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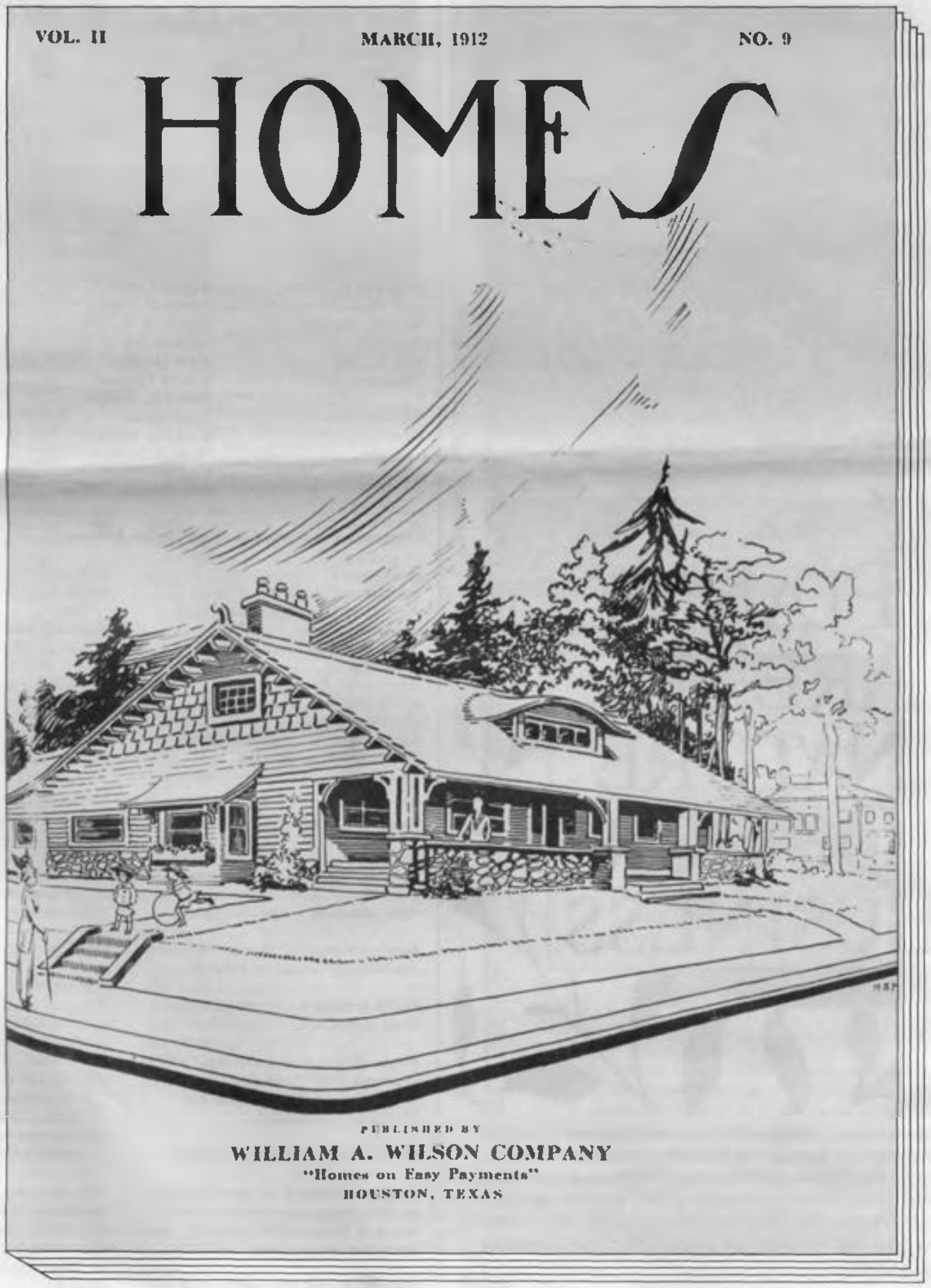
The Houston Bungalow



Touring Braeswood

West University Place: New Houses vs. Zoning

Suburbia Deserta

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OverCite

The review of *Pride of Place, Building the American Dream*, (*Cite*, Fall 1986) stated that KQED-TV, San Francisco produced the series and that the director of the series, Murray Grigor, also directed *Cosmos*. In fact, South Carolina Educational Television produced the series and the director of *Cosmos* was Adrian Malone, now of Malone-Gill Productions.

The renovation of Edgar Allan Poe Elementary School (Big Cité Beat, *Cite*, Fall 1986) was designed by Kendall Heaton Architects and Philip Ewald, not Sikes Jennings Kelly.

The Fall 1986 issue of *Cite* incorrectly attributed a submission to the Young Architects Forum charette, "Transformations;" the correct attribution is to Peter D. Waldman, Mary MacAuliffe, Eduardo Robles, and Philip C. Mahla.

Cite regrets the errors.

Big Cité Beat

☞ From zydeco to Pico, **Party Houston** has been working late into the night to revive and diversify the local economy by transforming Houston into the party capital of the earth. Spreading the Texas fiesta spirit abroad Party Houston's uncrowned king, **George O. Jackson, Jr.**, went to Lyons in October at the behest of **Jean-Michel Jarre** to photograph Jarre's Lyonaise light and music show, attended by none other than **Pope John Paul II**. Meanwhile, homeside, Party Houston *apparatchik* Cameron Armstrong will urge Mayor Kathy Whitmire to proclaim an official **Bottoming-Out Day** and kickoff Houston's economic recovery with some real low-down partying.

☞ The **Art League of Houston** concluded an informal architectural competition, held in August, by awarding the commission for its permanent studio, gallery, classroom, and office building to **W.O. Neuhaus Associates**. Neuhaus's design will be built in 1987 on the Art League's site at Montrose and Bomar. Other invited participants were **Ray Bailey Architects**, **Barry Moore Architects** and **Team HOU**, **Gensler and Associates**, and **McKittrick Richardson Wallace**.

☞ Coming Down; Going Up: The **Hovas-Donovan Shops**, in the 3500 block of Main, one of the last survivors of South Main Street's short-lived but ebullient escapade as Houston's Miracle Mile of the 1930s and '40s, was demolished in August. Built in 1929 by S.N. Hovas (grandfather of Baroness Enrico di Portanova), it was designed

Hovas – Donovan Shops

by **William D. Bordeaux**, architect of the neighboring **Isabella Court**. The future of the **Blue Ribbon Rice Company elevators** at Studemont and Memorial is uncertain, following current owner American Rice, Inc.'s move to Freeport. ARI has yet to decide on the fate of the nearly 40-acre site. Rumor has it that the **Texas Medical Center, Inc.** will unload the **Shamrock Hotel** site on **Texas A&M University**, leaving A&M to decide whether to retain or destroy the legendary hotel, which was shuttered in June. Now open: the third increment of the **Galleria** (Hellmuth, Obata and Kassabaum and Richard Fitzgerald & Partners) and containing **Macy's** (Hellmuth, Obata and Kassabaum) culminating a development program that stretches back 20 years. Also the 53-story **Heritage Plaza**, the "last" – for the time being – skyscraper in downtown (M. Nasr and Partners). Both are Pomo to the max.

☞ Photographer **Richard Payne** has taken up residence in Paris for the winter and spring on a grant from The American Center. Van Nostrand Reinhold has published *Construction Economics and Building Design, A Historical Approach*, written by Houston architect **R. Gregory Turner**. The **Greater Houston Preservation Alliance** received a 1986 Merit Award from the American Planning Association, Texas Chapter, for its *Sixth Ward/Sabine Historic District Revitalization Study* (*Cite*, Fall 1986, p.7), which it followed up by coordinating the rehab of eleven houses in the district, a project organized by the **Private Sector Initiatives Home Repair Program** with council member **Ben T. Reyes**.

Citelines

Fourth Ward Update: Houston Proud?

The fate of Allen Parkway Village is sealed with plywood

After dark, Allen Parkway Village almost disappears from the banks of Buffalo Bayou. Presently, about 200 of its original 1,000 housing units are occupied, and these are located within the interior blocks of the World War II-era public housing project (still Houston's largest), neatly hidden from the determined rush of commuter traffic along Allen Parkway.

As families are moved out or relocated into other housing projects operated by the Housing Authority of the City of Houston (HACH), vacant units are quickly boarded up and sealed rather than being rented to any of the considerable number of approved applicants who require subsidized housing. The dwindling number of tenants in Allen Parkway Village have little power or voice in determining the fate of their homes, despite the Resident Council's concerted opposition to HACH policies.

The Housing Authority awaits a decision by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) authorizing and funding the demolition of the federally mortgaged housing project and subsequent sale of the 37 acres of prime real estate that it occupies. This despite the fact that Allen Parkway Village contains one-third of all the public-housing units in Houston.

HUD's decision is pending an audit by the General Accounting Office (GAO) to determine how the Housing Authority spent $10 million in federal funds allocated in 1978 for rehabilitation of Allen Parkway Village. At the same time, the Allen Parkway Village Resident Council, headed by Lenwood Johnson, is preparing, with the assistance of the Gulf Coast Legal Foundation, a class-action suit contesting the demolition and sale of the project on grounds that the Housing Authority, in submitting its revised application to HUD, did not consult tenants as required. However, a recent investigation of HACH's application by the GAO as requested by U.S. Representative Henry B. Gonzalez of San Antonio, chairman of a congressional subcommittee overseeing housing funds, concluded that tenant consultation requirements had been met.

Despite its long-standing determination to sell the site of Allen Parkway Village, the Housing Authority continues to receive subsidies from HUD's Annual Contribution Contract to maintain the 905 units presently in the project. The only apparent use for these subsidies is to pay for the plywood with which vacant units are sealed. These plywood panels have become the most potent symbol of the condemnation of Allen Parkway Village itself.

Plywood symbolically threatens the adjoining Fourth Ward as well. The Alfred Smith House, an expansive bungalow built in 1918, and one of the last examples of substantial houses built at the turn-of-the-century in Fourth Ward by an emerging black middle class, was demolished in May by its owner after the house was cited for code violations under the city's Dangerous Building Ordinance. The Smith House was cited for being unoccupied and open to the public (a common violation) and for minor structural damage (sill rot). The owner had the options of contesting the citation in a hearing conducted by an official of the Public Works Department; securing the building; demolishing the building himself (thereby avoiding legal and demolition expenses assessed by the City Housing and Conservation Department if it had undertaken demolition); or disregarding the citation. Had the owner chosen the latter alternative, the city could have demolished the building only after obtaining an environmental clearance from the Texas Historical Commission.

Three years ago this stipulation saved both Gregory School and a house on Arthur Street in Fourth Ward; there is no doubt that it might have saved the Smith House as well, since it was listed as contributing to the significance of the Freedman's Town Historic District in Fourth Ward, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. If a building is determined by the historical commission staff to be significant (of which many buildings in Fourth Ward are by virtue of their inclusion in the Freedman's Town Historical District), the city must work with the owner to secure and rehabilitate the property.

Although the local real estate market remains in a depressed condition, Steven L. Jarnigan, spokesman for the Fourth Ward Property Owners, is optimistic about the collective sale of the 90-block neighborhood. The City Department of Planning and Development's Memorandum of Understanding with the property owners' association for optioning and selling most of the property in Fourth Ward expired in March without any offers being received. Nonetheless, it has been extended for two more years. Jarnigan suggests that out-of-town developers are presently interested in the deal and are not, as are local developers, particularly concerned with the fate of Allen Parkway Village. The city has made the sale and redevelopment of Fourth Ward contingent on the construction of 400 new units of low-income elderly housing within the new development; neglected is any plan to relocate the remaining residents of Fourth Ward. An entry by Peter D. Waldman, Philip C. Mahla, Eduardo Robles, and Mary MacAuliffe in the Young Architects Forum Fourth Ward charrette, a weekend design symposium and competition, which accompanied Diverse Works' exhibition "Architecture and Culture: The Fourth Ward," suggested that the Fourth Ward secede from the City of Houston, develop its own economic base, and assert independence during a period of internal reconstruction. As Houston's economy naps and entrepreneurial haste is temporarily held in check, this modest proposal reminds us that the City of Houston is now as close as it might ever get to reflecting on responsible policies for development.

Douglas Sprunt

Cemetery Incident Shows Need For Preservation Plan

Despite a long-standing reputation to the contrary, Houston is a city with a growing appreciation of its past. Although some of the preservation battles have been acrimonious, the city government has shown an increasing willingness to recognize the value of its material cultural heritage. Nowhere has that willingness been more evident than in the passage of an ordinance in 1984, sponsored by city council member Eleanor Tinsley, creating the Houston Archeological and Historical Commission. This ordinance was, in fact, revolutionary among local preservation statutes in that it accorded a significance equaling that of visible historic artifacts to the unseen, buried elements of the city's history and prehistory: its archeological resources. Since the creation of the commission two years ago, its members have worked (without benefit of funding or a salaried staff) with representatives of city departments to help ensure satisfaction of one of the commission's mandates: the city must take account of the impact its own projects will have on historical and archeological resources.

The commission is charged with providing informed, expert advice to the mayor and city council regarding the potential impact of city actions. Given the commission's dependence on volunteer expertise to conduct these evaluations, and the voluntary cooperation of city departments to make known their construction plans, the commission has done its best to carry out this function. However, the commission has been aware that its efforts to recognize projects warranting comment have been limited and unsystematic, relying on informal word of mouth or the news media to identify these projects.

