

The Architecture and Design Review of Houston

Spring 1986

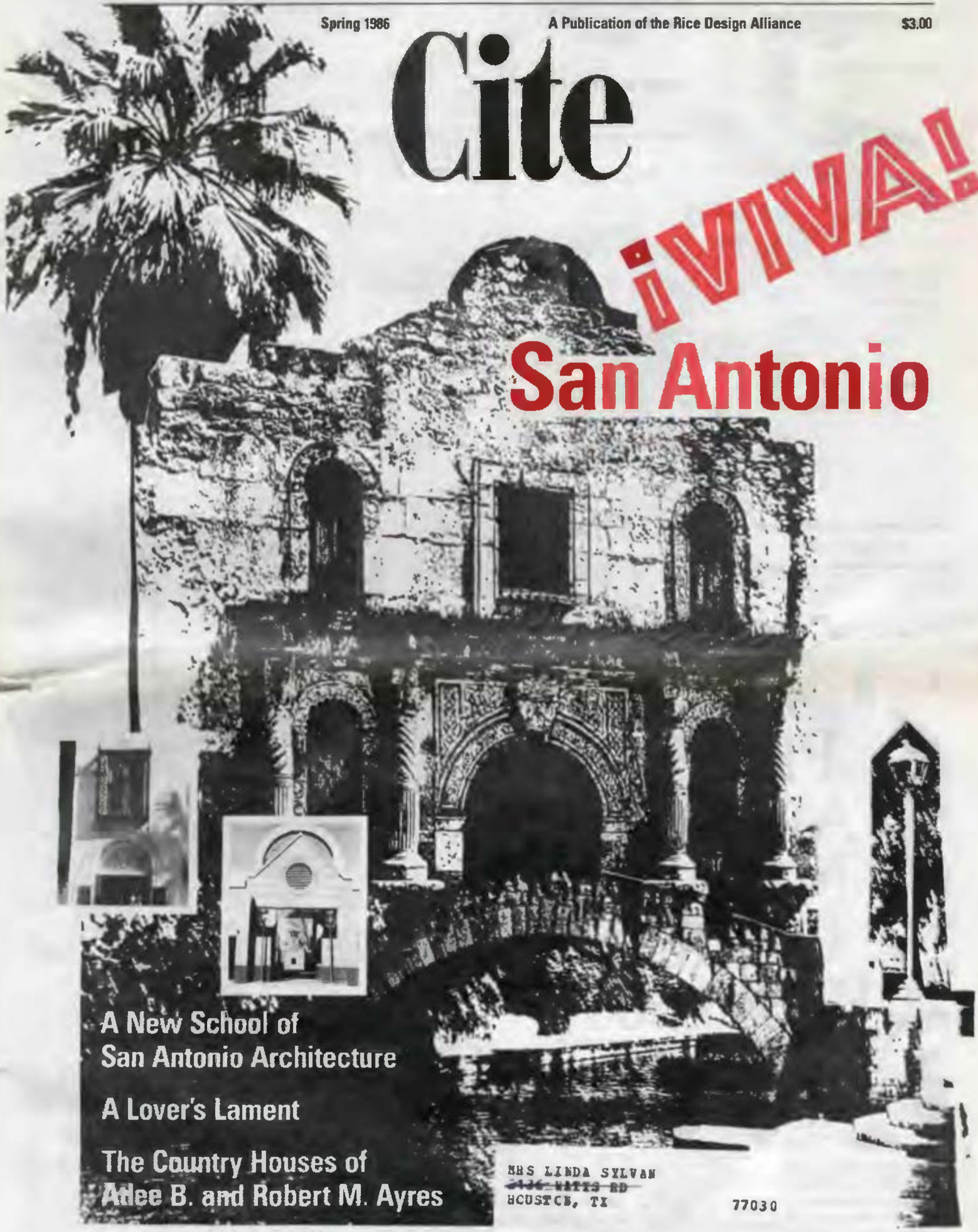
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RE:Cite

Blurred Vision?

To the editor:

In response to the HindCite column by John Kaliski ("Houston in the Rear-View Mirror," *Cite*, Winter 1985-1986), what I described in the Fall 1985 HindCite was not by any intention pejorative to present-day Houston; "good" and "bad" are, in fact, relative values, meaningless to the sense of my argument, and terms I did not use, or imply. However, there was a critical element, inexplicably deleted from Kaliski's quote of my column - and, to complete the quote, "This element was vision . . ."

In his interpretation of California's cultural development, Harold Kirkner in *California's Architectural Frontier* suggests that it was the projection of a symbolic image, embodied in literature and architecture, which made for a collective, regional lifestyle, a point echoed by Charles W. Moore in his brilliant essay on Southern California, "You Have to Pay for the Public Life." The search for a regional *genius loci* is more than a sentimental nostalgic revival; at its basis lies a reverence for the *indigenous* - that which was before or is native to a place - and the *particular*.

I contend that to be *particular* is not to be reactionary. What I was suggesting was, indeed, a cold, analytic look at the past in a *normative* sense to evaluate where we are, where we were, and where we might go.

I offer to John Kaliski, as absence makes his heart grow fonder, the suggestion that when you look in the rear-view mirror you have to be careful that you don't see things backwards.

Peter C. Papademasitron

Big Cite Beat

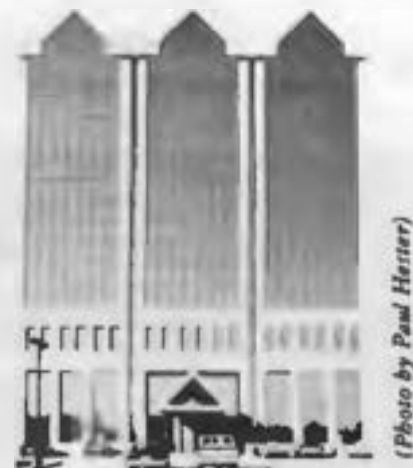
Houston Brain Drain: Mark A. Hewitt exited Houston (and the editorship of *Cite*) in December to become associate professor of architecture and preservation at Columbia University, but not before lining up Yale University Press to publish his forthcoming book on the American country house. In a surprise move, superstar Eugene E. Aubry bid adios to Space City in January to set up a new practice in Sarasota, Florida. His former firm, Morris/Aubry, has reorganized to become Morris Architects.

Dig It! Spectacularly disrupting the sedate elegance of the new Westinghouse Furniture Systems Showroom at Innova by ISD and Peter D. Waldman is Waldman and Christopher Genik's 64-foot-long Westinghouse Centennial Mural. This chromatically intense, neo-Cubist construct (Latex on gesso-covered hollow-core wood doors) analytically decomposes epic moments in Westinghouse's corporate history and compensates employees for the showroom's lack of windows. Two levels below, workmen are finishing out the new Sunar Hauserman showroom by Frank O. Gehry and Associates, a spirited delectation on 1950s science-fiction imagery. Eat your heart out Michael Graves.

Hothouse Press, just established by Phillip Lopate, will premiere with *Mirage* by Houston architectural intern Wolde-Ghiorghis Ayele. Lopate describes Ayele's book as a "personal, meditative journal about an Ethiopian student's experience in the 'fantastic' cities of Houston and Mexico City . . . Parts of it are humorous, parts of it are serious, it's very quirky. It gives this sense of Houston as a hypnotic mirage." Look for *Mirage* in May.

Philip Johnson and John Burgee may be doing all the scene-stealing at the University of Houston right now (their new Architecture Building was occupied in January) but they're not the only show in town. To be installed on campus this spring are three exceptional works of public art: two ceramic murals by Malou Flato, a stunning pair of Laurentian pink granite benches by Scott Burton, to be stationed at the campus entrance to the Architecture Building, and "Leda and the Swan," a pair of bronzes by Reuben Nakian, which go with the new Le Roy and Lucile Melcher Hall. To celebrate the installation of this classically titled twosome, Blaffer Gallery director Esther de Vecsey has proposed a Greco-Roman dedication festival.

So Aldo, what's going on? The *Tendenza* may have been postulated as a way to rescue architecture from formalist reduction, but someone sure underestimated American ingenuousness,



(Photo by Paul Herter)

as San Pedro Plaza, a nine-story office building in San Antonio, designed by House Reh Associates for Kilburne Moore Company, winsomely demonstrates.

What Becomes A Legend Most? Will a flick of the switch fell Houston's fabled, 37-year-old Shamrock Hotel? That's the rumor now that owner Hilton Hotel Corporation has announced the sale of the 18-story landmark to the Texas Medical Center, Inc. TMC has yet to commit publicly to the fate of the Shamrock. But the prospect of losing a classic example of the building-you-love-to-hate to yet another chain-link fenced asphalt parking lot is stupefying. Houston, will the outrage ever stop?



Single Block Granite Benches, Scott Burton (Photo by Ellen Page Wilson, courtesy Max Protec Gallery)

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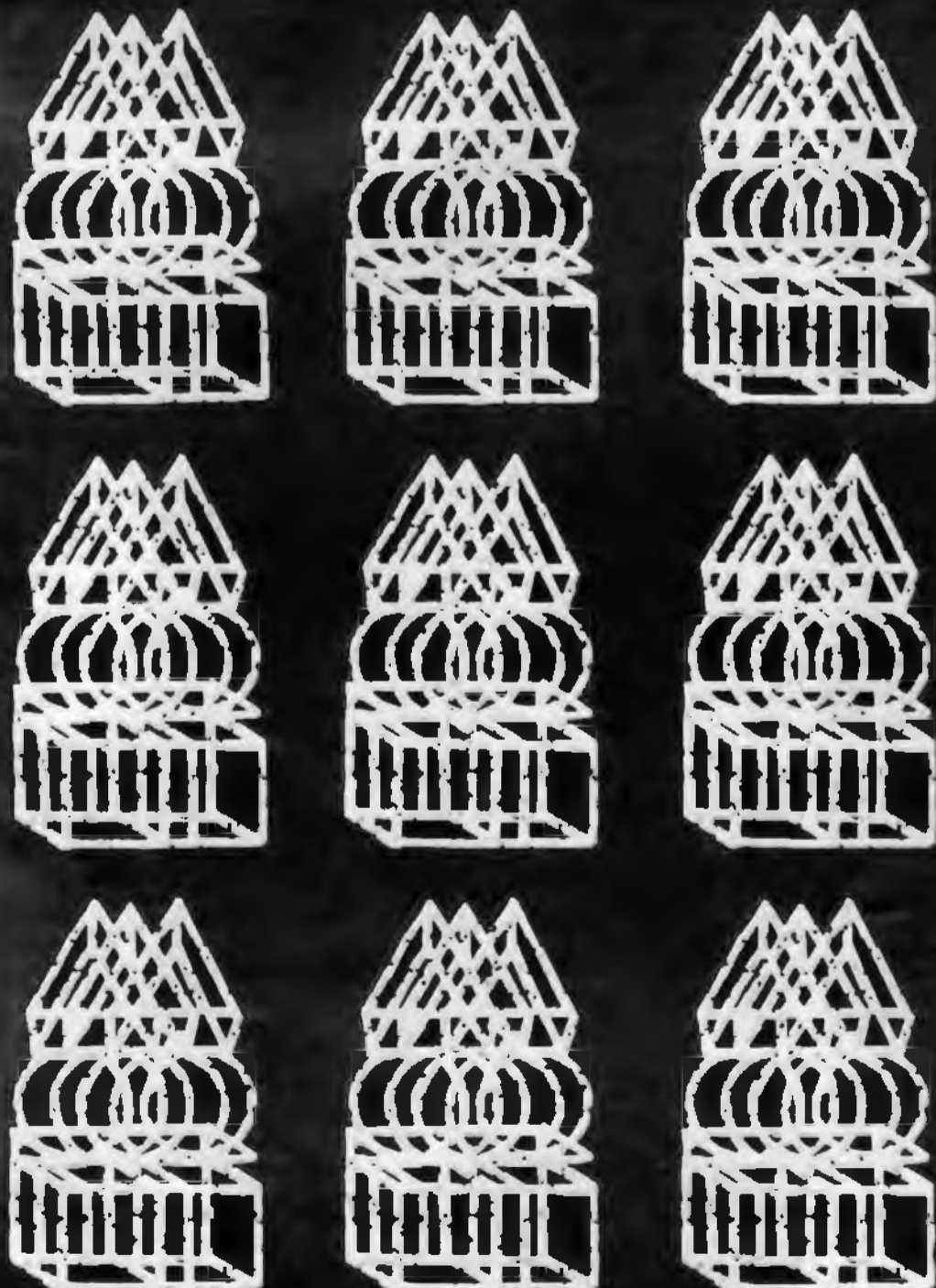

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Pillot Building Rescued



Pillot Building (Photo by Paul Hester)

The Pillot Building, important in the historical and architectural development of Houston, will see new life during 1986 after a long period of decline and several close brushes with destruction.

Constructed opposite Courthouse Square during the Civil War era, the structure is one of the oldest commercial buildings in Houston. The Pillot Building was acquired by Harris County in 1975. After unsuccessful attempts to destroy it for construction of the Harris County Administration Building, the County Commissioners Court allowed the building to reach so advanced a state of deterioration that in 1982, the roof, the south wall, and the interior fabric were dismantled, leaving only three of the four exterior walls intact. Then, in 1984, Harris County applied for permits to demolish the building, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and is a State Archeological Landmark. As occurred during previous attempts to demolish, this action was protested by community and professional organizations, individual citizens, and in a more organized way by the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance. The Texas Antiquities Committee refused the request for a demolition permit in January 1985, and created a panel to oversee the search for possible developers. This panel was composed of representatives of the Texas Historical Commission, the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance, and of the offices of the Harris County Judge, Engineer, and Attorney. After several Houston

developers expressed interest, the panel drafted a ground lease for the "footprint," that is, the exterior perimeter of the building, for a 50-year term. This agreement will allow the structure to be preserved and returned to active use by a developer with no expenditure of public funds.

During August 1985, the Harris County Commissioners Court accepted the highest bid from the City Partnership, Ltd. of Houston, which retained Barry Moore Architects to design an architectural restoration and reconstruction of the partially demolished building. The lease between the county and the developer was signed during September, and in November a schematic presentation of proposed architectural work was made to the Texas Historical Commission, in accordance with the terms of the lease. The proposal calls for restoration of the façades to their original appearance, retention of the original three-floor design, rebuilding of the interior structure in steel, and the addition of a new service core along the south rear wall.

City Partnership, Ltd. is pursuing leases in the hospitality industry, planning for a restaurant on one-half of the ground floor and a private club to use the remaining space in the structure. It expects to execute leases early in 1986, and public announcements will be forthcoming.

Michael E. Wilson



Pillot Building in 1869 (Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library)

The Zephyr, Inside and Out

In terms of its streamlined sophistication and kinesthetic appeal, Arquitectonica's latest building in Houston is hard to match. Both categories might be more appropriate in discussing a product of industrial design rather than a building, but the svelte aplomb embodied in the building's simple, strong, and systematic lines is, nevertheless, reminiscent of a manufactured sleekness. The consequential naming of the building "The Zephyr," after the first of a series of powerful, streamlined, self-propelled trains of the late 1930s is, therefore, justified.

The diminutive building, originally a warehouse, has been transformed into a "Center for Art, Fashion, and Design," and is located on Colquitt Street at Lake Street. Seen against the neutral backdrop of white-washed brick, the building's unique fenestration, which is by far its most prominent feature, achieves maximum effect. Abandoning the customary orthogonal arrangement of openings, Arquitectonica opts, instead, for 14 large, equally sized parallelogram-shaped voids, comprising both doors and windows. This slight geometrical deviation is drastically effective in conveying the illusion of movement. Each opening is delineated with a generous band of verde antique marble, and the standard aluminum frames have been spray-painted gold. Together with the metallic gold overhang, these materials affect a moderne opulence. In sharp contrast to the rigorous seriality of the façade are the functioning, fire-engine red drain pipes which sinuously wind their way down the face of the building to the sidewalk, where expansion joints have been set on the diagonal, echoing the

angle of the openings. Clusters of flat-black ceramic tile, facetiously simulating rustication and seemingly agitated by the effect of the "speeding" building, are dispersed about its exterior surfaces.

Five galleries, with strong avant-garde inclinations, currently occupy the premises. These are: Davis/McClain, Perception, Trinkets, Exvoto, and Atelier. The interiors of the first three, designed by Howard Barnstone, Robert Pahnke, and owner Kathy Wetmore, respectively, are similar in that they are appropriately and reassuringly unobtrusive. Their pristine interiors allow works, ranging from sculpture to ceramics to jewelry, to be seen to their best advantage. On the other hand, Exvoto's interior, designed by architect Yahya Fuizi, is considerably more charged. For Exvoto's recent exhibition entitled "Angels, Virgins, and Madonnas," the walls of the gallery were painted a brooding grey and the ceiling accoutrements (ducts and structure) a navy blue. Spots of gold paint adorn the dark and barren concrete floor. In the middle of the room is a large, freestanding altar-like structure upon which objects pertaining to the exhibition are displayed. A few steps behind it is a straight flight of stairs framed by a symbolic arched entryway, dramatizing the short ascent that terminates in a display surrounded by mirrored mosaics. The staircase itself is faced with these same mosaics, which are the work of Erin Adams. Altogether, the effect is quite primordial. For an upcoming exhibition of nude and erotic photographs which purports to develop an offbeat and provocative perspective on the human form and sexuality, the decor will alter accordingly.



Arquitectonica designed one lease space in the building, that of Atelier's. The conventional, rectangular-shaped room is made to exude a warmth reminiscent of a plant nursery. The walls, bathed in a rose Zolatorne tint (a process whereby a polychromatic coating, consisting of a combination of separate pigmented particles, is applied to a wall surface) are the primary cause of this appealing and thoroughly pleasant effect. Likewise, the grey carpet is interwoven with fibers of numerous colors achieving a rich, subtle, dimensional effect. The engaging simplicity of this space befits the nature of the gallery, which carries children's media (as well as a substantial selection of compact discs). There is a delicate resonance between the galleries and the building they occupy. Thoroughly urbane, yet exotic at the same time, both building and galleries appear mutually complementary.

