ethnicity and race, income level, or neighborhood age. Location relative to Loop 610 is a poor indicator of status with regard to almost all of these. The exception is age, yet even so there are subdivisions of single-family houses inside the loop developed as late as the 1970s. Being inside the loop doesn't even establish location within the City of Houston, since West University Place, Southside Place, and Bellaire are located wholly or partially inside the loop.

The inside versus outside distinction has been raised with regard to economic revitalization efforts. Council member Dale Gorczynski recently complained that a depressed area in his district, District H, has been neglected because it is located outside the loop. The nature of the complaint illustrates why the loop is not a commonly used reference point in city government. First, Gorczynski's district is a corridor running from Memorial Park and the Heights north to Greenspoint Mall. Its large black population is concentrated in Acres Homes and Studewood, both located outside the loop, yet it also contains significant black neighborhoods located inside the loop, too. Hispanic population is growing, especially in the north side, outside the loop. Young Anglos are buying homes and starting families in large numbers at both ends of the district, on the suburban edge and in the redeveloping areas of the Heights and Westcott area east of Memorial Park. Gorczynski's concern was that he has a neighborhood with "inner city" problems on the edge of the city. The variety of neighborhoods in District H, and the unpredictability of their location with regard to the loop, explains the irrelevance of the terms in municipal government.

In discussing the city government's role outside the loop, the only clear distinction to draw is between the already incorporated area of Houston, and its huge potential area covered by extra-territorial jurisdiction. This extra-territorial area (and Houston's ability to annex it) makes Houston different from most other cities and strongly shapes attitudes and events at City Hall.



Stub street, far west Houston (Photo by Paul Hester)

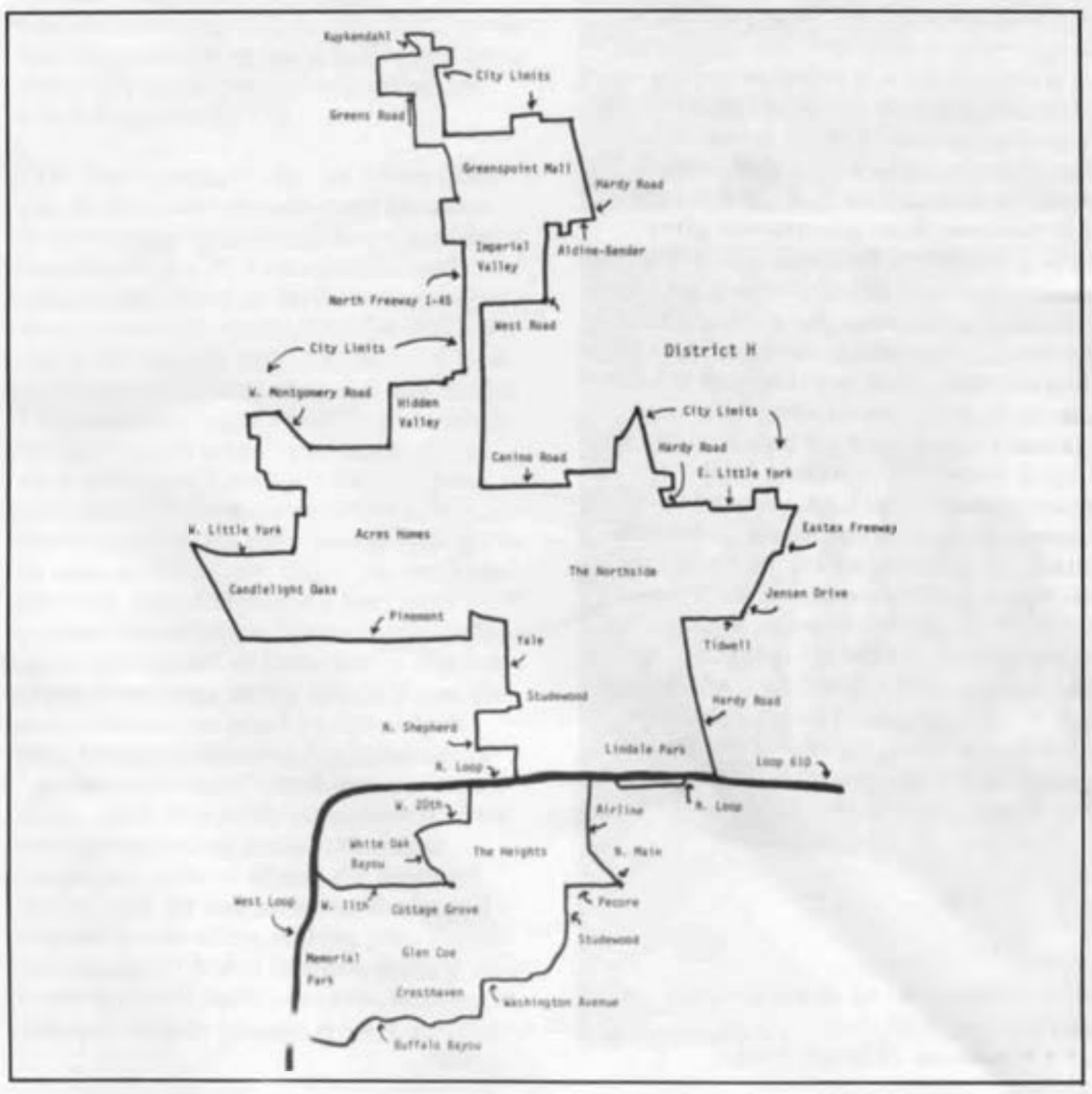
Houston is big, and will get bigger. Annexation has brought the "central city" of Houston to 576 square miles, with another 2,000 square miles in our extra-territorial area. Houston will continue to grow for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that, on most of our boundaries, no intervening incorporated municipalities constrain us. Further, annexation can be advantageous to residents and landowners in water districts on our periphery, in some cases replacing a high water-district tax rate with a lower city rate, and providing greater resources to cope with urban problems. Also, because the development of raw land is predicated on the assumption that Houston will someday annex the area, ending annexation would mean significant disruption in the development industry. Finally, the Houston City Council (in a rare display of unanimity on an issue of this importance) favors it. Annexation is beneficial for residents and property owners within the city, and it will continue to be beneficial. The real question is, will Houston incorporate the Delaware-size portion of Texas that is our extra-territorial area? If the answer is yes, then when and how?

It might be useful to point out how Houston currently regulates development in its extra-territorial area. The city must approve plats of subdivisions which affect the planning of major thoroughfares, and must consent to the creation of water districts within the extra-territorial area. As part of that consent process, the city reviews and approves utility plans for these districts, and recently these plans are being directed toward regional sewage treatment. Overseeing these aspects of development is not extraordinarily difficult for the Planning and Development Department to do. What would be difficult for the city would be the extension of comprehensive city services over the currently developed portion of Houston's extra-territorial area.

Because Houston annexed ten-foot strips down various roads in the early 1960s, Houston's extra-territorial area extends over most of Harris County and large portions of Fort Bend, Waller, Montgomery, and Liberty counties. Within this considerable area Houston may annex contiguous areas unilaterally, and can prevent incorporation of new municipalities or annexation by other cities. Houston's extra-territorial area surrounds a number of other towns, and limits their capacity to expand beyond an already established point. This means, for instance, that Houston will review plats and utilities for development west of Katy, northwest of Waller, northeast of Humble, or even southwest of Sugar Land. The prospects of providing services to such far-flung areas is daunting, but the magnitude of the efforts required to extend services to already developed areas is even more so. Consider, for example, that Houston's extra-territorial area covers Kingwood, The Woodlands, Mission Bend, the entire Mason Road area, FM-1960, Channelview, and points in between.

In the face of such an enormous area (some population estimates for our extra-territorial area go as high as a million people), Houston's most recent annexations seem rather small. In 1982 the city concluded some half-completed annexations in Alief and Fort Bend County, and made some small extensions of its boundaries elsewhere. The total population added was about 22,000, approximately the size of Deer Park. The 1983 annexation consisted of an uninhabited park site. The 1984 annexation added another 19,000 people to Houston. The 1977-1978 annexations of Clear Lake City, Greenspoint, most of Alief, and several thousand residents of Fort Bend County were more ambitious, and much more controversial.

Clear Lake City's story is well known by now. A bill in the Texas Legislature gave the residents of the unincorporated development of Clear Lake City the right to incorporate if Houston did not act before the end of 1977. Predictably, Houston acted, annexing the portion of the Clear Lake City Water Authority within its extra-territorial area in two actions before the end of that year. The result has been a continuing round of disputes and lawsuits. The annexation of Alief was less controversial only because residents there did not have any ambition to incorporate independently. The 1977 annexation in Alief added about half of the developed portion of the Alief Independent School District, lying east of Highway 6. Unfortunately, this half of the developed area was not a compact, discrete area. It protruded like a trailer hitch off Houston's rear bumper, skipping over some water districts, taking others, and rarely including the full length of any thoroughfare. The follow-up, in 1978, added most of the developed area east of Highway 6, but still created much confusion. The original townsite of Old Alief, for instance, was excluded, as was most of the right-of-way for Beltway 8. Large islands of unincorporated territory lay along Kirkwood, Wilcrest, and the Southwest Freeway (US-59). Emergency services were hampered by citizens' understandable confusion as to where the city left off and the Alief Volunteer Fire Department and Harris County Sheriff's Department began.



Boundaries of Houston City Council District H

From left to right: *Subdivision development along West Little York Road. Traffic barricade, Katy. The suburban frontier, Katy (Photos by Paul Hester)*

Problems caused by the haste of such annexations led the legislature to change the Municipal Annexation Act in 1979 and 1981. These changes require on-site public hearings prior to most annexations, and the development of service plans. They do not make annexation impossible, but make repetition of annexations like those in 1977 and 1978 unlikely. Annexation can continue in its current, incremental, form for some time under present conditions. The challenge will be when Houston attempts to move into areas like FM-1960, Kingwood, or Mission Bend. Annexation of these areas will require special efforts in planning and service development. The current capital improvements program, which runs through 1989, makes provision for fire-station and library sites outside the current city limits. These locations are in the State Highway 6 and Greens Crossing areas, and don't begin to cover the FM-1960, Kingwood, or Mason Road areas. The real test will come as the city projects its plans beyond 1989. Will the long-term goal of incorporating new growth into the city prevail over the short-term need to demonstrate improvement within the existing boundaries?

The assumption at City Hall is that most of our extra-territorial area eventually will be annexed. This attitude is very different from that in a city with fixed boundaries. A city which can annex shopping malls need not be as concerned about the decline of downtown retail. Such a city need not be concerned about the physical expansion of non-profit institutions reducing its tax base. The tendency of new freeways and airports to draw population and development away from the central city need not trouble a city which can incorporate this development. While decision makers in city government in Houston are not indifferent to the potential problems of annexation, these simply do not represent the kind of life-or-death questions that they do (or did) in St. Louis or Boston. To devise policies and ordinances that apply not only to aging neighborhoods in need of sensitive, creative redevelopment, but also to rapidly growing suburbs with huge tracts of raw land under development is not easy. Accommodating both in one municipal government leads to uneasy and sometimes unhappy situations. As the examples of numerous cities across the country demonstrate, the alternatives to making that accommodation are not very attractive.

There are too many variables in the parallel development of cities to isolate a single difference, such as the ability to annex, and make a valid comparison. We might speculate however, on how Houston would be different if it had been limited to its 1950 boundaries. Simply by overlaying those boundaries on the present city we can see some important differences in the city government's ability to meet local needs.

In 1949 Houston doubled its area by annexation. It then became the 14th largest city in the nation, when the 1950 census counted just under 600,000 people in the incorporated area. (Currently, the population within the 1950 boundaries is almost 750,000, just less than half of the population within 1985 boundaries.) Neighborhoods within Houston's old boundaries are, naturally, older. A greater percentage are deteriorated within this old boundary than in the current city limits. Office space is more heavily concentrated within the old boundaries since they contain three of the largest concentrations (downtown, Greenway Plaza, and the West Loop). However, office development has been spreading rapidly beyond these areas, to Greenspoint, Westchase, Sharpstown, and the Energy Corridor on the Katy Freeway (I-10).