Members of the commission, which is chaired by archeologist Margie C. Elliott, immediately realized the inadequacy and inherent dangers of this informal procedure, and have argued for the adoption of a city preservation plan. This plan would identify in advance historically and archeologically sensitive buildings, sites, and zones, and create a consistent, rational process for reviewing potentially damaging projects. Unfortunately, a widely reported event occurred in September that decisively underscores the present lack of such a process. The event is the disturbance of at least 30 historic burials in the excavation of a utility trench for a city fire department building on the long-forgotten site of Old City Cemetery in First Ward.

This incident does not represent a willfully destructive act on the part of city officials; rather, it is a case of the sins of the fathers being visited on the sons. The decision to erase the cemetery from public memory took place in 1924, when the first Jefferson Davis Hospital was constructed. At that time, many of the headstones were removed, and the hospital structure was erected over existing grave sites – apparently without effort to re-intere the burials elsewhere. With time, most of the remaining grave markers disappeared, and the actual extent of the cemetery slipped into oblivion. It remained in that status until the city was painfully reminded of its existence in the trench-digging episode.

The fundamental irony of the situation is that only a few minutes of research could have alerted city officials to the probability that their project was to take place in a potentially archeologically sensitive area, one that is stringently protected by state law, since the cemetery appears on many historic Houston maps. When, and if, the city decides to adopt a preservation plan, the potential sensitivity of an area like this would be immediately apparent, and the project could be routed to the commission for comment. Project planners could then rationally evaluate the possible costs – economic, political, and social – of building in a known, former cemetery.

For the present, at least, we can take assurance from two factors: first, that the Public Works Department acted promptly and in good faith, notifying the Archeological and Historical Commission as soon as it became aware of the cemetery situation. Second, at the suggestion of the commission, Public Works has included a new clause in the standard city construction contract. This clause directs its contractors to discontinue work temporarily should potentially significant archeological remains be encountered, so that these remains may be professionally evaluated. (Sadly, while this clause was added months before the cemetery incident, the contract for that project was signed well before its addition.) A further step by the commission will be planned workshops to educate city inspection personnel on the recognition of archeological remains. However, archeological features can be subtle, and it is far more desirable to have an idea of possible archeological and architectural resources well in advance of actual construction, knowledge that is possible only when a city preservation plan exists.

Roger Moore

Winter Architectural Events

Rice Design Alliance
P.O. Box 1892, Houston, Texas 77251-1892, 713/524-6297
3 December 1986 — Symposium: "Building Houston in the 1990s." Participants include John Walsh, president, Friendswood Development; Bob Hutchins, chief executive officer, Gemcraft Homes; Charles Savino, director of research, Houston Chamber of Commerce; Patrick Oxford, general partner, Western Growth Pool, Ltd.; and Steve Katz, associate, Smith, Murdaugh, Little, and Crawford. Brown Auditorium, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Main and Bissonet; admission charged. For time and reservations, telephone the Rice Design Alliance.
20 January-18 February – Four-part lecture series: "On Edge: Recent California Architecture." All lectures held at 8 PM, Brown Auditorium, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Main and Bissonet; admission charged. For reservations, telephone the Rice Design Alliance.
20 February 1987 – Frank O. Gehry (co-sponsored with the Contemporary Arts Museum)
4 February 1987 – Reyner Banham
11 February 1987 – Eric Owen Moss
18 February 1987 – Michael Rotondi (Morphosis)

Contemporary Arts Museum
5216 Montrose Boulevard, Houston, Texas 77006-6598, 713/526-3129
21 January-23 February 1987 – Exhibition: "The Architecture of Frank Gehry." Organized by the Walker Art Center. Open Tuesday-Saturday, 10 AM-5 PM, Sunday, 12 noon-6 PM; admission free. Opening lecture by Frank O. Gehry, 20 January 1987 (see Rice Design Alliance).

Farish Gallery
M.D. Anderson Hall, Rice University 713/527-4870
21 January-23 February 1987 – Exhibition: "This Edifice is Colossal: Architecture and 19th-Century Photography." Organized by the Museum of Photography, George Eastman House. Introductory lecture (for date, time, and location, telephone the gallery). Open daily, 12 noon-5 PM; admission free.

Greater Houston Preservation Alliance
22 January 1987 – Lecture: William Seale, "A History of The White House, Washington, D.C." For time, location, and ticket information, telephone Minnette B. Boesel at 713/658-8938.
17 December 1986; 21 January 1987; 18 February 1987 — Guided walking tour of Main Street-Market Square Historic District in downtown Houston. Tour groups assemble at corner of Milam Street and Preston Avenue; 12 noon; $1 fee. To arrange special group tours, telephone Barthel Truxillo at 713/861-6236.

Houston Chapter, American Institute of Architects
20 Greenway Plaza, Suite 246, Houston, Texas 77046-2002, 713/622-2081
21 December 1986; 18 January 1987; 22 February 1987 – Guided walking tour of new architecture in downtown Houston. Tour groups assemble in lobby of Hyatt Regency Hotel, 1200 Louisiana Street; 2 PM; $3 fee. For reservations, telephone the Houston Chapter, AIA.

School of Architecture, Rice University
713/527-4870
13 January 1987 – Lecture: Spiro Kostof, Craig Francis Cullinan Visiting Professor, "The Epic of Rome: City Form as History," 7:30 PM; Sewall Hall, Room 301, Rice University campus; admission free.

Lawndale Rebounds

The University of Houston's Lawndale Art and Performance Center reopened for its seventh year this fall, overcoming the threat of closing brought on by its shaky financial history and state-mandated budget cuts.

Lawndale's new director, Mary Evelynn Sorrell, has developed a program which focuses on Houston's artistic community. Several grant awards from such sources as the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), The Cultural Arts Council of Houston, and the Texas Commission on the Arts will contribute to reinforcing Lawndale's support of local and regional artists. In addition to financing Lawndale activities, a portion of the funds will be distributed directly to artists in the form of expenses and honorariums. Lawndale will continue to emphasize performance art, video art, and inter-arts projects.

Three or more NEA grants of up to two thousand dollars each will be awarded to artists to create inter-arts installations and performances to be exhibited at Lawndale from 3 January to 2 February. "Focus on Video" is an eight-month series (first Thursday of each month) that began on 7 November and features an open screening of new local and regional videos along with the Whitney Biennial Video Series, which includes work by Woody Vasulka, Dara Birnbaum, Joan Jonas, Bill Viola, and Lyn Blumenthal. "On the Edge," which opened 21 November, provides a forum for Houston-area artists involved in live performance, and is directed by a committee of multi-media artists who are members of the Lawndale Artists Advisory Board and others. "Diverse Idioms," which opened 15 November, is an exhibition of works by 14 Texas and Oklahoma artists, selected by Joy Poe, founder of Artemisia alternative gallery in Chicago. Through 17 December, "Diverse Idioms" will exhibit sculpture, painting, printmaking, weaving, drawing, photography, assemblage, and handmade books.

Luis Jiménez will be the guest juror for the fourth annual East End Show. For the first time, this exhibition also will include the work of artists from East End high schools. Jiménez will speak at schools and will give a public talk about his current work at Lawndale. An exhibition of student projects from schools of architecture in Texas will be organized by Christine Cinciripini, architect and assistant professor of architecture at the University of Houston. James Surls, artist and founder of Lawndale, will return to direct an exhibition of large-scale sculpture which will take place in May. Surls will moderate a panel discussion with artists, entitled "Attitudes Towards Three Dimensions."

Christine Cinciripini

The Lure of the Bungalow

William F. Stern

In 1910 John Wiley Link formed the Houston Land Corporation to acquire 165 acres of dairy farm land two miles southwest of downtown Houston. Link's choice of this acreage was not casual or accidental. The land was bought for the express purpose of residential development. Already other tracts had been assembled for smaller subdivisions (Hyde Park, Westmoreland Place, and Courtlandt Place) in the area, but none of these were quite on the scale of Link's purchase. Link proceeded to "improve" the T-shaped tract with streets and paved boulevards and gave his development the name Montrose, after a town immortalized in the writings of Sir Walter Scott.

On the esplanades of the wide boulevards – Lovett, Montrose, Yoakum, and Audubon – Link planted seven train carloads of palm trees. Grand, stately houses, homes for the growing upper middle class whose fortunes were being made in the local oil, timber, agricultural, and shipping industries, were built on generous lots facing the boulevards.

However, Link never intended Montrose to develop as a garden suburb for the rich alone. The majority of his property was laid out in blocks of tree-lined streets between the boulevards. Lots 50-by-100 feet sold for $1,700 or 34 cents a square foot. And it was along these streets that the bungalow appeared, a new, modern house type easily within the economic reach of Houston's working and middle-class populations. Between 1905 and 1925, the bungalow became one of the predominant house forms in Houston's turn-of-the-century suburban neighborhoods.

The rise of the bungalow in Houston was part of a nationwide movement. In fact, many newly platted suburban neighborhoods in cities throughout the United States came to be characterized and dominated by the bungalow. Although the bungalow carried on the tradition of the 19th-century wood-frame cottage, its origins came from the Bengali region of northwest India. The term *bungalow* is derived from *bangala*, a Bengali word for the typical native dwelling of the region. The *bangala* was a one-story, thatch-roofed rural house surrounded on all four sides by a covered verandah. During the Raj the British adaptation of the native dwelling became the preferred type of colonial house. It was characterized by a low-pitched, thatched, or tile roof overhanging the verandah, with a central arrangement of rooms on one floor. This was the progenitor of the bungalow. From colonial India, the designation *bungalow* spread to Europe where versions of this small house were built in England and on the continent. Around 1890, the bungalow was introduced into the growing vocabulary of the small American house.

The term *bungalow* is first mentioned in A.W. Brunner's "Cottages or Hints on Economical Building" to describe a Queen Anne New England cottage. Although the bungalow first may have been associated with the popular Queen Anne style, it was in Southern California that it achieved its identity and its particular American form. The California Bungalow, as this distinctive type came to be called, was the favored small house form in the Los Angeles basin. From Los Angeles the bungalow spread across the country from the West to the Midwest to the East. It was one of the earliest examples in the history of American architecture of an indigenous building type moving from west to east rather than in the other direction.

The bungalow became the perfect speculative house for the new suburban cities. The electric trolley and the automobile moved the living place from the city center to the undeveloped foothills of Los Angeles or farm prairies of Houston. The bungalow was idealized as the appropriate small house for a natural garden setting, far from the dense industrial and mercantile center city.

The bungalow was quickly accepted and received critical praise from the architectural journals of the day including *The Architectural Record*, *American Architect and Building News*, and *The Craftsman*. It was embraced and romanticized by such popular magazines as *Ladies Home Journal* for providing an efficient and affordable, yet cozy, modern home. *Radford's Artistic Bungalows* of 1908 promoted the bungalow by advertising plans for sale from $8 to $12, and the bungalow was further promoted in the popular Sears Roebuck and Company catalogue.

Architects too began to favor the style, notably the architects Charles and Henry Greene, easterners who had migrated to the resort town of Pasadena, California. In the early 1900s Greene and Greene took up the style and idea wholeheartedly, legitimizing the bungalow as a successor to the Shingle style of the 1870s and 1880s and as a topological innovation parallel to the Prairie houses of Frank Lloyd Wright. The Greene brothers, who were influenced by Japanese buildings, expanded and refined the vocabulary of the California Bungalow with exquisitely crafted wood detailing.

Gustav Stickley, a leading designer of the American Arts and Crafts movement best known for his handcrafted furniture and an exponent of the Crafts movement, made revealing comments on the phenomenon of the bungalow in his *Craftsman Homes* of 1909:

... a house reduced to its simplest form, [one that] never fails to harmonize with its surroundings, because its low broad proportions and absolute lack of ornamentation give it a character so natural and unaffected that it seems to sink into and blend with any landscape...built of any local material and with the aid of such help as local workmen can afford, so it is never expensive unless elaborated out of all kinship with its real character of a primitive dwelling. It is beautiful, because it is planned to meet simple needs in the simplest and most direct way...[1]

Stickley emphasized the unpretentious nature of the bungalow, a dwelling that underscored economy in plan, ingenuity in the use of materials and in detail, a house that is at peace with its "natural" surroundings.

The plan of the bungalow is clearly derived from its straight-forward organization. The plan of the one-story, two-bedroom bungalow shows an arrangement characteristic of dozens of Houston bungalows of this size. From the arrival point at the porch and front door there is a sequence of rooms: living room - dining room - kitchen on one side of the house, with two bedrooms and a bathroom occupying the other. Rooms are efficiently arranged so that one leads to another without the interruption of extensive hallways. There is an almost democratic equality of spaces, without compromising the separate and formal nature of the individual rooms. Often the living room or dining room is separated from other rooms by pocket doors or a screen that incorporates bookshelves into its design. A fireplace with an articulated surround and mantle is almost always part of the living room, and the public rooms are often enhanced with wainscoting, paneling, corner shelves, or window seats.

Besides efficiency and openness the compact plan yielded further benefits in the hot, humid Southern climate. Because the rooms join one another without interruption, the house can be naturally ventilated, with air freely circulating from one room to another. Built on a raised-pier foundation, the bungalow is typically lifted two or three feet off the ground, allowing air to circulate under the house as well, and an attic provides insulation between the interior and the roof. The rooms are well-protected and shaded from the summer sun by the wide, overhanging eaves.