Arquitectonica's uncompromising deftness and purposeful theatrics continue to make its buildings easily recognizable and unflinchingly provocative. The Zephyr is no exception, and though devoid (perhaps thankfully) of Arquitectonica's distinctly torrid palette, it nevertheless demands a response from us and is likely to enjoy a well-deserved *succès de scandale!*

Wolde-Ghiorgis Ayale



Top: The Zephyr, 1985, Arquitectonica, architect, detail of typical bay. Above: Exvoto, 1985, Yahya Fuizi, architect, interior detail (Photos by Paul Hoster)

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Visions of Houston

The 1985 Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects' annual Urban Design Symposium, cosponsored by the Houston Economic Development Council and the Linbeck Construction Company, was held 22 November 1985. The theme, "Visions for Houston," focused on the interrelated issues of quality of life and economic development; setting goals for the future; taking new initiatives in comprehensive city planning, transportation, and infrastructure improvements; and formulating an effective economic development strategy.

Mayor Frank Cooksey of Austin, a former Houstonian, provided some Lincolnian advice to the city's decision-makers. Cooksey pointed out that quality-of-life issues do affect economic vitality and the ability to rebound from recession. Houston should and can improve its quality-of-life amenities. The city must begin a serious, comprehensive planning process, with the land-use controls and coordination procedures necessary to enforce the plan. Cooksey suggested that Houston's assets - basic economic opportunities in space commercialization; trade and the Port of Houston expansion; energy and petrochemicals; agriculture; and medical technology - should be actively promoted. Cooksey urged that the city upgrade the quality of higher education in Houston, especially at the University of Houston. Finally, Cooksey said that transportation and improvement of public services and infrastructure are critical to the future of Houston, and that the city should capitalize on the benefits of linking Houston and Galveston with a high-speed rail line.

Other speakers discussed city-wide urban systems. Efraim S. Garcia, director of Planning and Development, spoke on his proposed Compendium of Plans; John King, chairman of the board of the Metropolitan Transit Authority, described urban planning and design opportunities that will reshape Houston's public infrastructure; and Don Moyer, president of the Houston Economic Development Council, described strategic economic development planning now under way at HEDC. Walter Mischer, Jr. presented an 11-point proposal calling for a private-sector "super-group" to determine basic goals, interagency coordination, a comprehensive planning approach, and economic development initiatives for the city. Houston City Councilmember George Greanias called for a strong public-private partnership to define a future vision for

Houston and the means to achieve that vision by 2000. He stressed that the city government is a critical factor in this process. Mayor Kathryn J. Whitmire spoke of past accomplishments and future initiatives in planning, capital improvements programming, and building the city's infrastructure.

What does all of this add up to? It was generally agreed that now is the time to act. Not only must a vision for Houston be defined but the means to achieve it by 2000 have to be determined. Houston should initiate a program similar to "Goals for Dallas" and San Antonio's "Target '90" to define the city's priority requirements and design programs that can ensure their realization.

Although there was lack of agreement on several key issues, including the need for additional development standards and controls, the role the MTA should play in defining the form of the city, stronger leadership from the public sector, the need of a broad program of urban beautification, and the role of the private sector in initiating city planning, "Visions for Houston" made believers out of a lot of skeptical people. There was an encouraging consensus among the speakers and audience reflecting a strong desire for dramatic improvement in the quality of the urban environment in Houston.

Peter H. Brown

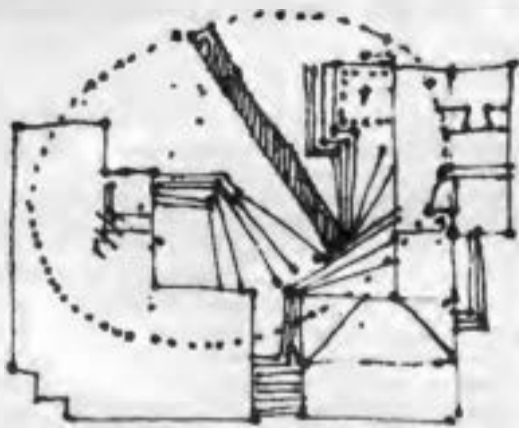
**Diverse Works:
Fourth Ward**

Diverse Works opened a major, month-long exhibition "Architecture and Culture: Fourth Ward" on 25 January which focused on the history, architecture, traditions, and people of the oldest black community in Houston. Organized by Neil Printz, with Diverse Works staff members Charles Gallagher, Michael Peranteau, and Caroline Huber, the exhibition featured historical documents and images of the community - which began in 1865 as the place where emancipated slaves congregated in Houston - from the Houston Metropolitan Research Center and numerous private collections. Contributing to the exhibition were photographers Paul Hester, Sally Gall, Geoff Winningham, Phyllis Moore, Doe Doherty, Earlie Hudnall, and Rob Ziebell and artists John Biggers, Vanzant Driver, Jack Massing, Elizabeth Ward, and Naomi Polk. Inshik Lee produced an engaging series of shadow-box models and Doug Sprunt a series of analytical drawings describing characteristic house types

found in Fourth Ward, and Peterson Littenberg Architects displayed drawings of its plan for the rehabilitation of Lake West public housing in Dallas.

In addition to a lively opening (featuring U.S. Congressman Mickey Leland, Carolyn Farb, a truly diverse crowd, and the choir of Mount Horeb Missionary Baptist Church, which shook the heavy-timbered frame of Diverse Works's gallery in the old W. L. Foley department store near Market Square with pulsating Gospel music), a series of special events occurred during the course of the exhibition. These were intended to increase public awareness of the value of preserving Fourth Ward and the adjacent Allen Parkway Village from destruction and redevelopment.

Moving In: Moore in Austin



Right: Moore Houses, 1985. Charles W. Moore, architect, diagrammatic sketch plan of existing house and new addition (Courtesy Charles W. Moore). Below: Moore House, living room (Photo by Scott Poole)



If Charles W. Moore's new home in Austin is less witty and overtly allusive than some of his earlier work, it is no less impure. Designed in collaboration with Arthur Andersson, this courtyard complex of two houses and a studio is a weave of the old and new that revels in both the denial of expectation and in the adjacency of dissimilar things.

The exterior of the house and studio complex is unpretentious, reflecting Moore's fascination with ordinary materials and their capacity to recall familiar imagery. This prosaic exterior, suggestive of ranch houses and barns, hardly reveals the high level of energy and intensity found in the interior spaces.

An ellipse superimposed on the site establishes an order between the public realms of the two houses and the courtyard. As the ellipse passes through Moore's remodeling of the existing house built in 1936, tension develops between the rectilinear enclosure of the house and the curve of the ellipse. This detached layer of wall, described by two-foot-wide pilasters, creates multiple layers of enclosure that are enhanced by dramatic effects of scale, light, and color.

These intimate leftover spaces simultaneously modify light and serve as repositories for a fraction of Moore's expansive collection of books and folk-art objects. The diminutive scale of these objects increases the apparent size of the modest living room, already widened and

deepened by light that washes the space from a large-scale window facing the courtyard. Another acquired object, a Kilim, serves both as a floor covering and as a source of inspiration for the rich colors of the already animated room.

Andersson's house also borrows from the secret life of objects, juxtaposing an 18th-century portal from Ireland with the otherwise abstract space of his living room, increasing through contrast the scale and texture of the space. Here the geometry of the ellipse is overlaid on new construction in the form of a faceted living-room wall that is defined by two skylight cannons and a wall of windows which face the courtyard, reinforcing the dialogue with Moore's house.

The clear, light, abstract space of the studio reflects more the restraint of Andersson's new house than the exuberant vocabulary of volumes in Moore's remodeled house. Unlike the two houses, however, the studio defers to more practical considerations, but nevertheless uses light, like the houses, to define the unity of the space.

Though metaphors characteristic of Moore's species of eclecticism abound, local events are underplayed, creating a balance between the particularities of the two houses and the integrity of the overall order.

Scott Poole



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Kevin Roche

Edited by Francesco Dal Co

Kevin Roche has been one of the foremost practitioners on the American architecture scene and abroad for two decades and recipient of such distinguished professional awards as the Brunner and Pritzker prizes. This book covers Roche's entire career, from his last work done in the office of Eero Saarinen through the beginnings of his partnership with John Dinkeloo when he executed his famous Ford Foundation Headquarters up to his most current work. This comprehensive catalogue raisonné of Roche's work also contains a lengthy and candid interview with the architect, in which he sheds light on many aspects of his career and design philosophy. 320 pages. 350 illustrations, 72 in color. 10" x 10". Hardcover: \$45. Paper: \$29.95

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Small text: Detail of a masonry wall showing the texture of the brickwork and the structure of the arches.

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First-Stage Winners Chosen for Park Competition

Five design projects for Sesquicentennial Park were chosen on 20 December from among 119 entries submitted in a nationwide design competition organized by the Rice Design Alliance and Central Houston Civic Improvement. Ten judges (five from Houston and five from outside Texas) spent two days evaluating entries with Professional Advisor Theodore Liebman before choosing the five finalists as well as awarding four honorable mentions and one special commendation.

The winners, who will compete against each other in a second round, are Charles Tapley Associates and Charles Moore Architects; SIR, Inc. and Bruce Webb, in association with Kirksey-Meyers Architects; Guy Hagstette, John Lemr,

and Robert Liner; and, from outside Texas, Victor Caliendo Architects of New York and Roberts Associates/Dean Abbot and Robert Sena of San Francisco.

The second round of judging by the same 10 jurors will occur in April and the winning project will be built during 1986 and 1987 as Houston's major Sesquicentennial project. Once the final judging occurs, the premiated projects, as well as selected non-premiated entries, will be exhibited publicly. The Rice Design Alliance also will produce a publication to document the competition, the first open architectural competition for a major project ever held in Houston.

Spring Architecture Events

Rice Design Alliance

The Rice Design Alliance has in progress a series of lectures, organized by Drexel Turner and Richard Keating, called "The City: Memory and Invention." Speakers include Kurt Forster on Schinkel's Berlin (5 March), Eduard Sekler on Turn-of-the-century Vienna (12 March), David Van Zanten on Haussmann's Paris (19 March), and Alex Krieger on Burnham's America (24 March). All lectures are held at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and begin at 8 p.m. Admission charged; reservations suggested.

To celebrate the completion of the Architecture Building at the University of Houston, the RDA will stage a benefit gala there on Wednesday, 26 March. Burdette Keeland and Mrs. Stewart G. Masterson are organizing the event. Tickets are \$100 per person; reservations required.

On 31 May the RDA will commence a six-day architectural tour of Savannah and Charleston. Barrie Scardino and John Lingley of IES Travel Group are organizing the tour, which is limited to 40 people. Reservations required by 15 March.

The Rice Design Alliance's Annual Meeting will be held in May, time and location to be announced.

For information on any of these activities, telephone the Rice Design Alliance at 713/527-6297.

Farish Gallery

Currently on display at the Farish Gallery is an exhibition organized by Drexel Turner for the gallery, "Paul Hester: Photographs of Texas Monuments,"

which runs through 19 March. From 24 March until 19 April "Antonio Sant'Elia: Italian Futurist Drawings" will be shown. This exhibition was organized by the Cooper-Hewitt Museum and contains over 70 drawings. The Farish Gallery is located in Anderson Hall on the campus of Rice University. It is open daily during exhibitions from noon until 5 p.m. Admission free. For information, telephone 713/527-4864.

School of Architecture, Rice University
The concluding lectures by J. B. Jackson, Craig Francis Cullinan Visiting Professor at Rice University, occur at 8 p.m. on Monday, 10 March, and Monday, 17 March, at Sewall Hall, Room 301, on the campus of Rice University. Jackson's topic is "Vernacular Landscape." Admission free.

Center for the Study of American Architecture

The Center for the Study of American Architecture at The University of Texas at Austin will stage its third symposium on Thursday and Friday, 24-25 April, at Jessen Auditorium on the university campus. The topic is "New Regionalism: Tradition, Adaptation, Invention." Participants include Robert A. M. Stern, Kenneth Frampton, Taft Architects, Ricardo Legoretta, Charles W. Moore, Lawrence W. Speck, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and UT Architecture Dean Hal Box. Pre-registration fee is \$15 for all three sessions. For information, telephone the center at 512/471-1922.

Due in the fall are the third volume of the center's journal, *CENTER*, and an exhibition to be held at the university's Archer M. Huntington Gallery on "New Architecture For Texas."

Wälzels

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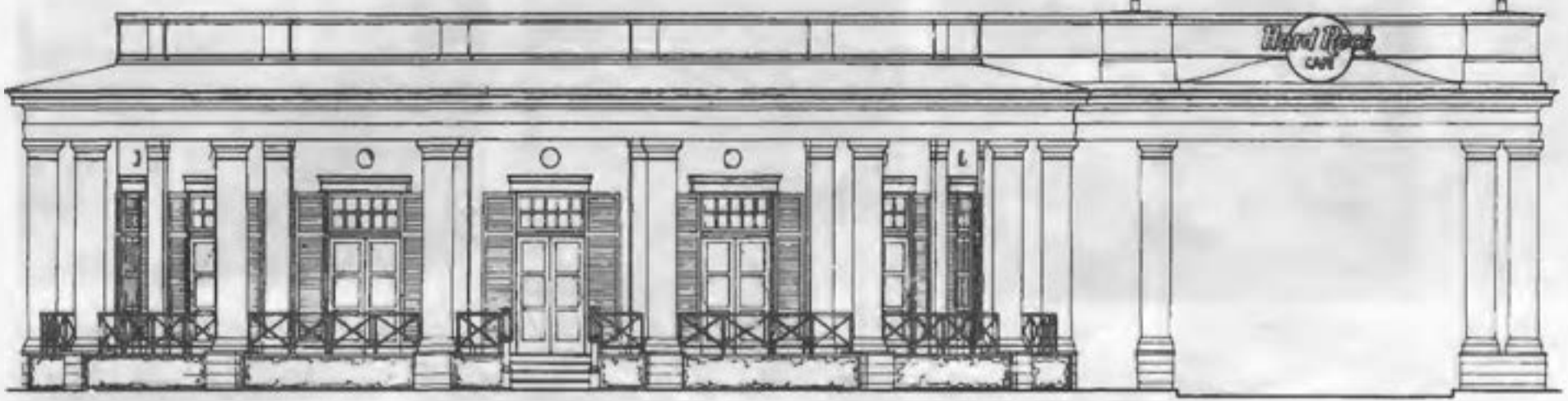
Young Architects Forum, in collaboration with Diverse Works, planned a string of events this spring to make visible the invisible city and reintegrate latent psychic and physical fragments into Houston's urban character. In conjunction with Diverse Works's "Architecture and Culture: The Fourth Ward" exhibition, the forum sponsored a city-wide Design Charrette on 22 February entitled "Transformations: Neighborhoods in Transition or Jeopardy?" Ad-hoc teams of architects and artists spent a weekend envisioning ways to sustain the Fourth Ward's cultural and architectural integrity. The schemes were juried by a panel which included Steven K. Peterson, Diane Y. Ghirardo, City Councilman George

Gretnias, John Hansen and Michael Underhill.

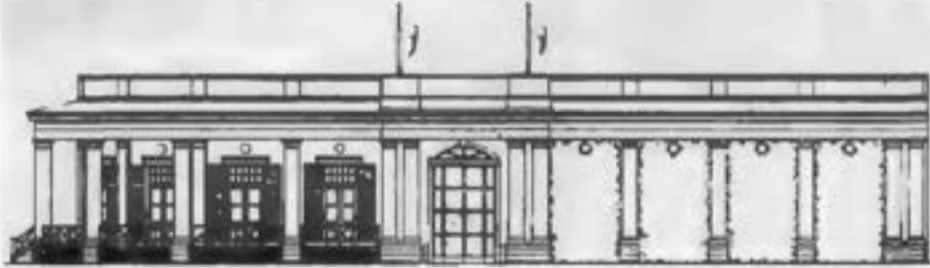
Although the effects of an event of this type are difficult to assess in the short term, the Young Architects Forum is to be applauded for elevating vision to an art.

In the coming weeks the forum will present a lecture series called "Four From Texas," featuring young and articulate Texas architects from outside Houston. For more information, telephone the office of the Houston Chapter AIA at 713/622-2081.

Jan O'Brien



Hard Rock Cafe, 1985, Tigerman Pugman McCarry, architects, (above) drawing of front elevation, (left) drawing of side elevation (Courtesy Tigerman Pugman McCarry)



Soft Image for Hard Rock

What do London, New York, Chicago, L.A., Honolulu, and Houston have in common? A love of great home cooking and rock and roll, according to Peter Morton, owner of the Hard Rock Café opening this September on Kirby Drive. Founded in 1971 in London, the "Smithsonian of Rock and Roll" is big business, and not a cookie-cutter chain. Each building is a separately commissioned work; Houston's was designed by Stanley Tigerman of Tigerman Pugman McCarry with Ray Bailey Architects as associate architect.

The rather staid, very "southern," classically ordered exterior with its veranda and shuttered French doors seems an unlikely home for Elvis Presley's cape and Z.Z. Top's guitar, but Mr. Morton is willing to bet that aging baby boomers prefer their nostalgia mixed with mahogany. He also is placing his money on Tigerman, who is designing the Chicago and Honolulu restaurants as well.

Jan O'Brien

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Caution, reader. If you want the dispassion of scholarship or the investigative scrutiny of journalism, look elsewhere. This is a lover's lament.

Above: Inside and outside: *Parties* of the Spanish Governor's Palace, 1749, restored, 1930

Above: Urban development clustered around open spaces: Main Plaza

Top: Good pedestrian environment design: a section of the River Walk built in the 1930s.
Bottom: Woeful neglect: Brackenridge Park

Some Straight Talk

Sherry Kafka Wagner

To me, San Antonio is, and always will be, a special place. That is why I find this piece difficult to write. Perhaps my vision is clouded since I only light in the city from time to time. Perhaps circumstances in San Antonio are better than I think. I hope so, for as I perceive it, the city's present condition is sad. San Antonio matters to me. Although I no longer reside there, I have an immoderate devotion to the place, deep gratitude for all the city taught me and the pleasure it has given me, and a serious concern for its present and future.

San Antonio is a city with character. As southwestern cities go, it is an old town. While Texas noisily announces its 150th anniversary this year, San Antonio is quietly celebrating its 268th birthday. It is a century older than most Texas cities, and the difference does not end there. What makes the place distinctive? For me, the answer lies in three elements and their pattern of continuous interaction: the physical form of the city, its history and heritage, and the fact that its population has always been diverse, never homogenous.

To discuss San Antonio, one must always go back in time. In fact, it sometimes seems that the past is the best thing about the city. San Antonio has a rich and varied history, the stuff of song and myth, and traces of those lost days still linger in the streets. It is possible to sit on a river bank that looks as it did when nomadic Indians camped there; enter simple houses built and used by the first settlers; worship in old Spanish missions; explore the fort where Gerónimo was held prisoner; visit a parish church which Colonel Robert E. Lee helped to build; stroll through the plaza where the first cattle drives were organized; see the spot where barbed wire, the invention that would change the face of the west, was first demonstrated; order a beer where Teddy Roosevelt drank with his Roughriders; and gaze down on the river from a bridge that served O. Henry as the setting for a story. The city's history cannot be denied.