Sales-tax receipts provide a quarter of the revenues available for general operations - police, fire, parks, library, health. Shopping malls are the greatest concentrations of retail space and produce large amounts of sales tax. These sources have followed higher-income population to the newer suburbs. Houston with its 1950 boundaries would have five major shopping malls within its boundaries. The Galleria would be the only one of the five not showing signs of decline. The 1984 annexation added eight malls, many of which are still expanding. Further, Houston's extra-territorial area includes one other mall and three proposed malls. In this metropolitan area, only two existing (and one proposed) malls are beyond Houston's ability to annex. Not all sales-tax revenue is derived from malls, but they serve as examples of the revenue sources annexation has provided.

Responsibility for services also comes with annexation, but the cost of services to commercial areas is more than outweighed by the revenues they generate. The same is not true of residential areas, especially because of the extensive declaration of homestead exemptions. Will Houston continue to annex residences? First, it must be said that the city is not pursuing annexation of residential areas as aggressively as in the past. Moreover, clear boundaries and coherent service plans frequently require the annexation of low-revenue areas. Finally, we have no way of knowing how long the current methods of financing local government will continue. State government gives local government the authority to tax, and can change that authority whenever it chooses. For instance, the State of Texas prefers to have local government tax directly, rather than provide state aid. If the state choses to eliminate local sales tax and provide state aid based on population or some other formula, local government's fiscal fortunes would change radically. Some would gain; some would lose, depending on the legislature's decisions. In the absence of long-range certainty about the structure of local finances, we're better off spreading our risk, establishing a broad base which most nearly duplicates the Houston area's diversity. Annexation allows us to do this, giving us a future of uncertain geography, but healthy finances.■

City of Houston and its extra-territorial jurisdiction, 1985
(• • • indicates 1950 city limits)

The Stuff of Dreams: New Housing Outside the Loop

The Work of Kaufman Meeks

Mark A. Hewitt

Inside the loop what's important is to show your friends how you've updated your kitchen with the latest high-tech appliances and Italian, French, or German cabinetry. What's important outside the loop is showing them you live on the golf course. Mark Kaufman

The notion of suburban sprawl eludes our concepts of urban form. It isn't enclosed or directed like the space of traditional cities, it is open and indeterminate. In the undefined space of the commercial strip, we find our way through signs and symbols, and in the vast space of suburbia there is a need for similarly explicit symbolism. Some physical elements of suburbia, such as roads, roofs, and doorways, fulfill functional requirements and are symbols that carry messages as well. Together with the more explicitly symbolic front-yard ornaments and decorations of the façade, these elements help to define suburban space. Their symbolic content makes up for their relatively small size and communicates their messages at varying scales, depending on the distance from which they are read. The American suburb keeps alive a pluralist aesthetic and a tradition of using symbolism in architecture.[1] Denise Scott Brown

The house both encloses space (the house interior) and excludes space (everything outside it). Thus it has two very important and different components: its interior and its façade. The house therefore nicely relects how man sees himself, with both an intimate interior, or self, as viewed from within and revealed only to those intimates who are invited inside, and a public exterior (the persona *or mask in Jungian terms) or the self that we choose to display to others.*[2] Clare Cooper

The Great American Suburb is alive and well in Houston, particularly outside Loop 610. Megatract developments like First Colony in Sugar Land, Clear Lake City, and Kingwood, and new towns like The Woodlands are viewed as among the most progressive in the country by the American home-building industry. Because of the lack of zoning, developers and their architects have used Houston as a testing ground for new housing. During the last ten years, with the city expanding rapidly to the west and north along Interstate Highway 10 and U.S. Highway 59, the important changes occurring within the nation's housing industry have been writ large on Houston's built environment. According to Houston architect Mark Kaufman, whose firm, Kaufman Meeks Inc., has been a national leader in suburban-housing design, west Houston is not only an exciting place to live, but contains "the most innovative housing and retail design in the U.S."

The "last American city," as writer Douglas Milburn has characterized Houston, is no stranger to innovation in consumer housing. In the 1950s Meyerland and other subdivisions in the Braeswood area were considered model, planned residential developments from the point of view of land planning and tract-housing design. The one-story, hipped-roof, L-plan ranch house, with its broad front lawn, sitting on a wide, gently curving street, represents not only the most ubiquitous 50s house type but, for baby boomers, is apt to be seen as "Mom and Dad's" house. Tanglewood, one of Houston's first large, postwar subdivisions, boasts some of the most representative examples of this suburban house type in the nation. From the mid 1960s to the late 70s, not only did tract houses proliferate, but hundreds of "garden apartment" developments were constructed, especially in southwest Houston, incorporating distinctive theme imagery or style to attract the uprooted denizens of the industrial northeast and elsewhere who came seeking jobs. Experimentation with this medium-density housing (15-40 units per acre), targeted at younger, middle-income renters, reached its peak in the mid 1970s, when as many as 20,000 units per year were being constructed. As architect Peter Papademetriou has pointed out in his study of this housing, the Houston garden-apartment complex often took some of its overall form and site planning from orthodox, modernist prototypes, while its image and unit planning resembled a cross between a motel and a traditional courtyard apartment.[3]

Top: *Texas Classical model home, Kaufman Meeks, architects.* Above: *Interior view, Texas Classical model home (Photo by Rob Muir).* Left: *Architect Mark Kaufman (Photos courtesy Kaufman Meeks)*

As land values inside the loop have risen dramatically in the 1980s, developers have looked to both the townhouse and the high-rise condominium tower as types suitable for the more sophisticated, upscale urban dweller - in the latter case with disastrous results, as a look at the paucity of lights at night in many a gleaming high-rise will attest. Among Houston's younger "high-design" architects, the townhouse has emerged as a major vehicle for formal experimentation and innovation (see "Recent Housing in Houston: A Romantic Urbanism," *Cite*, Spring 1985). The problem of squeezing two yuppies, their pets (or child), and their two cars into a constricted 25-foot slice of prime real estate has elicited responses as varied as the wacky multicolored constructivism of Arquitectonica and the cool, sedate work of William F. Stern. But as bustling as things have seemed in West University Place and Montrose in recent years, the real action in housing has been taking place out along State Highway 6 in far west Houston.

According to Kaufman, a transplanted New Yorker whose firm has designed over 100,000 units of single- and multifamily housing nationally during the past four years, the increased sophistication of home buyers in all income ranges has effected major changes in housing design. The motel-like garden apartment, low-slung and low-ceilinged ranchburger, and boxy Cape Cod colonial are things of the past, now being replaced by tract houses, condominiums, and rental apartments with more spatial variety, sophisticated imagery and massing, and more "premium" features to hook the discerning buyer. "Every market group wants something different," says Kaufman. "The home builders today really have started to get ahold of what people want. I'm not saying that the colonial out there in the suburbs is what I'm in agreement with. People won't buy them any more. I want to know what makes people buy what they buy...what they want in their dreams; when they close their eyes, what picture do they paint of their dream house, or more importantly, their dream lifestyle ...what they would give anything for but know they can never have. Then...we give it to them."

Kaufman Meeks, in existence for just over ten years, has been phenomenally successful at designing "dream" housing for many lifestyles - from 750-square-foot patio homes (nine dwelling units per acre) priced at about $50,000, to middle- and upper-income condominiums and apartments, to single-family houses in the $150,000 price range (four dwelling units per acre). The firm has consistently won building-industry awards, and includes among its clients most of the nation's major home builders. Kaufman makes no bones about the secret to his firm's success, and his distance from the profession at large. "I consider myself a marketing architect. I give builders three-dimensional market research and they put it up with sticks and bricks."

The seductive marketing brochure for one of the firm's prototypical lines of homes, called the "Texas Classical Collection," shows how the approach works. Rather than emphasizing one particular stylistic image or trend, as was often the case in the past, imagery is combined on these houses to provide what Kaufman calls a "timeless" or durable, high-quality look. ("Brick, stone, tile, and shingle denote

Substantial People," according to Denise Scott Brown.[4]) In a tighter, more conservative market, buyers tend to look for less adventuresome features in a home. Thus the invocation of the term "classic" in the brochure text:

Blending the finest points of classical styling into one graceful theme, Texas Classical says 'urban elegance' like nothing before. It combines the rich tradition of Boston brownstone with stunning San Francisco-style Palladian windows for an overall message of romance and charm ...Inside, there is a crisp departure from the statuesque exterior, as the home opens up broad expanses of space with contemporary flow. High vaulted ceilings, wide dividing stairways and panoramic windows create a feeling of size and freedom as only Texas Contemporary styling can. This delicate blend of the storied past and the exciting future is achieved with craftsmanship worthy of the old masters and innovation that dazzles the senses.[5]

The houses themselves, which are relatively compact, "zero lot line" patio homes, play up the romantic images conjured up in the mind of the prospective buyer. The names of the models themselves are telling: Veranda, Retreat, Courtyard, Gallery. Each implies significant differences, which, upon inspection of the plans, are only minor variations ("The builder has to make money, too," says Kaufman). One of the most important features of all Kaufman Meeks houses and apartments, which the architects go to great lengths to achieve, is spatial variety. The double-height living rooms, saddlebag greenhouses, and "garden kitchens," as well as the use of open staircases and three-quarters-height room dividers, are all meant to convey a sense of spaciousness, to make homes which are often rather small appear gracious and grand. Sectional variation, even complexity (which results in extra framing costs for the builder), hardly to be seen in speculative houses 15 years ago, is now something which buyers expect. They also, of course, expect the lavish bathrooms - "Hollywood" or "champagne" baths - that play on fantasies of glamour, sex, and romance. In the most intimate and private realm of the house - one of Clare Cooper's two primary symbolic components - the architect and interior designer turn their styling volume nobs to ten. Freudian interpretations aside, these palatial bath suites are wasteful of space in a small home. But they are critical from a marketing point of view. Substantiating Cooper's identification of the two powerful symbolic realms of the house, Kaufman asserts that suburban houses are most often sold via the design "perks" in bathrooms and kitchens (where owners spend the majority of their waking hours) and the power of the image exerted from the street façade and entrance to the subdivision.