The personality of the bungalow is almost always established by the covered porch which faces the street. The porch creates a threshold between house, yard, and street and gives the bungalow its dominant, sometimes eccentric, architectural presence. A side entrance porte-cochère for the automobile reminds us that this is a house approached by automobile as much as on foot. It is the first small house in America designed with the family car in mind.

A typical Montrose bungalow features clapboard siding with skirted base, exaggerated brick columns at the front porch, generous eave overhanging with carved wood bracketing, and side entrance porte-cochere

Bungalow floor plan shows the efficient and economic room arrangement with a minimum of corridor space

Detail and craftsmanship singularly express the architecture, with greatest emphasis at the porch where sturdy, almost exaggerated, brick columns support a stylized gable. Double-hung wood windows, grouped closely at the porch, add to the expansive feeling from within and from without. The carpenter's hand can be seen at every turn, from the skirted base which gracefully carries the house to the terra-firma, to the elegantly carved, exposed beams and facia. The craftsmanship is integral with the structure, expressing a sense of the materials and the craft of construction.

While the wood clapboard bungalow with brick porch columns is typical of the Houston bungalow, it by no means illustrates the only combination of materials. Bungalows clad entirely in brick or in stucco were not unusual and there are often combinations of materials used, each dependent upon its own sense of craftsmanship and material expression. Bungalows are not necessarily limited to one story -- in fact many are actually two stories, even when they appear to be one story. The term "airplane" bungalow was used to describe some two-story bungalows because they resembled in an off-beat way the biplanes of the day.

Although the majority of bungalows seem to be the invention of builders and carpenters, Houston architects during the 1910s began to employ the bungalow vocabulary in designing houses. A particularly fine architect-designed bungalow was built by the architect William A. Cooke at 1724 Alta Vista Avenue (1912) in the southeast Houston neighborhood of Forest Hill. Stylistically, this bungalow is reminiscent of the California Mission style stucco bungalow. Another fine, architectural design of bungalow derivation is the Block House at 5120 Berthea (1920) in the Turner Addition south of Montrose, designed by the prominent Houston architect Alfred C. Finn (architect of the Gulf Building, San Jacinto Monument, and many large houses on Montrose Boulevard). This house also shows the influence of the 19th-century English cottage style

This California Mission style bungalow at 1724 Alta Vista in Forest Hill was designed by the architect William A. Cooke for his family in 1912

An airplane bungalow, so called because it resembles the profile of a biplane of the early part of the century, was designed in 1923 by E. A. Lightfoot and is located at the corner of Audubon and Marshall in Montrose

Brick bungalow at the corner of Morrison and Bayland in Woodland Heights

Double porch, two-story bungalow at 912 Heights Boulevard in Houston Heights

Wood bungalow at the corner of Eastwood and McKinney in the subdivision of Eastwood

Stucco bungalow with prominent porte-cochère at West Alabama and Yupon in Montrose

A "cottage" on Sylvan Street in Idylwood, 1936. Ainsworth and Irvine, architects

popularized by the English architect, C.F.A. Voysey. Two others of note are The Cottage by the Fort Worth firm of Sanguinet and Staats at 2204 Baldwin Street (1910) near the Fourth Ward and a bungalow by E.A. Lightfoot designed and built for his family at 3702 Audubon Place (1923) in Montrose.

Link's Montrose development was one of several neighborhoods platted in the early part of the century in which the bungalow was the favored type of house. The general area now known as Montrose is made up of assorted subdivisions, each of which originally had its own identity and deed restrictions. Surrounding Link's Montrose are the neighborhoods of Westmoreland Place, Courtlandt Place, Avondale Addition, James Bute Addition, Fairview, Hyde Park, Waugh, Cherryhurst, Rossmoyne Place, Lancaster Place, Mandell Place, Turner Addition, and Winlow Place. Ultimately these neighborhoods became incorporated into the city, as Houston city limits began to spread out.

Perhaps the best-preserved neighborhood of bungalows is in Woodland Heights, located northwest of downtown and developed at the time of Link's Montrose. Woodland Heights was the creation of the William A. Wilson Reality Company, which in 1907 acquired land just east of Houston Heights, an older community that was until 1918 a separately incorporated city. Just as Link realized the value of land within a trolley car ride of downtown, so did William Wilson anticipate the suburban growth and the future need for housing when he acquired the land for Woodland Heights. Wilson publicized his vision of the new neighborhood in a promotional brochure of 1910:

...to show with convincing accuracy the growth and development of this piece of picturesque woodland, in all its stages, from a state of nature to a charming suburban park dotted with comfortable artistic homes.

The artistic home Wilson's brochure refers to is none other than the bungalow, a house he praises with entrepreneurial enthusiasm, saying:

It is just as easy to build a beautiful, cozy, convenient, artistic home as the other kind... While as much money may be expended in the construction of a bungalow as one may choose, it is a fact that there is no other form of construction that lends itself so readily to moderate-priced homes, because there is no other that gives so much beauty and grace and solid comfort for the amount of money.[2]

The neighborhood of Woodland Heights fulfilled Wilson's dream of the ideal suburban community. As in Montrose, the streets are laid out on an orthogonal grid. The finest street of the neighborhood, Bayland Avenue, is today an oak-lined thoroughfare of bungalows interspersed with larger wood-frame houses.

To further enhance the value of its development, the William A. Wilson Company produced *Homes*, a monthly magazine ostensibly published to advocate the ideals of American families living comfortably and modestly in bungalows. In fact *Homes* was a rather clever instrument of real-estate promotion for Wilson's Woodland Heights and Eastwood, another subdivision of bungalows that he platted to the east of downtown in 1911. Each month a new house, invariably a bungalow, was featured in photographs and an article entitled "What We Have Done for Others." The articles gave lengthy descriptions of the warmth and hominess of the rooms as well as the conveniences found in the modern bathrooms and kitchen. Other articles were written to give helpful suggestions in home financing, home improvements, gardening, decorating, and even recipes. Essays on family life in obvious imitation of the popular house journals of the day such as *Good Housekeeping*, gave further testimony to Wilson's suburban developments.

To the north and west of Woodland Heights, Will C. Hogg, later the developer of River Oaks, and Henry W. Stude created a suburb equally rich in artistic bungalows. The neighborhood, called Norhill, was platted in 1922 and features a series of block-long, park-like esplanades at three-block intervals on the major north-south thoroughfare, Norhill Street. To the southeast of Wilson's development, Eastwood, further out along the tracks of the Interurban line, are the neighborhoods of Forest Hill (1909) and Park Place (1912) where bungalows also were favored.

These suburban neighborhoods were built during the heyday of the Progressive era, a time that stood for family life, temperance, equality at the workplace, and a more equitable distribution of the country's great wealth. It was also the era of the City Beautiful movement, when cities across the United States built great parks, boulevards, public monuments, and parkways out of a desire to transform the squalid industrial city into a place of grandeur and beauty where nature could coexist with man's environment. Indeed, such men as William A. Wilson, John W. Link, Henry W. Stude, and Will C. Hogg personified the spirit of their times. While they were obviously real-estate entrepreneurs, they also returned to the community neighborhoods replete with a multitude of affordable, sensible, and appropriately planned houses built on abundantly landscaped streets.

With the end of the Progressive movement and the demise of the era of Wilsonian democracy after World War I, the bungalow's popularity in Houston and other cities began to decline. By the mid 1920s popular social values had changed. The United States was undergoing a period of prosperity that placed greater emphasis on material wealth and comfort. Somehow the bungalow represented a humbleness no longer valued by American society. And yet small houses continued to be built in the ever-growing suburban communities of Houston. To the south of Montrose and its surrounding additions, in the newly platted community of Southampton Place (1923), to the southeast of downtown in the neighborhoods of Idylwood (1928), or further towards Galveston in Garden Villas (1926), and to the west of town in the city of West University Place (1925), the suburban cottage took the place of the bungalow as the favored small house. While the cottage was designed for the same 50-by-100-foot lot as the bungalow, with approximately the same size and a similar plan diagram, there is very little in common on the exterior. The cottage was a small version of the larger period revival houses then being built in the exclusive neighborhoods of Shadyside and River Oaks. Invariably the cottage was faced with stucco or brick and was reminiscent of Georgian or Colonial revival styles. Steeply pitched gables and charmingly quaint windows and doors replaced the expansive porch and overhanging eaves so dominant in the bungalow. Like the bungalow, the cottage continued the tradition of the small, single-family, detached house as a commodious and affordable house type. With its romantic gabled forms, the cottage presented another sort of picturesque image for the neighborhood, an image that by the middle 1920s seemed more substantial than the humbler image of the bungalow.

The era of the bungalow in Houston left a remarkable legacy. The bungalow was the first small, inexpensively priced house of the automobile suburbs, anticipating patterns of urban expansion that have continued to dominate Houston's growth. Although the car has allowed Houston to expand ever further across the plains many leagues from the neighborhoods of Montrose, Woodland Heights, and Eastwood, there is today within these early suburban neighborhoods a repository of well-preserved bungalows, as appealing to the present generation as they were in the early part of the century. The bungalows and their neighborhoods speak of a popular utopian vision of a society where shelter in a natural setting, and in an artistic, well-planned dwelling was made available on the simplest of terms and at a price affordable to the working man and woman. ■

A Montrose bungalow at 3310 Yupon, restored by the Houston architect, John Kelly

The coherence of early bungalow neighborhoods is preserved in these examples; Above: *on Byrne Street in Woodland Heights;* Below: *on Polk Street in Eastwood*

Interior of bungalow at 3310 Yupon shows spacious open-plan arrangement of the living and dining rooms, beamed ceilings, and bookshelves that serve as room dividers

For further reading, the author recommends the following books:

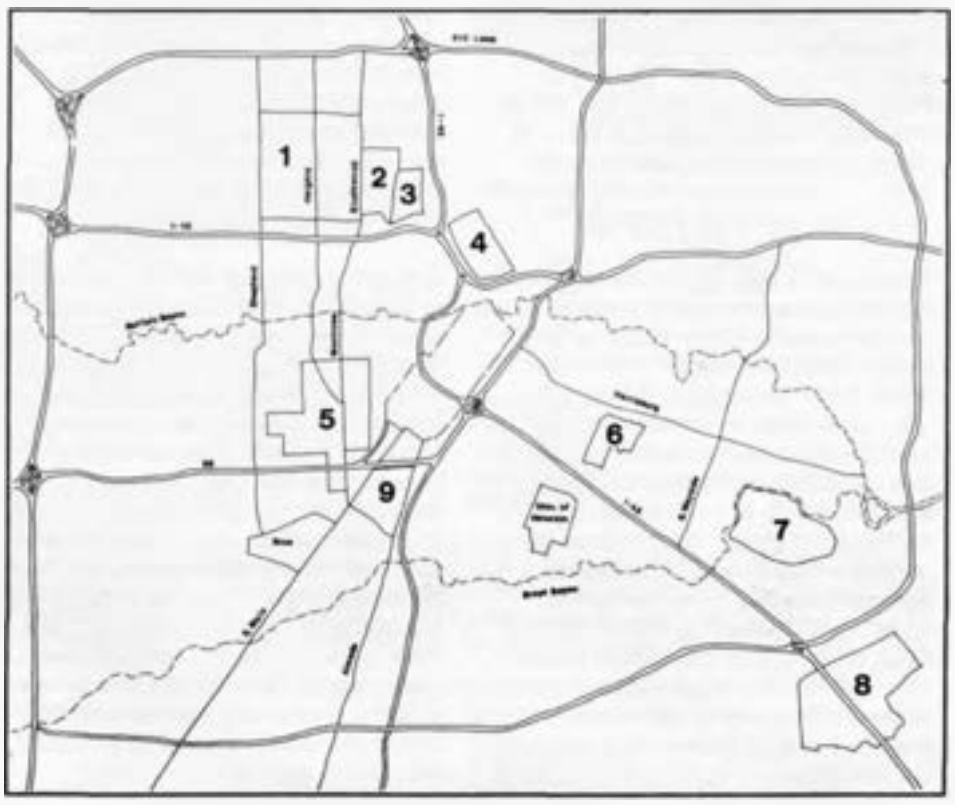
Clay Lancaster, *The American Bungalow, 1880-1930*, New York: Abbeville Press, 1985

Robert Winter, *The California Bungalow*, Santa Monica: Hennessey & Ingalls, 1980

Above, left: *Feature house from* Homes, *April 1912, published by the William A. Wilson Company to promote the subdivisions of Eastwood and Woodland Heights.* Above, right: *The same bungalow as it appears today*

Notes

1 These remarks are taken from "Bungalows: Mail Order Craftsmanship," *Preservation News*, November 1984.
2 Woodland Heights brochure. William A. Wilson Realty Company, 1910.
3 The author wishes to thank Stephen Fox and the staff of the Metropolitan Reseach Center, Houston Public Library for their assistance in the research of this article.