When first confronted with San Antonio's

array of irregularly shaped lots and convoluted streets, visitors tend to experience the city as haphazard and unplanned. Not so. This settlement site was chosen by the cool and practiced eye of Spanish missionaries who understood that only careful planning and building would ensure survival in this semi-arid land so distant from the supply centers of Mexico. The Spanish chose this place because there was ample water and a terrain suitable for a gravity-flow irrigation system. "Here," Father Antonio Olivares wrote, "and nowhere else."

Following the land contours that slowly dropped from little hills in the north and west to the flat lands of the east and south, the colonists laid out a water system that, when completed, consisted of seven canals and a number of dams and aqueducts. It watered several thousand acres. The land was divided into long narrow lots called *suertes*, which ran between the canal and the river or creek. As a property right, each *suerte* carried with it a water allotment to be used in a designated time period. The watercourses influenced the land patterns, and the irregularly shaped lots resulted in winding, twisting roads. In San Antonio, the grid pattern of Spanish colonial towns was modified by the primacy of water needs.

From the city's founding in 1718 until 1899 when the city abolished the office of canal commissioner and established the office of street superintendent, the canals - together with the river and creek that fed them - were the most prominent physical feature of the city. Except for a few stray remnants around town, the canals are no longer visible, but the city form still reflects their existence.

Because of this unusual development concept, San Antonio is not an easy city to comprehend. It is physically complex, revealing itself in stages and providing unexpected vistas, arresting spatial sequences, surprising points of visual terminus. It is a city of complexity, ambiguity, and subtlety, attributes that derive from its original plan.

I speak, of course, of the central city, that part contained within Loop 410. For the parts of the city presently being created around and beyond the loop in the familiar urban sprawl, there is no meaningful planning. It is happening as it happens, without guidance and direction and only the barest minimum of standards and controls. These new suburbs have little in common with the older city from which they derive. They are simply another manifestation of that monotonous and predictable American landscape Steven Spielberg uses for the setting of his films about exploding houses and alien infestation. Today's suburb-sprawling San Antonio looks on planning as antithetical to growth, a rather ironic situation considering that, without careful planning, there would be no city to grow.

Spanish city-making skills extended beyond the water engineering learned from the Moors. As designers, the Spanish were particularly sensitive to the integration of the natural and built environments. This principle of a planned, harmonious, interactive relationship between inside and outside, between what is growing and what is built, has continued as a motif in the design of San Antonio residences from the earliest houses to the most recent. This same principle is apparent in the city's early urban design where development was densely clustered around large open spaces. This design concept has endowed the city with a number of plazas and parks in the downtown and center city. Downtown contains Main Plaza, Military Plaza (although City Hall was built in its center), Alamo Plaza, Romana Plaza, Travis Park, Milam Park, Columbus Park, and Maverick Park. The center city has additional open space in King William Park, Mahncke Park, Madison Square Park, Crockett Square, and the larger Roosevelt and Brackenridge parks.

While the design principle of contextual and environmental integration has endured in the design of residences, it seems to have been abandoned in recent

San Antonio urban design. The last example of this principle was the development of the Paseo del Río, San Antonio's famed River Walk. The design and development of the River Walk is actually an example of communal folk art, the result of contributions by many minds, talents, and crafts over a number of years. Perhaps that is why it conveys the environmental sensitivity so conspicuously absent in city development during the last 20 years.

Not only has this urban design principle been lost, but the urban spaces that exist are, for the most part, woefully neglected. Brackenridge Park, a splendid, heavily-used, 370-acre city asset, is heartbreakingly tattered and strained. Not only is the city failing to perpetuate the tradition of good urban design, it is, through neglect, eroding the quality of the good urban spaces it has inherited.

The River Walk itself is in danger of being loved to death. Now that it is recognized as a priceless asset, it is being exploited without mercy or thought. First, a pond-like extension was made into the HemisFair grounds in 1967. Devices installed to keep the water moving through this still channel either do not work or there is no money to maintain them. Hence the natural movement of the river's current has been slowed. Soon after this construction, a flood retainer gate was relocated so the tourist boats could make a complete loop without turning. This resulted in more slowing of the river's movement. Famed for more than 200 years as a source of clean water, the river now moves too slowly to cleanse the water as it once did. And this is occurring at a time when urbanization and ever-building river use is increasing the dirty runoff into the river. Recently, a teacher showed his seventh-grade class a river film made some years ago. The youngsters were convinced the filmmaker had "doctored the film." "The water looks too clean," they protested.

At this moment, another pond-like extension is under construction, financed by the city through an Urban



Top: Sleek suburbs and glass towers: (left) Reunion Square, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, 1986 and (right) Airport Center, Harwood K. Smith and Partners, 1986. Bottom: San Pedro Avenue and Loop 410, (center) Two SASA Center, Lloyd Jones Brewer and Associates, 1983 and (right) SASA Center, Hellmuth, Obata and Kassabaum, 1980

Houston Street vignettes, clockwise from top: RepublicBank Plaza incorporating façade of demolished Texas Theater, Ford, Powell and Carson and Fisher and Spillman, 1985; view from Houston Street Bridge toward River Walk and Holiday Inn construction site; view south on St. Mary's Street toward octagonal Smith-Young Tower; and Frost Brothers, Harvey L. Page, 1930

About the Old Town

Photography by Paul Hester

Development Action Grant from the federal government. This extension will serve as the centerpiece for Rivercenter, a shopping mall being developed by Williams Realty Corporation of Tulsa on a multiblock site east of Alamo Plaza and designed by Hellmuth, Obata and Kassabaum and Ford, Powell and Carson. What effect will the new extension have on the river? Will the current move even more slowly? And who will pay the considerable expenses for maintaining the devices that keep the water moving, the developer or the citizens? I wonder.

Since the photogenic river has become famous, the land along its banks has significantly increased in value. In order to maximize the use of this expensive land, ever-larger buildings seem destined to rise beside the little waterway that is depressed 15 to 20 feet below street grade. Already the delightfully idiosyncratic Texas Theater was demolished so the mundane RepublicBank Plaza could rise on its riverside site. It seems that in today's feverish climate all that matters is getting the construction cranes into the air. If questions are provoked by projected riverside plans, questions of scale, context, environmental fit, quality of design, appropriateness of materials, damage to trees and vegetation, these are immediately put aside if there is resistance on the part of the developer. When the Holiday Inn's 24-story structure was rejected by the city's River Walk Commission in 1984 because of such considerations, the corporation hired Jane Macon, an ex-city attorney now working for Fulbright and Jaworski. Representatives of the architects, Walk Jones and Francis Mah, came from Memphis to tell the commissioners that it would be too costly to make major changes in their plans. Result? The building is under construction without major modifications.

These first two buildings are just the beginning: more are planned. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is standing by, eager to complete its "flood controlling" of the river by working on the Paseo del Río. And within the next three years, the

Convention and Visitors Bureau says that the number of hotel rooms in the city will double, spilling twice as many visitors onto the River Walk. Poor little river. It has gone through hard times before, but this is the first time it has been a victim of success.

Throughout its checkered history, San Antonio has drawn considerable strength from the fact that it is a city of diversity. When it was a tiny wilderness outpost, it boasted a population of Spaniards, Mexicans, Indians of different nations, and Canary Islanders. Small as the settlement was, it had three separate parts: the presidio, the mission, and the villa. As the city developed, waves of immigrants swept in - Irish, German, Yankee, Alsatian, and many others. Each group added buildings, neighborhoods, and texture to the cityscape. When Frederick Law Olmsted visited San Antonio in 1856, the man who would gain fame as the designer of Central Park wrote, "We have no city, except perhaps New Orleans, that can vie, in point of the picturesque interest . . . with San Antonio." He went on to describe the city as "closely built." This quality of a cohesive urban fabric woven from many cultural strands was characteristic of the central city until well after World War II. People lived in a variety of neighborhoods tucked into and around the lively downtown, each neighborhood possessing its own particular ambience. Then the federally financed Urban Renewal program came along during the 1960s and obliterated a number of these places. A residential area with a character much like that of the King William neighborhood was razed to make way for HemisFair Plaza, a place which has proven to be one of the city's most glaring and costly disasters. (Currently a UDAG grant is being used to build a hotel there in hopes of rescuing a portion of this wasteland.) Another residential neighborhood was cleared from the land south of the Market. When an Italian-American neighborhood was destroyed northwest of downtown, a former city manager told me his aged mother was heartbroken. She died soon after being evicted from her home.

The story goes on. But the national sins of Urban Renewal are so numerous, so obvious, so often relected, and so sad that it seems pointless to recount the particular San Antonio transgressions except to say that San Antonio, like other American cities, suffered from the very mechanism that was designed to help it. In San Antonio, the besetting sin is not that many good buildings were lost, although that is certainly true, but that so many functioning neighborhoods were obliterated. Downtown and center-city housing was destroyed with very little housing put back. The closely woven fabric of the central city had held firmly for more than 200 years. Badly torn by Urban Renewal, it is now unraveling.

When I chose to live in San Antonio - and I picked the city quite deliberately - I selected it because it offered more choices than any other Texas city. I had choices of where and how to live: suburb or downtown, old or new neighborhood, single or multi-family housing. I had choices of transportation: automobile, a decent and reliable bus system, and - surprise of surprises - I could even walk! My shopping choices were not limited to selecting one mall or strip center over another. There was viable retail in downtown and in some neighborhoods. Furthermore, this range of choices offered was not constrained by my age and income, as it would have been in other cities. Many San Antonio neighborhoods had a mix of incomes and ages and, in some rare cases, a mix of races as well. Sadly, I have watched these choices diminish with the slow dissolution of the central city. A Texas publication, self-designated for rich people, recently reported that the future of San Antonio resides in its northwest quadrant. Perhaps that is the belief of the town's movers and shakers. Perhaps that is why they allow the central city to be nibbled away in little rodent-like bites of destruction.

Everywhere the older city is under siege. Even the locally designated historic neighborhoods, for which special planning controls exist, are not safe. Recently the affluent Monte Vista

neighborhood was horrified when Trinity Baptist Church, grown into a mega-sized operation, decided to tear down nine houses and build a parking garage as an addition to its already sizeable real-estate holdings. The neighborhood fought back, and the mayor and city officials negotiated a plan for seven of the nine to be destroyed. The neighborhood took its case to the city council and lost. The church will spare only two houses and build its parking garage on the site where the other seven once stood.

Nowhere is the decline of the central city more evident than in the streets of downtown. Not long ago, the sidewalks were active and attractive while the river below was neglected and forgotten. Now the pretty River Walk hums with activity while the pedestrian streets above are dirty, sad, depressing, frightening, crowded with overloaded bus stops, and pock-marked by vacant retail space. As Tennessee Williams wrote, "The tables have turned with a vengeance."

Since the decline of downtown has come later in San Antonio than in other cities, one might hope the city would profit from the sobering examples of other towns and attempt to correct this situation before it gets worse. San Antonio's once well-integrated downtown seems to be breaking into separate and discrete activity nodes with ugly wasted streets separating rather than linking them. There are office and commercial districts along Commerce and Soledad streets where the sidewalks consist mostly of curbs for drive-in banks and parking garages; a tourist area down by the Alamo, the Convention Center, and the large hotels; an ancillary tourist area in the Market area; and a government center around the county courthouse and the city hall. The integrated use pattern of downtown is rapidly pulling apart into a system of autonomous and isolated zones. What action has been taken? The city is using UDAG funds to create Rivercenter on the eastern edge of downtown, which, one presumes, will be aimed at tourists and conventioners, since Fiesta Plaza, built last year on a huge tract of



Top: Contemporary public design: Midtown Garage, Ford, Powell and Carson, 1985. Bottom: Old neighborhoods: King William Street

Top: Past public design: (left) U.S. Post Office, Paul Philippe Cret and Ralph H. Cameron, 1937. Bottom: Under siege: housing demolished for a church parking garage in Monte Vista

Top: City center housing destroyed: view southwest from Market Square toward land cleared by Urban Renewal and Interstate highway construction. Bottom: Central city fabric now unraveling: Fiesta Plaza, Richard Moore, 1985

cleared land on the western edge of downtown, is intended to serve low-income shoppers from the West Side. Market segmentation according to the "targetting" of defined class and income groups is complemented physically by the creation of self-contained, enclosed, suburban malls constructed on the sites of former, central-city neighborhoods. Meanwhile, Houston Street, downtown's principal retail corridor, is dying.

Recently San Antonio received a \$20 million Urban Mass Transit Administration grant to deal with the transportation problems of downtown, including the impoverished pedestrian environment. I have my fingers crossed, but optimism is restrained by the fact that, for the last 20 years, the quality of San Antonio's public design projects has been mediocre at best. In the past there was fine public architecture in San Antonio: the Bexar County Courthouse by James Riely Gordon; the Municipal Auditorium by Atlee B. and Robert M. Ayres, George Willis, and Emmert T. Jackson; and the U.S. Post Office by Paul Philippe Cret and Ralph H. Cameron. When these are compared to such contemporary efforts as the Arena, Convention Center, and Lila Cockrell Performing Arts Theater; Riverside, Market, Midtown, and Convention Center garages; and HemisFair Plaza, one wonders how the standards for public design have become so lax.

Just as there was good public architecture in the past, there has been good pedestrian environment design in the past. The River Walk sets a high standard for the new work to follow. While the street-environment design should not - and could not - be the same, it certainly should be as good. That is a tall order, one that will be satisfied only if the quality of the design is made the foremost consideration, ahead of politics, cronyism, individual preferences, institutional and department rivalry, lobbying, egotism - all those factors that have played a role in reducing the city's design record from good to dreadful.

Sometimes this good old city reminds me of an aging actress prattling on about her glorious past and waving press clippings in the air, oblivious to the fact that her good looks are tarnished and faded, becoming a memory. At other times I imagine the city as the heir to a fortune, blithely spending his inheritance without once considering that when it is gone, it is gone for good. These thoughts make me sad, downhearted. Then I remind myself that San Antonio is the home of Emily Edwards and Ernie Cortés. That means it has a chance.

It is fitting that a San Antonio family gave the word "maverick" to the English language. Because the population has always been so various, the city never has lacked for outsiders who speak up. Emily Edwards and Ernie Cortés are two such leaders. I was fortunate enough to know both of them, and they continue to inspire me.

In the early 1920s, Emily Edwards and a handful of her women friends saved the San Antonio River from being paved over for a thoroughfare or a car park (the solution offered by a firm of professionals from Boston hired to advise the city government). The women accomplished this important task by means of a puppet show. They then formed the San Antonio Conservation Society, an organization that has continued to insist on articulating the values expressed by Mrs. San Antonio in that first puppet show: a concern for aesthetics and design quality, for the natural environment, for tradition and history, values sometimes pejoratively labeled "feminine" in our society. It was Miss Emily's contention that these values should be considered as important in public decision-making as the "masculine" values espoused by the Mr. San Antonio puppet: economy, efficiency, expediency. (That Mrs. San Antonio and the women who invented her won the argument to save the river is fortunate, for time has proven their solution to be of much greater economic benefit to the city than the short-term economic advantage offered as a solution by the professional consultants.)

The San Antonio Conservation Society works at keeping the city's decision-making processes ever-mindful of the values espoused by Miss Emily Edwards and her co-founders. Their successes have benefited the city greatly. Think of a San Antonio without the river, the missions, the King William neighborhood, and all the many other buildings and amenities that the Conservation Society has helped to save and maintain. The city simply would not be the same. It would lack the environmental character and ambiance that have burnished its image throughout the nation and made it the number-one visitor destination in Texas.

Ernie Cortés is another of the city's benefactors. In the early 1970s he saw the needs of the central-city neighborhoods on the south and west sides continually ignored. Good solid neighborhoods of hardworking people were neglected while public funds went to benefit development on the north side and the suburban fringes of the city. To correct this situation, he organized San Antonio Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS), a group that is fueled largely by the energy of women, a trait it has in common with the Conservation Society. By diligence, persistence, and confrontation, this group has made the community aware of the importance of human needs and has established itself as a voice in the city. Because of COPS's efforts, life has improved in the once-neglected neighborhoods, and COPS is helping to keep the central city from being completely forgotten.

Few cities have more effective activists than Ernie Cortés and Emily Edwards, persons outside the power circles who are not afraid to fight on behalf of the city. Such leaders are needed today to declare that the economic dynamics of a city that is a historical and cultural center are different from those of cities that are commercial, banking, industrial, or transportation centers. Maybe those new voices will point out that the economic development in such a city must be approached differently from those other models. The city's past - and I include all

the parts of that past: principles, standards, practices, as well as buildings and events - is too meaningful to be exploited only for the sale of hotel rooms. It is living heritage: to be protected, learned from, built on, extended. The success of any part of the city, even those slick suburbs and glass office towers in the northwest, is linked to the destiny of San Antonio's historic heartland. As the center city goes, so goes the entire community - eventually.

San Antonio cannot afford to stumble on with no effective planning, no effective design standards, no effective environmental controls, no effective mechanisms to encourage housing development in the center city, no effective protection for the river, for downtown, for neighborhoods. There is too much at stake to let this good place slide into environmental mediocrity for the short-term economic benefits of a single generation of entrepreneurs.

Perhaps my hoped-for leaders will bring such a message and turn around the present situation. It has happened before. San Antonio is still a special place. With leadership and commitment, it has a chance to stay that way. ■



A New School of San Antonio Architecture Emerges

VIVA! San Antonio

Melanie Young

Founded in 1718 as a Spanish mission station, San Antonio is one of the oldest American cities west of the Mississippi. Among large Texas and southwestern cities it is unusual not only for its antiquity, but because it has long been perceived as possessing a special character - exotic, romantic, eccentric, picturesque.

From the late 19th century onwards San Antonio has prized this character, celebrating it in guidebooks and with its spring Fiesta, an elaborate civic festival commemorating the heroism of the Alamo and of Texas's independence with a theatrical, colorful display of the city's cultural heritage - its German, Anglo, French, and above all, Spanish and Mexican roots. San Antonio has always been a city where extravagant gestures and colorful personalities translate into legend - from Davy Crockett to Teddy Roosevelt to the outspoken, charismatic O'Neil Ford, probably the only person in the United States to be declared an official National Landmark.