A look at the outside of any Kaufman Meeks patio home, condominium, or tract house shows emphatically that in 1985 the box with applied decor and the ranchburger are as outmoded as miniskirts and tailfins. Rakish, complex roof configurations that would make even Charles Moore dizzy are augmented by scores of dormers, balconies, projecting bays, and chimney stacks that add a new dimension of interest and play tricks with scale. The impact of this almost Victorian massing on suburban space and the street edge is considerable within a development enclave. Kaufman Meeks subdivisions and condominium projects do have a cohesiveness that sets them apart from most suburban complexes. At First Choice, in the Bear Creek area, the architects have created a closely-packed subdivision of tiny houses (averaging about 900 square feet) meant to suggest a community of turn-of-the-century bungalows, successfully coordinating the scale of the streets with that of the houses. At Brant Rock Village, a 350-unit condominium development, the architects stacked units to

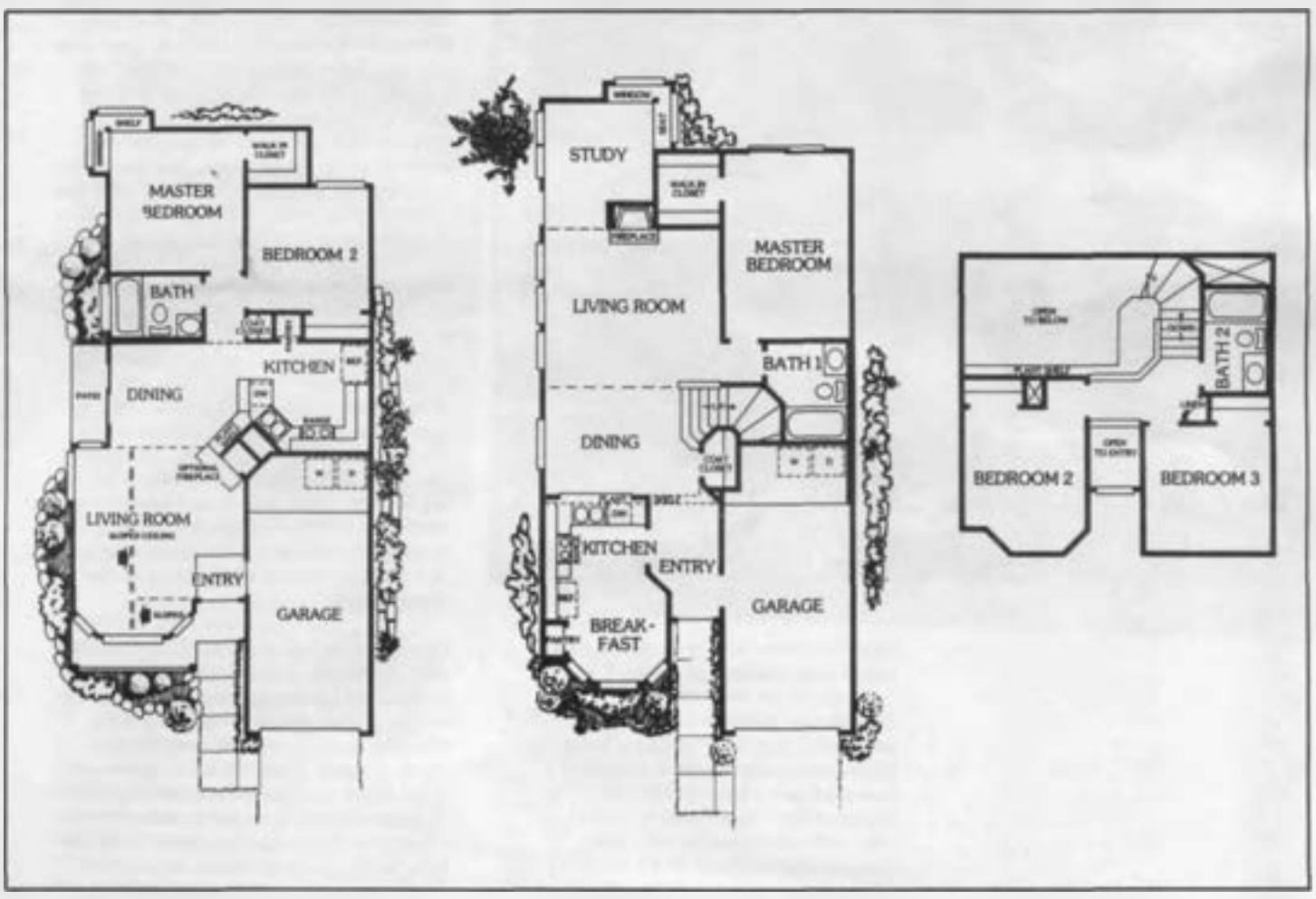
Top: *Poolside at Brant Rock Village, Kaufman Meeks, architects. Informal, picturesque massing acts to achieve a resort-like character in these condominiums designed for the younger market in west Houston (Photo by Paul Hester).* Above: *Interior view, Brant Rock Village condominium (Photo by Rob Muir, courtesy Kaufman Meeks).* Right: *Large gable subsumes the piggy-back sectional stacking of roofs at Brant Rock Village (Photo by Paul Hester)*

create picturesque massing suggesting a village, grouped around three small ponds: hence the dream of a resort lifestyle for the younger market (which in past years would have been accommodated in garden apartments).

Kaufman, a graduate of Pratt Institute, began his career in Mayor John Lindsay's Urban Design Group in New York City and once lived in Forest Hills Gardens, a planned community in Queens designed by Grosvenor Atterbury and the Olmsted Brothers between 1909 and 1912. He believes that urban design counts in the suburbs too. "What we're trying to do now is something we feel hasn't been done much before, and that's create neighborhoods; get away from the standard, linear street patterns designed only to get the most lots. We want to create a neighborhood feel, a country-club feel, so that when you go home you feel like you're going on vacation." The intended change in suburban space from a dispersed field of objects - signs and symbols in Denise Scott Brown's schema - to one of a more densely defined but picturesque edge, is in some ways a return to the approach taken by garden suburb planners in England and the U.S. at the turn of the century, an influence Kaufman admits. But there are significant differences. The scenography of Sweetwater is not the cohesive, planned urbanity of Forest Hills or Radburn. As with the marketing gimmickry which often appears inside the house, a little illusionism outside helps to create the feeling of status and well-being that market researchers consider crucial. The tenuous, tacked-on quality of even three-dimensional features (like false chimneys) and the unabashed "bill-ding-board" use of applied second garage doors on lower-end houses (not having two cars is an automatic social stigma) ties the new suburban imagery firmly to that of older suburbs like Levittown. Ultimately, symbols still count more than spacemaking in the contemporary suburb. Fake security gates and guardhouses are used in some communities to further reinforce the "upscale" feel; at Sweetwater (developed by Gerald D. Hines Interests and Royal Dutch Shell) elegance is invoked through the use of elaborate ornamental lamp posts and strict "traditional" materials and design controls, bringing River Oaks to the suburbs. "In the mentality of our country right now," Kaufman argues, "we've got to show our friends and ourselves how sucessful we are, so when they come to visit, they're impressed."

What sets the work of Kaufman Meeks apart from that of most builder architects is their concern for urban design with space and scale *as well as* symbols. Their best work sets a positive precedent for land planning and architecture in new planned communities like Kingwood.

Baby boomers live in the suburbs today for the same reasons their parents did: affordable houses (or houses that "look" bigger and more expensive than they really are); a piece of turf for lawns, swingset, and barbecue; and proximity to the "right" schools. Their houses are as symbolic of their aspirations and "dreams" as those of the previous generation. The changes in suburban housing today appear to be mainly changes of popular taste, with more sophistication



Left: *New suburban space: First Choice subdivision, Kaufman Meeks, architects. From left to right, Chesapeake, Mystic, and Boston models (Photo by Paul Hester).* Below, left: *site plan, Mystic model home.* Below, right: *site plan, Chesapeake model home.* Bottom: *"Home on the Range" at First Choice - Chesapeake model home (photo by Paul Hester)*

evident in the responses of architects and builders. It is probably true, as Kaufman suggests, that the "market" is more diverse, pluralistic, and worldly in 1985 than it was in 1965; that the "taste cultures" are as varied as the manifold kinds of food most Americans now enjoy, and the international world of fashion and entertainment they attend to. The dreams are different. But how different really is the suburban environment? Has the new look in houses and land planning resulted in a greater coherence, urbanity, and identity within the locale of the sort to be found in early suburbs?

A drive around the vast, unzoned, treeless spaces of west Houston dotted with myriad truncated subdivisions and retail strips, does not suggest a future city fundamentally different from the present one. The monotony of the suburban environment, while it may be enlivened by interventions evincing a concern for spatial variety, coherence, and density - things found in the best work of such firms as Kaufman Meeks - is not easily counteracted by mere architecture, or even enlightened land plans. The grand design is in the hands of the marketplace, especially in an unzoned city. Whatever unplanned zoning occurs most often puts things in the right place, but rarely ties them together in the ways that molded the suburban environments that we value from earlier eras: Riverside, Shaker Heights, Lake Forest, Kansas City's Country Club District, and River Oaks. Suburban space is still marked by a vast, undifferentiated collection of object-signs of similar scale - what has been aptly called a "new urban vernacular" made of replicas, signs, "bill-ding-boards," and parking lots.[6] Even trees and flora will not change its basic character - Orange County is west Houston with palm trees and lush greenery; Bellevue, Washington is Orange County with hills, spruce, and pine trees.

To Kaufman such criticism would not diminish the fact that most people prefer to live outside the loop, in the homogenized suburban environments that have shaped the new American cities of the Southwest, as well as the rest of America, since World War II. His sentiments about the vast gulf separating architects and planners from the wants and needs of most American home buyers might be aptly summed up by Scott Brown, who has argued that "for some architects and urbanists, the idea that the environment in a pluralistic society can and should accommodate different values and tastes, particularly aesthetic ones, is strange and threatening."[7] "Not only are most architects bad at marketing, they don't understand what people want," Kaufman insists. For the "silent" majority of middle-class Houstonians, the Katy Freeway/US-59 corridor is providing an environment with more than adequate variety and excitement. "The suburbs," Kaufman says, "are a place where people come home and have the lifestyle that they've dreamt about." These new suburban houses are even more than "symbols of self," they are the stuff of dreams.■

Notes

1 Denise Scott Brown, "Suburban Space, Scale and Symbols," *VIA III: Ornament*, Journal of the Graduate School of Fine Arts, University of Pennsylvania, 1977, 41-47.

2 Clare Cooper, "The House as Symbol of Self," in *Designing for Human Behavior* (Lang, et al, eds.), Stroudsburg, Pa., Dowden, Hutchison and Ross, 1974, 130-146.

3 Peter C. Papademetriou, "Magnificent Foun-
tains, Beautiful Courtyards: Garden Apartment Housing in Houston," *VIA IV: Culture and the Social Vision*. Cambridge, MIT Press, 1980, 126-145.

4 Scott Brown, "Suburban Space," 46.

5 Marketing brochure for "The Texas Classical Collection," inside cover.

6 Peter C. Papademetriou, "Aspects of a New Urban Vernacular," *Harvard Architecture Review I.*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 122-135.

7 Denise Scott Brown, "Architectural Taste in a Pluralist Society," *Harvard Architecture Review I.*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1980, 41-51.

Ground Rights

Rosellen Brown

Photographs by Paul Hester

Each year The Houston Festival Foundation, Inc. commissions an essay about Houston. The following essay was written by Rosellen Brown for the 1985 Houston Festival. The photographs by Paul Hester are from Our Ancestor's Graves *by Douglas Milburn and Paul Hester, Houston Public Library, 1980.*

You cannot love an invulnerable city. In that, I suppose, cities are only like people. They may dazzle or intrigue us, command or buy our respect with their power, their accumulation of talent, the sheer weight of their money and our acknowledgement of the cunning it takes to amass it, but those are not loveable qualities: they are functional, and spiritually off-putting. They are meant to be so. Every new monolith hoisted against Houston's skyline is only another strong-arm tactic to me - a permanent pitch to my vision that says, A profitable package has been born; air-rights, frontage rights, sewer rights and setbacks.

But even Houston has a humble center, easily glimpsed when the eye accustoms itself to looking down, not up, at ground rights, not air rights. Having quite accidentally found the vulnerable place, the still point of this crazily turning world, I have had a good many hours in which I have forgotten, and then remembered, jolted back astonished, where I was.

I am sitting now, writing this, under an unfriendly sky, color of cold granite, on a black iron bench meant to resemble a bower of ferns. I am in a crook in the elbow of the Allen Parkway and Montrose, where it is perpetually noisy - I imagine that at three in the morning cars still pour by with the distant sound of fast-running water. The American General Building rises on one side and, farther up, the America Tower. Behind me, outside the stone wall that is just high enough to repel curiosity at 50 miles per hour, the long block of rice silos looms, hectored and patrolled by a thousand thousand officious blackbirds as if it were the Galleria. There is nothing remarkable about such a confluence of rivers of traffic overseen by complacent industrial guardians in their glass and fluorescent aeries, except that I sit in an oasis, sweet and calm, whose obliviousness transcends, even mocks, all urgency. From here, Houston is only a small dog barking at my heels. This is Magnolia Cemetery, where live oaks and gray rock and hunched mounds of flowers hold back the ravening city without ostentation, with only shade and silence.