Bungalow Neighborhoods

1 Houston Heights
2 Norhill
3 Woodland Heights
4 Fifth Ward
5 Montrose and Montrose Subdivisions: Westmorland, Avondale, James Bute, Lancaster Place, Fairview, Hyde Park, Waugh, Cherryhurst, Rossmoyne, Mandell Place, Winlow Place and Turner
6 Eastwood
7 Forest Hill
8 Park Place
9 Southmore Addition (Binz)

Braeswood: On the Last Neighborhood In Houston

Peter D. Waldman

"Satiric Scene," 1618, Sebastian Serlio

The neighborhood is an idea of measure: a physical, social, and mythic geography more often founded on pretension rather than necessity. The Garden of Eden and the Tower of Babel are both allegorical constructs that permit us to understand the idea of neighborhood in Houston. Between the Towers of Work constructed in the urban precincts of downtown, Greenway Plaza, and the Galleria, the residential gardens of this city have grown up in the form of the neighborhoods of Shadyside, River Oaks, and Braeswood. This is the story of one of these garden neighborhoods and the Genesis of a City obsessed with the dream of Benign Bayou and the nightmare of the Bestial Bosque.

Braeswood is a "conjunctive" name: an invention linking the water's edge with the wilderness. Braeswood, conceived in an age of optimism (1927) and substantiated in a period of Depression, is an example of one of a sequence of residential landscapes in Houston. The focus of the Rice Design Alliance Architectural Tour this fall, its importance resides not only in the diversity of dwelling types in that neighborhood, but on the archetypal nature of the landscape itself.

While some neighborhoods have been characterized by a house type – the bungalow of Montrose; the cottage of West University Place – other neighborhoods might be identified with a spatial fascination with the Forest and the Bayou. Their names attest to the prerequisites of shade and edge in a limitless, sun-baked land where the horizon is endless and the surveyor's grid is the rule.

The first garden neighborhood was Houston Heights (1891), a fabrication in a landscape no higher than downtown. Conceived as a new town for industrial development and blue-collar bungalows, it focused its urban space on an introverted Heights Boulevard rather than exploiting the banks of the White Oak Bayou as the interface with Houston's place of origin.

The second garden neighborhood was Shadyside (1916), which was the first to exploit Houston's obsession with the Bestial Bosque, though it remains introverted behind its paradisiacal walls. Main Street, from Mecom Fountain to Sunset Boulevard, is an allegory of the genesis of Houston's growth from the banks of the northern (Buffalo) bayou to the banks of the southern (Brays), and the dramatic reorientation of Sunset as a portal to its open western frontier.

Broadacres (1923) affirmed the geographical imperative of this new cosmic landscape with the magnetic naming of North-South boulevards. If Houston has a quintessential neighborhood it is not the modest bungalows of Montrose, or the cottages of West University Place, but at the cosmic, Mercator dimensions of North-South boulevards.

River Oaks, commenced also in 1923, is founded on a certain set of geographical myths: the mountain to the south (Del Monte), the forest in the center (Inwood), and the bayou to the north (Bayou Bend).

Braeswood, to the south, along the banks of Brays Bayou and at the edge of the new landscapes of Rice University, is the last neighborhood of this kind of speculative genesis. The genesis of these neighborhoods was based on a vision larger than that of house type itself. From Shadyside to Braeswood, the City Beautiful era produced a vision of a garden landscape at the scale of the city and the neighborhood. From River Oaks on the north to Braeswood on the south, the two major bayous of the city were acknowledged in contemporary developments.

Unlike the palms planted along Montrose boulevard, the landscape of Shadyside, Broadacres, River Oaks, and Braeswood is in the form of shade-giving oaks. Where palms suggest an imagery of sunlit singularity, the southern live oak is characterized by its conjunctive capacity to make darkness. Braeswood is a neighborhood born, then, from a remarkable vision of an archetypical garden rather than from a prototypical house. It is "the last neighborhood" in a parable of this city that commenced with the fabrication of Houston Heights, the cultivation of Shadyside, the mapping of Houston along the north-south axes, and that terminated with the opening of the city to the west at the crossroads of Sunset. Hermann Park, to the east of Sunset, is Houston's original Bestial Garden which brings the axis of memorable growth to a stop at the Palace of the Primates. The perception of this city as extending beyond the loop, at the scale of the automobile, has destroyed this myth of a city between two bayous and having one significant crossroad.

Braeswood is also the last neighborhood because it is conceived as a labyrinth, not an extension of the Cartesian grid. Unlike Houston Heights, River Oaks, or North-South boulevards, Braeswood (like Shadyside) is more the world of Serlio's satiric labyrinth, where nature is dimensionally greater than the objects found within. It is a sylvan setting, a wilderness or jungle much akin to the original setting in which the Indian Bungalow developed. Adapting this sylvan type of dwelling, free on all four sides, to the highly constricted, pathetically reduced lots of urban America has made the bungalow a type divorced from its intended setting. As a result of the densification and democratization of the type in America, and particularly in some Houston neighborhoods, the setting, once such a precondition for dwelling, has been reduced to the hanging basket and the potted plant.

Braeswood, on the other hand, is determinably pretentious, not humbly folksy, as a neighborhood. Throughout its organic landscape are houses not of great size, but great reserve. Rarely does a porch appear to suggest social ambiguity. Doors are deeply set within clearly private facades. The bungalow was conceived for a life spent intentionally out-of-doors. There are no such spatial or typological pretensions in Braeswood, rather, there are two types of natural settings to be found there. Chronologically developed, they are the labyrinthian area planned by Hare & Hare between Main and Maroneal and the topographic area developed in response to a California sensibility for the horizon from Holcombe to Bellfontaine.

In *Il Secondo Libro Di Prospettiva* by Serlio (1618) there are projected three stage sets as conjunctive models for urban theater. The tragic setting is rational, systematic, and hierarchic; the Comic setting is circumstantial, idiosyncratic, and chaotic; the third setting is the Satiric, dominated by a society half-man, half-beast, a forest wilderness, the place of quarries and fallen trees, the place of huts along labyrinthian paths and dominated by expansive woods and walkways and small hills. Braeswood follows the tradition of Shadyside, Broadacres, and River Oaks in the satirical nature of its urban condition. The urban condition of Houston, as well as much of contemporary America, is a condition of the Tragic and the Comic. It is in the exploitation of this Satiric dimension that an American urbanism can be established at the scale of the city and the scale of the neighborhood.

It is only fitting that the last great house in Braeswood would be the Shamrock; a house at the scale of a hotel, a house set in a garden which recounts the genesis of Houston. With the world's largest hotel swimming pool, and perhaps the tallest diving tower, surrounded by banana trees and sago palms, this landscape of "the poolside garden," the exploitation of the conjunction of forest edge and water's edge, permits the final Narcissitic urge to dwell in a world that is a mirror of one's own making. The walls of Shadyside, the gates of River Oaks, suggest the Shamrock as the true portal to Braeswood, and complete this tale of one satiric precinct in a Tragic and Comic city. ■

CiteSeeing

BRAE

An Architectural Tour

Stephen Fox

Braeswood was the last in a succession of elite residential neighborhoods that developed along the axis of Main Street beginning in the middle 1870s. It was begun in 1927 on a 456-acre tract at Main and Holcombe by a group of investors headed by the lawyer, banker, and public official George F. Howard. Responsible for its design were the Kansas City landscape architects and planners, Hare & Hare. The onset of the Great Depression frustrated the complete realization of Hare & Hare's master plan; about one-half of it was implemented, and this required 25 years and, eventually, six developers.

As a result, Braeswood contains single-family house types characteristic of Houston's development from the 1920s through the 1960s. More important, it contains a number of singular, architect-designed houses, built between the mid 1930s and the mid 1980s, which chart the course of modern architecture in Houston.

Because of circumstances that affect all Houston neighborhoods – demographic change, past problems with the enforcement of deed restrictions, encroachment within the neighborhood, and large-scale development on its perimeter – Braeswood is not as homogeneous as Howard and Hare & Hare must have envisioned it. But its environmental and architectural characteristics have proved sufficiently strong and enduring to motivate residents to conserve and rehabilitate what they now fondly call "Old Braeswood."

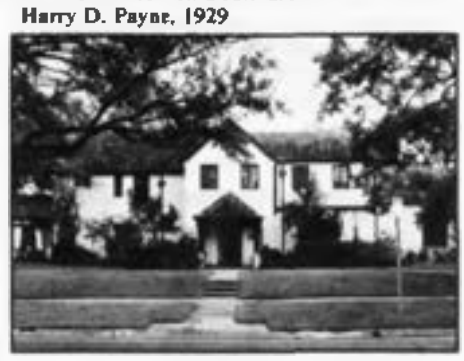
1 6900 Main Boulevard
Shamrock Hotel
Wyatt C. Hedrick, 1949

The symbol of Houston in the 1950s thanks to *Life*, *Holiday*, Frank Lloyd Wright, Dorothy Lamour, Edna Ferber, James Dean, Elizabeth Taylor, Conrad N. Hilton – and Glenn H. McCarthy, who built it. In the original Braeswood master plan this 15-acre site was reserved for a community shopping center, a vision that McCarthy and Hedrick hoped to carry out with the building of McCarthy Center. Only the hotel, the parking garage, and the legendary pool were realized, however. Now, even their continued existence is in doubt.

2 7200 Block Main Boulevard
Hare & Hare, 1928

The stretch of Main between Holcombe and Brays Bayou was paved, esplanaded, and planted with ranks of live oak trees by the Braeswood Corporation in 1928. The year before, the corporation's president, George F. Howard, had retained the Kansas City landscape architects Hare & Hare to work with Houston civil engineer William G. Farrington in preparing a master plan for the 456-acre tract, which had been acquired from John H. Kirby. At the time Houston stopped at the Rice University campus; not until 1937 in fact was Braeswood annexed by the City of Houston.

3 2115 Glenn Haven Boulevard
Harry D. Payne, 1929



Peter Yenne

The first speculative house built by the Braeswood Corporation was bought by one of the corporation's directors, newspaper editor and ex-governor, William P. Hobby. Following Hobby's marriage to Oveta Culp in 1931, Payne was called back to alter and extend the house. It was from this house that Mrs. Hobby went to Washington, D.C. in 1942 to head the Women's Army Corps.

SWOOD

4 2215 Glenn Haven Boulevard
Carl A. Mulvey, 1929
Brick, stuccoed, and timbered gables set amidst a profusion of lush Gulf Coast greenery. This is how all of Braeswood was supposed to have looked. The round-arched entry way is Mulvey's version of John F. Staub's version of a characteristic detail by the English architect Edwin L. Lutyens.

5 2234 Glenn Haven Boulevard
Carl A. Mulvey, 1929
Described at the time of its completion by the Braeswood Corporation as "French Colonial." Mulvey, the corporation's consulting architect, had worked for the distinguished Houston architect Birdsall P. Briscoe, some of whose eclectic versatility seems to have rubbed off.

6 2308 Glenn Haven Boulevard
Michael Underhill, 1986
The latest in postmodern traditionalism; the denticulated/ventilated cornice is out-of-sight.

7 2315 Glenn Haven Boulevard
Charles S. Chase, 1931
The Braeswood Corporation crashed at the end of 1929 along with the stock market. Development of sections 1 and 1-A was taken over in 1930 by the Belmain Company, which erected this stucco-surfaced, tile-roofed house, advertised upon completion as the "Belmain Mediterranean." The first occupant was Edwin H. Borden, who carried on the development of Braeswood until 1940.

8 2318 Glenn Haven Boulevard
Carl A. Mulvey, 1929
Another "English type" production by Mulvey for the Braeswood Corporation.

9 2355 Kelving Drive
Koetter & Tharp, 1954
Southern California was Houston's ideal during the 1940s and '50s. What better expression of this predilection could there be than this low, skew-planned, contemporary style house, its angled wings carefully adjusted to an intensively cultivated peninsular site?

10 Kelving Drive and Maroneal Boulevard
Braeswood Sunken Garden
Hare & Hare, 1929
As was characteristic of 1920s suburban planning, Hare & Hare overlapped street intersections to create residual islands of real estate that could be turned into small parks. This one has been transformed into a playground by the Braeswood Civic Club.

11 2348 Maroneal Boulevard
Dixon & Greenwood, 1948
Typifying patterns of postwar domesticity in Houston was this ranch-type house, designed for A.J. Sheffield, who with C. Mike Murphy, completed the development of Braeswood in the 1940s and 1950s.

12 2418 Maroneal Boulevard
Joseph Krakower, 1953
The western section of Braeswood was not opened for development until 1940 and Maroneal, Bellfontaine, and Gramercy did not begin to be built-up until the early 1950s. This brick-faced house featured on the Contemporary Arts Association's first annual tour of modern houses in 1954, exemplifies the trend of the times.

13 2523 Maroneal Boulevard
Paul László with Howard Barnstone, 1953

Peter Yeats

The Hungarian-born Beverly Hills architect, Paul László, essayed a modernist style that was refined, sophisticated, and accommodating. This wood-sheathed, Texas-sized, one-story house (faced with just enough brick to satisfy the deed restrictions) presents a subtly composed interplay of solids and voids, contained beneath a continuous cornice line, on its long street face. The pergolas, pipe columns, and north-facing *brise-soleil* are nifty period touches.

14 2423 Gramercy Boulevard
c. 1953
The archetypal Braeswood "rambler." The reverse-tapered V-profile piers are a distinctive characteristic of 1950s ranch houses in Houston.