Yet oddly enough, the earliest attempts to express San Antonio's special character through architecture were made by outsiders: Cyrus L. W. Eidlitz of New York responded to the city's "exotic" Hispanic past with his San Antonio National Bank Building of 1886, decorated with Moorish detail; Otto Kramer of St. Louis used vestigial Spanish Baroque ornament on the upper reaches of the City Hall (1890) on Military Plaza; and the Alamo was the stated source for the splendid Southern Pacific Company Passenger Station of 1902, a Mission style complex of buildings designed by two San Francisco architects. Only after the turn of the century did San Antonio architects begin to acknowledge the possibility of local tradition with Mission and Spanish Colonial style buildings, such as the International and Great Northern Railroad Passenger Station of 1907 by Harvey L. Page (modeled on the Southern Pacific); the Municipal Auditorium of 1926, with its brightly tiled domes and twin mission towers; or the 1926 Aztec Theater by the Kelwood Company, with its colorful exotic interior. These in turn became part of a larger tradition of ornate, colorful, highly decorated buildings by local architects: James Riely Gordon, Atlee B. and Robert M. Ayres, and Ralph H. Cameron, to name only the most prominent.

This larger tradition influenced the design



San Antonio National Bank Building, Cyrus L. W. Eidlitz, 1886 (Photo by Paul Hester)



Southern Pacific Railroad Station, D. J. Patterson and John D. Isaacs, 1902 (Photo by Paul Hester)

of the Paseo del Rio, conceived in 1929 by the architect Robert H. H. Hugman, but not built until 1939-1941. Its romantic Mediterranean (Spanish and classical) detailing, picturesqueness, and lush landscaping expressed, like the jazzily ornate skyscrapers going up alongside the river during this period, the city's delight in elaboration, intricacy, and theatricality. For in its heart of hearts San Antonio has always been a "baroque" city, not only in its Spanish Baroque heritage (exemplified by the sculptural decoration on Mission San José) but in its love of elaborate, exuberant, excessive detail, and all things ornate, colorful, odd, and complicated. This quality is evident not only in much of its downtown architecture, but in the meandering maze of downtown streets, in the lavishly bejeweled gowns of the Fiesta "Royal Court" as it parades by on floats, and in city politics that outsiders no longer try to understand. The "baroque" tradition in San Antonio's architecture is in part an expression of the city's complex accumulation of different cultures throughout its history. From the missions to the '20s skyscrapers to the Paseo del Rio, the baroque can be associated with "high" style and metropolitan prototypes in San Antonio's architectural history. Opposed to this, however, is the vernacular or "low" style that provided the foundation for a very different tradition, introduced to San Antonio by

O'Neil Ford when he moved there in 1939 to restore La Villita, a group of small mid-19th-century houses once inhabited by German and Anglo immigrants.

The Modernist Regional School of O'Neil Ford

The simple, vernacular, "pioneer" houses of La Villita, along with the examples of mid-19th-century domestic and rural architecture that Ford admired in Castroville and its vicinity, inspired the Modernist Regionalist tradition he helped create. Ford's approach to architecture a combination of abstracted vernacular building shapes accented with sturdy handcrafted detail, regionally available materials used "honestly" (to demonstrate their natural structural properties), modern functional planning, economy, and siting that respected the land and the climate - became enshrined in the 1950s as the correct way of building in Texas and San Antonio, overshadowing for some time the baroque tradition represented by the River Walk.

By virtue of his energetic personal charm (as much as by the merits of his buildings), O'Neil Ford fathered a school of architecture of which San Antonio, because of his presence there, was the center. Ford's charisma attracted numerous disciples: according to one local

architect, "half the architects practicing in San Antonio today spent some time working for O'Neil, and those who didn't still didn't escape his influence." The Modernist Regional school that this influence created not only shaped the practice of architecture in San Antonio during the past 30 years or so, it shaped the city's view of its own architectural history, enshrining Texas pioneer architecture as the true tradition. Ford's careful restoration of La Villita's houses to their elemental vernacular appearance can be seen as a rebuke to the picturesque, Mediterranean style of Hugman's River Walk (the two projects, constructed at the same time, intersect at the Arneson River Theater) as unauthentic and theatrical.

Ford and his disciples have produced some of San Antonio's finest buildings. In numerous, uncomplicated houses where the marriage of soft-colored masonry and weathered cedar makes them look as if they sprung from the site itself; in the way the red brick and reinforced concrete buildings of Trinity University cohere and complement the steep rocky slope where they are set; in St. Mary's Hall, a graceful school of chalky-beige brick and exposed cedar organized around a tree-filled courtyard that is framed by segmental arches - in these Ford produced the rough, low-key architecture that seems so right in its suburban settings.

But the problem with laid-back, unassertive buildings based on domestic and rural vernacular prototypes is that they don't always translate well into urban settings. They sometimes appear bland in places where a more striking public presence is called for. Nor has the Modernist Regional tradition provided an adequate vocabulary for dealing with some of the building types demanded in an urban setting - for buildings that need to be massive or tall, highly visible (especially in freeway locations or symbolic (expressive of their public role, particular subcultures, or the client's product, for example). Put another way, the school's disapproval of overt historical and cultural allusion, its distrust of monumentality, its suspicion of the public façade as deceptive and pretentious, and its insistence on abstract formal simplicity



St. Mary's Hall, Ford, Powell and Carson and Bartlett Cocke and Associates, 1968 (Photo by Paul Hester)

prevented it from developing a vocabulary that could address the plurality of San Antonio's architectural history, culture, and urban milieu.

The New School

It is the recognition of this pluralism, rather than of any one tradition, that appears to be shaping a new school of San Antonio architecture today. Although a majority of its pupils have emerged from the Ford tradition and identify it as a starting point - if not the foundation - of their work, what is noticeable about the group as a whole is that its members choose eclectically among the formal elements of Regionalism, Modernism, Postmodernism, and what they interpret as San Antonio's traditions and unique character. Postmodernism's effect has been to liberate rather than dictate: it has provided the freedom to explore and respond to the city's architectural pluralism (especially its baroque tradition) as well as an expanded vocabulary for articulating it.

Some of the characteristics of this school, which has emerged during the past six years, are sharp contrasts in color, materials, and textures; a penchant for gridded, skewed, and stepped configurations; and the use of layering as a compositional device (horizontal as well as planar layering). Common, inexpensive, or unconventional materials are used with zest and imagination, as are constructive elements (often brightly colored) in decorative or structurally exaggerated ways. It is an architecture that delights in allusion and symbolism, openly referring to local traditions, cultures, or the particular program. The references it makes are intended to draw the observer into a dialectic of meaning that contains a large element of "play" of humor, wit, irony, reversals, and patterns that cleverly interact. Such play makes for lively buildings, giving them an intense, active quality. Members of the new school also exhibit a concern for context and a commitment to careful urban design; many show a special interest in addressing the street (and the freeway) and like to emphasize the rituals of progression and arrival with carefully delineated outdoor spaces. Configuring buildings, walls, and the contours of the land itself to shape space and create a special sense of place is another widely shared practice, which in part alludes to

the courtyards, mission walls, and other semi-enclosed outdoor spaces (like the River Walk or the Alamo Enclosure) that are recurring elements in San Antonio's architecture. Besides using buildings to shape space, the new school sometimes treats buildings as oversized sculpture; there is an interest in giving buildings bold, sculptural forms drawn from Modernism, or its funkier incarnations of the 1950s. To summarize, this new school of San Antonio architecture draws on an eclectic vocabulary in creating buildings that are decorative, colorful, evocative, and formally complex.

The New School:

A Step Beyond O'Neil Ford Along with Chris Carson of Ford, Powell and Carson (the firm Ford founded), three other firms - O'Neill and Pérez; Lance,

to communicate the client's technical products and image. It reads like an oversized sculpture: a planar, gridded screen punctuated with glass-block apertures provides the backdrop for a chunky pylon and a stepped mass, connected by a steel space frame that spans above the entry. Adding wit to the building's attention-grabbing image is the company's name, "MUZAK," spelled out in giant letters applied to the face of the pylon, which is crowned by a tilted satellite dish. Though clad in rough, brown tile, the Muzak Systems Building transmits a lively architectural signal to passing drivers, an appropriate sign of itself that goes beyond the Modernist Regional aesthetic without resorting to commercial flashiness.

In designing the Straus Ranch House (1984), near Castroville, O'Neill and Pérez made the preciousness of water, which is crucial to the irrigation of this working ranch, the specific local condition that draws the building complex together. A stream channeled through an *acequia* and a series of small pools is the focus of a courtyard, shaped by the placement of the main house, guest house, and garage, a space that functions as an outdoor room in the Spanish tradition of courtyards enclosing fountains or *acequias*. The buildings' simple prismatic forms and pitched roofs allude to the mid-19th-century German-Mexican vernacular architecture of South Texas. Like the Steves House, the Straus Ranch House refers to these historical antecedents more openly than doctrinaire Modernist Regionalism sanctioned. In this project, as in others by this firm (which in 1984 became two firms, O'Neill Conrad Oppelt and Pérez Tillotson and Erfurth), an ideological loyalty to Modernist Regional forms is less important than architecturally expressing the particularity of a building's response to its context, client, and program. And although the two firms generally adhere to a muted palette of regional materials and natural colors, they

assemble their materials to create bolder, more evocative forms in order to address the particular context

Lance, Larcade and Bechtol use regional materials as one element in a vocabulary that is more eclectic and expansive than that of Modernist Regionalism. Like O'Neill and Pérez they often use these materials to create more complex, sculptural forms. Their work gains much of its impact from vivid contrasts of materials, textures, and colors. They are particularly adept at combining the low-key natural materials of the Ford aesthetic with brightly colored constructive elements, as in the chapel of the Convent of St. Scholastica in Boerne.

Here, in a simple rectangular structure focused internally on a floor-to-ceiling glass wall behind the altar which frames a view of a grove of trees, color-coded structural and servicing elements contrast with natural ones. The red- and yellow-painted steel roof trusses and lighting system, for instance, create an airy, three-dimensional grid that contrasts with the limestone side walls of the chapel. In the dialogue between natural and man-made elements that ensues, like answers like from opposed planes: the stone wall of one side echoes the stone wall opposite; the woods outside the altar window correspond to the wood wall at the back of the chapel; and the royal-blue carpet answers the red-and-yellow ceiling grid by completing the triad of primary colors. In the dynamic tension that results from the interaction of the unassertive natural elements and the bright man-made ones, the architecture becomes a metaphor for the spiritual dialogue that takes place within it.

Like Larry O'Neill, Andrew Pérez, Mike Lance, and John Larcade, Ken Bentley (of Ken Bentley and Associates) worked for Ford, Powell and Carson before starting his own firm. Bentley appears to be moving towards more sculptural, abstract

Larcade and Bechtol; and Ken Bentley and Associates - work in the spirit of Ford's Modernist Regional tradition while distancing themselves from its ideological insistence on formal simplicity, sobriety, and unassertiveness. Chris Carson's Steves House of 1965 marked the first dramatic break with tradition in its open reference to Mexican historical antecedents (including the use of actual 18th-century Mexican architectural fragments). Ford initially disapproved of the design commenting, according to Carson, that it was "so decorative it could ruin us."

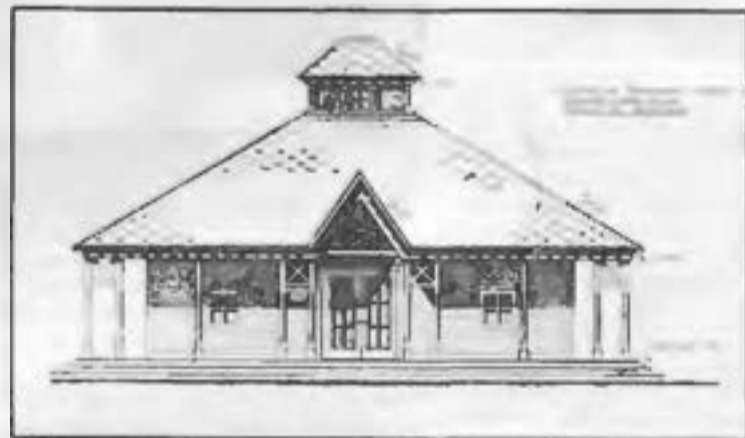
Carson's divergence from the formal precepts of Modernist Regionalism is evident in the 1983 Pace Foods plant, an industrial building (manufacturing plant, warehouse, and administrative offices) that responds to its freeway location with a strong, sleek image. Rusty orange-red awnings, window trim, and gates stand out crisply against the building's tan, stucco-finished, concrete tilt wall panels. The piquant color combination and stepped massing of the long two-story building not only add to its freeway visibility but evoke the Mexican origins of the plant's product: an orange-red Mexican hot sauce. In the Pace Foods plant Carson remained true to Ford's principles of formal and constructional economy and unpretentiousness while pursuing a vocabulary appropriate for a large industrial building along a freeway. A current project marks a further departure for Carson into color and allusion: the Fulton Beach Hotel in Rockport, which will recall a Victorian seaside hotel with its long row of narrow gables and wood siding painted in broad bands of color.

Since the early 1970s, Larry O'Neill and Andrew Pérez III, both of whom worked for Ford in the 1960s, have proceeded cautiously toward more and more formally assertive architecture. A fascination with the street, both as a site determinant and a conceptual strategy, has informed this progress. As Andrew Pérez III explains, they wanted to "put the street into buildings and create rooms outdoors" as a strategy for knitting a building into its urban surroundings.

O'Neill and Pérez's Muzak Systems Building (1983) uses the "street" as a compositional cue by addressing its freeway location with a boldness intended

Clockwise from upper left, below: Pavilion, Fulton Beach Hotel, Rockport, Ford, Powell and Carson, in design (courtesy Ford, Powell and Carson); Chapel, St. Scholastica Convent, Boerne, Lance, Larcade and Bechtol, 1980 (courtesy Lance).

Larcade and Bechtol; Bentley House, Terrak Hills, Ken Bentley and Associates, 1981, exterior and plan (courtesy Ken Bentley and Associates); Muzak Systems Building, Larry O'Neill and Andrew Pérez III, 1983 (Photos by Paul Hester)





Elevation drawing, 419 South St. Mary's Street, Alamo Architects, in design (courtesy Alamo Architects)

compositions of shapes drawn from a Modernism unalloyed by Regionalism. His compositions consist of elegant arrangements of intersecting cubes and rectangles (Oak Court Condominiums, 1980) or lean, horizontal layerings of rectilinear forms edged with slender horizontal bands to emphasize their linearity (Bentley House, Terrell Hills, 1981).

Bentley also uses his cubist geometry to manipulate light and achieve an effect he calls "transparency" - the feeling of minimal separation between inside and outside. In the Bentley House, for example, the view upon entering penetrates the long house from front to back through an enfilade of openings which frame works of sculpture in a central courtyard and in the garden at the back of the house: it is like looking through a series of transparent boxes within boxes.

Although Bentley's work is formally more complex than that of the Modernist Regional school, it maintains a connection to it through regional materials, hand-

crafted details (such as brick corbeling), and an emphasis on formal clarity and unpretentiousness.

The New School:
A Return to Baroque Traditions
Four firms, Arrow Associates, Alamo Architects, Chumney/Urrutia, and Reyna Caragonne Architects, have found in San Antonio's baroque traditions and other influences (contextualism and Post-modernism) a clear alternative to the Modernist Regional school. They do not identify its ideology as central to their work. What concerns Arrow Associates and Alamo Architects above all is context: if they use regional materials, the rationale stems from the project's surroundings rather than allegiance to the Ford aesthetic. And in responding to the context of downtown San Antonio for two planned projects, The Riverton and a residential-office development at 419 South St. Mary's Street (both unbuilt so far), each has recovered a part of San Antonio's baroque tradition: the urbane, highly decorated skyscrapers of the 1920s, such as Atlee B. and Robert M. Ayres's

neo-Gothic Smith-Young Tower and the colorful Art Deco J.M. Nix Professional Building by Henry T. Phelps, both completed in 1929.

The Riverton, by Arrow Associates (Cyrus Wagner, Sherry Kafka Wagner, and Gregory Warwick), a high-rise apartment tower planned on the River Walk, carries on the tradition of San Antonio's 1920s tall buildings with its mixed-use program and its irregular setback form, brick cladding, limestone trim, and stylized "Mayan-Deco" crown topped by a mansard roof.

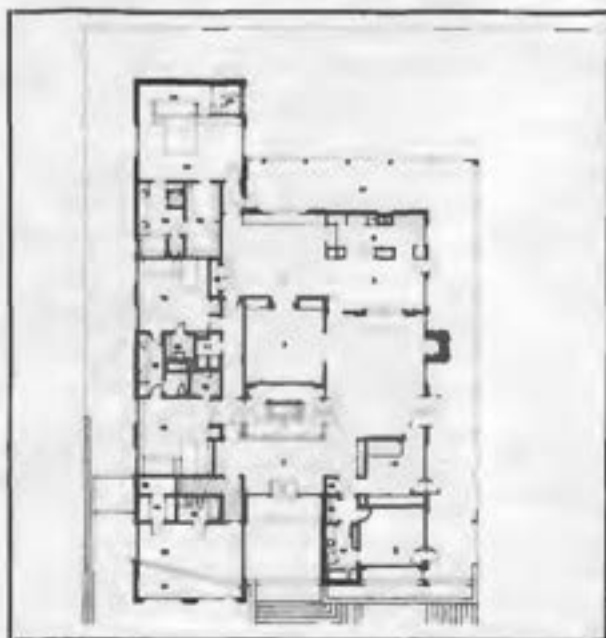
Alamo Architects (Irby Hightower, Michael Lanford, Billy Lawrence, Michael McGlone) will remodel and add another floor to a long, three-story building with narrow frontage at 419 South St. Mary's Street. Like The Riverton, this is a mixed-use residential project and it takes its contextual cues from the nearby Smith-Young Tower and the adjacent Plaza Hotel, also by Atlee B. and Robert M. Ayres. The wide bands of yellow, orange, and green that will be painted on the long

side visible from the street, and the colored tile that will decorate its street façade (a wall and gateway framing an entry court) echo the green tile of the Smith-Young Tower and the Mexican tile trimming the Plaza Hotel. The project will also allude to the Smith-Young Tower's detailing with neo-Gothic style piers, an arched gateway, and an octagonal green-roofed pavilion that crowns its façade and serves as its organizing element. With its color and decorative detail the project will take its place in San Antonio's baroque tradition of colorful buildings.