There is no jostling for space here: this is not even one of the huge cities of the dead, those enterprises outside of which monument-makers and florists set up their wares like food vendors around a stadium. Those are as intimidating as the cities of the live to me; this is a modest, orderly park whose intimacy makes street signs and row numbers unnecessary. Office workers from the neighborhood skyscrapers stroll through at lunch; occasionally someone jogs past or brings a dog to let him run across the low stones as if he were in a rocky Vermont field.

At the south end are what in Texas must be called, by way of differentiation, Anglo graves. Instantly they take me into their mystery. Which of these is the name of a good man, which of a scoundrel, who was truly beloved of the survivors, whose "Gone but not forgotten" leaves a hundred bitter ironies in its wake? Why did J.H. Fry die in Houston in 1892, having been born in 1861 in Dunville, Ontario? The game is irresistible - perhaps because I'm a fiction writer, perhaps only because I'm human, and it's both a profound and a titillating game. What did J.H. Fry *see* in 1892 in a city 60 years old, and thriving?

In another cemetery, in a rather grand tomb, I will come upon Araminta M. Noble Wettermark - I have my favorites, whose fates I ponder with all the delicious sentiment of a reader of Dickens's weekly installment concerning Little Nell. Mrs. Wettermark's daughter and son, aged nine and two, born here, died in Sweden two days apart, in 1868. On each side of the tomb is the inscription, "Buried apart, they are now together." Whatever the cause of the tragedy - I imagine them visiting their grandparents in Stockholm and encountering some epidemic we are safely delivered of in our day - I note that their mother, however bereft, survived her grief and separation and outlived them by 17 years. One takes out one's stereotypes to air, given such stingy facts and such an ultimate as a broad stone inscribed with flourished serifs, a dignity implying wealth and ceremony. The Mrs. Wettermark I see is probably too much like Liv Ullman in a Bergman movie, weeping in her high-necked dress, in Texas, in a hot September, 1868: fans would have been moved by hand; she probably had servants to keep her tolerably cool; children dead in a foreign country would have to stay there forever.

Down at this end of Magnolia Cemetery, near my bench, to both sides of the single stylish mausoleum that draws the eye like a centerpiece, are the Hispanic graves, cleaving to each other without a lot of room to spare. They are brilliant concoctions, many of them, of colored tiles inlaid in stone, of wooden crosses and - in other cemeteries these are even more common - handmade markers, shakily handcarved inscriptions, some with their "n's" reversed. Discernibly unskilled hands chiselled many of these headstones, amateurs at carving but probably all too experienced at the grief of untimely partings. I stare and stare. There is nothing morbid about relishing hints of deep feeling and hidden drama. The numbers on the Mexican-American graves seem to me, though this is unscientific, to chronicle earlier deaths than the Anglo-American. No surprise in that: the families are poorer. I can see, without trying, the chiseler of the stone gouging the name of the 20-year-old girl who died in childbirth, as the Mexican phrase has it, "with a prisoner in her womb"; of the baby who was just learning to walk, the mother *"recuerdo de sus hijos y su esposo."* There are few family plots among them; these are piecemeal deaths, bitter purchases eked out one by one. Where did the rest of the family go to when their time came?

In another cemetery I will find that the Hispanic names adorn stones interchangeable now with anyone else's, those uniformly polished granite hulks, the graceless contemporary sign of assimilation: a triumph of demographic equality over the charm and harsh economic necessities of folk art. In yet another old cemetery, there is a broad hill, a new section, much of it as expectantly empty as good building land, devoted to those flat markers that look like bronzed calling cards and cast no shadows. A sign on the hillside brusquely and explicitly forbids handmade markers, ornaments, or crosses: if death is a leveller, let it obliterate the celebration of mourning as well. I know there are excesses of imagination here and there - a friend in Tennessee told me he saw a gravestone with a telephone planted beside it, receiver off the hook, with the inscription, "Jesus called." But why uniformity is preferable to the individual gesture I can't imagine. Isn't it enough that the flesh falls from the bone, that no one is getting up from these graves at midnight to dance? Apparently it is not enough. But from the road I can see a brave resistance to the imposition of such anonymity: a field of red and yellow and bright baby-blue plastic flowers, heaped shiny and unchanging against the brownish grass, some of them huge constructions - crosses and floral gushers that fill and bedazzle the eye like Rose Bowl floats.

It is another day and I have just come from a nearly invisible cemetery whose existence I quite literally stumbled on, out walking one morning. It is not a place to sit in comfortably; I find myself looking over my shoulder constantly as I heave myself through the weeds - one could hide or be hidden all too easily in this jungle of neglect. This is the College Park Cemetery, just outside the Fourth Ward on West Dallas, an inadvertent monument to impersonal change and the splintering of community. What was the college celebrated here? Where is the park? There is the plastic lozenge of a Metro stop in front of the wrought-iron gate; from the street this is only an unclaimed lot, an eyesore, a dumping ground.

It is, in fact, an old Black graveyard. The college, long gone, was the Houston Central College for Negroes; it is only one of many Black institutions ploughed under by a city some of whose citizens held more cards than others. Somewhere, I am sure, there are pictures of serious-faced young men and women in stiff clean collars, posing for their graduation picture in front of this or that building whose solid bricks have gone the way of the students' flesh, to nothing.

Near the entrance to the cemetery stand three matte and shiny marble stones erected in the late 1960s by optimists who presumably trusted that this yard would provide some dignity in perpetuity. Farther in, though, I am lost in a field whose graves are hidden like mines; they appear in the midst of gnarled and splaying undergrowth, overgrowth far taller than I am, nettles and weeds. It hurts to walk here, assaults both eyes and bare legs. From time to time there comes a clearing, and here and there, blooming in the shade of cedar and high grass, white lilies spring into view, gone wild on thick succulent stems. Out of the insistent groundcover and broken and toppled stones, sudden open gashes in the soil can only be graves falling in. Under a low tree, heaped purposefully as any authorized dump, there lie a *Greensheet* turned a urinous yellow, paint cans rotted to rusty lace, flower pots, a plastic cup with the Astros' logo on its bashed side, an electrician's cap, mud-splattered; then in a tender bald opening, just beyond, pale narcissus blooming for no living eye. "Our Mother Asleep in Jesus, Oh How Sweet. Abraham Thomas, born 1860" when there were slaves, whose 1930 stone is snapped off jaggedly, like something done in anger.

Every time I think I have found the last grave I look farther through yet another species of bramble and there is a small stone or a platform bearing a fine weighty monument, a sign of pride: "The Holtz Family Asleep." "Mother Fry, 1881-1925," the familiar reclining lamb that marks the grave of "our Viola V. Hart, 1899-1900." My father was born in 1899: I cannot therefore fail to see the Hart baby grown into a destiny at least as fortunate as his: she is sitting on her porch, leaning on the rail, smiling at what her life might have held.

This cemetery pits two emotions against each other, fiercely: nostalgia, like an itch that can't be reached to be assuaged, for a glimpse of West Dallas thronged with horses and wagons, when ex-slaves and the children of slaves were put to rest in this modest yard under trees much smaller but undoubtedly more numerous. (Horses make fertilizer, not air pollution.) Against this I lay my anger that such hideous neglect has denied these graves their peace. But families scatter, and the last of some are buried here themselves. I was told that once the old and devoted sexton of the cemetery died sometime in the 1960s, there was no one to gather the upkeep fees that had kept the graveyard presentable. Once upon a time, the keeper of these grounds went knocking on doors, such was the intact community 50 years ago, and with the piecemeal revenues he hired help in the summer to keep the field clear. Growth is virulent in this climate: it takes no time for nature to reclaim the neatest plot. (Yet, when my egalitarian blood begins to boil on behalf of the distressed Black survivors, I remind myself: I have seen a scrapbook from the '30s that showed Founder's Cemetery, farther toward downtown on Dallas and full of "important" graves of Texas heroes, so badly tended there were scandalized letters to the newspapers, wherein people remembered when the only keepers of the grass were the cows that loped and lounged over the graves. Now, in a sort of backlash of care, the cemetery is patrolled by guard dogs, according to its signs, and inhospitably locked against vandals and benign visitors alike.)

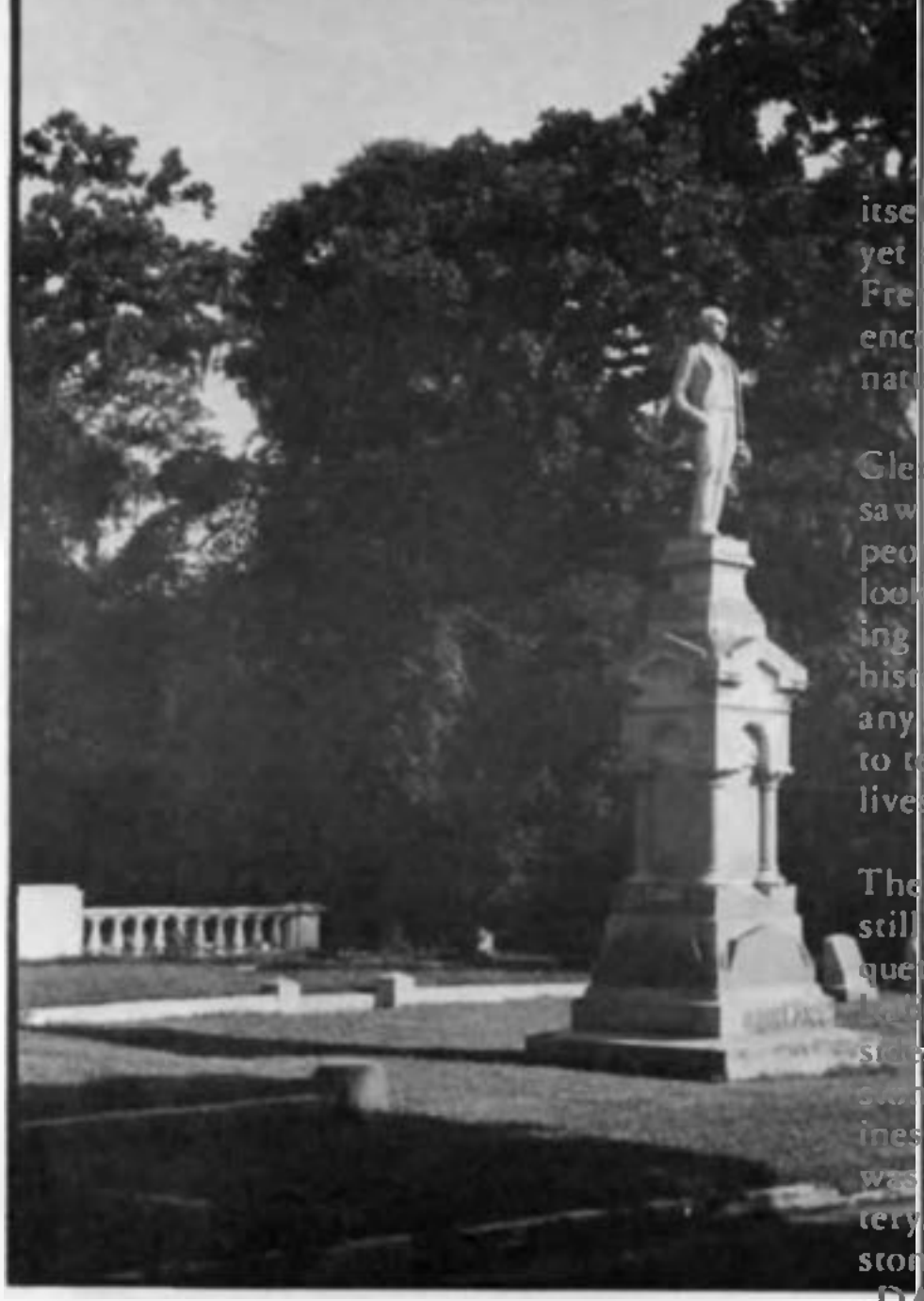
There are plans to make College Park a perpetual-care cemetery. That is an official designation that acknowledges that we no longer can expect grave-clearing parties on spring Sundays, not with the children living in Minneapolis and the grandchildren in Miami. At that point there enter trusts and legal covenants; the Banking Commission regulates the whole, and one more family and village function falls to strangers and the courts. This is not a bad solution, this legal protection of the defenseless dead; it is only sad, a makeshift efficiency, with a hint of profit perhaps attached; a symptom.