15 2424 Gramercy Boulevard
Val Glitsch, 1984
With tact, intelligence, and imagination, Val Glitsch gave this 30-year-old ranchburger the *Metropolitan Homes* makeover, transforming it into a demonstration house for the 1985 National Association of Home Builders' 1985 convention.

16 2311 Gramercy Boulevard
c. 1946
A two-story that wants to go ranch. Orange Roman brick, the thin, flat profile of the eaves, the cantilevered planting ledge, and the effusive prickly-pear screen-door motif are quintessentially '40s.

17 2302 Gramercy Boulevard
c. 1946
Carlos Jiménez, 1985
A dowdy two-story house artfully transformed by one of Houston's most talented young architects to accommodate an extended family.

18 2345 Bellfontaine Boulevard
Gonzalo Ancira, 1946
The Southern California country ranch look.

19 2337 Bluebonnet Boulevard
Wirtz & Calhoun, 1936

Peter Yeats

The most famous modern house built in Houston in the '30s. White stucco-surfaced walls, flat roofs, panels of Insulux glass block, and tubular metal railing were hallmarks of the period. Built for Mr. and Mrs. L.D. Allen, the house is of steel-framed construction. J. Herbert Douglas designed the interiors and Caldwell & Caldwell were landscape architects. Superbly maintained.

20 2344 Bluebonnet Boulevard
Hollis E. Parker, 1932
Compact in massing, with just a tinge of severity, this painted brick house contains a delightful array of picturesque Mexican-Mediterranean detail.

21 2404 Bluebonnet Boulevard
Ben F. Greenwood, 1955
One of the most handsome contemporary houses in Braeswood, this was designed by an architect who not only had been associated with the neighborhood since 1936 (first as an employee of H.G. McDaniel, then Sam H. Dixon, Jr.), but lived and worked there until 1986.

22 2356 Underwood Boulevard
Wirtz & Calhoun, 1936
Built just prior to the L.D. Allen House on Bluebonnet for Allen's business partner, this house presents a surprising stylistic contrast to Wirtz & Calhoun's better-known modern house. An unassertive but carefully detailed American Georgian production.

23 2334 Underwood Boulevard
Lenard Gabert, 1936
Gabert, the first graduate of the Rice Institute's architecture department, was a prolific designer of houses in the suburbs along Brays Bayou during the 1930s. This elaborately detailed, timbered brick house was designed for Morris Rauch.

24 2333 Underwood Boulevard
Eugene Werlin, 1950
Werlin adroitly combined a mixture of facing materials (much admired in the late '40s and early '50s) to design a contemporary style house that coexists amicably with its more conventionally detailed neighbors. His juxtaposition of the two-story stone solid and the glazed void at the entrance is masterful. Note the egg-crate grilles and the perforated eaves.

25 2330 Underwood Boulevard
Cameron D. Fairchild and James I. Campbell, 1930
A large, austere, classically detailed French provincial style house, designed by Eugene Werlin while he worked for Fairchild. The oilman W.W. Fondren built this house for his son and daughter-in-law.

26 2329 Underwood Boulevard
Eugene Werlin, 1937
Werlin was obviously in demand at this corner. Here he essayed an English manorial house of some pretension for Donald A. Lee, the brother of Mrs. Glenn H. McCarthy.

27 2328 Underwood Boulevard
Eugene Werlin, 1936
Turning the parapet of the entrance bay into a broken pediment was an inspired gesture of bravura in this otherwise low-key design for the retail merchant Harry Battelstein. Anthony E. Frederick is responsible for a small, elegant addition to the rear of the house.

28 1922 Braeswood Boulevard
Carl A. Mulvey, 1929
This was the first house that Mulvey designed in Braeswood. It lies in Section 1-A (east of Main), which lost its deed restrictions in the 1950s.

29 7404 Greenbriar Drive
Damon Wells, builder, 1929
The first house to be built in Braeswood was constructed by the warehouse developer, Damon Wells, for his mother.

30 Greenbriar Drive and Bluebonnet Boulevard
Hare & Hare, 1929
This landscaped traffic island originally contained the Braeswood Frog Pond.

31 2307 Bluebonnet Boulevard
Bolton and Barnstone, 1954

Peter Yeats

Emphatically rectilinear, exquisitely proportioned, framed in white painted steel outlining panels of brick and glass, this house is detailed in the manner of Philip Johnson and his mentor, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in an aesthetic that represented the pinnacle of modern design in American architecture during the 1950s. Not surprisingly, Howard Barnstone was its chief Houston exponent. Florence Knoll was responsible for the interiors and Thomas Church for the gardens. This was architectural historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock's favorite house in Houston.

32 2309 Bluebonnet Boulevard
Carl A. Mulvey, 1929
A graceful English Regency style house that once again makes evident Mulvey's tutelage under Birdsall Briscoe.

33 2329 Bluebonnet Boulevard
Carl A. Mulvey, 1929
Another of the Braeswood Corporation houses, notable for its fine ornamental brick work and pegged cypress timbering.

34 2335 Bluebonnet Boulevard
Cameron D. Fairchild and James I. Campbell, 1930
White painted brick, sharply profiled gables, and steel casement windows imbue this English manorial house with the cool, hard-edged look so admired in the '30s. W.W. Fondren built this house for his daughter and son-in-law; Glenn H. McCarthy eventually acquired it as a house for his parents.

35 7506 Morningside Drive
William Fred Gray, 1936
Additions and paint obscure the mildly streamlined detail of this transitional modernistic house, rotated on its deep site to catch the prevailing southeast breeze.

36 North Braeswood Boulevard and Braeswood Court
Hare & Hare, 1929
Hare & Hare laid out Braeswood Boulevard as the first increment of a parkway drive that was intended to continue the MacGregor Parkway westward along the course of Brays Bayou. Some of their scenic improvements have been lost to flooding and to street construction; Braeswood Court remains, however, a charming island of 1920s suburban pastoral tranquillity.

37 2322 North Braeswood Boulevard
I.S. Brochstein, 1951

Peter Yeats

Angled wings reach out from the central pavilion to frame the head of the court. Note the window at the base of the projecting stone chimney stack on the right; it is set next to the hearth, providing wonderful optical and spatial sensations from within. Brochstein designed the interiors, including much of the furniture, making this a virtual treasure house of Houston-produced modern design of the late '40s and early '50s.

38 2330 North Braeswood Boulevard
Joseph Finger, 1933
The first house to be built on Braeswood Court, it originally looked out across Brays Bayou to the open countryside. The painted tile plaque inset in the chimney stack next to the swimming pool is vintage 1930s.

39 7500 Kelving Drive
Site of Glennlee
Stayton Nunn-Milton McGinty, 1938
The Brentwood Condominiums fill up the once heavily wooded 18-acre tract that the 26-year-old Glenn H. McCarthy bought in 1935 to build the huge, steel-framed, centrally air-conditioned, Louisiana plantation style house that Milton McGinty designed for him. It was in front of this house, amidst the moss-draped live oaks, that McCarthy and his family were photographed by *Time* magazine when it made him the subject of a cover story in February 1950. Demolished in 1972.

40 7315 Main Boulevard
G.C. Christensen, 1936
Christensen, an architect-builder, seems to have been inspired by John F. Staub's Chew House in River Oaks when he designed this English manor house.

41 7312 Main Boulevard
Joseph Finger, 1931
Finger's office designed this trimly proportioned and detailed house in a French provincial vein; the asymmetric composition and steel casement windows are distinctive '30s attributes.

End of Tour

Zoning Test: Pass-Fail?

Rives Taylor

Map of West University Place from promotional brochure, c. 1924


Oversized Georgian-reproduction house is typical of the many developer houses that are cropping up on the streets of West University Place

Unlike its Houston neighbors, West University Place has used a form of zoning control to regulate neighborhood development almost from its inception. Begun as a speculative, planned development in a swampy area west of the Rice Institute in 1911, West U, as it is called by residents, became a popular community for young professionals who were attracted to the stable, small-town atmosphere and residential character of the area during the 1970s. As a result, property values soared, contributing to the construction of a spate of new developer houses that are larger and considerably more grandiose than their older neighbors. Although these newer houses obey the letter of the existing zoning codes, they nonetheless crowd their lots and disturb the prevailing scale of the residential streets. Residents have begun to question the effectiveness of the zoning code to deal with the economic pressures and popularity of their community in the 1980s.

Planning and development controls were always major selling points of West University Place. The community plan of 1917, platted by A.D. Foreman, the local representative of a group of Tennessee developers, consisted of a grid-block arrangement of streets and avenues for the first West University Place addition in an area bordered by University and Bellaire boulevards and by Kirby and Virginia roads. The initial prospectus of 1918 described the development as "an exclusive neighborhood in the shadow of Rice Institute." Sales remained slow through the 1920s owing to the fact that the area was still largely swamp land, and not tied into Houston's city services or the public school system. With the offering of 50 blocks in the second West University Place addition in 1924, Foreman reduced the size of the lots to 50-by-100 feet, targeting lower middle-income families such as Rice Institute professors, labor foremen, and newlyweds. He also sold off parcels of the original 500-acre tract owned by the Tennessee group to other developers. These two actions had profound consequences. The smaller lots which Foreman sold were improved by their owners with the smaller cottage-style houses on pier-and-beam foundations, while developers, with their own house types and sizes, began to build in the 31 smaller additions. The effect of this piecemeal development pattern is reflected in the 27 distinct subdivisions and myriad zoning districts comprising the community today.

A.D. Foreman's original prospectus of 1924 shows the wide range of house types found in West University Place. Both wood-frame and brick, one- and two-story houses, on pier-and-beam foundations, were deemed suitable for the development. Less expensive wood-frame cottages and, to a lesser extent, bungalows, were advertised in local publications, builder's books, and even women's magazines of the day (*The Houston Gargoyle, The Woman's Viewpoint*) as the most modern and desireable houses. Large eaves on low-pitched roofs, numerous gables, large porches, picturesque cladding, cross ventilation from large, shaded windows, and a cottage scale were described as the characteristics of the "attractive and cozy home."

The zoning and setback ordinances still in force today were formulated and adopted in 1937, and reflect the conventions used by developers in the community up to that time. Four classes of use-districts were designated: single-family dwelling, double-family dwelling (phased out in 1962), apartment, and retail. No industry or offices, including home professionals, were allowed. The code designated eight residential zoning districts (now extended to sixteen), prescribing the minimum house size (ranging from 900 to 1,600 square feet) as well as the type of construction (wood, brick, brick veneer, stucco) which could be used in each. The code further detailed setback requirements for residences and outbuildings: 20 feet were required for rear yards and 30 feet for front yards, and a house's maximum height was limited to 35 feet. The original ordinance called for 40 percent of the lot to be kept open.

A major zoning change was adopted in the late 1960s for the problematic lots facing the heavily trafficked Bissonnet and Bellaire boulevards. A study prepared by Caudill Rowlett Scott in 1962 had advocated using these peripheral lots either for low-rise offices or courtyard apartments to act as a buffer. There was also some public sentiment for creating a string of parks on these lots, giving the residential streets a green border. Finally, in 1968, West University Place elected to permit townhouse construction on these lots, thus increasing their value to developers.

One of the ironies of older neighborhoods that suddenly become desireable is that their very popularity often threatens those qualities which made them so popular in the first place. A 1985 study by Charles Wood points out that what was once an enclave of older residents and newlyweds with their first homes has become a community of upwardly mobile professionals who could afford the escalating prices of West U property. Although the last 20 years saw a growing number of remodelings of older houses, those remodelings, for the most part, respected the scale and character of the neighborhood. Where larger additions were undertaken they were usually located on the back side of the property, respecting both the letter and the spirit of the building ordinances. New construction, on the other hand, never amounted to more than 60 houses a year in the period preceeding 1980, and those rarely exceeded a construction value of $100,000.

The building boom of the early 1980s brought about significant changes. During the two-year period of 1984 and 1985, 159 new houses were built with an average construction value in excess of $150,000. An inspection of the building reports from this same period reveals that at least 50 percent of these new residences were constructed on speculation by developers. The houses built by these developers tended to be in excess of $200,000 construction value, with three or four bedrooms, extensive outbuildings, and a total area in excess of 2,200 square feet. (It should be noted that during this period, construction value was between one-third and one-fourth the selling price.) Whereas the 1970s witnessed homeowners building single-family houses or remodeling existing houses for their own occupancy, the building boom of the '80s introduced speculators who drove up land costs. And with the escalation of land values, each new wave of speculators calculated that they needed to build larger houses to ensure a profit. At the same time, the more affluent homebuyers who were being attracted to West U were also constructing larger and more expensive houses for themselves, houses which were better suited to the standards and amenities of the '80s than the older houses. Market-oriented stylistic treatments, such as overblown Georgian revival or New England shingle style, also are a disruptive influence.

Recently, the community has begun to view the 40 percent open-space requirement as a tool for controlling the size of new residences. If driveways and patios were to be included in the 60 percent allowable built areas, this would effectively reduce the sizes of new houses, squeezing them between height and site coverage limitations. However, developers maintain that such an interpretation would squeeze their profits and no doubt result in more garages on the street elevation of houses. The zoning board is also considering a plan to increase the side setbacks from three to five feet.