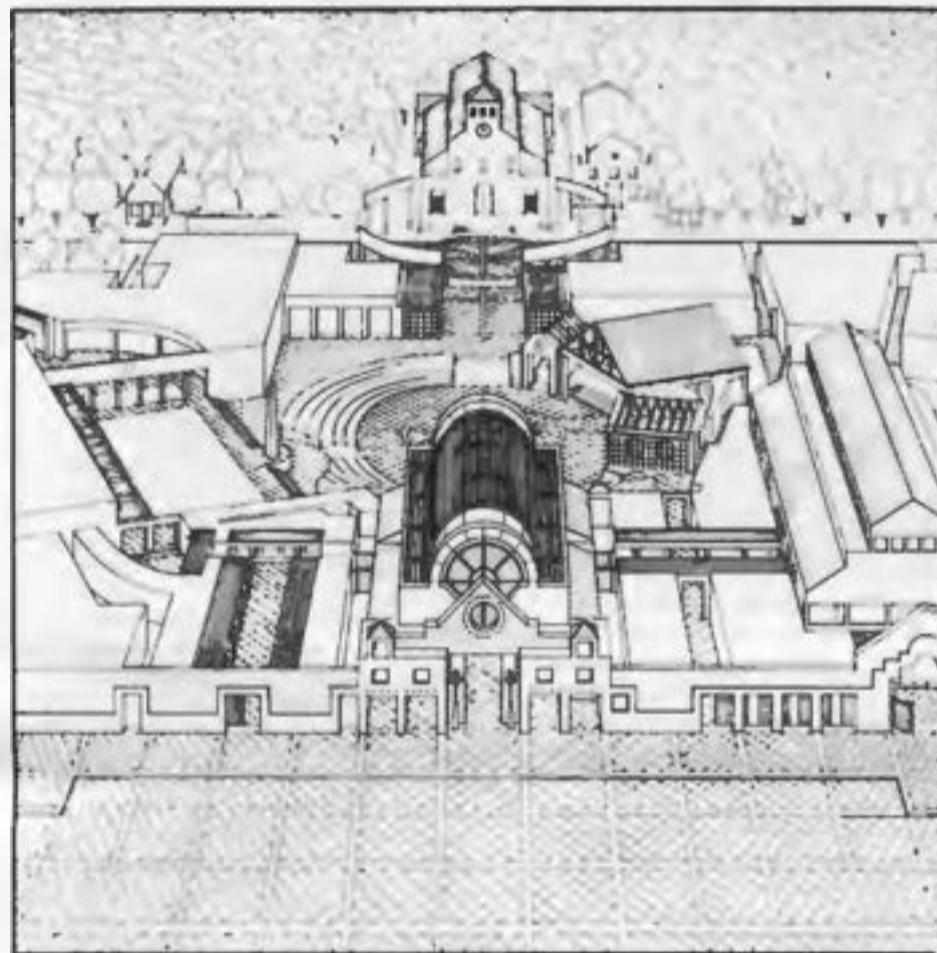
Chumney/Urrutia and Reyna Caragonne have adopted color as a key element and revel in it like merry-makers at Fiesta - Chumney/Urrutia using it in interior architectural work and Reyna Caragonne for buildings to assert a special sense of place. Walking through their projects is like entering another world, where fantasy and an atmosphere of celebration prevail.

The interiors designed by Chumney/Urrutia exhibit many of the characteristics of the new San Antonio school: brash oppositions in materials, textures, and colors; a delight in "play;" a penchant for grids, skewed elements, and planar and spatial layering; and work that is highly allusive and symbolic. Patrick Chumney and Judith Urrutia seek to create interiors with "content" - referring to the client, his product, or some key element of the program - and use inexpensive and unconventional materials with zest and ingenuity.

The opposition of vivid and muted colors prevails in the offices of the Negley Paint Company (1985), the color dialectic organized around division into reception and office areas (bright colors) and research (neutral colors). The lobby entrance, flanked by two Lucchi First chairs, greets the visitor with a dazzling array of Memphis-intense colors: black, red, blue, yellow. But what rivets attention is the undulating "river" of orange corrugated metal that seems to emerge from the blue back wall to slice through a corner of the lobby and pass through another wall. This "river of paint" sets the scene in motion: following it as it crosses over a hallway to the right, one is led in a visual dance from color to color and plane to plane, most of the surfaces punctured by niches or openings painted in contrasting colors. On the floor a checkerboard of vinyl asbestos tile, its grid slightly skewed from the right angles of the walls, shifts in color combinations as it spills across the floor. The exuberant space is the company's best advertisement.



Negley Paint Company, Chumney/Urrutia, 1985 (Photo by Paul Hester)



Clockwise from bottom left: Plaza Guadalupe. Reyna Caragonne Architects, 1984, aerial perspective (courtesy Reyna Caragonne Architects); Guadalupe Street elevation: portales;

Collins Garden Branch Library. Reyna Caragonne Architects, 1985, east elevation and view from southwest (Photos by Paul Hester)



Already an integral part of San Antonio's baroque tradition, Elias Reyna and Alexander Caragonne's Plaza Guadalupe (1985) is a colorful arrangement of shaded plazas, an open-air theater, and covered concession booths. Its brightly painted and tiled surfaces combine the festivity of a Mexican market with the ritual feeling of Hispanic courtyards and public plazas. Designed as a ceremonial plaza for outdoor festivals and events in the middle of an Hispanic neighborhood west of downtown, Plaza Guadalupe combines classical, European, and Mexican elements with a folk art-like array of colors that evoke the neighborhood and culture without resorting to kitsch. The tiled façade of the gateway structure, facing Guadalupe Street, acknowledges the use of tile on the fronts of commercial storefronts along that street, as well as on the colorful Art Deco Theater Guadalupe nearby, which Reyna Caragonne remodeled as part of the Avenida Guadalupe project. The plaza's main axis cuts through the center of the block between Leo M. J. Dielmann's Our Lady of Guadalupe Church on the north and the plain commercial structures on the south side of Guadalupe Street, symbolically spanning the project's synthesis of vernacular neighborhood elements and the baroque. Additional structures will be added to the project (a clinic by Lance, Larcade and Bechtol is scheduled for completion this year), as part of a master plan to revitalize the economically depressed neighborhood. Reyna and Caragonne were instrumental in helping the community get funding for revitalization efforts, demonstrating their commitment to addressing urban problems in San Antonio.

Reyna Caragonne's Collins Garden Branch Library (1984) displays iconic and deconstructive motifs: the masklike house-shapes above the entrance and rear elevations look as if they are about to slide upwards and away. The library uses a brilliant array of contrasting colors - violet, slate blue, yellow, eggplant, and deep green - similar to those at Plaza Guadalupe. Reyna and Caragonne explain that their foray into color and figuration was prompted by their collaboration in 1982 with Michael Graves on the San Antonio Conservation Society's plan for RepublicBank Plaza that would have saved the Texas Theater from demolition.

Chumney/Urrutia also attribute their use of color to the influence of Post-modernism, which has stimulated not only color exploration but a sense of play and exuberant celebration in the work of these firms. San Antonio has not been spared the overdose of tiresome Post-modern clichés visible in recent work in so many American cities: the northern freeway rim affords copious examples. What separates the work of this wing of the San Antonio school from such trite, superficial styling is that they use pop historical forms and allusions intelligently, purposefully, and effectively. Their architecture is experienced as joyful and as connected to its places and purposes, not merely as glib and forgettable.

The New School: Bringing It All Together
Joneskell, a large firm headed by J. Carlos Jones and John H. Kell, Jr. that evolved, as did Chumney/Urrutia, out of Bartlett Cocke and Associates (which worked with Ford on the buildings of Trinity

University and The University of Texas at San Antonio) selects freely from the elements of Modernism, Modernist Regionalism, and Postmodernism to arrive at an energetic, original synthesis of San Antonio's vernacular and baroque traditions. Joneskell's work is characterized by a vivid interplay of colors, textures, and materials, the ingenious use of inexpensive, industrial materials, as well as colorful constructive elements, a concern for contextualism, and playfulness and wit, particularly in combining elements of the different traditions in arresting ways. They also exhibit a penchant for serrated walls, triangular configurations, and stepped and gridded compositions, often infilled with tile or glass block.

The firm's Harvey Sculpture Studio (1983), which Jones and Kell call their "quintessential project," was designed for a woman who makes huge, colored, welded-steel sculptures. It is set in an industrial area filled with one- and two-story buildings, many of them prefabricated or made of inexpensive masonry such as tile block. Alluding to its context, the working studio and gallery areas are made of two double-height pre-engineered buildings whose walls - inside and out - are outlined with brightly painted steel sections and infilled with terra-cotta tile block. The barnlike forms of the Butler buildings, says Kell, with their seamed metal roofs, echo the vernacular shapes that Ford loved, while the exposed steel beams framing the walls recall Mies van der Rohe. They are painted in pure primary and secondary colors that suggest the paints used in elementary schools, a detail that adds to the playful, building-block quality of the structure.

Aztec-like stepped patterns (made by stuccoing over some of the wall tile and painting the resulting triangular areas) decorate the gable ends of the buildings below the roof line (inside and out), while square windows in a stepped configuration around the side-facing entrance cleverly reverse the pattern by turning it upside down. Through its energetic combination of colored metal constructive elements, the building expresses its role as a studio for a sculptor who works with similar materials.

Joneskell's remodeling of, and addition to, an older, one-story brick school building, now the James K. and Mary Ruble Activities Center of Trinity Baptist Church (1984), uses some of these elements, but more sedately. For the addition, the firm again took a pre-engineered metal building, outlined the outer wall panels with steel sections painted green horizontally and coral vertically, and infilled the wall not with tile but with glass block to let in light yet diffuse the view of the parking lot.

Glass block puts on a still more lively show in the serrated outer wall of the Bartlett Cocke Jr. Construction Company, where the firm was asked to design an addition compatible with the company's offices, an old wood-framed farmhouse in what is now an industrial and warehouse area. The addition was conceived as a double ribbon of glass adjoining the house and angling around a huge oak tree to create a courtyard. Its serrated glass-block walls screen out views of the adjacent industrial tract while clear mullionless glass sheets face the courtyard. Orange-red brick, the same as that used in the farmhouse's chimney, forms other

From top to bottom: Bartlett Cocke, Jr. Construction Company Building, rear view, Chumney, Jones and Kell, 1982; Harvey Sculpture Studio, Joneskell, 1983. Interior and street elevation (Photos by Paul Hester)



The library's entry court takes the triangle motif and combines it with the grid for a witty play of patterns using white tiles and the same dark-red tile found in the gridded screen walls: a large triangle made of the white tile leads to a checkerboard of white and red tile, which leads to a large triangle of red tile, and so on in a ritual dance that mounts the steps to the library and the adjoining lecture building.

The play with angles and triangles versus rectangles, squares, and grids stems from the building's response to its context: its entrance elevation faces the angular lecture building, while the rectilinear north elevation echoes the shape of the nearby medical school building. The massiveness of this side of the building is tempered by the flat, gridded screen east wall that projects out from the building several feet, as if floating in front of it. In the grid the thin vertical strips of reinforced concrete (the structural material of the building) appear light and almost insubstantial as they vertically intersect the broad bands of dark-red tile and glass block. The slender wedges of concrete sandwiching the rows of cantilevered bay windows have the same paradoxical appearance of lightness, making the obsidian glass they hold seem the stronger material.

But if the library wittily reverses the apparent densities of concrete and glass, it performs a virtuoso dance with tile, using it as wall, entry courtyard, and lobby floor surface, where it is laid in geometrically patterned rectangles resembling Navajo rugs: a large one in the middle of the lobby, a smaller one in front of the elevator, and a narrow one down a hallway. These *faux* rugs also bring to mind the tile in the gridded screen walls that seem to hover in front of the building, an association that sparks a cognitive dilemma: materials are not quite what they seem.

Joneskell produces another playful dialectic with materials at the Sarita (Continued on page 23)

connecting walls, tying the two structures together, as does the standing-seam metal pitched roof, echoing the shape of the farmhouse roof and the vernacular structures Ford admired. Exposed steel beams painted a deep slate blue outline and divide the brick and glass-block walls into panels. The color combination of the brick and steel, although more intense, recalls the red brick and blue-gray metal trim of Ford's buildings at Trinity University. "A lot of our masonry and steel vocabulary we owe to O'Neil - we just put it together differently," notes Kell.

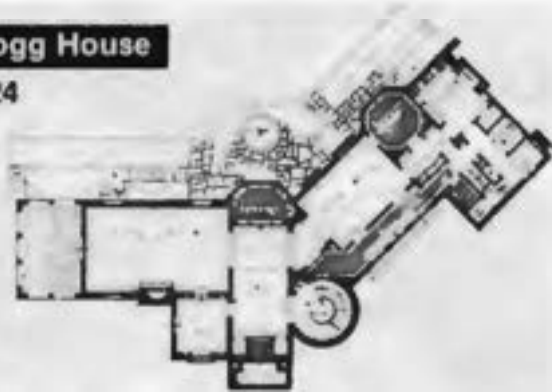
Serrated walls, tile, and glass block reappear at the Dolph Briscoe Library of The University of Texas Health Science Center (1984), a massive three-story building in the Southwest Texas Medical Center. Bands of glass block and rusty-red tile infill the large, flat, gridded east screen wall of the building, while an aggressively serrated wall of dark-tinted glass bays cantilever out from the entrance side. These three layers of dark triangular bays, alternating the angle in which they point from floor to floor, appear to be only barely restrained from shooting off into the blue by the thin layers of white concrete that support them. These jet-dark triangles suggest not only flight but the boomerang and wedge shapes of the 1950s, turned up several warps here to a new level of intensity and sophistication.



From top to bottom: Bartlett Cocke, Jr. Construction Company Building, courtyard view; Dolph Briscoe Library, The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, Chumney, Jones and Kell and Phelps and Simmons and Garza, 1982. entry court elevation; (left) detail of entry court paving; (right) detail of lobby paving (Photos by Paul Hester); below: main floor plan (courtesy Joneskell)

Hogg House

1924

*The American Architect*, 20 August 1928**Mannen House**

1926

*The American Architect*, 20 January 1929*The American Architect*, 20 August 1928

Photos by Paul Messer

The Country Houses of Atlee B. and Robert M. Ayres

John C. Ferguson

San Antonio's architectural heritage is condensed in the romantic image of the 18th-century mission church. Yet the city is as much a product of the 20th century as are Dallas or Houston. Between 1900 and 1930 San Antonio grew at a remarkable pace. Its compact central business district was largely rebuilt, with monuments of steel, concrete, brick, and terra-cotta replacing many small-scale commercial buildings. To the north of the business district there was an enormous expansion of elite residential neighborhoods. The areas known as Laurel Heights, Summit Place, and Monte Vista, which are part of the city proper, and the suburban communities of Alamo Heights, Terrell Hills, and Olmos Park, reflected San Antonio's affluence, with their numerous large houses set on commodious lots.¹



The architectural character of these new neighborhoods indicated the growing architectural sophistication of both San Antonio's professional community and its patrons. This change was brought about by a number of talented architects who followed the likes of Alfred Giles, James Wahrenberger, Albert F. Beckmann, and James Riely Gordon. Without question, the most notable, both in terms of quality and sheer output, were the father and son, Atlee Bernard and Robert Moss Ayres.

Atlee B. Ayres (1874-1969) was born in Ohio but moved to San Antonio in 1888 with his parents. He studied architecture at the Metropolitan School of Art and the Art Students League in New York City between 1890 and 1894. Between 1891 and 1898 Ayres also worked for several San Antonio architects and, briefly, for an American architect practicing in Mexico City. In 1899 he entered into a partnership with C. A. Coughlin, which lasted until Coughlin's death in 1905. Ayres then operated a very successful solo practice until 1922, when he was joined in partnership by his younger son, Robert, establishing the firm of Atlee B. and Robert M. Ayres.

Born in San Antonio, Robert M. Ayres (1898-1977) was educated at Haverford School and the University of Pennsylvania, where he received his architectural training under the Beaux-Arts curriculum established by Paul Philippe Cret. Before returning to work with his father, he also spent time in New York, in the office of Murchison, Lamb and French.

During the first two decades of the 1900s, Atlee Ayres established himself as a prolific designer of large houses in the San Antonio area. His work ranged from rather pedestrian Colonial Revival to diluted Prairie School houses.² It was not until the 1920s, and the development of what amounted to an obsession with the architecture of colonial Mexico in the United States, that the elder Ayres finally found his distinct architectural idiom.

Atlee Ayres's interest in things Mexican stemmed from a series of visits to that country which began after he returned to San Antonio from his schooling in New York. A passionate photographer, Atlee took numerous photographs on his travels to Mexico, and he also appears to have purchased photographs of Mexican subjects. His fascination with Mexican Colonial architecture led to the publication of a short article, "The Earliest Mission Buildings of San Antonio," in *The American Architect* in August 1924, and culminated in the production of a book, *Mexican Architecture*, which appeared in 1926.³ The latter work, an architectural reference book, consists mainly of photographs of churches in and around Mexico City, with a few examples of domestic architecture included as well. Given the urban settings of most of the buildings illustrated in the book, it is difficult to discern whether Ayres was exposed to the more informal hacienda complexes of the countryside, which would seem more likely models for his large suburban houses.

The first of the Spanish Colonial style houses to come off of Atlee Ayres's drafting table, the residence for Mr. and Mrs. Thomas E. Hogg, is also one of the finest of his San Antonio works.⁴ Located at 202 Bushnell Avenue and begun in 1923 (three years before Hogg's sister, Ima, began the planning of her house, Bayou Bend, in Houston), the Hogg House set a pattern which would be repeated, with variations in form and plan, in other houses which the Ayres firm would design over the next nine years. Situated on a large rectangular lot which slopes away from the street to the south, the Hogg House presents a carefully composed asymmetrical mass to the public. The main entrance is set within a projecting mass two stories in height, capped with a hipped roof clad in the ubiquitous red barrel tiles that are so much a part of this architectural style. The entrance bay is balanced by a chimney stack to its left and a monumental cylindrical stair tower to its right. The

stair tower is the most picturesque element of the composition, and it also serves as the hinge on which the plan and mass of the house pivot, with the dining-room wing being skewed at an angle to the main body of the house. It was this feature that was to become the leitmotiv of Ayres's Spanish style houses.

The Hogg House was soon followed by other Spanish Colonial style residences. Just down the street at 323 Bushnell Avenue stand the P. L. Mannen House, built in 1926.⁵ Much smaller than the Hogg House, the Mannen House makes use of a loggia situated on the south-facing street side of the house, sheltered by a tiled roof supported on broad, round arches. Climatic considerations relegated the stair to the north (back) side of the house. Nonetheless, its massing composition is hinged, with the single-story mass of the living room rotated toward the southeast, although this makes for an awkward juncture with the projecting second-floor bay above the entrance.