Every cemetery I visit forces me into sociology, yet tugs me back to an enjoyment of pathos without analysis. One sunny Saturday I visit a metropolis of graves. Inside the loop, still this one is distinctly suburban in feeling. It is laid out in subdivisions with the names of inviting neighborhoods: Whispering Pines, Lakewood. There is only the occasional reminder of where I really am: Catacombs Terrace would doubtless not appeal to Harold Farb. This cemetery has a Babyland that seems not much used these days, with a giant granite heart in the center. The acres and acres of graves face out, like houses, toward the grid of streets. Nothing random about them, they are oriented to the driver, not the walker.

And there are the efficient communal mausoleums, like apartment houses, in which neighbors sleep side by side in the ultimate anonymity. This is, of course, an old European tradition, the stacking of name upon silent name, with a little cuff on the sheer front to hold a bouquet; and in New Orleans, whose water table is more disastrous than Houston's, above-ground burial is as necessary and routine as the stacking of shoeboxes in a stockroom. But these are exceedingly neat, these walls of recent ancestors: they are the generic "deceased," as nearly shorn of visible inflection - of public eccentricity and private emotion - as they can be. I think, as I approach them across a vast lawn, that in this kind of giant wall of the dead there is a monumental equalizing implied, as if this were the mass of names of the Vietnam dead in Washington, whose remains are elsewhere. (In recoil I see the poor, pure gestures of affection on the graves of deep country cemeteries across Texas: the designs made of shells, the empty dishes, the chairs and toys and marbles of the children pressed into the dirt right about where their crossed hands must be.)

No one dare criticize the mortuary customs of another, there are too many variations in taste and economics to presume judgment. But differences in practice come whole out of our lives. I assume that the uniformity and neatness of such a resting place is appropriate for the families who have chosen it. Monuments, unique or not, are made out of the style of the survivors.

Still, it may be only the taste borne of economic power that could create and tenderly nurture such gardens as the River Oaks of cemeteries. High bushes along Memorial Drive make it invisible, I have discovered when I've mentioned it to people who drive past it daily. This is Glenwood, which has a large country mailbox at its Washington Avenue entrance, and where I have never been without hearing birds at song. Since Houston likes to call attention to its growing list of world-class attributes - artistic, architectural, culinary - let me call Glenwood a world-class cemetery: not that it contains the owners of half the street names in Houston (which it does), or that they rest at the feet of a downtown horizon many of them helped to create. But it has, among its beautifully landscaped acres, its trees hung with Spanish moss, its various levels and terrains, the only real statuary in the city, in some cases quite genuinely moving: a woman, or perhaps an angel, prostrate on a tomb; bas-relief faces of mother and son; a modern, semi-abstract figure doubled over



itself like a pained animal, or a god not yet awake - these are worthy of the French and Italian cemeteries that encourage artistic flowering alongside the natural.

Glenwood is the only cemetery where I saw visitors, not joggers, not mourners: people out for a Sunday drive, who came looking at Houston s silent history sleeping with its stories out of sight. What a history class could be taught beginning in any of these places - textbooks, every one, to [illegible] lives [illegible]

There is Holy Cross, [illegible] still visited by the faithful who leave [illegible] quets behind 50 years after a death; its [illegible]n and Slavic families nearly side by [illegible] porcelain photographs on so many [illegible] that stop the heart at such ordinariness, such innocence in the face of what was soon to happen. Hollywood Cemetery, where I saw the first of a number of stones inscribed not "FATHER" but "DADDY" and remembered where I was, and [illegible] one that "DADDY would be sad." Adath Israel, stunningly situated on the crest of the bayou, nearly grassless, pebbled, positively urban in its tight massing of stones, no more quarter given grass and weeds than in the so-called "scraped" graveyards of East Texas, whose owners attack any green excrescence as if it might shelter snakes or poison ivy. And there is Glendale, high above the junction of Brays and Buffalo bayous, a tiny clenched fist of fenced land, first in the city, where the dominion of death and silence seems in danger of extinction by the extraordinary clamor of train, barge, smokestack, garbage scow, that hem it on all sides; where scummy water bleeds beneath sheer cliffs of tangled vine. These banks are rumored to have been lush and green in another century, and this as lovely a scene as anyone could have found putting up any river looking for a likely place to gamble on a future and start a settlement. On a barge below me someone has scrawled "ALAMO" in white paint on a steel bulkhead door. When John Harris in 1828, before the Allen brothers, discovered this spot where he is commemorated, the Alamo was long years from its moment of glorious ignominy.

There are stories [illegible] these places a [illegible]orn, by [illegible] natur[illegible] could not ge[illegible]ery, as if it [illegible] fear, h[illegible] across it; she is [illegible] cemetery stubbor[illegible] picket fence in th[illegible] parking lot, and [illegible] under this famou[illegible] ard Hughes is bu[illegible] walk right past h[illegible] lie very possibly

I have achieved [illegible] in this city than [illegible] around the curbi[illegible] ing, being amuse[illegible] *psychiatrist or re*[illegible] pense the existe[illegible] our feet. But lest [illegible] ish about the dis[illegible] am suggesting e[illegible] touch, let me fin[illegible]

I was walking, sa[illegible] dramatic and his[illegible] the graves in Ma[illegible] like surfacing fr[illegible] back to the worl[illegible] walking toward [illegible] what I thought [illegible] grass near the p[illegible] rumpled, rained-[illegible] hunched on its s[illegible] sight from wher[illegible] close enough to [illegible] it was no rat, it [illegible] the distinction b[illegible] stunned me - kn[illegible] me, literally - wa[illegible] was unmoving w[illegible]

Citesurvey

The Transco Fountain

Elizabeth McBride

Philip Johnson and John Burgee's fountains and buildings depend for their breathtaking effects upon the power of metaphor, the tension of contrast, and upon both subtle and obvious illusion.

At the Fort Worth Water Garden, for instance, each of five fountains employs a different kind of beguiling illusion which, in juxtaposition with all of the other fountains, creates tensions even more beguiling. One fountain consists of a sheet of water moving so thinly and smoothly over a vertical stone surface that it seems the wall is merely wet, that nothing is moving. On the opposite side of the garden, water falls over large rough blocks of stone which are tumbled into a pool, partially buried in the rush of constantly turbulent water. The effect of the broken blocks, the rushing water, and the resulting noise imitate nature, as the simple moving film of water does not. It seems that one has broken suddenly out of the forest and into a clearing, that one has been magically lifted into a primeval scene.

Some of Johnson and Burgee's fountains invite the viewer's participation, as this one does - it is all one can do to restrain oneself from climbing down into the pool, although the descent is dangerous and the fountain is guarded. Other Johnson/Burgee fountains appear to invite participation, but the invitation is only illusion.

Philip Johnson's new Transco Fountain, lying at one end of a long greensward across from the Transco Tower, extends just such an ambiguous invitation. Ambiguity, in fact, adheres in the manner in which the site is laid out. And ambiguity is finally what this fountain is about.

The fountain itself consists of a tall, curved, semicircular wall which faces the Transco Tower and which, when the water is on, might be described most simply as a wall of cascading water. The backside of the fountain is also a cascade, so in a sense the fountain's broken circle is completed by the water which sluices awesomely down the back. This is one of the most obvious and basic of many ambiguous readings this structure permits.

In front of the fountain and functioning as an entrance, both a barrier and a link between the fountain and the tower, is a freestanding triple-arched façade, neoclassical in style, what is technically called a *scenae frons*. This apparently straightforward portal operates like a false front, a mock-up, calling forth visions of saloons in Western movies. With its three archways and brick facing - the shape seems to indicate that this is not a masonry bearing wall structure - the façade invites us into a world of questions.

This façade, or portal, is actually a threshhold, marking a transition in the procession from the Transco Tower, in its exquisitely Postmodern costume, through the classical period, however neo, and into the mythical past which the fountain itself embodies. Turning around and looking back through the central arch, which is centered on the tower, this procession is doubly clear. This movement into the past is half of another disturbing, ambiguous statement, for the movement is also a movement into the present, into a fountain which, for all its mythic appeal, we cannot forget is cast in concrete, and which - to control the lights and pump the water - depends for its dramatic effects upon electricity and a wealth of technological inventions.

View from the arena, the Transco Fountain, 1985, Philip Johnson and John Burgee, architects (Photo by Paul Hester)

Although the Transco Fountain appears to invite participation, the invitation is an illusion, for the steps up the sides of the fountain lead not into a pool but nowhere. What the fountain really invites is observation, and it is through observation that the viewer and fountain together create the illusion.

Let us look at the fountain as one might upon arriving, amazed, for the first time. We approach from the side, and ignoring the portal, walk instead into the area inscribed by the semi-circular wall. We see then, if we are more engaged by spectacle than by meaning, the most astonishing sight of all, the interior wall of water. The

top of the fountain cuts like the curve of a scythe through the sky, and from it the water falls, cascading over the rough, dark, obsidian aggregate which forms the invisible pebbly surface beneath.

The water falls in layers almost like petals, reminding one of photographs seen over the years, highly magnified, of the insides of blood vessels, of skin. Piped over that dark, invisible surface, the water glistens and is magnified by the light, so that water seems to be all that exists. There is something cold and alien here, but something human too, for in spite of illusion, the water is natural, and it endows the fountain with qualities analogous to a human presence. How many times have you heard that the human body is over 90 percent water?

This part of the fountain is so mysteriously formal, so restrained and patterned, that it is a relief to look down to the horizontal division. From the bottom half of the wall, the water springs exhuberantly into the air, in small splashes, in lively stairsteps, approaching closer and closer to what I am tempted to call the ground - a narrow trough which is all that separates this magnificent apparition from its entranced audience, the people who cannot stop gazing. If one is lucky enough to continue to gaze at the top stairstep, something miraculous happens. The illusion here is more than visual and one wonders how something like this could be planned. But because of the way

View looking southeast, the Transco Fountain (Photo by Paul Hester)

in which the water moves, one suddenly feels while staring at this boundary that all of one's body is moving, rising against the force of the water, lifting off from earthly cares and connections.

The illusion takes place on the outside of the wall also, although it seems to occur because of a totally different contrast. Here the effects are less sensual and more conceptual. The falling water is contained within wide, furrowed concrete channels, somewhat like pre-stressed freeway tees standing on edge (as if they could take us somewhere) and it is impossible not to feel, as well as to analyze, the illusory effects. So it is with less surprise but with equal delight that we give in to a perceptual invitation. As the water falls, our eyes rise up the furrowed concrete surface. Once again, we are pulled upward, but having learned from the fountain's interior what perceptual mechanism is operating here, our eyes rise with a less spontaneous motion and a more conscious awareness, as we give in knowingly and willingly to a wish, a desire for the infinite, the ideal.