Numerical zoning of setback requirements and minimum and maximum buildable areas cannot in themselves preserve the quality or scale of a neighborhood. Rather, some form of bulk zoning is needed to prescribe the size of a house's mass to prevent oversized houses from being constructed. More important, a comprehensive architectural and landscape plan for the city needs to be undertaken as a basis for regulatory zoning codes. An in-depth study, such as the one done in 1962 by CRS, needs to focus on West University Place's projected growth and how the community can maintain its desirable scale and character. ■

WUPPIE Housing: New Houses in West University Place

Jan O'Brien

The new houses built in West University Place in recent years seem to have been conceived in the midst of a dilemma. On the one hand, there is a mandate for innovative designs that match the large and commodious programs and budgets of contemporary West University houses. On the other, there is the scale and character of West University Place, the consistency of which is largely imaginary.

For unlike nearby River Oaks, which was based on a survey of noteworthy American suburban communities and was planned and protected by architectural controls, the municipality of West University Place established its building controls after the fact simply by institutionalizing the deed restrictions of the 27 subdivisions that comprise the town. Although these regulations have protected the small-town atmosphere, they often have not of themselves stimulated inspiring architecture. Rather, the regulations are treated like rules in a board game, with the players looking for ways to enlarge the quantitative limits while at the same time trying to resemble their neighbors. Individual homeowners can relax and let their town government watchdog, while in similar neighborhoods in Houston homeowners must band together in civic organizations to maintain deed restrictions and to prosecute violators. So, although it is not River Oaks, West University Place also is not Montrose. No massage parlors or rusting automobiles disturb the sanctity of tree-lined residential streets. Stability, which is the foundation of house value, is the rule here, and some suppression of individuality is the price one willingly pays for it.

Stability and character have made West University Place a popular residential community. Since many of the houses are small, over 50 years old, and in need of modernization, it is also an attractive place to invest, either in extensive remodeling or a new house. Many older residents remember a West University Place with open space in the form of unbuilt lots, and they resent the overshadowing of their small houses by new and much larger ones. Realtors and bankers, however, are quick to advise new home-builders to build big as a way of enhancing the resale value of their houses.

A standard scenario starts with the purchase of a "tear down" cottage, usually one story with two bedrooms and one bath on a 50-by-150-foot lot, for approximately $150,000. Basic requirements for the new house that will replace it typically call for four bedrooms, two-and-a-half baths, separate living and dining rooms, a family room, a spacious kitchen with built-in appliances, and a breakfast area. Two stories as well as a two-car garage are assumed, and the standard exterior finish is red brick. Depending on the exact location, the new house sells for between $270,000 and $500,000.

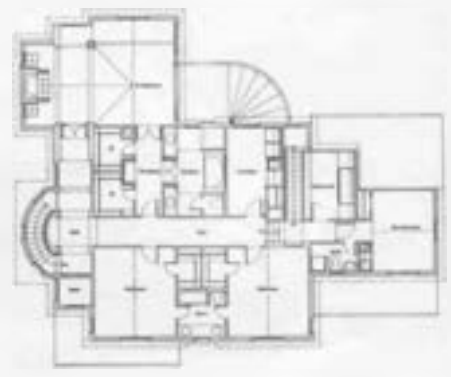
The house most often built, especially on a speculative basis, is ostensibly patterned after 18th-century Georgian houses: a rectangular, two-story box with a symmetrical facade composed around a central entrance. Like the front elevation, the plan, too, is straightforward, with a central entry hall and stair flanked by living and dining rooms on the first floor and bedrooms on the second. What distinguishes these houses from their putative models (as well as their 1920s and '30s suburban predecessors) are such variations as two-story-high glazed openings surrounding the front door, and unconventional proportions (most often because of disproportionate high ceiling heights inside). The Colonial box was compact to conserve on heating fuel, with steep roofs to shed the snow, and its square shape was economical, giving the most square feet with the simplest construction. But it is disappointing to see so many of these red-brick replicas lining up on West University streets. Are Houston's climate and lifestyle really so analagous to those of the Colonial Northeast?

The prevalence of these obsequious Georgian knock-offs can be explained by the conservative nature of speculative housing, which recently has accounted for the majority of new houses constructed in West University. In 1984, 75 percent of the building permits issued were for speculative houses that tended to fit the preceeding description. But the majority of the 65 permits issued through August of this year are for owner-occupied houses, most often designed by architects. Some of these have begun to deal with the verities of modern life in the Houston climate.

The Ake House (1986) at 3124 Amherst by Anthony E. Frederick is a good example of the unassuming brick standard. The exterior is a plain, unadorned, red-brick box; a two-story glass bay facing the side driveway provides the only noticeable feature of architectural interest. The interior takes some liberties with the standard plan: the living and dining room fill the entire width of the first floor and face out to the rear yard, with the kitchen and breakfast area situated in the first story of the glass side bay. The white walls and floor-to-ceiling windows together with skylights over the stairwell and in bathrooms create a light and open interior more reminiscent of the modern house than the builders' Georgian house. Little has been reinvented here, but all the requirements have been met with ease and simplicity.

The Safi House (1985), located at 3219 Robinhood, by John Rogers formerly of Chelsea Architects is a tongue-in-cheek variation on the standard Georgian theme. The front of the house stretches across the entire lot within the three-foot side setbacks. By matching the fascia height of its one-story, pier-and-beam neighbors and turning a large gable end to the street, Rogers manages to make a two-story house discretely. The colonnade across the front — part entrance, part porch, and part porte-cochere for the drive situated under the second story — serves as a transitional layer between the public street and the private house. Because it is on-grade and open, rather than raised three feet or more, and contained by balustrades like the porches on many older houses, this porch lacks some of the charm of a true sitting porch.

Above: *Zvonkovic House, 1986, Val Glitsch, architect.* Below: *Zvonkovic House, second-floor plan*



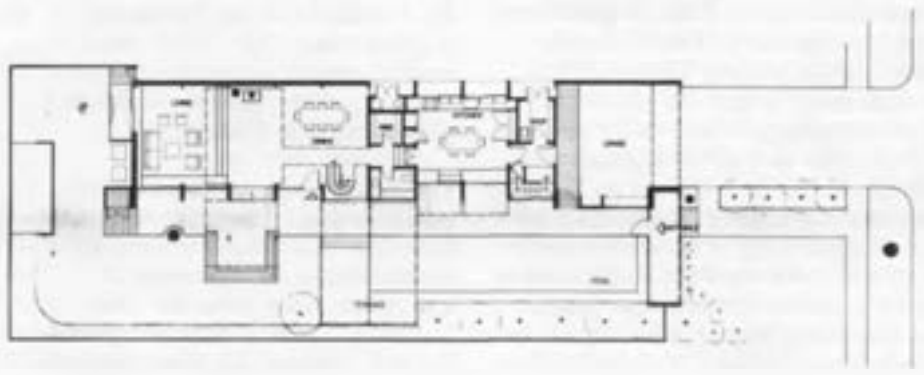
The massing becomes more complex at the rear as the L-shaped plan pivots on a two-story round bay to culminate in a double-story glazed gable facing the rear yard. The zoning of the plan places the formal rooms – parlor, study, and dining – on the street side, and the informal family rooms at the rear with views to the back and side yards. The kitchen, informal dining, and two-story family rooms flow together with a Mexican tile floor delineating the family zone. The specific requirements of a contemporary family are addressed with clarity and wit through a play on the memory of house.

When Val Glitsch undertook the design of the Zvonkovic House (1986) at 3716 Elmora in Southside Place, a zoned township adjacent to West University Place, she had a larger 75-by-100-foot lot with which to work. In meeting her clients' requirements for a large house with attached garage and a backyard play space, Glitsch broke up the bulk of the house, modulating the front facade in a rhythmic array of similar elements. Deep recesses in the front facade mark the entry and shade the garage doors. The lower-level interior is a study in orderly, formal balance. Columns and a semi-circular stair direct the visitor to the axis that bisects the formal dining and living rooms. These rooms open, respectively, into the kitchen and library through double doors. The family rooms face onto the large yard and are freer in their relationship to one another; a large, centrally located fireplace serves as the focus of the large room. The landscape plan calls for a continuation of the interior order with equal-sized playhouse and sandbox pavilions and a rectangular swimming pool on axis with the semi-circular breakfast-room bay.

Upstairs each daughter has an identical, gabled "little house" for her bedroom, while the master bedroom features a fireplace and an elaborately cross-gabled ceiling with collar beams. Color enhances the spatial richness of the interior with salmon and sea-blue hues, wood accents, and colored-tile fireplace fronts. Although making no special accommodations to the Texas climate, the Zvonkovic House is a stately neighbor attempting to evoke the English country house such as one might see in the Houston neighborhoods of Broadacres and Shadyside.

The Justice-Leibrock House (1984), located at 6435 Vanderbilt, by Leslie Barry Davidson makes more of a contribution to the discussion of appropriate house forms for West University Place. With a nod towards the New Orleans type house suggested

Left, from top to bottom: top left, *Mixon House, 1984, Taft Architects, architects, south elevation;* top right, *Mixon House, second-floor plan; Mixon House, entrance; Hunt House, 1982, Alan Hirschfield, architect; Wilson House, 1977, Anderson-Wilson Architects, architect; Wilson House, first-floor plan*



by the clients, this house offers a generous wrap-around porch as an invitation to social activity. The garage is cleverly hidden by placing its entrance off the side. Although entering it may take more patience than the standard, straight-shot driveway, the side location allows the house to maintain its simple form and southern dignity. The pink stucco exterior also enlivens a streetscape dominated by red brick.

Architect Thomas Wilson's house for his family at 6416 Sewanee (1977) is an adventurous deviation both in siting and materials. The house is framed with a standard metal building system and backed with residential wood construction, in which a carefully controlled eight-foot module is used to match standard plywood sheets and sliding-door sizes. Metal siding and grey stucco complete the exterior. The house breaks the tradition of the big and wide front, turning its narrow side to the street and filling only half the 50-foot-lot width while stretching back the greater part of the 150-foot length. Although the use of more color would soften the cool, rather industrial image, the narrow street gable over the open carport, with its perfectly round basketball backboard, conventionally symbolizes home. A porch, complete with a swing, in front of a wooden lattice furthers the theme and frames a tantalizing glimpse of the pool beyond. Indeed, the house fills the northern half of the lot's length, allowing the southern sun to fill the interior and add to the dramatic volume of the living spaces.

The Hunt House (1982) by Alan Hirshfield at 6638 Westchester delights in rejecting the rigors of the standard red Colonial. Instead it creates an internalized scheme of linked white stucco pavilions with blue metal roofs. The pyramidal roofs float above the solid walls, reminiscent of thatched huts or exhibition pavilions. Although a bit out of place next to the neo-suburban New Englander built in 1985, they display an affinity for the hot, humid climate. The over-scaled entrance porch with its columns and blank door is more grandiose than neighborly. The house is clever and eye-catching and seems to enjoy its individuality, confidently ignoring most of the West University Place conventions.

No discussion of innovative house design would be complete without reference to the celebrated Mixon House (1984) by Taft Architects, located at 3211 Pittsburg. Every element of the Colonial standard has been reshuffled and every West University limit pushed, or re-examined. Instead of a large, horizontal rectangular house with a small garage to the rear, one is confronted with garage doors at grade and a narrow, two-story house looming above. No windows break the banded gray concrete block on this first level; to enter, one faces an imposing, one-story flight of steps leading to the separate entrance pavilion. The second level, or *piano nobile,* is marked by a transition to red brick, more glass, and porches at front and rear. The entrance pavilion houses an old-fashioned receiving parlor that doubles as an office and features a pyramidal ceiling. The smaller pavilion is linked to the big house by a greenhouse passageway. In the main house, the dining room, central kitchen, and living room are grouped in a single volume with extensions to a deep deck overlooking the private yard and a "spittin' porch" to the street. Although the traditional relationship of the porch and stoop are weakened by their being raised one story, the porch is usable, not a mere decorative appendage.

Although a three-story house is not allowed by West University codes, a percentage of the area above the second-story floor area can be floored-over if it is open to below and if the ridge of the roof is not higher than 35 feet. Such a third floor houses the Mixon master suite, the rarified upper atmosphere importing privacy. Yet here the sleeping room faces the street and the bath has windows and French doors opening on to another large deck above the yard. A daughter's bedroom and game room complete the grade level, with views to a small garden and swimming pool. Although the house is somewhat aloof to be the best example of a good neighbor, the separation of public and private areas and the open, flowing living spaces define late 20th-century American upper-middle-income life very handily.

The limitations of municipal ordinances in preserving neighborhood character are most dramatically evident in two recent additions to existing cottages. Both follow the codes, but only one does it to real architectural advantage. The house at 3779 Darcus Street in Southside Place is squashed by a Mansard roof taller than the remnant of the original brick cottage. The mass of the second story is tenuously supported by exposed steel columns as it passes over the driveway. The roof carries two widely spaced dormers with little hats whose pitch bears no relationship to that over the existing entry.

In contrast, the addition architect Alfonso Varela did for his own house at 2808 Amherst is a loving exploration and expansion on the elements of a cottage. The new second story is discreetly nestled within the existing roof. Although barely seen from the street, it contains the ever-popular master suite with walk-in closets and large tub. The circular arch of the existing porch was glazed to become a stair hall and playroom, and the semi-circular window was repeated in the added dormer to the living room and upper-story windows. A new entrance porch and carport are eye-catching flourishes; a small temple shades the visitor, and a house-long "stoa" shades three cars placed bumper to bumper.