The following year came the commission for a residence for Mr. and Mrs. Carl D. Newton, located at 800 East Olmos Drive in Olmos Park Estates, the most elite subdivision in the garden suburb of Olmos Park.⁶ The Newton House, sited atop a superb, gently sloping lot, repeats the hinged-tower plan of the Hogg House, but with the main door situated at the base of the tower. The tower is no longer cylindrical, but squared, with the doorway set within an elaborately detailed frame.⁷

The Hogg, Mannen, and Newton houses, although set on large suburban lots, were not actually country houses. Ayres's first opportunity to design a Spanish style country house on an estate in San Antonio came in early 1927, when he was commissioned to design a residence for Marion Koogler (McNay) and Dr. Donald T. Atkinson.⁸ Today, the Atkinson House is the best known of the Ayres' many houses since it contains the McNay Art Museum.⁹

Newton House

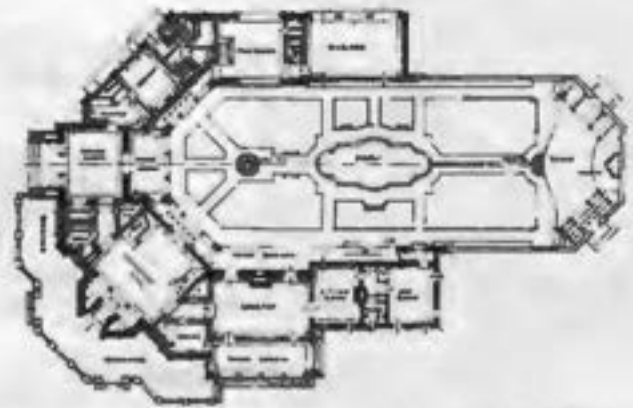
1928



2nd Floor Plan The Architectural Record, November 1929

Atkinson House

1929



House and Garden, June 1930



Photo by Paul Henner



The Architectural Drawings Gallery The Living of Texas at Austin (Photo by Harry Platt)



Photo by Paul Henner

The house was logically placed on the highest point within the 20-acre estate, situated on the undeveloped northern edge of Terrell Hills, so as to command the best view. The approach was via a winding road which led up from Old Austin Highway. The character of the site, as shown clearly in a series of remarkable aerial photographs taken soon after its completion in 1928 and now part of the collection of the Institute of Texan Cultures, was rather desolate. This fact may well have had an impact upon the

plan of the Atkinson House, since it is introverted, centered around a large, enclosed patio, complete with a walled pool and large planting beds. The house was, of course, Spanish Colonial in style, but on a larger scale than Ayres had yet attempted. Again, the central element of the main elevation is the stair tower, in this case octagonal in form and three stories tall, with the third level serving as an observation deck open to the elements through unglazed, segmentally arched openings.

The mass of the house, which wraps around most of the patio, is one room deep, with the library and dining room on the first floor opening onto arcaded loggias. Surprisingly for so large a residence, there were only three public rooms on the first floor. The entire north wing was devoted to the kitchen and its auxiliary spaces and a garage, which was separated from the other spaces by an open promenade connecting the patio to the northern grounds of the estate.

The organization of the enclosed and open spaces both in, and around, the Atkinson House is most clearly revealed in plan. The main floor includes the most entertaining aspect of the entire house, the open-air stage located at the east end of the patio, on axis with the dining room. Backed by a high stuccoed wall, the stage completes the enclosure of the patio, with the lush landscaping of the patio contributing to its theatrical atmosphere.

It is the patio which gives the Atkinson



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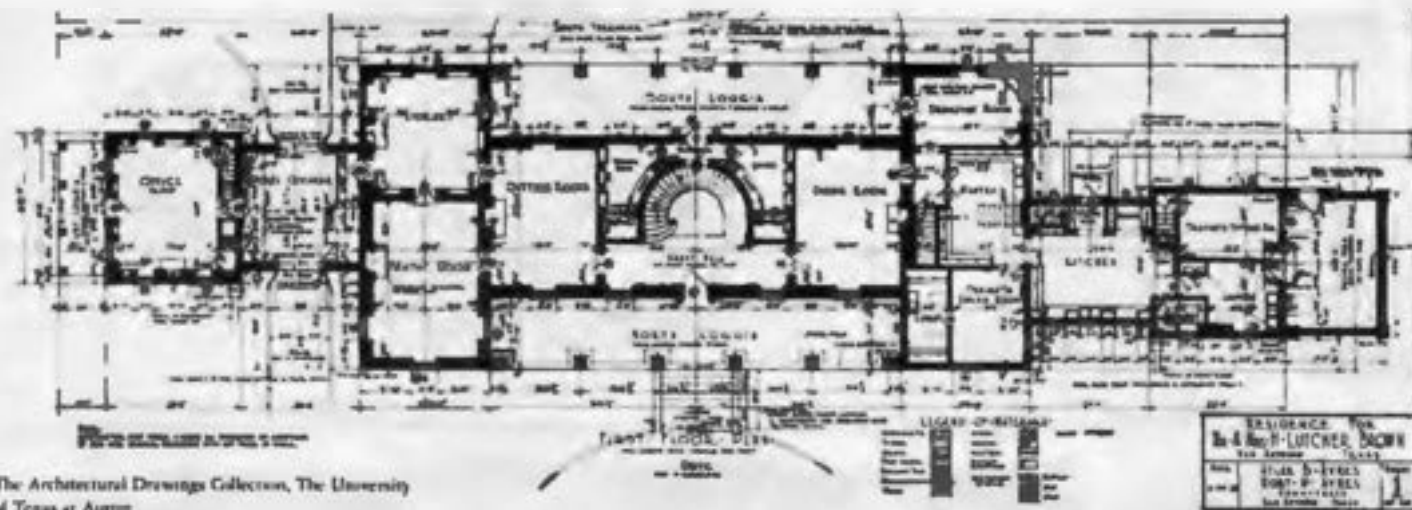
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The Architectural Drawings Collection, The University of Texas at Austin



Photo by Paul Hewitt

Oak Court

1935



Photo by C. Louis Bremer courtesy Dr. and Mrs. William Wineser

House its position of preeminence in terms of the firm's Spanish Colonial houses. The use of the patio as a private, landscaped space is a feature of many colonial Mexican houses both urban and rural, and can be traced back to Spain. Although the Atkinson House was not the seat of a hacienda, it nevertheless reflects the character of such structures in its interior-exterior spatial relationships and the quality of its detailing.

The design of these Spanish-Mexican houses can be attributed to Atlee B. Ayres. The San Antonio architect, J. Fred Bueenz, who worked as chief draftsman for the firm in the early and mid 1930s, recalls that Atlee and Robert were equal partners, except in the case of the Spanish Colonial style designs, where the elder Ayres assumed full control.

By the end of the 1920s, Robert had begun to handle major commissions, including the firm's best-known commercial building, the octagonal, 35-story Smith-Young Tower, completed in 1929. But he was also responsible for two large-scale country houses, one for Governor and Mrs. Frank Buttram in Oklahoma City, which was completed in 1938 and now houses the Oklahoma Museum of Art; the other, a commission dating from 1934, for Mr. and Mrs. H. Luther Brown.

The Brown House commission was initially conceived as another Spanish-Mediterranean production, but the clients decided on Georgian instead, which led to Robert's control over the design. Emily Wells and H. Luther Brown were moving to San Antonio from Houston (where they occupied an unremarkable Colonial Revival house designed by Joseph W. Northrop, Jr.¹⁰) on the advice of a physician who was treating one of their children for an asthmatic condition. Brown purchased 24 acres on Ivy Lane in the center of Terrell Hills as a site for their new house.

Although Brown was involved in a number of business ventures, it was his paper-making plant and associated timber lands in Louisiana which were his primary source of income. In the early discussions of the character of the house design, Brown made specific mention of the plantation house built near Vacherie, Louisiana for Jacques Telesphore Roman between 1832 and 1836, now known as Oak Alley. Although the Brown House did not imitate any elements of Oak Alley,

the clients did make reference to it in naming their San Antonio residence Oak Court, and in planting an *allée* of live oak trees leading up to the house from the gates on Ivy Lane.

The Brown House is situated in the center of the estate, with the north-south axis of the plan of the grounds bisecting the house. The house resembles a flattened H in plan. Inset porches on both the entrance and garden façades are framed by six unfluted Ionic columns which rise unencumbered to the cornice. Two small wings flank the east and west ends of the main block, the east wing housing Brown's office on the first floor, separated from the body of the house by a porte-cochère; and the west wing containing the kitchen and laundry. The east wing is given special prominence on the exterior with a veranda copied from Mount Vernon. The entrance court is flanked on the east by the housekeeper's residence and on the west by one of two garages. To the south of the house is a long, rectangular lawn leading to the swimming pool, which is sited in front of a small, but elegantly detailed, bath house. This was the sort of organization to be expected from an architect trained in a Beaux-Arts architectural program such as that which Robert experienced at Penn.

The composition of the design for Oak Court cannot be linked to any specific historic prototype, although some of the detailing was copied directly from 18th-century American Georgian sources. The monumental front door frame is an enlarged version of the front door frame of the Matthias Hammond House in Annapolis, Maryland, designed by William Buckland and built in 1774. The mantle piece in the music room was copied from a mantle in Gadsby's City Tavern in Alexandria, Virginia.

In contrast to the Spanish Colonial style houses of his father, Robert's design for Oak Court is entirely based upon an orthogonal series of axes and cross-axes centered on the house. The landscaping of the site, carried out by J. P. McNeil under the close supervision of H. Luther Brown, is also governed by these linear axes, with the sole exception of the rambling paths on either side of the swimming pool.

Although he did not actually prepare any drawings for the house, H. Luther Brown did exert strong and constant influence on the character of the design, visiting the

firm's office in the Smith-Young Tower on a daily basis to inspect drawings. As the house neared completion at the end of 1935, Brown oversaw the design of the wrought-iron gates to the estate, which feature his initials in a centrally placed cartouche, in a sense personally signing the final product.¹¹

Robert's other major country house project in San Antonio, the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert H. Denman, Jr. of 1936-1937, is not nearly as formidable as Oak Court. The Denman House, located near Horizon Hill, clearly reflects a knowledge of Louisiana plantation architecture with its portico of eight Tuscan columns supporting a second-story veranda with cast-iron railings. As is the case with Oak Court, the Denman House is set far back from the road, to be viewed from a distance, as if it were a plantation house. The house is about half the size of the Browns' residence.

With some exceptions, the Great Depression closed the books on the construction of such large-scale residences in and around San Antonio. Atlee and Robert Ayres were to maintain a close association with some of these houses, designing an addition to the Hogg House in the 1950s which is almost impossible to distinguish from the original.

Fortunately, the houses themselves have survived, albeit with changes in use in the case of the Atkinson and Brown houses. They reflect a way of life and a quality of craftsmanship which are no longer extant. The firm's work in domestic architecture is only now receiving the recognition it deserves as a major component of San Antonio's rich architectural heritage. ■

Acknowledgments

The author wishes to express his appreciation to the following individuals who assisted in the preparation of this article: Lila Stillson, curator of The Architectural Drawings Collection of The University of Texas at Austin for allowing ready access to drawings in the Atlee B. and Robert M. Ayres Collection and for sharing her knowledge of the firm; J. Fred Bueenz AIA Emeritus, for recounting his experiences in the design of the Brown House; Dr. and Mrs. William Wineser for their accounts of the planning of the Brown House; Dr. James Wagoner, president of The University of Texas at San Antonio, for granting permission to tour the Brown House; Stephen Fox, for sharing his research on San Antonio architecture; and Mark A. Hewitt for encouragement in writing this article.

Denman House

1937



Photo by Paul Hewitt

Notes

- 1 Bracketed by McCullough and San Pedro avenues, Laurel Heights, Summit-Ridge, and Monte Vista were laid out sequentially between 1890 and 1920. Abutting Monte Vista to the east is the smaller addition of Laurel Heights Terrace (1908). The first subdivision in what became the town of Alamo Heights was laid out in 1890. Terrell Hills, to the east, began to be developed in 1911; Olmos Park, which lies on the west rim of the Olmos Basin, was not laid out until 1927. Alamo Heights was incorporated in 1912; Terrell Hills and Olmos Park each in 1939.
- 2 Between 1911 and 1913 George Willis, who had been trained in the Oak Park Studio of Frank Lloyd Wright, worked for Ayres and it seems likely that he was responsible for the Prairie School designs.
- 3 "The Earliest Mission Buildings of San Antonio," *The American Architect*, vol. 126, 27 August 1924, 171-178 and *Mexican Architecture, Ecclesiastical, Civil, Domestic*, New York: William Helburn, Inc., 1926. Ayres was the only Texas architect to publish an architectural reference book, a type especially popular in the United States during the 1920s.
- 4 "The House of Thomas E. Hogg, San Antonio, Texas," *The American Architect*, vol. 134, 20 August 1928, 237-239.
- 5 "House of P. L. Mannen, San Antonio, Texas," *The American Architect*, vol. 135, 20 January 1929, 132-138.
- 6 "A House of Distinction in San Antonio," *House and Garden*, vol. 34, August 1929, 89-91.
- 7 Other Spanish style houses by Atlee B. and Robert M. Ayres are the Sheldon House (1925), 331 Wear Kings Highway; the Robert M. Ayres House (1927), 207 Laurel Heights Place; the Carruth House (1927), 218 Laurel Heights Place; the Chadwick House (1929), 114 Park Hill Drive, Olmos Park; the Pagenstecher House (1926), 502 Elizabeth Road, Terrell Hills; and the Kelley House (1928), 199 Wyckham Rise, Terrell Hills. In addition, the firm designed two extremely large Spanish style houses employing the hipped-tower plan: the Roberts House (1927-1929) in Kansas City and the Brown House (1931) in Oklahoma City.
- 8 "Nature and Man Combine to Produce the Romantic Atmosphere of Old Spain," *House and Garden*, vol. 57, June 1930, 100-103.
- 9 Marion Koogler established the Marion Koogler McNay Art Institute (now the McNay Art Museum) at her death in 1950, bequeathing her house to serve as the museum building. The patio has been completely enclosed with a series of gallery additions made during the 1970s, all designed by Ford, Powell and Carson.
- 10 Northrop's Brown House, at 1715 South Boulevard, was published in *House and Garden* in June 1930 on the pages preceding the presentation of the Atkinson House.
- 11 In 1965 Emily Wells Brown presented Oak Court to The University of Texas as a memorial to her husband's family. It is now called the Luther Center and presently is undergoing rehabilitation.

Houston Fine Art Press Building

Wilhelm Hahn

The Houston Fine Art Press, producers of art books, high-quality art printing, and graphic editions by such visitors as Richard Diebenkorn and Michael Heizer, is soon to occupy premises at 7336 Rampart Street, in a new building designed by Carlos Jiménez.

The setting is a ragged district of light industry and apartments beyond the barrage of traffic, advertising, and trash that is Bissonnet and Bellaire west of Loop 610. The most prominent buildings in the area are rows of flat-roofed, single-storied office warehouses, tilt-up concrete containers beside bleak delivery yards; a banal and nondescript system-built environment which seems almost immune to architectural intervention.

The design avoids perpetuating these depressed prototypes, recalling instead an earlier type, a 19th-century gable-ended industrial shed or loft. It is set back from the street to provide for a walled parking court in front and occupies the long and extremely narrow (40 feet) site in two parts. The simple double-pitched and symmetrical front, whose gable wall facing the street is relieved by a small attic window in the pediment, is set somewhat to the side to allow delivery access to the rear where the roof becomes more complex, ruptured, and asymmetric, its one face extended to form a north-light clerestory while the other bulges

below in a half barrel. The stuccoed exterior and boundary walls are painted in voluptuous shades of magenta pink.

The internal organization is reminiscent of certain Victorian row houses, but at a larger scale. A front room, which serves as exhibition space, is linked by a generous passage past administrative offices to a large back room, which occupies the full width of the site and is the printing workshop. The exhibition space and offices are contained under the unobstructed double-pitched roof of the front section, whose interior space is visually continuous from the entrance in front, over the storage walls of the offices which masquerade as miniature buildings, to the rear where it can be seen to develop into the more complex section of the workshop. It is a restrained and elegant space whose generous volume, contained by the unadorned surfaces of walls and ceiling and lit by reflected daylight from the large windows along the passage, shelters the exhibition area and work places below, evoking the simple grandeur of an early Christian basilica.

It is a pity that the by-now-almost-obligatory glass blocks that round the

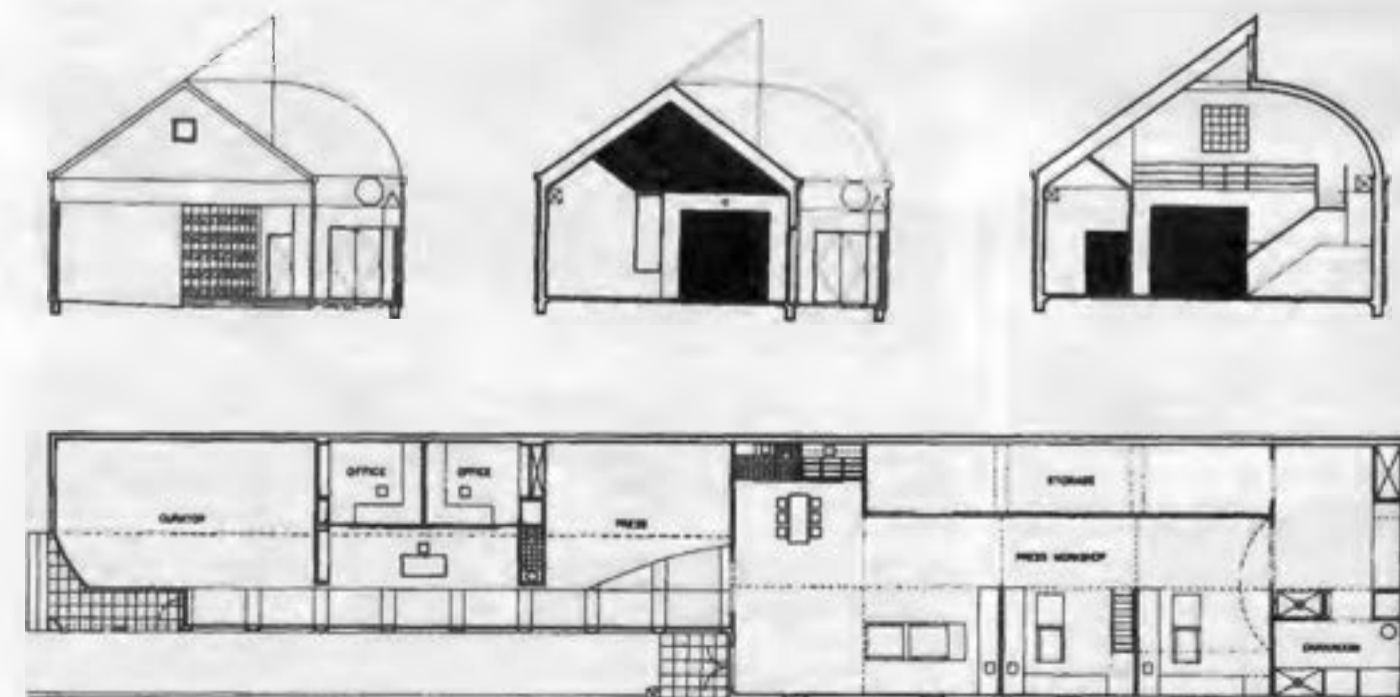
corner of the exhibition space at the entrance are so prosaic. Similarly, at the plane where the two main sections meet one would expect some significant resolving order but finds instead a scatter of devices.