In its curve, in the awesome power it has to affect us, the wall of water forces us to remember Niagara Falls. And of course, the simple fact is that water reminds us of nature. But if this fountain is reminiscent of nature, it is also reminiscent of nature subverted, nature made perfect and thus rendered no longer natural, deprived of that frightening, essential imbalance, the constant challenge which irregularities bring to us as inescapable parts of our lives. The impression finally is not like Niagara - that constantly changing natural structure, water in motion, rock breaking and falling over time. Here there is no

Rear elevation, the Transco Fountain (Photo by Paul Hester)

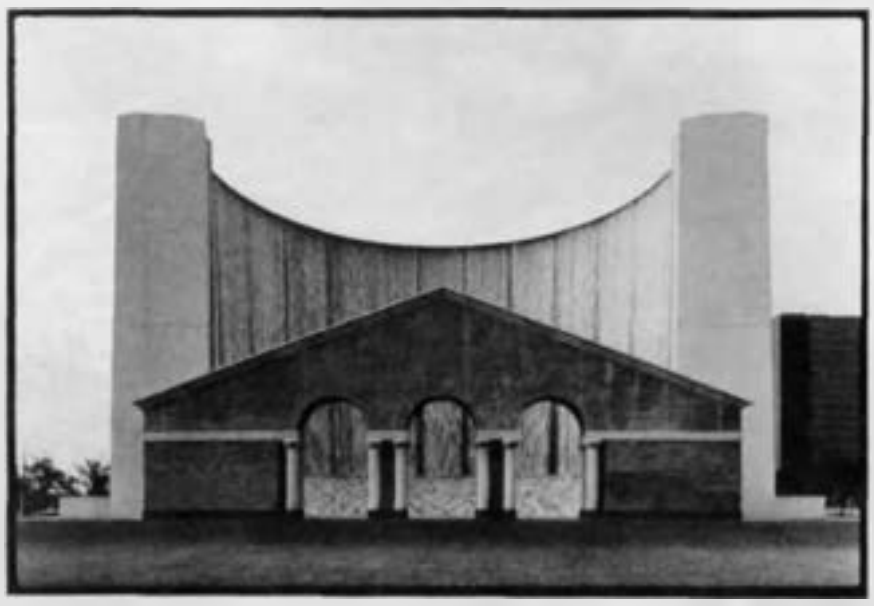
imperfection and, in spite of the moving water, no sense of change. Nothing is organic and nothing is alive. And if we return to that curve at the top, that dramatic line against the sky, the structure in its serene and sterile wisdom reminds us, as our eyes rise, that we can go only so high.

At night, with the water turned off and the fountain still, the impression of hard sterility I have described is intensified, but the fountain becomes complex in a different way. In the dark, the structure looks and feels more like a temple - the huge slabs of concrete seem more hewn than cast and the powerful top line crosses the sky like a lintel at Stonehenge. But this is a temple at which nobody worships.

On the outside, the vertical lines of the concrete ribs assert themselves with a firmness that in the daytime is softened by the movement of water. In the darkness, without the water as contrast, the illusion created is lost.

Inside the hemicycle, the intricacies of the fountain's construction are clarified. When the water falls from the top, it falls into sections without apparent cause. It seems impossible that a strip only an inch wide could cut the wall of water mysteriously into discrete sections. But with the wall exposed, we can see that the separation occurs at the narrow, vertical lines of mortar. It seems a miracle, and it makes one wonder. The fountain is clearly a work of genius, but how much is accidental?

Below the line which divides the fountain horizontally into two sections, the wall breaks into narrow steps about four inches deep which lead out and down, like a deserted amphitheater. Once deserted, the design of the floor is clear; it becomes both noticeable and important that the blocks are laid in a circle, a bull's-eye. The sense of victim leads to a sense of the sacrificial.



Front elevation, the Transco Fountain
(Photo by Paul Hester)

Then another kind of ambiguity becomes apparent. Although the large concrete steps at the side are more invitational late at night, when the lights are turned out and the surfaces are richer with shadow, they are so large that climbing them is forbidding. It seems like scaling a structure made for some strange, Titanic race. And although the lower half of the fountain as seen from the steps appears even more to resemble the steps of an amphitheater - implying that something might happen here that one might want to attend and remember - these steps are in miniature, so small that their size is just as discomforting and forbidding as the large blocks. Looking around, one suddenly feels cold, like an intruder in an eerie, Swiftian world.

The fountain operates within its context, a comment on what can last and what cannot. And with the fountain shut down and become a temple outgrown, we suspect that nothing can last. There are humans here, but there is no sense of the human. This world does not want us. It is a world abandoned by humans which itself has abandoned us. And this is when a memory may intrude, of the water cascading like fingers of wax, coating the structure, as if attempting to preserve a corpse.

One could hardly place such a dramatic structure in the center of Post Oak and not expect a curious and delighted public to seek access. Yet public access is just as ambiguous as the fountain itself. The fountain stands at one end of a rectangular lawn bordered by broad concrete walkways. But although cars may park conveniently near, there is no connection between the walkways along the streets and the walkways surrounding the lawn and the fountain. Drenched by the spray from the fountain, the ground nearby softens and the grass becomes slick. It is easy to fall although this does not deter an eager public.

To make the fountain inaccessable would probably require making it visually less attractive from the Transco Tower. And because it exists, because it is here, it becomes public, like any of Johnson's office buildings, which are privately owned pieces of sculpture themselves - yet have become public constructions which so strongly affect us that we take emotional title to them simply by looking. But if Transco acknowledges the right of public access, the site can hardly be left as it is. With all of that water falling they could start by disconnecting the sprinkling system which at night waters the already slick grassy park.

Although one could describe this fountain without reference to the Transco Tower, that description would be inappropriate and incomplete. The tower itself is an ambiguous, menacing shape, King Kong come back to life as the building itself. It is visible all the way to the airport in its precise and powerful lines. But what does it mean? Supremely masculine, it rises from the flatness around it to guard the city, its beacon a multiple message, sometimes a greeting, sometimes a warning. Its authority flashes deep, mysterious threats and then it shrugs its shoulders at us as if it didn't care. The phallic character of skyscrapers is so familiar we might ignore it if it weren't for the fountain, but the fountain is - at least in illusion - a feminine figure. Juxtaposed, they stimulate the imagination; one need only look from behind the fountain toward the tower to see a vision of sexual union. By posturing, as these buildings do, in a sexual way, they give us hope. But this is the level at which Johnson's ambiguity and illusion, although impressive, are also most frustrating, most teasing, and most complicated. For by placing these structures, in all their sexual implications, so tantalizingly close, he arouses a hope which must immediately die - destroyed by the knowledge that these inanimate structures are frozen in place and can never move closer together.

Lloyd Wright called the skyscraper the tombstone of our culture, and in their sterile futility, Johnson's buildings fulfill that definition. They are more than buildings, of course; they are sculpture, rich in innuendo and metaphor. The threatening ambiguity of the Transco building reflects not only the uncompromising Houston sun, but the dilemma of architecture - forced to erect structures which serve only narrowly defined requirements; and of the state of technology - offering salvation and threatening nature; and of the state of our culture itself, as we question in the shadow of our cities the potency of the most basic American dreams. Implicit in this commentary is a question about human nature, whether it can transcend this level of pessimism. If Johnson understands, as he must, how tragic his vision is, as reflected and recorded in these beautiful structures, how can he continue to build? Architecture is art, but it is also that which through his work he seems to condemn. Perhaps he is simply being inescapably human because he must, asserting himself, hoping that he is erecting not only the tombstones of our culture, but the monuments.■

Citesurvey

The Mesa

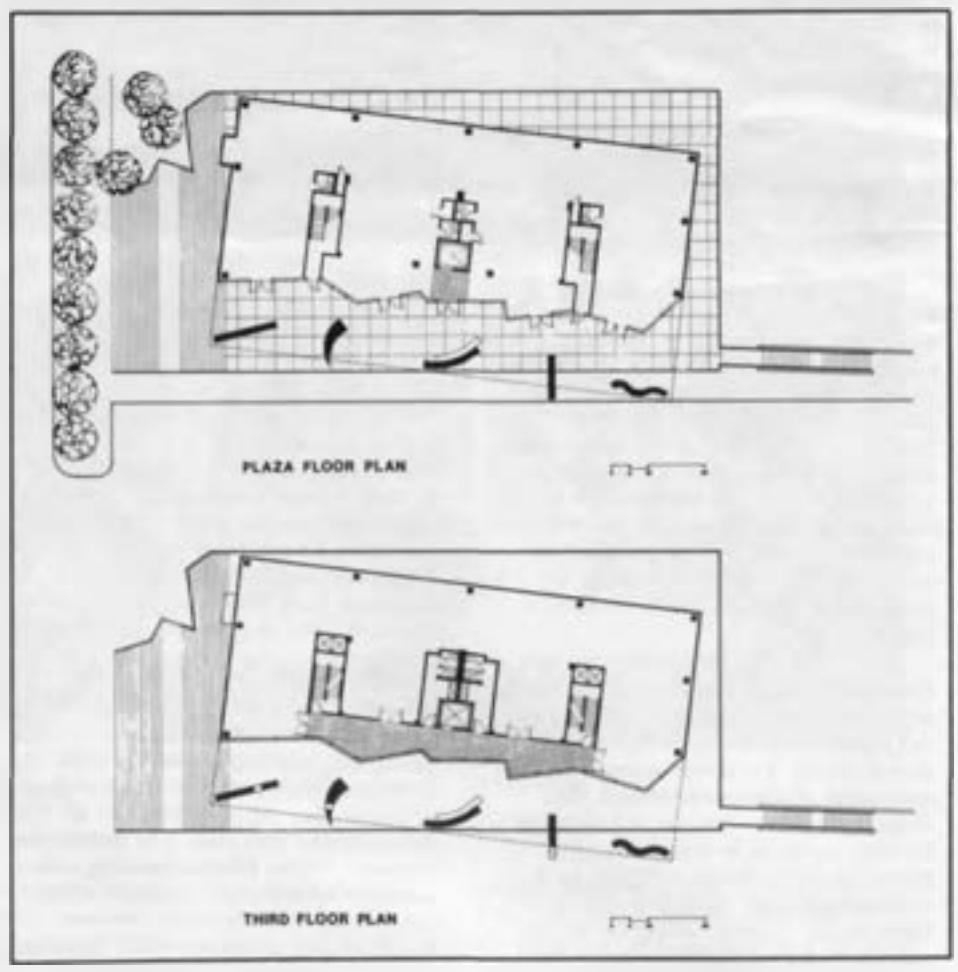
Stephan Hoffpauir

The Mesa, 1985, Arquitectonica, architects (Photo by Paul Hester)

A certain irony is manifest in the Houston projects of Arquitectonica. This firm, founded in 1977 by five young architects with little practical experience, has gained an international reputation for a series of bold, high-rise buildings in Florida. That the firm would eventually do work in Houston, a city that takes pride in its own brashness, was inevitable. Ironically, the firm's Houston work consists not of tall buildings, but of small buildings, principally a series of townhouses and now The Mesa, a 30,039 square-foot office and retail building billed as a "Better Home and Living Center."

Though Arquitectonica's work is idiosyncratic, much has been written about the contextualism of their buildings. Contextualism is not missing from The Mesa. Driving west along Richmond Avenue from the direction of downtown, one hardly notices the building located on the corner of Richmond and Fountainview. Except for the random placement of windows in the east elevation, it could be any other four-story office building along the strip. In an area whose only architectural unity lies in its diversity, where fast-food establishments and low-rise office buildings dot the landscape, this bow to roadside vernacular is not inappropriate.

Driving in the opposite direction, however, the full visual pyrotechnics for which Arquitectonica is famous come into view. Although the building is vibrantly, tropically, polychromatic, it is in plan and massing a small, rather simple, almost conventional building. The basic, three-dimensional composition is almost classical, with a clear differentiation between base, shaft, and cornice. The ground floor is the base on which the top three floors sit in the guise of a separate building. This feeling is reinforced not only by the reduced square footage of floors two and three, but by twisting the upper floors out of alignment with the ground floor, as if a seismic jolt has knocked three-quarters of the building askew, crinkling the western glass curtain-wall in the process.



Top: *The Mesa, plaza floor plan.* Above: *The Mesa, third floor plan*

The Mesa is organized on a north-south axis with the longest and most prominent façade facing Fountainview to the west. Since the parking lot flanks this side, it is this elevation one confronts directly upon driving up to the building. The base is a low-key, beige-yellow stucco wall punctuated at regular intervals with large glass openings framed with fire-engine red window mullions. It's easy to imagine a series of small shops nestled behind this yellow wall, giving the feeling of a commercial arcade.