New construction in West University Place over the last few years shows that zoning can help protect a neighborhood against major disturbances in scale and use. But architecture always will be more than the sum of these regulations and restrictions. The best of the new houses are beginning to suggest alternatives to the malaise of conformity and architectural dreariness. Imagination and a concern for architectural values (rather than mere size) will determine whether West University Place is transformed into a distinguished community or remains a set of subdivisions rebuilt with over-scaled houses crowded onto too-small lots.■

Suburbia Deserta

David Kaplan

These houses, once in an area of rich rice land, are now in the "foreclosure rainbow"

In only 12 years time, more than a thousand of them have appeared, places whose names evoke the country, aristocracy, and the past, places that sound like dreams come true – Kings Forest, Whispering Pines, Nottingham Country, Mandolin, Windsong, Vienna Woods, Woods of Wimbledon, Golf Villas of Atascocita, Pecan Grove Plantation, Sha-De-Ree.

For many, these places do represent lifelong dreams, even though the dream is way the hell out, even though the dreamer is moving to a block filled with strangers, even though his dream looks like every other house on the block. The suburb, for many of us, is the preferred setting for raising a family, staking out a community, making a life.

Robert A.M. Stern calls the home the "badge honoring individual success," and until recently, Houston has had plenty of that. But with the sudden economic downfall, some suburban neighborhoods have turned into what city planners call "war zones," a description formerly reserved for inner-city ghettos. Houston is often called the city of change, the city in process, but drive to certain middle- and upper-class neighborhoods and you'll see where things just stopped.

One section of Houston has seen so much suburban breakdown, so much abandonment it has been nicknamed the "foreclosure rainbow." It is an 18-mile arc of newer subdivisions in West Houston, stretching from US-59 south to US-59 north. Many of these subdivisions were built to be near the Energy Corridor, the series of energy-related offices along the Katy Freeway (I-10).

A real-estate salesman, who will be called Jim, takes me into the foreclosure rainbow. We drive along the I-10 feeder road, near Mason Road. "This area was supposed to be the center of Houston," Jim says, driving past great expanses of unmowed fields. The area was once rich rice land.

Driving through a healthy looking suburb, he explains why many of the two-story brick houses look alike: "One builder tried it and it worked." He gives a few quirks of the trade, including, "If there's no sidewalk, it's called an estate."

Jim drives to a different subdivision, where there are few signs of life, where things have stopped. The houses are in the $100,000 to $200,000 price range and only a few years old. Towards one horizon, there are enough adjacent empty lots to suggest a desert scene. Jim parks his car at a half-completed block where a few of the houses look lived in and the rest look vacant. We enter one of the vacant houses; carpeting has been ripped up and sinks are missing, reclaimed by their builder, Jim speculates. But most of the destruction has been done by teenage vandals. "There's nothing else for these kids to do out here," he says. A message has been painted in every room: "Rock 'N Roll" over the kitchen cabinets; a bedroom has been renamed the "Trashroom."

Scenes like this are common in Houston for a number of reasons. First, there is the economy; a prime contributor to foreclosure rainbows has been the absence of economic "lightning." Houston developers gambled that lightning would strike Houston a second time, but it did not, according to Barton Smith, director of the University of Houston Center for Public Policy. Our first boom, which began in 1975, was counter-cyclical in that the rest of the nation suffered during that period, prompting many Americans to migrate here. In 1981, foreseeing another great counter-cyclical boom, builders went wild, especially in the outlying regions of town. But the second boom never took place. In 1982, the oil market started slipping. "It was all kept secret," says Smith, "but many people lost their jobs and moved out." In a 15-month period between 1982 and 1983, 160,000 people lost their jobs here.

With a tremendously overbuilt real-estate market, property values dropped. This sent shockwaves through a town that had come to believe that the value of anything in Houston was bound to go up. At the same time, interest rates were rising. To make home buying more appealing, mortgage banks introduced the graduated mortgage which allowed a buyer to initially assume low monthly payments, then pay more with time, creating a situation where the buyer eventually made steep monthly payments as he or she watched their home's value decrease. This, along with job losses, encouraged foreclosure. If Houston had been a state during the summer of 1985, it would have led the nation in foreclosures.

But the economy does not tell the whole story. It doesn't explain why one subdivision makes it, while another in the same area does not. Other factors come into play, most importantly, quality of life.

According to University of Houston sociologist John Gilderbloom, too many projects were built by inexperienced developers who were "unable to see the big picture," who were looking for a quick buck. Rather than rely on the wisdom of professional planners or borrow from the examples of successful neighborhoods, these developers, says Gilderbloom, "acted too much on a whim." Gilderbloom believes that the neighborhoods that worked are those that were founded by developers who not only believe in planning, but who also commit to staying with their project. A viable neighborhood also requires a sense of community, a sense of "we-ness," as Gilderbloom puts it. Often, he laments, homebuyers choose their home solely for the deal they can get, overlooking who their neighbors will be, and whether the neighbors are the kind that look after one another.

If a neighborhood possesses the above-mentioned characteristics, it can flourish, even in these rough times, even way out in the foreclosure rainbow. Cathy Lecky enjoys living there, in the suburb of Nottingham Village. She and her husband have been there since 1980. From her screened-in porch, we look out on her flower garden, the centerpiece of her spacious backyard. Her fence blocks the view of I-10, although we still hear the traffic. Lecky brags on her 2,875 square-foot home. "We got a super deal," she says. "It's sturdy, energy efficient, and it doesn't leak." She adds that in the house's early stages, their builder, Ray Braswell, was very cooperative. "A lot who built out here have left town, or have gone out of business," she says, "but he still builds out here."

Nottingham Village, built by Kickerillo Company, is nicely landscaped, offers recreational facilities, and good schools. But despite its well-laid foundation and active civic group, Nottingham now has its problems. When Kickerillo sold out, the new developer built a big apartment complex near the country club, which angered homeowners. Crime also has increased. Teenage crime is a minor nuisance: recently kids knocked over mail boxes and stole the yard-of-the

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month sign. A more serious concern is adult crime. A security man told Lecky that because of the economy, more and more people are stealing jewels, guns – anything they can sell quickly.

But things are good in Nottingham compared to other subdivisions nearby, where, says Lecky, a "world of people" have foreclosed. Some have lost their jobs, others are unhappy with their subdivisions. Many houses leak badly. A developer in one subdivision built $300,000 to $400,000 houses and never got around to planting trees. Homeowners in another expensive suburb were startled when they discovered that the road connecting I-10 to their homes would be lined with strip centers.

Lecky knows a couple who are considering walking away from their poorly constructed $200,000 home. Their monthly payments have shot up to $3,000. They've paid $180,000 on the house – almost its original value – yet they still owe $215,000!

Some Houston streets now have as many as a half-dozen or more foreclosed houses in a row. When faced with such extreme abandonment and eventual deterioration, the best response for remaining residents is to draw on the strength of their homeowners association (HOA). The North Houston subdivision of Forestwood offers a case in point. Built in the late 1970s, its inexperienced developer sold out to another one who went bankrupt in 1985. The developer had been acting as Forestwood's homeowner's association, so that when it went under, there was no longer a HOA, and no deed restrictions could be enforced. Residents who couldn't pay the private garbage collector let months of garbage pile up in the backyard. One man raised goats. There was no street lighting; the club pool was covered with slime.

One resident, a school teacher named LaSandra Sanders, decided to save the neighborhood. She knocked on doors and she tried to clean up things. "My husband and sons would mow nearby vacant lots and it kind of caught on," Sanders says. They enlisted more neighbors by holding outdoor socials and literally stopping passing cars.

Sanders and her neighborhood posse then tried to get the owners of the abandoned homesites to maintain their own properties. Often it took months to figure out whether a house was actually vacant, suburban life being what it is. Once they did declare a house abandoned, it could take several more months to track down the owner. Making Forestwood their pilot project, the Center for Public Policy and Houston Proud stepped in to assist the Forestwood residents.

In October 1986, Forestwood residents achieved a milestone. By getting the approval from the necessary 50 percent of its property owners, Forestwood could recharter its HOA, giving it legal power to maintain restrictions and collect fees to pay bills. Forestwood's destiny, to a far greater extent, was in the hands of its homeowners.

In Forestwood, or anywhere else, when people walk away from their homes they go in many directions. They leave town, they rent apartments, or buy trailer homes. Some obtain bigger houses at lower prices. It is not uncommon these days for a person making huge payments on a house to foreclose, and, in the same neighborhood, find an identical house which has been repossessed by the Department of Housing and Urban Development and is being offered for $20,000 less than the value of the original home. To pull this trick, one must sign on to the new home before foreclosing on the old one.

Many people are desperate and one can find all kinds of "creative" negotiating. Says David Montgomery, a Forestwood resident, "All kinds of deals are taking place. You see a lot of 'save my credit' listings in the classifieds. It's unbelievably chaotic. It's a flood. Lenders are swamped with property now; they don't really want to be in the property management business; it's a great buyer's market right now. You can get good prices and good financing, if you've got a job."

Charles A. Fuller has made a business out of the current chaos. He goes door to door, buying homes about to foreclose, cleaning them up, and reselling them. Three years ago, he was himself a Houstonian in dire financial shape. Now he nets a six-digit income, and he trains teams of foreclosure buyers in seminars across the United States. Fuller sees himself as an entrepreneur who generates a previously stagnant market.

(Continued on page 20)

On 13 September 1986, the University of Houston Center for Public Policy and Houston Proud hold a half-day conference: "Neighborhoods at Risk: Strategies for Community Action." It takes place in a ballroom of the Mariott Brookhollow. Water is served.

Tables surround the room, staffed by various private and government groups. At one table is Darryl Keller, owner of Lifestyle Management. For the right price, his company will manage a neighborhood, overseeing security, trash, landscaping, and mosquito control. "Houston's a little unique, no local controls," Keller says. "We take the place of the local government."

The purpose of the conference is to stress the importance of the homeowner's association as a vehicle for improving a community's quality of life, and as a voice for reaching developers, local government, banks, and residents. Conference organizers also hope to cultivate future neighborhood leaders. Barton Smith speaks frankly to the audience of concerned homeowners, saying that Houston is experiencing the greatest home market decline since the Great Depression.

During a break, a member of the conference steering committee tells me that Houston could lose out as a whole because of its distressed neighborhoods. He hears that New York banks are getting nervous about insuring loans here. He also tells of neighborhood civic groups going to mortgage banks, trying to renegotiate, make trade-offs. " 'We'll mow lawns of foreclosed properties if you'll lower mortgage rates.' This has never been done before, but banks are open to the idea," he says.

Time sure flies. It seems only yesterday that Houston stood for power, but now we approach mortgage banks in the role of yardmen. Difficult years lie ahead for suburban dreams. Some literally may be plowed under, according to Smith. Others may revert to what he calls "mixed land use."

But when all is said and done, Houston may grow wiser. Perhaps in the future, we'll build suburbs with more care, and perhaps in this current struggle, we can add greater meaning to our existing neighborhoods. Says David Montgomery of Forestwood, "These are tough times, but the world's not coming to an end. At least in Forestwood, we're now talking to one another." ■

Citeations

Star Wars In the Labyrinth

"Buildings and Reality: A Symposium on Architecture in the Age of Information"
Sponsored by the Center for the Study of American Architecture
The University of Texas at Austin
23-24 October 1986

Reviewed by Malcolm Quantrill

The line-up for this, the third symposium to be organized by the Center for the Study of American Architecture, promised more than the conventional swings and roundabouts between regionalists and fashion-artists purveying the very latest *thing*. Having spearheaded the first two events, the center's director, Lawrence W. Speck, gave the ball to Michael Benedikt, whose game plan also gave Charles Moore a more modest part in the action. All this seemed most appropriate as the longhorns settled to battle out of the labyrinth of linguistics, seeking a cosmic spiral that would deliver us from the beastly myth of the machine, upwards into the cool, fresh air of *reality*, no less.

Benedikt set the battle lines by saying that if architecture responds to cultural change, it is only doing what it has always done; but that now the "information explosion of video, VCR, Walkman, T-shirts, et cetera are imperceptably changing our perceptions." He then played the already mythical Bo Gehring, arch-priest of video's new compact simulations of alternative configurations in space. Gehring spoke of this new *essence* in terms of an exclusive perfume: "Five seconds of film took 125 people five months to make, but half the world's population saw its initial relay." His most convincing tape, however, was an unedited shooting by Claude Lelouche of a high-spewed motorcycle run from Versailles, down the Champs Elysees, through Paris, to Montmartre. He told us: "When we read the 'viewer' controls the speed of information flow, while in TV everything is in real time, with no variant." According to Baudrillard, he said, "Architecture has two options: either to become more ephemeral (like the media) or more traditional: it is vestigial – it does not go away."

Horace Newcomb, professor of film and television at The University of Texas, saw "the environment as the medium. Through orientation and siting, the form of villages and towns express the environment. A cathedral expresses cultural values; a shopping mall does not. Postmodernism, its constant interrogation of forms, becomes *not only* the 'dissolver' of values *but also* a 'tutor.' TV, its endless being, becomes what Robert Eco has termed celebration of the victory of life over art; disolving the High Victorian illusion that stories have an ending into a mythic, religious, serialized, narrative of experience. But buildings are not serial," he said, "they do not embody narrative meaning – except in the *spiral* and the *labyrinth*. And it is difficult to get people to invest in metaphors!"