However, the workshop itself is a handsome space. At its center line, the clerestory casts light into the open roof of a storage area which shelters under the sloping ceiling on one side, while on the other the presses are accommodated under the concave surface of the half barrel. A late revision has closed the roof of the storage area, destroying an ingenious spatial relationship but admittedly serving the practical function of reflecting more light into the main work space. Against the gable wall, with its one large attic window facing west, a mezzanine work area and library are planned under the curved ceiling.

The design is spatially subtle and inventive, underplaying construction and surface texture or ornament with a modesty that is appropriate to its surroundings and to its, after all, pragmatic functions. It stands like a little outpost of the faith beside its barbaric neighbors. ■



Left: Houston Fine Art Press Building, Carlos Jiménez, 1986 (Photo by Paul Hester). Below: Elevation and sections (courtesy Carlos Jiménez). Bottom: Plan (courtesy Carlos Jiménez)



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The Black Image Office of the Menil Foundation

Andrew Bartle

"The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit" is a classic movie about a man's adjustment to society after spending two years in combat in the Pacific. The hero, played by Gregory Peck, resumes his career in business wearing the grey flannel suit and white shirt that signify conformity and acceptance of social norms in the city. The conflict at the center of the drama is the hero's desperate need to suppress the chaos and tragic memories that erupt in his conscious and unconscious mental processes, bringing his individuality into conflict with social norms.

This conflict is analogous to the building of a city. Urban form is both individual memory and identity and the need for social convention. "The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit" sheds a peculiar light on the grey clapboard exterior walls and the white interior surfaces of the building that houses the Black Image Office, a research library and archive containing the Menil Foundation's Image of the Black Collection, which Anthony E. Frederick designed for Dominique de Menil in 1983. The building is situated within the precinct surrounding the new Menil Collection Museum, an area whose special unity derives from the nearly identical scale, style, and type of single-family house located there, a unity reinforced by Mrs. de Menil's decision to have Howard Barnstone paint the houses grey in 1974.

The expression of the individual building as Architecture (with a capital A) was questioned by Adolf Loos in an essay entitled "Architecture 1910." Loos vehemently rejected the attempts of architects to make an individual expression of Architecture as Art in every building. Architecture for Loos consisted of the Tomb and the Monument; all other construction should conform to its existing context. The image that Loos selects to illustrate his argument is that of the ubiquitous black frock coat, worn by virtually every gentleman of his day in Vienna. Architecture must rely on convention, and Loos's metaphor of the code of dress exists today in our contemporary figural expression "urban fabric." It must be noted that while Loos designed "silent" exteriors, his interiors were elaborate celebrations of building methods and materials, and of the rituals of bourgeois life.

The Black Image Office is a significant and provocative statement of urban values, of the suppression of individual self-expression in favor of contextual coherence. This institution was formed by moving a nondescript 1920s house that was originally part of the neighborhood, but on a site required for the new museum. The house was moved on rollers to the new location - an empty lot - set on a new foundation, gutted, and reconstructed internally according to the new program. The new interior is painted white throughout, the floors are natural wood, treated to be as light as possible, and the furniture is white enamel, with the exception of elegant walnut desks, designed by the architect, and several large wood tables, purchased second-hand and very simple in profile, construction, and surface. Frederick describes the interior as a sort of "zero-degree architecture." The exterior is made to conform to the surrounding buildings in color and detail and it is quite impossible to tell which windows are original and which were added by the architect.

My initial visit to the office was both intriguing and disturbing. The notion of the city indicated by both building process and form seemed to be in sympathy with pre-Modernist ideas of built conformity and with recent European attitudes toward typological transformation and collective memory, best expressed in Aldo Rossi's *The Architecture of the City*; here, the building seemed to imply, Houston is being understood as memory. The design of this institution represents a critique of

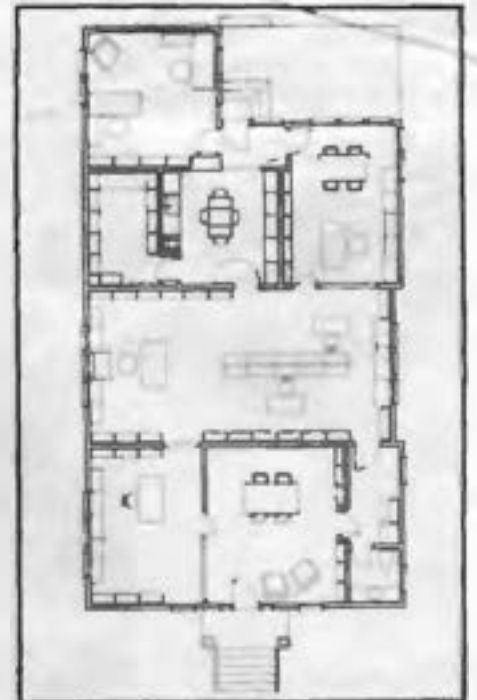


Black Image Office, Menil Foundation, Anthony E. Frederick, 1984. Top: Central room. Above: Entry vestibule and reading room (Photos by Paul Hester)

modern architecture's insistence on the identification of use and form, and the identification of an institution as something necessarily different from a house. The change in use is not expressed on the exterior. Other than a slightly-wider-than-typical brick stair, there is no literal or figural sign of change.

There is also a critique of modern architecture in Frederick's design of plan and section. The plan is elegant and simple but very sophisticated in its attitude toward the occupation of space. What is profoundly different from modern architectural planning is the deliberate absence of functional separation between circulation and work space. The plan can be read as three parallel layers of space. However, the entry vestibule is also the central reading room, and passage to the next layer is through, rather than by or adjacent to, the secretarial area. The central room is the only space elaborated in section. The ceiling is raised across the width of the structure in contradiction to the expectations generated by the gabled entrance bay. Use and movement overlap here and also in the final zone, where the staff dining area co-exists with filing and storage. There is no procession sequence or ritual in the Modern or Postmodern sense, nor are the spatial layers tied together by any obvious device, such as a visual axis. The internal overlapping of functions is analogous to the role of the building in its context, the presence of a public foundation in a largely residential neighborhood, allowing the city to develop a complexity of temporal and spatial occupation that is rare in Houston. This project suggests urban values: of a city of interpolation, reflection, and memory rather than a city of expansion and expression. The architect's critique of the modern clichés of functional diagrammatic planning and internal-external expression also avoids Postmodernism's pathetic preoccupation with style and meaningless images.

There was also a disturbing quality to my first experience of the Black Image Office. As an architect educated by a generation critical of the Modernist insistence on the spatial expression of individualized diagrammatic "functions" (and the loss of urban continuity felt in modern cities which inevitably resulted), I have been taught to appreciate thematic and symbolic celebrations of a building's



Plan (courtesy Anthony E. Frederick)

program, its structure, and its surfaces. I am not convinced that the "zero-degree" architecture of the interior is as capable of the "absence of history and value systems" that Roland Barthes suggests is possible in contemporary literature in *Writing Degree Zero*. Can there exist space and surface without association? Is this white architecture really a neutral condition or does it not have a utopian vision of hygienic purity that can just as easily be misread as sterility?

My second visit to the Black Image Office provoked purely emotional experiences: sorrow and joy. I traveled to the site in a taxi driven by an elderly black man, a native Houstonian who had never heard of this institution and was quite surprised and curious to see it. We pulled up across the street and both watched as an almost chubby black child climbed the slightly-too-wide brick steps. A door then opened, revealing a brilliant white interior, and we saw a friendly face appear co-planar with the grey exterior, and shared a poignant moment of sequential revelation of values as the child passed into the building. Dominique de Menil and Anthony Frederick have done something tremendous in white, grey, and black that colors our perception of Houston, its spatial and racial wealth of complexity and possibility. ■

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(Continued from page 17)

Kenedy East Law Library at St. Mary's University (1984). Here the play, acted out by a series of arches and horizontal bands that dance decorously around the two-story building, focuses on the conventional use of brick, glass, and cast stone. The basic pattern of two segmental arches within a larger round arch, all three intersected by two horizontal strips, varies from elevation to elevation. For example, the west wall displays white stone arches set into the solid red-orange brick wall and filled almost entirely with brick except for the two bands of glass that intersect them. At this point it is not clear whether the arches are structural or merely decorative. Their repetition and sharp delineation against the darker brick gives them the crispness and playfulness of unfolded paper cutouts. The teasing riddle of their function is compounded by a real segmental arch, of the same scale as those in the wall, standing like a ceremonial gateway over the sidewalk leading to the library. This *real* arch supports nothing beyond itself, whereas what look like *faux* arches may turn out to be structural elements. Pressing on to the north elevation and the entrance, one finds that the spaces between the arches are filled with glass instead of brick, while strips of brick rather than glass sail through the glass in an exaggeratedly non-structural way, as if it were paint or the kind of stone veneer that Ford liked to dismiss as "peanut brittle." By using brick in this "heretical" way the architects play with the Modernist Regional tenet that brick, to be used honestly, must arch over openings, not speed straight across them or whiz through glass. Continuing on to the far east wall, one finds that the arches have disappeared, leaving only the solid glass bands. The now-you-see-it, now-you-don't quality of the walls' witty striptease, where brick becomes weightless and glass almost solid, also has a symbolic role: the glass strips alone mark the side of the library housing the administrative offices, whereas the arches denote the reading rooms and stacks.

The two types of arches also have a contextual function: through them the building alludes to and knits together two different periods of campus architecture: the round arches from the oldest, the segmental ones referring to more recent structures in the style of the Modernist Regional school, which widely used the flat arch during the 1960s. The arch motif also suggests the firm's synthesis of San Antonio's baroque and vernacular traditions: the round arch a baroque element, the segmental one part of the vernacular tradition.

Berta Kenedy East Law Library, St. Mary's University, Jonesell, 1984. From top to bottom: Detail of curtainwall; west elevation and portal; view from southwest (Photos by Paul Hester)

Together the three images (two types of arches and horizontal strips) also demonstrate the ease with which the firm moves among the different vocabularies of the Ford aesthetic (segmental arches), Modernism (the rectilinear strips), and Postmodernism (the round arches) to arrive at a new synthesis. Indeed, the outstanding quality of this library is the way it gracefully knits such elements together. The building's achievement is not only the fluidity of its synthesis, but being both contextual and dramatic in its own right. The arches are at the heart of the building's paradoxical fusion of seemingly opposed attributes: they confer a dignity befitting a place for the study of law, while their playful variations provide that other important and elusive quality: delight.

O'Neil Ford's legacy still stands and probably will weather as gracefully as his buildings. Rather than repudiating it, most members of the new school treat its elements as part of a larger vocabulary. For what unifies this school more than anything else is its eclecticism. Rather than being guided by any particular ideology, they take a pragmatic, flexible, job-specific approach to each project. Uninhibited by rigid formal or ideological criteria, they have freed themselves to explore different directions and respond to context, program, and San Antonio's urban milieu with zest and ingenuity. Through the use of color, formal complexity, and play the architects of this school have created dramatic, lively buildings that address their surroundings with assertive presence and pizzazz. By retrieving San Antonio's baroque tradition as part of their vocabulary, they have found a larger, more flexible language for expressing San Antonio's cultural and architectural pluralism, urban complexity, and special sense of place."



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Charles W. Moore and Wayne Attoe, eds., Austin: Center for the Study of American Architecture, School of Architecture, The University of Texas at Austin, 1985, 128 pp., illus., \$15

Reviewed by Diane Y. Ghirardo

The great Roman historians - Plutarch, Tacitus, Suetonius - were above all great stylists and astute thinkers; even when profound prejudices emerge in their narratives, rich portraits of their eras and their imperial subjects nonetheless remain with us. Later historians of lesser talent often indulged in smear campaigns so vicious that one finds oneself siding with even the worst tyrants in preference to their biographers. Grotesque and outrageous drivel from antiquity, seasoned with an ignorance of history, decent grammar, and prose, affects us this way, and so does similar fare today: if classicism in 20th-century America has anything to do with CENTER, A Journal for Architecture in America, Ah Mediterranean!, then one will be desperately seeking soothing in the arms of modernism again.

I am no enemy of wit, amusement, or just plain fun in discussions of architecture. I only draw the line at rank stupidity. The crude caricature passed off in CENTER as



"A Memory Palace of Classical Civilization and Texas History to be located in Bastrop, Texas," drawing by Charles W. Moore (CENTER, Volume 2, Ah Mediterranean!)

scholarship hardly merits a review, let alone my time in writing it. But more is at stake here than a piece of fluff: bear with me a moment while I try to identify the contents of *Ah Mediterranean!*, edited by Charles W. Moore and Wayne Attoe.

This issue of the annual journal, CENTER, purports to be a review of classicism in 20th-century American architecture, but, as the director of the Center for the Study of American Architecture, Lawrence W. Speck, remarks in his introductory comment, "[The editors] have not attempted to be comprehensive or conclusive on the topic, but rather to collect bits and pieces . . ."

Indeed.

Editor Attoe's introduction, "Why Classicism . . . and Why Not?", a text fairly drowning in sophomoric prose and sub-infantile logic, tells us the following about classicism: The title, *Ah Mediterranean!*, is "naughty," says Attoe; it means to suggest the merging of rationalism and romanticism, "that polar opposites . . . melted and flow as a one-ish sort of thing . . ."; it means "that passion and Classicism each is at its best when it is with the other." One can only ask: In whose lexicon?

Attoe continues: "(1) Classicism is both a style and a way of molding things that are above or below style. (2) Classicism materializes periodically as a source for fashion, and it can be as fashionless and guileless as a friendship circle around a fire, or the crease between these pages. (3) If Classicism fails to touch you in some place you like to be touched, then that is mediocre Classicism . . ."

What has Attoe told us about classicism? In fact, if one substitutes "modernism" for "classicism" in the above comments, it makes just as much - or just as little - sense.

Well, let's give it one more try: Attoe tells us that discipline and passion "are necessary for truly good Classicism." And so they are for Islamic architecture, Japanese architecture, and ice hockey. Much as I would like to engage in some critical discourse, this publication is more like a Kapok-filled sofa into which one sinks with alarming rapidity without ever reaching any defined substance.

This is about as close as we get to some guiding or organizing principle. The editors lump Villa Lante, the Paseo del Alamo, Henry Kueh's set designs, and Villa Phillbrook together, but we never learn what unites them - and that they all have something to do with the landscape, as the editors seem to suggest, is not enough. The architecture of Paul Cret, Cass Gilbert, O'Neil Ford, Howard Barnstone, Bertram Goodhue, and Addison Mizner deserves better than to be tossed into this mish-mash.

I contemplated following Walter Benjamin's suggestion of fashioning an entire article from a collage of quotes - in this case from *Ah Mediterranean!* - but it would have been too pathetic, too easy to

expose the appalling vacuity of this publication by letting it impale itself with its own words. This self-indulgent riddle makes one yearn even for the dull and plodding fare of academic journals.

Nothing reveals more about this thin concoction than the presentation of a few shopping centers as a recipe: "Shopping Center à la zabaglione" (*sic*). Is the language there French or Italian? Incorrect in both languages, but anyway, who cares? - or so the editors suggest.

Lest we forget, these men are educators. They are publishing - in a world of shrinking funds - a richly funded and much-heralded journal which is supposed to represent the Southwest. This is one of the disturbing issues to which I alluded earlier. If *Ah Mediterranean!* is a fair sample of what is being passed off as research, as thoughtful work, as analysis, not just in writing but in architecture - and I believe it is - at The University of Texas at Austin, one can only sympathize with the students who are paying good money in the mistaken belief that they are being educated. A comparable level of discourse would not merit a "C" in most first-year classes elsewhere. The University of Texas is a first-rate institution in many of its departments, but if one doubted it before, it is now clear that architecture is at the bottom of the barrel.

There are four - and only four - redeeming features: some of the photographs; the work of a few architects (Antoine Predock and Batey and Mack); Paul Venable Turner's article on collegiate classicism, which is as solid and thoughtful as his recent book; and Martin Filler's essay on free-style classicism, quite simply, a magnificent and elegant exposé which lucidly indicts what passes for content in the rest of the publication. Still, they do not save it.

I deeply wanted to like this volume. Texas has a lively and intelligent architectural community with plenty of energy and moxie. It deserves far better than this, and so do the sources who have lavished money on what turns out to be toxic waste.

And toxic waste it is: it has a pernicious influence in the halls of academe, and it even seeps into Houston in the results of the Sesquicentennial Park Competition for Buffalo Bayou, where similar effluvia made it to the final round of competition (cutting out other and far richer works) because of the "Big Name" game.

Perhaps one fatal mistake was not to have graduate students edit the journal, as they do with extraordinary success at Harvard, Yale, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. This approach would have at least exposed the students to some good work and some thought. Charles Moore certainly needs no more credits on his resumé, and the other editors do not deserve any.

My advice to the reader: don't waste your money or time. Go see a good movie - even a bad one.■

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Historic Galveston

Text by Geoffrey Leavenworth,
photography by Richard Payne, Houston:
Herring Press, 1985, 99 pp., illus., \$49.95

Reviewed by Gerald Moorhead

Galveston is a time-capsule link with the social and architectural heritage of the 19th century, which Houston has long since destroyed. History left the city stranded in time, but wise advantage has begun to be taken of this accident, both for edification in the present and the transmission of culture to the future.