It is not the ground floor, however, that grabs the eye, but the large "pilotis," two-to-three stories in height, which structurally support the overhanging fourth floor. These are the dominant elements of the building, and the sight of them is arresting. They are a series of bent planes, randomly interspersed with geometric openings and no two are bent the same way nor are placed at the same angle. In plan two are straight lines, two are supple curves, and one is a squiggle. They look like large pieces of construction paper with cut-outs stood on end. Their colors are vibrantly aquatic, ranging from a subdued gray-green to the deepest aquamarine. The effect is Mycenaen. Surely their apparently scattered placement is no accident. Nothing can appear this random and not be the result of careful design study. Behind the pilotis is the crinkled-glass curtain-wall of the second and third floors.

From the parking lot, the entrance of the building is questionable. There is a door facing the parking lot leading to an eleva-

tor lobby on the ground floor, but it is hard to identify which of the many look-alike doors it is. The choices for access to the second floor are made clearer by the presence of stairs at either end of the building. The stair to the south is a simple, narrow, freestanding stair. It derives its visual prominence by being flanked on either side by two large, freestanding parallel planes, one curvilinear and fuchsia, and the other triangular and white. One is tricked into believing that this is actually a handicap ramp because of the gentle slope and extreme length of the triangular plane. The dishonesty of passing-off one element or function as another veers comes from doctrinaire modernism. There is, however, playful irony in the gesture and it serves to extend the façade a bit further along the length of the parking lot, making what would be an otherwise insignificant element into a significant one.

The stair to the north, unlike its counterpart to the south, is monumental in scale, extending the full width of the building. It is an almost straight run from top to bottom relieved only by an intermediate landing. It is so large that a not-insignificant portion underneath it is leasable space. One wonders how the architects got this concrete hill past the city plan-checkers without having to add more handrails. In terms of noticeability it finishes a close second to the pilotis. Why such a large stair? The answer must be symbolism. Its width is at least ten times that required by city building codes for egress. On a street that has not seen pedestrian traffic for years (there is not even a bus stop on the corner) and where all other buildings are set back to accommodate parking lots, this one goes right up to the sidewalk. This is either a wry comment on the nature of foot traffic in the city or the architects have made provision for the day Houstonians forsake their cars. What the stair establishes is a symbolic front entry on Richmond Avenue.

Ascending the stair one appreciates a sense of ceremony so often missing in speculative commercial buildings. Walking up (if you are fit; walking down could give you a nosebleed), one wishes that some of the lively plays of color used so effectively elsewhere could have been incorporated into the stair. The huge mass of unfinished concrete is harsh and the placement of a few planters on the intermediate landing seems to be a leasing agent's afterthought.

Surrounding three sides of the second floor is a loggia. Walking along the Fountainview parking-lot side one imagines one is in Brasilia. Here the great width of the pilotis seems to serve some functional purpose by shielding the curtain-wall from the harsh western sun. Unfortunately, figuring out the location of the elevator lobby is no easier at this level than it was on the ground floor. Walking around to the opposite side there is no doubt that this is the back of the building. The space is totally dead. Considering that the loggia overlooks the truck-loading areas and garbage dumps of the building's neighbors, it seems some effort could have been made to shield the view. Except for a sliver of glass-block there are no windows or doors opening onto this walkway - a very poor aspect of an otherwise striking design.

This building is discussed piece by piece rather than as a totality because, like other Arquitectonica projects, The Mesa appears to be a large architectural still-life, assembled from a standard, slightly modified set of parts. These are seemingly added or subtracted randomly to form a cohesive composition greater than the sum of the parts. The triangles, curves, and squiggles seen in plan and elevation are to be found in the paintings of Kandinsky and Miró. The curved surfaces which writhe almost like fabric recall the curved surfaces seen in Aalto's work. The colors, which to the contemporary eye look like Miami moderne, can be seen in the color field paintings of the late 1950s and '60s. Modernist references abound: the ramp of the Villa Savoye, the geometric cutouts of Kahn's work in Dacca, the pilotis of Chandigarh, the repetitive openings of the Unité d'Habitation, and the Italian Rationalists, the shaded colonnades of Niemeyer's Brasilia, the free-floating colored planes and pipe handrails of Rietveld and de Stijl, and the overhanging upper-floor of Schindler's Lovell House. In looking at this building there is the feeling that we have seen it all before.

Why then does Arquitectonica's work seem so fresh and inventive? Part of the reason is that it looks so improbable. At The Mesa, elements are grossly out of scale and chromatics are pushed to the frontiers of garishness. Looking at the initial design drawings one might think the work is the product of the most naïve of students. A "practical" architect would think these buildings unbuildable. Often the floor plans look unleasable from the standpoint of floor-area ratios or depth-of-lease space. Form seems to be generated by nothing more than geometric whim. The "practical" architect is left to wonder: who are the developer clients paying for these follies?

At the time the principals at Arquitectonica received their first major commission they had little experience working in an established architectural office. Perhaps if they had, the playful and naïve wittiness so abundant in The Mesa would have been snuffed out. Instead we see work of bold, undiluted concepts and strongly felt convictions, untainted by practical experience. Arquitectonica's buildings look like giant toys, models not built to scale blown up to full-scale.

One wonders how long The Mesa will last. Though the detailing seems competent, the primary exterior surface is stucco, a material not known for its permanence or ease of maintenance in this climate. The color scheme, so vital to the design concept, could at some point be erased under a fresh coat of paint. In an area where the colors of buildings change with the seasons, such a thing happens. Perhaps, like the Catalán architect Ricardo Bofill, Arquitectonica will use materials in which color can be permanently integrated. Perhaps this building was never designed to have a very long lifespan. Perhaps the budget was limited, and this was never meant to be more than a suburban stage set.

No doubt, many architects see Arquitectonica's work as lacking in seriousness of purpose. Perhaps they see the work as a series of parodies of great masters like Corbusier or that it is too far-out to fit into the serious modernist mainstream. Nevertheless, who ever said a building could not, on occasion, make you smile? ■

Citeations

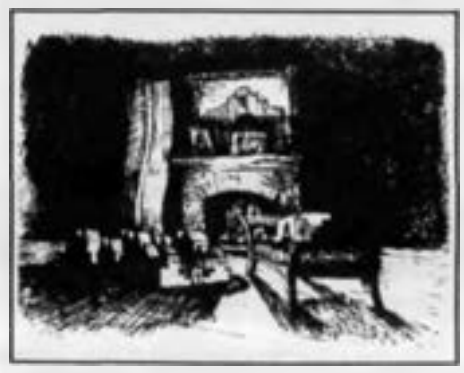
Architects Fireside Chats

Jury Room, Anderson Hall
Rice University
Sponsored by the Rice Design Alliance
16 January - 13 February 1985

Reviewed by Michael Thomas

The Rice Design Alliance's "Architects Fireside Chats" provided an informal atmosphere where the work of leading Houston architects was presented and discussed publicly. The purpose of these presentations was to foster a continuing dialogue about architecture and the city with local architects who are creating it. Taft Architects, Richard Keating of the Houston office of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, and William F. Stern and his associates, presented their works at the three consecutive sessions held in James Stirling and Michael Wilford's Jury Room in Anderson Hall. The series explored what makes the minds of these local architects work, work overtime, or not work enough.

John J. Casbarian, Danny Samuels, and Robert H. Timme, the Taft Architects, started the series by literally translating "Fireside Chats" into a temporary living-room setting, complete with furniture, a fireplace mantel with a video-taped fire, children's toys, and pop-up illustration books. Their presentation demonstrated



(Illustration by Peter Boyle/Bauencorp)

the cohesiveness of their 13-year partnership, a collective effort that has resulted in several strong client-architect relationships. Taft's sense of humor was natural and unforced. This droll light-heartedness is also reflected in the way they develop intentions into designs and into buildings.

Divided into categories of influences, process, and current works, Taft's presentation bespoke the partners' commitment to both the practice and teaching of architecture. The formal influences enumerated included Palladio, Ledoux, Jefferson, Mackintosh, Wagner, Sullivan, as well as Texas indigenous and roadside vernacular architecture. Yet the absence of an acknowledgement of context in much of Taft's current work (the Downtown Masterson branch of the YWCA, for instance), has enabled Taft to redefine building types by using any historical prototype and any building material while fulfilling the programatic requirements of their clients. From the initial diagrams and study models, through design development and construction, one could see how each project acquired an internally consistent identity. Taft redefines the programatic economy of buildings in a personable fashion.

The second lecture, given by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill's principal partner in Houston, Richard Keating, was evocative of its corporate presentations. SOM's ability to combine state-of-the-art technology with team cooperation was emblematized in the dramatic multi-media performance given by Richard Keating. Slides, computers, and a wide range of images accompanied by short explanations dominated the lecture. Keating introduced the firm's work by tracing genealogically the three generations of partners from three original offices: New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. The line of succession passed from the firm's eponymous trio to Gordon Bunshaft, Walter Netsch, and Myron Goldsmith, who according to Keating, passed the tradition on to Bruce Graham, Charles Bassett, and more recently, to Richard Keating. An almost split-second bombardment of current work from the firm's entire portfolio followed. Projects from New York, the Middle West, and the West Coast, as well as award-winning foreign projects, were reviewed in quick succession on three screens. The work of the Houston office followed with such examples as The Tenneco Employees Center, an addition to the top of an existing garage in downtown Houston, along with projects in Hartford, Little Rock, San Antonio, Milwaukee, San Fransisco, and Dallas. The denial of historical context as a conscious decision seemed to help the firm's work become outstanding within tight urban spaces, as seen with the Allied Bank Plaza in downtown Houston. In this building, form, color, and massing broke through the "white row of teeth" that constituted Houston's skyline. The final portion of Keating's talk consisted of a computer animation display that demonstrated the firm's use of computer-generated graphics and drafting techniques. At the touch of a button one was placed into a moving perspective of both the Houston and Dallas skylines. The next command brought up the elevation of 2200 Ross, a 55-story, reflective glass tower now under construction in Dallas. By using other commands, everything from curtain-walls to detailed configurations could be studied to suit the designers' intentions. Such innovations as these will replace conventional drawing methods, Keating pointed out, because the time it takes to complete a project is reduced, making for greater economies.

The final lecture was given by William F. Stern and his associates. This five-year-old Houston firm showed a progression of work from small residential remodelings to residential interiors to speculative townhouses.

By employing an atelier method of project responsibility, Stern's office achieves an individual approach to each project. Weekly critiques allow the office as a whole to maintain contact with other projects, as well as discuss current problems amongst the designers. Despite Stern's rhetoric, the use of historical prototypes seems less of a primary consideration in the speculative housing projects than does accomodation of a market-defined "life-style" category and of the densities required by Houston developers. The housing of automobiles also surfaced as a primary design requirement. The Wroxton Townhouses, presented by Stern's associate Jan O'Brien, dealt with these concerns by making the parking garage a plinth upon which to place other programatic elements, such as the master bedroom and raised, symbolic front porch. The living room of these townhouses, which typically faces the street, is thus anchored to a garden space in the rear. The Palladian arch on the front porch adds a romantic touch to the elevations. The connection of each unit with brick piers and iron gates serves as symbolic embellishment rather than added ornamental attractions. In a condominium interior presented by project architect Alex Engart, Stern set aside all historical allusions and concentrated instead on materials and cooly abstract, custom-designed furniture to fulfill exacting client demands. This project created its own context while the townhouse project dimly recalled precedents of both history and the suburban context.