Douglas Davis, architecture critic of *Newsweek* and a video artist in his own right, reminded us that the labyrinth passes through the Augean stables, out of which he made a determined effort to clear the bullshit. His tapes portray his own vivid efforts to break out of the labyrinth of television – one resulted in middle-aged women smashing their tubes in order *to touch* the beast within – supporting his contention that "there is no mass," because "the medium is *only* transmission, but there is also reception." He recalled the interview with a Texas woman in 1958, who, when asked what she thought of television, said: "It's great! If you close your eyes, it sounds just like the radio." "The medium is not the message," Davis concluded: "the message is the medium."

Peter Eisenman proved that, while architecture may no longer have a narrative role – "Modernism failed," he told us, "because it is impossible to deal with the fictive in abstraction" – he is a great raconteur. On this occasion his theme was "The Art of Dislocation." "Whereas the caveman did not have in

mind a two-bedroom ranch house with a cathedral roof and a two-car garage, a series of dislocations have brought us to it," he argued, proposing "an architectural narrative that is self-narrating." It seemed pure irony to hear Eisenman arguing for an Aaltoan "autonomous architecture;" but he related how Jacqueline Robertson had told him: "I always knew you'd get into the wavey-wavies."

Karsten Harries attacked the whole idea of a linguistic basis for architecture, saying that "the idea of text, and of *presence* is taken far too seriously. Architecture speaks to us of space, *not* signs, while the architecture of Las Vegas is *anti-spacial* precisely because as Robert Venturi says, it is a landscape for displaced persons." Harries was reminded of Nietzsche's observation that metaphors which are worn out, without sensuous powers, are like coins that have lost their pictures – now no longer as coins only metal! Yet he found hope in postmodernism's creative, imaginative response to this devaluation, "dislocating and translating devalued symbols into an unexpected medium, making what was long taken for granted again conspicuous." He found Frank Lloyd Wright's "image of Liberty" in Addison's "spacious horizon, where the Eye has Room to range abroad, to expatiate at large the Immensity of its Views, and to lose itself amidst the Variety of Objects that offer themselves to its Observations." Yet he sided, too, with Schopenhauer, who said of architecture: "its sole and constant theme is support and load."

For Eisenman, an architect had to have written a theoretical treatise to prove himself. He said (of the Dietzenhofers): "I cannot take account of every peasant who comes in from the fields and puts together a few bricks," but later admitted that he had gone too far! And he offered an important key to the proceedings with this comment: "The difference between a Robert Stern house and my Ohio Armory is that, when people go into a Stern house they believe it's 80-years-old. When they look at my Armory they know it's not real. Stern is practicing simulation; I'm doing dislocation!"

In his introduction to *The Architecture of the City*, Eisenman confuses the function of the spiral with that of the labyrinth. At Austin, thanks to Michael Benedikt, the essential distinction between them was re-established. ■

Landmarks of Texas Architecture

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Church, Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo, San Antonio, 1768-c.1780; reconstructed 1928-37, Harvey P. Smith, architect; restored 1984, Ford, Powell and Carson, architects

Text by Lawrence W. Speck, photographs by Richard Payne, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986, 119 pp., illus., $29.95

Reviewed by John C. Ferguson

This is the final product of a Texas Society of Architects project that first appeared in 1983 as an exhibition entitled "Creating Tomorrow's Heritage." The poll conducted by the Texas Society of Architects (TSA) to determine the 20 outstanding examples of Texas architecture, the subsequent voiding of that poll, and the selection made by a panel appointed by TSA have already drawn the attention of architecture critics, and, in any case, are outside the scope of a book review.[1]

The first sentence of the book is a caveat: "This is primarily a picture book." Given that the photographs which Richard Payne took for the exhibition in 1983 were a major precondition for the book, the narrative provided by Lawrence W. Speck nonetheless is more extensive than is to be found in most coffee-table books. The author notes that the text is not intended to be definitive. Yet even so, it must be judged on its ability to convey the architectural history of the buildings selected for inclusion in the book. Similarly, the photographs of the buildings must present a complete visual record of their significant features.

Most of the photographs are of very high quality, but there are serious problems with the text. These range from simple mistakes in dating to misinterpretations of architectural history. In the text devoted to the San Antonio missions, the author claims that the ornament and decoration of the missions is Moorish. While it might be possible to accept this claim, with some serious reservations, for the entry arch at the Mission Espada chapel, it is quite inaccurate when applied to the exterior ornament at the Alamo, Concepción, and San José. The work on the Alamo and Concepción is of Spanish Renaissance derivation, and that at San José is of baroque derivation, although all are rather *retardataire* efforts. In noting the various construction periods at the missions, the author curiously avoids referring to the restoration work at Espada and the major reconstruction work at San José in the 1930s by the San Antonio architect Harvey P. Smith. Since most of what the visitor sees at

San José is from the 1930s, and not the 1760s, this should be made clear to the reader.

By claiming that the Governor's Mansion in Austin has undergone little structural alteration since its completion in 1856, Speck chooses to ignore the major addition made to the house in 1914, greatly expanding the living space and resulting in the loss of the original rear wing. One of the major products of this addition, the conservatory on the first floor, is illustrated, but is not identified.

Speck's evaluation of Old Red and the Bishop's Palace in Galveston, the two N.J. Clayton works in the book, is somewhat confused by his excessive use of stylistic labels to describe the structures. The text for Old Red fails to mention that the entire roofscape of the building was redesigned after the 1900 hurricane, resulting in a significant alteration to the original appearance of the building. Speck's claim that the arcaded exterior elevations of Old Red owe a debt to the Cheney Building by H.H. Richardson ignores the fact that this work is in Hartford, Connecticut, not Boston, and that Clayton's use of such a design feature is more indicative of Richardson's broad influence upon countless other American architects between 1875 and 1890. Sadly, the Bishop's Palace, which contains Clayton's greatest interior, is not represented by color photographs of that interior, only two small black-and-white views. Speck's claim that the front parlor fireplace was exhibited at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, and was a prize winner at that event, cannot be substantiated with primary documentation, nor can the statement that the music-room fireplace cost ten thousand dollars. The suggestion that the use of floor-to-ceiling windows in the house is somehow an invention of Clayton's is to ignore the fact that such window types had been in common use in Galveston since the 1840s.

Battle Hall at The University of Texas was not completed in 1910, but in 1911. It contains the finest interior of any building on the campus, yet only black-and-white images represent the splendid reading room on the second floor. The statement that the use of polychromed terra-cotta on the building does not derive from Spanish and Italian precedents is to ignore the fact that it was to precisely such sources that Cass Gilbert and the major American terra-cotta makers were looking at the time of the design and construction of Battle Hall.

Perhaps most puzzling are the narratives for the Elbert Williams House and Fair Park, both in Dallas, in the sense that more is left out than is included. For example, it would have been of great benefit to the reader to show one of the vernacular houses that David Williams used as his inspiration for the Williams House, even if such a comparison demonstrated that Williams was not above taking liberties with his revered sources. Moreover, since the interior of the house has been scrubbed of all of its original painted decoration and Williams's specially designed furniture is no longer in place, why bother to include color photographs of rooms that have lost their integrity and can tell us little about what Williams's interiors were meant to represent?

Fair Park is described without reference to any of the artists whose works make the complex the success that it is: Pierre Bourdelle, Julian Garnsey, Raoul Jossett, Eugene Savage, Lawrence Tenny Stevens, Allie Tennant, and James Buchanan Winn, Jr. The source for the night lighting of the park can easily be traced back beyond the 1925 Paris Exposition to the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, and the combination of formal and informal landscape planning found at Fair Park is yet another example of the long-running impact of the Chicago exposition.

These and other errors tend to suggest that the manuscript was never carefully proofed by anyone versed in the architectural history of Texas, or of the United States. The general reader of this book will come away with no help in furthering his or her knowledge of the subject, as there is no bibliography to serve as a guide. Considering the ease with which such an addition could have been made, its omission suggests that the book was rushed to completion for the benefit of sales during the Sesquicentennial year, or at least the American Institute of Architects' 1986 convention in San Antonio. While the layout of the book allows for large-format color prints, there are some images – the State Capitol and Old Red – which are ruined by having their centers lost in the gutter of the book. A lack of captions for the photographs becomes a problem, especially when more than one building is mentioned in the text, as in the case of Trinity University and Fair Park.

In spite of its stated intentions, this volume is not the general introduction to Texas architecture that *should* have appeared in this Sesquicentennial year. One hopes that its publication will not preclude the preparation of a more comprehensive book on this important subject. ■

Notes

John Pastier, "Texas Architecture; Mythmakers and Realists," *Texas Journal*, vol. 8 (Fall-Winter 1985-1986), pp.16-17.

Austin: Its Architects And Architecture 1836—1986

Hank Todd Smith, editor; Michael McCullar, Kenneth Hafertepe, Lila Stillson, Edgar P. Van de Vort, and Bruce D. Jensen, writers, Austin: Austin Chapter, American Institute of Architects, 1986, 115 pp., illus., $16

Reviewed by Stephen Fox

Austin: Its Architects and Architecture (1836-1986), a handsome catalogue designed by Herman Dyal, Jr. and edited by Hank Todd Smith, is the result of an effort by the Austin Chapter of the American Institute of Architects to commemorate the Sesquicentennial by establishing an architectural archive to document local architectural history at the Austin Public Library's Austin History Center. The chapter's principal goal is to collect drawings and other records relating to local buildings and local architectural practices. The chapter additionally committed itself to the production of this volume to acquaint the public with the history of architecture in the state's capital city.

The catalogue comprises three essays, followed by profiles of 43 architectural practices that span from the 1850s to the present, a bibliography of published and unpublished sources on Austin architecture, and an "index" of about 350 buildings, listed by name (sometimes historic, sometimes current), with

Atrium, James H. Robertson Building, Austin, 1893, rehabilitation by Robert Jackson Architects, architects (1985)

address, date of construction (and demolition), and architectural attribution. Most, but not all, of the buildings in the index are mentioned in the essays or the profiles.

Surprisingly, there is no catalogue of the architectural collections now extant at the Austin History Center, The University of Texas's Architectural Drawings Collection and Barker Texas History Center, or the State of Texas's Archives, although reference to material collected by the chapter for deposition at the Austin History Center is made in the briefest of the three essays – on The Collection and Conservation of Architectural Documents – by Lila Stillson, Edgar P. Van de Vort, and Bruce D. Jensen.

The other two essays, "Building Austin" by Michael McCullar, architectural columnist for the *Austin American-Statesman*, and "Austin Buildings" by historian Kenneth Hafertepe, might well have been consolidated, since the former consists chiefly of data that is, or ought to be, in the profiles of the architectural practices. Hafertepe's essay is a concise, well-organized account of successive architectural developments in the capital from the time of its laying-out in 1839. Twentieth-century buildings are given attention equal to that accorded more frequently published 19th-century landmarks, although more attention might have been paid to the 1940s and '50s, when national awareness first began to be focused on Austin architects. Hafertepe sharply criticizes the mediocrity of the buildings erected during the past 30 years at The University of Texas, criticism that might justifiably be extended to the adjacent preserve of the State of Texas. There are small disappointments. Some important buildings go unnoticed or are insufficiently noticed. One also misses recognition of two house types characteristic of Austin: the five-bay, symmetrical-front Victorian cottage and the bungalow.

The profiles of architectural practice vary greatly in the amount and quality of information conveyed. Some are very unsatisfactory (for instance, Conrad C. Stremme: Is it known whether he designed more than one building?), or omit mention of important building projects that were executed outside Austin (George L. Walling designed far more significant buildings than those listed and illustrated in the profile on him). Once firms began to dominate, the profiles fill up with biographic data on the various principals, crowding out consideration of the architecture, mercifully in some cases, it must be conceded. Cass Gilbert and Paul Philippe Cret rather disingenuously are accorded honorary citizenship (who wouldn't want to claim them?), yet there are no entries for Renfro and Steinbomer and J. H. Eccleston Johnston, Jr. Perhaps their practices were not established by 1976, but does ability count for nothing?

Although not without shortcomings, *Austin: Its Architects and Architecture* provides the most comprehensive account of architecture in Austin yet published. The Austin Chapter of the American Institute of Architects deserves commendation for undertaking this venture. May it be the first step in a concerted program of collection, exhibition, research, and publication to detail the city's architectural history. ■

at all characterized by a sense of modernity. Rather it was solidly American in its hunger for *kitsch*. Why, for heaven's sake, y'all know that *house* is synonymous with *plantation* home, and it don't take no education to know that even a suburban villa has its li'l ole portico!

When Alvar Aalto opened his first office in Jyväskylä in 1923 the romantic

der Rohe, and Mendelsohn in the '30s. On the other hand, I should like to suggest that it was Le Corbusier's *ventilation* of the outer skin of the Villa Savoye and the Maison Cook that prompted Aalto to carve into and erode the cubic masses at Munkkiniemi and Noormarkku. Or does the interpenetration of volumes and erosion of the outer membrane derive from Gerrit Rietveldt's Schroder House, which

our enterprising Eustace Papava to designing hou interiors and sul exteriors. Aalto, five private hous "experimental" while Papava's "sandwich" sold, cakes