Historic Galveston is a richly produced volume that surveys the city's architecture through grandly scaled color photography. Geoffrey Leavenworth's introductory text broadly recounts Galveston's history: its founding and early personalities, the growth of its economy and society, and the effects of environment and fashion on its architecture. "Perhaps even more than other luxuries, architecture enthralled Galvestonians. As a trading rival, Houston was a formidable opponent. But when it came to architectural ostentation, the 'Bayou City' was no match for Galveston," Leavenworth observes.

Fifty-three historical buildings are pictured (not in chronological order) in large color views by Richard Payne. These are described in the last section of the book in some social and design detail, each accompanied by a small black-and-white photo.

The bibliography on Galveston lists many books dealing with the island's socio-economic history but few of value as architectural history. Howard Barnstone's *The Galveston That Was* (1966) still provides the best study of individual buildings tied to the social history and documented by Ezra Stoller's and Henri Cartier-Bresson's marvelous photos. But a comprehensive book documenting the architectural treasures of Galveston is needed as a working resource.

Historic Galveston adds little to the supply of information and insight into the city's architecture. The almost-blinding color photos are predominantly upward-looking views of building skylines, mercilessly cropped, almost claustrophobic. There is no impression given of overall building massing, context, or the city itself as a place, which all this gingerbread ultimately adds up to. An overview of "place" in a situation as unique as Galveston must be kept in mind, in addition to the precious beauties of individual buildings. These isolating photos could have been assembled from any 19th-century area of the country. They do not contribute to preserving the unique identity of Galveston.

The brief introductory text does discuss the architectural response to the changing patterns of the city's social and economic life, but only in the broadest terms. Individual buildings as examples could have filled out this history and been related to specific photos, giving the pictures more meaning than just eyewash.

The last section of the book, with more detailed information on the 53 buildings illustrated, is certainly the most interesting and useful and could have used more visual material.

As a resource for historians and architects, *Historic Galveston* is of no value. As a picture book, it is probably too expensive for the general public. Its sole purpose, one deduces from its large size, is to occupy too much space on the coffee table. But there it soon will be covered with *Time*, *Gourmet*, *Vogue*, and *TV Guide* and be forgotten. One wonders what this team of talented people had in mind. ■

A Guide to Houston Guidebooks

Houston's Gallery of Architecture: A Walking Tour of Downtown Houston, Phyllis Harris, Houston: Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, 1984, 57 pp., illus., \$8.95

Houston's Cradle of Culture and Environs, prepared by the Anchorage Foundation of Texas for the Rice Design Alliance, Houston: Rice Design Alliance, 1985, 64 pp., illus., \$6.95

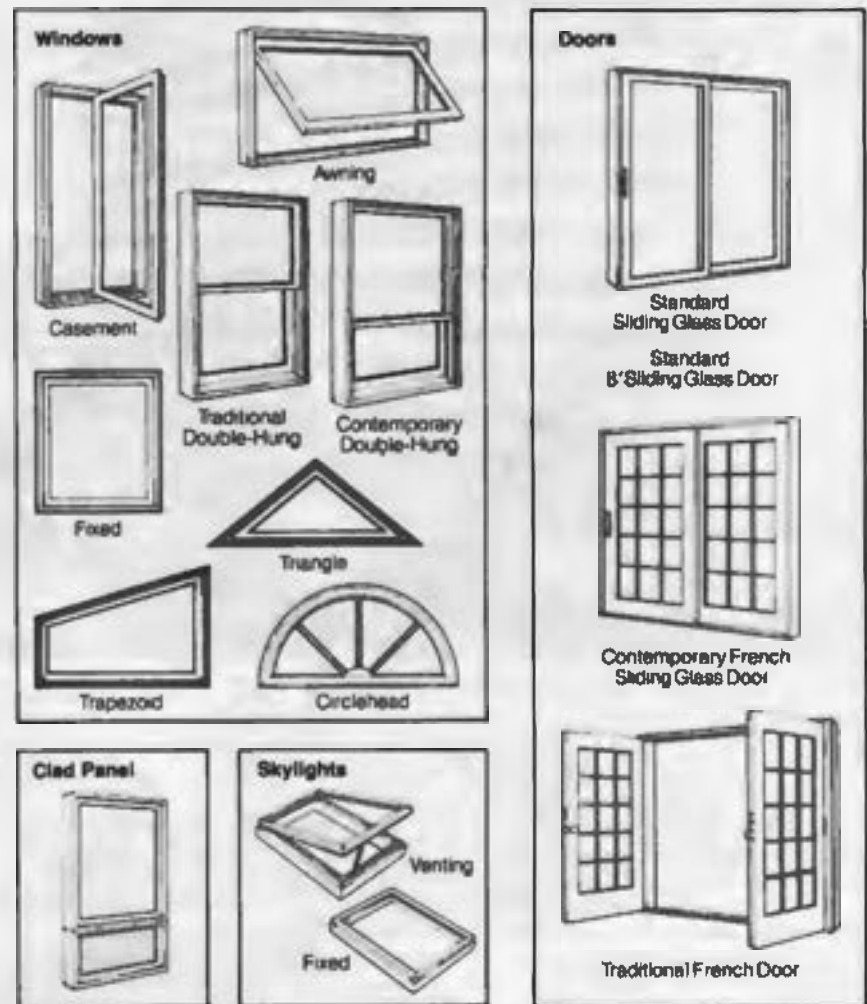
River Oaks, Three Self-Guided Tours of Its Architecture, prepared by the Anchorage Foundation of Texas for the Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, Houston: Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, 1984, 20 pp., \$6.00

Reviewed by Cameron Armstrong

There's no getting around the demands that some kinds of modern-day guidebooks make. There was a time, perhaps, when signs were signs and a guide was a guide. But lately, the distinction between a tour (as in, say, a tour of the prairies, or on a bus) and a walking tour has assumed an important place in the intellectual landscape of guidebooks. One of the things a real city must have nowadays is a real walking tour. And so it seems that even Houstonians have been drawn into a literary vortex of walking tour-guidebook writing. Local efforts now include three recently published booklets covering downtown (by Phyllis Harris for the Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects), the museums area (courtesy of the Rice Design Alliance and the Anchorage Foundation of Texas), and River Oaks (by the Anchorage Foundation and the Houston Chapter AIA).

We (a traveled and accomplished Houston native and myself) began our walking with the most obviously designed and produced of these pamphlets, the AIA's *Houston's Gallery of Architecture*. The tour begins with Allen Center, a "self-contained business park with . . . office space, a hotel, retail shops, restaurants, banking and other services on lobby and concourse levels, a private dining club and a health club with 14 tennis courts enclosed on top of a 5,600 car garage." Undaunted by locked doors (this being Saturday), we contacted security forces via hidden speakers and managed to infiltrate the Center. The empty concourse gave us

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Garden Verein Dancing Pavilion, 1880 (Photo by Richard Payne from *Historic Galveston*)



Las Colinas, 1978 (Photo by Doug Tomlinson from Dallas Architecture 1936-1986)

few hints of the kinds of activity it hosts during weekdays, but an early warning of what we could expect on the rest of the tour. The award-winning Antioch Park nestled outside, between the Center's towers and historic Antioch Baptist Church, was also empty. Its terraced, indigenous shrubs and careful siting did little to entice us - or attract the kids with the basketball from the church's parking lot. Moving on down Smith, and skirting the imposing blank walls of building #9, we halted before the Hyatt Regency at the guide's exhortation to "pause for a moment to notice design links." Here we noted how one million brown bricks, specifically color-ordered, could be used in combination with bronze glass to create "harmony and continuity." It was not long before we were brought to an even more decisive halt by the booklet's description of the entrance to Allied Bank Plaza: "a polished pink-rose granite canopy - baldacchino, in architectural terms - stands free as a work of art. The baldacchino..." Our earlier frustration with the locked-up state of the city was nothing compared to the confusion produced by a text seemingly intent on parody. Our walk-by of downtown's "gallery" subjected us to designs suggesting "nothing less than a modern pyramid" (building #11), a "montage effect that slenderizes" (#17), and exhaust pipes "positioned with pop-art flair" (#18). Not only does the pamphlet leave out some unusual parts of the downtown environment - the tunnels and the functioning parts of the great "mixed-use" developments (sorry, all closed on weekends) - it does a poor job of explaining the big projects. There is some very superficial discussion of the deals behind the buildings, but little explanation of either the evolution of the city form or of just how the place got to be so bleak. Now that's a story I'd like to hear.

In contrast to the AIA's effort - and to my immense relief as a tourist - the Rice Design Alliance's *Houston's Cradle of Culture and Environs* offers an entertaining and enlightening excursion into one of the city's best-built neighborhoods. The tour, by discussing the land plan and making an effort to introduce some of the personalities behind the area's growth, opens up aesthetic, social, and economic relationships important to understanding the place. Photographs are taken from the would-be tourist's point-of-view (another point of contrast with the AIA's CBD guide), and the text is a lively and perceptive discussion of design and history. My only complaint is that the building's numerical designations ("IL-39," for example) do not show up on the tour maps, making it difficult to trace one's progress. Beyond that, I recommend a good pair of walking shoes.

River Oaks, Three Self-Guided Tours of Its Architecture forgoes both maps and pictures in its drive-by approach. The text, though less informative than that of the RDA on the architects and their clients, does give a good overview of the neighborhood's history (sometimes

merely noting which house was built first and by whom is enough). Because the RDA museums-area guide gives better insight into the careers of the important designers of the River Oaks era, I recommend it as preparation for these tours. Together, they offer both pleasant entertainment and a better understanding of what it takes to produce a truly congenial environment. ■

Dallas Architecture 1936-1986

Photography by Doug Tomlinson, text by David Dillon, Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1985, 213 pp., \$29.95

Reviewed by Jay C. Henry

This has all the earmarks of a book published for an occasion. With the Texas Sesquicentennial and the fiftieth anniversary of the Centennial Exposition at Fair Park upon us, a book on Dallas architecture of the past 50 years must have seemed like a logical imperative. The considerable local interest in Dallas architecture of late has been reinforced by David Dillon's writing as architectural critic of the *Dallas Morning News*, and has also generated support for architectural photography as a professional discipline in Dallas, where Doug Tomlinson is a prominent practitioner. The result of their collaboration is an elegant edition which, unfortunately, is not without certain problems.

Dillon, in discussing the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Dallas (page 156), describes it as "a good quick read." This would also be an apt description of the book. It impresses neither as history nor criticism, but basically as reportage. The best chapters are those on historic preservation and planning, consisting of factual summaries of historical processes, which respond to Dillon's reportorial style. The weakest chapters are those which describe and analyze Dallas architecture. The descriptions tend to be incomplete and the analyses subjective and superficial, further marred by Dillon's propensity for the glib put-down rather than considered criticism. For example, the Dallas Convention Center "is no better or worse than most convention centers, which collectively are the Agent Orange of urban architecture" (page 39); or "the Zale Corporation headquarters by H.K.S. . . resembles a gold pop-up toaster" (page 115). Dillon intersperses his eight chapters with profiles of six personalities who shaped the Dallas environment: four architects and two planners. All of these profiles are too brief to be satisfactory, suggesting the reporter's technique - much anecdote and reliance on personal interviews - rather than the historian's craft.

A basic weakness of the text is its brevity, which contributes to the "good quick read" but frustrates those who seek information. This deficiency might have been ameliorated by notes and a bibliography, but neither are provided. Only 109 of the 213 pages are devoted to text, sparsely laid out at about 400 words per page, alternating with Tomlinson's elegant black-and-white photographs. This is as much his book as Dillon's and many will doubtless purchase it for the photography rather than for the text. There are, however, several problems with the illustrations. Some of the photographs are quite abstract; elegant compositions of light and shadow rather than clear depictions of the architecture. Many of them are quite small, floating singly on entire pages of empty space. Finally, they do not, in many cases, illustrate Dillon's text. For example, the Stemmons Towers by Harwell Hamilton Harris are lauded but not illustrated, nor is O'Neil Ford's Berger House on Stonebridge Drive, which Dillon describes as "one of Ford's freshest and most illuminating designs" (page 62). On the other hand, the U.S. Government Building from the Centennial Exposition is illustrated in both general view and detail, but is not discussed in the text.

The decision to limit the illustrations to Tomlinson's photographs also detracts from the book's usefulness. Plan drawings are not included, nor are renderings of projects described in the text, such as Frank Lloyd Wright's project for the Rogers Lacy Hotel or architect's renderings of the Arts District now under development.

In summary, *Dallas Architecture 1936-1986* is more frustrating than informative. It is not a serious contribution to scholarship. ■

A Catalog of Texas Sites in the National Register of Historic Places

James Wright Stealy, compiler, Austin: Texas Historical Commission, 1984, 230 pp.

Reviewed by Martha Doty Freeman

Nineteen-eighty-four marked the fifteenth anniversary of the first listing of a Texas property in the National Register of Historic Places, a comprehensive catalog of this country's cultural resources. From the best- to the least-known buildings and archeological sites, the listed properties express the rich heritage of our built environment in Texas. As Joseph K. Oppermann, director of National Register Programs for the state, points out in the

Preface, that heritage is comprised of buildings as opulent as the Bishop's Palace in Galveston and sites as well-known as the prehistoric and historic Indian pictographs at Paint Rock in Concho County. It is also expressed in structures which might strike the casual observer as decidedly mundane - service stations, bungalow homes of working-class people, or rock shelters used by New Mexican shepherders in the Panhandle - but which are an integral part of our varied cultural patrimony.

James Wright Stealy, with the assistance of other staff members of the Texas Historical Commission, succinctly explains the origins of the National Register program which began in 1955 when the National Park Service was designated as public guardian of the country's landmarks. Contemporary historic preservation activities received a major boost from passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 which sought to curb the tide of destruction of cultural resources and provided for the involvement of state governments in conservation efforts. States were instructed to inventory their cultural resources by means of field surveys, to compile information about important sites identified in the surveys, and to nominate those documented properties to the Register. In recent years, a major incentive for historic preservation has been federal legislation which provides tax advantages for those who restore or rehabilitate historic buildings.

Stealy includes a list of the criteria used to determine which cultural properties qualify for listing on the National Register and provides an explanation of the terms, abbreviations, and designations which accompany each listing in the *Catalog*. The text is organized alphabetically, by county; within each county, individual listings are also alphabetical. The general location of each property is given, together with a date of construction, a brief description of the property, and a notation as to whether or not the property has been designated by the state as well as by the federal government.

Like all such works which draw primarily on information compiled over a number of years by more-or-less adept researchers, the *Catalog of Texas Properties* suffers because it repeats past research mistakes, misspellings, and misdatings. As a result, the *Catalog* should be taken as a guide to materials which exist in the files of the Texas Historical Commission rather than as the last word in factual accuracy. Perhaps the greatest service which the Commission has provided by publishing the *Catalog* is that of giving academic researchers, for the first time, a detailed index to the numerous architects, contractors, and clients represented in the Commission files while acquainting the public with the scope and richness of more than one thousand Texas properties which have been listed on the National Register since 1969. ■

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Lessons from San Antonio

Jeffrey Karl Ochsner

On 17 January Mayor Kathryn J. Whitmire announced formation of a 15-citizen steering committee to initiate a "Goals for Houston" process called "Visions for Houston." In forming this task force, the mayor adopted a program which has been proposed by numerous groups including the Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. And, in so doing, the mayor drew upon the experience of San Antonio - that city's "Target '90" process represents a clear example of community-based public policy planning. The "Target '90" process and the resulting documentation, developed in San Antonio between the spring of 1983 and the summer of 1984, constitute a valuable precedent for the planning process Houston has just begun.

The value of this type of planning effort is that it offers a means for development of consensus and direction. For Houston, it is an opportunity to assess existing conditions, to generalize about assets, to recognize liabilities, and to develop a broad strategic sense of the future.

In San Antonio, "Target '90" grew out of the experience of acrimonious local politics in the 1970s; it was a way to bring the city together and develop common goals. As initiated in the spring of 1983, the process was to be inclusive, democratic, grass-roots-oriented; it was to recognize the cultural pluralism of San Antonio, and to seek unity of purpose through a diversity of ideas.

The primary theme of "Target '90" was quality of life. Within this theme, 12 broad areas were identified and 12 citizen task forces were created to focus on these areas: basic services, education, development, transportation, foreign trade, southern sector (inner city) development, utilities, the arts, human services, youth, transition to technology, and biosciences. The process of organizing the task forces, holding public meetings, reaching consensus, and preparing the final report took over a year and involved more than 500 citizen volunteers. Several thousand people participated in the process through public meetings. Ultimately 12 area objectives and 93 specific goals were identified.

This process, however, is only the first step. Further steps must be taken if plans are to become reality. Institutional mechanisms must be created in order to

see that plans and visions take actual (physical) shape and that irreplaceable assets are protected. A substantial part of the "Target '90" report involves implementation, and a "Target '90" Commission will carry out the "Target '90" process to see plans to fruition.

The creation of planning bodies, review boards, commissions, and agencies with adequate funding and authority to enforce decisions is an essential part of the process. In Houston, developing a broad-based vision of the future will be just an initial step, and the creation of institutional mechanisms to nurture and realize that vision - to continue the process - may be difficult. With the city's history of limited planning, an entirely new level of understanding of the purpose and effects of institutionalized guidelines will be necessary.

Even then, the ultimate determination of the future of any city still rests with individuals. Are policies followed? Are guidelines enforced? Again, the case of San Antonio is instructive. Incredible pressure was apparently brought to bear on the River Walk Commission in 1984 after it initially rejected a proposed 24-story hotel which did not meet urban design guidelines. Because the commission eventually gave in, the project is being built without changes and one stretch of the River Walk has been compromised. What may be worse, however, is the lesson for future projects - apparently, if sufficient pressure can be brought to bear, the expediency of the moment may win out over more subtle, longer-term priorities. Indeed, future enforcement of urban design guidelines anywhere on the River Walk may be much more difficult as a result. Although this does not bear directly on the visionary planning of "Target '90," it is nonetheless significant. After all, direction may be set by visionary goals and plans, but cities are built day-to-day, through many small incremental decisions.

There is risk in the mayor's proposal for a "Visions for Houston" process, but there is also tremendous opportunity. The time has come to take hold and shape Houston's future. As part of this process we should look to San Antonio (and to Dallas and Austin, as well as cities outside Texas). As we seek to shape our future we should not be afraid of good ideas no matter what their source. ■



Main Plaza, San Antonio, showing (left) San Fernando Cathedral, 1873, F. Giraud, architect and (right) Frost National Bank Building, 1922, Sanguinet and Staats, architects (Photo by Paul Hester)



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