The implication that the "chats" function as an open discussion raised the hope that the architects' explanations might be challenged by the audience. The result of creating a more personal atmosphere amidst the impromptu setting of the Jury Room certainly had an encouraging effect. The flexibility of this space, when compared to that of a formal lecture hall, allowed each firm to express its individual attitudes and personality. Instead of the usual images and tours of completed jobs and work in progress, each participant brought models, drawings, and renderings. By doing so, the audience was allowed a provocative glimpse into the profession and into the process of making architecture, from basic concepts through to built works. Yet, it is still not clear how the series might be used "to foster a continuing dialogue about architecture in the city with local architects who are creating it" when most of the dialogue was from, and about, the architects themselves.■

America's Cities: A Report On the Myth Of Urban Renaissance

Michael C. D. Macdonald, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984, 426 pp., $16.95

Reviewed by Jan O'Brien

At the opening of the Los Angeles Olympic games last summer, the exuberant flight of balloons against the backdrop of a clean and prosperous city symbolized for many a rebirth of American optimism. Soon afterwards, the boasting boosterism of the Dallas Republican Convention was photographed against a similar skyline of gleaming towers, implying perhaps that Reaganomics is benefiting our urban centers. In contrast, Michael Macdonald's book, *America's Cities: A Report on the Myth of Urban Renaissance*, aptly describes all the aspects of cities the cameras missed, with a more pessimistic conclusion. In this book, he employs the sharp edge of his long-range perspective and the weight of fact to pierce through the glittering façades that one understands as the modern American city. He exposes nearly all American cities as trapped in a downward spiral of declining tax bases, poor services, and minimal police and fire protection; the result, middle-class flight to the suburbs.

Macdonald examines 22 American cities. Regional overviews are followed by descriptions of the founding, growth, and status (circa 1984) of the selected cities. Fourteen representative Sunbelt cities are dissected, four Snowbelt cities are held up as paragons, and five Northern cities are dismissed as unsalvagable. He probes statistics to show that overall job gains hide blue-collar job losses for inner-city workers. While this hailstorm of criticism may well produce a feeling of futility in the reader, Macdonald's goal is to reveal the truth about our cities. His confessed prejudices are that "cities must be saved, poor people must be helped, economies must be revived with massive federal programs to employ, train, retrain, or relocate unskilled workers in a post-industrial age."

One chapter is devoted to selected Texas cities. Macdonald provides historical and analytic profiles of Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio, while touching on the much smaller cities of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

In his chapter on Houston, the author relates the popular Texas myth that Texans, and especially Houstonians, developed their state and city on their own, independent of the federal government. After the 1900 hurricane that nearly destroyed Galveston, astute Houston businessmen played up Galveston's vulnerability to storms, thereby setting into motion the then-biggest federal grant in history to create an inland port. Lyndon Johnson's coup, 60 years later, in securing the NASA Manned Spacecraft Center for Houston brought 150 corporations and 540 additional factories in its wake. Houstonians were proud of their supposedly recession-proof and diversified economy. Not only oil, but cattle, rice, heavy-equipment giants, and petrochemical plants prevented Houston from becoming a "company town" like Detroit. But while some numbers back up this optimistic vision - for example, a jobless rate one-third below the U.S. as a whole in the 1970s - other factors, such as 2.2 policemen per 1,000 residents, were less alluring. No corporate taxes, no personal income taxes, and low property taxes leave few resources to alter that ratio, especially in leaner times. In the face of mounting crime, crumbling traffic snarls, and a major recession, Mayor Kathy Whitmire promised to "run the city like a business" after her election in 1982 and improve services by trimming budgetary fat. Since Macdonald believes that such action has limited value, he must have applauded the multitude of bonds that were passed by Houstonians in the fall of 1984, as a demonstration of their willingness to pay to improve their city.

According to Macdonald, Dallas's economy, despite being rocked by a flood of job seekers since 1980 and lay-offs by Texas Instruments, is diverse (banking, insurance, aerospace, and high technology) and resilient. Like Houston, however, Dallas's problems are linked to unfettered growth, low taxes, and strong special interests.

He does not applaud Dallas for being "among the least federally dependent large cities" but, rather links that fact with Dallas's finishing last in a "quality of life" survey of 35 cities in 1976. When home owners found their taxes rising and read that booming commercial land downtown owned by Dallas Citizens's Council (DCC) members (a group of 200 corporation presidents or chief-executive officers) was underassesed by $1.1 billion in 1980, they formed the Tax Equality Association or TEA Party. Yet, rather than demanding an equitable boost in business taxes and thereby reaping the benefits of better service, they fell into a common trap of demanding tax cuts. The cuts were rejected by voters afraid of devastating already poor services. Macdonald suggests that coalition with the 42 percent minority block in Dallas could give this new group the power to take on the DCC and balance the tax burden.

As Snowbelt cities struggle to keep aging industries alive, the author exposes one "myth" which urban mayors find voters very eager to accept, hoping to lure new business - tax cuts. Yet, these very cuts often erode the tax base needed to pay for the good schools, parks, and police protection that actually make cities attractive to corporate executives in the first place. Macdonald also debunks the fantasy of annexing "taxurbs." Wealthier, politically powerful taxpayers in the suburbs fight annexation by the inner cities they just fled.

Macdonald calls the revival of cities like Philadelphia and Baltimore "media myths," pointing to high unemployment, particularly among blacks and teenagers. St. Louis makes the disaster list through its aborted attempt at urban renewal that bulldozed its city core. Detroit is beyond the point of return. The clouds of declining domestic demand for automobiles, robotization, and increased supplies of auto parts from abroad will darken its current recovery. Newark is our worst city - dead last in most city surveys.

New York receives a well-deserved inspection in this book since it is the world's capital of commerce and culture. In describing the polarization of golden Manhattan versus the declining boroughs, Macdonald takes a contradictory stand. While he uses residential flight from the inner city as an index of decline in other cities, he is against the rehabilitation of loft space as living quarters around New York City. He is consistent in his belittlement of the "yuppization" of urban areas, bemoaning the replacement of shoe-repair stores by quiche restaurants and high-fashion boutiques.

While Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Kansas City, and Wichita are held up as model cities, the book shows their examples to be of limited value for other cities. The lessons of diversified, stable economies are apparent, yet these cities all tend to have homogeneous populations and cold weather which keep crime low. Their dependency on federal aid makes them even more vulnerable to Reagan's promised cuts. Mayor Henry Maier of Milwaukee warned in 1981, "What have we gained if we trade federal red ink for blood in the streets?"

America's Cities generally balances historical fact, current statistics, and apt comparisons with a worldwide perspective of economic and industrial trends. However, while problems are easily described, solutions are more open to debate. Macdonald, with a personal mix of Democratic ideals, espouses major social change to prevent the slow death of our cities in a four-part prescription: reviving the military draft to prevent a costly mercenary army disproportionately high in minorities; an all-out attack on drugs; true tax reform; and a public-works program to train workers. While his book harbors a certain nasty "I told you so" stance toward the foolish folk who re-elected President Reagan, it is based on a real concern for a stable and equitable urban America.■

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Crabbing About Preservation

John Kaliski and Stephen Fox

Top: *Crabb House, 1936, John F. Staub, architect.* Above: *Crabb House, demolished, 1985 (Photos by Paul Hester)*

One of Houston's most famous and beautiful houses, the Dolores Welder Crabb Mitchell House at Pine Valley and Troon in River Oaks, was demolished on May Day, despite outcries of protest from the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance and a demonstration organized by Carolyn Farb whose participants included Mrs. Lloyd M. Bentsen III, Mrs. Peter S. Meyer, Mrs. Thomas W. Houghton, and Mrs. Peter T. Scardino. The Spanish Colonial style house — built in 1936 to the designs of John F. Staub — and its gardens were sold to Kenneth L. Schnitzer, Jr. and Douglas W. Schnitzer, who have retained Benjamin E. Brewer, Jr. to design replacement houses on the site. While the owners were completely within their legal rights to first strip and then bulldoze the house, is the issue merely: one can do with one's property as one pleases?

The destruction of any clearly superior example of Houston's architectural heritage in any stable, restricted neighborhood both diminishes the overall quality of the immediate environment for the people who reside there and hastens the destruction of a fundamental public trust that these stable neighborhoods constitute for all of Houston's citizens. In an essay which appears in *Modulus 16*, "Towards a New (Old) Architecture," Carroll W. Westfall defines the meaning of public rights in a civilized city and their relationship to architecture:

...buildings serve institutions and give form to the civil and political values they promote;
...cities are places where public purposes shape and check private ends;
...buildings in cities represent that balance between public and private which promotes civility.

Westfall does not limit his argument to public structures but aptly demonstrates that "...ornamenting the city with decorous private residences [has] a public consequence and affects the community at large. They are clothed with a public interest, and therefore ought to be retained as part of the city." The author suggests that an owner who cannot inhabit an important structure without destroying it should, with the public trust in mind, divest himself of it.

Houston does have a past — historical, institutional, and architectural. The continuing destruction of this past, both public and private, works like an amnesia to vandalize and demean the values that made Houston great.■

Aubade (Houston, 1985)

Each year The Houston Festival Foundation, Inc. commissions a poem about Houston. The following poem was written by poet Susan Wood for the 1985 festival.

Susan Wood

I This far south November
might just as well be summer
some days, it's that green
and hot. Leaves don't turn
here, or fall, drifting down to be raked
into bonfires of their own color.
One morning we look up and -
suddenly, it seems - find them
gone, we don't know where.
It's the way the diaphanous body
of the sky seems to fill overnight
with towers, its unblemished blue
disappearing into mirrors of glass and steel.
Like the future, they are beautifully
anonymous, each face a face
at the window as though the body
is a box which holds the heart
and is crowded with absence.
In this climate, how shall we know
we have been saved?

II In the neighborhoods of Houston, we were children.
Mornings we walked on air, moments
our stilts cut a wide path
through clouds of grass. I think
of a grandfather who lived by his hands
carefully planing the boards to make
those wooden legs. He knew children want to be
lifted up. We wanted to rise above our small
selves, as though knowledge equalled
height. We'd climb the body's ladder any way
we could, even scale a tree's green cliff
to watch a pair of lovers
melt to shade. He was taller,
and stronger, but when she raised her mouth
to his, each face opened to the other
like a door. Down below us, the garden
ran wild, rioting azalea and oleander, the pure
white flame of the lilies. High
on those high limbs, everything
seemed possible, that even
if we held our breath, the flowers
would go on blossoming.

III Remember a night in deep summer,
nineteen hundred sixty-nine?
The television bloomed blue
in the dark and outside a light hung
like a pale disc in the dark fold
of sky. Our city was walking on the moon!
By morning, it had disappeared.
We could not believe our eyes.
I think of that when I walk at dawn
along the wet streets, light beginning to leaf
through the live oaks, the moon still
a thin shadow of smoke in the clouds.
Above the trees the towers rise, a painting's
stylized idea of city, a version of the earth
looked at from the moon. It's the way experience
seen from a great distance seems
somehow unreal, and more intense.
Childhood, a particular summer day after rain.
Mimosa, the trees shaking out their leaves, the faint
sour fruit of earth. Description is the best
you can do, but not enough. It's the feeling
of the day you remember anyway, the way
everything seemed secret and blameless
at once. Just a hint on the early air
of what you'd have to learn, that something final
had begun, and nothing you could do would make it stop.

IV This chapel might be anywhere,
it is so anonymous. But it is here,
in the middle of Houston, at the edge
of a field, late in the century.
Inside, in the darkness, the eyes begin,
finally, to see. As though these canvases took
all our light and gave it back. Sitting alone
this morning, I think how much
it must have hurt him, to hold his heart
in his hand like that, to make of rage
a grave and sorrowful music. But Rothko
is here now, and King
just outside the door. Newman's obelisk breaks
its inscription across the still pool's surface:
Forgive them for they know not what they do.
Can we forgive ourselves?
He is out of bounds now. He rejoices in man's lovely, peculiar power to choose death and live -

V Driving east on I-10 at dawn, I see Houston loom,
backlit by sun, red, a hundred copper obelisks
cut off by cloud. They might be floating
in a water blue sky. They might be on fire.
I try to imagine this as the last
morning: To look up, suddenly, and find
a sky gone white and absolute.
No time to say what disappears.
I try to imagine it.
We must imagine it to live.
How far will the flash be seen?
No father to forgive us, not knowing what we do.

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